Nicolas Pesquès and the Ecology of Life-Writing: Human and Non-Human Relations in *La Face nord de Juliau*

Abstract: **Nicolas Pesquès**'s multi-volume work of **poetic life-writing**, *La Face nord de Juliau* (1988–), is examined here from an **ecological** perspective attuned to the weave of relations between the writing subject, the text, and the environment. In a discussion framed by **Jacques Derrida**'s remarks on the '**autobiographical animal**', the article explores Pesquès's treatment of language, subjectivity, the experience of exteriority, and **human/non-human relations**.The network of relations in play is examined from a range of **anthropological** angles, culminating in an extended and reworked sense, once again indebted to Derrida, of what anthropologists such as **Alfred Gell** describe as 'distributed personhood'.

In what proved to be his final major project, the volume that would be posthumously published as *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Jacques Derrida periodically reflects on the notion of the 'autobiographical animal'. In fact this was the titular theme of the third Cérisy conference devoted to his work, held in 1997, where he first presented the material that would be published as a book a couple of years after his death in 2004. On one such occasion, Derrida suggests an inextricable link between the living animal and a mode of self-relation that may be termed autobiographical. He affirms an ineluctable self-designating, self-tracing orientation of living beings in general, and the autobiographical impulse that he consequently extends to the non-human animal is described by him as 'cette aptitude à être capable de s'affecter soi-même, de son propre mouvement, de s'affecter de traces de soi vivant, et donc de

s'autobiograparapher, en quelque sorte'.[1] With this gesture, Derrida effectively opens a radically new perspective on the already familiar contention that the genre of autobiography, and in particular the position and status of its writing subject, is inherently relational, offering a view of generalized autobiographical inscription that has the potential to displace the human signatory from the organizing centre of that relationality.[2] Autobiography becomes a mode of life-writing in which the living is what writes itself, as much as what is written, and moreover in which the limits of the living — between the human and the non-human animal, but also between the animate and the inanimate, the organic and the artefactual, or indeed between life and death — are constantly in play.

Derrida's extended and decentred view of autobiographical relationality is offered here as the opening part of a frame for an exploration of the remarkable experiment in environmentally enmeshed poetic life-writing conducted over more than forty years by Nicolas Pesquès (b. 1946). That frame will return to Derrida in its concluding part, following a brief consideration of possible anthropological perspectives on the pervasive relationality of Pesquès's work, undertaken by way of some allusions to the work of Tim Ingold, Marilyn Strathern and, particularly, Alfred Gell. The multiple volumes of Pesquès's literary project all share the global title of *La Face nord de Juliau*. The first of these was published in 1988 and takes the form of a diaristic *carnet*, with dated entries starting from 2 August 1980. To date, *La Face nord de Juliau* has extended to eighteen separate *livres*, these being distributed across ten published volumes, the most recent of which, comprising *livres dix-sept* and *dix-huit* came out in 2020.[3] After the first book, the use of dated diary entries would continue in the next two parts of the project, and mostly these would still resemble a prose *carnet*, though the entries would at times veer towards prose-poetic fragments,

or indeed take the form of short poems in *vers libre* (the earliest of these occurs already in the first book, for example: *FNJ:1*, 33, 35, and 36). Dated diary entries ceased with *La Face nord de Juliau, quatre*, which contains six separate, named sequences of short free-verse poems, and would only resume again with *La Face nord de Juliau, onze*, since when it has been maintained except for the blocks of prose poetry constituting *La Face nord de Juliau, douze*, the single-page, two-word *quinze*, and *seize* which is once again given over to short free-verse poems. Pesquès has published other volumes of poems and notebooks, as well as studies of other poets and artists, but the *Face nord de Juliau* series is unmistakably the central column of his writing and, given its beginnings when he was in his mid-30s and its open-ended status now that he is in his mid-70s, it may truly be called a life's work, or perhaps even the poem of a life.[4]

The one key constant throughout this enterprise is, of course, signalled in its title: Juliau, a mountain or hill whose north face the writer can observe from his home in the Ardèche. The subtitle of the first book, *Tombeau de Cézanne*, also gestures towards the most obvious forerunner for a persistent, not to say obsessive, artistic engagement with such a feature of the landscape: Paul Cézanne's series of paintings and drawings of the Mont Sainte-Victoire near Aix-en-Provence. Notwithstanding the invocation of such an imposing artistic model, the focal point of Pesquès's work, Juliau itself, is presented as unremarkable, ordinary, banal even. References to it overwhelmingly favour the term 'colline' rather than 'montagne', and a passage early in the first book sets the tone, describing it as having the form typical of a child's drawing of a hill, and yet being distinguished from the stereotypical image of a hill by its somewhat indistinct and flattened contours, such that it even seems to fall short of an already humble stereotype (*FNJ:1*, 11). That is not to say, however, that the visual,

indeed painterly dimension of Pesquès's treatment of Juliau is in any way peripheral. For example, the green of the grassy hillside soon becomes a dominant motif in the early stages of the series (notably in the second book), subsequently to give way to a visual immersion in yellow, from the fifth book onwards, this being elicited by the flowering of Juliau's covering of yellow broom (*genêt*). But it is crucial to note that colour and its language is as much a poetic fascination in the *Juliau* series as it is a painterly one, since the verbal, phonetic, and graphic resources of *vert* and of *jaune* are exhaustively mined in Pesquès's writing. This is a topic we cannot pursue further here, but it will be important to note the linguistic entanglement in the environment when we turn later to the treatment of relations between human and non-human animals. Our route towards Pesquès's handling of human/non-human relations in particular will take us by way of a wider consideration of relations obtaining between the writing subject, the landscape associated with Juliau as the ostensible object of the series, and the writing that seems to mediate between those first two terms.

