

THOUGHT, PERCEPTION AND THE CREATIVE ACT

**A STUDY OF THE WORK OF FOUR CONTEMPORARY
FRENCH POETS: PIERRE ALFERI, VALÈRE NOVARINA,
ANNE PORTUGAL AND CHRISTOPHE TARKOS**

Kate Lermite Campbell

DPhil
Wolfson College, Oxford University

Michaelmas Term 2008

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

Works by Pierre Alferi:

C: *Le Chemin familial du poisson combattif*, 1992
CF : *Le Cinéma des familles*, 1999
CP : *Chercher une phrase*, 1991
EM : *Des enfants et des monstres*, 2004
F : *Fmn*, 1994
KO : *Kub Or*, 1994
PA : *La Protection des animaux*, 2003
SJ : *Sentimentale journée*, 1997
VA : *La Voie des airs*, 2004

Works by Valère Novarina:

AI : *L'Acte inconnu*, 2007
AH : *L'Avant-dernier des hommes*, 1997
AT : *L'Animal du temps*, 1993
CH : *La Chair de l'homme*, 1995
DA : *Le Discours aux animaux*, 1987
DP : *Devant la parole*, 1999
DV : *Le Drame de la vie*, 1984
EF : *L'Espace furieux*, 1st ed. 1997, 2nd ed. (used here) 2006
JS : *Je suis*, 1991
LC : *Lumières du corps*, 2006
LM : *La Lutte des morts*,
PM : *Pendant la matière*, 1991
R : *Le Repas*, 1996
S : *La Scène*, 2003
TP : *Le Théâtre des paroles*, 1989

Works by Anne Portugal:

CB: *Les Commodités d'une banquette*, 1985
DB: *définitif bob*, 2002
DQ: *De quoi faire un mur*, 1987
DR: *Dans la reproduction en deux parties égales des plantes et des animaux*, 1999
PS: *Le Plus simple appareil*, 1992

Works by Christophe Tarkos:

A: *Anachronisme*, 2001
B: *Le Bâton*, 1998
C: *Caisses*, 1998
EB: *Expressif le petit bidon*, 2001
HS: *L'Hypnotiseur soigne*, 1998

LA: *L'Argent*, 1999
ML: *Ma langue*, 2000
- MLI: *Carrés*
- MLII: *Calligrammes*
- MLIII: *Donne*
O: *Oui*, 1996
P: *Processe*, 1997
PAN: *Pan*, 2000
SI: *Le Signe=*, 1999
VS: *La Valeur sublime*, 1998

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Poetry has always been a cross-disciplinary literary form. Even when the visual or phonetic elements of written or spoken language are not played upon or exteriorized directly vision, audition and even (as I will argue) touch, are fundamental to poetic experience, whether that of writer or reader. These observations are banal, yet this thesis aims to suggest that they are more important – or rather important *in a different way* – than has been recognized hitherto. I will suggest that it is the way in which these four poets draw directly on sensory experience that imposes the necessity of a shift of critical focus away from the explicit manipulation or exteriorization of what might be called the physical aspects of *poetry*, in order to concentrate on the way they draw from certain sensory aspects of *thought*, and the effect this has on the way their poetry functions. The two main aims of this thesis are, then, to emphasize the significance of the work of the authors studied and to suggest a new critical approach to poetry that takes account of the role sensory experience plays in creative language use.

One unifying characteristic of the poetic approaches to be studied here is the extent to which they implicitly or explicitly draw on changes brought about in our perceptual habits by new technological media. However, instead of exploiting such media to exteriorize traditional dualisms stemming from the concept of the sign (which assumes a break between the physical and non-physical aspects of language) they use them instead to reflect back on language, exposing the tight bond between sensory experience, language use, and creative expression. The work of these writers is therefore not just interesting as poetry, it also draws out, in a particularly striking way, the extent to which words do not necessarily have primacy in the action of thought, thought being neither purely verbal, nor language a tool for translating it, but rather an experience in which boundaries between words and images, the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary are, more often than not, transgressed. In the light

of these poets' exploration of the sensory aspects of thought and their corresponding exploitation of diverse media, one central question posed here concerns their redefinition of what can be considered poetic material, and the way this affects our understanding of the link between experience and expression. I will argue that it is their particular attentiveness to the dynamic relations set up between diverse aspects of experience in thought that marks their importance both in the context of poetry, and in the context of our understanding of the relations that bind thought, perception and creativity.

A new critical approach is therefore considered necessary in part due to the novelty of the poetic approaches studied, and in part because discussions of the sensory aspects of poetry often carry with them a variety of preconceptions concerning both the nature of language and that of thought or the thinking subject. The tendency to pose dividing lines between mind and body, word and image, the physical and non-physical aspects of language has characterized the history of Western thought, and neither literature nor literary criticism have been exempt from the conceptual presuppositions inherent in such binary systems. The aim here is to consider how the work of these authors transcends such dualisms, using the analysis of specific works to develop a critical approach capable of reflecting the way they draw directly from the *ambiguity* of the boundaries that separate different sorts of experience and means of expression.

My analysis of the various ways in which their work functions will correspond with the development of three concepts: 'pensée-vue' 'pensée-voix' and 'pensée-toucher'. These concepts are intended to set the approach proposed here apart from traditional critical vocabulary. French terminology has been chosen not only because the works that have inspired the three concepts are written by French authors, but also in order to contextualize both the concepts and the categories involved in relation to the various disciplines drawn from in the course of this study (this will be discussed in

much greater depth in Section ii of this introduction). The omission of articles is intended to de-substantivize the concepts in order to stress the importance of the dynamic roles sight, voice and touch play within poetry, and to reinforce the idea that the poem is simultaneously a creative act *in* and a creative experience *of* the world. They are intended to reflect the active role sight, voice and touch play within thought. These concepts will be used to guide the analysis of the texts. It is hoped that they will provide a fresh way of considering poetry of all literary periods.

In this Introduction I will outline some salient aspects of these poets' work, then moving on to situate the poetry studied here in the context of twentieth century French literature. I will then discuss the approach to be employed. In conclusion, I will present the structure of the thesis. Throughout, I will outline various ideas related to this subject that require separate treatment.

Section i: LITERARY CONTEXT

All four poets studied here explore media other than the page in a way particular to them, and their work contrasts accordingly. The written text nonetheless remains central to each of their otherwise diverse approaches. Pierre Alferi (to proceed alphabetically) not only produces novels and poems that are occasionally accompanied by his own drawings, he also creates what he terms 'cinépoèmes' and 'films-parlants', using the DVD to experiment with reading patterns and explore (among other things) the connection between visual perception and comprehension.¹ Valère Novarina frequently writes stage versions of his texts, and other works intended directly for the theatre, often participating in their 'mise-en-scène'. This aspect of his work is bound to his fascination with the physicality of enunciation: the potential transgression of the mind-body divide

¹ Alferi lives and works in Paris where he was born in 1963.

that he associates with the act of speech.² Anne Portugal questions the limits of representational space throughout her work; she often includes photographs in her texts and even draws directly from contemporary media such as computer games, thus playing directly with our perceptual habits by exposing the extent to which our perception is conditioned by technology.³ Christophe Tarkos's texts also frequently include images, whether drawn by himself or by others. In a similar way to Novarina, he puts great emphasis on the physicality of the creative act, and he often read his texts in public. The desire to break beyond both image and concept, and thus provoke a new dynamic within language conceived of as substance, is fundamental to his work.⁴

As will be seen in the course of this thesis, each poet's exploitation of different media is bound to – and perhaps even entailed by – their conception of the poetic act. One fundamental aspect of their approaches is the aim to break beyond traditional representational models of thought: to transcend both word-image and mind-body dualism by concentrating on the experience of thought in and for itself. Within their work, this does not imply the sublimation of the physical aspects of experience in any way; instead it implies increased attentiveness to the dynamic interaction of sensory experience and language in thought. For these poets, drawing on other media does not, therefore, imply playing with the traditional boundaries set up between word and image, self and world, the physical and the mental, it involves exploring the nature of *experienced* boundaries: the constantly modifying relations between self and world that are only perceptible in the grey area in which the physical and the mental blur. They are therefore in no way concerned with the projection of inner states or with the

² Novarina is the most prolific author studied here. He has published a total of thirty-one texts. Born in 1947, he moves between Paris and la Haute-Savoie. He is best known for the work he has done for the stage, partly due to the fact that *L'Espace furieux* entered the repertoire of the Comédie Française in 2005.

³ Portugal was born in Angers in 1949 and she lives and works in Paris. She has notably worked in conjunction with photographers such as Susan Doppelt and other poets such as Pierre Alferi and Stacy Doris.

⁴ Tarkos was born in 1964 and died in 2004. He is the least well-known of the poets studied here, although his texts are still taken up in the course of poetry readings today.

representation of ideas concerning self, world, and the connection between them, but with capturing the transformational experience of thought.⁵ Such transgression of deeply entrenched conceptual dualisms concerning the mental and the physical, the world of inner subjective experience and that of objective reality, has particular significance in the domain of poetry, for it implies a movement away from the idea that the synthesis of different aspects of experience is the goal of art.⁶ In the works studied here, this idea is in fact reversed, for by emphasizing the grain and the dynamism of experience, the poet draws out the fact that it is the *process* and not the *result* of synthesis that characterizes thought and that it is the experience of this synthesizing action that poetry is (and perhaps more so than any other creative form) good at capturing. It would seem, therefore, that for these poets in particular, it is primarily a given poem's ability to invoke or rather induce an experience that makes a poem successful, and capable of bringing about a modification in the pattern of the reader's thought.⁷

The suggestion here is that certain characteristics of their texts break from traditional approaches – and even from various contemporary creative trends – in highly significant ways, and that this bears directly on our understanding of the way poetry functions. To generalize a little about the particular dynamic that seems to unite their otherwise extremely diverse work, it seems that their movement back behind words to draw from elements of thought that are generally ignored or overlooked constitutes a direct reaction to a world saturated by sign systems. This does not, however, imply a primarily negative poetic approach: indeed one particularly significant aspect of their work is its *affirmative* nature. In their work the negation of the known is only a stage

⁵ The idea of transformation will be dealt with in great depth in Part III.

⁶ This idea was particularly popular at the end of the nineteenth century, partly due to Wagner's influence. His belief in the possibility of an 'art total' was quickly taken up in literary spheres, and referred to extensively by poets such as Mallarmé. This ideal artistic form continued to haunt a number of writers and artists throughout the twentieth century.

⁷ These ideas will be developed in much more detail in Section ii of this introduction in relation to contemporary theories concerning the importance of attentiveness and pattern-making to the creative process.

necessary to what is (as I hope to show) an affirmation of being and of the creative power of all thought. Their work therefore seems to involve a particular form of engagement: an engagement that instead of involving construction on the known involves a move back to the unknown or unformulated. As mentioned above, one aim of this thesis is to suggest that poetry functions by drawing on the boundary within which mental and physical blur. The fact that these poets raise questions concerning the relation between thought and experience *explicitly* is what provides the direct connection between the analysis of their work and the exploration of this idea.

One point I hope to make here, then, is that the particular power of their work is bound to the way in which it transcends certain debates on which much twentieth century literature (and the accompanying criticism) has turned.⁸ This is not to deny the existence of profound affinities between the approaches studied here and those of certain earlier poets. What is more, many twentieth century movements or more individual innovations have drawn from the most diverse aspects of experience, hence paving the way, to a certain extent, for the freedom regarding what can be considered poetic material apparent in the approaches of the authors studied here. These poets refer extremely rarely, if at all, to possible influences. Not one of them belongs to a 'literary circle'. This thesis reflects these particularities: here the intention is neither to trace possible lineages, nor to concentrate uniquely on what might be perceived as similarities between their works. This section is therefore intended primarily to situate the work of these writers in the context of certain primary currents in twentieth century French literature.

⁸ Martin Jay's work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of the Visual in 20th century France* furthers this argument. He emphasizes the primary position negation has held in both creative and critical domains over the last century, suggesting that this has created the space necessary for the contemporary transcendence of traditional dualisms. His book is (as is obvious from the title) primarily concerned with visual perception, and his study indicates the way vision is undermined in a culture that is ostensibly ocular-centric. His work nonetheless provides a striking proof of the gradual disruption of the traditional hierarchy of the senses in twentieth century thought in both creative and critical contexts.

It would be impossible to make any generalizations about twentieth century French poetry without referring to Stéphane Mallarmé's revolutionary use of the space of the page. Mallarmé's experimentation with typography and pagination arose partly from his fascination with developments in printing; the alteration not only of the way texts were produced but also the way they could be presented.⁹ What is particularly relevant here is the desire that lay behind his experimentation: the desire to capture the dynamic, physical experience of thought, or, in his words 'l'acte magnifique de vivre'.¹⁰ As he wrote: 'Je crois que pour être bien l'homme, la nature se pensant, il faut penser de tout son corps – ce qui donne une pensée pleine et à l'unisson vibrant immédiatement comme ces cordes de violon avec sa boîte de bois creux', and indeed *Un coup de dés*, far from constituting a rigid representation of an idea or state of mind, intentionally reactivates the link between the physicality of thought and that of language by drawing on the spatial elements of thought in a way which suggests immediate affinities with the work of the poets studied here.¹¹ Mallarmé's belief that poetry should necessitate '[l]e recommencement des conditions ainsi que des matériaux de la pensée', and that the poetic act should involve 'l'emploi nu de la pensée' are far closer to the beliefs voiced by the poets studied here than many expressed by poets who have preceded them more directly.¹²

Following Mallarmé's revolution within poetry, the desire to experiment with the boundaries of poetic form and to challenge the dividing line traditionally set up between the verbal and the visual, continued to mark a vast amount of twentieth century poetry. Such experimentation was, however, often bound to quite different aims to those he expressed, whether or not they were directly influenced by external factors such as

⁹ It is important to note that my interpretation of *Un coup de dés* does not coincide with the idea that it involved a simple return to the origins of language, to the inscriptions made by the seer on the divination table, as has been suggested by various critics, including, notably, Anne-Marie Christin (see *L'Image écrite*, Christin, 1995:119). It also differs from Julia Kristeva's semiotic approach as put forward in *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Kristeva, 1974).

¹⁰ Mallarmé, 2001:216.

¹¹ Mallarmé, 1995:353.

¹² Mallarmé, 2001:233,406.

technological developments (cinema and photography, two of many), events (such as the World Wars), or the appearance of new disciplines (psychoanalysis for example). Despite the fact that the appearance or presentation of texts can often suggest similarities between the work of different authors, such appearances are often deceptive, and can mask the most diverse poetic approaches. The cursory glance at the work of a number of groups and individual writers that follows is intended to bring out the significance of such underlying contrasts.

The work of the Surrealist group is of obvious relevance here due to its frequently cross-disciplinary nature and also due to the interest expressed by so many of those associated with the group in the process of thought.¹³ One central aim of the Surrealist group was to create new meaning by drawing from the unconscious mind.¹⁴ As André Breton (who was greatly influenced by Freud's ideas concerning free-association, dream analysis and the hidden unconscious) stated in the first Surrealist manifesto of 1924: 'Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieure de certaines formes d'associations négligées jusqu'à lui, à la toute puissance du rêve, au jeu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous les autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie'.¹⁵ Their interest in thought processes, and the potential significance of those aspects of thought that escape introspection suggests certain affinities with the poets studied here, yet despite such apparent similarities, both the reasons why and the way in which they exploited other media differ in several significant ways from those associated with the approaches to be analysed here.

One salient difference lies in the emphasis they put on the unconscious. Their experimentation, whether with drawing, with automatic writing or with collaborative

¹³ See Jenny's work *La Fin de l'intériorité* for a discussion of the link between the Surrealist approach and photography (Jenny, 2002:150).

¹⁴ See Alexandrian's work *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* for an extensive discussion of their interest in dreams (Alexandrian, 1974).

¹⁵ Breton, 2000:36.

creativity, was intended to draw out those thoughts or ideas that could not be reached through introspection. However, the planning alone that preceded such experiments renders the idea that their work involved a mere plunge into the unknown questionable, and it can be argued that their work is indeed ultimately analytic: an exteriorization not of thought *as experience*, but of thought about thought.¹⁶ It is not possible to develop this argument here, but it is worth mentioning that their prioritization of the unconscious does indicate several ideas (underlying their approach) that contrast significantly with those of the authors studied here. One concerns what can and what cannot be known directly. Another concerns their belief in a ‘réalité supérieure’ that ordinarily lies beyond our grasp, our minds being overrun by habit (whether in the domain of perception or language use). The two are of course connected, and combined infer that meaning lies beyond the reach of ordinary perception; it must be extracted via the manipulation of the mind. It is not only the importance put on mind control (masked by the constant appeal to the unconscious) but also the split made between the conscious and the unconscious mind, the knowable and the hidden that matters in this context. The authors studied here (and Alferi in particular) do indeed draw frequently from dreams for example, yet the dream is in no way considered a state that allows privileged access to a reality hidden at the back of the mind. Instead, dreams are explored insofar as they interact or intertwine with ordinary conscious experience; they are considered simply as a form of thought that draws differently from perceptual experience, memory and language. The exploration of dreams is therefore not intended to contribute to the development of a new form of representation that would be capable of capturing a reality ‘beyond’: instead it is just a fundamental aspect of the exploration of any given thought process.

¹⁶ In the light of Freud’s influence on Surrealism, it is worth referring to his comment that what interested him in the works produced by those associated with the group was less their unconscious than their conscious. He argued that their work was highly structured by what he termed ‘ego activity’, their experiments therefore in fact very much shaped and processed by the conscious mind (he explored these ideas notably in the course of a meeting with Salvador Dalí) (see Sauret, 1999).

The Surrealist movement continues to have perceivable repercussions in all of the arts, for it involved a profound liberation of the imagination and thus in a way redefined creativity, and it is primarily the emphasis the Surrealists put on creative freedom regarding media that is relevant in this context.¹⁷ The work of the COBRA group, which developed in its wake, suggests direct affinities with that of the poets studied here. This new group, founded in 1948, was first referred to as Revolutionary Surrealism, and the principal writers and artists associated with this group were Christian Dotremont, Asger Jorn, Serge Vandercam and Pierre Alechinsky who worked both individually and together, producing a range of works inspired by their profound reflection on the gesture and on the physical act of writing, two recurrent themes in the diverse works to be looked at here.¹⁸ In their ‘peintures-mots’ and ‘logogrammes’, words no longer accompany images, or vice-versa; the two fuse in the physical substance of the work. The fascination these poets and painters had with the physicality of writing was not merely a result of their desire to break with poetic tradition. Their approach was in part influenced by a range of texts appearing at the time that aimed to combat all forms of idealism and instead stress the materiality of brain and body. One writer whose work is relevant here is Gaston Bachelard, who was both a scientist and a philosopher. In his work *L’Eau et le rêve: essai sur l’imagination de la matière*, he developed his concept of the ‘imagination matérielle’, which, opposed to the ‘imagination formelle’ (a force bound to the search for novelty) is directed towards ‘le fond de l’être’.¹⁹ He argued against the belief inherent in much psychological discourse that imaginary images are all ‘images de la forme’, positing the existence of what he termed ‘images *directes* de la

¹⁷ One caveat should be made here concerning Artaud whose work suggests certain strong similarities with that of the poets studied here. His poetic approach is inseparable from his almost myopic attentiveness to his own thought processes, and his individualism and obsessive approach to poetry both played a part in the early termination of his association with the Surrealist group. The violent power of his work is similar to that of Novalis’s, and in view of the fact that the latter wrote his thesis on Artaud, this is one point at which the suggestion of literary heritage seems unavoidable.

¹⁸ See, for example, the text *J’écris pour voir* which includes text, photographs and logogrammes by Dotremont and Alechinsky (Dotremont, 2004).

¹⁹ Bachelard, 1993:1.

matière'. He described these as follows: 'la vue les nomme, mais la main les connaît [...] on les rêve substantiellement, intimement, en écartant les formes périssables, les vaines images, le devenir des surfaces'.²⁰ His insistence on the materiality of such images is reflected in the commentary this group provided of their own work, notably in their prioritization of the physicality of the creative act, but also (and often in a very explicit way) in many works themselves: the words that appear on one 'peinture-mot' for example, read: 'il y a plus de choses dans la terre d'un tableau que dans le ciel de la théorie esthétique'. Such self-reflexivity was not omnipresent in their work, but the tendency to intellectualize the physical aspects of creativity contrasts sharply with the avoidance of conceptualization and abstraction that is characteristic of the works studied here.

This difference in approach brings the discussion to Henri Michaux, a poet at no point associated with COBRA, but whose increasing experimentation with painting at this time was also rooted in his fascination with the physicality of the act of writing. The emphasis he put on the gesture was inseparable from his increasing dissatisfaction with language as a medium, and his experimentation with painting developed gradually alongside his poetry until it finally began to displace it altogether. He laid great stress on this development, describing his 'Idéogrammes' (created in 1950-51) as 'des libérateurs [...] [u]n nouveau langage, tournant le dos au verbal'.²¹ He explained his need to paint as follows: 'je peins pour laisser là les mots, pour arrêter la démangeaison du comment et pourquoi'.²² Like the poets associated with the COBRA group, he was fascinated by Chinese calligraphy, which, as Michel Foucault observed, retains 'l'image immobile et encore reconnaissable des choses elles-mêmes', in direct opposition to the phonetic horizontality of Western script.²³ Foucault's comment is particularly relevant

²⁰ Bachelard, 1993:2.

²¹ Michaux, 'Mouvements', in Paquement 1993:124.

²² Michaux, 'Allocution de la Galerie Daniel Cordier', in Paquement, 1993:206.

²³ Foucault, 1966:10.

here, for it indicates one main aim of a large number of poets working at this time: to develop a new method of signification free from the restraints imposed by the linearity of Western script and the split between word and image implied by it. Michaux perhaps took this furthest, and experiments such as those he carried out were vital to the development of poetry, for they brought out both the fundamental physicality of the act of writing and the frequently non-linear nature of thought. To return to the present, as will be seen, Tarkos and Novarina in particular attach great importance to the gesture. However, in the context of their approaches, although the gesture is still considered to constitute a fundamental and irreplaceable part of the creative act, it is no longer conceptualized or elevated in and for itself and nor is it considered to be significant only insofar as it can be opposed to the word. No longer used, therefore, as a tool to expose the arbitrary nature of language, the gesture is instead incorporated, as a physical act, into poetry, conceived of as integral to the creative action of thought, as opposed to being creative of sense or deconstructive of signification in its own right. Even if the gesture is not reproduced in any explicit visual way (which it can be, see Tarkos's 'Calligrammes' for example), the physical sensation of the act of writing is still incorporated into the poem, for if the creativity of the experience of thought is to be activated in the mind of the reader, no aspect of that process can be ignored. This underlines the fact that for these poets, the emphasis is not on the arbitrary nature of language 'in itself' because language is not conceived of as something that exists outside of thought, but as part of its very substance.

The liberation poetry underwent in the first half of the twentieth century did not, of course, lead to the disappearance of the written text, and indeed, from the 1960s, poetry was largely characterized by a return to it. However, experimentation with the visual arts had altered poetic approaches: the profound spatiality of poetry had been brought to light, and while moving away from the use of images and the prioritization

of the gesture, the page continued to be exploited directly. In the work of poets such as André Du Bouchet, Philippe Jaccottet and Yves Bonnefoy this often entailed the use of the space of the page to create visual impressions capable of evoking the content of a poem while simultaneously inducing a dynamism within the text that would rhythm reading pattern.²⁴ Jaccottet chooses a quotation from Pasternak translated by Du Bouchet to best capture the essence of Du Bouchet's work. This translation reads as follows: « l'image est le produit naturel de la brièveté de la vie de l'homme et de l'immensité de la tâche qu'il s'est assigné. C'est cette incompatibilité qui le contraint à tout considérer de l'œil enveloppant de l'aigle, à traduire par brefs éclats son appréhension immédiate. Telle est l'essence de la poésie ».²⁵ This quotation serves to highlight two ideas concerning the poet's task that provide a useful contrast with the poetic approaches to be analysed here. The first concerns Pasternak's conception of the totalizing nature of the poetic image, which is caught by 'l'œil enveloppant de l'aigle'. The second concerns translation: the poet must 'traduire par brefs éclats son appréhension immédiate'. The two are connected, but it is worth considering them separately. The idea that the poet sees things differently and yet better is bound to the idea that there is no 'beyond' other than the one we are capable of creating on the basis

²⁴ An extract from a poem by Du Bouchet, for example, appears as follows:

Je regarde l'air animé comme si, avant l'horizon lisse,
j'étais embarrassé de cette étendue que j'embrasse.
Sur le sol à nouveau retourné, où le jour en suspens
s'abreuve à notre pas,
fixe, dans sa blanche indécision.

Comme le vêtement de ce glacier que l'usure couvre de son
givre.

Du Bouchet, 'Sur le pas', in Para ed., 2000:239.

²⁵ Du Bouchet, in Jaccottet, 1968:261.

of subjective experience. Michel Collot reinforces this point when he uses the concept of the horizon to suggest that for poets such as Du Bouchet the poem ‘recèle [...] une réserve inépuisable de perspectives nouvelles sur le monde [...] Donnant à voir un paysage tout en traçant une limite à nos regards, il résume le paradoxe de toute manifestation, qui voile et dévoile tout à la fois; il ne renferme d’autre mystère que celui de notre être-là, d’autre éclaircie que celle, toujours précaire et réservée, d’un « il y a »’.²⁶ The visual, in the work of poets such as Du Bouchet, is therefore used to overcome the insufficiency of language, for the latter, when spatialized, becomes capable of reflecting the relationship between vision and thought directly. This may seem very close to the aims of the poets looked at here, yet the idea of translation referred to above suggests otherwise, for it underlines the fact that for poets such as Du Bouchet, the way the world is perceived reflects internal conscious processes, and the poetic act involves the interpretation and translation of perception. The poet therefore uses words and the spaces between them to confine the gaze. By ‘traçant une limite’, the poetic act involves the subjective construction of a space capable of *containing* the unknown.²⁷

It is the idea of translation that provides the main contrast between poets such as Du Bouchet and the poets studied here, for it not only entails a radically different conception of the poet’s task but also a different conception of the subject. For the poets studied here, the question of translation simply does not arise, largely due to their implicit rejection of any sharp boundary lines between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience, or in other words self and world. As opposed to aiming to *translate* an experience, they therefore work (as will be seen) to *re-actualize* the dynamic interplay set up between language and perception in thought as it occurs, language becoming the very substance in which the boundaries between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, ‘self’ and ‘world’ can be

²⁶ Collot, 1988, v.II:15.

²⁷ This contained unknown replaces the traditional idea of the locatable ‘beyond’.

transgressed.²⁸ As will be seen, in their work the space of the page is often used in a very direct way either to call particular representational structures into question in the context of a particular form of thought, or to manipulate the phonetic texture of a poem. In each case, however, the aim is not to evoke an image or even to capture an aspect of thought that might seem to escape precise description, but to reproduce more closely the particular interrelation of sensory experience and language as experienced in the context of a given thought.

One last point is necessary in order to contextualize the work of these poets, and this does not concern the use of other media, but the conception of the poetic act. Oulipo (‘Ouvroir de littérature potentielle’) is the title that reunites an extremely important literary group set up in 1960 by the poet Raymond Queneau and the mathematician François Le Lionnais, which still functions today. One belief fundamental to this group is that the development and imposition of restrictions is the first stage of real creativity. They are hence fundamentally opposed to the idea that the creative act depends on an un-analysable moment of inspiration. Their conception of literary creativity as a form of intellectual fabrication has been responsible not only for a range of fascinatingly intricate verbal constructions, but also for a large number of so-called experimental texts classified as poetry on the basis not of their intrinsic worth as poems, but on their apparent novelty (‘apparent’ to be taken in both senses of the word). The prioritization of constraint entails one important assumption: that language is a tool of thought as opposed to an aspect of it. This assumption, which implies a functional – or at the very least modular – conception of the mind is implicit in such approaches whatever their final worth, and it is this that marks the main difference between them

²⁸ The quotations employed above were not chosen arbitrarily, for the concept of the poetic ‘horizon’ Collot appeals to will be questioned later on in the course of this thesis. To glance ahead briefly, it will be suggested that this concept, due to implications it bears concerning not only space but also time (progression and historicity) is unsuitable in the context of the contemporary poetry studied here. I will hence propose that this concept should be replaced in the context of contemporary poetry with the notion of a vertical scale, for (as I will discuss) the notion of verticality is better suited to bring out the transformational nature of the texts studied.

and those studied here.²⁹ As has been mentioned, experimentation, for the poets to be looked at, must either be necessary to the development of a work, or just occur naturally in parallel to a written text. As for constraints, these are never imposed on a proposed work. They may, however, be perceivable retrospectively, having imposed themselves as a given text was written. Planning and construction therefore have little place in the conception of the poetic act proposed. One highly significant comment Alferi makes is that thought is only poetically productive, ‘en faisant reculer les phrases, puis en suivant comme un souvenir ce qui n’est qu’un pressentiment’, the stress he puts on dynamism reinforced by Novarina’s statement: ‘Le langage est matière humaine et matière des choses: un jeu d’énergies. Pas du tout un outil à notre service’ (CP:48, LC:72). These differences firstly indicate the fact that for these poets language is neither a tool of thought nor a rock-like substance the poet carves at, but a part of thought, and secondly that for them, it is not literature that bears potential, but thought. The modification of form, for example, must be a necessary result of the modification of a thought.

To summarize this brief consideration of the exploitation of other media in twentieth century French literature, the primary difference between the work of the poets looked at here and those glanced at above does not lie in the fact that they exploit

²⁹ A brief comparison with what was happening in art at the time Oulipo was created is interesting here, and one comment made by Michael Fried in 1965 could (if the word poetry was put in the place of painting) be taken to be directly applicable to the literary criticism of the time. Fried commented that ‘criticism that shares the premises of modernist painting finds itself compelled to play a role in its development closely akin to, and potentially only somewhat less important than, that of new paintings themselves’ (Fried, in Harrison, 1965:24). Shortly afterwards (in 1967) an article by Sol LeWitt appeared in *Artforum* in which he provided the first substantial definition of conceptual art, stating that ‘in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work [...] all planning and decisions come beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art’ (LeWitt, in Albero and Stimson, 1999:12). To reinforce the wider relevance of the development of conceptual art, it is worth turning to Charles Harrison, the founder of the Art and Language group, who describes the advent of conceptual art as the necessary end of the strategy born at the end of the nineteenth century that aimed to free the materiality of art from its subordination to intellectual programmes. He explains the aim of the Art and Language group in particular to be ‘to prevent the supposed iconic face of a work of art from any longer masking its causal and indexical character’, commenting that ‘[a] painting deserving of the title is something that has an effect within the language-game of the spectator, such that the distribution of functions between the descriptions “literal” and “metaphorical” is rendered interesting and problematic’ (Harrison, 2001:98,153). What is significant is that the same criticism, that such works can simply end up reducing the work of art to a proposition (Joseph Kosuth’s presentation of a chair, a picture of that chair, a photograph of that chair and the written word ‘chair’ for example), can be applied to the work of several poets writing at this time.

other media but in the reasons for which they do so. Their use of other media is in no way analogical; it is not intended to illustrate ideas about thought. This implies a particular approach to the nature of perception, for the senses are not conceived of as interacting with a mind conceived of as functioning independently to them, but as playing a direct role in the developing thought of the conscious individual. For these poets, then, just as language can be moulded or modified both in appearance and in substance by the poetic act, so can the mind. As Tarkos writes: 'Au bout du chemin de la pensée, quelque chose doit se produire doit s'ouvrir avoir un peu changé par l'effet de la pensée' (P:38). These poets are in no way rejecting language, but recognizing their inseparability from it: the extent to which it constitutes part of their very substance.

Before concluding this brief glimpse of the literary context of these writers, it is worth mentioning the fact that these authors often refer to their interest in anglophone poets. Several names that recur, for example, are T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens. It is not possible to conduct an extensive analysis of the possible influences Modernist poetry may have had on the work of contemporary French authors, yet several observations can be made concerning this connection. Much Modernist poetry is characterized by the desire to make writing more like perceiving. In Pound's work, for example, perceptual experience is often condensed into the most precise linguistic form possible. This approach is inseparable from a belief in the ultimate indefinability of objects and a fascination with the relation between consciousness and its objects. A similar preoccupation with the nature of experience and of thought is therefore evident. But other connections can be made. Attentiveness to the minute characterizes the work of each poet studied here, particularly that of Alferi. One main contrast between his work and that of certain modernist poets is the way such attentiveness is brought to bear on the resulting poem. Pound's work, for example, involves condensation and polishing, until the poem becomes gem-like, an object of

perception that can be held up to the light and turned this way and that to let the light through differently. In Alferi's work, however, the aim is not the creation of a poetic object but the dynamic recreation of the interplay of different forms of perception in a given experience.³⁰

Although it is impossible to take this discussion much further here, I would argue that the interest these poets occasionally manifest in writers generally associated with modernism is an indication of their rejection of a post-modern aesthetic, and that their work constitutes the direct rejection of a literary context in which texts are lumped under the heading 'poetry' uniquely due to the fact that they seem difficult to confine within the limits of any other genre. This concurs with the belief reiterated by the poets studied, that mere experimentation with language and media in no way constitutes poetry and supports the idea that their poetry is marked by a new form of engagement, an engagement with goals conceived of as existing not beyond the poet's thought but within it. For them, the development of a poem is inseparable from the desire to capture experience as it occurs, to focus on the dynamic relations that bind self and world. The ambiguity of thought is therefore in no way an excuse for vagueness in the way the experience of it is captured. Thought is conceived, within their work, to be potentially transformational, and it is through heightened attentiveness to the actual experience of it that the individual can break beyond the known and, eventually, evolve.³¹ These poets

³⁰ An extract from 'An Ordinary Morning In New Haven' by Stevens seems to unite the particular aspects of Modernist poetry focused on above, for within this poem the solidity or grain of experience counteracts the arbitrary nature of both objects and words:

If it should be true that reality exists
In the mind: the tin plate, the loaf of bread on it,
The long-bladed knife, the little to drink and her

Misericordia, it follows that
Real and unreal are two in one: New Haven
Before and after one arrives or, say,

Bergamo in a postcard, Rome after dark,
Sweden described, Salzburg with shaded eyes
Or Paris in conversation at a café.

(Stevens, 1967:17)

³¹ The relation between their approaches and the conception of the self will be discussed in depth in Part III.

are, however, just as opposed to the conceptualization of experience and to the over-intellectualization of thought processes as they are to the attempted representation (linguistic, visual or both) of either. Indeed, the difference between their poetic approaches and those of almost all the authors listed above can be resumed in one belief they seem to share: that poetry (to draw the discussion full circle by returning to Mallarmé) should involve ‘[le] recommencement des conditions ainsi que des matériaux de la pensée’.³²

Section ii: THEORETICAL CONTEXT

With the exception of Tarkos, who died in 2004, all of the authors who figure here are still writing. The contemporary nature of the poetry studied entails two limitations of this thesis: firstly the fact that it cannot take account of what may or may not be produced following its completion; secondly (and most importantly here) the fact that little has yet been written on the work of these authors.³³ One aim of this study, however, is to convert the limited nature of the criticism available on the works of these poets into a critical asset, for the analysis of their work seems to require the avoidance of several trends that to a certain extent define contemporary poetry criticism. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive account of contemporary criticism here, instead, detailed reference will be made to particular critics in the course of this thesis where either my approach or my use of a particular concept differs in a significant way from theirs. However, it is worth mentioning two pervasive trends apparent in critical discourse that I intend to avoid. One trend involves extremes: the tendency to suggest, for example, either that poetry is bound for complete dissolution (whether or not this implies its replacement by some sort of ‘inter-media’ or ‘fusion’ art) or for rebirth (as an

³² Mallarmé, 2001:233

³³ Novarina’s work has attracted the most attention, primarily due to the fact that one of his works for the stage entitled *L’Espace furieux* entered the repertoire of the Comédie Française in 2005.

ideal linguistic form).³⁴ Such discourses often rely heavily on positive-negative dichotomies, and whether the critical text concerned assimilates poetry with the other arts in an overtly negative discourse that is rooted in the idea that the end of the twentieth century has marked the beginning of the gradual death of the ‘Arts’ as we know them, or heralds the re-ennoblement of poetry, the concepts appealed to are often the same. Another trend involves merging the boundaries between poetry and poetry criticism, which often leads to a diminution of analytic rigour.³⁵ Despite the fact that such texts can provide great insight into certain aspects of contemporary poetry it is important to note that the poets studied here do not fall into this category of writers and indeed, on the whole, express little interest in the work of their contemporaries.³⁶ Although such critical trends are of great interest in their own right, it is not possible to study them in great depth here. The decision to rely as little as possible on concepts currently fashionable in the domain of contemporary criticism is also intended to reflect a central aim of this study: to rely primarily for the development or adoption of concepts on the analysis of the way individual texts function.

³⁴ Jean-Michel Maulpoix’s idea of the appearance of a ‘nouveau lyrisme’ for example, relies on assumptions equally central to Jean-Marie Gleize’s conception of ‘le modernité post-poétique’ (see Maulpoix, 2000 and Gleize, 1992). An edition of the *Magazine littéraire* devoted to contemporary poetry that appeared in March 2001 provides a succinct but powerful insight into the strange homogeneity of the discourse employed by diverse contemporary poets and critics (*Le Magazine littéraire*, 400 (2001)).

³⁵ The reliance on positive-negative dichotomies is reflected on a superficial level by titles such as *A quoi bon encore des poètes?* and *A quoi bon la poésie aujourd’hui?*, titles proposed by Christophe Prigent and Jean-Claude Pinson respectively (Prigent, 1996; Pinson, 1999). It is exemplified, in a more detailed way, by the following extract from Jean-Michel Espitallier’s *Caisse à outils*. He writes: ‘la poésie, toujours radicalement présente, ici présente, s’affirme d’abord comme une insoumission inoculant ses grammaires parasites dans les bourdonnements communicationnels et le grisé du sens commun, rétive à toutes les injonctions de lisibilité, de traçabilité, de transparence, inféodée au temps réel de la consommation et à la marchandisation des discours avachissants-avachis. Langue d’une langue qui aurait perdu sa langue’ (Espitallier, 2006:24). The giddy oscillation between negative and positive terms apparent here persists throughout the text, and the proliferation of words prefixed by ‘in-’ is characteristic of the overtly rhetorical nature of Espitallier’s criticism. Emmanuel Hocquard and Philippe Beck are two other writers who constantly merge the boundary of poetry and criticism. A text by the former, entitled *Tout le monde se ressemble*, provides a particularly good example of such an approach (Hocquard, 1995).

³⁶ Even Alferi’s collaboration with Olivier Cadiot in the creation of the *Revue de littérature générale* can be seen primarily to manifest the desire to experiment with the review as a literary form. The fragmentary nature of the texts included and the way they are laid out encourage particular forms of reading pattern that are, for example, highly unusual in such a context. The experimental nature of this review is also underlined by the fact that the publication of these reviews has been neither cumulative nor chronological, bound instead to the exploration of a particular idea.

As opposed to drawing exclusively from literary criticism, then, I will draw from a range of disciplines. The argument is that this approach is necessitated both by certain specific aspects of both the texts studied and by the nature of the approach to be developed. Portugal and Alferi's direct references to and (in the case of Alferi, exploitation of) other media, for example, will lead me to draw from Georges Didi-Huberman and Gilles Deleuze. I will draw from the art-historian in order to clarify the way Portugal in particular experiments with the limits of the representational image, and from Deleuze's work on the cinematic image in relation to Alferi's exploitation of film. In both cases, the work of these theoreticians will be used to deepen the discussion of the way the media exploited effects the way specific texts function experientially. To turn to the approach to be developed, my use of the concept of touch, traditionally foreign to literary criticism, will also require the use of quite different sources. In this context, I will draw from writers as diverse as the anthropologist Ashley Montagu and the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu. These are specific and context-bound examples, but one domain I draw from throughout the thesis is the philosophy of mind. The inclusion of material from this discipline may seem surprising, but the decision to draw from this branch of philosophy was not arbitrary. Not only have philosophers working in this area recently started to express increasing interest in the imagination and in creativity, certain concepts developed in this field directly reflect a number of ideas that are (as will be seen) integral to the poetic approaches studied here. What is more, it is hoped that the apparent gap between this last discipline and poetry will render the juxtaposition of ideas developed in the context of each fruitful, for the fact that they are ordinarily seen to be mutually exclusive will guard against conceptual confusion. The analysis of the way particular texts work as poems, and the extent to which this is connected to the way in which they modify (implicitly or explicitly) the relation between perception and language in some way will therefore be juxtaposed where

appropriate with theories concerning the way thought functions. Such theories will therefore not be *imposed* on poetry, the intention being to draw out the significance of various ideas implicitly or explicitly bound to both disciplines.

It is vital to underline here that no concept will be employed without discussion, for failure to clarify those used would undermine the value of those developed. This indicates the usefulness of keeping the concepts proposed in French. Employing the term 'pensée-vue', for example, highlights the fact that the relation between thought and sight explored in the context of these authors is not restricted to image perception, an assumption that might be made if I simply drew from critics such as Didi-Huberman in my discussion of it. The concept 'pensée-voix' similarly elucidates the fact that the focus here is on the way the act of thinking is carried through into the act of enunciation, as opposed to 'l'énoncé' or the speech-act conceived of in purely linguistic terms. The term 'pensée-toucher' is important because it stresses the fact that my use of the concept of touch is not limited to the idea of contact, while simultaneously serving to differentiate the idea from others referred to, such as the concept of the 'Moi-peau' developed by Anzieu.

It is hoped, then, that the very disparity of the lexicon used by contemporary philosophers of mind in the analytic tradition and that of the French poets studied will make the comparison of ideas that appear central to both clearer, for the discussion will be unhindered by lexical (and hence by conceptual) ambiguity. This approach will therefore facilitate the avoidance of concepts that are bound to a particular line of already existing critical discourse (where a sufficiently restrictive definition of them does not exist) while also rendering the rigorous definition of all new terms proposed of primary importance.

To glance briefly, then, at certain particularly relevant ideas that have been developed recently in the philosophy of mind, it is worth turning first to Colin McGinn.

One of the most striking aspects of his recent work is the attention he pays within it to the imagination, a faculty that is often overlooked by philosophers in the analytic tradition. He defines the imagination as ‘essentially a creative, combinatorial faculty bound to attention and necessary to all thought’.³⁷ According to him, ‘imagining-that’ is the basic propositional attitude: we need the imagination to account for meaning. The connection he makes between imagination and attention is directly relevant to the work of the poets studied here, for however the aspect of experience concentrated on in their work may differ, each insists on the importance of heightened attentiveness – not necessarily to language and not necessarily to a perceived object, but to experience in and for itself. This is why McGinn’s description of the imagination as a ‘creative combinatorial faculty’ is significant, because it suggests the untraceable, non-linear nature of the imaginative process, which could best be described, perhaps, as pattern-making. This suggests immediate relevance to poetry, which often functions (as admitted by the most traditional approach to it) through the unexpected juxtaposition of words and the use of sound and rhythm. However, McGinn’s theory has further significance here, for his argument brings out the profound physicality of thought while also emphasizing the fundamental ambiguity of the way it works. McGinn’s belief that consciousness is by nature undefinable arose in part from his study of the imagination. The arguments for and against this idea cannot be discussed in depth here, and the acceptance or non-acceptance of this claim in no way affects the relevance of his research into the imagination. However, it is worth noting that this idea can be related to ideas expressed by various other contemporary philosophers including Gerald Edelman and Alva Noë, whose work will also be drawn upon in the course of this thesis. Edelman, in a similar way to McGinn, insists on the fundamental indeterminacy and irreducibility of our mental processes. According to him, consciousness does not imply

³⁷ McGinn, 2004[i]:131.

one single centre of supervision in the brain but the constant modification and development of existing neural circuits; complexity and ambiguity are therefore vital to thought, and increasingly so as it becomes more creative. Noë supports this idea, arguing that the neural activity that connects brain, body and world is integrated into dynamic patterns of what he terms 'sensorimotor looping'. His research into the process of thought therefore underlines the fact that however either might ultimately be defined, neither thought nor consciousness can be described in any sufficient way without reference to perception.

The importance these philosophers put on ambiguity and creativity in the context of possible explanations of thought and consciousness is significant for several reasons. The idea that consciousness may depend on the interactive functioning of a variety of organs as opposed to functioning (or even existing) somehow separately from the body is not only striking in its own right, it also seems to reflect the particular emphasis put in the poetry studied here on the creativity of thought, which is not implied to be a purely mental phenomenon, but a phenomenon that draws largely from sensory experience. Insights provided by recent work carried out in the philosophy of mind therefore underline the importance of the way in which these poets transgress mind-body dualism by working on experience in and for itself, thus drawing out the constant repositioning or reshuffling of perceptual, linguistic and other elements that occurs in each and every experience, however seemingly insignificant. This brings the discussion back to the observation made above concerning the idea that these poets are not interested in *synthesizing* conscious experience by means of the poetic act but in capturing the experience of thought and hence the diverse elements that play a role in it, thus stressing the fundamental creativity of all thought. The ambiguous and non-linear processes of transformation and modification that are associated with the pattern-making activity of thought in the work of the philosophers glanced at above are therefore reflected directly

in the approaches of the poets studied here, because for them attentiveness to a given experience has no goal outside of that experience: the transformation or modification that may take place will only ever be perceivable retrospectively, whether in a finished work or in the apprehension of the alteration of a habitual form of thought. Their work will therefore be seen to support the argument for an approach to thought and to consciousness that transcends the various dualisms that have marked twentieth century discourses, as the analysis of their concentration on the way actual experience often transgresses such conceptual boundaries is intended to show.

Before moving on, it is important to discuss (briefly) the possible objection that the connection between thought and perception cannot be discussed without reference to phenomenology, or at least, in the context of this study, to those literary critics who have been directly influenced by this branch of philosophy.³⁸ Reference will indeed be made to a number of insights provided by authors such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean-Luc Nancy throughout this study, but I have chosen not to confine my approach to ideas or concepts developed within the phenomenological tradition for several reasons. Firstly, despite the significance of the fact that this discipline is currently being taken up afresh by several contemporary thinkers, as Ian James has pointed out in relation to Nancy's work, many of the concepts employed even today are laden with preconceptions which renders the new ideas proposed difficult to extricate and employ in any other context.³⁹ The second point is intimately connected to the first; phenomenology is an essentially descriptive (as opposed to analytic) branch of philosophy and this entails that within it the discussion of perception, by drawing exclusively from the subjective experience of the writer, often carries with it the sense of an unbreachable subject-object divide. This point is directly related to my avoidance

³⁸ Here I am referring in particular to those critics who are often termed 'critics of consciousness' (see Lawall, 1968). Many were associated with the Geneva school.

³⁹ James discusses the relation between Nancy's use of vocabulary and his conception of philosophy as literature in depth (see James, 2006:21).

of literary criticism that draws from phenomenology. Such criticism is primarily inapplicable to the work of the poets studied here due to the idea of the psychological subject that is implied by the concepts and vocabulary it depends on, for these poets (as I will argue) transcend traditional identity criteria, concentrating less on subjective experience as such, than on those particular experiences in which the boundaries between subjective and objective blur. Thirdly, as will be seen, in this study I will be suggesting that poetry functions by drawing from aspects of experience that we are usually unconscious of; as opposed to appealing uniquely to vision, for example, I will draw from the relation between the spatial dynamics of thought and our proprioceptive abilities.⁴⁰ As suggested above, these observations are in no way intended to belittle phenomenological discourse in general, and it is important to note that many of the insights provided by thinkers working in this tradition are in no way incompatible with the ideas being developed by the philosophers referred to above. However, this subject could form the basis of a quite different study of equal length.

CONCLUSION:

To summarize, the theoretical approach that will be employed in the course of this thesis will be developed primarily on the basis of the analysis of particular texts written by the four poets, with emphasis put on the way in which they draw from other media and the role these media play in the resulting poem. The thesis will be structured around the development of the three concepts ‘pensée-vue’ ‘pensée-voix’ and ‘pensée-toucher’, with two chapters, each drawing primarily from the work of one particular author, devoted to each. The brief introduction to each Part will centre on the development of each of the above concepts. The order in which they are discussed is intended to reflect

⁴⁰ Gallagher’s discussion of the difficulty inherent in relying exclusively on phenomenological vocabulary to clarify the distinction between body image and body schema is directly relevant here and will be referred to in much greater detail later on (see Gallagher, 2006:40).

the attention paid to each form of perception in twentieth century critical discourse (vision therefore naturally taking first place).

The short introductions to the three Parts of the thesis will focus very specifically on the concept to be developed within each, and will indicate the particular relevance of this concept to the work of the two authors focused on within that Part. The first chapter of Part I will involve the analysis of Portugal's poetic approach through concentration on texts such as *Le Plus simple appareil* in which she questions the nature of traditional representational structures and their ability to capture the significance of our visual experience of the world. The second chapter will be devoted to Alferi's use of film as a poetic medium in his 'cinépoèmes', turning to *Fmn* and *Le Chemin familial du poisson combatif* in order to explore the role this aspect of his work plays in the transcendence of word-image dualism. Part II will begin by concentrating on Novarina's conception of the actor and his belief in the creativity inherent in the act of enunciation, developed notably in texts such as *Devant la parole*. The importance of the concept of 'voice' in the context of Alferi's conception of the poetic act will form the basis of the fourth chapter. The first chapter of Part III will focus on Tarkos's definition of language as a substance that is moulded by the poet, and his conception of the poetic act as an exploration of the boundary of sense. The sixth chapter will return to Novarina, who insists throughout his work on the physicality of both language and of the creative act, suggesting, in a similar way to Tarkos, that poetry is a medium particularly suited to question and test the boundaries traditionally set up between mind and body, self and world.

PART I

PENSÉE-VUE

INTRODUCTION

References to vision, whether occluded or manifest, recur in the most quotidian fragments of speech in both French and English, reflecting the primacy of this sense in Western culture. It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between thought and sight has been a subject that has nourished a vast number of philosophical and literary debates, which have been (and continue to be) influenced by a variety of different factors, notably the prevalent mode of visual representation used and the broader cultural importance attached to visual images within a given period. Thus, factors as diverse as religious iconophobia and innovations in printing have played important roles in the way vision has been considered, the former, for example, serving to draw out the potentially destructive power of the image, and the latter playing a key role in the increasing connections made between sight and verbalization in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the development of photography, cinema, computers, and, of course, the internet has led to what has been often been termed visual saturation, although the precise effects of these technological media on both the way we see and the way we think about sight have been diverse.⁴¹

French culture has ostensibly always been strikingly ocularcentric, yet, as Martin Jay points out in his pioneering work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, vision, although continuing to play a prominent role, has often, explicitly or implicitly, carried negative connotations in twentieth century French literature and discourse. It is impossible to do his argument justice here, but it is worth mentioning the emphasis he puts on the fact that vision, although

⁴¹ D.N. Rodowick's development of the concept of the 'figural' to define the semiotic regime resulting from the collapse of the distinction between linguistic and plastic representation is particularly relevant in the context of digitalization (see Rodowick, 2001:2).

constantly referred to, is often associated, in the work of authors as diverse as Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes with violence, voyeurism, or the cult of the image.

One thinker Jay considers to stand a little apart from this trend is Merleau-Ponty, who notably refused the strict compartmentalization of imagination and perception proposed by Sartre. Merleau-Ponty's ideas concerning 'la relation en quelque sorte organique du sujet percevant et du monde' explored in works such as *La Phénoménologie de la perception* and *Le Primat de la perception*, are bound to his approach to the nature of perception: as he writes: 'Nous ne pouvons [...] appliquer à la perception la distinction classique de la forme et de la matière, ni concevoir le sujet qui perçoit comme une conscience qui « interprète », « déchiffre » ou « ordonne » une matière sensible dont elle posséderait la loi idéale'.⁴² Jay draws from Merleau-Ponty's essay on Cézanne to underline the fact that according to Merleau-Ponty 'the great artist does not negate perception; he or she renews it by returning us to that primordial experience before the split between imagination and sensation, expression and imitation'.⁴³

These particular aspects of Merleau-Ponty's approach are significant in the context of contemporary approaches to the connection between thought and sight. As mentioned in the introduction, one striking aspect of contemporary philosophy is the attention paid to the intermodal nature of thought, and the insights provided by Merleau-Ponty are frequently referred to in this context by philosophers such as Shaun Gallagher, whose direct focus on the role embodiment plays in human development is particularly marked. Gallagher differentiates, however, between two sets of questions that should be posed concerning experience: the first concerns the phenomenal aspects of the structure of experience (here Merleau-Ponty is relevant) and the second focuses

⁴² Merleau-Ponty, 1996:42.

