The Printed Poem and the Reader

Guest Editor **Richard Bradford**

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The question of how we distinguish poetry from other forms of writing has migrated through the manifestos and exchanges of English literary criticism for four hundred years. The proliferation of new and unprecedented forms and techniques since the Renaissance has both fueled the debate and perplexed its contributors: How can we argue that a sonnet by Shakespeare and a piece of chiseled typography by e.e. cummings exist within the same genre of formal conventions? To trace variations in rhyme scheme, metrical structure or syntactic movement would be to rely upon a system of formal abstractions which is elusive and continuously redefined, but there is one structural characteristic which the poet and critic must acknowledge even when attempting to dismiss it as a structural conponent—the poetic line. The line is the single element of poetic form whose existence can never be denied or ignored. Even in concrete poetry—arguably the most self-consciously experimental manifestation of modern writing—the emphasis upon the visual materiality of language is a direct extension of the more traditional notion of poetry as a sequence of linguistic structures which remain outside the grammar and continuity of other forms of language—lines.

And here we return to one of the central issues in the question of "what is poetry" because our acceptance of the unshakable status of the poetic line as the defining characteristic of poetry must depend on our ability to identify its presence in the formal structure of the poem. Some critics have argued that we cannot hear the lines of loosely textured blank or free verse, to which the reply is usually that such an absence is the consequence not of the work of the poet, but of the unreliability of the reader. But we might then ask how a reliable reader might orally convey the lineal resonances of

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The answer is that in order to accept the poetic line as the defining char-
acteristic of poetry we must also accept its status primarily as a visual
phenomenon for which the eye is as dominant a receptive faculty as the ear.

The problems of interpretation raised by poems which self-consciously ex-
ploit the visual format of language also exist in the process of reading
and understanding more traditional forms. Consider the following lines
from William Wordsworth's "Home at Grasmere" and W.H. Auden's
"Musee Des Beaux Arts."

Wordsworth:

Dreamlike the blending of the whole
Harmonious landscape; all along the shore
The boundary lost, the line invisible
That parts the image from reality;

Auden:

the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water

A reader of Wordsworth's lines might be tempted to reflect upon the pleasing ambiguity of "whole," which seems to shift between its substantial and adjectival categories: the "Dreamlike" feeling of infinity which attends "the blending of the whole" is gradually transformed into a more specific reference to the "whole harmonious landscape." The point is that in order to "hear" this effect we would have to recite the poem twice since it is not possible both to pause after "whole" *and* to draw together the intonational structure of "whole harmonious" in one oral reading. We are forced to acknowledge that the key to this stylistic nuance is in our recognition of it in the visual text, our use of the eye. Despite Wordsworth's unintended irony, the "line...That parts the image from reality" is certainly not "invisible."

Similarly, the tension between the adjectival and substantive sense of Auden's "green" is particularly fruitful since the scene described is a painting. "Green" is both the color of the paint and a descriptive link with what the paint represents, and again the effect depends upon the reader's eye.

It has been my purpose in this introduction to propose that the visual format of poetry affects both the identity of the text and the ways in which the distinction between seeing and hearing verse can influence our perceptions of forms as diverse as blank verse and concrete poetry. It is this relationship between seeing and hearing which is the common theme of the following essays. The first five essays deal with critical perspectives of verse forms as varied as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, William Carlos Williams' free verse, Mallarme's experiments, Marinetti's "words-in-freedom" and Gomringer's excursions into pure typography. The concluding pieces are by two poets who have been asked to consider how the visual format has influenced both the composition and the interpretation of their own work.

The question of whether the poem on the page or the poem read aloud is the more influential medium will probably never be answered, but the attendant questions raised in what follows will, I hope, establish that there is a genuine and fruitful tension between the two spheres of perception.

"Visual Poetry" is a technique that we normally associate with
seventeenth-century pattern verse and with the typographical format
of modern free verse and concrete poetry. This essay is an exam-
ination of the ways in which eighteenth-century critics treated
the visual format of traditional verse as a determinant in the readers'
appreciation of form and meaning. Critics such as John Rice, John
Walker and Joshua Steele reprinted sequences of verse in ac-
cordance with their ideals of oral delivery, and others, such as
Thomas Barnes and Peter Walkden Fogg, regarded the silent printed
text as productive of effects which could be appreciated only via
the interpretive faculty of the eye. The final section explores
correspondences between the eighteenth-century work and modern
criticism, and goes on to argue that twentieth-century apprecia-
tions of the visual format of verse are limited by their concentration
upon the more extravagant typographic experiments of free verse.

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The Visual Poem in the Eighteenth Century

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Visual poetry is a concept that we tend to associate
with two traditions of writing: the first being the brief
seventeenth-century taste for typographical pattern,
whose best known practitioner was George Herbert;
and the second being the tendency towards typo-
graphic effect in the formal dispositions of modern free
verse, a development which has reached its most ex-
plicit and self-conscious manisfestation in concrete
poetry. The eighteenth century is regarded as the age
of poetic grace, order and lucidity; its most eminent
critical spokesmen, Joseph Addison and Samuel
Johnson, condemned the seventeeth-century pattern
poems as "false wit" and the relatively respectable ex-
periment of Miltonic blank verse as "verse only to the
eye." The critical and creative atmosphere of the
period between the Restoration and the emergence of
romanticism seems the least likely to have either
inspired or tolerated such self-indulgent peculiarities
as the visual manipulation of the written word. But, as
the following study will show, there existed within
the eighteenth-century a series of intriguing debates on
how the visual text affects the journey of the poem
from writer to reader.

The genesis of literary criticism as we know it today occured in the eighteenth century. It was not then attached to a particular eduational system, but it did begin to address itself to something called the reader. Earlier critics of poetry such as Sir Philip Sidney, George Puttenham and George Gascoigne had attempted to establish some sort of formal identity for a recent discourse whose subject was English literature, but their audience was the hypothetical practitioners of these forms. In the eighteenth century, the expansion of non-dramatic literature into the more public forum of booksellers, public readings and individual libraries of contemporary writing was accompanied by a shift of critical emphasis away from the writer and towards the reader, a person who might need to have the developing complexities of form and technique explained and interpreted for him.

One consequence of the emergence of the printing press into the center stage of cultural life was an increased sense of distance between the creator of the poem and the person who might find himself faced with the task of disclosing subtle nuances of intended meaning either in the silent, contemplative atmosphere of the drawing room or in the more active context of the public reading. And in the sphere of critical writing there developed a tendency towards the treatment of the printed poem as a temporary record of the original process of intonation, rhythm and emphasis which the distanced reader would need to recreate in order to receive, or to publicly perform, the full intensity of the poet's meaning. The most surprising and fascinating aspect of this new taste in interpretation was the meticulous and often ingenious emphasis given to the fact that the first meeting of poet and reader took place on the silent printed page. The critics to be discussed below grant us, even after two hundred years of interpretive sophistication, a new insight into the function of the eye in the determination of the effects and patterns in poetry which we might all too easily associate with the receptive faculty of the ear.

Samuel Johnson's famous declaration that *Paradise Lost* "seems to be verse only to the eye"[1] was no more than a perfunctory acknowledgment of a long established contemporary attitude towards the unrhymed pentameter as a convention of the printer. As early as 1679, a little-known country parson, Samuel Woodford, had suggested that the poem might suffer little if printed as prose.[2]

Woodford's significance in the history of interpretation should be recognized because he both addressed himself to what would become one of the major concerns of eighteenth-century critics and also raised problems of interpretation which re-emerged in early responses to the invention of modern free verse. Woodford admits that *Paradise Lost* "shall live as long as there are Men left to read and understand it," but of its style he suggests that though Milton might have been in a "Poetic rapture ... through the Disguise, the Prose appears" (Sig. B7ʳ). He goes on to reprint a section of Milton's prose as verse, and although the new format is an irregular departure from the strict iambic pentameter, it does echo the uniquely Miltonic effect of the verse line cutting into and intensifying the already elaborate syntax, which many critics have found to be part of the poetic design of *Paradise Lost.*

Then Zeal, whose substance is Aetherial,
Arming in compleat Diamond, ascends
His Fiery Chariot, drawn with two blazing Meteors
Figur'd like Beasts, but of an higher Breed
Than any the Zodiac *yields; resembling two*
Of those Four, which Ezekial *and* St. John *(saw;)*
The one visag'd like a Lion, to express
Power, high Authority, and Indignation,
The other Countenance like a Man, to cast
Derision, and Scorn, upon perverse,
And Fradulent Seducers.
With these the Invincible Warrior Zeal, etc

(Sig. B7ʳ)

Woodford's experiment is significant because it sets a precedent for eighteenth-century critics. First it suggests that the rhythms and intonational sequences which we regard as poetic are actually present in a variety of distinct expressive contexts, including, it would seem, theological prose. And by implication, it would seem that our response to such sequences is determined essentially by our *visual* recognition of context. We read *Paradise Lost* as poetry because it *looks* like poetry, and Woodford attempts to demonstrate that we would also read the unpoetically titled *Apology in Answer to the Modest Confutation of a Libel intituled, Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence of Smectymnuus* as a poem if it were made to look like a poem. It would seem that our response to context and genre might be part of a Pavlovian instinct triggered by typography.

In 1709, William Coward also observed that the effect and meaning of loosely textured blank verse owes something to the illusion of its visual format.

'Tis true the Fiction's *wonderfully done,*
And the whole Clue of Thoughts *completely spun.*
But like an Image *cast in Curious Mould,*
Tho' 'tis compos'd of finely polish'd Gold,
Yet wants that Breath of Life *to make It live,*
Which should right Vigour *and true* Spirit *Give.*
For fine Romances may be made the same,
If but the Printer *please to set the Frame.*
And Declamations ty'd to Measur'd Feet,
May yield an Harmony as truly sweet
But how can such Exactness Fancy *Raise,*
More than loose Prose, and undesign'd for Lays?[3]

To have regarded blank verse as an "*Image* cast in Curious Mould" and as partly the creation of the "Printer" was by no means an eccentric opinion, and this emphasis upon the effect of the visual format upon the reader's understanding was later in the eighteenth century to become an essential concern of one branch of criticism known as elocutionism. Writers such as John Rice, Thomas Sheridan and John Walker produced extensive guides to the oral performance of written discourse, and though a certain amount of their instruction is directed toward the preacher and public orator, their most intriguing work is concerned with the interpretation of poetry. The sensitive precision with which the elocutionists addressed themselves to the subtle nuances of poetic form preempts the modern ethos of close reading, but unlike their modern counterparts, the eighteenth-century critics maintained an almost fanatical concern with the genuine identity of poetic meaning as only realizable in its oral performance.

In his *Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety* (1765), John Rice raises what at the time was a familiar complaint against the reader who would emphasize the monotonous unstress/stress sequence of the pentameter and consequently suppress the broader interlineal pattern of rhythm and intonation. He lays primary blame for this fault upon the shape of the poem on the page: "The lines drawn up in Rank and File, with a capital Initial at the Head of Each, look formidable, and seem to demand a peculiar degree of Sound and Energy" (p.16). His solution to this is to have poems printed as a more accurate visual record of their intended aural identity, and he does this with lengthy sections of *Paradise Lost*, of which the follow-

ing is an example.

The third his Feet
Shadow'd from either Heel, with feather'd Mail
Sky tinctur'd Grain. Like Maias Son he stood ...
V 283-285 (original)

The third his Feet shadow'd from either Heel with feather'd Mail
Sky tinctur'd Grain.
(Rice's reprinting, pp.178-179)

The new arrangements would, he says, "be of great use to common Readers who are apt to pause at the End of a Line in reciting Verse, whether the Sense will admit of it or no...nor do I believe that they [the lines] would be deprived of any Part of their poetical Beauty." A contemporary of Rice, John Walker, was also aware that the printed pentameter could generate a causal chain of expectations, with its visual format providing an artificial backbone to an incorrect interpretation of the aural poem. In his *Rhetorical Grammar or course of lessons on elocution*, (1785), Walker rearranges the first twenty-six lines of *Paradise Lost* to "present to the eye the same union which is actually made by the ear," an experiment which has the famous opening lines ending at "Disobedience," "Tree" and "Taste" (pp. 343-345).

Rice and Walker were arguing primarily against another
elocutionist critic, Thomas Sheridan, who in his *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775) claimed that Milton had intended to have *Paradise Lost* interpreted according to its conventional printed form and that what he called the "pause of suspension" at the line ending was a Miltonic strategy to isolate the traditional pentameter, and more significantly, to intensify and make intricate both the rhythmic sweep and the delicate meaning of the verse paragraphs.[4]
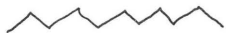
The most important element of this debate is that all three critics claimed to have heard three different poems. The point of controversy was in locating the visual structure which most accurately reflects, rather than determines, the aural poem, and here the elocutionists had wandered into a sphere of analysis which we tend to associate only with the academic sophistications of modern analysis. If the rhythms and consequently the meaning of a piece of writing could be altered by changing not the words themselves, but the context in which they are understood, then it would follow that poetic effects are as much the consequence of the attitude and condition of the reader as they are the products of the poet's intention. I will examine the correspon-

dences between the eighteenth century and the modern perspectives in the closing section, but at present I shall look more closely at how the eighteenth century version of reader-response theory found itself dealing essentially with the effect of visual patterns.

The results of the acceptance of the visual text as a kind of musical score, a guide to the oral recreation of the original poem, ranged from the tediously meticulous to the downright bizarre, but the most sophisticated adaptation of the musical analogy can be found in Joshua Steele's *Prosodia Rationalis: or an Essay Towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech, to be Expressed and Perpetuated by Peculiar Symbols* (1775), a work which rejects the bland relativity of unstress/stress values and presents a technique of scansion and performance which could claim as much precision as our own structural and generative linguistics.

It is generally assumed that the study of poetic form and prosody was revolutionized by George L. Trager's and Henry Lee Smith's paper, "An Outline of English Structure" (1951).[5] Trager and Smith argue that the notion of English as a language with only two degrees of stress is a gross simplification, and that the positive and negative degrees of accentuation in, say, an iambic sequence should be more accurately reco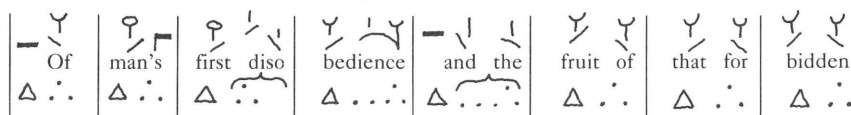rded upon a relative scale of one to four. This concept of multiple stress relativity has since been a central component of linguistic prosody, but a glance at Steele's explanation of his symbolic apparatus should establish that modern prosody is two hundred years behind the times.

1st ACCENT. Acute ╱ grave ╲ , or both combined ⌒ ⌣ in a variety of circumflexes

2nd QUANTITY. Longest ⊐ , long ⊋ , short Ⴤ , shortest |

3rdly PAUSE or *silence*. Semibrief rest ▮ , minim rest ▬ , crotchet rest ⌐ , quaver rest ⌐

4thly EMPHASIS or *Cadence*. Heavy △ , light ∴ , lightest ∵

5thly FORCE or *quality of sound*. Loud ϲ , louder ϲϲ , soft ϱ , softer ϱϱ

Swelling or increasing in loudness ∿∿∧ , decreasing in loudness

or dying away ∧∿∿ , Loudness uniformly continued ∧∿∿∿

(p. 24)

In Steele's application of this apparatus to the opening three lines of *Paradise Lost*, we find the conventional printed poem transformed into a diagram of its aural identity.

<div style="margin-left:2em">Joshua Steele and Visible Music</div>

tree whose mortal taste brought death into the

world and all our woe;
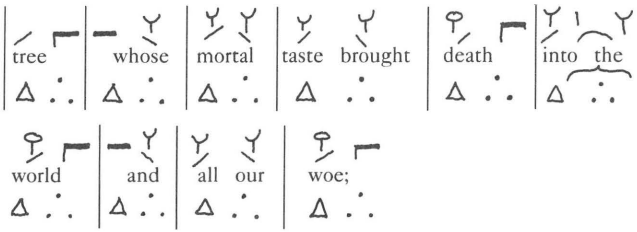
(p. 77)

Whatever our opinion of the accuracy of Steele's interpretive technique, we must accept that he succeeds in exposing a number of tacit assumptions about the poem on the page that we, in the later twentieth century, still often take for granted. It is difficult to determine precisely how the cognitive function of recognizing a "poem" as a printed format influences the more complex procedure of understanding its effects or reading it aloud, but as Rice and Walker have demonstrated, the two processes are by no means discrete. Steele goes even further than his contemporaries in his complete rejection of the printer's measure and his replacement of this by a format which is designed to record the precise duration, stress value and demarcation of formal components. The poem, in lines, has been effectively rejected in favor of a visual format where written language and symbols are predicates of its ideal aural presence.

The hypothesis of having all poems printed as musical scores is rather difficult to contemplate, but Steele's dedication to the visible format is no more than a logical extension of Woodford's claim that the silent recognition even of the poetic line can have a serious influence upon sound and meaning.

Paradise Lost offered the most complex points of controversy in the visual/aural debate because of its status as the first major English poem to deploy varied and extended rhythmic sequences unregimented by rhyme or regular syntactic closure—its true rhythmic and prosodic identity thus became a matter of opinion. But critical discussion of the relationships between visual cognition and oral performance extended far beyond the problems raised by blank verse.

Reading with the Eye

Steele's musical score is the most precise and meticulous attempt to recreate the aural poem in visual form, but the whole tradition of aural/visual speculation is underpinned by the implication that during the journey from creation to reading, the poem might well

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acquire and discharge several distinct, and possibly irreconcilable, patterns of rhythm and meaning.

In his 1789 "Essay on Rhythmical Measures," Walter Young considers the relationship between the reader and the written text to be an essential determinant in these matters.

A very gentle hint will incline a hearer to count off such feet by combinations of the smaller even numbers. For this little more is necessary than to write them out in separate lines. The tones of the voice, with which a person is disposed to read lines of such even measure, are often sufficient to direct the hearer to the number according to which they are framed.[6]

Young raises the question of whether it is the poem or the shape of the poem which conditions the reader's awareness of its structural form. It is a very short step from this implicit recognition of the power of visual form to the acceptance of silent reading as a process of appreciation quite separate from the ideal of oral performance, and this is exactly what we find in Thomas Barnes' 1785 essay, "On the Nature and Essential Characteristics of Poetry as distinguished from Prose."

The musicalness and flow of numerous composition, which charms the ear of every judicious reader, is certainly felt most strongly, where it is *read aloud*, with taste and expression. But when read *with the eye only*, without the accompaniment of the voice, there is a *fainter association* of the sound, the *shadow of the music*, as it were, connected with the words; so that we can judge exactly of the composition as if it were audible to the ear. This habit of composition associating *sound* with *vision*, is formed gradually by habit .... And some Gentlemen are said to have acquired this art of mental combination so perfectly, as to *read*, even the *notes* of a musical composition with considerable pleasure...[7].

Barnes draws out one element of the visual/aural relationship which critics such as Rice and Walker either take for granted or deliberately suppress. Walker's objective, to "prevent the eye from imposing upon the ear," is something of a contradiction in terms, since his own technique of typographic redisposition gives tacit priority to the power and function of the eye.

There must be many readers who are as fascinated by the changes in form and meaning which can be produced by changes in shape as they are concerned with the ideal style of oral delivery. And this slightly illicit process of silent, visual appreciation finds its most extravagant manifestation in Peter Walkden Fogg's *Elementa Anglicana* (1792/6). In his section on the appreciation of English verse form, Fogg reflects upon how the mind of the reader finds pleasure in the harmonies and discontinuities of rhythmic verse.

The traces of these delightful movements frequently remain in the mind, and serve as a kind of inspiration, allowing them no rest till they have filled up the craving void of these blanks of harmony with compositions of their own. The varied and yet regular maze affords numberless objects of comparison, which to perceive is

unspeakably pleasant, though to point them out might seem tedious. Nay, as was before remarked on the *melody* of pauses, pleasure may be derived from a view of straight lines in the same variety and proportion.

(Vol. II, p. 198)

It would seem that Steele's concept of musical form in language has been drawn out beyond its status as an analogy, to the extent that the substance, the material, of language can present us with a sphere of appreciation quite separate from its meaning—wordless music. The following is a short section from Fogg's rewriting of a poem by William Hayley:

Of humbler mien, but not of mortal race,
Ill fated Dryden, with imperial grace,
Gives to th'obedient lyre his rapid laws
Tones yet unheard, with touch divine, he draws,
The melting Fall, the rising swell sublime,
And all the magic of melodious rhyme

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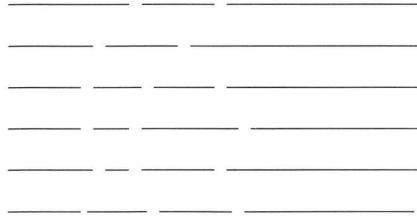
(Vol.II, p. 200)

Fogg comments: "Then the mind glances over the whole with a rapidity that enhances the delight; and the more as we suppose many other proportions still unperceived" (II, p.199). If his experiments leave us with a message, it is that it is all too easy to regard the processes of reading, seeing and understanding as distinct aspects of our cognitive and aesthetic response to poetry. We would surely not appreciate the proportions of harmony if we did not know that they interconnect with the more familiar medium of language, but as Fogg argues, our sensitivity to the beauty of language is conditioned to some degree by the literal shape and movement of language as material.

Fogg's experiments were a remarkably exact anticipation of Man Ray's 1924 poem[8] consisting of a title and four stanzas, with lines arranged in a straight vertical sequence on the left and a less predictable one on the right, but with no words. Man Ray called the poem "Lautgedicht," and the joke is rather more serious than it seems since Ray's reader would recognize a poem but would not be able to read it. Ray's pseudo-concrete experiment obliges us to admit that we understand

aspects of poetic writing which are outside its meaning, but the joke was a century and a half too late.

Man Ray: Lautgedicht. 1924

Rhyme

We still tend to regard the eighteenth century as a period of literary history dominated by the rhymed couplet, and we would certainly find it difficult to accept that the ethos of Dryden and Pope was accompanied by a critical attitude to rhyme as a dangerously irrational departure from the ideal of poetic clarity. But, as I shall show, such opinions existed, and they offer one more dimension to the eighteenth-century concern with the identity and effect of the aural poem.

W.K. Wimsatt has produced the most penetrating and influential modern readings of Pope's rhymed couplets,[9] but he was once caused to consider a peculiar dichotomy between his own attitude to rhyme and the image of the eighteenth century as the age of reason, and to ask why "sense, basically ordered by the rational schemes of parallel and antithesis" should rely so much

"on so barbarous and Gothic a device as rhyme?"[10] Wimsatt finds it odd that poetry which maintains an ideal of order and precision should depend upon a structural keystone which reminds us that the surface of language, its sound, is littered with connections and coincidences which relate only arbitrarily to its sense. William Mason, an elocutionist, preempted Wimsatt's question in 1749. Mason argued that the rhymed couplet,

lays [poetry] under the most miserable Restraint, hampers it with the most unreasonable Fetters, cramps a true poetic Fancy, and whilst it keeps the Attention fixt on the structure and sound of the Words, takes it off from that which is the very Life and Spirit of all true poetical Composition, viz sublime thought and strong Language, it pleases the ear at the expense of our Understanding, and puts us off with Sound instead of Sense.[11]

Rhyme presented a number of eighteenth-century critics with a problem which is obtusely related to the shape of the poem on the page: both are capable of bringing the reader closer to the materiality and away from the meaning of language. In the case of rhyme, it is the phonemic rather the typographic material which is the more disruptive. John Rice pursues Mason's sound/sense theme:

The English, and all those Tongues which retain any considerable share of the Teutonic Stock and Idiom, are remarkably addicted to Rhime; The numerous Similarity of Sounds frequently causing us to fall into it in common Conversation.[12]

Rice goes on to argue that poems which emphasize the random coincidental nature of rhyme, by using off-rhymes or by placing a rhyme word at a point which interrupts the flow of syntax, actually make poetry resemble the unstructured peculiarities of "common Conversation." The rhymes in these poems "are certainly disgustful, as they break in on the natural Expression." William Cockin, in his *The Art of Delivering Written Language; or, an Essay on Reading* (1775), shifts the emphasis toward the role of the reader, who might deliberately stress the rhyme words at the expense of the ordered linguistic sequence.

By this method they not only destroy one source of pleasure intended by the composer (which though not great is nevertheless genuine) but even often supply its place with what is really disagreeable, by making the rhymes, as they are interruptedly perceived, appear accidental blemishes of a different Style, arising from an unmeaning recurrence of similar sounds

(pp. 138-39).

Cockin's comments on the danger of readers being deceived into "accidental blemishes of a different Style" echo Rice's and Walker's discussions of the visual format as capable of distorting an accurate oral delivery of the poem. The tendency for rhyme to momentarily detain the reader so that the straightforward sequential progres-

sion of the language is interrupted was regarded as the equivalent of the printer's line's imposition of artificial form upon the true rhythmic sequence.

In his *Rhetorical Grammar* (1785), Walker brings the phonemic and typographic media together in his discussion of the type of couplet which allows syntax to run over, and thus isolate, the rhyme word. He locates several instances of this in the work of Pope and suggests that the confusion of the double perspective could be resolved for the reader by the familiar technique of reprinting the poem.

Which, without passing through the judgement, gains
The heart, and all its end at once obtains.
    (original)

Which, without passing through the judgement,
Gains the heart,
And all its end at once obtains.
    (Walker's reprinting, p. 333)

Music resembles poetry: in each
Are nameless graces which no methods teach
    (original)

Music resembles poetry:
In each are nameless graces which no methods teach
    (Walker's reprinting, p. 335)

There is a consistency in Walker's "rewritings" of both Milton and Pope because in both cases he attempts to present the text as a linear sequence of rhythm and meaning and to exclude those intensifications of form which deepen the texture, or as Rice put it, "break in upon the Natural Expression."

These eighteenth-century critics were by no means arguing for the total exclusion of rhyme from poetic writing, but they were attempting to limit its capacity to create "effect" outside the sphere of transparent meaning. And it is here that we can locate the crucial distinction between eighteenth-century readings and the codes of interpretation which are part of the conditioned reflexes of the modern reader, or to be more accurate, the modern critic. The following appreciation of rhyme is from Edward Stankiewicz's 1961 essay on "Poetic and Non-Poetic Language":

Successful rhyme is illogical and canny, striking and familiar, prominent and subsumed; it provides the condensed formula of poetic language: identity and variation, obligatoriness and freedom, sound and meaning, unity and plurality, texture and structure. [13]

Stankiewicz's catalogue of polarities, particularly the archetypal paring of "sound and meaning," run in complete opposition to the eighteenth-century ideal of clarity which would give full priority to meaning *over* sound. As the concluding section will show, our sense of poetic form as an explicit synthesis of surface and meaning, of the materiality and the transparency of language, place us in a very different category of reader from that shared by the eighteenth-century commentators discussed in this essay. The link point, and the point of controversy, is in the relationship between the aural and the visual poem.