Triangular relations

In the most general terms, the project of *La Face nord du Juliau* could be described as constituting an endlessly mobile triangulation between the poles of hill, writer, and the writing itself. Of those three poles, and despite the almost exclusive preponderance of the first-person voice, it is the writer who is often the explicitly elided term in the project's governing triangle. In the second book, for example, the writer acknowledges that the hill as object is not independent of its observer, and that Juliau and the writer are bound together in an entangled and sometimes fragmented reciprocity, but nonetheless insists on a desire to be excluded from the relation that draws together Juliau and the writing or 'poem' to which it gives rise:

> Au reste, je souhaite que le poème m'expulse, qu'il me traverse et, qu'au fil des ans, ne subsiste qu'une somme qui serait Juliau (ou tout autre chose ou personne) à la fin détachable de mes nombreuses postures.
>
> La colline et son poème. (*FNJ:2*, 5)

The exclusion of the writing subject will be far from a decisive and irrevocable gesture, however. This is acknowledged in another passage which, even as it insists on the ideal of an anonymous and autonomous writing, is forced to acknowledge that 'dans la relation toujours triangulaire entre une chose, un individu et un langage, il semble exister un lien qui interdise d'évincer le rôle d'aucun' (*FNJ:2*, 38). Furthermore, in a sense that will underpin the present discussion, even if as an often rather inaudible undercurrent, Pesquès's project has an inescapable autobiographical dimension. Another diary entry towards the end of this same *livre deux* closes with a repeated emphasis on the need to avoid coming to the autobiographical foreground, but nonetheless concedes that just such a foreground has necessarily been legible ever since the beginnings of his project, 'depuis plus de dix ans, dans l'histoire déjà visible de tous ces "maintenant" textuels qui me suivent comme une vie' (*FNJ:2*, 78).

If it is often suggested in the *Juliau* series that, in this triangular relationship, the role of the writer should be a withdrawn one, the better to allow the writing to appear as what is called, early in the very first book, a 'pendant' (*FNJ:1*, 13) to Juliau, it is equally made plain from that first volume that, whilst writing may offer the text as some kind of analogue for the hill, it can only do so by obscuring its putative object, by implicitly registering it as absent. The short poems that make up the tenth book, for example, frequently focus on this issue, one of them beginning with a couplet that

offers a particularly clear statement of the relationship between words and things: ‘Les mots ne nous donnent pas les choses | ils nous les enlèvent’. But the ensuing couplet states with equal force the distinctive power that this affords language, tying this power tightly to the seemingly negative version of the relationship by means of the repetitive figure of anadiplosis: ‘ils nous les enlèvent pour les dire | et les dire: c’est les faire être autrement’ (*FNJ:10*, 103). Numerous other terms are brought into play to explore the interval between words and things, an interval that is at once a negation and the source of an affirmation that is peculiar to language. Negative and privative formulations derived from *saisir* feature regularly, as in this remark from the eleventh book: ‘Le langage travaille à rendre impossible son effort de saisie. Le plus impossible possible.’ (*FNJ:11*, 58) There and in several other books, *dessaisissement* becomes a key term, where the etymological sense of ‘ungrasping’ or ‘losing grip’ on the part of language or the writer seems primarily to be in play, but where we may also perhaps discern the standard, idiomatic sense of *dessaisissement*, which is most commonly used in a legal context to mean ‘divestment’ or ‘divestiture’ (of property, powers, or rights). The noun *séparation* and its cognates also play an important role, and like the negation effected by language, separation is an ambivalent force: we are told that ‘séparer n’est pas détruire’ (*FNJ:10*, 149). In fact, not only does separation comprise a creative affirmation as well as its seemingly negative value, but it occurs even within what might be taken to be the self-identity of homogeneity or continuity, as one formulation neatly communicates by way of the verbally self-differing figure of antanaclasis, in which repetition serves to draw out a separation or difference within apparent sameness, the other within the *même*: ‘Il y a toujours une séparation à même le même.’ (*FNJ:13*, 88)

It is in this light that we should understand the numerous references to the novel form of affirmation afforded by the negativity of language: in being other than the mere reflections or products of language, things appear afresh by way of the interstices of words. Indeed, the cultivation of that negativity in language is often presented as entailing turning that negativity against itself in a reflexive, redoubling gesture, pursuing a poetic expression that is at odds with itself: passingly in the fifth book, for example, this is referred to as 'la titubation du non-écrire' (*FNJ:5*, 22), as 'un hors-jeu de langue' (23), or as 'désécrire' (39). A poem from the 'Suite Juliologique', later in the fifth book, begins with a couplet that claims a prior negativity in the world, onto which the non-representational, reflexive negativity favoured by poetic expression would open: 'le langage n'a pas inventé la négativité | il faut d'abord la voir dans le paysage' (191). Of the many ways in which that negativity in the landscape is conveyed in the *Juliau* series, one of the most persistent is the notion of the *hors-langue*, which we might gloss as the mute, opaque materiality of things, prior to their passage through the sense-making filter of words, and which the disrupted, disorderly words of poetic language offer a chance of glimpsing. Paralleling the mute materiality of the world onto which the *hors-langue* opens, the life inscribed in language is in turn bound up with what is at the limits of life, other than life, or, doubtless disorientingly, 'comme une vie' (*FNJ:2*, 78). Writing such a life is therefore couched at one point as 'écrire à partir du hors-vie' (*FNJ:11*, 107). In the fourteenth book, one diary entry offers a retrospective summary of the entire *Juliau* series in a similar vein: 'Voici l'ensemble — 13 livres, une masse sans estrade — de ce pourquoi il y aura eu élan: des trous dans la vie, des trous de vie.' (*FNJ:14*, 177)

