

**VISUAL POETRY:
A Brief History of Ancestral Roots and Modern Traditions**

by
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INTRODUCTION

A visual poem may be defined simply as a poem composed or designed to be consciously seen. The modern visual poem is generally composed with disassembled language material. This stuff of language includes word, text, note, code, petroglyph, letter, phonic character, type, cipher, symbol, pictograph, sentence, number, hieroglyph, rhythm, iconograph, grammar, cluster, stroke, ideogram, density, pattern, diagram, logogram, accent, line, color, measure, etc. Today's minimalist visual poet, or the post World War Two term, concrete poet, generally composes with fissioned language material to create new and free particles, and/or sonic patterns, clusters, densities, and/or textures. The visual poet composes with these freed particles and generally welds or fuses them to one or more art forms. By doing so, by crossing art form boundaries, the visual poet composes in a field of multimedia or borderblur or intermedia.

The modern visual poem is a poetic form reinvented by various avant-garde movements and influenced by abstract art. It is the contemporary expression of the pre-1900 visual poem handed down through millennia under a host of forms such as acrostics, anagrams, colored or illuminated text, emblems, labyrinths, and pattern and shaped poems. The pre-1900 visual poems are found throughout various language families around the world with numerous types, functions, and intentions. Many remain in use to this moment.¹ Except for the impact of modern technology, it is probably safe to say that all approaches to the visual poem after 1900 can be found somewhere in the past from rock art to proto-writing and ideogrammatic, hieroglyphic and alphabetical writing on fixed and portable objects.

Before beginning the discussion of visual poetry ancestors, I would first like to say that an overview such as this, a brief history of ancestral roots and modern traditions of visual poetry, is by its very nature incomplete. The observations and findings are open for correction whenever factual information is pointed to or provided. I would also like to mention a problem among those of us who have formally or informally discussed such histories. It appears to me that some individuals considering the history of ancestors actually discuss what they, as either an individual or a member of a self defined group or movement, have come to accept as their personal lineage, not an objective historical tradition. This lineage may be made of soft boundary lines and open to newly uncovered and wider possibilities of influences or it may be made of a closed and hardened ideological dividing line between group and not group. It seems

¹ Dick Higgins, PATTERN POETRY: GUIDE TO AN UNKNOWN LITERATURE. State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY., 12246. 1987.

as though those closely associated with minimalist tendencies are more likely than not to greatly reduce the numbers of their ancestors and individuals contributing to the group or movement; this may be a natural inclination within a minimalist orbit. A lineage, however, is not a history of ancestors but conscious or unconscious acknowledgment of direct and indirect influences.

Such narrow pre-1900 histories of the ancestral visual poetry types and genres more often than not center on Western European traditions perhaps with nods to the Mediterranean Basin. The primary ancestors considered are the variety of visual poems surviving from Greek, Latin, other Western European languages and perhaps Hebrew. There may be a gesture or more to Egyptian hieroglyphics because of the impact of ancient Egyptian culture on popular Western European culture in the 19th century. Bumping up against 1900 almost always is Mallarmé's **Un coup de dés** of 1896. To complete the ancestors after 1900, some American English lines list Guillaume Apollinaire's **Calligrammes**, the poetry of E.E. Cummings and the Concrete Poetry Movement from the early 1950's to circa 1975. For some this is a history; for me it is a lineage of recognized influences.

Bob Cobbing and Peter Mayer were among the earliest concrete poets attempting the first voluminous in-depth history of the ancestors of Concrete Poetry; and they acknowledged the wider field as visual poetry. They published their findings in the 1978 mimeograph printed **concerning concrete poetry**. Aside from numerous illustrated examples of historical and contemporary concrete poems, they included various timelines. One began at 1700 BCE, *A Chronology of Visual Poetry*; they had revised it from an earlier chronology from 1965 by Dom Sylvester Houédard. Jeremy Adler and Dick Higgins also helped on this expanded and revised version. Lewis Carroll's and Edward Lear's shaped poems are noted, but curiously the illuminations of William Blake were not. Also undocumented were the vast number of approaches to the visual poem by Kenneth Patchen. Other omissions exist including several movements of the avant-garde. Whether, as they moved into the twentieth century, what went undocumented was due to a lack of thoroughness, or some degree of adherence to a preconceived lineage or deliberate omissions remains a problem for others to investigate.

About 10 years later Dick Higgins published **Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature**. Until its publication, there was no single source to turn to for a detailed discussion with extensive examples of pre 1900's visual poetry. From his collection of 2,000 old visual poems that took 20 years to gather, 150 were reproduced. The book was not limited to Europe. The oldest illustrated example is a circa 3,000 year old Egyptian near-labyrinth crossword hymn from the 20th dynasty (i.e. 1000 BCE). From Islamic literature, India, Burma, and China came examples of counterparts to the European visual poem, which slowly faded out in the 17th and 18th Centuries in Europe with few active makers or composers in the 19th Century. However, a couple of problems or unintended consequences have occurred because of its title and the editorial point of view. The title by Higgins has become the accepted term, *pattern poems*, for all pre-1900 visual poetry. Being invested in the Concrete

Movement, the pre-1900 visual poetry forms gathered and published as examples left out numerous approaches and traditions.

All three concrete poets, Bob Cobbing, Peter Mayer and Dick Higgins, acknowledged and published their findings of a wider tradition for the ancestors of visual poetry. While incomplete, they at least promoted soft demarcation lines for concrete as part of a much larger visual poetry tradition. From my viewing point, much has been left out that should be considered as part of the wide tradition of what is now called visual poetry, so much in fact, that deliberate omission seems the most probable answer for the missing in action. I should point out that after the 1970's Cobbing moved out of Concrete Poetry into visual poetry and beyond to wordless compositions.

PRE 1900

English holds two definitions for the term *poem*: *poem* itself the long standard accepted usage; *rune* is rarely used. *Poem* came from the Greek root *to make* via Latin with the Norman conquest; the older *rune* is of Keltic origin and means *poem, part of a poem, magic poem, spell, charm, amulet, and song*. The Anglo-Saxon meanings of *rune* are *song, deep thought, and meditation or mystic communion*. *Poem* was urbanized and sanitized from its older tribal roots. *Rune* remained rooted in its tribal origins with deep and strong echoes of its druid-seer-bard traditions. In this section when the word *poem* is used, assume its full definition found in *rune*. The polarity remains with us today between the head and heart, the materialist and the mystic.

Just as the concept and meaning of *poem* evolved over millennia, so too has the visual image and its variety of uses and applications. One of these evolutionary trails follows rock art images eventually added to a corpus of abstract symbols that in turn morphed into proto-writing before their codification in alphabets. Along this developmental road, spells, chants and amulets became associated with a variety of symbols or were the actual reason for the symbols. Out of such interactions evolved the pre-1900 visual poems most are familiar with today. As the dates of proto-writing and alphabet use are older than previously considered, so too the dates of the visual poem and its earlier forms.

Ideally, a significant overview for the ancestors of visual poetry would fill an entire volume or more. Countless existing historical, archaeological and anthropological materials throughout the world cultures have been catalogued and analyzed waiting for such a recovery and illumination. The volume or volumes could be arranged in cultural regions beginning with prehistoric rock art. Rock art itself easily could fill a large volume. These are the moments when the first examples of oral traditions and concepts became expressed visually as pictographs, painted images and patterns, or petroglyphs, carved or inscribed images and patterns. The exact context of these moments are unknown and can only be surmised, but a broad consensus has determined that these moments were compositions by the poet-shaman or seer of the group; thus an oral and oracular poetic tradition probably informed most rock art. Rock art holds the record of the evolution of the first visual images to proto-writing as well as the art of charms and amulets.

In China, for example, rock art evolved from its prehistoric roots, through proto-writing to various forms of writing from poetry to government documentation carved with various types of calligraphies into jade steles now housed in the Forest of Stone Steles Museum. The only copies of some Ch'an Buddhist and Taoist monk poems are found carved into rock nearby hermit and monastery sites deep in China's mountains. This topic of Chinese ideograms and rock art could fill a large illustrated volume.

Rock art motifs throughout Europe moved onto ceramic ritual objects; the motifs seem to have evolved into symbolic proto-writing. Ancient rock art motifs of pre-Keltic and Keltic Ireland and Britain moved onto portable art objects,

eventually finding their way into illuminated manuscripts. One could make the case that the cement concrete poems of Ian Finlay are a contemporary expression of a tradition thousands of years old in his Scot homeland. Because of the book burning in Meso-America by the Spanish, the only extensive remaining source of Mayan hieroglyphs are the limestone molded and carved hieroglyphs on various structures and the carved steles. There exists an evolutionary movement from rock art to proto-hieroglyphs for the Mayans, their predecessors and neighbors. And, in India there appears to be a 40,000 year continuum of symbols moving off rock into other mediums of expression.

The next section would focus on proto-writing and the invention of iconographic, hieroglyphic, ideogrammatic and then alphabetical writing. It would also catalog examples of charms and amulets with proto-writing and writing, precursors of various visual poem types. Following would be a section on the evolution of the variety of the visual renderings of language as opposed to the purely lexical. A brilliant introduction to this subject can be found in the essay, ***Notation And The Art Of Reading*** by Karl Young.² This section would also include the vastness of the world's traditions of calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts as well as the development of various types of the older visual poetic expression. Further, this discussion should also include other important essays by Karl Young that set the bench mark for a thorough and highly intelligent discussion of the subject matter.³ This section ends at 1900.

