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Literality: The Question of Contemporary Poetry

By

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Professor Ann Smock, Chair  
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## Abstract

### Literality: The Question of Contemporary Poetry

by

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The history of French poetry has been marked by crisis. Frequently a mode of critical thought, poetry has drawn attention to the specificity of its historical and literary contexts, seeking to address the question of itself as a mode of critical agency and autonomous thought rather than as an extension of a determining social or cultural order. Poetry's continued engagement with the question of its autonomy and viable place in the world has been coupled with a history of breakdowns of poetic form, leading up to, in the 1970s, a poetry qualified by formal minimalism, a refusal of metaphor and image, and an apparent distancing with respect to traditional lyric. This poetry's attentiveness to language as written (or "à la lettre") defines its loyalty to the literal. Consequently, this poetry has frequently been misunderstood as self-absorbed, coldly formalist, and elitist in its apparent inaccessibility, as the poets Jean-Marie Gleize and Jacques Roubaud have remarked. Taking up their observations, I address the question of contemporary poetry's difficulty and the pertinence of this question to this poetry's contemporaneity by examining the work of three poets whose work belongs to those concerned with literality: the late Anne-Marie Albiach, Emmanuel Hocquard, and Claude Royet-Journoud. In doing so, I show what literality means for each of these poets. I suggest that despite criticisms against it, this poetry is the form taken by individuals' lived attempts to situate themselves autonomously within the world and within their own moment while taking into consideration the necessity to listen to voices other than their own and granting integrity to the present. This work of conscious self-situation is also the work of constructing a relationship to the past that is not based on linear narrative, or a determining form. My analysis is framed by and draws on the work of Robert Kaufman, who articulates modernism in terms of a "reinvention of lyric-Romantic critical agency."

## Introduction

*“Toutes les évidences lui sont mystère”*: *Literality and Poetry’s Contemporaneity*

“[L]a poésie est ‘maintenant’ ” affirms the poet Jacques Roubaud in his *Poésie, etcetera: ménage* (1995). There, he states, with equal vigor, that “la poésie peut continuer à s’exercer à continuer” (8). His energetic statements, however, come in the context of what he presents as a general loss of touch with what poetry is, an almost nonexistent faith in the possibility of there being anything that one could define as poetry anymore, and overall malaise surrounding the question of what poetry—and especially contemporary poetry—is. Roubaud refers to this climate in, tellingly, the opening lines of his book:

Quand on est poète, aujourd’hui, le monde étant ce qu’il est, plusieurs questions se posent à vous, vous sont posées, et vous ne savez trop comment y répondre. Par exemple:

- La poésie est-elle encore impossible?
- La poésie n’est-elle pas ailleurs?
- La poésie contemporaine, pourquoi si difficile?
- La poésie, c’est quoi?

et etcetera (7)

*Et etcetera*. The list of questions could go on, and it does—to this day, and perhaps not only on the French poetry scene. In *Altitude zéro: poètes, etcetera: costumes*, Jean-Marie Gleize begins an essay called “Le sens de l’obscurité” on a similar note.

Certaines questions se posent parce qu’elles vous cernent et vous englobent, et il n’y a rien à faire. Quand on écrit de la poésie, forcément, la question se pose: *Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire?* [...] je crois entendre autour et quotidiennement, et médiatiquement, des interrogations-injonctions du type: ‘ça veut dire quoi en clair?’, ‘ça veut dire quoi concrètement?’, où se trouve à la fois certifié que le sens doit être clair, que si le sens n’est pas clair il faut sur-le-champ le retraduire en sens clair, et que le sens clair est le sens concret, et qu’il est bien difficile d’échapper au sens et à la clarté et à la concrétude et leur synonymie lourde et impressionnante. (*Altitude zéro* 21).

Jacques Roubaud and Jean-Marie Gleize’s words put into focus the atmosphere within which writers of contemporary poetry have to live and breathe whether they like it or not, and to whose constituent interrogations they have, it seems, no choice but to respond, their work and their roles as poets already cast as inexplicable or dubious, the central charge of it being the difficulty and incomprehensibility of their texts. This seems, as Roubaud remarks, characteristic of contemporary poetry, and this due to the latter’s form: shattered, riddled with white spaces, refusing to adhere to the rules of syntax—in short, offering a reader no way in. The title of Gleize’s book, for example, speaks to an absolute degree of minimalism, which it conveys in terms of a leveling out or flattening, of surface, or of that which has no degree and is immeasurable to begin with. It will be the task of this project to situate three contemporary

poets—Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, and Anne-Marie Albiach—as working “within” the thin edge of this surface, this surface being that which for them is called “literal,” and which treats language “à la lettre,” or, as language as written—as the letter. But, rather than seeing their work in terms akin to those of the critics of contemporary poetry, this dissertation will attempt to show how it is that the qualities inherent in such poetry—flatness, minimalism, surface, impersonality—are also the way in which this poetry can be the articulation of a horizon on which an encounter with the world and those in it becomes possible and takes itself into account, or, in other words, takes the form of memory. Correspondingly, this project will also suggest that Albiach, Hocquard, and Royet-Journoud’s texts “contain” silent imperatives to recognize, in reading them, that as texts, they are the traces of their own making. These texts are objects that, while apparently opaque or difficult to read from the outside, tacitly demand their reintegration into our world and our moment. And although this project does not address, in its body, the implications of the Shoah in the work of these three poets, its impact both goes without saying but nevertheless of course cannot stand to not to be mentioned. But alongside this, there were also other tensions and dissolutions marking the terrain out of which a poetry of literality grew.

Coming into itself as a collective under the aegis of *Siècle à mains*, Claude Royet-Journoud’s first and seminal journal, which he founded in 1963 and which ran until 1970 from London, the circle of poets committed to writing a “literal” poetry, was also deeply feeling the energies of a moment experiencing the expiry of, or the tensions within, certain cultural and political narratives. As Rosmarie Waldrop has observed, the group was engaged in “the search for new directions in French poetry—directions away from the overwhelming influence of surrealism, hence away from the dominant image, the dominant metaphor” (94). This turn away from Surrealism and its particular way of charging the aesthetic with political value and force was inevitably coupled with a widespread consciousness of, also, the diminishing popularity of the notion of Sartrean “engagement.” And while *Tel Quel* was, and would be, engaged in multiple episodes of turmoil of its own over the decade, Royet-Journoud and his grouping had no inclination to participate in any overt attempts to negotiate politics and literature. Instead, working from London, the poets published quietly, in a literal and figurative cultural margin, turning toward the work of American Objectivists, namely, that of Louis Zukofsky, and with him, beginning to tap into the voices of the Romantics that had inspired them. The groupwork of *Siècle à Mains* also involved the poet and Holocaust survivor Paul Celan, who became a close friend of Jean Daive, another voice associated with Royet-Journoud’s *équipe*, and with Anne-Marie Albiach. Both Daive and Celan were greatly influenced by Celan, Daive in his book *Décimale blanche* and, later, the fifth volume of *Sous la coupole*, *La condition d’infini*, written in response to the pain of Celan’s suicide in 1970 and as an attempt to make sense of it, and Celan’s absence, in the present. Of course, the atmosphere was also thickened by the now oft-debated and recast question posed by Theodor Adorno: the question of how to write poetry “after;” for Royet-Journoud, Daive, Albiach, Hocquard, and others with them, this question must have dug its roots into them all the more deeply.

The journal’s operation from London also cannot but suggest that the group was, as its literary influences indicate, tuning out of its literary historical lineage and tuning into a voice that would already resound with its past, its baggage. This was the voice of American modernism, Objectivism in particular. Other voices that eventually became influential to the poets included those of Samuel Beckett, the poet Lorine Niedecer, Charles Reznikoff, Georges Oppen (the last three also part of the Objectivist movement). In time, work began to include American poets and

translators such as the American Language poets Keith and Marie Waldrop, and Norma Cole, who would translate much of the French poets' work. When Hocquard established *Un bureau sur l'Atlantique* in 1989, an association whose work it would be to further Franco-American projects, his aim, in his words, was to

combler, de manière significative, le retard que nous avons pris, en France, en ce qui concernait au moins la fraction la plus vive de la poésie américaine récente et même très récente (celle qu'on pourrait qualifier d' 'expérimentale' [...] et surtout permettre à des poètes français de pouvoir prendre en compte les aspects radicalement novateurs de ces écritures. Alors que le 'non-mouvement' *Language* battait son plein aux États-Unis, en France l'étoile d'Ezra Pound n'en finissait pas de monter..." (*ma haie* 517-18).

By 1989, though, a fair amount of work had already been done to introduce American writing to France: American poets had been invited, collective translation seminars held at Royaumont, readings organized (and not just in Paris), and translations of American poetry published in magazines (such as *Action Poétique*) and in the form of books and anthologies.<sup>1</sup> American poetry was wedging itself into the French tradition—and French literary modernity. But the turn toward the Americans that developed in the 70's and defined what can still today be considered contemporary French poetry should not be considered in terms of an attempt to respond to a perceived "crisis" in literary modernity meant to be "resolved" by an attempt to "make it "new,"" to cite the famous words of Ezra Pound, by an overthrow of the past. The past was too deep a wound for that to be possible.

The intimate and energetic engagement with American modernism and Language poetry became, for this expanding circle of poets, the means by which French poetry could rearticulate its relationship to the past, but, as if from the perspective of a bystander. The value and collaborations can be seen in terms articulated by Robert Kaufman's work, who discusses modernism as a realm within which individual agency is expressed as an active engagement with the past, something that he demonstrates more specifically as occurring in the form of a "reinvention of lyric-Romantic critical agency" ("Poetry After 'Poetry After Auschwitz'" 118). Kaufman's work engages with the relationship between thought and form in terms of aesthetic experience, defining critical agency as at once the condition on which individual expression is possible and on which this possibility is rendered experientiable. His approach to modernism is thus careful not to align itself with the mistaken or decontextualized renderings of Theodor Adorno's statement that "[a]fter Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric"; for Kaufman, poetry's "after" is, precisely, that condition of reinventing the past as, equally, an invention of the present-as-starting-point—a reinvention that therefore falls outside of the order of diachronicity or chronological determination. Literality's preference for language that is pared down, stripped of the excesses of metaphor, thus isn't the product of an inclination to shatter form for the sake of shattering it, or to present itself as yet another avant-garde. Rather, it is the form on which a reorientation occurring from within the medium of language is possible to begin with and on

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<sup>1</sup>The Electronic Poetry Center's website (<http://epc.buffalo.edu>), developed in 1995 through the State University of New York, is especially helpful in its account of the developments in France leading up to the founding of *Un bureau sur l'Atlantique*, to which it links in French and English. The website is an invaluable resource in modern poetry, electronic poetry and poetics as well as developments in the world of contemporary poetry, including publishing and criticism. The website's current editor is Charles Bernstein, one of the American Language poets with close ties to Hocquard, Albiach, and Royet-Journoud.

which language therefore becomes the site of a dramatization of this reorientation as well as an actual reconstruction of the basis on which a re-visioning of the world and the moment are possible—and not already given, as by an inherited narrative, convention, or construct. Literality is the mirror of language—one that is inevitably cracked, and therefore visible to itself.

An integration of the past into the present is the condition on which the present was, for the poets of *Siècle à mains*, possible; however, this integration could not occur as a function of linear narrative (as Kaufman argues) nor as a function of representation, a form whose assumption of exteriority would contradict any gesture of integration. If not representation, then what? Representation's rupture? This could only produce another form—of reified brokenness. What the poets of the Royet-Journoud's circle were, instead, keeping alive, in the wake of so many broken narratives, was a present broken up by the Shoah's scars, but not one denied its life for them. The answer to the "question" of negotiating the present with past took the form of making the present "speak" as its own answer, or, as its own disjuncture with itself, that is, as the form of a question, or, as a form performing its own lack of closure. In *Un test de solitude*, a book of "sonnets," Hocquard presents this question of negotiating the past and the present in terms of a question of finding a mode of transition that isn't linear, or one that doesn't already render the contents of the present uniform, or, "poser la règle de l'espace/unique":

Poser une question de savoir comment passer de  
l'un à l'autre, c'est supposer qu'on peut le faire.  
Et le supposer c'est poser la règle de l'espace  
unique.  
Que pour aller d'un point à un autre point, on  
Suit une ligne qui traverse un seul espace.  
C'est ainsi que les phrases s'enchaînent pour  
raconter une histoire.

Hocquard's lines suggest that, as opposed to "les phrases qui s'enchaînent pour raconter une histoire," brokenness is the only way in which an it is possible to "passer de l'un à l'autre" without freezing the constitutive elements of a field of vision into a static frame, so to speak, or without turning everything into a story. Hocquard's mistrust of linear and causal logic leads him to find other ways of making connections visible. Copy is one of them—because it puts into relief a form of representation and therefore separates it from a context in of operability and thereby neutralizes its capacity to signify, to take one particular direction, to create a frame on the basis of that direction.

It might be useful to see a little more closely what literality means for Albiach, Hocquard, and Royet-Journoud and to begin to get a sense of the kinds of texts that emerge in the form of this writing "à la lettre." Unsurprisingly, what's most immediately striking about this poetry is its radical opposition to metaphor, image, and expressiveness. This resistance to all forms of figuration and to representation is audible at the heart of Claude Royet-Journoud's first book, *Le Renversement*, published in 1972, where he asks: "[É]chapperons-nous à l'analogie"? For Royet-Journoud, writing is the medium and the space of an encounter with representation, an encounter that leads him to begin to sense a question relating to representation and to writing that, however, neither one can account for or answer. His poetry emerges through a process of what he describes as "nettoyage," which clears the way for "une possibilité de voir": after writing massive amounts of prose "sans aucun intérêt littéraire," says Royet-Journoud (Perroquet), the



text is neutralized via the suppression of metaphor, assonance, alliteration (Bénézet). What emerges after the prose is wrung of figurative meaning is a kind of “narrative” that Royet-Journoud sees as “embodying [...] language within a language” (Bénézet). Or, “surface, le plat [...] la platitude,” which he prefers the “métaphorique” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 22). Hocquard’s work of “l’auto-nettoyage du langage” (*ma haie* 61) shouldn’t be treated as the complete equivalent of Royet-Journoud’s—but its aim and its effect are, in the end, also to create distance from metaphor, inherited clichés, figures of speech, and the grammatical conventions that determine meaning and, therefore, the way in which the world is seen. The point, for Hocquard, isn’t to use language as a tool for representing the world or expressing one’s impressions (*ma haie* 479). It’s the work of literally printing out (“imprimer”) one’s expressions, of presenting language as a tool used for representing, that matters:

dresse la liste  
des feuilles mortes

ne photographie pas les feuilles  
qui tombent  
dans le brouillard matinal

*imprime* la liste  
*et imprime* le mot brouillard

*imprime* ce soir pour le dîner  
un demi-lapin aux carottes (*ma haie* 479-80)

This open resistance to expression might only add to the list of grievances made by critics of contemporary poetry or those just not warmed up to it: a poetry that is literal is cold, abstract—too distanced from what Gleize describes as the comforting poetry of yore that “savait parler directement et simplement aux hommes, au coeur humain” (*Altitude zéro* 22). Invoking those who are nostalgic for this “lost” poetry, Gleize goes on to describe their point of view that this lost, plain-speaking poetry “était la poésie,” and that “[e]lle peut redevenir elle même à condition de bien vouloir retrouver le chemin de ses formes, de ses rythmes, et du bon sens, et du sens.” The question of meaning is one that Gleize therefore describes as “la question douce, et comme maternelle,” or the question of ““Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire?”” Gleize translates this question into its other version, or “la question dure de l’orthodoxie sociale ‘ça veut dire quoi en clair?’” (*Altitude zéro* 22). But these kinds of questions have it all backwards, says Gleize—and Albiach, Hocquard, and Royet-Journoud would agree. For, they are questions that forget what it means to ask a question to begin with. To be able to ask a question is to be able to speak; otherwise, form, or language, or narrative, “speaks” the individual: “On ne peut que redire,” says Hocquard; “[q]uand on parle la langue on la récite/On ne peut pas davantage l’entendre/On n’entend que sa récitation” (*Conditions de lumière* 181). Like a question already giving away an answer, language already contains in it the possible ways in which something can be said. When something is literal, it doesn’t already belong to or reside in a particular way of being said and

that isn't already colored by connotations and clichés, or, spoken, as by a historically generated idiom. This “newness” or cleanliness is what Hocquard wishes to make “said,” or “visible,” in his poetry:

*petits enfants*

*c'est le début de l'automne*

comment dire *les feuilles tombent*

sans dire quelque chose bête

comme *la rentrée des classes*

*comment dire* les feuilles tombent

dans le poème

sans dire autre chose

que *les feuilles tombent* (*ma haie*, 193-4)

It's only from such a place that speech is truly possible—“maternelle,” original. A poetry that is loyal to literality doesn't demand, like the “question dure de l'orthodoxie sociale,” to be translated; instead, it seeks to remain a question, were it to not do this, it would cease to be poetry as much as it would cease to be a question. The segment of poetry above seems to express, but contain, as a productive one, the tension between one's own saying of something (the italicized “comment dire”) and the sense of that which he said (the italicized “les feuilles tombent”), the two presented in terms of inclinations, or inclinations of tone that are rendered visually to suggest two different perspectives—one belonging to the speaker and the other already given to him by circumstances (as that which still “speaks” for him, includes “la rentrée” in what he says even when he doesn't want to). Hocquard's poetry shows us that the kind of “speech” that literality makes possible isn't, then, one that says anything or one that can say anything to begin with. It is a speech that doesn't have a place, whose articulation is the articulation of a perspective—but not that of a personal perspective, rather, the perspective of a first person. This is a speech whose “language” has to be constructed.

Ascribing a negative value to this aspect of literality can only serve to reaffirm the basis on which critics of contemporary poetry, or, more specifically, poetry that is apparently too unapproachable or incomprehensible, generate their reproaches. Literality is, as the work of these three poets suggests, the way in which each individual is able to begin to say, and in this way, also to be able to listen. It is in this way that literality becomes the condition on which an immediate relation to the world is possible—on the ground that this immediacy isn't one that is taken as a given or taken for granted, but is one that must be created. In other words, Royet-Journoud must create the question at the heart of *Le Renversement*, arrive at its form, over time. Creating a form for this question is the way in which Albiach, Royet-Journoud, and Hocquard apply themselves as poets and make of their poetry a practice. This is a practice that necessarily destabilizes prescribed, inherited forms, seeking, instead, to allow the present, simply as it is, visible. “La poésie n'a sans doute ni à rechercher l'obscurité (ce serait la naïveté de l'hermétisme) ni à éviter l'obscurité (ça, c'est l'enfantillage de la transparence), elle a lieu en même temps que l'obscur, elle coïncide avec, et l'obscur est l'un de ses noms” (*Altitude zéro* 22).

This project therefore presents the work of Hocquard, Albiach, and Royet-Journoud as coming to the place in which a limit of form is reached and felt as a question, or a demand made upon thought. This limit is, has already been demonstrated, a linguistic, and, therefore, conceptual and contextual one. For each of these poets, writing is the performance of both a conceptual limit and a relation to the world that allows the world and one's relation to it to come forth as that which simply *is*—or, as that which has not yet been given form. It is from such a “place” that a way of seeing the world in terms not already provided by concept, and therefore by language,<sup>2</sup> becomes possible. In the following chapters, Hocquard, Royet-Journoud, and Albiach will be read on their own terms; that is, each poet's texts will be examined in light of literality, but from a different angle, or according to a different key term central to each poet's work. Each term, furthermore, will also be exposed as already the way in which its opposite is intrinsic to it, or the way in which this initial term is already involved in its own overturning, the space of this overturning being the space of the literal. For Hocquard, this term is objectivity. Writing poetry, for him, is a negotiation of public and private “personae” that allows for and requires the creation of an “impersonal” (and in this sense hermetic, innocuous) position. But this position is nevertheless the basis for intersubjectivity. For Royet-Journoud, the key term is preposition, which finds its place within the narrative of the composition of the book, a form that, however, Royet-Journoud says doesn't exist but whose closure bespeaks form's search for itself, but before form has any set trajectory. In the case of Albiach, the central term is the body, which is present insofar as it is already divided or appears as the body of division—the body as brokenness, or, as the way in which brokenness finds expression. Brokenness finds expression as lyric, a form of memory. If memory is a form of restitution, then Albiach helps us see that it is the restitution of a form of brokenness, or, an “answer” to the question of how to make connections as it is posed in Hocquard's sonnet from *Un test de solitude*.

The purpose of this project is twofold. The first aim is to show what literality means to each of these poets. The second is to “expose” literality, that is, to render literality as that which cannot be conceived of conceptually or linearly yet requires concepts, constraints, and the trappings of narrative in order to be evoked. This second aim thus carries within it a third, subtending objective: to show that literality is at once the way in which a space is shared and as the limit of such sharing, these two poles suggesting themselves as having a “charge” on another, or, as two axes of correspondence between which a space of correspondence is charted or the region of a “charge” allowed to emerge persist. The poetry of Albiach, Hocquard, and Royet-Journoud is therefore possible to see as a space of correspondence—with others, or with other

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<sup>2</sup>See Kaufman's “Poetry After ‘Poetry After Auschwitz’” in *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno* (Townsend Papers in the Humanities, No.3), ed. Anthony J. Cascardi (Berkeley: Townsend Humanities Center/University of California Press, 2010)). More specifically, he defines this as “Modernist constructivism's translation of the Kantian and Romantic theory-practice of organic form,” to be understood as a mobilization of form that produces “aesthetic thought-experience,” or thought that “maintains the form – but only the form, and is thus quite exactly only the semblance – of ‘objective-substantive’ conceptuality” (for a fuller account, see “Lyric's Constellation, Poetry's Radical Privilege,” *Modernist Cultures* 1:2 (Winter 2005): 209-34; cited here are pages 3,5, respectively). The “objectively-substantive” here refers to that which has substance as a universal concept (which is thus a fixed, universally applicable standard or form, or an idea according to which we can evaluate and define the contents of experience). But what Kaufman is suggesting is that art (including poetry) makes possible an “experience of quasiconceptuality,” or “aesthetic experience,” which is “[p]resented to the subject himself or herself as if it were a logical, substantive-objective concept, but actually characterized by a fundamentally affective experience of conceptuality (*feeling* rather than intellectually understanding the concept, so to speak),” and that such an experience is also what allows us to work on the concepts and forms that do actually exist, to make something with them imaginatively or to “propel the eventual expansion of objective conceptuality” (“Lyric's Constellation” 3).

voices and perspectives, as well as with its own forms of articulation. This space, then, is necessarily memorial, or necessarily one animated by but remaining desirous of its own restitution as one that also remains in resonance with itself and seeks resonance with that which is beyond it.

If Hocquard defines the literal in terms of that which is “à la lettre,” or that which is said or written exactly as it is said or written, and as such is literally a matter of “langage (oral ou écrit),” then literalism necessarily puts language into relief as referring to a particular set of circumstances or context and a particular perspective. As Hocquard’s work is especially helpful in showing, perspective isn’t, of course, anything that can be transmitted. But when language is removed from its context, separated from its capacity to represent or to carry a narrative and is exposed in its bareness, on a page and exposed there “à la lettre,” what comes to the fore is not a particular circumstance that is referred to, but the circumstantial, or the scene of language trying to signify, trying to articulate (*ma haie* 483). Hocquard, Royet-Journoud, and Albiach’s poetry presents literalism as a dramatization of a silence at the heart of language. This silence is one that arises when language is put into relief as a gesture of writing. Silence becomes the opening up of a space in which a demand to articulate a relation to the world can be heard and becomes possible to hear and respond to. So, while literalism may very well be, as Albiach puts it, “énigme,” or, the place at which, as she also states in her first book, *État*, “toutes les évidences lui sont mystère,” literalism is not, nevertheless, defined by a vain hermeticism or a difficulty for its own sake. Rather, it poses the question that is necessary to recuperate as at the heart of every moment: that of how to be in resonance with the present—or, contemporaneous with it and with its past, as a past that is always possible and necessary to reconstitute and therefore multiple, as multiple as there are human perspectives of it in the present.

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### *Hocquard, Objectively Speaking*

“Quand je dis que ce que j’écris est littéral, je ne veux pas dire que je fais état d’événements qui ont réellement eu lieu (même si c’est le cas),” writes Emmanuel Hocquard in “Ma vie privée,” a collection of 42 statements, reflections, and quasi-anecdotes published in *ma haie*, the almost 600-page anthology of his later work and second volume of *Un privé à Tanger*. “Je veux simplement dire que mes énoncés sont à prendre à la lettre, tels qu’ils sont reproduits, noir sur blanc. Tous mes livres sont à lire comme des copies. [...] Je suis le copieur de mes livres” (267). For Hocquard, literality has nothing to do with transmitting an account of something that really happened, or, as he also says, with what’s “behind” the words that he writes. His poetry and texts are objective—impersonal, indifferent. He has no investment in creating or presenting a persona and is explicit about this: “Ma vie privée” ends with him saying that the only “intention” that he has—in life as in his poetry—is one of silence: “Quelle est mon intention? Je dirais une intention de pauvreté” (*ma haie* 272). What’s so literal about Hocquard’s statements, then—at least in part—is the fact that they’re words on a page. Typographical objects, black on white.

Yet it’s in this way that Hocquard’s texts ironically also leave open the question of what literality is; it doesn’t come down simply to print on a page. For it’s in being emptied of contextual significance and then appearing on the pages of a book that Hocquard’s statements become inscribed there as fragments uprooted from their contexts, and so are reinscribed, on the pages of his book, as copies. There, they become traces, but not of anything personal. Hocquard’s texts are the traces of a work of laying bare—a work of dissociating from narrative, and thus from point of view—and in their published forms, are therefore traces of this work: they appear to the reader as objects that neither reveal nor occult the narratives of the poet’s work “behind” them. These texts therefore put forth the possibility of being read, or seen, for what they are—literal—without already demanding or asking this of a potential reader. So although Hocquard’s work may have the aspect of absolute impersonality, or of what can also fall under the term “objectivity,” it nevertheless bespeaks a negotiation of private and public personae that both allows for and requires the creation of a position that isn’t fundamentally so impersonal at all, a position that isn’t so black-and-white, but holds the promise of a condition on which relation—to others and to history—hasn’t already been given a form. Or, that hasn’t been objectified.

#### **Solitude (*Copy*)**

In “Cette histoire est la mienne (Petit dictionnaire autobiographique de l’élégie),” Hocquard presents a definition of the term “solitude” in terms of perspective. “Il n’existe aucune représentation possible de ce que je suis seul à voir ‘par observation directe,’” he says. “Je peux seulement en faire une description aussi exacte que possible. Ma description est une indication. Une indication de ma solitude” (*ma haie* 487). Hocquard’s solitude, in other words, is not possible to turn into an object (of representation): the impossibility of directly representing it likens it to a blank point around which all possible representations of it revolve—and against which they all bounce off, are deflected. Hocquard’s angle of vision is an unknown. In other words, there is no way to present it but as that which is already falling through the cracks, or that which isn’t possible to see to begin with and, as a result, is only literal insofar as it is an indication: “La littéralité ne peut concerner que ce qui relève, *à la lettre*, du langage (oral ou

écrit) [...] Il s'ensuit que si on parle de littéralité, on parle d'une proposition déjà formulée, oralement ou par écrit, quelle que soit, par ailleurs, la vérité de l'énoncé" (*ma haie* 483). The literal concerns the particularity of a context of linguistic usage, but only insofar as this particularity is also already used up and burned through, so to speak, and in this sense already dislocated from the specificity of any particular context, and thus, any particular way of meaning or saying. Hocquard explains this in terms of two people noticing that a certain Pascale's dress is red:

Par exemple, quelqu'un dit: *la robe de Pascale est rouge*. Or, je vois bien que la robe de Pascale est verte. Mais si je répète la proposition énoncée, *la robe de Pascale est rouge*, je suis littéral. La littéralité est vertigineuse comme cette sorte de tautologie (V. ce mot) qu'elle produit. (*ma haie* 483-4)

Literality is the condition on which an "énoncé" is yanked from a context while coming to present itself as indicative of a condition of context, but one that cannot be articulated or even conceived of, as it cannot be metaphorized: "la robe de Pascale est rouge, soit, littéralement, la même que la première. [...] Et comme = est impossible, la robe de Pascale est rouge dit autre chose que la robe de Pascale est rouge. Tout est clair?" (*ma haie* 264). The lack of equivalence between the two propositions occurs not only on the level of content that is contextually derived (for example, as Hocquard's utterance of the propositions), but also on the level of the very sense of that proposition itself, since what it is "saying" when it is literal isn't anything that anyone anywhere could or could have said, or say, to begin with. Literality is, in the most literal sense, impersonal in nature. And because of this, it's also impossible to seize either contextually (because it belongs to no one and never has) or conceptually, because it is tautological. As for tautology, "[r]ien ne l'explique," and "[e]lle n'explique rien. Elle se suffit. Rien ne l'amène, rien ne la suit. Elle est elle-même, seule, évidente" (*ma haie* 488). Tautology passes through—but how it does, remains a question.

