



ROLAND

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ICA'S VISUAL ART PROGRAMME
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FEATURING A GUIDE TO
POOR. OLD. TIRED. HORSE.

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Exhibiting artists: Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Anna Barham, Matthew Brannon, Henri Chopin, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Alasdair Gray, Philip Guston, David Hockney, Karl Holmqvist, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Janice Kerbel, Christopher Knowles, Ferdinand Kriwet, Liliane Lijn, Robert Smithson, Frances Stark and Sue Tompkins; curated by Mark Sladen

Magazine also features contributions by: Charlotte Bonham-Carter, Augusto de Campos, Lewis Carroll, Michelle Cotton, Douglas Coupland, Eugen Gomringer, George Herbert, Joseph Kosuth, Liz Kotz, Giles Round, Stephen Scobie, Tris Vonna-Michell and William Carlos Williams



The ICA is proud to present the second issue of ROLAND, which has been produced to accompany our summer exhibition, entitled *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* The first half of the magazine contains a guide to the exhibition and its associated events, while the second half contains a wider range of texts and images, creating a more expansive context for the current project.

POOR. OLD. TIRED. HORSE. ROOM ONE

Poor. Old. Tired. Horse. is an exhibition of art that verges on poetry. The exhibition starts with work from the 1960s, and with a group of artists who are associated with the Concrete Poetry movement that flourished during that decade. The movement can be taken as a symbol of the cross-pollination between art and literature that was a feature of the 1960s, but the exhibition goes on to look at other artistic practices from this era that explored the intersection of the graphic and the poetic, and concludes with a group of younger artists who place such concerns at the heart of their work.

As a genre, concrete poetry is understood as poetry in which the visual manifestation of words is as important in conveying the intended effect as the more conventional elements in the poem. The genre has ancient roots, and notable examples were created in the early twentieth century by the French writer Guillaume Apollinaire, and by the Dadaists. However, as a movement Concrete Poetry had its roots in the 1950s, in

separate initiatives by Swiss and Brazilian writers, and it went on to become an international phenomenon in the 1960s, gaining adherents in many countries and extending out of the literary sphere and into the art world.

The first room in this exhibition concentrates on the work of the Scottish artist and writer Ian Hamilton Finlay, who was a key figure in the Concrete Poetry movement in Britain. Moreover, the exhibition takes its title from a periodical that Finlay ran from 1962 to 1968, and which featured his own graphic and literary experiments alongside those of other artists and poets.¹ Finlay, in one of his aphoristic assertions, maintained that “stupidity reduces language to words”. The current exhibition challenges this reduction and, like Finlay and his collaborators, seeks to demonstrate the rich possibilities of language when manifested not only as poetry but as image.

Mark Sladen
ICA Director of Exhibitions

1. The phrase “Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.” originated in a poem by Robert Creeley.

IAN HAMILTON FINLAY



Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.
No 18, Wild Hawthorn Press

Ian Hamilton Finlay’s associations with the Concrete Poetry movement begin in the early 1960s, around the time that he founded *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* Finlay would go on to become the most important concrete poet in Britain, with work that paid homage to the Japanese haiku, and to the Carolingian scholar-poets, as well as to the Modernist avant-garde. He would also become one of the key promoters of the Concrete Poetry movement in this country, through his publishing and correspondence. The exhibition features a display of printed ephemera by Finlay—including copies of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*—and two of his concrete poems realised as wall paintings.¹

Finlay would come to feel confined by the acceptance of the Concrete Poetry movement by a wider public, and would disassociate himself from it in the later 1960s. His own practice was constantly developing, however, and he continued to experiment with the idea of giving form to syntax. In the early 1960s, Finlay made a number of ‘poem objects’, which frequently took the form of stone pieces, and

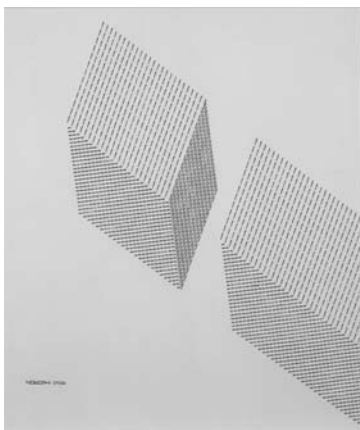
in 1966 he began to work directly in the landscape at his home in Stonypath, in the hills outside Edinburgh. Finlay’s most famous creation is his garden, Little Sparta, a fusion of poetic and sculptural elements with the natural landscape, and which employs the classical, revolutionary and martial imagery that would be a feature of his later work.

Ian Hamilton Finlay was born in the Bahamas in 1925, but spent most of his life in Scotland. He published his first volume of short stories in the early 1950s, and in 1961 he founded the Wild Hawthorn Press, which printed his prolific output of poems, cards and booklets as well as *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* His career was long and varied, and included a solo exhibition at the ICA in 1992. Finlay died in 2006.

1. In his later career, Finlay often chose to realise texts as wall paintings, recreating his older poems or creating new pieces. The wall paintings were often made in partnership with Les Edge, who has executed the installations at the ICA. One of the works at the ICA is *Sea Poppy I*, which is based on a concrete poem from 1968 that uses the codes of shipping boats.

ROOM TWO

The second room in the exhibition contains work by a number of artists who, like Finlay, were associated with the Concrete Poetry movement, demonstrating some of the range of positions that it embraced. This room also features other artists who emerged in the 1960s and 70s and who—though sometimes known for very different affiliations—created work that offers interesting parallels to that of the concrete poets. We now associate the deployment of text in 1960s art with the use of written instructions or records within Conceptual practice, or of advertising language within Pop, but these artists, just like the concrete poets, sought to explore the poetic or expressive possibilities of language.



Dom Sylvester Houédard
FOR THE 5 VOWELS (1), 1976

DOM SYLVESTER
HOUÉDARD

Dom Sylvester Houédard—or ‘dsh’, as he called himself—is, with Ian Hamilton Finlay, one of the two principle founders of the Concrete Poetry movement in Britain.¹ Houédard began experimenting with what he called ‘typestracts’ in the 1940s, and developed a highly distinctive style of typewritten visual poetry, using coloured typewriter ribbons and carbon papers. When Concrete Poetry emerged as an international movement in the early 1960s, Houédard became—through his legendary letter writing—one of its most active participants, advocates and theorists.

The work of Houédard is notable for its extraordinary formal discipline, for its exploration of the multiple combinations of letterforms and words, and for its examination of the spatial possibilities of the page. He saw Concrete Poetry as an extension of an ancient tradition of shaped verse, and his works are allied to notions of mystical contemplation. His interest in mysticism also encouraged him to explore Buddhism and Hinduism, and some of his works echo the mystic-psychedelic imagery of the hippy era.

Dom Sylvester Houédard was born in 1924 on Guernsey, and studied at Jesus College, Oxford, and at St Anselmo, Rome. In 1949, after serving in British Army intelligence he became a monk at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire, and was ordained as a priest in 1959. Houédard made many contributions to religious life, becoming a champion of the ecumenical movement in the 1960s, and working as a theologian and as a translator of the Bible and other religious texts. Houédard died in 1992.

1. Houédard, like Finlay, was galvanised by a letter celebrating the movement written by the Portuguese poet de Melo e Castro to the *TLS* in 1962. The two British poets would share a long correspondence.

HENRI
CHOPIN

Henri Chopin is a key figure within experimental art and literature in the post-war years, as an artist and writer, but also as a highly active curator, editor, designer and publisher. In 1958, Chopin founded the review *Cinquième Saison*, which became *OU* in 1964 and ran until 1974. Over the course of its life, this journal brought together figures associated with Dada, Surrealism, Lettrisme, Fluxus and Beat Poetry, as well as innovators of Concrete Poetry—including Ian Hamilton Finlay.

Chopin was an advocate of interdisciplinary production and multi-sensory art, echoing Raoul Hausmann’s view that “We are able to speak and write, because we hear with our eyes and we see with our ears.”¹ *OU* was notable for its inclusion of recordings of sound poetry—the area in which Chopin himself is probably most famous as an artist. This exhibition includes a number of Chopin’s ‘typewriter poems’ from the 1960s and 70s, which reflect another key aspect of the artist’s work: a fascination with the relationship between order and disorder, a preoccupation deeply rooted in his experience of war.

Henri Chopin was born in Paris in 1922. Deported to Germany in 1943, he spent periods in prison and in hiding before being repatriated, and subsequently enlisted as a soldier. In the 1960s in Paris he worked as a radio and television producer, but he left after the failure of the uprisings of May 1968, and moving to England, settled in Essex. Chopin’s solo exhibitions in the UK include Coelfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, 1972, Norwich Gallery, 1998, and Cubitt, London, 2008. Chopin died in 2008.

1. Cited in Alicia Drweski, ‘Henri Chopin’, in *Henri Chopin*, exh. cat., Coelfrith Arts Centre, Sunderland, 1972 (n.p.).

FERDINAND
KRIWET

Ferdinand Kriwet is a multimedia artist who has engaged with text, language and concrete poetry since the 1960s. Kriwet’s *Text Signs*, 1968, a set of which are shown in the ICA’s Lower Gallery, are made from stamped aluminium. The format implies a commercial function, and the pieces resonate with advertising culture. However, Kriwet’s circular use of text also has strong associations with the mandala, an Indian form imbued with spiritual significance in Buddhism and Hinduism. Moreover, it has the function of disrupting the linear process of writing, as words and names join together or are juxtaposed to suggest a clashing and fusing of ideas.

Kriwet’s signs, like Finlay’s landscape pieces and wall paintings, were an attempt to move concrete poetry quite literally into the world. The use of the sign form to contest subjects such as militarism and sexuality, and to co-opt the public inscription of power, is also an interesting precedent for the work of Jenny Holzer and other artists in the 1980s. The circular form is further explored in Kriwet’s *Text Dias* and *Text Sails*, 1970, giant signs printed on PVC, a group of which are displayed in the ICA’s Concourse.

Ferdinand Kriwet was born in Düsseldorf in 1942, and lives in Dresden. As well as his text works, the artist has also produced ‘sound-picture-collages’ and experiments in radio, television and publishing. Kriwet was included in the seminal concrete poetry exhibition at the ICA, *Between Poetry and Painting*, curated by Jasia Reichardt in 1965; more recently, he had a solo show at The Modern Institute, Glasgow, in 2008.

LILIANE LIJN

In a text from 1968, Liliane Lijn wrote, “WORDS = VIBRATIONS = ENERGY”.¹ Over the past forty years, Lijn has explored this idea through numerous kinetic artworks. In the early 1960s, she began experimenting with painting horizontal lines on revolving cylinders. Having decided to put words on the cylinders, she collaborated with the poet and filmmaker Nazli Nour, who had asked Lijn if she could “make her poems move”.² Lijn extracted words and phrases from Nour’s poems and used Letraset to apply them to her cylinders.

Around this same time, Lijn also began to experiment with truncated cone shapes inscribed with words in rhythmic circles and ellipses that visually recalled the sound of the text. The cones were placed on revolving record turntables. Lijn first showed her *Poem Machines* in La Librairie Anglaise in Paris, a popular spot for Beat artists and writers. In 1968, she was commissioned by the ICA to make a work for the exhibition *Guillaume Apollinaire 1880–1918: A Celebration*. The result, exhibited again here, is *Poemkon=D=4=Open=Apollinaire*. The cone has remained an important formal consideration for Lijn throughout her career, and she continues to investigate the notion of words, sub-atomic particles and reality in flux.

Liliane Lijn was born in New York in 1939. After studying Archaeology at the Sorbonne and Art History at the Ecole du Louvre in Paris, she has spent periods of time in Greece before eventually settling in the UK. In 2005, Lijn became the first artist in residence at the Space Sciences Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, where she experimented with Aerogel, a material developed by NASA.

1. Lijn, Liliane, ‘POEM MACHINES = VISION OF SOUND’, *Liliane Lijn Poem Machines, 1962–1968*, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1993 (n.p.).
2. Wilson, Andrew, ‘Liliane Lijn: Poem Machines’, *Liliane Lijn Poem Machines, 1962–1968*, op cit.

VITO ACCONCI

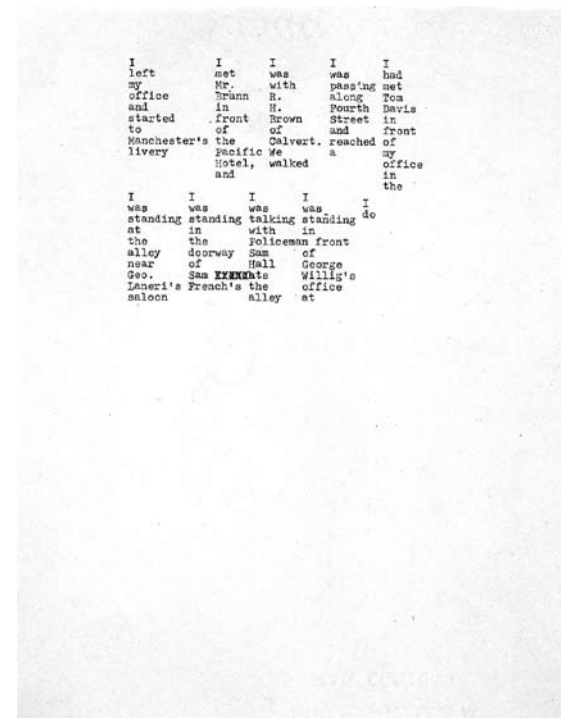
Vito Acconci began his artistic career as a writer and a poet, concerned less with the meaning of words than with the way in which they could be arranged across a page. Seeking to demolish the functionality of the word, in the late 1960s he made a series of works using pre-existing text. Sourced from a variety of material, Acconci’s ‘found poetry’ was relocated to the left or right margin of the page, thus disconnecting the words from a context that could establish meaning. Taken from *Four Book*, 1968, the pages on display at the ICA constitute one graphic collage poem, each page juxtaposing a photocopied image of a page of the Manhattan phone book with a column of phrases or words.

Acconci’s objectification of language echoed the anti-referential principles of Minimalism, which began to dominate the New York art scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Acconci cut, spliced, moved and displaced words, he performed many of the principle actions of the new sculpture. These actions became increasingly performative, as Acconci asked himself: “if I’m so interested in this question of space and movement over a page, why am I confining this movement to an 8 x 11 inch piece of paper?”¹ From here, he began to operate in a variety of media, exploring the real space of human interactions, and creating some of the foundational works of performance art.

Vito Acconci was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1940. He studied literature at Holly Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts, and received an MFA in creative writing from the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa in 1964. In the early 1970s his performances were supplemented by film and video; thereafter his practice became centred on installation; and at the end of the 1980s he moved into design and architecture and formed Acconci Studio.

1. Kotz, Liz, ‘Poetry from Object to Action’, *Art and Language*, The MIT Press, Cambridge and London, 2007, p. 174.

CARL ANDRE



Carl Andre, *III left: met was*, 1975

Carl Andre is today best known as one of the founders of Minimalism, but he has also engaged in a parallel practice as a poet. Andre’s poems are characterised by the way in which they isolate words from syntax, and from larger sets of words (often derived from a particular historical source). These isolated units are subjected to repetition, gridding and other arrangements, emphasising their materiality; Andre is especially drawn to nouns and proper names, words that emphasise their properties as ‘things’. There is a clear relationship between Andre’s poetry and his sculpture of the mid-to-late 1960s, the period in which he was developing his material language of stacked, gridded and modular structures.

Shown here are five pages from a seventeen-page poem by Andre entitled *Shooting a Script*, a project he began in the mid-1970s. In Andre’s words, “The main event of *Shooting a Script* is a mutually fatal gunfight that took place in Waco, Texas on April Fool’s Day, 1898. From a text presenting 17

eyewitness accounts of the bloody encounter, I have created a clastic reweaving of voices. The result is a Cubist-fugue rendition of the homicidal episode that reduces the orderly recollections of the witness to the panic and chaos of the event itself.”¹

Carl Andre was born in 1935 in Quincy, MA. He studied art at Phillips Academy, Andover, MA, and moved to New York in 1956. Andre first showed his sculpture publicly in 1965, and in 1966 his work was included in the seminal show of Minimalist art at the Jewish Museum in New York, entitled *Primary Structures*. Andre’s poems became widely exhibited only later, and were the subject of an exhibition at Lisson Gallery, London, and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in 1977.

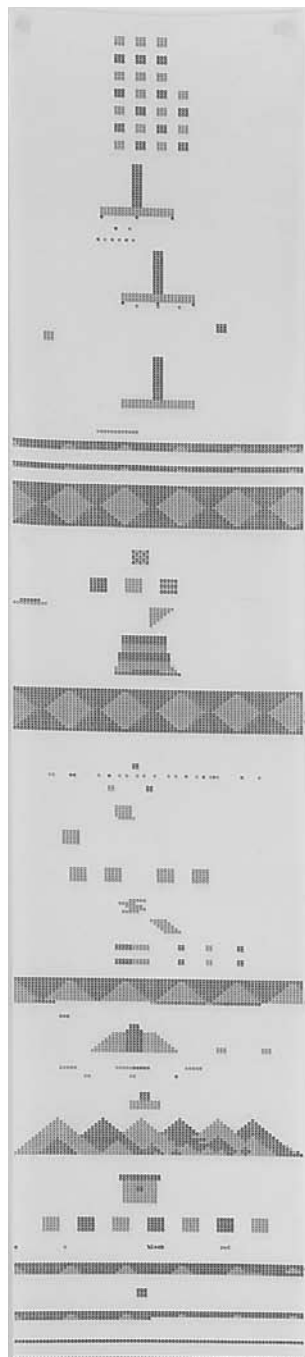
1. Carl Andre, quoted in press release for the exhibition *Carl Andre: Words & Small Fields*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2001–02. ‘Clastic’, from the Greek word *klastos*, meaning broken is a geological term referring to sedimentary rocks made up of individual particles.

CHRISTOPHER KNOWLES

Christopher Knowles is best known for his ‘typings’ of the 1970s and 80s, text-based pieces that were developed as a private pastime. The exceptional ability in mathematical organisation revealed in these works is a characteristic by-product of autism, with which Knowles was diagnosed as a child. His work also reveals affinities with the structure of serial art and music, and has a strong relationship to performance (the artist has also made live and recorded performances of his texts).

Knowles’ typings employ lists of words and phrases, including those derived from pop charts as well as other words and phrases from the artist’s life. Additional features include geometrical patterns, carefully built up using the artist’s initial, ‘C’. The works were created on an electric typewriter, using red, black and green inks, and the pieces exhibited here were made in 1980 on scrolls of rice paper.

Christopher Knowles was born 1959 in New York, where he still lives. His wider public exposure dates from his meeting, in 1973 at the age of fourteen, with the theatre director Robert Wilson. The latter had heard an audio recording by Knowles, and asked him to collaborate and perform with his company, a partnership that continues today. Knowles first exhibited in 1974, and had two solo exhibitions at Holly Solomon Gallery in 1978 and 1979.



