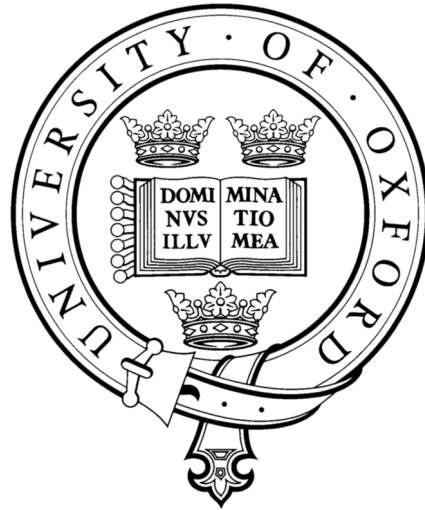




Weird Science: Affect and Epistemology in Contemporary Literary and Artistic Projects

Kathleen Morris

St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford

Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
LONG ABSTRACT.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	11
INTRODUCTION.....	12
RESEARCH CONTEXTS: THE OULIPO.....	16
INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND PROJECTS.....	24
THE AFFECTIVE TURN.....	30
THESIS OUTLINE.....	33
1 FROM MATHEMATICS TO NUMEROLOGY RECUPERATING PATHOS IN JACQUES ROUBAUD, ROMAN OPALKA & ON KAWARA.....	38
INTRODUCTION.....	38
READING ROUBAUD’S ARITHMETIC.....	45
AFFECTIVE MATHEMATICS.....	54
SAFETY IN NUMBERS.....	64
2 THE FORMS OF FACT.....	76
INTRODUCTION.....	76
I. LISTS, CATALOGUES AND COLLECTIONS: THE OULIPO IN THE LOUVRE.....	79
LISTS IN CONTEXT: BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES.....	79
VERTIGE DE LA LISTE: THE LOUVRE EXHIBITION.....	84
“L’ART DE LA LISTE” AND “LES JOIES INEFFABLES DE L’ÉNUMERATION”.....	98
LES HABITANTS DU LOUVRE.....	105
II. 107 ÂMES: THE CENSUS POETICS OF PERSONHOOD.....	111
3 SYSTEMATIC JOURNEYS: THE PRACTICES AND POETICS OF THE ITINERARY.....	129
INTRODUCTION.....	129
CRITICAL APPROACHES: EVERYDAY LIFE, AFFECT THEORY AND <i>TOPOCRITIQUE</i>	135
JACQUES JOUET AND <i>À LORIENT</i>	143
JACQUES ROUBAUD: <i>À LORIENT</i> AND ELSEWHERE.....	155
WANDERLUST: THE ART OF WALKING.....	165
FRÉVENT: OULIPIAN EXPERIMENTS IN TRAVEL AND TRUTH.....	176
CONCLUSION.....	190
4 LE QUOTIDIEN MÉTÉOROLOGIQUE.....	193
INTRODUCTION.....	193
NUHEURES: THINKING THROUGH THE CLOUDS WITH JACQUES ROUBAUD.....	203
RONI HORN’S WEATHER: AFFECT EXPERIMENTS.....	217
CONCLUSION.....	232

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Abstract

Contemporary cultural practices sometimes appear dispassionate, distant and clinical—committed to conceptualism or formalism. Yet works by Jacques Roubaud and Jacques Jouet (both members of the Oulipo, a group of experimental writers in France that use formal and mathematical constraints to generate new literary forms) suggest a complex relationship between epistemology and affect. This thesis argues that contemporary literary and artistic projects that appropriate the tropes of clinical procedure and experimental constraint, suggest alternative forms of knowledge-making that implicate the body and emotions of the experiencing subject. In these projects, affect and emotion travel through reason, logic, system and constraint and are transformed in the process. Therefore any analysis of forms of affect in these works must also consider the procedural and scientific aspect, that which makes them “projects”. My research, drawing on recent work that places emphasis on affect, considers these projects as test cases often mediating between a series of dichotomies such as reason/emotion and mathematics/poetry. Curiously it is in the encounter with epistemological systems that the value of affect, embodiment and subjectivity is underscored, and this thesis interrogates the various ways that contemporary projects articulate affect almost despite themselves. By passing through a scientific impulse to inquire about and test the validity of epistemological systems, these projects underscore the role of affect in producing knowledge. This thesis insists on the continued importance of the Oulipo in contemporary culture and seeks to provide a

larger, interdisciplinary context for oulipian experimentation by analysing similar works in the visual arts. This thesis has four chapters, each based on the materials that the projects themselves investigate: 1) numbers and mathematics, 2) lists, collection, and census-data, 3) itineraries and travel, 4) weather and meteorology. Projects bear witness to what the poet Lyn Hejinian has called the romance of science: its rigor, patience, thoroughness and speculative imagination (Mirage, 1983, 24) In so doing, these projects reveal forms of affect that only emerge through this ‘weird science’ as literary and artistic experiments.

Long Abstract

“Weird Science: Affect and Epistemology in Contemporary Literary and Artistic Projects” argues that contemporary literary and artistic projects—which often appropriate the tropes of clinical procedure and experimental constraint—suggest possibilities for alternative knowledge-making practices that implicate the body and the emotions of the experiencing subject. The setting up of constraints, rules, procedures and models of investigation in these contemporary projects is not merely perfunctory (or of purely formal interest), but can be called into the service of affect, offering alternative modes for its expression and thus different avenues for considering the relationship between feeling and thought as they commingle in cultural texts. My research draws on affect theory to consider these works as test cases that mediate between a series of dichotomies: science/aesthetics, reason/feeling, mathematics/poetry, and the formal/the lyrical. By complicating the relationship between thought and feeling, or epistemology and affect, these contemporary works not only insist that literature and art can ‘think’ (using the very modes in which knowledge is currently trafficked,

namely scientific methods ranging from statistics to samples and data collection), but they also suggest that such thinking and knowing necessarily, or perhaps inevitably include the ‘lesser’ orders of feeling, intuition and bodily experience. These projects create a space where the production of knowledge and the production of feeling are bound, thus refusing both simplistic humanist hierarchies that privilege thought over feeling, and aesthetic hierarchies that may privilege subjective emotive truth over fact and reason. The works discussed in this thesis produce alternative heuristic strategies while insisting on the multiple ways that feeling can be articulated—often necessitating a detour through reason, logic, system and constraint in order to be fully comprehended. They also carve out a place for the scientific within contemporary cultural practices that neither cedes to its dominance in contemporary culture broadly writ, nor entirely dismisses the values of its methods and practices.

Centred on the Oulipo, (a group of experimental French writers and mathematicians that use formal constraints to generate new and potential literature), this thesis queries what it might mean to unite, in the words of Raymond Queneau, “le délire du mathématicien à la raison du poète.”¹ The projects discussed in this thesis feature a scientific attitude or channel a scientific spirit of inquiry. I am interested in the ways ‘weird sciences’ emerge from the displacement of scientific

¹ Raymond Queneau, *Le voyage en Grèce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 39.

method, data and discourse into the aesthetic realm. Jacques Roubaud serves as exemplar and touchstone throughout the thesis. Because of his established interest in the interstice of poetics and mathematics, Roubaud's works often depart from and complicate oulipian formalism. I argue that such constraint can be considered outside of its purely formal articulation in literature, and that the relationship of constraint to both science and affect becomes clearer as a result. Much of Roubaud's oeuvre is preoccupied by the ambition to bring together seemingly irreconcilable domains for understanding the world and this can be seen in his first publication, ϵ , known in French as *le signe d'appartenance*, in which the encounter between set theory and literary history produces the text. Bringing together poetry and mathematics, as well as elements of his daily life, Roubaud's series of autobiographical texts, '*le grand incendie de londres*', also document his ongoing interest in epistemological structures of time. To produce this text Roubaud set himself the daily task of writing between 3 a.m. and when the light from the sun overtook the artificial light emanating from his desk lamp. He repeated this process for more than twenty-six years. The continuous and systematic element of Roubaud's project therefore occupies a prolonged temporal structure that serves to shore up an experience of time and registers subtle changes of temperament over a prolonged period. Without this regime, that temporal structure would not be given form, and the regime therefore becomes a kind of technology, a *technē*, and a new mode of writerly production. Roubaud's *Ciel et terre et ciel et*

terre, et ciel, meditates on variegation and subjectivity through a sustained encounter with both John Constable's cloud studies and Luke Howard's scientific treatise on clouds. The text is a kind of fulcrum through which Roubaud launches an inquiry that is as much epistemological as it is personal. Roubaud's career also provides a historical framework to my research given that he has been working since the beginnings of the Oulipo and the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s, yet he continues to publish and collaborate with artists and writers today.

The thesis also analyses recent works by Oulipian Jacques Jouet. Much of the current scholarship on the Oulipo works to position Jouet as the main proponent of a third generation of Oulipians whose practices are marked by an attempt to expand the domain of constraint from exclusively formal and textual protocols to those that can be applied to everyday life.² While I dispute the notion that this broader conception of constrained writing is exclusive to more recent oulipian texts and authors, my research focuses on texts which go beyond the confines of the book to incorporate or play upon elements of the author's everyday life and writing practice. The essential contribution of the Oulipo is that potential is created through constraints—it is neither a limiting device nor a gimmick, but creates unforeseen textual and creative outcomes. Pushing this notion further, then, the literary projects discussed do not

² In keeping with French standards of demonymy, the word *oulipian* is capitalized only when it refers to a person: Jacques Roubaud was an Oulipian, but his works are oulipian.

necessarily begin with literary or formal constraints, but rather use constraint to reconceptualise the kinds of things that writing can accomplish and the relations it might have to the world at large.

This research is interdisciplinary in its scope and methodology. The vast majority of oulipian works are based on constraints, rules, procedures and regimes, but such practices are not limited to the Oulipo. My work, therefore, while remaining centred on the Oulipo, seeks a broad context for oulipian works and traces similar practices in other disciplines, most notably the visual arts. The artworks that I discuss date from the late 1960s to the present, and have a decidedly conceptualist flavour. Works by On Kawara, Roman Opalka, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Francis Alÿs, Roni Horn, Christian Boltanski and Sophie Calle reveal the extent to which the clinical or procedural emergence and expression of affect in contemporary projects is also apparent in visual practices of the same period. In order to define and conceptualise the variety of contemporary cultural practices discussed, this thesis serves as an extension and further elaboration of the critical work of Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham in *The Art of the Project*, and I make use of their definition and taxonomy of “projects” throughout. From Gratton and Sheringham, projects “often involve setting up experiments, taking soundings, carrying out sets of instructions or sticking to carefully elaborated programmes.”³ Projects

³ *The Art of the Project*, ed. Gratton and Sheringham, (New York and Oxford: Berghhan Books, 2005), 1.

often foreground the experiential dimension of process over and against any finished outcomes or products. The projects discussed in this thesis position themselves as critiques, testing other unaesthetic disciplines that they appropriate in the process. However, in taking up the 'extra-aesthetic' or un-aesthetic, projects also point to certain limitations within literary and artistic forms, but they do so with the intention of transforming literature and art and returning to the aesthetic. In this respect, central to these projects is a concern for how shared experiences and common knowledge can be given form.

The theoretical framework for this research is informed by recent scholarship on affect and contributes to it by offering a new way for relating affect to epistemology in contemporary French literature and visual arts. Insofar as projects imbricate knowledge and feeling, they are particularly interesting to consider alongside critical studies in affect theory. Affect theory insists upon interstitial concepts—not links between dualisms but those elements not wholly belonging to either subject or object. Affects require us “to pose as a problem the relation between reason and emotions.”⁴ Affect theory moves and shifts the system of binaries showing turbulence within the system itself. With projects, “ideas, and perhaps more startlingly emotions, are freed from

⁴ Michael Hardt, “Foreword: What Affects are Good For,” in *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), x.

the limits of the singular 'I,' allowing for a poetry of complex and densely layered affect as well as intelligence.”⁵

This research is structured on the basis of the materials that the projects themselves investigate or take up as their subject and according to epistemological affinities between projects: 1) numbers and mathematics, 2) lists, collection and census data, 3) itineraries and travel, and 4) weather and meteorology. The first chapter “From Mathematics to Numerology: Methods for Recuperating Pathos in Jacques Roubaud, Roman Opalka and On Kawara,” discusses the formal, programmatic use of numbers in literary and artistic projects, relates this to current scholarship on the relation of literature to mathematics, and suggests ways that such projects can be read with respect to the affective turn. In the second chapter, “The Forms of Fact,” I analyse how alternative types of list, catalogue and survey can produce alternative types of information. Insisting that contemporary literary and artistic projects produce alternative epistemologies invested in affect, this chapter argues that the collection and arrangement of knowledge within the aesthetic domain necessarily problematizes received notions about the presentation of facts. The first part of this chapter centres on the list through analysing an exhibition at the Louvre, *Vertige de la liste*, and a bookwork by Roubaud and Boltanski, *Les habitants du Louvre*. The second part of the chapter considers the alternative collection and

⁵ Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 330.

presentation of census data in Jacques Jouet's *107 âmes*. The third chapter "The Practices and Poetics of the Itinerary," considers the relationship between an itinerary as a planned course, the act of taking that route itself, and the account of having done so. It thus explores the three-fold temporality of itineraries—bearing on the future, the present and the past—through analyses of recent travel projects that often involve local, neglected destinations. *À Lorient* is a collection of poems written by Jacques Roubaud and Jacques Jouet undertaken as a response to the invitation (made by the theatre director of Lorient) to visit and intervene in the town. *Frévent* is a text created by Jacques Jouet, Claudine Capdeville and Pierre Laurent as a result of each writer participating in a constrained travel project to the town. This chapter shows how modest travel projects like *Frévent* and *À Lorient*, can become fascinating explorations of truth, subjectivity and experience. The fourth and final chapter, "*Le quotidien météorologique* or What weather might report," historicizes the relationship between meteorology and aesthetics, arguing for the historical imbrications of scientific discourse and poetic forms of attention. It analyses contemporary weather projects by Jacques Roubaud, Stéphane Audeguy and artist Roni Horn. This chapter concludes that projects in weird science ultimately aim towards the creation of open, transitory structures for meditation and contemplation.

My aim has been to situate the development of contemporary projects in a trajectory that underscores their relevance to contemporary philosophical, literary and artistic debate, and to further elaborate a critical language and framework for discussing projects. By situating these arguments in the context of oulipian textual production, I also insist upon the continued importance of the Oulipo in contemporary literary and visual culture. By extension, this thesis insists on a more general project of conjoining and assembling what would otherwise be considered mutually exclusive ideas, registers, and modes, such that constraints, rules procedures and protocols become tools that enable the intermingling of a whole set of opposing terms, and are primed to explore interstitial territories between affect and epistemology. My interest in Roubaud begins at the points where his work departs from an exclusively formal constraint, giving rise to textual knots wherein what at first appears as a distinctly formal element gives way to more nuanced modes of expression of broader cultural importance. Not only fostering productive connections between opposites, but a transformation of the whole system which generates such oppositions and hierarchies, these projects exceed their own disciplinary boundaries. Or at the very least they represent the ambition to do so. In the encounter with epistemological systems provided by these literary and artistic projects, affect, embodiment and subjectivity are given prominence. But this is achieved precisely by passing through a scientific impulse to inquire about and test their validity over and against other possible ways of

producing knowledge. These projects refuse merely to accept a subjective and emotive truth at face value, while at the same time they problematize objective, rational truths. As such, the projects discussed in this thesis deepen conceptions of knowledge-making practices in general, and of knowing in the arts more specifically. In so doing, they reveal the multiple registers of experience that can contribute productively to literature and art as aesthetic practices.

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Introduction

This thesis argues that contemporary literary and artistic projects—which often appropriate the tropes of clinical procedure and experimental constraint—suggest possibilities for alternative knowledge-making practices that implicate the body and the emotions of the experiencing subject. In these projects the central subject can be variously conceived and positioned as the writer/artist or the reader/viewer. My research, drawing on recent work that places emphasis on affect, considers these projects as test-cases often mediating between a series of dichotomies such as reason/feeling, the formal/the lyrical, mathematics/poetry, and science/aesthetics. The setting up of constraints, rules, procedures and models of investigation in these contemporary projects is not merely perfunctory (or of purely formal interest), but can be called into the service of affect, offering alternative modes for its expression and thus different avenues for considering the relationship between feeling and thought as they commingle in cultural texts. By complicating the relationship between thought and feeling, or epistemology and affect, these contemporary pieces not only insist that literature and art can ‘think’ (using the very modes in which knowledge is currently and popularly trafficked, namely, scientific methods ranging from the use of statistics to other types of samples and data collection), but they also suggest that such thinking and knowing necessarily, or perhaps inevitably, includes the lesser orders of feeling, intuition and bodily experience. Hence these projects

create a space where the production of knowledge and the production of feeling are bound, thus refusing both traditional humanist hierarchies that rather simplistically privilege thought over feeling, and also aesthetic hierarchies that may privilege subjective and emotive truth over fact and reason.

The titular ‘Weird Science’ is offered as a category which might give shape to the literary and artistic projects that are discussed in this thesis. Such projects might be considered scientific in their elaboration of carefully considered mathematical models (as in chapter one); in their inquiry into the nature of measurement and classification (as in chapter two); in their formulations of hypotheses and the subsequent testing of such hypotheses through experiment (as in chapter three); and in their observation of objective, natural phenomena (as in chapter four). That such observation, experimentation, measurement and modelling should happen in the space of art and literature is crucial, for this is what makes the projects weirdly scientific—not exactly aimed at creating data and information but still somehow reluctant not to ask questions of an empirical and epistemological nature. The scientific ambition of these projects is problematic because they never seem genuinely aimed at a particular outcome, and yet without the scientific surmise that operates in and through them, the projects would not have come into existence. The art and literature is, rather like a child’s toy, wound up and set off by a science-like hypothesis. Moreover, by engaging with various

scientific models, the artists and writers test the disciplinary boundaries within their respective forms and genres. Or, to put it another way, to invite aspects of scientific method into the production of art and literature is a curious way of enabling comparison and contrast between aesthetic work with scientific work.

This thesis does not conceive of science as a unitary, monolithic entity; science does not exist independently of the various procedures used in knowledge-making. Rather, science is understood throughout this thesis as a field of inquiry that is deeply bound up with its objects of study, the tools and methods used to study those objects, the means of discursively accounting for that study and finally its particular way of relating language and knowledge to the material world. Like humanistic and aesthetic inquiry, scientific inquiry is also affected by the perceptual capacities of the observers and the modes of observation available to them. In her 2007 book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, theoretical physicist and feminist science scholar Karen Barad argues that particle physicist Niels Bohr was an important contributor to debates currently happening in both philosophy and science studies. While Barad wants to recuperate Bohr from a history that is rather more quick to recall the philosophical contribution of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Barad contends that Bohr's "philosophy-physics poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology and its

representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers and things.”⁰ Barad’s larger project reconsiders how matter might be considered anew, while taking into account developments in critical theory that foreground language, discourse, identity and social construction. Indeed, her work argues that “objectivity is simultaneously an epistemological, ontological and axiological issue, and questions of responsibility and accountability lie at the core of scientific practice.”⁰ In this respect Barad models ways of “thinking the cultural and natural together in illuminating ways.”⁰ While my aims are different, her thesis is a powerful model of how to relate things that appear to be separate entities and seem to that create distinct sets of epistemological concerns. For Barad, these appearances do “not actually entail a relation of exteriority at all ... [rather] the relationship of the cultural and the natural is a relationship of ‘exteriority within’.”⁰ In this thesis, what science thus signals is a set of inquiries into the conditions necessary for objective description and into the relationship between the natural world and the social world.

Certainly in the encounter with systems of knowing provided by these literary and artistic projects, affect, embodiment and subjectivity are given prominence. Yet significantly this is achieved by passing through a scientific impulse to inquire about and test their validity over and against other possible ways of producing truth. These projects

⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 138.

⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁰ Ibid.,

refuse merely to accept a subjective and emotive truth at face value, while at the same time they problematize objective, rational truths. As such, the projects discussed in this thesis deepen conceptions of knowledge-making in general—as well as the arts as forms of knowledge in themselves—revealing that multiple registers of experience contribute productively to it. They also carve out a place for the scientific within contemporary cultural practices that neither cedes to its dominance in contemporary culture broadly writ, nor entirely dismisses the value of its methods and practices. These projects confound “any neat distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, experience and experiment.”⁰ In this respect the use of what scholar Warren Motte has called “systematic artifice” in literary and artistic works—which is sometimes envisioned as extreme formalism, sometimes as a method or process of creating—encourages the encounter between science protocols and creative practice. This enables considerations of a whole range of attendant concerns not conventionally associated with, or explicitly at play in literary and artistic works.⁰ Moreover, the works that are created through such experiments produce alternative heuristics while insisting on the multiple ways that feeling can be articulated—sometimes

⁰ Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham, “Tracking the Art of the Project,” in *The Art of the Project*, ed. Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 2.

⁰ Warren Motte, “Oulipian Exceptionalism,” in *Oulipo@50 - L’Oulipo à 50 ans*, ed. Camille Bloomfield, Marc Lapprand and Jean-Jacques Thomas (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires du Nouveau Monde), 16. Motte argues for the importance of “systematic artifice” in the production of oulipian texts, by which he means a “carefully elaborated and voluntarily imposed set of writing rules.” I argue that this term can be expanded to include visual projects, such that systematic artifice becomes a much broader strategy characteristic of and shared by many contemporary projects.

necessitating a detour through reason, logic, system and constraint, in order to be fully expressed.

The projects discussed in this thesis feature a scientific attitude or channel a scientific spirit of inquiry. Broadly speaking my research asks what these projects might suggest about contemporary culture and subjectivity. In particular, this investigation is interested in the way ‘weird sciences’ emerge from the displacement of scientific method, data and discourse into the aesthetic realm. In this respect, these projects not only deploy aesthetics of clinical control and regimentation, but also function as critiques of conventional forms of *expérience* (the convergence in French of both experience and experiment seems relevant to underscore here). The austere or formal ordering of projects complicates the boundaries between affect and knowledge as it is represented in or produced by these works. My aim is to situate the development of project-based work in a trajectory that highlights its relevance to contemporary philosophical, literary and artistic debates, and to further elaborate a critical language and framework for discussing these kinds of projects.

Research Contexts: The Oulipo

Recent scholars have suggested that at least part of the longevity of the Oulipo as a group or workshop of writers—which began more than fifty years ago and is expanding even today, with new writers being ‘coopted’

as recently as 2009—is due to its constitution, “avec des membres venus d’horizons littéraires et scientifiques.”⁰ The ambitions of its founding members (François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau) were bound to epistemological concerns rather than merely to aesthetics or politics, and they were committed to a radical form of interdisciplinarity that brought literature and mathematics together. My own investigation begins from an inquiry into what it means to unite, in the words of Raymond Queneau, the “*délire du mathématicien à la raison du poète*.”⁰ That is to say, this thesis will insist that various contemporary texts (many of them oulipian) provide a space of encounter between mathematics and poetics, as well as encounters on the affective and epistemological continuum (*délire-raison*).

Jacques Roubaud’s work serves as both exemplar and touchstone throughout my investigation of contemporary literary and artistic projects. Roubaud is an important figure in my research because of his established interest in the interstice of poetics and maths—having had a career as a professor of mathematics and a successful career as poet and author. His career also provides a historical framework to my research given that he has been working since the beginnings of the Oulipo and the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s, yet he continues to publish literary works and collaborate with artists and

⁰ Camille Bloomfield, Marc Lapprand and Jean-Jacques Thomas, “Oulipo@50 - L’Oulipo à 50 ans,” in *Oulipo@50 - L’Oulipo à 50 ans*, ed. Camille Bloomfield, Marc Lapprand and Jean-Jacques Thomas (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires du Nouveau Monde), 4.

⁰ Raymond Queneau, *Le voyage en Grèce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 39.

writers today. While he has been a member of the Oulipo since 1966, his work with artists and writers produces projects that often depart from and complicate oulipian formalism. For example, his series of autobiographical texts that comprise *'le grand incendie de londres'* documents Roubaud's ongoing creative concern with epistemological and experiential structures of time and space.⁰ To produce this text Roubaud set himself the daily task of writing between 3 a.m. and when the light from the sun took over from the artificial light emanating from his desk lamp. The continuous and systematic aspect of Roubaud's project occupies a prolonged temporal structure that serves to shore up an experience of time. Without this regime, that temporal dimension would not be given form, and the regime therefore becomes a kind of technology, *technē*, for a new mode of writerly production. Roubaud's *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* departs quite dramatically from the "systematic artifice" of some of his other texts in order to meditate upon variegation and subjectivity through a sustained *ekphrastic* encounter with John Constable's cloud studies.⁰ The text, while not betraying any real constraint, serves to expand upon the persistence of clouds in Roubaud's work— what Ann Smock has called "Cloudy Roubaud."⁰ The text also reveals one of Roubaud's frequent interlocutors—the Quaker naturalist, Luke Howard who defined and named types of clouds and this operates as another, perhaps less formal, manner in which scientific

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *'le grand incendie de londres'* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2009).

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* (Paris: Éditions Argol, 2009).

⁰ Ann Smock, "Cloudy Roubaud," *Representations* 86, no. 1 (2004): 141-74.

tendencies interact with and complicate the literary and artistic in Roubaud's works, to powerful, moving ends. More recent texts such as *À Lorient* and *Les habitants du Louvre* play upon the associations available in particular words or phrases, reconfiguring cognitive fabric by insisting upon a kind of associative labour that runs counter to readerly expectation. The sense in which these works *undo* a conventional mode of thinking relates them to affect by revealing the extent to which thought, by its very definition, is open and unfinished. In instances of rupture and discontinuity in the status quo, affect erupts.

Much of Roubaud's oeuvre seems preoccupied by the ambition to bring together seemingly irreconcilable domains for understanding or describing the world. This can be seen from his very first publications, ϵ , known in French as *le signe d'appartenance*, in which the encounter between set theory and literary history produces the text.⁰ Yet, a similar preoccupation continues in the ambitions of '*le grand incendie de Londres*.' In this text, autobiographical in nature, Roubaud brings together elements of poetry and mathematics, with elements of his daily life that structure the writing scene. As such his work is polymath from the outset and it is therefore important to consider it as a space of encounter between various competing epistemologies. My interest in Roubaud begins, in a sense, at the points where his works depart from an exclusively formal constraint, giving space to those textual knots

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, ϵ , *le signe d'appartenance*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

wherein what at first appears as a distinctly formal element gives way to more nuanced modes of expression of broader cultural importance.

Following recent developments in the history of the Oulipo proposed by scholars seeking to position Jouet as the main proponent of the Oulipo's so-called "third generation," this thesis is also interested in projects by Jacques Jouet.⁰ Jouet's *107 âmes*, analysed in chapter two, makes use of alternative census data to generate poetic portraits of individuals and thus presents the opportunity to think through the relationship between survey data and subjectivity in poetic form. The *Frévent* project discussed in chapter three impressed itself on me once I discovered it in the Oulipo archives at the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* because it neatly encompasses the essential dynamic between a scientific impulse towards objective description attained through the imposition of constraints, while also insisting on the differences between three subjective experiences of those constraints. The outcome of this encounter is a fascinating, genre-bending text that has not been discussed by scholars elsewhere. Jouet's collaboration with Roubaud in *À Lorient* also provided the opportunity to consider his work in relation to

⁰ Camille Bloomfield opens the topic of these generations in a round-table discussion during the Oulipo@50 conference at the University of Buffalo dedicated to the notion of "Généalogies oulipiennes": "Je voudrais ensuite qu'on passe à l'étage intermédiaire de l'arbre généalogique, celui des générations à l'Oulipo: celle des fondateurs, dans laquelle on inclut les membres qui sont arrivés avant Jacques Roubaud, jusqu'à Marcel Duchamp; la seconde génération, donc on considère généralement qu'elle va de Jacques Roubaud à ceux qui ont été cooptés avant la mort de F. La Lionnais, ceux qui ont connu F. Le Lionnais et/ou Raymond Queneau (François Caradec et J. Jouet y compris)." (quoted in "Généalogies oulipiennes," in *Oulipo@50 - L'Oulipo à 50 ans*, ed. Camille Bloomfield, Marc Lapprand and Jean-Jacques Thomas (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires du Nouveau Monde)199)

Roubaud's well-established walking-poetics, allowing me to consider the poetics and practices of the itinerary as a set of planned procedures with unknown outcomes, a kind of experiment.

In 2009, multiple events and conferences were organised for the fiftieth anniversary of the Oulipo. Subsequently, a number of publications have emerged that reveal the ways in which (perhaps endemic to a momentous occasion like a fiftieth anniversary) scholars have started to ask questions about the group's periodicity, generationality, canonization, and evolution.⁰ Recent publications such as Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito's *The End of Oulipo: An Attempt to Exhaust a Movement* (2013), and sections of Daniel Levin Becker's *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (2012), are attempts to take stock of the movement, summarizing its history and its place with respect to the historical avant-gardes and contemporary poetics from an American perspective. Academic publications have also mapped out this terrain, including *L'Oulipo à 50 ans* (2012) edited by Camille Bloomfield, Marc Lapprand and Jean-Jacques Thomas, as well as *50 ans d'Oulipo: De la contrainte à l'oeuvre* (2011) edited by Carole Bisenius-Penin and André Petitjean. Notably, the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* (ANR)

⁰ The question of evolution is continued in the round-table by Hervé LeTellier: "Mais, tu as raison d'utiliser le mot d'évolution, c'est-à-dire que le groupe lui-même bouge, sur ces questions que ne sont pas de théorie, puisqu'il n'y a pas de théorie de la contrainte. Il y a, on le voit bien, un mouvement, un glissement sur les questions qui sont celles, simplement, des la classification des contraintes, l'usage qu'on en fait qui est extrêmement variable, donc peut-être que le groupe n'aurait pas pu naître à un autre moment que ce moment-là, mais le type de travail que fait le groupe est quasi éternel." Paul Fournel continues the debate: "En tout cas il est clair qu'on est darwiniens, pas créationnistes." (quoted in Bloomfield et al., "Généalogies oulipiennes", 131)

multi-year grant for the project “Différences de potentiel. Histoire, poétique et esthétique de l’Oulipo” underscores the need for both a historical and sociological framework for considering the Oulipo, while also analysing the contribution that the Oulipo has made to literary genre more broadly. As part of this research project, a number of publications are forthcoming. Rather than analyse the Oulipo in its specificity, however, this thesis continues its interdisciplinary strategy and seeks to align some of its ambitions and aims, consequences and concerns, with work in contemporary art.

While it is not the intention of this thesis to historicize the Oulipo as a literary movement, it is useful to consider the fact that many of the aforementioned critical texts attempt to periodize generations of the Oulipo specifically on the basis of changing relationships between constraint and its role in the overall literary text. To date, such discussions have been staged around changes in the quality and kind of constraints employed in oulipian texts. With this in mind, my research could be said to focus on a specific subset of oulipian works which happen to coincide with the last of these “generations.” For the generation of the “fondateurs,” namely Queneau and Le Lionnais, the conceptualisation of constraints was more important than their literary realisation. Subsequently, for the generation of “classiques” (Perc and Roubaud) the literary texts written under constraint became increasingly important such that the finished literary object ultimately superseded

the fact of its constraints. Finally, and most recently, the generation of “réinventeurs” (Jouet and Salon, but also, and somewhat awkwardly because of the place already given him as a ‘classique’, Roubaud) reveal an “élargissement du champ de la contrainte.”⁰ This is most obvious in works like Jouet’s *Poèmes du Métro*, which apply a constraint to the author’s physical body and writing practice that had indirect and collateral effects on the formal dimensions of the text itself. Significantly, however, the constraint is not directly related to form, but rather to a structured experience of writing. In this respect a difference emerges between the literary constraint as a formal property of the text and a more general notion of ‘the constrained’ and ‘restricted’ as applied to extra-textual dimensions of writing and experience. While I dispute that the broader notion of constrained writing practices, or “élargissement du champ”, are exclusive to the more recently co-opted Oulipians and their texts (for certainly Perec’s *Lieux* (1969-1975) project as well as Queneau’s *Courir les rues* (1967) would thus be categorised as ‘third generation’), this thesis nonetheless focuses on these types of texts. It is precisely when constraints move beyond exclusively formal and textual concerns of a literary nature that the literary encounter with a scientific impulse becomes most obvious and most interesting.

⁰ The notion of “élargissement du champ de la contrainte” is taken from an interview with Jacques Roubaud by Camille Bloomfield cited in Abigail Lang, “Oulipo et oralité,” in *Oulipo@50 – L’Oulipo à 50 ans*, 58. Lang goes on to situate this expansion of constraint in the works of Jouet and Roubaud.

In his article “Oulipian Exceptionalism,” American scholar of the Oulipo Warren Motte articulates an essential point about oulipian constraint:

Constraint is often conceived as a restrictive process, one that severely limits the field of possibilities available to a writer. Yet while it is undoubtedly true that the use of systematic artifice and writing rules in a literary text does make certain writerly gestures impossible, it may also provide for fresh and largely unsuspected possibilities, and for new sorts of mobility as well.⁰

The notion of mobility will be taken up more explicitly in the third chapter on itineraries, but the essential and obvious point is that potential is created through constraints. However, it is significant that such potential remains “unsuspected” or unstated at the outset of the project. Even if the constraints employed are only meant as formal structuring devices, there will be collateral effects and unforeseen consequences, which may or may not be of an exclusively literary kind. Pushing this notion further, then, the literary projects that will be discussed in this thesis do not necessarily begin with literary or formal constraints, but rather use constraint to reconceptualise the kinds of things that writing can accomplish and the relations it might have to the world at large.

Motte further elaborates the tension between oulipian emotion and oulipian experimentation. For Motte, what is unique to the Oulipo is the conjoining of playfulness and earnestness:

⁰ Motte, “Oulipian Exceptionalism,” 16.

Most of the time, playfulness and earnestness are taken to designate dispositions of spirit that are mutually exclusive [...], defining two poles of a spectrum of human behaviour, two attitudes that may color our ways of being and doing, but which must never commingle. From its very beginnings, the Oulipo has consistently and materially refuted such a notion, arguing instead for a practice wherein the playful and the earnest intermingle in mutually productive ways.⁰

Significantly, Motte takes up the term “earnestness” (denoting sincerity, but also a kind of emotional *gravitas*) and contrasts this with “playfulness” (a term that dismisses the very seriousness of the former term, while underscoring the gimmicky aspect of some oulipian texts). However, I would suggest that the way such opposites “intermingle” in oulipian works is not only mutually productive but also capable of transforming the idea of what it means to be earnest and how this might be achieved, just as playfulness when wielded by an Oulipian becomes a serious matter. Perhaps reiterating the sentiments of Oulipo founder François Le Lionnais, Anne F. Garréta, (also a member of the Oulipo), has claimed “on ne fabrique pas du texte. On invente des procédures.”⁰ By extension, this thesis insists on a more general project of conjoining and assembling what would otherwise be considered mutually exclusive ideas, registers, and modes, such that oulipian constraints can be said to enable the intermingling of a whole set of opposing terms and indeed they seem primed to explore this interstitial territory. Not only fostering productive connections between opposites, but also a transformation of the whole system that generates such oppositions and hierarchies,

⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁰ Anne F. Garréta, quoted in Bloomfield et al., “Généalogies oulipiennes”, 136.

literary and artistic projects “exceed the boundaries of mere aesthetics.”⁰ Thus, in addition to the types of limitation implied by constraints themselves, oulipian texts represent the ambition to transform boundaries of all kinds and insist on the value of doing so.

Furthermore, with this more expansive conceptualization constraint is moved out of its purely formal articulation in literature and the relationship of constraint to both affect and science becomes clearer. On this latter aspect Marcel Bénabou writes: “Constraint, as everyone knows, often has a bad press. All those who esteem the highest value in literature to be sincerity, emotion, realism, or authenticity mistrust it as a strange and dangerous whim.”⁰ Bénabou enlists a notion of sincerity (what Motte termed “earnestness”) and, by collecting these terms, syntagmatically links them to create an impression that is seemingly opposed to the notion of constraint. Yet as Bénabou intuits, this dichotomy of seemingly mutually exclusive terms, (constraint versus emotion), is broken down by those projects which move it into other realms of existence and other modes of writing or cultural expression, in which constraints cannot simply be dismissed as mere whim or fancy because they have real world consequences for subjectivity. “To the extent that constraint goes beyond rules,” Bénabou contends, “it forces the system out of its routine functioning, thereby compelling it to reveal

⁰ Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 321.

⁰ Marcel Bénabou, “Rule and Constraint,” in *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, ed. Warren Motte (Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 40.

its hidden resources.”⁰ Thus, oulipian constraints can be seen to reconfigure the system of literature, precisely by moving it away from received notions of sincerity, emotion, realism, authenticity and earnestness, and towards other disciplines notably philosophy, mathematics, and science. Doing so reinvigorates literature, by making its “hidden resources” apparent, but it also has consequences for the potential role of literature in social and political life.

Interdisciplinarity and Projects

Because of the breakdown of received disciplinary boundaries insisted upon by the use of constraint, an interdisciplinary and comparative approach seems relevant to scholarship on the Oulipo. My research seeks a broad context for oulipian works because the use of constraints, rules, procedures and regimes is not limited to oulipian literary practice. Yet because the vast majority of oulipian works are based precisely on such protocols, my work remains centred on the Oulipo and traces similar practices in other disciplines, most notably the visual arts. The art works that I discuss date from the late 1960s to the present, and all have a decidedly conceptualist flavour. On Kawara, Roman Opalka, Roni Horn, Richard Long, Francis Alÿs, Christian Boltanski and Sophie Calle are enlisted to reveal the extent to which the particular modality and expression of affect that I analyse in oulipian projects is also apparent in visual practices of the same period. Many of these artists have

⁰ Ibid., 41.

collaborated with members of the Oulipo directly, and because many of these artists would cite the Oulipo as inspiration as well, the interdisciplinary model seems important and relevant—it underscores a larger aesthetic community and practice.