Tautology is rootless. When literal, *la robe de Pascale est rouge* no longer "belongs" or has a definite "place" in which to be—and, in its exile, suddenly presents itself as something that had never belonged to anyone, anywhere, even if it appears through and in association with a particular moment. It becomes transparent, a site and a condition of passage that burns a hole through itself—sacrifices itself, like a Paschal Lamb. Hocquard's choice of name doesn't appear coincidental here, though it could be, for, it doesn't have to be significant, and is just as easily thrown away as kept when it comes to understanding what he means by literality. Maybe it was a name that happened to come up for him—or that stuck, for some reason; we will never know. But if we keep to the historically resonant metaphor of sacrifice (now that we've fallen upon it), we come to the adjective "pascal," which refers to "la Pâque juive" (Passover) and the associated "agneau pascal" ("Pascal," def. 2). Passover is the holiday celebrating the Jews' liberation by God from slavery, but also signifies the perpetuation of their wandering, and of wandering as a form of destiny.<sup>1</sup> Should we see the literal "la robe de Pascale est rouge"—the *énoncé* repeated

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<sup>1</sup>But the name "Pascale" calls forth an animal sacrificed not only in the Jewish tradition, but also in the Christian tradition. In the former, the sacrifice is literal; in the latter, the sacrifice is figurative. The term "pascal" is forked, like a split root, a tree branch—or a serpent's tongue. Depending on how it is seen, it takes one in a different direction. The place of passage here is fraught with chance, blind, dark: how did we get from one term to another, from one *thing* to another? From one cultural narrative to the other, and should one have come first, as the better example, the better framing metaphor, of the two? How did the articulation occur, the divergence take place—the term "speak," and we, remember, or conjure?

by Hocquard—as already passing over and just brushing itself, as if in oblivion? Or, with equal measure, being its own obstacle as it moves from one pair of writing hands or speaking lips to another, ever in the process of being resurrected this way, yet never *being*? The former brings to mind a folding<sup>2</sup>—of Pascalle’s red dress, as it doubles over itself, one of its surfaces moving across the other. The red staining a surface, a surface stained by its own redness, its own blood, as if in a forgetful sacrifice<sup>3</sup> made all too easily. The latter, not a bloody skin, but a knot, a muscle red with the rhythm of its own motion—maybe lips,<sup>4</sup> trying to say, or the tongue, tied.

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<sup>2</sup>The image arises in the greater context of Hocquard’s texts, where, in a way characteristic to Hocquard’s work, terms repeat themselves, acquiring multiple resonances within their particular contexts in a way that allows for the definition of a particular term to be greater than the sum of its parts—and to speak for itself, or to correspond to its definition. One such term is “pli.” The term speaks both to Hocquard’s resistance to image (and his valorization of the copy). The term can offer another way in which to understand and frame the way in which the *énoncé* is, for Hocquard, impossible to account for conceptually and how it therefore puts into relief the boundary of linguistic expression and the ways in which language can “trick” us into making imagined, though empty and false, analogies. In *Tout le monde se ressemble: Une anthologie de poésie contemporaine*, a compilation of the work of various contemporary writers and poets, Hocquard includes a short glossary of terms entitled “Tout le monde se ressemble,” in which he includes the term “pli.” He uses the term to define the way in which poetry has traditionally been a work on form effected linguistically: “la poésie est du langage plié, compacté, stratifié. Dans ses formes anciennes, le **pli** retombait sur le **pli**, bien soigneusement en cadence (toutes les douzes syllabes, par exemple) et la rime marquait le pli” (28). This “langage plié,” Hocquard suggests, is analogous to the image in prose, which “se contenterait de dérouler sagement ses phrases, on pourrait dire, par image” (28). “Mais il convient de se méfier aussi des images,” says Hocquard; “on croit qu’elles sont des raccourcis et on s’aperçoit qu’au contraire bien souvent elles brouillent la pensée et nous emportent nulle part, parce qu’aucun énoncé ne peut rendre compte d’un autre énoncé” (28). In *Conditions de lumière*, a collection of poems that Hocquard calls elegies, the term appears too: “Le sens impose sa fiction/Les tissus claquent dans cette langue” (119). Though a more detailed reading of the poem can only do justice to it, may it serve, at this juncture of the discussion, to introduce the way in which Hocquard’s oeuvre is at once a self-referential and self-refracting one—in a way that doesn’t simply mimic the way in which language functions in the world, but that literalizes and presents in the form of a seeming dramatization the way in which it does so.

<sup>3</sup>The theme of sacrifice, and the term as well, run deep in the work of Anne-Marie Albiach and Claude Royet-Journoud as well, and in the work of the many other French and American poets with whom Hocquard, Albiach, and Royet-Journoud are associated. Indeed, this body of writers seems in its totality to be the site of a ritualized sacrifice in the collaborations, borrowings, and friendships crisscrossing and keeping it alive—across texts, geographical, and literary historical boundaries. Albiach makes the distinction between “le sacrifice” and “le sacrificiel.” Chapter 3 addresses this aspect of Albiach’s work through her poetry’s treatment of the body (the body as a divided whole, as a narrative that doesn’t have a shape). Albiach remarks, “... je fais de [s]on corps et du corps des autres un élément sacrificiel” (*L’exact réel* 62). Royet-Journoud’s *Les objets contiennent l’infini* suggests that the “bête [qui] est dépecée sur le champ” is language, as Royet-Journoud works with it on the page and via the form of the book (17). It is the word that is at once sacrificed and revived through the poetic act. These remarks are meant to serve only to begin to call forth the living, breathing network of resonances that the poetry of this body of poets puts into relief and puts into relief as a body—a body, however, that is made. While the biblical resonances in Hocquard’s work will not dominate or overtly lead this discussion, it is nevertheless important to at least acknowledge them as an undercurrent (or a visible thread) running through this poet’s oeuvre, especially when the latter is being exposed for the way it effects—and indeed already bears—an initial “cut” made by the author in the name of displacing his “self” in an absolute way. That this is fundamental to Hocquard’s practice as a poet of literality also only puts into relief the word as a divided, refracted, but shared object.

<sup>4</sup>An invitation to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”—from which Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *A Descent into the Maelstrom* appears to take much of its imagery (see note 12):

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold. (Coleridge 422)



Or, the larynx,<sup>5</sup> either obstructed and gasping for air, or chortling—but is it with tears, or laughter?<sup>6</sup> Doubled over, and twisted (almost a Möbius strip,<sup>7</sup> but with a hollow space<sup>8</sup>), between a passing and a knotting. Maybe it's a beating heart,<sup>9</sup> or one of its valves, the rush of blood<sup>10</sup> heard, and the silent contractions—and the expansions, back and forth.<sup>11</sup> Or a fist, a hand, closing, or in the process of opening?

None of these images are ones that Hocquard's words are meant to suggest; none of them are ones that we can seize completely as being any more exact than evocations or approximations, or whose presence we can justify as they arose surrounding Pascalle's red dress, a word-object lodged in the body of *ma haie*, in the nooks in it where we've gone to understand Hocquard's words on literality. On the other hand, these images arose from somewhere, from a periphery or peripheral vision touched by and already in tune with the work of Hocquard's friends and fellow poets, including, but of course not limited to, Anne-Marie Albiach and Claude Royet-Journoud. Or, from what might seem to be a common ground and an underbelly of Hocquard's text, or what may feel like a vast "under"-world, hidden cave, or maelstrom<sup>12</sup> of resonances waiting to be heard, tuned into. The tension between the absolutes of facile passage on the one hand and obstruction on the other is a tension whose resolution literality, as tautology, allows and expresses. Its resolution also occurs within and as the boundary on which Hocquard negotiates the personal and the public personae, or, we could say, the "cut" that is in place between the two.

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<sup>5</sup>Constriction, passages, swallowing, breathing: the throat appears in Hocquard's work in many forms—and often negatively, or, not as the throat itself, but as the space within which speech is or is not possible.

<sup>6</sup>We will note the distinction that Hocquard makes between the classical elegist (the lamenter) and the reverse elegist (the maker).

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Möbius is the detective in Hocquard's *Le Commanditaire*; he also appears at the end of *Un privé à Tanger* (he will be reappearing later in our discussion, too). Hocquard calls the detective "un vrai enquêteur qui mène de varies enquêtes. Des enquêtes de langage" (*ma haie* 451). The Möbius strip, though, is also a relevant form because it is a surface and a circle; it is already touching its own limit as a surface, and as such, is double from the start—like the copy is, as Hocquard defines it. The copy is a state that is impossible to articulate; as such, we might say that it leaves us agape, or trying to say, mouths open, feeling the impulse to speak without being able to do so.

<sup>8</sup>The image of the bird's nest will reappear in our discussion, as will the resonances born by it.

<sup>9</sup>Rhythm, pulsing—these make their way into the work of Albiach, Royet-Journoud, and Hocquard (in a subtler way). Royet-Journoud's *Les nature indivisibles* ends with "Effacement du bord droit du coeur." Albiach's poetry is often filled with a back-and-forth pulsation or movement of figurative "personae" on the "stage" of the white page, or the oscillation between fragmentation and wholeness, fire and water; this aspect of her work is attended to in Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup>*Mauvais Sang* is behind this image. Arthur Rimbaud's work and voice have a strong presence in the work of Hocquard, Albiach, and Royet-Journoud.

<sup>11</sup>This surges forth inspired by Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre."

<sup>12</sup>A foreign voice now comes to the fore, that of Edgar Allan Poe, and his *A Descent into the Maelstrom*. A thanks to Robert Kaufman for signaling to me that the work done by the trio of poets that this project treats (and their larger circle), as well as their collaborations with American poets, is a play on Baudelaire's translations and work with the oeuvre of Edgar Allan Poe. The reference to Poe's "Descent into the Maelstrom" also shows up in notes to Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre," where Suzanne Bernard notes E. Satrkie's reading of part of the poem as an allusion to Poe's short story (Rimbaud 425). This resonance is a dimension of the work of this circle to further explore. But at least mentioning it here seems impossible to not do, especially since Hocquard's illustration of his notion of copy—on which he bases his construction of a neutral position—already has "adhering" to it (as if by chance) a resonance with a term that itself suggests itself as already divided (as far as its two possible readings) and puts division into relief as at once a structuring principle of the collective human body and a principle whose limit is being questioned, rendered ambiguous, subjected to a process that promises its neutralization. This, again, is material for future elaboration.

Hocquard calls this “boundary” between the two sides of a tautology a gap; it’s a space of spaciousness: “Ce que j’écris relève de cet écart,” he writes in “Ma vie privée” (*ma haie* 264). This is a boundary that demands work to be made, one whose sharp edge has to be smoothed, smeared—like a stone turned round and round in the hands. Tautology turns “around” itself, and takes the form of such a turning: “Si je pose en règle que tout énoncé est une tautologie,” says Hocquard, “il s’ensuit que toute proposition, parlée ou écrite, dit ce qu’elle dit et ne dit pas autre chose” (*ma haie* 488). From what vantage point or aspect is *la robe de Pascalle* “equal” to itself? No such aspect exists; there is no way to begin to say how the literal *is*. However, this lack of an articulable aspect is also the way in which *la robe de Pascalle* is literal: the literal is unsayable as the unsayable, and as such, the coming-to-light of that which has never been sayable to begin with—and so, of the never-said, the never-heard, and the impossible-to-hear. Hocquard’s most central example of this is a sentence addressed to a woman at a bakery named Viviane. She figures as the subject of Hocquard’s “sonnets” in *Un test de solitude*, a part of which Hocquard cites in *ma haie*:

Viviane est Viviane. *Seule, évidente.*  
 Qui parle?  
 La phrase est sans auteur. La phrase est sans sujet.  
 La phrase est sans verbe.  
 Dans ‘Viviane est Viviane’, *est* n’est pas un verbe dont la première  
 Viviane serait le sujet et la seconde l’attribut.  
 Il n’y a qu’une seule Viviane, *seule, évidente.* (488)

No speaker being present, only an indication of a solitude, an anonymous perspective, exists—in a sentence that doesn’t say that anything *is* (as a sentence with a subject and a predicate does), but instead makes evident something that cannot be pointed out. Within the tautology, there is an indication—an illumination or glowing, but no source of the illumination or object to which the light could be applied. Tautology is bright and dim at the same time; it reveals what’s fallen through the cracks and surges up almost just as soon, as if it were a feint, which it is, since it shows itself as one, but therefore almost dissipates in its honesty. We cannot know what literality is but also cannot *but* recognize it when it takes place: as such, it is not knowable, but knowable to what it might feel like to begin either to be in the know, or to recognize something forgotten. It isn’t black and white, but a flickering between the two.

This region of flickering is also the “space” of the copy. It’s from within this space that an author, a persona, disappears as such. This is, for Hocquard, the condition on which a gesture of tenderness is possible, as it’s the condition on which even his own perspective as such isn’t present:

Quand j’étais petit – enfin, pas si petit que ça quand même – e recopiais des livres entiers ou des passages entiers de livres que j’aimais à mon amie, que j’aimais. J’aurais pu lui envoyer les livres, mais je lui en envoyais des copies, écrites de ma main. Mon intention devait être de lui dire que je l’aimais en lui envoyant, copies de ma main, des livres et des passages de livres que j’aimais. (*ma haie* 473)

Leaving his friend with something as neutral, as impersonal—as “objective”—as a copied text has the appearance not of contact, but of its stopping, as if the “object” of the text were literally

an obstacle to correspondence. Hocquard's stance of non-identity is also the stance taken by "l'homme refait [qui] n'a pas d'intimité. Suivant le conseil objectiviste de Jean-Luc Godard, plutôt que d'exprimer ses impressions, il imprime ses expressions. *Littéralement*" (*ma haie* 479). Hocquard's copied text is the exact opposite of what "Les élégiaques classiques" do, which is to leave us with a representation of their innermost selves. For Hocquard, this means the imposition of a perspective—a kind of blackmail, or "chantage," that he links to inherited forms of expression that can charm us into seeing and thinking a certain way: "Les poètes sont, par tradition, de grands maîtres chanteurs. Ils ne font d'ailleurs pas seulement chanter la langue ou les mots de la langue, ils font aussi chanter leurs lecteurs. Ils les tiennent sous le charme (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 27). Literature, for Hocquard, is a self-perpetuating lie that gets in the way of autonomous thinking—"une machine à produire de la littérature, pas de la pensée" (*ma haie* 261). Hocquard's disdain for a thoughtless adherence to and perpetuation of clichéd ideas and formulas indicates a refusal to "make" by mindless copying. This mindless copying finds its unfortunate example in the form of a little girl that Hocquard overhears repeating on a train: "[I]a poule fait des oeufs, le mouton fait de la laine, la vache fait du lait. [...] Et le poète, qu'est-ce qu'il fait? C'est comme ça qu'on devient un menteur. En répétant des absurdités à haute voix dans les trains" (*ma haie* 259). The reality of such repetition—here framed as an instance of education "à haute voix"—is a loss of one's own voice: rather than speaking for themselves, the blind victims of "chantage" are made to sing, and to sing to a tune that isn't their own to begin with. This discordance is no less apparent in the content of the little girl's words, which reduce their objects to functions or positions that have already been ascribed to them. A chicken is not the equivalent of an egg-layer. In fact—and as extraordinarily ridiculous as it might at first sound to someone used to thinking in the terms on which the little girl speaks—there is no one who can speak for a chicken, or for what it is, any more than one person can to speak for another or occupy the another's perspective.

Poetry too, then, if it becomes a way of fixing ways of seeing—via image, metaphor—risks becoming an instrument of paralysis, as does a poetry that believes in its own essence, and values such as "la Beauté, la Nature, l'Amour" (*ma haie* 25). The poets who write this kind of poetry remind Hocquard of "[les] chiens chinois qui rongent de vieux os tout blancs sur lesquels il n'y a depuis longtemps plus rien à ronger;" however, they enjoy, says Hocquard, "[I]e goût de leur propre sang" (*ma haie* 25). On the other hand, a poetry that casts aside positive values risks becoming the self-perpetuation of "notions comme celles de manque, de défaut, d'absence, d'impossible," and, when taken to an extreme—or, as Hocquard says, taken "à la lettre"—they become empty rhetorical clichés and aesthetic games (*ma haie* 25). This is the stance of unproductive, hyperbolic reversal of "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 sixante et soixante-dix" (*ma haie* 25). A swing in either direction is dangerous, says Hocquard, and the problem now, in post-modernity, is a return to and a perpetuation of "un système de valeurs légitimantes" on the negative end of the spectrum, this being a return to the same structure to which it was initially a reaction, coming, in the end, full circle, albeit invisible as such to itself: "Comment la biscotte sans beurre se met-elle à dégouliner à nouveau de nostalgie, d'émotion, de souffrance, bref de psychologisme, de complaisance et de narcissisme?" (*ma haie* 27).

The middle road between a belief in essence and a belief in a fundamental lack of it, says Hocquard, requires vigilance, that is, a form of questioning that nevertheless doesn't swing to the extreme of suspicion, or *a priori* assumptions. Without it, "la machine poétique tend à

s'encrasser rapidement, à se remétamorphoser sous les apparences memes de la rigueur, à refaire littérature" (*ma haie* 27). Words must be cleaned of their contexts and narratives, and perspective emptied of its subjective "flavor." Left only with language, the poet must be a maker; it's in what he does with language—how he works with its logics—be they that of grammar, or culturally inherited structures, like clichés, images, metaphors that he becomes not a "menteur" who repeats the idiocies taught to him in school books, but a "monteur" (*ma haie* 476). A "monteur" uses forms already given in order to make new ones and, in doing so, turns his back on the world, giving us not the trace of his "self," but the false trace of the "trajectory" of his hands, the narrative of his making or how he puts together and "erects"—both of which the verb "monter" suggests—a new "architecture" through which to see. This architecture is one that is based on non-causal connections (to this we'll return) and, therefore, isn't meant to mediate vision, but to allow it to arise, clean. However, this "making" is based first on a cutting up and then on an arranging. The "monteur" is one who

... se dit: "Je vais faire la même chose que les autres, mais à l'inverse. Je vais aller fouiller dans la poubelle de mon passé et les décharges de l'histoire. Avec ce matériau lamentable, disparate et anecdotique, c'est-à-dire très privé, je vais voir ce qui pourra être sauvé au montage. Oui, je suis un monteur."

À partir des *fragments* (V. ce mot), éclats signifiants d'un quotidien insignifiant, l'élégiaque inverse va se fabriquer, au montage, une histoire faite de toutes les pieces, comme sa muse, le général de brigade par intérim John A.B.C. Smith, d'Edgar Poe.<sup>13</sup> Et quand je dis fabriquer, Inspecteur, je veux dire – je cite – que cette histoire est la mienne. L'histoire d'un homme refait. (*ma haie* 476)

"L'homme refait" (or, because it is Hocquard speaking, from his particular vantage point, the italicized *un homme refait*), hides the narrative of his (re)making behind the result of his craft; he is never an "object" of language or form, but its manipulator, its handler. Its dealer and measurer—in the sense of a measurer of perspective, its "objectifier" or "neutralizer" into an angle of flatness, when all that is seen is that which is "à la lettre, noir sur blanc." Or, in this sense, a "temper-er" of perspective, and as such, its "tamper-er." Hocquard is a maker: the indexes (tables) at the end of *ma haie*—of "animaux," "destinataires" (often other poets and friends), "groupes, institutions, maisons d'édition, revues..." "jouets," and "noms" are all tools useful to the craft of making what he calls his "île," or his "solitude," something to which we'll return, in the context of this second volume of *Un privé à Tanger*.

"L'homme refait" is, of course, anonymous. But the "copieur" is also "copious" in his work, which arises from arrangements, connections—which for him are means of a regeneration of perspective, albeit one that isn't proper to anyone but himself. Not addressing themselves to anyone in particular, avoiding commonplaces and cleansed of the intention to narrativize or project a perspective, his texts are made up of fragments or "unités décontextualisées –

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<sup>13</sup>In "Cette histoire est la mienne," Hocquard explains his choice of the general as a figure of inspiration for "l'homme refait": "ce general, d'une grande prestance et d'une incomparable beauté, avait perdu ses deux bras, ses deux jambes, un oeil, ses cheveux, son palais et la moitié de sa langue au cours des terribles combats qu'il avait contre les Indiens Bugabous et Kickapous. Chaque matin, son domestique Pompée lui revissait les innombrables prothèses dont il était refait" (*ma haie* 462-3). We will be returning to the character of the general, and to the peculiarity of his name in the context of Hocquard's work.

décontaminées,” that is, “des propositions flottantes,” or “[d]es 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). These “propositions flottantes” are useful for the construction and reconstruction of solitudes, poems, reverse elegies (Hocquard calls himself an “*élégiaque inverse*”). “Ce qui fascine dans les fragments,” writes Hocquard “ce n’est pas leur lien causal avec les événements de sa [the reverse elegist’s] vie passée, c’est plutôt qu’ils sont si vivants qu’ils soufflent tout contexte biographique antérieur. Ils brillent au présent d’un éclat inouï, d’un éclat qui leur est propre” (*ma haie* 477). Here, “propre” implies a cleanliness because these propositions “écrites noir sur blanc, sont à regarder comme autonomes et ne renvoient plus à aucun contexte préexistant. Elles sont comme les souvenirs, imprévisibles dans leur façon de surgir et de s’associer,” says Hocquard, meaning that “[I]’erreur serait de penser que pour en saisir le sens, nous aurions besoin de savoir de quel contexte caché (ou perdu) ils sont les fragments, faute de quoi nous resterions dans le brouillard” (*ma haie* 229). What’s important for the reverse elegist, then, is allowing the present to emerge from the “wreckage” of the past. In contrast, the classical elegist’s life is a life “*au passé*” and “*au passif*” because the fragments left of his life left over from the past “représentent pour lui ce qui reste d’un état original disparu auquel ils le renvoient incessamment”: and while he laments the past and lamentingly keeps returning to it, this gives him pleasure. In other words, “[I]’*élégiaque classique* rumine son passé. L’*élégiaque inverse* le refait” (*ma haie* 462).

For the reverse elegist, “les fragments ne renvoient ni à un tout, ni à une origine, ni à un contexte disparus qui garantieraient leur sens” (*ma haie* 477). The only “guarantee” that a “sens” will arise out of the work of making connections between fragments is the poet seeing or knowing—or rather, making known—this for himself, and from himself. Hocquard draws on the Objectivist poet George Oppen to explain this: “il y a un instant où l’on pense que quelque chose est vrai, et l’on construit un sens à partir de ces moments de conviction” (*ma haie* 477), just like the “souvenir,” which is “un instant de conviction’ au présent” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 13). The reverse elegist, in other words, allows for no forms of “chantage” to guide the form of his own work; in doing so, he prevents these forms from guiding his vision—and potential readers. It’s in this way that he in turn also doesn’t “objectify” or turn into a victim a potential reader. Instead, he is already disappeared, hermetically sealed. And he leaves behind him the “debris” or wreckage after his work of constructing, of “montage.” He assumes an innocuous position; he doesn’t impose. Being objective means making impressions on a page, and not already seeking to make them on *anybody*.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, the reverse elegist does not assume others and the

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<sup>14</sup>Important to note, however, is that Hocquard nevertheless does say that there have been writers who have “impressed” him, made him “hear” or “see” himself as if for the first time. He explains in *Une malaise grammaticale*, at the end of his *Théorie des Tables*:

Rares sont les livres qui m’ont impressionné. Je ne dis pas influencé. Les influences sont courantes, superficielles et utiles. Elles sont ces sortes d’émotions dont je peux avoir besoin à un moment ou à un autre et que j’accueille alors volontiers tout en sachant qu’elles ne touchent pas, au fond, ce que je recherche et ce que je veux. Elles sont autant d’indices, memes vagues et fluctuants, révélateurs de ce qu’au fond je ne vois pas encore.

Etre impressionné par un livre est une tout autre affaire, beaucoup plus rare et bien plus choquante. C’est être soudain pris à contre-pied. C’est se trouver soudain pris de court ou par surprise. Une autre voix a parlé à la place de la mienne. Une autre?

Tu reconnais le livre  
Que tu ne connais pas encore

world to already be an extension of himself. He is at once the General John A.B.C. Smith and, willingly, the general's servant, supported by the task of putting him back together daily, reattaching prostheses or extensions to his master's core—and in this sense, it is possible to consider the diurnal—indeed, the matinal—rhythm of the general's making and remaking thanks to his servant's hands as an analogue to the beating of the general's heart: both he and his maker are kept alive in the daily work of dismembering and re-membering.

In the case of the general and “l'homme refait,” there is no past to bring to light in terms of a particular narrative to preserve; rather, what Hocquard suggests is a construction as a form of revivification, such as the work done with fragments, which are “si vivants qu'ils soufflent tout contexte biographique antérieur.” That is to say, the present comes to life as much as the fragment does. The fragment “souffle”—blows away—“tout context biographique antiérieur,” making room for the “éclat” of the present moment in all of its brilliance, like the expansion of a lung filled with air.<sup>15</sup> Yet it's this “souffle,” or the sudden, unaccountable displacement that nevertheless occurs in the form of a trace of the “contexte biographique antérieur,” although no trace of this context is left behind. The “éclat” is the flashing forth of that which has no context, of that which doesn't fit, for which there are no words and never have been: it is an instance of the literal. It's in this way that we might also see the daily ritual of the general's remaking, a process by which the man is put together again as John A.B.C. Smith, and by which he comes to life as such, again, anew—the same but different from the last one, his life therefore seeming to arise, day after day, from and as the “space” of the fragment flashing forth “d'un éclat qui [lui] est propre.” This said, the un-making and remaking of the general's body might also appear to be a useless labor: why take him apart in order to take the time of putting him back together again? His servant's labor is apparently “sans objet”—with no clear explanation, and, in this sense, lacking a “raison d'être” (“objet,” def. 3). Sisyphean, even. And perhaps therefore even dubious, lacking ground, there being no obvious purpose or utility to the whole act save the fact that it is simply the way in which the general continues his existence—as does his servant.

Hocquard seems to be suggesting that this work “sans objet” is its own “raison d'être,” as a way of surviving and a way of living—silently, behind the scenes. As the “monteur” or the reverse elegist, Hocquard plays the role of the general's servant, giving his life up to the task of constructing “solitudes”; in doing so, he clears away room for the present to arise—brilliant, luminous. And, exposed, or naked—“nue.” In his *Méditations photographiques sur l'idée simple de nudité*, a series of short poems that “expose” literality in terms of photography, Hocquard casts literality in terms of “nudité,” which, he says, is “sans objet”: “nudité” doesn't have a place or its “own” place. It is the way in which something appears, and as such, does not already belong to a narrative or a form that accounts for the existence of something; “nudité” is on its own terms, and in this sense, it *is* not (like tautology, the verb “être” cannot account for it). It is “l'idée la plus simple” because there is no way of already being able to seize it, no form that already exists for it, and therefore, no way of thinking about it. It is thought's encounter with

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Rares sont les livres qui m'ont impressionné veut dire impressionné comme l'est une plaque photographique: je vois ici dans ce que je n'ai pas écrit quelque chose que je reconnais comme si je l'avais écrit. Qu'est-ce qu'un livre qui m'a impressionné? *De la nature des choses*. Ou bien, plus récemment, *Sun*, de Michael Palmer, quand je l'ai lu en américain. En américain, Sun aurait pu m'influencer. Sun m'a impressionné quand j'ai traduit *Série Baudelaire* en français. En traduisant *Série Baudelaire*, j'avais le sentiment, comme dans un rêve, d'écrire un livre que je n'écrivais pas.

<sup>15</sup>This is an evocation of the image of glass blowing, which runs through Hocquard's work, and which is especially present in *L'invention du verre*. The present is transparent, arising from no substantial center, but as if from a point of open space, as a result of the breath of a maker “behind” it.

itself, as thought suddenly ungrounded, stripped bare. “L’idée la plus simple” designates the instance in which thought is suddenly exposed to itself, at once illuminated with the “éclat” of this encounter and as if already, and to begin with, in its own shadow, or face to face with itself because already turning away, both close and impersonal:

la nudité est sans objet. Elle n’entre pas  
dans une histoire, même si elle traverse  
bien des histoires. Elle n’appartient pas à

Comme respirer, la nudité n’est pas  
personnelle. Il n’existe même pas de verbe.

nudité est l’idée la plus simple (18)

The work of the reverse elegist too is autobiographical, but it is not “personnelle,” being cleaned of “tout contexte biographique antérieur” and not being already just an extension of the past, or an attempt to recuperate it and reinsert it in the present moment. The reverse elegist creates his own breathing room: his work creates the space within which “respirer” is possible, and possibility itself *is* breathing room—this is its “use,” which is at once purposeful and open-ended, and the means of its own perpetuation, albeit as a “useless” tool: “la nudité ne sert à rien. C’est sa son utilité” (*Méditations photographiques* 46). The work of the reverse elegist is nevertheless in this way also necessarily his story. This is how, and why “la nudité est une histoire.” These words introduce the *Méditations photographiques*. They are Claude Royet-Journoud’s, and they appear in his first book, *Le renversement*. Hocquard’s life is the story of a constantly constructed solitude, a work that, for him, goes without saying—in both senses of the term. We might recall Hocquard ending “Ma vie privée” by stating that his “intention” is “une intention de pauvreté” (*ma haie* 272). Hocquard’s texts don’t already have us at their mercy: we aren’t blindly or unknowingly—like the little girl on the train, with the ground taken from under her feet, or the subjects of the “grands maîtres chanteurs” who “font ... chanter leurs lecteurs,” make their already an extension of themselves—told to see a certain way, having our chance to see taken away before it even exists, and so, the time and space within which to take a breath for ourselves taken away as well. But unlike the formulaic fallacies that the girl repeats out loud on the train, “[u]n poème n’a pas la même fonction qu’une mode d’emploi de machine à laver la vaisselle,” says Hocquard (*ma haie* 236). Rather, the problem, to him, is that most readers already begin reading on the basis of a false—groundless—assumption:

L’obstacle, ce sont vos repères habituels de lecture qui le dressent. Quand vous dites, par exemple, devant une page: “Je ne comprends pas ce que l’auteur veut dire,” vous partez du principe qu’il y a là un sens caché que vous n’arrivez pas à saisir. Le problème c’est que précisément vous voulez comprendre ce qu’il a voulu dire. Quelle drôle d’idée. (*ma haie* 236)

And in fact, Hocquard goes on, “comme vous n’êtes pas l’auteur, il y a de fortes chances pour que vous ne sachiez jamais ce qu’il a voulu dire (et il se pourrait que lui-même ne le sache pas toujours très clairement)” (*ma haie* 236). But “[c]e n’est pas la question,” says Hocquard, for

what matters—or what is in question, as he puts it—is “de savoir ce que vous pouvez faire de ce qu’il a écrit, ‘s’il y a assez en vous pour en faire quelque chose,’” the words he cites belonging to the American Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky (to whom we’ll soon return) (*ma haie* 236). This takes time, says Hocquard, and attention: “Ce n’est même pas une question de patience, parce qu’être patient c’est être passif, mais plutôt d’être vigilant et de prendre son temps. Ces textes sont à lire lentement” (*ma haie* 237). They are to be returned to, like the body of the captain, which must be put together every morning, in the light of day.