⁴³ Jay, 2006:306.

on what he terms ‘pre-noetic’ aspects of the structure of consciousness: aspects that develop as the embryo moves in the womb. For him, the emphasis is no longer on the *structure* of consciousness, then, it is on the *structuring* of consciousness.⁴⁴ He therefore clarifies a further distinction (until now left strikingly vague in both philosophical and psychological contexts) between body image and body schema, defining the former as ‘a system of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs pertaining to one’s own body’ and the latter as ‘a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring’.⁴⁵ This distinction directly supports his argument that no ‘translation’ occurs or needs to occur between different forms of perception, for the concept of an intermodal code (originally shaped by pre-natal movement) that is central to the latter means that visual and motor systems speak the same ‘language’ from birth.⁴⁶

Gallagher’s insistence on the relation between the visual dynamics of thought and our experience of embodiment is reflected in McGinn’s work on the imagination (referred to in the General Introduction), for McGinn analyses the distinction between images and percepts (observing notably that the former are, unlike percepts, attention-dependent, and hence bound to intentionality) in order to argue that cognitive imagination (used in linguistic understanding, to imagine that such and such might be the case) is not only continuous with sensory imagination but might even stem from it.⁴⁷ He concludes that: ‘It might *even* be true that without a capacity for imagery, linguistic

⁴⁴ See Gallagher, 2006:2.

⁴⁵ Gallagher, 2006:24.

⁴⁶ Gallagher, 2006:80.

⁴⁷ Sensory imagination involves experiences such as imagining that you are seeing something blue. One example of an act that appears to require the cognitive imagination, on the other hand, is that involved in imagining a 2000-sided figure. We can indeed imagine such a figure existing, but we cannot form a complete mental image of it. This example is particularly useful, for it shows that although vision and touch are in some way involved in such mental exercises, neither is sufficient for the idea of the figure to be properly grasped.

understanding would not be possible, because cognitive imagination relies on mechanisms and processes that originate in sensory imagination'.⁴⁸

Dynamism is therefore considered vital to the meaningfulness of the interaction between vision and thought in the work of both philosophers, and the following two chapters will aim to suggest that the particular brilliance of the work of the two poets focused on lies in part in the way in which they explore the experience of this dynamism.

A movement away from representation and description is central to both Alferi and Portugal, but this does not entail, in either case, the aim to flatten out the distinction between the visual and the verbal: instead, it seems indicative of a particular way of considering (and exploiting) the role visual experience plays in thought. I will suggest that vision is therefore not negated as such in their work: its role is reconsidered. Vision is activated by both the act of reading and that of writing and their experimentation with the space of the text manifests a conception of the poetic text as event and experience. In their work, words such as 'figure' 'réseau' and 'carte', which all designate an object that although visible, only bears meaning virtually, are frequently used to define the text. This brings us back to the suggestion made in the General Introduction, that their approaches present more similarities with Mallarmé's than with those of many authors who have preceded them more directly. He, of course, frequently used the term 'constellation' in relation to the text, writing of *Un coup de dés* as follows: 'le livre, expansion totale de la lettre, doit d'elle tirer, une mobilité et spacieux, par correspondences, instituer un jeu'.⁴⁹ This underlines the fact that for Alferi and Portugal, the reader's movement around the space of a poem is fundamentally different from the activity involved in the contemplation of static representational images. For

⁴⁸ McGinn, 2004[i]:158.

Here, the word 'imagery' designates our ability to imagine, not our ability to think descriptively about things.

⁴⁹ Mallarmé, 1998:213.

each author the poem is on one level a place of dynamic potential to be reactivated by the reader. Manipulating the space of the text is for both a means of capturing the experience of thought in a way that enables it to be reproduced more effectively as the poem is read, inducing a more immediate sort of engagement on the part of the reader. Understanding a text is therefore in no way conceived to be synonymous with critical analysis: it does not imply a unidirectional gaze.

In view of the emphasis put by these poets on the importance of will and action in the context of the poetic act, it seems possible to replace the word ‘painter’ with the word ‘poet’ in Noë’s observation that ‘the painter [poet] attends to the world *not as a* domain of facts and properties, states of affairs and so forth, but rather, to the world as a domain of skilful perceptual activity’.⁵⁰ Alferi and Portugal’s exploration of the role visual perception plays in thought in no way supports any argument for the primacy of visual perception over other sensory experience, instead it brings out the extent to which sight is intimately connected with tactile, kinaesthetic and auditory experience. The relation between experience and thought is both dynamic and interactive.

As mentioned in the introduction, then, the concept ‘pensée-vue’ is intended to capture the particular ways in which these authors draw out the active role vision plays in thought and to clarify the way these authors challenge the sufficiency of representational description directly. It is their particular fascination with the process of thought, and their extreme attentiveness to the role visual dynamics play in this experience that is unusual. The analysis of their work is intended to indicate how they exploit the visual dynamics of mental space in order to capture and provoke an experience of the fundamental creativity of thought; the way they draw directly from the fact that these dynamics are experienced most acutely when vision is activated during the process of reading or writing. My intention in focusing on these aspects of their

⁵⁰ Noë, 2004:179.

approaches is (as will be the case in Parts II and III) to draw out the way in which poetry directly engages elements of thought that are ordinarily considered quite remote from verbal communication. To look ahead, then, this Part does not aim to suggest that the work of contemporary poets such as Alferi and Portugal necessarily signals the end of a period bound to the denigration of the visual, but that their approaches indicate a new attitude to vision and that their work *transcends* the debates concerning word-image dualism on which so much twentieth century poetry (and poetry criticism) have turned. Implications of their approaches concerning the concept of the subject that arise here will be reflected in the discussion of the nature of communication in Part II (on ‘pensée-voix’) and in the exploration of the relation between being and transformation in Part III (on ‘pensée-toucher’).

CHAPTER 1

ANNE PORTUGAL: BEYOND REPRESENTATION, THE MODIFICATION OF THE FRAME

Vu de ce côté-ci

de l'horizon il se
produit forcément
une accélération
du cœur vers la nuit
on ne souhaite pas
d'autres passages
vers d'autres lumières
et s'il nous est possible
vous voyez bien des peines à croire
vous voyez bien des mots
des mouvements
sitôt créés
avec la bouche

et sur le formulaire le soir
on biffe
les inscriptions signalétiques (PS:91)

Portugal is the one author I concentrate on who does not personally experiment with other media. One of her texts, *Dans la reproduction en 2 parties égales des plantes et des animaux*, does indeed include photographs, but these were taken by Suzanne Doppelt. Nonetheless, these photographs are not used to illustrate her writing: they are integral to the text. Even her works that do not include such visual material are characterized by her constant exploration of the nature of the image (whether pictorial or linguistic) and the limits of various representational structures. Portugal aims throughout her work to bring out the creative potential latent in the simplest experience, and to show the extent to which this potential is curtailed by the restrictive methods of interpretation we often employ when attempting to capture them as experiences within a

given linguistic or pictorial structure or framework.⁵¹ On *définitif bob*, she stated that ‘un lieu m’a d’abord importé, les jeux vidéo’, describing the latter as a ‘matière première’ used alongside ‘les écrits du cinéma’.⁵² This choice of media is doubly significant, for it underlines her interest in the nature of perceptual experience and also manifests her desire to explore contemporary technologies. Throughout her work, by shifting the focus from what we see to how we see it – to the perceptual elements of all thought – she questions the boundaries that are traditionally set up between the virtual and the actual, the real and the imaginary, the conceptual and the non-conceptual. Language, in her work, freed from the constraints of any representational mould, takes on a new dynamism that is at the root of the great energy that characterizes her poetry.

In this chapter, I will first consider *Le Plus simple appareil*, a text that takes the word ‘exposition’ as a starting point from which to explore the limits of both pictorial and linguistic representation as aspects of thought. I will then turn to *définitif bob*, an exploration of the limits of poetic form that, as described above, draws on the virtual dynamics of the video game. The analysis of these works will be directed to the way in which a particular form of *visual* dynamism is instigated in each one.

Before beginning the analysis of the two texts listed above, it is worth considering *Dans la reproduction en 2 parties égales des plantes et des animaux* briefly. This text, although it draws directly from the indeterminate nature of both visual and non-visual experience, is primarily concerned with the arbitrary nature of conceptual thought. Photographic material is used not *constructively*, but *destructively* within it. The ambiguity of what each photograph represents and the relation it might have to the text curtails the reader’s imaginative (or, more precisely, imagistic) freedom, by blocking ordinary processes of reference and analogy. This play on the reader’s perceptual habits and expectations renders the linguistic abstractions of each passage

⁵¹ It is worth noting that she attributes her movement towards poetry largely to her distrust (felt since childhood) of discourses of all sorts (private correspondence).

⁵² Portugal, in Veinstein, 2002.

more, rather than less arbitrary. The text is largely ironical: it aims to create frustration in the reader through its apparent simplicity, exaggerating the indeterminacy that characterizes our experience in order to undermine the conceptual givens that are inherent in so much of our thought. This work therefore manifests many themes that recur in *définitif bob* and *Le Plus simple appareil*. The latter, however, are concerned less with the ambiguity of perception as we know it, than with the creativity of the dynamics that precede the description or definition of any perception. Both are overtly concerned with the nature and limits of *creative* thought. The indeterminacy of experience is hence not the *subject* of either poem, although both bring out the extent to which the experience of thought is often by nature indeterminate, or irreducible to analysis in terms of words or images alone. These two works are therefore better suited to indicate the particularity of Portugal's poetic approach for their semi-reflexivity highlights the profound reflection on the nature of creative language use that lies behind her work. The bearing Portugal's poetic approach has on the supposed limits of linguistic expression is bound to the relation that exists between her exploitation of language and of the page and her attentiveness to the nature of perceptual experience itself. The juxtaposition of these two texts – the first primarily concerned with the limits of pictorial representation, the second with the limits of poetic structure – will bring out both Portugal's preoccupation with boundaries, and the extent to which her conception of experience implies the connectedness of the visual and the linguistic in the action of thought.

Section i: TRANSCENDING THE IMAGE

The title *Le Plus simple appareil* indicates several of the most important themes that run through the book. The phrase 'Le Plus simple appareil' is a euphemism for naked. Euphemisms are used (and in this case literally so) to 'cover' or 'dress up' a meaning

that is often carried directly by another, single, word. This choice of title firstly calls to mind the extent to which metaphor is built into our everyday use of language. The most basic passage of prose is scattered with linguistic ‘images’ that have no relation other than that set up through metaphor with the ‘actual’ subject treated. The omnipresence of metaphor in language use is fundamental to its figurative nature. Words are often used to represent rather than to designate and it is the representational function we endow them with that interests Portugal. Secondly, the euphemism situates the physical reality (of nakedness) at two linguistic removes from the reader, as though the word ‘nu’ would be too close to the ‘reality’ of nudity. The relationship between words and what they designate – their power of evocation – is therefore called into play. Thirdly, the ambiguity integral to the euphemism encourages alternative readings of the title before any knowledge has been gained of the work itself. In French, the word ‘appareil’ is not only used to designate apparel or clothing, but can also mean ‘apparatus’ and even ‘camera’ (shorthand for ‘appareil-photo’). To begin with the possible connotations of the word ‘appareil’ in the first sense listed (extrapolating from its meaning in the context of the euphemism) it might refer to the way language can be used to embellish reality. ‘Apparatus’ could be taken to refer to the structural nature of the text or poem, understood as a mechanism used to transmit an idea or to generate an experience. Finally, ‘camera’ could refer to the descriptive method or form adopted by the author – to the ‘lense’ and ‘focus’ she has chosen to use to capture her idea or experience. To continue with this last analogy, the reference to photography could also refer to the nature of the representational language she adopts: in this case, ostensibly, ‘le plus simple’. A glimpse at the back cover of the book reinforces the relevance of these possible readings. The first line reads ‘« Suzanne et les vieillards » exposition’. A subject – Susannah and the elders – is given, but the word ‘exposition’ adds an important qualification to this, for despite the diverse meanings the verb ‘exposer’ can

take on, here the noun is primarily suggestive of a link with *visual* exhibition. The lines that follow are also visually evocative, including phrases such as ‘table d’orientation’ and ‘reconstitution des détails au trait rose’. Describing the development of this text in an interview, Portugal stated that ‘là aussi, c’était partir d’une image’, and that ‘c’est la question de l’exposition qui primait: qu’est-ce que c’est s’exposer en poésie, s’exposer avec des mots’.⁵³ Her approach here calls to mind Didi-Huberman’s observation that ‘le monde des images ne rejette pas le monde de la logique, bien au contraire. Mais il en joue, c’est-à-dire, entre autres choses, qu’il y ménage des lieux – comme lorsqu’on dit qu’il y a « jeu » entre les pièces d’un mécanisme –, lieux dans lesquels il puise sa puissance, qui se donne là comme la *puissance du négatif*’.⁵⁴

Both linguistic and visual representation are therefore at stake in this book. Portugal considers the two inseparably bound, and this text is a particularly striking example of her ideas concerning the way actual perception transcends both because it brings out the importance of the dynamism of the gaze, exploring the nature of perception in order to stress the active, and indeed creative, nature of thought. One of the main differences, then, between this text and *définitif bob*, is that the latter concentrates primarily on the boundaries set by the individual poem. *Le Plus simple appareil*, in contrast, explores the limits of representational structures in general, driven by the desire to question how it is we perceive and interpret both linguistic and visual material.

The story of Susannah and the elders is biblical in origin, and painters throughout history have taken up the image of Susannah being spied on in her bath. This image is intrinsically dynamic, firstly because it forms part of a story that extends both backwards (through all known versions and representations of the story) and forwards (due to the imaginative potential of fiction) in the mind of the perceiver.

⁵³ Portugal, in Veinstein, 2002.

⁵⁴ Didi-Huberman, 1992:174.

Secondly, it is internally dynamic in that it draws from the active nature of perception. Certain representations of the bath scene hence exploit the tension between the seen and the not-seen, the seeing and the 'blind'; between the elders, who 'see' Susannah, Susannah's unawareness of them, and what the spectator sees 'from without' as it were (Guercino's rendition is one example). In such representations, Susannah's nudity may well be partially occluded from the perceiver's point of view, but the fact of her nakedness is nonetheless 'present' in the scene, whether 'perceived' from the point of view of one of the elders or not. It is interesting to note that in such representations of the scene the tension is often more acute than in those that take the moment afterwards (the proposal being put to Susannah by the elders) as their subject-matter (Veronese and Bassano are two painters who choose to depict this particular instant). This is important because this tension arises partly due to the ambiguous position such representations put the spectator in, for their vision of Susannah is assimilated with the voyeuristic gaze of the elders. The supposition of dialogue – of verbal contact – may also increase the intensity of the reader's engagement with the scene.

The story hence stresses the active nature of vision, the way in which direct vision does not merely serve the creation of internal representations of a thing, but acts on the thing perceived. The fact of Susannah's nakedness requires the gaze of the other; she, as subject, is profoundly changed by the fact of the elders' gaze, her nakedness gains significance that was previously only potential. It is interesting to note that certain painters, such as Titian, depict her looking in a mirror, an approach which serves to underline the otherness of the image, for her image in the mirror is necessarily fragmentary, both broken and trapped by her own gaze. The power of this image is only 'realized' when the innocence of her own gaze is disrupted by that of the elders. Such depictions of the scene hence serve to underline the potentially destructive nature of the image in general. To summarize these observations concerning existing representations

of the story, it seems possible to argue that there is a sense in which Susannah herself is never really ‘present’ in the scene, her ‘actual bathing self’ replaced by the representation, or image, of her nudity, whether actual or virtual. The connection between Susannah’s often ambiguous status within pictorial representations of her, and the relation between perceiver and poem is made clear by Portugal in the interview I quote from above, as she stated: ‘la question était: comment se fait-il que la poésie est souvent regardée par des vieillards – pas dans le sens de l’âge mais dans celui de leur lecture – et qu’on lui demande des comptes; comme Suzanne, en principe non coupable, mais amenée finalement à se justifier. La poésie est sans cesse dans cette situation’.⁵⁵

The above has been intended to sketch out the potential held within the story of Susannah, and the multitude of pictorial representations it has inspired, for an exploration of not only the nature of representation, but also the dynamism of the gaze and the nature of perception. Susannah acts as a vector or material for thought, the representational structures we use to ‘channel’ it being called into question via the vast number of ideas, images or analogies she evokes. It is poetry in general that is the subject of this text, the suggestion being that the interpretative tools we employ when reading it are insufficient in the light of the diverse visual as well as linguistic games it is capable of instigating. Here, as throughout her work, Portugal is concerned with the existence of barriers – recognized or not – that limit our powers of thought and of expression.⁵⁶ It is the fact of Susannah’s multiple representational existence that enables Portugal to explore the possible movement of thought beyond such limiting, though arbitrary, frames of reference through her. In Portugal’s own words: ‘le texte doit faire son image, qui ne soit pas l’image de quelque chose mais... « vraiment de l’image »’.⁵⁷

The first section of the text, entitled ‘le bain’, opens with the following four lines:

⁵⁵ Portugal, in Veinstein, 2002.

⁵⁶ *Les Commodités d’une banquette* also explores this theme directly (CB).

⁵⁷ Portugal, in Veinstein, 2002.

il est mieux de connaître son nom
 de présenter la scène
 par son nom
 ça ouvre sur un pré (PS:13)

The word ‘pré’ immediately evokes the words ‘champ’ and ‘terrain’ that recur in Portugal’s work. The word ‘pré’ differs from them, however, in that it suggests fertility or growth, a possible reference then, both to the suggestive power of the name Suzanne⁵⁸ and to the fertility of the representational ‘fields’ to be explored.⁵⁹ The name Suzanne only appears on the following page, preceded by the pronoun ‘ma’. Her presence within the text is therefore immediately relativized – put into the context of the narrator’s thought process (‘ma Suzanne’ is followed by the line ‘est violette je pense’). From this point on, the text oscillates between appearing to address her directly and present/future-tense description of her appearance or movements. The section entitled ‘lettres de Suzanne’ on the other hand assumes her voice in the first person, and indeed although here the letters are attributed to her directly, the text is often ambiguous as to who is speaking, being spoken to or being described. This reinforces the idea that her name is best conceived of as a vector for the action of thought at work in the text, and it constitutes a direct challenge to the reader’s comprehension of it by destabilizing identity criteria. This first section primarily involves a plunge into the name, taken to occur in the present tense thought of the author. Characterized by its movement and marked by leaps between apparently disparate references (from ‘la Suède’ to ‘Bayeux’, ‘Alice’ to ‘Sigourney Weaver’ for example) this section of text at once evokes the movement of water in the bath (a rhythm only partially confined), and pushes Suzanne beyond the setting of the biblical story – beyond the ‘récit’ to which she owes her

⁵⁸ From here on I will use the French version of the name as it appears in the text.

⁵⁹ To look ahead briefly, towards the end of the text, the following passage accompanies Suzanne’s break beyond the ‘tableau’: sur tout le trajet

le trottoir est barré
 fleuri
 abondamment
 de petits mots
 encourageant
 la délation (PS :124)

existence, while simultaneously throwing the reader off balance as he/she is immediately forced to question the actual ‘subject’ of the poem (PS:14, 16).

The second section, entitled ‘exposition’, begins with the line ‘essayons maintenant de limiter Suzanne à un rectangle’ (PS:29). The name ‘Suzanne’ therefore regains some independence or objectivity. The challenge thrown up by this line concerns the potential pictorial representation of her and implies that the virtual space to be explored here is primarily *visual*. This is taken up through reference to the visual dynamism of the bath scene: ‘la notion la plus utile est celle du voisinage | le regard par-dessus le mur’, the importance of the dynamic relation instigated by the gaze of the ‘vieillards’ suggested by the line that closes this passage: ‘c’est la figure que nous avons posée au début de notre histoire’ (PS:29). The ‘figure posée’ is hence to be understood as the potential dynamism set up by the gaze within the scene. It is important to underline the fact that the story the text is concerned with here is not put forward as Suzanne’s, it is ‘notre histoire’, another indication of the way in which Suzanne is to function more as a vector than as a subject.⁶⁰ The text concerns the way *we* see. The ‘exposition’ continues, then, with the presentation of a series of ‘tables d’orientation’ that correspond to the sections of text that make up the book. These appear to exemplify various different approaches to the visual representation of a scene. The first seven lines of this passage suggest the way the ‘tables d’orientation’ are to function:

un beau dessin tout en longueur
 et quelquefois qui tourne
 pour montrer que c’est ça une colline
 en couleur
 et retrouver sur le terrain
 la colline et puis dire
 c’est pareil (PS:30)

⁶⁰ This is important, for it underlines the fact that Portugal is not undertaking a mere exegesis of the domination of the male gaze and its correspondence with the development of perspective in art. She is interested in the fact that such ways of looking can become incorporated into our thought process, limiting perceptual and imaginative freedom.

The ‘beau dessin tout en longueur’ could be taken as an allusion to the text as a whole, but this passage suggests more specifically that the ‘tables d’orientation’ are to be considered as map-like in that although each employs a different format, they are all intended to direct the perceiver to be able to identify ‘in reality’ what they merely represent. Each therefore presents a different visual ‘mode’ and hence draws attention to a different aspect of the way we see. What may or may not play a part in the activity of seeing – in recognizing structures and the relations they have with objects (whether real or imaginary) – is therefore brought out. The first (that may well refer to the preceding and actual sections of the text) contains the following lines: ‘le bain || Suzanne et les viellards exposition || une flèche « eau de bain » | puis reconstitution des détails au trait rose’ (PS:30). Here, the reconstitution of detail follows designation (an action evoked by the arrow). The active nature of ordinary visual perception is therefore brought out, for the recognition of and concentration on the substance (water) does not itself imply the awareness of detail (the pink reflections of Suzanne’s body in it). This ‘table d’orientation’ draws the perceiver’s attention to the water first and then to the possible reconstruction of detail (or appearance) of the water within the context of the story. It hence functions on the principle that recognition of a thing does not depend on immediate apprehension of all the detail it might contain: designation is sufficient for apprehension of an object, detail is secondary, and the aspects of detail that are noticed correspond largely with what catches the attention of the perceiver. This evokes McGinn’s statement that ‘the image is created by the act of attention’.⁶¹ Unlike percepts, which are dense and continuous, full of a wealth of detail that cannot be taken in all at once, images are specific. The second ‘table’ invokes ‘le jardin || titre de ce tableau | « les amoureux de la colline verte » ’ (PS:30). Here, it seems that verbal description (the title) is to direct the gaze: vision is to be directed by language. The

⁶¹ McGinn, 2005:27.

third, ‘les vieillards’ evokes the subjectivity of vision, ‘la taie sur l’œil t’en bouche un coin’, and the fourth ‘les visiteurs’ suggests the interactive or communicational input to vision; the correspondences, imaginative or not, that such input can encourage (PS:31). The fifth ‘les lettres de Suzanne’ suggests the role verbal elements, whether directly evoked or not, can play in the apprehension of a pictorial representation or the visualization of a scene (PS:31). The sixth, ‘le tableau’, draws out the input of memory – of the already known: this begins ‘un tableau très connu | peut toujours nous servir de cadre’, and ends ‘retournez au tableau | retournez aux formes | retournez’ (PS:32).

Following the ‘tables d’orientation’ this section of the text continues with the physical expansion of Suzanne’s potential representational space. The dynamism for this expansion has been provided by the ‘tables d’orientation’, which broaden the visual field containing her image, for by de-centralizing Suzanne and emphasizing the visual act, they alter the reader’s expectations concerning what is to be represented and how within the poem. This expansion is partly put into play by the evocation of potential action within her representational space: ‘il suffirait de faire passer un chien | en travers | pour viabiliser les allées le silence’ (PS:33). It is also actualized through sudden changes in tense (for example the sudden appeal to memory ‘j’ai vu’ (PS:34)); the use of literary references (to Paul and Virginie for example (PS:37)); the narrator’s shifting identity (her identification with Suzanne for example: ‘tout mon corps allongée’ (PS:35)); and internal commentary on the suitability of specific lexical items within the text (the narrator’s analysis of the word ‘corsage’ for example (PS:34)). It is as though the representational space that Suzanne (as vector) occupies is disrupted from within; opened up as it were; exposed to view but also to danger from without, a reading that suggests the relevance of the definition of ‘exposition’ as ‘action de soumettre à l’action de’.⁶² The dynamism of the ‘space’ of the poem is hence brought out: it is only

⁶² Petit Robert, 1993.

when perception is forced to become *active* and to cross boundaries between the visual and the linguistic that the experience of the ‘exposition’ (to return to two more common definitions: ‘[l’]action de faire connaître, d’expliquer’ and ‘présentation publique’) that *just is* the text, can occur. The following passage reinforces this line of interpretation:

du moment que ça n’arrive que sur des propos modérément élastiques
 participation
 expérimentation
 suggestion
 [...]
 du moment que c’est un frottement sans fin
 [...]
 moi j’entretiens la ville avec des plaisirs simples (PS:35)

However, the ensuing text suggests that the dynamic input that comes from the subject of the composition disrupts the potential construction of a stable ‘figure’ capable of existing objectively or apart from the perceiver. Suzanne is therefore presented as bound to ‘l’obligation de servir des rafraîchissements | au jardin’: she is necessarily an active participant in any representation that might be made of her – already known, as it were – although (in accordance with the reader/spectator’s knowledge and powers of association) in the context of the most diverse pictorial and linguistic representations of her. The implication of this for poetry is that reading a poem does not simply involve the analytic consumption of a linguistic object, but interaction. This section of the text does indeed end (reinforcing the above) with the suggestion that even when restricted to a ‘rectangle’ or frame – when limited, in short, to a static ‘image’ or ‘figure’ – Suzanne’s power to transgress the apparent limits of ‘le plus simple appareil’ or the ‘given’, remains, hence:

il me semble qu’elle garderait un sac à la main rouge
 y compris
 dans le lit du ruisseau

il me semble que des barrières de velours chiffonné rouge
 sépareraient
 le champ de son côté (PS:38)

This suggests that that the foreignness or ambiguity of a poem and its ‘subject’ is fundamental to its dynamism and hence to its potential meaning. It is worth turning to Noë here. He writes that ‘experience has content only thanks to the established dynamics of interaction between perceiver and world’.⁶³ This implies that although the active experience of an image or scene is not comparable to a photographic vision of what is given within it, including the space beyond the frame, details focused on apart from their context, visual and verbal memory and present sensation, the way we look at things is in part established by the way we have learnt to look. Poetry, by breaking away from representational norms can encourage the transgression of our perceptual habits – it can encourage us to *see* differently. The above account of the way perception functions does seem to correspond to the experience of reading which does not involve the direct apprehension of the poem as an ‘object’ but the exploration of diverse relations that stem as much from the reader’s experience and knowledge as from what is ‘given’ on the page. The penultimate page of this Section includes the following appeal to the reader:

veux-tu qu’elle t’investive
ce sera dans le plus grand silence

dans ton regard
avec ses yeux (PS:39)

It is within the perceiver’s direct gaze, as it were, that Suzanne is most powerful. There her presence is wordless, her ‘effect’ direct. The ‘tables d’orientation’ are not intended to lead to an ‘actual’ Suzanne, but the expansion they provoke makes her virtual existence all the more acute. This is vital to the move beyond the limits of representation and suggests the power of the act of designation (whether visual or verbal) within the context of a thought. It also stresses the virtual potential words are

⁶³ Noë, 2004:216.

endowed with – a potential that results from the nature of language in general but that can be most powerfully exploited within a poetic context.⁶⁴

The analysis of the first two sections of this text has been intended to bring out the way in which Suzanne is used primarily as a vector for the exploration of different representational approaches or forms. It is not merely the *content* of the text, however, that suggests the multiple potential representational models being put into play. Portugal's language, syntax, and particular exploitation of pagination and typography work to similar effect, either by reinforcing the content, or by instigating a polemic by opposing the apparent 'sense' conveyed, and (in both cases) working to engage the visual elements of the reader's thought.

To turn, then, to the visual appearance of the text, words are disposed on each page in accordance with the particular movement of thought captured on it. The page therefore plays a vital role in the reader's experience – in the intertwining of rhythm, sense and vision. Two pages (16 and 17), when looked at together, provide a striking example of Portugal's visual exploitation of the page.⁶⁵ On the right-hand page, the text is centrally aligned, evoking various images including a female body with outstretched arms, a face, a plane and a bird. The text on the left-hand page is less immediately evocative, but it is laid out in a way that draws the gaze to the right. This effect is partly generated by the fact that the first line is not aligned with those that follow, but seems to be drifting towards the opposite page. If the text that follows this line is taken to constitute the 'body' of text, the placement of this line becomes suggestive of a head (or gaze) peering over towards the 'figure' on the right. The act of looking is hence captured by the disposition of text on the two pages, and simultaneously leads the reader's own gaze. It also suggests the indeterminacy of vision; the way in which the

⁶⁴ Derek Melser's idea that sentences represent possibilities, and that their doing so is what their meaning consists in is relevant here (see Melser, 2004).

⁶⁵ Such use of the page is also evident in Portugal's other works. Pages 28-29 of *Les Commodités d'une banquette* are particularly striking (CB).

structure or shape of a thing (or things) can be perceived before any object is recognized. This is particularly relevant in the context of the story of Suzanne because the ‘vieillards’ (spies not spectators) do not perceive her directly; she was not placed before them ‘to be viewed’. The other idea that seems to be implicit in this use of the visual aspect of the text is that even something that appears progressive (here the text) in fact becomes static as soon as the images evoked by it are taken to function on a purely representational level. It is the ambiguity of the shapes created by the lines on these pages that leads the text beyond it. To return to Portugal’s description of the question posed by the text, these two pages could therefore be seen to directly challenge traditional reading methods that are here associated with the gaze of the ‘vieillards’. They construct an object in accordance with their own desire: their gaze is unidirectional.

The nature of the text directly prevents such an approach. The rhythm Portugal sets up is not merely bound to language, but to the disposition of words on the page; the rhythm is as much a function of the gaze as it moves from space to space as it is a result of the ‘intellectual’ movement between lexical items. The experience of this text can therefore be seen to engage spatial elements of thought in a way that reading, usually, does not; the visual richness of the text does not solely depend on the evocation of visual objects but draws equally from the active role the reader’s visual capacities are forced to play when confronted with it. To return to Noë, he emphasizes the fact that visual experience is fundamentally dynamic and mobile: even a surface that is fully visible is only virtually complete, it is *not* perceived photographically, or all at once.⁶⁶ The potential presence or absence of images can hence be seen here to constitute a vital aspect of the experience of the text, which questions not only what is perceived but how.

⁶⁶ See Noë, 2004.

The relation set up between rhythm, reading pattern and vision alluded to above is particularly apparent at the beginning of the section entitled 'le jardin' (PS:43). Four verses are laid out on this page, the space between lines (within each verse) greater than that between those that constitute verses or passages elsewhere in the text. The visual unity of the page is therefore striking, an impression reinforced by the absence of capital letters and punctuation marks within it. The lines that make up these four verses end, alternately, with the words 'passe' and 'donne'. This audible repetition produces a hypnotic effect that is strengthened by the heavy bell-like sound of the word 'donne' and the prevalence of soft consonants like 'm' and 'n' in the passage. The rhythm of the reading pattern set up by this repetition is slow, weighted further by Portugal's use of enjambement. One result this has is that 'donne' and 'passe' can often be attributed to more than one subject, changing meaning accordingly. This process reinforces the idea of interplay or exchange set up by the words 'passe' and 'donne'. These verses seem to constitute an exploration of the rhythm of a thought as it moves between sensory and linguistic elements. It is the way in which the poem functions through the two verbs that underlies the unusual, amorphous nature of the passage. The reader's eyes follow the seemingly regular layout of the text, but although lulled by the rhythm set up within it, the uncertainty of sense provokes an entanglement of sensation that is due only in part to the diversity of the things named or suggested within it. The intimate, dream-like effect generated by the ambiguity of the passage, evident in the presence of the unidentified 'deuxième corps' and 'les autres', and the way the text seems to be directly addressing the reader ('m'entends-tu' 'si l'on ne s'appelle pas') is increased by the sense of timelessness it conveys. Night is evoked in the first line, but later 'un jour supplémentaire à vivre passe' and the passage ends as follows: 'passe | le milieu d'une belle journée donne | demain le temps qu'il fait passe'. The combination of these references to time and the use of the present tense serve to prolong the sense of

suspension within a gaze created by the use of the present participle in the second line: ‘les autres l’observant’.

It is important to stress the fact that although the visual nature of the text is striking, this is not due to the linguistic representation of visual detail. Instead, the text seems to evoke the movement of looking: it captures the creative potential of vision. Hence the lines ‘le jardin donne | du champ à leurs visions’ suggest the deepening of the imagined visual field, the emphasis is not on any aspect of the actual detail seen. The lines ‘il peint des feuilles donne | le second effort pour effacer’ are significant, for the idea of the ‘second effort’ may well refer back to the ‘deuxième corps’, indicating the actual struggle with representation going on in the poem, and, more generally, the distancing nature of any representation of a ‘given’ object or scene. To turn briefly to the following page, here the text begins: ‘le terme vous savez m’évoque une cimetière | bordée d’allées de va et vient | et sur le mur de ce jardin une figure s’allume’. This seems to reinforce the above reading, for it suggests the borders and restrictions of representational space, whether pictorial or linguistic. This opening passage of ‘le jardin’ hence exemplifies the way in which the relations set up between rhythm, reading pattern and sight are integral to the way Portugal’s text functions and hence to its ‘sense’. It simultaneously underlines the fact that it is the interplay of different forms of sensory experience that characterizes thought, and in particular creative thought.

Didi-Huberman’s discussion of detail sheds light on the way meaning is bound to movement in Portugal’s poetry. He describes the individual detail, when taken out of context, as ‘un objet sémiotique qui tend à la stabilité et à la clôture’, an object that presupposes ‘un *objet de la réalité*, dont il s’efforce de tracer les contours et d’établir la lisibilité’.⁶⁷ He links over-attention to detail in the analysis of images to a positivist approach to knowledge, to an ‘idéal de savoir’ that just is ‘l’exhaustive description’; an

⁶⁷ Didi-Huberman, 1990:316, 318.

approach that postulates ‘que tout le visible peut être décrit [...que] tout sera su, vérifié, légitimé’.⁶⁸ He develops the idea that the real object of painting (and hence of the success of a painting) is bound to action: painting captures ‘l’acte de mettre *là-devant* nous, l’acte de ce qui nous fait front – nous regarde – lorsque nous regardons’.⁶⁹ This brings out the importance of Portugal’s interest in visual images, and is equally relevant to her avoidance of linguistic representation of detail, for it stresses the significance of her approach regarding possible theories concerning the relation between perception and knowledge, for she is directly concerned with the extent to which our perceptions alter when channelled into (or through) a given representational mould.

Before analysing the importance of this stress placed on the fundamentally indeterminate nature of detail in actual perception, it is worth considering what could be said to replace traditional description in the text. The study of page 43 brought out the importance Portugal puts not on *what* is seen but on the *activity* of seeing. This is vital, and it depends in part on her references to geometrical forms, directions, numbers and to diverse methods of seeing, whether artistic or scientific. A later passage reads as follows:

il est visible que ton pied
fixé
et tes pouces latéraux

ne sauraient contenir
élevés
l’émotion quand elle se change en peine

nous avons vu que les lieux de la terre en général
bouchés
et quand on est dedans

détournent du sujet de l’air

et pour t’apercevoir

⁶⁸ Didi-Huberman, 1990:274.

⁶⁹ Didi-Huberman, 1990:218.

c'est la dernière des choses
ils ont pensé

que tu étais en équilibre en l'air

(PS:128-9)

This passage distinguishes between the visible and the perceived. The act of perception involves directing one's attention to a specific object, at the expense of the other detail present in one's visual field. Hence 'pour t'apercevoir [...] ils ont pensé || que tu étais en l'équilibre en l'air'. Here the thoughtful nature of the act of perception is insisted on: it is impossible to be simultaneously aware of all the detail present in a given scene (as mentioned earlier, even when looking at a painting, our eyes are in constant motion) the direction of awareness to an object is necessary for it to be differentiated from its context. However, the dynamic relations that exist between the chosen 'object' and its surroundings are vital for what is seen to be understood as more than a mere representation or image (hence the first two verses of this passage). When an object (here Suzanne) is taken out of context, not only background and perspective are lost, so is the significance of the relations between parts of it and parts of other elements of the scene. This suggests the difference between a visual perception of something in the world and an image brought to mind through the imagination; the latter has a space of its own – it is not reliant on its situation among other objects for it to be perceived as spatially extended. The first implication for the reader is that analysis of a poem based on isolated words or images will fall short of a full apprehension of the 'sense' it conveys. The second provokes reflection on the extent to which the particularities of a given reader's engagement with a text/image affects their experience of it.

The dynamism of perceptual experience and the role it plays in thought is again explored in a passage that occurs in the section entitled 'lettres de Suzanne'. This passage begins as follows, setting up the connection between vision and movement directly:

Vu de ce côté-ci

de l'horizon il se
 produit forcément
 une accélération
 du cœur vers la nuit

The passage continues a little further on as follows:

et s'il nous est possible
 vous voyez bien des peines à croire
 vous voyez bien des mots
 des mouvements
 sitôt créés
 avec la bouche

et sur le formulaire le soir
 on biffe
 les inscriptions signalétiques (PS:91)

Here, the suggestion is that the *action* of thought draws from words and images alike, but neither remain static within it. Thought, like experience, is necessarily active and the activity involved transgresses the static representation of objects, whether linguistic or pictorial. Perceptual experience, which is inherently 'thoughtful', does not involve the internal reproduction of static representations or the deciphering of signs ('inscriptions signalétiques'). Poetry, as opposed to fixing aspects of a thought on a structure, captures the activity of thought, hence here, the experience both evoked and provoked is of active wonder or astonishment: 'des peines à croire'.⁷⁰

Portugal's poetic approach seems, then, to transcend traditional debates concerning the sufficiency of linguistic and pictorial representation. This text in particular seems to bring out the fact that the proliferation of representational structures (which condition so much of our experience) constitutes the primary impediment to our recognition of the fundamentally active nature of perception. By disrupting perceptual habit (here reading patterns) however, it simultaneously stresses the fact that

⁷⁰ Here, it is worth referring to A. R. Luria's study of the synesthetic thought processes of a man with almost limitless memory. This man's thought was directly dependent on images to the extent to which he was incapable of understanding abstractions. As Luria observed 'poetry was probably the most difficult thing for him to read'; metaphors, for example, would give rise to a 'chaos of images' that would block his comprehension of a poem completely; images directed his apprehension of a text rather than thought itself, saturating the space in which the sense of a text circulates (Luria, 1987:120). As the research subject stated, the best way he had of overcoming this drawback of his remarkable mind was to read very quickly, otherwise, as he said: 'I see every word' (Luria, 1987:24).

representational content is not *given* but *learnt*, and that despite the existence of such structures the world remains, in Noë's words, 'a domain for active exploration'.⁷¹ The effect of our visual habits, and the correspondence between what we can see and the way we choose to represent it is explored in the most depth in the section entitled 'le tableau'. Portugal writes:

par cet instrument
la lunette
ils ont cru

et par l'appui des forces
ils s'étaient
appliqués

à diminuer les proportions (PS:131)

The way vision is altered by the perceptual tools employed by the perceiver is inevitable, and is bound both to the knowledge and perceptual habits of the painter/writer and to the extent to which he/she questions the latter.

To look more closely at Portugal's incorporation of ideas concerning visual representation and perception, and in particular the way geometrical allusions may replace pictorial descriptions, it is important to note that potential visual dynamism in pictorial representation is understood less in terms of content than in terms of the geometrical tension set up by composition. Portugal writes:

représenter le monde en plans parallèles
percés d'une flèche
points de contact ab bc cd de ef
blessures
toutes de biais échelonnées (PS:114)

Here the imposition of 'points de contact' negates continuity, the arrow creates the illusion of depth, and, by directing the gaze, imposes this illusion on the viewer. It is the (often geometrical) relations set up within a representation that, by leading the gaze, engage the spatial elements of thought and provoke the *active* perception of a

⁷¹ Noë, 2004:179.

represented scene. This tension between pictorial representation and movement – manifested in the way relations between represented objects lead the gaze and hence provoke a particular perceptual movement across the canvas – is therefore drawn on directly. The significance of this emphasis on shape is linked to the absence of representational detail mentioned above. To return to Noë, he suggests that the perception of detail such as colour, for example, is amodal in a way that the perception of shape is not. He observes that: ‘The shape of a thing is independent of its look or feel in a way that the colour of a thing isn’t independent of its look’.⁷² The marked absence of such detail in Portugal’s text, and the corresponding emphasis put on form or structure (whether as a negative or positive aspect of a picture or poem) seems to be a fundamental aspect of her drive away from mere appearances, and to link directly with her statement that a text ‘doit faire son image’; it must function perceptually to capture and hold the attention of the reader, who must be led to explore it as he/she might explore a given perceptual space (whether imagined or real).⁷³ To return to Noë’s observation that perceptual experience is characterized by its indeterminacy, the suppression of descriptive detail in her text is therefore not an ‘absence’ as such but seems rather to correspond to the expansion of the virtual potential inherent in it, a potential in part constituted by the active gaze of the reader. The last page seems to reinforce this line of interpretation:

quand nous retournerons Suzanne vers le palais de Rosemonde
 la vitesse sera un nombre positif
 le sommet des arbres atteindra une belle proportion

et pour que rien ne fasse tuer
 le soldat à ta place
 tu lèveras les yeux avant la collision (PS:133)

The movement invoked here is immediately ‘virtualized’ through the use of the future tense in the first line. The direction implied by ‘retournerons’ and by the reference to a

⁷² Noë, 2004:141.

⁷³ Portugal, in Veinstein, 2002.

static object ‘le palais’ is associated with speed, the dynamic link set up between Suzanne and the palace set in relation to the changing proportions of the ‘sommet des arbres’. Suzanne is to break beyond the ‘mur’ and ‘périmètre du jardin’ that are the limits imposed by any linguistic/pictorial representation.

The power of the scene is bound to the effacement of the self or subjective perceiver. Lifting his/her eyes, the reader rejoins Suzanne’s oblivion to the possible ‘regard’ imposed (‘tu’ can apply to the reader or to Suzanne). Moving beyond representation, then, requires a movement ‘plus haut | que le mur’, a movement that is just the assumption of the naked eye – of perceptual experience and exchange that, as opposed to being directed through the filter of such and such a representational structure, is bound only to the action of thought, here provoked by the vast field of potential opened up by the name Suzanne. The liberation of poetry from the restrictive gaze of the ‘viellards’ means stretching it to its limits: ‘sabotage’ (a word used to describe bob’s attack on words) here refers to the author’s attack on unquestioned perceptual habits that condemn poetry to restrictive interpretation and to its potential incarceration within the perimeters of representational structures it works to transcend.

Section ii: GAMES IN VIRTUAL SPACE

The description of *définitif bob* that appears on the back cover begins as follows: ‘La poésie a besoin de tester ses barres de résistance’. bob, a ‘joker minuscule’, ‘spécialiste de la mission serrée horizontale’ is sent to confront the situation. ‘Dopé d’énergie pure’, his aim is to explore the limits of poetic creativity, but to a certain extent the limits inherent in poetry as a creative form circumscribe his ability to move within it.

The ‘terrain’ within which he must operate is described as ‘résolument virtuel’, and indeed, the tension between the virtual and the actual constitutes the main dynamism behind bob’s existence as instigator of the developing poem and as mobile

vector within it: in short, that of the text as a whole. bob is both creator and player of the game. My reference to the tension between the virtual and the actual will draw from Didi-Huberman's juxtaposition of the two concepts in *Devant l'image*, for as will become clear further on, his use of them with regard to images is helpful when some of the implications of Anne Portugal's use of the video game as poetic material come to light. The word 'virtuel' (that comes from the Latin 'virtus', defined as 'la puissance souveraine de ce qui n'apparaît pas visiblement') is used to describe that 'qui n'est tel qu'en puissance, qui est à l'état de simple possibilité'.⁷⁴ In the light of Portugal's statement that she used 'les écrits du cinéma' as a 'matière première' this seems to reinforce the sense that there is a potential visual experience that runs through the text – co-existing with it. The word has also come to be used for diverse scientific purposes; '[la] réalité virtuelle', for example, is defined as a 'système de simulation interactif par images de synthèses tridimensionnelles'. Within the domain of computer science, it is used to designate 'ce qui apparaît fonctionnellement pour l'utilisateur, indépendamment de la structure physique et logique utilisée'. One question implied by Portugal's insistence on the notion of the virtual, her definition of the 'terrain' of this specific poetic text as virtual and the fact that bob exploits words for their 'virtuality', is whether the word 'actual' can ever be suitably applied to the relation between words and the things they are used to describe. A negative response would reinforce the suggestion that the readability of the poetic text need not imply the reader's assumption of rigid signifier-signified pairing, and that the text draws from the fundamental ambiguity of our systems of reference – from the fact that word-object relations are never more than potential. To take the computer-science link further, what matters for the reader is the effect or total result of the diverse programs exploited: the reader's experience is to be as virtual as bob's. It is perhaps for this reason that bob must 'sabotage[r] le mot' or

⁷⁴ Petit Robert, 1993.

transcend words: he is to provoke an event within poetic language by exploiting the dynamism that results from the constant oscillation between word and image in thought. The poetic nature of the text is used to provide a space within which words can function on a purely virtual level, hence transcending any given representational or descriptive linguistic 'system'. Just as a computer program implies various physical actions taking place 'behind the scenes' the 'hidden actions' that underlie the dynamism of the poem are comparable to the activation of unexpected relations and movements between words, images and sounds in the thought processes of the reader. The 'terrain' which is the poem is not an inflexible, linear construction, it is characterized by the total number of different paths that can be taken through it or movements made within it; hence, perhaps, the fact that 'livre', 'page' and 'mot' are constantly associated here (as in so many of Portugal's other texts) with rigid structures such as 'mur', 'maison' and 'brique'.⁷⁵

To turn to Didi-Huberman, he uses the tension between the virtual and the actual to highlight the distinction he makes (in the context of images) between imitation and incarnation. Before the former 'nous saisissons des mondes, nous voyons. L'image est posée devant nous, elle est stable, susceptible d'un savoir à tirer d'elle toujours plus en avant'.⁷⁶ The experience of the latter involves 'un mouvement sans fin, alternativement virtuel et actuel', it implies dislocation: 'la frontalité où nous plaçait l'image se déchire tout d'un coup, mais la déchirure à son tour devient frontalité'.⁷⁷ In this case the image becomes an 'événement visuel'. To turn to bob, within the 'terrain' or poetic space assigned to him, he oscillates between roles, alternately endogenous and exogenous to the text. He is sometimes the image on the screen ('il voit | doré son corps'), a representation (or 'imitation') of himself manipulated (by himself) like a figure in a computer game ('il peut y ajouter | disposition des figures dans le champ') (DB:71, 65).

⁷⁵ The words 'jardin', 'périmètre' and 'mur' that recur in *Le Plus simple appareil* come to mind here.

⁷⁶ Didi-Huberman, 1990:268.

⁷⁷ Didi-Huberman, 1990:268.

Elsewhere he is incarnated by the word ‘bob’ *within* the poem: no longer situated outside the text it is bob himself and not his image who slips through doors and explores alleyways (‘il tombe d’une voiture découverte’): he is the physical energy of the poem, the word ‘bob’ *being released* into poetic space (DB:63).

It is within this latter role then, that he incarnates the individual word or phrase. The refrain ‘il peut comme ça’ recurs throughout the text, underlining the fact that the word, within the poem, is by nature dynamic; the movement and progression of the poem depends on the way words are made to function within it. The potential of each word is virtual because it is bound to the actual instant of enunciation as well as to the broader context of the poem – to bob’s potential next move(s). Meaning cannot therefore be considered a property of individual lexical items, for it is dependent on both the reader’s movement through the text and on the broader context of – and multiple possible relations set up within – the text as a whole. The limits inherent in traditional poetic structure and in our approach to poetry are suggested, however, at the beginning of the text: it is ‘le sujet traité le portant au carré’ (DB:17).

The multiple roles bob plays within (and, by extension, without) the text are firstly of great importance to the self-reflexive nature of the poem, for, as has been suggested, it is simultaneously a poem in its own right and a self-reflexive study of the development of a poem or the ‘poetic process’. Indeed, much of the text’s energy and humour arises from the fact that it is often hard to disentangle the narrator from bob and both of the latter from the developing poem. However, the text is more than a *mise-en-scène* of the mental agility required by the poetic act. Prigent suggests that it manifests the aim to ‘décrire, pas le fini des figures et des formes mais l’illimité de l’énergie qui défait et refait formes et figures’.⁷⁸ I would agree with his opposition of ‘énergie’ to ‘formes’ and ‘figures’ but I would suggest that in fact the poem is only descriptive –

⁷⁸ Prigent, 1993:1.

even of the former – by extension, for the creative act it captures is manifested by bob's actions; he is not a personification of it.⁷⁹ The discussion of the tension between imitation and incarnation above was intended to reinforce the suggestion that bob is from time to time 'imitation' insofar as he is represented (as an *image* of himself) on the screen he controls while elsewhere being incarnated within the text; the activating force at work within it. Portugal writes 'il peut comme ça [...] étudier le référentiel terrestre': ordinary referential frameworks are not 'givens' within the virtual space of the poem (DB:111). To return to the 'terrain' or text, it is indeed the disruption of ordinary systems of reference within it that is so disturbing, and this is fundamental to her movement away from traditional description. bob himself escapes definition through reference to ordinary identity criteria: the reader is led to question whether he is real or unreal, linguistic or meta-linguistic, whether he 'exists' within or without the text. The reader is therefore largely de-stabilized because they are constantly led to question bob's status, despite the fact that he is, ostensibly, the main point of reference (or referential term) in the poem. This is significant because it brings out an important aspect of our habitual reading patterns. We tend to assume that the recurrence of a name (like bob) implies a certain ontological stability of the thing so named, such names acting as stable (even if mobile) vectors that the reader can count on (as points of reference) as the text unfolds. As suggested above however, bob cannot be pinned down in a satisfactory way, anymore than the 'terrain' within which he operates can be understood in terms of the ordinary 'rules' taken to govern time and space.

It would seem that bob's presence within the text is in part to be conceived of as that of a disruptive force: a force capable not only of dislocating language, but of dislocating the way we ordinarily compartmentalize different systems of reference. For bob is neither uniquely word nor image: incarnated within the text, he embodies the

⁷⁹ The term personification implies a particular notion of 'personhood'. If something is personified it means that it takes on the characteristics of an identifiable individual. bob, however, escapes any limiting identity criteria for he is never described: he is therefore only 'perceived' through his action.

dislocation of the two. He can be imagined as a ‘joker minuscule’ but exists within the text more strongly as a sort of virtual energy that transcends definition. This is implied in the way he is never described in the text other than through the actions he performs. He could therefore perhaps be compared to a hologram, for holograms can only properly be defined by the totality of the changes they can pass through when turned in the light. The dynamism of the text depends on the way it transgresses both the physical limitations of the book and the linguistic norms we expect written language to adhere to.

To turn to another aspect of Didi-Huberman’s analysis of the way images function, he develops the notion of the ‘symptôme’, a term taken from Freud, used to designate the purely virtual ‘phénomène-indice’ which constitutes the power of every successful pictorial representation. He writes: ‘le symptôme est un événement critique, une singularité, une intrusion, mais il est en même temps la mise en œuvre d’une structure signifiante, un système que l’événement a pour charge de faire surgir, mais *partiellement, contradictoirement*, de façon que le sens n’advienne que comme énigme ou phénomène-indice’.⁸⁰ He argues that the efficaciousness of the image is not bound simply to the transmission of knowledge but rather to the disturbance of accepted systems of knowledge, a disturbance brought about by the dynamic nature of the ‘symptôme’, which is a ‘concept à double face [...] à l’exacte limite de deux champs théoriques: un champ d’ordre *phénoménologique* et un champ d’ordre *sémiologique*’.⁸¹ Didi-Huberman’s conception of the way images function seems to be directly relevant to Portugal’s text, and specifically to the role bob plays within it. *définitif bob* can be described as a dynamic questioning of the actual or possible fusion of word and image within poetry, for the poem works by exploiting the fact that with the development of technology our perceptual habits have changed: new ‘virtual’ spaces have opened up; we have become so accustomed to ‘mixed-media’ supports that we no longer need to

⁸⁰ Didi-Huberman, 1990:309.