In 1964, Yvor Winters published an essay called "The Audible Reading of Poetry."[14] As its title suggests, much of Winters' essay echoes the objectives and priorities of the eighteenth-century elocutionists, but it also strikes a note of loss and desperation, a feeling that he is working in a cultural environment in which the process of "audible reading" is redundant.

He begins with an apology for the possibility that his title might "have in it something of the jargon of the modern Educationalist," and he goes on to tiptoe through a chaotic battleground of terminology. His purpose is to "indicate the reading of poetry not merely for the sensual ear, but for the mind's ear as well; yet the mind's ear can be trained only by way of the other, and the matter, practically considered, comes inescapably back to the reading of poetry aloud." He goes on, very honestly, to confront the attendant problem of defining "reading," invoking, among others, those who "hear nothing when they read silently, and who are helpless in their efforts to read aloud"; those "trained by the psychological educationalists to merely read more rapidly," and the "scholar who appears to have read everything" but whose "failure to hear" has made him "understand very little." Winters' notion of audible reading is apparently "a matter of which there is no understanding at the present time" but which is "a matter of utmost importance to the proper understanding of poetry, a matter fully as important as the philosophical speculation and learned paraphrasing of the New Critics." Winters goes on to state that rhythm is central to the identity of all poetry, and without hearing a poem we are denied a vital key to its more complex meanings: "without audible reading, and adequate audible reading, you simply do not have poetry."

Winters was, and is, swimming against the tide because the tentative acceptance by Fogg of the visual text as of equal significance as its oral delivery has, in the twentieth century, become a tacit but fundamental component in

the process of interpretation.

One of the few modern critics to explicitly confront this fact was Samuel Levin in his essay on "The Conventions of Poetry";

Obviously, the line has typographical identity...the typographical groupings (and concomitant pauses) are not random; some organizing principle must be at work behind them. This is the principle of meter.... In fact, most meters are not in themselves transparent over the larger span; they provide no recurrent distinctive metrical configuration to mark the end of the line. In such meters the feature that functions to signal the end of the line is usually some sort of sound-euphony-rhyme or assonance.... When the line is defined for the hearer it is defined by conventional features of poetry and is thus itself a convention; it has no linguistic relevance.[15]

Levin restates, in very clinical terms, the problem which Woodford, Rice, Sheridan, Walker and Steele fought so conscientiously to resolve: the poetic line, unless signaled by typography, grammar, rhyme or by the meticulous care of the reciter, is a shifting and arbitrary category, a convention, or as the earlier critics put it, the printer's measure.

Stanley Fish, a reader-response theorist, extends such thinking to what must be regarded as its conclusion:

Line endings exist by virtue of perceptual strategies rather than the other way around. Historically, the strategy we know as 'reading (or hearing) poetry' has included paying attention to the line as a unit, but it is precisely that attention which has made the line as a unit (either in print or of aural duration) available.... In short what is noticed is what has been made noticeable not by a clear and undistorting glass, but by an interpretive strategy.[16]

In one sense this shift of emphasis towards convention and the power of the interpretive strategy might seem to threaten only the assumptions of metrical theory: Are the rhythmic alternatives of *Paradise Lost* the product of the different strategies of Rice, Walker and Sheridan and not of the formal subtleties of Milton? But the possibility of reversing the accepted balance between linguistic fact and interpretive variation is even more important because it can also undermine the elaborate process of criticism and understanding which *begins* with the identification of poetic form. The formal structure of a poem has to be identified as constant in order for a critic to explicate the ways in which it may organize, absorb or restructure surface meanings. For the modern reader the problem might seem less than threatening because an acceptance that a poem can be read in two or three different ways and thus discharge several distinct subtleties of meaning is fully accommodated by a critical ethos which has come to regard ambiguity, tension and paradox as central to all poetry. But in the eighteenth century, the form and meaning of the poem was the *single* objective of critical analysis, and to question the status of a unitary balance between form and meaning

would also threaten the more sacrosanct ideal of one person, the poet, *speaking* to another, the reader.

The question of why critics from two periods of literary history should address themselves to very similar issues and come to different conclusions is not too difficult to answer when we consider the significance of the one major aesthetic and cultural watershed which separates us from the eighteenth century: modernism.

It is clear that the sort of poetry which most consistently and forcefully proclaims its uniqueness as literature, its disdain of the familiar conventions of ordinary language, is that which began to be written in the twentieth century. So there is at least circumstantial evidence to suggest that twentieth-century criticism developed as it did in order to provide an interpretive model which could account for the initially disturbing discontinuities and peculiarities of modern literature, a model which went on to locate the opacities and ellusiveness of modern poetry as properties of *all* poetry. One important element of the sense of distance and disorientation in modernist technique is the absence of a stable voice or perspective to which the reader feels able to relate, and as a consequence of this, criticism has become more vividly aware of its own role in the disclosure, or to be more accurate, the production of patterns of coherence and continuity. The voice of the critic has now become as powerful as the voice of the poet.   23 \

The new role of the critic becomes most evident in essays such as Stanley Fish's "How to Recognize A Poem When You See One,"[17] in which he illustrates his thesis that literary form is a pattern established by the interpretive strategies of the reader. In this essay, Fish tells of how a group of "competent" English literature students are asked to criticize and elucidate a modernist religious lyric which is on the seminar room blackboard. They proceed to do so and employ an impressive repertoire of analytical techniques and scholarly awareness. The point of this exercise is that the words on the board are actually a list of names left over from the preceding class on linguistics and that the students are able to make them sound like a poem because their analytical methodology is triggered by the illusion that it is one. The "poem":

Jacobs - Rosenbaum

Levin

Thorne

Hayes

Ohman (?)

There is clearly a similarity between the illusion offered by Fish to his students and Woodford's experiment with Milton's prose. In neither case were the words *intended* as poetry, and in both cases the readers are asked to accept them as poems because of the context in which they appear, a context whose recognition is crucially dependent upon the shape of the words on the page. But there is also an important difference. Fish's students would no doubt find precedents for their critical procedures in the work of e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, or more specifically, in the writings of ideogram poets such as Charles Olson or Robert Duncan, where the typographic isolation of individual words and phrases has come to constitute something of a grammar, a technical tradition. Woodford's readers would be able to compare the typographically arranged prose with patterns and idioms of dramatic blank verse, and it is here that we find the crucial distinction between the responses to the two typographic experiments and between their critical contexts: eighteenth-century readers and critics *disclosed* a variety of formal sequences from a single text, but their twentieth-century counterparts possess a repertoire of formal models which they are able to *impose* upon practically any random sequence of typographic marks.

The distinction becomes more emphathic in an experiment by Jonathan Culler where he rearranges a section from Quine's philosophical essay, *From a Logical Point of View*, as a free verse lyric:

From a Logical Point of View

A curious

      thing

about the

      ontological

problem

      is

its

      simplicity

The typographical arrangement produces a different kind of attention and releases some of the potential verbal energy of thing,' 'is' and 'simplicity'. We are dealing less with a property of language (intrinsic irony or paradox) than with a strategy of reading, whose major operations are applied to verbal objectives set as poems even when their metrical and phonetic patterns are not obvious. [18]

Several pages later, Culler performs the same critical operation on William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just To Say," but we should note that neither he nor Fish

attempts to illustrate his reader-centered thesis by dividing up a piece of Dickensian prose and comparing it with a section from Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Had they done so, they would have been forced to acknowledge the fact that there is a subtle complicity between modern criticism and modernist writing because the rhythmic and intonational patterns are, to adapt Culler's phrase, "a property of language: in both of those pre-modernist texts, not merely a consequence of the reader's ability to respond to context."

John Herries, in his *Elements of Speech* (1773), found a discernible interchange of poetic form in distinct categories of writing: "As we often find a line of hexameters, sapphic periods unknown to the author, so it might be easy to produce a variety of the most perfect iambic or anapestic verses in Addison, Bolingbroke and other harmonious English writings" (pp. 187-188). And in his *Essay upon the Harmony of Language* (1774), William Mitford claimed to have found a considerable number of regular pentameters in Bishop Tillotson's sermons (p. 203). These two critics share with their contemporaries a belief that poetic form is tangible and intrinsic to the text, something which can be heard, and whose visual format will either disrupt or enhance the essentially aural identity of the poem. For the modern critic, the visual format has become a trigger mechanism for the silent process of criticism.   **25** \

In an article on the phenomenology of the poetic line, Richard Kell inadvertently reveals the true nature of the modern perspective.

We can safely claim that more often than not poetry does require verse layout, either because its rhythm is measured or because its rhythm is so subtle and so closely related to its meaning that versification is necessary to ensure that nothing is overlooked or distorted.[19]

This is an illuminating example of semantic morphology because Kell uses the word "versification"—first used by Dryden as a synonym for the meter and prosodic form—to mean nothing more than "lineation" or "typography." Kell's recognition that "verse layout...is necessary to ensure that nothing is overlooked or distorted" is itself a rather distorted echo of Rice's complaint that, "The lines drawn up in Rank and File, with a capital Initial at the Head of each look formidable, and seem to demand a peculiar Degree of Sound and Energy." Kell and Rice exemplify the distinction between two attitudes to the visual format. Kell relates form to content; he regards versification (or lineation) as a primary signal of the establishment of the artifact as a poem and as the starting point in the process of explication, a process which

involves the clarification of meanings "overlooked or distorted." Rice and his contemporaries regarded the visual format as a record of an oral event, an event which in itself can resolve potential distortions of meaning.

I would not argue that the desire to perform and appreciate the aural poem has been excluded from the cultural life of this century, but it seems clear that the processes of performing, hearing and criticizing verse, which in the eighteenth century were closely interrelated, have now become radically divergent. The tendency for modern criticism to work within the depth and complexity of multiple meaning is dependent upon the silent, clinical analysis of the witten text. In John Hollander's famous essay, "'Sense Variously Drawn Out': On English Enjambment," we find the modern critic savoring the "positional ambiguity" of "Fruit" in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost.*

Of Man's first Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree

For Hollander, the lines exhibit a tension between syntax and meter: "These two impulses...are the warp and weft of the verse fabric of *Paradise Lost.*"[20] The "warp and weft," to John Walker's 1785 ear, has the lines ending at "Disobedience," "Tree" and "taste." It would oversimplify matters to regard this as a straightforward critical disagreement because Walker's objective is to "present to the eye the same union which is actually made by the ear," to seek out the hidden aural text as the final realization of meaning and style. But, for Hollander, the visual format becomes the entry point for critical analysis: if the lines were reprinted at random, he would still be capable of imposing a plausible critical formula, just as Fish and Culler demonstrate their ability to do so with non-poetic language.

The centralization of the visual format in modern criticism is, in my opinion, the consequence of our ability to explicate free verse. One of the primary objectives of modernist poets was to free themselves from what they found to be the stultifying conventions of traditional form, a category which included the continuities of regular prosody. Critics were thus denied the recognition of a stable rhythmic or phonetic framework, such as the iambic pentameter, from which they could proceed to relate the form to the meaning of the poem. The tempting alternative to rhythmic form was visual pattern, and as Hollander, Fish and Culler demonstrate, this shift of

emphasis has been assimilated into critical perspectives on all visual arrangements of language.

It has not been my intention in this essay to discredit the assumptions and practices of modern criticism in favor of the eighteenth century. Critics from both periods are equally capable of ingenuity and precision, but it is in the tension between the two radically different perspectives upon aural/visual poetry that we might find a new and illuminating framework for the exploration of what we mean by seeing, reading, hearing and criticizing.

Endnotes

1 Samuel Johnson, "Life of Milton", in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. Birkbeck-Hill (Oxford, 1905), 193

2 The Preface to Samuel Woodford's *A Paraphrase Upon the Canticles* (1679).

3 William Coward, *Licentia Poetica discuss'd* (1709), 65-66.

4 See Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading* II (1775), 246-257, and Richard Bradford, " 'Verse Only to the Eye?' Line Endings in *Paradise Lost*," *Essays in Criticism*, 3 (1983), 187- 204.

5 George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, "An Outline of English Structure," *Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers*, 3 (Norman Oklahoma, 1951).

6 Walter Young, "Essay on Rhythmical Measures," in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, Vol.II, part II (1786), 72.

7 Thomas Barnes, "On the Nature and Essential Characteristics of Poetry as Distinguished from Prose," in *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, I (1785), 54-71.

8 Man Ray's "Lautgedicht" is reprinted in *Between Poetry and Painting*, (Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1965).

9 See W.K. Wimsatt, "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason: Alexander Pope," *MLQ* 5 (1944), 325-38.

10 W.K. Wimsatt, "Rhetoric and Poems: Alexander Pope," *English Institute Essays* (1948) References are from the reprint in *The Verbal Icon* (1954), 169-87; see p.72.

11 William Mason, *Essay on the Power and Harmony of Prosaic Numbers* (1749), 47.

12 John Rice, *Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety* (1765), 170.

13 Edward Stankiewicz, "Poetic and Non-Poetic Language," in *Poetics Poetyka—Poetika*, ed. D. Davie et al. (Warsaw: Mouton, 1961), 16.

14 Yvor Winters, "The Audible Reading of Poetry," *Hudson Review*, 4 (1951), 433-47.

15 Samuel Levin, "The Conventions of Poetry," in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. S. Chatman (New York, 1971) 177-93; see p.177.

16 Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in This Class?* (Harvard UP, 1980), 165-66.

17 Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* 322-337.

18 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 163.

19 Richard Kell, "A Note on Versification," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 3 (1963), 341-345.

20 John Hollander, " 'Sense Variously Drawn Out': On English Enjambment," in *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 94.
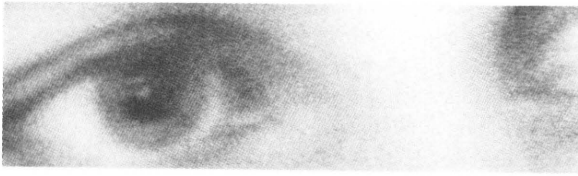
The essay examines the relationship of concrete poetry to another, more widespread, contemporary, self-referential poetry, which is broadly labeled *abstract* because its circular semantic play interferes with the image-forming aspect of representation. The interrelations of these two seemingly contrary types of poetry—the former, strikingly innovative in its textual forms; the latter, fundamentally linear and typographically conservative despite its complex word play—are analyzed in the context of a poetic tradition centered in France. The works discussed range from Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* (1897) to Francis Ponge's "Le soleil placé en abime" (1928-1954) and Pierre Garnier's "Soleil" poem visualized by Theo Kerg (1964). Although concrete poetry has developed far less than abstract poetry in the twentieth century (owing largely to its tendency to cyclically self-destruct) they are intimately related and strive, paradoxically, to fulfill one and the same aim—to eradicate the difference between the world and the text.

Mary Lewis Shaw

Concrete & Abstract Poetry: the World as Text and the Text as World

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Characteristically anti-representational and self-referential, many contemporary poems create an effect of self-sufficiency—of autonomy from the world outside the poetic text. In concrete poetry,[1] textual signs (words, letters and sometimes other elements functioning as such) refer to their own material substance as the object of the signifying process. The text's arrangement rivets the reader's attention on its presence as a tangible sur-face whereas in the conventional poem the physical text appears to function as an intermediary screen—a symbolic veil *through* which the reader enjoys an intangible poetic object: the message or signified. Concrete poetry can thus be described as a kind of thickening or reification of the poetic sign. Like other poetry it can convey subtle and complex messages, but its meaning cannot be abstracted from its material form—"the medium is the message."

In another very widespread yet relatively unconventional type of contemporary poetry, which I shall here label *abstract*, the text also creates the impression of self-sufficiency but in a manner contrary to that of the concrete poem. This type of poetry remains predominately linear. Rather than drawing attention to its own material substance, it uses circular semantic play to suspend the image-forming aspect of representation,

thereby denying the reader any sense of access to a referent per se.

Isolated as they may appear, concrete and abstract poetry have a profound and paradoxical relationship. In attempting to realize what has long been a linguistic and poetic ideal—the perfect unity of form and concept implied in the principle of the "logos" (as "word" embodying its referent)—each type of poem rejects the traditional treatment of language as medium of representation. While abstract poetry severs its ties to nonverbal phenomena in order to become a self-sufficient utterance, concrete poetry tends to selfdestruct—to exploit, reduce and finally delete its very foundation: the verbal text.

Innumerable well-known contemporary poets engage in circular semantic play and their abstract, linear works form privileged objects of theoretical analysis, whether of the structuralist, semiotic or deconstructive type. In constrast, concrete poetry is rarely discussed and its few proponents are not widely recognized as poets or critics of enduring significance. The difference in degree of success of these two poetic practices is not altogether surprising, for while the former exploits the richness and versatility inherent in the linguistic sign, the latter seems to cut itself off from the particular efficacy of language, and therefore from literary interest. Concrete poems do, of course, preserve and play on poetic conventions and can therefore be explained in relatively conventional critical terms. But analyses that focus on the continuing presence of traditional prosodic, grammatical and syntactic structures in concrete texts do not, in my view, illuminate their most interesting and innovative aspects—their radical alteration of the reading process itself.[2] Though concrete texts may declare themselves poetic, they rarely appear so, and their classification as poetry strains our understanding of that genre as well as some of our most basic ideas about language itself.

By looking at the development of concrete poetry within a cultural context loosely centered in France, we can gain insight into its relationship to the far more predominant abstract, contemporary poem. We shall see that in France, not withstanding the concretists' claims to having discovered an anti-establishment, "supernational" art form breaking through all language barriers, the concrete text arises as the logical consequence of a strong literary tradition, which it has, in turn, begun to color and shape.

French poetry begins to move simultaneously in the contrary anti-representational directions of extreme abstraction and concreteness in the late nineteenth century.[3] The symbolists threatened mimesis by their rejection of explicit allusion and exact description in favor of undefined symbols and vague suggestiveness. The aim of this aesthetic was to open the text to a wider range of interpretations. And the symbolists were also generally obsessed with the possibility of articulating the *correspondances* between the arts, a preoccupation manifest in Baudelaire's and Rimbaud's poetic practice of synesthesia and Verlaine's and René Ghil's identification of poetry with music.

It is in the works of Stéphane Mallarmé that these aesthetic principles converge in the most pronounced way, and in his work that the origins of contemporary abstraction and concretism can be found. His *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A throw of the dice will never abolish chance*, 1897) is unquestionably one of the most undecipherable and diversely interpreted nineteenth-century texts. It is also often cited as the first concrete poem.[4]

Setting the scene for a hypothetical event, a shipwreck of cosmic dimensions, *Un coup de dés* suggests that the fact of this catastrophe and the nature of its circumstances are without meaning for humanity—as all is determined by "chance." To quote one of its seminal phrases, in this text, "RIEN N' AURA EU LIEU QUE LE LIEU" ("NOTHING WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE BUT THE PLACE"). Despite its verbal complexity and heavy metaphysical overtones, the poem thus conveys a singularly "concrete" message. As in its avant-garde theme and uniquely convoluted style (exemplified by the circularity of the title), this text is revolutionary in its typographical arrangement.

As illustrated in figure 1, the verse is spread over the fold dividing two pages and dispersed toward the top, middle and bottom of the page. The white space normally delineating the broad margins of a poem is here assimilated within it. The text is also composed of several different sizes and styles of type.

As Mallarmé explains in his preface to the poem, these typographical innovations are meant to produce a number of effects: to offer a visual representation of the reading process by showing the natural fragmentation of thought; to serve as a logical and syntactic armature enabling the reader to understand what is of primary and secondary importance and to grasp multiple subordinated clauses; and finally, to provide the reader

with the necessary directives for its oral performance. In this respect, the text is said to function as a musical score. In recitation, the pattern of the verse on the page guides the reader's intonation while the size of print indicates the appropriate strength and dynamics of his voice. The arrangement of this poem has had an enormous impact around the world and throughout the twentieth century; its influence outside the French tradition is apparent in poets as diverse as F.T. Marinetti and Charles Olson.
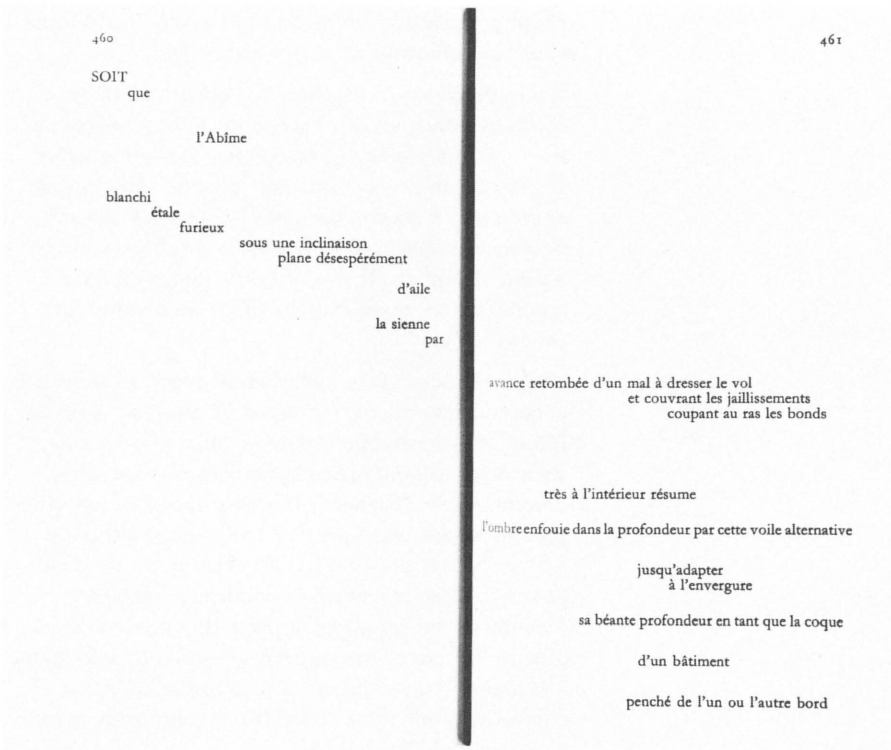
460

SOIT
que

l'Abîme

blanchi
étale
furieux
sous une inclinaison
plane désespérément

d'aile

la sienne
par

461

avance retombée d'un mal à dresser le vol
et couvrant les jaillissements
coupant au ras les bonds

très à l'intérieur résume

l'ombre enfouie dans la profondeur par cette voile alternative

jusqu'adapter
à l'envergure

sa béante profondeur en tant que la coque

d'un bâtiment

penché de l'un ou l'autre bord

Figure 1.
Stéphane Mallarmé,
a spread from *Un coup de dés*,
pp. 460-461 in Malarmé,
Stéphane, *Oeuvres complétes.*
Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

From Mallarmé's exploitation of typography and textual space in *Un coup de dés* there results a powerful demonstration of the simultaneous autonomy and interdependence of aesthetic forms. Verbal, figurative and musical symbolic systems converge within one and the same body of writing. It is important to underscore, however, that this accomplishment presents itself as only an effect of chance—of the all-pervasive arbitrariness marring the unity of language and preventing the creation of the ideal poem. The poem-as-logos would have to overcome two dualities inherent in language: the sign's internal split between the signifier and the signified (as immaterial concept) and that which

separates signs from their referents (the material objects to which they refer). It is the impossiblity of achieving such a unity that explains the fundamental ambivalence of Mallarmé's approach to poetry. As is evident in many of his poems, he sought to recreate through language nothingness and silence as well as the presence of the world. Like many of the later concretists, as much as by the beauty of poetry he was haunted by the beauty of its absence on the virginal white page.

In Mallarmé's paradoxical aesthetic lie the seeds of many modern efforts to purify the language of literature. The effort to write a poetry that speaks only of itself and thereby to narrow the gap between the poem and its referent is characteristic of a "classical" line of the twentieth-century French poets extending from Paul Valéry to Francis Ponge and Yves Bonnefoy. Curiously, the same drive toward pure, autonomous poetry motivates the experimentation of the concrete poets though by virtue of their similarity to other art forms, their poems are often hardly recognizable as such. We find a striking synthesis of these seemingly contradictory tendencies (toward literary abstraction and concreteness) in the works of one of the founders of the concrete movement, the Swiss poet, Eugen Gomringer.

"Silencio" (figure 2) is the liminary work of Gomringer's first collection of concrete poems, called *Konstellationen* in honor of Mallarmé.[5] Like Mallarmé, Gomringer wished to restore to words their original, expressive power. To release their latent energy, he wrote in such a way as to free them from the flattening effect of syntax. In "Silencio," unfettered by any phrase, the word "silence" stands out and reverberates through textual space. Owing to the symmetrical, mirroring composition, the graphic image of "silence" appears to extend in all directions. In an oral performance this would obviously translate into a rhythmic composition of echos.

Focused on the apparently critical nature of the concrete text's presentation, the reader inevitably wonders *how* it should be read: Silently or aloud; top to bottom; left to right? In "Silencio," as in most concrete poems, the loosening of syntactic ties forces us to participate actively and choose how to complete the poem. The reader does not function as a passive receiver of the work. The concrete text is, in Gomringer's words, a "thought-object" which we ourselves must determine how to use.[6]

The typographical arrangement of "Silencio" clearly
solicits something other than an ordinary reading—
the intellectual deciphering of a verbal code. And the
poem's semantic simplicity itself invites a more pro-
found sensory and psychological engagement. This
appeal to the subconscious does not, however, preclude
the communication of an idea. The wordcluster, though
free of syntactic relations, is far from devoid of con-
cepts. By its use of the word "silence" to express its
contrary—the absence of any word—the poem makes
a forceful statement about the nature of silence, about
the fact that silence, as the saying goes, is always heard.
Moreover, the repetition of the word adds hyperbole
to the truism suggesting that silence can be deafening.
As for the well-placed void at the center of the poem,
beyond its iconic value it constitutes an opening, a
point of entry and reference for the all-important read-
er. "Silencio" is, thus, not despite but because of its
verbal minimalism a complex, dense and perhaps even
a noisy poem.

silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio   silencio
silencio silencio silencio
silencio silencio silencio

Figure 2.
Eugen Gomringer,
"Silencio" 1954.
Reproduced with permission
of the publisher, Something
Else Press, Inc.

Such intricate semantic play is not necessarily charac-
teristic of all concrete poetry. Indeed, as the concrete
value of a text becomes increasingly exploited, its
semantic richness seems difficult to sustain. An even-
tual subordination of concept to form (preceding, of
course, the ultimate abandonment of textual form
itself) is suggested by the cyclical evolution of concrete
poetry in France.

