Unidentified Verbal Objects: Contemporary French Poetry, Intermedia, and Narrative

Eric Lynch

Graduate Center, City University of New York

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UNIDENTIFIED VERBAL OBJECTS:
CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POETRY, INTERMEDIA, AND NARRATIVE

by

ERIC LYNCH

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Mary Ann Caws
Chair of Examining Committee

January 26, 2016

____________________________________
Francesca Sautman
Executive Officer

____________________________________
Peter Consenstein
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

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Adviser: Mary Ann Caws

This dissertation examines the vital experimental French poetry of the 1980s to the present. Whereas earlier twentieth century poets often shunned common speech, poets today seek instead to appropriate, adapt, and reorganize a wide variety of contemporary discourses. Narrative also reemerges both in hybridized writing fusing prose and verse and in sequences of digressions and anecdotes. Poetic form becomes specific to a given text as poets adapt techniques from other fields, such as the visual arts, and integrate a wide array of media into literary works. In recent pieces, poets such as Emmanuel Hocquard and Olivier Cadiot incorporate new media into works that move literature from the book to video and performance spaces. I argue that these new poetic activities challenge traditional definitions of poetry as lyrical expression through formal innovation and alternative concepts of identity and affect.
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Introduction

Poetry in the Age of the OVNI

Contemporary French Poetry

This dissertation examines the vital experimental French poetry of the 1980s to the present. Whereas earlier twentieth century poets often shunned common speech, many poets today seek instead to appropriate, adapt, and reorganize a wide variety of contemporary discourses. Narrative also reemerges both in hybridized writing fusing prose and verse and in sequences of digressions and anecdotes. Poetic form becomes specific to a given text as poets adapt techniques from other fields, such as the visual arts, and integrate a wide array of media into literary works. In recent works, poets such as Emmanuel Hocquard and Olivier Cadiot incorporate new media into pieces that move literature from the book to video and performance spaces. These new poetic creations have garnered the name OVNI, the French for UFO, for their radical formal experimentation. In the short-lived journal Revue de littérature générale (RLG, 1995-6), editors Olivier Cadiot and Pierre Alferi theorize the assembly of literary constructs outside of preexisting forms, naming the resulting works “unidentified verbal objects (Objets verbaux non-identifié or OVNI).” These works operate fusions of texts from a range of registers alongside non-linguistic elements. Individual pieces often develop unique methods of transposing another art’s techniques into written form, or alternatively, of fusing poetry with other media, such as photography, video, audio recording, and the internet. Whereas twentieth-century avant-garde poets collaborated with other artists - incorporating, for example, pictorial or musical elements into literature - contemporary poets have intensified these interactions to the point of leaving behind the book itself. While poetry in book form continues to flourish, writing
that foregoes the page, such as performance or digital poetry, creates new possibilities for the creation and reception of poetic texts. By drawing on multimedia technology, literature moves to a period “après le livre,” in the words of François Bon (Après le livre). Simultaneously, contemporary poetry within the book embraces narrative to move beyond traditional notions of genre. Differing from prose poetry, these texts experiment with the distribution of text on the page, while also using sequences of digression. For example, Cadiot's *Retour durable et définitif de l'être aimé*, operates an innovative fusion of prose and verse within digressive, anecdotal passages. Thus, the “unidentified verbal object” is a highly adaptive literary concept that encompasses intermedia and narrative alongside other experimental, post-genre forms.

French poetry may be seen as operating a loss of genre identity from the end of the nineteenth-century onward, a phenomenon that Mallarmé famously characterized as the crisis of verse. If this crisis seemed to strike the heart of what defined poetry throughout much of the 19th century, namely the twelve syllable poetic line articulated around a caesura, it also offered opportunities for formal experimentation. The emergence of prose poetry in works such as Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose* and Rimbaud's *Illuminations* offered serious challenges to the dominance of the Alexandrine. Likewise, the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century emphasized continual formal innovation as an essential aesthetic criteria. Yet, in his *La vieillesse d'Alexandre*, poet Jacques Roubaud traces the persistence of meter in twentieth century poetry and undermines the radicality of formal innovations in movements such as Surrealism.1 While thematically these avant-garde movements were adventurous, Roubaud argues, they were often more conservative metrically than previously believed. Indeed, even as purporting to draw out experiences of radical psychological significance, these works often returned to deeply

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1 *La vieillesse d'Alexandre* 151.
resonant forms like the alexandrine. While Oulipian formal experimentation holds certain affinities with the work of the four authors analyzed here (Roubaud is among the authors featured in *Revue de littérature générale*), they have generally sought to push beyond questions of verse and prose, bidding adieu to the aging Alexanderine. Outlining various possibilities for contemporary poetry, Jean-Marie Gleize advances the possibility of leaving behind all reference to the verse: “La troisième [possibilité] consiste à dire qu'il ne s'agit peut-être pas de continuer l'art des vers. Ou qu'il s'agit de savoir comment continuer la poésie d'après la poésie, ou la littérature après la poésie” (*Sorties* 50).\(^2\) Gleize traces not only a crisis of the verse but something like a crisis of the genre of poetry, where the question becomes that of working with literature after poetry. For the four authors discussed here, Gleize, Emmanuel Hocquard, Olivier Cadiot, and Nathalie Quintane, vital experimental texts must necessarily push beyond the boundaries between poetry and its outsides, embracing the novel, photography, video, and other sources within the poem. Yet, this dissertation does not seek to merely address questions of poetic form, but rather interrogates broader developments in contemporary poetry in France. Ultimately, this work has three main goals: to examine the ways recent experimental French poetry engages with the language and forms of mass media and popular culture; to analyze the construction of increasingly hybridized poetic works; and finally to offer case studies of poets who offer transformative re-thinking of central literary notions, such as subjectivity, politics, community, and performance.

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\(^2\) Yet, Gleize validates Roubaud's project of working with inherited forms, whereas he rejects out of hand the notion of returning to a lyricism based on prosody and a strong subject position: “Certains posent qu'il faut travailler à l'exploitation systématique des conventions anciennes, des formes héritées. C'est bien de cette façon que Baudelaire manie le sonnet et, plus près de nous, Jacques Roubaud: tout le possible formel de cette forme fixe n'est pas épuisé, il reste à disposition” (*Sorties* 49).
Poetry after the Avant-gardes?

With the end of the Second World War, the capacity of avant-garde experimentation to usher in new esthetic and political significations was called into question. The future-oriented narrative of progress and historical advancement accompanying much avant-garde modernism was stymied by the catastrophe of war. Practices valuing rupture and originality above all else no longer appeared legitimate in light of the great consequences of this ideology of innovation for the West. In his essay “La bibliothèque de Trieste”, Emmanuel Hocquard traces the emergence of an alternative to these historic avant-gardes, which he names negative modernity:

Pas la modernité triomphante de l’avant-guerre, celle des avant-gardes de tous bords, dont on a pu déclarer, à juste titre, qu’elle avait pris fin avec Auschwitz ; mais l’autre versant de cette modernité, la modernité négative (apophatique) de l’après-guerre, celle de la suspicion, du doute, des interrogations sur tout et sur elle-même, dont les temps forts en poésie se situent dans les années soixante et soixante-dix (ma haie 25).

Hocquard, who emerged on the literary scene in the late 1960s with his Orange Export Ltd publishing house, articulates this mistrust of pre-war modernism. Not unlike the suspicion described by Nathalie Sarraute in her L’ère du soupçon, literary values are subjected to a deep reevaluation. Yet, going beyond the thinker of the nouveau roman, the implications of these questions for poetry are all the more radical due to the poem’s highly concentrated nature and its focus on form. Interrogations of the poem counter many of the traditional characteristics of the genre by these poets of negative modernity. Following post-structuralist theory and the corresponding dismantling of the Cartesian cogito, metaphor and a strong poetic “I” are cast into doubt. Skeptical of the power of language to designate subjects and objects in the world, these poets turn to the material presence of the words on the page. As Jean-Marie Gleize explains, this
poetry avoids metaphoric language and instead, “dit ce qu'elle dit en le disant”. Hocquard’s negative modernity is close to the movement of literalism or blank poetry (poésie blanche) that emerges at approximately the same time. Literalism begins in the 1970s and 1980s in the work of poets that include Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Anne-Marie Albiach, Jean Daive, Jean-Marie Gleize, and others. These poets propose to shift writing away from the lyrical subject and poetic figures towards the literal meaning of words, often employing a sparse, minimalist style to stave off poetic effects. By foregoing many of poetry’s traditional tools, these authors mount a profound critique of poetic language and its pretenses towards expression and song.

For Hocquard, negative modernity also implies searching for inspiration in an alternative modernist lineage. Anglophone poetry, notably the work of Gertrude Stein and the Objectivist poets, such as George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, and Louis Zukofsky, plays a significant role in this search. As my chapter on Hocquard will develop, the Objectivists minimize metaphor and lyrical effects in favor of appropriation, objective description, and focus on everyday words. Well suited to the suspicions of the post-war era, these techniques provide for new possibilities in French literature, and allow these French writers to escape the formidable weight exerted by France’s literary tradition. In his article “Que signifie la ‘fin des avant-gardes?’”, philosopher Jean-Pierre Cometti proposes a similar alternative history of the avant-gardes:

Cette “autre histoire”, qui n’est pas faite de lignées proprement dites, mais plutôt de ce que Wittgenstein appelait des “airs de famille”, […] Ainsi que Michel Foucault nous l’avait lui-même appris, il existe des histoires souterraines, d’apparence secondaire, dont l’histoire des avant-gardes est elle-même faite, et dont il faudrait peut-être confier le récit à un “idiot” (“Avant-gardes. Retours et detours,” 105).

Drawing out these literary influences to create an alternative history is an invitation to freely cross-pollinate literary movements and national traditions. Drawing on the philosophy of Clément Rosset and the recent work of Jean-Yves Jouannais, the perspective of the “idiot” suggests fluidity and spontaneity in place of rigorous mapping of cultural history. Without access to an overarching theoretical system, the “idiot” adopts an improvisational, *ad hoc* approach to issues as they arise. Elaborated from a perspective of *idiotie*, the narrative favored by Hocquard and Cometti offers a similar impromptu quality. Instead of building linear cause and effect relationships, this type of literary history obeys a rhizomatic logic. Similarly, the “idiot” seeks to leverage the means at his disposal to respond to specific questions as they arise, rather than addressing larger, “universal” questions. Further, Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance”, designating a mode of non-causal, nonhierarchical relation, is also useful. In reflecting on artistic movements, the notion of “family resemblance” signifies shared preoccupations without overdetermining the nature of literary ties or positing Bloomian influence among its members. Instead of forming a literary school, the four authors discussed in this dissertation, notwithstanding occasions of exchange and collaboration, may best be approached according to a similar notion of “family resemblance.” I assert a model of literary consanguinity that implies a similar frame of reference among these writers, yet preserves a significant measure of autonomy for each poet with respect to questions of literary form, style, and theoretic orientation.

More broadly, Emmanuel Hocquard has been instrumental in shifting the philosophical frame of reference from continental philosophy and its focus on phenomenology and Heideggerian thought towards Analytical philosophy. In her excellent book *Wittgenstein’s Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*, Marjorie Perloff discusses the
decisive influence of Wittgenstein on Anglophone poetry of the twentieth-century. Perloff discusses recent developments in poetry from the perspective of Wittgenstein’s concept of the language-game, where language is viewed as a series of rule-governed practices. Undermining the independence of the self, an “I” is viewed as manipulating language developed collectively by a larger culture. Language practice reflects a series of activities set within particular contexts, which allows Wittgenstein to interrogate the rules of language use within a given scenario. Instead of speculating on traditional philosophical topics, such as concepts of truth or certainty, Wittgenstein probes the everyday language at play within the language-games surrounding these philosophical notions. Perloff questions late 20th century poetic practices in light of the concept of the language-game:

What, we may ask, extrapolating from Wittgenstein’s question, is the “right” poetry game to be played today and, if “skill” – let us say, the ability to use meter, rhyme, and “vivid” imagery – is no longer enough, how should it be reformulated? To put it more concretely: what role does the interrogation of language that dichten (composing poetry) entails play in the mass culture of the later twentieth century? (3).

Taking this highly pertinent question as a point of departure, this dissertation seeks to initiate similar interrogations of the French writers who will be examined here. While my first chapter will treat the influence of Wittgenstein at greater length with respect to Hocquard's poetics, the philosopher’s influence may be felt on all four poets because each seeks out new modes of initiating a new poetry game within the context of contemporary mass culture. Similarly, all four share a suspicion towards a game of poetry involving meter, rhyme, and imagery, such as that proposed by certain French poets seeking to reinvigorate lyricism. Wittgenstein’s writing itself even presents tools useful for developing alternatives to these traditional poetic techniques. Nathalie Quintane remarks on the influence of Wittgenstein’s stylistics on her own writing,
notably his *On Certainty*. By interrogating everyday language rather than philosophical speech, Wittgenstein reveals the enigmatic, mysterious aspects of common speech. His prose reveals the labyrinthine aspect of language used in daily life. Thus, the philosopher’s tone, his interrogation of everyday language, and his suspicion of metaphysics have deeply marked these contemporary poets.

Thus, while the authors discussed here do not form a school of poetry (certainly not one united by a single figure like André Breton for the Surrealist movement), they share certain influences as well as a common theoretical orientation. Francis Ponge's refusal of lyricism as well as his valorization of object-centered writing offer notable rallying points. Jean-Marie Gleize has written extensively on Ponge, proposing that his work provides similar innovations as the American Objectivist poets within the French literary tradition. Certain poets, such as Hocquard and Cadiot, have also had a strong mutual influence; they completed a residency at the Villa Medici in Rome together and have taken a similar, grammar-inflected approach to poetry in some texts, as though conducting a Wittgensteinian language analysis. All four of the poets examined are also broadly united by opposition to a renovation of lyricism, which occupied much of the poetic debates of the 1980s and continues through to the present albeit in a less virulent fashion. In her essay “Monstres et couillons, la partition du champs poétique

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4 “*Toi aussi, tu as des armes*” 185. Quintane remarks on a nuanced use of statements that sound like pragmatic philosophy, yet are employed to different ends.

"contemporain," Nathalie Quintane discusses the opposition between formalists and neo-lyrical poets, such as Jean-Michel Maulpoix and James Sacré. Irreverently adopting the term “monstres” for the unfeeling formalists and “couillons” for the overly-sensitive lyricists, Quintane mounts a categorical attack on the latter camp:

Le lecteur aura compris que ce qui se joue derrière la parabole des Monstres et des Couillons, c'est une opposition tranchée (et erronée) entre émotion et pensée [...] Le problème du poète "lyrique", c'est qu'il travaille ante Deleuze, ante Foucault, ante Derrida, ante Perec - ou avec un Derrida tronqué, un Deleuze tronqué, un Foucault tronqué; mais nous reviendrons sur ce point. Le "Lyrique" travaille avec ce qui précède la période "structuraliste" : il a décidé que cette période n'avait existé que dans l'esprit fumeux de quelques imposteurs, et comme on lui rappelle sans cesse que cette époque a bel et bien existé (la preuve, c'est que Derrida vient de mourir, précédé par Deleuze et par Foucault, sans parler de Perec qui est mort aussi), ça l'énerve. Lui, il est obligé de travailler avec Descartes, puisqu'il veut pouvoir continuer à travailler contre lui (au feu Descartes! Je sens donc je suis!), et quand on lui explique que Descartes, ça y est, c'est intellectuellement mort, ça l'agace - parce que l'intellect, vous comprenez, c'est l'esprit, et que moi je sens ("Monstres et couillons, la partition du champ poétique contemporain” unpaginatted).

Contextualizing her remarks around well-established critiques of Cartesian philosophy, Quintane attacks the neo-lyric poets for their desire to restore romantic oppositions between thought and feeling. This outmoded approach sweeps aside both the advances of the historic avant-gardes and the theoretic innovations of the structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers. For the authors discussed in this dissertation, the opposition between intellect and emotion, like that of pure formalism versus lyricism, does not hold; instead, they seek continued experimentation beyond facile divisions.

6 These neolyrical poets advance what they name critical lyricism, which advocates critical distance towards self-expression and effusion. The debates within the field of poetry often hold, of course, a willfully polemical dimension.

Deeply involved in these same questions of avant-gardisme and modernity, Christian Prigent opposes neolyricism through a series of strategies that differ from those of literalism. A co-founder of the influential review TXT (1969-1993) and the author of dozens of books of poetry and poetics, Prigent is a key figure of the 1970s avant-gardes who has consistently supported intense linguistic experimentation. In addition to the importance of his own poetic œuvre as was highlighted by a 2014 conference at the Centre culturel international de Cérisy, Prigent’s theoretic work has proven highly significant for two generations of French writers. Influenced by Jacques Lacan and George Bataille, Prigent views poetry as a site where the opacity of the real is forcibly affirmed against the efforts of a certain epoch to render the world visible or interpretable through language. Undoing the representations evoked through conventional language, poetic writing ultimately gestures beyond signification. Close to Bataille’s concept of the impossible and the Lacanian réel, poetic language serves to tear a hole in representation. In poetry, this act of ripping through conventional discourses is facilitated by linguistic experimentation, according to Prigent. Authors like Valère Novarina, Jean-Pierre Verheggen, or Prigent himself, often employ neologisms, complex wordplay, dissonant sonorities and a variety of other literary devices within their work. Significantly, Prigent assimilates this poetic experimentation to the notion of the modern, not as a literary movement, but as the ever-enduring process of pursuing what is unrepresentable. Yet, while preserving the notion of modernity, he affirms the obsolescence of certain characteristics of avant-gardism, such as political militancy in favor of a Marxist utopia. Thus, for Prigent, the concept of modernity

8 “Trou(v)er sa langue” (June 30 – July 7, 2014), organized by Bénédicte Gorrillot, Sylvain Santi, and Fabrice Thumerel.

9 See Prigent’s Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes, among the many texts where he espouses this view of the modern.
offers a credible and enduring position toward the epoch in course and may be divorced from elements of avant-gardism that are seen as less pertinent today.

Prigent has also played an important role in promoting a range of emerging writers, some of whom have distanced themselves from the practices of linguistic eccentricity of the previous generation. In *Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes* and *Ceux qui merdRent*, he offers essays on authors such as Olivier Cadiot, Christophe Tarkos, Charles Pennequin, and Philippe Beck. In his introduction to Christophe Tarkos’s posthumous *Écrits poétiques*, Prigent remarks on what he calls a generational shift that rendered earlier codes of reading obsolete:

Les jeunes auteurs (au demeurant fort différents les uns des autres) qui surgissaient vers 1995 remettaient ce défi sur le tapis et leurs écrits forçaient à réapprendre à lire. Ce n’est pas tant qu’on avait du mal à “comprendre” ce qu’ils écrivaient (rien de plus immédiatement “lisible”, par exemple, que les premiers textes de Nathalie Quintane). Mais ils opposaient à la lecture une forme de résistance qui n’avait rien à voir avec ce que la génération précédente avait appelé “grandes irrégularités de langage” (syntaxes distordues, éclatement du mot, travail du son, verbigération spectaculaire, intertexte complexe, paragrammes cryptes – avec, au bout, la tentation de l’idiolecte absolu) (“Préface : Sokrat a Patmo” 12).

A turn occurs in the work of poets like Tarkos and Quintane, who oppose immediately understandable writing to the highly complex “idiolects” elaborated by the previous generation. While this writing also may offer political resistance, as I shall discuss with respect to Nathalie Quintane’s writing, it does not seek direct subversion of words or discourses and does not operate within an avant-garde context. As Prigent notes, Nathalie Quintane’s first book *Remarques* acts to prolong this mode of resistance to reader expectations. Composed of short haiku-like statements, the work presents a poetic estrangement from conventional logic, while employing everyday language. In the place of these “grandes irrégularités de langage,” works by the poets emerging in the 1990s offer a false impression of docility through minimalist writing and the use of everyday speech. It is also possible to place this shift in interpretative codes to an
earlier moment, namely Olivier Cadiot’s publication of *L’art poétique* in 1988. This text, composed of appropriated language from grammar books, similarly recenters poetic writing from the complexities of an idiolect (questions of syntax, sound, neologisms, etc.) to the rudimentary components of the French language. Easy readability moves to the forefront as Cadiot incites new approaches to the poetic text. The writers in this dissertation may be positioned with respect to these changes. Authors from an earlier generation, such as Hocquard and Gleize, while stylistically rather distant from Prigent, both helped to inaugurate changes that made this shift possible and adapted their own writing in response to it. While never pursuing intense deformation of language, Hocquard and Gleize entertain complex relationships with the negativity Prigent locates at the heart of modernity. Parsing their approach to the negative will be undertaken in what follows.

Tracing the influence of Prigent’s concept of the modern, poet and critic Philippe Boisnard locates an alternative to this notion in the work of Jean-Michel Espitallier, whose essay *Caisse à outils*, depicts the diversity of the poetry scene in France. Former editor of the influential review *JAVA*, Espitallier develops the notions of contemporaneity and post-modernity for this poetry. For Boisnard, these concepts provide a viable alternative to Prigent’s theory of the modern:

Les questions de la poésie se polarisent sur l’époque où elle apparaît à partir dès lors, ni de la recherche d’une langue propre (idiolectale), ni de la volonté de faire surgir une propriété extra-épouquale (le corps, le singulier, la pulsion, le ça, la négativité) qui serait voilée par l’époque. Bien au contraire, être contemporain selon Jean-Michel Espitallier, c’est saisir un certain nombre de questions “qui se posent mais ne me sont pas posées” (rupture de l’obnubilation du sujet), c’est intensifier des rapports logiques, politiques, sociaux, non pas en vue de trouver une part maudite, une sorte d’ipséité que la modernité rationnelle aurait voilée, mais selon le projet de les décrypter, de les mettre à jour du point de vue de leurs stratégies de domination, de diffusion, d’imprégnation. C’est
The concept of contemporanéity (or post-modernity as Boisnard writes) orients poetry away from idiolect or using adventurous language to tear through the representations of the epoch. Instead, this writing leverages the information mass of the contemporary era, not so much as indifferenced data (as post-modernism is sometimes critiqued for) but as raw material for literary creation. As Boisnard also notes, the political strategy of the contemporary period differs from that of the modernist era. Rather than promoting political action according to an avant-gardist framework where linguistic experimentation prefigures political revolution, this poetry analyzes strategies of domination and the circulation of information. My choice of the term “contemporary” over “modern” reflects consideration of these developments, while not excluding the enduring importance of negativity, albeit within new literary and theoretical configurations (for example, in the work of Jean-Marie Gleize). The term “contemporary” also has the advantage of avoiding ambiguity with respect to the historical modernist movement and also to evoke the milieu of the fine arts, where the term is in frequent use. Yet, this choice in terminology does not reflect a parti pris in favor of antimodernism, as Antoine Compagnon has espoused. Critic Fabrice Thumerel cautions against Compagnon's desire to locate a position of equilibrium between conservatives and avant-gardistes; such efforts ultimately undermine the innovations of the twentieth century by rehabilitating notions such as “author,” “style”, or “history.”


the avant-gardist experimentations of the last century. This is also the reason I have not opted for “post-modern,” a term which also has the disadvantage of offering slightly different connotations in France and in the United States.

**Objets verbaux non identifiés (OVNI)**

In addition to rejecting linguistic experimentation in favor of more transparent writing, the younger generation of poets make less use of literary theory to guide their creative efforts. These different relationships to theoretical writing and literary criticism are tied in with the intellectual climate dominant during the beginning of their careers. Authors who first published in the 1960s, like Denis Roche, or the 1970s, such as Jean-Marie Gleize, Emmanuel Hocquard, and Christian Prigent, emerged during the age of high theory, marked notably by *Tel Quel* and Prigent’s journal *TXT*. Theoretical pronouncements accompanied the purely poetic production of these authors, providing a highly elaborate conceptual framework for the interpretation of their œuvre.  

The generation of poets beginning to publish their work in the late 1980s and 1990s has developed a certain hesitancy towards theory in reaction to the strong imbrication of theory and poetry in the work of their predecessors. While these authors have not been without critical sources, notably Espitallier’s journal *JAVA*, which introduced many emerging poets, and various essays published in the *Cahier critique de poésie* among other journals, their theoretical

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12 Among the theoretical works published by these authors are Roche’s *La disparition des lucioles: Réflexions sur l’acte photographique*; Hocquard’s *Un privé À Tanger* and *Un privé à Tanger II : Ma haie*; Prigent’s *Ceux qui merdRent* and *Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes*; Gleize’s *Poésie et figuration* and *Sorties*.

13 Prigent is among those who remark on this tendency. See *Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes* 34-41.
ambitions remain less far-reaching. Critical reflections produced by these poets respond often to particular questions presented by a review or a conference, and demonstrate a general tendency to move away from strict definitions of the poetry genre. Similarly, there are relatively few texts that offer themselves up as manifestos for a new poetics, although there are some exceptions, as critic Alain Farah remarks with respect to poet Christophe Tarkos's work. It is valuable then to provide a detailed analysis of one of the most influential critical interventions of the 1990s, *Revue de littérature générale*, which served in many ways as a bridge uniting two generations of poets.

Olivier Cadiot and Pierre Alferi’s *Revue de littérature générale* (*RLG*, 1995-6) centers on questions of textual construction. Marking a divergence from the poetics of erasure of Blanchot or Beckett, Alferi and Cadiot posit active processes at the core of creation. Literary production enacts the “compression” and “digestion” of heterogeneous elements originating in disparate textual and visual regimes (Alferi and Cadiot, “Digest,” *RLG* 2, unpaginated). Literature weaves together multiple linguistic registers (as well as non-textual elements) through constructivist processes. Yet, for Alferi and Cadiot, twentieth-century French literature has often sought to mystify these “mechanics” of literary production (*RLG* 1). Paradoxically, this elevation of the literary has come at the expense of the position of the author, leading to a fetishization of the themes of self-effacement and discretion. Concepts such as the disappearance of the poet, the experience of limits, and confrontation with impossibility have all been removed from their original contexts to become clichéd literary postures. Therefore, the journal seeks to propose

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15 *La gala des incomparables* 42-50.

16 Alferi and Cadiot, “Digest,” *RLG* 2, unpaginated.
alternative, constructivist theories of creation so as to offer alternatives to these dominant literary
tropes. Alferi and Cadiot conclude the first issue of *RLG* with a text entitled, “Bataille en relief,”
which criticizes the author of *Les larmes d’Éros* for his fascination with a Chinese torture victim
in the photograph, *Cent Morceaux*. They critique a thematization of violence among the many
epigones of Bataille, who emulate his interest in experiences of the extreme without the
profundity of their master. Transgression becomes just another theme among other clichés: “Le
culte de la cruauté n’est pas moins un *motif* que les fleurs bleues des vrais poètes-lyriques-
enfin-revenus” (*RLG* 1.408). Cadiot and Alferi are equally forceful in opposing what they see as a
stereotype of erasure. According to what they name the “vulgate du ‘manque,’” erasure ensures
literary authenticity by means of a sudden reversal of values (“Digest”). Self-effacement would
bring an author in contact with the raw material of literary creation within a mystic, primal scene
of writing. Yet, for the authors of *RLG*, the motif of lack is, like the notion of cruelty, a theme
that has become facile in the French literary scene of the 1990s. Significantly, in “La
bibliothèque de Trieste” (1988), Emmanuel Hocquard expresses similar reticence towards the
negative modernity he has found otherwise influential:

"La modernité négative ne risque-t-elle pas d’engendrer à son tour un système de valeurs légitimantes tel que l’avait été autrefois la croyance au progrès, au sens de l’histoire, etc. Comment des notions comme celles de manque, de défaut, d’absence, d’impossible, prises naguère à la lettre, en arrivent-elles à se transformer en clichés rhétoriques ? (ma haie 27)."

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17 *RLG* 1, 408.

For Hocquard, negativity and its attendant concepts may compose a value system dictating normalizing modes of thought. Instead of leveraging negativity to breakdown (modernist) conventions and fuel inventiveness, these notions risk ossification into their own series of accepted beliefs.

To counter these concepts, Alferi and Cadiot propose an alternative theory of creation. Instead of reflecting intrinsic lack, writing is powered by the assembly of heterogeneous textual materials. Culled from a multiplicity of sources, the fabric of literary works is derived from the abundance of contemporary culture. In their introduction to the first issue of the review, “La mécanique lyrique,” the editors oppose these constructions to the notion of literary raw material:


Composing a literary work with “Objets verbaux non identifies” or Ovni, implies the manipulation of constructed literary components. The metaphor is one of industrial assembly (“ils sont manufacturés”) in place of creative authenticity. The notion of the Ovni also has important consequences for poetic form. Playing on the French term for UFO, the Ovni implies experimental works that may be far from resembling traditional literary forms. Appearing instead as “monstres,” these creations may combine multiple genres and several registers of language within a single work. As the title Revue de littérature générale implies, contemporary poetry may incorporate numerous sorts of prose as a sort of “general,” post-genre literature. These hybridized forms also take verse and prose alongside works involving drawings,
photographs, video, and other media. This theory of textual mechanics orients post-genre poetry by characterizing methods of intermedial composition proper to a specific work.

While they place a high value on formal experimentation, Alferi and Cadiot do not wish to oppose formalism to lyricism. By entitling their introduction, “La mécanique lyrique,” they seek rather to integrate lyricism within a formalist theory of poetry. Lyricism becomes the energy or tension that animates the work and creates a unified ensemble from multiple registers of language. Far from implying an intimate voice of the author, lyricism is inscribed within the literary text through techniques of acceleration applied to heterogeneous textual materials. In this way, enjambment and repetition serve to process complex textual assemblages. This “digestion,” as the post face to the second volume of the review, “Digest,” refers, also provides for the emotional effects of the work. Emotion originates in a lyrical mechanics even as Alferi and Cadiot preclude the notion of lyricism as self-expression. In chapter three on Olivier Cadiot, I will return to these questions of lyricism and textual creation in more detail.

The Emergence of Dispositif-Writing

A central figure in contemporary French poetry, Jean-Marie Gleize marks the passage from suspicion of the traditional defining characteristics of poetry towards an exit outside of the bounds of the genre altogether. The twentieth century has seen poetry continue Rimbaud’s tradition of voyance in the poetic image, notably in Surrealist poetics, and contemporary neo-lyricist poets have sought to restore the expressive power of the song. Following a literalist orientation, Gleize proposes an alternative to these poetics by breaking with inherited forms, the poetic image, and lyricism. Further, Gleize conceives of certain contemporary writing, which he
names post-poetry, as moving outside the poetry genre altogether. Emerging from the poetry, or anti-poetry, of writers such as Francis Ponge, Denis Roche, and Claude Royet-Journoud, this writing eschews lyrical or imagistic effects. Working against the supplement of meaning introduced by metaphoric language, this literalism seeks to restrict the play of interpretation and secondary associations, as Gleize explains: “La “littéralité” a encore affaire à ceci (je ne peux que renvoyer à quelques propositions banales) : la poésie dit ce qu'elle dit en le disant (ne dit rien d'autre, le dit littéralement : non paraphrasable, voire, c'est encore pire, non interprétable)”.

Literality conceives of an asymptotic approach to a direct, abrupt encounter with the meaning and form of words, even if there always remains a margin of figurative sense produced by language. The opposition between signifier and signified as well as that of language and metalanguage are subjected to extreme reduction, whereby language does not represent the external world but rather is treated as an element of reality in itself. This theory of language enables literalists to oppose the poetic image and the ancillary view of language as representation. Following from the literalist refusal of traditional poetic tools, Gleize proposes a “sortie interne,” whereby writing may move outside the boundaries of the poetry genre (Sorties 54). Central characteristics of poetry, such as the verse and rhythm, no longer are the major preoccupations of these post-poets:

la référence à la poésie n'est plus nécessaire ; la question du lyrisme, des différences entre modalités ou tonalités lyriques, la question de la prose ou du vers, les querelles concernant les images, etc., tout cela n'a strictement plus aucune pertinence […] On voit bien que toute une part de cette poésie contemporaine en perte de spécificité se trouve désormais en contact, en interaction avec des gestes, des objets, des dispositifs

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20 It is worth noting that this rejection of verse is by no means a shared phenomenon within the poetry field. For example, Philippe Beck centers his poetry on a highly cogent theory of verse.
relevant de l'art contemporain, des arts plastiques – installations, performances, vidéo, multimédia, etc. Non seulement la poésie ne se dit plus en poèmes, mais, de surcroît, elle est contaminée par l'image, le sonore non ou infralinguistique, le chorégraphique, etc. (*Sorties* 60-1).

Building on the literalist rejection of lyricism, post-poetry seeks to exit questions of image, lyrical tonality, and versification. Even more significantly, language is no longer considered the sole medium of poetic creation, but a medium among others, alongside photography, video, audio recording, and others. As Gleize remarks, poetry becomes hybridized with a variety of practices that undercut its status as a single, unified genre, but rather suggests a series of complex, difficultly classifiable activities.

As poetry opens to multimedia poetic practices, it engages significantly with photography (for example, in Gleize’s own photographic practice centered on the Polaroid). For poets proposing their words as non-paraphraseable elements of reality, the camera offers a complementary ability to seize fluid fragments of the real. Photography has become a central preoccupations of writers, who, following Denis Roche, have sought to challenge definitions of the genre. Roche’s own practice of photography becomes a model for his writing, informing his *Dépôts de savoir et de technique* (1980), which captures portions of text as though framing them through a photographic lens. Roche extracts a citation of a fixed number of characters from a myriad of different texts and transposes them within two types of forms. The first of these, his “antéfixes,” draw together diverse written materials, journals, favorite books, tickets, etc., to provide a textual snapshot of an individual. The other main form explored in the work, “dépôts” amass a sort of cache of knowledge and technical expertise on a given subject. The first “dépôt” of the work, “*Théorie, cure aiguë, rien à faire,*” stocks several polyglot excerpts:

21 See Jean-Jacques Thomas’s “Photographic Memories of French Poetry: Denis Roche, Jean-Marie Gleize.”
In addition to the numerous references to photography and to photographers (Walker Evans and Diane Arbus are among those referenced), Roche repeatedly evokes Jackson Pollock. The “all-over” paintings of Pollock become a second methodological inspiration for Roche, who covers the page from top to bottom in blocks of text. The depot of citations aims for a similarly dense saturation of textual material. Significantly, throughout Dépôts de savoir et de technique, Roche engages with texts according to a literalist approach as objects that may be appropriated or cut and pasted from one context to another. The meaning of any individual passage is of secondary importance to the greater structural objectives of the work; in this way, it may be said that Roche’s work is conceptually-oriented. Finally, Dépôts de savoir et de technique marks an important turn for Roche, coming after a series of books that attacked the poetry genre from within the space of the poem (published today as his collected works under the title La Poésie est inadmissible, without, it is worth noting, Dépôts de savoir et de technique). As poetry ultimately became “inadmissible” for Roche, he becomes one of the first poets to begin practices that Gleize identifies as post-poetry: conceptual writing such as the Dépôts, as well as alternatives to writing, such as photography.

Seeking to define a shift that Roche plays a major role in inaugurating, Gleize delineates, “[le] passage d'une conception de l'art dominée par les modèles formels-esthétiques, à une

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22 Dépôts de savoir et de technique 40.

23 See for example, Denis Roche’s La disparition des lucioles : Réflexions sur l'acte photographique.
démarche tournée vers l'acte, l'action, la contextualisation des procédures et dispositifs, la prise en compte de leurs effets” (Sorties 159). Gleize marks a move from formal models of poetic texts to an expanded notion of action or event that exceeds the printed work. This may result in conceptual writing, as we have seen with Roche’s work, or the notion of poetry as an action, as in the work of Francis Ponge, or, in a different sense, in the work of sound poet Bernard Heidsieck. It is this expanded conception of poetic activity beyond the textual object itself that proves to be the major innovation of post-poetry. It results notably in a reevaluation of poetic form and the adoption of a dispositif of experimental writing. The concept evokes multiple, yet complementary, meanings in the work of Gleize and an influential former student, Christophe Hanna. In his article “Is ‘Postpoetry’ Still Poetry? Jean-Marie Gleize’s Dispositif-Writing,” scholar Christophe Wall-Romana parses the complex notion of the dispositif:

The word dispositif can only be partially rendered as ‘apparatus’ in English because it points to four interrelated referents: (1) a technical setup considered from the viewpoint of its users (paradigmatically, the apparatus of cinema theorized by Jean-Louis Baudry); (2) Michel Foucault's reworking of his earlier notion of discursive episteme into the dispositif that includes non-discursive elements (institutions, the built world, people); (3) a new way of organizing writing that extends the dispositio from ancient rhetoric, that is, how to structure a speech or a text; and (4) an expansion of collage, montage, cut-ups and intermedia processes fundamental to avant-garde modernism (444).24 Wall-Romana characterizes Gleize’s dispositif as primarily concerned with the first and third aspects of the term. Most significantly attempting to reconfigure the dispositio of contemporary writing to move outside of the genre of poetry, Gleize texts feature a series of reiterations across multiple works and various media. Indeed, Gleize’s literary cycle, Simplifications, hinges on a series of interconnected works returning to common elements, repeated scenes, and non-textual material such as photographs. His reflections are also influenced by the work of Hanna, who has

focused on the second and forth aspects of the concept of the dispositif. Importantly, Hanna reverses Foucault’s use of the term. Instead of denoting a society’s diverse systems of control on an individual, Hanna’s dispositif refers to actions taken by a subject on these social institutions and their discourses. The dispositif facilitates “action directe,” as Hanna names his first theoretical work, adapting the name of a French anarcho-communist revolutionary group of the 1970s-1980s. Hanna’s highly political thought introduces pragmatist and analytic philosophy to a poetics centered on cut-ups and montage. Adapting a theoretical framework established by philosophers such as John Dewey and Richard Rorty, Hanna sees political writing as emerging through the appropriation and recontextualization of a wide range of texts. He locates a political charge within collage and appropriation based texts by virtue of their capacity to adjust common frames of reference, and thus, to offer critical insights. In this way, Hanna’s views poetic dispositifs as enabling resistance against the diverse frameworks of surveillance and control exerted within contemporary, post-industrial societies.

If Gleize evokes an exit out of poetry via the attribution of the prefix “post” to contemporary poetic writing, Christophe Hanna is even more categorical in proposing a rupture with poetic tradition in his theory of the dispositif. Breaking with the conventionally understood function of literature, dispositif works do not seek to engage the reader in aesthetic experience. Instead of eliciting disinterested appreciation, Hanna portrays these texts as acting on widely


26 “Pour désigner ce potentiel ouvert de fonctionnalités, on peut choisir la notion de dispositif, en le reprenant moins à la tradition de Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, qui présentent l’inconvénient de constituer le dispositif comme objet d’une fonction précise déterminant une action diffuse des sociétés sur les individus, qu’à la poétique de Francis Ponge qui s’intéresse à l’action inverse, du sujet sur les institutions ou les sociétés” (*Nos dispositifs poétiques*, 14)

disseminated information and their accompanying discourses. Through a variety of cut-up, montage, and intermedia practices, dispositif-writing seeks to infiltrate contemporary regimes of language in the manner of a virus. They engage with these discourses to reorient the reader’s view toward social institutions, popular representations, and other aspects of public life. Therefore, performativity and functionality are the key notions of the dispositif:

Dans un dispositif, la notion de fonctionnement devient plus importante que celle de « signification », de « représentation » et d’« expression » ; bien que monté ad hoc, un dispositif peut, comme le suggère Ponge, être comparé à un « ustensile ». L’effet disposital est avant tout pratique et vise à améliorer des conditions, faire face à un « danger ». Observer un texte comme un dispositif a donc pour effet premier de fortement le dé-subjectiver puisque cela le fait percevoir sous l’angle de ses possibilités d’action dans un milieu (Nos dispositifs poétiques 15).

The dispositif undercuts traditional literary notions such as representation and expression in favor of performative effects inscribed within a specific social setting. The dispositif assembles a temporary, provisory structure (“monté ad hoc”) destined to address certain questions or problems. Hanna cautions against reading this direct action as meaning immediate or instantaneous changes to well-established discourses; on the contrary, dispositifs often require a significant engagement by the reader so as to denaturalize routinized perceptions. A dispositif is often initially perplexing because it elicits an adjustment of perspective. Indeed, Gleize writes of drawing out, “nouveaux protocoles de lecture” (A noir 138). To take the example of Denis Roche’s Dépôts de savoir et de technique, this work operates according to a logic of recontextualization that requires the reader to adopt an approach far different from that with which he or she reads a conventional collection of poems. Using an ad hoc structure, Roche transposes the methodology of photography – specifically, its use of framing – to literature. This dispositif, unique to a single work, does not call for the reader to engage solely in aesthetic

28 Nos dispositifs poétiques 19.
appreciation of this mass of appropriated (or photographed) fragments of text. Instead, it superposes a photographic framework with a literary one, leading the reader to view the “antefixes” as portraits. Further, the works acts critically to denaturalize the subject, replacing a character or a lyric subject with accumulated bits of structuring discourses.

The varying emphasis in the use of the concept of the dispositif is addressed by Gleize in an article entitled “Opacité critique,” where he clarifies his thought with respect to that of Hanna. Gleize notes first that Hanna's pragmatist poetics is complementary to his own use of avant-gardiste techniques of appropriation. He incorporates techniques of montage, recontextualization, and superimposition of narrative sequences within the structure of his post-poetic works. Yet, even as he emphasizes the political aspect of his writing, he marks a difference with Hanna’s more activist conception of literature. Whereas Hanna envisions poetry insinuating itself within communication networks to produce direct effects on reality, Gleize views his own work first and foremost as bearing witness to undecipherable experiences. In place of Hanna’s poetics of direct action, Gleize advocates writing that may ultimately remain personal and even border on intransitivity:

Il y a bien là un écrire (au sens quasi durassien), une activité singulière, l’expression d’une relation subjective à l’événement qui ne tend peut-être à rien d’autre, dans un premier temps, qu’à sa propre expression (en termes de “survie”, nécessité vitale de l’expression contre l’asphyxie imposée, sans aucune garantie d’être entendu par quiconque). Loin (il peut sembler) d’une “visée socialement efficace”…Quoi qu'il en soit, si la notion d’“action” (dont j'ai dit qu'elle revenait dans le champ de nos réflexions et de nos pratiques) ne peut que rester soumise à confrontation avec l’en cours du réel, soumise à l’examen de son inscription réelle (effice ?) dans ce réel, reste que nous avons à penser l’écriture comme un acte (“Opacité critique” 42).

Gleize's poetic action confronts reality in all of its indeterminability, drawing its political resonance from this engagement with obscurity. As will be discussed in detail in my chapter on

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29 Gleize gives this title to two essays that appear in the volumes “Toi aussi, tu as des armes”: Poésie & Politique and L'Illisibilité en questions. I am referencing the former here.
Gleize, this politics of opacity locates the political action of writing first and foremost within the negation of conventional political discourses. Gleize puts forth an opposing orientation to Hanna's poetics of infiltration, while also indicating his shared use of practices of montage and recontextualization.\(^3\) Further, his theoretical writing and work with literary reviews (notably the journal *Nioques*) consistently demonstrate a far-reaching hospitality to experimental writing of all orientations.

In this dissertation, I will use the term dispositif according to this second working of the concept by Gleize to introduce elements borrowed from Hanna (such as practices of appropriation, montage, and other experimental techniques). Thus, “dispositif” will refer broadly to the structure of a poetic work that allows for an open organization of textual and non-textual material (such as photography, video, sound recordings etc.). While dispositif-writing may remove the narrative presence in an objectivist-oriented use of appropriated text, it may also retain the voice of a narrator. I will use the term “dispositif” then to refer to the heterogeneous practices of contemporary post-genre writing that create an ad hoc structure specific to a given work or a series of works. For purposes of clarity, I will use the common English translation of “apparatus” to refer to the Foucauldian concept of discursive and nondiscursive elements of structure and control. While “apparatus” does not give the full breadth of meaning of the French term, it appears essential to me to differentiate between the widely varying uses of the word with separate terms.

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\(^3\) Nathalie Quintane marks her support of Hanna, noting the fluidity of conceptual writing with other poetic practices: “Il y a, d'autre part, les poètes “à dispositif” ou “conceptuels” (ah la la cette typologie !), ceux qui ont, peut-être (c'est ce qu'on leur impute), lâché la langue comme aventure en soi, circonscrivant l'intervention du “littéraire” à l'obtention d'un effet strictement éthico-politique, les praticiens ou programmaticiens ; en bref, les poètes qu'on appelait autrefois engagés – ou ceux dont on dit abusivement – qu'ils font une “poésie de plasticien”. Abusivement, parce que leur sortie de la syntaxe (d'une “pensée syntaxière”, comme dit Michel Deguy) n'a la plupart du temps rien de total ni de définitif (*L'illisibilité en questions* 184).
Narration, Anecdote, and Digression

In addition to multimedia experimentation, narrative reemerges in recent work in unexpected and innovative ways. Literalist texts have long employed a form of narrative across literary cycles, where individual works give onto a larger whole. Examples include Jean-Marie Gleize's Simplifications cycle, Claude Royet-Journoud's interconnected volumes and Jean Daive's two cycles, Narration d'équilibre and La condition d'infini. The use of narrative in these works centers on dislocating continuous story line to reveal what is hidden by strict linearity. Rather than rehabilitating inherited modes of narrative poetry like the epic, these texts follow a multiplicity of fragmentary, competing story lines. They seek to probe enigmatic events that prove resistant to expression, such as experiences of loss or moments of plentitude. In his article “Narrations multi-linéaires et épistémologies poétiques chez Jean-Marie Gleize et Claude Royet-Journoud”, Alessandro De Francesco argues that these non-linear narratives serve to investigate cognitive processes inaccessible by chronological accounts of events:

[cès récits favorisent] la création de nouveaux paradigmes de connaissance du monde et de l’histoire; des paradigmes narratifs où la temporalité et les hiérarchies mêmes de l’histoire subissent un processus de bouleversement, au profit d’une plus grande proximité entre la poésie et ce qu’il y a, qu’il y avait et qu’il y aura autour d’elle, autour de nous (French Forum 37 125-6).

The use of narrative serves to interrogate the linguistic structures that shape experience, considering poetry as a means to engage with these cognitive frameworks. In this way, their writing is not only as a literary object but also as an epistemological tool probing new approaches to knowledge. Through the use of discontinuous narrative across literary cycles, literalist poets interrogate enigmatic experiences that are not readily accessible to linear

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transcription.

