Guy Bennett on the Visual in Poetry

"At its most minimal, the visual poem has as both its point of departure and final destination the letter shape, though it is rare that a poem consists of a single sign. More often than not, multiple instances of a given letter are assembled into an abstract composition that plays on the graphic structure of the letter form..."

Loss Pequeño Glazier: Grep: A Grammar

"Grep is a powerful computer command though one that is used mostly for file maintenance. Of interest here are other uses of grep, especially its use as a writing method; a concept that would probably leave a lot of UNIX *programmers scratching their* CPUS..."

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Concerning the Visual in Poetry

By Guy Bennett

I once found myself not reading a book but staring at the letters....
—GERARD UNGER

Y OU COULD SAY that all written poetry is inherently visual, and this is certainly true. Not of poetry alone, however, but of all instances of written language. You could argue that the multiform nature of the poetic text—as opposed to the more uniform appearance of written prose—tends to emphasize the visual qualities of poetry. This is certainly true as well, though it is a question of form, not ontology, and visual poetry is not a poetic form but a form of poetry.

In a broad sense, the term "visual poetry" can be understood to mean any poetry that accords obvious significance to the visual aspect of the poem. The abstract poem, the calligram, the concrete poem, the constellation, the *druksel,* the elementary poem, the evident poem, the ferro-concrete poem, the free-word poem, the ideogram, the kinetic poem, the lettrist poem, the mechanical poem, the optical poem, the opto-phonetic poem, the painting poem, the pattern poem, the plastic poem, the poster poem, the symbiotic text, the *tiksel,* the typewriter poem, the typoem, the typogram, and the zeroglyph are all types of "visual poetry," though the terms are far from interchangeable. To periphrase Mary Ellen Solt, so many kinds of experimental poetry are being labeled "visual" that it is difficult to say what the word means (Solt, 7).

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In a more restricted, and thus more precise and useful sense, the term "visual poetry" refers to a particular kind of "visual poetry," one that flowered in the 1950s and '60s, but was no longer practiced with any regularity after the early 1970s. Its specificity resides in the emphasis placed on the graphic nature of the printed or written sign, which is brought so predominantly to the fore that it occludes the semantic potential of that sign by obviating any linguistic context in which it might signify something—were it only a sound—thus radically reducing, if not altogether eliminating the possibility of conventional linear reading, that is - ultimately - reading for meaning.

It follows that the visual poem, in this more specific sense, is inherently meaningless. Unburdened by the conceptual weight of signifiers, signifieds, referents, and other such symbolic clap-trap, it is but itself: an autonomous (i.e. non-referential), aesthetically organized instance of written language. It ignores the figuration of concrete poetry and the calligram and, needless to say, has little if anything to do with the traditional linear poem articulated spatially—whether lexically or phraseologically, formally or typographically—on the page. Visual poetry in *this* sense is the subject of the present essay.

Schwitters once wrote: "Not the word but the letter is the original material of poetry." Were I to rephrase that statement, for the purposes of the present essay I would say that the letter *form* is the original material of *visual* poetry, and the study of the visual poem might very well begin by considering the position the poet takes vis-à-vis the letter form. At its most minimal, the visual poem has as both its point of departure and final destination the letter shape, though it is rare that a poem consists of a single sign. More often than not, multiple instances of a given letter are assembled into an abstract composition that plays on the graphic structure of the letter form, perhaps the most characteristic example being Hansjörg Mayer's 1962-'63 collection *alphabet.*

In these poems (figs. 1, 2 and 3), Mayer combines letter forms according to their structural logic (i.e. their horizontal, vertical and/or diagonal strokes, their curves and counters, etc.), creating purely visual compositions. They are compact, asemantic works that explore the structural relationships of letter forms and the amalgams those combined forms create against the white space of the page. They do not

seek to activate any potential meanings the letter shapes may have individually, nor any they may take on when organized into a poem. Mayer, as Stephen Bann has written, "is not concerned with meaning: the letters which he uses are not so much legible as supremely *visible*. ... The significance of his work lies in the fact that he uses the printed letter quite simply as a material." (Bann, 11)
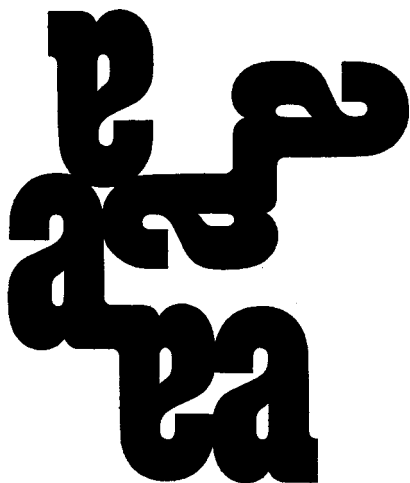
(FIG. 1)

(FIG. 2)
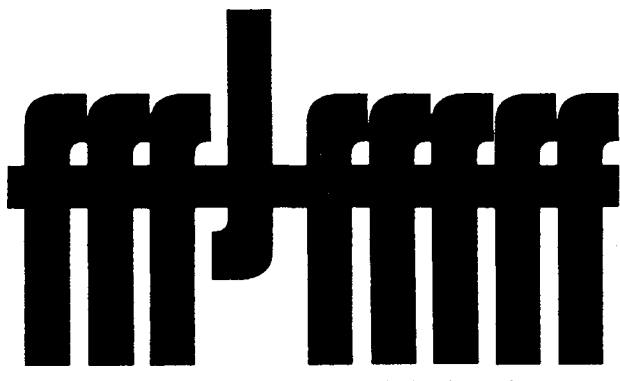
In contrast, let us consider a concrete poem by Ladislav Novák (fig. 4). It, too, is formed from a single sign, but as is generally the case in concrete poetry, the semantic potential of that sign is brought into play.

"individualista" is essentially a visual pun. Its humor results from the complex of meanings at work in the poem, and which (as is often true of concrete poetry) convey a relatively obvious, frequently didactic message—in this case: "Don't conform." Such semantic play is entirely lacking in Mayer's poems as they do not pretend to meaning. They are

individualista

IIIIIIIIIIIII
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IIIIIIIIIIIII
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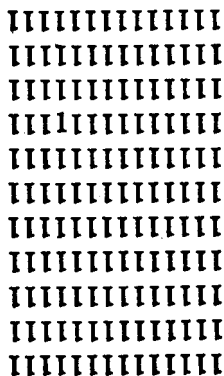
(FIG. 4)

strictly visual, semantically transparent works—ideograms unencumbered by ideas—and they operate in the free field of graphic form and color. They are minimalistic, even excessively so, whereas most visual poetry tends toward a richer typographic palate comprising multiple letter and analphabetic forms, often in combination with basic geometric shapes.

