

# Öyvind Fahlström's *Bord*: Visual devices in poetry

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**Abstract:** The poet and artist Öyvind Fahlström (1928–1976) was the leader of the Scandinavian avant-garde during the fifties and the beginning of the sixties. He wrote his only collection of poetry *Bord* [*Tables*] in 1952–1955, but it was not published until 1966. In this book he applies the aesthetic ideas of his two manifestos – signification is what matters in poetry but signification emanates out of the visual materiality of letters and the sounds of speech. *Bord* contains advanced visual poetry as well as sound poetry. We may notice that the same tools for description and analysis can be utilized for both these modalities, something that can be explained with the help of gestalt psychology and the image schemas of cognitive poetics.

Fahlström's poem "Den svåra resan" ["The hard journey"] is a three-pages score for speech choir and a beautiful visual poem as well. A harmonious, strict picture contrasts to the turbulent sounds. What you see and what you hear express different moods and supply different significations.

The printed picture of elder free verse typically has a straight left margin and a wavering right one. After Fahlström, poets more and more tended to pattern the whole page. With time, Fahlström's ideas met with American language poetry, creating a special quality we recognize in contemporary poetry.

**Keywords:** Öyvind Fahlström, concretism, The Swedish fifties, gestalts, cognitive schemas, premodality, visual devices

## Introduction

A piece of art presents various devices to manipulate time and space. Formerly, temporality dominated poetry, but during the last century the visuality of a poem has also become an important feature. The futurist and the dada movements invented visual as well as sound poetry. This happened in 1912–1916 during the First World War, in a period when pictorial art developed rapidly with a series of experiments. Painting was the predominant art form of that time and influenced other kinds of art with its boldness. After the war, dada was declared dead but it never really disappeared.

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Dada aesthetics did not influence Swedish poetry until around 1950, when the work of Öyvind Fahlström (1928–1976) became decisive. Fahlström was a poet and a well-known international artist. He wrote most of his poems in the beginning of the fifties, and this literary contribution became a determining factor for the future of Swedish poetry. However, his poetry was too bold for the period, and it was not even printed until the middle of the sixties when a new dadaism blossomed. In Sweden, this movement was known as ‘concretism’, and Swedish concretist poems were expansive and noisy in character. They differed a great deal from the German new dada style of the same period with its exquisite look (Gassilewski 1999: 70; Lilja 2006: 422). Some examples are presented below.

The inventive power of this movement cannot be overestimated, and many new methods for making meaning out of words were created. In the sixties, poetry could take the form of paintings, speech choirs, and happenings. These are texts to be seen and heard. Noisy performances are alternated with printed pictures for silent acquirement. Both methods imply close encounters with sound forms as well as pictoriality (Olsson 2005: 65–79). Both work with strong form in combination with vague signification.

## Fahlström and his book

Fahlström was the leader of the Scandinavian avant-garde for a long time. He was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and was the son of a Norwegian father and a Swedish mother. In July 1939 he was sent to Stockholm in order to visit some relatives, and because of the outbreak of World War II he had to stay there. In spite of his international background, he became a Swedish school boy. After the war he studied art history and archaeology in Stockholm, and 1950–1955 he went to work as a writer, critic and journalist (Hjelmstedt 2007: 173–175).

His first public appearance was in 1953, in the exhibition of “Opera”, which was a room-sized felt-pen drawing. In 1956 Fahlström moved to Paris and lived there for three years, but he remained a dominant leader of the Scandinavian avant-garde. With time, the Swedish scene became too limited for him, and in 1961 he settled down in New York, but even through the sixties he spent much time in Stockholm. He also represented Sweden in the 1964 Venice Biennale. Around 1970 he had a number of solo exhibitions in New York and he is also represented at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). Especially influential was his use of the game as a basic pattern for his art. He developed art forms like happenings and performance in cooperation with,

among others, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage. Fahlström also developed the Swedish radio drama into a new artfulness. A favourite is *Fåglar i Sverige* [*Birds in Sweden*] (1963), a half hour long fantasy of fantastic sounds. He also made four Swedish films. However, Fahlström's international success meant that his work with texts increasingly gave room for painting (Hjelmstedt 2007: 176–179; Bäckström 2011: 77–81).

Mostly, Fahlström's art works commented on social and political questions – like *Minneslista till Dr Schweitzers sista uppdrag* [*Memorandum to Dr Schweitzer's last mission*] (1964), a book that was turned into an exhibition – but he was also influenced by fairy tales, nonsense poetry, fables, pop art and the French situationists. Fahlström died of cancer in 1976 at the age of forty-eight.

