QUANCRETE POETRY

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In the February 1993 **Word Ways,** David Morice wrote about cross-number forms, a rule-governed arrangement of grids composed of numbers that are spelled out. The goal in crossnumber forms is to discover nontrivial patterns of horizontal and vertical interconnectedness, as in two of Morice's simple but elegant examples:

```
        N                       F I R S T
    E I G H T                   O     E
    N     E                     U     C
E L E V E N                     R     O
                                T     N
                          T H I R D
```

The concept of crossnumbers reportedly began with a sketch on a napkin by a friend of Morice's, a concrete poet named Lloyd Quibble. The napkin anecdote, rather apocryphal or true, is interesting because concrete poets make use of numbers in a variety of ways.

To my knowledge, the general qualities of concrete poetry have never been compared to other logological forms. So I will begin with a brief discussion of concrete poetry in general, returning then to specifically quantitative forms, which I call Quancrete Poetry.

A main difference between concrete poetry and forms such as word squares, palindromes, anagrams, transposals, transadditions, etc. is that typically the symmetry produced in concrete poetry is not governed by strict rules but geared toward an imperfect, often strained, aesthetic order. The goal of the concrete poet might, for example, be a visual-verbal pun or the creation of a verbographic pattern that is intentionally ambiguous. Also, concrete poems have firmer semantic requirements than most other logological arrays, although the meaning might not (usually is not) be expressed in sentences.

By its nature, concrete poetry involves bending and breaking of rules. The sizes, shapes, letters and numbers are distorted in some way to produce appropriate visual patterns. Deliberate logological and graphic imperfections combine to provide a holistic effect that is near-symmetrical or even asymmetrical.

Two examples of word-based concrete poems are presented below. The first, from a series I call "Word Graphs," is classically concrete in that it involves distortions of letter size, shape, and cartography. The second is from a group called "Poemutations,"

in which a word or phrase is the basis for successive permutations which are variants on the previous line. Note that the poemutation is not as rule-governed as, say, a transaddition, but it unfolds with associational semantic intent. For a sentence-length poemutation, see "The Poet's Corner" in the November 1974 **Word Ways**. For an intensive treatment of the nature and history of concrete poetry and related forms, see M. E. Solt, Concrete Poetry: A World View (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968) and M. Klonsky, Speaking Pictures (New York: Harmony Books, 1975).
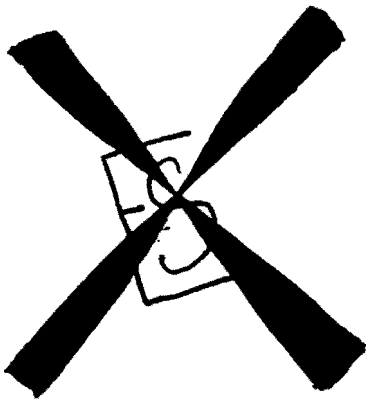
CENSOR'S MARK
Figure C

```
I N N O C E N C E
I N   A   S E N S E
I N N E R   S E N S E
I N   N O   S E N S E
S E N E S C E N C E
I N   E S S E N C E
N A S C E N S E
      S E N S O R
      I N C E N S E
```

POEMUTATION 6

The purposely distorted nature of a concrete poem is precisely the function of its inventive components. Consequently, there is no maximal graphic or cartological arrangement that could be generated by a computer, as is the case with many logological patterns such as word squares. The reduction of ambiguity or the adjustment of distortion would reduce the effectiveness of the invented visual "punchline" of the poem.

But broadly speaking, the concrete poetry genre can include any expression of language symmetry which includes a visual arrangement that bears a strong relationship to the meaning of the work. Within the genre, I use the term Quancrete Poem to focus on words that make strong use of quantities or numbers. Crossnumber forms would be within such a subgenre because the words which interconnect have a semantic link, albeit a weak one: they are all spelled-out numbers.

Turning now to mainstream examples of Quancrete Poetry, we can note the two poems on the next page. The first, a poem by Pamela Lynch published in Louisiana English Journal (Volume 15, 1975), makes use of digits in forming a visual pun. The second is my own haiku in which numbers, when written out, collide with the formal elements of haiku that they attempt to (but cannot) illustrate.

Closer to the style of Morice's crossnumbers are the numerical forms on the next page, which I have presented at concrete poetry

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
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2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

1-2 MANY

Haiku by the Numbers

One, two, three, four, five.
One, two, three, four, five, six, sev-
en. One-two-three -- oops!

readings and showings. In every case, there is an easily discov-
ered graphic-semantic-numerical respondence. But different strate-
gies and components are used in bending the graphic or ortho-
graphic elements toward the semantic/visual effect.

oneone

Two

THRE

FOUR

FIVE

SIX

```
SEVENS7
EVINSEV
VIISEVE
ENSEVEN
NSEVENV
SEVENSI
7VENVII
```

VIIIVIII

TWELVE
IMELVE

SIXTEEN

```
TWENT
WENTY
ENTY2
NTY20
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All of this sounds more serious than I intend it to be. There is no pretense of profundity in these works. The Quancrete Poem is best viewed as an unlikely combination of numerical/graphic elements that have some potential for delight. In fact, the neoclassical phrase "delight in disorder" is as good a summary as any for a literate response to most concrete poetry – although the disorder in the poem is partly resolved when the reader grasps its form.

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE X...

A Cappella Books has recently reprinted A Visit From St. Nicholas, Dave Morice's rollicking logological parody of Clement Moore's classic Christmas chronicle, complete with Dave's droll drawings. Meet St. Alphabet wearing his anagrammed vest, driving an "A full of nouns", and calling to his eight tiny B's with "On, P! on, A! on, G and E!...tell away, yell away, spell away, all!" Charming!