⁸¹ Didi-Huberman, 1990:309.

question how they function in order to grasp the messages they convey. bob, definable (if at all) as virtual, due to the video game analogy, works from within the poetic text to disrupt communicational norms and expose the arbitrary nature of the boundaries set by writer and reader on the way words and images may or may not function in poetry. His challenge seems to be to defy the limits of linguistic representation. This brings up two questions: firstly whether poetry can reflect the reality of these new ‘virtual’ perceptual frameworks we have grown so accustomed to (such as the video game), and secondly how the dynamism of such perceptual modes might be captured or a new ‘symptôme’ provoked through the exploitation of existing representational structures. bob, by slipping between the various roles described above, is experimenting with the various possibilities at hand. At times he experiments by creating and following the movements of a representation of himself as he would a 2-D, mobile representation on a screen. At others, by becoming (being incarnated by) that image, he assumes the ‘virtuality’ of the individual word within the poem. To exploit a phrase used by Didi-Huberman concerning the problem inherent in all creative arts, bob seems to be faced with ‘le désir contraignant de figurer’.⁸² His energy alone cannot overcome the limitations implied by his presence within the text. Didi-Huberman suggests that it is because of the constraints that bind creativity that in fact finally, only ‘la déchirure ouvre la figure’.⁸³ The successful image is one that somehow breaks beyond or away from the representational structure within which it operates. In *définitif bob*, bob can be seen as the energy (or desire) that characterizes the creative act, the challenge being made to poetic form. It is in part due to the tension that exists between the roles that he takes on that his ‘virtuality’ becomes absolute: he becomes pure ‘phénomène-indice’. His ultimate inability to exist as exclusively word or image suggests the fundamentally arbitrary nature of our systems of reference and the creativity of pure designation, for

⁸² Didi-Huberman, 1990:185.

⁸³ Didi-Huberman, 1990:185.

bob, though he might elude direct description or representation ‘peut comme ça’. It is therefore primarily this indefinable aspect of his existence that lies behind the peculiar strength of the poem, constituting the ‘symptôme’ that is the dynamism and effectiveness unique to it.

Another aspect of Didi-Huberman’s theory of the way images function is relevant to the poetic approach manifested within this text. This concerns the false transparency of images. He points out the way in which images ostensibly show everything. Traditionally, understanding an image has been taken to involve studying it close up or in detail; everything it can have to say must be there to be picked out by the viewer and used to construct what is taken to be the meaning or significance of the image.⁸⁴ It is in reaction against this traditional notion of the way images function that he develops the notion of the ‘symptôme’ which prioritizes interaction – the dynamism actuated by the viewer. Portugal’s text might appear, at first glance, to be ‘transparent’ in the sense that the reader is presented with the text as it is being created: he/she witnesses bob’s adventures in poetic space *with* him, as it were. He/she hence experiences the activation of the ‘phénomène-indice’ first-hand. However, it is not only true that bob and the ‘terrain’ within which he operates slip beyond definition, it is also impossible to isolate incidents or individual descriptions within the text that are capable of acting as clues to the functioning of the text taken as a totality. This indicates the fact that creative texts (and perhaps this one in particular) are often no more ‘readable’ than images are: transparency is an illusion bound to a belief in the objective and analytic power of the unidirectional gaze. Just as the effect images produce arises not from their ‘readability’ but in the ‘symptôme’ particular to them, so, in such texts, it is not the words, structure, or method employed that creates the power of the resulting text, but the dynamic set up between them and reactivated as the reader reads; in short, the

⁸⁴ The significance of the absence of descriptive detail was considered in the analysis of *Le Plus simple appareil*.

experience generated by it. This suggests that neither descriptive passages within the text nor bob himself finally ‘represent’ anything; what is set up by the text is rather a set of ‘virtual’ relationships between possible forms of representation. bob, synonymous with the energy and drive of creative thought, manifests the struggle the poet undergoes with the limits of existing structures and means of expression. We cannot read the text according to ordinary criteria and our experience of it alters accordingly. As soon as we feel capable of locating (via bob) the movement of the poem on one particular plane of rhythm or sense, he changes role or direction, and we are forced to reajust. Didi-Huberman writes ‘lorsque s’avance la matière de la représentation, tout le représenté est en risque d’écroulement’.⁸⁵ The poem’s strength comes from the fact that it is pushing poetic form and language to its limits: the ‘matière de la représentation’, incarnated by bob, is the thought behind the creative act, the process in which words and images are simultaneously in play, not yet separated out by the tools we typically use to communicate thought. This is at the root of the sense of risk and danger so prevalent in the poem, a feeling that constitutes a large part of its dynamism.

The absence of ordinary points of reference means that the poem itself seems to work on what might be called a principle of negativity, for meaning is not *constructed* by the text. Instead, the reader is encouraged to explore (with bob) the spaces between the ‘briques’ that are words (as used in ordinary communication) and to discover alternatives to the ‘couloir phrase’. What is more, he/she is led to question his/her own involvement in the text by being forced to improvise new reading methods. This is significant because it means that the reader experiences the restrictions bob is up against, providing dynamic evidence for the argument that the limits bob encounters within poetic form are closely linked to the perceptual habits that filter all experience. The arbitrary (yet often unquestioned) boundaries set up between the real and the

⁸⁵ Didi-Huberman, 1990:318.

imaginary, the virtual and the actual are put to the test. bob's adventure is therefore in part an exploration of the extent to which language reflects the new perceptual abilities and habits we gain as communicational technologies develop. The fact that Portugal draws from video games is again relevant here, for they are not on the whole intended to instruct, though they may sharpen and even extend the perceptual abilities of the viewer. Her text in a way has a similar effect, for one question it poses is whether poetry has what it takes to challenge the dynamism of high-speed audiovisual experience. Her subordination of linguistic representation to action suggests a link with a recent definition of the individual word (in the context of the philosophy of mind) as 'essentially an action (or action component)', that is 'inseparable from a wider transactional context', a definition that accompanies a conception of referring as the evoking of perceptual behaviour.⁸⁶ This suggests the necessity for Portugal's break with traditional referential frameworks in the context of her aim to capture a particular (contemporary) form of perceptual experience. This brief indication of the wider significance of her approach reinforces the idea that the success of this poem is proof both of her ability as a poet and suggestive of the creative potential particular to poetry.

To summarize, the study of these texts has been intended to suggest the significance of Portugal's attentiveness to the role visual perception plays in thought. Her work draws directly from the fact that the way we see and the way we think are inseparable: they not only inform one another, they stem from the same roots, from a combination of faculties and learnt structures that we use to make sense of the world and of our presence in it. McGinn's comment that 'the roots of meaning might lie in image formation, even though meaning itself transcends these roots' reinforces the stress laid here on Portugal's attention to the visual in the *experience* of thought: to the varied creative processes the term 'thought' is used to capture.⁸⁷ It also supports the idea

⁸⁶ Melser, 2004:210.

⁸⁷ McGinn, 2005:158.

that it may well be the multiple relations that can be set up between the visual and the linguistic within poetry that means that it is a creative form that is particularly suited to the exploration of thought *as it happens*. As Simon Critchley writes: ‘Poetry intensifies experience by suddenly suspending it, withdrawing one from it, and lighting up not some otherworldly obscurities, but [...] “the near, the low, the common” ’.⁸⁸ He expands on this when he writes, a little further on, that ‘[p]oetry transfigures a common, but contracted, reality’.⁸⁹ It is the grain of thought that Portugal’s work brings to the surface, and the same is true of that of Alferi, who I will turn to next. The transfiguration Portugal brings about, through poetry, is very much of a ‘common reality’, in the case of *définitif bob* in particular, which draws directly from the nature of video games. If Alferi’s use of media is very different, a similar desire to draw from perceptual experience is paramount in his work, and Critchley’s statement that ‘[p]oetry is truthful when it is in agreement with the world; that is, an agreement between imagination and reality, a finding of what will suffice [...] a *felt* agreement’ is, as will be seen, directly relevant to his conception of the poetic act.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Critchley, 2005:41.

⁸⁹ Critchley, 2005:43.

⁹⁰ Critchley, 2005:43.

CHAPTER 2

PIERRE ALFERI: PERCEPTION AND THE READER

A l'expérience qui n'en connut pas d'autre la phrase impose une forme; et, pour cette raison même, la forme semble s'être imposée d'avance à la phrase qui l'invente [...]. Mais l'expérience ne passe que dans une phrase: c'est la phrase qui s'impose comme expérience, comme seule forme capable de contenir son propre passé. (CP:41)

In this chapter, I will begin with a brief analysis of Alferi's 'cinépoèmes', putting his use of film in the context of his conception of the poetic act, developed notably in *Chercher une phrase*. I will then move on, in the second section, to look at *Le Chemin familier du poisson combattif* and *Fmn*. My aim in Section i will be to suggest that the 'cinépoèmes' are primarily reflections on the relation between the poetic act and the act of reading. They explore the way individual sentences can be made to function through manipulation of their syntax and of their visual and phonetic qualities. Section ii will serve to underline the importance of such methods with regard to his work as a whole, for the analysis of the two texts listed above will clarify the way Alferi draws directly from the visual dynamics of thought throughout his work, challenging the traditional dividing line posed between perceptual and imaginative experience.

Alferi's concentration on the visual is inseparable from his belief that actual experience cannot be compartmentalized into experience of the real world on the one hand, and that of imaginary worlds on the other. Thought, for him, is characterized by the dynamic interaction of the two, and this makes experience what it is. His approach implies that a combination of awareness of and attentiveness to this cross-over is vital to

creative thought. The role sensory experience plays in thought is, of course, characterized by perceptual habits developed throughout life. Film has, for example, become part of the way we see, and hence part of the way we think, and Alferi's experimentation with film can therefore be seen less as an extrapolation from everyday experience of the world than as a necessary outcome of his reflection on the nature of such experience. Hence, perhaps, his remark that: 'pour rendre compte de son propre sentiment présent, il faut s'inventer des outils, des techniques'.⁹¹ The alteration of perceptual habits necessitates the constant re-direction of the poet's attention and the re-shaping of his tools in accordance with the matter of his/her experience.

Section i: SPATIAL DYNAMICS

Alferi describes his film-based works as experimental; he has no pretensions to the title of 'filmmaker' as such. As he stated:

Les éléments de ce que j'essaie dans ce travail ont tous été déjà expérimentés: la lecture préparée, la 'discrépance' de la bande son, la confrontation aux images et aux bruits, les dédoublements de la voix... Mais ce qui m'intéresse là – et qui est resté embryonnaire ou résiduel dans l'histoire de la performance, des installations et même de la poésie concrète – c'est l'effet de ces dispositifs sur la nature du texte écrit pour eux, sur la production et la réception du sens langagier, bref quelque chose de strictement littéraire. Paradoxalement, l'enjeu pour moi de ces manipulations et de ces hybridations est leur action en retour à l'intérieur de la phrase et du vers, de ce que je veux continuer d'appeler la 'poésie'.⁹²

In this interview, he explained that for him, his film-based works are 'd'abord des prolongements du texte, des augmentations de ses possibilités de sens: de la polysémie en acte. Le sens y traverse des couches matérielles, concrètes, des lignes temporelles, des surfaces visibles': they constitute a vital aspect of his reflection on language.⁹³ As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the 'films parlants' appear to be primarily concerned with the notion of the 'récit', with the restrictions of linearity within a narrative. They

⁹¹ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005 (interview as yet unpublished).

⁹² Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

⁹³ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

draw from the free play that is set up in thought between perception, imagination and memory in order to escape from the limitations of traditional narrative structures and the patterns of reference and description associated with them. The ‘cinépoèmes’, however, are less concerned with narrative than with individual sentences. These works are shorter, and more minute in detail than the ‘films parlants’; they explore reading patterns, the role perception plays in comprehension and the particular way sentences combine to form a ‘tressage’ that (although non-linear) could be said to constitute the backbone of the literary text. The connection Alferi makes between the poetic act and the act of reading suggests two possible descriptions of them: as physicalizations of individual thoughts, or as poetic ‘actualizations’ of experience. His choice of the DVD underlines his desire for the experience of the ‘cinépoèmes’ to be as similar to that of reading as possible, for DVDs allow the spectator to pause, rewind, and even slow down the speed at which the images and/or words appear on the screen. Such manipulability, and the visual potential offered by the screen enable Alferi to develop ideas concerning rhythm; he explores how syntax can be present visually in a written sentence, experimenting with forms of ellipsis and with the effects of the visual assimilation of disparate lexical objects. The importance of such experimentation to his work is indicated by his comment that ‘en littérature, les véritables thèmes ne sont pas les idées ou les choses évoquées. Comme ceux d’une fugue, ce sont avant tout des fils syntaxiques’ (CP:71). It is the visual experience of reading then, that is shown to share fundamental characteristics with the creative action of thought in these ‘cinépoèmes’; their apparent simplicity is the result of profound reflection on the nature of thought and on poetic creativity.

The ‘cinépoèmes’ then, neither present visual representations of ideas nor involve the visual ‘transposition’ of literary descriptions or sentences: they are quite simply texts in their own right. This statement may appear most readily acceptable in

the context of those ‘cinépoèmes’ in which only text is visible on the screen, but in works such as *Tante Elisabeth*, sequences of images are used directly to explore the connection between spatial dynamism and syntax: they do not play an illustrative or descriptive role (CI). This ‘cinépoème’ is made up of clips (often coloured by hand) taken from a wide variety of existing films (from a Bollywood production to a recording of Loie Fuller dancing) separated by sequences taken from what appears to be a home video of a woman singing a traditional song (in dialect) that bears the title of the poem. The words of the recurrent refrains that make up the song are translated and appear as subtitles. Three different rhythms are hence set up, bound to the images, the song as it is heard, and the subtitles, for the latter in no way reflect the constant repetition that occurs in the song, nor the increasing speed of the rendition. The de-synchronization of the linguistic elements of the ‘cinépoème’ indicates the impossibility of capturing the singing voice. The film clips (other than those of a cherry tree) bear no relation to the various objects designated by the words of the song. The images are therefore merely present, as the subtitles are present; they ‘refer’ in a similar way to the words that occur in the latter ‘refer’. The meaning of the ‘cinépoème’ however, is not found in either. The relation between the disruption of traditional description (through analogy or illustration) and Alferi’s conception of language, is clarified by his statement that: ‘Les phrases de la littérature sont des calques sur la carte référentielle: elles n’en modifient pas les points, mais elles y font un choix pour tracer des lignes rythmiques’ (CP:38). The song proceeds inexorably, like a dream, and the idea seems to be that the experience of its enunciation (involving both retrospection and creativity) is irreducible to the linguistic or visual elements involved when these are considered individually. Memory is evoked by the use of a song written in a language that is now barely used, by the recitation of it (from memory) and by the images taken from old films. If a memory is being re-created, however, it is not obvious to whom it might belong: to the

imaginary aunt of the song, to the singer or indeed to the poet. It is therefore possible that the whole poem just captures the author's experience of the song, the images evoked by it unfolding in accordance with the rhythm of his thought. Whichever is the case, the use of visual material suggests that the perceptual activity involved in memory is not reducible to expression in linguistic terms. Here, it is worth referring to McGinn's argument that although memory images might be derived from percepts, they are not reductions of them. He argues that memory images are 'reincarnated' rather than 'reborn': they require both intention and attention in order to come into being, hence his remark that 'even the elementary memory image is "creative" relative to the percept that prompts it'.⁹⁴ This is, indeed, one of the observations that leads him to suggest that (imagined) images 'are irreducible to either percepts or thoughts – they should be added to perception and cognition as a third, distinct, category of intentionality'.⁹⁵ By playing directly on our perceptual expectations this 'cinépoème' emphasizes the irreducibility of memory to representational content: its power comes from the way it merges perception and imagination, what may be and what might have been. It therefore brings out the extent to which memory is a particularly rich form of creative present-tense thought in which words and images often bear meaning in unexpected ways.

Rossignol questions the sufficiency of literal description by exploring the arbitrary nature of the sign or 'trace' directly.⁹⁶ This 'cinépoème' involves the creation of a bird. No definite 'picture' results from it, however, and the visual material that is presented, including the graphic transcription of its song (as sound waves on a chart) and the shadowy 2-D shape of a bird, could not be said to 'objectify' it in any way. It is the mental movement towards the bird – the activity involved in transcribing its song – that is vital to its creation here. The recording or transcription of a sound captures

⁹⁴ McGinn, 2004[i]:162.

⁹⁵ McGinn, 2004[i]:39.

⁹⁶ This 'cinépoème' is not yet available on DVD although Alferi often shows it in the course of screenings.

nothing ‘in itself’; the visual presentation of sound waves on a screen in no way *evokes* the bird’s song. It is the *act* of recording that is important, and it is this act that, when poetic, is truly creative, and that, by bridging the gap between the perceived and the imagined, serves to perpetuate or de-temporalize a given experience. This conception of the creative recording of experience or thought may, broadly speaking, define the text for Alferi. It is, in any case, fundamental to his work, and serves to underline the strictly literary nature of his ‘cinépoèmes’.⁹⁷

By using the DVD as the support for his ‘cinépoèmes’ Alferi is able to explore the idea that poetic creativity does not involve the attempt to represent or reproduce things ‘in the world’, and that each poem should be conceived less as an object than as an action (in the world) in its own right. Similarly, it is by calling the visual space usually taken up by the representational image into play directly (in *Des enfants et des Monstres* the space of the *expected* illustration or analogy (EM)) that he insists on the emptiness of such images and draws out the physical nature of the action of thought.⁹⁸ It is the creativity inherent in the act of reading and of understanding a text that rejoins the poet’s original creative act.

The analysis of these two ‘cinépoèmes’ clarifies Alferi’s statement that: ‘Comprendre une phrase, c’est suivre un mouvement irréductible à une image: il n’y a là aucune station, aucun point de vue pour la contemplation’ (CP:58). The reader’s experience of a text cannot be compared to passive contemplation; it is dynamic. For Alferi, poetic clarity (‘la clarté’) is bound to movement and potential; to ‘la capacité du

⁹⁷ Raymond Tallis’s work on the hand (discussed in Part III) is relevant here.

⁹⁸ *Des enfants et des monstres* is made up of a series of short texts on a variety of different films, each accompanied by a drawing (by Alferi). The role each drawing has in relation to the corresponding text is described in the preface as the ‘trace d’un contact avec le film’ (EM:14). Elsewhere he explains that they ‘prolongent et incarnent l’appropriation d’un aspect du film, dans une intimité physique avec lui, par contact. Et les légendes ne sont plus informatives, elles intègrent l’image dans le mouvement du texte qui l’interprète, elles la rêvent’ (Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005). Here again, the act of recording reflects direct contact with the film. The drawings are not illustrations of the films, nor of ideas concerning them: they are part of the text conceived of as the creative recording of the poet’s experience of them. This reinforces the idea that the poet’s aim is to capture the moment at which perception and imagination touch and combine, and that it is the combination of attention (to what is perceived) and the creative activity of the imagination that makes the act of recording poetic or literary.

langage à mettre à plat ses propres possibilités' (CP:58). It is both the precision and the openness of 'l'acte de phraser' taken to involve a movement that bares the workings of a thought that engages the reader. It is the way the interplay of diverse elements of thought is reactivated by this act that makes their experience rejoin that undergone by the poet. This immediately evokes McGinn's insistence on the active nature of understanding. As he writes: 'each act of understanding is a small instance of genuine creativity'.⁹⁹ It is by insisting on the importance of movement to the experience of thought that Alferi underlines the fact that neither the poetic act nor the act of reading can be categorized either as strictly mental or as strictly physical. For him, perception is not a mere tool employed in such activities, it constitutes a large part of their meaningfulness as experiences. Vision, then, is not just a process used to generate an internal unified model of the world, it plays an active part in all thought.

It is the dynamic of a given thought that is therefore meaning-bearing, and it is the experience of this dynamism that is captured by the poet. The statement: 'A l'expérience qui ne connut pas d'autre, la phrase impose une forme', explicitly connects the idea of the singularity of each individual experience to that of the (retrospectively perceived) necessity of a sentence (CP:69). Further on in the same passage Alferi writes: 'la cohérence poétique est supérieure – parce que plus libre – à celle du récit, du raisonnement et du propos en général; elle est strictement textuelle' (CP:69). Poetry is thus at once opposed to linear form and to linear reasoning; internal freedom of movement (which is directly opposed to linearity) is fundamental to the experience of the unity of a text. This reflects Alferi's statement that film provides him with a 'modèle rythmique' that allows him to 'avancer malgré tout ce qui me bloque la vue, qu'il s'agisse de conventions ou d'inhibitions'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ McGinn, 2004[i]:150.

¹⁰⁰ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

Ne l'oublie pas explores the relation between rhythm, movement and language (CI). The one-line description of this 'cinépoème' that appears in the short manual that accompanies the DVD reads as follows: 'Une horloge verbale tourne pour appeler des souvenirs'. This short description involves references to movement, to rhythm, to time and to the act of calling something to mind. This is significant, because for Alferi, memory plays a vital role in the creative act; it is the act ('geste') of retrospection that constitutes the first step of the poetic act. This stage involves an appeal to a large number of 'known' sentences. It is the combination of their similarities and their insufficiency (when taken individually) that drives the new (necessary) sentence forward. It is not what these known sentences might represent that is called into play, it is the role they take on within the creative action of thought that is important. Hence '[I]e mouvement vers le passé est d'abord négateur. Mais la phrase recherchée est prise elle-même dans une rétrospection, cette fois affirmatrice' (CP:49). The apparent discrepancy between the ambiguity of the word 'souvenirs' and the precision of the imperative 'Ne l'oublie pas' hints at the crux of the poem, for (as will be seen) two of the most obvious ways it might be described are, firstly, as a single, distended sentence, or, secondly, as a combination of sentences (or text) that lacks any hierarchical arrangement at all, or rather in which all lexical items are of equal significance.

This 'cinépoème' includes music written for it by Susumu Yokota, which neither accompanies nor breaks into the various rhythms that are set up visually by the words and phrases that appear on the screen; it opens with the title shown (all in lower case letters) at the top of the screen (which is otherwise black). The phrase 'tu as', accompanied by a varying past participle, is simultaneously apparent a little lower down, as is a noun (which also changes) lower down still. The text is centrally aligned throughout. The following diagram gives a basic idea of the layout, though the 'cinépoème' of course at no point presents a static image strictly comparable with it.

Ne l'oublie pas
 place/time
 tu as + past participle
 adverb
 noun
 adjective
 qui t'a + past participle
 adverb
 Ne l'oublie pas

The rhythm according to which the composition of the lines varies is not synchronized, the result being that the same verbal formulation can have two or more nouns associated with it, and vice versa, over any given period. Pronouns, adverbs, adjectives and another verbal phrase beginning 'qui t'a', appear later on, inbetween the lines that are already active on the screen. These also vary, each according to its own particular rhythm. The original ambiguity of the statements that the spectator perceives are hence subjected to an ever increasing number of possible modifications and qualifications as the 'cinépoème' proceeds, an effect due in part to the fact that although each line alters, it only alters between a limited number of phrases or words.

The actual appearance of disparate (though individually recurrent) linguistic fragments on the screen sets up a complex network of potential sentences that, taken together, constitute the poem. This is vital to Alferi's break away from a representational conception of language, for what is perceived neither represents nor designates; meaning remains potential as each line alters, setting up new relations between phrases and individual lexical items. This effect is achieved mainly due to the fact that the reader is quite simply unable to track each new combination of words as it occurs. The experience that is the poem combines visual suspension and physical tension. The alteration of words is not foreseeable, and it defies linearity, for the changes that occur force the reader's gaze to move up and down the screen at random. However attentive you are, and despite the control provided by the pause button, an

experience of the total number of combinations that actually do appear remains impossible; another will always lie just ahead of (or just behind) your actual perception. What is more, a blink or moment of inattention can result in the failure to perceive a nonetheless ‘apparent’ combination. The result is that no one sentence can be pulled out with absolute certainty from the shifting possibilities on the screen. Meaning is therefore a result of the unification of all the words that appear and the total number of rhythms set up between them, which depends of course in part on the reader’s particular visual approach to the poem. The poem results, then, from the dynamic set up between the rhythm of a possible sentence and the syntactical possibilities presented by a thought. Meaning is not *constructed* on the basis of what is given on the screen, it is bound to the imaginative act required by the perceptual material that appears. *Ne l’oublie pas* therefore explores the experience of reading and of understanding a text by upsetting habitual reading patterns and directly engaging spatial elements of thought.

All of the ‘cinépoèmes’ increase the reader’s awareness of his/her creative input, for by requiring both perceptual and linguistic attention and by necessitating the use of the imagination by functioning primarily through potential and possibility, he/she becomes far more conscious of his/her own activity within the poem. This reflects the link between negation and creativity mentioned earlier. The reader must forget or block out known sentences in order to remain open to the potentially novel linguistic formulations that might appear or be suggested. This may be a process that occurs as anything is read, but Alferi’s emphasis on it sheds light on the idea that when absorbed the reader ‘loses’ him/herself in a text: to forget oneself is to forget what one ‘knows’.

Memory is again relevant here, which highlights the importance of Alferi’s statement that ‘l’attention au contenu et aux formes de l’expérience présente, fût-ce le présent du ressouvenir, est pour moi le moteur même de l’écriture’.¹⁰¹ It is by

¹⁰¹ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

experimenting with the way sentences are read via concentration on the visual and phonetic elements of the experience of reading that Alferi brings out the creativity of understanding, indicating that it is best defined through reference to will and action as opposed to being considered synonymous with critical analysis. The ‘cinépoèmes’ underline the fact that for Alferi, attention and awareness are vital to the creative act as well as to the act of reading, and these involve the author’s and the reader’s perceptual capacities.¹⁰² McGinn’s suggestion that the imagination is ‘the faculty that enables us to *combine* objects into possible states of affairs; it is, as it were, modally generative’, pinpoints the significance of Alferi’s refusal to characterize the unity of the literary text as ‘l’image arrêtée d’un déroulement’.¹⁰³ His insistence on the visual aspect of creative thought is vital both to his combat against the image proper, and against a representational conception of language. The movement the virtual space of the text allows for permits the experience of the text to rejoin the very action of its creation. In the light of Alferi’s desire to capture ‘la présence au monde à un moment donné’, a presence ‘qui n’explique rien, ne représente rien’, his insistence on the importance of potential and possibility can therefore be seen to provide the openness that allows the reader’s experience to be creative in a way that establishes a direct connection between his/her thought process and that of the author. It is the experience of the unity of a thought that constitutes the text for Alferi, and it is this that lies behind his insistence that no satisfactory ‘échantillon’ can ever be extracted from a given poetic text that would be sufficient to exemplify it.

In view of Alferi’s exploration of the interpenetrability of the visual and the verbal in the action of thought, it is worth mentioning recent research that has been carried out into mirror neurons. Research (carried out notably by Vittorio Gallese and

¹⁰² It would be fascinating to see how Alferi’s ‘cinépoèmes’ might be transposed for the blind. It seems quite possible that a combination of a mobile braille text and the audible material used could incite the same experience (it might even be interesting to develop such a method for the sighted).

¹⁰³ McGinn, 2004[i]:145.

Giacomo Rizzolatti) has shown that the same neurons respond when a sentence such as ‘hand grasps ball’ is heard or read, as when such an action is perceived or performed.¹⁰⁴ Combined with the fact that mirror neurons play a vital role in all learning, this suggests that language may well have developed from the syntactic understanding originally generated by their activity.¹⁰⁵ As Gallagher writes: ‘Their functioning clearly helps to account for the communication between proprioception and vision, and between specific movements and the visual perception of those movements in others’.¹⁰⁶ These scientific observations underline the significance of Alferi’s experiments with reading patterns and rhythms, and in particular his interest in the vague borders that exist between the visual and the verbal in thought. His use of film can indeed be seen, in the light of such research, not to be moving away from language towards some multimedia art, but rather to be exploring what language is and how it works; what it always has been, and the way it has always functioned, as the dominant manifestation of human thought processes.

To summarize, for Alferi, the text is not a static or closed linguistic object; for him, a poem is successful primarily insofar as it *fails to delimit* the number of various possible relations that might be set up within it. This is perhaps implicit in his comment that ‘le texte lui-même n’épuise pas les relations de parenté qu’il établit entre les phrases; aussi singulier soit-il, il s’ouvre sur un autre’, going on to suggest that it is this ‘et cetera’ that constitutes the ‘nécessité’ of both the individual text, and of literature in general (CP:72). This is vital with regard to the ‘cinépoèmes’, which escape closed analysis, being primarily dependent on the creative interplay between perception and imagination induced by Alferi’s use of visual material.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Gallese’s article: ‘Mirror neurons: from grasping to language’ and another written in conjunction with other authors including Rizzolatti entitled ‘Action recognition in the premotor cortex’ (Gallese, 1998 and 1996 respectively).

¹⁰⁵ It is also worth noting that these neurons are also held largely responsible for our ability to empathize with others, a fact that should not be overlooked in the light of the way fiction is generally understood to work.

¹⁰⁶ Gallagher, 2006:3.

Section ii: PERCEPTION, IMAGINATION AND THE SELF

la machine jamais ne fonctionne aussi bien qu'une fois
 sa fonction oubliée quand elle se leurre et abuse
 librement de soi et ainsi la vue devint une
 séduction autarcique obsédante carcérale
 moins dans les trompe-l'œil ou les erreurs de perspective
 qui laissent toujours une issue que dans cette évidence
 épaisse et luisante et lisse dans cette inévitable
 lumière que l'on prend où l'on est pris comme une mouche
 dans du miel et qui filtre à travers le crâne quand
 une illumination ou juste une intuition ramène
 à la scène trop vue trop théorique ou théâtrale
 où quelqu'un se trouve mis en face de quelque chose
 comme une borne et voit et reconnaît alors il faut
 pour sentir que la pensée est la dupe de la vue
 et que s'il y a du vrai en elles il sera tortueux
 ombreux et réticent comme peut l'être seule une phrase (C:92-3)

Le Chemin familier du poisson combatif and *Fmn* both explore the way perception and imagination merge, drawing out the way the ambiguity of their interaction is often responsible for the meaningfulness of experiences. Imagination is not conceived to be tacked on to 'real' experience, and perception is not understood to involve the mere gathering of data that is then processed by the brain and 'translated' into thoughts formulated according to the linguistic structures at our disposal. Alferi's experimentation with film feeds into both texts. As has been suggested, the experience of film is a resource that is significant within his poetic approach, firstly due to his fascination with the possible representation of movement, and secondly because it is bound up in our everyday experience of the world.

Le Chemin familier du poisson combatif is described on the back cover as follows:

Le narrateur se soumet à quatre expériences. La première est de sortir. La deuxième, de passer le temps. La troisième, de rentrer chez soi. La quatrième, de regarder.
 Récit d'une aventure.

The word 'expérience' immediately evokes Alferi's statement that 'l'exigence de trouver dans son environnement immédiat et l'expérience tout son matériau, en se

prenant soi-même comme cobaye, est encore ce qui justifie le mieux, pour moi, la pratique de la poésie'.¹⁰⁷ This statement occurs in the same passage as his description of a possible 'documentaire des origines' that would uncover 'l'organisation d'une perception, d'une sensibilité, sous la forme d'une expérience de pensée. Comme si l'on était soi-même, en vivant, le cobaye d'une expérience, et s'il fallait en rendre compte, sans viser pour autant une vérité universelle'. The book (as the text on the back cover suggests) puts these ideas directly into practice. Within it, Alferi carries out four experiments, each one taking a diagram extracted from a book by Jacob von Uexhill entitled *Mondes animaux & Monde humain* (on animal behaviour) as its point of departure (the diagrams are included in his text). This use of visual material calls to mind the relation between observed action or behaviour and the causes behind it, and hence the nature of scientific experiments which tend to involve laying out a method, putting it into practice, and drawing conclusions from the observed results. Methods of observation and comprehension are therefore focal points of this text that explores the limits of what can be recorded successfully and of what might be recorded meaningfully.

Fmn is similarly bound to ideas of experimentation and adventure. The first two lines of the back-cover description of this text read: 'Un homme se dit prisonnier du regard d'une femme. Il part à la rencontre de n'importe qui', lines which evoke the connection made between the words 'vue' 'séduction' and 'carcérale' in the introductory quotation. Further on, the author writes: 'il s'agit donc d'amour [...]. Et de genres'. These aspects of the book are summarized as follows: 'Prostitution de l'âme et décentrement du langage'. The text explores the connections between vision, subjective experience, the possible communication of that experience, and language. The idea of departure is connected to that of exploration, both suggestive of action, potential and

¹⁰⁷ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

possibility. The reflexive verb used in the first line indicates the tension between what is, what might be and what is not (visually and psychologically speaking), that characterizes the book.

In the light of the main themes of the two texts, the analysis of *Le Chemin familier du poisson combatif* will illustrate the way Alferi moves away from representational description by drawing from visual perception directly. I will then suggest that *Fmn*, which implements a similar approach, could be seen as a distension of the moment when perception and imagination meet. This will support the idea that Alferi's concentration on the visual in thought is vital to his transcendence of both the word-image and the mind-body divide. Here, I will consider the implications of his approach for the conception of the self or subject.

The first section of *Le Chemin familier du poisson combatif* (which bears the same title as the book) is concerned with movement, as is suggested by the description of the first experiment the narrator is to undertake: 'sortir'. As it is the narrator who submits himself to these experiments it could be the voice of the text itself that proposes this challenge, as though the author had merely proposed the existence of the narrator's voice.¹⁰⁸ The challenge is strictly textual; the action is to occur and to develop on the page. The gap between the traditional methods we use to classify and order data (restrictions the narrator aims to escape from) and what it is to have an experience or undergo an experiment is exposed from the beginning of this section. Static representational structures appear incapable of capturing the experience of a living organism or such an organism's movement through space. The subject 'retient des images actives et leur ordre': 'le trajet n'a pas de dessin' (C:16). It is movement that makes an experience, and the memory of that experience, what they are: 'Ce sont [...] les séquences [...] | qui constituent le fonds de la mémoire. | Entre, une obscure

¹⁰⁸ This suggests a direct analogy with bob's role in Portugal's text *définitif bob*.

opération relevant de la topologie | de la zoologie' (C:16). Here, the words zoology and topology suggest an analogy with language, with the formulation or laying out of an otherwise indeterminate memory in accordance with a structure, or (to follow the analogy through) with the linguistic structures at the subject's disposal, with an action, then, that is by nature reductive. This suggests that it is largely rhythm that marks the particularity of an experience and memory of it and this may underlie the narrator's question how (when recording his comings and goings 'sur le plan d'une table') he is to 'tenir compte | de l'hésitation?' (C:17). Here, the rigid rectangular 'plan' evokes the static image, incapable of capturing both the action of thought and its natural indeterminacy. The identification, labelling, or literal description of objects is hence presented as a process that distances them from us by abstracting from their mere presence and our experience of that presence. Later on in the text, Alferi writes:

c'est le réveil qui rend peu à peu leur volume aux choses
 [...]
 les objets décalqués au loin
 se regonflent et reprennent leurs distances de naguère
 sous l'effet d'une double pression fictive une double
 accommodation (C:87)

This passage clarifies the last point, because it concerns the relation between thought and perception. Here, the 'double pression fictive' involves first the awareness of percepts (as opposed to mental (dream) images) and then the recognition of the objects perceived (in accordance with the words associated with them). It therefore seems that it is only when the eyes are freed from their 'functions' of recognition and classification (their 'fonction oubliée' to return to the introductory quotation) that sight is freed from the limitations of our tendency to label and classify: a tendency that results in our ultimate inability to 'see' objects at all. Even then, however, sight is not considered an instrument of veridical perception, for, as sight and thought inform one another incessantly, despite any attempt to separate them out, the relation of either to truth is

necessarily ‘tortueux | ombreux et réticent comme peut l’être seul une phrase’ (C:92-3).

Hence:

TOUT PORTE A CROIRE

que l’œil pour justifier son existence
 ne prétendrait pas découvrir les choses
 comme elles sont ni déposer leurs portraits
 dans un fonds que l’on visite à loisir
 en un mot voir mais détecter
 afin d’esquiver ou de prendre (C:93)

This passage (that appears, due to the recurrent use of the words ‘tout porte à croire’ within it, to take the place of the one line ‘conclusion’ that occurs at the end of the other sections) suggests the importance of the dynamic interaction between sight and thought. The meaningfulness of sight depends on an active relation between perceiver and what is perceived. The input of the imagination is vital and it is the way this faculty transgresses the boundaries between the visual and the verbal that is significant. Its role is dynamic. Hence, ‘il faut lire et | il faut écrire pour essayer de surprendre sinon | de déjouer la vue’ (C:94). The passage quoted above continues further on as follows:

il doit y avoir une contemplation
 active inquiète qui balance la solennité sournoise
 de tout panorama par son geste à elle prodigue
 fiévreux graphique à la façon des yeux dans la démarche d’aveugle

No sweeping vision will do, it is the action of thought alone that makes experience meaningful.

The eye is hence no longer conceived of as an instrument we use to construct an internal representation of the world and of objects in it, instead, the active relation set up between vision and thought is given priority. The suggestion that this relation is characterized by the combination of perceptual awareness and imagination is backed up by the narrator’s comment (which concerns seeing anything at all) that:

[...] la pire illusion
 parce que la plus humble n’est pas de le voir assez bien
 pour le connaître mais d’en voir juste assez pour savoir

sa consistance et le laisser tel quel indifférent
intact et cohérent [...] (C:95)

The relation between sight and thought, between what is seen and the potential linguistic formulation of that experience of seeing, can only become significant or meaningful when the imagination is called into play. This involves acting on what is seen, hence the earlier description of thought as ‘fiévreux graphique’; it involves a gesture that breaks beyond the known.

The first section of the book (entitled ‘Le Chemin familial du poisson combattif’) that deals most directly with the possibility of capturing movement evokes movement around a park (the Jardin des plantes) which immediately suggests an analogy with Portugal’s use of a similar visual structure in *Le Plus simple appareil*. In both texts, the rectangularity of the park or garden is used to suggest the limits imposed on language and on pictorial representation by the four corners of a canvas or page. The activity of thought cannot be frozen within a frame (or page), and it is the presentation or reproduction of this activity that endows what might (or might not) be present within that frame (or page) with potential meaning. Hence Alferi’s narrator states (about the park): ‘S’il faut se le représenter en route, ce n’est plus une carte | ni un panorama, mais un système circulatoire | aux contours lisses, comme le corps propre, parce que fictifs’ (CP:24). The word ‘fictifs’ is vital here, for, occurring at the end of the sentence, it suggests that the boundary between the body and the ‘outside world’ is fictitious, and, by extension, that boundaries (such as those that may appear to mark the beginning and the end of a text) are by nature arbitrary. The upshot appears to be that such boundaries only ‘exist’ meaningfully insofar as they are put to the test and modified according to the nature of a particular experience. The perimeter of the park is never perceived in its entirety by the stroller, nor is it likely that he would be able to designate the spatial location of his limbs in relation to it at any point in his walk. That both the perimeter of the garden and his body exist are simply facts (as Alferi writes ‘la référence a lieu’) but

the walker's account of his experience while strolling need involve no explicit reference to either. One idea that seems to run through this Section is that however habitual movement may be, thought, even when regressive or repetitive, is creative.¹⁰⁹

As suggested above, the poetic act does not leave things intact, but acts on and amongst them, a rearrangement (rather than a distortion) of reality, in accordance with the experience that gave rise to it. The insufficiency of literal description is hence directly linked with the relation between thought and vision in the following passage, which occurs in the last section of the book, entitled 'Le Même chemin pour un œil de mouche':

combien je hais les paysages combien
 les descriptions m'ennuient surtout si l'auteur y a mis
 de la ferveur pour les choses du monde
 visible où était la rue il y a un chemin
 où les toits des arbres le reste est pareil quoique
 l'alentour de l'œil pèse d'un poids exorbitant
 sur la pensée les gestes la composition des humeurs
 et les choix les plus graves quand on y songe le moins
 encore que l'on y songe toujours assez l'esprit est à
 ce qu'il voit y revient s'y arrête et repose à plaisir
 comme sur un double plus présent que lui jamais
 ne le sera déployé rassurant mais tacite intangible
 et n'offrant en lui-même aucune résistance [...] (C:79-80)

Here, literal description of the visible is contrasted with the 'poids exorbitant' of 'l'alentour de l'œil' – the weight, then, not of things seen directly, but of what is mere (and indeed possibly imagined) presence. Here, the spaces left between the phrases in the fourth and fifth lines break up the rhythm of the text, slowing down the reader's progression through them. This use of space is a humorous reflection on the way we expect reference to work. Each space is left as though to give the reader time to 'visualize' the street, the path, the rooftops and so on, one by one, but the lack of visual

¹⁰⁹ The discussion of Novarina's use of repetition in Chapter 3 will develop this idea.

dynamism in the list brings out the descriptive insufficiency of the mere naming of objects and of literal description that only appeals to visual presence.¹¹⁰

Alferi's use of pagination and typography reflects his assimilation of sight and touch within his conception of the act of writing. His inclusion of diagrams here is comparable to his use of drawings in *Des enfants et des monstres* (discussed earlier) for they appear to serve again as traces or indications of physical contact with something: not borrowed but assimilated into the experiments to which the narrator submits himself. This use of visual material reflects Portugal's exploitation of the space of the page. Another, related similarity is that both often replace traditional description of things seen with passages that evoke the way they might be seen; passages that often employ cinematic vocabulary and references to shapes. Several passages are strikingly visual: 'Soudain, surimpression, | de celles qui donnent un faux relief aux contours familiers, | puis ce visage s'emboîte. L'espace en est courbé, invaginé' and '[l]es sensations identiques se multiplient, élèvent la présence au carré | puis refluent, sans retombées, vers leur source' for example (CP:19). Such lines suggest a particular conception of the role vision plays in metaphor. In Alferi's work, 'sense' or 'meaning' is often captured through the evocation of perceptual movement. This has significant implications for it suggests that vision in thought need not imply the precise recollection of percepts or images, and that the poet aims primarily to capture the felt spatial dynamism of a given thought.

In order to expand on the above, it is interesting to turn to recent research that has been done into the visual capacities of the blind. It has been shown that even people who have been blind from birth associate the same visual shapes with certain ideas, feelings, and concepts as the sighted. They can also draw, by working with their imagination and sense of touch, and employ the same visual 'techniques' as the sighted.

¹¹⁰ This evokes Thom Gunn's 'dull thunder of approximate words', and as he writes elsewhere: 'Description and analysis degrade | Limit, delay, slipped land from what has been' (from 'On the move', Gunn & Hughes 1962:14, 11).

For example, when a group of subjects were asked to represent a wheel in motion they used curved lines for the spokes. When asked why, they stated that the curves were ‘metaphorical ways of suggesting motion’.¹¹¹ The researcher concluded from such experiments that the part of the brain that deals with what is commonly called visual symbolism is in fact multi-modal, receiving input from not only vision but touch.¹¹² Such experiments follow research that has shown that various areas of the brain that deal with vision are increasingly activated in blind people as they solve a problem or even just read, and the results underline the fact that there is something fundamentally ‘visual’ about our thought processes. The physical act involved in writing and drawing is one obvious manifestation of the connection between visual imagination and linguistic ability, but whether or not the activation of parts of the brain that deal with vision in the blind can strictly be said to be equivalent to visual experience in the sighted, it seems clear that vision, imagination and linguistic ability are all closely interconnected. Alferi’s comparison of the ‘geste’ involved in creative thought to the act carried out by the blind reader supports this suggestion, for it suggests that the act of writing or drawing is directly connected to the physicality of creative thought – to a form of spatial dynamism that is fundamentally non-representational.

In a fragment that appears in the last section of the text (entitled ‘La même rue pour un œil de mouche’) the narrator writes: ‘la nature physique et morale de la vue m’intriguait | son mécanisme et son emprise muets’ (C:81). It is the potential control (or lack of control) that we have over what we see that is called into question here. Hence the following fragment, that could be seen (retrospectively) to apply to the whole text:

pour aimer la vue
 faire profession de voir en oubliant l’heure et le lieu
 encore faut-il et d’autant plus qu’elle est plus intérieure
 aimer son propre point de vue ne pas soupçonner
 un piège et je voulais tenter de contourner le mien

¹¹¹ Kennedy, 2006:49.

¹¹² The discussion of the relation between touch and proprioception in Part III will clarify the further significance of this result.

sinon de le défaire en me prêtant d'autres regards (C:85-6)

Vision must be subordinated to the movement of a thought if it is to be freed from the limitations and restrictions of conceptual thought. Percepts, like concepts, are vital points of reference within the process of making sense of experience, but mere reference to, or description of them cannot capture the experience of thought itself, in which vision, being primarily 'intérieure', is bound far more closely to the activity of the imagination than to mere perceptual data. The experiment that involves taking on 'd'autres regards' hence signals the attempt to push both concepts and percepts (in other words, the 'known') back, thus liberating the imagination and drawing out the fundamental creativity of experience. The passage cited above therefore underlines both the active nature of vision and indeed of thought, and this leads the discussion directly on to *Fmn*.

As suggested earlier, *Fmn*, like *Le Chemin familial du poisson combattif*, explores the nature of the relations that bind thought and perceptual experience. In *Fmn* however, the nature of the narrator's visual perception is not the result of self-imposed experimentation, it stems from his hyper-awareness of a potential other, manifested in the REGARD. As mentioned earlier, the first line of the back cover description of this text reads as follows: 'Un homme se dit prisonnier du regard d'une femme.' The first line of the book takes the form of a statement: '- J'attendais une femme', with an unexpected qualification added to it: 'cette femme était réelle' (F:9). The narrator's use of the word 'réelle' here is rendered ambiguous as it becomes clear that the woman's presence does not imply her visibility: 'jamais elle ne m'apparut' (F:11). What is more, she is not associated with any particular name, face or physical trait:

Elle se logeait dans un regard, s'y résumait, s'y contractait pour s'y dissoudre, s'y émietter, s'y émettre et m'atteindre. Elle était ce REGARD sans yeux, le regard qui, dit-on, passe par eux quoiqu'il se passe d'eux peu souvent. Sans yeux, oui, non sans point d'émission, il se situait à quelques mètres en amont, inondant ma face de trois quarts. Onde et particules de

conscience constamment renouvelées, feu nourri, rayon paisible régénéré.
(F :13)

This passage disassociates the ‘reality’ of the woman from any identity criteria we typically use to designate an individual; her existence appears to depend primarily on the dynamics of the narrator’s gaze. The word ‘virtual’ (discussed earlier) is hence applicable here; the woman may not be ‘actual’ but this need in no way affect the reality of her presence in the mind of the narrator.

Before continuing, it is worth drawing a brief comparison with Beckett’s *Film*, which also concerns the inescapability of the gaze, though the way it reflects on the concept of the self is quite different.¹¹³ In Beckett’s *Film*, the main character eliminates all other possible ‘gazes’ and finds himself nonetheless at the mercy of his own self-perception: ‘La recherche du non-être par suppression de toute perception étrangère achoppe sur l’insupprimable perception de soi’.¹¹⁴ In *Fmn* on the other hand the obsession with a single possible other gaze eliminates all *subjective* vision from the outset. Both texts nonetheless imply the presence of a third gaze; of an eye that sees *how* one sees. Branka Arsic elucidates the concept of a ‘third eye’ by drawing on Sartre’s analysis of the gaze in *L’Être et le néant*.¹¹⁵ Sartre observes that the possibility of a gaze is manifested by a virtual perceptual chart that is automatically suggested by any two perceived points. He uses the example of soldiers in a forest who see a house outlined against the sky on the top of a hill. The lines that connect these points (the house and the sky beyond) produce a geometrical projection of the perceptual field that constitutes the potential support for vision and hence for a particular gaze. Arsic expands on this observation as follows: ‘Each of these points is an eye in its double “nature”: the place from which one can see and the object that might be seen. That is why the structure of the Other is not only this network of eyes capable of the gaze, but

¹¹³ Beckett, 1964.

¹¹⁴ Beckett, 1972:113.

¹¹⁵ Sartre, 1976.

also the possibility for this entire network of eyes to be seen from one point, from the point of a single eye'.¹¹⁶ Hence he brings in the concept of the third eye, an eye that sees this virtual chart in its entirety. To return to Beckett's *Film*, it is precisely such a third eye that is inescapable but Beckett conceives of this as the eye of the self – of self-perception. For him, it is the idea or image of the self as an identifiable point or presence that is inescapable. In *Fmn*, on the other hand, Alferi concentrates not on the idea or image we have of ourselves but on the process of thought that enables us to have such ideas in the first place.¹¹⁷ He is concerned not with the *object* of imagining but with the *act* of imagining. His observation seems to be that the potential of the 'third eye' is only ever realized when the imagination is activated. The third eye (for him) thus appears to be the eye of the cognitive imagination: it is capable of suggesting the possibility of a virtual set of visual relations. It does not therefore 'produce' images, it is a vital characteristic of creative thought. As such, it enables thought to break both beyond the image and beyond a representational conception of language, for as has been discussed, such reductive forms of expression are necessarily subordinated to the imagination within the poetic act.

For Alferi, the third eye is therefore not associated with a specific point of vision, or a single, identifiable presence. The conception of the self that is implied is hence fundamentally different from that implied by Beckett's work, because for Alferi the imaginative potential rendered possible by the third eye provides a means of escaping a static conception of the individual. The separation between self and other is hence more a matter of degree than of precisely defined boundaries. The imagination, as opposed to creating a barrier between the individual and the world, hence provides one of the main bridges between them.

¹¹⁶ Arsic, 2003:140.

¹¹⁷ Gallagher's differentiation between body image and body schema discussed in the introduction is directly relevant here.

The role the REGARD plays, or rather the nature of its activity, evolves as the text proceeds, but despite (or perhaps due to) these alterations it remains largely the dictator of the experiences undergone by the narrator. The first section of the book, entitled ‘Son Apogée’ and subtitled ‘télévision’, appears to take the form of a dialogue between the narrator and another voice that interposes brief questions or comments. This voice, although disembodied and unbound by any name or description, could be that of a current ‘actual’ female presence. Cinematic ‘mises-en-scènes’ are dispersed throughout this Section in separate paragraphs typed in italics. Being purely visual, these are vital to the text here, for the narrator is recounting two stages in the REGARD’s development; its presence as first a watcher situated behind and above him, and then as a second point of vision situated directly behind his own eyes (‘Deux vues cohabitaient...’) (F:26). These cinematic passages are strikingly visual, and hence serve to actualize first the narrator’s visual apprehension of the REGARD, and then his attempts to see in accordance with it. As the text proceeds, the REGARD’s activity intensifies. It remains, however, simultaneously recognizable and unknown. It is capable of remaining external, of taking on the role of the ‘other’ (compared at one point to a judge for example) and indeed of appearing to absent itself altogether, but it becomes clear that it is equally capable of insinuating itself into (as opposed to merely onto) the narrator’s own perception (F:18). Towards the end of the section, the narrator recounts the development of his awareness of its presence both behind and within his gaze, the result being that – visually speaking – he has nothing left that is truly his own.

The first section of *Fmn*, subtitled ‘télévision’, can hence be seen to explore the power of imposed images. The cinematic sequences mentioned above are used as visual images or visualizations of sequences of experience that run in parallel to the narration. Their nature as ‘images matérielles’ is clarified following the description of the second stage of the REGARD’s development:

[E]lles répondaient, plus vraies que les vues passagères qu'offrent la perception commune et les vidéoclips, à leur définition d'images : découpes dans une aire dont elles gardaient une intuition, dans un laps dont elles contenaient une réminiscence et un pressentiment. Les rendaient désirables leurs bords en soi visibles, le soupçon que pesait sur elles le hors-champ, leur avant, leur après. Anguleuses, violemment, ostensiblement cadrées, il leur manquait cette rotondité de présent autarcique et de décor flottant, cette légèreté de bulles des plans télévisuels courants. Chacune promettait un récit, chacune appelait, en la défiant, une description. (F:34)

This brings out the significance of the subtitle 'télévision', for although at the beginning the simultaneously foreign and intimate nature of the images renders them suggestive of televisual images, as the REGARD imposes its own creativity on the perceptual faculties of the narrator, they become increasingly oppressive: invading, and gradually suppressing, his perceptual freedom.