Following an entirely different orientation, Olivier Cadiot fuses poetry with the novel, creating poem set within narrative sequences. Through constructivist experimentation, he seeks to garner the best aspects of both the novel and the poem in works such as *Futur, ancien, fugitif* and *Le colonel de Zouaves*. By presenting the poem within a larger narrative structure, Cadiot hopes to avoid fetishizing the particular discovery or revelation depicted within the text. Placing poetry within a narrative serves to accelerate its reception the reader, undermining a reading of the poem as a literary monument. In accordance with his theory of literature as an object that is manufactured rather than inspired, Cadiot accentuates the constructed nature of books such as *Futur, ancien, fugitif*. By multiplying different typographies and various sorts of texts, such as lists, glossaries, and songs, he exposes the artifice of his narrative. Further, the use of anecdote and digression heightens the non-linear aspect of the narration, not in the cognitive orientation of Gleize or Royet-Journoud's work, but rather to reflect the excess of contemporary experience. By overloading the narration, these digressions never manage to arrive at a uniform continuity, but rather take a series of bifurcations culminating in a playful, comic tone. Nathalie Quintane favors a similarly digressive use of narrative, privileging sequences of anecdotes to interrogate contemporary politics. Building on work by the American poet David Antin, Quintane foregrounds cultural criticism within meandering elaborations of thought. This enables Quintane to think critically without imposing a larger theoretical structure to her deliberations, such as those offered by critical discourses like Marxism. In so doing, Quintane seeks to reinvigorate leftist thought and critical initiatives at a time when the Marxist master narrative no longer holds credibility.
Contemporary French Poetry and Hybridity

Twentieth century philosophers and poets often cast technology in a negative light as a force capable of denaturing poetry. Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” evokes the threat posed by technology to the human capacity for poiesis, or creative bringing forth through language. Techne becomes synonymous with the industrial advances of the modern era that undermined the human ability to affirm a habitable dwelling place in the world through language. Similarly critical of technology and its effects on contemporary society, Michel Deguy affirms the superiority of poetic language over the commodification of “le culturel,” the industrial logic of manufacturing and selling cultural products. Yet, recognizing the heterogeneity of recent French poetry, Deguy’s concept of “écriture parabolique,” groups together poetry, myth, and philosophy (Réouverture après travaux, rear cover). Rather than reading these works according to a logic of predefined genres, Deguy's second concept takes into account the hybridized character of contemporary culture, even while rejecting fusions of language with other media. Other theorists are less critical of these perceived encroachments. Instead, they evoke literature’s increasing hybridization with both technology and other artistic media as a means of conceptualizing the contemporary era. Jacques Rancière conceives of a “grande parataxe” where the arts occupy a radically non-hierarchical domain open to montages of various art forms (Le Destin des images 55). In his concept of the aesthetic regime of art, where classical representation is rejected in favor of fragmentation and montage, Rancière sees hybridity between media as a defining feature of arts since modernism. Further, his notion of the “phrase-image” proposes a paradigm shift, whereby the distance between media (such as words and images) gives way before new schema of intermedial creations. While Rancière cites

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Michel Deguy. Choses de la poésie et affaire culturelle.
cinema as the central art form of contemporary culture, scholars have expanded his work on the phrase-image to apply to intermedial literature.  

Contemporary writing approaches transmedia work according to multiple modalities, either by integrating non-textual components into the work itself or by integrating another art's techniques and methods within writing. Like Roche's exemplary Dépôts de savoir et de technique, which adapts methods of photographic framing to textual appropriation, numerous other works borrow from the operational modes of another art form. Contemporary poets have reconfigured the distribution of labor whereby writers and visual artists (or musicians, etc.) worked independently even while collaborating on a single piece. There is an increasing preoccupation with engineering and constructing works uniting writing with the other arts in a dispositif specific to a single work. Yet, there also exists a general framework for these new types of creations, such as sound poetry, concrete poetry, or video-poetry. In his essay Caisse à outils, Jean-Michel Espitallier describes transformations in hybridized poetry according to these general categories:

La poésie paraît donc être sortie de l’espace strictement littéraire et, corollairement, du “graphocentrisme” pluriséculaire du livre comme étalon de l’espace d’écriture, lequel, depuis près d’un siècle, se dilate vers d’autres supports. Elle travaille aux frontières. À une relation type partage du travail, commerce policé entre poètes et artistes, a succédé une nouvelle façon de dialogues. Non plus comme une distribution, d’ailleurs plus ou moins équitables, des tâches, ni dans une logique d’accompagnement, de la voix double, et, ce qui est peut-être pis, de l’illustration, mais dans une relation d’entrelacement des outils et des techniques, des vocabulaires formels et des grammaires. Poésie sonore, concrète, hors-texte, vidéo-poésie, performances, etc., autant de pratiques, de recherches, de mixages formels qui ont mis à bas les interdits catégoriels (48)

It is useful to provide a working definition of some of these practices outlined by Espitallier.

Sound poetry designates works emerging with experimentations of the early 20th century avant-
gardistes, such as Apollinaire and Kurt Schwitters (Ur-sonate), that emphasize sound experimentation. From the 1950s, these sound creations underwent significant expansion in the work of poets such as Bernard Heidsieck and Henri Chopin. Video-poetry use cinematic or video techniques either to inform writing or as a poetic work incorporating moving images themselves. DVDs such as Pierre Alferi’s *Cinépoèmes & Films Parlants*, Jérôme Game’s *Ceci n’est pas une légende* and Anne-James Chaton’s *Autoportraits* make use of video as the medium of poetic creation. As Espitallier makes clear, these cross-medium works move beyond collaborations between artists, such as a poet writing texts for the theatre or the cinema, towards more complex schemas of hybridization. Indeed, he insists on relationships between the arts that stress an interpenetration of formal vocabularies, tools, and techniques.

Yet, while it is important for scholarship to delineate typologies of emerging poetic forms, I will focus here largely on the particular use of transmedia within a given poet’s work. This approach recognizes the diversity of intermedial creations as well as the varying imperatives of poets in employing an alternative medium. As critic David Ruffel suggests in his article “Une littérature contextuelle,” these hybrized creations are difficultly classifiable according to strict typologies. While concepts like Sound Poetry or Performance certainly have their uses, hybridized forms often resist codification into readily identifiable genres. For example, poets incorporate photography with such different objectives - for example, in the work of Julien Blaine (concrete, “metaphysical” poems), Jean-Marie Gleize (literalist photos alongside prose), or Suzanne Doppelt (anamorphosis) - that it would be illusory to group their work

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34 For a typology of sound poetry, see Heidsieck’s “1955-1975 : poésie sonore/poésie action” in *Notes convergentes*.  

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together as a unified genre, such as photo-poetry. Instead of subjecting these works to a homogenizing notion, I examine them by analyzing the montage of language, image, and multimedia elements present in a given text. Therefore, this dissertation does not seek to provide a panorama of experimental poetry, but rather selects poets whose œuvre illustrates transforming relationships between the written page and other media. Rather than tracing strict genealogies of twentieth and twenty-first century poetry, I seek to provide local, pointed critique of four poets of particular significance.

An example of the free-form dialogue between art forms evoked by Espitallier is the collaboration between Emmanuel Hocquard and photographer Alexandre Delay on a film and a subsequent book, *Voyage à Reykjavik*. The medium of video provides a possibility for the writer and painter to displace their artistic expertise, enabling an approach that is neither wholly that of a professional nor that of an amateur. Working beyond the bounds of their respective arts, Hocquard and Delay find a fresh approach to creation; “Nous devrions donc penser et fabriquer notre vidéo comme le peintre et l’écrivain que nous sommes font leur peinture et leur écriture. Mais *en vidéo*. Ce qui nous laisse toute liberté de faire *comme on sait et comme on ne sait pas*, les deux à la fois” (11). The essential notion is that of transposing artistic knowledge from one genre to another, where techniques from writing or photography may inform work in video. Following this experimental approach, Hocquard and Delay locate another source of their conceptual orientation in Gavin Bryars' experimental music of the 1970s:

> Je fais tout de suite le parallèle entre cette idée (le conditionnel) et une aventure musicale des années soixante-dix, qui me plaît beaucoup : la *musique approximative* de Gavin

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35 See Julien Blaine’s *13427 Poèmes Métaphysiques* and Suzanne Doppelt’s *Lazy Suzie*.


Hocquard and Delay seek to shift artmaking from established schemas towards an open, untested constellation of practices. The resulting work operates in the conditional, as though the reader or viewer is requested to agree to accept a certain series of experimental procedures before engaging with the work; for example, the fact that the musicians will be playing new instruments or the poet will be working on a video rather than a text. The collaboration between Hocquard and Delay is exemplary of the search for new syntaxes and procedures intended to be approached via the conditional tense. Following this orientation, individual texts often develop unique methods of adopting another art’s techniques in written form, or alternatively, of blending poetry with heterogeneous elements from other media, such as photography, video, recording tools, and internet technology. Further, as witnessed by recent publications, there is increased scholarly interest in these cross-medium creations. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the study of these intermedia works through case studies of four poets undertaking innovative poetic practices.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter one, *Emmanuel Hocquard: Towards a Grammar of Intermedia Poetics*, centers on the critical, investigatory poetics of Emmanuel Hocquard. Likening the poet to a private detective, Hocquard engages in a Wittgensteinian analysis of language. Hocquard’s literary

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project is based on “une intention de pauvreté,” and aims at dismantling conventional representations to reveal their failure in depicting reality (ma haie 272). Hocquard’s skepticism leads him to interrogate not only language but also art forms such as photography, land and sound art, and video. My study focuses on the emergence of transmedia works within the framework of this critical poetry. I begin by discussing Hocquard’s discontent with modernist art forms and his desire to deconstruct not only these works but language use in a more general sense. In this way, his focus expands from literature to a more general inquiry into system of representations: both those that rely on language but also those that employ a variety of other media. Thus, in Le commanditaire, Hocquard addresses the project of social documentary by depicting the Parisian suburb of Bondy-Nord in a work combing text and photography. The book Un Test de Solitude offers an innovative point of conjunction between traditional sonnet form, autobiography, and land art projects. Similarly preoccupied with the questions of time and space present in these art projects, Le Voyage à Reykjavik centers on the formal possibilities of video. Throughout this multivalent work, Hocquard continually questions the formal properties of a range of art forms as well as the possibilities they provide for intermedial poetic creation.

My second chapter, Jean-Marie Gleize and the Site of the Enigma, explores the role of place throughout the literary cycle of this influential poet and theoretician. Site functions in a double sense, both as the location of writing, as well as a reoccurring series of sites that Gleize employs in his works. Inspired by the reiterative aspect of Francis Ponge's work, Gleize seeks to expand the boundaries of the literary work from the traditional poetry collection towards open-ended dispositifs. By continually repeating and recontextualizing key episodes within his cycle, Gleize establishes the work as a space of action. The sites that preoccupy him, such as the lake, the forest, the point, and the corridor, return throughout his texts but also find themselves
transposed from one form into another (for example, a corridor transforms into a point). Gleize foregrounds the opacity that he sees as accompanying each of these sites. This negative approach acts to undo the hold of images, which he views as fundamentally illusory. By opposing images, Gleize seeks to expose the opacity that comes with profound experiences of reality. Citing mystics and their preoccupation with unknowing, Gleize similarly emphasizes the limits of language to convey events of deep significance. Further, his later work on cabins - remote habitations located beyond government sovereignty - focuses on the political implications of opacity. These spaces seek autonomy both for literary creation and political action by moving outside of the sphere of public control and surveillance.

Olivier Cadiot, or A Portrait of the Artist as “Auto-usine,” examines the narrator, Robinson, who provides Cadiot with an alternative to conventional notions of lyrical subjectivity. In texts such as the experimental novel-by-poems Futur, ancien, fugitif, a profusion of language undercuts the role of the speaking subject. Robinson functions as an empty site for the performance of the heterogeneous language of the contemporary world. This narrative presence corresponds to Gilles Deleuze’s notion of a conceptual persona, in which the character that creates the fiction is a tool for the creator’s movement of thought. Rather than taking on precise qualities or solidified contours, Cadiot transports Robinson from book to book and from the poem to the novel and the stage. The characteristics proper to this roaming narrator are a capacity to amass and list an encyclopedic range of language. Often taking on frenetic, manic qualities, the Robinson of Futur, ancien, fugitif expounds on the language that surrounded him before his shipwreck. Transposed in Le Colonel des Zouaves into a frantic butler, Robinson exaggerates the business and marketing discourses so pervasive in contemporary postindustrial societies. By pushing the logic of these discourses to a breaking point, he shifts towards the
position of a military officer drilling a service staff to provide absolute performance. Client research becomes an activity of surveillance and spying in order to achieve total knowledge of the customer. Significantly, the formal aspects of these works employ an adventurous hybridization of novelistic prose featuring poems set within the narration. Through this experimentation, Cadiot seeks to stake out new post-generic forms beyond the poem or the novel. In *Un mage en été*, Robinson moves towards a less frantic posture, with a number of cell phone photographs placed within the work to modify the tempo of reading. This work also tests the capacity of the conceptual persona to take on certain of Cadiot’s autobiographical details. While Cadiot has always refused a narrowly conceived opposition between lyricism and formalism, *Un mage en été* nevertheless features a reemergence of subjectivity, albeit in a highly restrained manner.

My fourth chapter, *Nathalie Quintane: Poetry as Political Speculation* examines the political stakes of Quintane’s digressive and anecdotal form of poetic narrative. Chronicling the evolution of her views on political writing, I trace a shift from texts that did not thematize politics towards increasingly direct meditations on contemporary politics. Quintane herself remarks on several occasions on this transformation, even noting her hesitancy to deal directly with politics within a theoretical essay on political community. Initially, she reflects on the fundamental unsuitability of master narratives to the epoch and identifies the ambiguous role culture often plays with respects to the political order. In her *Grand ensemble : Concernant une ancienne colonie*, Quintane engages with contemporary cultural politics, critiquing a 2003 event designed to celebrate Algeria. Problematizing facile representations of the former colony, Quintane seeks to expose the deeply troubling heritage of colonialism and the Algerian War. Similarly implicated in contemporary politics, *Tomates* responds to 2008’s Tarnac Affair, where
the writer and political activist Julien Coupat was arrested in a highly publicized incident. I analyze Quintane’s work on the concept of community, as articulated by authors including George Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Opposing these major theorists, Quintane proposes an alternative version of political critique integrated within sequences of narrative prose. Her Les années 10 expands on this theoretical impulse, including a series of difficultly characterizable texts often closer to the essay than to fiction. Throughout the work she interrogates certain postures of leftist intellectuals, such as a pervasive tone of melancholy, which may restrict effective political mobilization. By analyzing poetic and essayistic writings by Nathalie Quintane, I examine several modes of political writing and their application in the contemporary context.
CHAPTER I

Emmanuel Hocquard: Towards a Grammar of Intermedia Poetics

Emmanuel Hocquard favors the poetic practice of *literality* to orient literature away from contemporary discourses and the influence of mass media. Hocquard’s version of literalist writing enacts an *investigation* into the structures governing meaning-making processes. Referencing both the philosophical inquiries of Wittgenstein and those of a private detective, the concept of poetry as an investigation is based in a critical approach to grammar. Using the term “grammar” in an expanded sense, Hocquard refers not only to the rules governing language but also to the structures organizing various literary genres and media (i.e., detective novels, *le roman-photo*, but also photography, film, television, etc). By placing language at a remove, the poet-private-eye or the poet-grammarians is able to elucidate the constructions underpinning conventional representations. Opposing poetic language as an expression of subjectivity, Hocquard’s investigatory poetics are based on a theory of language as essentially impersonal. In an essay on grammar and poetic practices, *Les Babouches vertes : Une grammaire de Tanger II*, language is viewed as a collective use of indirect discourse. Hocquard follows the linguistic theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Mille plateaux* that posit language in its entirety as a “mot d'ordre” (95). 38 Refuting the accepted distinction between direct discourse and indirect discourse, all language is seen as a repetition of collective messages. Communication is rooted in what others have told us or taught us, and therefore, individual speech is far from providing a privileged voice of interiority. Hocquard draws out the anecdote of a man interviewed after a

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38 See the chapter “20 novembre 1923 – Postulats de la linguistique” in *Mille plateaux*.
hurricane who is unable to produce his own opinion without access to radio, television, or the telephone:

*Sans doute pensait-il que son témoignage destiné à la télévision devait nécessairement s'accorder aux autres témoignages que montrait la télévision qu’il n’avait pas vue, vérifiant au passage la thèse de Mc Luhan, selon laquelle le médium est le message*” (*Les babouches vertes*, nonpaginated, itallicized in the original).

Language functions then by “ouï-dire”, overhearing and repeating according to a preexisting grammatical system (*Les babouches*). This system defines the possibilities of expression and communication in a similar manner as a given medium creates communicative potentials for media theorist Marshall McLuhan. If a direct discourse may be obtained, it is only by copying preexisting language and re-presenting it outside of its initial context. Paradoxically, copying provides a direct form of address. A copied phrase is detached from a greater mass of language and evades its previous frame of reference. An interval is opened between the initial utterance, which derived its meaning through a reference to external reality, and its repetition, which merely reiterates the initial statement without serving to represent objects or events in the world.

Influenced by this difference between indirect and direct discourses, Hocquard conceives of writing as extracting utterances (“énoncés”) from circulating discourses. The act of copying and thereby decontextualizing these fragments, allows them to escape – or by cleansed of – the grammar governing their interpretation:

*Ces unités décontextualisés – décontaminés, devrais-je dire -, sont des propositions flottantes. Des propositions redevenues autonomes, qu’aucun contexte n’a désormais plus besoin de légitimer et dont la seule garantie est le regard actuel que je porte sur elles comme si je les voyais pour la première fois (ma haie 477).*

Hocquard’s utterance is a proposition that approaches direct, literal meaning through its independence from a context. Language emerges to confront the reader through a break in the
flow of words structuring discursive communication. Instead of being carried along by a continuous narrative, a reader confronts the utterance as though discovering it for the first time. In addition to Deleuze and Guattari, Hocquard often cites the Objectivist poet Charles Reznikoff as an influence because of his use of procedures of appropriation. In Reznikoff’s *Testimony*, reports from courtroom witnesses from the US of 1885-1890 are selected and transposed into verse form without any alteration of their content. The redistribution of court testimony within literary form cancels its function of representing real events. The shift to verse provides a new logical organization and a new series of utterances through a process of recontextualization. In *Ma vie privée*, Hocquard discusses the analogous creation of the text *Petit monument à E.H.* by Olivier Cadiot, cut-up from a guidebook to Rome. A nonliterary source enters into literature through its selection by Cadiot, as a monument to the residency of the two authors at the Villa Médici in Rome. Hocquard, in turn, recopies and transposes this poem into verse form to create his poem “Élégie VI.” The phrases achieve independence through an erasure of the initial context of the guidebook and the creation of an interval within representational language. A copy detached from a greater mass of language bypasses its previous frame of reference. In turn, these holes in discourse allow the self-contained fragments to read with an “éclat propre” (*ma haie* 233). An interval is opened between the situated phrase, which derives its meaning from a specific position in discourse, and its reiteration, which refers back to the initial statement itself in a decontextualized loop. Instead of fulfilling any representational function, the utterance puts itself forward according to what Hocquard will identify elsewhere as tautological affirmation.

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39 This text originally appeared in Cadiot’s and Pierre Alferi’s *Revue de littérature générale I* and was later reprinted in Hocquard’s *ma haie : Un privé à Tanger II*. 

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His literalist redefinition of poetic activity as manipulating copied phrases allows Hocquard to theorize alternatives to the modernist practices that meet with general suspicion in the second half of the Twentieth century. In an interview with Stéphane Baquey, Hocquard relates the desire to react against modernist literature and initiate an entirely new starting point for culture. However, finding a total erasure of the modernist tradition to be impossible, he takes another approach and expands his critique of literary modernism to an inquiry into language in a more general sense:

À partir de là, ce n’est plus seulement pour lui [the poet] une question de littérature ou de poésie, mais plus généralement une ténèbreuse affaire de langage. De tout le langage : comment en effet chercher à résoudre des problèmes qui sont posés en termes de langage sinon en termes de langage ? (ma haie 285).

Hocquard broadens the scope of literary art to a more general interrogation into language and systems of representation. His work with the utterance serves the vital purpose of suspending grammatical structures and allowing Hocquard to reevaluate the use of language. Passages of direct discourse reorient poetry to serve as an observation post set before the functioning of language itself. Exiting continuity and easy interpretability allows Hocquard to freely inquire into questions of language, and more generally, investigate representation across a variety of media. This chapter will discuss Hocquard’s poetics both with respect to mass media and artistic forms, analyzing works that deconstruct a specific genre or medium, such as Le commanditaire (journalism and photography), Un Test de solitude (sonnets as well as land and sound art) and Le Voyage à Reykjavik (video). By substituting the notion of poetic dispositifs for set poetic forms, Hocquard is able to incorporate photography, video, and art installations into his projects. The

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40 See La bibliothèque de Trieste, reprinted in ma haie.

41 Lespiau 58.
dispositif, an open semiotic organization combining language along with a multiplicity of other media, broadens the purview of poetic activities. This adjustable structure allows Hocquard to structure the work to respond to the demands of a given project. The form of the work corresponds to the questions of representation that are at stake in a genre or medium. Therefore, Hocquard is not only able to engage a general investigation into language but to push this inquiry towards non-language based media as well. To begin my discussion of Hocquard, I will examine how he reassesses the prevalent literary motif of the fragment in Théorie des Tables. While rethinking fragmentation, Hocquard opens poetic activity to more general issues of language, beginning a larger investigation of grammar across numerous different media.

From the Fragment to the Théorie des Tables

Fragmentation is a central preoccupation in Hocquard’s work, as the poet remarks in a short text, Cette histoire est la mienne : Petit dictionnaire de l’élégie: “Le fragment mérite qu’on s’y arrête un moment, ne serait-ce qu’en raison de la gêne technique qui s’y attache pour certains” (ma haie 476). This allusion to Pascal Quignard’s Une gêne technique à l’égard des fragments expresses a shared sense of malaise at the persistence of fragmentation in twentieth and twenty-first century literature, often a product of feigned violence or fracture. The programmatic La bibliothèque de Trieste offers a summary of Hocquard’s critiques. This text

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42 As discussed in the introduction, the term “dispositif” has a rich history. Originating in the thought of Foucault to replace the notion of “épistème,” the concept was later taken up by Deleuze. The term, as I am using it here, is later applied to specific works of art to describe a variable semiotic organization. I will retain the French term over the English translation “apparatus” to reflect this complex etymology. See Ortel, Philippe, and Arnaud Rykner. Discours, Image, Dispositif. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008. Print.

43 Une gêne technique à l’égard des fragments 50.
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affirms the exhaustion of the notions of absence, lack, and impossibility that characterize the post-war period Hocquard names “negative modernity” (ma haie 25). Confirming Quignard’s thesis, Hocquard reassesses the status of the fragment in his later work, judging it a characteristic feature of this era. Stéphane Baquey highlights an important divergence in Hocquard’s thought on the fragment in his later period from a poet of significant influence to him, Claude Royet-Journoud. Baquey cites Hocquard in conversation with Royet-Journoud, who attributes an experience of terror or menace to discontinuity:

“je crois qu’il faut dédramatiser un peu la chose et rappeler que l’accident c’est littéralement, c’est- à-dire simplement ‘ce qui survient’ – ça recoupe la phrase de Wittgenstein – et ce qui survient non pas de manière exceptionnelle mais de manière ordinaire.” Hocquard évacue le sentiment de la distance de ‘l’analogie’ et dénoue le tragique : la littéralité, c’est le simple prélèvement de singularités discontinues qui ne sont plus hantées par le spectre d’une unité perdue (“Emmanuel Hocquard : Une poésie littérale” 316-317).

Approaching the fragment as an utterance allows Hocquard to cast a fresh gaze upon it.

Liberating the fragment from a tragic rupture with the whole follows from Wittgenstein’s skepticism of metaphysical language and its analogous presupposition of transcendental unity. Influenced by Wittgenstein’s turn to investigate everyday language, Hocquard proposes that the poet treat the discontinuous phrase as a sample (“prélèvement”), free from pathos. I will analyze this new approach by examining Théorie des tables, which turns on the juxtaposition of numerous fragmentary passages. These elements, derived from Hocquard’s autobiography, are seen as independent from a linear personal history and become open to new, unforeseen connections with other passages in the work. Inflecting his treatment of the fragment with his

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44 See Glenn Fetzer’s Emmanuel Hocquard and the Poetics of Negative Modernity for an excellent discussion of this subject.

reflections on the copy, he approaches autobiographical utterances as fully self-contained and autonomous. Thus, Hocquard departs from the nostalgia of the fragment in two fundamental ways: first, by privileging the sovereignty of these independent propositions, and second, by positing that connections between them result from their free play, without serving to reconstruct a whole.

Hocquard’s turn towards a poetics inspired by Wittgenstein reorients poetry towards plain, non-metaphoric language. This reading of Wittgenstein facilitates a shift from a poetics centered on the images of the subconscious (as in Surrealism) or on presence (as in works by the poets grouped around the revue Ephémère, including Yves Bonnefoy, Jacques Dupin, and André du Bouchet) towards the notion of poetry as activity.46 Inspired by Wittgenstein’s reflections on ordinary language in Philosophical Investigations, Hocquard’s poetry does not seek to reveal essence so much as to think through the basic functioning of language. Hocquard experiments with the rules of grammar in order to liberate his language from prescribed manners of seeing and thinking. If this radical dismantling of grammar is possible, language cannot be viewed as representing preexisting relations between objects in the world.47 Untethering the bonds between word and thing allows Hocquard to unanchor language from a function of representation. He encourages his readers to approach his works as though they are composed of copies, decontextualized from their original sources: “Tous mes livres sont à lire comme des copies (V.

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47 In this way, Hocquard works through and rejects Wittgenstein’s “picture theory” of language in the Tractus-Logico-Philosophicus, where language is seen as providing an image of a state of affairs in the world. Just as the philosopher will later reject this theory in Philosophical Investigations, Hocquard will also pronounce himself in favor of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.
La Méthode Robinson)” (ma haie 267). Reading fragments as though they are copies allows them to be seen as autonomous utterances. Instead of describing relationships in the world, language creates meaning in a provisory manner as it is put into use in new contexts and situations. In this respect, the concept of the table in Théorie des tables is revelatory. In the elaboration of the tabular-poem, a series of autobiographical episodes allow Hocquard to interrogate language use in a variety of circumstances. Accordingly, contingent, transitory meaning is achieved through the arrangement of autobiographical fragments outside of any preexisting story of the self. Conceived of as a single poem, the fifty-one sections of the work (which correspond to the age of the poet) create unhabitual connections through their interactions. In the postface to Théorie des tables entitled Un Malaise grammatical, Hocquard speaks of his activity of collecting and spreading out rocks and glasses shards on a table to aid in formulating new linguistic relationships:

Je travaille sur une table. J’y jette, à plat, une collection aléatoire d’objets de mémoire, qui sont à formuler. Au fur et à mesure que s’élaborent les formulations, des relations logiques (non causales) apparaissent. C’est le dispositif aléatoire de base qui permet la mise au jour des relations logiques […] Ces relations logiques (de l’ordre du langage) forment entre elles des réseaux, des rhizomes, sources d’une dynamique dont les lois ne sont pas psychologiques, mais quasiment mécaniques. C’est ça qui fait que ‘soudain, on voit quelque chose’, qu’un sens surgit, même à propos d’anciennes choses. A ce moment, un énoncé devient possible. Je dirai même qu’il s’impose avec la force d’évidence (unpaginated).

A nonhierarchical positioning on the flat surface of a table allows for elements to be arranged outside of conventional organizational schema, such as normative grammar. Hocquard’s table does not serve to reconstitute a totality from these fragments or impose a larger unity on them. Instead, through aleatory juxtaposition, it allows them to form dynamic, rhizomatic openings through an expandable network. Critic Dominique Rabaté situates this shift away from a view of

48 Significantly, Hocquard’s reflections on the copy come in part from his reading of Olvier Cadiot’s Robinson in Futur, ancien, fugitif. See chapter two for further discussion of the two authors.
language as a system of relative positions: “Le modèle n’est ni système ni structure car le sens ne vient pas des oppositions différentielles. Penser idéalement le fragment sans la nostalgie du tout, sans le pathos romantique de cette déploration. L’idéal serait alors un réseau indéfiniment extensible de rapports” (109). Like the list, the table allows for the interconnection of its elements without establishing differential oppositions between them. The components of a list, Hocquard argues, all appear on a unique plane; they are not dependant on one another as in sentences or verse, but rather are made open to juxtaposition with other data.

The table is built of autobiographical phrases originating in the poet’s immediate surroundings that are subsequently made available to new connections. For example, we read addresses to friends and fellow poets (eg. Charles Bernstein in section 9; Pierre Alferi in 28; Claude Royet-Journoud in 43), observations of stones or bottle fragments (eg. Section 1, 2, etc), and descriptions of photographs (51). Further, the table is composed of utterances at the same time as it is the support that contains these elements themselves. The table provides no superior position outside of language nor does it allow the poet to present insights from a metaphysical space. Instead, the table provides a working surface to test persistent problems of language, the most central of which is the use of pronouns. Section three of the poem begins a series of questions on pronouns that will span the entire work:

Comment dire et ne pas dire je
comment te dire tu

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49 Hocquard distinguishes the list from the manner of thinking fostered by the sentence. Speaking of Pierre Alferi’s philosophical work *Chercher une phrase*, Hocquard agrees with Alferi’s position that philosophical thinking implies using the form of the sentence to construct one’s thoughts. Yet, he suggests alternative structures for language, such as the list, may serve to open new possibilities for expression. See *ma haie* p. 289.

Tu ne connais pas ta voix quand tu parles
la langue n’est pas à toi [...]  
Chère V., prends ce que tu as sous la main
trie ce qui est sur une table
Jette les cailloux dans un bol
La couleur apparaît dans l’eau
Ne trie pas je et tu
Ne trie pas bleu et mer Egée

Hocquard’s reflections on which objects to sort lead him to refuse traditional distinctions
between poetic subject matter and the autobiographical episodes of the everyday. Numerous
passages describe the Greek island where Hocquard stayed and observed the Aegean Sea. By
refusing hierarchies between literary and non-literary subject matter, Hocquard instead focuses
on what is directly before him (“ce que tu as sous la main”). His interrogation focuses on
elementary components of grammar, such as the pronouns. Present in any communicational
context, the seemingly innocuous pronouns fix identity within language. Therefore, the refusal
to distinguish, or sort (“trier”), between the pronouns undermines the unity of the subject. The
act of questioning how it becomes possible to say these pronouns opens up a vertiginous
interrogation of language. Further, this non-correspondence between subjects and pronouns is
evoked in parallel to discussions of color. Inspired throughout his oeuvre by Lucretius’ remarks
on the independence of a color from its object, color becomes, likes the pronouns, open to
questions of identity. Hocquard places his unexpected treatment of pronouns (“Ne trie pas je et

51 There are numerous examples of this language of daily experience. In the Section 5, we read, “Je
retournerai me baigner quand j’aurai fini ce chapitre/ Tu passes tes nuits au Barbarossa / à observer Carlos en buvant
du café”. Section 13 opens; “Fais griller des sardines/ les étincelles s’éteignent dans la lumière.”

52 For example, Hocquard’s Album de la villa Harris cites Lucretius in its epigraph: “De quelque couleur que
soient imprégnés les corps, ne crois pas qu’elle leur vient de ce que les éléments de leur substance soient teints de
tu”) on the same footing as the conventionally notion that the sea is blue (“Ne trie pas bleu et mer Egée”). After reflecting on the false, yet commonly accepted fact that the sea is blue, we may consider the questioning of “je” and “tu” in a more open way. If breaking the rules of the language is undoubtedly a radical enterprise, Hocquard urges us to reflect on the numerous errors that contained in the grammatically correct use of the language.

Hocquard’s questioning of pronouns emerges in part from his reading of and dialogue with Claude Royet-Journoud. In spite of the divergence discussed above, the two poets share a close literary affinity. In section 43, Hocquard cites Royet-Journoud: “Les pronoms s’échangent / passent de main en main / Cher Claude, cela / t’appartient / mais ce livre n’est à personne”. If pronouns are exchanged, meaning an individual may pass from “I” to “he” or “she” within the context of a conversation, these everyday words are less concrete markers of selfhood than they commonly appear. Therefore, Hocquard cannot so easily assume the role of the authorial “he” who signs the work, even in a heavily autobiographical poem. As he discusses in Ma vie privée, Hocquard contests the institutionalized positions of author and reader in addition to the constitution of the self through language. Indeed, a collaboration with photographer Juliette Valéry, L’année du goujon, is signed “Emmanuel Hocquard ou Juliette Valéry,” problematizing the attribution of the work to either party or to them both. Thus, questioning the status of pronouns ultimately leads Hocquard to larger interrogations of the traditional notions of authorship, readership, and the literary work.

cette couleur; les éléments de la matière n’ont aucune couleur, ni semblable, ni dissemblable à celle des objets.” De rerum natura II 734-738.

53 Valéry remarks on loosening up the role of the signature: “On a même signé un livre (L’année du goujon) avec ou entre nos deux noms – il paraît que ça a posé des problèmes au service du dépôt légal” (Action poétique 151 24).
Questions of citationality and literary influence open up onto a deep engagement with the work of the American poet Michael Palmer. Hocquard worked on the French translation of a section of Palmer’s *Sun*, which became the basis for *Théorie des Tables*. In place of traditional poetic figures of speech, Hocquard adopts rhetorical devices inspired by Palmer:

[Le poème] fait jouer simultanément l’interrogation (les questions n’appellent pas nécessairement de réponse) et la négation (dont j’use ici comme d’une suraffirmation). Saisis par ce double objectif - la photographie est omniprésente dans le poème -, les petits morceaux d’un quotidien ordinaire se voient connectés disons autrement que par la grammaire normative.

These rhetorical tools enable Hocquard to create nonhabitual connections between fragments. Rather than suggesting a preexisting, lost whole, these fragments of everyday life suddenly reveal new connections in the aleatory space of the table. In a process Hocquard likens to photographic development, seemingly agrammatical propositions become clear through their connection to later passages. Paradoxical, yet charged, questions (“Comment dire et ne pas dire je/ comment te dire tu”) work alongside negations to propose alternative structures of meaning.

Poem twenty-one contains a notable sequence of aporic questions and negative affirmations:

Tu dis quelqu’un a écrit des poèmes
Ces poèmes ne sont plus des poèmes
quelqu’un a-t-il cessé d’être quelqu’un ? [...] Ces énoncés ne disent pas je me souviens
ces photographies ne sont pas pour quelqu’un
ces chiffres ne sont pas des noms [...] Règle ta lecture sur ces détails

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The first question of the passage continues to interrogate notions of identity and authorship in light of experimental grammar (“Ces poèmes ne sont plus des poèmes / quelqu'un a-t-il cessé d’être quelqu’un ?”). Recalling the discussion of citation and ownership surrounding Royet-Journoud, this passage plays on the work’s formal innovation. What consequences are there if the poem no longer derives from preexisting forms but from the rhizomatic space of the table? What transformation is there in identity if memory is no longer conceived of linearly but according to an aleatory schema? At the same time as Hocquard’s interrogations tend towards aporias, they may provide a spark of clarification. If Hocquard’s phrases, like the photographs mentioned above, do not derive from memories, it is because they suggest a more active schema of memory outside of the unitary “je”. Accordingly, the reader is instructed to adjust his or her reading according to these techniques of interrogation and negation as one might adjust a camera. Rather than look to preexisting sources to confirm what is presented in the poem, the reader should allow for a sudden emergence of new meaning on the page like the development of a photograph. *Théorie des Tables* departs from a theory of language as representing preexisting components of reality in favor of a provisional, transitory creation of meaning. Hocquard expands the mandate of poetic activity to move towards a more general examination of memory and ordinary language. The next work that will be discussed, *Le commanditaire*, begins by recalling the dismantling of the linguistic markers of identity that are the pronouns. Expanding on *Théorie des Tables’* move beyond the strict domain of poetry, *Le commanditaire* pushes into the domain of documentary journalism.

*Le commanditaire*: Photographic Objectivity and Documentary Poetics
"Le commanditaire" focuses on the crafting of a commissioned book on Bondy-Nord, an economically disadvantaged city in the Parisian suburbs. Identified as “poème” on its cover, this hybrid work incorporates photography from Juliette Valéry, as well as TV stills and images of paintings, to interrogate linguistic and visual regimes of representation. Significantly, Hocquard does not postulate art or esthetic experience as the goal for the work. Instead of producing literature as a self-contained and self-enclosed practice, poetry becomes an investigation of the specific social phenomenon of the banlieue. Yet, by taking the suburbs for his subject, Hocquard is not seeking to orient his text with a specific social intention; this is not politically-engaged writing in the Sartrean sense. Simultaneously opposing the prescribed literary sphere and socially-engaged documentary art, Hocquard’s “poème” interrogates the structures within language and the image that constructs a certain social reality. Hocquard forcefully contests the nature of art or poetry by adopting a negative approach to the representations provided by words and images. This technique aims at stripping away errors in our mental and visual habits. The role of poet shifts to that of a more general investigator of meaning-making, culminating in Hocquard’s concept of the poet as private detective. The opening sequence of "Le commanditaire" dramatizes the opposition between the privé and the traditional artist. In a typical scene from an American film noir, a beautiful woman engages the private detective, Thomas Möbius, in a mission to create a work of art representing the social realities of the French suburbs. Yet, this patron cautions against the radical questioning of everyday language that begun in Théorie des Tables. The type of artwork commissioned on Bondy may be seen as reifying both the work

55 “la manière dont vous vous y êtes pris dans l’affaire de la Théorie des Tables m’inspire les plus vives réserves : votre approche négative du problème et le recours à ces indicateurs que vous appelez les pronoms personnels. Ici, M. Möbius, vous n’aurez pas affaire à des pronoms, mais à des personnes. Et il faudra que ces personnes s’y retrouvent” (“Vénus Tiziano”).

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and the figure of the artist. By strictly distinguishing between “art” and “life,” the work is relegated to a self-contained aesthetic sphere at a remove from more general questions of grammar and representation. Similarly, a privileged status for the artist suggests that this figure possesses prophetic ability, as in Romanticism’s notion of the genius. Far from endorsing this role, the “costume” of private-eye, adopted by the poet in *Le commanditaire*, to use Jean-Marie Gleize’s term, is not that of the inspired artist. Similar to other postures adopted by Hocquard, such as the archeologist and the grammarian, the detective seeks to provide critical insight into errors in the accepted vision of reality rather than work with the conventions of literary and artistic institutions.

Contesting pervasive visions of art dictates a change of gaze. For Hocquard, photography provides an Objectivist alternative to poetic images by acting to capture a vision of reality with minimal aesthetic effects. Hocquard and Valéry privilege a certain type of photography that diminishes style and composition as much as possible (as can be seen, for example, in figure 1). By minimizing aesthetic intention, the photos in *Le commanditaire* aim to simply copy or transcribe reality: "Donc, ces photographies nulles (sans intention esthétique), nous les avons prises tous les deux et nous avons pu travailler à partir de ce degré zéro (reznikoffien) de représentation" (*ma haie* 287). Similar to Reznikoff’s work in books such as *Testimony*, where court testimony is transposed into verse form without any change to its content, images of Bondy-Nord are intended to function like transcriptions of reality (fig. 1).

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56. *Sorties* 40-1.

57. Christophe Hanna highlights this break with the idea of genius, present in the traditional detective: “Chez le romantique Poe, la raison particulière du privé Dupin est représentée comme un trait de génie. Chez Hocquard, en revanche, la raison privée est simplement l’effet d’un très banal ‘malaise grammatical’” (*CCP* 3 34).

58. Photography is a major practice for literalist writers like Denis Roche, who abandoned poetry for photographs.
Unfocused, poorly framed, and underdeveloped photography approach an unmediated vision of the real. Refusing commentary, these photos are meant to provide literal presence that does not open itself up to interpretability. Further, photography in *Le commanditaire* generally does not illustrate the text by providing images corresponding to its subject matter (although there are exceptions) but rather occupies an autonomous role within the work. The intention of Hocquard and Valéry is then to reframe the vision of the *banlieue* through a change of context, where these images of Bondy are transposed into the literary work, rather than attempting to aestheticize the city through the use of poetic images, metaphor, or fine photography.

Following Wittgenstein, Hocquard's private-eye is skeptical of the possibilities of metaphoric language to produce intelligibility. Wittgenstein's philosophy radically questions meaning in figurative language, “se récusant l'idée que puisse exister un ‘sens métaphorique,’ un sens à part, du genre de ceux qu'on investit d'une signification métaphysique ou théologique” (Cometti, “Emmanuel Hocquard et le rhinocéros de Wittgenstein” 671). A metaphor, according to the Greek roots of the word, implies transportation or movement (“to transfer,” “to carry”). Yet, for Wittgenstein, metaphor’s reference to a separate, metaphysical world is ultimately unverifiable. Accordingly, the philosopher (or poet) must turn away from speculations of transcendence and embark in an investigation of everyday language. The project of philosophy and poetry becomes less that of creating an alternative vision of reality than of parsing the flaws in conventional language. In addition to incorporating Wittgenstein’s ideas into poetry, Hocquard transposes his methodology onto photography, taking photos without aesthetic interest in a manner analogous to reorienting philosophical reflection on prosaic language; “22. Le plus pointilleux des observateurs ne voit jamais les choses que telles qu’il les voit, c’est-à-dire telles qu’il a appris à les voir, c’est-à-dire telles que tout le monde les voit, puisque tout le monde a
appris à voir de la même façon” (“C’est Nord qui contient les pleurs”). If everyone sees in a similar way, these images are intended to provoke the unlearning of visual habits. The displacement of images of the inner city opens an interval that allows for certain visual stereotypes to be cleared away.

Fig. 1 ("Vénus Tiziano")
This negative approach to representation begins by creating a photographic dispositif capable of capturing this turn from metaphor towards everyday language (fig. 2). Hocquard begins by targeting the elementary component of language as he did in Théorie des Tables:

25. Fiction non fiction. Comment savoir, puisque ce sont les mêmes mots qui servent à raconter une histoire forgée de toutes pièces et qui servent à s'exprimer dans la vie de tous les jours. Möbius!

26. Surtout les petits mots ordinaires que tout le monde emploie sans y prêter vraiment attention. Elle, toi, je par exemple. Mais avec ces mots, nous sommes au bord du vertige, écrivait George Oppen. (“L’histoire commence à Bondy-Nord”)

As shown earlier, personal pronouns are problematic for Hocquard and the Objectivist poet George Oppen because they imply the fundamental entry of the self and other into language. Yet, the use of these same words in a work of pure fiction implies that they cannot go unquestioned. As in a Mobius strip, where the internal side of the strip reverses in order to occupy the external position, the same words are used in daily life and in an invented story. The reversibility of the Mobius strip provides an alternative to the activity of transportation implied by the metaphor. The private-eye begins his investigation with a figure - a series of photos in a mirror - to convey the interpenetrable nature of the Mobius strip. Implicating the position of the photographer as he or she takes the photos, this figure takes on a form similar to that of a pronominal verb: “18. C’est-à-dire qu’au moment où je te photographie, tu te regardes dans le miroir que tu tiens ; et, sur la photographie que tu as à présent sous les yeux, tu tiens une photographie de toi. / 19. Champ-contrechamps sur la même image. Nous tenons là un dispositif qui n’est pas sans rapport avec un verbe réfléchi” (“Bondy-Nord dans un miroir”). A camera coupled with a mirror simultaneously permits a view of the object and a self-reflexive

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59 As seen here, the work is comprised of a series of numbered statements resembling logical argumentation. There are no page numbers. I will include the title of the subsection of the book after each citation.
mechanism. An alternative to the metaphoric and mimetic registers of language is created.

Hocquard's fiction does not attempt to create an imaginary world analogous to our own but instead to open a zone of interrogation centered on the functioning of representation itself. The
image combined with the space of the reflection reveals the subjective framing choices made by the photographer. The photographic rendition of the personal pronoun joins an interrogation into structures of representation with a questioning of the self. The photographic figure of the personal pronoun allows Hocquard to bring a critical gaze to both his manner of seeing and his use of language.

If the way of seeing Bondy is stereotyped and sterile, a negative approach must be brought to sight. This implies a double process: one must both eliminate clichéd and false images of the city and implicate the position of the viewer. Further, this negative approach also allows for the introduction of new elements into the representation of Bondy: “30. Bondy-Nord est. Mais alors, qu’est-ce que Bondy-Nord n’est pas ? / 31. Bondy-Nord n’est pas une palmeraie. / 32. D’une certaine manière, je viens d’introduire des palmiers à Bondy. / 33. D’un seul coup, d’un seul. Comme dans un rêve ou comme on photographie” (“C’est Nord qui contient les pleurs”). The accompanying images show a nude of the photographer Valéry in a mirror, two old photos of the grove of palm trees Hocquard’s home city of Tangier, and two towels for sale in Bondy featuring images of nudes (fig. 3). For literary creation, the act of naming alone is sufficient to incorporate a new element into the world of the fiction. Merely showing an image of the palm trees adds them to the associations and the semantic field that is attributed to the city. These new elements of the fiction arise from the play of memory of the author, and his own subjective and haphazard vision of Bondy comes forth as he includes images of personal significance within his representation. Hocquard and Valery’s images of Bondy will depict their
Fig. 3 ("C’est Nord qui contient les pleurs")
subjective gaze onto the city, including imaginative experiences alongside photographic neutrality. In this way, Hocquard's objectivism also incorporates memory and the imagination without resorting to metaphor. Referencing memory, the text also states that it is only possible to imagine a grove of palm trees if you have seen one elsewhere. The old photos of Tangier’s palm trees follow this principal by recalling Hocquard's childhood memories in Morocco. They suggest that memories are perceived suddenly like a photograph or a gaze through a camera's lens.

Hocquard works from the premise that the immediate experience of memory takes place in the present not in a domain that is restricted from active thought (that is, the past itself). Gilles Tiberghien cites an interview with Hocquard where the poet elaborates on this notion through a discussion of Lucretius's philosophy:

Il y a dans la théorie des simulacres l’occasion pour moi d’une réflexion sur la mémoire. Évidemment c’est dévié du sens premier où l’emploie Lucrèce. En tout cas, on peut considérer que l’arrivée des souvenirs fonctionnant comme simulacres créé littéralement un autre concept du temps puisque le moment où le simulacre vous tombe dessus c’est du présent pas du passé. Ainsi tout est à plat et ça modifie votre perception, en tout cas votre manière à rendre compte du temps. Vous n’êtes plus dans un système avec trois dimensions temporelles ; ainsi vous pouvez travailler uniquement dans le présent même si vous employez des verbes au passé, vous pouvez mettre tout sur le même plan (81).

The series of four photographs implement this flattening of time through their montage. The old images of Tangiers are seen in conjunction with the recent photo of the nude in the mirror and the beach towels. The framing of the photo series by the two types of nudes also supports this unity of time. In this play of mirroring, the past and the present occupy a common surface, as well as a common temporal realm. The representation of time in language is conceived of in a single dimension, like Lucretius's simulacras falling against an empty backdrop. Thus,
Hocquard's literality implies a radical rethinking of the expression of time in language. Language is deprived of a zone of signification behind words, such as a space to which metaphor can transports them. Words do not refer to a true state of affairs in the world, such as a concretized sphere of the past. To counter the idea of a signifying space behind words, Hocquard privileges the empty spaces that may be perceived in the world, which are likened to the empty space supporting Lucretius's simulacras.  