Like the Oulipo, many of the artists discussed in this thesis have suffered from critical interpretations that emphasize the formal and conceptual dimension of their work, reiterating in the visual domain the kinds of perceived division between sincerity and constraint articulated by Marcel Bénabou above. Encountering these works in the space of a museum or gallery poses challenges to viewers because these works experiment with the assumptions of traditional visual practice and the expectations it creates. Such works are often text-heavy and repetitive, sometimes having a clinical visual aesthetic. It is not usually obvious what they are addressing because these works often make use of alternative (un-artistic) media. On Kawara and Roman Opalka's various ongoing, daily projects date from the 1960s. Their projects are most interesting when conceived of as accumulations and in relation to the lives of the artists who obsessively catalogue elements (whether numbers, hours, days, routes) of everyday life, even where each document is itself an artwork. Similarly Sophie Calle's work *Prenez soin de vous* redistributes the range of affects stimulated by a break-up email, through the professional opinions of 107 other women, notably leaving out the affective and emotional responses of the artist herself.

Through their walking projects in various landscapes, works by Richard Long and On Kawara reveal the forceful encounter of human and nature. Yet while positing the passage of each artist, the photographic records of these works rarely reveal a human presence. All of these examples mark a peculiar and emergent mode of expression of affect in visual works, that is involved in both a withholding of feeling and an excessive and obsessive compensation for it.

The critical writings of Nicolas Bourriaud (*Radicant: Pour une Esthétique de la globalisation*, *Topocritique*, *Esthétique relationnelle*, and *Formes de vies*), are particularly useful insofar as they insist on contemporary art's inborn interdisciplinarity: "l'art [...] ne se définit pas comme une essence qu'il s'agirait de perpétuer (sous la forme d'une catégorie disciplinaire close sur elle-même) mais comme une matière gazeuse susceptible de « rémplir » les activités humaines."⁰ The notion that art is intricately bound up with everyday life to the point that tidy distinctions can no longer be made between them is not new. In fact it was most forcefully demonstrated by Marcel Duchamp, an artist who has had an incalculable impact on art since, and who was also an early member of the Oulipo (joining in 1962).

My approach to interdisciplinarity is also indebted to deconstructive and feminist methodologies which insist on the productive potential of interference and turbulence, such that this thesis

⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant: pour une esthétique de la globalisation* (Paris: Denoël, 2009), 61.

insists on the sense in which both are displacing discourses. Acts of deconstruction, like acts of feminism, need to be repeated because by their very definition they are incomplete. As Luce Irigaray has claimed “il s’agit surtout d’une autre économie, qui dérouté la linéarité d’un projet, mine l’objet-but d’un désir, fait exploser la polarisation sur une seule jouissance, déconcerte la fidélité à un seul discours.”⁰ What marks these projects as weird sciences is that way that they generate alternative affective and epistemological economies by playing with the order and systems implemented. Projects are almost invariably doubled—establishing the “linéarité d’un projet” and creating the methods for transgressing it. They are transvestite forms that emerge from aesthetic inquiry which is open to the reason and feeling alike. *Différance* undermines identity in a productive and important way, and this thesis will analyse various binary oppositions implicitly grounded in the dualisms between science and aesthetics, language and matter. To use Spivak’s words, such interdisciplinarity “does not aim at *praxis* or theoretical practice but at the persistent crisis or unease of the moment of *technē* or crafting.”⁰

In order to conceptualise the variety of texts discussed in this thesis, I have found it useful to consider the notion of ‘projects’—a term that crosses “generic, disciplinary and cultural frontiers” and is explored

⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions Minuit, 1977), 29.

⁰ Gayatri Spivak, “Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiating with Unacknowledged Masculism,” in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 206.

in the book *The Art of the Project*. This collection of essays, edited by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham, seeks to raise the status of the project “to that of an ‘art’ in its own right.”⁰ Pursuant to this idea, my research seeks to further elaborate characteristics of the ‘project’ through a consideration of their affective and epistemological claims and outcomes. It is nonetheless useful to situate my inquiry in the traits and taxonomy of projects that their work established and which will provide the scholarly context for the chapters that follow. In the introduction, “Tracking the Art of the Project,” Gratton and Sheringham contend:

contemporary cultural practices often involve setting up experiments, taking soundings, carrying out sets of instructions or sticking to carefully elaborated programmes. The work made available to the reader/viewer is then very often an account of the conduct of the project or experiment, the record or trace of its success or failure, its consistency with or deviation from its initial premises.⁰

Much like the idea of oulipian constraints discussed by Motte and Bénabou, “the project is frequently a lure, a device designed not to achieve a particular end, but to allow something unforeseen to happen.”⁰ This notion of the “unforeseen” resonates with Motte’s discussion of the “unsuspected” consequences of the use of constraints, and Bénabou’s idea of “hidden resources.” I contend that these unanticipated elements are made even more interesting because of the various ways that projects would seem to foreclose the very possibility of the unforeseen through the clinical and neutral imposition of constraint. And yet the

⁰ Gratton and Sheringham, “Tracking the Art of the Project”, 1.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

oulipian insistence on potentiality already implies an anticipatory mode, insisting on the possibility for something uncertain to result.

Projects often foreground the dimension of process in contrast to a completed product. Unlike the use of experiments in a scientific model, Gratton and Sheringham suggest that “the outcome of the project, its final product (if any) may be less important than the procedures that enable it to get underway.”⁰ And yet, where a project then traces out what superseded the implementation of those procedures and rules, this also suggests that “the digressions and deviations are its very essence.”⁰ Projects often have an ongoing or processual dimension, inhabiting forms of research and fieldwork that are intentionally open-ended. They also tend to trouble the boundaries between the aesthetic and the unaesthetic or extra-aesthetic. Indeed as Gratton and Sheringham contend, “although the project is devised and carried out with an exactitude that can border on the manic, the investigator remains unofficial, amateur, a nonspecialist who mixes subjectivity and objectivity, high-minded speculation and parodic subversion.”⁰ Citing French art theorist, Paul Ardenne, they argue that while projects involve the intentional redistribution of creativity “into forms of cultural expression situated outside the artistic context,” such a shift is “always already preparing the way for a return to art.”⁰

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁰ Ibid., 12.

The projects discussed in this thesis are already inherently interdisciplinary. And yet projects often very self-consciously position themselves as critiques, testing the very disciplines that they appropriate. While the impetus of any given project often “originates outside the aesthetic concerns conventionally ascribed to the domain of the arts, [it] is at once appropriated and critiqued in the name of art.”⁰ At the same time, however, the interdisciplinary encounter pollutes any pure notion of art or literature, such that they are transformed in the process. Taking up the ‘extra-aesthetic’ is not a straightforward mode of critique, for it also implicitly criticizes the modes and methods available within a given aesthetic form (whether literary or artistic), inadvertently pointing out their limitations. Therefore my research is concerned with the effects of such encounters highlighting the productive and complex consequences that arise. This is achieved through consideration of literary and artistic projects that already have some relationship to the scientific. But, I also grant specific importance to the productive forces of the liminal, intermediary space of affect.

Inspiration and grounding can also be found in the work of Language poet and essayist Lyn Hejinian. In her collection of essays *The Language of Inquiry*, Hejinian frequently uses the metaphor of the border to think about poetry as being or possessing “the condition of doubt and encounter which being foreign to a situation provokes.”⁰

⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁰ Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 327.

Projects, like poetry more generally, consistently approach borders that disturb and unsettle an epistemological systems' usual functioning. For Hejinian, "knowing is not a terminus but an incitement," such that in our urgent desire to possess knowledge, whether as poets or people, we are "wasteful of uncertainty."⁰ However, many of the projects discussed in this thesis develop and cultivate uncertainty to productive aesthetic ends. Moreover, by aligning "knowing" with "incitement" in this way, Hejinian also insists on the relationship between the process and accumulation of knowledge and the affective way that it is roused, urged on and stimulated. At the same time however, Hejinian is unequivocal about poetry's involvement in knowledge and knowing: "Poetry undertakes acknowledgment as a preservation of otherness—a notion that can be offered in a political, as well as an epistemological, context. This acknowledging is a process, not a definitive act; it is an inquiry, a thinking on."⁰ For Hejinian, then, knowing is "indirect, oblique, and at some remove from that to which it pertains." However, for Hejinian, "this mediational, abstracted knowing may be our clearest expression of objectivity, just as, conversely, the expression of direct unmediated knowing, intuition, may be pre-eminently subjective."⁰ This leads her to the radical assertion that "intelligence is romantic," a claim that this thesis tacitly accepts and draws out in the literary and artistic works

⁰ Ibid., 225 and 222 respectively.

⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁰ Ibid., 220-21.

discussed.⁰ Hejinian would be the first to point out that “the ‘scientific method’ has dominated not just the laboratory; it has also provided a compelling model for writers, who have undertaken a ‘poetic method’ analogous to it.”⁰ This is particularly true of writers like Gertrude Stein, Flaubert and William James, in whom Hejinian is particularly interested. But, this also leads to a consideration of affect because by accepting poetry’s role in reason and knowing, “ideas, and perhaps more startlingly, emotions are freed from the limits of the singular ‘I,’ allowing for a poetry of complex and densely layered affect as well as intelligence.”⁰

If, as Gratton and Sheringham contend, “the project often has the role of providing an alternative to strictly scientific or abstract modes of understanding,” then this thesis analyses the encounter of alternative knowledge-making practices and affect in literary and artistic works. Following from Elizabeth Grosz, I implicitly ask “how can new models of thought, new intellectual practices come into being?” and is it possible that such new models and practices can be seen in the aesthetic projects discussed in this thesis?⁰

The Affective Turn

⁰ Ibid., 323.

⁰ Ibid., 327.

⁰ Ibid., 330.

⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels, Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 155.

Over the past two decades, certain branches of critical theory have been marked by a trend towards issues of embodiment, emotion and affect. Although it is not the intent of this thesis to trace the historical representation of affect, the allure of this critical discourse seems partially due to the fact that it presents the possibility for a reconsideration of the way that emotion and affect have been figured in philosophical discourse.⁰ Having recognized a tendency in philosophical history to downgrade emotion (and everything associated with it) and valorise reason and thought, scholars of affect engage in a recuperative practice that reads against this philosophical prejudice, suggesting the various ways that emotion and affect might serve as a corrective or a productive antidote to the philosophical impasse of postmodernism. Marked by third-wave feminism and queer theory, however, scholars of affect are not interested in simply reversing the binary oppositions between reason and feeling, but rather allow affect to move and shift the system of binaries more broadly, to show porousness and turbulence within the system itself. Affect theory thus insists upon what Steven D. Brown and Ian Tucker, have called ‘intermediary concepts,’ not links between dualisms but rather the interstices of affective relations, those elements which belong neither wholly to subject nor object.⁰ Projects

⁰ For further historical readings see: René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Trans. Stephen Voss, Indianapolis, In: Hackett Publishing, 1989; Benedictus de Spinoza, “Part III: On the Origins and Nature of the Emotions,” In *The Ethics*, Trans. R.M.H.Elwes, Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 1999; William James, “What is an Emotion?,” *Mind* Vol. 9 No. 39, 188-205.

⁰ Steven D. Brown and Ian Tucker, “Eff the Ineffable: Affect, Somatic Management, and Mental Health Service Users,” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 242.

thus share specific characteristics with affect theory in so far as they forge deep connections between emotions and intelligence.

Silvan S. Tomkins's ground-breaking, four-volume work *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1965), regularly displays its indebtedness to the Freudian concept of sublimation. But where psychoanalysis foregrounds the primacy of the drives in human behaviour and uses these to describe and explain psychopathologies, Tomkins's theory foregrounds the primacy of the affective system in behaviour and cognition and this leads to a number of unexpected conclusions. Tomkins's theory reconfigures affective responses, which mediate between bodily mechanisms—such as heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, etc.—and cognitive processes. Unlike the psychoanalytic model, it does not relate these to pathologies but rather situates them as a spectrum of experience ranging from the conscious and observable to the unconscious and unobservable. Following from Tomkins, Daniel Stern also argues that “affective and cognitive processes cannot be readily separated.”⁰ Affect, as such, floats between named and known experience and its inchoate or unacknowledged aspects. In this respect we can feel beyond our capacities to adequately express experience.⁰

⁰ Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, 1st paperback ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 42.

⁰ This is what Brian Massumi is getting at in his ‘half-second gap’ example, when he claims that “Will and consciousness are *subtractive*. They are *limitative, derived functions* that reduce a complexity too rich to be functionally expressed.” Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 29.

Affect is a-cognitive while also being a more-and-less than rational mode for engaging with the world.

Recent publications such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy Performativity*, Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, and Elizabeth Grosz's *Becoming Undone*, as well as the readers *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* and *The Affect Theory Reader*, mark a comprehensive development in existing feminist and queer criticism, (largely initiated by the work of Sedgwick and Frank in *Shame and its Sisters*) that moves the discussion away from identity politics towards a politics of pathos, embodiment and affect that has greater consequences for the study of contemporary literature and culture.⁰ In the Foreword to *The Affective Turn*, Michael Hardt puts it well when he argues that affects require us "to pose as a problem the relation between action and passions, reason and emotions."⁰ In affect, thought meets its spectral other—the disavowed and purged emotions which purportedly exist in excess of rationality. While emotive language has been used to

⁰ On this see Diana Fuss, "Lesbian and Gay Theory: The Question of Identity Politics," in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.97-112; Diane Elam, *Ms En Abyme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Judith Halberstam *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). Michael Hardt's seminal essay "Affective Labor," also significantly takes up the feminist stance: "Affective labor is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of 'women's work' have called 'labor in bodily mode.' Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower." Hardt, "Affective Labor", *boundary 2*, 26, no. 2 (1999), 96.

⁰ Michael Hardt, "Foreword: What Affects are Good For," in *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), x.

speak of the abject or “devalued aspects of the world—the irrational, the uncontrollable, the vulnerable, and the female,” it is also true that this same language articulates what is most valuable, meaningful, and magnanimous in the world—love, hate, fear, desire, joy, and sadness.⁰ Indeed, for Catherine Lutz, emotion “retains value as a way of orienting us towards things that matter, rather than things that simply make sense.”⁰ What is also at stake in the affective turn is the notion that “affect [...] generally has an evaluative function.”⁰

Affect has also played a significant role in redefining politics and the social in contemporary theory and, when applied to contemporary cultural practices, has productive, explanatory power. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s seminal essay “Value and Affect,” strikes at a central tension in the definition of affect that runs consistently through its history.

Affect can be considered [...] as a *power to act* that is singular and at the same time universal. It is singular because it poses action beyond every measure that power does not contain in itself, in its own structure, and in the continuous restructurings that it constructs. It is universal because the affects construct a commonality among subjects.⁰

For Hardt and Negri then, affects serve as a sort of *clinamen* to power—immeasurable and beyond measure, they are simultaneously too

⁰ Catherine Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁰ Rose Spiegel, “Cognitive Aspects of Affects and Other Feeling States with Clinical Applications,” *Journal of The American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 8, no. 4 (1980): 605.

⁰ Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri, “Value and Affect,” *boundary 2* 26, no.2 (1999): 85.

common and too singular. In the steady oscillations between these extremes, they further define affect as a “power of transformation.”⁰ Affect thus insists on openness and becoming, on what is unfinished and undone. It thus looks to what is anticipatory, transitory, virtual and potential rather than fixed nodes and definitions. What is productive about affect theory for the purposes of my research is that the literary and artistic projects discussed show the imbrication of affect in a social and political world dominated by information and its procedures and techniques. These projects test reality’s openness through aesthetic techniques and serve affect by creating a space where they intermingle with epistemology.

Thesis Outline

I have organized the chapters of this thesis on the basis of the materials that the projects themselves investigate and according to epistemological affinities between the projects. The first chapter “From Mathematics to Numerology: Methods for Recuperating Pathos in Jacques Roubaud, Roman Opalka and On Kawara,” discusses the formal programmatic element of literary and artistic projects; relates this to current scholarship on the relation of literature and mathematics; and suggests ways that such projects can be read with respect to affect. I provide readings of three projects (Roubaud’s *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, On Kawara’s *Today Series*, and Roman Opalka’s *1965-∞*)

⁰ Ibid.

showing how the clinical, procedural tactics employed in each project participate in more subtle affective discourses that are not immediately apparent.

In the second chapter, I look at projects that reveal alternative modes of collecting and classifying information and making use of it in literature and art. If this thesis will ultimately have argued that contemporary literary and artistic projects produce alternative epistemologies imbricated with affect, then this chapter will argue that the collection and arrangement of alternative knowledge and information in the aesthetic domain necessarily problematizes received notions about the presentation of facts. In the first part, “Lists, Catalogues, and Collections,” I provide an analysis of methods for considering the list, and then analyse a recent Louvre exhibition *Vertige de la liste*. I discuss the list in essays by Jacques Roubaud and Georges Perec and then analyse *Les habitants du Louvre* by Jacques Roubaud and Christian Boltanski. The second part of this chapter considers the interface of statistical and census data in contemporary art and literature. Beginning with an analysis of Jacques Jouet’s project *107 Âmes* I consider recent work in affect theory that involves ideas about collective experience. In this part, I also consider works by artists Komar and Melamid and Sophie Calle that make use of forms of polling data and the survey. In so doing, these projects create complex

relationships with epistemology because they generate a public dataset of what would otherwise be considered private affects.

The third chapter “The Practices and Poetics of the Itinerary” looks at a series of travel projects that often involve local, neglected destinations easily reached by train. This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, “Critical Approaches,” I provide a theoretical framework for the discussions of the specific projects that follow. This framework considers previous work in everyday life and urban exploration, everyday life and affect theory, and finally considers recent work on spatial practices in art criticism, known as ‘*topocritique*.’ The second and third sections of the chapter analyse *À Lorient*, a collaborative travel project by Jacques Jouet and Jacques Roubaud, in which each of their well-established urban poetic practices are shifted outside of Paris into the post-industrial landscape of northern France. The poetic outcomes of this shift tacitly reanimate the city and generate a vibrant landscape resounding with history and culture. In the fourth section, I continue the discussion of walking (begun in the previous section on Roubaud) and address theories of walking described by Rebecca Solnit in her seminal text *Wanderlust*. In this section I also analyse walking projects in the visual arts by On Kawara, Richard Long and Francis Alÿs. Finally, in section five, I analyse *Frévent*, a text that recounts a travel project undertaken by Jacques Jouet, Claudine Capdeville and Pierre Laurent in 1991, that reveals three subjective

experiences of a constrained travel project and does so through a new, oulipian form of collaboration.

The fourth and final chapter, "*Le quotidien météorologique* or What weather might report," is in two parts. This chapter explores the ways that contemporary literary and artistic projects have taken up the weather, sometimes through explicitly appropriating its historical discourse, sometimes through employing the daily, observational tactics of meteorology itself. In the first part of the chapter I analyse texts by Roubaud that appropriate meteorological history and reanimate it in the space of fiction, as a technique for meditating on variegation, experience, memory and subjectivity through the motif of clouds. This part argues for the historical imbrications of scientific discourse and poetic attention to transient states whether meteorological or metaphysical. This is best exemplified in Luke Howard's *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* which outlined and named cloud formations after a sustained observation of their changes. John Ruskin's concept of the pathetic fallacy is also discussed showing larger tendencies in the scientific and aesthetic fields of the nineteenth century that considered the weather a tool for addressing complex states of being. The second part of the chapter explores meteorology in a series of weather projects by contemporary artist Roni Horn. Horn uses the external phenomena of the weather as a testing ground for the expression of internal states of being, complicating and confusing weather events and affects in

interesting and important ways. The procedural models she employs recall those of the *journal intime*, particularly as it is framed in *Les baromètres de l'âme* by Pierre Pachet, as a simultaneous tendency towards spiritual improvement and a rational understanding of the soul.

“Weird Science: Affect and Epistemology in Contemporary Literary and Artistic Projects” is an inquiry into one specific way that contemporary cultural practices engage with the form, content and style of the sciences or ‘the scientific’. “Weird Science” unlocks the compelling ways that scientific protocols and rational systems have been used in contemporary literature and visual art to articulate, manage, withhold and contemplate affective states. While there are many other ways that contemporary cultural practices take up scientific elements, my research is interested in texts and works which exploit the cool, calm and collected demeanour of the scientific system as a technique for reorganizing affective attachments. Weird science is implemented as a means of simply getting on with things, for finding ways of thinking that are hitherto unavailable. Weird science makes the bargain that what is beyond the facts is important and suggests that what is outside of their purview counts nonetheless.

1

From Mathematics to Numerology

Recuperating Pathos in Jacques Roubaud, Roman
Opalka & On Kawara

“Qu’est-ce que la mathématique? Qu’est-ce que le monde, ou l’aspect du monde, de la portion du monde qu’éclaire la mathématique? Et, cela posé et répondu : qu’est-ce que la poésie, dans ou hors de ce morceau du monde expliqué par la mathématique?”

Jacques Roubaud, ‘le grand incendie de londres’

Introduction

This chapter explores a series of literary and artistic projects that seem to withhold the expression of affect in ways that complicate current frameworks of affectivity. It analyses three projects that are dominated by an unmoving, cerebral and detached aesthetic in order to suggest ways that such clinical, procedural tactics might also participate in the expression of affect. These aesthetics of affective neutrality are achieved through the deployment of numbers—whose matter-of-fact presence and visual accumulation are responsible for both the astounding yet somehow clinical aesthetics of the projects. Can ‘the affective turn’ be mobilized towards a revaluation of cultural practices which have little or no apparent relationship to affect and pathos? How does affective

sublimation and the withholding of emotion enable a reconsideration of austere, formal elements in literary and artistic works?

For a mathematician like Jacques Roubaud, numbers can be seductive, sexual, repulsive, mournful or even painful, depending on the number. As such, the numerical aspects of Roubaud's oeuvre act as indices of affect, that sometimes encourage and sometimes withhold or slow down the emergence of affects. They achieve this by forcing affects through an unconventional register and language of expression—numbers. In this respect, Roubaud's '*le grand incendie de londres*' project points to the difficulty of expressing negative affects rather than the sincere or direct expression of any emotion itself. The text plays upon the requirement of distancing oneself from loss rather than tackling it directly. It is important to note that when this thesis refers to '*le grand incendie de londres*', I am referring to the 2010 edition, which brings together all the branches of the project up to and including *La Bibliothèque de Warburg*. '*le grand incendie de londres*' thus becomes the title of the overarching project itself and this new edition presents the possibility of reading these texts differently and as a project, rather than as individual texts. The 2010 edition makes the continuous project of '*le grand incendie de londres*' visible and, at the same time, it emphasizes the multiple layers of the project and Roubaud's other projects, where such imbrications are made evident by the system of auto-reference. Over the 26-year period during which '*le grand incendie*

de londres' was written, Roubaud set himself the near daily task of writing between 3 a.m. and when the light from the sun overtook that emanating from his desk lamp.⁰ The continuous and systematic aspect of Roubaud's project occupies a prolonged temporal structure that serves to shore up an experience of time. The daily practice also gives tangible form to the passage of time itself, registering subtle changes in tone and affect. The formal, programmatic, and ongoing nature of Jacques Roubaud's '*le grand incendie de londres,*' finds visual analogues in Roman Opalka's 1965-∞ project and in On Kawara's *Today Series* and *One Million Years* project.⁰ In 1965, Roman Opalka adopted a programmed mode of artistic production and began painting a series of whole numbers that continued until his death in 2011. Similarly in 1961, On Kawara began work on the *Today Series* which is a series of documented daily practices that is still ongoing.

Taking Opalka as exemplar, Nicolas Bourriaud situates such projects in the historical lineage of modernism and claims that "la

⁰ Although it has not been discussed by other scholars, I believe that the stated project of '*le grand incendie de londres*' saw its completion with the publication of *La Dissolution*. Roubaud outlined that the total number of *moments de prose* for the project in its entirety would be 1178. (Jacques Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de londres*' (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2009), *Poésie*, 1495) The six branches recently published in a single volume by Éditions du Seuil, *Tokyo infra-ordinaire*, (Paris: Inventair / Invention, 2005) and *La Dissolution*, Caen: Nous, 2008.combine to form 1178 such parts. Despite this it is entirely likely that Roubaud continues to produce work according to this daily programme, just as it is conceivable that he did so before the commencement of the project itself.

⁰ Given the epistemological affinities of Roubaud's work with projects like Roman Opalka's 1965/1-∞ and On Kawara's *Today Series* and *One Million Years*, it is not surprising that Roubaud is aware of these artists. He wrote a meditative piece "Le nombre d'Opalka" for a monograph on the painter. He also wrote "Le Temps," in *La forme d'une ville*, a poem dedicated to On Kawara, and participated in an audio demonstration of Kawara's project *One Million Years* as part of the *Voilà! Le monde dans la tête* exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, 2000.

rigoureuse tâche que [Opalka] s'est fixée en 1965, consistant à chiffrer la course de son existence de l'un à l'infini, relève bel et bien d'une tradition ascétique moderne."⁰ In certain projects by both Opalka and Kawara one is literally confronted by a stark series of numbers and in Kawara's work each piece is accompanied by data regarding the circumstances of its production. None of these projects betrays a particularly emotional dimension. These works therefore complicate modes of affective legibility because the physical outcomes of the project are often detached from the rigorous, but nonetheless emotionally engaged human processes through which they were created. This chapter outlines epistemological affinities between the visual projects of Roman Opalka and On Kawara and Roubaud's literary works. Centred on the representation of numbers, I show how these projects flirt with a fantasy of control and mastery, only made necessary because of a surplus of negative affect. In so doing, they also reveal new modes and methods for expressing feeling and gauging affect.

Central to my analysis of affect in the contemporary visual and literary projects discussed in this chapter is Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* which traces negative emotions (i.e. envy, anxiety, paranoia, 'stuplimity'). Her thought favours "minor and generally unprestigious feelings" over grand emotions like anger and fear, or potentially morally ennobling states like sympathy and shame.⁰ Ngai is not only interested in

⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Formes de vie: l'art moderne et l'invention de soi* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2009), 46.

⁰ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 6-7.

affects that are “explicitly *amoral* and *noncathartic*, offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release,” but also in the inexpressive quality of affect.⁰ In contrast to the historical discourse of philosophical aesthetics, where emotions have been explored, what is novel about Ngai’s work is that it considers affects in their flatness and duration, as ongoing experiences that lack dramatic conclusion or cathartic release. Indeed, Ngai is interested in the types of feeling that “tend to interfere with the outpouring of other emotions.”⁰ *Ugly Feelings* thus explores a series of “affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity” in order to analyse situations in literature that address suspended agency.⁰ Her work is thus a powerful reminder of the extent to which emotion affects one’s ability to act, and in her selection of texts, Ngai makes clear that this is particularly important in the absence of strong emotion, even “where we are led to expect one.”⁰ For Ngai, these noncathartic feelings “give rise to a noncathartic aesthetic: art that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release (another form of suspended action).”⁰

In additional to their emotional opacity, Ngai’s selected texts and the literary and artistic projects discussed in this chapter also display a

⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁰ Ibid., 9.

discursive or visual noise. I will take up Ngai's notion of "stuplimity"—a neologism to describe a state of stupor married to sublimity—which not only reveals limitations in classical theories of the sublime but may also be better suited to addressing the experience of boredom that she sees as "increasingly intertwined with contemporary experiences of aesthetic awe."⁰ Attendant to her interest in boredom, Ngai is concerned with the affective dimension of states of inaction, what she calls "the inertial moments" or "moments of conspicuous inactivity."⁰ These moments also involve "processes of aversion, exclusion and of course negation," but which are nonetheless affectively charged, and which therefore have their own productive outcomes.⁰ Importantly, Ngai links these notions to textual strategies: "the anticathartic device of dilating the time in which any particular incident takes place thus accentuates the manner in which these uneventful moments mirror the general situation of obstructed agency."⁰ As will be seen below, the literary and artistic works discussed in this chapter dilate time to an absurd extent—becoming sluggish, stammering, tedious projects that are nonetheless surprising and bewildering explorations of common, though inconspicuous, aspects of subjectivity and agency.

The first section of this chapter, "Reading Roubaud's Arithmetic," provides an in-depth study of Roubaud's *'le grand incendie de londres'*.

⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁰ Ibid., 11-14.

⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

It then traces the various ways that Roubaud uses numbers (as formal, structural, epistemological, personal, and affective indices) in '*le grand incendie de londres*' and argues for his unique relevance to studies of the intersection of literature and mathematics. This section also situates aspects of '*le grand incendie de londres*' in relation to a Roubaldian literary mathematics, which I argue is often deployed to manage negative affects. I analyse the project's insistence on duration and repetition to suggest new ways for reading the text. Specifically I consider how the prose of '*le grand incendie de londres*' functions as a method for approaching and returning to poetry and to life itself.

The second section of this chapter, "Affective Mathematics," provides an overview of recent work on the relations between literature and mathematics. Using a recent special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* entitled *Literature and the Mathematical*, I argue that criticism in interdisciplinary work of this kind must allow for epistemological interference and I address what I perceive as serious limitations in the discourse to date. My research follows from Véronique Montémont's *Jacques Roubaud: L'Amour du nombre* and considers how numbers become meaningful and signify in Roubaud's work. While Roubaud's literary oeuvre has used a variety of mathematical concepts, and applied these to achieve many diverse ends, this section will outline the way that numbers, counting and modes of measurement are given an affective valence and personal resonance in his literary works. To put it another

way, numbers come to signify differently in the aesthetic domain. By analysing an article written by Elvira Laskowski-Caujolle, I argue against readings of oulipian texts that subsume questions of a literary nature to the demands of the mathematical constraints employed. Having established an affectivity of numbers as they appear in the literary text, I then describe how Roubaud's awareness of number systems in everyday life leads to an alternative model of aesthetic production that profoundly implicates his mode of being—suggesting not only different ways of counting and producing a literary text but different ways of living.

To elide consideration of the perpetual and programmed task of writing that Roubaud sets for himself in '*le grand incendie de londres*' is to avoid one of the crucial questions that arises when reading the text: why does Roubaud undertake such a project? My aim in the third section of this chapter, "Safety in Numbers," is to investigate the possibility that clinical regimes and projects can be considered a tool for reconfiguring daily life itself. In this section I relate Roubaud's project to similar works by Roman Opalka and On Kawara, while also relating these to an ascetic tradition described by Roland Barthes in *Comment vivre ensemble?* Exploring ideas of extreme duration, I use Sianne Ngai's concept of 'stuplimity' to draw out shared characteristics in the aesthetics of these projects that relate to the affective experience of suspended agency. In this section I define the temporal aspect of these projects through the little known affect of *acedia*. More often than not, the tasks involved in

projects establish a system in advance of the actual production of the work, but it is not usually clear what the goal or intended outcome of the procedures employed might be. Significant realizations emerge as secondary effects of the project, and yet projects are usually designed as a ruse out of an existing mode of being, thinking, or producing which has become prohibitive and ossified or, indeed, such projects test whether it has become so. In this respect, even if the pursuit of formal potential, through the use of mathematical constraints and procedural models of writing, only leads to more literary forms, the point (Roubaud's work suggests) is that eventually these forms might be able to inflect life.

Reading Roubaud's Arithmetic

As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Jacques Roubaud's literary oeuvre reveals a preoccupation with numerical elements. However, his use of numbers in literary works produces social, cultural and personal insight that complicates any defining boundary between the numeric and the poetic. This is somewhat unsurprising given Roubaud's ongoing and parallel work as both a poet and a mathematician. While the encounter between the two disciplines in Roubaud's work demonstrates the continued relevance of numbers in the formal and structural coherence of literature, the more provocative idea is that such imbrications inflect forms and structures—whether social, political, bureaucratic, epistemological or administrative—with poetry. What at first appears to be a rather clinical, totalizing ritual of daily aesthetic production is in fact well suited to registering the subtleties of affective transformation. Through the implementation of seemingly austere signifiers, like numbers and numerical systems, Roubaud sets about a methodical re-imagining of modes of feeling and methods for surviving personal loss. The insistence on the non-revelatory, through repeated procedures, suggests that such experiments in duration situate the work in a projected and virtual trajectory—the domain of potentiality—generated by a lot of hard work, rather than as processes that can or should necessarily achieve completion.

The programmed, daily discipline of writing that Roubaud sets himself in '*le grand incendie de londres*' leads to a halting narrative progression that frustrates any conventional emotional insights which might be sustained in reading the text. Each of the six branches is replete with *incises* and *bifurcations*, which create a disjointed reading experience, so that important sections of the autobiographical narrative are not filled out until later in the same branch or sometimes in later branches. The 1178 prose moments, which combine to form '*le grand incendie de londres*', represent the same number of days that Roubaud spent with his wife Alix Cléo before her untimely death at the age of 31. It is also the same number of days that he mourned her death before beginning writing again and starting work on the project itself. For Roubaud, this is an "éloignement palindromique du temps," a mathematical organization of time and memory.⁰ Through his slow and arduous writing routine, which stutters and stammers along, the project tries to conceive of a route towards writing again, if not towards living itself. There has been a tendency to situate the project in terms of trauma and other pathologies, but I want to suggest that across this project, Roubaud tries simply to redistribute the framework of feeling from a fragile moment in which getting to work is literally all that he could do. Since there are difficulties in expressing negative affects, employing a writing regime such as Roubaud's (that also transforms superficial, daily existence) is also a way of redistributing affective

⁰ Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de londres*', *La Destruction*, 334.

intensity into more manageable, homeopathic doses via other signifying systems. It is as if the project works to redress the loss of Alix Cléo, simultaneously projecting a fantasy of control and containment to guard against too much feeling. Roubaud's writing is thus figured as a "mesure de [son] avance."⁰ While he may live-out the normal "apparences de la vie," poetry has become impossible to think and feel, thus rendering the poet's experience vacuous.⁰ In this respect, if there is a "radical inarticulateness of the affect," then employing a programmed task to transform a superficial existence would also be a way of redistributing affects within other signifying structures in which their contents may be differently expressed.⁰ The text consolidates an accumulation of moments of halting narrative that advances slowly and sorrowfully, and suggests suspended agency centred on a prolonged and continuous solitary activity. Importantly then, what is evidenced in this seeming lack of affect and impassiveness, are what affect theorist Lauren Berlant has identified as modes of detachment that are not actually detached at all.⁰ For Berlant the conditions of ordinary existence, (what she calls habituated or normative life), are conditions of the "wearing out of the subject," and her work enables a consideration of the "ordinariness of suffering" rather than its exceptionality.⁰ She interrogates "technologies

⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁰ Claire Nouvet, "The Inarticulate Affect : Lyotard and Psychoanalytic Testimony," *Discourse* 25, no.1 & 2 (2003) : 232 & 245.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 97.

⁰ Ibid.

of patience” that “provide assurance that what seems like static really is, after all, a rhythm [subjects] can enter into while they’re dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing, or otherwise being worn out.”⁰ Berlant’s work in *Cruel Optimism*, archives “practices of self-interruption, self-suspension, and self-abeyance that indicate people’s struggles to change, but not traumatically, the terms of value in which their life-making activity has been cast.”⁰ Little by little, duration and repetition become procedures for transforming and exhausting a state of affective suspension.

At the outset, each branch of ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ was to be made of 196 “moments de prose” and there were to be six branches, plus two additional zero moments at the beginning and the end respectively.⁰ The stalls in the text’s daily production are literally reproduced in the text, wherein the numbering of each “moment de prose” is accompanied by the first few words of the chapter which are then repeated in the body of the paragraph: “le début de la lecture du fragment est donc une répétition à peu près exacte des mots qui viennent d’être lus dans le récit. Le *moment* est donc presque entièrement dirigé vers sa suite.”⁰ In other words, the sequentiality of the overall structure of ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ mirrors the discontinuity of its production, “separated [as it was] into ‘moments’

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’, 251.

⁰ Ibid.

begun and ended each day.”⁰ The text thereby shores up and accumulates a vertiginous sequence of halting narratives that barely lurch forward, and suggest suspended agency centred on a prolonged and continuous act of solitary contemplation. But for Roubaud, these continual pauses, traced in the text through the enumeration and title of each section, are “le mode le plus convenable à la *contemplation*. C’est en elles que l’exercice spirituel trouve sa nourriture.”⁰ The duration and repetition involved in the writing itself are procedures for transforming and exhausting this state of affective suspension. Martin Klebes has suggested that the programme prods Roubaud “to take up a routine of regular textual production after an extended period of refusal [...]; the constraints facilitate the filling up of time and space with text.”⁰ Rigid numerical constraints create a structure from which affect can be released where this might not otherwise, or more directly, be capable of expression. Of course ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ also recounts the failed project of *Le Grand Incendie de Londres*, a project which Roubaud conceived of and subsequently rejected, instead taking up the more minor, derivative project indicated by the lowercase title and quotation marks of ‘*le grand incendie de londres*.’⁰ Roubaud’s use of mathematical and numerical constraints in ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ is therefore a

⁰ Martin Klebes, “Jacques Roubaud: Projecting Memory,” in *Wittgenstein’s Novels* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 148.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’, 93.

⁰ Klebes, “Jacques Roubaud: Projecting Memory,” 152.

⁰ In the language of calculus, the derivative of a function, $f(x)$, is indicated using the prime mark (what linguistics would recognize as an apostrophe), such that a derivative, $f'(x)$ is a reduction in the order of a polynomial function. At its most basic, taking the derivative reduces the complexity of a function.

sign of failed productivity and agency, even as these same elements incite a new production.

As '*le grand incendie de londres*' signals, after the death of his wife Alix Cléo, Roubaud "ne peu[t] plus même penser la poésie...la poésie s'est arrêtée pour [lui]."⁰ During this time prose, he tells us, will suffice because it is a space "d'absolue neutralité."⁰ When Roubaud does finally take up poetry again, it is in *Quelque chose noir*, a collection of poems that deal with Roubaud's mourning for Alix Cléo. In this text, the use of numerical elements reveals a seriousness of intent, a weightiness of feeling. Warren Motte finds this example particularly compelling, because "it is a very solemn game that Roubaud is playing, a very deliberate and organized one which argues that meaning—in both experience and in poetry—becomes manifest only where we recognize its shape."⁰ While there are a variety of different poetic forms used in the text each poem is shaped by the number nine in some way. "Numbers thus converse intimately with words in *Quelque chose noir*, and form clearly becomes thematized."⁰ Thus Roubaud's work makes apparent the fact that mathematical and formal elements (elements lacking any explicit sentiments) can create diversions and detours from conventional emotive engagements with literary texts. Yet, as Sianne Ngai is careful to point out, the tone of a text or artwork, "cannot be reduced to

⁰ Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de londres*', 54.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Warren Motte, "Oulipian Exceptionalism," in *Oulipo@50 - L'Oulipo à 50 ans*, 23.

⁰ Ibid.

representations of feeling within the artwork, or to the emotional responses the artwork solicits from its viewers.”⁰ Instead, blankness is an aesthetic strategy and Roubaud’s text demonstrates how the appearance of sterility, of the clinical fact, not only plays an affective role but also suggests that the non-literary elements of the mathematical and scientific serve to restrain the emergence of too much affect in texts, if not in life itself.

