



::EDITED BY NICO VASSILAKIS::

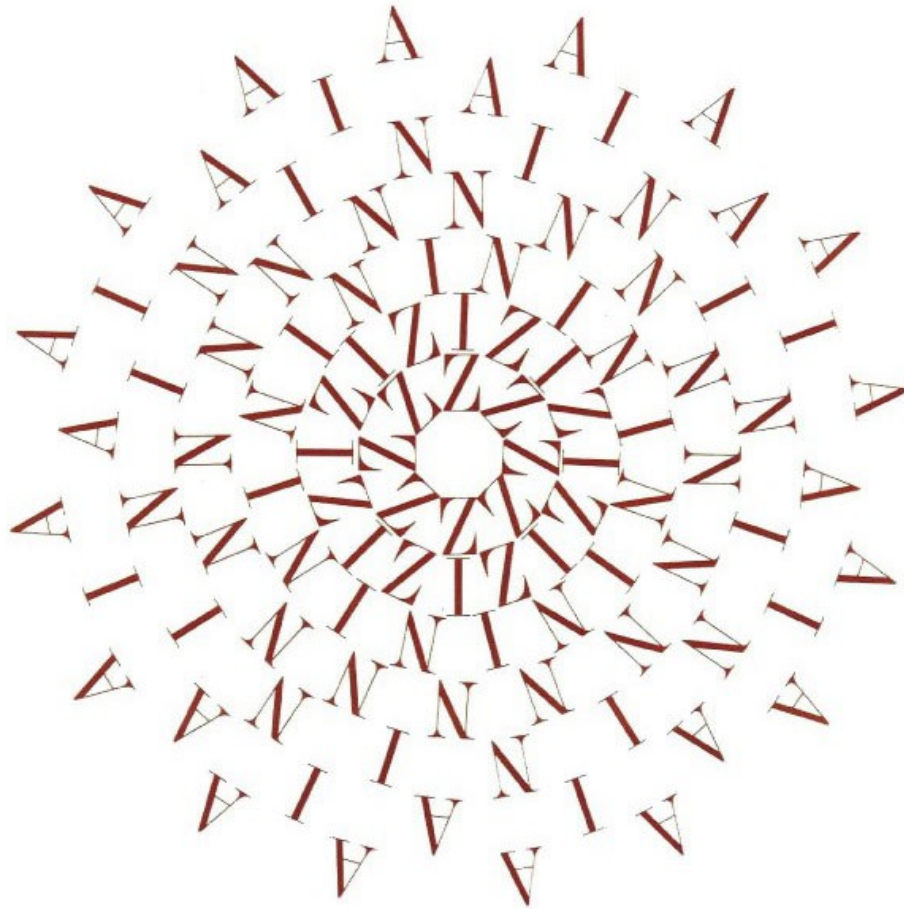
Was there an experience, a specific interaction with visual poetry that infected your brain, made you see language differently or drew you toward exploring vispo further? Is there a vispoem that captured your imagination. What piece first awakened in you the possibility of a visual alphabet/language alternative? That was the general question posed and here are the results. Though this query is overly reductive, the poets were kind enough to choose, for the most part, a singular vispoem as example of this phenomenon. These replies were first collected in Coldfront Magazine where I was serving as Vispo Editor. Thank you participants.

Nico Vassilakis 2016

Participants:

Amanda Earl	derek beaulieu	Michael Peters
Anneke Baeten	Edward Kulemin	Michael Winkler
Aram Saroyan	Francesco Aprile	Miguel Jimenez
Barrie Tullett	Geof Huth	Mike Borkent
bill bissett	Geoffrey Gatza	Orchid Tierney
Bill Dimichelle	Gleb Kolomiets	Patrick Collier
Billy Mavreas	Jeff T. Johnson	Scott Helmes
Brandon Downing	Jesse Glass	serkan_isin
Brian Reed	Joel Chace	Stephen Nelson
Carol Stetser	Karl Kempton	Sven Staelens
Clemente Padin	KS Ernst	Tim Gaze
Connie Tettenborn	Lawrence Upton	Tulio Restrepo
Crag Hill	Louis Bury	Vittore Baroni
Demosthenes	Luc Fierens	W. Mark Sutherland
Agrafiotis	Mark Young	Willard Bohn
Denis Smith	Márton Koppány	

Amanda Earl / **Mary Ellen Solt**



*Mary Ellen Solt
Zinnia*

Zinnia (1964) by Mary Ellen Solt

From her Flowers in Concrete series. Not the first visual poem, I'd ever seen, but most likely the first series that left me gobsmacked, made me want to create visual poetry myself. And

also made me interested in the idea of the series in visual poetry. These pieces are fanciful, delicate and minimal. They have life and movement, they imply music. The typeface chosen seems to suit the philosophy of the work. There's something personal about the series, which is a study of flowers from Solt's own garden. I have been fascinated with working with the circle, its occurrence in nature ever since. There's something celebratory about "Flowers in Concrete," something that says life exists despite all this.

As Solt wrote in her essay "Words and Spaces:"

"Concrete poetry asks us to look at the word: at its esthetic properties as a composition of letters, each of which is a beautiful object in its own right...Concrete poetry asks us to contemplate the relationship of words to each other and the space they occupy. We must be prepared to contemplate poems as constellations of words, as ideograms, as word pictures, as permutational systems. By discovering the meaning of the poem as it emerges from the method of its composition, the reader becomes in some sense the poet."

Anneke Baeten / **Denis Smith**



Twenty years ago or so I was exposed to the work of Denis Smith - the exploration of language based on the ancient art of calligraphy. The artist explained to me the formal training and form led him to rework the visual and the written, and explore the formal segments of the writing into a re-arranged visual blend. Some of the work was a warm primordial soup of tribal ochre colours and patterns and rich textures mixed with ancient scripts. Other work was starker, monochromatic Japanese calligraphy which the artist was highly trained in, which then was transformed and mixed in a fluent flow mixing both into pieces that speak to the audience in an unusual form of storytelling. The contradiction of the disciplined technique of calligraphy turns into a frantic subconscious flow. Looking at the piece results in a constant pulling to and fro in search of meaning but in the end the visual pleasure of form takes over.

Aram Saroyan / Ian Hamilton Finlay

a a a a a
c c c c c
r r r r r
o o o o o
b b b b b
a a a a a
t t t t t
s s s s s
t t t t t
a a a a a
b b b b b
o o o o o
r r r r r
c c c c c
a a a a a

The poem that came to mind for me was Ian Hamilton Finlay's "acrobats". I could see here and in other works by Finlay how a poem could enact rather than simply describe a meaning. Love Finlay's work in all its phases, including his early traditional poems collected in *The Dancers Inherit the Party* to his later garden designs and sculptures.



HN Werkman

My involvement and interest in Vispo grew slowly, rather than being a single moment of inspiration, it took place over several years.

When I was at School (around 17), my Art Teachers, Mr Dishington and Mr. Verrier brought a concrete poet in to run a workshop with us. I remember making work that responded to the things they were talking about, but as a student I was still concerned with going to Art School to become an image maker or illustrator rather than someone who might work with

words – however, around the same time, I also recall our English teacher Mr Hughes, introducing us to ee cummings, notably the poem '*r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r*' — these things stayed with me and when I began to study Graphic Design on my Degree Course, this interest in poetry and language led me back to the Concrete Poets as well to the work of Phil Baines, Alan Kitchen and other contemporary designers and typographers.

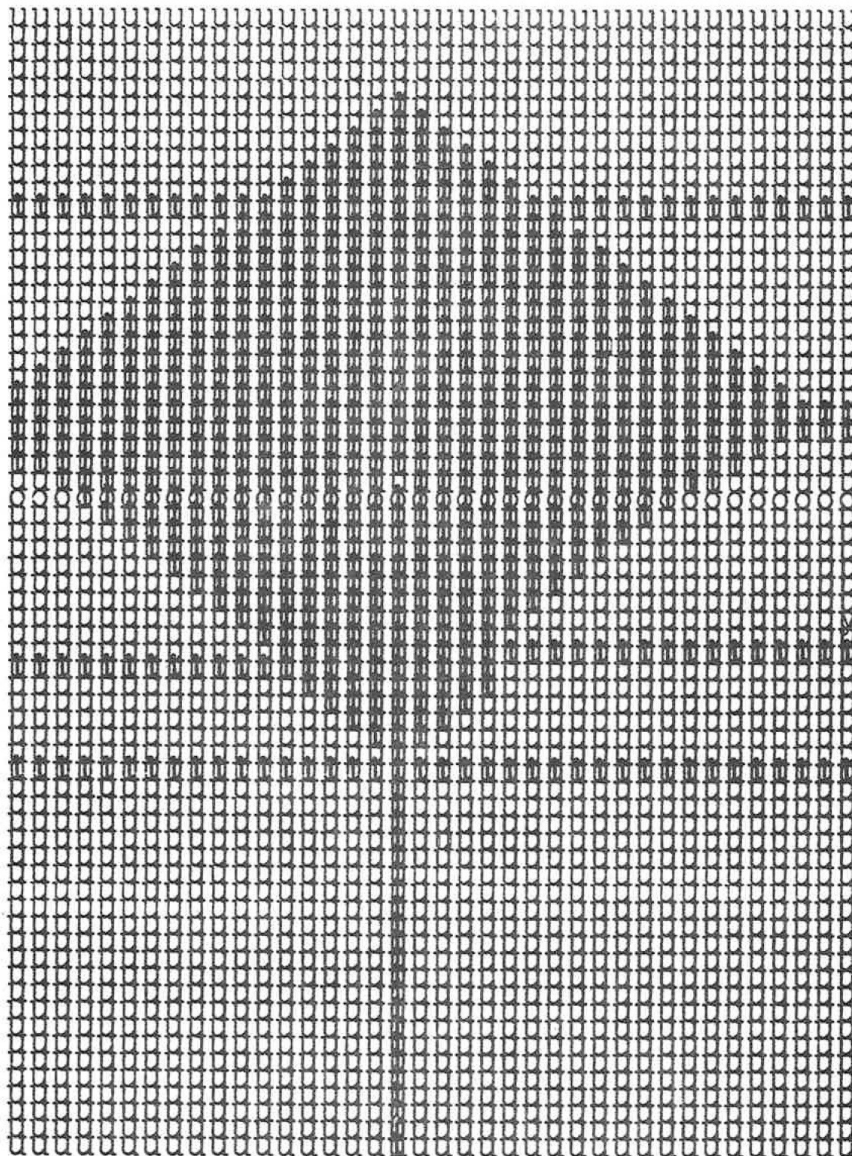
With these influences quietly asserting themselves, it was really my induction into the Letterpress studio that brought it all together and became my watershed moment.

When I was in my first year at Chelsea School of Art, we were set a project to typeset a small ad -- for the personals column in a fictitious magazine. I enjoyed it so much I set about twenty, and from then on I think I was almost always in the print-room, setting and printing type. Dave Strickland, who was the Course Leader suggested reading *Typographica* magazine, *Pioneers of Modern Typography* and *The Liberated Page* — and my influences suddenly expanded to include Apollinaire's calligrammes, El Lizzitsky, Rodchenko, Diter Rot, Stefan Themerson, Kurt Schwitters and Typewriter Art...

But the one piece that really changed the direction of my work — that set me on the path I'm still following, is from HN Werkman's *The Next Call Magazine*. The exuberance with which he used his letterpress studio, the combination of text as image and letter shapes (or any shapes that could be placed on the press and inked-up) as a method of communicating in their own right, was incredibly inspiring and liberating. There was just this amazing energy, and the realisation, that as a student in the composing room at Chelsea, I had access to the same materials Werkman did, and indeed so many of the other artists and designers that I admired.

It was at that point I decided to embark on my own project, one that's lasted me over twenty years – *The Typographic Dante*...

bill bissett / **bill bissett**

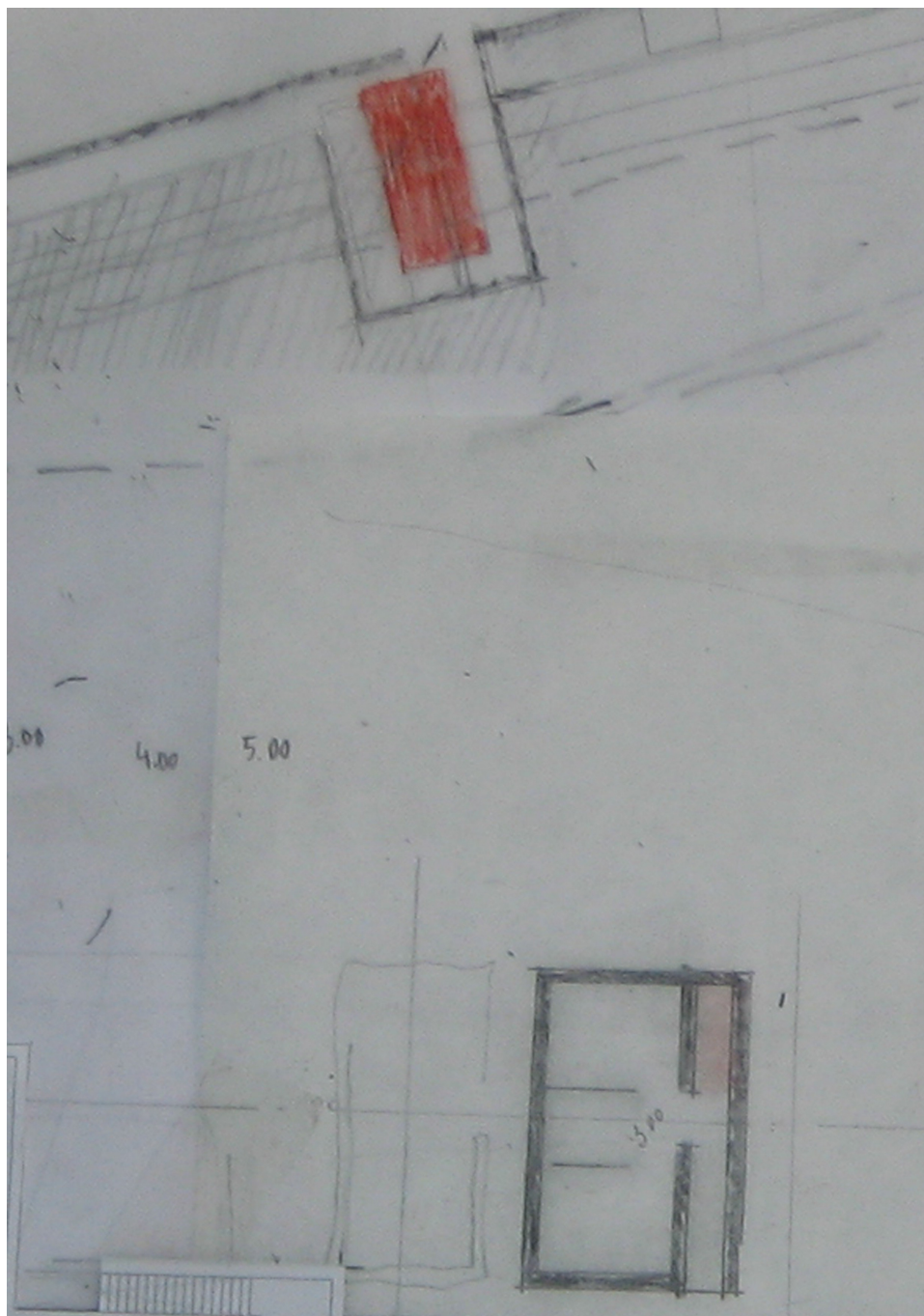


first viz sound pome writing

my mothr died i cudint go on
in th dog show world without her
i gave up my dog i gave up a
lot uv things n feelings i was
losing heart 2 n sum yeers latr at
16 i wrote my first viz sound pome
deth deth n mor deth spred all
across th page using space n not

paragraphs it was a visual incantation
poems about death and cummings and
strange character studies and parts of
words instances not content and then
when I found Gertrude Stein stanzas
in meditations and e.e. Cummings I was
so happy there were others like me
and I as they used to say never looked back
and I was regaining heart writing almost
all the time redefining the life I had chosen
when I was in the oxygen tent after 12
operations was told if I lived I wouldn't
be a dancer or a figure skater the abdominal
wall was cut up I decided to write and
paint then I could still feel the line moving
through space which is what I wanted
and parts of lines and syllables and parts of
syllables living inside the words and images
then after leaving home at almost 17 I
was able to write full time almost and
then even shulee reelee
I was eleven in the oxygen tent

Bill DiMichele / **Bárbara Mesquita**



pencil pool on paper 1 by Bárbara Mesquita

Somewhere south of Babylon and north of Ur-DasDim lays another city where specters haunt the crumbling towers and mosaics of Bárbara Mesquita's ghost palace. The overall atmosphere is one of fog and age, lines merging with background, silently fading into some ancient obscurity. Numbers echo through empty rooms, measuring, counting the ages of their decay. The number 300 settles into a more substantial plot, a throne room, a treasure room,

perhaps, important, but eclipsed by the inner chamber, the holy of holies, which houses a red rectangle, made, well, red-er-er by the contrast with the grey mysticism.

Looking at it from a purely formal point of view, we see a preliminary architectural sketch, drawn, erased, drawn, erased, aiming toward the design that the client requires.

Looking at it from an occult point of view, there's a sanctity of secrets, of ratios and proportions, partly bowing to the past and partly constructing the future.

Personally I would like to live there, among Bárbara's ghosts that run through the corridors, fading back into a building I've never seen and that I may never see.

It ne cancesaid. It nere t—o th—said
—have onge— to t ong
uch:—ere t—I f—uch. par' to tien t—I
the E— the Ethat—en to dr—
r frie it par:n M r frie! T' o dr—n N
o th—, thatnam— r fe— nan
left err! T I ca—left— ie sa I c
a p ver fea wh'n a p'— ie sa— a w

ERRORS OF REFRACTION AND OCULAR HEADACHE

Errors of Refraction and Ocular Headache by J. Lehmus

There is a particular agony in wading through reams of inspirational material from medieval talismans to Tolkien's elvish to Rick Griffin's lettering to every piece of succulent mail-art received to find that one jewel. Was it all of Once Again? Some arcane leaflet in an edition of 50? Some scrawl or sticker? Man alive.

I chose a piece seemingly entitled Errors of Refraction and Ocular Headache by J. Lehmus of Finland. It came to me circa 1990 printed on a postcard, a call for a "continuous visual/conceptual poetry portfolio project" entitled Brio Cell, part of Lehmus's Cyanobacteria work.

This piece is composed of actual readable Latin letters and fragmented words (English ?) intersected (sutured ?) by a few lines stretching between word parts and lines. To me it is the right combination of machine degradation and a hint of a meddling human hand. Readable but not really. My subsequent descent into the marvels of photocopy manipulation would leave me striving for that balance. My admittedly juvenile participation in that inspiring portfolio project replete with international talent further stoked my flames towards improving my craft.

This piece speaks of industrial process, decay, collage, omission. It dekes meaning(s) while hinting at a personal communication. It rests within the lineage of machine arcana so redolent of the early Industrial music scene, a throwback to Victorian pomp rudely unmasked, civilization faltering. A cousin of both fantasy and science fiction, one that skips the conventions. Evidently not hippie, not punk exactly. What?

These attributes stir my desire to participate in poetics. They are all over the rubber stamped, cut-up, xeroxed, collaged litter of mail-art. Stark black and white, text hobbling in a paragraph, on the tip of my tongue.

Brandon Downing / Joe Brainard



Joe Brainard, The "Nancy" works

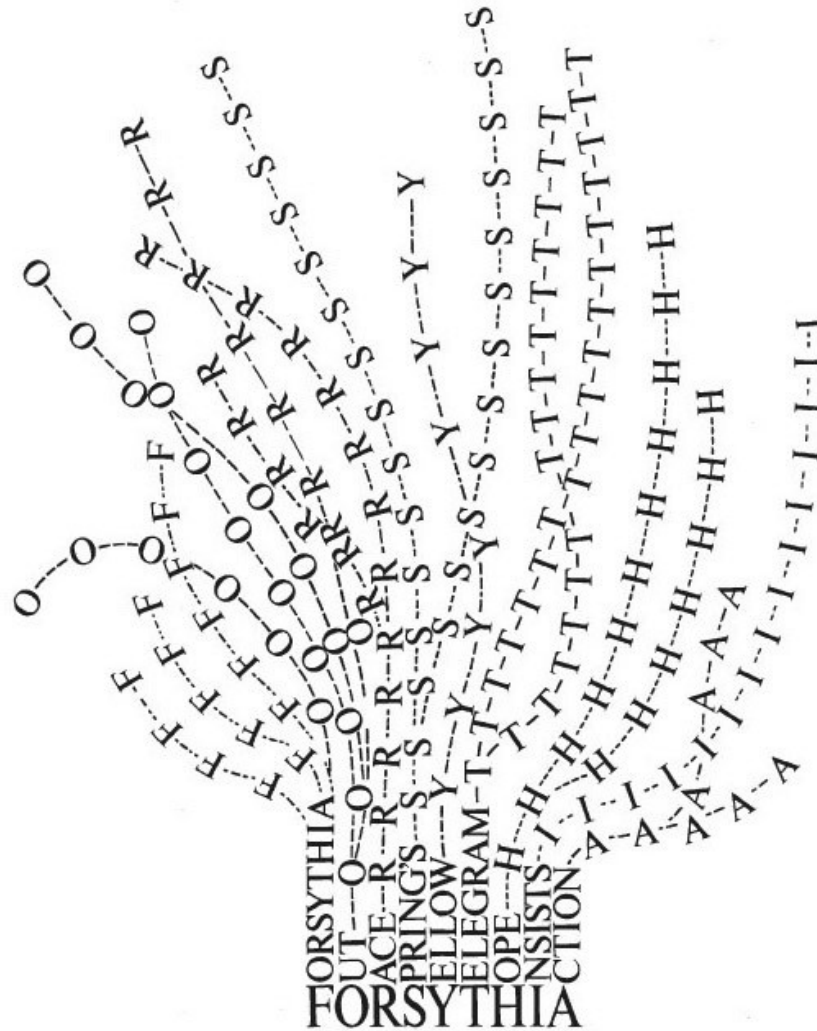
The painters and image-makers associated with the Bay Area Renaissance and the second-generation New York School were artists I was lucky to have been turned on to fairly early in my writing life. The great collage-maker Jess had created book covers for Bay Area writers like Norma Cole, who was a teacher of mine in graduate school at San Francisco State, and my friendship with Anselm and Edmund Berrigan, fostered in the mid-1990s, had turned me onto the radical work that Jo Brainard had done with Ted Berrigan's C Press, as well as his early collaborative books with his partner Kenward Elmslie, like *The Baby Book* and *The Champ*.