The critic Francis Cohen describes Hocquard's materialism in conjunction with a reflection on photography: “Tout ce qui se lit dans les livres d’Emmanuel Hocquard dépend d’une possibilité photographique à “possibiliser” les mots, la lecture sera une quasi-sensation, elle n’est pas plus que la réplique d’une vision parce qu’elles ont l’une et l’autre la même origine” (CCP 3 25). This experimental posture conceives of literature from the perspective of photography as though the act of passing one’s eye across the page develops the negative contained in the text. Further, this photographic reading may also be put into conjunction with Lucretian philosophy. In *Le commanditaire*, Hocquard develops a poetic materialism where the succession between lines of type and empty space on the page is presented in analogy to Lucretius’ play of simulacras and void. Words may be seen as arising from a white background not unlike Lucretius's simulacras falling in space. Further, the typographical organization of *Le commanditaire* separates individual propositions to suggest them as isolated simulacras or as utterances. By numbering the sections of text, they are also depicted as self-contained utterances against the backdrop of the white space. Meaning-making is accomplished by encountering these individual units analogous to Lucretian simulacras and developing them as

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60 Cometti *CCP 3* 673.
the reader passes his or her gaze across the page. Yet, as much as Hocquard privileges materialism, he also retains an aleatory aspect to his creation. In *Le Destin des images*, Jacques Rancière cautions against a too radical turn to materialism as an antidote to imaginative images. Writing on photography, thinkers such as Roland Barthes have opposed photography to the mythologizing images surrounding merchandise based on the physical imprint of light on the negative. Rancière critiques this view as an effort by the author of *La Chambre claire* to work against certain excesses perpetuated during his career as a semiotician. For Rancière, Barthes fetishizes the technical process of photographic development over against the visual object produced.\(^{62}\) Hocquard, for his part, foregrounds the material aspects of reading, writing, and photography, while also emphasizing radical indeterminacy at the heart of photographic materialism. Certain kinds of photography may neutrally transcribe reality so as to work against stereotype, while also providing a similarly demythologizing perspective for literature. Yet, instead of holding fast to the physical properties of reading or photographing as impressions on a negative, Hocquard also shifts his perspective to introduce haphazard visions within this strict literalism. He views objectivist photography as replacing preexisting, erroneous visions and thus fostering new, aleatory possibilities for sight. As critic Francis Cohen remarks, photography provides open-ended results: “La photographie (ou l’image) n’a qu’une fonction aléatoire, un développement parmi d’autres” (29). Thus, the images of palm trees discussed earlier provide a sudden imaginative aberration within a series of non-aesthetic images. Derived from childhood memories, these photos offer a similar emotional charge as verbal utterances. In this way, materialism and objectivism offer sudden, unanticipated access to images of deep personal significance even while resisting lyrical effusion.

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\(^{62}\) *Le Destin des images* 17-8.
Among the inspirations for Hocquard’s thoughts on framing in both poetry and photography is the American Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky, who associates literary creation with the act of divination. In the poem “An Era Any Time of Year,” Zukofsky's oracle creates an imaginary rectangle in the sky in the flight path of the birds. If a bird passes into the space of the square by chance, a meeting takes place. However, if no bird passes, no event arises. This is temporary, aleatory frame that is open to a new process of meaning-making via the act of designating a fictional space. Similar to the table, this space creates the possibility of an event that makes no reference to external reality. Yet, even within the framework of divination, restoring spontaneity to sight is less a question of poetic image or hallucination, such as the Rimbalidian vision of a mosque in place a factory, than receptiveness towards unforeseen events. The photographic frame enters into analogy with Zukofsky’s square of divination by dividing space into a zone open to new potentials. What is essential to retain from Zukofsky is less the idea of prophetic vision than the chance dimension of this activity, which is seen in the descriptions of the photographic act. This oracular rectangle is transposed to the view from Valéry's camera lens, as she energetically photographs the highway of Bondy:

Embusquée derrière la fenêtre du onzième étage, Véronique avait pris un camion en chasse dans son viseur. Elle le mitrilla tout le temps qu’il fut dans son champ de vision. Puis le camion disparut derrière les arbres. ‘Celui-là, dit-elle, je ne l’ai pas raté’” (“Alors, j’ai décidé de m’évader”).

The passing trucks, like the oracle's birds, allow for the possibility of a chance encounter. Photography becomes a playful, child-like activity that opens up a series of unforeseen events and captures images outside of the strict intentions of the photographer. The act of machine-
gunning photographs removes the question of framing and the precise arrangements of objects in favor of haphazard images. This description of Véronique also insists on the physical dimension of strafing photographs like firing a gun, emphasizing the materiality of creation like that of reading, as discussed earlier.

Significantly, the new element that enters into the oracular frame may give rise to critical insights. Hocquard poses an alternative method of provoking emotional effects on the reader through connections between utterances. He emphasizes the mysterious dimension of utterances because of their isolated, decontextualized nature and theorizes their relation to emotion. The utterance may be seen as a clue to meaning of profound emotional significance: “Un énoncé serait plutôt cette sorte d’indice dont parle L.J.W. à propos des souvenirs et des rêves : un fragment qui nous impressionne fortement, au point que nous nous mettons en quête d’une explication ou d’un ensemble de connexions” (“Le Billard”). This strong impression is not easily explicated even by a person who feels it to be meaningful, but instead proves to be persistently enigmatic not unlike the sensation surrounding certain memories or dreams. Indeed, the deeper signification of an utterance cannot be restated according to conventional hermeneutical processes. For Hocquard, the utterance, a “caillou presque de non-sens,” puts itself forward like a tautology (“Le Billard”). Entirely self-contained, it compels a search into other elements for its sense. If the utterance in itself is resistant to meaning, revelatory effects are produced through the successful juxtaposition of utterances. Recalling a conversation with Pierre Alferi, Hocquard describes insight into these enigmas by way of an unhabitual meeting or connection. This often occurs in a nonlinear manner, as in the certain shots in a game of billiards:

16. La rencontre de deux énoncés produit de l’émotion.
17. En termes de métier, ce moment d’émotion est le moment où soudain, on voit quelque chose.

18. Même si on ne sait pas encore très bien ce que c’est.

19. Mais il y a des cas où la bande n’est d’aucun secours. Sur le tapis, la bille qui doit toucher les deux autres billes se trouve placée entre elles. Il faut alors recourir au rétro. La bille du milieu doit venir frapper celle qui est devant et revenir toucher celle qui est derrière elle. J’ai vu réussir de superbes rétros (“Le Billard”).

This meeting between elements stimulates emotion as critical clarity into a problem, such as a moment when, “soudain, on voit quelque chose”. Often, this logical elucidation takes the form of the disappearance of a pervasive illusion produced by conventional representations. Thus, as the book concludes, the private-eye suddenly realizes that the project of representing Bondy-Nord is essentially delusory. By accepting the commission to create a representation of Bondy, he necessarily reduces a series of open-ended events to a unitary narrative. What would seem to be an alternative, objectivist vision of the city is also revealed to be fictionalization. The work cannot help but join the conventional narratives that provide an illusory coherency and mastery of the real; “12. J’aurais dû être plus vigilant, oui, quand je me suis lancé sur Bondy-Nord comme un titre. C’est-à-dire comme un journaliste se rue pour bloquer l’événement” (“On dit que ces collines rouges sont vertes”). Any representation of Bondy, whether one intended to illicit pathos or to uplift, is more likely to block the event of meaning being produced than to reorient preconceived notions. The work he has been creating on Bondy suddenly reverses itself like a Mobius strip to reveal itself as highly contingent and ultimately dubious. Thus, the figure of the Mobius strip and that of the “rétro” both convey an emotional revelation like a reversal or turning inside out of language. In a theory of affect centering on logical clarification beyond conventional, linear grammar, Hocquard foregrounds suspicion towards language’s ability to
seize the real. The ultimate realization produced by the private-eye is of the precarious nature of his use of words and images.

Beyond *Le commanditaire*, questions of relationality emerge repeatedly throughout Hocquard’s work, due to his distrust of conventional explanations of cause and effect. Critic Glenn Fetzer remarks on a general preoccupation with connections within Hocquard’s *oeuvre*; “his work signals a relational impetus: whether it be connections within the work, those existing between fragments, between utterances, for example; or connections with the world outside the work, or links with the reader / viewer / spectator” (90). Significantly, these connections result from haphazard, chance processes or tactical reversals like the “rétro”. Much like scattered rocks on a table, connection between utterances comes about through playful and unpredictable arrangement. In this way, he counters the lyrical tradition, which puts forth the transparent expression of emotion through language. The practice of copying and redistributing phrases is often characterized as a jubilatory, child-like activity. Singular utterances meet not through ordered progression, as in discourse, but through successful juxtaposition: “Ces fragments ne s’enchaînent pas mais ils s’attirent pas ‘sympathie’, par une sorte de nécessité ou d’intention ludique et heureuse, par *gai savoir*” (*ma haie* 477). If Hocquard celebrates the moment of joy at a good connection, he also emphasizes the role of conviction and sincerity as guarantors of its authenticity. Sincerity indicates, “une intention intellectuelle et éthique qui exclue aussi bien la complaisance envers soi-même que les effets de séduction vis-à-vis d’autrui” (*ma haie* 241). The construction of larger meaning through connections must be underwritten by a rigorous sense of sincerity by the poet and must resist disingenuous effects; poetic activity is profoundly ethical for Hocquard. Indeed, a deep skepticism of conventional representations restricts
Hocquard from direct emotional appeals, seen as coercion or seduction. Christophe Hanna traces the influence of the Objectivist poets on Hocquard’s theory of affect:

Hocquard cite Charles Reznikoff : « je vois une chose. Elle m’émeut. Je la transcris comme je la vois. Je m’abstiens de tout commentaire. Si j’ai bien décrit l’objet, il y aura bien quelqu’un pour en être ému mais aussi quelqu’un pour dire « mais bon dieu, qu’est-ce que c’est que ça ? » ». Donc l’émotion est avant tout une question de position ou de disposition d’objets (35).

Distant from the expression of interiority, the emotive charge of a work is essentially due to the distribution of objects without an explicit appeal to sentiment. Emotion, produced through the positioning of utterances, is the result of kairos, a successful arrangement at an auspicious moment.

However, in Avant, the 2012 epilogue to the Grammaire de Tanger series, Hocquard reassesses Reznikoff’s theory of Objectivist transcription that he had found so influential. Simple juxtaposition of elements no longer appears sufficient to Hocquard to communicate profound emotion. Taking the example of a moving childhood experience, he grows skeptical of the possibility of communicating its impact to another:

Ce n’est malheureusement pas aussi simple.

Aussi précise et “objectiviste” qu’en soit ma description, la petite turbulence d’air n’a pas la moindre chance d’émouvoir “à son tour quelqu’un.” Je peux rendre compte des circonstances, mais je ne peux pas communiquer ce que j’ai ressenti à ce moment-là.

Il me faut dire qu’il ne s’est pas agi d’une émotion passagère, mais d’un véritable bouleversement. Et cela, aucun mot ne peut le transmettre. (“Une brèche dans le paysage”, unpaginated)

Hocquard questions both the possibilities of Objectivism to create connections and to communicate them to others. Relationality is strongly problematized by the notion that language
may be powerless to attest to transformative experiences. Hocquard’s work from the *Théorie des Tables* (1992) to *Le commanditaire* (1993) to the film (1994) and book (1997) versions of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* and finally *Un Test de solitude* (1998) mark an intensive period of investigation into the nature of making connecting and transmitting these emotion to others. In the interview with Stéphane Baquey cited earlier, Hocquard delineates a shift in his thinking within these years. Where his work on *Théorie des Tables* focused on creating a new grammar of connection, Hocquard becomes increasingly skeptical of the possibility of connections between utterances: “est-il vraiment nécessaire de chercher à tout prix d’opérer des connexions, même autres ?” (*ma haie* 286). The viability of Hocquard’s solutions of discontinuity and the tension inherent in making connections between utterances is at the heart of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* and *Un Test de solitude*, to which I will now turn.

**Hocquard’s Intermedia Dispositifs**

Dissatisfied with the project of operating connections through the table or via Objectivist juxtaposition, Hocquard radicalizes his efforts to convey emotion. In the short text *Les Oranges de Saint Michel*, later included in *ma haie*, Hocquard describes an experience of discontinuity that defies connection. Observing a pile of oranges in a market, the author momentarily fails to make the connection between the fruit and the sign marking their price. Hocquard equates this experience of dumbfounded fascination with Clément Rosset’s *idiotie*, where reality appears in an isolated, simple form. *Idiotie* offers the brute presence of the real outside of relationality, providing, “l’expérience vertigineuse d’une non-relation, accompagnée d’une intense sensation de paix et de liberté” (*ma haie* 398). *Idiotie* finds its expression within Hocquard’s work through
the concept of the tautology. The tautology condenses the process of decontextualization and recontextualization found in the cut-up within a single phrase. When the tautology repeats its initial term a second time, it short-circuits the representational function of language. Instead of depicting external reality through words, the tautology disconnects language from the world and grants it radical independence. If the utterance functions as a floating proposition, unanchored in a specific context, the tautology achieves these qualities without requiring extraction from an external source. Yet, instead of flattening meaning or reducing expression to a dead-end, the tautology is highly adaptable.65 Hocquard characterizes the tautology as an open, welcoming structure, “en perpétuel mouvement” (Les babouches vertes). Fully independent from external systems of reference, the tautology affirms a new production of meaning as it occurs. The tautology corresponds to a state of absorption in the activity at hand. However, this idiotie is readily transferable to new activities, which are similarly invested with rapt attention.

Hocquard’s Un Test de solitude experiments with the potential of the utterance to veer towards the tautology, thereby fully realizing its autonomy. A series of poems devoted to Viviane, a bread seller in the village of Fargues, center on the tautology, “Viviane est Viviane. Seule, évidente” (II). Rather than offering meaning in the conventional sense, the tautology presents an affirmation of the presence of Viviane through repetition. It does not seek to clothe her in secondary commentary, but rather offers the nudity of her solitude, “Seule, évidente”.66

65 Philippe Charron clarifies the expressive capabilities proper to idiotie with the aid of a reading of Nelson Goodman: “La conception de l’idiotie propre à cette attitude n’est pas fondée sur un sentiment de résignation devant la singularité du réel, mais plutôt sur une indifférence vis-à-vis le statut de ce dernier. […] L’idiot ne peut que s’imposer momentanément une règle de fonctionnement propre à l’hétérogénéité du dispositif qu’il développe. Ainsi, l’enjeu du travail d’écriture d’Hocquard et de [poète Jérôme] Mauche devient la capacité que detient une langue de se mettre en action et de tirer des bénéfices de la recontextualisation d’une variété d’apprentissages et d’ainsi offrir diverses ‘manières de faire des mondes’ ” (“La visée tautologique et contradictoire : Capacité langagière chez Emmanuel Hocquard et Jérôme Mauche” 108).

66 The nude is also a central motif in Hocquard’s work from Le Voyage à Reyjkavik to Méditations photographiques sur la présence simple de nudité.
The tautology is frequently likened to photography, particularly that of the nude, with its analogous capacity to present an image outside of a proliferation of language. A similar effect may be extended to language in general without resorting to recopying: “La tautologie remplit tout l’espace du langage. Si / tu regardes n’importe quelle phrase comme une / tautologie, la phrase disparaît. / Alors l’énoncé” (Un Test de solitude XXXII). Resisting explanation or description, a tautological perspective dissolves the grammatical relationship between words. The test of solitude investigates the possibilities for language to be detached from the structures producing interpretability to a point of radical indeterminacy. This is what Hocquard names an “énoncé simple” or the “visée tautologique” of the utterance, a purely literal horizon for language. Exiting the hold of grammar produces language that is in a state of “repos”. The work Méditations photographiques sur la présence simple de nudité establishes a similar state of “repos” induced by the utterance, the nude, and the photograph: “La grammaire définit un espace grammatical. Quand la pensée excède ces limites, la langue se dilate. ‘Ma tête se décolle du fond, mon esprit s’endort’”(85). This state of language accompanies the indistinction between the subject and object, outside of relative positions. The tautology conveys a transformative experience beyond objective description, which may fail to communicate this powerful encounter. Yet, if the utterance gestures towards a moment of non-relation and indeterminacy, indeed a solitude, how can these experiences be conveyed to another?

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67 Significantly, this does not equate to pushing expression towards a dead-end. Philippe Charron cites Gilles Tiberghien: “‘la visée tautologique ne réduit pas le poème à la tautologie [si bien que] le poème est toujours en excès par rapport à elle.’ Viviane est Viviane. Elle a la capacité de produire une multiplicité d’actions (lever les yeux, sourire, dire bonjour) qui ne mène à rien d’autre qu’elles-mêmes (102).”

68 “Une babouche devient jaune.”

69 Méditations photographiques sur la présence simple de nudité 13.
The second section of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik*, “*Le Canale: Synopsis,*” the product of a collaboration between Hocquard and the artist Alexandre Delay, seeks to answer this question through its formal structure. This part of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* is wholly autonomous and is differentiated from the first section by a change in font, a shift in page numbering from Arabic to roman numerals, and the substitution of lush photographs for grainy video stills. Further, where the first section of the book centers on film montage, the central preoccupation is now with vision and photography. As Delay remarks, “Ces deux parties distinctes ne se succèdent pas, l'une est imbriquée, incrustée dans l’autre. Chacune contient des systèmes narratifs et visuels différents” (*Action poétique* 151 33). Thus, the larger, bipartite architecture of the text exemplifies the continual questions of joining utterances, film scenes, or experiences of solitude that are present throughout the work. Further, whereas the first section of the work derives from an exchange of letters between Hocquard and Delay, a first person narrative voice emerges in “*Le Canale: Synopsis.*” Therefore, where the film section of the work centers on relationality, the second part interrogates the subject position. Hocquard seeks to create a *dispositif* that will allow him to transmit an experience of solitude to another, who will also be able to occupy the position of “I”. The “Canale” project entails the creation of a trapezoid of white powder that appears as a square standing upright in the landscape when viewed from a specific point (fig. 4). This white section thus forms a “hole” at the center of the field of vision (or of the photograph), under the condition that the person stands at the precise location designated by Hocquard and Delay. In this way, an “objective” position is created for the first person pronoun. “I” does not refer to the interiority of an author as in formulations of lyricism centered on personal expression. Thus, the “Canale” *dispositif* provides an additional level to Hocquard's reflections on the first person pronoun in *Théorie des Tables*. For Hocquard, any subject (even “I”) must be
in the third person; occupying the subject position of a sentence implies taking on the position of an object within language. He quotes an excerpt of the “Lecture on Ethics” given by Wittgenstein, where the philosopher underlines the importance of assuming a first person role at the end of the conference: “je ne puis qu’entrer en scène comme une personne et dire je.” Yet, Hocquard counters that the act of occupying a physical space as a person on a stage (“entrer en

Fig. 4 (“Le Canale” p. ii)
scène") or a grammatical place within a sentence both result in a shift to the third person. He proposes a revision to Wittgenstein’s remarks: “Mais je tout court, pas je comme une personne qui entre en scène. Parce que je comme une personne qui entre en scène. C’est il” (VII). The site that enables one to view the free standing square offers a subject position free of both schemas of interiority and of the problematic first person pronoun. This position will not be a “je” attributable to a given individual but a “je tout court.”

The “je tout court” is a particular position that may be adopted by anyone who stands at the given location and observes the trapezoid, which appears to rise vertically from this perspective but reveals itself to be flatly painted on the earth from any other angle. This subject position may not be taken up by a third person pronoun because it is based on observation, experiential verification, and anamorphic vision. In this way, the canale offers a mode of resistance to the accepted grammar of both pronoun use and of vision. It is no coincidence that the white square rises directly in the center of the photograph at the location of the vanishing point in classical perspective. This anamorphic image calls habitually ways of seeing into question: “Je te parlais d’une anamorphose comme un regard de désobéissance précise à l’intérieur d’une perspective : d’un point et d’un seul, soudain on voit quelque chose qu’on ne peut pas voir d’un autre point de vue” (VI). From this unique point, the image approaches the self-sufficient tautology. The anamorphic site exits the structures governing grammar, thus serving to create a position outside of subjectivity. The “je tout court” serves as a position of resistance that may be held by any individual who occupies this position of observer.70

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70 In his article “Emmanuel Hocquard : une poésie littérarale,” Stéphane Baquey likens this position to that of Giorgio Agamben's “singularité quelconque”. See Agamben's La communauté qui vient : Théorie de la singularité quelconque.
Destructuring classical perspective as it reconstructs the subject, the “je tout court” provides a subject position that anyone may occupy.

Hocquard has realized a dispositif providing a solitude or a trou by means of an anamorphic gaze. Yet with this isolation achieved, the question of relationality is posed once again. How can this position of resistance be put into relation with other anamorphic structures? The answer to this question comes in the form of a multiplicity of overlapping or imbricated dispositifs. In Un Test de solitude XXXVI, Hocquard evokes, "un film puis un livre dans lequel on a creusé un / canale : le livre dans le livre de voyage, un synopsis ou un trou." In Le Voyage à Reyjkavik, these moments are equated to holes created in a preexisting grammar and the question of relation is posed in the following terms:


If the experience described seems to result from a negative gesture, that of exiting the meaning-making processes used to ensure communication and define the self, how can one solitude connect to another? By asking these questions, Hocquard reassesses his work on connecting autobiographical utterances according to unhabitual or agrammatical logic. Hocquard is now less concerned with creating a new grammar of autobiography and instead turns his attention to joining singular experiences across different regimes of time and space. Significantly, these connections provide not only a link between two isolated trou, they also serve to probe the tempo of a certain site in tandem with that of another location. Un Test de solitude proposes one such dispositif capable of simultaneously capturing space and distance:
Il s’agit de fabriquer de la distance en faisant entendre un morceau d’espace sonore.

Un premier micro, posé sur l’île à fleur d’eau captera les bruits du bassin trois (le jet d’eau) et plus faiblement les bruits lointain de la route.

Un second micro, placé sur la souche, captera les bruits de la route proche et faiblement ceux du bassin trois.

En mixant les deux enregistrements on devrait

Obtenir un espace-distance ou tache blanche (XXVII).

This poem sonically transposes two different sites as the sounds from these different spaces serve to bridge the distance between them. The table expands to a three dimensional space, capturing concurrent events at two locations. The fusion of these two sets of sounds provides a unified perspective that Hocquard names an, “espace-distance ou tache blanche”. Referencing Arakawa and Madeline Gin’s work on blank spaces, the “tache blanche” create vacant zones outside of conventional spatial representation. In cartographic terms, the world map used to contain empty portions indicating unexplored spaces. These empty spaces offer the possibility to adjust the relationships between words and things; “Une tache blanche est une zone de dégagement des possibilités, un lieu neutre nouvellement ouvert à l’action” (Lespiau 54). This new domain introduces an alternative space of representation to that of the map. As opposed to relying on a system of mimesis, where a site on the map indicates a precise location in the real world in proportion to all others, Hocquard puts forth his literary work as an alternative space that may test the distribution of physical space. A reformulation of the map is achieved through the
juxtaposition of noise from two disparate sites; not only is one location brought into contact with another, but sound becomes capable of figuring space. In this way, the “tache blanche” not only erases the coordinates of the map, it also provides an alternative measure or a new system of quantification.

Hocquard expands this concept of space-distance in the next group of poems in *Un Test de solitude*. In the next poem, XXVIII, the two parts of the film version of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* are described as obeying a similar logic of superposition. The two central portions of the film are drawn together across different regimes of time and space. In a similar vein, poem XXIX follows the poetic technique of the fold-in, where two pages are folded in half vertically and combined to produce a new series of lines uniting the two works. In this way, earlier, recognizable moments of the work are combined into a single poem. The poem opens with the following lines: “Octobre. Le retour de l’angle mort. Son nom est / sous les yeux visages Je soumettrai l’inattendu et / Viviane est Viviane. Seules mathématiques. La / mais comment faire additionner des pains aucuns.” Locating the fold at the center of the poetic line radicalizes the caesura of the alexandrine to unite not two halves of the verse, but two independent texts. Thus, this fold-in poem takes up the work’s larger question of measure. The fold-in provides an experimental system of measure in line with the search for equivalencies between incommensurable or unknown quantities. Poetry becomes a question of relaying “taches blanches,” which, by their nature, clear away conventional measurement. Poem VIII inscribes

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71 “V est V / Le film sera en deux parties. / La seconde partie est la même que la première. / Un pli d'espace et de temps” (*Un Test de solitude* XXVIII)

72 The poem combines earlier poems, such as poem II and the unnumbered poem "Dimanche 16 novembre," with slight deviations.
this testing of alternative systems of measure within the work's larger project of searching for new dispositifs:

Viviane, il y a eu le canale et il y a la souche / brûlée. / Entre les deux, il y a trente pas, dix-sept charmes / et huit saisons écoulées. / Quelle opération, mathématique ou logique, peut / compter, à la fois, en mètres, en arbres et en / années ? […] Ici pourtant existe une intention, liée à un projet / de film – la suite du voyage – où il s'agira de passer du canale à la souche brûlée (Un Test de solitude VIII).

Hocquard puts forth the possibility to join together sites of multiple land art projects as revelatory of a poetic intention governing his work. Seeking to quantify or qualify these experimental projects according to some common measure means to probe what poet Anne-Marie Albiach calls an “énigme” and what Hocquard names a “secret.”73 The text articulates itself around the search for an operation, be it mathematical, logical, poetic, or artistic, capable of placing independent, self-contained enigmas into common relation. Thus, Hocquard’s poetic dispositifs not only investigate the order governing common systems of representation, but expand their inquiry toward far more obscure experiences. By proposing an experimental distribution of time, space, or perception, these dispositifs explore events that evade ready representation or that may only manifest themselves on the margins of consciousness.

This test of different relationships between time and space continues in Le Voyage à Reyjkavik : Chronicle, with an emphasis on memory. Hocquard's reflections on time and space logically culminate in this film project, which meditates on the video camera's capacity to track time alongside a movement through space. In his article, “Tu vois? Anamorphic Writing in Emmanuel Hocquard’s ‘Le Canale : Synopsis,’” James Petterson remarks on the notion of the “chronicle”:

73  ma haie 368.
In other words, Hocquard seeks to "fabriquer cet espace [ce qui] concerne aussi le temps. Le temps que tu mets à traverser cet espace. Quelle sorte de mémoire est associée à ce temps ou à ce tempo ? Ça, est-ce que ça peut être montré ?" (VR 18). The fabrication of this space is not for the sake of representing some thing - that - within it, but of communicating, chronicling and perhaps offering a synopsis of how, with which apparatus or "dispositif", and with which tempo this space is created, perceived or created through perception (133-4).

Hocquard's preoccupation shifts from operating connections to constructing a dispositif that allows a space-time to be captured, measured, or chronicled. Far from seeking a common denominator between past and present, chronicling the past is accomplished by probing different modalities of perception. The earlier activity of freeing memories for open interactivity now becomes a question of rendering the characteristic tempo of a particular memory. While Hocquard doesn't explicitly associate this activity with meter, this construction of tempo suggests a rethinking of poetic rhythm. No longer prescribed by poetic form, rhythm grasps a specific measure in connection to memory. In keeping with the earlier discussion of the flattening of the temporal spheres of past, present, and future, this project does not seek to evoke the past in the present, but to seize a rhythm that corresponds to a certain mental state. Thus, rhythm becomes of question of creating or capturing the time signature of a specific state of mind as it accompanies a memory. Hocquard project is then to seek out the specific rhythm that may allow a space-time to be figured in art or produced through perception. Hocquard expands traditional poetic concepts beyond the conventional scope of literary activity. Approaching questions of rhythm in terms of space-time calls for a multimedia poetic practice that goes beyond the sole means of the book. Indeed, Hocquard transposes this work on time-distance across multiple structures and technologies, from the space of the page (Un Test de Solitude XXIX), to land art and photography (the “canale” and the other basins that Hocquard discusses throughout Un Test de Solitude), to audio recording and the domain of sound art (Un Test de Solitude XXVII), and...
finally to video and the book in *Le Voyage à Reykjavik*. The following section will continue the discussion of this last work in light of Hocquard's multimedia experimentation. I will focus on the use of video montage to counter conventional film narration.

*Le Voyage à Reykjavik: Montage and the Friend*

*Le Voyage à Reykjavik: Chronique*, the product of a collaboration between Emmanuel Hocquard and the artist Alexandre Delay, took the form of a video (1994), followed by a book (1997), where the medium of video is analyzed to reveal the creation of film grammar through montage. Compared to the organizational role of perspective in painting, montage creates an effect of continuity for a series of individual images; thus, both classical perspective and film montage create an illusion of continuity.\(^74\) Just as “*Le Canale: Synopsis*” substitutes a blank space for the vanishing point of the classical art, *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* isolates film scene to break up the grammar of an overarching narrative. Hocquard equates linear film narration with the introduction of a target in the dominant mass media system. A continuous series orients an audience or a market in a particular direction:

C’était le temps où les artistes faisaient de l’art et les journalistes-critiques de la communication. *Communiquer diffuser*. L’alternative, je l’appellerai pour l’instant : *circular*. La circulation à la place de la communication. La communication induit un but, la fameuse “cible” ; la circulation, elle, n’est qu’un mouvement.

*Circular pour* voir autre chose (80).
If film montage, classical perspective in painting, and realist fictional structures all follow linear narrative structures to push the story from its commencement to its denouement, circulation is open-ended questioning of the construction of the work itself. Circulating or chronicling, as the work is subtitled (chronique), suggest an experimental attitude towards video production. The artistic act chronicles film syntax by making montage the central object of the work in place of a plot. In a similar way as Un Test de solitude XXVII seeks to create and track distance (“fabriquer de la distance”), Le Voyage à Reykjavik orients itself around the movement of video. Interrogating film movement takes on an ethical role in the era of mass media public communication. Reminiscent of Godard’s remarks on the traveling shot, the act of circulating within a film proposes an alternative ethics. The goal of arranging content is no longer to correspond to a prescribed logic (and far less to the logic of the marketplace), but rather to move for the purpose of seeing differently. The ethical value of representation consists in questioning aesthetic structures as they serve over-arching schema of communication and diffusion of content.

The ethical value of the free circulation of image and sound in video turns on the breakdown of filmed sequences into framed shots linked together by montage. This question of framing and joining together parts of the film becomes the central preoccupation of the work in a manner reminiscent with Hocquard’s general preoccupation with connections. Following the logic of the list elaborated throughout his work, frames are likened to utterances, distributed one after the other without causal connection. Reconceptualizing sequences of film as lists makes each element autonomous, thus undoing standard film chronology. If the genre of the “chronicle” unfolds like a list, its scenes resist developing into a greater narrative: “Tous les éléments de la liste sont contemporains les uns des autres. Pas d’enchaînement, comme dans les
phrases or les vers, mais une juxtaposition des donnés” (*Action poétique* 151 40). This is then a radical questioning of video and cinema, which typically function by advancing over time. Instead, Hocquard and Delay's work may be viewed as a juxtaposition of scenes occupying a common space-time. Whether an element is added or removed, for example in the passage from film to book, makes little difference as there is no coherent whole to be (re)constituted.75

Further, working in the medium of video also allows Hocquard and Delay to mark their artistic independence in a similar manner to Godard. Video, as opposed to cinema, may be inexpensively produced and technically mastered by the artists themselves. Critic Dominique Rabaté identifies this independent production with the “mét hode Robinson” : “un peu à la façon du Robinson d’Olivier Cadiot. La « méthode Robinson » consiste donc à fabriquer des images, des énoncés, en retardant le moment de l’entrée dans le circuit médiatique. Dans cette perspective, il est nécessaire de créer des structures de production, à la fois personnelles et légères” (103).76 Like Godard, who also worked on creating alternative production structures, Hocquard and Delay use video to win their independence from the mass media system. Their self-reliance in turn allows them to better question the organization of cinematic art. Further, the medium of video provides a possibility for the writer and painter to displace their artistic expertise, enabling an approach to creation that is neither wholly that of a professional nor that of an amateur:

Nous devrions donc penser et fabriquer notre vidéo comme le peintre et l’écrivain que nous sommes font leur peinture et leur écriture. Mais *en vidéo*. Ce qui nous laisse toute

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75 Speaking of the book adaption of the film, Delay comments, “Cette bande d’images, cette liste, pourrait-on dire, ne respecte pas la chronologie du film et n’est pas non plus un prélèvement illustratif de quelque séquence” (*Action poétique* 151 33).

76 See also “la méthode Robinson” in *ma haie* 484.
liberté de faire comme on sait et comme on ne sait pas, les deux à la fois” (Voyage à Reykjavik 11).

Working outside of their areas of expertise allows Hocquard and Delay to incorporate new operating procedures into their work: first through experimentation with the new medium of video, and secondly, by allowing video techniques to inform their original artistic practice in the book version of the work. In a manner analogous to his work with photography, land art, or the roman photo in another work, Allo, Freddy ?, Hocquard seeks to push his writing towards different art forms so as to expand the bounds of poetic activity. These cross-medium creations mark a prolongation of Hocquard’s investigations beyond the genre of poetry towards general language use and its grammar, finally incorporating syntactic structures from other art forms within his work.

Keeping with their intention of working between familiar and unfamiliar procedures, Hocquard and Delay incorporate cinematic techniques into their project in several unorthodox ways. Whereas most films take sequential progression as a starting point, Hocquard and Delay provide an alternative structure based on two criteria: establish critical distance from narrative by emphasizing the autonomy of individual scenes, while also reflecting on how these scenes may be joined together. The conjunction between various scenes is reimagined according to the logic of the list, in which linear progression from a beginning to an end point is deemphasized in favor of freeform circulation. Yet, the raw material for these scenes originates not only in film footage, but also in other media, notably in letters exchanged between the two authors. The film implements a process of intermedia montage as various excerpts of letters enter into the film alongside images. If passages from a letter prove apt to for superimposition within the film, this is because elements from various art forms have the capacity to bleed into other medium:
Je filmais encore en écoutant la radio (pour avoir un peu de son) lorsque soudain le jardinière de France-Inter dit quelque chose qui s’intercale dans la lettre, au même niveau sonore que ma voix lisant ta lettre ; le même aléatoire dans le montage-son que le mouvement des voitures dans le plan fixe. Là, tu fais un bond en avant pour ne pas tomber dans le trou. C’est une prise d’appui sur un trou. C’est une réponse possible aux questions que tu poses. Je crois que le discontinu est fondé sur des trous (ou sur un trou). Si t’es pas malin, tu tombes dedans ; si tu l’es, tu *traverses* (57).

Even faced with the incommensurability of each element, different media may suddenly be brought into relation through a well-timed leap. “Traverser” in this context expands the notion of dialogue and the exchange of the letters to an exchange between the France-Inter radio program and a letter or a certain parallel movement in the soundtrack and a sequence of moving cars. Thus, intermedia artmaking follows Hocquard’s general preoccupation with relationality. The verb “s’intercaler” suggests juxtaposition of elements from one medium into another like that of physical bodies. Formally, the interaction between one form and another can be thought of as obeying a logic similar to that of early cinematic editing, where one medium is spliced into another not unlike two sequences of a film reel being cut and pasted together.

Hocquard and Delay’s reflections on film and photographic montage build on this concept of inserting a foreign element into a series. The images featured in the book version of the work provide a particularly clear example of this work on montage, illustrative of the notion of crossing (*traversée*). Video stills accompanying this portion of the text use the image of cars in a tunnel to unite two series of photos across the fold of the page. The passage operated between two series of video stills takes the reader from images of the sunken blockhouse (35-7) - evoking a hole in the representation – to nudes of the model, Sabine (49-57); thus, the vehicles, the tunnel, as well as the fold all reinforce the idea of passage from one element to another. While maintaining the essential discontinuity between various sections of the film, each of these two series also evokes a certain, complementary aspect of Hocquard’s concept of the utterance.
Fig. 5 (Le Voyage 47-49; 52)
Swallowed beneath the waves, the ruins of the blockhouse functions as a negative space like the terche blanche. This physical void evokes the liberating rupture that the utterance operates within conventional grammar. This moment of space-clearing is then connected to the second series of images on a page showing a half image of the blockhouse and one half of the tunnel (47) (fig. 5). Notably, the two images appear side by side on a single page rather than across the fold of the double page, thereby attesting to the act of montage uniting them. Hocquard and Delay are stressing the physical relationality between these two stills on a single surface, whereas most of the other images have an entire page devoted to them. Further, the still of the approaching car on the following page acts to transport the reader to a series of nudes taken of Sabine. As elaborated in Méditations photographiques sur l'idée simple de nudité, Hocquard views the nude as repositioning the viewer outside of himself as he becomes a pure gaze. The photo of the nude functions in an analogous manner, cutting short the proliferation of language through an immediate, insistent presence: “La nudité est agrammaticale. Toute phrase répond à une interrogation, formulée ou non. Dire de la nudité qu’elle est affirmation, c’est couper court à la tentation d’un discours à son propos. ‘Oui’ est un interrupteur du processus grammatical” (Méditations photographiques sur l'idée simple de nudité 27). The interruption of grammatical processes produces pure potentiality in the form of an affirmation outside of flows of communication and information. Thus, the nude acts similarly to the tautology to disrupt continuity and induce a state of pure receptivity. Further, Hocquard connects the book’s images to the general preoccupation of the work with chronicling time and distance. Two images of Sabine, a grainy film still of her face and a crisp nude photo of her from behind, are juxtaposed with the following caption: “(Ici le pli sépare ces deux photos de 7 ans et de 1 500 km.)” (68) (fig. 6). The fold of the page allows for a crossing of time and space outside of linear
progression, again suggestive of a process of montage. This leap is further stressed as the model’s position reverses from front to back and the frame shifts from a close-up of her face to a full body shot. Further, the activity of chronicling invests the relations between film and

Figure 6 (Le Voyage 68 - 9)
photographic images through a leap across the double page with the different size and resolution of the two images emphasizing their different media.

In addition to its importance for intermedia works based on relationality, the form of the letter holds significance for the work as much of the text of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* originated in letters exchanged between Hocquard and Delay. It is the form of the *lettre d’ami* that allows the film to take a certain intonation and to shift from questions of content to ask how the content may be shown. Jean-Luc Godard’s short film *Lettre à Freddy Buache* is influential in this respect. As Godard remarks in the film’s narration, he displaces the initial order for a film on the city of Lausanne for its 500 anniversary to a film by an individual director.\(^{77}\) It is complicity and the ability to share in an act of disobedience that is provided by the friend, in this case the director of the *Cinémathèque Suisse*, Buache, that allows this film to be created. The letter insists on a specific kind of communication that assures not only a mode of reception based on the relationship between two friends, but also seeks to extend this rapport to the audience at large.

This exchange of letters is represented in the film version of *Le Voyage à Reykjavik* in a scene where Delay is shown on a television screen and Hocquard, viewing his friend’s image, repeats his words aloud. This process of repeating the letter performs literality.\(^{78}\) Echoing the words of the letter serves to produce a copy of the initial words outside of their original context. The repetition on the video emphasizes a process of decontextualization to suggest that the viewer take these statements as detached, floating utterances. Hocquard affirms that the utterance opens up meaning to multiple possibilities by extracting words from the network of background

\(^{77}\) *ma haie* 444.

\(^{78}\) In his article “Littéralité et création cinématographique,” Vincent Bonnet identifies a similar procedure in Godard’s film, where the filmmaker repeats and suspends his narration of the film, 4-5.
information that grounds meaning. Yet, thinking on the letter, Hocquard insists ever the more on the importance of the addressee in grounding meaning, providing the intonation and intention that he qualifies as the true stabilizers of sense. Reformulating Marshall McLuhan’s maxim cited at the beginning of this chapter, Hocquard puts forth that “le message c’est le destinataire” (*ma haie* 417). The intimacy of the address to a friend functions like the medium for McLuhan, allowing a phrase to take on a particular tone and thus directing its interpretation. Reading, writing, and filming are oriented by the address to Buache for Godard, or Delay for Hocquard (and vice versa). The relationship between Delay and Hocquard allows them to bypass conventional narrative so as to focus on montage, chronicling, and crossing from one medium to another. Without the context of a relationship, literature vacillates into a medium destined to produce identical, institutionalized effects: “De même que la télévision ne s’adresse pas à des gens mais à des téléspectateurs, la machine littéraire ne s’adresse qu’à ses lecteurs. Le lecteur est une pièce de la machine. Une machine qui tourne sur elle-même et pour elle-même” (*ma haie* 225). Hocquard’s critique is that literature often functions merely to reproduce the positions of reader and writer, which in turn supersedes the particular character of any given literary work. Literature is first and foremost produces an instance of its own orthodoxies. To counter this ossification, the goal of writing becomes to create the literary object as a “tache blanche,” empty spaces for the production of new meaning outside of these fixed roles. As described above, these spots emerge by unraveling conventional structures of meaning-making through a logical analysis of their grammars. Since the literary institution, like the mass media, appropriates the content of artwork, the discovery of new creative space must be accompanied by a shift to an intimate addressee:

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79 Throughout *Théorie des Tables*, Hocquard frequently addresses friends and collaborators as well.
Ainsi, je crois : tout “acte de création”, dans son principe, est une “tache blanche.” Une production d’espace, la consolidation d’une solitude. Mais dès que tu injectes ton acte de création dans le circuit de la grande consommation-communication, le maquillage vire, ça se retourne et ça tombe en poussière […] Aucun message n’est assez fort pour faire sauter le réseau. C’est le réseau qui se nourrit et se renforce de ton message. D’où il ressort qu’une “tache blanche”, ça n’existerait pas comme objet, mais comme secret (c’est-à-dire, dit Lola, ce qu’on ne dit qu’à une seule personne à la fois) (ma haie 419).

There is a double process of withdrawal that occurs: writing must extract language from routinized use at the same time as its creator must refuse to occupy the position of author addressing a literary audience. Writing as telling a secret shifts the address to a unique, intimate recipient so as to preserve idiosyncratic creation. Hocquard’s literary project seeks to prevent the work from absorption into, “le circuit de la grande consommation-communication” in favor of an “intention de pauvreté,” by joining the dissolution of conventional meaning to a reduced, highly personal sphere of communication (ma haie 233).

Yet, Hocquard wishes to expand the address to a friend beyond the sphere of his own friends and colleagues. If the recipient of his letters is often a real person, such as Delay, Hocquard also accounts for the possibility of creating friends through the production of the work itself: “J’aimerais que notre vidéo s’adresse à des amis. Des amis qui n’existent pas encore forcément. Ça veut dire que notre vidéo devra inventer ceux qui la regarderont” (Voyage 12). As Stéphane Baquey underlines, this inversion of the role of the addressee in orienting the work to, instead, being produced by the work itself is akin to the functioning of the Mobius strip:

Le problème se pose donc du destinataire du livre. Si celui-ci doit être un ami, la réponse de Hocquard est que cette amitié est à inventer par le livre lui-même. Nous retrouvons ici l’anneau de Möbius. Le livre est l’élaboration d’un dispositif où s’indifférencient les surfaces, où le ‘je’ ne renvoie ni à une vie privée qui reste inaccessible pour les lecteurs, ni à la personne grammaticale mais à ce qui serait le ‘je tout court.’ (“Emmanuel Hocquard, l’écrivain public”)

Hocquard rejects both the identification produced by the illusory intimacy of autofiction and the grammatical pronoun “I” that easily vacillates to a “he” or “she.” In their place, Hocquard
privileges the alternative pronoun that is the “je tout court.” This “je tout court” is the addressee of the work and, following the logic of the Mobius strip, is invented by the dispositif used within the text. The work can be seen as occupying a space of undifferentiated or overlapping surfaces, where the friend may determine the content of the work, yet also be created by the text itself. Therefore, the project of evading literary conventions and their institutionalizing affects proceeds not only by addressing existing friends but also by using the communication network of literature to produce an alternative marker of identification. The “je tout court” seeks to overlap the positions of creator and addressee by producing a structure like the “canale” that is occupied by the narrator, yet remains open to all. Though a process of relational leaps across folds, in the page but also in the various media employed in the work, the addressee becomes the medium because he or she is produced by the work while simultaneously anchoring its dispositif.

In his later poetry, Emmanuel Hocquard departs from the postures of impossibility and lack characterizing negative modernity through an Objectivist-inspired appropriation and rearrangement of ordinary language. His literary project differentiates itself from purely negative notions by privileging logical elucidation and by engaging a generalized investigation into language beyond the field of literature. Significantly, he accords a positive, jubilant character both to solitary, tautological expression and to connections to other singular moments. Differing from a fragment that posits a rupture with the plenitude of meaning, an utterance concentrates meaning in itself so as to elude standard explanation and commentary. The utterance is in line with a zero degree of representation that is at the heart of literality. Yet, by questioning the powers of Objectivist transcription to convey profound emotion in his later work, Hocquard rethinks his concept of the connection. Instead of facilitating connections, deep experience is seen as producing a solitude. Yet, significantly, it is from within this radical
poverty bordering on idiotie, that joy, “repos,” and playful indeterminacy emerge (ma haie 372). Further, Hocquard pushes beyond Objectivist statement through a series of innovative dispositifs. In these structures, Hocquard unites disparate time-space regimes as a means of questioning experiential enigmas. Hocquard aims to make solitary, tautological moments communicate across different regimes of tempo and space-time so as to probe memory. In this way, the transformative encounters that necessarily arise in solitude from other experiences are not connected together so much as they are made to overlap with one another. Hocquard’s poet-grammarian moves through a series of encounters that call for a rapid and free adaptation of poetic practice. His task is to clear away the dominating messages of mass media culture in favor of an active, improvisational use of language in line with idiotie. While solitude implies breaking out of existing grammatical structures, Hocquard does not see this as a purely negative activity. Instead, the poet-grammarian practices joyful entropy. He adapts his practices across a wide range of environments that require an open-ended and experimental reorganization of systems of representation.
CHAPTER II

Jean-Marie Gleize and the Site of the Enigma

Jean-Marie Gleize foregrounds opacity, obscurity, unfigurability and unknowing throughout his writing. Gleize follows in the footsteps of poets or anti-poets, such as Francis Ponge and Denis Roche, who sought to oppose the genre of poetry from within or to seek alternative artistic practices. Similarly, one of Gleize’s primary concerns is placing contemporary poetry into new experimental contexts through the act of displacing its genre boundaries. A discussion of site, in both the sense of the locations depicted within his texts as well as the place of the poetic work itself, is revelatory of Gleize’s poetics of obscurity. Indeed, Gleize himself has addressed the question of location in an article, “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs,” which appeared in the collective volume Lieux Propices: L’Enonciation des lieux/ Le lieu de l’énonciation dans les contexts francophones interculturels and was reprinted in his volume of essays, Sorties. Gleize characterizes these sites by their mobile, improvised nature, contrasting them with the Heideggerian project of using poetic language to inhabit a place over a duration. With concern to the question of genre, Gleize proposes a twofold reevaluation of the poetic oeuvre, first by affirming an exit outside of traditional poetic questions, such as those of verse, meter, and the lyric subject, and secondly by conceiving of his works as a series of interconnected books. His most ambitious project has been a cycle of books beginning with 1990’s Léman and numbering some seven volumes to date. Gleize inscribes each of these works within a series of books that he names Simplifications.80 The full cycle includes Léman (1990), Le Principe de nudité intégrale (1995), Les Chiens noirs de la prose, (1999), Néon (2004), Film

à venir (2007), Tanac, un acte préparatoire (2011), and Le Livre des cabanes (2015). Each work incorporates scenes and motifs that are revisited throughout the other books, thereby establishing a larger unity within the interconnected Simplifications cycle. As the title suggest, the cycle manifests a tendency toward schematization and neutralization within a series of nonlinear narratives. These works replays several scenes over and again in the goal of rendering a minimalist version of them, thus emphasizing their abstract, opaque quality. In keeping with the overlapping chronologies of Jean-Marie Gleize's literary cycle, I will freely juxtapose passages from the various books whenever relevant to my discussion of his places and spaces. While each book privileges certain themes, taking this liberty to switch between the works remains in line with the interconnected, multilinear nature of the cycle.

