

## rem • press twenty one years on

if I were to hesitate chained by worry of worlds  
old or dated, what then slain? beautiful dreams  
the remembrance of a grand moment presumably shared

(Jennifer Moxley, *Enlightenment Evidence*)

Lucy: To offer an overview of rem • press it seems important to begin with an account of the design principles behind the press. To a large degree they reflected what was going on in the books. While creating a simple and inexpensive way to make the books was one factor in the design, when we devised it we also actively wanted the resistance of the black covers. It was impenetrable and gave nothing away. It was a symbol of the poetry that could seem, at first glance, on the surface, so unyielding. This was balanced against the bright colours of the title and end pages - writers chose a colour for their book, revealed, of course as you opened the book but also visible as a thin line of cover viewed side on. The minimalist covers were blank except for the small embossed name of the press going up the side edge of the front and back cover. Again the idea was they mirrored each other so unless you had the code you didn't know which way up they would be. I still open them the wrong way up even though I hand embossed and silvered most of them and should know instinctively how they are put together.



Karliën: In designing, Lucy may have had in mind Malevich's [Black Square](#). Turn a rempress black square and reveal its brightly coloured stage curtain. Jennifer Moxley chose chrome yellow for *Enlightenment Evidence* (1996), Beth Anderson cobalt blue for *The Impending Collision* (1996) and Tracy Ryan a stabilo highlighter pink for *Slant* (1997): those first books announced themselves in copyshop stock Kandinsky colours. I look at the rempress design now, and see them, not so much as re-encoding an avantgarde modernism, but rather, the sense of our own modernity, of contemporaneous fashion. The rem press design has the then-fashionable look of black sober suits with jewel-coloured silk shirts underneath, [Tom Ford for Gucci](#) (1995). Playfulness with fabric, with fashion, too was suggested by the contemporaneous poetry around us. Denise Riley's *Mop Mop Georgette* had come out with Reality Street Editions in 1993. Her title evokes Mallarme's "l'adieu suprême des mouchoirs!" in the scullery. Drew Milne did a pamphlet of Vogue cut-ups framed by Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* as a self-made gift edition (around 1993). Grace Lake's *Viola Tricolore* (Equipage, 1993) an indeterminant, glossy flag masquerading as a wild pansy. John James was an influence, for me, too, he got it. Black square, bright fabric, stage: Rem • press framed its poetry as performative.

Privilege of cadence,

the term

justified

praxis

mystery

bound

to the interval where both

tarry.

(Karliën van den Beukel, *Pitch Lake*)



gesture the feminine my way, the aspect subliminal cruelty  
what lifeless data will save you  
when tedious peace hangs down and our love becomes  
ungracious, the mean desires the comfort of a hesitant kiss withheld  
I saw this in your face and in all the efforts fatigued  
the ineffectual feminine building a life with bold retort,  
to bind my bearing witness I will say I speak in mocking  
of the foreign news you've brought,  
I will veer in subliminal cruelty

Details from Jennifer Moxley's *Often Capital*

pushing borders is a way of straining, set into motion  
with a forearm's twist

(Beth Anderson, *The Impending Collision*)

Lucy: The enlarged dot between rem and press - signifier of emptiness and obstacle - we embellished with silver ink and this was echoed in the only other visible design feature on the outside - the spiral binding. This binding gave the books a semi-industrial aesthetic but it also created another disjunct or gap, echoing the dot. The pages, effectively, did not meet and when the book falls open there is a fissure in the centre. Those pages are stamped with holes and twisted together by the spiral of metal wire. It was a rupture both managed and fixed, the wires never meeting as they spiralled up through the core of the book. The beautiful type was meticulously set by the designer Alison Wills.



Karlien: Rem • press took place in the interstice between the spiral wire and the embossed dot. In early nineties everyday life, the spiral wire was closely connected to the telephone, so much so you had to dangle the phone receiver to untwirl its spirally wiriness after invariably local calls. It was very fixed to its point. Yet in 1994, when we met, we already had dot addresses - cam.ac.uk - universities were fully networked, you will recall, well before early modem dial-ups. The communication technology of the dot address gave the press its dynamic. Lucy is able to set up as an international publisher through access to the university network, even as she materialises the poems as print-based limited edition work, small press in Cambridge.