Being objective, or doing the work of a “monteur” means being vigilant without suspecting oneself. It means asking the question of how it’s possible to put oneself “before”—anterior to, but also facing—others. This is the question of finding a position, or angle, from which one’s “self” can simply be *with* others, or be in a neutral, transparent position. Not to, or for them, like the classical elegist. The “monteur”—as the reverse elegist—always has to make the first cut, figuratively and literally: it is up to him to make himself by un-making a self that wants or aims, before all else, to matter to others, to express itself to others as a self. It is also in this way that the “monteur” is the one who thinks of himself first: he takes responsibility for himself, or for his “je,” his self “à la première personne.” The “monteur,” then, is *sincere*: when Hocquard cites Zukofsky’s statement that “[i]l n’y a aucun mot que vous ne puissiez utiliser pour en faire quelque chose,” he is suggesting that it is only on the basis of *making* something that it is possible to be a subject—but not a self:

*Sincérité* n’est donc pas à prendre ici dans l’acception morale ou psychologique du terme (la bonne foi, la franchise, l’authenticité), mais comme désignant une intention intellectuelle et éthique qui exclut aussi bien la complaisance envers soi-même que les effets de séduction vis-à-vis d’autrui. C’est avant tout une affaire de soi à soi. Wittgenstein encore: “Ce que j’écris est Presque toujours un dialogue avec moi-même. Des choses que je me dis entre quatre yeux.” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 33).

We’ll see how, for Hocquard, conventionally conceived forms encourage passivity (that is, tell us how to think and see), but for the moment, his words can serve to show how the act of making, “montage,” is a way of avoiding not only the kind of “fausse pistes” that a blind adherence to conventional forms puts into place and normalizes, but also an avoidance of the “fausse piste” of making oneself already available to another and, at the same time, feeding off of another. The image of the general John A.B.C. Smith might here come to mind again, for it is in the general’s remaking that the first, second, and third persons are collapsed yet held at a remove from one another. That is, if the scene of the general’s remaking is one that is neutralized of sense, of logic—of an “objet”—then there is no “je,” no “tu,” and, as a result, no “eux” to which it is possible to refer; rather, there is a correspondence created within the act of construction: the general is made in his making, and his servant is made in making his master. But, the two are nevertheless “touching” one another during this performance, and for this, there is, again, time and space necessary: “la nudité [est] émet sa propre clarté. Un corps se fait transparent” (*Méditations photographiques* 37). But, “la nudité [re]tient le corps à [juste] distance” (*Méditations photographiques* 76). And this is, also, “[l]a pensée, juste devant [avant] l’obstacle,” or the “place” at which, says Hocquard, citing George Oppen, “‘il y a un instant, un temps réel où l’on croit que quelque chose est vrai, et l’on construit un sens à partir de ces instants de conviction’” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 33). We come full circle: the reverse elegist’s work is at once its own aim and, as Hocquard puts it in citing Oppen, a “*test de*



*sincérité*,” or the way in which this aim is in turn “neutralized” of its subjective charge, or, of belonging to a “someone,” of already telling the story of a “someone.”

But the construction of a solitude nevertheless seems to be the way in which a past—and a personal one—can be protected, kept alive, precisely by being made and remade, for nobody other than for oneself. This work of reconstruction is one that characterizes the first volume of his anthology, *Un privé à Tanger* (which is also the name of the two-volume anthology, the second volume being *ma haie*). The book is a collection of texts detailing some of Hocquard’s experiences during his childhood and adolescence while growing up in Tangier, Morocco. But it also casts these revisitations in the light of a detective story; Hocquard “casts” himself as a detective—as “un privé à Tanger,” which is also the title of the last section of the book. It might be possible to see the reverse elegist as, also, the “privé”: or, one whose work it is to solve a crime, resolve a mystery—or perhaps find a missing body. But this work—one that he cannot help but do, or is, as Hocquard says, “une question d’amour-propre”—is one that eventually leads the detective to catch himself red-handed, so to speak, or to discover that his work was an investigation into his own work, his own actions:

Si l’enquête lui est retirée, il n’abandonne pas pour autant ses recherches. Il trouve un autre client ou bien il continue pour lui tout seul. C’est une question d’amour-propre. En furetant à droite et à gauche, il tombe sur des indices qui n’ont pas nécessairement de rapport avec l’affaire du moment. Comme il est libre d’aller du côté qu’il veut, il y va.

Peu à peu, son investigation hasardeuse change de nature et d’objet. A vrai dire, l’objet vient à faire défaut. Il regarde son index droit qui le désigne à présent, à ses propres yeux, comme le suspect numéro un. Il enquête désormais sur lui-même et comprend qu’il n’a jamais enquêté que sur lui-même. (*Un privé à Tanger* 224)

Hocquard suggests that his work as a poet is also a work that necessarily is a work with his own methods: it is a work of rendering himself anonymous—even to himself. However, this work nevertheless doesn’t deprive him of his integrity. If the “privé” is to himself as the “monteur” is, also, the creator of his own solitude, then both are involved with the work of remaking the present on their own terms, within a margin that hasn’t already been dictated to them, but which is a constantly created. This is a margin in which resistance to standards is possible, as it is to the automatic “death” promised by an association with “les grands maîtres chanteurs” or, even, the schoolbooks. In *Un privé à Tanger*, Hocquard explains how it was that the “petite langue de tous les jours,” or the “une langue concrete dont chaque mot servait à nommer une chose ou une personne existante: la couturière, le puits, le chat, le jeu de l’oie, le cartable, le théâtre d’ombres,” was in time overshadowed and replaced by “la langue générale” that Hocquard had to learn at school: French (“Le bouclier de Persée” 81). This was the language whose rules everyone was expected to learn and use, but also the one that had no meaning for Hocquard, that didn’t carry the weight of life of the “petite langue.” The “langue générale” was one that, as a result, was an abstraction to him:

Passé la grille du jardin, tout changeait. A l’école, il fut évident, dès le début, qu’en dépit de similitudes superficielles il ne s’agissait plus de la même langue [as the “petite langue”]. Régie par des lois écrites et abstraites, celle-ci tirait son autorité et sa pertinence

des livres. Destinée aux échanges entre des personnes qui ne se connaissaient pas, elle traitait de choses éloignées, selon le principe de généralité.

J'ai appris le français dans les salles de classe come une langue étrangère ou une langue morte. Dans les *livres de français*, comme on disait les *livres de latin*, d'*anglais* ou de *mathématiques*. Une matière du programme. Un objet d'étude. Un dehors. (*Un privé à Tanger* 81-2)

French was a language that didn't correspond to the way in which the world was seen; in it, Hocquard was in exile. And, as he describes, in a space of limbo: "Quand la petite langue du début a eu complètement disparu de ma vie de même que le petit garçon de la photographie, je me suis retrouvé longtemps sans langue. Entre deux langues. L'éteinte et l'empruntée. Avec l'énigme des choses et cette langue générale aussi comme une chose, comme une énigme." (*Un privé à Tanger* 82). Hocquard found himself in the place of needing to construct his language, one that would allow him to express *his* place in the world, *his* perspective—one that would be the way in which that perspective (and, therefore, the impossible-to-designate, illocatable place of "énigme") might be given room, might be allowed to be present to itself. This is the role that poetry, as a work on language (or with grammar), would come to play in Hocquard's life; Hocquard says that he had "pourtant deux sujets de satisfaction: la grammaire (le jeu des règles syntaxiques) et la poésie qui semblait une espèce de petite langue domestique à l'intérieur de la langue générale" (*Un privé à Tanger* 82). Hocquard, divided, now with a tongue cut in half—and, at once John A.B.C. Smith, the incarnation of "la langue générale," the worker of its articulations (the servant)—became also the onlooker of his own drama of constantly reconstructing himself: the "privé," or private eye. Accordingly, Hocquard describes the detective as disassociated from the body of officials who guard the public order, make sure that there are no discrepancies, no interruptions to the general peace—police officers:

Le privé n'est guère aimé ni estimé des policiers officiels, défenseurs attires de l'ordre public et garants du respect des lois. Il passe derrière et après eux, file doux, ramasse les miettes et se faufile comme il peut. Comme un crabe entre les rochers. Selon sa méthode à lui, il enquête dans l'ombre, ouvre des pistes nouvelles, rassemble des indices et fait périodiquement son rapport au client. Il ne lui rend pas forcément compte de tout ce qu'il a trouvé. Il garde parfois en reserve certaines découvertes. L'enquête dont il est chargé peut lui être à tout moment retirée si le client est mécontent ou insatisfait. (*Un privé à Tanger* 223-4)

Le privé is a rather fickle character, and keeps to himself: he is a sidelong figure—moving like a crab; we could even say that this is also the way in which the literal arises next to itself: according to no present trajectory, according to no causal link, no rule, but suddenly, and as if from the shadows. Being able to work with a language that was initially foreign and dead to him, and to do so from the inside out, Hocquard could make of it a living language, a language of "tous les jours." And in this sense, Hocquard came to occupy the position of overseeing and inhabiting the drama of an oscillation between the "petite," or the particular, and the "générale." For the "général" John A.B.C. Smith—a name whose commonality rings as befits his personification of the "langue générale"—neither small nor expansive, ever in the process of being undone and then remade. So is the servant, whose domestic, apparently lowly, or "small"

role is one endowed with a degree of authority not only within the bounds of the general's literal living space, but within the space of his life, his body—and its articulations. In tending to the general, the servant also tends to a living body.

Likewise, Hocquard's "solitudes" are ways in which he preserves his life "de tous les jours," but he does so in a way that doesn't go past the limits or boundaries created by the construction of these "solitudes"—just as the servant keeps to the space of the general, and the general, in turn, is subject to a daily remaking, an extension and a retraction that becomes a daily ritual rather than, as Hocquard is implying, a way of extending oneself already into a future in order to already contain others within its time and space in the way a classical elegist does. In "Cette histoire est la mienne," Hocquard continues to explain this responsibility for one's own position via his distinction between the classical and reverse elegists in terms of a work with anecdotes. Anecdotes lead to the present, but recursively, in a way that might make it possible to consider the performance of the general's daily reconstruction as the making of the distinction between day and night as one that is relevant to begin with, or one that is relevant and applicable in very particular terms, and, on terms that are made. It might in this way be possible to see the work of the "monteur" as the work of making the place in which distinctions themselves are made—or in the making—and therefore as the place of articulation itself, but one in which the basis of articulation has not been given, is not already being dictated. The "monteur" makes his own boundaries; he makes the difference between night and day, so to speak, as he makes the basis of a life, the way in which it is lived, seen. This might be seen as opposed to the day-and-night distinction being one conceivable in general terms, or, as the temporal distinction that dictates *all* lives, *all* rhythms or ways of living. As we began to see above, the classical elegist has as his aim saving the past from oblivion: for him, "l'anecdote représente un souvenir à sauver de l'oubli" (*ma haie* 463). The reverse elegist, on the other hand, cares about the present moment; for him, "l'anecdote est un indice, infime qui peut le mettre sur une nouvelle piste. Une piste au présent, en *extension*. Il tourne autour d'une pensée et, tout à coup, au détour d'un vers, il clique<sup>16</sup> sur un mot (ou entre deux mots) et ce *lien* le renvoie à une anecdote. Ses anecdotes ne sont pas à prendre comme des souvenirs, mais comme des *fenêtres*" (*ma haie* 463). The reverse elegist isn't concerned with creating a frame or narrative within which to place the present. This kind of framing assumes a bird's eye view blind to its own audacious gesture of overreaching, of assuming, from the start and in one swoop, responsibility for everything—the past, the present, and the future, and therefore for how transitions are made and imposed between them.

Hocquard presents a case in point of reverse-elegizing through using a story a friend once told him about a rich and uncompromising man who chose not to leave his house the year the French decided to make Morocco a protectorate, and to stay there until their departure. He did, because he could afford to. The man was alive but very old when Hocquard heard the story, but Hocquard says that he never saw him leave the house—so from his own vantage point, he couldn't really know for sure why he never again came out, or if he ever did. This said, Hocquard doubts that it was from a "patriotisme ombrageux et têtu" that the man had made the decision that he had made to shut himself off from the world, saying that he'd probably found another reason—but that the reason doesn't really matter anyway. What matters to Hocquard in this anecdote is how it can be seen as a way of presenting causality as a suspect, misleading mechanism, citing the words of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein to come to his point, to allow his point to come into focus: "Ce qu'il y a de fourvoyant dans le point de vue de la

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<sup>16</sup>The reverse elegist's work here prefigures the discussion of Hocquard's own writing methods: *ma haie* is based on a folder saved in his computer, in which texts don't follow any particular order.

causalité, c'est qu'il conduit à dire: 'Bien entendu, cela devait arriver ainsi'. Alors qu'on devrait penser: cela peut être arrivé ainsi, ou de quantité d'autres façons'" (*ma haie* 464). Causality is a point of view; it's a way of seeing and saying something—it implies a story, one at whose price all other stories, all other points of view, are already relegated to the shadows, made invisible. It assumes the task of an invisible framing and a framing that is invisible to itself as a manipulation going on as if “behind the scenes”: it assumes the role of a “menteur” and not that of a “monteur.”

Here, the story is of interest to Hocquard because it retrospectively offers an uptake, or because it offers a way of seeing the kind of position and role to be assumed by the reverse elegist, who can only take responsibility for his own perspective to begin with: “l'élégiaque inverse y trouve un écho à son propre cas: écrire comme ça à la première personne, sans sortir de chez lui” (*ma haie* 464). This remark by Hocquard shows what he means by “extension”: Hocquard suggests that in the particular context of what he's saying to the reader, the “moral” of the story is that the reverse elegist cannot take responsibility for any perspective other than his own—and that doing so requires the assumption of a self-less persona, or of anonymity. And what we in turn can take as an extension of Hocquard's words is a caution against “morals” and moralizing in general: both require, put in place, and ascribe an objective (that is, neutral, already just) black-and-white thinking—from the outside. And in doing so, they make real the risk of and become the seeds for potentially becoming exemplary narratives and exemplary metaphors that might solidify into real ways of seeing. In turn, they then become instrumental in making narrative and metaphor themselves into instruments of exemplification and facile transition-making that are dangerous in their transparency, not the less so for their availability, for their serviceability and thus their easy use or recitation—such as the “absurdities” Hocquard overheard being fed to and repeated by the little girl on the train. As opposed to the cutter of lenses seeing as if for the first time behind the smooth convexity of an “extension”—a lens as cut, but not fitted to an occasion—the little girl was put in the position of breathing in an atmosphere that was invisibly scathing, as it was filled with the finely ground glass of a dirty lens passed down to her, its dirt invisible to the eye for being, already, so well ground as to render the difference between black and white impossible to see in the first place. Indeed, this assumption of invisibility is paradoxically also what in part constitutes the dirtiness of the atmosphere. This is why Hocquard makes it a point to say that “[l]'élégiaque inverse n'est pas le contraire de l'élégiaque classique”: assuming such an opposition would frame the reverse elegist as someone who also blindly frames (*ma haie* 462). “L'élégie,” says Hocquard, “est un poème autobiographique” (*ma haie* 462). This is the case because the autobiographical is that which cannot be said.

### **“Ce que j'écris relève de cet écart”: ma haie, “à la lettre”**

The first pages of *ma haie* are a letter from Hocquard to his publisher, Paul. Though it could have simply been logical and called for to do so, it isn't necessarily arbitrary or inconsequential that Hocquard begins his book with a personal document about a private text that is to be made public: Hocquard is playing with the tension between the incidental and the requisite. In doing so, he is already disrupting, from the inside out, what a beginning normally does with seamlessness and transparency: introduce, make a gesture of address, provide entry. His letter to the publisher renders concretely apparent a circumstance in which the possibility of

reading is deflected: while this textual object is a piece of “evidence” of, and from, the private life of the author, Hocquard also means to present it for what it is anyway: an “obstacle” to reading him, Hocquard. He suggests as much in “Ma vie privée”:

En supposant que vous tombiez sur mes lettres et que vous les lisiez, ce que j'écris à mon amie n'est pas ce que vous lisez. Parce que vous n'êtes pas mon amie. À ce sujet, on pourrait dire quelque chose comme: vous nous voyez de profil alors que nous nous voyons de face. (*ma haie* 259)

Hocquard's letter to his publisher puts into relief, in the context of a personal narrative (that of Hocquard's life, and of the composition of *ma haie*), a disruption of reading. More specifically, as a disruption of the process of reading as a process, i.e., a development whose meaning both inheres in and is a function of the putting-into-place of a structure that can provide us with definite information of some kind—with a whole, or with an image (with something conceivable and thus “visible”). This disruption is put into relief all the more as such in that it takes place as an opening gesture, or a gesture of self-presentation, one that, furthermore, is both literalized and metaphorized by the context in which it occurs: that of self-publication (literally). Though again, this dimension of self-presentation doesn't mean that Hocquard is giving us anything intimate. Rather, he is casting a shadow over the possibility of reading (“him”) and thus of seeing directly, or of occupying a position from which one's relation to him is transparent. He presents himself to us as just beyond our reach, and to the side—as if “legible,” but fundamentally “de profil.” He presents himself as a persona whose locatability is not possible, and who presents himself as already lost in translation, so to speak; this is how he describes his “place” as the author of “Cette histoire est la mienne”: he is “l'organisateur d'un journal intime anonyme fait d'une liste d'anecdotes” (this is another instance of the way in Hocquard invokes his notion of the copy, to which we'll keep returning) (*ma haie* 480). A list can be read any which way, Hocquard says, because it doesn't have a preexisting ordering principle: “Toute liste est autonome et chaque élément d'une liste est autonome, de sorte qu'on peut permuter les éléments d'une liste sans que la liste en soit affectée, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour une suite ou une série” (*ma haie* 482). In a list, traceability to an origin is impossible: a list can be thought of in terms of a word whose individual letters—each of which matters in its particularity and is irreplaceable—can be rearranged to create another “version” of the “original” word. This original does not exist. It is, like the list, ever a copy of itself, a version without any prior model—an image but not of anything (else). Thus, an unfigurable unity, at once transparent and opaque, impossible to read or ever correctly pronounce, and only ever possible to see as if “de profil.”

This is also the way in which it's possible to begin to see what Hocquard means by “tautologie,” for, he writes, at the end of the day, “[q]uand on a fait le tour de ce qu'une liste n'est pas, on peut dire qu'une liste est une liste et pas autre chose” (*ma haie* 482). A list presents itself as such, but not in the image of anything; it's in this sense that a list is always ever the image of itself, and thus ever a perturbation of image or a condition of image-as-perturbed. Not representable, a list presents itself as a perfect misrepresentation, as the form of one. But Hocquard's definition of a list also suggests that a list nevertheless can “hide” a narrative behind it—the narrative of its making. This is because a list is “sans commencement ni fin,” like a tautology (which nothing leads to or follows). Being border-less, a list is always expandable or retractable: “à tout moment, en fonction des besoins, on peut l'allonger, la raccourcir ou y injecter des éléments nouveaux,” with this activity of modification taking the form of an altered

trajectory that occurs as if both in “diverging” from the list and “according” to it: “En faisant ses courses au supermarché, on ne suit pas forcément l’ordre de la liste, sauf si on a pensé la liste en fonction du parcours à suivre” (*ma haie* 482). When used, a list is a tool that can center and decenter, that orients and disorients. When seen by someone other than its maker, a list puts the same kind of pressure on legibility because it neither makes available a particular narrative nor excludes the fact that there is one; a list suggests a penchant, so to speak, as regards potential execution (or, the choice to go one way or another). And the elements in a list, says Hocquard, are autonomous, but they are not fragments, or unities that are “décontextualisées” and “décontaminées” (*ma haie* 477). There is no way to read a list just as there is no way to “see” Hocquard “de face.”

If the disruption of reading that Hocquard’s manner of opening *ma haie* puts forward is also the way in which the “question” of the legibility of a person is put forward, then what Hocquard achieves is a framing and a definition of reading in terms of perspective—a way of seeing based on a position or angle from which seeing is taking place. While he places himself face-to-face to us via his letter to Paul, or via a piece of “evidence” taken from his life, he renders this a placement that occurs in terms of, and as, an fundamental turning-away, as a contextual gap that we can both feel and conceive of (because he literalizes it as a letter), and in terms also of an emphasis on the literal presentation of this contextual gap as such, that is, “noir sur blanc.” But as it has become clear, reading, for Hocquard, is not simply an affair of what is “noir sur blanc,” but suggests an encounter with a contextual impasse—one as stark as the difference between black and white, or clarity and obscurity. Or, to return to tautology, the interval within which something appears as it does. In the case of Hocquard’s letter to his publisher, this interval is the manner in which we experience a contextual disjuncture and the manner in which our position vis-à-vis Hocquard appears and becomes palpable—as a disposition *to* (to read). We only ever “see” Hocquard insofar as our vision of him has already been decentered, de-oriented—put alongside itself. But in doing so, Hocquard positions himself in our field of “readerly” vision as a persona that is neither private nor public, but which, rather, takes up the position of “impersonation,” or a pretending to be someone else, an unpersonalization, a position that belongs to no one in particular and is located nowhere in particular. That position, however, doesn’t cancel out or devalorize subjectivity in the name of a desiccated impersonality: on the contrary, it underscores it as a necessary constraint—as a limit as well as a condition on which inter-subjectivity becomes possible, to the extent that it doesn’t dictate the way in which reading occurs. The impersonality through which Hocquard forces an encounter with a “persona” bespeaks an investment in the possibility of encounter *tout court*. This encounter happens to be an encounter of, and with, illegibility.

To really see requires a shaking-loose from habitual ways of seeing—or, in other words, of reading. Hocquard’s work is one of clearing space within which vision can take place to begin with, this being a space within which seeing is therefore “detached,” or hasn’t already been given to form and become its fodder, hasn’t already become wholly transitive and, therefore, invisible even to itself. “Pour lire, il faut donc se déshabituer, au moins en partie, de nos habitudes de lecture,” says Hocquard, citing the American Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky: “La seule chose à faire est de se désaccoutumer. [...] Alors soudain on voit quelque chose” (*ma haie* 236). Hocquard’s straddling of private and public personae, as it is effected in the form of a private letter that “happens” to be published as the first pages of his book, occurs inevitably as a function of a disruption of direct correspondence or “vision” on the part of a potential reader. The point of departure of *ma haie* thus has running through its core a perturbation or centripetal energy of

indirection that not coincidentally invokes the “dérèglement de tous les sens” behind many of the undertakings of Arthur Rimbaud. And it’s in this way that Hocquard’s “objectivity” has to do with his work as a grammarian rather than a poet in the conventional sense, that is, a worker of language whose objective is an exposition of the conditions on which meaning arises as well as a disruption of those conditions in order to reveal grammar as a logic and a fixed form whose constraints predispose a way of seeing that creates and naturalizes separations:

[P]ourquoi la grammaire d’un bègue devrait-elle être la même que celle de quelqu’un qui ne bégaie pas? Parce que, rétorquera-t-on, la norme est de ne pas bégayer. Et si, précisément, le bégaiement était une manière de désobéissance, de résistance aux mots d’ordre de la grammaire imposée? (*ma haie* 230)

When grammar becomes a standardizing logic, it levels and neutralizes—allows for no justifiable divergences and instead condemns them to an “outside,” an “outside” that, furthermore, is qualified as abnormal, deficient:

Nous vivons tous avec l’idée reçue—avant même l’école primaire—que la grammaire (le squelette de la langue), comme la Loi, doit être la même pour tous et qu’elle est immuable. Nul n’est censé l’ignorer et tout manquement à ses règles est sanctionné comme une faute grave. La grammaire dit: “Tout le monde se ressemble.” Nous la “respectons” comme un monopole d’État, jusque dans les aspects les plus anodins et les plus intimes de notre vie. Ses lois régissent nos manières de parler et d’écrire, de lire et d’écouter. (*ma haie* 230)

And as a standard reinforced by use, grammar becomes invisible: a lens through which to see things as right or wrong, black or white. Grammar narrows perspective, and vision, to the narrow margin between the two—a margin that in fact is the absence of one, or a difference that arises at the expense of a possibility of a margin of error. Or, at the expense of being able to see, to begin with.

So, while we can only “see” or read Hocquard “de profil” when we crack open *ma haie*, this kind of disruption places us in a space within which orientation is already not absolute, and in which reading is already put into relief as a necessary implication in and engagement with a contextual frame, but one within which distinctions are neither given nor absolute. This space is one in which reading becomes a condition on which vision is “aspected” with respect to what lies outside of it, but in a way that denies the fullness of completion and the transparency of immediacy—at least, in a way that goes without saying. While the question of seeing and thus “reading” Hocquard treats reading in a less literal way (that is, in a way that isn’t concerned with language), the way in which Hocquard describes reading nevertheless corresponds to his task of eschewing representation:

Il va de lire comme de voir: on lit et on voit comme on a appris à voir et à lire, de manière compulsive, en ramenant ce qui est inconnu à du déjà connu. C’est-à-dire en annulant. Somme zéro. C’est pour cela, je suppose, que beaucoup de gens aiment les images et les métaphores [...]: passé l’effet de surprise, il y a quelque chose de rassurant à savoir que ce qui est derrière l’étrangeté est en fait déjà familier. Le message decodé, on retombe sur ses pieds, à la case zéro. (*ma haie* 235)

Hocquard's refusal to represent himself according to narratives, or according to stories that lay claim to "vraisemblance," is also a resistance to standardization, and with it, to the paralysis of thought and the depersonalization that it creates, as well as the nullification of difference. If all that's possible to see "behind" a metaphor is what we're already expecting, then we don't really see at all, and in the process, so do we become fodder for the perpetuation of certain "coded" ways of seeing and saying things that, in the end, mean nothing. Hocquard's avoidance of becoming an "object" of our vision and his resistance to presenting himself in terms of a "self" is both a retraction and a potential rendering or gesture of *giving* made in the direction of the reader, a gesture of address through which the possibility of a relation can posit itself to begin with because the parameters of relation aren't already based on a nullification of vision, on a zero-sum game, an absolute leveling or definite neutralization.

Hocquard's notion of the book also indicates a "dérèglement" at the center of a form whose conventionally established parameters Hocquard resists in the name of the possibility of autonomy and alternative ways of seeing (as opposed to an ossification and standardization of vision). And we've already seen how this stake is also one that protects and makes potential the possibility of an inter-subjectivity that also isn't already based on a fixed standard, and, as a result, functions as a principle of exclusion. In his letter to his publisher, Hocquard says that he has always "résolument soutenu l'idée du livre" (*ma haie* 9). But he also explains that he has his suspicions about the book insofar as it is a standardizing form, remarking, too, that the book has come to be seen according to this very way of seeing, or "un peu comme on pense une phrase: un bloc cohérent de langage-durée, à sens unique entre ses deux butoirs" (*ma haie* 10). Just as the grammatical logic of a sentence determines not only meaning, but also establishes meaning as a given, as something to be anticipated and arrived at—and, arrived at linearly, as if thought itself were also already a function of this temporally, progressively, uninterruptedly unfolding form—this way of seeing the book is indicative of a paralysis of thought and amounts to the perpetuation of a dogma: "Le fait de fixer des règles de bonne conduite, telle que: 'Ceci est un livre, cela n'en est pas un!'," writes Hocquard in a letter to his publisher, "érige la notion de livre en critère dogmatique qui risque de devenir à son tour un modèle académique et de tourner au mot d'ordre" (*ma haie* 10). This "modèle académique" is literature ("Littérature").

Hocquard doesn't just throw away the notion of the book; his impulse is to ask "qu'est qu'un livre aujourd'hui? Autrement dit, qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire, aujourd'hui, avec ça? Et, corrélativement, qu'est-ce que ça peut aussi éventuellement empêcher de faire? C'est-à-dire, que devient cette part de réflexion par écrit qui n'entre pas nécessairement dans le cadre du livre tel que nous l'avions défini?" (*ma haie* 10). For Hocquard, the book, as it is conventionally conceived, is and exemplifies a form that allows for no new way of seeing to emerge. It is a form that already determines the trajectory of seeing and so denies the possibility for an alternative way of seeing, or for an autonomous, alternative trajectory of thought. He describes this in terms of a passivity that becomes so comfortable as to become a standard: "...[I]a notion de livre, à présent ancrée dans nos habitudes (de pensée, d'écriture), peut devenir à son tour une habitude de confort et de paresse, comme toutes les habitudes" (*ma haie* 10). But, as a form, the book can in equal measure be instrumental to exposing the limits of a way of seeing. As a form, the book is, as Hocquard's own use of the notion of the book suggests, a construct whose parameters can be questioned and whose limits can be reinvented instead of blindly perpetuated. Hocquard's work consists in doing something *with* the book, or from within form, or from within a structure



of legibility; his work therefore doesn't seek to negate or do away with form, but rather, to resist form's reification and standardization.