The final section would present the various avant-garde movements from the Twentieth and early Twenty First centuries to the present moment and the contributions of their various talented composers of modern and contemporary visual poetry. Though incomplete, here is a list of topics and movements that should be included: Fauvism, Cubism, Collage, Italian Futurism, Russian Futurism, Imagism, Orphism, Vorticism, Constructivism, Dada, De Stijl, Surrealism, Bauhaus, various Japanese avant-garde movements of the 1920s, Lettrism, Kinetic, Concrete Poetry, Fluxus, Pop, Op, Visual Poetry, Correspondence/Mail Art, Russian Transfurism, Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Book Art. Also woven into this discussion should be the impact of photography, motion pictures, print media, the internet and the rapid development of an international culture.

rock art

Rock art is the earliest surviving ancestor of the visual poem. Rock art generally is thought to be composed of either painted, pictograph, or incised,

² Karl Young, *Notation And The Art Of Reading*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/young/notation/notate.htm>> Nov 2005.

³ a) Karl Young, *APPROACHES TO CODEX VINDOBONENSIS*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/vind/vind.htm>> Nov 2005.

THE BOOK: SPIRITUAL INSTRUMENT, ed. Jermome Rothenberg and David Guss, Granary Books, New York, NY, 1996.

b) Karl Young, *THE CONTINUUM OF LIFE IN CODEX BORBONICUS*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/bot/ky-ab.htm>> Nov 2005.

petroglyph, images on protected rock surfaces, sheltered cliff faces, cave walls and ceilings. Rock art also is shaping or carving surfaces of standing, transported and portable stone. It is also kinetic and four dimensional by incising or painting a surface to mark a carefully aimed sunlight shaft or sun cast shadow for a solstice, equinox or lunar event.⁴

Prehistoric rock art holds those moments around the world when various groups and individuals first rendered oral traditions and complex ideas and concepts onto material that remains with us today. Surely perishable materials were first used. The oldest portable objects were documented by Alexander Marshack. At the time, 1971, they were among the oldest artistic and/or symbolic representations at 30,000 years of age.⁵ To date these may be the oldest recognized calendar and mathematical counts and may be the oldest portable ancestors of the visual poem. Of importance to this discussion is his comprehensive overview, summation and conclusions of symbolic representation carved on bone and stone artifacts of the upper paleolithic.⁶ Marshack's careful analysis came to the conclusion that the markings followed a lunar count. The significance of these findings is found below in the myths about the invention of writing and associations with calendars.

A couple of years ago, rock art dating 75,000 years old in the Blombos Cave, South Africa, was announced.⁷ Blombos Cave is now considered the oldest rock art site and predates Marshack's findings by 45,000 years thereby more than doubling the age of known rock art. The art made of complex geometric lines and its quality suggests "the development of written, symbolic language."⁸ Since it has a pattern and is portable, could this be the oldest known ancestor of the amulet or charm?

charms and amulets

Before the formalization of the visual poem, there existed many ancestors in the oral and visual rendering traditions. It seems to me that those 4000 to 5000 year old (or even older) ancestors of visual poetry are found in the development of the amulet, a spiritual-mystic-magic-religious physical representation of chant, prayer, mantra (a silently repeated verbal meditation

⁴ Karl Kempton, *POINTS OF VIEWING / AN INVENTORY OF POSSIBILITIES: OBSERVATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS ON CHUMASH SOLSTICE SITES, SYMBOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY*.

<<http://www.ourslo.com/poetryarchive/history/serpentrocktimeline.htm>> Nov 2005.

Jack Mothershed, *The Story of Sepent Rock* (Introduction to *POINTS OF VIEWING*).

<<http://www.ourslo.com/poetryarchive/history/serpentrock.htm>> Nov 2005.

⁵ Alexander Marshack, *On Paleolithic Ochre and the Early Uses of Color and Symbol*, *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 22:188-191, 1981.

— *Upper Paleolithic Symbol Systems of the Russian Plain: Cognitive and Comparative Analysis*, *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 20:271-311, 1979.

— *Some Implications of the Paleolithic Symbolic Evidence for the Origin of Language*, *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 17:274-282, 1976.

⁶ Alexander Marshack, *THE ROOTS OF CIVILIZATION; The Cognitive Beginnings of Man's First Art, Symbol, and Notation*. McGraw Hill, New York, NY, 1971.

⁷ *Blombos Cave Project*. <http://www.svf.uib.no/sfu/blombos/Picture_Gallery.html> Nov 2005.

⁸ Christopher Henshilwood, *Art Prehistory*.
<<http://www.accessexcellence.org/WN/SU/caveart.html>> Nov 2005.

focus syllable, word or phrase), or spell.⁹ With continuous repetition, all of these form verbal harmonic fields or spaces that can induce altered or non-ordinary states of awareness or consciousness. These, then, became acoustic and/or vibrational fields visually represented on amulets and later their kindred yantras, mandalas, sacred calligraphy, and sacred illuminated manuscript pages.¹⁰ An incised or embossed text could be rubbed much like the use of today's rosary or meditation beads; this rubbing creates, with a tactile experience, a mental/oral repetitious pattern of text or symbol. Thus, the ancestors are of a spiritual, mythological, sacred, cosmological and religious origin. This is not surprising since all the ancient arts were born in this matrix. Unfortunately, the influence of materialistic interpretations (corporate fascism to Keynesian to Marxist economic dominant historical methodologies) of the evolution and development of culture greatly discounted the positive aspects various religions and their dharmas contributed while focusing most of the attention on the economic and materialistic characteristics. Due to the negative deeds of organized religion over the last two hundred years in the West and elsewhere, it is not surprising these explanations easily took hold.

One of the ancestors of these visual forms disappears into preliterate culture. Spells, chants, prayers, mantras, etc. were mouthed through magical and sacred knots as they were tied. The words *knot* and *amulet* are etymologically related in Russian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and also found in Indonesia. My interest in knot art led me to this fortunate discovery. I would not expect others to find the root this deep or as a bridge to (perhaps rock art and) proto-writing. A variety of sacred knot art work is found throughout the world cultures and many remain in use to this moment.

myths for the invention of writing

The myths of the origins of writing, many of which point to sourcing patterns and forms from the natural world, though readily available, were not pointed out as possible ancestors by those looking for the roots of the visual or concrete poem.

China: 1) Tortoise shells were tossed into fires; the cracks were read as oracles — a suggested foreshadowing of ideograms; 2) after looking at star patterns (particularly those of the lunar zodiac), marks on turtle backs and bird prints, Ts' and Chich invented the first ideograms.

India: 1) The goddess Samjna, whose name means image, invented the first alphabets, pictograms, mandalas, and other magical signs; 2) Kali, goddess of

⁹ Cyrus Lawrence Day, *QUIPUS AND WITCHES' KNOTS*. University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, KS. 1967.

¹⁰ Ajit Mookerjee, *YOGA ART*. New York graphic Society, New York, NY, 1975.

Nik Douglas, *TIBETAN TANTRIC CHARMS & AMULETS*. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, NY, 1978.

Madhu Khanna, *YANTRA, THE TANTRIC SYMBOL OF COSMIC UNITY*. Thames and Hudson, London, England, 1979.

Pierre Rambach, *THE SECRET MESSAGE OF TANTRIC BUDDHISM*. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York, NY, 1979.

John Stevens, *SACRED CALLIGRAPHY OF THE EAST*. Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boulder CO. 1981.

life and death, invented Sanskrit from the cracks in human skulls and she is rendered wearing a necklace of 56 skulls, each with its own letter.

Sumer: 1) The goddess Nidaba, the scribe of heaven, invented clay tablets and writing; 2) the goddess Belit Sheri was the scribe who recorded the deeds of the dead upon the leaves of the tree of life.

Egypt: 1) The goddess Sef Chet played the same role as Belit Sheri and was the goddess of writing; 2) her husband, Toth, he with the ibis head (a bird sacred to the Goddess), was credited later with the invention of writing as well as the calendar.

Old Europe: What seems to be among the oldest known script signs or proto-writing symbols, are associated with the matricentered Vinca culture. The earliest attempts or finds, dated from the mid 4th millennium (BCE), are connected with religious sculpture and ceramic images of the Goddess. The signs are probably derived from naturalistic forms which evolved into stylized marks; bird footprint patterns are one consideration. Gimbutas and McChesney thought they discovered in the archaeological records of rock art ancestors of the symbols, codes, patterns, and images found in the later European prehistorical and historical art and literary records.¹¹ They concluded that there was a continuation of extremely ancient traditions from the matricentered Old European symbolic systems. Others continuing this research use the term *Danube Script* to describe this proto-writing or writing set of symbols and date it circa 5000 BCE.¹²

Greece: 1) The 3 fates wrote humans' destinies on the 3 leaves of the past, present, and future; 2) Hermes is later credited, after seeing a flight of cranes (sacred bird of the Goddess), with the invention of the Greek alphabet.

