

Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces in Reading Concrete Poetry: the Case of Concept-Shapes by Stanisław Dróżdź

Małgorzata Kłoskowicz
University of Silesia in Katowice

Abstract: *This text describes the relations between a concrete poem and the reader in the process of reading (perception). In the process of scrutinizing Polish concrete poetry continuously created for the last 40 years by Stanisław Dróżdź, we propose to observe two ways of reading, based on the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of the reader's mental activity. The point of reference of the first strategy is the world of the reader, including the reader's associations and expectations. The analysis focuses on a concrete poem, and involves its translation into a linear discourse. The other way of reading begins with the suspension of the reader's associations. This strategy is rooted in the rules of the world of concrete poetry and adopts developed "concrete" features. Our analysis is illustrated by two examples: Zapominanie (Forgetting) and Ludzie/Człowiek (People/Human).*

Keywords: *Concrete poetry. Concept-shape. Meaning. Non-linear Reading Process.*

Título em português: *Forças Centrífugas e Centrípetas na Leitura da Poesia Concreta: o caso dos conceitos-formas de Stanisław Dróżdź*

Resumo: *Esse texto descreve as relações entre um poema concreto e seu leitor em processo de leitura (percepção). No processo de escrutínio da poesia concreta polonesa continuamente criada ao longo dos últimos 40 anos por Stanisław Dróżdź, propomos observar duas vias de leitura, baseadas em tendências centrífugas e centrípetas da atividade mental do leitor. O ponto de referência da primeira estratégia é o mundo do leitor, incluindo suas associações e expectativas. A análise foca num poema concreto, e envolve sua translação num discurso linear. A outra forma de leitura começa com a suspensão das associações do leitor. Essa estratégia está enraizada nas regras do mundo da poesia concreta e adota traços "concretos" desenvolvidos. Nossa análise é ilustrada por dois exemplos: Zapominanie (Esquecer) e Ludzie/Człowiek (Pessoa/Humano).*

Palavras-chave: *Poesia concreta. Conceito-forma. Significado. Processo de leitura não linear.*

Concrete poetry is a type of art placed between the painter's and the poet's "word" and "work". It is an art movement that invites us to think in terms of "concept-shape", and thus makes us cease to operate in the framework entailing the opposition of form and content. It does not mean that we must completely move away from those two properties of art. As Mary Ellen Solt, the author of an important anthology of concrete poetry, wrote: "All definitions of concrete poetry can be reduced to the same formula: form = content/content = form" (SOLT, 1971, p. 13). However, this assumption signifies more than just putting an equality sign between those properties of art. Concrete poetry begins with form and content perceived as one uniform and complete word-object¹.

Taking up this theoretical stance, we are going to analyze two of the so-called concept-shapes, created by Stanisław Dróżdź, who is nowadays considered to be the most important Polish concrete poet. He was born on the 15th of May, 1939 in Sławków. He lived and pursued his artistic career in Wrocław, until his death in the 29th of March, 2009. His artistic work started with traditional linguistic poems. The first concept-shape, (this is a name applied by him to his concrete works) was created in 1967. It was called *Zapominanie* (*Forgetting*). During a career spanning almost 40 years, the poet was faithful to an artistic idea incorporating letter, punctuation marks and figures. He combined the linguistic signs with mathematic rules (such as permutation or variation), and "published" poems on boards, exhibited as images. His idea was distinctly formulated: In his work concrete poetry is not attached to any place or time. Each concept-shape exists for itself and means only for itself (in that sense it is context-free). Only the process of reading put the pieces into the context of the readers' experiences. However, at the beginning of

¹ Eric Maria Vos analyzed concrete poetry in terms of nominalistic semiotics. He emphasized that specialists in concrete poetry should keep in mind the changes that were brought in by this kind of art. The terms and categories used by us to describe concrete poetry should not be based on a dichotomy between "form" and "content". The mere name of Dróżdź's work invites us to merge them together (in the concept-shape) and use categories that are founded on the concrete roots of language (VOS, 1992, p. 34).

his artistic career, he was not aware of the existence of Concrete Poetry as an International Movement.

