

‘Double et divers’: Writing Doubly in Montaigne’s *Essais*

In ‘Des boyteux’, Michel de Montaigne attempts to describe the nature of thought and understanding: ‘[B] Il n’est rien si souple et erratique que nostre entendement: c’est le soulier de Theramenez, bon à tous pieds. Et il est double et divers, et les matieres doubles et diverses.’<sup>1</sup> Here, Montaigne stresses, as we might expect, the pliable nature of thought and belief; our capacity to remould what we think and to see things from opposed, antithetical perspectives. But Montaigne goes beyond this when he introduces a further characteristic which is much more surprising: for the essayist, thought is not simply ‘souple’, capable of being twisted and inverted, but is instead ‘double’. Thought follows multiple paths and maintains several perspectives at once.

This unusual characteristic of cognition is described in practice in ‘De la gloire’: ‘[A] nous sommes, je ne sçay comment, doubles en nous mesmes, qui faict que ce que nous

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965 [2004]), III.11.1034. All further references to the *Essais* will be incorporated into the text, following the conventional book, chapter, page system and including, where relevant, the [A], [B], and [C] markers of compositional strata. At certain key points, I follow the spelling and punctuation as it is found in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, a facsimile of which can be found at <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/montaigne/> [accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016]. Unless otherwise stated, I follow Villey’s marking of the compositional ‘couches’: these are reasonably accurate at the level of the sentence or phrase though they often fail to highlight one- or two-word substitutions. I provide markers for such changes where they are relevant to my argument.

croyons, nous ne le croyons pas, et nous ne pouvons deffaire de ce que nous condamnons’ (II.16.619). The subject under discussion in this passage is one of Epicurus’s ‘principaux dogmes’: ‘Cache ta vie’. ‘Voyons les dernieres paroles d’Epicurus’, Montaigne writes, ‘et qu’il dict en mourant: elles sont grandes et dignes d’un tel philosophe, mais si ont elles quelque marque de la recommandation de son nom, et de cette humeur qu’il avoit décriée par ses preceptes’ (II.16.619-620). Here, there is a simultaneity of contradiction: Epicurus believes and thinks two things at once. Montaigne does not argue that Epicurus believed his precept while healthy and then ceased believing in it when death was at hand; nor does he argue that Epicurus claimed to believe one thing while ‘truly’ believing something else; rather, ‘ce que nous croyons, nous ne le croyons pas.’ For Montaigne, ‘nostre entendement’ is ‘double’ precisely because it is capable of this duality and simultaneity of thought; of thinking this *and* that, regardless of contradiction, at the same time. As Ian Maclean has noted, Montaigne ‘rejette l’application du système [logique] aristotélicien’ and, in particular, the central principle of non-contradiction which is, for Aristotle, ‘le plus certain [...] car “il est impossible qu’un même attribut appartienne et n’appartienne pas à la même chose et dans la même relation à la chose”’.<sup>2</sup> Here, then, in defiance of this Aristotelian principle, Montaigne makes thought double, illogical, and apparently impossible.

Montaigne’s aim in writing the *Essais*, however, the objective of his ‘espineuse entreprinse’ (II.6.378), was to ‘reconnoistre le trein de [ses] mutations’ (II.37.758), to trace in writing the ‘poursuites [...] sans termes, et sans forme’ of his spirit (III.13.1068). To do so would require a textual practice which seems just as impossible: if Montaigne is to trace in writing the ‘double et divers’ nature not only of thought but also of the objects of thought and

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<sup>2</sup> *Montaigne philosophe* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996), pp. 33-34. Maclean’s quotation is from *Metaphysics*, IV.3.1005b.

the world in which he lives and thinks, his text must also be capable of being ‘double et divers’. The text would require more than an ‘endlessness’, growing longer with each new edition; ‘double et divers’ demands not simply a plurality, an unending sequence of different thoughts, but also a simultaneity: Montaigne’s proliferation of thought, in all of its monstrosity, is not just a sequence of disagreeing positions but is, rather, one where different and opposing thoughts can be held and maintained at once. It will be noted that this doubleness is not strictly binary: in aligning ‘double’ with ‘divers’, Montaigne’s point has less to do with oppositional thought and seems rather to stress the instantaneous adoption of multiple viewpoints, of two or more perspectives at once. To capture the nature of thought as Montaigne perceives it, it would not be enough for his text or the ways of thinking it describes to be pliable, affording multiple, divergent perspectives or interpretations at different times, nor simply packed with diverse opinions on a given subject; rather, this diversity must be coupled — as it is in the quotation with which I started — with duality and simultaneity.

In this article, I argue that Montaigne takes two linear, sequential forms of irresolution, forms which gesture towards a hypothetical infinity, only to collapse them, derailing their endless progression through, on the one hand, the time of composition and, on the other, the space of the page. It is in collapsing these two axes that Montaigne works to double, to render simultaneous, the diversity of thought and to make this duality visible on the page.

In ‘De l’experience’, Montaigne returns again to the nature of thought and it is in this account that we can identify some key aspects which will have a determining effect on his attempts to write out this double and diverse ‘entendement’:

Ce n'est rien que foiblesse particuliere qui nous faict contenter de ce que d'autres ou que nous-mesmes avons trouvé en cette chasse de cognoissance; un plus habile ne s'en contentera pas. Il y a tousjours place pour un suyvant, [C] ouy et pour nous mesmes, [B] et route par ailleurs. Il n'y a point de fin en nos inquisitions; nostre fin est en l'autre monde. [C] C'est signe de racourciment d'esprit quand il se contente, ou de lasseté. Nul esprit genereux ne s'arreste en soy: il pretend tousjours et va outre ses forces; il a des eslans au delà de ses effects; s'il ne s'avance et ne se presse et ne s'accule et ne se choque, il n'est vif qu'à demy; [B] ses poursuites sont sans terme, et sans forme; son aliment c'est [C] admiration, chasse, [B] ambiguïté. Ce que declaroit assez Appollo, parlant tousjours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement, ne nous repaissant pas, mais nous amusant et embesongnant. C'est un mouvement [C] irregulier, [B] perpetuel, sans [C] patron, [B] et sans but. (III.13.1068)<sup>3</sup>

The 'chasse de cognoissance' is endless and the same is true of the movement of the 'esprit', a term which in this context seems to signify the faculty of thought. As I have already noted, however, Montaigne's objective in writing his text is not to reach the end of this 'chasse', to find a definitive position (either of certainty or doubt), nor to ceaselessly enquire and debate, but is rather to trace the shape and movement of this double thought in writing; to write, like obscure Apollo, 'doublement'.