Northern Europe: 1) The runic script was invented by Wotan after looking at ash twigs (the great ash Ygdarasill, the Tree of Life, was taken over by Wotan from the Triple Goddess, known as the 3 Norns in Scandinavia, who administered justice beneath the tree); 2) The druids' alphabet of trees was a calendar, fortune telling device, mathematical system based on pi (22/7, ratio of letters to vowels), and more. (The Keltic term *rune* has many meanings — poem, part of a poem, magic poem, spell, charm, amulet, and song. Today, what is called mythology, cosmology, calendar or day and year count, astronomy, geometry, measuring systems, alphabets, etc., were all interwoven and part of the poetic and symbolic systems that probably can be traced deep into the paleolithic.)

Valley of Mexico (north of Mayan regions): Quetzalcoatl, patron of rational design and intent, invented writing and the calendar.¹³

¹¹ Marija Gimbutas, *THE GODDESSES AND GODS OF OLD EUROPE 6500 - 3600 BC, Myths and Cult Images*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1982.
— *THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODDESS*. Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, 1989.
— *THE CIVILIZATION OF THE GODDESS: THE WORLD OF OLD EUROPE*. HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, CA, 1991.

Milton McChesney, *THE SIGNS OF THE VINCA CULTURE*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA, 1973.

¹² The Global Prehistory Consortium, *Signs, inscriptions, organizing principles and messages of the Danube script*. <<http://www.prehistory.it/scritturaprotoeuropai.htm>> Nov 2005.

¹³ Karl Young, *Human and Animal Stages in the Aztec Continuum of Life*. <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/bot/ky-anm.htm>> Nov 2005.

oldest alphabet?

Approximately 3500 terra-cotta seals found in Harappa, Mohenjodaro, various smaller sites in the Indus Valley and in Western Asia across the Arabian Sea have been dated between 3100 and 1900 BCE. The seals consisted of pictorial images with symbols ranging from simple to complex. Initially, they were considered part of a narrowly defined Indus Valley culture along the banks of the Indus River and considered accounting markers. The actual cost of making such a seal compared to less expensive accounting marker systems eventually ruled them out as mere utilitarian economic artifacts.

Individuals and groups trying to unravel the meaning of the more abstract markings or symbols and pictorial symbols have been involved in one of the last major untranslated language puzzles. Some consider it the last major writing system enigma because of their possible relation to the early roots of India's alphabets. Nearly all those working on this problem assumed this script was of pre-Dravidian or Dravidian origin because the Aryan invasion, circa 1800 BCE, brought with it the roots of Sanskrit, an Indo-European language. The puzzle remained puzzling after all the teasing through Dravidian language pathways until Dr. Natwar Jha, a computer scientist, became interested in the seals upon noticing trigonometric formulas on a few seals. Identical formulas are found in the ancient Sanskrit texts for installing altars for Vedic rituals. That is to say, some seals were associated with yantras belonging to the tantric science for the placement of ritual objects and the building of temples upon sacred geometric diagrams. Sacred chants and prayers are repeated as the diagram is made; the temple is then built upon the diagram. He studied all the known seals. With an extensive knowledge of ancient Vedic texts, he broke the seal code recovering an old alphabet he calls Indus Script that he believes later evolved into the old Brahmi which in turn influenced Sanskrit, later Dravidian alphabets and by way of a migration Semitic and early Greek alphabets. (Such a migration, I think would have entered the sphere of Old Europe and interacted with its scripts and signs.)

In 1996, Dr. Natwar Jha published his monograph, **Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals**. His findings provide further evidence that there was no Aryan invasion; it was a projected myth by Europeans after misreading the **RIG VEDA**. His translations of the seals show that the writing system consisted of a hybrid of pictorial symbols, alphabetical symbols and compound signs and follows Sanskrit grammar and phonetics. Like the later Semitic alphabets, vowels were not written during the seal period. Some of the seals contain references to Vedic kings, sages, place names and rivers, such as the Saraswati River, previously thought of as mythological. His translations change from what was thought to be myth to fact; this means that the **RIG VEDA**, and thus Vedic Culture itself, is much older than Harappa by at least 3000 years. Harappa, in fact, is just one of many cities in what is now being called the Saraswati Culture, found north through Afghanistan and south to what was Dwarka (south of Mumbai [Bombay]), Krishna's capital that was submerged under a catastrophic ocean event. The Saraswati culture literally dried up; tectonic uplift changed the drainage off the Himalayas.

He also found the signs for numbers. Today, what we call Arabic numerals derived from the Indian decimal system. The early Indus number system, based on 5 points, is identical to the first nine Roman numerals, except instead of vertical marks, they were horizontal; v equaled 5. He also found their first value for Pi was the square root of 10 and is also found in an ancient Vedic text reference before its later refinement to the 22/7 ratio.

Some of the seals were written as short aphorisms found in Sanskrit Sutra works with Vedic imagery and symbolism. One seal contains a meditating figure surrounded by five animals. Before his correction, it was dubbed *King of the Beasts*. It is Shiva; the animals are symbols for the 5 elements. Another seal contains what was called the Unicorn, a profile of a bull with a horn projecting from his forehead. This is a representation of Vishnu.

Archaeologists, having found holes on the back of seals, assume these may have been worn as amulets or charms, making them, then, visual poetry roots or ancestors. Metal amulets and charms of the same approximate size are worn in India today. Some are worn around the throat as if to remind the individual to either speak harmoniously or repeat its inscribed or embossed mantra.

How old is this Saraswati alphabetical writing? The terra-cotta seals at the moment push back alphabetical symbol use beyond a thousand years of those in Western Asia and Egypt. It is known the people of India wrote books on palm leaves, a highly fragile material compared to the seals. The term for book, *granth*, was in use in 2900 BCE. Also mentioned in an old Upanishad was a term for alphabet; in others were detailed discussions of vowels, consonants, and accents. Given the expanse of the Saraswati Culture and the small amount of archaeological recovery work, deeper roots undoubtedly will be uncovered.

A younger Brahmi alphabet seems to have developed out of this system, not, as perviously thought, from Aramaic or Phoenician. Thus it appears that the influence runs from India east to west and the river basin birth place of humankind culture after migrating from Africa may not be the Tigris-Euphrates Crescent basin, nor the Nile Basin but the Saraswati Basin.

calligraphy, illuminated manuscripts and paper

A significant contribution and major ancestor of visual poetry is the world wide tradition of calligraphy and the illuminated manuscript. Calligraphy, beautiful writing, was and remains considered the queen of the art forms in many Islamic and Asian countries. While there are a small number of Islamic calligraphy types, Islamic calligraphers devised countless word shaped images and perhaps as a cultural group composed more word shaped imagery than any other until the present era of modern visual poetry. There are hundreds of types or styles of calligraphy in East Asia. Also, hundreds of language patterned Tibetan charms have been documented. For Meso-American illumination see the articles by Karl Young.

The developmental trail of illumination and calligraphy from Ireland and what is Britain began circa 400's when Coptic Christians made contact with Irish Christians. While Coptic art influences remained, the Irish quickly developed their own approaches by folding in their rich historical traditions and evolved the art of illumination to the highest levels. The **BOOK OF KELLS** is considered by many to be the apex of European illumination. Close seconds are the Hiberno-Saxon and Irish **LINDISFARNE GOSPELS** and **BOOK OF DURROW** composed in Northumbrian, Northeastern England. Careful examination of these and other illuminated manuscripts reveal many colorful visual or acrostic codes.

For those monks participating in illumination and copying, their role was not dissimilar with that of the artist assigned the task of rendering a sacred charm into a pattern or shape. Monks prayed while working; the text was an act of contemplation, a mantra for uplifting to the higher realms of consciousness and hence making these works a parallel to other visual renderings around the globe kin to yantras and mandalas.

The Carolingian period of illumination began with Irish and English monks teaching illumination to the monks in the young Carolingian Empire. Just as the Irish quickly drew on their cultural ancestors, so too these newly trained monks. Within a generation a distinctive Carolingian illumination and calligraphy style evolved that included influences from the Orthodox evangeliary, canons and symbols, such as the fountain of life.

Eventually came the great weakening of European calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts caused by the printing press. In Asia, calligraphy remained strong and vital. The printing press essentially turned European calligraphy into pretty writing and currently, to many, its historical beauty and importance seems inconsequential. Such a point of view, I believe has hindered important directions for the development of contemporary visual poetry.

Without paper, however, this could not have happened. The craft of paper making came into the Islamic cultural sphere in 751 CE at the battle of Talas when, in their victory against a Tang Empire attack along the Silk Road, the Turks captured some paper makers. Quickly, Samarkand became a paper making center; paper making soon followed in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Spain. Paper, coupled with a single language, Arabic, significantly strengthened and unified Islamic culture from Central Asia through West Asia, across North Africa into Moorish Spain. Cultures and languages separated since the short unity created by Alexander were united again with others to create a great cross fertilization. Unlike parchment or papyrus, ink was absorbed by paper and could not be erased. Paper, being less expensive than parchment and papyrus, promoted wider distribution of hand copied books and contributed to further developments in calligraphy.

