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Dom Sylvester Houédard

endlessly

inside

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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.
The Order of Saint Benedict and the History of Broumov

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 520 on the ruins of the altar of Apollo on Monte Cassino in central Italy. The *Rule of Benedict* (Regula Benedicti) contains the spiritual foundations and 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. 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 St. Anselmo in Rome and represents the Benedictines of the Holy See. However, each monastery still has its own abbot.

The *Rule of Saint Benedict* is considered a basic document of the discussion of 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” (Rule of Saint Benedict). *Saint Benedict* could not be perceived in a simplified way as a criticism or a counterpart of Eastern theology and monasticism. On the contrary, its roots can be traced to the traditions of the African, the Egyptian, 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). However, it has significantly changed the aspect of monasticism. The word and the monastic life are not to be found in the text of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, but only in the tradition coming from Africa, Egypt, Asia Minor and Syria.

In the past, the Benedictines were required to be located in the Břevnov Monastery (from the Hussite wars until the turn of 1992/1993). 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, the two-story hall was built, covered with a barrel vault and decorated with a ceiling fresco painted by Jan Karel Volf from Prague (1750). In the middle of the fresco in the hall, the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a blue painting of a ray of light below which there is the inscription *Ille vos docet 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 teaching 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 speak. 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.

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. 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.

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 monastery also had books on canonical and secular law, church history, secular history and auxiliary historical sciences (diplo-macy, 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 compilation 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.

The monastic library was thoroughly catalogued in the middle of the 19th century by the Prior Jeroným Růžička (1874–1884), 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. 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 VZK (the dissolution of women’s convents).

An internment camp was set up in the Broumov Monastery for monks and priests and subsequently for runs 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 Cultural Heritage Office of the Czech Republic. In particular, the abbey’s library has been opened to the public.

In 1991, the Broumov Monastery was returned to the Benedictines of Břevnov, and their books gradually came back. 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 170,000 volumes. In 2002, the monastery was declared a National Cultural Monument.
In the refectory of the Broumov Monastery, the typestracts are presented in three loosely conceived thematic perspectives. dh'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 dh and has prepared several solo exhibitions of his work in the past.1 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 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 dh attended. The text of the Broumov exhibition curator Monika Čejková deals with dh's correspondence with Czechoslovak authors, the doyens of experimental poetry Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hisršal, 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 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,2 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 dh'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

Notes from the Ora et Lege II – Endlessly Inside

1 Olsen (1986). Several of his works are kept in the Tate Britain library archive.
2 In the collections of Tate Britain, for example, dh's work is represented by one work on paper, Untitled (1968). Olsen (1986). Several of his works are kept in the Tate Britain library archive.
3 In the new millennium, dh's work has been presented in group exhibitions, such as Live In Your Head (Whitechapel Gallery, 2010); Poet Old, True Heretic (ICA, 2009); Concept as Concrete Form: Visual Poetry, Texts and Typography (University of Darby, 2010); Concrete Poetry (Hayward Gallery, 2010); Concrete Poets (Lower Green, 2010); New Typography: Typewriter Art as Print (The Print Center, 2010), as well as solo exhibitions, such as Frag Portal (Pop-up the Iga of Concrete (NUCA Gallery, 2005); Notes from the Concrete Typewriter (South London Gallery 2012); Dom Sylvester Houédard: Typoestracts (Richard Saltmann, 2012); dh's work is represented by one work on paper, Untitled (1968). Olsen (1986). Several of his works are kept in the Tate Britain library archive.
5 The now well forgotten principle of concrete poetry, which was often primarily intended for being received aloud as a kind of performance.
7 His foraging correspondence is kept in Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection at the Broumov Gallery in Brno (work in progress). The text is the subject of Monika Čejková’s text “My dear bohemia, knead this catalogue”.

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 poconcrete 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
A monk attuned by Tantrism to the cosmos

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.”

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, he was in touch with Tantrism.”

In what Benedictine and Indian monasticism have in common. The concern for the contemplative side of the wider ecumenicism is part of something that goes back to our foundation, nearly one hundred years ago.”

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 place 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 1957.” And this is exactly where the majority of Houédard of Tibet’s interests of a lifetime 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, intelectual, literary and autodidactic enterprise. And that for many people in the West between the immediate postwar period, the distinctions between the different Buddhist schools and traditions were not clear.”