Moreover, in moving beyond exclusively formal considerations, Roubaud’s work is often provoked by the existential question “à quoi bon?,” which underlies many of his projects and seems to render any creative activity trivial. Indeed the question is itself a residual speech act that Roubaud has carried with him since the suicide of his brother in 1961.⁰

Si je me cherche (et je ne me cherche pas vraiment), quelque réponse organisée à l’*à-quoi-bon généralisé* aujourd’hui, je ne trouve que le scepticisme [...]; je recherche le calme ataraxique dans la lecture et la ‘suspension du jugement.’⁰

The only way to respond, Roubaud’s writing suggests, is in a circumspect manner, employing a ‘suspension du jugement’ to a programme of life itself. Roubaud’s regimes therefore act as modes for ‘checking-in’ with the self—as if to register the minute changes that may

⁰ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 28.

⁰ Roubaud, writing in *Poésie* describes his last visit with his brother Jean-Réné as follows : “Il savait qu’il n’y avait rien. À toute parole il opposait, en souriant : « À quoi bon? ».” (Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de Londres*’, 1366).

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de Londres*’, *La Destruction*, 291.

be occurring. In turn, this regulated existence enables the commencement of writing and further implies that life might achieve transformation as a kind of collateral effect of repetition and duration in the task of writing.

What Roubaud's work also makes apparent is that the appearance of mathematical elements in literature can create potential diversions from an orthodox pathetic engagement with a literary text. It demonstrates how the sterility and facticity of numerical elements in literary and artistic projects—if not in life itself—serve to withhold the emergence of affect. But while procedural models invoke a clinical severing of emotion, in so doing they also constantly imply emotion and underscore the value of pathetic engagement. Indeed, there is something unsettling about the disaffected autobiographical text of '*le grand incendie de londres*' because one empathises not with a direct expression of emotion in it, but with what is constantly referred to but remains unstated and unavailable to full linguistic expression.

When feelings are not expressed, when they are withheld, making fellow feeling and pathetic engagement impossible, this too is affective, though it operates in a different way. Similar to rhetorical *occupatio* in drawing attention to something by professing to omit it, and also sharing characteristics of *paralepsis* in drawing attention to something by saying little or nothing about it, there is an omission of the direct expression of emotions in Roubaud's '*le grand incendie de londres*' even while the

absence of Roubaud's wife Alix Cléo is evident from the beginning of the text. Instead of confronting such loss directly Roubaud's approach is oblique—he will implement a system and regime to enable the writing project, and spend much of the writing project discussing the system and regime itself rather than the loss it redresses. What becomes clear is that the very reasons why the project needed to be rigorously implemented in this way are the same reasons why it could not get started without the system. In *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, Silvan Tomkins addresses this type of behaviour as a strategy for delaying affect and suggests that affect can be minimized through habitual action.⁰ Further to this point, Tomkins argues that the repeated exposure to a stimulus gradually and sometimes rather quickly loses its capacity to evoke any affects whatsoever.⁰ In fact the project is aimed at eliminating what Roubaud has called “l'angoisse récurrente et souvent infranchissable du «recommencement».”⁰ In this notion of “recommencement,” there is not only the sense of beginning literary work again, but also the larger sense in which one must at some point get on with life after great loss.

Numbers saturate the text and through these it is saturated by emotional valences. Roubaud's “numérologie” is sentimental and aesthetic, wherein “se mêlent les élucubrations combinatoires et les

⁰ Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1962 & 2008), 122.

⁰ Ibid., 275-6.

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de Londres’*, 250.

circonstances de la vie privée.”⁰ As such, numbers not only serve to organise the overall textual structure, but their abundance is a kind of *catachresis* specific to Roubaud that also signifies emotion and affect. The more negative the affects, the more numbers come into view. Paradoxically then, the numerical elements in Roubaud’s work also act as indices of affect, connoting as much as they denote, even while they initially minimize the legibility of affects as they flitter momentarily in various passages. For Roubaud, numbers are a “mise en ordre du monde, rassurants et familiers,” but this only begs the question as to why he needs reassurance, and from what?⁰

In Roubaud’s work numbers also have an important knowledge-bearing function, providing ways of orienting one’s self in time and space, history and memory, and Roubaud is careful to inform readers of these systems (whether personal or public) wherever possible. For Roubaud, numerical patterns are systems for ordering and describing the world, but of course if such patterns change, the ordering of the world would also be transformed. He admits being surprised that many of his friends remain unaware of “la règle d’or de la numérotation française” which holds that addresses (in Paris at least) are ordered with odd numbers on the left hand side of the street, beginning with the lowest numbers at the Seine. Roubaud also clearly delights in noticing

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, 273. So for example, Roubaud has “climatériques” years, which are always a multiple of 7; numbers which are multiples of 6 are associated with the sestina, while he has a particular fondness for Queneau’s numbers.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, 686.

outmoded or culturally variable systems of enumeration, which act as “témoins précieux d’autres systèmes de compréhension de soi et du monde.”⁰ One wonders how much of his appreciation of writers like Anthony Trollope and Charles Dickens stems from the pleasure he gains from the mental accounting required by such obsolete currencies as “farthings, halfpennies, pence, shillings, florins, half-crowns, crowns, pounds et bien entendu guineas” that appear in their novels.⁰ Furthermore in *Tokyo infra-ordinaire* Roubaud describes the Daimyo Clock, which, like the conventional western watch, is divided into 12 units represented both by Japanese numbers and the 12 elements of the Chinese zodiac. But for Roubaud, “la beauté du système” is that “les heures n’étaient pas, banalement, comme chez nous, de durée égale,” instead they are divided into day and night, each consisting of six Daimyo hours. For Roubaud the interest of the Daimyo Clock, is that the literal reorganization of the mechanics of time on these clocks may be better equipped to reflect the daily passage of time: “Le JOUR commençait à l’AUBE (*akemutsu*) et s’achevait au CRÉPUSCULE (*kuremutsu*), où commençait la NUIT, qui cessait à l’AUBE suivant.”⁰ These systems of measurement have an “intérêt arithmétique” which occupy Roubaud, yet such observations usually also interpellate him into

⁰ Michael Sheringham, “Une Journée à Soi,” *Conférence* 25 (2007): 49.

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de Londres’, La Destruction*, 314.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *Tokyo infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Inventair/Invention, 2005), 65-66. Roubaud continues, “Chaque Daimyo, possesseur exclusif de sa Daimyo Clock était maître absolu du temps dans son fief.”(66) A change in the accepted structure of time then took place, and made the Daimyo Clocks (if not their owners) out of date. « On January 1, 1889, the time at the 135th degree of east longitude was established as the standard time for all of Japan, giving Japan a regionally unified time system. »

a reconsideration of the structures for living that he subscribes to as a Western person of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁰ To invoke Barthes, this is an “imagining of a different way of life [which] takes the detour of history in order to unfix thought from itself and enable difference.”⁰

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’, *La Destruction*, 314.

⁰ Patrick ffrench. “A Different Life? Barthes, Foucault and Everyday Life,” *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (2004): 292.

Affective Mathematics

As Véronique Montémont has suggested, it is productive to consider the “levels of visibility and metaphoricity” that Oulipian constraints have within a text so as to enable a consideration of “their subtle connection to the world” and to the field of literature.⁰ This is particularly true of Roubaud’s work wherein the interplay of numerous mathematical constraints plays upon the reader’s attention in ways that serve to withhold or delay an affective resonance from appearing. This is achieved precisely because such elements are suited to distracting attention away from sincere expression and suggest the difficulty of expressing unpleasant affects. Numbers insinuate themselves into his discourse: “je remarque aussi que dans les écritures mon intérêt est déjà marqué pour les dénombrements, plus généralement pour toutes les indications chiffrées que produit le monde à nos yeux.”⁰

Recent work in the study of literature and mathematics suggests that like any other literary trope, when mathematics figures in literature it too needs to be read and interpreted.⁰ While this is an enticing provocation, in that it calls upon literary scholars to consider a subject that is generally outside our disciplinary boundaries, it may prematurely move beyond major epistemological differences between mathematics

⁰ Véronique Montémont, “Roubaud’s Numbers on Numbers,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 118.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘ *le grand incendie de londres*’, 540.

⁰ Mairéad Hanrahan, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 4.

and literature. Mathematics is a system of theoretical description used to analyse and predict real world (or possible real world) phenomena, while literature's relationship to the real world must be understood through representation and signification. Any study of the interrelation of these two subjects, then, should have epistemological implications for both. While both literature and mathematics are systems for describing and representing the world, when it appears in literature, mathematics generally represents a limit-case or testing ground for literary truths, and this seems to be the tropic function of mathematics in literature more generally.⁰ Mathematics and literature are each languages that describe and explain phenomena, yet neither is capable of claiming any singular or final reality given that both tend to posit theories of a hypothetical or fictional nature. Although the special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* entitled *Literature and the Mathematical* is a valuable resource in studies of this kind, the numerate reader will immediately question what exactly is meant by this idea of "the mathematical" just as a literary critic may find the presence of numbers and formulae in literary criticism suspect. While these criticisms are valid, they are also easily proffered in interdisciplinary work and this comes at the expense of the ways that interdisciplinary work can excite us into a rethinking of the presumptions we have about our discipline, prodding us out of dogmatic ways of thinking.

⁰ Here Hanrahan's hypothesis is that "texts which speak mathematics are inclined to undermine rather than to underline the idea that literature can mathematize reality." Mairéad Hanrahan, "Literature and the mathematical: the difference," *Journal of Romance Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 14.

Mairéad Hanrahan's piece "Literature and mathematics: the difference" draws out interesting cohabitations in the histories of literature, mathematics and deconstruction. As is common in interdisciplinary work which creates a space of encounter between competing discourses, Hanrahan also runs the risk of revealing foundational differences, because diffractions occur when the prisms of multiple disciplines are brought to bare on a singular object of study. While Hanrahan's method of deconstruction and feminism is convincing, it is less helpful when it comes to dealing with specific mathematical concepts and linking them to the history of literature or deconstruction: "I have mentioned the importance of Gödel in Derrida's work; space-limitations unfortunately prevent me from showing in detail how the notion of 'difference'[...] borrow[s] from mathematics."⁰ To be sure, Hanrahan is more interested in the mathematical as it appears in literature, and in this respect the article provides a number of pertinent reflections. The criticism in many of the articles in the journal is aimed at deconstructing the idea of mathematics as a pure, ideal, or universalizing force. As such, the articles seek to interpret elements of mathematics as if they were textual, to read the mathematics as literary elements. However, the journal issue as a whole is unable to venture very far into the complexities of the mathematics, a move that would enable the desired readings. But this only underscores the difficulty of interdisciplinary work because the kinds of mathematics that are

⁰ Ibid., 15.

discussed by the literary scholars are also being debated and developed within the field itself—one would have to hold graduate degrees in both mathematics and literature to really grapple with the details. Nonetheless, the journal is significant in pointing out potential avenues of research and provocatively demonstrates how fruitful such work can be.

Hanrahan argues that the last few decades have seen deconstruction mobilize the relativization of absolutes in a number of fields. However, where literature and the humanities have sought to explore differences of class, race, gender and sexuality, mathematics' "aspiration to universality" would seem to situate it *outside* of these differences.⁰ She claims "the difference between literature and mathematics has often been mapped in terms of gender."⁰ From a feminist perspective it is almost axiomatic to claim that "the logocentric assumptions of a culture which, ever since Socrates, has prized 'pure' intellect above all," and would therefore represent mathematics in masculine terms, "while literature has long been recognized as a field conducive to the expression of the feminine."⁰ Following this gendered reading, it is possible to suggest that mathematics is situated in the mind, while literature, as a form of 'expression,' necessarily involves the body. Although it is not the aim of this chapter to deconstruct numerical

⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

elements, the idea that numbers can have an affective tone in literature does participate in both a deconstructive and a feminist reading practice. However, Hanrahan's notion of exteriority is precisely what Roubaud's work challenges because his mathematics are already impure, marked by a decidedly personal and autobiographical rationale and one which also informs his poetry. By presenting the possibility for the deconstruction of mathematical assumptions and pointing to the need to consider the ways that numerical elements function in a text to both withhold and complicate pathetic engagement, Roubaud's oeuvre is particularly well suited to studies in the interstice between literature and mathematics. Numbers are also signifiers, Roubaud's work reminds us, and in this respect the presence of numbers in literary texts also requires new modes of reading. Rather than reiterating the dichotomy of interiority/exteriority, or affect/reason, which supports and perpetuates the disciplinary divide of literature and mathematics, it is more productive to read in Roubaud's texts a new form of disciplinary transgression. This 'weird science' is one which is also capable of undermining hierarchies of an epistemological nature.

On the other side of the literature and mathematics debate is an equally troubling tendency to interpret literature according to formal mathematical equations. This is particularly common in the treatment of oulipian texts where literature is often read through the mathematical

constraints it employs and becomes secondary to them.⁰ In “Jacques Roubaud: Literature, Mathematics, and the Quest for Truth,” Elvira Monika Laskowski-Caujolle problematically contends that oulipian poetics are characterized by “the essential analogy between mathematics and literature.”⁰ Unlike mathematical figures, however, literature is unconventionally referential; mathematics is a complex system of equations involving variables and substitutions, but it does not follow that mathematical equations can necessarily be substituted for poetic assertions.⁰ Laskowski-Caujolle, a mathematician by training, translates “literary language into mathematical language” and claims to find “The Mathematical Solution” to Roubaud’s text *La Princesse Hoppy* through a mathematical analysis of its permutations.⁰ Privileging the idea that a reader must “decipher the algebraic constraint,” Laskowski-Caujolle cites Queneau’s comparison of a literary text to an onion “dont les uns se contentent d’enlever la pelure superficielle, tandis que

⁰ This tendency is also apparent in recent work by Caroline Lebrec “Configurations oulipiennes du multiple,” in *Oulipo@50 – L'Oulipo à 50 ans*, 139-150.

⁰ Elvira Monika Laskowski-Caujolle, “Jacques Roubaud: Literature, Mathematics and the Quest for Truth,” *SubStance* 30, no.3 (2001): 72.

⁰ There is a structural analogy that I wish to draw out with David Hume’s *Of the Standard of Taste* wherein Hume’s attempt to define what makes great literature is coupled with a resistance to any such standard. At the same time that Hume attempts to work through the fundamental paradox of such a task, he seems unwilling to empty literature of its special status in relation to what has been variously described as the sublime and the beautiful, so that “to check the sallies of the imagination, and to reduce every expression to geometrical truth and exactness, would be most contrary to the laws of criticism.” Interestingly, it is mathematical truth that is figured as an unnatural expression with respect to the imagination or creative activity. David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1965), 7.

⁰ Laskowski-Caujolle, “Jacques Roubaud: Literature, Mathematics and the Quest for Truth,” 77.

d'autres, moins nombreux, l'épluchent pellicule par pellicule."⁰ This model problematically posits a final solution to textual analysis without actually having to contend with the fact that the image of removing layers— of disrobing, as it were— does not necessarily mean that a formula or equation can or should be found at the core.⁰ What is worse may be that Laskowski-Caujolle represents the “solution” as follows:

Only the reader who is willing to strip away layer after layer, will discover the isomorphism between the *automorphism group* of the *Klein group* K_4 and the *symmetric group of degree 3* —and therefore the solution to the algebraic enigma—in Roubaud's novel.⁰

Leaving aside the question as to whether these formulas could ever be meaningful to a non-mathematician—and, by extension, whether they contribute to our understanding of the text— Laskowski-Caujolle's methodology for approaching mathematics and literature suggests that in order to understand an oulipian text one needs to effectively eliminate poetic uncertainty and get at the equations or constraints which govern its structure. In so doing, her arguments create a hierarchy with mathematics firmly reigning over literary meanings. But Laskowski-Caujolle's argument is also insufficient in that it does not really grapple

⁰ Raymond Queneau, *Volontés* 11 (1938), cited in J. Bens, *Atlas de littérature potentielle*, (Paris, Gallimard: 1981), 23.

⁰ The cautionary tale of Bartlebooth comes to mind in this respect, so as Dominique Rabaté has commented “the X-shaped space corresponding to the W-shaped piece Bartlebooth holds in his hand is the revenge of the artist [...] over the stifling predictability of the programme.” Dominique Rabaté, “Programming and Play: Life Drive and Death Drive in the Work of Georges Perec, Roman Opalka and Jean-Benoît Puech”, in *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, 89.

⁰ Laskowski-Caujolle, “Jacques Roubaud: Literature, Mathematics and the Quest for Truth,” 81.

with questions of a literary nature. In her hands, problems of interpretation are eliminated; language loses its associative and connotative potential. Instead, she foregrounds the programmatic instrumentality of mathematics and produces a rather mechanical and structural reading of *La Princesse Hoppy*. If literature could be reduced to a formula from which it could then be decoded and qualified or disqualified by objective structural criteria, then mathematicians (or biochemists and economists) might be better equipped to search for its meaning and assess its value. Rather, what is important about these literary and artistic projects is the way that the programmatic and procedural models put into action through numerical and scientific signifiers actually operate in the service of aesthetics. Roubaud was distinctly aware of this imbrication:

les « raisons » mathématiques seraient présentes, mais pas exclusivement; et, surtout, elles seraient très largement soumises à une autre « logique », à une stratégie de choix plus décisivement esthétique.⁰

Subtending Roubaud's many contributions to contemporary poetics is the fact that he constantly brings together such disparate knowledge and multiple languages in ways that manage to rejuvenate the poignancy of an idea, illuminating aspects of thought which were previously mired in dogmatic approaches to the discipline.

Of course, the Atelier de Littérature Assisté par la Mathématique et l'Ordinateur (ALAMO), was established in 1980 by Jacques Roubaud

⁰ Roubaud, 'le grand incendie de Londres', *La Destruction*, 272.

and fellow Oulipian Paul Braffort with the intention of exploring potentiality through computer-assisted writing.⁰ Using combinatorial methods for generating texts, ALAMO developed computer programs to produce texts that would fulfil the rules of various genres and forms such as the sonnet. While it is not my intention to evaluate the relative merits of this mode of literary production, I wish to highlight that, like mathematics more generally, such oulipian projects have not been adequately situated with respect to contemporary and historical literary debates. Instead the mathematical and scientific aspects of the Oulipo have often lent themselves, too readily and too thoroughly, to formalism.⁰

Even at a superficial level it is important to consider how language works its way into mathematics (through equations, formulas, sets), just as numbers exist in linguistic forms (one, two, three, etc.). In her essay “Language and Paradise,” American poet and essayist Lyn Hejinian

⁰ Montémont, “Roubaud’s Numbers on Numbers,” 15. It is worth mentioning that in January 2008 a computer-assisted novel of 300 pages was published in Russian called « True Love ». It is also worth noting that 17 famous literary works including Anna Karenina, and Harumi Murakami’s ‘style’ were uploaded into the program, so it is produced by a combination of already extant works of art.
http://www.sptimesrussia.com/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=24786 (last accessed May 7th, 2010)

⁰ On this see Jean-Jacques Poucel, “Family Vocation,” in *Oulipo@50 - L'Oulipo à 50 ans*, 36: “...even though the Oulipians have imagined exciting horizons for innovative literature, they have apparently preferred to concentrate their efforts on thinking about poetic forms rather than putting the conceptual force of their enterprise into the service of a social agenda.” See also, Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito, *The End of Oulipo?: An Attempt to Exhaust a Movement*, (Winchester and Washington: Zer0 Books, 2013); Julianna Spahr and Stephanie Young. “Foulipo,” Performance at Noulipo Conference, CalArts. Los Angeles, California, October 28-29, 2005.
<http://www.drunkenboat.com/db8/oulipo/feature-oulipo/essays/spahr-young/foulipo.html>.

argues that numbers contribute semantic inflection to grammatical structures.⁰

Numbers, though they function grammatically as adjectives or pronouns, have a strong prepositional inflection, since in themselves they express relational concepts: *with, after, beside, beyond, inside, including, among, before, by means of, together with, after, excluding*, and so on as well as preposition-like adjective-conjunction constructions such as *more than* and *less than*.⁰

Moreover, “like the preposition,” she claims, “number refers to its frame of reference at the same time that it is specific within the frame, the name of the whole as well as the part.”⁰ In this respect numbers can operate as *synecdoche*—indicating and implying whole and part alike.

From its earliest contributions to its most recent, the Oulipo has consistently thematized relations between the numeric and the linguistic. A recent *jeudi de l’Oulipo* evening at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France took “le zéro” as its theme, presenting multiple oulipian literary engagements with zero and *le néant*. Marcel Bénabou, historian of the Oulipo as much as an active member of the group, discussed François Le Lionnais’s project *Poèmes en nombres* particularly because of his attempt to think about the number zero. For the purposes of this chapter, Le Lionnais’s contribution is significant because it traces a slippage from numerical concepts to issues of

⁰ Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 72. The inflection they add comes “...usually by adding an s.”

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

experience: “qu’est qu’un poème de zéro mots? C’est une émotion ressentie comme douée d’une qualité poétique potentielle et qui à été exprimée avec moins d’un mot.”⁰ The emergence of a kind of mathematics of experience is achieved by mapping a type of pre-verbal emotional experience onto the number zero. Affect works its way into mathematics precisely at the moment before linguistic expression.

By contrast, Roubaud’s work often foregrounds traditional literary forms such as the sonnet not only because it signifies a move away from free verse, but also as a strategic response to the formalist critique, for certainly the sonnet is not only of formal interest.⁰ The tacit implication therefore is that formal interest emerges in relation to content and style. Writing in *Poésie*, on his poem “Portrait minéralogique de Paris 1992,” Roubaud anticipates his reader’s response:

Le poème que je viens de vous donner à lire est un peu austère. (C’est un poème-liste, dont la contrainte est assez simple: noter, dans l’ordre croissant des immatriculations parisiennes des ‘sightings’ d’automobiles.) Certains douteraient fort qu’on puisse appeler cela poème. Je ne chercherai pas à les convaincre. De plus c’est, si on veut vraiment lui attribuer un sens, un poème engagé; ce qui ne parle pas, de nos jours, en sa faveur.⁰

While Roubaud is not apparently interested in convincing anyone that “Portrait minéralogique de Paris 1992” is a poem, the text necessitates some analysis because its dispassionate mode of displaying information

⁰ François Le Lionnais, “Poèmes en Nombres,” in *La littérature potentielle*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1988), 170. Also cited by Marcel Bénabou, in “Le zéro,” as part of the Les jeudis de l’Oulipo at La bibliothèque nationale de France, May 30, 2013.

⁰ Véronique Montémont, *Jacques Roubaud: l’amour du nombre* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaire du Septentrion, 2004), 334.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘le grand incendie de Londres’, *Poésie*, 1302.

encapsulates the types of projects that are of interest to me in this chapter. It is neither a 'poème engagé,' nor so formal as to be merely an exercise in style. Rather it complicates the boundaries of textual practice with practices of everyday life.

By way of explanation, in March 1991, Jacques Roubaud started the sober and continuous observation of a gradually ascending series of numbers that are so ubiquitous that they are hardly ever noticed. Likening himself to a bird-watcher, Roubaud collected the most recent licence plate numbers that he encountered while ambulating through the city— noting them in his *carnet* with the date and location of the sighting.⁰ Over a six-month period, from March to September, Roubaud noted the most recent licence plate numbers he came across and calculated that more than one hundred thousand vehicles “ont été vomies sur Paris.”⁰ Where they are sometimes figured as signs of pestilence being spewed into the city, the perniciousness of automobiles nonetheless takes on a more sinister, militaristic tone as the licence plates attest to “la progression fatale de l’envahissement des rues.”⁰ Roubaud’s calculations may have social implications, reflecting the circulation of goods and money, and the pervasive economics of the city

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de Londres’*, 693. The following passage explains his method and demonstrates the nuances of his understanding of the system: “[...] mon « record » est « 15 JNS 75 » (ce qui veut dire que plus de 100 000 voitures nouvelles depuis six mois (chaque progression de la troisième lettre représente 1000 voitures; chaque progression de la seconde 22 000 (22 000 et non 26 000, car les I et les O ne figurent pas parmi les triplets possibles, étant des lettres-chiffres qui prêterait à confusion, ainsi que les Q et les U[...]mais je ne vois pas pourquoi.)))

⁰ Ibid.

are here given form in a very banal trace. But when such ordinary numbers are submitted to a sustained discipline of observation over time, what is surprising is how interesting they can become—producing ideas that are really quite extraordinary. On one hand, Roubaud’s task is a rather mundane exercise in passive observation. It involves an attunement to one instrumental system, among a myriad of other possible examples that can be found in the banality of everyday life. But, on the other hand, for Roubaud what is important is that these numbers give him a means to “garder un certain contrôle mental sur les automobiles, ces ennemis mortels du piéton.”⁰ His notations were subsequently turned into a poem “Portrait minéralogique de Paris 1992” and published in *La forme d’une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le cœur des humains*.⁰ Significantly, “plaque minéralogique” is another name for “plaque d’immatriculation,” a term which retains the residue of its administrative past as they were a function of the *Services des mines* in France until 1992, the year of the “Portrait”. Not unlike Georges Perec’s steady notation of the arrivals and departures of specific city buses based on the numbers that define their routes in *Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien* and parts of the *Lieux* project, Roubaud’s calculations create a means of punctuating an experience of time—of registering what would otherwise be an un-demarcated flow of

⁰ Roubaud, ‘le grand incendie de Londres’, *Mathématique*, 938. Of course, in 2009 the changed system of automobile licence plates would have been noticed by Roubaud.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *La Forme d’une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le cœur des humains* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 200.

traffic and the systems used for measuring it.⁰ In so far as the poem also serves as a means for marking the flow of time it relates to the larger project of '*le grand incendie de londres*' and its test of endurance in time.

⁰ Throughout Perec's *Tentative*, he regularly notes the passage of particular buses. For example, "Le 96 va à la gare Montparnasse/ Le 84 va à la Porte de Champerret (12). Further on in the text this movement is phrased in more passive terms: "Passe un 86 presque plein/ passe un 63 presque vide." (29) *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*. (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2008).

Safety in Numbers

In 1965, Roman Opalka began a daily practice of painting the series of whole numbers, in white on a black background— a practice that he continued until his death on August 6, 2011. The last number he painted was 5 607249. Each of his canvases, called *Détails*, presents a range of numbers —painted from the top left of the canvas to the bottom right— which is then used to identify the canvas within the larger project. So, for example, “1965/1- ∞ *Détail* 1-35327”, is the title of the first canvas (the series of whole numbers from 1 to 35327) while situating these numbers within the larger project, 1965/1- ∞ signifies its ongoing nature and the name to which it is generally referred. When one canvas ends, the next begins with the following number in the series. Each canvas has the same dimensions, the numbers are painted with the same sized brush and the thickness of the paint is maintained as constant as possible. Opalka’s regime remained relatively constant since its beginning in 1965, although in 1972, when his series reached one million, he decided to add one percent of white to the background of each new canvas.⁰ Realising, of course, that eventually the trace of his painted numbers would become ostensibly invisible, (white on white), Opalka began recording his voice as he counted out the numbers in Polish, making audible the trace of an enumeration which otherwise would be difficult to attest to. In addition, Opalka photographed himself

⁰ Christine Savinel, “Opalka ou l’éthique de l’assigination,” in *Roman Opalka*, ed. Jacinto Lageira (Paris : Éditions Dis Voir, 1996), 5.

at the end of each day of painting. As Opalka has commented on his own work, “dans cette apparente monotonie il y a des émotions extraordinaires” and Opalka regularly remarks on the sublime anticipation he gets as his slow incremental climb approaches, for example, 55555 or 666666.⁰

Opalka is distinctly aware of the ambivalence of his solitary activity: “nous n’aimons pas la solitude mais pour être chez soi il faut être seul.”⁰ In a series of interviews with art critic and poet Bernard Noël, Opalka articulates the original impetus for the project in similar terms: “j’étais peintre j’ai voulu faire quelque chose où le rapport de la vie et de l’art serait plus engagé que dans la peinture.”⁰ For Opalka, visual art in the twentieth century “ne permettait plus de progrès nous avons touché des limites.”⁰ He continues: “J’étais là dans mon atelier je me disais il n’y a plus moyen de faire un tableau.”⁰ He imagines his painting project in the context of a post-global disaster society, and even suggests that his project would be the only one worth continuing after such an event. As Nicolas Bourriaud has argued, Opalka’s work is part of a modern ascetic tradition such that “le travail d’Opalka assume tous les aspects de l’existence humaine comme pour mieux mettre en relief son implacable et tragique dénouement, le commun destin qui lie l’oeuvre et

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” in *Roman Opalka*, ed. Jacinto Lageira, (Paris: Éditions Dis Voir, 1996), 51.

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 77.

⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁰ Ibid., 68.

son auteur.”⁰ In fact Bourriaud takes Opalka as exemplary of his notion of the relation between “l’art moderne et l’invention de soi”, when he claims that “ce protocole pictural décrit l’existence comme le déploiement d’une forme *disparaissante*, graduellement défigurée par l’informe qui finira par l’engloutir.”⁰

Such a description is equally applicable to On Kawara’s *Today Series* wherein the artist began the daily task of painting each date on the day to which it corresponds. This project began in 1966 and continues today. Unlike Opalka, however, Kawara’s programme more actively allows for variations in the colour of the background, the size of the canvas, and the language and national convention in which the date is painted. If he is in France or Germany, for example, he uses the respective language of each country and the European date conventions.⁰ Each painting is subsequently placed in a box and lined with newspaper articles from that day, often showing the artist’s mark-ups on the articles themselves, which he calls the *I Read* series. Attendant to these daily procedures, Kawara also started recording his daily journeys. Using a photocopied map of the city that he happens to be in on that specific day, he traces his passage in the city using a red pen (*I Went*) and he records lists of the people he meets each day (*I Met*). While his work cannot be said to be strictly autobiographical, it

⁰ Bourriaud, *Formes de vie*, 46.

⁰ Ibid., 46-47.

⁰ Charles Wylie, “Of Today,” in *On Kawara, 10 Tableaux and 16,952 Pages*, edited by Charles Wylie, Ervin Laszlo and Takafumi Matsui (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 33.

does allow viewers to see the specifics of Kawara's daily life as an adherence to a regimented practice. Another project more explicitly related to numbers is Kawara's *One Million Years*, which is a ten-volume work in two series: "Past" lists every year between 998,031 BC and 1969 AD, while "Future" lists those between 1980 and 1,001,980. For the audio recording of this enumeration in French, Roubaud was enlisted to read the odd numbers.

While there are many other possible examples of this kind of daily regime or practice in contemporary culture, I have selected these projects because they foreground clinical and sterile protocols that downplay any affective dimension.⁰ There are obvious differences between these projects, yet they all work using duration to enumerate the passage of time and in each work duration is pushed to a formal extreme. Importantly, they share an "attempt to divide things up with the systematic rigor of mathematics," but in so doing they revel in the inexpressive character of negative affects in specific ways.⁰ These regimes have what Ngai calls a "weak intentionality," because they are indistinct, lacking a specific object.⁰ In her discussions of Melville and Beckett, Ngai describes how such works manifest the "tedium of the

⁰ Similarly time predetermines the form of Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day*. The work begins when the clock is set running (at dawn on December 22, 1978) and ends when the time allotted to the work runs out (late night of the same day). "It's true," Mayer has said, "I have always loved projects of all sorts including say sorting leaves or whatever projects turn out to be, and in poetry I most especially love having time be the structure which always seems to me to save structure or form from itself because then nothing really had to begin or end." (Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 46).

⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁰ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 22.

ordinary: the monotony of routines organized by calendar headings, the movements of a body not doing anything in particular.”⁰ Though they may appear lacking in all conventional expressions of affect, such systems nonetheless have a strong affective sway. Ngai contends that “in contrast to freeing the subject from the realm of affect in its entirety,” these elements are a sign of affect, an affective expression which is “algorithmic or operational, rather than value- or meaning-based.”⁰ Moreover, such experiments in duration “indicate the *inability* of other mental activities, including reason, to overcome an affective state,” which might have the subsequent effect of transforming or changing the project, or simply bringing it to an end.⁰ In contrast to a Kantian sublime, Ngai calls the unusual synthesis of excitation and fatigue in these projects “stuplimity” which is “a response to encounters with vast but bounded artificial systems, resulting in repetitive and often mechanical acts of enumeration, permutation, and combination.”⁰ In these projects we see “the affective dimensions of the small subject’s encounter with a ‘total system’,” but importantly the system in this case is self-imposed.⁰

In Roubaud’s *‘le grand incendie de londres,’* Opalka’s 1965-∞, and Kawara’s *Today Series*, there is a continuous effort on the part of the

⁰ Ibid., 258.

⁰ Ibid., 270.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁰ Ibid.

individual simply to carry on with the programme. One senses that the unyielding, hermetic aspect of these projects operates much like Barthes's fantasy in *Comment vivre ensemble?* of a 'cella' which enables "l'autonomie complète, absolue de la structure."⁰ According to Diana Knight, in much of *Comment vivre ensemble?* Barthes can be seen to "overturn the *huis clos* of Living-Together into a voluptuous Living-Alone."⁰ Barthes is searching for "une zone entre deux formes excessives," by which he means an excess of solitude, and an excess of social proximity figured in terms of a *coenobium*, a convent or monastery.⁰ As Patrick ffrench suggests, what is at stake in the image of the 'Souverain Bien' "is the right distance from others, the distance that affords the subject the most happiness and the least conflict."⁰ This inchoate, perhaps utopian zone operates in the liminal territory between solitude and social integration. And according to Barthes, it is a space in which the ritual of daily life is dictated by *idiorrythmie*, a "smooth time," a "fugitivité du code, de la manière dont le sujet s'insère dans le code social."⁰ By contrast, in projects by Roubaud, Opalka and Kawara, such solitary activities are figured in terms of a fantasy of self-sufficiency and productivity, yet curiously the aesthetics of the project demand that completion is always deferred.

⁰ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble: Cours et Séminaires au Collège de France (1976-77)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 89.

⁰ Diana Knight, " 'Except When Night Falls': Together and Alone in Barthes's *Comment vivre ensemble*," *Paragraph* 31, no. 1 (2008), 56.

⁰ Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, 40.

⁰ Patrick ffrench, "How to Live with Roland Barthes," *SubStance* 38, no.3 (2009): 116.

⁰ Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, 38.

Attendant to these aesthetic projects is an implicit existential or spiritual project and yet their effectiveness in this respect is dubious because the projects are designed to be non-cathartic and non-exhaustive, “offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release.”⁰ For example, Opalka imagines that he is creating “un lieu où l’homme peut se réfugier.”⁰ While the generic ‘homme’ suggests a broader existential dilemma, there is a sense in which Opalka himself can be seen to take refuge in the project, and this is also apparent in projects by Roubaud and Kawara. In this respect when, for example, Opalka asks his interviewer, “qu’est-ce qu’une représentation qui ne représente rien que la somme d’un invisible trajet poursuivi jour après jour?” what he is addressing is the very flatness and persistence that his projects insist upon in lieu of more dramatic or sudden changes in feeling.⁰

Roubaud is also interested in the relationship between aesthetic forms and existential or spiritual programmes that can be used to mitigate emotional extremes. In his study of troubadour poetry, *La fleur inverse*, Roubaud argues that in this poetic form *mezura* “permet la lutte contre la menace sans cesse présente de la mélancolie.”⁰ According to Roubaud, *mezura* was invented by the troubadours “pour maintenir non pas balance égale mais tension surmontée entre joie et souffrance, peur

⁰ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 6-7.

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 62.

⁰ Quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 51.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *La fleur inverse: Essai sur l'art formel des troubadours*. (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1986), 14.

et audace, espoir et ‘cossirier’.”⁰ Moreover it serves as the “seul rampart contre l’anarchie de l’éros, contre le versant destructif d’amors qu’exprime la figure de l’éros mélancolique.”⁰ In this respect, *mezura*

désigne à la fois le concept clef de la résistance de l’amour à la force de destruction du ‘néant’ et l’enfermement des mots et des rimes dans les unités proprement indestructibles du vers, de la cobla, et de la canso.[...] La *mezura* est à la fois ce qui maintient l’amors entre les deux menaces extrêmes de sa destruction, l’insignifiance et l’insupportable, et ce qui fait se tenir ensemble les rimes et les mots de la canso.⁰

Serving to protect from an excess of love while also binding and containing this in poetry, *mezura* granted the troubadours a method for approaching the extremes of love without actually giving themselves over to it.

However, such a measured approach is not without risk. While these contemporary projects are aimed at creating a “rapport entre la forme du jour et l’acte éthique d’évaluation de soi,” which should mitigate any extreme emotions, Roubaud identifies, like the troubadours before him, *acedia* as one of the potential states that may arise from regimented existence.⁰

C’est l’*acedia*, objet d’une terrible et permanente condamnation ecclésiastique. Il est en bonne place parmi les sept péchés capitaux: beaucoup plus effrayant que l’oisiveté, sa banalisation sulpicienne, il est à la fois désespoir, renoncement, mal de la mort, futur mal du siècle, sentiment

⁰ Ibid., 278-9. This notion of a technique for mitigating emotional extremes will also be discussed in chapter four where I analyse the *journal intime* as a mode of checking-in with the self and regulating the emotional vicissitudes of everyday life.

⁰ Ibid., 279.

⁰ Ibid., 287.

⁰ Sheringham, “Une Journée à Soi”, 41.

du dérisoire et depuis sa fusion avec la *tristitia* de Cassian, *taedium vitae*, dégoût de soi-même et du monde.⁰

In “Portrait de l’Artiste Absent,” an aptly titled chapter of *La Destruction*, Roubaud outlines his four passions: walking, counting, reading and swimming. He adds to these as a “figure de leur parenté : la passion de la solitude” given that for Roubaud these activities must be practised alone. Surprisingly then, in the beginning of 1976, solitude had taken on a different tone:

on est calme, trop calme, pendant un certain temps, calme; on ralentit; on tergiverse; puis on s’inquiète d’être si calme. Et cela dure : un peu ; parfois tout d’un coup cela, cette paralysie, s’interrompt; parfois hélas cela dure beaucoup, et plus cela dure, plus cela ensuite, difficilement, s’interrompt.⁰

Solitude, figured in terms of procrastination and paralysis, defines the inertia and slowing-down that occurs once these prohibitions have set in. On one hand Roubaud’s four passions are dependent on a solitary state, while what can be seen in the above representation, on the other hand, is the sense in which the activities themselves rile him out of a pronounced stupor induced by too much solitude. For Roubaud, these are the “temps du plafond” in which he lies horizontally, staring at the ceiling, remarking on the “craquelures géographiques, de méandres mélancoliques, marqués, peints à l’à quoi bon.”⁰ Roubaud further describes the state as one characterised by *acedia*, a particular affective state which bears a profoundly prohibitive force on an individual psyche.

