

Mallarmé Apollinaire Maeterlinck Jarry:

Space and Subject in French Poetry and Drama, c.1890-1920

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Short Abstract

This study explores the interrelationship between spatiality and subjecthood in the work of Stéphane Mallarmé, Guillaume Apollinaire, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Alfred Jarry. Concerned with various modes of poetry and drama, it also examines the cross-pollination that can occur between these modes, focusing on a relatively narrow corpus of core texts: Mallarmé's *Igitur* (c. 1867-70) and *Un Coup de dés* (1897); Apollinaire's "Zone" (1912) and various of his *calligrammes*; Maeterlinck's early one-act plays—*L'Intruse* (1890), *Les Aveugles* (1890), and *Intérieur* (1894); and Jarry's *Ubu roi* (1896) and *César-Antechrist* (1895). The poetic and dramatic practices of these four authors are assessed against the broader cultural and philosophical contexts of the *fin de siècle*. The *fin de siècle* witnessed a profound epistemological shift: the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, increasingly challenged throughout the nineteenth century, was largely dismantled, with ramifications beyond physics, philosophy and psychology. Chapter 1 introduces three foundational notions—Newtonian absolute space, the unitary Cartesian subject, and subject-object dualism—that were challenged and ultimately overthrown in turn-of-the-century science and art. Developments in theatre architecture and typographic design are examined against this philosophical backdrop with a view to establishing a diachronic and interdisciplinary framework of the authors in question. Chapter 2 focuses on the spatial dimension of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire's *calligrammes*—works which defamiliarise page-space by undermining various (naturalised) conventions of paginal configuration. In Chapter 3, the notion of liminality (the experience or condition of the betwixt and between) is implemented in an analysis of character and diegetic space as constructed in Jarry's *Ubu roi* and Maeterlinck's one-acts. Chapters 4 and Chapter 5 undertake a more abstract investigation of parallel inverse processes—the *subjectivisation of space* and the *spatialisation of the subject*—manifest not only in the works of Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Apollinaire and Jarry, but in the period's poetry and drama more generally.

Long Abstract

In this study, I explore the interrelationship between spatiality and subjecthood in the work of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), and Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). Concerned with various modes of poetry and drama, I also examine the cross-pollination that can occur between these modes, focusing on a relatively narrow corpus of core texts: Mallarmé's *Igitur* (c. 1867-70) and *Un Coup de dés* (1897); Apollinaire's "Zone" (1912) and various of his *calligrammes*; Maeterlinck's early one-act plays—*L'Intruse* (1890), *Les Aveugles* (1890), and *Intérieur* (1894); and Jarry's *Ubu roi* (1896) and *César-Antechrist* (1895).

I assess the poetic and dramatic practices of these four authors against the broader culturo-philosophical contexts of the *fin de siècle*. The *fin de siècle* witnessed a profound epistemological shift: the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, increasingly challenged throughout the nineteenth century, was largely dismantled, with ramifications beyond physics, philosophy and psychology. I introduce three foundational notions—Newtonian absolute space, the unitary Cartesian subject, and subject-object dualism—that were challenged and ultimately overthrown in turn-of-the-century science and art. I examine developments in theatre architecture and typographic design against this philosophical backdrop, establishing a diachronic and interdisciplinary framework for my discussion of Mallarmé, Apollinaire Maeterlinck, and Jarry.

As employed in this study, the term *space*, first and foremost, denotes the physical extent of stage and page. Scenographic and typographic practices are historically contingent, reflecting the prevailing epistemology of the era, and particular configurations of stage- and page-space presuppose (and construct) historically contingent modes of readerly and spectatorial subjecthood. The proscenium theatre is a case in point. Developed in seventeenth-century Italy, the proscenium arch is as much architectural feature as physical manifestation of an

epistemology rooted in the assumption that subject and object are separable and autonomous. The audience in a proscenium theatre is atomised and distanced from the onstage action, which is viewed *from without* through an architecturo-epistemological frame. The proscenium was eliminated by *fin-de-siècle* theatre practitioners and theorists such as Adolphe Appia, who fundamentally reconfigured the nature of performance space and its relationship with audience space. Collapsing the distinction between playing area and auditorium, Appia brought the audience into proximity with the actors' moving bodies in an attempt to elicit a *kinaesthetic* response to the performance. His reforms, I argue, are symptomatic of an underlying epistemological shift away from subject-object dualism, and away, too, from conceptions of the subject as unitary, self-sovereign, and disembodied. Spectators, insular and detached in the proscenium theatre, come to be integrated into a community, and absorbed, physically and psychologically, into the space of the performance. Furthermore, they are *recorporealised*—treated as bodily-situated (rather than Cartesian) subjects, as creatures of *gut, blood, and breath*.

If the frame of the proscenium arch has naturalised a particular mode of viewing, the reader has been conditioned to expect the text to be ensconced in a uniform marginal frame. Usually, page-space is organised according to several institutionalised conventions, tending towards homogeneity due to the invariability of the margins (grounds) that define the type area (figure). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, produced a typographic aesthetic in which the expanse of the page ceased to be a mere ground; white (negative) space became a prominent design element in its own right. In Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, space, heterogeneous and dynamic, *invades* the text, literally shaping its meaning and creating multiple reading itineraries. The figure-ground dichotomy is dehierarchised, the expanse of the page metamorphosing from inert backdrop into positivised negativity. Thus reconfigured, space reconfigures the subject, the reading "I", *reincorporating*

the body into the site of reading by deautomatising its motile activities. No longer is “textual traversal” simply a matter of periodic page-turning and across-down-across eye movements—processes that, by and large, barely register in consciousness. Advancing to the forefront of the reader’s attention, space induces physical hesitation and a greater degree of bodily awareness.

As cultural practices, as modes of experience, as empirical processes, reading and spectatorship have, for the most part, been theorised independently of each other, and on fundamentally different terms. The physicality of spectatorship cannot go unacknowledged because 1) the spectator’s body is always in proximity of others’, and 2) the spectator’s engagement with the performance is directly and very obviously affected by specific architectural and scenographic strategies. The physicality of reading, conversely, is easy to overlook: in our post-oral culture, readers are solitary, silent (silenced?) figures, and their embodiment may appear by the by. Reading has therefore been conceived, if only implicitly, as an “activity of the mind”, a matter of hermeneutics, of interpretive strategies, by a majority of theorists. It is my aim in this study to refute this dualistic conception, to insist that reading is no less bodily a process and experience than spectatorship, and to sketch out a unified framework within which reading and spectatorship may be theorised concomitantly, and on analogous terms.

Constructed *by* texts, spaces and subjects are, of course, also constructed *in* them. As well as considering the spatial dynamics of reading and spectatorship, I explore the ways in which Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry manipulate *diegetic space*—fictive (virtual) space as constructed and organised through emplotment—and its relationship with characters and enunciatory personae—fictive (virtual) subjects. I do not employ the term *diegesis* in the Platonic sense of “telling” or “recounting”, traditionally contrasted with “enacting” (*mimesis*); the distinction between the latter and the former, I would argue, is by no means clear-cut.

Rather, as is common in film studies, the term is used to refer to the *total implied world* or *environment* of a work—its spatio-temporal parameters, settings, characters, objects, events. It is deployed primarily with reference to theatre (*Ubu roi*, Maeterlinck’s one-acts), but also plays a significant role in my analysis of Mallarmé’s *Igitur* and Apollinaire’s “Zone”—works which, though not *theatre* pieces in any direct sense, may nonetheless both be described as stagings of the “*drama of self*” (*intrasubjective conflict*). Typically, in naturalist narrative or drama, diegetic space exists prior to, and is separable from, the characters it contains; the environment of the story-world is an *outside*, a topographic milieu that is (implied to be) continuous, dimensionally extended and physically traversable. By contrast, the diegetic spaces I shall analyse here are, by and large, *emanations of character*: setting and psyche, exterior and interior, are inextricably linked and reciprocal. In “Zone”, real-world geography has been schematised, distorted, narrativised by the enunciatory persona’s consciousness; the “Europe” of the poem is not a geographical entity but a composite, physico-mental construct: cognitive map, interior landscape, site for projection of self. *Igitur*, meanwhile, cannot strictly be said to have a setting at all: the “castle” lacks *any* outward physical aspect whatsoever—it is, rather, a *mise-en-paysage* of *Igitur*’s body and consciousness.

I have no intention of adducing the works of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry as “exemplars” of the era; such an approach could only result in illegitimate generalisations. Wary of the instinctive predilection for grand narratives, I deal with each author on his own terms, noting points of common ground, certainly, but also foregrounding discrepancies of form, style, and theme: my enquiry is as contrastive as it is comparative. I alternate between close textual readings and broader conjectures concerning the period at large, but never use local conclusions as the sole basis for global claims. The *Zeitgeist* can never simply be “deduced” by extrapolating from specific examples; if such a phenomenon exists at all, it is heterogeneous and dynamic, and resists narrow definitions.

No previous book-length treatments or journal articles have, to my knowledge, been devoted to an in-depth investigation of this particular quartet of authors. The first to give equal weighting to analyses of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry, the present study is also the first to concentrate specifically on the mutually constitutive relation of space and subject in their respective oeuvres. I am, of course, indebted to an array of author-specific criticism in which the notions of spatiality and subjecthood have been explored independently of each other; the novelty of my approach is that I present them as crucially intertwined. I would also emphasise the synthesising tendency of this study in general: the overriding objective throughout is to draw out hitherto overlooked or little considered connections, whether between individual authors, modes of poetry and drama, forms of readerly and spectatorial engagement, or philosophical notions. This is reflected in my choice of texts, probing as they do the borderlines between book and theatre (*Igitur*, *César-Antechrist*), reading and seeing (*Un Coup de dés*, the *calligrammes*), setting and character (*Ubu roi*, Maeterlinck's one-acts), and so forth.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first serves as a kind of overture, introducing its recurring themes and motifs: spatiality, subjecthood, embodiment, dynamics of spectatorship and reading, etc. My purpose here is threefold: to contextualise the work of my four principal authors in relation to the *fin-de-siècle* period; to situate the *fin-de-siècle* itself in a broader historico-philosophical context; and, finally, to demonstrate that said practices reflect a particular, historically contingent understanding of space and subject. Opening the chapter with a discussion of Newtonian absolute space, the Cartesian ego, and the dualisms of subject/object and self/world, I evaluate the *fin-de-siècle* problematisation of these notions with reference to my quartet of authors, and to the period's scenographic and typographic practices generally. The aforementioned recorporealisation of reader and spectator is then examined in this light.

Chapter 2 focuses on the spatial dimension of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire's *calligrammes*—works which defamiliarise page-space by undermining various (naturalised) conventions of paginal configuration. Many of the *calligrammes* are nonlinear, having no “beginning” or “end”; *Un Coup de dés* is more accurately described as multicursal, its typographical hierarchy generating a network of forking paths that presents a formidable challenge to the first-time reader. Mallarmé and Apollinaire transform page-space from an inert ground into an integral component of the text; the syntax of *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* is not merely verbal but visual, and calls for *spatio-textual parsing*. In an effort to contextualise the discussion, I sketch out a taxonomy of literary texts based on the degree to which they actualise page-space, starting from conventional prose narrative and proceeding, via non-visual verse and pattern poems (Rabelais, Carroll, etc), to *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*—spatio-textual *objects* resistant to oral transfiguration. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of the ways in which Mallarmé and Apollinaire manipulate the *institutional frame* of the page, comprised of a series of typographic and spatial norms endemic to conventionally printed texts.

Moving from page to stage in Chapter 3, I shift my attention to Jarry's *Ubu roi* and Maeterlinck's one-acts, implementing the notion of liminality (the experience or condition of the betwixt and between) in an analysis of character and diegetic space. Both playwrights' characters are uncanny schematisations of the human form that blur the distinctions between subject and object, human and non-human, animate and inanimate. I examine the uncanny as a category of liminality, invoking Freud, the “uncanny valley” theory of Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori, and the *fin-de-siècle* cult of the marionette. Both playwrights also refuse to localise dramatic space, to transform it into a specific *Somewhere* by means of consistent diegetic framing. Deliberately eschewing any geographical or historical consistency in his use of proper names and toponyms—a particular type of diegetic frame universally exploited in

naturalistic drama—Jarry foregrounds the liminal character of his “Poland” by mixing and matching names, accents and costumes from various periods and locales. Maeterlinck, meanwhile, accords particular significatory power to the transitional spaces of the doorway and the window in *L’Intruse* and *Intérieur*, underscoring the neither-here-nor-there-ness or indeterminacy of the dramatic situation. As for *Les Aveugles*, this may be fruitfully read through the prism of Victor Turner’s theories of anthropological liminality: the blind men and women—deindividuated, anonymous, lacking personal autonomy, undifferentiated by hierarchy—are classically liminal figures who, upon the death of their guide, find themselves in a limbo-like state of permanent transition.

The separate discussions of page and stage in Chapters 2 and 3 are followed in Chapters 4 and 5 by a more abstract investigation of parallel inverse processes—the *subjectivisation of space* and the *spatialisation of the subject*—manifest in both the poetry and drama of the period. As already made clear, space is presented in the works to be discussed not as objective outside but as emanation of character; by the same token, the subject does not remain fully demarcated from its surroundings, and exhibits varying degrees of spatial dispersion. Chapter 4 explores several types of subjectivisation. One of these, in evidence in Maeterlinck’s one-acts, involves the staging of quasi-human agency as positivised negative space; rather than being presented explicitly (personified), the agency is indirectly evoked by means of *the effects it produces*. In *L’Intruse*, the eponymous “intruder” is denied both onstage icon and intra-dialogical persona, the fact of its approach implied only by the “disturbances” it generates in the dramatic environment. Alternatively, an entire physical milieu can be subjectivised, meaning that it is presented to spectator or reader partly or exclusively *from within* a character’s consciousness. “Zone” has already been mentioned in this regard; adopting a psychogeographic approach in an analysis of the poem’s subjectivised diegesis in Chapter 4, I shift focus in Chapter 5 to Apollinaire’s enunciatory persona, a bifurcated

“dividual” who, in self-focalising simultaneously from within and without (he designates himself now as *je*, now as *tu*), effectively *exceeds his own boundaries* and becomes *no less exterior (other) to himself than the world* that surrounds him. Lacking the discreteness or self-sufficiency of a Cartesian subject, he blurs into the world—is dispersed, fissured, *spatialised*. The “dividual” persona of “Zone” is the first of several spatialised subjects I examine in Chapter 5. Spatialisation may take place on a number of different levels—thematic, narratorial, typographic, and so forth. The poet’s voice in “Lettre-Océan” is dispersed across the page, merging seamlessly with that of his brother Albert to form a composite persona (“Guillaume-Albert”). Maeterlinck’s *Intérieur*, meanwhile, features a similarly composite narrator-commentator whose “story” (an exposition of onstage and offstage space) is splintered and put into the mouths of several “anti-characters”; the Old Man, Stranger and Granddaughters exist not as individual personalities but as narrative instruments for the production of diegetic space. Spatialisation and deindividuation are taken to the furthest possible extreme in the Acte Héraldique of Jarry’s *César-Antechrist*, whose dramatis personae are segments of the two-dimensional field of an escutcheon (shield).

In light of the play’s apparent valorising of (abstract) ground over (human) figure, I conclude the study with broader, speculative reflections on subjecthood, spatiality and humanism. *Fin-de-siècle* modes of literary, dramatic and pictorial representation are frequently anti-humanistic in character, challenging as they do the centrality of the human form and the anthropocentric worldview that elevated it to pre-eminence. But anti-humanism must not be equated with the anti-human. The relative marginalisation of the human *figure* does not, contrary to what José Ortega y Gasset argues in *The Dehumanisation of Art*, necessarily entail a flight from “human *contents*” (emphasis mine); as the work of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry bears witness, those contents can be distributed into space, expressed as gaps, fragments and fissures.

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Acknowledgements & Dedication

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Cui dono ~~lepidum~~ novum libellum? Vobis.

Introduction

In this study, I explore the interrelationship between spatiality and subjecthood in the work of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), and Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). Concerned primarily (though not exclusively) with various modes of poetry and drama, I also examine the cross-pollination that can occur between these modes. Although all four authors may be dubbed poet-dramatists (if not necessarily poet-*playwrights*¹), the focus here will be primarily on Mallarmé as poet and theorist of theatre; on Apollinaire as poet (and, very occasionally, as art critic); and on Maeterlinck and Jarry as theatre theorists and practitioners. The corpus of texts I have selected is a relatively narrow one; casting too broad a net would only serve to dilute the discussion. It is imperative, I believe, to interweave theory with extended textual analysis, and this becomes impracticable with a vast multitude of core texts. Mine number about a dozen: Mallarmé's *Igitur* (c. 1867-70) and *Un Coup de dés* (first published 1897, definitive edition 1914); Apollinaire's "Zone" (1912) and various of his *calligrammes*²; Maeterlinck's early one-act plays—*L'Intruse* (published 1890, first performed 1891), *Les Aveugles* (published 1890, first performed 1891), and *Intérieur* (published 1894, first performed 1895); and Jarry's *Ubu roi* (performed and published 1896) and *César-Antechrist* (published in 1895).

I assess the poetic and dramatic practices of these four authors against the broader cultural and philosophical contexts of the *fin de siècle*; though concerned predominantly with

¹ Mallarmé's *Hérodias* and *L'Après-midi d'un faune* were originally intended for the stage but, following the famous Tournon crisis of the mid-1860s, his desire for a physical *mise-en-scène* was replaced by a wish "to produce the effect of theatre [...] without the loss of poetic integrity implied by the actual collaboration of a performing art" (Shaw [1993], p. 127). For a discussion of Symbolist attitudes to theatre and performance, see Interlude I, pp. 96-7.

² Note the miniscule *c*—I am not referring to the *Calligrammes* collection as whole, but specifically Apollinaire's spatialised poems, including those composed for the Léopold Survage/Irène Lagut exhibition of 1917.

Francophone³ culture in the period 1890-1920, I occasionally stray beyond these historical and geographical limits. Widening the geographical scope may enhance my analysis of a particular author; thus, for example, I touch on Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold's stagings of Maeterlinck in the 1900s, and the typographical experiments of Mallarmé's friend James McNeill Whistler (better known, of course, as a painter), who shares Mallarmé's own preoccupation with negative (white) space. Widening the historical scope, meanwhile, will enable me to contextualise the philosophical, literary and theatrical currents of the period as a whole, and to demonstrate how conceptions of spatiality and subjecthood have evolved over time. The *fin de siècle* witnessed a profound epistemological shift—the most fundamental since the Renaissance. The Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, increasingly challenged throughout the nineteenth century, was largely dismantled, with ramifications beyond physics, philosophy and psychology. If we are to grasp the full implications of this shift, we must first consider the worldview that preceded it. It is therefore seventeenth-century natural philosophy, and not nineteenth-century poetry and drama, that I take as my point of departure in this study. More specifically, I introduce three foundational notions—Newtonian absolute space, the unitary Cartesian subject, and subject-object dualism—that were challenged and ultimately overthrown in turn-of-the-century science and art. It is against this philosophical backdrop that I shall examine developments in theatre architecture and typographic design, establishing a diachronic and interdisciplinary framework for my discussion of Mallarmé, Apollinaire Maeterlinck, and Jarry.

Before elaborating on my choice of authors and texts, I must first set out the parameters of the terms *space* and *subject* as employed in this study. Recent years have seen a regrettable tendency to utilise the former any which way, to the point where it has been bleached of all

³ Francophone rather than specifically French: the Belgian-born Maeterlinck moved to France only in his mid-twenties; Apollinaire, born in Rome, was of noble Polish ancestry on his mother's side.

meaning. “Discursive space”, “interpretive space”, the “space of analysis”—such usages are, more often than not, vague, ambiguous, and lazily impressionistic. The latter, meanwhile, is in yet greater need of precise definition due to its extraordinary polysemy. Utilised in a broad array of different disciplines—grammar, logic, social theory, epistemology, and others—it takes on new meaning in each one. Here, I shall use both terms in a number of ways, ranging from the highly concrete to the highly abstract (the degree of abstraction will increase as my argument progresses), but without, I hope, ever lapsing into wilful imprecision.

Space, first and foremost, denotes the physical extent of stage and page. Scenographic and typographic practices are always historically contingent, reflecting the prevailing epistemology of the era, and particular configurations of stage- and page-space presuppose (and construct) historically contingent modes of readerly and spectatorial subjecthood. The proscenium theatre is a case in point. Developed in early seventeenth-century Italy, the proscenium arch is as much architectural feature as physical manifestation of an epistemology rooted in the assumption that subject and object, seer and seen, are separable and autonomous.⁴ The audience in a proscenium theatre is atomised—comprised of individual spectators rather than a collective whole—and distanced from the onstage action, which is viewed *from without* through an architecturo-epistemological frame. The proscenium was eliminated by *fin-de-siècle* theatre practitioners and theorists such as Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), who fundamentally reconfigured the nature of performance space and its relationship with audience space. Collapsing the distinction between playing area and auditorium, Appia brought the audience into proximity with the actors’ moving bodies in an attempt to elicit a kinaesthetic (rather than merely intellectual) response to the performance. His reforms, I argue, are symptomatic of an underlying epistemological shift away from subject-object

⁴ See Lawrenson (1957), pp. 135-8, for a concise account of the role played by the proscenium arch in French seventeenth-century theatre.

dualism, and away, too, from conceptions of the subject as unitary, self-sovereign, and disembodied. Spectators, insular and detached in the proscenium theatre, come to be integrated into a community, and absorbed, physically and psychologically, into the space of the performance. Furthermore, they are *recorporealised*—treated as bodily-situated (rather than Cartesian) subjects, as creatures of *gut, blood, and breath*; the necessity of recorporealising the spectator is recognised above all by Artaud, who, inspired in part by the visceral physicality of *Ubu roi*, proclaims in *Le Théâtre et son double* that “il faut [...] permettre [au] spectateur de s’identifier avec le spectacle, *souffle par souffle* et temps par temps”⁵ (emphasis mine).

If the frame of the proscenium arch has naturalised a particular mode of viewing, the reader has been conditioned to expect the text to be ensconced in a uniform marginal frame. In a majority of texts (literary and otherwise), page-space is predictably organised according to several institutionalised conventions, tending towards homogeneity due to the invariability of the margins (grounds) that define the type area (figure). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, produced a typographic aesthetic in which the expanse of the page ceased to be a mere ground, a “host” for the figure of the text; white (negative) space became a prominent design element in its own right. Though evident in certain prose works, such as James McNeill Whistler’s *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), this reconceptualisation of page-space had a further-reaching effect on verse. From the *verslibristes* onwards, the poem was no longer conceived as “merely an arrangement of words”; it was now “a composition of words *and* the blank spaces between them.”⁶ In Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire’s *calligrammes*, space, heterogeneous and dynamic, *invades* the text, literally shaping its meaning and creating multiple reading

⁵ Artaud (1964), p.69.

⁶ Kern (2003), p. 172.

itineraries; “the topographical position of words and their distance to other words or word groups [become] a signifying force in their own right.”⁷ The figure-ground dichotomy is dehierarchised, the expanse of the page metamorphosing from largely inert backdrop into expressive, positivised negativity. Thus reconfigured, space reconfigures the subject, the reading “I”, *reincorporating the body into the site of reading* (to paraphrase Michael Camille⁸) by deautomatising its motile activities. No longer is “textual traversal” simply a matter of periodic page-turning and z-shaped, across-down-across eye movements—processes that, by and large, barely register in consciousness. Advancing to the forefront of the reader’s attention, space induces physical hesitation and a greater degree of bodily awareness.⁹

As cultural practices, as modes of experience, as empirical processes, reading and spectatorship have, for the most part, been theorised independently of each other, and on fundamentally different terms. The physicality of spectatorship cannot go unacknowledged for two basic reasons: firstly, because the spectator’s body is always in proximity of others’; and secondly, because the spectator’s engagement with the performance is directly and very obviously affected by specific architectural and scenographic strategies. The physicality of reading, on the other hand, is relatively easy to overlook: in our post-oral culture, readers are solitary, silent (silenced?) figures, and the fact of their embodiment may appear by the by. In consequence, reading has been conceived, if only implicitly, as an “activity of the mind”, a matter of hermeneutics, of interpretive strategies, by a majority of theorists. It is my aim here to refute this dualistic conception, to insist that reading is no less bodily a process and

⁷ Knowles *et al.* (2012), p. 76.

⁸ See Camille (1997), p. 40.

⁹ “Experimental visual works that combine text with other visual stimuli can draw readers’ attention to their eye movements across the text’s visual field. The process of visual search is primed as readers have to match an alphabetic order of writing, which they already master, with visual codes that have to be inferred, deciphered, or constructed during the act of reading. [...] The automatic movement of reading a familiar form of writing becomes denaturalized through an instance-specific spatialization of characters and words.” (Portela [2013], p. 25.)

experience than spectatorship, and to sketch out a unified framework within which reading and spectatorship may be theorised concomitantly, and on analogous terms. I make the transition between page and stage, between book and theatre, by contrasting the respective “ecologies” of reading and spectatorship. The environment in which reading takes place is entirely beyond the author’s control and subject to unpredictable fluctuations; the experience of reading, therefore, is inevitably and profoundly affected by *noise*.¹⁰ By contrast, the environment of the theatre (or at least the modern indoor theatre), is very meticulously regulated, and noise, though still somewhat inevitable, can be reduced to an absolute minimum. For this reason, spectatorship is—or has the potential to be—experientially more intense than reading. In the confined, precisely controlled space of the theatre, there is no escaping the *sensory totality* of the performance or the proximity of the performers’ bodies—a condition of quasi-entrapment exploited by Jarry and, later, Artaud.

Constructed by texts, spaces and subjects are, of course, also constructed *in* them. As well as considering the spatial dynamics of reading and spectatorship, I explore the ways in which Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry manipulate *diegetic space*—fictive (virtual) space as constructed and organised through emplotment—and its relationship with characters and enunciatory personae—fictive (virtual) subjects. It is important to note here that I do not employ the term *diegesis* in the Platonic sense of “telling” or “recounting”, traditionally contrasted with “enacting” (*mimesis*); the distinction between the latter and the former, as we shall come to see, is by no means clear-cut. Rather, as is common in film studies, the term is used throughout this study to refer to the *total implied world or environment* of a work—its spatio-temporal parameters, settings, characters, objects, and events. It is deployed primarily with reference to theatre (*Ubu roi* and Maeterlinck’s one-acts), but also plays a significant

¹⁰ I am using the term in its technical sense to denote any random interference (e.g. by extraneous sensory stimuli) in the transmission of a message.

role in my analysis of Mallarmé's *Igitur* and Apollinaire's "Zone"—works which, though not *theatre* pieces in any direct sense,¹¹ may nonetheless both be described as stagings of the "drama of self" (which I shall call *intrasubjective conflict*). Typically, in naturalist narrative or drama, diegetic space exists prior to, and is separable from, the characters it contains; the environment of the story-world is an *outside*, a more or less fleshed-out topographic milieu that is (implied to be) continuous, dimensionally extended and physically traversable. By contrast, the diegetic spaces we shall encounter here are, by and large, *emanations of character*; otherwise put, setting and psyche, exterior and interior, are inextricably linked and reciprocal. In "Zone", for example, real-world geography has been schematised, distorted and narrativised by the enunciatory persona's consciousness; the "Europe" of the poem is not a geographical entity but a composite, physico-mental construct—a cognitive map, an interior landscape, a site for the projection of self. *Igitur*, meanwhile, cannot strictly be said to have a setting at all: the "castle", I would suggest, lacks *any* outward physical aspect whatsoever—it is a wholesale "landscapification", a *mise-en-paysage* of *Igitur*'s body and consciousness.

Poised in the interstices between philosophy, literature and theatre, my enquiry into spatiality and subjecthood is necessarily informed by a wide variety of secondary sources, and draws on disciplines such as philosophy of mind, cognitive geography, and the histories of art and science. My understanding of evolving conceptions of space has been enhanced by diachronic accounts as diverse as David Wiles' *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (2003), Max Jammer's *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (1993), and William Dunning's *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (1991). Can pictorial space and the space of physics, some might query,

¹¹ *Igitur*, of course, exploits and subverts a particular formal feature of the playtext—stage directions (or, more precisely, fragments of text that initially *appear* to function as stage directions) set off from the rest of the text by white space. The incursion of dramatic elements into narrative, and of narrative elements into drama—a prominent trend in the *fin-de-siècle*—will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, as will *Igitur* itself.

be of more than tangential relevance in the context of this study? The answer, I insist, is a resolute yes in both cases. The historical links between the visual arts and scenography are well established;¹² until the late nineteenth century at least, the evolution of performance space was inextricably bound up with that of its painterly counterpart. Furthermore, the typographic experiments of Mallarmé and Apollinaire—in particular their manipulation of figure-ground relations—invite comparison with contemporaneous experiments in painting, especially given Apollinaire's association with the Cubists.¹³ The space of physics, meanwhile, requires at least a cursory discussion here, not least because developments in physics—and in the exact sciences generally—affect in fundamental ways the overall epistemology of a given era. Given my non-scientific background, however, the analysis of the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm undertaken at the beginning of this study inevitably gives greater prominence to Descartes's notion of the subject than to Newton's theories of space. My thinking about subjecthood has been shaped by philosophical studies,¹⁴ but I have, of course, also depended on literary-oriented explorations of the topic, such as Susan Harrow's *The Material, the Real, and the Fractured Self* (1994), a chapter of which is dedicated specifically to Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*.

As regards period-specific criticism, Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (2003), a wide-ranging cultural history of the transformation of spatio-temporal experience during the European *fin de siècle*, must be cited as a decisive influence—and, indeed, as an early catalyst for my interest in turn-of-the-century culture.¹⁵ There is a major flaw in Kern's methodology, however, that other critics have been quick to recognise. In the

¹² See Hénin (2003) and Krieger (1992).

¹³ For a comprehensive account of the latter, see Hicken (2002).

¹⁴ For example, Bordo (1987) and Zahavi (2005).

¹⁵ The present discussion has also been influenced by period-specific studies of typography, visual culture and theatre; these include Bablet (1975), Drucker (1994), McGann (1993), and Schumacher (1997).

words of Sara Danius, he “tends to mobilize individual works as mere illustrations”¹⁶ of the ways in which social and technological changes intersect with modernist aesthetics. I must make clear, then, that I have no intention of adducing the works of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry as “exemplars” of the era; such an approach could only result in illegitimate generalisations. Wary of the “will to narrativise”, of the instinctive predilection for grand narratives, I deal with each author on his own terms, noting points of common ground, certainly, but also foregrounding discrepancies of form, style, and theme: my enquiry is as contrastive as it is comparative. I alternate between close textual readings and broader conjectures concerning the period at large, but never use local conclusions as the sole basis for global claims. The *Zeitgeist* can never simply be “deduced” by extrapolating from specific examples; if such a phenomenon exists at all, it is heterogeneous and dynamic, and resists narrow definitions.

No previous book-length treatments or journal articles have, to the best of my knowledge, been devoted to an in-depth investigation of this particular quartet of authors. Of the four, Mallarmé has received by far the most critical attention,¹⁷ and Maeterlinck—Nobel laureate fallen prey to the vagaries of critical fashion—probably least.¹⁸ The quality of analysis, too, varies hugely: while the semiotics of Jarry’s *Ubu* cycle, for example, has been brilliantly and comprehensively elucidated by Michel Arrivé,¹⁹ critics have, until comparatively recently, tended to gloss over the semiotic complexity of Apollinaire’s *calligrammes*, some doing so

¹⁶ Danius (2002), p. 43.

¹⁷ I will not attempt here to give even a cursory account of the enormous body of Mallarmé criticism that exists in French, English, and other languages; the works I have found most useful in the context of my own research include Abbott (2009), Block (1977), Brown (2000), La Charité (1987), Pearson (1996), Robb (1996), Shaw (1993), and Williams (2004).

¹⁸ The two most comprehensive and illuminating studies of Maeterlinck’s theatre to have been written in the last fifteen years are McGuinness (2000) and Gorceix (2005). Useful earlier accounts include Konrad (1986), and individual chapters of Kane (1984) and Rykner (1996).

¹⁹ Arrivé (1972). Other works of Jarry criticism to which I am particularly indebted include Béhar (1980), Fell (2005), Jannarone (2009), and Schumacher (1994).

with unjustified disparagement.²⁰ The first to give equal weighting to analyses of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry, the present study is also the first to concentrate specifically on the mutually constitutive relation of space and subject in their respective oeuvres. I am, of course, indebted to an array of author-specific criticism in which the notions of spatiality and subjecthood have been explored independently of each other; the novelty of my approach is that I present them as crucially intertwined. I would also emphasise the synthesising tendency of this study in general: the overriding objective throughout is to draw out hitherto overlooked or little considered connections, whether between individual authors, modes of poetry and drama, forms of readerly and spectatorial engagement, or philosophical notions. This is reflected in my choice of texts, probing as they do the borderlines between book and theatre (*Igitur, César-Antechrist*), reading and seeing (*Un Coup de dés, the calligrammes*), setting and character (*Ubu roi*, Maeterlinck's one-acts), and so forth.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first serves as a kind of overture, introducing, in miniature, its recurring themes and motifs: spatiality, subjecthood, embodiment, dynamics of spectatorship and reading, etc. My purpose here is threefold: to contextualise the work of my four principal authors in relation to the *fin-de-siècle* period; to situate the *fin-de-siècle* itself in a broader historico-philosophical context; and, finally, to demonstrate that said practices reflect a particular, historically contingent understanding of space and subject. Opening the chapter with a discussion of Newtonian absolute space (a container a priori to, and independent of, its contents), the Cartesian ego (indivisible by essence, self-identical, defined by nothing beyond itself), and the dualisms of subject/object and self/world (the foundation of nineteenth-century classical positivism), I evaluate the *fin-de-siècle*

²⁰ Several authors have, nonetheless, produced stand-out accounts of “calligrammar” (to borrow a coinage of Willard Bohn’s); these include Bohn (1997), Longrée (1985), and Sacks-Galey (1988). The recent “cognitive turn” in literary studies has also generated new perspectives on the *calligrammes*; see Chapter 2, p. 69.

problematization of these notions with reference to my quartet of authors, and to the period's scenographic and typographic practices generally. The aforementioned recorporealisation of reader and spectator is then examined in this light.

Chapter 2 focuses on the spatial dimension of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire's *calligrammes*—works which, I argue, defamiliarise page-space by undermining various (naturalised) conventions of paginal configuration. The chapter's opening section draws on Espen Aarseth's notion of literary ergodicity. Ergodic texts are those which cannot be traversed without “nontrivial” physical effort on the part of the reader²¹; typographically nonlinear or multicursal (many-pathed), they present a choice of reading “itineraries”, some of which may also be *garden paths* (dead ends). Many of the *calligrammes* are truly nonlinear, having no “beginning” or “end”; *Un Coup de dés*, however, is more accurately described as multicursal, its typographical hierarchy generating a network of forking paths that presents a formidable challenge to the first-time reader. Mallarmé and Apollinaire both transform page-space from an inert ground into an integral component of the text; the syntax of *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* is not merely verbal, but visual, too, and calls for *spatio-textual parsing*. In an effort to contextualise the discussion, I sketch out a taxonomy of literary texts based on the degree to which they actualise page-space, starting from conventional prose narrative (the least spatialised literary mode) and proceeding, via non-visual verse and pattern poems (Rabelais, Herbert, Carroll, etc), to *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*—spatio-textual *objects* resistant to oral transfiguration. The near-loss of the aural-oral, however, is counterbalanced by a flaunting of the tangible, the material; the poems—refusing to become transparent, demanding acknowledgment as physical bodies—communicate to readers a sense of their own embodiment. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of the (often divergent) ways in which Mallarmé and Apollinaire

²¹ Aarseth (1997), p. 1.

manipulate what I call the *institutional frame of the page*, comprised of a series of typographic and spatial norms endemic to conventionally printed texts.

Moving from page to stage in Chapter 3, I shift my attention to Jarry's *Ubu roi* and Maeterlinck's one-acts, implementing the notion of liminality (the experience or condition of the betwixt and between) in an analysis of character and diegetic space. Both playwrights' characters are uncanny schematisations of the human form that blur the distinctions between subject and object, human and non-human, animate and inanimate. I examine the uncanny as a category of liminality, invoking Freud, the "uncanny valley" theory of Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori, and the *fin-de-siècle* cult of the marionette, which the theoretical writings of Jarry and Maeterlinck served to propagate. Both playwrights also refuse to localise dramatic space, to transform it into a specific *Somewhere* by means of consistent diegetic framing—Jarry, of course, explicitly so: the "Poland & Environs" of *Ubu roi* is a *Nulle Part*, a composite non-place wrought from impossible juxtapositions.²² Deliberately eschewing any geographical or historical consistency in his use of proper names and toponyms—a particular type of diegetic frame universally exploited in naturalistic drama—Jarry foregrounds the liminal character of his "Poland" by mixing and matching names (as well as accents and costumes) from various periods and locales. Maeterlinck, meanwhile, accords particular signifiatory power to the transitional spaces of the doorway and the window in *L'Intruse* and *Intérieur*, underscoring the neither-here-nor-there-ness or indeterminacy of the dramatic situation. As for *Les Aveugles*, this may be fruitfully read through the prism of Victor Turner's theories of anthropological liminality: the blind men and women—deindividuated, anonymous, lacking personal autonomy, undifferentiated by hierarchy—are classically liminal figures who, upon the death of their guide, find themselves in a limbo-like state of permanent transition.

²² "Poland & Environs" is my coinage for the play's anti-setting—it is not in general use.

The largely separate discussions of page and stage in Chapters 2 and 3 are followed in Chapters 4 and 5 by a more abstract investigation of parallel inverse processes—the *subjectivisation of space* and the *spatialisation of the subject*—manifest in both the poetry and drama of the period. As already made clear, space is presented in the works to be discussed not as objective outside but as emanation of character; by the same token, the subject does not remain fully demarcated from its surroundings, and exhibits varying degrees of spatial dispersion. Chapter 4 explores several types of subjectivisation. One of these, in evidence in Maeterlinck’s one-acts, involves the staging of quasi-human agency as positivised negative space; rather than being presented explicitly (personified), the agency is (to paraphrase Mallarmé) indirectly evoked by means of *the effects it produces*. In *L’Intruse*, for instance, the eponymous “intruder” is denied both onstage icon and intra-dialogical persona, the fact of its approach implied only by the “disturbances” it generates in the dramatic environment. Alternatively, an entire physical milieu can be subjectivised, meaning that it is presented to spectator or reader partly or exclusively *from within* a character’s consciousness. “Zone” has already been mentioned in this regard; adopting a psychogeographic approach in an analysis of the poem’s subjectivised diegesis in Chapter 4, I shift focus in Chapter 5 to Apollinaire’s enunciatory persona, a bifurcated “dividual” who, in self-focalising simultaneously from within and without (he designates himself now as *je*, now as *tu*), effectively *exceeds his own boundaries* and becomes *no less exterior (other) to himself than the world* that surrounds him. Lacking the discreteness or self-sufficiency of a Cartesian subject, he blurs into the world—is dispersed, fissured, *spatialised*. The “dividual” persona of “Zone” is the first of several spatialised subjects I examine in Chapter 5. Spatialisation may take place on a number of different levels—thematic, narratorial, typographic, and so forth. The poet’s voice in “Lettre-Océan”, for example, is dispersed across the page, merging seamlessly with that of his brother Albert, a continent away in Mexico, to form a composite persona (“Guillaume-Albert”).

Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, meanwhile, features a similarly composite narrator-commentator whose "story" (an exposition of onstage and offstage space) is splintered and put into the mouths of several "anti-characters"; the Old Man, Stranger and Granddaughters exist not as individual personalities but as narrative instruments for the production of diegetic space. Spatialisation and deindividuation are taken to the furthest possible extreme in the Acte Héraldique of Jarry's *César-Antechrist*, whose dramatis personae are segments of the two-dimensional field of an escutcheon (shield).

In light of the play's apparent valorising of (abstract) ground over (human) figure, I conclude the study with broader, more speculative reflections on subjecthood, spatiality and humanism. *Fin-de-siècle* modes of literary, dramatic and pictorial representation are frequently anti-humanistic in character, challenging as they do the centrality of the human form and the anthropocentric worldview that elevated it to pre-eminence. But anti-humanism must not be equated with the anti-human. The relative marginalisation of the human *figure* does not, contrary to what José Ortega y Gasset argues in *The Dehumanisation of Art* (1925), necessarily entail a flight from "human contents"²³ (emphasis mine); as the work of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry bears witness, those contents can be distributed into space, expressed as gaps, fragments and fissures.

²³ Ortega (1968), p. 26.

1 The Historical Contingency of Space and Subject

Isaac Newton's shadow is a long one indeed; so is René Descartes's. Their respective conceptualisations of space and subject have been naturalised—bleached of historical (and ideological) specificity—in Western popular consciousness. Even today, Descartes's notion of a unitary, centralised, self-transparent subject persists in what are often termed “folk-psychological” (or commonsensical) theories of selfhood, if not in contemporary philosophy of mind or cognitive science. The age-old adage “Know thyself”, whose staying power is testament to this fact, implies not only that the self is knowable from within, but also that there is an essence of self, fixed and indivisible, “real” and “true”, that may be revealed, undistorted, by means of introspection. The subject or self in folk-psychological theories may no longer be *strictly* disembodied—perhaps unsurprisingly, Descartes's mind-body dualism has proven easier to jettison than his unitary “I”—but it remains absolutely divorced from the world, a discrete and unproblematically differentiated entity. Meanwhile, the space of the world is conceived in folk theories as somewhat analogous to Newtonian absolute space—“space as a field, as a container, or as simple emptiness; in Western societies today this view of space is virtually instinctive in common parlance.”²⁴ Fundamentally distinct from matter, absolute space is an inert, immobile vessel incapable of influencing, and not influenceable by, its contents. It is also, in Newton's own words, “eternal, infinite, uncreated,”²⁵ an unchanging, homogeneous background against which processes play out. To speak of the “history of space”, therefore, would be anathema to Newton, for the eternal is ahistorical. That space does have a history, that history *produces* space, is perhaps even more counter-intuitive than the notion of the historically produced, rather than transcendental, human subject.²⁶

²⁴ Smith (2008), pp. 92-93.

²⁵ “De Gravitatione”, tr. Christian Johnson, in Janiak (ed., 2004), p. 33.

²⁶ See Foucault (1966), for a classic critique of the latter.

The concept of absolute space was challenged in Newton's own time by his rival Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (whose relationism shall be discussed below), and Descartes's model of the self vigorously contested in the eighteenth century by David Hume, but it was only in the nineteenth that the Newtonian-Cartesian hegemony began to be seriously eroded. The self-transparent, unified Cartesian subject became opaque and alienated upon the development of various theories of the unconscious, initially by the British philosopher-physicians William Hamilton, Thomas Laycock and William Carpenter, and subsequently—and much more famously—by Freud.²⁷ Meanwhile, absolute space was dismissed as a “metaphysical conception” by Ernst Mach in the 1880s. Developments in psychology, philosophy and physics were mirrored by novel presentations of space and subjectivity in the visual arts, theatre and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three general tendencies can be identified. Firstly, space, hitherto regarded as compositionally and thematically subordinate, undergoes a “transvaluation” or “positivisation,” resulting in the “levelling of former distinctions between [...] subject and background [and] figure and ground.”²⁸ Secondly, the human subject, no longer conceived as unitary, is “split open” or fissured, becoming self-estranged as a result (whence Rimbaud's “je est un autre”). Thirdly, and most importantly, the epistemological rupture between subject and space, between self and world—minimal in the medieval period, widened by the Renaissance rationalisation of perspective, and transformed into a seemingly unbridgeable abyss during the seventeenth century—contracts once again. The subject, disembodied in Descartes, is definitively recorporealised, reendowed with spatial extension.

²⁷ See Wilson (2002), pp. 10-12. Freud's theory of the unconscious, to which the notion of repression is central, differs radically from those of Hamilton, Laycock and Carpenter. Contemporary cognitive psychology, according to Wilson, owes more to the latter three than to Freud.

²⁸ Kern (2003), p. 153. Kern's notion of *positive negative space* shall be frequently invoked throughout this study.

These historical metamorphoses represent the primary concern of this opening chapter. If the work of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry, my primary authors, must be properly contextualised within the *fin-de-siècle* period, so too must the intellectual and aesthetic currents of the *fin de siècle* be examined from a broader historical perspective, not least because the late nineteenth century witnessed the rejection of fundamental epistemological assumptions that had prevailed, in one form or another, for several hundred years. From his mid-twentieth-century vantage point, Foucault asserts that “[n]ous sommes à l’époque du simultané, nous sommes à l’époque de la juxtaposition, à l’époque du proche et du lointain, du côte à côte, du dispersé.”²⁹ Simultaneity, juxtaposition, dispersal: the result of technology, perhaps? In part, undoubtedly so. Photography and the railways, telephony and the cinema, radio and aviation: these technologies of speed, perception and telecommunication all served to compress time and space, to pluck far-flung, disparate fragments of space-time and present them, condensed and integrated, to consciousness—but also, in so doing, to disperse that consciousness, to decentre and delocalise it.³⁰ And yet, the dominant aesthetic mode of the medieval period is, in contrast to the Renaissance ideal of unity,³¹ also characterised by spatio-temporal simultaneity and juxtaposition. Although Apollinaire’s directive in *Les trois vertus plastiques*, exhorting the painter to “*embrasser d’un coup d’œil: le passé, le présent et l’avenir*,”³² may well be a response to the technological transformations of his time, it strongly evokes the devices of *split representation* and

²⁹ Foucault (1994), p. 752.

³⁰ For an in-depth socio-geographic history of “time-space compression” from the early modern period to the present day, see Barney Warf’s book of the same name (2008). For a fascinating account of the way time and space were “annihilated” by the railways in the mid to late nineteenth century, see Chapter 3 of Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journey* (1986).

³¹ The terms “medieval” and “Renaissance” are notoriously slippery (some historians speak of *three* renaissances—Carolingian, twelfth-century and fifteenth-century—but even this may be an oversimplification), and their value and application are subject to energetic dispute. For present purposes, it is Leon Battista Alberti’s theories of perspective, expounded in his *De Pictura* (1435), that will serve as the (inevitably arbitrary) dividing line between the two eras.

³² Apollinaire (1966), p. 94.

continuous narrative (or *simultaneous succession*), prevalent in medieval painting but increasingly rare after around 1500.³³ Split representation is “the representation of three-dimensional objects as if split apart and pressed flat, so that the picture shows more sides and parts of the object than could possibly be seen from a single viewpoint,”³⁴ while continuous narrative typically involves a character making multiple appearances *within a single visual field*, giving the impression of temporal and, frequently, causal sequence. Split representation, too, suggests temporality: that of viewer rather than character. Linear perspective “position[s] the viewer at a particular point in space,”³⁵ generating a window onto a scene frozen in time. Medieval viewers, in contrast, are implicitly mobile; as Susan Bordo asserts, the “mobility of the subject is portrayed in the object itself, by showing more sides than would be seen ‘in (fixed) perspective.’”³⁶ Nor, therefore, are they “beyond” the painting, outside-looking-in; they are bodily “absorbed within [its] visual world.”³⁷

And it is precisely this emphasis on embodied absorption that re-emerges in the *fin de siècle*: not only in the visual arts, but in theatrical theory and practice also, and, perhaps less obviously, in “typographically spatialised” texts which, unlike most literature, call attention to themselves as spatio-textual objects and may require physical manipulation beyond simple page-turning. The *fin de siècle* rejects not only the “fixed, imaginary witness”³⁸ produced by the Renaissance rationalisation of perspective, but also its epistemological progeny, Descartes’s unitary, disembodied observer, resulting in a partial enmeshing of subject and space, self and world, spectator and spectacle—somewhat reminiscent, I shall argue, of the medieval period. What follows is a broad historical analysis, grounded in the philosophical-scientific context of these issues but with a particular focus on the changing nature of art-

³³ See Steiner (2004), p. 160.

³⁴ Edgerton (1975), p. 14.

³⁵ Tally Jr. (2013), p. 19.

³⁶ Bordo (1987), p. 63.

³⁷ Edgerton (1975), p. 21.

³⁸ Bordwell (1985), p. 5.

viewing, theatrical spectatorship and reading. I begin with an examination of Newtonian absolute space and the self-sufficient Cartesian subject, noting that subject and space were not conceptualised as fundamentally irreconcilable during the medieval period, and that the development of linear perspective in the first half of the fifteenth century generated an initial epistemological gulf between them. Bringing the discussion into the realm of drama, I demonstrate how perspectival staging and the proscenium arch, theatrical analogue to Leon Battista Alberti's notion of the "open window", definitively isolated audience from actors and, moreover, transformed the spectator into a kind of disembodied eye, all-seeing yet corporeally detached (I rely here on Martin Jay's analysis in *Downcast Eyes* of what he terms "Cartesian ocularcentrism"³⁹). Moving into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I ask whether, beyond any superficial medievalism, the *fin-de-siècle* era genuinely represents a return of sorts to a pre-Renaissance way of conceptualising subject and space. In this context, preliminary readings of works by Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry, to be explored at greater length in future chapters, are offered: Mallarmé's agon with Descartes in *Igitur*, for instance, is richly, if highly obliquely, illustrative of the period's repudiation of the self-transparent subject, and its blurring of the boundaries between self and world. Lastly, drawing on Jay's assertion that the late nineteenth-century "cognitive subject" was recorporealised—reendowed, in a rejection of Cartesianism, with "deictic specificity"⁴⁰ (bodily situatedness in space and time)—I examine various attempts, theoretical and practical, to recorporealise spectator and reader in the period in question, providing a context for the discussions of embodiment in Chapters 2 and 3.

³⁹ Jay (1993), p. 69.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 189.

The legacy of Newton, Descartes, and perspectivalism

The notion of absolute space—naturalised in today’s folk theories, as mentioned above—is neatly encapsulated by John Keill (1671-1721), mathematician, natural philosopher and “one of the early advocates of Newtonian physics in the University of Oxford”⁴¹:

We conceive Space to be that, wherein all Bodies are placed [...]; that it is altogether penetrable, receiving all Bodies into itself, and refusing Ingress to nothing whatsoever; that it is immovably fixed, capable of no Action, Form or Quality; whose Parts it is impossible to separate from each other, by any Force however great; but the Space itself remaining immovable, receives the Successions of things in motion, determines the Velocities of their Motions, and measures the Distances of the things themselves.⁴²

Homogeneous, isotropic, infinitely divisible and infinitely extended, Newton’s space exists prior to, and is therefore ontologically autonomous from, matter, which “resides” in it without influencing its shape or consistency in any way. “[W]ithout relation to anything external,” this space “remains always similar and immovable.”⁴³ An absolute coordinate system can therefore be imposed upon it, and motion and acceleration are ultimately computable only within the framework of this system (they are regarded as being relative *to space itself*). Having an a priori existence, Newtonian space can be likened to a kind of neutral stage or vessel which hosts items and processes but remains both quantitatively and qualitatively sundered from them. Leibniz attempts to refute this conception in the Third Paper of his famous correspondence with Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), another of Newton’s supporters: “I have said more than once, that I hold space to be something merely relative, as time is; [...] I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions.”⁴⁴ Leibniz illustrates this notion with an analogy: just as a genealogical tree is not a “substratum” that exists

⁴¹ Jammer (1993), p. 127.

⁴² John Keill, *An introduction to Natural Philosophy* (1745), p. 15, cited in Jammer (1993), p. 128.

⁴³ Newton (1995), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Alexander (ed., 1956.), p. 25. This is Clarke’s translation (c. 1717) of Leibniz’s original French, which reads: “Pour moi, j’ai remarqué plus d’une fois que je tenais l’espace pour quelque chose de purement relatif, comme le temps; pour un *ordre des coexistences*, comme le temps est un ordre des successions.” (Jacques [ed., 1845], p. 499)

independently of its members,⁴⁵ so too can space be understood as a structure configured by the positional relations of bodies (actual and potential), with no ontological existence prior to those bodies.⁴⁶ In the Fifth Paper, meanwhile, he insists on the interdependence of matter and space:

I don't say that matter and space are the same thing. I only say, there is no space, where there is no matter; and that space in itself is not an absolute reality. Space and matter differ, as time and motion. However, these things, though different, are inseparable.⁴⁷

Despite Leibniz's efforts, it was the Newtonian model that eventually won out—in no small part thanks to Voltaire, whose *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* (1741) popularised the Englishman's theories in continental Europe. Together with Euclidean geometry, Newton's principles were accepted as axiomatic throughout the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth, despite being criticised on various grounds by philosophers as influential as Bishop Berkeley and the young Immanuel Kant (who renounced his opposition to Newton in his mature works); it was not until the late 1820s, with the formulation of elliptical and hyperbolic geometries—which deny the parallel postulate, claiming, respectively, that there are no, or at least two, parallel lines to any given line through a point not on the given line—that the hegemony of absolute space came under serious threat. The foundations of the space-as-stage idea were subsequently challenged by Ernst Mach in the 1880s; adopting a relational, materialist stance, in some ways akin to that of Leibniz, Mach disputes Newton's assertion that motion is analysable only with reference to the grid of space itself, insisting that it should

⁴⁵ See Alexander (ed., 1956), p. 70.