For example, "e – o – ö" by Ernst Jandl (fig. 5) is characterized by a structural tension created by the juxtaposition of the roundness of those three letters and the conflicting triangular and square shapes they combine to form. Furthermore, the two–dimensional poem cleverly suggests visual depth and translucence through strictly typographical means: the square appears to be set in front of the triangle, the crossbar of the *e* creating a darker color than that of the *o* with its open counter. The square, as if transparent, lets the darker color of the triangle show through, so to speak, giving a median color created by the accented *ö*. The resulting gradation of typographic color evokes the parallel phonetic gradation of those letters, *ö* being roughly equivalent to *o* and *e* pronounced together, as demonstrated in the homophonous ligature *œ*.
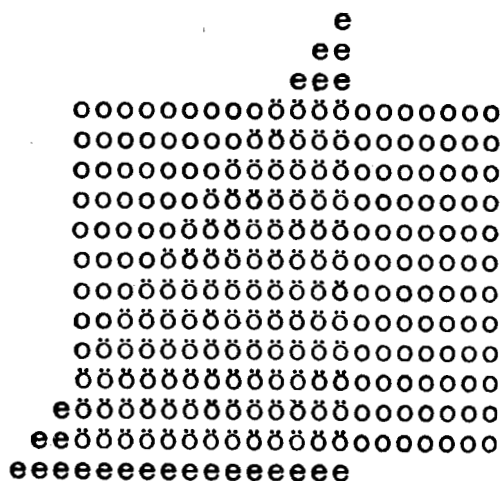
The visual poetry of John Furnival is more elaborate still as it combines a broad range of letter forms into a more intricate whole. As a result of overprinting, many of the letter shapes are obscured, thus limiting our "reading" of the poem to the recognition of its constituent elements, and the way in which they are combined to create the composition. In Furnival's work, there is frequently an underlying geometric structure which is created by repeating and displacing groups of letters around a central axis, producing an intricate pattern reminiscent of Islamic art, with its tendency to geometric abstraction (fig. 6).
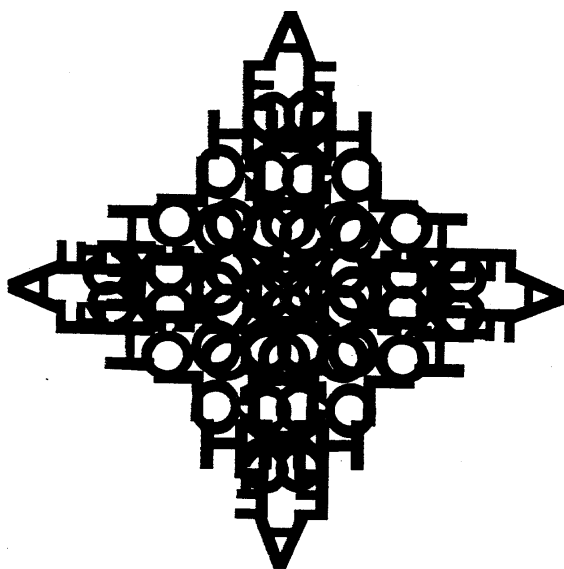
(FIG. 6)

Text 1 by Fernando Millán (fig. 7) also creates a strong graphic effect through the use of the black rectangle that dominates the work, giving the poem its elongated shape and generating diversity in color and texture by contrasting with the letter forms below. The latter are themselves combined into a rectangle of nearly identical proportions, resulting in a symmetrical composition. The use of simple punctuation symbols along with the letters creates variety and sets up a visual rhythm,

the square "dots" of the exclamation point, colon, periods and *I* breaking up the already fractured white space and contrasting with the round counters of the *p, b* and *d.*

Text 1 recalls the work of certain poet/artists of the historical avantgarde, most notably Hendrik Werkman, who produced a striking body of visual poetry—for the most part, painterly assemblages of letter forms, rules and/or simple, geometric shapes (figs. 8 and 9). Much of his work, printed in color, floats somewhere between poetry and painting. It prefigures the visual poetry of the 1950s and '60s in its singleminded exploration of the inner logic of graphic forms.

A similar atmosphere pervades the work of Giovanna Sandri, a poet remarkable for her graceful sense of abstraction and carefully balanced compositions. Her frequent, at times exclusive use of analphabetics (figs. 10 and 11) virtually removes her graphic work from any linguistic context whatever, giving it a stark, mute quality. The poems of her first book, *Capitolo zero* ["Chapter Zero"–1969], seem as does much of

(FIG. 8)

(FIG. 9)

(FIG. 10)

(FIG. 11)

13
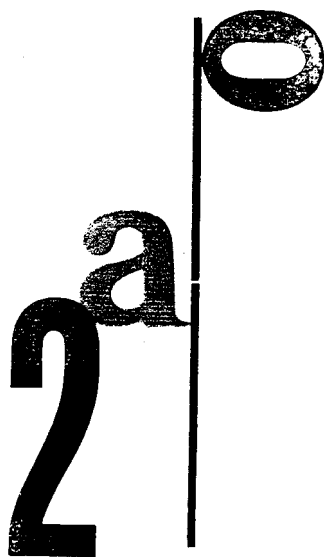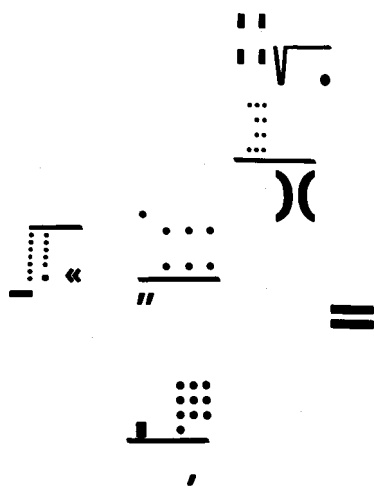
her visual poetry, a writing without a speaking, as if the poems issued from some preverbal language whose roots reach back beyond vocally articulated sound, as the title of the book suggests.

