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Words to Be Watched

Słowa do oglądania

Abstract

Visual and concrete poetry reduced ad absurdum current communication conventions and refused to take for granted what is only seemingly obvious. Visual poetry "forces us to look at the text before we read it, that is, to acknowledge its physical authority." [Willard Bohn, 1986] In the previous century, as well as in the present one, the visual, or if you will, the "scopic régime," brought about a change of attitude to a written word. Poetry and visual arts accentuated the materiality of writing.

Keywords: visual poetry, concrete poetry, visual perception, materiality, things

Abstrakt

Zarówno poezja wizualna jak i konkretnazredukowały ad absurdum konwencje komunikacyjne i nie można już było przyjąć za rzecz oczywistą tego, co do niedawna takim się wydawało. Poezja wizualna zmusza nas najpierw patrzyć na tekst zanim go przeczytamy, czyli uznać jego fizyczny autorytet [Willard Bohn, 1986]. W ubiegłym wieku, a także w obecnym, dominacja wizualności przyczyniła się do zmiany podejścia do słowa pisanego. Poezja i sztuki wizualne zaczęły podkreślać materialność pisma.

Słowa kluczowe: poezja wizualna, poezja konkretna, percepcja wizualna, materialność, rzeczy

The materiality of words, which could be visually perceived, began to play a crucial role at some time in human history.[1]The visual aspects of a written text can lead to the situation when words are treated similarly to material objects, or putting it differently, we can say that the calligraphic past of words equipped them with the status of a drawn thing [Foucault, 1996, p. 18]. There are regions in art and literature where words are things. This thingy character of words and the visual attractiveness of a written text can be exemplified predominantly by a phenomenon broadly called visual poetry. Visual poetry reduced *ad absurdum* current communication conventions and refused to take for granted what is only seemingly obvious [Wende, 2006, p. 237].

It can even be argued that similarly to ready-mades, visual poems undermine our perceptual habits and make us feel provoked, and all we can do is shake our heads in disbelief [Wende, 2006, p. 223]. Visual poetry, according to Willard Bohn, "*forces us to look at the text before we read it, that is, to acknowledge its physical authority.*" [1986, p. 67] Visual poetry has an inclination to "radical artifice", which is typical for the avant-garde. The term "radical artifice," coined by Marjorie Perloff, reflects a specific attitude of artists who realize that a poem, picture or performance text is a produced object. Such an object is arranged, constructed or selected and its interpretation also involves constructing, this time on the part of the viewer/reader [Bohn, 2006, p. 16]. However, if we want to explain exactly what the term "visual poetry" refers to we realize that there is a problem. As it is argued by David W. Seaman"*To even the casual observer it would be clear that no satisfactory definition could embrace all the forms of visual poetry, variously identified as technopaegia, pattern-poems, concretism, spatialism, and so forth. Yet what holds true for all of visual poetry is that to achieve its full effect, languagemust be visually perceived.*"[1979, p. 23]

Whenever we read about how the word became visual and suddenly stopped being transparent, stopped being merely a carrier of meaning, the same person is mentioned, namely StèphaneMallarmé.[2] His publication of the poem *Un coup de désjamaisn'abolira le hasard*in 1897 is treated as a pivotal point in the history of visual poetry. Michel Foucault wrote that "*Mallarmé's project – that of enclosing all possible discourse within the fragile density of the word, within that slim, material black line traced by ink upon paper*"[1994, p. 305] answered the question asked by Nietzsche: 'Who is speaking?' Mallarmé's reply was: "*what is speaking is, in its solitude, in its fragile vibration, in*

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[1]   This tradition of materiality of words is continued today by online poems which occur in a digital environment and still "*A letter is in fact a material, atomistic unit of e-writing.*" See JanezStrehovetc, "Text as Loop: On Visual and Kinetic Textuality," *Afterimage*, Vol. 31, 2003, p. 6+, www.questia.com/reader/print, (accessed 15 August 2008).

[2]   In the manifesto of Brazilian concrete poets we can find the following list of poets and writers who are considered precursors of concretism: "*Forerunners: Mallarmé (Un coup de dés, 1897): the first qualitative jump: 'subdivisions prismatiques de l'idée;' space ('blancs') and typographical devices as substantive elements of composition. Pound (The Cantos); ideagramic method. Joyce (Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake): word-ideogram; organic interpretation of time and space. Cummings: atomization of words, physiognomical typography; expressionistic emphasis on space. Appollinaire (Calligrammes): the vision, rather than the praxis. Futurism, Dadaism: contributions to the life of the problem.*" Augusto de Campos, DecioPignatari, Haroldo de Campos, Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry. In*Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. M.E. Solt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970, p. 71-72.

