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The poems by Édgard Braga translated by Edwin Morgan are taken from *Soma* (Sao Paulo, 1963). Acknowledgements are due to the following for permission to reprint published material: to Eugen Gomringer and *Konkrete Poesie* for poems on pp. 6, 7, 16-19; to Augusto de Campos and the Noigandres group for those on pp. 8-11; to Ian Hamilton Finlay and *P.O.T.H.* for those on pp. 12, 34-35; to Pierre Garnier and *Les Lettres* for those on pp. 24, 26.

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 Houéard'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

q u a d r a
q u a d r a
q u a d r a q u a t r o
q u a d r a q u a t r o
q u a d r a q u a t r o
q u a d r a q u a d r o
 d q u a d r o
 q u a d r o q u a d r a
 q u a d r o d
 q u a d r o q u a r t o
 q u a d r o q u a r t o
 q u a d r o q u a r t o
 q u a d r a q u a d r o
 d q u a d r o
 o q u a d r a
 d
 o

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**

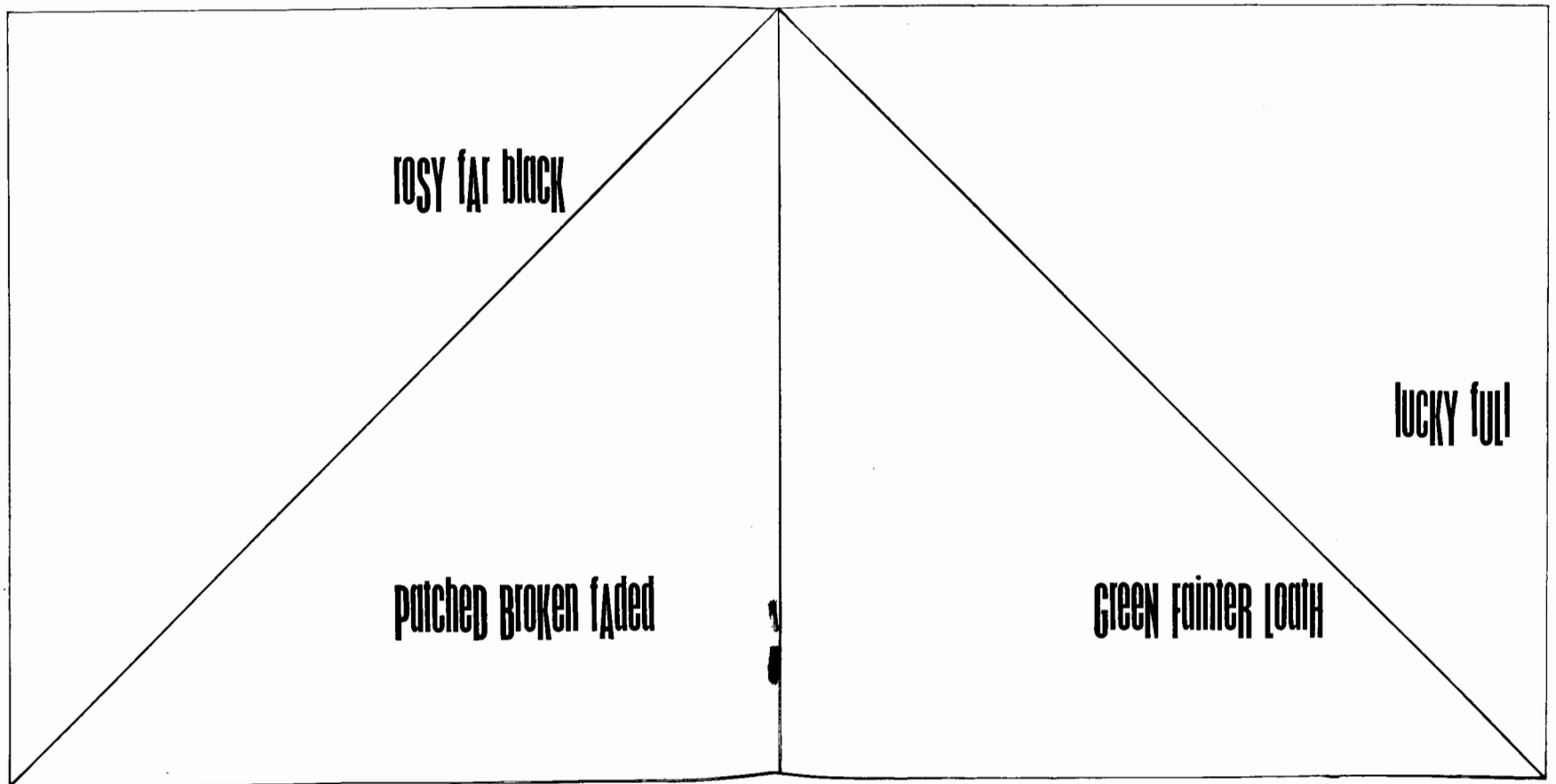
**die blume
die blume
die blume
die blume
die blume
die blume
die blume
die blume**

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	ulapool



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

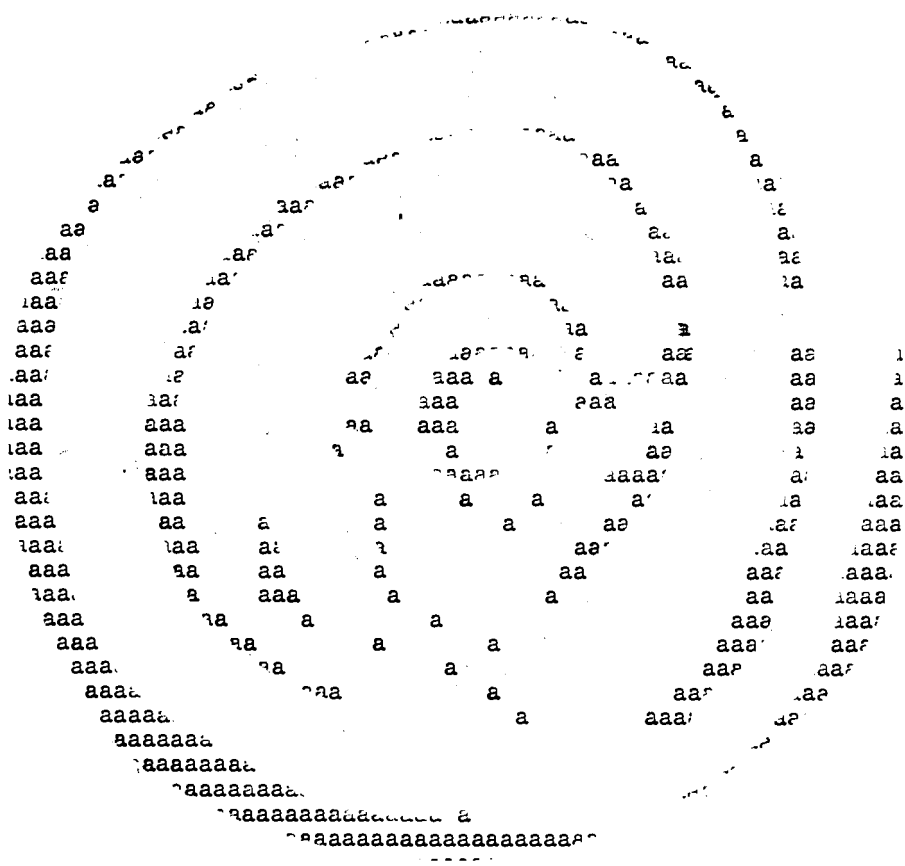
le soleil

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	
	coal	coal	fire
	coal	coal	
	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

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