

A CREATIVE PROJECT PAPER FOR LIFE,  
A PROGRAM OF CONCRETE POETRY

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## Chapter 1

### IMPORTANCE, JUSTIFICATION, AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Since World War II, there have been several kinds of innovations and experiments which are radically changing the writing of poetry throughout the world and increasing this art form's potential for expression and communication. There is a tendency by the general public to indiscriminately label these many kinds of experimental poetry "concrete."<sup>1</sup>

Concrete poetry is defined as an intermedium between poetry and painting.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of the poem arises from ". . . the juxtaposition of fragmentation of the words or letters on the page."<sup>3</sup> However, non-linguistic objects may be used instead of language, but they function in a way related to the semantic character of words. Generally, the concrete poet is interested in making an

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Ellen Solt (ed.), Concrete Poetry: A World View (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Lavonne Mueller, "Concrete Poetry: Creative Writing for All Students," English Journal, 58 (October, 1969), 1053.

<sup>3</sup>Books, "Hey Doodle Doodle," Time, 91 (April 12, 1968), 98.

object to be perceived instead of read.<sup>4</sup> Concrete poetry has many origins: the early Christian anagrams, Chinese picture writing, and George Herrick's picture poems.<sup>5</sup>

Concrete poetry holds significance for the poet, the reader, the director, and the teacher.

The poet sees many values in concrete poetry. He sees it as a release from the old grammatical-syntactical structures which are not suitable for the advanced thought and communication processes of our age. To him, concrete poetry is ". . . a form or, it is more likely, forms organic to the nature of our own world which, rather than being walled in, extends itself outward into space."<sup>6</sup> The concrete poet tries to free the poem of its continual reference to ideas and to make it an object worthy for its own sake.<sup>7</sup>

The concrete poem, they [the concrete poets] contend, by liberating words from meaningless, worn-out grammatical connections, cleans up language; and by means of its orderly method, it places a control upon the flow of emotions, thus creating a distance from the poem that allows the poet as man actively perceiving and articulating his experience to examine and consider the quality of his human materials.<sup>8</sup>

Concrete poetry is also valuable to the reader and the director. Upon first seeing a concrete poem,

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<sup>4</sup>Solt, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Mueller, 1053.

<sup>6</sup>Solt, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>Solt, pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup>Solt, p. 59.

one often reacts with complete bewilderment. However, this writer's experience has proven that usually the work conveys a feeling which, after considerable thought, develops into something more substantial. The job of the director is to first, interpret the poem; and second, after the brainstorming just mentioned, to evolve a method of putting it on stage in a way which enables the audience to literally see it. For example, this writer viewed a performance of the poem "Epithalamium II" by Pedro Xisto. The work appears like this on paper:



Figure 1

"Epithalamium II"  
by Pedro Xisto<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Pedro Xisto, "Epithalamium II," in Anthology of Concretism, ed. Eugene Wildman (2d ed.; Chicago: Swallow Press, 1969), 120-21.



Two male actors stood in almost a vertical line at the center of the stage and softly one began making the sound of the letter "H." The other sounded out the letter "E." The sounds became louder while, at the same time, the two actors became increasingly self-assertive in the way they stood. Eventually, the "H" and "E" sounds melded to form the word "He," and each grabbed the other's hand. At that moment two females entered, one from each side of the stage, and curled themselves around the legs of the males, forming the letter "S." They each began sounding out the letter and with their hands made snake-like movements upwards to the males. Soon the self-assertion of the males weakened, the females rose up to them, and the two couples embraced. The work ended with the utterance of the word "She" by the actors.

In this instance, the director created a story around the poem, and dramatized it; while, at the same time, he made certain that the audience "saw" the poem on the stage. Working with concrete poetry, in this way, thus, demands a great deal of imagination on the part of director and actor. Unlike the choreographer or the director of conventional theatre, the director of concrete poetry begins with a "script" that is extremely abstract: the poem itself.

Finally, concrete poetry is also significant to the teacher. Since concretism is basically a

visual<sup>10</sup> expression, the writing of concrete poems is useful for individuals of all levels of academic ability and varied interests.<sup>11</sup> Emphasis on the sense of sight aligns well with the visual world of the adolescent. This kind of poetry increases his awareness of the immense amount of printed words that constantly bombards him.<sup>12</sup> Concrete poetry is attractive to the slow student who has problems in verbal fluency, to the average student who has some knowledge of poetical devices, and to the above average student who is interested in linguistic devices.<sup>13</sup> This type of poetry can give the teacher insight into the student's attitudes toward words and ideas.<sup>14</sup>

In choosing the poems to be included in the presentation, the researcher was concerned with the exemplification of a specific theme. Her goal was to embody through concrete poetry the progression of mankind from his beginnings through today's highly complex world, and to point out the cyclic nature of this progression. The progression is cyclic in that as man's world becomes increasingly technological, he has a greater need to

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<sup>10</sup>Even the auditory symbols of a concrete poem derive their significance from their physical location on the page.

<sup>11</sup>Mueller, 1053.

<sup>12</sup>Mueller, 1056.

<sup>13</sup>Mueller, 1055.

<sup>14</sup>Mueller, 1056.

revert back to his beginnings, to the simpler, more fundamental truths. This writer contends that this goal is particularly relevant to today's college audience. These people have found themselves almost smothered by the complexity of the world; and, consequently, are returning to the more basic elements of life, such as religion and nature. The rejuvenation of interest in romantic and non-controversial films, books, and television programs indicates this trend in simplicity. For example, the "quiz shows" are returning to popularity. Another example is the overwhelming success of Erich Segal's current film, Love Story. As a recent article in Time magazine states,

Ali [MacGraw] and half a dozen other handsome new faces . . . represent a return to something basic in the U. S. cinema. To a fresh flowering of the romance and sentimentalism of the '30s and '40s. To a time when pictures told a story, when you could go to the movies and take the family, when you could lose yourself in fantasy, when you got chills at the final fadeout.<sup>15</sup>

In order to amplify the theme of her program, this writer utilized transitional commentary pointing out this progression of mankind from his beginnings to our highly technological world, and back to the simpler, more fundamental truths. This commentary was in the form of prose written cooperatively by two other students and this writer.

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<sup>15</sup>Show Business, "Ali MacGraw: A Return to Basics," Time, 97 (January 11, 1971), 40.

The secondary goal of this writer was to familiarize the public with concrete poetry. By "public," this director is referring to the cast as well as to the audience. She hoped that through participating in this project, the actors would become involved in a new kind of training experience, an experience that would increase their competency as actors. The audience, meanwhile, would be introduced to something new and challenging to its imagination. This writer felt that the innovative nature of concrete poetry, coupled with the novelty of dramatizing it on the stage, would be appealing to a college audience. Young people are usually more receptive to new ideas than older people.

This writer first came into contact with concrete poetry during the summer of 1970, as part of the course in readers' theatre offered at this college. At this time, she received information regarding this kind of poetry through lectures and directed one concrete poem. In the advanced oral interpretation course, she also directed and participated in a concrete poem. This writer has had responsibility for the entire production of a play during the time she taught, and also has had other experience in directing. While majoring in drama as an undergraduate, she worked in all phases of theatre.