Christopher Knowles
Untitled, 1980

ROOM THREE

The exhibition’s exploration of artistic practices from the 1960s and 70s, and the ways in which they were allied with poetry, is concluded in this room. However, unlike those in the Lower Gallery, these bodies of work use images in addition to words—or are purely illustrational, in the case of David Hockney’s etchings. The mid-century avant-garde often denigrated the pictorial or illustrative possibilities of art, but the four artists in this room all showed themselves capable of flying in the face of such opinion.



Robert Smithson
Untitled (Moth), 1962

ROBERT SMITHSON

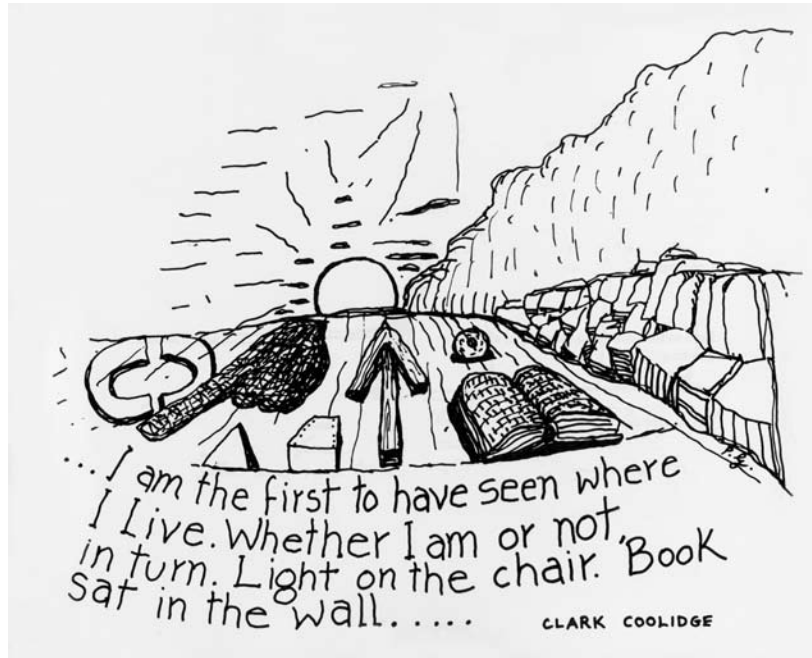
Robert Smithson had a special interest in language, and at the start of his career he created a group of drawings that explore its pictorial possibilities, including the two works exhibited here, *Untitled (Moth)* and *Untitled (Encyclo)*, from 1962. These drawings combine nude and mythological figures with rows of apparently random words, numbers and phrases. They correspond to Smithson’s recollection of “phantasmagorical drawings of cosmological worlds somewhere between Blake and ... oh, a kind of Boschian imagery”.¹

Smithson’s development of words as compositional elements on the page reflects his interest in William Blake and the idea of the painter-poet, but also offers a parallel with the way in which language is treated in concrete poetry. Smithson’s idea of the radical properties of words—once freed from the usual systems by which they are contained, and including the idea of words as architectonic material or as ritualistic incantation—would be developed in a text entitled ‘LANGUAGE to be LOOKED at and/or THINGS to be READ’, from 1967.²

Robert Smithson was born in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1938. He had wide-ranging interests that took in science, natural history, anthropology and science fiction, and his complex ideas were manifested in a variety of ways. He is best known as a pioneer of the Earthworks movement, and for his association with Minimalism, but as well as being an environmental artist and sculptor he was also a filmmaker and writer. Smithson died in a plane crash in 1973, at the age of thirty-five.

1. Interview with Paul Cummings in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, 1996.
2. Reproduced on p. 52–53 of this publication.

PHILIPPE GUSTON

Philip Guston, *I am the First*, c.1972

From the late 1940s through to the mid-1960s, Philip Guston was a leading figure within Abstract Expressionism. However, between 1967 and 1968 he abandoned abstraction in favour of a new style of painting, which featured everyday objects realised in a cartoon-like fashion. The critical reception to his first showing of these works was highly negative. As a result, Guston left New York City, retreating to upstate New York, where writers and poets became his primary influence.

The *Poem-Pictures* constituted a series of drawings first initiated by Guston in 1970 in collaboration with poets including Bill Berkson, Clark Coolidge, Robert Creeley and William Corbett. Guston was interested in the interplay of words and images. In a letter to Bill Berkson in 1975, he wrote, "It is a strange form for me—excites me in that it does make a new thing—a new image—words and images feeding off each

other in unpredictable ways. Naturally, there is no 'illustration' of text, yet I am fascinated by how text and image bounce into and off each other."¹ At the ICA, Guston is represented by a group of *Poem-Pictures* made in collaboration with Clark Coolidge.

Philip Guston was born in 1913, in Montreal, but moved with his family to Los Angeles in 1919. As a painter in New York, he rose to prominence alongside Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions around the world. Guston died in Woodstock in 1980.

1. Philip Guston, quoted in *Philip Guston's Poem-Pictures*, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts, 1994, p. 14.

ALASDAIR GRAY

Alasdair Gray's best-known productions as a visual artist are his graphic illustrations for his own books, and he is interested in a tradition of writers who have also illustrated their own work, including William Blake and Rudyard Kipling. In this exhibition, Gray is represented by two groups of prints: one is from a set of illuminated versions of his own poems, made between 1967 and 1971; the other is based on the illustrations for his celebrated novel *Lanark*, published in 1981.

Both groups of prints were created from originals made with scraperboard and ink, and feature the combination of precise line and phantasmagorical subject matter that are characteristic of Gray's illustrations (as well as of his murals). They also contain motifs that have recurred within the artist's work; as he has observed, "on inventing a figure of the sort I call 'a moral emblem' I keep using it again and again."¹ The poems that Gray has illustrated are from a cycle entitled *In a Cold Room*, 1952–57, written in response to the death of the artist's mother. The illustrations for *Lanark* are in fact a set of frontispieces produced for the different parts of the novel, a postmodern portrait of the author and his native city, which Gray began to write in the 1950s.

Alasdair Gray was born in 1932 in Glasgow, where he still lives. He obtained a Diploma in Design and Mural Painting from Glasgow School of Art in 1957, and since that time has been producing mural commissions as well as portraits and illustrations. Gray established a parallel career as a writer, producing plays for radio and television in the 1960s and 70s, and has published many novels and other books since the international success of *Lanark*.

1. From 'On Making Pictures', *Frieze*, issue 119, November 2008, p. 148.

DAVID HOCKNEY

The Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933) is famous for his gay love poetry, written in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Alexandria in Egypt in the 1920s. David Hockney discovered Cavafy's poetry while still a student, and it inspired several works that he made in 1961. In 1966 he was commissioned to make a series of etchings relating to the poet, and in 1967 he published a portfolio entitled *Illustrations for Thirteen Poems from C. P. Cavafy*, works from which are exhibited here.

As preparation for the commission, Hockney travelled to the Middle East, although he went not to Egypt but to the Lebanon, which was then the more cosmopolitan locale. Hockney returned with a set of pen-and-ink drawings of street life in Beirut, and several of these were used as the basis for etchings. However, the majority of the final prints concentrate not on street scenes but on interiors, and were based primarily on drawings of pairs of boys made in the artist's bedroom in Notting Hill. These works are not literal illustrations of Cavafy's poems, but evocations of the fleeting sexual encounters that are among their subjects.

David Hockney was born in 1937 in Bradford, and educated at Bradford College of Art and the Royal College of Art, London, graduating in 1962. Hockney is one of the leading figures associated with British Pop art, and has worked as a painter, draughtsman, printmaker, stage designer and photographer. In the mid-1960s he made Los Angeles his main residence, but he is now based primarily based in Yorkshire.

ROOM FOUR

The exhibition concludes with the work of six younger artists. Several are represented by text-based pieces, others use combinations of text and image, and in some instances their gallery-based works are allied to a wider poetic or performative practice. In recent years, the art world has been dominated by neo-Conceptual work, and where text has been used it has often been within the limits established by Conceptualism. However, artists are now turning towards poetry and expressive language in a way that has not been seen for many years. Like some of their forebears from the 1960s and 70s, these younger artists explore the potential of poetry to move beyond the constraints of linguistic and graphic systems, reflecting the true complexity of communication and creating meaning that cannot be pinned down.

ANNA
BARHAM

Much of Anna Barham's work centres on poetic texts, created using a self-prescribed set of rules, and in particular, the rules of the anagram. Inspired by the story of the archaeological discovery of Leptis Magna, an ancient Roman city east of Tripoli, in 2007 Barham created a series of drawings charting anagrams of the city's name. In 1816, some fragments of the ruins of Leptis Magna were given to King George IV, and used to build an artificial ruin at Windsor Great Park. Just as the excavated stones formed the foundations of an imaginary ruin, so in Barham's work the letters in the city's name become the building blocks of new poetry and prose.

In recent works, Barham has added R, E, E and D to her existing pool of letters, thereby generating further anagrams. At the ICA, the artist is exhibiting the video *Magenta, Emerald, Lapis*, 2009, in which she uses a tangram (a square cut into seven pieces that can be re-formed in various ways) to create letterforms, eventually building up words into a text. The tangram pieces are shuffled and reshuffled at the moment they become recognisable as letters, illustrating how symbols are transformed by the reordering of their parts. Barham's interest in anagrams stems from the idea of revealing an unconscious meaning of a word, and exploring its associative potential.

Anna Barham was born in the UK in 1974. She graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2001. She works in a variety of media, including sculpture, performance, video and drawing. Barham has exhibited internationally and within the UK, and is currently showing in the exhibition *Stutter*, in Tate Modern's Level 2 Gallery until 16 August 2009.

JANICE
KERBEL

Janice Kerbel works with a range of materials, including drawing, text, audio and print, to explore the indefinite space between reality and fiction, and between abstraction and representation. Her work frequently involves extensive research, and takes the forms of plans, proposals, scripts or announcements for imaginative scenarios that cannot or will not actually happen. In conveying these imagined events, Kerbel draws upon the potentiality of language and text.

In this exhibition, Kerbel is showing two works from the *Remarkable* series. Originally commissioned for Frieze Projects (for the 2007 Frieze Art Fair), the posters use precisely fanciful language to describe the appearance of a number of elusive and otherworldly characters. Borrowing from the hyperbolic language of fairground announcements, figures introduced in the series include: *The Human Firefly*, *Faintgirl*, *One-Eyed Soothsayer* and *World's Shyest Person*, *The Regurgitating Lady* and *Temperamental Barometric Contortionist*. The large-format silk-screen posters were created digitally using typefaces inspired by the nineteenth-century letterpress. Each letter was set manually into the page in a laborious process that creates subtle variations in the uniformity of each work.

Janice Kerbel was born in Toronto in 1969, and studied at Emily Carr College of Art and Design, Vancouver and Goldsmith's College, London. She now lives and works in London. The artist has had a number of solo exhibitions at institutions across the UK, including Norwich Gallery of Art, 2003, and Arnolfini, Bristol, 2000. Kerbel will be showing at greengrassi, London, in the autumn.

SUE
TOMPKINS

While Sue Tompkins' work owes much to various literary and art-historical movements, such as Concrete Poetry, the Beat poets and typewriter art, she frequently emerges as the rebellious offspring rather than as a clear descendent of these genres. Her performances usually involve three items: a stool, a microphone and a ring-binder full of hundreds of sheets of paper. She reads from these at a hyperactive pace, developing her rhythm. In a previous incarnation, she was a singer in the now defunct post-punk band, *Life Without Buildings*.

Tompkins's typewritten works are not residues of her performances, but a parallel practice, often using broadsheets that have been folded to fit into a typewriter, and that still bear the creases of this process. She presents segments of language, often de-contextualised snatches of everyday conversations. Words are given emphasis through repetition, juxtaposition, misspellings and uneven spacing.

Sue Tompkins was born in Glasgow in 1971, graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 1994, and is still based in the city. She has had solo exhibitions in numerous venues, including the Showroom, London, in 2007. Tompkins has also performed at institutions and events around the world, notably the Scottish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005, and Tate Britain in 2006.



Sue Tompkins
The artist performing at the Showroom, London, 2007

KARL HOLMQVIST



Karl Holmqvist
The artist reading at westlondonprojects, 2009

Karl Holmqvist is an artist and poet whose output has included performance, recorded sound, printed matter, video, collage and installation. His work is characterised by its social and political activism, albeit manifested in a highly personal and eccentric form. Filtered through a collage of cultural references, it takes in a lineage of figures associated with or appropriated by alternative culture, from Jesus and William Blake to William Burroughs and Patti Smith.

Holmqvist's readings are distinguished by their hypnotic, anti-spectacular quality, and his visual work is often deliberately functional, employing the tools and aesthetics of self-publishing, and extending the notion of reading and performance into the gallery space. The artist's installation at the ICA includes a copy of his photocopied book, *ONELOVEWORLD*, published in 2008, as well as a wall of posters that have been enlarged from it. *ONELOVEWORLD* demonstrates

Holmqvist's particular interest in repetition and patterning, and features concrete and other poems, interspersed with appropriated images that include Op Art paintings and photographs of underground pin-up Arthur Rimbaud.

Karl Holmqvist was born in Vasteras, Sweden, in 1964, studied literature and linguistics at Stockholm University, graduating in 1987, and now lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include The Living Art Museum, Reykjavik, 2008, and Argos Arts, Brussels, 2009. Recent group exhibitions include Manifesta 7, Trento, 2008, and *For Fans and Scholars Alike*, westlondonprojects, 2009.

MATTHEW
BRANNON

Matthew Brannon explores the potential of words to communicate, illustrate, misrepresent and confound. His work sometimes recalls the aesthetic language of advertising and posters, particularly from 1950s America. With hindsight, the 1950s has emerged as a decade in which the US presented a thin veneer of strength and unity that barely concealed a bored and disillusioned population, a situation that would result in profound social changes in the following decade. In many ways, this duplicity resonates in Brannon's work, which is frequently comprised of images that would not look out of place in a cookbook, juxtaposed with unsettling or inappropriate snippets of text.

Brannon's work suggests a complex relationship between image and text. Sometimes, the text is printed so small that it can be difficult to read. At other times, it is nonsensical, or at least a non sequitur, and on further occasions it presents a literal, deadpan explanation of the image. Brannon has explored text in a number of forms, from micro-stories to concrete poetry. In the creation of his work, he uses letterpress, an outdated printing technique. In the exhibition, Brannon shows a number of works featuring text spewing from a typewriter, an important device in the artistic positioning of words in society and another reference to a bygone era.

Matthew Brannon was born in St Maries, Idaho, in 1971. He received an MFA from Columbia University, and lives and works in New York. His solo exhibitions include a recent show at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York, 2007, and he will have a solo exhibition at The Approach, London, in the autumn.

FRANCES
STARK

Frances Stark is exhibiting four works that adapt the writings of other authors. *Having an Experience*, 1995, traces a reader's underlinings in a copy of *Art as Experience*, 1934, a book on aesthetics by the American philosopher John Dewey. The other three works employ quotations from novels: Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, 1930–42 (*The quantity of the effect and the effect of quantity*, 1997); Witold Gombrowicz's *Ferdynand*, 1937 (*I must explain, specify, rationalize, classify, etc.*, 2008); and Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, 1945 (*Untitled (Drop Out)*, 2003).

Stark often draws on book culture within her work, and she seems especially interested in the self-reflexivity that is a feature of modernist writing. Such self-reflexivity is echoed in the visual strategies that her work employs, which include repetition, fragmentation and collage (and her graphic treatment of text can create parallels with concrete poetry). However, Stark's quotations from literary culture are more playful than didactic. They are also part of a wider interrogation of the creative act, and of authorial uncertainty, that has a pronounced autobiographical aspect for the artist, who often, as in *I must explain, specify, rationalize, classify, etc.*, appears in her own work.

Frances Stark was born in 1967 in Newport Beach, California, and lives and works in Los Angeles. She studied at Art Centre, Pasadena, and at San Francisco State University, graduating in 1991. Recent exhibitions include *A Torment of Follies*, at Secession, Vienna, and Greengrassi, London, in 2008; and in autumn 2009 the artist will have an exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary.

Texts by Charlotte Bonham-Carter and Mark Sladen

EVENTS

Some exhibition-related events require booking. Please call the ICA Box Office on 020 7930 3647

For more information please visit www.ica.org.uk/poth

STEPHEN BANN
TUESDAY 23 JUNE 7PM
Nash Room / free / booking required

Art critic, curator and art historian Stephen Bann is recognised as the pre-eminent commentator on Ian Hamilton Finlay's work. Bann delivers a lecture on Finlay's vast and varied artistic output.

MARK SLADEN
THURSDAY 25 JUNE 7PM
Meet in the Lower Gallery / free

Director of Exhibitions at the ICA, Mark Sladen delivers a talk on the exhibition.

**WHAT WAS /
IS CONCRETE POETRY?**
WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 7PM
Nash Room / free / booking required

A panel discussion looking at the original Concrete Poetry movement of the 50s and 60s, and examining its legacy. With Arnaud Desjardin, artist and publisher of the The Everyday Press; Chris McCabe, poet and joint librarian at the Poetry Library; and other participants to be announced (please check the website for details). Chaired by Mark Sladen, Director of Exhibitions, ICA.

**DAN GRAHAM IN
CONVERSATION WITH
ANNA LOVATT**
TUESDAY 7 JULY 7PM
Nash Room / free / booking required

The celebrated artist Dan Graham will be in conversation with Anna Lovatt, Lecturer in Art History, University of Nottingham. The event will take in the linguistic turn in 1960s art, with special reference to the drawings of Robert Smithson. The evening is co-hosted by the ICA and Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, on the occasion of mima's purchase of two Smithson drawings, exhibited in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*

**CHARLOTTE
BONHAM-CARTER**
THURSDAY 9 JULY 7PM
Meet in the Lower Gallery / free

Assistant Curator at the ICA, Charlotte Bonham-Carter delivers a talk on the exhibition.

**ANNA BARHAM AT
THE PORT ELIOT
LITERARY FESTIVAL**
FRIDAY 24—SUNDAY 26 JULY

Anna Barham, one of the exhibitors in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, will be staging a new performance at The Port Eliot Literary Festival (held in St Germans, Cornwall). The performance will incorporate sculptural elements, and will translate Barham's manipulation of shapes and letters into a live arena, presenting language as a form of choreography. For details visit www.porteliotfestival.com

**LILIANE LIJN:
THE POWER GAME**
TUESDAY 28 JULY 7PM
ICA / free

Set in an imaginary casino, *The Power Game* is principally concerned with the power of words. It is both a game and a live performance, which investigates the politics of identity and power. *The Power Game* is the brainchild of Liliane Lijn, one of the exhibitors in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, and was originally staged by her at The Royal College of Art in 1974.

This event is unconfirmed at the time of going to print. Please check the ICA website or call the Box Office for more information.