Notably, this passage underwent a process of careful revision in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' and there are two changes which are particularly revealing in this exposition of the form of thought. The first comes after the [C] addition describing the characteristic over-

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<sup>3</sup> The [C] markers in the final sentence are absent in the Villey-Saulnier edition.

reaching of the ‘esprit genereux’. The now redundant ‘Les poursuites *de l’esprit humain*’ (my emphasis) is crossed out, allowing Montaigne to create a ‘chancelant, bronchant et chopant’ sibilance (I.26.146) — a movement which seems to gallop and stumble at the same time; a movement which ‘va outre ses forces’ — as we advance through these three clauses separated by colons: ‘Ses poursuites sont sans terme, et sans forme: Son aliment c’est admiration chasse ambiguïté: Ce que declaroit assez Apollo’ (punctuation and spelling according to the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. 472r.). Here, Montaigne refines his view on the ‘aliment’ of the ‘esprit genereux’: where the 1588 text reads, ‘c’est doubte & ambiguïté’, he writes, ‘c’est admiration chasse ambiguïté.’ In shifting away from ‘doubte’ — a term which, in the passage which immediately precedes this one, is associated with lawyers and theologians incapable of writing what they mean — Montaigne presents us with a formulation which seems to have its origin in Plutarch.<sup>4</sup> While it is possible that this term, ‘admiration’, bears the influence of Aristotle — William of Moerbeke’s standard medieval translation gives ‘*admiratio*’ for ‘*θαυμάσαντες*’ (*thaumasantes*) (*Metaphysics*, 982b) — it seems that a more likely source is Plutarch and specifically his opusculum, ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’: ‘Et pourautant que aux philosophes appartient enquerir, admirer & doubter, à bon droict la plus part des choses de ce Dieu [Apollon] sont comme cachees soubs des enigmes, & paroles couvertes.’<sup>5</sup> With this revision, Montaigne’s text further aligns the moving, marvelling (and thus unresolved) nature of his thought with Apollo and particularly his double and obscure way of speaking.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Admiration’ is used in a similar context in III.11.1030: ‘[C] L’admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l’inquisition le progresz, l’ignorance le bout’.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Que signifioit ce mot E’i’, *Œuvres morales & meslees de Plutarque*, trans. by Jacques Amyot (Paris: Vascosan, 1572), fol. 353r. For Moerbeke’s translation, see *Metaphysica, lib. I-XIV. Recensio et Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. by Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

The second change made in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' is more immediately significant. Here, Montaigne describes the 'mouvement' of thought and, in his manuscript changes, turns increasingly to spatial and quasi-visual terms. In 1588, the text read: 'C'est un mouvement perpetuel, sans arrest, & sans but.' In the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', we read: 'C'est un mouvement [C] irregulier [B] perpetuel, sans ~~arrest~~ [C] ~~regle~~ patron, [B] & sans but.' Montaigne's graphic hesitations as evidenced by crossed-out sections of the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' often reveal the cognitive and writerly processes at work in a given passage or argument. What, then, is he trying to express about the nature of thought and his own difficulty in rendering it visible on the page? Not only does Montaigne say that thought is difficult to follow and to write; his deliberations and changes, both here and throughout the *Essais*, testify constantly to this difficulty.

We may begin by noting that Montaigne insists that this movement of thought is not only perpetual but irregular: its movements cannot be predicted. Knowing how thought will move and progress is not a case of immensely difficult but always hypothetically possible knowledge; rather, the trajectory or itinerary of any given thought is unknowable.<sup>6</sup> Montaigne erases the redundant 'sans arrest', which doubles 'mouvement perpetuel',<sup>7</sup> and inserts first 'règle' and then 'patron' in what seems like a different ink. What are we to make of these two terms? Bernard Sève has studied the former in detail and, though there is a tendency in his work to conflate 'règle' and 'forme', his careful differentiation of 'fertilité et fécondité' helps

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<sup>6</sup> On the vagabond nature of Montaigne's thought and text, see Mary McKinley, *Les Terrains vagues des Essais: itinéraires et intertextes* (Paris: Champion, 1996) and Fausta Garavini, *Itinéraires à Montaigne: jeux de texte* (Paris: Champion, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> It is not, however, a perfect synonym: the use of 'arrest' here links back and contrasts this true depiction of the movement of thought with legal / juridical practices.

to illuminate this passage. Approaching the issue from an Aristotelian perspective, Sève argues ‘1) qu’un terrain fertile, que ce soit une terre grasse, le corps d’une femme, ou un esprit, est par lui-même producteur d’êtres ou d’objets; mais 2) que réduit à sa seule fertilité, non ensemencé par un principe extérieur, semence agricole, semence spermatique, ou, pour l’esprit, “sujet”, ce terrain fertile ne peut produire que des êtres absurdes et des “objets” indéterminés: herbes sauvages et inutiles, masses de chairs informes, folies et divagations.’<sup>8</sup> Fertility — that is, generation without a formal principle — creates monsters, ‘cheva[ux] échappé[s]’ (I.8.33), ‘chimères’ (ibid.). ‘Fécondité’, on the other hand, describes an ordered, well-formed production of beings and things: it is only with this formal principle, argues Sève, that the ‘potentialités de la fertilité’ are elevated to ‘la véritable fécondité’.<sup>9</sup> The mind, at least as it is described in the *Essais*, is naturally without such a principle; it is ‘sans règle’ and its movement is therefore monstrous. Sève goes on to argue that ‘l’esprit ne dispose d’aucune règle immanente, n’a nul accès à des règles transcendantes’,<sup>10</sup> that it has no in-built mechanism to guide or restrain it and, significantly, that the spirit has not lost its ‘règles’ but rather that ‘il n’en a jamais eu qui lui soient propres.’<sup>11</sup> All of this is borne out by the extract currently under analysis though Sève suggests that, in place of such ‘règles’, Montaigne turns to ‘règles supplétives’, that is, ‘règle[s] applicable[s] à défaut d’autres dispositions (légales ou conventionnelles)’,<sup>12</sup> such as the ‘rules’ of custom, the body, and conversation. These are rules which lack an assured foundation and yet they are sufficient and provide enough of a framework with which to control and order this spirit ‘sans règle’.