The researcher has read several sources on the subject of concrete poetry. She has consulted anthologies of this poetry, as well as works discussing the history

and nature of this art form, and those concerned with its value to the teacher. This writer's sources are listed in the bibliography. She utilized Mary Ellen Solt's Concrete Poetry: A World View and Eugene Wildman's Anthology of Concretism as the sources for the poems included in the program. This writer consulted Miss Solt's work for most of her information concerning the nature of concrete poetry. This book also included brief discussions of the poems by their authors, some of which proved useful to this director in her staging of the selections.

This writer is certain that this particular program of concrete poetry has not been presented in the past since she selected the works to be included in the production, and the particular theme they were to illustrate.

## Chapter 2

### STATEMENT OF THE PROJECT

This project involved the presentation of a 50-minute program of concrete poetry. The production dates were March 29-31, 1971, and the location was the Gallery Theatre in the Humanities Building of the Kansas State Teachers College.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

By "presentation," this writer includes the selection of the poems, their interpretation, the casting, the rehearsing, and the performance of all other tasks relating to the production. The latter part of this statement refers to the acquiring and/or utilization of the make-up, costumes, properties, scenery, lights, and special equipment (such as the tape recorder, projector, and screen).

### LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

The project was limited in the areas of costumes, make-up, properties, and scenery. The aim of the activity was to achieve most effects desired through the actors themselves.

The director had two reasons for this emphasis on the performers. First, the challenge to the director and to the cast was greater than it would have been if the director had relied on the technical aspects of the production to achieve certain effects. Instead, the actors used their bodies and voices in ways they had never used them before. Second, the director did not have a great deal of experience in technical theatre.

The fact that the program took place in the Gallery Theatre also placed severe limitations on the amount of flexibility available. However, as previously stated, the director was more concerned with using the performers to achieve the best results possible. The scenic effects aimed at suggestion, serving only to heighten the emotion of the particular poem, or to aid in the audience's understanding of it.

## Chapter 3

### PROCEDURES

#### ORGANIZATION AND PLANS TO DEAL WITH THE PROJECT

##### Steps Followed in the Project

The first step of the procedure that was followed in the study was choosing the concrete poems and deciding on the order of their presentation. The director's goal of presenting the progression of mankind from his beginnings to our highly complex world, and back to the simpler, more fundamental truths had a great effect on her choice of poems.

She selected an untitled poem by Décio Pignatari to begin the program because this selection conveys the spirit of a birth, or of a beginning.<sup>16</sup> Within the director's thematic scheme, the birth is that of mankind.

"The Creation of Eve," by Ernst Jandl, was the second poem; and the director chose it to indicate the entrance of woman.<sup>17</sup> She also chose it to reveal the simple, almost naïve, relationship of two lovers.

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<sup>16</sup> See Figure 2, page 37.

<sup>17</sup> See Figure 3, page 38.



This writer selected "Epithalamium III," by Pedro Xisto, as the next work because it reveals a change from the simplicity and romance depicted in the prior poem to the complexity and problems of married life.<sup>18</sup> The director used a satirical approach toward the staging of the poem, thus injecting some humor into the program at a point where she felt it was necessary.

She decided on an untitled selection by Haroldo de Campos to follow Xisto's poem.<sup>19</sup> This writer chose this concrete poem to indicate the continuing trend of mankind toward complexity. The work reveals man's search for the meaning of life.

This writer selected Ian Hamilton Finlay's "Poster Poem" to reveal the circus-like nature of our lives today.<sup>20</sup>

The director decided on "Individualista," by Ladislav Novák, as the next work because it depicts the loss of identity so prevalent in our highly civilized world.<sup>21</sup> This poem also provided some comic relief.

The next work, Bernard Heidsieck's "The Penetration," indicates technology invading the private lives of individuals; but, the poem approaches the problem in a humorous fashion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Figure 4, page 39.

<sup>19</sup> See page 40.

<sup>20</sup> See Figure 5, page 41.

<sup>21</sup> See page 42.

<sup>22</sup> See pages 43-45.

The director chose "Astrodome," by Edwin Morgan, because, through satire, it makes a very strong attack against the artificiality of our world.<sup>23</sup>

Through utilizing Václav Havel's "Estrangement," the director returned to the problem of losing one's identity, and to that of the fear of facing one's self.<sup>24</sup> She interpreted the work as saying that inner peace will result if one does accept himself.

This writer selected "The <sup>Old</sup> <sub>New</sub>," by Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, because it deals with another problem that exists today: the generation gap.<sup>25</sup> In the poem, however, the young and the old are not saying anything different.

The director chose Edwin Morgan's "The Computer's First Christmas Card" due to the humorous way it reveals the role of machines in our society.<sup>26</sup>

She selected an untitled work by John Furnival to indicate how the complexities of the world necessitate a reversal to more fundamental values.<sup>27</sup> In the case of this poem, war leads to a growing reliance on religion for comfort.

This writer composed the final selection of the program, "The Return," because she could not locate a poem

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<sup>23</sup> See page 46.

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 6, page 47.

<sup>25</sup> See pages 48-49.

<sup>26</sup> See page 50.

<sup>27</sup> See Figure 7, page 51.

that conveyed the idea she desired.<sup>28</sup> She intended the work to reveal a reversal to simplicity as a reaction to our technological world.

The next step that was followed was asking the technical director of the Gallery Theatre for cooperation in preparing for the production. He granted this cooperation.

The researcher formulated ideas regarding the interpretation and staging of the poems. She then held auditions.

The auditions involved individual and group improvisations and pantomimes. The director held the auditions in this way because she wanted actors who were imaginative and who could use their bodies well.

The rehearsals were experimental at first in order to determine the most effective methods for presenting the poetry. This writer's previous experience in working with concrete poetry had shown the necessity of formulating an idea of the effect desired for the particular poem, along with the steps to be utilized to gain the desired effect. However, during the actual rehearsal period, these steps are often altered when more desirable ones are found. For example, an actor may arrive at a more effective way to perform a poem.

The director and the cast rehearsed a small number of poems during each period. A typical rehearsal was a

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<sup>28</sup>See page 52.

session involving Pignatari's untitled work, and two other poems.<sup>29</sup> The cast and the director had approached Pignatari's work at a previous session, and the actors had had difficulty in achieving the vocal effects that were desired by the director. Therefore, at this rehearsal, they listened to a recording of the Swingle Singers. The cast sang with the record, and also attempted various vocal effects alone. The record did not aid the actors as much as the director had hoped. She then asked the cast to sound out the word "life," with each actor using a different rhythm and pitch level. She asked them to gradually meld these various rhythms into the same rhythm. She requested that they sit up in a circle holding hands. In order to increase the pulsating effect, she told them to expand and contract their bodies. One of the actresses sat in the center of the circle, and pounded on the floor, simulating a heart beat. Through the utilization of the methods described in this paragraph, the director arrived at the effect she desired: a building process culminating in the birth of an individual.