In May 1968, he was presented with an anthology of international concrete poetry, published in Prague. Later on, he would famously declare: “that was the moment when I realized that what I have been doing since the last year was concrete poetry” (JEDLIŃSKI, 1999, p. 81). He participated in approximately 300 individual and collective exhibitions in Poland and abroad. He represented Poland in the most important exhibitions of concrete poetry such as *sound text – concrete poetry – visual texts*, realized by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1970-1972), and the 50th Art Biennale in Venice in 2003.

Let us take a look at the concept-shape², named *Zapominanie* (*Forgetting*), that was written by Dróždź³ in 1967 (Figure 1). There is a possibility to translate this piece and several others into many languages, including English or Portuguese. However, Dróždź did not agree to change any words or letters and allowed only for the titles to be translated. As Dróždź said during the conversation with another artist, Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka:

In my work, concrete poetry should be context-free. The important point is that it is not attached to any place or time. “Między” (*In-between*) [another concept-shape – MK] was displayed in China and Japan, in Austria and Australia, and if at least the title is translatable into a foreign language, then everybody who is inside it is at home. (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012a, p. 150)⁴

² In Polish it is one word without a hyphen (“pojęciokształt”).

³ For more information on Dróždź’s work and life, you can visit his website: <http://www.drozd.art.pl>

⁴ As mentioned before, at the beginning of his artistic career, Stanisław Dróždź was not aware of how much his ideas were close to manifestos created in the 1950s by concrete poets like Eugen Gomringer from Switzerland, by Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari of the Noigandres Group, from Brazil, and Öyvind Fahlström from Sweden. All of them created this variety of poetry, without knowing each other at the beginning. Dróždź started his “concrete journey” when the international movement came to an end. The

And, elsewhere:

It's a bit artificial: when I select my work to be shown abroad, I choose something fairly universal (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012a, p. 151-152).



Figure 1⁵

last international exhibition was organized in 1970/1972, and the first exhibition of Drożdż's works was opened in 1968. But there are some differences between the Polish artist and other concrete poets. If we consider different international anthologies of concrete poetry, we can see for example Gomringer's poem *Schweigen* re-written in English (*silence*) or Spanish (*silencio*) (Figure 3). Drożdż did not allow for such alterations and his works have not been translated into other languages. Nevertheless, he participated in many individual and collective exhibitions and projects abroad.

⁵ S. Drożdż, *Zapominanie* (forgetting), 1967. Project implementation by Barbara Kozłowska. Source: <http://www.drozdz.art.pl/12020101.htm>

Following Drózdź's decision, we are not going to translate analyzed pieces either (despite the titles). In this way, the concept-shape can be treated as a type of painting and a poem at the same time.

But there is a hidden trap awaiting those who want to analyze a concept-shape. Concrete poems were created primarily as an exhibition work. It is possible to print them on the pages of journals, catalogues, books or on the wall of buildings, and it is impossible to analyze them without actually showing them. If we try to describe it, we always change some of the rules of Drózdź's artistic view. Everything should be read at once, in a glance. There is no linear reading in concrete poetry, and concrete poetry does not follow traditional grammar. These rules apply universally to concrete poetry. As explained by the German philosopher and writer Max Bense:

This is a kind of poetry which produces neither the semantic nor the aesthetic sense of its elements, e.g. words, through the traditional formation of linear and grammatically ordered contexts, but which insists upon visual and surface connectives. (BENSE in SOLT, 1971, p. 73)

“What about the syntax? Where is the verb? Where is the subject?” – asked Claus Clüver, when he saw the first concrete poem “ping pong”, written by Eugen Gomringer in 1953 (CLÜVER cited in DZIAMSKI, 2009, p. 245) (Figure 2). It is but the onset of the many enquiries that could be made:

There is a question of how the concept-shapes of Stanisław Drózdź were perceived when the author presented them in odNowa Gallery in Poznań in 1969⁶. Where they approached as poetry? Did the readers search for traditional features of the poem and analyzed them in terms of syntax, grammar and the speaking subject? (DZIAMSKI, 2009, p. 245)

⁶ That was the third exhibition of Drózdź's works in Poland, entitled „*Structural Poetry. Concept-Shapes*”.