its nothingness, the word itself – not the meaning of the word, but its enigmatic and precarious being" [Foucault, 1994, p. 305]. Stefan Themerson, when writing the text about Guillaume Apollinaire in 1966, observed that "*StèphaneMallarmé would be our present concrete &c poets' patron saint if they wanted and had something to say more often than they do.*" [1968, p. 17] It seems interesting that Themerson, so many years ago, argued that Mallarmé belonged to the computer age, and he was this kind of a computer which "*can be programmed to develop a thought such as his Un coup de désjamaisn'abolira le hazard, and to run it through wide white spaces of double-page openings in type seven sizes, arranged with a composer's rather than a compositor's logic.*" [1968, p. 17] The notion of a computer will be used again when the presence of concrete poetry in the 21st century will be discussed.

In Mallarmé's poem "*words tended to be reduced to nothing but their material thingness on the page,*"[Jay, 1994, p. 179] and Johanna Drucker, who is a book artist and a visual poet herself, is of the opinion that in regard to the use of varied typography "*Mallarmé's work (...) is unique and without precedent within literature.*"[1994, p. 51] She adds that "*He manipulated the typographic form, paying close attention to its visual features, spatial distribution, and capacity to organize the text into a hierarchized figural order.*" [1994, p. 52] This attention to font and size of letters, which is of such an importance for visual rendering of words, later characterized the works of Guillaume Apollinaire. He used the term *calligrammes* to refer to his visual poetry. About Appolinaire'scalligrammesDrucker writesthatthey *"in part attempted to mimic the ontological status of the canvas in their presentation on the page, approaching the form of objects by their visual format.*"[1994, p. 147] This brings them closer to pattern poetry present in the Western visual poetry tradition where words on the page were organized to take on the shapes of objects.[3]It can be argued that such incorporation of written words has something in common with the project of John Wilkins discussed in *An Essay Toward a Real Character, and aPhilosophical Language* in 1668. This project's aim was to establish a set of characters which would replace some objects or notions:

Each character stands for a thing or an idea, and when properly distributed and combined they are to correspond with empirical observation or philosophical ordering. In theseattempts, characters are designed in the likeness of the things they represent; their own material attributes are forged to match what they stand for. Words, it might be said, have been phased into things.[de Grazia, 2000, p. 231]

Stefan Themerson commented that Apollinaire's calligrammes function in a different manner than so called "normal" poems because "*you start with the image.*

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[3]   There is an opinion on Apollinaire's poems collected in *Alcools* in 1913 which brings to my mind the technique adopted by assemblage artists, e.g. Joseph Cornell. Georges Duhamel, cited by William C. Seitz, claimed that "*Nothing could remind one more of an old junk shop than those collected poems... I call it an old junk shop because a mass of heterogeneous objects has found a place there and, though some of them are of value, none of them has been made by the dealer himself.*" in William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961, p. 15.

Your eye sees it. And only then, when your eye has already seen it, your ear is allowed to decipher the elements that have created it." [1968, p. 30] Thus, we observe here a reverse process to the one which is involved into the reading of poems where the sound of words is of the main importance. Themerson emphasizes that Appollinare used "*the visual, spatial, qualities of signs"* to render his lyricism and this distinguishes him from Mallarmé, Marinetti and the futurists [1968, p. 17].

Filippo Thomasso Marinetti's Futurist manifestos called for a new model of language and typographic revolution. The engagement with matter, which was the primary interest of Marinetti, took on the form of experimenting with the printed word. Drucker writes that "*Marinetti's poetics was predicated on a faith in the capacity of typography to produce adequate analogies.*"[1994, p. 117] As we read in her *The Visible Words,* in the case of his use of typography,

the meaning of the words derived as much from their position, their relation to each other as visual elements and their movement as a series of marks across the sheet, as from their semantic value. Their differential linguistic operation cannot be isolated from their phenomenological appearance on the page: both are at work in the production of signification." [Drucker, 1994, p. 137]

The reader of such poetry becomes a viewer at the same time, and the sight is engaged to appreciate the appearance of the words as well as to recognize specific signs to understand their meaning.