⁰ Roubaud, *La fleur inverse*, 87.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de Londres*’, *La Bibliothèque de Warburg*, 1758.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 1759.

There is, however, another dimension of *acedia* which is related to an experience of distended time, as was evident in the lengthy passage from Roubaud cited above. For Evagrius of Pontus (c. 345-399), *acedia* “makes it appear that the sun moves slowly or not at all, and that the day seems to be fifty hours long.”⁰ Acedic time, then, is formless: it is an experience of timelessness. Time passes unmarked and undesignated. In ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ Roubaud’s struggle with *acedia* is also figured as a crisis of time and duration: “cependant on a (j’ai) cessé d’être accordé au temps. Or on peut cesser d’être en temps réel non seulement un peu, ou beaucoup, mais passionnément.”⁰ This passionate refusal to exist in time is in direct contrast with the “Portrait de l’Artiste Absent” wherein walking is figured as the very task which gives Roubaud a sense of time, over and above artificial devices like watches, clocks and church bells. “J’atteins par la marche à quelque chose comme une possession du temps; la déambulation le convertit en espace par l’intermédiaire des pas, d’une manière plus directe, plus sensible.”⁰ Time is transformed into space via the intermediary of the body in motion. What is curious is that Opalka also figures his project in terms of a slow and steady walk: “mes nombres sont les pas de cette promenade qui dure depuis mille neuf cent soixante-cinq,” so that the duration of the project is what “laisse le temps de rencontrer la pensée.”⁰

⁰ Quoted in Kathleen Norris, *The Noonday Demon: A Modern Woman’s Struggle with Soul Weariness* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008), 13.

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’, 1758.

⁰ Ibid., 120.

⁰ Quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 86.

In this context, a walking project like Roubaud's *Mississippi Haibun*, described in '*le grand incendie de londres*,' serves to structure and punctuate time while also foregrounding a writing practice. The *Mississippi Haibun* was conceived following the suicide of Roubaud's brother Jean-Réne. It was at a time of grief, similar to that following the death of Alix Cléo, and when Roubaud could not write. Roubaud conceived of the trip as a walk along the length of the Mississippi from north to south, in set, 20-mile daily increments. Each day he would compose a *haibun* en route. Beyond the obvious eccentricities of the itinerary, which was inspired by *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Roubaud devised the plan as an activity that would enable him to write again. In this respect, the impetus behind these projects is to move beyond traumas and their subtly persistent affects which paralyse action, making it impossible to either live or write. The work of becoming an agented subject is quite literally mapped onto the task of writing, which is itself conceived of through the proxy of the walking project. Such cartographical explorations are devised to enable writing, but also to encourage movement through the landscapes of affect, which subsequently becomes a writing of space, place and affect alike. Interestingly then, throughout '*le grand incendie de londres*' Roubaud consistently reveals that, in order to write, he sometimes has to get on the move, a subject that will be explored in chapter three. Reading the

text, one begins a journey with Roubaud, who initially experiences the task of writing as follows: “j’avance ligne après ligne sans espérance.”⁰

Like the minor affects described by Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings*, *acedia* also “interferes with the outpouring of other emotions” and “indicates an inability, of other mental activities, including reason, to overcome an affective state.”⁰ The tacit implication, then, is that *acedia* is an extreme negation of the social cosmology in that it is a “perte d’investissement,” causing a “vague de l’âme, lassitude, tristesse, ennui, découragement.”⁰ Moreover, if we return to Barthes’s framework, *acedia* stems from a “moment répété, étalé, insistant où nous en avons assez de notre manière de vivre, de notre rapport au monde (au mondain).”⁰ For Robertson Davies, *acedia* is figured as a “failure in the art of life”:

What is it like, this failure in the art of life? It is the failure which manifests itself in a loss of interest in really important things. It does not come suddenly; there is nothing dramatic about it and thus it works with a dreadful advantage [...]. If you are losing touch even with yourself, it is *acedia* which has claimed you for its own.⁰

This idea of a “failure in the art of life” might help answer questions about why artists and writers take up long, duration-based projects—namely to move beyond a failure or impasse in their own methods for producing their works and, in this connection, for feeling they have the ability to continue on with “really important things” despite the fact that

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de Londres*’, 54.

⁰ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 270.

⁰ Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, 53.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁰ Robertson Davies, *One Half of Robertson Davies*, (London: Penguin, 1977), 64-65.

they may seem insignificant at the time. At a certain point in his poetic inquiry, Roubaud discovers the medieval Japanese recluse poet Kamo no Chomei whose “styles” represent the arts of life. Among nine other styles governing his activities, Roubaud is distinctly preoccupied by the ‘rakki-tai’: the “style pour dompter les démons.”⁰ Following this style Roubaud defines the intention of his work as “un style de vie et un style de poésie.”⁰

As mentioned previously, the question “à quoi bon” subtends Roubaud’s work in *‘le grand incendie de londres’* and, as that text reveals, has led to an impasse in his writing since the suicide of his brother in 1961. In order to overcome such impasses however, neither Opalka nor Roubaud are interested in perpetuating the gestures of the historical avant-garde. Opalka’s obstinate refusal of the “piège de la nouveauté” is echoed in Roubaud’s desire to “faire table rase des formes vieilles de la modernité, table rase de geste avant-gardiste de la ‘table rase.’”⁰ Unlike most late twentieth century artists, and critics for that matter, Opalka characterizes Marcel Duchamp as being both intelligent and destructive: “il avait des solutions qui allaient vers un blocage total.”⁰ Roubaud may be intuiting a similar impasse when he describes his own task as a return to the “noeud de l’erreur pour prendre un autre

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, *Poésie*, 1370.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 78 followed by; Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, *Poésie*, 1671.

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 65.

chemin,”⁰ while for Opalka, it is rather to “savoir donner la preuve [que] le rôle de l’artiste c’est aussi d’être la référence d’une manière de vivre.”⁰ Both writer and artist implement draconian programmes to ensure an “immersion totale,” because once the mechanism of the project is set into place it is easier to avoid the existential dilemma and just continue with the plan.⁰

This chapter has provided examples of the various ways that numbers and numerical elements figure in Roubaud’s work and in that of two artists with whose work he is familiar. At times, the numbers that Roubaud encounters in his ordinary life (street numbers, license plates) are collected and enable him to consider the systems of categorization which surround his existence. At other times, foreign systems for counting (time or currency) mobilize a reconsideration of orthodox systems for enumerating real world experience. Most importantly, numbers are often used to create a personal, affectively driven numerology which then structures and orders experience by mitigating loss. As Roubaud is acutely aware “compter peut être un dispositif de protection: contre l’ennui, contre l’angoisse, contre l’attente.”⁰ Significantly, this numerology is employed as a system or programme governing Roubaud’s literary projects and spurs him to continue with the regime, despite all the factors that might lead him away from it.

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, *Poésie*, 1381.

⁰ Opalka quoted in Noël, “Détails,” 94.

⁰ Roubaud, *‘le grand incendie de londres’*, *La Destruction*, 98 & 250.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

Roubaud's use of numbers and mathematical constraints as structuring devices for his literary works is obvious, but I have demonstrated the ways in which such elements move beyond strictly formal concerns, and gesture towards alternative epistemologies and affective modes of being as much as strategies for survival.⁰ In generating new frameworks for the production of literature, the point is also to suggest new possibilities for ways of being. In projects by Roubaud, Opalka and Kawara, it is clear that experiments in duration also present possibilities for different ways of thinking and feeling. In these examples, such futurity or transformative potential is produced through rather sombre, solitary projects. Their work involves exercises in excessive duration and repetition, whereby the subtleties of difference are gradually accumulated over time. My task has been to read through the formal and austere elements of these projects to suggest the ways that such work can be seen to set out alternative epistemologies that have profound implications for the arts today. These dispassionate and clinical projects theorize an affective number system which can be mobilized against the emergence of too much affect. As Patrick ffrench has suggested, Roland Barthes's work in *Comment vivre ensemble* marks a shift in his thought from questions of an explicitly social and political nature, towards a new framework of the "subtle and delicate ethics of affective and corporeal relations."⁰ My research continues this line of inquiry. Rather than

⁰ Roubaud even claims that '*le grand incendie de Londres*' "devient indispensable à ma survie de solitaire" (Ibid., 131).

⁰ ffrench, "How to Live With Roland Barthes," 117.

considering the austere, programmatic element of projects as a formal element, it is time to read these programmes in order to determine how they prod us along a virtual trajectory that can enable a return of empathy or, as Barthes puts it, a “retour d’une pensée tendre du monde [...], un repatriement d’un monde de tendresse.”⁰

⁰ Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*, 172.

2

The Forms of Fact

"From the Renaissance onward, the museum has been envisioned as a compendium of the world, a microcosm of the macrocosm, and a symbol of harmonious, well-ordered society."

Andrew McClellan, The Art of the Museum

"...il faut également remettre en question la solidité des choses, pratiquer un relativisme généralisé, un comparatisme critique sans pitié pour les certitudes les plus adhésives; percevoir les structures institutionnelles ou idéologiques qui nous encadrent comme circonstanciées, historiques, et donc réformables."

Nicolas Bourriaud, Radicant

Introduction

This chapter shifts from a consideration of numbers and mathematics in literary and artistic works, to a related analysis of texts which use lists and surveys in ways that complicate the expression and representation of emotion and affect. The first part of this chapter considers lists, catalogues, and collections that are produced by artists and writers, as art and literature, while the second part explores contemporary uses of surveys and census-like data in the production of literature and art. This chapter explores how the use of these clinical strategies might structure alternative modes of understanding 'data' as individual subjects encounter it and what this might mean about collective social experience. It also tracks the various ways that affect is transformed in the process. These works depart radically from ideas of affect as

emotional interiority, insisting rather on affect's transpersonal and collective dimension. Rather than consider the various practical functions and applications of such forms of producing knowledge, I am interested in how the appearance of these forms as artistic and poetic tactics troubles assumptions about the neutral production of information.⁰ Thus, this chapter challenges conventional assumptions about knowledge, facts, and statistics by focussing on how these forms appear in literature and the visual arts as processes which sometimes cool down affective intensity and protect subjects from too much feeling, while at other times these same processes can encourage a surprising amount of fellow-feeling, inspiring a sense of commonality.

This chapter is divided into two parts, "Lists, Catalogues and Collections," and "*107 âmes: The Census Poetics of Personhood*." The first part is divided into four sections. The first section, "Lists in Context: Background and Theoretical Approaches," provides a brief discussion of a few key methodologies for considering lists in literature and a history of list as a linguistic construct. The second section, "*Vertige de la Liste: The Louvre Exhibition*," outlines the relationship between lists, catalogues and the Louvre collection, and demonstrates how in exhibiting lists, the function of the museum (as producer and upholder of various artistic canons) was turned inside out and put on display in the

⁰ As Robert Belknap has claimed, "the list form is the predominant mode of organizing data relevant to human functions in the world, from financial transactions to knowledge of tides." (Robert Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8)

Vertige de la liste exhibit. The third section, “L’art de la liste et les joies ineffables de l’énumération,” situates the central arguments of this chapter in two essays previously written by Oulipians Georges Perec and Jacques Roubaud. It also discusses an audio piece by Perec, *Tentative de description de choses vues au carrefour Mabillon*, as a list and a catalogue in sound. Finally, the fourth section analyses *Les habitants du Louvre*, a book-project by Jacques Roubaud and artist Christian Boltanski (produced for the exhibition), which uses the list form to disrupt conventional associations about the artworks exhibited and stored in the Louvre, underscoring the material processes and persons involved in the maintenance of the Louvre itself. Contrasting the names of artists exhibited in temporary exhibitions at the Louvre, with the names of persons responsible for those exhibitions, *Les habitants du Louvre* reminds readers of the ways that the museum has structured the art world along gendered, class and racial lines, while also revealing the power of lists to restructure this world through alternative criteria of assembly, most notably through the imposition of various oulipian constraints. In these lists we are consistently halted in the flow of our associative processes, at once pointing out their presence and also encouraging various ways of reconfiguring these associations.

In the second part of this chapter, “107 Âmes: The Census Poetics of Personhood,” I consider a project by Jacques Jouet, *107 Âmes*. For this project, Jouet anonymously circulated a survey to 107 people and

subsequently used the information to create poem-portraits of each of them. In each of these works, there is an inclusion of raw information and data within the literary text. In so doing, information is placed in tension with the individual subjects to which it pertains and points towards new, imagined communities based on the alternative information collected and its renewed legibility through poetry. This has transformative possibilities for such projects, their practitioners, and the readers and viewers who encounter them, just as it marks the potential to transform the very systems that it implements.

I. Lists, Catalogues and Collections: the Oulipo in the Louvre

Lists in Context: Background and Theoretical Approaches

How does the meaning of a list change when it appears in literature?

How do lists play upon readers and viewers and how does the affective experience of a list play upon its information-bearing function? These are some of the questions that are addressed in this section of chapter two and I address these questions through existing discourse about the list in literature and the historical emergence of the list as a written form.

Lists typically function as organized accumulations of related information, but when they appear in literary texts or visual art their meaning is changed. If, as William Gass has argued, lists “retard the forward movement of the mind. We remain on the site,” then where the list appears in literature and art, meaning is suspended and narrative continuity gets tripped up.⁰ By generating kinds of *caesura*, the list both points out the fact that there has been a rhythm to the text which surrounds it and enables certain epistemological gaps to be filled in. By breaking with this rhythm, the fact of rhythm, pacing, and continuity become visible and the role of these in the production of an overall meaning or sense is highlighted. As such, in literature and visual arts, the list is a tool for insisting on the present moment and for creating conceptual or readerly hesitation. When it appears in literature the list

⁰ William Gass, “And,” in *Voicelust: Eight Contemporary Fiction Writers on Style*, ed. Allen Wier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989), 119.

also becomes a space of epistemological uncertainty; a moment wherein a particular conceptual framework stammers. As Philippe Hamon has suggested, “la liste nous paraît effectivement toujours peu ou prou un élément étranger, inassimilable de l’oeuvre, une sorte de kyste textuel radicalement différent.”⁰ However, because it reads as distinctly un-literary and un-artistic, the list occupies a peculiar position with respect to the fictional and poetic that is further complicated by its more conventional function as a tool for conveying information. In her essay “Inside the List,” Patti White suggests, “the list inevitably represents a moment of stasis in an interminable series of decision points.”⁰ In this respect, the list operates much like literary language, requiring regular decisions (and assumptions) on the part of the reader. Unlike other forms of writing, the list suspends the need for meaning and refuses narrative continuity and because we are normally embedded in continuous language (sentences), the list marks a literal textual break.

In his book *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* (2000), Robert E. Belknap contends that literary lists are deliberate structures, built with care and craft. However Belknap has also noted the affective dimension of lists. He claims that a significant part of the intrigue of lists is that they can be simultaneously, “so cold, so objective, [yet] so compelling.”⁰ The list conjoins calculation and concern, reason

⁰ Cited in Bernard Sève, *De haut en bas: Philosophie des listes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2010), 108.

⁰ Patti White, *Gatsby’s Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1992), 102.

⁰ Belknap, *The List*, x.

and affect—even when a list is utilitarian, it has the power to excite the imagination.⁰ As a result there is a certain visual and readerly pleasure to be found in a list: “we follow its progression, priding ourselves on seeing and predicting connections and inclusions. Sometimes the pace or tune alters, but we follow willingly, challenged yet undeterred by the transitions, winding around and through the possibilities.”⁰ In the introduction and first chapter of his book, Belknap establishes the parameters of the list, which he will then consider in separate chapters each presenting one of four case studies from American literature (Thoreau, Emerson, Melville and Whitman), and significantly he makes distinctions between the operative functions of the list in prose and poetry. Poetry, in Belknap’s framework, has a distinct advantage over prose, because “the stacked lines of a verse provide virtual ledger entries in which the poet can itemize,” whereas the list in prose usually appears horizontally within the phrase or paragraph.⁰

Lists allow artists and writers to embrace a pseudo-scientific spirit that disavows any scientific claim to the exclusive tools of rigorous categorization and measurement. It also points to the intersection of the scientific and linguistic—scientific data usually require some linguistic explication. As Salomon Hegnauer suggests, listing in the space of aesthetics is not really about a strict order or classificatory system, but

⁰ Ibid., xii-xiii.

⁰ Ibid., xiii.

⁰ Ibid., 15.

rather creates the opportunity for speculation more broadly.⁰ When a list appears in art or literature, it suggests a second order of attention, a kind of play that is nonetheless capable of serious critique and of generating valid insight. In the chapters that follow, I discuss ways in which contemporary literary and artistic practices inhabit outdated modes of scientific inquiry, and use these as tools for transforming the aesthetic traditions to which they belong. The oulipian travel projects *Frévent* and *À Lorient*, discussed in the chapter three, appropriate techniques of historical travel writing and the modes of observation and exploration endemic to it, in order to investigate various “unknown zones,” in this case towns in the countryside of Northern France. Similarly, in the final chapter on meteorology, I discuss the ways in which writers Jacques Roubaud and Stéphane Audeguy use an extant historical discourse on clouds as a fulcrum on which a series of literary investigations is hinged. Similarly, the list serves writers and artists as a means of accessing the history of ideas from within aesthetic practice and it channels the means through which certain types of historical knowledge were produced. The tactics of the list, however, continue to exist as techniques for communicating information in the contemporary world. Although lists are often used to represent scientific forms of data such as the census and surveys (which will be discussed in part two of

⁰ Salomon Hergnauer, “The Rhetorical Figure of Systrophe,” in *Rhetoric Revalued: Papers from the International Society for the History of Rhetoric*, ed. Brian Vickers (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 183.

this chapter), they are also used to quickly convey populist information, most notably among these is the 'Top Ten' and 'Best of...' varieties. In the literary and artistic projects discussed in this chapter there is a confrontation with forms of rationality that would call the subjective value of things into question.

In his 2009 essay "A Science of Lists: Medieval Jewish Philosophers as List-Makers," Tamas Visi argues that the introduction of the term *Listenwissenschaft* by Wolfram von Soden, (which he used to characterize certain ancient Sumerian lexical lists), ushers in the notion of a "'science of lists' as a way of organizing knowledge, doing science, or even as an approach to reality itself."⁰ Visi describes how for Maimonides, the medieval rabbinical scholar, a list was by no means a trivial way of arranging information or an instrument that had only an auxiliary role in scientific research. Instead, it was a powerful way of transforming knowledge. By his lists, Maimonides redefined (sometimes invented) many possible fields of inquiry, introduced new hierarchies among objects and principles, appropriated older learning and accommodated it to new thought-patterns, and explicitly or implicitly demanded new competences at the expense of others from the participants in discourse. In Maimonides's discursive practice, making a

⁰ Tamas Visi, "A Science of Lists? Medieval Jewish Philosophers as List-Makers," in *The Charm of a List*, ed. Lucie Dolezalova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12.

list was a rather aggressive restructuring of a possible field of knowledge.⁰

Jack Goody also discusses the concept of *Listenwissenschaft* in his essay "What's in a List?" For Goody, the significance of the Sumerian tablets that led to the particular branch of knowledge known as *Listenwissenschaft* is that they provide "a kind of inventory of concepts, a proto-dictionary or embryonic encyclopaedia."⁰ In this respect, the written form of the list was not merely a "by-product of the interaction between writing and the economy"; it was constitutive of the economy itself.⁰ While the emergence of the list certainly reveals a "significant change [...] in the nature of transactions," Goody makes the much more radical claim that it also represented transformations "in the modes of thought that accompanied them."⁰ The list "is transformed by writing and in turn transforms the series and the class."⁰ In his essay, which uses the very form of the list to demonstrate that written language is not, or cannot only be, the by-product of oral language because it makes structures of thought possible (such as sequencing, series, discontinuity) that are not possible in oral traditions alone. Goody claims:

⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁰ Jack Goody, "What's in a List?" in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press, 1994), 80.

⁰ Ibid., 81.

⁰ Ibid. For Goody, "a characteristic of the presentation of information in the form of lists is that it must be processed in a different way, not only from normal speech but from other ways of writing." (81) Goody later considers the debate as to whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. The question makes no sense in an oral context, but it "may be essential to the advance of systemic knowledge about the classification or evolution of natural species. And it is the kind of question generated by written lists." (105)

⁰ Ibid., 105.

The explicit formulation of category systems or semantic fields (e.g. kinship terminologies, zoological species and literary genres), is a function of the reduction of classificatory terms to writing, and not simply writing in a linear fashion, but writing that takes words out of their speech context and places them, so abstracted, in a unilateral relationship with words (concepts/morphemes, lexical units, possibly phrases) deemed to be of a similar 'class', i.e. possessing certain common features which may be related to the concrete world outside (i.e. animals, trees) or to some other ordering concern.⁰

Unlike other forms of writing, the list suspends the need for meaning and narrative continuity. Because we are normally embedded in continuous language (sentences), the list marks a literal textual break. It is "opposed to the continuity, the flux, the connectedness of usual speech forms [...] and substitutes an arrangement in which concepts are separated not only from the wider context in which speech takes place, but separated too from one another."⁰ In this sense, lists are fragmented; the items on a list form textual islands of suspension that relate to one another in a suspended system of their class—a state which is not apparent in oral or narrative discourse.

Vertige de la liste: The Louvre Exhibition

The previous section underlined some of the key ways that the list (as a conceptual framework and as a literary device) has been understood by scholars and thinkers. This section will discuss a specific example of 'the list'.

⁰ Ibid., 104-5.

⁰ Ibid., 81.

In 2009, Umberto Eco was invited to curate a series of Louvre programmes that he collected under the title *Vertige de la liste*.⁰ The exhibition comprised a number of works by artists ranging historically from the early modern to the contemporary yet it only consisted of one small room at the very end of the Denon wing of the Louvre.⁰ Visitors would have had to pass by the Italian painting collection from the thirteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, the entire Spanish painting collection, as well as English landscape painting before finally arriving at the relatively modest exhibition. Much like their early nineteenth-century counterparts, therefore, contemporary visitors received an ambient lesson in the history of art through its systematic presentation by nation, chronology and subject matter (a hanging practice that the Louvre was instrumental in establishing), before arriving at the exhibit itself.⁰ However, an exhibition of lists in the context of the Louvre unsettles spectator expectation in two important ways. Firstly, the exhibition brought together works from a variety of

⁰ As a Louvre auditorium manager has explained, “the Louvre special guest is a project in which a major figure gives his or her vision of the Louvre on the basis of a chosen theme. Around this theme a multi-disciplinary programme of exhibitions, lectures, concerts and installations is organised.” (Quoted in Cristina Carrillo de Albornoz, “Umberto Eco: Master of the List,” *The Art Newspaper*, accessed 11 November 2009, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Umberto-Eco-master-of-the-list/19656>. Other guest curators have included Toni Morrison, Anselm Kiefer and Pierre Boulez.)

⁰ By contrast, the first page of the *Vertige de la liste* programme enumerates the scale of events as follows: “63 lectures, 3 concerts, 1 exposition, 1 chambre de merveilles, 2 accrochages, 5 conférences, 8 documentaires, 300 courts-métrages, 1 spectacle, 1 colloque, 51 intervenants.”

⁰ Indeed, Andrew McClellan and Nick Prior, among others, have demonstrated that during the Enlightenment, inspired by new taxonomies in natural history, art museums and private collections were increasingly classified and displayed according to school and chronology. See: Nick Prior, *Museums & Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*. (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 33; Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 3-4.

national 'schools' and historical periods, thus affirming the curious persistence of the theme of the list in art and cueing viewers to a broad return to history in contemporary art itself.⁰ Secondly, the pieces in the exhibition were understated in their artistic ambitions and in some cases not intended for display at all. In many respects, Eco's program merely re-stages the twentieth-century avant-garde gesture, which sought to subvert the hierarchies of museum classification through popular forms more prevalent in everyday life. However, Eco's project traces a lengthy historical lineage for art based on the list.⁰ In the contemporary context, the power of such a gesture lies less in its counter-cultural positioning than in its ability to inhabit the modes of epistemological inquiry endemic to the museum. In this respect, the exhibition is not only a kind of artistic project in itself, but also, by way of the list, opens the possibility for reconsidering current trends in curatorial and museological value, as well as the Louvre's specific history and continued functioning as a site of cultural production.

The visual dimension of the written word was at the core of *Vertige de la liste* or in English, *The Infinity of Lists*. Viewers of the exhibition

⁰ Former Louvre conservator Michel Laclotte shows how the museum's tradition pedagogical functions carried through in *Le Grand Louvre*: "Nous avons donc proposé d'exploiter ce sujet, le Louvre, comme source d'inspiration, et plus largement le thème des *revivals*, des rapports entre l'art ancien et les créations plus récentes, à travers une série d'expositions." *Histoires de musées: Souvenirs d'un conservateur*. (Paris: Éditions Scala, 2003,), 268.

⁰ Making a point that is now widely accepted, Didier Maleuvre contends in his book *Museum Memories*, "The avant-garde thus appointed itself the bad conscience of the institutionalization of art. The museum became the effigy of everything in aesthetic autonomy that was injurious to the individual artwork." Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 50.

might not have been surprised to find the beautiful calligraphy of “Alphabet de 1466” by Le Maître E.S., or a copy of it done a few centuries later by Antonio Pucci because such works are consistent with the historical framework for which the Louvre is well-known. But in placing these works alongside Eugène Delacroix’s slapdash “Liste de Couleurs” and Richard Serra’s similarly low-tech and straightforward “Verb List,” the exhibition becomes unusual, particularly in the context of the Louvre. Serra’s verb list and Delacroix’s list of colours serve as guides for future art projects—reminding the latter artist of possible colours to create or use in his works and for the former serving as a reminder of possible actions for manipulating sculptural materials. Exhibiting these lists not only reveals their dual roles as decorative and ornamental pieces, but also underscores an instrumental element to the list, not conventionally associated with masterworks in the Louvre collection.

Discussing *Vertige de la liste*, Eco envisions his curatorial task as follows: “The subject of lists has been a theme of many writers from Homer onwards. My great challenge was to transfer it to painting and music and see whether I could find equivalents in the Louvre.”⁰ Having identified a persistent theme in the history of literature, Eco’s exhibition translates this theme into the field of art. Eco was guided not only by the subject of lists and enumeration generally, but also by the qualities of

⁰ Carillo de Albornoz, “Umberto Eco: Master of the List.”

lists, such as voluptuousness and the effects of abundance or, as he terms it, 'vertigo': "I want to invite people to go beyond the form of the physical limits of the picture, to imagine the etcetera, a very important concept that suggests that it may continue."⁰ In this respect historical pieces from the Louvre's collection that otherwise have no real list element to them, can be said to have a list-like quality, because they invoke similar notions of categorization and accumulation. Eco is thus tempted to see voluptuousness in images which would not normally be considered lists at all. For example, Eco defines Giuseppe Archimboldo's *Spring* (1573), and Tullio Pericoli's *Robinson and the Tools* (1984) as lists even while the latter clearly represents the act of list making (rather than a list in itself) while *Spring* is a compendium of objects without linguistic analogues.

In his 2010 book, *De haut en bas; philosophie des listes*, Bernard Sève contends that "toute pratique séquentielle peut avoir allure de liste —sans en être une."⁰ For Sève, things can take on the qualities of a list:

Je parlerai donc d'«allure de liste», pour désigner non pas les effets (émotionnels, cognitifs, esthétiques) qu'une (vraie) liste peut susciter chez son lecteur, mais le sentiment de se trouver en présence d'une liste, alors qu'aucune liste n'est effectivement là. Il y a allure de liste quand nous sommes face à quelque chose qui, sans être une liste, offre une saveur de liste, a un air de liste, éveille dans notre esprit l'idée d'une liste possible—et provoque donc, à l'occasion, le genre d'effet que suscitent les listes, d'ennui à la jubilation.⁰

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Bernard Sève, *De haut en bas: philosophie des listes*, 82.

⁰ Ibid., 65-66.

Eco's sense that things can have list-like qualities of abundance is articulated by Sève as a series of affects that are experienced rather than as some quality of the object. In the context of the Louvre the list is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a visual one, and while the lists exhibited are unmistakably lists, comprehension is nonetheless forestalled because of the variety of languages—English, French, Italian—which ensure that while we grasp these *as lists*, what they are *lists of* remains unclear. Much like the readerly hesitations discussed by Belknap, as works of art these pieces are difficult to fathom. They collapse expectations about the boundaries between art and life, and the notion of masterworks that the Louvre is known for.

Yet Eco's focus on the textual (an appropriate starting point for an author) may detract from one of the more radical implications of his curatorial project—namely, that in encouraging spectators to consider the list, he might also encourage reflection on the museum as an institution which generates lists. Moreover, artists who take up the list form might be critical of the methods through which information and data are ordered and stored in the museum. In this respect, Eco is closer to the kinds of art practice that trade on archives and museums themselves (Mark Dion and Christian Boltanski for example), such that “the archival work done by artists is constructed outside the institution and is often at odds with the conformity of the institution,” even if

ultimately these works are displayed in museums and galleries.⁰ What is important about these lists is that they “develop alternative kinds of ordering to those of the museum or traditional collection” and this point is entirely elided in Eco’s exhibition statement, even while the exhibit’s thematic organization is distinct.⁰

In the catalogue *Vertige de la liste*, Eco takes the opportunity to explore various historical documents and art objects, ranging from Homeric texts to the work of French writer Georges Perec without actually formalising a particular conceptual framework under which such disparate objects could be gathered. The catalogue, one senses, reveals Eco’s joyous encounter with various lists, and collects examples of these, but in so doing it reproduces a concept of the list that lacks critical rigor. As Robert Belknap has argued, “lists differ from catalogues in presenting a simple series of units, without the descriptive enhancement a catalogue usually provides. The catalogue is more comprehensive, conveys more information, and is more amenable to digression than the list.”⁰ However, Eco’s catalogue lacks coherence—on one hand the argument is being made that lists have always preoccupied artists and writers, while on the other hand, the overwhelming number of contemporary (postwar) pieces suggests that it is a distinctly modern phenomena. In taking disparate types of list and listing these, his

⁰ Joan Gibbons, “The Ordering of Knowledge: Museums and Archives,” in *Contemporary Art and Memory*, (London: Taurus, 2007), 135.

⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁰ Belknap, *The List*, 2-3.

catalogue does not make any significant claims about the list-form in itself, or its relation to the Louvre, but rather seems content to perpetuate the banal assertion that there are many different lists that have interested people historically. However, as Bernard Sève rightly points out, “inventaire, catalogue et énumération présupposent un geste antérieur, qui consiste à fabriquer une liste,” so in many respects, Eco’s catalogue fails to transform from a mere list of lists into a catalogue in any meaningful sense, nor does it address the catalogue of the Louvre collection critically as a list in itself.⁰

In another register, Jean-Marc Terrasse suggests that Eco’s theme,

examines the Western mind’s predilection for list-making and the encyclopaedic format. In fact his central thesis is that in Western culture a passion for accumulation is recurring: lists of saints, catalogues of plants, collections of art, all show how in the right hands there can be a ‘poetics of catalogues’.⁰

Terrasse’s language suggests that Eco’s exhibit is a natural extension of a cultural “predilection” and “passion” for enumeration. However, it is widely accepted that public art museums have consistently demonstrated their integrity and power through “the systematic ordering of their contents,” and as Andrew McClellan suggests, “a rational, seemingly neutral classification and display of art yielding knowledge has long been viewed as the guarantee of the museum’s commitment to the public good.”⁰ If lists have been used to produce

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas: philosophie des listes*, 115.

⁰ Terrasse is quoted in Carrillo de Albornoz, “Umberto Eco: Master of the List.”

⁰ Andrew McClellan, *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), xvii.

knowledge and information within many disciplines, then it follows that an exhibition of lists as art objects also produces doubled, or second order knowledge.

Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* has inspired art historians and curators to contextualise the birth of the museum in relation to the emergence of other forms of modern knowledge.⁰ Although Foucault never discusses the museum as such he nonetheless approaches a definition of the list in his discussion "Classer": "[L'archéologie] montrera que ces organisations sont discontinues, qu'elles ne forment donc pas un tableau de simultanités sans ruptures, mais que certains sont de même niveau tandis que d'autres tracent des séries ou des suites linéaires."⁰ Using Foucauldian analysis, Donald Preziosi contends that the museum is "inseparable from a variety of 'external' practices, disciplines, and professions with which it evolved."⁰ In recent work Preziosi has sought to identify the main "epistemological technologies" of modern art history and museology, and maintains that the museum condenses philosophical, ideological, social and political

⁰ Foucault does, however, describe a set of imbricated tendencies in the nineteenth-century which are deeply related to the functions of the museum: "l'instauration d'archives, leur classement, la réorganisation des bibliothèques, l'établissement de catalogues, de répertoires, d'inventaires représentent, à la fin de l'âge classique, plus qu'une sensibilité nouvelle au temps, à son passé, à l'épaisseur de l'histoire, une manière d'introduire dans le langage déjà déposé et dans les traces qu'il a laissées un ordre qui est du même type que celui qu'on établit entre les vivants." Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966,), 143-144.

⁰ Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 230.

⁰ Donald Preziosi, "Philosophy and the Ends of the Museum," in *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*. ed. Hugh Genoways (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006), 74-75.

practices.⁰ Moreover, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Andrew McClellan have each demonstrated that the early Louvre served to reorganize its objects in a new series of relations and in so doing its contents were given coherence and new meaning.⁰ Finally, art historian Tony Bennett argues that the nineteenth-century museum “helped to form a new public and inscribe it in new relations of sight and vision,” that is to say, new relations of power forged through a complex association of soft disciplines and institutions of culture.⁰

It is not surprising, then, that since the opening of *Le Grand Louvre* there has been a notable shift in the museum’s techniques for attracting new publics to the museum. Speaking of precisely the kinds of multi-platform programming that characterised *Vertige de la liste* (involving lectures, conferences, and notably cinema and music), art historian and former conservator of paintings at the Louvre, Michel Laclotte, describes the effect of such techniques as follows: “tout cela constituait finalement une quantité de propositions variées qui ont attiré et attirent au Louvre des milliers d'auditeurs, devenus pour beaucoup de fidèles visiteurs au musée.”⁰ Indeed *Le Grand Louvre* was not only a reinvention of the museum but also redefined the museum as a

⁰ Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art Museums and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 13.

⁰ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 180; Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum*, 111.

⁰ Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *The Birth of the Modern Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73.

⁰ Michel Laclotte, *Histoires de musées: Souvenirs d’un conservateur* (Paris: Éditions Scala, 2003), 266.

constantly evolving space of cultural activity. It thus requires visitors to return regularly because conservators and curators would perpetually generate “une vision rajeunie de tels ou tels oeuvre, école, siècle, culture.”⁰

Simultaneously, many contemporary artists took up elements of history and the history of art as methods for orienting and creating their work. To this end, Nicolas Bourriaud has identified contemporary art practices that could not work “hors de la connaissance de son histoire.”⁰ Indeed, Bourriaud suggests that for contemporary artists “c’est dans la passé que l’on peut aujourd’hui faire des découvertes.”⁰ Thus Bourriaud’s description of the main tenets of contemporary art practice, (as for example when he suggests “il faut également remettre en question la solidité des choses, pratiquer un relativisme généralisé, un comparatisme critique sans pitié pour les certitudes les plus adhésives; percevoir les structures institutionnelles ou idéologiques qui nous encadrent comme circonstancielles, historiques et donc réformables”) are met by similar values in the transformed museum.⁰

By contrast, the 2010 exhibit *Lists: To-dos, Illustrated Inventories, Collected Thoughts and Other Artists’ Enumerations for the Archives of American Art*, at The Lawrence A. Fleischman Gallery (an outpost of the

⁰ Jean Lacouture, “Suite, sans fin: Le Louvre demain,” in *L’invention du Grand Louvre* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2001), 265.

⁰ Bourriaud, *Radicant*, 43.

⁰ Ibid, 43.

⁰ Ibid, 17.

Smithsonian Institute in Washington), takes up the notion of the list in a way which differs significantly from that of the Louvre exhibit. The Fleischman *Lists* exhibit was largely comprised of what we could consider practical lists—to do lists, to buy lists, packing lists for travel, and lists of recommendations. While artists made all of these lists, they were not made as art, nor are they exhibited as art-objects. Rather, the exhibition (or at least its curatorial mandate) was more interested in what lists could reveal about the biography of the artists displayed than in conceptualising the possibility that lists can constitute art in and of themselves as Eco's mandate assumed. For example, Oscar Bleumner's messy, barely legible inventory of his works is included in the exhibit because it is revelatory of his state of mind. This is given a particular affective valence by the historical knowledge that he would go on to commit suicide shortly after writing the list. Indeed, Liza Kirwin, the Archives' curator of manuscripts claims that:

This very mundane and ubiquitous form of documentation can tell you a great deal about somebody's personal biography, where they've been and where they are going... People can relate to this form of documentation because so many people are list keepers and organise their lives this way.⁰

Therefore, the lists in the Fleischman exhibit were selected for their intrinsically mundane, human and everyday qualities so that viewers could easily "relate" to the exhibit. The impulse towards the personal and biographical which characterized the exhibition is understandable

⁰ Liza Kirwin quoted in Jane O'Brien, "The Art of List-Making," BBC News March 3, 2010, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8537856.stm>

given that its contents were from collections at the Archive of American Art, and is therefore entirely consistent with the archive's historical function. However, in eschewing consideration of the particularities of the list as form, subsuming it under an archival impulse—which privileges the biographical trace through a variety of more ephemeral, process-based supports such as letters, notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks and now, evidently, lists—the exhibit contributes very little to debates about contemporary text and image studies, nor does it helpfully contribute to the central question raised by the list's appearance in the exhibition space: how does the list form relate to the formal ordering of the museum exhibition and collection? And what does the list accomplish artistically? If the list can reveal "someone's personal biography," then it should be noted that the items which make it onto that list play a determining role in his or her image. As such, the principle governing the list itself is central to the information that emerges from it. Lists are constructed yet suppress as much information as they offer, and this is what allows us to see situated and particular knowledge formations in examples of the list. Robert Belknap contends, "lists are plastic, flexible structures in which an array of constituent units coheres through specific relations."⁰ In this sense, the list is as fluid a construct as the identity it purportedly describes.⁰

⁰ Belknap, *The List*, 2.