Therefore it is never going to be an easy task to tease out the entangled influences in the transplantated, transnational and translated Modernist Buddhists 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.”

These help locate Houédard’s own approach to Buddhism and Taoism and can be useful in understanding individual works. The textprint hommage 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), a text which influenced many artists of the 1960s. Houédard’s textprint 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. The two entrances are, according to a translation of the text by D. T. Suzuki, the “Entrance by Reason” and the “Entrance by Conduct”. 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 conductive contemplation.

Over the years Houédard received numerous Tibetan monks as his guests at Prinknash Abbey and this wide exchange of monastic life, spirituality and creative work produced a profound understanding and a more spiritual awareness than many 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 practices), but what truth is in their teaching, what truths they are explaining, what truths they have discovered [...]”

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 free-wheeling” but also “the open and intense exploration of the creative self”. This was produced in the late 1960s and 1970s when Tarthang Tulku, Chogyam Trungpa, Kalu Rinpoche, and other Tibetan lamas were first teaching in Europe and America. This “free-wheeling” 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 “law” 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 concepts.”

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 mantra, mantra and mudra from another tradition and become attuned to the cosmos by these very concepts of Tantra.”

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 reunion by love of all that has been separated by the intellect. It is a movement out from and back to man.”

Houédard saw his Christianity and any practice of Tantric Buddhism as dovetailing in the mystic’s journey to knowing his own self in the Cosm. By using the petals of a flower in this movement bringing the attentive viewers awareness of the spiritual atmosphere is exactly what Houédard’s “wider ecumenism” and specific interest in Tantra embody.

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 and Four Practices, a text attributed to the 28th Indian Patriarch, Bodhidharma, in the 6th century CE. The
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 tyepstracts selected for this exhibition:�ntra of sex (1966); chakrometers (1967); om – supreme guru – patron of all the tantras of all monks – contemplation – & sensecontrol (1967), helicotatal akrobyothia (1967); inner view of the nala blueblad and thunderbolt vajra (1967) are a revealed image of this aspect of this journeying in the contemplative experience.

**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.” 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 laminate 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.

**Chakrometers**

The Tantric tyepstracts 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.

**Cosmic Tree** is situated in the middle of the universe in as it is generated within the Tantric body mandala. The experience and the non-semantic vocalization of sacred altered states of consciousness, the psychedelic drug was intensely interested in shamanic transcendence, Composed in February 1967 monk made that focus on the chakra system of the subtle chakrometers, freedom songs and wide love in the work of Dom Sylvester Houédard

**Songs and Wide Love in the Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard**


4. Ibid., 144.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


14. Chishang Trumpa Rinpoche (1939–1995) 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 “rōji chūiho”, the crazy wisdom lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Among Rinpoche (1939–1995) is a Tibetan Buddhist Monk and teacher of the Kagyu School and founder of the Sunny Ling Monastery in Scotland. Geshi Thupel Jampa (1958-) has been a principal English translator to the Dalai Lama since 1983. Terunt Gamto (1935-?) is the 13th and current Dalai Lama and head of the monks of the Golpo lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the 13th Dalai Lama, the position in one that also holds the political authority over Tibet.


16. Ibid.


19. Mantra is a Sanskrit word, literally meaning “mental protection”. Mantra is believed to be sacred words of power. Mantras protect the mind from the ordinary (conventional and voluntary) appearances and conceptions. Mantras can be both sound and form. They can be recited verbally or mentally.


21. Ibid.


Within the limited scope of the catalogues, the text is published in an abridged version, its full text is available online at: https://www.sorrelart.co/en/sylvester-ainedard-poems.html

Nicola Simpson is Research Fellow at Norwich University of the Arts. Her research, curatorial methods and poetic practices focus on the experiential embodiment of Zen and Tantric Buddhism in concrete poetry and performance, participatory kinetic and sound art. Shica is editor of Notes from the Cosmic Tyepstractor: *The Life and Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard* Ecclesiastical Papers, 2012 and co-editor of Dom Sylvester Houédard *Richard Salomon; Riding House, 2011). Exhibitions include: Notes from the Cosmic Tyepstractor (South London Gallery 2014). Performing the Thangka: The Erotic Poetry of Dom Sylvester Houédard, Ken Cox and Li Yuan-chu (East Gallery, 2008) and Dom Sylvester Houédard: Tantric paintings (Lisson Gallery, 2010).
"my dear bohumila & josef"
Monika Čejková