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<sup>8</sup> *Montaigne: des règles pour l’esprit* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

Montaigne's shift in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux' first from 'sans arrest' to 'sans règle' and then from 'sans règle' to 'sans patron' seems, I think, to push against this last point. To say that the spirit is 'unruly' suggests that Montaigne is trying to rule it when it seems that he is rather trying to pursue and trace it: as he writes in 'De l'exercitation', '[C] C'est une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de *suyvre* une alleure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit' (II.6.378, my emphasis). 'Sans règle' and 'sans patron' function here as near synonyms, both describing the sorts of 'un-formed' generation examined by Sève with the latter allowing the essayist to describe less ambiguously the way in which thought and the spirit are without pattern, model, mould. Both terms allow Montaigne to differentiate between an endless movement ('sans arrest') and an erratic, careering one. With the shift to 'patron', however, Montaigne removes the connotations of ruling and taming that which is unruly: rather than trying to remedy a spirit 'sans règle', he is trying to trace the shapeless shape and the movement of a spirit 'sans patron'. We ought to read the account of the 'poursuites' of the spirit, described earlier in this passage as 'sans forme', in a similar fashion: as J.-Y. Pouilloux has noted, 'la forme ne dit rien de l'être, elle désigne seulement — mais ce "seulement" est capital — la façon dont l'être apparaît, la figure de sa manifestation.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Philippe Desan has argued, 's'il faut prendre le mot forme dans son acception philosophique, il est pourtant erroné de lui donner une connotation essentialiste et universelle.'<sup>14</sup> According to Desan and Pouilloux, 'forme' in the *Essais* describes the thing as it appears and says nothing of its essential being or order. These Aristotelian notions of 'forme' as the guiding principle, as that which gives structure, definition, or essence to an

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<sup>13</sup> J.-Y. Pouilloux, 'La Forme Maîtresse', in *Montaigne et la question de l'homme*, ed. by Marie-Luce Demonet (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 33-45 (p. 34).

<sup>14</sup> Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: les formes du monde et de l'esprit* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), p. 13.



otherwise monstrous ‘férité’, are ‘difform[és] à nouveau service’ (III.12.1056) though this deformation takes place without erasing entirely the traditional philosophical understandings of these terms. Montaigne’s spirit and imagination is certainly without Form, in the traditional sense, as Sève has shown, though here the essayist seems to use ‘forme’ to describe the shape, movement, and the quasi-physical properties of his imagination. The Aristotelian reading, in which the spirit ‘sans forme’ is savage and lacking governance, is present but latent in the text; when taken alongside Montaigne’s other changes, it becomes clear that his understanding of ‘forme’ privileges not order but shape. This is a visual, physical way of thinking and one which imagines thought and the thinking spirit as bodies in space. This is particularly evident in the description of the ‘mouvement perpetuel’: where the 1588 text focuses exclusively on movement through time, the inclusion of ‘irregulier’ and ‘sans patron’ introduces additional dimensions and, as a result, a visual, three-dimensional impression of this ‘mouvement’.<sup>15</sup>

But this is, of course, a movement ‘sans patron’, a pursuit ‘sans forme’. Not only is thought without end, it is without shape. What shape, then, do these ‘imagination irresolues’ (III.2.805) take when they are put into text? Montaigne’s example of Apollonian discourse, ‘parlant tousjours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement’, highlights some of the

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<sup>15</sup> A connection may be drawn between this emphasis on the physicality of thought and the early modern understanding of ‘imagination’ as *phantasia*; that is, as the ‘façon de penser particulière pour les choses matérielles’. This quotation, taken from Descartes, is used by John Lyons in his study of early modern imagination, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. xi. It might be said that, in describing his ‘entendement’ in this way, Montaigne is ‘imagining’ his imagination.

key aspects which return throughout his discussions of this ideal form of writing: doubleness, productive difficulty, and endlessly reaching beyond what is currently available. In the long [C] addition to II.6, Montaigne writes, ‘je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe’, but what ‘forme d’escire’ is capable of writing this ‘pensée sans forme’?<sup>16</sup> ‘J’ay toujours une idée en l’ame’, he writes, ‘qui me presente une meilleure forme que celle que j’ay mis en besongne mais je ne la puis saisir’ (II.17.637)<sup>17</sup>: thought escapes form and yet, clearly, it would be a ‘signe de racourciment d’esprit’ not to pursue (‘chasse[r]’) this elusive marriage of ‘le penser’ and ‘le dire’. In writing the *Essais*, Montaigne seeks to find a literary, textual form capable of writing a formless and yet double thought. My contention, then, is that the textual practices found within the *Essais* afford their author a means of ‘collapsing’ the two axes of linear development, allowing him to flatten without erasing the compositional ‘chronologie’ on one axis and, on the other, to hold simultaneously a plurality of diverse opinions and perspectives.

With the metaphor of ‘collapsing’, I mean to evoke some of the spatial ways of thinking which Montaigne sets up; a spatiality which relies, counterintuitively, on the things it describes not being sufficiently physical to occupy space. The axis of time and of compositional chronology, for instance, is collapsed in that it is not erased but is instead maintained all while being flattened; moments of thinking and writing are plotted on a time-line, the time-line is crumpled, and yet the plotted points remain temporally fixed (though not in order) and sufficiently distinct and discrete for us to identify moments of composition. Similarly, the diversity of perspectives put forward in the *Essais* are collapsed in that

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<sup>16</sup> Compare III.2.804: ‘Les autres forment l’homme, je le recite [...] un particulier mal formé.’

<sup>17</sup> Note the subsequent discussion of ‘parler informe et sans règle’.

Montaigne does not pass from one viewpoint or set of ideas to the next and then on to another, but instead intermingles them. In I.50, Montaigne notes that, ‘Les choses à part elles ont peut estre leurs poids et mesures et conditions; mais au dedans, en nous, elle [l’âme] les leur taille comme elle l’entend’ (I.50.302). His approach is perspectival and the subjects he assays (including himself) are presented ‘tantost d’un visage, tantost d’un autre’ (II.12.509) and yet, as we will see, Montaigne overlays these ‘visages’ or inserts one perspective into another, thinking not only associatively but also multiply. The result is not a tour through different options but is rather the (almost) instantaneous presentation of different ways of thinking, different ideas, different thoughts. Montaigne’s anatomical analogy, which will be examined in detail later, perhaps best encapsulates this idea of collapsed perspectives: his ‘skeletalos’ is not an exploded diagram of his body but is, paradoxically, an exploded diagram which has been put back together — collapsed — so that everything is in its proper place and yet still affords a view of the different layers and parts from multiple angles. Montaigne’s text is attempting to convey two (or more) things at once, not simply many things at many different times, and it is through collapsing the text in this way that he works to achieve this.

### Collapsing ‘chronologie’

In *De la vanité*, after having asked his reader to let ‘[B] courir encore ce coup d’essay’ (III.9.963), Montaigne considers the ways in which his book changes as it is augmented and revised:

[C] Mon livre est tousjours un. [...] De là toutesfois il adviendra facilement qu’il s’y mesle quelque *transposition de chronologie*, mes contes prenans place *selon leur opportunité*, non *tousjours selon leur aage*. [B] Secondement que, pour mon regard, je crains de perdre au

change: mon entendement ne va pas tousjours avant, il va à reculons aussi. (III.9.964, my emphasis).