Within the Simplifications texts, Gleize looks towards procedures originating in other arts to inform his works. Several critics, such as Jean-Jacques Thomas and Luigi Magno, have written on the interdisciplinary character of Gleize’s writing, specifically highlighting his use of the concept of installation from the visual arts. Building on these discussions, this chapter will discuss Gleize's interest in film, photography, and installation art. Significantly, since the publication of “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs” in 2005, the political elements present throughout Gleize’s oeuvre have moved to the forefront of his writing. Tarnac, un acte préparatoire, was written in response to the Tarnac affair, in which the anticapitalist writer and activist Julien Coupat was arrested in a controversial application of new French anti-terrorism laws on November 11, 2008. The trial of Coupat, along with eight other associates, galvanized

81 See the chapter “Join to See This Fantasy,” in Sorties.

the intellectual public, who interpreted the police action as targeting his politics rather than criminal acts. Indeed, the accusations of the court did not only bear on the initial charges of sabotaging a TGV line (which was later claimed by a German group) but also on his activities within a commune at Tarnac and his presumed collaboration on the book *L'insurrection qui vient* and the review *Tiquun*. These anonymous works, written in response to the 2005 suburban riots that followed the deaths of teenagers Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré in Clichy-sous-Bois, propose a new revolutionary politics. In operation as these works were published, the Tarnac commune sought to put these ideas into practice in the form of a self-governing entity. Gleize, coincidentally a native of the village of Tarnac, meditates on the political potential of provisional, self-governed spaces, like that of the Tarnac commune. The slogan, “Il faut construire des cabanes,” Gleize’s injunction in favor of the creation of autonomous, self-governed zones like those of the commune indicates a central premise of *Le Livre des cabanes*. Thus, in Gleize's later writings, space becomes increasingly politically charged both as the site of literary activity and with respect to real world action.

**Opacity and the Site of the Poetic Work**

In Jean-Marie Gleize's writing, the importance of place resides both in the specificity of a given site, as well as the quotient of opacity it affords. A place provides both an indexical marker of lived experience and a site of contact with reality, understood fundamentally in negative terms. Throughout the cycle, Gleize emphasizes the essential unfigurability of the real, privileging simplification, reduction, and minimalism as means to approach that which goes beyond language and image. By unraveling complexity, erasing or pulverizing secondary
meaning, Gleize seeks to initiate a movement towards simple reality, unclothed by metaphoric language. In this way, the value of a given site resides in how its specificity may be leveraged to probe reality. Indexicality serves then to measure certain enigmatic experiences that cannot otherwise be rendered in language. A location such as Lake Geneva (Lac Léman), for which the first book in this sequence is named, acts as both a marker for certain historic experiences and also as an entrance point towards experiences of the real. Lake Geneva as figure is subjected to a process of schematization, as it is reduced to its simplest form:

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This extreme reduction of the lake’s geophysical features to a single point is complemented by the lake’s capacity to erase images. Verbal and visual images are absorbed and destroyed within the lake’s single, concentrated point, which in turn gestures towards the invisible and unfigurable. In so doing, the lake enacts an iconoclastic function, undoing the images that cloth the real. Throughout the works, the lake becomes a mobile site, transposed to other locations, such as Lake Wuhan in China, Silver Lake in Vermont, the Lake of Tunis and others. For Gleize, one location may be transposed onto another through a shared capacity to breakdown images and lead to bare reality.

Complementing this use of repetition within a multilinear narration, Gleize evokes the simplified lake-point as a means of passage or an access point. The lake, then, also evokes other minimalist figures featured in the cycle, such as a single strip of neon located in Le Corbusier’s Saint-Marie de la Tourette Convent, which becomes the primary motif of Néon. In Néon, the minimalist tube of light evokes a scriptural character drawn as a single line, suggestive of a
fragment of an ideogram, as Gleize himself remarks. Léman also begins by evoking light: “Léman coule en moi comme de la lumière” (Léman 13). The text suggests a paradoxical correspondence between the dark water of the lake’s depths and a source of light. Reading these two works together, a complex relationship emerges between darkness and light, expression and indecipherability, and the passage from one figure to another. The act of writing implies engagement with these paradoxes, both as the lake’s inner source and the minimal typographic form. In this way, one figure gives onto another in a process joining simplification and repetition with transformation, even transfiguration, of one substance to another. This constant process of conversion or becoming, both words employed frequently by Gleize, informs his conception of the poetic act. Undertaking writing is to embark on an open-ended activity where a figure may transform to evoke another substance, or alternatively, move towards schematization and minimization.

Gleize’s works enact a double movement of inquiry: documenting, archiving, or recording at the same time as simplifying and reducing. Gleize evokes, “un travail pratique d’enquête à partir d'un sentiment d'énigme” (Sorties 387). The enigma, like that expressed in the figure of the lake, then calls for an investigation engaging a series of actions over time. This process works by reiteration, where certain motifs are continually updated in new versions. For example, documentation of certain historical episodes, such as Byron and Shelley’s voyage around Lake Geneva are discussed in Léman alongside short excerpts from the authors’ letters and poems. These events are then reprised by a discussion of Shelley’s death by drowning and the recovery of his bloated body several days later. Like the voyage around a body of water or the discovery of the poet’s body, the description of these events circle around circumstances

83 Sorties 385.
whose meaning is inaccessible. In the third book of the series, *Les Chiens noirs de la prose*, a transcription of a newspaper article describes an alternative scenario of the recovery of Shelley’s calcified heart after his cremation. Yet other versions of the poet’s death are discussed throughout the work as though Gleize turns around an event that can be neither fully understood nor historicized. The enigma of Shelley’s death is documented through a series of reiterations of the circumstances surrounding the episode, not unlike an investigation of a private detective. Gleize, in this respect, follows a certain role for the poet elaborated by Emmanuel Hocquard, where investigatory procedures eventually gesture towards the limits of language.

In another sequence of the narrative, Gleize evokes Lamartine’s preoccupation with the figure of the lake in both his poetry and his novel *Raphaël*. Rather than the elegiac quality of this figure, what interests Gleize is Lamartine’s continual return to the site of the lake and the act of simplifying the title of his poems – from “Le Lac du Bourget” to “Le Lac de B.” to “Le Lac” – before ultimately converting the work to prose in *Raphaël*. Gleize’s interest in processes of lessening and subtraction find a historic antecedent in Lamartine’s work according to two characteristics. First, Gleize sees the progression towards prose in Lamartine’s work as revelatory of a turn from poetry to prose, which anticipates the dissolution of verse in the later part of the 19th century and the 20th century. Secondly, the movement of simplification and reduction present in this series of titles evokes events that cannot be easily captured, and that Lamartine viewed as surpassing the texts that attempt to evoke them. The resulting works are viewed as a series of actions that never capture the poem in a final, closed state, as though the written poem is superseded by occurrences external to it. Similarly, Gleize views his own

84 *Sorties* 327-330.

work not as poems collected within a book, but as a series of actions or verbal installations that cannot be reduced to the characters on the page. Poetic activity operates through the “création d’un environnement (site) avec action: le texte témoigne de ou rend compte d’une suite de postures, gestes, événements, scènes expérimentales […]” (Sorties 325). The place of the poetic work cannot be assured through institutional forms and inherited procedures; instead, a major part of the poetic work is devoted to demarcating the space of the poem. Critic Christophe Wall-Romana identifies Lamartine’s importance in informing Gleize's larger conception of the poetic work:

This, for Gleize, signals the major innovation, ‘l'installation de la poésie dans son propre lieu’ (PF 46), which is neither the text nor the page, the imagination, history or the real, but ultimately the interferences between them, which produce the poem as ‘toujours travaillé par [ses] bords’ (PF 304–05), like a lake. This reframing of poetry as a relational entity/event that exceeds the textual artefacts it leaves behind as traces Gleize calls ‘un dispositif poétique’ (PF 11) (Wall-Romana,“Is ‘Postpoetry’ Still Poetry? Jean-Marie Gleize's Dispositif-Writing,” 444).

It is this larger conception of poetic activity beyond the textual object itself, seen in the process of investigating, documenting, and reiterating, that proves to be one of the major preoccupation of Gleize's poetics. The notion of poetic dispositif reorients writing away from a self-contained object on the page (and accompanying questions of verse or fixed-forms) towards a series of actions taken through writing or by other mean, such as photography, performance, exhibition, etc. For Gleize, the site of writing moves beyond the page, countering the notion of the poem as a well-carved, textual gem. Instead, the location of the poem enters a diffuse state open to reprise and recomposition because the dispositif’s site exceeds any single, given text.

A later work, 2011's Tarnac functions within the literary cycle according to a similar experimental orientation that takes on more overt political inflections, as indicated by its subtitle, “un acte préparatoire”. This term, derived from French legal discourse, displaces criminality
from an act to the preparation of potential terrorist activities. In the Tarnac Affair, a book, *L'insurrection qui vient*, is used by the court as evidence of the terrorist intentions of Julien Coupat and other members of the Tarnac commune. The book, then, becomes fertile territory for acts of preparation as the ground for political struggle for Gleize. Further, the notion of “un acte préparatoire” also serves to contest the concept of a poetic work as closed and self-contained by suspending its completion and reinforcing a state of ongoing preparation. Gleize’s greater literary project finds its inspiration in a figure such as Francis Ponge, who systematically reinforced the non-closure of his oeuvre.86 In its differentiated repetition, Gleize’s writing is also related to what Ponge names “la verbalisation en acte,” where the text implies an active process of formulation and reformulation of its subject matter.87 In many of Ponge’s works, such as *Le savon* or *La Fabrique du pré*, a text is turned over and rewritten with multiple versions presented to the reader. Rather than depicting the evolution of a given text, Gleize achieves a similar effect by consistently returning to scenes featured in other works. For example, the initial phrase of *Tarnac*, “Tarnac coule en moi comme de la poussière,” (*Tarnac* 13) references and rewrites an utterance from *Léman* previously cited: “Léman coule en moi comme de la lumière” (*Léman* 13). Basing his dispositif in continual reprise, these rewritings test similar textual materials within new contexts, where minor variations are sometimes introduced, as is perceptible throughout the cycle’s complex play of intratextuality. The elements of his works, not unlike a granular substance such as dust, are held together in a provisory and unstable manner. Further, the reference to “la poussière,” the biblical origin of human beings and their destiny after death, also continues a reflection on impermanence begun in the earlier meditation on Shelley’s death. In

86 “Opacité critique,” “Toi aussi, tu as des armes,” 42.

87 See Gleize’s chapter on Ponge, “La poésie mise en orbite : Francis Ponge” in *Poésie et figuration*.
this way, Gleize’s work operates on multiple levels, unifying certain textual material on the micro level of an individual work, while also referencing the macro level of his larger literary cycle.

Significantly, this conception of the poetic cycle draws from literary fore-bearers, such as Ponge, in addition to contemporaries, all while dialoguing with the Christian mystical tradition in a way that is unique to Gleize. The dispositif’s consistent reformulation of certain scenes and formulas draws in part from the notion of the spiritual exercise. Yet, Gleize’s spiritual orientation is clearly situated outside of orthodox religious observance and even includes blasphemous passages, as sometimes is the case in mystical writings. These spiritual exercises take the form of processual actions marked by an approach towards obscurity. Instead of constructing poetic images, these acts aim at erasing the visible and often employ antithesis and denial to this end in a manner inspired by negative theology. Gleize cites two Christian mystics closely associated with negative theology to open and close Léman, thus framing the work with the systematic use of contradiction characteristic of the movement. The epigraph quotes the major work of the 17th century German author Angelus Silesius, The Cherubic Pilgrim: “Tu n'es pas dans le lieu, c'est lui qui est en toi” (Léman 6). This unfigurable place challenges the distinctions between the interior and exterior, ultimately favoring an opaque internal geography. In Les Chiens noirs de la prose, Gleize approaches a similar interpenetrability of inside and outside in his own writing: “Un lieu qui serait en nous comme les poumons, le foie” (27-8).

88 Alessandro De Francesco’s excellent article compares Gleize’s cycle with the multi-work narratives of Royet-Journoud: “Narrations multi-linéaires et épistémologies poétiques chez Jean-Marie Gleize et Claude Royet-Journoud.” Jean Daive is another noteworthy contemporary who has produced multiple poetry cycles.

89 In the essay, “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs,” Sorties 353.

90 For example, in her article “Tarnac, coïncidences,” Geneviève Mouillaud-Fraisse remarks on Gleize’s sarcastic recopying of instructions for catholic priests for cleaning the holy sacrament in case it is sullied.
Place becomes a function of inwardness rather than offering an external position with which to
close a subject. More generally, the division between subject and object no longer holds in the
normal way and the description or search for place leads inside. In his essay *Sauf le nom*,
Jacques Derrida comments on this passage in Silesius’s writings, accompanying the mystic’s
rhetoric of apophasis with his own series of negations: “Ce lieu n'a rien d'objectif ni de terrestre.
Il ne relève d'aucune géographie, géométrie ou géophysique. Ce n'est pas ce dans quoi se trouvent
un sujet ou un objet. Il se trouve, lui, en nous, d'où la nécessité équivoque de le reconnaître et à la
fois de s'en défaire” (59). Insisting on the incommensurability of this site, Derrida disqualifies the
various scientific approaches towards spatiality from describing it. Further, Derrida reminds us of
the obligation to both recognize this place and to continue the process of negation so as to finally
reject even this inner site, as Silesius himself admonishes at the conclusion of his aphorism.\(^9\)
Silesius’s movement of negativity progresses to further defer even the approach to this inner site,
and therefore, maintains apophasis as an active process. In this way, there is no location to seize
onto or fetishize; this inner space is always subject to being pitched out or cast away, as Derrida
notes.\(^2\) Throughout the cycle, Gleize subjects his locations to a similar treatment, deferring their
concretization into stationary sites through the use of repetition, contradiction, and
recontextualization.

This place is also often described by Gleize as a point, whereby the outer landscape may
be seen as collapsing into a single concentrated space. In a similar manner as Silesius disrupts

\(^{91}\) Silesius’s full quote reads as follows in French (Book I, 185): “Tu n'es pas dans le lieu, c'est lui qui est en
toi. Si tu l'écartes, est là déjà l'éternité.” Angelus Silesius, *L'errant chérubinique*, Arfuyen, 1993, 47. The original
German reads as follows: “Der Ort ist selbst in dir. / Nicht du bist in dem Ort, der Ort, der ist in dir ; / Wirfst du ihn
aus, so steht die Ewigkeit schon hier.”

\(^{92}\) *Sauf le nom* 60.
describing this point, Gleize insists on its irrepresentable or ungraspable nature, closing *Léman* with a citation of a second mystic, Meister Eckhart: “Cela est et personne ne sait quoi” (181). In his own descriptions of the point, Gleize also comes close to the language of negative theology used by Eckhart: “Personne ne sait, ne saura, si ce point est représentable” (*Léman* 28). This point signals radical unfigurability as the goal of poetic activity, and thus substitutes a process of breaking down and canceling poetic images to that of their creation. Like the German mystic, Gleize can affirm the presence of something (“cela”, the point), yet can only cast this thing in the light of unrepresentability and unknowing. In “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs,” Gleize associates this point with movement, calling it a “point de passage” or “point d'accès” (*Sorties* 360-1). The denial of figuration leads to an insistence on movement as though the breakdown of images creates a rush to fill the vacuum they leave behind. A powerful acceleration takes hold of the subject as he is pulled towards the concentrated space: “Je suis projeté en avant, aspiré” (*Chiens noirs* 61). Concentrating attention to a single point erases the images that habitually inform experience, while this point, in turn, becomes a passage point or access point that instills rapid acceleration. Moreover, Gleize establishes an equivalence between the point or hole and another space, that of the corridor. The corridor, both an external space and an interior mental one, funnels the subject towards the point:


D'ici, les couloirs ne sont pas visibles, mais on a les couloirs dans la tête, c'est impossible de ne pas y penser. C'est par les couloirs qu'on est pris. Comme des tubes, on est aspiré, tiré, on est comme la poussière, poussé, aspiré, lancé, oui tu as raison, les couloirs sont des trous, ils communiquent avec les yeux, dans la tête, à l'intérieur de la tête (*Chiens noirs* 22).

Gleize again insists on the act of being sucked up (“aspire”) by the corridors or tubes, which are not differentiated from the points. Corridors, points or holes, and inner and outer space are all put into dynamic interrelation. The passage demonstrates the high velocity of these actions
through the rhythmic series of verbs (“on est aspiré, tiré [...] poussé, aspiré, lancé”). The passage also recalls Silesius’s view of the site as an internal rather than external phenomenon: here, the corridors are within the mind. The sites of the point and the corridor are fundamentally disruptive of the boundary between inner and outer life. Gleize's conception of apophasis portrays obscurity and negativity as going hand in hand with a volatile and dynamic vision of both internal and external environments.

Gleize's suggestion of these activities as spiritual exercises implies a process of repetition and reiteration of these experiences of concentration and speed. In a section of Le Principe de nudité intégrale entitled “Premier manifeste et manifestes suivants”, he links the nature of poetry to movement and repetition. The text “Le mouvement du possible” draws on a reading of Emily Dickinson to depict poetry as a house of possibility:


Significantly, Gleize transforms Dickinson’s interior space composed of ample windows and doors into a site characterized by movement. Whereas Dickinson’s poetic house offers possibility through a greater number of passages outside, Gleize writes of “incursions,” evoking forceful drives into the surrounding space. He repeats the act of coming and going as the

movement of isolating and bearing down on a single point of concentration. In Gleize’s “manifesto,” poetic action consists in the movement of absorption in the landscape that is also described as a pre-linguistic darkness. The concept of action implies a series of starts and stops, instead of stable equilibrium with time and place (“Tous les jours je recommence”; “ce mouvement d’aller et retour”). This daily exercise projects the subject forward towards a single point, where language is reduced to its most literal form by eclipsing secondary meanings (“le noir d’une phrase réduite à elle-même, le noir lui-même au début”). A progression takes place in which the scriptural, literal form of words surpasses both their denotative and connotative sense, foregrounding the dark, aporetic nature of expression. What Gleize refers to here as movements of possibility recall original, pre-linguistic darkness; he highlights the opacity surrounding the emergence of expression and the series of movements that precede a sentence. Gleize privileges the literal register of language because it does least to cover over this obscurity with fabulation, but instead seeks to maintain contact with these non-linguistic movements (“La somme de ces mouvements avant la phrase”). Literalism leverages linguistic poverty to provide a maximal reduction of the fictions or distortions that are introduced by any use of language. Gleize's actions seek to cut through these fantasies through two series of movements: first, by favoring daily incursions in the landscape leading to single-pointed attention, and secondly, by reducing expression to its most literal form so as to focus on the prelinguistic movements that surround words. Gleize’s processual poetics is informed by multiple sources, from Lamartine or Ponge to Silesius or Eckhart; uniting these disparate authors is a common caution towards language’s powers to conceal the underlying opacity of reality. To resist against the deceptive qualities of language, Jean-Marie Gleize emphasizes a continual movement of writing and rewriting where the work never coalesces into a closed, singular state.
A Site Beyond the Page

In “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs,” Jean-Marie Gleize describes an essential link between his notion of place and speed, wandering, and vagabondage. This idea of place involves active pursuit of, or performative acceleration towards, a site, rather than fixing a location. Gleize’s insistence on dynamic location marks a clear opposition with the concept of poetry as enacting dwelling, a theme that passes from Hölderlin to Heidegger and through to the French neolyricist poets. For Heidegger, poetry serves above all the ontological purpose of allowing humanity to inhabit the world, where poiesis, or creative bringing forth through language, gives rise to being. Therefore, for the German philosopher, poetry’s essential act is to inaugurate being, and in so doing, facilitate authentic dwelling. In opposition to the rationality that characterizes modernity, poetic language allows a rediscovery or reactivation of primordial inhabitation of the world. By emphasizing movement, Gleize wishes to break fully with this ontological function of poetry and the concept of dwelling:

s’il un thème avec lequel la question du lieu est sans lien, c’est celui de l’habiter. En ce sens que l’habiter suppose un certain accord avec le temps, une certaine disposition du temps. Or « le temps fait rage » (c’est une expression de Denis Roche, très rimbaudienne, il me semble), et les limites du foyer sont dispersées, et nous nous hâtons dans la nuit (Sorties 352).

As we have seen with respect to the figures of the point and the corridor, Gleize’s does not seek to install being over a duration through his notion of site. Instead of establishing harmony with time, he seeks a quotidian practice of acceleration and destabilization. Like Rimbaud’s use of speed and instability in Illuminations or similar preoccupations in Denis Roche’s work, Gleize

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undermines the notion of dwelling by employing consistent movement to disaggregate time and place.

Gleize is also distancing himself from the work of Jean-Claude Pinson, whose Habiter en poète (1995) seeks to theorize a return to lyricism in contemporary French poetry and offers a critique of Léman and Gleize’s theoretical writing. Centering on the notion of dwelling, Pinson's writing merits discussion so as to parse the objects of contention in play between the literalist and neolyricist poets. In his book, Pinson polemically critiques Léman, calling the book unengaging to readers and unnecessarily abstract. In fact, he is so hostile to Gleize that turning our attention to his remarks on another poet, Emmanuel Hocquard, is more revealing of his poetics. While Pinson champions certain works of Hocquard, such as his Élégies, which he claims as an example of successful lyricism, he demonstrates mitigated appreciation of Hocquard’s more general poetic oeuvre and criticizes his more experimental texts. Significantly, he downplays the significance of Théorie des Tables; “À mon sens, Emmanuel Hocquard est moins convaincant lorsqu’il s'adonne à une démarche plus exclusivement “conceptuelle”, où le poème semble n'être que la concrétion d’une idée programmatique. Tel est le cas de sa Théorie des Tables” (Habiter en poète 260).⁹⁵ Pinson's preoccupation with the poetic capacity for song leads him not only to dismiss Léman, but also to dramatically diminish his reading of Hocquard's works. By privileging lyricism to the exclusion of other modes of poetic creation, such as conceptually-oriented writing, Pinson precludes much of the most innovative contemporary poetry. To return to Gleize, an essential aspect of his work revolves around conceptualism, as seen notably in his call for “des nouveaux protocoles de lecture” (A noir 138). Eliciting new codes of reception validates procedurally-based poetry and aims at developing literary criticism

⁹⁵ See my chapter on Emmanuel Hocquard for a discussion of Théorie des Tables.
adapted to its interpretative challenges. This call seeks then to disturb the dwelling place of the lyrical poet and push forth into the unknown in a manner not inconsistent with the avant-gardiste traditions of the twentieth-century.

In the essay “En lieu obscène,” Gleize treats the conceptual aspect of his writing, tracing a genealogy of this approach in the work of Francis Ponge and Denis Roche. He first notes two opposing orientations of his own texts; on the one hand, an emphasis on the unfigurable, enigmatic, and obscure, and on the other hand, a documentary impulse, focusing on the objective transcription of specific circumstances. This later practice has clear antecedents in Ponge’s Notes après coup sur un ciel de Provence and La Figue (sèche) and Roche’s Dépots de savoir & de technique and Essais de littérature arrêtée. Beyond his personal affinity with these authors, Gleize cites them as French antecedents to conceptual writing in a similar way as Hocquard turns to the American Objectivists. These conceptually-oriented practices investigate the circumstances surrounding highly significant events, which are seen as necessarily escaping language:

S’il existe quelque chose comme un espace d'activités postpoétiques (des formes d'écriture ou d'expression mixtes, non réductibles aux critères formels de littérarité poétique ou “poéticité” traditionnels), il se définit notamment par le choix d'investigation circonstancielle, autrement dit, de la recherche de ce qu'il y a là autour, là avec, avec et autour d'un fait, d'un geste, d'un acte, d'un événement, d'un objet qui lui-même est peut-être invisible, inaccessible, insaisissable, ininterprétable. La formule condensée de ce noyau négatif est pour moi initialement empruntée à Maître Eckhart: “Cela est et personne ne sait quoi” […] cet indéfini insistant et s'objectant, n'est en aucune façon prétexte à un épanchement poético-métaphysique, c'est au contraire, l’occasion (contrainte) d'un travail qui se voudrait systématique et minutieux de dénombrement des éléments, des composants, des circonstants de telle ou telle situation (Sorties 97-8)

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96 Sorties 94.

97 Sorties 95-7.
Instead of expression, then, these activities center on interrogating and documenting the components of an incommunicable situation. Far from merely enacting a prescribed series of procedures, as Pinson suggests, these conceptual practices widen the breadth of poetic action. Gleize’s interest in what he names postpoetic activities manifests itself in part through systematic documentation of the elements accompanying inaccessible events. In so doing, Gleize adopts a radical critique of lyrical poeticism and its underlying belief in communication through poetic song. While all proceeding from a suspicion of lyricism and its predilection for effusion, the dispositifs that serve to conduct these investigations take on multiple forms. In addition to Objectivist recording of circumstances surrounding an enigma, Gleize also employs techniques of appropriation, montage, and recontextualization of words and images. The later practices privilege the specific assembly of textual material and its context over song or “original” creation. Cut-up, superimposition, and related practices function by taking elements from one context and placing them into a new framework so as to provoke an adjustment of perspective.

Gleize's works not only appropriate and recontextualize found texts, such as sections of the graphic novel, *Ivik le petit esquimaux* by the Swedish author Pipaluk Freuchen (*Film à venir*) or legal documents regarding the preparation of terrorist acts (*Tarnac*), but also return to scenes from his own cycle to treat them according to a similar act of reorganization and montage. The conceptual writing practices employed by Gleize and others are then far more rich and varied than Pinson's summary dismissal of them as merely, “la concrétion d'une idée programmatique” (*Habiter en poète* 260). In Gleize's work, these techniques create new significations through the act of juxtaposing textual and visual materials into new contexts where they force a shift in their reception by the reader.
In addition to techniques of appropriation and montage, Gleize also interrogates the limits of the poetry genre and its interrelation with other art forms, most notably photography and cinema. This experimental stance has brought him into opposition with prominent contemporaries, such as the poet and philosopher Michel Deguy. Influenced by Heidegger and similarly critical of technology and the social space that it is used to create, Deguy affirms the poetic *logos* against the industrial logic of manufacturing and selling cultural products. For Deguy, poetic language is no medium like film, the internet, or any other, but rather the fundamental fabric of human being in the world. Writing in praise of Deguy’s work in *Sorties*, Gleize nevertheless marks an essential disagreement with respect to the status of poetic language, images, and figuration. In advocating a shift away from the genre of poetry, Gleize also accords no special privilege to poetic language as supplying anything like an ontological foundation for inhabiting the world. Consistent with his interests in negative theology (as well as post-structuralist theory not unlike Deguy), he holds language's powers in acute suspicion. For Gleize, being cannot be revealed through language but negation can provide an approach to the enigma of presence. Radically, this skepticism towards the capacities of the *logos* leads him to question the bounds of the genre of poetry with respect to other art forms.

Poetry enters a state of instability or latency, where its medium-specificity all but vanishes. Instead of relying exclusively on words, the poetic work exhibits photography within the book, as is the case in most of the works in the cycle, or exists virtually as a film as in *Film à

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99 For example, in the essays “Toujours pas d’image” and “En découdre” in *Sorties*. Towards the end of this second essay, we read: “La vérité est que, sans doute, je m’inquiète de cette inquiétude de Michel Deguy à l’égard de ce qui advient à la poésie quand elle sort de son lit et se met à errer en terrain instable, à errer jusqu’à disparaître ou se transformer en tout autre chose” (299).
venir. As critic Jean-Jacques Thomas remarks in his essay “Avec Gleize : aporie herméneutique illustrée”: “*Film à venir* de Gleize offre de nombreux exemples d’installations et son potentiel d’*intermédialité* inscrit une tension constante entre le livre traditionnel comme support et sa virtualité cinématographique à venir” (*L’illisibilité en questions* 161). This intermedial perspective calls into question the book as the primary site for poetry; not only is the individual unit of the book abandoned in favor of the interdependent cycle, but the written word is also on the verge of morphing into a moving image. Thus, Gleize manifests a fundamental ambiguity towards images; an iconoclastic streak opposes the illusions they offer, yet another tendency follows the flow of images and the technologies that accompany them. In fact, these two orientations are complementary in so far as undoing the hold of images results from first passing through a large number of them so as to arrive at their exhaustion.100 The beginning of *Film à venir* demonstrates the complex interpenetration between word and image through a series of italicized passages that describe scenes taking place in the film latent within the book:


Paradoxically, the movement of the camera through the landscape gives a simultaneous impression of speed and stillness, evoking at once the passage of the reader’s gaze on the page, the flow of images on a movie screen, and the capacity of these images to move towards an abstract “snow” of black and white. The notion of film works on both the ability of words to evoke images as well as the genre of the poem to introduce something like film techniques of

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100 *Sorties* 39.
slow-motion or, even more interestingly for Gleize, an effect of static. The slow-motion sequence culminates several pages later in a page occupied entirely with the capitalized word “IMAGE,” marking a film still that refuses to signify as an image. The flow of words fully realize their latent capacity to become images by offering forth their own opaque, scriptural form. By achieving their final, literal state, the progression of words on the page no longer produce figures but only the form of letters on the page. This literalism proposes a confrontation with the word “IMAGE” as the final abstract, unfigurable sequence of the book or film. Thus, Gleize’s filmic literalism oscillates between the written word, its virtuality as moving image, and its suspension as a scriptural freeze frame.

Beyond his interest in film, Gleize manifest an orientation towards intermedial creation through his work on art installations. He situates his concept of place in opposition to a tradition of landscape writing, citing a stronger affinity with contemporary art practices. In addition to the influence from Ponge and Roche (a photographer as well as a poet), his interest in documenting and recording draws on practices commonly found in the fine arts:

Cette écriture topo-graphique a peut-être beaucoup plus à voir avec ce qui, dans l’histoire contemporaine des arts plastiques, se présente comme (par exemple) l’art corporel (body art, voir Gina Pane, la façon dont elle archivait ses actions), ou l’installation (impliquant performance, enregistrement des événements associés à l’installation), ou travail “in situ” dans le cadre du land art, etc. beaucoup plus qu’avec ce qui, dans notre tradition poétique moderne, se présente comme une démarche paysagiste (je pense à l’argumentation de Jaccottet à propos de ce qu’il nomme “paysages avec figures absentes,” mais il n’est pas le seul à travailler sur ces motifs) (Sorties 355-6).

Following from his general rejection of poetic images, Gleize distances his work from depictions of landscape. Instead of depicting a particular environment, he is concerned with visual arts

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Interestingly, Gleize describes writing practices that closely resemble this observation of the flow of TV images up to and including their dissolution into abstract black and white “snow.” Gleize places this discussion of screens in parallel with his meditations on site in “Lacs, écrans, torrents, couloirs.”

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practices that involve performances or actions that are subsequently documented through writing and photography. Further, Gleize works in situ in his frequent collaborations with visual artists. The text “Naître encore,” which first appeared independently in the work Dessus dessus before becoming a section of Gleize's Les chiens noirs de la prose, is the result of such a project with the visual artist Franck Fontaine. Fontaine's installation at Le Corbusier's Dominican convent of La Tourette establishes an alternative cartography of the site through his work on land parcels. Through the use of the cartography signs + and – in the convent, Fontaine blurs the frontiers between the vocabulary of the map and the real space it depicts. Within Le Courbusier's complex, the installation suggests a single continuous space composed out of the building's four separate wings, disrupting the divisions between raised and level sections.¹⁰² In his article, “Procédures d'installations verbales,'” Luigi Magno remarks on Gleize's “Naître encore” as documentation of the poet's experience in the installation, citing his text in parenthesis:

De cette interprétation surfaciale de l'architecture du couvent ("monde réduit à ses trois côtés plus le sol") découlent l'expérience de son intérieur, c'est-à-dire le récit de l'expérience du corps dans le couvent, ou du corps du couvent, pour en épuiser les dimensions jusqu'à se rendre à l'évidence suivante : il n'y a pas pas de point de départ ni de point d'arrivée, "seul l'accomplissement physique de l'espace, expérience des trois côtés plus le sol, double impasse et". L'expérience inépuisable de l'espace (qui est une expérience temporelle pour Gleize) s'accompagne d'une série de détails (Faire part 26/27 94).

The experience of surfaces suggests movement through a space of unhierachical continuity with neither point of departure nor endpoint. The notion of being reborn evoked in the title, “Naître encore,” places the motifs of becoming, transmission, and conversion in dialogue with the continuous movement through space that is at the heart of Fontaine's installation. This movement through space collapses linear time as it flattens physical space; indeed, the text

¹⁰² Magno, Faire part 26/27 92-3.
concludes with remarks privileging flat ground over a curved surface as though illustrating a
generalized leveling.\textsuperscript{103} Rebirth or becoming takes place within a space where the structuring
principles of time and space have been suspended, as flattening suggests here. It is within this
flux that Gleize pursues the project of elaborating a "contre-chant" resistant to the metaphysical,
ascendant aspect of poetry (\textit{Les Chiens noirs} 109). According to its musical signification, this
song offers an alternative strain of melody, but Gleize is above all interested in its movement
“contre”. Instead of offering an architectural schema for the earthly and heavenly realms, as is
the case in baroque churches, for example, there is a sole plane that offers no possibility of
transcendence. Further, the counterpoint reverses the model of ascension by emphasizing "le
sol", evoking a slogan used by Gleize throughout the cycle: "J'utilise pour écrire les accidents du
sol" (\textit{Les Chiens noirs} 117).\textsuperscript{104} The act of writing maintains contact with the ground of things in
literalist refusal of metaphor. This grounding complements the elaboration of a counterpoint,
understood as an ongoing process, analogous with the movement through the space of Fontaine's
installation.

The philosophy and architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein also provide inspiration for the
grounding of poetry in literal meaning. Gleize takes interest in the Vienna house that
Wittgenstein designed for his sister known as the Palais Stonborough. Noting the address,
“Kundmannasse, 19, maison W.,” Gleize writes of this construction as a parallel for his own
poetics:

ce dont on ne peut pas parler il nous faut le construire en tracer les plans le
montrer et c’est comme la poésie qui est une des formes de l’architecture voilà

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Les Chiens noirs} 123.

\textsuperscript{104} Gleize makes this relationship clear: “Le contre-chant dépend de la relation au sol” (\textit{Les Chiens noirs} 109).
une maison construite par ce philosophe voilà une construction fanatique et pure des portes des fenêtres en acier des radiateurs
d’angle une

architecture objective

béton, acier
absence d’ornementation
geste (Néon 54)

Playing on Wittgenstein’s famous maxim of his \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}, “what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence,” Gleize proposes architecture as an alternative to an abusive use of language.\textsuperscript{105} Advocating a similar esthetic as objectivist poetry does for literature, \textit{objective architecture} would strip buildings of their ornamentation in favor of purified forms. Utilitarian materials such as steel and concrete are the structural equivalents of Gleize’s unadorned, non-lyrical prose, revelatory of gesture in place of song. In his \textit{Mysticism and Architecture: Wittgenstein and the Meanings of the Palais Stonborough}, Roger Paden describes the house as offering infinitely extending planes, recalling Gleize’s interest with unitary surfaces in “Naitre encore.”\textsuperscript{106} Significantly, Paden also likens the Vienna house to an enlarged version of Wittgenstein’s Norwegian cabin, where the philosopher came to isolate himself and pursue his reflections.\textsuperscript{107} Both structures offer unified forms in line with Gleize’s own interest in the construction of cabins. For Gleize, these temporary habitations offer a rural retreat from urban areas for the purpose of the free exercise of intellectual, artistic, and political activity. The cabin, like Wittgenstein’s architecture, offers an independent space that strips down ornamentation so

\textsuperscript{105} Wittgenstein’s quote read as follows: “What can be said at all can be said clearly; and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (Pears and McGuinness, trans. \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus} 90).

\textsuperscript{106} Paden 23. Magno also suggests a similar parallel, p. 6, \textit{Faire part} 26/27.

\textsuperscript{107} Paden 26.
as to privilege objectivism. As the next section of this chapter will develop, these isolated spaces become increasingly politically-charged for Gleize by offering the possibility for alternative political organization.

The work *Néon* is also inspired by the convent of La Tourette and features another collaboration with Franck Fontaine. Visiting the site, Gleize is struck by Le Corbusier’s minimalist use of neon strips that he finds suggestive of a rudimentary sign. The section of *Néon* entitled “Lettre suit” features an extended passage on a conference that takes place in a series of houses that transform into new locations as the conference advances. The scene progresses from Ulysses’ house in Ithaca to the space of a cave to a structure that is represented by a series of drawings by the artist Franck Fontaine, which are reproduced in the work (see Figure 7). Fontaine's drawings, which follow from an architecturally-based art projet entitled *Hôtel univers*, depict a house placed on its side, with an entrance opening where the house’s foundation would normally be situated. The work transposes the structure's verticality onto a horizontal plane, suggesting a challenge to hierarchical notions of social and spiritual elevation; the top is quite literally leveled out with the bottom. In this way, the house proposes an egalitarian model of utopian political space. Echoing Ulysses’ quest to return home, the question, “Où se trouve la maison?” punctuates the rapid movement between places in pursuit of this political ideal (*Néon* 96). The passage conceived of as an ongoing conference develops a series of responses to this question:

Où se trouve la maison? / La conférence devrait commenter une à une les réponses, analyser un à un les objets de bois, les cailloux disposés sur les tabourets, les cailloux disposés en forme de tortue, et l’analogie formelle, celle de la maison et de la tortue, et l’argument de la flèche, comme si la maison était tirée dans le vide, / mais la tortue est

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108 *Sorties* 385.
pleine et le corps de la maison vide ou vidé comme pour être jeté dans l’huile, au pieds des portes il y a du marbre de Numidie. La conférence ne tiendra pas compte de la légende d’une maison d’or, de ses vignes, de ses bois et de ses lacs, la légende de la maison inachevée, il s’agit d’une maison réelle, elle est habitée par tous ceux du bas qui poussent la porte, entrent dans le carré et triangle de la tortue, marchent horizontalement attirés par l’aimant, la table, l’autel (Néon 97).

Those attending the conference hypothesize on both the location of the house and the arrangement of a series of objects (stones, wood) that present a formal analogy with the larger

Figure 7.
structure of the house. Significantly, their analysis of these objects stands in contrast to a series of legends that are to be excluded from the conference, rejected in accordance with Gleize’s refusal of fable. These wood objects and stones are markers of material presence, and unlike certain objects that evoke legend or the marvelous (such as the Surrealist object) they resist metaphoric meaning. This attention towards objects also provides a blueprint for reading; by approaching the text as though each phrase offered concrete presence, a reader may gain entry into the house.

The text or conference centers on physical and spatial question of the full and empty, which are both the central argument of the conference and what is represented by the structure of the house (“l’argument de la flèche, comme si la maison était tirée dans le vide”). The two components of the house, the square and the triangle, suggest alternative measures of emptiness and plenitude (“mais la tortue est pleine et le corps de la maison vide ou vidé”). Further, the triangle is associated with the Roman testudo or tortoise formation and the reference to the Roman province of Numidia further establishes a semantic field around Rome. The tortoise formation, a defensive shelter constructed with shields, provides provisional and temporary shelter in a purely ad hoc manner. Instead of serving to delineate space and provide stable enclosure, this refuge gestures towards a series of dynamic sites, such as those improvised on the battlefield. Similarly, the focal point or angle, as it is shown in Fontaine’s second drawing, takes on a number of different attributes in a manner analogous to the transformations between the various locations featured in the passage, described alternatively as a magnet, a table and an alter. The “Ideal Home,” as it is entitled in Franck Fontaine’s accompanying drawing, is physically pulled towards a single point, in a similar manner as the point provided the culmination of movement through the corridors or the excursions in the landscape. Finally,
through a reversal of the figure of the home represented by the wood objects, stones, or the
drawings, the habitation is affirmed as a real site for all who enter it in pursuit of this empty
space. In this way, Gleize and Fontaine trace a complex architecture of utopian political space,
conceived as an unstable, even volatile site. As I will develop more fully in what follows, the
tortoise formation, like Gleize’s cabins, are sites of conjunction between the paradoxes of
apophaticism and an oppositional politics based in the negative.

Il faut construire des cabanes : Tarnac and Critical Opacity

In “Opacité critique,” Gleize’s contribution to the collective volume, “Toi aussi, tu as
des armes”: Poésie & politique, he describes his interest in joining two divergent models of
critical poetry within the dispositif of the Simplifications cycle. On the one hand, there is the
avant-garde writing of the 60-80s that subverts conventional language through neologisms,
verbal idiosyncrasies, and syntactic irregularities, and on the other, is the readily readable
language of contemporary works that appropriate and reconfigure mass media discourses,
such as those theorized by Christophe Hanna. Gleize seeks to incorporate the first model of
political writing through his concept of “une écriture déviée dialectale”:

[…] la forme de déviation qui caractérise ce dialecte n’est pas la torsion ni aucune
forme de transgression particulière, mais la simplification, la neutralisation, la
littéralisation. […] Ma proximité avec le second modèle pourrait se lire dans la
façon dont beaucoup de ces pages, qu’il s’agisse des événements de Flins, de la
mort de Gilles Tautin, ou de l’évocation d’une communauté “invisible” en lisière de
forêt sur un plateau reculé du centre de la France, tout cela se construit à partir
d’éléments captés, prélevés, cadrés, réagencés selon une logique de montage, de
recontextualisation, et de superposition de pistes (“Opacité critique,” “Toi aussi, tu
as des armes” 40-41).

To first examine the question of dialect before discussing montage, Gleize privileges a
minimalism centered on simple, flat prose. His deviated, dialectical writing does the opposite of challenging conventional language through idiosyncrasy or transgression. Instead, it reduces expression to its most basic, neutral, and literal form, thereby opening up onto an indeterminable, opaque prose. As this extreme simplification verges on abstraction, it produces a sense of disorientation. He views politics in literature as arising from this movement of simplification that leads towards a radical break with the language of communication. Gleize names the political potential of this sparse prose, “opacité critique.” In its extreme reduction, its literalism, this poor language pushed towards unfigurability, undermining accepted representations of social reality. For Gleize, disrupting or suspending ready interpretability ultimately challenges the claims to knowledge and mastery made by the political and social order. In a similar manner as L’insurrection qui vient, the anonymous political manifesto attributed to members of the Tarnac commune such as Julien Coupant (the invisible community alluded to here), Gleize seeks to radically contest conventional political discourses. Indeed, L’insurrection qui vient refuses to articulate a series of political demands, which may in turn be appropriated or marginalized by mainstream politics, but instead seeks to open and sustain an opposition movement. Seeking to leverage critical opacity through his sparse prose, Gleize's use of idiolect follows a similar orientation in the goal of generating open-ended resistance.

In Tarnac, bare descriptions of the black forest around the village of Tarnac are juxtaposed with recurrent questions that play on the turn from simplicity towards opacity. In a similar manner as he employs repetition and reduction to approach abstraction, Gleize seeks to undo images to approach unfigurability. When Gleize asks, “comment photographier la nuit,” and, how to “regarder jusqu’à l’extinction du regard,” he seeks to move beyond representational language towards indeterminability (Tarnac 13). He puts this writing of the
negative in parallel with the negation of politics that is at the heart of *L'insurrection qui vient*:

Partout les taches d’huile la rouille une lumière de / brouillard, de froid et d’incendie. / 
Aucune revendication aucun message rien / Incident technique indéterminé / Pendant ce 
temps l’image recouvre l’image / jusqu’à parvenir une écriture dévêtue dialectale / - je 
reprends à partir du mot « communiste ». / *Communiste* est ce mot enfermé dans l’eau, 
ce corps / enfermé dans l’eau. / Ici à Tarnac le brouillard se couche à la surface de l’eau / 
froisse les talus de fougères c’est la nuit / Aucune revendication aucun message, *la 
politique comme négation de la politique* (*Tarnac* 98-9)

The politics of *Tarnac* pronounce the violent non-figurability of politics (*le* politique) against 
the discourses of conventional politics (*la* politique). Writing's critical opacity proceeds 
according to a regime of pure negation that aims neither to transmit an oppositional political 
project nor to demand any particular political action, but rather to radically advance the 
unsayable and the enigmatic. Gleize privileges opacity as the antithesis of the discourses of 
power, whereby authority claims to master a coherent and rational world. Yet, this opacity also 
maintains contact with the history of leftist radical politics and its utopian dream that have been 
relegated to incompleteness. In his reflections on communism, Gleize sees the oppositional 
political tradition as held in suspension, as he expresses in the following terms: “*Communiste 
est ce mot enfermé dans l’eau.*” Nuancing his desire to negate politics altogether, Gleize’s 
inscribes the contestatory forces of the past within opacity in the form of traces or remains. 
This negative politics nevertheless maintains contact with the vestiges of the communism, 
which survive in a dormant state beneath the water. Marking his affinity with the second 
model of political writing described in “Opacité critique”, Gleize's dispositif seeks to rouse a 
dormant politics of contestation through the reiteration and recontextualization of certain 
scenes. Among several episodes that return throughout the cycle is the death of the young 
communist Gilles Tautin, who drowned at a Renault factory strike in Flins during one of the 
final contestatory episodes of 1968. Gleize describes this episode in several other works of his

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cycle, including *Néon* and *Film à venir*, and returns to it in a section of *Tarnac*, entitled "Enfermé dans l’eau." Indeed, it is this scene that is allegorized as, "Communiste est ce mot enfermé dans l’eau, ce corps / enfermé dans l’eau." Through this reworking, pragmatist recontextualization joins Gleize’s interest for simplification and reduction. By repeating and reworking the drowning scene of the young activist, he derives a condensed, minimalist version of the episode. Documentary elements are continuously juxtaposed and reactivated in new contexts leading sometimes to utterances that serve as incantations or slogans throughout his cycle. These utterances, in turn, become an additional element of the dispositif and may even move outside of the book, for example, to the walls of an installation by the artist Patrick Sainton. In this way, Gleize’s dispositif pushes writing beyond the book towards non-literary spaces through the logic of simplification and concentration that inform the cycle.

Even as Jean-Marie Gleize meditates on dormant political struggles, he refuses a politics based solely on nostalgia. Instead, he advocates both political entities like the Tarnac commune that create spaces of alternative political organization and an analogous conception of the site of writing as an autonomous, experimental zone. Accordingly, Gleize's politics and poetics may both be expressed by his injunction: "il faut construire des cabanes" (*Tarnac* 100). The cabin as both a textual and real world space proposes a provisional territory of independence and exploration. Instead of relegating these values to a utopia, Gleize conceives of these cabins as providing their concretized presence:

[...] on croit comprendre qu’il s’agit d’une poésie politique sans politique, et d’une action politique poétique sans poésie (ou sans poétisme, sans l’inconsistance de la poésie poétique), et d’un refus de l’utopie au profit de l’aménagement ici-maintenant de zones autonomes où l’on se réapproprie amoureusement la langue et la parole et où l’on jouit ici-

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109 *Sorties* 338.
maintenant d'une émancipation réelle et d'une réelle présence du réel, ou présence au réel (*L'illisibilité en questions* 47).

The refusal of utopia goes hand in hand with a rejection of lyricism and poetic solipsism in favor of the autonomous spaces of the page and the commune. The cabins seek a presence of reality that is unmediated by the barriers of both conventional language and poetic effects. This experience of reality in its immediacy is also necessarily accompanied by opacity as Gleize emphasizes throughout his earlier references to negative theology. For the author, the real always escapes figurability, canceling out preexisting representations and receding infinitely far into unknowability. Yet, while Gleize certainly privileges negativity, he allies contradiction and refusal with action undertaken in the present. As textual and real-world constructions, the cabins center on autonomous action in the here and now, going beyond the stifling negativity decried by Pierre Alferi and Olivier Cadiot.¹¹⁰

This obscurity defines an oppositional politics by complementing *Tiqqun*’s preoccupation with apparatus of power, knowledge, and control.¹¹¹ Building on the Foucauldian concept, *Tiqqun* defines the apparatus broadly as networks structuring experience that may be comprised of discourses, technologies, bureaucracies and other components. In a section of *Tiqqun* reprinted by La Fabrique in a volume entitled *Contributions à la guerre en cours*, the highway is given as an example of an apparatus.¹¹² Channeling movement along set routes through a combination of physical structures (the roadway itself), textual elements (driving manuals, road signs), and controls (toll booths, police), the highway orients flows of people according to strict

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¹¹⁰ See my introduction for a discussion of Alferi and Cadiot’s critique in *Revue de littérature générale*.