Lucy: These aesthetic devices were playing with the context in which we were publishing. We were pointing out the gap we keenly observed in our time as PhD students at Cambridge in a vibrant, challenging, high postmodernist scene in which certain voices and registers seemed to appear only at the margins, if at all. We were

interrogating absence. Of female voices. Of otherness. Why hadn't they found a place here?

Karlien: So, why hadn't they found a place here? Everyday intellectual life revolved around colleges, which, not so long before had been exclusively male. The college tutorial system seemed to lend itself to a genealogical narrative, an Olsonian sense of J.H. Prynne an impetus perhaps, of tracing the place of poets through their generational lines. That is how male poets seemed to orient their place in relation to each other, a quick intellectual proprioception, which also allowed them to create strong inter-generational connections in Cambridge. It wasn't like that for female poets, in particular, we did not have inter-generational connections. But of course, we were given places at Cambridge.

Rod Mengham's Equipage press introduced me to the work of many female poets. The Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry – organised by Rod Mengham, Ian Patterson and Peter Riley – was crucial. I remember seeing how in awe the organisers were of Denise Riley, her poetry was central, it seemed, to their generation. CCCP invited American poets, Barbara Guest, Karen MacComarck, Carla Harryman, Australian poet, Gig Ryan, London-based poets, Elizabeth James, Frances Presley, Caroline Bergvall, and our contemporaries, the American poets, Lee Anne Brown and Lisa Jarnot, whose *Heliotrope* we had published. Fiona Templeton came for a year's writing fellowship at Cambridge, followed by Kate Pullinger, their innovative, performative work is foundational to contemporary digital interactive narratives and ambient storytelling.

an ersatz volume from some

beloved conman

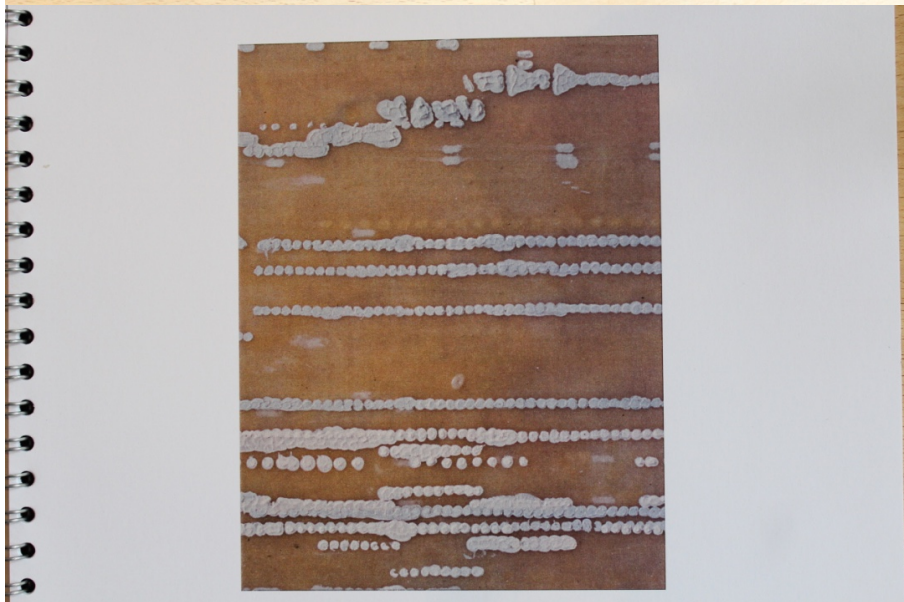
j'accuse: il était malin,

celui qui a inventé ce truc-là

across the text indicting

her maker and unmaker

(Tracy Ryan, *Slant*)



but bear with us    signor crescendo  
bid not to quit this trifling barrow  
  of darkling whim    lush dippy lippy  
stills to do lung to maths as another  
number bites the tip top mimic tusk  
scissors and silence    such sparkling  
scissors    but ne'er a drought of tosh  
till utilities squeak    a shunt of swish  
lurve    captain humble dancing on a  
reservoir of pith    as its roux trickles  
down to tra-la-la lump    mucker zoo  
  what prancing and panting pawns