Developing the idea of ‘nostre entendement’ as ‘double’, we see here that Montaigne’s thought goes both forwards and backwards, bifurcating not only across a diversity of opinion but also across the space of the material text and the time-line of its composition. It is in this passage that Montaigne discusses his ‘[B] troisieme allongail’, his ‘[C] marqueterie mal jointe’, and his process of adding to the text: if his thought was, temporally speaking, only to go ‘avant’ and never ‘à reculons’, we might expect the third book to be followed not by a process of systematic editing and addition but simply by a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

What is clear is that Montaigne struggles to express these difficult ideas about simultaneous uniformity — ‘Mon livre est tousjours un’ — and puncturing, punctuating insertions which collapse the text’s ‘chronologie’. The ‘chronologie’ — the only instance of this term in the *Essais* — of composition seems to reflect (or, at least, attempts to reflect) that of thought: in writing his text, Montaigne ‘ne va pas tousjours avant, il va à reculons aussi’. He tries repeatedly to explain and describe this unified text of discrete pieces written at

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<sup>18</sup> George Hoffman’s arguments, which suggest that Montaigne’s process of adding to his text was commercially motivated and served to secure a renewal of the ‘privilège du roi’, certainly account for a general principle of augmentation though this process, at least as evidenced by the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, clearly went beyond these purely commercial interests: one need only look, for example, at the systematic revision of punctuation to see that Montaigne’s editorial practice was not primarily concerned with simply meeting this required level of augmentation and renewing the ‘privilège’. See *Montaigne’s Career* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

different times and in an order other than that with which we, as readers, are presented. His prior attempts, crossed out in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, manipulate and juggle certain key terms which keep occurring at different stages of composition: ‘marqueterie’, ‘surpoids’, and ‘chronologie’. Here, Montaigne is using the act of writing to think through the relationship between the multidirectional and multitemporal nature of thought and its linear and static presentation in written, printed language.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, his concern here — ‘je crains de perdre au change’ — is not with problematic chronologies of writing *per se* but rather, as is made clear in a passage from the ‘Apologie’ which also tackles this issue, with inserting something worse in place of a better, albeit forgotten, meaning:

[B] En mes escrits mesmes je ne retrouve pas tousjours l’air de ma premiere imagination: je ne sçay ce que j’ay voulu dire, et m’eschaude souvent à corriger et y mettre un nouveau sens, pour avoir perdu le premier, qui valloit mieux. Je ne fay qu’aller et venir: mon jugement ne tire pas tousjours en avant; il flotte, il vague. (II.12.566)

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<sup>19</sup> We may note a further aspect of the doubleness of Montaigne’s project: the double, interlaced nature of thinking and writing. On literature not simply as a vehicle for thought but also as an instrument of thought, see Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), esp. p. 12: ‘The kind of thinking it [literature] affords may in some cases be close to philosophical, ethical, or political thought, but it is never reducible to those modes. [...] Literature is a special *object* of thought and hence of knowledge.’

The ‘premier’ may have been ‘mieux’, but not by virtue of being first. Once again, Montaigne describes his thought as alinear (‘mon jugement ne tire pas tousjours en avant’) and, as before, he establishes a strict relationship between alinear thought and non-chronological composition.

We see a similar account of this achronological though thoroughly temporal writing in the opening passage of ‘De la ressemblance des enfans aux pères’:

[A] Ce fagotage de tant de diverses pieces se faict en cette condition, que je n’y mets la main que lors qu’une trop lasche oisiveté me presse, et non ailleurs que chez moy. Ainsin il s’est basti à diverses poses et intervalles, comme les occasions me detiennent ailleurs par fois plusieurs moys. Au demeurant, je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l’aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster. [A] Je veux représenter le progrez de mes humeurs, et qu’on voye chaque piece en sa naissance. Je prendrois plaisir d’avoir commencé plus-tost et à reconnoistre le trein de mes mutations.

(II.37.758)

Highlighting first the diversity and fragmentation of his text, Montaigne emphasizes the spatial and temporal location of the act of writing before suggesting that, through temporally fixing his textual fragments in this way, he is able to trace ‘le progrez de [s]es humeurs’ and ‘le trein de [s]es mutations’.

The *Essais* are composed in such a way that they are inextricable from the temporal context within which they are produced and this temporality is necessarily endless and open-ended. As Richard Scholar has argued:

Essaying is caught in the flow of time. Montaigne makes this clear by using temporal markers [...] to designate variations in the texts he sets his judgement [and also] by revising and adding [to his text] throughout the nearly two decades during which he was writing his book: the passing of time is woven into the fabric of the passage.<sup>20</sup>

For Montaigne, however, this open-endedness is not, as it was for an epistolographer like Seneca, for example, a linear passage in which the movement through time mirrors the movement through text: in the *Essais*, compositional chronology ‘va à reculons aussi’. Most importantly, Montaigne collapses this chronology all while calling attention to the temporality of writing: not only does he inform the reader directly with references to ‘surpoids’ and ‘allongails’, or with claims that he ‘ne corrige point [s]es premieres imaginations par les secondes’; this temporality is, as Scholar notes, embedded in Montaigne’s prose with its recurring references to ‘tantost’, ‘hier’, ‘à cette heure’. This is a form of writing which is achronological but overwhelmingly temporal and, as such, differentiated from more standard modes of alinear composition in which the reality of writing ‘à diverses poses’ is made invisible and concealed from the reader.

How, then, does this compositional ‘transposition de chronologie’ facilitate a textual rendering of an ‘entendement’ which is ‘double’ and which moves both ‘avant’ and ‘à reculons’? What, in short, does Montaigne achieve in collapsing the ‘chronologie’ of writing? In these passages, he seems to deal almost exclusively in contradictions and paradoxes: his book is always ‘one’ and yet it is full of dislocated and discrete ‘lopins’; he wants to trace the

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<sup>20</sup> Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 76.

‘trein’ and the ‘progrez’ of his ‘humeurs’ and his ‘entendement’, and yet he attempts to do this by disordering the linear sequence — the progression — of composition. This process, described in difficult and confusing terms, is one which achieves, I think, two closely related aims: first, capturing the diversity of thought and, second, figuring or representing simultaneous doubleness, with the former focused primarily on the author’s thought and the latter on the reader’s. First, then, it allows Montaigne to incorporate a diversity of opinion and perspective in a non-linear manner: in collapsing this temporal difference, he can propose a thought or a perspective from 1580 alongside a different view taken in, say, 1590 and present them side by side. Rather than placing his changing opinions on a textual time-line, Montaigne overlaps them in a text which enunciates diversity (almost) simultaneously. Returning to my quotation from II.37, we see this in practice even as he describes it: ‘[A] je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes; [C] ouy à l’aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oster’ (II.37.758). Montaigne presents the reader with two almost contradictory assertions — he does not correct; he does — without having to move from one position to another: they are maintained and asserted equally and simultaneously. The ‘mutations’ of his thought mean that Montaigne has differing opinions at different times and, in presenting them together rather than in sequence, the essayist confuses, disorders, and makes more doubtful the ‘diversity’ of his thought. We understand this simultaneous diversity of opinion intuitively, though language struggles to capture it fully: we speak metaphorically and with gestures, presenting one idea ‘on one hand’ and a second ‘on the other’, though language forces us to extend only one hand at a time; Montaigne, it seems, in superimposing these cognitive and compositional moments, is trying to present us with both hands at once.