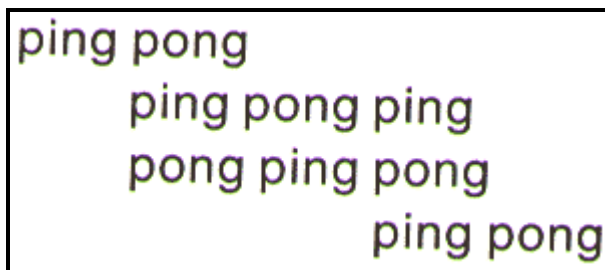


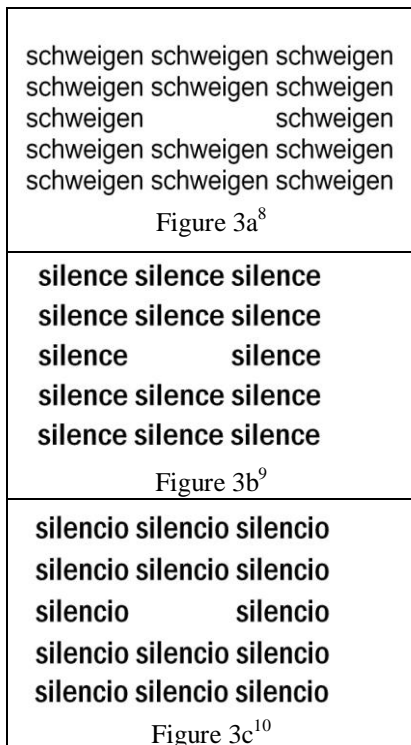
Figure 2⁷

All those questions concern the reader's point of view. While staying in the reader's position, one must start a type of forgetting process. The first concept-shape *Zapominanie* suggests literally to "open" the readers' minds for the new linguistic and space-time rules of the world of concrete poetry. Terms such as the "letter", "dot" or "font", which seem to apply naturally in the process of specification of a concept-shape, may be useless.

Those are questions that seem equally pertinent regardless of the nationality of the concrete poet. First of all, these are questions that lead their search for more appropriate forms to express their feelings of the changing world. Their own manifestos can be viewed as answers to these questions. Eugen Gomringer published his first *Konstellationen* (*Constellations*) in 1953, and a year later he wrote his manifesto „Aufruf vom vers zur konstellation" (*From Line to Constellation*). Öyvind Fahlström wrote concrete poems by 1952, and published the manifesto „Håtilla Ragulpr Pa Fätskliaben. Manifesto för Concrete Poetry" in 1953 (it was translated into English for the first time in 1968, and published in Solt's anthology "Concrete Poetry: A World View"). Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari formed the Noigandres Group in 1952, wrote an article "Poesia Concreta" in 1955, and the "plano-piloto para poesia concreta" (Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry) in 1958 (SOLT, 1971, p. 8-16, 29). The first concept-shape by Drózdź was created in 1967. He presented his basic ideas and

⁷ E. Gomringer, *ping pong*, 1952. Source: M. E. Solt, *Concrete Poetry. A World View*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971, p. 92.

principles of his work in the article entitled “Pojęciokształty” (*Concept-shapes*), published in 1968, also treated as a type of an art manifesto.



Terms such as “syntax”, “grammar” and “verb” would have their meaning creatively reestablished by the concrete poets in their manifestos:

⁸ E. Gomringer, *schweigen/silence/silencio*, 1953. Source: 3a: *sound texts – concrete poetry – visual texts*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1970, p. 47.

⁹ *Concrete Poetry. An International Anthology*, ed. S. Bann, London: London Magazine Editions, 1967, p. 31.

¹⁰ M. E. Solt, *Concrete Poetry. A World View*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971, p. 91.

Concrete poetry: product of critical evolution of forms. (...) Qualified space is a space-time structure replacing the mere linear-temporal development; hence the importance of the ideogram concept, either in its general sense of spatial and visual syntax or in its specific sense (Fenollosa/Pound) as a method of composition based on direct-analogical, not logical-discursive – juxtaposition of elements. (CAMPOS A., CAMPOS H. AND PIGNATARI, 2006, p. 217)

And elsewhere:

Thus the moment arrives in which poetry must no longer define itself in terms of anti-syntax, or anti-discourse. It has come to be governed by its own rules, by its own conditions, and these in turn are founded on the concrete roots of language. (CAMPOS A., 1972/1973, p. 61)

This is the common language for those who created concrete poetry with or without external influence. The set of rules and the conditions of concrete poetry demand suspending and revisiting the moment of perception. Let us return to the exhibition scenario and look at *Zapominanie* as a board with black background and white letters, without any context or manifestos, devoid of the artist's comments. There is only "the poem-object". In this model the traditional grammar, the traditional syntax as well as the linear process of reading are useless.