Fahlström actually began writing as a surrealist. In 1949 he wrote the unpublished poems collected under the title *Trumpeten i stjärten* (1949) [*The Trumpet in the Bottom*]. Here he was inspired by, among others, Marquis de Sade.<sup>1</sup> Even if he left surrealism a couple of years later, it is possible to trace this movement in all of his works (Gassilewski 1999: 67),

Fahlström published only one book of Swedish poetry, *Bord* [*Tables*] 1966, with texts written between 1952 and 1955. The very title, *Bord*, is developed out of two Swedish words, 'bokstav' [letter] and 'ord' [word], combined into 'Bord' [or 'Table']. In 1954, his first manifesto was printed in a small avant-garde journal. More about this below! The poems in *Bord* can be looked upon as applications of his aesthetic ideas in the manifesto, but this is also good poetry – visual poetry and sound poetry. Here we meet with a chaotic world where the human body dominates the circumstances. Fahlström's lifelong interest in scatology, pornography, the monstrous, and the body was already fully developed (Bäckström forthcoming: 1). The language works with repetitions and permutations into delirium. Incantation, nonsense, and all kinds of low language are used, something rare back in the 1950s (Bäckström 2012: 97–100).

The poems in *Bord* can be grouped in accordance with their use of visuality and/or acoustic means. The main text, "Det stora och det lilla" ["The big and the small"], fifteen pages long, expands from a few recurring themes, for example some sharks and a guy called KALLE HAVET [could be 'Charlie the Sea' or 'the cold sea']. Some of the themes run all through the book, like "Massif Central" – "Massif Central / halstrat i brinnande vin" ["Massif Central

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript of this poetry collection belongs to the Fahlström collection at the Royal library in Stockholm. Another unpublished collection of poems is "Borborygmernas fall" ["The fall of the Borborygmi", manuscript lost] (Bäckström forthcoming: 1; Olsson 2005: 48).

/ fried in burning wine”]. One passage replaces all vowels with an ‘i’, another passage uses an ‘y’. All of the (large) page surfaces are in play with the help of marginal stanzas, columns, capitals and so on. Sometimes the print makes decorative figures.<sup>2</sup> See picture 1 in the Appendix.

“MOA (1)” (‘Moa’ is a girl’s name) looks more like a score in music than traditional poetry with its ten columns of combinations and permutations. It may be read from the left to the right or, if you like to, downwards column by column (Olsson 2005: 271) (see Picture 2). The choice creates different word combinations making different possible meanings. “Nyårsklockorna” (“New Year’s bells”) develops a similar idea. The first four pages investigate the vowels in hovering word fragments (Gassilewski 1999: 69). But if “MOA (1)” doesn’t look that inviting to the reader, “Nyårsklockorna” seems tempting in its visual beauty (see Picture 3).

The two “Topp-timm” poems are primarily sound poetry just like the four “Bobb” poems. “Morgon i rådhuset” [“Morning in the town hall”] combines untidy rhythms with a harmonious printed image. The poem suggests that there are too many clubs and too many farmers in the Town Hall. They keep joking, swimming, and dining with their foxhounds. The ‘I’ of the poem has problems with his composite feelings. This might be a satire about local democracy and an old-fashioned man’s role, both of them functioning badly. The harmonious printed image is undermined by a disharmonious sound image and rather impolite meanings (Lilja 2009: 283–286) (see Picture 4). In this poem the printed image shows a spiral consisting of six swings – it is beautifully balanced, aiming at visual symmetry. The first three lines of each line group grows longer and longer before the arresting short lines. The left margin is straight but three half stanzas don’t begin until somewhere in the middle of the page and each time it has moved a little further to the right. At the bottom of the page the indentation reaches about two centimetres longer than in the beginning – this poem stands broad-bent. Like a chauvinist farmer? (Lilja 2014: 147–151).

Below I will delve deeper into “Den svåra resan” [“The hard journey”], a three pages score for speech choir AND a beautiful visual poem. But before that, we need to look at some aesthetic ideas.

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<sup>2</sup> Olsson 2005, p. 281f. Olsson makes an extensive description of “Det stora och det lilla” p. 409–416.

## The aesthetics in Bord

Fahlström is famous for his two manifestoes of concretist poetry, one published in 1954, and the other one in 1961. We will take a look at both of them. In 1953 he wrote "Hätåla ragulpr på fåtskliaben" ("Hipy papy bthuthdththuthda bthuthdy"), a manifesto for concrete poetry, published in Swedish the following year and in English translation in 1968 (Olsson 2005: 45–65).

The first and most important manifesto is "Hätåla ragulpr på fåtskliaben", nonsense words meaning 'Happy Birthday' (in Swedish 'Hjärtliga gratulationer på födelsedagen'). The Swedish version as well as the English one is a citation from *Winnie-the-Pooh*, from the passage where Owl doesn't know how to spell. Fahlström emphasizes that poetic form must have rules, but other rules than those of the tactus versification. He mentions vocal series, vertical parallelisms, marginal stanzas and framing stanzas. Most important is to break all kinds of conventions in order to restore the reader's genuine acquisition. It should be possible to read the poem vertically and diagonally, not only horizontally. The eye should move over the page in the same way as it does in front of an abstract painting.