¹¹¹ To avoid ambiguity with my earlier use of the term “dispositif”, I will be using the common English translation of “apparatus” to refer to Foucault's concept. See my introduction for a discussion of the term.

¹¹² *Contributions à la guerre en cours* 121.
protocols. Citing *Contributions à la guerre en cours*, Gleize develops a concept of the commune as a space of resistance to these apparatus in “Opacité critique.” This text envisions the expansion of these self-determining zones as giving rise to a new politics of opposition against the “Empire,” the global capitalist regime:

> L’Empire a peur. L’Empire a peur que nous devenions quelconques. Un milieu délimité, une organisation combattante. Il ne les craint pas. Mais une constellation expansive de squatts, de fermes autogérées, d’habitats collectives, de rassemblements *fine a se stesso*, de radios, de techniques et d’idées. L’ensemble relié par une intense circulation des corps, et des affects entre les corps. C’est une autre affaire (*Contributions à la guerre en cours* 189)

Accordingly, a squat or a commune does not try to conquer and hold a specific territory but rather to form a temporary, improvised space outside of the reach of the state. Following *Tiqqun*, Gleize associates this notion of an expansive network of autonomous zones with a politics of obscurity. The communes are conceived according to a Materialist orientation as sites of intense circulation, where bodies and their affects may be provisionally freed from the control exerted by apparatus. Within these spaces, free movement between bodies amplifies the force of their interactions within an expansive series of self-governing entities. By resisting the pretenses of power to possess knowledge and thereby to validate its right to rule, obscurity becomes the epistemological accompaniment of these spaces beyond the Empire's knowing gaze.113 Through his notion of critical opacity, Jean-Marie Gleize unites the political obscurity favored by *Tiqqun* with the spiritual unknowing that is at the heart of negative theology.

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113 Indeed, *Tiqqun* emphasizes the importance of opacity in combating the (Foucauldian) apparatus of power-knowledge: “Le crime correspond au moment de l’étude, nécessairement individuelle, du fonctionnement d’un dispositif. L’opacité est la condition du partage, de la communication, de la circulation des savoirs-pouvoirs acquis dans l’étude. Sous l’Empire, les zones d’opacité où cette communication survient sont par nature à arracher et à défendre” (*Contributions à la guerre en cours* 142).
This emphasis on negation also includes creative destruction, whereby the wresting of zones of autonomy and obscurity also partake in acts of remembrance. The construction of cabins evoke the establishment of barricades and reference the revolutionary past: “Il faut (il faut construire des cabanes) / percer les murs / abattre les escaliers / trouver les plafonds, les toits / arracher les portes / murer les fenêtres / faire de chaque étage un poste de tir (Tarnac 100).

Recalling the preparations made by the communards, as described by Kristin Ross in her work, The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune, Gleize evokes the gutting of buildings in preparation for a prospective attack by security forces. The passage suggests a shift in geography from the rural autonomous zone of the Tarnac commune to the 1871 urban combat against the Versaillais army. Drawing on the writings of Auguste Blanqui and the Commune’s first Delegate of War Gustave-Paul Cluseret, Ross describes the instructions to construct barricades and the allusions Rimbaud makes to these preparations. In a complex play of intertextuality, Gleize first draws on Blanqui’s instructions to “faire de chaque étage un poste de tir,” attributing this revolutionary action to the site of writing by alternating “étage” with “phrase” and “page”.114 The call to construct cabins communicates militancy by aligning the site of writing with the ambush positions of barricades. As Ross explains, the communards destroyed the interiors of apartment buildings and broke down the walls separating them (“percer les murs” as Gleize writes) for free movement through a network of attached buildings.115 Citing Rimbaud's poem “Nocturne vulgaire” from Les Illuminations, Ross identifies a reference to this urban insurgency tactic: “Un souffle ouvre des brèches opéradiques dans les cloisons, […] disperse les limites des foyers” (Oeuvres complètes 141-2). According to Ross’s compelling

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115 Ross 37-8.
reading, the act of breaching and dispersing partitions takes on unmistakable revolutionary connotations within the context of the poem’s composition following the Paris commune. In Rimbaud’s text, the poet's creative breath serves to deconstruct or dismantle the bourgeois interior in a manner resembling the communards's gutting of buildings throughout the spring of 1871.

Frequently cited by Gleize as well, this passage of “Nocturne vulgaire” appears notably in a section of Tarnac entitled Insurrection, taking on a new meaning in which the home’s dispersed walls evoke different time periods. Through a montage of documents, Gleize seeks to conjugate several temporal layers – that of a Franciscan in 1952-58, that of the 1968 revolts, that of Tarnac in 2008 – in a *present* of dynamic potentiality. This reworking of episodes from various epochs accompanies Gleize’s notion of poetry as an action. Indeed, Tarnac postulates the awakening of the radical past within the present as a critical, revolutionary principle. Gleize embeds a citation from Francis Ponge’s *La fabrique du pré* that is not attributed to its author alongside a reference to Rimbaud's “Nocturne vulgaire”\(^\text{116}\):

> “la platitude du pré ayant d’abord été dite / la prise de conscience soudain de la constante / insurrection de l’herbe nous ressuscite”/ Un mouvement révolutionnaire ne se répand pas par / contamination / Mais par résonance / Quelque chose qui se constitue ici / Résonne avec l’onde de choc émise par quelque chose qui s’est constitué là-bas / […] Cela prend corps à la façon d’une MUSIQUE et dont les foyers Dispersés/ dans le / temps et dans l’espace parviennent / À imposer le rythme / de leur VIBRATION / À prendre toujours plus d’épaisseur / au point qu’on ne puisse désirer aucun retour en arrière (Tarnac 77).

Through the concept of time in his texts, Gleize unites his interest in the Pongian open, reiterative work and the possibility of the text as action in the world. The space of the poem – that of the Pongian “pré” or the “foyers dispersés” of Rimbaud’s “Nocturne vulgaire” –

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\(^{116}\) *La Fabrique du pré* 41.
produce resonance or musicality as a principle connecting disparate domains of time. Fiction, like memory, may function non-linearly to bring events and temporalities into contact in a non-causal manner. By viewing literature as a space that allows him to act on reality, Gleize seeks to join together “un présent antérieure (mémoriel)” with “un présent à venir” within the work seen as a “présent statifié, un présent ‘en actes’” (“Opacité critique,” “Toi aussi, tu as des armes” 42-3). Gleize’s stratified present aims to create a space of heterogeneous temporalities in resonance with one another. Therefore, resonance or musicality, rather than evoking lyrical song, are conceptualized spatially and temporally, as principles of accordance or correspondence. Since writing confronts the active flow of events beyond the bounds of the text, it may approach both the past and the future as temporal domains open to action in the present. Among a multiplicity of other possibilities, this resonance between different eras would revive the communist ideal dormant below the water and allow it to be treated alongside future, utopian spaces. In this way, Gleize’s dispositif aims at preserving and reworking the remains of the revolutionary heritage so as to revitalize them within the present of the work.

Jean-Marie Gleize's reflections on memory and the past also stretch beyond key moments of revolutionary struggle to evoke early human habitations. Thematized in references to cave dwellings, these spaces associate the cabins both with a return to humanity's original dwelling spaces as well as a new beginning:

Au commencement, ils n'ont pas de maisons. Ils habitent ces grands trous creusés dans la roche. / Plus tard ils construisent ces cabanes en bois sur les lacs. / Ils enfoncent dans le fond du lac plusieurs rangées de poutres. / Sur ce pilotis, ils établissent la charpente [...] Plus rien ne distingue les souvenirs des autres moments / Scène coupée / - Je n'ai pas vu ces cabanes. On les avait dissimulées [...] - oui et les cabanes étaient cachées dedans, elles étaient cachées comme les oiseaux par le bruit du vent, un bruit sourd, continu, envahissant (Le Livre des cabanes 72-3).

By attributing an equal status to memory as any other experience, these visions of humanity's
origins emerge within the present of the work ("Plus rien ne distingue les souvenirs des autres moments"). Early human habitations that evolved from rock or cave dwellings become another face of the cabins. Significantly, Gleize associates these cabins with obscurity in two ways: first, by associating them with the primitive, that which predates civilization's apparatus of power-knowledge, and secondly, by describing them as hidden away or clandestine.

Gleize's unadorned style in describing these early cabins provides an example of his sparse, literal prose, mirroring the minimalism of the cabins themselves. If these statements inform about the evolution of human shelters, their simplicity perhaps does more to reveal the general obscurity of this period of human development. Far from depicting a Rousseauist noble savage, the descriptions of the cabins reflect their enigmatic origins, as is seen by the repetition of the adjectives “dissimulée” and “cachée.” The cabins also recall another sparse home, the igloo of Film à venir, equally described in flat, simple prose:

Cette image montre comment sont logés les Esquimaux. Il fait si chaud à l'intérieur de leurs maisons qu'ils y vivent nus. La moitié de la hutte est occupée par une planche sur laquelle ils parlent, ils mangent, ils dorment. Sous la planche il y a une caisse pour la viande, un récipient d'huile, un couteau, un séchoir, et des vêtements (21).

Presented as an exhibit at Manhattan's Museum of Natural History, Gleize insists on the mediated nature of the image. In place of the remote, hidden cave dwellings, these igloos are exposed within a museum diorama, yet simultaneously obscured by their too great visibility. The description, perhaps originating in a caption taken from the exhibit, then rejoins Gleize's deviated, dialectical prose and creates opacity through ever too direct assertion; the igloo may be physically present in the exhibit but it is entirely sucked dry of life. Within this prose, all is reduced to a single, flat plane not unlike the hut's unique surface where the activities of eating, sleeping, cooking, etc. are all performed.

The cabins are also associated with the personal memory of the author as it relates to the
question of transmission and heritage within his own immediate family. A Franciscan tertiary, Gleize's grandfather valued the poverty and simplicity emphasized by this religious order. A section of *Tarnac* entitled “Documents 'F’” draws on Franciscan writings and journals compiled by the author's grandfather that emphasize asceticism:

si nous avions des biens il nous faudrait des armes et des lois pour les défendre. C'est pourquoi nous ne devons rien posséder, rien / pour nous des cabanes de bois, aucun autre abri que les branches et les huttes, des cabanes. Il faut construire des cabanes (Tarnac 47).

In addition to evading apparatuses of control, the act of constructing cabins follows from a radical refusal of materialist, consumerist culture, marking a double rejection of the dominant society. The heritage of Franciscan spirituality exerts a continuing influence on Gleize's politics and his thinking on sites of alternative politics. In her article “Tarnac, coïncidences,” Geneviève Mouillaud-Fraisse parses the complex relationship between religion and political engagement in Gleize's work. Beginning with remarks on his grandfather, she comments on Gleize's unique union of political activism and spirituality:

Étrange de retrouver et de réactiver, chez cet ancêtre qui faisait peser sur ses descendants le poids de la pénitence, le côté subversif du refus de la propriété et du choix de la vie précaire. Mais peut-être une de ces coïncidences imprévisibles qui se produisent dans l'écriture de JMG, la reconnaissance d'un trait “commun” entre la religion rejetée et l'engagement politique qu'il lui avait opposé. Dans *Sorties* JMG parle de son appartenance en 1968 à la Gauche prolétarienne comme d'un “idéal strictement égalitariste, à coloration franciscaine (les médecins aux pieds nus, les récits hagiographiques concernant les saints révolutionnaires dans les campagnes chinoises...)” (Faire part 26/27 139-140).

While Gleize is clear throughout his work in rejecting religious orthodoxy, his own Maoist political engagement in 1968 is marked by an unprediditated concurrence with Franciscan ideals. The conjunction of asceticism and political resistance arise according to complementary principles in part because of the free play of different layers of memory associated with his Franciscan grandfather, the Maoism of 1968, and the activities of the Tarnac Commune.
undertaken in the present. Far from presenting Gleize as a Christian poet or insisting too strongly on his spiritual orientation, these religious sources may perhaps be seen as occupying a deliberately uneven place within the cycle, overlapping with atheistic passages, considerations on Marxism, etc. Thus, not unlike the free juxtaposition of various temporalities, references to various worldviews are imbricated alongside one another outside of any dominant ideology.

With this approach in mind towards Gleize’s use of religious references, other Christian sources merit mention, as his ascetic site of the cabin is expanded to include the accompanying location of the Tarnac woods. The obscurity of these woods comes to offer a series of signs that may be read by the poet, activist, or spiritual seeker. In Tarnac, an abbreviated citation of the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux highlights the insights to be gained from the natural world:

“Aliquid amplius in silvis invenies”(66). The full latin verse reads as follows:

Aliquid amplius invenies in silvis, quam in libris. Ligna et lapides docebunt te, quod a magistris audire non possis (you will find something far greater in the woods than you will in books. Stones and trees will teach you that which you will never learn from masters).

For the ascetic-revolutionary, the space of the forest provides a space for reading the signs of nature as traces of the divine. The obscurity of language highlighted by Gleize provides an alternative sort of legibility and readability. In keeping with his interest in apophatics, these signs never achieve translation into human language, but instead offer themselves forward in their illegibility. Gleize's use of photography provides an example of this attitude towards signs and images because these photos bear witness to particular circumstances and events without providing any explanation of them. In Tarnac, grainy black and white photographs of the Bois du Chat forest seize fragmentary visions of reality, yet appear without any caption or description.

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of their significance (see Figure 8). As Gleize suggests, the forest offers a vertiginous space where darkness erases all sense of perspective:

 [...] je m'y suis fait l'idée de la forêt comme épaisseur de vert et de noir, comme épaisseur végétale foncée, comme surface-profondeur à la fois infranchissable, impénétrable, inaccessible, hermétique et appelante, virtuellement engloutissante, noyante (comme le lac), tout à fait identique à elle-même, indifférente, dénuée de centre et de limite, etc. (Sorties 67).

This hermetically closed space, like the lake, offers a second blank site resistant to meaning and interpretation; borders and trail markers yield before a generalized sense of disorientation. Like the photograph, Gleize describes the forest as fully identical to itself; it is self-contained in a way that refutes questions about its origins or meaning. Further, the series of four images in Tarnac (perhaps indicative of the four cardinal directions) creates a virtual enclosure, suggesting a provisional territory. While the forest neither offers pathways nor provides for localization (“dénuée de centre et de limite”), Gleize's photographs suggest that a fragile enclave may be established within the four viewpoints offered by the images. Like the quadrilateral space of the page, the photos form a temporary, makeshift location that offers the possibility of opacity within its bounds.

The final section of Tarnac, “Chutes,” is preoccupied in a similar way with delineating a territory. First, passages suggestive of scrolling text mark the space of the page with the words, “ZONES D’AUTONOMIE PROVISOIRE ZONE D'AUTONOMIE PROVISOIRE” (157). Through his choice of typography, Gleize visually produces an enclosure or a demarcation of autonomous space within the work. Interestingly, this description of rural space also makes use of urban visual experience, perhaps suggesting multiple gazes set on Tarnac, where the repeated words could be seen as a blank or blocked reading on surveillance technology. Monitoring of the independent site by a government agency may garner no information but only display this...
scrolling failure message. Further, lists of locations within Tarnac are given to define this domain. From a list of bridges, fields, and farms, these spaces radiate outwards from a single village to the greater space of the municipality:

Vers la fin du cahier une dernière liste donnait les noms de quatorze des villages ou hameaux appartenant à la commune de Tarnac, une sorte de sonnet, suivi de quatre
séquences ou bribes prélevées sans doute sur un ensemble plus long. Sur la toute dernière page, la définition donnée du mot “chutes” semblait faire allusion à ce geste de couper, coller, poser, juxtaposer, à ce dépôt de matières en suspens, en état de décomposition lente, / Chabannes / Le Monteil / Couffy / La Fage / Larfeuil / Lacombe / Les Maisons / Merceil / Clupeau / Theillet / Le Mas à Loubaud / Le Treich / Broussas / Orliac / “sanglant sous la peau blanche” / “elle qui, dans sa nuque, avait reconnu la Présence” / “le ciel plié comme un livre”. Celui ou celle qui prononce ces paroles sait de la mort (de sa mort?) que le ciel sera plié comme un livre. Maintenant il flotte au-dessus de nous, c'est une peau qui flotte au-dessus. / “un moment de sensation éperdue” / Chutes : débris de matière (papier, tissu, bois) perdus après une coupe. (Tarnac 158-9).

The territory draws forth a series of associations evoking the political entity formed at Tarnac, Gleize's own experience in this village of his youth, and the mysteries surrounding death and loss. Delimiting this space in Tarnac, this list of villages references poetic activity by alluding both to the sonnet and cut up writing. The title “Chutes” evokes the later poetic form, by which a text or a depot of materials may be compiled and juxtaposed with other texts. It is by way of loss (“débris de matière (papier, tissu, bois) perdus”) that these materials gain significance. Significantly, the italicized phrases surrounding the mysteries of presence and absence also appear in fragmentary form as though similarly seen as debris. As Gleize theorized with respect to conceptually-oriented poetics, the systematic recording of the components of an untenable situation may provide a means of investigating its riddles. These cut-out phrases charting the cartography of Tarnac may be approached from a similar perspective. The act of naming sites then serves the dual purpose of mapping a space and cataloging a series of circumstances as means of recording the elements surrounding an enigma. A politics of “chutes” traces and claims a site for the cabins where materialist practices of cutting and documenting inform Gleize's investigations of the real. The political project of forming a site of self-determination rejoins the act of probing into the mysteries of loss and mortality through poetic procedures.

The sites featured in Jean-Marie Gleize's writing are closely joined to his multivalent concept of opacity, in which spiritual unknowing meets the negation of the genre of poetry in
favor of new types of experimental practices. Accompanying these ideas is the politically-oriented notion of critical opacity, whereby a refusal of politics as such seeks liberation from apparatus of surveillance and control. Further, Gleize's dynamic and open-ended literary cycle contests both the unity of the traditional collection of poetry and the closure of certain enigmatic experiences. The unstable boundaries of the poetic work accompany the continual reprise of certain sites, scenes, and motifs. The sites privileged throughout the cycle, such as the lake or the forest, erase their own frontiers as stable locations, and instead become corridors leading to a single point. Daily exercises lead the poet to contemplate landscapes that transform into these corridors and access points before his prolonged concentration. Movement towards these points undoes images and figuration altogether. In a complementary manner, temporary sites like the cabins allow for autonomous political activity through withdrawal from the knowing gaze of the Empire. Just as the points enact an iconoclastic destruction of images, the cabins escape from the visibility afforded by maps, surveillance technology, or even chronological ordering of time. Thus, the cabins usher in a fluid temporality, where early human settlements, political events like the Paris commune or May 1968, and a Franciscan spiritual journal from the 1950s all intersect. Throughout Jean-Marie Gleize's cycle, site emerges as a dynamic and adaptable concept that stands in opposition with the stability of dwelling. The places that return again and again are then apt accompaniments to the investigations and experimentation at work within Gleize's nonlinear and open-ended oeuvre.
CHAPTER III

Olivier Cadiot, or A Portrait of the Artist as “Auto-usine”

Olivier Cadiot presents a powerfully renewed figure of the narrator in the form of Robinson, the reoccurring character at the center of a series of hybridized poetic and novelistic works. Presenting a challenge to the lyrical subject traditionally at the origin of the poetic work, Cadiot’s first volume, *L’Art poétique*, bypasses the lyrical “I” through the use of cut-up poetry. By appropriating the formulaic language of grammar textbooks, the work creates a jubilant impression of naivety, presenting an alternative to both avant-garde combativity and restorations of lyrical subjectivity. Indeed, these two poetic schools – formalist and neolyricist – may be seen as defining the field of French poetry at the time of Cadiot’s emergence in the nineteen-eighties. Where the formal procedures of *L’Art poétique* place Cadiot in the former camp, his subsequent works seek to push beyond this rigid opposition between formalism and lyricism. After a discussion of *L’Art poétique*, this chapter will center on Cadiot’s innovation of Robinson, a reinvigorated poetic narrator who coordinators the creation of the work without falling into a posture of naturalized lyrical subjectivity. Introduced as a supplementary level of the work in *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, the text following *L’Art poétique*, Robinson coordinates the recovery of linguistic fragments from before his shipwreck. In subsequent iterations, explicit references to Robinson Crusoe are abandoned, preserving only his mania for construction and preparations alongside a digressive play of language.

Devoid of the psychological depth of the traditional literary character, Robinson functions as an engine through which sensations and perceptions are processed at frenetic speeds. Transplanted from novel to novel, Robinson undergoes a process of isolation and amnesia that
transforms him into a vacant stage for linguistic performativity. Despite employing scenarios of deprivation – the desert island of *Futur, ancien, fugitif* or the position of servant in *Le Colonel des Zouaves* – Cadiot marks a divergence from the poetics of erasure of Maurice Blanchot or Samuel Beckett. Rather than a symptom of lack, Robinson’s seclusion provokes an uncontrollable and hallucinatory proliferation of language. The narrative “I” of Robinson becomes an empty site for the heterogeneous language of the contemporary world; Cadiot evokes, “[le s]yndrome Robinson, maladie de la digression et de la division.” It is through Robinson’s manipulation of the excess of language that Cadiot arrives at a return to the first person, as he explains in an interview:

La première personne est d’abord une manière de dire : présent — comme on dit « présent » en classe, au moment de l’appel. Allow me to introduce myself. Or il a fallu que je gagne mon présent. J’ai été élevé à l’idée de la discrétion, nourri au Beckett ou au Bartleby… Mais j’ai bien dû constater ce que cela pouvait produire de rhétorique, de posture, de prêchi-prêcha. Ça finit par donner du basique ressassé. Le majeur du mineur […] J’aurai donc mis quinze ans, avant de publier, à me débarrasser de tout ce verbiage sur « la littérature », à me désurmoïser — paradoxe : à désurmoïser l’idée de disparaître, l’idée d’être un sous-moi. À bas la tyrannie de l’effacement ! C’est ça mon sujet (Cadiot “Cap au mieux : Entretien avec Olivier Cadiot” unpaginated)

Reassessing twentieth century literature’s reduced, discrete subject, Cadiot reconstructs a narrative presence as the element that elaborates a literary work. Robinson is informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the *conceptual persona* who enables the production of the text, acting as the center of linguistic excess. Significantly, the porous, open identity of Robinson enables Cadiot to align him not only with the formal creation of the work but also with the work’s emotional effects. Through Robinson, Cadiot bypasses the binary opposition between

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formalism and lyricism. Affect becomes transmissible even outside of subjectivity, or rather, is produced through the very suspension of realist narration.

The formal experimentation characterizing each of Cadiot’s books is essential to the qualities Robinson takes on in each work. Yet, Robinson enacts his manic constructivism at the expense of a fully defined character even in his better developed versions, such as the more novelistic *Le colonel des Zouaves*. This servant Robinson amalgamates several concepts – for example, perfectibility of work and service – that don’t operate as character traits so much as motifs for his delirium. If the Robinson of Cadiot’s latest work, *Un mage en été*, enters into the domain of autobiography, it is by means of the interplay between text and image rather than any conventional portrait of the author. After discussing the initial Robinson of *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, I will focus here on the independent versions appearing in *Le colonel des Zouaves* and *Un mage en été*. While the two works are separated chronologically by several intervening publications, they lend themselves to a joint discussion based on an opposing orientation. The themes of hyperactivity and acceleration that give onto poetry in *Le colonel des Zouaves* (indeed, poems are inserted within the narrative itself) are countered by a movement towards pacification in *Un mage en été*. Significantly, these motifs inform the formal organization of the texts; where *Le colonel des Zouaves* structures novelistic prose around bursts of speed in poetic sequences, *Un mage en été* suspends the movement of reading by installing images within the work, preparing a harmonization of Robinson’s frenzied activities.

*Cadiot: Grammatician of the Poétic’*
L’Art poétique’ incorporates cut-ups of grammar textbooks to return literary language to a joyful state of naivety, playfully undermining the consistency and coherency of the most basic language. By shifting the focus of poetic writing from the complex linguistic acrobatics typical of much poetry to simple phrases introducing the French language, Cadiot levels a substantial attack on literary tradition. As many contemporaries of Cadiot have noted, L’Art poétique’ served as a touchstone for many authors of his generation, offering a fresh, alternative poetics. Yet, much of the work plays on basic themes shared by textbooks and literature, such as elementary affects, the landscape and nature, and illness and death. High literature itself is often incorporated in the work through citations of Racine, Corneille and other authors of French Classicism, not so much to introduce postmodern irony as to heighten the work’s dialogic, theatrical effect. Neither a subject position nor any concrete location provide stability or realist representation to these texts, which is particularly evident in the volume’s first poem “une extraordinaire aventure une aventure extraordinaire.” One of the poem’s first lines - “Et Pierre qui n’est pas là !” – establishes the psychological consistency of the work’s main character (L’Art poétique’ 13). Rather than elaborating a convincing character or narrative double of the author, Pierre acts as an empty signifier, a linguistic token continually manipulated while always signaling a failure in representation. Pierre - later rendered as Peter in an English section of the work and Petrus in a Latin portion - is revealed to be wholly dependent on his existence within language, and as such, easily transferred from one language and cultural context to another. In this way, traditionally poetic lyricism is neutralized as language functions without any reference.

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120 Major poets such as Christian Prigent and Emmanuel Hocquard, as well as the influential revue Java, all hailed the publication of L’Art poétique’. See Alain Farah for a detailed discussion of the reception of the work in Le gala des incomparables : invention et résistance chez Olivier Cadiot et Nathalie Quintane.

121 Jacques Sivan makes this point in a brief article “Edito/Cadiot” in Java 10.
back to a subject; Cadiot never develops a lyrical I in *L’Art poétique*'. 122 Indeed, the work offers a powerful critique of traditional lyricism as well as contemporary renewals of lyrical poetry, particularly prevalent during the nineteen-eighties. Nathalie Quintane attributes the title of “monstres” to poets such as Cadiot and herself for their refusal to recuperate the Cartesian subject as in neo-lyricist poetics (unpaginated, “Monstres et couillons, la partition du champs poétique contemporain”). 123 For Quintane, putting forward a subject in this way runs counter to the developments of twentieth century critical theory since structuralism and ignores its efforts to dismantle the Enlightenment cogito. Rather than providing seamless translation of interiority, *L’Art poétique* exposes language as a system constructing the self and providing the fundamental building blocks of expression. Indeed, these texts have not been composed by the author in the traditional sense, but merely extracted from their original context and transposed into a different, literary, one. Neither is poetry created by distilling more perfect language from the common speech of the tribe, to paraphrase Mallarmé, as these phrases fail to achieve any sort of artistic purity even as they leave behind representation.

Further, errors introduced into the text act to further discredit any expressive or lyrical content through agrammaticality: “Moi, je vivrais ici! □ Moi vivre ici!” (*L’Art poétique* 57). Grammatical tasks asking a language learner to isolate a sentence’s verb (“vivrais”) and provide its infinitive (“vivre”) are transformed into an exercise in idiotie. It is as though the lyrical subjective is placed on the outside of the language he is supposed to master. Rather than

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translating inner speech into an externalized and transmissible artistic form, Cadiot’s poetic subject remains external to the language, seeming to trip and falter over the forms of the words themselves. The manipulation of cut-up materials also takes advantage of the lists often found in textbooks in order to undermine subjectivity:

la fin, on finit

Ah, on sait ce qu’on veut!

et cela la rendait heureuse

la pensée que – l’idée que – le sentiment que – la crainte que
– l’espoir que – la déclaration que – la promesse que – la preuve que (L’Art poétique’ 107).

Following the exuberance of the exclamatory phrase, these final lines of the poem “Voyages anciens : Roman” create a celebratory sensation even as they leave a host of questions unanswered (Who is this “on”? What is it that they want?”). Far from the creating a clear emotional effect attributable to a person (“la” is accompanied only by the pronoun “elle” throughout the text), the happiness described (“cela la rendait heureuse”) seems to float outside of any subject. Affect and the discovery of “ce qu’on veut” are ironically suspended in a delayed process of emergence through the long list of potential causes (“la pensée que – l’idée que” etc.). A textbook’s listing of grammatical devices creates a sensation of stammering and hesitation, undercutting the joyful resolution seemingly found.

A section of L’Art poétique’ entitled “futur, ancien, fugitif,” which will become the title of Cadiot’s first novel, continues to dismantle the subject by undoing the naturalized relationship to time typically supported by language. Cadiot’s attention to the elementary functioning of language reveals time to be oriented primarily through grammar. In a similar manner as emotion
and the will were undermined above, manipulation of language’s building blocks exposes the concept of time as ultimately constructed:

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quand on joue ou qu’on s’amuse le temps paraît quand
on s’ennuie le temps le temps s’enfuit très vite on
dit qu’il est nul peut empêcher le temps de s’écouler :
on dit qu’il est le temps ruine les plus solide
édifices [...] (L’Art poétic’ 126).
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The fugitive instant, what critic Christian Prigent would call the irreducible “trou” of the present is produced formally through these fill-in-the-blank exercises playfully looped together one after the other.¹²⁴ For Prigent, poetry seeks to produce a sensation of the present moment in its flight from codified signification. In these sequences, language’s failure to properly account for time is ironically traced back to basic grammatical phrases written in the present tense (the “fugitif” tense of the poem’s title), which highlight the partial and incoherent representation they provide. If a fundamental deficiency is located in the present tense, the other grammatical tenses – the “futur” and the “ancien” – must be equally lacking. Indeed, Cadiot ironically figures the traditionally elegiac function of poetry (“le temps ruine les plus solide /édifices”) within this more general dissolution of poetic convention. Cadiot accomplishes a neutralization of representational language by pushing the most basic operations of the language to the point of overloading grammatical order.¹²⁵ By undermining subjectivity, affect, and time, the work

¹²⁴ Une erreur de la nature 164.

¹²⁵ Critic Alain Farah remarks : “À de nombreux égards, L’Art poétic’ a pour objet la neutralisation” (99). See “La révolution poétic’ d’Olivier Cadiot” in Nathalie Dupont and Éric Trudel (Eds) Pratiques et enjeux du détournement dans le discours littéraire des XXe et XXIe siècles, 91-104.
initiates a more generalized negation of representation. The system of language exposes its seams, failing to provide mimesis as a result of Cadiot’s skillful manipulation.

Significantly, this willful neutralization of the bonds between word and thing provides for a reimagining of one of the themes that has haunted French poetry since Mallarmé: the arbitrary character of the sign. As Prigent remarks, *L’Art poétique* succeeds in breaking out of a certain clichéd posture of the poet faced with the materiality of language: “C’est un formalisme, oui. Mais un formalisme qui fait naître la beauté d’un allègement, d’une décomplexion, d’un dénouage des nœuds hystérisés qui crispent souvent le poète sur la rage de porter la croix suppliciante de l’arbitraire du signe” (*Ceux qui mèrdRent* 251). Perhaps the principle achievement of *L’Art poétique* is offer a jubilatory alternative to the notion of the sign’s duplicity, thereby rejecting one of the enduring motifs of twentieth century French literature. As he explains in an essay closing the second issue of *Revue de littérature générale*, coedited with Pierre Alferi, Cadiot’s larger project is a break with the French literary preoccupation with lack and impossibility. An alternative vision of language’s materiality is one element leading Cadiot to reassess the base construction of literary texts:

L’énergie motrice de l’écriture fut si souvent pensée en termes négatifs qu’il s’est développé une sorte de vulgate du “manqué,” propre à la France littéraire. Elle a réinjecté de la transcendance, du mystère et de la piété, en détournant de grands concepts négatifs élaborés rigoureusement dans les contextes bien particuliers (l’impossible, la limite, l’innommable). Loin de ce qui faisait la force et la pertinence de ces concepts, la vulgate du “manque” les a réduits à une seule thématique grandiloquente pour recréer une scène illusionniste de l’écriture (“Digest” *Revue de littérature générale* 2).

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126 As in the original cut-up procedure employed by Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, there is a political tenor in Cadiot’s manipulation of found language. For a discussion of politics in Cadiot’s work (primarily in *Un nid pour quoi faire*), see François Cusset’s “Politique de Cadiot,” *Vacarme* 40, summer, 2007: http://www.vacarme.org/article1341.html.
Marking a divergence from the poetics of lack, literary production enacts the “compression” and “digestion” of heterogeneous elements originating in disparate sources (grammar books in *L’Art poétique*, but numerous other sources in Cadiot’s other works as we shall see). Rather than reflecting an intrinsic lack, writing is powered by the assembly of “boules de sensations-pensées-formes,” raw material also designated as *objets verbaux non-identifiés (ovnis)* (“La mécanique lyrique,” *Revue de littérature générale* I, unpaginated). By playfully and exuberantly offering cut-ups of the basic tools of literacy, Cadiot’s gesture may be interpreted as a sort of reset button for contemporary literature, as though signaling the release from a certain weight of tradition.

*L’Art poétique* forcefully announces this agenda, inscribing itself in the tradition of the *ars poetica* even if the work itself never explicitly outlines a poetics in the way Boileau, for example, contributed to the genre. Textual construction based in the elaboration of *ovni*, will, in turn, be fully implemented in his next work, *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, which I will discuss after some additional remarks on the mechanics of *L’Art poétique*.

Among a host of other issues relevant to contemporary poetry, *L’Art poétique* enters into dialogue with Emmanuel Hocquard’s preoccupation with objectivism. Indeed, Cadiot was the last poet published by Hocquard’s Orange Export Ltd. press and the two authors completed a residency at the Villa Médicis in 1986 and 1987 before publishing several short texts together.127 The creation of new meaning by the act of recopying and transposing into verse form allows Cadiot to achieve objectivism in line with the procedure used by Zukofsky in *Testimony*, as

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127 These texts include “Les associations ne sont pas libres,” Hocquard’s “Elégies VI,” (discussed in his contribution to Cadiot’s *Revue de littérature générale*, “Ma vie privée,”) and “Ce beau mausolée.” “Ma vie privée” and “Ce beau mausolée” have been reprinted in Hocquard’s *ma haie.*
discussed in my chapter on Hocquard. Each of L’Art poétic’s cut-up sections unfastens language from its original context. Each phrase or fragment of dialogue achieves a liberating effect of unanchored language, as though the words emerge concretely to confront the reader while minimizing any effects of secondary, metaphoric meaning. Complemented by an effect of playful naivety, these lines seem to hover outside of ordinary language, even as their content never moves beyond the most elementary speech. A text published during the period of Hocquard and Cadiot’s active collaboration, “Note sur la nymphe Écho,” functions as an explanatory note following the objectivist text, “Ce beau mausolée.” Cadiot’s contribution contains several programmatic reflections revelatory of his thoughts around the time of L’Art poétic’s conception:

3. Et si on lançait le postobjectivisme. Slogan : rien que de la poésie au bout de la poésie.
4. L’empêchant de filer trop vite vers le hors-sens, vers une glose extérieure, moins intelligente qu’une mauvaise conférence phénoménologique. Comme si on pouvait voir trop vite sous la “forme”.
5. La poésie est enfouie dans la langue. Il suffit de dégager délicatement et puis de faire un moulage (“Note sur la nymphe Écho” ma haie 62)

Rejecting poetry that serves to exemplify or engage critically with external discourses, for example those of philosophy, Cadiot and Hocquard turn to objectivist writing as an alternative approach to literature. During a discussion with philosophers François Cusset and Pierre Zaoui at the 2010 Festival d’Avignon, Cadiot speaks of L’Art poétic’ as advocating a “solution matériologique” for poetic language. Cut-ups (as well as sound poetry) come in opposition to the idea that poetry transcribes philosophic thought or experience, one of the twentieth century’s

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128 Hocquard draws this parallel in numerous theoretical essays. For example, see his work, Les Babouches vertes.

dominant visions of the art, as demonstrated in the thought of Heidegger, Char, or Blanchot.\footnote{While this chapter will discuss Cadiot’s significant engagement with Deleuzian philosophy, the use of philosophical concepts within his oeuvre takes on a different tenor than that of certain poetry that he critiques for verging on indecipherability without reference to an external philosophical text. Cadiot’s works integrate philosophical ideas in a complex play drawing on numerous genres from pop culture to marketing strategy to literary tradition, etc. In his work, poetry never comes to offer a “liturgie” of philosophy as Cadiot remarks in “À quoi pense la littérature ?” This discussion between Cadiot and philosophers François Cusset and Pierre Zaoui offers an excellent discussion of this topic.}

In addition to this rejection of poetry as vehicle for philosophical concepts, Cadiot also continues his offensive against traditional lyricism, situating poetry as already present within the language as opposed to the production of a privileged subject. Instead, this writing locates the authorial act not within interior expression but in the physical manipulation of materials, offering the metaphor of extracting and making a mold of words for the activity carried out with scissors and paste.

The formal organization of the page - particularly evident in portions of the work creating a theatrical play between multiple voices at a remove from any enunciator – accentuates the concrete quality of the work. The section “pai-i-sa-ge” exemplifies this essential role of typography, developing the organization of text on the page into a veritable landscape:

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avant Bonsoir        eh !
Nous voici arrivés
petite,              Le bois et la forêt (touffu)
bonne humeur ?       - Ah * monsieur *
petite,              Dans quel but entoure-t-on les jardins de murs ?
Ne discutons plus,

Puisque nous croyons tous deux avoir raison (L’Art poétique’ 214)
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This page, which repeats earlier elements of dialogue from within the poem, multiplies the conversing voices while condensing their already fragmentary propos. Cadiot succeeds in rendering the poem “touffu” through the juxtaposition of numerous elementary and, indeed otherwise, crystal clear phrases. The distribution of text within the space of the page and the use of a both italicized passages and a variety of fonts further amplify the effect of several simultaneous voices, while never assigning them to any fixed speaker. Rather, the dialogue resolves itself in an example of the neutralization evoked by Farah; “Ne discutons plus,/ Puisque nous croyons tous deux avoir raison.” Cadiot remarks that this interest in the material aspects of language – emphasized by the gesture of cutting out and arranging sections of text - could have led his work to evolve into either sound poetry or the installations of words:

La page de L’Art poétique’ est une cimaise. Si j’avais continué, je serais devenu peut-être plasticien – imitateur de Laurence Weiner et Joseph Kosuth : j’aurais fait des installations des mots. Ou je serais devenu poète sonore, ce qui n’est pas très différent : la musique et les arts plastiques sont dans la même zone, la zone matériologique (“Cap au mieux”).

In his works following L’Art poétique’, Cadiot turns from poetry to a highly original blend of poetry and prose, thus leaving behind his use of pure cut-up. Yet, engagement with visual art remains present throughout Cadiot’s œuvre. In a recent discussion with Art Historian Michel Gautier, Cadiot remarks (perhaps polemically) that the idea for the work may stand more effectively within a literary text without actually being constructed as an art object. Indeed, many of Cadiot’s subsequent works meditate on an existing work of art or imagine a new creation. For example, in his recent novel Un nid pour quoi faire, Cadiot elaborates a scenario where gigantic installations of letters would serve to commemorate the life of an exiled king.


132 Un nid pour quoi faire 261.
As a marketing consultant’s proposal to a royal court occupying a ski resort, the installation of words follow from *L’Art poétique* as a purely satirical conceptual gesture. While he does not depict these Hollywood-sign like installations within the work, Cadiot is far from abandoning his preoccupation with the formal components of text on a page as he moves from poetry to an innovative fusion of verse and prose.

While *L’Art poétique* produces a forceful neutralization of poetic conventions, as I have described above, it avoids sterile formalism by producing emotion in its treatment of elementary language. By manipulating fossilized, banal phrases, the work is able to create affect outside of subjectivity as though the mere functioning of language itself allows emotion to arise. It is through a play between the absence and presence of language that emotion is created in *L’Art poétique*. Following from the use of the poetic page as a material or sculptural surface, Cadiot succeeds in producing what I would like to call material affect. The dislocation of passages and their entry into a typographical composition creates a partial reanimation of the stiff prose of grammar books. It is the act of cutting out and recontextualizing these fragments that opens them up to naïve spontaneity as they interact on the page. In this way, affect is primarily produced on the material surface of the page, rather than through direct emotional appeals to the reader. Often the tonality of the work that allows emotion to be produced is one of naivety.

Critic Jacques Sivan, coeditor of the review *Java*, remarks on the work’s power in creating an effect of naivety and its role in inspiring his journal:

> Heureuse naïveté plutôt qu’ironie d’une langue, que certains ont cru être de bois, mais qui, parce qu’elle est toujours en instance de mort, a cette délicatesse, cette excessive sensibilité, lui procurant une énorme et vivifiante capacité de renouvellement, faisant fi

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133 Cadiot, Mangeot, and Zaoui, “Cap au mieux : Entretien avec Olivier Cadiot,”
de tous les académismes qu’ils soient de droite, de gauche, avant-gardistes ou classiques (‘Edito/Cadiot’ Java 10, 3).

It is in this naivety that L’Art poétique’ is the most dynamic and jubilatory, recasting lyricism as a redistribution of language on the page. The work derives its affective charge outside of any lyrical subject but from an anonymous lyricism found within the language itself. As Sivan remarks, “naivety” is preferable in describing Cadiot’s work to the more critical notion of irony. Cadiot’s work succeeds in renewing literary language precisely through its refusal to adhere to orthodox positions of the literary establishment (often marked by distanciation and heavy irony). Rather, L’Art poétique’ sidesteps both the tradition of combative avant-gardism and the conservative poetics of neolyricism. It seeks neither to develop a utopian language to usher in social change, nor to elaborate an idiosyncratic personal idiom (to the contrary, it uses that most accessible language possible). Instead, this open and spontaneous language ushers in a new poetics that privileges the construction of the work from the discourses in common circulation in contemporary culture. The naïve tone allows for renewed buoyancy in poetic language at the same time as Cadiot clearly challenges the restoration of lyricism.

“Je suis ici depuis longtemps”: Robinson the Stutterer

The initial incarnation of Robinson in Futur, ancien, fugitif adapts the story of Robinson Crusoe to create a narrative presence acting as an echo chamber for the words and things learned before his shipwreck on the island. Yet, the isolated space of the island itself is revealed to be that of a mental institution with the disembodied voices – often cut-up as in L’Art poétique’-

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134 Cadiot describes his interest in the cut-up: “c’est ça qui m’intéressait, recopier ce que disent les gens via les exemples de grammaire, de trouver des choses personnelles au fond de la langue morte (“Un terrain de foot” 21)
turning within the fractured consciousness of Robinson. Differentiating his status from that of a realist character, Robinson follows Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the conceptual persona. Elaborated in Qu’est-ce que la philosophie ?, the conceptual persona engages the movement of philosophical thought not merely as a voice of the author, but as the essential function that creates the concepts themselves. Within the novel form, the conceptual persona Robinson does not act as a narrative vehicle for the author’s voice nor as a fully concretized character, but rather as an “auto-usine” serving to produce and project the novel’s language, affect, and thought (“Cap au mieux”). It is Robinson’s recopying and reworking of language from before his life as a castaway that lends the work its structuring disposition. Serving to synthesize both the proto-capitalist Crusoe of Defoe and the schizophrenic version of Michel Tournier as read by Deleuze, Cadiot’s Robinson pursues a purely derisory activity of classification and ordering:

1. J’arrive sur cette île et par pure convenance personnelle je commence à dialoguer à haute voix pour ne pas perdre l’usage de la parole.

2. Je consulte d’anciens documents, lettres, etc. pour essayer de reclasser mes souvenirs.

3. Pendant ce temps – et ce n’est pas facile – j’essaie de mener à bien les travaux nécessaires à ma survie - nourriture, habitation, défense et distractions – et ce n’est pas de tout repos si on regarde les conditions difficiles dans lesquels je suis placé.

4. Je fais un récit de tout ça le plus exact possible.

5. Parallèlement je suis tenté par des formes plus imaginatives – c’est mon dada- et j’essaie de les intégrer à ce projet (Futur, ancien, fugitif 74-5).

As the movement of thought that undergoes the robinsonade itself, the narrator’s mania to list and record is assimilated to literary creation. If Futur, ancien, fugitif is classified as a novel, this form may be thought of as a larger depot for Cadiot’s poems. Dialogues, documents, and letters

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135 In the chapter “Qu’est-ce qu’un personnage conceptuel ?” in Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?

are preserved by this shipwrecked man, who experiments with form as he transcribes (“formes plus imaginatives”), associating the Crusoe myth with the figure of the writer. Robinson creates a disjunctive narrative that does not advance linearly but rather collects and juxtaposes a wide array of content on a single plane, holding an encyclopedic ambition not unlike Perec’s La vie mode d’emploi. The structure of the work, with short chapters progressing from poetry to a multiplicity of genres, establishes an ironic literary compendium, where each element classified and collected is subject to erasure in the eternal present of the island.\footnote{Christian Prigent, Une erreur de la nature 159-169.} Rational ordering fails as numerous techniques of Cadiot’s writing – ellipses, multiple contradictory voices, and the breakdown of speech into onomatopoeias – discredit language as guarantor of positivistic knowledge. Instead, Robinson’s survival manual becomes an incongruous anthology of literary forms, which never allow the narrator to extract fixed personality traits or achieve coherent subjectivity.

The motif of the desert island evokes an initial rupture with ordinary language and more broadly with Robinson’s mastery of his own speech. Faced with unstructured island time and a generalized loss of memory, he conserves and reconstructs his language in a manner similar to the objectivist author copying over appropriated texts. Yet, significantly, this repetition is often not seamless, as his language begins to stutter and stammer. Rather than fully reconstructing language based on memories from before his shipwrecked, Robinson’s isolation pushes his language to deviate from the standard tongue. In a chapter sarcastically entitled “Robinson c’est moi,” stuttering reaches the height of its intensity as it proliferates through an automated system:

le système Robinson est une technique très élaborée de dédoublement automatique, autonome et perpétuel. Chaque information traitée par ce système s’y démultiplie en
séries parallèles inconciliables. Si je dis par exemple 'un brin d’herbe vert' / 1. un un brin/ 2. un brin d’herbe un brin d’herbe vert / 3. un brin d’herbe vert d’herbe vert / 4. un brin brin d’herbe / 5. vert vert / etc. / et le vert – au bout d’un moment – devient indépendant de l’herbe et l’un ne pourra plus jamais retrouver l’autre. Comme l’île est distincte de moi et chaque mot prononcé à voix haute prendra son existence indépendamment du contexte dans lequel il a été prononcé. Et ad vitam. Résultat zéro. Somme égale nul (Futur, ancien, fugitif 150-1).

Robinson, explicitly likened to a machine, pursues a process of multiplication and subdivision of the phrase “un brin d’herbe vert” as connections between words fail to be made. Rather than combining with other words, each element of the phrase diverges as though moving towards isolation and insularity, becoming emblematic of the condition on the island. Unable to combine words into grammatical phrases, Robinson instead enacts a stammering that evokes Deleuze’s concept of the writer as stutterer. Deleuze extends the stutter’s modulation on the level of the word or phrase to a process of destabilization of the language as a whole: “Chaque mot se divise, mais en soi-même (pas-rats, passions-rations) et se combine, mais avec soi-même (pas-passe-passion). C’est comme si la langue tout entière se mettait à rouler, à droite à gauche, et à tanguer, an arrière en avant : les deux bégaiements” (Critique et clinique 139). For Robinson as system of stuttering, the action of transcribing found texts is radicalized, moving from decontextualizing segments of language to autonomous syntactic creation. Each position in the phrase is no longer prescribed but rather gains its autonomy, pushing forward a variable, bifurcating, and dynamic syntactic line.138 Cadiot asserts a shift as Robinson acts to “diviser la liste à l’infini, jusqu’au point où elle produit un effet de zoom dans la réalité, comme on dit, un effet d’hallucination” (“Cap au mieux”). Robinson shifts from isolating and decontextualizing utterances to

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138 Deleuze aligns the stutter with a linguistic dynamism: “[les grands écrivains] font fuir la langue, ils la font filer sur une ligne de sorcière, et ne cessent de la mettre en déséquilibre, de la faire bifurquer et varier dans chacun de ses termes, suivant une incessante modulation” (Critique et clinique 138).
effectuating a generalized linguistic “hallucination,” as if a schizophrenic language improvised a flight from standard signification.

