

CONCRETE POETRY

stead relied on theories of allegory or, in the case of Dr. Johnson, moral exemplum, both of which explain poetic images as symbolic of a. ideas (see ALLEGORY). Romantic critics (e.g. F. Schlegel, Blake), in rebellion against this dichotomy of text and meaning, less apologized for the c. images of poetry than attacked abstractions as by definition false. Romantic historians of lit., like Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, ch. 1), used the terms c. and a. to distinguish between the neoclassical verse they disliked (e.g. Pope: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast: / Man never is, but always to be blest") and the poetry they wrote themselves (Coleridge: "I would build that dome in air, / That sunny dome! those caves of ice!"). The critique of theoretical lang. was developed further by imagists (see IMAGISM) and other modernists who turned the distinction against romanticism, and esp. against Wordsworth, whom Pound and the early Eliot found a. and discursive. The early modernists' contempt for "ideas" and for discursive poetry became in the work of the New Criticism (q.v.) a systematic and a. hermeneutics: Wimsatt and Ransom carried on a belated and ambivalent debate with Kantian idealist philosophy (see CONCRETE UNIVERSAL). But by the 1950s the literary critique of theoretical lang. had entered into the mainstream of philosophy (e.g. Quine) just at the time when crit. itself was becoming increasingly theoretical and a. Postmodern verse, however, may be c. in the extreme, avoiding (as in some "concrete poetry" and in "sound poetry"—qq.v.) the use even of words as too great a concession to abstraction. Many recent poets, in America at least, are indebted to the example of objectivism (q.v.) and of W. C. Williams, whose motto was "no ideas but in things." —F. Nietzsche, "The Question of Socrates," *Twilight of the Idols* (1888); O. Barfield, *Poetic Diction* (1928); J. C. Ransom, *The World's Body* (1938); W. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (1953), ch. 2; W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Substantive Level," *The Verbal Icon* (1954); F. Kermode, *Romantic Image* (1957); J. Weinberg, "Abstraction in the Formation of Concepts," *DHI*; R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), chs. 4, 6, 8; J. Milstead, "'C.' and 'A.' as Stylistic Descriptions," *Lang&S* 16 (1983); A. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (1986); C. Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist Am. Poetry* (1989). J.M.P.

CONCRETE POETRY is visual poetry, esp. of the 1950s and 1960s, in which (1) each work defines its own form and is visually and, if possible, structurally original or even unique; (2) the piece is without any major allusion to any previously existing poem; and (3) the visual shape is wherever possible abstract, the words or letters within it behaving as ideograms. This dissociates the prototypical c. poem from the freer-form visual poems of futurism and dada (qq.v.) as well as from the less consciously programmatic visual poetry of the

1920s through the 1940s, epitomized in e e cummings' "l(a)." The term "c. p." was adopted in 1955 when the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer (b. 1924) met Decio Pignatari (b. 1927), who had founded, with his fellow Brazilians Augusto and Haroldo de Campos (b. 1931 and 1929), the Noigandres Group (see SWISS POETRY; BRAZILIAN POETRY). The term was adapted from the Swiss sculptor Max Bill (b. 1908), who called some of his works *konkretionen* and whose secretary Gomringer was at that time; however, it had already been used independently in 1953 by the Swedish poet and artist Öyvind Fahlström to describe his own visual poems, which are unlike those of the later group. The main manifesto of the Noigandres group, "Pilot Plan for C. P." (1958), is reprinted in Solt (1968) and may be taken as describing the early concrete program.

Over the next four years the group expanded to include such Germans as Claus Bremer, Dieter Roth, and Franz Mon, the Swiss Daniel Spoerri, the Austrians Gerhard Rühm and Ernst Jandl, the Scot Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the expatriate Am. Emmett Williams. By the middle 1960s, when the largest-scale anthols. of c. p. appeared, those edited by Williams (1967) and by Mary-Ellen Solt (1969), the movement included several dozen more poets in countries as various as Spain, Italy, Argentina, and Japan. By that point the rigid original definition had been stretched and some degree of textual allusion and visual mimesis was allowed, though with the growing fashion for c. p., not everyone who called himself a "c. poet" was accepted by everyone else. But the influence of the anthols. and the dissemination to a larger audience encouraged many other poets who were by no means avant-garde to experiment with visual poetry (still known as "c." in most cases). This was the case with such Am. poets as May Swenson, M. L. Rosenthal, and John Hollander. Thus c. p. became not the style of a group but a possible form for the mainstream. The most conspicuous result of this popularization was a widespread confusion about the term "c. p." which has persisted to the present day.

From the late 1960s onward, some younger visual poets formed new groups, calling their works "post-c." (Cavan McCarthy), "visuelle Gedichte" (K. P. Dencker) or, ultimately, *poesia visiva* (sometimes attributed to Luciano Ori but actually first used by Eugenio Miccini as early as 1962); because "visual poetry" (q.v.) describes the general field of works which fuse visual and literary art, *poesia visiva* is used untranslated, and has become the commonest term in the Eng.-speaking world to describe the visual poetic forms that have developed since c. p. *Poesia visiva* typically combines photography and graphic techniques with letters, and these do not always make sense semantically, so that with *poesia visiva* one truly enters the world of visual art more than lit. As for the original c. poets, many of them turned to sound poetry (q.v.)

CONCRETE UNIVERSAL

after the 1960s and today combine the media of c. and sound poetry into activities for radio, television, and cinema. See also CALLIGRAMME; LETTRISME; PATTERN POETRY; VISUAL POETRY.