It is here that a parallel can be drawn with recent scholarship on embodied cognition and particularly the work of Guillemette Bolens on ‘kinésie’ (‘la perception motrice’) and



kinesic intelligence ('la faculté de sémantiser et de comprendre les mouvements corporels, les postures, les gestes et les expressions faciales') in works of literature.<sup>21</sup> Bolens studies the ways in which authors figure and capitalize on 'événements kinésiques' — Adam dropping his garland when he learns of Eve's transgression in *Paradise Lost*,<sup>22</sup> or the nested levels of recognition and 'reconnaissance' which occur when Proust's narrator recalls his memory of recognizing Françoise noticing him with a smile in *Du côté de chez Swann*<sup>23</sup> — to show that we as readers interpret and understand these events kinetically and from a position of embodiment. We do not, as it were, reason through these accounts and interpret them 'rationally', decoding their meanings; rather, we feel, anticipate, and mirror these bodily, gestural movements. In a passage which I will return to later, Montaigne describes himself 'semant icy un mot icy un autre' and notes that, 'de cent membres et visages qu'a chaque chose, j'en prens un tantost à lecher seulement, tantost à effleurer' (I.50.302). With the combination of 'tantost [...] tantost' and the image of sowing words here and there, Montaigne's text approaches this gestural, kinesic quality: we picture him gesturing in this way and we comprehend the simultaneity of the thought and the writing this gesture describes even though language (these metaphors of sowing included) necessarily takes these points singularly and in sequence. This almost gestural way of describing thought and writing, which relies on the reader's kinesic intelligence, further demonstrates the spatiality and physicality with which Montaigne thinks about thought and writing: his intuitive understanding of how his thought works breaches rational and logical rules of non-contradiction as well as the standard modes of discourse which are founded upon and find

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<sup>21</sup> *Le Style des gestes: corporéité et kinésie dans le récit littéraire* (Lausanne: Editions BHMS, 2008). Both of these definitions are given on p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 5-8.

their meaning in these rules. In their place, Montaigne utilizes this spatial, embodied language which affords images of duality which are understood somatically, not rationally, and this allows him to extend both hands together.

I have already begun to develop the second function of this collapsed chronology; that which is directed primarily at presenting the reader with simultaneous duality. Recognizing that text and writing struggle to capture the cognitive duality he experiences and describes, Montaigne works to artificially collapse a linear chronology of writing into a multiple and simultaneous impression of diverse thoughts upon the reader as he or she experiences this achronological text. In overwriting his text in this way, he gives the written word a synthetic duality and, in doing so, gives the reading experience, if not the act of composition itself, a sense of cognitive simultaneity. The clearest example of this is the back-dating of the ‘Au lecteur’ in the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’: where the 1588 edition had updated the original date of ‘ce premier de Mars. 1580.’, closing with ‘ce 12. Juin. 1588.’, the ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’ reads, ‘ce premier de Mars ~~1580~~ mille cinq cens quatre vins’.<sup>24</sup> Montaigne presents the reader with discrete textual moments — in chronological disorder and consisting of a deliberate diversity of perspective across time — simultaneously, under a unified ‘moment’ of authorial composition. The essayist intends for his reader to encounter these ‘diverses poses’ as being written, paradoxically and in spite of their temporal markers, at once, concurrently.

This collapsed chronology is, then, an attempt to flatten time and force the doubleness and simultaneity of thought into written language; to make thought — at least as it is presented on the page and experienced by the reader — double and to allow it to follow multiple paths at once, in spite of divergence, diversity, or contradiction. The point here is

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Exemplaire de Bordeaux’, fol. Aii-r.

that this is not simply diverse and multiple thought across time but rather that, in reworking the compositional chronology as he does, Montaigne makes this diversity and multiplicity simultaneous. It is with this quality of simultaneity that the text mirrors not only the diversity but also the doubleness of Montaigne's 'entendement'. Returning to my comparison with Seneca, mentioned above, if we were to think of the epistle, a quintessentially occasional genre, as a snapshot or, rather, a series of snapshots which allows us to trace and follow change across time, Montaigne's collapsed chronology is analogous to a photographic double-exposure: like the photograph, written language, at the level of the single utterance, can only capture one moment of thought from one perspective; it is monovocal and singular. This 'double-exposure' is not, however, a sort of palimpsest: the first impression is not erased in preparation for the second. Rather, by overlaying and disordering different compositional moments, Montaigne allows us to see both impressions at once and, in doing so, restores to the thought of the *Essais* its duality.

That this dismantling of compositional chronology occurs across the three main strata of the *Essais* is fairly apparent. Though more recent editions of the *Essais* — the 1998 Imprimerie Nationale edition, which relegates [A], [B], and [C] indicators to the margin, reducing their accuracy, and the 2007 Pléiade edition based on the posthumous 1595 text<sup>25</sup> — have, to various extents, marginalized this aspect of composition, my closing analysis of the opening of 'Nos affections s'emportent au-delà de nous' (I.3) will detail the ways in which this collapsed chronology functions within individual strata as I uncover the superposition of cognitive and scriptural temporal moments not 'd'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de

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<sup>25</sup> *Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by André Tournon, 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998); *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Catherine Magnien-Simonin, and Michel Magnien (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute' (III.2.805). Before we move on to this close reading, however, we must first uncover the mechanics at work behind the second method of rupturing linear modes of irresolution.

### Collapsing Perspective

The analogy, made above, of the double exposure finds a more historically appropriate mirror in Montaigne's long post-1588 coda to 'De l'exercitation':

Je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe, qui ne peut tomber en production ouvragere. A toute peine le puis je coucher en ce corps aerée de la voix. Des plus sages hommes et des plus devots ont vescu fuyants tous apparents effects. Les effects diroyent plus de la Fortune que de moy. Ils tesmoignent leur roole, non pas le mien, si ce n'est conjecturalement et incertainement: eschantillons d'une montre particuliere. Je m'estalle entier: c'est un Skeletos où, d'une veue, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege. L'effect de la toux en produisoit une partie; l'effect de la palleur ou battement de coeur, un'autre, et douteusement. (II.6.379)

Once again, we see that 'ce corps aerée de la voix', which seems to refer here to speech and writing, is an imperfect medium for the 'depiction' of thought. And yet this corporeal image leads, by way of association, to an (admittedly unusual) metaphor taken from anatomy: Montaigne's text, and the depiction of thought contained within, is a 'skeleton'. But what does he mean by this specialized and peculiar word?