Though effectively devoid of typical poetic devices, much visual poetry is in fact informed by traditional versification and rhetoric. The third poem by Sandri (fig. 12), for example, brings into play a number of conventional poetic techniques. There is what could be termed visual rhyme in the repeated letters *m, œ,* and *g,* a sense of form and analogy in the recurrence of certain graphic shapes (the vertical rule and the columns of *m*'s, the closed parenthesis and the right side of the 0 to the left, the round eye of the *a* and the *g*'s below, not to
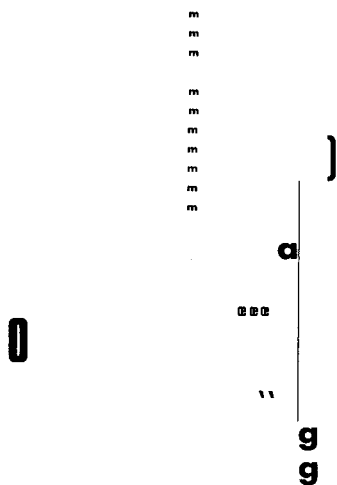
(FIG. 12)

mention the staccato-like punctuation of the ''), and a swift, choppy rhythm set up by the strong vertical emphasis and repetitive letter and graphic shapes that guide the reader's eye through the poem.

When letter forms are used, as they are here, as autonomous graphic elements, the physical nature of writing is brought bluntly to the fore, and certain poets have taken this approach to an extreme, basing their work on the materiality of the sign *as written/printed on paper.* The resulting poetry is unique in that it activates not only the graphic sign itself, but the paper on which it is printed, and which, as a material object, can be physically apprehended and manipulated, as well. Poets like Franz Mons (fig. 13) and Adriano Spatola (figs. 14 and 15) have

(FIG. 13)

15

(FIG. 14)

(FIG. 15)

16
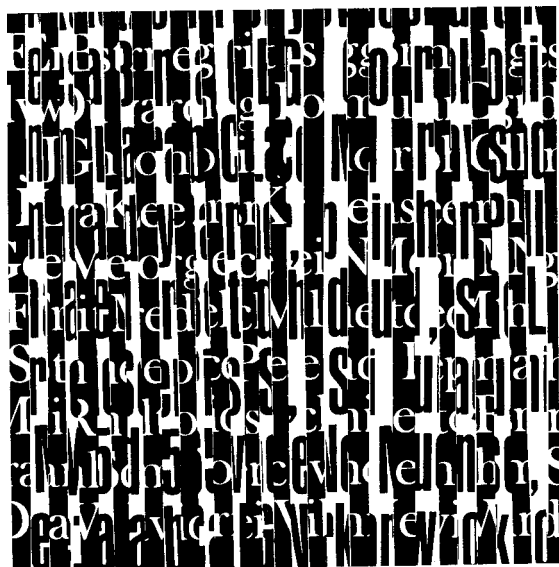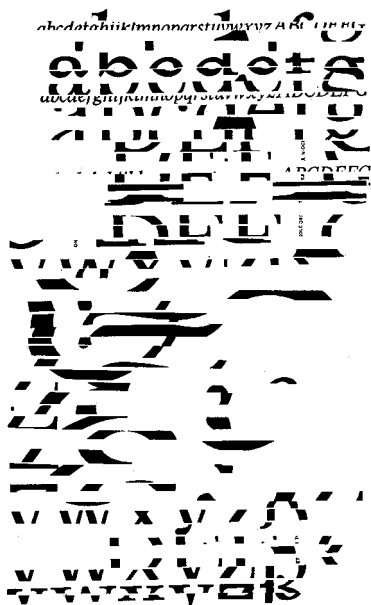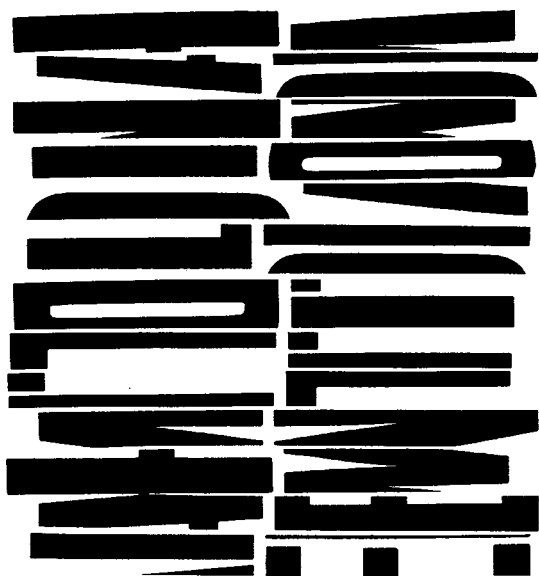
crumpled, cut up, fragmented and reassembled poems, producing a shattered graphic discourse that borders on optical static. Spatola in particular consistently pushed the boundaries of visual poetry, and his "zeroglyphics," as he called them, represent a limit beyond which written language virtually ceases to exist, for in these poems the letter form is so fragmented as to be unrecognizable as such. In an essay on Spatola's zeroglyphics, [1] Giulia Niccolai has commented: "Zeroglyphic stems of course from the word 'hieroglyphic,' and we know that hieroglyphic derives from the old Latin *hieroglyphicum,* from the Greek *hieroglyphicos* i.e. pertinent to the sacred (from *hieros*) incisions (from the verb *glyphein,* to incise, to sculpt)—and thus conveys the annulment of the semantic message and the presence of the iconic one."

The "annulment of the semantic message," I have argued, constitutes the very specificity of visual poetry, though some might complain that it also represents its major short-coming, as one might justifiably ask: is this really poetry at all? Can we accept a poem wholly devoid of semantic "content"? A writing that refutes interpretation? The answer, of course, is yes. There is a long tradition of semantically obscured or transparent poetry. One thinks of folk poetry and nursery rhymes, with their frequently "meaningless" turns and refrains, the French *fatrasie* of the Middle Ages, the "nonsense" poetry of 19th century writers like Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, not to mention the "sound" poetry of such luminaries of the historical avant-garde as Ball, Huelsenbeck, Khlebnikov, and Kruchenykh, to name just a few. Nor should we forget that visual poetry, as defined here, is a product of the first decades of the 20th century and was practiced by a number of poets, among them Marinetti, Pietri, Schwitters and Werkman.

As Paul de Vree has written: "[Visual poets] still adhere to the notion of poetry because *through the text* – however rudimentary, reduced or truncated—they are confronted with an *optical process.* The text remains primary." (*klankteksten,* p. 9). I would add that poetry, whose medium is language, begs an exploration of all aspects of that medium, and should in no way be limited or bound to that part which bears meaning. It seems self-evident that poets would investigate and exploit the potential of written language in their work, as it is *in and*

[1] from "A Possible Way of Interpreting Some Zeroglyphics," Niccolai's afterword in Adriano Spatola's *Zeroglyphics* (Los Angeles and Fairfax: Red Hill Press, 1977), translated by Niccolai and Paul Vangelisti. (Unpaginated)

through writing that poetry is generally conveyed and, in a broader sense, language eternalized. And as Schwitters once put it: "Eternal lasts longest."