⁰ Ibid., xii. As Belknap argues, "with the multitude of things and signs from which to choose, it can be exceedingly gratifying to get our list exactly right—and then to remake it all over again."

The inclusion of a project by Vito Acconci in the Fleischman exhibit, perhaps more accurately described as an unofficial will and testament made on the occasion of a flight Acconci took to Halifax, is a fascinating case in point. The curatorial discourse focuses on Acconci's fear of flying (made clear in his four point list 'on the occasion of a crash') rather than problematising this list by underscoring the fact that much of Acconci's artwork actually looks just like this list: acting through similar forms of enumeration, and insisting on various actions through the use of the imperative. Acconci's artwork is typically 'grungy' in aesthetic style, eschewing the high-gloss finish preferred by artists like Sophie Calle, discussed in part two of this chapter. There is something slap-dash and low-tech about most of Acconci's projects that makes the appearance of the list in his work generally personal and biographical, while also highlighting the profound connection between the affective and operative or technical dimension of his work. What makes this piece comically dark is the operative aspect, the attempt at a legal document; rather than Acconci's fear of flying, it is this appropriation of legal testimony in the form of the list that is interesting and funny because it is broadly generalizable to other people and other scenarios where a perceived (even if irrational) fear motivates the production of declarations and documents. For Acconci, these documents make an interesting ground on which to produce art for that very reason.

Contemporary works were also displayed in the Louvre exhibit. John Baldessari's "I will not make any more boring art" was included in the Louvre exhibition, for example. It depicts the title's phrase repeated over an entire sheet of paper. Students at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, upon receiving a handwritten page to be reproduced in an exhibition and a videotape of the artist writing the sentence, compiled the piece. After having been invited to the College, there wasn't enough money to actually fund Baldessari's travel there, so he proposed that the students voluntarily write the sentence "I will not make any more boring art" on the walls of the gallery, like punishments given at school. Baldessari's piece, displayed in the context of the Louvre, is problematic because Baldessari intentionally worked against received notions of art, based on academic traditions, which have been safeguarded by institutions like the Louvre. Repeatedly iterating an otherwise interesting provocation or idea becomes boring over time, as viewers read through each line of the piece, its intrigue is subtly worn away, becoming increasingly tongue-in-cheek.

In fact, the vast majority of works included in the exhibition were by little-known contemporary artists and successfully engage with the theme of lists to varying extents. Dora Garcia's "100 oeuvres d'art impossibles" is a piece that enumerates works of art that evidently cannot be realised as such:

- 34- tout oublier
- 35- tout se rappeler
- 46- remplacer tous les livres par leur reflet dans la glace
- 49- mettre le même texte dans tous les livres
- 65- ressentir la douleur de quelqu'un d'autre
- 80- remplacer le jour par la nuit
- 100- rien

While the work is full of potential (even if impossible projects), it is not clear that the individual items could constitute works of art even if they were realised, thus calling the list's criteria of assembly into question. Works included by Ryan Gander can hardly be said to constitute lists: "A diagram to show the history of movement and change to the student notice board of the Architecture Association, London." This is a piece which is clearly identified as a diagram, and where any lists that may have occurred would be incidental and happenstance. And this is also true of a piece by Anne and Patrick Poirier, *Mnémosyne IV*, whose title may evoke the historical relationship between the list and memory, but whose visual outcome remains ambiguously connected to the theme. All of this suggests the extent to which the theme of lists is positioned somewhat arbitrarily in the gallery space. On one hand, the argument is being made that lists have occupied a consistent space in the arts historically, while on the other hand, the overwhelming number of contemporary works position it as a modern phenomenon achieved to varying degrees of success, but which often feel like arbitrary inclusions based on availability or some other criteria.

Through artists, periods, media, and subject matter, one of the primary functions of the museum comes out of an ethnographic and anthropological impulse towards categorization and classification which was characteristic of the nineteenth century, and integral to, if not requisite for the birth of the modern museum. Indeed, Georges Perec's "Penser/Classer" incorporates the history of exhibition culture in his rumination on lists and list-making, taking as his exemplar the Universal Expo of 1900 (the culmination of nineteenth century museological practice) and comments made by its general commissioner: "«il faut» écrivait M. Picard, que les produits s'offrent aux visiteurs dans un ordre logique, que le classement réponde à une conception simple, nette et précise, qu'il porte en lui-même sa philosophie et sa justification, que l'idée même s'en dégage sans peine."⁰ Yet, as Perec dutifully points out, despite having divided the many objects on offer into supposedly structured groups and classes, "les catégories se succèdent sans qu'aucune idée de système se dégage avec évidence."⁰ According to Perec, from the very beginning the logic determining the ordered categories of exhibitions and classifications is justified quite simply by "une métaphore banale."⁰ But as Perec rightly points out, the problem with classifications and categorizations "c'est qu'ils ne durent pas ; à peine ai-je fini de mettre de l'ordre que cet ordre est déjà caduc."⁰ As the

⁰ Quoted in Georges Perec, *Penser/Classer*, (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 158.

⁰ Perec, *Penser/Classer*, 159.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid., 163.

list grows, managing the list, and the objects and information it represents, takes on an increasingly important role, but the temporality implicit in the construction of such a linearity renders it entirely contingent and momentary.

Unlike the Smithsonian show, in the exhibition catalogue for *Vertige de la liste* Eco insists on a distinction between practical and poetic lists. For Eco, “what often distinguishes a poetic list from a practical one is only the intention with which we contemplate it.”⁰ In this sense, the list featured in the context of the Louvre demands a kind of poetic or aesthetic attention to a work of art, and this really is an unusual way of engaging with lists.

In their own way practical lists represent form, because they confer unity on a set of objects that, no matter how dissimilar among themselves, comply with a *contextual pressure*, in other words, they are related for their being expected to be found all in the same place, or to constitute the goal of a certain project.[...] A practical list is never incongruous, provided we can identify the criterion of assembly that governs it.⁰

I will return to this idea of the ‘criterion of assembly’ in my discussion of *Les habitants du Louvre*, but for the moment it should be noted that the connotations, rhythms and associative possibilities of each list are changed by reconfigurations and permutations in the criterion of its assembly. “Nonliterary lists must have a practical composition in order

⁰ Umberto Eco, quoted in *Vertige de la liste*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Éditions du Musée du Louvre, 2009), 371.

⁰ *Vertige de la liste*, 113-116.

to be useful, but literary compilations, though they generally have some inner logic of form, have no such obligation.”⁰

Robert Belknap’s distinction between the practical and literary list is also significant to note here:

The literary list, however, is complex in precisely the way a pragmatic list must not be. In a literary work, lists and compilations appeal for different reasons. Here we do not hunt for a specific piece of information but rather receive the information the writer wishes to communicate to us.⁰

Belknap wants to demarcate a specific territory for the literary list, because he believes writers use lists to “mark off the literary from the nonliterary.”⁰ In the context of literature and art a list may begin from a specific principle, but can just as easily flower into a profusion of items relating to other principles forming “their own constellations of form for which there is no identifying label.”⁰

Eco describes a tension inherent in the list or, to use his terms, “a swing between a poetics of ‘everything included’ and a poetics of the ‘etcetera’.”⁰ In compiling the catalogue, Eco was faced with the task of making a meticulous record of the occurrences of lists in the history of literature and the history of art. In this respect, his catalogue effectively becomes a list of lists. What is interesting is that in a number of my examples the very task of thinking about lists, once posed, necessitates

⁰ Belknap, *The List*, 5.

⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

the production of a list, as if lists cannot be properly considered unless actively implemented, and this is evident too in Eco's catalogue.⁰ There is, therefore, a kind of contagion of lists whereby the initial gesture of the enumeration, leads quite quickly to an excess of potential, if not actual, lists. As Rowan Tomlinson has argued, listing is both celebrated and exploited as a means of capturing variety in verbal form.⁰ Moreover, this is a primary characteristic of the initial gesture of any curatorial impulse, albeit one which is turned inside out and made the very subject of that exhibition itself. As Eco contends, "the list also becomes a way of reshuffling the world, acting as an invitation to accumulate properties in order to bring out new relationships between distant things, and in any case to cast doubt on those accepted by common sense."⁰ If this is true of the list in conventional, knowledge-based or sociological realms, then it should also apply to the aesthetic realm, wherein the appearance of the list, whether literary or visual, reveals an engagement with the modes through which knowledge is produced and an ambition towards transforming them. As Charles Merewether has suggested, "lists are caught up in the very things that they connect; and if they are modified they can be transformed with them into certain decisive thresholds."⁰

"L'art de la liste" and "Les joies ineffables de L'énumération"

⁰ This will become clear further on in considerations of works by Jacques Roubaud and Georges Perec, where the contagion or mania for lists is most evident.

⁰ Rowan Tomlinson, "Thinking with Lists in French Vernacular Writing, 1548-1596" (D.Phil, Oxford University, 2008), 8.

⁰ *Vertige de la liste*, 327.

⁰ Charles Merewether, *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), 27.

Georges Perec⁰ describes mundane activities, such as list-making, in equally philosophical and poetic terms in a section of his *Penser/Classer* essays appropriately titled 'Les joies ineffables de l'énumération':

Il y a dans toute énumération deux tentations contradictoires ; la première est de TOUT recenser, la seconde d'oublier tout de même quelque chose ; la première voudrait clôturer définitivement la question, la seconde la laisser ouverte ; entre l'exhaustif et l'inachevé, l'énumération me semble ainsi être, avant toute pensée (et avant tout classement), la marque même de ce besoin de nommer et de réunir sans lequel le monde («la vie») resterait pour nous sans repères : il y a des choses différentes qui sont pourtant un peu pareilles ; on peut les assembler dans des séries à l'intérieur desquelles il sera possible de les distinguer.⁰

And in another passage, expressing ideas similar to those of Eco, Perec strikes at the heart of the problem of the list:

Comme les bibliothécaires borgésiens de Babel qui cherchaient le livre qui leur donnera la clé de tous les autres, nous oscillons entre l'illusion de l'achevé et le vertige de l'insaisissable. Au nom de l'achevé, nous voulons croire qu'un ordre unique existe qui nous permettrait d'accéder d'emblée au savoir; au nom de l'insaisissable, nous voulons penser que l'ordre et le désordre sont deux mêmes mots désignant le hasard.⁰

Perec's ruminations on enumeration are not merely philosophical, but participate in a larger set of interconnected literary projects which he worked on throughout his career. In these projects he made use of lists

⁰ Interestingly Perec haunted the Louvre programming, even where his own lists were not explicitly included. Nonetheless his influence upon those participating in the programmes (in music and performance especially) was evident. As well as releasing Perec's *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*, there was also a reading of passages from the piece and from *La vie mode d'emploi*. Similarly, members of the Oulipo and friends of Perec's were invited to perform a listing exercise. In a "Listing cérémonie," Perec's texts were also featured.

⁰ Perec, *Penser/Classer*, 167.

⁰ Perec, "Notes brèves sur l'art et la manière de ranger ses livres," in *Penser/Classer*, 42.

and list-making in a number of ways that sought to redress what he perceived as a lack of enumeration in contemporary writing.⁰ His *Penser/Classer* collection of essays not only reveals just how fascinated Perec was by listing and the dynamic tensions it implied, but also relates these to the more ludic dimensions of Oulipo—lists generate various potentials—and to the personal life of Perec himself.⁰

Unsurprisingly then Perec's friend and fellow Oulipian Roubaud has also written extensively on lists in two separate pieces: "Notes sur la poétique des listes chez Georges Perec" and *L'art de la liste*. In "Notes," Roubaud begins with the idea that:

les textes de Georges Perec, dans leurs états préparatoires aussi bien que finaux, sont «mangés de listes». D'habitude, la passion énumérative est visible partout (et elle s'étendait même, on le sait, jusqu'aux chapitres pré-préparatoires de l'oeuvre que sont les activités ordinaires de la vie).⁰

⁰ Perec, "Notes concernant les objets qui sont sur ma table de travail," in *Penser/Classer*, 21-22. In a lovely passage, which moves outward from, as the title suggests, the immediacy of the objects on his desk to the types of enumeration found in texts by Rabelais and Verne, Perec claims that "L'écriture contemporaine, à de rares exceptions (Butor), a oublié l'art d'énumérer."

⁰ In "Les lieux d'une ruse," (also in *Penser/Classer*) for example, Perec describes how he keeps an "objective" diary every evening, in which he records the simple facts of his day. Much like On Kawara, discussed elsewhere in this thesis, Perec notes the time he wakes, how he used his time, where he went, what he bought/read/saw etc. (69) But he also, perhaps more importantly, describes a "panique de perdre mes traces" which accompanies his fury for conserving and classifying such details (69-70). In an interview with Bernard Noël, Perec describes his great admiration for Jules Vernes's ability to "donner pendant cinq pages des noms de poissons sans que ce soit ennuyeux, enfin il y a des gens qui trouvent ça ennuyeux, moi je trouve ça fascinant." (31)

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, "Notes sur la poétique des listes chez Georges Perec," in *Penser, Classer, Écrire: De Pascal à Perec*, eds. Lucien Dällenbach, Béatrice Didier and Jacques Neefs (Saint Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1990), 201. Also of interest is the connection Bernard Sève makes between lists and the idea of sets, particularly given that Roubaud's research as a mathematician was in set theory: "Sans doute la notion de liste se rapproche-t-elle alors dangereusement de celle d'ensemble." (Sève, *De haut en bas*, 20)

Roubaud's contention is that Perec's finished work and notes are consumed by lists, as much as the life of the author was itself consumed by lists. The practice of listing discussed in the essay necessitates and proliferates more lists. One cannot talk about lists, it seems to suggest, without in fact making a list oneself. Thus the essay is structured as an enumeration, organized as a numbered list (while also containing lists of various types). Surprisingly, one finds a cornucopia of enumerated lists that are not from Perec's oeuvre at all. In fact, where the appearance of specific lists in literature is discussed, Roubaud more often cites other poets, such as Gertrude Stein, John Ashbery, Michèle Métail and Kenneth Gangemi, rather than Perec himself. Under the auspices of discussing Perec's work therefore, Roubaud takes the opportunity to discuss lists in literature more broadly—creating a minor canon of 'listers' as well as working to categorize the types of list that appear or could appear in literary works by Georges Perec and others.

While he explicitly sets himself the task to "dresser la «liste des listes» de Georges Perec : la classer par espèces," his project quickly expands to situate the list within a larger history of poetry: "comme le Nil le poème-liste, la forme poétique de la liste, remonte jusqu'à la plus haute antiquité..."⁰ In his 1998 text, *L'art de la liste*, Roubaud places the list at the heart of the origin of language through the specific form of the *poème-liste*. Interestingly, his contention may be supported by the work

⁰ Roubaud, "Notes," 202.

of Jack Goody, given that Goody argues for the primacy of the list in written culture and suggests that written culture's emergence came as a result of it, not that the list emerged once writing came into existence. In the first 1500 years of documented history (that is to say writing), "the most characteristic form is something that rarely occurs in oral discourse at all, namely, the list."⁰ Roubaud's essay is structured through numbered sections on lists and he connects these specifically to the history of poetry and the history of language more broadly. In a section titled "A) Naissance de la liste," Roubaud begins with a thought-experiment: "@ 2 Mais supposons (on peut toujours supposer) que la première forme poétique, aux origines fabuleuses de la poésie, ait été la liste. L'art de la liste apparaîtra alors comme vénérable."⁰ By insisting that listing was the first poetic form, Roubaud goes on to assert that "la langue est une forme d'expression dérivée de la poésie." In reversing the conventional wisdom which holds that poetry is derived from, or somehow secondary to ordinary language (which must first exist before effectively becoming poetic), insisting instead on the primacy of poetry to language, and furthermore, the primacy of the list within the history of poetry, Roubaud's deduction follows from the intuition that the world rarely, if ever, presents itself in singular form. "Les premiers poètes furent obligés de choisir une stratégie pour la restitution poétique du

⁰ Goody, "What's in a List?", 79. Further substantiating Roubaud's wild claims, Goody's research claims that "out of the 508 documents (from Mesopotamia), some two-third consist of lists rather than consecutive prose or poetry." (86)

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *L'art de la liste* (Paris & Tübingen: Éditions Isele, 1998), 7.

monde, avec son exubérance.”⁰ Evidently, the list is the best possible poetic form for treating this ebullience.

What is surprising about these essays is that Roubaud reveals a set of compelling arguments that situate the list in a position of relative historical importance throughout the history of poetry and language more generally: “Tout au long de son histoire multi-millénaire, la poésie, en toutes langues, a eu recours à la liste, glosée ou pas [...], listes des guerriers dans Homère, listes généalogiques dans la Bible et dans Rabelais.”⁰ Not unlike Eco’s contention that lists have consistently preoccupied writers, Roubaud insists that lists have served writers as a tool. Moreover, the list “est une forme particulière, universelle et constante, de *l’amour de la langue*.”⁰ This idea is also iterated in ‘And’ wherein William Gass claims “lists are finally for those who love language, the vowel-swollen cheek, the lilting, dancing tongue. [...] Life itself can only be compiled and thereby captured on a list.”⁰ The vibrant multiplicity of the world is sensed through categorization in the form of the list. At least a part of the pleasure, the vertigo, or the excitement of this multiplicity is felt by poets through the profusion of vocabulary that it necessitates. The sheer variety of linguistic choices that becomes

⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁰ Ibid., 12. Perhaps even more radically, Roubaud claims that the sequence of numbers itself, is or was the first poem. “Notes” concludes with the assertion that “la liste a clairement un lien substantiel avec la notion d’ordre, de séquence, de succession. Et le premier des grands poèmes-listes en toute langue est: un, deux, trois...” (206). In this respect, the list (as poetic form) is as ancient as numbers themselves, explaining perhaps the etymology of words like enumeration.

⁰ Roubaud, “Notes,” 204.

⁰ Gass, “And,” 120.

available to a poet through a list of words (or things, or actions, or places) serves to renew language and it can do so perpetually even through reading the same list repeatedly. For Roubaud, “chaque fois, au cours des siècles, que la poésie a hésité, ne sachant quelle voie prendre, elle s’est penchée sur son passé et a retrouvé la liste.”⁰ By returning to the list as form, poets may actually be returning to an essential element of their craft: language itself in all its polyvalent potential. In so doing the language of poetry can be renewed, refreshed, and polished as it were. Through such critical re-imaginings and returns, the list’s appearance in art and poetry may also signal transformations in the aesthetic regime of art and usher in a new paradigm of creative production.

Of Perec’s many projects that make use of the list, his audio recording *Tentative de description de choses vues au carrefour Mabillon* may be the most interesting, where an explicit engagement with enumeration is concerned, because lists often play upon both the visual arrangement of words on the page as with the aural qualities of those words.⁰ The audio project was recorded for the Atelier de Création Radiophonique and was aired on Radio France on February 25, 1979 though the recording was made on May 19, 1978. The audio project was

⁰ Roubaud, *L’art de la liste*, 12.

⁰ Tomlinson, “Thinking with Lists,” abstract. Tomlinson often focuses on the aural dimensions of listing, something which I have not chosen to concentrate on except in a perfunctory way where necessary, because of the diverse nature of my core texts. Rather than adding an aural dimension I wanted to focus on the visual through historic and scientific forms of the list.

connected to a more general interest in ‘tentatives de description,’ which included his *Lieux* project, as well as *La Clôture* and *Les lieux d’une fugue* and especially *Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien*. Interestingly Bernard Sève uses this latter project as an example of how “la littérature, dans certains de ses moments expérimentaux, s’est emparée de cette possibilité d’écrire un «texte objectif», sans auteur.”⁰ In these projects, Perec visited a number of Parisian locations and endeavoured to describe, in list form, what he saw there during a specified period of time. For the project, Perec spent six hours in a mobile recording studio situated in the Carrefour Mabillon in Paris. From this vantage point, he gave voice to the things he saw there. Although it begins with a description of the stable physical elements of the place, Perec’s attention quickly shifts towards those elements that are passing through it: pedestrians, cars, buses, and the particularities of each of these. The audio recording is an enumeration. Because of the sustained and continuous temporality of voice and its recording, various recurrent elements ‘appear’ which give the project a kind of rhythm and pattern, and these are the aural reflections of the rhythm and meter of the place itself. After the recording was transcribed, Perec took up the text and subjected it to “un comptage systématique des véhicules et des passants.” He used different colours to underline and distinguish on the transcribed page the objects which interested him, and more often than not these also coincided with the frequency of their occurrence. These

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas*, 89.

things were then inventoried in a list which was read out, recorded and dubbed back over the original recordings, notably loudest at the beginning of each segment.⁰ Not only do these secondary inventories alert the listener early on to the persistence of certain elements that pass through the carrefour, giving “rythme à l’émission, une sorte de scansion interne,” but they also shore up and reify the tension between the ephemeral and something more permanent that Perec was interested in. They allow a passage from an inventory of the real, to that of the textual. In this respect, “l’enregistrement énumère des choses, l’inventaire dénombre des mots. Or le dénombrement des mots, concernant un ensemble fini (le tapuscrit), est maîtrisable et peut aboutir à une liste exhaustive. L’inventaire est une revanche de l’écriture sur la nature.”⁰ For Perec, therefore, the list served as a fulcrum for a set of tensions that consistently emerges in his writing.⁰

While the various *tentatives* may appear overtly invested in the potential for classifying and categorizing the variegated elements of everyday life, Perec was keenly aware of its risk:

Toutes les utopies sont déprimantes, parce qu’elles ne laissent pas de place au hasard, à la différence, aux «divers». Tout a été mis en ordre et l’ordre règne. Derrière toute utopie, il y a toujours un grand dessein taxinomique : une place pour chaque chose et chaque chose à sa place.⁰

⁰ Bernard Magné, “Carrefour Mabillon: ‘ce qui passe, passe...’” in *Georges Perec: Poésie Ininterrompue, Inventaire*, ed. Bernard Magné (Marseille: André Dimanche Editeur, 1997), 65.

⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁰ Ibid., 65-66.

⁰ Perec, *Penser/Classer*, 156.

The list in the domain of art and literature opens up ways of considering this dark fantasy of total knowability and the fantasy of its perpetual incompleteness. These pieces also offer a second-order of knowledge; there is a primary form of knowing and an extra, doubled and often recursive form of knowing added to the initial forms offered as art and literature. Moreover, it reorients the list's relationship to objective forms of knowing, insisting on more exploratory and speculative modes of thinking. In this respect these works reveal, on one hand, that knowledge can leave us cold and unmoved, and yet, on the other hand, "the pleasurable infinitude of lists," suggests that there may be value in drawing up the lists in themselves.

Les habitants du Louvre

Les habitants du Louvre is a book-project by Christian Boltanski and Jacques Roubaud produced by Éditions du Louvre in association with the *Vertige de la liste* exhibition. The connection between the list and the museum is further elaborated in the book, which surreptitiously problematizes museological classifications and hierarchies through its earnest interest in playing with lists. Roubaud and Boltanski begin their project with two lists. "La première, la liste A, contient les noms des anciens, les artistes représentés dans le musée. Dans la seconde, la liste

B, on trouve les nouveaux, qui prennent soin des premiers.”⁰ In order to constrain what would otherwise make for an unwieldy and excessive list, list A is further constrained to include only those artists that featured in temporary exhibitions at the Louvre, while list B is further constrained to include only those museum employees directly involved in the preparations of those exhibitions. From the first list, Roubaud and Boltanski “a extrait des sous-listes qui constituent des propositions d’expositions temporaires, organisées selon des principes rationnels, moins frappés de la banalité qui règne dans les accrochages ordinaires.”⁰ The book subjects each of these two lists to 38 different constraints, thus generating 76 lists, plus an additional list represented by the index of all these lists themselves. The book also includes a series of black and white photographs in a project called “Portraits des habitants du Louvre.” In this series, (which operates much like a children’s flip book that can switch the face, torso, legs and shoes of one person for any other), the face is divided into two halves, upper and lower, and in each portrait one half of the face is taken from a painted portrait (presumably from works by artists in list A) while the other half is a photograph of a contemporary museum worker (presumed to be from list B).

The lists collected in *Les habitants du Louvre* make use of various types of constraint in playful ways which are typical of the Oulipo, while

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, “Introduction,” in Christian Boltanski and Jacques Roubaud, *Les Habitants du Louvre*, (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2009), unpaginated.

⁰ Ibid.

others are specific to the material and aims of the book. Combined they are a testament to the sheer variety of ways of organising data and information.⁰ There are lists in univocalics which are limited to names that only have one of the vowels (one each in A, E, I, O,U and Y), there are lists of names in monoconsonantism, such as Dadd and Roore which only have one consonnant. There is a list of names with a minimum of two repeated letters, (for example Bosboom, Calcar, and Foucou), a list of hyphenated names, a list of names wherein the family name and given name have the same first letter, and ‘isosceles names’ which are names which begin and end with the same letter. There is also the *boule de neige* constraint which begins with the last name ‘Do’ and adds a letter wherever possible and in alphabetical order:

Do
 Dou
 Duck
 Dupuis
 Duyster
 Eeckhout
 Epictétos
 Euthymides
 Gentileschi
 Gainsborough⁰
 Hardivilliers

The *Boule de neige fondante* constraint works in the opposite direction beginning with a very long last name and dropping a letter by the same means. There are simpler constraints such as last names which are also more conventionally first names, as well as a list of last names which are

⁰ Wherever possibly I have underlined the determining element of the constraint to make it clearer to my own readers.

⁰ Evidently Gentileschi and Gainsborough are not in alphabetical order!

qualificatifs (i.e. ardents, belle, blanc, good, gros). The book includes a list constrained by gender that includes only two women painters (Anne Vallayer-Coster and Élisabeth Vigée-LeBrun, one can thus assume that the Gentileschi listed above is Orazio, Artemesia's father) as well as last names that are also forms of labour (i.e. Berger, Boucher, Boulanger). And there are also the more ludic forms (unique to the Oulipo): *ulcérations* (names which do not contain any letters not in the word ulcerations), or names which are also family members (Aloncle, Beauneveu, Cousin).

To varying degrees then, the constraints reveal lists that are ludic, sociological, and even political (as evidenced by the list of female artists). The sociological and political dimension is made even more explicit when the constraints applied to 'la liste A' are compared to those of 'la liste B.' The presence of non-Western names only occurs on the lists generated through the use of list B, which makes their absence in list A all the more conspicuous. Readerly expectation is laid plain particularly when reading list B, which contains no artists' names or renowned persons of any kind, yet the eye consistently seeks something familiar, so that the last name 'David' here takes on entirely different connotations though it recalls the David (Jacques-Louis) from list A. The constrained list "risque alors de fonctionner comme une machine à déformer la pensée" which dissolves conventional associations.⁰

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas*, 149.

By bringing these two lists into visual proximity both in the photographs and the lists themselves which place the caretakers of the works alongside the makers of those works, there is already an implicit restructuring of the hierarchies of museum self-representation. Conventionally curators, conservationists, and art handlers—basically all of the workers involved in creating an exhibition or caring for a collection—disappear in the end result of the mounted exhibition. However, in their project, Roubaud and Boltanski make these people (or their names at least) central, by equating them with the artists exhibited. List B trades in the currency of anonymity, wherein the names “elicit curiosity about the untold stories behind the anonymous,” who demand a kind of respect simply because of their proximity to the more recognizable names of the artists, but also because these are the people who took care of the Louvre collection. Speaking of Boltanski’s work more broadly, Kobena Mercer contends that his work is often “imbued with a density of feeling all the more affective on account of the absence of information about their original owners.”⁰

By focussing on temporary exhibitions, the book downplays the value of the permanent collection of the Louvre while the mundane form of the list neutralises the canonical names conventionally associated with the institution. Among the 36 constrained lists generated using ‘list A’ it is surprising that although hundreds of different names appear, very

⁰ Kobena Mercer, “Imagine All the People: Constructing Community Culturally,” in *Imagined Communities*. exhibition catalogue (Manchester: National Touring Exhibitions, Hayward Gallery, 1995), 15.

few are in fact recognizable as famous artists.⁰ Despite the fact that the project's explicit connection to the Louvre seems to invite readers to look for those artists and pieces most commonly associated with the institution, this temptation is constantly frustrated by the project's constraints which systematise the contents of the temporary exhibitions according to alternative criteria that make visible, by contrast, the striking number of unremarkable or now marginal artists that its collections contain. In this respect their work can also be seen in light of Gibbons's notion that "there is not only more than one way of knowing, but more than one way of remembering knowledge."⁰ Roubaud and Boltanski further this point by including list 37, "Quelques oeuvres peu connues d'artistes connus," which they claim is a version of the common oulipian $s+7$ constraint, though one wonders how applying this constraint would necessarily and without exception lead to unknown works of art, for surely eventually a well-known piece would appear through the permutation.⁰

Within the form of these constrained lists, each collected element demonstrates new or potential relationships that may never have been considered, and unanticipated dynamics develop when such 'strangers' are held close together, and this in turn places tension on accepted

⁰ A preliminary search turned up 18 well-known artists, among them, Antoon and Philip Van Dyck, Michel-Ange, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Jacques-Louis David, William Hogarth, Auguste Renoir, Thomas Gainsborough, Paul Cézanne, Giorgio Vasari, Jan Vermeer, Bernardino Gatti, Edgar Dégas, Jean-Antoine Watteau, Titien, Nicolas Poussin and François Boucher.

⁰ Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, 125.

⁰ Boltanski and Roubaud, *Les habitants du Louvre*, list 37.

orders. List 35, “Le Menu,” for example collects all the last names which are also food items (in any language), “Beer/Bol/Borch/Carpaccio,” etc. and in so doing creates an associative network between these names based on their object associations that serves to interrupt the usual course of thinking about art and about last names. Two lists, 31 and 32, enumerate last names that are also the names of musical composers and writers respectively. There is a mental operation in the form of a kind of disassociative labour when encountering a list in which “MOZART Anton” is listed as a painter specifically because of the similarity of his name to that of the composer Mozart (Wolfgang Amadeus). They thus play upon a common characteristic of lists: “la liste une fois lancée dans une certaine direction, tend à se prolonger toute seule,” and indeed this is even true of the cognitive processes required to comprehend a list.⁰ Likewise the list of ‘Écrivains’ requires a suspension in the usual association of thoughts:

BALZAC Edmé-Pierre
 BALZAC Jean-François
 BARBIER Pierre-André
 BOILEAU le Jeune
 CORNEILLE Michel
 CORNEILLE Michel II
 DESPORTES François⁰

The key to these lists is the way that the capitalisation of the last names and their placement in a prominent position, fixes our thought in a certain (usually conventional) direction. But this initial association or

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas*, 38.

⁰ Boltanski and Roubaud, *Les habitants du Louvre*, list 31 and 32.

connotation, is constantly returned to the actual object it denotes by the given name which follows it. In this way the associations made available initially are subtly broken down through the physical arrangement of the items and their details.⁰ As such, “la liste est à la fois une expression et une perturbation de la rationalité.”⁰ In this respect, William Gass has argued in his article on the conjunction ‘And’:

Lists are juxtapositions, and often employ some of the techniques of collage. The collage, of course, brings strangers together, uses its *ands* to suggest an affinity without specifying what it is, and produces thereby a low-level but general nervousness. It is one of the elements of a truly contemporary style. Lists [...] remove things from their normal place.⁰

Gass’s notion that lists “remove things from their normal place” contrasts with ideas put forward by both Perec and Eco, who think of lists as placing things in order and giving them a spatial organisation. For Gass, the physical or formal arrangement of items in an enumeration is what generates possibilities, or suggests alternatives.⁰ Moreover, the “list depends on physical placement, on location; it can be read in different directions, both sideways and downwards, up and down, as well as left and right; it has a clear-cut beginning and a precise end, that is, a

⁰ A list which began with first names might not be as effective in this respect because the initial assumptions would not be activated, and as such there would be nothing that could pull readers up from the text.

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas*, 54.

⁰ Gass, “And,” 118.

⁰ Ibid.

boundary, an edge. Most importantly, it encourages the ordering of items, by number, by initial sound, by category, etc.”⁰

⁰ Ibid., 81. White also claims that the list must be characterized “by a physical location, multidirectional legibility, and precise boundaries.” (Patti White, “Inside the List,” in *Gatsby’s Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative*, 106).

II. 107 Âmes: The Census Poetics of Personhood

Jacques Jouet's *107 âmes* is a collection of *poèmes biographiques* published in 1991. For the collection, Jouet used surveys to collect information about each of 107 subjects and he used this data to write a poem about that person. Using the tactics of the census to collect survey data of a private or personal nature, these projects experiment with the accepted means of measuring the human subject and quantifying the national spirit. They test not only whether poetry can access, represent and comprehend individuals about whom we have limited information of a distinctly sociological form, but they suggest that poetry may be better suited to such representations. While the portraits of each of his 107 subjects are unique (reflecting their subjectivity and individuality), each of those subjects is generalized twice: first, by the survey itself (which necessarily limits information to specific indices) and secondly, by rendering each participant in a poem of fixed form. The information given by each participant thus limits the poetic outcome, serving as a constraint while also giving Jouet the raw materials he requires to write his poems. The text as a whole gives form to various commonalities based on the types of information collected in the surveys. However, the project also gives form to difference, making apparent a variety of human subjects that can, in this case, only be understood in their relations.

In this project, like many others discussed in this thesis, Jouet maintains an amateur approach, insisting on certain clinical and procedural protocols while eschewing others. Firstly, all of the participants in the project (ultimately the subjects of his poems) have no relationship to Jouet either directly or indirectly and Jouet insists that he should not know of them even by hearsay. Secondly, (and in order to maintain his distance) he enlists *rabatteurs* to distribute the surveys, explain the “*contrat*” or requirements of participation, collect the surveys and, once the poems have been written, to disseminate a copy to the corresponding participant. These are portraits wrought exclusively from data; there is ostensibly no possibility for subjective contagion because the information is purged of explicit personal relations, though these are held at one remove. The project’s mandate, that Jouet doesn’t personally know the various subjects about whom he will go on to write the poems, feigns a kind of objectivity, but it also generates a critical distance that allows the material to appear as the sole mediator of the poetry but, as will be shown, Jouet’s work problematizes notions of transparency and facticity.

The survey, reproduced at the beginning of the collection, consisted of ten questions:

- 1.Votre prénom, suivi de votre nom.
- 2.Votre âge à ce jour.
- 3.Votre formation. Études, compétences professionnelles.
- 4.Votre profession à ce jour et, le cas échéant, celles qui ont précédé chronologiquement.

5. Votre lieu de naissance.
6. La ville, le village où vous demeurez à ce jour et, le cas échéant, vos lieux d'habitation antérieurs.
7. Votre type d'habitation, et à quoi elle ressemble.
8. Votre revenu mensuel moyen à ce jour.
9. Votre «situation de famille» à ce jour et, le cas échéant, celles qui ont précédé.
10. Un (ou plusieurs) événement, élément déterminant de votre vie.⁰

These details represent the accounting of personal life; and, like On Kawara's projects discussed in chapters one and three of this thesis, they keep the personal at bay. The questions mimic those of the census with the exception of number ten which grants subjects the freedom to express themselves more subjectively, but the overall tone is clinical, aiming at the collection of sociological and ethnographic types of information. There is also this repeated notion of "le cas échéant" which is not necessary in a census because of its periodic nature. In contrast to the fixed and historically situated knowledge-making practices produced from the national census, with this notion of "le cas échéant" Jouet opens his surveys to forms of temporality and transition, to specific subjects with specific histories that change over time.

Accompanying his survey, Jouet also included an *Avis* for participants, which explained the intention behind his project:

J'utiliserai le questionnaire ci-joint—si vous acceptez de le remplir—pour écrire un poème, poème descriptif, impersonnel autant que faire se peut. Pas de jugement de ma part, ni d'évaluation. Je vous demande de répondre aux questions de la façon la plus administrative qui soit. La règle est que je ne vous connaisse pas, même par ouï-dire. Mais une personne que nous connaissons l'un et l'autre a offert son entremise. De

⁰ Jacques Jouet, *107 âmes* (Paris: Seghers, 1990), 10-11.

votre côté, vous acceptez que je cite, en substance, vos réponses, que votre nom soit inscrit ... que le poème soit publié. Le fait que vous remplissiez ce questionnaire valant pour accord. Je vous ferai parvenir le poème dès qu'il sera écrit.⁰

In this respect, Jouet furthers the clinical aspirations of the project by requesting that participants—despite knowing that the information would ultimately be used to poetic ends—respond just as they might to any other administrative form that had to be filled out. Moreover, he insists that there would be “pas de jugements de ma part, ni d'évaluation.” Instead he aims at a neutral (what he calls ‘impersonnel’) description of the bald facts as they are given to him in the surveys. But in reading the poems as a collection, relational forms of knowledge emerge which suggest comparisons between the poems and persons alike. Yet Jouet insists on a kind of democratic flattening or even investment for each participant. “Puisque les humains devraient naître et demeurer égaux en droits,” Jouet contends, “chaque âme fait ici le sujet d'un poème de même dimension et de même forme.”⁰

Between September 1987 and August 1988 Jouet used the information collected in the surveys to write 107 *poèmes biographiques*. Using the oulipian constraint called “rime berrichonne,” (one of the less formally intrusive constraints in the oulipian repertoire) the book also becomes an exercise in the variable application of a set schema, a sort of *exercice de style*, in this case constrained by the information provided in

⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁰ Ibid., backmatter.

the surveys and then by the necessity of writing each poem in the same form.⁰

Blandine Leclerc est artiste
et prévoit une exposition
en 88, elle aura
37 ans. Née en clinique
à Paris, mais le monde est vaste :
un an à Nantes, réussit

à en passer deux dans l' État
du Massachusetts. Depuis lors,
demeure à Miribel Lanchâtre,
jardin: 700 m².
Quoiqu'en son cœur elle portât
la terre, elle vit en Hubert

Just le bon compagnon de ruche,
père de Coralie, pas peu
de Marguerite secundo.
Blandine chérit la montagne.
Les maladies vont sur ses proches,
elle, les lions n'y touchent pas. (29)

This poem is a rather prosaic description of Blandine Leclerc. Wherever possible Jouet seems to have mirrored information from the survey in a matter-of-fact style. However, certain lines of the poem do come through as a sort of narrative aside, as for example when he sarcastically reminds readers that “le monde est vaste” when describing Leclerc’s trajectory from Paris to Nantes. The joke conjures an implicitly limited range of experience, only to reveal on the next line that Leclerc spent two years in America. This is also apparent in the tense: next year “elle

⁰ According to the Oulipo website, the rime berrichonne “Fonctionne sur trois vers : les deux premiers vers ne riment pas, mais la fin du troisième vers est composée à partir de la consonne de l’un et la voyelle (ou élément vocalique : ou, on, etc) de l’autre.” <http://oulipo.net/fr/contraintes/rime-berrichonne> (accessed April 2, 2014).

aura 37 ans,” but for now, it is implied, she is 36 years of age. Similarly, because not all the poems enumerate all available information, it is clear that Jouet makes selections from what is given in the surveys. He is thus quite transparent about the fact that his poems are meant as mediations of the information provided and his voice is often explicitly present in the ‘je’ form.