The use of typography characteristic for Futurists is present also in another group of avant-garde artists. Tristan Tzara's work even seems to mirror the gesture of another Dadaist, namely Marcel Duchamp. Tzara selected "*language from the already produced discourse of the newspapers, advertisement, published train schedule,*" [Drucker, 1994, p. 193] which is similar to using everyday mass-produced objects for Duchamp's ready mades. Drucker observes that the typographics used by Tzara "*bear the material traces of their original sites in their typographic form.*"[1994, p. 193] One of the Dadaists revolutionized our perception of objects and undermined the belief we held that we can trust our eyes, the other continued the revolution of words on the page. Drucker comments that

One of Tzara's most effective strategies for typographic work was his use of apparent look of appropriation as a means of subversive negation. Tzara's work gets its characteristic visual distinctiveness by its flagrantly conspicuous appropriation of commercial, mainly advertising, techniques." [1994, p. 200]

So far, examples of the use of typography within the realm of English language have not been mentioned here, since in the years when typography flourished among European avant-garde artists, it was almost non-existent in the works of English or American poets, or as Drucker puts it "*in the early twentieth century typographic innovation played a modest role among anglophone poets.*" [1994, p. 68] However, the specific use of typographic form was employed by Wyndham Lewis in his literary magazine *Blast*. As Drucker writes,

here is a modernism devoid of decorative distractions – clean, streamlined, direct and assaultive to the eye in the same striking tone as its language. The visual character is closer to that of the handbills placed by unionists and activists on the walls of the city streets than to any advertisement or diversionary eye-catching poster forentertainment." [1994, p. 220]

Visual poetry was introduced to the USA by the Mexican artist and writer Marius de Zayas. He was the director of the avant-garde magazine *291* in which were published the first visual poems. De Zayas was also an author of visual poems one of which was *Mental Reactions*, which resulted from his cooperation with Agnes Ernst Meyer. *Mental Reactions* marked, according to Willard Bohn, *"the birth of visual poetry in America."* [1986, p. 188] In *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry*we can read that

Although 291 went on to publish other visual poems, "Mental Reactions" remains the bestexample of this genre. Not only is it a remarkable accomplishment; it is unique in the history of visual poetry. Although Meyer's text follows the simultanist model fairly closely, de Zayas's drawing is very much his own creation. Indeed the theory governing its production antedates the invention of modern visual poetry by at least a year. [Bohn, 1986, p. 203]

There were attempts to offer theoretical commentary to the materiality of printed letters linking typographic form with linguistic expression. [Drucker, 1994, p. 27] In "What is Poetry" from 1933-34, Roman Jacobson argued that*"Poetry is present when a word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named."*[Drucker, 1994, p. 29] Words seemed to be tangible entities whose material status was emphasized by typography, and language was not evanescent but had its own mass. However, Drucker claims that

the idea that writing, written forms, possessed their own specific materiality, however, was articulated only by poets, practitioners, and never by those professionals with an investment in maintaining the subordinate, passive role of writing. For linguists, writing, and its subset, typography, had no distinct function."[1994, p. 46]

The physicality of language, in the form of a written word, after a long absence in artistic consciousness, came back termed as "concrete poetry". Noteworthy, the term can be quite differently understood depending on the language the poetry is written in. This aspect of the phenomenon termed as concrete poetry is discussed by Aleksandra Kremer, and she observes that for the speakers of English, concrete poetry was treated as something foreign or international rather than a national phenomenon, therefore it was not as important as it was for German-speaking communities. [Kremer, 2013, p. 96] Thus, a detailed discussion of concrete poetry would require separate presentation of various language areas. Here, the main focus is on English and American poets and artists for whom, unlike for German poets, concrete poetry was not only linguistic creation which explored the possibilities of language and writing (as it was in the case of *KonkretePoesie*) [Kremer, 2013, p. 100] Under the influence of Anglo-American poets

as well as visual artists, both concrete poetry and visual poetry seemed to merge and it was no longer possible to think about them as totally separate phenomena. [Kremer, 2013, p. 105)[4]

Although, understanding the term may be different depending on who used it, historical background or origins seem to be quite similar. JohannaDrucker observes that"*The Concrete poets, whether the Noigrandes group established by the De Campos brothers in Brazil and various groups around Diter Rot or Eugen Gomringer and ŐyvindFahlstrőm in Europe, returned in some ways to the concepts of constellation and icon reminiscent of Mallarmé.*"[1994, p. 226-227] It seems that there again occurred the need to focus on the thingness of words, or artists believed, as George Puttenham in the 16th century, that "*words (...) need to possess physicality in order to impress mind.*" [de Grazia, 2000, p. 231]