Fahlström stresses that signification is the aim of poetry. You need materiality – voice and print – to make meaning. His ideas for shaping poetry are spatial as well as temporal, visual as well as auditory in nature. Sequential reading will be prevented by a range of visual devices, something which considerably increases the number of significations. The visual patterns create tensions in relation to conventional meaning, and focus will be transferred to the materiality of the poem. Fahlström establishes poetry as an art form of space AND time, in contrast to Lessing's famous statement of poetry as situated in time (Olsson 2005: 61).

Fahlström considers rhythm to be the basic device in shaping poems – because of its bodily origin, the biorhythms. Rhythm is among other things a kind of repetition and it functions in time and in space alike. Fahlström's ideas are applicable to all art forms, music and painting as well as poetry. He is very conscious of the possibilities of different medias, but in the first place he thinks of all kinds of art as performance. In this respect he is about half a century before his time (Olsson 2005: 57–64; Bäckström 2011: 81; Hultberg 1999: 86f).

For many years Fahlström's first manifesto caught no attention. But in the sixties cultural life turned more experimental, and Fahlström wrote a new version of his manifesto, "Bris" ["Breeze"] for the widely spread journal *Rondo* in 1961. Now he got his well-deserved followers, poets like Åke Hodell and Jarl Hammarberg.

Once more Fahlström underlines that language signs are random. Meaning always stems from the associations of the reader. This implies that the poem must be shaped in a way that forces the reader to activate his associations. The poet should destroy conventional significations into a polyphony of connections tempting the reader to create a new whole. In this way one could either erase conventional meaning or sharpen it. The most fascination feature of language is that sound and signification have nothing to do with each other, says Fahlström in “Bris”.

The poetics in “Bris” describes a new way of thinking about poetics and versification. Over and over Fahlström emphasizes that the poem is its meaning. But he doesn't refer to lexical meaning as signification should emanate out of the sound and sight of words. Meaning is an effect of the play between letters and sounds. This is a turning point in the history of poetics, in a development that started with the Zürich Dada and nowadays is main stream in the poetics of Language materialism.

After moving to New York, Fahlström invented new international languages – his poetics is not limited to Swedish or any existing language. He started from his radio poem *Fåglar i Sverige* [*Birds in Sweden*] and shaped the language ‘Fåglo’ and its more English variety ‘Birdo’. In this poem he used transcriptions of bird song transformed according to some self-made rules springing from a game logic. Later on there was a third variety, ‘Whammo’, shaped out of the expressions of American comics. These home-made languages live in a borderland between image, sound, and performance (Bäckström 2011: 77–81).

## Gestalts and schemas

The poet Fredrik Nyberg writes that sight and hearing work simultaneously when writing a poem. The shapes of letters, words, and pages stand close to what is produced by mouth and ear. Traditionally, audibility has been thought to be the dominant sense in poetry, but this can really not be defended. Eye and ear together control the shaping of a poem, Fredrik Nyberg suggests (Nyberg 2013: 481). There seems to be a reciprocal dependence between senses. To explain this, we may first consider the findings of the school of *gestalt* psychology a century ago and their so called *gestalt* laws.

## Gestalts

*Gestalt* psychology primarily refers to visual gestalts. Obviously, visual impressions are grouped to attain coherence, be it the same colour or form, or perhaps closeness or similar direction. Temporal perceptions form gestalts through such features as vicinity and similarity. In 1923, Max Wertheimer formulated these universal laws for the first time, demonstrating how the human mind creates *gestalts*, significant entreties (Ash 1995: 224f).

All reading is determined by the *gestalt* laws of perception (Tsur 2012: 21).<sup>3</sup> Common experience will influence how we shape the *gestalts* – practise may stimulate us to prefer one certain form, and as readers we might apprehend one *gestalt* but not another. Our solid experience of *gestalts* can explain why we know when, for example, a piece of music is drawing to its end. Subtle acoustic signals tell us that closure is approaching (Herrnstein-Smith 1968: 41; Arnheim 1957: 323). Completion needs a limit, the borderline of the *gestalt*. This is true for spatial as well as temporal figures, for smaller and bigger *gestalts*.

During the past century, *gestalt* theory has developed in different ways. Classical principles of grouping, like closeness, vicinity and similarity, have had additions like synchrony, common region, uniform connectedness, not forgetting contour completion (Kubovy, Valkenburg 2006). Jean Piaget (1953, 1966: 47–143) studied how babies acknowledged perception schemas with the help of experience, how their schemas were coordinated and developed with time, and also offer a possibility to preserve human experience. Richard Cureton (1992: 190f, 270f) modernised the principles of grouping, referring instead to ‘preference rules’. Reuven Tsur adapts the *gestalt* laws to poetry performance. A main idea of his is the difference between strong and weak *gestalts*. He also emphasizes how repetition strengthens patterns (Tsur 2008: 111–154, 507; 2009).