En psycho un examen,
BTS commerce. In love,
la chose déterminante...?
Je ne peux pas ne pas ci-
ter: «La mort de mes amants
ou du moins leur tentative.» (20)

Jouet’s commentary (“Je ne peux pas ne pas citer”) in the poem thus brackets out the curious statement made by Danièle Wieder in her survey. In so doing, the poem retains surprising ambiguities even despite the supposedly objective and administrative methods used to collect the data.

Moreover, where family relations are suggested Jouet occasionally lets two or more poems interact, and this is encouraged by their sequential placement in the text. The poems on pages 60 and 61 provide portraits of Mireille Koch and Nicolas Maugenre. Each of the two poems begins with an acknowledgement of their imbrication, both as poems and as a couple. The first:

Parmi les traits singuliers
de Nicolas et Mireille,
il y a d’abord le nom:

elle est Koch et lui Maugendre
bien qu'ils soient de compagnie.

The second poem begins:

Voyons les choses communes:
leurs 6 500 f.
de revenu salarial,
à chacun

The two poems face each other on opposite pages and unite as one, and this is evident in their separate responses to the questionnaire: "L'autre est important pour l'un/ comme aussi l'un l'est pour l'autre./ C'est pourquoi je me permets/ces poèmes qui se mêlent."⁰ This coupling of poems is also apparent on pages 72 and 73, another pair of poems about a married couple, Anne Speed and Niall Meehan.

However, Jouet does not always create such explicit and binding connections between the poems and persons. As in the poems about "Annie Lesenne, épouse Bienvenue" and "Samuel Beauvais," on pages 42 and 43 respectively, we imagine that the two are related (that Samuel is the son of Annie), because they share the same progression of geographies and this passage is repeated in both poems: "Points de chute successifs:/ Région parisienne, Aix-en-Provence et le Périgord, / Cadouin avant Bigaroque." Jouet on the other hand, takes Samuel's statement «fils et c'est tout» to mean that "il est de la précédente," yet this seems the least convincing reason for imagining they have a family relation. Similarly, poems 77 and 78, about Peter Samis and Susan

⁰ Ibid., 61.

Church are related in that Peter is mentioned in the poem about Susan (“Mêmes âge et revenu pour Susan Church que Peter”), but we know from having read the previous poem about Peter, that he is married and living with a woman named Mary. Is the only thing that connects Peter and Susan the fact that they both have a monthly income of \$2000? Or are they friends of the same *rabatteur*? There is no way to definitively answer such queries but they nonetheless imply connections and a social continuum. Whether these connections are real or not is secondary to the insistence on building imagined communities through pattern recognition. Similarly, poems on pages 87, 88 and 89, are all about elderly German women. Where they reference each other the relationship between the three women remains unstated. For example poem 88, about Johanna Raabe, opens “Autre dame de Berlin” while poem 89 about Herta Albrecht begins “Si Johanna est divorcée...” thus referencing the previous poem without justifying such a connection. What is clear is that they are all German, of a certain age, and all are participating in the project. This, Jouet seems to suggest, is sufficient to place them sequentially in the text.

What is certain is that there are ambiguities and lacunae in the information presented in the surveys themselves. For example, Janine Marquet’s significant life events are listed as follows: “une naissance, un divorce voilà deux événements qui marquèrent une fille nommé Janine Marquet.” But then Jouet ponders “Naissance ... était-ce là sienne ou

celle d'un(e) autre sous elle?" The information provided, therefore, requires kinds of interpretation that Jouet sometimes develops in his poems, revealing the difficulty of decoding the survey information. This is largely achieved through variations in his voice and mode of address which allow him to position himself between the participant and the reader of the poem. In some poems, Jouet addresses the participant who, it should be noted, will also read the poem once it is sent back to him or her: "Professeur et Dunkerquoise,/ vous êtes née à Paris."⁰ But there are also points where Jouet's voice provides commentary on the surveys and the persons they imply. In the poem about Patrick Mercado, Jouet uses the information provided to imagine something unstated in the survey: "L'y verrais-je/ un ermite tibétain."⁰ Or in the following poem, he notes "discrète sur ses ressources/précise sur ses métiers."⁰ Yet this mode of address does not really transgress one of the rules Jouet promised to abide by—that there would be no judgment or evaluation. For at the points where Jouet's own voice emerges in the 'je' form, it is difficult to separate his perspective from the supposedly factual materials he is presenting. Jouet is not content to merely collect the data and offer this as a poetic outcome sufficient in itself, but rather uses that data to generate these portraits that nonetheless require a surprising amount of interpretation and intuition, even despite starting with the bald facts. There is a tension between the compartmentalization of subjectivity

⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁰ Ibid., 23.

characteristic of the survey, and a desire to reconstitute that subject in a new poetic form. The poems proceed by an indirect narrative, attempting to give form to experience.⁰ Wherever the poems fail to uphold the promise of objectivity, there they also reveal the possibility for poetry to bring persons into relation, to elicit concern for their well-being, and to attune readers to this process.

At the time that *107 âmes* was published, Jouet described the collection as 107 “poèmes biographiques,” but by the late 1990s the idea had developed into what he would eventually call *poèmes portraits*. Between June 1999 and March 2000, his *poème par jour* practice was entirely dedicated to such portraits. For these poems, Jouet would meet with his subjects for a short time, take notes, and then shortly after the meeting he would write the poem, naming the subject in the body of it, much like he does in *107 âmes*.⁰ Similarly a number of the poems in *Cantates de proximités* (2005) follow a similar trajectory. As this practice developed, Jouet described an emergent “économie du poème portrait” because of the particular relationship it fosters between the poet and his reader: “le sujet du poème en est aussi le premier lecteur.”⁰

The poems in *107 âmes*, while also being *poèmes portraits*, reveal marked social differences between the latter years of the 1980s and the

⁰ Sève, *De haut en bas*, 112.

⁰ See Éditions P.O.L. website for further information about this form in Jouet’s work: <http://www.pol-editeur.com/index.php?spec=livre&ISBN=978-2-84682-280-0>

⁰ http://www.pedagogie.ac-nantes.fr/1237461971099/0/fiche__ressourcepedagogique/&RH=1212497677105 (accessed April 2, 2014)

present. The most striking example is the currency, *francs*, in which subjects report their income. But transitions are also implied by the kinds of labour enumerated. Many of the subjects list their employment as various types of manual and industrial labour: gardeners, machinists, auto mechanics, retired farmers, and masons, among others. As such, and with the benefit of hindsight, the poems register an economy on the verge of significant transformations, towards what scholars now recognize as the post-Fordist economy in which Western cultures shifted away from manufacturing industries towards an information-based economy.⁰ Art critic Anthony Huberman has suggested that during this period art, and I think literary projects like Jouet's as well, were increasingly concerned with creating alternative forms of information that might "compromise our understanding of the world."⁰ He argues that "to disperse information," by which he means to usurp information and mobilize it for artistic or creative ends, "is to launch it into a complex constellation of relationships, causing it to intersect with a series of fierce interferences: power, politics, capital, speed, desire and technology."⁰ In pitting the neutrality of information against these other

⁰ Marina Vishmidt is suspicious about the "ebbing visibility of labour" in the post-Fordist climate and the various ways that "Conceptual art was found to coincide with, if not affirm, the 'post-Fordist' emphasis on information and subjectivity as engines of production." (Marina Vishmidt, "Situation Wanted: Something about Labour," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 19 (Autumn/ Winter 2008): 21-2) Similarly, Anthony Huberman argues that where "artists of the 1960s and 70s clung to information as a strategy and a tool to move beyond the modernist project, then artists working in the wake of post-Fordism are looking for ways to compromise the way information clings to their practice and identities." (Anthony Huberman, "I (not love) information," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 16 (Autumn/ Winter 2007): 19)

⁰ Huberman, "I (not love) information," 20.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

more dynamic, charged modes, artists and writers are able to “*puncture* information, [thus] throwing it off-course, making it leak and compromising its authority.”⁰ By coopting the tools and inhabiting forms of information, Jouet’s project and the others discussed in this section corrode conventional systems for producing information about subjective experience, generating possible alternatives to conceptions of a larger collective world. In this weird science, we can see the attempt at forming alternative social worlds and alternative understandings of collective experience. As artist Daniel Buren has observed, “in order [...] to get close to ‘reality,’ the ‘conceptual’ artist becomes gardener, scientist, sociologist, philosopher, storyteller, chemist, sportsman...”⁰ In the examples discussed in this section, the writer and artist become census-takers, statisticians and social surveyors, querying aspects of human experience organized according to conventional indices. These projects involve working in the world, using social life as the raw data from which art and literature can be produced. As Doris Von Drathen contends, such a processual approach is common in contemporary practice: “All the artists I have spoken to work unremittingly and almost by instinct on a kind of field research into the major concerns of human existence, grappling with such issues as love, life, death, time, reality, their inner conflict values.”⁰ These kinds of ‘field research,’ in her view,

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Daniel Buren, “Beware!” *Studio International* 179, no. 920 (March 1970): 100. Reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimon (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 144.

⁰ Doris von Drathen, *Vortex of Silence: Proposition for an Art Criticism Beyond Aesthetic Categories* (Milan: Chrata, 2004), 14.

are used in order to approach the central concerns of subjective experience, and in so doing they generate new notions of subjectivity as well as alternative kinds of information. Importantly then, such tactics are not meant to leave viewers and readers unaffected or unmoved.

Each of the poems in *107 âmes* provides a glimpse into particular experiences of life and death, love and inner conflict, time and reality. However, the poems address these issues in a clandestine fashion. What is surprising about these poems is the way that Jouet dispassionately enumerates important life events. For example, the poem about Christian Charpentier states the facts of a determining life event: “D’un mariage il a gardé / leur enfant, après divorce.”(55) Similarly, the poem about Agathe Luxcey contains the following image “souche mêlée, parents et frères, disjoints, suicides...”(84) In both of these examples, and in many others throughout the collection, there is a startling lack of emotion and affect even while scratching the surface of profoundly difficult emotional experiences. This is also true in terms of happy affects as when a number of subjects describe the birth of their children as the defining moment of their lives. The whole range of affective experience that makes up ‘a life’ cannot truly be registered in a survey, nor can it be redeemed merely by Jouet’s concession in his tenth question (“Un (ou plusieurs) événements, élément déterminant de votre vie”) which grants a more philosophical approach. From these disaffected fragments, however, Jouet tests whether poetry might redeem some of these

affective potentials from the myriad ways in which they are understood as ‘the facts of life,’ gently suggesting their persistence as meaningful events.

§

The backmatter of *107 âmes* describes the project and is in the form of a poem itself. It begins: “On a trop dit que le poème/ n’a d’autre sujet que lui-même/annulant par là toute fonction/narrative ou descriptive, historique ou morale,/comique ou de circonstance, politique ou biographique.” Registering a tendency in the late 1980s for poetry to take refuge in a hermetic, esoteric dimension, these poems are clear attempts to shift conceptions of poetry towards the material world. Benedict Anderson’s seminal study *Imagined Communities* (1985) is useful to consider in this context because of its conceptualisation of the role of census in the formation of community. For Anderson, “the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions.”⁰ Yet, because subjectivity fluctuates, moving through various states of becoming, census data produces valuable fixed information but it cannot address the transitive aspects of its subjects. Jouet’s project lends a sense of temporality to identity, showing how the subject holds multiple positions and variable attachments. The poems also reveal ways in which these positions and identification persist as affective experiences, as when the poem

⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 166.

identifies a subject as “célibataire,” giving the impression that this is an ongoing state of things when for all practical purposes that status could change rather quickly. For Anderson, the census enables a sense of the nation, which he defines as an imagined community: “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁰ Thus Jouet’s experiments in surveys and census taking suggest different ways of knowing others and different methods for imagining a community based on unacknowledged commonalities and affective experience.

As Daniel Levin Becker has argued in *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (2012), Jouet’s poetic practice is often scripted through daily practices that open onto questions of politics and the social world. “His early prose work,” Becker contends, “such as the *Mek-Ouyes* series and the larger, cyclical ‘Republic novel’ to which it belongs, deals with concepts of governance and citizenship in a civically existential way.”⁰ In these texts, as in *107 âmes*, “the political is literary,” and this aspect of Jouet’s work persists in recent texts such as *Bodo* (2009), *Le Cocommuniste* (2014), and the continuing *roman feuilleton*, the most recently published volume of which is titled *Agatha*

⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁰ Daniel Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 71.

de Mek-Ouyes (2011).⁰ For Becker, Jouet's work is particularly interesting because of its

underlying conception of poetry as a fundamentally communal activity, which manifests itself not only in the authorial self-effacement of *107 âmes* and a later collection of explicitly multi-player poems called *Cantates de proximité* (Local Cantates), but also in the example he sets by demonstrating structures other people can use wherever they are, whatever they're doing.⁰

Just as in Jouet's *Poèmes de metro*, these works make use of an enlarged notion of constrained writing, but it is also one that could be implemented more broadly and by more potential writers and this is what Becker is referring to in his idea of "communal activity".⁰ This type of literary activity importantly captures elements of the social world, rendering that world as a poetic relationality of which we are all a part.⁰ The census, as a tool used to engender an image of some imagined community, thus accesses modes of communal existence which Jouet's poetics then inhabit and transform, making an otherwise imagined collective tangible and concrete in the forms of poetry.

Levin Becker points out that in Jouet's work "there is a rare outward quality [...] without any sacrifice of interiority."⁰ What Levin

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Levin Becker goes on to suggest that Jouet is primarily "interested in making the practice of composition accessible, in fostering understanding of and appreciation for it on all sides. You or I could also write one poem for each day's commute to work..."(Ibid., 92).

⁰ On this see Lucy O'Meara, "Jacques Jouet, Jacques Roubaud and the Ethnographic Metro Poem," in *Oulipo@50 – L'Oulipo à 50 ans*, and Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 293-304.

⁰ Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels*, 92.

Becker is getting at is the sense in which Jouet's work often coopts the reader or participant into a sense of social collectivism, a shared plight, and one that sidesteps national traits and cultural stereotypes, allowing instead a rather impure, difference-filled body politic to emerge. This is a marked difference from the census-makers of the nineteenth century who, according to Anderson, had a "passion for completeness and [...] intolerance of multiple, politically 'transvestite,' blurred, or changing identifications."⁰ Certainly Jouet's insistence that "la poésie demande du concret d'abord," provides a starting point from which to insist on a transitive, shared experience, involving participation and opening new avenues for intersubjectivity based in common, everyday locales.⁰ But what Levin Becker terms 'interiority' may be more accurately described as an emergent form of intimacy that transgresses the boundaries of the personal and becomes public. Lauren Berlant observes that "to intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures [...] but intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared."⁰ Thus by taking the most common of signs, Jouet's poetics feel intimate while also pointing towards ongoing, collective experiences as the basis for that intimacy. Moreover, Berlant suggests that "intimacy [...] poses a question of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective."⁰ This was particularly apparent in

⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 165-166.

⁰ Jacques Jouet, *L'Histoire poèmes*, (Paris: Éditions P.O.L., 2010).

⁰ Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 281.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 283.

the above discussion of negative experiences such as divorce, familial strife, unemployment, the loss of a loved one or the loss of an entire way of life. Despite presenting these events in a dispassionate enumeration, Jouet's poetics succeed because they demand a kind of affective attachment through empathy or sympathy.

Showing a similar interest in the survey's ability to take a sounding of *pathos* and measure social relations, Berlant has discussed Miranda July's short film, *Are you anybody's favourite person?* In this film, actor John C. Reilly is positioned in a street setting and asks three passers-by "Are you anybody's favourite person? Are you the favourite person of anybody?"⁰ The film plays upon our expectations about attachments in present and past personal relationships. Like Jouet's project, it questions how 'the self' might be valued in relation to others, without guaranteeing any reciprocity, so that while July might be somebody's favourite person, that person will not necessarily be favoured in return. For Berlant, the film reveals the ways in which subjects can exist in relations of attunement without feeling a sense of belonging, showing how notions of a 'favourite' might foreclose other modes of commonality.⁰

⁰ In July's film (which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asyWVtoCjNM>), July claims to be the favourite person of her ex-girlfriend while the second participant, claims not to be the favourite person of anyone, and then reveals that he has a girlfriend in the present. Tying the tweekness of the film to a larger political issue is the third participant who refuses to engage, claiming when told it is just a survey, "Yeah but, I don't vote."

⁰ Lauren Berlant, Seminar at the School of Criticism and Theory, follow-up to guest lecture, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2012.

Many of Sophie Calle's projects also demonstrate kinds of attachment without belonging, displacing conventional boundaries of personhood through the use of weird science. This can be seen even in the early project *Les dormeurs*, in which Calle invited strangers (whose names were often suggested to her by friends and acquaintances) to sleep in her bed on permanent rotation for eight days while being photographed and observed. For this project, Calle described her process as follows: "I interviewed them, not to learn anything but in order to establish a contact that would remain distant and neutral, not too personal. The text is a way of establishing contact without becoming intimate."⁰ Like Jouet's survey tactics then, Calle's work also consistently recasts the spectrum of emotion through disavowing its personal dimension.⁰ This is most evident in *Prenez soin de vous*; a piece staged as a rather elaborate response to a break-up email from a man she dated for a mere 107 days. Showing an appreciation for the numeric, (and rather serendipitously given Jouet's *107 âmes*), Calle invited 107 professional women to respond to the break up email, but these women were obliged to do so from the perspective of their profession rather than with any sentiment, *pathos* or fellow-feeling. The resulting work is surprising because it withholds affective engagement precisely where we would normally expect some and, like July's short

⁰ Cited in "Sophie Calle in Conversation with Bice Curiger," in *Talking Art 1*, ed. Adrian Searle (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1993), 30.

⁰ Described by critic Linda Weintraub in *Art on the Edge and Over*, in Calle's work there is "no spark of emotion" and "no personal feelings are evident in her completed work." (Linda Weintraub, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970s-1990s* (Connecticut: Art Insights Inc., 1996), 66)

film, stages an indifference that is “dramatized by the expectation of attachment within this setting.”⁰ Moreover, the project insists on professionalism, objectivity and anonymity over and against familiarity, emotion and intimacy.⁰ But it also risks the intensely personal experience of a break-up in order to construct a large communal response to it and in so doing releases some of the personal burden of affect. Even in spite of the short-lived relationship and rather careless method in which it was ended, such experiences necessitate responses of some kind. Where a personal emotional response isn’t quite fitting, Calle’s work suggests that any number of other responses might be. The piece is thus not (or not only) a kind of revenge, but also a gently therapeutic process that brings people together using their work and it does so precisely because of the need for a response.

In *107 âmes*, Jouet’s poetics stage an inquiry into how various modes of identification and attachment might produce “transpersonal identities and subjectivities, [even] when those attachments come from within spaces as varied as those of domestic intimacy, state policy, and mass-mediated experiences of intensely disruptive crises.”⁰ By using the form of the census to collect information in an impersonal way, Jouet collects information that shuttles between personal experience and public policy, often implying how the latter may affect the former. In so

⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy,” 283.

doing, the poems allow us to notice various commonalities, creating intimacies precisely “when something [...] takes on a charge,” whether this is by resonating with previously read poems in the volume or through commonalities with the reader’s own life.⁰ Affect lays just below the surface of the poem, in the narrative cracks that plot out disruptions in the life lived. Importantly, these poems are therefore not just personal, but implicate readers in the affective and emotional vacuity that is retained in the poems. These commonalities are particularly necessitated where negative experiences (unemployment, the death of a spouse or geographical dislocation) are apparent. In these instances, there is an unease which “unsettles social and political relations between, within, and among many people, nations, and populations, especially formerly sovereign ones.”⁰ They demand kinds of fellow-feeling that are the foundation of social commonality. Unlike the formal periodicity of a conventional national census, which reveals broad, social and demographic trends of the recent past as *faits accomplis*, Jouet’s census is diagnostic, sensing and sounding out the unofficial state of individual and collective life in France.

In Jouet’s project what actually connects the various subjects to one another are the *rabatteurs*, who know Jouet as well as the various participants. As a result, the *rabatteur* haunts the text, making Jouet’s project possible but also raising questions about the relationships

⁰ Ibid., 287.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy,” 287.

between participants and the *rabatteurs*, between the *rabatteurs* and Jouet and perhaps even among the *rabatteurs* themselves. Thus, the poems constantly imply this missing participant, but withhold all information about him or her, insisting on kinds of neutrality that inhere in sociological studies with human subjects. The temptation to enlist secondary agents, go-betweens, is also apparent in a series of projects by Russian artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. For their “People’s Choice” series, the artists engaged Martilla and Kiley (a polling agency) to develop surveys that could help the artists understand what the people in a given country most want in a painting, just as they might do for products, brands and political parties through focus groups. The artists would then use this information to create paintings that reflect as many of the desired qualities as the artists could incorporate. The artists insist on the validity of the statistics used, even where the pollsters were unsure about the viability of polling subjective and aesthetic tastes:

At one point, flush with exertion, John Martilla, who led the focus groups, stepped behind the glass into the observer’s room. “They’re in over their heads,” he said, quickly gulping some water. The pollster had worried about this project from the beginning—worried that Komar and Melamid were romantic to think everyday people had any interest whatsoever in art, that creating a poll to plumb such interest, even if it existed, would be immensely, maybe impossibly, complicated (“I appreciate the concept, but it’s really *not* like testing a brand of soap.”).⁰

⁰ Joann Wypijewski, “ ‘Vox Pop’ Notes on a Public Conversation,” in *Painting by Numbers: Komar and Melamid’s Scientific Guide to Art*, ed. Joann Wypijewski (New York: Farrar, Stauss & Giroux, 1997), 53-54.

Martilla's anxiety about the possibility of gleaning meaningful data about art through polling is comical not only because it suggests that there are limits to the validity of polling data and limits to its ability to register the collective pulse. But it also suggests that Komar and Melamid seem to have taken the pollster's ability at face value in a way that the pollsters themselves do not: the artists have taken the poll seriously, putting their faith in the scientific process, while the pollsters remain unconvinced of their methods.⁰ The artists contended that "society now depends on polls [...]. And this is [a] scientifically accurate poll, so if this poll is wrong, then all polls are wrong," thus, the project seems to test a set of tools that are commonly taken for granted.⁰

Although Jouet claims that the poems would have the same form there is significant variety between the poems. Rather the poems have already been the subject of some editorial decisions, as Jouet does not always include all of the information given by the survey. A number of the poems have two stanzas while others defy the form entirely. For example, the poem on page 33 is *en prose* and lacks a title while all the others take from the name of the participant, because apparently the participant refused to answer the vast majority of the survey questions.

⁰ When the poll results came back such that "44 percent of American's prefer blue, 12 percent green and so on, and that 82 percent either strongly agree or somewhat agree that 'color affects people's moods,' John Martilla could relax. He hadn't been lured along some wild goose chase, after all. Science had come through." (Ibid., 57)

⁰ Alexander Melamid, quoted in "Blue Landscapes, Betwitching Numbers and the Double of Jokes: An Interview with Komar and Melamid," in *Painting by Numbers: Komar and Melamid's Scientific Guide to Art*, ed. Joann Wypijewski (New York: Farrar, Stauss & Giroux, 1997), 27.

The poem begins: "...dont le nom n'a pas d'importance, à l'en croire, mais faut-il vraiment? Rien n'autorise à jurer qu'il s'agît d'une *elle* ou d'un *il*."⁰ In defiance of the rules of the project, "ses professions sont oubliées, peu lui importent ses études, sa formation, ses compétences. Son revenu: «?!!!». Pas un mot qui agisse comme émollient, rien plus que ça qui l'incommode."⁰ The only information provided by this participant is that he was born in the 15e arrondissement of Paris. This anomaly prevents Jouet from generating a poem of the same form, and instead he chooses to discuss what is left out of the survey, exploring the potential answers if not the actual ones. This poem represents the outer limits of the project: the participation of a subject who refuses to disclose.

⁰ Jouet, *107 âmes*, 33.

⁰ Ibid.

3

Systematic Journeys: The Practices and Poetics of the Itinerary

“Observer la rue, de temps en temps, peut-être avec un souci un peu systématique.”

Georges Perec, Espèces d’espaces

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed literary and artistic projects that made use of lists and survey data. In this chapter I discuss projects that conceive of the journey as a kind of literary or artistic experiment. Central to these works is the notion of the itinerary, which can be formulated in three distinct ways: as the proposed plan or scheme for travel, as a route or course of travel in itself, and as the record of the journey composed en route or after the fact. As such, an itinerary presupposes a planned action, followed by a physical movement through a setting or landscape and the account or trace of the activity once it has been accomplished. An itinerary thus functions through connecting experience to writing and to forms of mobile storytelling, through presupposing a subject in action, through the narration or

representation of this action, and through embedding subjects within contexts and settings specific to each journey. If the projects discussed in this chapter can be described as experiments in travel, then a decisive element contributing to these experiments is established through the implementation of alternative criteria for travel, most notably an emphasis on monumental explorations of the near-at-hand.⁰

This chapter considers two literary projects, *À Lorient* and *Frévent*, which feature the writers' encounter with town environments in rural northern France. It also considers works in the visual arts by Richard Long, On Kawara and Francis Alÿs. These projects have their own idiosyncratic itineraries and implement various constraints for travel. While there has been a significant amount of critical work on these types of projects in Paris, *À Lorient* and *Frévent* represent a move out of the capital and into the landscape of France. In so doing, a distinct set of concerns arise which underscores the potential for aesthetic projects to act specifically where all signs of urban vitality are lacking. Despite being written fifteen years apart, the affects registered in these

⁰ Pierre Joseph's *Mon plan du Métro de Paris*, which generates a cartography of the Métro based on Joseph's personal and frequent routes, exemplifies this bidirectional understanding of the itinerary. As Nicolas Bourriaud has remarked, "Pierre Joseph reprend possession du monde en en "individualisant" les lieux communs, dressant la cartographie subjective de ses propres connaissances. Son plan du métro parisien ou sa carte de Tokyo, réalisés de mémoire, initient une topographie réhumanisée qui part d'une connaissance individuelle et transmissible, et non pas d'un savoir numérisé." (Nicolas Bourriaud, *GNS: Global Navigation System*, exhibition catalogue, (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, Éditions Cercle d'Art, 2003), 20.) While insisting on the relationship of travel to the map, Joseph's project also suggests that different cartographic systems might influence travel, such that a change in cartographic conventions will directly affect the journey, just as a shift in the specific criteria of travel will bear upon the forms of itinerary that it requires.

texts are borne from a precarious economic situation at a time when industry and agriculture are in flux, gradually being outsourced, and leaving workers without employment and, perhaps more perniciously, without traditional modes of identification. The aim of this chapter is to consider the encounter of contemporary Parisian writers with a rural, post-industrial landscape and to explore a range of affects that are embedded in that social milieu and to examine how such affects are allowed to emerge because of the particular modality of the project.

À Lorient is a collection of poetic texts and meditations written by Jacques Jouet and Jacques Roubaud. The poems trace their explorations of the port town of Lorient. The text foregrounds the embedded textuality of everyday existence in Lorient. Jouet and Roubaud visit Lorient at the invitation of the artistic director of the CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient with the instruction to “sillonner la ville, [...] ouvrir ses potentialités d’orientation, [...] trouver de la grandeur dans l’ordinaire.”⁰ While the plan of the city is prominent throughout the book, what is foregrounded is the potential and variety of outcomes that arise from each author’s different practices in the city. These texts are ludic and formally experimental, taking off from the curious orthography of the name of the town itself, but they also register what Kathleen Stewart has called “ordinary affects,” because they query “what potential modes of knowing, relating and attending to things are already somehow present

⁰ Bénédicte Vignier (Directrice artistique de CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient), Preface to Jacques Jouet and Jacques Roubaud, *À Lorient*, (Rennes: Éditions Apogée, 2010), 5.

in them in a state of potentiality and resonance.”⁰À *Lorient* works against the overriding image of the town being uninteresting, and at the same time bears witness to processes of social erosion and decay in France since the Second World War. While managing to cite the ways in which Lorient has ceased to function as it once did, the poetic meditations of the text restore its lost history and identity, and work to assure its present poetic interest. By working through the textual traces of the past, and creating contemporary poetics from these remnants as they persist in the lacklustre city streets, temporality is restored to the town, provocatively suggesting that things here might change. Instead of an ahistorical, atemporal conception of Lorient, the poems restore the history of the town so that new potentialities emerge from its very structure.

Frévent is a bookwork ostensibly about the town of Frévent, but which in actual fact emerges as an analysis of the subject experiencing that town and giving narrative form to those experiences. Constructed through correspondence, and conceived as an exercise in “voyages comparés,” *Frévent* recounts a travel project undertaken by Jacques Jouet, Claudine Capdeville and Pierre Laurent in 1991. Having selected the town of Frévent as their destination specifically because none of them had visited there before, and because of its proximity to Paris by train, each of the participants undertakes a solitary trip to Frévent on a

⁰ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

specified day: “Jacques le mardi 28 mai 1991, Pierre le mardi 4 juin, Claudine le mardi 11 juin.” Beyond these dates the constraints of the itinerary are simple: each participant must stay in Frévent for a minimum of ten hours. Following the trip each participant would write to the others about their particular experiences and activities in the town and, subsequently, each would respond to queries made by the other participants about the specifics of that experience. The book comprises these letters, which document three distinct experiences of Frévent, as well as the act of remembering those experiences and the act of narrating them. However, in recounting their experiences through written correspondence over the course of the year following the initial trip to Frévent, ambiguities, contradictions and apparent lacunae suggest that the subjects may have cheated the constraints of the project as it was originally set out.⁰ As inconsistencies between and within each subject’s description of their experience emerge from the letter-dialogues, what began as a modest local journey and innocuous attempt at describing it, becomes a debate about truthfulness, falsification, subjectivity and experience. Therefore, even in attempts at generating a critical and clinical discourse of the near, ambiguities are inevitable, and this seems particularly true in descriptive discourse. In a

⁰ One of the interesting facets of project-based work is that artist/writer participants often become bored with the project as they originally conceived it, and start adjusting their own procedures to respond to that feeling. This is evident in Perec’s *Lieux* project where the physical requirement of being in Paris each month for twelve years led to the project being abandoned. Likewise, in many of Sophie Calle’s works she experiences boredom or a lackadaisical approach to material, which explores different kinds of fatigue, particularly after long periods subjected to the regime, as for example in her hotel project in Venice.

project like *Frévent* which implicates the body of the participant directly, the aesthetic dimension is usually bound up in subjective, associative and affective experiences demanding self-reflexivity, even while this problematizes any apparent ambition towards objective description as it was initially established by the constraints of the project. The initial itinerary of the project acts as a summons to very particular practices of place (a 10 hour sojourn in Frévent), but the collective recording of those practices sets off a series of unexpected interrogations into the truth claims of the participants. Significantly, it does so through an aesthetic project.

This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section I outline three critical approaches informing my study of the itinerary: 1) critical approaches to everyday life in the city (and specifically Paris) that consider the role of urban textuality in creative productions; 2) the relations between affect theory and everyday life studies, considering works by Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant; 3) how critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of *topocritique* might be expanded to include literary as well as visual texts. Using these three approaches, the second section analyses Jacques Jouet's contribution to *À Lorient*. In section three I similarly analyse Jacques Roubaud's contribution to *À Lorient* and then contextualise this within an interconnected set of walking practices that are evident in much of his oeuvre. Continuing with an exploration of walking, section four considers Rebecca Solnit's

fascinating text *Wanderlust* and specifically focuses on the imbrication of corporeality and consciousness that has interested writers in the past. In this section I explore contributions to itinerary-based practices by conceptual artists Richard Long and On Kawara, and more recently walking projects by Francis Alÿs. Finally in section five I provide a close reading of *Frévent* showing how this work emerges as a new genre of travel writing, particularly well adapted to registering a historically precarious present through three subjective experiences of a constrained voyage. These projects are set up as modes of aesthetic displacement, operating with the surmise that going out of one's habitual, mundane trajectory can be used to effect aesthetic transgressions, pushing the boundaries of what constitutes literature and what counts as art. On one hand this is another iteration of the rather banal assertion that effecting change at the level of everyday life can have transformative effects on other levels of existence, whether creative, spiritual, health-related, or otherwise. But on the other hand, through embracing an ethos of experimentation, these projects set about testing the limits of the craft, producing valuable fictions and alternative representations that suggest that the world might be otherwise. This is already a relatively new way of conceiving of aesthetic production (though it is not entirely without historical kinships).⁰

⁰ As for example, the 1921 dadaist excursion to the deserted church of St.Julien le Pauvre, organized by Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara and Paul Éluard, precisely because "such sites have no reason for existing." From *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, ed. Francis Alÿs and Anne Wehrd (New York: Public Art Fund, 2004), 106.

Critical Approaches: Everyday Life, Affect Theory and *Topocritique*

In this section I provide the critical framework and scholarly context for this chapter. The three main frameworks informing this discussion are 1) urban space and *le quotidien*, 2) ordinary affects, and 3) Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of *topocritique*.

Following from ideas of *le quotidien*, there is already a significant amount of scholarship on urban spatial practices in French literature. In two related articles "'Naming the Streets': Experience and Identity in Contemporary Writing on Paris," (2002) and "Paris—City of Names: Toponymic Trajectories and Mutable Identities" (2011), Michael Sheringham contends that an expanded corpus of work on the *quotidien*, including works by Lefebvre, Barthes and Perec as well as literary texts by Ernaux, Modiano, Maspero and Queneau, reveals a tacit "return to experience."⁰ Inspired by the work of Michel de Certeau and Walter Benjamin, Sheringham's work argues that the appearance of specific street names in literary and visual projects can participate in and reiterate dominant spatial practices, or it can reveal ways to subvert or transform them through an inquiry into their meanings. The street name "plants the textual in the midst of the monumental, the relative

⁰ Michael Sheringham, "'Naming the Streets': Experience and Identity in Contemporary Writing on Paris," in *Thresholds of Otherness Autrement Mêmes: Identity and Alterity in French-Language Literatures*, ed. David Murphy and Aedin Ni Loingsigh (London: Grant and Cutler, 2001), 188.

immateriality of language in the midst of the concrete materiality of stone, brick and macadam.”⁰ Street names not only “conjoin materiality and meaning, textuality and monumentality,” but they can act as a hinge, transforming the meaning of linguistic signifiers and altering the meaning of particular spaces.⁰ Fascinating to authors and artists, historians, urban planners, and readers alike, street names engender “new modes of attention and new modes of representation.”⁰

But where Sheringham’s articles suggest that street names allow Parisian pedestrians to gain some purchase on “feeling oneself absorbed into the city,” or “made part of its mechanism,” it seems unlikely that towns the size of Lorient and Frévent would engender this sense of being overwhelmed or inundated. If Roubaud and Jouet have become accustomed to a Parisian urban rhythm which alternates “between named streets and nameless ‘disused lots’ (‘terrains vagues’),” then the musicality of Lorient and Frévent would likely have sounded quite flat, given that many of the named streets seem only to contain disused buildings and vacant retail stores. What in Paris appears as a tension between presence and absence, activity and passivity, is subverted in Lorient and Frévent because the contrast between the liminal and the interstitial states are less dramatic. Rather the city reveals different states of decay such that the material solidity of named space seems to

⁰ Michael Sheringham, “Paris—City of Names: Toponymic Trajectories and Mutable Identities,” in *The Cultural Identities of European Cities*, ed. Katia Pizzi and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 165.

⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁰ Ibid., 169.

become ethereal before the poet's very eyes.⁰ In ambulating through space, one is "continually and fluently responsive to an ongoing perceptual monitoring of the ground ahead," so that what the feet beat out is less a rhythm of urban space, than a "pattern of lived time and space."⁰ Lacking all conventional visual and cultural intrigue then, *Frévent* and *À Lorient* focus attention on the fact that it is "in the very 'tuning' of movement in response to the ever-changing conditions of an unfolding task that the skill of walking [...] ultimately resides."⁰

Street names gain an affective dimension either through explicitly relating to things that occurred in those streets themselves or to the connotations of the words that name that street. Street names "sponsor itineraries based on affect and whim,"⁰ and Sheringham further argues that street names "can be receptacles for feeling."⁰ But the city street can also be a testing ground for various affects: "through the sensuousness of the name we are brought into vicarious sensuous contact with the physicality of the street."⁰ A planned itinerary can

⁰ Tapping into similar affects to those described by Kathleen Stewart when she encounters a hotel while on a long drive through the Texas panhandle, a relatively unpopulated part of the state: "The scene is a little flat, dead, not quite right. [...] It's like a partially realized (or, in other words, failed) miracle. A fantasy tentacle floating in the stormy placidity of the nowhere of dully compelling force peppered by dreams of getting out or *something*." (Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 24)

⁰ Tim Ingold, "Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no.3 (2004): 335.

⁰ Ibid., 335.

⁰ Sheringham, " 'Naming the Streets', " 187.

⁰ Sheringham, "Paris—City of Names," 171.

⁰ Ibid., 171.

therefore be implemented in order to mobilize or withhold certain affects.

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Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (2007) forges important connections between studies of everyday life and affect theory. Stewart describes the everyday as a "life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided. It takes everything we have. But it also spawns a series of little somethings dreamed up in the course of things."⁰ Stewart's writing teases out these dreams and fantasies by presenting a particular scene or experience and she allows herself to play with it imaginatively, to return to scenes and rethink them, and to allow her readers to do so as well. Such processes, she argues, are quite ordinary and unexceptional. Echoing language often used to describe the everyday itself, for Stewart ordinary affects are simply "things that happen [...] in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something."⁰ The fear and the fantasy of the everyday and ordinary affects is found in giving one's self up. In these contexts, agency can become secondary, and subjectivity can be driven by another kind of force. "Ordinary affects," Stewart argues, "highlight the question

⁰ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 9.