This is also in line with Hocquard's resistance to the standardizing tendencies of grammar. A temporary turn away from the book and toward grammar might serve to illuminate the way in which the book is a potential tool for clearing a space for a more inclusive kind of seeing. Alongside his resistance to standards as ways of defining and fixing value—and thus for their fundamental valorization of exclusivity as an ordering principle—Hocquard acknowledges grammar as a logic that all languages have in common, and therefore as the interface between them that allows their specificity to become “audible.” Grammar doesn't only determine the way in which people speak, read, and listen:

Mais aussi le ton et le débit de notre parole. Cette musique grammaticale, nous la percevons mêmes dans les langues qui nous sont totalement étrangères, lorsque nous les entendons parler, même quand le sens de ce qui se dit nous échappe. (*ma haie* 230)

Grammar is the “skin” on which it's possible to “feel” the ripples of a language as they fall and fall into place, meaning that it's the form of a language *as* the form of a language, or form-in-articulation. But what Hocquard resists is the idea of a standard inherent in a language, hence his question as to why the “grammar” of a stammerer must be the same as that of someone who doesn't stammer. What Hocquard is suggesting, then—and this is one of the central observations in *Tout le monde se ressemble* and in his work in general—is that there is no standard grammar, that it is present in an infinity of variations, as many as there are individuals walking the Earth. But this lack of a standard is also the “key” in which it is possible to hear a kind of relation that does not have a form to begin with. In *Tout le monde se ressemble*, an anthology of terms important to Hocquard's poetic practice, Hocquard also explains variation as a silence that cannot register publicly to begin with—as the basis of communication, an a priori background, context, or given. He considers variation as a silence impossible to hear and therefore to share. This stillness does not lie behind or beyond words, but on the level of the word, where various “intonations,” or contextual versions of it revolve:

On trouve, dans n'importe quel dictionnaire, la définition de chacun des mots que nous employons quand nous parlons et quand nous écrivons. La définition du mot *table*, par exemple, y est la même pour tout le monde. La définition du mot *chèvre* aussi. Nous tombons d'accord sur le fait que le mot *table* et le mot *chèvre* ne désignent pas la même chose et que quand nous sommes plusieurs à parler d'une table, c'est bien d'une table que nous parlons, pas d'une chèvre. (...) Personne n'a appris à parler en se servant d'un dictionnaire. Le dictionnaire vient après. Même si tout le monde se ressemble (*v. Lieu commun*), même si tout le monde peut avoir recours au dictionnaire pour vérifier ou préciser la définition de tel mot, chacun de nous a appris à parler dans un contexte différent, même si ces contextes se ressemblent: à tel endroit, dans telle famille, à tel moment, etc. Il s'ensuit que, pour chacun de nous, le mot *table* s'est coloré différemment selon l'expérience que nous avons eue des tables et en fonction des circonstances, de notre caractère, de notre sensibilité, etc. Autrement dit, même si tout le monde tombe d'accord sur la définition générale et abstraite (sortie de tout contexte) du mot *table* dans le dictionnaire, dans la vie, que nous le voulions ou pas, *ma table* n'est pas *ta table*. Que je le veuille ou pas, *ma table* est faite de milliers de sens (dans toutes les acceptions du

terme) superposés et imbriqués et ta table de milliers d'autres. Toutes ces nuances sont des **intonations**. Et l'ensemble de *mes intonations* du mot table et *tes intonations* du mot table font que le mot table n'a pas la même intonation globale dans ta bouche et dans la mienne, sous ta plume et sous la mienne, dans ton oreille et dans la mienne.

Cela, consciemment ou non, celui qui écrit le sait. Il se trouve à la fois avec son *intonation-table*, liée à son histoire des tables, et le *mot-table*, qu'il partage avec tout le monde mais qui, comme tel, est parfaitement opaque, abstrait, pur énigme. (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 19-20)

If the “musique grammaticale” offers itself or makes itself audible as a “shape” of articulation as well as the articulation of a particular “shape” (of a particular way in which linguistic forms “fall”), then grammar can become the basis on which it is possible to perceive difference *as such*, “même quand le sens de ce qui se dit nous échappe.” It's when we can't understand what we're hearing that we're in relation to another language and “seeing” it as if “de profil”—while seeing ourselves “seeing” (or hearing) it, as one might overhear, but nevertheless do so directly.

This kind of vision or hearing is an attunement to a condition of visibility or audibility that doesn't follow a rule—or, no rule but its own. It therefore “disposes” itself to being seen as such, or, in a way that hasn't already been given. It's the condition in which “soudain, on voit quelque chose,” to recall Hocquard's translation of Zukofsky. It's in this sense that such an encounter with vision has the aspect of “firstness,” and constitutes the literal for Hocquard, or what he calls “nudité” in his *Méditations photographiques*:

la nudité est une disposition de surface. La  
toute première disposition.

Une surface lente [souple]. Sa puissance  
passe par les articulations d'un corps: cou,  
épaules, coudes, poignets, doigts, aine,  
genoux, chevilles, hanches...

Grammaire sans règles, tout en intensités. (*Méditations* 17)

The “firstness”—like an “éclat”—is also visible insofar as it appears also to already be partial, or as if it were coming already a bit delayed, or out from a shadow. Its arrival or appearance is therefore slow or supple because it is apparent *as* that which appears. This slowness is the way in which “nudité” gives itself to us as much as it is a retraction: the articulation of a body—a whole—has the aspect of a play of angles, corners, shadows, “tout en intensités.” The literal comes to us as if from within a corner, but it doesn't hide anything: its “penchant,” so to speak, is to put forth; but putting forth has no form already: as such, it also keeps sliding away from view, or presenting itself as that which has already done so. Here, Hocquard presents the various contextual “shades” of a color, red. But the color—also a word—becomes a play of multiplying facets.

Le mot définit un usage J'ai  
vu mon premier cardinal à

Brooklyn      C'était *comme*  
 compter par couleurs  
 Ou régler sa montre      (*Conditions de lumière* 129)

First, a cardinal, or cardinal-red, and then a new “facet” of red arises: Brooklyn-red. Is it the red of autumn trees in New York? Or the color on the jerseys of a baseball team? The red “habit” of an athlete glances off of the red “worn” by the cardinal, in a turning that seems to be a confusion of “directions cardinales,” and so, of temporalities in a poem that seems to “tell” time by showing it in a network of shades riffing on the base note of one particular shade, red, just as difference is articulated contextually, suggesting a missing term at its core. Or, the impossibility of articulating the ground on which relation does indeed occur, or is possible: “la nudité donne une idée du dos” (*Méditations photographiques* 42).

This is also what is exposed in a work of “sincérité,” a work of doing something with form, as Hocquard suggests the poet Joseph Guglielmi does in his one line poem, which he reproduces in *Tout le monde se ressemble*:

dans la cour      platanes cinq (8)

“Ce poème est un bon exemple de sincérité,” Hocquard says. It reveals the arbitrary standard that French grammar dictates, for “[i]l n’en est pas moins ‘grammaticalmenet incorrect’ dans la mesure où l’ordre ‘nomral’ des mots aurait dû être,” which is to say: “dans la cour, cinq platanes” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 8). He gives two more examples of grammatical reorientations, all of which make sense from a certain perspective, the “lesson” being: “essayons de lire ce qui est écrit et non pas ce qui ‘devrait’ être écrit” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 9). Guglielmi’s poem is a case in which we are “devant un instant de conviction”: Guglielmi expresses in it a way of seeing; first, says Hocquard, Guglielmi presents the place, the “cour,” then, the “déplacement du regard,” which is represented by the white space between the two lines, then, the trees, and how many there are of them, which is, he says, “logique.” For, “personne de sensé ne commencerait par compter cinq pour se demander ensuite: ‘Mais, au fait, cinq quoi?’” (*Tout le monde se ressemble* 9). Grammar, being subject to a fundamental disarticulation, becomes the site of “intensités”—at the center of which is a lack of center, or a lack of cardinal directions, and, instead, a play of directions, angles, colors. Likewise, Hocquard’s resistance to the book insofar as it is a one-dimensional form of thinking—that is, as one way of thinking, like a sentence transparently giving us a meaning as its structure unfolds as one of meaning-giving—is a resistance that takes the form of a reconstruction of the book as a “dossier” in which a like play of facets occurs.

It isn’t coincidental that the term “dossier” has, lodged within it, the word “dos”: etymologically, the two share a root. Yet it’s Hocquard’s play on not only this particular root, but also on the root as a fixed anchor of meaning, or an essentially shareable, pristine origin or starting point, i.e., a starting point that isn’t already “contaminated” by individual narratives, that exposes the root as already splintered and splintering, already always contaminated, already “rubbing” against the individual contexts within which a term is used. In creating a resonance between these words, Hocquard plays with and exposes *ma haie* as a form that presents us with the question of what it means to read—as an “uncovering” of that question. Seeing the question of how to read *ma haie* is also the “common ground” between our task of reading and Hocquard’s work of writing. Recognizing this “common ground” as such can also be the way in

which we come into or arrive at a place within which Hocquard's negotiation of private and public personae can be appreciated in terms of an attunement to the timbre of his texts: objectivity.

In his letter to his publisher, Hocquard says that the contents of his book have been put "dans un ordre à peu près chronologique" (*ma haie* 13). But its point of origin—its "root"—is a corresponding file on Hocquard's computer, one between whose "covers" he works in a way that, to outside eyes, might resemble a wandering, an aimlessness:

Quand j'allume mon ordinateur pour me promener dans *ma Haie*, je ne suis pas dans une logique de "livre à la française," où les choses se suivent et s'enchaînent pour former un tout. Chaque document est autonome. Je peux, à ma guise, revenir dessus, le modifier, l'amplifier ou le supprimer sans que cela ait d'effet sur les autres (V. *La liste*). Un document de plus ou de moins ne modifie pas l'ensemble parce que la notion d'ensemble n'a plus ici véritablement cours. [...] C'est une organisation de type haie, en mouvement come le "jardin" du même nom de Gilles Clément, avec ses trous, ses changements d'intonation et de vitesse, ses inévitables répétitions. (*ma haie* 12)

These "trous," these "changements d'intonation et de vitesse," are also described in terms of a rhizome, a term Hocquard borrows from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze:

C'est là. Là que gisent, pêle-mêle, une quantité de documents inclassables, sans liens entre eux, sorte de rhizome incontrôlé (amorces de textes, bouts de journal, notes, blaireaux, *Dernières nouvelles de la cabane*, lettres privées...) dans lequel j'ai puisé une bonne part des éléments qui constituent ce "livre." (*ma haie* 11)

Hocquard's description of the disorder of his computer file in terms of the rhizome plays itself out and is already put into relief in the body of the text as a reference to the list as a term that literally appears elsewhere in the book, as one of terms defined in the "anthology" *Tout le monde se ressemble*. The rhizome is a lateral, exposed root that moves along the surface of the ground. Its articulations or nodes of divergence, as instances of nonlinear correspondence, not only have the aspect of the kind of play that Hocquard establishes between "dossier" and "dos"; the pairing of these terms *is* a play—on the use of those terms as Hocquard uses them, and thus on meaning as derived from usage, or as it occurs within the particular context within which it appears. Alive in its "changements d'intonation et de vitesse," Hocquard's "haie" is mobile in form and content—like a "surface lente" and "souple," except that the "surface" is one inside of which Hocquard can move around as within a three-dimensional space, as he wills to begin with, and at his disposition. And as he "ambles" through it—as he chooses which of its contents to return to and work with, put into resonance with a life event, or with one another—Hocquard's "dossier" becomes at once a "play" of angles and facets and the form of such a play. Indeed, the "liste" (which, as we can recall, is at once an orienting and disorienting tool) is a term that shows up in an index of "jouets" at the back of *ma haie*. Hocquard's "haie" is like his word "table": both are "[fait] de milliers de sens (dans toutes les acceptions du terme) superposés et imbriqués," allowing for and filled with "nuances" created as a result and as a consequence of a correspondence created between their constitutive elements.

The "haie" as "table," however, is as a result full of gaps, is porous: unlike the solidity of a writer's table, it isn't a firm foundation but is instead a plastic medium, like an ocean rocked by

waves. Or, a nest—an aerie, tucked away in the depths of his computer. Hocquard’s “rhizome incôntrolé,” with its gaps and split branches, is not unlike a bird’s nest, except that its structure is ever-expanding and that it isn’t positioned loftily in the air, overlooking anything *already*, or already predisposed toward a certain end or vision of things, as is the structure of a sentence. Rather, the gaps and nonlinear “jumps” in the form of intonations, repetitions, and nuances follow the logic of “l’infinitif présent,” which doesn’t have a subject and doesn’t express temporality—even though the intonations, repetitions, and nuances may arise from a subject (Hocquard). This is the logic of the work of an “annaliste, pas un historien”: “il n’explique pas l’enchaînement des événements. Il juxtapose des données, à plat, sans établir de relations de cause à effet entre elles. Telle année, on retiendra: une éclipse, une inondation, une victoire militaire, une disette, etc.” (*ma haie* 483). In this sense Hocquard’s “aerie” is also an “aire,” or a “surface plane”: the expanding network of connections, or the widening “haie,” is, on the one hand, the articulation of a slippage within the realm of the personal (that of intonations) and, on the other hand, of a slippage on the level of the texts that Hocquard constructs, which becomes apparent as a slick surface on which nothing can stand, or on which no meaning can be constructed (“aire,” def.1). This slipperiness is the slipperiness of a surface that doesn’t say anything: it’s clear as glass. An “aire” is also an “[e]space plat où nichent les oiseaux de proie,” or, “le nid lui-même” (“aire,” def.1). And in geometry, “aire” refers to a “[p]ortion limitée de surface, nombre qui la mesure,”<sup>17</sup> or, a “superficie.” For Hocquard, this “aerie” is a space within which he has breathing room—air: this spaciousness arises as a work on language in which units of meaning—be they terms or propositions—are cleaned of contextual residue or charge, so to speak, and left to “dry” as such, as objects in a list. Or, as words on a computer screen, “noir sur blanc.”

The book is the trace—but, a false trace—of Hocquard’s solitude. It is a dramatization or a *mise en relief*, and a public *mise en scène*, of the “trajectory” taken by the author’s hands: “la première figure du récit,” says Hocquard to Paul, “c’est d’abord du papier, du plomb, de l’encre et de la ficelle. J’insiste particulièrement sur la ficelle, qui fait que, l’ordre des pages et des chapitres d’un livre étant ficelé une fois pour toutes, tout ‘livre’ n’est plus qu’‘un beau mausolée’”:

*son histoire desséchée  
engloutie dans le ventre des animaux sacrés  
les mains de l’embaumeur (ma haie 13)*

Hocquard’s book is a tomb; it holds a body, or a pair of hands, that aren’t there. It is an empty space, like an animal’s stomach, or the “cour,” or, the nest. All that it promises or presages<sup>18</sup> is in the reader’s hands, however. It is up to the reader to make something of it, or “en faire quelque chose,” as Hocquard, speaking through Zufkosky, has said. To bring the text back to life, illuminate it, make the page into a “moniteur,” lit up, on which the page has the potential to make “liens,” and thus to engage in an “investigation hasardeuse” of his or her own. The way isn’t always clear, but Hocquard is still reassuring:

<sup>17</sup>A spin on the word also appears in the title of a book that Hocquard published in 1985, *Aerea dans les forêts de Manhattan*.

<sup>18</sup>My understanding of these lines of Hocquard was made possible by a presentation by Ann Smock at a graduate student conference, which was also published as a paper in *Qui parle* 21.2 (2013): 27-59. Professor Smock explained the image of the animal stomach as a method of divining or auguring—of using what is seen of the insides of a dead body in order to foresee, or create an image of the future.

“Soit, direz-vous, mais je ne vois toujours rien.” Eh bien, sautez la page, essayez-en une autre et peut-être viendra-t-il un moment où vous tomberez sur un vers, une phrase, un mot avec lesquels vous entrerez en résonance. La lecture, c’est comme la pêche à la ligne. Vous pouvez rester des heures à ne rien prendre et soudain vous prenez quelque chose. (*ma haie* 236)

Suddenly, we might receive, or rather, fall on something, and in so doing, make a connection that changes the way in which we see our own world, and that sheds light on the way in which we see, or have been seeing it—puts us to the side of it, and of ourselves, and in the process, becomes the scene of our own catching ourselves red-handed. And, in the process of doing a work that is “sans objet.” What Hocquard’s hands give us are also our own hands—and in them, Hocquard has been coming to life and alive all along, coming finally to meet us as if at the moment in which we also suddenly meet ourselves, “de face,” because “de profil.” For no sooner does he arrive, Hocquard is turning away, and had been, all along. Yet it is, when suddenly, “on voit quelque chose,” that we see this for the first time, recognize him. This is the place of an “amour propre”: or, the place in which it might be possible to hear oneself in another, though without having any words for expressing this. Perhaps the work wasn’t, then, “sans objet” after all.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hocquard’s story is a reversal of Edgar Allan Poe’s *A Tell-tale Heart*: it is through his objectivity, through the construction of a “solitude,” that Hocquard has turned the question of a murder and an avowal of guilt into an affirmation of life and a moment of lived encounter within it. John A.B.C. Smith’s core is alive with a beating heart that is the heart of every body, of all individuals—possible to hear once each is accounted for, or, when sought and sounded, one heart’s beating allowed to come to the fore, to come into resonance, as Hocquard says, with our own.

“Vers” Royet-Journoud

Reste pour nous: la poésie. L’ignorance de ce qu’elle est. La faire, l’écrire, “pour savoir.” Pour progresser dans cette ignorance. Pour savoir cette ignorance. Pour l’élucider. Lire, pas pour “expliquer,” pour savoir. Écrire la lecture.

— Jean-Marie Gleize, *A Noir: Poésie et littéralité*

**Introduction**

“Les livres n’existent pas,” reads a line in Claude Royet-Journoud’s *La poésie entière est préposition*, a slim volume containing the substance of two notebooks of reflections and axioms on the work of writing poetry (39). The contents of the notebooks having come out after the publication the third book of Royet-Journoud’s tetralogy, *Les objets contiennent l’infini*, it’s possible, retrospectively, to read this line as a verification of itself if it’s seen as positioned within the unfolding narrative of a tetralogy working through the question posed at the heart of its first book: “échapperons-nous à l’analogie”?<sup>20</sup> For Royet-Journoud, the book isn’t an object with a quantifiable value; it is that which form cannot delimit to begin with: “il y a cette espace de méprise qui fait que parce qu’un livre est un objet,” he says, “on croit qu’il est une marchandise alors qu’il contient l’infini” (Interview with Michel). What lies between the covers of the book, for Royet-Journoud, is that which lies beyond the grasp of form; the book, in this regard, is possible to see not as some “thing” that exists or existed already and on its own, but as a form within whose bounds the limits of form have been pushed, sounded—in the direction and in the name of “l’infini,” or that whose possibility the question at the center of *Le renversement* glimpses in the form of, precisely, a question.

Royet-Journoud’s engagement with this question can be seen as the crux of his poetry—as well as the way in which his poetry is a practice defined by the literal insofar as poetry is the process of disrupting form from the inside out and, in this way, of creating a space of and for open-ended, rather than determined, relation. This, for Royet-Journoud, is also a “space” that can be defined in terms of a margin, or as surface—or as what he calls “platitude.” It’s platitude, rather than metaphor, that interests Royet-Journoud “puisque elle seule met le monde en demeure de nous répondre” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 22). This kind of basic, undetermined correspondence with the world is what Royet-Journoud’s poetry both seeks (as a question might) and in so doing determines as a stake; it is a correspondence that is both made possible by and emerges within the bounds of “le vers.” As the way in which Royet-Journoud’s poetry is a work of arriving at a position vis-à-vis the world that hasn’t been given, “le vers” is the articulation of a condition for which it is impossible to find a beginning; Royet-Journoud calls this condition “récit.” The book, for Royet-Journoud, is integral to the narrative of the real, time-consuming work of allowing for an encounter with this condition of impossibility; as such, the book really *doesn’t* exist and never has to begin with but is, rather, a form that holds the promise of the infinite. “Le vers,” then, subtends the book prospectively. Seeing “le vers” in this way can allow for an understanding of it as the “minimal unit” with which Royet-Journoud’s work is engaged

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<sup>20</sup>Eric Pesty’s treatment of Royet-Journoud’s tetralogy and his exposition of the book as an open-ended form was fundamental to an understanding of Royet-Journoud’s work and of the importance of the tetralogy. For Pesty’s analysis, see “Claude Royet-Journoud: L’objet de la poésie.” *Courrier du Centre international d’études poétiques*. 217 (1998): 39 – 51. Print.

and, by extension, allow for an appreciation of the stake that his poetry keeps alive—that of an encounter with the world loosened from formal determination. And it can allow for an appreciation of this stake as one whose value cannot and could not ever have been known as something that already exists but which instead requires that it be arrived at through a work of formal reduction. Royet-Journoud’s work suggests to its potential readers that to arrive at this encounter is to arrive at an encounter with silence as, in turn, the form of this very encounter. This is what Michèle Cohen-Halimi speaks of in terms of “le temps du vers,” or “le tremblement d’un pur présent” (*Je te continue ma lecture* 69). At stake in Royet-Journoud’s work is the integrity of the present, which cannot be met on any terms other than those of silence.

### **Book**

“Je donne à lire quelque chose qui est à peine visible,” writes Royet-Journoud in the first section of *La poésie entière est préposition*, “Un métier d’ignorance” (12). The task, for Royet-Journoud, is to allow legibility to become a condition that is no longer a function of representation, or no longer under the reign of image. He makes the latter point explicitly in citing Emmanuel Hocquard’s imperative to “[r]emplacer l’image par le mot image” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 11). This kind of legibility doesn’t operate on the register of that which definitively *is*, i.e., on the register of that which can already be circumscribed conceptually<sup>21</sup> or of that which is already figurable. What Royet-Journoud wishes to “donne à lire” is, instead, the condition on which legibility itself becomes exposed as such. This means that what Royet-Journoud seeks to bring to light is the condition on which it is possible to read, or to see. But this is also how, and why, Royet-Journoud’s texts so easily risk misreading and misconception once they enter the public sphere. This irony, however, is one that exposes the fact that the parameters on which “visibility” operates are those that have been conventionally established as such. And as banal and as self-evident a fact as this may fundamentally be, it is one that suggests that “visibility” operates on the basis of absolute exclusion and therefore risks becoming invisible to itself. This can account for the scathingly uncompromising responses to Royet-Journoud’s work, as noted by Mathieu Bénézet in a 1981 interview with Royet-Journoud following the publication of his first two books (also the first two of his tetralogy), *Le renversement* and *La notion d’obstacle*, respectively:

1972: Gallimard publishes a 96 page book by Claude Royet-Journoud entitled “Le Renversement” (Reversal). In “Le Figaro,” Maurice Chapelan goes wild. Under the title “So much white, so much white,” he writes. “That much white would certainly inspire dreams. Why not of a first communion procession in a snowy field?” “Can you then be surprised that our contemporaries don’t seem to give a damn about poetry or poets! The latter - or their publishers - need only stop taking them for idiots.”

1978: Gallimard publishes a 112 page book by Claude Royet-Journoud entitled “La notion d’obstacle” (The notion of obstacle). Lionel Ray writes in “L’Humanité”

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<sup>21</sup>Robert Kaufman’s work, especially his “Lyric’s Constellation, Poetry’s Radical Privilege,” has allowed for me a way of conceptualizing, and understanding, the way in which a work upon language as conceptual medium—as Kaufman states—becomes a basis for a conceptual starting point, or the mind’s encounter with the limit of thought. This is also the basis on which thought is possible as a mode of critical agency; see Kaufman’s “*AfterNach*: Life’s Posthumous Life in Later-Modernist American Poetry,” in *The Meaning of ‘Life’ in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ross Wilson (Routledge, 2009), 164-190.



“Arranging ten lines (the first of which repeats the title, *vois ci*) on six pages does not strike me as such a feat; nor does placing one word, “fragility,” all alone in the middle of a page. It’s as if the last century’s Mallarméan enterprise had degenerated into an intellectualism which is naive and, in the last analysis, without perspectives.

Ironically, the lack of perspective of which Claude Royet-Journoud is accused is what his critics suffer from in already, or all too quickly, seeing his work’s apparent obscurity in terms of a failure to bridge the gap between two presumable opposites—the concrete and the ideal. What these critics here miss is the fact that this dichotomy may very well be one that Royet-Journoud’s poetry is questioning. And to find a way to interrupt the clean-cut divide between the categories of the real and the ideal is to both make possible and work from a “place” in which thought isn’t already simply a function of the idea, but from which thought is an expression of its own autonomy, or from which it arises as its own gesture, and thus as gesture per se: “Pour que la pensée se fasse acte, il faut qu’il y ait arrêt” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 10).

Poetry protects the possibility of this kind of “arrest;” its endangerment, Bénézet suggests, “borders on an infringement of creative freedom.” If, as Bénézet goes on, “[a]ccusations such as intellectual naiveté or scorn for the public deny literature is rightful activity, and are closer to denunciation than critical discussion,” then these kinds of accusations also expose and reveal their own blindness to what is at stake in literature—and, by extension, in poetry: the possibility of intersubjectivity. What Royet-Journoud’s poetry therefore hinges on isn’t something that can be historicized. The obscurity and hermeticism ostensibly characteristic of his work cannot, then, be attributed to a literary-historical dead end (or “degeneration,” as one critic puts it) if the very thing that this work seeks to maintain and create space for is the condition on which fundamentally different ways of thinking are possible to begin with. Bénézet aptly suggests that an absence of this possibility, as it was evidenced in the kind of critique that “framed” Royet-Journoud’s poetry as naïve intellectualism, points to a “problem [that] is ideological, political, since we are unable to reflect upon the a priori or unspoken assumptions underlying this ‘critique.’” The blank spaces that fill Royet-Journoud’s texts put into relief a requirement that his poetry seeks to maintain: the requirement that there be space within which the parameters of legibility have not already been given. But such a space is also necessarily possible only insofar as it is made apparent as such. This is the space in which—to cite Emmanuel Hocquard—“[u]ne question cherche sa formule” (*Conditions de lumière* 97).

By contrast, Claude Royet-Journoud tells Bénézet, the review given in “L’Humanité” is “paternalistic” and “reactionary”: it operates on the assumptions that “the poem is [...] a hermetic object on the page, the book [...] something finished, completed.” Royet-Journoud’s critics are therefore blind to what Royet-Journoud is aware of: that “reading, like writing, is necessarily ‘ideological’” (Interview with Bénézet). But for Royet-Journoud, “the book, always assuming that one has written a book, is undefinable;” books “consist,” Royet-Journoud tells Bénézet, “only of a single text, the genre of which cannot be defined. It’s a *book* that I write, and I feel that the notion of genre obscures the book as such.” A book constitutes a process undergone by text; it evidences a narrative by which this process designates its own boundaries rather than being informed by them to begin with. Whereas his critics assume a position that is blind to the conditions on which it arises, Royet-Journoud’s work is that of confronting those conditions themselves. He is aware of this, as he tells Bénézet: “You can understand the ideology underlying this kind of review, the assumption that a book is completed, absolute.”

That the vast amounts of blank space filling Royet-Journoud’s books were seen as symptomatic of a self-absorbed worship of airiness suggests a stance that assumes and takes for granted a

clean-cut distinction between “blank” space and content. Seeing “so much white” as, already, a pretext for “dreams” takes for granted the fact that thought requires space within which to be to begin with. Royet-Journoud’s critics overlook the fact that something like “dreaming” is not gratuitous—it’s something that requires and takes place as the pushing open of a dichotomy, a boundary. It occurs within a space whose parameters are not defined, flexible—a space of volume. Volume is what thought both creates and requires; it is the form of thought’s being subject to this principle, which is at once its own and the principle by which it is disowned, made always separate from itself, as a tearing, a “violence,” as Royet-Journoud describes it. “The refusal to consider a book as its very volume,” Royet-Journoud says, “creates a non-existent dichotomy between blank space and text and denies the existence of a mental space which is, moreover, never free of violence” (Interview with Bénézet). This “violence” is impossible to separate from the motions of thought; thought cannot put a boundary around or circumscribe the space of its own gestures. Thought, for Royet-Journoud, straddles that which is known and unknown. There is both “[u]n paysage réel – étendue de la vue (c.-à-d. connaissance, préhension)” and “[u]n autre, mental. De l’apaisement, en quelque sorte, à la menace” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 15). This is “[l]a menace sans laquelle il n’y aurait aucune pensée.” But it is *writing* that allows for this duality to be inhabited. Poetry allows for these two “paysages” to exist together: poetry is writing that at once requires thought, and its structures, and what contributes to their constant undoing, creating a scene in which an encounter between the requirement for form and its being shaken off literally takes place—and takes away the possibility for a stable “place,” but instead, makes itself felt as displacement. Poetry, then, is also what subtends the form of the book as one that both requires itself to be presaged and is already an undoing of itself—and in that undoing, a fulfillment, but as a destruction, from the inside. The antinomy between Royet-Journoud’s relation to the book and the response to his work by certain critics brings the book to light as both an “object” and an obstacle. To his critics, a distinction between the two is necessary, taken as given, and turned into a standard of “measure,” so to speak; to Royet-Journoud, what is of central significance is working on the boundary between the two—or, in habiting the space within which thought is present with itself as an obstacle and therefore also its own object.