The Islamic call and demand for no depiction of any living form and its desire to render the KORAN into the most beautiful form humanly possible raised the culture's calligraphy to one of the great artistic and literary human

accomplishments. Calligraphers and artists developed over the centuries a lush language of calligraphy styles fusing visual and spiritual symbolism with complex geometric and abstract decoration for books, architectural surfaces, rugs, and other objects. Calligraphers quickly discovered a passage around the culture's prohibition against illustrating any living form by composing pictograms made of words and phrases. In a global and historical overview this seems a natural inclination found among illuminators and stretchers of traditional and institutionalized language usage. To illustrate how vast a subject Islamic Calligraphy is, recent findings estimate over 700,000 surviving unbound paper manuscripts in Timbuktu, one of the great learning centers of Islam and the world in the sub Sahara Mali Empire. Unfortunately, their condition ranges from good to almost dust, the downside of paper's character being less resilient than parchment. Many manuscripts were imported; the others written or copied in Timbuktu. Those manuscripts native to the Mali Empire are a potential source of study for the movement of sub Sahara symbology and patterns from pre-Islamic eras into the various arts of the empire as well as their movement north and east into other Islamic regions' arts.¹⁴

The paper trail into mid 13th Century Europe through Spain and Italy contains an irony. Over the next hundred years paper making centers developed in Europe. Paper mills in Mainz provided some material for Gutenberg's press. Around 1450, the first book was printed on a press with handset type cast in molds. Almost simultaneously, in 1453, with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire, scholars fled to Italy and initiated the translations of Greek philosophy and other ancient knowledge into European languages that were distributed throughout Europe in the form of printed books. In many instances, these reinforced classics which had hesitantly and on a small scale spread through some members of the European intelligentsia from Spain and Ireland. Without printing presses, the Ottoman Empire was slow to absorb and disseminate new knowledge evolving in Europe. This eventually aided in its being eclipsed by European nations it once consistently threatened with its military strength, particularly its metal casting cannon technology.

Paper was also used for woodcut books in which the graphics held equal or superior position to text for over a hundred years after Guttenberg. These books once again raised an illuminated form with text to a high level of artistic expression comparable to the high levels or the earlier German illuminated manuscripts. In Germany these books, essentially Gothic in text and ornament, dominated the scene until within a period of five years they were smothered by Renaissance rhetoric and academic art; the Renaissance destroyed illumination. Ornament and illumination woven with text has yet to

¹⁴ For an excellent introductory overview for Islamic Calligraphy see Abdelkebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, *THE SPLENDOR OF ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY*. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York, NY, 1976.

For samples of contemporary calligraphy see Hassan Massoudy A Survey by Karl Young, <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/massoudy.htm>> Nov 05.

Hassan Massoudy, *LE POETE DU DESERT*. Syros Alternatives, Portugal, 1989.

— *CALLIGRAPHE*, Flammarion, Paris, France, 1996.

— *PERFECT HARMONY: SUFI POETRY OF IBN 'ARABI*. Shambhala Publications, Boston MA, 2002.

recover and reach these levels in the West except for the illuminated work of the poet William Blake and perhaps some works by modern and contemporary visual poets and book artists. None of these works, however, reached or reach the mass appeal of the earlier woodcut books.

POST 1900

Many visual poets, especially concrete or minimalist visual poets, seem to look upon Mallarmé's **Un Coup de Dés** of 1896 as the poetic event inaugurating the modern visual poem — and the later Concrete Poetry Movement of circa 1953 to 1975 — throughout the 20th Century to this autumn moment, 2005. Others point elsewhere either to another possible candidate or the vortex of creativity in the European avant-garde movements between 1900 and 1915 — Fauvism, Cubism, Italian Futurism, Russian Futurism, Imagism, Orphism Vorticism, and Constructivism — and the developments of collage, photography, film, music and other arts and the print media. Mallarmé's text in my opinion can be read to a blind person; its spacing either expressing silence, or as others indicate, a decorative accenting. Also, in my opinion, it is the logical extension of the newly developing experiments with free verse, not freed words.

What counts as a first, a poem or an entire book? To point directly and unequivocally to one individual who cleared the ground for the era of the modern visual poetry field, one has a great amount of reading and research to digest before singling out one individual rather than a group process first unfolding in France, Italy and Russia, the main centers of this reinvention or reconfiguration. By interacting with each other, these individuals actively and subtly influenced one another. Others acted in isolation or near isolation. A few of those in isolation influenced or charted new courses only to be either forgotten or consciously dropped so that history could be rewritten with a particular ideological bent. One has to carefully read and view the diaries, notebooks and sketch books of all the artists and poets and execute a most diligent search in libraries and special collections for copies of obscure — because of conscious omission to maintain someone's gate keeping cannon — publications associated directly and indirectly with visualization of the poem and the various methods used freeing the word.

There are three primary approaches and two or more aesthetic sensitivities and inclinations in play during the small handful of years between 1908 and 1915: by the poet, by the painter and by the poet-painter/painter-poet. The first newly composed form or pole for the visualization of language was within a stretched or altered traditional layout of the word or part of a word or abstraction of word in a poem. The other pole was the compositional field being related to the painter's canvas, a total freeing the word from the traditional left to right horizontal and top to bottom vertical type-set-language to that of the field of two, three and four dimensional space. While I am going to present a limited timeline, it is not to solve the problem of the *first* (though I will point some out) but rather share some observations while revisiting this moment during the development of modern visual poem. I personally feel and think that the modern visual poem with all its new types and forms came about in a group dynamic just as today one can watch various approaches evolve from one individual to another eventually becoming a standard vehicle of expression.

europe

If, and I mean *if* only for those holding this concept, Mallarmé is considered the father of the modern visual poem, his heir apparent for the next step in its development is Guillaume Apollinaire, composer of **Calligrammes**. Leaving Mallarmé out, Apollinaire becomes a father not a son in the birth of the modern visual poem. For American English, E. E. Cummings seems to be the third or second step. While this may appear a logical aesthetic lineage for the freeing of word to a more visually active iconic signing and singing, the standard left to right and top to bottom reading structure remained the primary conveyor of meaning, much more so for Cummings than for the variety of Apollinaire's calligrammes. Especially Apollinaire, and Cummings to a lesser degree, wrote and composed during an unprecedented period of experimental — in its best meaning and accomplishments — creativity centered in Europe, for all the arts. To name a few, Apollinaire was friends with or worked with Braque, Carrà, Chanel, Cendrars, Cocteau, Debussy, Duchamp, Diaghilev, Jacob, Marinetti, Matisse, Miro, Picasso, Ravel, Rousseau, Satie, and Salmon. He promoted Cubism and other avant-garde expressions. Apollinaire published his first calligramme, **Lettre-Ocean**, in June 1914.¹⁵ It was the most Futurist like or influenced of his calligrammes and the longest, a two page composition. Later works from 1914 onward were reproduced by the newly invented photogramme providing today's readers and viewers his carefully composed hand scripted calligrammes — words freed from the bondage of type setting requirements.¹⁶ Though dead by 1919, Apollinaire's Calligrammes became and remain a vital energetic influence in visual poetry and have become, as a form, either a rallying point as an example for use of pictograph like approaches or an example to be purged in a mustering call for purity of typography without a visual image.

Between 1910 and 1912, lettering was added to Cubist, Italian Futurist and Russian Futurist paintings. While Braque was the first to paint text onto canvas in 1910 and while his *Le Portugais*¹⁷ of 1911 is more often referred to as the language freeing work, his *Violin and Palatte*¹⁸ of 1909 and *Piano and Mandolo*¹⁹ of 1909-1910 are equally important because of painted symbols.

¹⁵ Guillaume Apollinaire official site,

<http://216.239.39.104/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.wiu.edu/Apollinaire/Biographie.htm&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2BApollinaire%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG%26as_qdr%3Dall> Nov 2005.

Marcel Adema and Michel Decaudin, APOLLINAIRE: Oeuvres poetiques, Gallimard, Paris, 1965.

Willard Bohn, THE AESTHETICS OF VISUAL POETRY, 1914-1928. Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1986

Ann Hyde Greet, trans, CALLIGRAMMES: Poems Of Peace And War (1913-1916), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980.

¹⁶ Klaus Peter Dencker, TEXT-BILDER: Visuelle Poesie International. Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, Germany, 1972.

¹⁷ Georges Braque, *Le Portugais*. Guggenheim Collection,

<<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/B/braque/portgais.jpg.html>> Nov 2005.

¹⁸ Georges Braque, *Violin and Palatte*. Guggenheim Collection, <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_lg_23_6.html> Nov 2005.

¹⁹ Georges Braque, *Piano and Mandolo*. Guggenheim Collection, <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_lg_23_4.html> Nov 2005.

These two broken planed cubist works display impressionistic music scores. Because his *Violin and Palatte* render the violin f-holes unbroken as if signs or symbols, they become focal points for eyes to look into the ears of the imagination listening for a new music. Conceivably, Picasso may have been the first to use text in a collage in 1908, *The Dreamer*.²⁰ However, dates of his early work are suspect; he was known to have dated some works earlier in order to be the first in the “made something new” contest.

