

# Concrete Poetry: A Study in Metaphor

Abbie W. Beiman

Various characteristics of concrete poetry have been examined but little attention has been focused on this art form's contribution to literature. Indeed, the concrete poem exemplifies a dramatic variation in the most basic element of poetry: figurative language. Traditionally, figurative language has established a relationship between the tangible objects around man and the intangibles which he seeks to know. The most common form of such figurative yokings has been the metaphor, a trope that creates a tension between the similarities and dissimilarities of the juxtaposed elements. With concrete poetry the focus of that trope is no longer just the abstract and spiritual leg of the metaphor, but the sensory perception of the literal and concrete as well.

Critics have attempted to define concrete poetry,<sup>1</sup> place it in an international context,<sup>2</sup> discuss its historical influences,<sup>3</sup> isolate its typographical innovations,<sup>4</sup> and judge its impact on the world of art.<sup>5</sup> Yet very few have judged it as literature,<sup>6</sup> and no one has discussed in depth its contribution to the genre to which it has been assigned: poetry. The very basis of poetic style is figurative language, language manipulated in such a way as to inspire connotations and associations not inherent in the literal word definition. One of the most important manifestations of this style—metaphor—traditionally has been used to establish a relationship between two things by using a word or words figuratively instead of literally.

Metaphor, unlike other tropes such as simile, directs the reader to a *sense* of the relationship—not to an exact term—and thereby allows the reader to supply an image from his own experience. In that way it transcends denotative meanings inherent in any term and allows the reader to supply the connotations most immediate to him. Hence the successful metaphor is not only immediate but personal to the individual involved in its figurative ambiguity. Because of this power to inspire personal associations, metaphor can be used to present

197 *Beiman : Concrete Poetry : A Study in Metaphor*

phenomena not named in common language or used to replace worn out labels of a decadent language.

The twentieth century's obsession with the impotency of its own verbal power has inspired the poet to manipulate this metaphoric power in new and different ways. In the present century this linguistic technique must communicate the figurative meaning by manipulating the literal object and it must enrich the poetic structure by demanding the reader's inference. Of course metaphor has traditionally been used in this way. In addition to such standard usage however, metaphor must now function as vital language once did, and that is to present the literal images and to serve as signs for the concrete "things" that words once symbolized.

Perhaps most important about this interaction of terms and reader inference is the broad scope of meaning possible. Metaphor does not suffer from the fixity and the limitation of a direct verbal statement. That is not to say that metaphor is a chaotic conglomeration of terms, images, and meanings definable only by the individual reader's perception and experience. On the contrary, metaphor not only orders poetic communication by providing a structure in which language is enriched with multiple meanings, but also provides a relationship among the medium in the poem, the poet's intention, and the reader's perception.

Metaphor has always been based on either common characteristics in each of its two terms or similar attitudes to each of the terms, while it has maintained the dissimilar elements of the two and created a tension between the similarities and dissimilarities of the juxtaposed elements. For this reason, it traditionally has functioned as a tool that could elucidate without equating, limit without confining, and elaborate without inflating. Most importantly, it has provided a way in which the unknown and intangible could be experienced through the known and tangible. To this end, many poets in the past artistically manipulated the external, real world in order to understand or communicate the internal, spiritual, or abstract. They used concrete, tangible "vehicles"—the familiar leg of the metaphor—to elucidate abstract, intangible "tenors"—the more abstract and complex leg of the metaphor.<sup>7</sup>

With the advent of concrete poetry has come a new focus for the metaphor: the reader is no longer directed to the absolute, abstract

meaning beyond words, but instead, he is directed to the finite presence of the word itself, the concrete object being described, or the immediate experience being communicated. In effect, this “concrete metaphor” redefines a figureative relationship in literal terms. The world, as such poetic metaphors present it, is a finite entity composed of sensorily perceivable objects, tangible things, and knowable facts. This new focus on reality as subject is communicated by metaphors that also emphasize the real and the object rather than the spiritual and abstract. The new use of metaphor involves a transformation of the metaphoric terms. Rather than a concrete vehicle focusing attention on ultimate meaning in an abstract tenor as one might find in poetry by Shakespeare, Donne, or Keats, the abstraction in concrete poetry is often only secondary to the visual, concrete presentation.

In his introduction to the Chicago Review’s *Anthology of Concretism* (1970), Peter Michelson stresses that concrete poetry is “poetry of material,” and sees it at its best as “a visual metaphor of modern sensibility”:

Its first physical appearance gives coherence to, provides a center for, and thus defines, the page. Soon, however it takes over the page—dominating it with shape, shade, and even the tease of imagery, symbolism, and other “literary” paraphernalia. But no sooner is it “master” than it explodes, moving our consciousness beyond the edge of the book, ending one step short of its logical conclusion—the denial of not only the arbitrary authority of *page* but of all perceptive possibility. The “charitable” ending is the ultimate artistic statement, the artist controlling reality for his own purposes, intimidated neither by logic nor metaphysics, responsible rather to his own sense of reality than to rules of validity.<sup>8</sup>

What the poet then seeks to do, by presenting language visually, or by stressing in page placement, repetition, or variation, the sound sense of language, is to represent metaphorically the interaction of art object and the individual’s perceptions. The very letters of the poem itself serve as the metaphoric vehicle for a tenor that is nothing more than perceiver participation in the language itself. Disparate realms such as printed page and reader response are forced into a metaphoric union that elucidates the concrete reality of both the material and the personal response to it. This personal response is the only “meaning” the concrete poem as metaphor has. The perceiver must interact with

the linguistic sign (or signs) on the page to form the meaning of the metaphor/poem. The result is certainly not merely abstract reference in the tenor nor greater meaning in the poem. It is, rather, a concrete experience based on material (vehicle) and participation/response (tenor). The focus of the metaphor could not be more "concrete."