The first thing to note is that the ‘skeleton’ is not an account of Montaigne’s actions or circumstances; it is not a personal history: he states explicitly in the sentence which follows the extract above, ‘ce ne sont mes gestes que j’escris, c’est moy, c’est mon essence.’ As Jean Céard puts it, Montaigne is careful in this passage to ‘précise[r] son dessein. Ce qu’il entend peindre, ce ne sont pas ses actions [...]. Il retrouve (ou reprend) ici une réflexion d’Amyot préfaçant sa traduction des *Vies* de Plutarque.’<sup>26</sup> Montaigne, then, intends to present the ‘entirety’ of himself, privileging, in contrast to ‘[s]es gestes’, a moral, intellectual, and cognitive interiority. And yet he uses this word, ‘skeleton’, a word which suggests interiority, certainly, but also partiality.

Marie-Luce Demonet, tracing the uses and meanings of this term in the sixteenth century, has suggested that this is a defective metaphor. ‘Skeleton’, of course, means ‘skeleton’ or ‘squelette’ and though this rare word, taken directly, Balsamo argues, from the Greek text of Plutarch’s ‘Life of Antony’,<sup>27</sup> was certainly new in sixteenth-century French, Demonet asserts that its meaning was quickly established, referring specifically to ‘anatomie sèche’ and bones stripped of flesh.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, however, Montaigne’s use of the term, in which he ‘[s]’estalle entier’, is much more inclusive and seems to imagine something more like a cadaver. ‘[Il] faut donc se demander’, writes Demonet, ‘si Montaigne, conscient de l’inadéquation, la maintient dans une sorte de provocation destinée à la sagacité du lecteur;

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Montaigne Anatomiste’, *Cahiers de l’Association internationale des études françaises*, 55 (2003), 299-315 (p. 311).

<sup>27</sup> Jean Balsamo, ‘Skeleton’, *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: Champion, 2004), p. 922.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Le Skeleton de Montaigne ou la leçon de l’anatomie’, in *Théâtres de l’anatomie et corps en spectacle*, ed. by I. Zinguer and L. Van Delft (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp.63-88 (p. 69).

ou bien si, vaguement informé du sens technique de *skeletos*, il l'utilise seulement d'une manière approximative.<sup>29</sup> There can be little doubt that the latter is the more likely scenario. In any case, Demonet's analysis of this term leads her to identify the metaphoric significance of 'skeletos' as one of nakedness and transparency: 'le livre est un corps nu comme une "anatomie", un corps total, [...] sans la peau de l'apparence.'<sup>30</sup> She concludes by suggesting that, 'même s'il semble avoir laissé de côté le fait que le squelette est décharné, il en a conservé [...] la conscience d'une totalité visible au moins par son auteur.'<sup>31</sup>

The 'skeletos' metaphor is certainly problematic though perhaps not for the reasons outlined by Demonet. If we accept that 'skeletos' does not signify a literal skeleton, we can begin to think more fully about what Montaigne is trying to describe with this metaphor. In his article in the *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, Balsamo suggests that 'skeletos' 'désigne peut-être un dessin ou une représentation anatomique du corps découpé en couches successives', before noting that the essayist 'avait eu l'occasion d'examiner la réalité même' of anatomical dissection while visiting Basel.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, Montaigne has in mind the types of anatomical drawings made famous by Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) and Charles Estienne's *La dissection des parties du corps humain* (1546): cadavers propped up and positioned in life-like poses, flayed and skinned to various extents, revealing different

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> 'Skeletos', *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, pp. 922-23. Montaigne's account of this in the *Journal de voyage* is brief: 'Nous vismes & ches luy [Felix Platerus, médecin] & en l'escole publique des anatomies entieres homes morts, qui se tiennent', *Journal de Voyage en Italie* (1774), ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: Garner, 2014), p. 45.

layers. In one drawing we might see a skeleton, but in another, we may be presented with a human figure made entirely from muscles and, in another, the full network of tendons.<sup>33</sup>

And yet, this is also what Montaigne is not describing, for these drawings depict only ‘eschantillons d’une montre particuliere’ or, in Balsamo’s terms, ‘couches successives’. Montaigne imagines a way of depicting the ‘skeleton’, the veins, the muscles, the tendons all ‘d’une veue’. He is describing an impossible drawing, as Céard’s analysis makes clear:

Le dessein de Montaigne, c’est de s’étaler tout entier [...] comme sur une table de dissection. [...] Mais, en même temps, Montaigne se propose de faire voir ‘d’une veue’, non seulement le squelette, mais aussi les veines, les muscles, les tendons. Et, qui plus est, il veut qu’on voie ‘chaque piece en son siège’, à sa place, comme si ce corps pourrait découvrir toutes ses pièces sans pourtant être désassemblé.<sup>34</sup>

Céard’s argument is that Montaigne is creating a scriptural dissection which ‘garde l’unité du vivant’,<sup>35</sup> and while the ‘unity’ of his self-depiction is certainly key, we ought also to recognize that this metaphor of the ‘skeleton’, rather than describing a transparency, as suggested by Demonet, in which we look ‘through’ the skin to some deeper, inner ‘Self’, is, in fact, working to describe a way of seeing multiple perspectives simultaneously. With this

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<sup>33</sup> On the cultural history of anatomy and dissection in the early modern period more broadly, see, in the first instance, Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> ‘Montaigne Anatomiste’, p. 313.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp. 313-314.

quasi-defective metaphor, Montaigne attempts to describe a new way of seeing: a way of seeing multiple layers, perspectives, connections, effects, and causes simultaneously. We see each ‘layer’ of Montaigne’s anatomy of his ‘cogitations’ separately and together at once. We see the whole of Montaigne *and*, ‘d’une veue’, each layer and each part and, significantly, we see this multiple, almost holographic, proto-Cubist plurality of layers ‘doubteusement’: the effect of this portrayal is ambiguous, multiple, and uncertain.

