

Interview with Joakim Norling of Timglaset Editions
October 26, to October 30, 2018

Joakim Norling makes a living as a magazine editor and in his spare time edits the zine Timglaset and publishes books of visual poetry and experimental work in the borderland between the literary and visual arts. It's obviously all he knows how to do. He lives in Malmö, Sweden with his wife and their cat and has a grown son.

AHP: The first creative work listed on your site (<https://timglaset.com/page/3/>) date from 2015, include musical compositions and rereading of a novel called Dolly, Dolly, and Timglaset 1: the Kitchen Sink Surrealist. On the Timglaset Bandcamp page (<https://timglaset.bandcamp.com/>), this is the description:

“Timglaset is a bilingual, thematic fanzine. We like to think of Swedish and English as our languages. During its lifespan it may touch upon subjects like artful utopians, the re-invention of abstraction, the psychogeography of imaginary cities, space folklore, unearthly gardens, angry old men and cryptic cartography. On the other hand it may not. Timglaset turns every now and then.”

Can you talk about the idea behind Timglaset Editions, how did it go from recordings shared on Bandcamp and a zine to beautifully made editions of visual poetry in just three years? How has your vision changed and remained the same for the press?

JN: Well, the thing is that there wasn't exactly a vision to start with. I've been a publisher all my life, or at least since I was 13 or 14 when I started making childish fanzines with panegyric articles about bands I liked and pictures nicked from the NME and Melody Maker. The various zines, blogs etc that I have been involved with have mostly been about music, somewhere at the crossroad between pop and more experimental stuff. But I have been equally interested in art and literature since an early age. Dada was probably my first real crush art wise. I loved most of all the playfulness and the wild abandon of what they did. When I first bought a book about Dada in the early 80s I was totally blown away and couldn't believe that the art and writing I saw was 60-65 years old. It seemed so fresh and contemporary (and still does, to some extent).

Around 2014-15 I started to get fed up with writing about music. I felt I was repeating myself and couldn't find any fresh angles on the music I wanted to write about. At the same time I started to get a real itch to publish on paper again after primarily having written for the web for a long time. An involvement with a small publishing company,

among friends, further reinforced the desire to publish print again. Unfortunately that project petered out, for various reasons.

When I decided to start a zine again I had absolutely no plan, except that I wanted to involve friends and people I knew who were writers and artists, and I wanted the issues to be based around a theme, in order to provide some sort of scaffolding for the project. I'm infinitely grateful to people like Dolly Dolly (David Yates), Jonas Ellerström, Robin Tomens and many more for investing their time and energy early on and helping me realise my ideas.

Also around 2015 I discovered vispo. Or rather, I finally "got" vispo. I was aware of concrete poetry from before, and liked some of what I had seen, and I was vaguely aware it had developed into something called visual poetry over the years. Then I bought "The New Concrete" and it was actually like an epiphany. Suddenly a whole new world of experimental writing, on the borderland to visual art, opened up. I was literally awestruck by much of the work I encountered.

I started feverishly reading blogs and buying books and discovered Facebook groups dedicated to the stuff and knew immediately that I wanted to be involved with the scene. In many ways vispo is for me the perfect art form at the crossroads between writing, visual art and conceptual practices. When it's at its best it's playful, bold and has the same quality as a really good pop song, being both immediate and possessing layers of meaning beneath the inviting exterior.

Early on I got in contact with Petra Schulze Wollgast, who is an amazing typewriter and letterpress artist, and has become a dear friend. Another pivotal person early on was Derek Beaulieu who offered me a manuscript to publish when I was still figuring out what the hell I was doing. The trust he put into my publishing venture early on meant that I dared reach out to other writers and artists I admire.

Thanks to people like the ones mentioned, and many more, I now have a much firmer idea of what I want Timglaset to be and how it should evolve the coming years.

AHP: I love the idea of vispo as having the same quality as a really good pop song due to both its immediacy and subtlety. The visual poetry books you've published so far do seem to offer a good balance between providing an immediate feeling of joy due to the design and materiality of the work and a chance to contemplate each work to understand its depth. I notice you often have the creator of the work include a statement about the work. Why do you think that's necessary?

JN: I don't actually think it's necessary but it's an option I give the author. As a reader I certainly don't like being lectured about the meaning of the work but sometimes it's nice with some pointers. One of my aims as a publisher is to get new readers to gain understanding and appreciation for visual poetry and for that reason I think a short statement is valuable. Different authors have very different views on this and if they don't like to provide a statement then I won't be adamant. Others have prepared one in advance and sometimes I ask for it because I think the book package as a whole would benefit from it.