Eventually, the final method of presenting each poem in the program evolved; and, from then on, it was a matter of perfecting each method. Near the production date, the poems were rehearsed in their order of presentation.

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<sup>29</sup>See Figure 2, page 37.

### Tools Employed in the Project

The only tools that were employed in the production were an overhead projector, a screen, and a tape recorder. The construction of scenery was not necessary.

### Anticipated Problems and Possible Solutions

Before starting the project, this writer foresaw certain problems relating to it. Based on her own past difficulties, perhaps the major obstacle she noted was, simply, what to do with the poems. Sometimes ideas come immediately; but, often one has a feeling about the work, but cannot turn it into something concrete. The researcher hypothesized two possible solutions to the problem.

First, she noted the value of experimenting with different ideas during the rehearsals. Second, she proposed the avoidance of sitting down and staring at the poems waiting for the ideas to flow forward. She saw, rather, the usefulness of going about one's normal activities while waiting for the "inspiration" to come.

This writer anticipated another problem, although it was of a less serious nature. This was the lack of knowledge of concrete poetry on the part of some students. However, she felt this problem could be fairly easily overcome through the use of explanation and example.

This writer expected a third problem. The difficulty was her lack of experience in using certain tools to carry out a desired effect. For example, one of

the poems required a good deal of taping. The researcher planned to solve this enigma by turning to others who know about such matters for help.

#### ACTUAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE PREPARATION OF THE PROJECT

This writer encountered certain problems during the preparation of the project. She had anticipated some of these difficulties, while others were unexpected. This writer will present the problems first, and will discuss their solutions in the following section.

The first problem the director faced was that no one came to auditions the first night.

The second rehearsal involved a situation that occurred a number of times later. The cast and director discussed the specific work being rehearsed, and agreed on its meaning. They could not, however, arrive at an effective way of staging the poem. The director had planned one way to stage the selection, but the method could not be used due to limitations of space. She should have formulated alternative methods.

The third rehearsal brought another difficulty. The problem also related to arriving at means of staging the poems. The cast and the director realized the necessity of discussing a work's meaning before trying to stage the work, but these discussions often became too laborious. A conflict arose as to whether we would arrive at more

ideas regarding the staging of the poems through talking about them or through trying physical things with them.

The writing of the narration also entailed some problems. The director wanted material that would link the poems together smoothly, but not a narration that was too didactic or too blatant. The individuals to whom she turned for help in writing the narration initially misunderstood what she desired. Even when she clarified things, however, the director did not feel she received adequate cooperation from them. Although the director feels that she was specific in her requests, she notes that she may not have been specific enough.

Many of the difficulties this writer encountered related to the technical aspects of the production. These problems were often due to her lack of experience in this area, as had been expected. They were also due to the fact that she had not been properly informed by the graduate committee regarding the delegation of responsibilities.

In reference to the delegation of responsibilities, this writer was told by the costume department that they would make or provide her with whatever she needed. She had not been informed of this fact by her committee, and discovered it at a point when there was not enough time to do anything about it. This writer, therefore, was forced to order clothes through local retail stores.

The making of the master tape became a very tedious task due to the director's unfamiliarity with splicing and the other specifics involved in taping.

The final major problem involved the length of the program. One week before the first performance, the director timed the thirteen poems and narration. The result was a production of under thirty minutes in length. This length was considerably shorter than had been expected.

#### SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The fact that no one came to the auditions the first night resulted in an intensive publicity campaign to generate interest in the program. The director spoke to several speech classes, explaining and demonstrating concrete poetry, as well as simply announcing when the auditions were. She followed other similar methods and extended the number of nights the auditions were held. These efforts improved the situation sufficiently, but not overwhelmingly. The director eventually chose the following people to be in the program: Mary Duiker, Cathy Sears, Steve Finley, Bob Miller, Diana Barnes, Margaret Bertels, and Kevin Rues as the narrator.

The difficulty in arriving at effective ways of staging the poems did not have any single solution. Thinking about the selections outside of the actual rehearsal time often gave this writer new insights. Basically, however, the process she followed was one of



trial-and-error; she attempted ideas, and then either accepted or rejected them depending on their effectiveness. The actors were a major source of new ideas. The director found that, generally, she arrived at more ideas regarding the staging of the poems through having the actors try physical things, rather than through discussing the works with them. A certain degree of discussion was, certainly, necessary; but, this writer recalls several occasions when she had to direct the situation into one of trying physical things with the poetry.

The problem in gaining cooperation for the writing of the narration was never completely solved. The director did find, however, that she ultimately had to turn to herself for the kind of narration she desired. Although she realizes that it was her responsibility to unify the concept of the production, the director had turned to others due to her lack of experience in creative writing. Generally, she was able to reach her goal of a narrative that would clearly link the poems, and would reveal the speaker as a spokesman for all of mankind. The material remained, however, too direct.

The problem relating to the costumes for the program necessitated a compromise-solution. The catalogs published by the local retail stores did not contain what the director had in mind: a simple, black tunic and pants outfit, with long sleeves and a V-shaped neckline. She preferred this type of costume because it would be

unobtrusive, and because it would not limit the actors' movement. The men ultimately had to wear black pants and black polo shirts. The women wore black slacks and black tops, which had mock turtleneck collars.

With regard to the making of the master tape, this writer did the entire taping; but, she secured the aid of another student to do the splicing.

The problem involving the length of the program was solved by the addition of musical interludes between the poems, as well as the expansion of certain action within the works themselves. This writer will evaluate the effect of the music later, but she felt that an audience that was unfamiliar with concrete poetry would need some time to reflect upon each selection before witnessing the next one. The director saw the possibility of total confusion if there were no breaks within a program comprised of thirteen concrete poems.

#### METHODS FOR INTERPRETATION

The director evaluated her work on the basis of the comments of the committee, the cast, the audience, and on the basis of her own ideas. She utilized three categories of questions as the criteria for the evaluation of this project. These questions are located in the appendix. They were divided according to who performed the rating: the graduate committee, the cast, and the director. This writer discussed the questions to be

answered by the graduate committee with each of its members individually. After the performance, she had the cast answer its questions through the use of a written questionnaire. She also asked the members of the audience to remain after the program in order to discover, through discussion, their reactions to it. She recorded their comments on tape.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Evaluation

As previously noted, the evaluation presented in this section is the result of the weighing of a number of factors.

This evaluation deals with five major areas:

the conduction of the rehearsals, the selection and staging of the poems, the function of the narrator, the effectiveness of the acting, and the use of technical effects.

With regard to the rehearsals, many of the cast members felt that the director should have had a clearer idea regarding how she wanted to stage the poems prior to the rehearsals themselves. This writer agrees with her cast on this point. She lost time that could have been used to perfect the performance of the selections due to this lack of planning. The director does feel, however, that she knew what her goals for each session were; and she did make a point of informing the cast of these goals. The cast members and the director felt that most of the

time the aims of each rehearsal were reached, and they agreed that the rehearsals were organized.

The cast disagreed on the question of staging, some stating that the director did use the available space effectively, and some stating that she did not. One of the members of the latter group suggested the use of platforms, and the group as a whole often pointed out that the actors should have used the audience area on occasion. Some of the members of the audience and one of the committee members stated that they would have liked the actors to participate more directly with them.

