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## ESSAYS

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### UFOs IN HAIKU<sup>1</sup>

*Jim Kacian*

The aliens have landed and they're infiltrating haiku. Not fictional aliens, like E.T., Mork, or David Bowie, but actual UFOs: Unique Formal Objects. This article is intended to help you recognize these elusive entities, possibly with an eye toward helping you create your own.

UFOs have been among us for a century by one reckoning, and at least several decades by most. I'll provide a brief history of what the government has permitted us to see a bit later on. My own first encounter took place in my earliest days in haiku, when I came to possess Bill Higginson and Penny Harter's *The Haiku Handbook*.<sup>2</sup> I was intrigued, in my first reading, by the chapter subheading called "Modernization and Haiku Form," and especially by some of the contemporary Japanese poems. Take this one, for example, by Takayanagi Shigenobu:

in a mountain range's  
creases  
hear  
ing  
clear  
ly  
  
the  
bur  
ied  
ear  
s



a five- (or seven-) liner with very short lines and line spaces after one and five by Higginson himself;<sup>7</sup>

the drip

echoes  
unknown  
before

the cave

plus monoku from Peggy Willis Lyles, Geraldine C. Little, and Marlene Mountain.

Before we knew its name the indigo bunting

*Peggy Willis Lyles*<sup>8</sup>

a warm wind tickles the dark bewteen my toes

*Geraldine C. Little*<sup>9</sup>

at dusk hot water from the hose

*Marlene Mountain*<sup>10</sup>

I mention this not to disparage these fine poems, but simply to note that the agreed-upon range at that time, at least in this fairly conservative overview, was not awe-inspiring.

Oh, yes, there was one more item from Marlene Mountain—this:<sup>11</sup>

on this cold

spring 1  
2 night 3 4  
kittens  
wet  
5

This was when it occurred to me that I was entering Area 51. Though I was not yet sensitive to the nuances of haiku form, I knew right away this was not the usual encounter. The other shapes seemed of a piece, in two categories: one line or three, with some variation allowed. Even the Higginson poem seemed composed of three lines, with the middle line joggled a bit. But this kitten poem needed to be exactly this way to release its full impact, and it seemed apparent to me even then that this had not come into being by reasoning from three lines outward. Neither was it designed to illustrate anything in specific, unless we wish to speak of illustrating the shape of the moment. It was composed whole, and without concern for a standard that I was just coming to recognize. This was my first UFO.

As time went by I read more, grew far more accustomed to the three-line expectation, and proceeded to write in that form for the greater part of two decades. Every now and then, however, whenever I had occasion to look back at some of my earliest work, I saw that something was contained there that I had not yet been brave enough to announce. It was only after considerable reworking—of the poems and my confidence—that I was willing to publish some of these earliest poems. And though I could not say then what was needed to perfect these early attempts, I can say now that I needed to couple the uneducated and therefore uninhibited inspiration of that time with a facility in arrangement that seemed not yet to exist in the haiku world. I would have liked to suggest alternative ways of entering and being with such poems, but with the hope they would still evince a “haiku-like” experience. Some of those early poems failed in the latter, but nearly all of them held something of interest—to me at least—in the way they presented themselves. And so my enduring interest in UFOs was born.

It is worth adding, too, that I was at that time unaware of the rich anti-authoritarian conspiracy theories of Canadian poets such as LeRoy Gorman. It is to him and his cabal that I dedicate this article.

## Identifying UFOs

UFOs, as we have said, are Unique Formal Objects. The acronym also stands for the elements found within them: Unit, Field, and Order. We will explore each of these in time, but first, a little discussion of our purpose.

Unique Formal Objects are anomalies, manifestations of aspects of what is termed “organic form.” It’s worth saying up front: “organic form”<sup>12</sup> is an oxymoron—form implies a repeatable technique, and organic suggests shape devised to meet a specific need. In truth, each of the following examples is unique, and don’t prescribe useful methods for solving other formal problems. What we might say is that the following are a handful of solutions that, taken together, suggest different ways of approaching and being with groups of words. The premise of this approach is that

I love you

is different than

I love you

and

I love

you

and so on, and that there are as many shadings of emotions available as the number of different ways of presenting the same content. If you accept this premise, you grant that though the content of these illustrations is the same, their presentation makes them different. And so it is presentation we are ultimately considering.

UFOs can almost always be identified by a mere glimpse of their shape, quite apart from what they contain. This is because they usually appear

so different from what we are used to. For decades we have seen shapes like this

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/^/^^/^  
^/^^/

to the point where even non-literary people might well recognize this IFO (Identifiable Formal Object; these particular fashionings I will call *silhouettes*) to be a haiku.<sup>13</sup> Even more, we know it to be a traditional (that is, 5-7-5) haiku. In fact, it is the specific pattern for this famous poem:

A bitter morning:  
sparrows sitting together  
without any necks.

*James W. Hackett*<sup>14</sup>

In truth it could fit other traditional haiku as well, perhaps even exactly, though I have not looked for any further matches. And in recent times more and more we have seen this sort of shape:

/^///

Since you're already in a haiku mindset, you'll recognize this to be a very brief one-liner, and if you're a student of the genre, it might occur to you that it's none other than

pig and I spring rain

*Marlene Mountain*<sup>15</sup>

These are the two most iconic layouts for haiku, and are most often visually recognizable, even when we have only their silhouettes to work from. This is both a strength and a weakness, a unifying principle and a prison. We know when we see one of these that we are identifying haiku, but such certainty also limits what else we might recognize to be so. Consider these UFOs—are they haiku as well?

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The layout is the biggest tip-off in the first example—the line space after the first line, as well as the kerning spaces in the second and third. It is, of course, Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro.”<sup>16</sup>

## IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :  
Petals on a wet black bough .

And who among you did not recognize “tundra”?<sup>17</sup>

tundra

The next is only for serious skywatchers, but once you have seen this UFO I think you will agree it is uncanny:

beyond  
stars beyond  
star

*L.A. Davidson*<sup>18</sup>

And the last of these you'll recognize as the aforementioned kitten poem by Marlene Mountain.

