

A large grid of handwritten '@' symbols, arranged in approximately 20 rows and 20 columns. The symbols are scattered across the page, with many appearing in pairs or small groups. Some symbols are larger and more prominent than others. The handwriting is consistent throughout, suggesting a single source.

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N A T U R A L H I S T O R Y

Astronomy (1981)

Meteorology (1983)

Geology (1984)

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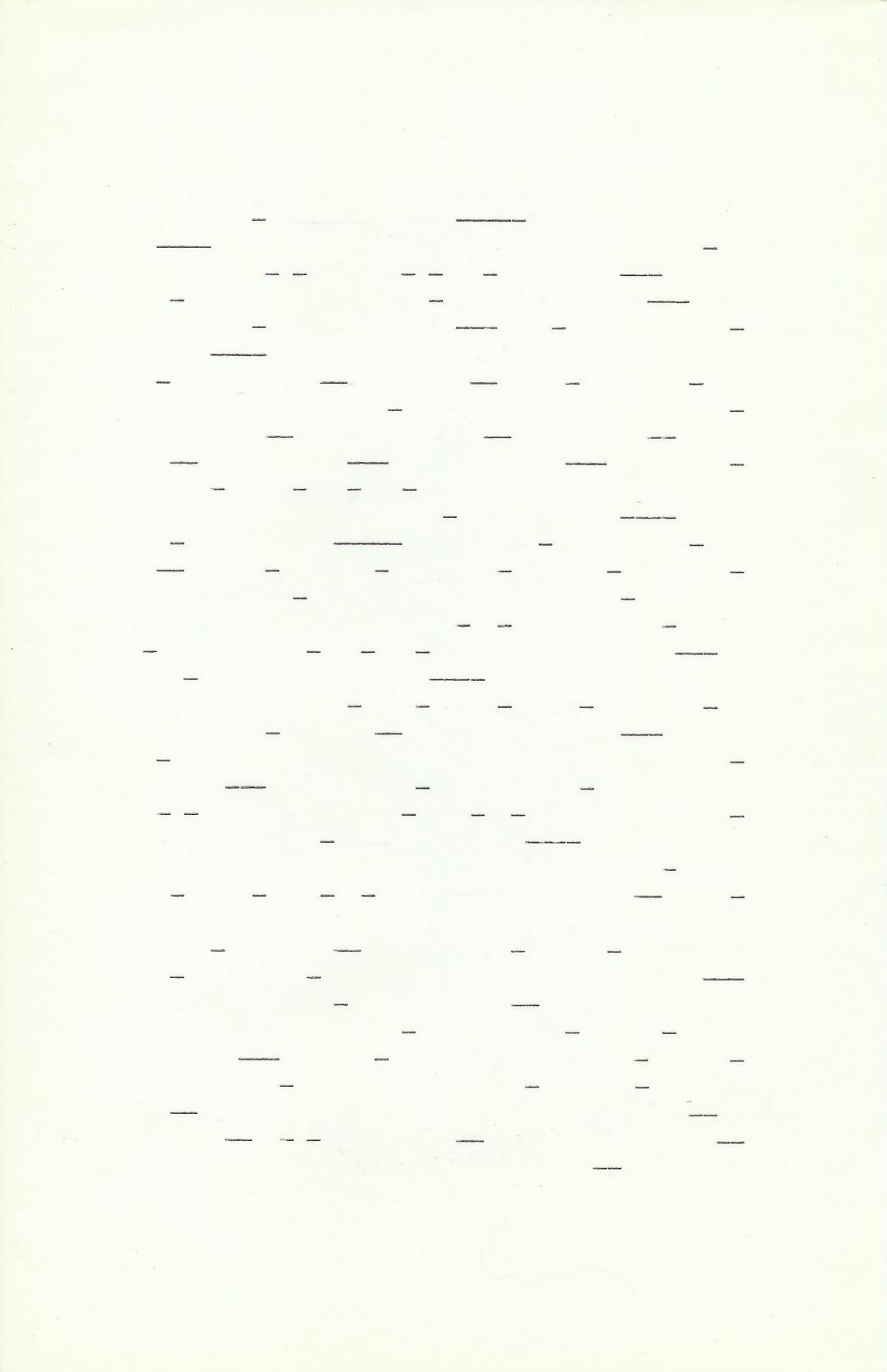
G E O L O G Y

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by
Denis Wood

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for
Christopher and Susan,
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note

That the suppression of "logical links" in Astronomy (1981) and Meteorology (1983) resulted in no loss of "transparency" was due, it would seem, to the abundance of "directional links". The position of a word on a page, its configuration (the "figure" figured by the word), its place in the sequence of words--its location, in sum, its its geography--generated a syntactical ground more fertile than most, the very soil for a semantic spring, for a blossoming of meaning.

This transparency is the antithesis of that opacity embodied in the phrase poésie concrète, which, formed on analogy with musique concrète, ought to refer to a poetry of words offered and received in themselves, as objets sonores or as graphic marks (I do not say "signs"); music, on the one hand (of which Kurt Schwitters' Ur Sonata remains the most startling example), drawing, on the other (of which the work of the Letterists --Isidore Isou, Maurice Lemaître, Albert Dupont--, Ferdinand Kriwet, Winfred Gaul and Mark Tobey is representative). Although disposed in space, these mots concrète are without geography, and can--often do--occupy other (or any) location with equal grace. Displayed, they constitute the ultimate thing-in-itself, utterly opaque, truly concrete.

In this sense, there is little concrete in most poésie concrète. It is not the words in themselves, but the words as places in a geography of meaning that give flight to the wings of George Herbert, that roll the dice in the wager of Mallarmé, that fall in the rain of Apollinaire, that bloom in the flora of Mary Ellen Solt. I offer these geological surveys by way of further charting this largely terrain vague.

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