The other members of the graduate committee concurred on the question of staging; they felt the director effectively used the available space. Some of the audience members disagreed, however, stating that they had difficulty seeing the poems involving actors on the floor. They suggested that the director should have made greater use of platforms to solve the problem of visibility.

The director agrees that the program would have been more exciting if the actors had made greater use of the audience area. Otherwise, she feels she was successful in her staging of the poems.

The members of the graduate committee agreed that the poems selected demanded a great deal of imagination to stage. The director feels that the very nature of concrete poetry requires creativity. The committee also felt that the poems varied sufficiently in terms of the

different types of concrete poetry. The director also feels that she was successful in presenting various kinds of concrete poetry. The poems ranged from the simple design of "Epithalamium III"<sup>30</sup> to the complex nature of the untitled work by John Furnival.<sup>31</sup> This variety in complexity aided in the attainment of one of the director's stated goals: to introduce the public to concrete poetry. The director also feels that there was enough variety within the poems in terms of lightness balanced with heaviness. As noted by an audience member, however, she feels that a less serious work placed at or near the beginning of the program would have made the production more exciting.

There are, of course, several instances where this writer can envision more effective ways of dealing with the poems. "The Creation of Eve," for example, would have been much more exciting if she had explored the aural aspects of the work, instead of merely presenting the poem as a dance.<sup>32</sup> In many instances, however, she feels she enabled the audience to "see," to hear, and to feel the poems.

The question of the narrator also involves both positive and negative comments. The narration itself served the purpose desired by this writer; it revealed the thoughts of a person who was speaking for all of mankind.

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<sup>30</sup>See Figure 4, page 39.

<sup>31</sup>See Figure 7, page 51.

<sup>32</sup>See Figure 3, page 38.

The difficulty was that the function of the narrator was not clear to the audience. The audience members, some of the actors, and one committee member cited the problem.

The director could have taken several steps to clarify the narrator's function. First, the actor portraying the narrator could have participated more in the poems themselves. Second, the part of the narrator could have been portrayed by all of the actors at different points in the program. Third, the director could have varied the blocking more, and could have done it in such a way that the audience could relate more directly to the narrator. The audience and the actors raised this suggestion. Originally, the actor delivered some of the transitions from seats in the audience; but, due to the difficulties in lighting these areas, the director abandoned this idea. She realized later that the lighting would have been sufficient for her purposes.

The narration was also too direct. One cast member noted the problem and another suggested the utilization of selections from prose, poetry, and drama. The director feels that a narration comprised of such selections would have been more subtle, but would have communicated the ideas that she desired.

With regard to the acting, the cast contributed most of the negative comments. Some of the actors noted that they did not use their bodies and voices as effectively as they could have, and others felt that they were not

believable. Some of the actors also felt that there was not enough tension and energy. All of the actors, however, said that they understood the poems and their parts in them, although not always from the time they began working on them.

Most of the committee members felt that the actors understood the selections and their parts in them, and that, considering their backgrounds, they were believable. One member, however, noted that the performers were not believable in every case. The director also felt the actors lacked credibility on occasion. The two dancers in "The Creation of Eve," for example, did not appear to be genuinely in love.<sup>33</sup> The director had worked on the problem during the rehearsals by stressing the importance of facial expression and concentration. Another point in the program that was not credible was the beginning of "Epithalamium III."<sup>34</sup> The young lovers did not seem realistic in their "hide-and-seek," and other games. The director feels that improvisational work with the actors would have led to greater believability. One of the audience members also brought up the criticism with regard to the dancers, as well as pointing out that he felt the cast was tense at the beginning of the program. Despite the few instances referred to, the acting pleased the director.

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<sup>33</sup>See Figure 3, page 38.

<sup>34</sup>See Figure 4, page 39.

The last area this writer evaluated was one of the most important in terms of the overall success of the production: the use of technical effects. The comments that were made by the audience summarized the problem. They noted that the program lacked spontaneity due to the way the poems were presented. They pointed out that most of the time the same format took place: the narrator delivered his lines, the audience viewed the poem flashed on a screen, the actors performed the work, and the audience again viewed the poem, this time to the accompaniment of music. They also mentioned that they were confused when they did not see certain poems at all. The reason the director did not show some of the poems was that they were works that were not written in a pictorial fashion. They also felt the musical interludes between the poems were too long, and that part of the monotony came from the fact that the poems were always shown in the same place.

This writer maintains that showing each poem before and after it was performed was effective, and the audience members did mention that sometimes they enjoyed seeing the poems for a second time. The director, however, also sees the possibilities that she overlooked. The audience noted that the increased use of sound devices, such as wood blocks, and the employment of various colors and special effects, such as banners to introduce the selections, would have greatly enhanced the production.



One of the cast members made a very valid comment regarding the technical aspects of the production. He noted that although the director's technical background was limited, she should have sought the advice of others in advance, allowed certain people to view the rehearsals for suggestions, and experimented more with her own ideas. Two cast members also pointed out that the director should have tried different kinds of music during the rehearsals, instead of selecting the music a week before the production date. This writer did follow this latter suggestion in some cases, but not in the majority of instances due to the fact that she did not originally plan on using the amount of music found in the final production. The fact that the director used the music as a means of lengthening the program was a serious error on her part.

The members of the graduate committee agreed with the comments that were made by the audience regarding the technical aspects of the production. One individual added that any empathic response from the audience to the program's theme was broken off between the poems, and had to be regenerated at the start of the next selection.

The primary reason for these difficulties in unifying the program was the director's schedule. She worked on individual poems for a considerable portion of the rehearsal period; and then, only one week before the first performance, she rehearsed the entire program as a unit. If she had thought sooner about the production

as a complete whole, rather than as a series of parts, the result would have been a much tighter program.

Despite the many problems she encountered with the creation of the program, and the mistakes she made, the director feels that she did reach her goals. Speaking as audience members, the people in the graduate committee stated that they did perceive the progression of mankind from his birth through today's complicated world, and his subsequent need to return to simplicity. Some of the cast members agreed, while others pointed out that, from their conversations with the audience, some of the people did not understand the theme. The director feels that the majority of the audience did, however. The director also provided a unique educational experience for the many individuals who had no familiarity with concrete poetry, which was another one of her goals.

The writer feels, unquestionably, that she reinforced the validity of concrete poetry in the audience's mind. Both the graduate committee and the cast agreed on this point. Some of the positive points the audience most often raised were the open-ended nature of concrete poetry, the possibility of its use as a rehearsal technique, and the value of such a thought-provoking art form in our passive society.

### Conclusions

Through participating in this endeavor, this writer has grown to realize the limitless possibilities

of this art form. She could have interpreted and staged the poems in countless ways. She also has learned of the many intricacies involved in the production of any theatrical presentation. Furthermore, this writer was very pleased to learn from the comments of the cast that they considered their participation in the program most worthwhile. They mentioned that working with concrete poetry had given them experience in several areas (literary analysis, acting, body movement, and the use of the imagination). They also noted that the importance of teamwork in dealing with concrete poetry had helped them to learn to work with other people.