What is of note here is that the shapes of these excellent poems are a part of their enduring fame. We know them even when we don't have access to their words. And when you think about how this effect is achieved, in each instance it's through a suggestibility of that shape matching the emotional tenor of the poem. These are not "shape" poems, per se; a shape poem would seek a more direct alliance between content and silhouette, as in George Herbert's literal wings in his "Easter-Wings,"<sup>19</sup>

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
And still with sicknesses and shame.  
Thou didst so punish sinne,  
That I became  
Most thinne.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel thy victorie:  
For, if I imp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

or E. E. Cummings's dedication to his volume *No, Thanks*,<sup>20</sup>





and the second a haiga I created on a similar theme, “rain tracks.”<sup>22</sup>



Clearly, the Apollinaire piece gains its effect from typographical resources, and while suggesting rain, doesn't actually try to represent it. Whereas the haiga inserts its text in the midst of tracks that do indeed intend to illustrate, though not with anything approaching realistic fidelity, the tracks of raindrops along a pane of glass. Clearly the haiga aims at an imagistic representation that is not intended by the typographical.

Such shapes capture something additional to the content of the poem, without necessarily illustrating it. Take Mountain's poem, for instance. It certainly could have been laid out as an IFO:

on this cold spring night  
 1 2 3 4  
 kittens wet 5

I have no particular confidence in this arrangement—the original UFO is so iconic that any tampering with it empties into arbitrariness. But let's use this simply for the sake of seeing what effect this usualness has on the poetic experience. The poem would still be groundbreaking, simply for enumerating the experience, and for “violating” the single moment trope in place at the time. This series of events, closely spaced in time, is a single event in the mind, but still challenges haiku norms. So there is something

extra here already. But the evocation of the discovery of these discrete events, one at a time and over time, in this particular shape lends a tremendous boost of surprise to the rendering, capped, of course, by that wonderful stroke of genius “5.” Does the shape remind me of anything? I can try, and if I do, my mind might range from the promising (a swollen teat?) to the hideous (a sack of kittens?). So the shape is ambiguous enough to suggest a range of “actual” things, but its greatest affect is that it contains emotion without actually being shaped like any one thing in particular. That is, as a UFO it engages the imagination in a way that as an IFO it does not.

The other examples are illustrative as well: the spacing of the Pound poem keeps the reading from being too literal, but is it possible to see the spaces as keeping the cars of the subway apart?; the loneliness of van den Heuvel’s single word in that immense white space is conveyed without a trace of exaggeration, but conjures its natural counterpart without hint of dwarf tree or scrub grass; and Davidson’s star, not flush left but indented, its singular effect upon us delayed until the other stars are out of the way, holds a promise in that pause. It is neither “star-like” nor “sky-like,” in appearance, but its subtle syncopation contains the stars and the heavens, in four words, in three lines. In each of these instances the poet has not simply followed, or only followed, form but has manipulated it to give the reader an extra frisson.

Still, aside from Mountain’s kittens poem and van den Heuvel’s tundra, all of these UFOs were conceived first as one- or three-line poems—that is, as IFOs—and then adapted. Even for so simple a thing as a haiku, there are many assumptions that undergird such regularity, and by conforming our poetic experiences to them we are complicit with this normalization. Again, this is both good and bad. By having a fixed form, people are able to know immediately how they should think in meeting this text. We have a very specialized compartment of our brains to cope with IFOs, one we’ve trained over years of study and practice. When a text, or even the silhouette of a text, comes into view, our brain shifts to that compartment, and we are ready to read and understand the poem in a special way. We all can recognize the three-line silhouette, we all can identify the cut (*kire*), we all accede to the ethos. And if we are less fussy about what

constitutes haiku content these days than we might once have been, we still hold a special store of images that feature in that haiku brain: fulling blocks and summer grasses and cherry blossoms the year round. We have prepared ourselves to identify these entities, and we know them when we see them.

So it might be easy to take for granted some of the things that are in play whether we recognize them or not. These things are so basic that it's easy to miss them, like the air we breathe if we're not thinking about it. Let's then consider the elements of haiku form, especially as they manifest themselves on paper (a good deal of any sort of form vanishes if the poems are encountered simply as spoken words, unless some artificial emphasis is made to keep such form clear).

We encounter most haiku in books and journals, or else online. These media have their own sets of assumptions that determine how we hold a book, in which direction we read, what our eyes can deduce from dots on a page or screen, and so forth. These do have some play in how we might approach the task of presenting our own UFOs.

### The Structure of UFOs

**U**for Unit: Haiku, like all literature, is a group of specific symbols in a certain order designed to elicit a response. It is normal for us to think in words, or in groups of words, when constructing our poems, but it isn't restricted simply to these. We have already seen that Marlene Mountain employed number symbols (though in a very straightforward manner) in her kittens poem. We might consider that individual letters, and non-letter symbols, as well as space(s), might also be the basis of our presentation—that is, might serve as the unit of our presentation. Once again the idea is that this

space

is different than this

s p a c e

and this

p  
s a e  
c

If we accept the character as the unit, a great deal of rich ambiguity opens up to us as poets, especially in terms of how we fill the space of the field. Individual characters may share more than one continuation, leading to multiple paths of interpretation. In this one example, we might well find “space” to be the primary reading, but it is easy to find as well “scape,” “paces,” and “capes.” There may be a time when a poet needs exactly that array of significances to come into play, in which case the devolution of the unit to the single character would be immeasurably useful.

