archetypes than of rituals, but his best-known disciple, Eugenio Barba, wrote of him: "Grotowski wished to create a modern secular ritual, knowing that primitive rituals are the first form of drama. . . .The rituals were repetitions of archetypal acts, a collective confession which sealed the solidarity of the tribe." Various descriptions of Grotowski's productions bear out Barba's comment. Thus, two Polish romantic dramas, *The Ancestors* by Mickiewicz and *Kordian* by Slovacki, become a dialectic of apocalypse and derision—often conveyed through Christian ritual. In Wyspianski's *Akropolis*, which was televised in this country, the acropolis becomes a concentration camp, the cemetery of our civilization; various scenes of Biblical and classical tradition are enacted against an archetypal action—that of moving materials to destroy space; in order to survive, each member of the concentration camp has to usurp another's space, and that becomes a ritual of collective murder. Conversely, Grotowski's production of Marlowe's *Faustus* is a miracle play, the making of a saint, which uses such ritual elements as baptism, making a pact with the devil, suffering a passion, resting in a Pietà. In all these plays, the actors confront their score and locate an archetypal pattern which they ritualize.

Similarly, Grotowski's disciple Barba, who now has his own theater in Denmark, finds an archetype within his scenario. One has only to compare accounts of his *Hauseriana* with Peter Handke's recent drama *Kaspar* (see *BA* 44:2, p. 299), to recognize the results of dedication to archetype. Both plays depart from the biography of Kaspar Hauser, who appeared mysteriously in Nuremberg in 1828, ignorant of all the amenities of our civilization, including speech. Provoking mistrust, he became a remarkably apt if erratic pupil; he was mysteriously stabbed at the age of twenty-one, and died of the wounds. A legend in his own lifetime, Hauser embodies a myth of natural man confronting civilization, and he has inspired a spate of literary works. Barba used a scenario by Ole Sarvig, into which he interpolated various initiation rites for the Kaspar of his company—social birth, culture via homosexuality, marriage, and war. One account describes these rituals in Jungian terms, though the article concludes "An atheist mass." As the Cambridge school of anthropologists felt that ritual preceded myth, Grotowski and Barba use ritual to suggest myth.

Three American theater companies—the Living Theatre, the Open Theater, and the more recent Performing Group—inspired by Artaud and Grotowski, have sought to involve audiences more directly in their rituals, differing from the Europeans in attempting to interject improvisation into ritual. During some of the action of *Dionysius 69*, the Performing Group members circulate among the audience —often nude—but their birth and death rituals are choreographed in a definitely demarcated playing area. The Living Theatre *Mysteries* uses Artaud's famous plague image, and sometimes the audience is induced to share in healing rituals, which Artaud only envisioned for the theater, but which the Living Theatre tries to enact, through Yoga and Kathakali exercises. Closer to Western tradition, the Open Theater's *Serpent* begins wtih the Kennedy-King murders (more Kennedy than King) and reverts to the archetypal Cain-Abel murder. But though *The Serpent* is called "a ceremony," the attempt at ritual repetition—a prescribed order of devotional exercises—is singularly unceremonious, miming sexual intercourse during the so-called begatting sequence, and kneeling or crawling during the prayer sequence.

Richard Schechner, director of the Performing Group and ex-editor of *Tulane Drama Review*, wrote of some of these theaters: "Each one has sought to define 'ritual' for our time and find uses for ritual in the theater." The statement is a tribute to theatrical dedication, but it is a fundamental misunderstanding of ritual, which is neither definable nor findable. Ritual rests on faith, and the only common faith of these various theater groups is that of each group in its own form of theater. And that's a good deal in this time of entertainment-oriented theater or mass media. But the illusion of theater as a new faith seems to me as great an illusion as the old illusionistic theater. Gide said, "Toute croyance est une incroyance surmontée." But what we have in today's theater is absence of faith overwhelming faith, and yet a terrible nostalgia for the words and gestures of the abjured faith. Artaud was attracted to unfamiliar ritual for its nonrealism, mystery, musicality, and solemnity. Today, when realism is dead in serious theater, mystery and musicality are solemnly sought in repetitive, incantatory rhythms which are indiscriminately called ritual, and often indiscriminately performed. Longing for community, today's most enterprising theater people are burying Today in these vestigial or neorituals.

