

## CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Eugen Gomringer (Switzerland)	6
Augusto de Campos (Brazil)	8
Decio Pignatari (Brazil)	9
Haraldo de Campos (Brazil)	10
Ernst Jandl (Austria)	12
Dom Sylvester Houédard (Guernsey)	13
Gerhard Rühm (Austria)	16
Claus Bremer (Germany)	18
Ian Hamilton Finlay (Scotland)	20
Pierre Garnier (France)	24
Pierre Garnier and Seiichi Niikuni (Japan)	26
Pedro Xisto (Brazil)	27
Edwin Morgan (Scotland)	28
Edgard Braga (Brazil) trans. Edwin Morgan	29
Robert Lax (U.S.A.)	34
Glossary	40

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## Introduction

The movement of concrete poetry has now entered its second decade. Perhaps this is the time to take stock of what has been achieved already, and to speculate on what may be done in the future. This small collection of poems is very far from indicating the complete range of the movement. But it is nonetheless one of the first attempts to trace the main lines of development.

If we are to establish a time and place for the origin of concrete poetry, the crucial event seems to have been the meeting of the Swiss Eugen Gomringer and the Brazilian Decio Pignatari, which took place at Ulm in 1955. It was in the following year that Gomringer adopted the title 'Konkrete Poesie' for a projected anthology. This collection, which was to contain work from Europe and South America, was never in fact published. But Gomringer wrote a preface under this title in which he called for a 'supranational' poetry, and pointed out that poets of both continents had moved independently towards a revaluation of poetic form.

Concrete poetry was therefore in essence an international movement, arising from this contact between two separate, if convergent, traditions. It depended upon certain key ideas which had been developed before 1956, and continued to evolve independently. The idea which was initially most productive was the Brazilian notion, derived from Pound and Fenellosa, of the poem as 'ideogram'. In the Brazilian *pilot plan for concrete poetry* (1958), the ideogram is identified with a 'spatial or visual syntax', or more specifically as a 'method of composition based on direct—analogue, not logical-discursive—juxtaposition of elements.' In other words, the Brazilians aimed to replace traditional syntax by the visual syntax of typographical arrangement, abandoning the discursive continuity of traditional verse and allowing meaning to arise from the juxtaposition or fragmentation of words on the page.

This explains why the presentation of the concrete poem is of vital importance. The meaning of the poem is inseparable from its notation. But it must not be concluded that the visual aspect is of equal importance in all cases. In *caviar o prazer* Decio Pignatari uses the pungency of ideogrammatic form to enshrine a social comment. Augusto de Campos' *quadra*, on the other hand, is a pictorial elaboration of a geometrical theme. Throughout the range of concrete poetry there is this distinction between the use of language to evoke a social or natural event, and the creation of fully realised forms from the visual and semantic potentiality of the printed word. Ian Hamilton Finlay recognises it when he divides his work into 'fauve' and 'suprematist' poems.

The main strength of the ideogram lies in its accessibility. Even if component words must be identified, it is the relationship of signs within the overall form that initially secures and finally retains our attention. Oriental script is clearly the model. The Japanese poem by Seiichi Niikuni and Pierre Garnier shows how intimately meaning can be reflected in the form of the characters, while Pedro Xisto's *wind/leaf* shows that western characters can also be used to suggest the interplay of forces in a natural event.

Many of Gomringer's early poems of which *fog* is a charming example, obey the criteria of the ideogram. But Gomringer prefers to use the title 'constellations' for his works, and this is a term which implies an entirely different context. It was the aesthetic of concrete art that led Gomringer to his new notion of poetic form. As early as 1954, he described the constellation poem as being held in a state of equilibrium 'as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster'. If this idea recalls the writings of the sculptor Hans Arp, Gomringer's later notion of the poem as a *functional* object, displaying in its visible structure the regularities of its composition, is avowedly derived from his compatriot, Max Bill.

In origin, the concrete poem was conceived as a single 'cluster'. But both Gomringer and the Brazilians soon reintroduced sequence into their work. It was not a question of returning to the discursive sequences of the traditional poem, but of controlling the poem in time as well as space. Devices such as permutation, repetition and inversion of words or phrases were used to retain formal coherence. Gomringer's *il peut* is an exactly articulated sequence in which each advance of meaning is immediately negated. It nonetheless involves a point of departure and a point of rest.