Montaigne’s radical reimagining of the metaphorical significance of the anatomical drawing can be seen most clearly through a comparison with Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, first printed in 1621. Burton’s text is superficially similar to the *Essais*: a long tome of introspective analysis which was filled out and augmented over a period of twenty years, it is riddled with Latin quotations which are always worn lightly, and its encyclopaedic range, prone to digression, is always tethered to its apparently isolated author, tucked away in his (ivory) tower. And yet, to borrow a phrase from Burton, this is a ‘disagreeing likeness’.<sup>36</sup> we need only look at Burton’s expansive, diagrammatic outline at the front of his book to see just how different these two works are. Structurally, his text is modelled on anatomical text books: Burton dissects his subject, pulls it apart, and, once he has arranged these elements in order, he proceeds through his partitions, sections, *membrae*, and subsections, moving

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001), partition I, p. 397. On the relationship between Burton and Montaigne, see Kathryn Murphy, ‘The Anxiety of Variety: Knowledge and Experience in Montaigne, Burton, and Bacon’, *Fictions of Knowledge: Fact, Evidence, Doubt*, ed. by Yota Batsaki, Subha Mukherji, and Jan-Melissa Schramm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 110-30.



through each disarticulated point in turn. It is in Partition I, Section III, Member II, Subsection I that Burton asks:

Who can distinguish these melancholy symptoms so intermixed with others, or apply them to their several kinds, confine them into method? 'Tis hard, I confess; yet I have disposed of them as I could, and will descend to particularize them according to their species. [...] Not that they are all to be found in one man, for that were to paint a monster or chimera, not a man; but some in one, some in another, and that successively or at several times.<sup>37</sup>

Burton's text, like his distinctly un-monstrous image of man, with its Ramist tree-diagrams, partitions, and sub-headings, is fundamentally linear, sequential, and singular in a way that Montaigne's new anatomy, in which he presents himself 'entier' but 'd'une veue', could never be.

As readers of Montaigne's multi-perspectival 'skeletons', we see multiple layers simultaneously. In this regard, his collapsed perspectives are the corollary to the collapsed chronology detailed above: Montaigne overlays a multitude of perspectives or opinions, writing a bit here and a bit there, building up his text 'à diverses pieces' and 'à diverses poses'. With these two techniques, he superimposes text over text, moment over moment, perspective over perspective: he collapses the space of the text and the temporality of writing and reading and, in doing so, extends his 'double et divers' thought onto a linear, static page. Here again, however, we see that these processes of overlaying, though seen most clearly in additions and insertions made across the three main strata of composition, are by no means

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, partition I, p. 408.

limited to such large-scale techniques. Rather, we see such processes functioning at the level of the sentence and clause throughout the text. '[C] Semant icy un mot icy un autre: eschantillons despris de leur piece: escartez', writes Montaigne in 'De Democritus et Heraclitus' (I.50.302, punctuation following the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 126r.). Noting that these clauses 'reflect in their form the dispersal of which they speak', Richard Scholar recognizes that 'each segment corresponds to a separate thought — its sudden appearance disrupting the onward flow of which it is a part — the flow to which the act of reading must eventually return.'<sup>38</sup> Here, Montaigne is describing a process of accumulative composition, capable of moving both 'avant' and 'à reculons', sowing a word here and a word there, writing alinearly and across the page, writing two sections of text at different ends of the *Essais* in one sitting, and inserting a line into a paragraph written twenty years ago. In describing these practices in this line from I.50, Montaigne's text, with its symmetrical structures ('icy [...] icy'), its idiosyncratic use of colons which seems to set up parallels to be considered simultaneously, and its repetition of ideas seen in new terms and from slightly different perspectives ('despris [...] escartez')<sup>39</sup> enacts the very thing it describes: a way of writing which presents a multiplicity of perspectives, not 'tantost d'un visage, tantost d'un autre', (II.12.509) but simultaneously, synchronically.

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<sup>38</sup> *Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking*, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> On a related note, we might comment that Montaigne is here describing his work as made up of 'eschantillons' while, in the passage from II.6 studied above, he asserts the opposite while using the same term. Both extracts are from manuscript additions made in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux'. Here we see, then, that Montaigne's multiple perspectives on his own text can be written at (roughly) the same time and, in different contexts, can be entirely antithetical.

We have seen, then, that Montaigne's conception of thought is one wherein thought is itself double, simultaneously diverse, capable of moving — both through the space of the text and through the time of reading and writing — not only 'avant' but also 'à reculons'. In attempting to commit this thought to language, he takes sequential ways of thinking about irresolution — endlessly writing through time, providing an ever increasing diversity of opinions — and removes precisely that quality which makes them unresolved: their linearity. The result is a compositional superposition which allows him to present diverse opinions and vantage points concurrently and, in doing so, he creates an artificial doubleness, a perceived cognitive simultaneity. For thought to be double, it must be capable of multiple perspectives at the same time. In the conclusion to 'De l'exercitation', we see Montaigne approaching this cognitive and scriptural duality from the other side, privileging not time but perspective: in his depiction of the 'skeletal', he presents all of his layers, with all of their opacity and in their proper place, equally and in one moment. With this metaphor, Montaigne is describing a way of writing which superimposes different viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions, not simply across the [A], [B], and [C] strata, but within the composition of a paragraph or sentence, employing punctuation, parallels, and connections in an attempt to render this multiplicity simultaneous.

### Writing Doubly in Practice

So far, this article has concerned itself primarily with Montaigne's thoughts about and comments on double writing. What remains to be seen is how this works in practice and, with this in mind, I turn now to the third chapter of the first book, 'Nos affections s'emportent au-delà de nous'. It opens with one of the sentences André Tournon highlights in his 'exemples d'altération du texte par segmentation défectueuse dans l'édition posthume':

[B] Ceux qui accusent les hommes d'aller tousjours beant apres les choses futures,  
 & [C] Et [B] nous aprennent à nous saisir des biens presens, & nous rassoir en  
 ceux-là, comme n'ayant aucune prise sur ce qui est à venir; voire assez moins que  
 nous n'avons sur ce qui est passé, touchent la plus commune des humaines  
 erreurs: s'ils [C] S'ils [B] osent appeller erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous  
 achemine, pour le service de la continuation de son ouvrage. (I.3.15, punctuation  
 following the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', fol. 4r.)<sup>40</sup>

With the exception of changes to punctuation and a brief extension of this sentence, this opening passage, inserted in 1588, remains unchanged in the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux'.

Tournon notes that 'la majuscule de scansion ['S'ils osent...'] marque un retour critique sur le présumé, et met en concurrence les deux perspectives qui prévalent alternativement dans le préambule ajouté en 1588.'<sup>41</sup> As Tournon recognizes, this subtle change goes some way towards creating a written form of simultaneously diverse thought: Montaigne's use of colons and majuscles allows him to present two clauses equally and, in doing so, pushes us to consider them together as simultaneous and yet separate.

Looking at this sentence more closely, we can take Tournon's point further. Below is an attempt to render the movement of this sentence graphically:

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<sup>40</sup> Annexe II, *Route par ailleurs: le nouveau langage des 'Essais'*, (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 403-28. These examples are highlighted and given a one-line explanation though Tournon does not analyse this passage in more detail. I have provided the [C] markers which are not found in the Villey-Saulnier edition.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

→ Ceux qui accusent les hommes d'aller tousjours béant après les choses futures,

- & Et nous apprennent à nous saisir des biens presens,
- & nous rassoir en ceux-là

○ comme n'ayant aucune prise sur ce qui est à venir:

- voire assez moins que nous n'avons sur ce qui est passé,

→ touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs:

← S'ils osent appeler erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous

achemine, pour le service de la continuation de son ouvrage:

- [C] nous imprimant, comme assez d'autres, cette imagination fausse, plus jalouse de nostre action que de nostre science.