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Concrete Poetry

By Mary Ellen Solt

In 1955 a Brazilian designer, Decio Pignatari,

met Eugen Gomringer, a Swiss, who was Max Bill's secretary at the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, Germany. To their mutual delight and surprise, they discovered that they were also poets committed to a new way of making poems, which would free the poet from the line as his basic structural unit. Gomringer, working alone, called his new poems "constellations"; and Pignatari working with two other poets in São Paulo—Augusto and Haroldo de Campos—conceived of his poems as "ideograms." (In São Paulo the three poets, taking their name from Canto XX of Ezra Pound, were known as the Noigandres Group). The surprise meeting in 1955 between Gomringer and Pignatari can be taken as the beginning of what was to be discovered to be the worldwide movement of concrete poetry. The most important single aspect of the concrete poetry movement is that poets in many countries, speaking different languages, unknown to each other, began making similar innovations in structure almost immediately following World War II. This would seem to indicate a significant relationship between the new concept of form, live processes of communication, and the conditions of contemporary language, poetry, and culture. Gomringer and the Noigandres Group found that they were preoccupied with the same linguistic concerns and that they had arrived at very similar solutions. They agreed to call their experiments "concrete poetry" in 1956 after Pignatari had returned to São Paulo.

There are several significant areas of agreement in the thinking and practice of these poets. For instance: although both Gomringer and the Brazilians were working to bring poetry into new relationships with the other arts and advanced areas of contemporary thought, they saw their experiments as related to the mainstream of poetry. Gomringer wanted to rescue the poem from literary professionalism, for he saw that it had become accessible for the most part only to poets and critics. He wanted it to be able to take its place as a functional object for spiritual use (*gebrauch*), like other works of art, in the contemporary environment; and he was able to perceive that the essence of poetry, concentration and reduction of language, can be found in the most common modes of communication now at work in our world—in advertisements, slogans, signs in international airports—in the live processes of mass communication, which are generally considered to threaten the very existence of poetry. So he gave up writing sonnets as beautifully irrelevant to the present reality; and, following the lead of the symbolists, particularly of Mallarmé and of Arno Holz, an east Prussian poet of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he sought his own new form, which was to substitute page space for the old grammar and syntax of the line with its redundancies of thought and feeling.[1]

In his first manifesto "From Line to Constellation," 1954, Gomringer defined his new constellation as:

> the simplest possible kind of configuration in poetry which has for its basic unit the word, it encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster.[2]

Gomringer's vision was of a universal poetry which, because of its simplicity and directness, could transcend the boundaries of language and culture to the benefit of language and of mankind.

The Noigandres Group, also going back to Mallarmé, took as their starting point his poem "Un coup de dés," in which both page space and typographical devices are brought into the poem as organic to structure and meaning: "subdivisions prismatiques de l'idée." For they saw their concept of the poem as ideogram as an evolutionary development growing out of the experimental work of earlier poets. That work, they were convinced, had brought "the historical cycle of verse (as formal-rhythmical unit)...mere linear-temporistical development" to a close. A radical new concept of form was needed, they felt, whose nature was predicted by the ideogramic method of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, which derived from Fenollosa's research into the Chinese written character; by the "word ideograms" of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* with their "organic interpretation of time and space"; and by e. e. cummings' "atomization of words, physiognomical typography" and "expressionistic emphasis on space." The work of two Brazilian poets, Oswald de Andrade and João Cabral de Melo Neto, also contributed, and the *Calligrammes* of Apollinaire were acknowledged as ancestral.