Outer experience

The distinctive approach to life-writing explored in the *Juliau* series is also reflected in discussions of experience, in which the term ‘expérience’ is subjected to contrasting and unstable doublings, accompanied by idiomatic linguistic coinages. The key doubling in question here is between an ‘expérience extérieure’ that generally takes precedence over an ‘expérience intérieure’, the latter term ultimately being the locus for a critical dialogue with Georges Bataille’s idiosyncratic use of that term. In the eighteenth book, the encounter with Bataille takes the form of a proclaimed re-reading of *L’Expérience intérieure*, in a section entitled ‘Avec et sans G.B’. As that title indicates, this re-reading entails taking a distance from Bataille, a gesture that is to the fore at the beginning of this section, but then turning to the acknowledgement of a proximity that grows as the diaristic record of this re-reading progresses. Pesquès’s wariness about the notion of fusion raised in Bataille’s *L’Expérience intérieure* is a key starting-point in the re-reading offered in these pages. Now, it is true that a fusion of subject and object is periodically claimed by Bataille as the ultimate endpoint of his special sense of inner experience, but it should be noted that, for example, an early reference in *L’Expérience intérieure* to ‘la fusion de l’objet et du sujet’ immediately qualifies that as involving ‘comme sujet non-savoir, comme objet l’inconnu’,[5] in which the fused poles are clearly rather different from subject and object as ordinarily conceived. Pesquès quotes a parallel passage, evoking ‘un lieu de communication, de fusion de l’objet et du sujet’ (*FNJ:18*, 151), but rather than falling directly under the heading of inner experience, as Pesquès’s deployment of it implies, that reference to a site of communication is in fact used by Bataille to qualify a distinctive mode of ipseity that already dislocates any autonomous, self-identical subjectivity. The full sentence reads: ‘“Soi-même”, ce n’est pas le sujet s’isolant du

monde, mais un lieu de communication, de fusion du sujet et de l'objet.'[6] Subject and object are brought together, for Bataille, precisely by way of the strong sense of 'communication' that he uses here and develops across this essay, in which 'la communication tire la chaise à l'objet comme au sujet'.[7] If there is fusion here, then, it is a fusion that radically unsettles the poles in question; in Bataillean terms, communication has to be conceived as prior to the poles of subject and object, and not just as a relation sustained by a subject and object that are already seen as constituted.

Pesquès's record of his re-reading continues to stake out divergences from Bataille's version of inner experience, but he is increasingly inclined to find common ground, in a dissolution of the stable categories of subject and object, for instance, which we have just seen to be central to Bataille's idiosyncratic notion of communication, and which Pesquès espouses precisely in order to explain why outer experience, for him, is not an experience of ecstatic fusion: 'Ni fusion ni effusion, peut-être parce qu'il n'y a plus de sujet ni vraiment d'objet non plus.' (*FNJ:18*, 153) Another key area of convergence emerges around the relations between interiority and exteriority. Pesquès's account of Bataille increasingly turns to moments of inner and outer reversal in the latter's version of inner experience, referring to *L'Expérience intérieure* but also to other works, such as the following, slightly adapted quotation from the 1947 text *Méthode de méditation*: 'à l'intérieur de moi, le monde des objets tisse un réseau d'extériorité' (*FNJ:18*, 152).[8]

Reflecting that emphasis on interchangeable relations between interiority and exteriority, and a model of what is still referred to as 'expérience extérieure' in which categories of subject and object are destabilized to the point of dissolution, the final pages of the eighteenth book see a new term gaining ascendancy to reflect that thoroughgoing mobility: that of *flux*.[9] The flux of experience is such that relationality

takes precedence over subjectivity and world as stable, discrete entities: ‘D’ailleurs ce monde n’est plus un monde de choses et d’êtres mais un monde de liens.’ (*FNJ:18*, 156) This world as relational network is a plurality of worlds in a restless state of flux in which no world can fully close on itself. Turning now to consider the relations of the human to the non-human in that flux of experience, let us firstly examine another area in which the *Juliau* series engages closely with Bataille: namely, prehistoric cave paintings.

Cave art and animal signatures

The first and most sustained exploration of prehistoric cave art comes in the third book of the *Juliau* series, with a sequence of diary entries running over some twenty pages, and setting up reflections on art, landscape, and human and non-human animality that will persist as an undercurrent throughout the second half of that book.[10] The first such entry dates from 21 January 1995, and bears the subtitle ‘LA COMBE D’ARC’ (*FNJ:3*, 47), this being the name of the area, defined by a meander in the Ardèche river, containing the palaeolithic wall paintings in what is now known as the Chauvet cave. Ancient though these paintings are, the pages Pesquès devotes to them bear witness to the experience of an immediacy in time and space: the Chauvet cave paintings had been discovered only the month before this first diary entry, in December 1994, and the site in question is not at all far from Juliau in the Ardèche.[11] Several passages underscore the resonances between the ancient bestiary covering the walls of the Chauvet cave and the animal inhabitation of the slopes of present-day Juliau, as the recent discovery of these painted figures just kilometres away seems to offer to the writer’s imagination an uncanny bridge across millennia: ‘Sur Juliau, des rhinocéros laineux, de grands fauves rôdent dans mes rêveries.’ (50) Moreover, these

cave paintings are likened to written forms or books that communicate across time, allowing ghostly animals to roam in the present pages:

> C'est ainsi qu'ils nous ont écrit. Ce sont leurs livres qu'ils nous ont laissés. Leur graphie.
> C'est pourquoi ils reviennent aujourd'hui hanter les nôtres.
> Leurs animaux flottent comme les fantômes de nos mots. (58)

As was the case with the exploration of inner and outer experience, and the relation between subject and object, when Pesquès turns to Bataille in relation to prehistoric cave art he does so with a degree of ambivalence. Bataille is treated in the first instance as a contrasting foil, this time for the kind of enmeshed human/non-human experience that is traced in the Juliau text. A diary entry from January 1995 recalls that other, famous discovery of palaeolithic cave art at Lascaux, visited by Bataille in 1955 and inspiring his famous study first published later that same year as *Lascaux, ou La Naissance de l'art*.[12] However, it does so in order to maintain a clear distance from what it takes to be the orientation of Bataille's analysis: 'Je ne peux adhérer à son analyse qui sacralise tout, trop; qui parle de miracle, de magie, qui reste attachée au divorce radical censé trancher l'homme de la bête.' (*FNJ:3*, 61) But what that rapid summary neglects is the extent to which what Bataille imagines as, precisely, the transgressive, 'sacralizing' moment preserved in the Lascaux cave is the moment in which the humanity of the palaeolithic 'Reindeer Age' avowed in these parietal depictions betrays a continuity with the non-human animal that is otherwise disavowed in the maintenance of a sharp human/animal distinction:

> Nous tenons aujourd'hui comme à l'essentiel à la différence qui nous oppose à l'animal. Ce qui rappelle en nous l'animalité subsistante est objet d'horreur et suscite un mouvement analogue à celui de l'interdit. Mais en premier lieu, les choses se passèrent comme si les hommes de l'Age du renne avaient d'eux-mêmes la honte que nous avons de l'animal. Ils se donnaient les traits d'un autre et se figuraient nus, exhibant ce que nous voilons avec soin. Dans le moment sacré de la figuration, ils semblent s'être détournés de ce qui devait être cependant l'attitude humaine (mais c'était l'attitude du temps profane, du temps du travail).[13]

Bataille's account of the role of parietal art at Lascaux is arguably much closer to Pesquès's reaction to the art in the Chauvet cave than the latter is inclined to acknowledge, and it is difficult to imagine Bataille disagreeing with the proposition to which Pesquès proceeds in the same diary entry, when he claims that neither Lascaux nor the Combe d'Arc mark the birth of humanity, since '[l]'homme n'a jamais cessé d'être un animal et de s'en défaire' (*FNJ:3*, 61).

In these pages of the third book, the bridge between the immemorial moment in which human hands figured non-human animals on the cave walls and the present moment of a poetic life-writing undertaken in the gravitational pull of the experience of Juliau's landscape is characterized in terms of the making of a kind of autobiographical mark. The gesture of mark-making on the cave walls is likened to staking out a territory, as an act shared by both human and non-human animals ('comme on compisse un territoire'), and an explicit claim is then made for a parallel between such a gesture and a first-person act of testifying or signing: 'Comme on dit j'appose, je suis ici, je touche, je signe, j'essaie, je témoigne, je bute.' (56) The continuity claimed between the ancient mark-making on the walls of the Chauvet cave

and the present testimonial inscription of the writerly experience of the landscape of Juliau is therefore presented as a signing of the human at the very point where, even as the latter seems to mark its distinctive presence, it remains bound up with a non-human animality from which it never entirely extricates itself: 'Elles accueillent, ces pages, aujourd'hui encore, la présence d'une animalité continue, l'irruption à tout instant de l'étrangeté la plus haute'(60).[14]

The partridge and the hare

Two non-human animals stand out in particular for their multi-faceted role in the species-crossing fabric of life-writing woven by the *Juliau* series: the partridge and the hare. At all times, however, we will also need to be attentive to their verbal presence as *perdrix* and *lièvre*.[15] In point of fact, the first appearance of the *perdrix*, in a section of *La Face nord de Juliau, cinq* entitled 'Histoire de la Perdrix', occurs in the context of a particularly intense textual glow of *jaune* standing out against the hitherto dominant backdrop of *vert* (the section in question succeeds that book's opening section, 'Les Mois jaunes'), into which the *perdrix* bursts as a flash of yellow-on-black stripes.[16] The titular 'story of the partridge' revolves around the surprise of an encounter with a female partridge brooding her clutch of eggs: the writer is 'abruptement étourdi par le tigrage jaune | sur ses œufs' (*FNJ:5*, 63). It transpires that the writing of this entire episode echoes the effect of camouflage of the partridge, a camouflage so successful that it almost causes the demise of the brooding bird. In the opening pages of the section devoted to it, the partridge flits in and out of view, at times, for example, its resemblance to a stone enabling it to pass unnoticed: 'Pierre parmi les pierres' (58). All the while, this ability to merge into the background can also take the form of a linguistic blurring, such as a tendency for the word *perdrix*

to be disguised as a *pierre*, or to be reduced to one of the *Juliau* series's important network of abbreviations, in the form of a single-letter *p*, in which guise it can lurk largely undetected in the verbal thickets of the fragmentary prose.[17] But then what is announced as the second part of this section belatedly offers what it calls the 'récit' of the episode that inspired the 'Histoire de la Perdrix', briefly switching to a more linear narrative style, and flushing the bird out into the open as it does so. As the story has unfolded, this revelation (at the level of the *histoire*, which the order of the narrative *discours* is now mimicking) turns out to be in the nick of time, since the brooding mother partridge had come within inches of being cut to pieces: as the long grass around the writer's house overlooking Juliau was being cut back in June, the camouflage of the bird had almost caused it to fall victim to the scythe, until it suddenly came into view at the last moment: 'Maman perdrix détigrée au bon moment' (69).

The accidental death that nearly befalls the brooding female partridge very starkly links the bird to the twin limits of the lifespan: 'La plus médusante immédiateté, celle à laquelle la perdrix sacrifie, sachant se sacrifier, compromettant ses chances de survie et celles de sa progéniture *couvée à mort*…' (79). The tight but sometimes paradoxical connections drawn between birth and death, or the living and the mortal, are echoed in the figurative and graphic undercurrents of this section of the fifth book. The living bird that is threatened with an untimely death is spared that fate not only by the halting of the scythe's lethal blade, but also by virtue of being afforded an afterlife in this written record: in what is referred to at one point as a '[s]urvie phrasique' (57). At the same time, such life as a written record affords is at the cost of a kind of death, an absence of the bird as living presence, the latter only now persisting in the silent *hors-langue* of the text: 'Hors-langue: la mort parlant, la