Yet, the linguistic or nonlinguistic sign on the page is not just visual representation manipulated as an exhibit, sign, or symbol for some more complex verbal meaning or referent abstraction. It is, however, visual representation that clearly presents a fusion of, rather than one portion of, the visual-verbal interaction.<sup>9</sup> Nor is that linguistic sign devoid of all spiritual content. As Eugen Gomringer, the acknowledged father of concretism, notes, "Even in its most primitive usage, language serves a spiritual use." Yet Gomringer's spirituality (and that spirituality found in most concrete poetry) is based on the concrete particulars of language. The multiple spiritual reverberations of a linguistic element, letter, syllable, or word are indeed important, but they are important as inherent parts in a form that is, above all else, physically real to the senses of the perceiver.<sup>10</sup>

The terms proposed for this artistic phenomenon range from "concrete poetry" to "pattern poems," "ideograms," "calligrams," "iconographs," and even "word-imagery." A second American concretist and critic, Richard Kostelanetz, has proposed two major genres in this "word-imagery" form: "imaged words and worded images." In the first, the word is the base and language is "enhanced through *pictorial* means." In the second, the image is the base and is "embellished by the language which forms it."<sup>11</sup> In both genres a tension is produced between the similarities and dissimilarities of verbal and visual perception. The perceiver is responding to two stimuli, linguistic (word meaning) and gestalt (word appearance). Though both aspects of the word have been apparent since the poem appeared on the printed page, both have not been emphasized as an interactional force. In the concrete poem the products of linguistic meaning, visual shape, and often, word-sound are not tangential aspects of language, but are the poem. In this way metaphor has become a tool of both form and content, and, in concrete poetry, is the one traditional technique atraditionally used to equate form and content, and to juxtapose poet, poem, and reader. The concrete poem is precisely that metaphor with a concrete vehicle (the lin-

guistic sign) and a concrete tenor (the perceivers'—poet's and reader's—response).

Not only is the concrete poem a metaphor for this relationship, but for others as well. Interactions may occur between visual and verbal, aural and visual, kinetic and visual, kinetic and verbal, word and blank, typography and space, color and figure until the poem becomes a multiplicity of vehicles and tenors, demanding a multiplicity of perceiver perspectives. For this reason Mike Weaver has defined metaphor in the concrete poem as “purely plastic.”<sup>12</sup> The poem then can move in many directions at once. This multiplicity and often simultaneity of movement demand an ordering principle to replace discursive grammar and linear progression. Apollinaire once proposed that the new art would require “our intelligence to accustom itself to understand synthetico—ideographically instead of analytic—discursively.”<sup>13</sup> Weaver has also stated that the concrete poem that is based on movement (“kinetic” poem) replaces discursive grammar with a “serial method.”<sup>14</sup> The perceiver moves from letters, words, or phrases in an order that in the end produces the same total number of combinations experienced by any other perceiver. The order of the perceptions is unimportant. Because minimally the stimuli are verbal and spatial, the order and response must minimally be dual. The simultaneous occurrence of verbal and nonverbal communication is experienced in this way. The Brazilian concretists, the Noigandres group, have proposed that a “verbivocovisual” order replaces discursive syntax and provides this very simultaneity.<sup>15</sup>

Each of these poet-critics is attempting to explain why the poem communicates in the absence of traditional syntactic order and presence of fused sensory stimuli. The concrete poem affects several senses at once without relying on logical or rational connectives. The relationships between letters, words, or signs in the poem and the senses that respond to them are not inherent in the page: the perceiver must forge the bond. Here again metaphor is crucial, because unlike clear syntactic communication or direct image description, metaphor requires participation in the tension between similarity and dissimilarity in the vehicle/tenor combination. The concrete poem therefore *requires* the perceiver's participation to complete the poem/metaphor. When Eugen Gomringer defined his concrete “constellation,” he defined the reader's role:

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 center 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.<sup>16</sup>

This active participation is crucial to the success of the poetic metaphor. Haroldo de Campos’ concrete poem titled “Alea I—Semantic Variations” is a series of adjectives and nouns listed and merged until the parts of speech and the poetic process are one. In a corner of the page/poem are instructions for the reader to extend the variations of the poem at his pleasure. When “reading” Gerhard Rühm’s poem “bleiben,” the perceiver encounters a white page with a large black square on it. Diagonally across the square stretches one white line, and near the base of that line, in white handschrift, is the word “bleiben” (German for “to remain” or “to stay”). In perusing the page the reader’s eyes have completed the “meaning” of the vehicle, and have continued to stay with and follow that white line.

Mary Ellen Solt has noted the importance of this fine white line and the solid black page on which it appears. According to Solt, the stark presentation of the message to “stick with it” is far more spiritually profound than any sermon on the subject.<sup>17</sup> Rühm is indeed successful in integrating the visual and conceptual impact. He does this by merging the stark physical presence of the visual stimuli with the abstract meaning of white line, blank page, and verb form. Both physical presence and spiritual reference coalesce in the concrete visual/verbal vehicle placed before the reader.