One of the constant aims of concrete poets has been to detach their works from the analytical structure that language has traditionally imposed on thought. This desire was clearly expressed by the early twentieth-century poet Guillaume Apollinaire, whose *Calligrammes* (1918) are among the rare visual texts well-known to French readers.[7] In 1917, Apollinaire wrote: "Man is in search of a new language....We must learn to understand synthetico-ideographically rather than analytico-discursively."[8]

Led by Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, the poets of Dada put this theoretical rejection of the essence of modern European languages into practice. They set out to destroy European culture and values (which they themselves viewed as destructive) and to this end, leveled a heavy attack on their most powerful instruments: European languages and literatures. Not surprisingly, several of the Dadaists—Ball, Christian Morgenstern and others—engaged in the earliest known modern attempts to create poetry without words.

Although the Dadaists produced relatively few visual texts, their experimentation realized many of the ideals of the concrete movement. They closed the gap between the literary text and its referents—the infinite phenomena of the world—by stripping poetry down to its most rudimentary elements (letters or phonemes) and by placing the emphasis on the creative process rather than on the finished and therefore necessarily imperfect work. And in renouncing the very attempt at preserving either the forms of or ideology behind their work, the Dadaists cleared the path for other cycles of textual exploitation, reduction and abandonment—a pattern clearly discernible in the history of the concrete aesthetic.

One such cycle begins with the work of Isodore Isou, who went to Paris during the 1940s to found the Lettrist movement. Like some of his predecessors in Dada, Isou argued for the reduction of the word as poetic unit to the letter. But he saw this reduction as a constructive, rather than a destructive, gesture. His positive attitude toward formal experimentation seems to have offered concrete poetry a fresh start. While the radical stance of Dada denied the possibility of a continuing tradition, the "lettrist" movement expanded to incorporate many types of visual and sound poetry, and it continues to be practiced today. Isou himself, however, moved away from his initially-stated doctrine to advance more radical poetic theories, most of which presume the impossibility of the verbal text as an embodiment of the poem. In the
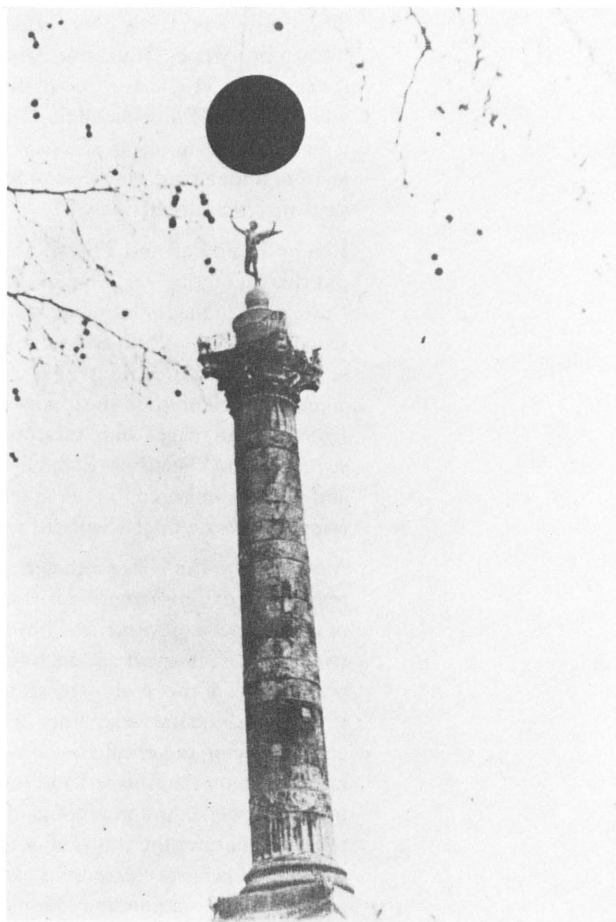
Figure 3.
Julien Blaine, "Julien
Blaine the i-Constructor."
Excerpt from *Concrete Poety in
France*, p. 300, © 1981, by
David W. Seaman, reprinted
courtesy of UMI Research
Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Isou's trajectory away from the text is far from excep-
tional. Several concretists of the 1960s eventually
vowed to abondon all attempts to create literature in
favor of acting directly upon the world. In his preface
to *The Last Novel in The World*, Henri Chopin affirms
that after his book there will be no more "writing,
concrete poems, lettrism, or Chatter."[10] Many of Jean-
François Bory's pieces, such as "veux," "the world is
dead" and the volume, *Post-Scriptum*, show a gradual
annihilation of the text.[11] Though Julien Blaine's piece,
"Julien Blaine the i-Constructor" (figure 3), makes its
point by retaining an element of the letter, it is not
so much a poem as a poetic operation on the world. It
is the dot that draws our attention to the "I"—an
extratextual sign which might otherwise have gone

unseen—articulating the identity-in-difference of world and text.[12]

Despite its impulse toward negation, concrete poetry, like abstract and representational poetry, continues to be written. While none of these appears in danger of extinction, remarkable in contemporary poetry is the increasing evidence that a fundamentally similar reduction of language's functions occurs in the two seemingly antithetical types. Each reduces the traditional complexity of the linguistic sign—as locus allying signifier, signifed and referent—in an attempt to eradicate the difference between the text and other phenomena in the world.

Concrete poetry aspires to silence the otherness of the world by emphasizing primarily the material existence of the signifier. Thus, at its radical extreme, the concrete poetic perceives any image, object or action in the world as a viable substitute for the verbal text. While this tends to limit the range of *what* poetry can express, it virtually explodes all constraints as to *how* it can express.

The seemingly more traditional but in fact equally radical abstract approach relies upon a converse operation which silences the otherness of the world by emphasizing the unlimited, reflexive play of meaning within the text. At its radical extreme, this poetic treats the text as a viable substitute for the world. For obvious reasons this perspective suits the natural bias of poets, whose chosen activity is to write. Moreover, it has gained compelling extrinsic (i.e., other than aesthetic) justification in current philosophical theory—in particular, through Jacques Derrida's argument that presence itself is fundamentally structured as a writing.[13] Though the difference between these perspectives has generally produced antithetical works, the increasing importance of visual elements in highly complex and semantically circular texts suggests a movement toward reconciliation and the development of a heterogeneous type of poem.

A juxtaposition of texts simultaneously concrete and abstract yet highly disparate in their approaches to writing in-relation-to (as opposed to representing) their common object will illustrate this point: "Le soleil placé en abîme" ("The Sun Placed in Abyss") by Francis Ponge and two visual "Soleil" texts by the concrete poets Pierre and Ilse Garnier.

The visual aspect of Ponge's poem is significant. There is clearly a concrete aspect to the arrangement of the passage :

LE SOLEIL SE LEVANT SUR LA LITTÉRATURE

QUE LE SOLEIL À L'HORIZON DU TEXTE SE
MONTRE ENFIN COMME ON LE VOIT ICI POUR LA
PREMIÈRE FOIS EN LITTÉRATURE SOUS LES
ESPÈCES DE SON NOM INCORPORÉ DANS LA
PREMIÈRE LIGNE DE FAÇON QU'IL SEMBLE
S'ELEVER PEU À PEU QUOIQUE À L'INTÉRIEUR
TOUJOURS DE LA JUSTIFICATION POUR PARAÎTRE
BRILLER BIENTÔT EN HAUT ET À GAUCHE DE LA
PAGE DONT IL FAIT L'OBJET...[14]

The Sun Rising Upon Literature
Let the sun on the horizon of the text show itself at last
as we see it here for the first time in literature in the
form of its name incorporated in the first line such that
it seems to rise little by little though still within the
justification so as to appear to soon shine at the top
and to the left of the page whose object it is...

The typographical placement of the subtitle "THE
SUN RISING UPON LITERATURE" and the underlying
comments upon its placement result in the creation
of an iconic or, in a loose sense, performative poem.
Because it refers not to the rising sun, but to its coun-
terpart within the text, the passage constitutes what it
represents; it actually is what it describes. Semantic
reflexivity is characteristic of Ponge's writing. Though
many of his poems appear to treat concrete objects
in the world, they do not. What they really treat are,
to use Ponge's term, *objeux* ("objests," a play on words
combining object and jest), the reflections of objects
in language.

The title of this poem, "Le soleil placé en abîme," is
an allusion to the rhetorical figure that it applies, *the
mise en abîme* (placement in abyss), which creates an in-
finite distancing of the represented object through its
own layers of representations. It is also a philosophical
statement about the inaccessibility of the sun as origin
of language and life.

Though they may engender the act of writing, un-
written sense-perceived objects are, for Ponge, nec-
essarily extrinsic to literary texts. Indeed, as is artic-
ulated in the closing lines of this poem, their direct
reflection within the text entails an eclipse and hard-
ening of the poetic vision and the subsequent death
of the poem:

Le Soleil était entré dans le miroir.
La vérité ne s'y vit plus.
Aussitôt éblouie et bientôt cuite,
coagulée comme un oeuf.

The sun had entered into the mirror. The truth was
no longer seen there. Immediately blinded and soon
cooked, coagulated like an egg.

(Translated by the author.)

Pierre Garnier, founder of "spatialisme" and editor of
several issues of *Les Lettres*, is one of the best-known
French concrete poets. He has produced much exper-
imental poetry both visual and auditory, and even sem-
antic, where, as Garnier describes it, the text functions
merely as a signpost on the road to the experience of
the poem. Thus while Garnier carries the art of con-
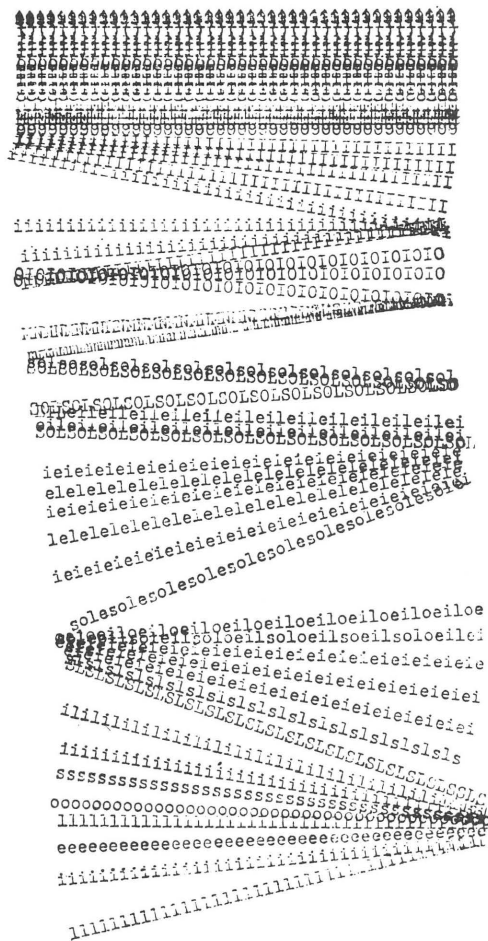crete poetry as far as it can go, like the Dadaists, he is

Figure 4.
Ilse and Pierre Garnier,
"Extension 2" 1964.
Reproduced with permis-
sion of the publisher,
Something Else Press, Inc.

ever ready to abandon its particular forms. His simultaneous preoccupation with and disregard for the specificity of linguistic material can be seen in two 1964 "sun" poems: "Extension classique 2" and "SOLEIL," a text "visualized" (rather than illustrated) by the artist Theo Kerg.

As its title suggests, "Extension 2" (figure 4) is not a literary representation of the sun.[15] Nor is it a verbal expansion on the word *sun's* connotations or semes. Rather it is an extension of its letters, its graphic components. Unlike Ponge's poem, which plays primarily on the vertiginous thickness of meaning associated with the signified "sun," Garnier shows how the signifier "sun," like the referent "sun," proliferates verbal material, engendering other signs. He explains this in the accompanying statement. In *Once Again*, Jean-François Bory, who cites this poem as the "ultimate degree attained by visual poetry," comments on the functional link between the text and the actual sun. "*Here*, by the transformation of the word sun (soleil) into its concrete components, the word becomes, as it was in the first age, a living organism in space."[16] The function of this text (and according to Garnier that of concrete poetry in general) is to reveal the word as an active presence in the universe—a presence of its own origin and end.

But for Garnier, as for a long and highly diverse line of poets and religious and philosophical thinkers, the presence of the word is curiously non-specific, or at least not specifically linguistic. This becomes clear in "SOLEIL" (figure 5).[17]

The title page reads "SOLEIL poem by Pierre Garnier visualized lithographically by Theo Kerg." One might be thus led to read the word "soleil" as the poem and the other components as commentary or exegesis and illustration. But a reading of the text shows that from Garnier's perspective the word "SOLEIL" is not the poem. The poem is also the lithograph and whatever may become present to the senses of the reader:

SOLEIL

mot composé sur la pierre, virant autour de son
centre de gravité O, vibrant inlassablement, intensé-
ment, en profondeur et en surface, éclatant en mille
fragments SOLEIL, déchirant l'espace, reculant la
craquelante couche terrestre, les fuyants ténèbres.
l'espace est aboli, le temps est aboli, remplacés par
une succession d'intensités du mot spatial :

SOLEIL

la poésie n'est plus dans la poussière des bibliothèques.
plus que jamais elle est dans la publicité, la télé, le film
de nos yeux, dans les disques et la radio de nos oreilles,
dans notre bouche, dans nos mains. on ne l'illustre plus,
on ne l'embaume plus, on la rend présente. elle prend
possession de nous, entièrement, autrement.

théo kerg crée actuellement, avec des textes de pierre garnier, un
livre de poèmes tactilistes, poèmes visibles, poèmes spatiaux, qu'il
présentera sous des formes inattendues, nouvelles, qui remontent
aux sources.

voici ➡

SOLEIL

hommage à pierre garnier, reproduction d'une litho en couleur de
théo kerg. format 72×53 cm. créée en 1964. exposée pour la première
fois à l'exposition annuelle du trait.au musée d'art moderne
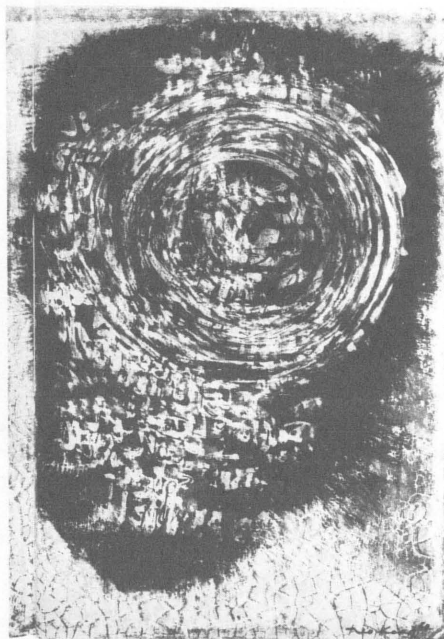de paris. du 16 avril au 10 mai.

Figure 5.
Pierre Garrier,
"SOLEIL."Visualized
lithographically by
Theo Kerg.
By permission of Clef
redacteur de la revue *Les
Lettres* aux Edition Andre
Silvarie 20, rue Domat,
75005-Paris.

SUN

"word composed upon stone, revolving around its
center of gravity O, vibrating tirelessly, intensely,
in depth and on the surface, exploding in a thousand
fragments SUN, ripping space, pushing back
the crackling earthly crust, the fleeing shadows.
space is abolished, time is abolished, replaced by
a succession of intensities of the spatial word:

SUN

poetry is no longer in the dust of libraries more than ever
it is in the advertisement, the television, the film
of our eyes, in the records and the radio of our ears,
in our mouth, in our hands. It is no longer illustrated,
no longer embalmed, it is rendered present. it takes
possession of us, completely, in a different way.

The concrete poem is thus no longer a monument to
language, becoming rather *whatever* the reader be-
holds—the reader whom Garnier has elsewhere called
"this sun, at the ideal center of the poem."[18] Its poet-
icity is gained with its presence through the act of
perception.

As the exchange between objects perceived and per-
ception has always been fundamental to writing and to
reading, it is not surprising that re-presentations of this

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reflexive process have become equally central to concrete and abstract poetry. To this reader, the blinding solidification of Garnier's text in Theo Kerg's "visualisation" provides the perfect concrete closure for Ponge's abstract poem. Another sun has entered a mirror coagulating its signified like an egg.

Endnotes

1   In the strictest sense, "concrete poetry" applies to the experimental visual texts of an international movement co-founded in the 1950s by Eugen Gomringer in Switzerland and the Noigandres group in Brazil. In their "pilot-plan for Concrete poetry," the Brazilian poets vaguely defined their work as productive of a "tension of word-objects in the time-space continuum," as creating a specifically linguistic ambiance, a "verbalvocovisual" world fusing the advantages of verbal and non-verbal communication. Owing perhaps to the subsequent increase of many radically new shapes and forms of poetry and in manifestos embracing the fundamental principles of the movement, the term "concrete" was then generally adopted by anthologies and critical studies referring to many types of visual works. Since the 1960s, concrete poetry has become a truly international movement, with a lively interchange of ideas around the world and active practitioners wherever poetry is being written. "Plan-pilote pour la poésie concreté," by Decio Pignatari; and Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, in LES LETTRES , no. 31 (1963), 15-17.

2   Two examples of analyses that treat concrete poetry as structurally analogous to linear verse are Janet Larsen McHughes' "The Poesis of Space: Prosodic Structures in Concrete Poetry" (in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, volume 63 [April 1977}, 168-179) and Aaron Marcus' "An Introduction to the Visual Syntax of Concrete Poetry" (in *Visible Language*, VIII 4 {Autumn 1974}, 333-360). McHughes convincingly demonstrates how traditional "poetic principles with a temporal base" are implemented in concrete poetry "in the added dimension of space" (169). Her analyses of poems are useful and interesting. In constructing her argument, she seems frequently forced, however, to subordinate the visual aspects of poems to their linguistic aspects (e.g., p.174) that is, to perform a critical subordination that concrete poetry implicitly denies and to make highly subjective decisions regarding the order of poems (e.g., p. 175) without recognizing that such subjective intervention by the reader in the ordering of poems sharply distinguishes concrete poetry from linear verse (in which it is not required). Similarly, Marcus' typology and diagrams of the visual structures of concrete poetry provide insight into the analyzed poems, but his structuralist approach underplays, in my view, the flexibility inherent in their organization and does not account (as he himself recognizes) for the most radical forms of concrete poetry, which leave behind traditional poetry's patterns of visual significance and which finally tend to abandon, as I shall argue, the visual-verbal text itself.

3   As David Seaman has shown in his excellent historical study, *Concrete Poetry in France* (a work upon which the research and documentation of this essay often depend), there were, of course, previous visual verse forms in France as in other countries—for example, the acrostic poems of Villon or Rabelais's "Dive Bouteille." David W. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France,* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981.)

4   Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* in *Oeuvres comptétes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 457-477.

5   Eugen Gomringer, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* Ed. Emmet Williams (New York: Something Else Press, Inc., 1967). Previously published in *die konstellationen* (Frauenfeld, Eugen Gomringer Press, 1963.)

6   Eugen Gomringer in "Poésie concrète—panorama," *Les Lettres*, no. 32 (1964), 8.

7   Guillaume Apollinaire. *Calligrammes* (Paris: Club du meilleur livre, 1955.)

8   Guillaume Apollinaire, in *Le Guetteur mélancolique*. Ed. André Salmon (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 144. Reference cited in David W. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France*.

9   See Jean-Paul Curtay's article, "Lettrism, Abstract Poetry, Mouth Symbols, and More..." in *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 12 (1983), 81-89.

10 Henri Chopin, *Le dernier roman du monde* (Belgium: Cyanuur, 1970.) Reference cited in David W. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France*.

11 Jean-François Bory. "Veux" in *Anthology of Concretism* Ed. EugeneWildman (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1969.) "The World is Dead" in *Once Again* Trans. Lee Hildreth. (New York: New Directions, 1968.) *Post-Scriptum*. Ed. Eric Losfeld (1970). Reference cited in David W. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France*.

12 Julien Blaine. *Cette carte et autres* (Paris: Approaches, 1968). Reference cited in David W. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France*.

13 Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.)

14 Francis Ponge. *Pièces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 164-165.

15 Ilse and Pierre Garnier, in *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*.

16 Jean-François Bory. *Once Again*, 28-29.

17 Pierre Garnier in *Les Lettres*. No. 32 (1964).

18 "La poésie visuelle exige du lecteur une position fixe et une stabilité végétale. Ce soleil, au centre idéal du poème, éclaire en retenant." Pierre Garnier in *Les Lettres*. No. 30 (1963), 17.

It is common for modern French verse to be printed without punctuation. This raises the question of whether the rhythms of speech, as denoted by the line endings of verse, correspond redundantly to the syntactic and semantic patterns of the ideas expressed, as normally denoted by other punctuation. It is argued that in the verse writings of Stéphane Mallarmé, the suppression of normal punctation, resulting in irresoluble ambiguities or in obscurities resolved only later in the text, obliges the reader to be especially conscious of his usual expectation of syntactic and semantic guidance and so requires him to concentrate to an exceptional degree on the tension between the physical activity of speech and the related ideational activity. In the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, on the contrary, the effect of omitting punctuation is to ensure that the reader can recognize simultaneously the varied sense perceptions related by the poet and to emphasize the immediately perceptible energetic rhythm of speech.

R. A. York

Mallarmé and Apollinaire: The Unpunctuated Text

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Modern French poetry is, very frequently, printed without punctuation. The typical poem consists, to the first glance at least, of a series of words arranged across the page in lines, which sometimes start with upper case letters but without the array of commas, full stops and semicolons which usually promise articulation and comprehensible sequence. The phenomenon is not, in itself, totally alien to English readers since there are considerable passages in T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams and other modernist poets in which punctuation is at least sparse and sometimes totally absent. What is startling is the normality of this style of presentation of the printed page and the fact that the assumption is obviously widespread in France that being poetic somehow entails an abandonment of the normal courtesy towards the reader of guidance on sentence and phrase structure of the sort afforded by punctuation.

The reading of French verse, it seems—at least as the reader first casts his eye on the page of a volume of poetry or a poetic magazine—is meant to be an encounter with words, with words in themselves and not words ordered into an act of continuous communication. If this is indeed the aim, it is a fairly obviously perverse one; one can hardly conceive what words could be outside the

frame of comprehension and interpretation consti-
tuted by the repertoire of possible acts of communica-
tion. At most, it might seem, authors might be aiming
at an impoverishment of language—symbolized, per-
haps, by the austere reduction of the shapes on the
page to the letters alone, unattended by their retinue
of dots. They might be aiming, that is, at a reduction
of language to lists of words. These words might, of
course, be suggestive, emotionally fraught or semanti-
cally rich. Such an attitude would certainly be in keep-
ing with a reverence for the word (or, quite often,
the Word—since capitals have not quite lost their au-
thority in France) which has certainly been both quite
common and quite serious and productive in the
aesthetics of symbolist and post-symbolist poetry; but
it would express this reverence only at the cost of
depriving the word of its roots in communication, by
making the naming relationship (the word as label
or picture of important entities) paramount or proto-
typical in a way which would be quite untrue to our
daily experience of the continuity of language as we
perceive it not least in the onward motion of the eye in
reading.

An important exception ought to be noted at this stage:
it is the poem in prose, a genre much more widely
practiced in France than in the English-speaking
countries. These prose poems normally are punctuat-
ed though even here there are many exceptions, such
as Jacques Roubaud's "ε". In other words, for many
French people now, division into lines of verse is
an alternative to the normal range of punctuation, not
a complement to it. This may make the situation seem
even stranger. Punctuation is an indication, primarily
one assumes, of syntactic form; line division is an indi-
cation, presumably, of rhythmic form (and one may
need to think here of whether we are dealing with a
rhythm of reading or a rhythm of imitated speech).
So how can one be substituted for the other? In what
sense can they be treated as equivalents? But those
questions can be put another way: In what sense can
the impulses of the eye that moves in reading or of
the voice that breathes in speech be equivalent to the
divisions and interrelations of ideas and of speech acts?

Put that way, the question looks a little less odd. It
even starts to suggest the beginning of an answer, or
at least a reason why the question might be an impor-
tant one. The activity of speaking—or of reading—is
a physical one: the layout of the verse page, with its
constant reminder of the need to move the eye back in

order to start on a new word group, demonstrates this physicality and insists on the renewed acts of energy that communication calls for. But communicative activity is also mental: it involves handling of ideas, feelings, deductions and implications. And yet there is only one activity here: Mental and physical are somehow part of the same process. Our dualistic framework of understanding may make it difficult for us to grasp this; but verse, it seems, makes it tangible.

It is beginning to seem, then, that the abnormal, even eccentric, abstention from punctuation practiced by many French poets may have something to do with the way ideas relate to utterance. This thesis—which as we have formulated it so far is still vague and un-informative—will be tested and refined in the follow-ing pages by reference to two poets of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). Of these, it is certainly Apollinaire who bears the major responsibility for the death of punc-tuation. The story has often been told of how, on receiving the proofs of his first major collection, *Alcools* (1913), he crossed out all the punctuation which he had previously included. "As far as punctuation is concerned," he explained to a friend, "I suppressed it only because I thought it useless and it is in fact, the rhythm itself and the shape of the lines (la coupe des vers) that is the real punctuation and no other is needed" (A, 1040).[1] The principle, we note, extends to the letter itself, curiously; more importantly, the concern with rhythm and verse division confirms the conclusions we have been inclining towards—but still leaves much to be explained.

Apollinaire is the pioneer of the total suppression of punctuation; but he has predecessors, as has often been pointed out, and the most important of them is Mallarmé. Mallarmé similarly believed that verse can do without punctuation because it "has the privilege of offering, without this typographical artifice, the vocal rest which measures force (élan)" (M, 407). His practice, however, is not quite as radical as this sug-gests. Using in his early verse a full range of punc-tuation (albeit sometimes rather oddly), he reduces it in the course of his poetic career until in many of his late works nothing survives but the final full stop. This itself is significant of a major distinction from Apollinaire's later practice. Mallarmé does not simply adopt the convention of not punctuating; he main-tains, largely, the convention of punctuating but com-poses his poems in such a way that no punctuation is

called for until that very final stop. (Though the sense of "called for" here may need some reflection, given that there certainly do appear to be points in some of his poems where stops or other end punctuation might well have been expected but do not appear.) The result should be that the stop asserts that the poem really is ended. This is, of course, redundant since the blank at the end of the page often asserts it anyway—and all the more conspicuously given the very high proportion of white space which strikes the eye on approaching a page of Mallarmé—but the redundancy is an emphatic and deliberate one. The aim of poems, Mallarmé said once in a characteristically teasing spirit, is to justify silence (M,387); the silence that follows a poem, the blanks round it, are meaningful because they relate to a completed act. They differ, that is, from the silences or blanks that occur accidentally, without reference to a specific act of communication (and one of the obsessions of Mallarmé's life was to eliminate accident). Thus, the redundant full stop is a claim to completion and so to justification.