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## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## APPENDIXES

## NARRATION

The narrator delivered the following lines between the performance of each poem. He did not say anything between the twelfth and thirteenth selections.

1. Life . . . in the beginning . . . identity . . . perfectability . . . identity . . . in the beginning . . . life.
2. Life, you are so beautiful. But, you'd be even better if I could share you with someone.
3. Can this beauty last forever? Or is it only temporary? If it is, will I ever see it again?
4. Sometimes I wish I did not have the ability to think; is it a blessing or a curse? The more I question my significance, the less I find out. Questions . . . no answers . . . ultimate unknowingness.
5. Step right this way, ladies and gentlemen, for the greatest show on earth. Don't pass up your chance to see the only circus ever performed in an arena that can never be exhausted! The only price of admission is your innocence. Step right this way . . . don't be shy. Bring the whole family!
6. Who am I? Maybe if I'm different--I mean really different, I can find myself. But, how can I be really different? I am still a man.

7. This world! If I created it, why is it destroying me? Isn't anything left that is still sacred? Privacy, you're a thing of the past.
8. Get the new Barbi doll. She does everything a real baby does.  
Now you can shampoo-in new hair color in just five minutes.  
This box contains real homemade frosting; all you do is add water.  
As real grass withers at the Astrodome (at Houston, Texas), it is being replaced by astrograss.<sup>35</sup>
9. My mask of artificiality, sometimes you get stuck, and I can't remember what's underneath. And when I find out, I don't recognize it; and I don't trust what I see.
10. The older generation just doesn't see things our way. They don't think we're any different than they were. But look at all the new things we're saying!
11. One thing all generations have in common; just look at this fantastic world we're faced with! Machines are better than ever!
12. Still, even if machines take away the true religious spirit, another, bigger machine soon brings it back.

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<sup>35</sup>Edwin Morgan, "Astrodome," in Wildman, 104-5.



## THE POEMS

The following pages consist of the selections that were included in the program. They are presented here in the order in which they were performed.

As previously mentioned, this writer wrote the last work; and, as can be observed, she did not write it in the form of a concrete poem. An actor read the series of news items, and two other performers accompanied it with a simple dance.

