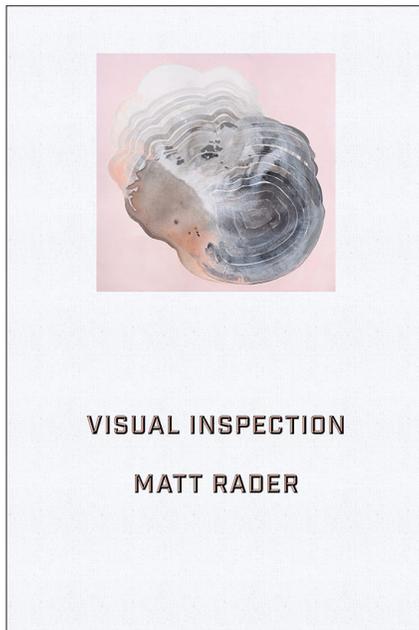


Visual Inspection



VISUAL INSPECTION

Matt Rader
 Published by Nightwood Editions
 Pub Date: April 27, 2019
 \$18.95 CAD
 Paperback 5.5" x 8" / 150pp
 ISBN: 978-0-88971-356-7

Composed over a period of profound illness, *Visual Inspection* is a searching reflection on poetry, power and our embodied lives. Through matching elements of literary history, poetic practice, contemporary art, *Visual Inspection* dreams what is accessible to our minds and bodies. Part memoir, part essay, part poetic investigation, the text guides us through kaleidoscopic meditations on disability, access, vision, pain, community and resilience. Set primarily in the central Okanagan, *Visual Inspection* is a codex of references, artifacts and associations that, taken as whole, revisions access as process and art as experience.

“Matt Rader’s *Visual Inspection* is an art object, an ethnography of a city, a medical history of a body pitted against itself, and a searching examination of the inscrutability of sense and sensation and, by extension, empathy, politics and creativity.”— Billy-Ray Belcourt, author of *This Wound is a World*, winner of the Griffin Poetry Prize

“[*Visual Inspection*] is less a linear, dot-connected travelogue than a constellation that, for this reader, lifts up at once and burns bright, as if to guide us, but also to warm us.” — Michael Turner, author of *Hard Core Logo*

Points of Interest

- **Highly anticipated release from an acclaimed Canadian poet:** With works featured in magazines across the globe and four previous poetry collections, Rader is critically acclaimed for his keenly observed, direct style. *Visual Inspection* is the work of an experienced craftsman at his best.
- **Moving inspection of disability:** Though 6.2 million Canadians live with disabilities that limit their daily activity, their experiences often remain overlooked. Drawing from his own struggles with intense chronic illness, Rader gives a fresh poetic voice to the pain, struggles and triumphs that come with disability. *Visual Inspection* is an empathetic exploration of the role our senses play in art, and how we can write from within bodies that challenge assumptions and expectations.
- **Cross-genre imagining of process as art:** Rader’s experience of disability leads him to question notions of what is ‘complete’ or ‘whole’ and to prioritize the process of poetry over a stable, finished form. Simultaneously memoir, essay and poetry, this collection inspires thought-provoking reflection on the boundaries of poetry as a genre.

MATT RADER is the author of four books of poems: *Desecrations* (McClelland & Stewart, 2016), *A Doctor Pedalled Her Bicycle Over the River Arno* (House of Anansi, 2011), *Living Things* (Nightwood Editions, 2008), and *Miraculous Hours* (Nightwood Editions, 2005), as well as the story collection *What I Want to Tell Goes Like This* (Nightwood Editions, 2014). His poems, stories and non-fiction have appeared in numerous publications across North America, Australia and Europe including *The Walrus*, *Geist*, *32 Poems* and *The Wales Arts Review*, as well as several editions of *Best Canadian Poetry in English*. Core faculty in the Department of Creative Studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, he lives with his family in Kelowna, BC.

Advance Praise

Matt Rader's *Visual Inspection* is an art object, an ethnography of a city, a medical history of a body pitted against itself, and a searching examination of the inscrutability of sense and sensation and, by extension, empathy, politics and creativity. What fascinates me about Rader's poetic practice is that it is in excess of the page, is against the sovereignty of text, is driven more by worldliness than wordiness, but the writing is nonetheless graceful, collaborative, referential and emotional. This is a combination that holds your attention, that shows you how to attend.

Billy-Ray Belcourt, author of *This Wound is a World*, winner of the Griffin Poetry Prize

You want to read this book because you have a body, are a body. You want to read it because it will make you excited about the different ways there are of saying hello to the world. You want to read it because you, like me, like all of us, are made of cells and have a cell-deep commitment to the lifelong project of living here, wherever your here is.