<div align="center">SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY</div>

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Grep: A Grammar

by Loss Pequeño Glazier

The working through of any real process will contain a sequential logic according to its own particular, essential dynamic. The character of that dynamic, which it acquires only in that exact and self-same process, becomes its own definition.

<div align="right">JOHANNA DRUCKER</div>

Larger productions, such as poems, are like completed machines. Any individual sentence might be a piston. It will not get you down the road by itself, but you could not move the vehicle without it.

<div align="right">RON SILLIMAN</div>

IF YOU ARE writing ASCII in the C shell along the forbidding but captivating coast of UNIX, the grep command will be an essential tool at your side. Grep is a powerful command though one that is used mostly for file maintenance. Of interest here are other uses of grep, especially its use as a writing *method*; a concept that would probably leave a lot of UNIX programmers scratching their CPUs. Such a vision of grep makes particular sense if we can begin to move from the concept of writing as the production of something static (a codex or file) to a

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more dynamic or fluid concept of writing as the *action* of production (process[1]). That is, to a viewpoint where it's the procedure or algorithm that counts, the output being simply a by-product of that activity. This is not an easy undertaking since so many of our assumptions about textuality rely on a traditional "fixed" scheme. What exactly is a grep and how can it have relevance to the production of text?

Grep is one of numerous similar programs, ed (a line editor) and sed (a "stream of text" editor), among them, along with the siblings of grep, `fgrep` and `egrep`. Such programs handle text in terms of input and output, and perform their activity with given modifiable parameters. At its lowest level, the grep is a "find" command. "Use grep to search for text in files, or in the standard input, then display each line matched on the standard output." (Topham 70) It is also sometimes described in terms of patterns: "Grep searches files for a pattern and prints all lines that contain that pattern" (Newnes 312). Commands, though often considered counterintuitive, are quite simple. For example, to search for lines that contain the word "halibut" in a file called "fish", you would enter:

```
grep halibut fish
```

at your command line. If the source file "fish" contained only the following 3 lines:

```
smoked salmon sings
sad halibut sags
grand carpe diem
```

Then the output of grep halibut fish would be:

```
sad halibut sags
```

That is, grep will use the pattern word as a filter to return lines (in this case only one) that contain that word.

One could argue that this command is solely geared towards locating. However, it has greater possibilities. First, grep is a rigorous text processing procedure. In certain senses, this would reinforce the popular impression of UNIX as an unforgiving and inhospitable system (especially for infrequent users). On the other hand, such rigor is interesting in the post-DOS era where computers frequently crash for no apparent reason.[2] (These crashes can result from pile-ups among multitudes of invisible programs, i.e., for reasons the user can't even see.) Such a rigor bespeaks a direct relation to the electronic text, a fearful symmetry, indeed. Yet one with productive qualities as strict rules, definition,

consummately effective flags, and undeviating execution of procedure, result in starkly literal (and material) textual output.

Such materiality is evident in concrete conceptions of language: "literal strings," "strings," "regular expressions," and "compound expressions" are among the way language is viewed in the world of grep. (Grep patterns are constructed from "regular expressions", that is, "ordinary" non-binary characters such as digits, letters, and various characters used as operators, the fundamentals "materials" of writing.) Materiality is also foregrounded by the intensified sense of grammar employed to evoke grep activities. Such a grammar, once invoked, sets into motion a determined process of textual production. One thus writes instructions for the *process*, and the output text is simply a by-product. As Johanna Drucker has written on other process work, "It is occurring then carries through whatever growth is appropriate to the logic of its own development.... That becomes the logic of its own development, the way grammar becomes an absolute fact of language: because the words are such powerful objects they command relation — or is it more simple, even, they are the units and any sequence of units becomes a structure" (264-5). The grammar of grep is one where expressions are quite literal. For example,

```
grep -i halibut fish
```

would retrieve both "halibut" and "Halibut".

```
grep -l hal* fish/*
```

would retrieve anything beginning with the letters "hal" in any file in the directory "fish" and only output filenames of occurrences, not actual lines of text. The shorthand for some of these possibilities is expressed by

```
grep [-bchilnsv] pattern file(s)
```

an arcane looking proposal indeed yet one that lays out operational directions for these rigorous procedures; it is one that also seems to invoke Ron Silliman's assertion that "Structure is metaphor, content permission, syntax force" (57).

Such rigor emphasizes the line as the basic unit of text. This could be called a "phrasiform as opposed to word form" (264) conception, as Johanna Drucker has written on another procedural investigation. It is interesting to work in texts where the basic unit is the line; some would argue this has special relevance to poetry. For UNIX, there are historical reasons for this; namely that grep is descended

from ed, an editor that displays text on a line by a line basis rather than on a complete screen. Such a concept evokes the use of teletypes instead of terminals and dates from a time when a key concern was keeping the amount of data transmitted to a minimum so that communication lines would stay open and costs would be kept down. The mechanics of the teletype medium, like the medium of International Code of Signals explored by Hannah Weiner in works such as *Code Poems*, create a potential objectification of language, thus providing access to its materiality. Such explorations provide, in Charles Bernstein's words, a "radical reaffirmation of a commitment to writing as a specific kind of object making, an investigation rather than an aestheticization" (286). The mechanics of grep provide a medium with consistent properties; this fact is important for the production of writing that emphasizes its material qualities.

The secondly reason grep has greater possibilities than being merely a search tool is that it treats the text *as a file* and operates on the text at a non-represented (or more material) level. One must image a dual world: the visible or tangible level (surface) presents interpreted or represented objects (pages) on the level of interpretation (the Web browser or through Windows). "Location" here can be points within individual documents or points within documents on different servers. The second level is the non-displayed. On this more chthonic level, objects are uninterpreted (files) and exist as the material surface at the location where writing "takes place" (through the editor). One might think of this as an intangible or invisible place but the fact is that it is *not* invisible; it is as present as the representations of browsers. In fact it might be *more* tangible since these are files composed entirely of "real" text ("regular expressions") with no control characters.