Rosmarie Waldrop is of the opinion that the main feature of concrete poetry is its "*revolt against the transparency of the word*," [1982, p. 315] thus, there is again something for our eyes offered by those who did not wish to reduce words to carriers of meaning. Since the 1950s, the materiality of language was propounded under the rubric of "concrete poetry" due to Gomringer, who is an assumed author of the term. Even the title of Gromringer's manifesto "The Poem as a Functional Object" (1960) may indicate that there was a specific interest in the way words could be used, namely in a similar way in which a physical, material object could be employed to perform certain tasks. As usually happens to different terms, it changed its meaning during the years it was in circulation, and at the end of the 1960s, Mary Ellen Solt wrote that "*there are now so many kinds of experimental poetry being labeled 'concrete' that it is difficult to say what the word means.*" [*Concrete Poetry*] In this article the most important feature of any works which can be regarded as concrete poetry is their focus on the thingness of words and the importance of visual perception, or putting it differently, important are "*words reduced to their elements of letters (to see).*" [Solt, *Concrete Poetry*] When we want to argue that words can become things, the concept that "*the concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read*," [Solt, *Concrete Poetry*] is of special importance. Gomringer himself claimed that "*writing is visible language. Thus, each written poem is a piece of language prepared for the sense-modality 'sight'.*"[1979, p. 153] Definitely, he wrote his "*Silencio*" ("Silence") with the sense of seeing in mind, and his one-word poems, termed by him "constellations," were of similar character. They made the reader confront the whiteness of the page, which was disrupted by the physicality of printed words. It can be argued that in the case of concrete poetry, a picture is painted in front of our eyes and first the form is appreciated, thus the poem as an object. A possible anticipation of the content seems to be secondary. Paul de Vree comments that "*In general terms, the definition as formulated by the Bolivian Swiss*

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4   `In Poland, concrete poetry was rather a thing to be exhibited in galleries rather than to be published. The beginning is dated to 1967 and Polish concrete poetry was first initiated in Wroclaw. The most important representative of Polish concrete poetry was StanisławDróżdż, however, the first collection of his poems was published in 1990 and prior to this his poetry could be seen only at various art exhibitions.

Eugen Gomringer and the BrasilianNoigandres group is central to the visual aspect of concrete poetry: the conscious perception of the material and its structure, the material as the sum total of all the signs with which we make poetry."[1982, p. 344]

There were very few attempts to employ visual possibilities offered by typology and the arrangement of words on the page by "anglophone poets" during the avant-garde years at the beginning of the 20th century, and the situation changed only a little in the case of concrete poetry, especially in the 1960s. Mary Ellen Solt, the author of *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), argued that "*although a few isolated poets have been making concrete poems for some time, itwould be an exaggeration to speak of a concrete poetry movement in the United States.*"[1970, p. 49][5] As the first truly concrete poet she regards Emmett Williams who, since his first poem, where he progressively exchanged letters, "*would go on to become a master of the concrete permutational method.*" [Solt, 1970, p. 50]Solt includes in her list of American poets in the 1960s Jonathan Williams, Ronald Johnson and herself. She wrote that Williams was "*fascinated by the kind of word play that allows the poet to make new words from old*" [1970, p. 52] and Johnson himself was delighted that thanks to concrete poetry, "*we may see, not through, but with the letters.*" [Solt, 1970, p. 52]

Mary Ellen Solt was an American concrete poet probably best known for her *Flowers in Concrete,* which was published in 1966. As she described it herself, she "*went on to make a book of flower poems in which (she) attempted to relate the word as object to the object to which it refers by studying the law of growth of the flower and making a visual equivalent.*" [Solt, 1970, p. 54] The design of one of the poems, namely "*Forsythia,*" was fashioned from the letters of the name of the shrub. We are offered the following description by Keith Aspley:

The trunk of the shrub is made up of words which begin with the letters of the eponymous word (FORSYTHIA OUT RACE SPRINGS YELLOW TELEGRAM HOPE INSISTS ACTION). The letters of the word 'Forsythia', together with the appropriate dots and dashes of the Morse code, are then set out in more or less ascending shapes, in the correct order from left to right, to make up the branches (...) [2005, p. 131].

When we recall the way printed words were used by Apollinaire, we can link the pictures of flowers drawn on the pages by Solt to his calligrammes. Here, not only are single words rendered material but they are used as means to materialize the shrub on the page. If looked from great enough a distance, the poem would no longer be perceived as one, but rather we could see a drawing, a picture. A very important comment of Solt on visual concrete poems is that "*if the* poet *succeeds in keeping our eyes sufficiently engaged, we have no desire or need*" [1970, p. 60] to speak the words of the poem.When looking at her flower-poems there occurs yet another association – pattern poems. As Dick Higgins observes "*the pattern poem of the past tended to be strongly mimetic – to*

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[5]   She writes that "*impulses toward concrete poetry have, then, been strong in American poetry*" and they could be found in works of Louis Zukofsky, Louise Bogan and Robert Creeley, "*but none of the above poets would wish to be or could be labeled 'concrete'.*" See Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View.* Blo-omington: Indiana University Press, 1970, p. 49.

take the shape of a natural object rather than a geometrical or other schematic form." [1979, p. 42]

Her "Geranium" and "Lilac" are constructed in a similar way, namely, letters are arranged around as if forming petals of the flowers, and the center is left empty. In "Geranium" the middle part of the poem contains words which can be treated as pedicles of the flowers surrounding them. Both, in case of "Lilac" and "Geranium" the letters chosen for the petals come from the names of these plants. The visual effect is pure and simple but her visual rendering of words would not follow strictly the linguistic interests of studying the possibilities of language and writing exhibited by Gomringer.