A similar plethora of possible correspondences is available as well should we choose the word as our unit. The prosodic layout of words

These are the times that try men’s souls

may convey much but when we conceive of the word as a unit rather than simply a way of conveying meaning, it opens to other possibilities, such as this

These

These are

These are the

These are the times

These are the times that

These are the times that try

These are the times that try men

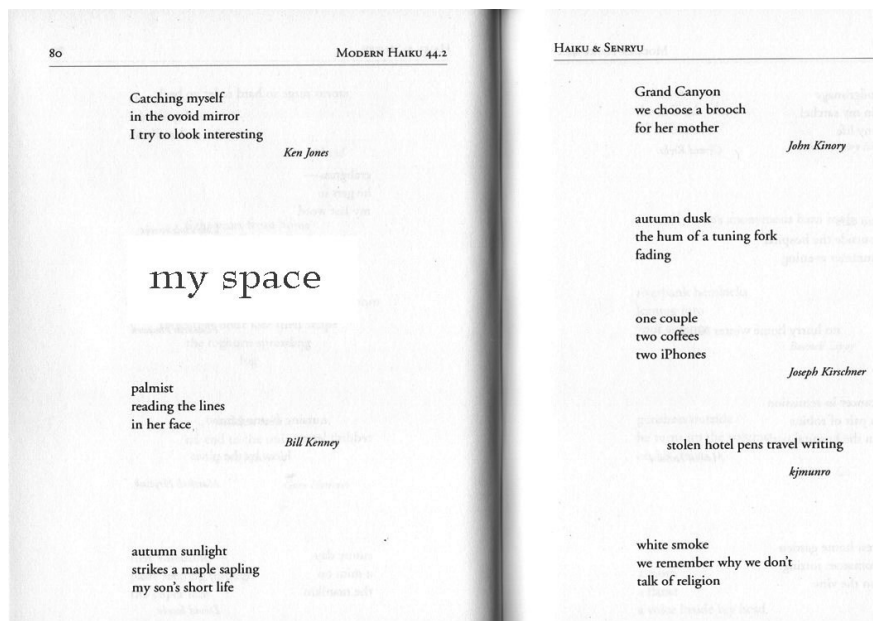
These are the times that try men’s souls

or this,

are  
men's  
souls  
that  
the  
these  
times  
try

We might make poems using whole phrases, even books using entire poems, as the primary unit.

**F for Field:** Where the poem is going to appear has a tremendous impact on its effectiveness. For nearly every haiku ever published, this has meant a narrow rectangular space with a white background against which the black letters of our text were displayed. Already there are some very powerful limits in play here. Why do such limits exist? Simply put, it's because in the great preponderance of instances, haiku poets have not demanded more space from their editors. We have been content with this narrow slot, and indeed have written to it.



Add to this the fact that it is much simpler for an editor to remove one such narrow three-line poem and replace it with another that there is little incentive for them to vary their template. The result can be a remarkable sameness to haiku books and journals. It has been remarked on at least one occasion that haiku should be read as occasionally as the sightings of UFOs. But this is exactly the opposite of how haiku have traditionally been presented to readers. None of which means a reader can't manage his or her own appetite, but the task is not made easier by the traditional handling of field in haiku. What might a more optimal field be?

It's important to recognize that a field is necessary. It is not possible to say that your field is the whole world, because that would mean that your art is the content of the world, which is life, which, as we know, is far from artful. Art is selection and order from life, and in order to differentiate that selection and order from the chaos of existence, the defining of a field is necessary. But that said, your field is wide open. Christo, the environmental artist famous for wrapping the Reichstag in fabric, among other monumentally scaled efforts, took as his field miles of beach, for instance, or entire bridges. On the other end of the scale, Willard Wigan produces sculptures that literally fit inside the head of a pin. Haiku poets may not wish to resort to these sorts of extremes, especially since our genre is already at one extreme end of literary length. We may well wish to continue to be published in these tight spaces and be grateful for the opportunity. But we need not automatically accept the dimensions of the field. Some poets have already forced a reconsideration of the narrow horizontal rectangle as the default field in haiku by utilizing a vertical layout for their poems.