In the case of Dróždź's concrete poetry, each concept-shape is a complete totality, which means there is no possibility of changing the elements whether they are letters or words. This stance invites us to redefine the process of translation. When the analysis takes place in terms of concrete (spatial and visual) syntax (the space-time structure and non-linear construction), the meaning of the word 'translation' has to be reestablished. Each attempt to say or to write something about a concept-shape forces us to undermine the very rules of concrete poetry. The translation is done from a non-linear structure back into a linear arrangement, with a traditional syntax and a perceptible subject. The following two fragments of analyses by Wiesław Borowski

and Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka illustrate the difference between concept-shape *Zapominanie* and its “translated” equivalent:

zapominanie (forgetting) is a poem in which the title word is written many times, one below the other. At the top, the word is complete. Further down, it is shortened by one letter, then by another, as it slowly loses its identity in the process of forgetting. The letters are heavy and lean tightly against each other. (...) The moment at which the detachment of more letters destroys the meaning can be identified. (BOROWSKI 2003, p. 46)

The condensed white letters in “Zapominanie” that were written in a sans-serif and bold font, form a right-angle, scalene triangle that is in contrast with black background. (...) This heavy geometric figure gets rid of its own elements and at the same time separates itself from the background, thereby suggesting the effort of irreversible process of forgetting. (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012b, p. 147)

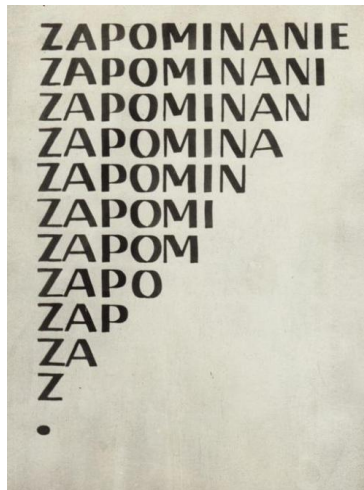


Figure 4¹¹

¹¹ S. Drózdź, *Zapominanie* (forgetting), 1967. Project implementation by Stanisław Kortyka. Source: Stanisław Drózdź’s Archive.

We can see the non-linear and reprinted concept-shape (Figure 4) and the linear descriptions (citations above). The linear descriptions are more than just an specification of the concept-shape. There is a kind of surplus, something that is added to the gaze of the board of *Zapominanie* during an exhibition. This is truth even when we read about white letters, sans-serif and bold font or black background, the descriptions sound like exact instructions for those who made the pieces¹².

There is more information than just the technical details illustrated with the quotations above. Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka perceived a “heavy” figure that gets rid of its own elements and shows us a process which suggests “effort”. This concerns mainly the shape side of the figure, but there is also the concept. The word slowly “loses its identity”, because of the decline of following letters. And the letters are also “heavy”. Wiesław Borowski perceived the process of destroying the meaning of the word in relation to the process of forgetting. These phrasings, such as “heavy letters” and “figure” as well as the effort or the process of losing identity of the whole word give us more than we can see only on the board. They reveal the reader’s associations. It is the first example of the centripetal force of reading.

Certain similarities between the two descriptions result from the unity of concept and shape of the piece. If we give up our expectations and habits, we can see in the poem a different word that remains separated from our everyday experiences. This is the reason why it is impossible to analyzing the concept and the shape separately¹³. We could perceive *Zapominanie* or other concept-shapes as the concrete words in Drózdź’s poetry. Each concept-shape can be treated as a part of speech in the concrete

¹² Creators of the concrete poems often co-operated with visual artists and later on with computer graphic designers. Stanisław Drózdź prepared designs for Stanisław Kortyka, Barbara Kozłowska or Zbigniew Makarewicz and they tailored his pieces according to the artist’s guidelines. Eugen Gomringer also co-operated with the painter and visual artist Marcel Wyss. They founded the international art magazine “Spirale” (Spiral) in Bern (CAMPOS H., 2006, p. 250-251).