Details from *Pianola* by Drew and Jo Milne

Lucy: As the press grew a little in confidence and reputation we were sent manuscripts in which writers deliberately played with the format and style. Fiona Templeton played with it in her title '*oops the join*'. Caroline Bergvall had great plans for the format of her book *Goan Atom* with us which we had to, reluctantly, quash for budgetary reasons. Redell Olsen promoted the press's distinctive style in [How2](#) and via a range of performances and readings. By the time we came to Harriet Tarlo's book she told me she was responding to the shape the pages might take in the square format as she wrote.

and so gives of its

cry to rectify the anomaly

that goodbye

to goodwill follows suit

(Drew Milne, *Pianola*)

Lucy: The genesis of the press was built on conviction and also on accident. We chose, meticulously, the name em press based on the term for the gaps between words in letter pressing and then found there was another press with the same name and we could not, therefore, register it. We had already had postcards printed in a bout of enthusiasm and so, rather quenched in spirit, we added an 'r' to each one, by hand, before they were distributed. In the end I quite liked the randomness of that chance arrival at a name we'd never have chosen. It disrupted the overthinking of the whole enterprise which was all part of the intensity of studying for a PhD. It allowed the chance element in.

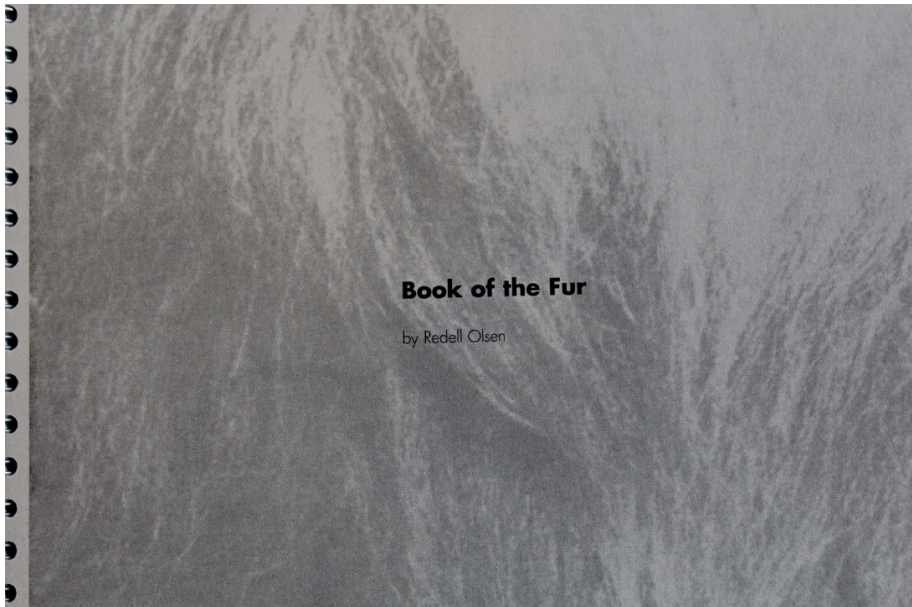
Make marks a word where a

dash would have done. A point at which

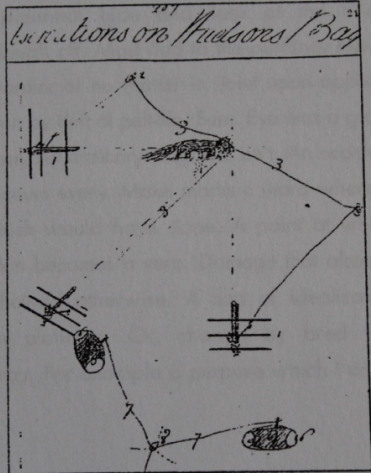
skin becomes a verb. Damage that already

showed otherwise.

(Redell Olsen, *Book of the Fur*)



Epidermal hide and seek of the finest  
slough off. Most fled to the purfling. Made  
frontier of no matter is. Joint upon applica-  
tion by dint of pelt-life. Sure. Eye was a glass  
one. An ordinary judgment isn't. An accident  
occurs every. Make marks a word where a  
dash would have done. A point at which  
skin becomes a verb. Damage that already  
showed otherwise. A sort of idealisation  
in platinum. Or, change by bred that  
way. For example a purpose which I could



Details from Redell Olsen's *Book of the Fur*



Lucy: Our editorial policy was not written down but certainly, as young women writing and reading experimental poetry, it felt to us that women writers were all but invisible. There were notable exceptions. Of course. But we wanted a series of readings and publications made up of those rather than featuring them. The pleasure of creating new books is in part that of discovering kinship, readership, connection where previously you had none.