Sue Sinclair, author of *Heaven's Thieves*, winner of the Pat Lowther Award

In this remarkable book, Matt Rader takes an evaluative, administrative term as his point of departure for a poetic field study that forsakes the traveller's time-worn horizon line for an unmapped landscape of the senses. Here, we are introduced to friends and colleagues similarly engaged—in art, but also in personal matters, philosophy, what we once spoke generatively of as politics. The result—the gift of this book—is less a linear, dot-connected travelogue than a constellation that, for this reader, lifts up at once and burns bright, as if to guide us, but also to warm us.

Michael Turner, author of *Hard Core Logo*, *American Whisky Bar* and *The Pornographer's Poem*

Praise for Matt Rader

I love this book for both the swagger and economy of its language, and for the mad and brilliant way it splices time. I love it because it populates its stories with peoples, geographies and lives so often missing from our fictive landscapes, and because it does so with imagination, bravado and a seriously beautiful wit.

Madeleine Thien, author of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, winner of the Governor General's Award for English-language fiction and the Scotiabank Giller Prize

Matt Rader writes the secret corners of history, pieces the shards of what is forgotten, and tracks the lost. These stories remind us of why literature is important.

Tamas Dobozy, author of *Siege 13*, winner of the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize

There is an ease and immediacy to Rader's writing that feels as intellectually discerning as it is strangely serendipitous ... Rader never holds back in substance and is most admirable for bravely risking moments of personal terrain.

Winnipeg Free Press

Rader has the ability to see strange things, the quirky unseen details that might be difficult to mention. ... He documents that continuing sensual edge between the bright light and the burn.

The Georgia Straight

Very impressive. ... Rader has craft to burn and a compelling dark vision of life.

Quill & Quire

Q&A with Matt Rader

1. What prompted you to write *Visual Inspection*?

In the autumn of 2014, I found myself teaching poetry to a young woman with vision impairment called Elisa. Elisa has a fierce spirit for poetry and sought me out after class many times to discuss the poems she was writing. At the same time, I was approaching the nadir of my own health crisis, which left me unable to do daily tasks such as typing and driving. Through my conversations with Elisa about imagery and the visual field of poetry, and through the shifting constraints my health imposed on me, I came to recognize in new ways how our embodiment impacts, mostly unconsciously, what we experience as beautiful and how we represent that in literature and art. I wondered what would happen if a poet could explore those unconscious influences and compose with more direct access to those parts of the poet's self. For three years I pursued this question. *Visual Inspection* is a record of that pursuit.

2. *Visual Inspection* is the cross-genre result of a research project by the same name. Can you speak to the research you undertook to create this book, and how it shaped the collection?

In the spring of 2015, my research assistant Clayton McCann and I began several literature reviews on topics such as adaptive technologies and embodied poetics. We didn't know what we were looking for really, but as artists that didn't bother us too much; we'd make something out of whatever we found. Later that year, we were awarded a small grant to collaborate with poet Jordan Scott and social practice artist Carmen Papalia on the topic of the visual field of poetry and embodied poetics. The research we undertook was creative. Over the course of the project, Clayton and I produced several texts ranging from stream-of-consciousness lit reviews to poetic manifestos to strange, garbled transcriptions of audio interviews of the research team produced through differing kinds of adaptive technologies. As a social practice intervention, Carmen lead a group of students, professors, artists, and community members on an eyes-closed walking tour of downtown Kelowna. It took us an hour and a half to walk about three blocks. One summer, Jordan and I hosted a reading in the woods where children and adults performed original writing as a collaborative experiment. The research was experiential; it was about what it felt like in our bodies. It was full of starts and stops, digressions, roundabouts, fragments, leaps and associations. It sourced our histories, philosophical frameworks and preoccupations. Hopefully, *Visual Inspection* works the same way, borrowing freely from a repertoire of genres and conventions and in the end producing something experiential and unparaphrasable.

3. In *Visual Inspection*, you write "I've always felt my health – my body – as a silent, invisible, but active presence [in my poetry]." Can you speak more to how your lifelong disabilities have shaped your poetry? What are some of the ways many of us fail to consider the body and disability in literature?

We experience the world through our bodies. What's curious about bodies that work differently from our own is how they offer an opportunity to experience the world anew, how they can transform time and space when we are in relationship with them. A gallery full of photographs hung for people in wheelchairs reorients everyone's perception of the gallery space. A dancer with cerebral palsy and a dancer without meet in the middle of the dance floor and begin to move in response to each other, inviting us to see the dance in a tremor and the tremor in what we previously imagined as dance.

Q&A Contd.

3. Can you speak more to how your lifelong disabilities have shaped your poetry? What are some of the ways many of us fail to consider the body and disability in literature?