In the collage-like entries of their extensive memoirs of letter writing, Josef Grögerová and Josef Hiršal mentioned that in 1965 Mike Weaver told them about the work of a British concrete poet, Benedictine monk Dom Sylvester Houédard. Grögerová and Hiršal, seminal personalities of experimental poetry in Czechoslovakia, decided to include Houédard in a planned international anthology of experimental poetry, which they were preparing for publication in Prague. Henri Chopip reported their idea to Houédard the same year during his trip to British 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 Houédard asked Valoch for collaboration, offering him to publish one of his typograms or one of his so-called non-semantic visual creation. This gave rise to Plakat No. 6: homage to vietnam printed black and purple on off-white stock. At the exhibition, this piece is accompanied by 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. Although in his following letter Furnival proposed a name change to Hommage to NLE instead of Hommage to Vietcong since “Vietcong is a term invented by the Americans” – the work was eventually published as homage to vietnam. 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 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 nevanavar-gate”.

The connecting link between Valoch and dsh was John Furnival, a prominent British concrete poet. In 1965 Furnival, together with dsh and Edward Wright, founded the publishing house Openings Press in Woodchester, 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 him to publish one of his typograms or one of his so-called non-semantic visual creation. This gave rise to Plakat No. 6: homage to vietnam printed black and purple on off-white stock. At the exhibition, this piece is accompanied by 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. Although in his following letter Furnival proposed a name change to Hommage to NLE instead of Hommage to Vietcong since “Vietcong is a term invented by the Americans” – the work was eventually published as homage to vietnam. 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.

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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 nevanavar-gate”. The connecting link between Valoch and dsh was John Furnival, a prominent British concrete poet. In 1965 Furnival, together with dsh and Edward Wright, founded the publishing house Openings Press in Woodchester, 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 him to publish one of his typograms or one of his so-called non-semantic visual creation. This gave rise to Plakat No. 6: homage to vietnam printed black and purple on off-white stock. At the exhibition, this piece is accompanied by 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. Although in his following letter Furnival proposed a name change to Hommage to NLE instead of Hommage to Vietcong since “Vietcong is a term invented by the Americans” – the work was eventually published as homage to vietnam. 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.
“Traditional Christian attitudes were also consistent... In the international 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, 1978

Remembered in the tide-ripple of recent writing on Dom Sylvester Houédard – Peter Sylvester Houédard, Pierre, Dom Sylvester, dsh, the Dom, Sil, Syl, Sylvia, Silvester, S, P, H, as H is H – is a strange and novel vision. The British filmmaker Peter Whitehead’s camera pans into the issues of world peace, human rights and ending violent and imperialistic Western purview to address the cult demand answers from their hero’s late typestracts date from the late nineties.

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 poetry incarnate of the mid-sixties" in London.

Ginsberg the beadly 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 Ian 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 hero’s late typestracts date from the late nineties.

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begun to hang on the wall of his studio – no longer resembled design, but approached the condition of painting or sculpture.19

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.20 What is given belies something else – the countercultural 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.21

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 a typed draft of a sermon given in 1987, speaking across the whole thing gently vibrated at eye level. Hokendard was delighted with this conceit – a “Kiff Garden”, he called it.21

By dsh from 1968, on which “H as H is H” is written in black marker pen.30

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, 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.24 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 queued, which ultimately would take his life – a queer martyrdom.25