Karlien: We applied for Arts Council funding for rempress: the word 'emerging' probably appeared in the application. We received the grant, this meant we could plan a series of publications. Yet we also had a responsibility to that public funding. To be responsible publishers. The highest editorial production standards. For the books, we registered ISBNs, also so the British Library could lodge the pamphlets. We worked on distribution – but wider distribution for small press print work was difficult. Practically, the wire bind did not lend itself well to shipping or shelf display in, say, Compendium. We were advised by an American small press distributor that in future we should opt for bound flat spines wide enough to accommodate the poet's name, title and publisher logo. That, of course, assumed a lot. Rempress poems were reprinted in anthologies, in collections, where kinships and connections can be discovered by tracing these first publications.

Des compressions

Des arrows

Rejects of form

Oratorical bypass colon

Mankind, that's me!

(Caroline Bergvall, *Goan Atom*)

Lucy: One of the things the press also did was to launch a series of readings to accompany its publications and this became another way of curating and platforming new voices in Cambridge. This contributed to a flow of debate and intersect between readers and writers in Cambridge, London and beyond.

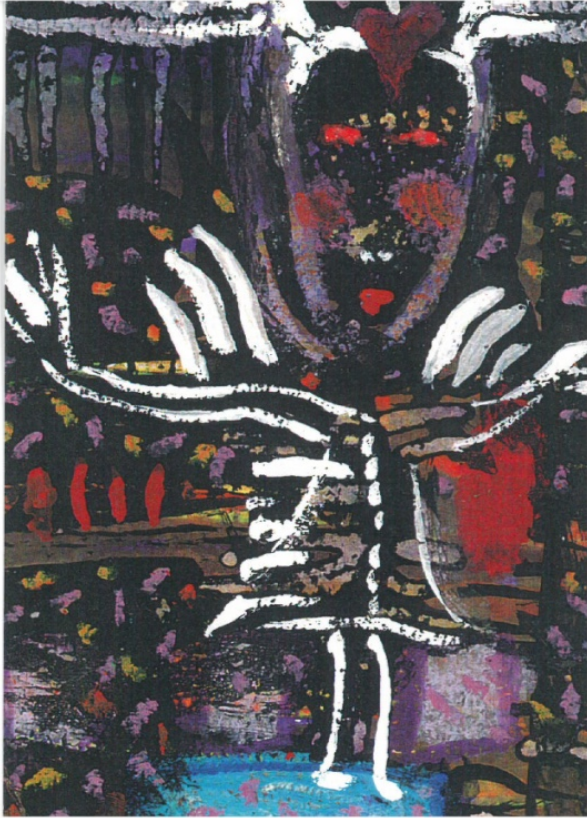
Karlien: The readings were held in a night club venue on Jesus Lane. Later, we held the reading series in a more white cube type space, a minimalist roof garden café.

Drawn hand has become the hand's mark.

The whole counters the draw.

Weave a hint of you, and bury.

(Fiona Templeton, *oops the join*)



rem • press postcard for reading series

**rem • press**

**rem • press readings at Po Nana**  
 7b Jesus Lane  
 on Thursdays at 7pm sharp  
 (bar opens at 6 pm)  
 Admission £1

**The Cutting Edge of Poetry Presses**

**13th February**  
 Suili - John Kinsella & Tracy Ryan (sponsored)

**20th February**  
 Equipage - Rod Mengham, Ullt Frei & Max Abbe

**27th February**  
 Fiona Topleton & Special Guest

**6th March**  
 Barque - Jordan Davis  
 Involution - Rory Drummond, s1 & Alastair Home

**13th March**  
 Poetical Histories - Andrea Brady,  
 Jennifer Chalmers, Peter Hughes & Peter Riley  
 with special guest

Readings may be subject to change.

