

THE NOTTINGHAM LINGUISTIC CIRCULAR

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Edited on behalf of the Nottingham Linguistic Circle

by

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EDITORIAL

This issue of NLC appears belatedly, at the end of a doldrum spell in the journal's history. Recent troubles have not been financial - for once, our position on that score is quite good - but 'material' in a more specialized sense, in that despite frequent and at times blatant coaxing, we have had great difficulty in procuring original contributions of suitable length and scope.

We owe it to Mike Stubbs, Deirdre Burton, and Matthew Grayshon that we are at length able to publish a new number without relying heavily on editorial composition. Dr. Stubbs reviews some recent publications; the review article, surprisingly enough, has not been a regular feature of the journal, and potential contributors might perhaps turn their attention to this. Miss Burton writes on 'concrete poetry', an unusual subject, perhaps, for a linguistic journal, but a useful reminder that we are interested in the language of literary texts and welcome short articles in this field.

M.C. Grayshon has given us a short note in reply to Dr. Stubb's comments on his contribution to an earlier number. At the moment, Matthew is in Nigeria, where he is collecting material for a comparative study of paralinguistic features in English and selected West African languages. He is shortly to publish, through Mouton, a book on the "social grammar" which he has discussed in occasional contributions to NLC.

Another recent publication is Margaret Berry's 'Introduction to Systemic Linguistics: Vol. 1, Structures and Systems'. We welcome this, and take the opportunity of congratulating the author, through whose efforts the study of linguistics in Nottingham was very largely established, and at whose summons the Nottingham Linguistic Circle was first formed. May her success be an omen for NLC during the coming year.

Walter Nash

Christopher Butler

For an index to past issues, see the back page.

NOTICES AND PROSPECTS(1) Forthcoming meetings:

Trier, Germany
2-4 October 1975

Trier Kolloquium Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Romanistik c/o Prof. Dr. A. Barrera-Vidal, Romanistisches Seminar, Univ. Trier, 55 Trier, Schneiderhof, W. Germany.

York
31 Oct. - 2 Nov. 1975

Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. Theme: The nature of the data of linguistics. c/o Dr. J.N. Green, Dept. of Language, Univ. of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD.

Louvain, Belgium
3-4 Nov. 1975

Colloquium: 'Plurilinguisme a l'université'. c/o Institut des Langues Vivantes, Dekenstraat 2, B-3000 Louvain, Belgium.

Washington D.C., U.S.A.
27-30 Nov. 1975

Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes (FIPLV): 12th International Congress. c/o FIPLV, D-355 Marburg an der Lahn 11, Postfach 544, W. Germany.

Amsterdam, Holland
13 December 1975

International Meeting/Annual General Meeting of the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing. c/o Mrs. J.M. Smith, 6 Sevenoaks Avenue, Heaton Moor, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 4AW.

San Francisco, U.S.A.
28-30 Dec. 1975

Annual General Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America. c/o Linguistic Society of America, 428 East Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, U.S.A.

Tuscan, Arizona, U.S.A.
12-16 Jan. 1976

2nd International Conference on Historical Linguistics.

Edinburgh
3-5 April 1976

Spring Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. c/o Dr. J. Christie, Dept. of Linguistics, 15 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9LN.

Tokyo, 1976

3rd World Congress of Phoneticians, c/o Phonetic Society of Japan, 13 Daita-2, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, P.O. No. 155, Japan.

Philadelphia Marriot, U.S.A.
28-30 December 1976

Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (for address see above)

Birmingham
29-31 March 1977

Spring Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. c/o Dr. J. Payne, Dept. of Linguistics, Univ. of Birmingham, P.O. Box 363, Birmingham B15 2TT.

London
Autumn 1977

Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. c/o Dr. R.A. Hudson, Dept. of Phonetics and Linguistics, University College, Gower St., London WC1E 6BT.

Chicago, U.S.A.
28-30 December 1977

Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (for address see previous page).

(2) Reports on conferences:

Child Language Seminar. School of Education, University of Birmingham, 5th April, 1975.

This seminar, held annually (in different institutions), is useful in bringing together an interesting collection of linguists working on very varied aspects of child language. The atmosphere at the Birmingham seminar was decidedly and pleasantly informal - providing a welcome opportunity for comments on ongoing research presented in the individual papers, and forum for the casual exchange of ideas and information. The tight schedule was a frustrating aspect of an otherwise full and stimulating day. However, this allowed a width of topic-coverage often sacrificed elsewhere.

Papers given were: "Some Aspects of the Deviant Acquisition of Speech" (Ron Beresford, University of Newcastle), "Personal Pronouns and Language Universals" (Alan Cruttenden, University of Manchester), "On the Notion of the Child's Own System" (Pam Grunwell, City of Birmingham Polytechnic), "The Importance of Wanting: what does a child have to know in order to use the verb want", (Ewan Klein, MRC Unit, University of Cambridge), "Children's comprehension of indirect speech acts: an experimental study" (Ken Reeder, University of Birmingham), "Prelinguistic Communication of Severely Sub-normal Children" (Sinclair Rogers, Sheffield Polytechnic), "Two ways of looking at Child Language as a Corpus" (Ramsay Rutherford, University of Bielefeld). Abstracts and/or copies of these can be obtained from the authors.

The seminar also watched and commented on two films on language acquisition, 'Early Words - Action and the structure of language', Bruner, May and Greenfield (published by Wiley) and 'Language', Kagan and Gardner (published Harper and Row), and considered their potential use as teaching resources.

Those interested in next year's seminar, to be held in the Easter vacation at the University of Bristol, and/or in receiving the Child Language Newsletter, should contact Sinclair Rogers, Department of History and Communication, Sheffield Polytechnic, Pond Street, Sheffield S1 1WB. (Deirdre Burton)

Meetings of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain and the Societas Linguistica Europaea. University of Nottingham, 6-8 April 1975.

This was the first time that British and Continental linguists had come together in this way, and we are particularly honoured that Nottingham should have been accepted as the venue for this important occasion.

The SLE meeting had as its general theme 'Intralingual variety and interlinguistic contrast', while the LAGB meeting ranged over syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, language acquisition, linguistics and literature, and text linguistics, as well as touching on matters of general theoretical interest.

Readers who wish to receive a list of participants at the above conference should write to Dr. R.R.K. Hartmann, Language Centre, University of Exeter, Queen's Drive, Exeter EX4 4QH. (C.S. Butler)

Language problems of overseas students in Higher Education
Birmingham University, 16-18 April, 1975.

This was a two-day seminar organised jointly by the British Association for Applied Linguistics and the small group of lecturers appointed specially at various universities to produce Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students (the SELMOUS Group). The seminar turned out to be the most stimulating that I have ever attended, with eleven papers of equally high standards on one day! The emphasis was on study and communication skills, on taking proper account of both functional and formal needs in the development of course material, and on flexibility. It is hoped that the papers, edited by one of the organisers J.B. Heaton, University of Leeds, may be published. (W. Grauberg)

Second Workshop on the Bases of Systemic Theory
University of Essex 10-12 July, 1975.