¹³ As it was postulated by Vos. See footnote 1.

grammar with its own concrete rules and principles – the equivalent of word in a traditional grammar. Therefore, the word is not complete at the top of the board, as Wiesław Borowski wrote. It is complete only in the context of the entire piece with all the letters, the dot and the shape.

In this sense, the exhibition is treated as a concrete utterance with concept-shapes and concrete rules of non-linear reading constituted by space-time structures. By adopting the interpretative framework of categories of concept-shapes, by understanding language in its concrete roots, with redefinition of the concepts such as “word”, “utterance” or “translation”, the meaning of such concrete words and concrete utterances has also to be reshaped. Therefore all the above mentioned terms must be distinguished according to the way of reading. If the analysis is based on the reader’s ordinary experiences and traditional grammar (the centripetal force of reading), the terms word, utterance and meaning will be used. But if the analysis is based on the rules of concrete poetry itself, terms such as the following might be used: c-words (concrete words), c-utterances (concrete utterances) and c-meanings (concrete meanings).

First of all, the direction of the analysis will depend on the direction of the reader’s reaction. There is another condition affecting the awareness and associations resulting from the reader’s contact with a concept-shape. The categories of the reader’s ordinary experiences (including language, knowledge etc.) sometimes provoke questions and open the possibility of interfering with the construction of the piece. Below are suggestions made by Dawidek Gryglicka to Dróżdź:

(...) I had various doubts about the way of forgetting you put forward in this picture [*Zapominanie* – MK]. In my opinion we forget in a slightly different way. Not in an order. And not in a regular way. The process of forgetting is much more complicated, I’d say, much more fragmented, disorganized (...) (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012a, p. 248)

Dróżdź admitted that another solution is also possible:

Last year, after thirty years, it suddenly dawned on me that *Zapominanie* [Forgetting] needs to be expanded and transformed in various ways. (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012a, p. 248)

Those proposals lead up to a transformation of the piece. It provokes a modification of its structure, and changes the concrete word. The traditional meaning of a word, the way it is usually understood by the reader acts upon the concept-shape. The power of transformation is accumulated in the difference between the reader's expectations/associations (the meaning of the word *forgetting*) and the c-meaning of the concept-shape *Zapominanie*. That is the first way in which the reader might participate in the concrete world by creating a new concept-shape. It is also the second example of the centripetal force of reading. In terms of concrete poetry, this process is called c-neologism (when the concrete poem is created as a new piece). But there is also the possibility of reversing the direction of the abovementioned process.

The reestablished process of translation allows also for the possibility of transforming traditional grammar into a structure with concrete features. If we try to think in terms of the rules of concrete poetry itself, the direction of motion (of reader's participation) must be understood as reversed from centripetal to centrifugal¹⁴. Let us return to *Zapominanie* which is treated as an irreducible wholeness, as a c-word in a space-time constructed c-grammar. This concrete word has also a c-meaning that can be used for reshaping our traditional syntax, for making it more flexible, closer to the art of poetry (as another effect of translating concrete poetry on its own terms). It seems that the first condition for this re-understanding is "the suspension of disbelief" in what matters the rules of concrete poetry and its world. Therefore, we must return to them once again.

¹⁴ There is no need to make value judgments about the two types of perception. We cannot think about these two ways of reading concept-shapes in terms of correction. What we are doing is to try to show how two different possibilities of analyzing concrete poetry might affect both the world of a concept-shape or the world of the potential reader.

Concrete poems can exist only in an exhibition or in the public places where they are to be read at a glance, where the piece of art “happens” in front of our eyes. It must be a context which allows for the reader to be surprised. The ideal situation would be one in which the reader is able almost to refrain from using knowledge, associations or expectations, and works “mostly” with perception, with the reflected image of the concept-shape in memory. This does not mean, however, that one should forget everything that appears to be useful in a first more analytical reading. We cannot think in terms of destruction – it is rather the process of *destabilization*. Tadeusz Sławek, who has interpreted Polish concrete poetry for many years, wrote in his commentary to Dróżdź’s work:

The artist does not suggest that this meaning [which has been established by the familiarity of everyday use – MK] ought to be destroyed (...). On the contrary, the world does not end at the moment of one’s entering the museum, a word in the text does not forget its banal meaning, but it destabilises it and perforates the boundaries of the word. (SŁAWEK, 1994, p. 12)

Therefore, the exhibition can be treated as a place which derails the traditional word that is under the influence of the concrete meaning of the c-word. This is also the place where the c-meaning is creating itself, in front of the eyes of the reader. The process of “production” of the c-meaning has started.