6 GASMERE GARDENS, CAMBRIDGE CB4 3DR, UK. TELEPHONE/FAX 01223 328742

POSTCODE

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Lucy: The writers platformed in Maggie O’Sullivan’s *Out Of Everywhere*, published at around the same time as we launched the series were brilliant but elsewhere. Anna Mendelson was brilliant but fragile. The title of Karlien’s debut book, *Pitch Lake*, deeply disturbed her because it mirrored the name (Grace Lake) she was known by at that time and it read, to her, as an appropriation of allegiance. In such a climate Stephen Rodefer, resident in Cambridge at the time, became the unofficial fairy godmother of the press. He brought irreverence and play and his trademark savage wit as well as news of the burgeoning scene of a generation of younger women writers in the States who were sending him work. His rootlessness, the fluidity with which he attended poetry events all over the States and Europe brought us contacts we would not, otherwise, have made.

## TO THE EMPRESS

If the vapor could be parted from the miasma,  
if the fat were sliced from the filth,  
if memory could rise above the mud  
and the residue were filtered from the gunk

If conduct were not founded on the fens  
or love not rung around with doubt,  
if relation were not confounded  
with ignorance, nor judgment  
with prejudice, appearance with  
dissemblance, nor residence with a dungeon

If impression could run over  
the interferences and the nameform  
still whet the wits that convey contacts  
that sweeten desire that adheres  
to attachment that dogs death  
which bears beauty, that bitch  
of birth, that entails the ensuance  
and the endurance - the negligence  
and the indulgence of the supposes  
in which we live could be maintained  
and replicated, to thread the hole  
which is the invisible axis of the world  
and the iron tether of the beating heart

Since by definition everything is  
provisional and all by definition is  
complete, even at the Château d'If

Limited edition poster of 'To The Empress' by Stephen Rodefer

Karlien: I had forgotten about that, Grace Lake's allegorisis. Perhaps her own poetry may be read in the light of baroque Trauerspiel. Allegory was a mode in Cambridge, ciphers for a hothouse elite. Stephen Rodefer, with his satirical *Answer to Dr Agathon* (Equipage, 1992) certainly played the carabosse in Cambridge. Yet allegory also means the other in the agora, in the public speaking place. As Lucy says, Stephen Rodefer's generous, open salons were very important; he enabled us to create the sense of our generation.

This is a place where accidents occur

I am tracing the origin of the custom

Fickle the range of the word for word'

(Lisa Jarnot, *Heliopolis*)

Lucy: Our first poets we met on paper, seeing work they'd sent to Stephen Rodefer and in small print-run journals. Jennifer Moxley had been a student in San Diego. She sent us *Enlightenment Evidence*, Part two of *Often Capital*. He saw Beth Anderson read and was struck both by her poetry and by her resemblance to 'a young Barbara Guest'. She sent *The Impending Collision*. Karlien had just completed *Pitch Lake*.

Karlien: *Pitch Lake*: I grew up next to the Pitch Lake, La Brea, Trinidad. If there was any appropriated allegiance, it was to Earl Lovelace. A reader got in touch with me after calling up the pamphlet in the British Library: he understood pitch lake as a note on the globalisation of steel drums, Anglo-Dutch oil interests, later nationalised. He sent me his own historical research pamphlet on the Merikins, African-American marines who free-settled in Trinidad after the 1812 War. I've come to understand more, in London, but also to write less poetry.

As we completed our doctorates, moved, got jobs, the press became less of a joint endeavour. In fact: it was Lucy who produced many of the later rempress books. It really is her press. Lucy had been very much in charge of editorial commissioning, along.



CINDY # 250  
Bah bah  
By ba  
Ba by  
a Hole is some fairground  
to limins as these  
Easy not to know  
which is where is which is who when when  
before in after-breach  
baby baby  
Catch your  
Skin a collateral  
Screwed into one sprawled  
live-sized granpa  
with a liver no,  
blood pud  
no,  
rganic drill  
do up e's mule

Details from Caroline Bergvall's *Goan Atom*

Lucy: After this first batch we produced another eight. We always planned a series of twelve and a book of essays and maybe we still might. I love these books. Even now I pick them up and start reading and find an electrifying thrill of recognition. The delight that I had found work that meant something to me emotionally as well as intellectually. How to describe that sensation - certainly it felt like a guilty secret. It was not, of course, secret anymore. Those impenetrable black covers were hiding something. Setting out our stall with this promise of expansiveness and difference gave us different avenues to choose from. We were going by gut instinct and the search for work that we were missing, sometimes finding what was missing as we searched.

she'd been thinking

about it

for a long time

you're my funny lady

constructed out of

old desire from

somewhere

(Harriet Tarlo, *Love/Land*)