I had already been working with collage pretty steadily for almost a decade by this point, and thought I knew my way around the variations and approaches that were available to me. I was super wrong. Seeing how Brainard, in particular, used his visual prowess and cutting eye to create collaborative works with other poets that fused seamlessly into the language, extending it, widening the field of play while simultaneously telescoping its focus, was pretty revelatory.

My own collages, focused at the time on simple juxtapositions, material counterpoints, etc... seemed, well, easy and goofy in comparison. The way I was integrating language into the collages was barely more than simple label-making and the irony of a slightly-advanced twenty-something. Taking in the work of Joe Brainard changed the whole course of the ship for me. So it was with something verging on abject joy that I visited the Berkeley Art Museum several times in early 2001 to view a major retrospective in person. And there were literally heaps of works I hadn't seen, including a room of Cornell-influenced assemblages of consumer goods, several featuring the unnaturally green hue of Prell shampoo, one of the most revolting products of the 1970s. But what really captivated me in the show was work I thought I already knew. Over two decades, Brainard used the innocuous character of Nancy – the bland and crisply drawn newspaper-comic heroine – as the subject of more than a hundred drawings, collages and other creative ephemera. Nancy was Brainard's jam. I'd seen a set of terrific Poetry Project reading flyers featuring the sparsely drawn and inscrutable Nancy, but at the museum, seeing a group of them set together in a grid, was a plain old revelation.

He had essentially transformed Nancy into an entire cosmos. She was everywhere. Brainard attached Nancy's confused heads to Duchamp's nude descending a staircase. Nancy as World-Ender. Nancy as an ashtray, as an acid casualty, as a Buddha. Nancy's face adorning porn. Nancy paintings, Nancy collages, repurposed comic strips where Nancy and Sluggo watch her aunt being devoured by a dog. Old master-styled sketchbook pages of the human form, with Nancy posing alongside the angelic figure studies, her inscrutable face smeared in sfumato. All throughout this catalogue of variety, however, it was Nancy's implacable face, and the consistency of her representation, that made the collected works into a compelling, mind bending body.

I think the particular work here speaks a bit to that, it's one I've always had a photocopy around of. A simple eight-panel-comic riff, it's intentionally sloppy, and pulses with rule-breaking at a cosmic level: the falling Nancy literally breaks the frame, and the implied velocity and gravity of comic strip world, as, with a rare grimace, she appears to fall through and outside the physical world itself, while her little silhouetted dog seems to lunge toward her in the final frame, while being trapped by it. The implication is that Nancy, through no fault of her own – rather, through the brilliant permutations of Joe Brainard – has become a body, a physical being, too formed to exist in the flatly drawn world from which she came. That she is facing this new reality with plain dread adds a nice little pointer to her dialogue bubble: "OF CRAZY PRIDE THAT GOETH BEFORE A FALL". I could look at this image all day.



Mary Ellen Solt

Mary Ellen Solt's "Forsythia": An Appreciation

Mary Ellen Solt's "Forsythia" is taken from *Flowers in Concrete* (1966), a collection of poems that, as she puts it, draw on "the visual properties" of the name of a flower to suggest the "shape of the flower" itself. Other poems in the book include "Dogwood," "Marigold," "Lilac," and "Zinia." I first encountered "Forsythia," however, in a different context, in the Solt-edited anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), where it leapt out at me, convinced me that visually inventive poetry could be every bit as expressive and complex as the more conventional verse that I studied in college.

The word "FORSYTHIA" appears at the base of the poem written horizontally left to right, as well as centered on the page. The font and letter-spacing are slightly peculiar. The

letters look a bit squeezed together and vertically stretched. Each letter in “FORSYTHIA” serves as the start of a new word whose letters appear on an implied perpendicular intersecting line. The result is a curious, grammar-ambiguous word string: “FORSYTHIA OUT RACE SPRINGS YELLOW TELEGRAM HOPE INSISTS ACTION.” Each of these words, in turn, gives way to one to four curving, occasionally dividing fronds that repeat between four and eighteen times the first letter in the word from which it originates. Between these repeated letters appear stippled lines that, on closer inspection, turn out to be a mix of dots and dashes that correspond to the Morse code for that particular repeating letter. Between the H’s, for instance, appear four dots, whereas between the A’s occur one or more dot-dash combinations. Seen not in parts but as a unified whole, the poem looks like a side-view of a forsythia bush in bloom.

The relation here between form and thematic content is extremely tight. The word “FORSYTHIA” serves as the root, so to speak, from which the poem as a verbal construct and the flowering plant that it depicts both grow. The nine words that sprout from the root identify a setting and occasion. “FORSYTHIA OUT”: the plant is among the very first to flower in Spring, to be “out.” Indeed, it blooms before it produces leaves. “RACE SPRINGS”: one hurries to see this harbinger of a new season of growth. It is a “YELLOW TELEGRAM,” a vivid and colorful missive after a gray dead winter that gives “HOPE” and “INSISTS ACTION,” that is, provides an example of revived life that provokes a corresponding stir of energy in one who sees it. The telegraphic way manner in which the poem’s language suggests this scene is apropos. Everything is urgent, immediate, swiftly emergent. Hence, too, of course, the switch from Roman letters to Morse code and the celebratory spray-spread of text-boughs, reminiscent of the ecstatic jets of water in Guillaume Apollinaire’s *calligramme* “La colombe poignardée et le jet d’eau.”

One could talk endlessly about “Forsythia.” It connects to a venerable tradition of female poets who compare their poetry to flowers, from the “Pierian roses” of Sappho’s Fragment 55 to Stein’s “a rose is a rose is a rose.” It plays with the Colridgian ideal of organic form, the belief that a superior poem unfolds as a plant grows from a seed. It reinvents the Imagist and Objectivist faith in a poem’s ability to record and convey through the particulars of its form an epiphanic moment of perception. Etc. Mary Ellen Solt’s “Forsythia” enabled me, all in a flash, to begin to see vispo not as a foreign graft on the Western poetic tradition but instead an integral part of it, root and branch.

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Carol Stetser / Petroglyphs



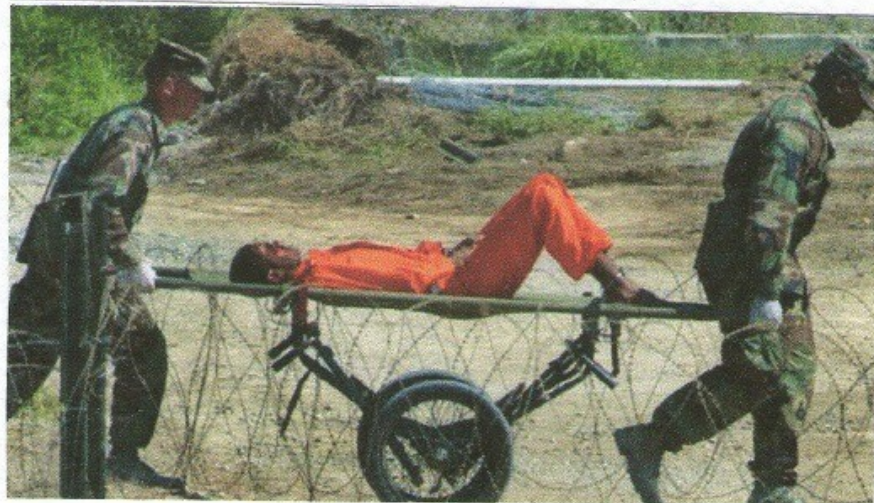
The photo by Jim King shows Carol observing the petroglyphs at Christmas Tree Pass in 1976.

I exchanged my photography books with Karl Kempton after reading about his publication, *Kaldron in Umbrella*. Padma Press was added to his mailing list beginning with the winter 1978-1979 issue. I was completely baffled by what I saw. For the next few years I struggled to understand what the artists published in these pages were saying. It wasn't until 1984 that I was able to make a bookwork, *Hierograms*, that I knew could be called visual poetry. I had finally made the connection between the "writing to be seen" in *Kaldron* and the rock art I loved to photograph.

The petroglyphs at Christmas Tree Pass in Nevada are the inspiration for the visual poetry I was to create. After we moved to the Mohave desert, my husband and I made yearly pilgrimages to this desert canyon. The people who chipped these images in the rocks are unknown to us and the meaning for them of the symbols they left are also unknown. But these petroglyphs have a visceral impact on those who encounter them.

Philip Glass in his memoir, *Words Without Music*, posed the question "where does music come from?" For me, visual poetry comes from the "ancient ones", the ancestors. The pictographs and petroglyphs they left on the rocks of this country are significant for all of us and deserve a place in the lineage of contemporary visual poetry.

VACATIONS IN GUANTANAMO



ENJOY OUR ORANGE PLAN

"In Dialogue with Dick HIGGINS"

In 1995, Dick Higgins was invited by Luigi Bonotto in Molvena/Bassano di Grappa/Veneto/Italia. During his stay, he proposed a scheme for a possible "definition" of Visual Poetry (Fig.1) in the book of Dencker (Fig.2). In 1990, Luigi Bonotto asked me to comment and to complete the proposal of Dick Higgins. So, I have elaborated on a new version (Fig.3 - my new elements in hand writing)/(Fig.4 Hybrid version of D.H-D.A). Also, I used the Italian version of my text (originally in Greek) on Visual Poetry: "a small organon on visual poetry" (below).

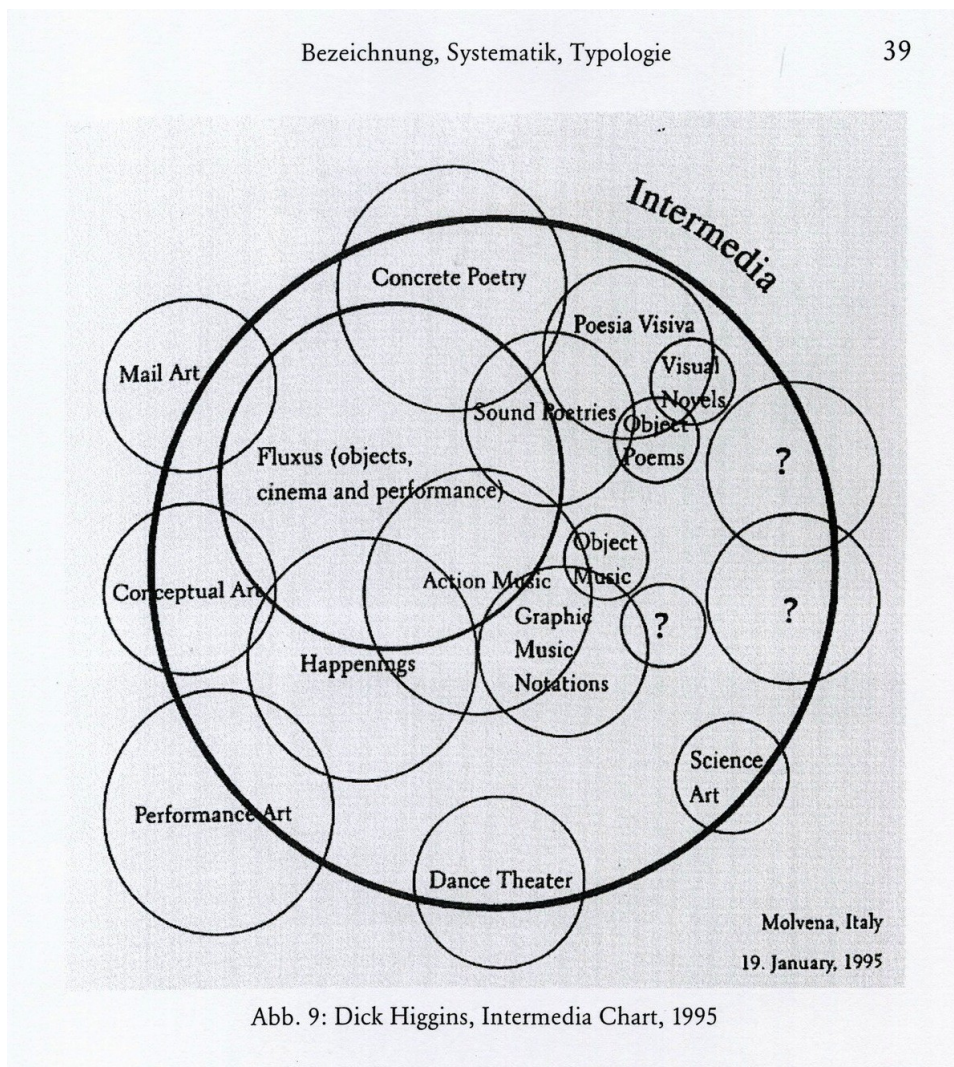


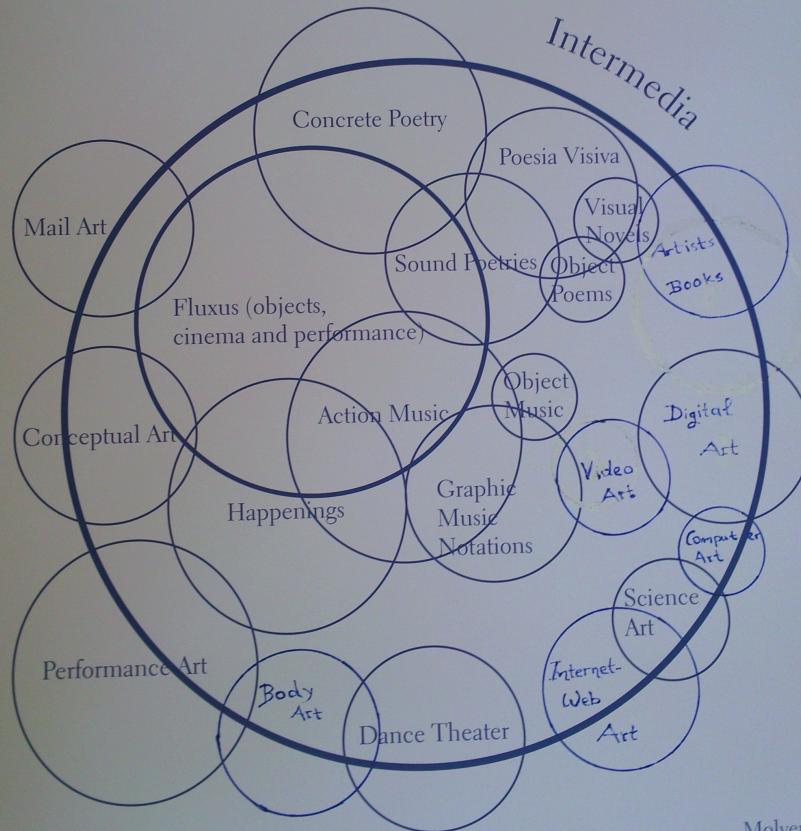
Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Intermedia: Chart

Dick Higgins



Demosthenes Agrafiotis
Athens, Greece
23, June, 2010

Molvena, Italy
19. January, 1995

Fig. 3

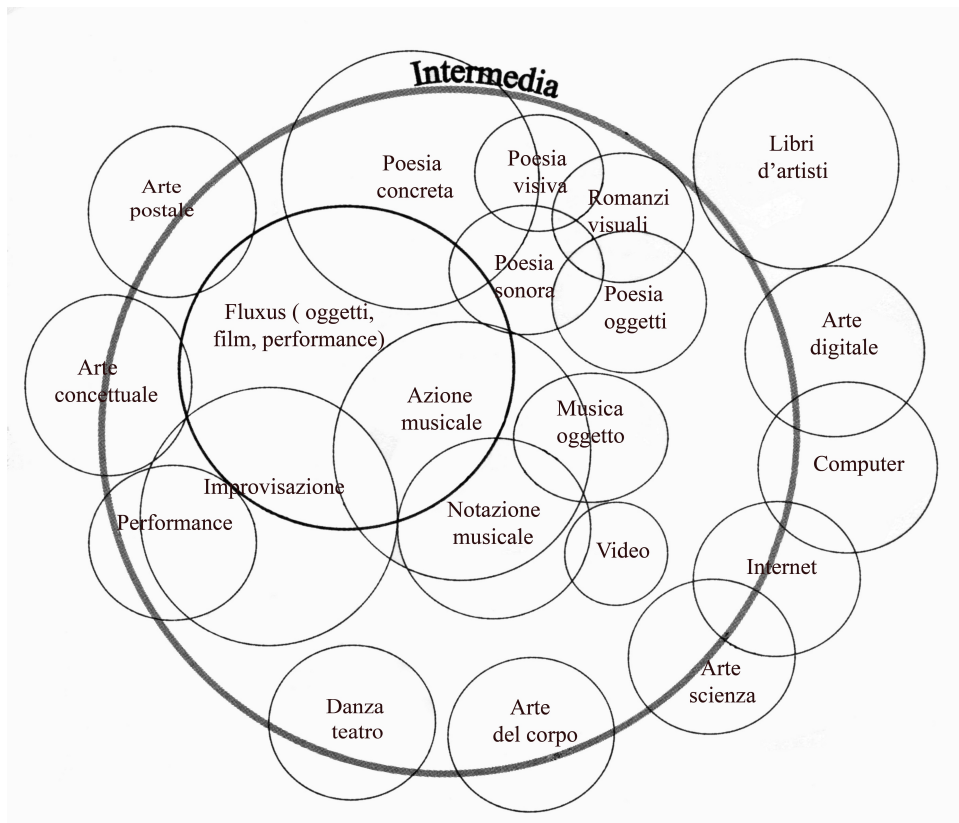


Fig. 4

A. Indizi introduttivi

1. Parole, espressioni, combinazioni linguistiche emergono all'orizzonte sociale per descrivere una situazione, un progetto (projet-project), un gruppo, una mossa in un settore della vita socio-culturale (nell' arte per esempio). Di solito questi complessi linguistici si propongono in modi diversi e hanno un percorso particolare. Alcuni diventano molto noti, alcuni rimangono solamente « vivi », mentre la maggior parte si perdono nella macchina del tempo. Tutte queste espressioni hanno lo scopo di evidenziare la dimensione più critica di un fenomeno, un evento o una situazione con la portata massima di comunicazione e di economia retorica. Ad esempio « società dello spettacolo », « artisti selvatici », « poeti della sconfitta », « la generazione degli anni 30 o 70 », « avanguardia rivoluzionaria », « arte sperimentale ». In questo senso, è necessario formulare alcune domande sul quanto certe espressioni « rivelano » o « nascondono » le cose, « ombreggiano » o « illuminano » le situazioni.

2. Due o tre decenni fa, l'uso del termine « modernista » (modern) o del termine « contemporaneo » (contemporary) nel quadro della società greca, causava più confusione e quesiti che comprensione. Oggi molti ricercatori, giornalisti, critici e pensatori usano il termine « modernità » evitando in questo modo di usare espressioni come « capitalismo » o « mondo occidentale ». Ad esempio: anche i marxisti, sedicenti, puristi e analisti, hanno adottato questa terminologia abbastanza neutra in una prospettiva storica. E quindi importante dare informazioni o chiarimenti circa il contenuto di termini come « modernità » per evitare la confusione giornalistica, fra le altre sul « postmoderno ».

3. In molti settori della vita sociale greca (come l'arte, la scienza, la filosofia, la moda), i modelli di procedure e di termini molto spesso sono importati - prova della capacità dei greci moderni di assimilare le varie forme di innovazione. L'introduzione qui sopra può essere fatta in modo sistematico o in un modo superficiale, casuale e imprevedibile : per questo motivo non è possibile evitare malintesi, incomprensioni e distorsioni. Per esempio, i termini sono tradotti in un modo così particolare che alla fine creano confusione, come è il caso con « surrealismo », in greco « yperealismos » , e « iperrealismo » che deve essere tradotto con « yperparastatikotita » per evitare errori grossolani.

B. Nell' arcipelago delle parole e delle immagini

4. Nella scelta di un approccio non-storico (ad esempio senza riferimento all'antica Grecia, a Simias Rhodius o all'inizio del movimento Dada), evitando il cambiamento della base socio-culturale (ad esempio la rivendicazione della tradizione cinese, o l'esperienza delle società cacciatori-raccoglitori), prendendo come prospettiva storica le società industriali, i paesi tecnologicamente avanzati degli ultimi 50 anni, la domanda che viene formulata è la seguente: quali sono le avventure, gli esperimenti, le prove, le azioni relative all' accoppiamento di parole e immagini, di lettere e figure, di processi e risultati.

5. Dick Higgins ha proposto la classificazione seguente:

Poesia concreta (Concrete Poetry)
Poesia visiva (Poesia Visiva – contesto italiano)
(Visual Poetry - contesto anglosassone)
Romanzi visuali (Visual Novels)
Poesia oggetti (Object Poems)
Poesia sonora (Sound Poetry)
Arte postale (Mail Art)
Fluxus (oggetti, film, performance) (Fluxus objects, cinema and performance)
Arte concettuale (Conceptual Art)
Musica azione (Action Music)
Musica oggetto (Object Music)
Notazione musicale (Graphic Music Notations)
Eventi improvvisazione (Happenings)
Prestazioni (Performance Art)
Danza teatro (Dance Theatre)
Arte scienza (Science Art)
Arte mediana (Intermedia Art)

6. Questa tipologia può essere accettata o rifiutata, ma riflette in modo abbastanza semplice una serie di iniziative intraprese in uno scambio internazionale di idee e proposte per mezzo secolo. Il punto principale della tipologia di cui sopra si riferisce al fatto che Dick Higgins (1938-98) ha vissuto, lui stesso, come uno dei protagonisti chiave delle vicissitudini degli ultimi 40 anni. In realtà è morto nel corso di un colloquio «Art Action» («Arte Azione»), che aveva lo scopo di esaminare criticamente le correnti che sono menzionate nella sua tipologia (Art Action, 1958-1998, Rencontre Internationale et Colloque Interactif. Ed. Richard Martel. Interéditeur Editions Intervention, 2001, Québec, Canada).

