Franz Josef Czernin/Ferdinand Schmatz

NOTES ABOUT THE POETRY PROGRAM POE

Some years ago already, we, Franz Josef Czernin and Ferdinand Schmatz, had the idea of developing a kind of poetry enabling us to give a methodically more exact representation of our proceeding in poetical work.

As we never wanted to obscure the view on the theoretical conditions of our poetry–although in fact rather different between us –, and a kind of floating state between the method developed and poetical liberty seemed ideal, it was close at hand to integrate the methods and practices historically outside of poetry–as we found them in various poetics–into the poetical procedure as such and have them become a constituent of poetry.

Without falling into an academic or scientific ductus, we wanted and still want to explore the internal and external procedures within the process of making poetry, in order to get more clarity and understanding of what we insert into the literary context under the notion of "creative" in our works.

This proposal of a more distinct definition of the term "creative" within poetry began to take more and more shape when we started–independently–to work with personal computers. After some time of training it became clear to us that beyond the simple word processing this technology includes language-generating abilities that should interest also the artist and poet. On one side, he will catch up with the pace of the constant evolution of various media, on the other hand, he will find means for a poetical individual basic research close at hand, giving him insight into communication processes that might develop from personal experiences into models of global collective, intersubjective processes.

Besides this actual systematic perspective, the historical point of view must be stressed: reaching back to Lichtenberg's reflections about the relation between language and thinking; to Novalis' diary notes concerning mathematics and poetry; and via Mallarmé's "Coup de dés", Valéry's "cahiers", via various directions within avantgarde–with the syntactical and semantical dissolutions in Dadaism, the re-definition of the Word and the aesthetic functions in the (Russian) Formalism and Constructivism –, via the theoretical notes and essays of Musil up to e.g. the language experiments of the Vienna Group and the present-day Language Poetry in the USA.

With this literary-historical background and its achievements (texts) accessible only through (passive) reading, it was important to us to create a practically oriented dimension of the application of poetical procedures through the poetry program POE. The program (Poetic Oriented Evaluations) is bowing to E.A.Poe's basic analysis of the "method of composition" and the "logics of the verse" etc. and we want to point out its character as a tool.

The latter covers two areas: poetical production as well as scientific analysis (of poetry). In other words, the application of the program POE may take place in poetical practice as well as in science–Germanistics, Linguistics, or (as it is a syntactical program) in Comparative Literature.

The conception of POE was and is made in the detail work by Franz Josef Czernin, relating to letters and syllables as found in words on a first level. The program allows to select words from a given text or dictionary that have certain affinities or differences as to the structure of their letters. This, as a purely syntactical result, can be transformed into poetics, into the deliberate poetical practice of Modernism: from Mallarmé to the present-day Anagram Poetry

(that uses permutations of letters within one or several words, excluding the use of foreign material whatsoever).

It seems important to point out that the texts resulting from an application of POE are not Computer-Poems that a machine creates and prints all by itself. But whenever the functions thus elaborated are transferred in a constructionally adequate manner, new texts will evolve the creation of which would not have happened without POE. POE, thus, is more than merely a supporting tool program able to follow the paths of poetical work by brain or by hand in a more complete or faster way. It does have some "creative" potential and runs on "creative" tracks–if the letter has been laid down in the shape of a program to be written by the poet or an analyzing scientist.

POE, which is under constant development, is working with the Turbo Pascal language and easy to use through its user-friendly menu system. This relates also to such commands that POE applies not only to letters, but to syllables or words from partial sentences or sentence parts or whole sentences or even to any pre-defined section of text.

POE thus overcomes the character of a dictionary or encyclopedia–commands are available that allow not only for the research of the letter structure of a give text unit, but also for changing text units of a given text.

Thus the permutation (often applied in contemporary poetry, but rather tedious to do) of the words of all given sentences of a text allows to produce combinations of sense-carrying lingual elements that one would not come across (so easily and globally) under normal circumstances. Besides this "sensitive" function, POE allows for a very speedy automatization of this usually very time-consuming procedure, with the effect to filter out the permutation most adequate for the text from all the possibilities.

Furthermore, a kind of "text sieve" allows to view the text under certain aspects while leaving out others. It is e.g. possible to dump all consonants and vowels excepting "a" and to view the distribution of "a" as a kind of graphic poem on the screen.

POE/Makedic, another subfunction of the program converts any ASCII-file into a dictionary excluding multiple entries of the same word and arranging the dictionary in a vertical column, one word per line. The dictionary then is available for further use with POE.

The statistical program of POE is used for the generation of new text from an old one and for the analysis of the distribution of letters, syllables, words and grammatical categories: In it, we introduced our practical experience (deriving not only from novelist literature) that the contextual levels of a poem do not only depend on the meaning of the words used, but also on the numerical distribution of letters and words on the paper. This means, the material character of language also affects the sensually perceptible side of production and reception.