An American, Carl Fernbach-Flarsheim, extends the space of his reader’s role to three dimensions. One of his poems is a piece of white paper folded double with edges to the right. Opened like a greeting card, the right-hand page of the poem is an exercise for non-verbal sensory participation in the poem. The left-hand page is the secondary focus of the eyes as they glance at the “greeting card” and define the limits of that experience—limits bounded only by the sky and the filter through which it is perceived. The poem ultimately means nothing until the reader completes the vehicle by participating

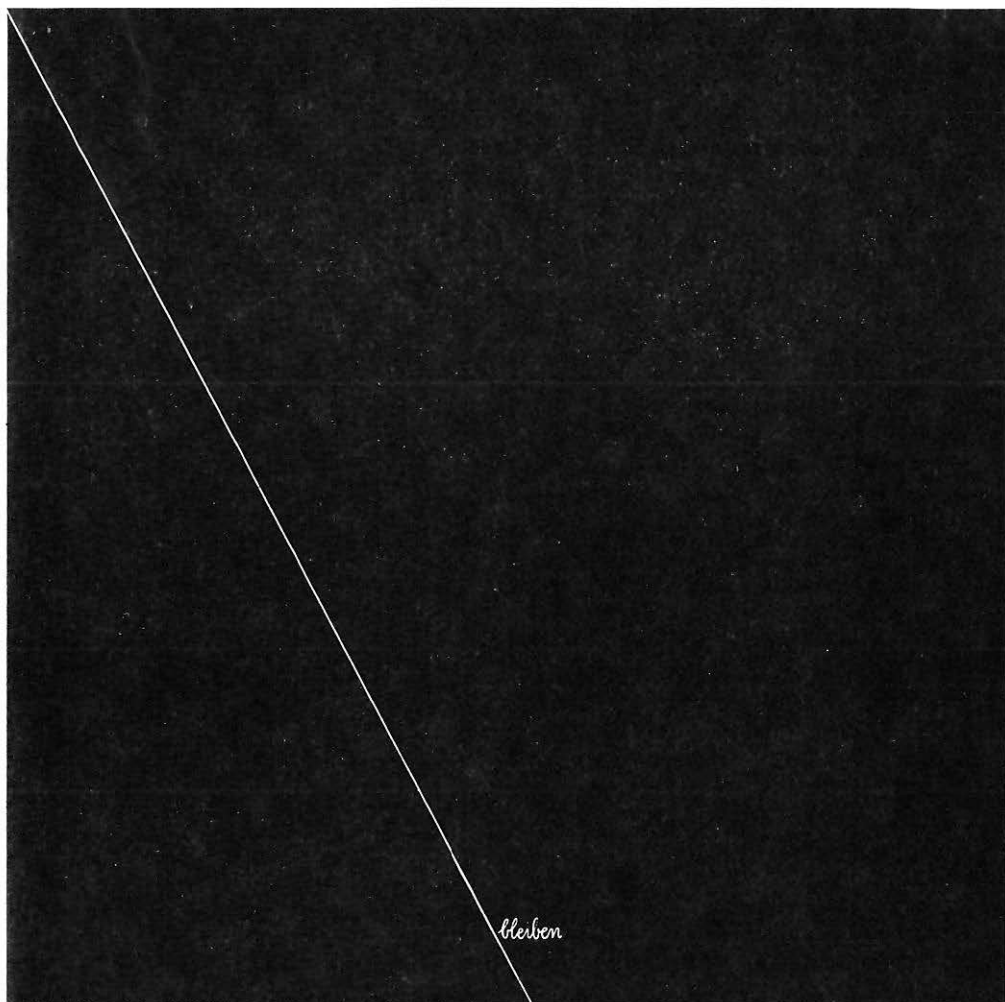
THE UNSURPASSABLE the laudable the notable the adorable  
the grandiose the fabulous the phenomenal the colossal  
the formidable the astonishing the miraculous the marvellous  
the generous the excels the portentous the stunning  
the spectacular the sumptuous the faerifying the faery  
the supereminent the venerable the supersacred the supercelestial  
the unpolluted the uncorrupted the inviolate the intrepid

THE UNSHITPASTABLE the lowbabble the nauseable the malodorable  
the ganglious the flatulous the fetoranimal the cutarsadical  
the fornicable the astinking the iratulous the matrocituous  
the degenerous the insect the pustiferous the stomafuching  
the tentacular the suppurous the faecifying the fevery  
the supermuckent the veneravid the suprasacral the supersyphilable  
the pollust the upcorpsed the violoose the tumorped

FEWERDOLR  
FOWLREDER  
DREERFLOW  
LOWFEEDRR  
FROWLEERD  
REERFOWLD  
FLEDWEROR  
FREDERLOW  
WEEDFLORR  
FERROWELD  
REDFLOWER  
FLEERWORD  
FREEWORLD

*program* do it yourself  
the reader (operator)  
may go on at pleasure  
doing new semantic variations  
within the given parameter