⁴⁶ It seems worth pointing out here the influence of Leibniz's relationism on theorists such as Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, who transpose it into the domain of social space. Note the identical phrasing (emphasis added): "[L'espace n'est pas] une chose, mais *un ensemble de relations entre les choses*" (Lefebvre [1974], p. 100); "Nous ne vivons pas dans une sorte de vide, à l'intérieur duquel on pourrait situer des individus et des choses. [...] [N]ous vivons à l'intérieur *d'un ensemble de relations* qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables." (Foucault [1994], p. 754).

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 77. The original French reads: "Je ne dis point que la matière et l'espace est la même chose; je dis seulement qu'il n'y a point d'espace où il n'y a point de matière, et que l'espace en lui-même n'est point une réalité absolue. L'espace et la matière différent comme le temps et le mouvement; cependant ces choses, quoique différentes, se trouvent inséparables." (Jacques [ed., 1845], p. 541)

be referred instead “to a material framework—that of the universe as a whole”⁴⁸. If it is accepted that the quantity and distribution of matter in the universe influence the motion of a particular body through space—which Newton, arguing that an accelerating body would experience inertial forces even in an otherwise empty universe, presupposes *not* to the case—space and matter can no longer be regarded as independent of each other. Einstein, much indebted to Mach in this regard, went a crucial step further, combining space and time into a single continuum, spacetime; the theory of general relativity describes a universe in which “the distribution of matter influences the overall affine and metrical structures of spacetime; and conversely, the geometry of spacetime determines the paths taken by inertially moving particles.”⁴⁹

If Newton insists on a sharp distinction between space and the bodies it “contains”, no less sharp is the division between bodies and minds (selves) in Descartes. The Cartesian ego is essentialised as a *res cogitans*, “une substance dont toute l’essence ou la nature n’est que de penser, et qui, pour être, n’a besoin d’aucun lieu, ni ne dépend d’aucune chose matérielle.”⁵⁰ The body, *res extensa*, is in no way integral to subjecthood, and can, according to Descartes, be legitimately *imagined out of existence*: “Je pouvais feindre que je n’avais aucun corps, et qu’il n’y avait aucun monde, ni aucun lieu où je fusse.”⁵¹ Although mind-body dualism is perhaps the keystone of Cartesianism, it has exercised a less powerful hold over folk psychology than the idea that the mind (self) is indivisible and knowable from within. Not only is “[l]’âme [...] plus aisée à connaître que [le corps],”⁵² whose existence is subject to doubt, it is, in fact, *entirely and immediately* accessible to introspection. The self is, by definition, a “thing which thinks,” and thought, by definition, is equivalent to consciousness:

⁴⁸ Ray (1991), p. 119.

⁴⁹ Ibid., (1991), p. 139.

⁵⁰ Descartes (2000), p. 67.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵² Ibid., p. 67.

“Par le nom de pensée, je comprends tout ce qui est tellement en nous, que nous en sommes immédiatement connaissants.”⁵³ The notion of *unconscious* thought, proposed by Hamilton, Laycock, Carpenter and, in a different guise, by Freud, would at best have represented a contradiction in terms for Descartes, who is able to claim, with abundant confidence, that “rien ne peut être en moi, dont je n’aie quelque connaissance.”⁵⁴ And, if thought is knowable whole and entire, it follows that the ego, the *res cogitans*, is, by contrast with the body, atomistic and self-identical:

Le corps, de sa nature, est toujours divisible, et [...] l’esprit est entièrement indivisible. Car en effet, lorsque je considère mon esprit, c’est-à-dire moi-même en tant que je suis seulement une chose qui pense, je n’y puis distinguer aucunes parties, mais je me conçois comme une chose seule et entière.⁵⁵

Je me conçois: crucially, the *reflexivity* of this construction does not appear to disconcert Descartes. Despite being both conceive and conceived, *je* somehow remains unitary. The act of self-reflection opens up no division, no fissure in the Cartesian self; it is fully illuminable by “la lumière de la raison”—a light *that casts no shadow*. Descartes thereby posits a kind of pure or absolute subjectivity. The *res cogitans* is never objectified (othered) by its cogitations; it is a subject without an object. In direct contrast, the ego of Rimbaud’s *lettres du voyant*, texts which epitomise the late nineteenth century’s “crisis of consciousness”, is characterised by alterity, duality, opacity. “Shadow” is cast by the very process of illumination: “C’est faux de dire: *Je pense*. On devrait dire: On me pense. [...] *JE* est un autre.”⁵⁶ Later, consciousness comes to be defined by Jean-Paul Sartre as a “distancing-from” which generates a fissure in being: “L’être de la conscience, en tant que conscience, c’est d’exister à *distance de soi*

⁵³ *Secondes réponses*, in Descartes’s *Œuvres* (eds. Adam and Tannery 1974-83), Vol. IX, p. 124.

⁵⁴ *Premières réponses*, in *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵⁵ Descartes (1979), p. 201.

⁵⁶ Rimbaud (1972), p. 249.

comme présence à soi et cette distance nulle que l'être porte dans son être, c'est le Néant."⁵⁷

For Sartre, consciousness of self and absolute self-coincidence are mutually exclusive. But, prior to these poetic and philosophical repudiations of the *cogito*, Cartesianism exercised an immense influence on Western models of self (subject) and its relatedness to the world (object). "Self-distance" as conceived by Sartre is impossible for Descartes: because his *je* is monadic—indivisible by definition—there can be no intrasubjective differentiation or disjunction.⁵⁸ Conversely, the differentiation between subject and object in the Cartesian worldview is razor-sharp and fundamental. Epistemologically independent, subject and object are also ontologically distinct. The extension-less self is not "embedded" in the physical world; afforded a transcendental, atemporal perspective, it looks out into that world *from nowhere* ("aucun lieu").

In order fully to "de-naturalise" the notions of absolute space and the unitary, self-sufficient ego, a brief excursus into the medieval period is necessary. The pre-Renaissance boundaries between self and world, according to historians and theorists such as Aron Gurevich, Susan Bordo and Samuel Edgerton, were fragile and porous. "Medieval man's relationship with nature," writes Gurevich, "was not that of subject to object. Rather, it was a discovery of himself in the external world, combined with a perception of the cosmos as subject."⁵⁹ There was, prior to the age of Descartes, no absolute distinction between a purely mechanistic external world and the spiritual, extension-less domain of the human ego. The medieval

⁵⁷ Sartre (1976), p. 116. This "distancing-from", incidentally, is also articulated (indirectly) by Rimbaud: "Cela m'est évident: j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute" (1972, p. 249).

⁵⁸ Descartes does not, of course, deny the existence of "internal conflict", but ascribes it to the competing influence on the pineal gland of "animal spirits" (*les esprits animaux*)—which, by essence, pertain to the body, and are not, therefore, integral to the self. *Within* the self, Descartes insists, there can categorically be no conflict. See *Les Passions de l'âme*, article 47.

⁵⁹ Gurevich (1985), p. 56.

cosmos—finite, heterogeneous, hierarchised, and geocentric,⁶⁰ unlike Newton’s—is not a mechanistic one: it is suffused by spirit. Self, neither discrete nor self-sufficient, blurs into world, its limits only partially demarcated; “for the medieval aesthetic imagination,” asserts Bordo, “*absorption* in the world rather than *locatedness* in the world was central”⁶¹ (emphasis in the original). The perspective on the world of the absorbed self, in contrast to that of the “withdrawn” and isolated Cartesian ego, is not fixed, atemporal or monocular.

This may be gleaned from the spatial configurations of pre-Renaissance painting, which, in offering a multiplicity of vantage points to the viewer, presuppose (and construct) an embodied, mobile subject fully immersed in the picture-world. Mobility, of course, implies temporality—banished from painting by Albertian perspective, as shall be examined below. If the above-mentioned techniques of continuous narrative and split representation appear alien, perhaps even “naïve” or “childlike,”⁶² to contemporary viewers, it is precisely because we have been conditioned to expect a de-temporalised pictorial space, apprehended from an external, geometrically determined vantage point by a solitary eye. A medieval painting, however, typically constructs no fixed vantage for its viewers, situating them neither in a particular position in space nor in a frozen, atemporal instant. By presenting objects and figures from several divergent perspectives (split representation),⁶³ the medieval painter evokes both spatial displacement and the passage of time. In his comparison of two Florentine cityscapes, the first dating from the mid-fourteenth century, the second from the late fifteenth—several decades after the publication of Alberti’s *De Pictura* (1435)—Edgerton maintains that

⁶⁰ As William V. Dunning (1991) asserts, “Medieval thinkers believed everything should maintain its proper place in relation to the centre of the universe [i.e., the earth]. They could not imagine an all-pervasive and uniform space as we do” (p. 10).

⁶¹ Bordo (1987), 62.

⁶² Edgerton (1975), p. 9.

⁶³ For example, by juxtaposing frontal and lateral views.

[t]he painter of the earlier picture did not conceive of his subject in terms of spatial homogeneity. Rather, he believed that he could render what he saw before his eyes convincingly by representing what it felt like to walk about, experiencing structures, almost tactilely, from many different sides, rather than from a single, overall vantage.⁶⁴

While split representation characteristically implies relatively minor spatio-temporal shifts, a painting employing continuous narrative, such as Sassetta's *The Meeting of Anthony and St. Paul* (c. 1440),⁶⁵ generates a more radical effect of delocalisation. Here, events occurring in three

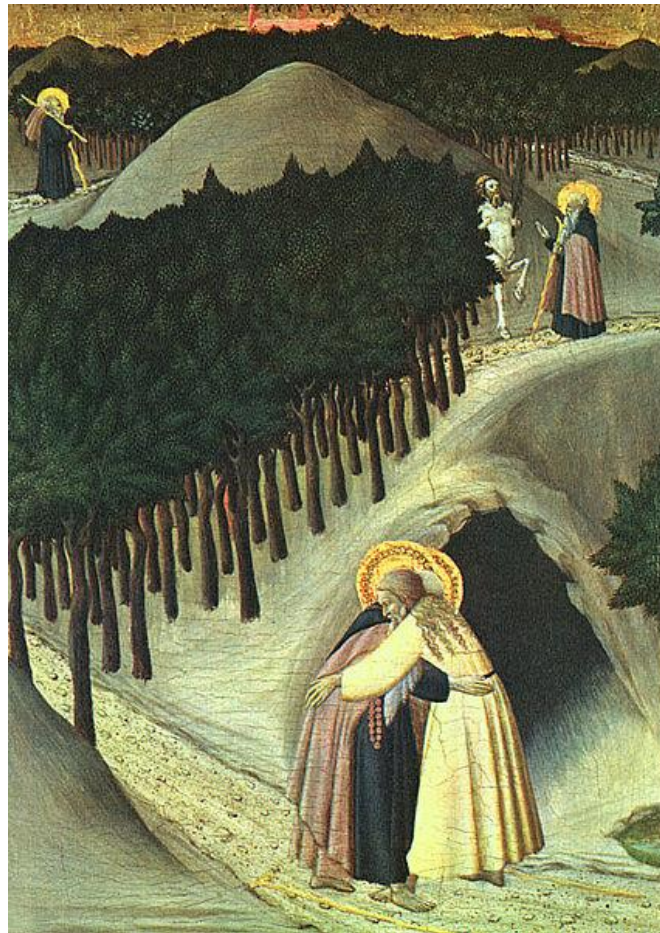


Figure 1: Sassetta, *The Meeting of Anthony and St. Paul* (c. 1440).

time-frames—Saint Anthony's initial appearance, his encounter with a centaur, his meeting with Saint Paul—are presented simultaneously within a unified-yet-composite space. Locales understood as non-contiguous are spliced together, the boundaries between them indistinct, generating a kind of allegorical non-place. The relationship between beholder and image is

⁶⁴ Edgerton (1975), p. 9.

⁶⁵ Note that this work post-dates *De Pictura* by around five years, proof that the categories "medieval" and "Renaissance", however they might be construed, are by no means clear-cut.

thereby problematised. Is it, in fact, meaningful to speak of a vantage *point*, or even points, upon such a scene? A “point” connotes discreteness of location; but here the viewer has been delocalised—*smear*ed across a vast expanse of space and time. Clearly, then, *simultanisme* as advocated by Apollinaire is no invention of the twentieth century, but the rediscovery of a structural principle seemingly invalidated by Renaissance epistemology.

Simultaneity of setting is also a fundamental feature of medieval “place-and-scaffold” drama, in which “a number of juxtaposed scenic locations”—raised structures known as *scaffolds*, *mansions* or *loca*—are “grouped around or across an open playing-area (‘the place’, in Latin *platea*) [...] and [remain] in view throughout the action, during which several locations may be in use concurrently.”⁶⁶ The physical onstage contiguity of scaffolds representing geographically disparate locations would not be perceived by medieval spectators as a violation of spatial “realism”—and *could* not have been, because medieval performance space is, much like its pictorial counterpart, emblematic rather than illusionistic. In contrast to perspectival theatre (see below), place-and-scaffold drama constructs no geometrically ideal spectator position and generates no inviolable frontier between audience and playing area. (That is not to say that the playing area was not *physically* demarcated, or that audience members were permitted to interfere with the performance; rather, there was no absolute *psychological* barrier separating audience from actors, such as exists in fourth-wall theatre.) It appears likely that spectators would have often stood (or sat) in the round,⁶⁷ a spatial arrangement which offers multiple viewpoints on the onstage action without privileging a particular vantage over the rest. In-the-round staging serves to absorb individual spectators into the community of the audience by facilitating constant mutual observation—a

⁶⁶ Tydeman (1978), p. 57.

⁶⁷ “The issue of a medieval theatre-in-the-round is still in dispute,” cautions J.L. Styan (1996), adding, however, that “what evidence there is points to the likelihood that playing in the round, with the actors occupying a *platea* that could be surrounded by spectators, thrived on the proximity of an involved audience crowding round the players. [...] The roundness suggested the world itself: it made of the platform stage or other acting area a microcosm which enclosed its human inhabitants” (p. 42).

near-impossibility when looking out onto an end-on stage from a darkened auditorium (which gradually became the norm in mainstream theatre after the late 1870s⁶⁸)—and also into the stage-world at large. “[T]he actor/audience boundary,” as David Wiles points out, “was fluid because all humans were conceived as ultimately players” under the unblinking eyes of “God and the Devil,”⁶⁹ and the reciprocal dramas of performance and spectatorship played out within a space governed by the principle of the all-embracing sphere rather than the perspectival cube: a *theatrum mundi*. This space, like the cosmos it analogises, is not grid-like, neutral and uniform but fundamentally heterogeneous. “Medieval theatre,” notes Wiles elsewhere, “was vectored by the points of the compass,”⁷⁰ heaven being associated with east and hell with north or north-west. This orientation encompasses the audience, too, binding it—as a community, not as atomised individuals—firmly into the geocosmic scheme of the drama. Irrespective of any physical demarcations between performance and audience space, medieval spectators did not exist fully “beyond” the drama, there being no fourth wall to sunder them from the stage-world.

Indeed, the very notion of the fourth wall can come into existence only once the sphere of the *theatrum mundi* is reconceptualised as a scenographic cube—a rationalised, Euclidean space defined by a system of linear coordinates. The rationalisation of stage-space, a gradual process which entailed the expulsion of the audience into a distinct space of its own, began in Italy in the 1530s, a full century after Brunelleschi and Alberti developed their theories of single-point perspective and applied them to the two-dimensional space of the canvas. Perspectival staging is founded on pictorial principles, and represents an attempt—which, as shall be seen, met with decidedly mixed success—to extend those principles into the third

⁶⁸ German, English and French audiences were first plunged into darkness by Wagner at Bayreuth (1876), Henry Irving at the Lyceum (1881), and André Antoine at the Théâtre Libre (1888).

⁶⁹ Wiles (1997), p. 82.

⁷⁰ Wiles (2003), p. 187.

dimension. Before dealing with stage-space, therefore, I must briefly outline how Alberti restructured pictorial space and its relationship with the viewer.

The Renaissance perspectivists, according to Erwin Panofsky, assumed the existence “of an infinite, unchanging and homogeneous space—in short, a purely mathematical space [whose structure] is quite unlike the structure of psychophysiological space.”⁷¹ Manifest in medieval painting, as Edgerton demonstrates, tactile and kinaesthetic experience is banished from perspectival space. Alberti’s conception of the relationship between viewer and viewed is strictly geometric:

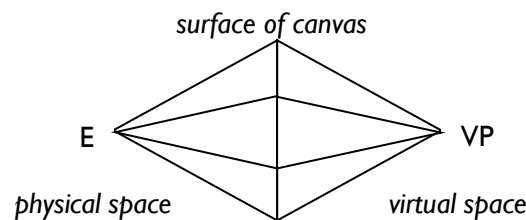


Figure 2:
Alberti's pyramid.

The canvas corresponds to the common base of two symmetrical pyramids: 1) a pyramid of visual rays, whose apex is at the sole eye (E) of the cyclopean viewer; and 2) its mirror image, a reversed pyramid extending into the virtual space of the painting, whose apex is at the vanishing point (VP), where, in theory, objects would be infinitely small (zero-dimensional). The viewing eye is assumed to be motionless (fixated, unblinking). Single-point perspective, constructing as it does a single, sovereign vantage, models only one aspect of human vision, taking no account of its binocularity and mobility of focus, of saccadic jumps and various other physiological factors⁷²; it is a powerful abstraction which became naturalised over time. The canvas, meanwhile, is regarded by Alberti as “an open window through which the subject

⁷¹ Panofsky (1997), pp. 29-30.

⁷² Only 1-2% of the visual field (the *foveal area*) is in focus at any one time. Saccades, eye movements occurring 3-4 times a second, enable rapid—and imperceptible—redirection of focus. The brain integrates the information gleaned from each fixation into (the illusion of) a unified visual experience.

to be painted is seen,”⁷³ a metaphor which, as already mentioned, implies a fundamental division between viewer and viewed, and thereby functions as an optical analogue to Cartesian epistemology, predicated on a separation of knower and known, of subject and object.⁷⁴ The self “behind the window,” notes Robert Romanyshyn, is “distant and detached, separated and isolated from the world, a neutral observer and recorder of the world’s events.”⁷⁵ Alberti’s eye-witness, like Descartes’s I-witness, is fixed, unitary, disembodied; and the world it observes is *entirely* de-temporalised, as Edward Wachtel takes care to stress: “In perspective representation, time is reduced not to the moment, *but to the non-existence of a theoretical instant*, and the remaining three dimensions of existence are envisioned as a rigid box of space”⁷⁶ (emphasis mine).

A “rigid box” is precisely what Western stage-space became, too, metamorphosing from the sphere of the *theatrum mundi* into an actual three-walled box over the course of three centuries. The ramifications of this metamorphosis are enormous. Theatre architecture, the geography of drama, and the nature of audience subjectivity—all variously interlinked—underwent profound transformations. An ever-greater architectural differentiation between performance and audience space, starting with the development of the proscenium stage in the early seventeenth century and culminating with the darkening of the auditorium in the late nineteenth, occurred in concert with the gradual decoupling of the world represented on stage from the reality of the audience. “The creation of the proscenium arch,” according to Allen S. Weiss,

⁷³ Alberti (1972), p. 55.

⁷⁴ “[Descartes] replaced the invisible “eye point” of Alberti’s visual pyramid with the ‘thinking I’ (*cogito*) [...]. Alberti’s central perspective space became supplanted by the representative space of an ‘inextended’ (dot-like) soul who [...] inhabits a nihilistic empty space behind its retina in order to construct an abstract picture of the world based on its disembodied power of cognition.” Johannes Hoff (2013), p. 58.

⁷⁵ Romanyshyn (1989), p. 67.

⁷⁶ Wachtel (1995), p. 49

[...] was a key technical feature guaranteeing the possibility of representing a rationalized theatrical and operatic space. Subsequently, the heterogeneous, polymorphous outdoor space of religious and secular festivals gave way to the unified, isotropic space of the theatre; spatial homogeneity was accentuated by suppressing spectatorial mobility in the theater.⁷⁷

Viewed through the unifying frame of the proscenium by an immobilised audience, dramatic settings slowly became what I shall call “localised Elsewheres” (as opposed to the simultanist Everywhere-yet-Nowheres of medieval drama). “Nothing could be more foreign to Renaissance [pictorial] realism,” remarks Wendy Steiner, “than the juxtaposing of temporally distinct events within a single visual field, as is commonly found in ancient and medieval art.”⁷⁸ *Ut pictura theatrum*: upon the adoption of perspective scenery, the fundamentals of which were set out in Book II of architect Sebastiano Serlio’s seven-volume treatise, *Architettura* (1545), the multiple set of medieval theatre fell into disuse—more rapidly in Italy, but surviving on the Parisian stage into the 1630s.⁷⁹ The unities of neo-classical French drama may be regarded as corollaries of this same process of spatial and temporal rationalisation, which uniformised both time and space and decoupled one from the other.⁸⁰ With the advent of perspective scenery, the disassociation of time and space was made visible in the theatre. The temporality of the dramatic action, and of the living bodies that peopled the stage, contrasted awkwardly with the painted flats, de-temporalised like the paintings which inspired them. Awkwardly, because, to avoid breaking the illusion of depth, the action must be confined to the forestage, relegating the scenery—and, ultimately, space itself—to the status of mere backdrop.

The majority of the audience, meanwhile, was forced into *vicarious spectatorship*, the luxury of viewing the stage from the sovereign vantage generated by single-point perspective

⁷⁷ Weiss (1998), p. 56.

⁷⁸ Steiner (2004), p. 158.

⁷⁹ William Driver Howarth (1997) reminds us, for example, that Corneille’s *Le Cid* was “first performed on a multiple set” in 1637 (p. 3).

⁸⁰ See Chapter I of Giddens (1991) for a primarily sociological discussion of this decoupling and its relationship with the development of modernity.

being reserved for actual sovereigns (or patrons).⁸¹ Progressively distanced from the stage-world by various means—architectural, perspectival and psychological—over the course of three centuries, the audience was exiled outright by the regime of fourth-wall naturalism. If single-point perspective generates just one ideal viewing position, the convention of the fourth wall relies on the counterfactual assumption that there are, in fact, no viewers at all. Increasingly atomised in the dark auditorium, the late-nineteenth-century spectator of naturalist theatre was a quintessential Cartesian subject. Upon being plunged into darkness, writes Erika Fischer Lichte, “[the spectator] wanted to know nothing of a field of energy between himself and the actors or even between himself and other spectators. Every spectator isolated himself from every other.”⁸² Insular, radically detached from the Elsewhere beyond the proscenium arch, the spectator is reduced to a decorporealised gaze, awareness of body, self and situation severely diminished.

A New Middle Ages?

Specificity of setting (local colour), scenic unity and sequentiality, full three-dimensionality of stage-space, a razor-sharp separation of the latter from audience space—these are the obvious structural hallmarks of theatrical naturalism, as advocated by Zola and others. Naturalism strives, by means of a supposedly verisimilar representation of a *tranche de vie*, to conjure onstage a localised *here-and-now*—but, as has just been made clear, one which is necessarily also an Elsewhere, another world that has occluded or displaced the reality of the physical space in which the drama is being performed. In this respect, the movement represents the culmination of a scenographic tradition catalysed by the Renaissance rationalisation of perspective and reinforced by the rationalisation of time and space in the seventeenth century.

⁸¹ See Mielziner (1970), p. 48.

⁸² Fischer-Lichte (2000), p. 129.

Now, as a literary-theatrical response to scientific determinism and positivism, late-nineteenth-century naturalism is frequently contrasted with contemporaneous avant-garde currents in drama, poetry and painting, symbolism most prominent among them. The Symbolists' privileging of imagination over experience, their inclination towards the mystical, spiritual, occult, and hermetic (amounting, at first glance, to a strong anti-rationality), their extensive use of pre-Renaissance themes and iconography—all this appears antithetical to the aesthetics and philosophy of naturalism. Yet a distinction between the two movements made purely on this basis is facile and somewhat misleading. Richard Cándida Smith insists that “[s]tereotypical conceptions of symbolists as being antiscience” do not stand up to the available evidence; rather than contesting science as such, the symbolists contested *scientism*, seeing “no need for a science circumscribed by observation and measurement of physical facts to become the foundation of culture, that is, the source of interpretive values.”⁸³ By the same token, the *fin-de-siècle* medieval revival, sometimes assumed to go hand in hand with the counter-positivist movements, was encouraged by so-called “arch-naturalist” André Antoine, who staged not only Zola, Ibsen and Strindberg, but also Arnoul Gréban's *Le Vray Mistère de la Passion* (c. 1450). Antoine, in the words of Helen Solterer, “set a model for modernizing medieval drama and making it compelling to large, diverse audiences.”⁸⁴ So much, therefore, for a distinction between naturalism and symbolism founded on absolute dichotomies such as rationality/religiosity, positivism/mysticism and, in particular, modernity/medievalism: as Mallarmé proclaims in “Catholicisme”, “Le moyen âge, à jamais, reste l'incubation ainsi que commencement de monde, moderne.”⁸⁵ On what basis, then, *can* the movements be legitimately differentiated? Sociological and linguistic lines of inquiry have yielded much insight into the issue, but they shall not be pursued here. For the purposes of the present discussion, the most

⁸³ Smith (1999), p. 20.

⁸⁴ Solterer (2010), p. 10.

⁸⁵ Mallarmé (1945), p. 392.

important differentiating factor is *the degree to which dualistic paradigms inform the movements' respective worldviews*. A brief examination of these paradigms, and of attempts to move beyond them, will allow me to clarify what I understand by “a new Middle Ages”.

Naturalism, an offspring of classical positivism, has dualism at its heart. Not mind-body dualism, which, as I have already observed, is one of the less tenacious elements of the Cartesian legacy and which, by the late nineteenth century, had already lost credence among a sizable proportion of philosophers, psychologists and neurologists.⁸⁶ However, the dualism of subject and object—along with associated binarisms such as self and world—proved far more enduring. Classical positivists, just like Descartes before them, assume that subject and object exist independently of each other, making fully detached, objective observation a theoretical possibility. Zola's naturalism represents an attempt to realise that possibility in literature and theatre, with the erection of the fourth wall between *scène* and *salle* serving precisely this end. As Richard Lewis Barr asserts, “[s]ubject and object, stage and auditorium, were cleanly detached in Zola ideal theater-as-laboratory, which presented absolute truth onstage before absolutely detached viewers.”⁸⁷ At bottom, the fourth wall functions as a safeguard against the interpenetration, or at least reciprocal influence, of observer and observed. It is the theatrical corollary of broader epistemological assumptions: that the act of observation can be neutral or disinterested, that “objective reality” is therefore directly apprehendable by means of the senses, and that, in fact, all (scientific) knowledge must be based on sensory experience. A major qualification is necessary at this point: it must not be assumed that the naturalist faith in an objective reality entails a belief in the possibility of fully objective *representation*, whether in literature or in the theatre. Zola expressly denies such a possibility in several of his theoretical

⁸⁶ For detailed overviews and analysis of the nineteenth century's engagement with Descartes, see Woodward and Ash (eds., 1982) and Clarke & Jacyna (1987).

⁸⁷ Barr (1998), p. 112.

statements—as, for instance, in his celebrated letter to Antony Valabrègue of August 1864, which features a variation on Alberti’s fenestral trope:

toute œuvre d’art est comme une fenêtre ouverte sur la création; il y a, enchâssé dans l’embrasure de la fenêtre, une sorte d’Écran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés, souffrant des changements plus ou moins sensibles dans leurs lignes et dans leur couleur. Ces changements tiennent à la nature de l’Écran. On n’a plus la création exacte et réelle, mais la création modifiée par le milieu où passe son image.⁸⁸

It remains a matter of vigorous critical debate whether Alberti’s metaphor testifies to a conviction on his own part that a perfect transparency (im-mediacy) of representation is an achievable (or even desirable) artistic end. Zola, however, unequivocally insists in his letter that no medium can be absolutely transparent. Of the three artistic “screens” he describes to Valabrègue—classical, romantic and realist—the latter “donn[e] des images aussi fidèles qu’un Écran peut en donner,” but even it is covered by “une fine poussière grise [qui] trouble sa limpidité.”⁸⁹ The fact that the realist screen “nie sa propre existence,” moreover, is denounced as “un trop grand orgueil”⁹⁰; no mode of representation can efface itself entirely. *Le naturalisme au théâtre* (1881), however, finds Zola in a more bullish mood: “L’esprit scientifique du siècle, la méthode analytique, l’observation exacte des faits, le retour à la nature par l’étude expérimentale, vont bientôt balayer toutes nos conventions dramatiques et mettre la vie sur les planches”⁹¹ (emphasis mine). Zola’s ambivalence regarding the notion of a convention-free, artless art is clear to see: as author and dramatist he acknowledges it to be unachievable, yet the positivist in him defines artistic conventions as “les barrières qui nous séparent du vrai absolu,”⁹² and clings to the hope that they may be reduced to an almost-transparent minimum, if not refined altogether out of existence. Ultimately, such a hope stems from the conviction that the “vrai absolu” (objective reality), though *artistically representable* only through the

⁸⁸ Zola (1978), p. 375.

⁸⁹ Zola (1978), p. 379.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Zola (2004), p. 147.

⁹² Ibid., p. 61.

distorting prism of an individual temperament, is nonetheless knowable and measurable *as such*, owing to the radical dualism of subject/observer and object/observed. As Zola explains in *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), the naturalists' point of departure, their "base indestructible," must therefore be "[l]es faits vrais"⁹³—which are presumed to exist "out there", independently of any observer.

Symbolism, an offspring of idealism, is rooted in much the same dualistic paradigm as naturalism, but gives primacy to the opposite polarity: to "inner reality", to the noumenal world, and, in Mallarmé's case, to the *notion pure*, to the virtual, supersensual Idea, "analogous to Platonic forms in that it could not be apprehended empirically through the senses."⁹⁴ Yet, in spite of these dualistic foundations, and in contrast to naturalism/positivism, symbolist artistic practice (and that of associated avant-gardists) is *not* predicated on the assumption of an *absolute* bifurcation of the ideal and the real, of inner and outer, of subject(ivity) and object(ivity). Indeed, I would contend that the various anti-realist movements within *fin-de-siècle* drama, literature and the visual arts are united, above all, by a fundamental overturning of the Cartesian paradigm. In symbolism, cubism, futurism, expressionism (to name four of the most prominent of these), the boundaries between subject and object become porous and permeable, bringing about, on one hand, what may be termed a "subjectivisation" of the external world (see Chapter 4), and, on the other, a "spatialisation" of the human subject (covered in Chapter 5). Integral to these parallel processes is an emerging understanding of the subject as embodied and therefore *of the world* rather than sundered from it. Because the body is (perceptible as) a worldly object, just like any other, there can be no clean Cartesian dualism once it is acknowledged that embodiment is a precondition for, rather than a mere accessory of, subjecthood. The world thereby infiltrates the subject, and the subject, in turn, spills out into the

⁹³ Zola (1880), p. 10.

⁹⁴ Mester (1997), p. 14.

world. Crucially, the collapse of dualism *does not give rise to monism*—that is, to an undifferentiated continuum in which all distinctions and boundaries are dissolved. Quite the opposite, in fact: intrasubjective disjunction, incompatible with Descartes’s monadic conception of the individual, moves to the fore of aesthetic and philosophical concerns precisely because the individual has been *divided*, transformed into a dynamic, kaleidoscopic interplay of subject and object.

The partial enmeshing of self and world, of observer and observed—resisted by positivism/naturalism but embraced by anti-realists of all stripes and enacted in the works of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck, and Jarry, as shall be seen shortly—represents a rejection of an epistemology which began its evolution in the fifteenth century and crystallised in the seventeenth. If a “new Middle Ages” does indeed materialise during the *fin de siècle*, its foundation is epistemological, not merely iconographic. The phenomenon I am attempting to describe differs markedly from the (often superficial) medievalism of the late nineteenth century, founded, in part, on “selective appropriations” of “formal elements” and “stylistic conventions.”⁹⁵ Now, it is certainly true that medieval iconography—deployed to various stylistic ends and with varying degrees of irony—abounds in the work of my principal authors. As examples, I need only adduce *Igitur* (c. 1869), a work in which ostensibly gothic motifs are ironised and deployed in the service of Mallarmé’s idiosyncratic philosophical agenda; Maeterlinck’s *Les Sept Princesses* (1891) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), with their folkloric settings and atmosphere; and Apollinaire’s *Bestiaire* (1911), a playful take on an eminently medieval genre with woodcuts by Raoul Dufy. Jarry’s engagement with the themes and forms of medieval visual arts and drama is exceptionally extensive and sustained, and merits a full-length study of its own. Particularly demonstrative of his fascination with pre-Renaissance

⁹⁵ Emery and Morowitz (2003), p. 54. “Many Symbolist painters paid homage to medieval artists while simultaneously *inventing* them. [...] [T]hey remade medieval art to validate late nineteenth-century values.” Ibid.

imagery is the magazine *L'Ymagier*, co-edited with Remy de Gourmont between 1894 and 1896 and teeming with reproductions of fifteenth-century woodcuts; the apocalyptic symbolism and heraldic components⁹⁶ of *César-Antechrist*—a distillation of the most hermetic elements of the *Ubu* cycle—are further testimony of his strong medievalist leanings. It must be borne in mind, however, that Jarry's knowledge of *actual* heraldic practice was, in all likelihood, relatively limited, as evidenced by the sometimes inaccurate blazons in *César-Antechrist*'s *Acte Héraldique*. Heraldry for Jarry is not so much a means of “channelling” the historical Middle Ages as it is *a signifying system appropriated for the construction of his own mythopoeia* (private mythology); much the same can be said of the various other types of pre-Renaissance imagery to be found throughout his oeuvre.

This appropriation of medieval iconography constitutes a visual-literary strategy of undoubted sophistication, but it is not of primary concern here. Rather, I am concerned with spatial practices and the epistemological assumptions embedded within them. What is crucial, then, is that *Ubu roi* exhibits a fundamental *structural* affinity with pre-Renaissance drama, as Claude Schumacher describes:

Whether he was aware of it or not, [Jarry] renewed links with an earlier European pictorial and scenic tradition. His set [for *Ubu roi*] harked back to the medieval pictorial convention of continuous narrative, which allowed, for instance, a painter, by the juxtaposition of episodes, to tell the story of Christ's passion within a single large frame, and he also drew on the medieval theatrical convention of simultaneous staging, which meant that right from the outset all the important locations of the drama were visible on the stage together.⁹⁷

Contemporary critics denounced what they perceived as a kind of wilful infantilism on the part of Jarry and set designers Pierre Bonnard and Paul Sérusier: Arthur Symons, for example, declares that “a child's conventions” had dictated the painting of the scenery and its presentation of “indoors and out of doors, and even torrid, temperate and arctic zones at

⁹⁶ See Chapter 5, pp. 202-4.

⁹⁷ Schumacher (1984), p. 49. The set and its aesthetic of juxtaposition is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, pp. 129-30.

once.”⁹⁸ I suggested earlier, following Samuel Edgerton, that continuous narrative and other pictorial principles of the medieval period may be deemed “childlike” by modern-day viewers due to the powerful conditioning forces of Renaissance compositional logic—which goes some way to explaining Symons’ comments. Simultaneous staging is underpinned by the principle of the all-embracing sphere—“la forme parfaite,” as Ubu himself proclaims in *Les Minutes de sable mémorial*⁹⁹; this, too, makes a return in *Ubu roi*, the scenographic cube being replaced by a uniquely Jarryesque take on the medieval *theatrum mundi*. We might call it a “théâtre de la Gidouille”: Ubu’s Gut or “Strumpot”, as shall be seen in Chapter 4, is equivalent to—or, more precisely, *encompasses*—the entire world. This world’s geography is a subjectivist one: much like his medieval predecessors, Jarry splices together entirely disparate locales (implicating ever vaster swathes of Eastern Europe in the play’s plot) without regard for real-world scale, distance or topography. And he can be accused to no greater degree than they of violating spatial “realism”. The diegetic space of *Ubu roi* is derationalised. Neither geometric nor homogeneous, it does not exist independently of the character of Ubu; Poland & Environs is *Ubu writ large*—the *mise-en-paysage* of his Gidouille. In Jarry’s carnal cosmology, world becomes body, evoking medieval theories of macrocosm and microcosm.

On one level, Maeterlinck’s early one-acts—*L’Intruse*, *Intérieur* and *Les Aveugles*—could not be more structurally dissimilar to *Ubu roi*, strictly observing as they do the unities of time and place. All three plays unfurl in “real time” (performance time and diegetic time are identical); all three are set in a single location, precluding the possibility of spatio-temporal compression or distortion. Jarry’s dramaturgy, recalling pre-Renaissance drama and anticipating cinematic montage, is founded on juxtaposition and multiplicity. Maeterlinck,

⁹⁸ Symons (1913), p. 373.

⁹⁹ Jarry (1972), p. 188.

conversely, favours extreme concentration and cohesion. And yet, his treatment of temporality and spatiality is no less deserving of attention than Jarry's. As Patrick McGuinness maintains, the "one-act plays take time and space, traditionally disguised as secondary or incidental materials, and make them into the very subject matter of drama."¹⁰⁰ Stage-space, in particular, ceases to be a receptacle—an inert background or Newtonian container that plays host to, but is never implicated in, the dramatic action. Space and characters interpenetrate in various ways. Paul Gorceix calls this an "osmose des personnages avec le monde"¹⁰¹—an apt biological metaphor underscoring the permeability of the frontier between subject and object in Maeterlinck's theatre. Echoing Gorceix, Arnaud Rykner asserts that

la réalité extérieure [chez Maeterlinck] est directement liée au personnage. [...] La fusion de l'un et de l'autre est poussée à un tel point que leur relation reste constamment réversible: si le personnage demeure le produit du lieu qui l'entoure, ce lieu est lui-même la projection du personnage."¹⁰²

The most obvious example of such a *relation réversible* in Maeterlinck's oeuvre occurs in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, where the descent into the grotto represents "a descent into the abysses of the subconscious mind"¹⁰³; as we shall see, however, it is by no means the only one.

The probing of subject-object, self-world boundaries also plays a central role in Apollinaire's later verse, occurring in concert with an implicit rejection of the unified, self-sufficient Cartesian ego. According to Richard Howard Stamelman,

Apollinaire desires to create a world-self in which there would be no separation, no distance, and above all no difference between subject and object. [...] Apollinaire's poems express repeatedly the desire for the wholeness of a unified self completely and perfectly fused with the world; but they also reveal the failure of this desire for undifferentiated being.¹⁰⁴

In "Vendémiaire", for example, the poet's persona proclaims a state of ecstatic, intoxicated union with a cosmos he has imbibed in its entirety:

¹⁰⁰ McGuinness (2000), p. 171.

¹⁰¹ Gorceix (2005), p. 275.

¹⁰² Rykner (1996), p. 288.

¹⁰³ Innes (1993), p. 20

¹⁰⁴ Stamelman (1990), pp. 73-4.

Je suis ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers
 Sur le quai d'où je voyais l'onde couler et dormir les bélandres

Ecoutez-moi je suis le gosier de Paris
 Et je boirai encore s'il me plaît l'univers

Ecoutez mes chants d'universelle ivrognerie¹⁰⁵

This longing for the dissolution of ego-boundaries, for a delocalisation of self and absorption into the world, is even more pronounced in various of the *calligrammes*, where interpenetrations of subject and setting, psyche and environment, (self-)portrait and landscape are enacted verbo-visually, by means of a cross-contamination of semiotic levels. Thus, the reflected night sky of “Voyage” (Figure 3) is literally inscribed with the poet’s presence: not unlike Stephen and Bloom in the *Ithaca* episode of *Ulysses*, the *je*-persona has been transfigured into a heavenly body.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the reflexive pronouns *me* and *te* nestling in the torso of the *amants* and the trunk of the *arbrisseau* in “Paysage”¹⁰⁷ (Figure 4) deny “lovers” and “tree” alike the status of stable mimetic figures and transform them into sites for the projection of the poet’s self, delocalised and decentred. And yet, as Stamelman indicates, subject-object differentiation can never be overcome *entirely*: so long as there is reflexive consciousness, “distancing-from” is inescapable. It is, I must reiterate, not monism that arises out of the ashes of Cartesian dualism, but a new conception of “a subject that emerges through its relations with the world and the other”¹⁰⁸—emerges, that is, *from betweenness*, in direct contrast to Descartes’s essentialist subject. As demonstrated in the definitive text of “Zone”, other is not cleanly detached from self in Apollinaire’s later verse: rather, self is othered—distanced, estranged from itself—by dint of its very self-consciousness. This internal disjunction is dramatised in “Zone” through the interplay of the pronouns *je* and *tu*. In mono-

¹⁰⁵ Apollinaire (1991), p. 176.

¹⁰⁶ In a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce writes that, in *Ithaca*, “Bloom and Stephen [...] become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze.” Joyce (1966), p. 160.

¹⁰⁷ Which, significantly, was originally entitled “Paysage animé”.

¹⁰⁸ Jonsson (2006), p. 44.

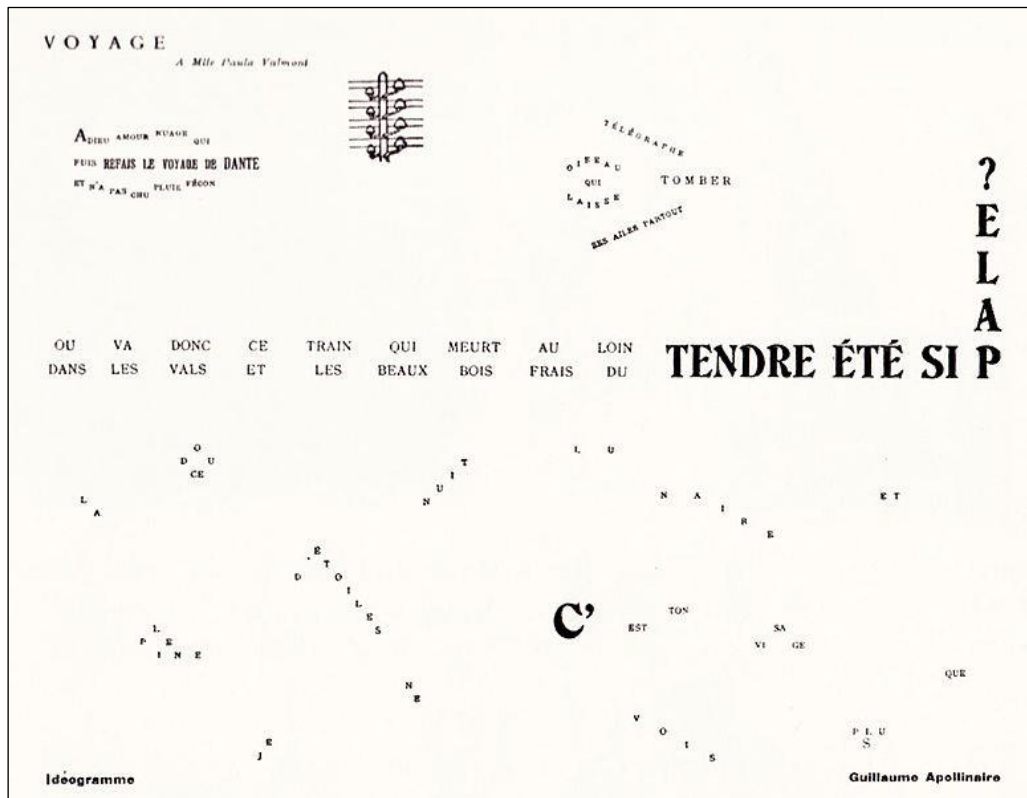


Figure 3: Apollinaire, "Voyage".

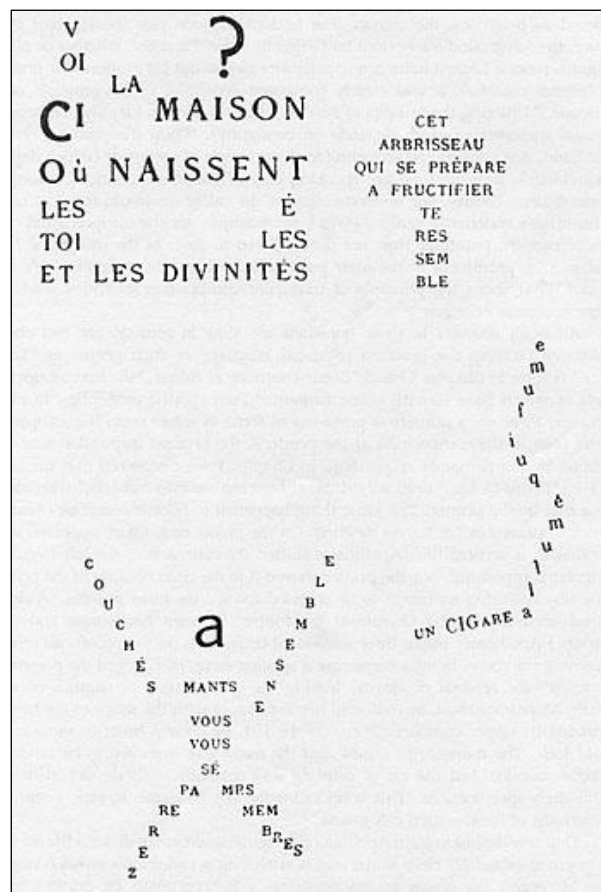


Figure 4: Apollinaire, "Paysage".

logical lyric poetry, the first and second persons designate, respectively, enunciating subject and external addressee; here, however, the same enunciator designates himself *simultaneously as subject and object*, focalising himself now from within, now from aside—a literary analogue of sorts to the multiple perspectives of analytical cubism and, ultimately, of medieval painting. Realism’s fixed vantage is no more.¹⁰⁹

If the rejection of the Cartesian subject is only implicit in “Zone”—a poem, after all, and not a theoretical treatise—Mallarmé’s *Igitur*, written during the poet’s metaphysical crisis, meets Descartes’s challenge head-on, on its own philosophical terms, albeit in highly allusive fashion. The title itself references the *cogito*: the conjunctions *igitur* and *ergo* are roughly synonymous in Latin. Conjunctions, of course, are syntactic connectors, serving to indicate structural or logical *relationships* between clauses; by personifying a conjunction (a suitably estranging literary strategy), Mallarmé is able to allegorise the *relational* self which, unlike the Cartesian, never stands alone, absolutely sundered from the world. Mallarmé spatialises his protagonist, dissolving the boundaries between the figure of Igitur and the gothic décor of the castle. Just like Jarry’s “Poland & Environs”, the castle is not a *Where* but a *Who*: not an autonomous physical setting but a *landscapification* of Igitur, who is “disseminated” into his environment by various linguistic means. Descartes is also repudiated in another, no less important sense which, to my knowledge, has largely escaped critical attention. The “*lumière de la raison*”, as mentioned above, illuminates the Cartesian ego beyond any shadow of doubt and ensures its absolute knowability; the ego is self-identical, undivided by the process of self-reflection. Consider now this passage from the introductory “Ancienne Étude”: “Lui-même à la fin [...] tirera une *preuve* de quelque chose de grand [...] de ce simple fait qu’il

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 5, pp. 178-85, for a detailed analysis of the poem’s evolution, with particular emphasis on the metamorphosis of the draft’s unified *je*-persona into the “dividual” *je-tu* of the definitive text.

peut *causer l'ombre en soufflant sur la lumière*"¹¹⁰ (emphasis mine). I have no conclusive evidence that the passage is a *deliberate* allusion to Descartes, but, given that the "lumière" in question emanates from the "bougie de l'être, par quoi tout a été"¹¹¹—in other words, the precondition for human existence—it appears justified to construe it as a repudiation of the self-identical subject. Self-consciousness, for Mallarmé, brings about *negation (ombre)*. Igitur's *preuve* entails the following reversal of the cogito: "'I' thinks therefore 'I' is not". This 'I' is not unified or monadic; it springs from *difference and distance*—an agonising distance which, as we shall see in Chapter 5, Igitur vainly seeks to abolish.

Spectator and reader recorporealised

Taking my cue from Martin Jay's claim that the late nineteenth century witnesses a "recorporealisation of the cognitive subject,"¹¹² I now turn my attention from character-I's to I's (and eyes) of spectator and reader, and to a different type of subject-object relation.

If conceptions of the human subject are historically contingent, no less so are the modes of spectatorship and reading constructed by particular theatrical and typographic/chirographic practices. The progressive alienation and disembodiment of the spectator in the period between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries has already been detailed; reading, too, became less and less of a "full-body" practice as manuscript culture, characterised by a high degree of "residual orality,"¹¹³ gave way to print culture, which displaced the auditory modality in favour of the visual and transformed reading into a predominantly silent and solitary endeavour. Today's popular conception of reading as a "mental" or "intellectual" pursuit—endorsed, tacitly at least, by much literary theory, in which the reader's body is simply ignored, taken as *immaterial*—demonstrates not only the pervasiveness of Cartesian

¹¹⁰ Mallarmé (1985), p. 373.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 376.

¹¹² Jay (1993), p. 187.

¹¹³ Ong (2002), p. 41.

dualism but also the de-corporealising, de-spatialising effect of print culture. It is all too often forgotten that reading was a largely (though not exclusively) communal practice until at least the end of the seventeenth century, and that both prose and poetry were habitually read out loud—the presence or absence of listeners notwithstanding.¹¹⁴ Reading aloud, asserts Elspeth Jajdelska, “makes the reader’s body the point of orientation for any spatial or temporal references in the text.”¹¹⁵ Its counterpart, listening, is a similarly embodied, spatialised activity: auditory information is quantitatively and qualitatively affected by the distance between speaker and listener, the physical and acoustic properties of the immediate environment, the presence or absence of sonic interference, and many other factors. And, as Christopher Collins points out, the spatiality of the page itself was more readily perceptible in the pre-print era:

In an age before standardized print, the chirographic peculiarities of the text could distract the visual centers of the brain from the imaginal signified to the graphic signifiers; illuminated manuscripts, not to mention pattern poems, forcefully drew attention to the written surface as an object, not only as an instrument, of visibility.¹¹⁶

By contrast, print has, according to Jay David Bolter, “often been regarded as a medium that should disappear from the reader’s conscious consideration. Indeed, two levels of mediation are supposed to disappear, the printed page and prose itself.” The traditional novel, the development of which is more or less concurrent with the rise of silent reading, must be regarded as the least spatialised literary mode. As Bolter suggests, “the reader [of a traditional novel] is supposed to forget that he is reading and simply ‘see’ the events that the author describes.”¹¹⁷ Note the parallels with Zola: the physical medium of print, just like the artistic “screen” of realism, was felt by many nineteenth-century commentators to possess a

¹¹⁴ “Manuscript culture in the West remained always marginally oral. [...] Written material was subsidiary to hearing in ways which strike us today as bizarre. Writing served largely to recycle knowledge back into the oral world, as in medieval university disputations, in the reading of literary and other texts to groups, and in reading aloud even when reading to oneself.” Ong (2002), p. 117.

¹¹⁵ Jajdelska (2007) p.3.

¹¹⁶ Collins (1996), p. 246.

¹¹⁷ Bolter (2001), p. 43.

maximum of transparency. But this transparency, just like that of realism, is an illusion, a masquerade. Conventionally printed material is, in fact, maximally self-effacing, maximally repressive of its own materiality, its *density of mediation*. Two factors are at play here. Firstly, to quote Marshall McLuhan, print splits the sensorium (the aggregate of all sensory experience), engaging only the “isolated and stripped-down visual faculty.”¹¹⁸ The experiences of reading out loud, of listening to a story being narrated, a poem declaimed, are all *denser* than the experience of reading a printed text in silence, involving as they do a greater degree of bodily exertion (vocal chords straining, ears pricked, etc.¹¹⁹) coupled with a more intense awareness of *situation* (proxemic relations,¹²⁰ audience feedback/reactions, etc). Secondly, as well as banishing all sensory modalities save the visual to the background, print tends to automatise vision itself, minimising “[a]ll interference, resistance, [...] in order to allow the reader a smooth reading of the unfolding linear sequence.”¹²¹ The printed page, when conventionally laid out, recedes from the reader’s attention by dint of its homogeneity and regularity. It masquerades as a “non-medium”, a “window” for the mind’s eye whose surface *embodied* eyes need never contemplate.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the reader, art-viewer and spectator were recorporealised in the theories and artistic practices of figures as diverse as Georges Braque, Blaise Cendrars, Adolphe Appia, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and (later) Antonin Artaud. This newly embodied subject produced—and was a product of—a reconceptualisation of pictorial, paginal and theatre spaces. With the advent of Cubism, pictorial space once again came to be psychophysiological; inscribed with the tactile and kinaesthetic dimensions of

¹¹⁸ McLuhan (2001), p. 336.

¹¹⁹ “Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer”. Ong (2002), p. 70.

¹²⁰ Proxemics is the study of the cultural use, and communication via, space and distance. Proxemic relations between reader-aloud and listener(s) are predicated on factors such as degree of eye contact, voice loudness, and body orientation.