The increasing dominance of the REGARD has a direct effect on the narrator's sense of self: finally, he describes himself as deprived of both memory and of subjectivity: 'J'étais aussi sans mémoire. En substituant à celui de la plongée le dispositif de la caméra subjective, elle substituait le REGARD au regard, le sien au mien, pour la part effective, durable de la vision' (F:37). The 'contenu visuel' of his memory is hence 'privé de tonalité singulière, séparé comme par un carreau des sentiments, associations d'idées, désirs, rêveries qui d'ordinaire y apposent une signature' (F:37). The visual elements of the narrator's memory have lost their natural indeterminacy; cut off from thought, which combines linguistic elements, current perceptual experience and so on, they have become 'dures comme la vitre de la télévision' (F:38). Here the narrator speaks of the 'sacrifice que fait l'écran des corps'. The tactile element of vision is suppressed as depth and shape become mere functions of rays of light projected onto a glass surface.¹¹⁸ What is more, mobility is impossible within the imposed frames that surround his supposed memory images. The result is described as follows: 'Tous fils vivants tranchés, tous liens défaits capables de les

¹¹⁸ The earlier discussion of the nature of the visual experience of the blind is relevant here.

innerver, les irriguer ou les mouvoir, je n'en retenais rien' (F:38). Frozen within a frame, the visual aspects of memory become static and unreal, cut off from sensation, thought and movement, 'souvenirs' take the place of active memory. These images, although they appear to correspond 'aux critères objectifs de ce que l'on nomme la mémoire', simultaneously undermine them; for without action and indeterminacy there is no real memory (F:39). The suggestion is that the connection between the visual elements of memory and reality (things both as they have been and as they are) is bound to the fact that they are not static or 'framed', it depends primarily on the way they interact with present thought and current experience. The result of the imposition of the REGARD at this stage is hence summarized in the following lines: 'j'étais pris par l'image'; '[le REGARD] me brûlait par les deux bouts, me privait de tout temps, dépossédé que j'étais et de mon présent subjectif et de mon passé objectif' (F:40, 41). One conclusion the narrator draws from the experience is that 'le regard qui préserve efface' (F:42). The visual elements of memory are only real or effective insofar as they are active within creative present-tense thought.

Towards the end of this section, when the REGARD is described as present both within and behind the narrator's actual perception of the world, his comprehension of both space and time is shown to be profoundly altered by his loss of control over the visual elements of his thought processes. Hence he writes of '[n]appes de durée, d'espace perçus qui se chevauchaient, disparaissaient l'une sous l'autre ou en soi-même roulées' (F:45). 'Exterior' reality has been virtualized following the REGARD's invasion of his perceptual capacities, hence: 'La beauté du spectacle, d'un genre nouveau, tenait moins à mon absence personnelle qu'à la disparition sans trace, par enchantement, de toute organisation subjective, au défaut merveilleux d'un centre' (F:43-4). The loss of his own subjectivity ('Ce mot « je » ne le dirait plus') is bound to the increasing predominance of the virtual dynamics of the REGARD and this, as

manifested by his attempts to see in accordance with it, is fundamentally connected to the increasingly predominant activity of his visual imagination (F:44). This alteration of his perceptual habits will have direct repercussions on his cognitive imagination, on his ability to imagine anything beyond the imposed gaze. At this stage, the heightened activity of his visual imagination does not alter things in themselves, as it were, but works to undermine his conception of himself and the nature of his experience of them, by affecting his ability to situate himself in any objectively conceived spatio-temporal reality. The narrator's increased perceptual awareness does not generate certainty with regard to what he sees, but enlarges visual potential to the extent that he can no longer predict what he might see on the basis of his movements. His experience is hence characterized by a constant 'pressentiment', a feeling that the felt (virtual) presence behind the REGARD is about to become actual. It is this feeling that lies behind his purposeful attempt to discard his perceptual habits and to 'see' in accordance with an undefined gaze which suggests a direct link between the relationship explored by the text and Alferi's definition of literary creativity.

All cinematic passages disappear at the end of the first section. The narrator himself remarks that '[les images] ne sont jamais qu'un début' which immediately evokes McGinn's suggestion that 'there is a kind of continuity between sensory and cognitive imagination with respect to the non-actual: cognitive imagination continues and extends what the humble image had already initiated' (F:30).¹¹⁹ The effect of the REGARD's total invasion of the narrator's perceptual faculties results in his inability to form thoughts of any nature that do not in some way reflect her purpose. All aspects of his imagination are therefore subsumed to it. The second section (entitled 'La sape') is introduced with the following two lines that complete the last:

- Et maintenant, elle voit?
- Mieux: vous voyez, elle tourne. (F:50)

¹¹⁹ McGinn, 2004[i]:138.

The dialogue hence closes, and the reader is thrust into the (present-tense) action of a ‘vidéo littéraire’. Instead of any descriptive ‘mise-en-scène’, the reader is immediately placed in the action, a witness of the video as it is made. The section opens with a continuous block of text, unbroken by full stops, in which sounds and images are blurred. This block in no way resembles the cinematic passages of the first section. No camera movements are described directly; they are merely implied by the way what is seen is seen:

[B]ousculée par le montage cut, de moins un bombardé acteur, pilées avec un filet de voix, cut montre une place grise de monde, feu rouge feu vert et feu vert feu rouge, voix qui se faufile entre les couches, grise de monde puis tout à coup vide, feu vert feu rouge et les têtes sautillent, entre les couches de bruit en noir et blanc, vide il est un jeté cahotant dehors, sautillent retournées vite d’oiseaux [...]. (F:53)

The REGARD is behind the camera, film the ‘modèle rythmique’ she imposes, and the narrator of the first section hence becomes the subject of the text: NHA (Notre Héros Anonyme). Time is subordinated to her rhythm, and as he goes out, his walkman on, ‘il vit avec bonheur sa mémoire vive s’effacer devant les quidams, les voitures, les heures prochaines absentes des agendas, les faux contacts’ (F:55). The control the REGARD has over NHA’s movements affects both the nature of his perceptual experiences and his interpretation of their content. The need for (and indeed possible sufficiency of) images has been transcended (or transgressed), for the connection between the REGARD behind the camera and NHA’s thought is now manifested directly in the text. For example, the line ‘[p]our se rappeler l’ordre de ses pensées il commença chacune par les derniers mots de la précédente, point de couture’ is immediately reflected in the text, where each paragraph opens with the last words of the one that preceded it (for example: ‘Mettant le cap au nord il s’engagea dans un réseau de ruelles inconnues. || Dans un réseau de ruelles inconnues NHA persécuta [...]’ (F:58).) His action, his thought, and the REGARD’s manipulation of the camera are thus rendered

indistinguishable. Hence, when the text centres around fragments of dialogue he hears at the bar *Le Progrès*, the italics interspersed between the words he hears do not only describe actions taking place, but also his visual experience: ‘*Soudain vertige de théâtre, du manège où pilier, patrons, garçon évoluent*’ (F:66). Both the subject’s visual imagination and his cognitive imagination are now at the mercy of the REGARD. The dominance of this potential gaze is complete.

The title of this Section is ‘La Sape’, defined retrospectively, in the course of the sermon NHA stumbles into, as ‘la sujétion à personne’, a definition that bears the following qualifications:

‘personne’ comme ‘rien’ signifie le contraire de ce qu’il dit: quelqu’un comme quelque chose d’inconnu, d’espéré. Ce qui doit se comprendre ainsi: De meme que ‘rien’ garde la signification de *res* [chose – *ndh*], de même ‘personne’ garde la signification de *persona* [masque de théâtre – *ndh*]. Et le masque demeure suspendu devant l’esprit du passant parce qu’il couvre la face, qu’il ne peut voir en face, de Celle qu’il ne sait point nommer. (F:71)¹²⁰

The sermon, like the ‘film’ that follows, illustrates the influence the REGARD has over his experiences, and the illusory nature of his belief in his freedom of action. Here, as in the café, the disruption of any subjective ‘centering’ of experience and the de-synchronization of what actually is seen and heard, is caused by the dominance of an imposed imaginary that is set in place via the REGARD’s manipulation of his perceptual faculties. At one point he watches a film entitled ‘Baudelaire dans le cyberspace’, set in a futuristic place called ‘Blituriland’, a ‘holosphère’ or ‘mappe’ in which no actual movement is necessary, all possible transactions and trajectories being already set up and short-circuited by a ‘réseau signalétique’ that it suffices to click into in order for virtual movement or contact to take place. Baudelaire’s theory of ‘correspondances’ is at stake. The problem here is that as all connections are pre-programmed, the ‘hypertexte’ that is Blituriland is completely static. The hero of the film (significantly named Dufays) has one aim: to escape or undermine the network. His

¹²⁰ The abbreviation *ndh* used in the text signifies ‘note du héro’.

attempts reflect the futility of NHA's efforts to escape the REGARD, which now dominates all his perceptual faculties. What he sees has been programmed by her, and the exclusivity of his visual awareness hence resembles the experience of visual elements of dreams: as McGinn observes, the attention-dependence of the imagination is at the root of 'the *enthralling* character of dreams, the single-mindedness of the dream-state'.¹²¹ When dreaming, we become 'modally blind', we cannot imagine anything else being the case.¹²²

At the end of this section we are presented with NHA's decision not to look beyond the town – to allow his actual experience of it to take priority over his search for 'n'importe qui'. However, the phrase 'ce jour-là il la rencontra' appears, vital to the reader's comprehension of the following section, entitled 'Une Idylle'. He has been propelled forward by his abandonment of his belief in his ability to control his experiences. This section is made up of short fragments of text. A whole page is devoted to each although some pages are left blank. These passages therefore float, disparate and yet connected, in spaces that appear almost autonomous. Two voices (one male one female) weave in and out of them, although it is often unclear which, if either, is speaking. The word 'rencontre' appears on the third page (F:99). However, composed of what appears to be a mixture of memories, dreams, questions and thoughts, this section is primarily suggestive of the illusory nature of contact and communication. The dialogue could be imagined, for two pages from the end, one fragment begins as follows: 'Elle répond. Jusque-là, il parlait d'eux mentalement' (F:197). The word 'idylle' is expounded upon (retrospectively once again) in the following passage:

Je vois deux aimants c'est le mot maintenus proches par la force répulsive un
 temps assez court non sans mal tirant chacun et manquant
 prendre la tangente à chaque instant cela c'est la liaison
 l'idylle tendue fragile (F:207)

¹²¹ McGinn, 2004[i]:79.

¹²² McGinn, 2004[i]:80.

The word 'aimants' insisted upon here stresses the active nature of the two subjects involved. The 'idylle' is a moment of suspension or balance that cannot last. This moment hence resembles brief synchronization as opposed to real contact. This connection is again referred to later as an occasion when the two thought as one, but within this section, the duality of the REGARD remains and it appears that if contact and communication do actually occur, they need not coincide. Thus, the passage that opens with the word '*Rencontre*' includes the phrase 'une double vitre les sépare', and later '- Elle était double, je le maintiens' (F:99). The duality of the REGARD that appears to have taken on a more tangible form, seems to be compared to a discrepancy of a linguistic nature; to the difference between a verb (as active) and a noun (as object), both of these still at a wide remove from the experience that either might be invoked to describe. Hence '[l]e tonerre tonne après que l'éclair éclaira' (F:99). Vision is followed by the apprehension of a voice ('La voix') that comes from a source other than that of 'ce cher visage' (F:99). The momentary synchronization referred to later is therefore that of vision and language. The relationship therefore remains virtual, and indeed, in the context of this section, even the passages that evoke sexual union suggest the distancing nature of actual physical proximity. In this section, the creative power of the gaze is stressed once again. The line '[q]ui t'a montré que tu es nu?', for example, evokes God's reaction to the changed self-perception of Adam and Eve after the fall (F:123). The passage in which this line occurs concerns '[c]onversations, préliminaires', yet nakedness, once imagined, has become more real than the clothes it is seen through. This section is hence characterized by suspension; both the voices heard and the reader's comprehension of the continuity and indeed reality of the fragments oscillate between the real and the imagined, the virtual and the actual. This feeling continues beyond the end of the section, however, for the second page from the last includes the lines: 'Echange de roles. Elle attend' (F:199).

The last section of the text is entitled 'Déconcert'. It is made up of two monologues, the first carried by a female voice, the second by a male voice. Each makes its way through the memories and possibilities that surround the rupture provoked by the 'différence'. The tone is that of a search; no full stops are included, and the attempt to trace a thought through therefore resembles the search for a sentence. The vague continuity that binds passage to passage reinforces the dream-like impression created by the text. The monologues are indeed the result of insomnia, and the rhythm created is reminiscent of that set up in *Ne l'oublie pas*. However, the apparent autonomy of the two voices and the suggested physical separation between them indicate the rupture of the preceding union. The 'différence' is first referred to as follows: 'Subtile différence creusée sous mes yeux je vois un petit clou ce fut un renversement une catastrophe' (F:223). This evokes the catastrophe mentioned in the previous section, in the account given by NHA of the film: 'Dufays ne douta pas que ces yeux l'avaient vu et lui disaient une chose, qui donnaient du plaisir sans le promettre, ni l'exprimer. En eux tournés vers lui, dans leur vide adressé, il ne distinguait rien qu'une chose qui point, une catastrophe peut-être et peut-être passée, mais peut-être évitée, à moins qu'elle ne fût imminente' (F:85). To return to 'Déconcert', the 'différence' referred to is connected to 'un ordre', 'une logique', and it is connected to the speaker's recurrent vision of a 'clou d'argent', a vision that gains clarity as the thought progresses. This may well be a visual actualization or equivalent of the 'chose qui point' mentioned in the passage quoted above. The 'différence' does not therefore appear to have been made apparent or brought about by estrangement, instead, it is related to an order. The suggestion seems to be that increased knowledge of a thing is bound, ultimately, to bring out its foreignness; that as apprehended detail takes the place of mere presence, the imagination is no longer called into play, and the object of thought is exteriorized,

concentrated into a perceived detail: once ‘known’ its dynamic potential becomes obsolete.

The above immediately evokes the ‘double pression fictive’ referred to in *Le Chemin familier du poisson combattif*, that is echoed, earlier in *Fmn*, by the line ‘le réveil brouillait l’image active’ (C:87, F:49). The change brought about is described as follows: ‘je le connaissais tout court soudain par ce côté semblable et cette connaissance le changeait un rai de lumière qui délogait la particule et le rendait méconnaissable’ (F:225). This suggests Alferi’s comparison of an individual sentence to a ‘particule libre’ and here, the ‘différence’ is comparable to the displacement of a single line that alters the ‘known’ text completely, suppressing old relations between components of it and creating new ones. It may indeed be the moment of displacement that corresponds with the highest point of the ‘élan’ experienced by the subject. The ellipsis of the actual moment of contact is hence perhaps analogous to the unconscious moment when, as all known sentences are forgotten, the new sentence is born. The following passage occurs further on in the text:

On n’a pas vu le point idéal immobile où la vitesse acquise perdue laissait la place à l’autre accélération due à la pesanteur (F:231)

When the ‘élan’ descends the ‘différence’ becomes apparent. It seems unavoidable to suggest an analogy with Alferi’s definition of the poetic act here, and indeed, it is not merely evoked by the text, but referred to explicitly, as in the following passage:

La phrase m’entraînait dans un balancement d’abord familier puis d’une amplitude périlleuse alors il y avait à dire quelque chose à quoi je n’avais jamais songé non pas même un instant plus tôt l’élan m’en donnait un pressentiment
Je vois un trapèze une conversation et touchée la pointe du demi-cercle qu’il a peu à peu tracé j’imagine que le trapéziste les yeux bandés lâche prise enfin espérant des mains pour le rattraper (F:246)

Here, the first three lines are directly suggestive of Alferi’s definition of literary creativity. The following three, however, appear to develop it. Here, the narrator switches to the present tense with ‘je vois un trapèze une conversation’ hence situating

himself within the spatial dynamic of the poetic act. The following phrase ‘j’imagine que’ refers to the moment when the writer lets go completely of what he knows, breaking the dialogue and falling ahead, blindly, into the possibility of the new sentence.¹²³ This reading is backed up by the frequent use of the word ‘courbe’ in connection with various moments in the development of the relationship, for this underlines the unity and singularity of the movement being captured, the point of suspension, when the curve (and hence the relationship) is at its peak, analogous to the moment of pure potential, when the known is pushed back, and the only possibility left for the writer is a freefall towards sense. The following passage that occurs in ‘Une idylle’ is relevant here: ‘C’est parti. Leur histoire ne se racontera pas [...]. Mais au travers, train fantôme, puits d’Alice Liddell, tunnel typographique qui est celui-là velouté, grimaçant, interminable et rouge de l’amour’ (F:147). The poetic act transcends both space and time, but the freefall towards the new sentence is nonetheless ‘typographique’, however, for it is through the act of writing that the poet must attempt to capture the moment of suspension (in which the known is pushed back and the élan is at its peak) that precedes it. The text explores the nature of the relationship set up (in the creative act) between perceptual experience, the imagination and the tools or knowledge at the poet’s disposal. It hence manifests, both implicitly and explicitly, the connection between the increasing activity of the visual imagination and the poet’s ability to break beyond the known and capture the creativity of his experience within language. Meaning, bound to possibility, takes us beyond the actual. As McGinn writes: ‘acquaintance will not take us as far as possibility – and possibility is where meaning has its roots’.¹²⁴ Hence, perhaps, Alferi’s insistence on the need to push back the

¹²³ The word ‘élan’ also recurs in *Chercher une phrase*. Alferi writes, for example: ‘La force engagée dans la formation d’une phrase n’est que l’élan de la profération’ and later ‘[i]l y a phrase quand l’élan de la profération, sa mesure et sa retombée deviennent pulsation, quand un dispositif rythmique porte l’affirmation’ (CP:27, 28).

¹²⁴ McGinn, 2004[i]:147.

known, for it is by creating new spaces for thought, that new relations or connections become possible.

To bring this reading full circle, the increasing physicality of the REGARD's presence could be compared to the increasing number of written words on a page, the irresistible draw she/it exerts to the growing feeling of necessity that accompanies the birth of the new sentence. The reality of the woman the narrator states he was waiting for in the first line of the text is hence the reality of the sentence to come. The 'femme' is simply the form given to the 'force indéterminée' that inspired the sentence (CP:31). The 'secret formulaire f m n' remains beneath the sentence: this was the object of the 'pressentiment' and it is this formula that can be glimpsed retrospectively as constitutive of the particular force and unity of the completed sentence. The final line '[e]lle dort ma pensée la borde' suggests the completion of the sentence, contained and yet 'alive' within the pages of the text, sleeping until activated by the reader's gaze. It is movement (the dynamism of the gaze) that makes the presence of this woman (or poem) real via the activity of reading. It is in the intensified mesh of perception and imagination set in play by the writer or reader's evolving understanding that meaning is to be found. This in turn suggests that the potential woman behind the gaze could be the unknown aspect of the evolving thought of the narrator. A passage that occurs near the beginning of the text reinforces this argument:

Le plus simple sentiment qu'elle laissait : de présence en retrait et d'accord.
Et ce qu'elle m'infusait : une vie plus constante et moins sûre, artificielle,
dont elle celait la source. Si peu dosé qu'il fût et si subtil, le fluide altérait la
composition des humeurs sans retour, faisait verser dans un genre nouveau le
corps élémentaire du corps, de gazeux devenu minéral ou l'inverse.
(F:14)

The word 'corps' could refer to the text, forced by the REGARD to assume a different shape or form. This would imply that visual experience, when accepted as a fundamental aspect of thought and incorporated as such into a literary work, can

provoke the development of a ‘genre nouveau’ that crosses the boundaries traditionally interposed between visual and verbal.

To summarize briefly, *Fmn* can be seen, on one level, to capture the reality of one person’s experience of the world via the precise recreation of their evolving thought about that experience, and on another, to capture the birth of a sentence, conceived as the only form capable of containing its entire physical particularity. What is fascinating is that it does not aim to recreate experience understood to involve the perception and ordering of things taken to exist objectively or outside the self, and nor does it attempt to capture thought defined as an entirely private, first-person phenomenon. Instead, subjective and objective, the real and the unreal are blurred within it; perception and imagination are simultaneously drawn upon as the narrator’s experience – and his comprehension of that experience – develop. Within Alferi’s conception of the poetic act, the body is therefore not considered a mere receptor of perceptual information, and the mind is not considered a translator of the information so gathered. Indeed, the self appears to exist primarily through and in perceptual activity.

To turn once more to McGinn, he writes: ‘the “world of the imagination” is just the world we ordinarily inhabit [...] it is not that in imagining we direct our minds to another ontological realm’.¹²⁵ Alferi’s work manifests the validity of this statement and in so doing not only reflects the current movement in philosophy to reconsider the importance and the nature of the faculty of imagination, but also underlines the extent to which the imagination is fundamental to all of our conscious experience.

This chapter has been intended to indicate a few of the multiple connections and similarities that exist between Alferi’s ‘cinépoèmes’ and his texts, and to underline the fact that all his works manifest his preoccupation with ‘la nature du texte [...] la production et la réception du sens langagier [...] quelque chose de strictement littéraire’,

¹²⁵ McGinn, 2004[i]:71.

in short ‘la poésie’.¹²⁶ His use of film as a poetic material, his manipulation of the visual space of the page, and his replacement of traditional description and narrative structure signal not a distension of the *idea* of poetry, but a necessary broadening of the materials drawn upon by the poet in the context of the evolution of our perceptual habits and abilities. His approach is hence not only of wider philosophical significance, it also underlines the potential that is latent (due to our imaginative ability) in the most seemingly banal experience.

* * *

To conclude, it is worth returning briefly to Portugal. As has been discussed, her work manifests her preoccupation with the possible rejection of given representational structures which suggests a certain affinity with Alferi’s belief that creative work involves pushing back the known and following a ‘pressentiment’. McGinn highlights the significance of this similarity when he observes that ‘the role of negation in reasoning or belief formation is always a sign of the operation of the imagination – that is, of the entertaining of thoughts (as opposed to the perception of facts)’.¹²⁷ In the texts studied in this Part, the blurring of borders set up between the real and the imaginary affects ordinary processes of designation and hence of comprehension. This bears directly on the concept of identity, for existence often appears to become primarily relational and hence virtual. Such an effect on what might be called the ‘poetic ontology’ of the two poets works supports the idea that the transgression of the traditional internal-external or subjective-objective dichotomy is fundamental to the liberation of language from the metaphysical backlog associated with the philosophy of the sign. This effect on the concept of subjecthood is not exclusive to the concept of ‘pensée-vue’ developed here, and as will be seen, the possible transgression of the barriers traditionally posed between self and world, subject and object is a theme that

¹²⁶ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

¹²⁷ McGinn, 2004[i]:141.

recurs in the work of all four authors. In the following Part I will turn to the concept 'pensée-voix'. In Chapter 3 I will analyse the work of Valère Novarina and in Chapter 4 I will return to Pierre Alferi.

PART II

PENSÉE-VOIX

INTRODUCTION

Sound and rhythm are fundamental aspects not only of poetry but of all speech. Direct experimentation with the relation between sound and sense has taken many forms over the last century, resulting, for example, in the development of ‘poésie sonore’.¹²⁸ Such experimentation has, of course, often been linked to technological developments, a connection explored extensively by Jean-Pierre Martin in *La Bande sonore*, in which he considers the influence of novelties such as the gramophone, the radio and even jazz music on writers as diverse as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Raymond Queneau and Nathalie Sarraute.¹²⁹ One result of the experimentation with sound as a meaning-bearing medium in its own right, has been to highlight the fact that even music can be representational: it can have a narrative structure and it can also be ‘conceptual’. This in part depends on the way particular sounds and rhythms are employed within it, for these can directly reflect syntactical patterns to which we are accustomed, hence evoking particular rhetorical forms as well as mirroring rhythms associated with particular emotional states. Even the most traditional poetry draws from similar sources, yet, being restricted to the audible variations created by the human voice, and the sounds associated with a given language, it brings out the close connection between physical and mental rhythms and methods of comprehension more directly. As William Empson observes in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, the way words are formed in the mouth can play a vital role in the resulting meaning attributed to a given phrase or sentence, whether or not it is pronounced out loud, heard or read.

Here, Empson’s observations are particularly relevant, for the concept ‘pensée-voix’ is not intended to draw out the signifying potential of sound but to analyse the experience of voice: the way the creativity of the physical act of enunciation feeds into

¹²⁸ Bernard Heidsieck is the best-known poet associated with the development of this genre.

¹²⁹ Martin, 1998.

linguistic expression. It is the connection between the act of enunciation and the possibility of sense – the relationship between the physicality of the speech act and the origin not only of language as we know it, but also of the conceptual systems we have developed using it – that will be focused on here. Fascination with the creativity of speech leads both writers behind language in a way, and the analysis of Novarina's use of the stage as a medium that directly exploits the physical aspects of speech production will feed directly into a discussion of Alferi's exploration of the relations between the physicality of speech, thought and expression.

The concept of 'pensée-voix' therefore targets two aspects of their work: the emphasis they put on the creativity of enunciation, and their exploration of the possibility of communication and expression – the nature of verbal contact. It is therefore intended, as suggested in the General Introduction, to break from the notion of 'pensée-langue' that has become so common in literary criticism, a notion bound to the Saussurian distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' and hence to the philosophy of the sign.¹³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu directly attacks the consequences of such binary conceptions of language. He insists on the need to break away from a conception of language as homogeneous and autonomous, arguing that language is a 'phénomène socio-historique' that can only be understood in relation to context-bound production and reception.¹³¹ Despite having been elaborated in a very different context, this is directly related to the importance these authors put on the connection between the particularity of experience and the way it is captured. Alferi, for example, refuses the distinction between quotation and non-quotation and often includes dates and place names in his work: for him, this is an integral part of creative language use. As he stated in an interview: 'Il n'y a pas de

¹³⁰ One poet-critic who frequently employs the term 'langue' is Prigent, who speaks, for example, of the 'dette de la langue au réel', stating elsewhere that 'j'appelle modernes ceux qui vivent toute langue comme étrangère et doivent donc trouver une autre langue', comments which imply an ultimate or unbridgeable split between language and reality, experience and language use (Prigent, 2000:59, 1996:10).

¹³¹ See Bourdieu, 2001.

différence pour moi entre citation et non-citation. Je ne peux pas m'interdire d'être, dans ce que j'écris, là où je suis'.¹³² The poetic act involves capturing the actuality of the poet's experience of the world, language being an element of that experience.

Alferi and Novarina's work contrasts enormously. However, certain similarities are perceptible in their poetic approaches. For both authors, for example, the poetic act involves pushing back behind language; no longer bound to the 'poetic distillation' of specific aspects of it the focus is put on the action or movement of thought that both precedes, and is one with, the finalized poem. The distinction (or the attempt to overcome the distinction) between the mental and the physical is not a primary concern for either. Their work is not characterized by a relaxation of thought on the nature of language, but by a drive to dig beneath it to the root of the creative act, to assume the physicality of thought and the inseparability of the experience we have of the world from our language use. As Novarina writes: 'Toute représentation plane, duelle – en seulement deux dimensions – du langage est fausse [...]. Le langage se développe dans le volume de notre corps et le pluriel des temps qui s'y croisent [...] il n'appréhende pas les formes, ni les fixe' (LC:160).¹³³ In both cases, the movement towards other media followed a large amount of purely textual work. This underlines the profound reflection on language that necessitated the movement towards film in the case of Alferi (as has already been discussed) and towards theatre in the case of Novarina; the use of other media is inseparable from their reluctance to use already existing 'forms' as receptacles for 'ideas'.¹³⁴ Both poets aim to capture the very experience of thought that lies behind the creative act. The more profoundly their intuitions concerning language and thought

¹³² Alferi, in Disson and Maré, 2000 (article as yet unpublished).

¹³³ It is worth noting recent arguments put forward notably in the philosophy of mind that insist on the idea that the shortcomings of many current theories on the mind and on thought are directly linked to a failure to take into account the fact that language is partly constitutive of the phenomena it is used to describe. Bennett and Hacker are two philosophers who have developed this argument most thoroughly (see Bennett and Hacker, 2004).

¹³⁴ It may seem odd that I concentrate on the 'films parlants' here as opposed to in relation to 'pensée-vue', but their appropriateness in this context merely reflects the extent to which in Alferi's work this medium becomes poetic material on the same level as the page or even pen.

develop, the more they feel the need to explore media other than the page. The physical nature of their work is therefore far from arbitrary, although it is not derived from a set of structural rules but from the felt experience of the poetic act.

Before turning to the idea of voice and its relation to physical experience, it is worth considering Barthes's definition of 'le grain de la voix' as 'la matérialité du corps parlant sa langue maternelle'.¹³⁵ He develops this idea when considering the particular strength and beauty of the voices of certain singers. He transfers Julia Kristeva's concepts 'phéno-texte' and 'géno-texte' to music, suggesting that whereas what he terms the 'phéno-chant' is bound to structure, rules, interpretation and form, the 'géno-chant' involves 'le volume de la voix chantante et disante, l'espace où les significations germent « du dedans de la langue et dans sa matérialité même »; c'est un jeu signifiant étranger à la communication, à la représentation (des sentiments), à l'expression; c'est cette pointe (ou ce fond) de la production où la mélodie travaille vraiment la langue – non ce qu'elle dit, mais la volupté de ses sons – signifiants, de ses lettres'.¹³⁶ I will not adopt Barthes's binary concepts here, but his observations concerning the materiality of the voice are directly relevant. C. B. Martin's research clarifies the physical nature of all language use, an aspect of it that (as he remarks) remains generally unnoticed. He explains, for example, that: '[v]erbal imagery seems not to consist in an exclusively internal (that is, central) or external (that is, peripheral) signal. Pharyngeal, tongue, and lip muscles, as well as digital muscles for deaf users of sign language, show electrical activity above rest state with in-the-head verbal use. This is not perception-like, but perception itself, largely unnoted, like peripheral vision [...]. These are feelings (percepts) that are, even when magnified in full vocalization, used largely without notice'.¹³⁷ This underlines the fact that even internal verbalization involves physical activity that, though it may not 'signify' in any obvious way, plays a crucial role in the

¹³⁵ Barthes, 1982:238.

¹³⁶ Barthes, 1982:239.

¹³⁷ Martin C. B., 2008:167.

production of sense-bearing linguistic formulations. Neither poet provides a single definition of voice, but this clarifies the fact that (for both) it is a dynamic concept; the voice perceivable in a text captures the movement through a particular layering of experience and sensation, a movement that is rarely linear or chronological and not analysable according to exclusively linguistic criteria.

Poetry, for these authors, involves capturing thought in its dynamic totality, and this is what (for them) differentiates the poetic act from everyday communication in which thought is reduced to the most efficient communicable sign. Capturing the experience of thought requires attending to the kaleidoscopic layering and interchangeability of words and images, of memory and imagination within it; capturing the action of a thought requires attending to the particular rhythm set up between all these elements of it. The idea of voice therefore in no way implies fixed identity or sense of self: instead it captures the continually modifying line traced by thought that ignores supposed distinctions between self and world. As Alferi states:

Je ne pense pas qu'il y ait vraiment de sujet quand on écrit [...] la présence au monde se donne d'une façon très particulière, très précise et en même temps très difficilement palpable. C'est pour la saisir à un moment donné, pour l'activer, la réactiver, qu'on a besoin d'inventer une suite de mots, d'images, de rythmes dont on ne sait pas à l'avance ce qu'elle sera. Cette suite n'explique rien, ne représente rien, elle essaie de produire à nouveau, de reproduire la sensation. Le sujet, c'est donc toujours une humeur dont je ne sais comment l'appeler ou la définir: je ne m'y reconnais pas et tout le monde peut s'y trouver, c'est infrapersonnel, infrasubjectif.¹³⁸

One further aim of this Part, then, is to suggest, through the analysis of the concept of voice as employed by each author, that their work draws out the potential creativity of enunciation and in so doing challenges the traditional separation between public and private language uses.

¹³⁸ Alferi, in Loret, 2004:IV.

CHAPTER 3

VALÈRE NOVARINA: THE CREATIVITY OF ENUNCIATION

Tout ne se comprend qu'en mouvement: si l'on s'arrête, si l'on s'immobilise sur un mot, sur une scène, tout s'écroule et se fige en un chaos incompréhensible; c'est seulement dans l'écoulement, dans la dépense, la perte et la reprise du sens – et avec son ombre négative –, que la phrase existe... A l'arrêt, tout se bloque, rien n'est possible. On ne comprend le langage, comme la musique, que dans le mouvement respiré. (LC:17)

Novarina never refers to himself as a 'dramaturge' or even an 'écrivain de pièces de théâtre', but most often as a poet and painter, stating (and thus rendering definition of him as a writer even more difficult) that he has always felt '[n]on pas l'auteur mais l'acteur de mes textes, celui qui les soufflait en silence, qui les parlait sans un mot' (TP:85). As will be seen, however, the role theatre plays in his work is bound to his conception of the 'drame de la parole', the 'drame' that characterizes the relationship between, and the corresponding development of, language and thought. In Section i I will consider the way his use of theatre clarifies the importance of voice within his conception of literary creativity. I will then proceed, in Section ii, to explore his conception of voice by considering the significance of the similarities and differences between his texts and his stage versions of them. Here, I will concentrate in particular on *Le Repas*, an adaptation of the first part of *La Chair de l'homme*.

Section i: VOICE AND THE POETIC ACT

Action and dynamism are fundamental to Novarina's conception of the way language functions. As he writes: 'La pensée est la mise en mouvements des mots et de leur

combustion’: ‘Tout ne se comprend qu’en mouvement’ (LC:86, 17). These statements immediately evoke Alferi’s comment that ‘[l]a possibilité d’une phrase consiste seulement dans le mouvement de sa recherche; c’est en cela qu’elle constitue une pensée’ and (to glance ahead) Tarkos’s description of how ‘la pâte mot repose sur l’élasticité du des sensations, sur une seule couche d’existence, sur une modification d’appréhension’ (CP:48, S:35). It is the movement or action of thought captured by the sentence that has signifying value. To return to Novarina ‘[l]es mots cherchent la pensée qui les défait; la pensée se délivre des mots qu’elle capture’ (DP:24).

Fundamental to Novarina’s desire to re-work language is his belief in the profound physicality of language – a physicality (*savoir du corps*) largely forgotten due to the conceptual separation of the physical aspects of language and the ‘sense’ it purports to convey (LC:16). His aim to write ‘[n]on plus sur la langue mais dans la pensée!’ and to ‘[p]ousser jusqu’à la scène, jusqu’à la pensée’ therefore implies a movement to capture the very action of thought, the ‘point pascal de renversement et de saut [...] *au fond du corps de la pensée*’ (TP:94, LC:173). The ‘état surgissant de la langue’ is the ‘drame’ and, for Novarina, ‘la poésie’ is the ‘passage à l’acte’ (PM:76). It is on the stage that this relationship between thought and action can be captured ‘sur le vif’; the stage, for him, is not a goal in itself, it is an extension of the creative space opened up by the poetic act.¹³⁹ The physicality of thought and of the creative act are bound, in Novarina’s work, to the nature of speech or ‘la parole’; to ‘la respiration’ and ‘le rythme’ that are integral to enunciation. The line ‘[a]u commencement, on ne pensait encore qu’en pulsations, en battements de chiffres’ evokes Artaud’s conception of ‘l’impulsion physique secrète qui est la Parole d’avant les mots’ underlining one

¹³⁹ It is worth mentioning Novarina’s interest in Jean Dubuffet briefly here, for the two corresponded until Dubuffet’s death. Like Novarina, Dubuffet was fascinated by the potential of the space of the theatre and the way experiences can be generated differently within it. This is manifested primarily in his creation of ‘Cocou bazar’. This spectacle is perhaps best described as an active painting, and indeed he insisted repeatedly that this spectacle was neither primarily theatrical, nor choreographic, but the work of a painter. He even suggested that, constituting an ‘exercice philosophique’ it might be called a ‘traité de philosophie’. Similar problems of ‘definition’ occur for both authors despite the importance both attach to the fundamental preoccupation (painting or writing) that led to their creation (Dubuffet, 2002:56-57).

significant point of contact in the work of the two authors (PM:18).¹⁴⁰ For both writers, thought, like speech, involves the whole body: it is inseparable from the dynamic of being.

For Novarina, the creative act and the subject matter targeted are therefore inseparable the one from the other. He equates the action (or ‘geste’) that is the creation or birth of the sentence with its product. For him, neither the creative act nor the experience provoked by the text or theatrical production can be understood without reference to physical experience. It is the poetic act, understood as a movement of thought, that is re-activated by the actor, and as will be seen, this title designates the reader as well as the man/woman on stage. The physical nature of the theatre, however, is vital for Novarina, for it permits an actualization of the physical aspect of enunciation (through the actor’s use of his/her voice and body). As he writes: ‘On entre au théâtre [...] pour vivre au présent de l’apparition, assister pour la première fois au spectacle de la transfiguration humaine’ (PM:8). The theatre also provides a setting against which Novarina’s desire to work against representational language use takes on particular poignancy, for it is in this space, usually conceived of as representational *par excellence*, that, confronted with Novarina’s work, ‘les spectateurs retrouvent l’expérience animale du premier parlant’ (LC:18).

Novarina was profoundly influenced by Jerzy Grotowski, who established the ‘Théâtre Laboratoire’ in Opole, Poland, which, moving to Warsaw in 1965, gained the status of ‘Institut de Recherche pour le Jeu de l’Acteur’. He is best known for his text *Vers un théâtre pauvre*, in which he describes the methods he has developed and the theories that support them. In the course of this text, he argues against the idea that the theatre is a ‘composée de disciplines’, stating that ‘la technique personnelle de l’acteur est le noyau de l’art théâtral’.¹⁴¹ His conception of the theatre was revolutionary in that

¹⁴⁰ Artaud, 2004:540.

¹⁴¹ Grotowski, 1971:13.

he suggested that all emphasis should be put on the latter, insisting that the actor must undergo strict physical and mental training, and that even in the final performance of a piece, stage sets, décor and props should be minimized to the utmost degree, the aim of this approach being ‘la communion de perception directe « vivante »’.¹⁴² This involves an eclosion of the individual towards the potential other. He writes: ‘Dans ce combat avec la propre vérité de chacun, cet effort pour arracher le masque de la vie, le théâtre avec sa perception par la chair, m’a toujours semblé une sorte de provocation’.¹⁴³ He compares this form of provocation to ‘la transgression’; theatre, for him, involves breaking the barriers traditionally imposed between actor and spectator, self and other. The following observations Grotowski makes are reflected directly in Novarina’s texts: ‘l’activité du corps vient d’abord, et après l’expression vocale’, ‘l’acteur ne doit pas utiliser son organisme pour illustrer un « mouvement de l’âme », il doit accomplir ce mouvement avec son organisme’.¹⁴⁴ His comment concerning the actor’s task: ‘sa recherche doit être dirigée de l’intérieur de lui-même *vers* l’extérieur mais pas *pour* l’extérieur’ directly evokes Novarina’s statement: ‘je n’écris pas *pour* mais *vers* le théâtre’, reflecting the latter’s self-description as more the actor than the author of his texts.¹⁴⁵

These points of comparison clarify Novarina’s aim to disrupt the visual, auditory and linguistic expectations of the spectator by exploiting the physicality of the act of enunciation. The un-repeatability of the actors’ speech acts, which entails that the creative act is witnessed directly within the space of a theatre during the time the play runs, is vital. The physical stage becomes a dynamic in its own right (through Novarina’s set-painting), it is part of the organism that is the play, and it is set up primarily in order to allow the dynamism of a given work to circulate most freely. The

¹⁴² Grotowski, 1971:17.

¹⁴³ Grotowski, 1971:20.

¹⁴⁴ Grotowski, 1971:145,91.

¹⁴⁵ Grotowski, 1971:203.

emphasis on movement as opposed to symbolism or representation reflects the non-linearity of plot and absence of traditional character construction that characterize Novarina's work. The contrast between the spectator's expectations and what actually occurs underlines the fact that it is the very possibility of representation that is at stake. The aim to undermine habit and provoke a new experience necessitates the confrontation of the known with the unexpected. In Alferi's work, this is achieved through the re-looping and slowing down of recurrent (and yet increasingly strange) images and the non-chronological evolution of the relationship between these images and the narration. Novarina's use of the space of the theatre has a similar effect: the expected 'representation' of human interaction does not take place: 'communication', if any occurs, stems rather from the stage, from the interactive movement of the actors, than from the words they employ. Similarly, words are not accompanied by descriptive gestures: they seem rather to function as accessory to the physicality (evident in the emission of words and gestures) of the speech act. This observation brings out the weight of his imperative: 'Produire. Produire et non représenter' (TP:29). This imperative is underlined later, when he writes that his aim is not to 'reproduire le monde autrement' but to 'produire le monde autrement' (TP:62). The theatre provides the material for an exploration of the physicality of thought and speech that other media could not. The actors do not 'represent' anything on stage, their action on it is equivalent to the original production of text by the author for it reactivates the physical movement of thought that gave rise to the voice of the text.

Before taking this idea further it is worth elaborating on the above by considering certain striking productions of his stage works. *Vous qui habitez le temps* directly questions the boundaries traditionally set up between self and world. In one production, three actors were present on the stage throughout the performance, each

holding a faceless puppet on one arm.¹⁴⁶ The play opened with the actors lying on the ground, their limbs embroiled and partially indiscernible due to the copious nature of their clothes. Their heads were invisible to the audience. The puppets rose from the inert mass, and it was they that were first seen to speak. The actors later became speaking beings in their own right, in dialogue with the puppets, although they never appeared to control the actions that occurred on stage. The game set up between voices and movements as now the puppets manipulated a human limb, now a human hand reached out to grasp a puppet, evoked a battle between not only representation and reality but also presence and absence. At times it seemed as if the puppets were taking on the role of the actors' physical selves, rising above a motionless mass of mind, at others it seemed to be only the play of voices that had any truly active role on the stage. Two lines attributed to *Les Enfants pariétaux* that occur at the beginning of the text indicate the unnerving oscillation that characterizes the play; pronounced in the performance by a puppet, these lines read: 'Lorsque nous portons des corps ainsi debout devant nous et parlant, sommes-nous des vivants? La parole en nous est comme un corps négatif que nous avons devant nous pour nous conduire dans les trous' (VH:15). As the performance progressed it seemed possible that everything present on stage was simply a diffraction of the thought of a single, evolving individual. At one point, for example, all three actors were covered by a mass of flat white squares, from which two arms, two legs and a head did appear but so far apart that they could never have belonged to a 'life-size' individual. At this moment the puppets themselves seemed to form part of the great undulating living mass. One line that occurs in the text is particularly relevant here: 'J'ai mangé l'horizon'. The absorption of the world that occurs when the speaker has rejected traditional conceptual distinctions is the first stage of a rebirth of language – a re-activation of the original creativity of enunciation – and this implies a

¹⁴⁶ The company 'Le théâtre qui' was responsible for this production which was shown at the festival '20scènes' in 2007.

transformation of both speaker and world.¹⁴⁷ The performance hence captured the predominant question posed by Novarina's text, which turns on the possible suspension of the boundaries that ordinarily limit the concept of the individual.

L'Avant dernier des hommes is another, later text, that questions the conceptual separation of self and world, but here, multiplicity of being is not explored through the presence of several actors, but in the course of a monologue in which the speaker addresses not people (actual or potential) but objects. This text questions the extent to which self and world consist of shared matter; the extent to which things in themselves can be called upon to fill the space that rejected concepts have left vacant. One extract reads as follows: 'J'entendais le français parlé au loin comme un idiome donné aux pauv'cailloux en guise de termes – et nos mots, offerts aux gisants, non comme des mots jetés aux pierres et aux poussières mais comme des *morceaux de mon corps* placés aux bornes du sol des traces d'enfant ressuscitant' (AH:48). The fragmentation of a known language is equivalent to the fragmentation of the self. The term 'enfant ressuscitant' refers not only to the individual, as he rediscovers the sense of being as part of the world, but also to language, as it crystallizes into new and unexpected forms. It is the speaker's very conception of himself, of his mind and body, that is thrown out, discarded on the 'bornes du sol', the only recognizable boundary left to him, in the hope of some response from 'things' before he 'knew' them. As the speaker says earlier in the monologue: 'Et même maintenant, vous qui n'avez plus peur de qui que se soit, mots habitant tranquillement mon cerveau en habits pacifiques, avancez-vous en vêtements effaçants, redansez-vous! parlez creusants!' (AH:45). Recognition of the self is no longer recognition of an image, but recognition of the developing consciousness that suddenly becomes aware of the potential other:

La parole qui créa le monde d'un trait. Qui l'attira et qui l'appela, pour que paraissent ici cette herbe, là cette ortie, ces pierres, mon doigt, et mes deux

¹⁴⁷ This idea will be taken up in greater depth in Part III.

yeux qui tout voient – et cette phrase ici qui sort par l’instant de ma bouche, quand je parle cette parole qui sort, est-ce celle-là qui créa et appela le monde? De même ces cailloux entendent-ils pas qu’ils sont en vrai pendant que je leur parle?
(AH:68)

Here again, reference is made to ‘l’appel’: it is the recognition of the voice as an action in its own right that gives depth to reflection on the nature of the language, and the extent to which it reflects the inseparability of self and world.

This play was also presented in the course of the festival mentioned above, produced by Claude Buchwald, who has been involved with the ‘mise-en-scène’ of a large number of Novarina’s works for the stage. Before turning to this particular performance, it is worth mentioning one aspect of the text that could not fail to affect any production of it: the actor is alone on stage throughout the performance, and the stage is covered with a multitude of random discarded objects and stones. The only interaction that occurs hence involves the relationship set up between the actor and these objects. He speaks to them, picks them up, throws them to the floor, caresses them and moves them from the floor to his pocket and back. This in itself renders the audience’s experience of the performance strangely tactile, for the dynamic of the text seems captured within the contact, or non-contact, of the actor’s fingers with the diverse things scattered on the stage. The particular performance referred to above aimed to underline the extent to which the actor’s speech only gains substance as his relation to the objects present evolves through the choices made concerning the way the play opened. The actor entered the theatre from behind the audience, his voice at first unlocatable and faint. It was only when contact with the objects on the stage occurred that the performance seemed really to start, and yet the unease created by the opening reinforced the impression of the fragility of our ordinary conception of ourselves that is at the root of the speaker’s desire to allow objects to ‘speak’ for themselves. The first action properly seen and line fully heard were thus the following: ‘*Il jette la pancarte portant son nom. Je le jette, je lui dis ici: nom, je t’abandonne*’ (AH:10).

Novarina writes: ‘le théâtre donne une leçon de pensée dans l’espace’ and the above has been intended to indicate the way in which his use of the space of the theatre is an exploration of his belief that thought is not made up of separate components divided into the physical and the mental (LC:75). He describes the act of writing in *Devant la parole* as follows: ‘insémination, mûrissement dans le noir – puis poussée, naissance, floraison’, stating later: ‘J’écris d’oreille. J’émets des figures écrites ou peintes, qui naissent par poussées’; writing involves the development of ‘une hyperperception. On entend que tout respire’ (DP:56, 66, 68). Three aspects of these statements should be drawn out: firstly, the fact that no obvious fabrication or planning is involved in the development of a piece of writing, secondly, the importance put on the *action* involved, taken to determine both the movement and the product of the thought, and thirdly, the emphasis on awareness, on the importance of following through the most minute detail (sensation, word or image) of that thought for it to be captured completely. Novarina describes himself as an ‘écrivain pratiquant’ who works ‘en partant des exercices et non de la technique ou des procédés’ (PM:61).¹⁴⁸ The rigour is in the thought involved: ‘penser’ defined as ‘attendre en pensée, avoir corps et esprit en accueil’ as opposed to ‘avoir des idées, jouir d’un sentiment, posséder une opinion’ (DP:25). Thought is neither possessive nor primarily functional: it is active but not necessarily constructive. As he writes: ‘Le langage est matière humaine et matière des choses: un jeu d’énergies. Pas du tout un outil à notre service’ (LC:72). In his work, the sentence becomes an ‘édifice respiré’, its power contained in the ‘*mot fantôme*’ that is only suggested as the sentence is activated through the movement of its pronunciation (LC:73). This is what binds Novarina’s notion of the relation between language and thought so closely to the physical, and explains his movement towards the stage.

¹⁴⁸ His attention to the physical aspect of his texts is shown, for example, in his tendency to pin the manuscripts on the wall in order to maintain a visual sense of their development while he works on them.

To return to the actors, they are to manifest the way in which ‘[l]e langage se développe dans le volume de notre corps et le pluriel des temps qui s’y croisent [...] il n’appréhende pas les formes, ni les fixe’ (LC:160). They actualize the creative act on stage: incarnate the dynamic creativity of enunciation experienced by the poet. Véronique Vella, who played L’Enfant d’outrebref in *L’espace furieux*, describes her emotion concerning the line ‘je suis à l’intérieur de ce que je dis’ as follows: ‘J’ai pleuré en lisant cette phrase pour la première fois. Elle me fonde absolument: Ce que je dis, c’est ce que je suis’.¹⁴⁹ This illustrates the way in which the actor is – more than anyone – aware of the creativity of speech. Acting involves both the constant remembering of learnt text and constant physical improvisation: it involves thinking forwards and backwards – giving words a life of their own as the self is forgotten, subordinated to the necessity of the pronounced phrase. Each movement an actor makes on stage is hence a manifestation of the fact that just as no action can ever be repeated, we are re-born (recreate the world) with every breath: language is modified (perhaps even re-invented) with each new ‘voicing’ of a sentence. Novarina makes Louis de Funès the porte-parole of the belief that ‘ça se déconstruit perpétuellement et refait [...] c’est tout neuf à chaque respiration’ (TP:116). This underlines Novarina’s belief that words and ideas, taken as individuals or objects, are mere ‘idoles’, that meaning is inseparable from the action of thought and the ensuing *voicing* of a text. As he writes: ‘Les mots sont incompréhensibles séparés des corps qui les ont soufflés, ils n’ont de sens que dans leur danse dans l’espace’ (PM:60). The written word is compared to the trace of a dancer’s step, the dance reactivated each time the sentence is pronounced, whether on stage or silently by the reader. Novarina’s texts draw from the intricate physical underlay of both public and private language use, and it is the actor’s enforced awareness of these

¹⁴⁹ Vella, in Huthwold, 2006:13.

sensory aspects of both thought and speech that endows his/her speech with a power that transcends the limits of ordinary signification.

The actor (or reader) is therefore ‘ni un instrument ni un interprète, mais le seul endroit où ça se passe’ (TP:22). Here, ‘ça’ designates the re-activation of the action of thought: the actor’s body is not taken as a ‘support’ for the voice he/she emits, nor are the actors conceived of as ‘mentally’ translating from thought to action: ‘Parler est une fondamentale expérience du corps et un voyage dans la matière’ (DP:63). The action is bound to the rhythm of the sentence – to the movement instantiated by it. On stage, the actor’s movements are not descriptive or metaphorical. Novarina writes: ‘Il n’y a rien à jouer. Seulement tenir toutes choses à leur naissance [...] retenir toutes les figures et les voix [...] dans la force qui les faisait jaillir du corps pour la première fois’ (TP:126). Even if Novarina does not write *for* the theatre, it could therefore perhaps be said that he writes for the actor, insofar as ‘le jeu de l’acteur’ – the voicing of the text – is made analogous to the action involved in thought. As he writes: ‘C’est en partant des lettres, en butant sur les consonnes, en soufflant les voyelles, en mâchant ça très fort, qu’on trouve comment ça se respire et comment c’est rythmé’ (TP:20).¹⁵⁰ Watching the actor, the spectator learns to ‘voir par les oreilles’; to witness the production of the world through the sound and rhythm of speech (PM:73). The reader’s necessarily ‘internal’ experience is similar to the spectator’s, but the actor can manifest the process involved in a way that informs the significance of the connection between body and voice and hence the way in which we read: ‘A travers l’animalité du theatre, le spectateur voit maintenant clairement ici le drame du langage [...] le drame verbal qui vient devant nous ici singer le drame de la matière’ (LC:153). The ‘drame de la matière’ is the

¹⁵⁰ Barthes discusses the singer Charles Panzera in depth when considering voice. Panzera apparently insisted that, when singing ‘il faut *prononcer*, nullement *articuler*’. Barthes explains this as follows: ‘la *prononciation* maintient la coalescence parfaite de la ligne de sens (la phrase) et de la ligne de la musique (le phrasé)’. He continues as follows: ‘pour que la musique fasse irruption dans la langue, il faut [...] une certaine *physique* de la voix’, defining ‘physique’ as ‘la façon dont la voix se tient dans le corps – ou dont le corps se tient dans la voix’ (Barthes, 1982:250, 251).