A mixed group of systemicists and interested non-systemicists gathered to hear and discuss papers on the 'functional components' proposed by Halliday, and on a variety of more specific topics related to systemic theory. There was a very definite feeling, at this meeting, of progression from the successful first systemic workshop held at Walsall in September 1974. In retrospect, it became very clear that the Walsall meeting had cleared the ground in an extremely useful way, providing a firm base on which the second workshop could build. The Essex meeting also provided an opportunity for the participants to wish Professor Michael Halliday and his wife Ruqaiya Hasan the best of everything in their new life in Sydney, where Prof. Halliday is soon to take up a chair in linguistics. (C.S. Butler)

The Eighth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences
University of Leeds, August 17-23, 1975.

It was the largest Phonetics Congress to date, being attended by over 500 people, and including presentation of some 350 papers. Accommodation was mainly in university flats or halls of residence (many of them conveniently situated on the university campus), and meetings were held in the Great Hall of the university (plenary sessions), or in a single block containing 21 lecture theatres (section meetings).

The main business of the Congress was carried out in the six days Monday through Saturday, Wednesday and Saturday being half-days. The first half of each morning was devoted to a full plenary session. On two mornings, the full plenaries were followed by divided plenaries (two papers running concurrently); and the remainder of the time was devoted to the section meetings.

The papers in the plenary sessions were well chosen to provide both reviews of recent work, and a number of more concentrated reports from leading researchers in the field. D.B. Fry presented a comprehensive review under the title "Ends and Means in Acoustic Phonetics", which was, in fact, far more wide-ranging than the title suggests, and effectively covered almost all aspects of instrumental phonetics - no mean achievement. Eli Fischer-Jorgensen reviewed recent work and trends in phonology, a surprising choice, some might think, for a Congress of what is increasingly an experimental science, but nonetheless laudable in the eyes of those who, like myself, aren't too certain where the dividing-line between phonetics and phonology falls, however clear things might be at the extremes. Also surprising, particularly in a review given by a European scholar, was the way in which 'phonology' tended to be equated with 'generative phonology'. This was objected to by some (even of American origin) who felt that alternative theories had rather been left out in the cold, or (even worse!) treated as variants of generative phonology.

Of the other full plenary papers, almost all either fell on the hazy borderline between phonetics and phonology, or attempted to draw out the phonological implications of the phonetic research that had been carried out, and as such contributed to the growing interest in "Linguistic phonetics". Ladefoged's paper, entitled "Phonetic Specification of the Languages of the World", was a contribution to a subject he has been working on for a number of years now, and contained further notes to add to his early work on the specification of vowels. Wang, in his talk on 'Prosodic Features' reported on experiments to throw light on the perception of F₀ contours in tone languages, Chinese in particular. Lindblom reported on the continuation of his work on the structure of vowel systems, and presented some impressive results from experiments on acoustic and perceptual distancing between vowels. The correspondence between the structures predicted by the model for systems of varying numbers of vowels, and the structures actually found in various languages was amazingly good, and plausible predictions were made regarding the types of sound-change that could occur without affecting the overall balance of a system. The remaining plenary paper, given by Liberman, departed from its brief in order to report on a number of experiments designed to shed new and favourable light on the motor-theory of speech perception. The experiments themselves were carefully designed, and produced some interesting results, but none it seems, that can do much to reverse the declining fortunes of the theory.

The divided plenary sessions contained papers by Martinet on 'The Conditioning of Phonological Changes', Stevens on the aerodynamics of sound production in speech, Wells on 'Phonetic Variation in Dialectology', and Whitaker on 'Levels of Impairment in Disorders of Speech'.

The papers for the section meetings were divided among fourteen groups; the areas covered by the various groups, together with the number of papers each group contained, can probably be taken to provide a fair indication of the current spread of interests among phoneticians. The largest group, with nearly 50 papers, was that covering Articulatory Phonetics, Speech Physiology, Neurolinguistics. This was also one of the most wide-ranging, covering topics relating to all stages of the speech production process from neural activity to vocal tract aerodynamics. The group covered a number of areas of study which seem to have witnessed a considerable expansion of research activity in recent years, (electromyography, computer-based modelling of vocal tract geometry, and aerodynamics, in particular), and also included studies of the behaviour of the larynx, which currently seems to be receiving more attention from phoneticians than any other single speech organ. Perhaps these considerations offer some explanation for the size of the group.

Close behind in terms of number of papers were the group covering Auditory Phonetics, Speech Perception, Psychophonetics, etc. and the one covering Suprasegmentals, Intonation and Speech Rhythm. At the other extreme, groups which included fewer papers than might have been expected were those on Speech Acquisition, Speech Synthesis, Acoustic Phonetics, Applied Phonetics and Language Teaching, all four with around a dozen papers. The remaining groups covered General Phonetics, Phonology, Analysis of Particular Languages, Historical Phonetics, Speech Pathology and Therapy, "Sociophonetics" (the last apparently being the most recent birth in the family of Phonetic Sciences).

Obviously, it is impossible, in a review of this kind, to give any more detailed picture of the varieties of research currently being undertaken by phoneticians, and of the significance of the results produced, simply because of the sheer size of the Congress, and the fact that no single observer could attend more than about one seventh of the total number of papers. The papers will, in any case, become available in the forthcoming Proceedings of the Congress.

Information which will not become generally available, however, is that concerning the organisation of the Congress. This, to my mind, was quite outstanding (as was perhaps indicated at the time by the marked lack of comments from the participants), and might well serve as a model for organisers of similarly large (or smaller) events.

As already mentioned, the papers were arranged into fourteen groups, and the programme was devised in such a way that no two papers from the same group were given at the same time. This arrangement may not have been too well adapted to the needs of those participants who had particularly wide-ranging interests, but such people seemed to be relatively few in number. For the

majority who specialized in one or two areas only, and wished to cover these in detail, it had the great advantage of minimizing the number of timetable clashes between papers of interest.

The papers were restricted to ten minutes presentation time, followed by up to ten minutes discussion. This might at first seem an excessive restriction. In fact, none of the presentations I attended gave the impression of suffering greatly from shortage of time, and some of the speakers who found themselves forced to conclude hurriedly, or were cut short at the end of the ten minutes, would probably have had the same problems if they had had twice as long. The advantages gained from this arrangement were a considerable increase in the number of papers that could be presented, and a reduction in the number of papers being given at any one time. In fact, there were never any more than seven papers being presented simultaneously, which in principle made it possible to achieve complete coverage of two of the fourteen groups of papers. In addition, chairmen of section meetings adhered strictly to the prescribed timetable; in no case was a presentation allowed to extend beyond twelve minutes, and each session was drawn to a close after precisely twenty minutes. Again, if this almost to-the-second timing at first seems excessively rigid, it is nonetheless true that participants generally appreciated knowing that a given session would close exactly on time, and that there was no danger of their missing the beginning of the next through delay. In a situation where every twenty minutes, one has to find which of the seven papers being given one has decided to attend, and where it is being given, and then find the requisite room in a building of at first rather confusing layout, and that along with five hundred other people all doing the same thing, and do it up to seven times in one afternoon, in that situation, knowing that at least the timing of the section meetings would be exact, was a considerable relief.

Another feature of the organization that contributed greatly to the smooth running of the Congress was the fact that no room was occupied for two successive 20 minute sessions. Clearly, this arrangement require twice the number of rooms than would otherwise have been needed, but it brought with it two considerable benefits. First, the formal 10-minute discussion following the presentation of the paper could be followed by up to twenty minutes of informal discussion after those who wished to leave had been given the opportunity to do so. This certainly offset whatever disadvantages might have been caused by restricting presentation times to ten minutes, and also made it easier for chairmen to draw sessions to a close punctually. Second, since there was never a queue of people waiting to get into a lecture room at the same time as others were leaving, movements within the building were much freer.