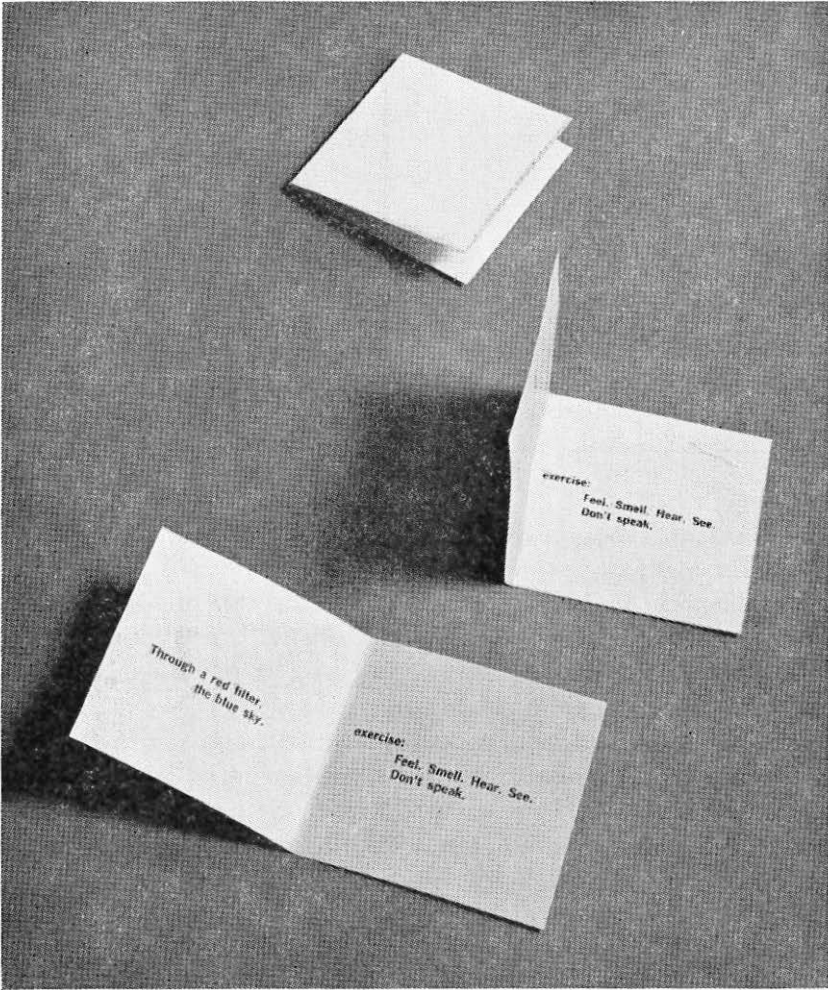
Haroldo de Campos. "Alea I—Semantic Variations" (translation Edwin Morgan). Reprinted from *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Mary Ellen Solt, ed. Copyright © 1970 by Indiana University Press, Bloomington. Poems are reprinted by permission of the publisher.



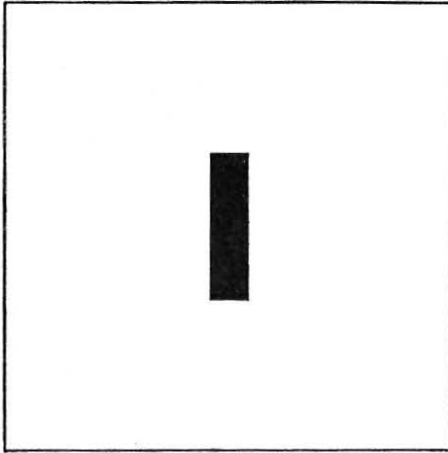
Gerhard Rühm. "bleiben." Reprinted from Solt.

204 *Visible Language* : VIII 3 Summer 1974





Carl Fernbach-Flarsheim. "exercise." Reprinted from Solt.



Décio Pignatari. "Life."  
Reprinted from Solt.  
See discussion on page 217.  
The poem continues on  
six alternate pages and  
should be viewed by letting  
the pages fall in succession,  
one on top of the other.

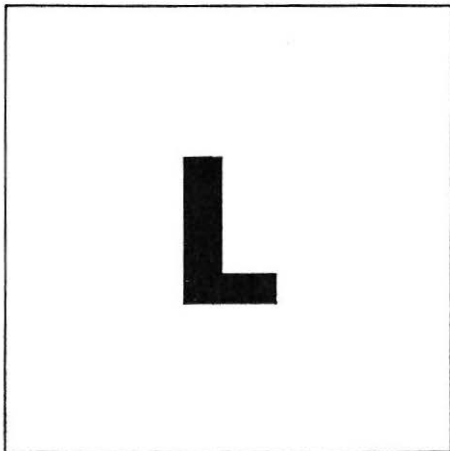
in the exercise. His perceptions are the tenor, the meaning, the focus of the poem/metaphor—experiencing with all senses a blue-red sky.

Yet the poem need not be such a dramatic exercise to involve the reader in the metaphorical process. Emmett Williams<sup>18</sup> accomplishes this involvement by the simple presentation of permutational word evolution, as seen in the example from his novel, *The Clouds*. Although Williams explains the poem as an "eye-and-ear test," the procedure is the epitome of the sensory, concrete metaphor: one stimulus, perception, or thing is a vehicle for another equally concrete stimulus, perception, or thing. In this poem, sound metaphorically becomes sense, and sense becomes sound—both through visual and linguistic perception.

In the concrete poem there is also a metaphor within the greater metaphor. The words or letters manipulated in a concrete poem do not function merely as traditional linguistic symbols. A word such as "table" does not just stand for an object, table. Instead, the referent of the word is often the word's component parts—its appearance, progression, or sound. In effect, the word may refer to itself as linguistic symbol while it also functions as a metaphor for a visual, kinetic, or phonic realm of perception in which the poet places it. In traditional poetry the word and the metaphor have only the referential value ascribed to them by linguistic denotations and connotations. In concrete poetry the word and the thing signified are one.

**SENSE SOUND**  
**SONSE SEUND**  
**SOUSE SENND**  
**SOUNE SENSD**  
**SOUND SENSE**

Emmett Williams. A section of text from his unpublished novel, *The Clouds*.  
Reprinted from Williams.