*Décio Pignatari*

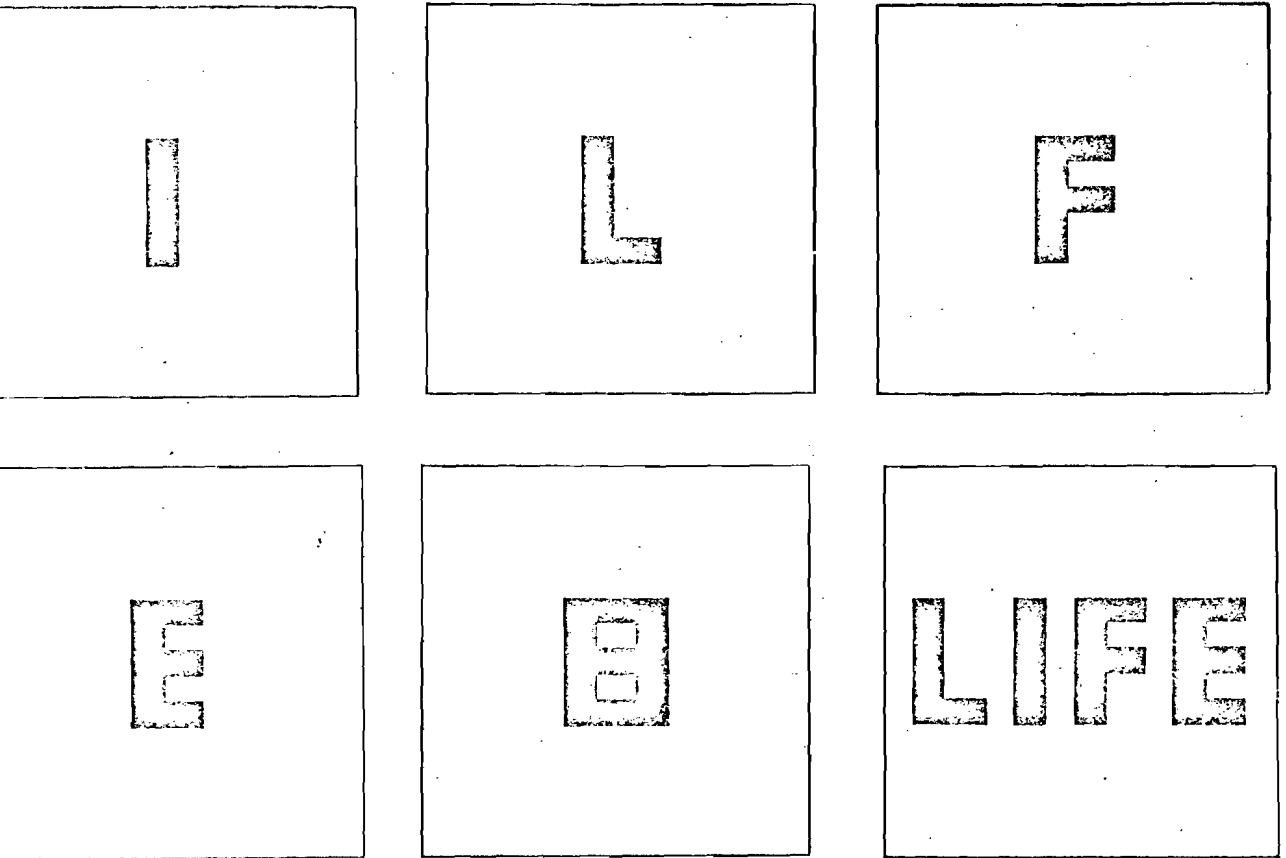


Figure 2

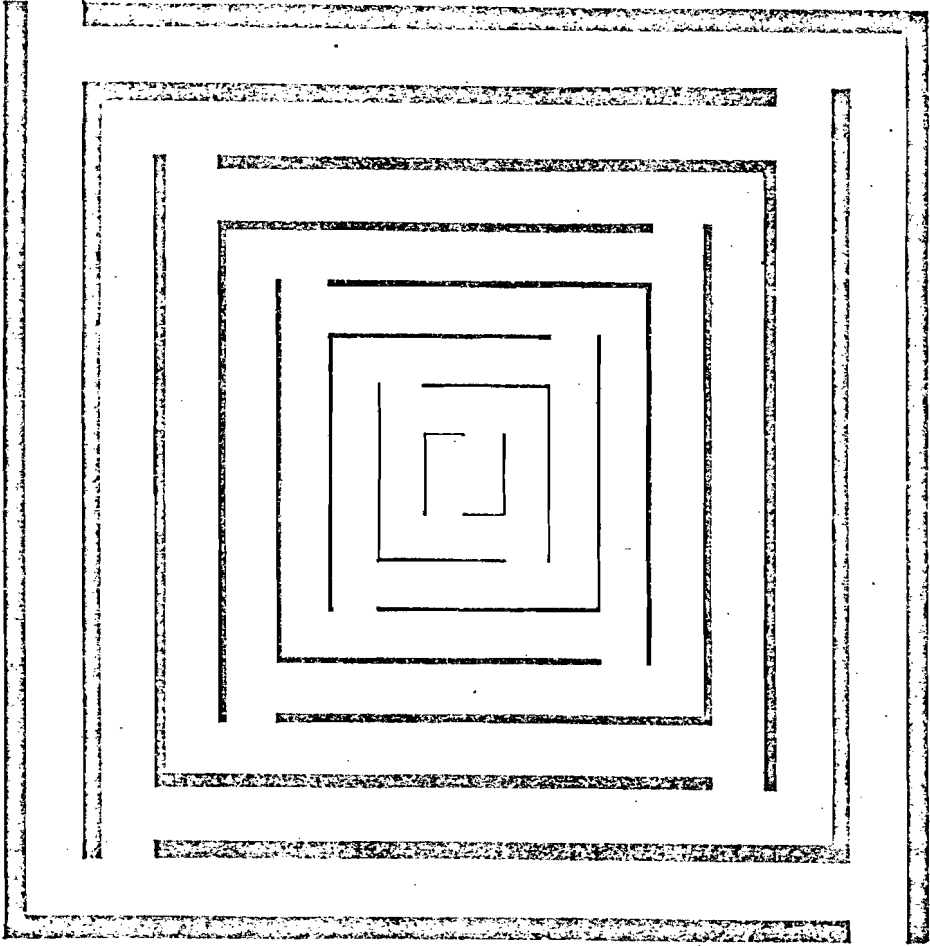
Untitled Poem by Décio  
Pignatari<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Décio Pignatari, *Untitled*, in Solt, 109.



Pedro Xisto EPITHALAMIUM III



Labyrinth { Love } L { Logos } Labirinto  
 Life } Leito }

Figure 4

"Epithalamium III" by  
 Pedro Xisto<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Pedro Xisto, "Epithalamium III," in Solt, 115.

*Haroldo de Campos (Translation Marco Guimarães and M.E.S.)* <sup>39</sup>

if  
 to be born  
 to die            to be born  
 to die            to be born    to die  
                                  to be reborn    to die again    to be reborn  
    to die again    to be reborn  
    to die again  
    again

   again  
    not to be born  
    not to be born  
 not to be dead    not to be dead    not to be born  
    not to be dead  
    to be born to die to be born  
    to die to be born  
    to die  
    if

---

<sup>39</sup>Haroldo de Campos, *Untitled*, trans. Marco Guimarães and Mary Ellen Solt, in Solt, 104.

Ian Hamilton Finlay Poster poem

on the right, a red blinker

*le circus!!*

smack

**K47**

and crew

also

**corks**

**nets**

etc.

they

leap

**BARE-BACK**

through

the

rainbow's

on the left, a green blinker



Figure 5

"Poster Poem" by Ian Hamilton  
Finlay<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Poster Poem," in Solt, 209.

Ladislav Novák Individualista<sup>41</sup>

individualista

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII  
IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII  
IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII  
IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII  
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<sup>41</sup>Ladislav Novák, "Individualista," in Solt, 139.

Bernard Heidsieck (Translation Sandra L. Miller and M.E.S.)<sup>42</sup>

THE PENETRATION (Mechanico-Poem) March-May 1964

for Nathalie and Emmanuelle

This mechanico-poem is not totally achieved until the surrounding noises, whatever they may be, captured by chance, during the very course of its audition, are superimposed upon the frame below, on the same recording.

A few words, perhaps, about the Poem-Partition.

But "Partition" is not a particularly appropriate term. Let's say rather that it's a question of a... Mechanico-Poem.

Its title... let's see..., its title... uhhhhhh... could be "THE PENETRATION." Think of that. Yes. Well. After all. And yet... it's his turn.

...So when there has been obtained, in a suitable geometric form, an assembling of a certain quantity of fissionable matter—called the critical mass—a chain reaction is brought into play, and a release of energy... which expresses itself...

...by an explosion.

Practically speaking this critical mass is formed by putting together two or more smaller masses so that their total is greater than the critical mass. And it is at this point, at this point that a delicate technical problem presents itself.

If the reaction lets go too slowly,

*The recording  
of a baby  
drinking  
a bottle*

(Emmanuelle)

*"SO...  
Continuation  
of  
the recording*

*A baby's cry  
(Emmanuelle)  
for 7 seconds*

*Nathalie  
singing a march  
for 8 seconds*

*If you go to the  
woods...*

(Nathalie)

---

<sup>42</sup>Bernard Heidsieck, "The Penetration," trans. Sandra L. Miller and Mary Ellen Solt, in Solt, 172-74.



the discharged energy separates the masses and the reaction stops:

the return from the explosion will be slight.

It is important then to release the maximum energy in the minimum time before this breaking up begins.

The masses, then, must be rapidly brought together, and the explosion encouraged by an exterior flux:

which is much easier to obtain when you have enough room, but much harder when you have to make the OBJECT transportable. Therefore...

...therefore, therefore, it's a question of MINIATURIZING it and for all that of rendering it more powerful while perfecting its yield: two exigencies very difficult to reconcile...

...

...problem still more difficult to solve, if one wants to place it, for example, in the cone of a fuse.

For the room there is meager. Not to speak of exigencies of weight which are draconian. As for its power.

which should be great,

condition of its efficaciousness will be obtained—taking account of the fact that one cannot cram it with a quantity of explosives much larger than the critical mass—by a

*If you go to the woods, and the wolf is not there...*

(Nathalie)

*Oh no, that won't do...*

(Nathalie)

*...the lady is on top of the gentleman.*

(Nathalie)

*Zan... Zan... Zi... bar  
Da den Da ne  
demmark den DENMARK  
(Nathalie)*

*song of a child for 6  
seconds in the street*

*I am the cat*

*no it's me*

*RICHARD IS the cat*

*HERE ARE*

*TWO CATS*

*song of a child for 5  
seconds in the street,*

*song of a child for  
two seconds in the street*

*NO*

*NO*

*and the strident cry of a  
baby*

single, but appreciable, amelioration of this yield.

Simply.

And it's the leap from A to H.

The energy, here, the energy is furnished by the fusion of two nuclei of heavy hydrogen which one causes to meet at a very VERY great speed. Moreover to do this one must bring the hydrogen to very high temperatures. And one does not achieve that

except by exploding a little A bomb.

By means of a detonator. And since it is evident that one must avoid at all costs having an H bomb of cumbersome size

it is a question from that point on of MINUTORIZING the little A bomb, that it must contain in considerable proportions. But this having been obtained,

which is not a slight problem, its yield will be at once

assured in the optimum fashion.

Thus, paradoxically, this miniaturization is the condition of a good

of a good penetration.