R. H. Fogle, *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* (1949), ch. 5; R. L. Beloof, "E. E. Cummings: The Prosodic Shape of His Poems," *DAJ* 14 (1954); *An Anthol. of C. P.*, ed. E. Williams (1967); *C. P.: A World View*, ed. M.-E. Solt and W. Barnstone (1969); R. P. Draper, "C. P.," *NLH* 2 (1971); "Konkrete Poesie I, II," *Text & Kritik* 25, 30 (1974-75); *Theoretische Positionen zur konkreten Poesie*, ed. T. Kopfermann (1974); A. Marcus, "Intro. to the Visual Syntax of C. P.," *VLang* 8 (1974); H. Hartung, *Experimentelle Literatur und konkrete Poesie* (1975); L. Gumpel, "C." *P. from East and West Germany* (1976)—conflates terms; A. and H. de Campos and D. Pignatari, *Teoria da poesia concreta* (1975); J. L. McHughes, "The Poesis of Space," *QJS* 63 (1977); *Visual Lit. Crit.* (1979), *Am. Writing Today* (1982), both ed. R. Kostelanetz; D. W. Seaman, *C. P. in France* (1981); W. Steiner, "Res poetica," *The Colors of Rhet.* (1982); G. Janecek, *The Look of Rus. Lit.* (1984); *Poetics of the Avant-Garde / C. P.*, Spec. Iss. of *PoT* 3, 3 (1982); *Verbe et image: Poésie visuelle*, ed. D. Higgins and K. Kempton, Spec. Iss. of *Art contemporain* 5 (1983); E. Sacriogari, "El despertar de la forma en la poesía concreta," *RI* 50 (1984); *The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of C. and Visual P. 1984* (1986)—catalog and bibl.; K. McCullough, *C. P.: An Annot. Internat. Bibl.* (1989); C. Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec* (1989). D.H.

CONCRETE UNIVERSAL. In a 1947 essay, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., proposed "c. u." as a key concept for any poetics that aimed to be "objective and absolute." During the 19th and early 20th c., various idealist philosophers (e.g. J. Royce, B. Bosanquet, F. H. Bradley) had tried to clarify the concept of c. u., which they had inherited from Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), and to show its relevance to logic and aesthetics. Wimsatt does not provide a hist. of the varying senses in which philosophers have used the concept or of the objections raised to it; rather, he defends his proposal by pointing out that, like philosophers, many literary critics ancient and modern have been preoccupied with an opposition in which one extreme is called "u.," "general," or "abstract," and the other "particular," "individual," or "c." (see **CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT**). In philosophical terms this is the problem of the nature and reality of universals. Critics have used this opposition to define poetry, to determine its subject matter and structure, and to generate principles for evaluation. It has been incorporated in critical dicta such as the following: poetry "tends to express the universal, hist. the particular" (Aristotle); the poet "coupleth the general notion with the particular example" (Sidney); "the business of a poet is to examine, not the individual, but the species" (Johnson); the object

of poetry is "truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative" (Wordsworth); Shakespeare had "the universal, which is potentially in each particular, opened out to him" (Coleridge). The recurrence of this opposition suggests that the concepts of "concrete" and "universal" must both appear in any acceptable theory of the nature and structure of poetry. Wimsatt held that 20th-c. crit., esp. that of Empson, Brooks, Blackmur, and Tate, had finally formulated correctly the doctrine which had been adumbrated in earlier critical writings such as those above.

Wimsatt classified as a c. u. any natural or artificial object which exhibits "organized heterogeneity" of a complexity sufficiently great to make it seem "in the highest degree individual." The criteria for determining whether or not an object is a c. u. are diversity of parts, interrelatedness of parts, completeness, unity, independence, and self-maintenance. Perhaps the chief reason for Wimsatt's preference for "c. u." is that it provides him with a pair of polar terms which suggest the structure of the organic unity of the poem. He regards poetry as discourse which expresses a "meaning," "value," "idea," "concept," or "abstraction" (the u.) by means of the specific details (the c.) which constitute the matter of the poem. Thus the meaning is the form or unifying principle; and the poem is an organic unity if the characters, actions, metrical devices, words, and metaphors combine to body forth this u. Furthermore, the c. is the only possible means for expressing the u., which (in a good poem) is so novel, subtle, and individual that ordinary lang. cannot provide a substantive class name for it.

Thus the u. is not just an everyday generality or even a Platonic idea. It is not an abstract u. (like "yellow" or "horse" or "love") which is usually opposed to the individual. Abstract universals, whether they be concepts of attributes ("blue," "round") or of syntheses of attributes ("dog," "man"), are only mental creations and as such have no "real" existence. Indeed in a good poem the u. is the very principle of individuality, embodied in all the diverse particulars of which the poem is composed. According to Wimsatt, c. u. is applicable not only to the poem as a whole but also to any prominently distinguishable part of it, e.g. a character, metaphoric imagery, or a narrative sequence.

Wimsatt's proposal evoked a critical response from John Crowe Ransom, a lifelong opponent of "Hegelianism" and other versions of holistic aesthetics. Ransom attacked the organicist implications of the concept. His model for the c. u. is a complex machine in which each part has significance and justification only as it works with the other parts to achieve the purpose for which the machine was designed. A natural object is not a c. u. in this sense; it always exhibits characteristics which are "irrelevant" in terms of human conceptions of order and purpose. Poetry arises from the