In 1913, 10 days after his book, **The Cubist Painters**, appeared, Apollinaire abandoned cubism to found Orphism dedicated to a purity of lyrical abstraction. Its members included Delaunay (who was also a strong inspirational force on Apollinaire), Duchamp, Leger, Picabia and Kupk; it influenced the Germans Klee, Macke and Marc and the American founders of Synchronism, Macdonald-Wright and Russell. Some may say this marked a conservative turn or that he became unsettled with the obsession by some of his friends with nihilism, materialization and violence. He surely rejected cubism’s intellectual coolness by embracing the warmer and brighter coloring of the heart. Maybe Picasso’s cutting remarks on the book was the final shove. Whatever the reason, this turn was not so much a conservative reaction as an embrace of the poetic traditions of the past and what he considered the positive aspects of the new. The choice of Orpheus seems a conscious decision for a middle way between the Dionysian insatiable appetites of the solar plexus and the mind that encloses whatever possible in a Hermetic seal. Perhaps it is not much of a stretch for the Orphic trajectory to include Cocteau’s film, **Orpheus**, in which an obsessed Orpheus, while seated in an automobile receiving sonorous and abstract and surreal poetic phrases based on World War Two French resistance messages over a radio, loses love. All that remained after being torn apart by the feminine in the early Greek story of Orpheus, was a speaking head floating in a river.

Italian Futurism was unlike other avant-garde movements. It was founded by Marinetti in 1909 upon the publication of **Futurist Manifesto**. Others quickly joined him and through the years individuals in the group published many manifestoes on the arts, science and politics. Marinetti, a free verse poet and writer, was very wealthy and helped finance a movement that for the first time was managed like a business. In 1913, Marinetti published a manifesto, **Destruction of Syntax - Imagination Without Strings - Words-In-Freedom**, announcing the death of free verse replaced by words in freedom. This is the year he traveled to Russia hoping to create a grand union with the Russian Futurists. Though this excursion into Russian avant-garde regions was considered a public relations success because of good press, applauded lectures and invitations to many parties, he did not meet the individuals he believed closest to him. They were *out of town*. The theories of the Italian Futurists, anti past, pro future and material based, were antithetical to these Russian Futurists who were delving into the roots of Slavic language, culling the best of the past to meld with the best of a potential future and spiritually inclined to a Russian Orphism and for a few individuals a deeper Russian mysticism in the tradition of the seer.

²⁰ Brandon Taylor, *COLLAGE, THE MAKING OF MODERN ART*. Thames & Hudson, New York, NY, 2004. (note — disappears Italian Futurists and seems pro Picasso.)

Also in 1913, Carlo Carrà, a member of the Italian Futurists First Wave and a friend of Apollinaire, published *Parole in Libertà* (Words in Freedom).²¹ In 1914, he composed a series of collages: *The Chase*²², *Still Life with Soda Syphon*,²³ *Umbrella of the Sun*,²⁴ and *Noises of the Night Cafe*;²⁵ all were preludes to the striking fifth. *Noises of the Night Cafe* forecasted more than the others the hyper dynamic language based collage, *Interventionist Manifesto* also known as *Patriotic Celebration* (Free Word Painting).²⁶ Its source of inspiration was leaflets dropped from an airplane. The spiraling and energetic vortex of collaged sounds, noises and smells surpassed anything done with text before the war.

The Italian Futurist typeset visual poem books were published generally in editions of 1000. The series begins in 1914 and ends in 1934 — **Zang Tumb Tum**, Marinetti, 1914; **Ponti sull'Oceano** (Bridges over the Ocean), Luciano Folgore, 1914; **BIFSZF + 18. Simultaneità e Chimismi lirici (BIFSZF + 18. (Simultaneity and Lyric alchemies)**, Ardengo Soffici, 1915; **Guerrapittura (War-Painting)**, Carlo Carrà, 1915; **Piedigrotta**, Francesco Cangiullo, 1916; **Les mots en liberté futuristes** (The Futurist words-in-freedom), F.T. Marinetti, 1919; **Caffè Concerto - Alfabeto a Sorpresa (Café-Chantant - Unexpected Alphabet)**, Francesco Cangiullo, 1919; **Poesia pentagrammata (Poetry on the Staff)**, Francesco Cangiullo, 1923; **Depero futurista 1913-1927 (Depero the Futurist 1913-1927)**, Fortunato Depero, 1927; **Parole in libertà: olfattive, tattili, termiche (Words-in-freedom: olfactory, tactile, thermal)**, F.T. Marinetti, 1932; and **L'anguria lirica (Lyric cucumber)**, Tullio d'Albisola, 1934.²⁷ The last two books were printed on metal sheets.

Georges Braque was the first to paint commercial lettering on his canvas work; by doing so he could be the first modern artist to truly free the word from syntax, though not in isolation. Painting speed and energy as subject matter, the Italian Futurists added a more vibrant palette to Cubism. Other Italian and Russian Futurist works, with their great energy and intensity, extended in many directions the freedom of the word initiated by Braque in France and independently by the Russian Futurists. After World War One, many

²¹ Carlo Carrà, *Parole in Libertà*. Futurism and the Futurists, <http://www.futurism1.fsnet.co.uk/carra/carra_im63.htm> Nov 2005.

NOTE: home page for Futurism and the Futurists: <<http://www.futurism.org.uk/>> Nov 2005.

²² Carlo Carrà, *The Chase*. <<http://www.perch.com/images/chase.jpg>> Nov 2005. — <<http://www-lnc.usc.edu/~brannon/pix/carlo-carra/chase.jpg>> Nov 2005.

²³ Carlo Carrà, *Still Life with Soda Syphon*. <<http://www.pintura.aut.org/SearchProducto?Produnum=11113>> Nov 2005.

²⁴ Carlo Carrà, *Umbrella of the Sun*. Futurism and the Futurists, <<http://www.futurism1.fsnet.co.uk/carra/carra15.htm>> Nov 2005.

²⁵ Carlo Carrà, *Noises of the Night Cafe*. Futurism and the Futurists, <<http://www.futurism1.fsnet.co.uk/carra/carra16.htm>> Nov 2005.

²⁶ Carlo Carrà, *Interventionist Manifesto*. The International Museum of Collage, Assemblage and Construction, <<http://collagemuseum.com/carra001.htm>> Nov 2005.

— <<http://www-lnc.usc.edu/~brannon/pix/carlo-carra/intervention.jpg>> Nov 2005.

— dmmac design, <<http://www.dmmacdesign.com/artchive/Art/artchive%20on%20cdrom/artchive/C/carra.html>> Nov 2005.

²⁷ Maurizio Scudiero, *The Italian Futurist Book*. <<http://www.colophon.com/gallery/futurism/index.html>> Nov 2005.

movements, commercial advertising, cinema and perhaps the commercial art of newspaper comics and comic books continually evolved the freedom of the word in paintings, collage and printed text formats. The Italian and Russian Futurists' books and works within other movements dispel a false rumor directly or indirectly caused by the Concrete Poetry Movement that no serious typographical experimentation existed between the demise of Dada and the Concrete Poets.

Marinetti in 1924 published *Futurism and Fascism*; he argued Fascism was a natural extension of Futurism. This embrace doomed Italian Futurism as a respected movement to this day and has been seen by critics and writers as responsible for planting a dark seed in avant-garde movements that operate with an identity of group and not group. Such a movement is heavily influenced or controlled by a hierarchical structure as opposed to one of egalitarianism, an open circle as opposed to a closed ideological fortified square.

The exact degree that Russian Futurist visual poetry was influenced by Western European avant-garde remains to be uncovered. The Russian Futurist visual poetry seems a parallel and independent blooming inspired by the general spirit of the time. Russia not only gave birth to many internal avant-garde movements but also had an immensely rich multicultural heritage from which to draw and fuel its own uniqueness that also greatly contributed to the wider trans-European avant-gardes. The first abstract painter was a Russian, Wassily Kandinsky.

Also of interest to this discussion, are Zaum and Constructivism. Zaum and Constructivism combined book art and graphic design. The Futurists produced handmade books, using handwriting and rubber-stamping rather than type as the Italians. Together these three spawned most of the Russian born visual poetic experimentation.

The internal particulars of the cultural influences creating and informing the Russian Futurists, Zaum, Constructivism and Russia's other avant-garde movements are beyond the scope of this writing. See the works of Gerald Janecek.²⁸ The Russian culture is undoubtedly one of the more complex when one tries to unravel all its sources and resources. Founded by Vikings, there was a runic past. From the south came the conversion to Greek Orthodox Christianity and after the fall of Constantinople to Islam, Russia became the Greek Orthodox center. Islam before and after the fall of Constantinople contributed its influences. From the East with its incorporation into the Mongol Empire came the influences from West Asia, India, China, and the Mongols. Upon regaining its own power, Russia as empire acquired much of the land to its east previously controlled by its occupiers. On the western side there was the on and off relationship with Catholic and later Catholic and Protestant Europe.

²⁸ Gerald Janecek, *THE LOOK OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900-1930*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1984.

— ZAUM: The transrational poetry of Russian futurism. San Diego State University Press, CA, 1996.