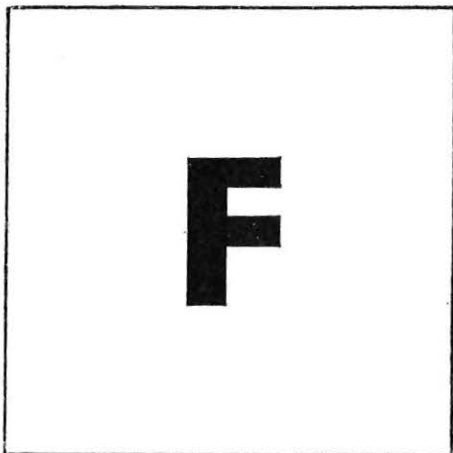
The image on the page is not a representation of something found as real in the external world, so the phenomenon on the page is not just an image. That word on the page has reference not only to verbal associations but to physical shape, syllabic sound, and progression of letters. The object on the page (letter, syllable, or word) functions as verbal vehicle with a visual and/or auditory tenor and as visual and/or auditory vehicle with a verbal tenor. The poem and its parts are an object, a poetic reality that refers back to itself: the poem (letters, syllables, or words on a page) is a metaphor for the properties which make it a multi-faceted perceptual phenomenon.

Two German concretists provide examples. Max Bense's "homage to mathematics" is a series of German and English words ranging from "rock," "arms," and "lid"—to "ear," "sand," "year," and "nothing." The poet sees his poem as a "set of words" rather than a set of things and further explains: "It seems reasonable to say that in this kind of poetry words are not pretexts for objects so much as objects are pretexts for words. . . . It is poetry on a level of meta-language, poetry in a world of its own."<sup>19</sup>

The world that such poems create and refer to is further defined by Heinz Gappmayr: "The new poetry does not describe a situation outside of language, but refers to itself, to its concepts, and to the connection between these concepts and the signs necessary to its conveyance."<sup>20</sup> In Gappmayr's poem "alles," the "all" of letters and

sog wand jagd sein  
 fisch strich tang nichts  
 tag stroh herbst glanz jod  
 haus sand bild jahr  
 spur schritt rost meer krebs  
 tritt last laut mohn  
 flut schiff fall wind netz  
 holz rot ist strand bar duft knie  
 stein kiel hals salz  
 blick gras kiel fuss ziel  
 halt mund schlag weg  
 arm rock scham mond see  
 ohr schlaf traum glas  
 strumpf nacht  
 lid haut

Max Bense. "set of words (homage to mathematics)." Reprinted from *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, Emmett Williams, ed. Copyright © 1967 by Something Else Press, Barton, Vermont. Poems are reprinted by permission of the publisher.



a l l e s

sind            (sind)

~~sind~~

"sind"

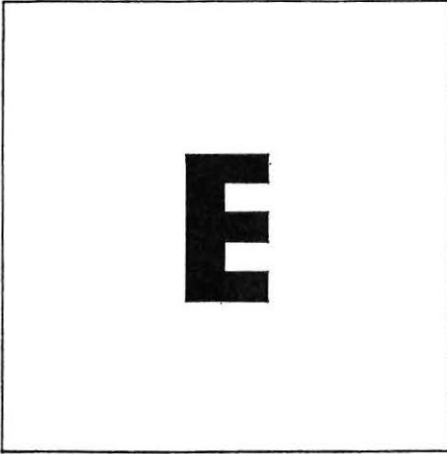
ABOVE

Heinz Gappmayr. "sind." Reprinted from Williams.

OPPOSITE

Heinz Gappmayr. "alles." Reprinted from Williams.

space of the first version interact with the "all" in one place. The first encompasses much space (all), and the second brings many things together (all). Both versions elucidate and make concrete the word meaning by juxtaposing the linguistic meaning (encompassing much space into one area) and the visual appearance (encompassing much space and complete totality). The space, linguistic meaning, and broad vowel sound are interactional vehicles and tenors for one another. Gappmayr is more obvious in this attempt at interaction in a poem "sind" (the first and third person plural present indicative of the German verb "sein," to be). The poet explains: "The text is a fixed connection between thought and physical reality, a unity of concept and sign, and each change of the sign (size, placement, etc.) and its material condition (color, typeface, paper) changes the concept."<sup>21</sup> One might transpose Gappmayr's explanation: The text



OPPOSITE  
José Paulo Paes.  
"Anatomia da musa."  
Reprinted from Solt.

is a fixed metaphor between thought and physical reality, a unity (and similarity) of concept and sign, and each change (or dissimilarity) in the presentation of the sign and its material condition changes the relationship of vehicle to tenor, the meaning of the word as sign and concept.

In more conventional concrete poems the form in which the word is presented becomes the metaphoric vehicle for the semantic meanings or associations with the word content. In effect, the visual functions as vehicle for the verbal. The seventeenth-century shape poems by George Herbert and the twentieth-century Calligrams of Apollinaire are forerunners of this usage. Apollinaire's "Il Pleut" (It's Raining) forces words into a visual configuration resembling streams of rain, while he uses rain as a traditional metaphor for voices, droplets as encounters, clouds as universal cities of sound, and finally, rain as the externalization of emotion.<sup>22</sup> A one-word concrete poem by Aram Saroyan places the words "eye to eye" in that very eye to eye relationship by deleting the "to" and merging the final "e" of the first word with the initial "e" of the latter word. This poem is a simplified version of the visual-verbal metaphor, while Jose Paulo Paes' "Anatomy of the muse" is a more complex presentation. In Paes' poem a woman-dressmaker's form is verbally labeled. The form is a graphic metaphor for the concrete poet's muse: a headless, non-intellectual creature with a bawdy respect for word play. The quota-