Accordingly, POE is for instance capable of analyzing the absolute and relative frequency of letters or any given letter, and of groups of letters or given groups of letters, as well as the absolute frequency of words attributed to the level of expression in question.

Whatever POE is able to analyze statistically, it is able to synthesize–that is, it is capable of transforming any given text in accordance with statistical wishes as expressed by the author into a new text that shows exactly those statistical properties the author wants to have (occurrence of letters, length of words, percentage of vowels, grammatical categories etc.).

Beyond the letter structures in syllables and words, there is the possibility of access to any given text section, part of sentences or sentence (in order to exchange the first part of the sentence with the third etc.).

An important achievement also for phonetics and linguistics would be the analysis of the sound quality attributed to the letters as for the place and kind of their forming as vowels, labials, spirants, dentals etc. These–and any categories deliberately chosen by the authors– could be defined in a "configuration file", with POE retrieving the text parts as marked. This important step in the development of POE allowed for access to the linguistic level of grammar.

What happens "unconsciously" with language in daily use, namely a classification of non-linguistic components with grammatical typologies, could become the topic of a poem in poetry (think of Roman Jacobson's research about the "Grammar of poetry and the poetry of grammar").

In producing a literary text, the manipulation of grammatical categories may be as important as the manipulation of sounds and syllables. POE, on one hand, is a tool that makes such manipulations easier, on the other, it is a tool for tracing such manipulations in given texts (such as Jacobson /Levi-Strauss pointed out in Baudelaire's "chats" after tedious searching and counting).

For instance, the following command could be successfully issued:

Exchange the nouns and the verbs in all sentences that include nouns with three syllables in which the letters A and 0 appear.

With the help of the above-mentioned meta-symbols ("markers") it is possible to mark grammatical categories (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, etc.; subject, predicate, object, attribute etc.). Accordingly, any command will be available (such as "replace", "permutation", "insert", etc.) that uses the grammatical categories of the words given.) Presently we are working on enhancements for the statistical program of POE as well as on a POE/GRAPHICS program that also considers the tendency in modern poetry to use the page of text also as a graphics surface. Furthermore, we are trying to have POE run multiple dictionaries simultaneously in its analysis, marking the parts used upon printout.

Under the aspects outlined in short, we consider POE above all a poetical innovation rendering visible the poetical decision processes on screen through its constructive transparency.

Franz Josef Czernin, Ferdinand Schmatz Vienna, autumn 1990

POE is distributed by SEGUE FOUNDATION, 303 East 8th Street, New York, N.Y. 10009.

We started from the following three poems:

First, from a piece by Hölderlin, with POE determining the vocal structure which we took over and kept; this led to the poems "tag" and "nacht":

Wo aber sind die Freunde? Bellarmin
Mit dem Gefährten? Mancher
Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn;
Es beginnet nämlich der Reichtum
Im Meere. Sie

Wie Maler, bringen zusammen
Das Schöne der Erd' und verschmähn
Den geflügelten Krieg nicht, und
Zu wohnen einsam, jahrlang, unter
Dem entlaubten Mast, wo die Nacht durchglänzen
Die Feiertage der Stadt,
Und Saitenspiel und eingeborener Tanz nicht.
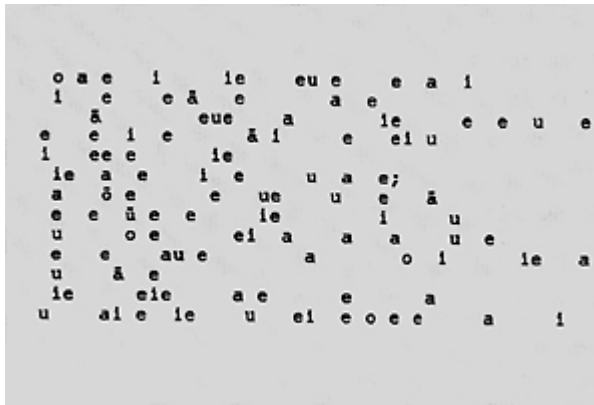
(Hölderlin)

tag

sog aber licht; die leuchten wellartig
lind dem gelände; blasses
wägt heuers fracht. die nebel brummen
fern: seichtes, ständig der preisung
wind; gegeben trieb
sie daher, sinne umfangen
das röhren; der seh; und gewährt
den ermüdeten die sicht und
luft; oder weitab, fanal unter
dem vertrauten lacht horn in die fahrt, umschwärzend
die weissverplankten, der schwank
und kaibetrieb. und scheinersonnener glanz sinnt.