Other poets have been quick to develop the 'kinetic' possibilities of the concrete poem. Ernst Jandl, in *Fox* draws unpredictable effects from a succession of names. Robert Lax, on the other hand, works through permutations on a phrase or a group of words, varying his tone by new juxtapositions and nuances of rhythm rather than by new material. In Gerhard Rühm's *stille* and *die blume*, repetition is used with an almost incantatory effect. All these poems involve a strong 'phonetic' element and, in contrast to the ideogram, gain from being recited. Dom Sylvester Houédard's *H-psb-rg* poem is purely a phonetic poem, which gains its unity from the free variations upon a given word.

The range of concrete poetry has also been extended in other directions. The French poet Pierre Garnier, whose early work (*Echanges*) was an attempt to situate the word in space both graphically and semantically, has moved to the new domain of 'spatialism' in which letters and words become the raw material of the poet/designer. The Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay has created kinetic booklet poems (a genre originating with Gomringer and the Brazilians but carried further by Finlay) as well as standing poems, and poem/constructions for architectural settings. His *four sails* testifies to the fruitful collaboration of poet and typographer. Edward

Wright has given formal precision to a poem which is itself the rescue and transformation of a conventional code. Finlay's glass poem *wave/rock*, which is illustrated on the cover, opens up the almost unexplored field of the poem in our environment.

It is difficult to predict the future developments of concrete poetry. At the moment it enjoys a measure of popularity which is not without its dangers. There has been a tendency of critics to identify concrete poetry with a mere typographical expressionism. In a recent letter to me, Ian Hamilton Finlay confronts the real issue: "I think the simplicity achieved by some concrete (i.e. Robert Lax and Eugen, in their quite different ways) is only going to *remain* possible if we can find a way back to *metaphor* (the sum of any poem must be greater than its parts merely *added* together). But this means a new understanding of metaphor — for instance, in my 'wind/wind/wave/wave' there is metaphor by virtue of the use of colour change and word-play — bough/bow — and that is *one* possibility . . . I think it is perhaps the *real* present problem in concrete . . . to start with it was a problem of syntax but now it's one of keeping the simplicity without abandoning metaphor.'

In emphasising the problem of metaphor, Finlay recalls us to the perennial instrument of language which forms the basis of concrete poetry. Metaphor is the process by which a sign becomes the sign of a sign, uniting in one compass the literal meaning; and the meaning conferred by the context. Concrete poetry is essentially an art of signs, in which the element of metaphor arises not from the discursive framework, but from the range of variations and types of assemblage which can be exercised upon the printed word. In an age when we are accustomed to looking for the personal 'signature' of the artist, the concrete poet reinvigorates the classical notion that communication in art derives from a mediate language of signs.

fog fog fog fog  
fog all fog fog  
fog fog oer fog  
fog fog fog fog

Eugen Gomringer

il peut  
peut il

il doit  
doit il

il dit  
dit il

il prend  
prend il



**caviar o prazer**

**prazer o porvir**

**porvir o torpor**

**contemporizar**

sevilla  
naranja  
sol

sol  
amarillo

naranja  
amarilla

amarillo  
amarillo

sevilla  
amarilla

córdoba  
color  
olor

olor  
córdoba

color  
córdoba

córdoba  
córdoba

dolor  
córdoba

Names

Fowl

Fred Owl

Fox

Fred Ox

Fred

Fred Red

Harp

Hans Arp

h-bsb-rg poem  
for ernst jandl

bsss - sssb

bsb

bbsbb

absbu

sbu-sbu

grubs

ubsgrubs

sbah

BAH

ha ha

the longago & yetocome

t h

e l o

h e l o n

n g a

g a g

g a g o

o &

y e t

o

y e t o

e t o c c o

m e

c o m e

is this this?  
    this is this  
this  
    this is  
is this  
that this is that is  
that is  
is  
that this  
that is this  
that this is  
is that that  
that  
is that  
that that is