While considering concrete poetry written in English on the old continent, the names of two Scottish poets emerge: Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay.[6]The origin of concrete poetry in Great Britain is traced by Greg Thomas and we can read that

On 25 May 1962, a letter from the Portuguese poet E.M. de Melo e Castro appeared in Time Literary Supplement introducing 'poesiaconcreta' ... The Glaswegian poet Edwin Morgan, after reading the TLS letter , wrote to Melo e Castro, who posted him an anthology of Brazilian concrete poetry ... Morgan also alerted Ian Hamilton Finlay in Edinburgh to his discoveries, and by June 1963 was publishing his first concrete poems in Finlay's pamphlet Fish-Sheet.[The Tower of Babel]

However, Morgan did not confine himself only to this one kind of artistic expression and as Aspley argues "*With Ian Hamilton Finlay poetry has been steered in the direction of sculpture and variousmedia: wood, stone, bronze etc.*" [2005, p. 143] Mary Ellen Solt claimed that thanks to Finlay "*our concept of the poem as a functional object in the environment*"[1970, p. 44] had been enlarged. Finlay himself explained "*that new means of constructing a poem aesthetically*" [1970, p.44] called for the use of new material. Those poems were created to be contemplated and thus placed in places where they could be pondered on by passers-by, or those who intentionally approached them. In a conversation with Nagy Rashwan, Finlay said: "*but at the beginning it was clear to me that concrete poetry was peculiarly suited for using in public settings.*" [The Death of Piety] The used material offered tangibility to poems, and to comment on such a use of materiality in Finlay's poems, Solt writes:

What impresses us most about Finlay's use of materials is their organic relationship tocontent. "Fisherman's Cross," in which man's life ("seas") rhymes with his death ("ease"), would lose considerably were it printed on paper: the hard, rugged mold of cast concrete is entirely in keeping with the hard, rugged mold of the fisherman's life. This is not an interpretative use of materials; it is a semantic use of materials. Also, placing the cross within an eightsided outline that modifies its shape, the word "seas"

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[6]   At this very moment, Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer would object as they did in their text "Some Myths on Concrete Poetry." They blame Gomringer for the myth that the only concrete poetry worth attention was created by the Scots. They enumerate the names of British poets to prove their point, namely that to mention only Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay is a big mistake. See Bob Cobbing, Peter Mayer, "Niektóre mity o poezji konkretnej," trans. A. Szuba, *Literatura na świecie*, No. 11-12, 2006, p. 86.

both makes the cross and appears to be floating away from its definite shape. "Ease" on the other hand rests quietly in its place. Nothing is done with materials, typography, or space in this poem that is not essential to meaning"[1970, p. 44].

Finlay first decided to break with "*the discursive linear poetry*"[Solt, 1970, p. 44] when *Rapel,* the first collection of his concrete poems, was published in 1963, and then he broke with the limitations of the printed page and shifted his poetry "*into the wider horizons of the land, the sea, and the literally structured word.*"[Solt, 1970, p. 44]Alec Finlay, using the quotes from Ian Hamilton Finlay's letters, commented that

The Concrete poem offered a model of order, 'even if set in a space which is full of doubt.' Finlay spoke of his faith in concrete as something 'honest' and 'true', not in terms of aesthetic preference but inner need, for, as he put it in his oft reprinted letter to Pierre Garnier, '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.' [2012, p. 28-29]

In his works materiality is entwined with words and they both represent the thingness which has stepped beyond the customarily postulated relation between things and words, and undermined the familiarity of poetry on the printed page. There is another feature of Finlay's concrete poems due to which they do not fit the theoretical frame provided by Gomringer. Gomringer wanted concrete poems not to be involved with emotions but to function as a linguistic structure; however Finlay's poems, as it is argued byNicholas Zurbrugg, "*particularly his overtly political and ethical text of the eighties, indicate a far more complex range of references.*" [1996, p. 120] Nonetheless, his earlier attitude to concrete poetry did not differ from that of Gomringer, since he wrote in the letter of 1964, that

(...) "concrete" by its very limitations offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity; it is 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 (...) 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." [Finlay, 1970, p. 84]

The aesthetic ambition of concrete poems, where a word is used as "*an intelligible object treated with concrete intentions as a useful thing,*" [Gromringer, 1970, p. 69] is evident since they were created to appeal to the eye. What is more, the work of Finlay was referred to as "*the finest exponent of the poem manufactured as an object of contemplation.*" [Williams, 1970, p. 85]As we can read in Alec Finlay's introduction to the selection of Ian Hamilton Finlay's poems, inserting the words in the open space where they could be enjoyed by other people in a very direct manner was "*his youthful dream*" [2012, p. 36], and "*The garden-poem combined the spatial and temporal possibilities of his poem-prints and bookworks*" with the gardening abilities of his partner Sue [2012, p. 36].