AHP: The publications are often a combination of old and new tech. I'm thinking, for example of Dona Mayoora's *Listening to Red* and Aditya Bahl's *Name Amen*, both printed on glossy paper and hand bound using a Japanese binding method, or mwpm's *tm*, which was printed on a mimeograph machine. What is the rationale behind combining old and new tech and how do you figure out what type of design to use for a publication? How much input do you get from creators of the work?

JN: Ah. Well, to begin with the last question that is also very different from author to author. Aditya Bahl basically proposed a book ready for publication, designed with font selection, format etc. I did propose the black cover which I thought was in line with the blackness and boldness of the poems and his strong political commitment. I also asked him to write a statement based on his letter of proposal to me, since I thought the very personal motivations behind the work was key to understanding what it is about and where it's coming from. Many others though just send a manuscript and basically leave the design work to me. I'm not a trained designer but I enjoy that part of the work very much. I'm keenly aware of my limitations but try to use them to my advantage.

When it comes to printing methods etc I try to avoid being fetishistic and use the method which is cheapest while still providing a quality I find acceptable. Sometimes this means good old laser printing, sometimes it means letting a printshop with an excellent, high resolution digital printing machine do the work. I can understand the temptation of using for example letterpress. The problem then would be that all the books would be terribly costly and I probably wouldn't be able to make more than four or five a year. This would mean putting my own fetishistic needs before the work of the authors and then I shouldn't really be into publishing. I do this because I love the work that I put out and I try to publish as much as I can, without compromising quality, and at the lowest possible cost to both me and the buyer. The only method I won't use is print on demand. The cost is attractive but I find the paper, the binding and the print quality dismal in most POD books I see. Also, I like the fact that every book I publish entails a financial risk, albeit a small one. If I can't risk losing a few kronor then it's somehow not real. There are a couple of reasons I often do my own binding, or do

manual work on some other part of the manufacturing. One is the very egoistical one that I enjoy it and it means that I do work without sitting at the computer for a while. The other is that it feel like cheating if I don't. The author has often spent many hours thinking about and making her or his work and doing manual labour on the book means acknowledging the labour that went into writing it.

As for the mimeograph printed book by mwpm, that was more of a coincidence. I visited Petra Schulze-Wollgast in her studio in Germany and really wanted to try her machine and she generously volunteered to help me print the book while I was there. I absolutely loved the machine, by the way. The smell of the ink, the sound it makes... As you can hear I definitely am at risk!

AHP: I particularly enjoyed Karl Kempton's introduction to Dona Mayoora's *Listening to Red*, and Catherine Vidler's notes on making the lost sonnets in *Lost Sonnets*. These written pieces don't lecture the reader, in my opinion, but act as a complement to the work and serve to continue the dialogue about the tradition and direction of visual poetry. When you go to a gallery, the catalogue and exhibit often include an artist's statement. People are fine with that when it comes to art but for some reason with visual poetry some people feel it should be seen and not spoken about I don't know why that is.

Since its inception, it seems like Timglaset Editions has been trying different ways of making experimental and genre-breaking work, I don't want to say, accessible, but I guess that's what I'm saying...accessible to an audience from the sound recordings to the zines to free pdfs once a work is sold out to the prints themselves. What thoughts do you have about the audience for such work, whether its experimental music or Dadaist zines or visual poetry books? I'm not talking about the existing audience, but more about widening the audience for such work.

JN: I'm of course keenly aware that the audience for genre-breaking work is very limited but if I didn't think it was possible to reach new readers I shouldn't be doing what I do. I do believe it's important to be "out there", to go to fairs (I'm writing from one now!) even though most people pass by my table in disbelief, and try to get the books into bookshops. Once in a while you get into a conversation and someone buys something, even though it's completely new to them. That fills me with joy.

AHP: The first publication from Timglaset that I purchased was Gary Barwin's *Quantum Typography*. It's a gorgeous full colour book with a thoughtful introduction by Gary. In Canada, it's very rare that visual poetry is published in print, particularly in colour. How did his work come to your attention?

JN: The answer is very simple: social media. I saw some of the poems that ended up in the book on Gary's Facebook-page and instantly fell in love with them. I asked him if I could publish them and was overjoyed when he agreed. Even though Timglaset is primarily a print publisher it probably wouldn't exist if it wasn't for social media. The online community around visual poetry is absolutely essential to Timglaset. I'm a bit surprised that colour print is still rare. Thanks to digital print techniques it's surprisingly affordable, at least in Sweden. The print run for Quantum Typography was 100 copies and I'm pleased to say there are now only 5 copies left.