Whereas the emphasis in Gomringer's concept of the constellation is primarily visual, the Noigandres ideogram is conceived of as a "space-time" structure, the word and consequently the poem being conceived three-dimensionally as *verbivocovisual*.[3] The Brazilian concrete poem is intended for oral performance in addition to the fact that it can be enjoyed simply as a visual object on the page. But both the ideogram and the constellation are made of reduced language: language stripped down to its nouns and verbs,

to the minute particles of letter and sound of which words are made. Space having become the syntactic agent, the meaning of the poem is to be perceived from the structural relationship of its spatial-linguistic elements. This means that in the last analysis the content of the concrete poem is inseparable from its structure:

form = content
content = form

In the concrete poem form and content are commutative.

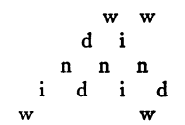
Gomringer conceived of the structural relationships of his constellations in terms of "play-activity" (*denkgegenstanddenkspiel*).[4] That is to say, the concrete poem may be seen as a highly serious linguistic game in which the reader (or perceiver) is required to participate actively with his imaginative faculties to complete the poem. It becomes possible, as the Danish poet Vagn Steen has emphasized, that the highly perceptive reader may be able to make a better poem with the materials the concrete poet gives him than the poet himself. Gomringer believes that the "play-activity" in the concrete poem can have a beneficial effect upon both language and the reader. He seems to be saying that it provides a way of extending the timeless function of poetry *to delight*, into a psychologically restorative function much needed by contemporary man, who has nearly forgotten what it means to become as a child and to delight in simple, elemental things such as the sounds of words, the forms of letters, word patterns on a page.

There is a great deal of play-activity in Noigandres ideograms as in Gomringer's constellations. The Brazilian "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry" (1958) speaks of the poem as "a mechanism regulating itself." But more emphasis is given to the problem of isomorphism: "the conflict form-subject looking for identification." This conflict goes on, of course, in all works of art. The Noigandres group became more conceptually aware of the isomorphic problem than most poets because, having eliminated much of the grammatical structure of language upon which we rely to convey meaning, they found that when one word or a few words are isolated in a spatial structure, they cannot be considered except as themselves, as separate material objects in relationship to other word objects inhabiting the same space. Syntactical Space, then, adds the third or visual dimension to the poem.

In the verbivocovisual concrete poem, the problem of isomorphism resolves itself more successfully than in the linear-grammatical poem, but at a cost—drastically reduced language. Consequently in the concrete poem we find a simultaneous appeal to verbal and nonverbal communication—"metacommunication." The great contribution the Noigandres theory can make to our understanding of all poetry is the recognition that the essential poem in any structure resides in a very few words—in nouns and verbs mostly. The rest is linguistic convention. It can probably be said that the poet working within linear structures succeeds or fails to the extent that he is able to keep linguistic conventions from adulterating the few words in which his actual poem is to be found.

Every poem is in some way a space-time structure. The Noigandres poets were able to perceive that "parallel to form-subject isomorphism, there is a space-time isomorphism, which creates movement. . . .In a first moment of concrete poetry pragmatics," they discovered, "isomorphism tends to physiognomy, that is a movement imitating natural appearance (motion); organic form and phenomenology of composition prevail. In a more advanced stage, isomorphism tends to resolve itself into pure structural movement (*movement* properly said); at this phase geometric form and mathematics of composition (sensible rationalism) prevail."[5] This would seem to suggest that there are degrees of concreteness obtainable by linguistic structures corresponding to the degree of synthesis resulting from resolution of the isomorphic conflict, and that the resulting structure involves both time and space. The poet who stays with the line is much more deeply involved with time than with space, but he must accommodate the spatial factor in some way if only to use it to indicate the ends of lines and the breaks between stanzas.