7. Philippe Castellin nel suo libro: « DOC (K) S Mode d 'emploi » (Al Dante, 2002) basato sulla sua tesi sulla storia della rivista « DOC (K) S », che gestisce e controlla Julien Blaine e gli Akenaton, suggerisce le seguenti tipologie : Concreta, Visuale, Poesia Sonora. Azione, Video, Informatica, Internet (Concrète, Visuelle, Poésie Sonore. Actione, Vidéo, Informatique, Web). Indubbiamente questa tipologia riguarda il percorso specifico della rivista, che comunque ha tenuto un ruolo importante perché era aperta ai contributi provenienti da tutto il mondo, e fu una risposta forte al introverso e logocentrico parisianismo della letteratura del 1969-70 (per esempio il giornale « Tel Quel »). In relazione alla tipologia di Higgins, la seconda tipologia si apre alla produzione artistica degli ultimi 20 anni che si basa sulle nuove tecnologie.

8. Sulla base delle due tipologie, con una definizione minima del modernismo, « superare le definizioni tradizionali della pratica artistica (aldilà dei generi) », tenendo conto della priorità della domanda « che può essere l'arte ; oppure quali sono i suoi limiti? » e accettando il presupposto che la poesia non si limita alla poesia « classica » lineare, propongo la seguente tipologia:

Arte mediana
Arte postale
Poesia concreta
Poesia visiva
Romanzi visuali
Libri d'artista

Poesia sonora
Poesia oggetti
Arte digitale
Arte concettuale
Fluxus (oggetti, film, performance)
Azione musicale
Musica oggetto
Computer
Improvvisazione
Prestazioni
Notazione musicale
Video
Internet
Scienza arte
Danza
Arte del corpo

C. Rintracciamento

9. In nessun paese, regione, o continente si possono trovare tutti gli elementi della tipologia precedente, nè le stesse denominazioni, nè lo stesso percorso storico dei dati, nè la stessa regolarizzazione socio-culturale. Diamo alcune indicazioni sulla capacità di analisi della tipologia ma anche dei suoi limiti.

(i). La tradizione di Marinetti e del movimento Dada è molto debole in Grecia a differenza del surrealismo che ha una sua presenza, anche se il nostro paese non ha una tradizione di cristianità cattolica. (Secondo un' ipotesi di ricerca, il surrealismo ha avuto maggiore risonanza nei paesi cattolici). In altri paesi la tradizione Dada ha creato punti di partenza e certamente delle pratiche e teorie diverse che nel nostro paese. Ad esempio, i rapporti degli artisti con le forze politiche sono radicalmente diversi nel campo europeo (vedi il caso di Marinetti e il caso di Richard Huelsenbeck nel suo libro « En avant dada. » L'Histoire du dadaïsme, L'Ecart absolu, Les presses du Réel, Dijon, 2000).

(ii). Il termine « poesia visiva » è usato per nominare due correnti che differiscono in modo significativo. La « Poesia Visiva » è un fenomeno italiano, con forti radici semiologiche, che ha come scopo, con l'aiuto di immagini (di pubblicità), di ironizzare e di scalzare la comunicazione di massa. È stata coltivata alla base nella Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze e non nella Scuola di Belle Arti (ad esempio, uno dei protagonisti, E. Miccini, era un professore di comunicazione e di architettura). La « Visual Poetry » si riferisce a diversi paesi (ad esempio Inghilterra, Brasile, Giappone, Germania), a progetti in cui le parole, le parole-forme e le lettere sono utilizzate figurativamente per la produzione di significati impreveduti, con aspetti ironici o di strizzatine d'occhi. (Spesso si riferiscono anche a sovrapposizioni con la « poesia concreta » (Concrete Poetry) o lo « spazialismo »). Naturalmente entrambe le forme erano in fiore negli anni 60-70. Oggi il termine « poesia visiva » ha piuttosto un carattere storico, in particolare con lo sviluppo delle nuove tecnologie di telecomunicazioni e dell'informatica.

iii). Clemende Padin dall'Uruguay ritiene che la « Mail Art » è stata la forma politicamente la più avanzata nell'arte. Per i poeti e gli artisti in carcere dell'America Latina la superficie delle

buste è diventata un campo in cui l'arte è chiamata a sviluppare creativamente il massimo dei messaggi politici. Nell'emisfero nord del pianeta, l' « Arte postale » ha creato una comunità di artisti al di fuori del quadro istituzionale stabilito. La grande importanza data all' « arte postale » è stata un precursore delle pratiche su Internet, cioè della pratica dominante nel 21 ° secolo. Nessun'altra pratica artistica ha mostrato un tale potenziale di anticipazione. Ciò ha portato ad uno studio sistematico, alla registrazione e all'analisi di questo movimento internazionale ma differenziato.

iv). Spesso sono utilizzati i termini «arte sperimentale» - «poesia sperimentale» o «avanguardia». Nella tipologia di Higgins questi termini non sono menzionati. Perciò sono date due spiegazioni diverse. Julien Blaine sostiene che i movimenti artistici durano 2-3 secoli; quindi siamo nel mezzo dell' avanguardia e della sperimentazione. L'altro punto di vista è quello di Jerome Rothenberg il quale sostiene che la sperimentazione e l'avanguardia sono dei termini storicamente identificati. Oggi non c'è alcuna necessità di utilizzarli, perchè i poeti e gli artisti hanno il privilegio e la libertà di muoversi in diverse lunghezze e larghezze (spaziali e temporali) della creazione culturale, attraversando continenti e periodi storici.

(v). È storicamente evidente che gli artisti, i poeti attivi in questi luoghi dell' arte, hanno origini diverse e hanno sviluppato una serie di pratiche diverse. Alcuni sono partiti dalla poesia, altri dalla danza, altri dalla teoria, altri dalla scienza. Non c'è una regola generale per questo settore complesso e complicato di arte e di azione. (John Cage appartiene a questo gruppo di artisti, poeta, musicista, ma anche ricercatore nella scienza della parassitologia).

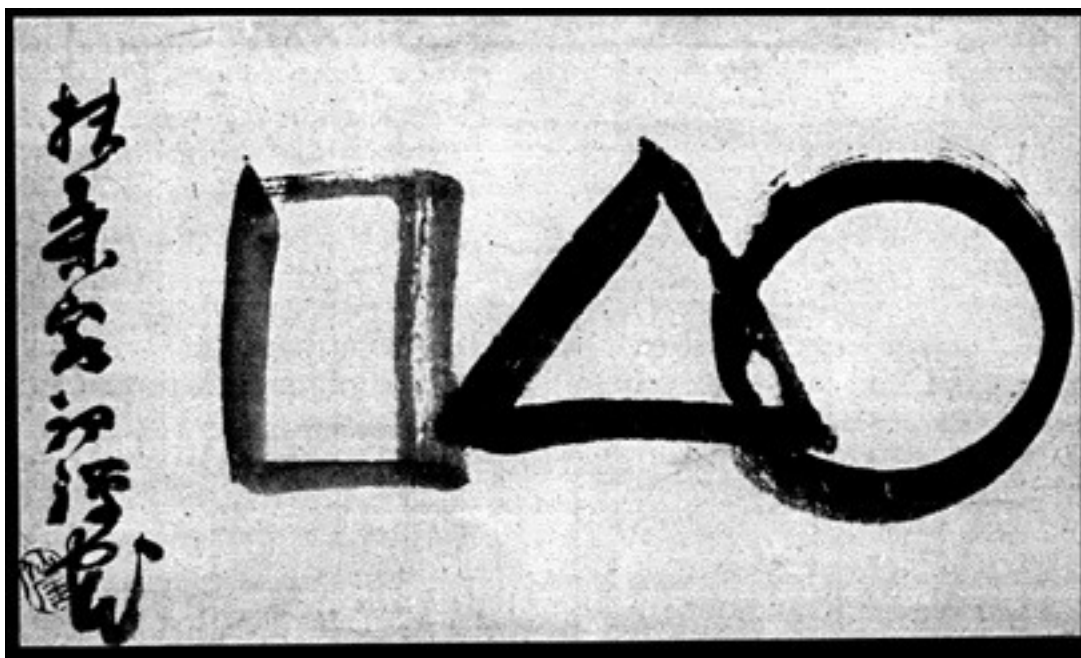
10. Questa procedura dettagliata ma breve della tipologia delle immagini e delle parole, come si sono intrecciate negli ultimi cinquant'anni, dimostra facilmente che questo modello non è definitivo nè certo, ma è un punto forte di partenza e non il luogo di destinazione finale. Naturalmente rimane aperta la questione fino a che punto il modello è in vigore nel caso della lingua greca, sia in Grecia che a livello internazionale.

D. L'ineguaglianza della prova

11. Tutte le società, a un certo punto del loro avanzamento culturale, sono confrontate a dilemmi e problemi posti dall' accoppiamento di parola e di immagine, di significato e di percezione, di codice e di rappresentatività. Le società di oggi e di domani sono spinte in questa situazione di sicuro non solo a causa dell' arte, ma soprattutto per via delle nuove tecnologie. Questo fenomeno non accade a nome dell' estetica, ma è legato alla moltitudine d' informazioni, alla frammentazione della conoscenza e all'emergere di tutte le forme di incertezza. In questo senso, l'arte che si concentra sull' intrecciamento di parole e di immagini ha la «missione» (estenuante) di mettere alla prova uno degli elementi fondamentali della vita collettiva: lo scambio di segni, di parole, di simboli e d'immagini.

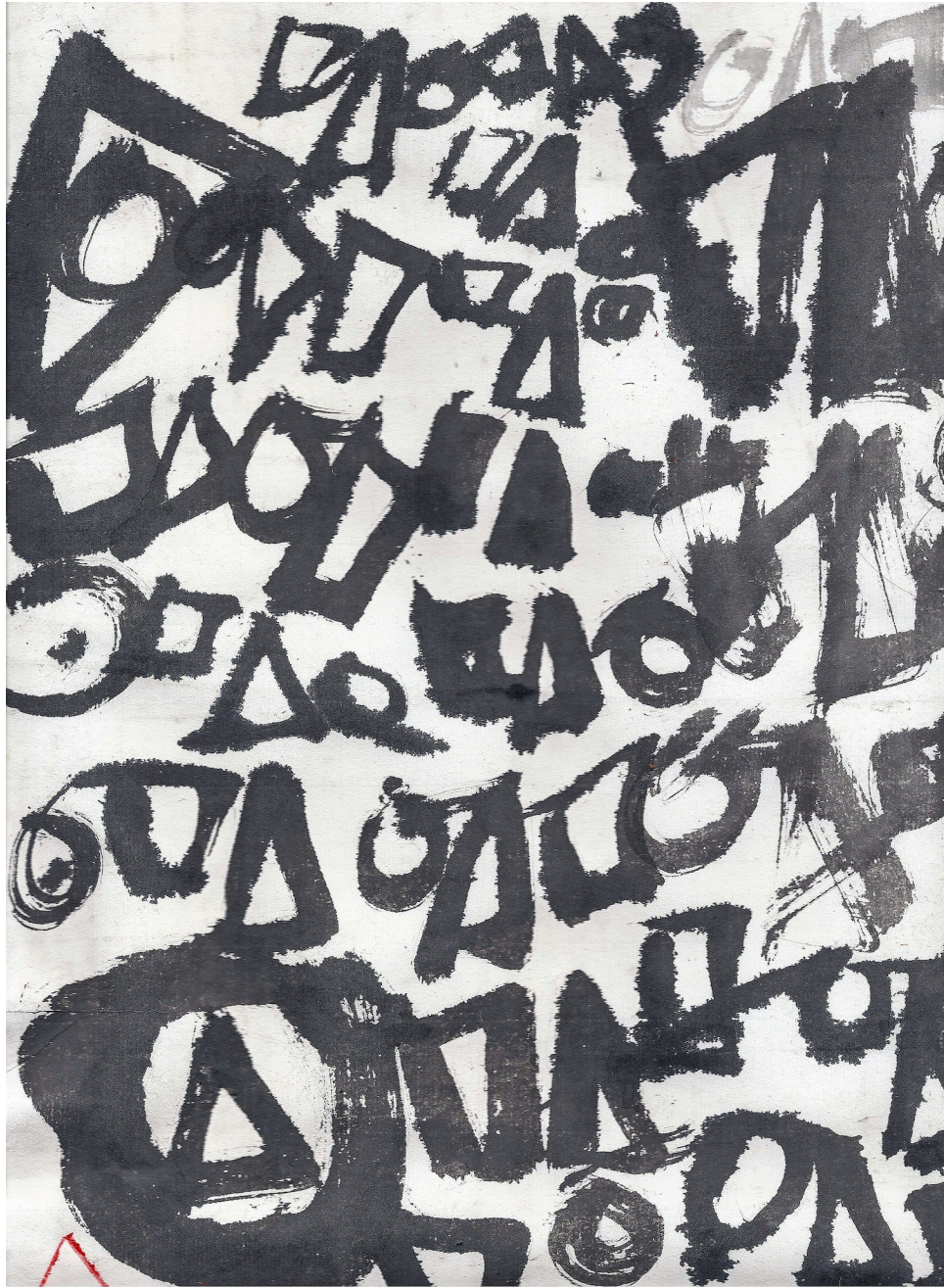
Partecipazione alla mostra "Eikono-grafes"
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Denis Smith / **Segai Gibon**



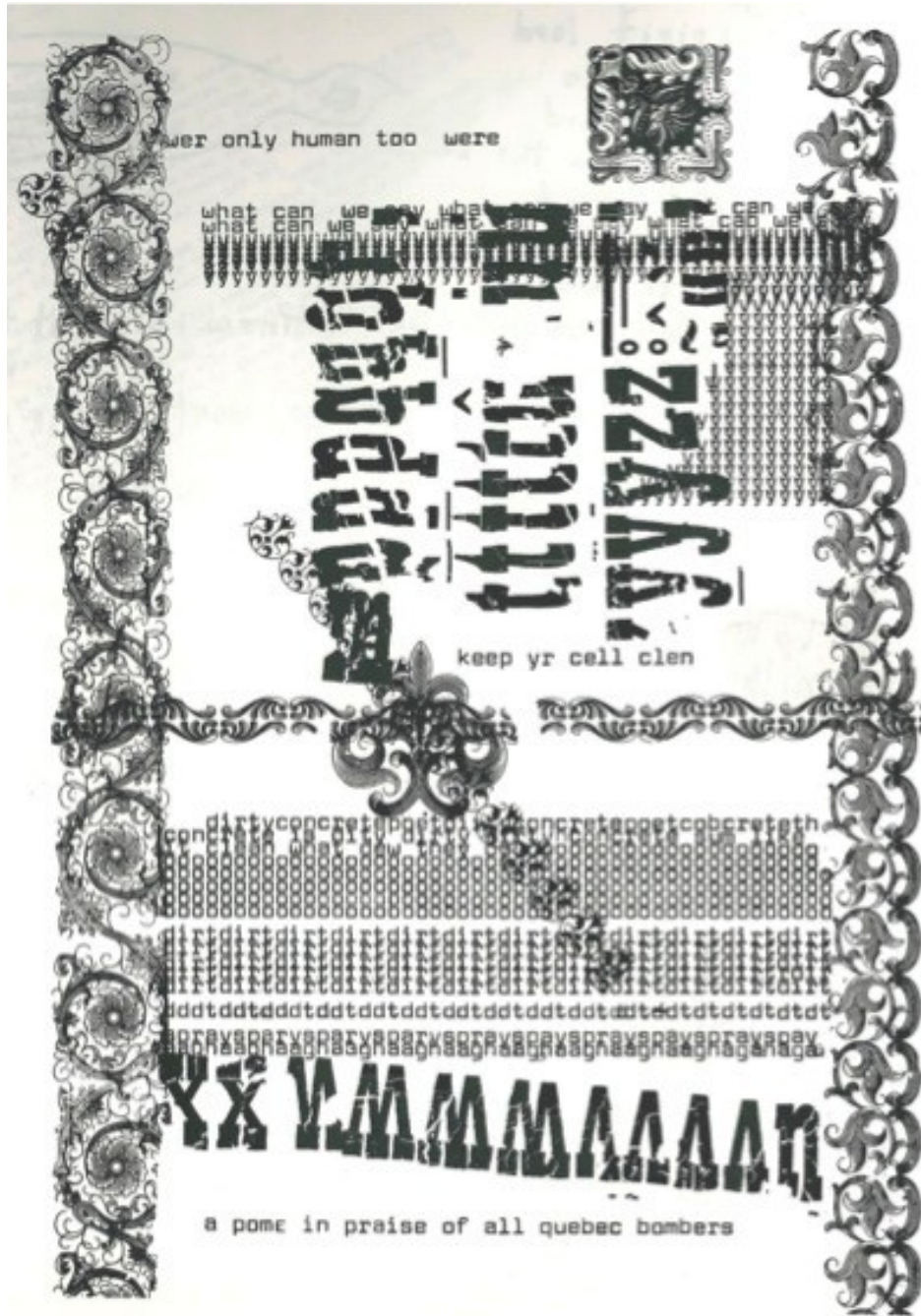
"The Universe" by Segai Gibon

My asemic response to vispo is by the Japanese Zen monk, Segai Gibon, 1750-1837. His famous Square Triangle Circle. I first saw the original in an exhibition of Sengai's paintings at the Art Gallery of N.S.W, Sydney, thirty years ago. The collection from the Idemitsu Museum in Tokyo. I was drawn to this piece for its universality, that the three components are recognizable by anyone, anywhere. Indeed a visual poem that transcends language.



An Asemic Treatise on "The Universe" by Denis Smith

derek beaulieu / **bill bissett**



“Quebec Bombers” (1973)

bill bissett’s “Quebec Bombers” (1973) typifies Dirty Concrete poetry with its overlaid text, use of mixed-media (typewriter and dry-transfer lettering in this case) and embrace of palimpsestic illegibility and anti-representationality. This style of Concrete poetry is best recuperated through a discussion of Sianne Ngai’s formulation of a “poetics of disgust” which

“deliberately interferes with close reading” (Ngai “Raw Matter” 116).

“Quebec Bombers” is a rare example of a Concrete poem that is overtly self-reflexive. bissett aligns his poetic illegibility with explicit support for the Marxist-Leninist, cell-based, paramilitary group the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ): “what can we say [...] keep yr cell clen [...] in praise of all quebec bombers” a voice-centred chant layered on a stanza of “dirt dirt dirt dirt dirt.” “Quebec Bombers” is an example of the poetic “inarticulate mark.” bissett does not produce a cogent, emotionally-laden poetic treatise on political injustice; he creates a *lump* of text through the disjunctive use of corporate and design material.

In “Raw Matter: a Poetics of Disgust” Ngai theorizes a space which articulates the poetic response towards the hegemony and capitalism. As capitalism

imposes a limit on our ways of expressing outrage [and] *has the effect of deliberately curbing our potential to articulate our abhorrence to it* (Ngai “Raw Matter” 98, original emphasis)

Ngai believes that the more frequent emotive response is that of rejection, exhibited not a moving *toward* the object, either to possess or be possessed by it, engulf or be engulfed by it [...] but a turning *away*” (ibid 101, original emphasis) accompanied by an “inarticulate utterance”—a reflexive gagging (ibid 102). Ngai’s article has not been adopted by poets as far as I am aware but I believe that the “inarticulate utterance” is well-suited for adoption by Concrete poets as an “inarticulate mark” in order to situate Dirty Concrete poetry’s refusal to operate as semantically-grounded poetry.

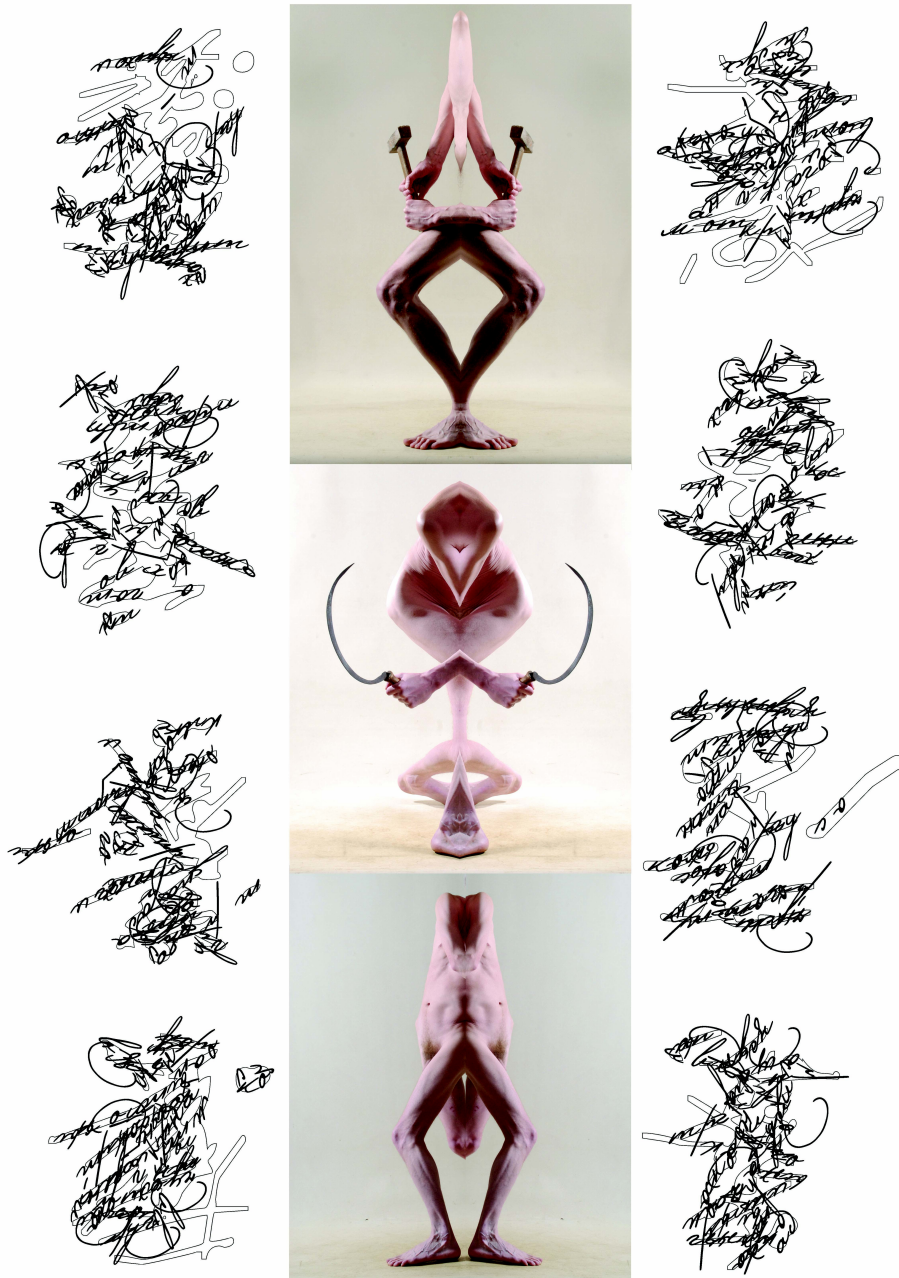
As bpNichol playfully states “[a]ll that signifies can be sold” (Nichol “Catalogue” 161) and as Sianne Ngai vehemently argues “most forms of cultural subversion are ultimately contained” (101). The inarticulate mark—the Dirty Concrete poem—“thwarts close reading” (102) as it doesn’t work along expected signifying chains; it “won’t coagulate into a unitary meaning and it also won’t move; it can’t be displaced” (114). It is precisely this resistance to displacement and refusal to co-operate which best exemplifies Dirty Concrete poetry: a poetry that co-opts degenerated text, letteral fragmentation, palimpsestic text and *waste* as poetic tropes.