‘drame’ inherent in the action of thought, an experience proper to the thinking subject and definable, perhaps, as the production of ‘world’ through language, a ‘drame’, then, that is fundamental to all human experience.¹⁵¹

As the earlier discussion of the production of several of Novarina’s plays suggests, the exteriorization of the ‘drame du langage’ on the stage is also vital to his aim to ‘[v]ider la représentation – *quitter* – se dévêtir de notre figure’; as he writes, ‘[p]ar l’opération et l’action de la pensée, par le don du langage, nous brûlons l’idole humaine’ (LC:85). The actor, representing ‘l’homme *arraché à lui*’, must (as mentioned) aim to ‘tenir toutes choses à leur naissance’, which implies that their own ‘figure’ is constantly ahead, potential and undefined (LC:151). For Novarina, traditional identity criteria have no direct connection with what it is to be in the world, they are constructions that have developed with language use. It is, indeed, the fact that the actors in Novarina’s plays are permanently suspended before the possibility of their own representation or image that constitutes one disturbing aspect of Novarina’s plays,

¹⁵¹ Here it is worth referring to Tarkos, who put great emphasis on the physicality of enunciation, often reciting his texts himself. By forcing the listener to experience language differently, he insists on the possibility of the affirmation of presence in the face of the fundamental ambiguity of the means of expression we dispose of. Only one CD recording devoted exclusively to his recitation exists, although fragments can be found in various other audiovisual documents (see Bouhenik, 2005 for example). This CD is entitled *Expressif le petit bidon*, bearing the title of one of the texts recited in it, almost all of which appear in written form in his other works (EB). The humorous effect generated by certain extracts underlines Tarkos’s refusal to take himself seriously other than as a field for experimentation. His ability to modulate his voice is striking, and his way of particularizing the enunciation of each syllable, as though gulping, sucking, chewing or spitting the phonetic flesh of each word immediately calls to mind Novarina’s exhortation to the actor, to ‘mâcher et manger le texte’. His corresponding bodily immobility (as evidenced by audiovisual recordings of his recitals) increases the physical effect of his speech, in turn calling to mind Grotowski’s comment that ‘la domination du geste’ is a sign that an actor ‘n’est pas vraiment enraciné dans son corps’ (Grotowski, 1997, vol.2, face B). The fifth extract, entitled ‘les têtes’, is one of the most humorous, it involves an apparent *reductio ad absurdum* that turns on itself, thus opening a new possibility of sense. This text begins in apparent seriousness with the lines: ‘La poésie est une chose, est la chose la plus importante du monde, quelque chose qui donne un sens, et il n’y a pas beaucoup de sens’. Then Tarkos continues, the rhythm of his speech almost painfully slow and the weight of each syllable doubled, as follows: ‘Chacun a une tête, dure, ronde, tout le monde, toute ronde, de tout le monde, pas carrée ou en forme d’aubergine...’. Later on he continues: ‘la tête s’inscrit bien dans la courbure creuse du ciel et du monde [...] la tête préexiste avant que la pensée vienne la traverser’. By drawing from the physical presence of the immobile poet, the recital plays on the gap between physical appearances and potential signification with added force. Both the written and recited texts work to uncover the limits of exhaustive description; they aim to bring out the importance of poetry as movement, as a force capable of counteracting the stagnation of language and indeed of our conception of ourselves. The suggestion is that poetry somehow allows us to go back behind words by exploiting the physicality of enunciation, hence touching the limits of sense.

for this undermines assumptions concerning not only identification but designation. In his work, words appear detached from things and from individuals. Rather than instantiating any recognizable system amongst themselves however, they often alienate and even dehumanize; secondary to the physical drive that is their pronunciation by the actor they appear to belong neither to him/her nor to ‘things in the world’. If there is any communication on stage, therefore, it arises from the physical side of the actor’s discourse rather than from the words employed within it; intonation, volume and gesture are the primary indications of the very human nature of the ‘drame’ the spectator is witnessing. The emphasis put on the ‘pulsion’ or ‘poussée’ behind ‘la parole’ is vital. Novarina writes that the actor must ‘refaire l’enfance du parlant’, he/she must re-experience the fundamental strangeness of language; re-live the child’s first explorations of it (TP:132). As L’Antipersonne 1 says in *La Chair de l’homme*:

Le langage est d’origine. Il n’est pas quelque chose qu’on aurait gagné sur les bêtes à force d’évoluer loin d’animal, mais quelque chose qui va plus loin que toutes les choses visibles par toutes les bêtes, parce qu’il rejoint leur appel [...] Le langage ne décrit rien et aucun, puisqu’il commence. Toute la parole appelle l’univers à nouveau. (CH:498)

The ‘appel des choses’ is the ‘calling out’ of a rhythm that precedes the conceptual separation of self and world; it is our increasing deafness to the physicality of this rhythm that has caused language to lose its connection with the materiality of thought, with the physical creativity of enunciation.

The ‘sacrifice’ of the actor, involving the destruction of his/her individuality and the prioritization of the voice, can therefore be seen to correspond to the transcendence of the representation or the ‘figure’ through the liberation of language. This occurs with the actor’s assumption of its physicality and his/her ensuing ability to evoke the action that is fundamental to thought and hence to the development of speech.¹⁵² Words no longer represent ‘things’ in Novarina’s plays, they do not designate but circumvent any

¹⁵² Alferi’s exhortation ‘[t]endez la main pour voir’ comes to mind here (CF:223).

direct connection with what is actually physically present – materiality becomes a property of the speech act rather than a property of the ‘exterior world’. The prioritization of ‘le parlé’ or ‘la parole’ is the means of escape from ‘toute représentation plane, duelle [...] du langage’ and the means by which to ‘détruire la figure et sa langue’ (LC:160, TP:40). Novarina writes: ‘Ecrire opère le réel’ (LC:27). The transposition of the act of writing (which is, as discussed earlier, inseparable from the action of thought) to the space of the theatre, results in the ‘théâtre des opérations’ – intended to captivate the spectator ‘par d’autres voies, d’autres circuits, d’autres parties du cerveau que celles par lesquelles nous communiquons d’habitude’ (PM:70). It is the assumed link between language and the world around us that is being targeted in an attempt to recover the original dynamism of enunciation. The theatre is the space that allows the full extent of the physicality of Novarina’s conception of language to be actualized.

Section ii: EXPERIENCE, TEXT AND STAGE

Novarina’s intention to provoke a similar experience through his texts and through his theatrical performances clarifies his ideas concerning the nature of language and thought. The similarities between his texts and his stage versions of them are striking. Many texts such as *Je suis*, *Le Discours aux animaux*, and *La Chair de l’homme*, are composed of what appears to be theatrical dialogue. The stage versions of texts on the other hand often include no obvious stage directions or even scene separations.

To begin with this last particularity of Novarina’s work, when stage directions are included, they are indeed set apart typographically from the main body of the text, being written in italics, but the role they are intended to play is not always obvious: ‘*Ici, il pense secrètement qu’il est l’avant-dernier des hommes*’ is one particularly clear example (AH :10). Such notes can only be intended to inform the actor (or reader) for

they have no obvious physical manifestation on stage. Similar lines abound: ‘*Il va à terre chercher un verbe*’ and ‘*[i]l danse partout sauf dans son corps*’ two examples (AH:26, 24). This is one main indication of the importance Novarina puts on the connection between thought and speech, on the physical action integral to both. Stage directions such as those listed above are intended to inform the speech act of the actor: they stress the potential significance of his/her mere physical presence, the extent to which each of his/her actions (or non-actions) is itself part of the speech act that the spectator is to witness. Similar lines appear in his other works, set apart from but not typographically different from the body of the text. These are often longer, and more physically descriptive; they actualize the movement of the text by referring to action in the present tense: ‘*Entrent la Femme à la Fumigène et l’Enfant Prénuptian: ils ramassent et jettent un fil de fer [...] puis ils disparaissent...*’ (CH:155). Such passages aerate the dense dialogue of the text and instigate a play between physical presence and absence that is mirrored in the stage versions through visual means: in both texts and stage versions of them they are thus subordinated to a voice that proposes no reality other than that of the movement of thought that characterizes the speech act.¹⁵³

Text that resembles dialogue is even included in Novarina’s most theoretical texts. In *Lumières du corps*, for example, the voices of certain of Novarina’s recurrent characters are suddenly interjected into the text, the fragment of text attributed to them preceded by their name and a colon (the Second sosie for example, and the dialogue between Le Danseur, Les Enfants olaminiens and Les Enfants uniates) (LC:174, 171). Not only names, but whole passages also recur, and this continuity highlights the fact that Novarina’s primary concern is to transcend the separation of language, thought and experience, not to experiment with genre.

¹⁵³ The visual means offered by the stage are various, including not only the presence/absence of actors and hence the possible exploitation of ‘disembodied’ voices, but also the visually dynamic potential of the stage sets used. As mentioned, Novarina paints these himself and is often also involved in costume design. The visual experience generated by the set is an integral part of the work as a whole.

The nature and content of the ‘dialogue’ employed in Novarina’s texts and his stage-works is very similar; it resembles an interactive series of fragments of discourse or isolated thoughts rather than conversation. Even questions posed do not appear necessarily directed at a listener, they seem more like fragments of thought emitted into the space of the text. Potential ‘responses’ to questions constitute the main body of meaning carried by the work; they are suspended between the fragments of dialogue that are the text, which – being non-chronological and non-linear – reproduces the dynamism of a single thought. The overriding of ordinary patterns of communication and discourse is effectuated slightly differently in the texts and in the stage versions of them, because on stage Novarina must battle with the appearance of the actors as ‘communicating individuals’. In the original texts it is often the case (as in *La Chair de l’homme*) that speakers only appear once; what is more, questions are posed and answered in such a way as to negate any assumed identity of any single participant of the dialogue, a process that continues throughout the play. This is achieved in part by the introduction of a new character with each speech act, but it also results from the way in which the reader/spectator’s expectations concerning the gender and number of the characters by whom and to whom questions are addressed, and the nature of the relations he may at first suppose to exist between them, are overridden so quickly. For example:

L’Acteur qui mange: Père, pourquoi cette nuit est-elle contraire au jour?
 La Mangeuse omnivore: Cette nuit n’est-elle pas comme toutes les nuits qui se sont suivies dans la nuit depuis la nuit une?
 Le Rongeur parlassier: Mère, en quoi cette nuit est-elle semblable à nous?
 Le Mangeur de vindicatif: Enfant, penses-tu la nuit semblable à toi? (CH:86)

If reference is possible it is regressive, working against the current of the dialogue. This constant change of speaker in the text creates the same effect as the dialogue carried by the actors on stage which is not communicational in any ordinary sense of the word. On stage the actors may be physically limited in number, but the constant flux of names

with which they refer to themselves and to each other undermines any ordinary process of individuation, hence reinforcing the effect produced by the fundamentally non-referential nature of the speech involved. The ‘continuity’ of the characters is merely a dynamic consistency of voice: they are different with each speech act, each fragment of dialogue being inseparable from the physical movement on stage that accompanies it, the actors’ gestures and their changing positions in relation to the stage, the objects present on it and of course the other actors.

Within those texts that include dialogue, ‘communication’ (if it can be said to occur at all) therefore seems to involve the shifting of a discourse that ‘exists’ somewhere else – somewhere behind the words spoken by the characters on the stage or in the space of the text. As suggested above, it is the voice of the text as a whole as opposed to the superficially apparent dialogue or discourse that is active ‘communicationally’. This is captured in the text as a new name is attached to each speech act, a name that does not (as suggested above) designate an individual, but that is, each time, the marker of the physical appearance of a new voice; a modification, then, of the reader’s phonetic experience of the text. This effect that draws directly from the physical creativity of speech is mirrored on stage due to the un-repeatability of the actor’s utterances.

Novarina’s avoidance of individualization and designation underlines the fact that even when a line or fragment of discourse may appear meaningless when taken out of context, both the fact and the particularity of its enunciation as it appears amongst so many other voices mean that it is carried by its physical presence – its physical emission within the ‘stade d’action’ that is the book or theatre. Each phrase is described by Novarina as ‘une coque’ or ‘une matérialité opaque’; its utterance (whether this occurs ‘in one’s head’ or out loud) is a manifestation of the suspension of thought before the possibility of meaning (DP:65).

This emphasis on materiality, on the sheer sound and movement of the sentence, is intended to underline the extent to which ‘les lois qui régissent notre langage et les lois qui régissent la nature sont identiques’ (LC:37). The development of language is bound to the rhythm of the body, of breathing: no enunciation can be separated from the voice that, however silently, follows it through. Here it is worth returning to Empson’s discussion of the fundamental symbolism of sound, for he suggests that the way words are produced in the mouth is latent in this symbolism, which has more to do with the physical production of sound than with words ‘in themselves’.¹⁵⁴ It is the desire to stress this dynamism that is so fundamental to our use of language that drives Novarina to push this aspect of language to the extreme; to pronounce the following aim: ‘A aucun moment n’être dans la signification, la résolution, l’échange, mais toujours dans la dynamique, dans la force de *l’allant*’ (LC:38). This is reinforced by his disruption of time in both texts and stage versions: not only are these non-chronological and non-linear, the possibility of stable spatio-temporal locatability (of places, people and objects) is counteracted within the substance of language itself. One particularly clear example occurs in *L’Avant dernier des hommes*. Here, Novarina writes: ‘Le soleil-matin revenait soudain régulièrement [...] me faire savoir qu’il temps revenait à temps nous annoncer par sa sonnerie que le jour précédent venait de quitter de nuit sa sortie qu’il fuyait’ (AH:34). Time is secondary to speech, and speech, bound to thought and understood to involve the ‘instauration d’une phrase’ to borrow Alferi’s expression, involves a movement back through time as much as a progression through it. Indeed, Alferi’s idea that thought is only productive ‘en faisant reculer les phrases, puis en suivant comme un souvenir ce qui n’est qu’un pressentiment’ is directly applicable here (CP:48). The creative act does not, for either author, involve the attempt to capture a clearly defined idea or image within a linguistic construction, it involves following the

¹⁵⁴ See Empson, 2004.

felt necessity of a thought through from the moment its possibility was felt, an action that involves pushing all known sentences back. Reinforcing this comparison, Novarina describes the ‘[s]ensation permanente, très physique et inexplicable, que dans le langage, c’est le mouvement de la négation qui nous guide’ (PM:117). His texts, indeed ‘ne sont pas écrits *pour* [...] le théâtre’. His claim to write ‘*vers* le théâtre’, implies the physical movement towards a new space that becomes necessary when language is released from its usual confines, a space in which the action of thought is unrestrained by the arbitrary constraints we impose on it.

This stresses the need felt by Novarina, as a poet, to exploit the physicality of the stage, and highlights the necessity of such a step in view of the novelty of his conception of the bond between thought, language and speech. As in the case of Alferi’s use of film, far from involving some sort of loose post-modern eclecticism, Novarina’s use of theatre is a fundamental aspect of his rigorous re-working of language.

I will now focus on *La Chair de l’homme* and the stage-version of this text *Le Repas* in order to clarify the way each can be seen to provoke a similar experience, an experience that is bound to the actualization of Novarina’s conception of language which is, as has been seen, bound to his belief in the creativity of enunciation.

Le Repas is about half the length of the text that preceded it. This is not exclusively a matter of practicality, it is due to the potential each medium has for generating a particular sort of experience. As discussed earlier, the physical intensity conveyed by the actor’s presence, voice and movement, is, for Novarina, the most important aspect of theatre. For the full physicality of the text to be felt – for the voice of the text to be experienced by the reader – he too must become the actor of the text. This is provoked in part by the length of the passages that occur in the texts. The first part of *La Chair de l’homme*, for example, is made up of one hundred and thirty-seven pages. The first thirteen are composed of a list of speech acts attributed to a

corresponding number of different names, each one separated from the next by a semi-colon:¹⁵⁵

‘Voyez!’ dit Jean; ‘Soyez attentive!’ ajouta Jaques; ‘S’arrêtera-t-elle?’ demanda Pierre; ‘Oui’ répondit Marie; ‘L’arrêterons-nous?’ reprit Josette; ‘Certainement pas’ répliqua Anne; ‘Continuons’ poursuivit Jean-Louis; ‘Encore’ répéta Mathieu; ‘Jamais’ rétorqua Véronique; ‘Vive le Un!’ enchaîna André; ‘Pas assez près du centre’ rectifia Claire; ‘Rien à faire’ constata Oscar; ‘Et pourtant’ protesta Sonia [...]. (CH:7)

The verb used to describe the speech act is different each time. The reader is immediately made to ‘speak’ – to voice each speech act – forced to change his voice by the multiplicity of different speech acts that are suggested by the verbs that follow each one. Preceded by the phrase ‘[s]ur la scène circulaire, entrent...’, the seventeen pages that follow are composed of a list of all the characters that either appear or do not appear in the text:

Jean Mutique, Jean Taupin, Léondru, l’Andripode, le Chanceur Nihilo, les Enfants de la Colère, la Séciliaire, le Délivreur, les Corilliers Urs & Luthi, Jean Nuisance, Jean Multiplique, les Mangeurs de Oui-da, l’Encombier du mort, Madame de Villfroide, Jean Récluset, Jean Tombin, la Modicine, le Docteur Hirlippe, le Manqueur Durable, Son Creuseur de Dent, l’Homme à la corde, la Délivrance, l’Enfant à la Un et à la Deux, l’Esprit de Galoupe, Quelqu’un avec un Couteau [...]. (CH:20)

The reader is drawn into the rhythm of the list and into the materiality of the sound of the names by the sheer weight of their proliferation and the apparent interminability of the passage. The physical effort required is intensified by the strangeness of the names evoked; many of them are made up of half recognizable words, or unexpected combinations of syllables. The reader is forced to read differently, reading speed is slowed down, for example, because of the large number of semi-recognizable/unrecognizable words. This is fundamental to the physical experience of the text because reading an unrecognized word involves the mental ‘speaking out’ of a series of sounds: the more the reader is forced to read in this way, the more it becomes a

¹⁵⁵ I have only included fragments of the two lists here in order to give an idea of the way language is employed in them: the effect generated by their length can only be experienced through recourse to the original text.

habit, or natural part of their reading of the text. The fundamental creativity of the reading experience generated calls to mind an observation concerning the expressivity of words – and particularly the sound of words – made by the psychologist Alexander Luria. He remarks on the particular interest the film director Sergei Eisenstein had in his study of the synesthetic approach to language of a man with seemingly limitless memory. He writes: ‘Eisenstein, in testing students to select those he would train as film directors, asked them to describe their impressions of the variations on the name Mariya (Masha, Mary, Marusya). He found this an infallible way to single out those who were keenly sensitive to the expressive force of words’.¹⁵⁶ What is important here of course is the fact that the word involved is a proper name: its reference is open, the phonetic qualities and the texture of the words alone bear potential meaning.¹⁵⁷

To return to Novarina, his instructions to the actor are to ‘[m]âcher et manger le texte’ (reflecting Grotowski’s statement that: ‘la règle de base pour une bonne articulation est d’expirer les voyelles et de « mâcher » les consonnes’) and this is precisely what the reader is forced to do (TP:9).¹⁵⁸ Hence Novarina’s description of the page as a ‘traversée respiratoire’, the book as a ‘seul corps dansant’ (PM:73). As he writes: ‘l’esprit du texte, c’est le souffle donné par toi lecteur’ (LC:100). To turn back to *Le Repas*, here the list of speech acts is left out, and the list of characters is restricted so that it finally takes up only three pages of the text. This result of the transposition from text to stage is explained by the fact that in the theatre the spectator is confronted directly with the rhythm with which the actor chews and spits sound. In *Le Repas* La Voix seule pronounces the list of characters: the spectator’s first experience of the play is of the physicality of the bodiless voice that pronounces the names.

¹⁵⁶ Luria, 1987:93.

¹⁵⁷ The subject’s own account of his understanding of these variations in name is included and discussed on pages 91-92 of this text.

¹⁵⁸ Grotowski, 1971:128.

The physicality of thought and of the speech act underlies both the similarities and the differences between the texts and the stage versions of them. Language is transformed in both, as the physicality inherent in it is given the upper hand. The violence and intensity of the actor's vociferations on stage are mirrored by the catatonic nature of the texts, and the reading pattern they require the reader to adopt. Novarina's use of punctuation is vital to the way both function. The actor's speech is heard, not read, and the rhythm must be even more pronounced if the spectator's attention is to be held. The sentence '[n]ous ne mangeons que ce que nous sommes, pour ne devenir en somme que la totalité de ce que nous aurons mangé' from *La Chair de l'homme* becomes, in *Le Repas*: 'Nous ne mangeons que ce que nous sommes : c'est pour devenir en somme la totalité de ce que nous aurons mangé' (CH:40, R:16). The use of the colon serves to mark a break in the sentence, reinforcing the rhythm of the sentence and its self-reflexivity. It also emphasizes the mirroring of the sounds of the words within it. Such changes serve to render effects generated by the texts more economically. This section of the text is much longer than the corresponding passage that appears in the stage version. It is in order to reproduce the intensity of the number of proverb-like statements that follow each other beginning with 'nous' in the text that rhythm is exaggerated in the stage version.

Rhetorical structures are also often parodied in a more blatant manner in the stage-versions of texts provoking a similar result. The sentence '[n]i le silence ni le bruit ne sont vraiment là absolument et cependant nous en parlons' (CH:42) from *La Chair de l'homme* for example, becomes '[n]i le silence ni le bruit ne sont vraiment là absolument – et cependant nous en parlons. Car c'est samedi' (CH:42, R:20). The actor's voice is hence better able to carry an effect that is woven more subtly into the text. Ralph Ellis, a contemporary philosopher and neuroscientist, discusses the relevance of what he terms auditory and kinaesthetic imagery to the recognition of valid

and invalid arguments. He suggests that such recognition can depend to a large extent on the conformation or non-conformation of the given argument to certain recognizable rhythm patterns. As he observes: ‘ “this implies that; not that; therefore not this” is *modus tollens*, whereas “this implies that; not this; therefore not that” is the fallacy of denying the antecedent. We can hear these temporal rhythms just as we would a recognizable pattern in music’.¹⁵⁹ This reinforces the idea that the length of a passage is quite simply unnecessary when transferred to the actor’s mouth. The sentence ‘[f]aites entrer le cortège des phrases de repas faisant suite à la suite des choses de trépas. Faites entrer un cortège de suites de couac’, for example, becomes ‘[f]aites entrer le cortège des phrases à la suite de quoi; faites entrer un cortège de suite de couacs’ (CH:42, R:19). In the text, the sentence is attributed to Le Mangeur loquace, a name that guides the way it is read. The chattering rhythm of the first part is reinforced by its length. In the stage version, the actor’s stance and gestures contribute to the speech act and replace the effect generated by the use of the character name and the more explicitly ‘loquacious’ rhythm of the original line.

The alterations effectuated in the stage versions of texts are connected to another of Novarina’s intentions discussed above: to destroy ‘la figure humaine’. The battle against representation is, as discussed earlier, omnipresent in his work, and it is waged with the violence of enunciation. In the texts, this battle is not only manifested in the content but also in the typographical presence of either partially or totally unrecognizable words in the text, the presence of lists of numbers and so on. The idea of the written word as a ‘sign’, as a physical mark bearing signifying value, is disrupted; the reader falls rhythmically through the text, incapable of identifying any individual ‘sense-bearing’ object other than the constantly moving physical current of the whole (‘tout ne se comprend qu’en mouvement’) (LC:17). Ordinary habits of comprehension

¹⁵⁹ Ellis, 1995:98.

are attacked from within. The reader is given no representation to identify with; no image or stable individuated presence in the form of a recurrent character that might reflect their own conception of themselves. Thrown back behind words to the physicality of thought and of the speech act each reader is confronted with the fragmentation of their own 'figure'. The beginning of *La Chair de l'homme* is a clear illustration of the above. Each speech act in the first list is, as mentioned, followed by a different verb and attributed to a different name. It constitutes a rhythmic continuum: many of the speech acts are (or could be) connected to the one that precedes them, but there is no progression of 'sense' apart from that inherent in the terrifying accumulation of voices; the presence of the growing, shuffling, bodiless crowd. The names that are attached to each fragment of speech follow the verb that describes the speech act: they are accessory to the voice, as void of representational value as the speech acts are powerless to designate anything. The list ends, followed by the line '[i]ls entrent dans le cirque des Maladroits' (CH:20). The second list (of characters) begins, as mentioned above, with the phrase '[s]ur la scène circulaire, entrent' (CH:20). It is as though the preceding speech acts have been transformed into the names of Novarina's characters: as though the essence of each one has been fixed in a new name which designates nothing but that singular voice or moment of expression. This list of names accomplishes the complete breakdown of representation: the reader has, by the end of it, entered a new realm of potential sense.

The theatre allows the effect generated by the lists described above to be manifested physically. The experience provoked by the beginning of *La Chair de l'homme* described above is mirrored in the opening of *Le Repas* through the exploitation of the space of the theatre. As discussed earlier, the first list is left out entirely. The (much shorter) list of characters 'entering' the stage is pronounced by La voix seule. In fact no actor enters the stage at this point, only the names are 'present',

incarnated not in flesh and blood but in the speech of a (disembodied) voice. This list is followed (as in *La Chair de l'homme*) by the sentence '[i]ls éteignent' (R:12). The spectators must learn to 'voir par les oreilles', pushed back to a world that precedes representation (PM:73). The following section of dialogue is preceded by the title/stage direction '[d]ans le noir' (R:12). The characters are therefore now present on the stage but they cannot be seen. The 'world' of the birth of language has been recreated on stage. This accomplishes the breakdown of the spectator's expectations. To turn back to *La Chair de l'homme*, the absence of individuation between characters in the text in the dialogue that follows the lists is accomplished by the absence of character names. Here the speech acts are attributed to Une voix dans le noir, Une voix noire, Aucune voix dans le noir, Une voix dans la nuit, and so on: an impression of physical darkness is hence impressed again and again on the reader who, like the spectator, can only differentiate between voices at this stage. The use of the space of the theatre, through play on the presence or absence of the actor and/or their voice, is exploited in order for precisely the same breakdown of representation to be brought about on stage.

The above illustrates Novarina's determination that, on the stage, the actor is to 'represent' nothing: '[il/elle] ne nomme pas, ne désigne pas'; each is a speaking presence, detached from any 'personhood' and even 'individuality' (PM:12). Novarina's conception of voice therefore serves as the main point of reference when comparing texts and stage versions of them. *L'Avant-dernier des hommes* (a stage adaptation of section XVII of *La Chair de l'homme*) provides another example, opening with the line '[e]ntre celui qui porte sur soi sa pancarte de *Jean-sans-nom*' attributed to L'Acteur fuyant autrui (AH:10). The name is immediately made physically accessory to the man; it negates itself and designates nothing. What is more, this speech act separates the subject of the sentence 'celui qui...' from the actor/character's presence on the stage. The speech continues with the line '[m]a mère m'appela de ce nom: Jean-sans-

nom, pour en faire fuir mon père Josubabel et que je devienne présent par la présence uniquement que je porte à mon cou' (AH:10). He then throws it away, fleeing from his existence as a designated object or 'figure' in the eyes of the potential 'other'. Involving a double negation (the negation of a self-negating name), the gesture becomes a positive act, an act that involves both a movement of rejection and one of advancement. It also serves to actualize the thought that is the tension behind the character's name as it appears in the text (L'Acteur fuyant autrui): as Novarina writes, the actor's task is to 'refaire l'acte de faire le texte, le ré-écrire avec son corps' (TP:20). It is neither purely through the words employed, nor through the actor's voice and movement that the voice of the text is to be found, but in the interaction of both with each other and with the physical space of the stage as apprehended by the spectator. The rejection of communicational norms is therefore not a rejection of language as such but a way of breaking beyond a static or closed conception of the individual.

It is worth returning to Grotowski here, for the idea of contact is fundamental to his conception of the actor's task. As he writes: 'il n'y a ni impulsions, ni réactions sans contact'.¹⁶⁰ The sort of contact he refers to is unusual, however, for it need not imply the actual presence of an object or other person. Such contact can be invoked through the use of memory or indeed through that of the imagination. To clarify this idea, he develops the notion of the 'partenaire sur'. This term does not designate an actual person or other actor, but a potential other. This potential other is not an individual as such, the term is far more general than that, evoking the possibility of otherness. The 'partenaire sur' is therefore irreducible in a way, for it is a constant aspect of one's sense of oneself as an individual. The dynamism of the concept is of great significance, for this captures the constantly shifting boundaries between self and world; the 'partenaire sur' can both crystallize within a name or person and expand to include the

¹⁶⁰ Grotowski, 1971:184.

limitless realm of the unknown. Grotowski's development of the idea underlines the fact that actual contact with an object or other person is irrelevant: the mime, to take an extreme example, requires no prop, stage, or even voice; his/her task involves the constant suggestion of contact (potential or actual). The use of the voice implies contact, for enunciation is a physical act, but the actor's aim, for Grotowski and Novarina, is not to illustrate ideas in order to communicate them, but to capture the particular movement through language that endows a given utterance with sense at a given moment and within a given space. The physical awareness of the potential other hence serves to check the veracity of each gesture, the meaningfulness of each modification of the voice understood as an action in the world. As mentioned earlier, the idea of a potential other is of course implicit in language which is primarily a means of expression and communication. This is why it is within language itself that the boundaries we normally assume to exist between ourselves and others can best be questioned and ultimately transgressed. It is the physical manipulation of language carried out by both the writer and the actor that can alter our perception of it by encouraging us to see it as malleable as opposed to rigid, hence affecting our understanding of our own nature – the extent to which our own substance is reflected in the primary medium we exploit in order to describe it.

As suggested earlier, the space of the theatre is a necessary extension of the space within which language is ordinarily confined if Novarina's goal – to touch the profound physicality of language and to re-activate our consciousness of it – is to be achieved. The experience provoked in both the text and the stage version is the experience of the action of thought, the experience of 'l'enfance du parlant', an experience in which words are transcended in a dynamic freefall towards the possibility of sense: 'le drame de la parole' is at the root of both.

CHAPTER 4

PIERRE ALFERI: THE RHYTHM OF THOUGHT

La littérature est faite de phrases qui se donnent pour ce qu'elles sont. La fiction montre en toute clarté comment les phrases, en disant quelque chose, font quelque chose. Chacune, ici, se rapporte avant tout à sa propre possibilité : un passé singulier – expérience, pensée, langue – inventé en ce sens qu'il ne peut être ressaisi ailleurs. Et chacune, ainsi, se donne clairement comme un geste ou un acte : celui de recueillir ce passé en phrasant. La littérature met donc en œuvre une théorie de la phrase. Mais elle n'a généralement aucun besoin de la formuler à part. Car la littérature forme des phrases nouvelles, qui opèrent seulement sur ce qu'elles disent et contiennent leur propre passé. Produire une phrase et produire son origine se confondent alors dans le fait de dire. Ce geste unique est une instauration. Les phrases de la littérature ne sont pas descriptives, elles sont instaurationnelles. (CP:13)

The violence that characterizes Novarina's poetic approach is absent from Alferi's work, which is in a way subtler, and less explicitly physical. His emphasis is not so much on the original drive of enunciation as on the way in which that drive is carried through in the rhythm of a voice. The idea of voice, in his work, refers to the particularity and unity of thought: the way each thought draws from and combines the physical and the mental, past and present experience. His focus on the emergence and metamorphosis of fragments of language within it characterizes much of his work.

Here, I will begin by considering the role Alferi attributes to voice and the implications this has for three interrelated concepts: communication, narration and intersubjectivity. The first section will include a brief analysis of *Sentimentale journée*. I will then move on to look at two related works: the 'film parlant' *La Protection des animaux* and the text *Le Cinéma des familles*, because the subject matter they share

clarifies the way in which Alferi's experimentation with different media is intimately related to his conception of voice.

Section i: THE VOICE OF THE TEXT

As discussed in Chapter 2, for Alferi, the creative act is an experience characterized by the need to push thought beyond the known: language is a given, a part of thought, but to break beyond communicational norms and capture the particularity of a given experience, the poet must follow the 'poussée' or drive back through language and beyond the image. Thought, for Alferi, is profoundly physical, and the experience of thought combines sensory input and language. It is attentiveness to the way these diverse elements combine that constitutes the first stage of the poetic process. As Alferi writes: '[c]e que je voudrais saisir relève de la constitution instinctive des sens, de l'éveil et de l'attention, notamment à travers les postures et les passions du corps'.¹⁶¹ This emphasis on the physical draws out the full import of Alferi's statement 'la phrase est une expérience' (CP:35). Poetry, for him, is successful insofar as it manages to capture the actual movement of thought behind it, so that as the experiment (of reading the text) is undertaken, the experience of that thought is provoked in the reader. This dynamic constitutes the voice of the text. For Alferi as for Novarina: 'Penser, parler, n'est pas émettre des idées, les enchaîner, les dévoiler – mais conduire jusqu'à l'envers des mots. Il y a une pensée sous la pensée qui dit toujours : « Va jusqu'ou les mots rebroussement chemin »' (DP:25).

Alferi's conception of the way words and images function in the sentence or poem is therefore bound to the importance he puts on the physicality of language. Continuity, coherence and precision are vital, for 'voice', as Alferi conceives of it, is responsible for both the unity and the dynamism of the text, although it is not locatable

¹⁶¹ Alferi, in Cassagneau, 2005.

either behind the text (in the form of a supposed narrator) nor in a metaphorical form beyond it. As Alferi writes: ‘La nécessité du tressage, si elle empêche d’enfermer la voix dans une définition, permet en revanche de la reconnaître au premier coup d’œil’ (CP:73). The voice of a text is, in a way, just that text. As Alferi writes: ‘la voix instaure le texte en tant que tel’ (CP:69).

The poetic act does not, therefore, involve turning in towards some supposed ‘inner’ self, and nor does it imply the subjectivization of ordinary discourse, for it captures the way conceptual boundaries traditionally set up between interior and exterior, self and world are transgressed in thought.¹⁶² This emphasis on voice as ‘tressage’ is at the root of the rhythmic, hypnotic nature of so much of Alferi’s work. His approach manifests the power of fascination language can exercise when, following the liberation of words and images from their referential or representational functions within the space of the poem, the relations between words and things are no longer taken as given. It is the coherence of the thought captured by the poet that constitutes the ‘reality’ of the text. Interplay is therefore an integral part of Alferi’s work, partly because of the way he refuses any hierarchical arrangement of different elements of thought as experience, forming a ‘tressage’ that escapes definition in terms of the traditional split between physical and non-physical aspects of poetry, and partly because of his interest in the relation between expression and communication. His exploitation of different media is, of course, a further manifestation of this theme. As mentioned earlier, all utterances assume a potential ‘other’, and (to reunite the aspects of Alferi’s approach to be focused on here) in the texts to be looked at shortly he explores the effects this has within narrative.

¹⁶² Here, it is worth considering Jean-Pierre Martin’s study of Céline and Queneau. He analyses the way both authors draw from speech as follows: ‘le langage parlé ne fait plus objet d’une représentation [...] en retour, il contribue à briser la membrane de la phrase, à imposer une musique qui raye le disque du français littéraire’. He considers this a particular form of subjectivization of language, associated with a ‘passion de la pulsion dans la langue’. I would suggest that Alferi’s approach is mainly different in that he aims rather to transcend the notion of the individual, focusing instead on intersubjectivity. By focusing on voice, understood to transgress the limits posed between self and world, he simultaneously prevents the possible identification of any single ‘psychological’ subject (Martin, 1998:90,266).

Sentimentale journée is composed of a series of poems ‘improvisés comme une conversation [...] on voit en gros de quoi ils parlent [...] et précisément ce qu’ils disent, mais pas très bien ce qu’ils veulent dire’ (SJ:back cover). This quotation immediately indicates that the text does not bear meaning in any ordinary way (through description or metaphor for example) but that, nonetheless, communication itself is at stake. The poems that make up the text, like the images, ideas and names that occur within them, function like shots in a tennis game: each one is in part dependent on the dynamic of the last shot, and in part shaped by the intentions and capacities of the ‘player’ in action. To continue with the analogy, the text (or conversation) is made up of no one shot, but of the total number of shots hit. Indeed, the most decisive moves made with regard to the ‘result’ of the game or the strength of the text are only likely to become evident when it is looked at in retrospect as a unity.

The experience of the text is overtly non-linear due to the form it takes, yet this aspect of it is evident elsewhere. Unexpected repetition forms a vital part of the way the text functions, for whether a specific word (‘récidive’ for example) or an allusion (to dance say) is concerned its re-use stresses the continuity and self-reflexivity of the dialogue. The imaginative power of the content plays an important part in this effect, for the most disparate objects, ideas and references recur in slightly altering formulations throughout the text, strengthening both the ‘tressage’ of the whole and reinforcing the dream-like nature of the text.

The text on the back cover suggests that the participants of the conversation ‘prennent à revers la communication: ils repoussent le sens d’une image à l’autre, qu’ils défont, d’une phrase à l’autre’. The ‘reality’ captured, then, is bound to the dynamic of each participant’s thought. The reader, in tracing the ‘ligne serpentine’ of what is ‘said’ is not encouraged to analyse the conversation conceived of as a clear-cut two-way

dialogue, but is swept on by the rhythm of two (or more) intertwined thought patterns.¹⁶³

To turn to a specific example, ‘Suite à notre conversation’ opens, like the other poems, with a few lines set apart typographically from the rest of the text. These reappear throughout the poem, although their meaning often alters with context. This passage reads as follows:

*Appelle ça
L'épreuve du souvenir, l'épreuve de la parole privée
Qu'est-ce qui n'est pas
Passé
Qu'est-ce qui vaut, existe
Vraiment? ces choses dites, écrites, chantées
Ou leur echo informe
On peut refaire
De la musique avec
Quelle attention
Ou plutôt quelle distraction faut-il?
(SJ:29)*

The title suggests that the poem turns on a conversation that has already happened. It therefore evokes memory, and (on one level) the poem explores the dynamism of memory as present-tense thought, directly affected by current, actual experience. Thus, current sensory experience (including the ‘bzz | Du frigidaire’ ‘L’aspirateur des voisins’) not only recalls the conversation, it becomes a prolongation of something particular about it that continues to bear sense in a way that is irreducible to words (SJ:29). What is occurring in the present can dull or sharpen particular aspects of what is remembered (the debater reclining in front of his TV refuses to acknowledge ownership of the recorded and edited speech attributed to him, the fact that the words *appear* to be emitted by him is somehow not sufficient to entail his identification with the sense they convey). The important aspects of a memory are often, paradoxically, ambiguous, an ‘écho informe’. What is more, as the narrator comments ‘rien de plus difficile que de situer la source | D’un son’: the significance of a memory does not lie in

¹⁶³ Alferi, in Disson and Maré, 2000.

a relation of cause and effect. This suggests that memories can signify in unusual ways because they are often bound to moments when a pattern of thought was modified and that such moments (that can only be apprehended retrospectively) depend as much on physical sensation as on verbal expression or communication. Grotowski's conception of memory is relevant here. He writes: 'Les souvenirs sont des réactions physiques. C'est notre peau qui n'a pas oublié, nos yeux qui n'ont pas oublié'.¹⁶⁴ Remembering something is, for him, 'accomplir un acte concret'.¹⁶⁵

To return to *Sentimentale journée*, the conversation referred to is still present within the poem, yet the dialogue that runs through the text is as much between different elements of thought as between two distinguishable speakers. The 'other' of the dialogue therefore in some ways escapes both identification and location, no more a stable element of the process of thought than the thinking subject. In this way, the poem draws directly on the way the dynamic of thought (and here memory) breaks boundaries. Indeed, the last few words of the poem 'parfait parfait très bien très bien' that sound most conversational constitute perhaps the most imaginary element of the memory, for, being meaningless in themselves, they leave the experience open: project it forward, unresolved. The 'reality' of the memory is therefore caught tight between the diverse threads that physically and mentally bind the poem. Alferi's use of enjambement, juxtaposition and surprise are therefore intensely precise, and the retrospective apprehension of connections between diverse elements of the poem is fundamental to the reader's re-activation of the voice that (here) is specific to a given memory experience. The 'écho informe' is both the voice of the poem and the truth of the memory.

To conclude this brief analysis, this text explores aspects of dialogue that are not strictly communicational. Here, as in the other poems that make up the collection, the

¹⁶⁴ Grotowski, 1971:184.

¹⁶⁵ Grotowski, 1971:184.

importance of images within the dialogue is not bound to any representational value, and the significance of words is not reducible to their power of designation; it is the interplay set up between them in the context of the particular dynamic of the conversation that constitutes the rhythm of the text. Meaning is carried by the action of thought that is reflected in the rhythm of the voice. The refusal to bow to communicational norms marks the intimacy of the dialogue. The blank spaces between each line and around each 'poem' affect the rhythm with which the text is read, and also the visual impression of the autonomy of each new thought, while the use of verse reinforces the coherence and unity of the text as a whole. The nature of this unity, that calls into question the 'actuality' of the conversation, is clarified by Alferi's statement that: 'La cohésion d'une voix écrite est telle qu'un texte littéraire, bon gré mal gré, s'entient généralement à une seule, même s'il la fait émettre, comme un ventriloque, à divers simulacres de voix – par exemple à des « personnages »' (CP :73). This underlines the real subject of this text: the constantly modifying boundary between self and other. The movement captured is the movement of thought towards another. Here, then, Aferi explores the roles which wordless communication and imagined presence play in experience and expression.

Before concluding this section, it is worth mentioning that Alferi's exploration of voice in this poem is apparent in works not explicitly concerned with dialogue at all. *Kub Or*, for example, is composed in a way that sets up a particular relationship between reader and text. It includes photographs and cubic blocks of texts which encourage the reader to flick back and forth through it. The reader is directly engaged in the way they would be if throwing a dice (or, indeed, dissolving a stock-cube). Multi-faceted and non-linear, it provokes the engagement of the reader's voice, for his/her own physical movement through the text as well as their own knowledge becomes a form of creative dialogue with the potential 'other' who is the author of the text. This

brings out the significance of Alferi's comment concerning his texts that 'ce sont toujours des histoires de surfaces sensibles'.¹⁶⁶ Voice, for him, is not uni-directional, it acts on the world while bearing within it an imprint of the world. By developing the notion of voice, Alferi therefore directly challenges traditional narrative: thought, for him, is a space within which subject and object are often indistinguishable, and it is poetry as a particularly physical means of expression that can capture the creativity of this very ambiguity.

Section ii: THOUGHT, EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

I will now turn to the 'film parlant' *La Protection des animaux* and the text *Le Cinéma des familles*, in order to consider the way in which Alferi transforms traditional narrative structure in both and the extent to which the two works inform each other, for both are in a way 'poetic treatments' of the same subject matter. The same 'materials' are exploited in each and, as will become clear, words and images are in fact made to function in a very similar way in both works. This is not to imply that the two works are interchangeable or equivalent in any way, but that the experience captured by the author and provoked in the reader/spectator is perhaps not ultimately so different in each case.

Before I begin, it is necessary to consider the generic marker 'film parlant'. This immediately differentiates the works gathered under it from his 'cinépoèmes' and also, due to his choice of the word 'parlant', from film, whether traditional or experimental. The word 'parlant' does not indicate the use of narration or voice-over: in *La Berceuse de Broadway* for example, subtitles are used. It is the interplay or rhythm set up between the images, sounds and linguistic elements included that constitutes the coherence (and therefore voice) of each work, and the spectator's experience is bound

¹⁶⁶ Alferi, in Disson and Maré, 2000.

to this 'tressage', to a rhythm not dictated by the verbal communication of an idea, but by the unity of a thought.

To begin with the text, *Le Cinéma des familles* is described on the back cover as an 'autofiction'. Written in the first person, it follows the lives of three children (including the narrator) from within their developing perceptions of the people they encounter and the experiences they undergo. By disregarding all boundaries between the imaginary and the real, Alferi captures the particularity of the child's actual experience; the selectivity of perception and the extent to which perception is active, the world continually re-created as memory, experience and imagination shuffle and change roles. His aim is not psychological, nor is it analytical. For Alferi 'la voix est sa cohérence propre', and coherence of voice is, as suggested above, the primary aim of the text (CP:69). The text explores the creativity of thought that draws from memory, linguistic knowledge, current perception and something less easily definable – a dynamic that pushes thought on beyond the given or known. It is therefore directly concerned with the extent to which each individual's conception of the world is the result of reconstruction, fabrication, projection and imagination.

By concentrating on the thought processes of a child, Alferi is able to evoke perceptual experience of the world before it has become polluted by habits formed as a result of social interaction, which in turn enables him to explore the way in which creative thought, especially when un-bound by habit, draws from every possible variety of sensory experience. The child's conception of the 'other' for example is striking, for it appears at first sight paradoxical. The notion the child has of those around him oscillates between an impression of their absolute strangeness or foreignness and one of total intimacy with them (the other as a slightly out of focus part of the self), it is founded both on his developing physical awareness of his surroundings and on his acquisition of linguistic abilities. A sudden change in his visual capacities as a baby is

captured in a passage that begins as follows: ‘Une première ombre, dès que je pus accommoder, le suivre quand il s’éloignait, le tacha avec la violence d’une métamorphose. Effet de caméra: le contour dégagé avait une épaisseur une seule’ (CF:18). Here it is his father’s potential existence apart from him that has become possible and with it his potential existence as ‘other’ – as something different from his habitual perceptual experience of him, for his gaze has until now been incapable of distinguishing clear boundaries or of grasping the three-dimensionality of shapes beyond his reach.¹⁶⁷

The child’s paradoxical grasp of the ‘other’ is later often reflected in his adoption of, or his refusal to adopt, the different speech patterns employed by those around him: ‘dès que je sus parler, les deux guises du langage – clair & distinct, confusobscur – informèrent le décor qui était le monde’ (CF:20). Both the content of such passages and the way language is used in them draw from the fact that, for the child, language is not yet frozen to a communicational model but is still bound to actual experience: it forms part of the environment. The ‘memory’ of the experiences recounted by the narrator is similarly inseparable from certain linguistic elements of the child’s thought, yet, a thought in the present tense, it is in part defined by later experience. Here, the child’s own discovery of film through a video camera that informed his developing conceptions of self and world and the adult’s knowledge of cinematographic vocabulary. The reality of the experience captured in the text lies in the dynamic conception of memory it puts into play: instead of being constructed around static ‘photographic’ memories it involves the exploration of present-tense thought, understood to draw from rhythms set up long before the comprehension of visual images or linguistic representations was possible.

¹⁶⁷ It is fascinating to note the similar account given of this change by the research subject of Luria’s book on memory. He writes: ‘“Seeing my mother was like looking at something through the lens of a camera. At first you can’t make anything out, just a round cloudy spot... then a face appears, then its features become sharper”’ (Luria, 1987:78). For an account of perceptual development and the bearing it has on conceptual understanding see Gopnik and Meltzoff, 2002.

One of the salient ideas present in Alferi's 'autofiction', then, is a belief in the fundamental creativity of speech, a belief that our adoption of certain vocabularies and linguistic structures informs what we perceive and that attentiveness to the physical nature of thought bears directly on creative expression. Eugène Fink's statement '[n]ous ne sommes pas, nous devenons constamment' is reflected in the very structure of the book, for just as the child's perception is not yet structured by the concepts we depend on in ordinary communication, the book itself is not bound to the temporal or chronological ordering of events, either implicitly through the use of linear structure or explicitly through reference to dates.¹⁶⁸ The traditional concepts of space and time are bypassed, allowing the boundaries between the virtual and the actual, the past and the present, to be transgressed in favour of a 'récit' that explores the way memory functions as a thought in the present-tense. The action of thought is conceived of as a constant re-creation of the world.

The linear and overtly 'progressive' nature of traditional narrative is undermined throughout Alferi's work. This is perhaps because he sees it as an imposition of certain fixed, though arbitrary ideas concerning spatio-temporal reality. Chronology and historicization falsify the actuality of memory and the dynamism of experience. This idea is inherent in the child's fear of '[c]artons d'archives [...] albums photos biographies chronologies' which inspire '[la p]eur de me faire posséder, dépossédé de l'expérience, de voir embouteillé ce qui fut organe vital' (CF:351). We may well make use of such narrative tools in thought and experience, in particular when communication is necessary, but the order we impose through them need not necessarily bear any relation to what it is to think or to have an experience per se. The disruption of such conceptual structuring of the 'récit' by Flore in her constant re-looping of the same fragmentary stories is hence described as 'salutaire', a 'modèle de liberté' involving 'un

¹⁶⁸ Fink, 1966:188.

récit en temps réel [...] commentaire perpétuel en perpétuel décalage, qui bousculait chronologie logique distribution des rôles, défait l'appropriation' (CF:354). Later the significance of her approach is expanded upon: 'Avec les mots [...] elle bricole, mais avec le sens elle ne plaisante pas' (CF:430). In blurring the boundaries between the virtual and the actual, the imaginary and the real in a way that is comparable to Flore's non-linear, non-descriptive method, the text escapes from the limitations of date, time and place. The significance of the memory (experience) being captured lies in the evolving perception the narrator has of it and the relation that exists between this perception, what he knows and what he is capable of imagining. It is the particularity of the experience of memory that fascinates Alferi, the extent to which it is bound to voice in a far closer way than any other form of thought due to the way it is often intimately bound to sensory experience. This is what draws him to film – to create a different reading pattern that brings out the fundamentally unique yet largely unclassifiable voice that is memory.

C. B. Martin's research clarifies the importance of Alferi's attentiveness to the physicality of voice. He writes:

Muscular movement and electrical activity in proprioceptors in the mouth and throat and their apparent informational input to higher functional systems are only a part, although they could be a necessary triggering part, of the full richness of the signals needed for feedback control involved in verbal tasks done for yourself in your head [...]. As such, the signals that will be providing feedback for the in-the-head verbalizations will be a mix of the internal and external, involving motor-kinaesthetic, tactile, and auditory modalities [...] The range of our imagery accords with how we *perceive*, not [...] what we can mimic.¹⁶⁹

Even if words themselves can seem empty shells, speech, whether private or public, remains fundamentally creative through its physicality and through the dynamic relationship it has with thought and with experience. Here it is worth mentioning Oliver Sacks's research into the particular richness of sign language. He points out that true

¹⁶⁹ Martin, C. B., 2008:169-70.

sign languages are complete in themselves: ‘their syntax, grammar and semantics are complete, but they have a different character from that of any spoken or written language. Thus it is not possible to transliterate a spoken tongue into Sign word by word or phrase by phrase – their structures are essentially different’.¹⁷⁰ Sign, for many native speakers of it, is the preferred medium of thought, especially for intellectual tasks. This suggests the significance less of habit than of sensory aspects of thought. For those lucky enough to have learnt both Sign and spoken language from birth, the former is quite simply better able to capture certain ideas.

Before turning to the ‘film parlant’, it is worth mentioning the form the book takes. Each chapter has a heading; the book at first glance can therefore appear to be a series of autonomous texts. Poems, diagrams, sketches, lists, fragments of dialogue and sections of scattered prose or decomposed sentences all form part of the text. This reinforces the impression the reader has that he/she is reading a film (as opposed to a novel or even a film-script) – the scene changes are sudden as is the often unexpected interjection of voices. As is evident from the quotations already used here, the book is full of cinematographic vocabulary that affects the way descriptive passages and images function within it. Terms such as ‘*fondue-enchaîné*’ and ‘*plan-séquence*’ both affect the movement between images and the way things and people are visualized. This is fundamental to the realism of this text that explores the way diverse aspects of perceptual experience contribute to the evolution of a thought.

To move towards a closer comparison of the two works, it is worth observing that film in general can appear to function in a similar way to thought – non-chronological, it can work by flashback, the rhythm put in place through the sequences created (via camera movement and editing) being proper to it as a unity. Through the use of such techniques it can subordinate both space (through the use of different

¹⁷⁰ Sacks, 1991:29.

frames) and time (through editing) to the coherence of a narrative or idea. The constant shuffling of perspectives suggested by alterations of camera position and focus and the changing relations set up between what is seen and the spectator or narrator, are integral to the resemblance film sequences can have to memories or dreams.

Deleuze's analysis of cinematic images highlights the unusual way visual material functions in Alferi's work. Deleuze's description of the different varieties of image that have developed with cinema draws out the relation between the development of cinematic images and that of our perceptual habits and capacities. He believes that the creation of what he calls 'images-temps directes' only became possible following the disruption of the 'lien sensori-moteur' bound to the use of images within film as representations or illustrations of a narrative. The development of these new images means that understanding a film need no longer be a question of recognizing signs, but can become 'une fonction de l'œil'. Hence: 'C'est par le corps (et non plus par l'intermédiaire du corps) que le cinéma se noue ses nœuds avec l'esprit, avec la pensée'.¹⁷¹ His concept of the 'image-temps directe' is bound to the notion of becoming. Such images cross the boundary between the real and the virtual, capturing the 'dédoublé continué' of perception and memory.¹⁷² Deleuze conceives of thought, memory and dreams as forming a layering of different circuits ('nappes') and the present is the extreme limit of all these, a single circuit or point that contains all the past. He considers the 'image-temps' to capture this layering and hence to reproduce actual experience of the world more closely. Deleuze suggests that the danger inherent in such images is the development of an 'automatisme spirituel' that depends less on the nature of the materials used in film than on an imposed aesthetic.¹⁷³ The spectator becomes a consumer of canned, aestheticized experiences. This clarifies the importance of the fact that Alferi uses film not as a representational medium, but as poetic material.

¹⁷¹ Deleuze, 1985:319,246.

¹⁷² Deleuze, 1985:106.

¹⁷³ Deleuze, 1985:349.

By concentrating on the perceptual patterns invoked by the different interrelations set up between words and images, he disrupts traditional patterns of seeing or reading images from within. The spectator is made to follow the movement of the creative act (the thought) behind the work actively; he/she is not presented with a closed product. Alferi's use of film as a poetic material therefore provokes the creative engagement of the spectator in a way film rarely can.