The first poem which was intended by Finlay to be printed separately "*like a print of a painting*" [Finlay, 2012, p. 25] was "Le Circus (or, Poster Poem)" from 1964. The original was printed in black, red and blue and just a quick view can make one think that it is really a poster announcing some circus performances. However, when you start reading the words spatially organized in a way you could expect on a typical poster, it turns out that they do not announce any acrobats or clowns. Like in many other of his concrete poems, he shows his interest in or maybe even fascination with ships, boats, barques (sailing vessels with three or more masts). In the letter to Emmet Williams, Finlay wrote: "*the form of the poem suggests a poster for the circus. The fishing-boat K 47 is compared to a pony, its port and starboadrd lights to colouredblikners, the crew to bare-back tiders, the rainbow and its reflection on the sea to a hoop. The corks, nets, 'etc.' are introduced like lesser parts of the act.*" [2012, p. 25]

The title of poem "Barque. Homage to Jonathan Williams" straightforwardly corresponds to the image printed on the page. At the top of the page there is a sketch of a barque and below we can read the list or rather instructions. The parts of the masts are numbered and all twenty of them should be "white only". We are used to assume that the title of a written work is always given first, at the very beginning or at the top. Here, the word "BARQUE" is given at the bottom of the page and the size of the type − much bigger than the other used on the page − emphasizes its importance and draws the viewer's attention to it instantly. Sailing vessels seem to evoke a specific nostalgia, longing for the time when sea-travel involved specific rituals and behavior, and definitely the image of sails, especially white ones, arouses a kind of majestic feelings. In this poem by Finlay, the barque is isolated from its "natural" environment – the sea, the ocean – and becomes an idea. The repetition of the phrase "white only" printed in two even columns has a hypnotic effect, or when read aloud, can be associated with quiet whispering of waves.

A detailed presentation of Finlay's work is beyond the scope of this article, but I would like to reach for his "Homage to Malevich" which occurred in *Rapel: Ten Fauve and SuprematistPoems* in 1963. Since I focused on "whiteness" of the poem "BARQUE", this one is chosen just for contrast. Kasimir Malevich painted the first version of his *Black Square* in 1915. The painting influenced modern art development, or to be more specific, the development of abstract painting. The title says it all, on square canvas one color dominates – black – and when the work was created it constituted a radical gesture (repeated by Malevich in four versions of the *Black Square*). Philip Shaw comments that "*Malevich gave his 'new art' a name, suprematism, announcing a few years later that 'To the Suprematist the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless; the significant thing is feeling.'*" [Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square*]

The poem by Finlay "reconstructs" the painting in words repeated and arranged in a different order within a square space on the page where the first line reads: "lackblockblackb." Here, "the visual phenomena," the printed words themselves are meaningful, the black square "locks" the emptiness within its four equal sides. The intensity which is involved into looking at Malevich's painting also accompanies looking

at/reading Finlay's poem. A painting, which is a visual object, is here rendered in words, which used to be treated as transparent vessels of meaning before their material and visual traits were employed by poets and artists.

As Alec Finlay observes, Ian Hamilton Finlay's "*interest in Concrete poetry as a movement*" did not last long [2012, p. 42] However, his interest in introducing words into the environmentcontinued and resulted in creating *Little Sparta*. It is located in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh and the space of this specific garden is filled with Finlay's artworks, since they are no longer just words but physical objects with inscriptions. Thus, his apparent need for creating something tangible was satisfied by creating the garden with more than 270 artworks. The parts of the garden are named according to their content and, for example, in the *Roman Garden* one can see "*six stone works on plinths, variations on the theme of warships and their modern airborne equivalents*" [Little Sparta] To create the artworks, Finlay cooperated with stonemasons and lettercarvers. His son comments that

Gradually the status of the poem was refined, for, if it was 'only one element in a composition', it also took precedence as 'a kind of presiding deity'. The method he and Sue pioneered was to create intimate 'organized corners', or 'areas', as he came to refer to them. Within these screened islands, these 'diverse secrecies', the poem acted as a 'joint', hinging 'the work of art into its surroundings'. [2012, p. 45-46]