That the two conditions within which writing takes place coincide with—or rather, glance off of—one another suggests that the terms on which thought is its own object are not quantifiable or possible to delimit to begin with, this impossibility thereby affording the kind of remove that allows thought to be possible at all. Writing allows for this remove, which the poet inhabits as he might a “scene.” This is the scene of the mind, and the page. In “Até,” the first section of “Le travail du nom” in *La notion d’obstacle*, Royet-Journoud opens with a scene in and over the course of which this kind of remove takes place. But what “takes place” is therefore not of the order of event (as the scene of an occurrence), but as a tension within which it becomes impossible for “event” to take place. Instead, what comes to the fore or plays itself out is a tension by which an “interval,” or a unit of difference that isn’t measurable, tries to come into itself, tries to “take place,” but cannot:

*cela*

*bleu*

et qui ne s'éloigne pas (15)

Royet-Journoud arrives at a scene of return, one that utters, so to speak, its own returning, over and over. The page, “bleu,” or the element within which this scene is taking place, invokes the Mallarméan “azur,” a symbol of the ideal shared by poets in the French literary tradition (Marvick 144). Indeed, “Até” seems to be an invocation of and a play on Mallarmé’s poem “L’Azur,” in which the poet “fait, pour la première fois l’essai de la poétique de l’effet de Poe, révélée par ‘La Genèse du poème’” (*Poésies* 196). Poe states that “a good writer has already foreseen the last line when he writes the first” (Poe quoted in Macherey 24). In “L’Azur,” the poet’s impotence, and his dream of the azur—the ideal—turns into a nightmare in which the poet does *not* disappear into his own act, but becomes aware, to an absolute, terrifying degree, of the “l’artifice poétique tout entire orienté vers l’effet à produire” (*Poésies* 197-8). The poet finally cries out, after having tried to effect a disappearance, an absolute separation that might bring him to the pure azure of the ideal, “*Je suis hanté. L’azur! L’azur! L’azur! L’azur!*” (*Poésies* 21). Falling into the truth of Poe’s statement about writing, Mallarmé realizes that “il fallait toute cette poignante révélation pour motiver le cri sincère, et bizarre, de la fin, l’azur...” (*Poésies* 197). Royet-Journoud is within the space of the “cri.” But for him, the cry is already the element within which he is always already moving through; it is that which is at once close and distant, within an oscillation, or a relation to itself, that can be defined as *writing*. The scene within which writing takes place is one of an expansion and a retraction, the page becoming the scene of a retraction into itself and, just as quickly, a flooding or an expansion—in which what pours forth is “l’azur,” the blue of the page. The page—a white space, a blank—is volume within which writing takes place and is possible. This is the space of thought. It is also that “déperdition dans l’aveuglement” that Royet-Journoud seeks; this is, however, also the place at which the poet’s vision is not already following a definite form—and so, must also be the place at which vision is most possible (*Un privé à Tanger* 165).

In this space of writing, the movement of thought occurs within the boundary of form and content as they move through one another constantly. This is a movement that constantly promises an opening out, or an outside, a “dehors” but just as quickly fulfills this promise by “casting” its fulfillment as the return of yet another, but different “inside,” or by turning “le dehors” into another scene in which it is on stage, so to speak, this stage being the page. The space of writing is one in which the promise of an outside repeats itself, “casts” itself as such, and therefore is a constant performance of its own role, its own promise. This performance is the staging of a constant “passage,” as a drama in which the promise of an outside is played out as “la pensée” moving through constantly assumed, but shed, “rôles”:

premier passage.

le dehors

la pensée traversait les rôles (16)

Not “inhabiting” any particular form or “role,” “la pensée” isn’t already rooted in an image and doesn’t settle into one: the “scene” played by it isn’t one that is stable (or a stable “act”) but is instead one of seamless changefulness. This instability, while always referring to the fact of its passing (as from “role” to “role”), is also visible in terms of a promise of something that will continue to remain withheld:

This scene puts into relief the form taken by obstacle—as the *notion* of obstacle, or as an open-endedness that points itself out as such, one on whose boundary thought moves, as if adhering to yet as if always having slipped off of a non-existent “object.”

This is also the way in which Royet-Journoud conceives of the book: in ascribing to books the status of “objets mentaux” (Interview with Michel), he suggests that they are forms that index a narrative whose trajectory was not already given, or not one given in terms of the distinction between what is and is not conceivable. Rather, they are indicative of a narrative whose trajectory occurs “within,” or pushes apart, the distinction between what is and is not conceivable, expanding this margin *as* a margin into a condition of spaciousness. Michèle Cohen-Halimi describes the book, in Royet-Journoud’s oeuvre, as a form whose integrity is constituted by a tension between diametrically opposed, but not distinct, registers; according to her, in Royet-Journoud’s work with the book, “[l]’unité a été retrouvé pour le livre entre le champ de la présence et le champ des virtualités” (*Je te continue ma lecture* 67). Cohen-Halimi’s words suggest that the book, as a form that “finds” itself at a crossroads between the real (as “présence” suggests) and the imagined, is one that must literally *find* its integrity—or, arrive at itself via a process of anchoring the imagined. This anchoring takes place as a process by which the imagined is given space in that it is allowed to appear as such, or *as* that which is imagined. This form of appearance<sup>22</sup> is also a space of variation—which Royet-Journoud also figures as a tension between a casting off of “old” form(s) and an exposition of “new” one(s)—or, as the place in which some “thing” cannot take place, but nevertheless presents itself as the portent of a form-to-be, a spectre of closure, or the “angle” at which form is perceptible but can nevertheless never be seen in its closure, as such.

The book can therefore serve as the frame within which Royet-Journoud’s work can be “read” because it suggests the presence of an underlying narrative, a narrative, moreover, whose “aim” is to arrive at a condition of “aim-less-ness,” so to speak, caught up in the confines of its waywardness. This condition is literality. Literality, then, is necessarily ever a question: “[c]e qui fait problème, c’est la littéralité (et non la métaphore),” says Royet-Journoud (“Un métier d’ignorance” in *La poésie entière est préposition* 13). This “problem” recalls the question with which Royet-Journoud begins his tetralogy—“échapperons-nous à l’analogie?” But Royet-Journoud’s question is also in part its own answer. Royet-Journoud’s work of arriving at a condition of non-determination must require a work of arriving at a place in which determination is in tension with itself, or, a place that requires division or differentiation, but not differentiation whose measure is possible to seize or articulate: for Royet-Journoud, “[c]e qui fait problème [...] C’est mesurer la langue dans ses unités ‘minimales’ de sens.” Arriving at such a place means arriving at the aforementioned place of aimlessness, or, the place at which a boundary is in relation to itself. He explains:

Pour moi, le vers d’Eluard *La terre est bleue comme une orange* est épuisable, c’est-à-dire s’annule par son surcroît de sens, tandis que, par exemple, *Le mur du fond est un mur de chaux* de Marcelin Pleynet reste et restera, je crois, pour son exactitude même et dans

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<sup>22</sup>See Robert Kaufman’s “Lyric’s Constellation, Poetry’s Radical Privilege,” where this form of appearance can be understood as states, “semblance.” Kaufman’s articulation of fiction—as representation *as such*—has allowed me to articulate, and better see, how this poetry is “semblance,” or operates according to the latter’s “rule.”

son contexte bien sûr, paradoxalement infixable quant au sens, donc porteur d'une fiction constante pour chacun (*La poésie entière est préposition* 13).

Pleynet's line generates a condition of exactitude that arises as a function of its inexhaustibility; this inexhaustibility is the articulation of a form of potentiality—as well as the form taken by “surface.” Eluard's line collapses on itself; Pleynet's, in lacking anchoring, becomes a vehicle for indeterminacy: it remains on the level of “surface” rather than on the level of form-and-content (or, of a “depth” that collapses just as soon into meaning, into a single point). Because “platitude” doesn't allow for an already determined meaning, it isn't a function of a specific trajectory of signification; this is why Royet-Journoud sees it as the basis for the real: “[f]onder un réel sur du métaphorique! Je préfère la surface, le plat et pour tout dire la platitude” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 23).

The work of arriving at platitude must necessarily follow a recursive trajectory, or a trajectory whose unfolding is also the work of form's disruption or undoing. But if Royet-Journoud is to remain on the level of “surface,” then this work of undoing form must itself also never become a form: that is, his work must pit him in the middle of a chiasmus, or at a place in which form and content don't coincide but instead, in brushing past one another, produce a condition of exposition. This condition of exposition is at the “heart” of the book for Royet-Journoud, and the heart is arrived at by an extensive work of clearing:

Each of my books is composed of a number of sequences, five to ten pages in length. Each sequence starts out as four to five hundred pages of prose. That's why it takes me about six years to produce a book! All of this is contained in large notebooks. I write prose texts on the right-hand pages from which I later extract certain elements. These are noted on the left-hand pages. The object of this effort is enter into the mental space proper to the act of writing. This stage can last a long time, until it “gels.” When the text finally takes form, it is distributed over several pages. It is essential to the narrative that the text circulates across facing pages as well as recto-verso; even the volume of the book itself is important. If you will, I always write from within the book, from the very start. Later, when I already have a few pages of text, a sketch, I begin to work on the language, neutralising the text. How? By tracking down and suppressing metaphor, assonance, alliteration - to see what narrative emerges - what appears, embodying this language within a language. (Interview with Bénézet)

Royet-Journoud's massive blocks of prose “sans aucun intérêt littéraire,” as he notes in *La poésie entière est préposition*, are “un ‘nettoyage,’ une possibilité de voir”<sup>23</sup>: writing text without anchoring it meaning allows for the conditions on which a basic vision—one not conceptually or figuratively oriented—can arise. The work of cutting through prose (and with this, through its structuring forms, such as syntax, grammar, linearity) becomes a work of allowing space to instead become a structuring principle, or of making writing a function of movement—the movement of thought—as opposed to it already being a function of these structuring forms. In a conversation with Emmanuel Hocquard, Royet-Journoud explains this process of composing a book as well, but this description of it underscores the fact that the work of “nettoyage” done in

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<sup>23</sup>Royet-Journoud's explanation of his process of book-composition also appears as a note in *La poésie entière est préposition*: “J'écris d'abord de la prose sans aucun intérêt littéraire. Le poème ne vient pas de la prose, mais il n'arrive pas non plus à son terme sans elle. Elle n'est qu'un ‘nettoyage,’ une possibilité de voir” (12).

order to enter the “mental space proper to the act of writing” is a work that is time-consuming, that places the preparation of a mental space within a very temporal, lived, and therefore bodily register, suggesting that the making of the book is also the making of an interface or stage on which a correspondence with the world that hasn’t *itself* already been narrated might eventually be possible to experience, bear (blind) witness to:

Pour écrire j’ai besoin d’un temps de travail très long. Il y a des gens qui sont “habités” par la langue; moi ce n’est pas le cas. Il n’y a jamais rien. Je passé mon temps avec rien et je m’obstine et j’insiste sur ce rien et donc il y a d’abord ce travail qui est très corporel, qui consiste à écrire une grande quantité de prose sans valeur littéraire. Ce n’est qu’une façon de se nettoyer, de faire le vide, en sorte qu’au bout d’un certain nombre d’heures par jour, par semaine, par mois d’un travail permanent, on arrive à sentir que ça bouscule et que le monde deviant lisible. Car on passe une grande partie de son temps aveugle. Il n’est guère facile d’atteindre cette espèce de lisibilité où tout d’un coup une table veut dire quelque chose, ou un livre, ou une ligne... (*Un privé à Tanger* 157-8)

The book becomes a vehicle for running “air” through the structures of language and the structures determining how the world is seen, both of which are literalized when the book, as an object, becomes voluminous, or when its form is put into relief and becomes mobile as a nexus of articulations, plays of facets—such as those of pages with respect to one another, recto-verso, or the pages as they orient themselves vis-à-vis one another, around the “hinge” of the binding or spine, no longer forming a horizontal sequence but instead moving or “breathing” through one another, expanding horizontality into the vertical dimension, giving the book a vertical “spine” and making this “spine” into the equivalent of a point around which movement occurs or revolves, so to speak. The book becomes the scene (or stage) *on* which and the space *in* which what is played out is “[I]’importance du dos”: the literalization or “mise en relief” of the parameters of the book subjects it to an inversion by which its articulations are exposed *as* such, or as a play on a stage; surface—not just a plane, but now surface *as* such, and in this way the condition of an exposition of an edge or “spine”—is rendered three-dimensional and “opened” up in a show of the inner movements that account for the relations constituting the form of the book (*La poésie entière est préposition* 30).

But this opening-up of surface—as an exposition of its mobile vertebrae—is also an inversion of the book, or a *mise en relief* of an “underside” of a form: the book becomes the way in which its contours are felt and or its “syntax,” so to speak, rendered palpable as one might “feel” the movements of a language: “Des dessous-de-langue comme il y a des dessous-de-table” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 43). The book, as the articulation of volume, both opens up and is as if the “pretext” for the kind of space of that which “n’aura jamais lieu.” This space is one of spaciousness—or, the space *of*. This kind of space doesn’t belong *anywhere*: it is neutral. Like the notion *of* (obstacle), it is also a place that is both object and obstruction, or a course part of whose substance is its own crossing, like a mental double take whose stutter allows for some *kind* of place or position to come into focus as such, and thought as well, to return to its own movement, as this middle section of “Milieu de dispersion” in *Le renversement* suggests:

trajet —

l'idée de lieu  
ou encore le regard (*Le renversement* 53)

Like a foundation that keeps shooting through itself, or a basis that keeps being overturned and literally keeps turning into a spacious groundlessness (“un dessous-de-table”), the book—and its constitutive elements, such as page and text—the book enacts its own neutralization. Writing “from within the book, from the very start,” Royet-Journoud makes of it a decentered form, one that resembles an ever-expanding locus.

Royet-Journoud’s work of clearing away prose within the contours of the book, as a neutralization of space—or as its disassociation from structures of formal articulation and, instead, its exposition as the space *of* articulation—turns the book into a “translucent” object, one that therefore “contains” space but also seems also to keep spilling it out in the form of an essential disarticulation. The book becomes a space of emptying as “air” is blown through and between its constitutive articulations, which are at once fixed and unmoored, called upon and disengaged:

les rites s'établissent  
splendeur refoulée dans le noir

avant même d'atteindre le bras  
cette part à combler (*Les objets contiennent l'infini* 29)

These lines open the poem called “Elle dans la répétition” in a book whose title appears strongly to bear a reference to “énigme,” Anne-Marie Albiach’s term for literality. Royet-Journoud refers to “énigme” in a conversation with Emmanuel Hocquard published in Hocquard’s *Un privé à Tanger*, citing, to define enigma, a line of the first part of Albiach’s book *État*: “toutes les evidences lui sont mystère” (159). If the book becomes a place of darkness—of the condition on which vision is possible (“une possibilité de voir”) but therefore also a dimness of vision, an obscurity—then so does writing become a “space” within which it is not that which is written but writing itself, as a work within the constraints of conceptual articulation,<sup>24</sup> that becomes a “part à combler,” but which remains, literally and figuratively, at arm’s length, or a form of conceptual slippage that ever remains within the dark space inside of a writing hand wrapped around a pen

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<sup>24</sup>Again, Robert Kaufman’s “Lyric’s Constellation, Poetry’s Radical Privilege” is helpful in this regard, as has Kaufman’s suggestion that the “stretching” of these constraints produces “semblance,” or, the condition on which something appears *as* it does (in both senses of the word), and thus repeats itself but in doing so, also is a perturbation of an “original” that is not there to begin with.

as it writes and is therefore its own tenor as it is its own vehicle. To be able to grasp something or circumscribe it mentally is to articulate it linguistically. The writing hand is the vehicle for apprehension. But to write is to also already possess the language—the structures, the shared and inherited conventions and associations—in order to do so: linguistic articulation becomes the vehicle for the motions of the hand and its articulations as their movements constitute the act of writing.

Royet-Journoud's books are the trace of the point at which these two chiasmically related literalities (for they are not metaphors) move past and “touch” one another; and, although his tetralogy addresses the question of disengaging from analogy from varied vantage points, it's still possible to say that his work as a whole does what his third book enacts:

J'ai l'impression que ce livre (*Les objets contiennent l'infini*) est une hesitation entre le dedans et le dehors, une avant-naissance; ce moment où le corps même ne'st ni dedans ni dehors. Le ‘balancement’ entre vers et prose est une image de cela. (Il s'agirait peut-être d'agencer vers u prose de façon à rejoindre, par le poème, l'acte de naissance comme si l'on pouvait le montrer). (*La poésie entière est préposition* 14).

This is the place of hesitation is the place not only of writing—as we've now begun to see via Claude Royet-Journoud's descriptions of the narrative of writing a book—but also that of reading. The two—writing and reading—intersect at the point of this “avant-naissance,” or the point at which the structures that are stored, in and as language, for articulating a relationship to the world haven't begun to “enunciate” themselves but are on the verge of doing so (or showing themselves as if already having done so).

Royet-Journoud's writing takes us to the place in which it is possible to sense the truth of what his friend and reader Michèle Cohen-Halimi suggests (and what finds its way into his notebooks): “C'est parce qu'il y a en nous des mots sans bouche que nous lisons” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 42). There, his writing is also the place at which reading is possible—but legibility not. There, “[u]ne extrême maladresse preside à tout cela. Je veux dire à l'élaboration d'une forme. Cette maladresse en est le coeur” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 34). And while we'll be returning to the intersection of the space of the book and the space of writing (and the dark space inside of the hand), it might already be becoming clear that the more the book is exposed as a space of volume—as the space of the reversal of image, a space in which the disruption of focus is what arises—the more it becomes visible as a space of relation tout court, a space that is contingent upon and expressive of an intersection of the registers of abstraction and concretion. This intersection necessarily obfuscates the possibility of linearly achieved meaning or “sens” and instead becomes a point of open-endedness that exposes itself as such, appearing as a point of ever-disrupted direction or of a constant dis-orientation—a point whose expansion is at once the way in which surface is articulated (but, in all directions, voluminously).

Correspondingly, the kind of “flattening” or “neutralization” of formal relation that Royet-Journoud effects in his book he aims for on the level of language. *La poésie entière est préposition* contains an echo of his description of book-writing to Bénézet: “Charles Bernstein insiste, me semble-t-il, sur la sonorité du vers, du mot. Pour ma part, j'insisterais sur une absence d'assonance, d'allitération, d'image, etc. Je rechercherais une certaine ‘platitude.’ Mais les deux démarches se rejoignent peut-être par le souci précis et ambigu du sens. Serait-ce l'envers et l'endroit d'une démarche identique!” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 11). Royet-Journoud's fundamental identification with Bernstein suggests that platitude isn't a dead end, but that its



refusal of meaning is the condition on which space is “pushed aside” for something “else,” opening up the space for a condition of exposition tout court. Or, transparency, as Royet-Journoud’s lines in “Neutre” from *Le renversement* here suggest:

il interrompt la pensée  
il déplace quelque chose au-dehors  
transparence du nerf (14)

Neutrality, as a space and a condition of relation, is also a condition of transparency: “Écrire, c’est être capable de montrer l’anatomie. Il faut aller jusqu’au bout du littéral,” says Royet-Journoud (*La poésie entière est préposition* 12-13). Literality is a condition of absolute displacement: it is (the place of) reversal, or of the kind of displaced focus that we’d just visited in “Milieu de dispersion” as a trajectory that “adheres” to itself as a tendency to keep dislocating itself, keep derauling—and therefore, to keep exposing itself *as* a condition of exposure, and of appearance (rather than representation or anything graspable, as image), or, fiction. Later, we’ll see how Royet-Journoud also says that he wishes to work with the smallest possible units of meaning. This absolute division is the boundary on which such displacement is possible, or, on which reversal *can* take place, to begin with.

Literality is, in other words, preposition: “[e]ssentielle parce que transparente” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 34). Preposition is also the condition of “[d]u sens en attente. En souffrance. Il se construit au loin,” as ever on a horizon but ever present as such, present as a haunting of that which is impossible to touch—but which in this sense touches (*La poésie entière est préposition* 33). As the condition on which an un-figured opening arises, preposition is a condition of possibility and therefore of potentiality. In this, it recalls the book as object and obstacle, or as the space through which a trajectory is cut, and thought passes and is always passing alongside itself, and makes the book all the more imaginable as a skin that breathes—expands, stretches, and in which thought has “breathing room” to move in any direction. The book, as a space within which articulation is exposed as such, and therefore as a space of absolute dislocation is the space of preposition, to which the impersonal “elle” here refers to in the first lines of “Neutre” in *Le renversement*:

où  
plus avant  
elle précipite  
elle adhère (13)

In a space of neutrality, direction struggles, as if trying to get ahead already by, paradoxically, anticipating or speeding up (precipitating) an anterior position. This anticipation is also what “falls,” as a precipitate, adhering but also doing so in having slipped. The space between these two definition of precipitation—anticipation, or a rising, and a falling back or dropping—is the space of chiasmus, a place of passage or transparency. Preposition is “[a]ction de mettre en avant”: Royet-Journoud’s placement of quotation marks around his description of the “gesture” that preposition embodies and performs also suggests that this gesture is one that is already referring to itself as such, or positing itself as a recitation of itself—as a fundamental self-

interruption that thereby both frames and perturbs the form that is subject to it *La poésie entière est préposition* 34).

### **Body**

Preposition is, then, a chiasmus: a place of absolute exposition that presents itself as such, but without positing any definite position from which such presentation is occurring. It's in this way that preposition is the condition on which form is ever appearing *as* itself. Though not possible to grasp, preposition is ever present as a trace that it keeps leaving as if “behind” itself, or, a trace that Royet-Journoud here figures in terms of a “tracing” that perpetuates itself in the form of a demand that cannot but reiterate itself and that even in its own enunciation is already doing so, taking from and providing for itself as if in the same conflicted gesture; preposition is, therefore, representation put into relief as such, doubled:

insistance de la doublure  
la transparence est un leurre

vers le neutre  
lumière dispersée de l'attente (18)

The above passage is a continuation of the scene of thought's traversal of roles in *La notion d'obstacle*. Preposition is a relation that is marked by a tension between stabilization and proclivity. Here, “ce qui n'aura jamais lieu” becomes “visible” as a form of indication or “insistence,” as the voice of an understudy coming as if from behind the scenes: the term “doublure” refers to an understudy. But this second “voice” is, as Royet-Journoud suggests through this term, a “layer” that is woven and that, while transparent, is also a red herring—a “leurre” (“doublure” can also refer to tissue or cloth that is used to line an interior). Transparency has come to be visible because representation is now visible—as the form *of*, or as a putting-into-place of form, i.e., form's articulation. This kind of relation points somewhere, but not anywhere in particular; it is always tending “vers le neutre,” and, as the inverse of image, its presence is palpable only as a half-light, or, light dispersed.

And as far as doubling goes, the lines following are cast in terms of the writing hand, in terms of the physical gesture of writing, where it is the hand that is the source of a continuous loquaciousness. The writing hand puts into relief the articulation of meaning in writing, or the way in which meaning takes shape; as such, it is between seizing and letting slip the closure in whose “name” or under whose principle its gestures fall. In putting into relief the articulation of meaning *as* written (or as a “sense” expressed linguistically—and the latter term is charged), the moving hand is also constantly putting itself and its movements into relief, betraying itself as it “enunciates” or “speaks” the articulation of sense *as such* (or, as it mimes a form for which there is no form to begin with, and, a form that is figurative or relational at that). But this betrayal—and the retribution that appears to come as the rule of language over the possibility of “embodied” sense—is just as soon de-described or silenced, ever-present yet present only parenthetically as that which subtends and is as if a pretext for the hand's continued “speech”:

main intarissable  
(la description du châtiment) (19)

The hand's motions recall Royet-Journoud's effort to "see what narrative emerges – what appears, embodying this language within a language" when he writes a book. The "language within a language" isn't anything that is attainable; it is the condition on which language is possible to begin with—and with this, the condition on which the body is divided, body taken to be embodied meaning, or a sense that is original, pure. Or, sense that isn't already subject to a form, a version or a rendition, so to speak—that doesn't already have a narrative of arrival (that of a language) and that doesn't, consequently, have to be translated.

But if we only speak because there are, in us, "des mots sans bouche," then, there is, "[d]e la préposition dans toute traduction... (Celle de la Bible, par exemple.)" (*La poésie entière est préposition* 34). The work of writing a book is the work of coming to the place at which "the Word" is possible to begin with, at the place of "maladresse." This is also the place at which the question that Michèle Cohen-Halimi sees as driving Royet-Journoud's work becomes both possible and therefore also necessarily visible to itself: "Comment lire *ce* mot sans lire *le* mot?" (*Je te continue ma lecture* 68). The question remains and cannot but remain: but the book is the means by which its return becomes the articulation of its answer. "Ce qui s'écrit est muet" (*La poésie entière est préposition* 22). Claude Royet-Journoud's books contain a silence at their heart—a silence that presents itself as at once an object and an obstacle, as that which is impossible to translate but whose translation would eradicate the possibility of speech to begin with, and with it, the possibility of inquiry. Poetry, for Royet-Journoud, seems to be the scene in which the gesture of articulating meaning, and at a fundamental level, "gesture" itself, assumes an ambiguous, quivering position or posture—posed as if between, on the one hand, the Fall (the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge having been plucked) and, on the other, salvation or a rising anew, that same knowledge being the means by which gesture is no longer oblivious to itself but tinged with its own coming and going as such, with its own memory. Or, self-possessed in its dislocation from itself—ever in parentheses, de-scribed.

The place of "maladresse," or of the question "échapperons-nous à l'analogie?"—one that also finds another iteration in the form of Michèle Cohen-Halimi's question—is also a condition of absolute disarticulation, that is, a dis-order or condition of possibility that Royet-Journoud also describes in terms of a restitution of the body. While we've already begun to see preposition as a condition of possibility (a "place" of no predetermined direction or trajectory), returning to preposition in terms of this disarticulation or entropy can allow for a reframing of the writing hand as a place of passage to the body, to a condition of embodied meaning, even if such embodiment is itself an impossibility; writing, when put into relief, creates this place of passage—as a place of displacement (preposition). And the creation of such passage is the work of poetry, to cite Royet-Journoud citing the French writer and critic Daniel Oster: "[c]'est par l'interposition du poétique que se révéla la brute separation du langage et de l'être. Le langage, même *creusé*, ne fait voir que lui-même: un mur" (*La poésie entière est préposition* 37). But "un mur" is also the place at which "[l]e sens afflue dans la préposition:" it is the place at which "sens" is inexhaustible, the place of "platitude," surface—relation, or "neutre" (*La poésie entière est préposition* 40).

This inexhaustibility is also the basis of linguistic expression: "[t]oute écriture est fondée sur l'entropie;" this is the why "[l]'unique question est celle du sens et elle demeure insoluble," and why "[o]n voudrait saisir un sens au moment où il se met en marche, où il reste indécidable" (*La poésie entière est préposition* 10). This indecidability is the place of preposition as the place—or rather, the space—of articulation: "J'aimerais vraiment m'expliquer ce qui se passé

‘avant’ et ‘après’ la préposition. Pourquoi cette aimantation du sens dans l’articulation même. Le coude fait-il le bras, le genou la jambe! Tout reflue vers l’articulation” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 33). So, the “dessous-de-langue” is not just the underside of language—its disarticulation, its entropic “avant-naissance”—but also the warm underside of the tongue, the tissue of and extension of the body as the body, or, the body “analogous” to or constantly placed alongside itself; “J’aime cette résistance (au sens),” says Royet-Journoud (*La poésie entière est préposition* 37). The hand, too, as an extension of the body, but this extension occurs via the wrist, at a point of articulation or dislocation. The moving hand or wrist both performs that “maladresse”<sup>25</sup> inherent in and forming the basis of articulation itself; it performs the embodiment of meaning as inseparable from the impossibility of its embodiment. In other words, the hand performs the condition of meaning’s embodiment, exposing the condition on which meaning *appears* embodied—or *as* it is embodied, or, *as if*<sup>26</sup> it were embodied. This space of appearance is that of representation being put into relief as such, and it is also the place at which the embodiment of sense is also almost threadbare, in which the “tissue” of articulation has almost rubbed through itself, if we turn to the early part of “Effacement du bord droit du coeur” in *Les natures indivisibles*:

le poignet (analogue)  
image  
d’une naissance inverse

à peine visible  
détruite par l’usure

l’espace s’alimentait à une main sèche (84)

The wrist is therefore ever made in its own image, and as image itself—always in parentheses as much as it is in the foreground, in a state of “naissance inverse”: the wrist puts into relief a condition of fiction, of performance. And in this sense, the wrist is also always disappearing into the “blank” of the page (“à peine visible”), its movement so close to the border on which it articulates form, that it nears the enunciation of silence (as we’d also already seen), nearly rubbing itself out, and the page. The moving wrist gets in the middle of and loosens the tight hold of the knot of the opaque “tissue” of formal articulation—aerates, makes space between its fibers—but nevertheless remains within its “tissue,” which is inseparable from that of the body. Or, it almost burns through the page itself (which, like preposition, becomes “essentielle parce que transparente,” to recall), as the volume within a book, the respiration between its pages, or the rush of blood through the heart (for Royet-Journoud, the heart includes a play on the notion of the center as well as on that of the bodily, and, on movement).<sup>27</sup> This emptiness at the center of the articulation is the “creux du langage” as much as it is the “dos,” the give-and-take between hollowness and protrusion akin to the motions of a struggling tongue (*La poésie entière est*

<sup>25</sup>A corresponding phrase shows up in *État*, where Albiach describes an “isolement” accompanied by “encore d’intérences” within the space of the “poignet malhabile” (45).