The 'films parlants', including *La Protection des animaux*, tend to be composed of images taken from already existing films. Such use of already existing sequences and shots reflects the recurrent theme of memory in Alferi's work and calls into question the role that what has been seen or imagined in the past plays in actual experience. The constant shuffling between a restricted selection of images and sequences also instigates a more obvious disruption of the 'récit'. In *La Protection des animaux* the same images, taken from Charles Laughton's film *The Night of the Hunter*, recur, played either forwards or backwards in slow motion. The film is used as 'poetic material' much in the way language is in both works. However, to turn back to the text briefly, it is not only the preceding chapter heading that takes the film's title as its own; implicit and explicit references to specific shots are scattered throughout. Alice's song is translated into French in the text, and the reference to the world 'humain de la mesure, dur pour les petites choses' is a slightly altered 'quotation' from the film (CF:214, 215). To return to the 'film parlant' then, here the images and the narrative both follow their own rhythm; the relation between them is almost choreographic as they join, separate and join again.¹⁷⁴ This creates confusion between the seen and the not-seen, between 'tableau' and 'action'. The recurring sequences or shots are soon recognized, but the relation of each one to the narration is never the same. The narrator is often simultaneously a

¹⁷⁴ Dee Reynolds uses the notion of dance in her discussion of the exploitation of spatio-temporal interactions in Mallarmé's poetry and in the painting of Kandinsky and Mondrian, but her description of it as a 'privileged site of imaginary space' does not capture the sense of actual movement that I wish to emphasize here (Reynolds, 1995:227).

spectator. The actual spectator is therefore made to look, not just see: as in *Fmn* the emphasis is on the ‘regard’ not the ‘vision’. He/she is forced to create his/her own sequence, based neither on the narration, nor on the sequence of images, but on the relations either instigated or denied between them. As Christophe Fiat says (speaking about the function of repetition in poetry) ‘la répétition empêche la pensée et la langue de revenir à un fondement originaire du sens’.¹⁷⁵ To return to Alferi, such use of what could be described as the constant retraction (as opposed to negation) of visual and verbal material amounts to a rejection of the traditional link instigated in film between word and image: it is this that constitutes the particularity of Alferi’s ‘films parlants’: the spectator is offered no representation and no ‘récit’, but simply the rhythm of a thought.

The linguistic elements of the two works do not only differ in form (written and narrated text), they also differ slightly in content. The sections of the written text that are elided in the narration seem to bear certain identifiable characteristics. Firstly, they are often passages in which a lot of cinematic vocabulary is used, descriptions of the angle of a shot and the composition of the frame. Secondly, they often involve more detailed commentary on the shots or the action taking place. Thirdly, they tend to involve reference (direct or indirect) to Tom and Alice, the children in the boat. One fragment of text (from a much longer elided passage) reunites all of these elements: it captures the visual exchange between zoo animals and children, developing the impression of ‘flou réel’, ‘ni conscience ni inconscience’ characteristic of the visual zone that accompanies half-sleep:

L’un à l’autre vis-à-vis s’y cherche du regard, ne s’y reconnaît pas, voit pourtant quelque chose, médium diaphane, cône de buée, qui les lie de gré ou de force. C’était le raccord des plans américains de La Chouette, du Renard, de La Tortue avec les plans généraux où voguaient Tom et Alice, cette zone infilmable [...] La zone la plus fertile de la vie et la plus étouffée. (CF:224-5)

¹⁷⁵ Fiat, 2002:21.

In the ‘film parlant’, it is the free play set up between narration and image that constitutes the ‘zone infilmable’: it is the tension between what is seen and what is heard in which the ‘voice’ of the work exists. ‘[L]e raccord des plans’ is the rhythm created by the editing: the breaks between images constitute the rhythm of the thought, it is the spatial dynamism set up between them and perceptually *felt* by the spectator that bears meaning. As opposed to visualizing action, the way the images are used therefore ultimately *de*-visualizes it. As Alferi writes: ‘Inaperçu dans l’interstice de deux images planes, tout peut glisser être englouti’ (CF:224). The space that is left for the reader in the text (through the absence of images and the emphasis put on the movement of vision) is re-created in the ‘film parlant’ through the lack of descriptive narration. This is vital for the reactivation of the ‘voice’ integral to both, which, as discussed, is largely dependent on movement.

In *Le Cinéma des familles* the absence of visual images and the general resemblance of the text to what is usually described as ‘prose’ provoke a particular approach and encourage certain expectations from the reader. Yet traditional reading patterns are disrupted and purely linguistic analysis proves insufficient, for, as described above, the reader constantly falls back on what are in fact shots or sequences of images – a ‘gros-plan’, or a ‘fondu-enchaîné’ – either implicit in the movement between fragments of text or signalled explicitly as such. In the ‘film parlant’, on the other hand, it is the spectator who, caught in the constant re-looping of images, is led to ‘read’ them in accordance with the rhythm set up between them and the narration. Similar games concerning the expectations generated by the use of a particular ‘support’ are therefore instigated in both cases, and it is the way perceptual habit is disrupted in each that informs possible approaches to the other.

The word ‘cinematic’ is indeed in some ways better suited to the text than to the ‘film parlant’. To develop this idea it is worth turning to the chapter in *Le Cinéma des*

familles that corresponds to *La Protection des animaux*. The chapter that precedes it is entitled ‘La nuit du chasseur’, so the link with the film has already been made. In the second line, reference is made to ‘plan’: ‘j’ai vu se figer une image sous un angle aberrant, haute plongée biaise vers l’eau, qui me tordait la tête mais aplatisait le plan’: the narrator’s vision is described as a sequence of camera movements (CF:210). This immediately creates a tension between the active and the static, through the implication of the ‘existence’ of fixed images taken from the film referred to, and their subordination to the movement of the narrator’s thought. This ‘cinematic’ description both distances the viewer from the viewed (through the suggestion of a cinema screen) and draws the reader into the action of viewing by putting them within the eye of a camera. The use of the visual layout of words on the page reinforces this effect:

Elle veillait Tom, qui par intervalles la veillait,

Tom debout

Alice couchée

Tom couché

Alice assise

(CF:212)

Here, the fixed or repetitive nature of the children’s movement is reflected in the frame or rectangle created by the disposition of the text on the page. This visual structure sets up an internal dynamic through its visual unity: crossed with two diagonal lines, at the centre Tom and Alice are both simultaneously awake and asleep; the structure constitutes an almost diagrammatic reflection of the oscillation between these two possibilities that characterizes the text. The effect is that spatial elements of thought are engaged actively, they play a far more direct role than that required by, say, a metaphor. It is important to underline that this experience is not equivalent to following a scenario, for here images are in no way subordinated to words: it is cinematic in that the way the reader is made to visualize movement between shots ‘actively’ often informs his/her understanding of the action taking place. The reader is led constantly to reconsider what he/she has read in the light of the new image or shot invoked by the text, to question

who is speaking or seeing, who or what is seen. Images can therefore be seen to play no representational function within the text: it is film as a process, not as a receptacle or 'support' for the description or development of ideas, that is being drawn from, used to instigate a particular form of dialogue between reader and text, that instead of using film as a communicational medium, plays on the relation between rhythm, spatial awareness, expression and understanding. The text's recreation of the perceptual processes put into play by film directly draws out the extent to which reading 'in your head' involves the spatial navigation around words; bound (to return to Ellis) to tactile and kinaesthetic as well as auditory experience, a fundamental aspect of the process that is nonetheless quickly forgotten as reading becomes habitual.

The transposition of the canary from the text to the 'film parlant' has a similar effect. Here, the meaning of several written passages is rendered purely visual and synchronized with other parts of the (narrated) text to which it is relevant. In the text the canary appears twice: the first time it is mentioned it is the metonymic movement of the canary in its cage that is emphasized, the way it is seen silhouetted against the light (CF:220). The second sentence in which it appears is less visual but the rhythm is very strong, accentuated by the recurrent hard c's and proliferation of monosyllabic words: 'A terre un canari dans sa cage compterait les heures du sommeil mieux qu'un coucou ses douze coups' (CF:223). These passages capture the gradual breakdown of the barrier between the world of the children and that of the animals, and suggest the mixture of imagination and memory drawn in by the rhythm of the thought particular to the voice captured. In the 'film parlant' the physical rhythm of the canary's movement and its two-dimensional appearance capture the movement of the mind unguided, as though in a dream: thought is liberated from the arbitrary conceptual impositions (the coucou's 'douze coups') of adult life. The canary is not mentioned by the narrator, yet it appears more frequently, and indeed, much earlier than in the written text. The first time the

image is seen it is accompanied by the following fragment of the narration: ‘...figurant quoi? La merveille faisait dissonance, mondes coupés des autres...’ (PA, CF:216). The second time it is seen the same image is inserted between shots of the other animals that appear in quick succession, creating a rhythm that begins accompanied by the line: ‘-deux plans dans la truca grippée de ma cervelle se sont raccordés’ (PA, CF:225). The foreignness of the image, that appears suddenly, disrupting the sequence of animals from the riverbank, is integral to the power of fascination it exerts; just as the unrecognizable words that appear in the text jolt the reader and make him/her read differently, the sudden, unexpected presence of the canary in the ‘film parlant’ makes the spectator question the supposed link between narration and images. This evokes Alferi’s conception of the ‘décollement de la perception’ that can characterize both dream sequences and those created within films, involving: ‘le double mouvement de déréalisation et de surréalisation dans l’image et le son’ which is, according to him ‘d’abord le mouvement même du cinéma suivi dans son effet intime’ (EM:227). The use of the canary in both works exemplifies how the functioning of visual and linguistic images is questioned in both works with neither following patterns that conform to the reader/spectator’s expectations.

The use of capitalization in the text and the way this use of typography is reflected in the ‘film parlant’ is indicative of the particular way Alferi upsets traditional modes of reference within narrative. In the text the name of each animal and the article that precedes it are capitalized (‘Le Crapaud’, ‘Le Renard’ and so on). This prevents generalization from the particular animal mentioned to its species: restricting each animal’s ‘existence’ to the text. They are necessarily singular, not humanized or personified however, but rather ‘ontologically sanitized’: their existence within the text is both absolute and entirely restricted to it. The use of the images that correspond to them, taken from the film, stands in for this use of typography: caught in black and

white and condemned to the repetition of the same movements, the animals become ‘figurants’ of memory: they are disconnected from general terms such as ‘owl’ or ‘fox’. The disruption brought about in the reader/spectator’s approach to what they read or see is therefore in both cases fundamentally bound to language, and their expectations regarding words’ power to designate. It is following the semantic decomposition and phonetic distension of both the French and English names for the animals in a passage that occurs in both works that the synchronization of names and animals is most fully disrupted (‘chouette chevêche chouetchevêche chouetchevéchette | ouhibou hibouhi bouhouuu owowl’ and so on) (CF:222). In the text, the capital letters disappear and the reader stumbles through semi-recognizable words whose phonetic qualities evoke both the names of the animals and the sounds they make. The corresponding narration is shorter than the text, but its phonetic quality is intensified by the narrator’s modulation of his voice. It is also significant that in the film the animals appear before they are named. Their names do indeed become simultaneous with their respective images (first the toad, whose image is the first to appear synchronized with his name: ‘Le crapaud n’a pu être détourné sans son rocher’ (PA, CF:217)) but later in the film the synchronization is disrupted again for as the children pass through the spider’s web, the net of reference is again broken. What is first seen is then named, but the dominating rhythm of the thought renders these names arbitrary and finally they are discarded. This movement of rejection is also one of liberation and advancement, and it is fundamental to the creative act which, for Alferi (as discussed earlier) involves pushing back all known frames of reference and following a ‘pressentiment’ beyond (CP:48). What is striking about this section of both works is that it is the identifiability of both the children and the animals that is lost in the wake of this breakdown of language: ‘Confusion alors, confusion. Les bêtes et Tom Alice se surimprimèrent pour moi, se fondirent enchaînés’ (CF:225). Following the rhythm of the thought has led to the

breakdown of the ordinary designatory power of words and the one-one naming relationship implied by it: to the creation of new links between aspects of the experience captured in which there is no hierarchy of sound, image or sense, and (most importantly) no clear split between subjective and objective reality.

The comparative study of the way the two works function underlines the shared dynamic that runs through them. The co-existence of the two works is therefore significant in that it represents neither a negation of literary form nor a negation of the cinematic process. Instead, it clarifies Alferi's conception of voice as the principal characteristic of literary texts. Alferi writes: '[à] l'expérience qui n'en connut pas d'autre la phrase impose une forme' and the unity that results from this is what allows the finalized work to transcend any specific spatio-temporal setting (whether imagined or real) (CP:41). The appropriation and subversion of language by the children in *Le Cinéma des familles* reflects the permanent reconstruction of the world that characterizes thought. It is the free play instigated in thought between perception, imagination and memory captured again, though differently, in *La Protection des animaux* that marks out the particularity of human experience and the constantly shifting individuality of each person – the continuous modification of the 'voice' that is the singular, dynamic expression of one mind.

The way Alferi enlarges the concept of poetic 'material' brings out the fundamental significance of the poetic act as a reinvention of the link between self and world through the subversion of communicational norms. He writes: 'La possibilité d'une phrase consiste seulement dans le mouvement de sa recherche; c'est en cela qu'elle constitue une pensée' (CP:48). The poetic act, then, is conceived to be equivalent to the emission of a voice: to the act of enunciation and it is, as such, very much an act in the world. It does not, however, involve the subjective description of 'private' experience through the exploitation of 'public' language. Instead, it overcomes

the distinction set up between the two by appealing to the constantly renewed relations that are instigated between them in the action of thought. By transcending this distinction, the traditional hierarchization of mind (or sense) over body (or physical sensation) is not inverted, but bypassed. The movement away from ordinary communicational models and literary forms is not a negation of them; it is inherent in the attempt to capture the actual experience of thought. As Hans Joas writes: ‘it is only in our utterances and our actions that we realize our own potentiality’.¹⁷⁶ Edelman’s suggestion that consciousness does not imply one single centre of supervision in the brain but simply the constant modification and development of existing neural circuits is relevant here. He suggests that the brain works largely through association, for it possesses what he calls pre-metaphoric capacities which means that it can work by recognizing structures before it is even capable of using language; consciousness therefore primarily involves the constant aim for and movement towards greater coherence and unity.¹⁷⁷ This highlights the importance of the fact that Alferi does not aim to synthesize conscious phenomena: his focus is on the action of thought: on movement, not representation.

* * *

To conclude, both Alferi’s and Novarina’s work liberates language from communicational norms and thus manifests the way in which the poetic act can open up new linguistic potential by widening the ‘space’ of human expression. Their creative approaches draw directly on the bond that exists between perception and language use, and the aim here has been to emphasize the fact that their exploration of this connection is fundamental to the poetic nature of their work. The potential transgression of the subject-object divide referred to frequently in the course of these chapters on ‘pensée-

¹⁷⁶ Joas, 1996:81.

¹⁷⁷ See Edelman, 2004.

voix' will recur in the following (and final) Part, in which I turn to the concept of 'pensée-toucher', concentrating on the work of Tarkos and Novarina.

PART III

PENSÉE-TOUCHER

INTRODUCTION

The concept ‘pensée-toucher’ has deliberately been left until last, for it extends several ideas that have arisen in the context of ‘pensée-vue’ and ‘pensée-voix’. Touch is a sense rarely alluded to or drawn from in relation to literary texts, and it is therefore necessary to consider the word ‘toucher’ in some depth.¹⁷⁸ The French verb ‘toucher’ (from which the English verb ‘to touch’ originates) stems from the Latin verb ‘tocare’, meaning ‘to tap against’ or ‘knock’. This verb gained primacy over the verb ‘tangere’ (also ‘to touch’) when assimilated into the Romance languages due to its onomatopoeic qualities. The first definition of the French verb (in which an association is made with the verbs ‘palper’ ‘manier’ ‘tâter’ ‘effleurer’ and ‘atteindre’) is preceded by the following specification: ‘Entrer en contact, avec mouvement’. The second definition is preceded by the following words: ‘Sans mouvement’. The first part of the definition reads as follows: ‘Se trouver en contact avec; être tout proche de, jouxter’. The second: ‘Qui touche une surface – tangent, avoir un rapport avec’. When followed by the preposition ‘à’ the verb retains the same two levels of meaning, but it is more abstract. The first definition is: ‘Porter la main sur, pour prendre, utiliser’ (‘aborder’ and ‘entamer’ are two verbs associated with it). The second is: ‘Etre en contact avec, concerner’. The noun ‘toucher’ is defined as follows: firstly, as ‘un des cinq sens, correspondant à la sensibilité cutanée qui intervient dans l’exploration des objets par palpation (tact)’; secondly as ‘action ou manière de toucher’; and thirdly as ‘qualité que présente un corps pour la main qui le touche’.

The concept ‘pensée-toucher’ proposed here exploits both the active and the passive or non-actional meanings of verb and noun. In relation to thought, touch, on the

¹⁷⁸ All of the following definitions are taken from the Petit Robert, 1993.

passive level, corresponds with the sense we have of being (physically) in the world. One word that can be associated with this experience is proprioception. This particular sense is bound to our fundamental physical structure: to our muscles, ligaments, bones and skin. As the element ‘proprio’ suggests, it cannot be shared and nor can it be simulated. Far from bearing merely on our ability to move, this primary sense is also generally recognized to be vital to our ability to perceive things in the world, to interact with them and hence to think about and conceptualize our experience. As Gallagher writes:

At the time of our birth, our human capacities for perception and behaviour have already been shaped by our movement. Prenatal bodily movement has already been organized along the lines of our own human shape, in proprioceptive and cross-modal registrations, in ways that provide a capacity for experiencing a basic distinction between our own embodied existence and everything else.¹⁷⁹

Indeed, the psychoanalyst Anzieu draws from Henri Wallon’s observation that it is the skin that is ‘le siège des sensations proprioceptives’ in the development of his concept of the ‘Moi-peau’, a concept which stresses the importance of the physical sense we have of ourselves ‘in the world’ to our physical and psychological development and corresponding ability to function ‘normally’ as human beings.¹⁸⁰ The fact that we experience proprioception primarily via the skin brings out the relation that binds this sense with that of touch.¹⁸¹

To clarify the nature of this relation, the skin is the first sensory organ to develop in the embryo, followed by the olfactory, gustatory, auditive and visual organs

¹⁷⁹ Gallagher, 2006:1.

¹⁸⁰ The concept of the ‘Moi-peau’ was intended to suggest that it is the development of this sense of oneself as a physically autonomous individual that is necessary for healthy development. The development of the metaphorical ‘Moi-peau’ involves the transformation of tactile experience that allows the individual to move on to a different system of functioning whereby what Anzieu calls the ‘Moi-psychique’ and the ‘Moi-corporel’ are separated (see Anzieu, 1995:26). This is not the place for an analysis of the psychological aptness of his concept, but his observations concerning the nature and significance of tactile experience are relevant. Here, I will simply draw from the latter, because, as discussed in the general introduction, to adopt a psychoanalytical approach in the context of this work would be to defeat the aim of the development of the three concepts.

¹⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty’s observation that ‘le corps sent le monde en se sentant’ comes to mind here (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:158).

respectively, and it is through the skin that we develop a sense of our bodies as autonomous. Touch and proprioception are closely bound due to the way we develop in the womb, although we pay less and less attention to either as our other senses (in particular vision and hearing) develop.¹⁸² The fact that this primacy of the skin is often overlooked or ignored is partly responsible for the conceptual misunderstanding that equates the idea of ‘skin’ uniquely with that of ‘surface’ (impregnable and without depth). Gabriel Josipovici reinforces this point, when, in a recent book devoted to touch in the context of art, he compares this often ignored sense to tradition, suggesting that both designate ‘an unconscious set of habits and practices which allows us to function and which only reveals itself as the vital thing it is when we suddenly feel ourselves deprived of it’.¹⁸³ In accordance with the passive or inactional meanings of the word ‘toucher’, the concept of ‘pensée-toucher’ is therefore intended to refer to thought that draws directly from attentiveness to this sense of being, physically, in the world. Such thought implies the suspension of ordinary perceptual habits that tend to short-circuit perceptual experiences in accordance with the (by nature discriminatory) way we have learnt to perceive.

In Tarkos’s and Novarina’s work, this particular form of thought is regularly suggested to be vital to the first stage of the creative act. In Tarkos’s work, the words ‘flottement’ and ‘suspension’ often signal a reference to this particular form of attentiveness to ‘being’ that is necessarily accompanied by the active rejection of habitual modes of thought. Novarina states, in a similar vein, that ‘[c]’est par une table rase totale que ça commence. Il faut commencer par renoncer à toutes les figures humaines’.¹⁸⁴ The approach implied does not involve construction on the ‘known’ or

¹⁸² See Cassam, 1997:62, for a particularly relevant discussion of the extent to which proprioception is a prerequisite for tactile perception.

¹⁸³ Josipovici, 1996:112.

¹⁸⁴ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:103.

‘given’, or even the consolidation of the latter, but rather a release or opening, towards the ambiguity of what just is.

To turn to the active meanings of the word ‘toucher’ and the relation they have to the concept developed here, it is worth considering the nature and function of the skin in greater depth. To draw again from Anzieu, he stresses the fact that the skin, due to both its structure and its multiple functions, can neither be considered a mere envelope, nor a single organ, for, at the very least, it is ‘un ensemble d’organes différents’.¹⁸⁵ The skin breathes, secretes, excretes, stimulates circulation and digestion and it is directly connected to all of the other senses. What is more, as Montagu points out, a strikingly large proportion of the brain is devoted to tactile experience.¹⁸⁶ The skin is also aware of both time and space – less acutely than the ear or eye, but it alone combines these dimensions experientially. It is in fact better at estimating distances than the ear and it reacts to diverse stimuli: the alphabet, for example, can be taught via the application of electric impulses. What is particularly relevant here is that, as Anzieu points out, the skin is ‘le premier organe de l’échange signifiant; échopraxies et écholalies ne trouvent à se développer que sur un fond originaire d’échorythmies, d’échothermies, d’échotactilismes’.¹⁸⁷ The skin is hence the primary medium through which communication passes, and this particular form of exchange never fades out completely: ‘Cette communication échotactile subsiste comme source sémiotique originaire. Elle redevient active dans l’empathie, le travail créateur, l’allergie, l’amour’.¹⁸⁸ These last observations underline the fact that touch as an activity is in no way restricted to the act of reaching out with the hand to make contact with the surface of a given object. What is fundamental to it is the setting up of a new relation or circuit. Touch is vital to the development of connections between self and world and to our understanding of these

¹⁸⁵ Anzieu, 1995:35.

¹⁸⁶ Montagu, 1978:14.

¹⁸⁷ Anzieu, 1995:177.

¹⁸⁸ Anzieu, 1995:78.

connections and it is the significance of such pattern-making through contact that is reflected by the active definition of the word ‘toucher’ within the concept developed here.

To return to Tarkos and Novarina, this aspect of touch is also reflected in their work, corresponding to a later stage in the creative act. The attainment of this stage is dependent on the first. It involves the occurrence of a movement or change in the way things are experienced that brings about a new pattern or circuit that, retrospectively perceived, bears new meaning. As Novarina writes: ‘Tous les exercices préparent à ce moment où l’écriture est auriculaire, tactile. Elle devient un exercice du toucher’.¹⁸⁹ Tarkos refers to this stage as involving a sudden, un-analysable ‘saisissement’. It is important to note that the modification or process that leads to the creation of a new pattern remains un-analysable. However, it is in this pattern-formation that both the novelty and the sense of the text lie.¹⁹⁰

The merging of active and passive in the word ‘toucher’ suggests the transitional nature of both the activity and the concept of touch. Our experience of it varies; it can be active or passive, conscious or unconscious. This is not only reflected by our physical experience, it is also evident in our extremely common figurative appeals to the notion of touch. Figurative expressions that draw from tactile experience are widespread in both English and French, whether they capture emotional states, intellectual endeavour, attitudes, behaviour, psychological states or any other aspect of thought or experience.¹⁹¹ Examples are endless, suggesting the breadth of figurative uses the concept of touch is put to and the correspondingly ‘malleable’ nature of the word.

¹⁸⁹ Novarina in Costaz, 2001:100.

¹⁹⁰ These ideas will be developed further in the course of the following chapters.

¹⁹¹ It is indeed worth noting that the word touch has the longest definition of any word in the *OED* and one of the longest in the *Robert*.

The suggestion that the poetic approach of these two authors involves particular attentiveness to both the active and passive experience of touch indicates the extent to which their work involves the exploration of boundaries traditionally set up between mental and physical, interior and exterior, experience and meaning. I will therefore suggest that the appeal to the experience of touch marks the exploration of a boundary. This boundary is the point at which the mental and the physical blur, a boundary that is constantly modified in accordance with both our changing environment and our awareness of ourselves in it. Concentration on the most primary (and multifunctional) of all the senses can hence be summarized as an exploration of what I will call the ‘boundary of sense’. This terminology is intended to reunite the two relevant applications of the concept ‘pensée-toucher’ discussed here by drawing directly from the fact that the word ‘sense’ can be used either in a way similar to ‘sensation’ or with a meaning closer to ‘knowledge based on instinct’ for these two possibilities indicate the merging of thought and physical experience.¹⁹²

In order to clarify the nature of the ‘exploration’ referred to above, and to reinforce the unsuitability of the equation of the two concepts ‘skin’ and ‘surface’, it is worth considering the nature of the boundary. To become aware of a border is to discover a boundary: the limit of something known. The discovery of a boundary hence entails the (actual as opposed to virtual) possibility of a beyond, and modifies perception in a way that accommodates this possibility. The knowledge attained when a

¹⁹² It is important to mention that the connection I make between the concept of touch and what I have called the boundary of sense purposefully does not assimilate the body (or corporeality in general) with what Prigent, following Nancy, has called ‘l’insensé’ (Prigent, 2000:35). Although Nancy appeals to the concept of touch both directly and indirectly throughout his work, he never defines it, and although this choice may well be important to his particular philosophical approach (as suggested by Ian James), the lack of clarity that results leaves both it and his own position concerning mind-body dualism largely open to interpretation. To appeal to his use of it in relation to his equally broad conception of ‘sens’ could therefore (in the context of this piece of work, which aims to suggest that these poets transcend such dualisms) lead to conceptual confusion and hence to the devalorisation of the poetry studied. Another reason for avoiding such discourses is the negative terminology that often accompanies them. Prigent again provides examples when, in the context of contemporary writers including Tarkos, he speaks of ‘la violence insensée de l’expérience’ and the importance of ‘la conscience du négatif’ in their work (Prigent, 2000:29, 62). Here, I hope to suggest the redundancy of such negative discourse in the context of poetic approaches such as those studied here which are, I will argue, fundamentally affirmative.

boundary is discovered nonetheless remains primarily knowledge of the ‘thing’ the limitations of which one has reached. This knowledge is in part a sense of the wholeness and individuality of that thing, for by enabling the perceiver to draw on spatial and tactile information that was previously unavailable – or that was in some way present but incompletely known – it allows him/her to ‘hold’ the object mentally in a new way. These observations underline the fact that the exploration of a boundary or border is in no way equivalent to posing limits or drawing sharp lines between interior and exterior or even between different forms of experience. The aspect of exploration and discovery involved implies the opposite. To clarify this idea it is worth considering cartography. Borders drawn between countries on maps are imposed and are hence fundamentally ‘virtual’; the experience the individual may have of those often invisible borders when walking in no way resembles their appearance as lines on the surface of a page. Cartography is on one level a form of conceptual imposition. The distance between maps and what they represent is thus comparable to the distance that results from the imposition of conceptual lines between mind and body, self and world.¹⁹³ The suggestion here is that these poets, by concentrating on the boundary of sense in and for itself *as they experience it*, succeed in drawing from its very ambiguity in a way that highlights the richness of an approach to the question of being that does not start from outside experience (to continue with the map analogy, from a bird’s eye view) but from within it.¹⁹⁴ The creative approaches focused on here not only indicate new potential

¹⁹³ This reinforces the objection to the use of the concept of the skin as a dimensionless separating line.

¹⁹⁴ The need to reject the concept of the horizon will re-surface. To indicate briefly what will be discussed in depth later on (in particular in Chapter 6 devoted to Novarina), the metaphorical use of the concept of the horizon entails a particular structuring of reality: it involves the situation of a subject as the centre of an organisation of perceptual profiles (and hence the imposition or assumption of defined spatial and temporal limits). Such application of the concept of the horizon is hence bound to the connection made between identity and spatio-temporal continuity. In accordance with the present discussion of boundaries, I will suggest the suitability of an appeal to a vertical scale as opposed to a horizontal scale due to the particular dynamic central to the works studied here. This will underline the idea that the poetic exploration involved works against traditionally functioning chronological frameworks and that the creativity involved does not involve a traceable linear development but rather a non-linear transformation of what ‘is’. As mentioned in the General Introduction Collot is one author who has written extensively about the concept of the horizon in relation to a wide range of twentieth century authors. My aim is in no way to suggest the fallibility of his theories, on the contrary (as the discussion of his approach in the

within poetry, they also gesture towards a new approach to questions concerning the connections between experience and knowledge, self and world.

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTOPHE TARKOS: SUBSTANCE AND SELF

L'usage de prendre des mots pour des allumettes jette un mauvais sort. (S:36)

References to Tarkos have been made in the course of the preceding chapters, and his manipulation of visual material and the emphasis he puts on voice are indeed vital aspects of his approach. Here, however, the focus will be different. Section i will centre on his conception of language as a substance and the relation this has with his conception of the subject focusing on his most theoretical text *Le Signe=* and *Donne* (Book III of *Ma langue*). In Section ii I will concentrate primarily on Tarkos's last text *Anachronisme*, in order to consider the transformational nature of creative language use.

Section i: LANGUAGE, SUBSTANCE AND SUBJECT

Tarkos draws from the experience of touch directly in the context of the relationship between the poet and the material at his disposal: language. For him, both writing and speaking involve touching, piercing and shaping the formless mass ('pâte') of language. Within his poetic approach language is not conceived of as an ordered set of lego-block-like linguistic items, nor as purely organic, but rather as a substance that we hold; a substance that we are capable of flattening out and moulding in accordance with the particular pressure of our own experience.¹⁹⁵ For Tarkos, creativity within language

¹⁹⁵ This idea of flattening out will recur in this chapter, and it is therefore necessary to define it briefly. This notion is firstly intended to suggest the physical pressure of hands on the surface of a malleable

necessitates such initial flattening out, for it entails working against previously existing forms or structures: the poet must knead the 'pâte' until it becomes warm again between his or her hands. Poetic creativity does not therefore involve a return to some pure pre-babelian form of language; the poet must draw from his own experience of the world and the relation this has (or could have) to the language we learn how to use in order to describe it. Such creativity requires power over language, but also a new approach to it that involves considering it not as something distinct from experience but as part of it. The poetic act involves the modification of the poet's awareness of his physical presence in the world. Attentiveness to the 'sense' of being, that is generally acknowledged to precede self-consciousness and linguistic ability in the development of any human being, is part of the procedure necessary if the conceptual frame that habitually guides our perception is to be transcended. The rejection of pre-existing structures and tools is what gives the poet's hands new freedom to mould the 'pâte' of language in accordance with the particular sense he has of his own presence in the world.

This aspect of Tarkos's poetic approach suggests that the relation that exists between language and the poet is double-sided. On the one hand, language is conceived of as a closed system due to its function as a public means of expression and communication. However, it depends on use for its survival and hence although closed (in the sense outlined above) it is extendable. The changes that occur within it ordinarily reflect the development of what we know and of what we are capable of imagining, but due to the importance given to it as a truth-bearing medium in its own right, these changes often occur within it through a process of conceptual extrapolation, the result being that the evolution of new linguistic terms and structures often has a distancing effect: the things or feelings supposedly captured by such modifications becoming

object. Secondly it is intended to suggest the conceptual flattening out that occurs when existing linguistic structures are undermined or overridden.

more, rather than less removed from our actual experience of them. This, then, defines the poet's task: although he cannot change language, he can flatten it out, or rather burst it like a balloon so that, grounded, it is within reach – back on the level of immediate experience.

Le Signe is Tarkos's most theoretical work, and its appearance in 1999 marks a turning point in Tarkos's development as a poet, for here he develops various ideas that are latent in recurrent words such as 'pâte' and 'poussée' that recur throughout his texts. Thought, sensation and movement are the principal themes of this text in which Tarkos develops his conception of the relation between language and experience. He writes: 'la pâte mot repose sur l'élasticité du des sensations, sur une seule couche d'existence, sur une modification d'appréhension' (S:35). Here the juxtaposition of the words 'du' and 'des' signifies the simultaneous presence and absence of a singular noun. This potential noun is suggested recurrently throughout Tarkos's work through various unusual linguistic constructions, as will be discussed in much greater depth shortly. Here, it suffices to indicate that this word is by nature unutterable, although it is nonetheless 'pronounced' even if this pronunciation is no more than the contraction at the back of the reader's throat as he/she stumbles from syllable to syllable (as here): the word hence hovers between the physical and the non-physical, between physical sensation and potential linguistic meaning. Only thought as 'poussée' is capable of capturing sense, or 'la vérité': 'le sens [...] n'a pas de mots, il y a le sens qui pousse, qui s'attache à la poussée', a phrase that immediately evokes Alferi's statement that: 'l'instauration de la phrase est la phrase' (S:28 and CP:35). The idea expressed by Tarkos in the former quotation is illustrated directly in his text *Le Bâton*. This short work involves the attempt to create an exhaustive description of a 'bâton' through reference only to itself. The attempt fails: in the absence of any reference to its physical surroundings or to a possible perceiver the materiality of the object is lost. Paradoxically, in view of the

seemingly overtly physicalist drive of the text, the ‘bâton’ hence becomes a poetic object *par excellence*: a virtual object that only exists in the phonetic texture of the poem. The identity relation presumed to hold between word and physical object is lost: the new (virtual) object created belongs in the substance of language, and, more precisely, in language as used by the poet.¹⁹⁶ This text hence involves a play on the simultaneous limitlessness and ‘closedness’ of language. Formal games such as that exemplified by *Le Bâton* clarify Tarkos’s ideas concerning language, but they only actualize one aspect of his approach. To return to *Le Signe=*, here he expresses the desire to capture the experience of ‘being’ in the world: ‘être immédiatement [...] le sentiment se promenant, se disant, sans attendre, sans chercher, sans aller, se promenant, se disant’ (S:115). Within his poetic approach language is to be subordinated to awareness of the grain of being. Words are only to be used insofar as they are inherent in, or appear necessary to the development of, an experience. In the above quotation the verbs ‘se promenant’ and ‘se disant’ suggest rhythm and enunciation: the emphasis is neither on the direction taken by the subject nor on what is being said: it is on the fact of ‘being’, physically, in the world. For Tarkos, the poetic act is primarily an affirmation of presence.

Initial support for this idea can be drawn from *Le Signe=*, for, despite the theoretical nature of this text, both its linguistic composition and its appearance directly reflect the ideas it turns upon. On the first page, the following line appears in the centre of the page: ‘le signifiant = le signifié’. On the next, only the sign ‘=’ is present,

¹⁹⁶ In order to suggest the wider significance of the point Tarkos is making here, it is worth mentioning Max Black’s argument against the theory of the identity of indiscernibles here. This theory (elaborated primarily by Baruch Brody) aimed to disprove the assumption that the truth conditions of claims concerning identity vary as the entity varies. He suggested that naming an object is more or less sufficient for it to be identifiable throughout a given period: it must simply fit under the same sortal predicate at different times. Black’s counterexample proposed a universe in which two identical spheres are suspended in space. In such a universe neither sphere can be described in a way that distinguishes it from the other unless a radical change occurs in the universe such as the introduction of a spectator who could appeal to his own sense of right and left (Black, 1964:153-64). One immediate objection to this that seems to be directly relevant to the upshot of Tarkos’s poem, is that perhaps a spectator should always be assumed in the context of such questions, for metaphysics, like language, both stems from and concerns *our* knowledge of the world.

complemented, on the right hand page, with the following words disposed vertically in a straight line down it: ‘distance’ ‘distant’ ‘la distance’ ‘distendu’ ‘le distant’ ‘un peu de distance’ ‘un distant’ ‘de la distance’ ‘distancée’ ‘distendue’ ‘une distance’ ‘sa distance’ (S:7, 8 and 9). The subject of the text is hence *posed*, in every sense of the word. In general, full stops are rarely employed within the text, and the text unfolds – unstoppable – working through repetition, looping and accumulation. The passage entitled ‘La Bouillie’ for example begins:

Le fait est des faits liés entre nous, entre les uns et les autres, entre deux, entre trois, entre cinq, le fait lié à ce qui fait les liens qui restent aux liens, qui reste en suspension, qui est toujours en suspension au-dessus et au-dessous du parlé, les relations sont mélangées sont des mélanges ne sont pas brouillées [...]. (S:51)

The result is both dense and dynamic: within the text language becomes tangible, like the substance Tarkos states it to be. Here, as throughout his work, it is in the lines or creases that disrupt the surface of the deflated ‘sac’ of language that the backbone of his approach can be perceived most clearly.¹⁹⁷ This simultaneously phonetic, visual and semantic topography of lines and bumps that marks the reader’s passage through the text is perhaps analogous to the ultimate expression of Tarkos’s conception of the poetic act. The exploitation of pagination and typography in evidence here characterizes all of his work, serving to mark the movement of the poet’s fingers (mental and physical) around the ‘pâte’ of language. Both the words and the blank space of the page are moulded in accordance with the experience or idea being developed. Tarkos’s use of repetition for example (taken furthest in *Caisses*) is hence significant on several different levels, for it indicates not only the manipulation of the sense of a given word, but also the shaping of the phonetic qualities of language and the repeated pressure of the poet’s fingers on the visible surface of the page.

¹⁹⁷ The work ‘sac’ recurs throughout Tarkos’s work. It will be discussed in greater depth later on in relation to *Ma langue*.

Many of Tarkos's texts make the reader feel that he/she is stumbling physically into and over words. *Donne* (Book III of *Ma Langue*), a text that is prefigured by the passage beginning 'Op op je te donne' in *Oui*, provides a particularly striking example of this (O:27). This text is composed of a series of passages, each (excepting the last) made up of fifteen lines. Only the first word is capitalized, and no full stops are used. Commas are employed, but only ever within individual lines. One passage, to which I will refer back in my linguistic analysis of the text, is presented as follows:

passant par toi, je avec toi de ma toujours vérité
pour qui tout ainsi ne se perde perdu, t'en souviens
n'en sais tu tu l'as su étais en vie le il que j'en donne
le tien, moi non plus je vis avec si ce sera le manque
de rien est à moi toi vu de te vivre donnerais
je sommes-nous donnés vus donner dès que tu l'aurais
m'est un peu vrai le peu de tu le cœur de tu j'étais perdant
envie de ta chaleur tu ce le toi prends sera toujours veux-tu
je il me le destin destine pourquoi je sais de cela toi
j'ai est donné, l'accordant prends, j'ai la nouveauté diras
vu et pour le vrai et par donne et par le plus
pourtant nous donne le sais que je donne pour le ainsi
besoin est, ton veux, ai donné en a plaisir
tu m'a la marque voilà, oui, toi s'est passé donné
fort était le demandé, jour, le tu ne m'as jamais attaché (MLIII :11)

One of the most striking aspects of the above passage, and indeed of the text as a whole, is Tarkos's unusual use of pronouns and articles, for these abound, occurring unexpectedly, and generally situated contrary to traditional grammatical rules. Reading the poem at speed and out loud brings out the strength of its construction, and only then can the full physicality – and beauty – of the text be experienced. Part of its meaning is felt, it occurs in the throat as the reader progresses from syllable to syllable. The sensation of phonetic thickness and the impression of a mesh (as opposed to a layering) of sense is partly generated by the merging of three voices within the text. Tarkos (like Alferi in *Fmn*, *La Voie des airs* and *Sentimentale journée*) draws here from (to use Barthes's terminology) the 'discours amoureux': a form of communication supposedly both intense or complete – capable of blurring the boundary between self and other, and

yet also capable of provoking a sudden awareness of the distancing nature of language: a 'discours' that is ultimately, then, (to turn again to Barthes) 'd'une extrême solitude'.¹⁹⁸ In *Donne*, a 'je', a 'tu' and an 'il' appear, but the thoughts or actions referred to fail to clarify the nature and role of the possible individuals referred to. The text does therefore seem to concern some kind of a relationship, and indeed, some form of communication, but its phonetic, syntactic and semantic density is more suggestive of a monologue than of a conversation. The pronoun 'le' that occurs in the first line of the text ('je veux le perdre') recurs throughout the ensuing passages; it is given to, taken from, forced upon, possessed and refused by the 'je' and the 'tu' alternately, despite the fact that it is at no point attached to any 'definite' object. In the first passage the only masculine nouns that appear are 'désir' and 'besoin', but the word 'amour' appears later on, reuniting, in a way, the restricted number of nouns that occur in the text as a whole, for those that recur most often include 'plaisir', 'accord', 'envie', 'vie', 'cœur', 'nouveau', 'odeur' and 'coup'. The upshot of the ambiguity of the 'le' is that the text fuses around something that always lies just ahead of reference, but that nonetheless remains almost relentlessly present. The unexpected occurrence of the word 'le' also constitutes a vital part of the reader's experience of the text for it breaks into the flow of his/her reading pattern. The phonetic aspect of this effect is intensified by the proliferation of monosyllabic pronouns exemplified in the passage quoted above (the repetition of 'tu' in line three for example) for the reader is forced to stutter and stammer his/her way through the text, falling phonetically over consonants.

To turn back to the possible object referred to by the recurrent 'le', the semantic strength of the word 'amour' that suggests its suitability as a unifying concept

¹⁹⁸ Barthes, 1977:5.

It is also worth noting the following comment Barthes makes in the foreword to this text: 'Ce discours est peut-être parlé par des milliers de sujets (qui le sait?), mais il n'est soutenu par personne; il est complètement abandonné des langages environnants: ou ignoré, ou déprécié, ou moqué par eux, coupé non seulement du pouvoir, mais aussi de ses mécanismes (sciences, savoirs, arts). Lorsqu'un discours est de la sorte entraîné par sa propre force dans la dérive de l'inactuel, déporté hors de toute généralité, il ne lui reste plus qu'à être le lieu, si exigü soit-il, d'une affirmation' (Barthes, 1977:5).

reinforces the idea that the difficulty involved in distinguishing two clear-cut individuals from each other (despite the 'je' and the 'tu') implies a union, and what is more, a union that occurs in the substance of language itself. This directly reflects Tarkos's belief that the reconciliation of the different aspects of our experience can only occur through the poetic act. It also suggests the double nature of the poem that can be seen both as a reflection on the relationship between poetry and language as we use it, and as a meditation on the relationship between the poet's experience and the world. The peculiar line 'la pâte mot repose sur l'élasticité du des sensations' cited earlier reinforces this reading, for here the singular noun that could be expected to follow 'du' is absent; it is as if the singularity of the poetic act can only be captured through reference to the dynamism and multifaceted nature of the poet's experience, experience that is (retrospectively) unified within it. A line that occurs in *Oui*, in a passage which concerns the act of writing, backs up this broad interpretation: 'ça a une forme c'est la forme que donne l'ensemble parce que c'est ensemble formé par le on pourrait dire que ça va ensemble' (O:78). Here, the absence of a noun after the 'le' throws the reader back to the word 'ensemble' due to the tight lexical restriction of the passage, hence suggesting both the infinite meaning held by this unnameable and yet phonetically tangible concept, and the simultaneous necessity and ambiguity of the 'relations' integral to it. Given the absence of any named or described individual in *Donne*, this supports the suggestion that this text is primarily a reflection on the poetic act. One idea implied by this reading is that the text is concerned with the illusory nature of communication and exchange, for within it language appears to turn in on itself, absorbing and negating the individuality of its user and the object of his speech. The suggestion may hence be that the concepts of self and other are written into language, permanently implied by the simplest construction, this being the reason that they have come to be primarily defined by it, as opposed to being defined by the nature of the

particular awareness of the other that gave rise to their development (and their necessity) in the first place. The elusive pronoun could thus be taken, on one level, to present the possibility of actual contact or exchange, a possibility taken to exist outside the realm of designation and definition, a point of intersubjectivity, as it were, that transcends the arbitrary nature of communication.

Tarkos's unusual use, and occasional ellipsis of personal pronouns supports this idea, for although such pronouns are not common, they are occasionally used, applied or replaced in a way that upsets the reader's understanding of the relations suggested by the text. To turn back to the passage quoted above, the phrase 'le cœur de tu' immediately stands out. This formulation suggests that at this point in the text the person referred to by the word 'tu' only exists within the enunciation of the speaker, as a part of his speech act or as a result of his use of language. '[L]e cœur' could hence belong to either the speaker or the 'tu'; it becomes the point of contact prior to speech; prior to the necessary but distancing personal pronoun. As the narrator says at the end of the passage: 'le tu ne m'a jamais attaché'. The formulation 'ton veux' has a similar effect; here the verb 'veux' could be attached to the 'je' or to the 'tu' that precedes it. Here, the idea seems to be that the other is assimilated to an action or activity that simultaneously characterizes the narrator's own thought. The process or event that has occurred, and that is perhaps still occurring, entails a transformation of the subject: as his thought process touches the other, the self is left behind. His conscious state, in which this modification takes place, is reflected directly in the rhythmic movement between active and passive that marks the text; the poet's direction of his awareness to this modification is neither analytic nor critical, and it is this form of awareness that both allows the state to evolve and makes it meaningful. The conscious distance he maintains from it is necessary to allow him to witness and encourage its development, and it also provides the space necessary for language to be incorporated in the process:

for linguistic fragments to circulate unhindered. To summarize, in the light of the ‘je’ and the ‘tu’ present in this text, it seems that here Tarkos aims to transgress the subject-object divide as it exists as a function of speech acts (implied and imposed by language), in order to insist on the possibility of the point of contact or union at which ‘je’ and ‘tu’ become interchangeable (or, in other words, undergo referential failure). The drive to set such a process in motion does not manifest a desire to *escape* language, but marks the intention to mould it; to make it bear the imprint of the narrator’s movement towards the other in thought. The stumbling block presented by the recurrent pronoun does not, therefore, merely affect the surface linguistic meaning of the text: it pierces a hole in the very nature of language as we use it.

Various other linguistic peculiarities that stand out in *Donne* clarify the relations between language-use and the possible transformation of both subject and self-image questioned by Tarkos. The limited number of nouns that appear within the text has already been mentioned, but such lexical restriction is equally apparent in Tarkos’s use of verbs. Those that recur are ‘passer’, ‘donner’, ‘prendre’, ‘attacher’, ‘perdre’, ‘savoir’, ‘rencontrer’, ‘accorder’, ‘disparaître’, ‘désirer’ and ‘devenir’, all suggestive of contact: only a couple of others make a single appearance.¹⁹⁹ A brief glance back at the nouns used is sufficient to bring out the multiple connections that exist between the two groups, connections that are in part responsible for the condensed feeling of the text. This lexical limitation renders the text almost claustrophobic, for although all of the verbs are relational, no clear subject and object are ever posed, with the result that the life of the text beats between them, with no outlet, as it were, situating the poem on the very boundary *within which* thought and perception intermingle. The physical sensation of enclosure provoked is intensified by Tarkos’s exploitation of both lexical and

¹⁹⁹ The first two verbs on this list are immediately suggestive of the passage in Portugal’s text *Le Plus simple appareil* that revolves around them (a passage analysed in detail in Chapter 1). Although the context of their use is quite different, in both cases the poets are concerned with the possibility of communication, and in particular with the possibility of communication that in some way transgresses traditional linguistic or representational structures.

phonetic ambiguity. To turn back to the passage quoted above, here the words ‘ton veux’ are phonetically indistinguishable from ‘ton vœux’; the words ‘par donne’ and ‘par le’ retract when read to ‘pardonne’ and ‘parle’; elsewhere the game is made more explicit, as in the fragment: ‘si il est en vie, je envie’ (A:13). This fragment instantiates another unusual and at first sight paradoxical aspect of Tarkos’s use of language: here, as throughout the text, the ordinary phonetic liaisons that would be made by replacing the ‘i’ of ‘si’ and the ‘e’ of ‘je’ with apostrophes are not made. Each word stands alone, the space left between them partly constitutive of the friction generated as the reader stumbles over them individually. The text is thus anti-linear: words interpenetrate as the same syllables recur and self-negate, hence creating the phonetic thickness that characterizes the text. It is from the verbal friction generated that the essence of the elusive object behind the recurrent ‘le’ seems to rise, an object that is invisible yet tangible, non-verbal yet a product of language, and that hence exists – resulting from awareness as opposed to analysis – within the boundary of sense. In the context of this reading of the text, the fact that the object of the verbs employed remains virtual or in some way outside it, suggests that nothing can really be either given or taken via language. It is only the disruption or friction created by the writer or speaker as they delve into, pierce or mould the ‘pâte’ of language that can reflect the particularity of their experience. It is this activity, this flattening out of language that makes the break beyond the subject-object divide possible. The particular textual substance of this work therefore manifests the push and pull of the poet’s hands on both the ‘matter’ of his experience and that of language. In this way, it exemplifies Tarkos’s distension of the boundary traditionally set up between self and world.

This analysis of *Donne* has been intended in part to draw out the extent to which both Tarkos’s conception of the poetic act and his actualization of it are inseparable from his preoccupation with the boundaries traditionally set up between self and world.

In *Processe*, such preoccupations are more explicit. Ronald Klapka draws out the main question posed by this text in the following terms: ‘comment procède-t-on pour être un humain, véritablement, aujourd’hui: convoquer la religion, l’histoire, la linguistique, les sciences, la philosophie, aimer? Faut-il que la forme procède des concepts, des sensations, la procession est-elle mutuelle, y a-t-il une histoire, comment les mots passent de génération à génération, bref comment vit-on?’.²⁰⁰ This summary suggests the breadth of ideas touched on by the work, but it fails to underline the extent to which such content is bound to questions concerning potential linguistic expression in the text.

Tarkos suggests repeatedly that for him, the poetic act must leave mere description behind if it is to become meaningful. As he writes: ‘la description donne son lot de noms. Sortir de la description, sortir du codage des fragments infimes en leurs noms, pour que penser soit possible’ (P:29-30). A little further on he continues as follows: ‘Il existe des instants descriptibles avec deux ou trois petites choses plus précises, un vocabulaire pour les choses et puis aussi pour les sentiments et puis aussi pour ce léger décalage entre les choses et les sentiments’ (P:29-30). Here, thought and poetry appear to be interchangeable terms. The descriptive ‘codage’ of particular moments is possible, but for language to become poetic, or, in other words, for the movement of thought to be reproduced in its creativity, even the most refined vocabulary is insufficient. It is only by exploiting the boundaries of such vocabularies, and hence re-moulding the very texture of language that the actual process of thought can be reproduced.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Klapka, 2005.

²⁰¹ This reference to various possible vocabularies calls to mind a short story by Borges entitled ‘Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, and a brief glance at an imaginary language described within it clarifies the unusual nature of Tarkos’s approach. For the people of the imaginary world of Tlon, the world is ‘successive and temporal, not spatial’, they conceive of it as made up of an infinite number of mental processes. Their language reflects this conception, for it contains no nouns, but only ‘impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) with an adverbial value’. Their literature hence abounds in ideal poetic objects that ‘are convoked and dissolved in a moment’ each made up of two or more terms (one of an auditory and one of a visual character for example), objects that can be combined with others (through a process of abbreviation) almost indefinitely (Borges, 1972:32, 33). The conception of the world mirrored by this peculiar language implies the irreducibility of mental states (the fact of naming

Such re-moulding of language is evident throughout the text: old songs, music, religious texts, humour, visual references and so on intermingle, apparent both in changes of vocabulary and in the phonetic texture of the text. The following fragment: ‘Je sais que 1 Des écrits | imprimés existent 2 Les | choses imprimées ont un | sens 3 Les bouts des seins | durcissent sous le frisson 4 Le frisson vient du froid ou de l’émotion’ is commented on by Klapka in the following way: he suggests that it is ‘comme si les questions du sens, de l’imprimé et du féminin qui parcourent le texte venaient tout à coup se télescoper et créer ce que Prigent appelle évidence’.²⁰² It does seem true that here the sudden ‘telescoping’ of ideas apparent elsewhere in the text leaves a trace or physical mark, but I would suggest that what is important is not the telescoping of themes but the transformation of the substance of language, which in this case retracts, becoming smooth and angular. The physical effect this has on the reader calls to mind the idea of friction brought in earlier. The following fragment from *Processe* clarifies this idea:

Les poils sont tac-
tiles, gustatifs, olfactifs, scolo-
pals, récepteurs de vibrations
variées, auditifs, sensibles aux
variations de pression, adeptes de
la pensée. (P:20)

One possible reading of this passage would suggest that the sensory awareness of hairs should be paralleled in thought: that the latter should ideally not merely reflect mental thought processes but sensory input as well. Another idea suggested by the text concerns the fact that hairs are positioned on the boundary between body and world: although they themselves are devoid of feeling it is through them that a large part of the sensory information we take in is mediated. The passage is of course partly ironical, but

such a state would imply a falsification of its very nature). It is interesting, however, that even such a language would also be rejected by Tarkos, for the creation of objects of any sort is foreign to poetry as he conceives of it: his aim being rather to expose the point at which language and perception intermingle – language, for him, being creative only insofar as it reflects the sense of being experienced by the poet at a given time.