¹²¹ Drucker (1997), p. 95.

experience, it “enclose[s] us and enfold[s] us in [its] embrace,” transforming us from observers, detached and stationary, into embodied “insiders.”¹²² The Cubists, and Braque in particular, were preoccupied with “visual tactility”—with an incarnate eye that can *reach into* or *probe* the space of the picture, attaining what Braque calls “la pleine possession des choses.”¹²³ Visual tactility requires the abandonment of vanishing-point perspective, which, as mentioned above, immobilises the viewer, de-temporalises pictorial space, and expels the

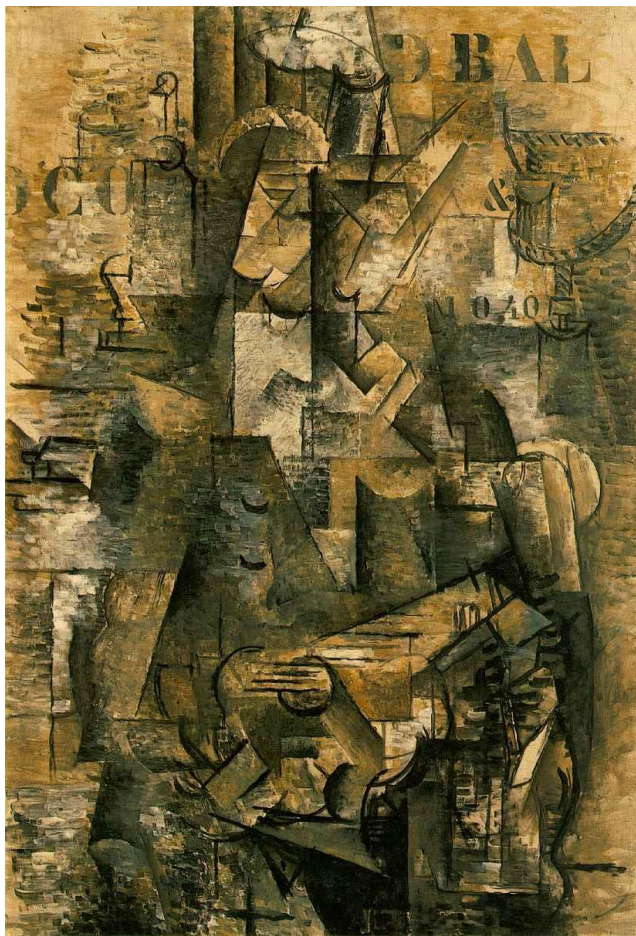


Figure 5: Braque, *Le Portugais* (1911).

former from the latter. Analytical cubism, on the contrary, draws viewers in, invests them with “full possession of things” by presenting objects from multiple vantages. What re-emerges is a mobility of perspective and, with it, temporality. Not only is space re-temporalised by the cubists, it is also *materialised*: “la direction maîtresse du cubisme,” Braque declared retrospectively, “c’était la matérialisation de l’espace.”¹²⁴ This entails a visible “thickening” of space, but also hierarchical levelling (figure and ground

interpenetrate), and, most importantly, the *foregrounding of betweenness*. “[C]e qui est entre la pomme et l’assiette se peint aussi,” insists Braque. “Cet entre-deux me paraît aussi capital que ce qu’ils nomment l’objet. C’est justement le rapport de ces objets entre eux et de l’objet

¹²² Pallasmaa (2011), p. 59.

¹²³ Quoted in Gaultier (2002), p. 97.

¹²⁴ Leymarie (1961), p. 38.

avec l'entre-deux qui constitue le sujet.”¹²⁵ *Le Portuguais* (1911), featuring the barely discernible form of a man holding a guitar, demonstrates each of these formal innovations: a thickened, tactile space; interpenetrating figures and grounds; a privileging of relations over things. Denied a fixed, transcendental perspective, the viewer constructed by the painting is pluralised and mobile, assimilating the “scene”¹²⁶ fragment by fragment from an ever-shifting vantage. The guitarist, by the same token, is denied the unity or coherence of a Cartesian subject, the same muted palette being used to render his body—analysed into a series of severe geometric components—and the surrounding space, which, far from empty or inert, violates the integrity of his form and threatens to engulf him altogether.

Theatre space, together with the audience it encloses, was similarly reconceived by various anti-naturalist theorists and practitioners throughout Europe, culminating in the late 1920s and early 1930s with “[t]he Artaudian assault on boundaries, which [...] demolished that most enduring of all theatrical frontiers, the audience as disembodied gaze, and redefined it as embodied and performing coactor.”¹²⁷ The violence and sheer intensity of Artaud’s vision for the theatre may be without precedent, as is his notion of metaphysical cruelty, but his ideas concerning theatre space and the nature of the spectator-spectacle relationship build on reforms instigated by Appia, Meyerhold, and others. Appia advocated the integration of *scène* and *salle* into a continuous and unified space, doing away not only with the proscenium arch but also with the “act curtain, [...] footlights, [...] light/dark separation, [and] raised stage.”¹²⁸ He deplored perspectival flats—“peintures mortes”¹²⁹ which, as pointed out earlier, are incongruous with the living bodies of the performers. And, under the influence of music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, with whom he collaborated between 1906 and 1914, Appia

¹²⁵ Leymarie (1995), p. 146.

¹²⁶ For want of a better word: this “scene” cannot be observed from a distance—it is no longer separable from the observer.

¹²⁷ Chaudhuri (1997), p. 24.

¹²⁸ Fleischer (2007), p. 169.

¹²⁹ Appia (1983), p. 152.

became preoccupied with the effects that these bodies, moving through a playing area sculpted by light and music and organising it into an *espace rythmique*, would have on the psychophysiological state of the spectator:

Jusqu'ici l'on ne demande du public que de la tranquillité et de l'attention. Pour l'y encourager on lui offre un siège commode et on le plonge dans un clair-obscur favorable à l'état de complète passivité qui, paraît-il, doit être le sien. [...] *C'est cette attitude passive que la discipline rythmique vient bouleverser.* – En pénétrant en nous, le rythme musical vient nous dire: l'œuvre d'art, *c'est toi!* (emphasis in the original)¹³⁰

The passivity that must be overcome, emphasises Appia, is not merely an intellectual one. “L'éveil de l'art” must take place “en nous-mêmes, en notre organisme, en notre propre chair,” and “c'est [du] corps [du spectateur] que l'art vivant doit rayonner.”¹³¹ The audience, then, are to be implicated into the action on a visceral level, responding “kinesthetically to the physical proximity of the body of the performer”—and becoming “virtual participants” as a result.¹³² The original performance of Jarry's *Ubu roi*, as Chapter 3 shall show, exposed its audience to precisely such viscosity, engaging not just the visual faculty but the entire organism.

Meyerhold, indebted to Appia in various theoretical and scenographical respects, anticipated Artaud in his efforts to develop in-the-round staging at actress-producer Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's theatre in St Petersburg, circa 1907—perhaps the first such initiative in modern times. An in-the-round arrangement, as we have seen, absorbs spectators into stage-world and audience-community, enables mutual observation and offers multiple viewpoints on the action in implicit acknowledgement of spectators' deictic specificity. But Meyerhold's attempts to introduce elements of medieval scenography into his productions—including one

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Tallon (1984), p. 501. “Participation” here should not be understood literally as “interaction”: the operative word is *virtual*. Spectators *can project themselves into the performance* due to what dance theorist John Martin (1983, p. 22) calls kinesthetic empathy—“the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertion he sees in somebody else's musculature.”

of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in October 1907—were thwarted by “local theatre regulations,”¹³³ and ultimately by Kommisarzhenskaya herself. It was not until the mid-1930s that the possibilities of in-the-round staging were fully realised—by Meyerhold's disciple Nikolai Okhlopkov in the USSR with his adaptation of Gorky's *The Mother* in 1933, and, almost contemporaneously, by Artaud in France (*Les Cenci*, 1935). Artaud proposes that the audience be seated on swivel-chairs *within* the action, “enveloppé et sillonné par elle.”¹³⁴ Physically confined, given no pause for detached reflection, subjected to an unrelenting assault on their sensoria, Artaudian spectators must lose the capacity to resist “à des effets de surprise physique, au dynamisme de cris et de gestes violents, à des explosions visuelles, à tout un ensemble d'effets tétanisants venus à point nommé et utilisés *pour agir de façon directe sur la sensibilité matérielle*”¹³⁵ (emphasis mine). Artaud's is an assault not only on scenographic practices, but on Cartesianism itself, on its various dualisms: mind and body, subject and object, sensation and reason. “Il y a un esprit dans la chair,” he proclaims, “mais un esprit prompt comme la foudre.”¹³⁶

Artaud's desire to reendow performance with a “densité dans l'espace,”¹³⁷ so lacking in “*théâtre dialogué*”¹³⁸—not an autonomous art but a mere subset of literature where verbal *content* is paramount—must, at bottom, be regarded as the desire to disrupt semiotic transparency, to foreground the materiality of signification. Precisely the same desire motivates the typographic experiments of the *verslibristes*, Mallarmé, Cendrars, Apollinaire,

¹³³ Braun (1986), p. 16. Though far beyond the scope of this study, an in-depth investigation of Maeterlinck's reception in Russia would be of considerable interest. Of all Maeterlinck's contemporaries in European theatre, it was arguably Meyerhold who engaged most deeply and directly with the Belgian's notions of stasis and second-degree dialogue. In addition, he sensed—more acutely, perhaps, than Paul Fort, Aurélien Lugné-Poe, and other French directors of the time—that the new dramaturgy of Maeterlinck's one-acts required new scenographic strategies. French- and English-language literature on the subject is comparatively scant; see, however, Piccon-Vallin (2002).

¹³⁴ Artaud (1964), p. 148.

¹³⁵ Artaud (1976), p. 160.

¹³⁶ Artaud (1956), p. 237.

¹³⁷ Artaud (1964), p. 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 55.



Figure 6: *Prose du Transsibérien* (1913)

futurists Russian and Italian, and numerous other innovators. Typographic experimentation is not, of course, confined to the *fin de siècle*; yet few other periods have produced as concerted an interrogation of spatio-visual norms and, indeed, of the codex form itself. Written to lay bare the material objecthood of the book, to heighten textual visibility, to increase “the difficulty and length of perception,”¹³⁹ many modernist poems appeal to readers’ bodies—to their eyes, certainly, but to their hands also. *La Prose du Transsibérien* (1913), Cendrars’ and Sonia Delaunay’s collaborative *poème-objet* (Figure 6), is a case in point. A two-metre-long vertical scroll divided into two columns—on the left, an abstract composition in bold watercolours by Delaunay; on the right, surrounded by fainter washes of colour, Cendrars’ text¹⁴⁰—it de-automatises the act and experience of reading. The codex form is more compact and versatile than the scroll, and offers efficient *random access* to information. Its physical structure makes systematic cross-referencing practicable, and allows any passage to be retrieved simply by turning to the appropriate page. The activity of page-turning, repetitive and wholly automated by habit, remains at the very periphery of the reader’s attention, if not altogether invisible, under normal conditions. The scroll, in contrast, offers *sequential access*: passages can only be retrieved in the same sequence that they are written/printed, meaning that *its materiality is*

¹³⁹ Shklovsky (1965), p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Discussed in Chapter 4, pp. 147-50.

harder to bypass. Handling a scroll—holding it with one hand, rerolling it with another—requires “exceptional coordination”¹⁴¹ (*grappling with the text* ceases to be a metaphor), and a vertical scroll of two metres calls to be read standing up, thereby bringing the whole body of the reader into play.

The determination of modernist poets to reinvigorate the visual and tactile modalities—resulting, in part at least, from what Jerome McGann dubs the late-nineteenth-century “Renaissance of Printing,”¹⁴²—produces a fundamentally ambivalent engagement with orality/aurality. On one hand, the ear is solicited by means of sound imagery and onomatopoeic effects: the dense *mise-en-page* of sonic textures, though particularly associated with futurist poetics, is a hallmark of literary modernism as a whole. On the other, as W.B. Worthen notes, “[t]he typographical play of modernist poetry is often designed [...] to prevent the direct assimilation of written language to performance, to speech.”¹⁴³ These contradictory tendencies can sometimes co-exist in the same work—Apollinaire’s “Lettre-Océan”, for instance. The *calligramme* is a riotous celebration of the oral/aural world, of urban noise and overheard dialogue, and yet, paradoxically, its integration of aural and visual in a complex orchestration of page-space appears to preclude conventional recitation.¹⁴⁴ *Un Coup de dés*, though described in the author’s preface as “une partition”, a visual guide to “l’émission orale”,¹⁴⁵ is only marginally more amenable to oral transmission. Mallarmé’s “spectacle idéographique” cannot, contrary to Valéry’s claims, be fully animated by the voice of a solo reader, no matter how “familiarisé avec le texte.”¹⁴⁶ But perhaps Worthen’s remark

¹⁴¹ Avrin (1991), p. 152.

¹⁴² McGann (1993) p. 20. McGann is concerned primarily with developments in Britain (Arts and Crafts, William Morris, Kelmscott Press, etc), but this “Renaissance” is clearly a pan-European one.

¹⁴³ Worthen (2005), p. 61.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 5, p. 186.

¹⁴⁵ Mallarmé (1985), p. 424. Should Mallarmé’s remarks concerning the “read-aloud-ability” of *Un Coup de dés* be taken at face value? The question has, needless to say, caused much disagreement among critics. See Brown (2000), p. 180, for a good summary of the various positions.

¹⁴⁶ Valéry (1957), p. 627.

requires qualification: although it is certainly true that the effects of “typographical play” and spatialised language cannot be adequately conveyed in single-voiced readings, I would suggest that *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* encourage polyphonic enactment—*performance in space by multiple voices and bodies*—as a means of emulating their objectness, their material concreteness.

It is to Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and concrete poetics that I turn now in Chapter 2—which opens, concretely enough, with an analogy.

2 The defamiliarisation of page-space in *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*

You're on a stroll. You've never been to this part of town before. You decide to explore. There's no rush. You may not know exactly where you are, but you're sure you're heading in roughly the right direction. Time to leave the main thoroughfare behind and take a meandering route through the backstreets. You've been doing a lot of walking of late. Watching the world go by through the frame of your windscreen, you have concluded, keeps you too removed from your environment. Almost like going to the movies—a kind of virtuality. And the predictability, the monotony of it leaves you cold. Navigational gizmos, motorways. It all feels the same. Muscle memory takes care of almost the whole process. You want to revive the old art of getting lost, leave things up to chance for a change. So you turn off the main road and head down a residential street. Quite unwittingly, you begin to savour the textures beneath your feet—the uneven pavement, the barely perceptible relief of the double yellow lines painted parallel to the kerb. Suddenly you're brought into an increased awareness of your own body. It's been so long since you last really paid attention to minor environmental details. Now these sensory novelties are heightening your proprioception.¹⁴⁷ Impulsively you cross the road, the smoothness of its surface an instant counterpoint to the rough paving slabs, turn down a small side street and then, propelled onwards by the pleasure of discovery, dart into a narrow alley between two houses. Of course. This is a dead end. You'll have to backtrack, retrace your steps—possibly even go all the way back to the main road. But so what? Mistakes are the portals of discovery. The experience, though banal in the extreme, has been an enriching one. The interface between your body and your environment, sundered from one another by machine-mediated travel, has been revitalized.

This little non-story, as forewarned, is an analogy. No need to unpack it all at once: this shall be done over the course of the chapter. But it isn't, I hasten to add, a throwaway

¹⁴⁷ The sense of embodiment; more specifically, the awareness of bodily positioning in space.

analogy, or anecdotal froth. Walking is what Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls an *eotechnical*¹⁴⁸ mode of transportation, a traversal of physical space powered exclusively by the human body. It is also a relatively “unframed” mode, at least in comparison to car travel. The windscreen (or indeed any window for that matter) is a framing device: it arranges, delimits and excludes, endowing the landscape outside with *narrative*.¹⁴⁹ The road, too, serves as a frame, one yet more unyielding. The pavement, for the motorist, represents a generally unassailable beyond, both literally and “institutionally”. Driving on the pavement is, needless to say, a hazard to pedestrians. But to leave the road behind is also, with certain exceptions, tantamount to leaving behind the institution of driving. (An analogy-within-an-analogy: a chess board is not only a physical accommodator of chess pieces but a reification of the entire institution, a metonym for all its laws, conventions and expectations. A king can, of course, be literally taken off the board, but not without being dethroned—reduced to a small painted piece of wood—in the process.) Walkers, in contrast, are much less constrained. No external static visual frame mediates their apprehension of the environment. They are free to construct their own dynamic narrativising principles—all the more so because of their ability to slow down, speed up, stop, backtrack and change course at any time. This freedom, however, is coupled with the necessity of sustained physical exertion and real-time creative decision-making. Which is not to say that the car driver is completely divested of either requirement (although the *passenger* certainly is); but the requisite physical effort under normal conditions is comparatively trivial, while the laws of the road generally preclude any genuinely creative decisions, regulating as they do speed and direction, amongst various other factors. *Strolling* is an aleatory subset of walking. While not necessarily purposeless or directionless, neither is

¹⁴⁸ Schivelbusch (1986), p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ For a modernist-oriented discussion of cars and trains as “visual framing devices on wheels”, see Danis (2002), in particular pp. 124-46.

it simply a means of getting from A to B. Strollers are prepared to let themselves be blown off course, to inject chance into their perambulations, to go wherever their feet take them.

Up the garden path: page-space and the pleasure of misreading

The aleatory reader, by the same token, is willing to give in to ocular caprice and engage in a spontaneous, non-linear perusal of page-space. The book, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is a random-access medium, and, physically speaking, any printed text, whatever its layout, permits unlimited *tnesis*,¹⁵⁰ meaning that the reader can skim certain passages, skip others (“see below”), and go into reverse (“see above”) at any desired moment. Unlike some electronic hypertexts, which might be programmed to prevent the user from accessing previously viewed pages or spending an indefinite amount of time on any one page, the printed text does not physically constrain the cadence or tempo of reading. But since the vast majority of texts consist of chains, rather than more complex networks, of signifiers—they are written to be read linearly, from beginning to end—an aleatory, explorative approach is ultimately of limited use. In most cases “getting lost in a book” really means two things: gradually losing your sense of self and body as you become ever more engrossed in the story (it is almost exclusively narratives, and more precisely prose narratives, rather than verse or drama, that obliterate the ego), and losing sight of the book as a material object as you begin to look *through*, rather than *at*, its pages, and into the story-world. In this respect the reader’s experience can be closer to the motorist’s than the walker’s. Just like driving, the traversal of conventionally configured page-space is a monotonous, predictable activity requiring minimal physical effort—and one which has the potential to decrease conscious proprioception and sunder the reader from the environment of the book. What the metaphor does *not* generally refer to is “losing your way”—an impossibility in conventional texts since there is only one

¹⁵⁰ See Barthes (1973), p. 21.

“way” to go. The reader can stumble into an *interpretive* cul-de-sac, of course, and be forced into a U-turn on a conceptual level, but this is a different matter entirely.

Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire’s *calligrammes*, conversely, offer a truly explorative reading experience—a “stroll” across page-space. It seems fruitful at this point to make use of Espen J. Aarseth’s notion of literary ergodicity, as expounded in his *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. “Ergodic,” explains Aarseth, is a “term appropriated from physics that derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning ‘work’ and ‘path’.”¹⁵¹ This implies that the reader of an ergodic text must make a concrete physical (or “extranoematic”, meaning “beyond the mind”) effort to traverse it, an effort that transcends “eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages.”¹⁵² A standard linear¹⁵³ text gives rise to a wholly predictable mode of reading. Across, down, across, down; strict alternation between horizontal and vertical; absolute orthogonality. An ergodic text, on the other hand, requires its reader to take on any of three additional roles or functions. These Aarseth terms “explorative”, “configurative” and “textonic”. The latter need not concern us here, for it exists only in programmable electronic texts—computer games, for example—which allow permanent user input; the other two functions, however, are present in certain paper texts as well. The “configurative user function” is available in Raymond Queneau’s *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), a cycle of ten sonnets whose lines may be mixed and matched by the reader to create any of 100 trillion further poems (as facilitated by rhyme scheme and syntax). The cycle is configurative because it allows the *generation* of entirely new linguistic strings. While explorative texts are possessed of a lesser degree of interactivity than their configurative counterparts, if only because they do not permit the physical

¹⁵¹ Aarseth (1997), p. 1.

¹⁵² Ibid., p.2.

¹⁵³ Aarseth takes care to point out that he is concerned specifically with the *physical* properties of texts; “linearity” in this context should not be taken to imply a chronological ordering of events or a smooth (rather than fragmented) plot development.

generation of meaning, they require more than mere interpretation. Both *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* exploit the book's capacity to "accommodat[e] [...] non-linear discourse"¹⁵⁴—and frequently conspire to lead the reader up the (spatio-textual) garden path.

Consider the following sentences:

The animal hides in the basement vanished.
 The brown bed bugs me.
 The manager relocated to the Staines office was hard done by.¹⁵⁵

In the first example, what initially seems to be a verb phrase must be reparsed as a noun phrase after *vanished* is encountered; the reverse happens in the second, and in the third an apparently active construction turns out to be a passive one. In *The Language Instinct*, Stephen Pinker refers to constructions of this type as "garden path sentences, because their first words lead the listener 'up the garden path' to an incorrect analysis."¹⁵⁶ Clearly, to speak of a *listener* being "led" up a "path" is to metaphorise the cognitive processes that take place during real-time parsing. However, the description is considerably less metaphorical in the case of the *reader*, whose eyes are likely to linger on the syntactically unexpected word (here, *vanished*, *me* and *was* respectively) and then literally backtrack to the start of the sentence, at which point a second attempt at analysis can commence. But because parsing usually requires no conscious effort—at least not in one's native language—the reader is extremely unlikely to become aware of these irregularities of eye movement; no real *ergon* is needed to traverse a *hodos* of this type. Pinker rather prescriptively labels garden path sentences "one of the hallmarks of bad writing" because "the reader repeatedly runs up against dead ends and has to wend his way back"¹⁵⁷. Yet "bad writing" can have good results; the experience of hesitating and backtracking as a result of syntactic ambiguity can be an agreeable one. You're reading the paper. Your eyes briefly alight on a headline:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ My own inventions, as is the "headline" below.

¹⁵⁶ Pinker (1994). p. 213.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

PRECOCIOUS 4-YEAR-OLD DECLARED US PRESIDENT

What?! Wait, there's more:

PRECOCIOUS 4-YEAR-OLD DECLARED US PRESIDENT
"PERSONAL HERO", SAYS MOTHER

You smile to yourself. Far from being irksome, the ambiguity that resulted in your momentary misreading is a source of pleasure. Pinker's censure, moreover, applies only to communicative, "transparent", self-effacing writing. Needless to say, the ideal reader of the later Mallarmé is a *rereader*—and a virtuoso parser.

Here I turn, somewhat inevitably, to "A la nue accablante tu":

A la nue accablante tu
Basse de basalte et de laves
A même les échos esclaves
Par une trompe sans vertu

Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu
Le sais, écume, mais y baves)
Suprême une entre les épaves
Abolit le mat dévêtu

Ou cela que furibond faute
De quelque perdition haute
Tout l'abîme vain éployé

Dans le si blanc cheveu qui traîne
Avarement aura noyé
Le flanc enfant d'une sirène.¹⁵⁸

It is not my intention to put forward yet another interpretation of the intricate syntactic infoldings of this iconic sonnet—various analyses have already risen to the challenge.¹⁵⁹ The syntactic garden paths that criss-cross Mallarmé's late poetry have been well trodden and successfully traversed by critics. Rather than following in their footsteps, I would like to introduce the notions of *spatio-textual parsing* and *paginal syntax*. These predominantly apply to *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* (and visual poetry in general), but "A la nue

¹⁵⁸ Mallarmé (1985), p. 81.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Williams (2004), pp. 85-88, Cook (1998), pp. 56-59, Robb (1996), pp. 200-4, and Pearson (1996), pp. 223-233.

accablante tu” presents a convenient entry point into the discussion. Ordinarily page-space—as opposed to the text it “accommodates”—does not require parsing of any kind: it is uniform, homogeneous and readable only from top to bottom and from left to right. Verso and recto are qualitatively identical. The terms “above” and “below”, meanwhile, have been largely bleached of their literal meaning and are more often than not employed figuratively. The formula “see below” can, of course, direct the reader to look further down the same page, but is far more likely to be advertising relevant material several or many pages ahead; in the latter case, it should be regarded either as a metaphorical spatialisation of the reading process (*below* = “later”) or as a no less metaphorical spatialisation of the text itself (*below* = “elsewhere in the textual body”). In “A la nue accablante tu”, Mallarmé goes some way to reendowing page-space with directionality. I call the poem “iconic”, but this is no empty adulation: it really does exhibit a vestigial degree of visual iconicity. What is “above” and “below” in page-space is also “above” and “below” in the world of the text. The reader descends, and so does the poem—from the *nue* in the first quatrain to the juncture of sky and sea at the pivotal *volta* to the potential drowning in the second tercet. Yet neither descent is by any means a smooth one. Numerous parsing attempts are required even for limited comprehension. Sea is inscribed in sky and sky in sea: “basse” (l.2), above the waterline of the *volta*, mirrors “haute” (l.10), below it. Even though multiple readings reveal the two terms to be lexically and syntactically asymmetric, the most likely first-time analysis of “basse” as a feminine adjective—in other words a direct parallel to “haute”—*should not be disregarded*. This is a productive misreading, and one (retrospectively) “justified” by the balanced positioning of the terms: “basse” opens the second line of the first quatrain while “haute” closes that of the second tercet. The poem is configured to maximise the creative potential of rereading; it accommodates a plurality of possibilities that never fully negate one another.

Hence the “Ou” of the *volta*, which casts doubt on the (already indeterminate) reality of the quatrains—yet does not refute it completely.

But back to parsing and syntax. Fred Lakin defines spatial parsing as “the process of recovering the underlying syntactic structure of an expression in a visual language from its spatial arrangement.”¹⁶⁰ The visual syntax of “A la nue accablante tu”, as opposed to its *linguistic* syntax, is highly rudimentary. It makes an iconic distinction between “above” (sky) and “below” (sea), as just seen, thereby bringing the horizontal axis of the page into play, but the vertical axis (left vs. right) remains unactualised. Nor, unsurprisingly, can a single sonnet exploit the spatial potential of the verso/recto dichotomy. In *Un Coup de dés*, conversely, Mallarmé draws on all of the above, thus fully heterogenising page-space. Vocabulary on the horizontal axis is highly polarized. Positive, celestial, cosmological imagery is consistently to be found towards the top of the page; examples include “aile” (double page 2), “LE MAÎTRE” (d.p. 3), “tête” (d.p. 4) “plume” (d.p. 6), “issu stellaire” (d.p.8), “altitude” (d.p. 10). Negative, infernal, marine imagery is confined to the bottom: “DU FOND D’UN NAUFRAGE” (d.p. 1), “coque” (d.p. 2), “N’ABOLIRA” (d.p. 4), “gouffre” (d.p. 5), “écueil” (d.p. 6), “roc” (d.p. 7), “Choit” (d.p. 8), “s’ensevelir” (d.p. 8), “perdition” (d.p. 9). Due to Mallarmé’s particular use of the double-page spread, lexical distribution on the horizontal axis affects our understanding of the vertical: since almost every spread, with the exception of double pages 2 and 7, features a diagonal descent of text, from upper left to lower right, the verso is rendered the domain of positivity, the recto, of adversity (pun intended), thereby reversing the conventional associations of left with ill-fortune and right with auspiciousness. Meanwhile, directionality is also restored to the single page by means of the gutter: text in close proximity to this shadowy chasm is likely to be more fragmentary than that on the outer edges of the page. The gutter splits syntactic atoms—for example, “que se / prépare” (d.p. 3),

¹⁶⁰ Lakin (1987), p. 684.

and “sauf / que” (d.p. 6)—kept intact elsewhere. In contrast, complete verb and noun phrases, such as “legs en la disparition” (d.p. 4), “prince amer de l’écueil” (d.p. 6), and “Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés” (d.p. 10), are invariably sited at or near the periphery of the text, a safe distance from the deleterious gutter.

This, of course, is all retrospective analysis; but what of the first-time reader, unaccustomed to spatial parsing in general and to the spatio-syntactic logic of *Un Coup de dés* in particular? A “competent” and attentive newcomer might grapple with the opening pages in the following manner: “[*Single page.*] Repetition of the first part of the title. Text aligned slightly to the left. Typeface large. Bold capitals. Where is the rest of the title? [*Double page 1.*] Why has a whole page been left blank? Is it still part of the text? Another fragment from the title, once again in capitals, followed by two further, seemingly incomplete, capitalised phrases in smaller type. These in striking opposition to the whiteness surrounding them. Space certainly seems to play an active role; attention drawn to the page itself, and to the book as an object. Type size appears to be non-arbitrary. [*Double page 2.*] Autonomy of the single page compromised: a syntactically coherent phrase (‘par / avance retombée’) is spread over two pages. Evident that layout is anything but incidental—effect would be destroyed if both pages were not simultaneously available to the exploring eye. [*Double page 3.*] Eye drawn immediately to capitalised noun phrase (‘LE MAÎTRE’) in upper left-hand corner—but where to go from here? Down to ‘surgi / inférant’, or across to ‘hors d’anciens calculs?’ Obligated to explore in order to decide, even reading ahead—down the left side of the double page, then down the right, then across, seeing what works and what doesn’t—before settling on chosen course. *But* said course effectively contains every previous ‘garden-path’ (mis)reading! A genuine subversion of linearity, and one which once again points up the physical reality of text and book...” It might be objected that no empirical first-time reader could approach the poem in such a manner, focusing exclusively on the spatial dimension of the text while paying

no heed whatsoever to the lexical. Nevertheless, it seems justified to maintain that the former consistently disrupts our understanding of the latter and, moreover, holds sway over our attention in its own right, increasing perceptual difficulty and length. It is precisely this difficulty that makes *Un Coup de dés* an ergodic work; the spacing of the text deautomatises the reading process, transforming it into a creative, aleatory endeavour.

Literary criticism of all kinds has a tendency to “iron out” interpretive errors, to discard provisional readings, to present only the final analysis. Critics *overcome* the difficulty of the text, condensing their experience of it into a seamless, retrospective, sequential, teleological narrative. We expect the critic’s opinion to be at least somewhat definitive; and we expect it to be expressed with more than a modicum of confidence. We pounce on any admission of weakness, on any avowal of uncertainty. What we really crave is a more or less comprehensive, coherent and, most importantly, *post-hoc* reading. The problems of hindsight and confirmation bias are very well recognized within the study of history¹⁶¹: none but the most armchairish of historians would claim, for example, that the signing of the Magna Carta “paved the way for democracy in England”. Hindsight bias is a particular kind of the narrative fallacy, which, as epistemologist Nassim Nicholas Taleb maintains, involves “our limited ability to look at sequences of facts without weaving an explanation into them, or, equivalently, forcing a logical link, an arrow of relationship, upon them.”¹⁶² This fallacy is committed by literary critics who overlook the fact that the process of reading, like any other, has a history of its own—and that the specific *course* of this history has a bearing on the final analysis of the text. Such critics untie the knot of uncertainty, unravel the reading experience. For obvious reasons, non-linear or multi-cursal (many-pathed) texts like *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*, which offer multiple reading itineraries, are particularly susceptible to

¹⁶¹ See, for example, David Hackett Fischer’s *Historians’ Fallacies* (1970).

¹⁶² Taleb (2007), pp. 63-4.

mistreatment of this type. The knot is not there to be untied; these texts are generators of vacillation—the ultimate source of truth, according to the Russian philosopher Vasily Rozanov:

“Where, then, can truth be found?”
 “In the plenitude of all ideas. Simultaneously. Choose one over the rest at your peril. In *vacillation*.”
 “*Vacillation*? Is it truly a principle?”
 “It is—the most fundamental of them all. The only one that is secure. The one that brings everything into bloom, into life. The onset of *stability* would bring with it the petrification—the icing over of the universe...” [translation mine; emphasis in the original]¹⁶³

The negotiation of page-space—garden paths and all—must not be regarded as being somehow prior to “reading proper”, which can begin only once the “correct” course through the text has been determined. The sheer pleasure of the ergodic text lies not so much in arriving at one’s final interpretive destination as in the challenge of navigation itself, in the state of being at a spatio-textual crossroads.

Mallarmé scholars are by and large acutely attuned to the problems of page-space and spatialised parsing (though the latter notion has not, to my knowledge, been referred to as such before). Nevertheless, I believe that insufficient attention has been paid to the process of reading the poem as it unfolds in real time; hindsight bias, moreover, is by no means uncommon. Consider this passage from Hélène Stafford’s *Mallarmé and poetics of everyday life*:

it is clear that Mallarmé does make use of the most ordinary of ‘ordinary syntax’ right through his work. Even his most transgressional text, in Kristevian terms, *Un Coup de dés* still displays examples of simple predicative syntax, as in the sentence half-announced in the title: “Un Coup de dés [...] jamais [...] n’abolira [...] le hasard”, or:

RIEN
 N’AURA EU LIEU
 QUE LE LIEU¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Rozanov (1990), p. 670.

¹⁶⁴ Stafford (2000), p. 66.

First of all, it seems odd indeed to cite the poem's central proposition as an instance of "simple" or "ordinary" syntax, given the anastrophe of "JAMAIS / N'ABOLIRA": this word order is marked (i.e., unusual, non-default), and should immediately arrest the reader's attention, irrespective even of the poem's spatial disposition. That is a relatively minor objection, however; of far greater concern is Stafford's failure to account for the bracketed ellipses in her first example, or for her own decision to present the text of the second as a column. The syntax of *Un Coup de dés* is not simply textual: it is spatio-textual. It is only with the benefit of hindsight, once we have got to grips with the poem's typographically communicated hierarchy, that we can extricate text from space and resolve "RIEN / N'AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU / EXCEPTÉ / PEUT-ÊTRE / UNE CONSTELLATION" into a single unified narrative. *Typographically self-contained units are not only fed by, but also feed, syntactic strings*. For instance, the literally meandering "SI / C'ÉTAIT / LE NOMBRE / CE SERAIT / LE HASARD" flows into the title, but is itself fed by a minor affluent: "*pire / non / advantage ni moins / indifféremment mais autant*". This extreme degree of spatio-textual hypotaxis, generated by the contrapuntal interplay of typographically autonomous yet syntactically interdependent units, can hardly be called "simple" or "ordinary". Parsing the text is difficult enough; but being forced to parse page-space *at the same time* makes for a highly disorienting reading experience.

Now, what of the *calligrammes*? In complete contradistinction to *Un Coup de dés*, which has elicited a great number of superlative critical responses over the years, this part of Apollinaire's oeuvre has received comparatively scant attention, much of it disparaging—and also rather lacking in analytical rigour. Roger Little, for example, calls the *calligrammes* "amusing doodles", maintaining that "Apollinaire cannot take their visual aspect beyond a

stylised representation of the object evoked,”¹⁶⁵ while Decio Pignatari accuses him of falling “into meaningless decorativeness.”¹⁶⁶ These are virtually out-of-hand dismissals, however, and care must be taken not to set up Little and Pignatari as straw men. More revealing is the manner in which Malcolm Bowie seeks to distance *Un Coup de dés* “from the sphere of concrete poetry” in *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult*. “The pictorial sign-system [of Mallarmé’s poem],” he claims, “is too little developed to be able fully to collaborate or fully to conflict with its extraordinarily intricate verbal counterpart.” In contrast, “the concrete or ‘calligrammatical’ poet seeks to superimpose sign-systems upon each other with a view to the construction of a more or less elegant and ironically suggestive tautology.”¹⁶⁷ Bowie is right to insist on such a distinction—the *calligrammes* undeniably exhibit a greater degree of overt iconicity than *Un Coup de dés*. Yet I must question the basis on which the distinction is made. As already seen, the visual syntax of *Un Coup de dés* should on no account be regarded as “little developed”. Though not strictly pictorial, it *is*, nonetheless, iconic—and self-referentially so. Consider, for instance, the following fragment on double page 5:

<i>Une insinuation</i>		<i>simple</i>
<i>au silence</i>		<i>enroulée avec ironie</i>

Insinuation derives from the Latin word *sinus*, meaning “lap” or “fold”. Can this be regarded as anything other than an ironic insinuation of the gutter—the ultimate *silence*? It is the arrangement of the text around the gutter that facilitates this etymological play; were it not for its spatial configuration, much of the poem’s extraordinary verbal intricacy would remain unactualised. Nor should the *calligrammes* be considered tautological constructions—as we shall see below (there it is again, that metaphorical spatialisation...), it is actually in the *rupture between text and image* that much of their signifiatory power resides. Far from being

¹⁶⁵ Little (1976), p. 38.

¹⁶⁶ Pignatari (1982), p. 190.

¹⁶⁷ Bowie (1978), pp. 119-20

¹⁶⁸ Léopold Surville (1879-1968) and Irène Lagut (1893-1994), artists loosely associated with Cubism.

The first problem with a methodical reading of “La Fontaine” [*this title is Bohn’s, not Apollinaire’s*] is deciding where to start. According to the literary model one would expect to begin with the word “comme” at the platform’s upper left-hand edge. [...] According to the artistic model, one would start with the arch. [...] Which of these conventions are we supposed to follow? One of the problems with [the former] approach [...] is that it requires the reader to advance *à rebours*. In each of the four sections one must read from top to bottom, which violates the poem’s visual flow in the opposite direction.

Another critic proposes to begin with the fountain’s spray, proceeding thereafter to the arch, the platform, and the fountain itself. The trouble with this itinerary is that two of the transitions are illogical. The more one reviews the poem, the more one becomes convinced that it is composed of two units: the frame and the spouting fountain. To be convincing, a reading strategy should respect these boundaries. In either case it is clear from the poem’s sense that the arch must precede the platform.¹⁶⁹

Let me be clear that I am not advocating an interpretive free-for-all, and do not dispute Bohn’s claim that some reading strategies are more “convincing”, more apposite than others. But, in the absence of any institutionalised *mode d’emploi*, we can only proceed by trial and error. The decision of “where to start” cannot take place prior to reading—the *calligramme* is a field of potentiality, and demands exploration. Bohn completely overlooks its deautomatising capacity; for him, the process of “reviewing the poem” is evidently a means to an end (namely, restoring *stability* to a frustratingly volatile structure), and not an end in itself. But is this process not worthy of consideration in its own right? Denied the crutch of familiar institutionalised conventions, we must unlearn to read, taking pleasure in vacillation. Perhaps (or perhaps not) Bohn’s conclusion that “the arch must precede the platform” is inevitable—but it is a retrospective conclusion nonetheless, and one which *does not efface* previous readings. Besides, the arch can be said to precede the platform only on the level of verbal syntax; we are dealing, however, with a *spatio-syntactic* object.

Apollinaire’s use of page-space cries out for an *empirically founded* theorisation—one which would take into account the varied responses of individual readers. Bohn’s analysis, just like the vast majority of critical responses to the *calligrammes*, makes no use of empirical data. Over the last fifteen to twenty years, however, issues of perceptual and cognitive

¹⁶⁹ Bohn (1993), 162-3.

processing have attracted increasing interest within the field of literary studies; in keeping with this so-called “cognitive turn,”¹⁷⁰ some Apollinaire scholars have turned to eye-tracking data in an attempt to verify how the interplay of visual and verbal elements in the *calligrammes* affects reading behaviour. Figure 8, taken from Shingler (2011), shows the eye

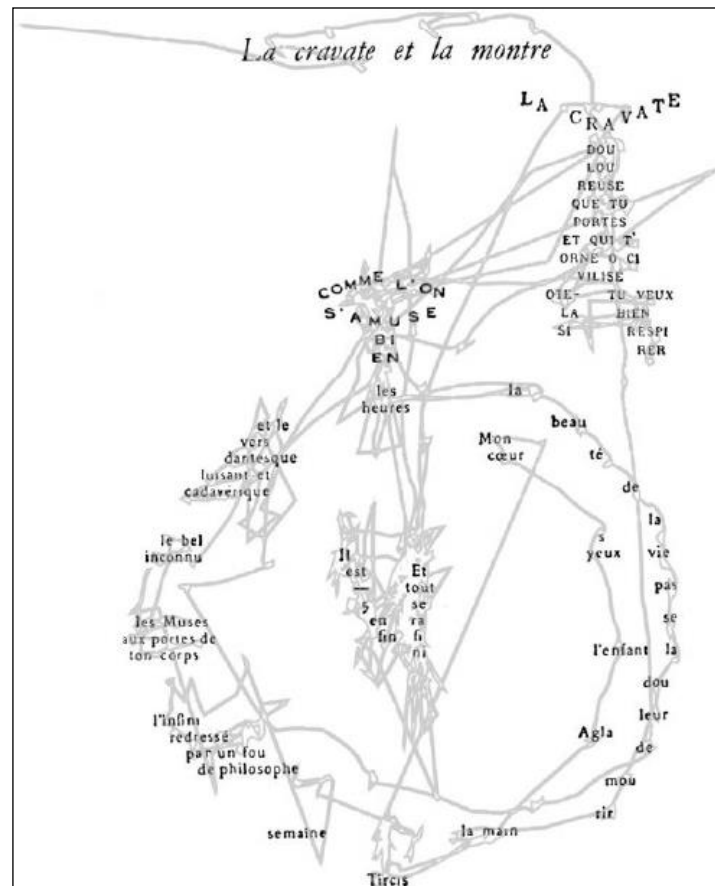


Figure 8: Eye movements of a test subject reading/viewing “Le Cravate et la montre” over a 60-second period, taken from Shingler (2011).

movements of a test subject reading/viewing “Le cravate et la montre” over a 60-second period, as captured by a high-speed video tracker. It represents a palimpsest of readings and re-readings: uneffaced, the test subject’s “errings” remain legible—as rightly they should. Shingler insists, in implicit contradistinction to Bohn, that, despite the presence of “cues prompting the reader to scan its various elements in a certain order (for instance, the inclusion of titles might encourage the reader to start at the top of the page and work downwards),

¹⁷⁰ See Stockwell (2002), for a general introduction.

neither order of scanning nor attention to visual and verbal elements can be fully determined by the poem itself”¹⁷¹ (emphasis mine). Post-hoc justificatory narratives such as Bohn’s are not invalid per se; they must simply be recognised for what they are.

Degrees of spatialisation in literary texts

I would now like to backtrack a little and sketch out a brief taxonomy of texts based on their actualisation, if any, of page-space, before returning to *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*.

In **conventional prose narrative**, negative spaces

express structural hierarchies and create semantic groupings[;] [...] demarcate the boundaries of words, headers and sub-headers, paragraphs and sections [...]; visually reinforce the conceptual organization of a given text[;] and [...] facilitate the process of perception by guiding the eye and the mind of the reader.¹⁷²

The prose reader has been conditioned to expect fixed orthogonality. The text, enclosed on all sides by an inert marginal frame of fixed dimensions,¹⁷³ is never threatened its “pure vacuity”; figure and ground, positive and negative remain fully sundered. The negative space of the margins *structures meaning without being integral to it*; much the same can be said of line spacing, indentation, justification/alignment, and other spatio-typographic variables. Indeed, the dimensions of the page itself are ultimately inconsequential: the “definitive edition” of a novel is generally understood to be the most authoritative version of its *text*, but has nothing whatsoever to do with the book as a *physical object*; the very attempt to correlate the notions of definitiveness and materiality appears almost absurd as far as conventional prose is concerned. Narrative texts tend towards visual homogeneity—and the aforementioned “process of perception” is likely to remain imperceptible for precisely this reason. In the most extreme scenario, the interface between reader and book is rendered weightless, “transparent”.

¹⁷¹ Shingler (2011), pp. 74-5.

¹⁷² Knowles *et al.* (2012), p. 75.

¹⁷³ Cf. the frame of verse; see below.

We simply become oblivious to its existence. Oblivious to the smell, texture, substance of the book; oblivious to the hands holding it, *sine materia*, no longer our own. We surrender ourselves to the narrative, the physicality of its signifiers virtually invisible to us. Page after page is turned in regular, unbroken rhythm: wholly absorbed in the story-world, we neither flip back nor skip ahead.¹⁷⁴

In certain **experimental prose texts**, however, the materiality of the page is actively foregrounded, and negative space positivised. The marginal frame may be manipulated in a variety of ways; glosses and footnotes, which normally provide subsidiary or elucidatory information, may be given precedence over the main body of the text (a reversal of the figure-ground relation); and the appearance of the page, or the double-page spread, may be defamiliarised by dint of heterogenisation. These visual manoeuvres are best illustrated by two very brief case studies: James McNeill Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), a sardonic account of the artist's 1878 libel suit against John Ruskin; and the "Night Lessons" chapter from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), purportedly annotated by the twins Shem and Shaun, and footnoted, irrelevantly and irreverently, by their sister Issy.

As Figures 9 and 10 show, Whistler and Joyce both heterogenise the layout of the double-page spread, exploiting negative space, marginalia and typographic variation to serve their own ends. According to Nick Frankel, Whistler deploys glosses "culled from [...] the less well-considered passages of Ruskin's art criticism" in order to turn Ruskin "against himself", thereby "revers[ing] the conventional order of the page so as to give the marginal gloss the upper hand over the central text [*a transcript of the trial*] it is designed to annotate."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Extreme variation in paragraph length and the use of spacing rather than indentation, as deployed in certain of Mallarmé's own prose pieces, such as "Étalages" and "Le mystère dans les lettres", might serve to disrupt this rhythm, and bring the reader back into an awareness of book-as-body.

¹⁷⁵ Frankel (2000) p. 91.

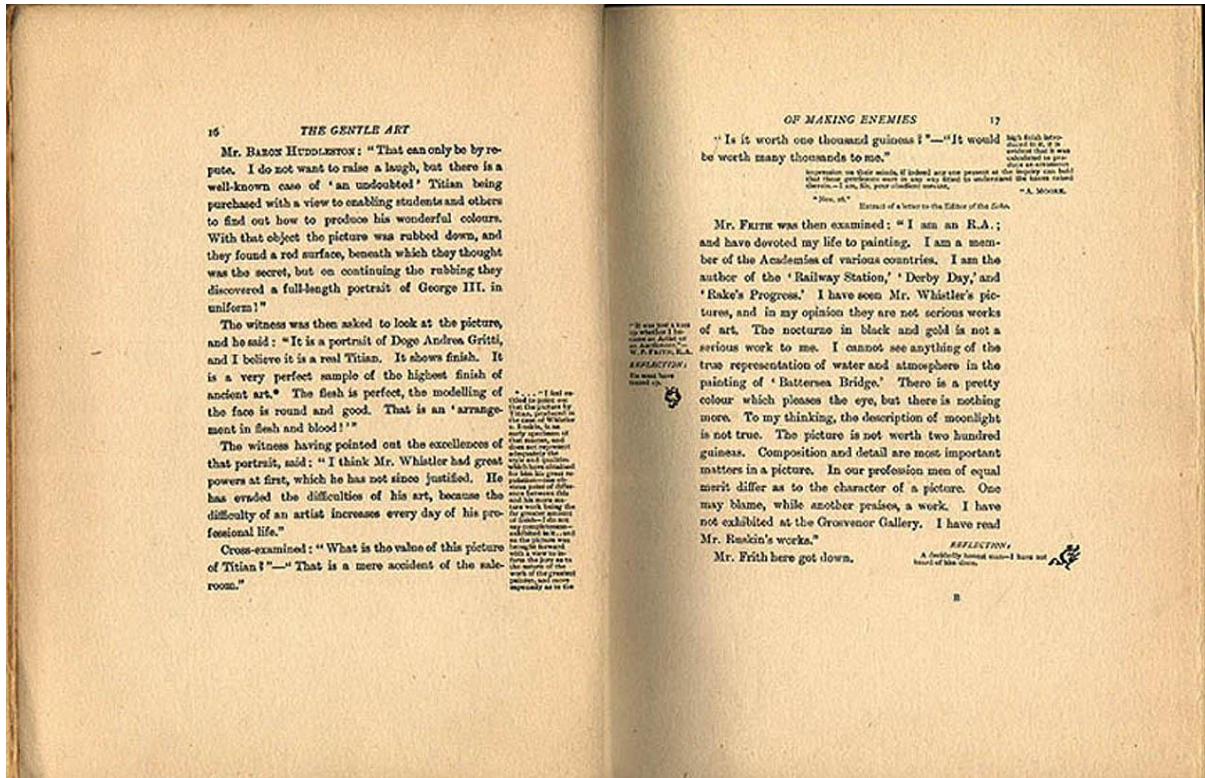


Figure 9: Double-page spread from *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890).

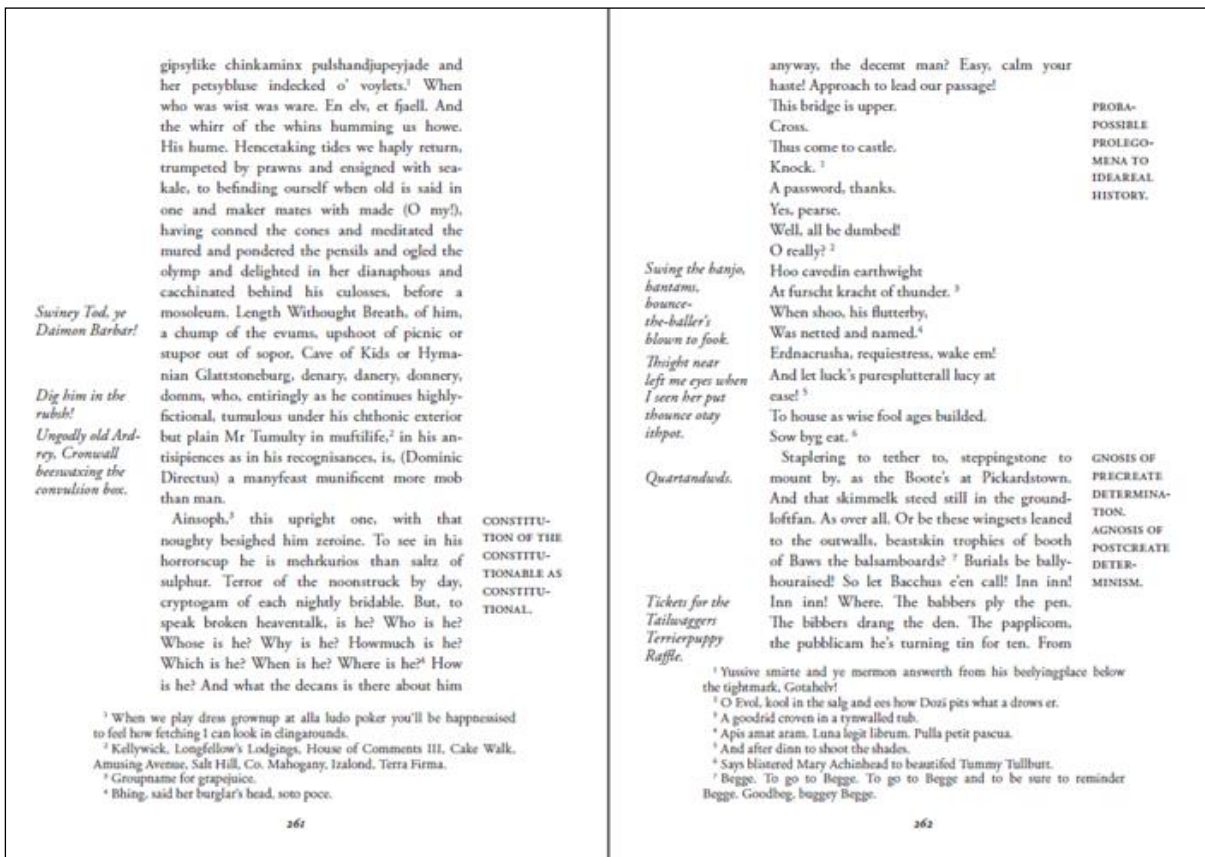


Figure 10: Double-page spread from the "Night Lessons" chapter of *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Irregular negative space compounds the effect: the gloss at the top of the recto in Figure 9, for instance, pierces the marginal frame and juts violently into the centre of the page. “Whistler’s glossed page,” Frankel continues, “is one of enmity and scorn, in which truth *emerges from negation* somewhere in the middle of the process whereby Ruskin cancels out his own arguments”¹⁷⁶ (emphasis mine). In “Night Lessons”, too, the voices of Shem, Shaun and Issy refuse to remain on the margins, clamouring for the reader’s attention in boisterous polyphony. The twins’ parodic annotations are transfigured into a subversive spatialised drama midway through the chapter, when Shaun’s Latinate orthodoxies (Gr. *orthos*: “right”, “straight”) suddenly migrate to the left marginalia, and Shem’s vernacular flippancies move to the right, as if to signal some kind of shift in the balance of power between bourgeois self-righteousness and left-field artistry (cf. my earlier comments regarding directionality in *Un Coup de dés*). Both *Gentle Art* and “Night Lessons” are multi-cursal: with several juxtaposed textual spaces competing for their attention, readers may negotiate them sequentially—for example, main body first, marginalia second, footnotes third—or concomitantly. (Once again, however, any decision about “where to start” can be made only in retrospect: newcomers to the texts are extremely unlikely to have a consistent reading strategy.) The juxtaposition of incongruent, heterogeneous elements engenders an interstitial aesthetic, offering the reader no reassuring vertical hierarchies. Whistler *coaxes signification from betweenness*; and Joyce, as Thomas Jackson Rice observes, “reinforces his readers’ realization that greater meaning may be found on his text’s lateral axis, in the networked relations of its parts.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁷⁷ Rice (1997), p. 136.