<sup>26</sup>Here, Robert Kaufman’s articulation of “semblance” has been instrumental to my understanding and reading of the poetry; see especially his “Lyric’s Constellation, Poetry’s Radical Privilege.”

<sup>27</sup>This seems to be the way in which one scene in *Les natures indivisibles* creates an intersection between the spacious and the foundational, where “l’air/sert de table” as well as “de mur,” in between the two, there being barely an interval: “à quoi bon attendre”(40).

*préposition* 30). It also suggests itself as a self-perpetuating, self-engendering—and self-destructing—place: the “main sèche,” resembling the branched roots of a tree (perhaps that of language), posits itself as both life-giving and already empty, dried out. Preposition, as that condition on which embodiment is experienced (but, as such), “[c]’est une sensation que j’ai du mal à saisir, à comprendre,” writes Royet-Journoud; “[m]ais parfois j’en éprouve le contact physique” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 33).

As we’ve seen, preposition is the condition on and the space in which a certain kind of relation to the world is possible that isn’t already dictated by language (and that doesn’t, therefore, already fit into a narrative, that is clear, “neutral”) and that, consequently, is one that is experienced as embodied, albeit as a tension between the necessity for form and for form’s undoing, or of formal open-endedness; as such, preposition is the form of appearance itself. And as such—as a doubling or *mise en relief* of form’s articulation—preposition is indeed like the voice of an understudy, or, always a place-holder that nevertheless makes known, both loud and clear and parenthetically, the fact of itself as a displacement. Preposition, in other words, both constitutes a conjunction and effects a disruption. So, if Royet-Journoud suggests that preposition is also the way in which silence is vocalized in writing (as poetry), making “voice” the enunciation of silence, then it’s voice—as the give-and-take of the writing hand, or the scene of a paradoxically constitutive disarticulation—that also appears as if “embodied” in Royet-Journoud’s texts. “Voice,” as the enunciation of the impossibility to embody meaning, is at once what Royet-Journoud’s poetry makes “audible” and what constitutes a dismemberment at its center: “[l]a voix n’aide pas à reconstituer une charpente. Elle dissout l’ensemble, la fragilise et ne retient que l’apparence” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 29). But this “appearance” is also what is ineffable, it’s what makes silence “audible,” so to speak. When Royet-Journoud seeks to work with “des unités minimales de sens,” it is indeed to present silence, in the form of a performance or staging of formal articulation, as he tells Emmanuel Hocquard: “J’aimerais bien mettre en place une théâtralisation non pas de l’infime, parce que je ne pense pas que ça soit sans ampleur, mais une théâtralisation (*silence*) d’un sens à peine fait, à peine formulable, à peine...” (*Un privé à Tanger* 155-6).

This “théâtralisation” occurs at once at, as, and “within” surface, or within the space of preposition; this space is also a vertical space or edge—like the “dos.” Royet-Journoud’s disruption of the linear articulation of form and his entry into the space of preposition is one in which meanings overlap, denying the possibility of an origin, as “[l]’importance [...] de la préposition vient peut-être aussi du fait que je coupe toutes les autres articulations. Je veux superposer des sens, favoriser des croisements” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 34). This vertical space is one that recalls the mental space—that of “menace,” terror. When thought cannot account for what it confronts, it feels itself as if in free fall or on the edge of a precipice; “[s]i l’on pousse le littéral à l’extrême, comme l’a fait Wittgenstein, on tombe dans la terreur” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 13). And so, the literal is that which “fait peur aux philosophes,” as Hocquard puts it in his conversation with Royet-Journoud; “il y a quelque chose à interroger là [in this fear],” he says, suggesting, too, that literality is at once the provocation of uncertainty and its perpetuation (*Un privé à Tanger*). Royet-Journoud’s work is a serious engagement with the limit of thought in that this limit is one of an awakening to the world—and, with this, an awakening to others in it in a way that might make possible an inter-subjective awareness that isn’t dictated by narratives but might resemble a “superposition” of meanings or perspectives. Accordingly, the kind of experience of mental terror or limbo is one that is not possible to translate, for, “[o]n ne peut voir le rapport de la prose initiale au poème publié. Aucun

manuscrit ne montre un état réel du texte en train de se faire” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 12). This is the way in which we are also “united,” or bound together, in language; Royet-Journoud’s books literalize or stage this fact of sharing a medium through which what is overlooked is the fact of a fundamental incommunicability: “Nous sommes réunis dans la peur. Celle de parler du livre que j’écris et que tu lis. Ou encore l’inverse. On se dit qu’il y eut une ‘vraie’ parole. Mais à quel moment reviendra-t-elle?” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 14). The book, as the product of Royet-Journoud’s hands, reproduces what the letter, or language, does; however, it also allows for the possibility of hope, as the possibility of a return, via its “dead” or dried up pages, to breathe life into something that is shared—silence. Burned up in the hands of the poet (or, the trace of a narrative of an encounter with this silence), the book reaches its readers much like the words on its pages, which, when they are removed from the stiff innervation of prose, “font soudain relief. Ils signalent leur épuisement, leur trop grande utilisation” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 42). Royet-Journoud’s book isn’t possible to place in a narrative other than one that readers must reconstitute as one of reconstitution—but, of a reconstitution that must also be considered in terms of a paring down, or, as a “réduction projective,” in the words of Michèle Cohen-Halimi. As such, Royet-Journoud’s books reach us as opaque objects as much as they reach us as blanks.

### *Vers/récit*

Claude Royet-Journoud’s process of writing a book as a process of paring down and leveling, in order to get to a place of entropy or dispersal—to find the “place” of preposition—is also a narrative that seeks to disappear itself as one but put into relief the substance of narrative, event. The book, as a constant work of putting form into relief and therefore perturbing it, is an enactment of preposition as much as it is the way toward an encounter with preposition (as an encounter with “surface,” or “neutre”). Correspondingly, an arrival at the “place” of preposition is also an arrival to the articulation of preposition, or, a coming unto it *in medias res*: because “[l]e récit est dans la préposition,” preposition should be thought also in terms of an experience of process (*La poésie entière est préposition* 43). But, to Royet-Journoud, poetry is “ce qui n’est pas événementiel;” that is, poetry—as, finally, an entry into the space of and encounter with preposition—is not only the means toward an “arrest” of thought, but also the form and the content of thought’s motions within this arrest, or, of a “narrative” within which those motions are *as such*, or within which a mental space is ever articulating itself, but without the motions of this articulation being inscribed already within any kind of logic. (*La poésie entière est préposition* 10). This kind of articulation or “narrative” action is something that takes the form of an “approche,” “[u]ne masse confuse. On tourne autour. On tente de rassembler des bribes. Il se trame quelque chose d’imprévisible qui vient prolonger l’intrigue” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 33). This is the form in which an answer to the question in *Le renversement*—“échapperons-nous à l’analogie?”—presents itself, constantly. As, also, “un semblant de corps, ou un semblant de déplacement du corps” (*Un privé à Tanger* 156).

While Royet-Journoud sees his books more in terms of sites of performance than of narratives, they nevertheless are performances of narrative. In his conversation with Mathieu Bénézet, for example, Royet-Journoud says: “I think “theatre” is the most exact description of my books, in that they are concerned with characters - a bit like a detective story. I might add, quoting Klossowski: “The words assume postures.” The book and the poem interpenetrate one another via the form of the “story”:

What I'm most interested in is the idea that in the book, there's a story to be told through the intermediary of the poem. This story has characters, plots. I'd like my book to be read the way one reads a detective story. There are clues, there's a crime, there's a body no one can find (...). (Gavronsky 119-20)

Indeed, there is no body to be found, but the reconstitution of this body is also the answer to the question that Royet-Journoud poses in *La poésie entière est préposition*: “Comment fait-on pour capter ce récit qui oscille à l’intérieur du texte. Qui balbutie. Qui tente de trouver une forme, un soufflé” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 42). This “récit” is the articulation of what cannot be said and of its condition of impossibility, silence. It is the narrative of the book’s composition as that of its undoing, its disarticulation: “[l]’intrigue, c’est le tissu qui sépare et relie quatre ou cinq mots-personnages” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 16).

This “semblant de déplacement du corps” is the territory of “le vers.” But “le vers” works within the bounds of “récit,” or, the basis on which form’s disarticulation is felt as a condition of interrelatedness, shimmering, as Michèle Cohen-Halimi here strikingly puts it:

Ce que vise le vers est comme l’envers d’une reconstitution – impossible. Une série d’indices marquent des énoncés implicites, des événements antérieurs, des rencontres demeurées silencieuses. Les ressemblances de syllabes, les symétries de syntaxe, les identités morphologiques, autant d’allusions à ce qui ne se manifeste pas. Les indices n’ont pas de signification par eux-mêmes, ils n’en acquièrent que de manière seconde, par la voie oblique d’une lecture qui les utilise comme repères. L’ensemble des indices se multiplie à l’infini à mesure qu’avance et s’unifie le récit avec lequel ils ne se confondent pas. Ils apparaissent en vertu d’une indication probable et ne sont que la méthode de reconstitution d’un contenu présumé latent ou d’un sens supposé originaire. Ce sens lui-même, on ne peut pas le mettre au jour. C’est le mouvement de sa saisie qui fonde la présomption de son existence: “la transparence est un leurre.” Ainsi commence la visée du vers. (*Je te continue ma lecture* 67-8)

“Le vers,” then, constitutes the form of a promise of a projected whole—without, however, falling into a fulfillment of this promise; “[l]e vers porte au-delà et cependant reste” (*Je te continue ma lecture* 69). Cohen-Halimi refers to the “vers” as the unit by which representation is put into relief as such—or, the circumstance in which “la transparence est un leurre;” as such, it is also the circumstance of a shaken frame of reference, or an imagined whole that coincides with itself insofar as it appears out of lock with itself, and emergent: “[c]onceptuellement comment le sens visé peut anticiper sur lui-même (prolepse) et résumer sa singularité dans un corps, qui ne saurait le (re)constituer que bougé” (*Je te continue ma lecture* 69).

“Le vers” functions according to the rule of preposition. And as such, it is the formal condition on which thought too is in constant, disjunctive coincidence with itself; the movement of prolepsis that leaves a trace of itself, and then becomes the basis of its own dissolution as it repeats the gesture of return and aimed reconstitution (one that nevertheless is headed for disarticulation) is a motion of coming and going. These “allées et venues du mental et de la fable” are also the substance of “récit,” which, in carrying the network of indexing, mutually resonating forms that Cohen-Halimi describes, tries to say something—tends in the direction of it, but is ever the returning appearance of such a gesture of enunciation (“[Pour Emilio Araújo]”

22). This is what Royet-Journoud calls “[l]a seule ‘vérité,’ [or,] le mouvement. Le mouvement, pas le rythme” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 41). This movement the way in which the book—even when broken down—is the frame within which “unities” of meaning are constantly appearing as in relation to one another; this kind of pared-down (not logically determined) association has as its literal version the smoothness of a writing hand moving across the surface of the page, the air between the surface of the page warmed; in the book as in writing, Royet-Journoud “rattache les gestes les uns aux autres” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 15). It’s in this way that what he articulates—the “récit” at the heart of the book, or, that which is encountered when surface is finally touched, and entropy encountered—is the inarticulable, or, the moment when Royet-Journoud can say: “Je n’ai pas de langue pour autre chose (que ce que je fais)” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 40). “Récit,” as the continued oscillation between unification and dispersal, ending and beginning is the basis of not only the “vers” but also the book. “Récit” is indivisible; it occurs as the instantiation of “[l]e mot FIN pour que ce qui suit devienne ce qui precede” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 23). This justifies Royet-Journoud’s aim to “[d]évelopper à partir de cette notion d’indivisibilité une idée du vers, de la séquence, du livre” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 24). Correspondingly, even though Royet-Journoud is very conscious of *when* a book ends,<sup>28</sup> the book itself is akin to a movement through which its ending becomes not a fixed point and an anchor for another book, but a dispersal on whose basis something new can arise to begin with, as he puts it in *La poésie entière est préposition*: “J’attends pour écrire que le livre precedent me devienne illisible” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 10). Even in between books, there is volume, respiration—and, the inarticulable, or, a transition whose logic cannot be accounted for, but which arises as the “trace” of a narrative that is already in oscillation “with” itself, in resonance, but according to no prior condition.

The indivisibility upon which the book, and “vers,” are based nevertheless come into light in terms of accident. That is, the way in which preposition manifests itself—through the form of “le vers,” and, within the greater “logic” of “récit” as that which runs through both preposition and “le vers”—is put into relief as a reversal of a teleological order. This reversal suggests itself in the form of dividedness, or of a division of form that is palpable as the unforeseen. It’s accident that puts form into relief as such, or makes it legible: “[l]es accidents sont essentiels. Ils sont ce qui donne la forme et sa lisibilité” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 29). So, while “récit” isn’t a narrative in the sense of one whose course is possible to determine, the way in which Royet-Journoud works with form—cutting out prose, leaving certain words in tact, working with resemblance—in turn functions to put “récit” into relief: it appears as if accident is what is necessary for the “le vers” to be operative. “Chercher les accidents que la langue ne cesse de provoquer au-dessous de la surface”: this is the way in which it seems Royet-Journoud works with “les unités minimales de sens” and in which he allows for a “semblant du déplacement du corps” to manifest itself as well, and, for silence to emerge as well, as the condition on which displacement comes to be apparent (*La poésie entière est préposition* 34). Accident becomes the motive force revealing a crime that hadn’t before been known but is ever intimated; what is constantly revealed, however, is an encounter with appearance itself, or with revelation—and this, in turn, is the condition on which the possibility of the reconstitution of a whole becomes palpable as impossible (to return to Cohen-Halimi’s words). This is the baffling yet clear point at which

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<sup>28</sup>In his interview with Natacha Michel for *Le Perroquet*, Royet-Journoud says: “Quand un livre est achevé, on le sait, on le reconnaît. On sent physiquement quand un poème commence et quand il s’arrête. Un texte est connu quand tu en vois la totalité, c’est comme reconnaître un corps à la morgue.”



l'éblouissement  
face à la nature du crime  
un simulacre épuse le sol (*Théorie des prépositions* 13)

“Récit” is the way in which legibility and illegibility weave in and out of one another; “le vers” is the formal, structural way in which accident arises and in turn points out to the drama of “récit” as one that can never reveal the “body” at the scene of the crime. Only the “scene” is ever revealed: “le corps porte le blanc de la fiction qui le divise,” as Anne-Marie Albiach puts it (her words appear alone on one of the pages of Royet-Journoud’s *La poésie entière est préposition* (19)). The “blank” is the place of thought’s passage through and alongside itself (a palce of an “allée” and a “venue”); as such, it is also the condition on which thought appears to itself as such, but one on which the question of how this appearance takes place also returns. And it returns in and as “récit.”

This moment of oscillation—of coming and going—is one in which “le temps du vers, comme le tremblement d’un pur present, est le lieu arrêté où l’existence se temporalise,” writes Michèle Cohen-Halimi, continuing, in quotation marks: “dans l’hors-jeu de la répétition” (*Je te continue ma lecture* 69). “Le vers” is the unit by which it is possible to “[r]essaisir le temps à l’envers” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 40). It is there that “récit” is also palpable. Eric Pesty, who takes into account the narrative of Royet-Journoud’s entire tetralogy—which includes *Le renversement*, *La notion d’obstacle*, *Les objets contiennent l’infini*, and *Les natures indivisibles*—puts this condition into relief, but from the perspective of a critic. “Le vers,” as a moment of pure *presence*, as such, is also one that, while not an event, is of the nature of event, is also the condition on which the present as it arises arises as a question, or as that which thought cannot account for. Correspondingly, each book coming to us from Royet-Journoud must be seen as arriving at, and therefore fundamentally expressing, this open-endedness. It is necessary to reconstitute the “narrative” by which this open-endedness was achieved; “il s’agit,” writes Pesty, “de poser la question capital du récit pour l’inaccompli que constitue la structuration des livres” (Pesty 29). Doing so puts into relief that which the book opens up onto, which is with the question: “Où commence le poème? Qu’y a-t-il *avant* le premiers vers?”

This question is one that cannot but return. While thought may find its moment of arrest in the disjunctive space of preposition, it this arrest is one in which the pulsation of the question’s return is also felt; this is where “on compte dans l’obscur” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 38). “Récit” appears to be that which “houses” or is the basis of a “une théâtralisation (*silence*) d’un sens à peine fait;” and “récit” occurs as movement—undetermined. “Ce n’est que lorsqu’on met le pied sur l’âme de la corde que le récit se déploie,” writes Royet-Journoud; “Avant cela, il n’y a que des fragments de sens et l’on voit rien de ce qui noue l’intrigue” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 29). Royet-Journoud states that the only “vérité” is “movement,” not rhythm. Within movement, there is rhythm, by which endings and beginnings are possible to determine as such:

Quand même la poésie est comptée, le rythme est compté et le poète un comptable, j’ai l’impression qu’il y a quelque chose entre la respiration et la non respiration. Quelque chose entre vie et mort. Quand un livre est achevé, on le sait, on le reconnaît. On sent physiquement quand un poème commence et quand il s’arrête. Un texte est connu quand

tu en vois la totalité, c'est comme reconnaître un corps à la morgue" (Interview with Michel).

But it is movement, as the overarching structure within which a book comes to come and go, and its volume expands, that allows for and contains the rhythms of the poet's work.

While the poet may be arrested by rhythm, this rhythm occurs within the frame of something greater and inarticulable, "récit." "Récit" furnishes the possibility of immobility such that the world suddenly arises as itself, for "récit" is itself *not* according to a way of seeing, but works in reverse, as preposition, and on the basis of "le vers":

L'immobilité de celui qui écrit met le monde en mouvement.

C'est dans la mesure même où l'on est arrêté dans une immobilité voyeuse que les choses sont mobiles. La pensée aussi n'existe que par rapport à un arrêt qui est un blanc. Joë Bousquet a écrit: *ce paralytique a fait un trou dans l'espace*. Écrire, c'est faire ce trou dans l'espace. Tout part de l'immobilité, de ce travail d'attention qui est également un travail corporel. Le funambule a le même problème, il tente de réunir le mouvement et l'arrêt, de trouver le juste équilibre entre eux. La table de l'écrivain est mentale, c'est une façon de savoir s'arrêter, de commencer en sachant qu'il n'y a aucun origine. Écrire est un métier d'ignorance.

le silence est une forme

(*La poésie est préposition 9*)

Silence is a form—one that arises from the "trou dans l'espace," and one that is felt as the "blanc" within "body," or, as that which cannot be said, as a meaning that cannot be embodied, but whose embodiment is essayed in and as the question of "escaping" analogy, finding an equilibrium between form's determination and its overthrow. In between is the dark space of "réduction projective," contained in the palm of the hand—a dark, fecund "blanc."

This is also the place of literality, the place where, to recall the words of Hocquard, "il y a quelque chose à interroger." That which is the question is also that which arises as the answer, but that which arises as the answer is only ever legible as the need to reconstitute a narrative, for it arises as accident, as Royet-Journoud notices:

... plus je lis Wittgenstein, plus je me demande ce que j'y comprends... finalement ce qui m'intéresse c'est ce mystère de la littéralité. J'ouvre le *Tractatus*; je vois: "*Le monde est tout ce qui arrive*"; je suis content. Ça va avec ce que je pense de l'accident par exemple, de la possibilité d'écriture, de la lecture du monde uniquement par ce fil, ce tranchant qu'est l'accident. L'accident est notre seule possibilité de lisible. "*Le monde est tout ce qui arrive.*" (*Un privé à Tanger 162-3*)

In the *Tractatus*, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (a favorite, in many regards, of Emmanuel Hocquard) writes: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." For Royet-Journoud, silence must be made; it is a form of passage as much as it is that which is passed over. It is the body, restituted, or, that which is unsayable seen as such. Poetry is a condition of remembrance, but one that makes itself felt as that which can only ever be felt in,

and alongside, the present. In allowing an encounter with the world (no strings attached), poetry is an encounter with memory—a blank “détruite par l’usure.”

*The Body of Lyric: Horizon, Remembered*

...il y a peut-être un corps sacrifié dans l’écriture. Mais sacrifié en vue d’une réapparition.

...il semblerait qu’il y aurait une sorte de musique que moi je transcris par “voix,” et qui serait dans la mémoire...enfin purement mémorielle.

—Anne-Marie Albiach in *L’exact réel*

***Introduction: “énigme” as the confluence of body, lyric, and memory***

With its unpronounceable first letter, Anne-Marie Albiach’s first book, *État*, makes plain the fact that there is no way “into” the literal: literality is impossible to articulate and is the articulation of a form of impossibility. Literality is, in other words, “énigme.” Correspondingly, the term is the title of the opening section of *État*. Literality puts into relief the absence of an origin or beginning, exposing beginning as already disjunctive, already a misalignment. Albiach’s letter forces us to read *à la lettre*, that is, to recognize language as the site of a fundamental lack of origin; the impossibility to begin pits us in a space of dispersal and fundamental multiplicity instead. Albiach explains this in a conversation with Jean Daive:

... l’italique intervient ici pour détruire le mot. C’est-à-dire pour lui enlever sa signification première et permettre de multiples significations. Avec l’italique il est impossible de prononcer vraiment le mot, il devient imprononçable. (...) On le prononce quand même parce qu’on ne peut pas faire autrement, mais en fait il est... il devient visuel: on peut le prononcer mentalement mais je ne vois pas comment on peut prononcer une italique qui commence un mot. (*L’exact réel* 32)

Albiach’s poetry issues from the “place” articulated by the italicized first letter of *État*: it is the exposure and encounter with a fundamental and definitive speechlessness, an impossibility to *say*. By dramatizing this impossibility to say in the form of an unpronounceable letter that cannot leave our lips, Albiach puts into relief a discursive limit in terms of the body, and as the body’s relation to itself. “Evidenced” at, and as, a limit of expression, “énigme” therefore occupies the “position” at which expression is possible to begin with, and it thereby designates the “place” of lyric and is the way in which lyric is a condition of possibility. We might take Albiach’s description of the structure of *État*, in which Albiach designates discursive forms in terms of characters, describing there to be “une intrusion de personnages, qui donnent un aspect concret à un texte qui en apparence resterait abstrait. Mais je pense que les personnages sont nécessaires puisqu’ils incarnent les voix, ou les voix les incarnent” (*L’exact réel* 24). This description speaks

to Albiach's poetry as a dramatization, and therefore a concretization, of the discursive as a space that is possible unto itself in that it is the arena of potential and possible articulations, configurations, junctures, and disjunctures. Speech is presented in terms of its possibilities, as agents or figures endowed with a life of their own, with an energy of action or performance. This space, as the plurality of figures whose intersections cross and put it into relief as a disjointed unity, also becomes apparent as a condition of possibility that is being articulated in terms of the body, or in terms of corporeality, that is, in terms of the embodiment of meaning.

Taking as its center Albiach's presentation of the body, we will move through two apparently opposed facets of lyric, suggesting that they may be seen in terms of night (a falling into shadows, a retraction) and day (or exposure or affirmation), and that in between the two can be found something like voice that is ever in tension with itself, ever alongside itself. This night-and-day tension can be seen as the horizon on which "énigme" teeters and is "posed," as a question that both answers itself and seeks to be answered, presents itself and turns away, and in this sense, is the form of desire and the form of thought. Within and "as" this horizon is memory. Albiach's poetry is an expression of the fact that the past *must* be taken into account, a relation to it *must* be made and taken into account. This requirement is one that itself cannot but occur in a temporal register even though it does not appear within a narrative or a history to which it can ever belong. This requirement is one that nourishes Albiach's work as a poet and is one that we as readers can keep alive—and thus keep the body alive, as necessarily divided.

### *Body*

The body, in the context of Albiach's poetry, isn't therefore to be taken in the most common sense of the term (that is, as a person's physical body and its limbs). Rather, the body, as already divided, is the expression of a form of disruption, or an embodiment of division; it "speaks" of life, and time, as divided. The body refers to a disrupted "whole" as regards a narrative that cannot provide a unified vision of reality, be this a collective narrative or a the narrative of a single life by which the world, or one's place in it, can be conceived of cohesively, according to a sense, or in terms of a self-justifying unity—one that has already been scripted, so to speak. Going back to Albiach's description of the scene of figure-voices, we might notice that Albiach describes its energy in terms of an intrusion: the action on "stage" isn't smooth, predictable. It suggests a necessary violence, a violence that is vital and that allows there to be a "body" of intersections to arise to begin with. The "body" can also refer to the always-missing, and missed, wholeness of identity:

Jean Daive – Il y a deux mots qui reviennent assez souvent dans vos derniers textes, ce sont les mots personnage et reference. Est-ce qu'ils posent le problème de l'identité?

Anne-Marie Albiach – Oui. Disons le problème d'une identité qui ne tiendrait pas compte de la relation de cause à effet. D'une identité hors du discours logique. Mais peut-être c'est le problème d'une identité multiple, en fait, toujours double. D'où les personnages, qui reviennent sans cesse. Les personnages sont des simulacres d'identité, c'est-à-dire qu'ils sont désirés et en même temps perçus comme un peu effrayant, porteurs d'une certaine destruction et d'une certaine élaboration. Ce sont eux qui prennent la parole, et qui la prennent à celui qui écrit. Pour la donner à celui qui lit, peut-être? ... Ou la reprendre à celui qui lit. Or celui qui écrit est toujours en train de lire. Donc il y a ce

rapport en spirale par rapport à celui qui écrit, à ce qui est écrit. En fait, ce qui essaie de se dégager, c'est un certain sens du risque. (*L'exact réel* 33)

Writing becomes the way in which an attempt to clear or release a “sens du risque” pits this the latter in its substance. Writing is a dramatization of the approach toward a wholeness that is promises. But this dramatization only serves to hollow out a space within which an attainment of that which is sought is at best uncertain, overshadowed, and writing becomes “une ligne médiane” on which the articulation of identification takes place but also seems to fall or sink—“sombrier”—into the substance of this line, a line formed in the shadow of the writing hand, or black with ink. The line remains a contour that mirrors or “says” back its own impossibility to shake itself, something that this moment in “Travail vertical et blanc,” published in 2007 in Albiach’s last book, *Figurations de l’image*, records:

“tu es là  
sombre”  
dans une ligne médiane ils cherchent leur corps; “tu effectues des gestes par lesquels  
tu t’approches ou te retires” il n’est pas en ton pouvoir  
d’annihiler le contour (18)

Writing is as much a fall into uncertainty and shadow as it is a “work vertical and white,” or the work of the hand as it moves down across the page, a work that is therefore also one that makes evident to and as itself the blank at the heart of the body whose restitution it apparently seeks but uncovers as an impossibility, a gaping hole: “lèvres ouvertes, taches, brûlures: cette/ représentation corporelle devenait interdite” (“Travail vertical et blanc” 19). The body is fraught, but alive, undetermined save for its embroilment in the constraints of its own articulation, like the first letter of *État*, divided already by an “intrusive” inclination in a direction that issues from no articulable ground.

### *Lyric*

This impossibility of a whole to “say” or perform itself, to arrive at closure, is, then, substantive. It is body. Body is the form of a relation that designates itself. Lyric, then, is as much a condition of possibility as it is a tension that is constitutive of the body, one that cannot but maintain an oscillation between its own articulation and disarticulation, and as such, is also the site of memory. For Albiach, lyric is the expression of a tension constitutive of the corporeal insofar as corporeality is, as we’ve been coming to see, the articulation of a tension between wholeness and division. But in allowing this tension to be seen as the limit of representation (of speech, of vision, of recollection, even of writing), Albiach also presents it as a tension that takes the form of a relation to limit itself: “[c]est surtout la représentation qui est primordiale,” she says (*L'exact réel* 101). Representation is first, original. And in this sense, it presents itself as *already* representation, that is, representation, but of nothing prior. This means that the way in which “énigme” appears or shows up—or just shows—takes the form of that which is initially a copy, but of no original. If, as Albiach suggests, language is the site of a fundamental absence or lack of origin, then this lack is one that necessarily points itself out linguistically, and cannot but do so, positing itself as an insistence, or as a form of return that therefore keeps on returning, is incessantly interrupting itself. The last page of “*Énigme*” suggests as much: at the top margin,

there seems to be, unwaveringly pinned mid-air, the unwavering cry at once signaling the news of something arriving and performing this state of arrival. But this archetypal firstness seems to be exposed as the constant coming-up of “l’autre,” which incessantly figures as “le premier” and therefore is a constant assertion of the immaculacy or virginity of the narrative of its arrival as such:

## NOUVELLE

l’autre  
le premier  
de la trame sa pureté  
une (14)

“Énigme” is therefore necessarily imbricated in, yet also always separate from, a narrative—a narrative *as if* it were “its” narrative. “Une”—neither unambiguously singular (in the sense of separate or individual) nor indefinite (and thus single, and lent stability by this). As the presentation of appearance, “énigme” requires temporality but also annuls it by disrupting the possibility of its being anchored in the form of a coherent narrative. The only narrative that it offers is one that constantly presents a question, the way one might feel in stopping at a crime scene, and seeing only traces of something that had happened without knowing what it was or what these traces are indicative of: “toutes les évidences lui sont mystère” (*État* 14).<sup>29</sup>

### *Memory*

Literality therefore also requires narrative but requires its shattering just as much. The intersection of these two paradoxically related extremes is—and necessarily so, a requirement at once made and voided—memory. Memory, for Albiach, is then also an expression of representation as primordial, i.e., as original, but apparent only in the form of a return, as that which is derivative but which evidences no first root. Body and lyric, both figured in terms of a tension between wholeness and division, are therefore not only possible to see in terms of memory, but also require to be seen this way, cannot but be seen this way. And memory, then, is a relation that “destroys” itself from the inside out, or that destroys itself as something that can trace itself back to an origin. Memory is, instead, a restitution with respect to its own form, and is therefore the form of a tracing. In “Travail vertical et blanc,” Albiach presents memory as the basis of relation and the space in which it is possible simply to be in relation, to feel the

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<sup>29</sup>Michael Palmer’s translation of Albiach’s line as it appears in his *Code of Signals* (as quoted by Claude Royet-Journoud in a conversation with Emmanuel Hocquard) reads, “all clues are mystery to him” (13). It is possible, then, to take the line of poetry in terms of an encounter with literality (as by a character in a story, trying to solve a mystery or a crime) or in terms of literality’s own paradoxically concurrent imperviousness and transparency vis-à-vis itself.

constraint (“une étreinte”) of something *like* the recursive without this constraint determining or giving form to that which happens in relation to it. Instead, memory clears the space in which something can happen, can arrive, to begin with:

à cet endroit où les images s’effacent  
s’avère une terre ;  
une étreinte une réminiscence comme si  
l’on attendait dans l’épuisement le lever  
du jour (20)

Memory too, then, occurs in, and as, a “ligne médiane”—a horizon. The horizon that shows itself to be is a “terre,” fecund, anticipatory. What proves itself to be, reveals itself, or appears (“s’avère”) is a place of no beginning. As its own ground, but as that which is already divided and dividing from itself, this place is—like the body, which is the “origin” of lyric, and vice versa—one that is performed. It is the space of fiction, of theatre.