To mention only poetry while talking about the thingness of the word would be insufficient since "*language in its many forms – as printed text, printed signs, words on the wall, recorded speech, and more – has become a primary element of visual art. Under labels like Fluxus, Pop art, Conceptual art, and text and image, words have proliferated in art since the 1960s.*" [Kotz, 2007, p. 1] This panoply of uses of language which is spread before our eyes has some examples of transforming a word into a thing, since many artists reduce language "*to a kind of object that has been isolated, broken apart, crossed out, and at times nearly evacuated of meaning or expression.*" [Kotz, 2007, p. 1]At the end of the 1960s, there began the times when words in an artistic context "*were treated in some sense like objects – to be looked at.*" [Kotz, 2007, p. 2]

However, the occurrence of bits and pieces of language in artworks described as visual was not a total novelty then, since as Liz Kotz reminds us, "*in the twentieth century, one could argue that it was with Cubism that snippets of language decisively reentered the picture plane, and by the 1960s, as Pop painters drew on advertising and poster design, the use of language as a graphic emblem or visual sign was commonplace.*" [2007, p. 4] Sometimes, the attitude to words echoed the way objects were transformed from the everyday environment into the realm of art. Found objects or ready mades seemed to have their equivalents in words, since words were also picked up by artists from their surroundings, and they appropriated "*brand names, advertising slogans, office records, grocery lists, banal conversations, telegrams, assembled documents, and instructions for making a work.*" [Kotz, 2007, p. 7] When we think of the way that "borrowed" language was utilized in word collages, it is worth recalling

that such literary ready mades were comprised of words which were not separated from their previous surroundings. Only the words treated as one with the page they were written on share the same status as mass produced objects appropriated as ready mades into works of art. [Karpowicz, 2007, p. 70]

Nonetheless, beside the group of concrete poets who began to create their works in the 1960s, there were visual artists who also expressed similar interest in the thingness of words. One of the members of the Minimalist movement, Carl Andre, wished "*to foreground the palpable, tactile, and material qualities of words*"[Kotz, 2007, p.143] when he started to write concrete poems and display them on the page in the manner of drawings. He did not exactly believe that words are things; he appreciated their materiality: "*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 feel when we speak them, when we write them, or when we hear them.*"[quoted in Kotz, 2007, p.146] His experiments with visual poetry were collected in *Shape and Structure*(1960-1965),where he used all the techniques employed by those interested in the visual possibilities offered by written words on the page, and there could be found "*a series of massed poems and constellations using individual words, letters, and typographic symbols.*" [Kotz, 2007, p. 148]He used the method of printing words in various typefaces (and sometimes colors) on sheets of paper, which means he did not introduce any drastic changes in to the words.However, Liz Kotznotices that "*the pages are far closer to drawings, composed of punctuation marks and letters, than what we think of as poems.*" [2007, p. 149]

Vito Hannibal Acconci was another artist who did not confine himself to language only, but is also known as an installation, performance and video artist. He used language to create "*an 'installation' of words on the physical space of the page analogous to an installation of objects in the physical space of a room*" [Kotz, 20017, p. 156] and "*his poems use words as objects to be accumulated, arranged, stacked, dispersed, and moved*" [Kotz, 20017, p. 156]. Here again, many verbs which are used here to describe what could be done with words, we commonly employ while describing ways we handle material things.He began to employ words as elements of his artworks in the 1960s, and the interest in materiality of language continued. *City of Words* (1999) is a series of lithographs where words enter architectural space. They are constructed from printed paper to create urban landscapes. In 2010 another version of *City of Words* was created, this time to offer three-dimensional rendering of the concept visualized before. Using printed paper as a material for artwork results in a different reception – a viewer not only focuses on the shapes but also tries to read/decipher the words. It is impossible to ignore the words even if the sentences are left unfinished ortheir beginnings have been lost in the process of cutting/bending/folding the paper.

Today the interest in materiality of words is still quite vivid among artist although

Concrete poems being written in the twenty-first century have all been strained through the digital – and in some ways, have reacted to it; call it post-digital concre-tism. Even in cases where poems might look similar to what was done in the last century,

there's something different about them that responds to the digital in the ways they're produced, constructed, or distributed. Concrete poetry in the twenty-first century always winks at its twentieth-century precursors [Goldsmith, 2015, p. 14].