**stille  
stille**

**stille die  
stille**

**die stille  
stillen**

**stiele**

**die stiele  
der stille**

**die stiele  
der stille  
stillen  
die stille**

**stille**

**stille**

**die blume**

**die blume blüht  
die blume blüht  
die blume blüht  
die blume blüht**

**die blume welkt  
die blume welkt  
die blume welkt  
die blume welkt**

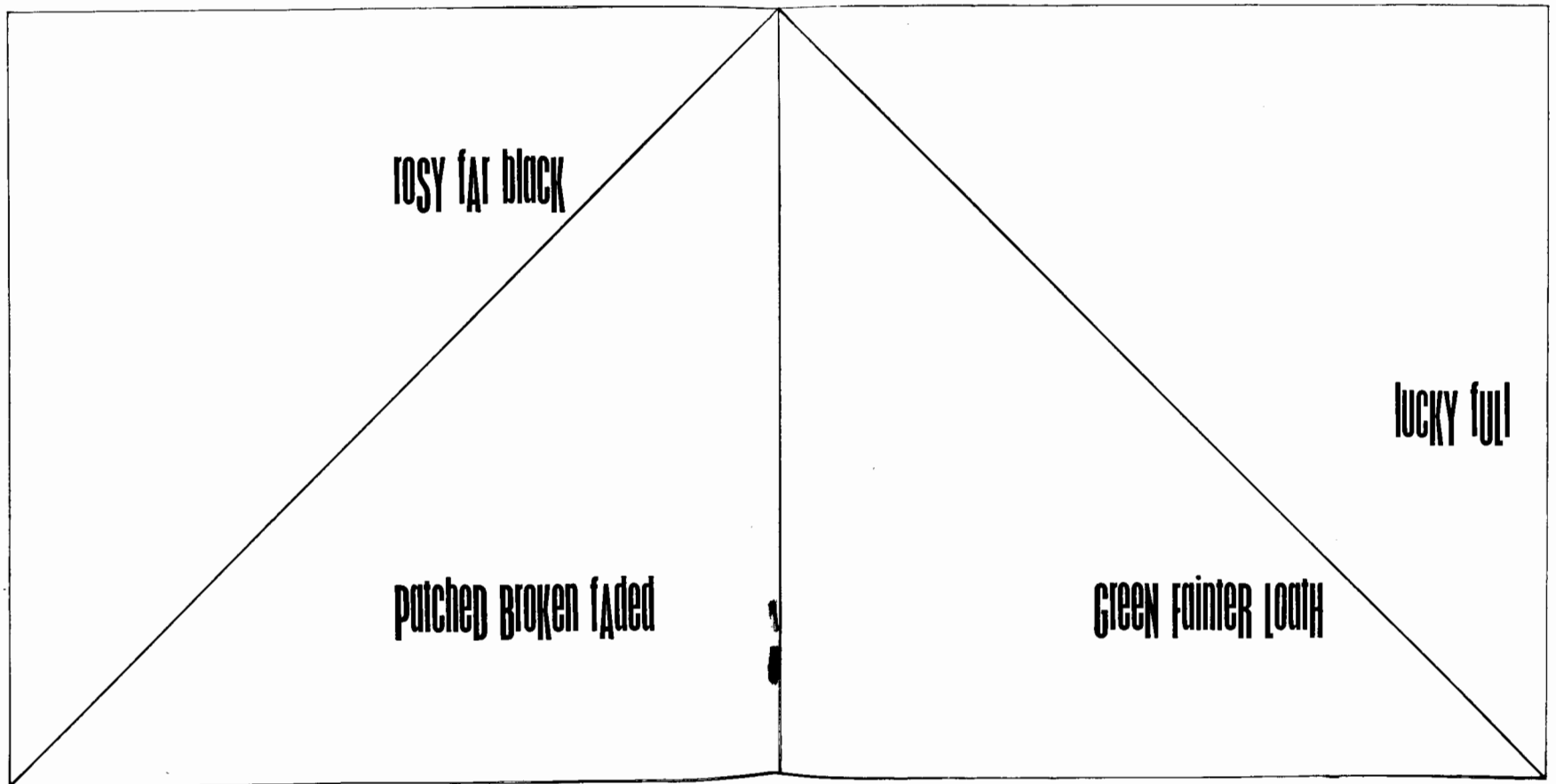
**die blume  
die blume  
die blume  
die blume  
die blume  
die blume  
die blume  
die blume**

e  
ei  
ein  
ein  
in t  
n te  
tex  
text  
ext  
xt p  
t pa  
pas  
pass  
assi  
ssie  
sier  
iert  
ert  
rt  
t

kann ich allseitig zeigen was ich zeige  
kann ich was ich zeige allseitig zeigen  
allseitig zeigen was ich zeige kann ich  
was ich zeige allseitig zeigen kann ich  
allseitig zeigen kann ich was ich zeige  
was ich zeige kann ich allseitig zeigen