Space does not invade or penetrate the **non-visual poem** in such a way as to render “navigation” problematic for the reader; as with conventional prose narrative, no genuine exploration of page-space is required, since there is one and only one predictable path through the text. Nevertheless, the spatial component of poetry differs markedly from that of prose—as do the reader’s preconceptions and (bodily) experiences:

1. *Two types of frame.* The marginal frame of a prose text varies in accordance with the physical dimensions of the book that accommodates it. Imposed from without, the frame is *not determined by the text itself*, and the author generally wields no authority over it (different editions have different frames). In verse poetry, conversely, the frame is invariably and by definition a fundamental constituent of the text, as Paul Claudel makes clear in “La philosophie du livre”:

Le *blanc* n’est pas en effet seulement pour le poème une nécessité matérielle imposée du dehors. Il est la condition même de son existence, de sa vie, de sa respiration. Le vers est une ligne qui s’arrête, non parce qu’elle est arrivée à une frontière matérielle et que l’espace lui manque, mais parce que son chiffre intérieur est accompli et que sa vertu est consommée.¹⁷⁸

Generated *from within* by line breaks, the frame is fully integral to the poem. It is also changeable and heterogeneous. The degree of its heterogeneity depends, of course, on the regularity of the verse: a uniformly metred poem is likely to produce a near-orthogonal frame, while one which makes use of various meters, or has no meter to speak of, will produce one striking in its irregularity, as the *verslibristes* were only too aware.

2. *Verse as indivisible body.* The poem—at least the shorter poem, if not the multi-sectioned narrative or epic poem—has the potential to be an autonomous visual structure, and, to employ an astronomical metaphor, the gravity of its mass is sufficient to maintain a kind of “atmosphere”. The reader *expects* to see it fully delimited from other textual bodies, to be surrounded by swathes of white. (And Mallarmé, for his part, insists in a letter to Catulle

¹⁷⁸ Claudel (1965), p. 77.

Mendès on the need to inject “*de l’air entre les vers, de l’espace*, afin qu’ils se détachent bien les uns des autres, ce qui est nécessaire encore avec leur condensation.”¹⁷⁹) Sonnets, for example, are frequently given a page to themselves, even if the page can accommodate one or even two other texts—and they are extremely unlikely to be broken up and printed over two pages. They are (or should be) regarded, therefore, as indivisible typographic structures, and the space they command is, in a sense, integral to fulfilling the reader’s visual expectations, if not to the process of reading itself.

3. *Increased conscious proprioception.* I certainly do not intend to suggest here that a simple binary distinction can be made between conventional prose and poetry on the ground of proprioception (and any attempt at absolute differentiation, irrespective of its basis, appears both unnecessary and doomed to failure). It does, however, seem warranted to argue that the greater degree of visual heterogeneity in poetry, together with its laying bare of page-space, serves to bring the reader into an increased awareness of the interface between body and book. Since the visual frame of a poem is independent of paginal dimensions, every spread has its own particular appearance, and every leaf turned over is, to actualise the metaphor, new and unfamiliar. Confronted with an irregularly configured and relatively exposed page-space which, as Claudel asserts, constitutes more than a mere substrate for graphemes, readers of poetry cannot become wholly insensible to the materiality of the book, as might readers of an absorbing and visually homogeneous prose narrative. Nor, therefore, can they cease to be aware of their physical selves: acknowledged as body, the book in their hands communicates to them a sense of their own embodiment. Conscious proprioception, I believe, is intensified by fully spatialised texts (see below).

¹⁷⁹ Mallarmé (1959), p. 212.

Sparsely punctuated and unpunctuated verse. Page-space can be brought further into play by the suppression of punctuation marks, a manoeuvre which, as noted by Roger Pearson, points up the “naked vulnerability of language.”¹⁸⁰ Another, more abstract kind of frame, punctuation is the handmaiden of verbal syntax; it also serves as a safeguard against the undifferentiated blankness of the page, cordoning the text off from its white expanses. The almost complete absence of punctuation constitutes one of the principal (visual) features of Apollinaire’s mature poetic output. In a letter to Henri Martineau, Apollinaire declares that he resolved at the last moment to make the entirety of *Alcools* punctuation-free because “elle m’a paru inutile et elle l’est en effet, le rythme et la coupe des vers voilà la véritable ponctuation et il n’en est point besoin d’une autre.”¹⁸¹ He was not, of course, the first to exploit the potential of unpunctuated verse: Mallarmé’s late-period poetry is also typified by highly sparse or non-existent punctuation and, like Apollinaire, he considers it (largely) redundant, at least in his own verse:

*Le sonnet ne doit pas être ponctué ! . . . Du moins celui qui, comme le mien, ne saurait laisser de place à la ponctuation. Les signes qui en sont absents ne serviraient qu’à diviser inutilement le tout. Ainsi la pensée demeure entière.*¹⁸²

In both cases, the removal of typographic clutter results in a distillation of the poem-as-image—as Roger Shattuck affirms, “poetry does gain a kind of purity on the page when it is not interrupted by the recurrence of black dots.”¹⁸³

But while the lack of punctuation reinforces the syntactic indeterminacy central to the latter poet’s aesthetics, it has the almost the opposite effect on Apollinaire’s verse, which consciously eschews the hypotactic intricacies and incessant qualifications ubiquitous in Mallarmé. “The visual effect of the printed page,” writes K. R. Dutton, “was a constant preoccupation with Apollinaire, and we are not surprised that he should envisage the line of

¹⁸⁰ Pearson (1996), p. 224.

¹⁸¹ Décaudin (ed., 1996), p. 40.

¹⁸² Quoted in Barbier (ed., 1968), p. 315.

¹⁸³ Shattuck (ed., 1971). p. 27.

poetry as being a distinct unit in itself.”¹⁸⁴ Apollinaire favours very strong spatio-syntactic congruence (1 line $\approx$ 1 noun or verb phrase, 1 clause, etc). Thus, a paratactic series of noun phrases opens “Liens”:

Cordes faites de cris

Sons de cloches à travers l'Europe
*Siècles pendus*¹⁸⁵

—while main clause is cleanly cleaved from subordinate in this excerpt from the third stanza of “Le musicien de Saint-Merry”:

Lorsque tout à coup les cloches de Saint-Merry se mirent à sonner
 Le musicien cessa de jouer et but à la fontaine
 Qui se trouve au coin de la rue Simon-Le-Franc¹⁸⁶

—and once again in this one from “La petite auto”:

Nous comprîmes mon camarade et moi
 Que la petite auto nous avait conduits dans une époque
 Nouvelle¹⁸⁷

(Though note also the striking *rejet* in the latter example. Enjambment is not, of course, *completely* non-existent in Apollinaire; it is just utilised very sparingly.) Because parataxis is Apollinaire’s favoured mode, and because hypotaxis, where it does occur, is generally accompanied by line breaks, punctuation, and especially end-line punctuation, becomes largely superfluous, and the *absence* of typographic marks (unsullied page-space) acquires signficatory power.

For Mallarmé, conversely, enjambment represents one of the most potent means of generating various kinds of ambiguity; he delights in stripping the octosyllabic line (and, to a lesser extent, the alexandrine) of all autonomy, setting it at odds with syntactic boundaries—a technique which would ultimately give rise to the altogether *antagonistic* relationship between

¹⁸⁴ Dutton (1968), p. 304.

¹⁸⁵ Apollinaire (1991), p. 183.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 224.

Rien au réveil que vous n'ayez
 Envisagé de quelque moue
 Pire si le rire secoue
 Votre aile sur les oreillers

Indifféremment sommeillez
 Sans crainte qu'une haleine avoue
 Rien au réveil que vous n'ayez
 Envisagé de quelque moue

Toutes les rêves émerveillés
 Quand cette beauté les déjoue
 Ne produisent fleur sur la joue
 Dans l'œil diamants impayés
 Rien au réveil que vous n'ayez.¹⁹²

Mallarmé's *riens* frequently carry a trace of their original, positive meaning (*rien* derives from Latin *rem*, accusative of *res*, "thing"): the first line of "Salut", for instance, might be rendered in English as "Not a thing, this foam, virgin verse", or "No thing, this foam, this virgin verse". Here, too, the *rien* of the refrains is more of a *no-thing* than a clear-cut *nothing*; it is the subject of the verbless main clause "Rien au réveil" (l.1), and its status as Thing rather than adverb is confirmed in the second stanza: "une haleine avoue / Rien"—where is the customary *ne*? Yet it is there, out of sight, riding the currents of the sleeper's breathing—*haleine*. Breath is life, and negation, for Mallarmé, resides at life's very core. Enjambment, cleaving as it does the verb phrase in the subordinate clause of the refrain ("que vous n'ayez / Envisagée"), contributes to the foregrounding of the negative, perhaps even forcing the first-time reader into a momentary misreading of *n'ayez* as a main, rather than auxiliary, verb... which is in fact what it turns out to be in stanza 3. The refrain, inserted into a novel syntactic context, functions differently each time; far from serving as a fixed pivot for a reassuringly symmetrical structure, as was the case in most traditional rondels, it engenders uncertainty and encourages rereading.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 96.

Spatialised poetry. The final category in this rough taxonomy is ontologically, and not just visually, distinct from the rest: as suggested above, *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* compel the reader to negotiate page-space, and to make choices based on its configuration. In this they differ fundamentally from earlier pattern poems, such as Rabelais' bottle-shaped *epilenie* (a song in praise of Bacchus), Panard's "Verre", George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and Lewis Carroll's "The Mouse's Tale" (from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*). While innovative in their own way, pattern poems generally preserve the traditional distinction between positive and negative space (and, by extension, between figure and ground) because they consist of a *solid* block of text, clearly demarcated from the pristine expanse of the page. Offering only one possible reading direction, they also have no "explorative function"; their (usually rather limited) pictorial dimension notwithstanding, pattern poems do not transform the reading experience in any crucial respect.

Un Coup de dés and the *calligrammes*, in contrast, make use of space not only *around* the text, but *within* it as well¹⁹³—they are spatio-textual *objects*, and cannot in any way be extricated from their medium of transmission without being seriously mangled in the process. Although *Un Coup de dés* can at least be approximated orally if a concerted effort is made to render the different types intonationally—ranging, perhaps, from a self-confident FORTISSIMO to a tentative *sotto voce*—and the blanks as pauses and silences of varying lengths,¹⁹⁴ many of its visual features are almost completely irreproducible. When Mallarmé read his work out to a thunderstruck Paul Valéry in 1897, he could not have communicated to the younger poet any true sense of the text's heterogenisation of page-space, or of its use of

¹⁹³ Apollinaire makes the crucial distinction himself: "Les figures uniques de Rabelais et de Panard sont inexpressives comme les autres dessins typographiques, tandis que les rapports qu'il y a entre les figures juxtaposées de mes poèmes sont tout autant expressifs que les mots qui les composent" (*Paris-Midi*, July 22, 1914). C.f. Mallarmé's hermetic observation in "Crise de vers": "Tout devient suspens, disposition fragmentaire avec alternance et vis-à-vis, concourant au rythme total, lequel serait le poème tu, aux blancs" (1985, p. 277).

¹⁹⁴ For an illuminating discussion of recordings of the poem by Nicole Ward Jouve and Yves Bonnefoy, see Abbot (2009).

the double-page spread, or of its actualisation of the up/down, left/right, and centre/periphery oppositions. Any attempt to do so would probably require a full-scale *dramatization* of the poem wherein stage-space would serve as a surrogate for page-space.

Many of the *calligrammes*, meanwhile, demand acknowledgement of, *and cooperation with*, the materiality of the book. “Visée”, for instance, requires a gradual rotation of the page, while “La Petite Auto”, in juxtaposing conventional portrait-oriented free verse with an ideogram in landscape, calls for the whole book to be turned ninety degrees and back again. No reader, whether first-time or otherwise, can fail to submit to these demands (although intellectualising them is, of course another matter): any successful reading—even in the purely physical sense of being able to read the words on the page—is predicated upon his ability to do so. The most sophisticated *calligrammes* permit no oral transfiguration whatever. A noteworthy example is “La Cravate et la Montre” (refer to Figure 8). Here, each of the twelve hermetic verbal formulas corresponding to the numbers around a watch face “demeurait énigmatique si l’ordre, mais *surtout si le lieu* de leur inscription au sein d’un espace que nous reconnaissons pour celui d’une montre ou d’une horloge ne nous fournissait un cadre de référence lexical *et spatial*” (emphasis mine).¹⁹⁵ The “spatial frame of reference” allows the poet to construct puns and allusions with maximum economy: by virtue of its occupying the “8” position, the phrase “l’infini redressé par un fou de philosophe” comes to connote the mathematical sign ∞ ; meanwhile, “et le vers dantesque luisant et cadavérique” has the capacity to refer to the hendecasyllabic line of the *Commedia* because it is in the “11” position. Any attempt to “temporalise” the text—to isolate it from its medium by, say, attempting to read it aloud—could only result in meaninglessness, because the spatio-textual syntax of the poem would instantly be destroyed. Apollinaire exploits the perceptual instability of the *calligramme*, requiring the reader to weave together the disparate strands of

¹⁹⁵ Longrée (1985), p. 106.

information gleaned from its verbal and visual dimensions; it is not sufficient merely to consider the lexical content of each textual fragment—the poem must also be understood holistically as a system of spatial relations.

In proprioceptive terms, the non-orality/aurality of *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* is offset by their flaunting of tangibility, of material presence; unable fully to vocalise or listen to the poems—activities with the capacity to heighten our awareness of body-in-space—we can instead derive a strong sense of embodiment from our haptic engagement with the book. The unavailability of one sensory modality is counterbalanced by the foregrounding of another.

Reframing the page

The analogy at the beginning of this chapter featured frames physical and institutional. The static frame of the car windscreen can be likened to both the marginal and paginal frames of a visually homogeneous prose text. A further parallel can be drawn between the institutional frames of on-road driving and reading from a predictably organised page: just as the experienced motorist obeys the laws of the road without having to think about them, so the traversal of page-space is an entirely automatised, transparent endeavour for the experienced reader:

The text block that print culture has accustomed us to is regular and uniform, at times almost aseptic [...], providing reading movements which are formally regular. We are used to seeing the text cramped between two margins, and we have grown used to that girdle in such a way that we associate the speed at which we read to this graphic regularity. In perceptual terms this regularity leads to a huge predictability, and therefore the reader is not confronted with surprising movements. The gaze follows a path, a pattern like that of tilled land, in a highly regular movement.¹⁹⁶

Walking, conversely, was described as a relatively “unframed” mode of transportation—and it is on relatively unframed modes of discourse that I shall focus for the remainder of this

¹⁹⁶ Maia (2006), p.385.

chapter. Why only “relatively”? Because nothing can be *completely* unframed: the frame, conceptually speaking at least, is more than a simple adjunct or supplement—in fact, it constitutes the very condition for the existence of the enframed. The limits of any object, process or notion must be perceptible if we are to delimit it from other objects, processes and notions; without periphery there can be no zones of focus.

Consider the ornamental frames favoured by the Académie des Beaux-Arts during the *fin-de-siècle*. These, as W.H. Bailey maintains, “often related more to the style of the room than that of the painting,”¹⁹⁷ and can be regarded as reifications of the rigid institutional frame of nineteenth-century academism, the formulaic precepts of which various turn-of-the-century art movements defied. The Académie physically imposed its ideology upon artists by severely constraining, if not actually determining, their choice of frame; the status of the work as a legitimate *objet d’art* depended on institutionally sanctioned framing. A mode of discourse, by the same token, must have *some* kind of frame to be defined as such. The frame may differ significantly from the one we have been conditioned to expect—it may have been transformed by the author for purposes of defamiliarisation, or somehow conflated with another—but it cannot be effaced absolutely. And it can be transformed only within the confines of a meta-frame. Take the preface to *Un Coup de dés*, for example; it is an attempt at legitimisation, a kind of (ironic) apologia on the part of Mallarmé, who is at pains to stress that his poem, despite its unorthodox layout, should not simply be considered an act of transgression:

Les “blancs” en effet, assument l’importance, frappent d’abord; la versification en exigea, comme silence alentour, ordinairement, au point qu’un morceau, lyrique ou de peu de pieds, occupe, au milieu, le tiers environ du feuillet: je ne transgresse cette mesure, seulement la disperse.

The boundary of tradition has not been exceeded, merely redrawn: the “dispersion” of the text, while a radical move indeed, does not remove it *entirely* from what has gone before. The

¹⁹⁷ Bailey (2002), p. 104.

institutional frame remains intact—it must, if the work is to remain at all comprehensible—but its unfamiliar configuration disorients the reader.

A frame consists of a set of institutionalised conventions which govern and direct understanding of a particular sphere of endeavour, process or discipline. Each text genre has its own frame, and each must fulfil a different series of expectations. The unexpected reconfiguration of a generic frame, or the conflation of previously distinct ones, can lead us to lose sight of the boundaries that allow us to engage with a particular mode of discourse. At this juncture, two major options arise: we can either promptly dismiss the work as mystification, hoax or frivolity, or attempt to reorient ourselves within the new frame. The process of reorientation, during which we must vacillate between various strategies of reading, is a creative one, and should be regarded as an aesthetic end-in-itself. *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* are sites of a particularly radical conflict of frames, commingling as they do verbal and visual semiotic systems, and not merely different literary modes. As Penny Florence points out,

[w]e do not value illustration, or transposition between verbal and visual signs, and still find visual material hard to integrate with serious written texts, even though we can accommodate words and images in film or in comics and advertising. This is partly because of hierarchies of form, and partly because the way we direct verbal consciousness separates it from other ways of knowing. It is also because we still prefer to read texts as discrete.¹⁹⁸

The taxonomy above differentiated between conventional prose and poetry on one hand, and *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* on the other, on the basis of degrees of spatialisation; it now remains to examine, in somewhat greater detail, Mallarmé's and Apollinaire's respective—and often highly divergent—treatments of page-space, and their flouting of, or conformity to, conventions of typography and paginal arrangement.

“In European printed language”, writes R.P. Draper, “it is an automatic assumption that letters forming words are separated by space from other letters forming words, that these

¹⁹⁸ Florence (1988), p. 110.

letters march across the page from left to right, and that the lines so formed are strictly parallel and progress downwards at regular intervals.”¹⁹⁹ The table overleaf elaborates on this statement, identifying six distinct features endemic to conventional texts: arrangement according to a rectilinear grid; left-to-right/top-to-bottom progression of print; linear presentation; uniform inter-line and inter-word spacing; use of margins as clearly defined negative spaces; and single-page autonomy. Together, these comprise the institutional frame of the printed page. If they are all consistently respected, as is the case in the vast majority of texts, the physical process of reading becomes at least partially automatised. (As already seen, the degree of automatisisation depends, amongst other factors, on the fixity or otherwise of the marginal frame and on the general level of visual heterogeneity.) True explorative reading—what I earlier referred to as a “stroll across page-space”—becomes a possibility only in texts which challenge institutionalised typographic norms, whether by activating previously inert visual elements or by rejecting a priori structural principles such as the rectilinear grid—and do so in an (initially) unpredictable manner. As the table shows, Mallarmé and Apollinaire differ vastly in their manipulation of the institutional frame. While Mallarmé, true to form, reconfigures it in large part from within, just as he had experimented “*within* standard metres”²⁰⁰ and verse-forms in the *Poésies*, Apollinaire works from without, discarding outright five of the six conventions listed in the table, and incorporating pictorial and non-linguistic elements into his work—a conflation of frames which, as Penny Florence rightly claims, can be difficult to acknowledge as “serious”.

The layout of *Un Coup de dés* abounds in strong diagonal lines (good examples may be found on double pages 3, 5 and 7) which encourage—almost compel—the first-time reader to

¹⁹⁹ Draper (1971), p. 337.

²⁰⁰ Pearson (1996), p. 236.

Adherence/non-adherence to various institutionalised conventions of paginal configuration in <i>Un Coup de dés</i> and the <i>calligrammes</i> .		
	<i>Un Coup de dés</i>	<i>Calligrammes</i>
Is the text governed by a rectilinear grid?	Yes. Individual lines of text are invariably placed at right angles to the gutters. However, the predominance of <i>composite</i> diagonal lines undermines the hegemony of the grid from within.	Almost never. Most <i>calligrammes</i> reject orthogonality, often even at the level of individual glyphs. Text may be slanting, undulating or circular. <i>Notable examples:</i> “La petite auto”, “La colombe poignardée et le jet d’eau”.
Is the text physically linear?	Yes/No. Although the notions of “beginning” and “end” are not inapplicable to <i>Un Coup de dés</i> , it is best described as <i>multi-cursal</i> . Traversed page by page, in the conventional manner, it can then be reread according to its typographical hierarchy (e.g. bold primary axioms first, italicised conditionals second, fragmentary qualifications last).	No. The <i>calligrammes</i> may be termed <i>non-linear</i> because: 1. They generally consist of two or more non-hierarchised ideograms, with little or no indication of which order they should be considered in. 2. The arrangement of words within individual ideographs rarely suggests any clear sequence of reading. Text may extend in several directions simultaneously.
Is the text read left → right / top → bottom?	Yes.	No. Frequently forced to read from right to left and from bottom to top. <i>Notable examples:</i> “La mandoline l’œillet et le bambou”, “Cœur couronne et miroir”, “Du coton dans les oreilles”.
Is the text enclosed by negative space?	No. In terms of layout, this is the greatest point of convergence between <i>Un Coup de dés</i> and the <i>calligrammes</i> . The distinction between positive space (text) and negative space (margins) is collapsed, eliminating the organising apparatus of the marginal frame.	
Is inter-line and inter-word spacing uniform?	No , holistically speaking. (Significantly, however, inter-word spacing is uniform within individual lines.)	No. Heterogeneous spacing is constitutive of the very notion of a <i>calligramme</i> .
Is the single page an autonomous unit?	No. The double-page spread must be regarded as the primary spatio-syntactic unit of the work.	Generally N/A. The <i>calligrammes</i> are almost always confined to a single page. (“Voyage” and “Lettre-Océan” are two noteworthy exceptions.)

take an asyntactic route through the text, so eye-catching is their left-to-right descent. The recto of double page 7 (Figure 11) features a particularly striking example: “de vertige /

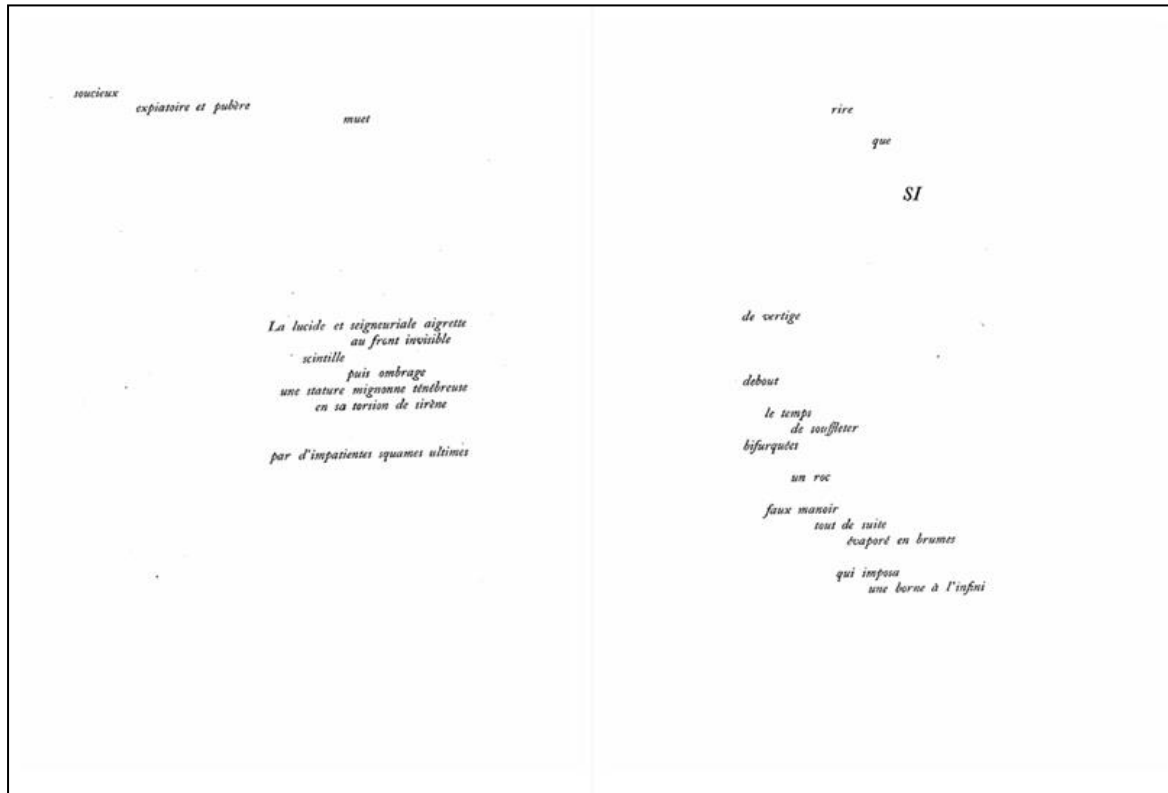


Figure 11: *Un Coup de dés*, double page 7.

debout / le temps / de souffleter / bifurquées / un roc / faux manoir / tout de suite / évaporé en brumes / qui imposa une borne à l'infini". What makes it doubly disorienting is that whereas its first half (up to *bifurquées*) should be integrated into the square of text ("La lucide... squames ultimes") on the verso, the second half truly *does* stand alone. As Virginia A. La Charité maintains, "[s]pace destroys reading decisions by pointing to multiple reading directions"²⁰¹: the layout and syntax of *Un Coup de dés* are mutually antagonistic. Significantly, these diagonals do not violate the orthogonality of the typographic grid—they are *composite* structures formed by strategic textual spacing; *individual* lines of text are never placed at anything other than right angles to the gutters. In contrast, very few of the

²⁰¹ La Charité (1987), p. 105.

calligrammes are mappable onto an orthogonal framework (“Il pleut” and “Aussi bien que les cigales” are two of the exceptions): text can be positioned at any angle, and is not necessarily

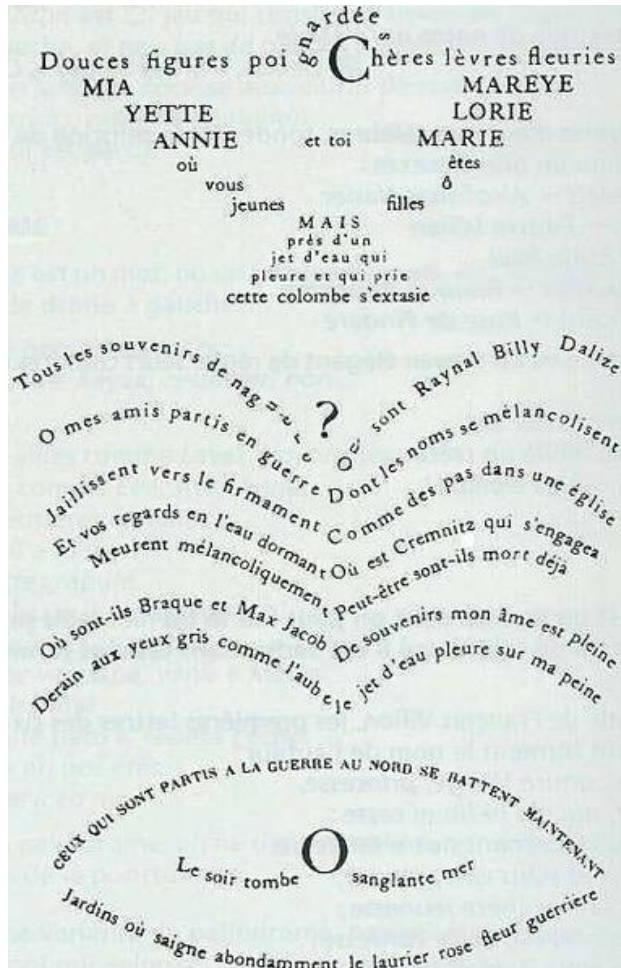


Figure 12: “La colombe poignardée et le jet d’eau”.

of the grid—and may well begin their perusal of the poem from the middle of the page, thereby ignoring the top-to-bottom convention of reading.

What Espen Aarseth terms the “explorative user function” is a fundamental feature of both *Un Coup de dés* and all but the most rudimentary of the *calligrammes*, but it is made available in very different ways. Once again, Mallarmé deautomatises our perception of existing forms and practices—forces us to consider them as if for the first time—without altogether doing away with them. *Un Coup de dés* does not involve reading upwards, or from right to left. Nor, having as it does a definitive beginning (the single page) and end (double page 10), can it be classified as non-linear. There is no reason for first-time readers not to move through the text

arranged in straight lines. Even individual glyphs can be set askew to one other so as to intensify the desired effect (heterogeneous *kerning*), as in “La colombe poignardée et le jet d’eau” (Figure 12). This extreme heterogeneity appeals to the eye, encouraging it to rove freely across the page, untroubled by syntax, and to defer the process of verbal parsing. Newcomers to “La colombe poignardée et le jet d’eau” are likely to be immediately drawn to the sinuous curves of the fountain ideogram—curved text is visually alluring precisely because it defies the established hegemony

in the usual fashion—consecutively, page by page. Only subsequently will they come to the realisation that typographically differentiated fragments can be read not only in the context of their immediate spatio-syntactic surroundings (for instance, “*C’ÉTAIT / issu stellaire*” or “*UNE CONSTELLATION / froide d’oubli et de désuétude*”), but also pieced together to form new sequences: “*SI / C’ÉTAIT / LE NOMBRE / CE SERAIT / LE HASARD*” (double pages 7-8), “*RIEN / N’AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU / EXCEPTÉ / PEUT-ÊTRE / UNE CONSTELLATION*” (9-10), and even less obviously, “*SOIT / LE MAÎTRE / EXISTÂT-IL / COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL / ILLUMINÂT-IL*” (2,3,8)—which might then be linked via “*LE HASARD*” to “*RIEN / N’AURA EU LIEU...*”. I noticed this last possibility only after numerous rereadings; the full gamut of reading itineraries generated by the poem’s multi-cursal configuration becomes apparent very gradually.

Conversely, the non-linearity of the *calligrammes* is immediately manifest, as is the frame conflict. Just like painting, calligrammatic poetry “imposes no point of entry and offers no consistent order of reading”²⁰². Readers must contend straight away with branching structures and unpredictable variations in text direction (this is especially true of the handwritten *calligrammes*—not unexpectedly so, since these are unhampered by typographic limitations). More importantly, however, they must also grapple with the tension generated by the clash of textual and iconic elements—a tension which further necessitates an explorative approach to the poems. Consider the horse *calligramme* (Figure 13) in the Survage-Lagut catalogue, and “*Quadrature du cercle*” (Figure 14), from *Poèmes retrouvés*. The text proceeds horizontally across the stallion’s forelegs in the former and across the square table’s top and legs in the latter, violating the boundaries of the figures and thereby compromising their integrity. The table ideogram is a site of particular tension; the strong suggestion of three-dimensionality on

²⁰² Shattuck (1986), p. 296.

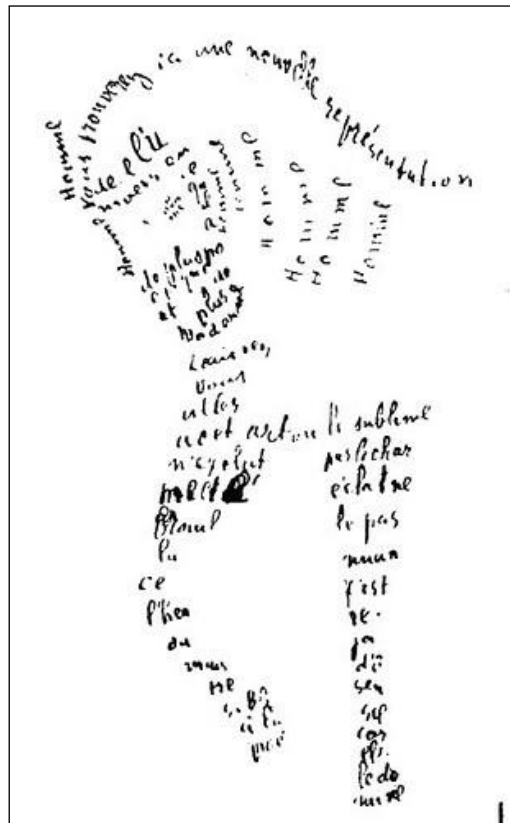


Figure 13: Apollinaire, untitled calligramme

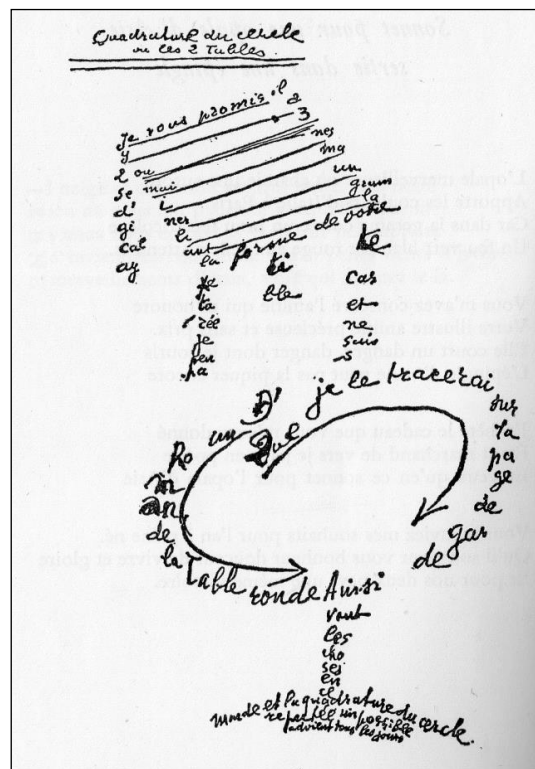


Figure 14: Apollinaire, "Quadrature du cercle ou les 2 tables".

the iconic plane is undercut by the arrangement of the text, which completely flattens the composition. Background and foreground collapse into one another, coexisting within single words (thus, “pe / ti / te” compresses the space between the rear and front legs of the table). Garden paths aplenty await the first-time reader: there is initially no way of telling whether to proceed according to literary conventions (top-to-bottom, right-to-left), or pictorial ones (which, in both of these cases, would entail treating the legs in isolation as distinct elements—and therefore reading vertically rather than horizontally).

Though highly dissimilar in the respects just described, *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* are united in their rejection of any frame of negative space that ordinarily serves to delineate a block of print. “The white spaces that surround the ordinary poem,” writes Mary Lewis Shaw of the former,

are here not confined to the perimeters of the text but, rather, assimilated within it, producing varying expanses of emptiness between the fragments of verse. Another arresting feature, which is related to the poem’s assimilation of its white spaces, is the “éclatement”, or explosion, of any horizontal or vertical margins that ordinarily confine a text.²⁰³

The variation in size or extent of these expanses must be regarded as a functional feature of the poem’s spatio-textual syntax: clearly, the small gap between “*au velours chiffonné par un esclaffement sombre*” and “*cette blancheur rigide*” (double page 6) is not equivalent to the sizable stretch of white separating “ILLUMINÂT-IL” and “LE HASARD” (double page 8), while the bare single page which cleaves “UN COUP DE DÉS” from “JAMAIS” is in a category of its own. This gradation of spaces closely corresponds to the typographical hierarchy by means of which the text distinguishes between self-evident certainties, conditional propositions and hypotheses—the bigger and bolder the typeface, the more extensive the space that surrounds it. Within individual lines of text, however, inter-word spacing is absolutely uniform, and inter-line spacing tends to be largely consistent within individual word-clusters—neither of which is true of most *calligrammes*. Once again, the

²⁰³ Shaw (1993), p. 176.

deep-rooted difference of approach is clear to see: though both authors heterogenise space and, to paraphrase Mary Lewis Shaw, assimilate it into the text, Apollinaire, operating from beyond the institutional frame, does this at the lowest possible level—even inter-letter spacing is subject to variation in some *calligrammes*—whereas Mallarmé does it holistically, on the level of the page, thereby reconfiguring the frame from within.

Given Apollinaire's advocacy of *simultanisme*, “the aspiration of [which] is to grasp the moment in its total significance, or, more ambitiously, to manufacture a moment which surpasses our usual perception of time and space,”²⁰⁴ it is hardly surprising that all but two of the *calligrammes* (to my knowledge at least) are printed on a single page—the better to facilitate instantaneous apprehension. “Voyage” (Figure 3), however, does make use of the double-page spread, while the two parts of “Lettre-Océan” (see Figure 23, p. 186) were originally printed side by side in the *Soirées de Paris* review²⁰⁵ (though not, unfortunately, in many subsequent editions—which is symptomatic of the comparative lack of respect accorded to the *calligrammes* in particular and to paginal configuration in general). But while both poems—and especially “Voyage”—go some way to problematising the conventional notion of the single page as a self-contained unit, this in itself does not particularly increase their explorativity. Recto and verso are fully sundered from one another in “Lettre-Océan”; though the same cannot be said of “Voyage”, the horizontal bar of text in the middle of the spread leaves the reader in little or no doubt as to how to proceed—a far cry from the disorientating diagonals of *Un Coup de dés*. Mallarmé, for his part, denies the single page any autonomy. The caesura-like gutters,²⁰⁶ as noted above, constitute a tangible impediment to the flow of the text, inducing us to acknowledge them as fundamental elements of its composition, much as pauses and silences must be deemed constituent rather than incidental components of a piece

²⁰⁴ Shattuck (1961), p. 345.

²⁰⁵ See Mathews (1987), p. 163.

²⁰⁶ See Pearson (1996), p. 249

of music. Additionally, no one page, whether single or double, resembles any other, each bearing what Wallace Fowlie evocatively terms “its own particularised graphic physiognomy.”²⁰⁷ Space is projected to the forefront of our attention by virtue of its very heterogeneity; both the extent and configuration of the white blanks differ each time, forcing us to adopt a fresh reading strategy on the fly, with every turn of the page. It is by compelling us to apprehend the spread in its totality, blanks included, that Mallarmé succeeds in thwarting the “*va-et-vient successif incessant du regard*”²⁰⁸: the first-time reader must decide time and time again whether to read across or down, and whether to remain on the verso or to make the leap across to the recto. We can’t look at the stars without acquainting ourselves with the gutter.

²⁰⁷ Fowlie (1953), p. 219.

²⁰⁸ Mallarmé (1945), p. 380

Interlude: Between Page and Stage I

Un Coup de dés and the *calligrammes*, as I have stressed, compel us to acknowledge the corporeality of reading by “thickening” the interface between reader and book, by rendering newly perceptible the very processes of (embodied) readerly perception. Aspects of the bibliographic code²⁰⁹—together with the codex form itself—have been fully naturalised over the course of several centuries due to the progressive mechanisation of print, rendering these processes virtually invisible. This, as we saw in Chapter 1, has led to the metaphorisation of the printed page as a “transparent window”—a metaphorisation that endures in some contemporary scholarship. “Reading presents almost no phenomenal distraction,” proclaims theatre phenomenologist Bert States. “It is because words on the page have no resemblance to the things they conjure,” he adds, “that reading is such a transparent process. In reading, the eye is an anesthetized organ, little more than a window to the waiting consciousness on which a world of signification imprints itself with only the barest trace of the signifiers that carry it.”²¹⁰ In certain respects, print culture and Cartesianism go hand in hand—both contribute to the interiorisation of subjectivity in the early modern period and beyond²¹¹—and States’ assertion is imprinted with not so bare a trace of mind-body dualism. The reader’s eyes, as I have insisted, are far from anaesthetised; the singular Eye, numb and motionless, is a naturalised abstraction, as is the idea of a consciousness “waiting” to receive sensory information (the tacit assumption being that perception and cognition, mind and body, are somehow separable).²¹²

²⁰⁹ The term “bibliographic code” refers to “the symbolic and signifying dimensions of the physical medium through which (or rather *as* which) the linguistic text is embodied” (McGann [1991], p. 56); it encompasses “features of page layout, book design, ink and paper, and typeface as well as broader issues [...] like publisher, print run, price, or audience” (Bornstein [2001], p. 7).

²¹⁰ States (1985), p. 28-9.

²¹¹ See Wilson (1990) for a discussion of the interrelationship between subjectivity and the rise of private reading—facilitated, as we have seen, by the introduction of printing.

²¹² There is no “inner spectator” in the brain ready to “receive” and “review” the flow of sensory input; see Dennett (1993), pp. 101-11.

States' comments are remarkably reminiscent of Symbolist theorisations of reading, which must be understood in the context of their anti-performance bias. Jean Moréas, Téodor de Wyzewa and others regard physical performance *in general* with considerable suspicion, and frequently go as far as to advocate reading drama as a theoretically satisfactory alternative to viewing it. "Symbolism," writes Paul Monaghan, "was the inheritor of a fundamentally anti-theatrical, anti-body and neo-Platonic vector in Western philosophy,"²¹³ and it is the movement's neo-Platonic idealism, founded on the opposition between *corps* on the one hand, and *Esprit*, *Symbole* and, above all, *Idée*, on the other, that gives rise to the injunction against performance. The Idea is eternal, unchanging and universal, the human body just the opposite: ephemeral, chaotic and local, an open system vulnerable to the influence of external forces, it cannot be fully controlled onstage. Performance entails *instantiation* (concretisation), and therefore destroys poetry's "indirectness, suggestiveness, and purity," reversing "the poet's process of abstraction and purification."²¹⁴ The performer's body pollutes with its very particularity; in consequence of its irreducible material *opacity*, moreover, it cannot but interfere with the transmission of the Idea. Wyzewa, claiming that "l'évolution artistique" tends towards "l'atténuation progressive [de tout intermédiaire] entre l'âme de l'artiste créant la vie et de ceux qui la recréent," argues for the relative transparency of the written word, superior by far to the human body as conduit for the "soul of the artist". "[L]es lettres [...], vite négligées pour leur valeurs linéaires, évoqu[ent], sans la gêner, une vie, toute différente, de notions"—and therefore "un drame, lu, paraîtra aux âmes délicates, plus vivant que le même joué, sur un théâtre, par des acteurs vivants."²¹⁵

Clearly, then, Wyzewa (much like States) dismisses the written word's materiality—its density of mediation—as virtually negligible, and wholly disregards the bodiliness of

²¹³ Monaghan (2008), p.132.

²¹⁴ McGuinness (2000), p. 96.

²¹⁵ Wyzewa (1886), p. 104.

reading; this stance, I would suggest, is symptomatic of the pervasive effects of print culture, touched on in Chapter 1. The decidedly non-transparent physicality of reading in the pre-print era is highlighted by Nathan Mitchell:

the page was basically a performance piece [...], meant to be mouthed, to be read aloud, its meanings *tasted* by bodily action. [...] [R]eading [was] emphatically not a retreat to “a world within” (as we often think of it today). On the contrary, reading meant entering “the world *outside*”, full bore, full body. Reading was not mere mental activity aroused by the eye moving across a page; rather, it was loud motor activity, a fact of flesh and saliva, an unavoidably social and communal enterprise.²¹⁶

Print, in contrast, produced a solitary, silent, and private mode of reading—precisely the mode advocated by the Symbolists as an alternative to spectatorship; its “mechanical repeatability,” meanwhile, “transformed the text from a performing object to a transparent window into the writer’s mental interior.”²¹⁷ It appeared to *disembody the writer* (the printed page, unlike the handwritten, bearing no palpable trace of manual exertions²¹⁸), *the reader* (flesh and saliva seemingly circumvented), *and the text itself* (its meaning now presumed to be “dislodgable from its various material circumstances”²¹⁹). “Appeared”, of course, is the operative word here: we must take care not to lapse into dualism. The material intermediary never disappears; it merely becomes imperceptible. In part, perhaps, because of his neo-Platonist leanings, Wyzewa overlooks the materiality of the book, overlooks, too, the reader’s embodiment and situatedness, as factors contributory to the generation of meaning. The Symbolists’ antipathy to performance is grounded in the desire to eliminate the accidental, to exert total control over the channel of transmission between sender (“the soul of the artist”) and receiver (the reader). As an empirical (rather than metaphysical or mystical) process,

²¹⁶ Mitchell (1999), pp. 171-2.

²¹⁷ McCorkle (2012), p. 76-7.

²¹⁸ “Because writing by hand assumes the speed of the body,” asserts Susan Stewart (1984), “it is linked to the personal. [...] To sign your name, your mark, is to leave a track like any other track of the body; handwriting is to space what the voice is to time” (p. 14). Apollinaire’s handwritten *calligrammes*, like other manuscripts by those now dead, have a poignancy that is lacking in their printed counterparts: they evoke a body’s presence even as they remind us of its no-more-ness.

²¹⁹ Nyberg (2009), p. 102.

however, reading is fundamentally more uncontrollable than spectatorship for at least three reasons.

First of all, *tnesis*, discussed at length in the last chapter, has no spectatorial equivalent. The reader skips, skims, backtracks at will; the cadence of each individual reading is not within the author's power to dictate. To be a spectator, conversely, is to submit absolutely to the rhythm of the performance, to relinquish oneself to a space-time over which one wields no dominion. Secondly, the reader may "jump out of the system" (close the book) whenever necessary or desirable, but the spectator enjoys no such freedom: quitting the auditorium is straightforward only during the interval. Admittedly, doing so during the performance itself does not constitute a particularly grave violation of the institutional frame, but it is a violation nonetheless. To leave mid-performance is not merely to "snub" the players and disturb other audience members (issues of "social propriety"²²⁰): it is also to transgress the ritualistic covenant on which theatre is founded. Granted, playgoing is a voluntary activity, and as such can be distinguished from true ritual (I shall return to this question below in a discussion of the terms *liminal* and *liminoid*, as used by the anthropologist Victor Turner), yet, once present in the auditorium, the playgoer experiences considerable institutionalised pressure to remain in attendance until the very end. The house lights are dimmed, the foyer doors closed; the audience is *locked into place*, and cannot look away without undermining the edifice of the drama, to which it is integral. Thirdly, there are massive discrepancies between what might be called the "ecologies" of reading and spectatorship. We cannot disregard the fact that the reader's *situation* is, once again, beyond the author's dictates. Reading may take place in a variety of different settings. The book is at most a micro-environment. Its influence on the reader's overall psycho-physical state is inevitably curtailed by *noise*, in the technical sense of the term—the total effect of any number of extraneous (accidental) sensory stimuli. As

²²⁰ See Fahy & King (2003) p. 1.

Proust's Narrator maintains in *Le Temps retrouvé*, "[t]el nom lu dans un livre autrefois, contient entre ses syllabes le vent rapide et le soleil brillant qu'il faisait quand nous le lisions."²²¹ In contrast, the situation of the spectator can potentially be regulated down to the tiniest detail; spectatorship is not only less vulnerable to happenstance than reading, but also, I would argue, experientially purer. Of course, noise is no less inevitable onstage due to the "material concretization of signs."²²² Performers' bodies, as the Symbolists emphasise, are not easily controllable, "subsist[ing] as a kind of uncleansable residue in the process of signification"²²³; nor can the force of their personalities be absolutely contained. Nonetheless, as we shall see below, it is possible to reduce to a minimum the effect of a performer's individuated presence, and to eliminate other types of noise, like the environmental interferences alluded to by Proust's Narrator, almost entirely.

Questions of transparency and opacity—both semiotic and somatic—are central to the following chapter. The carefully regulated, hermetic environment of the theatre, sealed off from the disorder and unpredictability of the world at large, can vastly amplify the intensity of embodied experience, transforming the healthy spectator's usually "translucent" body into a painfully opaque encumbrance. Yet the physical proximity to the stage of a flesh-and-blood audience is seldom fully exploited. This is true of nineteenth-century bourgeois entertainments and farces, true of the formulaic *pièces bien faites*, true, too, of the "théâtre dialogué"²²⁴ or "psychologique" so vehemently despised by Artaud. Escapist *divertissements* serve to diminish the spectator's bodily awareness—but so do predominantly cerebral (intellectualist) dramas, privileging as they do the conceptual over the experiential, the signified over the signifier. With their disquieting focus on the body and the sensorium, the

²²¹ Proust (1990), p. 191.

²²² Rzhevsky (2009), p. 10.

²²³ McGuinness (2000), p. 113

²²⁴ Artaud (2001), p. 55.

dramas of Jarry and Maeterlinck stand in stark contrast to the theatre of ideas and the theatre of diversion, traditions which, though antithetical in most respects, both serve to transport their audiences out of themselves and away from their surroundings, to leave them with a diminished awareness of self and situation. By “thickening” the signifier—or, otherwise put, by making it impossible to look directly *through* the performance and into a rarefied conceptual realm—Jarry and Maeterlinck imprison the audience in the domain of the experiential, fully exploiting its physical confinement and powerlessness in the face of a situation it can influence only by violating the institutional frame (walking out, for instance, or heckling: precisely what happened at the premiere of *Ubu roi* in 1896).

It is to Ubu, and to the effigies and quasi-marionettes that populate Maeterlinck’s one-acts, that I now turn my attention.

3 Maeterlinck, Jarry and the Staging of Liminality

As we have seen, the Symbolists' desire for semiotic transparency, coupled with their neo-Platonic dread of somatic "impurities", is at the heart of their aversion to the physical stage. Maeterlinck, for his part, shares the Symbolists' antipathy towards the uncontainable *hasard* generated by the onstage body, as evidenced by the following unequivocal appraisal in an early essay entitled "Menus propos: le théâtre" (1890):

La scène est le lieu où meurent les chefs-d'œuvre, parce que la représentation d'un chef-d'œuvre à l'aide d'éléments *accidentels* et *humains* est antinomique. Tout chef-d'œuvre est un symbole et le symbole ne supporte jamais la présence active d'un homme. [...] [L]'accident [...] détruit le symbole, et le chef-d'œuvre, en son essence, est mort durant le temps de cette présence et de ses traces.²²⁵

Jarry, too, maintains that flesh-and-blood contingency must be banished from the theatre, describing Hamlet in his "Réponses à un questionnaire sur l'art dramatique" (1896) as "une abstraction qui marche,"²²⁶ a pure symbol-on-legs that eschews the accident of personality. In "De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre" (1896), meanwhile, he refers to décor and actors as "objets notoirement horribles et incompréhensibles [...] qui encombrent la scène sans utilité,"²²⁷ insisting, much like the Symbolists, on the necessity of ABSTRACTION, liberator of the imagination:

Or il serait très dangereux que le poète à un public d'artistes imposât le décor tel qu'il le peindrait lui-même. Dans une œuvre écrite, qui sait lire y voit le sens caché exprès pour lui [...] Et il est juste que chaque spectateur voie la scène dans le décor qui convient à sa vision de la scène. [...] Nous ne reviendrons pas sur la question entendue une fois pour toutes de la stupidité de la trompe-l'œil. Mentionnons que ledit trompe-l'œil fait illusion à celui qui voit grossièrement, et scandalise qui voit d'une façon intelligente et éligente la nature [...].²²⁸

²²⁵ Maeterlinck (1999a), p. 461

²²⁶ Jarry (1972), p. 412.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 406

²²⁸ Jarry (1972), p. 406. Jarry's stance particularly recalls that of Pierre Quillard, who writes in an article entitled "De l'inutilité absolue de la mise en scène exacte" (1891) that "[l]a parole crée le décor comme le reste [...]. Le décor doit être une simple fiction ornementale qui complète l'illusion par des analogies de couleurs et de le lignes avec le drame. Le plus souvent il suffira d'un fond et de draperies mobiles. [...] Le théâtre sera ce qu'il doit être, un prétexte au rêve" (quoted in Robichez [1957], p. 188).

Both Jarry and Maeterlinck, however, deviate from “orthodox” Symbolist theories of theatre in several fundamental respects. “Symbolist poets were so obsessed with writing that they forgot to be playwrights,”²²⁹ quips Jeanyves Guérin; a tendentious proclamation, no doubt, but one that cuts to the very heart of the matter. There is a crucial distinction to be made between Wyzewa’s hostility to *performance per se*, on account of its irreducible materiality, and Maeterlinck’s resolution to regulate intonation, gestures and bearing, to *rein in the performing body* by veiling it in “un grand nombre de conventions synthétiques.”²³⁰ Maeterlinck may insist that it is necessary to “écarter entièrement l’être vivant de la scène”²³¹ but this certainly cannot be equated with enmity towards the *scène* itself. As can be gleaned from the closing remarks of “Menus propos: le théâtre”, which I shall examine below, he is well aware of the *affective* power of performance, impossible to emulate in reading. The textocentric stance is equally alien to Jarry, who clearly recognises the value of the material dimension of the stage, as demonstrated by the following statement from “Questions de théâtre” (January 1897, *Revue Blanche*): “Je pense qu’il n’y a aucune espèce de raison d’écrire une œuvre sous forme dramatique, à moins que l’on ait eu la vision d’un personnage qu’il soit plus commode de lâcher sur une scène que d’analyser dans un livre.”²³² Predicated on brute physicality, privileging viscera over intellect, the aesthetics of *Ubu roi* is incongruous with orthodox Symbolist doctrine.²³³ Inundated by a torrent of raw sensory data, the play’s first audience felt

²²⁹ Guérin (1985), p. 29.

