

Living  
In A  
Land  
Sean

LEEDS  
ARTS RESEARCH  
CENTRE

**LIVING IN A LAND**

**DR SEAN ASHTON**

## **OUTPUT INFORMATION**

Title:  
Living in a Land

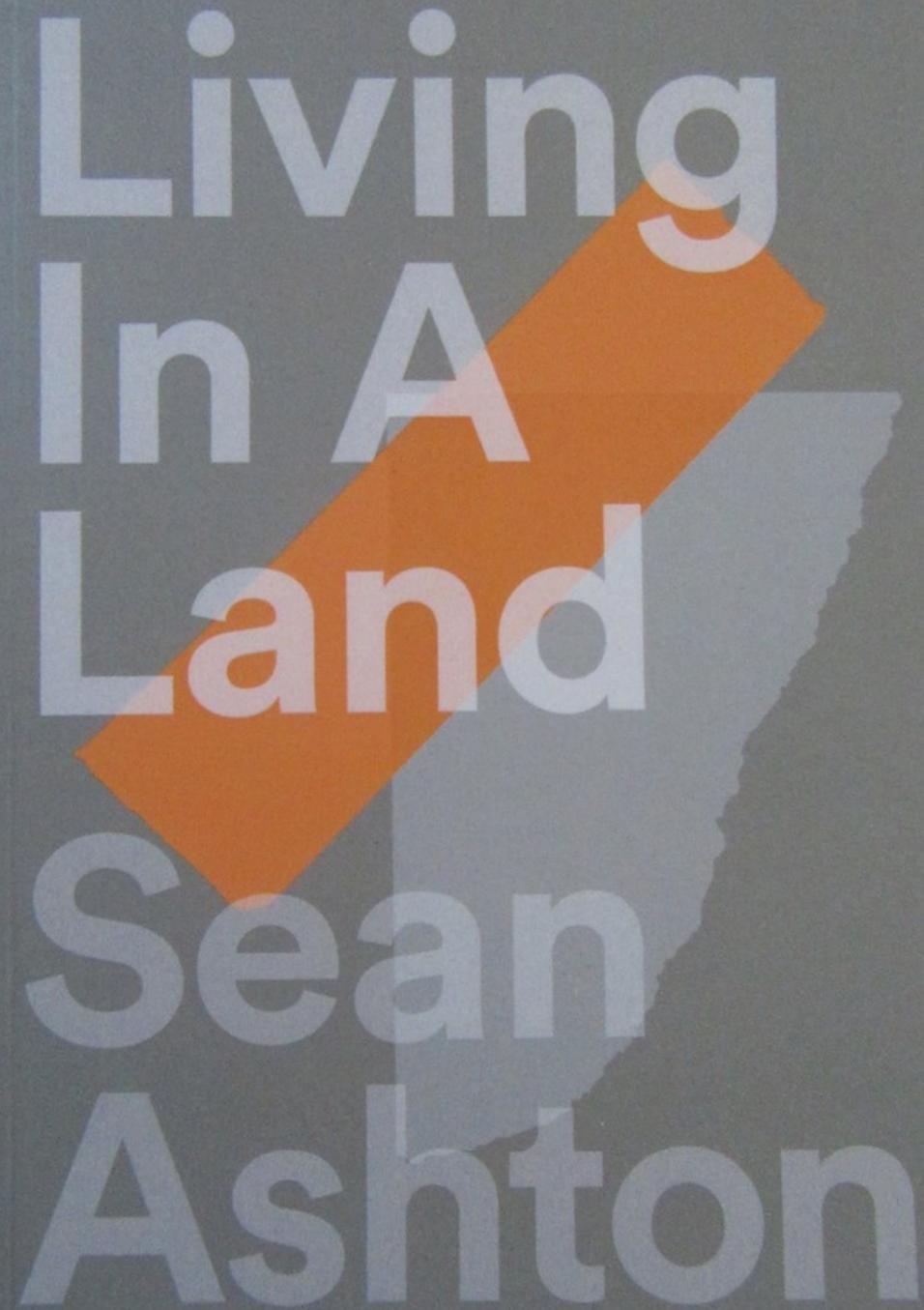
Output Type:  
A – Authored Book

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Date of Publication:  
2017

Research Group:  
Experimental Publishing



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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

*Living in a Land (LIAL)* is a portrait of a hypothetical man. Written in sentences constructed in the negative, the novel consists of things the narrator has never done, no longer does or will never do. The research question is whether an exhaustive narrative using an 'algorithmic' technique can take us into stranger cognitive realms than the conventional approach of choosing one storyline to produce specific dénouements or emotions. Ashton is interested less in emotional catharsis, less in what language says, than in how language means what it says. Flitting from one theme to another, logically demonstrating its thought processes, *LIAL* is not a memoir of a life, but a memoir of how it feels to be alive.

Reviewing it for *Poetry Nation Review* (2017, Issue 232, Vol 43, No. 2), Nicholas Tredell noted that a key method is repetition: devices like anaphora (the use of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses) and grammatical parallelism (the balancing of phrases within a given passage).

Disseminated through readings at *Miss Read: the Berlin Art Book Fair* and *Ears Have No Lids*, Leeds, *LIAL* was also issued as a vinyl and downloadable LP with the journal *Inscription* (2020), whose 500 subscribers include the Bienecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The significant impact included Tredell's review: 'Like Georges Perec, Ashton works within his self-imposed constraints with energy, wit and inventiveness, [offering] a refreshing alternative to the burnished banalities of a Barnes or McEwan' and 'provides an implicit diagnosis of both the proliferation and constriction of possibilities in the way we live now, facing a profusion of "lifestyle choices" which are in fact closely circumscribed and which never touch the real.' Psychoanalyst Darian Leader described the book as 'just the funniest, most enjoyable and oddest read I've had in years.'