²⁰² Klapka, 2005.

the idea that words can act as hairs – that their phonetic ‘feeling’ alone can carry more meaning than the most polished description – is important, for while constituting a direct attack on language as we use it, it also bears directly on Tarkos’s use of language in this text and elsewhere. Another cube of text that appears on the same page directly after the above passage provides a microscopic illustration of the comparison suggested above:

Neotère, Néopole,
 Népotien, Nymphodore,
 Néosmadie, Nymphe,
 Triphose, Triphille,
 Tryphenne, Tripode,
 Néophyte, Néophyte,
 Néophyte. Adeptes de la
 Pensée.

(P:20)

This block bears on the questions concerning the religious doctrine of the Trinity that open the text, but the word ‘néophyte’ does not necessarily designate a recent convert to a religious system. In the light of Tarkos’s creation of words that, placed together, produce a mesh of sense enhanced by phonetic mirroring, the last two lines suggest that the ‘conversion’ that has taken place involves an awakening to a new way of considering the relation between language and sense. Here, then, as elsewhere, the friction generated is *linguistic* friction produced by the disregard for ‘vocabularies’ and the prioritization of the process of thought as experienced as it occurs on the boundary between thought and sensation. As Tarkos writes: ‘Penser encore, il existe une pulsation’ (P:22). The ‘pulsation’ is the rhythm of the text, borne by the development of the poet’s thought. It is the directedness of his awareness that counts: ‘Penser avec justesse penser la vérité [...] sans céder à la félicité d’une méthode mais dans la réflexion d’une méthodique précision devant la justesse infinie’ (P:28). The implication is that the connection between language and form is equivalent to the connection between thought and ‘being’, for the process that links both pairs is creative of meaning.

The rejection of descriptive ‘codages’ is therefore also a rejection of habitual systems of thought. It is important to note, however, that neither necessitates a rejection of language. On the contrary, words remain integral to the thought process of the poet although they are subordinated less to the logic of language, and more to the poet’s feeling of their necessity. The abundance of lists in Tarkos’s work (see pages 26 and 34 in *Processe* for example) hence marks the poet’s conception of language as a substance and his distrust of the misleadingly shiny surfaces of given discourses; surfaces that often mask depths of conceptual presuppositions that constrain thought.²⁰³ Hence in *Anachronisme* (to glance ahead) he writes:

Les noms sont hantants, me hantent. Ils sont utilisés, ils n’entrent dans aucune généralité [...] ils ne veulent pas se décomposer et s’allonger et s’assouplir [...] Je dois ranger tous ces noms qui me hantent [...] ils proviennent d’un fond où ils ne trouvent pas le sommeil, où ils continuent à bouger [...] je ne peux pas faire une phrase sans que ces noms indéclinés viennent se glisser comme si de rien n’était. (A:74-5)

It is only by feeling his way through the physical reality of language – by treating it as a substance – that the poet can mould it to reflect his experience of being in the world and transcend any imposed or unwittingly assumed self-image. In this last text the narrator comments on his progress through an alphabetic list of verbs as follows: ‘ce tri me fait une figure’ (A:60).²⁰⁴ The poet does not simply leave an imprint or reflection of himself on the surface of language, he pierces it with both mental and physical fingers, hence breaking the barrier between words and things, between self and world, an act that enables him to capture the particularity of his experience. The dynamic ‘figure’ of the poet that can be perceived in the resulting text is hence carved into the very substance of

²⁰³ The deceptive nature of visual surfaces is the principal theme of *L’Hypnotiseur soigne*.

²⁰⁴ The series of verbal phrases in *Oui*, including: ‘l’arrière sonne’, ‘les briques arrivent’, ‘la vie ponctionne’, ‘le sentier retentit’, ‘les poumons réalisent’, ‘l’air invente’, ‘les puits appellent’, is relevant here (O:60-61). These could be taken as fragments of longer descriptions; their interest lies in the fact that left as they are (incomplete and non-consecutive), those (implied) descriptions could be of anything, from a scene, to a painting, to an event or even a psychological state. Here, meaning is a function of the movement created by objectless verbs: it lies ahead of reference.

language: it is a product of his movement within it, and a direct affirmation of his own presence in the world.²⁰⁵

This idea of the poet's self-transformation in the matter of language is expanded upon in the following passage: 'qu'est-ce qu'un acte dans l'organisation des collections, de tout l'intérêt porté aux pièces de collection, dans la curiosité penché sur l'organisation et l'intérêt des préparations, entre les lignes on peut voir apparaître un visage, mon visage, des lignes forment le dessin d'un visage qui apparaît en filigrane' (A:62). The 'pièces de collection' referred to here may well be taken either as concepts or quite simply as nouns: the idea seems to be that the choice and organization of them is in itself a stage in the poetic act. This brings out the significance of Tarkos's choice of the word 'dessin' – for it is the physical 'geste' from self to world that is involved in the poetic act that is partly constitutive of the resulting glimpse of the poet perceivable within the text: the 'acte' and the appearance of his 'visage' are simultaneous. Raymond Tallis's discussion of the hand is directly relevant here. He argues that 'the sensorimotor uniqueness of the hand – the result of a combination of self-touching and manipulative indeterminacy – is [...] the key to its unique role in transforming our relationship to our

²⁰⁵ It is worth suggesting a brief analogy between the passage just looked at and the end of *L'Innommable* by Beckett. Here, the narrator's monologue ends as follows: 'il faut dire des mots, tant qu'il y en a, il faut les dire, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me trouvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me disent, étrange peine, étrange faute, il faut continuer, c'est peut-être déjà fait, ils m'ont peut-être déjà dit, ils m'ont peut-être déjà porté jusqu'au seuil de mon histoire, devant la porte qui s'ouvre sur mon histoire, ça m'étonnerait, si elle s'ouvre, ça va être moi, ça va être le silence, là où je suis, je ne sais pas, je ne le saurai jamais, dans le silence on ne sait pas, il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer' (Beckett, 2004:213). Language, for both authors, is simultaneously inescapable and uncontrollable. It is part of their very substance as individuals, but – also a shared means of communication – it can never remain completely within their grasp. The line 'jusqu'au seuil de mon histoire' suggests that language not a tool that can be picked up and manipulated at will, it is part of what makes the hand alive and its movement possible. The mobile boundary (or 'seuil') which is the poet's domain, is therefore not merely a grey area of linguistic ambiguity, it is also the point at which self and world merge, a realm of possibility within which ordinary assumptions concerning identity and even existence become less secure. The constant hesitation on the boundary of the epistemically possible that characterizes the work of both Beckett and Tarkos hence provokes the intensification of a particular sort of mental act that turns on itself, inverting the order in which we perceive the world by blocking the ontological presuppositions that ordinarily structure what we perceive, hence directly affecting both our perceptual 'methods' and our comprehension of the describability of what we perceive. The metaphysical upheaval that occurs within their texts does more than provoke the questioning of conceptual givens. Instead of evoking the non-actual they provoke a linguistic experience that forces the mind to confront the possibility of non-existence directly.

bodies and permitting the human organism to acquire true agency'.²⁰⁶ He expands on this later as follows: 'the sensorimotor set of inner distances arising out of the hand creates the sensorimotor awareness of self; the sense of an "I" that is to some degree identical with this body or, at any given time, with a subsection of it. Linked to the sense of self is the sense of agency which, in turn, rests upon and then italicizes and rests more firmly upon, the sense of self'.²⁰⁷

The emphasis put on the 'geste' indicates Tarkos's mistrust of the image, and reinforces the idea omnipresent in his work that it is only through the rejection of an image-based conception of the self that either poetic transformation of language or inner transformation of the self can become possible. It is by directing awareness towards the sense of being in the world that a new way of thinking can be brought about: 'la plongée ramollit les bords des carrés et rend leurs formes inconsistantes, souples, ondoyantes dans le mouvement de l'air parfumé. Les notions, abruptes, sont allées prendre un bain' (P:95). By plunging into lists that are carried by the rhythm of thought as it unfolds within the border of sense Tarkos demonstrates the bond that exists between poetry and life, suggesting the similarity between the process involved in the poetic act and that of drawing meaning from the simple fact of being.

The above supports the suggestion that the novelty and brilliance of Tarkos's poetry lies in part in the fact that it involves an exploration of the boundary of sense, conceived of (as discussed in the introduction) as the boundary within which mental and physical blur. In the case of Tarkos's exploration of the boundary of sense, the 'object' is the self or subject. The knowledge gained is knowledge of 'being' in its fullest sense, for the exploration of this boundary brings with it a new sort of awareness of what lies beyond. His approach hence actualizes the possibility of drawing truth from the simple awareness of how one 'is' at a given moment. This use of the concept of the boundary

²⁰⁶ Tallis, 2003:127.

²⁰⁷ Tallis, 2003:282-3.

of sense in relation to Tarkos's work underlines the fact that neither the language he uses nor the ideas conveyed by his texts draw a distinction between the mental and the physical aspects of our existence. Both the substance of his texts and the meaning carried by them lie where the two blur. In order to suggest the implications of his approach for the way we tend to think of relations connecting self and world, language and things, it is worth considering another physical phenomenon that appears repeatedly in his work: the hole. The idea that the poet in some way pierces language has been touched on earlier, but the following passage clarifies the import of this idea:

le sens [...] est fait de toute la substance
 ne s'embourbe pas mais est l'endroit toute la substance
 en étalement longuement
 trou
 un trou est quand on laisse
 d'écouter devant un trou alors qu'un objet
 d'attendre attentive à un trou où
 une chose y a chu (PAN:39)

Here, sense is stretched out – totalized, for it is made up of 'toute la substance'. The hole is something that occurs in it that breaks or disrupts ordinary perception. The sudden perception of a hole is analogous to the moment when the experience of a thing breaks the apparently uniform surface of sense: at such a moment the link between a word or description and an object or thing is broken, for in both cases the result is that the subject's perception of it is altered. Here the perception of the thing only occurs retrospectively, not at the moment of its appearance. What occurs in both cases is a piercing of the apparent uniformity of sense, a piercing that brings about a new perception, and hence a transformation both of the object or thing, and of the perceiver. In the case of the poetic act it involves a simultaneous transformation of the substance of language as it is pierced and hence re-shaped in accordance with his/her experience.

It is vital to note not only the bearing this has on what might very broadly be called spatial perception but also the effect it has on the temporal nature of the event. A connection is made between the perceiver's directed awareness and the resulting perception of a modification, but they are not presented as the direct cause of that modification. It is the state of 'flottement' that has made it possible but that is all. The 'thing' that has been modified is only perceived retrospectively – when it has already fallen ('une chose y a chu') – it is thus as though the perceiver cannot go back because as far as he is concerned, before the event took place there was nothing precise or definable there that he could now refer back to. The subject can therefore no longer be regarded (or regard him/herself) as continuous, as directing (or being directed by) a chain of foreseeable events, but only as existing in that modification as it occurs, an event which is by nature as ambiguous as the 'flottement' that characterized the first stage of the process.

The above relates directly to Tarkos's rejection of linearity and chronological progression in his texts. A glance at any one of them, from *Caisses* to *Ma langue*, is sufficient to illustrate the consistency of this aspect of his writing. One unusual passage in *Oui*, however, sheds light on the connection being made here. Several pages in this book present text broken by horizontal lines that are much longer than dashes – resembling erasure lines – although the words they might be taken to have erased are not apparent (O:73 ff.). They suggest a negation of *visible* significance and also of both syntactic and chronological progression. They therefore imply a negation of horizon, particularly as symbolic of historicity. This reading is backed up the following line from *Processe*: 'l'esprit historien est inutile [...] n'aide pas la pensée à penser bien' that follows an earlier comment that if history is to be thought, it must be thought 'sans avant ni après' (P:32, 26). If thought is to be creative it must primarily involve awareness of the present, even if this present involves the memory of something that

has happened before. The piercing of habitual perception and thought patterns hence introduces the idea of a scale that is not horizontal but vertical, a scale which has as its highest point the transformation of the subject. This underlines the fact that creativity and construction are not interchangeable words. The poet adds nothing to either words or things; something is simply transformed through his directed awareness to the totality of being at any given moment. The idea of the boundary of sense can hence be taken to refer not only to the ambiguous line on which mental and physical blur, but also to the boundary of the present as apprehended by an evolving subject.

Section ii: CREATIVITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Comme une machine qui bougeotte, qui bougeotte en vibrant et, quelquefois, dans l'un des mouvements de vibration, la machine a un mouvement plus ample pour rester dans la succession des mouvements de la vibration, touche la corde, ça fait un bruit, touche le métal, la plaque de métal [...] touche le réel, l'a frôlé, on ne le sait pas, on ne s'en rend pas compte [...] on ne la voit pas comme machine qui a trait à toucher les plaques du réel [...] c'est intermittent, elle n'est pas contre à creuser, elle ne s'appuie pas dessus, elle n'est pas en contact, elle est en contact, elle ne touche pas, elle est flottante, elle flotte, elle est presque en contact [...] elle ne touche la plaque que quand celle-ci se met à vibrer, est touchée, est frôlée [...] la machine ne se détache pas, est engoncée dans des pointes dans le réel sur la plaque. (A :198)

Anachronisme is the last text published by Tarkos, and it is in some ways superior to his earlier work, for here he relies less on overt language games, and the violence that characterizes so much of his work (although still present) is subtler, and hence correspondingly more effective. The complexity of the book is also striking, and this is partly due to the fact that it combines many ideas expanded upon (directly or indirectly) elsewhere; ideas that are not reduced within the text, but synthesized by it. It is perhaps, therefore, the most complete actualization of Tarkos's poetic approach.

Anachronisme opens with the designation of a physical space 'le parc' and the narrator's imposition of a non-specific period of time 'un hiver'. The fundamental ambiguity of this a-temporal location serves to break expectations concerning chronological or linear development: 'un hiver' is 'une masse lourde' 'une seule masse

d'un seul hiver qui ne finit pas' (A:7). The boundaries of the 'seul hiver' stretch away indefinitely, incorporating those of the physical space of the park within them. It is the imposition of this winter that is anachronistic: 'l'hiver couvre le parc, couvre le temps [...] il n'y a plus d'endroits à trouver dans le parc [...] le temps a été mangé [...] il n'y a pas moyen de se faire un chemin' (A:25). The disruption of temporal order within a designated physical space reflects the narrator's consideration of the following possibility: 'la possibilité de se modifier, de faire en sorte que les mécanismes de consciences se soient modifiés, qu'il y ait eu une modification de soi' (A:7). His physical sense of himself as a spatially and temporally bound individual is thus immediately called into question. The possibility of modification referred to here calls to mind the following line that occurs in *Processe*: 'Au bout du chemin de la pensée, quelque chose doit se produire doit s'ouvrir avoir un peu changé par l'effet de la pensée' (P:38).²⁰⁸ To return to *Anachronisme*, here, modification of the self and modification of the nature of subjective experience are presented from the outset as interdependent. The spatio-temporal ambiguity brought about by perceptual modification appears to be fundamental to the possibility that a 'rencontre' (an event or point of contact signalling a transformation) might occur 'clandestinement' within the park, or 'si l'on arrive à sortir du parc', without. The difficulty suggested by the last phrase suggests the poet's fear of the unknown; his lack of certainty concerning the possibility of creating 'sense' when all existing structures or forms (here evoked by the assumed boundaries of the park) are left behind, not even present to be worked against. The possibility that an event might occur, however, requires just such a rejection of the known for it is directly associated with the potential modification of the narrator's awareness of the spatio-temporal form of an experience. The suspension of the subject's perceptual habits is therefore necessary before anything can occur. The narrator must

²⁰⁸ The narrator's self-description in *Processe* as a 'spationaute spatio-temporel' suggests the similarity of these two works which both involve experiments, these experiments in turn suggesting comparisons with Portugal's text *définitif bob* and Alferi's text *Le Chemin familier du poisson combatif* (P:24).

override imposed distinctions between thought, perception and feeling for only the resulting state of suspension or ‘flottement’ can give rise to the setting up of a new mental ‘circuit’ and hence to the perception of a new pattern capable of bearing sense. To underline the connection implicit in this experiment undertaken by the narrator of *Anachronisme* with Tarkos’s conception of poetic creativity, it is worth recalling the line referred to earlier (from *Le Signe*=) where he writes: ‘la pâte mot repose sur l’élasticité du des sensations, sur une seule couche d’existence, sur une modification d’appréhension’ (S:35).

This preliminary reading of the text that draws from certain ideas that arose in the context of *Processe* calls to mind Edelman’s conception of the evolution of conscious states, and before continuing with the analysis of *Anachronisme*, it is worth giving a brief summary of his ideas. According to him, consciousness is a process that is directly affected throughout life by both bodily and environmental inputs; conscious states are hence continually modified according to re-entrant activity in the brain. He suggests that consciousness evolved in two stages: the first involving re-entrant activity linking perceptual categorization with value-category memory; the second (leading to consciousness as we know it) was brought about with the development of language. With this last stage, consciousness of consciousness becomes possible, simultaneously giving rise to ‘an explosion of possible thoughts’. He argues, however, that it is over-attention to the wealth of possibility opened up by language as a system in its own right (classed with mind, as distinct from both body and perceptual experience) that leads to ‘the temptation to equate thoughts and beliefs, and even sometimes knowledge, to propositions and propositions alone’, a trap into which he suggests traditional epistemology has fallen.²⁰⁹ He believes that thought precedes language, and stresses the importance of pattern recognition (a process we learn before becoming capable of

²⁰⁹ Edelman, 2006:63.

logical thought) in the development of consciousness. He writes: ‘early thought is creative in its pattern making through processes akin to metaphor. These processes are not free of feeling. Indeed, the constraints of value systems essential to the evolution of adaptive behaviour make emotional experience a necessary accompaniment to the acquisition of knowledge even after logic and formal analysis supervene at later stages’.²¹⁰ Before proceeding, it is worth pointing out the striking similarities that are apparent between his ideas and those put forward by Noë and McGinn. Noë, in the context of perception, suggests that neural activity is only one element in a system that involves brain, body and world. He writes that ‘crucially, the qualitative character of experience may not be determined by the intrinsic properties of neural activity set up by one region or another, but rather by the way that neural activity is integrated into dynamic patterns of sensorimotor looping’.²¹¹ Writing on the (often overlooked) significance of the imagination in the context of theories of knowledge, McGinn suggests that this faculty is ‘essentially a creative combinatorial faculty’ that is bound to attention and necessary to all thought.²¹² He argues that ‘each act of understanding is a small instance of genuine creativity’, reliant on the combinatorial ability of the imagination.²¹³ Edelman’s comment on one implication of the possible veracity of his theory synthesizes the relevance of the above. This implication is that: ‘every act of perception is to some degree an act of creation, and every act of memory is to some degree an act of imagination’.²¹⁴

The first aspect of Edelman’s theory that is significant for Tarkos’s poetic approach is the emphasis he puts on the necessity for complexity and ambiguity in creative thinking. According to him, our ability to think creatively (to create new patterns and see beyond the known) is bound to the fundamental indeterminacy and

²¹⁰ Edelman, 2006:65.

²¹¹ Noë, 2004:226.

²¹² McGinn, 2004[i]:131.

²¹³ McGinn, 2004[i]:150.

²¹⁴ Edelman, 2006:100.

irreducibility of our mental processes and the complexity and degeneracy of brain networks are directly reflected by language.²¹⁵ As he writes: ‘The metaphorical capacity of linking disparate entities derives from the associative properties of a recurrent degenerate system’.²¹⁶ Conscious states are therefore necessary for learning, and indeed for all forms of creative thinking, but they are not sufficient for it: ‘They are modulated by attention’.²¹⁷ The significance of this idea in the context of Tarkos’s work is clarified by Edelman’s suggestion that the incredible re-combinatorial and integrative power of the brain, that draws from all aspects of our experience of the world, only becomes creative with the emergence of ‘internal experiments’ involving interplay between the conscious and non-conscious parts of the brain, when these are set against the constraints applied by convention and experience. Significantly, Edelman argues that we do not inherit a language of thought: ‘Instead, concepts are developed from the brain’s mapping of its own perceptual maps’.²¹⁸ This both suggests a new approach to the nature of concepts, and also points to the necessity for constant reconsideration of them; to the importance of attending to – and indeed of inciting – the formation of new patterns that reflect our experience of the world as it occurs.

Many of the ideas summarized above appear relevant to Tarkos’s ideas concerning the poetic act, particularly in view of his recurrent reference to thought in statements like the following: ‘la pensée est la focalisation. La focalisation est une combinatoire’ (OUI: 20). As suggested earlier, according to him, creative thought is thought that does not rely on existing structures or beliefs, but that involves a particular mode of attention to one’s sense of being in the world that requires the rejection of perceptual habits. To return to *Anachronisme*, then, the notion of the ‘experiment’ that occurred in relation to Edelman’s conception of the creativity of the brain is directly

²¹⁵ In the context of Edelman’s work, ‘degeneracy’ means the ability to fulfil diverse functions: the same output obtained via the setting up of different circuits.

²¹⁶ Edelman, 2006:58.

²¹⁷ Edelman, 2006:86.

²¹⁸ Edelman, 2006:153.

relevant to the process set up in this text. The experiment to be attempted here is clarified by the narrator's following reflection: 'Une expérience, un truc expérimental, une expérimentation, il est possible d'expérimenter, expérimenter sur soi, nous allons faire une expérience, faire l'expérience de certains produits cérébraux, de certains états d'âme, de certaines ambiances, de certaines substances qui suintent, qui coulent de la pensée' (A:21). A little further on the following line appears: 'un certain attentisme, un flottement et c'est parti, l'expérience peut commencer' (A:22). Here (as throughout) the passage is both part of the text and a comment on its production and nature *as* a poetic text. Such passages serve to manifest the movement of thought as it focuses now on an abstraction, now on something perceived, following a rhythm that balances on the boundary between pure experience and the possibility of capturing it as it occurs. This rhythm constitutes the voice of the text, it directly reflects the author's physical presence as he writes, and the way it moves between active and passive, subjective and objective reflects the constant modification of both the writer's and the narrator's conscious states, for the act of writing and the fact of undergoing the experiment are, as will be seen, inextricably bound.

The state of 'flottement' that marks the first stage of the experiment has (as mentioned above) been brought about through the imposition of 'un hiver': 'l'hiver a fait un creux' (A:25). The absence of spatio-temporal markers that characterize this state leads to the destabilization of objects and concepts that had previously governed both the narrator's thought and his movement. The 'space' of thought is stripped both of perspective and of horizons, whether visual or metaphorical. The result is that he must attempt to develop a new pattern of comprehension that does not depend on a set of given (exterior) markers, but on his sense of his own presence – from within as it were. His focus is no longer on any potential one-one relationship that could be set up between himself and objects existing outside of him. The new boundary to be explored

is hence posited: it is the boundary of sense. The narrator may well still be in the park at this point, but he has lost his ability to navigate around it, the modification of his awareness has begun. The potential outcome of the experiment is, however, ambiguous from the beginning. The word ‘événement’ is connected explicitly to the idea of a ‘rencontre’, a word which is expanded upon as follows: ‘une rencontre est ce qui saute soudain, au moment où on s’y attend le moins, au moment où l’on flotte, où l’on se concentre, où l’on est concentré à se promener, à penser, recueilli, dans le recueillement’ (A:35). The suggestion is, however, that the nature of the ‘rencontre’, defined only (if at all) as an ‘événement rencontré’ is only determinable retrospectively: ‘les événements [...] se tissent souterrainement [...] [ils] viennent souples, malins, enveloppants, influents, infiltrants’ (A:34-35). This suggests that the development of new possibilities cannot be analysed or traced step by step. Their significance can only be perceived retrospectively, in the form of a ‘rencontre’ that is compared to bumping into an acquaintance unexpectedly:

[M]ême si on ne voulait pas la voir, que même si on ne savait pas qu’on la verrait, nous nous trouvons dans l’obligation d’entrer en contact, [...] nous sommes surpris de la reconnaître, de l’avoir reconnue, de ne plus pouvoir faire marche arrière à ce moment-là, de ne plus pouvoir reculer, on est obligé de la voir, de prendre conscience qu’il y a eu lieu une rencontre, que la rencontre a eu lieu. (A:35)

At this stage of the experiment, the narrator suggests that he is nonetheless capable of manipulating these events: ‘on est trieur, on va parmi les événements, ceux qui doivent être laissés mourir progressivement, se perdre dans l’oubli, nous pouvons trier, faire une limite entre ceux qui survivent et ceux qui ne survivent pas’ (A:35). Such manipulation is presented as desirable: ‘on va faire filtre, on va produire un événement, on va procéder à une rencontre’ (A:35). As mentioned above, however, the retrospective necessity of the event, desired or not, is vital: once the state of suspension or ‘flottement’ has been attained, any event that occurs within it must prove its indispensability, for it is in this way that awareness can lead to a new pattern of

comprehension, and hence to knowledge.²¹⁹ This directly reflects Alferi's statement that thought only becomes creative 'en faisant reculer les phrases, puis en suivant comme un souvenir ce qui n'est qu'un pressentiment' (CP:48). The narrator's inability to go back once the 'rencontre' has taken place signals the fact that a change has occurred within him: the modification of his perception has brought about a change in his conscious state: a change that bears directly on his comprehension of his own presence in the world. His knowledge has in some way evolved as a result of the contact that is comparable to the connection of a circuit, but his grasp of this evolution and of the meaning that is its result is only possible retrospectively, because of the non-constructive, non-linear nature of the process involved. The idea of the vertical scale (discussed briefly in the introduction to this Part) is directly relevant here, for it is only in accordance with such a scale that the creativity of such pattern-making can be evaluated.

In order to clarify the nature of this process, that leads to the second stage of 'pensée-toucher', it is necessary to backtrack a little and expand upon the direct connection Tarkos makes between the state of suspension or 'flottement' and a particular form of awareness. This state is perhaps the 'terrain propice, qui est organisé de telle manière qu'il est possible que se passe un événement, qu'il est nécessaire, qu'il se trouvera après coup nécessaire qu'il y ait eu un événement' (A:40). It would seem, however, that no rules can be followed in order to attain such a state, the most salient characteristic of the 'terrain propice' being its very ambiguity. The narrator's aim is hence most clearly described as follows: 'être à un moment donné dans un endroit qui est dénommable, qui est déformé, qui est perdu, qui est flottant, qui est incompréhensible' (A:40). No specific action or activity other than that suggested by the verb 'être' is mentioned: 'je laisse faire'. However, the deformation or absence of

²¹⁹ Tallis's discussion of the feed-forward relationship between prehension, apprehension and comprehension is relevant here (see Tallis, 2003:329).

spatio-temporal location has broken a boundary: now ‘dehors est le parc, tout dehors se trouve dans le parc’ and the perceptual possibilities that ensue from this disruption require a high level of awareness of, attentiveness to and concentration on the moment if the desired (and, in view of its ‘verticality’, necessarily anachronistic) modification of the narrator’s conscious state, and hence of his knowledge, is to come about (A:49).

One passage appears to provide an example of the simultaneous flattening out of what is visually present and of the linguistic means of expression available to the narrator:

On peut voir les feuilles des arbres dans les arbres dressées droites hautes tomber sur la surface plate du sol, s’étendre en tombant sur le sol de toute leur étendue, bien plate, passer de en haut dressées droites dans les branches des arbres à l’écrasement toutes étendues à l’endroit où elles tombent sur la surface plate du sol, sur le carré plat du sol des feuilles d’arbres étendues écrasées plates, alors qu’elles étaient droites, pliées, ondulées dans la hauteur disséminée des différentes branches des différentes hauteurs des branches des arbres, sont d’abord en l’air, en hauteur, souples, variables et s’écrasent sur le sol plat où elles deviennent plates et étirées et tirées tirées par l’eau sur le sol glissant plat mouillé, le carré de sol où tout s’est effondré, où tout est tombé, où tout se tient, l’image de l’effondrement, l’image carrée plate où les feuilles apparaissent comme elles sont tombées, avec leur forme délimitée de feuilles d’arbres découpées, si tout ce qui est en l’air tombe cela est l’effondrement, tout ce qui est en hauteur s’effondre et tombe par terre et tout ce qui était en hauteur est déposé, tiré par terre à l’endroit où elles tombent, elles n’ont pas la même forme dans les arbres et étalées par terre sur le sol plat elles prennent la forme plate du sol, elles se collent au sol, elles sont tirées par le sol mouillé, la seule forme qu’il leur reste est la forme de leur forme découpée, leur dessin découpé sur le carré du sol mouillant, les feuilles sont plates. (A:50-51)

Here, phrases such as ‘la surface plate du sol’ and ‘le carré de sol’, evoke the space of the text. Following this reading, the ‘feuilles’ that are ‘d’abord en l’air, en hauteur, souples, variables’ but then ‘s’écrasent sur le sol plat où elles deviennent plates et étirées’ are comparable to words. Perceptual modification is hence directly assimilated to the poetic act, a reading supported by a line that occurs a little further on in the text: ‘les événements se chevauchent [...] nous entrons dans la compréhension qui est un bouillon [...] nous pouvons nous approcher du point qui est un tourbillon, du point qui se détache, les détache, tous les éléments qui sont fondus, qui coulent, coulées de cire,

de fonte' (A:65). This fragment highlights the way in which in the above passage each stage of the poetic act is dilated: each minute development that is involved in the act of creation is drawn out, the substance of language rendered malleable as the point of real creativity is approached. This directly reflects the suggestion that *Anachronisme* concerns both the poetic act and the act of being: the possible reconciliation of thought and sensation in language and hence that of self and world in the grey area that is the by nature ambiguous boundary of sense.

This text is the most autobiographical of all of Tarkos's works, as has been mentioned in passing by Phillippe Rahmy which supports the argument that *Anachronisme* is a text in which poet, subject matter and text are very much one.²²⁰ The connection made by the text between the possibility of the directed modification of perception and that of self-transformation calls to mind the notion of metanoia, a concept expanded upon in great depth by Nicoll who draws from the Greek to insist upon its psychological meaning (as opposed to its often presumed moral meaning) as change or transformation *of mind*.²²¹ He suggests that it implies a transformation of the self that only becomes possible when a person begins to see themselves neither analytically nor critically, but as 'a new conscious experience, a new event'.²²² The individual subject just is the experiment, and what is brought about is 'a new state of consciousness'.²²³ This not only suggests the importance of the autobiographical aspect of the work, it also indicates poetry's potential as a medium capable of actively reproducing the search for change or meaning as it occurs and hence, perhaps, the possibility of self-transformation within language.

To summarize, by transcending word-image dualism and by concentrating on the affirmation of presence in the context of linguistic creativity, Tarkos's poetry

²²⁰ See Rahmy, 2002.

²²¹ Nicoll, 1965:92-3.

²²² Nicoll, 1965:21.

²²³ Nicoll, 1965:151,71.

emphasizes the potential inherent in language as a means of expression that is bound to our very substance. By concentrating on experience as it occurs and thus modifying the boundaries of poetic creativity, he suggests a new approach to the question of meaning, an approach that thus has significance beyond the domain of poetry. To conclude, the following extract from *Caisses* provides a final glimpse of Tarkos's belief in the possibility of discovery even within supposedly 'charted' domains such as that of language, and hence suggests the constantly renewable potential inherent within poetry:

Un endroit frais dans la cervelle à l'âge tendre à l'heure fraîche du petit matin, un coin frais nouveau de la cervelle dans tous les endroits usés un renouvellement neuf tout frais, un endroit renouvelé inutilisé de petit matin dans la masse vieille de la cervelle usée, un endroit frais entièrement nouveau des premiers rayons de soleil du jour un renouvellement d'un recoin du cerveau dans la fraîcheur d'une heure matinale la redécouverte qu'il existe encore un endroit encore tout frais dans la vieille et chaude cervelle usée le recoin d'un cerveau d'un enfant d'un an dehors aux premières lueurs du jour le renouvellement natif d'un recoin de la cervelle qui sert la sensation de fraîcheur d'un endroit nouveau entièrement redécouvert, une partie nouvellement fraîche, qui n'avait jamais été utilisée qui se trouvait là cachée dans les replis d'un cerveau plein utilisé vieux chaud, un petit animal vif qui se renouvelle dans la cervelle, le jaillissement d'un morceau du cerveau d'un enfant d'un an vif et frais sortant dehors à l'heure du petit matin, au lever du soleil. (C :20)

CHAPTER 6

VALÈRE NOVARINA: MATTER AND MIND

Les sensations que j'ai en face du langage sont des sensations de l'ordre du toucher.²²⁴

The earlier chapter that occurred in Part II on 'pensée-voix' focused on Novarina's movement towards the stage, and the necessity of this movement to the development of his ideas concerning the relations between thought, the creative act and speech. In that chapter, emphasis was put on his intention that the experience generated by both texts and performances should be the same; that both reader and spectator should become in some way the *actor* of the text, their experience hence becoming similar to that undergone by the author himself.

This chapter will draw from the ideas developed earlier, but here, in the context of the concept 'pensée-toucher' the focus will be on the relation between language, perceptual activity and the individual subject. The physicality of Novarina's work often borders on violence. The connection he makes between the act of writing and physical experience is in no way unique to him. Indeed, whether only indicated in a brief mention of a physical obstacle that stands in the way of the realization of a work, the relation between the effort required by the creative act and the body's role in its accomplishment recurs in the notes of authors of the widest range of texts.²²⁵ However,

²²⁴ Novarina, in Bouhénic, 1995.

²²⁵ Kafka, Mallarmé, Schopenhauer and Freud are four of the extremely diverse authors who discuss this relationship in depth.

the importance attached to the body in Novarina's work is striking, and inherent in this persistent physicality is the idea that language is part of our substance.

Here I will first concentrate on the relation between Novarina's conception of language and the notion of the subject, drawing from several of Novarina's more theoretical texts before moving on to *Je suis*. In Section ii, I will focus on the connection between transformation and creativity, drawing primarily from the text *Le Théâtre des oreilles*.

Section i: THE MATTER OF LANGUAGE

The following passage manifests Novarina's belief in the inseparability of the substance of language and that of the self:

La matière dans son croisement d'ondes et son *inquiétude rythmique* nous apparaîtra un jour comme un drame parlé. Le langage est *l'analogue* de la nature. Si bien que la grammaire, la phonétique, la phonologie, l'étymologie, la sémiotique et toute la linguistique font en fin de compte partie des sciences physiques. Nous ne sommes pas tous *physiciens* mais nous pouvons tous en savoir plus sur la nature en collant notre oreille au langage, en écoutant ses lois, en observant attentivement son efficace, son *œuvre opérante* et comme il déchaîne des actes en nous et dans le monde extérieur. L'expérience des sens – si l'on sait s'y tenir et la suivre au plus près... – rejoint l'état dernier des sciences, en ce qu'elle tourne elle aussi son dos à toutes nos habitudes idéologiques et façons de penser. (LC:69-70)

Here, Novarina indicates the relation between our senses or perceptual skills, attentiveness to the way these alter or develop, and language. It is not simply by listening, but by 'collant notre oreille au langage' that we can glimpse 'son œuvre opérante'. The constant modification of the dynamic relations that bind self and world is perceivable in the matter of language ('pendant la matière'), and the sort of perception entailed involves sensory experience, not merely some sort of abstract mental apprehension. References to both the active and passive experience of touch proliferate in Novarina's work, and the vocabulary he employs often reflects that built up by Tarkos. He insists, for example, on the need to 'creuser le langage'; 'creuser la langue

qui est notre terre; creuser la langue, notre corps, mettre à jour le souterrain mental'; 'traiter la langue comme une chose'; 'pratiquer la descente dans la langue, écrire en français *stratique*' (PM:61, 78, TP:48, LC:63). At one point, the poet's task is described as follows: 'Refaire tout le chemin de l'apprentissage de la langue matérielle, réapprendre son languisme' (DP:34). As suggested in the last few lines of the passage above, the idea of digging beneath language is bound (as for Tarkos) to the rejection of two conceptions: that of language as surface, and that of thought as linear. As the amalgamation of words in the last quotation suggests, poetic creativity involves both mind and body, it involves physically working on language, subordinating learnt structures to the experience of thought, in which linguistic items often play ambiguous or unexpected roles.

The methods Novarina employs reflect his conception of poetic creativity directly; he attaches great importance to what he terms 'exercices', which can involve experimentation with different writing materials or with restrictions concerning duration. In the course of an interview conducted by Gilles Costaz, he mentioned that he keeps 'une sorte de journal qui porte sur des choses très matérielles: les horaires, la façon d'écrire: le crayon, le feutre, la machine à écrire, l'ordinateur, le retour à la plume, à la gomme et au crayon. J'enregistre les différentes phases, les différentes « températures d'écriture »: l'écriture tissée, ourdie, l'écriture à la fresque, l'écriture en face, l'écriture en miroir, l'écriture par parenthèses, l'écriture réversible'.²²⁶ He clarified the use of such exercises as follows: 'Tous les exercices préparent à ce moment où l'écriture est auriculaire, tactile. Elle devient une exercise du toucher'.²²⁷ The word 'matière' which recurs throughout his texts, can refer simultaneously to thought, language, and the media used by the poet. Drawing and speaking (whether reading or improvising parts of texts) are fundamental aspects of the creative process for him, as

²²⁶ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:100.

²²⁷ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:100.

the references to both in *Le Drame dans la langue française*, a ‘record’ of sorts written while the first five versions of *La Lutte des morts* were accomplished, shows.²²⁸ As he stated:

Vite, travailler la matière avant que quelque chose ne fige! J’écris minutieusement, longuement, mais toujours *dans le frais du langage*. Ce qui n’exclut pas l’agencement patient, le tissage maniaque, l’ouvrage de Pénélope – mais il faudrait garder toujours le geste, l’élan de la main. La pratique de la peinture apprend à inverser des scènes, mettre une phrase à l’envers, faire apparaître vite un personnage d’une tache, d’une syllabe, d’un mot...²²⁹

The importance Novarina attaches to the physical input to his texts clarifies the fact that his poetic aims do not involve the desire to polish surfaces or construct edifices, but, in his own words, to: ‘faire sortir l’action, principe de réalité’: ‘non plus sur la langue mais dans la pensée’ (TP: LXXXIV, TP:94).²³⁰

For Novarina, it is the physical movement of thought through the substance of language that is creative of meaning. Recurrent words such as ‘naissance’ imply not the creation of new matter but the transformation of existing matter that enables it to bear meaning in a new way. Hence: ‘Dans l’écriture, toute la caverne du corps résonne de mémoire; les mots creusent et tressent une fugue; ils descendent, par la danse, dans la matière même de la pensée [...] c’est musculaire et pulsif’ (DP:76). In this context, it is important to note that in Novarina’s work, language is not only repeatedly associated with words such as ‘sol’ and ‘terre’ but also with the word ‘chair’. This association is reinforced by another; that of ‘parole’ with ‘sang’. The boundary between the external world and subjective experience is hence implicitly transgressed: both the substance of the thinking subject and that of the objects he perceives depend for their expression on

²²⁸ It is worth referring here to the importance Alferi attaches to the act of drawing. He speaks of it as a manual exercise that allows the necessity of a sentence or phrase to be felt; to develop without language.

²²⁹ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:102.

²³⁰ It is worth mentioning Dubuffet here, for as mentioned in Part II, his work had a profound influence on Novarina. In the course of an interview, Dubuffet explains the aims behind his use of different materials as follows: ‘L’une était de fortifier l’image produite en l’associant aux pulsions intimes de la matière, aux mouvements pathétiques de celle-ci, avec le sentiment que le langage proper de la matière, au moment de ses coulures et solidifications, conférait à l’image une dramatisation interloquante. A l’arrière-plan, il y avait le désir de prêter à la pensée (la pensée du peintre traçant son image) la langue parlée par la matière, obliger la pensée à faire cette langue sienne’ (Dubuffet, 1986:13).

the potential inherent in language to transcend barriers imposed between the two. As Novarina's use of words such as 'chair' and 'sang' shows, the equation made between language and the physical substance of the individual is exteriorized more directly than in Tarkos's work, primarily because of his fascination with the body of the actor and the space of the stage. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, this in no way implies dependence on reductive physicalist identity criteria. For Novarina, the creative act involves: 'Ni corps, ni tête, ni vision, ni voix, mais l'impression du seul toucher' (TP:72). What Novarina's insistence on words such as 'chair' and 'sang' (words that are so often used to refer symbolically to humanity) does suggest, however, is that for him, as for Tarkos, it is the descent into the substance of language that has the potential to bring about a modification of the thinking subject, whether writer, reader, actor or spectator.

The religious connotations of the words 'chair' and 'sang' cannot be overlooked, and Novarina's interest in religious texts is apparent in much of his work. However, he neither posits nor presupposes a fixed spiritual edifice. As he states: 'Il n'y a pas d'autre socle que l'échafaudage fragile du langage lui-même'.²³¹ This approach clarifies his primarily esoteric fascination with the Bible. As he writes: 'C'est un livre ouvert où le creusement, l'espace perpétuel est comme un paysage de montagne qui se métamorphose autrement à chaque pas devant le marcheur'.²³² It is the phenomenal (even organic) nature of the Bible that draws him to it; stories and characters metamorphose within it, lists of names and places abound, and what is more it is composed of strata, having been modified in various ways (through mistranslation for example) that often remain untraceable. Here it is worth referring back to Novarina's fascination with voice, for this is, of course, the sense most frequently referred to within

²³¹ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:101.

²³² Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:100.

the Bible.²³³ Although this is not the place for a detailed discussion of Novarina's possible religious beliefs, it is his conception of voice that clarifies the particularities of his reading of the Bible. He writes: 'Comptez-moi au nombre des antidualistes militants! Je crois l'univers soufflé d'un trait, et à l'unité pneumatique de la création: corps et esprit fondus dans une même combustion. L'esprit est le souffle'.²³⁴ Movement is central to this statement, but to return to the idea of the modification of the subject mentioned above, the idea of 'combustion' suggests not progression but transformation. Novarina attaches great importance to the act of breathing, but 'la respiration' and 'le souffle' are not only associated with traceable voice; the act of breathing is in itself conceived as a sort of meditation or form of prayer that forces thought to submit to physical experience, to the sense of 'being' in the world. The word 'Dieu', when it occurs, is consistently connected with the word 'souffle', indeed the two often appear interchangeable. Both words designate not a thing, person or even isolated act, but a state experienced by the individual in which his/her conceptions concerning space, time, and the self are suspended.

To return to the connections Novarina makes between language and perception, the earlier comparison of the effects generated by Novarina's texts and his stage versions of them supports the idea that the coherence of Novarina's work is not only remarkably strong, but also of an unusual kind, for it does not only involve a uniformity of ideas (indeed the ideas expressed in his more theoretical works are occasionally contradictory) but of substance. Both written texts and plays open a physical space, and it is this movement of eclosion that is experienced (as opposed to understood) by the reader/spectator. Whether Novarina is speaking about language with his own voice, or whether he is pushing expression through that of one of the myriad characters he has developed, words and syllables do more than just designate or evoke 'la chair' or 'le

²³³ See Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman, 1998:918.

²³⁴ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:100.

sang': they provoke a reaction within it. Novarina's references to 'l'acteur' are similarly neither references to a specific individual nor to the profession usually designated by the term; the word in itself connects action and creativity, and as has been seen, it is used to designate the writer, the reader/spectator, the actor, a word or the text interchangeably, depending partly on context, partly on the way a text is read. Hence, sentences such as 'l'acteur porte l'homme devant lui' are not merely metaphorical descriptions of the actor's task, they refer to the creative dynamism of the text that breaks the boundaries between subject and object, self and world (LC:131). If the word is to be defined in the context of his work it could only be said to designate a movement that occurs within the substance of language.

Novarina's use of the word 'personne', which can designate either somebody or nobody as opposed to 'personnage', 'caractère' or 'figurant' is relevant here. This lexical choice reinforces the idea that the speakers who occur and recur in Novarina's texts are conceived of as dynamic: they exist within the substance of language as manipulated in accordance with the poet's developing thought. To draw from the text to be analysed shortly, the name Jean Singulier in *Je suis* fills various functions. The first letters of each word are those of 'je suis'. The 'personne' so designated therefore bears the role of a word and of an idea. Indeed, Novarina describes him as a nut or stone that must be broken in order to gain a dynamic within a text that is productive of sense. The 'personne' so designated is both somebody and nobody; a word and an empty name; an idea or statement that must be cracked open. This bears directly on the relation between subjecthood and language explored by this text for it suggests the need for some sort of crisis or transformation bound to the need to rethink the notion of 'being'. It is hence directly related to the concept of metanoia discussed in the last section of the previous chapter on Tarkos.

To consider Novarina's use of words in a more general way, despite the many words that appear in his texts that can most definitely not be found in any dictionary, he states in *L'Atelier d'écriture* that he never has the impression of creating words, but only of moving among them. As he says in the course of this documentary: 'il n'y a aucun jeu de mots dans ce que j'écris [...] les mots bougent [...] il n'y a rien à déchiffrer'.²³⁵ It is necessary to consider these comments in depth, because the argument that word-games in fact proliferate in his work can be backed up by abundant examples. The point Novarina is making concerns the process through which his texts come about. There is no split between the writer and his material. For him, linguistic expression is not accessory to thought, it forms an integral part of it. In this light, the above quotation serves as a useful warning to the critic, for it suggests the futility of any attempt to construct generalizing theories based on the decoding of presumed linguistic games or hidden structures. In Novarina's work, each word – indeed each syllable – is important, but primarily in the context in which it occurs, and even then its importance is not to be measured according to how well it serves the representation of a general idea, but according to the role it plays in the particular dynamic of the text at that point, and how this bears on the reader's experience of the latter. This underlines the fact that Novarina is primarily a poet, and for him theatre is above all 'le *précipité* de la lecture: son lieu plus dense, plus concentré, somatique'.²³⁶

Novarina's aim is therefore not to externalize thought but to work within it; to write: 'non plus sur la langue mais dans la pensée'. This has direct repercussions not only on the idea of communication but also on the conception of the subject, for it involves a return to the form of experience that precedes the clear definition of boundaries between self and world, hence entailing the rejection of the idea of the self as a clearly defined individual locatable through reference to the arbitrary linguistic

²³⁵ Novarina, in Bouhénic, 1995.

²³⁶ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:102.

structures that constrict our notion of space and time. This is directly related to the connection between touch and proprioception discussed in the introduction to this Part. In *Le Théâtre des paroles*, Novarina writes: ‘quand je dis *je*, c’est une façon de parler’ (TP:80). This statement is clarified by the following comment: ‘les mots précèdent les choses; au commencement, il y a leur appel. Au commencement, ça n’est pas l’être qui est, mais l’appel’ (PM:24). Novarina’s use of the word ‘ça’ instead of ‘ce’ in this last quotation reinforces the idea that what is designated is fundamentally ambiguous and unnameable; referred to indirectly by the word ‘l’appel’ it refers to a movement that draws the world to the subject, dependent, then, on the subject’s apprehension of that world as a world.²³⁷ The choice of the word ‘appel’ as opposed to ‘cri’ or ‘son’ is also significant as shown by the following comment on the particular form of voice Novarina terms ‘chant’: ‘Il y a quelque chose d’insupportable dans l’idée d’émission [...] Le chant est un appel à entendre, un appel pour écouter tout l’espace se précipiter sur nous’ (PM:85). Novarina in no way denies the existence of the individual, it is just that the word ‘je’, separated from any movement of thought that draws the world to it, is meaningless. Novarina hence states that what is necessary is that ‘*je suis* respire au centre du mouvement’; enunciation must involve an affirmation not of *the* self but of ‘self in world’ (TP:125). The creative act must draw directly from the physical sense of being in the world.

Je suis centres around Novarina’s conception of the dynamic of being. It is presented in theatrical form, being divided into acts and scenes and primarily composed of dialogue. The large number of names that introduce speech and the ambiguity of what appear to be stage directions (such as ‘*Le cadavre est sans réponse.*’ and ‘*Entre un morceau du monde.*’) underline the fact that this text was primarily written to be read (JS:54, 50).²³⁸ The first part bears the title ‘Prologue’, and is composed of thirteen pages

²³⁷ Tarkos’s ‘le’ comes to mind here (discussed earlier, pp. 179-182).

²³⁸ The text was indeed re-written for the stage and appeared in 1997 entitled *L’Espace furieux*.

of sentences and phrases made up almost exclusively of different combinations of the following words: ‘personne’ (occasionally preceded by the definite article ‘la’), ‘toi’, ‘lui’, ‘quelqu’un’, ‘espace’, ‘rien’, ‘intérieur’, ‘extérieur’, ‘hors’, ‘sans’, ‘dans’, ‘plus’, and the verb ‘être’. The text opens as follows:

L’espace est à l’intérieur de lui. L’espace est à l’intérieur de quelqu’un. La personne est dans l’espace. L’espace n’est pas à l’intérieur de toi. Tu es à l’intérieur de la personne. Personne n’est à l’intérieur de rien. Il n’y a plus personne à l’extérieur de l’espace. (JS:7)

Any quotation taken from this part is bound to be reductive, because as so often in Novarina’s work, meaning here is bound to the density built up through processes of repetition, looping and accumulation. However, the above quotation indicates the way in which this prologue condenses the main preoccupations of this text that centres on the fluctuation of boundaries that characterizes our sense of ourselves both as subjective perceivers of the world and as part of it. This section serves to destabilize the boundaries inherent in our conception of ourselves (our notion of our ‘subjecthood’) and those assumed in the linguistic means we dispose of to describe our experience. This destabilization is achieved as a result of two interrelated aspects of the Prologue: its semantic content, and the phonetic texture built up within it. The repetition of the words listed above is in itself powerful for example, for it removes the signifying power from any sentence or phrase taken out of the context of the whole; words lose their individual identity in the flux of meaning created by the modification of the roles they play within individual phrases. The alterations of order and rhythm (however minute) are also vital to the dynamic of the text, for this is inseparable from the phonetic texture built up by recurring syllables and sounds. The text is therefore simultaneously homogenous – even closed, due to the intense lexical restriction imposed – and mobile. It can perhaps best be conceived of as a substance that reproduces internally, activating a sort of inverse growth beneath the surface of the text.

The reader's experience of this closed dynamic is reinforced in two ways. Firstly by his/her phonetic experience of the text (the experience of the modulation of his/her voice as the text is read) and secondly by the way sentences alternate between appearing to address somebody directly ('Tu es dans quelqu'un' for example (JS:17)), and resembling general statements ('Il n'y a plus personne dans quelqu'un' for example (JS:17)). The 'tu' employed in the former could apply to the reader or to another possible subject, and the general statements could be voiced again by the reader, by a possible author or narrator, or by the text itself. This supports the idea that the text is in a way auto-generative, definable only (if at all) by the totality of possible combinations of the words that occur within it. The reader's conception of him/herself is hence called into question directly by the Prologue, and the movement instigated by it is vital to the destabilization of his/her ideas concerning identity and spatio-temporal continuity, an effect that is fundamental to the conception of 'being' presented by the text, for presence and absence become mere functions of the sense of being, both integral to the fluctuation of 'la respiration' and 'le souffle' that define the phrase 'je suis'.

To turn to the relation both Novarina's conception and use of language have to identity, the first scene involves a dialogue between 'La Logique' and 'La Grammaire'. Here, the apparent naivety of the questions posed to the latter by the former serve to undermine our assumptions concerning language. The question 'Comment appelle-t-on un mot?', for example, gains the following response: 'Le mot *mot* veut sans doute dire quelque chose dans une langue que nous n'entendons pas' (JS:26). The fallibility of our assumptions concerning the power of designation are targeted again in scene two: 'C'est en vain que vous parlerez de mon nom, car c'est lui seul qui s'est nommé Jean Singulier' (JS:30). The 'personnes' chosen to carry out this dialogue, and the simultaneously abstract and childish nature of its content indicate Novarina's belief that the way we conceive of language is bound to the way we conceive of ourselves. For

him, both typically imply constructions we tend to leave unquestioned. The need to reject linguistic habits is therefore bound to the need to think in a new way both about the world and about the nature of our relation to it.