XPRMNTL PTRY
THURSDAY 30 JULY 7PM
ICA Theatre / £4
(£3 concessions, free to ICA members)

The Concrete Poetry movement helped to open up the field of poetry, and visual poetry is now practised by many poets at some stage of their career. But is there still a dedicated group of experimenters in visual poetry, and how does the shape on the page translate into live performance and sound? Poet Chris McCabe organises an evening of avant-garde and experimental poets, including Peter Finch and Jeremy Reed as part of The Ginger Light.

MICHELLE COTTON
THURSDAY 6 AUGUST 7PM
Meet in the Lower Gallery / free

Curator of Cubitt, London and freelance art critic, Michelle Cotton delivers a talk on the exhibition.



Alasdair Gray
We Will Go into the Streets of Water, 1965

ON THIS DAY ONLY. Welcome with *Disbelief*—

**LIKE THE TRUEST OF SCALES
AND FAIREST OF BEAUTIES,
THIS POLYGRAPHIC WONDER**

PERFORMS THE MOST DELICATE BALANCING ACT.

SWOONING

IN THE FACE OF ANY UNTRUTH!

WHITE LIES, BLACK LIES, COMPLEX AND ELABORATE LIES — LIES TOLD TO PROTECT, LIES TOLD TO ENCHANT,

LIES TOLD IN PURSUIT — EVASIONS, EXAGGERATIONS, EQUIVOCATIONS — FALSE MODESTIES, INSINCERITIES, SELF-AGGRANDISEMENTS

— HARMLESS LIES AND HURTFUL LIES — LIES TOLD BY OMISSION, LIES TOLD TO ONESELF —

**INDEED, ALL FORMS OF
FALSEHOOD!**

Compensating With EQUAL & OPPOSITE Measure For EACH & EVERY Deception

HER HEARTBEAT SLOWS, HER BREATH SHALLOWS;

HER VISION DIMS, HER PALLOR ASHENS

AND HER DIVINE, SOOTHSAYING BODY
crumples to the ground.

A HEROINE

OF THE SINCEREST BENEVOLENCE AND MOST INFALLIBLE COMPASSION

WITNESS THIS INCREDULOUS SPECTACLE OF STAGGERING
!! EQUILIBRIUM !!

FAINTGIRL

Janice Kerbel
REMARKABLE: Faintgirl, 2007

PUBLICATIONS

The following is a selection of the exhibition-related publications that are available in the ICA Bookshop.

ICA Members receive 10% off all books, ICA branded gifts and ICA films and DVDs.

www.ica.org.uk/bookshop

LILIANE LIJN
Works: 1959—1980

By David Mellor
Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, 2005
£20.00

This book accompanied the first major retrospective exhibition of Liliane Lijn's work and concentrates on the development of her work from the 1960s and 70s. The illustrations feature not only Lijn's early surrealist drawings, kinetic sculptures and light works but contemporary photographs that document and illuminate this era.

ABOUT CARL ANDRE
Critical texts since 1965

Edited by Paula Feldman, Alistair Rider, Karsten Schubert
Ridinghouse, 2005
£25.00

Spanning four decades, this book charts the gradual evolution of consensus about the meaning of Carl Andre's art, including texts written by some of the most influential art historians and critics: Clement Greenberg, Donald Kuspit, Lucy R. Lippard, Robert C. Morgan, Barbara Rose and Roberta Smith.

NORTHERN GRAMMAR
Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), Glasgow, 2003
£10.00

Northern Grammar brings together many of the best known artists in Scotland whose work incorporates the written word as a key element of their artistic practice.

WORDS TO BE LOOKED AT
Language in 1960s Art

By Liz Kotz
MIT Press, 2006
£19.99

This is a critical study of the use of language and the proliferation of text in 1960s art and experimental music, with close examinations of works by Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, John Cage, Douglas Huebler, Andy Warhol, Lawrence Weiner, La Monte Young, and others.

LANARK
A Life in Four Books

By Alasdair Gray
Canongate Books, 1981
£9.99

Lanark, a modern vision of hell, is set in the disintegrating cities of Unthank and Glasgow, and tells the interwoven stories of Lanark and Duncan Thaw.

NATURE OVER AGAIN
The Garden Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay

By John Dixon Hunt
Reaktion Books, 2008
£29.95

Nature Over Again is the first book to examine all the garden designs and 'interventions' of Ian

Hamilton Finlay (1925—2006), best known for the garden of Little Sparta he created for himself in the Lowlands of Scotland.

TO SAY THE VERY LEAST

By Matthew Brannon
Art Gallery of York University, 2008
£50.00

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Matthew Brannon: Try & Be Grateful, To Say the Very Least* is the first comprehensive publication on the print works and installations of Matthew Brannon.

A TORMENT OF FOLLIES

Edited by Annette Südbeck
Secession, Vienna, 2008
£16.00

Secession is published on the occasion of *A Torment of Follies*, an exhibition of twenty-two new large-format paper works by Frances Stark. The catalogue includes an essay by Martin Prinzhorn.

WHAT'S MY NAME?

By Karl Holmqvist
Book Works, London, 2009
£12.00

Artist and poet Karl Holmqvist is interested in language, both as performance and as text. *What's My Name?* is a new publication of the artist's writings.

EDITIONS

To accompany *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, Frances Stark has generously created a special limited edition print which will be available to purchase from Wednesday 17 June.

We offer ICA Members and Patrons priority purchase and a 10% discount on this edition and 20% discount on all previous ICA limited editions. For more information contact Vicky Steer, Editions Manager, on 020 7766 1425 or email vicky.steer@ica.org.uk

The ICA regularly publishes limited edition prints by internationally acclaimed artists involved in its exhibition programme—recent contributors include Fia Backström, Mark Leckey and Enrico David. To view all ICA editions visit www.ica.org.uk/editions.

Proceeds from the sale of these editions provide vital support for the ICA, directly contributing towards the ICA's future exhibition programme.

FUTURE PROJECTS

ROSALIND NASHASHIBI

10 SEPTEMBER—8 NOVEMBER 2009

London-based artist Rosalind Nashashibi has established a strong international reputation for her 16mm film works, which are presented as gallery-based installations. Nashashibi's work is influenced by cinematic history, including the legacy of ethnographic film, and pursues an interest in myth, voyeurism and portraiture, using intuitive and experimental filmic structures. This autumn the ICA is staging the first major survey exhibition of Nashashibi's work, including an ambitious new commission and a group of films from the last four years.

The first part of the exhibition will set out a number of recurring motifs within the artist's work, and what she describes as a "family tree" of symbols and signs. One featured work will be *Eyeballing* (2005), which was shot in New York, and which literally finds 'faces' within the architecture and landscape of the city. Another featured work will be *Bachelor Machines Part 2* (2007), a double projection

piece, which includes excerpts from a film by German director Alexander Kluge, along with footage of Nashashibi's own restaging of Kluge's scenes using the artist Thomas Bayrle and his wife Helga.

The second part of the exhibition will include *The Prisoner* (2008), which is based on a work by Chantal Akerman, and extends Nashashibi's exploration of vision and control. In this piece Nashashibi's camera follows a woman through an anonymous interior and out onto the streets of London. It will also include a new 16mm film commission that will be ambitious in scope. The latter is set on Hampstead Heath in North London, and features scenes of men roaming in the park, as well as a sequence of a film crew shooting in the woods at night. The work enacts the theatrical space of desire, as well as the dream space of cinema.

Nashashibi's exhibition will be accompanied by the first retrospective publication on the artist's work, which will include texts by Dieter Roelstraete and Martin Herbert. The exhibition is a collaboration with Bergen Kunsthall in Norway, where it will be shown later in the year.



Fia Backström
Studies in Leadership—The Golden Voice, 2009
 Seven-colour silkscreen print on 300gsm paper, 81 x 61 cm
 Edition of 50, signed and numbered
 £250 including VAT (£200 for ICA members and patrons)



The second half of the magazine includes a collage of texts and illustrations, including new essays by Michelle Cotton and Charlotte Bonham-Carter, and previously unpublished artistic contributions by Giles Round, Frances Stark, Karl Holmqvist, Tris Vonna-Michell and Anna Barham. The publication also includes poems by Lewis Carroll, Augusto de Campos, Eugen Gomringer and George Herbert and texts and statements by Liliane Lijn, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Smithson and Carl Andre, as well as a section from the first chapter of Alasdair Gray's forthcoming autobiography, *A Life in Pictures*.

VISUAL-LINGUISTIC FORMS IN THE WORK OF IAN HAMILTON FINLAY

CHARLOTTE BONHAM-CARTER

In his seminal work of 1593, *Iconologica*, Cesare Risa declared: “an image is a definition”.¹ And certainly, the post-Renaissance trend towards representational painting suggested as much. The relationship between language and image is dense, and it comes as no surprise that the impulse to combine one’s literary and visual experiences is a clear trajectory in the history of culture. From the origins of language as pictographic forms such as hieroglyphics, to the use of imagery in language, it is evident that the visual and the linguistic are interrelated. Take, for example, the word ‘Revolution’ in a political sense: the word derives from medieval pictures of the ‘Rota Fortunae’ (the wheel of fortune), which spun unpopular monarchs out of power and lowly people into good fortune.² This image, amongst millions of others, has infiltrated language.

One of the most influential examples of visual-literary conjunctions is the ‘emblem book’, a popular form across most European lands by the sixteenth century. These books containing pictures and mottoes were used to embody an abstraction, a concept, a nation or occasionally, a person (though usually one of great social or regal standing). The emblem almost always had a subtle religious message, either Protestant or Catholic. In the eighteenth century, emblems began to be taken less seriously—a movement instigated

by John Bunyan’s moralistic book of poems for children, *Divine Emblems; or Temporal Things Spiritualized*, 1724, which popularized the form amongst children’s literature.³

In 1978, Ian Hamilton Finlay published a booklet called *Heroic Emblems*.⁴ It contained a series of emblematic forms that borrowed from the Classical, the Renaissance and the Modern era. According to Finlay scholar Yves Abrioux, for Finlay, “the form of the emblem generates ... ‘a free-floating metaphor’, formed from the conjunction of motto and image, setting it apart from more conventional methods of established meaning”.⁵ Finlay’s employment of the emblem was recurrent throughout his life’s work; it surfaces in many of his early prints from the 1960s and 70s, and continues later on, as he began to explore neoclassical forms through sculpture and works in the landscape. Although, in Finlay’s work, one thing can often be seen in terms of another, his use of analogy and metaphor is so complex and richly circuitous that one thing never definitively stands for another. Instead, he creates a new syntax, established by a network of visual and literal correspondences.

The tradition of the emblem is continued in a more illustrative sense by the few writers/artists that have managed to carve out a unified position in what can often be two mutually exclusive roles. Works in this category include, among others, Ben Jonson’s writings, Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, much of William Blake’s work and the illustrated poems and texts of the septuagenarian Glaswegian, Alasdair Gray. Gray’s most famous illustrated novel is *Lanark*, published in 1982. Each book of the novel is richly introduced by an emblematic frontispiece. Gray juxtaposes realistic and antiquated phantasmagorical



Medieval frescoes on ceiling of Church of St George, Topola, Serbia

1. Ian Hamilton Finlay and Ron Costley with commentaries by Stephen Bann, *Heroic Emblems*, Z Press, 1978, p. 9.
2. Alasdair Gray, ‘Text as Illustration’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 7 November 2007.

3. Ian Hamilton Finlay and Ron Costley, p. 10.
4. Portions of the booklet are reproduced in this publication, on p. 44–50
5. Stephen Bann, ‘Neoclassical’, in Yves Abrioux, *Ian Hamilton Finlay, A visual primer*, Reaktion Books, London, 1992, p. 105.

or allegorical illustrations with excerpts of contemporary discourse to create an intricate web of meanings, associations and references.

It is the possibility of establishing new systems of interpretation that has propelled the consideration of form in writing. And for Finlay, as the progenitor of the Concrete Poetry movement in the UK, it was using words as objects, at first on the page and then in real space, that spurred his continual development as an artist. In the catalogue for an exhibition at Tate St Ives in 2002, Finlay remarked, “There is always a distance between a name and what it names.”⁶ In giving words a power beyond that of mere signifiers of a remote signified, Finlay imbued language with a level of autonomy and authenticity that was not otherwise possible. In the same vein, he often worked with abbreviations, words that had a ‘found poetry’⁷ to them and that offered no actual means of deciphering meaning. Words were deliberately distanced from their referents in order to stand alone as objects on the page or in the landscape.

One of Finlay’s most important found poetry works is a series of four poems from 1966, *Sea Poppy* (see page 38) and *Sea I, II and III*. The works are comprised of fishing boats’ names (the abbreviation of the port they come from, followed by a number) arranged in concentric circles. Thus the works in the *Sea Poppy* series adopt the shape and style of another historically significant visual-linguistic form, the mandala. The mandala is a geometric design enclosed within a circle and imbued with mystical significance in Buddhism and Hinduism. It is often used as a spiritual training device, to focus attention or to embody an imaginary place that is contemplated during meditation. It is comprised of different layers of symbolism, from the outer edge to the

inner core. As a whole, the mandala is often understood to be a representation of the cosmos, or the universe.

Possibly connected to a resurgent interest in Buddhism during the 1950s Beat generation and the 1960s Hippie era that followed it, a number of Concrete poets experimented with the form of the mandala, including, amongst others, the German artist, Ferdinand Kriwet. In works such as his *Rundscheiben* series of 1960–63, *Text Signs* 1968, and *Text Sails* and *Text Dias*, both 1970, Kriwet gave the spiritual symbol a contemporary Pop twist. Liliane Lijn’s poem machines bear a strong resemblance to another spiritual device, the Tibetan prayer wheel. A spinning drum inscribed with prayers or mantras, the prayer wheel is used to visualise the dissemination of the mantra, and as a means of purification. It is interesting to note affinities between Concrete Poetry, which sought to circumvent conventional systems of interpretation, and spiritual practices that share a similar aim.

In Finlay’s web of metaphors, analogies and associations—realised through poems, prints, sculptures and work in the landscape—he established a methodology of interpretation that is endlessly coded and infinite. Understanding and the means to an understanding are one and the same. This kind of interpretational conundrum is played out in Plutarch’s dialogue *On the E at Delphi*. The essay, which is constructed as a dialogue revealing a number of opinions on the meaning of the large, enigmatic ‘E’ inscribed on a stone fragment near the shrine of Apollo, was an important influence on Finlay.⁸ Fascinated by the relationships between things, he discovered that the *Enterprise*, a World War II battleship and a recurring motif in Finlay’s work, was nicknamed ‘the big E’.⁹



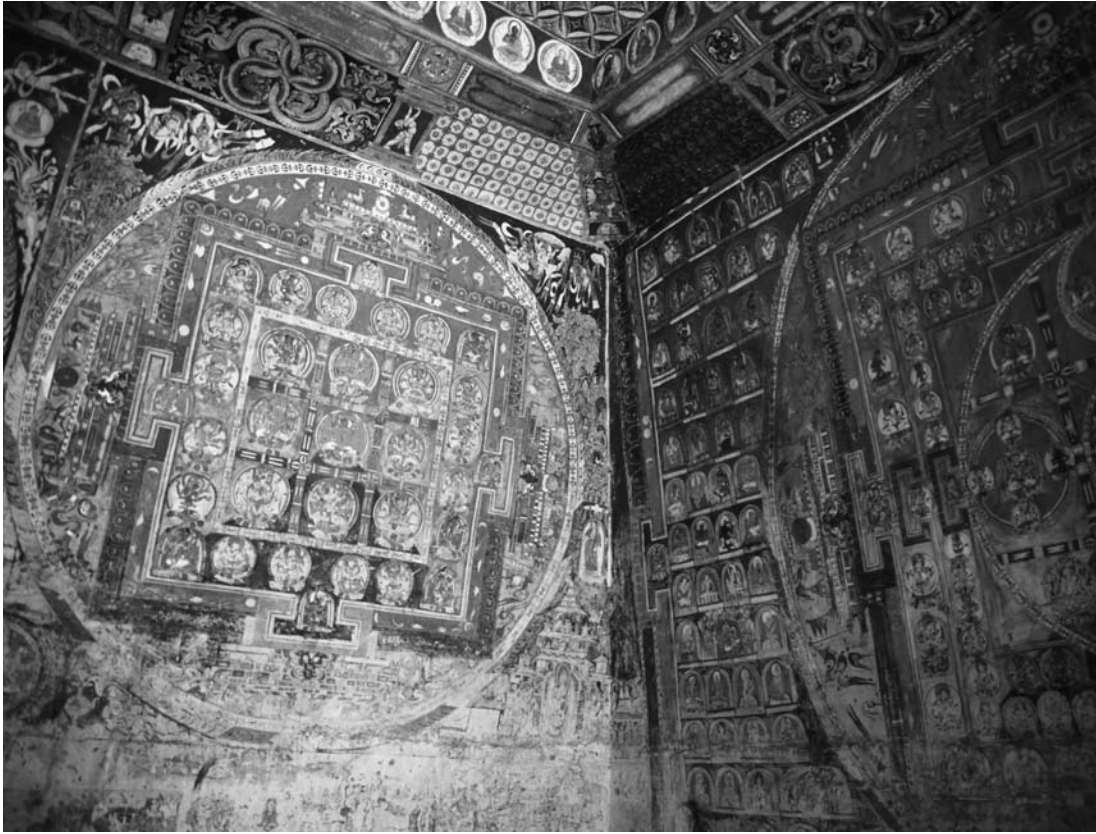
Prayer wheels

6. Tom Lubbock, *Ian Hamilton Finlay Maritime Works*, exh. cat., Tate St. Ives, 2002.

7. A practice common to other artists in the exhibition *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, such as Vito Acconci, Carl Andre and Sue Tompkins.

8. Stephen Bann, *Ian Hamilton Finlay*, exhibition catalogue, Serpentine Gallery, Arts Council, London, 1977, p. 27.

9. *Ibid.*



800 year old frescoes depicting mandalas at
Dungkar Caves, Tibet

In Plutarch's dialogue, there are several explanations offered for the significance of the 'E', ranging from its position as the fifth letter in the alphabet (the number five was important for its association with the five sages) to its meaning, in one sense, as the Greek word for 'if', and in another, for 'thou art'. The latter would offer the most intriguing hypothesis for the purposes of understanding Finlay's work, and the Concrete Poetry movement in general.¹⁰ Read this way, the letter exists as pure being, and it is both the provocation of, and resistance to, interpretation that reifies its existence.

10. Ibid.

☞ Easter wings.

My tender age in forrow did beginne
And fill with sickneses and shame
Thou didst fo punish finne,
That I became
Moft thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

George Herbert, *Easter wings*, 1633

☞ Easter wings.