This is a comment from the introduction to the book in which visual poetry in the 21th century is presented. The number of entries proves a vivid interest of modern artists in the use of words as artistic material. It also confirms that the narrow understanding of the term "concrete poetry" where the linguistic and not purely visual aspect of words was important, is no longer employed. The artworks presented on the pages of *The New Concrete*,on the one hand resemble the concrete poems of the 1950s or 1960s, on the other hand, they utilize just the materiality of the word itself, its physical appearance. Here, the works of poets and artists are presented in the same volume offering a broad view on what is visual poetry looks like in the digital age. Thus, we can see two-dimensional printed poems as well as three-dimensional works presented within the space of a gallery (Caroline Bergvall*CROP*, 2010; Liliane Lijn*Am I Who Poemcon*, 2010) or even integrated into the landscape (Ian Hamilton Finlay *HOW BLUE! HOW FAR*!, 2004; Jenny Holzer*Xenon for Berlin*, 2001). Chris McCabe describes this collection as follows: "*The New Concrete includes poets and artists who find patterns in computer code and poets who use computer code to make patterns which can easily be called art*" [2015, p. 215].

At present, according toDerek Beaulie "*concrete poetry has expanded beyond the tightly modernist 'clean concrete' poems of the 1950s – typified by Eugen Gomringer& Mary Ellen Solt. Gomringer&Solt sought simplicity & clarity in their materialist use of semantic particles (Gomringer's 'Silencio' &Solt's 'Flowers in Concrete' are examples).*" [an afterword after words] In the modern world, not only can words be turned into things in concrete poems, but things themselves can create concrete poetry, since "*business machines & tools – the printer, photocopier, shredder, scanner, 3-hole punch, leteraset (dry-transfer) – move beyond the role of device in concrete poetry through a poetics of waste & refuse – into a role more closer (sic) to that of author/ reader*" [Beaulie, an afterword after words]. Nonetheless, discussing concrete poetry which is a result of "*non-prescribed use of business machines*" [Beaulie, an afterword after words] would go beyond the scope of this article.

When a written word entered our visual field not as a mere carrier of meaning, but a material being worth attention due to its physical presence, whether on the printed page or any other surface, its inferior status ascribed to it by ancient philosophers was defied. Jacques Derrida reminds us that in Plato's *Phaedrus* "*the god of writing is (...) a subordinate character*" [1981, p. 86] and that writing was regarded only as "*the supplement to speech.*"[1981, p. 86] In his dialogue, Plato makes the argument thatwriting is not a good *tekhné,* by which we should understand an art capable of engendering, pro-ducing, bringing forth: the clear, the sure, the secure (*saphes kai bebaion*). That is, the *alētheia*of the eidos, the truth of being in its figure, its 'idea', its nonsensible visibility, its intelligible invisibility. The truth of what is: writing literally hasn't a damn sight to do with it. It has rather a blindness to do with it. Whoever might

think he has pro-duced truth through a grapheme would only give proof of the greatest foolishness (*euētheia*) [Derrida, 1981, p. 134-135]

However, this belittled role of writing underwent changes, or rather fluctuations within our history, since it acquired significance during the Renaissance. Then, in the West, the fundamental place was accorded to Writing [Derrida, 1981, p. 134-135] and there was no doubt that it was "*the primal nature of language to be written*" [Derrida, 1981, p. 134-135]. As we can read in *The Order of Things*:

> *This primacy of the written word explains the twin presence of two forms which, despite their apparent antagonism, are indissociable in sixteenth-century knowledge. The first of these is a non-distinction between what is seen and what is read, between observation and relation, which results in the constitution of a single, unbroken surface in which observation and language intersect to infinity* [Foucault, 1994, p. 39].

Nonetheless, with the end of the Renaissance "*the primacy of the written word went into abeyance*" [Foucault, 1994, p. 43]. Thus, writing again began to serve a lesser function as "*weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath*" [Derrida, 1981, p. 143]. Derrida writes that "*Rousseau repeats the Platonic gesture*" [1997, p. 17] and for Rousseau again "*writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life*"[1981, p. 143]. To remark in passing, writing so defined brings to mind the Žižekean definition of the Lacanian Thing when he reaches for Gothic novels and treats "the living dead" as one of the embodiments of the Thing [Žižek, 2002, p. 220].

In the previous century, as well as in the present one, the visual, or if you will, the "scopic régime," brought about a change of attitude to the written word. Poetry and visual arts accentuated the materiality of writing. This tangibility of a letter or a word on the page was also reflected in the word coined by Derrida. His *différance,* the neographism of the word *différence,* can only be seen; it only is for our eyes. "*Now it happens, I would say in effect, that this graphic difference (a instead of e), this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, between two vowels, remains purely graphic: it is read, or it is written, but it cannot be heard. It cannot be apprehended in speech (…)*" [Derrida, 1982, p. 3-4] On the one hand, this Derridean term seems to defy the superior role of speech in Occidental philosophy in the way ready mades defied the Occidental ocularcentrism. On the other hand, *différance,* like visual and concrete poetry, exists "*for your eyes only.*"[7]

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[7]   The title of the theme song from the James Bond movie (*For Your Eyes Only*, 1981), written by Michael Leeson and Bill Conti.

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