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.”26

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 Avant-garde Monk

4  It had its abusers: the charismatic mindfuckers - think Charles Manson and Mal Cerrnan – who, as David Felton argues in Mediakulture: A Source Book on the Rise of Acid Funk (1967), filled a spiritual void.
5  See Chris Thompson, Falk (Sarah Joseph Evans), and the Jakes Lane, University of California Press, 2012. For a critique of the Beuys years, see Charles Verey’s review of La Jetée” by H. D. Buchholz’s 1966 essay essay “Beuys. The Twilight of the Idiot.
9  Ibid.
10  dsh’s luminates are of a kind with Duchamps’ The Large Glass (1915), which traps oil paint, lead, wire, and dust between glass sheets, and anticipate the French artist Juliette Bonniviot’s PET plastic assemblages (1917), which traps oil paint, lead, wire, and dust between glass sheets, and anticipate the French artist Juliette Bonniviot’s PET plastic assemblages and the vacuum pack wall-mounted sculpture of Greco-Belgian artist Dami Anoumou.
11  Jarman (Note 8), p. 71.
12  In the archive of Bob Cobbing there is a single A4 page work by dsh in 1987, on which “H as H is H” is written in black marker pen. Signed “dsh 200468”, it is dedicated “to sirve abramo”. It suggests this pseudonym was created by dsh himself. To view the archive go to www.majtuk.uk.
13  Jarman (Note 8), p. 128.
14  Ibid., p. 71.
Dom Sylvester 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, klinkteksten, 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.
List of Exhibited Works

**Typography**

Dom Sylvester Houédard

- Epiphany, 1974
  - ink typed on paper
  - 20.5 × 12.8 cm
  - courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

- Pater noster, 1969
  - ink typed on paper
  - 13.7 × 13.2 cm
  - courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

- hommage a la bouteille de chambertin, 1974
  - ink typed on paper
  - 19.3 × 26.3 cm
  - courtesy of Lisson Gallery

- Laminate Works / Cosmic Dust Poems
  - Homage to Bodhidharma the roly-poly daruma
    - Dom Sylvester Houédard
    - 8.5 × 20.3 cm
    - ink typed on paper
    - courtesy of Lisson Gallery

- The Nine Layered Universe of the Pawnee
  - Inner blue womb
    - Dom Sylvester Houédard
    - 32.9 × 20.2 cm
    - ink typed on paper
    - courtesy of Lisson Gallery

- Yantra of Sex
  - Chris Milligan
  - 8.5 × 14.5 cm
  - offset
  - courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

- 4 Stages of Contemplative Writing
  - Typestracts
  - List of Exhibited Works
  - 1967
  - 14 × 23.3 × 0.1 cm
  - vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material)
  - courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

- Untitled
  - Franciszka Themerson and Stefan Themerson
  - 20.6 × 11.2 cm
  - folding card
  - courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

- Freedom Song
  - Franciszka Themerson and Stefan Themerson
  - 27.3 × 12.3 × 0.1 cm
  - and PVC plastic
  - courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

- Oopenings Press Collection
  - Folded Poems
    - Ian Hamilton Finlay
      - With Furniture, Opening No. 3, Oopenings Press, 1966
      - concertina book
      - edition 500; printed by Sleem Press Ltd.
      - 28.5 × 16.4 cm
      - courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

- Other works
  - Richard Kostelanetz
    - Card Series 1, Oopenings Press, March 1969
    - 19 × 14 cm each (3 prints)
    - courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

- Poetry Books
  - Begin Again
    - Personality, Opening No. 1, January 1967
    - 24.4 × 18.2 × 0.3 cm
    - published by Writers Forum, London
    - courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

- Correspondence
  - From Dom Sylvester Houédard to Ivo Novak, probably 1967
    - 19.6 × 13.9 cm
    - letter
    - Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

- Postcards
  - From Dom Sylvester Houédard to Jiří Valoch, 24 September 1966
    - 10.5 × 14.9 cm
    - postcard
    - Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

- Other works
  - From John Furnival to Jiří Valoch, 23 July 1966
    - 18.4 × 10.3 cm
    - postcard
    - Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

- From John Furnival to Jiří Valoch, 9 July 1966
  - 16.4 × 13.9 cm
  - letter
  - Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno
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.

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 (2018), 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.
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), Smiška 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. 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 legitimate 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.

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 Kunsthaus 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. The artist 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.
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), 88 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 leges 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 overly recognizable. Both performances were first presented in 2022 at the Catriona Jeffries gallery in Vancouver.

Ferdinand Kriwet 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, 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. The poetry of 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.”

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
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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Monika Čejková, Dom Stephen Horton, Nicola Simpson, Jonathan P. Watts

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