new  
robin  
nest's

a  
perfect  
mud



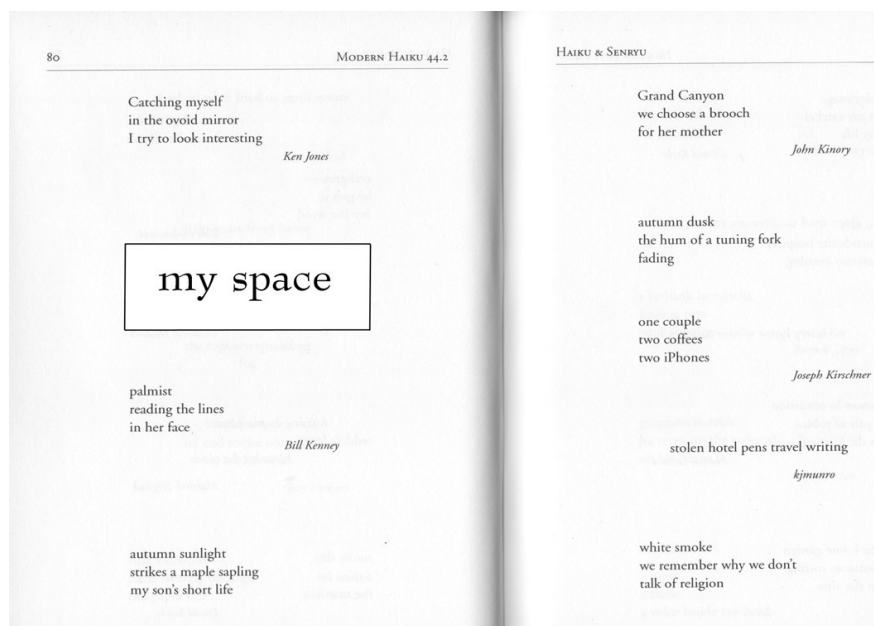
circle  
in

any-  
day-  
now

*John Martone*<sup>23</sup>

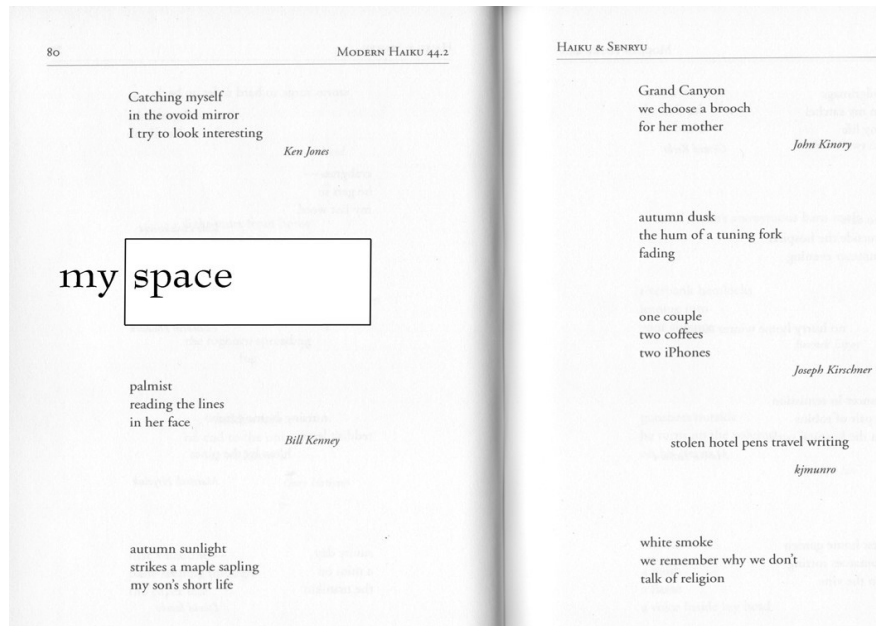
You might argue that this is simply exchanging a narrow vertical rectangle for a narrow horizontal one, but you must admit it does change the look of a page.

Another approach within the confines of the narrow horizontal rectangle is to redefine the rectangle for one's self. As usually presented, there are no edges to "your" rectangle, so as to allow a seamless movement from one poem to the next. But you don't have to accept this convention. You can make a box around your poem, which guarantees it its own space.





Not only that, but by creating tangible “in” and “out” areas, you have a dynamic available to you that is not available when the rectangle is more amorphously defined.



Where you have more space at your disposal—in your own book, say—you can explore the dimensions of field to a greater extent. Single pages or even spreads can become the field, or you can divide the blank space up into any number of fields per page, as the Muse demands.

**O for Order:** As we manipulate different units in a variety of fields, the question of order arises. The conventions of our culture, as you know, are top-left and left-to-right. We begin reading at the top of the page at the left margin, and we proceed to the end of the line from left to right, at which point we move all the way back to the left margin to begin the next line. This is not by any means automatic or instinctive, but entirely cultural, that is, entirely learned. According to perceptual psychologists, the eye favors the lower left of any visual field,<sup>24</sup> and other cultures have had defaults which worked just as effectively as our own: Egyptian hieroglyphics are read top-left top-to-bottom; Early Greek lapidary characters began top-right and read right to left for the first line, left to right for the second, right to left for the third, and so on; and consider how we read

the classifieds—top-left left to right column by column. The primary point of order is to establish meaning. It is one thing to have a group of words laid into a field

a a all art and and and as brag breathe buds but by  
 can can chance changing compare complexion course  
 darling date day death decline dimmed do  
 eternal eternal every eye eyes fade fair fair fair from  
 gives gold grow'st hath heaven his his hot I in is  
 lease life lines lives long long lose lovely  
 May men more more nature's nor nor  
 of of of often or or ow'st possession  
 rough see shade shake shall shall shall shines short  
 so so sometime summer summer's summer's  
 temperate that that the the thee thee this this  
 thou thou thou thou thy time to to to too too  
 untrimmed wand'rest when winds

and quite another thing for them to cohere.<sup>25</sup>

Shall I compare thee to a summer day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.  
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Haiku has a built-in advantage over prose in this regard: it is, by nature of its very brevity, already a pruned collocation, at its very best a meme. And this is precisely the goal of every poem, which is, after all, simply a kind of persuasion, an invitation to view the world—or this selected bit of it within this field using these units—in a particular fashion. Short is easier to memorize than long, but because it also competes with so many other short things, it must be really special to conquer the mind. All the better, then, if its form contributes to making it memorable.

This still leaves, of course, how we come to order. Do we follow the cultural default, top-left left-to-right? Do we break with this to guide the eye along a different path, or perhaps many different paths? If we do this, will the reader “get it”? And am I willing to risk meaning for an effect? These are not simple questions. Consider the process of Eduard Tura in realizing this poem:<sup>26</sup>

	new		first step		child
spring		moon—the		of my	
	full		last word		father

The poet wished to establish an equivalence to the events being noted, along with a sense of the passage of time. It would have been extremely difficult for him to do this with an IFO. His solution is ingenious: the reader is compelled to re-read the poem by virtue of the layout, and so the two events, so united in the poet’s mind, become united in the poem as well. And despite the poem’s irregularity, I believe the poet has managed the reading experience quite well. While one could read the top part on the left with the bottom part on the right and vice versa, that has a feeling of arbitrariness. I think the reader neatly supplies the necessary order—top with top, bottom with bottom—that makes the poem hold together.

Of course, we have expectations of our poems, we hope they will be received and understood, and so we are balancing our manipulations of these elements, unit and field and order, against our quest for meaning. It is easy to destroy meaning by going too far afield in our play with any of these tools, and so the whole point of the enterprise might be lost. This presumes, of course, that the goal is to be understood, and that, too,

should be challenged and explored. Perhaps the message is that communication is impossible—wouldn't it then be useful to skew the elements to the point where they might seem intelligible but don't cohere? But of course since communication is impossible, it may be that your message never arrives.

But let's presume meaning is our overarching concern. If that's the case, then all these other elements must serve meaning. If the unit is too small, or too large, if the field is too ambiguous, or out of scale, if the order is indecipherable, we may well fail to reach the reader. So while it's fun to explore these elements, we ultimately must answer the final question: did these enhancements to the poem, in our search for a truly unique form, a UFO, impair or destroy its meaning? A final proviso to this is that even this is not so simple as it might seem. A poet might well feel that he or she has gone too far with their process and destroyed their intended meaning, but another reader might feel that only at that point did the poet actually begin to convey this, or some other and equally important, meaning. In fact, a reader may feel the poet did not go far enough. Poets are in fact rarely the best judges of their own work, caught up as they are in the understanding of how it came about, what undergirds it, where it aims. A sympathetic reader who is not burdened with this backstory might well be the best judge of whether or not a poem reaches a mark, and, in fact, just what mark that might be.