Often you hear of ‘good *gestalts*’. The grand old man of *Gestalt* psychology Karl Koffka points out that ‘good’ in this case refers to regularity, symmetry, and similarity – qualities supplying salience, conciseness and orderliness, or simply ‘Prägnanz’ (Tsur 2012: 49). The ‘good *gestalt*’ has worked as an important factor in aesthetic thinking (Tsur 2008: 113; Ash 1995: 226).

The *gestalt* laws are the same independent of art form or medium (Tsur 2008: 154; Kandinsky, Wassily 1926: 110). The same categories work in dance and poetry, music and sculpture. A dancing body is a *gestalt* just like

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<sup>3</sup> Tsur also adds the importance of short time memory in the reading process. The two together form the reader’s rhythmical competence.



the picture and the poem, all of them composed by sets of smaller *gestalts* (Cureton 1992: 189; Lilja 2014: 78). Obviously, *gestalt* laws are premodal in character. From the perspective of intermedia studies, this is a crucial point. We can use the same tools for analyzing dance, sculpture, paintings, music, and poetry – visual as well as audible qualities in Fahlström's poems. *Gestalts* are just as important in audible sequences as in visual ones, and for sure also in tactile ones (Gallace, Spence 2011: 538–561). The *gestalt* has no objective existence but an intersubjective one (Tsur 2012: 132f). It is easy to agree on its shape even if it is formed in the individual perception.

### Image schemas

Fahlström's poems can be looked upon as visible and audible *gestalts* formed by mental mechanisms, the so-called image schemas. These schemas provide models that turn the artefact into *gestalts*, patterns aiming at coherence and significance – they give shape to the *gestalt* (Rohrer 2005: 171, 173).<sup>4</sup> An image schema stands for bodily experiences that are transferred into stable patterns of perception (Johnson 1987: xix; different articles in Hampe 2005). Something happens during the passage of perceptions into the mind – image schemas act as a kind of filter in the way from perception to form and signification. They adapt the world to the human being, organising the interplay between mind and world. Image schemas are mental mechanisms that form our experience of the world – including poems.<sup>5</sup> From this view point, a poem starts as a set of perceptual impulses, what you see and what you hear. More than that, this is an important aspect of how Fahlström regards poetry. Signification will develop in the other end of this process.

The choice of schema happens instinctively, often influenced by the reminiscence of some bodily movement arisen from the actual perceptions. Other important sources are environment and memory (Gibbs 2007: 74; Ash 1995: 115; Lilja 2014: 97f.). You never get in contact with those sensory impulses that do not fit into your schemas. Eyes and ears have seen and heard, but these perceptions are never realized and therefore they get lost (Ash 1995: 115; Lilja 2014: 97f.).

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<sup>4</sup> Rohrer stresses that image schemas are recurrent patterns of bodily experience, they preserve the topological structure of the perceptual experience, they operate dynamically in time, and they link sensorimotor experience to conceptualization and language.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson 1987 demonstrates different cases.



These schemas occur before a differentiation takes place into visual, audible, and tactile forms – they are premodal.<sup>6</sup> Image schemas work the same in time and space.<sup>7</sup> This means that the same patterns are valid for all art forms, dance, sculpture, music, and poetry. We may compare with the Ancient Greek art form *mousiké* where dance, music and poetry form a whole (Evans forthcoming). Let us remember the poet in the *agora* moving, playing and reciting, a body in time as well as space.

Visual forms primarily meet as an entirety, and you need some time to see the details. In contrast, temporal forms are first perceived in sequences, but in a next step it is possible to grip their wholeness. Looking at a picture, you will take it in as a whole and later on notice the parts. The opposite holds for temporal art forms like poetry – the ear starts with the segment, and it will take you some time to catch the whole *gestalt*. Fahlström's visual poems first approach us as expressive pictures that need some time to be considered while the eye wanders from one side to another and back again.

## Kandinsky on signification

Visual qualities as well as speech sounds influence the meaning of a poem. Of course, this kind of signification is subtle and not that easy to describe. It is a matter of associations, similarities, and affects. The same problem turns up in front of an abstract painting, something that might give us some help.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) is one of the most influential painters in Modernist abstract art. He wrote some books in art theory where he reflects over the possibilities of abstract forms creating meaning, for example *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* [*Point and Line to Surface*] 1926. We may take note of a couple of his viewpoints. He starts with the square of the canvas, the basic surface, *Grundfläche* (Kandinsky 1955: 131–146). He makes observations concerning directions up and down, where 'down' means the stable ground, but 'up' is expansion and freedom (Kandinsky 1955: 131f). The bottom line works as a transfer of earth, a place where we can stand safely. This is to be compared with the cognitive metaphor MORE IS UP and its depressing opposite

<sup>6</sup> Johnson and others refer to psychological experiments to prove what they call 'cross-modal-ity' (Johnson 2007: 143).