In the first clause, Montaigne presents the reader with an anonymous assertion which is then extended and amplified by two sub-clauses before reaching a second, subsidiary point which functions as a way of explaining this accusation. It is only then that, finally, we reach Montaigne's verdict on the anonymous 'ceux' and their accusation: they 'touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs'.

This, then, is the first 'half' of this sentence and we see that it is governed by parallels, comparisons, and other such balancing techniques. The anonymous 'ceux' are opposed to the equally generic 'les hommes'; 'choses futures' balances 'bien presens', though 'bien presens' is part of its own prose 'couplet' with '& nous rassoir en ceux-là' by virtue of 'Et [...] &' rather than the original '& [...] &'. In changing the text to read 'Et', Montaigne brings these two clauses into a parallel relationship of their own whereas, in the 1588 text, they functioned

hypotactically, extending and running on from the first clause. Returning to ‘choses futures,’ we see this echoed again in the next main sub-clause in ‘ce qui est à venir’ though, once again, this opens its own pairing, opposing and balancing ‘ce qui est passé’. In this couple, we see a shift, mirroring the opening pair of ‘ceux’ and ‘les hommes’ and reinforcing our implicit association with the latter, more generic term though, this time, through creating a pairing of association rather than a pair of difference and contrast: ‘ce qui est à venir’ is out of reach of an implied ‘ils’ (‘comme n’*ayant* aucune prise’) while ‘nous’ cannot grasp ‘ce qui est passé’.

In half a sentence, he has set up a series of interconnecting, non-exclusive doubles which is also coupled with an apparent movement between different groups of people as the verbs and pronouns shift from clause to clause. We are beginning to see a plurality of perspectives in Montaigne’s apparently monovocal and simple claim that ‘[c]eux qui accusent les hommes d’aller tousjours béant après les choses futures [...] touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs.’ These small-scale doubles and oppositions find their larger counterpart in the second half of this sentence which is introduced by the pivot identified by Tournon and highlighted by Montaigne’s shift to the majuscule: ‘S’ils osent appeler erreur, chose à quoy nature mesme nous achemine.’ Upon first impression, this looks like a moderating statement: he is querying a point of terminology, balancing his apparently affirmative and resolved opinion that the anonymous ‘ceux’ have touched upon this most common of errors.

And yet this is a balancing act which does not quite work: the spinning plates that he has set up in each successive clause and sub-clause come crashing down. It is Montaigne, not the anonymous ‘ceux’, who dares call this natural tendency an ‘erreur’. ‘[B]eant apres les choses futures’ — his antithesis, his sub-clauses, his rich and diverse exposition of his argument — he finds himself unable to ‘saisir’ his first premise. The first half of the sentence, stripped of its diversity and *copia*, contains two judgements: the judgement of ‘ceux’ who criticize ‘les hommes’ for chasing after future concerns, and the judgement of Montaigne that

this accusation touches this most common error. In accumulating these diverse perspectives, he loses his thread and elides these two judgements before displacing his own judgement onto ‘ceux’ and, in doing so, disowning it and arguing against it. This is, it might be noted, evidence of his diversity of opinion across time, ‘de minute en minute’ (III.2.805).

Montaigne’s corrective antithesis is wrong: it contains a syllogistic fallacy. But it is, at the same time, right: it testifies to his assertion that ‘les hommes [vont] tousjours beant apres les choses futures’, that Nature ‘nous imprim[e] cette imagination fausse’, pushing us to race ahead without grasping what is at hand. Similarly, he tells us that ‘ceux’ are both correct — they ‘touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs’ — and, at the same time, incorrect: to err in living according to Nature is surely a contradiction. Importantly, Montaigne does not describe this simultaneity or doubleness, nor does he say that the anonymous accusers are *somewhat* right or right given a certain set of circumstances. As he writes in ‘De la vanité’, ‘J’entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesme’ (III.9.995). This is a sentence which moves and fills out as it progresses: we can see Montaigne thinking, exploring multiple ‘visages’ though without reducing this to a dialectical (and therefore linear and sequential) analysis of *pro* and *contra* ‘ceux qui accusent les hommes’. The focus shifts in almost every clause, allowing us to see this multiplicity and overlaying of diverse thought, though the essayist leaves this for the ‘suffisant lecteur’: he does not label his diversity, nor does he label this simultaneity of ‘right and wrong’. In this one sentence, then, we can identify a clear formal manifestation of Montaigne’s view of ‘nostre entendement’ as ‘double et divers’ and his attempt to write this double diversity without reducing it to a linear sequence.

We can also see how Montaigne’s collapsed chronology of double thought does not require us to think of this ‘chronologie’ purely at the level of the [A], [B], and [C] strata. Thinking through diverse perspectives and maintaining multiple opinions simultaneously, he has created a sentence which appears, at first glance, to present one opinion — they are

correct — and then another — they are not — though, once we look more closely at the formal practices at work, at its ‘maniere’ as well as its ‘matiere’ (III.8.928), the concurrence and simultaneously diverse nature of this sentence begins to emerge, allowing us to see that both positions are held at once. Here, in this short opening to a chapter, we find Montaigne ‘semant icy un mot, icy un autre’, all so as to collapse these diverse perspectives and write his cognitive simultaneity.

## Conclusion

Montaigne’s collapsed chronology and his collapsed perspectives are techniques which are difficult and sometimes impossible to disentangle: chronological collapse, for instance, serves to increase the number of perspectives. In unpicking these elements as I have, I am not suggesting that these are discrete methods. Rather, I am pulling them apart in an attempt to show how they work, though this is always against an intrinsic resistance: they will always work together and are, like the ‘cogitations’ they describe, double. In this article, we have seen how Montaigne stresses the visual, physical qualities when describing his ‘esprit’ and his form of thought: his thoughts and imaginations run on endlessly, certainly, but not in one direction; they have an irregular movement which, paradoxically, lacks form. This second axis is crucial: it allows us to see how his thoughts move ‘à reculons’; to see that this cognitive movement is recursive and elliptical. ‘Mon stile et mon esprit’, he writes, ‘vont vagabondant de mesmes’ (III.9.994). We have seen that this three-dimensionality, this emphasis on the axes of time and space, is also at work in his way of writing: the linear trajectories traced by the time of writing and reading and by the space of the page, the arrangement of the text, are collapsed so as to allow for a text which can say two things at once. In writing doubly, he writes doubtfully but it is precisely in accommodating rather than



attempting to excise this doubtfulness that Montaigne finds a ‘forme d’escire’ (II.12.509) which can capture the ‘subject informe’ (II.6.379) of his ‘double et divers’ ‘entendement’.

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