# 4 sails

SY	stornoway	GN	granton
A	aberdeen	FR	fraserburgh
K	kirkwall	LH	leith
PD	peterhead	KY	kirkcaldy
BK	berwick	UL	ultrapool



pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
pleut  
pleure  
+  
para-  
pluie

pair  
pair girl  
au pair g  
r girl au p  
au pair girl  
girl au pair girl  
u pair girl au pair g  
girl au pair girl au p  
ir girl au pair girl au  
girl au pair girl au p  
ir girl au pair girl  
pair girl au r

## **Echanges**

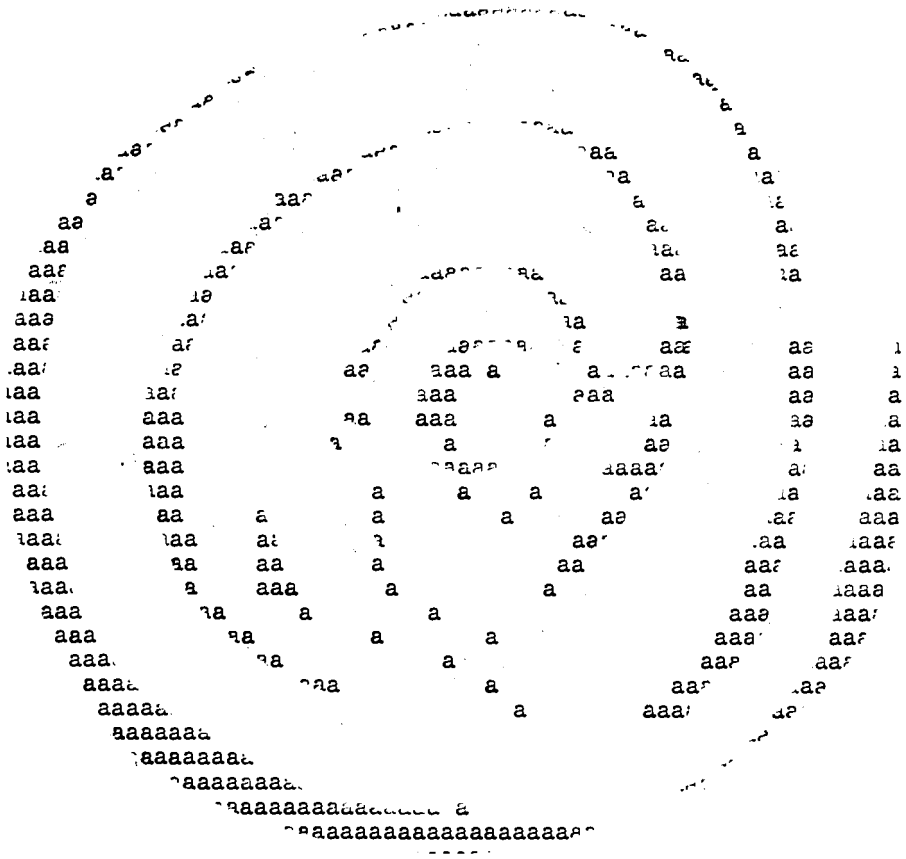
**le soleil**

**le poème**

**dore**

**l'arbre**

**l'homme**





wind wind wind wind wind  
wind **leaf** wind **leaf** wind  
**leaf** wind **leaf** wind **leaf**  
wind **leaf** wind **leaf** wind  
**leaf** wind **leaf** wind **leaf**  
wind **leaf** wind **leaf** wind  
**leaf** wind **leaf** wind **leaf**  
**leaf** **leaf** **leaf** **leaf** **leaf**