Concrete poetry’s resistance to *reading*, and close-reading in particular, foregrounds the materiality of language, the rubble with which poets are left after the commercialization and co-opting of poetry and poetics for marketing, sales and government. Dirty Concrete rejects the spoken in favour of the written, and then rejects the legible in favour of the illegible. Instead of trying to reclaim poetry as generative, Dirty Concrete sits there, unwilling to participate, unwilling to mean, unwilling to do anything other than simply take up space:

[t]he poet’s expression of inexpressiveness thrusts the base materiality of language into the foreground [...] here the question of what a word means [...] as well as the question of how it relates abstractly to another word in the system [...] becomes secondary to its simply “being there,” in all its insistence and affective force. (Ngai 106)

Dirty Concrete poetry lays bare the myth of transparency. Instead of the page operating as a smooth medium for clear, emotional transference, it is the site of a lump, a wad, a knot of immovable refuse.

Edward Kulemin / Edward Kulemin



Edward Kulemin (Russia) Word and body

Word and Body by Edward Kulemin

The word and the body are the main visual elements of art, by which the artist produces an interaction between thought and form. Facial expressions, gestures, hearing, smell, touch underlie all communication. Early symbolic systems for communication of information (pictograms, hieroglyphs, alphabets) used symbols, often interpretive gestures. At all times the body was a metaphysical tool of communication such as dance, ritual, theatre, film, photography, sculpture and other plastic arts.

Signs, letters and symbols carry not only meaning but also shaped information. Today the artist has the difficult task of expressing what lies between word and image. There arise indescribable (but intuitively felt) vibration and sense.

Bodily structures fill a number of fine brutal and sensual symbolisms. In this impersonal body, sculptures refer to the experiments in the field of bioengineering and to the direction in contemporary art, which is associated with the concept of "postbiological". New computer technologies allow us to manufacture plastic surgery text. Verbal and body composition-characters constitute a single semantic structure, similar in aesthetics to visual poetry and post-concept

Francesco Aprile / Francesco Saverio Dòdaro



Francesco Saverio Dòdaro, "Fra spazio e suono", 1984, cm 50×70 in *Parola fra spazio e suono. Situazione italiana*, Viareggio, 1984

Genetic perspective. About Francesco Saverio Dòdaro

Francesco Saverio Dòdaro (Bari, ITA, 1930) is a poet, visual poet, essayist, writer, literary and arts theorist. In 1976, Dòdaro founded the *Genetic Movement* that is located in Lecce, Rome and Toronto, based on the Mukarovsky-Lacan-Bowlby-Fonagy co-ordinates. He placed

the poetic condition in the mourning processes, which are caused by amniotic separation. The matrix of the Dòdaro's theory is a language considered as a conjunction - *Language is a conjunction. Language is an 'and'* (Dòdaro, *Dichiarazione onomatopeica*, Lecce, Ghen Arte, 1979) - owing to a lacanian *manque à être*, that is the primary cause of the *separation of the subject from the maternal complement* (Dòdaro, *Codice Yem*, Lecce, Ghen Arte, 1979). All human languages have a sound. Dòdaro found that sound in pre-natal heart-beats (of both mother and foetus). Francesco Saverio Dòdaro theorized the rhythmical archetype of poetical languages. According to the *Genetic theory*, mother and foetus were the archetype dual-principle and language was a link to the dual-unity.

Gomringer y yo (Una vez más)

I came of age in the 1970s, reaching my teens in that decade, and (even though I lived overseas) I lived through some of the fads in the teaching of English that took place in the United States during that time. My teachers taught haiku, the lyrics and even the music of the Beatles, and concrete poetry as part of the literary world—which actually made and makes sense to me. This was the mid-1970s, and I was living in Calacoto, Bolivia, just down the hill from La Paz, and the usually simple and visually structured words of mid-century concrete poetry that I was exposed to appealed to my interest in the word as language, as visible and aural sign.

Let's admit that I didn't interpret my interest in this way at the time. I was merely entranced by the writing that had as core to its meaning its visual presentation. I had always been a boy interested in books, and part of what I enjoyed about them was the way text looks on a page, how it is enhanced on the covers and title pages, how visual cues indicate the significance and purpose of the text. In another world, with a slightly different focus, I may have become a typographer, a textual designer. But I came into my intellectual life in the middle of the seventies, at just the point that mid-century concrete was dissolving into the esthetic fabric of the world—so I entered the world of concrete poetry just as it was dying, just at the time that the common rigidity of that form to culture had reached the zenith of its fame, and just at the point of its steep and quick decline.

I made it in time for the death throes of concrete poetry, but I didn't know it yet. Poesia visiva, a poetry of much richer visual richness, was already being practiced in Europe. The wider world of visual poetry was already in play, but I was still in the throes of concrete, particularly the concrete poems of Eugen Gomringer, one of the putative fathers of concrete poetry. Gomringer was, I note, one of the three independent coiners of the term "concrete poetry" (the others being the Brazilian Noigandres group and Öyvind Fahlström, an accomplished artist who never really was a concrete poet).

avenidas
avenidas y flores

flores
flores y mujeres

avenidas
avenidas y mujeres

avenidas y flores y mujeres y
un admirador

Gomringer's poetry was visual and did depend on the visual presentation of words across space, but they could also sometimes be read as simple textual poems. His reportedly first concrete poem was the simple "avenidas," in which he worries less about the visual and more

about sound: massive rime riche, extreme repetition (except for the last line's words, every individual word in the poem appears at least four times), and an interest in meter. And this poem had something for a teenage boy living near La Paz, Bolivia, in the 1970s: It seemed to be about Miraflores, a suburb of La Paz. I have never read this poem about avenues, flowers, and women without imagining it in Miraflores (and actually at a particular corner there). The poem is all about seeing, as a visual poem should be, so it seems a poem appropriate for a suburb bearing a name that translates as Seeflowers.

Also, although Gomringer was German Swiss, he was born in Cachuela Esperanza, Bolivia, a village in Bolivia's far north, and a place so far from La Paz that I never visited the place—and there was probably no reason to (it was not Oruro with its carnival nor Cochabamba with its Cochabambinas wearing their bowler hats). Being from Bolivia, Gomringer wrote this poem in one of his native languages, and its simplicity has a nostalgic and childlike quality. The poem reminds me (and reminded me) of where I was living at the point I learned of concrete poetry, and the poem tells me that visual poetry can be written in any language, that it is about the elimination of words to their essential core, often to the noun alone, sans normal syntax. I learned that concrete poetry could almost be a poetry that breaks the constraints of language, because its spareness allows for easy translation, almost allows for an automatic invisible translation. The great concrete poetry anthologies of the seventies included poems in many languages presented in those languages but also easily translated via tiny glossaries on the pages they each appeared.

Concrete poetry appealed to me because it was always polyglot and internationalist. Gomringer wrote his poems in three languages: Spanish, German, and English. Gomringer grew up in a polyglot world, just as I had, and he used all of his languages, just as I have. His multi-continental biography reminded me of my own. And I enjoyed the Bauhaus-influenced purity of his poems. His poem "avenidas" is as visually uninteresting as his poems come. Although his poems are always rigidly formatted, they still can have complexity, and sometimes even a beautiful fluidity. One of his best poems, an almost perfect poem in both visual form and verbal content and meaning, consists of arcs contained and created by nothing more than horizontal and vertical lines:


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o
bo
blow
blow blow
blow blow blow
blow blow
blow
bo
o
so
show
show show
show show show
show show show
show show
show
so
o
lo
flow
flow flow
flow flow flow
flow flow
flow
lo
o

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Except for the meaningless word “bo,” this poem deftly uses actual words in the English language to demonstrate, rather than discuss or explicate, the growth of plants through to the point of the release of their leaves and petals. The poem does not try to educate; it attempts only to show. All it does is be.

Inside this poem, I see die Augen der Eugen, the eyes of the well born, the ability to create visual interest with the simplest of visual cues, all of them made of printed words—which forms the core of the visual poet, though certainly not the whole. Gomringer is a touchstone for me because he is the beginning, but the graceful and transformative beginning, of modern visual poetry. I was probably caught for too long in the trap of trying to replicate Gomringer, and I cannot even believe now that it was ever possible for me to capture his style. Below is my Gomringeresque poem (written now as part of these notes) about die Augen der Eugen. The poem has the structured meaning and utility of a Gomringer poem, but it doesn’t have its perfection. It is as visual as it is aural. It has the shadow of a Gomringer poem but not the heft.

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eugen augen eugen
augen eugen augen
eugen augen eugen

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eugen augen eugen
eugen

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eugen augen eugen

eugen augen eugen
augen eugen augen
eugen augen eugen

Sitting here, I have just realized that all the coiners of the term “concrete poetry” were born in South America: Fahlström and the Noigandres poets in Brazil, and Gomerlinger in Bolivia. All of them, also, were born in countries whose names begin with the letter b (an important letter in concrete poetry because it can be mirrored in all directions into three other minuscule letters of the Latin alphabet). I myself wasn’t born in South America, but I lived there, I learned of concrete poetry there, and I became a poet there. To some degree, Gomerlinger is the poet who influenced me the most, who drew me into this world of visual poetry, because he was the one most like me, the one I could follow without fearing I would be lost. His was the path I could branch off from.

word *frau* breaking and cascading into the shape of a pyramid. Frau is German for a woman; an adult female. But it also has many connotations such as a title of courtesy equivalent to Mrs./Ms.; but can also mean a lady or one's wife. But when sounded out it creates the sound which sounds like utterance of experiencing pain, Ow! In this poem Jandl has realized both a beautifully envisioned work but when spoken out it creates a wonderfully timed sequence of sounds running through the gates of dreams, faith, love and pain. We are reminded of both the hidden geographies and sentiments; as organic and breathing as one senses not only the gravity of love and loss, but one can visualize the rolling hills of some forgotten and dignified place. In bright and wide-eyed verbalizations this poem evokes in both verbal and visual echoes.

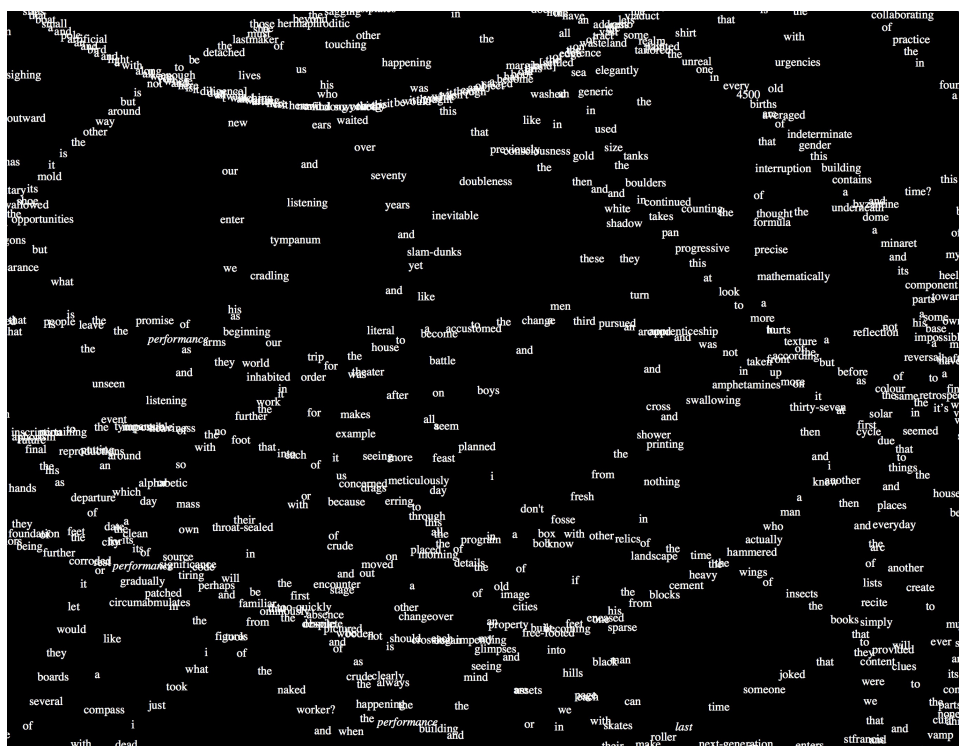


Kino Zero by David Baptiste Chirot

This work is one of the turning points in my perception of visual poetry. It helped me to discover a new field of the experimental art beyond the boundaries of formal experimentation. David Baptiste Chirot has unique seeing which makes it possible for him to find the elements of his work in his closest surroundings. The author takes for his works objects everyone can find close by – scratches on the walls, pieces of newspapers, ads, or signs. Form and texture of the elements bears the traces of time and nature's forces. And this makes possible for the artist to express in his works (and this work in particular) the tremendous complexity of the actual world. Multiplicity of active forces, complex structure of the matter, numerous practices of human existence – these are the "characters" of Chirot's works.

By including the piece into my own network of interaction with the world, I discovered new

qualities of seeing; I learned to find evidences of diverse and mysterious interactions that form the world from subjective and objective perspectives. I saw that the forms are ever-changing and the processes are ever-flowing. I understood that visual poetry can be more precise and more truthful than even photography and then uncovered new qualities both of visual art and real world.



[screen capture courtesy of Judd Morrissey, as published in *LIT* No. 22]

Projecting Form: Judd Morrissey's *The Last Performance* Toward an open-field digital concrete poetics

Before we read language on page or screen—if we do so with the eye—we look at it. We can't separate the process of comprehension from the act of looking, and much of what we think of as reading is, in fact, viewing language. Until I began to see language as letterform objects in relation, I could not appreciate concrete poetry as anything but the confusion of language for the objects it purports to represent. (It does not help that the anthologized works of concrete poetry I first encountered were names of flowers shaped like flowers rather than tanks or nebulae.*) Of course, language need not aspire to representation, nor does it necessarily succeed at mimesis if it is used with that goal.

It wasn't until I saw Judd Morrissey and Mark Jeffery present [The Last Performance](#) at Brown in 2008 that I recognized what concrete poetry indicates. Kinetic language projections require embodied reading practices within the logic of Morrissey and Jeffery's performances. Imagine the body as a preferred reading tool. Morrissey must visually interpret and select from morphing textual fields in order to voice the work, a process complicated by Jeffery's interventions—moving the microphone stand, lowering it for supine use, or extending it to absurd heights that require a step ladder, among other interruptions and provocations (I am undoubtedly combining elements of other Morrissey/Jeffery performances I have seen over the years). Not only does Morrissey select and embody text (with machinic collaborator), he moves in relation to an immediate human collaborator, prop and site collaborators, and audience collaborators (we too select and read in relation).

Of course, *The Last Performance* is not concrete poetry, nor is it comprehensively described as performance art, but it is certainly transdisciplinary art that intersects with visual poetry.

Detour on historical terminology (via hobby-horse):

Vispo as a generic or genric term includes concrete poetry without renaming it, which is to say they are distinct, if related. This requires much more consideration, but one important if not absolute distinction seems to be 20th-century concrete poetry practitioners' resistance to identification with institutionalized visual art (as ratified and rarefied by museum and gallery), contrasted with the more typical embrace of art-world context by self-identified contemporary vispo artists who seek to break down the institutional distinction between visual art and poetry. Contemporary vispo does not seem to share concrete poetry's ambivalence toward hanging next to framed visual art as singular material object-composition. 20th-c concrete poetry and contemporary vispo tend to agree, however, that poetry is language art that does not (necessarily) rely on traditional notions of expressive semantic or mimetic representation. (Max Bense, 1965: "Everything concrete is nothing but itself"; de Campos, Pignatari and de Campos, 1958: "concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings.") Letterform gestures need not point away from themselves. In concrete poetry as practiced and theorized in the 20th c, the danger of decontextualized, apolitical formalism (which vispo may well resist) is checked by its vision of a universal poetry that transcends individual expression as well as literary and linguistic barriers.

The revelation of *The Last Performance* as it relates to concrete poetry is the demonstration of letterform systems in relation allowed not only by linguistic kinesics and embodiment, but the open field. If concrete poetry presents an autonomous letterform object, the open field of digital poetry confronts us with relational letterform systems. Cobbing and Mayer's selection of historical examples in *Concerning Concrete Poetry*, as a matter of expedience perhaps, suggests the possibilities of open-field composition: exemplary works are arrayed together on the page, rather than isolated one to a page. Triangulated with Morrissey and Jeffery's explorations, there is the potential for an open-field digital concrete poetry of relational quasi-discrete language objects. This is what I explore in collaboration with Andrew Klobucar in the poetics and practice of [THE ARCHIVERSE](#), and this is what I look for in contemporary works of vispo inspired by concrete poetry.

* Nor was I aware of statements like this, gathered in Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer's [Concerning Concrete Poetry](#) (emphasis mine): "Concrete poetry is *all too often confused* with the CALLIGRAMMES of Apollinaire and their modern equivalents in which lines of text are ingeniously manipulated in order to imitate natural appearances." —Stephen Bann, 1967



Laocoön by William Blake

I.
 William Blake’s remarkable reworking of the Laocoön group, now known as “Yah and his sons Satan and Adam” (as per Morton Paley’s excellent study)* was an early influence on my conception of visual poetry. I found this application of words to a resonating image irresistible and immediately began to employ it. In Jr. high school I created several pictures similar to Robert Smithson’s “A Heap of Language,**” though in reverse to R. S.’s apparent method, while true to Blake’s: the landscape was drawn first and the words layered in rather than the words themselves constituting the landscape. In both Blake’s “Yah” and **the ancient Roman curse tablet (defixio)**, which I append as exemplary of the second influence on my visual

poetry, *** text and image inhabit an equal space inviting the reader to participate actively in reading the image as if reading a map, or negotiating the image as a figure “in the round” as it were*** (This fulfills Willard Bohn’s definition of one basic characteristic of visual poetry—that of disrupting (of making strange) a straight-forward reading of text). In addition the curse tablet contains a promise of cause and effect which intensifies the physicality of the image. We could consider the inclusion of the voces mysticae—what we might now call sound poetry--in both the Blake in both his use of Hebrew and his subjecting standard English to the overwhelming desire to follow the default mode of reading from top to bottom and left to right, which also leads to a constant interpenetration of contiguous readings resulting in powerful “babble,” and the curse tablet, as a further enhancement of the physical “presence” of text and image. (The curse tablet also interested me because of its connection to horses), as it was designed to be a plea to a Sethian Gnostic deity for the destruction of a chariot driver in a horse race. (As a young man I was constantly around horses on the family farm and at the track—sulky racing—modern equivalent to the chariot, was part and parcel of my life .) A final set of images in a similar mode were Antonin Artaud’s “Gris-Gris”--poetic and magical curses.

In the 1930's Antonin Artaud, poet, actor, and polemicist for the new theater, created a series of prose poems which he sent to various people--some personal acquaintances, some (like Hitler) not. Just a few of these self-styled **"gris-gris"** survive, and one only has to examine them closely to see why. We can imagine the surprise of Jacqueline Breton when she opened a letter addressed to her on September 17, 1937 and read in part: I'm sending a Spell to the First One who will dare touch you. I'll crush his braggart's little snooty snout to pulp. I'll spank him in front of 10,000 people..." To yet another recipient he writes: " All those who banded together to prevent me from taking HEROIN...I'll have them pierced alive...in a PARIS square and I'll have their marrows perforated and burned..." {Rowell, 149} During the process of creating these texts, he soiled, tore, spattered and creased the paper he used. In some cases he burned the pages with cigarettes. In order to emphasize the physicality of his message he often used crayons to write his spells, crushing the wax into the page as he wrote. (43-51) His violent language threatened imminent death, madness, and destruction--often to the recipient. Always the curse was cast in the present tense, and always Artaud's curses were to effect an immediate change in the reader's life. "And this spell will not be recalled. It will not be deferred...And this spell will act instantly." (149)

Gaston Bachelard, in his study of the violent imagery in Lautreamont, makes this point: "The word,' says Maxime Alexandre, 'seeks action.' In Lautreamont the word finds action immediately. Some poets devour or assimilate space; one might say that they always have some universe to digest. Others, far fewer in number, devour time. Lautreamont [and Artaud, I might add] is one of the greatest devourers of time, and that...is the secret of his insatiable violence." (1) While Bachelard's insight is true enough, there is yet another aspect to violent imagery in poetry, and that is the attempt to give the text an added dimension--a true physical presence--or, if you will, A BODY OF LIGHT situated somewhere between this world and the world of ideation. Karl Popper famously calls this phenomenological space inhabited by intellectual artifacts "world 3." We find this attempt at reifying the text--by allowing it to act-- in poets as diverse as anonymous shamans in every culture, Artaud, Lautreamont, and in America, Emily Dickenson, and this quest always takes the form of violent tropes--of LITERALLY PLAYING WITH PSYCHIC BLADES AND MATCHES and in the case of visual poetry, the application of those scoraic processes to matter. Violence implies dynamism, which in turn defines presence. (As in the Hadron Collider, the use of extreme force reifies the subtle components of matter.)

Yet another characteristic we can observe from the text of Artaud's gris-gris is his emphasis on the body as the basis of thought.

Ralph Merrifield, in his *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, says, "To the illiterate there is something magical in the way that ideas can be conveyed by the written word, so it is not surprising that writing itself should from its beginnings have played an important part in magical practices....symbols drawn for magical purposes everywhere precede written characters and are likely to be their source. It may be useful to juxtapose the following text with Artaud's curses.