Lord, who createdt man in wealth and flore,
Though foolishly he loft the fame,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Moft poore:
With thee
O let me rife
As larks, harmoniously,
And fing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

RHYMES

FRANCES STARK

PICTURE-MAKING:
INFANCY TO ART SCHOOL,
1937–1954

ALASDAIR GRAY

*The world becomes a private world
and shines like a rainbow**

Some light can hit some rain
at an angle of X degrees
I was thinking “Is this relevant?”
indulge me if you please
accept my puerile format
and relentless appetite
for undivided attention
and text that’s fueled by spite

But that is immaterial,
the text’s for text’s sake too
the thing that it’s in spite of
doesn’t matter—even if it’s true
So what I’m getting at is simply
(or complexly actually)
that the rainbow which is beautiful
is simultaneous proof
that light is but a falsehood assisting
all bad lookers to ascertain that
looks
can indicate, obliquely, that
beholding is a sham:
appearing lit reveals the surface
that I am

A rainbow can astound
with its ethereal appeal
or fill a head with science facts
because it is so real
Believe me I’m not trying
to tell you how I feel
nor am I describing
what I intended you to think
I wondered if you wondered that
I wonder as I dare
to loiter in publicity,
sucking in thin air

I was born at the end of 1934 in Riddrie which with Knightswood was one of the earliest, best designed and poshest of Glasgow housing schemes. Houses in Riddrie were allocated to teachers, shopkeepers, clerks, nurses, postmen and men like my dad who had factory jobs during the depression years when nearly a quarter of Glasgow was unemployed. Like many British folk I assumed for years that I was Upper Middle Class. Apart from politicians mentioned in BBC news broadcasts I knew of nobody socially superior to my dad, whose hobbies included unpaid work for the Scottish Youth Hostel Association, a local branch of the Camping Club of Great Britain and the Holiday Fellowship. Through one of these organisations he knew Glasgow’s deputy town clerk who lived in a semi-detached corporation house, just like my grandfathers nearby, but a bit higher up the Cumbernauld Road. Like most of our neighbours I was a snob, one of a superior class to the proles of Blackhill, widely known as a slum clearance scheme divided from Riddrie by the Monkland Canal: now the Monkland motorway.

At least two years before attending Riddrie Primary School my parents gave me coloured pencils and paper and liked me to use them. I enjoyed using them and was so lucky with my primary and secondary school teachers that they liked instead of discouraging my

picture-making. My first art exemplars had been book illustrations, mainly illustrations by authors who had written the books—Rudyard Kipling’s in the Just So Stories, Hugh Lofting’s in the Doctor Dolittle books, Tolkien’s in The Hobbit. The worlds in these pictures had fantastic historical and geographical scope that chimed perfectly with Walt Disney and Wizard of Oz films, and Peter Pan and Christmas pantomimes on stage. Chiefly in library books I had discovered the poetry and paintings of William Blake—Bosch’s Hell, sinister Garden of Eden and exuberant Garden of Earthly Delights—Breughel’s encyclopaedias of medieval, biblical humanity, including his Tower of Babel and Triumph of Death—the exactly-balanced white and black and patterned areas of Beardsley’s erotic worlds—yes, four of my favourite artists had names starting with B.

Norwegian Munch was the first great modern artist whose paintings I saw on their original canvases. He died in 1944 when I was nine, and about ten years later a great exhibition of his life’s work filled at least three upstairs galleries of Kelvingrove Museum. I was then at Whitehill Secondary School and seeing all the great Munches at exactly the right time.

Like many adolescents, maybe most, I was finding life a terrible business. Though not unusually lonely, and with no doubt of my ability to paint anything interesting I imagined, I feared I could give no girl enough sexual pleasure for her to give me any back: an attitude only overcome (a little) in my late twenties, when I met a woman who decided to marry me. My teenage longing for sensual and romantic love was not relieved by masturbation which induced guilt. Frustration and guilt also alternated

Public though the world is becoming what it is not is its best feature, amplified—a private after-thought

(1999, * Robert Musil)

Impossible the grassy maxim’s dream

To grow as green as others seem
Oh, to be as sound as a song
Not simply flat and half as long
So dark dark green the envy at
which this hints

*In other places light’s pitched happy tents**

(1998, * Novalis)

Coveting is a copious thing
Rip a body from the wing
A wing from the body is more usual stuff
Either way the pluck is rough
And so a butterfly’s now butter
Stupidly it tries to flutter

(1996)

Some rebelliousness is bubbling
up to posit
In short gurgling gasps:

*This art arrangement is wrong,
It would be better to give a song*

But rebel bubble I can’t sing

Then put a song in your thing

(1998)

Some poems as you know
 Read painful and slow
 But they flirt with what's wickedly
 fast
 The brain cells that wiggle
 Connect when a giggle
 Equates what is felt with a fact

(1997)

a tree in snow will probably go
 repeatedly unnoticed
 instead I see just me me me
 and nothing's there between us

(1996)

with eczema of the face and joints and bouts of asthma. I also worried about passing the Latin and Maths exams that would get me into Glasgow University. I hated these subjects—thought it harmful for anyone to live well by studying what they did not enjoy—but my mum, dad and teachers were sure that a working class Scot (yes, I had at last accepted I belonged to the working class) could only win the freedom to write and paint by first earning a secure income by doing something else. Bodily health made manual labour and factory work impossible for me. A university degree would allow a library or civil service job. That prospect struck me as equally loathsome. MEANWHILE, despite Britain having been on the winning side of a war that would have made all Europe a hell had Hitler won, wars were still being fought and nuclear wars industriously prepared by all the biggest, civilised nations whose governments, while building huge nuclear bunkers for themselves, were telling their populations that this was nothing to worry about. The world was obviously in as bad a state as I was. Both of us seemed heading for an even worse future.

POETRY FROM OBJECT TO ACTION

LIZ KOTZ

Graham's self-identification as a poet suggests the extent to which poetry appeared, in the 1960s art world, as a potential field for investigating language as such and, in particular for exploring the behaviour of words on the page. In this context, language is increasingly understood not just as a material but as a kind of 'site.' The page is a visual, physical container—an 8½ x 11 inch white rectangle analogous to the white cube of the gallery—and also a place for action and a publication context. This site is implicitly relational and dynamic: words on a page operate in relation to other texts and statements, since language as a system is perpetually in circulation. Viewed in this way, conventional poetic forms, and especially individual lyric utterances, are but a small part of a much wider field. Understood in its most general sense, as 'language art,' poetry is a form that explores the aesthetics, structures, and operations of language as much as any specific content. In the postwar era, various types of concrete and visual poetry, in particular, promised to probe the space of the typographic page and link contemporary literature with the visual arts. Yet a reliance on rather quaint illustrational or pictorial modes—as in poems that take on the shape of their subjects—left much concrete poetry out of touch with changing paradigms in the visual arts and the wider conditions of language in modernity. In their turn to compositional procedures

"I SEE YOU SEE LITTLE CONNECTION OF YOUR ART TO POETRY?"

"Absolutely no relation at all. It's simply one of things superficially resembling one another. A poet wants to say the unsayable. That's the reason the concrete poets have been doing 'street work' projects, because of the fact that they don't feel in many ways that language is adequate to make the kinds of statements they want to make. And so they've been doing a lot of performance pieces as well. But the typical concrete poem makes the worst sort of superficial connections to work like mine because it's a kind of formalism of typography—it's cute with words, but dumb about language. It's becoming a simplistic and pseudo-avant-garde gimmick, like a new kind of paint." (51–52)

Joseph Kosuth, interview with Jeanne Siegel, 1970, reprinted in *Art After Philosophy and After*, Ed. Gabriele Guercio, MIT Press, MA, 1991.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO DO absolute nonsense poetry, and people may think that this poetry of mine is absolute nonsense, but I have never been able to use non-words or invented words or ersatz words. Other people have done that and tend to make music out of language, but for me, my poetic interest in language is exactly the palpability, the tactile sense of the words themselves. I have been accused of trying to treat words as things, though I know very well that words are not things. But words do have palpable, tactile qualities that we feel when we speak them, when we write them, or when we hear them, or read them, and that is the real subject of my poetry. To talk about the link between my sculpture and my poetry, all I can say is that the same person does both of them. Indeed all I know is that when there are words printed on the bricks I use, I always turn the words to the floor so that they cannot be read. I repeat that all I can say is the same person does both, and certainly my interest in elements or particles in sculpture is paralleled by my interest in words as particles of language. I use words in units which are different from sentences, grammatical sentences, but of course words always have grammatical connection when they are placed together, if they are not nonsense words. I have attempted to write poetry in which the sentence is not the dominant form but the word is the dominant form.

Transcription of the Audio Arts tape made to accompany Carl Andre's exhibition at Lisson and MOMA Oxford in 1975.

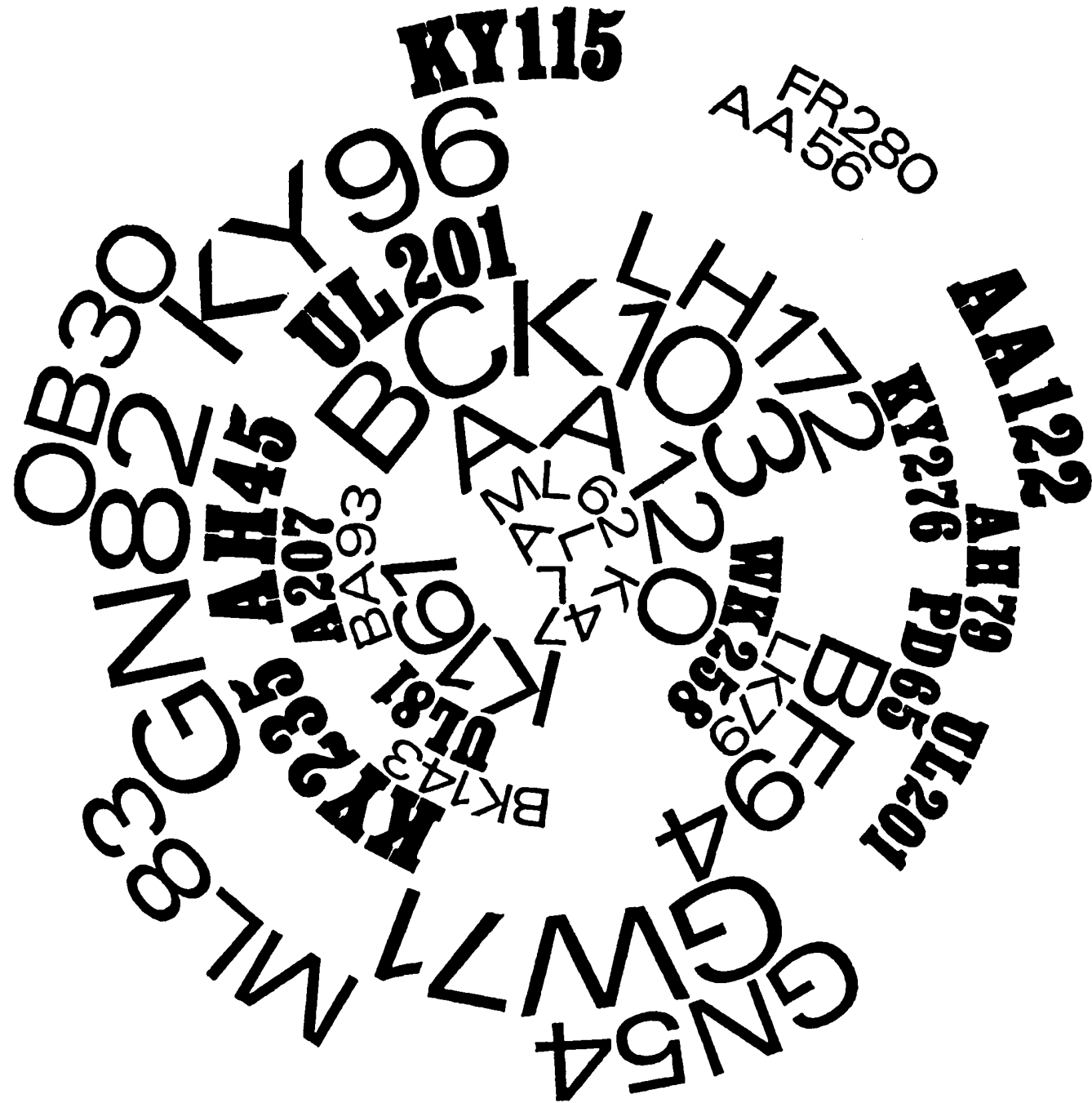
that sampled existing texts and fractured syntax, John Ashberry and Jackson Mac Low generated works whose extreme fragmentation of language seemed to divorce the utterance from the expression of any single speaker. Their collage-based treatment of words as found objects opened the door to much wider investigations of non-literary uses of language, yet ultimately, their works tended to recontain these experiments back into something all-too-recognisable as poetic form. If Ashberry's work rejoined a high-modernist lyric revitalised with the resources of nonliterary language, and Mac Low's poems ultimately reconventionalised Cagean procedures within traditional models of oral performance, what other possibilities might one envision for work with language emerging out of poetry?

Alongside Graham, whose involvement with poetry was relatively short-lived, the crucial figures here are Carl Andre and Vito Acconci, two artists far better known for their work in other forms: sculpture for Andre; performance, video, and later architecture for Acconci. For both Andre and Acconci, their work with language is foundational for their larger projects: Acconci, as is well-known, began as a poet before he took up work in performance, and Andre produced much of his early poetry during the crucial period, 1960–1965, when he developed the core sculptural strategies that produced landmark works of Minimal art.

716 Harris E—Harris K	New York City's Area Code is 212	is called
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is looked at
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is named
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is read
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is turned
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is numbered
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is skimmed
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is used
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is passed over
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is spelled
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is pronounced
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is spoken
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is found
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is mispronounced
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is studied
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is thumbed
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is counted
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is whispered
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is ordered
Harris Elnora 420E78	Harris G Elderly 319E9	is stared at

Vito Acconci
From *Four Book*, 1968

Excerpt from Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2007, p. 138-39.





Ferdinand Kriwet, *Text Sign*, 1968

Previous page:
Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Sea Poppy 1*, 1968

POEM MACHINES = VISION OF SOUND

LILIANE LIJN

SEE SOUND
AS MOVING LINES OF LIGHT

The words we utter travel in sound waves vibrating
through the air into our inner ear.

When we see the written word we forget these letters
are symbols of vibrations.

WORDS = VIBRATIONS = ENERGY

When I put words on cylinders and cones and
make Poem Machines, I want the word to be seen
in movement splitting itself into a pure vibration
until it becomes the energy of sound.

First Poem Machine—1962—3
Action—Words—Power—Words
The Word Becomes Energy

1964–65 Poem Machine takes on shape, becomes Poemkon.
Conic shape bends itself to the dematerialisation of the word.

At the narrowest point of the cone the words may still be
readable whereas at the base they become a vibration pattern.

The word accelerated loses its identity and becomes
a pattern pregnant with energy. It is pregnant with the energy
of its potential meaning should it once again become a word.

Invisible Poemkon : the cone becomes transparent.

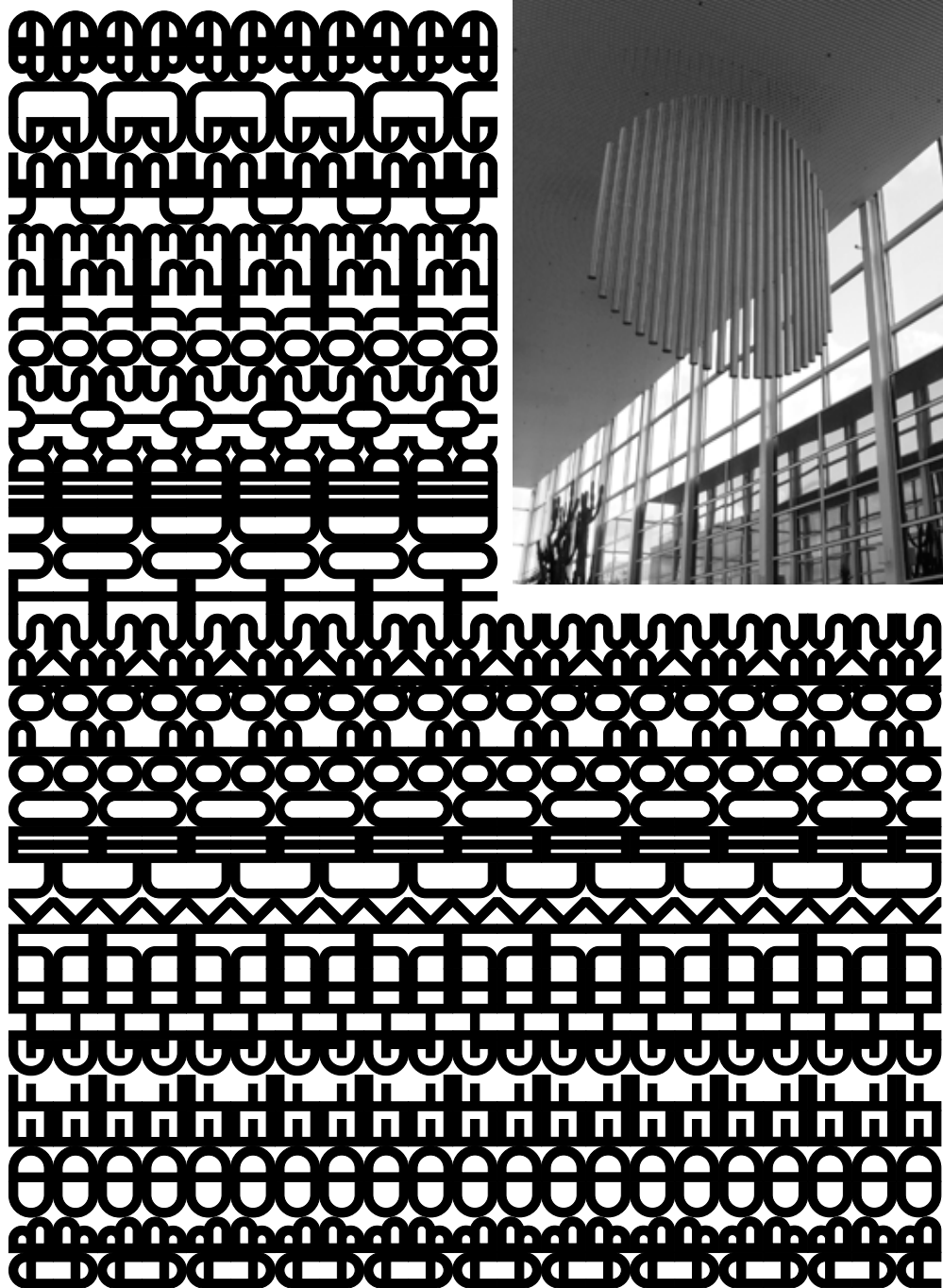
Words float on its almost invisible skin and spin into space.

I make Poem Machines to transform words into energy patterns.

In the Poem Machines the words we use are sublimated
and become pure energy.