<sup>7</sup> Lakoff and Johnson explains this in terms of brain organization. Time is conceptualized in motion, and the detection of motion has an area in the brain visual system (Lakoff; Johnson 1999: 140).

downwards (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 14). Cognitive semantics has ascribed the directions up and down positive and negative signification respectively. In this, cognitive theory supports Kandinsky's ideas, at least concerning the upward direction. Maybe the ambiguous connection between earth and death is the missing link considering the different understandings of the downward direction.

Directions left and right are more complicated in Kandinsky's thinking. The left side is connected to the upward direction but with a weaker expression (Kandinsky 1955: 135). The right side means heaviness, a continuation meeting a border (Kandinsky 1955: 137). This is in accordance with the Western reading direction – you are aiming towards the right side. In a next step, Kandinsky says that 'left' stands for far-away but 'right' means home (Kandinsky 1955: 138).

## Black print and sound music

We have already taken a rapid glance at a couple of the poems in Fahlström's *Bord*. Now we will go deeper into one of them, the three pages of "Den svåra resan" ["The hard journey"], probably written as early as 1953. See picture 5!

## Sound music

This is an impressive visual poem, and at the same time the text makes a score for a speech choir of eighteen voices. Only few of the expressions have any conventional meaning, but you may find a salmon ("lax"), an extract of cat ("kattextrakt"), and a love-making girl called Ulla ("ullaligg"). From these examples you may notice a sharp contrast between soft and hard consonants, explosives like /k/ and /t/ beside the soft repeated /l/. However, the soft and the hissing sounds dominate over the hard explosives in this poem. The eighteen parts of the speech choir restart from the left marginal five times. Every part is supposed to transcend the line break.

The very start exploits a mighty /A/. The harsh repeated "RRA – CKA" is the only task of part 5 and given extra significance with the help of extra big capitals. Today we think of the city "Raqqah", but this was an unknown place in the Swedish fifties. However, 'racka' is the beginning of Swedish 'rackare', 'scoundrel'. In the very end it develops into a "TACK" [thank you] also in very big capitals. The word brings along other rough sounds like "ódidakteriodi"

in part 12 (could be Greek and mean something like 'ways of teaching') not to mention the cats (*kattor*) and the salmon (laxar) of part 9.

Part 6 takes care of the lovemaking Ulla starting slowly with "jállí" but transforms into a joyful "... lillallugglillallújá" (to be compared with 'hallelujah', 'lilla' means 'small' in Swedish, 'lugg' is a hair style) – part 6 is really signified by melting l-sounds. Even part 16 works sensually, for example with a 'word' like "mummjújölúll". Part 12 completes in a lonely "...smörgås" (sandwich) while several other parts blurt out with "F-R-F-R-F". I think that the sandwich will drown in the noisy hissing hubbub that finishes the performance.

Firstly, this vivid sound play should be looked upon as a demonstration of what phonemes are able to do if they are freed from lexical signification. Maybe voice 1, exploiting a stubborn quiet /O/, could stand for rest and balance. Also part 4, 8, 11 and 15 exploit one sound only but more noisy and hissing ones like the fricatives 'f', 'sj' and 's'. Consonants in other parts move forwards, more and more determined, during this journey. We travel and it is a hard journey, a landscape of paths /ffff/ (part 4), water /MMMMMMMM/ (part 13–14) and stones /BL-BL-BL/ (part 3).<sup>8</sup> Some dirty corners seem to be present as well.

### Black print on white paper

In the book, "Den svåra resan" uses three pages. The poem moves slowly within harmonious squares. Typography is pure and beautiful in spite of the juicy and woolly character of the sounds, just like the case in many other poems of this book. The figures of the left margin do not belong to the text, but are instructions for the speech choir. To begin with, six parts cling to one sound each, and the repeated letters stretch over the pages as elegant edgings. Long lines contrast to half long and very short ones, capitals contrast to lower-case letters.

As already said, the speech choir starts from the left margin five times. The first turn on the first page balances a text surface of black letters to the left with another to the right. After that a steady movement to the right follows. The second and the third turn move from upper left down to the right, and the fourth and fifth turn transfer the weight to the right side of the page. This motion harmonizes with the ordinary reading direction from the left to the

<sup>8</sup> Cognitive theory conceptualizes (reading) time, among other possibilities, as walking along a path. Lakoff; Johnson 1999: 146.

right. 'Right' means home and safety, says Kandinsky, but emphasizes an element of confinement in this (Kandinsky 1955: 137).

Long liners in beautiful edgings hold shorter text pieces in a balanced picture. The visual poem lies quietly on the paper. The white surfaces between letters add silence to a reading – the empty paper also supplies rest, tension, balance. "Den svåra resan" possesses many white surfaces to subdue the print.

The one-letter-lines divide the paper into sections, something that disappears in the last third of the poem, where the bottom line is a short one. Part 1 repeats a persistent /O/ until the beginning of turn 4 where it suddenly ebbs out with a surprising /... IPS/. After that the steady edgings come to an end. The very last line (part 13, 14, 15, 17, 18) snorts and murmurs to the right but this is not enough to construct a solid bottom for the visual poem. If we remember Kandinsky's observations concerning directions up and down, this circumstance influences the meaning of the poem. Here there is no steady ground while the tight first line provides an obstacle for upward movements – this could mean missing chances.