As regards the material side of the organization, the section meetings all took place in one large lecture block, which, although most people found its internal layout rather confusing at first, nevertheless proved to be an extremely efficient piece of architectural design, in that it allowed five hundred people to change around simultaneously from one room to another without there ever being congestion on landings or stairways. Lecture rooms were equipped with slide-projector (lights dimmed automatically when the projector was switched on!), tape-recorder and, in

some cases, overhead projector (as well as black-board, of course); there was also a helper in each room, whose job it was to see to the loading of slides, correct functioning of equipment, and so on. These facilities, particularly the last, presumably contributed significantly to the cost of the Congress attendance fee (£20), but also added greatly to the smooth running of things.

In addition to the plenary and section meetings, there were also two evening sessions of a more informal nature, one on the larynx and one on voiceprints. As these threw up some interesting contributions, it is to be hoped that some space will be found for them in the Proceedings. There was also a display of phonetics equipment, a book display, a collection of historic photographs from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Congress, and a display of apparatus, offprints, etc. from Congress participants.

On the non-academic side, there were the usual University reception, a concert, a trip to York, and a buffet-dance, together with a full programme of visits for accompanying persons.
(A.S. Crompton)

4th International Congress of Applied Linguistics
Stuttgart, 25-31 August, 1975

At this Congress 1500 participants had to make anxious decisions every hour on which of the 514 papers in the 36 sections to listen to. The papers covered the whole spectrum of applied linguistics; they showed that, while second language teaching and contrastive linguistics continue to be the central preoccupation, there is growing interest in sociolinguistics and even more in psycholinguistics. Other developing areas seem to be error analysis, language for special purposes, discourse analysis and rhetoric. Among the main speakers, Corder showed that the study of learners' interlanguage could lead to a clearer understanding of the learning process and hence to better teaching materials; Spolsky warned against undue faith in the infallibility of tests, while a number of speakers pleaded for more individualized learning and teaching. Over 20 national affiliates now belong to AILA; the next congress will be held in 1978 in Canada. (W. Grauberg)

8th Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics
York, 15-17 September

Several of the papers were concerned with error analysis, including a thought-provoking talk by J. Mountford on errors in English spelling. There were contrasting descriptions of some courses in applied linguistics (Edinburgh, Essex, West Midlands), and a most interesting investigation of language variation in Belfast, in which ethnic background, religion and class are seen to interact, was described by Mr. & Mrs. Milroy (Belfast). The Bullock report was welcomed, but BAAL is to set up a working party to study how some of the recommendations can be put into practice. (W. Grauberg)

SOCIAL GRAMMAR AND DISCOURSE FUNCTION ANALYSIS

(Comment on Stubbs' "Grammatical form, discourse function, discourse structure and social situation.")

I was grateful to read Stubbs' article in Nottingham Linguistic Circular Vol. 4 No. 1. It would be most unfortunate if the two approaches were in any way thought to be contradictory or if it were imagined that one superseded the other. The analogy might be between two gangs building a bridge, or constructing a tunnel and working towards each other; it is sensible to correspond - we then have a chance of meeting!

As I understand the position, those analysing conversation are attempting to work from the actual utterance situation of language at work. They are, in Stubbs' words, 'making structural statements and specifying precise realisation relationships between forms and functions.' Realising the complexity of levels between utterances and social situation, they are plotting their way from form to social situation. My position is the opposite - I am starting from social situation and trying to see what utterances are needed to perform in that social situation. Both approaches are valid; both have their strengths and limitations.

The difference can be seen in the brief discussion of solidarity. Stubbs says that 'solidarity has to be accomplished through precise describable conversational strategies.' I find the word "accomplished" interesting, I would have said "revealed". Solidarity is a personal relationship we reveal to each other and also to observers. Now Stubbs suggests that by analysis of many conversational utterances we shall be able to say that this pattern of linguistic form, with hesitations, etc., reveal this. I agree. However if we turn from English we must not assume that the same linguistic forms will give the same social information. This is the limitation of this approach - it is valid ONLY for one language at a time. My work, initial though it is, shows that in West African tonal languages different levels of linguistic discourse to the ones of English are used to show social patterns. By approaching from the social situation and asking questions of the following variety, we reach patterns from the other side, as it were.

"How do you show anger"

"To whom can you show anger"

"Do you use a different form to be angry to a superior as well as to an equal"

We involve ourselves with different universals. A language description has to deal with social situations where, for example, the husband/wife relationship varies from society to society, and inside society. 'Henpecked' is a social description, but we may make the judgement from utterances; so there should be a describable order of utterance that would allow us to describe to a learner of that language how to recognise the abnormal pattern of social relationship 'henpecked'.

From the social point of view we have first to know if the relationship 'henpecked' is a viable one in the foreign culture; then find out what linguistic levels reveal it; and finally correlate the English language levels with the foreign language levels. Now in the foreign society 'henpecked' might not exist but an analagous one of 'cockpecked' might! The two are examples of a general category status, sub-category male/female married... so then we can suggest to the foreign language speaker the linguistic terms of his language and the comparable linguistic terms of English.

What I am saying can be summarised in the following table:-

1. English	2. Social Category	3. Foreign Language
discourse utterance.	social description.	discourse utterance.

Analysis of 1 or 3 leads to 2; but analysis of 1 or 3 cannot lead to 3 or 1. By starting at 2 and utilising the descriptions of 1 and 3 one can reveal a universal that allows relationships between 1 and 3 for a comparative linguistic description. This is particularly true when languages are, as it were, a long way away from each other, as are tonal languages and English.

The limitation of my approach is that it cannot be fully effective until there has been effective analysis of discourse function. In its initial stages it can only show broad contradictions and broad universals.

Another way of looking at the two approaches is that discourse analysis does its work inside certain linguistic and social conventions or parameters within a single language. Social Grammar is concerned with the definitions of these conventions, drawing the parameters as well as being concerned with the linguistic forms.

I would like to return to the matter of lack of fit between linguistic form and linguistic function. There is an implicit suggestion in this term: it suggests that there is a fixed form, or a fixed function, and that with a bit of juggling or manipulation a fit can be made. This, I suggest, is a misleading implication for the following reasons. First, language function is not fixed, but is a social convention that can and does change; as with meaning its function is what we want it to be. Linguistic description, by the nature of scientific method, by the nature of the descriptive process, is a description frozen in time, and always in the process of being reified. Therefore the two can never be made to fit without a continuous redefining and restatement of linguistic form terms. And, to underline a previous point, the linguistic convention of one linguistic group is not the linguistic convention of another group. This is also true of social descriptions; they are limited to time and place. But just as linguistic form is based upon a finite number of universals which we refer to with such terms as phoneme, intonation, pause etc., and the RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN them, so societies are based upon a number of finite universals which we refer to as status,

emotion etc., and the RELATIONSHIP between them. One aspect of the discovery and mapping out of language is to make the map of the relationships between these two groups of relationships. And, if possible, postulate some pattern of change so that we do not fall ever further and further behind in our cognition of language.