(Schmatz)

nacht

so aber sind, die streunen gestaltig;
mit dem, gewächsen, schatten
schwärzt streuen; acht, die schwelle zu drehn;
es bestimmen, tränig der reibung
in leeren. wie
die wangen sinken, zustande;
das hören. der quell und erkrähn
den erhügelten tief; schicht und
ruht zonen scheinbar. andrang unter
dem verschauten: schacht, so dicht die pracht
durchrändernd.
die schreien sagen: der schwankt
und laibe zielt und eingezogenen hang misst.

(Czernin)

Note: The vowel structure is that of Hölderlin as well as the one of "tag" and "nacht", from which we took it.

sog licht; leuchten
gelände; blasses
heuers fracht. nebel
seichtes, preisung
wind; trieb
sinne umfangen
röhren; seh;
ermüdeten sicht
luft; fanal
vertrauten horn fahrt,
weissverplankten. schwank
kaibetrieb. glanz

gewächsen, schatten
schwärzt acht schwelle drehn;
reibung
leeren.
wangen
hören. quell erkrähn
erhügelten schicht
zonen andrang
verschauten: schacht, pracht

schreien sagen:
laibe eingezogenen hang misst

Note: Variation on the two basic poems "tag" and "nacht", keeping nouns and verbs.

sogHZ–umschwärzendZ
leuchtenHZ–streuenZ;
wägtz–weissverplanktenHZ. streuenZ;
brununenZ–sinntz.
streuenZ;
gegebenZ–sinntZ.
sinneHZ–streuenZ;
röhrenHZ;–sogHZ
sehHZ;
gewährtZ
vertrautenHZ

umschwärzendZ
weissverplanktenHZ.
sinntZ.
sinntZ.
sogHZ
leuchtenHZ
wägtz
brummenZ–leuchtenHZ
– wägtz
gegebenZ
sinneHZ–und gegebenZ zieltZ und eingezogenenZH hangH misstZ.
röhrenHZ;
sehHZ;–und sinn e H Z ziel tZ und eingezogenen ZH hangH misstZ.
gewährtZ
– und röhrenHZ; zieltZ und eingezogenenZH hangH misstZ.
vertrautenHZ
umschwärzendZ–und sehHZ; zieltZ und eingezogenenZH hangH misstZ.
weissverplanktenHZ.–und gewährtZ
sinntZ.–zieltZ und eingezogenenZH hangH misstZ.
sinntZ.–und vertrautenHZ zieltZ und eingezogenen ZH hangH
– misstz.
sogHZ streuenZ;
leuchtenHZ streuenZ;–und umschwärzendZ
wägtZ streuenZ;–zieltZ und eingezogenen ZH hangH misstZ.
brummenZ
streuenZ;–und weissverplanktenHZ. zieltZ und eingezogenen ZH
gegebenZ streuenZ;–hangH misstZ.
sinneHZ streuenZ;
röhrenHZ; streuenZ;–und sinntZ.
sehHZ; streuenZ;–zieltZ und eingezogenenZH hangH misstZ.
gewährtZ
streuenZ;–und sinntZ.
vertrautenHZ streuenZ;–zieltZ und eingezogenen ZH hangH misstZ.

Note: Results of POE's mixing all nouns and verbs in "tag" and "nacht" on the level of word groupings defined by commas; markers: H (noun), Z (verb), HZ (both noun and verb), this text represents an intermediary stage.

dämmerung

sog leuchten,
vertrautumschwärzend
brummen, streuen:
die zu drehn wägt
tränig der seh;

gegeben
die sinne,
die röhren;
die weissverplankten
sinken,
gewährt
der vertrauten;

erkrähn
tief sog und
leuchten wägt
umschwärzend
und ruht seh,
ruht scheinbar.

umschwärzend
weissverplankten unter
sinnt
unter
dem gegeben
sog leuchten,
wägt,

so dicht die gewährt,
so dicht die sinnt.
die vertrauten
dieumschwärzend
sagen:
die weissverplankten:
und sog zielt,
eingezogenen hang misst und sinnt.

Note: Final version; processed intermediary version keeping some of POE's mixtures of the original poems. Only the words produced by POE were used.

```
 File      Select    Transform Compute   Set      Compose  Option   Utility

 |    f                      6.86    h                         38.24
 |    s                     44.12    v                          2.94
 |    z                      7.14
 |
 |
 |
 |   Char                   Score   Char                       Score
 |    l                    100.00
 |
 |
 |
 |   Char                   Score   Char                       Score
 |    a                     14.81    o                         46.03
 |    i                     18.93    ø                          3.29
 |    u                     11.11    a                          0.82
 |    ä                      4.12    å                          0.82
 |
 |
 |
 |
 Compute Vowel Probability
 Input ARS.GEO | Output comp.out    | Reference   HOME      |   CONTEXT
     move cursor   <Esc> Switch To Commandline
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Note: Statistical analysis of spirants and vowels in "tag" and "nacht", (screen print).