### *Theatre*

Albiach translates the title of her book *Mezza Voce* as “à mi-voix” (*L’exact réel* 42). She explains that the title is “un contrepoint avec le contenu du livre” because “c’est un livre assez violent” (*L’exact réel* 47). But Albiach also says that “*Mezza Voce* est voix théâtrale” (*L’exact réel* 102). Albiach’s descriptions indicate that theater assumes the function of mediating and capturing a certain energy in her poetry. The tendency toward dispersal that we’ve begun to get a sense of is maintained in the form of performance, or as a limit that, as presentation itself, both reaches its height and is tempered because it remarks upon its own parameters. Jean Daive’s versions of the title suggest as much. To him, *Mezza Voce* means “‘à bruit secret’ ... ‘à bruit secret’ baroque, théâtral, exposé à la trajectoire de la représentation. *Mezza Voce*, c’est-à-dire l’ébruitement des choses” (*L’exact réel* 102). “Ébruitement” designates disclosure, leaking, divulgence, as if an answer had begun to be given. This word is illustrative of the *mise en relief* that Albiach’s poetry both exposes and hinges on, for the “scene” on which representation is put into relief in Albiach’s poetry is one that discloses itself—already breaking its own margins or boundaries, as an expanding territory whose form is impossible to capture, “baroque.” Theater, then, can be seen in terms of the substance holding together the confluence of body, lyric, and memory (the latter indicating the form of a trajectory).

Theater puts into relief these three aspects of Albiach’s poetry as much as it is itself put into relief by them. What is rendered apparent is also the appearance of that which cannot ever fully appear; that body, lyric, and memory all intersect on this horizon and stage can serve to frame our future readings of Albiach’s poetry in terms of its value as a text *to* be read (a text left as a trace of a work that was not our own to begin with). Theater, then, can be seen as a function of desire. Correspondingly, the body, in Albiach’s work, is made apparent in its two aspects: as that which is not already bridled by language, or as that which takes shape, and that which is, as Jean Daive describes it, “une habitation du langage” (*L’exact réel* 9). Literality is the expression of a tension that is constitutive of the body and the way in which this tension is rendered apparent. This tension is the body’s desire to “inhabit” itself. It is desire itself, of which the poem becomes a trace, as Daive here explains:

La bouche est fermée, reste fermée, parce que le désir de la vraie vie est impossible à exprimer. Donc ce que je lis – lorsque je lis *État*, *Mezza Voce*, *L'EXCÈS: cette mesure* – relève d'un alphabet des restes, désinvestis du désir. Un langage se constitue avec cette dimension que l'autre reconnaît comme action érotique. La bouche est parlée. Pourquoi la bouche est-elle fermée? Parce que la question est muette et que la réponse se fait à bouche fermée. L'économie de la jouissance s'appelle poème. (*L'exact réel* 11)

It is via and as this tension inherent in the body that the body is also the site of its own dispossession: the mouth is excluded from itself insofar as it is a function of speaking. What “speaks,” what is put into relief, is this exclusion, as the mouth—closed. Daive thus suggests that voice is an expression of body, body being that which is already constrained. Speech is a dramatization of expression and an exposition of the duality (yet intrinsic interdependence) of body and the letter, or language. By putting into relief the boundary on which this duality is articulated, Albiach's poetry presents this boundary as present within its own atmosphere, as a boundary leaking something tertiary: this boundary becomes a *space* of desire. This spacious boundary is a coincidence of desire perpetuated, or thought's indeterminacy. It shows up, in *État*, as production of “impondérables du désir”: between figure and quality, the space of enigma is the space of figuration (13).

***Body: caesura, or “déperdition perpétuelle”***

How is this space “spoken,” then, in *Mezza Voce*? Albiach describes to Daive the way in which *Mezza Voce* is a dramatization or literalization of the various aspects of performance in the name of creating a fiction—or, of presenting representation as representation takes place, and in so doing, laying bare a space or “scène” in which what becomes evident is an inarticulable multiplicity that surpasses the single voice and instead presents itself as an aspecting of voice or voices:

Jean Daive – Vous vous servez du théâtre pour couvrir, effacer la parole, ou bien ce sont deux approches différentes, parallèles, le théâtre et la parole...

Anne-Marie Albiach – Deux approches différentes, le théâtre et la parole. J'essaie d'en faire une seule approche.

Jean Daive – Quand vous écrivez “*dans le retrait de la parole/Plusieurs VOIX*”

Anne-Marie Albiach – C'est encore la fiction. C'est la fiction “*dans le retrait de la parole/Plusieurs VOIX*” ... c'est-à-dire qu'il y a une sorte de multiplication du un, du il ou du elle qui se tait et alors surgit une sorte de chœur.

Jean Daive – D'aspect choral.

Anne-Marie Albiach – D'aspect choral ou antique. (*L'exact réel* 48)

This “aspect choral” bears correspondence with the first italic of *État*, and with the space within which “toutes les évidences lui son mystère”: this is the space within which “parole” is possible, the space being cleared for it, yet, within which it is impossible to trace back to a single speaker or origin of speech or to decipher what is being said, as nothing arrives as a message.

This lack of origin is also what Albiach describes in terms of a root, but, one that is necessarily already splintered. This root is at once the source of writing and the expression of lyric:



Jean Daive – Qu'est-ce que vous entendez par "ancêtre"?

Anne-Marie Albiach – "Ancêtre," c'est la racine.

Jean Daive – De quoi?

Anne-Marie Albiach – C'est la racine de l'écriture. C'est la racine du désir, du mouvement, du lyrisme, c'est vraiment où je puiserai toutes les forces possibles. Une fois parcourue cette descente, comme une renaissance, comme un phénix. (*L'exact réel* 48-9)

This "descente" should be taken in the context of Albiach's rapprochement of *Mezza Voce* to Mallarmé's *Igitur*: "il faut lire *Mezza Voce* comme une descente vers nos ancêtres pour éteindre la bougie," she tells Daive (*L'exact réel* 47). *Igitur* seeks to blow out the candle and so, to die in order to begin again—for he, "croyant à l'existence du seul Absolu, s'imagine être partout dans un rêve" and "Il agit au point de vue Absolu" (*Igitur* 32). Albiach enacts the "point de vue Absolu" as a scene that cannot terminate, or, as a candle that cannot be blown out: this "place" of énigme." It is also the place of the body, already divided, in its own shadow. The ancestor does not exist, but the ancestral—the inarticulate, that which allows us to speak but which cannot be spoken—does.

The division that is essential to the body, or lyric, is, for Albiach, the page. Here, we can begin to see how aspects of "énigme" can become traceable to the way in which Albiach writes her poetry and to the way in which this becomes an analogue to the form that her texts take on the page. In a radio interview with her friend and fellow poet Jean Daive, Anne-Marie Albiach speaks to the fundamental importance of the page in her poetry:

La fonction de la page est primordiale. En fait elle est un support concret. De par sa limite, sa compacité, elle est un peu comme une page musicale: c'est un peu comme si elle comportait des portées sur lesquelles s'inscriraient des notes. Je vois la... la page comme... la matière du discours. Je pense que le discours engendre une scène, ou l'inverse. Et cette scène c'est l'orchestration, qui revient sans cesse, qui est organisée par les pronoms, par les italiques, par les mises entre guillemets, par les rejets des mots, par les blancs. Tout cela constitue le discours et en même temps un discours qui est donné sous forme de mise en scène... de théâtre. (*L'exact réel* 23-4)

The page is the "matter" of discourse—or, speech. And the page, a "body" on which a musical score appears. Or, from which a performance—a scene—is born, arises. This performance constitutes speech, or the articulations that occur within the "fabric" of discourse, as much as it is the form or aspect of speech, or its appearance, in both senses of the latter term. Albiach's poetry lays bare and renders the parameters within which speech is native, original. These parameters, or this condition, are its performance, which Albiach also presents as a drama or fiction. Speech is a *gesture* of speaking, and its possibility is only real insofar as it occurs not according to constraints, but within their workings, as the opening of "'Théâtre,'" from *Mezza Voce*, here illustrates:

LA DISTANCE, L'OUVERTURE

l'explication des centres  
le genre

double

la distance exacerbe le mouvement  
dans la PAROLE que tu lui donnes

The scene continues as the space of “théâtre,” or the space within which “le mouvement” is put into relief, which the quotation marks around the poem’s title already imply. “Parole,” capitalized as if to suggest its archetypal status, appears as a condition for its own emergence, and arises as its own possibility in and as the space of “la distance, l’ouverture.” The comma between these last two terms also suggests the space of a breath taken between the two, as a body might begin to move in a gesture of respiration and so come to life. And it does, repeatedly, as a “ponctualité,” or to its own “time,” so to speak, as the articulation of a partial retreat or *mise en abîme* of the body’s fundamental dividedness (the scene continues):

: le geste *dévore*

une fiction blanche reprend sa ponctualité

indistincts ils élaborent des retraits partiels

#### DÉNOUENT DES LIENS ACCESSIBLES (89-90)

The space within which “parole” is possible yet rendered as its own retreat and the clearing of a space within which speech is possible and body emerges can also be seen in terms of fiction: it is only within the space of *mise en abîme* (fiction), that a “geste”—an impulse of emergence—can “devour” itself, so to speak, in showing up *as* it does, in both senses of the word. In this way, it arises as “une fiction blanche,” or, fiction as such, which is at once real and,

as Albiach here explains to Daive, “le comble de la fiction,” or where fiction itself arises as that which is tipping over, visible as a turning away, in retreat:

Jean Daive – (...) il y a des mots comme voix, théâtre, appareil, éblouissements vocaux et cependant, écrivez-vous, “la FICTION n’a plus cours.”

Anne-Marie Albiach – Oui.

Jean Daive – Donc c’est qu’elle a eu cours?

Anne-Marie Albiach – Elle a eu cours. Mais quand je dis “la FICTION n’a plus cours” en fait elle a cours en disant “la FICTION n’a plus cours.” C’est la fiction suprême. Quand j’énonce, quand l’écrivain énonce “la FICTION n’a plus cours,” c’est que la fiction est à son comble. (*L’exact réel* 47)

Albiach literalizes the performance of speech by using deictics—grammatical, written, typographical—to present the motions and impulses of discourse visually and linguistically, and to dramatize discursive situations. In other words, her poetry presents the discursive as, and at, the chiasmus between language and image.

The figure of the chiasmus can be useful to consider here because it is an intersection that doesn’t quite occur, or a relation that can’t close itself; it can therefore help us to imagine the body as a meeting place and the place in which meeting is disrupted somehow, imperfect. The “center” of this chiasmus is at once the “blank” space of the page and the drama born of it: as it shows through (as if between the cracks), “body” arises as a function of this chiasmus, arising, however, as already having receded. The body is born, paradoxically, of that which it also bears (theatre, fiction—or scene). Albiach’s inversion of language puts into relief the fact that, on the one hand, language already “speaks” through individuals and, on the other hand, that individuals are also speakers of it—and that it is possible to create the space within which “imponderable,” alternative ways of seeing are possible; or, to put it differently, a language can instill difference (reify it), but it is also the way in which a body can appear when the parameters within which sense arises are put into relief, “mis en jeu.” Albiach makes visible “le déroulement du discours comme une mise en jeu,” this “mise en jeu” being the space of a movement or “respiration” that is not centered:

Mais une mise en jeu où se joue vraiment la respiration de son propre corps à travers l’écriture. À partir du moment où le corps prend lieu sur la page, il respire pour soi, mais en fait il est aussi défait de soi, pas tellement pour l’autre, mais pour les autres [the “personnages” in Albiach’s poem]. Même si les autres se réduit à deux ou trois. Deux ou trois personnages. En fait il y a peut-être un corps sacrifié dans l’écriture. (*L’exact réel* 25)

If Albiach’s poetry presents speech as emergent, it exposes speech as in relation to itself, presenting the discursive as a scene of articulation as well as one of disarticulation. Speech inhabits and expresses a constitutive tension and occurs on an indistinct boundary. This tension therefore both subtends and permeates the “page musicale” and as such is the basis of lyric. As such, it is *already* lyric’s expression: lyric is the exposition of body as divided, or the “terme

d'indivision.” The body, in other words, must be made to appear. Albiach’s poetry is the making of this appearance. This means that a purely formalist reading of her texts is not possible to accommodate fully but is allowable only insofar as it is inflected. That is, the form of Albiach’s texts indicates the limits of form, and therefore of reading. A quotation by Michael Davidson that Claude Royet-Journoud includes in his notebooks is helpful to illustrate this point: “...the page must first be seen in order to be made invisible” (*La poésie entière est préposition* 39).

The page being made “seen” is dramatized in *Mezza Voce* as theater. While *État* presents lyric in terms of a division, *Mezza Voce* puts into relief and dramatizes this same division in terms of a scene, or, as Jean Daive clarifies in a conversation with Albiach, “un jeu ... [qui] nécessite de[s] personnages, des sujets”:

Jean Daive - Alors *État* se présente comme une partition.

Anne-Marie Albiach - Oui. Et *Mezza Voce* a encore un sens musical.

Jean Daive - Mais aplani, c’est-à-dire que des choses-événements se passent sur une scène.

Anne-Marie Albiach - C’est théâtral... (*L’exact réel* 42-3)

“C’est théâtral.” Albiach’s words here are suggestive because the “partition” of *État* becomes endowed with the qualitative, and this functions as a “force” of lyric:

Jean Daive - ...quelle est l’énergie de votre théâtre?

Anne-Marie Albiach: C’est le lyrisme. Parce qu’un mouvement lyrique toujours à la fois attire et repousse ces personnages – anonymes – dans leur retrait et dans leur présence. (*L’exact réel* 43-4)

In *Mezza Voce*’s “Répétition,” the body is the “site” of the rift within which the multiplicity of characters (or engenderments, roots of articulation) is active. This rift is possible with repetition, or, in the space of fiction. Indeed, Albiach figures the articulations of the body in terms of “une relation entre le corps et les nombres – les chiffres du corps – le corps étant vu comme composé de chiffres et d’articulations” (*L’exat réel* 29). She goes on to suggest that “l’écriture fait violence au corps et le corps s’en défend (...) Et peut-être que les nombres sont les garde-fous,” suggesting that writing, for her, is the dramatization of language, made apparent on the page. Here, the body appears in terms of a multiplicity of wounds, the third person pronoun and first word of the poem referring to the title, “Répétition”:

“elle accentue l’ouverture

restreinte”

qui s’approche  
l’éblouissement

depuis la chambre: obscure:

## LE CORPS S'EXPOSE DANS LE SOMMEIL À DES BELLESURES INFIMES (53)

These wounds are the way in which the body effects a disappearance: this disappearance cannot be the body's "own" if it is contingent upon it. "[L]'ouverture" therefore remains "restreinte": the possibility of *other* meanings, and thus of articulation, remains intact. The body performs itself as both the subject and the object of its own drama, like the empty, or "blank" space of the stage. And the body is constantly casting itself off, which recalls the motions of "dénouement" we just witnessed in "Théâtre." This casting off is at once anticipated, as a "souhait," and that which already occurs, as "déchet," that which is between the two terms being "opéras," or, the performance of speech torn between its arrival and departure:

*"de terreur elle lui souhaitait*

*tremblements*

*opéras*

*déchets*

il dédouble sa momification" (53)

The body is the place of an absolute "cut," or a caesura; this caesura is at the heart of *Mezza Voce*: the body, as the site of its own articulation *as such*—and therefore the space of the possible—is also the site in which an absolute silence is articulated, as that which is "held" as possible to say and as the form of the unsayable, the infinite. The body is the site of a caesura that has always defined it, or, is "ancienne":

## L'ÉCART

*Ils ressentiaient comme une merutrisse cette faute dans le temps, et la voix insistait sur la blessure mettant à nu une vulnérabilité ancienne: l'élaboration du silence. Cette marge, lame récidivé dont aucune courbe ne se dessinait à l'horizon. "Comme on porte une parure." ("Distance: "Analogie" in Mezza Voce 14)*

"L'écart" might be seen as the place of the "terme d'indivision," or that which keeps returning, or recurring, a margin whose sharpness is, nevertheless, impossible to distinguish as such, and whose blade edge remains invisible. This recurrence appears as the way in which body presents itself on stage, "comme on porte une parure," or, as a performance of the unspeakable and the unsaid, which presents itself as going without saying and as an imposition. Accentuated—and in this way appearing as always an extra layer, as that of a mask—and as an accentuation itself.

***Body: return ("éblouissement")***

“L’écart” is as much the page—already ripped—as it is the body, or, the possibility of something emerging from within the constraints that are available to thought. The last page of “Théâtre” closes with the page as a place of passage as well as a rite of passage. The page becomes the scene of a ritual, repeated sacrifice:

: un passage est

ouvert ou clos

*la page accentue la distance*

dans le Verbe

Sacrificiel (96)

The page seems to ooze the “Sacrificiel”: the accentuation of a distance—or, the wounding that occurs as body’s appearance as a limit of its own articulation—results in a medium whose element is the qualitative itself, as something tertiary. The “scene” closes as an outpouring of violence, of “the sacrificial.” If, so far, we have seen the body in terms of a retreat or a wound, or as form’s *mise en scène* and *mise en question*, then the body is also the way in which the reappearance of a new form becomes visible as a possibility. Albiach says that after “Énigme” in *État*, the second section, “État” she tried “de dépasser la déperdition [as presented in “Énigme” in the form of entropy], et d’atteindre peut-être un certain éblouissement, alternative” (*L’exact réel* 26). The last lines of “Théâtre” also suggest the “medium” from which this new form can arise: the sacrificial is the “sea” or the blood from which the body is already arising, even as it is presenting itself as a sacrifice. The body is present as the space within which it is possible to “think” it—like the italic that is possible to “prononcer mentalement,” but not quite imagine as an articulable whole. Jean Daive helps articulate this aspect of Albiach’s work in suggesting that “une mise en question joue à reorganizer le monde au moment où une scène articulée nous signifie que l’objet perdu du corps ne disparaît pas, mais pense son abandon” (*L’exact réel* 15). “Énigme,” then, cannot but be its own return as much as it is the constant break-down of the ground on which that return is occurring. This is the “place” in which uncertain grounding presents itself as, paradoxically, a form of certainty in that it returns—albeit as that which cannot be grasped and which “takes place” as an aporia, a puncture wound: *‘instabilité du support : une cavité dans le reflet’*” (“DiScours” in *Mezza Voce* 104). This paradoxical analogousness of certainty and its “certain” reflection, as the continued dissolution of the ground on which return occurs, is how return *is* possible.

In “CÉSURE: le corps” (also in *Mezza Voce*), Albiach presents the passage from retreat to protrusion or accentuation in the form of an excess. This movement occurs within, and via, the same space of theater, the space that Albiach designates as that of lyric. Lyric, as a tension between retreat and return, must just as much be the “elaboration” of a silence as the audibility of this silence. Lyric is the oscillation or alternation between these two poles, as the “register” of speech—that is, of the possibility of speaking:

“de son apparence alors qu’il disparaîtrait”  
cette césure

alternée ;

il suggère :

ainsi support alternatif  
son corps de la disparition  
prenant parole ; (117-8)

This is the body “sacrifié en vue d’une réapparition,” as Albiach puts it. “C’est-à-dire qu’il passerait sans cesse à travers une chute, une descente, une mise en abîme – perdrait son souffle dans la césure et se retrouverait dans une sorte d’éclatement;” “après chaque négation ou retrait” says Albiach, “que ce soit dans le discours, dans la ponctuation ou dans le vocabulaire, après chaque retrait surgit une ouverture” (*L’exact réel* 25). The “réapparition” of the body takes place as the last page of “CÉSURE: le corps” as the “avowal” of “éclatement,” or as an expression of the brilliance that marks its shimmering return from retreat. This aspect of lyric was already being prefigured in the “éclat” that “Distance: “Analogie”” and presented in terms of “l’élaboration du silence.” Fittingly, Albiach implies a parallelism between the re-illumination inherent in the emergence of a “support alternatif” and the “blanc”:

répétition,

*“le corps porte le blanc de la fiction qui le divise”* (121)

The body “carries” the “blanc” as something to which it is ever ready to give birth. The way the body “carries” or articulates itself is also the way in which it is already birthing itself and carrying a new aspect or version of itself ready to emerge, spilling over as the “sacrificiel.” The “support alternatif,” or the influx of a new medium, “mount,” or frame (“support” carries a variety of meanings, and Albiach’s poem accommodates this overlap), is the way in which the body presents itself via an intrinsic distortion or deterioration, if we consider the various resonances of the verb “altérer.” It is also the way in which this alternation then replenishes or “fills” itself in, quenches the thirst (“désaltère”) of the fire produced by the body’s desirousness, or its shape-shifting, its constant expression on the vertical axis thereby inflecting the horizontal axis, which becomes a function of depth, not just linearity. This burning at the heart of the body Albiach suggests in the last page of “Distance: “Analogie””:

une multiplicité de “masques”

*“et le corps prend feu”*

antérieur :

ligne vertical

dans la fragilité théâtrale de son opacité (20)

The body punctures itself with its own fire, burning from its multiplications as much as it is the site in which the “blanc” (a white heat, perhaps) allows it to flash forth.

The gesture of return animating the body in “Répétition” might recall, then, Albiach’s words about the white page, whose function, she says, is “primordiale (...) un peu comme une page musicale.” So, in arriving at a presentation of lyric as the relationship between body and page—a relationship that is possible to apprehend in terms of a silence at the heart of language that poetry puts forth and grapples with—we can now also see the “blanc” in Albiach’s poetry as fundamental and substantial. She explains this to Daive:

Le blanc n’est pas un miroir: il ne renvoie pas. Il a sa propre opacité. Ou alors on peut dire qu’il renvoie à un discours second, ou ternaire. Le blanc renvoie au corps de façon initiale, mais une fois qu’il est inscrit sur la page il renvoie au discours et au discours du corps. En fait le blanc m’est très naturel. Il n’est pas pour moi une mise en question. Il est devenu l’écriture même, enfin... il fait partie de l’écriture même. Tout autant que la lettre, que l’alphabet. (*L’exact réel* 30)

The “blank” is what allows and is the performance of the oscillation between the possibility of speech and the “elaboration” of silence. This oscillation is erected or upheld, so to speak, as writing: the blank is “l’écriture.” In describing her long poem “L’EXCÈS: *cette mesure*” (in *Figurations de l’image*), Albiach explains to Daive how voice is essential to writing:

Anne-Marie Albiach – (...) le corps est musique. Le corps est une partition (...)

Jean Daive – Comment alors situer la voix qui est nommée à plusieurs reprises? La voix fait partie du corps, fait partie de la partition, de la musique. Est-ce que...

Anne-Marie Albiach – La voix, c’est l’écriture. La voix serait la mise à jour, la transposition du travail aveugle ou silencieux de l’écriture. Il y a là aussi comme une donnée salvatrice, elle sauve le corps – elle sauve le corps de la menace, la voix. De même que toutes les données musicales: partitions, etc. (*L’exact réel* 98-99)

The body is a paradox: what “saves” the body is the inarticulability that it expresses, or of which it is a fundamental expression. The body’s salvation lies in the elaboration of silence together with its constant “aspecting” of speech (the body as “prenant parole”). The inseparability of the two are lyric. The body, as the multiple, is saved because it remains potential: “[I]a voix est une référence” (*L’exact réel* 107). What it allows for is a disruption of breath, or a work with the constraints of the page: “...la voix ne renvoie pas forcément à la tessiture vocale,” says Albiach; “[c]’est une forme d’écriture. Le souffle est altéré. Il est toujours en suspension.” (*L’exact réel* 107). “Écriture” is the “mise en scène” and “mise à la page,” so to speak, of discourse. In other words, Albiach’s dramatization of the constraints of language in the form of her “mise en jeu” of the constraints imposed and offered by the page allow for the exposure of the “blanc,” and, with this, the space within which the body expresses itself as the primordial. In this sense, her poetry is not a representation of what it tries to accomplish. It is the task of exposing representation as a condition of possibility rather than the constraints imposed by image—or closure, uniformity of vision, stasis and its reification. Albiach’s poetry both is and is not a metaphor for what it



accomplishes because its accomplishment lies at the limit of figuration: the poem is both essential to and a means for a vision that is aware of itself, or extends beyond the figurable or articulable. Generating the opening that lies on this limit is a “travail aveugle” in that the form of possibility is never one that is possible to reveal. However, what poetry allows for is the exposure of the space within which there is room for a constant operability of form. “La scène est aussi la pensée,” as Daive puts it; “[e]lle est même opératoire, parce que le corps peut s’y avancer” (*L’exact réel* 9-10). This space is the space of new ways of imagining relation, in the half-light, between illumination and a fall into the shadows, backstage.

“Écriture” can begin now to serve as a way to start to prepare for Albiach’s formulation of memory and the centrality of it to her work (this includes the practice of writing poetry). But before a turn toward memory is made, it might help to see how Albiach figures writing itself in terms of the creation of the space in which both “sides” or “aspects” of lyric that constitute it as a tension are negotiated via fiction—but, this time, as the creation of a hazy passage. In “DiScours” (from “Distance: “Analogie” in *Mezza Voce*), the whiteness of “le blanc” of fiction and of the body’s articulation, is “inclined” or overshadowed. The tilting of the wrist as it writes creates a spiral through which it moves, covering itself with the “braclets” of its own circular motions as it writes. In this space, we are in the place of passage, a place that is either “ouvert ou clos,” to recall the last page of “Théâtre”:

à la proche lumière

DE LA VOIX

*le cercle autour du poignet*

à la déclinaison

: une alternance apparaît du noir au blanc

les multiples degrés

en excès (104)

The wrist engirds itself and becomes pregnant, “enceinte,” intrinsically excessive. This excess is its motive force, its manner of putting form into relief, or applying “les multiples degrés/en excès.” The place of this passage is one of alternation: Albiach casts a shadow over the whiteness of the page, makes writing a place of uncertainty, one in which “il faut savoir,” but in which it may not be possible to square the circle, to use a phrase Daive was keen to put to use in light of Albiach’s “écriture au carré.” Daive suggests that poetry is not an “écriture [qui] affecte le genre de la roue carrée,” or writing that seeks to take blindly, as given, the constructed realities that define our world if we let them, but that, instead, “il s’agit de conjuguer le cercle et le carré”

(*L'exact réel* 16-7). Conjugation is an act of inclining. Daive sees Albiach as making the problem of squaring the circle—or of finding a form for that which is not possible to formulate—visible in and as her poetry. However, Albiach's poetry is not motivated by an “exploding” of form. Rather, it is meant to be a work with constraint, with the rules of relation—or, the rules that figure and give shape to constraint itself. Albiach wishes to “garder un lyrisme froid [...] contrôlé, enre guillemets, en italique, avec des blancs. Donc il passe à côté d'une certaine rationalité” (*L'exact réel* 51).