The Russian visual poetry book publications, usually lithograph books, began circa 1912 with **Igra v Adu** (A Game in Hell), by A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov with art by Kazimir Malevich and Olga Rozanova. In 1913 it was followed by Alexi E. Kruchenykh's **Poluzhiboi** (*Half Alive*), with lithographs by M. F. Larionov. Then in 1914 came his **VZORVAL** (EXPLODITY) three editions with art by Natan Al'tman, Natalia Goncharova, Nikolai Kul'bin, Kazimir Malevich, and Olga Rozanova and text by Aleksei Kruchenykh.²⁹ This is an abridged list of many books published into the twenties. Of importance is the time period overlapping or paralleling work in France and Italy at the same moment and earlier. The Russian Futurists viewed hand written text as a visual image, not text; hand writing itself was unique to the individual. The exploration of the roots of Slavic proto-writing, writing, fairy tales and mythology all played a role in their compositional presentations. How this fits a critic's assumptions of what makes a visual poem a visual poem is not my interest here. The Russians worked out of their stated theories and the images produced were to them like painted brush strokes. In my way of thinking about this, they were freeing the word from the confines of type in which language had become frozen by metal and the left to right march across and then down the page.

Vasilii Kamenskii is another significant Russian Futurist freeing the word from its long imprisonment sentenced since the Renaissance. Besides many visual poems, he composed a series entitled ferro-concrete poems. Janecek rightfully concludes Kamenskii is the first visual poet to use concrete to describe a visual form of poetry.³⁰ The series appears to be small, numbering eleven, composed from 1914 to 1917.³¹ Ferro-concrete, reinforced concrete, immediately implied to me a vertical building material and concrete, non reinforced, a horizontal construction material. One reaches skyward with a strong foundation and the other covers ground.

Members of the Russian Futurists and other avant-garde groups were disappeared or killed by Stalin after the fall of Trotsky. The full story of Russian Futurism, Zaum and Constructivism slowly presents itself as Russia opens up. For a colorful and important sampling of Russian Futurists, see THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE 1910-1934 available at Moma.org.³²

In England a couple of years before World War One, the Vorticism movement was named by Ezra Pound, empowered by his ideas and those of the Canadian Wyndham Lewis. They published only two issues of their magazine, **BLAST**, in

²⁹ Russian Books. Barbara Leibowits Graphics,

<<http://www.barbaraleibowitsgraphics.com/russianbooks.html>> Nov 2005.

Russian Avant-Garde, Collection of Russian Avant-Garde Books.

<http://www.artmedia.co.yu/inter/russian_avantgarde/avantgarde.htm> Nov 2005.

later work see Gerald Janecek, from *ZAUM: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/kruch/lkrucht1.htm>> Nov 2005.

³⁰ Gerald Janecek, THE LOOK OF RUSSIAN FUTURISM, page 123.

³¹ Vasilii Kamenskii, Museum of Modern Art Collection,

<http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A12432&page_number=1&template_id=1&sort_order=1> Nov 2005.

³² The Russian Avant-Garde Book. Museum of Modern Art Collection,

<<http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2002/russian/index.html>> Nov 2005.

1914 and 1915; the war ended their effort to present an alternative to Futurism. Pound's influence on visual poetry, especially Concrete Poetry, came later from his earlier interest in, but misunderstandings of, Chinese ideograms influenced by Fenollosa.³³ Some of these ideas had formed the foundation of Imagism. Prose writers like Stein, Joyce and others also contributed influences shaking the conventional approach to reading and writing. These individuals along with Pound are an extensive source of exploration for their impact on freeing the word and altering spatial use of the stuff of language for the visual poem in general and in particular the Concrete Poem.

Pound's influence on the Concrete Poetry Movement is a large subject in itself that included and perhaps for some continues to include linguistics, compositional field, image (or pictogram) versus no image, theories and manifestoes. Some interpretations of his work in turn were convoluted to the point by some to call for or demand a purity of form. I personally have no problem with an individual making such a demand of her or his own work or perhaps even a group forming a collective by consensus to pursue such a venture. However, when such a demand or call has as its deepest desire the dominance and control of an entire field of poetic expression, it is not an aesthetic movement but anti egalitarian foolishness and arrogance at best and worse not poetry, rather egomania doomed to poetic and artistic failure.

In 1916, Dadaism was named and founded in Switzerland, the calm eye of the WW One hurricane that ripped off the European establishment's cultural mask. The arts would continue undergoing radical and reactionary transformations. The modern visual poem with a wide variety of forms and types associated with the Dadaist, Italian Futurist and Russian Futurist movements was one of the many new multimedia arts. The visual poets of the Dadaists, such as Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters, embraced the material freedom of the word and extended typographical experimentation on the page rather than the calligramme form. In Spain, during and after World War One, a blending and struggle between the influences of the calligramme and Italian Futurist inclinations informed a number of poets composing their language's first modern visual poetics. Between the two World Wars, Collage, Italian Futurism, Russian Futurism, Constructivism, Dada, De Stijl, diverse Japanese avant-garde movements of the Twenties and Surrealism, continued or faded out while adding to the approaches of the visual poem and proto-concrete poem.

At this point the list of influential artists using text in paintings and visual poets associated with these various movements becomes too large to discuss within a limited observation such as this. Each language and country has their story of the evolution of the visual poem, including Concrete Poetry, during the Twentieth Century.

³³ Ernest Fenollosa., THE CHINESE WRITTEN CHARACTER AS A MEDIUM FOR POETRY. Ezra Pound, editor, City Lights, San Francisco, CA, 1986.

concrete poetry movement

After World War Two, avant-garde movements continued to be born. Among these adding to visual poetics were Lettrism,³⁴ Kinetic, Concrete Poetry, Fluxus,³⁵ Pop, Op, Visual Poetry with its various subgroup movements and individuals (for example -- Spatialism [France], Signalism [Balkans]), VOU, Plastic Poetry [Japan] and Russian Transfurism,³⁶ Correspondence Art/Mail Art, Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Book Art.

In the early Fifties, various subgroups and/or individuals were composing a minimalist visual poetry in isolation or were loosely connected. It came, according to various stories and histories, to be called Concrete Poetry with centers of gravity in Brasil, Northwest Europe and Japan with a later fourth center of gravity in Northeast USA. They quickly congealed into perhaps the first truly international poetic movement — working with fissioned materials of language, only translations of titles or individual words into another language were necessary to move the body of work into another tongue and eye experience. Essentially hostile to the calligramme or pictograph composition, their poems attended to typography alignments of order and disorder. With rare exceptions, typography ruled and the handwritten and hand printed script were, if not exiled, shoved into a shadowy nearly hidden corner. The Brazilian group demanded a purity of the mechanical typographical poem and while not adamant about such a demand, the Fluxists discouraged but accepted handwritten or printed poems if they were done by already consecrated members of the group.

Through national and international exhibitions, magazine publications, and then in the late 60's commercial anthologies, Concrete Poetry gained its fame, positive and negative. Many works composed during this 25 year or so span remain classics and potentially exhibit a strength and beauty to last a long while. Others were so weak critics used them to easily dismiss Concrete Poetry as drivel. Visual poetry to this day remains in a defensive and crippled posture because too many concrete clichés accepted as standards are constantly recycled. Not that the wider field of visual poetry or poetry do not have this problem of cliché.

The Concrete Movement, with a strong center of gravity in Brasil, the Noigandres, a name derived from Pound's *Canto XX*, continued its exclusiveness and maintained its limited lineage. Visual poetry is divided not only by those inclined towards a mental and material manipulation of matter compared to those resonating towards an Orphic aesthetic, but is also divided by those choosing hierarchal structures of closed associations opposite those choosing an egalitarian ideal. There is the question of the Brazilian Noigandres working in a climate of censorship while Brazilian musicians, writers, poets,

³⁴ Karl Young and Karl Kempton, *Lettriste Pages*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/lettrist/lettrist.htm>> Nov 2005.

³⁵ Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyneditors, *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*. <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/fluxus.htm>> Nov 2005.

³⁶ Gerald Janecek, *A Report on Transfurism*.

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/janecek/janecek2.htm>> Nov 2005.

artists were imprisoned, disappeared, killed or chose exile contrasted with the Lettrists who attempted a revolution of liberation in France in 1968. Clemente Padin and Jorge Caraballo were imprisoned in Uruguay for political opposition to the existing regime. Many Latin American visual poets, including individuals in Brasil, composed, in my opinion, the strongest political compositions of high protest art any where except perhaps some works in Eastern Europe and Russia. However, I know of no such visual poems composed by Brazilian Noigandres poets. For most Latin American visual poets, the avenue of choice to an international audience was through the truly international egalitarian movement of mail art because of national censorship, closed groups, black listing and affordability. Mail Art or Correspondence Art exhibitions and catalogues presented to a wider international audience more visual poetry than any other movement to date. Perhaps the internet will eclipse those 25 or 30 years of creativity as long as openness reigns.

usa

A group of nations constantly underestimated and ignored are those of the First Peoples who developed their symbols of pre and proto-writing composed in rock art, woven into fabric arts and basketry, inscribed or glazed onto pottery, painted on or carved into wood, etc. Just as Keltic symbols moved into illuminated manuscripts, so too have the First Peoples' symbols moved from traditional techniques to contemporary techniques in the Twentieth Century through the cross fertilization of their cultures with each other and the dominant culture of the USA, particularly with materials such as new paints and canvas. One of the earliest adaptations were those of the Navaho blanket and rug weavers mixing their symbols with those of Western and Central Asia. Among other examples to trace the evolutionary use of symbols in new and highly stylized forms can be seen in the paintings of the Hopi and Pueblo Peoples of the South West, the coastal North West Native American Nations and the Ojibway of the Lake Superior region. This is a very short list pointing to a huge and very necessary task for someone or ones.