The concrete world created under the influence of an impulse was expanded and transformed by the artist in different ways. Stanisław Dróżdź commented:

As I remember, I woke up in the middle of the night with those absolutely insane ideas. In this way I wrote “Zapominanie”. (DAWIDEK GRYGLICKA, 2012a, p. 249)

The artist changed the colors – white letters were set against a black background or black letters were superimposed on white background. Some of the pieces were written in capital letter and later in lower-case letters, with the possibility of

changing the font size or the size of the board – always as a variation of the first project. Let us compare Figure 1 and Figure 4 as the same concept-shape *Zapominanie*.

Despite of all the transformations, the concrete meaning of an individual concept-shape is unchanged. It emerges in the act of perception from the unity of shape and concept. The crucial gesture in this centrifugal reading leads up to the space-time structure which was mentioned in the manifesto “plano-piloto para poesia concreta”, written by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari. The c-meaning of *Zapominanie* is what is being observed each time it is regarded. The concept-shape always refers to itself. This “self-referentiality” means also, to employ physical terms, the rotary motion excited and accelerated or retarded only by the presence of reader and his or her mental activity. What is crucial is not to reject previous knowledge or associations. What is crucial is to be aware of the different contexts in which the contact with concrete poetry takes place, and to be able to separate them. As it was mentioned, the artist did not want to destroy the meaning and the word. His aim is to construct a space-time structure that destabilizes the meaning and the word and creates the c-word and the c-meaning. Therefore, we could perceive the concept-shape as a combined existence of those two elements. In that sense, each concrete poem is more like a referent¹⁵ – not as a sign composed of the signifier and the signified, but as a presence without medium. Now it can no longer be said that a c-word has a c-meaning. From now on, a c-word *is* a c-meaning.

The process of destabilization entails a surplus which was mentioned at the beginning. But if we scrutinize *Zapominanie*, the c-meaning seems also to be a kind of tautology: *Zapominanie* c-means *zapominanie* (*forgetting*), and nothing more. There are also destabilized factors that excited reader’s mind: *Zapominanie* is the process of forgetting; *Zapominanie* refers to the loss of information that occurs with the passage of time; *Zapominanie* means decreasing, vanishing, declining etc.

From this it follows that

¹⁵ An actual object in the world of concrete poetry.

The works by Stanisław Dróżdż constitute a serious promise (object/ word promises what enters its area by changing the shape of word/ object) and an equally serious warning (you can see always more than what you are looking at). (SŁAWEK, 2009, p. 263)

According to the first centripetal way of reading, the warning seems to mean that the traditional classification will be used to transform the concrete poem. In that sense the reader is seeing something more than it is visible on the board. He or she wants to translate c-word back into the word. But the attempt to apply traditional grammar classifications to a c-word can lead us also to contradictions. C-word “Zapominanie” in traditional classification and according to its rules can be used as a noun (the name of the process) and as a verb (which conveys an action or a state of being) at the same time.

The centrifugal way of reading may lead up to transference of the rules of a c-world into the world of the reader’s own perception. In this way, traditional classifications are questioned and the c-word is useful as a “*nounverb*”. Maybe this is also an empty place for scientific analyses. It is impossible to specify what is being referred, what is being filled up by the language of poetry, without at the same time losing the objectivity and universality of this language.

Each concept-shape is its own c-meaning and reveals another rule of a concrete world. One can understand this process by following the reader who, as we assumed, is looking at the (untitled) concept-shape Ludzie/Człowiek (Figure 5).