²³⁰ Maeterlinck (1999a), 461.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 462. This, it must be noted, is a highly ambiguous statement. Maeterlinck is almost certainly not calling for the expulsion from the stage of human performers *as such*, but rather for the negation of their “présence active”, their personality and egoism. See below, p. 109.

²³² Jarry (1972), p. 289.

²³³ Rebecca Schneider (1997) goes as far as to call the play “[an] affront to Symbolism”—a “spoof [of] Symbolist attempts to transcend corporeal detail and invoke a psychic ideal” (p. 139). If *Ubu roi* is anti-symbolist, however, *César-Antechrist*, an unstageable “drama of the book”, can be seen as *hyper-symbolist*; see Chapter 5, pp. 200-205.

revulsion such that the text alone could never have generated (“Malgré l’heure tardive, je viens de prendre une douche,” reported a critic after the inaugural performance²³⁴).

Ubu roi, *Les Aveugles*, *L’Intruse* and *Intérieur*, populated as they are by effigies and quasi-marionettes—uncanny schematisations or distortions of the human form—can force their incarcerated audiences into an all too painfully intense recognition of their own embodiment. It is at this juncture that the notion of liminality enters the scene. Broadly definable as the experience or condition of the betwixt and between (L. *limen*, “threshold”), liminality was explored in passing by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in *Les rites de passage* (1909) and then, much more extensively theorised, came to form the crux of Victor Turner’s thinking in *The Ritual Process* (1969), *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) and *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987). Involving border crossings, blurred boundaries and various kinds of frame transformation, it can be applied to socio-cultural processes (such as theatre-going), physical and conceptual spaces, individual human subjects, and the body itself. In Chapter 2, I was concerned primarily with various aspects of visual space—the marginal frame, figure-ground manipulations, and so forth. *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes* were described as “spatialised” because they are dispersed across the page, with ground (blanks) invading figure (print). My objective here is to develop a considerably more abstract, non-visual conception of spatiality. Consider somatic experience, for instance. The shifting of the figure-ground relationship, investigated in Chapter 2, remains of critical relevance in this context, but is no longer fundamentally visual in character. Under normal conditions, the (healthy) body exists at the fringes of awareness as a “neutral background”²³⁵: it is a translucent, if not entirely transparent, instrument for existing in, and interacting with, the world at large. At times of

²³⁴ Quoted in Beaumont (1984), p. 101.

²³⁵ Leder (1990), p. 25.

“sensory intensification”²³⁶ (such as pain), however, the body forces itself to the forefront of our attention, becoming partially opaque and therefore alien and “othered”. We both are and have bodies. The body is simultaneously subject and object, a ground *for* consciousness and a figure *in* consciousness, yet it is only seldom that the ever-shifting boundary between figure and ground, the “frame of embodiment”, becomes the focus of attention. These moments of self-estrangement are grounded in the experience of betweenness, in the (oft-unwelcome) realisation that we inhabit the fissure between subject and object. As shall be shown, the bodies of various characters in the plays under discussion—that of the dead priest in *Les Aveugles*, for example, as well as Ubu’s, amongst others—call attention to that very fissure, and are, in that sense, liminal. The physical proximity of these in-between creatures can, in a performance of sufficient intensity, affect spectators on a *visceral* level, eliciting sensations of sickly disconcertion, slow-churning dread or even outright revulsion or disgust.

Although the present discussion is not, as a whole, anthropologically inclined, I do not consider it legitimate to explore liminality without reference to the notion’s anthropological roots, especially given Turner’s pervading interest in theatre and performance. Consequently, I shall employ a specifically Turnerian framework in my analysis of Maeterlinck’s *Les Aveugles* before moving on to a more general discussion of borders and boundaries (delimiters) in the other plays, focusing particularly on the manipulation of what I call the “diegetic frame” (a set of semiotic strategies—visual, aural and verbal—for the delineation of dramatic space). The plays’ settings foreground betweenness no less than their characters—a direct riposte to naturalism’s insistence on the specificity of locale and detail. Naturalist drama is predicated on the principle of *hic-et-nunc*, that is, on the clear-cut oppositions of here/there and now/then. The “here-and-now” of a particular setting is communicated by various semiotic cues deployed in consistent fashion, and this consistency gives rise to a clearly defined diegetic frame. A frame

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

with razor-sharp edges is a naturalised and inconspicuous, if not invisible, means of directing attention, and it is precisely this *naturalisation of the frame* that Maeterlinck and Jarry seek to disrupt. The “patchwork diegesis” of *Ubu roi*, constructed around a series of frame conflicts (as defined in Chapter 2), is a case in point.

First, however, I would like to consider a subset of liminality in which the manipulation of boundaries plays a particularly critical role.

Uncannies of body and sensorium

The uncanny, according to Nicholas Royle, “entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense,” and “is often to be associated with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers.”²³⁷ Before embarking upon an analysis of the plays in question, I must define and illustrate the concept, which, as Royle suggests, is anchored in the experience of betweenness. Appropriately enough, I shall base my discussion on sources both familiar (Freud) and alien (Mori) in the context of literary discourse.

“The uncanny,” Freud asserts in his famous essay of the same name (1919), “is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”²³⁸; uncanny events or circumstances invariably involve defamiliarisation—the laying bare of the familiar as partially alien. *Partially* is the operative word here; total estrangement would extinguish the effect. In order to generate experience of the uncanny, the familiar must be contaminated by the alien without being obliterated as a result: the “husk” of the familiar must endure.²³⁹ Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of semantic satiation, wherein the constant repetition of a word or phrase causes it to be temporarily bleached of meaning. When vocalised

²³⁷ Royle (2003), p.vii.

²³⁸ Freud (2003), p.124.

²³⁹ The neologism *merdre* can itself be considered an uncanny device. The infix *r* represents the intrusion of an alien body into a more-than-familiar obscenity, which, “au lieu d’en diminuer la grossièreté, la renforce” (Damerval [1984], p. 89).

over and over, even the most common words—or rather, *especially* the most common words—are reduced virtually to pure sound, almost as if they were being heard for the first time. This is frequently perceived as “funny” or “unsettling” (whence but a short step to “uncanny”). Why? Precisely because the experience is being played out within *the arena of the familiar*: the word’s constituent phonemes are still recognisable, even if the word itself is not. Freud does not, of course, refer to semantic satiation as such in his essay. He does, however, dwell at length on “[t]he constant recurrence of the same thing”, which, alongside “the false semblance of death,” “silence, solitude and darkness,”²⁴⁰ and sundry other phenomena, is shown to generate uncanny effects of varying intensity. But the ultimate locus of the *Unheimliche* is the human body—the most familiar “Heim” of all, and the most fundamental.²⁴¹ To feel the bodily uncanny is to feel “a foreign body within oneself” or, put more strongly, to “experience [...] oneself as a foreign body.”²⁴² By way of illustration: waking up with a dead arm, ponderous, strangely unresponsive, you find yourself confronted by the sheer bulk of the thing—does it *always* weigh this much?—and by your unnerving failure to feel it “from the inside” or even, in extreme cases, to move it. The appendage, though still manifestly part of you, has metamorphosed into an object, into an alien mass attached to your torso. You have become, if only fleetingly, a stranger to your own body.

The Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori’s *uncanny valley* theory is somewhat indebted to Freud, but concerned not so much with identifying the deep-rooted psychological causes of the uncanny as with the practical question of constructing robots of sufficiently familiar appearance to be appealing for the human user, yet not anthropomorphised to a degree that would result in a negative emotional response (represented by the trough or “valley” in the

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

²⁴¹ This is not, of course, to imply, as dualists might, that we are straightforwardly “housed” in our own bodies.

²⁴² Royle (2003), p. 2.

graph in Figure 15). That the uncanny is a species of betweenness is clearly visualised here. Unlike industrial robots and healthy individuals, humanoid robots, corpses, zombies and prostheses resist binarisms such as human/non-human and animate/inanimate, and it is their very neither-here-nor-there-ness which is found to be unsettling or repulsive. As the graph shows, the uncanniest visual stimulus of all is not an anthropomorphic simulacrum: it is *the human body itself* when in an unfamiliar or aberrant state, such as dead or zombified. The uncanny is felt most acutely not when non-human or inanimate forms are anthropomorphised,

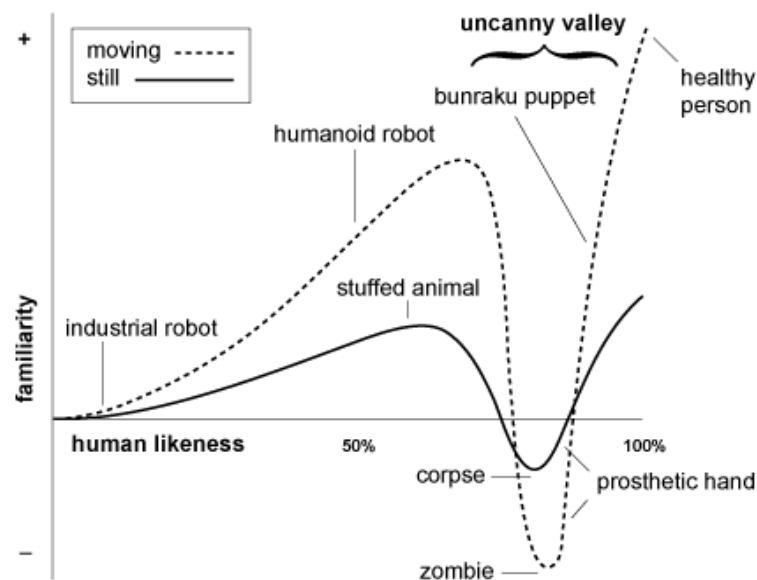


Figure 15: A simplified version of the figure in Mori's original article (*Energy* 7, 1970), from MacDorman and Minato (2005).

but when the reverse takes place—namely, when the human form is distorted, deindividuated or reduced in some way to the status of object. Bunraku puppets, though not without the potential to unsettle—especially when viewed from afar in the semi-darkness of a theatre²⁴³—do not quite fall into the uncanny valley, and could clearly never elicit the same level of revulsion and horror as a corpse or somehow deformed body. Mori therefore recommends

²⁴³ The unsettling effect may also be intensified by the fact that, unlike their Western counterparts, the puppeteers in traditional Japanese puppet theatre are always in plain view. Bunraku puppets are not simply “stand-ins” for humans, and the “interaction” (for want of a better word) between puppet and operator can be uncanny in itself. See Kenneth Gross's *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011), pp. 70-1 and 117-8, for a lyrical, idiosyncratic account of this.

“nonhumanlike design” so as to “produce a comforting familiarity,”²⁴⁴ a principle adhered to, by and large, in fields such as commercial digital animation (think of the stylised or “cartoonish” human characters in Pixar’s *WALL-E* and *Up*). Audience alienation is, of course, strictly undesirable in the context of mainstream cinema—but the same certainly cannot be said of the theatre of Jarry and Maeterlinck, for both of whom it represents a particular aesthetic end.

Ubu roi, writes Rae Beth Gordon, was “intended to provoke [...] a profound and disturbing psychological and physiological recognition of one’s own essence”.²⁴⁵ Jarry, holding the proverbial mirror up to nature, goads the “public stupéfait” by bringing it face to face with humanity’s “double ignoble”²⁴⁶—“un être [...] [qui] ressemble (par en bas) à tous.”²⁴⁷ *Par en bas*: Jarry’s mirror is distortive, eliciting *discomfiting* recognition by means of *partial estrangement*. Ubu is instinct incarnate, the embodiment of a primal drive abstracted from the gamut of attributes and capabilities that comprise human nature. Having conveniently flushed his Conscience down the toilet in *Ubu cocu*, he is an Id shackled by no Superego: the very antithesis of the Cartesian *res cogitans*. Propelled ever onward by the law of instinct—inexorably, with no capacity for cogitation²⁴⁸—he recalls Kleist’s marionettes, graceful in their lack of consciousness:

“And what is the advantage your puppets would have over living dancers?”

“The advantage? First of all a negative one, my friend: it would never be guilty of affectation. For affectation is seen, as you know, *when the soul, or moving force, appears at some point other than the centre of gravity of the movement*. Because the operator controls with his wire or thread only this centre, the attached limbs are just what they should be... lifeless, pure pendulums, governed only by the law of gravity. This is an excellent quality. You’ll look for it in vain in most of our dancers [emphasis mine].”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Mori (1970), p. 34.

²⁴⁵ Gordon (2009), p. 261.

²⁴⁶ Jarry (1972), p. 416.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 402.

²⁴⁸ The French term *conscience*, of course, encompasses the meanings of both “conscience” and “consciousness”.

²⁴⁹ Kleist (1994), p. 7.

Ubu himself is an impossibly *centred* creature; his *manque de conscience* (in both senses of the term) produces a terrifying coincidence of desire and action (*want* → *take* → *have*), possible only in a character purged of all psychology. Unanguished, unreflective, undoubting, Ubu is an anti-Macbeth; it is the promise of unlimited sausages, and not of limitless supremacy, that drives him to murder:

MERE UBU. A ta place, ce cul, je voudrais l'installer sur un trône. Tu pourrais augmenter indéfiniment tes richesses, manger fort souvent de l'andouille et rouler carrosse par les rues.
 PERE UBU. Si j'étais roi, je me fais construire une grande capeline comme celle que j'avais en Aragon et que ces gredins d'Espagnols m'ont impudemment volée.
 MERE UBU. Tu pourrais aussi te procurer un parapluie et un grand caban qui te tomberait sur les talons.
 PERE UBU. Ah! je cède à la tentation. Bougre de merdre, merdre de bougre, si jamais je le rencontre au coin d'un bois, il passera un mauvais quart d'heure.²⁵⁰

Terror is Jarry's aim: terror in the face of a liminal entity, all-too-human-yet-not-quite.

Extolling the virtues of marionettes in the final paragraph of "Menus propos: le théâtre",

Maeterlinck entertains a terrible vision of his own:

L'effroi qu'inspirent ces êtres, *semblables à nous, mais visiblement pourvus d'une âme morte*, vient-il de ce qu'ils sont absolument privés de mystère? [...] Est-ce l'effroi, né précisément de la privation de l'effroi qu'il y a autour de tout être vivant, et si inévitable et se habituel, que sa suppression nous épouvante, comme nous épouvanterait un homme sans ombre ou une armée sans armes? *Est-ce l'allure de nos vêtements ordinaires sur des corps sans destinées?* Sommes-nous terrifiés par les gestes et les paroles d'un être pareil à nous, parce que nous savons que ces gestes et ces paroles, par une exception monstrueuse, ne retentissent nulle part et n'indiquent le choix d'aucune éternité? Est-ce parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas mourir? Je ne sais, mais *l'atmosphère de terreur où ils se meuvent* est l'atmosphère même du poème [emphasis mine].²⁵¹

Whether or not Maeterlinck was familiar with Kleist's dialogue, the theoretical affinity is unmistakable: the notions of the "dead soul" and the "lifeless pendulum" are virtually analogous. As Kleist's marionettes are unencumbered by consciousness, so Maeterlinck's lack *mystère* (interiority). Yet, unlike Kleist, Maeterlinck does not explicitly advocate the use of *actual* marionettes; as Patrick McGuinness suggests, they "occur less as practical solutions to be

²⁵⁰ Jarry (1972), p. 354. The opening scene of *Ubu roi* is a grotesque lampooning of *Macbeth* I:7. Lady Macbeth, in goading her husband to murder, queries tauntingly, "Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valour / As thou art in desire?" (Shakespeare [1997], p. 17). Ubu, of course, would remain happily immune to psychological manipulation of this sort.

²⁵¹ Maeterlinck (1999a), p. 462-3.

applied literally than as possible paradigms from which real actors can learn their art.”²⁵² It seems probable, then, that, in speaking of “nos vêtements ordinaires sur des corps sans destinées”, Maeterlinck envisages not dummies dressed up as humans, but precisely the opposite—the “everyday garment” that is the body of the actor transfigured into a consciousness-free, “soulless” object which, in its turn, masquerades as a (pseudo-)subject: *two* removes from nature rather than one.

Uncanny effects, as Mori’s graph demonstrates, are more readily achievable by means of living bodies (actors) rather than puppets—provided they are deindividuated and made to recall androids in gesture and articulation. Precisely this strategy is endorsed by Jarry, for whom the marionette unequivocally represents a “possible paradigm” rather than a “practical solution”. “*Ubu roi*,” he insists, “est un pièce qui n’a jamais été écrite pour marionnettes, mais pour des acteurs jouant en marionnettes, ce qui n’est pas la même chose.”²⁵³ Rachilde’s suggestion that the play’s inaugural 1896 performance should feature “actors with strings attached to their limbs” was therefore rejected “contemptuously by Jarry”²⁵⁴. The actors must not be *equated* with marionettes (and what would the strings be but costume, a conventional visual marker of equivalence); they must simply consent to marionette status, *simulating what is already a simulacrum*. The “estranging ‘tripleness’”²⁵⁵ of this vision stands in direct contrast with the binarisms of both naturalist drama (actor/subject → character/“subject”) and puppet theatre (marionette/object → character/“subject”). Naturalistic performance conceals

²⁵² McGuinness (2000), p. 114; Segel (1995), p. 51, makes roughly the same point. We might compare Maeterlinck’s pronouncements on the marionette with those of his near-contemporary, English theatre practitioner and theorist Edward Gordon Craig. In *The Actor and the Übermarionette* (1908), Craig insists that “the actor must go,” to be replaced by “the inanimate figure” of the “Übermarionette” (quoted in J. Michael Walton [ed., 1983], p. 85). Once again, however, the term “inanimate” proves ambiguous. In his 1924 preface to *The Art of the Theatre*, Craig clarifies his notion: “The Übermarionette is the actor plus fire, minus egoism: the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality” (Craig [1980], p. 9).

²⁵³ Quoted in Béhar (1980), p. 138.

²⁵⁴ Beaumont (1984), p. 99.

²⁵⁵ McGuinness (2000), p. 115.

the binarism; its insistence on camouflaging the gap between portrayer and portrayed generally precludes experience of the uncanny. This gap is exposed and amplified when actors are replaced by puppets, and the discrepancy between these inert, pure effigies and the messy human dramas they play out is no doubt a jarring one—but it is also too clear-cut to be radically disquieting. Immortal and incorruptible, puppets can never be contaminated by the contingency of flesh-and-blood subjects (which, of course, may also be regarded as their greatest virtue). It is comparatively straightforward, however, to transform human actors into the guise of automata through a combination of formalised gesture, monotonous articulation²⁵⁶ and severely choreographed or “geometric” movement; deindividuation is also easily achieved by means of masks,²⁵⁷ uniform clothing, and the like. Organism succumbs readily to mechanism, and it is in the interstices between the two that the uncanny resides.

Despite the considerable theoretical common ground between Maeterlinck and Jarry, their theatrical practices are highly divergent in various respects, as are the ways in which they generate and exploit the onstage bodily uncanny. The uncanny encompasses a broad spectrum of interrelated yet distinct emotions, ranging from disconcertion and dread to revulsion and disgust. Experience of the uncanny, as suggested above, is catalysed by a sense of betweenness, of neither-here-nor-there-ness; but different modes of betweenness generate contrasting experiences of the uncanny, and so, by the same token, do the various ways in which the human form can be rendered partially alien by means of deindividuation, schematisation or distortion. Certain forms of the not-quite-human provoke dread or terror, while others trigger disgust. Clearly, a figure with the appearance of a normal human subject

²⁵⁶ “Il va sans dire qu’il faut que l’acteur ait une voix spéciale, qui est la voix du rôle, comme si la cavité de la bouche du masque ne pouvait émettre que ce que dirait le masque, si les muscles de ses lèvres étaient souples. Et il vaut mieux qu’ils ne soient pas souples, et que le débit dans toute la pièce soit monotone.” Jarry (1972), p. 409.

²⁵⁷ “L’acteur devra substituer à sa tête, au moyen d’un masque l’enfermant, l’effigie du PERSONNAGE.” Ibid., p. 407.

but object-like—inert, “soulless”—in its behaviour will not elicit the same response as one endowed with (a degree of) agency but visibly deindividuated, diseased or deformed. We do not react to Père Ubu—crudely dehumanised, reminiscent of a young child’s schematised drawing, yet driven by an insatiable will to live—as we would to Maeterlinck’s characters, many of whom, though outwardly human, seem to belong to the realm of inanimacy. We find ourselves emotionally and physically unsettled by the creatures of betweenness that inhabit both playwrights’ works, but the binarisms they problematise—subject/object, organism/mechanism, vitality/inertness—vary from play to play, and so, therefore, does the nature of our reaction.

*

If, on the level of character, Père Ubu is the very embodiment of animal instinct, the reification of a internal, intangible drive, he is visually no less synecdochic, and might, as Elizabeth K. Menon suggests, be interpreted “as a penis and a rear end connected. The circular pattern on his ‘stomach’ could represent intestines”²⁵⁸ (Figure 16). A part for a whole or, more precisely, two parts, *corne* and *gidouille*; human parts, to be sure, but, decontextualised as they are, no more fully human, and no less terrifying and grotesque, than Gogol’s similarly phallic Nose, which (who?), inexplicably sundered from the face of a collegiate assessor, roams about St. Petersburg, climbing higher in the state bureaucracy than its former owner. Ubu appears in another, yet more bizarre incarnation on the poster designed by Jarry for the play’s premiere (Figure 17). Head bud-shaped, moustache formed of two leaves, left arm resembling a vine or parasitic creeper, his other limbs reduced to stumps, he has been transfigured into a nauseating anthro-po-vegetal hybrid. Why are metamorphoses of this kind so unsettling? Probably because we are intrinsically adept at recognising other humans, not only as individuals but also as distinct from non-human species. Thanks to our cognitive model of the

²⁵⁸ Menon (1993), p. 61.



Figure 16: Véritable portrait de Monsieur Ubu, Jarry's woodcut frontispiece for *Ubu roi*.

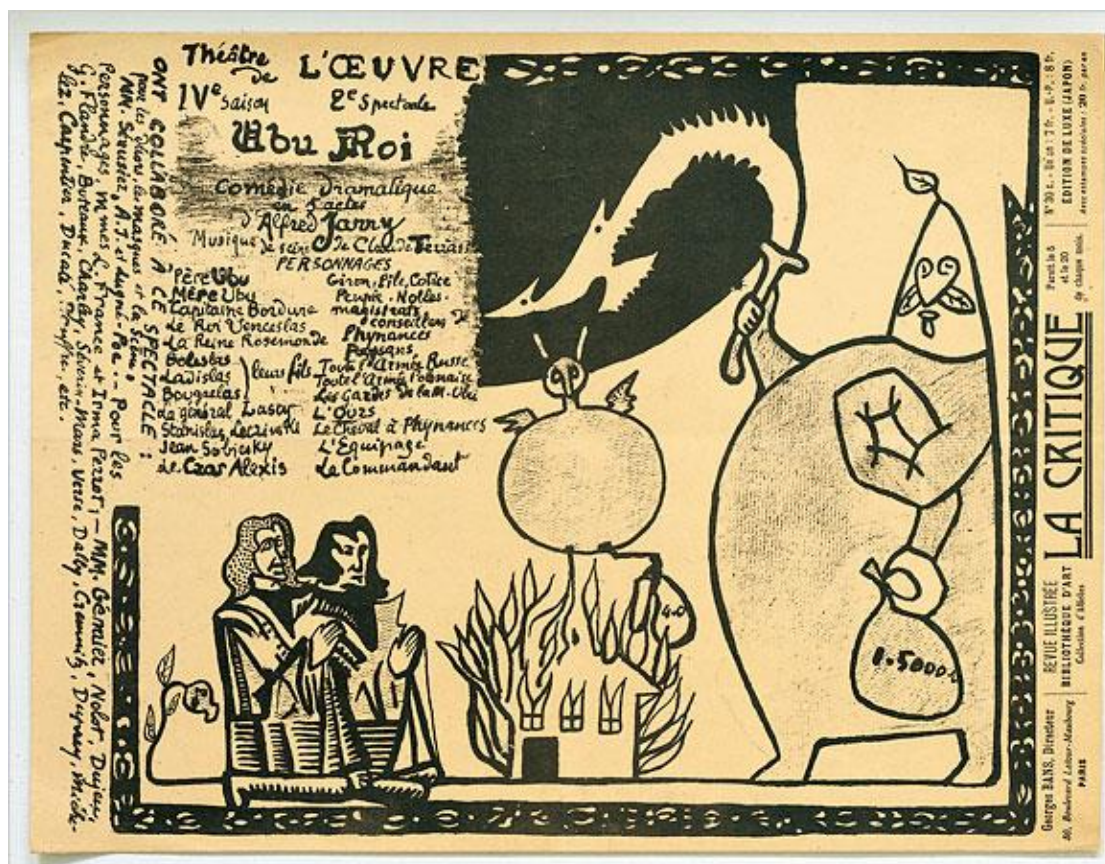


Figure 17: Lithographic poster for *Ubu roi*, made by Jarry for *La Critique*.

global structural characteristics of typical human bodies and faces—which also encompasses movement—we are highly attuned even to minimal deviations from the habitual visual schema. Imagine, for example, someone whose eyes do not saccade, and whose head is constantly twitching and jerking to compensate. A negative emotional response is probable in this instance not because immobile eyes and head-bobbing are disturbing *in themselves*—birds, after all, do not usually horrify us—but because the boundary between what is perceived as human and non-human has been violated.

Ubu roi and its paratexts abound with such violations. But it is the relegation of the human body to the status of prop or décor—inanimate matter—that most infuriated and repulsed the play's first audience. “Pour remplacer la porte [de la prison]”, recalled Firmin Gémier in a 1921 interview,

un acteur se tenait en scène avec le bras gauche tendu. Je mettais la clé dans la main comme dans une serrure. Je faisais le bruit du pêne, ‘cric-crac’, et je tournais le bras comme si j’ouvrais une porte. A ce moment le public trouvant sans doute que la plaisanterie avait assez duré, s’est mis à hurler, à tempêter, à tempérer, [...] une protestation telle que je n’avais jamais rien entendu du comparable.²⁵⁹

A commonplace of contemporary physical theatre, the use of actors to represent parts of the scenic environment was simply beyond the frame of reference of late nineteenth-century theatregoers. In the context of the period, such a manoeuvre constitutes a grave offence to propriety, but it is more than that—as Neil Blackadder suggests, it represents a threat to “the integrity of the [human] body,”²⁶⁰ to the conception of the human body as organic, vital and fundamentally superior to its inert surroundings. The polyvalent term *integrity* is especially pertinent here; not only has the body been degraded, dishonoured, it has also been robbed of its natural (naturalised?) wholeness: the actor's arm functions in isolation to the rest of his figure (further echoes of “The Nose”), which no longer has any signifying capacity. “There are few things,” writes William Ian Miller, “that are more unnerving and disgust evoking than

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Robichez (1955), p. 96.

²⁶⁰ Blackadder (2003), p. 62.

our partibility. Consider the horror motif of severed hands, ears, heads, gouged eyes.”²⁶¹ The trope of actual bodily mutilation is prevalent in the play, as amply demonstrated by the litany of gruesome threats flung at Mère Ubu by her spouse in V:I:

Tu vas subir le dernier supplice [...]: torsion de nez, arrachement des cheveux, pénétration du petit bout de bois dans les oneilles, extraction de la cervelle par les talons, lacération du postérieur, suppression partielle ou même totale de la moelle épinière (si au moins ça pouvait lui ôter les épines du caractère), sans oublier l’ouverture de la vessie natatoire et finalement la grande décollation renouvelée de saint Jean-Baptiste [...].²⁶²

But the prison-door gambit represents a more abstract—and therefore, perhaps, more disturbing—kind of mutilation, wherein the usually hierarchised distinction between human and environment, character and décor is flattened. The public’s violent reaction must be construed as (unconscious) protest against the mechanistic, brutally analytical treatment of a complete human individual—who, crucially, remains recognisable as such. The familiar is being made alien *from the inside*, putting us squarely into the territory of the uncanny.

*

Unlike Jarry, Maeterlinck does not distort, deform or dissect the body—but he does deprive his *guignol*-like characters of agency, leaving them powerless against the inexorable movement of impersonal forces, against the relentless stage- and off-stage geometry that dominates his dramas. In this they recall Kleist’s “lifeless, pure pendulums”. Jarry may dehumanise, yet he does not deny Ubu the dynamism common to all living things. Maeterlinck’s characters, conversely, inhabit a world of beings not yet departed but already beyond reach, a kind of purgatory where the distinctions between subject and object and presence and absence are no longer in full force. The dead priest in *Les Aveugles* is undoubtedly the most extreme instance of the objectified subject in the four plays under discussion here. Maeterlinck’s introductory stage directions are revealing:

²⁶¹ Miller (2009), p. 27.

²⁶² Jarry (1972), p. 394-5.

*Au milieu [...] est assis un très vieux prêtre enveloppé d'un large manteau noir. Le buste et la tête, légèrement renversés et mortellement immobiles, s'appuient contre le tronc d'un chêne énorme et caverneux. La face est d'une immuable lividité de cire où s'entr'ouvrent les lèvres violettes. Les yeux muets et fixes ne regardent plus du côté visible de l'éternité et semblent ensanglantés sous un grand nombre de douleurs immémoriales et des larmes.*²⁶³

The priest differs from most onstage corpses in at least two crucial respects. Firstly, in defiance of the horizontality of death, he maintains the upright posture we associate with living human subjects; a body sprawled on the stage floor, in contrast, appears definitively, unambiguously dead. Secondly, and yet more significantly, the priest is there from the very outset; we do not see him die, do not see him undergo any transition. An onstage death usually constitutes a clear-cut change of state which calls for a straightforward suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. A character has *become* a corpse, *become* an object that can be engaged with and manipulated—mourned over, picked up, carried offstage, and so forth. The body of the actor has been explicitly transferred from positive into negative space (and does not generally remain in view for long after this shift occurs, since death is almost always the culmination, if not of the entire play, then at least of an act or scene, after which the actor will get up and slink away under cover of darkness). However, an onstage body which never represents anything *but* a corpse is a different proposition entirely. It is simultaneously figure and ground, positivity and negativity.

*

Until they discover his body, the priest is regarded by his blind charges as an absent presence (literally so: they believe him to be elsewhere, yet alive), while the audience sees the reverse—a present absence. This is, of course, true not only on the dramatic, but on the extra-dramatic level: we know that the corpse is only a “corpse”—that the actor is playing dead. And, if we agree with Blanchot that a real corpse is “pure resemblance,”²⁶⁴ the “corpse” of the priest is resemblance squared, but *impure* because contaminated with the living body of

²⁶³ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 285.

²⁶⁴ See Blanchot (1955), p. 347.

the actor; *very like a corpse* (to misquote Polonius), but not identical. This *partial* simulacrum, capable of generating uncanny effects by virtue of its very imperfection, cannot be achieved with actual puppets. Puppets, Maeterlinck points out, “ne peuvent pas mourir”—and therefore make for highly ineffective corpses. A rare London revival of *The Blind*, performed in a double bill with *The Intruder* at Islington’s Old Red Lion Theatre in April 2013, featured a dummy-priest strung up by a rope (see the top left of Figure 18). There is some-



Figure 18: Production still from *The Blind* (dir. Benji Sperring, April 2013).
Photograph © Peter Langdown

thing deeply unsatisfying about this semiotic strategy. On one hand, the dummy/character binarism is too clear-cut to provoke genuine disquiet, as mentioned above. On the other, the representation is frustratingly tautological: the priest is inanimate, and so is the dummy. Immortals cannot play dead; frames remain unconfused, boundaries unblurred.

*

Intérieur, meanwhile, offers us a noteworthy example of a proto-cinematic uncanny (interestingly, its publication in 1894 exactly coincides with the beginning of the silent era). *Ubu roi* demonstrates the partibility of the body; *Intérieur* splits the sensorium. Through the ground-floor windows of the house at the bottom of the garden,

*On aperçoit assez distinctement une famille qui fait la veillée sous la lampe. [...] Il semble que lorsque l'un d'eux se lève, marche ou fait un geste, ses mouvements soient graves, lents, rares et comme spiritualisés par la distance, la lumière et le voile indécis des fenêtres.*²⁶⁵

This would appear to be a typically Symbolist approach: the scene is archetypal, static and nebulous. It is remarkable, however, for its total absence of sound, thrown into sharp relief by the almost entirely aural outer shell of the play; though they have visible forms, the onlookers in the garden are integrated into the drama only by means of speech. From our early twenty-first century vantage, it is difficult to conceive that the dissociation of sound and image, or indeed any other compartmentalisation of the sensorium, could be existentially disconcerting or even terrifying, so engrained are recording and broadcasting technologies in our lives. But during the *fin de siècle*, when sensorium-splitting technologies, such as those of telephony and cinema, were in their infancy, they were frequently described as mechanisms for the conjuring of death.

The telephone conversations Proust's narrator has with his grandmother in *Le côté de Guermantes*, for example, function as prolepses of her demise:

C'est lui, s'est sa voix qui nous parle, qui est là. Mais comme elle est loin! Que de fois je n'ai pu l'écouter sans angoisse [...] Présence réelle que cette voix si proche—dans la séparation effective! Mais anticipation aussi d'une séparation éternelle!²⁶⁶

Maxim Gorky, meanwhile, documents his discomfiting experience in what he calls the Kingdom of Shadows: a screening of the Lumière cinematograph at the Nizhni Novgorod Fair in 1896. He appears preoccupied not so much by the temporal dimension of film—its most obvious novelty—as by the

strange silence where no rumble of the wheels is heard, no sound of footsteps or of speech. Nothing. Not a single note of the intricate symphony that always accompanies the movements of people. Noiselessly, the ashen-grey foliage of the trees sways in the wind, and the grey silhouettes of the people, as though condemned to eternal silence and cruelly punished by being deprived of all the colours of life, glide noiselessly along the grey ground.
[...]

²⁶⁵ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 504

²⁶⁶ Proust (1954), pp. 162-163.

And here is another picture. Three men seated at the table, playing cards. [...] Suddenly, they break into laughter, and the waiter who has stopped at their table with beer, laughs too. They laugh until their sides split but not a sound is heard. It seems as if these people have died and their shadows have been condemned to play cards in silence unto eternity.²⁶⁷

In both cases, the seamless “audiovisual totality”²⁶⁸ of everyday life has been unravelled. Proust’s narrator and Gorky both find themselves existentially disturbed because their respective sensory experiences are somehow incomplete, unfinished. “[T]he sudden absence of sound,” writes Don Ihde, “can disembody a scene. [...] At the instant of the disappearance of animating sound, the scene becomes eerie, a moving tableau that becomes absent and distant. [...] Emptiness which can be uncanny is silence in the auditory dimension.”²⁶⁹ Though Ihde has the cinema in mind, this description is equally applicable to *Intérieur* (note that Ihde and Maeterlinck use the terms “distant” and “*distance*” in largely analogous fashion). Like the corpse of the priest, the family seen through the drawing room windows is at once present and removed; like Père Ubu, they lack the audiovisual completeness of living human beings—but because it is the sensorium that has been fragmented in this case, rather than the body, the effect is more eerily disconcerting than visceral.

Anthropological liminality in Les Aveugles

The uncanny, as mentioned above, is a subset of the much broader notion of liminality. Liminality was first addressed by Arnold van Gennep in the context of his analysis of the *rites de passage*. Concerned primarily with small-scale, non-Western societies, van Gennep defines *passage* as the transition of an individual or a collective from one state of social or cosmic being to another, and *rite* as the accompanying set of ceremonies and formalised protocols, frequently devised to test the ritual subjects’ capacity or readiness for the change to come. A micro-scale rite of passage enacts and commemorates a change in status of a

²⁶⁷ Gorky (1960), p.69.

²⁶⁸ Altman (2004), p. 9.

²⁶⁹ Ihde (2007), p 83.

particular individual or social grouping; if an entire community is involved, however, it usually marks a “passage from one culturally defined season to another in the annual cycle,” or, alternatively, constitutes a “collective response to hazards such as war, famine, drought, plague, earthquake, volcanic eruption, and other natural or manmade disasters.”²⁷⁰ In both cases, it may result in “a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another.”²⁷¹ Van Gennep identifies three distinct phases of passage—separation, transition and reincorporation—each with its own rite. During the separation phase, the ritual subjects prepare to leave their old lives behind, and enter into a space symbolically detached and/or physically segregated from the well-defined structures of their previous social existence (boot camp, for example, in the case of new army recruits). The transition phase constitutes the threshold between the initial and final states of being, and resembles neither, being characterised by its ambiguity and comparative lack of socially and legally prescribed structures. Thus, although engaged couples are not bound by any legal or sacramental contract (at least in a contemporary, secular Western context), and enjoy none of the rights accorded after marriage, they are nonetheless expected to conduct themselves in a manner reflective of their future status. Still single as far as law and church are concerned, already half of a greater whole in the eyes of family, friends and society at large, the fiancé(e) is neither here nor there. The ambiguous period is brought to an end by a rite of incorporation—in this case, the wedding ceremony—after which the ritual subjects, now transformed, are reintegrated anew into the social fabric, and reacquire the definitional stability denied to them throughout the separation and transition phases.

Victor Turner, for his part, concentrates predominantly on the latter, greatly developing the notion of liminality and taking it beyond the narrow context of ritual proper to encompass,

²⁷⁰ Turner (1987), p. 101.

²⁷¹ Turner (1982), p. 25.

amongst other things, quasi-ritualistic Western cultural practices such as theatrical performance. He differentiates between true ritual and quasi-ritual on the basis of *optation* (choosing, wishing, desiring) and *leisure*. Participation in the former is mandatory, and refusal to take part will result in marginalisation, ostracism, exile or excommunication. The existence of the ritual subject as a social entity depends on the rite, and there is no firm distinction between performers and spectators (if the former assertion no longer applies to the Eucharist, the latter certainly does). Conversely, quasi-rituals—theatrical performance included—depend on the voluntary attendance (and attention) of the audience, and Turner labels them and related cultural phenomena *liminoid*; the liminoid is the “successor of the liminal in complex large-scale societies, where individuality and optation in art have in theory supplanted collective and obligatory ritual performances.”²⁷² Theatre-going is also, in a contemporary Western context, habitually regarded as a leisure activity—that is, as a period of “free time”, of relaxation, diversion and enjoyment, which exists in counterpoint to the routine mundanity of work: “Leisure is a non-work, even anti-work phase in the life of a person who also works. [...] [W]e might call it *anergic* as against *ergic*.”²⁷³ True ritual liminality, however, is in many respects the antithesis of diversion; the transition period, as outlined by van Gennep, is a bridge between two states of being, and invariably involves the expenditure of social and physical energy (in other words, work). And, given that it is integral to the ritual subjects’ continued social existence, and is never optional, it certainly cannot be called *free* time. Now, in view of my earlier comments on the uncanny and the spectator’s body as “encumbrance”, it would appear that *Ubu roi* and the Maeterlinck dramas under discussion here are, if performed with sufficient intensity, highly unlikely to induce a *state* of leisure in the audience—and even less so when they were first staged—despite existing in the

²⁷² Turner (1987), p. 29.

²⁷³ Turner (1982), p. 36.

context of a leisure-oriented *institution*. This is because, as I have repeatedly pointed out, they can make the spectator's body feel opaque. A healthy body is, in normal circumstances, experientially translucent: it barely makes itself felt. A heightened sense of embodiment can, of course, be highly pleasurable, but the opposite seems to be true here. Whereas recuperation is at the heart of leisure, disturbance, disquiet and sickness form the crux of Maeterlinck's and Jarry's visions for the theatre—not only conceptually, but *experientially* so, which is precisely what sets them apart from the majority of their contemporaries—Symbolists and Naturalists alike—and makes them precursors of Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty.

As well as providing an extensive characterisation of liminal entities, Turner introduces two other fundamental notions, *communitas* and *subjunctivity*. In what follows I propose to implement these in an examination of *Les Aveugles*—a play which particularly invites an anthropological approach. *Communitas*²⁷⁴ is characterised by egalitarian personal relationships, (temporary) attenuation or loss of individual identity, and collective homogeneity. Turner defines it in opposition to social structure, positing

two major “models” for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more or less.” The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.²⁷⁵

Maeterlinck's *communitas* of the blind is a collective of barely individuated beings. Leaderless among themselves, they have been escorted into the forest by a priest, their authority and guide, so that they may “jouir des derniers jours de soleil avant [d'être enfermés] tout l'hiver dans l'hospice.”²⁷⁶ Marking the arrival of a winter predicted to be “très

²⁷⁴ Turner uses the Latin term to refer specifically to a “modality of social relationship”; *communitas* is distinct from *community*, defined by Turner as “an area of common living” (1969, p. 96).

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 293.

long et très froid,”²⁷⁷ the passage into the forest also constitutes a response of sorts—its nature never explained—to an impending natural disaster:

LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. [...] Il [le prêtre] était très inquiet; on dit que les grands orages de ces jours passés ont gonflé le fleuve et que toutes les digues sont ébranlées. Il disait aussi que la mer l’effrayait; il paraît qu’elle s’agite sans raison, et que les falaises de l’Île ne sont pas assez hautes. Il voulait voir; mais il ne nous a pas dit ce qu’il a vu.²⁷⁸

During a period of profound crisis, social bonds are intensified, generating a more profound sense of communality, of oneness; as a result, the sense of personal identity becomes attenuated. This is reflected in the group’s attire, homogeneous and androgynous: “[*Les femmes*] ont, ainsi que les vieillards, d’amples vêtements, sombre et uniformes.”²⁷⁹ Save for their canes, the blind have no belongings whatsoever, and no outer accoutrements of social standing. This is consistent with Turner’s assertion that

[L]iminal entities [...] may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, [or] position in a kinship system.²⁸⁰

Elsewhere he adds that “attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of liminality,” meaning that men and women are likely to be “dressed alike and referred to by the same term”²⁸¹ (in this case, of course, the common descriptor is *aveugle*). Maeterlinck has reduced the personal idiosyncrasies of the blind to an utter minimum, differentiating between them only on the basis of age and degree of blindness. Yet more radically, he has denied them even a modicum of individual autonomy. The twelve men and women are nothing but nodes in a network of verbal and spatial relations. Significantly, this network is non-hierarchised. No single individual attempts to take control over the situation, and none wields even the slightest degree of authority over the group: the old hold no dominion over the young, nor the

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 290.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 285.

²⁸⁰ Turner (1969), p. 95.

²⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 102-3.

men over the women. The verticality of conventional social relations has been transformed into an unstructured horizontality. Collective submissiveness, one of the distinguishing features of *communitas*, is also in evidence in *Les Aveugles*. We first encounter the blind sitting in what is almost a foetal position, “les coudes sur les genoux et le visage entre les mains.”²⁸² According to Turner, “liminality is frequently likened [...] to being in the womb.”²⁸³ Much like unborn children, liminal entities have no self-sufficiency or individual agency. They are *passengers*²⁸⁴—those who are acted upon, those who endure, undergo and suffer (L. *passio*). Waiting for the priest’s return is suffering in both senses of the word—it is at once supremely torturous and supremely passive—but the blind unquestioningly acknowledge it as their duty: “Il nous a dit de l’attendre en silence,”²⁸⁵ flatly proclaims the oldest blind woman. The priest’s behest to remain silent, however, goes unfulfilled, because, as Patrick McGuinness maintains,²⁸⁶ speech for the blind is both evidence and precondition of (public) existence: “J’ai peur quand je ne parle pas,”²⁸⁷ retorts the third *aveugle-né*, betraying a kind of ontological fear that he might cease to exist were he to desist from interacting with the rest of the collective. The submissiveness of the blind, though extreme, is not total: they are at least capable of maintaining themselves in existence by means of their own speech acts.

Unbeknownst to the group, the authority to which they submit is no more: the priest is dead, and the structural order that he epitomises—an order inverted during this transition phase, but which should eventually be restored upon reincorporation—has thereby collapsed. Ignorant of this fact, the blind believe their situation to be endowed with *potentiality for change*: the priest may come back, enabling them to complete their passage and return to stability and order. But we, as audience or readers, know not only that the priest has died, but

²⁸² Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 285.

²⁸³ Turner (1969), p. 95.

²⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁸⁵ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 289.

²⁸⁶ See McGuinness (2000), p. 183.

²⁸⁷ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 289.

also, barring any clumsy *deus ex machina* (and of course this is a play that thematises the absence of such a possibility), that the scenario must be resolved with the discovery of his dead body. The future, for the audience, exists as extrapolation from the present, as absolute ineluctability, as *statement*. Not so for the blind, whose situation is one of radical indeterminacy, and is typified above all by their incessant questioning (“Il ne revient pas encore?”; “Quelqu’un sait où nous sommes?”). This, I would argue, corresponds to Turner’s distinction between culture’s “indicative” and “subjunctive” moods:

The subjunctive [...] is always concerned with ‘wish, desire, possibility, or hypothesis’; it is a world of ‘as if,’ ranging from scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy. It is ‘if it *were* so,’ not ‘it is so’. The indicative prevails in the world of what we in the West call ‘actual fact’.²⁸⁸

Inhering predominantly in performative, (quasi-)ritualistic phenomena such as carnivals, pageants, “happenings” and sports games, the cultural subjunctive exists in the interstices of structure, largely beyond social time and space. If the indicative mood, which governs most social activity, conveys actuality and predictability (“*Thus* it is, and *thus* shall it be!”), the subjunctive expresses potentiality, desire, uncertainty, anticipation (“It *may* be thus, and *would that* it were!”). The more aleatory an activity is, the more unforeseeable its outcome, the greater its degree of subjunctivity as experienced by both performers and spectators (who, as already mentioned, may be one and the same in the case of true ritual). Consider a football game, for instance: no matter how unevenly matched the two sides may be, the final outcome of the contest, let alone its “storyline”, is impossible to predict from initial conditions—it can only be hypothesised (“What if..?”), said hypothesis being subject to potential ridicule (“As if!”). Complete and instantaneous role reversals impossible within normative social structure are not only commonplace, but represent one of the primary pleasures of sport: underdogs on paper can become giant-killers on the field of play, whereas favourites may be humiliated. Moreover, while the game is in progress—the liminal phase—the institutional status of the

²⁸⁸ Turner (1982), p. 83.

team (minnows, say, or champions) loses most of its significance; what truly matters is the unpredictable unfolding of the event, which, at any given moment, constitutes a field of potentiality. The crowd of passionate fans, meanwhile, is a prime example of what Turner calls *spontaneous communitas*: for the duration of the match, their individual personalities and idiosyncrasies, which would prevent them from ever “communing” en masse in ordinary circumstances, are set aside as they surrender to collective transports of joy and despair.²⁸⁹

The blind, too, form a spontaneous *communitas* governed by the subjunctive mood. They are united in their desire for *nostos* (homecoming), in their geographic disorientation, in their anticipation of the priest’s return. But the discovery of the latter’s body (“Il y a un mort au milieu de nous!”²⁹⁰) prompts an immediate and brutal shift to the indicative; the characters finally come into possession of all the facts of the situation, available to the audience from the outset. The emergence of actuality from potentiality normally coincides with reincorporation: their transformation complete, the ritual subjects return into the fold of social structure, and *communitas*—described by Turner as “a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition,”²⁹¹ and one which “can seldom be maintained for very long”²⁹²—comes to be dissolved. In this case, however, there appears to be no chance of any reincorporation, since, by their own acknowledgement, the blind are completely cut off from any type of social structure, whether religious or secular:

²⁸⁹ Although beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to extend the discussion of *communitas* to theatre audiences. To what extent do groups of spectators experience *communitas*, and how is that experience affected by the configurations of audience and performance space? Perspectival theatre, as we saw in Chapter 1, generates spectatorial stratification more or less reflective of social hierarchies, and isolates spectators from one another. At the other extreme is the Dionysian dissolution of boundaries in Artaud’s ideal theatre. But almost any theatrical event, whatever its specifics, is dependent on, and capable of generating, at least a degree of *communitas*. For example, quick and automatic emotional contagion (see McConachie [2008], p. 97)—spontaneous laughter, jeering, applause—is both cause and consequence of uninhibited spectatorial communion.

²⁹⁰ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 315.

²⁹¹ Turner (1969), p. 140.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 132.

LE PLUS VIEIL AVEUGLE. Je crois que nous allons mourir ici...
 LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Quelqu'un viendra peut-être...
 PREMIER AVEUGLE-NE. Je pense que les religieuses sortiront de l'hospice...
 LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Elles ne sortent pas le soir.
 LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Elles ne sortent jamais.
 DEUXIEME AVEUGLE-NE. Je pense que les hommes du grand phare nous apercevront...
 LE PLUS VIEIL AVEUGLE. Ils ne descendent pas de leur tour.
 TROISIEME AVEUGLE-NE. Ils nous verront peut-être...
 LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Ils regardent toujours du côté de la mer.²⁹³

The priest's death leaves the blind in a limbo-like state of permanent transition, defenseless against what, taking inspiration from Mallarmé, we may call "la neutralité identique du gouffre": the all-engulfing sea or, more abstractly, absolute undifferentiation. "Communitas," writes Turner, "exists in a kind of 'figure-ground' relationship with social structure. The boundaries of each of these [...] are defined by contact or comparison with the other, just as the liminal phase of an initiation rite is defined by the surrounding social statuses (many of which it abrogates, inverts, or invalidates)."²⁹⁴ And elsewhere: "[I]f there were no intervals, there would be no structure, and it is precisely the gaps that are reaffirmed in [...] liminality. The structure of the whole [social] equation depends on its negative as well as its positive signs."²⁹⁵ Otherwise put, signification springs from borders and frames, from ground (by the same token, the grammatical subjunctive can only function as a marker of modality against the "ground" of the indicative²⁹⁶). If all ground is taken away, the very notion of figure becomes absurd—and it is the Absurd that assails the figures of the blind men and women in the closing stages of the drama.

²⁹³ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 320.

²⁹⁴ Turner (1982), p. 50.

²⁹⁵ Turner (1969), p. 201.

²⁹⁶ Which, incidentally, is virtually never the case in modern French—the subjunctive has been grammaticalised as a marker of syntactic subordination in all but a handful of cases. With few exceptions, its use is obligotary, so there can be no figure-ground relation to speak of: it is no longer defined "by contact or comparison" with the indicative.

Manipulating the diegetic frame

Liminality, as has been seen, is predicated on the blurring or reconfiguration of borders and boundaries. In the previous chapter, I examined the contrasting ways in which Mallarmé and Apollinaire reconfigure the institutional frame of paginal configuration, thereby defamiliarising page-space and typographic norms. Jarry and Maeterlinck, for their part, destabilise and manipulate the boundaries of the dramatic diegesis, denying the audience recourse to any fixed external framework which would stabilise or concretise the dramatic situation.

For late nineteenth-century audiences weaned on the tenets of naturalism, a “stable” and coherent diegetic frame comprised various crucial features. Of particular relevance here is the naturalists’ historically and geographically accurate deployment of proper names and toponyms, insistence on consistent and recognisable markers of setting (props, decor, costumes, accents), and use of the offstage as a negative space or ground which, though informing the positive space of the stage and belonging to the same continuum, is nonetheless hierarchically inferior to the latter. All three of these features may ultimately be regarded as instances of Barthes’ notion of a *luxe de la narration*, expounded in his essay “L’effet de réel” (1968). Significant only in their insignificance, “narrative luxuries” are structurally redundant, unmotivated descriptive details whose sole function is to naturalise the representation, to pass it off as verisimilar (“nous sommes le réel”²⁹⁷). Barthes’ own example of “le détail inutile” is the barometer from Flaubert’s “Un Coeur simple”. In the case of illusionistic theatre, it is also physical objects—props, items of decor, etc—that are characterised by the greatest degree of narrative superfluity: unlike Chekhov’s gun, the archetype of the seemingly extraneous prop which later becomes a functional component of the plot of a naturalistic drama, most onstage items perform a largely ornamental purpose

²⁹⁷ Barthes (1968), p. 174.

on the level of emplotment. *Diegetically* speaking, however, this is not so. Any item, no matter how incidental to the dramatic action, plays a role in the framing of the piece, enhancing “local colour” or otherwise contributing to the specificity of a particular setting, as André Antoine is only too aware:

Il faudrait, dans les décorations d'intérieur, ne pas craindre la profusion des petits objets, la diversité des menus accessoires. Rien ne donne à un intérieur un aspect plus habité. Ce sont ces imperceptibles choses qui font le sens intime, le caractère profond du milieu qu'on a voulu reconstituer.²⁹⁸

Similarly, the (ostensibly) non-symbolic, “ordinary” character names common in realist and naturalist fiction and drama operate as diegetic delimiters; the same can be said of toponyms and other indicators of locale: “Geographic facts function like reality-effects; their microscopic incontestability serves to naturalize the world order.”²⁹⁹ Meanwhile, offstage space, evoked aurally (“noises off”) or verbally by onstage characters (*ekphrasis tou topou*), usually fulfills a comparable purpose: to create the illusion of an extended spatial continuum, and to situate the scene, to transform it into a “here”, differentiating it not only from the “elsewheres” of the diegesis but also from the “here” of the theatre itself.