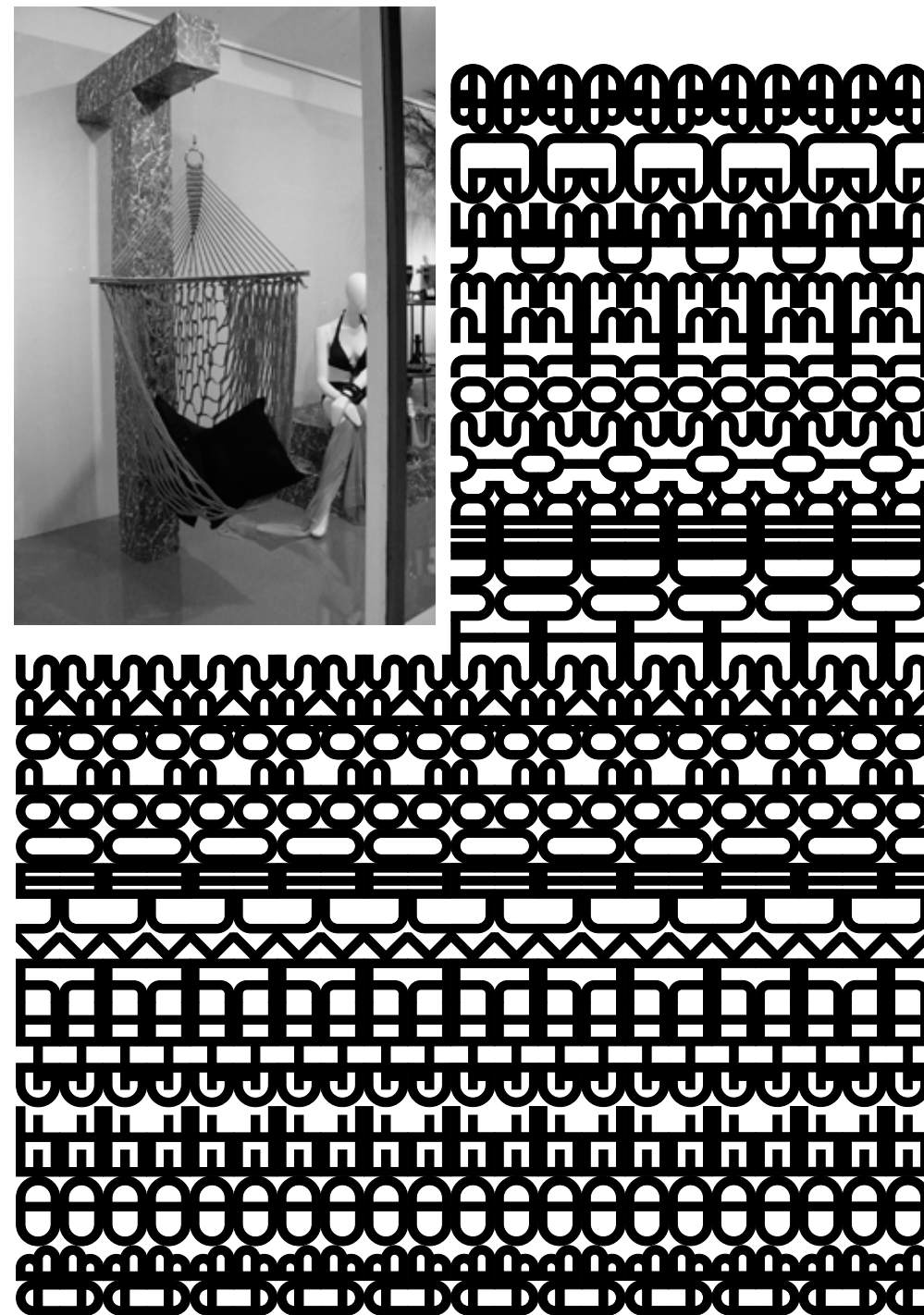
DISSOLVE THE IMAGES CREATED BY
WORDS SEE SOUND

From *Liliane Lijn Poem Machines, 1962–1968*, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert
Museum, London, 1993 (n.p.).



Giles Round creates text out of his own uniquely designed fonts. Here, inset within the text, are two images which depict structures in the everyday environment that

resemble letters in the Latin alphabet; they are also examples of 'found concrete poetry' and haphazard encounters with text and language in the world around us.



Giles Round, *Font Especial Mirrored Tessellation*, 2009 and inset *Letters are things not pictures of things: O.T.*, 2009



Among the favourite subjects for the original *imprese* were the various machines of contemporary warfare: siege-engines, flint-lock guns and numerous types of cannon. Here is a modern equivalent for these citations from the technology of war. But the motto that is added casts the device back into an entirely classical context. The three words employed, which are a fragment of the work of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, imply that the tank's 'fire-power' holds two symbolic meanings: as an index of its dominant role in modern field warfare, and also as a metaphor of fire as the governing principle of the universe. The tank is the modern equivalent of Heraclitus' thunderbolt, in that it represents not only the supreme natural force of destruction, but also the dynamic element that regulates the cosmos.

It may be added that this fragment from Heraclitus has attracted numerous different interpretations. Part of its ambiguity lies in the fact that the 'thunderbolt' is both a conventional personification of Zeus by synecdoche (substitution of the part for the whole) and a metaphor illustrating the philosopher's own cosmology. The new *imprese* retains and builds upon this ambiguity. The tank's equivocal status suggests a conjecture of traditional Epic form, in which the divine guarantee of order is always present, and the demythologised forms of Modernism.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES CONCRETE POETRY IN RETROSPECT

STEPHEN SCOBIE

~~SIGNS~~ — JACQUES DERRIDA

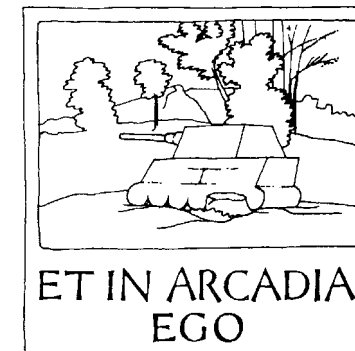
SIGNS — IAN HAMILTON FINLAY

As concrete poetry recedes into retrospect, then, it is in some ways easier to describe its properties, and to situate it within the cultural and intellectual history of the twentieth century. I wish to propose some very broad generalisations along these lines: namely, that concrete poetry in its classical phase can be described in terms of modernism, structuralism and metonymy.

In *The Banquet Years*, Roger Shattuck characterises the art of high modernism under the headings of self-reflexiveness, juxtaposition and simultanism. A self-reflexive art is one that 'endlessly studies its own behaviors'. Among the Cubist painters, Shattuck writes, "Juan Gris was the most exclusively concerned with this aesthetic ... Gris painted by watching himself paint, and his immaculate compositions of tables and chessboards convey the impression of intense observation directed inward rather than outward." The degree to which concrete poetry is about its own modes of existence and communication is obvious: every concrete poem demands a re-thinking of the ways in which a poem is written, or is read.

"Juxtaposition" Shattuck defines as "setting one thing beside another without connective", and he contrasts modernist art to the traditional art of transition. Again, concrete poetry is an example even purer than the Apollinaire 'conversation poems' cited by Shattuck, since the essence of concrete poetry lies in its suppression (or modification or substitution) of syntax, the most fundamental connective in language. For Shattuck, "juxtaposition" ultimately proves inadequate, since it still "implies succession", whereas Shattuck is trying to define an art form in which the elements "are to be conceived not successively but simultaneously, to converge in our minds as contemporaneous events". So Shattuck adopts, principally from Robert Delaunay, the term "simultanism". Admittedly, there are visual concrete poems that extend for more than one page (and sound poetry significantly diverges from visual poetry at this point), but by far the majority of the concrete poems collected in the three definitive anthologies are 'single-image' constructions, deployed spatially across the page (or poster, photograph, wall, field) in a manner that invites the analogy to the way in which one perceives a painting.

Indeed, the analogy to painting is in itself the most telling indication of the modernism of concrete poetry, since the evolution of modern painting (from, say, the Salon des Refusés in 1863 to the Dada soirées in 1916) presents the exemplary paradigm of modernism: painting, not music, became for that period the art towards whose condition all other arts aspired. Thus Shattuck takes his ultimate term for the aesthetic phenomenon he wishes to describe—simultanism—from a painter, Delaunay. Attempts to describe tendencies within con-



One of Panofsky's most justly celebrated essays in iconology (the term he takes directly from Cesare Ripa) is concerned with Poussin's painting *Et in Arcadia Ego*. Contemporary disputes about the significance of this enigmatic work lead him back to Greek pastoral poetry and the progressive formation of the cultural concept of 'Arcady', with its almost infinite tissue of poetic references converging upon the point that even here, in the ideal pastoral world, death is present. But Panofsky has not checked the speculation about the inner meaning of Poussin's picture, which may indeed be bound up with a hermetic interpretation of the golden section and might even lead (it has been suggested) to the rediscovery of the lost treasure of the Albigensian heretics in a particular part of southwestern France.

The metaphorical presentation of the tank as Poussin's inscribed monument, within the Arcadian setting, offers us not so much an emblem as an enigma. Estienne describes the role of Enigma as that of serving 'as a Rind or Bark to conserve all the mysteries of our Ancestors wisdom'. We are not immediately tempted to generalise or extend the implications that we see, as in the 'moral' emblem. The treasure, such as it is, is necessarily remote from us,

and we have no foolproof method of lifting the hermetic seal (an oblique comment on the fact that here, particularly, Finlay's adoption of a pre-existent motif has proved a stumbling-block to those who would deny the relevance of wide-ranging cultural reference, Estienne's 'ignoramus').

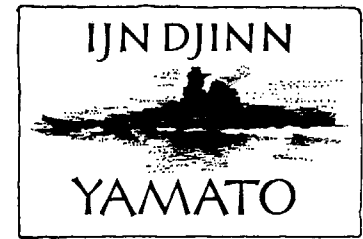
crete poetry have frequently used vocabulary drawn from the history of modern painting: the most frequently used pairing is 'expressionist' and 'constructivist', while Finlay at one time used 'fauve' and 'suprematist'. Even more strikingly, a 1982 study of inter-artistic analogy, Wendy Steiner's *The Colors of Rhetoric*, concludes with the "bold hypothesis" (which indeed it is) that Cubism is "the master current of our age in painting and literature and—why not?—criticism itself". From there it is only a short step for Steiner to argue that "There is no clearer working out of a cubist ideology than concrete poetry."

Steiner's argument is largely a theoretical one. She points to the balance, in Cubist painting, between the self-reflexive exploration of painting's own modes of existence and communication, and its concern to represent an external world, its refusal to move into total abstraction. Such a balance is also maintained, Steiner rightly observes, in concrete poetry, which is inhibited from complete abstraction by its very existence in language. Steiner's theoretical argument could have been considerably bolstered by pointing to Ian Hamilton Finlay's explicit avowals of the debt to Cubism, especially in the widely quoted letter to Pierre Gamier, in which Finlay explains the "huge uncertainty" with which he came to concrete poetry by recalling that "One of the Cubists ... said that it was after all difficult for THEM to make cubism because they did not have, as we have, the example of cubism to help them."

Finlay's closest affinities with Cubism are with the painter also singled out by Shattuck, Juan Gris, and with the exposition of Gris' theories in the most dogmatic statement of Cubism's high-modernist aesthetic,

Daniel Henry Kahnweiler's *Juan Gris: His Life and Work*. I have already written in some detail about Kahnweiler's importance in Finlay's work; here, I wish only to recapitulate briefly a couple of points from that essay. Kahnweiler defined painting as the "representation of thought by means of graphic signs—writing", and insisted that such writing had to be legible, i.e. that it convey to the informed reader information about the external word (hence his outright rejection of 'abstract' painting). "There is a kinship between poetry and painting", Kahnweiler continues, "for both are writing"; but whereas "the very existence of painting is bound up with its signs, which in consequence have a value of their own", for the poet "graphic signs only serve to transcribe vocal signs". (Briefly anticipating the argument, let us note here, despite Kahnweiler's insistence on writing, the classical assumption of the priority of speech, which was to be the focus of Jacques Derrida's attack.) In my previous article, I noted the various points in Kahnweiler's book at which he seems to lead up to a theoretical basis for concrete poetry, and I tried to suggest what the culminating steps would have been. I also noted that Kahnweiler's description of the way Gris used "emblems" and "rhyming shapes" accounts exactly for similar features in Finlay's work. The point of these techniques, I concluded, "for Finlay as for Gris is the establishment of metaphoric identity between the various elements... Finlay's view of nature as a unity, a network of correspondences finds its fullest expression in the garden at Stonypath".

Metaphor is the central literary technique of Finlay's work, even though the terms of the metaphor are usually established by non-literary, visual means. From the



The crucial events that were to determine the outcome of the Pacific War are celebrated in this image. Under the emblematic cover of a Renaissance pastoral, we see enacted the conflict of 4 June 1942, when the four ships of Admiral Nagumo's I Carrier Striking Force were destroyed by dive-bombers from their American counterparts, *Enterprise* and *Hornet* (*Yorktown* being the major American casualty). The dramatic success of this action depended on the fact that the American planes were able to engage the Japanese fleet at its most vulnerable—whilst each of the carriers bore a full deckload of armed and fuelled aircraft. The effect of American bombing was therefore to ignite petrol tanks, bombs and torpedoes, causing unquenchable conflagration. The analogy of the Renaissance garden shows us the carriers as hives, the American attack planes as swarming bees and the conflagration of overspilling honey. Formal trees in tubs fill out the pastoral conception, while signifying at the same time the ocean, in whose lush distances the opposing carriers were concealed from each other.

At Stonypath, Ian Hamilton Finlay's home in Lanarkshire, there is an interaction and interpenetration of the Garden and

the Ocean. A series of stretches of water of greater and less magnitude is juxtaposed with the enclosed (the 'inland') garden. But even within the garden, poem inscriptions pick up the distant murmur of the sea. The axis of this opposition, which can hardly be explained more fully in this context, has perhaps become the base structure of Finlay's poetics.

fishing-boat as circus pony to aircraft carrier as the four elements, Finlay bases his work on a system of metaphoric connections. Metaphor is also a central characteristic of modernism in literature; it works as a vertical system of correspondences, identifying, for instance, Leopold Bloom with Ulysses. It depends upon highly structured and relatively stable works; it is a spatial rather than temporal relationship; it is (in structuralist terms) synchronic rather than diachronic. Thus the whole of cultural history becomes simultaneously present and accessible, as Eliot proclaimed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Eliot and Pound redefined the usable past, demanding that their readers acquaint themselves with, say, Sextus Propertius, Arnaut Daniel, or Sigismundo Malatesta. Similarly, readers of Ian Hamilton Finlay have found themselves called upon to the pre-Socratic philosophers, the revolutionary writings of Saint-Just, and the Spanday diaries of Albert Speer. Concrete poetry, or at least Finlay's version of it, is simultaneously Classical and avant-garde, a blend of innovative form and traditional sensibility (as indeed was the Cubism of Braque and Gris, if not always of Picasso). What unites these disparate elements is the controlling structure of metaphor.

Concrete poetry, as a synchronic structure creating metaphors out of the relationships between spatially distributed elements, can therefore be related to structuralism, and it is perhaps no accident that its period of greatest activity (1955–79) roughly coincides with the ascendancy of structuralist thought. Finlay's critics (especially Stephen Bann and myself) have frequently resorted to the work of the structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, with particular reference to his

notion of the 'small-scale model', in order to comment on Finlay. In *Ian Hamilton Finlay: an illustrated essay*, the catalogue to the 1972 exhibition of Finlay's work at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Bann wrote that "the contemporary inquiry undertaken in the fields of linguistics, anthropology and biology promises a new Classicism based on the constant relational figures that may be extrapolated from the operations of the human mind". Bann linked the work of Lévi-Strauss with that of Noam Chomsky in linguistics and François Jacob in biology, and stated that Finlay's work "relates intimately to the 'new Classicism'", since it has "an exemplary value for the notion of linguistic constants underlying visual structure". Bann is here re-stating, in structuralist terminology. Kahnweiler's notion of painting as writing.

The confidence of Bann's structuralist faith in "constant relational figures" was already, in 1972, under severe attack. Indeed, a major part of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976) is devoted to a deconstruction of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The structuralist study of the relations between signs requires that the signs themselves remain stable; what Derrida did was to question and undermine the very possibility of a "linguistic constant". "There is not a single signified that escapes", he wrote, "the play of signifying references that constitute language". Saussure's synchronic system of difference is invaded by the endless recession of Derrida's *diférence*; the word, far from being the sign of meaning's presence, becomes the trace of its absence. Every sign is put "under erasure", simultaneously present (since we cannot do without it) and crossed out (since we cannot ever define it): sign becomes sign.



Through that pure virgin-shrine,
That sacred veil drawn o'er thy
glorious noon,
That men might look and live,
as glow-worms shine
And face the moon;
Wise Nicodemus saw such
light
As made him know his God by
night.

Henry Vaughan's poem, 'The Night', invokes Nicodemus, the wise man who came to seek out Jesus by night in order to learn the secret of salvation. For Vaughan, the night is a 'shrine', in which the mysteries of the true light are veiled from view, and the searcher after truth, who would otherwise be dazzled by its brilliance, has the task of training his own miniature apparatus of perception upon the occluded prospect. That he is able to see in the night is, of course, a result of the fact that God has planted all creation with the 'seeds' of external light: even the flint-stone—which gives its title to Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans*—reveals by its flashes of mica the destiny of all sublunary matter to act as a theophany, leading men towards the eternal unclouded being.

LETTER TO PIERRE GARNIER 1963

IAN HAMILTON FINLAY

I feel that the main use of theory may well be that of concentrating the attention in a certain area-of providing a context which is favourable to the actual work. I like G. Vantongerloo's remark: "Things must be approached through sensitivity rather than understanding ..."; this being especially acceptable from Vantongerloo since he is far from being against understanding (it seems to me)-his "must" I take to mean "must" because the world is such and we are so ... An understanding (theoretical explanation) of concrete (in general) poetry is, for me, an attempt to find a non-concrete prose parallel to, or secular expression of, the kind of feeling, or even more basically, "being," which says, if one listens carefully to the time, and if one is not sequestered in society, that such-and-such a mode of using words-this kind of syntax, this sort of construction-is "honest" and "true." ...