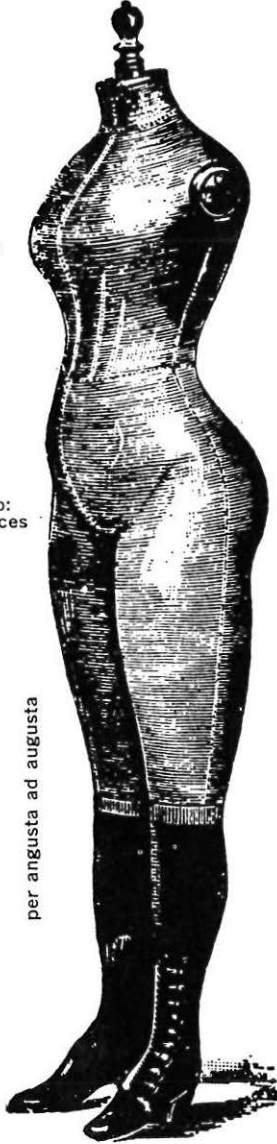
capitis diminutio:  
area non aedificandi

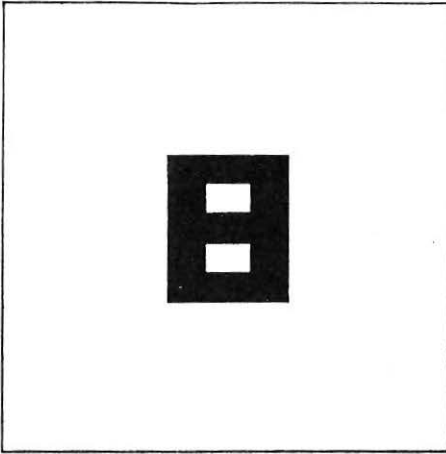
abusus non tollit usum:  
ad usum delphini

multum in parvo:  
in hoc signo vinces

mutatis mutandis:  
modus in rebus!

per angusta ad augusta





tions are linguistic metaphors for the way that muse works: randomly selecting material from literature, history, and life. The smaller image of the same dress form captioned “all rights reserved” mimics the poem’s very existence: Even the technological advances that have placed poetry on the printed page are now part of the reference and meaning of that very metaphor/poem.

The pages themselves become important metaphoric vehicles in Emmett Williams’ book-length, kinetic poem, “Sweethearts.”<sup>23</sup> The poem is preceded by the poet’s instructions for its use (opposite page). The poem is “about” the linguistic meaning of the elements which comprise the long original word. Words such as “he” and “she” are introduced on separate pages, placed in closer proximity on several succeeding pages, and finally metamorphosed to “we.” The poem is “about” the sounds in the original word and in component words. Vowel sounds proliferate and indicate emotion once “he” and “she” become “we.” The poem is “about” the shifting of letters on each page and the movement of the greater figure (composed of letters) as the reader rapidly flips the pages. A sense of growth from small to large, distant to close, and component part to integral whole is conveyed by the kinetic flow of moving pages. “Sweethearts” is a metaphor for the very letters and poetic techniques that comprise it. And it is metaphor for all the linguistic connotations inherent in the meaning of the word “sweetheart” and in the intimate relationship,

instructions for use

the structural and textural characteristics of this erotic poem cycle derive from the 11 letters of the word *sweethearts*

unluckily for the poet 3 of these 11 letters are es and 2 others each occur twice so that there are only 7 different ones for word building from these letters are extracted all the words that make the poem the position of each letter on the page is determined by its place in the word *sweethearts*

no single poem can be more than 11 letters wide or 11 letters deep

in addition to the word poems there are kinetic metaphors also constructed from the 11 letters of *sweethearts*

these sections can be animated by flipping the pages fast enough to achieve a primitive cinematic effect the words and the kinetic visual metaphors work hand in hand to express what the poem is all about the author feels that this fusion is best achieved by beginning the book where in the west books traditionally end

emmett williams

new york city

july august 1966

both physical and spiritual, of one element to another. It is the epitome of the successful concrete poem which defies the limits of traditional linguistic meaning while it establishes valid “meaning” in its own component parts. Ultimately, it is metaphor turned in on itself to communicate metaphor. The poem combines visual, audial, kinetic, and linguistic meaning while the letters, sounds, syllables, and words function as the metaphoric vehicles for one another. The sweetheart metaphor does not contain one single vehicle which elucidates some tenor or abstract love relationship: the sweetheart metaphor, however, does contain, in its own parts, multiple specific vehicles with visual and audial value (“he,” “she,” “we,” “sweet,” eeeeeee, etc.) that facilitate the concrete perception of one another and the greater word. Meaning then resides in the concrete, specific parts of the word, rather than in any abstract word reference.



Because this “meaning” shifts with the cinematic flipping and perception of each new vehicular letter, Emmett Williams calls the process “kinetic metaphors.”

In contrast to the fluidity and multiplicity of such kinetic metaphors one finds, in concrete poetry, some of the most mathematically sparse metaphors of all times:

mist  
mountain  
butterfly  
mountain  
butterfly  
missed  
butterfly  
meets  
mountain

This poem, composed by Eugen Gomringer in 1955,<sup>24</sup> consists of five different words in three sets of three. “Butterfly” and “mountain” are constant in each set while one word progresses from “mist” to “missed” and finally to “meets.” This progression establishes a metaphorical relationship between the other two objects in the poem and transforms those two objects into elements of a shifting, kinetic

interaction. The changing term in each set is the metaphorical force behind this shifting scene. In stanza one, indistinct relationship is shrouded in “mist”; in stanza two, a definite but disjoint relationship is established in “missed”; and in stanza three, a definitive union is accomplished in “meets.” The constant first letters of the three stanzas function as common aural and visual stimuli for the reader. The metaphor (word/ vehicle as linguistic meaning and aural-visual constant) is only completed by the perceiver’s addition of a tenor. The concrete things (mountain, butterfly, and force) are alive for the poet—and enough for his share of the poem.