**O wife of Pluto, good and beautiful Proserpina...pray tear away nostrils
lips, ears, nose, and his tongue and teeth so that Plotius may not be able
to utter what it is that gives him pain; his neck, shoulders, arms, fingers,
so that he may not be able to help himself at all; his chest, liver, heart,
lungs, so that he may not be able to feel what gives him pain; his...
belly, navel, sides so that he may not be able to sleep; his shoulder-blades
so that he may not be able to sleep well; his sacred part, so that he may
not be able to make water; his buttocks, vent, thighs, knees, legs, shins,
ankles, soles, toes, nails, that he may not be able to stand by his own aid.
...So I consign him as victim to thee, Proserpina....Send, I pray, some-
one to call up the three-headed dog with request that he may tear out
Plotius' heart. Promise Cerberus that thou wilt give him three offerings--
dates, dried figs, and a black pig--if he has fulfilled his task before the
month of March....I give thee the head of Plotius, slave of Avonia. O
Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius' forehead. Proserpina Salvia, I
give thee Plotius' eyebrows, Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius'
eyelids. Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius' eye-pupils....**

(Warmington, 281-285)

This is the text of a curse written about 80 B.C. in the month of February on a thin sheet of lead pierced by a nail. It was accompanied by four other curses of similar wording, and was probably written by a professional sorcerer.



"I Fly Against Your Life" by Jesse Glass
 (Paint, marker, pen on Chinese Hell Money), 2011

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Joel Chace / Robert Grenier



Four words in each of two sentences that occupy, roughly, the same physical space, that are entwined in, nested within each other.

My heart is beating.
I am a beast.

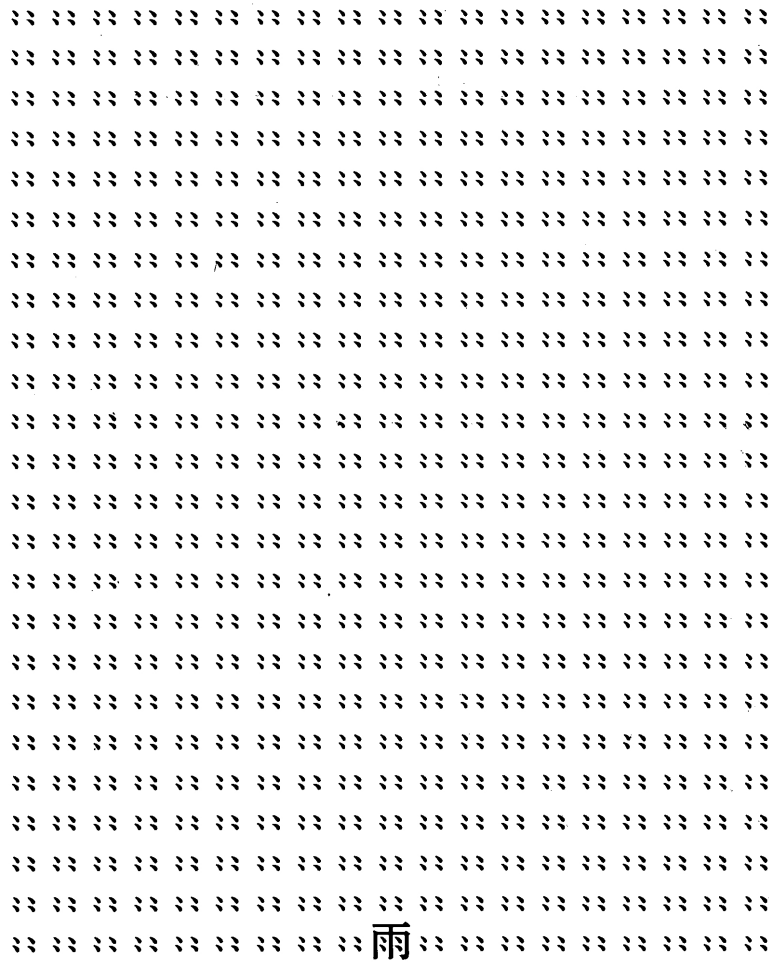
In order to distinguish letters, words, a reader must gaze intently through undergrowth of calligraphy.

I am a beast.
My heart is beating.

If someone were to ask me to explain the visual, intellectual, and emotive powers of this creation, my best response should be, "Well, just look."

I am a beating.
My am is beast.

Well, just keep looking.
And feeling.



雨
rain

Seiich Niikuni's "Rain"

A single moment or work luring me into visual poetics or inspiring me to compose visual poetry is not to be found. There is no point from which a single line can be drawn, except maybe from my indictable creative center. I suspect this center is but a jumble of energetic points mimicking a formed constellation of intent rooted in the more allusive intuitive from whose guiding hands I await delivery of the next gift. Perhaps this is why I view lineage as a twig in the tree of visual text art history, especially now that my studies have greatly expanded my understanding during the last two years as I write anew on the subject matter.

Seiich Niikuni is the individual of singular import during my introductory phase to concrete poetry. Selecting an individual work of his or even his body of like work as the point or points from which to draw a line for my lineage, as the question seems to have been framed, is nebulous. His available few poems at the time formed a challenge to try to equal, having found most concrete poetry uninspiring in the Williams' *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* and later, Solt's *Concrete Poetry*. When I thought I had perhaps accomplished my goal, it was after three or four years of dedicated effort. To this day, I hold his book, sent as a review copy by his widow, as one of my archive's treasures. Before discussing his work, I suggest a larger context triggered his influence.

I began graduate studies in economic history emphasizing in Middle Eastern studies in 1971 at the University of Utah. In the U's library was the Middle Eastern Library where I spent hours, part of which were "off course," absorbing Islamic calligraphy and art that I had quickly come to love. That was the year I diagnosed myself with dyslexia. My form is visual (reversing letters, numbers, and syllables and dropping or adding letters in words) and auditory (inability to sound out unfamiliar polysyllabic words along with the dropping or adding or reversing letters or syllables). I gradually accepted its constraints and embraced its gifts, such as the ability to mentally navigate three- and four-dimensional space, see poems in words and colors vibrating off black and white patterns. If the intuitive visual flash, a "seeing" of an "incoming" poem, is part of my dyslexia or not remains unanswerable. During this period, I met Charles Potts, who was then demanding an American phonetic spelling, which solved my spelling troubles. The phoneticism accelerated my word poem work; I soon called my word breaking poems fissions.

Two earlier incidents, 1965 and 1966, come to mind before seeing and reading the Williams' anthology. Before being drafted into the army and then sent to Stuttgart, Germany, I heard Ken Nordine's first *Word Jazz* album. I "saw" the letters and numbers about which his marvels spun, my first such experience. The 1966 incident in Stuttgart remains with me to this day. Often I went off base into Stuttgart. My wanderings lead me to a cellar club frequented by the youth, Club Voltaire. Then, the name had no association with dada. As I descended the stairs, I noticed and took in, but uncomprehendingly, exhibited arrays of letters. While publishing *Kaldron*, upon receiving his exchange and for review publications, I came to know that the work was concrete poems by Hansjörg Mayer.

Next to me, on my left, is an archive filing-cabinet folder full of individuals' concrete and visual poetry. The visual poem, "Rain," on display scans best from *Seiichi Niikuni: Concrete Poetry*. It is one of a handful I have been moved by because of its clarity, a presentation both simple and complex. Stare unblinkingly at it; it is an optic wonder of shimmering raindrops. Stare longer, and the rain drops through a rainbow. I understand that Crag Hill will also discuss Niikuni, his "River and Sandbank" poem. These two and a few others of like expression inexplicably attracted me. The only explanation I can now offer is the kindred spirit and patterning similar to the Arabic works informed by Persian and Byzantine patterns I was first drawn to and "eye" and "heart" trained by. Eventually, I came to know this piece had an undercurrent, a subtle unemotional and objective reference to an earlier emotional "Rain," the "Il ple ut" calligramme by Apollinaire, who is both a mistaken beginning or second point in visual text art histories and a point for many lineages disguised as histories.

We are confronted with a paradox by these two works, one based on a misunderstanding of the ideogram, the root of the calligramme, and the other unwittingly seems to support the misconception that the ideogram is pictorial, not phoenetic. Apollinaire first called his visual poems ideograms; his initial and basic understanding of the visual aspects of the ideogram was commonplace at that time among non-Chinese speakers, and Pound's heralding its supposed pictorialness only added to the confusion among uninformed literati. It appears also that t

he term calligramme was first used by the Chilean poet, Vicente Huidobro, and later mistakenly credited to Apollinaire (as were other terms and movements, isms, for which there is no room to digress into). Concrete theory continued the misinterpretation of the ideogram being pictorial by demanding the replacement of lyrical language, common among the many calligramme poets who remain obscure footnotes hidden by Apollinaire's large, inflated shadow, to a highly rigid geometric patterning of language. Niikuni's "Rain" fit nicely into the theory as did other of his works. It would be as if one outside the knowledge of the European alphabets stated proof that they were pictorial because the letter A is an ox head, B a house, etc., or that) (are new and old moons.

Perhaps Niikuni's piece is not the unemotional, objective, geometric, concrete presentation on rain found within its kanji ideogram. Perhaps it is directly composed as an additional and deeper companion to Apollinaire's "Il pleut" as a subjective, emotional, and political visual repetitive haiku-like lyric expressing grief of and also by innocent victims of war. In Niikuni's work, the rain can read as the Black Rain, rain contaminated with radiation after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Additionally, the rain can be the torrent of tears caused by continued aftermath from these bombings.

Autumn Equinox 2015
Oceano Ca



When I first noticed how Lawrence Ferlinghetti used space between words to control the rhythm of his poems, I saw it as white space in a painting. However, the first true visual poem that had a major impact on me was Ian Hamilton Finlay's "wave rock," which he did in 1966. That poem started me on a journey to lift poetry out of books and put it out there for people to see, something Finlay continued to do as well. His poem led me to believe that there must be some way to make poetry three-dimensional - or even four-dimensional if the poem could change with time. While I also create visual poems via digital media and painting, I have found over the years that, in general, the more dimensional a poem is (collage, mixed media) the more satisfaction I derive from having created it.

Poetry, or any writing at all, is about communication. Claes Oldenburg has said, "The image is the most complete technique of all communication." What we tend to forget is that words, when written, and the letters that make them up, are in fact images. So what can we do with these images to add to the communicative resonance of their meanings? Therefore my first thought in creating visual poetry is the visual aspect. Sound is far less important, if at all, because with either visual or textual poetry you see the poem with your eyes first.

I tend to think three-dimensionally. What I mean is that my mind at rest is not a blank slate but rather an empty chamber. I can put whatever I want into that chamber and "walk" all around it, look underneath it, see how it looks from above. I can do so for letters and words as well. For example, the letter 'E' looks exactly the same as the number three to me. This ability is really useful for mentally constructing visual poems, but unfortunately sometimes causes me to sign my last name as 3rnst. I love working with all kinds of three dimensional letters and using their shapes as seen from different views to build shapes that are still meaningfully readable.

In this particular poem Finlay's photographing a piece of printed glass in front of the environment precipitated my later use of mirrors. I often use mirrors in my work not only to reflect three-dimensional letters, but also to include the reflected view in the piece. Because, make no mistake, the viewer is an important part of the piece. Art happens twice: first when the artist conceives of and constructs the artwork and again when the artwork is seen by a viewer.

I was lucky enough to catch an exhibition of Ian Hamilton Finlay's work in Edinburgh, Scotland some years back. It was beautifully put together in a gallery in one of the parks. I have always felt that a gallery setting is the appropriate place for visual poetry, especially the work being done today, work that tends to be larger and more colorful than that of the 1960s.

For more information about Ian Hamilton Finlay see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Hamilton_Finlay

<http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com>

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/nov/16/ian-hamilton-finlay-concrete-poetry>

<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/ian-hamilton-finlay>

Yves Abrioux, *Ian Hamilton Finlay, A Visual Primer*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press ISBN 0-262-01129-8

For more information about K.S. Ernst see:

www.ksernst.com

<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/ernst/ernst.htm>

Lawrence Upton / **Bob Cobbing**



“Portrait of Robin Crozier” by Bob Cobbing

A SINGULAR WORK: Bob Cobbing's “Portrait of Robin Crozier”

No one work drew me towards exploring “vispo”.

I was aware of visual poetry long before I began to make my own. I saw what I would now regard as visual poetry which is worth experiencing without understanding it. (As an example of what I consider not worth experiencing, I offer a heart-shaped balloon with 'love' printed on it; though, out of an odd desire to save the maker public ridicule, I shall not name the maker.)

My earliest awareness of “vispo” which I have retained may have been of Bob Cobbing's work; and later and to some extent Peter Finch's. This was in the late 60s and early 70s. I was undoubtedly seeing much more than that, some of it worth seeing.

Where I am mentally now, it seems to me inexplicable that poetry of any kind, except perhaps in a very few exceptional cases, would be made and yet not, potentially at least, performed. I have seen rationales for making poetry for the page only and usually I do not accept the argument, when there is one. Generally it involves often subjective assertions or vapid irrelevancies (“it is the digital age”, “it is the twenty first century” et cetera).

I have always favoured live performance and came to adulthood in a city (London) full of poets keen on performance.

Cobbing, my subject in this 'essay', emphasised the importance of the human voice and that must have had a profound effect on me because during the 1970s I spent inordinate amounts of time working alongside and often with him. The influence, however, was one of reinforcement rather than persuasion. I do not propose here to make the case for performed utterance of poetry; that is not the subject I have been given.

I met members of the Language Group of Fylkingen in 1972 and first worked in the studio of the Fylking, then in Östgötagatan, Stockholm in 1973, an analog studio in a converted cinema. There I found a varying and fluctuating interest in the kind of visual work I knew, but always – so it seemed to me – respect for Cobbing's work.

What I also gained from my association with Fylkingen was a deepening of my understanding of what I might call the shared category space inhabited by poetry music and graphic art; and I have since used the term text-sound composition, a 1967 coinage by Lars-Gunnar Bodin and Bengt Emil Johnson, both Fylkingen Language Group members, for one type of intermedial artistic activity.

'Intermedial' was also in the relevant lexicon of composer-and-more Dick Higgins – **statement on intermedia**, 1966, published 1967 – but is there in writings of Language Group members in the mid 60s. My usage is probably at some odds with that meaning, especially that of Higgins who referred to it as related to a general “change of sensitivities”; whereas I think it – the categorical intermedia space – always was there, though possibly without anyone who could be heard noticing it. (I have just heard a BBC Radio 4 documentary on Black British composers, once compared to Mozart, whose names have almost vanished from critical appreciation, apparently because the idea of an important *black* composer was not one that many found meaningful – Handel it has been said invested in the slave trade.)

Thus, from the beginning of the 70s until the late 70s, I was rather immersed in the public expression of Bob Cobbing's practice, working with him on a number of projects including *Association of Little Presses*; working alongside him in the *Consortium of London Presses Print Shop* and as a fellow member of the Executive of *The Poetry Society / National Poetry Centre*. Perhaps most importantly in the present context, I attended his “experimental workshops”, known now as *Writers Forum Workshop* but then, often, as “Bob's workshop”, exposed thus to his constant encouragement. He gave that encouragement to everyone who did not throw his efforts back in his face; but from 1977 we collaborated for a time – and that collaboration was later picked up in new manner, expanded and cemented: from the mid 90s until his death, but then, though still influenced by him (and he by me perhaps) I had begun to formulate my own ideas on the matters involved.

In 1976, I with cris cheek and P C Fencott, equals, formed *jjggjg*. Bill Griffiths was also part of

the first performance as was Jeremy Adler in the later Berlin performances.

Also in 1976, I met bpNichol and Bill Bissett, plus Steve McCaffery (later, I think) and definitely later because he has previously corrected my memory on this the excellent Paul Dutton. Meeting Nichol and seeing him perform had a tremendous effect upon me although not anything I could cite as a direct influence in the current context.

In fact, by the late 70s I would say that the initial “influence” was done. Though it had been predominantly Cobbing at the core of my influences, there were many other, to me, important and powerful elements.

Text-sound composition was one of those even though I was soon trying to define for myself some of what I did by reference to its differences from what I had seen in Stockholm by other practitioners; and it wasn't long before I was doing that with Cobbing's work as well! I had been exposed to a great deal; and what may be beneficial in any field in moderate quantities may become toxic if absorbed to excess. In the early years of this century I threw away many many of my visual works which, it seemed to me, were too derivative of Cobbing's work; threw them away before anyone had seen them.

Yet one of the ways that I have moved away from influence, making my own discoveries without direct imitation, has been to engage increasingly with others in collaborative works – primarily with composer John Drever; but also with violist / composer Benedict Taylor; and with composer Tina Krekels to the degree that conflicting schedules and locations allow; with poet Tina Bass, with whom the work is always or has always been semantic; with artist Guy Begbie. And one of the features of Cobbing's artistry was his willingness to collaborate and the cross over of poetry and music and graphic art.

It's 13 years since he died and they're still trying unsuccessfully to absorb him. One current ploy of those seeking reflected glory is to say that his scores weren't scores but jumping off points, occasions of “inspiration” I suppose, so that anyone can do it without too much effort.

Cobbing made an effort. His visuals were scores. They could also be jumping off points. It's not the same thing. Cobbing's work can be demanding to perform and jumping off is only one approach and probably not the most significant.

I found it difficult to decide which work of Cobbing's to nominate as an example of his influence. I reduced the possibilities to **Are your children safe in the sea (eye version)**, **Beethoven today**, **Winter Poem 1** and **Portrait of Robin Crozier**.

I have chosen the last in that list, **Portrait of Robin Crozier**, from the first half of the 70s. Like **Winter Poem 1**, it is a decade on from **ABC in sound**, a poem which attends in its presentation to the visual but is still to a great extent typescript.

It may be appropriate here to break off and clarify my quibble about what is worthy of being called vispo. There are two things going on: one is my personal evaluation of others' work, and of course of my own work; the other is a worry about the term.

My use of *vispo* as a term is both laziness and a desperation at the idiocy of the term “visual poetry”. Some years ago, I proposed “visually-emphatic poetry” (utterance and notation of poetry, *Riding the Meridian*, 1999). It never had a chance of becoming popular; but the proposition may have pedagogical use still. One advantage is that, by implication, it renders what some regard as being “true poetry” or some such – and some seem ready to fight to the death over this, especially if they haven't bothered to learn much to support their beliefs – as “semantically-emphatic poetry”.

Portrait of Robin Crozier, in such a systematisation, emphasises the visual to something of an extreme. Unlike the first two in my list of four, it doesn't originate in typescript.

Much is conceptually excluded by my categorisation. There is for instance the “picture poem” approach, or so I would argue, because it loses the connection to (written) language already being a picture. Lose that connection and you end up with heart-shaped balloons called “love”, relying on trite and tawdry commonplace images – perhaps what Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* called Fancy -- rather than works which draw you into new perception of perception and the means by which we express it.

There might be something to be done with Coleridge's distinction between primary and secondary imagination. We could spend a lifetime wading through (what I tend to see as) the mud of his argument; but I am content to note here the idea that there is a lot more in some poetry than in others.

I have written about the Crozier poem before, in my essay [Bob Cobbing: and the book as medium; designs for poetry](#) in *Readings* magazine; and I shall not much reiterate here what I said there. Note from that essay, if you read it, that there is more than one version of the poem; that it is an assemblage of ink spills; that one version uses colour.

There is also [PoemTalk #72](#) in *Jacket 2*. There it is surmised that Cobbing had not met Robin Crozier when he made the poem and indeed knew relatively little about him. That is so. And Cobbing told me that Crozier did not like his poem at all.

So the references in the *Jacket 2* notes to friendship do not apply except in a very broad sense. The phrases “Gestetner smear” and “visual blot” are way off; and, by the way, the Gestetner was an ink duplicator and not a spirit duplicator – those are quite different processes.

“A kind of score”, they say. Well, no, it is a score; and it was rather apparently so in the first performance with David Toop and Paul Burwell. The degree to which Toop and Burwell followed it as such is questionable. Cobbing walked into the performance space, with Toop and Burwell already performing, handing the text to each of them; and Burwell took and dunked his copy in the bucket of water he was using to modify percussive sounds.

I think both the younger men were listening to Cobbing and each other rather than following the score. My colleague John Drever listens to me in performance, I think. So... You can hear Cobbing working through the score.

The reworking of the recording of that performance in the subsequent studio text-sound composition (Cobbing did not refer to his live performances as text-sound compositions to the best of my knowledge) may make that progress through the score less obvious because the studio work imposes its own order on the preceding order; but it is there. **Portrait of Robin Crozier** is an indicative score rather than a directive score; but it is a score.

I'm not sure that Cobbing did share Crozier's sensibility as is claimed in *Jacket 2*. I say that not just because Crozier reportedly did not like the work but from my observations of the wide differences in their practices and my conviction, from observation, that Cobbing's starting point is likely to be more formal than representational so that the determining elements arise from the formal 'investigation rather than an analysis of the subject.

In my essay, referred to above, I trace some of that formal investigation, which is not apparent if one homes in on one example of the works in the **Portrait of Robin Crozier** set.

I have spoken of Cobbing as an occasional poet, but often the occasions on which he was

occasional provided opportunities for making something new and the all-important limits and constraints to confound repetition rather than occasions for self-expression. The result is more likely to produce a response in the mode of “I have a new idea” rather than in the mode of “As I have said before”.

Expression is there but it originates from the formal elements, including structure, definitely including structures; and the whole person of the artist rather than the performance of details of his autobiography.

That's not an absolute demarcation though. His poem for Basil Bunting, much less visual than the Crozier pieces, has deep personal warmth to it, or I find it so. Yet it is still formally rigorous every bit as much as it is extremely playful. All Cobbing's work is playful.

If the Crozier poem or its performance is direct utterance, as stated in *Jacket 2*, it is a controlled but not controlling product of the formal operations of the poem rather the doggerel of the greetings card.

Poetry that interests me is not the same as the use of language as that which tells us something mundane which we knew already or could have known.

A final 'word', perhaps an afterword... I shan't say much of it because I have said it elsewhere...

In this text I have got as far as the mid 70s. Cobbing lived more than another quarter century. He was working as an artist to within days of his death.

Many accounts of that life of work get not much further than the mid 60s.

In one case in particular I strove to extend the account and analysis to cover his whole life and I might as well have sat down beside King Canute. Notes were taken; thanks were given; and that was it.

What is remarkable about the man as artist is the degree to which he renewed his practice repeatedly. And each time, as well as being an adaptation, the most striking being when he broke and could not repair his ink duplicator and moved to photocopying, it was also an expansion and deepening of what he had achieved already.

