

From Line to Constellation (1954)

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from *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, (1968, Indiana University Press)

Our languages are on the road to formal simplification, abbreviated, restricted forms of language are emerging. The content of a sentence is often conveyed in a single word. Longer statements are often represented by small groups of letters. Moreover, there is a tendency among languages for the many to be replaced by a few which are generally valid. Does this restricted and simplified use of language and writing mean the end of poetry? Certainly not. Restriction in the best sense-concentration and simplification-is the very essence of poetry. From this we ought perhaps to conclude that the language of today must have certain things in common with poetry, and that they should sustain each other both in form and substance. In the course of daily life this relationship often passes unnoticed. Headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use. The aim of the new poetry is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of poet in society. Bearing in mind, then, the simplification both of language and its written form, it is only possible to speak of an organic function for poetry in terms of the given linguistic situation. So the new poem is simple and can be perceived visually as a whole as well as in its parts. It becomes an object to be both seen and used: an object containing thought but made concrete through play-activity (denkgegenstanddenkspiel), its concern is with brevity and conciseness. It is memorable and imprints itself upon the mind as a picture. Its objective element of play is useful to modern man, whom the poet helps through his special gift for this kind of play-activity. Being an expert both in language and the rules of the game, the poet invents new

formulations. By its exemplary use of the rules of the game the new poem can have an effect on ordinary language.

The constellation is the simplest possible kind of configuration in poetry which has for its basic unit the word, it encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster.

The constellation is an arrangement, and at the same time a play-area of fixed dimensions.

The constellation is ordered by the poet. He determines the play-area, the field or force and suggests its possibilities. the reader, the new reader, grasps the idea of play, and joins in.

In the constellation something is brought into the world. It is a reality in itself and not a poem about something or other. The constellation is an invitation.

(Translation: Mike Weaver)

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