So we finish where we started; the theoretical standpoints are complimentary and not mutually exclusive. We each need to understand the other in order that each may make sensible progress.

M.C. Grayshon
Department of Education
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REVIEW OF

Geoffrey Thornton (1974) Language, Experience and School,
Edward Arnold, 81 pp., £1.50.

Anne & Peter Doughty (1974) Language and Community,
Edward Arnold, 109 pp., £1.60.

These books are in the series "Explorations in Language Study" which has followed the work by the Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching in the preparation of the workbook Language in Use. The series is aimed primarily at teachers, in the belief that they should have a firm understanding of a "linguistic approach to language". As such, the books aim to present discussion of language in education at a level which is appropriate to a teacher in the classroom. They are not books about linguistics, but, on the whole, sensible statements designed to get rid of the large amount of dubious linguistic folklore and prescriptive ideas about language which often still exist amongst educationalists, and, more positively, to help the teacher in the classroom. The "linguistic approach" taken has a strong Hallidayan bias towards a functional, socio-semantic view of language.

Thornton is primarily concerned with the school as a language community, which transmits to pupils a wide range of social meanings and values through various "message systems". These systems include not only the language used by teachers or by textbooks; but also the way schools structure subjects into timetables; the way they impose school rules; and, crucially, the attitudes which teachers have towards language, and the linguistic demands made on pupils. The

general argument is largely an illustrative, anecdotal version of Bernsteinian and Hallidayan notions that an interesting way of studying a child's socialization is to study how the culture is "transmitted" through different "symbolic orders of meaning".

Doughty and Doughty aim to "tell the story" of how a child learns to become a social being in its family, community and school. A community is defined as being constituted by the shared values, attitudes and assumptions of its members. And the process of growing up is seen as a process of learning to make sense of the culture through learning its language. The way a child learns to use language in its family and community is then argued to be an essential background to what is done in classrooms. This book is an anecdotal account of the way children are socialized, based (very loosely indeed) on the interpretive sociology of writers like Berger and Luckman or the view of recent anthropologists, such as Frake, who argue that internalizing a culture involves learning how to behave appropriately in different social situations.

I will begin with a couple of critical points, but then suggest that most of the discussion in the books is not done justice by the apparent theoretical stance taken.

The General Introduction (by P. Doughty and Thornton) to both books states that:

"Many teachers in schools and in Colleges of Education see themselves that 'Educational failure is linguistic failure'."

This statement has become more or less a catch-phrase in recent years. It is unfortunate that it is here restated in this crude form, for, in fact, the content of both books displays in detail that the situation is much more complex than such a formulation suggests. My own view is as follows. (1): schools and classrooms depend on language - education, as we know it, is inconceivable without the lecturing, discussing, reading and writing which comprise it. So, (2), if a school defines a pupil as "linguistically inadequate", then he will almost certainly fail in the formal education system. But this is a tautology: (2) follows directly from (1), and merely raises the question of what linguistic ability schools expect of pupils. Also, I have yet to be convinced that educational failure is "primarily" a result of any single factor. Swings in academic fashion have variously attributed educational failure to: IQ (in the 1920s to 40s); home background (1950s); and, now, language.

The crude form of the linguistic failure/deficit thesis crops up in Thornton's book. For example, potentially the most dangerous part of his argument is a short section which uses a hypothetical case study in discussing the relation between language and home background. We are invited (p.23) to imagine two "extreme examples" of families. The first comprises a teacher, his ex-teacher wife and only son. The second comprises a husband and wife, working as labourer and cleaner, both illiterate, with three children under five years. Various unsubstantiated "predictions" are made about language use in the two families, including

the predictions that in the second family the child will have less opportunity than the middle class child of using language in a wide range of functions and situations, and the child's questions "may habitually go unanswered". Such generalisations may or may not be true for such families. Then comes this assertion (p.23-4):

"...the child (of the labourer and his wife) cannot come to appreciate the potential of language as a means of asking questions and getting answers. ... This doesn't mean that he can't, linguistically, construct a question ('Why ...?', etc.) but rather that he doesn't come to appreciate the possibilities of question and answer."

If this is really meant literally, it is *prima facie* totally implausible. Does Thornton seriously mean that working class children, even from illiterate homes, do not know what questions and answers are?

The general position being asserted is a functional version of the restricted code hypothesis: that children in linguistically impoverished homes (this concept is implied, but undefined) are restricted in their experience and use of language. But imaginary situations will not do to substantiate such assertions, for when ethnographic fieldwork is done, it leads to quite different conclusions. Thus, Labov's (1969) fieldwork in the USA with working class Negroes leads him to conclude that:

"... Negro children in the urban ghettos receive a great deal of verbal stimulation, hear more well-formed sentences than middle class children, and participate in a highly verbal culture".

No comparable fieldwork has yet been done in Britain, but until it is, there is no reason to assume that working class language is not just as syntactically and functionally complex as middle class language. Quite different values may, of course, be attached to different linguistic skills in the two communities - hence the emphasis in both books on the importance of attitudes to language in families and schools.

The argument in the bulk of Thornton's book is, in fact, much more complex than is implied by the joint statement by Doughty and Thornton quoted above and by the dubious hypothetical families example. Thus, on p.13-14:

"... explanations of success and failure are to be sought, ultimately, in the inability of the school system always to enable the pupil to make the best use of ... his language. ... This entails looking for the factors which make for educational success and failure in the relationship that is set up between school and pupil."

This formulation is a clear shift away from any form of linguistic or cultural deficit theory. It places the explanation of educational failure firmly in the relationship between pupil and school, and ultimately between pupil and teacher in the classroom (p.15).

The bulk of the book is then concerned to discuss features of these relationships: the way schools act as meaning imposing institutions; how schools are "message systems" transmitting the hidden curriculum to pupils; how teachers' attitudes to non-standard dialect may disrupt the teacher-pupil relationship. In other words, the bulk of the book locates the causes of educational failure firmly in attitudinal factors and in how language is used in the social context of the school. This suggests that a more adequate formulation might be:

Educational failure results from sociolinguistic breakdown between schools and pupils.

It is as well to be careful about such formulations, especially in books intended to be of practical help to practising teachers. For what the casual reader tends to remember in this area is the short, striking generalisation, rather than the illustrations of the complexities of the sociolinguistic situation in schools.

Doughty and Doughty also illustrate the complexity of cultural assumptions about language. There is little to say about their argument that cultural norms are implied by the way we use language in different social settings. The argument is proposed in such general and anecdotal terms as to be irrefutable. For example, man is said to be "a problem-solving animal" (pp. 16, 49), without any precise claims being made about just what problems a child solves when it acquires communicative competence in its culture.

After this woolly discussion of the community as comprising a set of shared values, the final chapter argues that a necessary aim of schools is "extending an individual's linguistic competence" (p.96); and "the critical factor" in this aim is seen as the "language climate of the school" (p.103). The authors put forward what one might call a horticultural theory of education: that a pupil's language "develops" best in a "favourable climate" (p.96). But, given that this argument is the culmination of the book, it is disappointing that the specification of what a "language climate" comprises is so vague. Features of the language climate of a school are said to include: the teacher-pupil relationship; the formality of relationships between speakers; and the way school rules are enforced (e.g. whether talking is allowed in corridors). But the only specific advice on how to create a "favourable micro-climate" in the classroom is to use course material such as Language in Use.