perdrix ne se taisant que dans les mots.' (78) Indeed, perhaps that silence of the bird is echoed in another sense of the disseminated letter *p* that becomes its cipher: the mark, also, of a musical muting of sound. The camouflaging of *perdrix* in *pierre* may be a lifeline for the animal, albeit a potentially dangerous one, as we are reminded by the story of what nearly happened to this particular partridge as a result of the resemblance of a *perdrix* to a *pierre*. But at the same time it links the bird to what is not only inanimate but may also stand as a tombstone, marking the experience of a loss (*perdre*) that is, lexically, scarce if not absent from these pages, even though it may be discerned in every instance of the word *perdrix*. Finally (although we're far from exhausting the resonances of this creature, or its verbal resources as *perdrix* or as the mobile cipher *p*), it is doubtless significant that this partridge is, above all, a 'maman perdrix' (61, 69), and sometimes a 'maman p' (62, 70). If we have a sense that, in that guise, she is not only more widely representative of motherhood, but that her designation as 'maman p' reminds us that *p* also stands for Pesquès, then that inkling that there is a more specifically autobiographical strand woven into the story of 'maman p' seems to be confirmed much later, in the twelfth book: it is here, in the prose-poetic blocks emerging from the writer's mourning of his mother, that the *perdrix* makes its most insistent return.

The partridge's companion in that twelfth book, appearing with even more noticeable regularity, is the hare, a *lièvre* which, from that point on, will be the most common non-human animal frequenting the pages of the *Juliau* series, often in the company of the *perdrix*.[18] The regular appearance of the *lièvre* in this book of darkness and grief associates the creature and the word with death and mourning, and on occasion the autobiographical link with the writer's mother seems to be highlighted, with the remark, for example, that '[c]'est le lièvre de toi et voilà sa

fréquence' (*FNJ:12*, 200), closely followed by an allusion to the '[l]ièvre filial' (203). The twelfth book also features a particularly insistent reflexive focus on its own status, and invariably refers to the 'livre' in order to do so, making the proximity of *lièvre* to *livre* inescapable. Indeed, that proximity is expressly signalled, on one occasion, with the formulation 'li(è)vre' (177), and also in expressions drawing together the two terms — here, for example linking them with darkness, mortality, and an effect of fragmented dissemination, the collocation being stylistically underscored in a sentence that manifests the balance of a classical alexandrine (scanned with the prosodic flexibility due to prose rather than verse), and that ties the play on *livre* and *lièvre* into some tightly organized rhetorical patterning: 'Le livre dans le lièvre dans le noir en mille morceaux.' (215) Doubtless the verbal connection drawn with the *livre* is the most prominent textual dissemination of the *lièvre*, but one particular prose-poem condenses a whole range of further echoes, with its reference to '[u]ne affaire de lieu, de lien, de lièvre' and a remark that bears precisely on the enunciation of this network of words, calling to each other in a context suffused with death: 'Sur le bout des lèvres: le lieu, le livre, le lièvre. Tout ce que la mort enclenche et lie.' (165)

The accompaniment afforded to the writer by the non-human inhabitants of Juliau therefore marks another way in which, if this adventure in poetic life-writing may in some sense be regarded as autobiographical, it is as an experimental autobiography in which the writing subject occupies a recessed place, indeed is to be found in no one place, since its identity is distributed across a wider experiential and textual ecology: the *je* is written into an experience of the landscape, into an experimentation with life-writing as the life taken on by words, and into a shared

existence in the flux of the living.[19] A diary entry from the seventeenth book offers one of many telling expressions of this:

> Le *sujet*, comme presque toutes les idées, n'est pas une bonne idée. Les corps sont si poreux. Il s'y enchevêtre une telle permanence de sensations qu'on n'a plus du tout le désir d'en boucler le concept et d'enfermer tous ces *moi* dans une possibilité d'histoire dont il pourrait être le centre et y concentrer la maîtrise, voire le contrôle. Seul le flux est souverain, seules ses traversées nous importent.
>
> Nous avons élu le paysage comme partenaire
> la colline interlocutrice, pourvoyeuse de tact, de jaune, de grammaire.
> (*FNJ:17*, 36)

But, as we've seen in various ways, what characterizes this flux is not a simple immersion in the world, a placid harmony of living beings, or a serene celebration of the spontaneity and multiplicity of life. This is a poetic life-writing in which the act of writing also marks distancing, separation, and privation; in which the sharing of a world is always an uncertain *partage* (at once held in common and apportioned discretely); and in which absence, loss, and death of course have their ineluctable place in the flux of the living.

Anthropological perspectives on human and non-human relations

As a coda to this account of Pesquès's ongoing experiment in a poetic life-writing that is particularly attuned to the living ecosystem, I want to consider briefly some versions of the flux of the living, of relationality, and specifically of the place of the

artwork in a kind of distributed autobiographical personhood, drawn from a range of anthropological perspectives.[20] Firstly, and to pick up on the idea of an entangled flux of the living that we saw emerge forcefully in recent books of *La Face nord de Juliau*, Tim Ingold has put forward a particularly strong and increasingly influential model of the fluid entanglements of beings — human, non-human, and material — in the 'lifeworld'. He is at pains to distinguish his version of a fundamental interconnectivity from accounts of distributed agency or, for example, Latourian Actor Network Theory that, to his eyes, still end up smuggling in a world of discrete entities that would *post facto* enter into relations or agential networks (hence, for example, his preference for the term 'meshwork' for the 'entangled lines of life, growth and movement').[21] Notably, rather than agency, he promotes the notion of animacy:

> Animacy […] is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded. Rather […] it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation.[22]

Ingold's ontological substrate of animacy clearly resonates with Pesquès's evocation of the entanglement of porous bodies in the currents of a living flux. But, for all that Ingold's account does explicitly have room for the ravelling, unravelling, and re-ravelling of the entangled lines of life in their dynamic, evolving weave,[23] his determination at all costs to navigate around a worldview of discrete entities may

leave too little scope for the interruptions, separations, and discontinuities that also attend Pesquès's vision of a lifeworld where the sharing of existence remains an open question.