*child counting very fast up to 50 for 5 seconds in the street*

ONE · TWO · THREE

*there is there is...*

*song of a child for two seconds in the street.*

*haven't you finished yelling like that (big voice of a man)*

*brave soldier let's attack*

*(modulated voice of a child in the street)*

*song of a child for one second in the street.*

*neutral noise without voice from the city for 7 seconds.*

*neutral noise from the city with soft and carefree contrapuntal music for 12 seconds.*

ASTRODOME<sup>43</sup>

'As real grass withers in the Astrodome (at Houston, Texas), it has been replaced by Astrograss.'

(news item)

all is not grass that astrograss  
 that astrograss is not all grass  
 that grass is not all astrograss  
 astrograss is not all that grass  
 is that astrograss not all glass  
 not all astrograss is that glass  
 all that glass is not astrograss  
 that is not all astrograss glass  
 that glass is not all fibreglass  
 not all that fibreglass is glass  
 fibreglass is not all that glass  
 is that not all fibreglass glass  
 that fibreglass is not all grass  
 glass is not all that fibreglass  
 is all astrograss not that glass  
 all is not grass that fibregrass

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<sup>43</sup>Morgan, "Astrodome," 105.

Václav Havel Estrangement

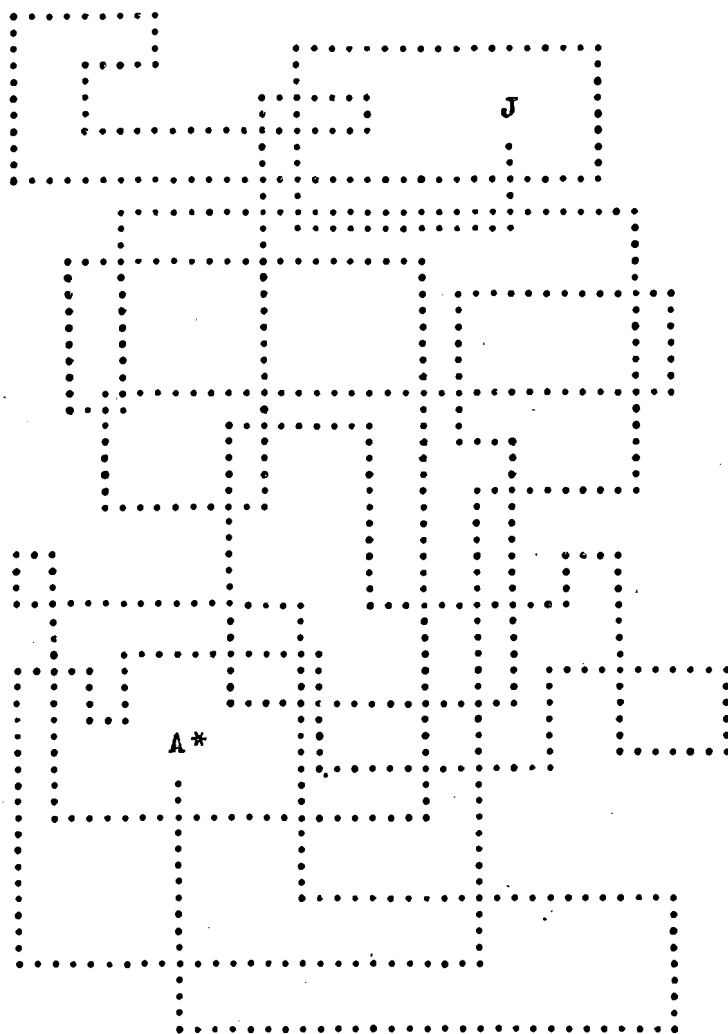


Figure 6

"Estrangement" by  
Václav Havel<sup>44</sup>

\*"Ja" is translated as "I."

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<sup>44</sup>Václav Havel, "Estrangement," in Solt, 149.

The Old<sup>45</sup>  
New

(from the book of JOB:BOJ)

The aesthetic of the old<sup>new</sup> work of art is primarily determined by the subject. It has material. It has nothing to do with creation in the old<sup>new</sup> sense of the word, unlimited<sup>limited</sup> by the final concep-

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<sup>45</sup> Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, "The Old," trans. Juliet McGrath, in Wildman, 34-36. New

tion of the completed work, but it is a matter of a range of interrelated events realizing the predetermined goal of coordinating the random process of development, events which are realized through the known use of learned signs. natural laws of used elements. This process may not be broken off at any time. It is not incumbent upon the artist to specify the "ripenesss," "unripeness," or "over-ripeness" of the works resulting from a given subject. Beginning, labor, material, rhythmization, and end—in this way one can characterize the role, the activity, of the old new artist, the result of which represents an expression of the world picture by means of a conventional human condition by means of an original form. The subject and the event material and the form determined by it provide limited numerous possibilities for constructive or destructive rapprochements, for harmony or disharmony, for the preordained or the accidental.

*Edwin Morgan*

THE COMPUTER'S FIRST CHRISTMAS CARD<sup>46</sup>

jollymerry  
 hollyberry  
 jollyberry  
 merryholly  
 happyjolly  
 jollyjelly  
 jellybelly  
 bellymerry  
 hollyheppy  
 jollyMolly  
 marryJerry  
 merryHarry  
 hoppyBarry  
 heppyJarry  
 boppyheppy  
 berryjorry  
 jorryjolly  
 moppyjelly  
 Mollymerry  
 Jerryjolly  
 bellyboppy  
 jorryhoppy  
 hollymoppy  
 Barrymerry  
 Jarryhappy  
 happyboppy  
 boppyjolly  
 jollymerry  
 merrymerry  
 merrymerry  
 merryChris  
 ammerryasa  
 Chrismerry  
 asMERRYCHR  
 YSANTHEMUM

---

<sup>46</sup>Edwin Morgan, "The Computer's First Christmas Card," in Solt, 210.