Perhaps what is being said here can be made clearer if we compare two very different poems on the same subject—the wind: one a very objective and drastically reduced concrete poem (or constellation) by Eugen Gomringer, the other Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." Let us look first at the concrete poem.[6]



It would appear that Gomringer has attempted to make a linguistic object which will embody the essential nature of "wind" using the noun alone. The challenge is to see

how much the poet can say with one word, for limiting himself to one word, he has eliminated all possibility for comment, even metaphor. Having eliminated grammar, syntax, line, meter: having almost succeeded in eliminating sound itself by engaging the eye to such an extent that the reader is not impelled to pronounce the word unless he remembers consciously to do so, Gomringer is left with the letters of his word, the space of his page, and some typographical possibilities. First off he chooses a light, unobtrusive typeface—helvetica. It is particularly important in a poem about the wind that the typeface not be heavy or obtrusive, or it would be semantically discordant. The structural organization of the poem involves printing the word multidirectionally as the wind blows. Space intrudes between the letters in such a way that they seem to float as though the wind were acting upon them as it acts upon leaves, scraps of paper, and other light objects. Still the poem is very strictly organized, for if we number the letters of the word 1-2-3-4, we can see that its normal orthographic order has in no instance been violated, although we are required to liberate ourselves from our habit of reading from left to right across the page. There is no preferable place or direction to begin reading this poem. Gomringer considers liberation of the reading eye to be one of his most important contributions. Looking at the poem as a totality, we notice that it is so small in relation to the rest of the page that it leaves a mere trace, as the wind imprints itself briefly upon objects.

We have here purity of language and integrity of perception. The reader will find this poem slight or spiritually profound to the degree that he believes that the wind itself is slight or profound, for the poet has presented it to him simply for what it is as an object for contemplation.

It cannot be denied that the poet who wishes to make concrete poems must be willing to give up a great deal of the luxury of language and impressiveness of message available to the more traditional poet. But at this moment in history the art seems to require it. The Scottish concrete poet, Ian Hamilton Finlay, has put it this way:

> "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 mode of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt.[7]

Gomringer states that algebraic formulas have always fascinated him, and that the concrete poem as a rationally conceived construction of linguistic materials seems significant to him because "today more than ever it is thought structures which are decisive."[8] It is increasingly true that in the most advanced areas of contemporary thought, more and more reliance is being placed upon nonverbal mathematical models as the basic structures for thought. Printed alone in the center of a blank page, many of the profoundest concepts of all time, such as Einstein's famous formula, would look as slight as Gomringer's "wind" constellation.

Shelley, writing during a less scientific-technological period, at a time when language was less worn-out from overuse, not yet affected by the visual assaults of the mass media, conceives of a quite different kind of poem when he wishes to write about the wind. Because he is such a fine poet, he knows that in using the wind as metaphor, as the take-off point for the expression of his own thoughts and feelings, he must also recreate it in some way linguistically as an object. "Sounds as well as thoughts," he writes in "A Defense of Poetry" (1821), "have a relation both between each other and towards that which they represent." But the conventions of his romantic age afford him also the privileges of subjectivity, biographical reference, optimism, and confidence in the significance of the role of the poet in society, so that he can unabashedly assert: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[9] No poet writing today can comfort himself with such an illusion. But he can allow Shelley the privileges of his own time and vision, even envy him a little, perhaps, and go on to find a great deal in his use of language as material in the texture of the poem to admire. In "Ode to the West Wind," the poet's skillful handling of words made up of *w* and *wh* in combination with certain vowels—particularly *o*'s and short *i*'s —and repetition of the word "thou" results in onomatopoeia of a high order which, like Gomringer's poem, captures the essential nature of wind. This is combined, of course, with the rhythmic sweep of the lines within a stanzaic structure. Throughout Shelley's poem one can find concrete lines sandwiched between lines in which language is much less objectified. For instance:

> . . .the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
> Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
> Pestilence-stricken multitudes:[10]

The concrete poet would probably limit himself to the color words alone, searching for a

more precise word than "pale." "Ghosts" and "pestilence-stricken multitudes" would not be allowed to attach themselves to the wonder that is leaf.