For an account of a prior and thoroughgoing relationality, but where relations are always poised between attachment and detachment, the network and what cuts the network, we may turn, all too briefly, to the work of Marilyn Strathern, whose thinking has consistently been concerned with, in the words of one chapter of a landmark study, 'Relations which Separate',[24] and who, like Ingold, looks to mark out some limitations of Actor Network Theory, but ultimately to almost contrary ends, emphasizing the cuts and stops that interrupt the flow of networks.[25] Her contribution is helpfully summarized in the 'Introduction' to a volume of essays on detachment: 'Strathern's work […] can be seen as establishing a real and effective symmetry between [disconnection, cuts, and distinctions, on the one hand, and relations and connections, on the other]: every cut is revealed as also a relation, every relation is also a disengagement from something else.'[26] In terms of ecological relations, notably, Strathern has more recently suggested that it is only by attending to relations as also involving separation, divergence, and dissent that a thinking of relationality can be afforded the kind of political purchase that would be in any way adequate to confronting our current ecological crisis.[27]

Let us turn, finally, to an anthropologist on whom Strathern's early work was influential, namely Alfred Gell, and the brilliant theory of the anthropology of art he set out in a book he managed to complete in what he knew were the last months of his life, the 1998 volume *Art and Agency*. In brief, Gell's view of the relations of indexicality, operating in the social field in general, but pursued in his study with particular reference to artworks, involves a thoroughgoing version of distribution, as

artworks themselves are seen as portions of distributed objects, which, via their participation in networks of social relations, themselves stand as indexes of a distributed, fractal personhood and, thereby, of a distributed consciousness or cognition. In the 'Conclusion' of this study, Gell turns his attention to examples of related artworks that be considers as temporally dispersed objects, evidencing what he calls, in the title of this conclusion 'the extended mind'.[28] His interest in temporally dispersed artworks is oriented towards a conception of the entirety and integrity of an *œuvre*. Such an approach is also avowedly phenomenological and, particularly where the status of a temporal series is concerned, specifically Husserlian and Bergsonian, as Gell seeks to marry a Husserlian view of the flux of time-consciousness with a Bergsonian account of the *durée* of an artist's works. In the context of Pesquès's multi-volume, ongoing series, especially viewed as an innovative mode of life-writing, it's worth noting that Gell talks about the totality of an artist's *œuvre* as constituting a 'dynamic, unstable, entity', adding of that entity that '[w]e can only appreciate it by participating in its unfolding life.'[29] Interestingly, he refers in passing to Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire series, but only as an aside in a more sustained consideration of the work of Marcel Duchamp. As a kind of microcosm of the latter, Gell highlights the preparatory studies spanning 1913 to 1923, paving the way towards what would emerge, forever incomplete, as *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, or *The Large Glass*. Of those preparatory works, Gell dwells on the *Network of Stoppages* of 1914, of which he comments:

> The 'Net-Work', both shows us a Network of Stoppages, *and also is a network of stoppages*, i.e. a series of 'perchings' at which Duchamp, in his 'flight' becomes visible in the form of an index of his agency, a particular work of art. […] In other

> words, as a distributed object, Duchamp's consciousness, the very flux of his being as agent, is not just 'accessible to us' but has assumed this form. Duchamp has simply *turned into* this object, and now rattles around the world, in innumerable forms, as these detached person-parts, or idols, or skins, or cherished valuables.[30]

Consequent upon Gell's notion of the artwork as distributed object and the concomitant notions of dispersed, relational personhood and likewise distributed cognition is this attractive view that, as he puts it elsewhere '*images* of something […] are *parts* of that thing',[31] and therefore that the life unfolding in temporally extended artworks is not so much represented or even expressed in those artworks, as permeating them as the splinters of a life and its afterlives. Intriguingly, given our present concern with reflecting on the mode of autobiographical identity implicit in Pesquès's experiment in painterly–poetic life-writing, in a draft essay on Duchamp, presumed to have been written around 1985 but unpublished in his lifetime, Gell rehearses the essential argument about Duchamp that will feature in the 'Conclusion' of his posthumously published *Art and Agency*, but in this earlier draft specifically floats the notion that 'the *Network of Stoppages* can be read as painterly autobiography'.[32] Indeed, when Gell then proceeds to enter a caveat about regarding the *Network* and its place within Duchamp's *œuvre* as resembling an autobiography, on the grounds that 'an autobiography is written as a narrative after the facts, representing the past as a whole made up of completed events', then one cannot but reflect that Pesquès's poetic life-writing bears an even closer resemblance to the idiosyncratic form of autobiography attributed by Gell to Duchamp, according to which, to quote what Gell says about Duchamp by way of contrast with the linear,

narrative model of autobiography he has just invoked, 'successive "stops" […] interact in a complex relational network'. But, one may at the same time wonder whether, in this picture, and as a consequence of the holistic, continuist frame of reference that he adopts from a combination of Husserl and Bergson, Gell has been inclined to underestimate the effects of these stoppages, and concomitantly has been too disinclined to question whether they forestall the very possibility of reintegrating these splinters into the integrity of a work or a life.

Perhaps we need to give more weight to separation, interruption and detachment, and to rethink what we mean by 'distribution' and 'personhood'. It is towards a more radically distributed personhood, no longer necessarily anchored in a human consciousness, that Pesquès seems to be pointing with his sovereign flux of porous, entangled bodies that exceeds the category of the subject. If this is still conceivable at all as a form of autobiographical subjectivity, it is one in which the writing subject is given over, from the outset, to the chance encounters of an 'outer experience' that holds the subject position open to multiple exchanges and substitutions, as is declared in the final single-page section of the eighteenth book:

> Si tout est dehors et que l'expérience extérieure en est le témoignage d'une part et un récit de l'autre, cela signifie qu'on est exclu de toute intimité, que le flux l'emporte, et gomme nos empreintes, que plus la moindre identité n'est possible — après avoir cessé d'être souhaitable — et qu'on a perdu tout recours à soi. On n'écrit plus je qu'avec une minuscule indistincte et interchangeable (*FNJ:18*, 187).