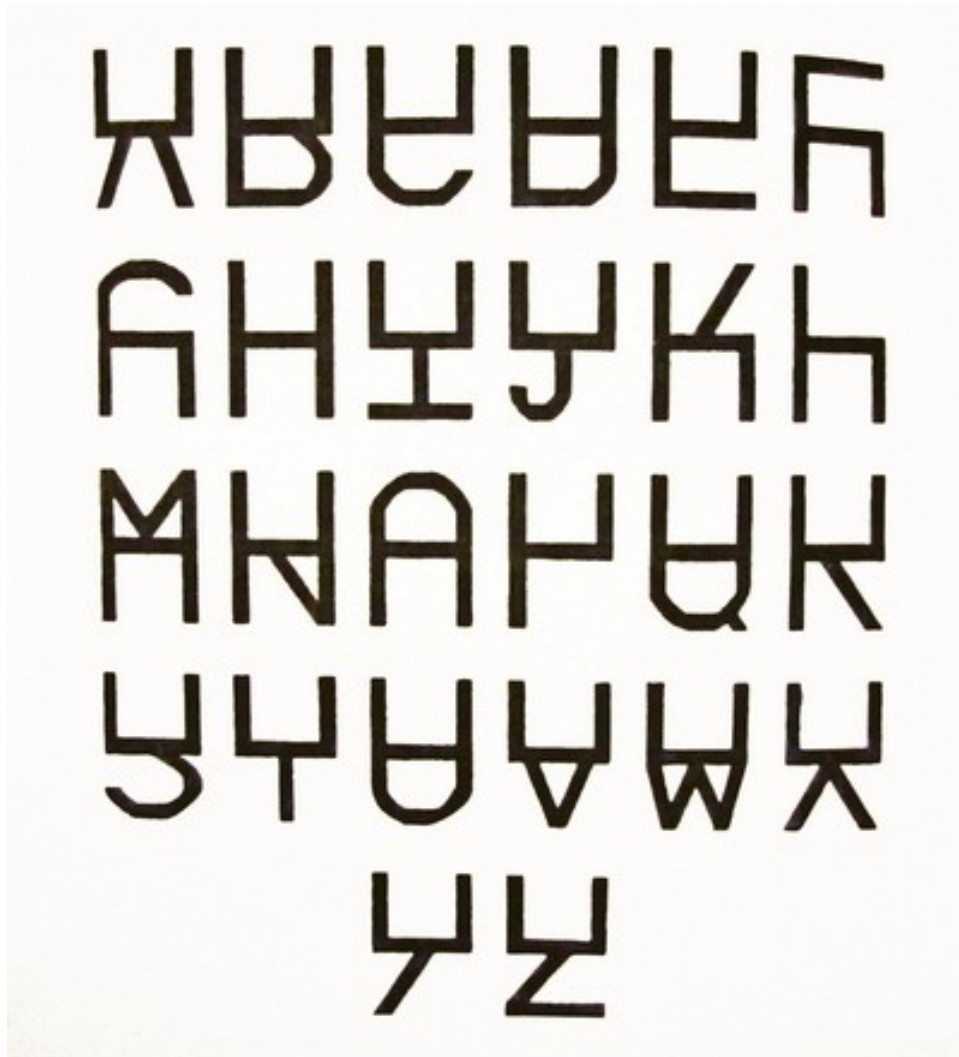
It seems to me that those who treat the work before and after that are missing much that is to be learned; and an examination of how he reworked the duplicator poems on the photocopier are illuminating of his craft skill and intellectual originality.

That I have limited myself to relatively early Cobbing vispo here is only a consequence of the question I was asked about the starting stimulus that the work provided for me in my own vispo career.

Lawrence Upton

Faversham, Kent, UK; July 2015

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bpNichol's "H (an alphabet)"

What first attracted me to bpNichol's iconic concrete poem "H (an alphabet)" is its visual wit, its combination of a clever underlying conceit with an equally clever execution of that conceit. Like a beach chair with twenty-six improbable settings, or a contortionist pretzeling herself for sport, H, in the poem, reconfigures itself into a series of amusing and unexpected shapes in its effort to resemble the other letters of the alphabet. These permutational hijinks are similar in their effect to the ninety-nine stylistic variations of Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*; in both texts, much of the fun derives from seeing how the author conjures up an unlikely yet apt solution to the constraint. My personal favorites in "H (an alphabet)" are the letters L and T for the way they resemble, respectively, a chair in profile and football goalposts.

But the poem, like the best visual poems, is not simply an amusing visual exercise. Just as Queneau's exercises enact a philosophical inquiry into the nature of storytelling, Nichol's H-alphabet enacts inquiries into the nature of the alphabet, the nature of form, line, and shape, the nature of identity, similarity and difference, and the nature of other bedrock values that inhere, hidden, in the

contours of a language's letters. One of the poem's most curious letters in this regard is O, which, because of the visual logic that requires H's horizontal line to be in the middle of each character, looks more like an ordinary A than does the A in the poem. The H-alphabet O can in a sense "pass" for an actual letter, but not the one it would like to pass as. What's more, given how unconventional twenty-four of the other twenty-five other letters in the poem look, it's debatable whether O could even be said to pass at all: at a glance, it and the letter H stand out, in their normalcy, as the oddballs in the series.

It's important to insist on the larger resonances of "H (an alphabet)" because it inhabits a tradition of visual poetry that can too easily be mistaken for mere joke. Poems such as Aram Saroyan's four-legged "m," Christian Bök's odalisques made in part out of letters, and others that rely on subtle visual humor, are the types of visual poems most likely to be encountered and remembered by readers not already familiar with the genre. That's a mixed blessing: it can be a way into visual poetry, as it was for myself; but it can also be a way to dismiss the genre as slight, as in the decades-long indignation over the use of 1965 NEA funds to compensate Saroyan for the publication of "lighght." Such dismissals, not uncommon, point up perhaps the hardest thing about appreciating visual poetry as a genre: how deceptively easy it seems to read and to write.



- when i started writing experimental poetry, after some try-outs at school because of an inspiring flemish teacher who taught about the surrealists & paul van ostayen, i wrote my experimental poetry in a "brouillon"(scrap)book and later i took out the best to be published. Already in the bouillon i put newspaper photo's in collage in this book , see examples in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXcjpkmSOU> (0.49) and when i made my first magazine Parallel i had contacts with Lotta Poetica & Sarenco and i recognized the same research of poesia visiva.

""poesia visiva : c'est une guérilla des images et des signes. Le passant détourne le message et ouvre un nouvel espace de liberté.""

Poesia Visiva movement in Italy came out when gruppo 70 (with Umberto Eco, Lamberto Pignotti etc..) changed the literature in Italy and connected with the contemporary art scene where the Arte Povera & Conceptual art practices started. But the market decided to make Conceptual Art big and Poesia Visiva became a niche but still inspiring young artists world wide also Concrete Poetry now has been re-used for new experiments.

I think these (political & social) times have many similarities (see Pasolini) with the 70's so it is no surprise that poets and artists attack the images & texts of the mass media to comment on situations.

Luc Fierns

Sarenco (pseudonym of Isaia Mabellini) is an Italian critic and visual artist. In the 70s, as a member of the collective *Gruppo 70*, he actively participated in the development and diffusion of the artistic movement called "Visual Poetry" (*Poesia Visiva*). Among many other things, he was cofounder of the magazine *Lotta Poetica* (*Poetic War or Poetic Struggle*), along with Belgian artist and poet Paul de Vree. The first issue of the polemical magazine appeared in June 1971. From the beginning, the objective was to assign poetry in particular, and art in general, with a concrete political function, "bonding visual poetry with Marxism and political activism" (*Images and Imagery*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005, [p. 81](#)). In a text published in 1972 in the anthology *Poesia e/o poesia*, Sarenco wrote:

[W]hat we demand is the unity between politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of a political revolutionary content and artistic form as perfect as possible... our avant-garde "poetic" position cannot but be a fundamentally avant-garde "political" position: the awareness of the absolute value of class struggle for the triumph of the dictatorship of the proletariat. (quoted in *Ibid.*: 86; original Italian version quoted in *The New Avant-garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices* by John Picchione, University of Toronto Press, 2004, [p. 189](#))

For this reason, "Visual Poetry" (also sometimes labelled "concrete poetry") often took aim at what was identified as "conceptual art":

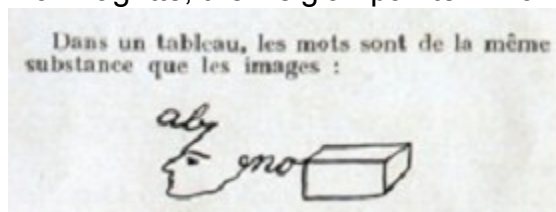
It is perhaps against this spectacularization of the artist as commercial rather than social figure that Sarenco, the Italian visual poet, critic, and publisher, launched a serial attack on conceptual art in his journal *Lotta Poetica* at the beginning of the seventies. In several articles printed between 1971 and 1972, all titled "Poesia visiva e conceptual art / un plagio ben organizzato [Visual Poetry and Conceptual Art / A Well-Organized Plagiarism]," he attacks language-based conceptual work produced by figures like Kosuth, Andre (in his poetry), and Richard Artschwager. Sarenco largely avoids examples of their work, however, instead opting to disqualify the entire conceptual art movement as derivative and socially corrupt. ("[Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art: A Misunderstanding](#)" by Jamie Hilder, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 54, No. 3, Fall 2013, 608)

Mark Young / Márton Koppány



Ellipsis No. 5 by Márton Koppány

I may have come to the appreciation of vispo late, but I was prepared for it. I was a wannabe surrealist in the 1950s, a fan of Magritte, the Belgian painter who included words in his work.



My discovery of Donald M. Allen's *The New American Poetry* early into the 1960s eased me into an appreciation of the Numbers of Jasper Johns, the Comic Words of Roy Lichtenstein. Later in the same decade I worked as an art critic, wrote about—as impersonal task although personally overwhelmed by—the work of Colin McCahon. I noted at the time, in *New Zealand Art: Painting 1950-1967*: ". . . words appear in the paintings, at first superscriptions or titles but later becoming the subject of, or the forms used in, various paintings." See, for example, "Let

us possess one world." [<http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001410>]

I drifted away from poetry, from all writing, in the mid-1970s. Came back to it just before the *fin de siècle*. Started publishing again just after the *début de ce nouveau siècle*. From an essay I later wrote for the Finnish journal *Parnasso*:

"One of the first places I was published in on my return was *can we have our ball back*. I had heard of almost none of the poets in the issue, but amongst those with whom I shared a line in the list of contributors on the front page was a person called Jukka-Pekka Kervinen. To my Anglo-Saxon eye it was a name that leapt from the screen. Evocative. As I've written elsewhere, Jukka-Pekka like a ragged mountain range, Kervinen like the valleys that run down from them.

[<http://pelicandreaming.blogspot.com.au/2005/06/i-sing-body-electric.html>]

Jukka was my introduction to the world of manipulated text, stochastically generated, randomly positioned on the "page." & Jukka moved so fast that Einstein's theory disappeared down a black hole. He was perhaps the prime innovator of the time.

But Jukka was also a collaborator & an editor, & the wide range of people he either worked with or published — including myself: & my first attempts at visual poetry were collaborations with him — meant that I was exposed to a large number of vispo practitioners both directly &, through further exploration, indirectly.

Among them was Márton Koppány. I had been excited by Jukka, had admired the work of many of those others whom I came to through him, but Márton was the one of whose work, when I first made its acquaintance, I just said YES! His work clicked with me – its humor, minimalism, satire, genius, art, politics, its multi-faceted et ceteras.

His work has appeared in many issues of my journal, *Otoliths*. I published three of his collections whilst I was publishing books. He is still my favorite.

On the low bookcase beside my desk, there is a signed postcard-sized print of a singular piece of vispo, *Ellipsis No. 5*. I have garnered many pieces during my editorship of *Otoliths*: this piece by Márton is the only one I have consciously sought out.

Márton Koppány / **George Brecht**

A reading of *Six Doors* /1963/ by George Brecht

Nico, I would love to contribute to your series, but the thing is that - as I have already confessed it several times on different occasions - my first influences had nothing to do with concrete or visual poetry in a strict sense. I started writing concrete or visual poetry at the end of the 70's because I wanted to get rid of my mother tongue. I simply re-invented tools and means. My first influences were Zen koans and Fluxus events. (Of course later on I closely studied concrete and visual poetry, too and got influenced by it.) Could you be interested in a text about a piece by George Brecht, which had a strong influence on me at the beginning or almost? Could we use the terms as loosely as to include this piece? Here I send it attached.

George Brecht: *Six Doors*

- . **EXIT**
- . **ENTRANCE**
- . **EXIT**
ENTRANCE
- .

We must have six doors if we accept the rules of the game. We have four dots, and only three sets of text. What is a door good for? We can go in and out, that's two options, and we can do both, of course, which is a third option if summing them up (keeping them in mind together) is a new choice. The possibility of having options at all might be the fourth door, represented only by a dot. We have – must have – two more doors, but those are invisible for us, have no meaning at all, they are (or are they?) completely empty – blank on the page. The only thing we are entitled to suppose is that both of them embody new possibilities, exactly the same way as the first four doors do. The two invisible doors are certainly different from each other, because they inherit the qualities of the list consisting of jumps of inclusion. The sixth door contains the fifth, perhaps. It might be a broader category. Anyway, they are *different*. And there is no more step in this game.

But if the invisible doors are exactly as different from each other as the visible ones, then each door is the same. We have gotten nowhere (else). I find this repetition moving and instructive.

Each step is relative, visibility and invisibility don't work as concepts. This is a kind of conceptual piece, but not only for the mind. The full body, all senses can participate in it, because this is a "score" for an "event". Let's trust our eyes. Invisibility belongs to the realm of the visual.

Simple as it might be, *Six Doors*, a small card in its physical reality, depends on typography, on design. It communicates its own structure – like canonic concrete. I can also read it as a commentary on Gomringer's famous *Silence*. The road from mystery to joke is very short, indeed. And what could be more mysterious than a good joke?

Márton Koppány
Budapest, Sept. 25. 2015

VISUAL POETRY REFLECTED

POETRY IS THE COFFIN OF LANGUAGE

INSIDE THE COFFIN IS A MIRROR

THE EYE AND THE WORD (IN ADDITION
TO EVERYTHING ELSE) ARE JOINED IN
THE INSTANT, OR DEATH, OF CREATION

VISUAL POETRY (IS NOT MOST POETRY
IN SOME MEASURE A VISUAL RECORD
AND EXPERIENCE?)
IS IN THE EYE SMEARS ON THE MIRROR
OF DEATH

JOHN M. BENNETT

1978

Getting Vispo to the Point . Articulating Schematics on the Vaward Sound-Imaging Tip

E. Michael Peters (For Nico)

For 1.)

like me, honing in on a singular visual poem is a difficult task, especially if you think of either the historical or amazing contemporary work being made right now. Given my history, it could have easily been Blake, or my Blakean art professor at Ohio University (Æthelred Eldridge), or Henri Michaux's drawings perhaps—when did I first encounter these?—or Richard Kostelanetz's "Disintegration." You cannot go wrong with any of these. They're still influential—to me, at least— but there are two pieces in particular that continue to haunt me in the most profoundly contemporary way: For one, John M.

Bennett's 1978 "Visual Poetry Reflected," which appeared in the somewhat rare anthology *Visual Lit Crit* anthology, from the early 1980s, which was edited by none other than Kostelanetz. Then too, there is Bliem Kern's work, specifically his observances of sound in yet another Kostelanetz anthology—*Aural Lit Crit*—as a means to activate what Bennett has drawn out in "Visual Poetry Reflected." I am ultimately speaking here of the delayed resonances of my first encounters with these works, and the coupling of what they suggest.

In the context of sound-imaging as a means to an activating end, let us begin with the image. Bennett's "Visual Poetry Reflected," is nothing really but text, but in a quasi-poetical, life-like way, it is intensely theoretical. The notion of poetry being "the coffin of language" is, well, a dramatic statement. But let us think about grabbing onto it. Let us be Ishmael-like, so as to float off from the wreck of socio-cultural dictates and the rigid structure of grammar, *et cetera*, on the coffin of a cosmology that is not your own. Poetry gets at what socio-cultural dictates can't. It's a flotation device, for sure. So if you can grab on to that premise, Bennett's visual poem gets even deeper in a very schematic way. In some sort of dissection of that coffin, he describes the presence of a mirror within the coffin of language. Images of mirrors surface in my oceanic head like some sort of black-cloaked figure in Maya Deren's film "Meshes of the Afternoon" or the beginning of the Sun Ra movie "Space is the Place." But keep in mind, the coffin is only an empty container for that which is dead.

Look, I know this talk of death sounds all dark and heavy, but we're talking about a flotation device here. Look at what Bennett is saying. This is not some sort of cosmic bull shit. I'm talking about what we can see in the structure of this bad-ass Bennettian schematic: The art/life relation. Art always takes from life. Sucks the life out of it. Makes it commodity, *et cetera*. But to complete the circuit? All this talk of death is outside the point, for it's all about the mirror—and in this sense, what's in that mirror. This strange theoretical schematic by Bennett is not so creepy or as dark after all. It's a schema that's death defying, for what we actually see in the mirror of language is life, not death. It is a cosmology that is not our own because we are alive to the past and the future that dictates what we've become. Text, just as a visual image does do what it does, is "empty." It takes on a reader, a performer, or a narrating coffin surfer to summon the past or the future into the service of the present. And it's this moment that Bennett addresses in one page. Goodnight Lacanian sprites, sleep a little fake death dream in the deeper bolus of a black and starry night; sleep a little death dream about the so-called gaze as a life-trap, much less a death trap. Like the best theoretician ever, Bennett has the whole process carved visually to the coffin's exterior whereupon it is plain to see:

THE EYE AND THE WORD (IN ADDITION TO EVERYTHING ELSE)
ARE JOINED IN THE INSTANT, OR DEATH, OF CREATION

In a small phrase, you get a schematic of some big stuff: Pure process, pure death *and* creation, or in the case of this writer's reflection, what he sees in the Bennettian mirror: Not only art put back into relation with life, but at the same time, the past and the future put into direct relation with the present. This is stuff you can hold on to. Something like poetry, as mangled a word as it may be, that dictates to us the possibilities of what Piaget called reflective abstraction. Not the dogmas of our 21stC neo-liberal afflictions, but poetry. Nothing but poetry, alive in that empty coffin, should trump those cruzin' for a no boehner state of mind. Should poetry rise—phoenix or sparrow-like—from the rubble like a shiny ceramic flag pinned to your suit jacket lapel? Smeary eye'd yet? It's "on the mirror of death," as Bennett says, like some sort political death hoax. Like some Vaseline smeared on the lens of some 1970s camera, blurring the commodified heroine so that everything gets trippy and foggy with neoliberal lust when the camera sees death walking down the plank of the Neo-Con Love Boat. I suppose this eye smears the reflection of our time. And time is that big knot—that is *not* that which is. With further reflection, the question ought to be: What kind of reflection should we ask for? A sounder image? What do we want to see?

So 2.)

think of the visual as only half of what's needed, is to get at this sound-imaging thing itself. Self-reflection is purely more smeary eye'd reflection on the death thing. What we want is reflective abstraction. Something that can get us further than simple reflection, Byrd-like, to see the other pole of images. So let us think for a moment. What is the image? It is all that *was* at the vaward tip of all that *is*. Pure smeary eye'd reflection. Image is the past. And just as it take the sun some 8 minutes and 20 seconds to reach earth, even the Hubble is a smeary eye'd deep-time vision of the past. The sky is not flat, and the stars are not some Flammarion domed wonder, but much much deeper than the shallow water we look back to it from. I like this Bennettian reflection on visual poetry because it schematically hints at this insanely vaster structure, an empty space that holds all within, within which rests yet further little holding devices, devices we could call "coffin-like" bins upon which we might find the algorithmic poem, the cosmological directives from which we came from to partake of this much littler thing of here and now. Yes, I've got a book called *Vaast Bin* and a larger Vaast Bin Project. Yes, I also harbor an idea about the role of language within the spectrum of sound and image. Yes, a bin is a box—a flux box?—is a coffin, out of which we see life between the darkness of our eyes and the night sky beyond the fictional blue of day. Because, yes, when it's all said and undone, it's just that little point after all . . . this end where everywhere is up, a period, a periodic earth-time point that halts at the shores of nothing like some sort of fever-dream before the waking coma of history or the flickering vapor of a comet's tail in a solar wind.

So if we have Bennett's image of potential image to hold on to, and if it can be solidified via Kostelanetz's *Visual Lit Crit* anthology from which I encountered it first, let us conjure sound. And let us summon the wedding of sound via Kostelanetz's *Aural Lit Crit* to the image, which is the point of Part II: How to get

to the little point .

Autobiographically, I found the sound part first, before I barely had premonitions of what the visual could be beyond good old-fashioned text. This is to also say I found John M. Bennett after I found Bliem Kern. I found a copy of *Aural Literature Criticism*—before I found the *Visual Lit Crit*—in a below-sidewalk bookstore near NYU just above Houston in NYC. This crazy little anthology was focused on sound, and in it, there was an interview-like symposium with Jackson Mac Low Charles Dodge, and Bliem Kern, which was moderated by Kostelanetz. I found Kern's symposium comments wildly provocative, but I couldn't say why, just then. I found this anthology before I had actually met Kostelanetz too (and eventually collaborated with him, and through whom I would also met Bennett, all of which is another story), but as far as the symposium figures, I knew only Mac Low. I had been lucky enough to meet Jackson Mac Low because of my affiliations with the composer Petr Kotik. On several occasions, I was lucky enough to give Mac Low rides home from SEM Ensemble events. But Kern's thinking about how sound works? It remained wildly mysterious to me for a good while after that. I liked what Kern was saying in the symposium transcripts, but I had no foundation. My spine was still forming. But like Bennett's theoretical visual poem schematic, Kern's theoretical thinking would also come to haunt me later on—sound wise.