These two poets, then, have different conventions and achieve different effects through them: What do the two of them tell us about the role of rhythm, pauses, articulation and syntactic hierarchy in poems? Both reduce the normal double system of poetic articulation to a single one. Reading a poem with traditional punctuation, our eye scans ahead to find what pattern of rhythm and logic we should be expecting and should be fitting the words into as we proceed; and we are aware, both during this process and also as we actually reach the specific point in the sentence, of the line endings marking a new impulse of sound or a new group for the eye—and of the stops, commas, question marks and the like indicating how the sentence is put together: whether it is declarative, interrogative or exclamatory, how long the sentence is, how many subdivisions it has, and other such structural guides. Often, of course, the two can coincide, the line end also being a syntactic unit and marked as such by punctuation; but they certainly need not, and a considerable part of the interest of poetry is probably given by the interplay of the two systems. Mallarmé and Apollinaire, to varying extents, suppress the marking of syntax which contributes significantly to this interest. Why? What is gained by the suppression? Why do they regard a single system as (more or less) sufficient?

In Apollinaire (as our quotation from his letter already indicates), there certainly is a sense that the single

system really is sufficient. The rhythm of speech is, it seems, enough; the vitality of the poet, the force of his utterance, the inventiveness and effectiveness of his images, the lucidity of his statements are enough to communicate to the reader the sense of a personality, of the fictive presence of a speaker who is an occasion for pathos, entertainment, admiration, respect. Apollinaire, in Derridean terms, is logocentric; he aims to create the sense of a unified and persuasive utterance.

The situation is (of course) not quite so straightforward, and we shall be considering later what limitations there are to this sense of fullness. But we can start by contrasting it with the procedures of Mallarmé, who presents the suppression of punctuation as something of a sacrifice, as an ascesis. Far from a triumphant simplification of language, the loss of easily visible syntactic articulation is an ordeal; Mallarmé's work shows by implication that the interplay of rhythm and syntax is normal and positive, and the loss of one side of this interplay makes for effort, difficulty, uncertainty on the part of the reader. The point is relevant to his thematic concerns and to the whole form of his poetry; his poems often enact a difficult discovery of certainty (a revelation of the ideal or an acceptance of the known), and the sudden emergence of clarity from obscurity, disorder or absence that the reader of the poems himself experiences is an image of what for the author is obviously a privileged moment, the moment of unhesitant knowledge. The background has to be that of disorder or of absence; the punctuation signs are one thing of which we feel the absence, rather as we might feel the absence of expected guidance in a labyrinth. It is the absence, perhaps, in the last resort, of the author we expect: the helpful, rational, considerate author who tells us what his message is going to be like; the impersonality of Mallarmé is manifest in part through this technique. But another way of looking at it would be to say that we do get a view of the personality of the author, after all; only it is an unexpected personality, a malicious, puzzling personality that escapes from the set social roles of the author-reader relationship.

Be that as it may, Mallarmé is relying on a positive act of reading to a very large extent; the reader is obliged to interpret very actively, possibly even to supply missing bits of the text (at least on the level of commas or question marks), to read himself into the text, so to speak. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that if a group of readers were asked to punctuate a poem by Mallarmé and another group a poem by Apollinaire, the Apollinaire group would produce nearly identical results but the

Mallarmé readers would diverge widely; and that this would be in part a test of literary and linguistic competence (some of the Mallarmé answers might be wrong) but also a test of personal set towards the poem or towards poetry as such. If Apollinaire is centered in personal expression and logocentric, Mallarmé is based in a questioning of reading and is, if one dare use the word, logofugal. Apollinaire depends on the continuity of his energy; Mallarmé depends on the multiplicity of connections and tensions that lie within his writing.

How precisely does this tendency manifest itself in Mallarmé? It creates two major kinds of communicative effect: irresoluble ambiguities, and ambiguities or false connections that operate for a few words but are then seen to be wrong and corrected by the reader (what are known in linguistics as "garden paths," as in "Throw Mamma from the Train").[2] He thus produces passages where for an appreciable time the reader can see no word or phrase connections in which he can feel any confidence, so that he is forced to hold the chain of words in his mind together with all their *potential* connections without losing what the poet called their "mobility of principle" (M,386). Mobility, for Mallarmé, is the essence of the word; the fixed order of the syntagm threatens it, but the verse form should preserve it.

The first of these communicative effects, the irresoluble ambiguity, appears quite often in the case of phrases which may refer either forward or back (and the problem is exacerbated by Mallarmé's liking for unusual word order in which complements and objects are delayed to well after their normal positions). Instances occur in the first poem which appears in the collected works with minimal punctuation, the "Cantique de Saint Jean" from the uncompleted verse play *Hérodiade* (M,49). This canticle recounts the feelings of Saint John the Baptist as he waits to be decapitated.

Le soleil que sa halte
Surnaturelle exalte
Aussitôt redescend
Incandescent

Je sens comme aux vertèbres
S'éployer des ténèbres
Toutes dans un frisson
A l'unisson

The sun, exalted by its
supernatural arrest, immediately
descends again, incandescent;
I feel, as it were, darkness
unfolding along my backbone,
all trembling in unison.

Is this the equivalent of "the sun...descends again, in-
candescent"? This seems the most obvious reading.
But it has drawbacks. For one thing, it requires us to
add a full stop or other final sign after "Incandescent."
For another, Mallarmé is not always given to the most
obvious combination. So we might think of a full
stop before "Incandescent", giving "Incandescent, I
feel...darkness," which is possibly a more poetic con-
ception than the first. (One notes, incidentally, that it
is the line end that most often provokes the sense
that a punctuation mark might have been used: once
again the line is an alternative to punctuating.) Or what
about stanzas three and four:

Et ma tête surgie
Solitaire vigie
Dans les vols triomphaux
 De cette faux

Comme rupture franche
Plutôt refoule ou tranche
Les anciens désaccords
 Avec le corps

And my head, rising as a
solitary watchman in the
triumphant flights of this
scythe, as a clear break,
rather represses or cuts
off its former disharmony
with the body.

Has the head "risen...like a frank breaking off" (with
comma after "franche") or does it (with comma after
"faux") "like a frank breaking off suppress or cut away
the discords"? The difference, admittedly, is probably
secondary. Either way, the rising of the severed head is,
ultimately, a denial of any duality of mind and body.
But the emphasis is quite different: on the first reading,
the frankness is an assertion of acceptance of the decapi-
tation; on the second, it is an expression of determination
in the suppression of division. (There is even a third
reading, which is why the difference of sense was said to
be "*probably* secondary": the decapitation might suppress

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"the discords as breaking off," and here the meaning and the balance of feeling have changed quite a lot.) What is sure in all this is that the reader is presented with a haze of more or less convergent meanings and not with *a* reading. If, as readers no doubt usually do, he hopes for clarity and for a ground on which he can confidently place the progression of the text, he will be frustrated—and perhaps one of Mallarmé's achievements is to create a poetics of frustration.

A further ambiguity that is constituted by the abolition of punctuation is the inability to distinguish between defining and non-defining relatives. In the first stanza quoted, the relative clause referring to the sun can obviously only be non-defining. (There is only one sun; we can't be reading about that particular sun which is exalted by its supernatural halting, as opposed to the others—which is what the absence of commas before and after the clause would usually mean.) And even though we realize this on reflection, it may be quite difficult to read the line with the proper intonation (rise on "soleil," pause and fall for the relative); we may be inclined to read the whole of the first line as a rhythmic group rising to "halte" (as the sun has no doubt risen to a halt). If we do it this way, the line is not yet meaningful; the tension and hesitancy of the poem is enacted in our performance of it. If we do it the correct way, the line contains at least a meaningful unit ("le soleil"), but we may feel uneasy about having introduced a spectral comma and a real pause. What all this suggests is something quite radical: that the poem resists being read aloud. In view of the traditional treatment of poetry as *audible* (e.g., in the commonplace references to poems as "song"), a genuinely silent poem is a novelty and one that creates a slightly uncanny sense of restraint.

A more real ambiguity, perhaps, lies in the sonnet in memory of Wagner (M,71). In it, the silence of mourning is laying a pall over

le mobilier
Que doit un tassement du principal pilier
Précipiter...

the furniture which
a collapse of the
chief pillar is to bring
down...

on, that is—if we follow a strict reading of the punctuation—that particular furniture which is to be overthrown by the composer's death, and on no other. Or might it be affecting the furniture in general, of which Mallarmé comments—omitting a comma after "mobilier"—that it is all about to be overthrown? Quibbling about the scale of the furniture affected by the loss of genius may appear disproportionate; but it isn't quite (not quite: some sense of absurdity or futility may well attach to Mallarmé's very discreetly ironic treatment of a rival art). The poem appears to adopt a grandiose, almost pretentious myth of art and deprivation; eliding the distinction between specific and general contributes to that myth—until the attentive reader notices what's been done. And the oddity of punctuation should so alert him; there is discomfort here, and it matters.

A comparable case lies in the role of certain adjectives following nouns: Are they defining terms or—what would normally be shown by commas—mere epithets? Does the opening phrase of the tribute to Wagner refer to a silence which is conceived of as essentially funereal, as the punctuation would imply ("Le silence déjà funèbre") or—assuming a suppressed comma after the noun—to a silence of which the existence is presupposed, which is the starting point of the poem but of which the poet then chooses to comment that it is funereal? If the difference doesn't matter, as Mallarmé's failure to mark it might seem to indicate, then the difference between what already exists and what is identified by the speaker doesn't matter either, and existence appears to be a function of being named. A whole conception of symbolism would assert that that is in fact the case, that language is a record of the active and creative mind and not of exterior reality; and Mallarmé may not be averse to a suggestion of that sort. But he has made it conspicuous since the line read without intercalated punctuation is slightly odd, overheavy, containing too many rhythmic points for the meter and too many kinds of information—auditory, temporal, tactile—for prompt assimilation. (What especially is implied by that "déjà"? Was the "moiré" there before the death? Has the death merely revealed some potential of mourning that pre-existed it? Is death not an event in the full sense at all?)

"Garden paths" are common in Mallarmé's writing and contribute to much of its fascination, to the reader's sense of a constant lure and of a constant discovery of possible but fantastic connections of words and concepts. These may be, one has to recognize, actually quite obviously wrong, for instance on grounds of gender.

When Mallarmé says in "La Chevelure…"(M,53) that a woman

Accomplit par son chef fulgurante l'exploit

glowing, achieves by her head the exploit

> we may be tempted to think that it is the head ("le chef") that is glowing. "Fulgurante" occupies the slot next to "chef," exactly where we should expect a qualifying adjective, and the semantic link would be perfect: the "chef" is characterised above all by its hair, the "chevelure" of the title, which is flame-like, as we already know, and so glows. But "chef" is masculine and "fulgurante" is feminine; it can only refer to the woman herself, and in a normally punctuated text would have been enclosed between commas. So the illusion is a momentary one; but it may have done something to tempt the reader into identifying a person with her hair—to confusing selfhood with beauty—and it may have warned him of the danger of doing so and given a little training in syntactic and moral discrimination.

> Other confusions can take longer to dispel. Stanza four of the "Cantique de Saint Jean," we recall, announces of the severed head that it

Plutôt refoule ou tranche
Les anciens désaccords
Avec le corps

rather represses or cuts off
its former disharmony with the body

> Stanza five apparently starts with a relative clause formulating an attitude towards the body:

Qu'elle de jeûnes ivre
S'opiniâtre à suivre
En quelque bond hagard
  Son pur regard

than, intoxicated with fasting, obstinately
following its pure gaze in some haggard leap

> Things have gone wrong. If the "que" is in fact the relative pronoun "which," referring to the body, so that the rest of the clause states that the head still longs for physical satisfaction, of which it has been deprived during life (the reunion of body and spirit thus taking the form of an assertion of the sensual), then it must be the object of the clause. But what is the "pur regard" doing in this case? In fact, it has to be the object of "suivre." This is a pleasing thing to discover since we

now have a use for the "plutôt" in the previous stanza, which we have not yet parsed: the sentence is saying that the head rather suppresses discord *than* ("que") follows the eye ("regard"). The reader alternates between physical and spiritual, as Saint John the Baptist perhaps does, as the poet certainly does; the reader discovers for himself the links of thought that are tempting and interesting, and he discovers the heroically strained syntactic discipline through which Mallarmé controls them.

The "plutôt" here, which cannot be given a syntactic function until several lines after it appears, is one sign of the "suspensive" quality of Mallarmé's syntax. A fuller example is the elegant sonnet of friendship and acceptance of time, "Dame, sans trop d'ardeur" (M,60), ("Lady, without too much ardor"). I quote the second quatrain:

Oui sans ces crises de rosée et gentiment
Ni brise quoique, avec, le ciel orageux passe
Jalouse d'apporter je ne sais quel espace
Au simple jour le jour très vrai du sentiment.

Yes, without these crises
of dew, and gently, and
without any breeze,
although the stormy sky
passes over it, eager to bring
some space, to bring to mere daylight
the very true day of feeling.

The opening "oui" here is already an obstacle: the poet has used in the previous line the archaic ver "ouir" ("to hear"), and "oui" might be its past participle. We quite soon realize that it can't be and that it must be the affirmative "yes"; we would have realized at once with a comma after the word. We are halted again by the "Ni" in the second line: it may be the beginning of the pair "ni...ni" ("neither...nor"), but the second "ni" never comes and so it obviously must follow on "sans" ("without")—from which it is, however, separated by the parenthetic "et gentiment," which is not marked in any way as a parenthesis. What does "jalouse" refer to? A comma after "passe" would have made it clear that it can only refer to the lady addressed.

The last two lines depend on a nice concision: she is eager to bring some space and to bring the light of feeling to mere, literal daylight. The lack of punctuation at the end of the third line makes that relationship

difficult to sort out and tempts us to look for some way the space could be brought to the mere day. But the line break has, nevertheless, led us to read the phrase about the two kinds of daylight as a single group— supported, of course, by the symmetry of the line, and both supported and confused by the half-presence of the idiom "au jour le jour"("from day to day"), the pertinence of which is not immediately apparent but which seems to relate to the general suggestion in the poem of an acceptance of age and continuity. So what has most crucially happened, perhaps, is that we have been invited to read the lines separately as well as part of an ongoing sentence; the line, that is, becomes a unit of major importance even though it may be difficult to grasp exactly what kind of importance it has. Certainly, it is not a redundant confirmation of syntactic or rationally semantic segmentation, as with classic lines such as Baudelaire's "Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage,"("My youth was nothing but a dark storm"), which can be read and remembered as a complete statement. The Mallarmean line is fragmentary in sense and syntax; it has a strange, elusive coherence of sound and suggestion, and these connotative aspects of meaning are given odd prominence by the degree of autonomy the line as a unit has acquired.

We have perceived "Ni brise quoique, avec, le ciel orageux passé" ("without any breeze, although the stormy sky passes over it") and "Au simple jour le jour très vrai du sentiment" ("to mere daylight the very true day of feeling") as if they meant something substantial: but they only suggest something. They suggest links—breeze and storm, simplicity and truth— which are part of our general repertoire of semantic links; so they are, in the linguist's terminology, *paradigmatic*, and they invite the reader to pause at these links. But the reader knows that the pause is temporary, that the links are part of a larger, more progressive act of utterance in which the storm is a mere qualification and the daylight is the product of personal desire.

To this view of Mallarmé we may add two notes: firstly, his strong sense of the visual appearance of the verse page—of the page as having to be *read*— is elegantly caught by a play of spelling (of repeated letters, not necessarily corresponding to the same sounds), which may catch the eye across the lines. Most witty of all, perhaps, is the pair of lines in "Le Pitre châtié" (M,31): ("The Clown Punished"):

Qui pure s'exhala de ma fraîcheur de nacre,
Rance nuit de ma peau quand sur moi vous passiez...

which, pure, was exhaled from my mother-of-pearl fresh-
ness, rancid night of my skin, when you passed over me...

There is an indirect semantic link between "nacre"
("mother-of-pearl") and "rance" ("rancid"). There is
no similarity of sound, but the shift to the new line
is marked by an anagram—by, that is, a purely visual
device which ought to check the reader's tendency to
immediately convert letters into sounds.

Secondly, we should not exaggerate Mallarmé's hos-
tility to punctuation. He does retain quite a lot of
punctuation, and some may remain even in those
poems which are barest. In order to retain the com-
plexity of syntax to which he attached so much impor-
tance, he obviously found it impossible to abandon
parentheses altogether, so the brackets in a poem such
as "A la nue accablante tu" (M, 76) ("concealed from
the overwhelming cloud"), which is otherwise unpunc-
tuated, ostentatiously show his sense of hierarchy in
utterance. Nor could he abandon the exclamation mark
though one may find it confusing—at least in trying
to allow for an intonation—that this is used to mark
rhetorical questions. Some of his punctuation even is
quite innovative: there is the use of italics and upper
case to distinguish different levels of reality in the
dream sequences of the "Après-midi d'un faune"
(M,50) ("The Afternoon of a Faun"); there is the iso-
lation of terms of address on a separate line, as in the
first line of a sonnet quoted above, which is not as
hastily given there, but actually:

Dame

       sans trop d'ardeur à la fois enflammant...

Lady, without too much ardor at one time inflaming...

The organization of thought and the organization of
communication are displayed here—as they are, in
more spectacular style, in one of his boldest works,
Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard (*A throw of the
dice will never abolish chance*), in which verse and regular
line spacing are abandoned and the text scattered
over the page, the position of each word or phrase indi-
cating (according to the author) pitch, and the play of
different types demonstrating syntactic structure. Tex-
tural organization matters acutely to Mallarmé, and
he never loses sight of the need for the reader to be
clear about it, however deliberately he may be kept in
uncertainty about other aspects of what is being
communicated.

When we turn to Apollinaire, we do not find complexities of the kinds that are characteristic of Mallarmé. This is what a typical passage of Apollinaire looks like:

A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien
Bergère ô tour Eiffel le troupeau des ponts bêle ce matin
Tu en as assez de vivre dans l'antiquité grecque et romaine
      (A,39).

In the end you are weary of this old world. Shepherdess, oh Eiffel Tower, the herd of bridges is baa-ing this morning. You are tired of living in Greek and Roman antiquity.

As with Mallarmé, the verse line is a fundamental unit, and the reader is bound to be very conscious that it has an importance much greater than he might expect from other poets' practice. But here, unlike in Mallarmé, it is not in competition with other systems of segmentation; it is in agreement with them, so that the poem proceeds through a series of observations or impressions, each apparently self-contained and delineated in a single line of verse. This does not wholly eliminate ambiguities and difficulties in reading: one notes for instance the uncertainty as to the sentence ending here:

Je m'arrête pour regarder
Sur la pelouse incandescente
Un serpent erre c'est moi-même
Qui suis la flûte dont je joue
Et le fouet qui châtie les autres
      (A,174)

I stop to look over the incandescent lawn.
A serpent wanders; it is myself who am the flute I play
and the whip which punishes other people

or the garden path here:

La rue ...
S'en va mais qui sait si demain
La rue devenait immobile
Qui sait où serait mon chemin
      (A,311)

The street...goes away, but who knows,
if tomorrow the street became motionless,
who knows where my path would be.

(This is not, we discover "who knows whether..." but "who knows, if... .") And like Mallarmé, Apollinaire is

of course incapable of distinguishing defining from non-defining relatives or other qualifying phrases:

J'aime la grâce de cette rue industrielle
Située à Paris entre la rue Aumont-Thiéville et l'avenue des
Ternes

(A,40)

I love the grace of this industrial street,
located in Paris between the rue Aumont-Thiéville
and the avenue des Ternes

But these problems look either secondary or vestigial. The problems are vestigial in the first two cases quoted, where Apollinaire is still exploring, in quite a modest way, the complexities of a symbolist style that was to get less and less important for him. The problem is secondary in the last—and more typical—case, where it hardly matters whether the location of the street is an afterthought or not. It is secondary for the important reason that Apollinaire has little sense of priority; he works by accumulation and seeks to convey more than anything else the sheer wonder that so many things exist and that they are known and felt by himself. Above all he was fascinated that so many things can go on simultaneously while language can only process them sequentially. This, in one way, makes the printed page especially tantalizing for him because it does allow the reader, to some degree, at first to perceive simultaneously the words which are afterwards to be read in sequence. The point is of course most radically demonstrated in his "calligrammes," the ancestors of concrete poetry, in which the printed (or written) words are arranged in the form of objects—a car, a cigar, a broadcasting station with its radiating waves. These experiments are often, and rightly, thought trivial; there is no inherent link between the verbal form and the visual form, and grasping the verbal form entails restoration of a linear sequence anyway.

Rather more important is the tendency to make the verbal form of the poem itself immediately perceptible by quickly visible repetitions which establish—as soon as the reader glances at the page—that the poem consists of a list of similar things. The famous example is "Il y a" (A,280) ("There is"):

Il y a un vaisseau qui a emporté ma bien-aimée
Il y a dans le ciel six saucisses et la nuit venant on dirait
des asticots dont naîtraient des étoiles
Il y a un sous-marin ennemi qui en voulait à mon amour

There are six sausages in the sky and when night falls they
look like maggots from which stars might be born;
there is an enemy submarine which wished harm to my love

and so on for another twenty-seven lines—to end
however with a new look:

Car on a poussé très loin durant cette guerre l'art de invisibilité.

For we have developed very far during this war the art of invisibility.

This sort of writing, of course, is the art of visibility.
What is made visible is the mere coexistence of things
(though this is conflicting, on occasion, with an actual
sequential rationality: the boat that takes away the
beloved is a precondition of the danger from subma-
rines). The poem is a list, and Apollinaire makes it
obvious. Elsewhere, the specific form of repetition can
be made more promptly perceptible by conventions
of print: the poet's delight in places, in particular,
means that capital letters often pinpoint the repeti-
tiousness of his text:

Te voici à Marseille au milieu des pastèques
Te voici à Coblence à l'hôtel du Géant
Te voici à Rome assis sous un néflier du Japon
(A,42)

Here you are in Marseilles, amongst the watermelons.
Here you are in Coblenz, at the Giant Hotel.
Here you are in Rome, sitting under a Japanese Medlar.

The problem with all this, however, is that the list, the
accumulation of undifferentiated experience that
Apollinaire practices, is, after all, essentially a written
form. Lists are barely comprehensible when spoken;
they really exist in writing (and form a model for un-
punctuated texts, along with newspaper headlines and
posters, which Apollinaire cites in one of his poems
as the source of the poetry of modernity [A,39]). The
visual form in the poems, of course, is mimicking a
possible spoken form, the form of emphathic repeti-
tion, and doesn't wholly in itself dispel the sense that
language is essentially speech. But when the vis-
ible repetition gets excessive (when, for instance, it
exceeds the three repetitions normal in rhetorical
parallelisms), we start to *see* the poem rather than to

read it in sequence. Apollinaire's prime aim would otherwise appear to be that of maintaining an oral contact with his reader, and for this reason he dreamed of publishing his work on gramophone records. But it appears here that his dramatization of personal emotion and personal utterance has to take the path of the visible text.

There is another way in which the appearance of Apollinaire's page adds to his communicative impact: that is the length and disposition of his lines. Much (though by no means all) of Apollinaire is in free verse; the length of line, that is, varies. And it varies visibly. It is not just that an acute ear will note that some lines have a syllable more or less than others (though that does happen); it is also that some lines are so short as to give a visible sense of the contraction of the rhythm while others are very long (quite often extending beyond the limits of a single line of type, and so holding the reader's expectations in abeyance as he finds his eyes moving back to the left without a new start in sense of feeling). They may be so long that they immediately suggest an expansive fullness. The last four lines of "Zone" demonstrate a weary exhaustiveness of statement giving way to tragic concentration on a symbol of death and new life, the sun that heralds a new dawn but also looks like an execution:

Ils sont des Christ d'une autre forme et d'une autre croyance
Ce sont les Christ inférieurs des obscures espérances
Adieu Adieu
Soleil cou coupé

(A, 44)

They are Christs of another form and another faith;
they are the inferior Christs of obscure hope.
Goodbye, Goodbye.
Sun cut neck.

(The third line here, incidentally, brings out one way in which punctuation survives in Apollinaire: a new sentence may start with a capital, even in mid-line; on this occasion the effect may be to stress still more the brevity and lack of energy of the utterance).

Lines, furthermore, are often inset from the margin; sometimes this is to suggest a stanzaic form, but quite often it is to enact delay, hesitancy or a dramatic pause. And as the lines vary in length and disposition, so do the blocks of verse. Many of the examples already quoted show the poet's love of isolating lines completely; but elsewhere the lines may be amassed in

lengthy paragraphs enacting exuberance and pertinacity in speech. "Zone," for instance, starting with the slight, delicate, scattered observations about the Eiffel Tower and the ancient world that suggest the discovery of thought in a newly awakened consciousness, goes through a section of fertile and ingenious symbolic invention, articulated in substantial verse paragraphs, before relapsing more and more consistently into the brief and disparate notions of the sort we saw with the last line of all, "Soleil cou coupé."

Apollinaire shows in this way that speech is energy, that it is accumulation of experiences and inspirations—or that it is a record of the failure to accumulate them; the personality of the poet is the capacity to add together fragments of felt experience, or it is a yielding to the actual separateness of things. So that personality is a capacity for speech, which is apparent primarily in the rhythm of print; it is the creation of a voice which communicates in the first place by an appeal to the eye and by the invitation to read, in proper sequence, what the poet offers as synthetic vision.

For Mallarmé, writing—as opposed to speech—was to be a record of "the deeds of the Idea (les gestes de l'Idée) as it manifests itself in speech" (M,854). These deeds, it is apparent, are essentially rhythmic acts; and in both Mallarmé and Apollinaire it seems that the suppression of punctuation is a way of enhancing the rhythm of reading and so of making conspicuous the rhythm of thought.

Endnotes

1 References in the text indicated by "A" are to G. Apollinaire, *Oeuvres poétiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). References indicated by "M" are to S. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

2 G.L.Dillon, *Language Processing and the Reading of Literature* (Indiana UP, 1978).
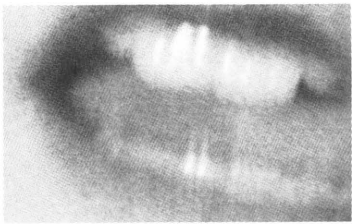
Despite the fact that his early poetry was grounded in the oral rhetoric of nineteenth-century declamation, F.T. Marinetti invented a new form of visual poetry he called "words-in-freedom." This article explores ways in which oral and print characteristics meshed or clashed in the new form. The new style can be seen at least partially as visual notations for oral performance and as an attempt to unite the interior, isolated spaces of print with the exterior, social event of oral performance. This attempt failed because of the different natures of the two media and because of coding difficulties occasioned by Marinetti's ideology of presence. A reading of Marinetti's poster-poem "Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto" confirms this view.

