

*Modernism meant new opportunities for the exercise of concision. What Ezra Pound (1916) called the “one image poem” summoned the sparseness of Japanese and Chinese poetry in recording “the precise instant when a thing outward and objective . . . darts into a thing inward and subjective.” The lyric intensity of Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” or of Giuseppe Ungaretti’s famously brief “Mattina” captures the profundity of the minute. Such poems anticipate *minimalism, in which diminution and reduction signal authenticity and exemplify the rejection of discursiveness summarized by W. C. Williams’s phrase “No ideas but in things.” In poems such as “The Red Wheelbarrow” and “As the Cat,” Williams uses small structures to force attention to infinitesimal units of meaning within the poem (sounds, stress patterns, line breaks).

The formal openness of these poems points to the centrality of concision in arguments about free verse. Conventional poetic forms are typically seen as demanding compression: Wordsworth’s 1806 sonnet “Nuns Fret Not” states the case by linking form with self-denial (“’twas pastime to be bound / Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground”). But for Pound (1918), **vers libre* best facilitates the exercise of concision: “words are shovelled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound. . . . If you are using a symmetrical form, don’t put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush.”

Concision bears political meanings. It can represent an avoidance of a hegemonic discourse or the difficulty of negotiating that discourse or even the outright silencing of voices within it; Adrienne Rich’s half-sonnet “An Unsaid Word” uses concision to communicate “a negative experience of power” (Keyes). For Audre Lorde, poetry’s concision suits it to the representation of marginalized experience: “of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is . . . the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper.” Theodor Adorno’s oft-quoted dictum “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” suggests how a concision evoking silence might be the most appropriate way of describing certain experiences; thus, in Paul Celan’s “Chymisch” (“Alchemical”), silence is not only sacramental and memorial but emblematic of lang.’s potential violence: “Schweigen, wie Gold gekocht, in / verkohlten / Händen” (Silence, cooked like gold, in / charred / hands).

■ E. Pound, “The Serious Artist,” *The Egoist* (1913); *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916); and “A Retrospect,” *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918); Empson; R. H. Brower and E. R. Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (1961); R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (1977); *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century*, ed. B. Watson (1984); A. Lorde, “Age, Race, Sex and Class,” *Sister Outsider* (1984); C. Keyes, *The Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich* (1986); H. Vendler, *The Music of What Happens* (1988); P. Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, trans. K. Murphy-Judy (1990); P. Nicholls, *Modernisms* (1995); H. Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry* (1995); *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600–2000*,

ed. W. T. DeBary et al., 2d ed. (2001); K. Painter, *Flint on a Bright Stone: A Revolution of Precision and Restraint in American, Russian, and German Modernism* (2006); Z. Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (2007).

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CONCRETE POETRY. Although used in a general way to refer to work that has been composed with specific attention to graphic features such as *typography, layout, shape, or distribution on the page, concrete poetry properly understood has a more specific definition created in the mid-1950s by the Swiss-Bolivian poet Eugen Gomringer and the Brazilian poets Décio Pignatari and Haroldo and Augusto de Campos. The original tenets of concrete poetry are clear in the early writings of the group. Their 1958 “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry” outlines a distinct approach in which form and meaning (material expression and reference field) would be as close to each other as possible. Thus, *concrete* suggests a unification of the word with its presentation. The poets derived certain ideas from the work of Ezra Pound, in particular his adoption of Ernest Fenollosa’s productive misunderstanding of the Chinese ideogram as a self-identical verbal-visual expression. The concrete poets recast this notion into an idea of isomorphism (identity of shape and meaning) that they believed embodied an ideal of structure as content. This attempt to eliminate extraneous associations or ambiguities comports with the aesthetics of “specific objects” expressed by minimalist artists of the 1960s, who sought to strip art objects of all superfluous elements.

Gomringer’s poem “silencio” (1953) exemplifies the concretists’ aim of creating a total integration of word as image in a single aesthetic expression. By repeating the word “silence” eight times to frame an empty “quiet” space, Gomringer’s poem is self-defining and self-referential. Gomringer had been the secretary to Max Bill, a visual artist and graphic designer affiliated with the New Bauhaus, a post-World War II Swiss movement with a highly formalist orientation. Bill used the term *concrete* to identify his own functionalist, analytical methodology, which had an influence on the devel. of Swiss-style graphic design. Though committed to principles of self-identical work, concrete poets were profoundly interested in and attracted by mass culture and the graphic langs. of signage and advertising. Pignatari’s famous “beba coca cola” (1957) reworks commercial lang. to critique corporate colonialism.

Concrete poets embraced the concept of inter-media works that could operate simultaneously in verbal-to-visual and acoustic modes. The use of sans serif typefaces, particularly Helvetica and Univers, lent the concrete poets an air of cool modernity that separated their work typographically from trads. of humanist poetry and *lyric voice. Many concrete poets distanced themselves from earlier 20th-c. avant-garde movements by their less explicit political content and absence of inflammatory rhet. But they continued the trad. of writing *manifestos to state their aesthetic positions.