One of the Cubists-I forget who-said that it was after all difficult for THEM to make cubism because they did not have, as we have, the example of cubism to help them. I wonder if we are not all a little in the dark, still as to the real significance of "concrete." ... For myself I cannot derive from the poems I have written any "method" which can be applied to the writing of the next poem; it comes back, after each poem, to a level of "being," to an almost physical intuition of the time, or of a form ... to which I try, with huge uncertainty, to be "true." Just so, "concrete" began for me with the extraordinary (since wholly unexpected) sense that the syntax I had been using, the movement of language in me, at a physical level, was no longer there-so it had to be replaced with something else, with a syntax and movement that would be true of the new feeling (which existed in only the vaguest way, since I had, then, no form for it ...). So that I see the theory as a very essential (because we are people, and people think, or should think, or should TRY to think) part of our life and art;

and yet I also feel that it is a construction, very haphazard, uncertain, and by no means as yet to be taken as definitive. And indeed, when people come together, for whatever purpose, the good is often a by-product ... it comes as the unexpected thing. For myself, on the question of "naming," I call my poems "fauve" or "suprematist," this to indicate their relation to "reality" ... (and you see, one of the difficulties of theory for me is that I find myself using a word like "reality" while knowing that if I was asked, "What do you mean by reality?," I would simply answer, "I don't know ..."). I approve of Malevich's statement, "Man distinguished himself as a thinking being and removed himself from the perfection of God's creation. Having left the non-thinking state, he strives by means of his perfected objects, to be again embodied in the perfection of absolute, nonthinking life ..." That is, this seems to me, to describe, approximately, my own need to make poems ... though I don't know what is meant by "God." And it also raises the question that, though the objects might "make it," possibly, into a state of perfection, the poet and painter will not. I think any pilot-plan should distinguish, in its optimism, between what man can construct and what he actually is. I mean, new thought does not make a new man; in any photograph of an air crash one can see how terribly far man stretches- from angel to animal; and one does not want a glittering perfection which forgets that the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his home. I should say -however hard I would find it to justify this in theory-that "concrete" by its very limitations offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity; it is very far from the now-fashionable poetry of anguish and self ... It is a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt. (Whereas non-concrete might be said to be set in society, rather than space, and its "satire," its "revolt," are only disguised symptoms of social dishonesty. This, I realise goes too far; I do not mean to say that society is "bad.") ... I would like, if I could, to bring into this, somewhere the unfashionable notion of "Beauty," which I find compelling and immediate, however theoretically inadequate. I mean this in the simplest way-that if I was asked, "Why do you like concrete poetry?" I could truthfully answer "Because it is beautiful."

LANGUAGE TO BE LOOKED AT AND/OR THINGS TO BE READ (1967)

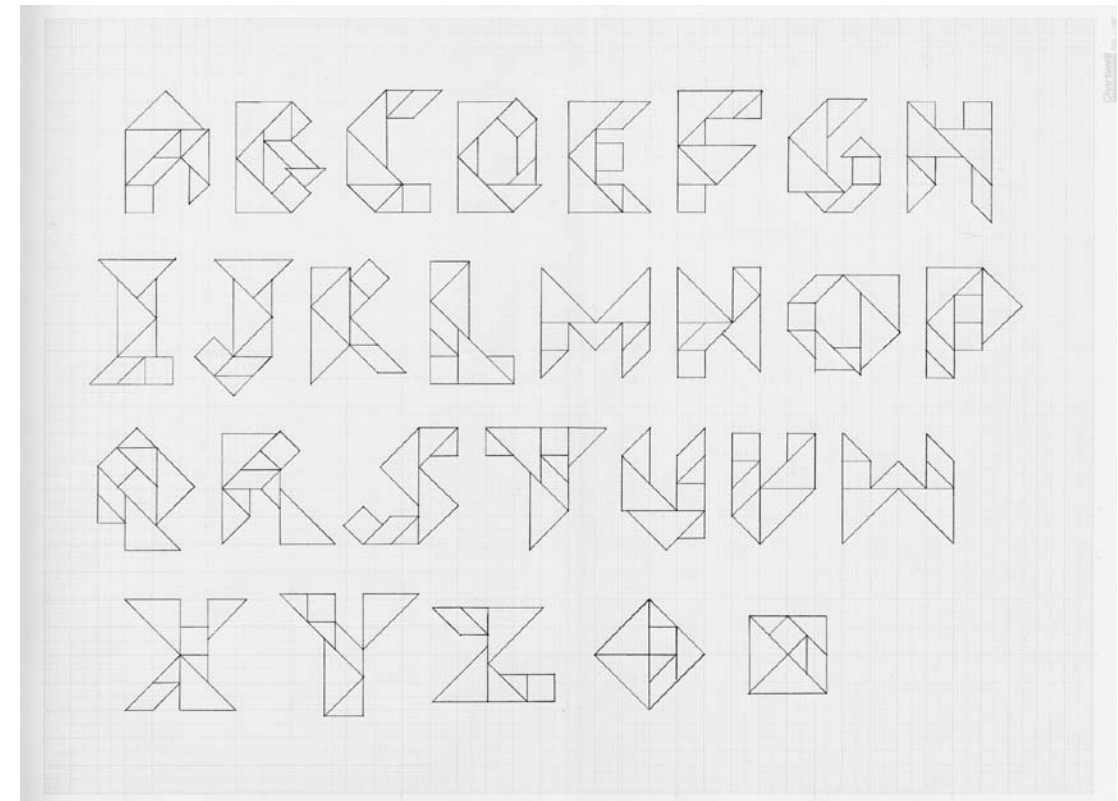
ROBERT SMITHSON

Language operates between literal and metaphorical signification. The power of a word lies in the very inadequacy of the context it is placed, in the unresolved or partially resolved tension of disparates. A word fixed or a statement isolated without any decorative or “cubist” visual format, becomes a perception of similarity in dissimilars—in short a paradox. Congruity could be disrupted by a metaphorical complexity within a literal system. Literal usage becomes incantatory when all metaphors are suppressed. Here language is built, not written. Yet, discursive literalness is apt to be a container for a radical metaphor. Literal statements often conceal violent analogies. The mind resists the false identity of such circumambient suggestions, only to accept an equally false logical surface. Banal words function as a feeble phenomena that fall into their own mental bogs of meaning. An emotion is suggested and demolished in one glance by certain words. Other words constantly

shift or invert themselves without ending, these could be called “suspended words.” Simple statements are often based on language fears, and sometimes result in dogma or a non-sense. Words for mental processes are all derived from physical things. References are often reversed so that the “object” takes the place of the “word”. A is A is never A is A, but rather X is A. The misunderstood notion of a metaphor has it that A is X—that is wrong. The scale of a letter in a word changes one’s visual meaning of the word. Language thus becomes monumental because of the mutations of advertising. A word outside of the mind is a set of “dead letters”. The mania for literalness relates to the breakdown in the rational belief in reality. Books entomb words in a synthetic rigor mortis, perhaps that is why “print” is thought to have entered obsolescence. The mind of this death, however, is unrelentingly awake.

Eton Corrasable

This text was originally the press release for *Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read* at the Dwan Gallery in June 1967.



Anna Barham
Tangram Alphabet I, 2009

I'LL MAKE THE WORLD EXPLODE

KARL HOLMQVIST



CORPORATE CANNIBAL
TREAT U LIKE AN ANIMAL
LIKE A HANNIBAL
LIKE A CLOWN
CORPORATE CANNIBAL
EXCUSE ME, WHILE I KISS
THIS GUY
THE HIDDEN LIES
GLASS BOX IN THE SKY
LIKE THE MOST NATURAL THING
IN THE WORLD
THE I'N'I
THE BATTLESHIP EARTH
4 WHAT IT'S WORTH
THE MOTHER PLANET
CORPORATE CANNIBAL
PRAY FOR ME
THE BODY OF CHRIST
PRAY FOR ME
THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

THE CHOSEN FEW
LIKE ME & U
WHO SAID SENDING OFF
PEOPLE 2 PRISON WAS
NORMAL?

CORPORATE CANNIBAL
TREAT U LIKE A CRIMINAL
LIKE A HANNIBAL
SLAVE 2 THE RHYTHM
OF YR CORPORATE PRISON
PRAY FOR ME
CAN'T GET ENOUGH PREY
PRAY FOR ME
BATTY BOY
PRAY FOR ME
BOOM BATTY
BATTY BOY
BOOM BOOM BATTY
NEED 2 STAY AWAY FROM

WE
HOPE IS THE LAST THING
THAT LEAVES
WHAT U NEED I DON'T WANT
WHAT U HAVE I CAN'T USE
GOSPELS OF GREED
SOMALI PIRATES
& PONZI SCHEMES
PRIMITIVIST HIT LIST
ANTI-MATERIALIST BLISS
TELEVANGELIST HOT TIPS
HOW COME WE CAN'T ALL
JUST GET ALONG?
FIRST WILL B LAST
FUTURE WILL B PAST
NEED 2 STAY AWAY FROM
WE
TREAT OTHERS THE WAY
U YOURSELF WOULD LIKE 2
B TREATED

THE WORD MADE FLESH
BATTY BOY
HOPE IS THE LAST THING
THAT LEAVES
U WENT BACK 2 WHAT
U KNEW
& U DEAD HAND STRETCHING
PAYBACK THE GREEN
U STOLE 4YR MONEY
U WENT BACK 2 WHAT
U KNEW
SO FAR REMOVED FROM
ALL THAT WE HAD BEEN
THRU
FINAL UNFETTERING
& U DEAD HAND STRETCHING
PAYBACK THE REAL DEAL
BIRDS & THE BEES
PAYBACK THE TREES

*THOUSHALTNOTKILL
THOUWHATDOWILT*

CORPORATE CANNIBAL
TREAT U LIKE AN ANIMAL
LIKE A HANNIBAL
LIKE A PLANT
BATTY BOY
BOOM BOOM BATTY
VEGETABLES R PEOPLE TOO
NEED 2 STAY AWAY FROM
WE
THE CHOSEN FEW
THE WHO IS WHO?
THE YOUNG WILL B OLD
TALK 2 ME
BOUGHT WILL B SOLD
BATTY BOY
BOOM BOOM BABY
BOOM
TELL ME YR DREAMS
TELL ME YR STORY
AM I IN THEM?
BATTY BOY
BOOM BOOM BATTY
RICH WILL B POOR
IT'S A WAR

*THOUSHALTNOTKILL
THOUWHATDOWILT*

TREAT OTHERS THE WAY
U YOURSELF WOULD LIKE 2
B TREATED
TREAT OTHERS THE WAY

U YOURSELF WOULD LIKE 2
B TREATED
SHALL B THE WHOLE OF
THE LAW
MR & MRS SMITH
TOTALLY FAKING IT
SHALL B THE WHOLE OF
THE LAW
TIME OF THE ASSASSINS
BOOM BOOM BATTY
CORPORATE CANNIBAL
EAT U LIKE AN ANIMAL
LIKE A MANIMAL
LIKE A BEAST
I'M A MAN
BOOM BOOM BATTY
PRAY FOR ME
I'M A MAN
BOOM BABY BABY BOOM
CAN'T GET ENOUGH PREY
PRAY FOR ME
I'M A MAN, A MAN EATING
MACHINE
THE WORD MADE FLESH
HURRY UP & WAIT
OPEN UP & BLEED
PRAY FOR ME
KIDS WITH KIDS
IT'S A WAR
ONE CHILD PER HOUSEHOLD
THE BOOK OF LOVE
BOOK OF BOOKS
S P R E A D I N G THE WORD
MAKING YOURSELF HEARD
I'M A MAN
BOOM BOOM BABY
BOOM
I'M A MAN
CAN'T GET ENOUGH PREY
PRAY FOR ME
I'M A MAN, A MAN EATING
MACHINE
I'M A MAN, A MAN EATING
MACHINE
CAN'T GET ENOUGH PREY
PRAY FOR ME
I'M A MAN, A MAN EATING
MACHINE

I NEVER COULD FUCK U
I NEVER COULD HOLD U
I NEVER COULD TOUCH U
HEY, HE-E-EY
YOU'RE A SOLDIER
I NEVER SHOULD HAVE
TOLD U, WHAT I TOLD U

HEY, HE-E-EY
WHAT U DO?

I NEVER COULD FUCK U
I NEVER COULD HOLD U
I NEVER COULD TOUCH U
HEY, HE-E-EY
YOU'RE A SOLDIER
THE THIRD EYE
SOMEBODY ELSE'S GUY
I NEVER SHOULD HAVE
TOLD U, WHAT I TOLD U
HEY, HE-E-EY
IF THE HILLS COULD KILL
IF YR EYES COULD SMILE
OPEN UP & BLEED
SEE YR EYES SEE
FEEL YR HEART FEEL
THE VOID
GIVING VOICE 2 THE
VOICELESS
AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES
SUPER TROOPERS
SOUL SINGER
DEAD RINGER
LIKE-A-LOOK CONTEST
SWINGER PICK-NICK
MR & MRS SMITH
TOTALLY FAKING IT
ANONYMOUS SEX
TIME OF THE ASSASSINS
SEE YR EYES SEE
FEEL YR HEART FEEL
SOUL SINGER
DEAD RINGER
MAKING YOURSELF HEARD
LIKE THE MOST NATURAL THING
IN THE WORLD
HE SAID, SHE SAID
THE MOTHER PLANET
ENDING THE ENDLESS SEARCH
ON GOOGLE EARTH
GUITAR NOODLINGS
THE POODLE'S ESSENCE
BIRDS & BEES
WILD IN THE STREET
HOPE IS THE LAST THING
THAT LEAVES
THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE
& U DEAD HAND STRETCHING
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
U WENT BACK 2 WHAT
U KNEW
SO FAR REMOVED FROM

ALL THAT WE HAD BEEN
THRU
LES MAÎTRES FOUS
THE WHO IS WHO?
THE WITCHES' BREW
PAYBACK THE REAL DEAL
U STOLE 4 YR MONEY
SLAPSTICK MYSTICS WITH
STICKS
THE STATION MASTER
PAYBACK THE TREES
VEGETABLES R PEOPLE TOO
THE WHO IS WHO?
IF IT'S 4 FREE IT'S NOT
4 ME

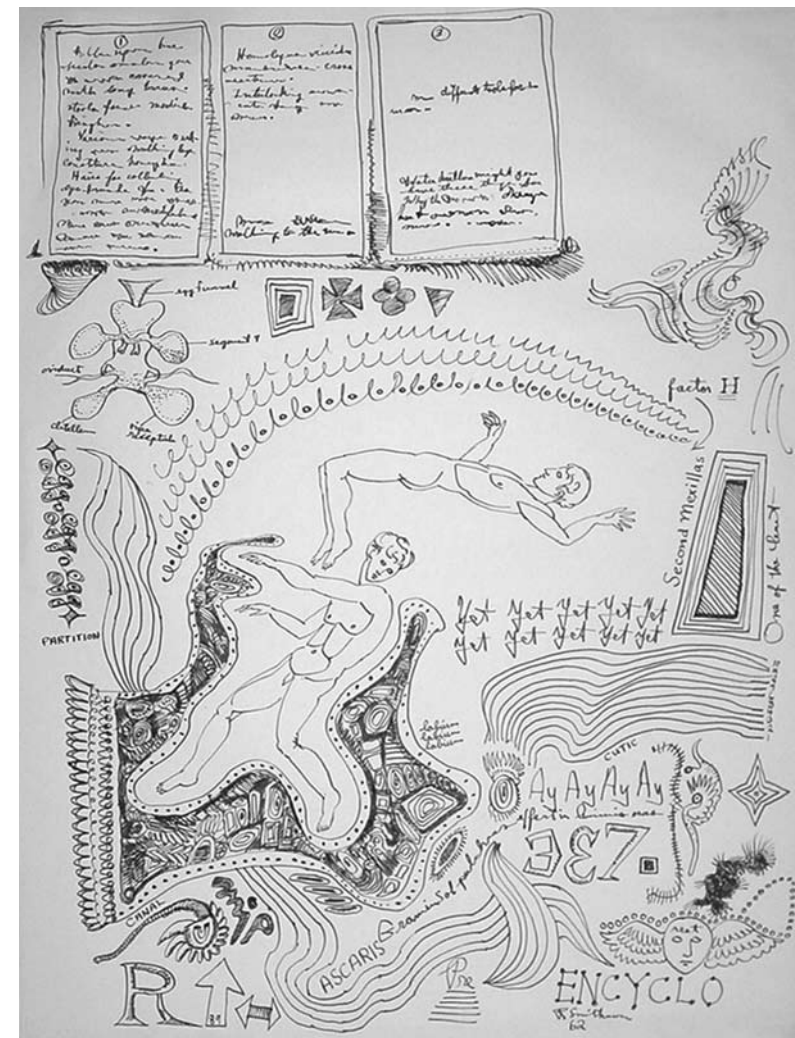
LAST NITE ON THE WAY 2 THE
POW-WOW
THE POW-WOW
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
MURDER HAS ITS SEXUAL
SIDE
WHAT ABOUT HUMAN
SACRIFICE?
ASSISTED SUICIDE?
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
RITES OF PASSAGE
TREAT OTHERS THE WAY
U YOURSELF WOULD LIKE 2
B TREATED
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
PRIMITIVIST HIT LIST
ANTI-MATERIALIST BLISS
THE DUDETUBE
WHEN THE PUSH COMES
2 SHOVE
WATER 2 WINE
PEARLS 2 THE SWINE
WEATHER UNDERGROUND
VAMPIRE LESBIANS OF SODOM
SECRET SERVICE
BOOMERANG EFFECT
U AIN'T SEEN NOTHING, YET
GENDER BENDERS
BEGGARS' BANQUET
LAZY LADY
LYDIA LUNCH
GOO-GOO-GA-JOOB
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
PEEN-PEN-PENNY ARCADE
ARISTOTLE'S MISTAKE
GIVING THE ROBOT HAND
A HAND
REDRUM RIVER RUN
BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN
SLEEPING IN A CASKET

LAST NITE ON THE WAY 2 THE
POW-WOW
THE POW-WOW
CROUCHING TIGER
HIDDEN DRAGON
CADAVRE EXQUIS
ROGER & ME
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
MR & MRS SMITH
DR JEKYLL & MR HYDE
FROM THE OTHER SIDE
HEY, HE-E-EY
IF THE HILLS COULD KILL
IF YR EYES COULD SMILE
THE DUDETUBE
DISCOVERY CHANNEL
WHATEVER U DO UNTO ME
I LOST AN ARM
LOST AN EYE
THE LION KING LOOKING
4 A PARKING
THE BODY OF CHRIST
TREAT OTHERS THE WAY
U YOURSELF WOULD LIKE 2
B TREATED
DUDE, WHERE IS MY DUDE?
THE EMPEROR'S NAKED ARMY
MARCHES ON
IT'S A WAR
MAN VS. NATURE
WOMAN VS. ARCHITECTURE
CONSTRUCTION SITE
THE DUDETUBE
WHY IS DESIRE ALWAYS LINKED
2 CRIME?
MURDER, SHE WROTE
DESTROY, SHE SAID