Michael Webster

Words-in-Freedom and the Oral Tradition

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Young European writers in the years 1900-1915 created a bewildering variety of responses to the poetry, generally termed "symbolist," of the generation that preceded them. While symbolist poetry was enormously influential in shaping the attitudes of future modernists, at the same time many saw it as "a poetry of literati . . . removed from reality" (Eruli 252). As early as 1897, writers as diverse as André Gide in his *Nourritures terrestres*, Francis Jammes in his *De l'angélus de l'aube à l'angélus du soir* and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier in his "Naturist Manifesto" were calling for a more direct style, closer to popular concerns and natural rhythms (Romani 58-60; for de Bouhélier see Perloff 84). The young writers no doubt had reason for this reaction. According to René Wellek, "In symbolist poetry the image becomes 'thing.' The relation of tenor and vehicle in the metaphor is reversed. The utterance is divorced, we might add, from the situation: time and place, history and society are played down" (113).

The arch-exemplar of this kind of hermeticism was Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). For him, the poet's task was to purify language, "donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu" ("to give a purer sense to the

words of the tribe" [Mallarmé 50]). This purified and difficult language would try to express the inexpressible, the absent, the symbol, and not the thing. The poet's task would culminate in an impossible and paradoxical project, the Book: "All earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book" (Mallarmé 80; quoted in Wellek 115).

When Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) inaugurated the futurist movement in 1909, he was reacting partially at least to the bookishness of symbolists like Mallarmé. Futurist poetry was to be liberated of all constraints, including Mallarmé's cherished syntax. Marinetti devalued the word as aesthetic object, as ineffable purity, and instead insisted that words be treated as material, as weapons in a propaganda war. For Marinetti, the world was not to end up in a book, but rather the book was to end up in the world. To that end, he created a visual style called words-in-freedom. We shall see, however, that while the new style drew upon popular sources like nineteenth-century elocution, it did not entirely shed symbolist traces.

Though the early Marinetti professed great admiration for Mallarmé, the young poet was most closely associated with the less rigorous and less hermetic Gustave Kahn, who favored public declamation of a prosodically loose free-verse poetry. It was as an orator and performer of others' poems that Marinetti first made his mark in the French and Italian literary worlds: "Marinetti began his career in 1900 as a 'declaimer' of French poetry on French and Italian stages, in the broad forensic style of popular elocution" (Flint 11). For the most part, he recited the great French romantic and symbolist poets: "Hugo, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Verhaeren" (De Maria: PCM XLV). But recitation did not occur solely on the stage: his memoirs mention reading aloud "the epic futurist finale of [Zola's] *La Bête Humaine* " to himself in a small pension and reading a poem to Kahn and his family while on a picnic (Marinetti: GMSI 221, 223; Flint 318). Reading aloud was also common in some Parisian salons of the period: Marinetti recalled visiting, with Alfred Jarry, "the ornate salon of Mme. Périer where from three to eleven at night thirty or forty men and women spouting poetry would parade through all ages appearances" and reciting his "ode on the speed of cars" to the assemblage (GMSI 244; Flint 330).

Brunella Eurli notes that Marinetti was in the habit of composing his poetry, both French and Italian, by

dictation (285), and indeed, his style betrays evidence of oral composition. For example, in the orally-composed memoirs, the name Gustave Kahn is almost invariably accompanied by the epithet "creatore di verso libero francese" (GMSI 204, 223, 243, 320; Flint 307, 318, 329) or by its more sweeping variant "creatore di verso libero" (GMSI 51, 236; Flint 322). In his pre-futurist French verse, a noun seldom appears without the accompaniment of at least one adjective. These adjectives often have the repetitive quality of epithets, and as Eruli notes, "hanno più il carattere di zeppa che della necessità estetica." ("They have more the character of padding than of aesthetic necessity.") Sentences in the poems are highly paratactic, proceeding "per immagini parallele stratificate" ("by parallel images piled on top of one another" [284]). Eruli recognizes the oral roots of these epithetic repetitions and paratactic constructions. Interestingly, she sees these qualities as faults when compared with he writing-based virtues of revision and careful word choice (286).

For an oral poet, the repetition of formulaic epithets and a paratactic sentence structure are obligatory (Lord 3-67). Walter J. Ong notes that "written discourse develops more elaborate and fixed grammar than oral discourse does because to provide meaning it is more dependent simply upon linguistic structure." Oral discourse, meanwhile, relies less on grammar because it has the help of "the normal full existential contexts which surround [it]" to help determine meaning (*Orality* 38). Redundancy is a psychological and semiotic necessity in oral discourse, which vanishes as soon as it is uttered:

Hence the mind must move ahead more slowly, keeping close to the focus of attention much of what has already been dealt with. Redundancy . . . keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track. (Ong: Orality 39-40)

In oral poetry, repetition is not only a psychological necessity; it is a metrical and mnemonic one as well. Milman Parry first showed how Homeric lines were not memorized verbatim, but rather, stitched together (Greek *rhapsoidein*, "to stitch song together") from a "massive vocabulary of hexamerterized phrases" (Ong: *Orality* 58). Epithets recur for metrical reasons: "Odysseus is *polymetis* (clever) not just because he is this kind of character but also because without the epithet *polymetis* he could not be readily worked into the meter" (*Orality* 58-59). The oral poet does not memorize a verbatim transcript of the poem but rather fills in the outline of the narrative with memorized, pre-patterned, metrical formulas. According to Parry's student Albert Lord, the oral poet does not strive for

"stability of text, the exact words of the story" but for "stability of essential story" (138).

Marinetti had neither the benefit of a long apprenticeship in oral techniques nor the desire to tell a traditional story. It is only by a kind of temperamental accident that his writings resemble in places the devices of true oral poetry. He called his two early books—*La conquête des étoiles* (The Conquest of the Stars, 1902) and *Destruction* (1904)—"epic," but they do not stitch together in a disciplined way a series of formulaic narratives. Rather, these "epics" consist of series of rhetorically inflated lyrics placed end to end. As a good symbolist, he avoids narrative but not in the manner of Mallarmé, who manipulates an elaborate syntax and an allusive, metonymic language in order to suggest a subject without actually making explicit statements about it. Instead of leaving things out, Marinetti inflates the *récit* with redundant amplifications of bombastic nineteenth-century rhetoric.

What little there is of narrative in Marinetti's poems is nearly lost in thickets of anaphora and apostrophe:

Ton sourire s'ouvrit en l'eau sereine de ton visage,
comme sous la chute calme d'une fleur...
Ton sourire déferla dans le ciel vaste
et fit pâlir la face impétueuse des Astres dans le silence!

(PCM 310; SF 346)

Your smile opens in the serene pool of your visage
as under the calm fall of a flower...
Your smile unfurls in the vast sky
and makes pale the impetuous face of the Stars in the silence!

This excerpt from *Destruction* shows how the poet can elaborate groups of images by the initial repetition of the master anaphoric term ("ton sourire"). The lyric in question, "La chanson du mendiant d'amour," inflates a simple anecdote of a romantic assignation to some 250 lines by similar rhetorical devices. Marinetti's "ode on the speed of cars" ("A mon Pégase"), which he recalled reading at Mme. Périer's salon, avoids any sense of narrative specificity by liberal use of apostrophe, or direct address:

Dieu véhément d'une race d'acier,
Automobile ivre d'espace,
qui piétines d'angoisse, le mors aux dents stridentes!
O formidable monstre japonais aux yeux de forge,
nourri de flamme et d'huiles minérales,
affamé d'horizons et de proies sidérales.

(PCM 310; SF 346)

Vehement God of an iron race,
Automobile drunk with space,
who tramples on anguish, the bit in strident teeth!
O formidable Japanese monster with the eyes of a forge,
nourished with flame and mineral oils,
famished for horizons and sidereal prey.

In his article "Apostrophe," Jonathan Culler notes that this trope "resists narrative because its *now* is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a *now* of discourse, of writing (152). We can agree with Culler's point about narrative while wondering how writing got into this discussion: surely the *now* of a direct address refers to the *now* of the spoken word, which vanishes as soon as it is uttered. Culler attributes the relative critical neglect of apostrophe (as opposed to, say, metaphor) to the "artificial character" of the trope, which leads literal-minded readers to "embarrassment" (152; 140). Most people don't naturally go around apostrophizing machines or, in a notorious example which Culler cites, the West Wind. While he correctly sees that apostrophe refers back to vatic utterance, "the power of poetry to make something happen" (140), Culler fails specifically to connect the device with oral discourse.

Apostrophe may look artificial on the printed page, but it becomes much less so when cloaked in the codes and context of the spoken rhetorical tradition. In oral cultures, words are powerful because they happen in a direct human context; they are not removed from life on a flat page but resonate through things:

Without writing, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual. They are sounds. You might "call" them back—"recall" them. But there is nowhere to "look" for them. They have no focus and no trace (a visual metaphor, showing dependency on writing), not even a trajectory. They are oc-curences, events. (Ong: Orality 31)

Culler does note the event-character of apostrophe: "[It] is not the representation of an event; if it works, it produces a fictive discursive event" (153). Apostrophe "works" when words have the vocative power to call up things, to make things happen; it works in an oral context.

With Marinetti, the oral context was that of spoken declamation, which lacks the metrical and formulaic discipline of oral poetics. In this context, "stirring the audience up" by direct address, pathetic exhortations, and emotional and humorous exaggeration is not at all uncommon. Such a practice has the immediate character of an event, is descriptive and propagandistic rather than narrative, and leads naturally to the theatricality of the futurist manifestos and the deliberate audience-

C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

CE SERAIT
père
non
davantage ni moins
indifféremment mais autant
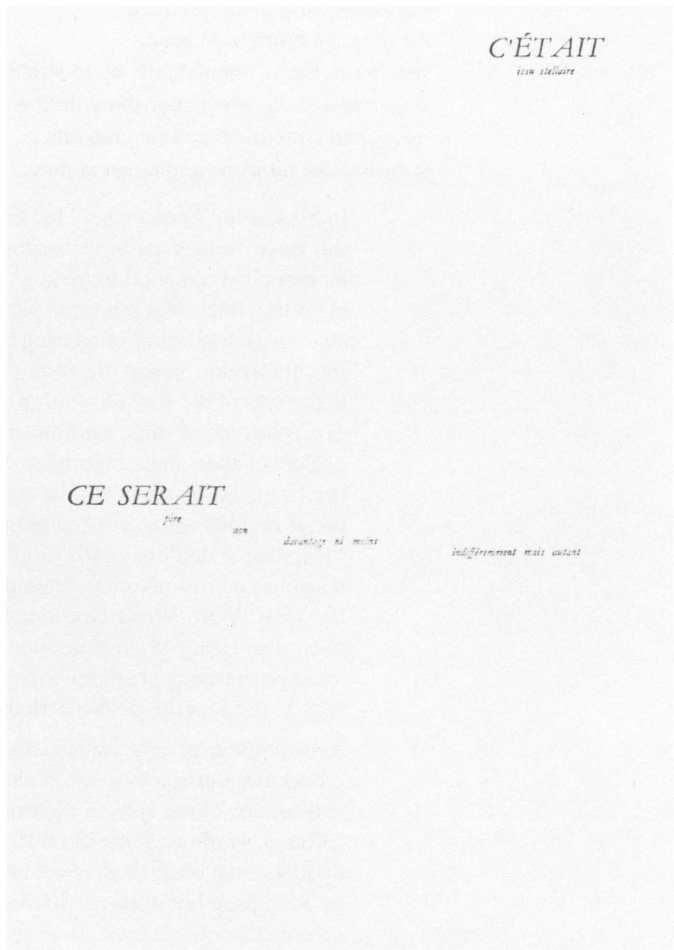
Figure 1
Stephane Mallarmé,
Un coup de dés, 1897,
From Igitur-Divagations-Un coup
de dés, © Editions Gallimard,
pp. 424-425.

baiting of the *serate futuriste*. (For the theatricality of the manifestos, see Perloff 101-115; for descriptions of "futurist evenings," see Kirby 12-18, 28-32 and Tisdall 91-93). How, then, did such an orally-oriented poet come to invent a new form of poetry that featured such visual devices as the use of various typefaces for emphasis and the spatial layout of words on the page? And what models did he use to produce this visual poetry?

Mallarmé's poetry also culminated in a visual experiment, *Un coup de dés* (1897; figure 1). I have reproduced here one two-page spread from a poem of eleven such "pages." The poem can be read either across the two pages or down each individual page in the more usual manner. Also, by a remarkable feet of syntactic prestidigitation, Mallarmé allows the reader either to scan words in the same typeface consecutively through the poem or to read each word in succession. Thus syntax

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL
autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL
sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu
enfin
par quelque profusion répandue en rareté

SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une

ILLUMINÂT-IL

LE HASARD

Choit
la plume
rythmique suspens du sinistre
s'ensevelir
aux écumes originelles
naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
flétrie
par la neutralité identique du gouffre

works in concert with spatial values (various type fonts
and sizes and the arrangement of words on the blank
of the page) to form the meaning of the poem. How-
ever, Mallarmé had already "spatialized" his syntax by
emphasizing static nouns over verbs and by moving
those verbs from their normal, spoken position. By often
placing the subject after the verb, he defused its mo-
tive, active power (Scherer 148-50). When such syntax is
combined with the strategies of metonymic indirection
mentioned above, words tend not to make linear, se-
quential sense but rather to form a visual constellation
of signifiers that wink enigmatically at one another
without making explicit statements. *Un coup de dés* car-
ried the logic of this syntax one step further by setting it
in immobile visual clusters. We have seen that Marinetti
perferred oral modes of composition to syntactical man-
ipulation. Even though the pre-futurist Marinetti

revered Mallarmé as a master, he did not imitate the master's syntax or prosody, and it is doubt-ful that he even saw *Un coup de dés* before attempting his own visual experiments (Webster 22; 31-33).

The invention of futurism (1909) marks a great divide in Marinetti's literary career. Superficially at least, he renounces allegiance to symbolism and indeed, to all past art; he began to write for the most part in Italian, not French; and he began in various ways to call into question distinctions between life and art. This last activity meant an increase in oral-based techniques of rhetorical and theatrical provocation. Ong has noticed that oral discourse is often "agonistically toned," and he gives examples that range from the *Iliad* to the practice common in oral societies of reciporal name calling, know as "flyting" (43-4). The flip side of this extravagant denunciation is the fulsome praise— panegyrics, funeral orations, victory odes—"found everywhere" in oral societies (Ong 45). Marinetti's efforts to merge art and life often centered around the "agonistically toned" *serate futuriste* we have already mentioned. The futurists deliberately provoked their audiences into participation by shouting inflammatory manifestos, displaying their paintings, declamimg their poetry and berating their audiences for their poli-tical and artistic *passéism*. The audiences responded in "agonistic" fashion by hurling back insults and vege-tables; these evenings often ended in a near-riotous mutual exchange of verbal and organic missiles.

The manifestos abound in the theatrical, exaggerated rhetoric of fulsome praise and blame. For example, in "Contro Venezia passatista" ("Against Passéist Venice," 1910), Marinetti and the other futurists unleashed their rhetoric on the Jewel of the Adriatic:

Ripudiamo la Venezia dei forestieri, mercato di antiquari falsificatori, calamita dello snobismo e dell'imbecillità universali, letto sfondato da carovane di amanti, semicupio ingemmato per cortigiane cosmopolite, cloaca massima del passatismo.

Affrettiamoci a colmare i piccoli canali puzzolenti con le macerie dei vecchi palazzi crollanti e lebbrosi.

Bruciamo le gondole, poltrone a dondolo per cretini, e innalziamo fino al cielo l'imponente geometria dei ponti metallici e degli opifici chiomati di fumo, per abolire le curve cascanti delle vecchie architetture.

(TIF 30; PCM 26-7)

We renounce the Venice of foreigners, market for
counterfeiting antiquarians, calamity of snobbery and
universal imbecility, bed shattered by caravans of
lovers, jeweled bathtub for cosmopolitan courtesans,
cloaca maxima of passéism.
Let us hasten to fill in its stinking little canals
with the shards of its leprous, crumbling palaces.
Let us burn the gondolas, rocking-chairs for cretins,
and raise to the skies the imposing geometry of metal
bridges and factories plumed with smoke, abolishing the falling
curves of the old architecture.

> (Flint 55; translation somewhat amended)

In "Noi rinneghiamo i nostri maestri simbolisti ultimi
amanti della luna" ("We Abjure Our Symbolist
Masters, the Last Lovers of the Moon," 1915), praise
and blame alternate in one oxymoronic phrase: "Oggi
odiamo dopo averli immensamente amati, i nostri
gloriosi padri intellettuali." ("Today we hate our glor-
ious intellectual fathers, after having greatly loved
them" [PCM 219; Flint 66]).

Marinetti did not confine his oral performances to re-
citing manifestos or to extempore verbal jousting with
a provoked public. We know that as late as 1920 he
declaimed Mallarmé's "L'après midi d'un faune" for a
performance in which a dancer interpreted the poem as
it was read aloud. It seems that he recited this symbol-
ist gem as a favor: his name did not appear on the pro-
gram, nor did he appear on stage (Sinisi 26). His vocal
prowess was well known. Even a rival (and no doubt
envious) observer like Wyndham Lewis was impres-
sed by the sheer volume of Marinetti's performance of
Zang Tumb Tumb (1914), a composition about the
Second Balkan War of 1913:

It was a matter of astonishment what Marinetti could do with his unaided voice. He
certainly made an extraordinary amount of noise. A day of attack upon the Western
Front, with all the 'heavies' hammering together, right back to the horizon, was
nothing to it. (Lewis 33)

Zang Tumb Tumb was written in a new futurist style that
Marinetti called "words-in-freedom." This new style
introduced radical syntactical and visual innovations, as
can be seen if we take a look at a sample page (figure 2;
TIF 696-7).

At first glance, it seems that Marinetti has done away
with the oral qualities that characterized his earlier
style. Gone are the epithets, the formulaic turns of
phrase, gone the anaphora and apostrophe, gone, in-
deed, anything resembling grammatical sentence

flauti clarini dovunque basso alto uccelli cinguettare beatitudine ombrie *cip-cip-cip* brezza verde mandre *don-dan-don-din-bèè* **tam–tumb–tumb tumb–tumb–tumb–tumb –tumb** Orchestra pazzi bastonare professori d'orchestra questi bastonatissimi suoooooonare suoooooonare Graaaaandi fragori non cancellare precisare ritttttagliandoli rumori più piccoli minutissssssimi rottami di echi nel teatro ampiezza 300 chilometri quadrati Fiumi Maritza Tungia sdraiati Monti Ròdopi ritti alture palchi loggione 2000 shrapnels sbracciarsi esplodere fazzoletti bianchissimi pieni d'oro **Tum– tumb** 2000 granate protese strappare con schianti capigliature tenebre **zang–tumb–zang–tuuum**

Figure 2.
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,
from *Zang Tumb Tumb*, 1914.
(TIF 696-697)

structure. Instead, we find strings of nouns interrupted at intervals by onomatopoeia in different typefaces, by blank spaces, and by verbs in the infinitive, with letters of stressed syllables occasionally repeated. Under the heading "BILANCIO DELLE ANALOGIE," the reader will notice a string of adjectives enclosed in parentheses and set in yet another typeface (an italicized boldface).

Though we are not primarily concerned with ideological aspects of futurism here, it would be well to note that these innovations stem from the futurist concern to merge art with the modern fast-paced life of the new machine-world. Marinetti defined lyricism as the faculty of "intoxicating oneself with life." When in "a zone of intense life," such as a revolution or war, a person gifted with such lyricism would naturally speak quickly,

tuuumb orchestra dei rumori di guerra
gonfiarsi sotto una nota di silenzio

tenuta nell'alto cielo pal-
lone sferico dorato sorvegliare tiri parco
aerostatico **Kadi–Keuy**

BILANCIO DELLE ANALOGIE

(1.ª SOMMA)

Marcia del cannoneggiamento futurista
colosso-leitmotif-maglio-genio-novatore-ottimismo
fame-ambizione *(TERRIFICO ASSOLUTO SO-
LENNE EROICO PESANTE IMPLACABILE FE-
CONDANTE)* **zang tuumb tumb tumb**
(2.ª SOMMA)

difesa Adrianopoli passatismo mi-
nareti dello scetticismo cupole-ventri dell'in-

impressionistically. He would, in fact, speak in words-
in-freedom:

*Non perderà tempo a costruire i periodi. S'infischierà
della punteggiatura e dell'aggettivazione. Disprezzerà
cesellature e sfumature di linguaggio, e in fretta vi
getterà affannosamente nei nervi le sue sensazioni
visive, auditive, olfattive, secondo la loro corrente
incalzante. L'irruenza del vapore-emozione farà saltare
il tubo del periodo, le valvole delle punteggiatura e i
bulloni regolari dell'aggettivazione. Manate di parole
essenziali senza alcun ordine convenzionale.*

(TIF 61; PCM 103)

He wastes no time in building sentences. Punctuation
and the right adjectives mean nothing to him. He will

despise subtleties and nuances of language. Breathlessly he will assault your nerves with visual, auditory, olfactory sensations, just as they come to him. The rush of steam-emotion will burst the sentence's steampipe, the valves of punctuation, and the adjectival clamp. Fistfuls of essential words without any conventional order.

(Apollonio 98)

The practice of intuitive, almost "automatic" writing outlined here joins the poet to modern life and matter: "Solo il poeta asintattico e dalle parole slegate potrà penetrare l'essenza della materia e distruggere la sorda ostilità che la separa da noi" (TIF 46; PCM 82). ("Only the unsyntactical poet who unlinks his words can penetrate the essence of matter and destroy the dumb hostility that separates it from us" [Flint 88]). Periodic sentences were a "myopic" attempt to "dominate the multiform and mysterious life of matter." Now, however, with the suppression of the "intermediary" of syntax, "la letteratura entri direttamente nell'universo e faccia corpo con esso." ("Literature may enter directly into the universe and become one body with it" [TIF 47; PCM 83; Flint 89]). Such a stance has been seen as tantamount to equating nouns with objects (Curi 155) and creates curious semiotic problems, as we shall see. But we need to look first at the implications this style has for oral performance.

At least one critic has called Marinetti's free-word texts "partiture declamabili"—"declaimable scores"—and they are, but of very special kind (quoted in PCM XXI). If we glance back at figure 2, we can see that the heavy black *tam-tumbs* should be recited loudly while the small italicized bird sounds (cip-cip-cip) should be read softly. Likewise, the repetition of key letters in words like "suonare" and "grandi" tells the performer to emphasize those letters while lengthening the syllables. As for the white spaces, they indicate "i riposi o sonni più o meno lungo dell'intuizione" ("the pauses or drowsings more or less long of intuition" [TIF 51; PCM 88]). Presumably, the performer of the fixed typographic text would also pause at the spaces to indicate pauses in the original oral intuition of the poet. Indeed, both of the visual innovations of the text in figure 2 (differing typefaces, blank spaces) serve as visual cues to oral performance.

Yet the discrete, visual isolation of words is actually a characteristic of print, which embeds the word in space (see Ong, *Orality* 123). Print changes words from sound to visible objects fixed on the page. The oral word,

when written, becomes an object on the page. In general, writing and print especially interiorize consciousness since writing takes place alone and is usually received in silent solitude. The shift from the social, event character of orality to the interiority of print can be seen if we compare an oral performance by a traditional bard before an audience with the solitary silent reading of a printed poem. This shift from oral to a printed poetry was canonized into a critical commonplace by John Stuart Mill in 1833: "Eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*" (quoted in Ong, *Rhetoric* 238). Poetry since the romantic age reflects the interiority occasioned, at least in part, by print technology. "The psyche has withdrawn to this extent from the old social, exteriorized oral world into its own isolated spaces" (Ong: *Rhetoric* 19). With words-in-freedom, Marinetti sought in a groping way to unite the interior, isolated (white) spaces of the page with the exterior, social event that is oral performance.

In a world dominated by print technology, such an attempt must largely be doomed to failure. In oral and manuscript cultures, the idea of a final, closed text is an impossibility. Print implies by its structure (bindings, identical multiple copies) that the work is closed off from existential life-contexts (Ong: *Orality* 132-35). For these technological and for other, perhaps more pressing, sociological reasons, art in the European society of Marinetti's time had become detatched from the everyday praxis of life. One modern theorist, Peter Bürger, has seen this autonomous social status of art as decisive in the development of the avant-garde. Avant-garde movements like futurism "can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society" (49). Marinetti's typographical innovations would be seen by Bürger as an effort to remove art from its aesthetic, autonomous realm, an effort to move art closer to "life praxis" by inserting "reality fragments" into the work of art (Bürger 77-78). While I do not have the space here to enter into the delicate semiotic and epistemological question of what constitutes "reality" in a sign system like language, it is clear that Marinetti himself claimed his free-word style was more natural than prose and would enable the poem to enter directly into the heart of material. Certainly also, the social agonism of Marinetti's oral performance brings us into the realm of speech acts which have direct, real consequences.

Marinetti hoped that his typographical innovations would help express hand and facial gestures of the performer and that they would bring reality closer to the reader through a kind of pictorial analogy. These

analogies could be as simple as expanding each successive letter of "FUMARE" ("to smoke") in order to indicate "l'espandersi della noia-fumo in un lungo viaggio in treno" ("the expansion of boredom-smoke during a long train trip [TIF 89; Flint 100]). Or they could be as complex as the spiraling organization of abstract marks (both handmade and typographical) and onomatopoetic words in various typesizes used in "Letter from the Front" (figure 3) to indicate an intensive bombarment. For Marinetti, the typographical innovations were only a means to achieve immediate sensation and were not intended to become a new art form, or an end in themselves:

Queste tavole sinottiche non devono essere uno scopo, ma un mezzo per aumentare la forza espressiva del lirismo. Bisogna dunque evitare ogni preoccupazione pittorica, non compiacendosi in giochi di linee, né in curiose sproporzioni tipographiche.

(TIF 89)

These synoptic tables should not be a goal but a means of increasing the expressive forces of lyricism. One must therefore avoid every pictorial preoccupation, taking no satisfaction in the play of lines nor in curious typographical disproportions.

(Flint 100)

Too much "line play" could draw attention to itself and obscure the matter. These visual analogies were also somewhat at odds with the oral flow of the recited text, and Marinetti recognized this. He observed that as soon as the visual effect has achieved its "maggiore espressione" ("greater expression"), "le parole in libertà ritornano al loro fluire normale" ("the words-in-freedom return to their normal flow" [TIF 89; Flint 100]).

This mostly oral, "normal flow" of words dominated compositions like *Zang Tumb Tumb*, but in poster-poems like "Letter from the Front" and "Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto" (figure 4), there was no flow to interrupt. Much later, in "La tecnica della nuova poesia" (1937), Marinetti distinguished "tavole parolibere" ("free-word tables") from "parole in libertà" proper (TIF 182). However, this distinction still didn't solve the fundamental problem of a poetry that wants to be both oral and visual, both social and private, both event and printed word. In poster-poems or free-word tables like "Letter from the Front" and "Après la Marne," Marinetti obviously wanted to create visually the same direct effects he achieved in oral performance.