Be that as it may, every poet knows what he wishes to convey with each poem, and knows what meaning has prompted this attempted communication. Since that's the case, we should aim to maximize that meaning with our creative approach to form, and find the balance between suggestiveness and identity that will bring the most resonance out of the experience.

### Some Early Sightings

Let's look back at the history of UFOs, to see when they first appeared and what people made of them. The first UFO we should consider is that very form which has become the norm for haiku practice around the world: the three-line, short-long-short version that has dominated haiku

production for the past century. We have already seen its classic shape in the famous sparrow poem by James Hackett. With small adjustments this poem's silhouette could be the shape for nearly every haiku produced in English (and most other languages) from 1920 through the late 1960s, as well as nearly every haiku encountered on the internet from popular culture sources from the 1980s to this day. But we should not take this shape for granted; it was a UFO when it was first sighted. The earliest translations, after all, did not look like this at all. Lafcadio Hearn's translations were in a single horizontal line.

Oh, this firefly!—seen by daylight, the nape of its neck is red!

*Bashō*<sup>27</sup>

Basil Hall Chamberlain's were in (most often) unrhymed couplets.

The end of autumn, and some rooks  
Are perched upon a withered branch.

*Bashō*<sup>28</sup>

Even as late as the 1930s Asatarō Miyamori was producing couplets with titles,

Crows on a Snowy Morning

The usually hateful crow—  
How lovely on the morn of snow.

*Bashō*<sup>29</sup>

and the Peter Pauper Press books of the 1950s produced four-line stanzas.

HI! MY LITTLE HUT  
IS NEWLY-THATCHED  
I SEE . . .  
BLUE MORNING GLORIES

*Issa*<sup>30</sup>

The best-selling haiku book of all time in English, *A Net of Fireflies*, translations by Harold Stewart, is a series of rhymed couplets.

“THAT IS NOT HAIKU!”

You take a scarlet pepper-pod, apply  
Two wings of gauze, and look—a dragonfly!

*Bashō*<sup>31</sup>

And of course Japanese haiku are nearly always single vertical lines.

So it was an inspired choice for early promoters of the genre—Sadakichi Hartmann, for example—to identify the resources of the three-line format, and poets have been exploiting these resources ever since.

Similarly, the most obvious variant to the three-line norm, the monoku, we have also encountered in Marlene Mountain’s “pig” poem. Admittedly this is an extreme case, but the silhouette of any one-liner will merely be some extension of it. This, too, has unexpected resources that are only latterly being exploited by poets. The first published monoku I can find is

in the eggshell after the chick has hatched

*Michael Seger*

This was published in *Haiku Magazine* 5.2 in 1971. And though this shape is now sighted often enough to no longer qualify as a UFO, it is still relatively rare and far from fully explored and understood.

The point is, the first UFOs of haiku were so successful that they became the norm. The many attempts to regard haiku as a two-line poem—not wrong-headed, since haiku do indeed most often feature a pair of contrasting elements—have proven to be too literal for most poets. One or three lines has offered a more flexible handling of material without losing the music, asymmetry, surprise, and other elements that we find in the best such poems. In any case, while we no longer consider one- and three-

line poems alien, we should not lose sight of the fact that they once were, and have been ingenious and productive poetic solutions for conveying the stuff of haiku for a very long time.

We've already discussed Pound's "Metro" poem and noted its unusual shape. His other haiku are more usual, following three-line formats plus titles. Other early sightings of English-language haiku mainly turned out to be IFOs as well, from such poets as Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, and E. E. Cummings. But occasionally we would find something that would baffle the skywatcher, as, for example, this:

Suicide's Note

The calm,  
Cool face of the river  
Asked me for a kiss.

*Langston Hughes*<sup>32</sup>

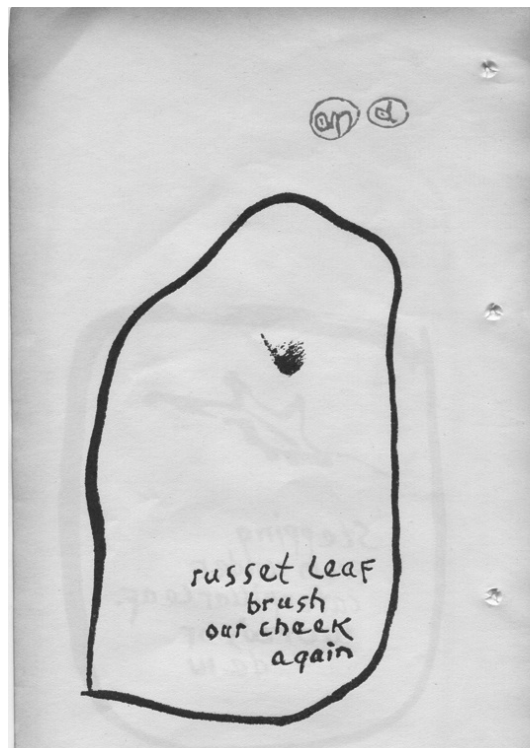
The resulting silhouette

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//^^/^  
//^^/

is a UFO, and only a syllable count (including title) makes clear the provenance from which it arose.

Mostly, however, once haiku "found" its form, it remained fairly well committed to it for half a century. The only significant body of UFOs to be found during that time was Paul Repts' ink drawings, and these are probably more properly considered haiga. Repts was not an advocate of haiku, per se, but of Buddhism, and he used any medium that would further his interest. This image would be typical.<sup>33</sup>





It's worth noting, given our new nomenclature, to see how Reps manages the viewer's experience. U: he chooses the phrase as the unit; F: he creates his own field within the constrictions of the actual page, and that field is irregular and non-representational; he works both inside and out of it; and O: he delays the appearance of the text until after the image is accommodated.

Through the mid-'60s, very little changed in terms of haiku form. This is completely understandable: haiku was still largely unknown and/or misunderstood, and early attempts at making it an acceptable new poetic genre focused on keeping it identifiable and consistent. After so many poems, though, whose silhouettes were interchangeable with the Hackett poem we explored earlier, imagine how disturbing it must have been to readers to glimpse a UFO like this:<sup>34</sup>

^/^/^ ^ ^  
/^  
/^



It is, of course, Jack Cain's often-anthologized

an empty elevator  
opens  
closes

But even as radically different as this poem, and a few others by Nick Virgilio, Larry Wiggins, etc. might look, they still emanate from within a three-line mind-set. While content and syllable count underwent sea changes, format remained pretty much where it had been for half a century.