Jarry and Maeterlinck, conversely, construct various types of diegetic neither-here-nor-there-ness or indeterminacy, refusing to localise diegetic space and even, in Jarry’s case, to set it fully apart from theatre (extra-diegetic) space. Traditionally, transitions between scenes in Western theatre are treated as regrettably necessary at best, or as “shameful business” at worst, taking place as they do either behind a curtain or under cover of darkness; likewise, the audience is inculcated by convention to regard the black-clad stage manager and other stagehands as invisible. The process of removing elements of blocking and décor and introducing new ones is unmistakably extra-diegetic—that is, it takes place beyond the world of the play. The boundary of the diegesis is generally more or less clear-

²⁹⁸ Antoine (2008), p. 390.

²⁹⁹ Brewer (2009), p. 80.

cut, and is indicated by conventional markers such as lighting changes and background music. Intervals and transitions serve as the “negative time” during which audience members are free to attend to the comfort of their bodies by stretching, coughing, and so forth. Now, the bearded old man in evening dress who tiptoed onstage to change the scene-indicating placards throughout the inaugural performance of *Ubu roi*³⁰⁰ must be considered the absolute antithesis of conventionally invisible stagehands. Thus executed, the process of scene-changing becomes highly ostentatious, not least because, as Neil Martin Blackadder notes, the words on the signs “were often misspelled”³⁰¹: purposely or inadvertently, misspellings accentuate the text’s materiality, much like the infix *r* in *merdre*. The intention was no doubt to underplay the importance of each particular setting *in itself*, thereby foregrounding betweenness, but also to incorporate conventionally extra-diegetic elements into the drama “proper”. Such a manoeuvre constitutes a radical reconfiguration of frames both diegetic and institutional: yet another means of keeping the audience in a state of confinement, of denying them the physical and emotional respite usually afforded by negative time, it also blurs the distinction between theatre and dramatic space.

Impossible combinations of visual and verbal markers of setting generate the in-between space that is Jarry’s “Poland & Environs”. Ever the provocateur, Jarry explained in a pre-performance speech to the audience that

[n]ous aurons d’ailleurs un décor parfaitement exact, car de même qu’il est un procédé facile pour situer une pièce dans l’Eternité, à savoir de faire par exemple tirer en l’an mille et tant de coups de revolver, vous verrez des portes s’ouvrir sur des plaines de neige sous un ciel bleu, des cheminées garnies de pendules se fendre afin de servir de portes, et des palmiers verdir au pied des lits, pour que les broutent de petits éléphants perchés sur des étagères.³⁰²

Recalling medieval simultaneous staging, the unified-yet-composite set by Pierre Bonnard and Paul Sérusier was a kind of patchwork quilt, its seams left brazenly on display rather

³⁰⁰ Segel (1995), p. 88.

³⁰¹ Blackadder (2003), p. 51.

³⁰² Jarry (1972), p. 400.

than being concealed. Of similar effect was the mixing and matching of incongruous accents (“Gémier imitated Jarry’s speech. Mother Ubu spoke patois, Bordure had an English accent, the Polish Queen an Auvergnon accent and the Tzar a Russian accent”³⁰³), and the use of (generally real) names from widely divergent periods of Polish and Russian history. “By distributing these names indiscriminately as he does among Poles and Russians, kings and peasants,” claims Keith Beamont, “Jarry effectively achieves [a] mutual cancelling out of anachronistic and contradictory elements.”³⁰⁴ I would argue the opposite: far from “neutralising” one another, Jarry’s juxtapositions *interfere constructively*; the condition of “Nowhere” is achieved not by attrition but by accretion—by a layering of incongruous frames. Jarry also nonchalantly combines recognisably human names with heraldic terminology (Giron, Pile, Cotice and Bordure)—a yet more drastic frame conflation. Maeterlinck, meanwhile, leaves the characters in *Les Aveugles* and *Intérieur* nameless (with the exceptions of Marthe and Marie in the latter); and although the family in *L’Intruse* do have first names, they feature extremely intermittently in dialogue, with no mention of them made in the list of *dramatis personae*. This, according to Claire A. Culleton, is a typically modernist ploy:

While literary namelessness used to be a fate designed to marginalize characters in fiction, a reflection of their unimportance, a marker (ironic in its absence) that distinguishes them from the primary cast of characters, modernist writers challenge that notion, and many of them leave nameless the very protagonists of their texts.³⁰⁵

Names are markers of personal identity and belonging, and initiation rites such as baptism enact both personhood and social incorporation.³⁰⁶ Maeterlinck’s one-act dramas are asocial worlds populated by non-individuals, and his refusal to name them is yet another means of deindividuation. By denying his characters names, he denies reader and audience the crutch

³⁰³ Deak (1993), p. 232.

³⁰⁴ Beaumont (1987), p. 33.

³⁰⁵ Culleton (1994), p. 20.

³⁰⁶ “Par la dénomination l’enfant [...] est individualisé [et] agrégé à la société.” Van Gennep (1909), p.89.

of conventional diegetic delimiters. While neither as provocative nor as original as Jarry's proto-surrealistic juxtapositioning, his strategy, no less than the latter's, delocalises, "unsituates" the drama, divesting it of any "hereness".

In naturalist drama, the *Here* of stage-space is defined against the *Elsewhere(s)* of offstage, which may be subdivided into *contiguous offstage* (or, in the terminology of Tim Fitzpatrick, *localised off*³⁰⁷) and *remote offstage*. The naturalist diegesis is comprised of a series of concentric circles, with stage-space occupying a hierarchically privileged position at the centre. Important events can, needless to say, occur offstage, and (secondary) characters may be confined to an offstage existence, but, generally speaking, offstage action serves to inform onstage action, rather than vice versa. Otherwise put, the "dramatic centre of gravity" is located onstage. As Jean Chothia points out, "increasingly realistic figuring of on-stage space" gave rise to an onstage-offstage continuum: "the conceived world beyond the perceived stage space could [now] be more literally identified and stabilised. This was particularly true of immediately contingent spaces."³⁰⁸ Crucially, the frontier between onstage and offstage, between figure and ground, is *naturalised*; in the words of Mark B. Sandberg, "[t]he implication [carried by the naturalist stage] is that the world is always larger than the frame, and that *the presented 'slice' is one of many possible views*"³⁰⁹ (emphasis mine). A prominent example of the naturalised frame can be found in the introductory stage directions to Strindberg's *Miss Julie*:

Stage left the corner of a big tiled stove with a section of its hood.
Stage right there protrudes one end of the servants' dining-table, of white pine, with some chairs [emphasis mine].³¹⁰

The frame slices clean through elements of décor, generating two illusions: firstly, that of space receding beyond the confines of the stage, and, secondly, that of a certain

³⁰⁷ See Fitzpatrick (1989), pp. 60-62.

³⁰⁸ Chothia (2011), p. 20.

³⁰⁹ Sandberg (2003), p. 85.

³¹⁰ Strindberg (1998), p. 71.

arbitrariness of framing (as if the scene has simply been “discovered” from a given perspective).³¹¹

In *L’Intruse* and *Intérieur*, Maeterlinck, operating within an ostensibly naturalist mode of presentation, displaces the dramatic centre of gravity, shifting it definitively offstage and thereby inverting the figure-ground relationship. The attention of the characters in both dramas is directed almost exclusively *Elsewhere*, undermining the significance of *Here*. In *L’Intruse*, *Elsewhere* consists of three contiguous offstage spaces—the garden and the rooms of the dying mother and the silent infant. *Intérieur*, by contrast, makes greater use of the remote offstage. With its *mise-en-abyme* structure, it also features an “onstage offstage”—the garden—whence the Old Man, Stranger and Granddaughters watch the play-within-a-play unfolding through the house windows. If naturalist drama is concentric, *L’Intruse* and *Intérieur* are fundamentally decentred. In addition, Maeterlinck is obsessively preoccupied with membranes, margins and boundaries, and, far from seeking to naturalise the onstage-offstage frontier, to pass it off as arbitrary, he invests transitional spaces—doors and windows—with particular signifiatory power.

“The door,” writes Arnold Aronson, “is a threshold, a liminal space that marks a boundary between two spaces, yet belongs to neither. [...] A passage between two spaces—two worlds—that the door signifies is a dangerous one.”³¹² This is particularly true of *L’Intruse*. The room’s doors and windows may be presented in the introductory stage directions as ordinary architectural elements—

³¹¹ Lutz Koepnick (2007), discussing Diderot’s *De la poésie dramatique* and the introduction of the proscenium arch into scenographical practice, effectively summarises the issue of naturalised framing: “The purpose of the theatre’s proscenium was [...] not actively to frame the viewer’s viewing but rather to generate illusions of unseen and hence voyeuristic seeing. A synecdoche for Diderot’s fourth wall, the frame of the proscenium came to present the world on stage as *one emancipated from the strictures of framing*. It generated naturalistic effects and viewer identification by *disguising its own status as an interface*, as a site of bi-directional communication [emphasis mine]” (p. 62).

³¹² Aronson (2005), p. 60.

*Une porte à droite, une porte à gauche et une petite porte masquée, dans un angle. Au fond, des fenêtres à vitraux où domine le vert, et une porte vitrée s'ouvrant sur une terrasse.*³¹³

—but soon prove themselves to be “multivalent symbols of access and egress [that] are unpredictable, threatening, and generally restrictive.”³¹⁴ Moreover, what appears initially to be a naturalistic onstage-offstage continuum is, in fact, anything but: as Aronson suggests, offstage space in *L’Intruse* is not simply space which “happens” to exceed the frame of the proscenium arch, but very much another world or domain—that of the invisible forces of death, which the porous membranes of the room cannot keep in check.

As an archetypal blind-seer, the Grandfather is far more attuned to this tragic truth than the rational-oriented Father and Uncle, and it is he who initially draws our attention to the doors leading to the chambers of mother and child, gesturing towards them, one by one, in solemn, almost ritualistic fashion:

L’AÏEUL, *indiquant la porte à gauche*. Elle ne peut pas nous entendre?
 LE PERE. Nous ne parlerons pas trop haut; d’ailleurs la porte est très épaisse, et puis la sœur de charité est avec elle et nous avertirait si nous faisons trop de bruit.
 L’AÏEUL, *indiquant la porte à droite*. Il ne peut pas nous entendre?
 LE PERE. Non, non.
 L’AÏEUL. Il dort?
 LE PERE. Je suppose que oui.
 L’AÏEUL. Il faudrait aller voir.
 L’ONCLE. Il m’inquiéterait plus que votre femme, ce petit. Voilà plusieurs semaines qu’il est né, et il a remué à peine; il n’a pas poussé un seul cri jusqu’ici; on dirait un enfant de cire.³¹⁵

Two contiguous offstage spaces are invoked simultaneously, a decentring strategy which relativises the importance of what is visible onstage and places the onus on the spectator’s imagination: the silent “enfant de cire”, who, like his mother, seems to be suspended between life and death, functions far more effectively as a verbally evoked absence than he would as a concretised stage-image. Meanwhile, the Father’s assertion that “the door is very thick”—revealing a misplaced confidence in the permanence and inviolability of the room’s

³¹³ Maeterlinck (1999b), 245.

³¹⁴ Kane (1984), pp. 37-38.

³¹⁵ Maeterlinck (1999b), 247.

boundaries—is progressively undercut in what follows, as evidenced by the following exchange:

L'ÂÏEUL. Il me semble que le froid entre dans la chambre.
 LA FILLE. Il y a un peu de vent dans le jardin, grand-père, et les rosés s'effeuillent.
 LE PERE. Eh bien, ferme la porte. Il est tard.
 LA FILLE. Oui, mon père. – Je ne peux pas fermer la porte.
 LES DEUX AUTRES FILLES. Nous ne pouvons pas la fermer.
 L'ÂÏEUL. Qu'y a-t-il donc, mes filles?
 L'ONCLE. Il ne faut pas dire cela d'une voix extraordinaire. Je vais les aider.
 LA FILLE AINEE. Nous ne parvenons pas à la fermer tout à fait.³¹⁶

The *porte vitrée* refuses to stay closed,³¹⁷ despite the Granddaughters' best efforts; the boundary between onstage and offstage and, by extension, between life and death,³¹⁸ is neither clearly defined nor within the characters' power to control, and their onstage sanctum is forever imperilled.

The same is true of the house in *Intérieur*. The elder sister attempts to solidify the boundary between *Here* (the family's domestic haven) and *Elsewhere* (the garden, in itself a liminal space, an interface between nature and culture):

La plus grande des deux sœurs se lève et va pousser les verrous de la porte...
 MARTHE. Elle l'ouvre?
 L'ETRANGER. Au contraire, elle la ferme.
*Un silence.*³¹⁹

Of course, the very fact that the act of locking the door is *observable*—by the spectators in the garden, and by us, meta-spectators—testifies to its futility, as the Old Man is only too well aware:

Ils sont là, séparés de l'ennemi par de pauvres fenêtres... Ils croient que rien n'arrivera parce qu'ils ont fermé la porte et ils ne savent pas qu'il arrive toujours quelque chose dans les âmes et que le monde ne finit pas aux portes des maisons... Ils sont si sûrs de leur petite vie, et ils ne se doutent pas que tant d'autres en savent davantage; et que moi, pauvre vieux, je tiens ici, à deux pas de leur porte, tout leur petit bonheur entre mes vieilles mains que je n'ose pas ouvrir...³²⁰

³¹⁶ Maeterlinck (1999b), pp. 253-4.

³¹⁷ The front door of the house, as we discover shortly, behaves in much the same way ("Pourquoi était-elle ouverte à cette heure?" the Father, less self-assured now, asks of the Maid (ibid., p. 263).

³¹⁸ C.f. Hamm's explicit remark in *Endgame* (Beckett, 1986): "Outside of here it's death" (p. 96).

³¹⁹ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 517.

³²⁰ Ibid., 513.

The house and garden may be presented as “two clearly demarcated zones,”³²¹ but the frontier of demarcation is porous and easily breached, initially by the gaze of the spectator-voyeur, and ultimately by the Old Man, an unwilling messenger of death. The play draws to a close once he has crossed the threshold, and exterior and interior, aural shell and visual kernel, are collapsed.

³²¹ McGuinness (2000), p. 203.

4 Space Subjectivised

The manipulation of frames paginal and diegetic (and, on a higher level, institutional)—a challenge to entrenched binarisms such as figure/ground, text/page, stage/offstage, amongst others—was treated in Chapters 2 and 3 as the principal analogue between the dramatic practice of Maeterlinck and Jarry and the verbo-visual poetics of Mallarmé and Apollinaire. Many of the works in question also problematise what, in the context of this study at least, must be regarded as a more fundamental opposition: that between subject (enunciatory persona, dramatic character, etc) and space (environment, setting, locale). Spaces may be *subjectivised*, subjects *spatialised*; analysis of this two-way process of subjectivisation and spatialisation forms the bulk of my fourth and fifth chapters.

In the broadest terms, a subjectivised space may be: 1) a space used to evoke the presence of a non-personified (iconless) quasi-human agency; 2) a space distorted by, and presented to reader or spectator through the filter of, a character's consciousness; or, most radically, 3) a space that functions as the *mise-en-paysage* of a character's body and/or psyche (the degree of association or interdependence between space and subject obviously increasing as we move from 1) to 3)).

In order to explain the first of these, I shall draw a distinction between *personification* and *anthropomorphism*.³²² When personified, a natural landscape, impersonal force or inanimate object is not only endowed with the agency of a quasi-human subject, but also named and/or embodied in human-like form. For example, in Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1917), the Kiosk, already a reification of the abstract notion of "news", comes to life—is transfigured into a humanoid subject—at the end of Act I.³²³ To personify a landscape, force or object, then, is to turn it into a *positive, fixed-form figure*, to concretise an abstraction; to

³²² My distinction is specific to this study: the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and sometimes differentiated in other ways.

³²³ See Apollinaire (1956), p. 896.

anthropomorphise it, quite on the contrary, is to evoke a human-like agency without representing it, *to outline its presence in negative space (ground)* via the effects of its influence on its surroundings (“Peindre, non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit”³²⁴). Thus, the approach of the eponymous “intruder” in Maeterlinck’s *L’Intruse* is evoked by means of unexplained “disturbances” within onstage and offstage space: palpitating lamp, self-opening door, fearful animals, and so forth. The intruder is represented by no onstage icon; its infiltration of the familial sanctum is made perceptible through environmental signifiers—through negative space inscribed with “traces” of an unseen agency.

Apollinaire’s *poème-conversation* “Lundi rue Christine” provides an interesting point of comparison. The poem features no *je*-persona, and yet a controlling subjectivity, lurking literally between the lines—in the *conscious arrangement* of blanks—makes itself gradually felt as a kind of present absence, an underlying organisational locus. “Lundi rue Christine” also serves to illustrate the second type of subjectivisation outlined above. The entire poem is focalised through the poet’s ears and—as gradually becomes apparent—eyes; space and time are distorted, evoking attentional shifts and dramatising the selectivity of perception. “Zone”, meanwhile, draws the reader even further inward—into the warped space-time of the poet’s memories. European geography is fragmented and recombined into a mind’s-eye patchwork, while the cityscape of Paris becomes interiorised, transformed into a site for the projection of self. In order to convey spatio-temporal compression (telescoping) in perception and memory, Apollinaire employs collage and paratactic montage. Emphasising rupture, discontinuity, heterogeneity, these combinatorial techniques enact the subjective experience of time and space on a formal level.

Collage and paratactic montage are also to be found in *Ubu roi*, serving a purpose that becomes fully apparent only when the play is situated in the context of the *Ubu* cycle as a

³²⁴ Mallarmé (1959), p. 137.

whole. As will be shown, various lines and stage directions in *Ubu cocu ou l'Archéopteryx*, *Ubu enchainé* and *César-Antechrist* suggest that the universe of the play cycle is isomorphic with Ubu's Gidouille—that, in fact, universe and Gidouille stand in reciprocal relation with each other as macrocosm and microcosm. Which brings me to the third and most radical type of subjectivisation: setting, no longer a physical locale, now becomes *character writ large*. In Mallarmé's *Igitur*, the protagonist's "inner self" is, as Mary Lewis Shaw suggests, "paradoxically project[ed] outward into the claustral universe of his castle."³²⁵ His psychic space is reformulated as a notionally physical one, with "décor" and "props" (darkened chamber, tombs, candle, etc), functioning as allegorisations of self-consciousness. The "castle" staircase, for instance, facilitates a *descente vertigineuse* (to borrow Breton's term³²⁶) into—or, alternatively, *out of*³²⁷—the self: "Igitur descend les escaliers, de l'esprit humain, va au fond des choses."³²⁸ At the end of the *conte*, when the candle has been extinguished and consciousness snuffed out, what remains is Igitur's corpse, "le château de la pureté"³²⁹—pure because now unencumbered by the duality of self, reflecting and reflected.³³⁰ A spatial reformulation of Igitur's interiority, the "castle" contains an icon of his exteriority (the body), which *itself* accommodates his interiority. This *mise-en-abyme* structure also features in the first act of Jarry's *Ubu cocu ou l'Archéopteryx*, whose "setting" is described in a stage direction as "*L'intérieur de la Gidouille*"³³¹. The *mise-en-abyme* is complicated further by the presence of the synecdochic figures—I hesitate to call them "characters"—of Conscience and Soul, which gives rise to a paradoxical interpenetration, or cross-contamination, of levels:

³²⁵ Shaw (1989), p. 152.

³²⁶ Breton (1972), p. 92.

³²⁷ "The first comma sets up the sentence structure as an invitation to a polysemic reading. 'De l'esprit humain' can be read in two ways: the steps can be the steps *of* the human mind, or they may be read as an exit *from* the human mind. In either case, it is a descent and not a transcendence." Zachmann (2008), p. 73.

³²⁸ Mallarmé (1945), p. 434.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 443.

³³⁰ See Chapter 5, pp. 195-8, for a detailed analysis.

³³¹ Jarry (1972), p. 491.

Ubu interacts with exteriorised components of his own being in the already synecdochic “setting” of the Gidouille. Although there is no explicit *mise en abyme* in *Ubu roi*, the play’s aggressively anti-realist spatio-temporal organisation suggests that the diegesis I have termed “Poland & Environs” is purely *emblematic*, or, otherwise put, that it does not in any sense function as a geographic or “mappable” environment. When understood in the context of references in *Ubu cocu* et al. to the macrocosm-microcosm relation of universe and Gidouille, the collage-like set and phantasmal shifts of scene from one “country” to another (“Poland”, “Russia”, “Ukraine”, “Lithuania”...) take on new meaning, pointing to the simultaneous co-existence of every space and every time in Ubu’s all-encompassing Strumpot.

From Allegory to Symbol: Subjectivisation in Maeterlinck’s Plays

In keeping with the Romantic theorists of the symbol (Goethe, Schelling, Coleridge) and their *fin-de-siècle* successors, I shall differentiate between the symbolic mode and the allegorical. As defined here, personification and anthropomorphism belong, respectively, to the domains of allegory and symbol. The former, according to Friedrich Schelling, is “[t]hat representation [...] in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular.”³³² In other words, it is a trope, or system of tropes, which establishes a point-to-point correspondence between an abstraction and its embodiment or concretisation. At its crudest, allegory is the mechanistic figuration of the conceptual—or, as Coleridge puts it, the “translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses.”³³³ Thus, for instance, a straightforward isomorphic relationship is assumed in the commonplace *life is a journey*. The truly symbolic, however, permits of no such isomorphism, for, in the words of Schelling, it constitutes “the

³³² Schelling (1989), p.46.

³³³ Coleridge (1972), p. 30.

synthesis of [the particular and the symbolic], where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one.”³³⁴

Whereas the husk of allegory becomes *superfluous in itself* the moment we “intuit” whatever universal notion it might denote, the symbolic mode is one in which, to quote Goethe’s famous maxim, “the particular represents the more general, not as a dream or a shadow, but as a living momentary revelation of the Inscrutable.”³³⁵ Maeterlinck, for his part, echoes the statements of his Romantic predecessors in the following proclamation from “Menus propos” (1891), a collection of oblique aphorisms reminiscent of Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell”:

Le Symbole est l’Allégorie organique et intérieur; il a ses racines dans les ténèbres. L’Allégorie est le Symbole extérieur; elle a ses racines dans la lumière, mais sa cime est stérile et flétrie. L’Allégorie est un grand arbre mort; il empoisonne le paysage.³³⁶

The function of allegory is to elucidate, to illumine, that of symbol *to reveal the Inscrutable as such*, to preserve the darkness of the unknown rather than to dispel it.

It must be noted, however, that Maeterlinck does not always manage to eschew the sterility, the deadness of allegory; true in particular of later dramas such as *L’oiseau bleu* (1908), this assertion also applies, in part at least, to some of his early-period plays. Consider, for instance, *La mort de Tintagiles* (1894)—perhaps the turning point in Maeterlinck’s oeuvre, following which his vision of humanity becomes increasingly optimistic, and his dramaturgy distinctly less innovative. Death is personified as the Queen within the characters’ discourse in more or less unequivocal, if not entirely explicit, fashion, as evidenced by the following exchange from Act I:

TINTAGILES. Je ne verrai pas la reine ?
YGRAINE. Personne ne peut la voir...

³³⁴ Schelling (1989), p. 46.

³³⁵ Quoted in Barry (1987), p. 14. I am highly aware that there are various significant divergences between Goethe’s, Schelling’s and Coleridge’s respective conceptions of the symbol, but consideration of them is beyond the scope of this discussion.

³³⁶ Maeterlinck (1999a), p. 190. For further discussion of Maeterlinck’s theorisations of allegory and symbol, see van de Kerckhove (2007). For an analysis of his debt to German Romanticism, see Gorceix (1975).

TINTAGILES. Pourquoi ne peut-on la voir ?

YGRAINE. Approche-toi davantage, Tintagiles... Il ne faut pas qu'un oiseau ou une herbe nous entende...

TINTAGILES. Il n'y a pas d'herbe, petite sœur... *Un silence.* – Qu'est-ce qu'elle fait, la reine?

YGRAINE. Personne ne le sait, mon enfant. Elle ne se montre pas... Elle vit là, toute seule dans sa tour; et celles qui la servent ne sortent pas durant le jour... Elle est très vieille; elle est la mère de notre mère et elle veut régner seule... Elle est soupçonneuse et jalouse et on dit qu'elle est folle... [...] Ses ordres s'exécutent sans qu'on sache comment...

The Queen, adds Ygraine, possesses “une puissance que l'on ne comprend pas.”³³⁷ Several of the customary mythologised attributes of death are invoked here: despotism, capriciousness, incomprehensible power. An unremarkable, even rudimentary, allegorisation? It would be, were the Queen not denied onstage embodiment; though personified intra-dialogically, she exists as positivised negative space, as Mallarméan *effet*, on the level of spectacle. Her thwarted attempt in Act III to abduct and vanquish Tintagiles, who blacks out at the sound (or non-sound³³⁸) of an approaching crowd, takes place in the liminal space of a doorway, in the interstices of stage and offstage:

*[Ygraine], Bellangère et Aglovale, avec des efforts vains et énormes, tentent de repousser la porte qui continue de s'ouvrir lentement, sans qu'on entende ou qu'on voie personne. Seule, une clarté froide et calme pénètre dans l'appartement. A ce moment, Tintagiles [...] revient à lui, pousse un long cri de délivrance et embrasse sa sœur, tandis qu'à l'instant même de ce cri, la porte qui ne résiste plus, se referme brusquement sous leur poussée qu'ils n'ont pas eu le temps d'interrompre.*³³⁹

Décor and lighting—most frequently utilised in naturalistic drama as little more than delimiters of setting, as I pointed out in the last chapter—are here deployed as *indirect evidence* for the presence of a malevolent force with no form, visual or auditory, of its own. Agency thereby comes to be figured spatially, rather than by way of an onstage persona.

Meanwhile, in a highly effective take on the murder-behind-closed-doors of Greek tragedy, Maeterlinck situates the climax of the play—the eponymous death of Tintagiles—

³³⁷ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 526-7.

³³⁸ “On entend et on n'entend pas,” claims Aglovale (ibid., p. 540); Maeterlinck's stage directions, significantly, remain silent in this regard, giving the director free reign in developing the auditory dimension of this scene, and the degree of its aural specificity and (ir)realism.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 541.

immediately offstage, behind a door which Ygraine, for all her frenzied efforts, cannot prise open:

TINTAGILES, *sanglotant désespérément*. Tu n'as pas quelque chose pour ouvrir, sœur Ygraine ?... [...]
 YGRAINE. Je n'ai rien que ma lampe, Tintagiles... Voilà! Voilà!... *Elle frappe la porte à grands coups, à l'aide de sa lampe d'argile qui s'éteint et se brise*. Oh!... Tout est noir tout à coup!... Tintagiles, où es-tu !... Oh! écoute, écoute!... Tu ne peux pas ouvrir de l'intérieur?...
 TINTAGILES. Non, non; il n'y a rien... Je ne sens rien du tout... Je ne vois plus la petite fente claire...
 YGRAINE. Qu'as-tu donc, Tintagiles ?... Je n'entends presque plus.
 TINTAGILES. Petite sœur, sœur Ygraine... Ce n'est plus possible...
 YGRAINE. Qu'y a-t-il, Tintagiles ?... où vas-tu ?...
 TINTAGILES. Elle est là !... Je n'ai plus de courage. – Sœur Ygraine, sœur Ygraine !... Je la sens !...
 YGRAINE. Qui ?... Qui ?...
 TINTAGILES. Je ne sais pas... Je ne vois pas... Mais ce n'est plus possible !... Elle... elle me prend à la gorge... Elle a mis la main sur ma gorge...
 [...]
*On entend la chute d'un petit corps derrière la porte de fer.*³⁴⁰

Crucially, however, Maeterlinck rejects the Greek tragic device of *teichoscopia* (the onstage account of an offstage action or event): Tintagiles's death is not reported but enacted. Offstage space, far from being “confined to a merely verbal existence,” as Michael Issacharoff would have it,³⁴¹ is evoked acoustically and proxemically—without recourse to verbal mediation—as much as dialogically. We hear the fall of the body and, presumably, the remoteness of Tintagiles's cries prior to the fall, issuing forth from a different (and, depending on directorial choice, potentially distorted or “otherworldly”) acoustic space; we also see Ygraine's struggle to open the door, strongly suggestive of the parallel struggle taking place in immediate, yet tragically inaccessible, proximity—at least until her lamp is extinguished, plunging us into total darkness: “Tout est noir tout à coup!” Generally, we are more auditors than spectators here. Vision is the most highly developed of the human senses, and orthodox Western epistemology is primarily vision-oriented (“seeing is knowing”). Maeterlinck, in an effort to not to represent or concretise *l'Inconnu*, progressively reduces and

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 551-2.

³⁴¹ Issacharoff (1989), p. 58.

ultimately blocks the flow of information received through sight—our most powerful sensory channel—and forces us to direct our attention to the auditory modality. Aural experience is more ephemeral, more “slippery” than visual. “Sound,” writes Walter Ong,

exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent. [...] [N]o other sensory field totally resists a holding action, stabilization, in quite this way. [...] There is no equivalent of a still shot for sound.³⁴²

A sound-oriented theatre is therefore more in keeping with Maeterlinck’s aesthetic of evocation than one which foregrounds the “lastingness” of visibility (*spectacle*).

In *L’Intruse*, the allegorical impulse of Maeterlinck’s later plays, already discernible in *Tintagiles*, has not yet surfaced. As mentioned above, the “intruder” is denied both onstage icon and intra-dialogical persona; personification within the characters’ discourse is replaced by anthropomorphisation, as the following exchange demonstrates:

L’AÏEUL. [...] *Qui est-ce qui fait ce bruit?*
 LA FILLE AÏNEE. C’est la lampe qui *palpite* ainsi, grand-père.
 L’AÏEUL. Il me semble qu’elle est bien *inquiète*... bien *inquiète*...
 LA FILLE. C’est le vent froid qui la *tourmente*...
 L’ONCLE. Il n’y a pas de vent froid, les fenêtres sont fermées.
 LA FILLE. Je crois qu’elle va s’*éteindre*.
 LE PERE. Il n’y a plus d’huile.
 LA FILLE. Elle s’*éteint* tout à fait.³⁴³ (emphasis mine)

Earlier, I defined anthropomorphism as the outlining in negative space of a quasi-human agency, and precisely this is achieved here. The family members do not refer to the intruder in the same unequivocal fashion that Ygraine refers to the Queen—and nor could they: like a black hole, the intruder is detectable only indirectly, and remains imperceptible to audience and characters alike. The fact of its inexorable approach is communicated through localised diegetic disturbances (“phenomena that occur as a result of its movement”³⁴⁴) and characters’ reactions thereto. Because its incursion into the house is evoked exclusively by means of

³⁴² Ong (2002), p. 32.

³⁴³ Maeterlinck (1999b), pp. 274-5.

³⁴⁴ Konrad (1986), p. 158.

ground rather than figure, negative space acquires a positive value, and the hierarchy implicit in the figure-ground dichotomy is thereby reversed. The arrangement of the italicised terms above merits close attention. Maeterlinck does not simply pepper the dialogue with sporadic anthropomorphic imagery—rather, the Grandfather and the Daughter engage in *rapidly escalating* anthropomorphisation, which the Father and Uncle attempt to counter with conventional rationality. The process of anthropomorphisation is catalysed by the Grandfather's use of *Qui?*, a seemingly innocuous interrogative pronoun, but one whose significance the Daughter's reply confirms: the lamp is a *who* rather than a *what*, a quasi-animate entity that quivers or throbs like a living creature. The verb *palpiter* animates the lamp; the adjective *inquiète*, however, endows it with the specifically human capacity for anxiety, while the next *réplique* goes further still, transforming the wind into an agent-tormentor. The affirmative *C'est ... qui* constructions employed by the Daughter, in which the lamp and wind feature as (grammatical) agents, are counteracted by the *Il n'y a pas/plus* negations in the rejoinders of the Father and Uncle, where, it might be argued, the nouns are denied agency in a vain attempt to restore logic and order to the inanimate world.

Though the intruder has no persona within the play itself, it is personified extra-diegetically, in the play's name. As well as encapsulating the theme of encroachment, the title *L'Intruse* also reveals the intruder to be notionally female—a crucial piece of information in understanding its (“her”) nature, since death, in Francophone culture, is typically (though not always) personified as a woman.³⁴⁵ *Les Aveugles*, in contrast, affords us no such extra-diegetic guidance. There is nothing to explain who, or what, might have stepped into the midst of the blind at the play's climax. Nor, significantly, is there any definitive confirmation

³⁴⁵ See Guthke (1999), for a thorough and wide-ranging discussion of personifications of death, male and female, throughout European history.

in the stage directions of the “bruit des pas”³⁴⁶ alluded to by the Oldest Blind Woman—merely reference to ambient sound: “*Une rafale fait tourbillonner les feuilles mortes*”³⁴⁷ As in *Tintagiles*, the auditory modality comes to take precedence over the visual, but here this is coupled with an apparent switch from external to internal focalisation. Stage-space, which thus far has represented what might be called a *Without*—an external environment fully separable from the characters’ interiorities—abruptly and disorientingly comes to be filtered through their perceptual field: the blind cannot see the source of the footsteps, and it remains invisible to us also. The entire premise of the play hitherto has been founded on dramatic irony, but at this ultimate juncture, audience and readers suddenly find themselves with precisely the same information as the blind—and that information is exclusively auditory:

LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Le bruit des pas se rapproche par ici ; écoutez donc! écoutez donc!
LE PLUS VIEIL AVEUGLE. J’entends le frôlement d’une robe contre les feuilles mortes.

[...]

PREMIER AVEUGLE-NE. C’est peut-être la mer dans les feuilles mortes?

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Non, non! ce sont des pas! ce sont des pas! ce sont des pas! [...] [Ils] se sont arrêtés parmi nous!...

LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Ils sont ici! Ils sont au milieu de nous!...

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Qui êtes-vous?

Silence.

LA PLUS VIEILLE AVEUGLE. Ayez pitié de nous! (ibid., pp. 324-5)

Seeing is no longer knowing. We are offered no visual (or any other) instantiation of the potentially malevolent agency that has invaded the stage in the dying moments of the play, nor provided with any straightforward set of isomorphic correspondences (life = journey, Queen = Death, etc); the footsteps evoke a true Symbol, a pure, absolutely unconcretised abstraction.

³⁴⁶ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 324.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 322.

Space-Time Compression I: Geographies of the Self

I would now like to shift focus from Maeterlinck to Apollinaire and Jarry, and to investigate the *interiorisation* of space and time that occurs in “Zone”, the *poèmes-conversation* and the *Ubu* cycle. The climax of *Les Aveugles* affords us an initial example of such an interiorisation: we, as readers or audience, perceive what is perceived by the characters themselves, and not what “objectively” exists “out there”. The inner-outer dichotomy is thus blurred: the setting of the “*ancienne forêt septentrionale*”³⁴⁸ becomes a Without-as-experienced-from-Within, an environment mediated by subjectivity. Now, the interrogation of inner-outer, mind-world boundaries in modernist *prose narrative* is a well-documented phenomenon; David Herman, for example, situates it within the (implicitly) anti-Cartesian tendencies of the period, as discussed in Chapter 1:

in place of Cartesian mappings of the mental as a bracketed-off interior space, [modernist narratives] allow the mind to be imagined as a kind of distributional flow, interwoven with rather than separated from situations, events, and process in the world.³⁴⁹

Turn-of-the-century drama and poetry, however, are seldom analysed from the same perspective, and it is this critical lacuna that I would like to address in the remainder of this chapter, and in the Interlude that follows.

The “interweaving” of mind and world is richly in evidence in “Zone” and “Les Fenêtres”. These poems feature warped, subjectivist geographies—they are highly schematised “maps” wrought by an apparently global consciousness, delocalised by technologies of speed, perception and telecommunication. In “Zone”, the poet’s physical Parisian *dérive* sets in motion another, wider-ranging tour across the Europe of his mind’s eye:

Maintenant tu marches dans Paris tout seul parmi la foule
[...]
Maintenant tu es au bord de la Méditerranée
[...]

³⁴⁸ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 285.

³⁴⁹ Herman (2011), p. 255.

Tu es dans le jardin d’une auberge aux environs de Prague
[...]

Te voici à Marseille au milieu des pastèques

Te voici à Coblenz à l’hôtel du Géant

Te voici à Rome assis sous un néflier du Japon

Te voici à Amsterdam avec une jeune fille que tu trouves
belle et qui est laide
[...]

Tu es à Paris chez le juge d’instruction³⁵⁰

This is a Europe of isolated locales, no longer a continuous, traversable territory but a series of discrete points abstracted from their public (geographical) milieus and collated into a private (interior) narrative. The pan-European consciousness of “Zone” is “transatlanticised” in “Les Fenêtres”:

Vancouver
Où le train blanc de neige et de feux nocturnes fuit l’hiver
O Paris
Du rouge au vert tout le jaune se meurt
Paris Vancouver Hyères Maintenon New York et les Antilles³⁵¹

This catalogue of toponyms *does not simply represent a real-world itinerary*—or at least not a practicable one: we are not transported across the Atlantic in any given direction, but traverse it several times, taking in the entire breadth of Caribbean and the North American continent. The distinction between *hier* (hom. Hyères) et *maintenant* (hom. Maintenon) is seemingly blurred, and geographical space compressed and “twisted”.

This subjectivist treatment of geography is not, of course, unique to Apollinaire. Numerous literary works of the period thematise spatio-temporal distortion within subjective experience, often in tandem with the technological compression of space and time. A notable example is Blaise Cendrars’s *La Prose du Transsibérien* (1913). Set against the background of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5, *Prose* is ostensibly a travelogue poem, recounting a journey

³⁵⁰ Apollinaire (1991) pp. 50-53.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 185.

from Moscow to Harbin on the Trans-Siberian Railway as undertaken by Cendrars's fictionalised younger self at the age of 16. The variable speed of the train generates the impression of a world now contracting, now expanding:

Toutes les gares lézardées obliques sur la route
 Les fils télégraphiques auxquels elles pendent
 Les poteaux grimaçantes qui gesticulent et les étranglent
 Le monde s'étire s'allonge et se retire comme un accordéon qu'une main sadique tourmente³⁵²

The onrushing landscape, experienced as an *evanescent panorama*,³⁵³ is rendered in proto-surrealistic, anthropomorphised terms; beheld at speed, the vista of telegraph poles is grotesquely deformed in the poet's perspective. The technological matrix of machine and man gives rise to new modes of subjectivity, new means of apprehending the world. There may also be a meta-textual reference lurking in the last of the quoted lines, a sly allusion to the physical form of the poem, printed on a single accordion-folded sheet.³⁵⁴ The "main sadique", then, is perhaps none other than the reader's, furling and unfurling the scroll—a "monde" in microcosm.

Meta-literary devices of this kind should alert us to the fact that *Prose* is no mimetic account of a straightforwardly physical train ride. The space traversed by the poet is as much inner as outer, his journey—"poised on the threshold between documentary realism and fantasy"³⁵⁵—taking him through the mutable terrain of the mind. The accurate topographical map at the head of the scroll (Figure 19) stands in subtle yet deliberate contrast with the following toponym catalogue: "Tomsk Tcheliabinsk Kainsk Obi Taïchet Verkné Oudinsk Kourgane

³⁵² Cendrars (1967), p. 34.

³⁵³ "Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived," writes Wolfgang Schivelbush (1986); "the [train] traveller saw the objects, landscapes, etc. *through* the apparatus that moved him through the world. That machine and the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception" (p. 64). Elsewhere, he notes that "the landscape that was seen in this way was no longer experienced intensively, discretely [...] but evanescently, impressionistically—panoramically, in fact. More exactly, in panoramic perception the objects were attractive in their state of dispersal" (p. 189). Panoramic perception finds a filmic counterpart in montage techniques, discussed below.

³⁵⁴ Or, more precisely, on four sheets glued together.

³⁵⁵ Perloff (1986), p. 16.



Figure 19: Detail from the “Prose” scroll.

Samara Pensa-Touloune”³⁵⁶ While the map shows a real-world itinerary, the catalogue, much like the one in “Les Fenêtres”, warps geographical space; rather than proceeding linearly from west to east, as might be expected, we jump back and forth across the vastness of Russia: Chelyabinsk, for example, is really west of Tomsk, Kurgan east of Samara. The logic of this list seems to be alliterative and assonantal—place-names are grouped aurally (Tomsk Tcheliabinsk Kainsk ... Obi Taïchet ... Kourgane Samara) rather than in accordance with geography. Elsewhere, recollected sounds are worked into a transcontinental montage, disrupting narrative continuity, defying the linearity of rail travel:

Le train avance et le soleil retarde
 Rien n’y fait, j’entends les cloches sonores
 Le gros bourdon de Notre-Dame
 La cloches aigrette du Louvre qui sonna la Barthélemy
 Les carillons rouillés de Bruges-la-Morte
 Les sonneries électriques de la bibliothèque de New-York
 Les campagnes de Venise
 Et les cloches de Moscou, l’horloges de la Porte-Rouge qui me comptait les heures
 quand j’étais dans un bureau

³⁵⁶ Cendrars (1967), p. 35.

Et mes souvenirs³⁵⁷

As Katherine Shingler asserts, “the poem seems to question whether time”—and, I would add, space—“is ever experienced, or remembered, as linear at all.”³⁵⁸

Despite the obvious similarities of technique, Apollinaire takes diegetic subjectivisation considerably further than Cendrars. The filters of perception and memory in *Prose* are usually *identified as such* by Cendrars’s narrator-mediator. In the just-quoted passage, for example, the reader is made explicitly aware that the tintinnabulation of bells is being replayed in the mind’s ear of the poet—firstly by means of the phrases *j’entends* and *mes souvenirs*, and secondly by the switch from present to past historic (*qui sonna*) or imperfect (*qui me comptait, quand j’étais*). The mental tour of Europe in “Zone”, by contrast, is mediated by no consistent *je*-narrator, and written almost exclusively in the present (an early example of the “continuous” or “eternal” present, theorised and more fully exploited by the high modernists of the 1920s and 1930s³⁵⁹)—thus:

Tu es dans le jardin d’une auberge aux environs de Prague
 Tu te sens tout heureux une rose est sur la table
 Et tu observes au lieu d’écrire ton conte en prose
 La cétoine qui dort dans le coeur de la rose³⁶⁰

A more profound interiorisation of time and space is in evidence here: while Cendrars’s *je* interposes, however subtly, between reader and memory-montage, Apollinaire’s *tu* seems to draw us inwards, into the very fabric of memories being woven in consciousness. *Tu es dans le jardin*: unframed by changes of tense or by explicit retrospection, this flashback masquerades as a conduit directly into the mind’s eye,³⁶¹ into the poet’s second-person visualisation of his own self, past-yet-present, elsewhere-yet-here.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 39

³⁵⁸ Shingler (2012), p.23-4.

³⁵⁹ Gertrude Stein and James Joyce being the two most notable examples.

³⁶⁰ Apollinaire (1991), p. 50.

³⁶¹ See Chapter 5, pp. 180-3, for further discussion.

Brian McHale identifies the heterogeneous, composite diegesis of “Zone” as the ultimate precursor of the heterotopias³⁶² of postmodern fiction—subjectivist, liminal and (at least partially) virtual spaces (or *zones*, as he aptly dubs them) “capable of accommodating [...] incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds.”³⁶³ Diegetic space, claims McHale, is constructed (but also simultaneously *deconstructed*) by postmodern authors according to the principles of “*juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, and misattribution*”³⁶⁴ (italics in the original). Of particular relevance to “Zone” are juxtaposition—the drawing together of “spaces which real-world atlases or encyclopedias show as noncontiguous and unrelated”—and superimposition, wherein “two familiar spaces are placed one on top of the other, as in a photographic double-exposure, creating through their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space identifiable with neither of the original two.”³⁶⁵ Significantly, these two strategies are deployed simultaneously in “Zone”: the mishmash of European cities—which, as in “Les Fenêtres”, appear in an order that does not resemble any workable itinerary—is overlaid upon the geographical locale of Paris, giving rise to a new, multiply synthetic milieu that is neither wholly physical nor wholly mental, neither geographically verisimilar nor fabricated *ex nihilo*.

In its paratactic juxtapositioning of disparate locales, “Zone” is highly akin to a *cognitive map*—a type of cognitive abstraction defined by Barbara Tversky as the “mental representation of an external environment”. Tversky elaborates: “All conceptions of cognitive maps recognize that, as for maps on paper, not all the information in the environment is

³⁶² “L’hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles.” Foucault (1994), p. 757.

³⁶³ McHale (1987), p. 44. Some examples of zones in postmodernist fiction cited by McHale include Nabokov’s *Ada*, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. “Behind them all,” he writes, “lies Apollinaire’s poem ‘Zone’ [...], whose speaker, strolling through the immigrant and red-light districts of Paris, finds in them an objective correlative for modern Europe and his own marginal, heterogeneous, and outlaw experience” (p. 59).

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

represented. Rather that information is schematised. Much information is left out, some information is simplified or idealized.”³⁶⁶ Cognitive maps, unlike topographic maps, often include little or no metric information regarding direction and distance, and retain only salient geometric and topographic features—salient, that is, in subjective experience, rather than publicly acknowledged as such. Frequently, geographic reality is broken apart and reassembled into a *cognitive collage*,³⁶⁷ a loose grouping of unconnected or semi-connected knowledge chunks separated by lacunae. Prague-Marseille-Coblenz-Rome-Amsterdam: this, I would suggest, is just such a collage, its lacunae represented iconically as wordless white spaces. It would be senseless, therefore, to wonder what sort of “terrain” separates, say, Coblenz and Rome, or by what means the poet’s persona “travels” from one city to the other: this would be to misconstrue the space of “Zone” as topographical and metric. The splicing together of two radically different orders of magnitude—a continent is effectively made to nestle within a single city—problematizes the notion of geographically localised place. Overlaid with the collage of capitals, Paris ceases to be a static geographic locus and becomes a dynamic, mutable site for the projection of the narrator’s psychological state and his manifold recollections: a subjectivised space. In this regard, Apollinaire anticipates the ideas of Situationist Guy Debord and his theorisation of cities as being divided “en zones de climats psychiques tranchés.”³⁶⁸

This (psycho)geographic approach to Apollinaire’s later poetry, and to “Zone” in particular, is by no means novel.³⁶⁹ By contrast, *Ubu roi* has not, to my knowledge, been comprehensively examined from the same perspective; critical attention has been largely oriented towards questions of linguistics and theatre semiotics. The specifically geographic

³⁶⁶ Tversky (2000), p. 24.

³⁶⁷ See Tversky (1993).

³⁶⁸ Debord (1955), p.

³⁶⁹ See, e.g., Apter (2006), p. 5; Healey (2003), p. 82; Scott (2007), pp. 183-4.

dimension of Jarry's concept of "Nulle Part" has, understandably enough, been largely overshadowed by its crucial semiotic ramifications ("How does the play signify Nowhere? How can Nowhere be staged?"), touched on in Chapter 3, in which I examined the liminal nature of "Poland & Environs", the play's anti-setting. Here, however, I must emphasise Jarry's predilection for the compression and distortion of geographic space—a predilection shared with Cendrars and Apollinaire, but far more aggressively "anti-encyclopaedic". Outright misrepresentations of geography are common in *Ubu roi*: distances are massively exaggerated or underestimated, and topographical features non-existent in a given region may be "imported" from another. For instance, Bordure claims, upon arriving at the "Moscow" court of Tsar Alexis after his escape from the Fortress of "Thorn" (the German name for Toruń, a city in northern Poland), that "je suis parvenu à m'échapper et j'ai couru cinq jours et cinq nuits à cheval à traverser les steppes pour venir implorer Votre gracieuse miséricorde."³⁷⁰ First of all, even a cursory look at a map of Eastern Europe would reveal that no horse would ever be able to cover the distance between Thorn and Moscow in five days and five nights. In typically subversive fashion, Jarry juxtaposes the language of fairy tales—"for x days and x nights" is, of course, a stock folkloric formula—with real-world locations. The reference to "les steppes", meanwhile, constitutes what Brian McHale would call misattribution—another principle of spatial (de)construction characteristic of postmodernist fiction:

Traditional catalogues of places and their attributes [...] in effect transcribe the unwritten encyclopedia of conventional wisdom and common knowledge. [...] Common knowledge automatically associates Canada with snowshoes, Newfoundland with fishing, Vermont with hills. [*All these locations feature in Section 16 of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself (1881), which McHale quotes to substantiate this claim.*] [...]. It would in a sense be *ungrammatical* in this context to associate Vermont with ranches, or Texas with fishing or the woods, even though, objectively, there are certainly fisherman and woods in the real-world Texas. [...] Postmodernist fictions, by contrast, often strive to displace and rupture these automatic

³⁷⁰ Jarry (1972), p. 375.

associations, parodying the encyclopedia and substituting for “encyclopedic” knowledge their own *ad hoc*, arbitrary, unsanctioned associations.³⁷¹

Jarry, presaging postmodern techniques, challenges the encyclopaedia by relocating the steppe—a vast ecoregion which, in reality, stretches from the Black Sea to Siberia, but is particularly associated in the Western popular consciousness with Central Asia and Mongolia—to the expanse between Thorn and Moscow. The objective is, no doubt, to mock his compatriots’ preconceptions about the “East”—a poorly understood, feared Other in the Western mindscape—and to expose their ignorance of its topography. In this respect, the postmodern answer to Jarry’s “Poland & Environs” is the “Kazakhstan” of Sacha Baron Cohen’s *Borat* (2006)—visually, acoustically and linguistically a quintessential “Nulle Part”. The film’s opening scenes, purportedly set in Borat’s home village, were actually filmed in the Romanian settlement of Glod—a blatant geographic misattribution that plays on cultural ignorance, very much in the vein of Jarry. Moreover, no Kazakh is heard in *Borat*; while the villagers speak Romanian, Borat himself speaks Hebrew interpolated with snippets of Polish and Russian (cf. the melange of accents—English, Russian, Auvergne—used by Firmin Gémier, Louise France et al. in 1896). In a further conflation of frames, the film’s soundtrack features a bricolage of Balkan and Romani music, ironically mirroring the Western tendency to collapse Eastern Europe’s regional and cultural idiosyncrasies into an amorphous hotchpotch of stereotypes and clichés. Cohen’s “Kazakhstan” and Jarry’s “Poland” are deliberately constructed so as to fall between many stools—the better to satirise and stupefy.³⁷²

“Poland & Environs” is not simply an in-between space, however: it is also a space that appears to be generated by, and coextensive with, the character of Ubu—and, more

³⁷¹ McHale (1987), p. 63.

³⁷² Geographic considerations aside, I might add that the character of Borat should be regarded as Ubu’s twenty-first century offspring; just like Ubu, he is a mirror held up to an unsuspecting public, an incarnation of the most abhorrent aspects of contemporary society.

specifically, his stool-producing Gidouille, that “*vorace avaleur de mondes, qui engloutit tout ce qui se présente à lui.*”³⁷³ As such, it might be regarded as the *mise en paysage* of a primordial, anti-rational self. The bodily drama of Act I of *Ubu cocu ou l’Archéopteryx*—set, as mentioned above, inside the Gidouille and featuring Ubu’s Conscience and Soul—appears to take its rise from late medieval debate poetry, in which body parts and moral faculties are allegorised as autonomous agents and made to engage in dialogue with each other, often for didactic or instructive purposes. (Notable examples include François Villon’s “Le debat du cuer et du corps de Villon”, and many of the *ballades* of Charles d’Orléans.³⁷⁴) Debate poetry is (if only implicitly) grounded in faculty psychology, which was predominant in some form or other until at least the early nineteenth century, and persists in folk theories to this day. It is defined by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson as

a model of the mind divided into discrete “faculties.” That model is [...] metaphoric through and through. [...] The Society of Mind metaphor is basic to faculty psychology. In the metaphor, the mind is conceptualized as a society whose members perform distinct, nonoverlapping tasks necessary for the successful functioning of that society. The capacities of the mind are thereby conceptualized as autonomous, individual people, each with a different job and each with a distinct, appropriate personality.³⁷⁵

At the end of Act I, Plato’s theory of the tripartite soul—one of the earliest incarnations of European faculty psychology—is referenced, fittingly enough, by the Soul of Ubu:

L’AME DU PERE UBU. Je vous ai entendue, Mère Ubu! Ici les murs ont les oneilles! Car ma Gidouille est la plus noble partie, la tête de mon corps a des oneilles, donc ma Gidouille, dont les parois sont les murs de ce séjour, a des oneilles. Et comme Platon distingue trois âmes, ce qui n’est pas trop pour notre volume, je suis l’âme de la Gidouille!³⁷⁶

In Book IV of the *Republic*, Plato arranges the three aspects of the soul—rational, spirited and appetitive—in strict hierarchy: reason must restrain both spirit and appetite, of which the latter is clearly the baser faculty. This is a chain of command which Jarry, predictably,

³⁷³ Béhar (1980), p. 46.

³⁷⁴ See Coldiron (2000), p. 61ff., for a stimulating discussion of “the lyric self in conversation with itself” in Charles’s “heart poems”.

³⁷⁵ Lakoff and Johnson (1999), p. 410.