In summary: Thornton argues that the causes of educational failure are to be found in the sociolinguistic context of the school, especially in the teacher-pupil relationship. It is difficult to see what Doughty and Doughty are arguing more than that a child has to learn a complex set of cultural and sociolinguistic rules; and that a favourable language climate in the school helps language develop. Both books would be greatly strengthened if the vague notions of teacher-pupil "relationship" and language "climate" were tied down to descriptions of actual classroom dialogue. Such descriptions are now beginning to be available

in the work of Barnes, Bellack, Hammersley, Mishler, Sinclair, Walker and Adelman, and others. This would not only make the theoretical points more convincing, but might also be of more help to practising teachers. For example, I found the most interesting and useful section of Thornton's book the final chapters where he gives several examples of the kinds of language often found in classrooms: the very different language in English and science text-books; the artificial types of English exercise still used in some schools; and the complex instructions used in the introduction to a "nonverbal test" - i.e. very complex language which children have to follow before they can begin the test! Thornton's comments on the details of actual bits of classroom language are often illuminating, and would seem the best introduction to a "linguistic approach to language" in schools and classrooms.

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CONCRETE POETRY - "THE GENERAL ART OF THE WORD".¹

"O mouth man is seeking a new speech
that cannot be dictated to by the
grammarians of any language!"

Eluard: 'Proverbs' 1920.

01. In thinking about concrete poetry and language, one of the many interesting aspects to explore, is the way in which the stated aims and goals of concrete poets relate to a developing line of argument found in the manifestos and declarations of the successive substantial avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. In these declarations, there is a vast resource of lay comments about characteristics and problems of language, language use, style, formal poetic design, and potentials of the written and spoken media, with related concepts and interpretations occurring time and time again. The problem lies in finding useful ways of comparing and discussing material which has obvious underlying relevance to linguistics, but which, on the surface, is subjective, whimsical, even apparently nonsensical in terms of its linguistic content. What I intend to do here, is to clarify this development of the response of progressive art to language, which is often so esoterically expressed in the source material. To do this, it is convenient and helpful to focus on the rank of "word". This was initially suggested to me by the observation of the functions of several hundreds of concrete texts themselves. On reading the pronouncements of the creative artists concerned, it became clear that they too were aware of this rank as a central reference point, though not always as explicitly as might be supposed. Perhaps an extract from the work of Max Bense would be useful here as a typical example of the sort of prose material I have in mind; many other snippets follow.

The word is being manipulated so-to-speak in three dimensions, verbally, vocally and visually. Seen as material the communication sphere is three dimensional. The word has simultaneously a verbal or vocal and visual positional value. This is why a word that is to be used in a text should not be chosen according to its role or position in a possible sentence. Sentences are not the aim of concrete texts.²

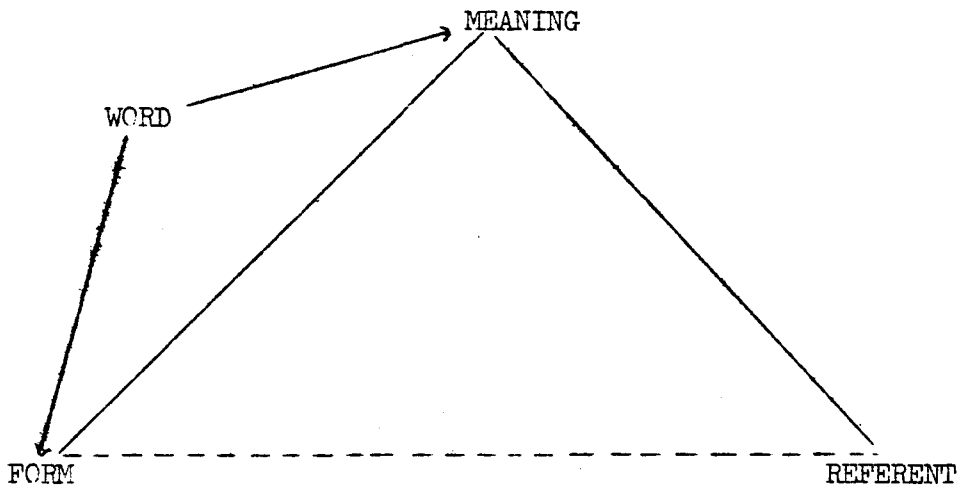
Unfortunately "concrete poetry" is not any longer a simply descriptive term, as many people suppose, but a convenient blanket term used to cover a wide range of experimental poetry and art. Since all viable art forms must per force proceed and develop by revolution and counter-example, possibly only esoterically meaningful, so concrete poetry now contains much contradictory material. I should make it clear that the concrete poetry I am writing about here, is the variety that the cognoscenti would regard as purist. A full explanation of this is not possible in so short a space, but it includes all the early work of those

consciously involved in the concrete poetry movement, and those later artifacts which employ similar deep models, if different surface exponents. All these are of particular interest for their use of language - in the widest senses, both professional and lay - as content as well as form.

02. In order to process the manifesto material, it is necessary first to recognise and articulate the variations in interpretation intended for the term "the word", as this is seldom markedly explicit in the often impassioned rhetoric. It will be convenient for the present purpose to consider the use of the term in three fundamental ways:

- 1) semantically, as an arbitrary sign of a referent, and, given the existence of this relationship, the further arbitrary realisations of the word:
- 2) phonetically, as the aural substantial realisation,
- 3) orthographically, as the visual substantial realisation.

Reproducing the familiar semiotic triangle,³ the relationship between these categories may be represented diagrammatically thus:



This basic pattern established, it is possible to add a fourth category at the higher functional level, where the word is regarded

- 4) syntactically, as a unit incorporating the lower grammatical element of morpheme, and capable of functioning in combination, as constituents of the higher ranks of group, clause and sentence.

In the, then novel, anti-romantic ethic of the French Symbolists and their successors, particularly evident in the excited and exciting manifestos of the Futurists, Spatialists and Dadaists, (who, without doubt provided the immediate stimulus and opportunity

for concrete poetry to develop,) there is another use to account for, where the word is intended

5) metaphorically, as a paradigm of language in general.

This last category, outside the conventional domain of literary and linguistic usage and reference, provides the key to many of the following examples.

03. Marcel Duchamp, crucial figure in any discussion of Modernism or post-modernistic theory, has lately expressed these opinions:

As soon as we start putting our thoughts into words and sentences everything gets distorted.