Concrete poetry found many adherents, and the poets who identified themselves with the term quickly expanded to include major figures in Europe, the Brit. Isles, the U.S., Japan, and South America. With increased distance and time, the work of these groups and individuals expanded beyond the strict orthodoxy outlined in the pilot plan. Thus, many poets who experimented with visual forms and typographic features are loosely associated with concrete poetry, even though their work is only pictorial, composed as a field or a score, rather than conforming to the strictly self-referential guidelines of concretism. By the time the first three major anthologies of concrete poetry appeared, ed. by E. Williams (1967), S. Bann (1967) and M. E. Solt (1968), their editorial range included poets from around the globe.

Precedents for concrete poetry can be traced to cl. antiquity and followed into the Middle Ages when poems shaped as religious icons carried theological meaning (see *CARMINA FIGURATA*). Similar shaped works appeared in printed form in the Ren. and after as part of a contemplative trad. and then in a secular era as novelties and poetic amusements. Few visually shaped works follow the intellectual rigor of concrete poetry's self-identical reduction. Important later 20th-c. devels. brought concrete poetry into dialogue with procedural work, visual arts, installation, film, *sound poetry, typewriter poetry, critical theories of deconstruction and *performance, and later digital works using animation and graphic means.

See TECHNOPAEGNION, VISUAL POETRY.

■ *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. S. Bann (1967); *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed. E. Williams (1967); *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. M. E. Solt (1968); D. Judd, "Specific Objects," *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (1975); D. Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France* (1981); W. Bohn, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry 1914–1928* (1986); J. Drucker, *The Visible Word* (1994); *Experimental-Visual-Concrete*, ed. K. D. Jackson, J. Drucker (1996); *Poesure et Peintrie*, ed. B. Blistène, V. Legrand (1998); W. Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (2000).

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CONCRETE UNIVERSAL. In an essay published in 1947 that was later adapted as a chapter in *The Verbal Icon*, W. K. Wimsatt proposed the term *concrete universal* as a primary concept in "an objective criticism." Wimsatt's term works off the long philosophical and literary preoccupation with similarly opposed terms: *abstract* and *concrete*, *universal* and *individual*, *general* and *particular*. Defining a literary work as a "complex of details" composed and complicated by its "human values," Wimsatt argues that a concrete universal, which may be a character, a figure of speech, or some other formal element of a work, embodies the individual but expresses the universal. In other words, the meaning expressed in the particular way an object or concept is represented becomes inseparable from the meaning expressed by the object or concept itself. For

the *New Criticism, of which Wimsatt was a major exponent, the notion of the concrete universal is a considered approach to the question of how complex formal and structural features produce not only an object that requires a thoroughgoing *explication, but a kind of truth.

Deriving the term from G.W.F. Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), Wimsatt cites Aristotle, Plotinus, Hegel, and John Crowe Ransom, among others, in tracing the critical legacy surrounding the "concrete" and the "universal" through canonical statements: "Poetry imitates action and that poetry tends to express the universal" (Aristotle); Shakespeare's genius is due to a "union and interpenetration of the universal and particular" (S. T. Coleridge); the artist's "soul reaches straight to the forms that lie behind in the divine intelligence" (Plotinus); "The business of the poet is not to number the streaks of the tulip; it is to give us not the individual, but the species" (Samuel Johnson). Wimsatt believed that New Critics such as William Empson, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, and Cleanth Brooks had "implicitly" elaborated similar assumptions.

Wimsatt's term *concrete universal* is both descriptive and prescriptive, involving both an analysis of rhetorical structure and a judgment of the work's difficulty and sophistication—thus, its use and value; indeed, Wimsatt asserts that "complexity of form is sophistication of content." As a prescriptive concept, the concrete universal is employed as an interpretive tool by the "objective" critic to aid readers to come to a "full realization" on their own and to distinguish the "good" from the "bad." Following the publication of *The Verbal Icon*, Ransom contested the efficacy and clarity of Wimsatt's notion of the concrete universal, finding the concrete and the universal "radically incommensurable," while defending an earlier formulation of his own that emphasized the concrete detail in poetry (*"texture") as central to the knowledge about the world that it makes available (see SCIENCE AND POETRY).

In a substantial critical encounter with the term, Knapp dedicates a chapter in *Literary Interest* to revisiting the concrete universal, finding that Wimsatt's account of the distinctiveness of the literary is troubled by his (unknowing) reliance on notions of *affect such as interest and pleasure. While Knapp finds Wimsatt's use of affect unintentional, he argues that the affectivity of literary representations (and, thus, of *imagination) is endowed with its own type of generality, as well as its own kind of rationality. Knapp does not find the *"unity" of literary works that Wimsatt claims but offers that literary works particularize typical meanings and create new connections and associations short of achieving a complete melding of particularity and typicality. Knapp also interprets the concrete universal in terms of what he calls "literary interest": literary works offer an analogical experience to what it feels like to be an "agent," by reproducing the oscillation between typicality and particularity that characterizes the interiority of human agency.

See AFFECTIVE FALLACY, INTENTIONAL FALLACY.

■ J. C. Ransom, "The Concrete Universal: Observa-