For one engaged in the production of representation, grep is a simple tool and would not generally be thought of as a text production engine. Similarly, someone painting portraits of judges for display in a courthouse might not think of a can with a hole in it as a painting utensil (as Jackson Pollack would). Like the paint can and many other UNIX utilities, the grep command is a solid conduit for text with strictly defined rules and properties, rigorous in its execution of procedure. Like the hole in Pollack's paint can, a grep is an opening into the world of the materiality of words constituting the electronic text file.

What possibilities might there be for grep and poetry? Let us consider a few examples.

G r e p Experiments

> *For instance one could just as easily take the TURK POEM and make an AEROPLANE and vice versa the possibility of such transformations lies less on the nominal level and more in the material consistency even in this particular case it is quite easy one folds the turk poem according to the pattern for making an aeroplane and ends up with an admittedly highly simple but airworthy aeroplane.*
> —Oskar Pastior

Most importantly, a grep is a procedure. Like the procedures of Oulipo, Cage, Mac Low, or procedures such as those suggested in Bernstein's poetry "Experiments" list, a grep is a formal method or program for parsing or altering the machine-readable text according to a fairly basic algorithm. Grep tells the machine: "Check the first line of text, if that line of text contains x, output that line; if there is following line of text, check that one and repeat the procedure; otherwise, stop". In fact, the simplicity of this procedure makes it seem merely utilitarian. But its ability to unadornedly incise text makes it fundament to any investigation of text-altering programs. Following are three examples of how procedures can be conceived for grep. (See http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/glazier/greps/ for some versions of these works.)

A Grep for Jackson Mac Low

A grep of "Methods for Reading and Performing Asymmetries" was first published in part in *Crayon* 1 (1997). The source text for this work consists of Jackson Mac Low's "Methods for Reading and Performing Asymmetries" as it appears in *Representative Works: 1938-1985*. (Lines were kept consistent with the original to allow comparison with the published text.[3]) The UNIX grep command was used to produce blocks of text from pattern words drawn from the title, "Methods for Reading and Performing Asymmetries", with the omission of "for" and "and". This title is also generated as the first line of each of the output sections since this title begins each section of the source text. Date of generation was 5 August 1997. Use of the grep was a way to examine a procedural work through a procedure.

"The Fishtail" & "Grep on 'Y'"

These two works are both derived from writings of Hawthorne and

Melville, with an emphasis on Melville's letters to Hawthorne[4]. Parts of the multi-section poem, "The Fishtail: Arrowhead, or 'The Whale'", were generated through the grep procedure: (1) In section "M", "Shakespeare" was used as a pattern word to generate the indented text from the source text "Mosses from an Old Manse." (2) The epigraph to Section h is a grep of the pattern word "church" on the source text *Moby Dick*. (The output was reformatted for paragraph style). (3) A grep of the serendipitously selected pattern words "manse," "book," "house," and "mosses" on the source text "Mosses from an Old Manse" generated the section "Manse/Mosses". (This section also treats the source html file as a literal text, allowing html encoding to result from the grep.) (4) Finally, "from Melville's Letters to Hawthorne" is a grep on the twelve surviving letters from Melville to Hawthorne[5] as available at "The Life and Works of Herman Melville" (http://www.melville.org/corresp.htm). Pattern words for this grep, selected serendipitously, were "gable", "book", "mount", "gray", "dard", "shore", "house", and "pit". Except for the reformatting into paragraph format noted above, no post-grep alterations were performed on the output. Using the grep procedure was a way to "collaborate" with these texts influenced by literary exchange.

"Ego non baptiso te in nomine: A grep on Y" was first published in *Salt* 10 (1997) as part of "[Mayapán] : a Poetics of the Link". This is a very simple grep, using a single pattern word consisting of one character, "Y". The source text consists of the twelve surviving letters from Melville to Hawthorne. "Y" was selected as a pattern word due to its vocalic kinship with the personal pronoun "I", since the "I" is germane to these letters. (The letter "I" could not be used due to the inordinate amount of output it would have produced.) No post-execution editing was performed.

"Clear Eyd Fox Quickn Brown Hoax"

The third grep experiment documented here is "'Clear Eyd Fox Quickn Brown Hoax': A grep of the 1995 Poetics Logs". This text was generated in an effort to use the grep procedure to create a collaborative text. To this aim, what could be better, it was thought, than an entire year of discussion on the nation's premier electronic discussion list for innovative poetries. This grep uses the 1995 archive of the discussion list as the source text, a considerably large source text from

which to draw. The procedure for this work is somewhat more complicated than the grep works mentioned above, since the volume of grep results required editorial decisions to be made. As with all procedural works, it is crucial that editorial decisions are documented. They are presented here as details of this procedure.

"Clear Eyd Fox Quickn Brown Hoax" was generated by taking the phrase "Clear Eyd Fox Quickn Brown Hoax", my own variation of the old typewriter repairman's infamous "a quick brown fox jumped over the lazy moon", and using these words as pattern words. The work was generated and built within the UNIX C shell. For the first web version of this work, HTML was used to display the output files. For the print version, word wrap was determined by Netscape's default display parameters. (Internal truncation of title words was also guided by Netscape's pixel width on a standard monitor.)

Procedure: The UNIX grep command was used to parse the Poetics log files for 1995. Thus, every word in this text was written by persons posting to Poetics (that is, one or more of the approximately 200 subscribers to Poetics at that time). The input string was altered in some cases ("browning" for "brown," for example, as detailed below) to keep the output within the 3 to 100 line range which was deemed optimal for this composition.

Text Preparation & Images: Each section represents the unedited output for the grep returns on the indicated expression with two exceptions. (1) The "clear" section was truncated at 41 lines due to an excessive length. (2) Multiple repetitions of header lines were trimmed in the case of repeats due to hits based on threads. Images were a crucial component to the Web version of this work. For images, Alta Vista was used to search the Web based on search phrases identical or similar to the grep pattern word. The first usable (i.e., non-proprietary) image encountered was downloaded and incorporated into the installation.

The Input Phrases: Details about the input phrases are as follows:

Title Word	Grep Pattern Word	Alta Vista Search Phrase (for Images)
clear	clear	clear images
eyd	eyed	eye image
fox	fox	fox
quickn	quicken	quick images
brown	browning	brown
hoax	hoax	hoax images

Note: for images, "search word" + "images" was first tried (to force retrieval to contain image files). If this did not work, "search word" + "image" was tried. As a last resort, if nothing could otherwise be found, the search word on its own was tried, even though it meant looking through hundreds of hits. Interestingly, "fox" was the most difficult word to search because of numerous movie and sports hits containing proprietary material.

Date of Generation: "Clear Eyd Fox Quickn Brown Hoax" was generated on 12 November 1996.