The computer's  
first birthday card

many returns happy  
 many turns happier  
 happy turns remain  
 happy remains turn  
 turns remain happy  
 turn happy remains  
 remains turn happy  
 mains return happy  
 happy mains return  
 main happy returns  
 main turns happier  
 happier main turns  
 happier many turns  
 many happier turns  
 many happier turns  
 many happier turns  
 er turns er turns?  
 happy er er happy?  
 er error er check!  
turn er pre turns!  
 many happy turners  
 +\$- != 0½ †\*/£( &?  
 many gay whistlers  
no no no no no no!  
 manygainsboroughs  
stop stop stop stp  
 happier constables  
01 01 01 01 01 01 01  
 raise police pay p  
 ost early for chri  
 stmas watch forest  
 fires get well soo  
 n bon voyage KRGK  
 many happy returns  
 eh? eh? eh? eh? eh?

Edgard Braga  
translated by Edwin Morgan

isle  
smile

tranquil

Edgard Braga  
translated by Edwin Morgan

ballad  
ballad

brooded  
brooded  
brooded

beloved  
beloved

bird  
bird  
bird

ballad  
brooded  
beloved

bird

Edgard Braga

translated by Edwin Morgan

white	swallow
yellow	swallow
black	
black	coat
yellow	swallow
white	
yellow	
black	coat
yellow	swallow
white	
	black
	silver
	yellow
white	swallow

Edgard Braga  
translated by Edwin Morgan

one  
fly fire fly  
fire one fly  
fire fly one  
fire fire fire  
one fly fire  
one fire fly  
one

Edgard Braga  
translated by Edwin Morgan

living	deadman	living
deadman	living	deadman
	alive	
	living	
	deadman	
	living	
	deadman	
	alive	
long live	the	dead man

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

not for  
this ship

not for  
this sea

not for  
that ship

not for  
that sea

not for  
this ship

not for  
this sea

not for  
that ship

not for  
that sea

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

the port  
was longing

not for  
this &

not for  
this &

not for  
that

not for  
that

not for  
this &

not for  
that

Robert Lax

Four coal poems

red	red	red	red	red
yel-	yel-	yel-	yel-	yel-
low	low	low	low	low
blue	blue	blue	blue	blue
blue	blue	blue	blue	blue
Coal	Coal	Coal	Coal	Coal
Coal	Coal	Coal	Coal	Coal
fine	fine	fine	fine	fine
fine	fine	fine	fine	fine

fire	fire	red	red
fire	fire	yel-	yel-
		low	low
coal	coal	blue	blue
coal	coal	blue	blue
coal	coal	coal	coal
coal	coal	coal	coal
fire	fire	fire	fire
fire	coal	coal	
fire	coal	coal	
			fire
fire	coal	coal	
fire	coal	coal	
			fire

blue	blue	fire	red
blue	blue	fire	red
blue	blue	blue	yel-
fire	fire	blue	low
fire	fire	fire	yel-
fire	fire	fire	low
fire	fire	blue	fire
fire	fire	blue	fire
fire	fire		blue
blue	blue		
blue	blue		
blue	blue		

blue	fire	fire	fire	fire	blue
blue	fire	fire	fire	fire	blue
blue	fire	fire	fire	fire	blue

red	red	blue	blue
red	red	blue	blue
yel-	yel-	red	red
low	low	red	red
yel-	yel-	fire	fire
low	low	fire	fire
blue	blue	blue	blue
blue	blue		
blue	blue		

blue	blue	red	red	fire	fire	blue
blue	blue	red	red	fire	fire	blue
blue	blue	red	red	fire	fire	blue

## Glossary

page 7	il peut il doit il dit il prend	he can he ought he says he takes
8	quadra quatro quadro quarto quadrado	square, side of square four picture quarter square
9	prazer porvir contemporizar (contemporizar) (por ali)	pleasure time to come temporise somewhere there
10	naranja sol amarillo	orange sun golden, yellow
11	olor dolor	fragrance grief
16	stille stillen stiele	stillness to quiet stalks
17	blume blüht welkt	flower blooms fades
18	ein text passiert	a text passes
19	kann ich . . .	can I universally show what I show
22	pleure pleut parapluie	weeps rains umbrella
24	Echanges dore	exchanges gilds
26	川 州	river sandbank