Quietness dominates the visual impression, but there are some disturbing details, covered reading instructions. Interesting elements are the hyphens that sometimes thin the edgings of letters. A foot note on page 44 tells us that hyphens should be pronounced as 'mute e' (!). Perhaps Fahlström thinks of vowel murmur, but the hyphens serve as pronunciation help as well – without that hyphen you have to gurgle the "GL" and snort the "FMMF". The powerful "RRA – CKA", repeated three times, has a letter size that substantially exceeds the rest – maybe the most visible 'word' will also have the highest volume.

Above I suggested that reading or listening to this poem could be comparable with walking through a landscape making 'a hard journey', as the title says. Remember Fahlström's thesis that meaning is what matters in a poem. Is there a story in "Den svåra resan"? What is this poem doing except elaborating the look of letters and the taste of speech sounds? The quiet motion from the left to the right – could it be understood as development? Maybe the love-making Ulla could be its princess.

If the journey of sounds provided a landscape of stones and water – what does the visual poem convey? Here we are more as in a square garden where the flower borders are harmoniously and strictly spread over the place. I have underlined the opposition between the harmonious, somewhat severe picture and the turbulent sounds of the score. What you see and what you hear express different moods and supply different significations. Typography mediates orderliness but the sound picture is jerky and unclean. We may presume that the quiet picture dominates the poem when silently read and, reversely, the speech choir in the first place elaborates the turbulent sounds.

## Visuality and free verse

In my analysis, I have shown that the very same text may evoke different schemas depending on temporal or visual modus. Nevertheless, the same schemas occur in both my analyses – the temporal and the visual one. Primarily, I have been looking for the schemas of ‘direction’ and ‘balance’. Both of them are to be found, but they do not occur at the same place in the visual and the temporal poem.

Old-time metered poetry is temporal and acoustic. Free verse was born around the turn of the century 1900, a period when the prices of the printing houses went down and as a consequence poetry changed appearance. In the nineteenth century poems were recited, but in the twentieth, poetry was mostly consumed by reading a book. Visuality does not interest performed poetry, but the picture became more and more important for silent reading. Even then temporal rhythm is evident to the reader, but the printed picture is what meets the eye at a first sight.<sup>9</sup>

The very first experiment in visual poetry, Stéphane Mallarmé's poem “Un coup de dés” (1897), moves in diagonals over the opening from the upper left corner down to the lower right one – and we could trace the same motion in “Den svåra resan”. This means a gesture of continuation and development, but also much emptiness and white paper. In the Mallarmé tradition you look for the silence of a poem. The page turns into a picture where blank space is just as important as letters. One of the most typical devices of modernist free versification came to be the play between words and silences, letters and white paper. Mallarmé's invention of the printed picture coincided with the cubist idea of suspending the difference between time and space in a painting. For example, motion was described by depicting the body in several moments of a movement at the same time. In that way, time was incorporated with space.

During the first half of the twentieth century, free verse mostly uses a typical typography – there is a straight left margin and a wavering right one. During this time, poets worked mainly with temporal rhythms, trying to make them expressive without the means of the tactus. Mainly, they followed the heritage of Antique cola and Old Norse accent versification, adapting both to modern languages. It took time before Mallarmé's keen experiment had

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<sup>9</sup> Olsson makes a valuable survey of the hybrid tradition of pictures and poems (Olsson 2005: 281-389).

its followers. In the beginning, visuality was used only for some details – this means of versification needed to be developed.<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective, the fifties appears to be a most interesting period. In the Swedish history of poetry, this is a prospering time. Among others, the Nobel Prize winner Tomas Tranströmer published some of his best work, and, not least, the international artist Öyvind Fahlström fought with the stiff Swedish language before he left for New York. The Swedish fifties is a time of fulfilment at the same time as the period prepares for new insights in poetic language.

It took some time before these efforts found any use for following generations. In the eighties, Katarina Frostenson was able to develop concretist findings and reshape them for application in a somewhat more conventional poetry. After that contribution, Swedish verse could use more and more of the concretist inventions, not least visuality. Nowadays, the poet normally utilizes all the page, arranging letters in beautiful patterns to make meaning out of the space between words. In this process, international influences have meant something, but Fahlström's heritage was decisive. Swedish poetry today is especially strong in so-called language materialism, and the historical base of this strength is Fahlström's *Bord* and his manifestos.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Gunnar Ekelöf used pictorial devices in his famous *Sent på Jorden* [Late on Earth] (1932). Among other things, the very word "guld" [gold] was coloured in golden yellow in the print (Wählin 1993: 126).