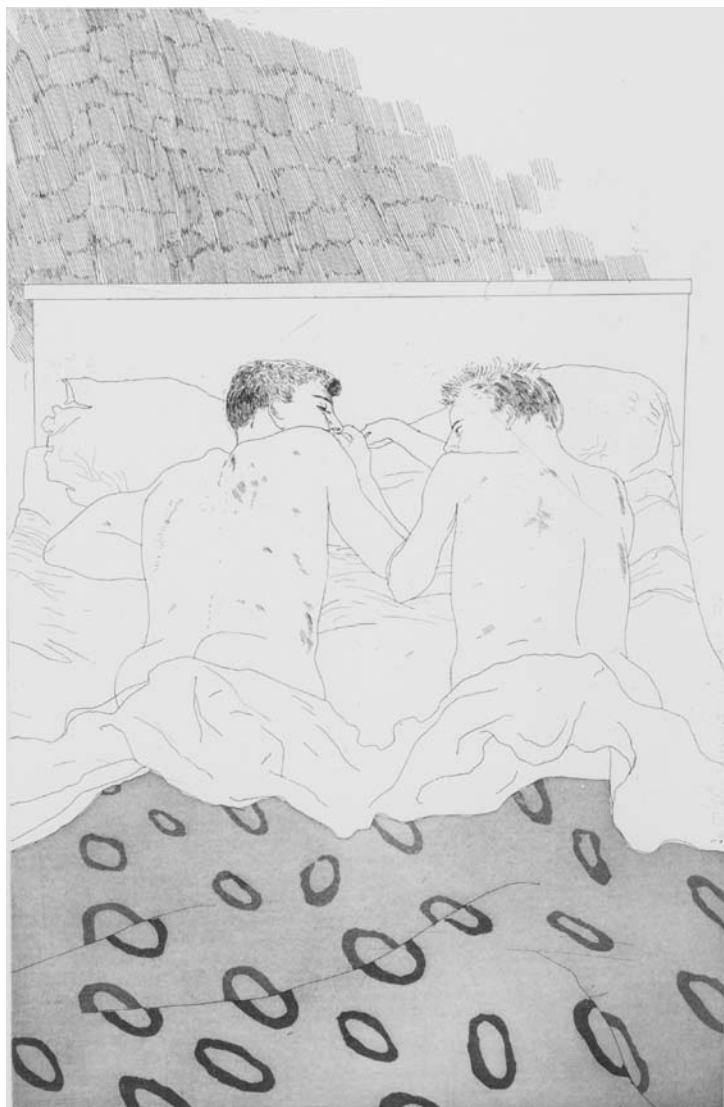
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
WHEN SPEAKING OF THE
DEVIL
THE WITCHES' BREW
THE WHO IS WHO?
MEAT IS MURDER
VIVA HATE
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
ALLA BARN SKA HA RÄTT TILL
EN MAMMA OCH PAPPA
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
DJINNS, JEDIS & UFOS
GIVE IT UP 4 NAUGHTY

BY NATURE
THE LAST FLIGHT
FINAL COUNTDOWN
WITH COUSIN IT
BOARDING IT
SMALLEST OF MY BRETHERN
EVEN A BLIND HEN
THE DEAF & DUMB
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
MUDRACKER
FUDGE PUSHER
THE WITCHES' BREW
THE WHO IS WHO?
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
THE MISSING LINK IS NOT
WHAT U THINK
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
SLEEP OF REASON PRODUCES
MONSTERS
THE DUDETUBE
DOING NOTHING IS DOING
SOMETHING TOO

I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
THE WHO IS WHO?
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
MUDRACKER
ASS CRACK
LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE
PROJECT RUNAWAY
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
IT'S THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON
GIVING
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
THE BOOK OF LOVE
BOOK OF BOOKS
S P R E A D I N G THE WORD
MAKING YOURSELF HEARD
THRU THE DUNGEON
THE CESSPOOL
THE WHITE NOISE
WEATHER UNDERGROUND
MEAT PACKING DISTRICT
PULL UP 2 THE BUMPER, BABY
DRIVE IT IN BETWEEN
SLEEPING IN A CASKET
THE GLORY HOLE
THE DANCING POLE
DO YOU REALLY WANT 2 LIVE
FOREVER?
AND EVER??



Robert Smithson
Untitled (Encyclo), 1962



David Hockney
Two Boys Aged 23 or 24, 1966

THE DUDETUBE
DISCOVERY CHANNEL
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
A HANDSOME RANSOM
I'D RATHER GO BLIND
LE PAIN QUOTIDIEN
SONGS 4 DRELLA
AT THE END OF THE BREAD-LINE
FROM THE BOTTOMS UP
TREAT U LIKE AN ANIMAL
SLAPSTICK MYSTICS
WITH STICKS
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
THE BOOK OF LOVE
BOOK OF BOOKS
S P R E A D I N G THE WORD
MAKING YOURSELF HEARD
IT'S THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON
GIVING
AS ABOVE SO BELOW
TIME OF THE ASSASSINS
FUZZY WUZZIES
WITH UZIS
PULL UP 2 THE BUMP, BABY
THE BABY BUMP, BABY
BUMP BABY LADY BUMP THE
BABY BUMP
PUMP & BUMP IT
DRIVE IT IN BETWEEN
IN YR BIG BLACK STRETCH
LIMO
WHO SAID SENDING OFF
PEOPLE 2 PRISON WAS
NORMAL?

MORE COURAGE, LESS OIL
STOP, REPAIR PREPARE
IT'S A WAR
BETWEEN THE SEXES
EVERYWHERE IS WAR
ALL THE EXES
& YR NEED 4 MORE
ALWAYS MORE AMORE
PEOPLE R MAKING TOO MUCH
LOVE, THEY OUGHT 2 B
HAVING SEX
WAR 2 END ALL WARS
ALWAYS MORE & MORE
LA MORT C'EST LA MORT
PEOPLE R MAKING TOO MUCH
LOVE, THEY OUGHT 2 B
HAVING SEX
STOP, REPAIR PREPARE
COFFEE GENIE
SPILLING THE BEANS
IT'S NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

LOVERS+HATERS UNITE
DON'T GIVE UP
THE FIGHT
THE FIGHT, DON'T GIVE UP
THE FIGHT
THE GHOST SCRIBE
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
ALLA BARN SKA HA RÄTT TILL
EN MAMMA OCH PAPPA
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
DJINNS, JEDIS & UFOS
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
DJINNS, JEDIS & UFOS
U GO BACK 2 HER
I'M LIKE REALLY BAD AT
REMEMBERING NAMES
DJINNS, JEDIS & UFOS
U GO BACK 2 HER
NURSE MILDRED RATCHED
THE MEDICINE MAN
CAN AS CAN CAN
U WENT BACK 2 WHAT
U KNEW
SO FAR REMOVED FROM
ALL THAT WE HAD BEEN
THRU
& I TREAD A TROUBLED
TRACK
MY ODDS R STACKED
WE ONLY SAID GOODBYE
WITH WORDS
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES
U GO BACK 2 HER
& I GO BLACK 2 BACK
DJINNS, JEDIS & UFOS
MORE COURAGE, LESS OIL
IT'S A WAR
WAR 2 END ALL WARS
U GO BACK 2 HER
& I GO BLACK 2 BACK
COFFEE GENIE
THE GHOST SCRIBE
RUN & HIDE
GOO-GOO-GA-JOOB
BATS 4 LASHES
BOUGHT WILL B SOLD
YOUNG WILL B OLD
DOING AS YOU'RE

TOLD
END OF THE BREAD-LINE
FROM THE TOP DOWN
HUTUS & TUTSIES
DOING THE WATUSI
LOVETHINENEIGHBOR
& YOURSELF
LIKE EVERYONE ELSE
THE GOOD DEEDS
WEEDING OUT THE WEEDS
WOMEN WARRIORS
FALLING TREES
IN THE AMAZONIAN
RAIN FOREST
NO ONE CAN HEAR U SCREAM
DUDE, WHERE IS MY DUDE?
FUN 2 FUNKY
GOSPELS OF GREED
KLEPTOCRACIES
ANOTHER ONE BITES THE
DUST
LOVE EVERYONE ELSE
& YOURSELF
FROM ALL YR HEART
EGO WARRIORS 2 THE STARS
PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS
THE WEEPING WALL INSIDE US
ALL
WE SHALL OVERCOME
WE SHALL FIND LOVE
4 EVERYONE
I AM HE AS U R WE
& HE & SHE & US & THEM
HE IS HER & SHE & WHAT?
& WHO R U & WHODUNNIT?
GOO-GOO-GA-JOOB
THE WHO IS WHO?
CALLING PEOPLE NAMES
SEPARATION OF CHURCH
& STATE
PLAYBACK THE REAL DEAL
U STOLE 4 YR MONEY
IT'S CALLED BY INVITATION
BY INVITATION, DAHLING
MUTUAL CONSENT
2 YR HEART'S CONTENT
BIRDS & THE BEES
PAYBACK THRU YR TEETH

Poem by Karl Holmqvist, from the artist's
book *What's My Name?* Bookworks,
London, 2009.

VISUAL THINKING

Zulu Romeo Foxtrot

DOUGLAS COUPLAND



Last summer in Vancouver I attended a screening of the cult documentary *Helvetica*—a biography of the classic sans-serif font designed in 1957. All 950 seats of the Ridge Theatre were filled, and I haven't felt as much energy in an audience since attending the 1993 taping of Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged* at Sony Studios in New York. Had it been possible to buy pennants and banners in the lobby, the air would have been filled with such graphic bursts as *Italics!* or **MEDIUM!** or *Light!*, and I'd have been holding one, too. Mine would have read: **Helvetica Neue (T1) 75 Bold**. The font is a rock star.

Directed by Gary Hustwit, the film richly rewarded an audience comprised almost entirely of designers, artists and architects. Afterwards, during a Q&A session, I asked a question that revealed that roughly eighty per cent of the audience used Macs, not PCs, and those who held up their hands as PC users received mild boos. It was a tough crowd.

This Mac dominance hardly came as a surprise to me. Last spring my New York publicist asked me who my reading audience was and I blurted out, "Mac users."

"Why is that?"

"Because Macs are used by visual thinkers."

"I see."

Silence

No, he didn't see, because one is either a visual thinker or one is not. He was not. I'm beginning to think that being a visual thinker is like being right-handed or red-haired; it was all decided the moment the sperm hit the egg. And just to be clear, being a visual thinker isn't a preference like Country and Western music or fondness for pugs. One has no choice in the matter. People who study the science of this stuff say that roughly one person in five thinks visually, which perhaps explains the four-to-one ratio of PC users to Mac users in the everyday world. My question here is, of course, if you don't see the world visually, then how exactly are you seeing it?

I came to realise the fundamental perceptual difference in humanity rather late in the day, perhaps a decade after I began writing novels. Before writing novels, I worked as a visual artist and designer, and I naively and romantically assumed that writing precluded the making of visual art. Wrong. To illustrate the result of this assumption, let me provide

a generic reconstruction of an interview with me in, say, 1999, just before I figured things out:

INTERVIEWER: So, I read your book and, uh, you're a visual thinker, aren't you?

ME: Uh ... yes.

INTERVIEWER: (pained silence).

ME: (pained silence).

INTERVIEWER: Yes, your work is so (insert loaded sigh here) visual.

ME (in my head): What is it with this person?

ME (out loud): Well, isn't everybody a visual thinker? We all have eyes and we all see. How can people not be visual thinkers?

INTERVIEWER: (another sigh).

And there's the gist of it. I tried for a decade to be a part of the book universe, and the harder I tried, the more I encountered that same feeling that might have been experienced, say, by a black musician walking into a Baltimore country club *circa* 1955, sitting down at a dinner table and expecting to be served. *This is not a very good fit, is it?*

And so, around 2000, I began to rethink my relationship with words. I looked back on the origins of my relationship with text to the first time I ever remember getting an almost erotic charge from words. This would have been from reproductions of Pop art in elementary school encyclopaedias: Roy Lichtenstein's *Whaam!* or Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*. They were words, but they were something

else, too. It was those words that landed me in art school in 1980, where I received my next dose of words that made me warm and tingly: the work of US artist Jenny Holzer. Holzer came to prominence in New York in the late 1970s. She generated truisms wherein she went through the great classics and reduced them down to sentences or fragments of sentences, a body of work referred to as *Truisms*. For example, Machiavelli's *The Prince* boils down to ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE. These truisms were then collected together in extensive lists and wheat-pasted on to the hoarding boards surrounding SoHo construction sites. These lists were in turn ripped from the walls by classmates doing the art-student pilgrimage to New York and shown to me back in Vancouver. When I saw these ripped papers with their columns of hundreds of truisms, my brain popped like a popcorn kernel. Words were not simply what they connoted: they were art objects and art supplies in themselves.

There is a eureka moment that most visual artists have at some point early in their career and, once the moment has happened, they take their first steps across the great divide between visual art and literary art, two camps to whom words mean totally different things.

Once sensitised to text as an art object, the visual artist must, in way, learn his or her own language all over again from scratch. One looks at the shape of words and the texture of the paper they rest on. One looks not just at the book, but at its cover. Visual culture is a very free and permissive place; high culture, low culture, pop culture, all source material is permitted if it's a part of your world.

Literary students, however, don't relearn their language from a visual and material standpoint. They are, if anything, actively en-



couraged to consider the process *infra dig*, and are certainly never allowed to fetishise the physical, typographical form of a word. In France there exists the convention of standardised unemotional text-only book covers, basically a Salinger-like belief that a book (excuse me, a *text*) ought to speak for itself and not be compromised by such vulgarities as cover art, non-standardised fonts or author photos. Words exist only inasmuch as they denote something individually and collectively, but that is *all* they are. They're merely little freight containers of meaning, devoid of any importance on their own. To see words as art on their own is heresy.

This inflexibility makes sense to a non-visual thinker, but to visual thinkers such dogma is depressing and sad, like forcing ballerinas to wear suits of armour.

Here's a personal anecdote. Someone recently asked me what the most beautiful word I know is. I thought about it and the answer came quickly: my father used to have a floatplane with those call letters on the tailfin, ZRF—Zulu Romeo Foxtrot. The way these words look on paper is gorgeous; the images they conjure are fleeting, rich, colourful and unexpected. To savour the look of Zulu Romeo Foxtrot on a page is almost the sound of one hand clapping. The letterforms mean something beyond themselves, but the meaning is not empirical—and it's pretty hard for me to imagine discussing this at a literary festival. *Doug, there's no verb.*

Here's another question I was recently asked: when I see words in my mind, what font are they

in? The answer: Helvetica. What font do you think in? It's a strange question, but you know what I'm getting at: how do you see actual words in your head as you think? Or do you see words at all? Is it a voice in your head? Do you see subtitles?

I think that an inevitable and necessary step for written culture over the next few decades is going to be the introduction of a détente between visual and literary worlds—at the very least, an agreement to agree that they're not mutually exclusive and that each feeds the other. The notion that literary experimentation ended with the publication of Finnegans Wake doesn't leave much hope or inspiration for citizens on a digital planet a century later. Acknowledging the present and contemplating the future doesn't mean discarding the past, and to be interested in print's visual dimension isn't the same as being anti-literary. People in the art world do a spit-take when they hear that James Joyce is called 'modern'. The literary world has the aura of a vast museum filled with floral watercolours and alpine landscapes, a space where pickled sharks will never be contemplated or allowed. Ten-year-olds now discuss fonts, leading and flush-righting paragraphs. Words are built of RGB pixels projected directly onto the retina for hours a day. Machines automatically translate spoken words into Japanese. Medium and message are melting into each other unlike ever before. Zulu Romeo Foxtrot.

From *Granta* 101, Spring 2008, p. 17–22.



TEXT EXCERPT FROM AN ONGOING NARRATIVE

TRIS VONNA-MICHELL

Recently while installing *Finding Chopin* I placed a sheet of paper on a shelving structure. It was an invitation flyer printed in the 1980s, depicting a collection of cassette tapes from various artists. It never made sense in terms of an overall picture nor as a subtle pass-over or sub-plot. A few hours later I took it back to the hotel room, and tried once again to find a better place for it to reside. In fact I took the entire material installation to the hotel, but also a special Telex projector too. With difficulty I hobbled across a bridge with a bag full of small artifacts and a heavy slide projector; alternating hands from left to right every thirty metres. From left / right: mustard / relish, followed unremittingly by: tweezers / Pritt-Stick before the narration (usually at this point, 5-6 minutes into full volubility) collapses into accelerated passages of information, unless derailed by unexpected audience disruption or loss of concentration. Click—a gridlock seizure of narration and direction. Relapse—I always claimed it started in the Lake District, after visiting Kurt Schwitters' home in Ambleside. If available, a slide of a pencil museum would usually follow... I remember finding a neat stack of A4 sheets; seeming deliberately collated to form a solid breeze-block of paper-pulp. As for whether they were ever intended for further distribution remains to this day oblique. Black and white lo-fi printing aesthetic on thin off-white paper stock. The papers appeared to have been carelessly thrown into a removals stacker-box and somehow resisted any unwanted imperfections.

At best, just adopted a suitably warped sheen and thick coating of soot. The box was one of many coming down from the attic space, where an assortment of reel to reel machines, microphones and bric a brac instruments were concealed, by a fire-proof door, displaying a three-tier lock system. I took a few sheets from the moulded slab of many more... they traveled with me and accompanied the mutations of form and content, yet never withered from the unassigned role of resolute aloofness.

A late night flight to Glasgow. I had arrived early at Prestwick airport and immediately punished myself by indulging in a packet of crisps while waiting for the taxi driver to appear, with a name-sign. Twenty minutes had passed by and no more incoming flights, just pottering Polish passengers groggily playing bingo games and text-messaging. I bought another packet of crisps. By around quarter past midnight and after several attempted calls, using the clanky pay phones I finally managed to make contact with the taxi company. The driver had waited outside for 30 minutes, while I stood by the arrivals foyer among the early morning passengers, destined for Krakow. A London black-cab; the driver took me speedily to my hotel on Albion Street. The room was soon scattered with opened boxes and bags. A series of transformations, however my most persistent thought was how to overcome a sudden headache, inevitably caused by crisp poisoning. I sat on the edge of a King-sized and felt-mantled bed, staring into the alterations of football tables on Sky television. Slowly

undressing, while mounting my nocturnal adventure with a toothbrush dangling from my mouth. A spacious hotel suite, in a once familiar place, and another adjunct set of narratives gradually finding their way into this rehearsal... starting with the bundle of printed papers set beside me. I reached out for a cupboard door, and in doing so knocked over a 1664 beer can; I returned to memories of a red table from 2005, in Glasgow, where pins, eggs and bowls once laid. And now back in Glasgow in 2009, where just harmless puddles of beer gathered to my right.

Selecting more slides for a verbal story, which ceased long ago to welcome any new visual motifs. I knew that at 7pm the following

evening I'd have to perform again. The best way I knew how to rehearse had been with a screwdriver, mini-portable studio and analogue camera. By dismantling the interior solitary spaces that accommodated the soon-to-be-spoken-words; and then capturing them in the most salient manner possible using a metal 1970s airline suitcase, suitably padded and rigid: a base easily found, place it on the floor or the coffee table, position, open and keep ajar. Studio lights to the left and right of the arena. Soft-boxes made instantly by slipping ladies' underwear on. Unroll the felt and attach to the interior division buttons. Slab of opaque plastic inserted upon the baseline of the lower case. Small battery-powered fluorescent tubes underneath and adorned by a variety of colour films. Frivolous chocolate boxes with a golden gilt and tin foil wrapped postcard holders to supply any additional radiance. Reflectors positioned accordingly and the object soon to belong

in an endless sequence of hotel vocabulary, for a hermetic syntax. Two wooden tape measuring sticks expanded and lodged into both undersides of the suitcase cushioning. Brilliant white, jet-black and grey long sleeve shirts, all 100% cotton and fresh to drape over the spectacle and twist intricately around the upright measuring sticks. Light weight tripod and 35mm analogue SLR camera with a healthy quantity of out-of-date film stock.