He nevertheless continues putting them into words and sentences, doubtless aware of the irony:

Language is just no damn good - I use it because I have to, but I don't put any trust in it. We never understand each other. Once I became interested in that group of philosophers in England, the ones who argue that all language tends to become tautological and therefore meaningless. I even tried to read that book of theirs on 'The Meaning of Meaning'. I couldn't read it, of course, couldn't understand a word. But I agree with their idea that only a sentence like "the coffee is black" has any meaning - only the fact directly perceived by the senses. The minute you get beyond that, into abstractions, you are lost.⁴

Henri Chopin, the eminent concrete poet, writing on "Why I am the author of sound poetry and free poetry", in 1967, makes a very similar comment on the inadequacy of language for all but the most trivial of communications:

The Word today serves no-one except to say to the grocer; give me a pound of lentils.⁵

This belief in the tiredness of language and linguistic usage had featured as a central issue for the French Symbolist poets, hence the experiments of Mallarmé, Valéry and the following generation of French and English writers. Futurism, Marinetti in particular, developed this concept of "Parole in libertà", which demands:

IMMEDIATE DISAPPEARANCE OF ALL INTELLECTUAL SENTIMENTALISM (which corresponds to amorous sentimentalism in the field of sensuality) WHICH GATHERS ROUND THE WORD INSPIRATION. Since the puerility of the idea that a work of art must move us has already been demonstrated, there is a superjustified case for a work that is lucid, cold-minded, lazy even, smiling and based on a given theme: e.g. given 43 substantives, 9 infinitive verbs, 12 atmospheric adjectives, 3 prepositions, 13 articles and 25 mathematical or musical signs, create a masterpiece of words in freedom using only these.⁶

Similar are the concerns of the Spatialists and Lettristes.

The antecedents of concrete poetry could be traced back through this epoch, through Medieval art forms, through early oriental cultures and beyond, but to do this is to misunderstand cause and effect elements in the texts, whose antiquarian echoes are often purely retrospective. It is in Dada that the immediate stimulus and example can be found, in the Dadaist approach to all art in general, and, more particularly, in their poetry, which was a later development from their theoretical base. The "phonetic", "optophonetic" and "logically consistent" poetries are of particular relevance.

Hugo Ball, an initiator of the declaimed abstract poetry made this observation,

The human figure is progressively disappearing from pictorial art, and no object is present except in fragmentary form. This is one more proof that the human countenance has become ugly and outworn and that things which surround us have become objects of revulsion. The next step is for poetry to discard language as painting has discarded the object, and for similar reasons.

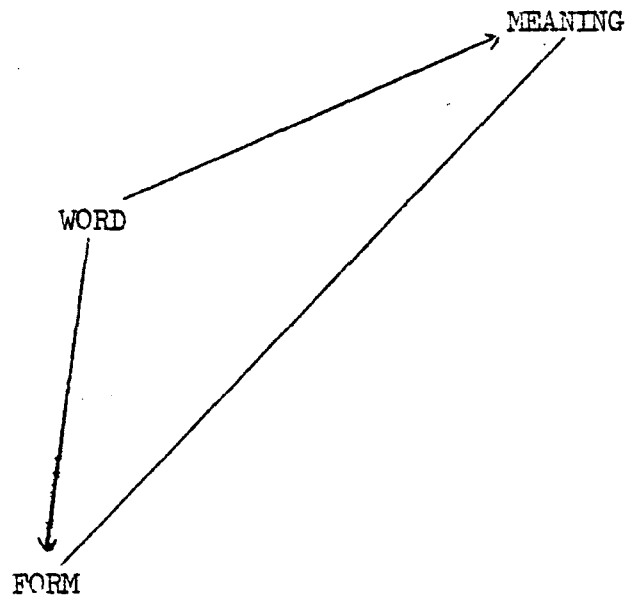
He refers, like Duchamp and Chopin above, to the outworn, impotent language of current usage,

In these phonetic poems, we want to abandon a language ravaged and laid barren by journalism. We must return to the deepest alchemy of the Word, and leave even that behind us, in order to keep safe for poetry its holiest sanctuary.⁷

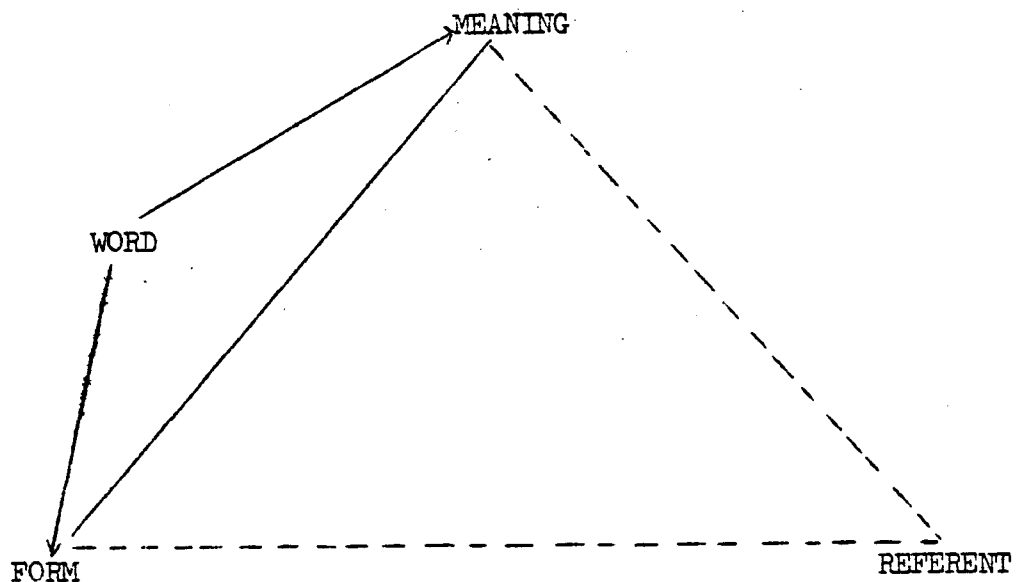
With this in mind, he staged the first performance of "gadji beri bimba" at the Dada gallery of the Bahnhofstrasse Zurich in June 1917, amidst near-riotous conditions, apparently. Unfortunately, the orthography gives little indication of the method of delivery, but considering the earlier orations of manifestos, the admitted later return to incantation, it is not difficult to conjecture the general overall atmosphere, though lacking the detail.

gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori
 gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa lautitalomini
 gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim
 gadjama tuffm i zinzalla binban gligia wowolimai bin beri ban
 o katalominal rhinocerosola hapsamen laulitalomini hoooo gadjama
 rhinocerosola hopsamen
 bluku terullala blaulala looooo....

The Phonetic poem is, however, notably structured at word rank, conceptually, visually and phonemically. The lack of diacritics here is partially compensated for by the traditional lineation. So Ball's attempted solution to the tiredness of everyday language for poetic purposes is to try and break the connection between form and referent, which, in terms of our original diagram may be represented thus:



but, perhaps more usefully thus:



It is interesting, and important, however, that there are strong hints of established and significant words and morphemes too, with very clearly recognisable referents e.g. "rhino" or "blau" or "seman". It is worth noting too that the phonetically irrelevant "h" of "rhino" is retained as an orthographic clue to a pre-existing word. In the end, it is this tension between the familiar and strange that gives the poem its particularly powerful effect.

Hausman, hoping to establish a chronology for this type of experiment⁸ cites as a pre-cursor, this poem of Scheerbart's, dated 1900:

Kikakoku!
 Ekoloraps!
 Wiso kollipanda opolosa.
 Ipassata ih fuo.
 Kikakoku proklinthe peteh.
 Nikifili mopa lexio intipaschi benekaffro propsa
 pi! propsa pi!
 Jasollu nosaressa flipsei.
 Ankarotto passakrussar Kikakoku.
 Nupsa pusch?
 Kikakoku buluru?
 Futufukka - propsa pi!
 Jasollu...⁹

Although not committed to the same poetic ideology as Ball, Scheerbart has, in fact been more successful in eliminating probable reference. The diacritical marks, here, provide useful intonational and metrical clues, but, these, together with the scarcely bizarre phonetic combinations, the careful structuring of the text - made especially prominent by the lack of familiar "content", provide the reader with an artifact familiarly styled.