Yet, this instrumentalization of the stutter, indeed its automation, saps the tragedy of isolation from this list of decontextualized words. As in L’Art poétique, Cadiot continues his effort to reorient contemporary literature away from clichéd postures of deprivation and failure, even as he treats these themes in an alternative manner. Where much twentieth-century literature takes the theme of language’s rupture with its enunciator (“chaque mot […] indépendamment du context’) as grounds for crisis, the Robinson system replays this drama without the same weight. The lyric I dispossessed of his language is ultimately the “système Robinson,” a computer system for processing information, rather than an artist. If poetic creation for certain thinkers may serve to render the world inhabitable, Cadiot’s computer system is able to stammer through this same enterprise, yet with a routinized, preprogrammed outcome (“technique […] dédoublement automatique, autonome et perpétuel”). His language escapes him because of his system design. Rather than lamenting the alienation of the author from his language, the revelation of language’s materiality offers a certain pince-sans-rire humor. Cadiot strikes a tone inbetween humor and pathos as the computerized subject laments language’s failure: “Un Un système d’isolement automatique un/deux automatique système d’isolement un système système d’isolement un/deux Je suis ici depuis longtemps signé R. / Je suis ici depuis longtemps signé R.” (Futur, ancien, fugitif 151). In its ironic unbalance, the machine stutter is programmed for pathos. Indeed, the melancholic motif of isolation does not offer the possibility to construct subjectivity (as it might in romantic lyricism), but instead offers subjectless language as the narrative presence. Indeed, romantic lamentations of passing time are equally apt for derisive treatment by Robinson at another moment in the work. Thus, Lamartine's “Le Lac” is subjected
to a comical increase in tempo: “mon cheval est arrivé premier / (je touche du bois). / Hier soir / chanté / Ô tempssuspendstonvoletvousheurespropices” (*Futur, ancien, fugitif* 106). Comically, frenetic acceleration, like stuttering, does serve to undo the course of time, not by providing a reservoir of unspoiled moments but through eternal return of the fugitive present. In both cases, language moves towards pure dissolution in the dead time of the island (“Résultat zéro. Somme égale nul.”). Robinson does not consolidate a lyric self against passing time, but rather continually returns to repeat, recopy, and reconstruct the narrative “I” as a movement at one with the work’s elaboration.

Following from the generative capacity Deleuze attributes to the stutter, critic Jérôme Game describes Robinson as creating *Futur, ancien, fugitif* through his stumbling, searching tongue. His chapter, “Olivier Cadiot, or the Stuttering Self,” analyzes the conceptual persona who creates the work through his jerky progression across various genres.139 Building upon Game’s dynamic reading, I will examine a final stutter not discussed in his text, which emphasizes the stutter’s move towards silence. A verse of Cadiot’s song with the musician Rodolphe Burger, “Cheval-mouvement,” inserted into *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, pushes language towards a melancholic leak:140

Quand il s’arrête oh ce / cheval-mouvement / de la main ou ralentir / ralentir / son mouvement / Demi-ar temps ah / arrête oh arrête le cheval / temps quand il s’arrête / ce cheval oh / ralentir / Quand il s’arrête oh ce cheval / mouvement demi-ar temps arrête / - arrête / ralentir de la main [/…] Bé la voix pour parler / inutile cette / difficulté d’articuler les sons / difficile / exemple bé- é égal ? (*Futur, ancien, fugitif* 113-4).

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139 See Game’s “Olivier Cadiot, or the Stuttering Self” in *Poetic Becomings: Studies in Contemporary French Literature*, 151–188.

140 On Rudolphe Burger’s album *Cheval-mouvement*. 
Initially offered by Robinson as an example of a literary composition in opposition to a series of “phrase[s] modèle[s],” the short poem is critiqued for failing to achieve a monumental quality, as though dissolving in purely fugitive time: “FFfuit envolée disparue” (*Futur, ancien, fugitif* 64). Thematically, the passage suggests the suspension of Robinson’s accumulation of found language, tending towards a zero sum, as the work’s final chapter is entitled. As the incitation to stall or stop (“ralentir,” “Demi-ar,” “arrête”) provokes the division and decomposition of syntax through repetition, Robinson’s chant begins to fall out of speed, explicitly evoking “bégaiement” (“bé- é égal ?”). In this stumbling, stalling tongue, language pushes towards the breakdown of speech: “Articulé / clac / - fin / ailes-mouvement / cheval / repos l’air / L’ - / L’ –” (*Futur, ancien, fugitif* 115). The tension exerted on language moves it towards silence, a correlative aspect of the stutter for Deleuze. Estrangement on the island pushes Robinson’s speech towards erasure, as language reaches the limits of its powers, tending towards muteness. The extreme tension exerted on Robinson’s language stretches his words towards visions or delirium before they collapse into silence. The work as a whole may be seen as operating such a stutter across its brief sections punctuated with white space. From this perspective, the constructivism characterizing the short sections of lists, models, and schedules takes place against a backdrop of empty time giving onto silence.

Yet, rather than setting the tone for the novel as a whole, the pathos or negativity that qualifies language’s breakdown is a single tonality that is rapidly reabsorbed into the work’s

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141 See Daniel Riou’s “Olivier Cadiot, “Le sujet et la déterritorialisation du sens” in *L’illisible*.

142 “[les bégaiements] accèdent à de pures visions, mais qui se rapportent encore au langage en tant qu’elles en constituent un but ultime, un dehors, un envers, un dessous, tache d’encre ou écriture illisible. Les mots peignent et chantent, mais à la limite du chemin qu’ils tracent en se divisant et se composant. Les mots font silence” (Deleuze, *Critique et clinique* 142).
complex play of voices. Returning once again to the theoretical propositions of the *Revue de littérature générale*, lack and silence are never fetishized in Cadiot’s work:

Bien sûr, quelque chose échappe au démontage mécanique des textes, il y a toujours un reste de l’opération. Mais il n’est pas ailleurs, au fond d’un puits, il est dans l’opération même. Tant qu’il reste l’inconnue de l’équation, reste = x, tant qu’il n’est pas hypostasié en objet de culte, il ne manque pas. Il fait au contraire jouer les pièces, tourner la machine par décalage moteur (“Digest,” *RLG* 2).

If a movement towards silence is continually recast in the white space between each of *Futur, ancien, fugitif*’s short chapters, the novel does not seize upon emptiness as the core of writing. Instead, the sharp limit of each subsection - often a brief departure into a specific style or genre – serve to continually expose the work’s constructivism. Rejecting both literature as mimesis as well as a mystification of the notions of silence or the unnamable, Cadiot’s work instead exposes its contours as an object in the process of being fabricated (“Digest”). *Futur, ancien, fugitif* continually shows its creation through a weaving together of a multiplicity of styles, genres, and appropriated texts. Silence or emptiness, in turn, may be seen as being produced within the engine that is the literary work (“il est dans l’opération même”), but not as a limit or frontier that would give onto transcendence. Where *Futur, ancien, fugitif* reaches the limits of its language, it does not come upon lack but instead exposes the mechanics serving to power its textual machine (“jouer les pièces, tourner la machine par décalage moteur”).

Robinson as stuttering narrator integrates the work’s disparate regimes of language into a self that is always in process. As both narrator and the conceptual persona charged with elaborating the work, he continually flees stable identity for a self in open transformation. Where his writing encounters the silence emblematic of isolation on the desert island, it rebounds and reinvests itself in a new section of text. The discontinuity of the desert island moves towards
the open interconnectivity of the archipelago. Jérôme Game describes Robinson as adopting an archipelagic self through the stutter at the conclusion of his essay:

[…] the speed of the stutter, its jerky rhythm across the book, conjures up an abstract line punctured by chunks of absence, pure negativity: the blank/white space between two reiterated semantic units. The overall feel is that of a porous, unstable horizontality constantly reconfiguring itself in the utterance.

Via the stutter, Robinson’s insular condition becomes more that of an archipelago than that of an actual island, inasmuch as the unitary island/subject is de-territorialized into an unstable series of relations between different morphing stases: chunks/moments of the stutter (*Poetic Becomings* 185).

Robinson’s stutters allow him to construct a self in constant mutation. Beyond fixed schemas of identity, he moves towards a porous, open being: a constantly mutating self. Where the novel falls into white or black space, the stuttering text and its narrator does not mark a limit so much as they reconstruct themselves in the following subsection. In this way, a modulating and bifurcating tongue reconfigures itself alongside a variable, unstable narrative. In his malleable identity, Robinson rejoins Deleuzian figures such as that of the schizophrenic who fall into frenetic hallucination. As performative narrator, Robinson’s deliriums power his formulation of a self and his world through a constant reconfiguration of mental and physical space. Where one of the concluding sections of *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, “Le retour,” places Robinson in an asylum, his preceding narrative of isolation on the desert island is exposed as a series of illusions. The mental constructions of the schizophrenic and the literary creations of the writer are shown as resulting from an ever active process of reworking and redistributing signification. At the core of this process for Cadiot following Deleuze is a factory-like productivity that opposes both lack and transcendence. Where *Futur, ancien, fugitif* harnesses a schizophrenic narrator to propel its “novel by poèmes,” Cadiot’s next work, *Le Colonel des Zouaves*,

143 On the figure of the schizophrenic, see Deleuze and Guattari’s *L’Anti-Édipe.*
reconstructs Robinson into a more novelistic character suffering from a different variety of madness.144

**Le Colonel des Zouaves** or Robinson as Runner

In the second installment of the Robinson cycle, *Le colonel des Zouaves*, Cadiot moves closer to the novel form, creating a digressive work with a central consciousness who more explicitly assumes the narration. No longer referencing the island of Defoe’s novel, this version of the conceptual persona carries over his excessive preparations and delirious manipulation of language into the position of butler. Calibrated to satirize contemporary politico-management rhetoric, this servant Robinson pushes this logic to a breaking point, donning the role of military commander training his troop of servants to provide “service total” to the guests of M.’s English manor (*Le Colonel des Zouaves* 12). Robinson’s extreme organization of life on the island is transposed into a hyper-regulated systemization of daily duties, where each menial activity ironically introduces an opportunity for excellence. This Robinson acts as an inversion of Melville’s Bartleby both through an exaggerated commitment to service and by incessantly multiplying preparations and arrangements. Bartleby’s devastating formula, “I would prefer not to,” which served to install a regime of pure negativism and disconnect the relationship between words and things, is substituted for a pseudo-philosophy of perfectionism.145 In *Le Colonel des Zouaves*, the copier, rather than resisting the dominating language he transcribes, joins the side

144 The expression is Cadiot’s. Cadiot, Mangeot, and Zaoui, “Cap au mieux.”

145 See Deleuze’s chapter, “Bartleby, ou la formule,” in *Critique et clinique*.
of his captors as though suffering from Stockholm syndrome.\textsuperscript{146} Particularly evident among the archetypes of contemporary culture that enter into Robinson’s delirium are the action hero and the marketing researcher, where, Robinson as super-soldier responds to the paradigm of the single combatant who becomes invincible. Cadiot discusses a similarly hyperbolic conception of marketing in an interview: “Dans le management et le marketing, les objectifs sont devenus métaphysiques, ce ne sont même plus des chiffres, c’est l’excellence, quelque chose qui a à voir avec la perfection.”\textsuperscript{147} Assembling the corpus of servants, Robinson joins together the discourses of administration and military authority by taking on the qualities of a drill-sergeant. In his address to the “troops,” the encyclopedic preoccupation of Futur, ancien, fugitif is transformed into obsessive-compulsive marketing research-cum-metaphysics:

Conclusion : il faut tout savoir du client, jusqu’au dernier bouton. Tendances, désirs, potentiel de modification des goûts. Courbe des envies et des satisfactions […] je me lève et je me jette sur le tableau noir où je dessine à la diable des cercles et des ovales comme on le faisait pour la théorie des ensembles, en hurlant : Asymptote d’une ligne de travail amélioré n’atteignant jamais la perfection idéale en justesse et rendement, mais s’en approchant à l’infini (\textit{Le Colonel des Zouaves} 54).

This mania for service tending asymptotically towards perfection leads Robinson to initiate a veritable spying program on the guests, conceived of as an exaggerated form of marketing research (“il faut tout savoir du client”). Yet, Robinson’s intelligence gathering activities, such as beginning an internal newspaper for the service staff, are undermined by paranoid leaps in meaning, as Robinson interprets table conversation as secret code.\textsuperscript{148} These spy fantasies

\textsuperscript{146} Cadiot makes use of the Stockholm syndrome metaphor. See Cadiot, Gauthier, and March, “Sur l’œuvre d’Olivier Cadiot.”

\textsuperscript{147} See Cadiot’s interview in \textit{Jeu: revue de théâtre}, 98 (2001) 64.

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Le Colonel des Zouaves} 34.
establish the servant’s madness as he enlists media references to psycho-killers to fuel deliriums of intrigue and murder.\textsuperscript{149}

Following from this insanity, the servant Robinson as literary character has less fixed personality traits than an amorphous identity open to rapid transformation. This Robinson hybridizes several ideas that never sediment into fixed personality traits, but rather always reveal themselves as non-naturalized and composite. Cadiot refers to these characters as monsters or “idées trolls,” amalgamations of ideas floating half-installed within a body and serving as motifs for the deliriums of Robinson (Cadiot, “Cap au mieux”). Throughout the short sections of the novel, Robinson is provided with a variety of new characteristics all subject to hysterical exaggeration, matching changing registers of language and fluctuating meaning. Cadiot attributes an open-ended schema of identity to Robinson: “Le personnage de Robinson dans Le colonel, il empile des traits de caractères, c’est comme dans les Pokemon ou les Donjon et Dragon : il y a un personnage, il peut prendre des choses à droite et à gauche, tant de points de vie, telle ou telle arme” (Cadiot and Xavier Person, “Un terrain de foot). These additional personality traits are complemented by new motifs in the novel and unexplored styles of writing. The attributes frequently find expression through mutations in Robinson’s body or perception as he adopts new properties. Robinson as voyeur alters his senses and speech through the use of a telescope that pushes vision and desire toward derangement. Able to discern each molecule of a redhead guest’s face, the image of her magnified freckles leads him to expound a chain of metaphors:

\textsuperscript{149} On Robinson’s lunacy, see Alain Farah’s chapter “Le fou et l’idiot” in \textit{Le gala des incomparables : invention et résistance chez Olivier Cadiot et Nathalie Quintane}. 

Lynch 160
Les taches de rousseur sont comme des abeilles ou comme du soleil sur de l’herbe filtré par un feuillage ou comme des fourmis sur une poire, ou comme des hannetons sur une salade. / Avec la chaleur, ces taches doivent fermenter et produire une chaleur anormale, comme une fièvre de dévoration dans la terre, un morceau de viande qu’on expose sur un mur, un kilo de prunes enterrées, une tête de lapin dans un placard, une peau de saucisson derrière une armoire. / Je l’aurai. (Le Colonel des Zouaves 81-2).

An alteration of vision engages a digressive sequence where the semantic field of desire ("chaleur," “fièvre,” “dévoration”) joins with a series of food items that have been oddly hidden away ("enterrées," “dans un placard,” “derrière une armoire”). This bizarre eroticism centering on secluded and confined spaces signals a new transformation for Robinson, foreshadowing a series of fantasies of seduction and kidnapping throughout the latter portion of the novel.

Robinson’s array of new perceptual capabilities renders him constantly adaptable, powering scenarios of hysteria and violence in reaction to his alienation as servant.

Moving beyond character alterations, Robinson himself is explicitly associated with the performative enunciation that generates the novel: “Je dis tout ce que je fais à la même vitesse que je le fais.” Like a machine requiring constant adjustment and tuning to best serve his master, Robinson either assures that he possesses a “moral d’acier” and is “bien réglé,” or alternatively, condemns falling out of order (Le Colonel des Zouaves 32). A constant process of calibrating writing, juxtaposing multiple registers of language, and weaving together genres orients Robinson’s narration and is continually associated with speed. Critic Michel Gauthier evokes the centrality of poetic speed in Cadiot’s book following Le Colonel des Zouaves, Rétour définitif et durable de l’être aimé. Where Gauthier convincingly argues that the later work

150 While I will make references to Rétour définitif et durable de l’être aimé throughout this study, I have chosen not to discuss this work in detail here. For an excellent study of the text, see Gauthier’s monograph, Olivier Cadiot, le facteur vitesse. The work also figures prominently in Farah’s Le Gala des incomparables. See Game’s short piece as well, “De l’involution poétique, ou le devenir-têtard d’Olivier Cadiot”: http://www.aup.edu/faculty/publications/game_OlivierCadiot.pdf.
acquires speed by integrating the fragmentary nature of verse into prose, he notes that *Le Colonel des Zouaves* is better anchored within the novel form. Rather than formal innovation of prose, Robinson’s periods of running outside the manor serve the function of acceleration. Simultaneously, these sections break out of the loose narrative framework of the novel, as Cadiot remarks: “mettre des poèmes à l’intérieur du livre, comme des courses, pour échapper” (“Un terrain de foot” 22). Under the pretext of training to provide faster service, these runs allow Robinson to fully assume the narration through performative acceleration: “J’enclenche ma vitesse intérieure surpuissante, crac […] Dégagement grande foulée. Je cours merveilleusement” (*Le Colonel des Zouaves* 37). Robinson’s interior monologue unites speed with the performative actualization of the present characteristic of poetry for Cadiot.\(^{151}\) Simultaneously, the novel form acts to house these poems as Cadiot explains:

À la limite, dix ans avant j’aurais pu les publier telles quelles, ces courses. Dans une revue de poésie. Mais je n’ai pas le droit, je ne m’autorise pas à faire ça, je ne sais pas pourquoi. Je suis donc obligé d’inventer ce serviteur qui doit être très en forme pour servir ses maîtres, pour des courses à pied (“Un terrain de foot” 22).

Problematising the status of poetry and lyricism since *L’Art poétique* as we have seen, Cadiot seeks to avoid a certain fetishistic quality of poetry by adopting it within the novel. Through its complex structure, *Le Colonel des Zouaves* provides a demonstration of the concept of “objet verbal non identifié (ovni).” The *ovni* manipulates literary raw material on the larger level of the work, combining poetry and prose into post-generic writing.\(^ {152}\) The *ovni* activates several literary (or even nontraditionally literary) genres by compressing and integrating their forms within a hybridized structure. Moving beyond *Futur, ancien, fugitif*’s more transparent *mise en*

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152 See *Revue de littérature générale* 1 & 2.
abyrne of poetry, *Le Colonel des Zouaves* weaves these sequences into the fiction in order to better push beyond this framework. In turn, poetry escapes its tendency towards detail, concentration, and a restricted field of vision. It is this aspect of poetry that the *Rivue de litterature generale* criticizes as particularly apt to privilege a certain regime of epiphany in the literary text and unduly provide illusions of transcendent experience. On the contrary, energizing poetry by placing it within the novel allows Cadiot to move past the presentation of a particular poetic “trouvaille”.\textsuperscript{153} Combining poetry with prose around the significant theme of running and speed, *Le Colonel des Zouaves* develops a literary engine that functions by leveraging the active components of each genre: prose’s action and continuity and poetry’s ability to condense and accelerate. In turn, the conceptual persona Robinson, who experiences these complex processes that generate the work, is propelled towards an active and performative elaboration of identity.

If these sequences function as poems set within the larger work, the activity of running strongly suggests Deleuzian deterritorialization, a short-circuiting movement whereby an unstable form commingles with a separate sexual, animal, vegetal class. Game, in his discussion of *Futur, ancien, fugitif* discussed earlier, interprets Robinson as enacting the perpetual transcoding with heterogeneous elements characteristic of Deleuzian becoming.\textsuperscript{154} In *Le Colonel des Zouaves*, these runs project Robinson towards a porous identity, destructuring subjectivity even as his interior monologue replaces the novel’s narration and dialogue. His hyperactivity culminates in acceleration surpassing the hysteric amplification of his duties at the manor, instead tending towards deterritorialization. As Robinson fully assumes the narration through

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154} Poetic Becomings 170-80
the multiplication of the first person pronoun, poetic performativity accompanies a breakdown in subjectivity, leading his body to disintegrate into the landscape. A sudden realization of the present moment asserts a self in dynamic disarticulation:


Alluding to British artist Richard Long’s “A Line Made by Walking,” where an ephemeral line was formed in a field by continuous walking, Robinson’s narration of running equates literary language with a similar performativity act (“Je suis cette ligne faite en marchant”). Following from Long’s piece, Robinson’s interior monologue corresponds to the realization of the artistic and scriptural gesture, employing the present tense as he explicitly assumes the course of writing. A second allusion to Quand dire, c’est faire (the French translation of How to Do Things with Words) evokes the seminal work of J.L. Austin, theoretician of speech acts, again insisting on performativity. Refiguring the impression on the natural world in Long’s piece, Robinson enacts a deterritorialization, moving him to project himself into the landscape (“Imprimé dans le paysage,” “je passe dans le décor”); a line made by walking becomes a line of flight (Le Colonel des Zouaves 171). Robinson, as amalgamation of personality traits or perceptual capabilities, moves from complexity to a simplified blur of color (“Bras jaunes. / Pieds bleus”). As he accelerates, Robinson’s identity melts into pure movement, suggesting Deleuze’s concept of flight:

La ligne de fuite est une déterritorialisation. [...] Fuir, ce n’est pas du tout renoncer aux actions, rien de plus actif qu’une fuite. C’est le contraire de l’imaginaire. C’est aussi bien
faire fuir, pas forcément les autres, mais faire fuir quelque chose, faire fuir un système comme on crève un tuyau (Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* 47)

Robinson’s hyperactivity (“rien de plus actif qu’une fuite”) culminates in pure departure, as anchoring in social organization, language, and the self all begin to leak and give way. Fleeing the structures of signification serving to construct reality for the social order, Robinson engages in performative decomposition: “je suis biodegradable” (*Le Colonel des Zouaves* 170). Dynamic inscription of the poetic line stimulates a movement of transcoding with the natural world as he fuses into the countryside. This deterritorialization pushes Robinson towards rupture bordering on dissolution.

This fleeing movement continues as the running line burrows into the earth, evoking interiority through the image of a trench, while losing nothing of its speed:

Dans la tranchée profonde à l’intérieur de dedans là où on voit les petits [ ] trucs les tu sais les en forme d’oiseau mais qui ne vole pas en miettes en poudre des cages d’air dans la terre c’est ça ?

Les [ ] les ? le non-name ? Les petits no-word trucs. Est-ce que je peux dire ça ? Est-ce que ça ira ?

Est-ce que c’est valide ? / + = le [ ] X ∞ (*Le Colonel des Zouaves* 169–70)

Reproducing the form of the line (“tranchée”) and exaggerating the theme of interiority (“à l’intérieur de dedans”), perception focuses in on the infinitely small (“en miettes, en poudre”), tending towards the molecular. This fragmentation accompanies a number of scenes throughout the novel where Robinson dissolves into the cracks in the floor or is absorbed into the pattern of a rug.\(^\text{155}\) In place of the intimate space that would provide subjectivity, there is only a descent into the infinitely small and unnamable, a hysterical becoming-molecular of perception. Where

\(^{155}\) *Le Colonel des Zouaves* 23, 80.
the cross, figured comically in the equation, alludes to an earlier discussion of mortality and Christian redemption, the passage evokes the incommensurability of these concepts, ironically insisting on inexpressibility (“Est-ce que je peux dire ça ?). Where Robinson’s monologue asserts performativity, this is far from producing lyrical subjectivity; instead, disequilibrium in tone allows pathos to emerge tinged with irony. Following from the inadmissibility of traditional lyricism for Cadiot, affect is produced through the hysterical decomposition of the self.156

At the conclusion of the passage, the figure of the line is once again transposed, this time into the verticality of the trees: “direct dans le grand bain devenir des arbres devenir les arbres devenir un arbre devenir l’arbre” (Le Colonel des Zouaves 171). Blurring together several trees before settling on a single one, perception vacillates in this progression from the indefinite plural article to the singular definite article as the fleeing Robinson finally reterritorializes into vegetal immobility. Earlier fantasies and deliriums are subject to intensification, where Robinson no longer hallucinates on his duties at the manor, but escapes this system altogether through lines of deterritorialization. The figure of the line pierces within him, forming a trench as an interval but not a pause within performative language, before a becoming-vegetal finally ends this movement. Structured within the novel as escape from the manor, Robinson’s monologue harnesses the performativity of the poetic line, projecting a flight from the structures that constitutes the self. Poetic speed is fully harnessed within Robinson’s performative interior monologue, as hyperactivity transforms into the pure acceleration of deterritorializing flight. In

156 “Un terrain de foot,” 22. In this interview, Cadiot’s alludes to Denis Roche’s slogan on the inadmissibility of poetry: “La question, c’est: quelle part de pathétique est-ce que je m’autorise à l’intérieur d’un dispositif. Encore une question de réglage […] La poésie, comme la douleur, est inadmissible. Le lyrisme, c’est bien ça, l’expression des affects importants. Il y a des affects importants. Il y a des choses importantes qui se passent dans la vie. Comment les dire ?”
this way, the porous, open identity of Robinson is complemented by the composite poem-novel form of the “objet verbal non identifié”.

Summer Psalmody: *Un mage en été*

*Un mage en été* leaves behind the more traditional novel form of *Le Colonel des Zouaves*, employing not only an innovative fusion of poetry and prose, but also incorporating images within the work. In addition to referencing visual artists such as Long, Cadiot often situates a work of art as launching his novels – for example Eduardo Kak’s *GFP Bunny* for *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé* and Nils Udo’s *The Nest* for *Un nid pour quoi faire*. In *Un mage en été*, images occupy a central place within both the imagination of Robinson, suffering from “la maladie de faire tourner les images,” and in the book itself, where color images alternate with text. As in these earlier texts, a photograph that is not reproduced in the book, Nan Goldin’s *Sharon in the River, Eagles Mere, PA*, depicts a peaceful and immobile bather, who plays the role of propelling the robinsonade. This stillness opposes Robinson’s frenetic line of flight at the conclusion of *Le Colonel des Zouaves*, establishing calming as one of the work’s themes. Where the colonel’s interior monologue establishes the performative hyperactivity that forces acceleration, the figure in the river attains a serene state where thoughts wash over her:

Cette image réussit à traduire ce que ressentirait n’importe qui planté là au milieu de l’eau […] Une idée subite, ah je deviens une statue, comme ça, je fais barrage, et ça s’organise autour, des filaments d’eau, des chaînes de molécules froides, en fouets, à l’image des herbes en lasso qui colonisent les rivières au ralenti, en ondulant. […] Vous

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me direz, mais être réduit à l’état d’ automate, c’est bon ça ? Évidemment que c’est bon, évidemment que c’est bon. Mais pourquoi c’est bon ? Pourquoi c’est notre rêve à tous ? Ça a toujours été le rêve : un automate qui crie. Pourquoi ? En quoi c’est le rêve ça ? (Un Mage en été 9–11).

Following Deleuze reading Spinoza, the self may become a spiritual automaton, entering into relation with the river in movement like automatic and subjectless thought. For Robinson, occupying the place of the bather would lead to calming and tranquilizing (“au ralenti, en ondulant”), rather than hysterical amplification as in Le Colonel des Zouaves. Reminiscent of Deleuze’s remarks on cinema’s claim to interior monologue, Un mage en été operates a transposition of the colonel’s performative monologue into the free play of text and image.159

Following from the exclamations on the spiritual automaton derived from Deleuze’s courses (“évidemment que c’est bon”), cinema as pure thought outside of subjectivity is equated to a purely mental narrator housing flux of information.160 A flow of images similar to those of the cinema as interior monologue would assimilate the mage’s consciousness, reducing him to the state of automaton and pacifying Robinson’s obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Simultaneously, an autobiographical component of the work treating themes of memory, personal loss, and mourning, centers on rejuvenation as leading to a similar state of harmonious fluidity. In this

159 Cinema 2: L’Image-temps (Paris: Minuit. 1985). On cinema and interior monologue, see Deleuze’s lecture from Oct. 30, 1984 (http://www2.univ-paris8.fr/deleuze/article.php3?id_article=6). Speaking of Sergei Eisenstein, Deleuze states: “[…] c’est que le monologue intérieur est érigé à une nouvelle puissance, il ne sert plus et ne désigne plus la possibilité du cinéma de donner une expression à ce qui se passe dans la tête du personnage, il devient adéquat au film tout entier […] Le monologue intérieur est le film.”

160 Ibid. Cadiot makes use of phrases taken directly from Deleuze’s Oct. 30, 1984 lecture: “C’est que parce que l’image cinématographique est une image automatique que loin de nous empêcher de penser elle fait lever en nous le vieux rêve, le rêve archaïque mais seulement réalisé par le cinéma, le rêve d’un automate spirituel.

Automate spirituel, automate spirituel, alors c’est ça, le cinéma ne serait pas seulement l’image automatique, il serait le corrélat de l’image automatique et de l’image de la pensée, c’est à dire la corrélation de l’image automatique et de l’automate spirituel qui lui correspond. Vous me direz : mais être réduit à l’état d’ automate spirituel, c’est bon ça ? Évidemment que c’est bon, évidemment que c’est bon. Mais pourquoi que c’est bon, ça a été notre rêve à tous, du moins notre rêve de la pensée, c’est ça que Duhamel ne savait pas, ça a toujours été le rêve de la pensée. Un automate qui crie. Pourquoi ? C’est ça qu’il faut voir maintenant, en quoi c’est le rêve de la pensée ça ?”
way, *Un mage en été* remains distant from a certain regime of autofiction parodied in *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*: “c’est écrit vite fait bien fait, [...] no style, c’est que du cul écrit genre rédaction de 4e, ça le fait à maximum, autofiction totale” (*Un mage en été* 34). Distinct from a confessional mode with its assumptions of univocity and where a lack of style would serve as guarantor of autobiographical candor, Robinson asserts a self in process: “Je suis dans une phrase qui bouge” (*Un mage en été* 121). An active component of this movement, memory enters into the process of mourning through a circuitous path combining text and image, finally opening up onto a lyrical chant at the conclusion of the work.

From among the multiple theories of memory referenced in *Un mage*, including those of Deleuze, Proust, as well as Barthes’ reflections in *La préparation du roman*, I will discuss primarily Cadiot’s interpretation of Walter Benjamin’s thought as an alternative to melancholic memory.\(^{161}\) While one of the central motifs of the work centers on mourning and personal loss, remembrance operates by juxtaposition of marginal content and bric-a-brac, rather than by rumination on the past. Robinson-mage engages in neither autobiography nor Benjaminian brooding so much as playful archival documentation, conceived of as open configuration of text and image. Cadiot evokes the influence of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* on the dynamic memory characteristic of *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*:

On en arriverait à un moment à se réveiller du passé. Du XIX\(^e\) siècle pour Benjamin. Du XX\(^e\) pour nous. S’enfoncer de plus en plus dans le passé, en utilisant le présent comme critère de division, jusqu’à ce qu’il ne reste pratiquement plus rien. C’est plus amusant que de « faire le deuil ». On est presque complètement en arrière, puisqu’on a tout dévoré du passé, mais on est en même temps complètement dans le présent parce que ce présent qu’on a mis au frais il a occupé tout l’espace (“Un terrain,” 21).

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The mage peruses an “album de famille bizarroïde,” not unlike Benjamin sorting through the archive of the nineteenth century, as a historical component of the work accompanies the question of family descent. Branching out from a photo of a nineteenth-century dark mage, Éliphas Lévi, who married into Cadiot’s family, Robinson forms these images into a rhizomatic network: “Je n’ai aucun mal à tout vivre en même temps” (Un mage en été 35). A rapid procession of images surge forward from the past in a manner suggestive of a cinematic dissolve: a satellite map view moves to a description of Roman baths before launching forward to the Hundred Years War. In addition, Robinson introduces contemporary images of many of these sites, observing traces of Roman graffiti like an anthropologist and integrating these historical images directly into the work.

Following from this collection of historical fragments, the relationship between text and image enacts a spontaneous and digressive movement, as not only film but also the internet becomes a central reference for the work. Rather than playing an iconic role in the text, images enter into a dialogic relationship with words, evoking the internet’s rapid accessibility to voluminous information. The awakening characteristic of Benjaminian memory invests the text–image relationship, allowing images to arise within the course of the narration in a manner suggestive of search engine responses. Robinson as mage generates the work by manipulating the photographs, maps, graphs, and paintings circulating in information networks or housed within databases: “C’est comme si j’avais à ma disposition des hangars gigantesques bourrés de documents, étagères en métal, petite manivelle, on rapproche et éloigne les murs d’archives à volonté. / Mais en version moderne” (Un mage en été 75). Following from Robinson’s activity of collection, images and memory, instead of forming a linear narrative or a traditional family

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162 Cadiot and Bourmeau, “Un mage en été – et à la rentrée pour Olivier Cadiot.”
album, become open to rhizomatic connections with a multiplicity of other elements in the present. Further, Robinson echoes the conditional statements characteristic of *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*, which, as in this earlier work, also derive from a nonlinear, fragmentary archive. For example, he imagines himself a historian constructing a work around the site of Goldin’s river; “Si j’étais historien, j’écrirais une monographie de cette rivière” (*Un mage en été* 40). For critic Jean Renaud, these conditional statements characterize the contemporary regime of knowledge:

Les incessants et joyeux « si on est » (menuisier, mathématicien, dans la nature, dans un film noir, dans un film de guerre…) ne définissent pas la culture d’un sujet (ses préférences, sa mémoire), mais parcourent (de façon découssue, interminable, fragmentée, incomplète, obsédante) ce qu’à chacun (à tout le monde) offre notre temps – savoir mobile, « culture » commune, ni rangée ni construite, jetée là, présente (toujours présente, seulement présente). (“Le monologue extérieur d’Olivier Cadiot,” *Critique* 667, 771)

Where both works bear the influence of this “savoir mobile,” *Un mage en été* integrates these images (often taken by Cadiot’s mobile phone) directly into the work itself. Conditional statements evoking a potentiality become entries into a search engine, instantaneously providing a pictorial response. Robinson as mage navigates the ever expanding flux of information characteristic of the contemporary era.

As the performative narrator serving to funnel data into the work, the identity of the mage resides in a constructivist dispositif enlisting historical fragments, memory, and images. In *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*, the novel form of *Le Colonel des Zouaves* is replaced with a fuller hybridization of poem and prose as the blank space of the page plays an essential role in organizing the rhythm of reading. Michel Gauthier signals an opposition between the performative monologue of *Le Colonel des Zouaves* and a fuller integration of poetic speed in accompaniment to the purely mental narration of *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*:
À vitesse dans la fiction, vitesse de la narration ("Je dis tout ce que je fais à la même vitesse que je le fais."), c’est le rapport que donne à voir *Le colonel des Zouaves*. Ce rapport semble s’inverser dans le *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé* : à vitesse narrative, vitesse fictionnelle […] la vitesse prise par la lecture dans sa descente du texte et des blancs qui la scindent et la relance sans cesse (*Olivier Cadiot, le facteur vitesse* 36).

Figure 9.
Where *Un mage en été* multiplies the use of fragments, sentences and paragraphs follow a more traditional alignment rather than the poetic use of white space privileged in *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*. Yet, following from the earlier work’s use of the page’s space to provide a rhythm for reading, *Un mage en été* distributes images within blocks of text like freeze frames. The mage as mental narrator distributes images to interrupt reading, serving to pause the eye’s progression across the page. Alternating the size and frequency of photographs and drawings within different sections of the work introduces variable speeds of this suspension of the gaze. For example, a rapid progression of small pictures of demons occurs during the discussion of the occult on the facing double pages ninety and ninety-one (see figure 9), testifying to the mage’s dark powers, while the conclusion of the work features a succession of full page images (see figure 10), accompanying Robinson’s movement towards contemplative deceleration. Moving outside the novel form of *Le colonel des Zouaves*, the space of the page plays an active role is designating the pace of reading as in *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*, as Cadiot distributes images throughout *Un mage en été* in active relation with the text.

Accompanying this progression of images, a complex process of remembrance leads the mage towards serenity and reinvigoration, ultimately bringing forth a release in the form of a chant. Significantly, an essential photograph is absent within the odd family album that he presents, that of his own recently deceased father. In a likely homage to the omitted winter garden photograph of Barthes’ mother in *La chambre claire*, Cadiot choice to include photos of miscellanea in place of his father’s image reflects a similar emotional restraint and desire for privacy. Thus, Cadiot takes the reader through a process of mourning and recovery that touches on autobiographic memory, while consistently demonstrating reserve. As discussed in relation to

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163 *Un mage en été* 137, 147, 151.
Figure 10.

Est-ce qu'on peut dire ça?
Et ça?
Ligaments modernes dans une balade ancienne?
Trop compliqué.
Oublions.
Réflexions.
On se souvient pour l'éternité de certaines personnes à cause d'un infime corail. À chaque fois que je me fais un café, j'oublie souvent, je pense à mon frère qui disait chaque matin, d'un ton grave de ne verser qu'une seule cuillère, même si la tasse était grande. S'il est filtre, je pense immédiatement à cela qui insista sur le truc de ne remplir la casserole d'eau à bouillir qu'en plusieurs fois, à petits coups, pendant que le café passe, pour gagner du temps. On pense toujours à son grand père en disposant les béchtes en forme de petite maison pour réussir un feu de cheminée. Ça peut être un usage de table déguisant une superstition de désespoir mondain, comme celui de servir la coquille vide de l'œuf à la coque avant de la briser d'un coup sec et désinfecter, Parole du Père. Éviter un danger : ne jamais toucher un interrupteur électrique les mains mouillées. On pourrait classer ces conseils en catégories en opposant par exemple ceux qui sont là pour éviter une mort certaine à ceux qui vous facilitent la vie, etc. Mais l'essentiel, c'est qu'ils vous font penser automatiquement à quelqu'un, chaque fois que café soluble m'oblige à saluer un frère, comme ces croix sur le talus des routes à la mémoire de X Renversé ici, que l'on salue chaque jour dans le même tournant près de chez soi.

Une expérience qui campe près d'une autre.
Je me tourne.
Tête dans miroir noir.
Je tiens très longtemps sous l'eau.
Sous l'eau.
Lignes de bulles vers la surface.
Et là, les muscles craquent légèrement.
Cartilages nageurs.
Muscles verts dans la coque de l'eau.
Je nage.
Des personnages ! des personnages ! criais-je. De la fiction, je sors, je reviens, je remonte un à un tous les caucasiens de mon cerveau-cœur à toute vitesse en bateau à moteur. J'ai l'impression d'avoir été congédié très longtemps.
Je nage.
Brasse coulée, et raatch, s'arrachant à la terre de la masse liquide, Fossober, Siter, Brother, je hurle en cadence, comme un galeriste à chaque coup de rame, tête renversée vers la voûte de ciel bordée d'arbres qui ressemble à une cathédrale naturelle, Macombober, comme dans la chanson qui débute par un énorme coup de cloche, je nage en criant à la rivière.
Ça fait du bien.
Je retrouve les sensations comme le picotis dans les doigts de nouveau en vie. Hmm, je réécrit le trajet électrique des neurones. Comme ça.
Reprends de l'air.
Revue de littérature générale, Cadiot has consistently problematized the status of lyricism, advocating careful calibration of these effects within a work. Whereas the Robinson of Le colonel des Zouaves actualizes the present moment through his interior monologue, the mage, also in a performative posture, comes to acceptance through an awakening of memory culminating in song:

Guérissons-nous. On redessine, on conforme, on épure ses souvenirs […] je crie, oh je chante, je suis en contre-chant, je suis guéri, je suis la deuxième voix, au-dessus, en dessous, basse continue, ah, je descends, grave, très grave, lié, ça ondule, doucement, comme ça, un enroulement de comparaisons douces, les chants les plus connus mêlés aux sentiments uniques. / Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine. / Quand on entend l’auteur le réciter d’une voix si plaintive, tout le monde se moque, mais c’est un tube, il a raison. / Un vrai tube, dont on peut se moquer en l’aimant (Un mage en été 120–1)

Accompanying a renewal alleviating bereavement, the pop song facilitates healing by providing a “stéréotype” of emotional gravity, allowing heaviness to move towards fluidity.164 Apollinaire’s “tube” functions similarly: one may make light of his plaintive tone even as it is this mocking that provides the levity necessary for the verse to resonate. Like the appropriated language of L’Art poétique, this music can often be without real particularity and circulates like a shared possession of all. Popular songs, precisely because they are so commonplace, allow themselves to be charged with personal feeling (“mêlés aux sentiments uniques”). Empty of content, these songs transform rather into vehicles for affect and memory; they achieve a “fusion d’ironie et d’abandon” enabling them to carry emotion (Un mage en été 138). Evoking in a parallel moment in the work, “une psalmodie sans regret,” Cadiot locates musicality as emerging spontaneously alongside memory (Un mage en été 135). These abrupt openings onto song form the base of literature as non-codified, individual chants, paradoxically functioning in a similar manner to Apollinaire’s poem as pop song. Opposing overt effects of musicality throughout his

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164 Cadiot, Gauthier, March, “Sur l’œuvre d’Olivier Cadiot,”
oeuvre, Cadiot remarks in an interview: “Reste peut-être une envie de psalmodie secrète. L’idée que les beaux livres rejoignent la part de littérature qui est en chacun de nous, ce qui fonde la littérature, le petit chant, la douce déploration, la consolation enveloppante, ô saisons, ô châteaux” (“Cap au mieux”). If literature communicates by means of simple refrains or naïve rhythms, to paraphrase Rimbaud, Cadiot advocates discretion and carefully balancing of these effects within a work. This psalmody remains decidedly private and distant from the more transparent musicality of certain (neo) lyric poetry. Avoiding formulaic melodiousness, lyricism is delicately coordinated within a work by carefully manipulating literary codes and conventions.165

The final scene of Un mage en été couples lyricism and memory, combining multiple layers of intertextual memory through a reference to Deleuze that echoes throughout Cadiot’s oeuvre. The mage joins Sharon of Goldin’s photograph to swim, where concluding the process of mourning leads Robinson toward an adaptable relationship with the multiplicity of circulating words, images, and memories. Liberated from the dark side of mage ancestry, identity moves towards porosity as Robinson dives into the water in a scene reminiscent of the harmonious swimming sequence at the conclusion of Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé. The final words of Un mage en été repeat a famous citation from Spinoza, often commented on by Deleuze: “Vous n’imaginez pas ce que peut un corps” (Un mage en été 156). Entering the water engages the body in its capacity to compose beneficial relations with other substances well suited to it. The mage’s dive follows the metaphor of composing and decomposing connections with a

165 On emotion, Cadiot writes: “Je crois qu’il faut faire énormément de détours pour être particulier. Barthes racontait qu’il devait écrire une lettre à un ami qui venait de perdre sa mère. Si je lui dis exactement ce que je pense, dit-il, il ne me croira pas. Si je mens et que je trouve une forme, je parviendrai à lui dire la vérité. Voilà, l’émotion ne se proclame pas, elle se fabrique et se refabrique dans l’espace virtuel qu’est l’écriture.” (“Faire entendre la mécanique de l’âme” 64).
wave for Spinoza’s second kind of knowledge, moving towards fluidity in his relations with flux of language and images:

Comme dans les jeux, où l’on exige de plus en plus de fluidité, et, quand le sujet s’avance, armé du maximum de points de vie, le décor se construit au fur et à mesure. / En avançant, l’histoire se serre. / Je nage très profondément. / Et je reviens à la surface. / Brasse profondément coulée. / Comme ça. / On se développe, on se conforme, on se compose, on se décompose. / Je nage. (Un mage en été 152).

The colonel’s frantic line of flight is recast as a partially unstable equilibrium, in which a malleable self and a fluctuating landscape continually reconfigure themselves. Robinson’s identity reconstructs itself in this indeterminate, vacillating movement, as adaptable virtual scenery becomes analogous with engaging in the correct configuration of movement and rest with Deleuze’s wave. The scene echoes another “sample” from Deleuze’s lecture in Un nid pour quoi faire: “Vous sentez bien que c’est un étrange bonheur” (323). Indeed, this phrase is among the samples of Deleuze’s voice used in Cadiot’s collaboration with the musician Rodolphe Burger on the song, “Je nage,” as Cadiot participates in the contemporary movement blurring boundaries between artistic practices.166 In their echoes throughout Cadiot’s works, Deleuze’s “tube” evokes not only this philosophical discussion of Spinoza but also a certain affective quality emerging through memories of the lectures and voice of the philosopher. These reprises within multiple currents of Cadiot’s oeuvre “stéréotype” high philosophy even as they integrate its concepts into the work, providing lyricism not unlike in the earlier mention of Apollinaire’s plaintive reading. In Cadiot’s psalmody of memory, sampling may serve to evoke the intimate portion of an individual chant.

In addition to his musical collaboration with Burger, Cadiot has pursued a longstanding engagement with the theatre and was invited as artiste associé of the Festival d’Avignon in 2010.

Directed by Ludovic Lagarde, the actor Laurent Poitrenaux played Robinson in the initial collaboration between these three artists in *Le colonel des Zouaves*. *Un mage en été* was conceived of as companion piece to *Le colonel des Zouaves*, with Poitrenaux similarly performing an extended monologue without the use of additional actors as in the adaptations of Cadiot’s other works. As the hysteria of *Le colonel des Zouaves* is matched by *Un mage en été*’s progression to calm, multimedia productions utilizing screens and voice-altering microphones reinforce Robinson productivist nature. If Robinson is transplanted into numerous genres and arts by Cadiot – from the novel by poems of *Futur, ancien, fugitif*, to *Le colonel des Zouaves*’s more classically novelistic form, and the autobiography by images, *Un mage en été* – his status is always that of the narrative presence that realizes the fiction itself. In Robinson, mania for collection and digression push towards hallucination, enabling Cadiot to house the circulating text and image of the contemporary world within an empty character.