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Notes

1 Grep is an instrument that enters the file to create a separate entity, delivering it to standard output. Grep gives such an emphasis to process that its default destination is not even a file, only an impermanent display on the screen.

2 Commands such as grep present interesting alternatives to hyper-dominant paradigms for electronic writing, such as those marketed by Microsoft. Curiously, the graphical environment that typifies most word processing programs is highly imprecise. User vulnerability to predictable aspects increases wherever compiled/proprietary code restricts the user from access to the source code of the word processing software. In UNIX systems, by contrast, access to source code is common.

3 Again, emphasis is on the unit of the line.

4 Though short-lived (1850-52), the friendship between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville was an intense one. It began with each writer writing about the other's books and ends most markedly with Hawthorne in Melville's books as Vine in *Clarel* and as the subject of "Monody". It was Hawthorne's influence that may have turned *Moby Dick* from a sea adventure into a darker investigation. It was the idea that interactions between texts could so drastically alter their outcome that made these interesting as source documents.

5 None of Hawthorne's letters to Melville seem to have survived.

A Small Balletic Hive

By Will Alexander

The assumed results of creative workshops remain tangible objects, drawings, paintings, poems, small sculptings. A mono probing of the particular mediums pursued, honing their exterior state to a competent level so as to withstand a certain technical scrutiny. A creation externally fortified against palpable leakage, against standard incompetence.

To take writing as example, texts read, choices of phrasing discussed, fleeting forays into possible forms of publication. But to me such activity seems induced by a conservative pragmatics; a finished product no matter the consequence of the entropy that it faces in the long run. What I was concerned with all three incarnations of my workshop was the praxis of the interior life.

First of all a state of mind must exist in order for any created form to appear. I introduced during the first five sessions the absolute need for inner fertilization. Not a dogmatic fertilization, but a need for embarking upon a quest for understanding the natural atmosphere of one's mind. Its predilection towards fire or quiescence, or its condition being of a curiously formed hybrid. The text consulted most useful in this regard was Edward de Bono's *Lateral Thinking*. A book of seminal exercises which allows thinking to go beyond selection and "open up other pathways," generating "as many alternative approaches as one can." Even after a promising direction has been found, other approaches should never be abandoned. Normally students are lauded

for expertise in mastering a single limitation, but what was encouraged in this context was the relevance of movement for the sake of movement. To "change one's ideas," to generate flux even if that entails a kind of ambivalence or perception of incompleteness. Which recalls Surrealism's shattering of the sequential. As de Bono states, " the parts do not have to be self-supporting at every stage," so the whole idea of a proper or accessible manner of creating something is no longer uppermost in carrying a workable export into the world. Leaps can be made. One can start at G, work back to F, and eliminate A. I call it flexible ambulation through one's mental catacombs.

By engaging in such praxis the creative person begins to evolve a necessary discrimination, thereby understanding the isolation concomitant with one's imaginal efforts and the fickle circumstance of the public appraisal of those efforts. In keeping with this tenor we then began to probe the predatory nature of the marketplace. And at that point two seminal figures appeared in our purview: Joan Miró and Fernando Pessoa. The former's letters were quite revealing in this regard. His disdain for the thought of the provinces and their alignment with imaginal conformity. Then the legacy of Pessoa's imaginal flight in an indifferent Lisbon, creating his host of heteronyms, bringing to Portuguese a renown it had failed to know since the creations of Camoëns.

These examples amongst others brought to our small collective the eruptive point of character and the seminal power it embodies. By stressing character throughout our gatherings we would discuss the different texts perused always with an eye to the different personal approaches gathered. Normally we would range in number between five and ten souls, but the atmosphere seemed always capable of an electric plasticity generated from one of my random verbal sparks, which seemed to allow verbal cross-feeding, which would further inculcate conundrums. And this was good, because not only were there poets and writers present, but a Klebnikov scholar, a former concert pianist, visual artists, editors of film, all focusing upon the art of creativity. So in keeping with such a human array painters like Varo and Vlaminck, the aforementioned Miró, Matta and Matisse, were all discussed, as well as poetic mathematicians, such as Kurt Gödel and Georg Cantor. Then of course poets, such as Bob Kaufman, Blanca Varela, Andre Breton, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Philip Lamantia, Octavio Paz and Garcia Lorca were discussed.

After the first phase, which was entitled Psychic Fiesta, we entered the second phase, which was entitled Passion & Ethics. It centered around the theme of self-challenge and the interior nucleus of courage which was understood to flow as an essential plasma. One could say that a vivacity of understanding and resistance began to evolve from the readings and the exchanges, and so the organics of poetic collectives were discussed under present world conditions on week eight of Passion & Ethics. Then the question was put, "Should current institutions be attacked, or should they be left to meander and die?" It seemed the latter gained a more favorable reading. In 1964, Andre Breton said that we were entering a "neutral zone," and the shapes which Surrealism took during its incipient phases was no longer applicable. Which led to forays into quantum physics relating its non-sequential character to the present imaginal field and the imperceptible shift into more refined zones of awareness. More refined arrays of assault on the current temporal forces like an electrical contagion which slowly takes over a body.

One thing was agreed upon, that the era which followed the Second World War has entered an irreversible Waterloo. And it was agreed that the century itself, for all intents and purposes, drew to a close at the fall of the Berlin Wall. The feeling was such that the world population had entered a liminal zone, called by the Maya the "nameless days," which "were considered unfortunate..." These were the five extra days of the Mayan solar calendar where being took refuge from the world. Paraphrasing this period, one could call it the five empty days of poison, where confusion and danger existed as principle hallmarks. This being understood as a prevailing general condition, we convened upon the third phase of the workshop entitled Interiority & Light. Texts from Rene Guenon, Henry Corbin, and Anada Coomaraswamy became dominant. An attempt to return to one's inward power, not in terms of some didactic religiosity, but opening up the fecund chemistry of one's creative ducts.

This is not to say that individual works were not read and critiqued, nor an isolated revery brought to scale over the power necessitous in works. We did exercise in our small balletic hive.

The idea of the workshop was to draw from the being powers which were buried, outward, so as to actively attack imaginal complacency.

And in this regard Juan Goytisolo was a shining example. When the great Spaniard attacked his former incarnation as a didactically hallowed prince of Communist right thinking, he exhibited the courage to extinguish his narrowed agenda, his airtight Marxist programmatics, thereby forgoing superficial adulation in order to swell within the imaginal kingdom of true fertility and chance. A writer no longer of the enterprise to command the range of an infertile public. By working with such examples as this, we began to brew a creative fuel capable of transmuting collective biography.