Morgenstern, professedly ignorant of this poem, wrote one similar in 1905:

Kroklokwaenzi! Semememi?
 Seiokrontro - prafriplo:
 Bifzi, Bafzi, Hulalomi:
 quasti besti bo...
 Lalu lalu lalu lalu la!¹⁰

Again, visual clues are important, providing a substantial connection between this poetry and the "optophonetic" poetry of Hausman which uses varying type, both face and size, as an extension of the usual conventions for expressing performative sound in the visual medium. Here this is intended to emulate aspects of a musical score, indicating mainly variations in volume and intensity. Here too, one might consider poems like

Morgenstern's "fisches nachgesang" and Man Ray's "Dumb Poem", where the form involves a diagrammatical representation of the abstract concept of the sign and the poem, again removing the arbitrary referent.

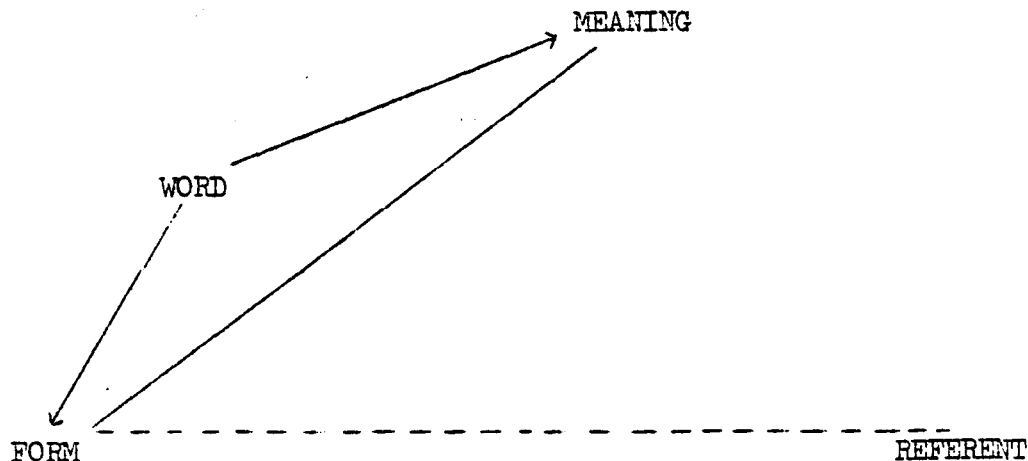
In Paris-Dada, a different, yet related, line of revitalisation is evident. Again, phonic substance is emphasised, though traditional word form is maintained. Jean Piere Brisset, working in a style reminiscent of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Lautréamont, was producing richly sonorous poems, relying on familiar words, but allowing the overall meaning of the text to take a subsidiary place to the manipulation of the phonemic characteristics of each successive line, and its relationship to the line preceding:

les dents, la bouche
 les dents là bouchent
 l'aidant la bouche
 l'aide en la bouche
 l'aides dans la bouche
 lait dans la bouche.
 - - - - -
 Les dants - là bouche.¹¹

Marcel Duchamp is more adventurous, if less formally restrained, using a similar technique. Here he achieves an alienation effect in that the poem is using techniques familiar to traditional poetic craft; lexical items in word groups being chosen for their appropriateness to the phonetic design of the whole. Here these effects are foregrounded in that the discourse as a whole is semantically bizarre.

Paroi parée de paresse de paroisse
 A charge de revanche et a verge de rechange
 sacre de printemps, crasse de tympan
 Daily lady cherche démêlés
 Avec Daily Mail.¹²

The use of words in this way, despite their unremarkable syntactic properties may be represented thus:



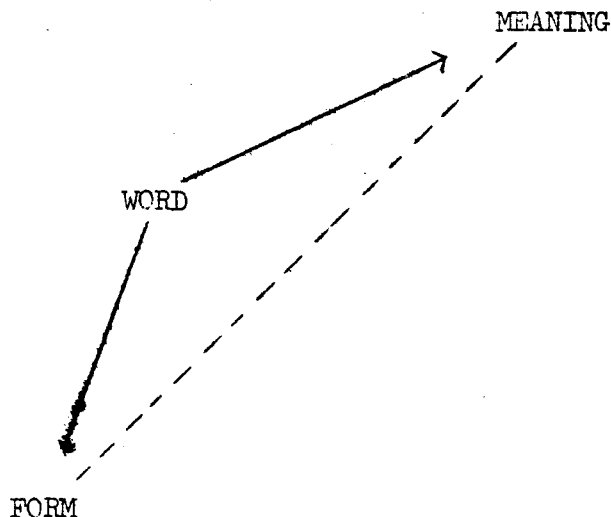
The above innovations have obvious repercussions in the texts of concrete poems. It was Kurt Schwitters, however, who presented another Dadaist attempt to solve the "language problem". He recognised the achievement of the abstract phonetic poets in progressing from the outworn mode of Romantic poetry, but wanted, himself, to create artifacts whose word forms were still farther removed from any referent:

Abstract poetry released the word from its associations - this is a great service - and evaluated word against word and in particular, concept against concept, with some thought paid to the sound. This has more logical consistency than the evaluation of the 'poetic feeling', but it is not logical enough. The end pursued by abstract poetry is pursued, logically, by Dadaist painters, who, in their pictures, evaluate object against object by sticking or nailing them down side by side. Concepts are easier to evaluate in this way than they are when signified indirectly by words.

His own concept of "logically consistent" poetry is formulated thus:

Logically consistent poetry is made up of letters. Letters have no conceptual content. Letters have no sound in themselves, they only contain the possibility of sounds, which may be interpreted by the performer. A logically consistent poem evaluates letters and groups of letters against each other.¹³

For Schwitters, letters instead of words become the paradigm of language, because it is letters which are the smallest physical unit of visually perceived and standardised words. So, here, the basic diagram may be further pared in this way:



For fruitful development, it is necessary to turn now to the Second de Stijl manifesto of 1920. Van Doesburg, it is important to establish, had been closely associated with late Dada, and with Schwitters in particular. This manifesto seeks to revitalise the word by exploring other, more freely constructive channels:

THE WORD IS DEAD
 THE WORD IS IMPOTENT
 asthmatic and sentimental poetry
 the 'me' and 'it'
 which is still in common use
 everywhere ...
 is influenced by an individualism fearful of space
 the dregs of an exhausted era...
 psychological analysis
 and clumsy rhetoric
 have KILLED THE MEANING OF THE WORD ...
 the word must be reconstructed
 to follow the sound as well as
 the IDEA
 if in the old poetry
 by the dominance of relative and
 subjective feelings
 the intrinsic meaning of the word is destroyed
 we want by all possible means
 syntax
 prosody
 typography
 arithmetic
 orthography
 to give new meaning to the word and new force to expression

the duality between poetry and prose can no longer
 be maintained
 thus for the modern writer form will have a directly
 spiritual meaning
 it will not describe events
 it will not describe at all
 but ESCRIBE
 it will recreate in the word the common meaning of
 events
 a constructive unity of form and content.¹⁴