Even later, I found a copy of Kostelanetz's *Text-Sound Texts*. What an anthology! Bliem Kern's work is on the cover and inside too, so I had something with which to ground his earlier symposium comments. As a musician, touring and recording in Poem Rocket, I was already interested in sound. My first brush actual brush with Kern's work, not just his symposium comments, was more like a moment of glimpsing what is possible beyond good old-fashioned text for the first time. It helped trigger the formation of a Blakean-Mac Low axis, which is now ultimately my spine. And the work of Kern and Bennett make arms or hands with which to embrace the spectrum of sound and image. Even though I

was immediately captivated by Kern's work in this third Kostelanetz anthology, the funny thing is, I still couldn't say why—exactly—only that it was super interesting to look at and read. First encounter-wise, however, I think I must have been attracted to the visual aspects of Kern's work, like the spacing, which was new to me, for it would fall out of wildness and back into more traditional text. I liked that he was moving in and out of both. His *Meditations* does that on a base level. It moves in and out of traditional and non-traditional words. From sounds with and without semantics, and then into more semantic-cum-poetic phraseology. Now I can see it more clearly: The weft of manifesto, the clusters of synonyms, the spiritualism of it, and the physics of sound and thought as material. It's ye olde hylopathic, matter and energy equivalence thing. Kern's work was like a codebook, a little museum of code variations. It's like he pinned Proteus down on the cosmological beach in order to document the morphology. And if John Cage goes from meaning to non-meaning, demilitarizing language in "Empty Words" (also in *Text-Sound Texts*), Kern weaves in and out of the strands of meaning and non-meaning on a loom of sound combined wefted, creating a morphology that is still powerful now and still an affirmation of language's potential.

Influential? Absolutely. Kern's sound work is a visual delight. And Bennett's visual work too, is a sound delight, if you've ever heard him read. And in this sense, the way that I think about the work of either—as works of sound-imaging—has been obscured to most others. Or dare I re-phrase it, smear'd in the big coffin of language and the usual and predictable necrophilia for the old ways. But at the same time, both Kern and Bennett are also right on time. I find it interesting that many poets today describe their work as "experimental." And often now too, there is this intense sense of materialism about language, but for the most, it is part void of ethics. It drifts aimlessly like gorgeous Foucauldian epistemic bubble in the moonlight in the backyard of a house with many gables, barely conscious of its application. It's virtuosity without purpose. Baroque maybe, or at worst, bad goldsmithery at the precious-metal forge of ethics. Not all of it, of course, but many of the "experiments" of today's unicorn cavalry are procedural or pure procedure for process's sake—or in terms of Bennett's schematic, a poetry that *is* the coffin of language with a mirror aimed back on the instant of death rather than life. It's all self-reflection of cause or all effect, let alone load-bearing any indexical relation to life, which is how reflective abstraction would indexically have it, if properly undertaken.

This is what we miss if we don't consider the task: Visual poetry can become, with not so much as a coffin to hold on to, eye candy. So for me, it's the indexical, schematic materialism of Bennett, his sense of sound and image that makes his work—though "Visual Poetry Reflected" is soundly historical—wildly contemporary to what is going on now. And at the same time, I'm enamored with Kern's sound ethics: His cosmic spirituality, his Buddhist principles, or however you want to describe these elements embedded in his work. It's all of that which makes them still "ahead of their time" or more like "right-on-time." There's this primal self-awareness in either that I still find invigorating in that it stirs up aperiodic thinking about death's smeary eye'd mirror, which is purely periodic material in a genetic, Erwin Schrödinger-kind-of-way. We need the periodic materials to be re-cast, aperiodically.

Let us use Bennett's haunting equation about death and creation and experience, to rewrite the equation of death becoming life via the coupling of image and sound:

VISUAL POETRY—VIA SOUND-IMAGING—IS AN APERIODIC
ELEMENT OF COMPOSITION THAT IN PERFORMANCE BECOMES
LANGUAGE MADE APERIODIC

VIA SOUND

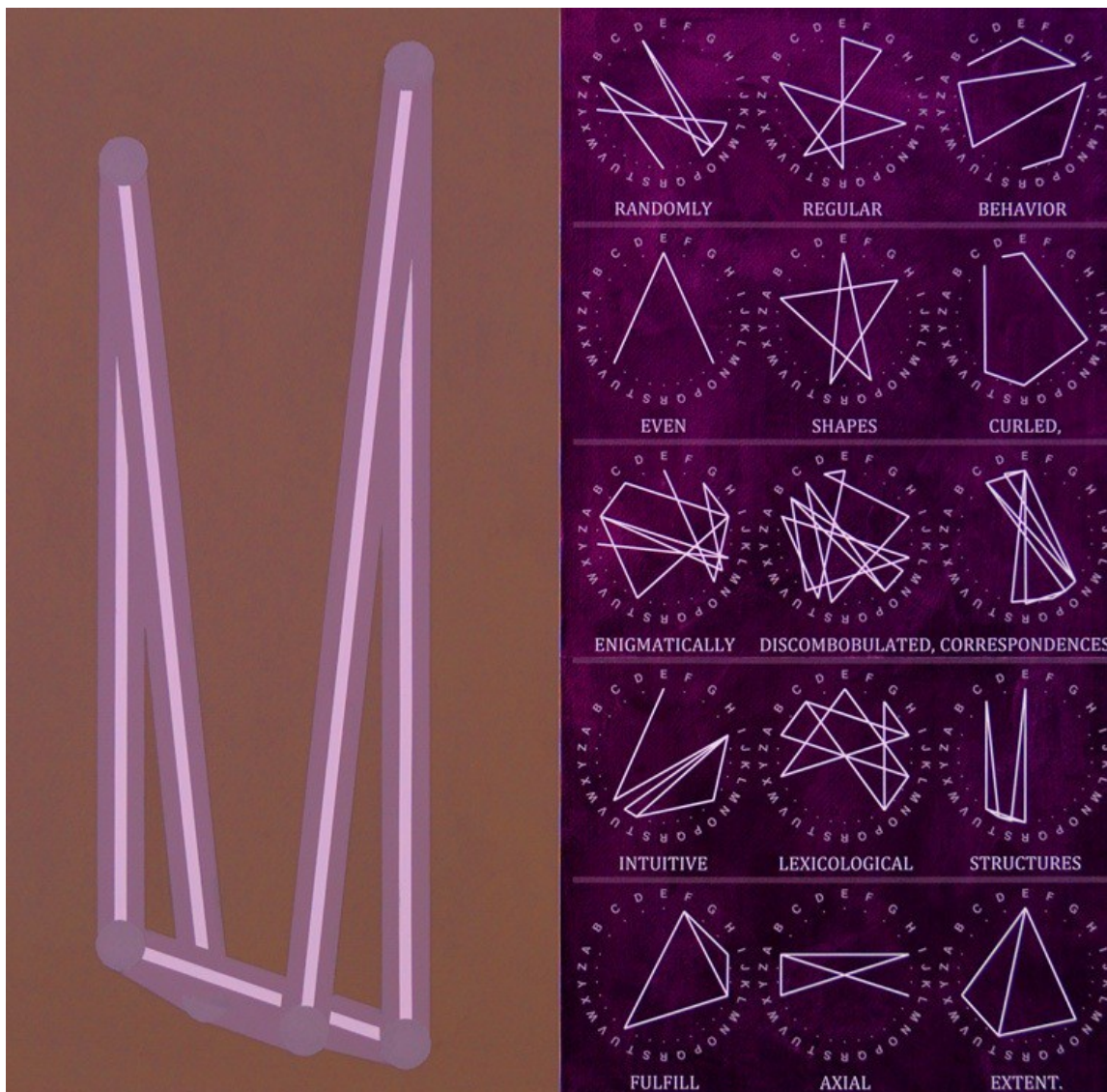
When we juxtapose the use of sound and image, there is a new kind of power, as Bennett and Kern, when combined, can remind us. And the delayed resonance of these first encounters for me now? I've been working off and on for the past four years on an even stronger attempt to enact what I think is

very similar to Kostelanetz's terms "text-sound" and "sound-text." It's a newer work to eclipse the last *Vaast Bin* series, and I have been calling it *sound-imaging* all along, but because these first encounters have resonated over this expanse of time, I've a better means to adjust the mechanics. This is what you get when you combine the hands of sound and image. It's sound-imaging, something you can hold on to, as in the sound solid and sound aural, and both at once, as a means of addressing the ethical urgency in both composition and performance. Sometimes I'm more visual. Sometimes more traditionally text-based. Sometimes more sound-oriented. And I inhabit and explore these areas. Sometimes, I employ variations of these on the sound-imaging spectrum, as needed, for the ethics of ideations. Performance is all about sound, and I use it in a number of ways and in a number of registers, depending on the work at hand.

Knowing how, as the Bennettian schematic suggests, when combined with the necessary kerning of sound as part of the activation of the visual matters at hand, can create new ethical resonances. That interview-like symposium in *Aural Literature Criticism* has haunted me for years, and especially now, because Kern's words speak more strongly than ever to what I am also trying to do by way of the Bennettian schematic. "The world began in sound," Kern said. "I say from vibration of matter we have sound and from vibration of matter we have light." And if that isn't life animating, I don't know what is. So there it is, pilot of the visual: Sound lead to light and the possibility of seeing again. It's not some origin-quest or some Russian Formalist fantasy, though it's as formal as a Bennettian schematic can be. It's not some Levi-Straussian induced dream of structuralism as a paleontological means of accessing an ur-text song, though it is structurally sound-based. Sound-imaging is a means to know ends, and too, to hear ur here. It's primal, and it's both an ethical means and an aim at pure aperiodic creation, something that breaks the old patterns of mere reflection. Holy Karst, Batman. Echolocate this point for yourself. The kern'd acoustics I speak of are not that far-fetched, and the Bennettian schematics are sound solid: Image *can* lead us to new sounds, and new sounds *can* lead us to new images of new life, where we might be more clear-eyed, reclining on the backrest of the binnish coffin of poetry. Sound-imaging is a process of reflective abstraction, and that local piloting is part of the point of

getting to the vaward tip of this urthy little
terrestrial point

Michael Winkler / **A MATTER OF CONTEXT**



I really like the idea of this project. Unfortunately, I can't reference a work which inspired me to become involved in visual poetry because my involvement didn't begin that way. My creative practice originated in the context of process-based visual/conceptual art (35 years ago). I've always worked primarily within that context. But from the very beginning, I produced artist's books which visual poets like Karl Kempton, Crag Hill, and Karl Jirgens supported by republishing excerpts in their magazines (KALDRON, SCORE, and RAMPIKE). At the time, the visual art community was only interested in my work from the perspective of conceptual process. But visual poets were interested in discussing the possibility of a meaningful structure being intuitively encoded in the signs for words (an idea treated as taboo in the visual arts). I liked a lot of the visual poetry I saw after becoming involved, but I can't say any of it influenced my work because my methodology was already well established. And although the signs of language are the focus of my work, I don't really use language as the

creative means of expression, rather it's the subject matter--the work evolves from the visual/conceptual process which maps the structure of the signs. However, I do choose words from which to develop particular works, and I believe my choice of words has been significantly impacted by my contact with an experimental literary community which was initially accessed through the open arms of visual poets.

I like this project because I see it as a first step to getting visual poets to think about their history and key influences. And that could be a first step to positioning visual poetry in the critical context of the central discussion of interdisciplinary creative practice. As a visual artist, I can position my work in a critical context: I can say that my process is an extension of process-based conceptual art originating with Sol LeWitt and Francois Morellet; I can describe my painting technique as being rooted in the hard-edge painting tradition as exemplified by Al Held; and I can talk about my concerns with the alphabetic patterning created collectively by the intuitive consciousness of our linguistic ancestors as being related to the concerns of the abstract expressionists. In short, I can make a case for how my work is relevant to the cultural dialogue of art history. Visual poets have refused to develop a critical context which relates either to the history of their own practice, the history of literature, or the history of the visual arts. Consequently, a creative practice which is genuinely interdisciplinary, and is highly relevant to the discussion of the use of language in contemporary visual art; is not brought into the central discussion--and as a result, not properly supported by our cultural institutions. No artist; whether literary, visual, or interdisciplinary; likes to be defined and categorized, but without definitions and categories there can be no discussion, and no discussion means there is no mention, no support, and limited potential for having an impact. I admit the deck is already stacked, but I'd like to see visual poetry in the game--it would benefit everyone who explores language in a creative context. Perhaps at some point, there could be a conference or symposium presenting various viewpoints on categorization, definition, and historical relationships of the practice of visual poetry. The idea of examining key figures and influences could be extended and positioned in the context of the larger discussion. Some key figures that come to mind are Dick Higgins, B.P. Nichol, and Emmett Williams.

• Brisa

Brisa (Breeze) by Mikel Jáuregui

As my arrival in visual poetry occurred in a progressive way, there wasn't actually a specific poem that made me feel attracted to it, but was it a fuller, more general, attraction to this area of arts.

This admired work I hereby present, brings together many of the principles that, in my opinion, any work should contain to be classified as a visual poem:

Simplicity, understood as economy of means, as a way of touching directly the heart and mind of the viewer.

Absoluteness, because everything is there, at once, all of a sudden.

Clarity, understandable at first glance, without further explanation.

Delicacy, softness, caress of the soul, which takes us back to the soft blow, to the gentle breeze.

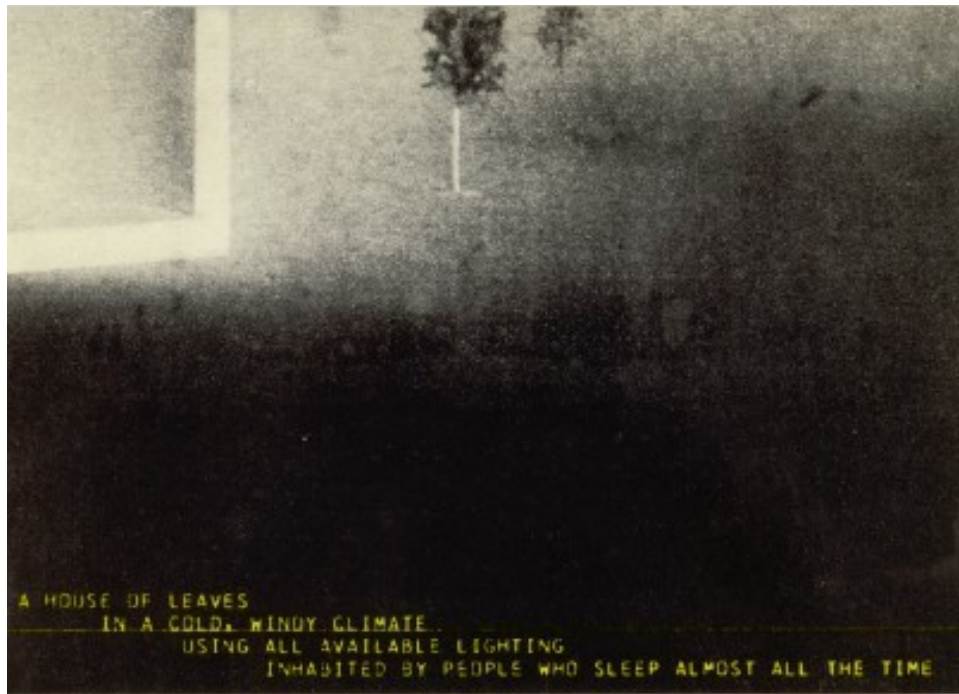
Mike Borkent / bpNichol

l e
o e
l o v e
o e v o l
l o v e o
e v o l
e e o
e i

“Blues” by bpNichol

I first bumped into visual poetry as an undergrad. I hadn't seen it before then, as far as I can recall, although I had seen lots of lyric poetry. bpNichol's visual poem, “Blues,” caught my eye initially with its balanced form and clarity of concept. It seemed simple but upon closer examination was filled with interpretive potential. The use of the page as a mirror for words, which so easily transformed love into evol (evil? evolve?), was innovative and refreshing. I experienced a facet of communication in a way I had never seen before. I loved how the poem invited me to both look and listen at the same time (and were those dueling guitars, or soundlines?). So much to think about. I now know that it was a part of a wider and longer tradition of visual poetry, which I have since had the pleasure to explore, but it remains a prime example of concrete elegance. I keep this poem in mind when I work. I hope to reflect a sense of that elegance in my own way.

“Blues” was originally published as a typewriter poem in *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, and was later redone in the more commonly anthologized version seen here. *Konfessions* stands out not only for its success as a book of poetry, but also because it was the first major volume of visual poetry published in Canada (and recently reprinted by Coach House Books). It was also the opening statement of an accomplished career of genre bending borderblurs by bpNichol.



A House of Dust, Alison Knowles and James Tenney

Alison Knowles's and James Tenney's poem *A House of Dust* has been widely lauded as one of the first computer poems, although its production history suggests a far more complicated picture. As the story goes, Tenney had attended a seminar on the computer and the arts, hosted by Knowles and Dick Higgins in 1967, where he demonstrated how FORTRAN IV, a programming language, could be used to create chance-based art. Knowles proposed at the seminar a poem with randomized attributes inserted into the following structure:

a house of (list material)
 (list location)
 (list light source)
 (list inhabitants)

Tenney later compiled Knowles's sequences along with her list vocabularies in FORTRAN IV and generated the poem on a mainframe Siemens 4004 at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. In 1968, Verlag Gebrüder König published a small chapbook of the poem on dot matrix paper.[1] To compress this media history of the work even further, the poem was subsequently reimagined as an installation/sculpture, slides of gift objects, and postcards, not to mention numerous art performances that took place around the variants of the work.[2]

As a poem created for and executed by a computer, *A House of Dust* is unsurprisingly repetitive. Naturally, scholarship to date has tended to focus on the poem in the context of early computing and/or as a precursor to born-digital literature.[3] Yet less understood, perhaps, are the 4x6 postcards of the poem, published by Verlag Gebrüder König, which combine a stanza with an image. If the chapbook of *A House of Dust* stresses the programmatic registers of a computer, the postcards highlight instead the indeterminate fields of experimental poetics in which text and image are staged. Here, the postcards explicitly declare themselves as permissive art objects to be inscribed on by writers other than Knowles and Tenney and circulated through the postal system. In other words, the postcards not only incorporate the codes of a mass-produced souvenir item, but the bureaucratic networks of the postal service are also implicated in the aesthetics of the work.

While I am less interested in placing *A House of Dust* explicitly in a visual poetry lineage, the postcard “House of Leaves” is clearly preoccupied about the relation of visual semiotics to the textual field.[4] Although Knowles’s aestheticization of the postcard foregrounds its status as a commonplace, personal medium, the image on this particular artwork is decidedly unfamiliar with arborous details only partially rendered legible. If the text is meant to establish a dialogic relationship with the imagery, then as reader and viewer, I find myself in an infinite feedback loop in which the stanza fails to provide additional illumination to emphasize, instead, the curious nonindexicality of the picture.

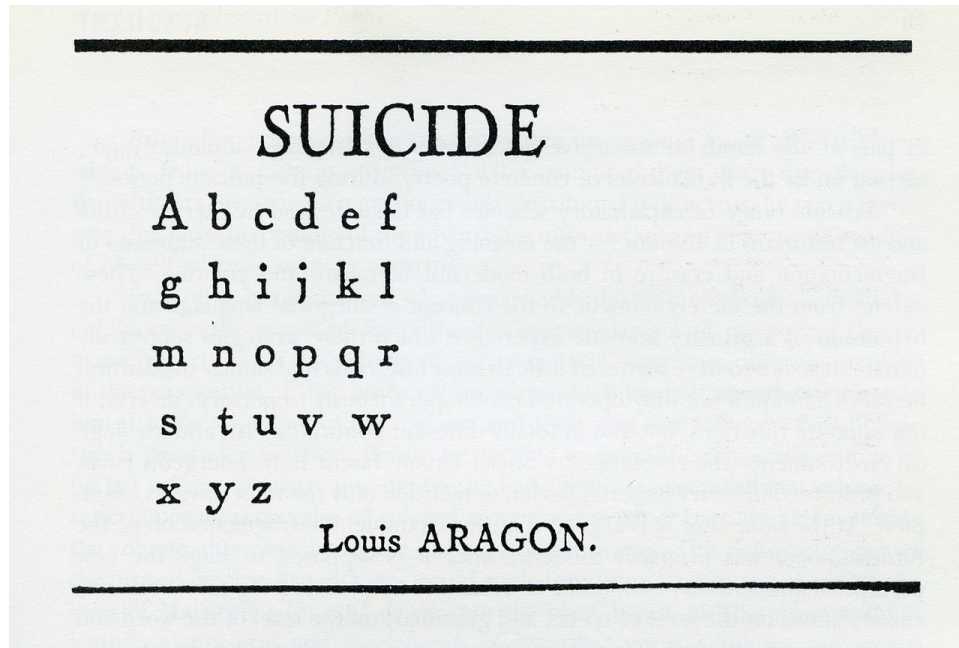
Indeed, what fascinates me about this particular postcard is the way it collates the socio-aesthetic impulses that still resonate in visual poetry today: the experimentation of media and artistic processes; the incorporation, breakdown, and ambiguity of spatial and linguistic fields; and the ambivalence toward graphical and visual signs as carriers of pure meaning. More broadly, *A House of Dust* demonstrates that the processes of production and distribution—and the everyday contexts of those processes—become inseparable from the visual-textual conditions of the artifact. (Of course, all this makes sense when we consider that Knowles is one of the founding members of Fluxus, a loose network of artists, writers, architects, and musicians, who have been committed to blurring the boundaries between art forms and life since the 1960s.) *A House of Dust* serves, then, as a reminder that we should search for the horizons of the material imagination in contemporary visual poetry, where the specificities of the medium, and the kinds of processes and networks they imply, cannot be easily disentangled from the poetic text.

1. Examples of the chapbook can be seen on the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library webpage: <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/about/blogs/room-26-cabinet-curiosities/2010/02/15/house-dust>.
2. Hannah B. Higgins offers a detailed history of the poem. See Hannah B. Higgins, “An Introduction to Alison Knowles’s *The House of Dust*,” in *Mainframe Experientialism: Early Computing and the Foundations of the Digital Arts*, eds., Hannah B. Higgins and Douglas Kahn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 195–199.
3. For examples, see Christopher Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of*

Forms, 1959–1995 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 60–61; and Nick Montfort, “Conceptual Computing and Digital Writing,” forthcoming in *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art*, ed. Andrea Andersson, <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/92876>.