The four works studied in this chapter present Olivier Cadiot’s significant engagement with several of twentieth century French literature’s central problematics. *L’Art poétic*’ achieves a sophisticated neutralization of the lyrical subject and locates poetry’s emotive quality in an activation of preexisting phrases. Working against the “vulgate du manque” that reifies the notions of impossibility, limits, and lack, Cadiot’s tone of joyful naivety reorients poetry towards the building blocks of the language. The essentially material quality of the language of grammar books allows Cadiot to defy the potentially mystifying concepts of lack or impossibility by emphasizing the construction of the text. This focus on constructivism and the introduction of the conceptual persona Robinson allows for a new type of narrator to enter into the literary work. Avoiding a strong lyrical subject (often allied with a return to the Enlightenment cogito) as well as the hesitant, debilitated narrator typical of much *minor* literature, Robinson manipulates an
excess of language that he never claims as entirely his own. Instead, as the narrative presence that coordinates the creation of the work, Robinson engages with the proliferation of text and image characteristic of the contemporary era. These works function as Bildungsromane as each iteration of Robinson moves towards adapting harmonious relations with flux of information. Lyricism is ultimately achieved in the text from within this equilibrium achieved with the language of the contemporary world. Beyond a return to the lyrical subject, Robinson realizes the poétique through dynamic porosity with ever expanding networks of word and image.
CHAPTER IV

Nathalie Quintane: Poetry as Political Speculation

Nathalie Quintane has emerged as one of the strongest voices of a generation of poets who began publishing in the 1990s and have reassessed the notions of the avant-garde and the political engagement of literature. Her dynamic and digressive writing foregrounds poetic performativity in sequences of anecdotal prose. In this chapter, I will focus on Quintane’s recent works, which produce an improvisational, ad hoc reaction to contemporary French political events. *Grand ensemble, concernant une ancienne colonie*, a commentary on 2003’s cultural event *L’année de l’Algérie*, and *Tomates*, written in response to 2008’s Tarnac Affair, both attempt to respond in vivo to political circumstances as they arise. Quintane levels an implicit critique of the historical avant-garde and their teleological model of thought by restricting her writing to provisional responses to questions of contemporary import. *Grand ensemble, concernant une ancienne colonie*, mounts an attack on *L’année de l’Algérie*, a 2003 French national celebration of the former colony. Through verbal provocation, Quintane seeks to provoke a frank discussion of the troubled past in place of the sanitized view of Franco-Algerian history proposed by this commemoration. In *Tomates*, Quintane reacts to the 2008 arrest of activist and theoretician Julien Coupat under new French anti-terrorism laws. As discussed in chapter two, the Tarnac Affair was widely interpreted as targeting Coupat for his radical leftist politics and his presumed collaboration on the book *L’insurrection qui vient* and the review *Tiquun*. These anonymous works, written in response to the 2005 suburban riots that spread from Clichy-sous-Bois to large areas of the country, propose a new revolutionary politics.
Throughout her writing, Nathalie Quintane upends the discursive grammar that serves to order and format conventional political thought. Yet, Quintane’s writing is not working in an avant-gardist framework against the fascism of the language, to paraphrase Roland Barthes. Instead, writing after the end of the post-war avant-gardes of the 1960-80s, her position must necessarily be less ideological, less idealistic, but rather articulated across a series of entanglements. While certain of her earlier works have clear political resonance, none take up politics explicitly and to the same extent as her recent books. *Jeanne Darc* retells the story of Joan of Arc in literal, demythologizing prose, seeking to reclaim a figure that has been celebrated by Jean-Marie Le Pen and his far-right Front National party. Similarly, her work *Formage* features numerous, playful political meditations centering on a version of Poland situated somewhere between the country’s communist period and Alfred Jarry’s *ubu kingdom*. However, a general shift may be observed from writing that acts politically through linguistic experimentation, for example in *Chaussure*, to literature that addresses the theme of politics directly, as Quintane herself remarks:

"Donc, je pensais qu’écrire *Chaussure* suffit. Mais j’ai compris, à la sortie de *Tomates* (qui revenait sur l’affaire de Tarnac et la période Sarkozy) que la thématisation était (revenue) indispensable : le livre, pour être politique, devait parler de politique. Si, pour être politique, on doit parler de politique, alors c’est qu’on ne comprend pas grand-chose au politique (ni même à la politique) (*Les années 10* 200)."

Incorporating the theme of politics responds both to a change in social context and in the climate of literary reception, and most importantly, to the alarming realization that politics are poorly understood at present. By explicitly incorporating politics within her recent works, Quintane seeks to remedy these interpretative through the creation of “expériences de pensée alternatives, des propositions de bifurcations” (*Les années 10* 195). This evolution leads Quintane from an exclusively literary production, published by the edition POL, toward a new volume of texts that
combine literary and theoretical writing around the theme of politics. Published by La Fabrique, an editor of political and philosophical essays, *Les années 10* marks a turning point for Quintane, because she belongs to a generation of French writers who have sought to minimize the theoretical dimension of their writing. Along with poet Christophe Tarkos and the poet and visual artist Stéphane Bérard, Quintane has reacted against the over-theorization on the part of avant-garde writers. Moreover, for these writers beginning their careers in the 1990s, the era is characterized by a fundamental incertitude that renders grand proclamations out of place and inappropriate.

Instead of a future-oriented posture characteristic of the avant-garde, Quintane seeks to ground political commentary in the unique circumstances of particular events. While she works to dismantle conventional representations, and especially those that serve as a vehicle for reactionary or militaristic ideologies, she constantly shows the ambiguities of this project with humor and irony. In place of a posture of gravity, Quintane elaborates an incongruent, anecdotal, and playful prose, often approaching complex political issues from the posture of *idiotie*.\(^\text{167}\) Derived in part from the philosophy of Clement Rosset and discussed with regards to Emmanuel Hocquard in chapter one, Quintane employs a comical version of the idiot. Proving herself supremely open to the unforeseen, the idiot comically stumbles through reflections that are unanchored in any systemic philosophy. The perspective of the idiot resists master narratives and a coherent *Weltanschauung* in favor of the “coq à l’âne” remarks that Quintane playfully employs throughout her work. Defining the political potential of poetry elliptically as, “Poème: spéculaction politique,” Quintane insistes on the conjectural character of literature.

\(^{167}\) See Jean-Yves Jouannais’s *L’idiotie* for a discussion of the idiot in Quintane, Cadiot, and Emmanuelle Pireyre’s work, 89-93.
(“Astronomiques assertions” 196). Thus, her politics is derived from a sinuous, digressive elaboration of thought, rather than any preexisting conceptual model. In this chapter, I will examine the political aspects of her work by discussing the content of her critiques, her use of performativity, and Quintane’s innovative critical forms. Far from an anachronistic return to the avant-gardist posture, her critiques freely combine literary and essayistic writing without recourse to established forms such as the manifesto.

Politique de l’embarras

In her early work, Quintane’s reflections on literature's political implications center on the use of fragmentation and incongruity to challenge the expectations of the reader. Indeed, Quintane’s first volume, Remarques (1997), is composed of a series of individual sentences that produce an idiosyncratic and literalist vision of the world. These remarks undermine literary and philosophic schema of depth by affirming a poetics of surface. Working in a style evocative of Wittgenstein interrogation of everyday language, she unravels the language used in the quotidian. Several of these remarques read as follows:

Quand je longe des voitures garées, les reflets du soleil avancent avec moi (12).
Le son du frigo vient du frigo. S’il partait d’un mur voisin, ce serait autrement déstabilisant (24).
Selon l’endroit du corps que je gratte, je produis un bruit différent (42).
Quand je pense fortement à quelque chose, je ne vois pas ce que je regarde (53).

These elliptic sentences don’t employ metaphor to poeticize the surrounding world but rather focus on nuances of perception, ambiguities in language, and singularities of the body to create an effect that is “autrement déstabilisant” (24). Thus, her early works rarely directly address politics, but rather approach the political through unorthodox arrangement of language. Indeed, as Jacques Rancière argues, art acts most powerfully on politics not by endorsing certain political
positions or engaging directly in favor of certain policies, but by using its powers of language, image, or sound to work subtly on perception. By proposing alternative distributions of the sensible, literature and other arts act politically to call into question the systems of knowledge and perception that organize a given society. Presenting experimental uses of language, for example, may do more to render subaltern voices audible within a conservative spectrum of political dialogue, than explicitly incorporating activist themes. Yet, significantly, Quintane's writing, especially in her early works, employs simple, accessible language in inventive ways, eschewing avant-gardist experiments with neologisms, wordplay, or complex syntax. As her Remarques demonstrate, linguistic experimentation may be accomplished in everyday language just as readily as in highly complex avant-garde writing. This model of political art informs most of Quintane's early literary production, although deliberations on politics become increasingly frequent, as we shall see in greater detail in what follows.

Following Remarques, the use of fragments also reappears periodically throughout her work in the form of humorous syllogisms or near tautologies. A later text, Formage (2003) makes use of fragments in a didactic manner, by employing them to discuss the political content of an unorthodox phrase. Quintane gives a grammatical lesson on the fragment that may be read as an irreverent take on a subject that often appears in the work of contemporary poets (for example, Emmanuel Hocquard’s Grammaire de Tanger series). She introduces a non sequitur, “un lapin traverse une rue,” which she identifies as politically charged because it references an uncommon event. The phrase is then subjected to a series of recontextualizations that inflect its political content either by situating it within conventional expectations or by drawing out its associations with radical politics. Commenting on the latter possibility, Quintane proposes that

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168 See Rancière's Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique.
the unhabitual proposition provides utopian political meaning by belying expectations:

Peut-on dire que, non continuée, et au présent, un lapin traverse une rue est l’équivalent de : le travail doit devenir une libre activité, riche en jouissances (par exemple). N’est-ce pas, d’ailleurs, en quelque sorte, métaphoriquement, ce que signifie cette phrase – si le travail doit devenir une libre activité, etc., c’est qu’il ne l’est pas encore, ce type de travail est, pour ainsi dire, aussi rare qu’un lapin traversant une rue, ce lapin ne peut qu’évoquer, d’autre part, les jouissances que procure le travail libre, etc.? Ainsi, **toute proposition rapportant un fait inhabituel serait susceptible d’être un programme politique,** utopique comme un lapin traverse la rue d’une grande ville. (Formage 97)

The fragment (“non continuée, et au présent”) becomes more generally defined by the capacity to present unhabitual subject matter in a digressive mode. Quintane’s utterance becomes political by evoking joyful, utopic possibilities for work. She playfully inverts the logic into a general principle destined to govern her new grammar. Provided in bold, the statement “**toute proposition rapportant un fait inhabituel serait susceptible d’être un programme politique**” affirms the political charge of the unhabitual fact. Forcing the reader to confront unusual, discontinuous content disrupts adherence to ingrained modes of thought, thus enabling one to imagine new possibilities for work and politics. In a short essay entitled, “La Sénéchale,” Quintane continues her discussion of the political force of suspending easy readability. She goes so far as proposing digression as a definition of literature: “Je ne vois pas le rapport. / Je ne vois pas le rapport étant, des définitions de la littérature, celle qu’on hésite à dire, par ménagement” (“La Sénéchale”). If this definition of literature is not generally favored, it is due to the radicality of resisting conventional logic. Frustrating a reader’s expectations by presenting unrelated elements acts to undermine established systems of thought and the coherency of discursive logic. Disrupting or suspending ready interpretability ultimately challenges the knowledge and mastery claimed by the political order. Not unlike Rancière's call for new distributions of the sensible, Quintane emphasizes the radically experimental implications of this

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169 This article is available online on the politics and culture site, Vacarme.org: http://www.vacarme.org/article1926.html
approach. If literature works by subtly challenging systems of representation, Quintane stresses its disorienting quality to thoroughly confound reader expectations.

Yet, significantly, Quintane resists an exaggerated view of literature’s powers; instead, she nuances her claims for political radicality through art. “La Sénéchale,” proposes that revolutionary literature may result more ambiguously in a resolution of these energies in a sort of catharsis. While affirming literature’s power to stimulate political action in certain circumstances, she also discusses its capacity to restrain activism by providing an emotional release for political anger. These qualities appear as copresent to Quintane, as the writer who refuses conventional representations out of rage may nevertheless fail to communicate a truly revolutionary pessimism to her readers. Instead of spurring on rebellion, the radical writer becomes enlisted in the cultural apparatus of the state as seneschal, a medieval royal officer in charge of both justice and administrative duties:

Les râleurs ne sont pas forcément les plus critiques, en littérature (amour, politique) : on peut rechigner, et plus on rechigne, râler, et plus on râle, chipoter, et plus on chipote, plus on passe les plats. La plupart du temps, la littérature ne fait rien d’autre qu’un boulot de sénéchal. Elle ne suicide pas la société. Elle n’en a pas même l’idée. Elle suppose qu’un mot bien placé calmera les gens (les “lecteurs”) — ce qu’on appelle “prise de conscience”, “prendre conscience”, etc. — et voilà j’ai fait mon boulot (“La Sénéchale”)

The writer’s radical opposition to accepted regimes of representation do not provoke an Artaudian overthrow of the society (“Elle ne suicide pas la société”), but rather pacifies the people by providing an outlet for their rage. In the end, the realization produced in the reader does not serve to send her to the barricades, but rather to allow her to more comfortably accept the ruling order. Quintane writes from this complex understanding of the political stakes of literature, art, and a variety of other cultural domains, such as sport. With no political master narrative guiding thought, Quintane is the product of a much more ambiguous era, characterized by multiple, entangled positions. Contemporary thought faces an embarras de la pensée, as
Quintane entitles her volume of criticism on the artist Alain Rivière, where no clear intellectual or political project is able to provide a model for action. Quintane’s writing works from within this state of embarras, pushing forward its own contradictions and emphasizing the simultaneous presence of opposing positions alongside a series of unintended consequences. In an article on the soccer star Joey Barton, Quintane evokes a similar complexity. A contentious, controversial figure like Barton demonstrates the opposing political forces that are at play in sport: “C’est dans cet embarras de pensée furtif mais visible que loge l’image exacte de ce qu’est le football depuis longtemps : un obstacle au bon ordre ET un agent de contrôle social, un substitut à une action radicale en politique ET un détonateur possible” (“Crâne chaud : variations sur Joey Barton, nouvelle recrue star de l’OM”). The working class sport star Barton amalgamates multiple roles, causing him simultaneously to oppose the established order, to support it by standing in for more radical political rebellion, and, finally, to provide a potential trigger for radical action. The figure of the footballer and that of the politically radical writer are not so distant from one another as both occupy multiple, seemingly mutually exclusive positions. At the heart of rebellious, iconoclastic action, there is also a mechanism of catharsis that serves to reinforce the established political order. Art that would seem to encourage progressive political action cannot be sure of achieving these results. Quintane casts formidable doubt not only on the viability of politically-engaged writing in the Sartrean sense, but also the politically-charged experimentation of the avant-garde. She situates the utopian charge of the non sequitur within an entangled, muddled field of contemporary thought, where the consequences of political action are unclear at best.

Within this malaise, the concept of incongruity takes on a special significance for Quintane, not by providing a path towards action, but rather by provoking unhabitual modes of thought. Mortinsteinck questions effective modes of art making; the work is a narrative
documenting the shooting of a film by the same name by Quintane and her partner, the artist Stéphane Bérard. In the work, Quintane provides an elucidating passage on tactical positioning within an environment of intellectual stagnation. Confronting the problematic of situating oneself within a field of competing positions, she introduces the notion of falsity or incongruity:

On pense, on craint, quand on prépare un bœuf bourguignon, de ne pas vraiment cuisiner un bœuf bourguignon, quand on écrit de la poésie (vers, champs, blocs, ou lignes, ou phrases, ou propositions) de ne pas être en train d’en écrire, quand on fait un film, de ne pas être suffisamment dans le cinéma – ou trop, ce qui revient au même, la posture consistant à vouloir à tout prix se situer dans la Nouvelle Cuisine, l’Anti-Poésie, ou le Non-Cinéma, produit des effets identiques, puisqu’elle présente l’assignation à un lieu, et l’obligation conséquente qu’aurait ce qu’on fait d’y être, comme un impératif […] – ceux qui sortent, à reculons ou excités, du cinéma/de la poésie, les refondent, mais ceux qui s’y sentent et le revendiquent ne font pas mieux, en les maintenant biens inaliénables, privés (Mortinsteinck 46).

In a passage reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological partition of the literary field between conservative and bohemian writers in Les règles de l’art, Quintane draws a series of oppositions between faithful practitioners of institutionalized literature and cinema and those who oppose these traditions. Commenting on the distribution of these artistic fields, Quintane comes to the conclusion that these positions, rather than constituting a profound difference, produce identical effects. Therefore, producing an anti-cinema or an anti-literature also results in a confining position that governs artistic creation. This writer or filmmaker is just as stuck in her oppositional stance as she is if she continues with conventional artistic practices, because either position serves as an imperative structuring her art. Yet, there is no ambiguity in Quintane’s radical and oppositional stance in art, as she explains in an interview with critic Alain Farah:

La frontière, elle est pas entre les « lisibles» et les « illisibles» ou entre « récit » et « poésie », je crois. Elle est entre les « traitables » et les « intraitables », ou du moins ceux qui essayent d’aller vers un peu moins de « traitabilité ». Et donc, si l’on est « intraitable », c’est peut-être parce que l’énorme machinerie idéologique n’a pas de visage, cette fois-ci, elle s’appelle « printemps des poètes », par exemple, et le « printemps des poètes », c’est comme le slime. Vous vous souvenez, la pâte slime, gluante et verte, un peu dégueulasse, qui vous colle aux mains (L’illisibilité en questions 182).

Quintane affirms an anti-institutional, critical position towards both conservative and avant-
gardist literary schools. Instead of adopting certain stylish considerations, such as readability or unreadability, she describes the more salient political issue as the relationship to literary and cultural institutions. By maintaining a rebellious, “intraitable” stance, she seeks to maintain her independence.

Quintane continues by proposing an alternative both to claiming allegiance to a tradition and to opposing convention through the use of incongruity:

Or, le film (le livre) peut se construire avec ce qui a priori n’aurait pas même dû y figurer, avec ce qui le dénature, le fausse, le contrefait. Ces éléments « hétérogènes » ne disparaissent pas, ne sont pas assimilés, ils se proposent et demeurent lisibles, tels quels. Ils font du livre, du film, une chose déplacée, trop maladroite pour entrer dans le cadre général des fictions, pas assez incorrecte thématiquement pour intégrer celui des productions expérimentales. Le film n’est pas insolent, il est incongru. L’un de ces éléments est la séquence type vidéo-gag (fuite en VTT en chute*), ce que le gag devient quand il est involontaire (amateur), pauvre parce que réduit à sa dernière extrémité (la chute) […] (Mortinsteinck 45-46).

If no truly exterior position can be found and oppositional stances have come to produce their own series of conventions and clichés, the only remaining option relies on incongruity. Instead of favoring one side or the other of the artistic spectrum, introducing heterogeneous components creates an irregular work that is too idiosyncratic to fit into either category. Quintane puts forth a parti pris for what she calls here the “gag,” humorous incongruity or farcical digression. Humor created by ironic naivety and deliberate amateurism allow her to exit preordained literary postures. The anecdote of the rabbit crossing the road succeeds in taking on a political charge not only because it represents utopian possibility, but also because it sidesteps easily recognizable political positions in favor of incongruity. In his book Le Gala des incomparables,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{170}}\] Quintane’s remarks are in line with those of Pierre Alferi and Olivier Cadiot in Revue de litterature générale, where traditional genre distinctions are abandoned in favor of an Objet verbal non identifié (Ovni). This literary engine is marked by its construction from heterogeneous sources and its combination of unequal registers of language. Quintane, who contributed to the second issue of Revue de litterature générale, extends this expanded poetic mandate to film as others, such as Pierre Alferi in his cinépoèmes, have also done.
Invention et résistance chez Olivier Cadiot et Nathalie Quintane, Alain Farah provides a lucid reading of Quintane’s technique of incorporating idiosyncratic elements into her writing:

En termes littéraires, la posture faussement ingénue de Quintane reproduit cette tension entre la vérité et le jeu, la fausseté et l’imprévisible, en acceptant de garder ce qui apparaît de façon imprévue précisément parce que ces moments produisent de l’événementialité, de la surprise (178).

By pushing the reader off balance through her use of unpredictable, digressive phrases, Quintane is able to provoke a reaction through surprise. If conventional positions and literary themes are often unable to shock or move readers, Quintane seeks a nuanced idiotie in their place. Playing false allows Quintane to level a critique of contemporary society in a way that produces receptivity in the audience because of the surprise it generates. Quintane’s idiot naïvety leads us to follow her as she improvises thoughts, perceptions, and affects in an incongruous, seemingly uncoordinated arrangement. In this way, a nuance may be added to Quintane’s earlier remarks on establishing a political program based on the unhabitual fact. Not only does she mark the political potential of contesting the legitimacy of reality as it appears, but she situates this radical critique within the intellectual climate of post-avant-garde thought. Poetic writing that tests the bounds of what can be communicated (“Je ne vois pas le rapport”) is already situated within an embarrass de pensée, where ideology and political critique seem to fall flat. Yet, significantly, Quintane traces a path to renew criticism through the mode of the idiot gag. Quintane’s work engages with events as they unfold by leveraging tactical thought lodged within irreverent and digressive prose. In Grand ensemble, to which I shall now turn, Quintane situates political critique in the specific lived circumstances of contemporary events. In so doing, she conceives of literature as “une tentative de réfléchir en direct.” (“Arrêt sur images” interview).

Grand ensemble: “Faux Barrage” and Performativity
In her works from the late 2000s onward, Nathalie Quintane’s incongruous prose has targeted the aspects of performativity at play in both contemporary politics as well as cultural events. *Grand ensemble, concernant une ancienne colonie* is written in reaction to unfolding political events and reflects on the imbrication between culture and politics. The work centers on *L’année de l’Algérie*, a French cultural event of 2003, which celebrates the culture of France’s former colony. Quintane writes in reaction to the apparent nonchalance with which French society is able to theatricalize its extremely troublesome history with Algeria. She assesses the true effects of these events, “qui le célèbre pour mieux l’effacer encore” (*Grand ensemble*, rear cover). Opposing a simplification of the colonial past, Quintane employs a complex dispositif moving from *Faux barrages*, sections of poetic prose; *L’année d’Algérie*, a description of a series of cultural events; a fifteen page “novel,” *Une rencontre heureuse* complete with a cover page; a series entitled *Grands Récits*, before concluding in a series of cemetery inscriptions in *Épitaphes*. This multilinear narrative suspends any unified historical narration and instead confronts the reader with a series of gaps and textual cuts. In the structure of her work, Quintane problematizes any simple identification with the commemorative events as well as an easily palatable version of the past. Instead, bare, factual descriptions of the cultural events of *L’année d’Algérie* lead us to adopt a distanced, critical posture towards them. By working through the complexities of the work, the reader engages in the construction of a non-totalizing vision of France’s colonial past and its political present.

Throughout *Grand ensemble*, Quintane employs digressions and anecdotes in order to oppose a model of performative speech that mobilized the political organization capable of conducting the Algerian war. She seeks to counter the performativity that facilitates social control by employing her own incongruous prose: “Au pragmatisme policier (du grec politeia,
organisation politique), *Grand ensemble* oppose une pratique de la langue, cruelle et drôle, pour qu’un peu les gorges se desserrent…” (*Grand ensemble*, back cover). Opposing this authoritarian linguistic performativity that orders the social body, Quintane seeks to provoke discussion and reflection. She counters this commanding speech by deconstructing or dissecting the political language used to justify the war by working with particular slogans from the war, such as “On utilisera tous les moyens” and “On ne mettra pas les gants.”

It is partly these phrases functioning performatively that led soldiers to enact the brutalities of the war in accordance with this “pragamatisme policier.” By analyzing these slogans, Quintane seeks not only to provoke deeper reflections on the Algerian War beyond the superficial celebrations of *L’année d’Algérie*, but also to push beyond the closed “on” that defines and divides the French and Algerian communities. The title *Grand ensemble* also references the social exclusion of the French suburbs (such as the *grands ensembles* of HLM housing projects) that is masked behind the veneer of cultural festivities. Quintane advocates a genuine *grand ensemble* for French society as a whole that is founded on the recognition of the Algerian War as an unresolved tragedy. By undoing facile representations of Franco-Algerian history, she reveals our stupefaction before its horrors and their legacy in the post-colonial present. By taking this bewilderment as a starting point, she elaborates an unrehearsed working through of France’s colonialist heritage. In place of surface celebrations of diversity, Quintane’s project consists in idiosyncratic and grimly humorous provocation that highlights France’s social rift.

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171 Quintane also analyzes the circumlocutory rhetoric used to characterize the war itself: “7.2 Il y a dix jours, mon père me montre deux documents sensiblement égaux : sur le premier, le plus récent, on fait état de sa qualité de combattant lors des opérations en Algérie ; sur le second, le plus ancien, on fait état de sa qualité de combattant lors des opérations de sécurité et de maintien d’ordre, en Algérie. […] 6.11 Relever les contextes, vérifier les formules. / 7.2.1. Opérations n’est pas opérations de sécurité et de maintien d’ordre (*Toi aussi, tu as des armes* 184-5).
To analyze performative speech, Quintane begins by interrogating the rhetoric of the democratic state at war. In so doing, she seeks to analyze the moment where a democracy's euphemistic expressions turns to more violent speech:

Un type de phrases correspondait à un type d’État. On imagine l’État démocratique amateur de modèles souples, souplement assertifs. De modèles grammaticalement corrects sans dureté. / Puis, les circonstances (disent-ils, pense-t-on) accablent le poème : / par tous les moyens / ou / on a retiré les gants” (Grand ensemble 102-3).

Quintane exposes the shift in political language towards violence that is incompatible with a democracy’s view of its own just assertiveness (“modèles souples, souplement assertifs”). She emphasizes the moment when anodyne political rhetoric cedes before militaristic performative speech, where, “les circonstances […] accablent le poème.” The appearance of assertiveness without harshness is belied by the conclusion of the passage, where the slogans “par tous les moyens” and “on a retiré les gants” are put into effect. At the conclusion of the passage, Quintane describes a slaughterhouse not only kills chickens but also destroys any trace of their existence. She ironically relates that the butchered chickens are confounded by the political rhetoric that had earlier promised them just treatment.

Beyond this deconstruction of slogans, Quintane continues to analyze linguistic performativity as characterizing military modes of action. In “Faux barrage 10”, these military tactics are revealed as being closely aligned with certain modes of literature:

les méthodes et modèles de gouvernement en vigueur aujourd’hui en Alger sont, d’après ce que j’en sais, assez mal librement inspirés des modèles et méthodes de l’A.F. / créatrice de la guerre contre-subversive. / inventeur du faux maquis. / poète puisque poëin c’est faire du faux barrage (Grand ensemble 34)
“Faux barrage”, as the first section of the work is entitled, adopts the terminology of military tactics created by the French Army and subsequently used by the Algerian government, to refer to the prevalent use of fake checkpoints to stage ambushes. Provoking an intellectual shock is ironically likened to engaging in counter-terrorism operations. Both activities partake in an act of poiein to create fictional circumstances to generate an attack. Yet, the violent, subversive thrust of Grand ensemble seeks to reveal the deeper violence marked by these cultural events. Her use of provocation seeks to disrupt the French consensus surrounding a sanitized view of French-Algerian history and relations. By signaling this extreme violence, Quintane acts against a certain vision of the France as a benevolent and progressive pays des droits de l’homme. By rejecting a view that serves to reinforce national identity, Quintane hopes to work towards a more expansive and less self-serving grand ensemble between France and Algeria.

Continuing in her reflections of linguistic performativity, Quintane is particularly attentive to the avant-gardiste vision of art, which also finds its conceptual model in military tactics. From this point of departure, the performativity of literature in general is assimilated to that of a military command:

Les militaires pensent et agissent d’un coup. C’est : littérature. Ils ne nous donnent pas que des titres pratiques ou un lexique mais, en douce, des modèles tactiques, cependant que nous faisons nos découpages et nos collages avec fuck war.

Cependant que nous faisons nos découpages et nos collages avec fuck war, nous pensons comme des militaires ou des avant-centres. D’autres part, il ne vaut pas mieux s’imaginer le football marocain porteur de traits typiquement marocains : n’allez pas vous imaginer des choses.


Capturing a sinuous, digressive sequence of thought, Quintane questions the assumptions of avant-garde literature as it attempts to transform society by preparing revolutionary action.
through art. The logic of the military command (“pense[r] et ag[ir] d'un coup”) comes closest to capturing this form of avant-garde writing that hopes to spur on revolutionary action, yet may fail to instill any true ability for judgment in its audience. However, Quintane also problematizes several other dominant views of literature. She comically rejects literature functioning as mimesis; for example, where Moroccan football would mirror typical Moroccan traits.

Literature does not act directly to change reality because language does not represent the real (“Pas de pépites de réalité dans les cookies alphabétiques”). Yet, neither is it the privileged domain of the imagination without any effects on the real. Literature does employ performativity to shock (“nos découpages et nos collages avec fuck war”), but its deeper political force is to undermine a seamless relationship between word and thing. By scrambling and satirizing the various oppositional positions that she sketches out, she destabilizes the grammatical structures and discursive logic that facilitate the performativity of the military slogan. Thus, the alternative performativity of this passage resides in its sudden leaps to new subjects (“le football marocain”), its imbrication of different registers of language, and its use of anadiplosis (the repetition of the conclusion of the last phrase at the beginning of the next).

Rather than attempting to project ideology through art like the historical avant-garde, she integrates critique within digressive writing that no longer lays claim to a global, totalizing view.

Continuing in her digressive reasoning, Quintane manipulates logical argumentation by drawing out her subject matter to hyperbolic absurdity. Following from this commentary on action, she satirically proposes a form of direct action through retrospection:

la rétrospection est un travail. / La rétrospection est notre travail car le présent ne suffit pas. Comment agir tout court par le biais de la rétrospection ? Comment agir tout court par le biais de la rétrospection sans être traité de marxiste intellectuel pédophile ?
Il s’agit, au moment d’agir, de travailler à mieux prêter le flanc aux accusations de marxiste intellectuel pédophile. Et de ne pas faire le malin en énonçant les dimensions exactes d’un terrain de football, par exemple.

Par exemple, la préférence du mot foot ou du mot football devrait faire toute la différence. Ce n’est pas le cas. Le lexique n’est pas une solution. Un esprit sain dans un corps saint, c’est un mauvais début pour tout le monde. (Grand ensemble 106-7)

Quintane ironically sketches out an alternative vision of performativity arising from retrospection instead of authoritarian command (“agir tout court par le biais de la rétrospection”). She begins by hyperbolically emphasizing critiques of thought as failing to translate into action. Quintane opts for a strategy of humoristic idiotie and feigned submission: the intellectual may act through retrospection by fully submitting herself to the critiques of her enemies. Action through retrospection equates to confirming a position of abjection (“travailler à mieux prêter le flanc aux accusations de marxiste intellectuel pédophile”). Yet, activism based in the intellectual position is simultaneously ironized; by ceding fully to the anti-intellectual position, Quintane’s reasoning concludes in mock naivety. Direct action based on retrospection would allow the writer to intervene in reality based on lexical changes. A minimal shift in terms (“foot” for “football”) should transform the world, according to these exaggerated expectations for avant-garde literature. Continuing with the substitution of “saint” for “sain”, Quintane humorously concludes that, “un esprit sain dans un corps saint, c’est un mauvais début pour tout le monde.” By rendering literary action ridiculous, Quintane mockingly adheres to the superior performativity of the soldier’s speech. Through this sarcastic idiotie, she ironizes on both authoritarianism and avant-garde intellectualism, suggesting her own incongruous prose as an alternative mode of performative critique.

Yet, when Quintane chooses linguistic performativity in line with the logic of the “faux barrage” ambush, she sheds all humor for direct treatment of the worst abuses of the war. In
these sections, her writing is aligned with the first version of literary performativity as shock tactic. It is by reversing the position of colonial domination and emphasizing the horrors of the Algerian War that a non-restrictive version of a community may be realized:

Si l’Algérie, c’est la France, alors la France, c’est l’Algérie.

glalité ayant eu lieu qu’avec.
couilles coupées portées encore chaudes à la bouche.
électrification non des campagnes.
cuts de langues.
enculades non toujours de petits garçons” (Grand ensemble 12)

This passage insists on equality by exchanging Algerian experience for that of the French (“la France, c’est l’Algérie”) and, therefore, emphasizing the Algerian suffering during the war. Thus, a series of torture scenes undermines the benign representation of history proposed by the French government. In this way, political community is anchored in the suffering of the other instead of easily palatable, orientalist scenes. Throughout the work, Quintane opposes this facile and even erroneous portrayal of Algeria. For example, that of serving pastries from Morocco, as though Algeria’s neighbor is more or less the same nation.172 Instead, Quintane’s provocation seeks to reveal a profound failure of representation and a blockage of thought: “Explication par papa : en face ils faisaient pire, ou : ils faisaient pareil, quand tu retrouves un copain les couilles dans la bouche qu’est-ce que tu fais. / Et qu’est-ce que tu fais quand tu entends ça” (Grand ensemble 146). In this way, the performativity of Quintane’s language leads towards an aporia

172 Grand ensemble 120.
or an effect of stupefaction before brutality. From this fissure in understanding and expressibility, alternative modes of political community may perhaps be conceived.

In his review of the work for Libération, Éric Loiret discusses the concept of a political community as a grand ensemble: “Quintane propose d'essayer un nouveau partage de l'espace politique, un grand « ensemble » au sens adverbial, les uns avec les autres. Alors que, pour l'instant, « le monde est divisé entre éradicateurs et dialoguistes », surdité qui se propage au point que « de chaque côté de la Méditerranée meurt un pays d'occasions ».”

If this new political space may be achieved, it is by opposing both the “éradicateurs” of the extreme-right and the “dialoguistes,” who seek to script the interactions between the nations to mask deeper wounds. To move beyond these closed perspectives towards more open interaction, Quintane seeks to include the perspective of the other within her work. She is now seeking to represent something of the experience of those living within grands ensembles, within the HLM of France. As a corollary to her dissection of military slogans, she analyzes two phrases attributed to Algerian servants and maids. These sentences, “j’amène des cornes de gazelle à la patronne” and “je suis comme une épluchure sur l’eau,” act performatively to perpetuate a state of servitude beyond the period of colonization. The action of bringing the Maghrebi pastries, “cornes de gazelle,” suggests a stereotype of generosity: “une représentation fameuse du colonisé(e)-nourrice (mama noire des Amériques), plaisir d’offrir, joie de recevoir, ainsi qu’en l’évocation de l’aspect non limité de l’action sur l’axe du temps” (Grand ensemble 16). According to this stereotype, the colonized is happy to give as though her subservient role corresponds to the natural state of affairs. The present tense of the first sentence (“j’amène”) suggests an ongoing state of affairs to Quintane, as though the domestic worker is eternally relegated to this position. The second

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sentence similarly presents a powerless subject: “épluchure, non comme ce qu’on ôte et dont on ne veut pas mais comme pièce légère sans contrôle allant là où on la mène et dit d’aller, je conjugue ces deux phrases épluchure et cornes de gazelle, et tout ce qui en sort, afin de compléter et d’instruire cette page, instruisant et complétant des faits” (Grand ensemble 101).

This peel, like the Algerian worker, has no control over events, but is simply carried along by outside forces. Quintane provides these two sentences not to allow the subaltern to speak (Gayatri Spivak reminds us of the perils of this endeavor), but to inform our thinking on the colonial past and its continuing effects in the present. Suggestive of the more general role of literature, these phrases serve to instruct and complete our understanding of the facts (“compléter et d’instruire cette page, instruisant et complétant des faits”) over against attempts to whitewash history.

The last section of the book, Épitaphes, similarly features a shift in perspective towards the other. Quintane’s writing enters an elegiac mode that takes a literalist transcription of the inscriptions on Algerian graves as its point of departure. In one instance, she attempts to scripturally restore names that have been truncated in their passage from Algeria to France:


Resisting the effects of pathos typical of lyrical elegy, Quintane seeks rather to rectify an error in representation. While the name Fatima evokes negative stereotypes within France, this is due to
unfaithful transcription and poor translation from one culture to another. With restraint and finesse, Quintane follows the restoration of a full name and its accompanying promise for a fuller context. In this way, a path towards a community is indicated through attempts to provide a greater understanding of the other. Instead of reinforcing a restrictive view of community by denying historical trauma, Quintane favors a reflection on losses suffered on both sides of the Mediterranean.

*The Virgin Nathalie: Participation and the Image*

In addition to her reflections on linguistic performativity and the perspective of the other, Quintane situates her discussion of a grand ensemble in several passages that reflect on the status of the image. She employs a series of rhetorical tools to tease out the complexities surrounding the visual representation of Algerian suffering. First, she multiplies her references to the Pieta, which she puts forth as the lens with which the West often interprets and assimilates suffering, even when that suffering takes place in the non-Western world. Secondly, Quintane uses looped repetition, hyperbolic listing and digression to unpack the entangled positions contained within the Virgin imagery. Quintane evokes an image of the Pieta that served as a visual representation of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, that of the "Massacre à Bentalha" by the photographer Hocine Zaourar (see fig. 11). In 1997, Zaourar’s photograph of an Algerian victim caused a polemic when it accompanied an article in *Le Monde* entitled “Une madone en

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174 Quintane ironically activates these prejudices earlier in the work: “Pourtant, personne ne peut rien au fait que Fatima est un prénom de boniche. A la fille Fatima, même nommé Rivière (Fatima Rivière), il sera conseillé de ne pas énoncer son prénom par téléphone” (*Grand ensemble* 139).
Quintane employs a looped description of this photo in conjunction with an extended list of its appearances in the media:


In this passage, poetic refrain duplicates the shock effect created by mass media in a similar manner as “Faux barrage 10,” modeling itself on the performativity of military commands. Quintane calls the reader’s attention to their familiarity with the famous photograph, (“Vous connaissez sans doute”;“vous vous souvenez plutôt précisément”, etc.) which is nevertheless absent from the text. In place of the image, Quintane emphasizes its jolting presence by looping a description of the photo in capitals, which she screams during live performances. The immediacy and repetition of the phrase, “PHOTO DE VIERGE ÉPLORÉE BOUCHE OUVERTE,” acts performatively in a similar manner to the “faux barrage” ambushes, mimicking the shock produced by the photo. The passage then highlights the omnipresence of a narrative of disaster through a list of print media and their headlines. Acting in an analogously manner to this mass media discourse of crisis, the passage acts initially to oppose the sanitized vision of colonialism’s heritage. However, Quintane inscribes her references to the photo within


Figure 11.

a reflection on the consequences of the pieta imagery. Indeed, this photo presents a particularly complex series of references and has drawn criticism of its use of Christian iconography to depict the suffering of a Muslim nation. Western cultural memory, it can be argued, provides the only lens that allows French society to gaze upon the suffering of the other. Quintane is interested in appropriating the image’s power to impact, while also interrogating the

177 Quintane references a series of artists who have also done work inspired by this image, such as http://www.pascalconvert.fr/histoire/madone_de_Bentalha/madone_de_bentalha.html
complexity of the emotional effects it stirs. Through her provocation, she also questions the nature of the images that Western viewers are able to recognize and respond to with pathos.

At what may be interpreted as the counter position of the feminine colonized figure as either suffering Pieta or, “colonisé(e)-nourrice (mama noire des Amériques),” is the posture of the Western militant as a Madonna figure (*Grand ensemble* 16). In “Grand récit 4,” Quintane examines Godard’s views on the figure of the leftist militant as Virgin. In the documentary, *Letter to Jane*, Godard condemns a photograph of Jane Fonda in Vietnam as a Madonna (see fig. 12). For Godard, the two thousand years long cultural history of the Christian suffering and saving mother is determinate for the Western viewer. Quintane questions how this heritage influences our view of compassionate acts in a discussion of a cultural event aimed at benefiting foreign victims:


This passage calls into doubt Godard’s dismissal of Jane Fonda’s photo as failing to produce real engagement with the other. Throughout *Letter to Jane*, Godard opposes a Marxist Materialist

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178 Quintane does not reproduce this image nor Zaourar’s photo.
critique to the Idealism reflected in the image. He rejects the photo’s framing, Fonda’s thoughtful expression, and the photo’s caption as all undermining the material circumstances of the Vietnamese’s struggle. Quintane questions this validity of his criticism on these philosophical grounds, but also objects to the melancholic posture incarnated by the Madonna. She parodies this interpretation of Jane (Birkin, Fonda) as Madonna by extending the list of non-Western countries and ironically describing the melancholy the reader may feel (“votre cou mélancoliquement s’incliner”). Black humor undermines the polemic gravity of Godard’s position as Quintane begins a less ideologically informed reflection on the image while

![Image](image_url)

Figure 12.

179 Letter to Jane. This film is included in Tout va bien: Everything’s All Right. Irvington, N.Y.: Criterion Collection, 2005.
simultaneously offering an implicit critique of the melancholic image of the virgin. Indeed, the hyperbolic list dares the reader to think of an alternative posture for a Western woman interacting with non-Western spaces (“peut-elle adopter une pose autre”). As with the passage on Zaourar’s photo, Quintane works through the implications of the Madonna figure in structuring interactions with the other; the series of roles possible to play prove to be tightly restricted.

Following from her deconstruction of the figure of Mary, Quintane generates a series of Janes as well. Proceeding across seemingly unrelated topics, while still preserving rigorous connection between her ideas, Quintane moves through a list of Janes, beginning with Jane Birkin before coming to Jane Fonda and finally Tarzan’s Jane. In the filming of Tarzan des Singes, the actress who played Jane was never filmed with the tribes she was supposed to live with; instead, the director shot separate film reels that were superimposed on one another. Quintane asks if this is a shared phenomenon that characterizes all three Janes, in that they may all be led toward, “la juxtaposition sans la participation?” (Grand ensemble 139). In line with the open, non-exclusive “grand ensemble,” Quintane puts forth an alternative posture, which would not dominate the other but rather respond gracefully to him or her. This position is incarnated in the figure of Jackie Chan, who suggests open participation with the other in place of a posture of domination:

Jackie Chan. Un jour j’ai vu un film avec Jackie Chan et j’y crus déceler une porte de sortie. Chan, dans un geste d’une souplesse inédite, glissait plus qu’il n’entrait à la place du conducteur d’une voiture sans ouvrir la portière de la décapotable. Chan, acculé par quelques bagarreurs classiques dans un appartement modèle, utilisait les meubles comme autant de camarades, basculant assis dans un fauteuil pour mieux pincer un nez à droite, une joue à gauche, en balançant. Chan marchait au mur, et le mur n’était pas son ennemi. Rien n’était à l’opposé de Chan, tout était avec lui, ou devait l’être par sa grâce (Grand ensemble 137–8).
Following from this digression, Quintane proves similarly supple in manipulating unconnected subject matter. Far from imposing a single unifying discourse, she creates connections across an immensely wide, unhierarchized body of references where the tragic mixes with the comedic, high art (Godard) meets low (Tarzan, Jackie Chan) as all is taken up together in hyperbolic and ironic prose. This mode of thinking through anecdotes upends conceptual definitions based in rigorous identity and difference. It muddies the waters that allow political ideology to construct an exclusionary view of identity. Instead, literature acts politically by drawing in the heterogeneous language and images of the contemporary world in a graceful balancing act. Returning to the visual domain, Quintane concludes in a passage rejecting Godard’s charge of cultural hegemony in his reading of the Jane Fonda photo:

Jane est femme forte au Vietnam, doublement forte, puisqu'elle nique son pays (elle va au Vietnam) et qu'elle est pourtant madone. Fonda ne fait pas l'actrice, elle fait la madone – dans cet effort au style pour atteindre au plus près le peuple qu'elle visite, passant de la juxtaposition à la participation visuelle (Grand ensemble 140).

While Fonda is occupying mutually exclusive positions for Godard, the union of rebel and Madonna poses no difficulty for Quintane. Instead, Fonda’s complex positioning is not unlike that of the footballer Joey Barton cited earlier. She is both occupying a reified, mythologized position out of the cultural canon and simultaneously rebelling against Western imperialism. Opposing Godard’s materialist critique, the success of the image results from its reference to the spiritual as an “effort au style”. Instead of perpetuating cultural imperialism or occluding participation, Fonda is able to combine multiple roles through gracefulness comparable to that of Jackie Chan. Moreover, the photo achieves visual participation with the other. It depicts the non-Western other alongside Fonda and projects this anti-imperialist image throughout the world. Quintane interprets the image according to its participatory capacity and its effectiveness.
in touching minds by using the Western world’s most immediately recognizable figure of compassion, the virgin.

“Nous” le peuple

In *Tomates* and *Les années 10*, Nathalie Quintane continues to interrogate the political capacity of literature, reflecting on the modes of political writing that may stimulate an intense reaction in a reader in the perspective of political action. In *Tomates*, Quintane is preoccupied with the Tarnac Affair, in which political writings were presented before the court as evidence. Coupat’s presumed collaboration on works such as *L’insurrection qui vient* and the review *Tiquun*, were presented as preparatory acts for the sabotage of a TGV line. Thus, the Tarnac Affair poses the problem of the government exerting pressure on free speech, both within literature and more generally, in private life. It is towards the beginning of 2010s that Quintane adopts more theoretic writing in her work, whereas she has previously concentrated on purely literary expression. Articles such as the previously discussed, “La Sénéchale” (2010) as well as “Critique des nous” (2011) initiate politically-oriented essayistic writing, all while demonstrating certain hesitations on the part of the author to fully undertake the mode of theoretical writing. Quintane’s critical work first confronts certain leftist modes of thought, in which she identifies a sense of melancholy and nostalgia that prohibit true political action. She centers her remarks on key concepts of political community, such as the pronoun “nous,” which acquires distinct tonalities according to its use by different thinkers. For example, Quintane distinguishes between the community as it is advocated by thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and especially, Jean-Luc Nancy, who she comments on specifically. Reexamining the Bataille and Blanchot’s thought corresponds to a similar project engaged by Olivier Cadiot and
Pierre Alferi in the influential *Revue de littérature générale*. For Alferi and Cadiot, themes, such as lack, impossibility and erasure of the subject had become clichés of contemporary literature. Quintane adopt a similar approach by interrogating less the philosophical soundness of this concept of the community as the pertinence and its interpretation today. Beginning with a critique of Nancy’s concept of the community, Quintane then advocates an alternative approach to treating the problems shared by a public by turning to the theoretical work of Christophe Hanna. Analyzing the modalities of the “nous” employed by each of these theorists, Quintane is led to explore other issues relative to political community, such as the concept of the “peuple.” A highly significant notion since the French Republic governs in the name of the people since the great revolution, Quintane begins a debate with the leftist philosopher Jean-Paul Curnier, that is continued in *Les années 10*, on the idea that “le peuple n’existe plus” (*Tomates* 75). Beginning with an analysis of the the debates surrounding the terms “nous” and “peuple”, I will then examine Quitane’s methods of theoretical writing, which seek to integrate criticism within the literary work by means of digressive and anecdotal writing.

Significantly, in “Critique des nous”, Quintane includes a critique of Jean-Marie Gleize within her general criticism of the rhetoric employed by thinkers of the community. It is important to briefly trace the relationship between the two authors before elaborating on these remarks. Nathalie Quintane (born in 1964) and Jean-Marie Gleize (born in 1946) have both written in response to the Tarnac Affair, as my chapter two discusses with respect to Gleize, and

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both have collaborated on several occasions. Their writing has appeared together in the collective volume, *Toi aussi, tu as des armes : Poésie et politique*, and in *Nioques*, Gleize’s review, which features Quintane on the editorial board. The work of both authors rejects set poetic forms in favor of the juxtaposition of heterogeneous textual material, as follows from a logic of montage, recontextualisation, and superposition of narrative sequences. Yet, while Quintane works within an experimental framework close to the literalists (for example, in her book *Chaussure*), they are clearly differentiated by the tone of their writing and by differing conceptions of literature’s political capacity. Quintane likens Gleize to theorists of the community, such as Jean-Luc Nancy, who reflect on possibilities for collective action. Nancy’s *La communauté désœuvrée* follows George Bataille in proposing modes of community outside of a collective project. This alternative model of community reacts against the fascism of the 1930s and 1940s by opposing the unifying *œuvre* and the role of art in supporting it through myth and theatricality. In this way, Nancy hopes to protect his community against the fascist communion that proved so devastating during the Second World War. Instead of shared action, the community is joined together based on the *inoperability* of this common project. Quintane critiques the style that Nancy employs in proposing his alternative community, which becomes particularly dubious to her when he seeks to extend his thought to poetics.  