Wake-up call for 8am confirmed. Finding Chopin visual sequence still to be loaded in the carousel and ready for an early morning rehearsal. All other related original slides to be selected and dispatched for immediate duplication. Plastic archive boxes detached and further displaced from sought-after sequences: plants trees fungi and flora once contained... Categories of mounted and usurped slides followed my carbon footsteps. The same slides being used since the begin-

ning, still surpassing yet erroneously passing by. Yes—passing my eye-view at an irregular pace; in buoyance to my hotel-image-acquisition-routine... Many more minutes pressed by and all within selected and contained moments many more words entered, found and left images wailing. Why so many words, ushered swiftly away from an attentive ear when so few remain stoic? When excited Chopin spoke French, I attempted to understand but often didn't. When excited I spoke fast, he attempted to understand but probably didn't. I drank two cups of coffee. He drank three glasses of red wine. Neither ate breakfast. Before leaving he asked me to photograph him, I obliged. Light box still on; archive boxes almost full inside a relatively spacious hotel room, located directly opposite an abandoned hair dressing salon.

Henri Chopin archive / Tris Vonna-Michell, installation at Museum im Kulturspeicher, Würzburg, 2008



**com
som**

**can
tem**

**con
tem**

**ten
são**

**tam
bem**

**tom
bem**

**sem
som**

Augusto de Campos
Tensão, 1956

HAROLDO DE CAMPOS

“Concrete poetry: tension of things-words in space time.” This phrase from one of Augusto de Campos’ theoretical texts, later incorporated into the ‘Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry’, explains the process of this poem. Its reading is open: you may depart from wherever you wish.

com som = with sound
cantem = sing
contém = (it) contains
tensão = tension
também = also
tombem = tumble
sem som = without sound

o
bo
blow
blow blow
blow blow blow
blow blow
blow
bo
o
o
go
grow
grow
grow grow
grow grow grow o show show show
grow grow show show
grow
go
o
lo
flow
flow flow
flow flow flow
flow flow
flow
lo
o

Eugen Gomringer
flow grow show blow, 1954

EUGEN GOMRINGER

The constellation, the word-group, replaces the verse. Instead of syntax it is sufficient to allow two, three or more words to achieve their full effect. They seem on the surface without interrelation and sprinkled at random by a careless hand, but looked at more closely, they become

the centre of a field of force and define a certain scope. In finding, selecting and putting down these words [the poet] creates ‘thought objects’ and leaves the task of association to the reader, who becomes a collaborator and, in a sense, the completer of the poem.

FROM DELLA
PRIMAVERA
TRANSPORTATA
AL MORALE

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

APRIL

the beginning—or
what you will:
the dress
in which the veritable winter
walks in Spring—

Loose it!
Let it fall (where it will)
—again

A live thing
the buds are upon it
the green shoot come between
the red flowerets
curled back

Under whose green veil
strain trunk and limbs of
the supporting trees—

Yellow! the arched stick
pinning the fragile foil
—in abundance
or
the bush before the rose
pointed with green

bent into form
upon the iron frame

wild onion
swifter than the grass

the grass thick
at the post's base

iris blades unsheathed—

NO IDEAS BUT
IN THINGS

MICHELLE COTTON

“It began with a heart attack”, he said to the student from the city. “I had lived for sports like any other kid. They let me go to school. But no more baseball. No more running. I didn’t mind the running too much . . . there was a boy up the street I never could beat. But the rest. Not being with the others after school. I was forced back on myself. I had to think about myself. And I began to read.”¹

The student was visiting William Carlos Williams at his home in Rutherford, New Jersey, sometime in the mid-1950s; she had asked him how he began to write poetry. Williams’s response is characteristically diagnostic: the short statements, the medical verdict; there is even a (self-prescribed) treatment. The townspeople knew him as Doc Williams, the local physician and paediatrician, and from 1913 until 1951, the ground floor of his house in Rutherford had held his private practice. Poems were sometimes jotted down between appointments, on the spare prescription pads he kept in his car or at the office. There was a studio in the attic with a typewriter for more concentrated work. His college friend Ezra Pound moved to Europe, but Williams remained in Rutherford, finding all the material he needed in the life observed from his attic window or the patients he visited during the day. Medicine, he said, far from interfering, was ‘the very thing which made it possible for me to write . . . it was giving me terms, basic terms with which I could spell out matters as profound as I cared to think of’.²

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1. William Carlos Williams in Edith Heal (ed.) *William Carlos Williams: I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet*, originally published 1958, New Directions, New York, 1978, p. 1. The book is comprised of conversations that took place between

Williams, his wife Florence, and Edith Heal, who was then a student at Columbia University.
2. William Carlos Williams, *Autobiography*, Random House, New York, 1948, p. 357.

Spring and All (1923) was dedicated to another college friend, the painter Charles Demuth. Amidst the experimental typography, the Roman and Arabic numerals appearing out of sequence, chapter headings printed upside down and the discussion of Cubist painting, were eight lines that would become his signature work:

SO MUCH DEPENDS
UPON

A RED WHEEL
BARROW

GLAZED WITH RAIN
WATER

BESIDE THE WHITE
CHICKENS³

Pound aligned Williams’s poetry with Imagism, introducing him to London as a writer who ‘apparently means what he says’.⁴ The absence of ‘false ornament’⁵ fitted with the Anglo-American group’s pursuit of a precise, economical language and a lyrical control of metre. The Imagist poets selected his work to be printed alongside their first published statements in 1913, advocating:

1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to presentation
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase not in sequence of a metronome.⁶

Influenced by the Greek pastoral poets, Williams wrote verse that spoke of a rural situation, not the idyllic landscape of flutes and shepherds, but the austerity of work-yard

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3. William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems: Volume I 1909–1939*, originally published 1987, Carcanet Press Limited, Manchester, 2000, p. 224.
4. Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 12.
5. Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 12.
6. Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 12.

BUY THIS
PROPERTY

—the complexion of the impossible
(you’ll say)

never realized—
At a desk in a hotel in front of a

machine a year
later—for a day or two—

(Quite so—)
Whereas the reality trembles

frankly
in that though it was like this

in part
it was deformed

even when at its utmost to
touch—as it did

and fill and give and take
—a kind

of rough drawing of flowers
and April

STOP : GO

—she
opened the door! nearly
six feet tall, and I . . .
wanted to found a new country—

For the rest, virgin negress
at the glass
in blue-glass Venetian beads—

a green truck
dragging a concrete mixer
passes
in the street—
the clatter and true sound
of verse—

—the wind is howling
the river, shining mud—
Moral
it looses me

Moral
it supports me

Moral
it has never ceased
to flow

Moral
the faded evergreen

Moral
I can laugh

Moral
the redhead sat
in bed with her legs
crossed and talked
rough stuff

Moral
the door is open

Moral
the tree moving diversely
in all parts—

—the moral is love, bred of
the mind and eyes and hands—

But in the cross-current
between what the hands reach
and the mind desires

and the eyes see
and see starvation, it is

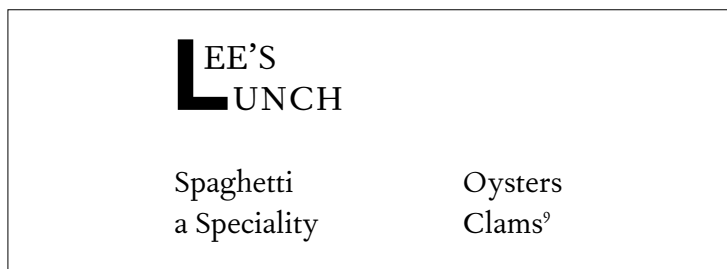
useless to have it thought
that we are full—

But April is a thing
comes just the same—

and in it we see now
what then we did not know—

New Jersey. His pastoral consisted in an idea of locality, reflecting his immediate situation in the subject and form of his writing. He drew on the American ‘idiom’ to structure his verse; this term, he said, was ‘better ... than language, less academic, more identified with speech’.⁷

For Williams, idiom was not limited to something oral; it took on the increasing presence of the printed word in the home and on the street. The typographic design of the poems, their metrical arrangement, tone and phrase, and their collaged sense of reality referred to the way in which language was encountered at the diner or the general store. A poem describing the view from his studio is centred by the word ‘SODA’, the letters printed vertically down the page with a border of asterisks to represent the ‘running lights’ around the neon.⁸ Similarly, *Brilliant Sad Sun* (1927) begins with a menu:



and *April* (1930) quotes an entire list of ice-cream flavours, with their prices laid out in a column opposite. The same poem includes a pair of arrows and a skull-and-cross-bones amongst the words and symbols appropriated from signage.

Orchid, 1977. @ 1977 The Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe
Orchid, 1977. @ 1977 The Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe¹⁰
Sue Tompkins, *More Cola Wars* 2004

Williams dealt with the objectness of words. He responded to how language was being reorganised by industry and technology; the way in which newspapers, advertising, packaging and other printed ephemera were communicating their message. The Imagist direct treatment of the ‘thing’ becomes translated, in Williams’s own terms, to a phrase that opens his epic *Paterson* (1946–1958): ‘No ideas but in things.’¹¹ This objectness does away with commonplaces of opacity and ambiguity in the writing; complexity is everywhere—it doesn’t need to be invented. In contradistinction to Stéphane Mallarmé’s belief that ‘to name a thing is to destroy three-quarters of the poem’, things are named and presented on the page exactly as they appear in life, and yet they remain just as unfathomable. These words, clipped from a magazine or a programme on the radio, always remain so, part of a register or a specialised parlance, rather than a single voice.

Subjectivity, then, emerges from the way in which these word-objects are gathered together, assembled and apprehended subvocally, or audibly, by a human voice.

Sue Tompkins’s spoken-word performances, for instance, often involve pop songs, beginning from the middle and cut before the end. *More Cola Wars* includes a fragment from ‘I’m a Believer’, recorded by The Monkees in 1966¹² (via Robert Wyatt’s 1974 version) and finishes with ‘God Only Knows’, released by the Beach Boys the same year. *Grease* (2006) ends similarly with Frankie Valli’s title song from the 1978 film soundtrack. They sound different from the original versions, but unlike many of Tompkins’s citations, the words remain intact and the tune remains the same; they are direct quotations. Like Williams’s SODA sign or the fragment from the menu, they sit adjunct to the

STOP : STOP

I believe
in the sound patriotic and
progressive Mulish policies
and if elected—

I believe
in a continuance of the pro-
tective tariff because—

I believe
that the country can’t do
too much—

I believe
in honest law enforcement—
and I also believe—

I believe
in giving the farmer and
land owner adequate protection

I believe

I believe

I believe
in equality for the negro—

**THIS IS
MY PLATFORM**

I believe in your love
the first dandelion
flower at the edge of—

taraaaaaaa! taraaaaaaa!

—the fishman’s bugle announces
the warm wind—

reminiscent of the sea
the plumbtree flaunts
its blossom-encrusted
branches—

I believe
Moving to three doors
above—May 1st.

I believe
ICE—and warehouse site
No parking between tree and corner

6. F.S. Flint, ‘Imagisme’, in Peter Jones (ed.), *Imagist Poetry*, Penguin, London, 1972, p. 18.
7. Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 65.

8. William Carlos Williams ‘The Attic Which is Desire’ (1930), in *Collected Poems: Volume I*, p. 325.
9. Williams, *Collected Poems: Volume I*, p. 269.

10. Sue Tompkins, *More Cola Wars*, 2004, typescript for spoken-word performance, courtesy of the artist
11. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, W. W. Norton & Co, New York, 1995, p. 9. Williams use of this phrase in his poems pre-dates *Paterson* (e.g. *A Sort*

of Song, 1944) however its coinage is more often linked to Book I of *Paterson*.
12. Neil Diamond wrote and recorded the song before The Monkees’ hit, releasing it in 1967 on the album, *Just for You*.

You would “kill me with kindness”
I love you too, but I love you too—
Thus, in that light and in that light only can I say—

Winter : Spring
abandoned to you. The world lost—in you

Is not that devastating enough for one century?

I believe

Spumoni	\$1.00
French Vanilla	.70
Chocolate	.70
Strawberry	.70
Maple Walnut	.70
Coffee	.70
Tutti Frutti	.70
Pistachio	.70
Cherry Special	.70
Orange Ice	.70
Biscuit Tortoni	

25c per portion

trees—seeming dead:
the long years—

tactus eruditus

Maple, I see you have
a squirrel in your crotch—

And you have a woodpecker
in your hole, Sycamore

—a fat blonde, in purple
(no trucking on this street)

body of the writing, peripheral as opposed to core.

Apart from the prescription pads, Williams composed his poetry and prose on a fold-up electric typewriter. In the introduction to *The Wedge* (1944) he spoke of the poem as a ‘machine made of words ... its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than literary character’.¹³ He was fond of talking about writing in a way that expressed an affinity with the practice of painting (having once considered being a visual artist himself), he went on to say:

When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them—without distortion which would mar their exact significances ... It isn’t what he *says* that counts as a work of art, it’s what he makes.¹⁴

Objectness then, often involves a collection of words that effectively constitute a unit: a song, a list, a phrase taken piece-for-piece.

In the abstract compositions of Christopher Knowles, optical patterns mapped out by typed characters neighbour inventories of peoples’ names, song titles, singles charts etc. In Knowles’s work, it is language itself that becomes adjunct. The text is ornamental, graphic, arranged according to visual principles, but the scheme is entirely limited by the typewriter. The colours are always black, red and green, the paper is always of a certain width, and the type is always laid out in rows, the letters automatically spaced and of relative size and shape.

Williams spoke of making the verse ‘coldly, intellectually considered’, so that the ‘concept of the thing itself’ would be stronger than ‘the emotion, the heat of life’.¹⁵ There are poems that seem to say everything in their

13. William Carlos Williams, *The Wedge*, The Cummington Press, Massachusetts, 1944, p. 8.

14. Williams, *The Wedge*, p. 10.

titles, like for instance, *To Be Closely Written On A Small Piece Of Paper Which Folded Into A Tight Lozenge Will Fit Any Girl’s Locket* (1919). There are others written in the tradition of verse addressed to a single reader, like a note. As such, they function as objects in themselves. Book IV of Paterson anonymously quoted a series of letters from a young Allen Ginsberg, who had been writing to Williams from various addresses in New York and New Jersey for almost a decade. In *Notes After an Evening with William Carlos Williams*, which Ginsberg published in 1952, Williams is recorded as saying: ‘I don’t even know if Paterson is poetry. I have no form, I just try to squeeze the lines up into pictures.’¹⁶

Amongst Williams’s child patients was the Rutherford-born Robert Smithson. In an interview from 1972, Smithson recounts returning to the town in the late 1950s to visit Williams at his home. The poet told him that ‘he enjoyed meeting artists more than writers’, and showed him some paintings by Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Ben Shahn and ‘Hart Crane’s boyfriend’. There were also some stories about Allen Ginsberg turning up at all hours and Ezra Pound getting him into trouble with the FBI. Smithson ends the account by describing his early ‘contact’ with the quarries in Paterson, the city on the Pas-saic River from which the Williams poem takes its name:

As a kid I used to go and prowl around all those quarries. And of course, they figured strongly in Paterson. When I read the poems I was interested in that, especially this one part of *Paterson* where it showed all the strata levels under Paterson. Sort of a proto-conceptual art, you might say.¹⁷

15. Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 83.

16. Allen Ginsberg, ‘Notes After an Evening with William Carlos Williams’, *Portents*, 17, Samuel Charters, New York, 1952.

POISON!

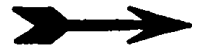


I believe

WOMAN’S WARD



PRIVATE



The soul, my God, shall rise up
—a tree

But who are You?
in this mortal wind
that I at least can understand
having sinned willingly

The forms
of the emotions are crystalline,
geometric-faceted. So we recognize
only in the white heat of
understanding, when a flame
runs through the gap made
by learning, the shapes of things—
the ovoid sun, the pointed trees

lashing branches

The wind is fierce, lashing

the long-limbed trees whose
branches
wildly toss—

William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems: Volume 1 1909–1939*, originally published 1987, Carcanet Press Limited, Manchester, 2000.

Smithson ends the account with a reference to his 1967 *Artforum* essay, *The Monuments of Passaic*, which, he had suggested in a previous interview, ‘might be conceived of as a kind of appendix’ to *Paterson*.¹⁸ Smithson’s essay bears some stylistic resemblances to Williams’s writing, particularly in the textual fragments (from a newspaper, labels, signs, etc) that are fixed within the narrative of the essay. There is also a shared sense of the landscape and its merged material assemblage of geology and industry. Ultimately, though, *The Monuments of Passaic* presents the character of locality as we know it from Williams. Rutherford and the surrounding area become the subject of a work of Conceptual art and implied as a subject for Smithson’s work in general. Williams has become part of the idiom, and Passaic, an amalgamation of past and future, Smithson asks if it has ‘replaced Rome as The Eternal City?’¹⁹

Passaic center loomed like a dull adjective. Each “store” in it was an adjective unto the next, a chain of adjectives disguised as stores ... Actually, Passaic center was no center—it was instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery! Or maybe an ‘outdoor sculpture show’.²⁰



Matthew Brannon
Words on a Page, 2008

17. Robert Smithson interviewed by Paul Cummings, ‘Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art / Smithsonian Institution’, 1972, in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1996, p. 285.

18. Robert Smithson interviewed by Gianni Pettena, ‘Conversation in Salt Lake City’, January 1972, in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, p. 298.

19. Robert Smithson, ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’, 1967, originally published in *Artforum*, December 1967, as ‘The Monuments of Passaic’, in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, p. 74.

20. Smithson, ‘A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’, in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, p. 72.

COLOPHON

We lived beneath the mat,
Warm and snug and fat,
But one woe, and that
Was the Cat!

To our joys
a clog, In
our eyes a
fog, On our
hearts a log,
Was the Dog!

When the
Cat's away,
Then
The mice
will
play,
But alas!
one day, (So they say)

Came the Dog and
Cat, hunting
for a
Rat,
Crushed
the mice
all flat,
Each
one
as
he
sat,
Underneath the mat,
Warm and snug and fat,
Think of
that!

The Mouse's Tail
From *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865

Published on the occasion of
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Curated by Mark Sladen

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Another preface.... without a preface I cannot possibly go on. I must explain, specify, rationalize, classify, bring out the root idea underlying all other ideas in the book, demonstrate and make plain the essential griefs and hierarchy of ideas which are here isolated and exposed... thus enabling the reader to find the work's head, legs, nose, fingers and to prevent him from coming and telling me that I don't know what I'm driving at and that instead of marching forward straight ahead like the great writers of all ages, I am only revolving ridiculously on my own axis. Then shall the fundamental overall angle here art thou great-grandmother of all. The deeper I dig, the more I explore and the more clearly do I see that in reality primary, the fundamental grief is pure and simply, in my opinion, the agony of bad form, defective appearance, the phraseology, grimaces, faces... yes, this origin, the source, the fount from which flow harmoniously all the other parts, follies, and afflictions without any exception whatever. Or perhaps it would be as well to emphasize that the primary and fundamental grief is that born of the constraint of man by nature from the fact that we suffocate and smother the narrow and rigid idea of ourselves which others have of us.