Robert Grenier's Opems

By Michael Basinski

Robert Grenier's hand-generated poetry emerges to offer powerful alternatives to the poem restricted by type. His dexterous, amuletic compositions propose a poem that can be entered from many or any point in the form. This possibility results from the visual component of his poetry. His poems are minimal, hand-composed, multi-colored, word-gesture images. You might imagine an expressionistic Robert Lax. The poems push the stagnancy of visual poetry from its frozen state to a more organic and highly flexible visual form. In so doing, the poems also force an imaginative rather than intellectual reading. Creative reading renders each poem aurally unique. The reading of a Grenier poem is not fixed. Reading is a creative act. The poems are opems because they are open. They incorporate the burgeoning aurally of the imaginations attempt to enunciate.

Text poems are dictatorial. While the last decades have produced many fine attempts at altering the impact of type, the fact remains that type manifests literary rigidity. Formalized writing is best suited for listing the number of grain filled amphora in stock or stock reports. Poetry by adopting formal text stifles its potential as an imaginative activity. The poetic quest for magic and primal commune is severely limited by the frozen alphabet and alphabet's vessel, the word. The use of rigid material has produced rigid poetry, a poetry which is separated from its transcendent quality by its sole dependency on words, lines, stanza, i.e. antique device. No amount of font manipulation can

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alter this fact. To challenge this prison of shape, Grenier has abandoned text based poetry in favor of multi-colored drawn and layered lines and shapes. What occurs in his poems must be encountered or engaged not as something written or as a text but as an artifact. In order to discover the poetry the reader must enter and reenter the form of the poem from many angles. Only after repeated attempts at perception, altering inroads from various levels and from various points, or treating the poem as a tactile event (turning it this way and that to locate a portal) can an unraveling or surfacing of understanding occur. At that point the intellect has been replaced by imagination. The potential for poetry to emerge from the poem is greatly enhanced. The poem does not grant the poetry via a structured, architectural maze of meanings, rather a nebulous structure involves multiple senses. Grenier's poems, therefore, reveal a unity with the spiritual of the natural world. His work, rough hewn as it is, is natural. It is nature. And nature is noise.

The aural component to Grenier's poetry is its most fascinating aspect. In any attempt to give his poetry voice, fragments of words, words (of various types) letters themselves or otherworldly alphabetic symbols form and reform in speech until meaning surfaces from the visual matrix as sound. Some of the sounds have meaning as we, in the antique, understand meaning. However, beyond this there is a level of speech and speaking where the text virtually manipulates the lips and tongues pushing, voicing various forms of utterance. Noise, the abstract and the real, in poetry creates a multiple state poetic texture. Sound is not just pronunciation or articulation but all aspects of acoustics (background noise, thermal noises, etc.). In Grenier's poems various facets of poetry, sound, visual, and antique form, as well as poetic philosophy meld into a multiple state poetry, which is part of the whole of poetry not separated from it by text.

By the simple act of refusing a type bound culture, by taking charge of his literary creation and not bowing to the imperial nature of words, poetics, and text and book, Grenier has been able to invent a form of poetry that is suitable for the computer era but also moves beyond the stagnancy of text based poetry, visual poetry and performance poetry. His poems best utilize the capacity of the computer. He does this by not using a computer as a tool to manipulate text but as a medium to present his unique and individualized poetic operations. It is intimately

merged with the imaginative, poetic depth. This dynamic proposal offers poetry a chance to regain its stature as an important and innovative part of art culture, while not sacrificing poetry to frozen mass production. Grenier's poems are organic. They continuously change. They are holistic because they involve aspects of the human condition. The poems are poetry. But they are not simply Grenier's poems, they are portals to the poetic in each individual recitation. Even if the reader is removed from the poet, poetry is a communal act.

Publications Received

Journals

Arshile (Number 10) (Edited by Mark Salerno, includes work by Paul Vangelisti, Elizabeth Willis, Joel Brouwer, Katy Lederer, Mark McManus, Christine Hume, Kenward Elmslie, Merrill Gilfillian and others. P.O. Box 3749, Los Angeles, California 90078. $7.99.)

Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics (Number 18) Edited by Edward Foster. Lewis Warsh issue, also Irish poets, David Bromige, Rae Armantrout, many others. Box 3157, Jersey City, New Jersey, 07303-3157. $9.

Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics (Number 19) Edited by Edward Foster. Armand Schwener issue, with work by John High, John Tritica, Pam Rhem, Lisa Jarnot and others. Box 3157, Jersey City, New Jersey, 07303-3157. $9.

The End (Number 1) (Edited by Scott Keeney. Work by Peter Ganick, Rachel Levistsky, Rosmarie Waldrop, Gian Lombardo, Nava Fader, William Fuller, Sheila E. Murphy and others. 464 Somerville Ave. #8, Somerville, MA 02143-3230. $3-$5 suggested donation.

Inscape (Number 3) Edited by Leonard Brink. Work by John Olson, Martha Ronk, Gene Frumkin, Ray DiPalma, Dennis Barone, Elizabeth Robinson. P.O. Box 3124, Saratoga, California 95070, n.p.

Inscape (Number 4) Edited by Leonard Brink. Work by Patrick Durgin, Brydie McPherson, Sheila E. Murphy, Drew Milne and others. P.O. Box 3124, Saratoga, California 95070, n.p.

House Organ (Number 25). Edited by Kenneth Anthony Warren. Work by John Lane, Bruce Andrews, Tom Beckett, George Bowering, Stephen Ellis, Mirian Sagan, Cid Corman and others. 1250 Belle Avenue, Lakewood, OH 44107.

Melodeon: A Journal of Poetics (Issue 2) Edited by Peter Neufeld, Colin Mahar, Eric Frost. Work by Tricia Roush, Stephen Ratcliffe, Kyle Fischer, Colin Mahar, Sarah Rosenthal, George Albon and others. c/o Eric Frost 996 Valencia No. 8, San Francisco, CA 94110. $12/3 issues.

Nedge (Number 6) Edited by Henry Gould, Janet Sullivan. Work by Jesse Glass, Jonathan Brannen, Carrie Etter, Mark Wallace, Elizabeth Robinson, Joe Safdie, Gwen McVay and others. PO Box 2321, Providence RI 02902.

Mike & Dale's Younger Poets (Summer 1998). Edited by Michael Price, Dale Smith, Hoa Nguyen. Work by Gerrit Lansing, Sarah Menefee, José Lezama Lima, Kenneth Irby, Katrina Dalton and others. 766 Valencia Street, San Francisco CA 94110.