Other examples of concreteness or objectified language could be pointed out. Two are particularly fine examples of meaning forged into the materiality of words:

> Vaulted with all thy congregated might[11]

and this phrase which takes us to the very floor of the sea:

> The sea blooms and the oozy woods. . . .[12]

What, if anything, can the concrete poet have gained by giving up what he has obviously given up when we compare these two poems? Most important, he is able to face the word as a purely objective thing rid of its burden of redundancy and imprecision. He has gained clarity and integrity of language, in other words. His position, the Noigandres Group found, is one of "total responsibility towards language": each word must be confronted in terms of its "sound, visual form, and semantic charge."[13] The American concrete poet Emmett Williams discovered that, thinking of the word as a material object, much as the painter thinks of his pigments, the sculptor his stone, he could:

> do anything he wanted to with it. Collage it, paint it over, isolate every detail and look at it that way, throw it together at random, put it together according to a strict system.

His reason for adopting this attitude toward the word was not "so much protest," he contends, "as finding a way, my way, to be a poet under the circumstances of my place and time."[14]

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[1] *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Mary Ellen Solt, ed., Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1968, "A World Look at Concrete Poetry," pp. 8–11, 12; and Eugen Gomringer's manifestoes and statements on concrete poetry, pp. 67–71.
[2] Ibid., p. 67.
[3] Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos, "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry," pp. 70–72.
[4] Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation," ibid., p. 67.
[5] De Campos, Pignatari, De Campos, "Pilot Plan. . .," ibid., pp. 70–72.
[6] Gomringer, "wind," ibid., p. 93.
[7] Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Letter to Pierre Garnier, September 17th, 1963," ibid., p. 84.
[8] Gomringer, "Max Bill and Concrete Poetry," ibid., pp. 68–69.
[9] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," *English Romantic Poets*, James Stephens, Edwin L. Beck, and Royall H. Snow, eds., New York, American Book Company, 1935, pp. 517, 531.
[10] Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind," 11. 2–5, ibid., p. 426.
[11] Ibid., 1, 26, p. 427.
[12] Ibid., 1, 39, p. 427.
[13] De Campos, Pignatari, De Campos, "Pilot Plan. . .," *Concrete Poetry*. . ., p. 72.
[14] Emmett Williams, Letter to Author, 25 February 1967, quoted in Solt, "A World Look. . .," ibid., p. 50.

Johannes Aavik, Artificer of the Estonian Language

By Paul F. Saagpakk

In 1880 Johannes Aavik was born in Estonia; two years later James Joyce first saw the light of Apollo in Ireland. As creative men both of them became artificers with an epiphanic vision, one in the field of linguistics, the other in that of arts. Their creation testifies to makers who play on the instrument of language with mature virtuosity. Aavik has become renowned in Sibelius' land and in other Scandinavian countries, while Joyce is world famous. Aavik is the fabulous artificer of Estonian, a little-known Finno-Ugric tongue, while Joyce worked in English, almost a universal language.

Jung has characterized art as "a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument." Being seized by this drive, Aavik became a unique inventor not only in Estonian but also in world linguistics, and Joyce, one of the greatest artists of our time. Both Aavik and Joyce worshiped beauty with its "wholeness, harmony, radiance," mastering not only their native tongues with their inherent beauty but also other languages, and in particular admiring the charm of Latin. For both of them the artist is like "the God of creation" indifferently "paring his fingernails." Mirabile dictu, these two creators were as revolutionary as Lucifer: the one coining neologisms for literary Estonian, the other, portmanteau words for his works. Unfortunately, Aavik, because of communism, and Joyce, voluntarily, have experienced the meaning of Dante's words, "*Tu proverai si come sa di sale/lo pane altrui. . .* (*Paradiso*, Canto XVII).

In the revolutionary year of 1905, in Estonia a new literary movement got under way, led by a group of young men calling itself Noor-Eesti (Young Estonia) which turned its eyes westward, away from Baltic provincialism. The leader of the group, Gustav Suits, a poet, scholar, critic, was as instrumental in renewing Estonian poetry with devices from French