Figure 3
"Letter from the Front" 1917,
(from Marinetti, *Les mots en liberté futuristes* 103).

And certainly, the bold spread of both abstract and letter shapes across the page creates a visual excitement that the usual block-page format conspicuously lacks. But when we go beyond this initial impression and actually try to *read* these works, a tension surfaces between the intuitive visual composition and the semiotic exigencies of language itself. Marinetti wants to create a direct

experience, and thus he is wary of losing himself in art, whether it be in visual "line play" or in traditional syntax. But by treating written words as if they were oral events instead of signs on paper, as if they were material reality and not signifiers, he occasionally creates coding difficulties for the reader instead of the immediate presence he seeks. We can trace some of these difficulties by looking at "Après la Marne" (fig.4).

The poster is made of hand-drawn and typecast letters, numerals, mathematical signs and brackets. The author has provided us with two clues in how to read these signs: 1) in his title: "After the Battle of the Marne, Joffre Visits the Front in an Auto,"and 2) in the instruction that brackets a section of text at the lower right: "Dynamic verbalization of the route." With the help of

Figure 4.
Marinetti,"Apres la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto," *(*1915 Marinetti, *Les Mots en liberté futuristes* , 99).

these clues, a general knowledge of futurist ideology and a careful reading of those parts of the text that form recognizable words, the reader can gather that the poem celebrates the beauty of war ("BELLE," "GUERRE"), that it endorses the French side over the Germans and that it celebrates the speed and power of the automobile that carries Joffre to the front ("vitesssss," "spirale pneumatique," "virer" and "coup de volant"). The "dynamic verbalization" is also no doubt an onomatopoetic imitation of the automobile (and sounds along the route?), just as "tatatata" and the by now familiar "TOUMB TOUM" are onomatopoetic representations of machine gun and cannon fire. In addition, the reader may also get some sense of disorder and strangeness from the capital letters strewn across the page. Some readers may wish to see these letters as a typographic imitation of the futurist painters' "lines of force," creating a sense of movement and a pictorial unity at the same time.

However, this first reading fails to account for large portions of the text. For instance, how are the numbers and mathematical signs to be read? It also leaves other parts of the text in doubt. Are we to put together the large capitals to form a secret message, or do they indicate in a general way troop emplacements and trenches? What is the significance of the words "Mon Ami," "Ma petite" and "LEGER LOURD"? Above all, how are we to read onomatopoetic words which, unlike "tatatata," have no readily discernible semantic value? We can answer some of these questions by referring to statements in the manifestos and by looking at proofsheets, but it is doubtful that Marinetti thought we would need to go that far since he believed that readers could understand his new asyntactic style instinctively, as if it were spoken, not written:

Corrono infatti fra il pubblico e il poeta, i rapporti stessi che esistono fra due vecchi amici. Questi possono spiegarsi con una mezza parola, un gesto, un'occhiata. Ecco perché l'immaginazione del poeta deve allacciare fra loro le cose lontane senza fili conduttori, per mezzo di parole essenziali in libertà.

(TIF 61-2)

Between the poet and audience, in fact, the same rapport exists as between two old friends. They can make themselves understood with half a word, a gesture, a glance. So the poet's imagination must link together distant things *with no connecting strings,* by means of essential *free words.*

(Apollonio 98)

2

Cat. no. 68

Words-in-freedom can be understood because author
and reader are such good friends; they understand one
another with a gesture, a wink. Somehow the printed
page takes on the event-character of oral communica-
tion.

There exist proofsheets for a free-word composition
about a speeding automobile that Marinetti never
published (figure 5a, b and c). However, he did cut up
parts of these sheets and scatter them throughout
"Après la Marne." Some references that were clear in
the proofs become problematic in the poster-poem.
For example, in the proofs, "Mon Amiii" refers to the
automobile, while in the poem the phrase could allude
to Joffre or (as we have just seen) to the reader. Sim-
ilarly, in the proofs it is the auto that is "BELLE" while
because of its feminine gender and its proximity to
"FRANCE" and "GUERRE," the reader of the poem as-
sumes the word refers to France or the war. The math-
ematical signs that mystified us in "Après la Marne"
still puzzle in the proofs, however. For their elucida-
tion, we need to go to the manifesto "Geometric and

de la pompe chandelles tourbillon de chandelles tourbillon
de poussière auto la dépasser **erocoo-eraaae** héroïsme
Tension s'enfariner

petite chérie chériechérie chérie chériechérie

$$
\begin{array}{c}
+ \; + \; + \\
\times \; + \; \times \\
\text{BEL} \quad \times \; + \; \times \quad \text{LE} \quad \text{(inclina pola ridressol)} \\
\times \; - \; \times \\
+ \; + \; +
\end{array}
$$

foooooooooorxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxce

V forrrrrrrrrr + + + x x x ≡ ≡ ≡ x ≡ 0 troc tra
craac craac croc croc + ≡ + croc craaac

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\times \quad + \quad - \quad + \\
+ \; - \; \times \; \times \quad + \; - \; \times \; - \; + \; - \; + \; + \\
\times
\end{array}
$$

Figure 5b

Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility"
(1914), which tells us that the mathematical signs, by
virtue of their "abstract simplicity," are fit to render
the mechanical shifting of gears in an automobile (TIF
91-91). As for the lists of numbers, Marinetti says that
though they "non hanno significato nè valore diretto"
("have no direct significance or value"), they "espri-
mono le varie intensità trascendentali della materia e le
rispondeze incrollabili della sensibilità" ("express the
various transcendental intensities of matter and the in-
destructible correspondences of sensibility" [TIF 92;
Flint 102]). Here we reach the semiotic limit of inven-
tion and intuition.

The sound-poem at the lower right of the composition,
the "Verbalisation dynamique de la route," remains at
the edges of this limit. The keys to it have not been
given, neither in the manifestos nor in the poem itself.
The title obviously indicates that the poem is meant to
be taken as the equivalent for the sounds along Joffre's
route to the front, but which words refer to which
sounds? "Intuition" tells me that "viaAAAR" probably

virer virer vir vir vir virer vir + × × × × = spirale-
5 spirales × + 629 = spirale pneumatique d'un coup de
volant (oblique dur arraché intestinal rose très net) hourrah
hourrah 80 HP + + + × × + + + — + — + — + —
+ × × × ahahahahahahahah + + + — + — + — + hourrah
troc trauc

INTEGRALE

∫

résistance
terrain
+ rési-
stance atr

90 km.
à l'heure

130 km.
à l'heure

=

1 trillion de puanteurs +
3000 déchirements d'ammo-
niaque + obscurité intinie
éclairée par une ampoule
de 6 chandelles

Figure 5c

represents the roar of the engine, and the manifestos
have already been consulted for the meanings of the
mathematical symbols, but the rest resists all but the
most elementary of decodings. It is possible that
changes in the endings of the words "angolò angoll
angolà angolin" refer to slight shifts in the car's angle
(*angolo*) as it bumps and careens down roads pock-
marked by war, but there is no way to say for sure.
Other words in the passage are either nonsensical or
yield a sense that hardly accords with the context.
("Mocastrinar" might mean "to singe mocha" = burnt
uniforms? camouflage?). The sound-poem could be an
example of what Marinetti called "indirect and analogi-
cal" onomatopoeia, which uses nonsense sounds to
create "un rapporto tra sensazioni di peso, calore,
colore, odore, e rumore" ("A rapport between sensa-
tions of weight, heat, color, smell, and noise" [TIF 90;
Flint 101]). The onomatopoetic words do not imitate
sounds literally but rather create a sonorous analogy to a
sensation. The manifestos cite one example of this
kind of correspondence: the syllables "dum-dum-dum-

dum" from the free-word poem *Dune,* which express the "circling sound" and "orange weight" of the African sun (TIF 90). Here the vocables could represent sounds, weight, heat, etc., of Joffre's auto and of the sights along the route.

Apparently relying on the "indestructible correspondences of sensibility," Marinetti expects that the reader will intuitively grasp the meanings of his signs, be they onomatopoeias, mathematical symbols or numbers. Whether an onomatopoeia expresses the inner psyche directly or a sensation indirectly, the intuitive processes of writer and reader must function on the same level. The rupturing of syntax implies an intuitive bond between writer and reader, one not based on grammatical rules but on the ability to experience the same sensations. Marinetti first used isolated words as sense-units, and when that was not enough, he introduced visual elements. He adapted old symbol systems to new uses, believing that the new uses could somehow be more direct than the old. These new procedures would shock and mystify and yet be intuitively understood at the same time. His new symbology depended on the kind of intuition present in oral speech situations and thus sometimes ran afoul of the clarity demanded by visual grammar. For example, he wanted to replace the question mark with an X—instead of concentrating doubt into a point, it expanded it over the page—and yet he used this same X to "express" the acceleration of an automobile (TIF 92).

A determined deconstructionist might see this ambiguous symbology as proof that Marinetti understood (intuitively?) the arbitrary nature of the sign and the shifting, slippery character of language itself, which is seen as merely a system of differences without positive terms. To read him this way, however, disregards his ideological statements which indicate that he was not concerned with signs but with presence. Never interested in the word as symbol, he valued intuitive comprehension, quick syntheses, spoken declamation—in short, propaganda. Here style connects with ideology: free-word poetry and the cult of sensation both locate "truth in what is immediately present to consciousness with as little mediation as possible." That is how Jonathan Culler defines "the metaphysic of presence" (*Structuralist Poetics* 132), and Marinetti seems to be singularly captivated by it. His disregard of the signifier, his preference for spoken declamation and his belief in intuitive communication all attest to his captivity. For him, writing is not writing, but speaking.

To break syntactic connections, to suggest that writing can somehow contain the added semiotic features of speech (gestures, winks, an existential context), to believe that brute sounds can carry a direct meaning not available to words, is to believe in a semiotics of presence or intuition, a semiotics in which the reader understands not by means of a complex secondary sign system like written language ("fili conduttori") but by sign systems that are attached in some way to the phenomenal world. People make gestures and utter sounds; machines make noise; speech-making and theater happen in existential contexts. Marinetti wants to get away from the pure relational system differences that is written language and move toward the force of the real world. His semiotic inventions (the new uses for numbers, mathematical symbols, sound-poetry) betray an ad hoc character (they are "intuitive") and do not form a relational system that can be consistently decoded by the reader. It should not be surprising that Marinetti misunderstands or underrates the nature and power of the written system, given his emphasis on the spoken event and given the rudimentary state of this sort of theory in his age.

Marinetti attempts to put the visual at the service of the oral: in his "words-in-freedom," spacings often serve as indications of pauses for the speaker; in his poster-poems, he renders the auditory chaos of the war with visually prominent onomatopoeias and large, often isolated or overturned letter-shapes. Semiotically, the attempt to connect the written system in a more direct way to the stuff of life was bound to cause coding difficulties for the reader which interfere with the immediate presence Marinetti sought. Creating an absence of syntactical connections does not necessarily make art and life a simultaneous presence.

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Visual form performs numerous significant and diverse functions in modern free verse poetry. The theoretical pronouncements of such poets as Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky recognize only its function of scoring for performance and often belittle its significance. In representative works of these poets, however, we find lineation, line-grouping, spatial arrangement and particular graphological details operating both globally and locally to make meaning and to compose text. Even though *opsis* has been, since Aristotle, an acknowledged element of literary art, not only practitioners, but with certain exceptions, literary critics and theorists have failed to assign it more than a subordinate, supportive role. Historical approaches that privilege sound because of the originally oral nature of poetry are of little help in explaining the use of visual form in modern free verse. A functional approach, entailing careful attention to how visual form affects our experience of printed poems, can contribute toward developing "a theory of graphic prosody" such as John Hollander has called for. Functional analysis of visual form in representative free verse poems and passages yields a dozen distinct functions—rhetorical, mimetic and aesthetic functions that tend to support the illusion of the poem as unified and autonomous, and on the other hand, an equal number of functions that tend to be disintegrative and intertextual. Analysis of a passage from Pound's *Cantos*, using these functions as an analytical tool, shows that visual form helps realize this modern long poem's simultaneous drive toward coherence and impulse toward openness.

Eleanor Berry   # Visual Form in Free Verse

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Recent work in prosodic theory has dealt mostly with traditional meters. Derek Attridge's study of *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, for example, confines its coverage to "the main tradition of regular accentualsyllabic verse in Middle and Modern English" (vii). Likewise, in linguistic metrics, the rules proposed by the American "generative" metrists have been mainly for iambic pentameter (e.g., Halle and Keyser, Kiparsky, Youmans); and the statistical studies of the Slavic metrists, despite their comparatist orientation, have also been devoted to metrical verse (e.g.,Tarlinskaja). The few scholars who have undertaken to analyse free verse have done so principally in terms of grammar (Mitchell, Wesling) and intonation (Byers). While some attention has been paid to lineation based neither on grammar nor on phonology (Hartman, Sayre, Cureton), there is still nothing like a full study of the role of visual form in free verse prosody.

Theoretical discourse about the prosody of the twentieth-century free verse has consisted largely of the apologetics and polemics of the poets themselves, and the poets' theories have not been adequate to account for their practice—in particular, for their use of visual form. Meanwhile, "the poem on the page," as John Hollander

has noted, "became the central mode of its existence during the Modern period" (277). In directing attention to visual form in free verse, then, I am attempting to repair a significant neglect, to make a start toward developing "a theory of graphic prosody" such as Hollander calls for, dealing with "[h]ow various modes of free verse take shape on the page, what occasional sound patternings they may or may not embrace" (277). First, however, I want to consider what sorts of things some of the prosodic innovators among twentieth-century American poets have had to say about free verse prosody.

Poets' Polemics and their Poetic Practice

Twentieth-century American poetry displays an extraordinary amount and variety of prosodic innovation, and many twentieth-century American poets have been consciously concerned with prosodic invention as their problem and project. This concern is expressed in manifestos from Pound's "A Few Don'ts" to Olson's "Projective Verse" and in the poets' correspondence and their comments in interviews as well as in self-reflexive passages in their poems. Here are some characteristic pronouncements by Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky, respectively:

One wants to write the poem, put it, as ultimately one would say it; the page is his means, *not* his end. If we grant that poetry must be relegated finally, to what the eye can read, then we have no poetry....

Otherwise, one works in, to the page, as where he can score, in a literal sense, the language of his poem; he wants that as his means, the structure of his words *on the page,* in the sense that their spatial positions there will allow a reader to *read* them, with his own *voice,* to that end the poet is after—i.e., the poem in its full impact of *speech.* (Creeley, "Note" 27)

It is the advantage of the typewriter that due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions, even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work. (Olson, "Projective Verse" 57-58)

[W]henever and however, either by the agency of the eye or ear, a persistent irregularity of the metrical pattern is established in a poem, it can justly be called [free verse]. The irregularity involves both the eye and the ear. Whether the measure be written down with a view to the appearance of the poem on the printed page or to the sound of the words as spoken or sung is of no consequence so long as the established irregularity is maintained. (Williams, "Free Verse" 288-89)

The test of poetry is the range of pleasure it affords as sight, sound, and intellection. (Zukofsky, *Test* 7)

All of these pronouncements are concerned with the relations of the poem as printed text on the page to the value of the poem as poetry and/or to its nature as verse. Both Robert Creeley and Charles Olson speak of the printed text as a score for oral performance, Creeley especially denying the value of the visual form of the printed poem except as a vehicle for directing the reader how to voice it.

Despite Creeley's dismissal of "what the eye can read" as "no poetry," however, the visual form of a representative poem of his operates much more complexly than as a score and, I would argue, contributes more to the "poetry" of the poem than would a mere score for performance. "The Rain" is a lyric in visual quatrains of short lines:

All night the sound had
come back again,
and again falls
this quiet, persistent rain.

What am I to myself
that must be remembered,
insisted upon
so often? Is it

that never the ease,
even the hardness,
of rain falling
will have for me

something other than this,
something not so insistent—
am I to be locked in this
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,
lie next to me.
Be for me, like rain,
the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
lust of intentional indifference.
Be wet
with a decent happiness.

(CP 207)

Listening to this poem voiced, even if the performer paused for a certain length of time at the end of every intra-stanzaic line and for a certain longer time at the end of every stanza, one would not be able to apprehend it as consisting of a small number of equivalent

units. But the printed poem is arranged in sight-stanzas, groups of equal numbers of lines where the line - and group - boundaries bear no regular relationship to grammatical or narrative structure or to a meter or rhyme scheme. (The sight-stanza is a free verse form pioneered by Williams [Berry, "Williams' Development"].) Looking at Creeley's printed poem on the page, one immediately sees it as a composition, tidy, four-square, a made thing. This perception cannot be derived from "the poem in its full impact as speech," but it is an important part of the aesthetic experience of the printed poem. The visual form presents itself as an image of order and objectifies the text. Further, it relates this poem to other poems in the tradition and accordingly generates certain expectations in the experienced reader—that in genre the poem will be a lyric, that its language will be simple in diction and syntax but marked with patterns of repetition, that its tone will be quiet. (These are all associations of the visual form of a page or less of short-line quatrains.)

The poem's visual form operates not only globally but locally. The first stanza, with its longer first and final lines and shorter medial lines, presents an image of containment, iconically representing the poem's theme of mental/emotional entrapment:

All night the sound had
come back again,
and again falls
this quiet, persistent rain.

Then, in the three couplets that begin the next three stanzas, parallel elements are parceled out in immediately juxtaposed, visually equivalent units—successive lines:

that never the ease,
even the hardness,

something other than this,
something not so insistent—

Love, if you love me,
lie next to me.

Here visual form reinforces syntactical parallelism and sound repetition to foreground semantic similarity and antithesis. In the final stanza, we encounter what are obviously the longest and shortest lines of the poem (the first and penultimate lines of the stanza):

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
lust of intentional indifference.
Be wet
with a decent happiness.

Working in conjunction with syntax and meaning, the
visual expansion and contraction of the verse line helps
evoke first a sense of pressure against limits and then
a feeling of resolution. This expansion and contrac-
tion, followed by a return to the norm, also helps to
effect closure (Smith, *Poetic Closure*). The visual form
of this poem of Creeley's functions both globally and
locally to achieve various aesthetic and rhetorical
effects. In the case of this poem at least, if the poetry is
"relegated…to what the eye can read," we still have
poetry.

In the midst of Olson's discussion of the text as a score
for the voicing of the poem, in a series of words desig-
nating aspects of voicing ("breath," "pauses"), appears
the word "juxtapositions," which designates a spa-
tial relationship. Juxtapositions are, in fact, but one of
several features of visual form having nothing to do
with scoring for performance that appear in Olson's
printed poems, giving one who reads them on the page
elements of experience lacking to one who listens to
them performed. The following passage is typical but
unspectacular in its use of typography:

By Filius Bonaci, his series, rediscovered Pisa 1202, we shall
    attack,
for it, too, proceeds asymptotically toward the graphic and
    tangible, the law
now determined to be
phi

Its capital role in the distribution of
leaves seeds branches on a stem (ex.,
the ripe sun-flower)

the ratios 5/8, 8/13
in the seed-cones of fir-trees,
the ratio 21/34
in normal daisies

("The Praises," *Distances* 22)

Certain features of this text are purely graphic, do
not serve to "indicate how…silently or otherwise,"
one should voice it. Most conspicuous of these are the
fractions; though one can, of course, translate them
into "five-eighths," "eight-thirteenths," "twenty-one

thirty-fourths" (or "five over eight," "eight over thirteen," etc.) in order to read the passage aloud, probably no one would do so unless, in fact, called upon to read it aloud. Reading silently, I do not even verbalize, let alone voice, them. The fractions allude to a kind of printed text—technical writing—that is virtually never read aloud, never voiced. The incorporation of such textual materials into poetic texts has been common in twentieth-century American poetry, conspicuous, a generation before Olson, in works of William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound. Likewise, the abbreviation "ex." is a print convention, more ideographic than alphabetic. While the parentheses signal intonational as well as logical subordination, they are also foregrounded as elements of the visual texture of the text by their positions near and at the ends of successive lines.

While the layout of Olson's text can be taken as signaling the phrasing and pacing for a performance, that is hardly its sole function: besides alluding to other printed genres, it works both globally and locally to present the reader with a visual image of form crystallizing out of chaos. The two groups of more or less evenly short lines referring to the mathematical patterns in the forms of plants contrast conspicuously with the group of very long *and* very short lines leading up to the determination of "phi." Likewise, the relative shortness of the third line of the passage and the isolation of the single monosyllabic word "phi" in a line of its own iconically represent the narrowing down of apparent diversity to a single solution. The conclusion seems inescapable that "only hearing such a poem is an experience essentially poorer than hearing and seeing it" (Mooij 94).

Williams' effort to pin down free verse with the paradox of "established irregularity ... maintained" and Louis Zukofsky's dictum on pleasure as the test of poetry both imply that the visual form of the text can be a source of interest in its own right, quite apart from cuing how the poem should be voiced. But in their other comments on form, both poets fail to give equal time to the ear and to the eye. In a poem on "The Poem," Williams begins, "It's all in / the sound" (*CLP* 33). And Zukofsky, enumerating "[t]he components of the poetic object," includes "[t]ypography—certainly—if print and the arrangement of it will help tell the voice how it should sound" (*Prepositions* 17). Again, however, in the free verse of these two poets, "the appearance of the poem on the printed page" typically

does much more than "help tell the voice how it should sound."

Look at the first six lines of Williams' poem "Rain" (*CEP*, 74-77):

As the rain falls
so does
> *your love*

bathe every
> *open*
object of the world—

The deep indentation of line three and the deeper indentation of line five create a diagonal from upper left to lower right—a visual image suggestive of falling. The same visual image is produced by Williams' famous stepped triadic line, a form he later developed in a passage of *Paterson* II, iii, beginning

The descent beckons
> *as the ascent beckoned*
> > *Memory is a kind*
of accomplishment
> *a sort of renewal*
> > *even*
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places
> *inhabited by hordes*
> > *heretofore unrealized*

(77)

While I would not say simply, as Stephen Cushman does, that "The Prosody of [Williams' stepped] triadic stanza is a visual one" (84)—I think that it is primarily an intonational one, with each lobe of the triadic line (or, in Cushman's terms, each line of the triadic stanza) corresponding to a tone-unit—I do concur that the form has a visual aspect, and that its format, as that of the much earlier "Rain," presents an image of descent.

Besides helping create a mimetic image, the indentations in the opening lines of "Rain" function locally to lend emphasis to the phrase and word that constitute the indented lines. The isolation of "open" as a single, deeply indented line seems also a local instance of iconic representation of meaning.

In the following passage from the body of the poem, we find the format again functioning mimetically on a

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local as well as a global level and again also functioning
rhetorically:

So my life is spent
                    to keep out love
with which
she rains upon

            the world

of spring

        drips

so spreads

        the words

far apart to let in

            her love

And running in between

the drops
            the rain

        is a kind physician

The indented second line of the passage, "to keep out
love," gains emphasis from its indentation, contrasting
with the ten short, left-justified lines that immediately
precede it in the poem. Then, beginning with "the
world," the words are spread "far apart," vertically as
well as horizontally, in short phrases; the format does
exactly what the "she" of the passage is described
as doing. Balancing "to keep out love," "her love" lines
up beneath it and brings a sense of resolution, returning
to the local norm for line length and structure after a
deviation in the run-on, enjambed preceding line, "far
apart to let in." Finally, an initial capital and a succes-
sion of two left-justified lines signal a transition. Overall,
the visual openness of the format seems to make the
loose syntax easier to read than it would otherwise be.
This is an instance of what Hollander is apparently
referring to when he says, "In contemporary verse form-
ats, we frequently find odd sorts of interruption and
linkage being developed—extensions of the more

archaic white spaces between stanza breaks—in order to handle complex sorts of transition that defy ordinary syntactical punctuation" (283).

Near the end of the poem, the format in which the following sentence is cast helps the reader both to see an image and to have, in reading, an experience of the process it describes:

The rain
falls upon the earth
and grass and flowers

come
     perfectly

into form from its
               liquid
clearness

As in the earlier passages, an overall diagonal thrust from upper left to lower right presents an image suggestive of falling. But the local visual detail of the passage is further suggestive. The spatially isolated one-word lines contrast with the left-justified lines of four words each at the beginning of the passage and are disposed nearly symmetrically around a central four-word line that begins at the left margin. Like the short-line stanzas in the Olson passage discussed above, these lines, in their arrangement, can readily be seen as an image of form crystallized. Further, in reading this one sentence as it is disposed into lines on the page, a reader, revising an initial syntactical interpretation of "and grass and flowers" as an extension of the object of "upon" and following the syntactical relations of the line "into form from its" backward and forward, feels the sentence itself "come perfectly into form."

In the passage of *Paterson II* mentioned above, which Williams later published as a separate poem under the title "The Descent," the format of the stepped triadic line or stanza seems, Cushman points out, to function mimetically, as does the format of "Rain." But what, Cushman rightly asks, of the other twenty-eight poems that use the form (91)? Besides descent or falling, such a format can reinforce other related meanings. The experience of reading a passage or poem in triadic-line verse entails a heightened awareness of the fact of lineation (left-justified lines, on the other hand, are automatized) and of the successiveness of reading.

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Thus, the visual appearance of the stepped triadic line foregrounds the temporality of language. In "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," where the poet speaks "against time," this operation of the format definitely supports the theme. Awareness of time, aging, mutability, informs many of the late poems that Williams wrote in the triadic line, and the visual aspect of the form helps convey this awareness to the reader. But in many of the poems written in triadic lines, the form simply gratifies ear and eye with its regularities and its relatively few variations.

To be a significant part of our experience in reading a poetic text, the contrastive or repetitive patterns highlighted or created by visual form need not function mimetically. Compare the role of visual form in Williams' "Rain" with its roles in Creeley's "The Rain," on the one hand, and in Apollinaire's famous calligram "Il pleut" (100-101) on the other. Williams' format is less mimetic than Apollinaire's (see Bradford's Introduction, page 6, this issue), and Creeley's is still less so. Nonetheless, visual form is as important in both of the American poems as in the French one. Besides working globally to convey a poem's generic affiliations, format can operate locally in significant non-mimetic ways. Even where, as in "Il pleut," the graphic form is pictorial or mimetic, it can function in other ways as well; thus, in a commentary on the Apollinaire calligram, Anne Hyde Greet claims, "The first function of the lines as graphic form is to sustain and enhance the verbal music. Effectively the visual continuity turns each line into one long rhythmic unit" (Apollinaire 402). In a discussion of the juxtaposition of prose and various kinds of verse in Williams' *Paterson*, Marjorie Perloff sees the shifts in typographical format as "signaling a change in perspective, in tone, in mood," and "[s]uch consistent shifting of ground, such change in perspective [as] propel[ling] the reader forward through the poem" (185). The juxtapositions "create visual interest" (183). They do much more, however, for the variously shaped blocks of text are not just gray areas on a page layout, but language. "Because abstract typography organizes language in lines," Stephen Cushman quite rightly observes, "it produces not only subtle creations of visual order, but also subtle creations of thematic order" (75). Because visual format creates configurations of words, Perloff points out, "a semantic shift takes place" (167) from the meaning of the same sequence of words in an undifferentiated layout. This

"thematic order," this "semantic shift," need not be matters of mimetic form.