I now turn to American English Visual Poetry. Others more knowledgeable than I can present a cohesive, articulate and comprehensive visual poetry overview for Canada and Britain, both of which created stronger traditions, at least until the mid 1970's or early 1980's, than the USA. The city of Toronto itself with ease could be pointed to as the visual poetry capital of the English language visual poem. Other nations and languages need their own visual poetry history illuminated.

The objective, as opposed to subjective, history of American English Visual Poetry remains to be written. Much has been forgotten, or worse, consciously omitted by the American English wing of the Concrete Movement, the Fluxists, disinterested or hostile academics except for Ana Hatherly, Klaus Peter Dencker, Gerald Janecek and allies. Given this atmosphere, had Cummings been less popular and supported by weaker publishers, he too would have been forgotten or a victim of erasure. He currently stands as the father figure of American English Visual Poetry. His fathers and mothers or older sisters and

brothers have either been forgotten or nearly or successfully erased.

The usual story line for birth of American English Visual Poetry begins with the first USA major exhibition of European avant-garde works displayed at the 1913 Armory Exhibition in New York City. One attendee was the young poet and painter, E. E. Cummings. In 1915, Stieglitz exhibited a couple of Calligrammes by Apollinaire. Cummings, reportedly when asked about Apollinaire's work, said that it had no influence on him. Regardless, his forms and shapes of visual poetry gave birth to and continued the line of an abstract lyricism, and by extension Orphism. Cummings' first use of visual poetic elements was circa 1916 while a college student. His work along with foreign and a few national influences informed in varying degrees the American Concrete Movement and later American visual poets. In other words, American English Concrete believed its cement bag with printed directions came from a moderate measure of Mallarmé mayonnaise & cubic centimeters of calligrammes and cummings crumbs & dishes of dada dashes & Rhine River Valley cement dust bundled and barged Brasil bound after stopping for a handful of England syllable grids and Scotland stone scribed syllables & shipped back north to the East Coast with rain forest Brazilian nut wood frames and Amazon River water & to be fanned dry by Japanese ideogram blinks and winks.

In 1906, Mexican born artist Marius de Zayas came to the USA; he began working for and with Alfred Stieglitz in 1907. From its founding in 1905 until 1908, Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery exhibited the American cutting edge of photography. Between 1908 and 1917, 291 Gallery displayed European and American avant-garde works and published the magazines *Camera Works* and *291*, making it, if not the avant-garde focal point, one of the most important.

Marius de Zayas became a significant figure for American English Visual Poetry for a number of reasons. Circa 1912, after a trip to Europe and influenced by cubists and African sculpture, he invented *abstract caricature*, a rendering of individuals into a geometrical ideogrammatic or pictogrammic form with mathematical symbols or formulas representing the trajectory of intelligence and character. Nine such works were exhibited at 291 Gallery in April 1913. His 1912 or early 1913 portrait drawing of his friend Agnes Meyer is one available example;³⁷ another example, published in *Camera Work*, October 1914, is of his friend Picabia.³⁸ This new style influenced Picabia and other dada artists in symbolic portraiture.

As editor for the magazine *291*, Marius de Zayas published several visual poems. In the initial issue of March 1915, he published one of Apollinaire's calligrammes, *Voyage*. In the second issue of April 1915, he may have

³⁷ Marius de Zayas, *Agnes Meyer*. Eye Contact: Modern American Portrait Drawings from the National Gallery, <http://www.npg.si.edu/cexh/eye/html/1_meyer.htm> Nov 2005.

³⁸ Marius de Zayas, *Picabia*. Between Music and the Machine: Francis Picabia and the End of Abstraction, <http://toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/articles/rothman/rothman4.html> fig 28 mathematical formulas. Nov 2005.

published the first American English visual poem, *Mental Reactions*.³⁹ Considering Agnes Meyer and de Zayas co-composed this work, it also may be the first collaborative modern visual poem, and also a visual poem composed by two minorities in the arts. The third issue contained his illustration of a long prose poem by Katharine N. Rhoades, his poem-drawing, *Woman*, and a calligramme by J. B. Kerfoot. He continued his collaborations with others including Picabia; *Femme* was published in issue 9 in November 1915.⁴⁰ There were a total of 12 issues in which many important figures of what was to be called Dada appeared.⁴¹ For a more complete history of American English Visual Poetry, the story of Marius de Zayas fully illuminated with his works is waiting.

Others may be found in pre 1920's founded publications such as Picabia's *391*,⁴² *Blindman*, *Others*, *The Ridgefiled Gazook*, *New York Dada* (one issue 1921), *Rongwrong*, *The Soil* and *TNT*. These publications are a starting point for the recovery of forgotten and or disappeared visual poets and their works. For example, in its only issue, in 1919, *TNT* published a visual poem, *ETYMONS* by Adon Lacroix;⁴³ it was a pure concrete poem by the Concrete Poetry Movement's definition. She was a painter and a poet. Soon after coming to America from Belgium, she moved in with Man Ray whom she married in 1915. Kenneth Rexroth in the Twenties composed a number of cubist poems; a surviving handful can be found in the **THE COMPLETE POEMS OF KENNETH REXROTH**. The works of Wallace Berman have also been omitted or disappeared. There are many other individuals whose stories should be rendered and fully illuminated with samples of their works. And, while the list could go on, a good starting point is *Whose History of What World?* by Karl Young.⁴⁴

I would, however, like to focus on two individuals as examples illustrating the negative impact on American English Visual Poetry caused by omission or premeditated disappearance. Without their personalities and works actively participating in the American English Concrete Movement dialogs and exhibitions, Concrete Poetry veered off in a direction it most probably would not have taken. And, generally speaking, American English Visual Poetry today would feasibly be populated with many calligraphers as well as painters and multimedia artists focused on language as subject matter. And it follows, that a much larger appreciative audience would exist compared to the actual audience of this moment.

The first individual example of neglect, omission or conscious erasure by the Concrete Movement is Kenneth Patchen. Like Cummings, had his main

³⁹ Willard Bohn, *THE AESTHETICS OF VISUAL POETRY, 1914-1928*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1986

⁴⁰ Marius de Zayas and Francis Picabia, *FEMME!*
<<http://www.ieeff.org/dadanydezaypicabelle1915.jpg>> Nov 2005.

⁴¹ STIEGLITZ. Alfred, editor 291. Sims Books contents
<http://books.simsreed.com/find_books.php?stk=26241> Nov 2005.

⁴² 391 dada. <<http://www.391.org/dada.htm>> Nov 2005.

⁴³ Rudolf E. Kuenzli, editor, *NEW YORK DADA*. Willis Locker & Owens, New York. NY, 1986.

⁴⁴ Karl Young, *Whose History of What World?*
<<http://www.jackmagazine.com/issue5/renhistkyoung.html>> Nov 2005.

publisher not been strong, his work may well be hidden at this moment. If one accepts the concept of an Orphic lineage, Kenneth Patchen without argument is a significant and revelatory member. While he may be better known for his picture poems, his first visual poems appeared in 1939 in **FIRST WILL & TESTAMENT** followed by others in **JOURNAL OF ALBION MOONLIGHT**. Both volumes also included picture poems. He composed major series of visual poems between 1941 and 1946 found in **CLOTH OF THE TEMPEST, PANELS FROM THE WALLS OF HEAVEN** and **SLEEPERS AWAKE!**. Some of the latter were composed prior to the moment the plates were set in the press. Bern Porter related the story to me about Patchen working directly on the plates as the book was being printed. It was later reprinted by New Directions which also reprinted **PANELS FROM THE WALLS OF HEAVEN** in **In Quest of Candlelighters**.⁴⁵

Nearly all the compositional forms and styles for what came to be called Concrete Poetry are present in these series composed by Patchen between 1939 and 1946. All Concrete Poetry anthologies failed to publish any of this work. It easily fit within the concrete forms, compositional approaches and time frame found in the anthologies. They failed too in their introductory or historical overviews by leaving him and his work unmentioned. I wrote to either the editors and/or publishers of the four American Concrete anthologies about this in the late 70's. None of them had a satisfactory or justifiable answer about why they left Patchen out. One chose not to reply. Some answers like, "He was too famous," were and remain to this day stunning and foolish. Higgins told me and others that Patchen was not a concrete poet. I guess he thought we would not research these early, pure concrete poetic works of Patchen. In an interview with Miriam Patchen, Kenneth's wife, I learned he was deeply hurt by this conscious disappearance. This was not an oversight by these editors and publishers. The question as to why this conscious disappearance happened remains an unsolved puzzle. Since the answers to my question were unsatisfactory, I can only make guesses ranging from jealousy, to being a threat to a narrowly defined lineage or that he stood firmly rooted in the American English poetry prophetic tradition with Whitman and in the illuminating lineage of William Blake and thus was unsuitable for the Concrete Cement mixer generally reactionary to the Orphic visual poetry resonance.

Another visual poet standing large and also ignored by conscious omission was Paul Reys. He seems to be the first composer of the American English visual haiku poem beginning in the late 1930's. Between the early 1920's and mid 1930's he visited India 12 times and lived in Japan 14 years with some time spent in China. Many of his books sold several thousand copies. Over the years he studied and developed his Asian sourced brush calligraphy; in forty years he composed a significant body of brushstroke poems. His is an example of a life being his message: his works being biographical artifacts and his Buddhism not a hunted down and convoluted twisted theoretical poetic dharma but a

⁴⁵ Karl Young, *Kenneth Patchen Survey*. <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/kpint.htm>> Nov 2005.