Given what we noted earlier about the dissemination of inscription and mark-making beyond the authority of the human, this is also to say that the writing subject is always exposed to the unstable, irresolvable contingencies of reading, the latter being understood as a participation in this inappropriable exteriority, an uncertain adventure in this criss-crossing space of marks made and traced: 'Je suis donné à lire.' (*FNJ:17*, 28)[33]

Postscript: the autobiographical animal

We began this discussion with a perspective on generalized autobiographical inscription, encompassing but also extending beyond and decentring human authorship, offered by the late work of Derrida, and it is to Derrida that we turn once more to close the frame of this account. In particular, I want to cite a couple of passages that offer food for thought about the kind of dissemination of the autobiographical mark we discovered in Pesquès's series, and what a radical distribution of autobiographical personhood may mean for the life and afterlife of the autobiographical signatory. The first passage is from an extended footnote in *Passions,* where Derrida has been reflecting on the status of literature as involving an essential undecidability about voice and reference, and then takes the first-person pronoun as his example:

> Par exemple, mettons que je dise 'moi', que j'écrive à la première personne ou que j'écrive un texte, comme on dit, 'autobiographique'. Personne ne pourra sérieusement me contredire si j'affirme […] que je n'écris pas un texte 'autobiographique' mais un texte *sur* l'autobiographie dont ce texte-ci est un exemple. Personne ne pourra sérieusement me contredire si je dis […] que je

> n'écris pas sur moi mais sur 'moi', sur un moi quelconque ou sur le moi en général, en proposant un exemple : je ne suis qu'un exemple ou je suis exemplaire. […] Ce que je viens de dire de la parole au sujet de quelque chose n'attend pas la parole, je veux dire l'énoncé discursif et sa transcription écrite. Cela vaut déjà pour toute trace en général, fût-elle pré-verbale, par exemple pour un déictique muet, le geste ou le jeu animal.[34]

Finally, as a further example of the iterability and, hence, undecidability of the first-person pronoun, and one with a particular autobiographical resonance where Derrida himself is concerned, I'd like to conclude with this remark from a three-way discussion between Derrida and his friends Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy that took place in June 2004, so just months before Derrida's death in October of that year. Derrida has just been talking, very frankly and engagingly, about his lack of understanding of Spinoza, and in particular his proclaimed bafflement at Spinoza's account of our sense of the immortality of the mind. Naturally, Derrida says, he himself has no belief in immortality, but he adds: 'Quand je serai mort, il y aura un oiseau, une fourmi qui dira "moi" pour moi et quand quelqu'un dit "moi" pour moi, c'est moi.'[35] It is perhaps in this sense that we should understand the signature scattered across the *Juliau* series as being 'donné à lire': as an iterable mark of identity that is always already ventriloquized, spectral in its afterlives, and distributed across and beyond human inscription.

Merton College, University of Oxford

Ian Maclachlan

Address: Ian Maclachlan, Merton College, Oxford OX1 4JD, UK

email: ian.maclachlan@merton.ox.ac.uk

[1] Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 76.

[2] Influential accounts of the relational dimension of autobiography include Susan Stanford Friedman's essay, focused on writings by women and minority groups, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 35–56, and Paul John Eakin's discussion of relational selves and lives, in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). For a valuable overview of critical work on relationality in autobiography, I am indebted to Hannie Lawlor's doctoral thesis, 'Balancing Acts? Relational Responses to Trauma in 21st-Century French and Spanish Women's Writing' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2020).

[3] Publication details of Nicolas Pesquès's series are: *La Face nord de Juliau: Tombeau de Cézanne* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 1988); *La Face nord de Juliau, deux* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 1997); *La Face nord de Juliau, trois, quatre* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 2000); *La Face nord de Juliau, cinq* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 2008); *La Face nord de Juliau, six: poème installé* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 2008); *La Face nord de Juliau, sept* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 2010); *La Face nord de Juliau, huit, neuf, dix* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 2011); *La Face nord de Juliau, onze, douze* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013); *La Face nord de Juliau, treize à seize* (Paris: Flammarion, 2016); *La Face nord de Juliau, dix-sept, dix-huit* (Paris: Flammarion, 2020). References to these will be given in the text in the form of *FNJ*, followed by the numbers of *livre* and then page. All emphases in the original, unless indicated otherwise. In my own text, I will use the word 'book' to refer to each numbered part of the Juliau project, rather than to individual publications (since these published volumes often contain more than one 'book' in the series). I owe a debt to my colleague and friend, Emily McLaughlin, for a conversation in which she first alerted me to Pesquès's extraordinary project. For an excellent account of the poetic *carnet* as a distinctive mode of ecologically attuned life-writing, see her article '"Dans le tissage de la vie": The Poetic

Notebook as an Ecological Form of Exploration', *Nottingham French Studies*, 61:2 (2022), 168–82.

[4] As I prepare this article to go to press, there is an indication that, although in principle interminable, the *Face nord de Juliau* project is soon to reach a provisional conclusion. In 2023, Pesquès published a study entitled *Chères images: peinture et écriture chez Gilles Aillaud* (Strasbourg: L'Atelier contemporain, 2023). The accompanying biographical blurb about the author on the publisher's website describes his *Juliau* project as 'inachevable', and the poem itself as 'imprévisible', before going on to note the impending publication of '[l]a dix-neuvième et dernière version de *La face nord de Juliau*' (http://www.editionslateliercontemporain.net/collections/monographies/article/cheres-images-peinture-et-ecriture-chez-gilles-aillaud [accessed 6 December 2023]).

[5] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 7–181 (p. 21).

[6] *L'Expérience intérieure*, p. 21.

[7] *L'Expérience intérieure*, p. 68.