It is this attitude, the use of "all possible means", that makes room for the vital expansion in the theory and practice of concrete poetry. The destructive aspect of the early phonetic poetry, by aiming to sever the form/referent relationship, had limited possible creative courses to the manipulation of a basic design. Let us now consider some extracts from the statements of those whom Stephen Bann calls "the first generation" of concrete poets.¹⁵ Their methodology, whilst

restrictive in comparison with traditional poetry's exploitation of language, leaves scope for much experiment. Fahlström and Gorringer, two of the acknowledged father figures of the movement, do not choose to destroy the semantic charge of individual words, believing that they may function equally remarkably in new, and therefore marked syntactic structures, and thus re-focused may enrich the reader's perceptions of language and poetic structure outside the context of the individual poem. Gorringer writes:

I find it wisest to stay with the word, even with the usual meanings of the word. By doing this I hope, in spite of the apparent scarcity of my words as compared to the verbosity of non-concrete poetry, to stay in continuity with poetry that emphasises formal pattern.¹⁶

As even the few examples of experimental poetry given above may demonstrate, the usual form of the word is not an essential pre-requisite for formal pattern. It is clear, however, that Gorringer wishes to retain not specific referents, but the possibility of relating the signs in his poems to general and concrete concepts, available, however inadequately, to the semantic interpretive systems of his readers:

First it seemed important to me to isolate and present the already existing word (so as to remain within a reasonable area of communication.)¹⁷

Fahlström is concerned with retaining known and used forms, similarly, but with re-arranging their contextual situations to startle the reader into a new perceptive awareness of both the material, the act of reading, and linguistic convention in general:

Squeeze the language material: that is what can be titled concrete. Do not squeeze the whole structure only; as soon as possible begin with the smallest elements, letters and words. Throw the letters around as in anagrams.¹⁸

In the poetry of Fahlström and Gorringer, in many ways only tentative explorations when compared with work of their followers, it is not the word as such that is exploited, but the readers' traditional textual expectations. Thus it is syntactic relationships that functionally determine the creative process. The finished article is aimed at illuminating the reader's awareness of all elements, compounds and syntactical systems used in the

language, which have previously been unquestioned. Thus Fahlström says:

The elements were not new; but the newly formed context yielded a new material.¹⁹

He sees the poet's function as that of intermediary questioner, as he forms original groupings, exploring both grammatical and spatial syntax, thus implicitly criticising the limitations of conventional poetry, whilst explicitly offering a constructivist alternative. As questioner, however, he does not offer answers, but the opportunity for the reader to educate himself from the artist's stimulus:

...putting well-known words into such realised strange connections that you undermine the reader's security in the holy context between the word and its meaning and make him feel that conventional meanings are quite as much or as little arbitrary as the dictated new meanings.²⁰

It is important to emphasize here, that it is still the semantic aspect that is the central issue. Later concrete theorists enlarge the "making strange" approach to incorporate an awareness of structures qua structures. A quotation from Pierre Garnier will serve as one of the many illustrations of this trend:

they [concrete poets] isolate language, modify it, upsetting it, liberating thus its profound vitality they create new structures - (acoustic as well as visual, syntactic as well as semantic) provoking the appearance of hitherto unknown situations and putting man into a permanent environment of creation.²¹

Returning to a consideration of the first generation of concrete poets, it is the other main complementary source of concrete poetry, the initiatory Brazilian poets, Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Decio Pignatari, who take up more fully the aims of de Stijl.; the use of all possible opportunities available in language-use to reinforce a given message. In their pilot plan they write:

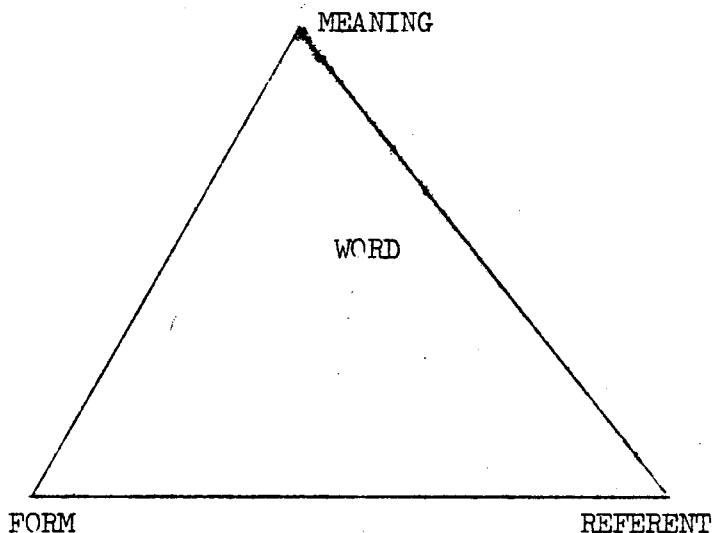
Its material: word (sound, visual form, semantical charge.) Its problem: a problem of functions, relations of this to material. Factors of proximity and similitude, gestalt psychology. Rhythm: relational force. Concrete poem, by using the phonetical system (digits) and analogical syntax, creates a specific linguistic area -

verbivocovisual - which shares the advantages of non-verbal communication, without giving up the word's virtualities.... a general art of the word.²²

The "general art of the word" is what mainstream concrete poetry became. It would be useful at this point to recall the three categories with which we began, where the word is considered 1) semantically, or 2) phonetically, or 3) orthographically. For concrete poetry these can no longer be seen as independent, discrete units. A concrete poem, wishing to represent the semantic content of its words, must do so by conscious manipulation of its orthographic or phonetic qualities, as Max Bense writes:

To be understood concretely a word must be taken at its word. All art is concrete which uses material functionally and not symbolically.²³

Our original semiotic triangle might be adapted thus:



Developments in concrete poetry have extended the range of choice much farther, however, using aspects of all our original categories, independently or in permutation. Bense makes this quite explicit:

The word is not used primarily as a carrier of meaning. Beyond that it is used in such a way that meaning and structure reciprocally express and determine each other. Simultaneity of the semantic and aesthetic functions of words occurs on the basis of simultaneous exploitation of all the material dimensions of the

linguistic elements which of course, can also appear to be broken up into syllables, sounds, morphemes or letters to express the aesthetic dependence of the language upon their analytical and syntactical possibilities.²⁴

In re-considering category four, where the word is regarded syntactically, we can compare Gomringer's rather limited view of the constellation, which one might correctly evaluate as very early concrete, with Bense's more objective, but related statement which follows below:

The constellation is the simplest 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.²⁵

This is a kind of poetry which produces neither the semantic nor the aesthetic sense of its elements, words, for example, through the traditional formation of linear and grammatically ordered contexts, but which insists upon visual and surface connectives. So it is not the awareness of words following after one another that is its primary constructive principle, but perception of their togetherness.²⁶

Any group of two or more words placed together automatically form a syntactic relationship. Concrete poetry, however, can provide extra-grammatical syntax, perhaps spatial or positional, to augment the grammatical structures from which a word group cannot escape.

In concrete poetry, the word, in this case representing language, is not used as elsewhere as a means to a communicative end, but ideally, as form, content and poetic referent simultaneously, thus using poetic material in a way comparable to the use of fundamental materials in other creative media, as poet and critic John Sharkey says:

In concrete poetry, words can be presented in their totality. In practical terms this meant that the material itself was a valid source of inspiration and communication, a situation long ago accepted in other art forms.²⁷

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