However, once haiku had established a beachhead in the poetry world, and especially once it had cultivated its own movement, poets were freer to explore the range of possibilities that lay within its brief compass. So one could argue that haiku required a sense of its self—via dedicated journals, organizations and gatherings—before it could afford to change itself. And this sense of self didn't emerge until the late 1960s.

No surprise, then, that beginning at this time there was a spate of UFO sightings. Can you identify this one from 1969?<sup>35</sup>

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^/ ^/^/  
/ ^/ ^/

How about this one, from 1974?<sup>36</sup>

^/  
/^ ^ ^/  
/^  
  
//

These poems, mildly divergent from the norm though they were, were nevertheless considered to be groundbreaking at the time. This is at least partly because up to this point, the only basic element that most poets were willing to contemplate tweaking, and that only slightly, was the field. Pizzarelli's poem extends the field vertically by a couple line widths along with attempting to limn the timing of the actual moment, which Wills's does likewise through the horizontal extension of the third line.

And it must have been downright shocking, then, to encounter this:<sup>37</sup>

```

GGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG
RRRRRRRESRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR
AAAAAKSNAAAAAAAASNAAAA
SSNKESSESSSSSSSSNAKESSE
SSAKESSESNSSSSSSAKESSE
GGGGGGGGGGNAKGGGAKEGGGG
RRRRRRRRRRRRKESRAKERRRRR
AAAAAAAAAAAAASNAKEAAAAAA
SSSSSSSSSSSSSAKESSSSSSSS

```

*Larry Gates*

"But it isn't haiku!" I wonder how many times Gates heard that? And he didn't argue the point. He called this poem and others like it "test patterns." Nevertheless, there is a genuine moment of discovery in the poem, when we find the snake in the grass, and other contextual elements, such as noticing the rake, and of course the grass itself. I would argue that this very much arrives at meaning in a haiku manner, and I personally have no difficulty identifying it as one.

Gates had another interesting idea in terms of form shortly thereafter, replacing the three horizontal lines with three verticals:<sup>38</sup>

As            a            flashes  
 the           little        white  
 falls        water-thrush  
 darken

In the 1970s Evelyn Tooley Hunt, writing as Tao-Li, adopted this as her signature style.

Only a couple years later Marlene Mountain drew all these elements together, using improvisatory spacing to give her poems the shape of the experience, à la Wills and Pizzarelli, and exploring the character, rather than the word, as the unit. The kitten poem was only one of many successes in this vein:

                         o            g  
                          r  
                          f                            frog

*Marlene Mountain*

### Recent Sightings

If Mountain threw down the gauntlet with *the old tin roof*, few in the United States, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, or other Anglophone cultures stooped to pick it up. The great exception was Canada. Canadian poets seemingly were just waiting for the opportunity to explore the more arcane variants of haiku form, and the study of UFOs for the next couple decades emanates largely from north of the 49th parallel. In the very first issue of *Inkstone* (1982), a journal produced by the Toronto Haiku Workshop, the estimable George Swede published an assessment of the work of, and interview with, Eric Amann. Among other things, Swede notes that Amann's valuation of his own work peaks with what he terms the visual-experimental. Swede reproduces a couple examples, such as this one:

# The starlit sea

\* \* \* \* \*

~~~~~

*Eric Amann*<sup>39</sup>

Today we would call such work word painting, but at the time, and especially for an audience that would have limited access to Mountain's work (this was long before the internet), such poems seemed completely novel. So much so that over the next few issues, whether by accident or design (depending on the conspiracy theory you believe), *Inkstone*, announced a bevy of new sightings.

Bob Boldman turns his hand here to a bit of word painting, the most direct response one might make to the Amann comments.<sup>40</sup>

acoldnightattheendofthelitcigarette\*\*\*\*

Notice how nick avis's poem captures not only the physical motion of the moment, but also linguistically announces the season, in French, in bilingual Canada.<sup>41</sup>

shhhhh h h h h h iver

jwcurry was very active in the 1980s in the haiku world but moved on to short poetry activism soon after. This overlap style is one adapted from the world of concrete poetry, and the typed text strikes us today as rather nostalgic, but such work was once the cutting edge of visual poets.<sup>42</sup>

corderniaord

And then there's LeRoy Gorman. So many of his poems over the 40 years of his career have been UFOs that one must wonder about where he's really from. I have purposely chosen to feature only a couple of his fine works, to keep this article balanced and moving along, but also to leave you to your own joy of discovering his remarkable oeuvre.

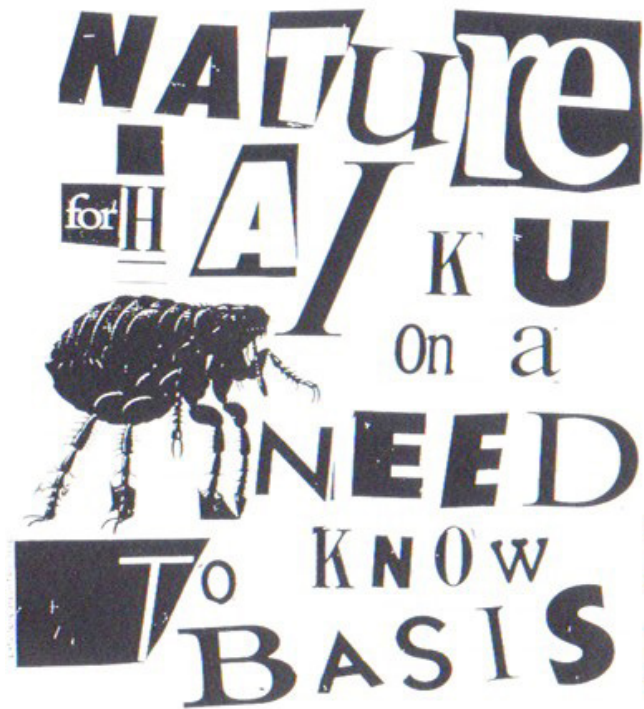
f        a        l  
                  l  
 w        t        r  
           a        e  
 f        a        l  
                  l  
 a                   l  
                  l  
 i                   s  
 n                   t  
           o  
 w        h        t  
                  a  
 i                   t

This poem might be considered a kind of typographical futurism, which can be clearly parsed, and at the same time might be appreciated for the nicely gauged action of its motion.<sup>43</sup> To speak in terms of UFOs, LeRoy takes liberties with unit (making us aware of individual letters even as whole words are the "sense" of the poem), field (elongating it), and order (giving us two planes of meaning). A beautiful and characteristic piece.

*Inkstone* had a relatively short and sporadic life—it ran for 11 years but produced only 5 volumes, a total of 20 issues, folding in 1993. And the better news was that the vacuum it left in Canadian UFO studies was filled immediately (1994) by an even more outrageous production, *RAW NerVZ*, with Dorothy Howard at the helm. Styling itself the nemesis of ordinary haiku, *RAW NerVZ* advocated attitude, and if the results were somewhat uneven, they were never dull. Howard had a taste for the visual as well, so the Canadian, and increasingly worldwide, interest in UFOs had a place to be shared, to influence, and to challenge, others.

In addition to those we've already encountered, many new poets also found a home for their most daring work in *RAW NerVZ*. What follows is a mere sampling.

Marlene Mountain joined the conversation with such characteristic works as this:<sup>44</sup>



The shrill politics of Marlene's collage work dovetailed perfectly with the strident visual style of *RAW NerVZ*. She was one of the most consistent contributors and helped to establish the "house style" early on. If the unit and order are normative, there is no doubt she demands her own field with such work, and leaves no uncertainty about her meaning.

Of course LeRoy Gorman would appear numerous times. This “mutant crystal” in an acrostic style has significant challenges for the reader, especially in arriving at an order that guarantees a stable meaning. But of course the instability speaks to the subject of the poem, and the visual shape, attempting the elegant but listing to the side, is a warning beyond any meaning that might arrive from the words.<sup>45</sup>

**how does your radon grow**