³⁷⁶ Jarry (1972), p. 495.

delights in subverting. Within the mythos of the *Ubu* cycle, the *Gidouille* is the all-powerful source of all things, and can be restrained by nothing: as Ubu remarks to his reified Conscience (whose counsel, in contradistinction to the debate-poem tradition, can only ever fall on deaf ears, and whom Ubu can dispense with at will), “Nous faisons en ce moment notre digestion, et la moindre dilation de notre gidouille nous ferait périr à l’instant.”³⁷⁷ Not only is animal appetite the prime mover in the *Ubu* cycle, it also permeates the entire universe, transcending its original status of discrete faculty. In the penultimate scene of *Ubu enchainé*, the nature of the relationship between *Gidouille* and universe is stated in yet more unequivocal terms by Ubu himself: “Je commence à constater,” he declares, “que Ma *Gidouille* est plus grosse que toute la terre.”³⁷⁸

Now, if the geography of the *Ubu* cycle gestures toward postmodernism, its “cosmography” also reaches back into the Middle Ages: Ubu’s all-encompassing, globe-like sphericity evokes the medieval conception of microcosm (human body) and macrocosm (universe) as models of each other, reciprocal and mutually reflective.³⁷⁹ The universe of the plays is not so much Ubu-centric as *incorporated* (pun intended) into Ubu’s very flesh. The significance of Ubu’s sphericity may not perhaps be immediately obvious in *Ubu roi*, where the occult and hermetic elements of Jarry’s mythopoeia are somewhat downplayed, but is brought to the very fore in *César-Antechrist* (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5). In the latter’s *Acte héraldique*, the Antichrist (soon to metamorphose into Ubu) is associated with the personified “character” of Orle, a narrow border tracing the outline of an escutcheon (shield) at some distance from its edge:

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 504.

³⁷⁸ Jarry (1972), p. 461.

³⁷⁹ The macrocosm-microcosm model of the universe went into terminal decline in the first half of the seventeenth century in the wake of the Copernican revolution; it is appropriated by Jarry for mythopoeic purposes.

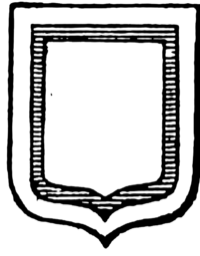


Figure 20: An orle.

In the words of Alastair Brotchie, “[a]n ‘orle’ is the *nearest ‘ordinary’ (band of colour)* to the circle available within the rules of *heraldry*. It thus stands for the circle (and sphere) and embodies Jarry’s use of these two figures as symbols within the play.”³⁸⁰ Set on (or against) the two-dimensional field of the escutcheon, the “action” of the *Acte h raldique* is literally encompassed by Orle,³⁸¹ and, by association, by the soon-to-arrive Ubu himself. This integration of microcosm and macrocosm recalls medieval *mappae mundi*—theologically instructive rather than geographically accurate world maps in which the earthly globe (*orbis terrarum*) was often identified with the body of the crucified Christ (*corpus Christi*).³⁸² Christ may be depicted on *mappae mundi* as sitting in judgement atop the globe, or as embracing it his arms—a more intimate form of identification. Uniquely, the thirteenth-century Ebstorf map (Figure 21) presents *orbis* and *corpus* as *fully conflated*, with Christ’s head, hands and feet marking the four points of the compass. “Geography,” writes Toby Lester, “has merged not only with cosmography but also anatomy. The world’s waterways have become Christ’s bloodstream and nervous system, its land formations have become his flesh and bones, and its center, Jerusalem, has become his navel.”³⁸³ In Jarry’s mythopoeia, Christian theology is inverted: Christ becomes Antichrist becomes Ubu, who, rather than embracing the globe,

³⁸⁰ Jarry (1992), p. 41.

³⁸¹ “Orle” is also the Act’s subtitle: Jarry clearly wants to underline its significance.

³⁸² For example, the sign of the cross was invoked on T-O maps—schematic diagrams in which the three known continents (Afro-Eurasia) were enclosed within a circle (“O”) and divided by a “T”.

³⁸³ Lester (2011), pp. 60-61.



Figure 21: Ebstorf *mappa mundi* (c. 1234), attributed to Gervase of Tilbury.

swallows it whole.³⁸⁴ The geography of the *Ubu* cycle is a fleshly one, its space and time twisted and coiled like intestines.

Space-Time Compression II: Collage and Montage

The techniques of collage and montage, as we have already seen, are favoured by both Apollinaire and Jarry, and I conclude this chapter with a detailed analysis of their use in “Lundi rue Christine” and *Ubu roi*. Some preliminary definitions are necessary here, not least because, as Michel Décaudin rightly asserts, “la frontière [entre ces termes] est bien floue.”³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ I am not suggesting, of course, that the *mappa mundi* tradition exerted a direct influence on Jarry’s imagination (although, given his general medievalism, this is eminently possible); I am merely noting (significant) correlations.

³⁸⁵ Décaudin (1980), p. 31.

Both collage and montage involve *découpage* (severing) and subsequent assemblage—a novel *recontextualisation* of fragments severed from their “native” contexts. “The former,” writes Marjorie Perloff, “refers [...] to spatial relationships, the latter to temporal; the former to static objects, the latter, originally a film term, to things in motion.”³⁸⁶ Although that is indeed how the terms are typically employed, care must be taken not to cleave time absolutely from space: as has already been demonstrated, any warping of the latter inevitably entails warping of the former, and vice versa. We might also attempt a distinction based on the degree of heterogeneity that is allowed to remain in the assemblage, or the extent to which its disparate elements are integrated into a cohesive whole. “The refusal to suppress [...] alterity” is, as Perloff suggests, undoubtedly “[c]entral to collage”³⁸⁷; in cinematic and theatrical montage, however, alterity may be either foregrounded or masked, depending on the desired aesthetic effect. In mainstream cinema, montage sequences are predominantly *hypotactic*. Each shot flows “logically” out of the previous one, and causal and temporal relationships between shots are immediately apparent. In order to achieve maximum integration and continuity of action, transitions (cuts, fades and so forth) are made unobtrusive: the process of narration must be seamless, almost invisible. Yet the original theory of montage, as elaborated by Sergei Eisenstein,³⁸⁸ lays emphasis precisely on what Hollywood continuity editing seeks to mask or eliminate: fragmentation, discontinuity, apparently unmotivated transition. Eisensteinian “collision montage” is fundamentally *paratactic*. It juxtaposes shots without hierarchising them or making explicit causal or temporal connections; these are left for the viewer to construct.

Rather than dwelling unduly on definitions or distinctions, however, I would like to consider the ways in which collage and montage can be used to dramatise the telescoping of

³⁸⁶ Perloff (1986), p. 246.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. xix.

³⁸⁸ See Eisenstein (1957).

space and time within subjectivity. At first glance, “Lundi rue Christine” would appear to be highly inappropriate as a case study here: it is, after all, famed as a poem constructed almost entirely out of random conversational fragments, and from which the poet seems to have disappeared, or at least to have been reduced to the role of a neutral *enregistreur* “[du] lyrisme ambiant,”³⁸⁹ as Apollinaire himself puts it. That the poet’s *je*-persona has vanished is indeed indisputable: the overheard fragments of café chatter are recorded verbatim, apparently without narratorial mediation. But the disappearance of the persona, contrary to initial impressions, *does not entail the expulsion from the text of a controlling subjectivity*. In his discussion of the poem, Timothy Mathews highlights “the sense of creative intervention [produced in “Lundi rue Christine], in spite of the studied absence of any unifying authorial presence”³⁹⁰ How, then, is this “creative intervention” achieved? Subtler, non-narratorial forms of mediation are available to the poet: blanks and lineation. Instead of being presented as a single, undifferentiated mass, the café’s aural ambience is recorded on the page in blocks of unequal length:

La mère de la concierge et la concierge laisseront tout passer
 Si tu es un homme tu m’accompagneras ce soir
 Il suffirait qu’un type maintînt la porte cochère
 Pendant que l’autre monterait

Trois becs de gaz allumés
 La patronne est poitrinaire
 Quand tu auras fini nous jouerons une partie de jacquet
 Un chef d’orchestre qui a mal à la gorge
 Quand tu viendras à Tunis je te ferai fumer du kief

Ça a l’air de rimer³⁹¹

Where is the poet? In the text’s interstices, “a significant, felt absence [...], an unstated but inescapable source of control” (to borrow David Hayman’s description, highly applicable

³⁸⁹ Apollinaire (1991), p. 197.

³⁹⁰ Mathews (1987), p. 155-6.

³⁹¹ Apollinaire (1991), p. 197.

here, of the so-called “Arranger” who lurks behind the scenes of *Ulysses*).³⁹² The visual demarcations create narrative, or at least the *possibility* of narrative, from seemingly unrelated textual splinters. Represented by no persona, but outlined in negative space—in the *arrangement* of the text—the poet teases his readers, provokes them into finding correspondences where, in fact, there may be none: *ça a l’air de rimer*, indeed. How, for instance, are we to interpret the first block of four lines? Do we ascribe the three sentences that comprise it to a single speaker—some would-be burglar planning a job—thereby surrendering to the natural desire to narrativise? Or do we resist that urge, assuming instead that three distinct conversational spaces have been conflated into one by the poet-provocateur?³⁹³ By the same token, the *quand* clauses in the second block set up a deliberate parallel between two *tu*’s—but is their referent one and the same, or not? It is clear, then, that the “lyrisme ambiant” of the café is recorded in a fashion that is far from neutral or passive; rather, disparate contexts are calculatingly intermeshed,³⁹⁴ forced into productive collision (in the Eisensteinian sense of the term) by a non-personified subjectivity. Conversational spaces are filtered through perception, broken apart and recombined in ambiguous and suggestive ways. And, to complicate matters further, certain lines in the poem strongly suggest (but never confirm definitively) that the perceptual filter may itself not be entirely transparent. Consider, for example, the following four-line sequence:

Des piles de soucoupes des fleurs un calendrier
 Pim pam pim
 Je dois fiche près de 300 francs à ma probloque
 Je préférerais me couper le parfaitement que de les lui donner³⁹⁵

³⁹² Hayman (1982), p. 123.

³⁹³ C.f. Eisenstein’s discussion of montage (1957, p. 63): “[A]ny two pieces of a film stuck together inevitably combine to create a new concept, a new quality born of that juxtaposition. [...] When we see two objects placed side by side, we draw certain conclusions almost automatically. Take, for example, a grave. Imagine a weeping woman in mourning beside it. And it is almost a sure guess that you will conclude that she is a widow” (emphasis in the original).

³⁹⁴ See Mathews (1987), p. 155.

³⁹⁵ Apollinaire (1991), p. 197.

Piles of saucers, flowers, a calendar: these items could conceivably be part of the “landlady” scenario reported in the latter two lines. Equally, however, they may be objects in the poet’s own field of vision—a possibility made more likely by the apparent onomatopoeia of the next line, evoking, perhaps, the clatter of crockery in the café: “Pim pam pim”. As Timothy Mathews suggests, “items supposedly from conversation dissolve into those from perception,”³⁹⁶ and, given the lack of unambiguous narratorial framing, it is impossible to differentiate absolutely between the two. The poet is playing hide-and-seek with us, interspersing verbatim transcription of others’ words with deliberately planted traces of himself, of his perceptual field.

It was pointed out in Chapter 2 that Apollinaire favours parataxis over hypotaxis, and in “Lundi rue Christine” this is true not only on the syntactic level, but also on the levels of structure and composition:

Cher monsieur
 Vous êtes un mec à la mie de pain
Cette dame a le nez comme un ver solitaire
 Louise a oublié sa fourrure
 Moi je n’ai pas de fourrure et je n’ai pas froid
Le Danois fume sa cigarette en consultant l’horaire
Le chat noir traverse la brasserie [emphasis mine]³⁹⁷

Here, structural parataxis suggests the rapid switching of attention from one stimulus to another, and between the auditory and visual modalities. The italicised lines appear to take us once again into the poet’s field of vision; although the first of these may also be an overheard remark, the latter two almost certainly represent fleeting visual impressions. Perception is highly selective—only salient details register in consciousness, and focus is easily redirected by the introduction of new stimuli.³⁹⁸ Precisely these redirections of focus are dramatised in “Lundi rue Christine”: as well as evoking the polyphony of everyday urban living, the poem

³⁹⁶ Mathews (1987), p. 155.

³⁹⁷ Apollinaire (1991), p. 198.

³⁹⁸ See Pashler (1998) for a book-length analysis of perception, attention and selectivity.

also enacts a drama of perception. The rapidity of attentional shifts is particularly well conveyed by the following three-line sequence:

Un journaliste que je connais d'ailleurs très vaguement

Écoute Jacques c'est très sérieux ce que je vais te dire

Compagnie de navigation mixte³⁹⁹

The blanks suggest gaps in attention, as does the first, syntactically incomplete utterance: it is as if the eavesdropper has become distracted by the “serious” news about to be sprung on Jacques—and then again by an advertisement⁴⁰⁰ for the shipping line Compagnie de Navigation Mixte. Far from being mere backdrops against which this perceptual drama plays out, space and time are fully implicated therein: by cross-cutting between simultaneous conversational lines, Apollinaire manipulates the spatio-temporal continuum in a quasi-cinematic manner.⁴⁰¹

No less cinematic in scope, the emplotment of *Ubu roi* represents a final break from the restrictions placed on temporal continuity and spatial unity by neo-classical conceptions of theatre. The paratactic juxtaposition of highly disparate pseudo-settings—echoed by the collage-like décor, as discussed in the last chapter—lacks dramatic motivation, not least because transitions between scenes are seldom causally determined. The foremost theorists and practitioners of dramaturgical (rather than cinematic) parataxis in the first half of the twentieth century are arguably Meyerhold and Brecht, and the relationship of their work—predicated, above all, on episodicity—to Eisenstein's has been thoroughly documented.⁴⁰² Jarry is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the same breath; yet *Ubu roi*, too, throws down the

³⁹⁹ Apollinaire (1991), p. 198.

⁴⁰⁰ My own interpretation—any number of others is possible.

⁴⁰¹ It must be remembered that Apollinaire dabbled in actual screenwriting, collaborating with André Billy on a melodramatic “*cinema-drame*” entitled *La Bréhatine* (1917).

⁴⁰² See Ebrahimian (2004) on Eisenstein, Meyerhold, Brecht, and the complex dialogue between theatre and cinema.

gauntlet to the hypotactic constructions of naturalistic drama and its insistence on motivated, causal sequencing of events.

Scarcely is Capitaine Bordure imprisoned in III:5, for example, than he presents himself at the Czar Alexis' court in Moscow. How has he escaped? we are left asking: the "causal connector" has been suppressed. It is at this point in Act III, in fact, that the paratactic mode starts to become increasingly more dominant, with the "motivatedness" of scene transitions decreasing accordingly. The first two acts, parodying as they do the opening of *Macbeth*, are marginally more concentrated in terms of plot structure, and vastly so in terms of setting: the action is confined largely to Ubu's house and the King's palace. (The only major exception is II:5, set in a mountain cavern. We might expect this scene to instigate a pseudo-Shakespearean subplot, with Bougrelas in the role of exile and avenger, but, somewhat predictably, it never fully materialises.) In the latter three acts, however, geographic space is warped in a frenzied, almost hallucinatory manner: the theatre of war extends from "Ukraine" to "Lithuania", vast swathes of notional Eastern European geography being progressively implicated in the plot without any apparent justification. Scenes 3 and 4 of Act IV see "*L'armée polonaise en marche dans l'Ukraine*,"⁴⁰³ only for the action to resume in "*Une caverne en Lituanie*"⁴⁰⁴ (Scene 5), where Ubu and the Palotins have taken refuge. Mère Ubu, expelled from "Warsaw" in IV:2, conveniently finds her way to the very same cavern at the beginning of Act V, rounding off Jarry's parodic subversion of hypotactic, well-motivated plotlines. Although this manner of emplotment represents a particularly radical violation of neo-classical tenets, it must be remembered that Jarry was by no means the first to call them into question. We need think only of the Shakespeare-influenced Romantic drama: of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (1830), whose five acts are each set in different, dramatically pertinent

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 380.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 385.

locations, or of Musset's *Lorenzaccio* (1834), with its indeterminate chronology and thirty-plus scene changes.⁴⁰⁵ *Ubu roi* does *not*, however, represent the culmination of the Romanticist attack on the unities of time and place. As made clear in Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), the Romantics insisted on the necessity of precisely what Jarry sought to suppress—*couleur locale* and spatio-temporal *specificity*:

On commence à comprendre de nos jours que *la localité exacte est un des premiers éléments de la réalité*. [...] Le lieu où telle catastrophe s'est passée en devient un témoin terrible et inséparable. [...] L'action, encadrée de force dans les vingt-quatre heures, est aussi ridicule qu'encadrée dans le vestibule. Toute action a sa durée propre comme son lieu particulier.⁴⁰⁶
(emphasis mine)

It is instructive, incidentally, to compare Hugo's critique of neoclassical precepts with Voltaire's defence of the same, presented almost a century earlier in another, lesser-known preface—the *Préface d'Œdipe* (1730):

Qu'est-ce qu'une pièce de théâtre? La représentation d'une action. Pourquoi d'une seule, et non de deux ou trois ? *C'est que l'esprit humain ne peut embrasser plusieurs objets à la fois* [...]; c'est que nous sommes choqués de voir même dans un tableau, deux événements ; c'est qu'enfin *la nature seule nous a indiqué ce precepte*, qui doit être, invariable comme elle [...] L'unité de lieu est essentielle; car une seule action ne peut se passer en plusieurs lieux à la fois. Si le personnages que je vois sont à Athenes au premier acte, comment peuvent-ils se trouver en Perse au second? [...] L'unité de temps est jointe naturellement aux deux premières. [...] [L]e spectateur n'est que trois heures à la comédie; il ne faut donc pas que l'action dure pas plus de trois heures.⁴⁰⁷ (emphasis mine)

At first glance, Voltaire's (in many ways dubious) stance appears to be diametrically opposed to Hugo's: he rejects any telescoping of time, arguing, somewhat improbably, that performance time and diegetic time must always be near-identical, or of place, allegedly because this would disrupt the unity of action. Of far greater importance for the purposes of this study, however, are the underlying correspondences between the two positions: both Voltaire and Hugo justify their arguments *on the basis of verisimilitude or "naturalness"*, doing so in almost indistinguishable terms. Voltaire enlists *la nature* in support of his

⁴⁰⁵ Deemed unstageable for most of the nineteenth century, it was first performed in 1896—the same year as *Ubu roi*.

⁴⁰⁶ Hugo (1855), p. 7.

⁴⁰⁷ Voltaire (1867), p. 76.

perspective, Hugo, *la réalite*; Voltaire claims that “the human mind cannot encompass several objects at once”, and so—asserting it as an incontrovertible truth—does Hugo: “l’unité d’action [...] résulte *d’un fait*: l’œil ni l’esprit humain ne sauraient saisir plus d’un ensemble à la fois” (emphasis mine).⁴⁰⁸ Despite defining the unity of action in different ways,⁴⁰⁹ both authors strongly endorse it not merely as a *convention* of dramaturgy, but as a corollary of the apparent *nature* of perception (*œil*) and cognition (*esprit*). For all their resistance to dramaturgical prescriptivism, Romantic theatre practitioners remain fundamentally indebted, just like their neoclassical predecessors, to the Renaissance ideal of unity, as discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to single-point perspective. Tellingly, Hugo even employs a (flawed) perspectival metaphor in his discussion: “Il ne peut pas plus y avoir trois unités dans le drame que trois horizons dans un tableau. [...] L’unité d’ensemble est la loi de perspective du théâtre.”⁴¹⁰

Jarry’s theatre, in contrast, is an emblematic “théâtre de la Gidouille”; the belly of the supreme Protagonist—in Jarry’s own words, “un personnage un [autour de qui] tout gravite”⁴¹¹—encompasses all space and all time simultaneously, as demonstrated by the “décor parfaitement exact.”⁴¹² Geography and history are rendered ductile, pliable; characters in *Ubu roi* are able to rove the world of the play at will, covering what appear to be vast distances instantaneously, for this world *is not one that must be physically traversed*. Poland & Environs is an Everywhere-yet-Nowhere, much like the anti-settings of medieval mystery

⁴⁰⁸ Hugo (1855), p. 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Voltaire’s claim that “a single action cannot occur in several places at once” is uncharacteristically naïve. Hugo, for his part, argues against precisely such a definition, cautioning that *unity* and *simplicity* of action must not be confused: “L’unité d’ensemble ne répudie en aucune façon les actions secondaires sur lesquelles doit s’appuyer l’action principale. Il faut seulement que ces parties, savamment subordonnées au tout, gravitent sans cesse vers l’action centrale et se groupent autour d’elle aux différents étages ou plutôt sur les divers plans du drame” (ibid.).

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. In fact, it is perfectly possible: a painting in three-point (oblique) perspective has three vanishing points and three horizons.

⁴¹¹ Jarry (1972), p. 415.

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 400.

plays, and Jarry's use of collage and montage is structurally comparable to *mansion-platea* staging.⁴¹³ Once again, I would emphasise the importance of situating *Ubu roi* in the context of *César-Antechrist* and the rest of the *Ubu* cycle, where the emblematic nature of Jarry's dramaturgy is far more apparent. Along with the lesser *Ubu* plays, *César-Antechrist* foregrounds the "cosmic carnality" of Jarry's vision. The Antichrist Ubu is a malevolent cosmic force, an apocalyptic scourge upon the earth, hard as space-rock yet soft as pumpkin flesh: "Semblable à un oeuf, une citrouille ou un fulgurante météore, je roule sur cette terre où je ferai ce qu'il me plaira."⁴¹⁴ Ubu's to traverse as he pleases, the earth, as we have already ascertained, is also coextensive with his *Gidouille*. Interior (self) and exterior (world) become emanations of each other—a tendency which, as I shall now show, pervades works dramatic and non-dramatic in the modernist era.

⁴¹³ "The aesthetics of montage of collision," argues Yongsoo Kim (1992), "may go back as remotely as to the medieval or Elizabethan theatres. Meyerhold sought his ideal theatrical form from these theatres, influencing his pupil Eisenstein significantly. [...] The common thread that runs from the medieval theatre to Eisenstein was the principle of conflict (or gap) between parts" (p. 283). *Ubu roi* is a significant, though often overlooked, bead on this thread.

⁴¹⁴ Jarry (1972), p. 293.

Interlude: Between Page and Stage II

In elevating Ubu to the status of *un personnage un*—a supreme Protagonist to whom the lesser characters, mere *comparses*, owe their very existence—Jarvis typifies a significant trend in turn-of-the-century dramaturgy. I have described “Poland & Environs” as the *mise-en-paysage* of Ubu’s anti-rational self, and its denizens as exteriorisations of his own being⁴¹⁵; the notion that an entire diegesis might serve as the *projection or writing large* of a single psyche surfaces again and again in dramatic theory and practice throughout Europe.

Endorsing Mallarmé’s assertion in *Crayonné au théâtre* that “Hamlet exteriorise, sur des planches, ce personnage unique d’une tragédie intime et occulte,”⁴¹⁶ Edward Gordon Craig attempted (with mixed success) to stage Shakespeare’s play as a *drame solitaire*, a monodrama focalised entirely through the Prince’s eyes, in a collaboration with Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912.⁴¹⁷ “He can be in the distance,” Craig writes, “lying, sitting, in front of the people acting, at the side, behind, but the spectator ought never to lose sight of him”⁴¹⁸—because, in Craig’s conception of the play, the character of Hamlet is all-encompassing: everything “[takes] place in Hamlet’s soul,” with the *dramatis personae* representing “psychic emanations of his loves and hates.”⁴¹⁹ The theatre practitioner and theorist Nikolai Evreinov, an associate of the Russian Symbolist movement and an admirer of Craig, defines monodrama as

the kind of dramatic presentation which, while attempting to communicate to the spectator as fully as it can the protagonist’s state of mind, displays the world around him on stage just as the protagonist perceives the world at any given moment of his existence

⁴¹⁵ *Excretions* is perhaps more apt a term than *exteriorisations*. Mère Ubu, after all, is styled “madame de ma merdre” (1972, p. 376) by her husband, while Rensky is dubbed “garçon de ma merdre” (*ibid.*, p. 381).

⁴¹⁶ Mallarmé (1985), p. 225.

⁴¹⁷ For a book-length discussion of the Craig-Stanislavsky collaboration, see Senelick (1982).

⁴¹⁸ Quoted in Senelick (1982), p. 64.

⁴¹⁹ Senelick (1982), p. 45. It seems undeniable, in any case, that the diegesis of *Hamlet* is, at the very least, partially subjectivised: the Ghost could justifiably be interpreted as a projection of Hamlet’s mind, if only because he alone can fully interact with it—in Act I, Horatio and the three soldiers catch a glimpse of the specter but fail to speak to it, whereas Gertrude in Act III can neither see nor hear it, and accuses her son of discoursing with “incorporeal air.”⁴¹⁹ Shakespeare (1968), p.141.

onstage. [...] In other words, the external spectacle must be an expression of the internal spectacle.⁴²⁰

The operative word here is *expression*; anticipating the German Expressionist cinema and drama of the 1920s, in which “exterior facts are continually being transformed into interior elements and psychic events are exteriorized,”⁴²¹ Evreinov’s definition is also reminiscent of the Author’s Note to August Strindberg’s proto-Expressionist *Dream Play* (1901), where we are informed that “[t]ime and place do not exist. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, and converge. *But one consciousness holds sway over them all, that of the dreamer*”⁴²² (emphasis mine).

Discrepancies of approach and terminology notwithstanding, Mallarmé, Craig, Evreinov and Strindberg all conceive of play-worlds that revolve around a single sovereign axis: the psyche of an *ontologically privileged* character. Such play-worlds differ fundamentally from those of naturalist theatre. A naturalistic diegesis is an environment which encloses the dramatis personae and is equally accessible to them all as an objective *outside*; it can be characterised, in other words, as existing beyond and independently of their bodies and minds. Admittedly, a minimal degree of “diegetic anthropomorphism” may be discernible in even the most staunchly naturalistic of plays: particular use of décor or lighting, for example, might exteriorise a character’s inner state at a given moment. Yet a naturalistic diegesis never serves as a *wholesale* extension of a psyche; no single character is ontologically superior to the rest. Drama is externally focalised by default,⁴²³ and the turn-of-the-century tendency towards “blanket” or absolute internal focalisation (meaning that the diegesis in its *entirety* must be seen as a psychic “emanation”) is therefore of great consequence. Interestingly, this tendency exists in the period’s non-dramatic texts as well.

⁴²⁰ Quoted in Selenick (1982), p. 28.

⁴²¹ Eisner (2008), p. 15.

⁴²² Strindberg (1998), p. 176.

⁴²³ See Hühn (ed., 2009), p. 6.

The narrative space (“the environment in which story-internal characters move about and live,”⁴²⁴ as shaped by emplotment, focalisation and so forth) of the vast majority of verse and prose texts alike is clearly distinct from the narrating subject. The latter statement, in fact, is a tautology of sorts. Narration is, by definition, mediation. Irrespective of whether the narrator is homo- or heterodiegetic (present or absent from the story being told),⁴²⁵ recognisably human (individuated) or merely an abstract agency, a locus of narrative control (impersonal), there is always rupture between the information being communicated and the communicative act itself, which, never fully transparent, serves to enframe the diegesis. Consider the statement “Smith was speaking to Brown”, which, decontextualised, generates a simple narrative space consisting of two nodes (the named individuals) and a link (the process of speaking). By virtue of being a *report*, the statement exists outside that space—is not, in other words, concomitant with it. Even if the narrator turns out to be homodiegetic, a character within the story-world—“Smith was speaking to Brown as I passed them on the street”—the very act of narration effectively splits “I” into two: narrated I (protagonist) and narrating I (agent of discourse).⁴²⁶ The agent of discourse may manifest itself only as a “trace” of sorts on the surface of the text, but it is nonetheless the ground against and through which the narrative space is defined. But in modernist limit cases such as Édouard Dujardin’s *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888) and the “Penelope” episode of *Ulysses* (1922), the reader is confronted with (needless to say, ostensibly) unmediated, “self-generating” subjectivity; the diegesis is apprehended wholly *from within*, and the distinction between enunciatory subject and narrative space disappears. Indeed, the latter term is not strictly applicable to *Les Lauriers sont coupés* and “Penelope”, since Daniel Prince and Molly Bloom are not narrators (communicators) as such, but simply focalisers: interior monologue, notes F.K. Stanzel, “*does not narrate or address* a listener or

⁴²⁴ Herman, David (ed., 2005), p. 552.

⁴²⁵ See Genette (1972), pp. 255-6.

⁴²⁶ See *ibid*, p. 259.

reader, but reflects in its consciousness its own momentary situation [...]. The outside world presented in an interior monologue thus appears *merely as a reflex in the consciousness* of the first-person character” (emphasis mine).⁴²⁷ Neither are they agents or directors of discourse, but channels for an (ostensibly) unchecked, haphazard flow of associations *enacted by*, rather than *related in*, the text, whose “setting”, like that of Craig’s *Hamlet*, is the thinker’s headspace.

It appears, then, that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century avant-garde witnessed, if not exactly a convergence, then a significant diminishing of distance between dramatic and non-dramatic texts. In an attempt to burrow into mental interiors and present cognitive content *directly*, dramatists experiment with internal focalisation, while prose writers (and, as we shall see later, poets as well) reduce or even suppress narratorial mediation. The development of modernism, according to Martin Puchner, presents us “with two competing histories, one that tells of an increasing absorption of drama (and poetry) by the novel and one that describes the increasing use made of narrative elements [...] by modern drama.”⁴²⁸ As narrative becomes more dramatic, so drama is narrativised—a cross-pollination of representational modes. Narrator-mediators, exiled from their “native” domain, find their way into drama, resulting in the narrativisation of stage directions⁴²⁹ on one hand and, on the other, in a proliferation of intra- and extradiegetic narrator-like characters in the European theatre of the period. For instance, Yeats’ *Four Plays for Dancers* (1916) is, in the words of William Gruber, “framed both verbally and visually by extrascenic figures [...] who chant narrated descriptions of the characters, the plot, and the imaginary setting for the action.”⁴³⁰ Closer to this study’s sphere of inquiry, Pierre Quillard’s *La fille aux mains coupées* (published 1886, performed 1891) is yet

⁴²⁷ Stanzel (1986), p. 212.

⁴²⁸ Puchner (2002), p. 82.

⁴²⁹ See Pier and Landa (2008), p. 371.

⁴³⁰ Gruber (2010), p. 86.

more narrative-driven, so much so that, as Pierre Véber notes, theatre (enactment) seems to disappear entirely:

Somme toute, la tentative de M. Quillard se résume ainsi: simplification complète des moyens dramatiques; une récitante, placée au coin du proscénium expose la scène, le décor et l'action. La prépondérance est accordée à *la parole lyrique*. Le théâtre disparaît pour ainsi dire complètement, pour faire place à une déclamation dialoguée, une sorte de décoration poétique. Maeterlinck ne va pas aussi loin.⁴³¹

Writing in 1891, Véber could not have read or seen Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, first performed in 1895; had he done so, he may have withheld the judgement expressed in the last sentence of the quote, for *Intérieur* consists *almost entirely of narration*. While Quillard's play differentiates between narrator and dramatis personae,⁴³² *Intérieur*'s four speaking characters are, as Arnaud Rykner suggests, *themselves* nothing more than instruments of narrative. The Stanger, Old Man and Granddaughters represent fragments of a "voix décentrée", and much of the play's dialogue, therefore, must be regarded as "une longue didascalie prononcée à haute voix et répartie arbitrairement entre différents locuteurs."⁴³³ Their words serving as *surrogates for décor*, they constitute a decentred, composite persona: a quasi-narrator in dialogue with himself.

Intérieur is one of several texts (some already examined, some not) I shall consider in Chapter 5 with a view to presenting a grand synthesis of the principal themes of this study. Chapter 4's investigation of the blurring of boundaries between subject and space will be reprised, but this time from the opposite angle, and presented in tandem with a final discussion of the dialogue between page and stage, and between poetry, drama and narrative, that takes place across the oeuvres of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry.

⁴³¹ Véber (1891), p. 117.

⁴³² The playtext itself features no explicit narrator figure, but the stage directions call to be spoken aloud. Declaimed in the 1891 production by a blue-robed woman "reading from a book supported on a lectern" (Yarrow [1997], p. 30), they serve to heighten mood and even to influence the audience's judgement, as evidenced by the following emotionally charged extract: "La jeune fille, éveillé en sursaut des prières se lève frissonnante vers son père et le guerrier convulsif brûle ses mains de caresses, de caresses incestueuses et brutales" (Quillard [1886], p. 16).

⁴³³ Rykner (1996), pp. 324-5.

5 Spatialised Subjects

Alongside the subjectivisation of space, a parallel inverse process is at work in the poetry and drama discussed throughout this study. If space is inscribed with traces of subjecthood, endowed with its various attributes, the subject, in turn, is spatialised, losing its unity, prominence and “verticality”—a term I shall define and illustrate in what follows.

In his critical piece “Ballets” (1886), Mallarmé famously describes the dancer as “*in-individuel* [...] jamais qu’emblème point quelqu’un”⁴³⁴: she has danced herself into impersonality, dissolving into a play of light and veil, with her body, in the words of Debarati Sanyal, “transformed into a purely semiotic surface.”⁴³⁵ Sanyal is alluding here to the following oft-quoted passage from “Ballets”:

A savoir que la danseuse *n’est pas une femme qui danse*, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu’elle *n’est pas une femme* mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc., et *qu’elle ne danse pas*, suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d’élans, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu’il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction: poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe.⁴³⁶

In identifying the dancer as “metaphor incarnate”, Mallarmé gives emphasis to her fundamental betweenness. Mappings of one domain or notion onto another, metaphors are *mechanisms of relation*. Depersonalised, the dancer becomes just such a mechanism, a bodied site for signification suspended between her own corporeal form and the spectator’s imagination—which is free to interpret her “inherently open-ended”⁴³⁷ movements in any number of ways. The dancer is *not* a “metaphor for”, but simply Metaphor; she exists onstage as a facilitator for the experience, however partial or brief, of the Idea. No longer an individuated human subject—a *figure*—she is, instead, betweenness or positivised *ground*.

⁴³⁴ Mallarmé (1945), pp. 303–4.

⁴³⁵ Sanyal (2006), p. 130

⁴³⁶ Mallarmé (1945), p. 304.

⁴³⁷ Shaw (1989) p. 55.

Mallarmé's reading of the dancer's "écriture corporelle" provides us with a particularly revealing example of what might be called a *deverticalisation of the subject*. In "Les Fonds dans le ballet" (1893), he writes of "le sortilège qu'opère Loïe Fuller, par instinct, avec l'exagération, les retraits de jupe ou d'aile, *instituant un lieu*. L'enchanteresse fait *l'ambiance, la tire de soi et l'y rentre*, par un silence palpitant de crêpes de Chine"⁴³⁸ (emphasis mine). The "enchantress" is not a vertical figure, prominent against the background of a horizontal space that exists prior to her. Rather, she *fashions* that space ("institu[e] un lieu") and is, furthermore, dispersed into it, interpenetrating with an "atmosphere" of *her own making* ("la tire de soi et l'y rentre"). Mallarmé's play on *soi* (self) and *soie* (silk), as noted by Felicia McCarren, punningly conveys this cross-contamination of conventionally hierarchised elements: "the space which Fuller draws out from inside herself becomes the space in which she moves,"⁴³⁹ thereby obviating the need for any external, static scenery. (Loïe Fuller danced on a dark and bare stage.) Dominique D. Fisher phrases the matter in stronger terms: "the body of the dancer, capable of being spatialized, invests the entire scenic space."⁴⁴⁰

"Ballets" and "Les Fonds dans le ballet" challenge the humanistic privileging of figure over ground, of human over landscape. Significantly, the human subject does not disappear outright in the two essays. Rather, it is "horizontalised", losing the near-absolute prominence it enjoys in humanist modes of representation. The notion or trope of the horizontalised subject, as I hope to demonstrate presently, constitutes a defining feature of the aesthetic theories and artistic practice of all four authors under consideration here, playing a particularly important role in Apollinaire's "Zone" and "Lettre-Océan", Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, Mallarmé's *Igitur*, and Jarry's *César-Antechrist*. Deverticalisation may occur on any of several interconnected levels—thematic, visual, narratorial, and semiotic—but it

⁴³⁸ Mallarmé (1945), p. 309.

⁴³⁹ McCarren (1995), p. 225.

⁴⁴⁰ Fisher (1994) p. 62.

invariably entails spatial dispersion or reconfiguration of the subject and, consequently, (implicit) repudiation of a humanist, Cartesian “I”. By being spatialised, the figures that populate the just-mentioned works are denied “uprightness”, autonomy, unity; spatialisation at its most abstract might be understood as an injection of otherness, an introduction of a *disjunctive fissure* into the subject, no longer presumed to be self-sufficient or self-identical. The spatialisation of the human subject often seems connected, curiously enough, with the reconfiguration of the generic frames of poetry, drama and narrative. Spatialisation occurs alongside the intrusion of dramatic elements into poetry (“Zone” and “Lettre-Océan”) and narrative (*Igitur*), or in conjunction with the narrativisation of drama (*Intérieur* and *César-Antechrist*).

“Mes yeux nagent loin de moi”: The Dispersion of Self in “Zone” and “Lettre-Océan”

“Les Fiançailles” (1908), whence the above line, marks a significant turning point in Apollinaire’s oeuvre as regards his deployment and manipulation of the lyric persona. Broadly speaking, the *je* of Apollinaire’s earlier verse is a largely self-consistent point of reference and, in the words of Theo Hermans, “the single, unchanging focus around which the thematic structure of the poem is organised.”⁴⁴¹ To illustrate this point, Hermans draws attention to two quatrains from “Les villes sont pleines d’amour...” (published posthumously in 1926), a walking poem or *poème promenade* which Apollinaire subsequently reused in modified form in the second section of “Les Fiançailles”:

“LES VILLES SONT PLEINES D’AMOUR...”

Au clair nul des bougies tombaient vaille que vaille
Des faux cols sur les flots de jupes mal brossées
Des couples d’ombres célébraient leurs accordailles
A mes yeux de dehors dans le rez-de-chaussée

⁴⁴¹ Hermans (1982), p. 55.

La ville aux feux de nuit semblait un archipel
 Des femmes demandaient l'amour et la dulia
 Mais à mes yeux de mâle horreur je me rappelle
 Les passantes du soir n'étaient jamais jolies⁴⁴²

LES FIANÇAILLES

A la clarté des bougies tombaient vaille que vaille
 Des faux cols sur les flots de jupes mal brossées
 Des accouchées masquées fêtaient leur relevailles
 La ville cette nuit semblait un archipel
 Des femmes demandaient l'amour et la dulia
 Et sombre sombre fleuve je me rappelle
 Les ombres qui passaient n'étaient jamais jolies⁴⁴³

The various lexical and thematic changes, though not necessarily insignificant, need not concern us in themselves: the crucial modification is the excision of the two insistent references to “mes yeux”, which serve in the earlier poem as explicit indicators of a focalising persona.⁴⁴⁴ The “I-witness” has not been exiled outright in the final version—the verb phrases *la ville ... semblait* and, more obviously, *je me rappelle* testify to his continuing presence. Nevertheless, the status of the imagery has become considerably more indeterminate as a result of the excisions. What reads unambiguously in “Les villes...” as a continuous stream of visual impressions—especially given the context of a nocturnal walk (“Villes chair de ma vie j’aime vos nuits solaires / J’ai promené mon cœur par vos soirs blancs et froids”⁴⁴⁵)—becomes fragmented, discontinuous: part memory, part reverie.

A fundamental distinction must be made at this juncture. As I attempted to demonstrate in the last chapter in my discussion of “Lundi Rue Christine”, the disappearance of the poet’s persona from the *surface* of the text does not by any means entail the disappearance of a controlling subjectivity from its *interstices* (arrangement of lines, blanks, etc). Though

⁴⁴² Apollinaire (1956), p. 567.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁴⁴ These alterations are largely representative of the evolution of “Les Fiançailles” as a whole: the “centrality of the poetic persona” (Hermans [1982], p. 56) is reduced with each successive draft.

⁴⁴⁵ Apollinaire (1956). p. 567

ostensibly fabricated pell-mell from snippets of “objective” reality in the manner of a Cubist collage, that *poème-conversation* can, paradoxically enough, be read as one of the purest (because narratorially unmediated) expressions of an individual selfhood in all of Apollinaire’s output. The apparent transparency and neutrality of its construction is, as we have seen, just that: apparent. Now, as Hermans rightly asserts, the evolution of “Les Fiançailles” is undoubtedly symptomatic of the gradual fall from grace of the *je*-persona as an organising principle or invariable point of reference in Apollinaire’s verse, with the *poèmes-conversation* representing its final overthrow. But, while subversive of generic norms, its elimination does not in itself represent a serious challenge to the humanist notion of a unified subjectivity. Subjectivity, as I have repeatedly stressed, *does not require personification to be perceptible*. Although “Les Fiançailles” occasionally *thematizes* an otherness or dispersion of self, as in the above-quoted line about “free-floating” eyes, this is not reflected on the levels of narrative and focalisation. The persona’s structural role may indeed be significantly reduced, but it is never turned *against itself*, in contradistinction to “Zone”, nor does its voice coalesce disorientingly with other voices, as is the case in “Lettre-Océan”. It is to these poems that I now turn.

*

“Zone”, like “Les Fiançailles”, exists in several variants, and comparison of an early manuscript draft (published in Michel Décaudin’s *Dossier d’Alcools*) with the definitive text yields some illuminating insights. The two versions are diametrically opposed to one another in several respects, with homogeneity and discursiveness giving way to heterogeneity and discontinuity. Visually, the definitive “Zone”—characterised by heterogeneous spacing, varied line lengths and a ragged marginal frame—stands in stark contrast with the uniform appearance of the draft version, which consists entirely of typographically demarcated, predominantly alexandrine couplets. Thematically and structurally, too, the two “Zones”

could not be more dissimilar. The earlier text exhibits a strict unity of time and place: no mind's-eye tour of paratactically juxtaposed European locales is superimposed onto the Parisian setting. Far from being a physico-mental space pieced together from disparate fragments of real-world geography, the diegesis of the draft text is naturalistically rendered as a topographic milieu, replete with local colour and incidental detail. The narration is discursive, sequential, almost gonzo-journalistic; the tone impassioned, pathos-inducing, and straightforwardly, lyrically personal:

Je regarde les yeux pleins de larmes ces pauvres émigrants
Ils croient en Dieu, ils prient, les femmes allaitent les enfants

Ils emplissent de leurs odeurs le hall de la gare Saint-Lazare
Ils viennent de Russie, de Roumanie, il y a des Polonais et des Tartares
[...]
Beaucoup de ces émigrants restent ici et se logent
Rue des Rosiers ou rue des Écouffes dans des bouges

Je les ai vus souvent le soir ils prennent l'air dans la rue
Il y a surtout des Juifs leurs femmes sont tête nue

Elles restent assises exsangues au fond des boutiques
Et sont tristes et dolentes comme les saintes femmes

Les hommes lisent les journaux en yddisch
Et quand ils boivent c'est de la limonade

Il y en a de bleue, de verte, de rouge, d'orangée
Les cartes-postales à toutes vitrines sont bien rangées

Et parmi ces Juifs il y a des slaves orthodoxes, catholiques
Ils se tiennent sur le pas de leurs boutiques

Et moi en qui se mêle le sang slave et le sang latin
Je regarde ces pauvres Polonais qui rêvent aux jours lointains

Aux jours où la Pologne était un grand royaume
On y cultivait les lettres, on y formait des hommes

La Pologne était la sœur cadette de la France
La Pologne aujourd'hui n'est plus qu'une espérance⁴⁴⁶

It is clear from this passage that the poet's persona and the landscape he traverses are separable and independent of each other; the latter, in other words, is not—unlike the

⁴⁴⁶ Décaudin (ed., 1996), p. 79.

impossible itineraries in the definitive “Zone” and “Les Fenêtres”—a cognitive construct or emanation of the former’s consciousness. Inhabited and meticulously scrutinised by the persona but not (to invoke Mallarmé) “instituted” by him, it is, in short, a physical location with an a-priori existence, a fully autonomous “décor”. The persona is an I-witness; emotionally implicated, admittedly, in the tragedies of immigration he observes (“Et moi en qui se mêle le sang slave et le sang latin”...), he is also sundered from them—and from the diegetic space of the poem generally—on a more fundamental level, *by dint of his very capacity of narrator-mediator*. In the definitive “Zone”, however, this gap between diegetic space and enunciating subject is radically reduced, if not altogether eliminated. When the unified lyric *je* metamorphoses into the “dividual” *je-tu*, narration (mediation, reportage) is transfigured into something approaching a kind of interior dialogue, and the text of the poem, no longer addressed to reader or listener, now masquerades as the direct expression of the content of consciousness. Our access to the poem’s diegesis ceases to be narratorially mediated; diegetic space, therefore, loses its autonomy and becomes an extension of the enunciating subject. Meanwhile, the abrupt shifts from first- to second-person self-focalisation and vice versa spatialise the enunciating subject by collapsing the distinction between interior and exterior, self and world: the now bifurcated, self-alienated persona is simultaneously inside-looking-out (*je* →) and outside-looking-in (→ *tu*).

These assertions are far from self-evident, and closer textual analysis is required to substantiate them. To this end, the discrepancies between the draft and final versions of “Zone” must be considered more closely. The passage quoted above, typical of the draft in general, features a homodiegetic narrator who reports his thoughts and impressions almost exclusively in the present tense. The use of the present contributes to the immediacy of the style, creating the illusion that the persona’s tearful observation of “ces pauvres émigrants” is precisely contemporaneous with his report of that observation. But narrative time and the

time of narration can, by definition, never coincide exactly. As mentioned in Interlude II, the act of narration necessarily exists *beyond the frame* of the story-world it evokes, as does the narrator's voice—even one which relates events in the first-person present to generate the impression of absolute spatio-temporal coincidence with the protagonist's. Having as it does a double referent—narrated “I” and (implicitly) narrating “I”—the *je* of the draft text is not fully subsumed into the story-world of the poem, but straddles the diegetic/extradiegetic divide. What happens, then, when *je* becomes *je-tu*? *Tu* is dominant over *je* throughout the definitive text: the latter emerges for the first time only in line 15 and is outnumbered by the former by a ratio of more than 3 to 1.⁴⁴⁷ It is as if confidence in the “legitimacy” of the first-person pronoun, clearly abundant in the draft text, as evidenced by the above passage, has suddenly drained away. Second-person narration proper can itself dramatise profound existential alienation and fragmented subjectivity, being deployed precisely to such an end in Perec's *Un homme qui dort* (1967), for example. It is, more generally, an intrinsically ambiguous narrative mode. As Brian Richardson points out,

“you” [...] is, at the outset, epistemologically a more dubious pronoun than the traditional “I” or “she”, which we ordinarily have no trouble processing as we encounter a fictional text. The “you” also threatens the ontological stability of the fictional world insofar as it seems it could be addressing the reader as well as the central character.⁴⁴⁸

For that reason, the opening line of the definitive “Zone” (“À la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien”⁴⁴⁹) is far more problematic for the first-time reader than that of the draft (“Je suis éccœuré de vivre en ce monde ancien”⁴⁵⁰). The identity of the addressee is initially indeterminate—is it the reader? a secondary character? the protagonist?—and, perhaps more importantly, it is unclear whether the address has been made from within the diegetic frame, or from beyond. Had Apollinaire decided to suppress the *je* of the draft text entirely and

⁴⁴⁷ Including possessive, reflexive and disjunctive forms, the second-person pronoun appears 72 times, the first-person pronoun merely 22.

⁴⁴⁸ Richardson (2006), p. 20.

⁴⁴⁹ Apollinaire (1991), p. 47.

⁴⁵⁰ Décaudin (ed., 1996), p. 77.

simply to replace it with *tu*, that in itself would have constituted a manoeuvre radically disruptive of the period's narrative norms, and one anticipatory of postmodern experiments with second-person narration.

The *je*, however, is not jettisoned completely, and—at certain points in the poem at least—its interplay with *tu* seems to remove the text from the realm of narration altogether.

Reportage is transfigured into the percolations of thought. Consider lines 109-112:

Te voici à Amsterdam avec une jeune fille que tu trouves belle et qui est laide
Elle doit se marier avec un étudiant de Leyde
On y loue des chambres en latin Cubicula locanda
Je m'en souviens j'y ai passé trois jours et autant à Gouda⁴⁵¹



Figure 22: Picasso, *Marie-Thérèse, face et profil* (1931)

Picasso's "double-faced" paintings of the 1930s, such as *Marie-Thérèse, face et profil* (1931).

If the dispersion of self is thematised in *Les Fiançailles* with the use of occasional proto-surrealistic imagery, it is dramatised structurally in "Zone" by manipulating focalisation. The effect would be impossible if either first or second person were employed consistently. In the

The movement from second to first person, I would suggest, enacts something like the following "movement of mind": the thinker has a flashback or an involuntary memory in which he visualises himself from without as a *you*; then, as if consciously acknowledging his spontaneous mental self-image, he comments on it from within, subvocally: "Je m'en souviens". These perspectival shifts fissure the subject—a literary precursor of sorts to

⁴⁵¹ Apollinaire (1991), p. 53.

former case, the above passage would resemble the kind of extra-diegetic voiceover narration that often accompanies flashbacks in Hollywood films⁴⁵²; in the latter, it would become a somewhat contrived self-apostrophe. But the passage in its actual form is clearly neither narrational nor apostrophic: the thinker is not *communicating to himself* the fact that he remembers, he is *simply remembering*. Which is why Brian McHale's definition of interior dialogue as an internalisation of the "communicative circuit" is only partly applicable to "Zone" (and, I would argue, to narratorially unmediated presentations of consciousness in general). "The character," he claims, "has in effect split himself or herself in two, one part acting as the addressor, the other the addressee, of the communication [...]. The second person of a self-addressed discourse is essentially equivalent to the first person of direct interior monologue."⁴⁵³ Communication circuits do indeed constitute the basis of interior dialogues which explicitly treat the mind (or *animus/anima*) as a set of discrete, reified faculties: Ubu actually *converses*—exchanges information—with his exteriorised Soul in *Ubu cocu ou l'Archéopteryx*, as do Heart and Body in "Le debat du cuer et du corps de Villon". But, as made clear earlier, modernist interior monologues and dialogues in their pure form address no narratee of any kind, whether diegetic or extra-diegetic, and as such cannot, in my opinion, strictly be described as *communications* at all.

McHale is right, of course, to point out that interior dialogue splits or fractures the character. But in "Zone" and other modernist stagings of the *drame de soi* the fracture is far from a clean one, resulting not so much in a dichotomy of Self and Other—addressor and addressee—as in a re-evaluation of the self *as* other (uncapitalised because unpersonified). Inter-personal discourse becomes intra-personal discord. It is fitting, then, that in her analysis

⁴⁵² A somewhat whimsical recent example being Lester's posthumous voiceover in *American Beauty* (1999): "My name is Lester Burnham. This is my neighborhood. This is my street. This... is my life. I'm forty-two years old. In less than a year I'll be dead."

⁴⁵³ McHale (1992), p. 92.

of the autobiographical elements in Apollinaire's oeuvre, Susan Harrow should invoke the *lettre du voyant*:

The self merges more intriguingly with phantomic second persons, movements captured in dialogical shifts ("je"/"tu") of poetry that resists implacably fixed third-person positions. This discontinuous, perpetually self-displacing "je" forms the precarious site where autobiographical pliancy and unresolved modern subjectivity (launched by Rimbaud's fractured "JE est un autre") coincide.⁴⁵⁴

In the definitive "Zone", the first person is no less "phantomic" than the second. *Tu* is not merely *je*'s "shade": the poem, I repeat, resists this kind of clear-cut dichotomisation. This is nowhere more evident than in lines 115-20, which I quote, for comparison's sake, alongside the relevant passage from the draft text:

DRAFT

J'ai fait de douloureux et de joyeux voyages
Avant de m'apercevoir que je n'étais plus un enfant

J'ai souffert de l'amour à vingt et à trente ans
J'ai vécu comme un fou et j'ai perdu mon temps

Je me sens abandonné sur terre depuis mon plus jeune âge
Je n'ose pas me confier à l'étoile comme les rois mages

Je n'ose plus regarder la croix et à tous moments je voudrais sangloter
Sur moi, sur celle que j'aime, sur tout ce qui m'a épouvanté⁴⁵⁵

DEFINITIVE

Tu as fait de douloureux et de joyeux voyages
Avant de t'apercevoir du mensonge et de l'âge
Tu as souffert de l'amour à vingt et à trente ans
J'ai vécu comme un fou et j'ai perdu mon temps
Tu n'oses plus regarder tes mains et à tous moments je voudrais sangloter
Sur toi sur celle que j'aime sur tout ce qui t'a épouvanté⁴⁵⁶

The draft text's "I-witness"—a self-consistent persona mediating between reader and diegesis—has been broken open, dispersed, dialogised. Although the two versions are superficially very similar (save for the excision of the third couplet and the complete

⁴⁵⁴ Harrow (2004), p. 85.

⁴⁵⁵ Décaudin (ed., 1996), p. 79.