4. Alison Knowles, “House of Leaves,” accessed September 10, 2105, <http://www.aknowles.com/postcard.html>.

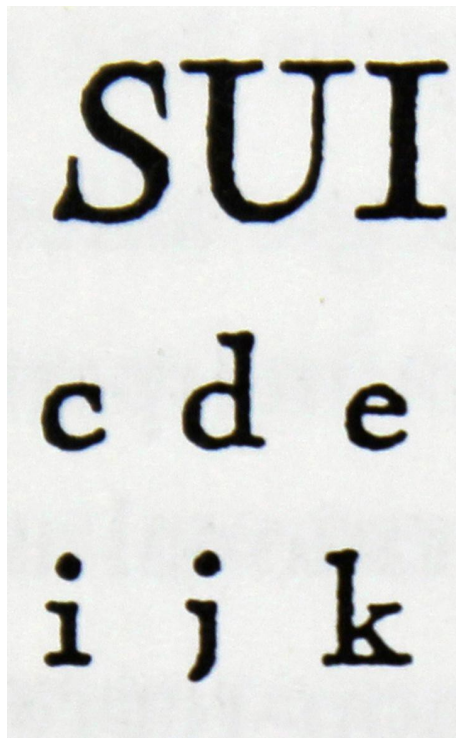
Louis Aragon's "Suicide" (1924)



Concomitant with the strategies of deletion and erasure, the strategy of fragmentation succeeds in the abolition of meaning in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advanced poetry. Like its strategic allies, it is riddled with the deficiencies of the spatial liberation's dialectic counterpart: it finds itself merely in the cul de sac of the alphabet's infinite permutational and combinatory possibilities. Not unlike the problems faced by the non-representational painters of that generation, when the abolition of representation and referentiality opened up the abyss of infinitely arbitrary chromatic and compositional permutations, so linguistic reduction of the syntactical structure to the lexical unit, of the lexical unit to the phonetic element, of the phonetic element to the single letter, allow for a spiritual flight into an infinity of combinations that rapidly leads to an anomic impasse. Louis Aragon had anticipated this already in his poem "Suicide" in 1924, where the "poem" ends in the mere restriction to the mechanistic rehearsal and infinite repetition of the given terms of the 26 letters of the alphabet. This nightmare of reductivism would come to pass in the hands of successive generations of "language administration" exercised by the functionaries of concrete poetry in the postwar period.

from "Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to

1975,” by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh



mdr (from the series, “Gists”) PtC 2010



After the Marne, Joffre visited the Front by Car by F. T. Marinetti, (1915)

This poem was not the first visual poem that drew me to concrete/visual poetry, however it continues today to inform my thinking about poetry. All inclusive, it contains action, story, sound, symbols, language and emotion. It's shunned by many, being a symbol of Futurism, a historical marker in the saga of war and fascism. On a single piece of paper, it condenses the story of WWI, in its glory and horror. If you can separate it from the political environment, or accept its reason, it is an achievement that deserves to live in language. The Futurist works on paper, for me, were the beginning; and it flowered into all the arts, continuing, really, through today in various forms; but still controversial after 100 years.

serkan isin / serkan isin

Tuhaf İlke



Stephen Nelson / Ian Hamilton Finlay

a a a a a
c c c c c
r r r r r
o o o o o
b b b b b
a a a a a
t t t t t
s s s s s
t t t t t
a a a a a
b b b b b
o o o o o
r r r r r
c c c c c
a a a a a

Being a Scot, the poetry of the Scottish concretists always interested me. It felt significant that Scottish poets had participated so successfully in such an important international movement. In particular, the playful, lyrical quality of Ian Hamilton Finlay's work appealed to me. I loved his earlier short stories, and later art work, and of course, Little Sparta. There's a ring of standing stones inscribed with text in my home town created by IHF, so the connection felt local and emotional, as well as artistic.

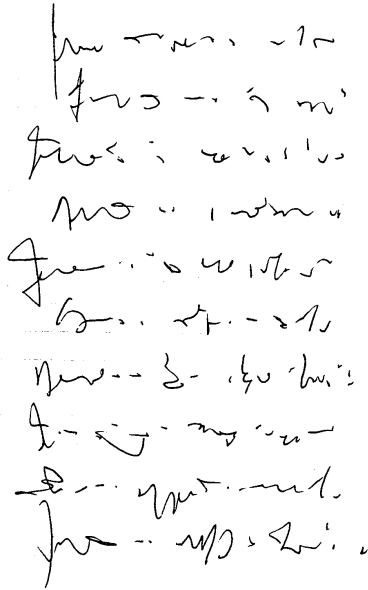
The piece that stood out for me when I first explored his work several years ago was playful and full of joy - ACROBATS. The initial contact with the image appealed because of its order, its rigour, the way the letters ran straight across the page. Then, as I looked into the space

between the letters, there was such movement and vitality - the eye could dance between the letters and into the space quite joyfully. It's quite thrilling to follow the contortions and physical permutations of the word as the letters zig-zag up and down and across the page in various patterns, the way a troupe of acrobats might twist and bend their bodies across a circus stage. There's a dramatic flip of the word between the upper right diagonal and the lower left, and a cartwheel between the top and bottom halves - some real textual gymnastics. From the perspective of pure language, there's a dance or gyration of letters away from and back into the word, as well as that very real relationship between word and body. The physicality of the piece, its endless movement and reference to the body within that rectangular block of text, is one of the most significant aspects of concrete poetry for me - the physicality of language mirroring our own patterns of physical and, of interest to me, spiritual energy.

Hooray then for the Scots and the Scottish concrete poets. Hooray for IHF, one of the most significant Scottish artists of the 20th Century. And hooray for the acrobats and the poems they inspire.

his visual poems, I'm paralyzed for at least a few seconds. The way he interprets the borderline between text and image is amazing. Often he starts with canonized techniques and styles, which he transforms, alters and augments until there is a unique Topel poem. The image I have chosen, is one from his *comix* series. I recall taking my first steps in visual poetry around 2009, with the *poemic strip* project. It must have been in this period I first noticed Topel's work. The way he combines the letter/word constellations and images is surely an endless source of inspiration for me and undoubtedly a lot of other visual poets besides.

Tim Gaze / Jim Leftwich



Jim Leftwich



Jim Leftwich

chout aund potre quaux n dant
 bblab vraus a don Proteur
 répcieus sde psçàcsite de liga
 uneent ous es gampeadesanfaou
 a attitroter faisu jemaiss dels
 ei laans, ns c

18

Theo Lorenc

answ that't beid. "e," s impo's
 fabecau have "You nted "Yet" he f
 l cseemyou! "hy shof lotwo kan't
 id. "ll," sity., a p, a t obst "It'
 she lieveI donhe saof lother n
 too withrnal wante happe, reit cot
 to timacr she, anybodywithol my
 an lig youu?" "me wi it t Why
 e butnybodn't wr me. enou. "Yo"
 she I enWhy a

THE PARADOX OF PORTRAITURE
 or **HOMAGE TO MAX ERNST**

The windows of houses are masks glued to a chair,
 Masks of fresh water caught in a young girl's skirt.

We talk lip to lip while the sun radiates and darkens.
 The seasons are graves spun from ribbons of sugar.

Painters stare at brushes and boards,
 Boards entitled to carmine, thread and verdigris.

The glass of commerce reverses each letter.
 Far off, the sea absorbs one mite of dust.

Joel Lipman

19

visual poetry inspiration - Tim Gaze

Here's a double page spread from **Lost & Found Times #39** (November 1997), which introduced me to Jim Leftwich's wordless marks. I think it's important to show both pages in their entirety, because John M Bennett's method of laying out multiple poems or visuals on each page influenced my thinking, as well as the effect that Jim's creations had on me.

Seeing these by Jim, my initial thoughts were something along the lines of: are these really poetry? Are they even writing?

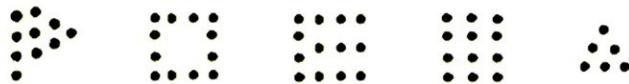
The left hand composition seems close enough to typical lines of cursive writing, even if there don't seem to be any easily extractible words in it. The right hand composition destroys the sense of an orderly grid, and raises doubts about just what these marks are meant to mean.

John christened Jim's many pages of such work "spirit writing". The term spirit writing has also been used to describe script by the otherwise illiterate artist J. B. Murray (or J. B. Murry).

Several years ago, in the early 2000s, I published a very small run photocopied edition (maybe 4 or 5 copies) of Jim's work, under the title Spirit Writing.

Whether or not he intended these compositions to be considered to be poetry or visual poetry, they certainly gave me pause for thought, and made me question many of my assumptions about reading, writing and poetry. Probably more than anything else, they stimulated me to begin to explore what we now call asemic writing, both as a creator and as a publisher.

Tulio Restrepo / **Tulio Restrepo**



Digital Ready Made: Visual poem on the work “Fountain - 1917” Marcel Duchamp by Tulio Restrepo

Manuel Sesma in his text, *Tipografismo*, instructs us on how to build the sense of a visual poem, which means to link the text and image to form an indivisible unit, so both signs suggest new readings to contribute in an experimentally way, extension and interpretation of the grammar of images emphasizing the pure act of visual perception.

Another way to approach the meaning of a visual poem is taking the definition of the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, about the sign, understood it as something we use to

represent and identify the essence of things, tangible or intangible, and build sign systems to say, lie or construct fictions.

Peirce, in turn, classifies generally signs in sign, icon and symbol; this may lead to understanding the subtle connection that exists in a communication process or experience meaning in which the use of the signs is always involved.

The dimension of the signs on the visual poem is given by the simultaneous reading the text and the image to be interpreted as a unit and also as a visual and plastic plurality discursive, with multiple meanings, manifested from the use of signs, icons and symbols.

In the work Liquid Poem (Poema Líquido) a ready made digital, it creates a transposition sense and a transfer of manipulating signs (points) enrolled in the defunctionalized object, to propose a word that interrogate the object with an explicit purpose to create new iconic and semantic appropriations and meanings about the work and the conceptual legacy of Marcel Duchamp.

*

Manuel Sesma en su texto, *Tipografismo*, nos instruye sobre como construir el sentido en un poema visual, lo cual significa poner en relación, el texto y la imagen para formar una unidad indivisible, por lo cual, ambos signos proponen nuevas lecturas para contribuir de manera experimental, extensión e interpretación de la gramática de las imágenes enfatizando el acto puro de la percepción visual.

Otra manera de aproximarnos al significado de un poema visual es tomando la definición del filósofo Charles Sanders Peirce, sobre el signo, entendido como algo que utilizamos para representar e identificar la esencia de las cosas, materiales o inmateriales, y construir de paso sistemas de signos para afirmar, mentir o construir ficciones.

Peirce, a su vez, clasifica los signos de manera general en indicio, icono y símbolo; lo cual puede dar lugar a la comprensión de la sutil conexión que existe en un proceso comunicativo o experiencia de significado en la cual está siempre implicada la utilización de los signos.

La dimensión de los signos en el poema visual esta dada por la lectura simultánea en la que el texto y la imagen deben ser interpretados como una unidad y a la vez una pluralidad plástica discursiva con múltiples significados, manifestada a partir de la utilización de indicios, iconos y símbolos.

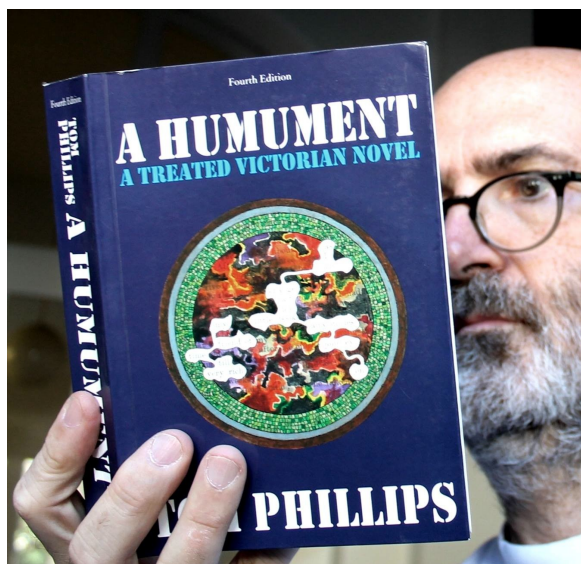
En la obra **Poema Líquido**, se crea un ready made digital, una transposición y transferencia de sentido manipulando los signos (puntos) inscritos en el objeto desfuncionalizado, para proponer una palabra que interrogue al objeto, con un fin explícito, crear nuevas apropiaciones y significaciones icónicas y semánticas sobre la obra y el legado conceptual de Marcel Duchamp.



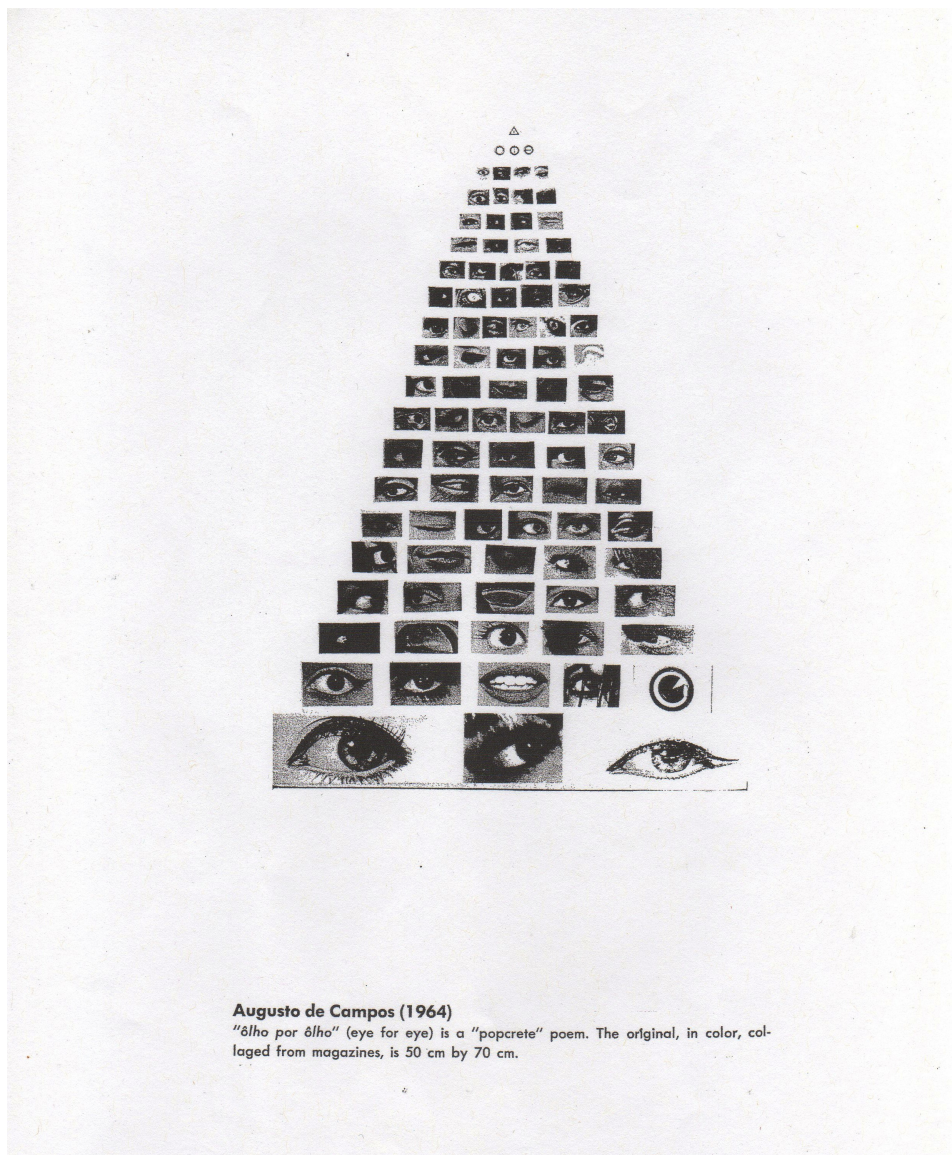
I became aware of visual poetry, and in particular of the Italian school of “Poesia Visiva”, reading art magazines and books about Contemporary Art when I was still in high-school. I saw a large international exhibition of VisPo in my home town Forte dei Marmi in the mid-Seventies (the Modern Art Museum was located in a villa just in front of my house), and that happened before I even learned of the existence of Mail Art. I was very impressed by some of the works on display (by Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Eugenio Miccini, Luciano Ori, etc.) and I

remember thinking "I should make something along these lines!". The overall effect of that show is still vivid in my mind, though I do not recall a particularly influential individual piece. I was captivated by the whole field, rather than by a single author. In a few years I would be at the University in Bologna attending a course on advertising techniques taught by visual poet Lamberto Pignotti. In those years I studied more in depth the VisPo tradition, I met authors like Miccini (who had a summer house in Forte dei Marmi) and I started to contribute regularly works to mail art and visual poetry magazines, projects and exhibitions. It was through one of my early collectors (Marvin Sackner of the Ruth and Marvin Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, located then in Miami Beach) that I got to know what is probably the single most inspiring VisPo work I have ever encountered. Sackner introduced me to the more experimental side in the production of the British painter Tom Phillips (who I immediately recognized as the author of a famous record cover for King Crimson, my favorite progressive rock band) and he urged me to find a copy of his *A Humument - A Treated Victorian Novel*. First published in 1980, this is a 368 pages masterpiece (de)constructed modifying in a wide array of techniques and styles the novel *A Human Document* (1892) by a certain W.H. Mallock. I eventually found a copy of the book (Thames and Hudson, first revised edition, London 1987) and I totally fell in love with it.

I consider *A Humument* a sort of VisPo's *Finnegans Wake*, a book I constantly return to for renewed pleasure, always discovering in the text new details and layers of meaning. Each page is a visual poem in itself, but is also linked in various ways to the rest of the volume, no word is added or displaced from the original page yet a whole range of sub-texts and characters (such as the lovely Irma) emerges from the skillful selections, connections and alterations through drawing, painting and collage of the available text (a piece of literary detournement or "plagiarism" on the same wavelength of John Oswald's plunderphonics). I later acquired other revised versions of the book and some spin-offs, such as the cd of Phillips' opera *IRMA*, whose libretto and music are based on characters and passages of *A Humument*. So maybe this is not a "single poem" as requested, but it certainly is a single, organic and superbly structured piece of verbo-visual virtuosism (though Phillips is often unfairly and inexplicably excluded from VisPo studies and anthologies). I can open the volume and pick up a page at random, and I'll be sure to find a "visual poem" that has and will continue to inspire me (it turned out to be page 3, just at the beginning), renewing each time my faith in the breath, depth, density, humor, pathos and all round wonderfulness of the marriage of image and word. VisPo - this is *A Humument's* weighty contribution to the genre - can be appreciated as a single self-contained picture, but can also construct complex nonlinear narratives that potentially expand into the most different media. Thanks Tom for all this, and thanks also to Marvin!



vittorebaroni@alice.it



Olho por Olho (1964)
Augusto de Campos

In 1968 my high school art teacher loaned me her copy of *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* edited by Emmett Williams (Something Else Press, 1967).* She and her husband were young American ex-pats, conscientious objectors escaping the draft and the war in Vietnam in Canada. They had recently studied art in New York City and were familiar with Fluxus, Pop Art, Warhol, Duchamp, Cage, etc. I marveled at the many concrete poems in William's anthology, but it was Augusto de Campos "popcrete" poem *Olho por Olho* (1964) that changed my understanding of what poetry is. My aesthetic practice continues to this day informed by the ear of the eye and the eye of the ear.

*Later in life I met some of the poets featured in the anthology: Williams, Cobbing, Gomringer, corresponded with Chopin and saw bp Nichol perform with the Four Horsemen. In 1970 I obtained a copy of *Notations* edited by John Cage (Something Else Press, 1969) and that's another element of this story...

BICCHIER D'ACQUA

Parole in libertà.

In un pollice di trasparenze circolari
cristallo miracolo disciplinare di molecole
sentinelle fronte all'infinito circostante un
mondo Globi angoli plaghe d'imper-
sonalità vedi stagni d'armonia al taglio
degli orizzonti in partenza solitudini d'etere

Perpendicolarmente la nullità della
notte sono a pieco blu-di-prussia in silenzio

SILENZIO SILENZIO SILENZIO SILENZIO SILENZIO

fino al vertice metafisico d'oltre i pianeti

Poi strle bianche virgole di pla-
tino ondulazioni di gelo nevi in abbandono pa-
gine vuote d'alba senza speranze senza rosa di
ciminiere di tetti

Ma subito accanto
un'equatore d'occhi di fuoco portici d'oro
d'amore penne di sole

Gli orienti in
fiore le sirie carovane d'amarillo dei ricordi verso
la mecca delle gioventù dei popoli

Siamo sulla terra Rotazione di pri-
smi nella serenità dell'acqua

IRIDE

**VIOLETTO ROSSO ARANCIONE GIALLO
VERDE AZZURRO INDACO VIOLETTO**

Sciagunatio di felicità mascherata degli es-
seri degli elementi delle stagioni delle civiltà

VIOLETTO come in cuori profondi
di assassini dormire dormire delle passioni col
vino le glorie vomitate sullo strascico postumo
delle stelle

ROSSO profumo elettrico
della carne baciata estate d'affiches sulle guance
delle città senza vergogna

ARANCIONE
mare del sud in amore strade notturne gonfie
di calcoli al ritmo prostituto delle serenate

GIALLO labbra dell'ironia nel no-
vembre dei cimiteri strazio di un cielo sugli au-
tunni teatrali delle vetrate

VERDE
stemperamento velenoso di gemme bagno dell'a-
nima nell'aritmetica dei viaggi delle traversate
sguardi di pupille giovani verso la vita fuoco
complementare

AZZURRO eternità
dell'intelligenza migrazione delle nostalgie nel
cerchio degli assoluti senza cuore

INDACO rifluire rumoroso del sangue delle ve-
locità delle guerre nei misticismi prostrati goido
stazione dell'esistenza allucinata in pressione
di partenza

**VIOLETTO ULTRAVIO-
LETTO NERO** voluttà morte promessa spring
scoppio uragano meccanico di nuove primavere

Un mondo E un giro liquido
d'ali ebbre d'aria Sfera pirotecnica
della fantasia al caffè.

The first visual poems I ever encountered were Apollinaire's calligrams, which in 1967 became the subject of a dissertation at the Université de Toulouse on the role of the Chinese ideogram in Apollinaire and the Anglo-American Imagists. However, the first poem that inspired me to devote much of my life to exploring visual poetry was Ardengo Soffici's "Bicchier d'Acqua" ("A Glass of Water"), published in Lacerba on January 15, 1914. Invited to contribute to a collection of essays on Soffici published in Italy in 1976, I took my first hard look at visual poetry and was amazed to discover what it could accomplish. Visual and verbal components not only reinforce each other in Soffici's composition but also complement each other in several ingenious ways (for an analysis, see my The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, pp. 37-40). Since Soffici was primarily a painter, he chose to portray the glass of water visually. And yet the fact that it is composed of words allies it to traditional poetry. Since the glass is half full of water, the words in the top half are arranged differently than those in the bottom half. Justified on both sides, the composition resembles a picture and a text simultaneously.