```

      d             d
      e             n
    r a d a r a d i s h   p o t a t o
      e   e   w   o       i
      e   b       u w   n o r t h
      w   m       r t   i   r
          u       e h   n u
    : a s t   c       c a r r o t
      s   u       l       e
    s u e t c u n u c l e a r   r
      w   u       c l e a r
      o   c       l e a r
    h       u n c u m b e r
          m   o
          b       r
          e       t
          r       h
  
```

Michael Dudley was another Canadian who specialized in typographical anomalies. This typical piece, with its bold capitals, redirects the attention from the flow of the italics to “discover” the object of attention.<sup>46</sup>

*froM clOud to clOud sileNtly*

George Swede had an innovative turn of mind that affected even his more normative haiku. This example of freight-train technique, where each word is tied to the one before and after by a shared letter or letters, is typical.<sup>47</sup>

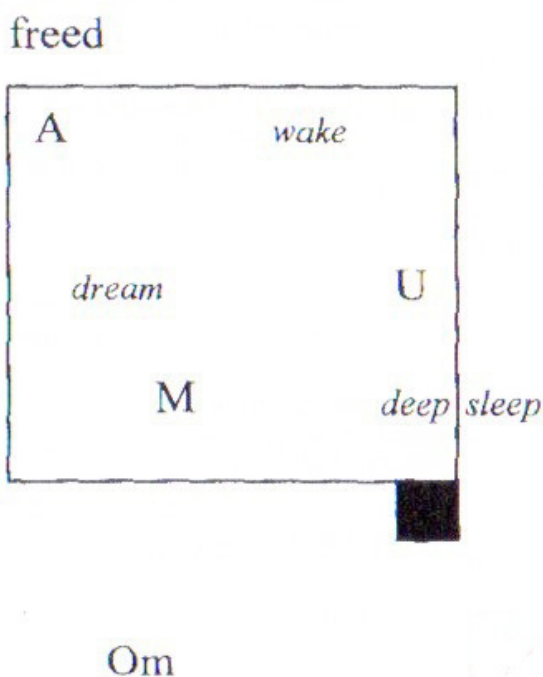
mindeadreameruns







And one could not flip through a copy of *RAW NerVZ* in the late 90s without encountering some of the extremely imaginative work of Jean Michel Guillaumond. You can see at a glance how he uses field, unit and order to construct complex meanings, and manages to direct the attention of the reader without demanding any single “right” reading. And the arrhythmic weight of that black box at the bottom right . . .<sup>51</sup>



Suddenly UFOs were everywhere, and everyone admitted to seeing them, even if they didn't always concur as to what they were or meant. To arrive at your own interpretation of these heady times, I strongly recommend you immerse yourselves in the pages of *RAW NerVZ*.

Since its demise in 2006, however, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of sightings. Whether this is the work of a conspiracy by the authorities, or the result of a diminished lack of interest on the side of the aliens, it is difficult to say. Nevertheless, a few poets working on the periphery of haiku and in other kinds of journals have produced some work worth noting. Consider the silhouette of this piece by John Phillips, for instance:

//^/

/

^

/

/^

^

/

This is not quite like anything we have seen before.<sup>52</sup>

## SNOW FALL IN FOG

hard  
to  
see  
either

through  
both

*John Phillips*

And a few poets, such as Lee Gurga, have fashioned a UFO as their signature style.<sup>53</sup>

not  
the  
whole  
story  
but probably enough  
fresh  
snow

Such work is novel in its first sighting, but without variation will tend to be seen as an IFO over time.

However, at least one electronic journal, *Roadrunner*, has entertained some of these same poets and quite a few new ones interested in expanding the repertoire of formal expressiveness. Here's a glimpse of a UFO from one of the journal's editors, Scott Metz:

/  
^  
  
/  
^  
  
/  
/  
  
/^^ /  
/^^ /

In this instance the silhouette doesn't intimate what is truly unique about the UFO. Within this vertical array, Metz begins by treating the syllable as the unit for some of the poem, and then the word in the rest, a novel approach, and one that promises much for future sightings.<sup>54</sup>

man  
u  
fact  
u

red  
rose

echoing mountain  
lingering body

Another poet who seems particularly interested in UFOs is Eve Luckring. In this example she distends the field in both vertical and horizontal dimension, and by varying the usual kerning between characters arrives at a quite unusual vehicle.<sup>55</sup>