It's interesting to hear about problems getting Canadian visual poetry published. To me Canada seems like heaven for visual poetry. So many brilliant authors, so many great chapbook publishers. In Sweden there is almost zero interest. I'm at a book fair right now and haven't sold anything. People who come here don't even bother looking at the books. At the poetry fair in Stockholm's main library this spring I think I sold five books.

AHP: You have an eclectic catalogue with work by people from Europe and North America. Do you receive a lot of submissions and how do you decide which you will publish? What are you looking for?

JN: I get more and more submissions, which is wonderful, but also a source of anxiety, since I have real trouble saying no... What I've published so far is maybe 50% work that has been submitted and 50% work that I have sought out myself. There needs to be a strong visual aspect to the work I look for. I get more and more submissions that loosely fall into the conceptual writing category. Even though much of the work is very good I will turn it down if there isn't a visual aspect to it.

I also consciously try to publish both poets and writers that work visually and visual artists that work with language in a broad sense. I was for example very pleased to do a project with the Norwegian artist Cecilie Bjørgås Jordheim, which involved her making a zen-like "gesture" with a rolling stamp used for making staff lines every day for one month. This was published as a set of cards in a handmade box. I'm also going to make a book with the Swedish artist Lina Nordenström who has been working with typewriters and letterpress for a long time. Needless to say the most important thing is that I find the work strong and that it responds to the rich history of this art form in an original way. If the work is playful and humorous too, then I probably can't resist it.

AHP: In recent years there has been an increase in small press publishers willing to publish visual poetry, but this is very new, with publishers like Simulacrum Press in Hamilton, Ontario and The Blasted Tree in Calgary, Alberta publishing visual poetry

after just starting presses in the last year or so. Colour printing is still expensive here so most of the visual poetry published in Canada remains in black and white.

AngelHousePress can only afford to publish visual poetry online and we have been doing so for a decade, publishing visual poetry from all over the world on NationalPoetryMonth.ca and Experiment-O.com.

Literary journals and books which give writers credentials which help them to be eligible for government funding rarely publish visual poetry. Much of Canada's mainstream literary publishing begins on the left hand side of the page and moves down the page from left to right, with very few exceptions.

In the last few years, there has been an increase in interest for visual poetry with a recent University of Ottawa English Department symposium entitled "Kanada Koncrete: Material Poetries in the Digital Age" last May, which included visual poetry papers. In Toronto, a new exhibit entitled "Concrete is porous," curated by Hart Broudy and bill bissett is about to open and there more than 25 visual poets' work on display. I have noticed young writers such as Kate Siklosi, eric schmaltz and Dani Spinosa, taking up visual poetry, so perhaps a renaissance is going on. I think CanLit is going to have to start publishing more visual poetry if it wants to accurately represent the current activity of Canadian literature.

Perhaps some day you can come to Canada to our small press fairs. It would be great to meet you in person and thank you for your great work.

JN: I would love to come to Canada some day and meet some of the wonderful people I've met through the vispo scene!

AHP: Once the work is sold out, you often offer a free pdf of the publication? What's your philosophy behind offering the free pdf?

JN: Well, the most important thing is to spread the work, isn't it? Many people who love poetry and art scrape by on very little money and I can understand that people can't afford to buy all the books they would like to. I'm happy to offer anything that is sold out as a free pdf, provided the author agrees of course. I love physical libraries and bookshops but the Internet is after all the ultimate library and I think it's our duty to add to it as best we can.

AHP: Is there anything else you'd like to add or talk about in relation to Timglaset Editions or any of the topics we've discussed here?

JN: Maybe I should add something about what my plans for the future are? I'm at a juncture now where my output (and revenue) is getting too big to be passed off as a hobby. The Swedish tax authority won't have it. So I have now registered as a business, which means I will have to deal with all the things that I dread, like bookkeeping, VAT etc. On the other hand I will maybe also start applying for grants for larger projects. So far I haven't applied for anything. Everything has been financed out of my salary.

I will keep doing smaller chapbooks with emerging writers and artists but these don't really sell anything. In fact it's the larger projects that get the attention and shift a few copies. Increasingly I will give away the smaller chapbooks (up to say 16 pages) for free to people who buy major work like *Listening to Red* or *Lost Sonnets*, thereby spreading knowledge and interest in younger artists to people who have a genuine interest in concrete and visual poetry. This seems like the way forward.

Also I wanted to say something about the fact that there is almost no interest in Sweden. Even though this fact bothers me, it's outweighed by the joy of getting orders from places like Abu Dhabi, India and the Czech Republic. 90-95% of all *Timglaset* buyers live abroad (a majority in North America). *Vispo* truly is an international language!