For printed color work see *THE ARGUMENT OF INNOCENCE: A Selection from the Arts of Kenneth Patchen*. forward by Miriam Patchen and text by Peter Veres, The Scrimshaw Press, Oakland, CA 1976.

Dharma lived reaching for transcendence.⁴⁶ Besides the skill and beauty of his visual poems, his humor and kindness flow throughout the body of his work. **letters to a friend: writings and drawings** at this moment presents the best overview available of his life with a considerable number of works excellently illuminating his masterful and beautiful brushstroke poems and other visual poem achievements.

It is interesting to note both Patchen and Reps mastered the picture poem and that 1939 was the year they published their first visual works. Patchen's initial influences were Apollinaire and the European Avant-garde; Reps' influences were mainly Japanese calligraphy, some Chinese calligraphy and the Dharma he learned from Buddhism and masters in India. From 1939 through at least 1946 Patchen was more interested in typography than Reps; he was also composing with handwriting. While Reps developed his distinctive brush calligraphy style over the years, he also composed with handwritten and hand printed scripts and the use of typography. Reps may also have composed the first American English mathematical haiku, published in 1969.⁴⁷ Patchen's painted poems contain a beautiful hand script easily passing as calligraphy. Both loved humor; their works are full of visual and lexical puns. Because neither were *pure* in the eyes of the Concrete Movement, they were consciously disappeared from their written histories. Both poets also sold more books than the Concrete Movement.⁴⁸

While the strongest Concrete works infected the following generation of visual poets and artists with a desire to equal or surpass what they experienced with Concrete Poetry and its ideology, there remains a small audience for visual poetry in the USA. Graffiti, a form of visual poetry, has more practitioners, followers and viewers than visual poetry; probably the same holds true for tattoos. Concrete Poetry was as new and refreshing as what the Beat Poets successfully created with lexical poetry. If one compares these two American groups, the Concrete Poets and Beats, on their antiwar, environmental and spiritual approaches, the former movement falls short on these issues of their moment. The American Concrete Movement /Fluxus Movement, (also known as the North Atlantic wing of the Concrete Movement) with its Hermetic inclinations, was generally apolitical, environmentally contradictory and used convoluted interpretations of Buddhist Dharma texts and teachings to inform theoretical approaches to their work, not transcendence. Jackson Mac Low is their exception proving the rule. The Beats, with their Dionysian inclinations, helped lead the overthrow of the first Texan president because of his foolish notioned war, were among the first environmental activists and among the primary Buddhist ushers and early post World War Two practitioners.

⁴⁶ For those interested in a spiritual discourse on poetry see *CARRYING POETRY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY* by Karl Kempton <<http://SoHo/Cafe/1492/Poet-Statements/state001.html>> Nov 2005.

⁴⁷ **GOLD and/ fish signatures**, p 56.

⁴⁸ Paul Reps Playshop. Timeline <<http://www.paulreps.com/Timeline.asp>> Nov 2005.

— Samples of picture poems <<http://www.paulreps.com/PicturePoems.asp>> Nov 2005.

Paul Reps by Ty Hadman <<http://www.ahapoetry.com/PP1000..htm>> Nov 2005.

The American concrete anthologies were (and for some remain) the primary or only sources available for study and information for interested poets and artists in this country. Unless one knew more about the wider and actual field of visual poetry, what was presented in these anthologies was assumed by many new readers and viewers to be a comprehensive presentation of available visual poetry works, not a very limited slice of the wider multimedia expression. There is no actual excuse for this exclusiveness and the narrow histories of conscious omission these four anthologies presented and the lack of an openness recognizing many other approaches to the visual poem. One needs only to look at Klaus Peter Dencker's **Text-Bilder: Visuelle Poesie international** from 1972 and Roberto Altman's, **TECKEN: Lettres, Signes, Ecritures** from 1978 to be a witness to the narrow exclusiveness of these and other concrete anthologies in presented work and the introductory historical outlines and their examples.

The disparity between the genders among anthologized concrete poets is another question waiting an answer just as that of the disappearing of specific male individuals. Illustrated above, in the teens and twenties of the last century, women were composing visual poems. The exact or estimated number remains to be recovered given reasons already stated or implied. A quick census of three of the American English concrete anthologies finds: in the Something Else Press anthology, one solo piece and one male/female collaboration piece, with a husband; in the female edited Indiana University Press anthology, two male/female collaborations (again one of these a collaboration piece with a husband) and two individuals, one of whom was the editor; in the New Directions Press anthology, four women. In the Second Aeon / Something Else typewriter anthology, two women. The answer is not that women were not composing such works. One glaring omission is Yoko Ono, a prolific Fluxist. Alison Knowles appears only in the New Directions Press collection but not the Something Else collection nor the University of Indiana collection. Why were Paula Claire and Alison Bielski only published in the Second Aeon / Something Else typewriter collection? And, only two male/female collaborations are found in the Writers Forum collection. And, there were other women composing concrete poems. For the above mentioned contemporaneous visual poetry anthologies, the Dencker collection appears as out of balance as the concrete collections. While the Altmann collection seems a bit brighter with more women represented, it too is open to this question. One need only to skim contributors to the more egalitarian Mail Art / Correspondence Art exhibition contributor lists / catalogs / collections embodying much higher male-female ratios to understand this remains an unanswered question to be solved with researching through deep and shallow resources.

As a result of the above examples and other factors, the following generation called their works Visual Poetry.⁴⁹ The term quickly spread. Over the years through hundreds of international correspondence / mail art exhibitions and catalogs, visual poetry exhibitions and publications, a wide and deep informal egalitarian group of individuals came to know about each other though never

⁴⁹ Klaus Peter Dencker, *From Concrete to Visual Poetry with a Glance into the Electronic Future* <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/dencker/denckere.htm>> Nov 2005.

coalesced into a movement. The history of visual poetry after circa 1965 is one of a vast collection of stories about hundreds, if not a few thousand including those who dropped out for a variety of reasons, of individuals composing an ever widening range of visual compositions in contrast to the narrow, well known history of Concrete Poetry.

One can only wonder what the stature of Concrete Poetry and Visual Poetry would be today had the Concrete Poetry Movement been open, generous and expansive by fully recognizing its mother and father forerunners, especially the large number of painters and poets, those early multimedia composers who laid the modern foundation between 1909 and 1955, and the paralleling or fore-running sister and brother peers of their moment. Instead, having somehow absorbed the dark seed of exclusiveness and a hard edged boundary identity, Concrete Poetry isolated itself into a ghetto which was recognized as such by some critics 30 years ago.

What I have come to call the Orphic lineage in visual poetry endured after Cummings and Patchen. In the late 1960's and early 1970's the line continued in the works of David Cole, Doris Cross, Kathy Ernst, William Fox, d.a. levy, Joel Lipman, Marilyn Rosenberg, Karl Young and others in America and bpNichol and others in Canada. Tom Phillips in England would be considered of the Orphic Lineage as well as an heir of William Blake (Patchen as well). In France the entire Lettrist movement would be included. From the lyrical to the pure abstract manipulation of language, visual poetry compositions world wide increased greatly both in numbers of its composers and extension of forms and kinds. As long as electronic media and technology maintain a continual reinventing of themselves, there is no reason to assume that visual poetry and its types will not continue to evolve and in turn excite and surprise its practitioners and its growing audience.

Oceano, California
Full Moon
November 2005

footnotes

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APPENDIX

1909 — 1919 Abridged Timeline

1909 - 1910

Baraque paints first symbols and letters on canvas

1910 - 1912

Cubists and Futurists add text to paintings

1912

Alexi Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov publish *Igra v Adu*

Marius de Zayas adds mathematical formulas to portraits

1913

Marinetti publishes *Destruction of Syntax - Imagination Without Strings - Words-In-Freedom*

Carlo Carrà publishes *Parole in Libertà*

Alexi E. Kruchenykh publishes *Poluzhiboi*

1914

Vasilii Kamenskii begins ferro-concrete poem series

Carlo Carrà composes *The Chase, Still Life with Soda Syphon, Umbrella of the Sun, Noises of the Night Cafe* and *Interventionist Manifesto*

Apollinaire composes first calligramme, published June

Kruchenykh publishes 3 editions of *VZORVAL*

Marinetti publishes *Zang Tumb Tum*

Luciano Folgore publishes *Ponti sull'Oceano*

1915

Marius de Zayas and Agnes Meyer compose *Mental Reactions*

Carlo Carrà publishes *Guerrapittura*

Ardengo Soffici publishes *BIFSZF + 18. Simultaneità e Chimismi lirici*

1916

Carlo Carrà leaves Futurists, creates *Metafisica* with Giorgio de Chirico.

Cummings first use of visual elements

Francesco Cangiullo publishes *Piedigrotta*

1918

Apollinaire dies

1919

Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* published

F.T. Marinetti publishes *Les mots en liberté futuristes*

Francesco Cangiullo publishes *Caffè Concerto - Alfabeto a Sorpresa*
a pure concrete poem, *ETYMONS*, by Adon Lacroix

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