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## Appendix

oaäaia oaaöa oeyaiä

aoä-ä-a-a ä-a

äae-oae oaäaia

heet heet heet heet heet

heet

heet heet heet heet

heet heet heet heet heet heet

heet heet heet heet

heet heet heet heet het

grova säkra nickar

och han ska gör dom mest sympatiska

av dom där hästarna

lärdä

hårdare tjockare

groäaia

stoia uio öieiöä

aäiae äuue

äae-oae stoi uio

stora milda gubbstrimor finare het het het försvinner i grödan het het het het het het

han bär sin sadel het het het het het het på huvudet het het het het het het het

hårdare tjockare het het het het het het het stoi uio het het het het het het het

han fick en varm röksmak haieaöä eouu aiae e genom huvudet han vilade det <sup>ord</sup> var  
före nicken öeie ie-ä dvs. i en häst öeie ie-ä öeie ie-ä öeie ie-ä öeie som helst

hårdare tjockare äae-oae hai eaöä äae-oae äae-oae äae-oae äae-oae äae-oae äae-oa

het het het het het

het het het

het het

stampar vatten för att

få sticka upp näsan ur hajbot

och håller sin kofitta

hårdare

tjockare

staae

staae öä öäaia uäa uao

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oae staae öä

oae oae oae oae oae oae oae oae oae oae ae

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het het het h

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haaaet höat höäaäiat huäat huaot

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ee ee ee ee ee ee ee ee ee ee ee ee

hastam hapar tack karlar



## MOA (1)

fång	brinnande	bort	hoppa	på	mellan	benen	kör-sko	öraskokujonskinång
kör	fast	sko	skurar	miljondels	skri-trav	lång	tigerkatalog	måbogtbonuogläbå
månglare	bort	gräsligt	bort	nu	cylinder-trästen	bär	SJÖ I ITALIEN	änfäckangaosurn
än e på	få	nickad	långsamt	skakt	ros	skrin	rutt	naav tårtfåbenapa
nacken	av	stångbädd	kort	fäst	ben	pipa	ifatt	i moapstraarfofo
i	morse	knapp	jäst	rar	bondfort	pigknapp-bondfort	betar av	klutskortackmero
klippa	tuta	ånga	storbädd	SJÖITAL	med	drog	vippor	sjuutaomförfåta
sjuka	talar	skola	tigrar	för	få	flyta	såsong	ångbrorppapåbranen
gräsligt	nu	klippa	bort	månglare	bär	katalog	SJÖ I ITALIEN	bäst naavna kopina
stångbädd	fäst	hinna	av	nacken	pipa	ben	ifatt	skitmeta li-st-rock
skola	SJÖITAL	med	tuta	la	storbädd	julp-socker	såsong	skitt li st örär lask
skos	miljondels-	cylander-trä st en	fast	kör	lång	skri-trav	tigerkatalog	bopållring oppenock
bort	på	mellan	brinnande	fång	benen	bröst-socker	kör-sko	ick ak urfåpå-ång skos
nickad	skakt st	murar	få	än e på	skrin	ros	rutt	so örfåta katikat
som	för	få	talar	ång	i kör	att	flyta	aparrt moistapar
knappst	rar	bondfort	morse	i	jäst	pigfort-knapp	betar av	linu la bolabo-bå-lo
					springande	ånga	vippor	fast

säs ong	med fast mellan	klippa fast fång	drog fast benen	SJÖITAL fast på	skola bort	tuta brinnande	julsocker fast socker	st_ormbädd få st hoppa	me fåne på bondkappa få july öröm örtar
kör-sko	få hinna	sjuka nacken dött	flyta pi pa	för få skaka	som cylinderr_bä dd	i kör av	hina	tigrar kort	hind-pi- skakaskaka av en ko bröst
talar ifatt	hinna	nacken dött	pi pa	få skaka	cylinderr_bä dd	av	hina	tigrar kort	pa-ng far nu gror lort skurar
SJÖ I ITALIEN	klippa	månglare	fast r	nu	gräsligt	bort	katalog	bort	st or å non kokorira
tigerkatal	stång-trasten	kör	lång	miljonfels-skos mitten	skos	med skola stormbädd	skri-trav	skurar	foiröra ap-moa rak hoppa
dukar av vippor	bondfort i	pigbröst springande	knapp ånga	rar	knapp	morse	bar	jä skaka are	äri st ick få o s ång
rutt	murar	e än på	skrin	st t	nickad	fä	ros	långsamt	e dipprota kotas orm
i kör	SJÖ I ITALIEN	flygpåmej-cellen av vippor	kör-sko	säs sjuka ifatt	ifatt	rutt	tigerkatalog ta la	lys oa t ång få fö i gal	
fly-ta pip	som	att	ång	få	fö-r betar nu	tigrar ort	pi p klip pa betar r	bä slog la nu boor	
bä r	gräsligt	katalog	m ång klip-pa re	klip-skurar	bondf ort	bort	b ort	bröst apar in drar st or	
pi gka pip-log pi	knapp	ba betar	i	med	moa	jä st springande	morse sjuka a	en boe r ång an på moa n	
benen	b tigrar	pi socke-betar	f ång	mellan	på hop skurar moa	brinnande	brinnande	ro ko jula me lo långsamt ut	
drog	sko-klippa	la	la	med	SJÖ-LOG	tu ta	pa dd bett in stavko		
rar	skar	benen	nacken dött	hinna	få st	av	K ORT	krickro på rakt ång få	
pi p a st ång bä dd	skar	skar	än e på	mu r r a r	skakt	dd t	få	ångsk r iköas en kust	
skar	skar	skar	kö-betar	cylinderr_tra skaka	miljonfels-mitten	pa	bä	o r t ka ta log	
dd = långsamt	skar	skar	skar	skar	skar	skar	skar	skar	