A second example of this sparse metaphor may be found in Décio Pignatari’s “Life” poem. On succeeding pages the visual images build from a simple line to the Chinese Ideogram for sun to an entire verbal meaning. The metaphor grows by images of accretion: the linguistic signs increase in complexity of individual visual stimulation and in semantic meaning as the accumulated letters begin to form a word. The poem bursts into “Life” in the final ideogram which includes all the earlier visual lines as well as the meaning of all the letters read together. The vehicle and tenor are interchangeable: the letters gradually direct the reader to the ideogram and the ideogram adds to the meaning of the composite letters. A tension exists between the similarities and dissimilarities of the two metaphoric feet: one basically verbal and English, the other basically visual and Chinese. Yet each foot is as real, concrete, and understandable as the other. Because the properties of each foot extend, enhance, and reinforce the properties of the other (the sun is life-giving energy—life depends on the sun; and the letters placed simultaneously in the same place will produce the Chinese character—the lines of the character taken separately will form the letters), that tension is exploited if not resolved.

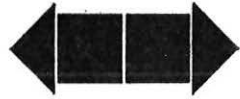
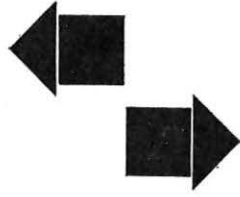
The most sparse of the concrete metaphors, and the most mechanic, is the computer poem. Fernbach-Flarsheim has produced poems written in Fortran. His poem, “Random Generator Program,” is written as a computer input tape to which the machine, rather than perceiver, must respond. The result is mechanized metaphor. What the computer produces is its response to the similarities and dissimilarities in the two types of language used to address the machine. Fernbach-Flarsheim’s “poem” does seem to strain the limits of the

genre's definition, but even the more traditional Brazilian concretists termed the poem a "mechanism regulating itself: feedback" and a machine that produces a "poem-product: useful object."<sup>25</sup>

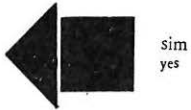
This mechanistic tendency is taken to an extreme in the most revolutionary concrete poems in which metaphor is nonverbal. The vehicle becomes pure energy for a tenor that is itself pure tension between energies. Luiz Ángelo Pinto, a Brazilian, along with Décio Pignatari, has launched "semiotic poetry" or "code poems" in which non-linguistic signs must function as vehicles for communication and perception. Contradictions and dissimilarities such as those found in the mutually exclusive terms "yes" and "no" are resolved and the signs totally merged because the perceiver has no word associations (of mutual exclusion) to the non-linguistic signs. If traditional metaphors could forge new relationships by yoking disparates, the concrete poem/metaphor extends this to its logical extreme. The sign metaphor can yoke disparates in a union that merges the dissimilar and similar by combining shape or unifying directional force (see the last two "lines" of the poem). Both vehicle and tenor are reciprocal forces that influence each other and the "meaning" of the "poem" (in traditional terms), or the "experience" of the "material" (in concrete terms).

Mary Ellen Solt's non-verbal "moonshot sonnet" provides a supra-linguistic means of communicating the relationships that modern syntax is incapable of conveying. The sonnet is composed of an octave and a sestet, but the rhyming elements, like all the word elements in the poem, are non-linguistic symbols. Solt designed the poem after seeing the scientists' markings on photographs of the moon. She notes that "No one has been able to write a sonnet to the moon since the Renaissance, and I could not do it unless I was willing to incorporate its new scientific content. The moon has become a different object."<sup>26</sup> She compares the concrete poem to the "supra-national, supra-lingual" sonnet and terms her own version as both spoof of the old form and statement about the necessity for the new form. Her concrete vehicle, scientific symbol, is her way toward a scientific world of fact. Her moon is no longer even linguistic vehicle, but is the object or tenor of a scientific world.

The visual aspect of these concrete metaphors is important and has great implications for poetry to come. Traditionally, verse has been a tool of the wit and intellect. This tendency, epitomized in the meta-



chave léxica  
lexical key



Luiz Álvaro Pinto. "A code poem." Reprinted in *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* from the semiotic poetry manifesto of Pinto and Decio Pignatari, *Invencao* No. 4, 1965.

ト	ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄥ	ㄣ
ト	ト	+	ㄣ	ㄣ
ト	ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄥ	ㄣ
ト	ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄥ	ㄣ
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ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄣ
ト	ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄥ	ㄣ
ト	ト	+	ㄣ	ㄣ
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ㄣ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄣ
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physical conceits of the seventeenth century, is climaxed in the early twentieth century by the obtuseness in much modern poetry. Even in recent romantic, confessional poems that deal with personal intuition or individual emotion, the poetic faculty, the imagination, has provided a rationalizing force. While not abandoning either the intellectual or the emotional, metaphors in recent concrete poetry have emphasized the sensory.

The sensorily perceivable metaphor achieves literal reality in the concrete poems that are nothing if not seen, spoken, heard, and touched by reader participation. For this reason Peter Michelson could term the concrete poem a “visual metaphor of modern sensibility.” By making a verbal art—poetry—visual and often pictorial, the concrete poem establishes the most revolutionary definition of a figurative technique: when literal, verbal meaning is juxtaposed with literal, visual appearance, the result is a newly defined figurative relationship between the word’s denotative and connotative meanings, and the visual figure’s stark appearance and multiple associations. “Meaning” therefore is multiplied (as in any figurative relationship) but is bound in the knowable, tangible world of the literal word and literal object on the page. This is how the sensorily perceivable metaphor can be defined as “concrete” and be judged as a real object rather than linguistic symbol. The figurative similarities and dissimilarities abound and enrich the relationship while the literal terms maintain a foot-hold in the real, external world. In effect, the “vision” of such contemporary poetry is accurate perception, not philosophic abstraction, and views through language first an external object and only then turns to spiritual meaning within that object.