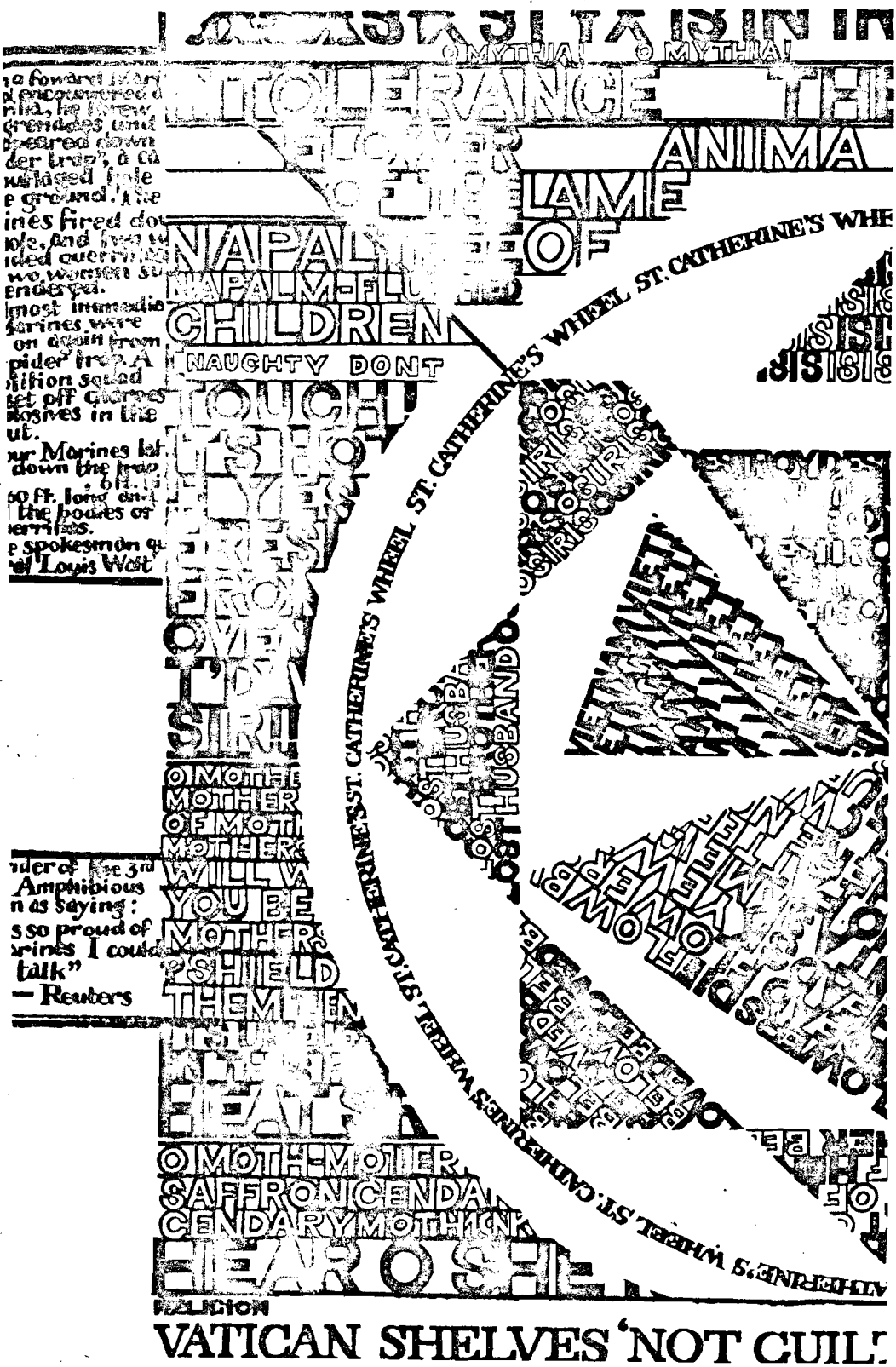


Figure 7

Untitled Poem by John Furnival<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> John Furnival, Untitled, in Wildman, 70.



## THE RETURN

Good afternoon, and welcome to the noon-time edition of the news. These are today's headlines.

1. The manned space center at Houston says, "All systems go." for Sunday's Apollo 14 moon shot.
2. U. S. Department of Labor figures forecast a growth in U. S. construction in this decade of more than 50 per cent. The boost will be from ninety billion dollars annually now to one hundred and thirty-five billion dollars annually by 1980.
3. In Washington, Secretary of Transportation John Volpe said that the United States must not fall behind western Europe in the development of the supersonic transport.
4. "As real grass withers in the Astrodome (at Houston, Texas), it has been replaced by Astrograss."<sup>48</sup>
5. Construction is now well underway for the five hundred and fifty thousand kilowatt Duane Arnold Energy Center in Iowa. It will be one of the world's most advanced nuclear power plants.
6. Prices were higher than average today on the New York Stock Exchange with Dow Jones Industrials up six and two thirds.

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<sup>48</sup>Morgan, "Astrodome," 105.

## CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Questions Answered by the  
Graduate Committee

- I. Decision to do a program of concrete poetry
  - A. Does the director have sufficient background and skills?
  - B. Does the cast have sufficient skill?
- II. Selection of the poems
  - A. Did the poems demand a great deal of imagination to stage?
  - B. Was there enough variety within the poems in terms of the different types of concrete poetry?
- III. Performance
  - A. Were the poems given in an order that was smooth and that led to a climax?
  - B. Acting
    - 1. Did the actors understand the poems and their parts in them?
    - 2. Did they effectively use their bodies to create a certain attitude?
    - 3. Did they effectively use their voices?
    - 4. Was there enough tension and energy?
    - 5. Were they believable?
  - C. Did the director get the most she could from the available space?
  - D. Special effects (including lights, and so on)

1. Was there a valid reason for every special effect that was used?
2. Were there any places where a special effect should have been utilized, but was not?

E. Audience reaction

1. Did the audience find the performance exciting?
2. Did the production reinforce the validity of concrete poetry in the audience's mind?
3. Did the audience perceive the theme of the program?

F. Did the cast and the director learn from the experience?

Questions Answered by the Cast

I. Decision to do a program of concrete poetry

- A. Does the director have sufficient background and skills?
- B. Does the cast have sufficient skill?
- C. Was the decision appropriate to the audience?

II. Rehearsals

- A. Did the director have a clear idea of what she wanted to accomplish at each rehearsal, and did she let the cast know what these goals were?
- B. Were these aims reached?
- C. Were the rehearsals orderly?

III. Performance

- A. Acting

1. Did the actors understand the poems and their parts in them?
  2. Did they effectively use their bodies to create a certain attitude?
  3. Did they effectively use their voices?
  4. Was there enough tension and energy?
  5. Were they believable?
- B. Did the director get the most she could from the available space?
- C. Special effects (including lights, and so on)
1. Was there a valid reason for every special effect that was used?
  2. Were there any places where a special effect should have been utilized, but was not?
- D. Audience reaction
1. Did the audience find the performance exciting?
  2. Did the production reinforce the validity of concrete poetry in the audience's mind?
  3. Did the audience understand the theme of the program?
- E. Did the cast and the director learn from the experience?

### Questions Answered by the Director

- I. Decision to do a program of concrete poetry
  - A. Was the decision appropriate to the audience?
  - B. Does the cast have sufficient skill?

## II. Selection of the poems

- A. Did the poems demand a great deal of imagination to stage?
- B. Was there enough variety within the poems in terms of lightness balanced with heaviness, and in terms of the different types of concrete poetry?

## III. Rehearsals

- A. Did the director have a clear idea of what she wanted to accomplish at each rehearsal, and did she let the cast know what these goals were?
- B. Were these aims reached?
- C. Were the rehearsals orderly?

## IV. Performance

- A. Were the poems given in an order that was smooth and that led to a climax?
- B. Acting
  - 1. Did the actors understand the poems and their parts in them?
  - 2. Did they effectively use their bodies to create a certain attitude?
  - 3. Did they effectively use their voices?
  - 4. Was there enough tension and energy?
  - 5. Were they believable?
- C. Did the director get the most she could from the available space?

D. Special effects (including lights, and so on)

1. Was there a valid reason for every special effect that was used?
2. Were there any places where a special effect should have been utilized, but was not?

E. Audience reaction

1. Did the audience find the performance exciting?
2. Did the production reinforce the validity of concrete poetry in the audience's mind?
3. Did the audience understand the theme of the program?

F. Did the cast and the director learn from the experience?