Nancy’s argument rests on disqualifying a series of essences as unpresentable, which Quintane identifies as a

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181 Quintane also writes of Nancy: “Quand, en 1987, dans sa préface au recueil de textes d’abord parus dans la revue *Po&sie* et consacrés à l’analytique du sublime, Jean-Luc Nancy écrit "Il se révèle sans doute que la question de la présentation est la question de ce qui se joue à la limite de l’essence : ainsi, à la limite de ce qui est à l’art plus "essentiel" que son essence d’"art" elle-même, de même que le sublime est plus "essentiel" à la beauté que l’essence même du beau.",[1], on sent bien qu’à force de guillemets, de mêmes et d’essences, tout cela est à deux doigts de crameler - si bien qu’il y faut le rappel, préalable, que "La tradition nous transmet l’esthétique comme question." Arrimer la poésie, le poétique, la question poétique ou la poésie comme question, à l’esthétique* et à un essentialisme ou un fondationnalisme est en effet essentiel non à la poésie, mais à la philosophie "entendue comme la structure maîtresse et matricielle à travers laquelle l’Occident, comme tel, se comprend” (“*Nos dispositifs poétiques* de C. Hanna”).
rhetoric of the “sublime” (“Critique des nous” 6). She calls particular attention to a rhetorical turn invoking a call to destiny, a “désormais” serving as an imperative (“Critique des nous” 6). The nous employed by Nancy is informed by a form of address that verges on a prophetic call, which Quintane terms, “le pathétique particulier prophétique” (“Critique des nous” 7). This appeal to a nous draws together individuals in a common destiny based on the pathos of a community of those without community. In Gleize’s work, Quintane critiques the use of a similar nous, which relies on a rhetoric of struggle to unite in spite of the impossibility of action.¹⁸² Quintane questions Gleize’s poetics in his call to found a community by way of the “réveil de la mémoire défuncte” (“Critique des nous” 7). She identifies a rhetorical move that unites a community around a nostalgic vision of political solidarity; thus, the awakening prescribed by the slogan is already undone by the adjective “défuncte”. She also locates a series of “nous” that attempt to assemble a community; in Gleize’s La nudité gagne, she cites, “La révolution, c’est nous” and in Neon, actes et legandes, she invokes, “REJETEZ VOS ILLUSIONS PRÉPAREZ-VOUS À LA LUTTE” (“Critique des nous” 7). These calls to action function together with Gleize’s desire for a reawakening of memory. Quintane qualifies the following line from Tarnac as following a mode of sublime memory: “Le monde possède déjà le rêve d’un temps dont il doit maintenant posséder la conscience pour le vivre réellement” (Gleize 82). By alternating between these two types of sentences, Gleize employs a stylistic procedure that constructs a nous based on a prophetic-pathetic mode reminiscent of Nancy. Issuing imperatives and expressing the desire to reawaken a defunct ideal, Gleize seeks to unite a political community that can concretize the dreams of the past. For Quintane, the “nous exclusif”

¹⁸² Others have brought together Gleize and Nancy. See for example, Jean-Jacques Thomas’s article, “Jean-Marie Gleize’s Poetic Pix.” “Jean-Marie Gleize's Poetic Pix.”.
initiated by these calls to action relies on an illusory sense of political destiny grounded in a pathos of remembrance.

Quintane proposes a break with the notion of a community founded in literature by turning to poet and theorist Christophe Hanna, a former student of Gleize himself. Hanna favors political poetry inspired by analytical and pragmatist philosophy, which no longer seeks to found a political community through literature. In a review of Hanna’s *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, Quintane praises the work’s effort to theorize a turn of contemporary French poetics towards pragmatism and analytical philosophy. Rejecting a philosophical master narrative anchoring art in a unified world view, this political poetry will respond ad hoc to social and semantic problems as they arise. This change implies a correlative transformation in the concept of community. Rather than constructing a specific, restricted community in literature, writers open up to address problems faced by the general public. Thus, Hanna offers an alternative to the versions of “*nous* exclusif” proposed by Nancy and Gleize:

Quand Hanna choisit un *nous*, ce n’est pas le *nous* académique, ni le *nous* exclusif auto-constituant d’un groupe, encore moins le *nous* de la communauté des poètes, c’est un *nous tous* : […] *la forme selon laquelle nous percevons chacun* [des objets qui nous laissent démunis, par exemple les actions terroristes] *nous stupéfie littéralement, nous laisse muets devant leur intensité et leur violence. Ce sont des objets pour lesquels il nous manque un mode de saisi approprié* […] (préface à *des documents poétiques*). […] Hanna continue, certes, à opposer au corpus consacré du champ poétique actuel un « contre-corpus », mais surtout il pense de manière beaucoup plus débridée par le biais d’examplès et d’anecdotes, comme dans cette *Table de Kamelia*, lycéenne de Minguettes.

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183 Quintane summarizes the accomplishments of Hanna’s work in the following terms: “Les dispositifs que théorise/décrit Hanna (tous “recontextualisants”, au sens où Mallarmé compose le coup de dés en utilisant/accommodant la partition musicale, étrangère jusqu’à lui à l’ordre de la page poétique) sont tous intéressés au monde autrement que par un “engagement” thématique ; ce sont des systèmes, ou plutôt des agencements, compréhensifs ; ils n’ont pourtant pas pour but d’offrir un sens ou une vérité, mais se confondent avec une position et sont conçus ‘comme des outils ou des disciplines d’inquiétude sémantique et de méfiance sociale’” (“*Nos dispositifs poétiques* de C. Hanna”).

184 “Astronomiques assertions,” *Toi aussi, tu as des armes* 188.
qui s’est confectionné un montage *ad hoc*, collé à même la table, pour pouvoir répondre aux questions qu’on lui pose (“Critique des nous” 9). Hanna avoids both the community founded on fascist communion as well as its inversion into a negative community based in the sublime. Instead of defining the community through an (in)operative project, Hanna focuses on general issues of communication and expression that are presented to a community as a whole. By addressing a breakdown in public communication (rather than expression a given ideology), his community becomes that of a *nous tous*. The community defines itself by coming together to address particular problems that arise and call for new theoretical tools, rather than any preexisting criteria. Poetic activity, in turn, engages with these shared linguistic, visual, and conceptual problems (“objets pour lesquels il nous manque un mode de saisi approprié”). Poetry reorients itself around the recontextualization and montage of heterogeneous documents. Working within a theoretical framework established by pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, recontextualization of heterogeneous material allows for the creation of new conceptual tools. The community addressed by this writing is that of a non-exclusive *nous* grappling with shared difficulties in formulating and articulating public problems. According to Gleize’s own statements, his works also demonstrate a pragmatist orientation through the use of a wide array of genres of writing in addition to photographs. Quintane’s critiques do not center on the use of a multilinear dispositif, which is a technique that she shares with Gleize. Her remarks focus more pointedly on the vision of community favored by Gleize, which appeals to a community that is delineated from other political actors. Breaking with this

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185 Quintane cites Christophe Hanna’s preface to *des documents poétiques* by Franck Leibovici.


187 *Obscurité critique* 46.
notion, Quintane advocates a shift towards a non-exclusive community that emerges around questions of universal significance.

Significantly, Quintane emphasizes Hanna’s reasoning through the use of anecdotes and examples rather than the various categories of dispositifs that he elaborates (Hanna distinguishes between “les documents poétiques,” “les formes synoptiques,” and “les installations ou interventions critiques destinées à analyser et dénaturaliser nos manières de faire des mondes”). Quintane is perhaps less concerned with Hanna’s formalization of dispositifs (such as the “document poétique,” which Hanna uses to describe Quintane’s own Saint-Tropez), than with his use of anecdotes in his argumentation. Indeed, Quintane praises Hanna’s innovative approach to writing a theoretical text by means of examples and digressions (“il pense […] par le biais d’exemples et d’anecdotes”). Writing by way of anecdotes complements a mode of thought that is adapts to changing circumstances and adjusts itself according to new contexts. For Quintane, this mobile thinking is opposed to traditional critique, which is shown all the more clearly by a certain reticence she demonstrates towards theory even within a critical essay:

Mon propre travail fait que je suis plutôt pour une “critique intégrée” – à la Antin. Écrire un texte comme celui-ci me coûte, et je ne le fais plus qu’en cas de nécessité, quand il me semble qu’il y a difficulté ou déni, cécité durable (la mienne, d’abord). J’en ai longuement discuté avec Manuel Joseph, qui ne se voit pas publier des recensions ou des textes “critiques” – mais moi non plus. Moi non plus (“Critique des nous” 10).

Quintane’s ambivalence toward critical texts is derived from what she sees as the fundamental incertitude of the epoch. Confronted with the incoherencies of the contemporary era and the end of master narratives, she questions the relevancy of systematic critical theory. However,

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188 Nos dispositifs poétiques, rear cover.
189 See Nos dispositifs poétiques 179.
effective criticism, illustrated by Hanna’s work and his “pensée débridée,” may be integrated within literary writing itself. Quintane is inspired by Emmanuel Hocquard’s thought on the anecdote, and perhaps even more consequentially as demonstrated by her references, by the American poet David Antin. In his talk pieces, Antin implements “thinking by way of examples” in hopes of capturing a more substantive portrayal of experience than that which can be expressed through conceptual thought. For Antin, the anecdote provides an alternative to conceptual thinking by providing a story that is far richer than the concept alone. According to Quintane, writing and speaking with anecdotes integrates political critique within concrete experience that safeguards against abstraction. In “Astronomiques assertions,” her contribution to Toi aussi, tu as des armes : Poésie et politique, Quintane first publication by the editor, La Fabrique, she proposes an alternative to the community of “nous exclusif”: “De la critique, mais intégrée. De la critique intégrée, c’est un peu ce que fait David Antin ; ce que firent Nostradamus, Nerval. […] Une critique ponctuelle, qui ne viserait aucun horizon, n’esquisserait aucun genre de Weltanschauung” (195-6). Quintane rejects the founding of community within literature or philosophy in favor of writing that incorporates political critique within sequences of anecdotes. This writing does not work from a pre-established world view, but rather attempts to interpret and think through political events and their consequences through examples derived from lived experiences and literature. Thus, integrated critique enables Quintane to level analysis of unfolding political events that present semantic, conceptual, or esthetic difficulties. Following from a pragmatist orientation, the dispositif of Tomates incorporates a series of


fragmentary passages crossing through numerous styles, according to a logic of recontextualization and montage. *Tomates* juxtaposes literary criticism, autofiction, a series of syllogisms, and exchanges of correspondence. Quintane’s anecdotes follow not only the reading of politically significant works such as those of Auguste Blanqui or Jean-Paul Curnier’s work on the riots of 2005, but also reflections on the posture of the writer, her position in the literary field and her implementation of style. Quintane pointedly pursues critical reflection on the social practices and conventions that are present within literary institutions yet rarely questioned. By situating her commentary in relation to specific experiences at cultural institutions, she follows the politics of integrated critique.

Significantly, integrated critique also allows Quintane to establish a point of compromise between her suspicion of critical theory and the necessity to respond more directly to unfolding political circumstances. In an interview with Jean-Marie Gleize, Quintane praises the “négligence” with which Olivier Cadiot approached the question of literary genres in *Revue de littérature générale* as offering an alternative to the rigidly combative position typical of avant-garde movements (*L’illisibilité en questions* 193). By eschewing a militant use of critical theory, Cadiot also avoids creating the type of literary community that defines itself as a group or school. Quintane elaborates on her own period of theoretical negligence, in which her early review *R.R.* appeared, and a return to a posture of seriousness and greater political implication:

> Je dois ajouter que si j’ai pu, ici, revenir sur cette époque, c’est qu’elle est close. Je dirais, sans doute arbitrairement (il faudrait que les chercheurs s’y penchent, si ce n’est fait), qu’elle commence avec l’interview de 83 d’Emmanuel Hocquard (celle où il déclare que la poésie c’est quand on passe à la ligne…) et qu’elle s’achève avec le retour à un certain type de gravité poétique (la parution, chez Al Dante, d’*Ouvriers Vivants*, ouvrage

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collectif, en 99). Bérard, Pennequin, Tarkos, moi et d’autres, somme sur la ligne de crête de cet entre-deux, si j’ose dire, au sens où R.R. appartient encore à la période “négligente” et où les textes et travaux qui ensuite vont, plus ou moins rapidement, s’inscrire dans la période dans laquelle nous sommes, beaucoup plus “impliquée.” Tant qu’un certain “parti pris” à la capacité d’électriser le travail, il est à sa place et de son temps. Il fut un temps où la “néligence” électrisait. C’est bel et bien fini – le fait que je réponde de manière non-négligente à tes questions et à celle de Christian Prigent en est une preuve supplémentaire (L’illisibilité en questions 195).

Tracing the historical boundaries of a period marked by theoretical negligence between roughly 1983 and 1999, Quintane seeks a renewed political writing that, nevertheless, avoids contracting into avant-garde militancy. Therefore, she manifests the need to address political and literary questions both as themes within her writing and within the framework of an interview. Importantly, this reinvigorated political writing still calls for the deconstruction of language that Quintane deems “grand seigneur,” according to the terminology that she borrows from Derrida. For her, this high language lapses into a conservative posture when speaking about both politics and poetry, incarnating the paradoxical elitism of the avant-gardist stance that she seeks to avoid. In opposition to the elevated style with which Denis Roche deems poetry “inadmissible,” Quintane seeks preserve something of the studied negligence of her earlier work even as she moves towards critical writing.

In Tomates, she prepares an alternative political voice, located between negligence and militancy, by first critiquing the style frequently employed in politicially progressive writing. Quintane opposes what she names the “style insurrectionnel,” which orders the expression of revolutionary texts up to and including L’insurrection qui vient: “Les thèses 204 à 206 de La Société du Spectacle mettent les choses au point quant à la langue : on ne touche pas à la syntaxe (classique) ni au lexique (marxiste & Lumières)” (Tomates 132). Adopting elevated style to

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193 See Derrida’s D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie.
address the question of revolution presents a contradictory use of highly conservative language. For Quintane, it is precisely in the domain of language, syntax and the lexicon, where literature acts most effectively. As pertaining to lexicon, the title Tomates obviously does not signal itself as a political work. Yet, it is within sequences of the work pertaining to an unconventional lexical field, that of vegetables – tomatoes and potatoes – that she articulates certain political reflections. Quintane extends politics to an expanded domain of inquiry, thereby seeking to push beyond the grammar structuring political debate and the divisions between public and private life. At the beginning of the book, the tomato is presented as an object belonging to private life: it first evokes the garden of a vacation home or the country residence where the author herself lives. Yet, in this context, the fruit also evokes political action in that the choice between industrial grains or heirloom tomatoes also evokes the difference between the political system in its current form or a radical alternative. For example, Quintane’s discussion of heirloom tomatoes evokes the context of the larger project of self-sufficiency of the Tarnac commune. Quintane references the legal prohibition to circulate the instructions for preparing traditional compost for tomatoes. To act against this law protecting large agricultural conglomerates, Quintane includes a dialogue of several pages in which she provides the complete recipe for this compost.194 Reflecting on her own political responsibilities and possibilities of political action, growing tomatoes comes to be associated with political action in accordance with the Tarnac commune’s self-reliance projects. If the tomato equals action or political dissonance, the potato is its counterpoint. The discussion of potatoes also provides an example of Quintane’s contestation of conventional rules of syntax and lexicon, as she mixed together several registers of language ranging from playful puns, references to the history of the French left, and sober

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194 Tomates 13-16.
reflections of class. Quintane associates potatoes with her native city of Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, which she nicknamed “pommes de terre frites” in childhood (Tomates 87-8). This city of Seine-Saint-Denis is home to, “l’ouvrier pommes de terre,” according to the terminology of the nineteenth century socialist Émile Pouget (Tomates 80). Les pommes de terre frites, l’ouvrier pommes de terre and la patate are so many names for the lumpenproletariat, those incapable of organization or political action. Thus, Quintane’s political writing breaks with the “style insurrectionnel,” to pursue a digressional, freeform challenge of the grammar ordering political expression.

Literature that dramatizes personal experience and private life offers a particularly apt lens with which to analyze the Tarnac Affair, because it centers on the division between public security (anti-terrorism) and individual liberties (such as free speech and the rights of those living in the Tarnac commune). Tomates employs integrated critique to parse these fault lines between public and private and Quintane positions herself consciously as a guinea pig to test the imbrication between these two domains. Quintane traces the distribution between public and private through a critique of a speech by Interior Ministor Michèle Alliot-Marie on the extension of security responsibility. According to Alliot-Marie, security must be enforced not only by the police but also by the national education system, families, etc., thus becoming as much a domestic as a public matter:

Sécurité domestique ? Sécurité publique ? / Sécurité domestique = sécurité publique : je m’aplatis s’il y a de la fumée, je contourne le mendiant (pour ne pas favoriser l’aumône), j’ôte le savon du dedans de la baignoire et je le pose sur son bord, je complète les fiches d’identification des enfants en bas âge, je ferme le gaz, je signale les sans-papiers à la préfecture, je mets un trois-points à ma porte d’entrée, etc. Ainsi, je réduis les dépenses domestiques-publiques (jonction-fusion) (Tomates 70).
Through her irony, Quintane operates an ad hoc critique of a political proposition that undermines that distinction between the individual and public spaces. With the division between these two domains unclear, any domestic action may be overridden by public security concerns. To conclude this sequence, Quintane offers a series of syllogisms that recall the brevity of her Remarques. These passages relate directly to the Tarnac Affair: “Des anarchistes ont écrit des livres. Des anarchistes ont lancé des bombes. Il y a parmi ceux qui écrivent des livres des gens qui lancent ou lanceront des bombes” (Tomates 71-2). She emphasizes the absurdity of this logic of securitization that consists in locating preparatory acts for terrorism in literature, or deeming a book evidence in court.

Quintane also reflects on social and symbolic practices inherited from authoritarianism, which, although present within literary institutions, are rarely questioned. Thus, she situates her work at the junction point between political power and the literary institution, to adopt Christophe Hanna’s framework for political writing. Continuing her anecdotal criticism in an autofictional passage, Quintane describes a festival of female poets in Spain, where she observes certain authoritarian practices inherited from the fascist era. Touring the island of Majorca, a fascist stronghold throughout the Francoist period, she experiences a “flash de fascisme”: the sudden experience of the complicity between culture and the fascist power (Tomates, 30). Culture and politics are again intertwined as she visits the poet Costa i Llobera’s house and observes the authoritarian posture of the site’s inheritor, as well as the compliant reaction of the tour group. High culture reveals itself as an arm of the Franco regime to reinforce the authority of the upper class (as exemplified by the inheritor) to rule and command. Through these reflections, Quintane seeks to analyze the relationship between fascism and culture more deeply.
by probing beyond its obvious, exterior features. This “flash de fascisme” betrays modes of thinking and habits revelatory of elusive qualities:


The experiences at the women’s poetry festival and at Costa i Llobera’s house lead her to criticize the literary institutions that acted in complicity with the authoritarian regime. Beyond a formal definition of fascism, she is interests in identifying and deconstructing elements within democratic societies that are inherited from these regimes. Reading these signs may also allow us to interpret signs of a future oppressive government. Moving beyond a definition of fascism that may be contained within “une poignée de phrases,” she seeks knowledge of qualities that may be both more opaque and more persistent. In place of set criteria to describe fascism, Quintane uses a complex experiential sequence to decipher the vestiges of the fascist epoch and to decode premonitory marks of future dangers.

Significantly, Quintane casts a critical gaze on literary institutions. She problematizes literary festivals as contributing to a conception of literature as entertainment, and thereby diffusing its critical capacity. Commenting on Pierre Alferi’s novel Les Jumelles, Quintane opposes the critical functioning of the work to the notion of literature as a “fête”:

[Les Jumelles] comme tous les livres qui placent le lecteur dans une situation délicate (délicate, irritante, intenable), dont le cœur est la préparation d’un piège qui fait de l’anticipation des réactions du lecteur pris à ce piège l’un des motifs, voire l’enjeu, de la littérature. / Mais si la littérature est une fête, qui pourrait y voir encore une piège possible; un enjeu ? (Tomates 90).
Alferi’s novel resists the notion of literature as entertainment because it leads its reader to think through a delicate, “intenable” situation. Quintane reflects on the tactical functioning of literature that acts as a trap held forth to the reader. It is precisely this type of writing that can train a reader in political consciousness by taking him or her through complex sequences of experience. Quintane’s writing itself is similarly informed by an impression “[d’]avoir les boules” during the presidential reign of Sarkozy when *Tomates* was written. This fear following the Tarnac arrests leads her through a series of tactical negotiations within the work. As critical literature, *Tomates* does not seek to entertain its reader or “faire la fête,” but to make the reader engage with the complexities of contemporary politics. Negotiating these entanglements accompanies the elaboration of thought in vivo, as Quintane explains: “Ce n’est pas un livre engagé qui transmet une vision du monde. C’est une tentative de réfléchir en direct.” (“Arrêt sur images” interview). The work integrates tactical calculations in place of a broad world view and seeks to instill a similar ability to think actively and improvisationally in its audience.

Entering more clearly into the domain of critical theory, the status of the lumpenproletariat class becomes the subject of a debate between Quintane and the philosopher Jean-Paul Curnier. In his book *Le commerce des charmes*, Curnier, a veteran of May 1968 and the French left, arrives at the conclusion that “le peuple n’existe plus” or “le peuple manque” (*Tomates 77-78*). While the foundation of the French Republic reposes on the people, Curnier views the manifestation of the people as a rare event that arises only during significant uprisings, while there is a “manque perpétuel” of the people at other times. He affirms that the notion of governing according to the will of the people substitutes historically for the divine right of the monarchy, which reigns in the name of God, who also exists according to a continual “manque” with respect to worldly affairs. Yet, this lack of the people is aggravated today because “c’est
l’individualité sérielle de masse qui l’a remplacé” (*Le commerce des charmes* 19). For Curnier, an individualized approach to social services and assistance undermines the unity of a class that can be called the people. For this reason, the notion of lumpenproletariat fits better with the suburban rioters of 2005. Reflecting on these events throughout his text, Curnier concludes that these revolts do not constitute the emergence of the people because the rioters lack any sophisticated sense of political consciousness, such as that demonstrated by popular movements such as the Black Panthers. Analyzing the notion of the people, Quintane returns to her work on pronouns and the position of enunciation in order to critique Curnier for depoliticizing the 2005 riots:

1. Si le peuple n’existe plus, alors il n’y a pas eu d’émeutes (révoltes) en banlieue. […]

4. Nous regrettons que ces émeutes soient spontanées, non organisées. L’émeute, c’est une insurrection qui a échoué. Par conséquent, les émeutiers des banlieues ont échoué (selon nous). D’ailleurs, ils sont dans l’échec (scolaire d’abord, émeutier ensuite).

5. Les émeutes ont eu lieu, pas l’insurrection – qui vient. Nous préférons l’insurrection qui va venir aux émeutes qui ont effectivement eu lieu – sans nous (*Tomates* 77-8).

By employing the pronoun several times, Quintane accentuates the exclusive “nous” implied by Curnier. Shedding light on the position of this “nous” outside of the suburban rioters, and even of the lower class, is what allows it to posit the non-existence of the people. She highlights the disjunction between leftist intellectuals and the impoverished class they reflect upon by casting irony on the supposed ineptitude of these rioters in comparison to participants in movements like the Black Panthers (“l’échec (scolaire d’abord, émeutier ensuite)”). This attitude toward the inhabitants of the *banlieue* contributes towards depoliticizing the riots in favor or an insurrection still to come.
This discussion of the concept of the people continues in an annex of *Tomates*, where Quintane publishes an exchange of letters featuring Curnier’s response to her critiques. Further, *Les années 10*, which includes a continuation of this debate, is presented as “un inventaire des façons dont ceux qui, n’étant pas ou plus du peuple, voient, désirent, fantasment, sabordent, ruinent, suppriment ‘peuple’” (41). This work integrates both literary passages and a clear tendency towards theoretical, essayistic prose. If it is important to refrain from too readily placing Quintane’s unclassable works within preexisting literary genres, *Les années 10* is nevertheless closer to the essay form due to both its content and its editorial context. Quintane’s other work of the same year, *Descente des mediums*, which was published by her usual editor POL, is more clearly inscribed with the literary genre. In *Les années 10*, the author no longer expresses the reserves that she held with respect to theoretical writing at the time of publishing “Critique des nous.” Instead, it is literature’s political capacity that is brought into question, notably in the text, “Pourquoi l’extrême gauche ne lit-elle pas de littérature ?”. In addition to Nancy and Curnier, she evokes a widespread intellectual and artistic tradition that reiterates the motif of a lack of the people or their melancholic decline. For example, the films of Guy Debord and Pier Paulo Pasolini chronicle the defeats suffered by the left, while also anticipating future setbacks. By interrogating the concept of the “people”, Quintane also returns to her analysis of the pronoun “nous”. She comments a citation of Charles Péguy, where a “nous” emerges as a melancholy observer of the absence or passing away of the people:

C'est qui, ce “nous” ? Et bien, c'est un “nous” posé devant, ou à côté, dessus ou dessous un peuple qu'il observe [...]. C'est un “nous” qui ancre l'observation de ce peuple (un peuple) dans la répétition mélancolique – ou la mélancolie de la répétition : *Nous avons connu un peuple que l'on ne reverra jamais. Je ne dis pas : on ne verra jamais de peuple.*
Je ne dis pas : le peuple est perdu. Je dis : nous avons connu un peuple que l’on ne reverra jamais (Les années 10 57-8).195

This “nous” constitutes the people by the act of observation at a distance, while the work on prepositions (“posé devant, ou à côté, dessus ou dessous”) expresses the difficulty of fixing this position precisely. Adopting an elegiac tone through his repetition, Péguy creates the people as the subject of a loss. Quintane proposes that the esthetic pleasure of the elegy surpasses and presents itself as an obstacle to political thought about the people. She seeks to expose a prevalent motif and esthetic centered on presenting the people as absent or impotent by means of their esthetization. In Péguy’s work, elegiac nostalgia freezes a certain vision of the people, while prohibiting the unforeseeable and dangerous manifestation of the living people. This depoliticizing conception the people saps the possibilities of political action and reinforces the separation between the observing “nous” and the people. Listing and analyzing the functioning of these “nous” aims to open possibilities for other representations of the people within art and perhaps to once again endow literature with political import.

The theoretic aspects of Nathalie Quintane’s writing entertain a complex relationship with her literary production. At the beginning of her career, the author demonstrated ambivalence or even wariness of critical writing, a tendency that was present even within certain of her essays, such as “Critique des nous”. More recently, she has introduced criticism within her work in a more explicit manner, both by turning toward the genre of the essay and by employing integrated critique to integrate theoretical reflection within literary prose. Without doubt, this evolution is partly due to her consecration within the field of contemporary poetry. Yet, even as Quintane increases her public appearances and lectures alongside her theoretical publications, her critical works also comes in response to a more acute need to decipher

195 Péguy’s citation, in italic, originates in his L’Argent.
contemporary political circumstances. Her recent work aims both to incorporate overtly political themes and to initiate theoretical reflections that may help to meet controversies, such as the Tarnac Affair. Quintane prolongs her generation’s act of reassessing certain major concepts of twentieth century art, such as the notions of the avant-garde and literary community. Rejecting a coherent Weltanschauung in favor of anecdotal, improvisatory thinking, she writes politically by taking her reader through a series of tactical elaborations. Significantly, this “thinking by way of examples” replaces the gravity and teleological perspective of the avant-garde with ironic and playful humor. Quintane endorses Christophe Hanna’s version of a non-exclusive nous tous, where literature responds to problems of theoretical and political legibility. Thus, the provocation used in Grand ensemble aims to destabilize euphemistic narratives, like that of L’année de l’Algérie, through a barrage of shocking truths. These performative passages expose the failure of the official narrative to convincingly and justly depict the Algerian War. In Tomates, Quintane works through a series of political reflections motivated by the policies of the Sarkozy administration and its crackdown on the Tarnac commune. She seeks to expose what may be an approach of fascism by dissecting inherited habits from authoritarian eras, as well as encroaching signs of a turn to the extreme right. Yet, Tomates also deliberates on the failure of the nous of L’insurrection qui vient, which rejects the political actions of the suburb riots of 2005 in favor of a rebellion directed from above. To praise the coming insurrection is, in a certain manner, to erase the spontaneous, popular movements that occurred in 2005. It relegates the political action of a non-organized minority to insignificance out of preference for an insurrection directed from above. By taking the reader through a series of complex deliberations, her writing seeks to provoke tactical reflection on events of particular political resonance and to critique the role of culture in supporting conservative politics. Leading the reader through
experiential sequences, literary criticism, and reflections on style, Quintane seeks to mobilize her thought for critical, tactical application in the present. Throughout her work, Quintane seeks to create political writing that acts as a mobile critique, adaptable to ever fluctuating circumstances.
Conclusion

Passages between Poetry and the Visual Arts

Christian Prigent has often played a significant role in recognizing and welcoming emerging poets. In his essay *Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes* (2000), Prigent designates three emerging authors, Philippe Beck, Charles Pennequin, and Christophe Tarkos, that appear to usher fresh voices into the contemporary poetry scene. In a later article for the review *Fusées* “Phénix ! Phénix !” (2001), Prigent selects a new series of emerging talents: Fabrice Bothereau, Sylvain Courtoux, Antoine Dufeu, Jérôme Game, and Jérôme Gontier. Similarly, Nathalie Quintane, in her contribution to *L’illisibilité en questions* (2014), follows this prospective undertaking by championing three contemporary poets, Jacques-Henri Michot, Jérôme Mauche, and Anne Parian. If these authors have yet to receive sustained critical attention (with the obvious exception of the trio Beck, Pennequin, and Tarkos), their work offers the potential for exciting new developments in the field. This conclusion proposes a similar gesture as that accomplished by Prigent and Quintane by analyzing the work of authors who have generally received limited critical attention. While necessarily reflecting subjective choices, the following

196 Prigent’s essay on these poets is accompanied by a second essay designating important theoretical works by this younger generation of authors, such as Chrisophe Fiat and Christophe Hanna. Both essays are available on the POL website: [http://www.pol-editeur.com/ouverturepdf.php?file=001-phenix-phenix.pdf](http://www.pol-editeur.com/ouverturepdf.php?file=001-phenix-phenix.pdf).

197 Quintane evokes *Salut les anciens/Salut les modernes*, p. 55.

198 An incomplete list of critical writing on these authors includes the following works. Philippe Beck’s poetry has received extensive critical attention, notably in the form of a conference at Cérisy-la-Salle: Isabelle Barbéris and Gérard Tessier. *Philippe Beck, Un chant objectif aujourd’hui : Colloque international : 26 Août-2 septembre 2013*. Paris: Corti, 2014. Print. The poetry of the late Christophe Tarkos has been discussed in essays, such as those written by Prigent for the first volume of his collected works *Écrits poétiques* and the rich introductory essay by Philippe Castellin for the second volume *L’Enregistré: Performances, improvisations, lectures*. Paris: POL, 2014. Print and CD. The poetry of Jérôme Mauche has featured in a doctoral thesis by Philippe Charron: *Du “métier d'ignorance” aux savoir-faire langagiers : l'environnement de la littéralité chez Emmanuel Hocquard, Pierre Alferi et Jérôme Mauche*. Montréal (Québec, Canada), Université du Québec à Montréal, 2014.
pages will outline the work of two poets who present innovative poetic practices so as to suggest avenues for future research, notably with respect to hybridized creations. Here, I am interested in discussing poets who have made significant overtures towards the world of the visual arts. However, this conclusion by no means wishes to suggest that there is little left to discuss in the work of the four authors examined in depth. To the contrary, each poet examined in this dissertation is continuing to publish and their work demands continued attention as part of a still unfolding oeuvre.

Exhibiting Manuel Joseph

Collaborative projects between visual artists and poets have taken on new characteristics with the emergence of installation work and similar immersive forms. The work of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn is revelatory in this respect as he has engaged in sustained partnerships with several poets, including Manuel Joseph (as well as Christophe Fiat and others). Joseph’s literary production is deeply marked by political engagement; for example, his *Heroes are Heroes are...* (1994) incorporates textual samples from Gulf War news broadcasts, World War II tourism sites, pornography mail-order catalogues, and other sources to reveal shared rhetorical strategies that usually pass unperceived by readers. Thomas Hirschhorn similarly uses techniques of collage and appropriation, often employing poor, quotidian materials in installations and “presence and production” pieces, where the artist works directly with economically disadvantaged, often immigrant communities to create a local art event (*Critical Laboratory: The Writing of Thomas Hirschhorn* 299). Joseph has collaborated on several of these works by giving readings, leading writing workshops, and writing and directing theater pieces. These projects range from fan
homages to *Spinoza* and *Georges Bataille*, to a temporary art museum in the Paris suburbs entitled *Musée Précaire Albinet*, to the installation *Das Auge*. Hirschhorn conceives of collaboration as operating under an open modality that he names “unshared responsibility” (*responsabilité non-partagée*), which preserves the autonomy of the other artist’s unique practice (*Critical Laboratory: The Writing of Thomas Hirschhorn* 70). Rather than directing or directly engaging with the written portion of the exhibit, Hirschhorn welcomes another artist’s work into his own without conditions or reservations. If both Hirschhorn and Joseph apply techniques of collage as a critical dislocation of mass media information, the juxtaposition of disparate material also provides a relational model for union between artistic media. Unshared responsibility can be seen as extending Rancière’s ideas on the equal status of text and image in the aesthetic regime of the arts to the domain of group artwork. Just as pictures and words are brought together to form montages, artistic practices may be joined together within an exhibition. Following from this perspective, in 2010 and 2011, Hirschhorn decided to devote an artistic tribute to the poet in *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, transposing his poetry from the page to the gallery space. Joseph’s poetry is projected into installation space in a move intended to upset the preeminence of the book. Hirschhorn proposes a form of poetry present on all supports from post cards, advertisements, emails, and drafts of poems to readymade objects:

Aujourd’hui, le travail de la poésie ne se limite pas à écrire des poèmes et à les publier. Produire de la poésie n’est pas simplement produire un livre […] (Joseph) produit beaucoup et – même s’il publie peu – manifeste cette production depuis des années par une écriture sur tous supports qu’il adresse à ses ami(e)s (*Exhibiting Poetry Today* 6).

By privileging poetic production outside of the official form of the book and emphasizing the importance of the address to friends, Hirschhorn is putting forth a form of literature that seeks to undo established hierarchies in a similar way as his concepts of unshared responsibility and presence and production. Initially offered to a friend, these poetic texts and objects engage with
a general readership in a similarly direct, improvisational manner. The reader/viewer is also shown the development of certain texts through drafts and emails regarding publications, emphasizing the elaboration of a text rather than a closed, finished work.

Manuel Joseph’s term “abjets” (joining together “object” and “abject”) refers to a series of works involving both texts and physical objects, where no clear line is drawn between the two types of materials (Exhibiting Poetry Today 176). Opposing notions of inspired authorship, Joseph speaks of his texts as scanned images in an interview with Jean-Charles Masséra, likening them to Hirschhorn’s poor, quotidian materials. Appropriated passages are pieced together and manipulated to serve a critical function. Neither wholly an object nor wholly writing, the works demonstrate what Joseph sees as the abject quality of the contemporary media environment. Through the repetitive passages, Joseph mimics the insistence of news outlets in shaping opinion and teases out Wittgenstianian family resemblances between seemingly unrelated subjects. For example, portions of an article describing the augmentation of FDA staff are juxtaposed with an account of the selection process for an elite airborne military force.199 The FDAs role in evaluating the safety of imported medicines is highlighted by excerpts on a poisonous drug, Heperin. The unfortunate consequences of this regulatory work are then put in conjunction more generally with the theme of aerial surveillance, which is evoked by airborne division and police drones.

If the term “abjets” refers initially to the regressive or numbing quality of consumer society, a more dire sense of the abject is also brought to the forefront in certain pieces. Resembling Hirschhorn’s exhibition Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques, Joseph sometimes

199 La tête au carré, unpaginated. Joseph’s text Flat Red Flag, which originally appeared as a handout from Hirschhorn’s installation Das Auge, is also reprinted in this book.
uses magic marker on cardboard to evoke the signs of the homeless. By imitating a form used by those in desperate need, Joseph opts for a material manifestation of the downtrodden. One work puts forth an ironic pro-war message on a cardboard sign while on the reverse side displaying packaging from consumer products, drawing a parallel between poverty and the military enterprises of capitalist society. Critic Alexandre Costanzo highlights similar preoccupations in certain of Joseph’s books where the narrative is told from the point of view of a child, the intellectually disabled, or the mentally ill: “Ou l’on dira qu’il s’agit de voir le monde avec des yeux d’enfant, d’infirme, d’idiot pour mieux l’entamer […] Ce peuple absent s’invente ici en quelque sorte une langue pour exister au monde” (*Exhibiting Poetry Today* 13). Other works by Joseph employ the readymade, moving collage from the page to the use of actual objects. Providing an ironically jingoistic message, “Hurry up next war!”, Joseph highlights the militarized look of a paintball helmet. In other works, Joseph makes connections between the formal qualities of disparate objects. The exposed mechanical components of the remote control are offered in parallel to the debris of medicine packaging with its similar rows of button-like compartments for pills. Yet, this organization of the buttons and pills in symmetrical rows is offset by the haphazard taping together of each item, which suggests them as refuse. Products of the entertainment industry, such as the CD, featured in another piece, would act as opiates in a similar manner as pharmaceutical drugs. In this way, Joseph freely moves between texts and physical objects according to a common critical intention. Hirschhorn’s installation affirms the richness of these interventions as they blur the frontiers between poetry and visual art. Indeed,

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201 *Ibid* 190.
poetry is proposed as an art form that can not only be read but also exhibited. Notably, Joseph has also planned on a text in response to Hirschhorn’s interventions (yet to be published at this time of writing).

**Jérôme Game : In and Out of the Book**

Sound poet Jérôme Game is similarly preoccupied with new paradigms of cross pollination between poetry and other art forms. His work implements a transfer of formal codes and syntax from other media into literature, most notably those of film and photography. These operating procedures originating in other arts may be seen in terms of “import” and “export”, as Game signals in the critical text, *Sous influence : Ce que l'art contemporain fait à la littérature* (10-11). As this terminology suggests, Game seeks to draw on the technical capabilities of another medium or art form to inform new approaches to writing. In live performances, CD recordings, and typographical play, he employs a variety of syntactic experimentations to this end, often centering on the stutter. In so doing, Game references the technical glitch of the skipping CD as much as Deleuze's “bégaiement.” As Deleuze theorizes, the stutter signals resistance to unperturbed expression, marking the birth of a minor language within the dominant tongue. Spanning maximal linguistic territory by slipping across phonemes from separate words, Game joyfully stutters towards a disaggregation and recomposition of language. His volume *Ça tire* includes both a book and an audio CD of Game's performance of the work. In the two

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205 See Deleuze’s *Critique et clinique.*
complementary forms of the text, words are subjected to systematic reframing as though the narratorial presence undergoes constant oscillation:

l'hors-c adre ar essencep arn aturep ure, c'est ça qui si beau, non seu lement différent i qui tisse i tissant, qui court, ligne irconscrit en ouvrant d'éporte sur ce mouveme en

wide-b odied air lanes p are
décadrant cadre me r
eporte c'est
ouvert à tout vents c'est
savoirm entre à la phrase en lap ression u cadre ers v l'hors-champ.
de l'image ers v e langue, e l'horschamp à dans l'caadre en
dispose a matière à l'étale, à l'embraye, à l'aérostatic a sustente e le (Ça tire 17).
The normal unity of words comes undone as they are pulled apart in a manner analogous to a frame vascillating. This deconstruction can also be seen metaphorically as a sudden cut being introduced into the image through a technical malfunction. Positions inside and outside the frame kaledeidscope in and out of one another. Meanwhile, the space contained within the frame can be seen as collapsing beneath the pressure of its outside. Significantly, this movement can be seen as a radical form of enjambment that opens up Game's writing to a movement of acceleration. The breaks between syllables and lines power language down what is referred to as lanes of breath or lanes of the highway. Game channels Deleuzian becoming as his unanchored language moves the subject towards an open schema of selfhood centered on virtuality. The increase in velocity and the accompanying decomposition of language push the subject towards dynamic processes of transformation.

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206 Game explores the theme of Deleuzian becoming in his Poetic Becomings: Studies in Contemporary French Literature.
At times, syllables are stretched so far as to offer new meanings. A phrase featuring a series of successive verbs offers an example of this transformation: “en diapo la dia se condense, lie p, on voir on a pellicle se défiixe / tatique en nouveau” (Ça tire 14). The act of joining (“lier”) is complemented by the notion of folding (“plier”), where the English speaker also hears the word “leap”. Game proposes a complex interrogation of the nature of writing and seeing across a series of actions performed by the image. These activities simultaneously offer an act of fusing, folding, and bounding forwards, before settling into a static state. Further, at moments in Ça tire, language is subjected to such extreme contortions that only a few syllables are conserved of any single word and a phrase appears to dissolve into a haze of fragments. The result is a joyful decomposition of what Game describes as verbal matter in the citation given in the last paragraph (“matière à l’étale”), and as “mulching” or “compost” towards the end of the book (Ça tire 69). Verbal dislocation approaches its maximal state as words are reduced to a disordered bits of letters. Yet, as Ça tire draws to a close, a new style emerges, in which writing becomes less dislocated. Game marks the emergence of a new paradigm of expression: “Arfois, un objet passe à un d’un statut à un autre au cours d’un même plan ar d’invisibles effets de morphing” (Ça tire 63). This new sensibility substitutes effects of morphing for the stretching that dominated the work. A more tempered regime of transition arises where word are not so forcefully wrought asunder but rather seem to pass between each other almost imperceptibly. In place of the maximalist effect of deconstruction, morphing enacts a more understated effect of slippage.

In Jérôme Game’s following work, Flip-Book, a more subtle syntax of morphing becomes the main poetic procedure, providing smoother, more fluid writing. Largely incorporating cinematic techniques, he reproduces key scenes from sixteen films, making
strategic elisions of syllables and words to adapt cinematic techniques, such as dissolves, fades, and cuts to writing. Featuring text on only a single side of the page without pagination, *Flip-Book* mimics the sense of movement that characterizes the art of cinema. Indeed, the book seems to operate continuous movement like that of the camera:

Le film avance en dandinant d'une jambe sur le skate, en avançant plus vite dans le mouvement des skates en reculant, la caméra monte à hauteur d'âme Jonathan dans l'ombre avance à pas de géant, la végétation le trottoir en béton défile des roues en virage crache (*Flip-Book*).

Accompanying the movement of the skates, passages like this one favor a general confusion between the advance of prose, the movement of the camera, and the action on screen. Game seeks to provoke just these effects of slippage, where descriptions of film scenes turn towards immersion in their progression.

As Game remarks in an interview, he seeks not only to recreate cinematic effects in writing but also to capture a certain trembling proper to the moving image. His focus is then not simply on mimicking film techniques, but rather on capturing particular visual experiences offered by the medium:

Moi, ce que je veux, c’est un truc qui vibre. Tu sais comme quand on règle la télé, juste avant l’image fixe et toute lisse. Et pourtant, je veux qu’on y voie (pas reconnaissable) quelque chose. […] Je ne veux pas que cela rentre dans un cadre. Je veux que cela sorte du cadre, que cela suinte (Game, “De quoi parlons-nous”).

Game is interested in the moments when the camera passes from a focused image to an unfocused one, or alternatively, when the framing of a scene suddenly appears to shake and appear unstable. These technical imprecisions provide the space for a new grammar within their interstices, not unlike the stuttering language that develops over against the dominant tongue for Deleuze. These effects are often produced delicately, for example through a sentence lengthened
Beyond what normal syntax allows, or through the absence of a comma or a period, *Flip-Book* provides a number of examples of this subtle loss of footing, such as the following:

La ligne bleue électrique horizontale, la station service de nuit dans le vert foncé marron de la forêt noire le rouge de la tache s'arrête au milieu, longe les lignes grises de ciment liseré blanc de l'autobahn, la peau de porcelaine les arcades sourcilières de Catherine les arêtes de son nez les yeux baissés sont à Paris (*Flip-Book*).

The blur of highway lights mark the advance of the vehicle in the night, testifying to an interest in visual experiences of flux. Not unlike the cloudy images of an untuned TV, the movement of lights from the car provides a blurry electric line and an imprecise red stain. The elliptic construction of the passage contributes to an effect of montage as jumps mirroring film cuts alternate between views of the roadway and Catherine. For example, the conclusion of the passage moves suddenly from a description of Catherine’s eyes to signal arrival in the capital (“les yeux baissés sont à Paris”). In this way, *Flip-Book* introduces more harmonious effects to poetic syntax. By both adapting techniques of film creation, such as montage, as well as reproducing unintended moments of haze and imprecision, Game interrogates visual perception.

Game has also worked within institutions of fine art, notably the Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne. Within this art space, he invited poets, such as Anne-James Chaton, Jean-Michel Espitallier, Charles Pennequin, and Nathalie Quintane, to create projects by adapting the methodology of a contemporary art piece in the collection to their poetic work. These works gave rise to a series of performances at the museum and the publication of an issue of the magazine *Art Press 2*, as well as a theoretical text published by the museum, entitled *Sous influence : Ce que l'art contemporain fait à la littérature*. In this project, Game expands his thinking on transposing artistic procedures to approach the museum as a space of sensation and atmosphere:
Musée comme appareillage de réfraction, captation indirecte, en flux, détournée, J’indétermine le musée, le vide de sa spécificité pour en faire le site de cette écriture d’être-affecté que je mets en place (Sous influence 25).

Beyond simply presenting artistic works, the museum provides a space where their perceptual effects can be put into circulation according to open configurations of affect. Game advocates indeterminability for the museum, whereby it comes to house the free play of perceptions and affects produced by the works. The writer, in turn, approaches this space with maximal availability to receive these sensations and allow them to inform his writing. Much like writing under the influence of cinema, writing with the atmosphere produced by a museum offers new operational codes to poetry. Thus, Game’s experimental work continues to expand towards an array of different institutions, media, and art forms, all while reinforcing the bonds between poetry and the world of visual art and cinema. Emphasizing the expansive nature of poetry, he seeks to actively denature literature by incorporating the syntactic codes of these alternative media into both vocal performance and writing.

These authors, as well as the four poets examined in depth throughout this dissertation, offer new possibilities for poetic creation. While often exiting questions of lyricism, their experimentation remains distant from the sterile formalism criticized by neo-lyricist poets. Instead, by pushing their work towards interaction with other media, they seek new possibilities for poetry roughly a century and a quarter after Mallarmé proclaimed the crisis of verse. As poetry has lived through this prolonged state of crisis, its self-definition has become increasingly open. Indeed, reflecting analogous transformations within the field of the fine arts, poetry continues to expand from an exclusively language-based genre to an increasingly hybridized art form. As multimedia poetic creation continues and expands, another important role for criticism will be to trace the zones of cross-pollination between art and poetry, particularly from an
institutional perspective. In this sense, it is fitting to conclude with the series of texts and performances initiated by Jérôme Game within a museum, because movement towards the art world is a defining characteristic of these transformations. However, this is not to suggest, as some critics have, that poetry is becoming merely a subfield of the fine arts. Unlike video art, photography, or installation art, poetry maintains its own institutions separate from those of the art world, even if they too exist in a state of permanent crisis. The collaborations between Thomas Hirschhorn and Manuel Joseph offer another fruitful model of partnership, operating at the periphery of institutions and dialoguing with those at the margins of society. In both series of collaborative projects, poetry traces new modes of interlacing with visual art. Contemporary poetry continues to push deeper into a state of crisis – a familiar circumstance by this time – transforming instability into a condition for innovation.
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