And finally, even the visual relationships become relative as the reader is required by poet and poem to provide multiple perspectives and varying sensory responses to the ever-shifting elements on the page. Both the visual relationships and relativism are crucial to the concrete use of metaphor. By juxtaposing multiple, disparate words, letters, diagrams, and objects (that are things and energy), the poet/

Mary Ellen Solt. “Moonshot Sonnet.” Reprinted from Solt.

artist establishes his art as an integral part of reality in the modern world; by isolating specific particulars and constituent parts such as sound or letters he defines that reality as tangible and knowable; and by using the reader's/perceiver's sensibility to complete the "meaning" of the metaphor he facilitates reader contact with the real world of the poem. This evolution in the use of metaphor therefore is extremely important because it has moved poetry beyond the merging or confusion of abstract realms to a process whereby poetic "meaning" is a function of concrete particulars fused in the poet's and reader's sensibilities.

1. See Mary Ellen Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 67-86; Mike Weaver, "Concrete Poetry," *The Journal of Typographic Research* (now *Visible Language*), I, 3 (1967), 293-326. Reprinted from *The Lugano Review*, I, 5-6 (1966), 100-125; Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Imaged Words & Worded Images* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970), intro. n.p.; Eugene Wildman, ed., *Anthology of Concretism* (Chicago, Illinois: Swallow, 1970), pp. vii-xi; and David W. Seaman, "The Development of Visual Poetry in France," *Visible Language*, VI, 1 (1972), 19-44.
2. Solt, pp. 7-60; Emmett Williams, ed., *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else, 1967), pp. v-vii; and Charles Boultenhouse, "Poems in the Shapes of Things," *Art News Annual*, XXVIII (1959), 64-83, 178.
3. For discussion of twentieth-century influences and how they relate to poetry in particular or concrete art in general see: Cecily Mackworth, *Guillaume Apollinaire and the Cubist Life* (London: William Clows, 1961), pp. 205-231; Wylie Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature* (New York: Vintage, 1960), pp. 312-330; Roy McMullen, *Art, Affluence and Alienation* (New York: Mentor, 1968), pp. 93-128; Sheldon Cheney, *A Primer of Modern Art* (New York: Liveright, 1966), pp. 17-73, 97-154; Anna Balakian, *Surrealism The Road to the Absolute* (New York: Dutton, 1970), pp. 13-49, 67-99, 123-139; Hans Richter, *Dada Art and Anti-Art* (New York: Abrams, n.d.), pp. 41-49, 118-121, 137-154, 167-196; and Katherine Kuh, *Break=Up: The Core of Modern Art* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1966), pp. 54-101.
4. Solt, pp. 60-64; Mary Ellen Solt, "Typography and the Visual Concrete Poem," *Visible Language*, VI, 2 (1972), 109-122; and John Begg, "Abstract Art and Typographic Format," *Magazine of Art*, XLV, 1, 27-33.
5. Eugen Gomringer, "The First Years of Concrete Poetry," trans. by Stephen Bann, *Form*, IV (15 April 1967), pp. 17-18; and Erich Kahler, *The Disintegration of Form in the Arts* (New York: Braziller, 1968), pp. 73-109.
6. Two articles provide exceptions to this oversight: Seaman bases his discussion of visible poetry in France on the assumption that the visual is an important aspect of verse that runs throughout the mainstream of poetry. Solt, in her article on typography, also recognizes the under-emphasized fact that concrete poetry is, above all else, a form of literature.

7. I. A. Richards first divided the metaphor into two constituent parts, the "tenor," an underlying idea or abstract principle which the "vehicle" or concrete figure means. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford, 1950), p. 99.
8. Peter Michelson in Wildman, pp. viii-ix.
9. This study is indeed one-sided in its approach to the visual aspect of concrete poetry as a concomitant interactional force with verbal meaning. Such limitation of approach is demanded by the absence of critical inquiry into concrete poetry *as verse*. Such a deficit requires an integrative approach if the concrete medium is to be termed poetry; yet such an approach does not slight the visual as secondary in such an art form. On the contrary, the increasing importance of the visual image outside traditional boundaries of visual art is the stimulus for viewing the visual and verbal together.
10. Solt, p. 68. Reprinted from an essay in the Festschrift *Max Bill*.
11. Kostelanetz, n.p.
12. Weaver, *The Lugano Review*, p. 105.
13. Quoted by Margaret Davies, *Apollinaire* (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), p. 243.
14. Weaver, p. 100.
15. Solt, p. 14.
16. Williams, pp. v-vi.
17. Solt, p. 21.
18. Williams, n.p.
19. Williams, n.p.
20. Williams, n.p.
21. Williams, n.p.
22. Apollinaire's contribution to the concrete movement in particular and modern art in general is extensive. His calligrams are the first *modern* experiments with poetry emphasizing sight rather than sound. See especially Cecily Mackworth, pp. 205-231; Francis Steegmuller, *Apollinaire Poet Among the Painters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1963), pp. 323-326, 333-334; Margaret Davies, p. 244; Leroy C. Breunig, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 34-36; Stephen Themerson, *Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms* (London: Gaberbocchus, 1968), pp. 17-23; and Phillip B. Rice, "A Modern Poet's Technique: Guillaume Apollinaire," *Symposium*, II (1931), 470-483.
23. Emmett Williams, *Sweethearts* (New York: Something Else, 1967), n.p.
24. Williams, *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, n.p.
25. Solt, p. 72.
26. Solt, p. 54.