[8] Cf. Georges Bataille, *Méthode de méditation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, V, pp. 191–234 (p. 205); Pesquès's quotation makes a silent adaptation to a phrase in the paragraph beginning 'Ce monde d'objets qui me transcende…'.

[9] Although Pesquès refrains from quoting Bataille directly in this regard, 'flux' is also a term employed in similar vein on occasion in *L'Expérience intérieure*, as in this remark from a section entitled 'La "Communication"': 'Je ne suis et tu n'es, dans les vastes flux des choses, qu'un point d'arrêt favorable au rejaillissement.' (op. cit., p. 112)

[10] Pesquès will revisit the topic of prehistoric cave art with some briefer references later in the *Juliau* series, for example at *FNJ:11*, 54, and *FNJ:13*, 124.

[11] The first full account of the discovery of these cave paintings was published as: Jean-Marie Chauvet, Éliette Brunel Deschamps, and Christian Hillaire, *La Grotte Chauvet à Vallon Pont d'Arc* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

[12] Georges Bataille, *La Peinture préhistorique: Lascaux, ou La Naissance de l'art* (Geneva: Albert Skira, 1955), in the full title of that original edition; collected under its usual, shorter title in Bataille's *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IX (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 7–101.

[13] Bataille, *Lascaux*, *Œuvres complètes*, IX, p. 63. Bataille's reflections on Lascaux have been the object of much commentary; for a short study that focuses on the ambivalence of the human/non-human relations involved in Bataille's account, that is clearly contextualized in relation to previous commentaries, and that draws on related writings by Bataille, see Yue Zhou, 'Alongside the Animals: Bataille's "Lascaux Project"', *Yale French Studies*, 127 (2015), 'Animots: Postanimality in French Thought', 19–33.

[14] For an interview that is enlightening about the Juliau project in general, and especially so in relation to the treatment in it of non-human animals, see Nicolas Pesquès, Gwenola Caradec, and Steven Winspur, 'Poésie at animalité: un entretien avec Nicolas Pesquès', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies,* 16:4 (September 2012), 453–60.

[15] The *Juliau* series is also a dense fabric of intertextual references and quotations, but one obvious antecedent for a poetic treatment combining these two creatures is never explicitly invoked: Jean de La Fontaine's 'Le Lièvre et la Perdrix', in the fifth book of his *Fables*. Given the unfortunate fate of both animals in that fable, the association with death that we will note in both instances in Pesquès's work may constitute an indirect echo of La Fontaine.

[16] Of the relatively few critical treatments of Pesquès's work, two focus on this 'Histoire de la Perdrix'. It appears as a brief coda to a discussion of Michael Riffaterre in Steven Winspur, 'Cultural Damage and Some Literary Repair (Condé, Carn et al.)', *L'Esprit créateur*, 49:4 (Winter 2009), 94–106 (see pp. 103–5). More sustained treatment is offered in Franck Villain, 'Dans la couleur immergeante, le toucher du monde chez Nicolas Pesquès', *French Forum*, 38:1–2 (Winter/Spring 2013), 141–58, where this section of the fifth book is the object of close analysis in pp. 147–57.

[17] The recourse to abbreviations, often in the form of single-letter initials, is one of the ways in which the verbal matter of the *Juliau* series can be widely and unpredictably disseminated across the text. Thus, for example, the dominant colour term *jaune* is often abbreviated to an initial *j*, in which guise it may also represent *Juliau*, and cannot but echo the *je* of the writing subject too.

[18] Following this first series of appearances in the twelfth book, the thirteenth and seventeenth books offer further opportunities for tracking down the *lièvre*.

[19] For an ecopoetic reading of the relations of language and world in the first four books of the *Juliau* series, alongside a parallel consideration of the poetry of Eugène Guillevic, see Gwenola Caradec, '"Descendre et séjourner/ Dans cette espèce de terre," deux écopoétiques (Guillevic et Nicolas Pesquès) en quête "de vivre avec"', *French Forum*, 43:3 (2018), 439–56.

[20] Everything I write owes an inestimable debt to Elizabeth Hallam, but I'm particularly indebted here to Liz for her patient explanations of aspects of anthropology, and especially for introducing me to Alfred Gell's remarkable work.

[21] Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 63.

[22] Ingold, 'Rethinking the animate, reanimating thought', in *Being Alive*, pp. 67–75 (p. 68).

[23] See, for example, *Being Alive*, p. 71.

[24] Marilyn Strathern, 'Relations which Separate', in *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 191–224.

[25] Marilyn Strathern, 'Cutting the Network', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2:3 (September 1996), 517–35.

[26] 'Introduction: reconsidering detachment', in *Detachment: Essays on the Limits of Relational Thinking*, ed. by Matei Candea, Joanna Cook, Catherine Trundle, and Thomas Yarrow (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 1–31 (p. 16).

[27] See, for example, Marilyn Strathern, *Relations: An anthropological account* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 12–13.

[28] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 221–58.

[29] *Art and Agency*, p. 242.

[30] *Art and Agency*, pp. 249–50. In choosing between French and English titles for my own references to Duchamp's works, I simply echo Gell's preferences, for the sake of uniformity.

[31] *Art and Agency*, p. 223.

[32] Alfred Gell, 'The Network of Standard Stoppages (c. 1985)', in *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell*, ed. by Liana Chua and Mark Elliott (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), pp. 88–113 (p. 100). The same volume contains a helpful account of Gell's treatment of Duchamp: Simon Dell, 'Gell's Duchamp/ Duchamp's Gell', pp. 114–29.

[33] There are numerous references in the *Juliau* series to reading in that kind of extended sense, for example: 'Il est possible que l'expérience extérieure puisse se lire plus que se dire. Se lire ou se vivre.' (*FNJ:18*, 129)

[34] Jacques Derrida, *Passions* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), pp. 89–90 n. 12.

[35] Jacques Derrida, 'Dialogue entre Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy', *Rue Descartes*, 52 (2006), 86–99 (96).