⁰ Ibid., 2.

of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation. They're not exactly 'personal' but they sure can pull the subject into places it didn't exactly intend to go."⁰ Affects, thus, do not work through meaning or signification, but rather as "expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation."⁰ The itinerary projects in this chapter are aimed towards kinds of involuntary participation, and are attuned to the modes of knowing and relating to physical conditions that emerge from the project.

Stewart cites Lauren Berlant's work on affect as an important influence. Of specific importance are Berlant's concepts of the "noncoherent, the incommensurate, and the scenic, as well as of attachment, intimacy, exhaustion and the unliveable."⁰ Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* uses a mixed archive of literary, cinematic, and televisual texts that date from between 1990 and the present (overlapping historically with the literary projects discussed in this chapter). Her work seeks to reveal how certain long-held cultural fantasies about upward mobility, social security, and welfare have begun to fray and fracture in the present.⁰ Exploring elements of desire and attachment that are incoherent or inconsistent, Berlant insists that while optimism, as an

⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3. She continues "These new aesthetic forms, I argue, emerge during the 1990s to register a shift in how the older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies shape adjustments to the structural pressures of crisis and loss that are wearing out the power of the good life's traditional fantasy bribe without wearing out the need for a good life." (7)

affective form, allows us to “lean towards promises contained within the present moment,” cruel optimism is distinct because it “names a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility.”⁰ The types of attachment that Berlant considers cruel are those which the subject will not willingly lose despite the fact that their presence may threaten the well-being of the person. “Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss.”⁰ Berlant is thus interested in texts which register imminent loss, and her research “tracks the emergence of a precarious public sphere [...] of subjects who circulate scenarios of economic and intimate contingency and trade paradigms for how best to live on, considering.”⁰ All of her chosen films and texts share a local perspective, but such perspective can only really be understood through structural changes as “an outcome of globalization and neoliberal restructuring.”⁰ Thus, what Berlant is tracing in contemporary texts is a situation “in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changed, but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it [remain] unstable, in chaos.”⁰ The projects of *Frévent* and *À Lorient*, whilst not discussed explicitly by Berlant, enrich her corpus of texts and participate in an evolution of genres that might be better equipped to register the types of precarity she is interested in. They also register some of the problematic

⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 93-4.

⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 194-5.

⁰ Ibid., 6.

attachments to ideas about the French countryside, history and national identity that her work discusses with reference to other texts.

Throughout her project, Berlant locates zones where the ordinariness of suffering is apparent; “where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable.”⁰ Berlant devotes two chapters in her book-length study to what she calls “Post-Fordist affect,” and analyses two films by the Dardennes brothers *La promesse* (1996) and *Rosetta* (1999) in one chapter, and two films by Laurent Cantet *Ressources humaines* (1999) and *L’emploi du temps* (2001) in another. Berlant studies these films as instances of “spreading precarity [which] provides the dominant *structure* and *experience* of the present moment.”⁰ Interestingly her corpus of European films tracks specific kinds of locale (in contrast to a cosmopolitan geography) and similar attraction to these types of space can be seen clearly in both *À Lorient* (2010) and *Frévent* (1993) as well as texts such as François Bon’s *Paysage Fer* (2000), François Maspero’s *Les passagers du Roissy-Express* (2004) and Jean Rolin’s *Zones* (1997).⁰ Particularly in her analysis of Cantet’s films, Berlant suggests that the present is dominated by genres that tap into affects of animated suspension that reveal “the instability of the ongoing present as the ground for living. It is an aesthetic shaped by the fraying of norms.[...] Fraying implies something

⁰ Ibid., 95-6.

⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁰ At the Colloque Jacques Jouet in June 2013, Jouet revealed his great admiration for Cortazar and Dunlop’s *Les Autonautes de la Cosmoroute* (1983) and admitted that the *Frévent* project was conceived with it as well as Maspero’s project in mind.

slow, delicate, processual, something happening on its own time.”⁰ This is not the temporality of rupture and revolution, but the slow, natural time of evolution and decomposition. In both *Frévent* and *À Lorient*, each of the towns emerge as spaces in which people are living in the fray, and on the fringes, during a historical moment of loss, and what Berlant dubs a ‘glitch’: “an interruption amid transition,” the sense of being in the middle of a shift but without agency and possibly without consciousness of the shift itself.⁰

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The various itineraries discussed in this chapter can also be situated within an emergent discourse of ‘topocriticism.’ This discourse was developed by Nicolas Bourriaud in his essay “Topocritique: l’art contemporain et l’investigation géographique,” published in the Palais de Tokyo catalogue corresponding to the exhibition *GNS: Global Navigation System* (2003) which he curated. The exhibition serves as a corpus of visual examples that elaborate Bourriaud’s concepts of emerging aesthetic practices. The essay draws the contours of these particular aesthetic practices as follows:

À partir du même matériau de base, la vie quotidienne, on peut ainsi réaliser différentes versions de la réalité. L’art contemporain se structure comme un banc de montage alternatif, qui réorganise les formes sociales ou culturelles et les insère dans d’autres types de scénarios. En déprogrammant et reprogrammant, l’artiste démontre qu’il

⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 196.

⁰ Ibid., 198.

existe d'autres usages possibles des techniques et des outils qui sont à notre disposition.⁰

For Bourriaud, the practices that he is interested in are artistic, rather than literary. However, there are a number of similarities in the mode of production described. The literary works of *Frévent* and *À Lorient* also take everyday life as their basic material and from it foster alternative realities which "réorganise les formes sociales ou culturelles." Moreover, such projects are set up as attempts to "deprogramm[er] et reprogramm[er]." By selecting these unassuming spaces of rural post-industrial France, the towns and the possibilities for thinking through their potential are transformed. Moreover, by focussing on works that take lesser-known geographies as their terrain of action, these towns open new aesthetic possibilities because they are less determined by and less overwritten with literary history than Paris itself.⁰

As Bourriaud suggests:

la géographie des artistes contemporains explore désormais les modes d'habitation, les multiples réseaux dans lesquels nous évoluons, les circuits par lesquels nous nous déplaçons, et surtout les formations économiques, sociales et politiques qui délimitent les territoires humains. Ce sont là quelques-uns des sujets majeurs de l'art actuel, traversé par l'obsession d'écrire la planète et d'utiliser ses espaces à l'aide d'investigation.⁰

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 29.

⁰ Indeed, counter to the Oulipo's almost constant association with Paris, Roubaud claims "La surface de Paris était le support de mon art de mémoire poétique par commodité seulement, par nécessité. Car je n'ai aucune admiration, ni passion, ni amour pour Paris." Jacques Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de Londres*', 1393.

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 9. Interestingly it is "l'obsession d'écrire" which Bourriaud uses to describe the phenomena rather than a more visual verb, such as *représenter* or *envisager*.

Rather than working in a mimetic, lyrical or even formalist aesthetic, these practitioners use space “à l’aide de l’investigation,” and are preoccupied with geography conceived of as human infrastructures (“économiques, sociales et politiques”), which delimit human activity and territory in contrast to any natural and necessary geography. Moreover, these aesthetics are concerned with “modes d’habitation” as *réseaux*, *circuits* and *déplacements*, all of which present the possibility for investigations precisely around the concept of the itinerary.

This section has provided the necessary theoretical context for the sections that follow. My discussion of specific literary and artistic projects in the sections that follow will draw on, develop and synthesize the theories and approaches of Sheringham, Stewart, Berlant and Bourriaud. This nexus illuminates how travel comes to be considered a weird science.

Jacques Jouet and *À Lorient*

In this section and the section that follows, I take up the theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous section in order to consider a recent text by Jacques Jouet and Jacques Roubaud, *À Lorient*. This section considers Jouet's contribution to that text, while the next section considers Roubaud's work in Lorient and other urban spaces.

By perceiving in the word Lorient the palimpsest *L'orient*, Jacques Jouet embarks on a poetic and historical reimagining of the cityscape, identifying traces of foreign geographies and trade routes in place names such as the *Pont chinois* and the *Quai des Indes*, as well as the more recent traces of its German occupation. Jouet's contribution to *À Lorient* consists of 18 poems, categorized according to one of the following general concepts: *Histoires* (of which there are 3 poems), *Paysages* (6 poems), *Événements* (5 poems), and *Portraits* (4 poems). This chapter will focus on the *Histoires* and *Paysages* poems. Jouet plumbs the textures of language through its presence in the city, much in the same way that Raymond Queneau established in *Courir les rues* and Georges Perec explored in *Lieux*.

The *Histoires* poems appropriate excerpts from extant historical documents and texts which are indicated at the end of the poem as follows, "Source: *Séjour à Lorient en décembre 2008*.—Lorient, la Bretagne et la traite (XVIIe-XIXe siècles), *Cahiers de la compagnie des*

Indes, no. 9/10, 2006."⁰ However, (much like Audeguy's use of historical documents discussed in the following chapter), there is no clear demarcation between Jouet's text and that of his sources, except perhaps in "Histoires, 3: Prohibition des indiennes" where some of the text is italicized. But, lacking *guillemets*, it remains ambiguous as to whether this represents a citation. What is clear, however, is that Jouet effected some degree of research in order to reimagine the city as a textual and historical palimpsest of poetic interest, and he used pre-existing texts to thicken his poetry and experience of the city alike. The ambiguity, ushered in by the inclusion of the sources, is paralleled in the conspicuous citations of the city of Lorient itself—the names of streets, historical zones, and shop names—signs dislodged from their urban topography. Following from Sheringham's work then, Jouet's poems also reveal that "the power of street names is their capacity to induce multi-layered vision."⁰ These elements underscore the epistemological inquiry involved in Jouet's poetic practice. What is suggested by the inclusion of references to urban topography and the integration of archival documents is that, in Bourriaud's terminology, "l'acte de représenter s'est élargi en incluant des nouveaux outils."⁰ Much like the artists represented in the GNS exhibition, these poetical works are

⁰ The source text for "Histoires, 2: Pantoum de bois, de pierre et de béton" is indicated as: *Délibérations du conseil municipal de Lorient, Archives municipales — Au petit bonheur des baraques, Liv'Éditions, 2006*. Similarly the source for "Histoires, 3," is indicated: *Féerie indienne, Des rivages de l'Inde au royaume de France, catalogue d'exposition, Somogy éditions d'art, Musée de la Compagnie des Indes à Lorient, Musée de l'impression sur Étoffes à Mulhouse, 2008-2009*.

⁰ Sheringham, "Paris—City of Names," 174.

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 13.

positioned as kinds of research, and use it as a new tool of aesthetic representation.

In the first poem in the collection, "*Histoires 1, Quai des Indes*," Jouet begins as follows:

S'être arrêté quelques jours à Lorient suppose une apostrophe
tombée dans l'océan qui bouge sous le nom d'un port de mer.(9)

Jouet's attention, like the reader's own, is immediately drawn to the possibility of an apostrophe being placed in the name of the town, L'orient, such that the town can recall:

l'Orient comme direction, comme orientation, justement
Le Levant redoublant le le, et vers lequel on ne part plus
aussi décisivement que jadis en prenant tous les risques
un bateau sur quatre ne revient pas entier avec sa charge

From *Lorient*, through *l'orient* to *orientation*, Jouet transitions from the immediacy of the proper noun, through a resuscitation of an alternative and more historically imbued orthography. On the way he plays with the connotations, finally considering the act of getting one's bearings—of literally orienting oneself through the geographical certainty of a place name. This action is what the overall textual process records and achieves: an orientation towards Lorient from the passive sense of being stuck, as implied by "s'être arrêté" in the town to that of the more active possibility of movement suggested by *orientation*. Such a practice is described by Berlant who wants "to see what is happening to systems of self-intelligibility through watching subjects getting, losing and keeping

their bearing within a thick present. [...] to understand action that does not express internal states but measures a situation.”⁰ We are thus no longer just in Lorient, but in the virtuality of the city—in the imagined spaces which its texts (both those literally inscribed in the plan of the city and those in its archives) create, and the multitude of past and potential narratives which it traces into the present.

What can be seen in Jouet’s poems is also apparent in other texts. Sheringham has described the intrigue of the street name for other writers as follows:

the encounter with and deciphering of street names often points to submerged layers of communal and cultural experience. In the experience of the name, self and other, public and private, meet and mingle, opening up a space where identities can be affirmed, denied or created. The street name functions as a trace, a mark left sometime in the past which now forms part of an archive. To open the archive is not simply an antiquarian gesture, but rather the reactivation—or making present—of past inscriptions.⁰

Street names also link the kind of travel involved in *À Lorient* to the kinds of travel that would once have begun or ended in Lorient, such as global trade, shipping and exploration. I think it further situates the text in relation to the forms of travel writing that might have resulted from these historic passages, albeit such a connection remains implicit and also distinguishes these texts from that particular tradition of writing.⁰

⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 198.

⁰ Sheringham, “ ‘Naming the Streets’,” 177.

⁰ Rebecca Solnit has criticized postmodern theory’s interest in travel and idealisations of complete mobility. As she points out, “much of the terminology of location and mobility—words like *nomad*, *decentred*, *marginalized*, *deterritorialization*, *border*, *migrant* and *exile*—are not attached to specific places and people; they represent instead, ideas of rootlessness and flux that seem as much the result of the ungrounded

Whereas the stakes of historical travel significant (and historical travel writing certainly attests to this), those at play in *À Lorient* are of a lesser order and take a self-deprecating tone. Even while the plan of the town consistently recalls world travel and the exoticism of an elsewhere, Jouet's experience is local and safe. He voyages in foreign linguistics more than foreign lands. Lorient is a seaport in Brittany with a population of approximately 57,000.⁰ Throughout its modern history, Lorient played an important role in the Franco-Dutch war, the French East Indies Company, participated in the slave trade, served as a Royal naval base and important centre for ship building and, during the occupation, U-boat making.⁰ It is at once a town in the present, but also recalls a history of trade, exploration, and colonialism.

If travel conventionally served to enrich knowledge of a foreign geography, the tacit assumption of *À Lorient* is that exploring unknown zones is what counts—whether these are local and of little cultural and historical importance or not. What is important is the spirit of investigation, the inquiry and the expedition. In this respect Jouet's projects in Lorient also suggest a kind of *topocritique*. Describing the

theory as its putative subject." In this respect the types of travel considered in this chapter may be said to run counter to such rootlessness because these forms of itinerary are intended to activate relationships between the body, the mind and the world, and this will become particularly apparent in the section on walking and art. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), 28.

⁰ Based on most recent census data found here:
http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau_local.asp?ref_id=POP1A&millesime=2010&niveau=1&nivgeo=CV&codgeo=5698 (last accessed February 5 2014)

⁰ Louis Chaumeil, "Abrégé d'histoire de Lorient de la fondation (1666) à nos jours (1939)," in *Annales de Bretagne*, Vol. 46. No. 1/2. (1939), 66-87.

works of Pierre Huyghe, (though he could equally be speaking of Jouet's work), Bourriaud contends: "il s'agit pour lui de reconstituer des objets de connaissance, de substituer au tourisme scientifique et culturel une nouvelle forme d'exploration du monde."⁰ Jouet's poems explore the world as it is collected into and reinscribed on the plan and topography of one town.⁰ More specifically, as Bourriaud contends, "il ne s'agit plus de se rendre maître des *Terrae Incognitae*, mais de procéder par forages ou échantillonnages, par prélèvements et relevés, au cours de véritables expéditions dans le réel vécu."⁰ What is suggested by Bourriaud is a space perhaps first conceptualised by Georges Perec as *l'endotique*, a counterpoint to the exotic. As a port, however, Lorient retains a degree of the exotic through remnants of a bygone era of European shipping.⁰ For many of the artists discussed in this thesis, the past and history are exotic. Like the artists that Bourriaud describes, Jouet and Roubaud take the familiar and mundane geography of everyday life as the setting for their various inquiries and aesthetic projects. But their work is also often about the persistence of the historical past. This is even more apparent in a town like Lorient where of course lives are still lived even if the urban landscape appears degraded. In turning to these types of

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 35.

⁰ Of course alternative methods for organising space have been proposed, notably Pujoulx's idea that Parisian streets could be named after cities and regions, and the relative sizes of those cities would be reflected in the sizes of the streets, so that visiting Paris would provide one with a microcosmic view of France and vice versa. (From Sheringham, "Paris—City of Names," 173...but also from Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 520).

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 35.

⁰ Georges Perec, *L'infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 11-12.

landscapes, Roubaud and Jouet might well be participating in what art critic and scholar Stephen Bann has termed a *ricorso* (a return) which reveals “a surreptitious kinship between aspects of contemporary sensibility and the ‘curiosity’ of the early modern period.”⁰

By ambulating through the city in order to conceive the poems for *À Lorient*, Jacques Jouet and Jacques Roubaud participate in a well-established oulipian practice that typically seeks to foreground the relationship between urban exploration and writing. In relating these, new spatail practices emerge which require new literary genres and new modes of thought. Jouet is already well-known for his *Poèmes de métro*; composed and written over the course of a *métro* ride. Comprised of as many lines as there are stations on the journey, Jouet composes each line in his mind while the train is in motion, and then jots it down while the train is stopped at the station. The last line of the poem is noted down on the platform of the last station of the journey. As Ann Smock has argued, Jouet’s “*poèmes de proximité* (and the *poèmes de métro* among them) are practically inseparable from their circulation in the more general sense that they emerge from, and flow back into, a certain locale.”⁰ This movement is also apparent in Jouet’s *poèmes paysagers* which are monostich poems written in a landscape about that landscape

⁰ Stephen Bann, “The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display,” in *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millenium*, ed. Andrew McClellan. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 127.

⁰ Ann Smock, “Everyday,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 42, no. 2 (2009): 67.

itself.⁰ These poems are printed across the longest aspect of the page and this often requires the reader to turn the book sideways thus mimicking the horizontality of the landscape. But it is when Jouet reads these poems aloud that the extent to which “they emerge from a particular set of circumstances, or from a certain world [...] and return to it” becomes most apparent.⁰ Jouet describes these poems as follows:

un poème composé sur le motif, devant un paysage. [...] Il doit être écrit sur une seule ligne. La topographie du paysage cherche à être épousée par la topographie du vers. En lecture orale, il est prononcé par le poète qui balaye les regards des auditeurs comme s'ils étaient le paysage.⁰

The landscape poem is carried from Jouet's voice outwards towards the audience who listens. For the duration of the reading, the audience also becomes Jouet's visual landscape, as he reads the poem as if it were written on the faces of the audience members from left to right. In that moment the audience is both a kind of screen on which the landscape is projected and, because the audience is simultaneously listening to the poem, it penetrates them. As an audience member, it feels almost as if

⁰ To give some sense of these poems I give three examples of the Jouet's *paysages* poems from *À Lorient*, found on pages 12, 33 and 37 respectively. In the originals they are printed along the vertical axis of the page such that readers must turn the book on its side in order to read them. Doing so reproduces the horizontality of the landscapes themselves.

Paysages, 1

au port les voitures sont garées les bateaux sont garés, où sont passés les chauffeurs
où sont rangés les capitaines?

Paysages, 5

dans mon dos de gradins la rue Professeur Mazé, dans mon ventre un stade et un stade, à
mon flanc gauche un stade

Paysages, 6

face à l'Hôtel de Ville on ne peut pas dire que celui des Impôts dilapide ses fonds en
lettres d'or: OTEL DES FI ANCE

⁰ Smock, *Ibid.*, 68.

⁰ Jacques Jouet, *Du monostique*, (Paris: La Bibliothèque Oulipienne), no 135, 2004, 19.

the poem is about you. Thus when read aloud, these poems imbricate the audience, the landscape and the poet in an intimate present. Lauren Berlant has suggested that ‘the present’ is first perceived affectively; it is “a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now.”⁰ In this respect, Jouet’s poetics may be particularly adept at capturing the present as a negotiation between personal and public, in a present writing moment. These poems cycle back into their places of origin, acting as brief inconsequential detours that nonetheless subtly change the locales to which they will return, exemplifying a regulatory aesthetics that takes soundings through a sensual encounter with the worldly.

Kathleen Stewart situates her concept of “ordinary affects” in common spaces where their emergence is wedded to the “banality of built environments.”⁰ Her text is a series of situated vignettes that demonstrate “glimpses of a public culture shifting over time,” but she warns that such impressions are “too easily gathered into a narrative of social decline.”⁰ Instead of immediately jumping towards that narrative then, she wants to slow down her thinking (and ours) for long enough to imagine “a world of shared banalities [that] can be a basis of sociality.”⁰

⁰ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

⁰ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 28.

⁰ Ibid., 26-7.

⁰ Ibid., 27.

She wants to explore the ordinary that happens in inchoate form because inhabited experiences “that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and dead,” can also lead to imagined futures.⁰ Ordinary affects thus often require a subject in movement. They emerge through “disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers [...] they have to be mapped through different, coexisting forms of composition, habituation, and event.”⁰ Projects which conceive of the journey as a kind of experiment are capable of registering such affects because they accrue scenes and events that are the direct result of alternative modes of travel and composition. For Kathleen Stweart, “rogue intensities roam the streets of the ordinary [... creating] all the lived, yet unassimilated, impacts of things, all the fragments of experience left hanging.”⁰ Projects pickup these fragments and forge continuities among them that “tempt the passerby [or the reader for that matter] with the promise of a story let out of the bag,” something intuited and experienced but not yet named and known completely.⁰

Writing about the *Quai des Indes* leads Jouet into one such imagined world: “je voudrais qu’à Mahé ou Pondichéry / il y ait un vieux quai des Frances ou des Europes avec s.”(10) Here the subjunctive suggests the wish as much as the impossibility of the fulfilment of that wish, and posits an imagined reality in which trade relations between

⁰ Ibid., 63 and 127 respectively.

⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁰ Ibid., 23.

East and West, (like place names themselves) were reciprocal and apposite. In such a world, the idea of a plurality of *Indes* is reciprocated with an equally curious notion of a plurality of *Europes*. The example of the *Quai des Indes* is indicative of the types of attention required by these contemporary urban projects because they use toponyms to defamiliarize common places. In orienting oneself towards the textual city, “la topocritique part de la réalité physique des espaces humaines (domicile, bâtiment, zone urbain, ville, nation, continent, planète) afin d’interroger les modes de représentation qui forment notre imaginaire et gouvernent nos actions.”⁰ If *À Lorient* can be said to reformulate conceptions of Lorient, then it does so through generating alternative representations of the town itself. Found in the “textured, roughened surface of the everyday,” Jouet takes up small, passing elements of Lorient and suggests how “some kind of intimate public of onlookers [might] recognize something in a space of shared impact.”⁰

Like the ebb and flow of the ocean on which a town like Lorient is dependent, Jouet recalls “le commerce partait du quai des Indes et y rapparaissait.”([sic] 9) The invocation of trade passing through the *quai* in both directions operates at the explicitly literal level of the town’s past function as a port and a centre for trade. But, in a broad timeless, it also suggests that such trade may return in a different form. In a striking reversal of metaphors, Jouet underscores the ephemeral nature of urban

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 36.

⁰ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 39.

life in comparison with the permanence of the ocean: “le Lorient de mon enfance était en ruines / tandis que le locéan de la même époque était intact.”([sic] 9) A town like Lorient can depend on the figurative solidity of the ocean as a geographical asset and source of commerce, whereas the temporality of the town’s function may shift and change, fall into and out of favour. In playing with the proper names, “redoublant le le,” Jouet furthers this connection between Lorient and *l’océan*. The natural characteristics of the ocean, more commonly associated with surging, cyclical movement and tidal shifts, are reinstated as ceaseless and timeless, a sort of behemoth. As such, the temporal is rendered on the larger, natural scale of geology and nature, which inevitably dwarfs all human endeavours, making them appear ethereal and ineffective. From the first stanza, in which “l’océan qui bouge sous le nom d’un port” to the second stanza in which the ocean “était intacte,” Jouet effects a progression and reversal in the agent of movement and that of stasis. At the same time, if the port functions of the town no longer have any relevance or purpose, then for Jouet “la ville ne reste pas les deux pieds dans ses sabots de quais.” (11) The ironic play on “sabots de quais” suggests that the city must reinvent itself. By extension, what is traced out in the project of *À Lorient* is also a dialectical economy of growth and decay. The subject traces out a process whereby Jouet’s poems seem to emerge from and return to specific locales. The poems of *À Lorient* intervene in the material conditions of the city and open

possibilities for alternative understandings of its economic and social precarity.

In highlighting textual sensitivities and experiments characteristic of Jouet's contribution to *À Lorient*, the crucial point about these poems is their ability to shift the agent of movement—by implementing an itinerary the concept of agency is changed. Such a shift allows for a less self-possessed, more affective form of agency because subjects find themselves following the itinerary. As Kathleen Stewart has remarked “simple things take time, intensity, ingenuity,” but also “some things have to be sidestepped.”⁰ In this respect what emerges is a concept of the subject as a “collection of trajectories and circuits” recognized through “fragments of past moments glimpsed unsteadily in the light of the present.”⁰ Itineraries are deployed in the texts as practices of the poet, and yet what is glaringly obvious is that the itineraries and practices are in fact wedded to everyday life, thus presenting alternative possibilities for conceptualising that life as well as poetry. The implication is that by walking, the city becomes a changeable *paysage*. On one hand the walker moves through the static city, while at the same time, the poet pauses, contemplates the city and in such a moment of passive engagement that city shifts and changes.

In “Histoires 2, Pantoum de bois, de pierre et de béton” a similar sense of cyclical time is articulated and this is reinforced through the

⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁰ Ibid., 59.

verse structure of the pantoum's repeated lines in the form abcd-bedf-egfh, where each letter corresponds to the repetition of the entire line rather than simply its rhyme scheme. This structure is repeated through 39 stanzas. In this poem, the conception of historical time is more explicitly linked to the history of the twentieth century and specifically foregrounds the German occupation and the U-boat base Kéroman. Once again Jouet enacts a temporal reversal: "le provisoire est ce qui dure." (18) But, rather than situating this temporality in the traces of foreign geographies and trade routes, in this poem Jouet's poetic and imaginative restoration of the city must first pass through the much darker lens of the war and the role the town played as a bastion and base for U-boats. The difficulty of such a task is apparent in the fifth stanza:

reprenons du début: Lorient allemand
pour les sous-marins allemands port d'attache
avec quelle fourchette saisir l'Histoire
pour qu'elle soit savoir et non instrument? (18)

The production of knowledge is a question of scale and relationality. Unlike instrumentality, it is nimble and flexible. Similarly, the German presence is clear in stanza 9:

la base sous-marine de Kéroman
tandis qu'autour la ville était vulnérable
à leurs états de corps plus qu'à la Shoah
on oublie le concret dans les grands traités (19)

In this stanza the strong German military presence in Kéroman is contrasted with the vulnerability of the city and its inhabitants, whose

experience of the war was in the immediacy of the “états de corps” rather than a principled response to the treatment of Jews. While concrete existence is usually forgotten in “les grands traités,” these poems work at the level of everyday life through the materiality of the city, in order to conceive of an alternative historical narrative. Indeed, the representation of the post-war period shifts focus towards re-animating the town: “reviennent d’abord les professions utiles,” “on rhabite dans les caves sous les ruines,” and “où le temps retrouve le plaisir de perdre.” (21) The repeated alliteration of “re” serves to highlight Jouet’s vision of Lorient as a town that will come back around again; it returns. A similar idea is expressed in stanzas 18 through 23 in which “les sentiments de fragilité, de force/ se mélangent dans une nouvelle vie.” (21) This “nouvelle vie,” Jouet’s poems imply, will have a hybrid character wherein feelings of fragility and strength coexist in a kind of ethereal materiality with the pleasures and pains of times past.

Jacques Roubaud: À Lorient and Elsewhere

A preoccupation with the way that history is traced out in the textuality of local geography is also evident in Roubaud's contribution, titled "Lorient infra-ordinaire," (a title which echoes Roubaud's *Tokyo infra-ordinaire*). Based on the connotations of the names of streets Roubaud creates textual implications from their various intersections in the city. For example, at the corner where rue (Jules) Védrières meets rue Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Roubaud connects the two streets in a poem about the names of each man's airplane. In rue du Chant des Oiseaux he listens for birds but only hears silence and he suggests that rue Le Levé's east-west orientation allows it to be called rue Le Couché in the evenings. He also discovers a submarine appropriately stationed at the foot of rue Jules Verne and writes this into one of his poems. Roubaud also sees a local and distinctly French history in the textual palimpsests of Lorient, often comparing the occurrence of street names in the town to those in Paris or elsewhere in France. At the same time, Lorient is also distinct from other towns in France, and Roubaud's work registers these differences. As he goes along, his poems trace kinds of dispossession that seem part of contemporary rural France.

Roubaud's engagement with the textual interface of Lorient is associative and allows linguistic connotations to emerge from fortuitous convergences of text in everyday life. His section titled "Lorient infra-

ordinaire" consists of 28 poems, the majority of which take their titles directly from the names of streets in the town. Reinforcing this urban textuality, there are a number of photographs of the actual street signs depicted with many of the poems. Some poems describe the physical conditions in which they were apparently written, for example "Portrait en marche," "Pluie!," which reads simply "Pleut," and "Les mouettes, dimanche." Roubaud's method often begins from the literal form of the intersection of two streets (such as Rue Jules Védrières and Rue Antoine de Saint-Exupéry cited above) whose names suggest to him some connection of an unusual nature. Another of Roubaud's tactics comes out of the intersection of the name of a particular street and what is suggested by that name in contrast to what is present and visible while walking along that street itself.⁰ In one poem Roubaud was attracted to the curious name of the 'Rue du Bout du Monde.' In the poem of the same title he writes: "Rue du Bout du Monde/passées les douanes/(françaises)/ jusqu'à l'impasse du Petit Paradis."⁰ (63) Although the poem is playful and quirky, it remains obtuse because Roubaud stays at the level of surface facts. Below the poem, on the same page, there is a reproduction of the street signs which inspired the poem indicating

⁰ Sheringham, "Paris - City of Names," 165. Jouet also makes use of this technique in poems such as "Paysages, 3": "élu un endroit de parfait non-paysage place du Pont chinois, dit le plan, hé oui le pont sur les voies est très bombé." (26) Here evidently Jouet is weighing the connotations of the name of the square against what he actually sees there: an overpass with many potholes.

⁰ Similarly, "Paysages 4, Rue du Bout du Monde" in which the name of the street demands some attention: "La rue du Bout du Monde me demande un peu / quel il est ce monde au bout duquel." (24) After introducing textual elements evident in the street itself (indicated by changes in typeface), Jouet concludes "le quai qui est le bout du bout du pur langage."

both “Rue du Bout du Monde” and “Douanes françaises”. The comedy that inheres in the image of a customs office regulating exchange between France and the *bout du monde*, is undercut by the very palpable sense that Lorient is already positioned as a kind of end point to culture. Importantly the impasse du Petit Paradis does not intersect with the Rue du Bout du Monde (the two streets are separated by approximately three miles), yet Roubaud taps into the humorous implication that between the *bout du monde* and *le petit paradis* one will inevitably find the regulatory body of French customs and bureaucracy.

Many of Roubaud’s poems are enigmatic, and this is underscored in the very first poem “Rue Trescat” which simply states “=17 (remerciements à Olivier Salon).” While this feels like a homonym, the poem’s relationship to the number seventeen is never explained. Other poems are more obviously associative and political. If his turn towards the materiality of Lorient via toponyms is initially playful, Roubaud’s attention eventually moves towards the larger material conditions of the town. In poem 10, titled “Rue des Travailleurs,” which reads “Rue des Chômeurs?”, the poem traces a process from the ‘travailleurs,’ to the lack of work evident in the street itself. In addition to such ludic experiments, there are also rather enigmatic and typically Roubaldian formal experiments. In poem 27 “Portraits par rues” the first stanza can be read as follows:

Rue Nelson Mandela
 Rue Emile Zola
 Rue Lazare Carnot
 Rue Théophile Kerlir (résistant, né à Lorient)
 Rue Irène Joliot-Curie
 Rue Olivier de Clisson
 Place de la Résistance (91)

By distinguishing the initial letter of each proper name, readers are invited to create the anagram LORIENT. The national character of street naming practices in France is made apparent in these poems because, with the exception of Rue Nelson Mandela, the streets are named after historical French figures, and a few 'local heroes' specific to Lorient and the region. Progressively through each stanza an increasing number of letters are offset, (corresponding to the number of the stanza), so that in the first stanza one letter is offset, in the second stanza two are offset and so on until finally in stanza seven, the last letter of the proper name is offset. It appears as follows:

Rue Angela Duval (poète bretonne, traduite par Paol Keineg)
 Rue Joseph Rolland (résistant, mort en déportation)
 Rue Antony Fleury (déporté comme juif)
 Rue Louis Blanqui
 Pierre Maître (Il y a trente ans dans la nuit du 4 au 5 juin 1977, l'ouvrier verrier Pierre Maître était assassiné à Reims par des nervis du patronat.)
 Rue Charles Tillon
 Rue Lazare Carnot (94)

The poem moves from an anagram using the first letters of street names to a resolution of that anagram on the last. That this is the driving force of the poem does not become clear until the last stanza in which the offset letters vertically spell out Lorient. If the initial stanza was surprising in its use of place names to create the anagram, then it is

even more shocking to find that the anagram can be created using the last letters of the street names. What is astonishing is that these streets actually do exist in Lorient.⁰ There is no doubt about the existence of the streets or the faithfulness of Roubaud's project to his environment and the fact that he was able to poetically enact this textual resolution to the anagram on Lorient using only streets within the town itself is really quite extraordinary.

Given Roubaud's self-proclaimed passion for walking, and his "adoption du personnage du marcheur," it is not surprising to find him engaged in the types of textual activity that characterise *À Lorient*.⁰ Many of his books are situated in real physical space: filled with street names, the names of squares, historical monuments and parks. His poetry is marked with topographies and situated within specific urban and rural contexts. These elements are sometimes stand-alone titles, while at other times they are simply mentioned in the poems. In books like *Churchill 40*, the topographical elements give shape to a group of poems through section headings such as "Rue d'Amsterdam," "Skye, Juillet 2001, Marches de Réminiscence," and "Promeneur des rues Mortes." His 2006 text *La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le coeur des humains* is not only an intertextual nod to Charles Baudelaire's "Le cygne," but also to Raymond Queneau's *Courir les rues*. By returning to the streets mentioned by Queneau, in the first part of

⁰ I was able to use google mapping technology to verify their existence.

⁰ Roubaud, *'le grand incendie de Londres,'* 120.

this text Roubaud sets out to ‘Recourir les Rues’ by textually rewriting the “états des lieux” that he found there.⁰ For Roubaud, much like his mentor Queneau, there is something not only about getting up and going out into the world that matters, but how one decides to get there counts.⁰ Roubaud’s walking poetics initially require and then invoke “a *practice* of space, an embodied experience: not a desire to describe but a desire to meditate, ruminate and circulate, to be drawn through space, allowing oneself to be informed and transformed by the process.”⁰ In these works, the planned itinerary of a walk is inextricably bound to and determines the types of text that emerge from the experience of the walk. In a sense then, ‘the plan’ actually takes on more significance than either the process or the end result, thus completing a subversion which insists on the extreme value of preparation and pre-meditation, but not at the expense of actually going out and testing that plan itself.

If the itinerary is central to all of the projects discussed in this chapter, then walking is the predominant practice required by them. By conceiving of walking as a mode of composition, these projects transform passivity into activity, deconstructing conventional assumptions about the passive, reproductive processes of writing, emphasizing rather its active and productive potential. Moreover, this

⁰ Roubaud writes: “En déterminant sur le plan de ville les lieux identifiables que contiennent les poèmes du livre qu’il écrivit sous ce titre, je me suis rendu compte de la grande variété et étendue de ses déplacements métropolitains.” (Ibid., 1308)

⁰ Roubaud conceives of practices of walking as strategies: “Marcher les rues, lire les rues, voilà ma tactique[...] Seulement ‘aller,’ d’une manière ou d’une autre; mais aller beaucoup, souvent avec obstination, avec hâte.” (Ibid.)

⁰ Sheringham, “Paris – City of Names,” 176.

dichotomy between active/passive and productive/reproductive is further subverted at the level of content wherein what otherwise appears as a sleepy town, somewhat abandoned by industry and progress, is reanimated in the space of poetry precisely because these poets, even while underscoring the forsaken appearance of the town, refuse to represent it without intrigue and social and historical importance.

Roubaud describes his own walking practice as follows: “Je suis un marcheur. Je marche tout le temps, longtemps, loin, par plaisir, par choix, par compulsion.[...] Je mâche l’air avec mes pieds, je médite l’espace en arpentant la terre, ses routes, ses rues, ses sentiers, ses chemins.”⁰In ‘*le grand incendie de londres*,’ Roubaud regularly describes these walks and suggests that: “les lieux où l’on marche peuvent avoir un effet décisif sur la poésie que l’on dispose dans sa tête en marchant.”⁰ Indeed, Roubaud’s practice of constructing a poem mentally, while walking and transcribing it later, emphasizes not only the rhythms of walking but also those of recollection and association made available through different itineraries. Speaking of a particular day in December of 1994, but which is characteristic of many of his days, Roubaud writes:

Le reste du reste de mes jours je marchais dans Paris et j’écrivais à la craie mentale sur le ciel, sur les façades des maisons, sur le sol, les solutions aux exercices de poésie que je m’étais proposés, que j’avais résolus, plus ou moins, dans ma tête ; et je me refusais absolument le secours de notes, du papier.⁰

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de londres*,’ 119-20.

⁰ Ibid., 1303.

Roubaud describes a similar dynamic, only he adds to the work of walking and writing, the active role of memory which he uses as a kind of rule for composition: “La règle était plus précisément celle-ci: composer dans la tête, ne poser sur papier que ce qui a été décidé dans la tête et a été maintenu un temps (assez long) en mémoire. Ensuite, ne plus y revenir. (Je me tiens encore aujourd’hui (généralement) à cette règle),” not unlike Jouet’s *Poèmes de métro*.⁰ Walking enables one to “...prélever dans les signes que le paysage urbain propose des assemblages et des circonstances propices à la composition de poésie.”⁰ Unlike the surrealists’ urban chance encounters and associations, or the situationists’ experiments with *psychogéographie* and *dérive*, Roubaud’s urban practices are most often planned itineraries even where the end point or goal lacks significance: “Quand je pars sans but, comme cela, pour marcher, je ne vais pas, je ne vais presque jamais, au hasard. Le hasard dans la marche m’est peu attirant, comme il ne l’était guère en littérature pour mon maître Raymond Queneau.”⁰ Rather Roubaud’s *parcours* operate “au moyen de la carte, du plan, des photographies mêmes parfois,” and thus his travels don’t profess the grandiose pretensions of finding any “terres vierges.”⁰ Rather he has developed a

⁰ Ibid., 1392. If there is anything unique about this particular day, I believe that it is either on or proximate to Roubaud’s birthday of December 5th. He states “Un des premiers jours de décembre 1994,” at the beginning of the section (§42).