⁴⁵⁶ Apollinaire (1991), p. 53.

suppression of punctuation), the vacillating focalisation fundamentally alters the emphasis of the passage. Of course, the causes of the *je*-persona's *épouvante*—the anguish of love and abandonment, the regret for “days spent in vain” (to tweak Samuel Beckett's translation of line 118⁴⁵⁷)—endure in the definitive text. Amongst these commonplaces of lyric verse, however, now nestles an altogether different malaise: a recognition of one's own “not-I-ness” (to borrow from Beckett once again). The draft's persona dares not look upon *la croix*—a transparent metonym for faith, dogma, etc—but the cross he bears in the definitive text is a heavier one. He has lost the Cartesian consolation of self-identity, and must eye *tes mains* from aside, unable to acknowledge them unproblematically as *les siens*. *Je* is no longer the hierarchically privileged element in a clear-cut self-world dichotomy; its relationship with that world has been deverticalised. Figure and ground, once distinct, now interpenetrate. The drama of *je* and *tu*, meanwhile, is one predicated not on communication, but on the conflict of multiple divergent perspectives.

*

Suffused as it is with Futurist-inspired onomatopoeic effects, “Lettre-Océan” (Figure 23) must be regarded as Apollinaire's most sound-oriented *calligramme*, and yet its spatio-textual syntax absolutely resists oral transfiguration. Or rather, it resists transfiguration by a solitary, disembodied voice—but positively encourages enactment by an ensemble of voices and bodies, with contrapuntal and proxemic relationships serving to dramatise the complex visual dynamics of the poem's page-space. The idea of “performing” a *calligramme* may seem far-fetched, but it has also occurred to Roger Shattuck, who describes a five-voice reading of *Lettre-Océan*, devised by himself, “in an arrangement based on a montage or counterpoint of three basic lines [‘sound effects’, ‘sequential texts’ and ‘circular fields’].”⁴⁵⁸ Shattuck, however,

⁴⁵⁷ “My life was folly and my days in vain”. Beckett (2012), p. 148.

⁴⁵⁸ Shattuck (1984), p. 260.

makes no mention of proxemics. In order to generate an effect even remotely comparable to that achieved on the page, a contrapuntal reading of the poem must, I believe, be fully spatialised, according due significance to the distances between readers, to their positioning or formation, and perhaps involving at least a degree of movement. Of course, it would still only amount to an approximation—but the very fact that, together with Shattuck, we can seriously entertain the possibility of such a multi-vocal performance suggests that “Lettre-Océan”, more so even than “Zone”, transcends the confines of the monological lyric tradition and accommodates a genuine plurality of voices, independent yet polyphonically interrelated.

“The language in the work,” writes Johanna Drucker, “does not originate from a single place, nor does it have a single ‘speaker’. It offers several points of view recorded simultaneously for [...] ‘condensation’ of a rather complex narrative—or maybe it would be

better to say—set of circumstances.”⁴⁵⁹ The space of the poem is not only visually but conceptually horizontal (equalised): there is no clear hierarchisation of voices. (Or, indeed, of subject-matter; the “spokes” of the two wheels comprise independent and seemingly unrelated mini-scenarios, none holding dominion over the others.) Though not entirely effaced, the voice of the poet’s persona is by no means predominant: neither discursively nor typographically demarcated from Albert’s, or from the assorted snatches of conversation and other verbal fragments which constitute the circular fields, it has become porous, permeable. It is only upon several re-readings and retrospective analysis, therefore, that the various voices become differentiable, and then only partially, speculatively so. The first-time reader, moreover, would not likely even anticipate the many-voicedness of the poem, if only because of its misleading title. A letter, of course, is a one-way communication, and a verse letter or epistle, as Patrick Deane points out in his discussion of Auden’s “New Year Letter”, “is, conventionally if not theoretically, univocal”: the voicing forth of “a purportedly coherent and exclusive self.”⁴⁶⁰ “Lettre-Océan”, conversely, is an “epistolary collage”⁴⁶¹. To be sure, it has a sole signatory—“Guillaume Apollinaire”—but one who is comprised of an admixture of voices, registers, narrative slivers and (given the presence of Spanish slang) even languages. And this heteroglossic self is thematically, typographically and narratively spatialised.

“Le poème,” according to Pénélope Sacks-Galey, “révèle le moi créateur animé d’un désir de se confondre avec l’espace. [...] C’est l’ivresse d’un moi prêt à boire l’univers.”⁴⁶² The most obvious instance of this “conjunction” with space is to be found in the larger circular field on the recto. In a kind of progressive de-corporealisation, the POÈTE is reduced to a synecdoche (LES CHAUSSURES NEUVES), which, in turn, is reduced to an onomatopoeic effect

⁴⁵⁹ Drucker (1994), p. 162.

⁴⁶⁰ Deane (1994), pp. 68-9.

⁴⁶¹ Bohn (2001), p. 41.

⁴⁶² Sacks-Galey (1988), p. 42. She is alluding to the lines from “Vendémiaire” quoted in Chapter 1.

(“cré cré cré”), which—once we decipher the meaning of “Haute / de / 300 / mètres”—is revealed to be a radio wave emanating from the Eiffel Tower transmitter. Refined out of corporeal existence and into this most abstract of forms, the POÈTE is broadcast into page-space and across the Atlantic. The creaking of his shoes is presented as no more and no less significant than other ambient noises (gramophones, omnibuses, sirens): it is just another element of the aural atmosphere of the city. Spatial dispersal of a subtler kind also occurs in the sequential text (which, unsurprisingly, has attracted far less critical attention than the poem’s ideographic components). The first-time reader, led to anticipate a univocal work on account of its title and the bold phrase at the head of the recto (“BONJOUR MON FRÈRE ALBERT à Mexico”) will doubtless be disconcerted to discover the poet’s voice dissolving seamlessly into his brother’s:

J’étais au bord du Rhin quand tu partis pour le Mexique
 Ta voix me parvient malgré l’énorme distance
 Gens de mauvaise mine sur le quai à la Vera Cruz
 [cancellation lines]
 Les voyageurs de *l’Espagne* devant faire
 le voyage de Coatzacoalcos pour s’embarquer
 je t’envoie cette carte au lieu
 [stamp]
 de profiter du courrier de Vera Cruz qui n’est pas sur
 Tout est calme ici et nous sommes dans l’attente
 des événements⁴⁶³

It seems improbable that the newcomer to the poem, operating within the frame of expectation generated by the title, could interpret the above lines as a bivocal utterance combining the voice and perspective of Apollinaire with those of Albert. Retrospectively, of course, it becomes apparent that the *je* of the first line cannot be identical with the *je* of the sixth—and that *cette carte* does not, therefore, represent a one-way communication, as initially supposed. Yet it remains unclear precisely where the boundary between the two personae lies. The cancellation lines (or ocean waves) offer no neat demarcation. Who is the

⁴⁶³ Apollinaire (1991), p. 200.

focaliser of line 3, and who the enunciator? The suppression of punctuation is instrumental in creating this ambiguity; a single colon would destroy the effect:

Ta voix me parvient malgré l'énorme distance:
Gens de mauvaise mine sur le quai à la Vera Cruz [...]

In the absence of any such indicator, there is nothing categorical to suggest that Apollinaire is straightforwardly reporting his brother's words. The line serves as a pivot point between two selves and two continents: it appears, at least momentarily, that the poet has "locat[ed] himself in the events of a drama from which he is an ocean distant,"⁴⁶⁴ and that, once again, *ses yeux nagent loin de lui*. Nor, ultimately, can we ascertain which of the brothers is reminding the other, on the recto, of the "tremblement de terre entre 1885 et 1890". If the deictic centre⁴⁶⁵ shifts disorientingly in the verso text, here, bereft of context, it is completely unidentifiable; the speaker—a not-I, a dual, horizontalised entity—has been "unsituated", divested of "hereness".

Institutors of (Non-)Place: Anti-Characters in Intérieur and Igitur

In "Zone" and "Lettre-Océan", Apollinaire disrupts generic boundaries while simultaneously calling into question the boundaries of subjectivity. The unitary *je* of lyric verse is dialogised in the former poem and supplanted by a myriad competing voices in the latter. Both works also minimise the gap between enunciating subject(s) and diegetic space. Setting becomes an emanation of character, and character is dispersed into setting. Relativised as they are, however, the notions of setting and character remain more or less applicable to both works.

⁴⁶⁴ Drucker (1994), p. 163.

⁴⁶⁵ Deictic expressions are defined by David Crystal (1987) as context-dependent "lexemes which can be interpreted only with reference to the speaker's position in time or space" (p. 106). The deictic centre, as defined by Yan Huang (2012), is "[t]he central anchorage point around which deixis is organized. The default deictic centre or the deictic origo (the ground zero or zero point) of the three major categories of deixis, namely, person, time, and space deixis, is (i) the person who is speaking, (ii) the time at which the speaker produces the utterance, and (iii) the place where the speaker produces the utterance" (p. 85).

The diegesis of the definitive “Zone” is, as argued in Chapter 4, more akin to a cognitive map—a construct “quilted from many different vantage points, thoughts and memories”⁴⁶⁶—than to a topographic milieu. Filtered through, and abstracted by, the persona’s consciousness, the poem’s landscape is not wholly physical—but not fully mental, either. Apollinaire may schematise and distort geographical reality, yet he does not negate it outright. *Where is the persona? Where are his perambulations taking place?* These questions are problematic, certainly—by contrast with the draft text, “in Paris” is not the unequivocal answer—but they are not illegitimate. The poem does not simply “take place” in a topographic milieu, but, subjectivist as its geography may be, it still *refers outwards* to identifiable real-world locales which, though evoked “from within” the persona’s consciousness, nevertheless exist beyond it. And while “Lettre-Océan” problematises the issue of locatedness yet further, as we have just seen, and is even more oblique than “Zone” in its presentation of the Parisian cityscape, the locales of Paris and Vera Cruz are, once again, more than merely notional, embedded as they are in the historically specific context of the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁶⁷ Similarly, despite Apollinaire’s renegotiation of the boundaries of subjectivity, the subjects in “Zone” and “Lettre-Océan” are, if no longer Cartesian, unitary or “vertical”, recognisably human all the same. Neither de-psychologised nor de-socialised, they can be called *characters* even if their personae do not function in the consistent manner prescribed by the lyric tradition.

The reverse is true of Maeterlinck’s *Intérieur*: the Old Man, the Stranger and the Granddaughters may have the consistent appearance of embodied individuals, but are, in fact, flesh-swaddled components of an *abstract narrative agent*. *Intérieur* represents an extreme example of a narrativised drama. Narrators, of course, may be (representations of) *persons*—

⁴⁶⁶ Kirchoff (2008), p. 17.

⁴⁶⁷ For a historico-cultural analysis of Apollinaire’s association with, and reception in, Mexico, see Bohn (1997), Chapter 8.

human (or human-like) individuals—but that is not the case here. Although they articulate what may broadly be called “psychological truths” about the human condition, the Old Man and the others have been entirely bleached of personal psychological content (and, furthermore, of all but the most basic individuating characteristics). Now, in the ordinary context of a narrative text, the notion of an impersonal narrator is unproblematic. It is commonly accepted that, while narration logically presupposes a narrating *agent*, that agent need not be an individuated, personified entity.⁴⁶⁸ Dramatic representation, conversely, necessitates the use of personae (onstage icons), which, in conventional naturalist theatre, embody distinct human personalities involved in a plot structure. The Old Man and the others, however, are hollowed-out mouthpieces for narration—a doubly estranging manoeuvre, since, in addition to being de-psychologised, they have also been *de-dramatised*. *Intérieur* anticipates Brecht but also, more intriguingly, harks back to the pre-Thespian Greek choral lyric, which, having no actors distinct from the chorus, bears a closer relation to performance poetry than to drama as conventionally understood in the modern period.⁴⁶⁹ The family members glimpsed through the windows of the house, as discussed in Chapter 3, are present absences, shadow-figures in a *tableau mort*, leaving the ensemble in the garden as the

⁴⁶⁸ According to David A. Zubin and Lynne E. Hewitt (1995), we instinctively tend to treat narrators as persons because of “[o]ur folk belief in the unitary nature of experience”; this belief “causes us to construct a deictic centre from which to view the unfolding story events, and we use this deictic centre as we would use the ‘I’ of face-to-face interaction to anchor our comprehension of the text. The reader tracks the shifted deixis in the text as if placed in that center.” But “[t]he decoupling of deixis in narrative from the speech situation allows the linguistic realization of the deictic center to be altered from that of face-to-face interaction in a variety of ways, from a fictional ‘I’ to impersonal third-person narration” (p. 131).

⁴⁶⁹ “The tragic chorus of the Greeks,” writes Nietzsche (1999), “was supposedly older, more original, indeed more important than the ‘action’ proper,” adding that “the stage and the action were originally and fundamentally thought of as nothing other than a *vision*,” and that “the only ‘reality’ is that of the chorus.” Tragedy in its primeval state “is only ‘chorus’ and not ‘drama’” (pp. 43–44). It is important to note that the transition from “choral” to “dramatic” tragedy is much more gradual and convoluted than the term “pre-Thespian” suggests: in the words of Peter D. Arnott (1991), “the introduction of the first actor” may be “attributed by tradition to Thespis but [is] certainly the product of a much longer and more complex period of development” (p. 30).

only functional element in the machinery of the play. And that machinery is narrative rather than dramatic, as exemplified by the following passage:

L'ETRANGER. En ce moment, ils sourient en silence dans la chambre...
 LE VIEILLARD. Ils sont tranquilles... Ils ne l'attendaient pas ce soir.
 L'ETRANGER. Ils sourient sans bouger... mais voici que le père met un doigt sur les lèvres...
 LE VIEILLARD. Il désigne l'enfant endormi sur le cœur de la mère...
 L'ETRANGER. Elle n'ose pas lever les yeux, de peur de troubler son sommeil...
 LE VIEILLARD. Elles ne travaillent plus... Il règne un grand silence.
 L'ETRANGER. Elles ont laissé tomber l'écheveau de soie blanche...
 LE VIEILLARD. Ils regardent l'enfant...
 L'ETRANGER. Ils ne savent pas que d'autres les regardent...
 LE VIEILLARD. On nous regarde aussi...
 L'ETRANGER. Ils ont levé les yeux...
 LE VIEILLARD. Et cependant ils ne peuvent rien voir...
 L'ETRANGER. Ils semblent heureux, et cependant, on ne sait pas ce qu'il y a...⁴⁷⁰

The argumentation theorist Douglas N. Walton identifies six basic types of dialogue—persuasion, inquiry, negotiation, information-seeking, deliberation and eristic (strife or quarrel)⁴⁷¹—all of which entail some kind of dialectical exchange. No exchange, however, is taking place between the Stranger and the Old Man here; rather, a monologic commentary on the movements of the family has been fragmented into rhythmic splinters and put into the mouths of two anti-characters who, together with the Granddaughters, comprise the decentred narrating subject of the play.

The splitting of the narrator-commentator into several voices—a powerful deverticalising strategy—is reminiscent of the Greek chorus, but a pre-Thespian (pre-dramatic) one. The chorus in “drama proper” does not, generally speaking, serve as *pure* narrator or commentator: by interacting with individuated characters, it implicates itself in the events of the plot at least to a certain degree. The sole such interaction in *Intérieur*, however, occurs at the very end (the Old Man finally enters the house to break the tragic news to the family), bringing the drama, predicated on an “informational divide between speaking and silent

⁴⁷⁰ Maeterlinck (1999b), pp. 507-8.

⁴⁷¹ See Walton (1998), pp. 171-73.

characters,⁴⁷² to an immediate close. Which, of course, only serves to confirm that the Old Man's role—like that of the Stranger and the Granddaughters—is, exclusively, to *relay messages*. Observing from aside the play's negligible plot, the multipart narrator in the garden, like Mallarmé's dancer, functions not as personality but as *instituteur d'un lieu*, a vehicle for the exposition of onstage and offstage space. The Old Man's first speech is, to all intents and purposes, an extension of the stage directions which immediately precede it:

Nous voici dans la partie du jardin qui s'étend derrière la maison. Ils n'y viennent jamais. Les portes sont de l'autre côté. – Elles sont fermées et les volets sont clos. Mais il n'y a pas de volets par ici et j'ai vu de la lumière... Oui; ils veillent encore sous la lampe. Il est heureux qu'ils ne nous aient pas entendus; la mère et les jeunes filles seraient sorties peut-être, et alors, qu'aurait-il fallu faire?...⁴⁷³

This descriptive and interpretive “fleshing out” of the spare stage-image is performed in parallel with *récits*⁴⁷⁴ of offstage events. As always in Maeterlinck's early dramas, the offstage is far more than an inert ground or backdrop, and encroaches progressively upon the onstage. Its relentless advance is evoked by way of a very precisely calculated orchestration of voices and entrances, which is worth examining in some detail.

The first *récit* is of the recent past—the Stranger relates his discovery of the girl's body in the river:

J'allais vers le village; il était déjà tard et la berge devenait obscure. Je marchais, les yeux fixés sur le fleuve parce qu'il était plus clair que la route, lorsque je vois une chose étrange à deux pas d'une touffe de roseaux... Je m'approche et j'aperçois sa chevelure qui s'était élevée presque en cercle, au-dessus de sa tête, et qui tournoyait ainsi, selon le courant.⁴⁷⁵

The use of tense is noteworthy here. In a systematic escalation of intensity, the narration transitions from imperfect (*j'allais – je marchais*) to historic present (*je vois – je m'approche – j'aperçois*), before eventually moving into the ongoing present with the entrance of Marie:

⁴⁷² McGuinness (2000), p. 203.

⁴⁷³ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 503.

⁴⁷⁴ I employ this term in allusion to Racine, with whom it is most closely associated; *Intérieur* is, structurally at least, Maeterlinck's most Racinian play.

⁴⁷⁵ Maeterlinck (1999b), p. 505.

“Ils viennent, grand-père. [...] Ils sont au bas des derniers collines.”⁴⁷⁶ Next, references are made to events in the contiguous offstage as witnessed in real time:

MARIE. Je crois que c’est la foule... Ils sont si loin qu’on les distingue à peine...

L’ETRANGER. Ils suivent les ondulations du sentier... voici qu’ils reparaissent à coté d’un talus éclairé par la lune...

MARIE. Oh! qu’ils semblent nombreux... Ils accouraient déjà du faubourg de la ville, lorsque je suis venue... Ils font un grand détour...⁴⁷⁷

The ineluctability of the crowd’s approach is confirmed by the Old Man’s response to Marie, which shifts the narration into the proleptic future: “Ils viendront malgré tout, et je les vois aussi...”⁴⁷⁸ Further escalation occurs with a second entrance—that of Marthe, whose terse report is supplemented by acoustic evocation of the crowd’s proximity: “Me voici. Je les ai conduits jusqu’ici. Je leur ai dit d’attendre sur la route. *On entend des cris d’enfants.*”⁴⁷⁹ Finally, the play’s climax is precipitated by two decisive spatial transformations: offstage irrupts into stage (“*Une partie de la foule envahit le jardin*”⁴⁸⁰) while the porous membrane of the house wall, with its “pauvres fenêtres”⁴⁸¹, is penetrated by the Old Man, who crosses over into the stage-within-the-stage of the familial abode. This final entrance is narrated in real time by the Stranger:

Il ouvre à peine... Je ne vois qu’un coin de la pelouse et le jet d’eau... Il ne lâche pas la porte... Il recule... Il a l’air de dire: “Ah! c’est vous!...” Il lève les bras... Il referme la porte avec soin... Votre grand-père est entré dans la chambre...⁴⁸²

It is evident, then, that Maeterlinck’s anti-characters are *instruments for the production of space*: commanding no interest in their own right, they serve as “conjunctions”, as mechanisms of relation between stage and offstage, between mute family and advancing crowd. *Intérieur* is a radically decentralised drama in which signification is generated by the

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 509.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 511-12.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 512.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 518.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 516.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 513.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 518.

spaces between the impotent effigies that populate it rather than by the effigies themselves. What matters is the *totality* of the dramatic situation.

Do the anti-characters inhabit an anti-setting? Otherwise put, does the play have a *Where*, or not? On one hand, the “*vieux jardin planté de saules*”⁴⁸³ functions not as a specific locality but as an allegorical site: the willows are conventionalised reifications of grief and mourning. There is, therefore, a fundamental reciprocity of personae and landscape, with the latter externalising the emotional state of the former. On the other hand, the garden setting cannot be called a fully subjectivised space since it is not mediated by, or a projection of, consciousness. Although actualised—brought into play as a dynamic component of the drama—through the anti-characters’ narration, it exists prior to that narration as a generic physical environment (if not as a locality). The Old Man and the others are *in* the garden—unlike Igitur, who, as already touched upon in the last chapter, is not *in* the castle. Because Mallarmé’s text establishes an equivalence between *château* and *corps*, the castle cannot be regarded as a setting (*milieu*, ground) at all; rather, it is a *spatial reformulation* of the figure of Igitur and his metaphysical quandary. Far from playing out against the backdrop of the castle, the plot (or rather, amalgam of plot and philosophical schema) mobilises elements of its gothic décor—furnishings, draperies, clock, candle, book, mirror—and transforms them from insensate objects into projections or extensions of Igitur’s body and consciousness. *Where* becomes *Who*. The boundary between protagonist and space is collapsed, or, to phrase it another way, the protagonist is analysed into a series of spatial constituents, facilitating a staging of the *drame de soi*. This is a drama of self-consciousness, of the anguish that results from apprehension of the self’s otherness, and of the “will-to-impersonality”. The young Igitur comes into an awareness of his own duality—his capacity to reflect upon his own self;

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p. 503.

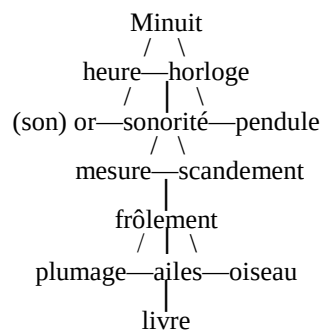
he knows that “il peut causer l’ombre en soufflant sur la lumière.”⁴⁸⁴ Later, he articulates a desire to “rentrer en mon Ombre incréée et antérieure”⁴⁸⁵—that is, to return to an *undifferentiated* state not of his own making, a state antecedent to reflexive consciousness.

F.C. St. Aubyn frames this desire in Sartrean terms:

[Being-for-itself] envies the uncaring, unthinking existence of being-in-itself and wants more than anything else to realize its “desire for an escape” [...], to achieve the impossible combination of being-in-itself-for-itself, the perfect awareness of self free of all contingency.⁴⁸⁶

The blowing on the “bougie de l’être” represents the first stage in a spatial dramatisation of the process of coming into a personal self and, agonised by its not-I-ness (incompleteness), snuffing it out in a valiant (but necessarily futile⁴⁸⁷) attempt to attain an impersonal or transpersonal consciousness. The text’s reformulation of the protagonist in terms of the castle’s décor is, from a Sartrean perspective, tantamount to a reformulation of *le pour-soi* (human consciousness) in terms of *l’en-soi* (being of objects)—which mirrors *Igitur’s* own longing for the latter state.

The protagonist is disassembled and “diffused”, piece by piece, into his surroundings by means of an elaborate network of aural, etymological, lexical and semantic correspondences, including, but certainly not limited to, the following:



⁴⁸⁴ Mallarmé (1985), p. 373. “Duality” here is *not* synonymous with “dualism”; as I suggested in Chapter 1, *Igitur* represents a general challenge to Descartes. Rather, it denotes *intrasubjective disjunction*. *Igitur’s* capacity for self-reflection is perhaps evoked by means of a phonetic echo (*lumière* → *lui-même*).

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 383.

⁴⁸⁶ St. Aubyn (1989), p. 129.

⁴⁸⁷ “For consciousness means presence to oneself as distant from oneself, whereas being-in-itself means the absence of that fissure or rift which is essential to consciousness. It is thus impossible for *pour-soi* and *en-soi* to be united in one self-identical being.” Copleston (2002), p. 188.

Any discursive reading of the text is therefore doomed to failure, as this passage amply demonstrates:

Certainement subsiste une présence de Minuit. L'heure n'a pas disparu par un miroir, ne s'est pas enfouie en tentures, évoquant un ameublement par sa vacante sonorité. Je me rappelle que son or allait feindre en l'absence un joyau nul de rêverie, riche et inutile survivance, sinon que sur la complexité marine et stellaire d'une orfèvrerie se lisait le hasard infini des conjonctions.⁴⁸⁸

Just as Igitur (= ergo) has been abstracted from the Cartesian *cogito*, so Midnight, Igitur's analogue, has been abstracted from the flux of time. To put it another way, time has been spatialised, transfigured into the seemingly atemporal space of a room (in the words of Maurice Blanchot, it has become a "moment qui est un lieu"⁴⁸⁹). And yet, "[a]s a conjunction between the past and the future, Midnight exists only insofar as it unites two opposites, yesterday and tomorrow,"⁴⁹⁰ and its *présence*, therefore, can be neither absolute nor pure, even if we accept the *conte*'s premise of a spatialised time. By analogy, the "rêve" of a self-coincidental "moi pur"⁴⁹¹ is just that—a "rêve", and nothing more. Igitur is doomed to duality, blighted as he is by self-awareness: "Ce scandement n'était-il pas le bruit du progrès de mon personnage qui maintenant le continue dans la spirale, et ce frôlement, le frôlement incertain de sa dualité?"⁴⁹²

Mallarmé's polysemic poetics is at its most intricate here. Not only do the pulsations of Igitur's heart, of which he is painfully conscious, metamorphose into the swing of a pendulum (*scandement*⁴⁹³), on one hand, and into the fluttering of wings (*frôlement*), on the other—they are also indirectly equated, by means of these selfsame two nouns, with (oral) reading and the turning of pages. *Scandement* is scansion or declamation; wings, birds and plumage, meanwhile, are habitually associated in Mallarmé with the book as a material

⁴⁸⁸ Mallarmé (1985), p. 377.

⁴⁸⁹ Blanchot (1955), p. 142.

⁴⁹⁰ Shaw (1989), p. 159.

⁴⁹¹ Mallarmé (1985), p. 378.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 383.

⁴⁹³ The connection may not, perhaps, be immediately obvious; a pendulum serves to *scander le temps*.

entity.⁴⁹⁴ The drama of self, then, becomes a suitably self-referential drama-of-the-book,⁴⁹⁵ prefiguring the *conte*'s finale: "Il ferme le livre—souffle la bougie,—de son souffle qui contenait le hasard: et, croisant les bras, se couche sur les cendres de ses ancêtres."⁴⁹⁶ The book of the self closed, the "bougie de l'être" extinguished, duality is finally overcome, and Igitur returns into undifferentiated non-being; like the ashes of his ancestors, he is now "indivis", a conjunction no longer. If Igitur's reading of the book is acknowledged as an analogue for fissure-generating self-awareness, the irruption of stage directions into what initially appears to be a prose text takes on additional significance: disunity of self is mirrored by disunity of literary modes (and perhaps even by the typographic demarcation of the didascalia).

Full Circle

Before this final chapter is brought to a close with a discussion of *César-Antechrist*—certainly the most eccentric text of all those discussed on these pages, and perhaps the most radical both in its treatment of the human subject and in its manipulation of generic frames—a brief summary seems in order.

As we move from the two versions of "Zone" and "Lettre-Océan" to *Intérieur* and *Igitur*, the distinction between character (figure) and setting (ground) grows increasingly blurred. Fully

⁴⁹⁴ See, for instance, "Les Fenêtres":

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté
Et de m'enfuir, avec mes deux ailes sans plume
— Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité? (Mallarmé [1985], p. 31.)

—or "Autre éventail de mademoiselle Mallarmé":

O rêveuse, pour que je plonge
Au pur délice sans chemin,
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,
Garder mon aile dans ta main. (Ibid., p. 61.)

—or, most relevantly here, double page 3 of *Un Coup de dés*:

l'Abîme / blanchi / étale / furieux / sous une inclinaison / plane désespérément / d'aile / la sienne (Ibid., p. 430.)

⁴⁹⁵ C.f. Beckett's *Ohio impromptu*.

⁴⁹⁶ Mallarmé (1985) p.389.

separable from character in the first draft of “Zone”, setting is, in part at least, mediated by the consciousness of the enunciator(s) in that poem’s final version and also in “Lettre-Océan”; in *Intérieur*, the multipart narrator serves almost exclusively as an expositor of stage- and offstage-space, while Mallarmé, as has just been described, fully collapses the boundary between protagonist and space in *Igitur*, using the latter as a means of articulating the existential predicament of the former. The more permeable said boundary becomes, the greater the degree of de-individuation: the cohesive *je*-persona of the draft of “Zone”, rooted in the tradition of monologic lyric verse, fissions into a “dividual” *je-tu*; this decentralisation becomes yet more pronounced in “Lettre-Océan” and *Intérieur*, both of which feature fully composite personae (Guillaume-Albert and Stranger-Old Man-Granddaughters); and *Igitur* is not a persona at all (and still less a *person*), but a personification. Two seemingly opposite tendencies are in evidence here. Apollinaire’s attempts in “Zone” and “Lettre-Océan” to burrow into the interior of his personae and dramatise the workings of consciousness are seemingly antithetical to Maeterlinck’s renderings of impersonality in *Intérieur*. Mallarmé’s *Igitur*, an impersonal drama “about” consciousness, stands at the nexus of these tendencies—which, though diametrically opposed, both challenge the notion of the unitary individual self.

This antinomy, as Ástráður Eysteinnsson suggests, typifies the modernist project as a whole:

The dismantling of conventional presentation of individuality has led to a certain dichotomy in modernist aesthetics as well as in theories of modernism. On the one hand, it seems that modernism is built on highly subjectivist premises: by directing its attention so predominantly toward individual or subjective experience, it elevates the ego in proportion to a diminishing awareness of objective or coherent outside reality. [...]

On the other hand, modernism is often held to draw its legitimacy primarily from writing based on highly antisubjectivist or impersonal poetics. [...]

[...] [W]hat the modernist poetics of impersonality and that of extreme subjectivity have in common (and this outweighs whatever may separate them) is a revolt against the traditional relation of the subject to the outside world.⁴⁹⁷

Subjectivism entails a “zooming-in” on the subject, antisubjectivism a “zooming-out”. In both cases, however, the subject is no longer being treated as an autonomous monad—in

⁴⁹⁷ Eysteinnsson (1990), p. 26.

contradistinction to the Cartesian view, which assumes a fundamental separation between world and subject, and conceives the latter as a self-identical entity. The modernist subject is internally fractured (othered by dint of its very self-consciousness), and constituted from without by its being in the world and relations with other subjects.

As mentioned above, the modernist probing of the subject's boundaries appears to go hand in hand with a reconfiguration of the boundaries of literary modes. (Note that I am not positing a causal relationship here, merely observing a correlation.) All the texts in question, save for the first draft of "Zone", are also characterised, to varying degrees, by the cross-pollination of narrative (whether verse or prose) and drama. In *César-Antechrist*, Jarry takes this hybridisation further still. Not only is the work an amalgam of drama, narrative and mythopoeia, reminiscent at once of Blake's prophetic works, the *Alice* books and the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, it also stands apart from the literary tradition it most closely resembles—closet drama—by dint of its graphic dimension, the text being interspersed with numerous woodcuts and engravings. "The combination of the nearly impenetrable text with complex illustrations may," according to Kimberly Jannarone, "be an indicator of a revolution by Jarry that was more than formal: it was an act against genre."⁴⁹⁸ In this respect, we have come full circle, back to the discussion in Chapter 2 concerning frame conflicts and the clash of divergent semiotic systems; yet I reprise that discussion now in what seems a most unlikely context—that of drama written for the page.

Jarry's "profoundly complex text destroys the play's performability,"⁴⁹⁹ claims Jill Fell. But, if the illustrations are considered integral to the text,⁵⁰⁰ it would appear highly unlikely that performability was of any concern to Jarry. *Unperformability*, no doubt, is what he sought:

César-Antechrist, as a word-image amalgam, is resistant to oral transfiguration, and the dense

⁴⁹⁸ Jannarone (2009), p. 123.

⁴⁹⁹ Fell (2005), p. 42.

⁵⁰⁰ This, it must be pointed out, has seldom been the case, resulting in the mangling of the work in various reprints, few (if any) of which accurately reproduce the carefully planned layout of the original edition. *César-Antechrist* has suffered a fate similar to that of the *calligrammes* (see Chapter 2, p. 92).

interplay of textual and graphic elements serves to draw attention to the materiality of the page—a two-dimensional surface accommodating literally two-dimensional characters, personifications of heraldic charges such as Orle, Cotice and Giron.⁵⁰¹ The graphic dimension of the play is by no means limited to the inclusion of woodcuts and engravings: in the *Acte Héraldique*, blazoning is utilised in lieu of didascalia, as in the following example from Scene IX:

De gueules à deux fasces d'argent, un chef contrepalé et un pairle d'or, trescheur d'or à huit feuilles d'argent ; – couché d'argent et de sable: d'argent à une fasce de carnation et une sphère de sable , – et de sable à trois sphères d'argent, chargées: en premier d'un giron de gueules, en second d'une pile de sinople, en tiers de six cotices ensemble d'azur.⁵⁰²

Naturalism calls for a stage endowed with depth and volume, for three-dimensional scenery and props; Jarry, by contrast, deploys a semiotic system where the third dimension simply does not exist, thereby precluding the possibility of a physical staging, which is necessarily sculptural (at least to a certain extent) as well as pictorial. The page is the only possible stage for *César-Antechrist*.

Even compared to the personified grammatical conjunction in *Igitur*, the personification of heraldic charges is, for several reasons, a remarkable manoeuvre. In terms of its sheer hallucinatory quality, it far exceeds even the most anti-realistic elements of *Ubu roi*, “deranging the senses”—or at least the imagination—arguably to a greater degree than any of Jarry’s other works, dramatic or narrative. Contributing further to the sense of hallucination is the fact that the heraldic characters—geometric signs—are placed on an equal footing with objects (*Bâton-à-Physique*), animals (*Scarabée*), mythological creatures (*Centaure*, *Licorne*), and “humans” (*Roi*, *Templier*); unhierarchised in the character lists for each act, they are, moreover, all endowed with the ability to speak. In this aggressively anti-anthropocentric scenario, the human figure has lost the centrality accorded to it since the Renaissance. Admittedly, personification—

⁵⁰¹ In heraldry, a charge is any figure, emblem or object borne on an escutcheon (shield). The geometric figures utilised by Jarry in *César-Antechrist* are known as *ordinaries*.

⁵⁰² Jarry (1972) p. 293.

of animals, and, to a lesser extent, even of objects—is an instinctive tendency and a commonplace device in literature and art of all ages. Abstract geometric forms, however, are far more resistant to personification: endowing segments of two-dimensional space with a semblance of agency or subjecthood, as Jarry has done in *César-Antechrist*, requires a particular—bizarre, phantasmagoric—leap of the imagination. Various kinds of spatialisation have been explored throughout this chapter, but in no other text I have discussed does it occur quite so literally as in the *Acte héraldique*, where, as Didier Plassard points out, “la distinction entre décors et personnages s’estompe tout à fait, au point de rendre parfois difficile l’intelligence du drame.”⁵⁰³ In heraldic terms, the “décor” is the field (background) of the escutcheon; the “characters” (charges) can exist only in the context of the field, becoming meaningless when taken in isolation. Field and charge, décor and character are inextricably linked and interdependent—a prime example of what I term deverticalisation.

The four spheres in the above-quoted blazon metamorphose into Ubu and the Palotins, the latter spelling out a kind of composite (other) “self”, a *you*, in a remarkable fusion of word and image:

Au premier plan, Ubu, puis les trois Palotins semblables à des sphères grossissantes, germent.

UBU. Cornegidouille, Messieurs, je crois que voici ce qu’il faut demander: qui sera Roi?

*Au soleil levant les trois écus de Chef, Trescheur, Pairle, luisent, écrivant, T.O.Y.*⁵⁰⁴

The manuscript version of the play features the following graphical representation, suppressed in the final version of the text:

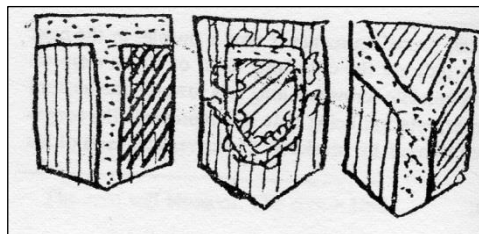


Figure 24: “T.O.Y.” [manuscript drawing].

⁵⁰³ Plassard (1992), 41.

⁵⁰⁴ Jarry (1972), p. 293.

Bizarrely enough, the distinction between *character* (personage) and *character* (typographic element) seems almost to disappear here: Jarry has *literalised* his *dramatis personae* (etymological pun intended), reducing them to the status of graphemes—de-individuation taken to an absolute extreme. If the pseudo-exchange between the Stranger and the Old Man in *Intérieur*, discussed earlier, is monological commentary masquerading as dialogue, there is no such masquerade in *César-Antechrist*. As evidenced both by the *T.O.Y.* gambit and the following passage from Scene X of the *Acte héraldique*, the Palotins/personified charges are explicitly denied even a modicum of autonomy, functioning only as elements in a verbo-visual system of relations:

GIRON. Hon! Monsieuye, nous sommes les seuls
 PILE. Parfaits pour qui veut que la Volonté s'érige loi souveraine, les Palotins, qui sont
 COTICE. Mécaniques et pourtant ne se remontent que par le repos, comme
 GIRON. Des êtres animés, dans d'ophidiennes caisses en fer-blanc, dominicalement
 PILE. Ouvertes. Et ils ont
 COTICE. Une volonté propre, parallèle plus loin prolongée
 GIRON. De la Volonté de leur maître. Ils ont
 PILE. Au moins quatre oneilles, sur lesquelles le pôle
 COTICE. Exerce diverses influences
 GIRON. De déclinaison, et autant d'inclinaison. Ils n'ont
 PILE. Que de petits ailerons, et de grands
 COTICE. Pieds plats sonores...⁵⁰⁵

This is undisguised narrative, distributed in what appears to be genuinely arbitrary fashion between three *abstract mouthpieces*.

Despite describing themselves as having “oneilles”, “petits ailerons” and “pieds plats sonores”, the Palotins of the *Acte héraldique* cannot be considered representations of fleshly creatures (let alone, of course, humans) simply because, to paraphrase Mallarmé, they are too infused with heraldic abstraction. In this they differ somewhat from the Palotins of *Ubu roi*: though no more human or individuated, the latter do, at least, exist as physical characters in a three-dimensional stage-space and participate in genuine communicative events (dialogic

⁵⁰⁵ Jarry (1972), pp. 293-4.

exchanges).⁵⁰⁶ There is little or no dialogic exchange in three of *César-Antechrist*'s four acts (the *Acte terrestre*, an abridged version of *Ubu roi*, is incongruous with the rest of the play precisely because it is constructed out of communicative events); the "characters" do not *interact*—they are merely constituent symbols in a semi-formalised semiotic system. And, yet, despite this degree of abstraction, *César-Antechrist* is—unlike *Ubu roi*, where the scatological takes precedence over the sexual—replete with phallic symbolism: "Si, dans le texte d'[*Ubu Roi*]," writes Michel Arrivé,

la Bâton-à-physique apparaît exclusivement comme une arme particulière à Ubu, totalement dépourvue, au niveau du système du dénotation, de tout élément sexuel, il en va tout autrement dans [*César-Antechrist*], où [...] le Bâton-à-physique est explicitement donné [...] comme un symbole phallique.⁵⁰⁷

The sexual dimension of *César-Antechrist* is not in itself of particular concern here; of greater relevance is the following apparent paradox: how can sexual motifs predominate in a work as non-representational, impersonal and codified as *César-Antechrist*, and yet be so conspicuously absent in *Ubu roi*, which, though undoubtedly "ABSTRAIT", is nonetheless populated by embodied figures and, moreover, appeals to and exploits the audience's own sense of embodiment, as described in Chapter 3? Or, framed in broader terms: in spite of what might be termed *César-Antechrist*'s "geometric impulse", and its extreme marginalisation of the human form *as such*, its symbols—seemingly sterile, unburdened of life, the mess of organism—*become surrogates for human presence*. Thus, the minus sign, exported from the most abstract of all disciplines, becomes phallicised (see Scene VI of the *Acte héraldique*).

This leads me to some concluding remarks.

⁵⁰⁶ See Elam (1980), p. 136.

⁵⁰⁷ Arrivé (1972), p. 156.

Conclusion

In a now-famous essay entitled “The Dehumanization of Art” (1925), the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset notes approvingly that

[t]he young set [*the cubists, expressionists, etc.*] has declared taboo any infiltration of human contents into art. Now, human contents, the component elements of our daily world, form a hierarchy of three ranks. There is first the realm of persons, second that of living beings, lastly there are the inorganic things. The veto of modern art is more or less apodictic according to the rank the respective object holds in this hierarchy. The first stratum, as it is most human, is most carefully avoided.⁵⁰⁸

Referring not only to the visual arts, but to an entire gamut of artistic practices (poetry, drama and music among them), he writes of a “flight from the human person,”⁵⁰⁹ of a “triumph over human matter”⁵¹⁰ that supposedly occurred in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The term *dehumanisation* is not employed by Ortega in its pejorative senses of “degradation” or “inhumaneness”; rather, it denotes what he perceives to be a turning away from “human realities”⁵¹¹ in early twentieth-century art, the “aberration”⁵¹² of nineteenth-century realism now consigned to the past. Having overcome the mimetic impulse—the urge to represent reality *as it is lived*—the modern artist, claims Ortega, sets about “deforming reality, shattering its human aspect, dehumanizing it.”⁵¹³

Mallarmé, poet of the impersonal, is adduced as one of the earliest catalysts for such a tendency. Alluding covertly to his assertion in “Crise de vers” that “l’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots [...] remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique,”⁵¹⁴ Ortega contends that “Mallarmé’s verse muffles all vital resonance”: the poet, having “learned to extricate himself from the surrounding man”, becomes “a pure nameless voice breathing into the air the words—those true pro-

⁵⁰⁸ Ortega (1968), p. 26.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 25.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵¹⁴ Mallarmé (1945), p. 366.

tagonists of the lyrical pursuit.”⁵¹⁵ In light of what we have encountered in the creative works of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry, and in their theoretical pronouncements, we might be tempted to agree with the following:

The art of which we speak is inhuman not only because it contains no things human, but also because it is an explicit act of dehumanization. In his escape from the human world the young artist cares less for the ‘*terminus ad quem*,’ the startling fauna at which he arrives, than for the ‘*terminus a quo*,’ the human aspect which he destroys.⁵¹⁶

Jarry’s heraldic phantasmagoria, populated by geometric forms; Mallarmé’s notions of poetic impersonality and theatrical abstraction; Maeterlinck’s insistence that organic beings must be banished from the stage—all this appears, superficially at least, to vindicate Ortega’s stance. Then there is Apollinaire’s declaration in *Les peintres cubistes* (1913), which, according to Willard Bohn, may have influenced the Spaniard directly: “Avant tout, les artistes sont des hommes qui veulent devenir inhumains. Ils cherchent péniblement les traces de l’inhumanité, traces que l’on ne rencontre nulle part dans la nature.”⁵¹⁷

Apollinaire and Ortega were writing in reaction to an ongoing *crisis of representation*, itself a reaction to the epistemological crisis I have touched on throughout this study. The “shattering of the human aspect” in literature, theatre and the visual arts occurred in conjunction with the progressive dissolution of the unitary, self-identical subject of Cartesianism; existing modes of representation, dominated by the human form, no longer sufficed to perpetuate the new episteme. Caught up in the *Zeitgeist*, Apollinaire and Ortega are both *in thrall to abstraction*. Apollinaire proclaims cubism to be fundamentally different from previous schools of painting in its denigration of *imitation* and pursuit of *conception*; for him, the artist’s search for “inhumanity” is, in fact, tantamount to a search for quasi-divinity, for the power to engender things not found in nature. Ortega, for his part, trumpets the

⁵¹⁵ Ortega, p. 32.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵¹⁷ Apollinaire (1966), p. 17. See Bohn (1997), p. 222.

marginalisation in modern painting of people, houses, mountains—the “good old friends”⁵¹⁸ we would have easily recognised on a painting of 1860, but whose organic forms have been replaced on the canvases of the new artists by “a language of pure Euclidean patterns.”⁵¹⁹ The question, however, is this: does the displacement of the human form as the principal focus of art necessarily entail dehumanisation? Furthermore, to what extent is it actually meaningful to speak of an art voided of “human matter”?

The poetry and drama that has occupied my attention on these pages challenges traditional conceptions of subjectivity and character. It deindividuates and depersonalises. It is, by turns, anti-realist and anti-mimetic, anti-anthropocentric and anti-humanist—sometimes aggressively so. Yet I would insist on the need for a distinction between *anti-humanist* modes of representation and *dehumanised* ones. Far from banishing human concerns from page and stage, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck and Jarry all engage in artistic investigations of humanness no less sustained, no less capable of eliciting powerful affective responses, than their pre-modernist forebears. The difference is that, in order to do so, they implement a radically novel set of representational tools and techniques. Rather than eliminating the human subject, they reconfigure it by way of a *mobilisation of absence and negativity*: of décor, blank, ground, space. Space, both physical and abstract, becomes a means to express attributes of humanness, acquiring powers of signification usually limited to *figures*—icons, personae, characters, etc. The reconfigured subject, in contrast to the Cartesian ego, is no longer indivisible, self-consistent, or fully separable from its milieu. It is fragmented and turned against itself, its boundaries blurring into the world. I would argue, in contradistinction to Ortega, that, far from dehumanising art, these techniques are deployed in an attempt to *redefine the human*, to articulate the condition of the turn-of-the-century subject and the

⁵¹⁸ Ortega (1968), p. 21.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

existential concerns that underpin it: the anguish of self-distance (*Igitur*), the supremacy of the unconscious (*Ubu roi*), technologised delocalisation (“Zone” and “Lettre-Océan), and so on. Of course, forthright (and disturbing) celebrations of inhumanity *do* occur in the period in question—Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) being a prime example⁵²⁰—but Ortega, in claiming that modernism *as a whole* tends towards the “inhuman” (however it may be defined), falls headlong into the trap of generalisation.

It is a trap that we—looking back on the early modernist period with the benefit of a century’s hindsight—must take great care to avoid. Modernism has always been vulnerable to monolithic narrativisations, often catalysed by its own practitioners. The notion of dehumanisation serves as a keystone for one such narrative; another is founded on the idea of a so-called “inward turn”—a retreat from the external world into the (implicitly Cartesian) “interior” of consciousness—initially propagated by authors like Virginia Woolf, but recently called into question by David Herman and others.⁵²¹ As my discussions of early modernist texts such as “Zone” have shown, it is, in many cases, fruitful to recharacterise the inward turn as an exploration of the nexus *between* consciousness and external world, *between* subject and object. Cognition becomes understood as embodied and situated. At the interface of self and world, and part of both, the body is frequently thematised, its perceptual activities evoked by techniques like montage (as in “Lundi rue Christine”, for example). When we consider turn-of-the-century theorisations of art-viewing, spectatorship and reading, the inward-turn narrative becomes even more problematic. As was discussed in Chapter 1, Georges Braque and Adolphe Appia (among others) recognise the situatedness and corporeality of the viewer/spectator; so, too, does Jarry. With the re-emergence of in-the-round staging (Meyerhold, Artaud), the issue of audience intersubjectivity comes to the fore.

⁵²⁰ For a discussion of Marinetti and “naïve” Futurist attitudes to the (in)human, see Hollington (2003).

⁵²¹ See, e.g., Herman (2011) and Waugh (2012).

Spectators are no longer treated as disembodied I's, monads in the dark, disengaged from each other and severed from the performers by the fourth wall. The reader, too, is recorporealised by means of texts like *Un Coup de dés* and the *calligrammes*, which deautomatise the processes of perception and reinvigorate the visual and tactile modalities. If anything, these developments represent a turn *outward*, not inward.

A third narrativisation, and one which calls for a particularly high degree of circumspection, revolves around the modernist “anti-theatrical prejudice”—a highly ambiguous term, as Martin Puchner describes:

The negation and rejection inherent in the term anti-theatricalism is [...] not to be understood as a doing away with the theatre, but a process that is dependent on that which it negates and to which it therefore remains calibrated. Even the most adamant forms of modernist anti-theatricalism feed off the theatre and keep it close at hand.⁵²²

The existence of an anti-theatrical tendency in modernism is by no means to be disputed—it is very well showcased by several of the works under discussion here. Once again, however, it must be acknowledged that this tendency is far from uniform. On these pages, we have encountered a *wholesale* distrust of performance, as articulated by Wyzewa; but this exists in counterpoint to Maeterlinck's more nuanced injunction against *uncontrolled organic materiality* onstage. Another, quite distinct category of anti-theatricalism involves *de-dramatisation*, as featured in *Intérieur* and Quillard's *La fille aux mains coupées*. But de-dramatisation, as has been seen, is offset by an opposing trend: if narrative elements come to dominate, and even overwhelm, drama, drama can also *irrupt* into narrative, as it does in *Igitur* in the form of pseudo-didascalia. A double-edged notion, anti-theatricalism is predicated on a desire to achieve what, to paraphrase Mallarmé's remark about *Hérodias*, does not seem possible in the theatre, but nevertheless requires some form of theatricality. The interplay between page and stage, between book and theatre, that takes place during the *fin*

⁵²² Puchner (2002), p. 2.

de siècle is a highly complex one; I have merely sketched out some of its salient features here—but in detail sufficient to demonstrate, if nothing else, how irreducible it is to monolithic interpretations.

A final word, now, on my principal authors, and on their place in the turn-of-the-century avant-gardes. I stated in the introduction that, rather than being put forward as exemplars of the era, Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Jarry and Apollinaire would be dealt with on their own terms. As should have been gleaned from this study, they are none of them “representative” figures, and do not truly even typify the movements with which they are most closely associated. Although Mallarmé was, in many ways, the “high priest” of Symbolist society, he stands apart from his contemporaries not only as poet, but also as thinker and theorist. In his notions of impersonality, abstraction, negation; in his extraordinary ability to choreograph typographic space, to work meaning from absence; in his conception of an ego fissured by self-consciousness, anticipatory of twentieth-century philosophy—in these and manifold other respects, he transcends the trappings of Symbolism. Likewise, Maeterlinck, sometimes regarded as the quintessential Symbolist playwright, departs from “mainstream” Symbolist dramaturgy in his one-acts, eschewing its lyrical excesses; as various critics have noted, *Les Aveugles* and *Intérieur* share more in common with early Beckett than with other Symbolist dramas of the 1890s.⁵²³ As for Jarry, he is, despite his early association and theoretical affinity with the Symbolists, undoubtedly a *sui generis* figure, and should be recognised as such. A vehicle for his mythopoeia, the *Ubu* cycle showcases Jarry’s remarkable engagement with the theatre and visual culture of the medieval period even as it foreshadows postmodernism. Lastly, Apollinaire. Like Mallarmé in the 1880s and 90s, Apollinaire in the years immediately preceding the war found himself at the centre of a vast and intricate social

⁵²³ For discussions of the affinities between Maeterlinck and Beckett, see, e.g., Worth (1978) and Sutcliffe (1981).

web of artists and *littérateurs*; but, though involved with Cubism, Futurism and a handful of other, shorter-lived movements (Orphism, a term he coined himself, being the most notable), he refused to be defined by any of them. I have touched on the Futurist influence discernible in “Lettre-Océan”, and on the Cubist techniques employed in “Zone” and “Lundi rue Christine” (collage, perspectival shifts, etc); nor should we disregard the vestiges of an earlier Symbolist aesthetic in *Alcools* (manifest in poems such as “Le Larron” and “Merlin et la vieille femme”), which Apollinaire never *entirely* obliterated. Susan Harrow emphasises the complexity of his relationship with “the competing currents or ‘isms’” of the time. “The expression of an affinity,” she writes,

frequently incorporates an element of resistance or qualification. Apollinaire typically offers a critique of the code that he appears to espouse, or presents a humorous (and potentially damning) reinterpretation of that code. [...] It is this distinction between his fluid, syncretic approach and the typically homogenous output of named Avant-Garde groups that Apollinaire himself underlines. His declared position is that of an independent.⁵²⁴

If I have used the poetry and drama of Apollinaire, Jarry, Maeterlinck and Mallarmé to explore the crises of representation and epistemology that dominated the *fin de siècle*, I hope that I have also laid sufficient stress on the idiosyncracies of their respective oeuvres, and on their originality as individual artists.

*

Spatiality, subjecthood, embodiment, modes of spectatorship and reading—the themes and motifs of this study remain more pertinent than ever in our own time. With the inexorable rise in the new millennium of site-specific, immersive, and aleatory theatre, the relationship between actors, spectators and performance space(s) is being renegotiated anew; by the same token, the ongoing development of interactive and hypertext literature, and the partial displacement of print by electronic media such as e-books, is transforming readerly subjectivity and producing new spatialities—physical, phenomenal and virtual. Both

⁵²⁴ Harrow (1995), p. 452.

immersive theatre and hypertext literature have encouraged a proliferation of clichés in the popular consciousness. “Active participation”, “empowerment” and “self-expression” are the new buzzwords. Excitable brouhaha and gross generalisations tend to follow in the wake of major paradigm shifts; to attain a more nuanced understanding of present-day practices, it is often imperative to look to the past—and, in this case, the period 1890-1920 has many answers to give.

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