

poetry more generally. *Life in Space* is a natural for the classroom. The facing Russian is ideal for students learning the language, and the poems—in turns difficult, beautiful, tactile, abstract, headlong, and hopeful—will electrify any setting where poetry, gender studies, and political theory is studied. Read it alongside *F Letter: New Russian Feminist Poetry* (2020), the anthology assembled by Rymbu, Ostashevsky, and Ainsley Morse. Just out from Isolarii Press, *F Letter* has two more extraordinary long poems by Rymbu, plus her Introduction. In Moscow, Rymbu has also just published a new volume of Russian poems (*Ty, budushchee*, Tsentr Voznesenskogo, 2020). If we're very lucky, more translations of her work into English will come our way.

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Andrei Monastyrski: *Elementary Poetry*. Ed. and trans. Yelena Kalinsky and Brian Droitcour. New York: Ugly Duckling Presse; Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2019. xxiv, 328 pp. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. Figures. \$28.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2021.210

If I heard the rumor that *Andrei Monastyrski: Elementary Poetry* contained encoded instructions for the Philosopher's Stone, or that reciting certain passages would turn one invisible, I would believe it. *Elementary Poetry* is a bewildering and brilliant collection of the lesser-known poems, texts, and experiments of Andrei Monastyrski, a towering figure in Russian contemporary art, as both a performance artist and organizer within Collective Actions, and as a key voice within Moscow Conceptualism.

The present book was lovingly curated by Yelena Kalinsky and Brian Droitcour for the Ugly Duckling Presse and Soberscove Press, offering excellent new translations of the vital artist, and a delightful work in its own right, mystifying and enticing. The book recalls the heterogeneity and playfulness of samizdat artist albums. Poetry is interspersed with questionnaires, astronomical charts of culture, pictograms testing the limits of language, violent excerpts from a Soviet cooking book, and even an intruding sheet of sandpaper labeled "distance" whose texture derails the haptics of reading (279). The texts, images, and photographs are framed by two essays introducing Monastyrski and offering an insightful exegesis of the collection.

Boris Groys's "Preface" explains the significance of Monastyrski as a poet and performance artist, and describes the Collective Actions group. Groys weaves immediate connections between Monastyrski and other Moscow Conceptualists like Ilya Kabakov, and through reference to Martin Heidegger, sets larger stakes for the utopianism and egalitarianism in Monastyrski's project. This is a crucial insight, because the collection can feel as if elitist, as though making complex reference to some privileged culture the reader does not know. This feeling is a red herring, as Groys points out. He focuses on Monastyrski's privileging of "emptiness" as the key to his and Collective Actions' utopianism. By emptying their artwork of authorial control and intention, Monastyrski and Collective Actions liberated their audience, freeing them to make their own meanings. Groys reminds us that *Elementary Poetry* also elides prepared meanings, prompting conceptual play, not studious passivity.

Kalinsky and Droitcour's "Translator's Introduction" is a nuanced analysis explaining key choices made in the volume. They emphasize Monastyrski's experimentation with the boundaries of poetry as a priority for themselves. When describing Monastyrski's experimental *Poetic World* (1976), it is clear that they applied the same formal principles that *Poetic World* sought, in their own translation: "By

writing through nothingness, Monastyrski built a form that has volume. By describing the invisible, language acquired material. For him, the book as a physical phenomenon mattered more than the contents of the text” (xiv). Kalinsky and Droicour directly address how *Elemental Poetry* misbehaves as a poetry book, entangling word, image and touch: “The work’s unusual material properties—the pasted cut-outs, rough sandpaper, and colored papers—are physically engaging. The reader feels different weights and textures, sees the visual cues that distinguish the sections, flips the photo pages, and moves back and forth between questions and answers. . . One might read this as a suggestion that poetry is a physical process, much like cookery” (xix). While referring to Monastyrski’s inclusions from a cookbook, the collapse of poetry and cookery into a performance played by the readers themselves, stages a flickering between the visceral and spiritual, poetic and mundane, esoteric and domestic, that organizes the polyphony of voice and meaning within the text.

Monastyrski’s characteristic voice emerges clearly here, perpetually eliding and shimmering between earnest mysticism and critical irony, structuralist analysis, and playground rhyme. Dmitrii Prigov aptly described Monastyrski’s poetic approach in a 2007 essay entitled “The Understanding Machine,” as “quasi-esoteric practices appearing as quasi-esoteric formulae, processing numerous metaphysical and metapsychological situations—not to figure out some grand truth (which truly esoteric texts are prone to do) but to create a particular situation, atmosphere, or aura of experience and consciousness” (Dmitrii Prigov, *Mysli: Izbrannye manifesty, stat’i, interv’iu*. Mark Lipovetsky, Ilya Kukulin, eds. [Moscow, 2019], 611). None of Monastyrski’s voices are authoritative, the unitary artistic voice is here willfully discarded for a polyphonic architecture of meaning prompting readers to explore, expand, and liberate their consciousness on their own.

This is a necessary addition to the library of anyone interested in contemporary art and poetry in Russia, Andrei Monastyrski, the Collective Actions group, Moscow Conceptualism, or experimental books of poetry. Ugly Duckling Presse and Soberscove Press have published a work of art: complex and challenging, a joy to hold and insistent on the haptic as a source of pleasure and meaning.

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Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North. Ed. Joachim Otto Habeck. Cambridge, Eng.: Open Book Publishers, 2019. xx, 465 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Maps. \$39.70, paper.
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Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North is an exciting volume. As a collaborative project it emerges out of ethnographic field research conducted around 2011 in largely non-urban centers, stretching from Chavan’ga in Russia’s northwest to Novoe Chaplino in the Russian Federation’s northeast. The foremost goal of the volume’s eleven contributors based in Germany, Russia, Slovakia, Scotland, and the Czech Republic is to capture the diversity of lifestyles in those places. A second goal is to examine issues, circumstances, and factors that delimit and make possible individual and social aspirations. In documenting the extensiveness of social realities, desires, dreams, and ambitions in Siberia and the Russian Far East, all contributors also add to documentations and discussions on economic and aesthetic style, as well to debates on technology, mobility, and communication. Overall, *Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North* does not only speak to scholars interested in community