+Y fjärrar som sitter på väggen i form av svällande eller platta bruna blåsor. Streck under ord eller bokstäver: ny betydelse. Streck under ord: ordet har (även) ny betydelse. Utan streck har ordet endast vanlig betydelse. 1954

Picture 2.

## NYÅRSKLOCKORNA

Irroob asráas be-a lo aes be-ár se bloáál	rbál ráal e vauoovb bsoou asán aer nuhr	voee lá öon fbb sura dráp bb r lo au nä yos	jpna reifou in pbo á ouvbal ao ár hy göbs				
	låg	röra	röra	o-			
orrkkaar			bál	andrum	svalt		
röra	át			asynja		svalt	
	bál				ekar	andrum	låga
orkar	asráa	eka				svállt	
	bålet		eka			át	rör
		svalt	eka	bálen			låg
			orkar		át	át	låga
	röra			bålet	át	låg	
röra		än			asráar		låga
	epö			vilt		arsráa	utslag
			o-	orrkkaar	vilt		bålet
bålet		slang	o-	orkar			
utslagen	andrum		svalt			än	
nosar		aráar			eka		röra
	nosar	utslag	bålet			rör	



riuvnj aso äyrgobbon hi e opö blpu å af		lobäna ry ö årb pvåoo ussbrua efa lebon		o breo lua brsansu e e åv lavrbaån e rbo		aas seerrool lååbb bbåål lo orrä e ssaa	
			ring		is- o. tå- pallen	u-	urr
		vilt	nära	jumper			aska
	skriv		ovana		ändar	yra	
ring	glöd	ovan				bullar	
	bullar	i is- o. tape- hallen	eter	ovan	ovan	nypa pekor- finger	hopp
ön			bo	löst	pekor- finger		
ur	åker	askar		famnar			
	löst			ovana	bo	ändar	
närande		askar			ring		yra
	ö			åker		ringen	buren
			pekfing- rets	vakna	åskådare		ovana
ovana		ur	slunga	slunga			
bo	ringa		ur			askar	
eter		famnar			applåd- åska		lös
	eter	buren	om			nära	

Picture 3.

## MORGON I RÅDHUSET

det börjar bli för mycket klubbar i Rådhuset

om vi tar bort hela världen t.ex. amalgam-  
känslor: han sitter gärna och skämtar, osv.

och resten är l u m p med en stövare framför sitter han gärna och skämtar  
och resten är l u m p na och skämtar  
med en stövare framför na och skämtar  
sitter gärna och skämtar och skämtar

världen allt torrare och torrare och där

bortom är allt lump badande

som hjärtan i råttlökssolar för varje hjärta sprängs en klubb av en bonde: jag k ä n n e r

som hjärtan i råttlökssolar för varje hjärta

hjärta sprängs en klubb lar för varje hjärta

av en bonde : jag k ä n n e r varje hjärta

h ä l f t e n av botten i alla bönder höjs försök att

hålla i mej när jag rusar fram genom klubben flytande bondfort

av hela världen och hälften av lumpsolen jag sitter gärna med en stövare framför

av hela världen och en stövare framför

och hälften av lumpsolen jag sitter framför

gärna med en stövare framför framför

bönder sträcks mot varandra i klubbarna

i sina rökrockar en framför varje hjärta svettandes

efter badet har dom rusat upp ur v ä r l d e n och fått stenhårda hundar till hjärtan

efter badet har dom rusat upp ur v ä r l d e n

ur v ä r l d e n och fått ur v ä r l d e n

stenhårda hundar till hjärtan ur v ä r l d e n

på dom sitter jag gärna och skämtar bortom mej och Rådhusolen

är det tyst lite riven ost ryker genom luften och vänder sej

på en femöring lump är amalgamkänslor när man tar bort alla klubbar i Rådhuset

på en femöring alla klubbar i Rådhuset

lump är amalgamkänslor när i Rådhuset

man tar bort alla klubbar i Rådhuset

och sitter på botten och sätter

stövare framför mej för att andas

mitt hjärta så att v ä r l d e n håller sej borta från mina amalgamkänslor

mitt hjärta så att v ä r l d e n håller sej

håller sej borta v ä r l d e n håller sej

från mina amalgamkänslor den håller sej