There is only one way of perception of a c-meaning. There is the board (the background) and the concept-shape. The most important thing is the distance, the measurable space between the board and the reader’s eyes. The reader must be standing at the front of the board to see the c-word correctly. The distance is determined automatically by our vision. The dominant technique of reading is determined by the font size. The bigger letters are perceived without an effort. However, there is also a certain “noise” effect inside the bigger letters. Because of that, the

observational distance sometimes must be changed. The reader stays closer to the background because of the interior of the letters (Figure 6 and Figure 7). Each bigger letter contains the strings of words “ludzie” and “człowiek” (“people” and “human”) written vertically or horizontally without a space. Only by changing the distance between the board and eyes, the reader “gets through the gate of” legibility. The c-word “Ludzie/Człowiek” must be conceived as a whole – with a short and a long distance, and with the balance between legibility of bigger letters and illegibility of smaller letters.

The c-word sets the reader in perceptual motion, while he or she is experiencing the piece of art. Thus there is a difference between seeing a piece of poem prepared on board, and seeing the same work with its background, and all the shapes and neighboring elements (Figure 8).



Figure 5¹⁶

¹⁶ S. Dróżdź, *Untitled (human being, people)*, 1972. Source: <http://www.drozdz.art.pl/12020124.htm>

It is probably not necessary to know which Polish word (*ludzie/człowiek*) corresponds to which dictionary meaning (human/people). That concept-shape read as a c-word seems to derail the difference between a human being and people, as if it was just one word in our familiar vocabulary. A “human being’s” background is inside the word “people” and “people’s” background is inside the word “human”. There is also an extra element of c-meaning – the surplus. In our perception of that concept-shape, there is a kind of horizontal and vertical flow or flux of vaguely written letters which resembles a grey illegible pattern, as it was mentioned above (Figure 5). Everything seems to be correct if we stay far away from the concrete word. However, when we notice more letters inserted into the bigger ones once again the rules of “traditional” grammar will be suspended.

This concept-shape destabilizes the values of the grammatical category of number (plural or singular). In Polish the word “*ludzie*” is used as the plural of the noun “*człowiek*”. It is not possible to create the plural form of the word “*ludzie*”. It *is* the plural form. But it is only from the point of view of a linear grammar based on linear structures and assuming a linear reading that the concept-shape could be said to be “incorrect”. As a c-word, the concept-shape eliminates the difference between the words “*człowiek*” and “*ludzie*” (human and people) and provokes us to construct the plural form of those two words (what is incorrect from the perspective of a traditional grammar).



Figure 6¹⁷



Figure 7¹⁸

¹⁷ S. Drózdź, *Untitled (human being, people)*, The fragment of work presented at the exhibition in Muzalewska Gallery in 2012, Poznan, Poland. Photo by M. Kłoskowicz.

¹⁸ S. Drózdź, *Untitled (human being, people)*, the fragment of work presented at the exhibition in Muzalewska Gallery in 2012, Poznan, Poland. Photo by M. Kłoskowicz.

This text was an attempt to analyze two ways of reading selected concrete poems and initializing the process of destabilization of words involved and their meanings. Words and rules of grammar based on linear reading and structures could also be derailed. Two concrete poems, “Zapominanie” and “Ludzie/Człowiek”, were selected as examples of two c-words. They are capable of questioning at least two rules: the clear cut division of the parts of speech (the case of “nounverb” *zapominanie*) and the grammatical category of number.

Two interrelated processes were exposed: the centripetal and the centrifugal force of reading. In both the possibilities there is only one direction of translation: from c-word into word. The centripetal force of reading translates c-words into words whose use in ordinary experiences is ruled by traditional grammar; the centrifugal force of reading translates c-words into words whose use is ruled by concrete poetry.

The latter way of reading seems to repeat the same gesture of the artist, who also creates the c-words. In that case, the reader must first of all conceive the c-word/c-meaning and then look for the concrete roots of language throughout the perceived space-time structures and non-linear constructions (throughout the concept-shapes).

Only the process of constructing the c-neologism is based on the translation from c-word into another c-word.

The centripetal forces of reading destabilize the world of concrete poetry. The centrifugal forces of reading derail the reader’s world determined by “traditional” rules and principles. The question is: which force is actually stronger?



Figure 8¹⁹

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¹⁹ The reader. Jerzy Ryba in the background of work by S. Dróżdż (*human being, people*), Kwartal Gallery, 1975. Source: M. Dawidek Gryglicka, *A Piece of Poetry. Conversations with Stanisław Dróżdż*, trans. K. Bazarnik, Cracow-Warsaw, 2012, p. 129.

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