J.J.A. Mooij is one theorist who has asserted the importance of graphic elements in poetry. While Creeley maintains that the poet uses the page simply as his means to get the reader to voice his poem in a particular way and Zukofsky claims interest in typography only insofar as it "help[s] tell the voice how it should sound," Mooij argues that

Writing in verse-lines...[is not] only or mainly parasitic upon... ear-appeal....[I]t may lend a higher degree of prominence and conspicuousness to repetitive and contrastive patterns in a poem, and thus substantially influence the structure of foreground and background of the work. (94)

Consider the almost diagrammatic patterns of repetition and contrast in the following passage from Zukofsky's A 6:

Thus one modernizes
His lute,
Not in one variation after another;
Words form a new city,
Ours is no Mozart's
Magic Flute—
Tho his melody made up for a century
And, we know, from him, a melody resolves
                              to no dullness—
But when we push up the daisies,
The melody! the rest is accessory:

My one voice. My other: is
An objective—rays of the object brought to a focus,
An objective—nature as creator—desire
        for what is objectively perfect
Inextricably the direction of historic and
                              contemporary particulars.

(24)

The two blocks of text contrast the poet's two "voices," the one calling for melody, the other for objectivism. The fact that each voice is given a block of text implies a rough equivalence between them. In contrast to the Olson passage discussed earlier, however, there is no mimetic effect in the nature of the difference between the two blocks here—that one has more and shorter lines, the other fewer and longer. The mere fact that they are differentiated, though, implies the distinctiveness of each "voice."

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Within the first block, the lineation "lend[s] a higher degree of prominence and conspicuousness" to certain phonological repetitions and corresponding semantic contrasts. Thus it helps to set "modernizes" against "Mozart's" and the modernized "lute" against Mozart's Magic "Flute." The paired words are linked not only by alliteration ("*m*odernizes," "*M*ozart's") and full rhyme but also by their corres-ponding line-terminal positions in two couplets of the same shape (and the same grammatical/intonational status), with the second lines being the two shortest lines in the passage. The lineation also helps to set "his melody" against "a century" and "the melody" against "accessory," each pair of opposed terms occuring near the beginning and at the end, respectively, of a single line. Again, the visual form highlights phonological patterns: besides assonance (in /ɔ/), linking their stressed syllables, and rhyme of the secondarily stressed syllables, these paired phrases/words are associated together by identical stress patterns and by their similar positions in the intonational structure of the lines in question. The repetition of "melody" is given prominence by the fact that the two occurences line up visually; likewise, "century" and "accessory" are linked by their line-terminal positions, again roughly one under the other visually.

Within the second block, "My one voice" is set against "My other" in the first line; the repetition of "An objective," with its two distinct senses, is given prominence by the position of the repeated phrase at the beginning of two successive lines. The length of the final line of the block, together with the visual length of the Latinate polysyllables sandwiched between monosyllabic function words, highlights the alliteration in stops and the assonance in front vowels that link those polysyllables to each other and to the key word "objective." Evidently, non-mimetic visual form can serve to point up sound patterns and concomitant semantic relations. The result has much the same appeal as the kind of poetic syntax that Donald Davie has called "syntax like mathematics," syntax the function of which "is to please us in and for itself," in contrast to all Davie's other kinds of poetic syntax, which "were at bottom *mimetic*, or aspired to be" (92).

If the poets' primary concern were, in fact, simply getting the reader to hear their speech, to voice the poem, one would think that they would avail them-selves of more than the "rigidity and space precisions" of the typewriter. Modern linguistics has developed systems of notation not only for segmental phonemes

and degrees of stress but for intonation and juncture as well. The linguist Kenneth Pike has even commended these to the poets as a means of eliminating ambiguity as to how their texts should be performed. Certainly modern poets and their readers have shown considerable tolerance and even appetite for graphic novelty in the printing of poems, so one should not expect them to object to the introduction of markings for stress, pitch and juncture on the grounds of their novelty. Modern poets and their readers have likewise shown considerable tolerance and even appetite for erudition, so one should not expect them to object to learning the linguistic apparatus for phonemic transcription. The fact is, however, that aside from possibly (however covertly or even unconsciously) setting a positive value on ambiguity in this as in other aspects of poems, twentieth-century poets work, at least in large part, within a belletristic print tradition and compose their texts in terms of its conventions; and their readers read poetic texts in terms of the same tradition and conventions. In this print tradition, phonemic notation has no place.

What the typewriter—and more recently and to a greater degree, the word processor and printer—offer the poet is greater control over the manipulation of print conventions in the text of his or her poem. It is these conventions that are defamiliarized in many of e.e. cummings' poems, such as no. 33 from *No Thanks:*

emptied.hills.listen.
,not,alive,trees,dream(
ev:ery:wheres:ex:tend:ing:hush

)
 andDark
IshbusY
ing-roundly-dis

tinct;chuck
lings,laced
ar:e,by(

fleet&panelike&frailties
!throughwhich!brittlest!whitewhom!
f
 l o a t ?)

          r

              h y t h m s

     (416)

As we read, an immediate effect is disruption of the process of interpreting the discursive syntax, such as Richard Cureton says is produced by cummings' poems that fragment words below the level of the morpheme. Here, the normally unconscious process of parsing is raised to consciousness not only by the obstructiveness of the punctuation, but also by deviation from normal word order and violation of collocational restrictions. Most significantly, the arbitrariness of print conventions of punctuation, capitalization and spacing, and the visuality of punctuation marks and of text layout, are laid bare by their non-conventional but highly patterned use. Cureton, who provides a useful categorization and illuminatingly detailed discussion of cummings' use of visual form in *No Thanks*, finds the poet's visual forms satisfying only when they are subordinate to the poems' phonological forms or leave these undisturbed. To my mind, however, the primary interest of cummings' experiments lies precisely in their demoting the aural from its position of privilege, promoting the visual from a role of mere pattern-carrying to one of pattern-making. No longer a pack-horse, as it were, bearing the poem's aural form on its back, the visual can show its own paces.

It should be no surprise to find Williams and other inventors and continuators of a visual tradition in free verse using, as we have seen above, aural terms to justify their visual forms, or to discover them inconsistent, as they are, in their exploitation of visual form in their poetry. For in the absence of prosodic theories dealing with or even acknowledging the visual aspect of verse form, and with aesthetic theory heavily dominated by organicism, it is difficult to imagine how any modern American poet could have arrived at a clear conception of visual form and its functions. The bias toward the aural, against the visual, is of long standing. The sixteenth-century English prosodist George Puttenham, who, in his "Arte of Englishe Poesie," represented not only figurative stanzas but also possibilities for non-figurative nonce forms graphically, with ruled lines representing verse lines of divers lengths, was exceptional in "see[ing] the essential rectangularity on the page of those verse forms whose shapes, even today, we overlook as being a trivial consequence of typographical necessities" (Hollander 261).

Where critics have taken the visual seriously at all, it has generally been visual imagery evoked by the meanings of the words that they have studied, not the visual form of the printed text on the page. John Hollander, a notable exception to this generalization, acknowledges

Sight, Sound, Meaning, Pleasure

the prevailing bias when he remarks that "consideration of poetry's visual aspect may... seem as superficial as... shaped poems have been charged with being" (270). Even John Sparrow, who, in his book-length study of inscriptions, admits that "the quality of the impact that a piece of writing makes upon our minds may be in part determined by the layout, and particularly by the lineation, of the text in which it is embodied on the page" (143), concludes finally that "the literary effect that can be achieved by visual presentation is limited" (144). Even workers in the new field of "visual poetics," which "tries to make characteristics of visual analysis like perspective and vantage point, but also less obvious elements like indiscreteness, composition, and even color, work for literary analysis," and likewise "to make recent developments in literary theory and philosophy work for visual analysis" (Bal 178), have not, so far as I know, turned their attention to the visual forms of printed poems.

Where critics have recoginzed the existence of visual form in poetry, they have generally valued it only insofar as it serves to reinforce both sound and meaning, contributing to the "organic" unity of the poem. Paul Fussell, for example, though acknowledging that "now that we are fully accustomed to using printed texts for apprehending poems, our sense of stanzas has become a very complex art of mediation between what our eyes see and what our inner ear hears," nonetheless contends that, if a poem is good, "the visual and aural experiences of the poetic form—the eye's measure of the physical shape and symbolism of lines and stanzas, the ear's confirmation of the form given to sounds by rhyme—will perfectly merge" (135-6). On the other hand, Michael Cummings and Robert Simmons, who include a unit on "Graphology and Design" in their textbook on *The Language of Literature*, recognize that a poem can derive an important part of its effect from "[t]he interrelationship of the graphological with formal patterns of lexis and grammar" (67) even where, as in Williams' "Nantucket" (their example), the two do not "merge."

The "sight, sound, and intellection" in Zukofsky's definition quoted above translate Ezra Pound's terms "phanopoeia," "melopoeia" and "logopoeia," which, in turn, correspond to Aristotle's "*opsis*," "*melos*" and "*lexis*." Northrop Frye has discussed how, in literature, *melos* and *opsis* are combined in *lexis*. In his discussion of genre, Frye ascribes to the lyric "a relation to the pictorial" as important as its relations to the musical

and to the purely verbal (274). No more than Zukofsky (or Pound), however, does he consistently treat visual pattern as an aspect equal in importance to aural rhythm. Thus, within a few pages of speaking in such egalitiarian terms of the three members of the triad as manifested in lyrics, he remarks that "although of course lyrics in all ages are addressed to the ear, the rise of fiction and the printing press develops an increasing tendency to address the ear through the eye" (278). Here, like Creeley in the note quoted above, he treats the visual form of the text on the page as at most a means for conveying how the poem should sound when spoken. This view of the visual aspect of lyric follows from his taking as the basis for generic distinctions what he calls "the radical of presentation":

We have to speak of the *radical* of presentation if the distinctions of acted, spoken, and written word are to mean anything in the age of the printing press. One may print a lyric or read a novel aloud, but such incidental changes are not enough in themselves to alter the genre. (247)

The radical of presentation for lyric Frye takes to be the poet speaking with his back to the audience and so over*heard*.

However, as Hollander puts it, "just as poetry's sense of itself, its fiction about its own nature, remains a musical, an auditory one throughout a good deal of its history, a visual concern just as surely begins to emerge after a while" (248). "Once the inscribed text was firmly established as a standard... end-product of literary art and typical object of literary appreciation," Richard Shusterman argues persuasively, "it was only natural that the literary artist would exploit the rich aesthetic possibilities offered by the inscribed medium," among them, "visual effects" (87-8). By this late in the age of the printing press (and perhaps even more in the new age of video display of text), surely the overwhelming predominance of silent reading of alphanumeric characters as the way audiences encounter poems has bred eyes receptive of and greedy for prosodic pleasures of their own. And surely the poets who compose at their "machines" have developed such appetites to gratify in themselves as well as in their readers.

Findings by experimental psychologists doing research on the perception of print offer some confirmation of this expectation. Researchers have found that reading proficiency is correlated not just with general language comprehension skills but with speed of memory access for visual pattern matching (Jackson and McClelland).

And experiments have shown that readers access an internal lexicon *before* recoding words into inner speech (Banks, Oka, and Shugarman). In one series of experiments, "even for very young readers," it proved "more difficult to read text that preserved only the sound than text that preserved only the visual outline" (Frith 379). Further—and more direct—confirmation of an appetite for printed texts affording specifically visual pleasures is found in the contemporary phenomenon of avowedly visual literature.

In his study of *Roots of Lyric*, Andrew Welsh borrows Pound's notions of phanopoeia and melopoeia, and draws on Frye's related conceptions as well, with the difference that he gives equal attention to phanopoeia. "To name is to have known, and to know is to have seen"—this he takes as "the fundamental premise" of phanopoeia (26). Welsh discusses both riddles and Renaissance emblem books as among the manifestations of the power of phanopoeia in the roots of lyric. Riddles, he generalizes, "can work from either of two basic elements, the metaphorical presentation of an image or 'picture' or the presentation of an intellectual paradox in which the sense of picture is slight or nonexistent"—or they can "combine both elements, fusing picture and thought," with "the implied metaphor or comparison…used to create the paradox" (30).

In the Renaissance emblem books that Welsh discusses, the emblems are works in a dual medium; the pictorial element enters the work as an actual woodcut or engraving. The printed verses that accompany the picture have, of course, their own visual form, however much it may be overshadowed by the more strongly visual appeal of the picture. (Welsh points out one instance in Francis Quarles' *Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man* where "the poet has encroached upon the domain of the painter and given us a shaped poem" [63].) In a letter to Pound, Williams toys with the idea that the "increasingly difficult music" of modern verse may be attributable to the fact that "whereas formerly the music which accompanied the words amplified, certified and released them, today the words we write, failing a patent music, have become the music itself" (SL 126). An analogous point may be made regarding the relation of modern free verse poems to the dual-medium works in the Renaissance emblem books. In the absence of an actual picture, the printed text of the poem has itself become the picture.

The word "lyric" associates poems in this genre or mode with music, but it is remarkable that a great proportion of lyric poems are poems that fit on a page, hence, are initally encountered by the reader as a visually apprehensible shape. Indeed, "poempicture," a coinage Cummings reportedly used to designate his own poems (Kidder 244), would be an apt term for many of the poems we call lyric poems—provided it were understood that the "picture" in question is often abstract.

Where the printed text has become the picture, the pleasure of visual form in a poem may derive principally from the experience of two distinct structures occupying the same words, that is, the experience of counterpoint. Charles Hartman defines "counterpoint" as the "significant conflict" of "multiple patterns," a conflict on one level that becomes perceptible "as meaning on another" (25). This implies a view of form of a poem as subservient to its meaning and an aesthetic that values unity of form and meaning. Likewise Willard Bohn takes interest in visual poetry where the effect is to "remotivate the signifier" (8) but not in Dadaist work where visual form is used decoratively; he dismisses visual effects that are "entirely gratuitous" as "severely restrict[ed in] their aesthetic function" (7). But the formal aspects of a text can legitimately function independently as sources of interest, of sensuous and conceptual pleasure. As Donald Hall has said, "The sensual body of a poem is a pleasure separate from any message the poem may contain" (32). Patterns and their interactions can seem quite gratuitous in relation to what a text says and still serve to make the text an aesthetic object and to make manifest various aspects of language, typography and textuality.

Jerrald Ranta has drawn attention to the use of geometric shapes—increasing, diminishing and palindromic—by modern poets. Such geometrical forms, Ranta takes pains to stress (revealing, perhaps, a justifiable suspicion that they wouldn't be taken seriously if assumed to be "merely" visual), may be found not only as "visual figures in the printed surface of the poem" but "on every level of the poem," and different forms may be found on different levels of the same poem; forms may also be "differently geometrical... more or less geometrical" ("Geometry" 708,718). They may reinforce each other, but they need not.

Finally, neither a theoretical approach in terms of "the radical of presentation" nor an historical one in terms of "the roots of lyric" takes us very far toward understanding the use of visual form in modern free verse. In Hollander's words, "Historically, there is nothing to say save that all poetry is originally oral, and the earliest inscriptions of it were clearly ways of preserving material after the tradition of recitation had changed or been lost" (250). Welsh's plural "root*s*," though, suggests that the "radical" was always already split, that neither the aural nor the visual can be assigned primacy by reference to the origins of the lyric genre or mode. "Historically," as Cummings and Simmons tell it,"the development has been from the phonological to the graphological," i.e., from "visual organization of phonological data… to a visual organization that carries meaning without reference to the phonological" (74). To appreciate how visual organization carries meaning in modern free verse, a functional approach is needed.

For a start, I would enumerate the following functions of visual form in poetry:

1. To lend prominence tophonological, rhetorical and/or other kinds of patterns in the text. This would include scoring for performance. It would also include the use of white space to express emotion, invite contemplation, signal closure or suggest a parsing of the syntax.

2. To indicate juxtapositions of similar or contrasting images and ideas.

3. To signal shifts in topic, perspective, tone, etc.

4. To render iconically the subject of the poem, something referred to in it, the tenor or vehicle of its governing metaphor, etc. This would include the use of white space on the page as an icon of space, distance, length of time, whiteness, void, etc.

5. To present the reader with an abstract shape of energy, e.g., an image of form or chaos, crystallization or disintegration, expansion or contraction.

6. To help objectify the text.

7. To indicate a general or particular relation to poetictradition.

8. To allude to various kinds of printed texts, including ones, such as technical writing, that are not normally voiced.

9. To create visual texture and visual interest.

10. To crosscut other textual structures, producing counterpoint between two or more structures occupying the same words.

11. To heighten readers' awareness of the reading process.

12. To draw attention to particular features of the text in question and, more generally, to defamiliarize aspects of language, writing and textuality.

Functions (1), (2) and (3) are largely rhetorical; functions (4) and (5) are mimetic; function (6), aesthetic. All tend to support the illusion of the poem as unified and autonomous; I shall refer to them collectively as Group I. Functions (7) through (12), on the other hand, tend to be disintegrative and intertextual; I shall refer to them collectively as Group II. The visual form of a poem and particular features of that visual form can realize several different functions at once, even unifying and disintegrative ones at the same time (in which case the visual form will contribute to the poem's deconstruction of itself).

We have already seen all of these functions of visual form realized, generally several at once, in the poems and passages examined above. Having discovered the functions empirically in those texts, let us conclude by looking at another text, this time with our functional categories as an analytical tool. Visual form is an inescapable and important part of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, as it is of most modern American long poems, including Williams' *Paterson*, Zukofsky's *A* and Olson's *Maximus Poems*. When we look, for instance, at the text of Canto LXXIX (in the group of "Pisan Cantos"), we are assailed by a great number and variety of visual features—variable indentation, intralinear white space, abbreviations followed by slashes ("wd/," "cd/," "shd/," "sd/," "re/," "per/," "vs/"), Arabic numerals, words printed in the Greek alphabet, Chinese characters. (Since it is impractible to show all of these features through excerpts here, the reader is urged to review the full text of Canto LXXIX.)

As we begin to study the effects of these various visual features, we discover that a conflict between unifying and disintegrative tendencies, between Group I and Group II functions, is central to the operation of the poem. The unifying functions of some visual features counter the disintegrative effects of some other kinds of features of the text. Thus, the variable indentation is virtually a condition of possibility for reading, given the discontinuity of the discourse; by

topic, perspective, voice, etc., as per function (3), it helps readers negotiate the discontinuities and perceive recurrent themes, such as the one of the birds on the wires. If this feature tends to unify what is otherwise discontinuous, the abbreviations with their conspicuous slashes, the Arabic numerals, the Greek letters and the Chinese characters all tend to highlight intertextuaiity via functions (7) and (8). Both the abbreviations with slashes and the Arabic numerals are visual features of certain non-poetic written genres such as lists and notes. The Greek alphabet and the Chinese characters obviously allude to other literary traditions. Altogether, the visual form contributes significantly to realizing the conflict between the drive toward coherence and the impulse toward openness that gives the *Cantos* and other modern American long poems their essential problematic character.

In the study of free verse, "one might very well come to the [same] conclusion" as did Barbara Herrnstein Smith in a different context—"that only by surfacing from the deep can we discover the salutary pleasures of air and light, acquire a less subterranean and more sunlit view of the continents there are to explore, and have the hope of dry land at the end of our journeys" (*Margins*, 201). Only by attending to the visual surfaces of printed poems and analyzing the effects of their features can we adequately appreciate the artistry of modern free verse poets. On this, let Pound have the last word:

<div style="margin-left:2em">

to "see again,"
the verb is "see," not "walk on"
i.e. it coheres all right
   even if my notes do not cohere.

</div>

(796-7)

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Despite the traditional belief, endorsed by T. S. Eliot, that the printed poem should represent merely the equivalent of a musical score for its actualization in oral performance, the creative procedures of writing, performing and interpreting poetry are actually subtly inter-related. The voice, the persona of the poem, is encoded in its printed form; but in its release or realization in oral performance, it begins to resonate both with the intended idiom of its creator and with the conditioned, interpretive expectations of the audience. The poet-performer releases his poetry from the tyranny of the printed page. The author is a performing poet who illustrates his argument with examples from his own writing in which he seeks to recreate the voices of, among others, Paul St. Vincent, a young, black South Londoner; Sally Goodman, the white, English feminist; and Philpot the middle-aged, black cricket fan.

E. A. Markham

Which Poem Am I Reading?

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Many years ago, at a poetry reading held at my flat in Shephards Bush, West London, I got an unexpected response to a poem I had just read. It was a short poem, and printed with it on the same sheet of paper was another short poem, very different in shape. Members of the audience had an opportunity to see what was being read but—as this was a "reading," not a workshop—not to read the poems themselves. The unexpected response referred to was based on the assumption that I had read not the poem whose rhythm, shape and pace I had tried accurately to convey in the reading but the other poem on the page, which seemed very different to me in all these aspects. I was given credit then, after I'd revealed the error— was this to save face?—for working *against* the flow of the poem on the page. (This was the late 60s or early 70s, the tail end of performance, concrete and sound poetry.) I was thought to be subverting the poem on the page, un-dermining it. Someone used the image of a discredited government running against itself in the hope of reelection. I liked that.

It was tempting, of course, to dismiss this response of the gathering in the room in Ladbroke Grove on the grounds that it was mainly English—there was one American—and that the possibilities people allowed for

in how a poem written by a West Indian might sound, might be limited. It is entirely possible that had I read the poem which people thought they recognized, they would then not have recognized it as such.

Of course, we were determined to break away from the world represented by the pentameter and from what A. Alvarez was then calling "the gentility principle." And the trick was to achieve this even when you read the right poem. We didn't wish to give ammunition to the many literary snipers aiming their fire at poetry-in-performance. They talked, often convincingly, of the coarsening effects of the poet playing to an audience; of the tendency to simplify imagery and to become literal, to have an eye to the quick laugh, the telling punch-line; of the temptation to subordinate poem to poet. There was a feeling, too, that the poet-in-performance tended to select or develop a performing voice that she/he was comfortable with and to write to that voice, gradually equating it with the poet's voice, with the attendant failure further to experiment with other voices (as, say, actors do) which might equally be authentic voices of that particular poet.

I was later to explore this aspect of growth, this area of possibility, by adopting different personae—Paul St. Vincent, the young black South Londoner:

Chase him down the alley
put him behind bars

in a basement and charge him rent.

Lambchops has potential
for violence. He's faking

says the Pig in the wig,

make him an example
of our collective self-defence.

Black them here stop them there

before they get too cheeky
too second-generation aware

and ape us overtake us

queueing up for houses
they claim their fathers built.

They're a problem so he's a problem

a potential mugger
on a quiet English street,

so smash him smash him
or soon he'll flash an education
and leave you crumpled in a heap.

<div align="right">"A Mugger's Game"</div>

<div align="center">Or, Sally Goodman, the white feminist:</div>

We're writing a poem about a lily in a pond.
We're clearing away the garbage to get to the pond.
We're entangled and frustrated by the fuckrapemurder to the pond.

We press through the splaat violence violence
and win through to the lily in the pond -
the lily with the broken neck, bleeding.
Our poem shows the witchbitch, the outlaw looking on

from the edge of the pond. Ah Ah, my innocents;

we are sitting here debating the group position,
all trying to break wind secretly, together: a small success.
Now we must prepare for rivals flushed
with a taste of Götterdämmerung

We are writing a poem about a lily in a pond...

<div align="center">"The Group"</div>

I tried to exploit the rhythmic possibilities released by these other selves.

We're not just talking about contrasting great visual extremes here because that lifts the pressure on the poet to get it right and removes the sense of ambivalence, the possibilities for creative confusion—all of which make the thing interesting. There is no way, for instance, that in looking at Apollinaire's *Il Pleut*, with its five delicate streamers of rain, we're going to communicate this to a listener as rhyming John Betjeman. Nor are we likely to associate the following eight lines with the first part of a traditional sonnet:

p m r k g n i a o u

p m r k g n i a o

p m r k n i a o

p m r n i a o

p m r i a o

p m i a o

m i a o

m a o

This being the celebrated "Chinese Cats" of Edwin Morgan.

But as a practitioner, a performer, I have a notion of visible language which transcends interpreting what's been written on the page. Surely by now we all agree with Charles Olson in his questioning of the "closed form," the inherited line, stanza, formal pattern, the "verse that print bred," and we find our own release in more open forms of composition by "field." But when Olson says "the voice is greater than the eye," he is still in a sense using the book/line frame of reference. The *line* is meaningless in a non-scribal culture. The line of poetry, in the traditional sense, can be said to work one way for the reader and another for the poet. What does the reader in fact see when she/he opens the book? A shape which might be sense or nonsense. On reading the first line, the reader is still aware of the shape of the poem, but apart from the line which is being read, the rest of the poem might well be nonsense until, gradually, each line is recovered for sense.[1]

This isn't how the poet necessarily sees it. It's true that often the verbalization of a smell, a sound, a memory, an idea, a dream accords with what is easy to say with one breath, with what would seem springboard for development/expansion and at the same time is comfortable to the eye conditioned to conventions of how books are designed, of how their contents are to be negotiated. *A line of poetry*. So far so good. But it's equally possible that the poet sees more than this, might see, in fact, *poem* rather than *line* and might see it in startlingly clear terms, different, in fact, from the way in which the reader might see all but the line which she/he is actually engaged in reading. In that sense, *poem* and *line* dissolve; they become one: it's almost like something hierarchical becoming democratic. Your *line*, then—we have to use these confusing terms—becomes as long as the *poem*: if your poem has the dimensions of China, you might see your line as a billion visible characters long instantly apprehended by the reader or audience.

Of course, the question of human scale—which properly dominates disciplines like architecture, but not music or philosophy or thinking or the novel, though very short novels might be given another name—this human scale question might be used to put limitations on the poem, the line, limitations happily coinciding with the aesthetics of book design, with the tyranny of the page. With this in mind, therefore, talking about visible

language in terms of patterns words make on the page, how do we rescue the poem?

There is an interesting point, reputed to have come from Philip Larkin, designed to convey a distrust of poetry reading or poetry-in-performance. I'm not thinking of his throw-away remark that the poet performing is someone pretending to be himself, but of the more telling charge that the poet-in-performance in some way holds the listener up to ransom. The theory being that the poet puts the listener at a disadvantage, for unlike the solitary reader, the listener is unable to go back and check things imperfectly understood or to confirm that a later verbal explosion was triggered from an earlier planted image. Also, the listener is deprived of the ability to pause and reflect *within the poem* and of the security of knowing when the poem will end: the listener is robbed of the total—as opposed to the localized—cultural experience.