*Living in a Land* is a novel written almost entirely in the negative, consisting mainly of things the narrator has never done, no longer does or will never do. Given that what he has not done is more diverse than what he has, there is much ground to cover, and he approaches the task with arguably greater zeal than a conventional diarist. A study of the conceivable versus the actual, the personal *versus* the universal, idiocy *versus* logic, black *versus* white, circles *versus* squares, renting *versus* buying, *Living in a Land* is a chronicle of a mind fighting its own oppositional nature, a portrait of a hypothetical man.

**Book Blurb**

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“Buy this book rather than anything else. It’s just the funniest, most enjoyable and oddest read I’ve had in years.”

**Darian Leader**



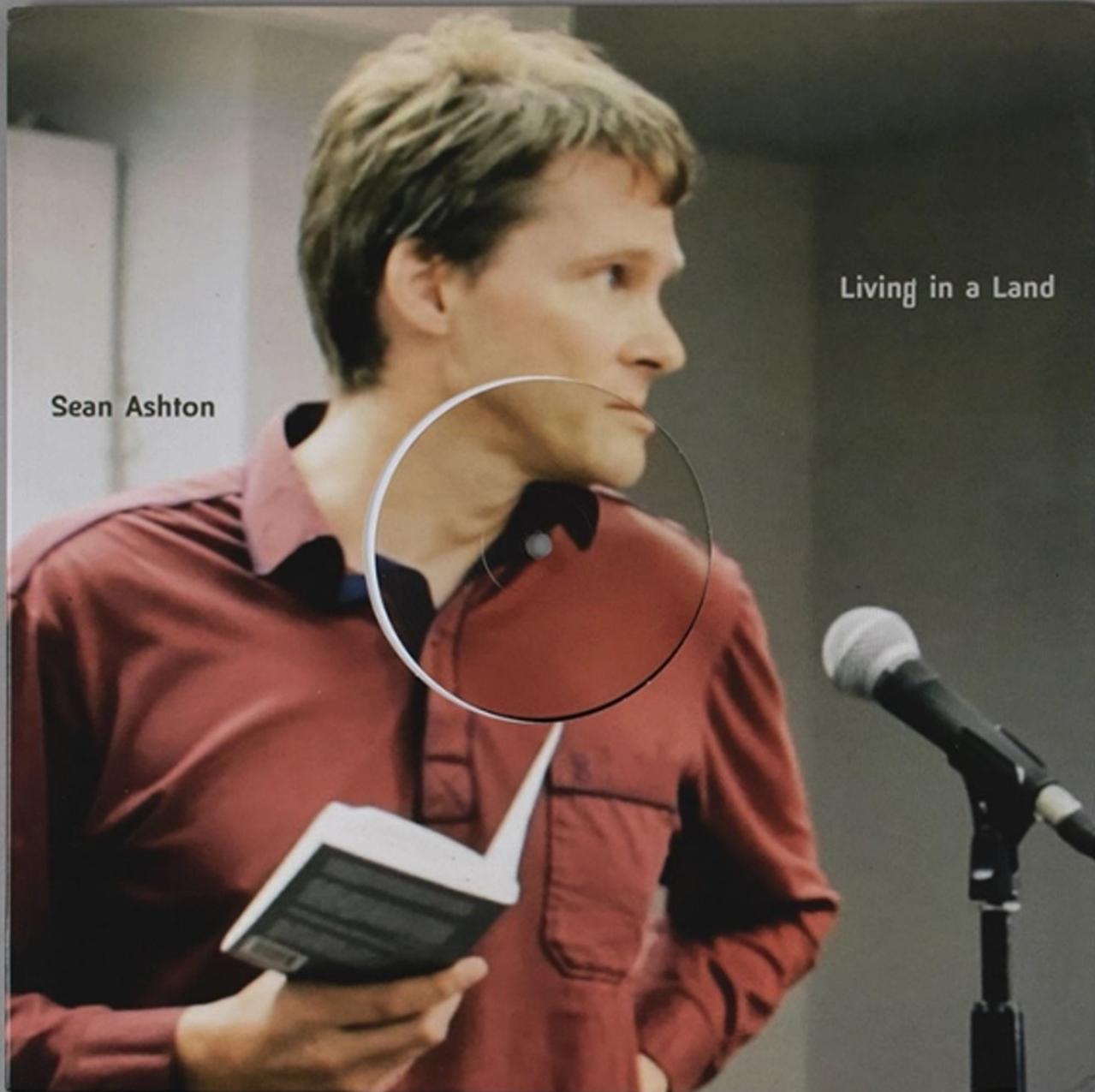
“Sean Ashton’s *Living in a Land* takes the old adage that we could define ourselves by what we are not for a new ride. Each sentence of the novel offers personal and social insights through the negative—a concept that allows Ashton to flood us with Proustian details and a dizzying imagination of unexpected confessions: “I have never stinted on the garlic, or gone too far on the nutmeg...” Readers will feel invited, even compelled, to respond: Me too! Never”

Robert Fitterman

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“Like Christine Brooke-Rose or Georges Perec, Ashton works within his self-imposed limits with energy, wit, and inventiveness; *Living in a Land* [...] provides an implicit diagnosis of both the proliferation and constriction of possibilities in the way we live now, facing a profusion of lifestyle choices which are in fact closely circumscribed and which never touch the real.”

**Nicolas Tredell**



Living in a Land

Sean Ashton

*Living in a Land* vinyl record and sleeve published with Issue 1 of *Inscription – the Journal of Material Text – Theory, Practice, History*

Keywords:

Novel

Algorithmic

Language

Links:

<https://mabibliotheque.cargo.site/Sean-Ashton-Living-in-A-Land-2017>

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