Itsynccast Edited by)ohn Lowther. Work by Guy R. Beining, Mark Presjnar, Brian Strang, Guy Bennett, Brian Kim Stefans, William Marsh, Paul Vangelisti and others. 2996 Hermance Dr. NE, Atlanta GA 30319.

Ribot (Number 6) ("Under 30, Over 60") Edited by Paul Vangelisti. Work by Robert Heinecken, Catherine Wagner, Carlos Illescas, Giovanni Sandri, Elio Pagliarani, Christopher Alexander, Jeff Clark, Ginny Bishton, Robert Crosson and more. P.O. Box 65798, Los Angeles, CA 90065.

Outlet (Number 3) ("Ornament") (Edited by Elizabeth Treadwell. Work by Laura Moriarity, MTC Cronin, Brenda Iijima, Yedda Morrison, Franklin Bruno, Jason Nelson, others. Double Lucy Books, PO Box 9013, Berkeley, CA 94709.

Tinsfish (Number 7) (Edited by Susan M. Schultz). Work by Ida Yoshinaga, Bill Luoma, Steve Carll, Dan Featherston, Renee Gladman, Hugh Steinberg and others. 47-391 Hui Iwa Street #3, Kane'ohe, HI 96744

Orpheus Grid (Number 2) Edited by John Noto. Work by Susan M. Schultz, Spencer Selby, Andrew Joron, Michelle Murphy, Stephen-Paul Martin, Will Alexander, John Noto and others. PO Box 420803, San Francisco CA 94142-0803

Explosive Magazine (Number 6) Edited by Katy Lederer. Work by Jenna Roper Harmon, Camille Guthrie, Dale Smith, Anselm Berrigan, Jackson Mac Low, Magdalena Zurawski and others. PO Box 250648, Columbia University Station, 534 West 112th Street, New York, NY 100251.

Situation (Number 17) Edited by Joanne Molina, Mark Wallace. "Beggar" by Heather Fuller. 10402 Ewell Avenue, Kensignton, MD 20895.

Situation (Number 18) Edited by Joanne Molina, Mark Wallace, Seth White. Work by Chris Alexander, Beth Joslow, Mark Salerno, Catherine Wagner, Timothy Shea. 10402 Ewell Avenue, Kensignton, MD 20895.

Books and Chapbooks

1998: An Artist's Diary by Tod Thilleman (meb|pny, 1999)

7 Poems from Homages by Thomas Taylor (OASiA: Broadside Series No. 41, 1998, $2.)

A Little Syncopy by Sheila E. Murphy (Marshall Creek Press, 1996, $5.)

A Run of Letters by David Baratier (meb|pny, 1998)

Above the Human Nerve Domain by Will Alexander (Pavement Saw, 1998)

Addenda by Susan M. Schultz (Meow Press, 1998)

Anatomies by Dan Featherston (Potes & Poets, 1998)

Avec Sampler #2. edited by Cydney Chadwick (Avec Books, 1999)

Black Box Cutaway by Susan Gevirtz (Kelsey St. Press, 1999)

Blood Substitutes by Sarah Mangold (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

Burning Flags by Mark Prejsnar (3rdness, 1998)

Conversations by Theodore Enslin (meb| pny pamphlet series two, 1998, $10/year for series).

Deus Ex Machina by Vincent Ferrini (3300 Press, 1998, $9.95.)

Ding the Bell by Peggy Garrison, drawings by Lesley Heathcote (meb|pny, 1998)

Dinner with Franz by Charles Borkhuis (meb | pny, 1998)

Doctors Spinning by Jefferson Hansen (Propjet, 1998)

Drafts of the Sorcery by Jake Berry (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

Eleanor Ramsey: the Queen of Cups by Elizabeth Treadwell (San Francisco State University Press, 1997, $7.)

Emblems by Martha Ronk (Instress, 1998)

Fieldnotes by Mark Weiss (Junction Press, 1995, $11).

French Windows by Jane Augustine (meb|pny, 1998)

I**mprovisations** by Jim Leftwich (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

In A Flash by Rosmarie Waldrop (Instress, 1998, n.p.)

Leaflets by Sheila E. Murphy (Instress, 1998, n.p.)

Little Wives by Barbara Cole (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge by Mark Scroggins (University of Alabama Press, 1998.)

Mag Nets by M. Magoolaghan (PaperBrainPress, 1998, n.p.)

Metropolis 16-20 by Robert Fitterman (Edge Books, 1998, n.p.)

Midas by Peter O'Leary (pny|meb pamphlet series four, 1998).

Music, No Staves by Katy Lederer (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $6).

NdjenFerno by Lindsay Hill (Vatic Hum, 1998)

Next Song by Maxine Chernoff (Instress, 1998)

No Island by Spencer Selby (Drogue Press, 1995, $10.)

—ocracy by Sheila E. Murphy & Peter Ganick (Nominative Press Collective, 1997, n.p.)

—ocracy: parts 1-4 by Sheila E. Murphy and Peter Ganick (Texture Chapbook Series 36, 1997, $6.)

—ocracy: parts 5-7 by Sheila E. Murphy and Peter Ganick (Runaway Spoon Press, 1997, n.p.)

Other Veins, Absent Roots by Elizabeth Robinson (Instress, 1998, n.p.)

Psycho-motor Breathscapes by John Noto (Vatic Hum, 1997)

Quite Vacation by Jack Kimball (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

Separate Objects by Dennis Barone (Left Hand Books, 1998)

Spicer's City by Laura Moriarty (pny|meb pamphlet series three, 1998).

Studio as History by Ryan Whyte (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $7).

Subterfuge for the Unrequitable by Carrie Etter (Potes & Poets Press, 1998, $6).

Temperture as Art by Sheila E. Murphy (Instress, 1998)

The Big R by Spencer Selby (Angle Press, 1998)

The Erratix & Other Stories by Elizabeth Treadwell (Texture Press, 1998, $6).

The Marriage of the Well Built Head by Yedda Morrison (Double Lucy Books, 1998, $3.)

The New Frequency by Tod Thilleman (Ma'arri, 1998, $12.)

The Texts of Anabasis by Thomas Taylor (26 Books, no date, n.p.)

They Beat Me Over the Head With a Sack by Anselm Berrigan (Edge Books, 1998, n.p.)

Wallpaper & Lightening by Tod Thilleman (Hive Press, 1998, n.p.)