```

c u m u l o
  n i m b u s
    d r i f t      the
      d          a      y
        o    f    f
          s    c    h    e    d    u    l    e

```

There are, of course, many other ways in which you can proceed.

To close, I would like to suggest that not all UFOs are the result of aliens or conspiracies: sometimes a cigar-shaped craft is just a cigar-shaped craft. A UFO might emerge simply from stochastic process: that is, by accident. Examine, for instance, the silhouette of a poem sent to me electronically by Peter Newton:

```

      ^
      /^^
      ^
      /
      /
      /
      /
      ^
      /
      <
      <
      <
      <

```

I was quite excited to see this, thinking I was encountering some strange new species. In fact, it was merely a software anomaly for his striking poem<sup>56</sup>

the  
 animal  
 in  
 me  
 can't  
 be  
 spo  
 ken  
 to  
 tem  
 p  
 o  
 l  
 e

But the mere fact that we were looking for UFOs gave us plenty to discuss.

Is UFO sighting mere hysteria and suggestibility? Only you can decide that. I believe UFOs are here to stay, and am looking forward, to paraphrase LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, to the next time “something weird comes along.”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A version of this article was delivered on August 15, 2013, at Haiku North America in Long Beach, California.

<sup>2</sup> Higginson, William J. and Penny Harter. *The Haiku Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Lamb, Elizabeth Searle. *in this blaze of sun*. Paterson, NJ: From Here Press, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Roseliep, Raymond. *Firefly in my Eyecup*. Battle Ground, IN: High/Coo Press, 1979.

- <sup>5</sup> Swede, George, ed. *Canadian Haiku Anthology*. Toronto: Three Trees Press, 1979.
- <sup>6</sup> van den Heuvel, Cor. *dark*. New York: Chant Press, 1982.
- <sup>7</sup> *Haiku*, 1970.
- <sup>8</sup> *Brussels Sprout* 2.2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Frogpond* 5.2.
- <sup>10</sup> Mountain, Marlene, *the old tin roof*. Hampton, TN: self-published, 1976.
- <sup>11</sup> Mountain, Marlene, *moment moment/moments*. Hampton, TN: self-published, 1978.
- <sup>12</sup> Organic form, as described by Denise Levertov in her essay "Some Notes on Organic Form," (*Poetry*, 1965) is "a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man's creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories." The practical upshot of this is that Levertov asserts that "there is a form in all things (and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal." She goes on to say "Such poetry is exploratory." It is the thesis of this article that experiments of the sort examined here partake of this exploration, and that such resulting shapes of the best of these reveal themselves more fully for this experimentation.
- <sup>13</sup> In these examples the ^ represents an unstressed, and the / a stressed, syllable.
- <sup>14</sup> *American Haiku* 1.1.
- <sup>15</sup> *Frogpond* 2.3-4.
- <sup>16</sup> *Poetry*, 1913.
- <sup>17</sup> van den Heuvel, Cor. *the window washer's pail*. New York: Chant Press, 1963.
- <sup>18</sup> *Haiku Magazine* 5.3.
- <sup>19</sup> Herbert, George. *The Complete English Poems*. London: Penguin Classics, 2005.
- <sup>20</sup> Cummings, E. E.. *No Thanks*. New York: Liveright, 1998.
- <sup>21</sup> Apollinaire, Guillaume. *Calligrammes*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1918.
- <sup>22</sup> Kacian, Jim. *rain tracks*. unpublished.
- <sup>23</sup> Martone, John. *around this stream*. tel-let, 1999.
- <sup>24</sup> Dondis, Donis A. *A Primer of Visual Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Riverside Shakespeare*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
- <sup>26</sup> The Haiku Foundation HaikuNow! Contest 2013 Runner-Up.
- <sup>27</sup> Miyamori, Asatarō. *An Anthology of Haiku, Ancient and Modern*. Tokyo: Maruzen Company Ltd., 1932.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Beilenson, Peter. *Japanese Haiku*. Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1956.
- <sup>31</sup> Stewart, Harold. *A Net of Fireflies: Japanese Haiku and Haiku Paintings*. Rutland, Vermont, and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960.
- <sup>32</sup> *Vanity Fair* (25 September 1925).
- <sup>33</sup> Reps, Paul. *big bath*. Hong Kong: Liu Publishers, 1961?
- <sup>34</sup> *Haiku Magazine* 3.4.
- <sup>35</sup> John Wills: “the hills / release the summer clouds / one    by one    by one” *Back Country*. Statesboro, GA: Kenan Press, 1969.
- <sup>36</sup> Alan Pizzarelli: “a spark / falls to the ground /                      darkens / / that’s it” *Haiku Magazine* 6.1&2.
- <sup>37</sup> *Haiku*, 1971.
- <sup>38</sup> *Modern Haiku* 2.4.
- <sup>39</sup> *Inkstone* 1.1.
- <sup>40</sup> *Inkstone* 1.2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Inkstone* 1.3.
- <sup>42</sup> *Inkstone* 2.2.
- <sup>43</sup> *Inkstone* 5.1.
- <sup>44</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 1.1.
- <sup>45</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 1.2.
- <sup>46</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 1.1.
- <sup>47</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 4.2.
- <sup>48</sup> Swede, George. *Bifids*. Toronto: Curvd H&Z, 1984.
- <sup>49</sup> *Haiku Canada Holographic Anthology* 2004.
- <sup>50</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 10.3.
- <sup>51</sup> *RAW NerVZ* 8.3.
- <sup>52</sup> Phillips, John. *Broadside*. San Francisco: Tangram Press, 2002.
- <sup>53</sup> *Frogpond* 33.2.
- <sup>54</sup> *Modern Haiku* 44.2.
- <sup>55</sup> *Modern Haiku* 41.2.
- <sup>56</sup> Newton, Peter. *Welcome to the Joy Ride*. Winchendon, MA: Imaginary Press, 2013).