phabetical

Nico Vassilakis

Nico Vassilakis uses various processes to bring us to his visual poems. In "phabetical" he uses a toy microscope with a built-in video camera to capture highly magnified images of text, often with his hand moving the microscope across the page to capture still text in motion. As he has done here, Vassilakis sometimes modifies the settings on the camera so that the texts are captured in unnatural colors, and he sometimes reverses the polarity of these to further alter their materiality. In this poem, he has used a software process to band many slips of texts into columns and rows, and he has captured these blocks of text in motion so that we can see all of the middle column but only half of the two columns to either side of it. The result uses Greek letters (an homage to his ancestry) so abstracted that they appear before us almost as concrete images: birds, an arm reaching out, a child kicking a ball. He forces us to see not the common symbols of our alphabet but instead the "phabet": the pictographs from which all alphabets arose.—*Geof Huth*