Of course, we can quibble about some of these notions. The listener, unlike the solitary reader, might not be able to stop and go back over something imperfectly understood, but at least the listener is often in a position to ask a direct question to the author. There is also, the other point: the length of the poem acting as a sort of tease. Is this how it really works? It's common practice at a poetry reading to announce the unusual. The unusual, in this context, might mean that the performer might sing rather than recite or read a piece, or that a section might be in a foreign language. More usually, it means drawing attention to a poem that might be thought longer than average or, at the other end of the scale, a haiku. The modern poetry audience, in the absence of any introductory comment to the contrary, would assume an experience of listening to a poem equal to, say, the attention span of the reader who might have occasion to turn the page once but not, perhaps, twice. What I'm saying is that the modern poetry audience is as attuned to the poem as the theater audience is to the scene from the play (the play being the complete reading) or the concert hall audience to this or that particular movement or song (the symphony or the concert being again the complete reading).

But what is it that we are performing? No one accepts (other than the sound poets, who are no longer young or, in many cases, alive) that a written poem is just a score waiting to be interpreted. But immense care is taken by the potential performer to hit the right note with the audience and to try and militate against

anything discordant—from a too-cold hall to what might be perceived to be inappropriate dress on the part of the performer.

Everyone agrees that sound is different from sight and that, hence, hearing a poem read or recited is different from reading it silently yourself. There are, of course, ideologies associated with the tyranny of words on the page, linking with all sorts of terrible things in other aspects of the world generally associated with class or—if you are a person of real imagination—with patriarchy. I'm talking about things like the compartmentalization of knowledge; a division of labor of understanding, and the sort of anti-oratory approach to cultural expression (and hence, presumably, to the conception of culture) which either leads to or issues from some form of de-racination. There is the parallel charge of elitism—the under-privileged being the world's millions unable to read—though it probably isn't true anymore that those who can read tend naturally and voluntarily to do so.

What everyone agrees on is that the habit of writing shouldn't make us deaf and dumb, or words would be robbed of, among other things, much of their sensuality and their drama and *all of their noise*. T.S. Eliot, on the sleeve note to *Four Quartets*, puts the minimalist position:

What a recording of a poem by its author can and should preserve, is the way that a poem sounded to the author when he had finished it. The disposition of lines on the page, the punctuation (which includes the *absence* of punctuation marks...) can never give an exact notation of the author's metric. The chief value of the author's record... is a guide to the rhythms.[2]

Of course, in this, Eliot wants to assist the potential listener, not, in fact, to be influenced by that listener, not to engage with that listener; and he is not in any real sense talking about poetry-in-performance.

One of the more exciting aspects of poetry-in performance (as with nation language in Caribbean poetry) is the way in which it has brought new life to the traditional made-for-the-page line, even in the most hidden of ways, in forcing old work to take new stresses by the very consciousness of existence of the new. I fancy that my somewhat nostalgic poem, "Family," which opens

And we, too, are family.
We have not succumbed to the priests,
the psychiatrists

though not exactly recollected in tranquility, and suggesting a lower noise level than, say,

HER RED RIB ELK AND EEL HER WET DIP
THE NEW BIB DAZ AND VIM SHE LET RIP

which is a clear boast of patriarchy and obviously influenced by performance, is not, in subsequent reading/performing, unaffected by the later poem. This later poem—about patriarchy—is secure partly in the assumption that its audience is likely to be anti-patriarchical in its sentiments, so the poet can safely be the bad guy. There is an unheard but palpable call and response thing happening, the poison is being lanced, the poem is being challenged. So the drill-like, drum-like, insistent, relentless maleness—absent in the "Family" poem—is not a possibility closed to the poet.

Now, finally, let me look again at a bit of a poem and at some of the visual aids which have helped me to communicate it to an audience.

A Last Fling IV and V
(a late meeting with Philpot)

Yes man,
talkin bout statistics, the boys
gettin better. Now it's First after First
after First—and where it goin end
is nobody's business. Man, we not talkin
bout cricket any more, you know: we moving
into History. Whitewash. Blackwash,
every damn kinda wash. We talking big name,
man. Napoleon and Russia. Ever hear
of that woman, first one, fling sheself
over Niagara in a barrel and come out
dancin? Richards driving through the covers, eh?
That's what we talkin bout! See what I mean?
Sperm count of the hog, man. That's what I mean.
Genghis Khan, world conqueror givin the chineyman
licks. Slapping down old Asia. They say he
warm up Siberia hotter than that girl we used to know
back in Great Portland Street days, eh? And we don'
come to Mongolia yet. We win there too, you know:
runs in the family. Roots? You talkin bout root!
This is the tree, the tree of knowledge.
A good feeling, man, a nice warm feeling.

Yes,
here in the dark, on the verandah, a little
bit like home again. Nothing furtive, No Sir.
Forget about the old man and young girl stranded
at a holiday resort out of season.
We're over the awkward, scripted phase
making up for impersonating the other to please
bitches in the audience. Just one of those
necessary meetings of old-time pioneers
who took different forks in the road
and turned what was common into difference.
We pay each other the compliment
of having lived on the edge of the team,
which didn't win in those days, a team
of saggar-boys who couldn't cope
with the women and their batting. There he was
young Philpot, yearning
to throw off the taunts of small-island dasheenman,
and come out breaking arms and heads, hotter
than Wes Hall and Griffiths—another bluestreaking
tornado to punish and lash the enemy. Ah well,
the young boys seem to be catching on.

Yes,
Philpot's reminiscences cloud and illuminate
like a day at Headingley toying with the covers.
There, in a patch of sunlight, his hero snicked
a four through the slips. For twenty years
this fan pondered the blemish on a fine innings.
Now, wise in the ways of the world (and of women) he
    can see
the value of mishitting towards the victory.
Ah, but those were the days, the days. So when's the next
    Test?
v

It is Tomorrow.
It is next year.

First, let's quote the note to this section of the poem. Part of the interest here is the play between the voice and the written idiom. The nation language/creole/dialect of the first section is that of a now familiar sort of poetry-performing act, in which tone and gesture are as important in conveying the experience as are the words on the page; then comes a change of balance, West Indian in its vocabulary and stresses, but less stagy; and finally, a voice still

recognizable from the multiplicity of West Indian voices, distinctive not in its idiom, but in the values (again stresses, pauses, associations…) which it invests in the most innocuous-looking "standard English"phrase. The point is to try to avoid type-casting and stereotyping.

"A late meeting with Philpot" is Part IV of a long poem. The preceding part had the visual tidiness of rhymed couplets, the sense of loss filtered and teased into matching strands, like a card-player playing without a partner. There is a sense of control here, of emotions, of a low-keyed game in accepting one's position with a mild wit and a pretense of humor. The longish lines and rhyming couplets seem to portray this visually.

"A late meeting with Philpot" looks different. There is a chunk, and another, and a third; then it peters out. Indeed, there is a decrease in bulk from chunk to chunk—some draining, perhaps, of his overt West Indianness, through which he might rediscover some-thing not so easily labeled but fitting him. So in this first mode the poem seems to convey the physicality, the bulk of Philpot. He is at a cricket match in England; it is summer so we suspect that it is cold or raining; he's probably in an overcoat, a raincoat. He's middle-aged (a contemporary of Hall and Griffiths, prominent mem-bers of West Indian cricket teams of the '60s) so the suggestion of bulk might refer to his physical girth or to the information baggage he brings with him to the match, baggage which starts spilling out in the form of random information when he is excited and finds him-self an audience. The word-salad which results suggests someone whose outward bombardment with (perhaps useless) information might be overloading the filtering of his mental processes: hence the feeling that this could not be represented by traditionally tidy shapes like the couplet, the sonnet, quatrain, etc.

As the concerns of the poem change, the sense of bulk awkwardness decreases somewhat, till we get to *Part V:*

It is Tomorrow.
It is next year.

which disengages from Philpot and returns the poem to its opening conceit, that there will be time, tomorrow, next year, to meet, as it were, one's destiny.

I seem to be saying that the listener-reader-performer relationship is more complex and productive than, say, Eliot's musical score model would have us believe and that embracing it need not lead to all of Larkin's complicated fears being realized. Consider what seems to be happening in performance: the poet presents the

poem to a live audience. The poet differs from an actor performing, in at least two important ways: the poet is not backed/protected by the text, by an absent author; and the live audience can challenge the validity of the product in more intimate ways than walking out (which is the usual course of action employed by the disappointed theatergoer). For the poet/performer, the protection of middle-man is removed.

This, perhaps, militates against the poetic mountebank succeeding indefinitely (though the parallel problem of the good poet but bad performer reading her/himself off the circuit remains). The poet-as-performer is coming out this side of not being quite a preacher/teacher/ activist/comic/apologist/bore, stripping the sermon/ lesson/protest/joke/cause of outside authority, thereby admitting to a degree of vulnerability, thereby working against structures (most of them oppressive) which, in order to deny/conceal that vulnerability, wear the faces of authority. In this spirit, in this environment, performance is a continuous process of *becoming*.

Endnotes

1   Olson, Charles. 1950. *Projective Verse*. New York: New Directions.

2   Eliot, T.S. (1979: originally published 1939-1942). London: Faber.

Technique and form are integral to a poem's expression of its

particular vision. Rhythm, lineation and syntax—sometimes

played off against each other—collaborate with meaning to guide

the reader's inner hearing of, and response to, a poem.

The author illustrates this interrelationship with references to

his own poems.

Andrew Waterman

Soundings Along the Lines

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A poem begins not in ratiocination but in experience— with a fermenting in one's mind of something, perhaps overtly trivial, one has in some sense lived through. It may be a landscape, or an incident in a supermarket, a gesture or conversation witnessed or recalled, a per- sonal relationship, a dream, or an attunement to some historical or geographical elsewhere; even such an abstract concept as relativity theory, which has meta- phoric suggestiveness. And very often an uncalculated collision and fusion in one's imagination of more than one such detail, probably scattered in real life, triggers things off. A pressure generates, that nags one into taking out pen and paper—and only the actual writing, altering, deleting, redraftings, verbally exploring pos- sibilities, holding yourself alert to further sleights and glints, discovers what, if anything, can be won into a poem, and what the poem needs to be. The whole process is analogous not to construction from a blue- print, but to extricating a tenuously conceived sculp- ture entire from the given mass which is its raw material—and at the end a rubble of discarded phrases and details litters the draft sheets.

In all this, technique and style are not things extrinsic, respectively applied like spanners and chisels to the task in hand and spread on the poetry's substance like

jam, but are integral to vision; and crucial to getting a poem under way is sensing its appropriate form, rhythms and movement, its voice—all vital determinants of its perspective and texture. One knows very early whether the particular poem needs to define itself in a regular rhymed form, or in free verse—and if the latter, its essential manner and movement. I write primarily for the printed page, and therefore for a silent reader. But as a silent reader sees with his mind's eye, so also he hears with his mind's ear, and the poem has to direct the movements, pauses and pace of his internal enactment of it. Additionally, there are poetry readings or radio broadcasts where one can deliver the thing aloud oneself, and also one's poems are on occasion read aloud by another reader, who needs the text's guidance to performance. With rhymed forms, or regular iambic blank verse, there are obvious ways in which one can play off syntax and speech-rhythms against the fixities of the given structure; but in free verse also, if indeed it is to have vitality and not be merely flaccid, such counterpointings, generations of tension or slight surprises, are essential to the poem's total expression.

Having been asked, I'll annotate what is attempted in a couple of my poems, both prompted by West of Ireland landscapes, neither in a traditional rhymed form, but differing considerably in the pace and articulation of their movement.

The Two Roads

The fork in the path
came up before
I was ready to choose;
I found I had taken
the sky road. At first
I could glimpse through thicket
the other lane dipping,
escorted by water,
between flowering banks,
rollered lawns, white stone dwellings.
A turn lost the view.
And what with the rain
closing in, the unsheltered
climbing a stony

road riding blown grass,
it was only attaining
the ridge I could look
down through snatches of cloud
at the coast road whole:
past meadows where cows
stood in clusters it followed
the strand to the bay's
bluest haven, a house,
sunlit garden, child playing
as if who belonged there
might have been me;
who appearing now
did not look up,
would be deaf at such distance
to the nothing I knew
was all I could say now.

I think the symbolic in poetry should be rooted in the actual, a kind of resonance off it, when a particular actual experience, unbidden, suddenly "blazes," illuminating one's imagination with awarenesses larger than just its literal self. The two roads, named and signposted as in the poem, branch from a fork outside Clifden in Connemara, both leading around a hilly peninsula. A problem in life is that over and again alternative choices, of various kinds, open before one, and before one has time to weigh-up all the pros and cons and ifs and buts, the moment arrives when one has to jump, one way or the other—and for a long time after the disused possibility remains vivid, one can almost see one's alternative self traveling it, and what might have been, and how different.

When I wrote the poem, some time after the event, the form and movement, the continuing pulse of two-stress lines each also containing varying numbers of un-stressed syllables, was there from the start. It perhaps suggests the rhythm of the walking that is the poem's physical action. But decisions which came later, as I put it through successive drafts, and which shape the way it reads, had to do with punctuation and notably the very unequal length of the sentences within the poem's thirty-one lines.

The opening sentence states the triggering occurrence, the taking of a direction, an option, when the alterna-

tives happen upon one with an immediacy which preempts or precludes any adequate consideration of them. That the rhythm here puts heavy stresses on "ready," "choose" and "found" is no accident. The next sentence describes what can be literally seen for a while after that, looking across to the untraveled coast road. The lines end in commas, the pace is leisurely. Then comes the deliberately clipped and laconic one-liner, "A turn lost the view." This functions as a sort of launch pad from which the reader is catapulted into a very long twenty-line sentence concluding only with the poem as a whole, wherein moreover only five lines are in any sense end-stopped, and which draws the reader, aloud or within his head, through certain modulations of tone. The aim is to create an effect of urgent ongoing, an acceleration not through space at the poem's literal level of action—the protagonist isn't breaking into a run—but rather through time, at the metaphoric level where journeying along a road, and what it brings, images life's quest, a level of meaning disclosing itself at the point where, from a height half-veiled by cloud, the coast road comes back into view, but now remote and transfigured, a landscape no longer merely actual.

The sentence pauses there at the colon for the protagonist to take in what he now envisions, as from much further along his own life, as what he might have arrived at had he chanced the other way at that early fork, a contrastingly sunlit landscape wherein the house by blue sea embodies what his own life might have been, blessed with the child he has never had. The next pause, at the semi-colon, marks another turn in the sense where his doppelganger appears from the house, not reciprocating the gaze; then the comma closing line twenty-eight ushers in the poem's final bleak recognition that the divergence between the two lives, the one lived and the one once possible, has become too vast for any meaningful contact between them. Again, I'd hope the alliteration accentuates the stressed words "deaf" and "distance," and "nothing," "knew" and "now".

By way of a footnote to an obviously autobiographical poem, which leaves its protagonist *in media res* rather than at the end of his road, I'd remark the fact that in 1981, nine years after I wrote "The Two Roads," I became a parent: but then, the distinction between art's world of being and life's of becoming is funda-mental.

In the following poem again in a fairly straightforward way a physical scene and experience, visiting an island off the coast of Kerry, generate feelings and insight about life.

Great Blasket

From land's extremity the island
entices, delectable with shadow.

The landing-place is clefted between rock,
and a green road loops up

around what have been dwellings: roofless,
foundering into blown grass set

with flower-constellations I have no name for.
Elemental enough: some sheep, the sea

they rode in curraghs casting nets;
the long winters of inbred storytelling

in the Irish; the young drifting to mainland
jobs and marriages. Till all were taken off.

And if this twenty-year dereliction harboured
ghosts, there'd be nothing to be said

except agreement how across the water
always looked more alluring.

The boat collects us. From the stern
I see, before a shower cuts off, the broken

walls still marking each frail holding,
a longer stay than mine, and not romantic.

Richard Bradford has invited me, as its perpetrator, to respond to his sugestion that the poem's lineation "cuts into the syntax in a way that might prompt a typically pretentious theorist of poetic form... to lots of ingenious readings, and broader speculations on the ways in which the visual format of poems can change and intensify the ordinary continuities of language."

Theorizing thus, upon such lines as one might say, would of course be neither amiss nor original. In "Great Blasket" I wanted a slow, contemplative and reflective pace, also a sort of sparseness to the poem's shape and movement appropriate to the dereliction of the scene described. The lines have no regular number of stresses, but recurrently aspire towards iambic pentameters, always however faltering away, collapsing back, like the "broken walls" in the poem.

Separating the poem into little two-line "stanzas" also felt right—seen as white space on the page they enact in the mind's ear the recurrent slight pause one would insert if reading the poem aloud, slowing the pace, contributing an effect of hesitancy, adding to the intended starkness with each mini-stanza a "frail holding." However, as the islanders' perilous nets could never contain the eternal amorphous sea, neither could their walls lastingly mesh the land, and correspondingly the syntax of the poem overflows and breaks, largely ignores, the poem's lineation and stanza-division—although the full stop after "alluring" to close the eighth stanza makes a break prior to physical return from the island. And the way the formal breaks repeatedly cut into the utterance generates a certain tension, perhaps mimetic of the poem's struggle to apprehend imaginatively the contradictory scene it contemplates. For the dereliction is also beautiful, superfically to the day-visitor as "romantic" as his final realization insists the lives constrained by hardship to give up trying to inhabit it were not.

In the poem, certain specific line breaks are calculated, by imposing delay, to generate anticipation which may then be mildly surprised. Thus "island"/ "entices" defers, as if until it has crystallized from among various possible alternatives, the initial effect of the island when first seen from the mainland. "Harboured"/"ghosts" keeps the reader momentarily guessing until the noun arrives, itself to tilt the verb to its larger meaning rather than that denoting, say, the "landing-place" described earlier in the poem. And on the page, the stanza-break

and a green road loops up
around what have been dwellings...

makes the eye enact such a loop around to enclose the dwellings.

In general, I'll only conclude that whilst when writing poems one does the sort of things I have described wittingly, they start from intuitions about the particular poem's needs; and whatever the poet's intentions, the sucess of his effects depends upon whether they convey what feels right—the judging of which is the reader's prerogative.

Having one's editor along the corridor of one's work-place is a mixed blessing—in this case easing Richard Bradford's path, now he has read the foregoing, to waylay me with a request to comment further on "per-formance and effect." He asks me: "When you read your poem aloud do you recapture the original experi-ence? Or, to put it even more naively, when you hear yourself read them do you feel that you're putting together the original sense of timing, mood, intonation, which brought the poem together in the first place?" And, referring to poems I would "choose for a public reading," he asks: "Say why, or to be more specific, say which poems are intended to give the most striking effect to the hearer rather than the silent reader." I can be straightforward on these matters. As my paragraph opening this piece indicates, a poem doesn't necessarily have its origin in any single unified actual "experience"; and even where it does, the experience of writing it is something else, with other dimensions and considera-tions. As Donald Davie has put it,

The practice of an art
is to convert all terms
into the terms of art.
By the end of the third stanza
Death is a smell no longer;
it is a problem of style.

—Likewise love, suffering, joy, satirical contempt and the rest of the emotional gang. One may fall upon the thorns of life and bleed, or walk a Connemara road intuiting larger resonances, but the poem gets written elsewhere, perhaps much later, hard-headedly, in a chair or at a desk, where one's critical mind, like an old-timer panning for gold, sifts the "given" material for glinting richnesses. That said, there is of course a sense in which the process of writing re-inhabits the original experience, whether single and literal, or scattered in actuality, or purely imaginary, which has prompted the poem. Wordsworth, when one restores his often-quoted phrase "emotion recollected in tranquillity" to its full context in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* showing that "tranquility" is precisely *not* the state he attributes to actual composition, puts the matter well: "Poetry", he wrote,

takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contem-plated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually

produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.

The attendant pleasures, even where the theme is heartfelt loss or suchlike, are of aesthetic and technical achievement in mediating experience through language.

If in these ways the work of writing to an extent reenters the original experience behind the poem, so also, much more transiently and less intensively, must reading it, whether silently or aloud. But if, as his own gloss suggests, by "original experience" Bradford primarily means the original experience of *composing* the poem, then I am unable to differentiate between the manner in which one reenters and recreates the original "timing, mood, intonation" when reading silently to one's mind's ear, or when reading aloud. In both, one is reenacting the poem's movement, play of natural speech utterance and syntax against lineation and the rest. Of course, reading aloud presents also a physical challenge: one is trying to *perform* such effects so that they register upon listeners, to figure which line breaks or syntactical stops in a long complex sentence—such as the final twenty lines of "The Two Roads"—one should best use to take breath so the poem does not run one out of it.

And, writing as I do for the page and for the silent reader whose eye and inner ear can dwell on the words and rhythms as much as he or she wishes, I have never written a poem intended to give, in Bradford's words, a more "striking effect to the hearer rather than the silent reader": such aural effects as "strike" a listener will, I trust, register comparably upon the silent reader. In choosing among my poems for public readings I am guided by, in addition to my own notions of which of my poems seem best or most interesting to me at present, the variety principle; and I am constrained by my inability to utter aloud, although I can hear them in my mind and see them on the page, accents other than my own, which excludes from public readings certain poems with Irish or regional English dialogue in them.

Form is always part of meaning, a factor defining content. Of course, there are poems using formal effects which are purely visual, such as the typographical tricks of e.e. cummings, which cannot survive into oral rendition. Nor indeed can Geoffrey Hill's use of brackets, often very telling on the page, for these

cannot really, even allowing for virtuoso pause-and-sotto-voce shots at enactment, be uttered aloud in a way that definitively distinguishes them and their significance from other parentheses enclosed by dashes or commas. Occasionally however a poem makes overt allusion to and use of its own form; and since sound waves are not white paper it may seem that in such cases a sharp distinction may emerge between silent reading and oral performance. Here is one such poem I have written and published recently:

Frohe Weinachten

My son, in Lincolnshire, reads back your card's
German, asks its meaning. I explain.
We count fünf, vier, drei, zwei, eins—down our phones...
Outside my window, aqueous monotones
of greyness: sky, roofs, coal-smoke, windswept yards.

Aglow in red this morning in Coleraine
you and your children, as we pranced among
dour shoppers, tinselled windows, twitched balloons
under a drizzle of loudspeakered tunes,
beercans rattling. Then you were gone again.

So, Christmas nears. I picture your home hung
with green sprays...Well, TV extravaganzas,
crass ritual boozing, all such I can skip,
to dwell on what redeems man's fellowship,
gracing, I'll know, your family rites. Your tongue

confirms, love, how our meetings link like stanzas,
loose ends picked up, transfigured to a chime.
In peace mere geography can't wrench untrue
I'll ring my son, and wait to hear from you.
Trusting our rhythms to intuit answers

as they gather to the final rhyme.

The analogy between the spaced-apart stanzas and separated human meetings is explicit; and the way an unfellowed second line in each stanza is picked up with a harmonizing rhyme only after a gulf, at the start of the following stanza, is obviously mimetic of the experience described, enacting a sequence of tensioned waitings always completed by accord, a recurring emotional rhythm finally binding together the stanzas/meetings.

All this is apparent on the page. Returning to Richard Bradford's questions in relation to this poem and these of its effects, I ask myself what differences emerge between it being read on the page, and aloud—which I have only, so far, experimented with just now, in the solitude of my home. Orally, the white spaces separating the stanzas and by extension the meetings with the woman, disappear; but are replaced by pauses which seem their equivalent. The overt figurative use of "stanzas," "rhythms," "rhyme," surely registers identically whether aloud or on the page. One might argue that the listener might be less apt than a silent reader to notice the "loose" yet finally interlinking second lines of each stanza; yet I would not necessarily expect the silent reader with the page before him to notice this trick consciously, at any rate on a first reading, but would still like to think that the effect, the emotional pulse I intend, would nevertheless register as part of the experience of the poem for both types of audience.

So again, I can detect no essential difference between literally hearing and silently reading the poem.

Adams, Hazard and Searle, Leroy (editors). 1986. *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Tallahassee: Florida State University Press. 892 pages. Softcover. $34.95
A collection of theoretical writing by thirty-eight contemporary theorists with background on eighteen intellectual precursors, this volume supplies a working understanding of contemporary critical vocabulary and thought. It includes: phenomenologists, structuralists, deconstructionists, Marxists, feminists, reader-response critics, dissenters and eccentrics.

Andersch, Martin. 1989. *Symbols Signs Letters about handwriting, experimenting with alphabets and the interpretation of texts.* New York: Design Press. 255 pages. Illustrations, many in color. Hardcover. $75.00
A beautifully designed and produced book that visually explores (with limited text) the process of teaching and learning handwriting/calligraphy. The title defines the scope of the book.

Baudin, Fernand. 1984. *How Typography Works (and why it is important).* New York: Design Press. 144 pages. Illustrations. Softcover. $14.95
First published in French under the title *La Typographie au tableau noir* (mentioned in *Visible Language*, volume XXII, number 2/3, p.337), the author combines lettering and type to illustrate principles of typography.

DeFrancis, John. 1989. *Visible Speech. The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 306 pages. Illustrations. Hardcover. $27.50
The author stresses the unity of widely divergent writing systems as representations of speech while noting their differences in script form. He proposes a new classification of writing systems based on his theme of oneness and diversity.

Gottschall, Edward M. 1989. *Typographic Communications Today.* Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press. 250 pages. Illustrations, many in color. Hardbound. $75.00
This exploration of twentieth century typography is international in scope and technologically up-to-date. It is an arresting visual compendium of diverse typographic problems and the graphic approaches to their solution.

Harris, Roy and Taylor, Talbot J. 1989. *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought.* New York: Routledge. 200 pages. Softcover. $14.95
Major issues and themes in the development of the Western linguistic tradition are presented chronologically. Extracts from 'landmark' texts are followed by a commentary which locates the concept in its social and intellectual context.

Kostelanetz, Richard (editor). 1989. *Esthetics Contemporary.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 470 pages. Hardbound. $29.95
Cultural and aesthetic implications of the avant-garde arts that have flourished since 1959 provide the frame for this volume. The editor has collected papers by critics and practitioners as diverse as Nelson Goodman and Charles Jencks or Robert Smithson and John Cage.

Toolan, Michael J. 1988. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. New York; Routledge. 281 pages Softcover. $13.95
The author examines a range of narrative types – written and spoken, literary and nonliterary – showing what systematic attention to language can reveal about the narratives themselves, their tellers and their audience.

Zapf, Hermann. 1987. *Herman Zapf and His Design Philosophy*. Chicago: Society of Typographic Arts. 255 pages. Illustrations, many in color. Hardcover. $60.00
An important monograph of a contemporary master typographer, this book is beautifully designed and produced.