At the beginning of scene two, Jean Singulier states: ‘Je viens d’assassiner mon père ma mère mon beau-frère son fils et son p’tit frère, sa tante, leur récipient, mon oncle et leurs cousins, mon fils, son père, sa sœur et sa belle-sœur’ (JS:28). This speech suggests the simultaneous rejection of linguistic heritage, of the supposed relation between language and meaning, and of traditional identity criteria. Indeed, in the course of the speech Jean Singulier admits the recent assassination of himself. Significantly, however, this is not of himself as held within the ‘je’ that opens the sentence but of himself as designated within the context of a semantically bound set of linguistic items (evoked, perhaps, by the word ‘récipient’). Following directly on from the prologue, this speech manifests the fact that the matter of language has (in the context of this text) replaced the matter of the world insofar as the latter is conceived to be composed of objects designated or named by man. Hence Jean Singulier’s question: ‘Que faire pendant la matière?’ (JS:29).

The effects the disruption of reference described above has on our ordinary understanding of physical reality are manifested directly in the speech that follows the question quoted above. Two sentences of this speech read as follows:

J’ai séjourné huit ans dans la tour aux trois temps: futur, passé, présent; puis j’ai marché de N à N’, travaillé chez T’, puis poursuivi la filière F par sa diagonale B, puis en sens inverse de U à U; puis redennouveau U à U où sous l’influence I du facteur A, j’ai rencontré le problème B, qui s’aggrava jusqu’à la fin F où j’ai plus vu la personne P [...] Dans la cage d’escalier du bâtiment C, huit ans plus tôt, un jour d’anniversaire de ma naissance, j’ai revécu les mois foutus puis j’ai rencontré B dans la ville de Quoi où je venais d’avoir été mis en naissance pour finir par erreur. (JS:29-30)

Here, both space and time are shown to be reducible to linguistic constructions that are themselves as arbitrary as the names given to places, things (both abstract and concrete), and people. The reduction of time and movement to formulaic constructions involves a

reduction or flattening out of both language and knowledge that is, however, liberating, although the liberation involved is not immediate or effortless. This transgression of ordinary rules concerning space, time and their description is vital to the resulting thickness or tangibility of the text, but this is only meaningful insofar as it reflects the author's experience of thought. As suggested above, the rejection of conceptual structures leads back to the experience of the fundamental ambiguity of the boundary between self and world. As Jean Singulier states a little further on, caught in the idea that 'being' should be definable through reference to objective criteria of space and time: 'Ici, je dois d'abord chercher l'espace qui correspond à mon cerveau' (JS:37). As the modifications brought about in the text through the activity of other voices suggest, however, the essence of 'je suis' cannot be pinpointed, but only experienced.

The above evokes Novarina's comment concerning his development as a writer: 'J'ai dû complètement reconstituer mon cerveau', and indeed, the need expressed in Jean Singulier's speech to find a space that fits the pattern of his experience of thought reflects a particular stage of the creative act that follows the break from habitual perception. Within this stage, the ordinary methods we employ to understand and classify our experience is reversed; it is no longer the world that modifies experience but experience that modifies the world; space and time become functions of thought, which is itself subordinated to the experience of 'being' in the world. This interpretation is supported by two statements he makes further on: 'J'ai beau été, j'ai rien pu faire sur terre ni séjourner: alors je me suis assis au bord de moi en attendant ma catastrophe. [...] Au lieu de parler, je prononçais que des mots' (JS:51). These two statements are open to several different readings. One suggests that the inability to speak that corresponds with the pronunciation of words is equivalent to death, to inactivity. Yet the fact of being forced to sit on the border of the self and to mechanically repeat learnt words does not negate being as such, and the difficulty implied by this state evokes that

suggested by Tarkos in *Anachronisme*, when the narrator, caught in the ‘flottement’ induced by his suspension of perceptual habits, can find no exit, for all known boundaries (suggested by the once ‘known’ park) have disappeared. This reinforces another reading that draws from Novarina’s choice of the verb ‘séjourner’, a verb that suggests not only immobility, but more specifically immobility within a given or designated space. This reflects the fallibility of the recourse to words or ideas (such as ‘je suis’) which in themselves (out of the context of a given utterance) remain meaningless: ‘des coques vides’. One fragment illustrates this idea: ‘Première philosophe: A propos de Je suis. Est-il celui qui est? Deuxième philosophe: Non. Celui qui devient n’a aucun besoin d’être’ (JS:83). Identity is thus conceived of as dynamic, not static. Reference to a set of criteria can only fail to capture the constantly shifting sense that constitutes ‘being’, or existence in the world. One last interpretation reflects the emphasis Alferi puts on the need to ‘attendre en penser’ within his conception of the creative act. He suggests that this state is necessary because it involves the suspension of one’s sense of oneself as situated in space or time which entails the release of the reference points we normally appeal to in order to reinforce our own sense of identity.

Novarina’s creation of the vast body of voices or ‘personnes’ that recur sometimes hundreds of times and sometimes no more than once in his work is directly related to his attack on traditional identity criteria. Many of the speakers named in *Je suis*, including Jean Singulier, Sosie, L’Illogicien, Le Mangeur de soi-même and L’Enfant d’outrebref appear elsewhere, and here other well-known and hence perhaps more surprising names such as Jean Dubuffet and André Marçon are scattered among them, adding a further physical dimension to the text. As discussed in Chapter 3, Novarina’s constant creation of new voices, and the incessant shuffling between them that occurs in all of his texts, constitutes (paradoxically) a vital part of their coherence by adding directly to their substantiality. The sense of the thickness and

interpenetrability of language and sense is particularly strong in *Je suis*, perhaps because here, Novarina is focusing directly on the extent to which the substance of language and that of our world(s) are shared. As cited earlier, Novarina states that it is necessary that '*je suis respire au centre du mouvement*' (TP:125). In this text, the apparent multiplication of voices and the splitting or re-manipulation of words in fact results in just that: in the development of a rhythmic kernel that captures being by actualising – and suspending – the confrontation and ultimate interpenetration of matter and mind in thought. The idea seems to be that both self and world depend on this rhythm, a rhythm that can be felt although it escapes description and analysis. It is the sensation produced in the reader by the thickening of the substance of language that indicates the profound connection that binds our substance with that of language, and the text hence constitutes an affirmation of presence that is a-temporal, for it is reactivated with each reading of it.

One passage provides a particularly striking example of the way experience becomes matter through language:

Avec Jean Manger et ceux d'Izouf, chez Jean Mangedouze, chez Beauchamp, chex Répétot, puis j'ai passé quelques temps quelque part chez quelqu'un sans m'en être aperçu que j'avais dépassé tout mon temps de moi-même, puis je me suis raversu que j'avais passé toute la mort dans mon corps pour cette vie; puis lever matin; puis sonner réveil avec cette personne-ci; puis suite en Villeparisis, gare du quai B, ouest, face d'un train, pour animer conversation, je changeai le feu vert en un rouge puis un bleu – et autres idem et isitoines actions stupides dont découlèrent ce que vous savez... Vous avez appris? Vous avez su? (JS:181)

Here, time and space are shown to be functions not of the world but of the particular grain of an experience; the action of thought is not confined to the 'mental' but involves the direct alteration of what is ordinarily considered objectively perceivable ('je changeai le feu vert en un rouge puis un bleu' for example). The internal linguistic shuffling that occurs both between otherwise separated lexical items and the semantic breaks and connections that occur within individual words all contribute to the

condensation of the texture of the speech. Jean Mangedouze is at once a replication and a multiplication of Jean Manger, for example; the word 'Répétot' suggests the abortion of the word 'répéter', and the anachronistic nature of this abortion through the evocation of the word 'tôt'; 'raversu' suggests an amalgamation of the verbs 'raviser' 'renverser' and the past participle of 'savoir', hence suggesting a return towards the known that involves a reversal or inversion of ordinary methods of thought. Such disruption of ordinary linguistic construction underlines the fact that it is in the substance of speech as experienced that the 'je suis' at the heart of its rhythm lies. The meaning is largely felt in the phonetic texture of the text. Such use of language poses an equivalence between experience of the world and experience of language, for both involve mind and body: meaning hovers on the boundary of sense. The looping and recycling of words and syllables apparent here recurs throughout Novarina's work, and it constitutes a direct reflection of the a-chronological action of thought. The way the text wavers between meaning and nonsense is also highly significant, for this reflects the relation between language and reality. Our habitual (and for the most part unquestioning) use of the former moulds our perception of the latter, so much so that we tend to ignore the possible discrepancy between objects or experiences and the set phrases or constructions we use to describe them. cursory recognition involving reductive systems typically short-circuits the act of looking, the experience of touch, and so on, and such processes extend within the domain of language; it is often sufficient to recognize the pattern of a speech or the intonation of a voice to guess the intention or meaning behind an enunciation. This underlines the importance of Novarina's constant 'remâchage' of words and syllables which imposes the increased awareness of and attentiveness to words and structures both re-used, transgressed and transformed.

The affirmation of presence implied by the text draws directly from Novarina's concentration on each aspect of the experience of thought. The difficulty created by the

destabilization of the ordinary delimitations between self and world plays a large part in the form awareness of both takes. This is drawn out in the speech attributed to Un vivant malgré lui:

J'arrivais plus, je croyais plus à la saison des autres, ni à la lumière qui m'éteignit. [...] Chaque fois que j'avais une pensée c'était au détriment de mes idées; chaque fois que je disais un mot, c'était toujours une chose en moins. Chaque fois que je me rappelais un souvenir, c'était de quelque chose que je ne reconnaissais pas; chaque fois que j'avais un sentiment, c'était accompagné du pressentiment d'un signal qui me signalait que j'éprouvais rien; chaque fois que je faisais un mouvement c'était un tourment pour m'arrêter [...] réclamant d'être, j'étais ce que j'étais pas, j'avais ce que j'avais pas, j'étais ce que j'avais pas eu, j'avais tout ce que je n'étais pas (JS:66)

This form of awareness involves an acute sense of the break between mind and matter implied by language. It results in an inability to act and the dissolution of all goals. The last part of this speech also suggests the extent to which the idea of 'being' is itself a container into which the reality of thought *as experienced* doesn't fit. This in turn suggests a break between possession and being: neither self nor world are ever 'possessed'. It is the constant reversal of subject and object that is creative of meaning, directly related to the transitional relationship that defines touch. This idea is directly related to a later speech voiced by Jean Singulier: 'Nous ne pouvons vraiment rien dire de ce qui est ici; sauf que nous l'avons traversé, sauf que nous l'avons nommé monde en traversant' (JS:156). The act of naming is referred to here as a dynamic act that includes the totality of a movement or 'traversée'. The importance attached to the act of naming is therefore at once maximized and minimized, for it is indeed the *whole* world, but then again *only* 'the world' that is named. The act of naming as referred to in this fragment therefore does not involve the classification and separation of objects in accordance with an arbitrary lexical scheme, but the designation of a movement. This suggests an equivalence between the movement through things and the movement through language: the former involves the affirmation of being ('je suis') on the most basic level, the acceptance of the 'je' as both subject and as part of the world. The latter

is proper to the poetic act: the acceptance involved is the same, the difference being that, exteriorized as text, the experience that gave rise to the moment of affirmation can be reactivated indefinitely. The idea of the dynamic nature of being developed here is clarified by the following fragment of dialogue:

Première Philosophe: L'être manque à tout ce qui est, et cependant, il n'y a pas de néant dans la création. Je suis. Et de même, toutes les choses sont. Et cependant l'être est ce qui manque à tout ce qui est.

Deuxième Philosophe: Non à tout ce qui est, mais à tout ce que nous nommons. (JS:73)

Hence, perhaps, the line that occurs in *Pendant la matière*: 'Le moi est la région de la mort' (PM:12). The evolution of the self is bound to the modification of mental states brought about through the physical contact of thought with the matter of language and the world. It thus involves a necessary break with any existing 'self-image' and an increased openness to and awareness of the potential novelty of each pattern brought about by every experience as it occurs.

Before concluding this section, it is worth returning briefly to Novarina's use of theatre to break from a conception of language as descriptive or representational. It is the actor's transgression of his own self-image and 'personality' that fascinates Novarina: the fact that through speech and movement he can transcend his own 'being' or rather the identity criteria that usually define it, for himself or others. Within Novarina's conception of the theatre, the actor's task is therefore not conceived of as mimetic, but as transformative; each act that occurs on stage is fundamentally dynamic: unrepeatable and yet complete in itself. The particular form of engagement induced by Novarina's texts has been commented on repeatedly. In the course of a 'table ronde' that followed a festival devoted in part to Novarina's works for the stage, Claude Buchwald for example spoke extensively about the physical and mental effort required of the actor by his texts.²³⁹ Her observation of the power they have to take over the

²³⁹ Buchwald has produced a number of Novarina's stage-works. The festival referred to was entitled '20scènes' and took place between the 22nd and the 27th of May 2007. The central thematic of the festival

physical body of the actor has even led her to state repeatedly that it is the actor alone that creates the spectacle; the ‘metteur en scène’ merely orchestrates space so that the dynamic of the spoken text can be sustained most successfully on stage. Novarina himself spoke in the course of the same ‘table ronde’ of a particular moment in *L’Origine rouge*, when having recited three pages of algebra the actor threw a stick that carried within it all of the energy contained, until then, in the body of his speech. It was the physical power of the list that endowed the gesture with such force: it is the suspension of the understanding that allows action to become meaningful in a completely new way. William Calvin’s discussion of the role throwing plays in developing intelligence is relevant here, for his analysis of the relation between this skill and language use bears on the idea that a particular *sense* of agency is implied by all expression.²⁴⁰ The event on stage exemplifies the liberation from habitual methods of thought that confine expression and comprehension to arbitrary linguistic structures that themselves curtail awareness of the fundamental role physicality plays in the creativity of thought.

Novarina’s conception of the actor’s task is bound to his ideas concerning the importance a break with any fixed idea of self has to creativity. The actor no longer uses objects as symbols, or space as a backdrop. By concentrating on the physicality of enunciation he plays on the very boundaries usually set up between self and world, accomplishing a transformation of these boundaries not only for himself but for his audience.

To conclude, this section has been intended to suggest that for Novarina creativity does not involve myopic concentration on the self but the transcendence of the self brought about by the rejection of the distinction between subject and object, self

was the bond between theatre and poetry. The ‘table ronde’ referred to here took place on the last day of the festival.

²⁴⁰ See Calvin ‘The unitary hypothesis: a common neural circuitry for novel manipulations, language, plan-ahead and throwing?’ (in Gibson & Ingold, 1993:230-251).

and other within the matter of language. For Novarina, 'subjecthood' is not a matter of identity criteria or role fulfilment; it is a dynamic state that is characterized by constant modification and change. In the context of poetry in particular, such modification is directly connected to the increased awareness of language as part of our substance. Creativity within language involves a necessary break with any static self-conception or image and an openness to the potential novelty of each thought pattern set in motion by a new experience.

Section ii: TRANSFORMATION

The alteration that occurs within the poet as the creative act takes place is captured directly in the text *Entrée dans le théâtre des oreilles*. Here, the following passage occurs:

Il n'avait ni voix, ni visions, ni visitations, mais il était touché, il devenait celui qui touche, manipulateur, autogénique. Il traversait des états de séparation, il voyait avec ses mains. Il n'a plus d'yeux mais le corps entier comme un œil. Les pieds, les mains, les muscles, nerfs, sexes, les boyaux intérieurs des tubes qui voient, il est la main d'une vue, l'objet d'un son tactile, touché et visité. Il ne parvient plus à se déplacer qu'en pensée. (TP:68)

The person designated by the pronoun 'il' in this passage is never named, but as the text proceeds, it is replaced more and more frequently by a 'je'. The pronoun 'il', taken alone, could therefore refer to an unspecified actor, writer or reader: it could thus designate either an unspecified thinking individual or the process of thought individualized. The following line occurs towards the end of the text: 'L'Homme de Valère entre dans le Théâtre des Oreilles et commence à voir' (TP:118). This suggests a further, connected interpretation: that the subject of the text is both the creative act as experience by Novarina, and the conception of man entailed by it. The text traces the modification of the subject from two angles simultaneously – from within and from

without – and it is in part this shuffling that endows the text with its particular significance and of course its dynamism.

The experience captured by the above passage is directly connected both to thought and to touch. Novarina refers to the difficulty of movement (‘se déplacer’) for example which directly evokes Tarkos’s narrator’s difficulties with orientation and movement once his perceptual habits have been rejected and the modification of his state has begun. The nature of this difficulty is clarified later on in the text: ‘Tout faisait bloc, il avait perdu en grande partie la mémoire, la faculté de s’orienter, mais en revanche jouissait d’un nouvel organe, d’un nouveau sens, d’un œil pour apercevoir dans la nuit, d’une vue aveugle, aigüe, crépusculaire, d’un œil noir’ (TP:104). This directly reflects Tarkos’s narrator’s experience of time and space as ‘une seule masse d’un seul hiver qui ne finit pas’ and his remark that ‘il n’y a plus d’endroits à trouver dans le parc [...] le temps a été mangé [...] il n’y a plus moyen de se faire un chemin’ (A:7, 25). Novarina’s references to vision in *Entrée dans le théâtre des oreilles* do not imply that he is concerned with sight. Indeed, the new sense referred to by words such as ‘voir’ and ‘apercevoir’ appears to require a blindness to ordinary visual points of reference: ‘tout faisait bloc’. The experience generated by the ‘nouvel organe’ referred to above is primarily tactile, and indeed, Novarina’s choice of the word ‘organe’ has sexual connotations that evoke penetration and fecundation that are reflected elsewhere in the text. It is the whole body that is involved however, as the passage shows: the thinking subject has become ‘manipulaire’. This transformation results from a change brought about in the process of thought for the physical is no longer subordinated to the mental, perception has become tactile: no longer directed by thought it is governed by the writer’s sense of being in the world. Movement is thus no longer conceived of in relation to concepts of time and space, it is conceived solely in relation to the evolving experience of the subject ‘tout est en germination, saisi au surgissement même; les

choses n'apparaissent que dans leur appel-disparition'.²⁴¹ The role that every aspect of experience plays in the process of thought is given equal weight; attentiveness to the sense of being has overridden the barriers so often interposed between mind and body.

The temporal aspect of the passage quoted above backs up this interpretation: some point of contact has occurred: 'il était touché' 'touché et visité', but this occurrence is in some way inseparable from both a past dynamic ('il devenait celui qui touche' 'il traversait des états de séparation') and a present state ('[i]l n'a plus d'yeux', 'il est la main', '[i]l ne parvient plus'). The moment of transformation that occurs in the course of the creative act thus involves the rejection of a linear conception of time. Just as the subject has ceased to be definable by reference to his visible presence in space, his experience can no longer be explained in accordance with a linear conception of becoming. This evokes the rejection of the concept of horizontality discussed in the introduction to this Part; just as space has lost its three dimensions ('c'est une perte dans l'espace, une chute, une perte de l'espace, trois dimensions qui tombent, tous les repères qui chutent'), time is no longer a matter of past, present and future (TP:110). Both have become functions of the evolving subject, bound to the possibility of his transformation, on a scale best conceived of as vertical. This idea of verticality is therefore bound to a particular sort of experience that is in a way a-temporal, for it can neither be pinpointed nor located within a series of events of any sort. Added to the spatial ambiguity of the event, this means that the experience is by nature untraceable, and it is for this reason that its occurrence can only be recognized retrospectively, in the form of the realisation that it has instigated the modification of a thought pattern. It is the very transience of the moment of transformation, the fact that 'cela s'édifie à l'instant même', that endows the experience with its particular poignancy (LC:50). In a strict physical sense, only the present exists, and, in this context, it is the overriding physicality of the occurrence that

²⁴¹ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:98.

not only gives the experience its force, but that also proves the extent of the change brought about in the subject. The modification of perception is experienced physically; it alters the subject's sense of his presence in the world, and hence his comprehension of the nature of the boundary of the self. The experience is transformational.

In order to develop this idea, it is worth turning to a later passage in which Novarina refers to the 'renversement' central to *La Lutte des morts*. This 'renversement' involves what could be considered Novarina's most violent disruption of the reader's preconceptions concerning language. Not only does the proliferation and metamorphosis of the multitude of 'personnes' that appear challenge concepts of identity and designation, words and syntax are inversed or broken, subsumed to the ferocious dynamic of the text. This aspect of the 'renversement' referred to by Novarina is captured in the following extract:

Foncine Lupé: –Du drombe odscurre le bord s'avance divisionné. L'hôm à quat'marches, bêle du fût. Bête du fudlé, seize plantes qui marchent, qui arquent la fente, qui brassent personne... (*Il le mime.*) L'bomb finira sans té, et l'global par d'la pètte. Et la hôt jétéra du noir sperm et lé preûmier qui de son spexe verra saillir c'te noirr, prendra la peur, et c'est moi.
Son tour de piste ridiculé, les enfants lui appliquent un bonnet. On étanche les sections des sutures des quatre qui sortent. On entend les débuts des coups fracassants. Il a la force tout de meme de dire :
 Oncine: - Le spexe noir d'once qui vient-qui sort, Foncine, c'est le premier signe qui vient de nous la-faire-la-physique-des-inversions-des-dénaturés-des transfuratsfinauxdesménèbres qui fossentdansdesmondesentiers des engloutirésanimals
 desSouffrancesAernellesdestroupéesdesaniméauxdespendredesmortalitassité
 rnitassitéèèèèère (T:350)

The sound alone of the first speech is violent, each syllable a weighted blow. This is in part due to the slow reading pace induced by the frequent apparition of unrecognizable words; language thickens and physically impedes progression through the text. The actor/reader is presented visually with language as matter, he is forced to read it as a phonetic substance. He thus experiences it as such, as a glutinous mass, the 'sense' of which lies in the contortions the text forces his mouth and throat to make through combinations of letters such as 'l'b' 'l'g' and 'c't'. The effect generated is intensified in

the second speech, where all potential meaning is subsumed to the irreducible accumulation of syllables that circulate in the dynamic space of a single breath, to ‘la force d’inversion qui est notre souffle’.²⁴² In both cases the densification of the text is due in part to the partial or total repetition or recurrence of certain words and syllables. The sounds ‘du’ ‘b’ ‘u f’ ‘é’ that recur in the fragment ‘bèle du fût. Bête du fudlé’ evoke the name ‘Dubuffet’. Whether this is intentional or not, the way in which the text works through processes of inverse multiplication is immediately evocative of the shuffling mass, simultaneously finite or closed and infinite of Dubuffet’s *Coucou bazar*. This impression is reinforced by Novarina’s statement that:

On frôle joyeusement le chaos [...] Réversible, le langage irradie, fait resurgence... J’ai la sensation d’avoir affaire à des atomes, à des molécules en mouvement, à quelque chose de vraiment physique [...] On est au travail dans le champ de force de l’espace et du langage. Il y a une menace, un croisement physique qu’il faut capter dans un état semi-conscient. J’ai l’impression de toucher au langage et de tenir en lui la vraie matière.²⁴³

It is attentiveness to the grain of experience, to the physicality of thought that brings about the inability to differentiate between the infinitely small and the infinitely vast, between individuality and multiplicity.

It is not possible to consider the full significance of this passage here, but it is worth pointing out the way it exemplifies not only the inversion of words and that of the reading process (as sound and the physical experience of language take priority over sense) but also that of identity. Within the individual speaker designated by the two names, Foncine Lupé can be seen as the inverse of Oncine. The two are interdependent and yet fundamentally opposed; it is the dynamic of potential creation through inversion that rhythms the ‘personne’s’ battle with non-existence. The inversion of Foncine involves the absorption of things in the world through the hole designated by the O of Oncine, as opposed to the movement from self to world suggested by the verb ‘foncer’ (which evokes penetration) implicit in Foncine. The result is the substantivization of

²⁴² Novarina, in Mercoyrol and Johansson, 2000:5.

²⁴³ Novarina, in Mercoyrol and Johansson, 2000:9.

language; the destruction of the individual from within as the matter of language re-asserts itself as mind.

To turn back to Novarina's statements concerning this text, he writes:

C'est le *temps* de la langue qui est traversé, la suite des mots, l'ordre des choses. Ici, l'ordre est partout renversant, la parole à l'envers, son cours inversé. C'est un livre contre l'écoulement sujet-verbe-complément, c'est une pensée qui se retourne, une parole qui remonte, un contretemps, une utopie, uchronie, une utopie du temps, une île imaginaire du temps, une île du temps. C'est un autre temps qui a jailli dans le monde et fait un trou dedans, un trou noir dans la nature, dans nos habitudes de perception [...] C'est l'expérience de la sortie d'un corps qui est vécue, l'expérience de la sortie du corps humain. (TP:112-3)

This passage manifests Novarina's belief in the relationship between the modification of language and the possible modification of the self, as is evident from the equivalence suggested between the book ('c'est un livre contre l'écoulement sujet-verbe-complément') thought ('c'est une pensée qui se retourne') and experience ('c'est l'expérience de la sortie du corps qui est vécue'). The reversal of temporal order is vital both to the movement away from constrictive linguistic structures and to the subject's transgression of a self-image moulded by historicity. The verb 'jaillir' that occurs towards the end of the passage suggests birth, but the 'île du temps' that is associated with it is also said to create 'un trou noir dans la nature'. The birth involved hence gives rise to something that is simultaneously a presence and an absence, a growth and an abscess. It is also, however, 'l'expérience de la sortie du corps humain'. As attention is riveted to the felt movement of a thought, the ordinary boundaries of the body are transgressed, 'l'ordre des choses' is inverted and a new form of perception becomes possible, a form of perception which itself entails the enlargement of the bounds of sense. The 'île du temps' hence refers to a particular state that reflects the state of 'flottement' discussed in relation to Tarkos's conception of the first stage of the creative act.

The references made above to the transcendence of the self are related directly to a line which occurs in *Lumières du corps*: ‘Par l’opération et l’action de la pensée, par le don du langage, nous brûlons l’idole humaine’ (LC:50). Language, once recognized as part of our substance as human beings, becomes a means to break beyond an image-based conception of the self. The emphasis put on the potential inherent in any given utterance is vital. As Novarina writes in the text referred to above ‘l’acteur [...] tient dans ses mains les mots *irrésolus* en faisceaux d’équations ouvertes’ (LC:45). Such openness of language is not easily attained, however; for words to lose their power to designate and yet remain open to potential meaning a return to the origin of the spoken word is necessary, and violence again characterizes Novarina’s description of the processes required to achieve it. As he writes in *Entrée dans le théâtre des oreilles*: ‘Il pensait, par des opérations faites à la langue, des épreuves à lui faire subir, des tortures, des traitements, provoquer des changements chimiques, des transmutations dans l’esprit’ (TP:115). Such violence is apparently directed uniquely at language here, the intended effect on the subject only secondary, but this impression is qualified by the sentence that follows: ‘La langue n’est pas ton instrument, ton outil, mais ta matière, la matière dont tu es fait; les traitements que tu lui fais subir, c’est à toi-même que tu les infliges, et en changeant ta langue c’est toi-même que tu changes’ (TP:115-6). The ‘mots irrésolus’ held by the actor are hence equivalent to his very substance: to the potential of his being, activated by the mental and physical space of the stage. The return to the origin of language is hence equivalent to a return to the origin of our idea of what it is to ‘be’ at all. The conceptual ‘flottement’ entailed is vital to creative potential.

The violence that characterizes the first stage of the creative act for Novarina requires particular attention. For him, the creative act is a physical act in the world, and the manipulation of the substance of language is inseparable from the manipulation of

the substance of the thinking subject. The violence of his work therefore serves on one level to mark the importance he attaches to the poetic act; his belief that alterations brought about in the domain of language bear directly on the way we think about the relations that bind self and world. The apparent oscillation between the physical and the non-physical indicates the extent to which he refuses any sharp distinction between the two: thought is a physical act, and therefore the material and phonetic substance of a given sentence or utterance is as important as the words it is composed of.²⁴⁴ References to the theatre can apply (as has been seen) both to an internal and an external stage upon which the action of thought is played out. In a similar way, references to the actor can designate the thinking subject, a text, or the man on stage. One main difference between Novarina and Tarkos lies in the way they conceive of the connections that bind the creative act and other aspects of experience. Whereas Tarkos draws the generality of various experiences in towards the particular, Novarina's work seems to explode indefinitely from the central core of his belief in the significance of the relation between linguistic creativity and life. As he writes: 'j'ai toujours voulu produire à l'envers, à partir de la cellule la plus petite' (TP:111). The violence of his work is a direct effect of this explosion. In this context it is interesting to note Tarkos's constant references to moulding language, to pressing into it, and Novarina's marked preference for verbs such as 'jeter' 'effondrer' 'surgir' and 'déchirer'. The force that drives the creativity of both writers is felt with equal intensity by the reader; the two experiences differ primarily in rhythm, for the pulse felt in the work of the two writers reflects the particular movement of thought proper to each of them. Tarkos's texts therefore seem to evolve in accordance with an intensification of pressure that evokes the poet's hand moulding the 'pâte' of language, Novarina's with a much more sudden movement,

²⁴⁴ Novarina's refusal of temporal order and linear linguistic structure can hence be understood as a manifestation of his desire for language, through the poetic act, to be bound to the real: to reflect not what might be or what might have been, but what is. His writing method is also relevant in this context: his refusal to reread a text until it is complete, the importance he attaches to the speed of execution, and so on.

evoked by the following line: ‘insémination, mûrissement dans le noir – puis poussée, naissance, floraison’ (DP:56). One vital similarity between their approaches, however, is the refusal to assimilate the act of writing with fabrication; for both it is the descent into being rather than the construction of a structural or conceptual edifice that lies behind the potential significance of the creative act. The following passage underlines the idea of explosion discussed above while manifesting the particular form of inversion that characterizes Novarina’s conception of the ‘poussée’ fundamental to the creative act:

Éclipse, point aveugle, trou noir, crépusclement, crépusculation, syncope, blanc dans l’espace, dans la perception, blanc des sens, perdre la langue, nucléaire, jeter sa cervelle, empirer, faire l’expérience, descendre dans le souffle, dans la colonne d’air, descendre dans le trou de la lumière du tube de la colonne d’air, lésions expérimentales, trous de mémoire, vides de sens, vertiges languiers, languisme, gendrée perpétuelle, chute du système de reproduction, chute du système d’action, j’écris sans moi, comme une danse sans danse, j’écris renoncé, défait. Défait de ma langue, défait de ma pensée. Sans pensée, sans mot, sans souvenir, sans opinion, sans voir et sans entendre. J’écris par les oreilles. J’écris à l’envers. J’entends tout. (TP:104-5)

Here, the ‘point aveugle’ evokes the second stage of the creative process; the moment before ‘contact’ occurs (to refer back to the discussion of this stage in relation to *Anachronisme*). The passage explodes in both directions, turning on the ‘trou noir’ of sense referred to at the beginning, for on the one hand it proceeds as a list, giving an impression of accumulation and intensification, but on the other it involves a descent from a universal phenomenon (the ‘éclipse’) down through ‘le souffle’ to the ‘je’. Another movement proceeds from the ‘crépusclement, crépusculation’ to the action invoked by the phrase ‘jeter sa cervelle’ which in turn leads to the inversion of the perceiving self: the subject’s attention at the end of the passage is turned inwards to the sense of being. Action is no longer directed outwards, it is bound to the development of what Novarina calls ‘une hyperperception’: a form of perception that inverts the

processes of recognition and designation and that develops through heightened attentiveness to the sense of being (DP:68).

The nature of the change brought about in perception by the creative act is clarified by Novarina's use of mathematical and geometric vocabulary in the context of the experience undergone by writer, actor and reader. In a quotation cited above, the actor was said to hold words 'en faisceaux d'équations ouvertes'. This suggests that it is his physical relationship with the words of the text that endows them with their potential: he mentally and physically *holds* them. No longer subsumed to the functions of description and designation, the resolution of their potential meaning (suggested by the words 'équations ouvertes') depends on this contact: what is involved is a reactivation of the creative process as experienced by the writer. The word 'équations' also suggests that the text, borne by the actor, balances dynamically between the man on stage and the spectator. The rebirth of the text is dependent on the maintenance of this dynamism. The nature of this experience, which (in the case of both the actor and the spectator) is largely a reactivation of that undergone by the writer, is expanded on by the following line: 'c'est un croisement, un pont, un seuil, une équation à l'envers devant soi et au loin, illisible, un lieu de passage'.²⁴⁵ This is developed in the line: 'Comme en géométrie, le théâtre est la scène où le lieu n'est jamais vu mais démontré' (PM:41). This suggests that the operation that occurs on stage is directly mirrored in the process of thought induced in the spectator, because the verb 'démontrer' refers both to the action carried out on stage and to the spectator's perception and comprehension of it (it is also significant that it carries an implicit reference to the hand). The operation referred to involves the negation of ordinary methods of visual and auditory comprehension. Novarina's aim is to highlight the extent to which, ordinarily: 'Ce n'est que la peau de la terre que nous voyons'.²⁴⁶ This is fundamental to the actor's task, as

²⁴⁵ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:101.

²⁴⁶ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:99.

discussed in detail in the section devoted to ‘pensée-voix’, but the significance for Novarina of the actor’s rejection of the known as each utterance occurs unrepeated and unrepeatable on the stage is inseparable from his drive to counteract linearity of movement. As Novarina writes in *Le Drame dans la langue française*: ‘on lutte contre les lois de perspectives en langue [...] change vision et audition. La perdition sans perspective’ (TP:39). The use of the plural here (‘lois de perspectives’) is significant, for it suggests that what is referred to is not only the linearity of language – the conception of sentences as progressive – but also the extent to which linguistic structures reflect and constrict our understanding of space. What is experienced by reader, spectator and actor is ‘le reel réversible, miroitant et tremblé’.²⁴⁷ The amalgamation of vision and audition suggests the bearing perceptual habits have on our use of language. The disruption of these habits is said to lead to ‘la perdition’, a word which suggests inevitability and irrevocability: the spectator no longer has any conceptual foothold that might enable him to ‘make sense’ of what he is witnessing on stage. What is changed is therefore, in Novarina’s own words, ‘la perception’; the very process of comprehension has been inverted (TP:39). A little further on he states his certainty that ‘ce travail fait à la langue altère le cerveau’, a line directly reflected by one of the statements (cited earlier) that make up the *Impératifs*: ‘J’ai dû complètement reconstituer mon cerveau’ (TP:41, 149). These statements directly reinforce the discussion of the physicality of the transformation of the creative act discussed earlier. The following underlines the connectedness of space and time within Novarina’s conception of transformation: ‘L’au-delà ne se trouve pas forcément *après*. Il y a un au-delà spatial, dans l’instant. Dans l’épreuve du *toucher* des sens, il y a une *outrevue*. Une sensation d’outrevue. Une traversée, un départ. L’au-delà n’est pas après. Les sens – et d’abord surtout le premier des sens: le *toucher* –, nous donnent aussi la sensation de

²⁴⁷ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:101.

l' 'intangible'.²⁴⁸ For Novarina then, the alteration of perception has a direct effect on mental functioning, and it is this effect brought about in the mental processes of writer, actor and spectator that corresponds to the development of the new 'organe', compared to a hand, which could be defined as a new mode of attention, directed towards the sense of being.

In the light of Novarina's association of spatial and linguistic inversion, it seems that loss of perspective in the context of language is bound to the rejection of a particular aspect of our thought: spatiality. The experience of space is fundamental to thought, and as such, it is (unsurprisingly) directly reflected in language. The disruption of the spatial aspects of language hence entails not only the alteration of linguistic structure but of the structure of thought.²⁴⁹ It is worth turning to McGinn here, whose analysis of the problem consciousness poses to philosophers turns on the fact that it quite simply does not slot smoothly into the spatial world. He observes that to describe it as a purely physical phenomenon seems reductive, and yet to define it as something that exists in some way above and beyond the physical seems counter-intuitive. He argues that the problem lies in the fact that our primarily spatial methods of understanding the world fail to yield the right relation between consciousness and the brain, for these methods fail to explain how conscious states can emerge from brain states when the former are not spatial entities.²⁵⁰ McGinn develops this idea as follows:

We are, cognitively speaking as well as physically, spatial beings *par excellence*: our entire conceptual substance is shot through with spatial notions, these providing the skeleton of our thought in general. Experience itself, the underpinning of consciousness, is spatial to its core [...] We go in for spatializing metaphors and, centrally, we exploit relations to the *body* in making sense of numerically distinct but similar conscious episodes. We embed the mental in the conceptual framework provided by matter in space.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Novarina, in Merocoyrol and Johansson, 2000:15.

²⁴⁹ The arbitrary nature of our conception of space is explored in a striking way by Edwin Abbott in *Flatland*.

²⁵⁰ See McGinn, 2001:64-74.

²⁵¹ McGinn, 2001:110-111.

The problem is, of course, that this is quite simply ‘to impose upon conscious events a conceptual grid that is alien to their intrinsic nature’.²⁵² As McGinn points out, we do make locational judgements about consciousness but rather than being based on perceived facts these are drawn from causal considerations. The approach that entails such judgements is hence parasitic on prior location of physical objects, and this is where the problem lies: ‘Given the fact of emergence, matter in space has to have features that go beyond the causal conception, in order that something as spatially anomalous as consciousness could thereby come into existence’.²⁵³ In relation to Novarina’s evocation of the ‘nouvel organe’ that comes into being as a result of the creative act, it is fascinating to note the conclusions McGinn draws from the above observations. He suggests that what is necessary is ‘a perspective shift, not just a paradigm shift [...] we need a new faculty, not just a new concept drawn from our present faculties’.²⁵⁴ This directly evokes Novarina’s desire to bring about an alteration not of what is perceived, but of how we perceive it. As he writes: ‘Aujourd’hui, ce qu’il nous faut, c’est non pas un lieu de représentation en plus (ils pullulent; il y en a des dizaines de millions) mais un outil pour briser toutes nos représentations’.²⁵⁵ Hence, perhaps, his statement that: ‘il faut entendre le mot *sens* comme quelque chose qui concerne l’espace: aller vers, ouvrir vers... En mouvement et déséquilibré: une dynamique et pas du tout une équivalence. Cela *tend vers*, irait *jusqu’à...*’.²⁵⁶ Elsewhere, describing his work, he states that: ‘ça s’adresse à ailleurs qu’aux couches communes du cerveau, ça met au travail d’autres hémisphères que les deux globes reconnus’ (TP:113). For him as for the philosopher, a new approach to our existence as physical objects among physical objects is necessary, based not merely on conceptual reorganization, but on a transformation of the way in which we perceive.

²⁵² McGinn, 2001:110-111.

²⁵³ McGinn, 2001:106.

²⁵⁴ McGinn, 2001:24,23.

²⁵⁵ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:101.

²⁵⁶ Novarina, in Mercoyrol and Johansson, 2000:13.

These observations suggest the potential inherent in poetry, which, being a fundamentally spatial form of linguistic creativity, exteriorizes and clarifies our dependence on spatial concepts. Creative as opposed to analytic, it is perhaps in a particularly good position to challenge the descriptive sufficiency of the spatial metaphors that are embedded in our vocabulary and that restrict not only our thought but also our ability to think about thought. To return briefly to various ideas expounded upon in the introduction to this Part, the boundaries of any given poem (understood primarily as an experience) are the same: they include the space of the page, screen or theatre within which words appear or are pronounced, and the limits of the reader/spectator's attention and understanding. As an experience, a poem therefore necessitates an alteration in the process of thought, beginning with the modification of perception entailed quite simply by the act of reading an unknown text, and also that of concepts concerning the identity and locatability of objects, as new patterns are set up between perception and imagination. The reader or spectator, just like the actor, must cross the 'frontière mentale' of their self-image in order to become open to the possibility of new pattern formation (TP:167). Hence Novarina's frequent references to both theatre and text as a 'seuil' or 'lieu de passage'. As he states: 'S'il y a une perspective, elle est inversée et son point de fuite est à l'intérieur du corps de chacun: lecteur, spectateur...'.²⁵⁷ The constant questioning of what exists inspired by Novarina's texts reinforces this provocation of thought in the reader: not only are the 'personnes' invoked fundamentally non-actual – the relations between words and things upset through semantic and syntactic inversion – the boundaries between author, actor, reader and spectator, action, speech and thought are also blurred. As McGinn points out, 'existence is having a mind-independent property but non-existence results from the occurrence of a certain kind of mental act – a pretence or an erroneous postulation of

²⁵⁷ Novarina, in Costaz, 2001:98.

existence. Assertions of non-existence really are statements about mental acts'.²⁵⁸ The constant hesitation on the boundary of the epistemically possible that characterizes Novarina's work hence provokes the intensification of a particular sort of mental act that turns on itself, inverting the order in which we perceive the world by blocking the ontological presuppositions that ordinarily structure perception, hence directly affecting both our perceptual 'methods' and our comprehension of what we perceive. One idea that arises from these observations concerns the incompatibility of Novarina's work with the idea of fiction, for the metaphysical upheaval that occurs within his texts does more than jolt the conceptual stones in the kaleidoscope of our habitual ontology. Instead of evoking the non-actual he provokes a linguistic experience that forces the mind to confront the possibility of non-existence directly.

It is Novarina's insistence on the fact that the whole self is involved in the poetic act that is significant for our understanding of the relation between perception and creativity, for his persistent self-positioning as a writer within the boundary of the physical and the mental suggests the particularity of the sort of thought that is involved in the creative process. The predominant idea that marks his poetic approach is that heightened attention to the sense of being is capable of provoking the development of new forms of thought. This in turn suggests that because the possibility of meaning is bound to the possibility of thought, the possibility of new meaning is bound to our ability to modify our thought processes. This evokes the importance of the connection made between consciousness and creativity in the last chapter. For Novarina, as for Tarkos, the possibility of self-transformation is inseparable from the creative act. The possible formation of new thought patterns that follows on from the modification of perception is bound to the potential evolution of the individual. This is clarified by the following question and answer Novarina poses: 'Qu'est-ce qu'un artiste? Quelqu'un qui

²⁵⁸ McGinn, 2000:43.

doit s'autogénérer, naître lui-même, naître seul, qui doit se fabriquer l'organe qui ne lui a pas poussé' (TP:107). Creativity necessitates the modification of the way the artist perceives, and this modification must, as the verb 'naître' suggests, involve a return to a way of thinking about the world which avoids the frontiers set up and generally left unquestioned between self and world. The experience of the creative act is (as has been discussed earlier) best understood on a vertical scale, due to the rejection of linear and chronological structure necessary to the departure from self-image and traditional identity criteria. This is reinforced by Novarina's description of the way in which the writer's experience is reflected in that undergone by the reader: 'Lire, c'est changer de corps; c'est faire un acte d'échange respiratoire, c'est respirer dans le corps d'un autre. L'écriture est résurrectionnelle' (TP:154). Both the creative act and the act of reading involve transcending the physical and the mental boundaries of the self. The rejection of the known does indeed first induce the 'trou noir' that is the apparent impossibility of meaning, but the return to the sense of being enables a new form of thought to become possible. Hence the line: 'on ne renverse pas la langue sans tomber. C'est pourquoi, désormais, depuis le jour où j'ai *touché*, je vis tout à l'envers, et quand je dis *je*, c'est une façon de parler' (TP:116). What is referred to by the verb 'toucher' here is the realization of the fact that the matter of language is inseparable from our own substance. The point of contact referred to is therefore central not only to Novarina's creativity, but also to the wider significance of his approach.

* * *

To conclude briefly, these two chapters have been intended to bring out the fundamentally transformational nature of Tarkos's and Novarina's work. The concept 'pensée-toucher' reunites this aspect of their poetry by drawing out the direct connection they make between the potential modification of the substance of language and the potential modification of the self. In the General Conclusion, I will discuss the

overlap between the concept 'pensée-toucher' and those developed in the preceding two Parts.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

La pensée n'exprime pas mais livre passage; elle soulève, fait basculer. (DP:22)

In conclusion, this thesis has been intended less a comprehensive study of given texts than an indication of the fertility of the change in critical focus suggested by the poetic approaches studied. As mentioned in the introduction, it is hoped that the three concepts proposed will inspire new ways of considering texts of all sorts. My aim has been in part to suggest the great potential inherent in the most 'un-analytic' experience of a text and to indicate a few of the multiple ways in which the poet's creative experience can be reactivated directly as a poem is read. I have also hoped, firstly, to suggest the extent to which much contemporary literature and philosophy is working on a shared premise – the need to transcend the dividing line traditionally posed between mind and world – and secondly, to provide further arguments for emphasis on creativity in the context of questions concerning the nature not only of literary texts, but of the thinking subject.

This thesis has aimed to disrupt the traditional hierarchy of the senses. Part III, devoted to 'pensée-toucher', despite appearing last, is therefore the most important. This is partly due to the fundamental nature of touch, tactile experience (as discussed) being a prerequisite for human development. I hope to have argued convincingly that the primacy of touch to thought bears directly on our understanding of creativity. One final point to make on the subject is that it would surely be surprising if the sense so fundamental to our own 'creation' played no part in our ensuing creativity.

To bind the discussion of touch in Part III to the observations made in Parts I and II it is worth turning to André Leroi-Gourhan, who (in his discussion of human evolution and the particular role the hand plays in it) makes a direct connection between tool production and linguistic production. He writes: 'le rôle de la main, comme moyen de création de l'outil, équilibrait le rôle des organes faciaux, moyen de création du langage verbal ; [...] à un certain moment, antérieur de peu à l'apparition de l'homo sapiens, la main inaugurerait son rôle dans la création d'un mode d'expression graphique

équilibrant le langage verbal. La main demeurerait ainsi créatrice d'images, de symboles non directement dépendants du découlement du langage verbal, mais réellement parallèles'.²⁵⁹ Both activities are concerned with possibility, and both are implicitly classifying. The imagination plays a vital role in both. Whether or not tool production rendered language possible, Tallis's discussion of the neural substrate, common to both, that developed as a direct result of increasingly self-aware interaction with the world, is directly relevant here, for it reinforces the idea (central to this thesis) that sensory experience is vital to the creation and experience of poetic texts: it is felt interaction with the world that lends a text its particularity and it is the extent to which this felt experience is captured that endows it with its power.²⁶⁰ Another connection between tool production and language production is relevant: both are, like the activities they make possible, fundamentally transformational. It is physical engagement with the substance of thought that characterizes the work of the poets studied here, and it is this that renders their texts so significant on a wider philosophical scale. As Novarina writes: 'La pensée est le passage à l'acte' (PM:76).

As suggested throughout this thesis, language, for these poets, is not considered so much a *tool* of thought as part of it. For them, it is the action of thought that shapes the means of expression at the poet's disposal. This implies a conception of thought as a dynamic process that is itself tool-like: vital to the search for, and creation of, meaning, in the ambiguous realm that is the simultaneously virtual and actual boundary of the self. If our physical hands play an increasingly indirect role in shaping our world and even our experience of it, the appeal to the physical aspects of thought in no way implies the simulation of aspects of experience now lost, or increased abstraction or distancing from what is, but an appeal to the firmest 'meaning' there is: our creation of meaning. As Alferi writes: 'La poésie est le lieu critique de l'invention de la phrase'

²⁵⁹ Leroi-Gourhan, 1995:290.

²⁶⁰ See Tallis, 2003:22.

(CP:26). This may indeed imply a movement through abstraction, through the layering of sense implicit in our means and modes of expression and communication, but what is vital to this act is attentiveness to the experience of thought in and for itself. McGinn's statement that 'imagining may be compared with uttering a sentence, as distinct from asserting it' is directly relevant here.²⁶¹ As in Portugal's text *De quoi faire un mur*, moving through the pure form of an abstraction (in this case a painting by Mondrian) can be vital to the 'grasping' of the experience it provokes (DQ). What is significant is the assumption implicit in the works studied of the creativity of each and every experience. To return to Alferi: 'Il y a phrase quand l'élan de la profération, sa démesure et sa retombée deviennent pulsation, quand un dispositif rythmique porte l'affirmation' (CP:28). The texts examined focus directly on the sense of being that necessarily accompanies any experience. This presupposes no line drawn between mind and world, but nor does it deny the sense of distance and separateness that often characterizes our experience of things and, indeed, of our 'selves'.

The dynamic approach to poetic texts proposed here is intended to underline the fact that it is not *poetry* that evokes or connects things: only thought can do this. Poetry captures and provokes an experience in which perceived connections are re-activated or become possible as (thoughtful) experiences. This is what makes the reader's experience of a text potentially as creative and transformational as the poet's. As Gallagher argues, embodied movement is fundamental to our development, and 'language is generated out of movement', an observation elaborated by his observation that 'gesture and language work in a prenoetic manner': both contribute to the shaping of our cognition.²⁶² These comments underline the importance of the dynamism inherent in the act of reading and of the physical engagement of thought required by

²⁶¹ McGinn, 2004[i]:131.

²⁶² Gallagher, 2006:107,122.

these texts. The poem is a transformational space, and as such it directly affects the thinking subject in ways that clarify the way thought works.

A further statement Gallagher makes bears directly on the significance of movement and interaction within the poetic approaches studied for our conception of subjecthood. He writes:

Neither proprioception nor kinaesthesia offers a perceptual perspective on my body. If they did, they would require a second body, or perhaps a homunculus that would act as index. Our pre-reflective kinaesthetic-proprioceptive experience thus plays a role in the organization of perception, but in a way that does not require the body itself to be a perceptual object.²⁶³

The transcendence of a static conception of the subject or self, implicit in the work of the poets looked at here, is a theme that has recurred repeatedly, frequently associated with the transcendence of the image. Breaking the boundaries of the self has been linked throughout with the possibility of transformation within the substance of language. Moving beyond a sense of the self as a static or closed individual arises in part from the disruption of communicational norms entailed by the rejection of a conception of language as a mere tool of thought. This connects with the idea of verticality that has arisen several times in the course of this thesis. As has been discussed, in particular in Chapters 2 and 5, the transcendence of the concept of the subject implies the transcendence of the arbitrary assumptions concerning spatio-temporal reality that are written into the most common linguistic expressions. If the essence of the poem is (as suggested here) transformational, it cannot be captured in terms that presuppose a horizontal or linear scale. The concepts proposed are thus intended to support the idea of a vertical scale by suggesting an alternative to what might be called the ‘historicization’ of detail. Instead of taking words and phrases as components of a static whole, the approach developed treats them as interactive manifestations of a dynamic particular. The focus has shifted from ‘objects’ of thought to the relations that can be set

²⁶³ Gallagher, 2006:138.

up between them. This is why even Cadiot's brilliant description of certain contemporary texts as 'des boules de sensations-pensées-formes' falls short of capturing the essence of works such as those studied here, for the 'boule' is too suggestive of an object that is held at a distance from the perceiver.²⁶⁴ It is the active grasping of an experience that is important for these poets, and it is the instigation of a physical engagement with the substance of a thought in the reader that renders their experience of a text creative. As Tarkos writes: 'entre la faiblesse de vouloir et sentir la pensée qui est en train de partir, c'est presque marcher, le balancement, l'envie de sentir, il existe un battement' (P:34).

The movement away from traditional identity criteria so apparent in the work of all these authors is directly bound up with a particular form of engagement: not with anything resembling a 'higher ideal' but with thought itself. This particular form of engagement is therefore not bound to a conception of self as agent but better defined as a sense of agency characterized primarily by heightened attentiveness to and awareness of the experience of thought. This combines the physical sense of acting on a substance and the non-physical sense of creating meaning. It seems possible to argue that the particularity of this form of engagement – so powerful in the work of these poets – is indicative of a new form of creative potential. It also suggests the vital role creativity plays in the advancement of our understanding of both self and world. This idea is inseparable from one main aim of this thesis, which has been to stress the fundamentally affirmative nature of the poetry at the core of this thesis. This is more important than it might seem, for it not only marks what is new about the texts studied, the absence within them of the negative drive that has characterized so much preceding poetry, but also a shift away from the tendency inherent in so many twentieth-century discourses to concentrate solely on the destructive power of humankind, whether

²⁶⁴ Cadiot, in Alferi and Cadiot, 1995:5.

manifested by insistence on our animality (physicalism, biologism) or on our increasing loss of a sense of 'humanity' resulting from technological advancement (Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno etc). The affirmation of the creative potential of all experience in no way refutes the insights or justified fears that underlie such discourses. It is in fact much more humble than that; an acceptance of existence and an attempt to draw back from what has been constructed on it to attend to what makes each experience what it is. These poets' use of media other than the page thus evokes Mallarmé's statement that: 'un livre que son esthétique spéciale met d'accord avec le mode d'en user que peuvent apporter ses lecteurs, est un chef d'œuvre'.²⁶⁵

Interaction is central to the connections between thought, perception and the creative act explored here, and the idea that this takes place within mobile boundaries reinforces the idea of engagement outlined above. The activity of the imagination is not limited to the elaboration of utopias; when combined with attention and awareness it plays a direct role in the apprehension and creation of meaning. The works studied here thus provoke a re-engagement of the imagination that entails a re-engagement of the *whole* thinking subject.

²⁶⁵ Mallarmé, 1995:552.

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