Contd.

Like literature, the challenges of my personal embodiment are less visible; they have to do with largely internal processes. Literature exists from the beginning in an encoded, symbolic realm, but it is created by people who do not. It's also true that the symbols themselves have bodies: they make shapes in the world. Beyond the question of the kinds of bodies represented in literature—which is an important question—I'm most interested in what happens when writers begin to explore the ineffable experiences of our bodies, that vast realm of ourselves that takes in information about the world, that collaborates in exceptionally complex systems, but which is not part of our conscious minds and is, potentially, beyond language.

4. Your project began as a way to make poetry accessible to those with differently abled bodies. What are some of the barriers disabled persons encounter with poetry or literature more broadly?

A page of poetry is a visual field. It contains visual information such as the number of lines and the amount and location of white-space that informs our expectation and experience of the poem before we read any words. People who cannot see obviously experience this field in a different way than those can, not to mention how they experience “reading” as such. Similar problems exist—for example concerning hearing—when we begin to imagine other typical ways people encounter poetry such as at poetry readings. These are, on one hand, the usual questions of translation, but they also speak to the way poets and writers might approach the original composition.

5. What are some of the ways *Visual Inspection* attempts to overcome these barriers?

Visual Inspection is less concerned with *overcoming* and more interested in *becoming* through community. I don't have discrete or definitive solutions to specific problems. The truth is that all people negotiate access at all times. The nomenclature of “adaptive technologies” is a misnomer since all technologies are adaptive. What people experience as a barrier has more to do with how we've organized ourselves as a community—our built structures, our social structures, our ecologies—and how that organization does and doesn't include certain individuals at certain moments in certain places. I'm interested in how a community comes to include those people and is transformed through inclusion.

6. Did anything during *Visual Inspection*'s unique creation process surprise you?

Sometimes the most surprising things are the most obvious things. What's surprising I guess is how long it can take to accept clarity, to accept what's true and what one already knows. How we can see clearly then forget what we've seen. The surprise of finding oneself engaged in that process of clarity, forgetfulness, clarity, forgetfulness. I knew when I started that the answer to my questions about making art for other bodies had to do with relationship and could only be answered in relationship. So naturally I had to learn that over and over again. It was a surprise each time to accept what I knew to be true.

Q&A Contd.

7. Form plays a key role in this collection. Can you speak to some of the visual, as well as poetic challenges of creating this text? How did you approach the challenge of tangibly representing experiences that is not easily visible, such as your experience with autoimmune diseases?

Ultimately, my strategies will be familiar: narrative plus lyric meditation. We tell stories because stories illustrate experience better than anything else—it's a human tradition so old it likely dawned with the species. We sing songs because songs call forth our spirits and our spirits are what animate our experience. It took many drafts to understand how this manuscript might work. I eschewed any a particular commitment to a literary genre, though I committed myself to the truth as I knew it. The challenge of this kind of writing is familiar to any lyric poet: how to speak the ineffable. The repertoire of genres, the leaps and associations, are meant to invoke a feeling and it's this feeling that I hope rhymes with my experience of health and disease.

8. The “endnotes” are as much a part of the book as the poetry, making the process of creating *Visual Inspection* an active part of the narrative. Why did you decide to use endnotes so prominently? What is so important and exciting about framing the process itself as art?

I started writing endnotes when I felt the need to be more discursive than the “Notes” section could accommodate. It was actually the term “endnotes” that gave me the term “notes,” which is of course exactly what that section is. Once I had the structure (to which I later added the Introduction, Coda, and Bibliography), the endnotes also became a place to stash asides, fragments, productive mistakes, and artifacts of the writing. I liked the way these elements informed the rest of the book and also drew attention to the formal aspects of the book. I liked the gesture to academic genres of writing pitched against the entirely unacademic tone of much of the book.

9. *Visual Inspection* invokes a number of classical, famous writers – Milton, Borges, Basho – and re-examines their relationship to disability. Drawing from these icons and your own work, how are you hoping to reframe how we view poets and the practice of poetry?

No writer writes on their own. No reader reads on their own. We read and write with our community of ancestors, our community of contemporary interlocutors, our community of selves. Language means little—if anything—without someone else who also uses that language. I'm not hoping to reframe anything as much as maintain that clarity.

10. What do you hope readers – disabled and able-bodied – will take away from this collection?

Visual Inspection is about relationship. Relationship with our bodies, our ecologies, our built environments, our friends, our art. For me this is where the love begins and where meaning arises. What I hope people take away from this book is a sense of community, even in our isolations and loneliness. I want to make invitations: invitations to imagine, to be in relationship, to see what is there even when we can't see.