If it is the work of lyric to make the limit of form visible via fiction, then poetry is a constant shedding of itself over the course of this work. The forms that bind or function as articulations—that is, the forms that make discourse possible to begin with—do so insofar as one remains blind to them, or insofar as they are not sounded. As the space of performance, *Mezza Voce* contains ornament, masks, the weight of jewelry. These can either be chains—chains that bind thought, dispose it to think according to dictated forms or roles—or a work that is also a play, in both senses of the term. “Je suis très sensible à l'ornement, aux bijoux, aux chaînes,” Albiach tells Daive. “Mais elles sont à double tranchant, les chaînes. Ce sont à la fois des ornements, et des ornements qui rendent prisonnier” (*L'exact réel* 46). In “Voyage d'hiver” (part of a series of poems making up “Distance: “Analogie””), Albiach casts “savoir” and the act of determination in the light of impotence; however, she suggests that it is this same act, as (to recall *État*) a “travail pratique” in the direction of blindness, that is illuminating, “omniscient”:

dans l'acte projeté qui se joue sur la scène  
l'impuissance *et ses lyrismes*                      CHAÎNES

LE PARCOURS N'EN DEMEURE PAS MOINS  
omniscient (32)

We are in the space of descent, the space shared by Igitur—that of the point of view of “l'Absolu,” except that in our case, “l'Absolu” is only partial vision, a form of blindness. In the passage created by the circling wrist, the candle flickers in “multiples degrés,” one motion of the flame portending a “prochaine lumière.” This is yet another way in which “le corps prend feu,” but sacrifices itself just in time, “à terme,” so to speak, for it not to be completely burned away, but maintained to just the right degree as a performance of “le Sacrificiel.” Daive asks Albiach what she associates with the word “excès” as it refers to the title of her long poem. Their exchange follows:

Anne-Marie Albiach – Ah! Je pense à la démesure, forcément. Je pense à ce qui ne se contrôle pas. Je pense aussi à ce qui détruit souterrainement. Ce qui peut détruire souterrainement.

Jean Daive – C'est-à-dire?

Anne-Marie Albiach – Ce qui brûle. Je pense à ce qui est l'envers d'un texte construit.  
Jean Daive – C'est à dire... la construction prévient le feu.

Anne-Marie Albiach – Oui. La construction est cette mesure. Et en même temps, je ne peux pas les dissocier, parce qu'il n'y a pas de construction sans feu. (*L'exact réel* 107-8)

“Excès” is, in one of its forms in Albiach’s poetry, destruction, such as the destruction by fire. But the fire is always contained in the poem, in fiction, and in the body, the poem being the latter’s *mise en abîme* and thus its “theatricalization.” It rises and falls within its parameters, which suggests that, despite the apparent sense of the word itself, “excès” is also the way in which the tyranny form is kept in check: it is by the inseparability of “construction” and “feu” that any “acte projeté” is subject to curtailment, and an overreaching vision of an order kept from becoming a tyranny—and from silencing the body as plurality and as the “space” within which an autonomous “acte” is possible to begin with.

*Mezza Voce* contains a poem called “la nudité comme appareil.” But we can now see that Albiach’s poetry casts “appareil” not as an excess in the sense of a uselessness, but rather as something intrinsically or already useful because it is the possibility of being used up, spent, in the work of opening up the space from which an autonomous act might be possible. Excess is the way in which impulse “anchors” itself, as paradoxical as this may at first sound. Below, Albiach presents a scene in which a “point d’ancrage”—or “encr-age,” writing—is generated in one of the final pages of *L’EXCÈS : cette mesure*. The work of the poet is the work of creating a passage, or of putting form into relief, “repeating” it so that there is room within its “jointures,” or articulations. This work, however, is a difficult “effort aveugle” that nevertheless requires that it be maintained as such:

répétition

nocive accoutumance

un effort aveugle  
loin des abords

de profil les atteintes  
chaque nuit  
les chants élucidés  
une projection  
“le voyage quotidien  
dans l’enceinte”

excès  
de l'alternance

ou point d'ancrage  
dans la démesure  
qui prend de toutes parts (87)

The “point d'ancrage,” as the last line of the excerpt here suggests the antidote to a blind paralysis, or the silencing of the body's multiplicity. The “excès d'alternance” is a fundamental instability that seizes the body “de toutes parts,” that shakes it and holds it in this shaking. Yet, the balance of give-and-take energies that sustains this oscillation at the heart of lyric (which we have seen as the oscillation between speech and silence, elaboration and retreat) is also one that characterizes the poem, based on Albiach's explanation of its title. “L'excès,” she tells Daive, “c'est encore une dramatisation du corps, et cette mesure, c'est la négation de la dramatisation” (*L'exact réel* 94). This oscillation, then, isn't one that perfectly cancels itself out. It too has no form, and instead, is necessarily chiasmic in nature—reciprocal, but not perfectly so, the correspondence between its two poles occurring on an axis of intranslatability. Albiach's description of her writing comes to mind, as it is at once the scene of the “disposition” or *mise en relief* of language and the space within which the rhythms and form of Albiach's own body finds its territory:

Il y a une disposition chorale, mais cette disposition je pense que je le fais d'après un rythme corporel, tel que je le ressens, enfin... par exemple la nécessité de mon rythme de lecture, ou de pensée ou de respiration (...) La nécessité de sentir la page respirer... peut-être presque à la limite vibrer. Comme une peinture. (*L'exact réel* 31)

The work of illuminating blindness, as we've so far seen Albiach to be suggesting, is a “voyage quotidien”: or, one of “mettant à jour,” so to speak, the forms that we can't quite make out, or the forms that appear as seen by night or are imagined. This work is also one that Albiach connotes as needing to happen in and as the quotidian, or the everyday: it is the space of the everyday, as the space within which life takes place, that must be protected. This is also the work that the revolutionaries of May '68 were undertaking and maintaining over the several months of their own uprising in protest of the repetition of an inherited order whose principle was self-perpetuation and under which social divisions were perpetuated and reified. The revolutionaries work of overturning the order by exposing, as Kristin Ross has shown, the weft of the social order for what it was, was work that in turn planted them in the middle of a collective form that had no form already. And so it is with the work of writing: work that takes the body into its care, loves it in the darkness or by night, so to speak, in a repeated act of the “nocif.” A different way of looking at this last term brings us to the meaning suggested by Albiach—the nocturnal.

**Body: “la mémoire se réfère au texte qu’on vient de parcourir”<sup>30</sup>**

In explaining to Jean Daive the way in which fiction manifests itself in her work, Albiach speaks of the body as a starting point, or the “ground” from which her writing takes its motive force: fiction is a work done upon the body (in the discursive sense, of course) so as to alter it and sustain its metamorphosis. That is, the body is made theatrical, presented as already a double. But she presents this task as if it were also already in response to the demand that this be done:

La fiction commencerait justement dans cette phrase [from *État*] que vous citez: ‘Car s’il est un thème qu’il soit dit.’ La fiction, c’est aussi par exemple des mots comme attribut... c’est-à-dire un déportement grammatical accompli sur le corps en vue de métamorphoser. Mais dans une déperdition perpétuelle. Dans la première partie d’*État*, qui s’intitule *Énigme*, en fait je pensais sans cesse à l’entropie, c’est-à-dire à cette incompréhension que j’avais de toutes les évidences qui sont mystère. Au déchet aussi, qui restait de toute métamorphose. (*L’exact réel* 25-6)

Albiach uses the word “déportement” to refer to a pressure applied in the form of a deviation or a carrying off course. If, to recall, writing “saves” the body, keeping it intact as the expression of a multiplicity, it does so by keeping intact a division inherent to the body, or by allowing the body to be theater. Writing is the stage on which division becomes absolute and “on” which body keeps playing itself out as division itself. In the passage above, Albiach speaks of fiction as the way in which the body can remain in a state of constantly being subject to, and thus also a function of, constraint. Fiction therefore “captures” the body as ever on the verge of metamorphosis. This is the place in which the body cannot *but* “cry out” or mouth the words that open the second section of *État* in “*Énigme*”: “Car s’il est un thème qu’il soit dit” (17). Writing is the condition on which this “cry,” or its performance—as body itself—remains possible. Body is possible as fiction, and writing makes fiction possible and maintains it: “il y avait métamorphose quand le corps passait à l’écriture et se trouvait restitué sur la page et dans la mise en scène (...)” (*L’exact réel* 26).

Fiction is the body as the body on the verge of itself, or, the body as horizon—reiterating itself as horizon. The body is always “en vue de métamorphoser.” It can never settle, and while fiction doubles it, puts it in relation to itself, it does so in the way a letter is italicized: at no articulable angle. The body performs its own incapacity to settle and to settle into itself; this incapacity is at once its excess and a form of lack. But if fiction is the constant (re)generation of an angle of approach, then at no point can fiction be taken for granted, or taken as a given. Body, relies upon the constancy of its own articulation. As such, it is always transitional, but in the form of a constant restitution of itself, like a pulsing horizon that tends *toward*. This means that lyric is not something that can be “seen” or grasped from the outside. Space must be cleared for it to be accessed, “heard,” to begin with: we have to enter into the “scene” of the body—or, into the space of the horizon on which it is repeating itself, presenting itself as a demand on its wholeness while paradoxically making this wholeness possible as the demand’s reiteration.

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<sup>30</sup>These are Albiach’s words to Jean Daive in *L’exact réel* (100). Albiach is referring to the ending of *L’EXCÈS: cette mesure*, a poem that she wrote quickly, and whose writing was one that made the verticality of the page very palpable to her. The end of the poem, then, is a return to the downward falling “stratification” of lines that comprised it.

Albiach's texts are only traces, remainders, of her own process of opening up this space, of occupying it by making it. Her texts are indexes or references of the drama of the making of this space. We are necessarily blind to her perspective, but her texts, in dramatizing the elements of language and the functions and features of discourse, allow us to produce an imperfect reflection—a version—of the scene on which the page breathes, the body trembles, and vision is uncertain.

In describing "écriture" as a "donnée salvatrice," as a "mise à jour," Albiach therefore inscribes the act of writing with temporality and ascribes a fundamental value to that temporality. In other words, Albiach implies the fact that writing is a scene of listening and seeing, and one that is individual at that. This specificity is an aspect of lyric: lyric is the way in which Albiach is a poet. So, while we have seen Albiach "expose" her poetry in terms of body as the opening up of a space in which speaking is possible, and alongside this the possibility of discursive (re)articulations, none of this can be taken in a vacuum or even appreciated for what it is if "énigme"—seen as lyric—isn't also seen in terms of memory, or as the form taken by memory and, therefore, also the condition on which memory is possible. Albiach's texts make the implicit yet crucial demand on their readers that the "angle" according to which they are read be accounted for. That is, the "voyage quotidien/dans l'enceinte" that takes place within the circuit of Albiach's wrists, as the form of a work of "projection"—of extended vision, gesture—must also be one assumed by us, readers. Lyric is, and should be, seen in terms of memory in Albiach's poetry. The oscillation between "déperdition" and "éblouissement," "projection" and its curtailment, is one of remembering. The body is also a site of remembrance. Its articulation, which Albiach figures with respect to "chiffres," or "nombres," is composed of wounds and burns as much as it is an articulation of memory, of voice—or "écriture." As such, the body's reconstitution and reimagining necessarily occur within the "matrix" of memory. The substance of lyric is memory because memory is the way in which reconstitution is possible immediately, that is, not from the outside in (with the help of a form), but not according to any articulable form either. Rather, as the body's repetition, here present as "instances juxtaposées":

*nombres du corps exposé  
aux brûlures*

du mouvement

instances juxtaposés

dans la mémoire

LA VOIX IMMÉDIATE:

conjonction de l'environnement

("L'existence du terrible": la remémoration 149-50)

The body is the way in which “voix” is memory. Memory is also what marks the passage of the body and therefore the way in which the text becomes a trace. Or, a transcription of lyric, “chant”:

...au fur et à mesure que l’écriture s’élabore dans sa recherche, il semblerait qu’il y aurait une sorte de musique que moi je transcris par “voix,” et qui serait dans la mémoire... enfin purement mémorielle. C’est-à-dire que le texte que je mets sur la page, je voudrais qu’il puisse aussi être le reflet d’un chant. [...] C.h.a.n.t., pas d’un champ... à défricher – les deux peut-être? – mais enfin d’un chant. Il rebrasse tout ce qu’il y a de violence. J’utilise assez souvent ce mot dans le corps à corps de celui qui écrit avec la page.  
(*L’exact réel* 27-8)

The body, as it passes through “écriture” and becomes text, indexes the narrative of Albiach’s composition. What arises on the page is the trace of the body’s drama of maintained “déportement”—or, the body’s persistence as a horizon, but one that is always separating itself from itself. The text, then, is the poet’s way of “meeting” the body at the place at which it is always in division. As such, text is the softening of violence that Albiach suggests is necessarily at the center of the body. While lyric, like body, is the expression of a tension between wholeness and division, it is also the way in which this division returns to itself: “rebrasser” can refer to a pulling up of a garment (as of a sleeve). Lyric in this sense is a return to the body’s scene as a return to a beginning. Figured as an uncovering, this return is one that connotes a tenderness toward the body, or a desire simply to touch its skin. And Albiach does, by arriving at the blank of the page. In “Distance: “Analogie,”” this process occurs as a movement from “DISPARITÉ: UNE ÉCLOSION/ DANS LES MARGES” to a “retournement à angles aigus (dans la *douceur*)” (“Le voyage d’hiver” in “Distance: “Analogie”” 32-3).

Reading and writing correspond to one another, the “space” of their correspondence being that of fiction. Albiach’s poetry puts reference into relief (it is an “écriture au carré”). Memory is the form of this *mise en relief*. Albiach describes her composition of the second part of *État*, “État,” as taking the form of a “lecture multiple,” or, an ordering of elements according to their multiple positions, which, again, she describes using the word “déportement.” This in turn becomes the basis for her “writing” (an “écriture fictionnelle”) and subtends, or explains, the way in which the body is an “épopée du désir” in that it is motivated by plural readings or the possibility of new combination:

En fait “État” est peut-être une lecture. (...) On peut dire que c’est à la fois une épopée du désir, dans une lecture multiple. Il y a une sorte d’absorption certainement... fictionnelle. Et là intervient la fiction. Vous me demandiez tout à l’heure où se situait la fiction. Il y a dans cette lecture une fiction. Il y a un déportement de mes lectures qui donne une écriture fictionnelle. Mais la lecture demeure... en contrepoint, enfin... disons qu’elle est en référence, et en abîme.

This mode of composition is the way in which Albiach resists analogy, looking for new ways of creating relations, which she and Daive call “équivalences”:

Jean Daive – C’est-à-dire que pour vous, écrire c’est chercher en quelque sorte des équivalences?

Anne-Marie Albiach – C’est à la fois chercher des équivalences et essayer d’en créer d’autres. À partir de ces équivalences-là. (...) Il est quand même urgent de créer d’autres équivalences! (...) Et peut-être d’échapper à l’analogie, si on peut. (*L’exact réel* 26-7)

The work of creating new “equivalences” is the work of a “repetition nocive,” or the “voyage quotidien dans l’enceinte”: it is the work of creating the space for, and of, lyric, where the body “pense son abandon,” and is always on the verge of *almost* forgetting itself, or seeming to—but then, rising up from the flames, reconstituting itself. Albiach’s work is the work of constantly creating a new blank, a new “weft” for the page, or the score on which the body arises, as “chant.”

Albiach’s texts are traces of the movement of the body’s “desirings,” or of the ways in which it sets fire to itself. Albiach continues her description of “État” as an “épopée du désir” and describes it as the way in which her work is an alchemical one in that the metamorphosis that takes place, as memory, is a function of a fundamental rearticulation, or a work on the past figured as such in view of the latter’s essential transformation. Memory can therefore be seen as a constantly transmuting starting point, but one that also holds, as a medium or liquid might, all instances of the drama of the body’s articulation together, but according to no causal logic:

Et aussi les désirs multiples qui occupent la mémoire, sans cesse, sous forme de souvenirs de lecture transformés, de projections dans le future, d’assimilation du présent. En fait ce chant engloberait une certaine notion du temps. Pas coupé du passé. Simplement le passé ne cesse de se métamorphoser...enfin ne peut pas être fixe, et cette voix en serait la modulation. Si le passé devenait fixe, ce serait l’asphyxie et l’impossibilité d’écrire. Si un texte devenait immobile dans la mémoire, je crois... un autre texte ne pourrait pas suivre.” (*L’exact réel* 28)

Memory is the way in which the body breathes, reconstitutes itself. Lyric, as the inseparability of “construction” and “feu,” then, is not a work that annihilates the past in an act of deliberate forgetting. Rather, lyric is the way in which the past can be recovered, but not as that which determines, or already dictates the present. That is the job of lyric: to “sing” the present, reconstitute it in the form of an alternate direction, give it room to breathe. This is the value, and the use, of poetry, for Albiach. It is a way of clearing traces and scars. She tells Daive, in talking about *Mezza Voce*: “Je veux oublier ce qu’il reste d’oubli loin en moi comme des traces, des cicatrices, ce que j’ai écrit, comme des cicatrices. Je crois qu’il y a une pulsion. Je peux parler de pulsion plus que de savoir” (*L’exact réel* 50).

The reconstitution of the present on the basis of the past, including its scars, takes the form of the creation of a new musical score or a new “weft.” This presents itself as a constant rubbing-out of an “original” tissue in order for another layer or version of the weft to become visible, and for it to emerge on the page as a “reflet d’un chant.” Albiach describes fiction in terms of a weft—one that allows for the exposition of a “tension,” or a relation that cannot be negotiated by form but that is put into relief by it. It is fiction that at once brings to life, exposes, this tension, but then in turn is subject to a reconstitution via “écriture”:

Anne-Marie Albiach – Dans L’EXCÈS : *cette mesure?* Ce qui est sous-entendu, c’est la tension. La tension. Ce qui est sous-entendu, c’est un déplacement de sens. Un



déplacement de sens. C'est-à-dire que... Si je dis par exemple "tu es là," cela ne veut pas forcément vouloir dire: tu es là. Mais c'est une conséquence de l'écriture.

Jean Daive – Est-ce que le sous-entendu dont vous venez de parler sous-entend la fiction? Est-ce que c'est le sous-entendu qui fait fiction?

Anne-Marie Albiach – On ne peut pas séparer le sous-entendu de ce qui est donné, et ce qui est donné, c'est la fiction, en définitive. C'est donné en tant que fiction. Le sous-entendu, à la limite, il n'est pas important de le connaître, parce qu'il est gommé par l'écriture. Le sous-entendu devient tout à fait secondaire comme un papier qu'on jette, un papier brouillon qu'on jette. Ce n'est que quand j'y réfléchis, quand j'y pense, que je me souviens qu'il y a un sous-entendu. Mais quand je le donne comme tel, quand je le lis comme tel, le sous-entendu ne forme qu'une trame. (*L'exact réel* 104)

The text of the poem, then, is an objet and a vehicle for memory. What is left behind for us to see of remembrance are cinders, a skeleton.

Fiction, in Albiach's texts, is the way in which displacement both comes to light and is altered. It is in this sense that the body is composed in terms of a constantly displaced "image," an image that has no referent and tends toward no articulable shape. The body is always subverting itself, as if in a gesture of attempted explosion:

première blessure  
elle intensifie les interdits régressifs  
de *déplacements* visuels

dans les annulations ou les nudités une permanence des  
aveuglements ;

le subersif tente l'éclat  
("Distance: "Analogie"" 20)

But the body contains itself: no narrative of rearticulation ever assumes primacy, is ever able to illuminate the whole in one final gesture of "éclat." Lyric is the way in which memory is protected as multiple: the body is respected as the site of the possibility of a multiplicity of retellings, of its own history. This was indeed one possibility and one right that motivated the revolt of May '68.

The revolutionaries sought a place from which to start anew. In order for their hopes to not, in turn, become the imposition of yet another order, it was necessary for their work to be one of both creating and fulfilling the demand for a constant distancing from form, and thus, a diligent, vigilant reconstitution of the foundation on which a collective narrative might be possible to begin with; it turns out that such a foundation rests on the maintained work of protecting its instability.<sup>31</sup> To do so requires a constant engagement with the past, and a

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<sup>31</sup>My understanding of Anne-Marie Albiach's work in *État* was helped by a discussion with Robert Kaufman, who made explicit this contextual grounding of this work and suggested to me that Albiach's book describes a plurality

reconstitution of narrative in the present—without, nevertheless, collapsing the distance between one’s own gestures of reconstitution and the body as reconstituted. The body depends on the distance between the two. To reside in the space of this distance is to maintain one’s certain, yet never surely positioned, footing in the place in which “toutes les évidences (...) sont mystère.” This “place” is the place of “énigme,” a place that is neutral, “incolore,” yet animated by the urgency of its own maintenance—so reads the last page of *Mezza Voce*:

Mais ce POINT surtout incolore détermine l’“urgence”  
cette notation précise à la trajectoire/détournement du souffle:  
un rythme sous lequel la déformation des corps  
mimerait une soustraction de “reflet”

(“Strates” 158)

This point’s colorlessness is visible because it is a space—a circle, but a constantly ruptured one. A mouth, perhaps, that wishes to speak. Or be heard, as a silence that seeks our voice in order to keep speaking and keep alive the body of which we are already a part, and to hear ourselves reflected in its speech, approximately, as

les accords  
dans la mémoire (‘L’EXCÈS: *cette mesure* 100)

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that challenges “the state” as an autarchic order. In *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), Kristin Ross presents a detailed and vibrant prehistory, history, and portrait of the ways in which the events of May ’68—a term she also demonstrates as significantly reductive—occurred as the construction of an intersection of socially determined roles and in conscious, discerning resonance with other narratives of political uprising in the years leading up to and during the revolt’s unfolding. Ross’s account of the work of revolutionary action committees was extremely helpful in my reading of Albiach’s work and the value of the work done by those in her circle.

## Conclusion

Having introduced this project with Jean-Marie Gleize's words on "l'obscurité," let us close with them now, and see how they might, this time, offer a way of recasting and opening up what these pages on "l'énigme" of the literal have tried to expose in the work of Hocquard, Albiach, and Royet-Journoud. For what each of these poets was at heart concerned with was life, the singularity of it, the necessity of it being given room to be lived. How can there be words to describe what *this* moment is? There aren't, there can't be. But this is how life retains its integrity—it is a solitude, as many times over as there are those who live it. Nevertheless, like the subject of Hocquard's sonnets, Viviane, life is "[s]eule, évidente." It is the "evidence" of that which is clearest, most plain to see, that these three poets work to encounter. For Hocquard, it is the possibility of inhabiting an anonymity. For Royet-Journoud, it begins with a blindness that comes when seeing is no longer following a form but becomes the form of breaking up all of form's articulations, or when there is "[d]u sens. En souffrance," when "[i]l se construit au loin," and which finally ends with the cutting recognition of that which has been there all along, the world. For in the end, "le monde est tout ce qui arrive," as Royet-Journoud realizes, through the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein. For Albiach, who seeks to forget "ce qu'il reste d'oubli loin en moi comme des traces, des cicatrices," it is the possibility of beginning again, of allowing the body—the body as already fragmented—to return once again, to fall into place as again newly composed. Then, the forms of old ruptures, or scars, clear and the page "speaks" anew, as if by means of a new dissonance, or according to a new musical score, one that had never been there, but which is a return to, and an encounter with, that same impossibility to make sense of life, to gather it up into a narrative, embody it once and for all, as if it were one's "own" to begin with.

And so it is that for each of these poets, the literal is not that which, as Gleize says in "Le sens de l'obscurité," that which has to be *given* a "sens" to begin with, or that has to be subject to an "affirmation du sens de l'obscurité." This is what those who have "le sens de l'obscurité" seek to do: they see "l'obscurité" as that which, in being inconceivable or hard to conceive of, merits or asks to be given a form, to be articulated. But what Gleize's tired reproach of this perspective is allowing to become clear, now, is this: as "l'obscurité" is that which has no place to begin with, it is *this* that does indeed merit and ask to be given form, to be articulated, spoken, though it is not that which can ever be given form—nor even to be seen in terms of "l'obscurité." Its being spoken will necessarily only ever belong to the one "speaking" it, the one seeking to make it speak. "L'obscurité" is literality, which can't already occupy the other side of "sens," or shadow. It is life—and life does not occur in the shadows. It is that which is always before our eyes, "seule, évidente." It isn't anything that can be given a form to begin with, and once this becomes evident, so does the "sens" of Gleize's words, to which we can now turn again: "La poésie n'a sans doute ni à rechercher l'obscurité (ce serait la naïveté de l'hermétisme) ni à éviter l'obscurité (ça, c'est l'enfantillage de la transparence), elle a lieu en même temps que l'obscur, elle coïncide avec, et l'obscur est l'un de ses noms" (*Altitude zéro* 22).

Literality is that which is. While it cannot be said, it is also already that which is "saying" itself. It is only a case of being able to tune in, of trying to listen—clearing the space within which this is possible. To inhabit the place between and inhale and an exhale, there must be a place made that can be called "between." This "between" is poetry: poetry is what allows us to see the space within which breath is possible to begin with—and is ours, and not: "...the page must first be seen in order to be made invisible," says Michael Davidson, whose words Royet-Journoud must have felt to inhabit his own (*La poésie entière est préposition* 39). The page

cannot be taken for granted. Nor can the space within which breath *is* breath—for that is the space within which breath breathes. To be in this space is to reach a clearing in which nothing has changed, but the image of everything has come into focus because it has shifted, like a frame having been shaken. This is the place in which silence has a form, the place in which suddenly, we are still, and what is around us is alive—this is the place in which attention comes to itself, not by any motion of its own, but by the fortuitousness of having suddenly fallen into balance:

L'immobilité de celui qui écrit met le monde en mouvement.

C'est dans la mesure même où l'on est arrêté adns une immobilité voyeuse que les choses sont mobiles. La pensée aussi n'existe que par rapport à un arrêt qui est un blanc. Joë Bousquet a écrit: *ce paralytique a fait un trou dans l'espace*. Écrire, c'est faire ce trou dans l'espace. Tout part de l'immobilité, de ce travail d'attention qui est également un travail corporel. Le funambule a le même problème, il tente de réunir le mouvement et l'arrêt, de trouver le juste équilibre entre eux. La table de l'écrivain est mentale, c'est une façon de savoir s'arrêter, de commencer en sachant qu'il n'y a aucun origine. Écrire est un métier d'ignorance.

le silence est une forme

(*La poésie entière est préposition 9*)

How can there have been a question to answer at this place? There is only silence to be heard, and silence as a response. The question, it turns out, was how to arrive here. And once there, the answer takes no form, and could not have done so anyway. Literality is the return of the initial question, when it is thrown away. For to have asked it was what mattered; yet, to retrace our steps is to find ourselves standing in the same place in which we began with the question now appearing to have been useless to ask from the very beginning. Yet not asking it would have gotten us nowhere. It was necessary, yet it is also what in the end asks to be thrown away, to be burned up.

In this place, we hear more than just our own voices: being part of the world is being able to speak for oneself as much as it is being able to listen, to be silenced—to reside in the space in between the two. In this place, we hear not just what is said, but the saying—for as Hocquard points out, “Quand on dit *le ciel est bleu* la langue entière est contenue” (*Conditions de lumière* 182). A language speaks through us; what is heard is that which we already know, and can hear. But it is also our own language that we speak—one that we cannot share: no blue is the same from one person to the next; it is colored differently, contains not the same memories, the same stories. Hocquard's poetry allows us to hear between the lines, to “see” in between one color blue and another: this place doesn't exist, is unspeakable. This is a boundary whose difference cannot be articulated because it is the possibility of difference itself: it is the place in which there is a “crack” in a shadow, where light itself cannot get in: “[c]'est de l'air sans lumière” (*Un privé à Tanger* 17). Hocquard's words refer to a painting by his friend Raquel—it is a diptych (the title of the poem from which we quote is “Diptyque”). Two planes coincide: one light, one dark. In between, the difference between them becomes the impossibility of articulating difference. One blue, and another next to it, as Hocquard's second “Diptyque” might allow us to see:

Deux récits ne pouvant coïncider. Ils ont en commun ce qui les sépare: un bord d'ombre. Dans la succession des pages, deux à deux, la juxtaposition es scenes est le sujet du récit. Une suite d'à-côtés. (*Un privé à Tanger* 17)

*Un bord d'ombre.* This might be the place inhabited by poetry. The kind of attention that contemporary poetry can only ever be paid is one that must first pass through the question of why it matters to begin with. This is a question that exists only because it is haunted by the very real possibility that it might not be asked. For, to recall Roubaud, contemporary poetry is often bemoaned as “si difficile,” “impossible,” or as non-existent, or existing somewhere else anyway. Or if the question is asked, it runs the risk of not being asked seriously, and so to not be a question. The question of poetry is one that asks to be given room as that for which there isn't room, as that which doesn't fit anywhere from the start. Poetry today is thus haunted by its precarious, uncertain place in the world, by the possibility of our neglect of or oblivion. But this is only the risk of an obliviousness to ourselves and our part in the world, a world that is ours, and not, for it is a world to which we all belong.

But what Hocquard, Royet-Journoud, and Albiach can show us is that this precariousness lies in the fact that it also has another side. For the more we ask—*really* ask—why we should even care about poetry, the more we begin to sense that this isn't simply a question about the poetry, but also a question of how to find our way to a place from which we understand why asking such a question matters, or mattered, to begin with. Yet such a “place” can only be one from which the question as such no longer needs to be asked. Paradoxically, poetry therefore needs its lack of place—and needs us. If today's poetry is haunted by the possibility of being misunderstood or neglected, then this is the way in which it occupies a place in the world. Poetry cannot exist without pointing to a question that both concerns it and is greater than it. This question can be as easy to dismiss as it can be difficult to shake, and perhaps this is why such a question exists at all. It is up to us to give this question its place—a place. This “place” is the place in which life is: it is the “place” of the “in between,” like the interval between frames in a movie, or the fold in between pages; it is the crease holding together “[u]ne suite d'à-côtés.” It waits to be resurrected—touched, and to touch us. Exposed, like an image rising to the surface. It waits to give itself to us, for us to give ourselves to it.

Il est midi touche le dos  
Dans le noir des photos  
attendent Le pain lève sur le  
tabouret typographique  
Idée même de relation (*Conditions de lumière* 121)

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