⁰ Ibid., 1442. Elsewhere, however, Roubaud has suggested a contrary practice, “J’ai un carnet dans la poche de ma veste (anglaise) où je note certains de ces messages des rues de Paris ; parfois linguistiquement étranges.” (Ibid.,1301)

⁰ Ibid., 1303.

⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁰ Ibid.

number of different modes of walking. On the one hand, he will go from one street to another “pour des raisons arithmologiques, méthodologiques, sentimentalologiques” and these rules “peuvent être très contraignantes, absurdes, bizarres.”⁰ Roubaud readily admits that “chaque fois qu’il est possible je m’approche de mes destinations par les pieds.”⁰ One senses that part of this insistence on walking is the delight to be gained from establishing new routes, as well as from going over familiar ground. On the other hand, Roubaud professes: “J’aime les itinéraires familiers, les parcours accomplis une infinité de fois, vers des points invariables[...]. La familiarité réduit le temps, permet [...] la contemplation intérieure (je travaille beaucoup ainsi).”⁰

Furthermore, Roubaud titles the third section of *Churchill 40 et autres sonnets de voyage (2000-2003)*, “Sonnet-Walking,” which

⁰ Ibid., 1310-1311 and 121 respectively. Later in the same text, Roubaud enumerates a few examples of these logics:

-La contrainte du feu rouge favorable (on traverse chaque fois que possible et on prend à droite (ou à gauche)). (Ibid., 1399)

-La contrainte des noms de rue qui sont des noms géographiques (cas particulier d’une famille plus vaste de contraintes portant sur l’onomastique de la ville : rues sans e par exemple (les rues sans ‘e’ du neuvième arrondissement : Ballu, Chaptal, Charras, Chauchat, de Douai (si on veut bien négliger le ‘de’ du génitif), Frochot, Gluck...

-La contrainte ‘du troisième type’ : suivre une femme séduisante (cette contrainte est risquée : elle est génératrice, disons, de distraktion, le piège par excellence du marcheur en poésie. (Ibid., 1399)

-La contrainte du passage par les passages

-La contrainte des trois minutes : après trois minutes dans la même rue, en prendre une autre.

-La contrainte alphabétique : d’abord une rue en A, puis une rue en B, puis une rue en C, and so on. (Ibid., 1400)

⁰ Ibid., 120. Moreover, Roubaud goes on to suggest that by walking he is able to “[éliminer] ainsi les incertitudes mécaniques dans l’évaluation des trajets de métro ou d’autobus, avec toutes leurs causes de retard (ce qui fait que, si je ne marche pas, je risque d’être considérablement en avance, tant je prends de marges pour chaque section de trajet.” Roubaud thus inverts the relationship between the natural and the mechanical, because mechanical forms of transportation present a myriad number of “causes de retard” whereas walking can be easily accounted for and regulated.

⁰ Ibid., 120.

represents not only an apparent collapse of the boundaries between ambulation and textual practice, but also signifies for Roubaud the composition of a poem in the mind over the course of a walk. It is thus simultaneously a poetics and a walking practice organized around the itinerary, involving mnemonic tactics and the body.

Le regard que je viens de dire 'poétique' n'est pas destiné à identifier une quelconque poéticité du paysage, la teneur en poésie d'un coucher de soleil sur la voie express rive droite, par exemple. Il sert à disposer le monde à pénétrer par le regard jusqu'à cet endroit (sans lieu précis : l'espace du dedans) où l'image en train de se faire rencontrera l'image-souvenir ancienne qui mettra en mouvement les séquences marmonnantes d'un peut-être poème en voie de constitution.⁰

What Roubaud is suggesting is a particular kind of urban meditation, a "méditation ruminante, murmurante, réitérante et redondante" that he will go on to term "ruminement (rumination + cheminement)."⁰ This itinerary is a heavily pre-determined regime for movement that enables "ruminement." These formal methods for moving through urban space actually enable one to walk without thinking much about where one is going, thus focussing the mind on where one is or perhaps more importantly on the affects and poetics that emerge from that experience. *À Lorient's* "Portrait en marche" is composed of seven stanzas, typically a reference to a specific street will be followed by some kind of description or meditation about what is seen in that street. This is not, as one might imagine, a portrait of the poet walking, but rather a portrait

⁰ Ibid., 1304.

⁰ Ibid.

of Lorient through the poet's ambulation in the city. While for Bourriaud and visual artists this can "servir de support à un travail de géomètre ou de géographe," Roubaud will use the tactics of surveyors to ambulate up and down the street as if to literally measure out in feet its poetic meters.⁰

Significantly, the following passage taken from early in '*le grand incendie de londres*' conceives of the project as having "deux voies" (poetry and mathematics) and is revelatory of an overall conception of the project as a kind of itinerary.

À partir du moment où je me suis rendu compte du fait qu'il ne s'agissait pas d'un faux carrefour (je voulais que les deux voies soient, en fin de compte, parcourues ; j'avais à dire les deux), dès que je me suis représenté '*le grand incendie de londres*', comme le récit d'un parcours dans le système des branches de l'arbre du *Projet*, comme la lecture de la carte routière d'un pays où avait lieu le *Projet*, du réseau hydrographique des rivières au cœur du continent géologique, du squelette dans le corps, des nervures dans la feuille verte ; dès que j'ai accepté de considérer comme vain l'effort d'une représentation topologique linéaire (ou seulement semi-linéaire : balayage de lignes sur surface, des morceaux de surface plane, les pages) [...], j'ai décidé que toutes ces branches, routes, rivières, sentiers d'os, nervures du récit, je les parcourrais, mais à mon pas de prose narrative accompagnant le marcheur.⁰

Not only is the project imagined as a *carrefour* where the particular *voies* of poetry and mathematics intersect, but also the whole text is described as a 'parcours,' a 'carte routière,' 'réseau,' which resonates with Bourriaud's concept of the *topocritique*. Because a "représentation

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 21.

⁰ Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de londres*', 37-38.

topologique linéaire” is insufficient for the types of *parcours* that Roubaud has in mind, he must generate an alternative structure for his text. The textual structures can determine a particular route, but a particular itinerary can also determine what textual structures will emerge from it. For Roubaud, “il ne s’agit pas toujours, il ne s’agit même pas le plus souvent, de choisir une route principale, quand sur mon chemin un carrefour se présente, et d’abandonner provisoirement les autres, pour les reprendre en des *insertions*.”⁰ Precisely because the choice of narrative path is impossible to make, because the entire project is overshadowed by the existential question “à quoi bon?”, Roubaud’s text is forced to open potential routes in the form of his *incises* and *bifurcations*, which branch out from the narrative. This arborescent structure is most visibly apparent in works such as *Tokyo infra-ordinaire* and *Ode à la ligne 29 des autobus parisiens*, which incorporate the incisions and bifurcations into the main body text through a colour-coded and numbered system which appears directly in the text. While opening multiple branches using this technique, Roubaud is able to maintain a multiplicity of virtual textual narratives which are active on each page.

Much of ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ can be said to describe Roubaud’s various projects that seem geared specifically at exploring the particular intersections between thought, poetry and walking. For

⁰ Ibid., 72.

Roubaud, these practices amount to a kind of relaxed contemplation or active receptivity. In *Poésie*, the fourth branch of '*le grand incendie de londres*,' Roubaud describes the relationship between walking and poetry in his own life: "Marcher dans Paris, sans but véritable, sans obligation, est occasion de poésie. La poésie, selon mon expérience, naît de la marche, principalement (je me considère comme poète, principalement.)"⁰ Stating that he considers himself primarily a poet is only necessitated by the fact that he very nearly (and frequently) subordinates his poetic practice to his practices as a pedestrian, so much so, that in speaking about many of Roubaud's works it is almost mandatory to consider his ambulation.

⁰ Roubaud, '*le grand incendie de londres*', 1299-1230. I will expand on whether Roubaud actually ever walks "sans but véritable" in further sections.

Wanderlust: The Art of Walking

This section attends to the various ways that walking has informed creative practice. Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust* frames the discussion of walking practices in the visual arts and specific works by Richard Long, On Kawara, and Francis Alÿs.

In her 2001 book, *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit provides a crucial intervention in the cultural history of walking, which provides readers with intriguing insights and historical anecdotes even while it may lack critical (academic) rigour. As Solnit's book demonstrates, walking has provided inspiration for a number of great thinkers and writers, among them Rousseau, Wordsworth and the English romantics, as well as more modern and contemporary examples found in surrealist texts like *Le Paysan de Paris* and *Nadja* as well as texts by Virginia Woolf like *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Street Haunting."

Walking is as natural as it is social and, as with all things that are socially constructed, its meanings change over time and vary across cultures. Many people think of walking as a type of experience which requires no thought; it is a practical means of locomotion requiring little, if any, consideration.⁰ Yet alongside this tradition in which walking

⁰ More recently, as disabilities studies, medical humanities and work on the phenomenology of illness have demonstrated, it is precisely these elements of banal everyday existence that often pose the greatest problems for those with physical limitations. Not only does the physicality of daily life pose problems in itself, but able-bodied administrators and policy makers often overlook these elements that are, for them, natural and given.

remains an unconscious activity, there is another tradition that would “make walking into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation.”⁰ If walking can be all three of these, then such polyvalent potentials situate it within the aesthetics of ‘weird science’ as forms of investigation and modes of meditation. Solnit insists that it is possible to see in the history of walking a “history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can.”⁰ The more ethereal qualities of thought are literally brought down to the ground and made corporeal through the act of walking, and yet like thought itself, walking too is a trace of passage, a flicker. In addition to tracing out a passage of thought, there is a generative connection between the two, so that “the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts.”⁰ More than simply shorthand for articulating the relationship between thought and movement or for spurring thought towards a goal, walking insists upon relations between corporeality and consciousness that are unique to the act itself.

Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts.⁰

⁰ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 3.

⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁰ Ibid., 5-6. In this sense, one would be wise to choose one’s itinerary based on the types of thought or feelings processes it may generate.

⁰ Ibid., 5.

Solnit's harmony may be a bit idealistic, because it belies any dissonance between body, mind and world. Yet for Solnit, "walking returns the body to its original limits again, to something supple, sensitive, and vulnerable."⁰ In contrast to the majority of *quotidien* tasks, walking "strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals."⁰

In many respects Solnit's book serves as a provocation to those interested in the history of walking and the history of writing. She provides ample consideration of writers who either demonstrate a personal fondness for walking in their private lives, or for those who used walking as a tool for writing itself. From analyses of Rousseau, Boswell, Wordsworth, Joyce, Woolf, Breton, Whitman and Ginsberg, it is through the accumulation of these exemplars that her argument foregrounds the seemingly timeless relationship between walking and writing, or walking and contemplation.⁰ Admittedly, it does so through an unapologetically Western lens, eliding consideration of cultural variants in conceptions of walking. But, as she points out, the

⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁰ These ideas are more adequately articulated by contemporary writers who often take on the task of theorizing the relationship between walking and writing themselves. Paul Auster's remarks in *The Invention of Solitude* could easily express the dynamic at play in Solnit's conceptualization: "So that what we are really doing when we walk through the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken, so that, in the end, we might safely say that we have been on a journey, and even if we do not leave our room, it has been a journey, and we might safely say that we have been somewhere, even if we don't know where it is." *The Invention of Solitude*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 122.

relationship between writing and visual or conceptual art wasn't explored until quite late, in fact it wasn't until the 1960s that walking began to appear as a form of art in itself.⁰ Alongside a number of transformations effected by conceptual artists, "it seems as though these artists were remaking the world, act by act, object by object, starting with the simplest substances, shapes and gestures."⁰ In fact, it is in large part due to the work of 1960s conceptualist artists and experimental writers that aspects of everyday life came to prevalence *as* modes of art, and walking became one of the quintessential examples of this emergent aesthetic. Artists of the 1960s like Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, André Cadere, Bruce Nauman, Stanley Brouwn, and Vito Acconci, to name only a few, found various ways of conceptualising walking as art, using different environments, constraints, traces and documents to demonstrate walking's profound relationship to art and its ability to spur it on, to get things going.

Richard Long's *Line Made By Walking* is a photographic document of precisely what the title suggests, the trace of Long's passage through the British landscape. As Solnit describes:

it was both more ambitious and more modest than conventional art: ambitious in scale, in making his mark upon the world itself; modest in that the gesture was such an ordinary one, and the resultant work was literally down to earth, underfoot.⁰

⁰ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 267.

⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁰ Ibid., 270.

Often categorized as a form of earth art, Long's works can be situated in relation to romanticism because of the natural settings in which the art 'takes place.' This is often over against any willingness to conceptualise the walks themselves. There is something deeply resistant about walking that makes it difficult to represent and conceptualise on its own terms, whereas its archived documentation is more easily managed. However, its various instrumental uses by artists offer a ready-made opportunity to connect aesthetic practices to practices of everyday life and their attendant affects. As critic and curator Tom Briedenbach wrote in *Artforum International*, the works' "austere formal simplicity belies an almost guarded yet nonetheless resonant quality, a timorous discretion that reflects our most profound experience of the wild."⁰

If photography works to document Long's walks, providing visual traces of passages that would otherwise lack physical permanence, then such images may also misrepresent the element of Long's work which makes it a project as I have previously defined—photography belies the time in which the walk was being planned and projected. In fact Long's walks are more adequately framed through considering them as ongoing methods, processes or investigations which make use of a wide range of plans and itineraries even before the walk takes place, and certainly before the photographs which document it. In this respect the temporality of his projects is prescriptive rather than simply descriptive,

⁰ Tom Briedenbach, "Richard Long: Sperone Westwater (New York)," *Artforum International* 43, no.3 (2004): 221.

presenting possible walks at least as much as accomplished ones. For many of Long's projects, documents are available such as maps and elevation charts, on which he marked out his intended route. There is little indication as to whether these count as documents of walks actually taken or rather present plans for potential walks to undertake. This can be seen in *A Five Day Walk*, which is listed on his website under "Documentations," "First day ten miles/ Second day twenty miles/ Third day thirty miles/ Fourth day forty miles/Fifth day fifty miles. Totnes to Bristol by Roads and lanes, England 1980." The title provides site-specific information suggesting that a specific walk took place, however the generic instructional format of the first section suggests the possibility for its formal repetition elsewhere and by others. The scenario in which a five day walk occurred in evenly rounded miles each day, and in which Long was still able to arrive at Bristol according to plan seems almost as unlikely as walking fifty miles in one day itself as the title implies. Rather, the satisfying numerical symmetry between the numbers of the days and the number of miles walked on that day, is suggestive of potential ways to measure space and days, and to move through them in an ordered fashion.

Soon after *Line Made By Walking* (which he would repeat in different geographies and with slightly distinct methods for decades) Long started *Ten Mile Walk* which was a planned walk in Exmoor along a completely straight line. In this case, Long was interested in "the

shape of the walk,” and so the way that his walks use time and space as interchangeable formal structuring devices becomes clear. In some of his projects “the distance and the form and the pace are set, and the walking time results from these factors. Sometimes the walking time and the place, or the condition of its terrain, are first established, resulting in a distance which can then be identified (*A 24 Hour Walk*).”⁰ As Richard Fuchs points out, because “the number of possible permutations is endless,” establishing such formal constraints is actually a way of maintaining openness and generating potentiality through the production of a work. These “interventions into the landscape” as one critic has classified the works, involve measurement, calculation, and experimentation through the use of the body and its relationship to space.⁰ To work in the raw natural world and still insist upon the human dimension of that world through art required Long to use geometric and abstract forms to reclaim the human subject, literally giving shape to human experience.

On Kawara’s *I Went* project meticulously records the artist’s daily excursions into various cities depending on which city he is in on a given day. On black and white photocopied maps of the city, the artist records the various routes that he took on a particular day in red pen. He uses a new copy of the map for each day. This creates a bird’s-eye view of his

⁰ R.H. Fuchs, “Along the Way,” *Richard Long*, exhibition catalogue, ed. R.H. Fuchs, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1986), unpaginated.

⁰ Hall, “Hamish Fulton: Tate Britain (London),” *Artforum International* 40, no. 9, 2002, 192.

various routes. Because the artist's schedule is already quite itinerant—apparently moving from city to city and country to country constantly—the project provides visual evidence of these movements, whereas Kawara is generally a difficult figure to pin down, consistently refusing interviews and photos. However, these works bear witness “to an individual human presence in the midst of an infinitude of information, visual and otherwise.”⁰

As itineraries, these are curious documents: there is no definite starting point or ending point and the traces reveal types of anomaly encountered in the city. Kawara's itineraries rarely reveal a perfect form, or a ‘perfect walk’ for that matter. With unusual regularity, Kawara's traced routes stop abruptly in a dead end (perhaps these are stops he made along his way?) and double back. At other times they intersect with existing urban infrastructures to demonstrate the myriad ways in which ‘the grid’ is broken. Throughout these documents there are a surprising number of recurring shapes and patterns that disobey urban grid formations, and Kawara's walks, traced in red as they are, make these shapes even more apparent. Even where the routes taken often amble through the ordered urban streets, they usually enter into some area where this ordering is broken. Diagonal lines in red crop up regularly, as do fascinating ‘detours’ that populate the walks—ways of moving through the city that don't always seem to make sense. For

⁰ Jonathan Watkins, “Survey: Where ‘I Don't Know’ is the Right Answer,” in *On Kawara*, ed. Jonathan Watkins. (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 92.

example when a road butts into a park but continues on the other side of that park (the aberration looks much like this ) , or where a road opens into a roundabout (-----o-----). As Jonathan Watkins suggests in his analysis of the piece:

The very process of recording his movement in this way engendered what the artist refers to as a ‘double-consciousness’, more extraordinary than the relativistic perceptions of nomadism, involving concurrent horizontal and vertical points of view. It was as if he were observing himself from above whilst navigating at a terrestrial level.⁰

In considering the *I Went* project in this light, it becomes clear that while these maps operate as documents of Kawara’s daily excursions after that excursion has taken place, the very fact of documenting them by means of the map, transforms subsequent itineraries through this idea of “double-consciousness.” This ‘doubling’ becomes an associative framework in which the memory of previous itineraries and the anticipation of inscribing future ones lead Kawara to conceive of his ambulation in the streets as maps even while these walks are still unfolding.

More recently, walking projects by Francis Alÿs speak to emergent problems within everyday life and participate in an “esthétique de la précarité.”⁰ In projects like *The Leak*, *Railings*, and *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, Alÿs walks through the city leave behind the most ephemeral of traces. For *The Leak*, Alÿs poked a small hole into

⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁰ Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Action/Fiction,” in *Francis Alÿs: du 14 avril au 17 juin 2001*, ex. cat. (Antibes: Musée Picasso, 2001), 19.

the bottom of a can of paint and carried it around as it leaked gently onto the hard concrete. When it ran out, the project came to an end though the trace of the latex paint remained. In *Railings*, Alÿs carried a drumstick at arms length, letting it rattle and bounce off of any objects in its way, literally translating the shape of the city into sound. And In *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, Alÿs pushed a one-meter by one-meter block of ice through the streets of Mexico City until it eventually melted into a small puddle leaving only the most temporary traces of its moist passage. Alÿs's walking projects also include *The Modern Procession* which involved carrying replicas of modernist master pieces like Giacometti's *Woman Standing* and Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, from the New York MOMA's downtown location through the streets of Manhattan and across the Williamsburg Bridge to the temporary site of the museum in Brooklyn.⁰ And finally in *The Collector* Alÿs built a small dog on wheels with a magnetised bottom which he pulled through the streets of Mexico City collecting the various metallic detritus that it happened to pass over while walking.⁰ Alÿs's pedestrian provocations demonstrate various ways of situating walking in relation to politics and

⁰ In the planning stages of this project, Alÿs had to walk the route on multiple occasions in order to estimate the timing of the procession so that city officials and police officers could accurately cordon off sections of the city. As one critic describes it, "Walking and counting, in an endless series of walks, he paced off block after block of the whole of Manhattan, charting off these spaces by precisely counting the meters traveled, mapping the city step by step." (Harper Montgomery, "A Mythologist at Work," in *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, ed. Francis Alÿs and Anne Wehr (New York: Public Art Fund, 2004), 141)

⁰ It seems this project was a development of an earlier project in Havana called *Magnetic Shoes*, in which the magnets on Alÿs's shoes, "retiennent donc les débris métalliques abandonnés dans un premiers temps par les flanêurs anonymes puis récoltés, par la suite, par le piéton collectionneur, au gré de ses déambulations, de ses 'cueillettes.'" (Davila, "Fables/Insertions," 53)

poetics, such that the projects neither amount to diatribe nor do they necessarily leave us with an art ‘object’ per se. Instead we are left with the traces of his passage, documentary film footage or sound recordings that testify to its occurrence.

In Alÿs’s work there is a tension between the grandiose and the mundane, the monumental and the modest, and the epic and the ephemeral. His work literally plays within the limits of functionalism, gesturing towards those places where systems actually become dysfunctional, break down or become anti-functional as can be seen in his *Barrendos* piece (discussed more thoroughly below). Alÿs was educated and worked briefly as an urban planner in Europe before shifting his full attention to art and moving to Mexico City, and as such it is unsurprising that most of his projects operate in urban spaces and according to the various functions of public space. However, unlike the Surrealists or Situationists before him, Alÿs is not content to ambulate aimlessly in search of the miraculous. Alÿs envisions his work as “une série de notes et d’orientations,” in which “l’invention du langage va de pair avec l’intention de la ville.”⁰ Echoing an oulipian mode of production, Alÿs describes his method as follows:

Faire de l’art ce n’est pas être fidele à un ‘style’ [...] mais s’en tenir résolument à une matrice productive. Celle-ci est un ensemble de règles et de contraintes qui ne sont pas définies a priori mais prennent forme (et établissent un territoire) sous l’effet d’une succession de décisions particulières. [...] Le

⁰ Francis Alÿs, “Déclaration faite à Mexico en 1993”, cited in Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Action/Fiction,” in *Francis Alÿs*, 15.

modèle prend sens dans la mesure où il constitue une hypothèse suffisamment ouverte pour être mise à l'épreuve dans des situations répétées et changeantes.⁰

This idea of art production as a kind of social experiment or epistemological enquiry, that requires returns and repetitions, crops up throughout Alÿs's oeuvre. Like many oulipian texts, Alÿs's work is distinctly playful in tone, almost to the point of seeming childlike and naive.⁰ In an interview with James Lingwood, Alÿs readily admits to this dimension of his practice when speaking about *Railings*: "maybe as a kid's game, you know, picking up a stick and running it along the railings. A lot of walks have had that kind of echo, like kicking a bottle along the pavements, or dragging a magnet through the streets at the end of a string..."⁰ If his work questions authority, it may be successful in doing so because of this light-heartedness, which implements a rhetorical strategy rather than a polemical one. Moreover, because Alÿs's works "interrogent la pensée systématique jusque dans ses formes les plus innocentes," they not only point to the tendency for all such regimes to become totalising to the point of ubiquity, but, in the same gesture provide a model for breaking it down or revealing precisely where it is already broken.⁰ For art critic Kelly Baum, Alÿs's work emphasizes a much more problematic relationship between aesthetics

⁰ Medina, "Action/Fiction," 7.

⁰ Describing *The Collector* Cuauhtémoc Medina writes "Alÿs emporte la mascotte à roulette comme on emporte un jouet, et la 'promena' quotidiennement dans les rues de Mexico dans le but d'attirer clous, morceaux de fer blanc et de fil de fer..." (Ibid., 13)

⁰ Francis Alÿs, "Rumours: A Conversation Between Francis Alÿs and James Lingwood," in *Francis Alÿs: Seven Walks*, (London: Artangel, 2004-5), 20.

⁰ Medina, "Action/Fiction," 25.

and politics: “by introducing the subject of aesthetics, Alÿs implicitly complicated the question of the political.”⁰ This can be seen quite clearly in titles like ‘Sometimes doing something poetic can become political, and sometimes doing something political can become poetic’ and the more esoteric ‘Sometimes making something leads to nothing.’ Cuauhtémoc Medina has identified *The Collector* as the piece which “avait institué la marche comme discipline artistique. Une pratique qui identifiait la promenade à la pensée, le parcours à la recherche, l’agir au dire, mais qui entrelaçait surtout en une seule et même opération observation et incitation.”⁰ For Medina, Alÿs’s varied walking projects since *The Collector*, “allaient être à la fois l’origine d’une narration, la définition d’un échantillon sociologique et un instrument d’intervention politique.”⁰ But while it may be tempting to situate his practices as an elaboration on the *flâneur* or as a continuation of the Situationist *dérive*, “ses marches[...] sont avant tout un moyen de susciter une friction entre le nouvel autoritarisme de l’efficience et les formes déclarées ou larvées de sabotage qui l’accompagnent et s’y opposent.”⁰

If Long’s works imposed a geometrical order onto the natural landscape, Alÿs’s works sometimes generate a similar visual form but through radically different means. In the piece *Barrenderos*, Alÿs hired a

⁰ Kelly Baum, “Francis Alÿs: The Green Line: sometimes doing something poetic can be political and sometimes doing something political can be poetic,” in *Nobody’s Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 92.

⁰ Medina, “Action/Fiction,” 15.

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Ibid., 25.

group of street sweepers to walk through the city pushing all of the detritus and trash along with them until they simply could not move the enormous mass any further. The trash accumulated into a heaped line whose mass dwarfs both the human sweepers and the city itself. Although the contexts are radically different, there is a formal element of Long's *Line Made by Walking* that is retained in Alÿs's interventions. The work skews the spatial relationships between what is ephemeral and discarded (trash that didn't even make it to the bin), and what is supposedly monumental and permanent (the city itself). By approaching the world in this way, Alÿs's work gestures towards collectivism, sociality and political engagement.

Frévent: Oulipian Experiments in Travel and Truth

This section analyses *Frévent* as a specific example of systematic travel. It reveals the modality of weird science that is the consequence of the use of protocols and procedures.

Frévent opens with the following *Avertissement* which describes the constraints of the project:

Il est difficile de dire, aujourd'hui, si nous avons choisi Frévent par hasard, lorsqu'il s'était agi de trouver un lieu de France inconnu de nous pour y faire un «voyage». Nous avons conclu qu'il devait se trouver plutôt dans le nord de l'hexagone, et, bientôt, le doigt sur la carte s'est arrêté à Frévent.

Il s'agissait que chacun de nous trois s'y rende, consécutivement (l'ordre avait été tiré au sort), Jacques le mardi 28 mai 1991, Pierre le mardi 4 juin, Claudine le mardi 11 juin, et n'y demeure pas moins de dix heures. Au retour, nous entamerions une correspondance relative à notre séjour.

*Cette correspondance achevée, nous la ferions lire à un quatrième larron, ce fut Alain, qui ferait à son tour le déplacement.*⁰

The correspondence collected in the book consists of 39 questions and answers, conducted through a series of letters and carried out over the course of the year following the original journeys. One participant puts a question to another participant, who responds and subsequently poses another question to one or another of the participants. Each entry is

⁰ Claudine Capdeville, Jacques Jouet, Pierre Laurent & Alain Barandard. *Frévent* (Paris: Éditions Plurielle, 1993). Subsequent references will be given in the text. Subsequent to presenting this material during the Colloque Jacques Jouet at the Université de Poitiers, Jouet sent me three further texts that, along with *Frévent*, form an even more extensive project of regional travel in France loosely titled "Tour de la France par trois adultes (et quelques comparses)," and each having their own various constraints. *Kayersburg* (1997), *Impressions de Mormoiron* (2003), *Les Lilas* (2008), all published by Éditions Plurielles, will be the subject of future research.

dated and these range between June 1991 and May 1992. Alain Barandard's piece "Lettre aux auteurs" closes the book and serves as a kind of summation and post-face to the text as a whole. A black-and-white photo essay concludes the book and provides visual representations of some of the streets and spaces described in the letter entries, with captions such as "Autour de Frévent", "Aux portes de Frévent," and "Le jardin public." Early in the entries, a black-and-white plan of the town of Frévent is provided and photographs are scattered through the book at points where these correspond specifically to the text on the opposite page. The types of things registered in these accounts include mundane descriptions of places such as the bookstore, barber shop, café and restaurant, replete with textual portraits of the cast of characters to be found in these locales. The descriptions also touch on the overall layout of the town, particularly a large hill or embankment (which none of the participants had imagined in advance), the abandoned railway station and derelict manufacturing buildings, as well as the overwhelming presence of cemeteries, both civilian and military, complete with memorials from the world wars. The 'entries' also reflect the participants' various activities in Frévent ranging from ambulating through the streets, to eating and drinking in the café and restaurant, to having one's hair cut (Claudine) or making phone calls to Paris.

Almost immediately the vestiges of war in the town are encountered. In the very first question, posed by Pierre Laurent to Jacques Jouet, we discover that Jouet purchased a copy of Marguerite Duras's *Hiroshima mon amour* at the bookstore in Frévent. Allowing himself to reminisce about the text, Laurent asks Jouet to recount the experience of purchasing and reading the book while in Frévent. Jouet obliges, explaining that he needed a book that could be read in a single day, but states "je n'ai pas songé une seconde à la première réplique et sa résonance, évidente aujourd'hui, avec notre curiosité de Frévent." (9)⁰ This somewhat flippant reference to *Hiroshima mon amour* nonetheless unlocks important aspects of the Frévent project. Both *Frévent* and *Hiroshima mon amour*, can be situated within a canon of post-war French writing. Where *Hiroshima mon amour* involves the account of an affair and a period of stay in Hiroshima after the Second World War, *Frévent* involves a brief journey to a local setting of relatively minor historical significance. Duras's text recounts a love affair between a Japanese architect and a French actress, who has been hired to play a nurse in a film that takes Hiroshima as its setting. Their relationship is represented through the intimate dialogue of the two lovers. And yet there are important ways in which *Frévent*, created some 32 years after

⁰ Duras's text opens with the male protagonist saying: "Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima." To which the female protagonist replies: "J'ai tout vu. Tout." (Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour, scénario et dialogues* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960), 22). To his repeated claims that she saw nothing, the female protagonist begins to enumerate those things that she did see, the hospital, the museum, and with each thing, her descriptions become more and more detailed.

Hiroshima, is occupied by similar issues arising from the representation of history and problems attendant to vision that arise through dialogue.

Like *Hiroshima*, *Frévent* consistently stumbles upon the violence left behind after the Second World War. The presence of death and destruction is everywhere in the text and the town. While this is made most evident by the constant remarks about the multiple cemeteries (civilian and military) in the town, it is also apparent in a broader sense: “Et puis toujours cette impression d’abandon, de temps révolu, comme bien d’autres endroits.”(33) The human presence in Frévent is attested to through absence and negation, through the interred bodies of the cemetery, and the disappearance of what once was, rather than any present activity or urban bustle. Just as *Hiroshima* consistently spirals around the contrasting presence of the healthy bodies of the lovers and the representation of evanescent or disfigured bodies of post-atomic Japan, the tension between activity and passivity is a constant motif of *Frévent*. Through the very act of writing Jouet, Capdeville and Laurent participate in the culture of Frévent, and this is contrasted with the overriding image of the town’s seeming abandonment. Their work as writers seems to run in direct contrast to a general lack of productivity evidenced in the buildings and streets of the town itself. On page 27, for example, Pierre recounts his quest to find the town’s abandoned railway tracks, which he then follows to an abandoned goods station. He describes these as the “bout du monde.” Like *À Lorient*, going in search

of manufacturing and industry in Frévent reveals only the historical trace of such commerce. In this same entry, he recounts how one of the civilian cemeteries will be razed as well, so that even death rituals are here given a finite life span. Frévent is a sleepy town; it is past its prime. The sense that Frévent has quite literally been left behind relegates it to the domain of history rather than to that of an active participant in the construction of a present French reality.

Evidently, this conception of the town is entirely dependent on questions of vision: Who is the seeing/speaking subject? What are they seeing and from what perspective? And how is this represented in the texts? If *Hiroshima, mon amour* is structured as a fugue between the female protagonist's narrative and the counter-narrative of her male lover then, at its most basic level, that text is a question about truthfulness and subjective vision, epitomised by the opening statement made by him in the film, "tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima." Because of the dialogic structure of *Frévent*, a similar inquiry into the truthfulness of the participants' testimony is foregrounded. Unlike the journey to Hiroshima represented in the book and film, Jouet contends "personne ne m'a présenté Frévent, personne ne m'a brossé un tableau de Frévent," just as no one "a sussuré dans l'oreille (voix «calme, mate, récitative», dit Marguerite Duras) et dans l'étreinte, que j'avais rien vu à Frévent." (9) Rather for Jouet "j'ai vu quelque chose à Frévent-la-normale. J'ai vu ce que j'ai vu et c'est un bon souvenir." (9) Jouet's

tautological vision, his assurance that what was witnessed in Frévent was somehow self-evident and clear, is not only undermined over the duration of the year-long correspondence, but the correspondence seems designed to question precisely this assumption.

The form of *Frévent*, as an epistolary and thus dialogical project between three people is fascinating because it suggests a kind of intentional datedness that may illuminate an historical inspiration for the travel project itself. The form also seems particularly well-suited to representing the town, which similarly has fallen out of favour. While one does not want to risk aggrandizing the project, there is something of Magellan, Cook or Bougainville inspiring the work of *Frévent*, particularly because, as Bourriaud observes, “expedition involves gathering data and at the same time inventing the cognitive mode that will format that data.”⁰ On one hand, the Frévent project inhabits forms of historical adventure and mimics the scientific tools used to produce and comprehend that adventure. On the other hand, the project selected a relatively banal location and implemented a minimal constraint (the ten hours required by each participant). In the case of Frévent, the journey is marked as distinctly local and intensely lacking in historical significance. The ‘tools’ used to interrogate it are quite subtle, more akin to forms of attention and modes of observation or comparison, than to anything genuinely scientific. Given the almost comedic proximity of the

⁰ Bourriaud, *GNS*, 119.

location selected for the project and its relatively unimportant history, the project is invested in what Georges Perec referred to as the *endotique* and *l'infra-ordinaire*.⁰ Much like Perec discovered while working on *Lieux* and *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* projects, the attempt at penetrating everyday experience becomes caught in a dynamic of description. Such projects admit the impossibility of any final or exhaustive description because, rather obviously, more detailed description is always possible. In *Frévent*, the accumulation of three distinct experiences and the proffering of these for comparison is easily lent to a teleology—since the reader is given the impression that they are getting a fuller, more accurate image of Frévent as the text progresses. And yet parallel to the reader's progression through the letters (which are organized chronologically), the temporal distance between the participants' experience of Frévent and the time of writing is increased. The duration of the letter writing project, taking place over the course of the entire year following the participants' trips to Frévent, necessarily raises questions about the changing role of memory in the construction of Frévent as a narrative subject. The farther away from Frévent temporally, the more the task of remembering comes into the letters as a subject in itself. This happens in terms of the difficulty of remembering specifics about the town, but also those specifics give way to other related memories which predate them or took place elsewhere but were recalled because of the Frévent experience. In many instances,

⁰ Perec, *L'infra-ordinaire*, 11-12.

the act of remembering Frévent sets off a secondary and simultaneous act of remembering something utterly unrelated to Frévent but somehow evoked by it. These fluctuations result from what Bernard Stiegler has called *réentions tertiaries*. Because the letters capture the flux of experience both as it was forming in Frévent and as it was forming at the time of writing (which is also the time in which Frévent was already formed in the mind as memory), I would argue, following from Stiegler, that the collected letters constitute a temporal object that “se constitue dans son unité comme écoulement. Cet objet temporel, en tant que flux, *coïncide* avec le flux de la conscience dont il est l’objet—la conscience du spectateur.”⁰ What is important about Stiegler’s conception of the temporal object, and what allows me to extrapolate and suggest that the Frévent project is such an object is that for Stiegler:

l’objet proprement temporel n’est pas simplement dans le temps: il se trame au fil du temps—comme ce qui apparaît en passant, comme ce qui passe, comme ce qui se manifeste en disparaissant, comme flux s’évanouissant à mesure qu’il se produit.[...] Rendre compte de la constitution du flux de l’objet temporel, ce sera aussi rendre compte de la constitution du flux de la conscience dont il est.⁰

In this respect, itinerary projects not only help to unfold experience in a controlled way, but also seek to record the unfolding of that experience structurally. Added to what would already have been an interesting experiment in Frévent, is the temporal dimension of the letters

⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps, 3: Le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être*, (Paris: Galilée, 2001)., 33.

⁰ Ibid., 36. This resonates so clearly with what I believe Perec was grappling with in his *Lieux* project; that in meticulously observing the temporal passage of space, he might detect the subtle unfolding of consciousness.

exchanged between the participants, which is itself an unfolding dimension of the project, its after life.

But the structure of the letters as questions and answers enables a shift in the discourse from description and giving an account of one's actual experience, to an engagement with both imagined realities and memory. Initially, the questions are posed as calls to narrate the experience of Frévent. Such questions take the form "raconte-moi," "parle-moi," "peux-tu raconter," and emphasize the distinctly narrative dimension of the project and its basis in the straightforward description of experience. Once each participant has described a major part of their time in Frévent, the questions become both more whimsical and more interrogative. For example, Pierre asks both Jacques and Claudine in questions 22 and 24 respectively: "As-tu imaginé un peu ce qui se passe derrière les fenêtres de ces maisons en briques rouges, bâti des scénarios sur les gens que tu croisais dans la rue ou au café? Pouvais-tu t'imaginer dans une vie sociale à Frévent?" (53) For Jouet, "il y a évidemment un scénario par carreau de fenêtre" even if "il ne pouvait pas y avoir autant d'habitants à Frévent que de carreaux de fenêtres." (55) In looking at the red brick buildings, Jouet fabricates possible stories from the experiences he has had elsewhere in the town, or at the very least he recognises the imaginative potential for doing so. But for Jouet, the town is already a sort of literary backdrop, imbued with fiction even in his account of the place: "un jour ou l'autre, je sais qu'en

réfléchissant à un personnage de récit, le décor de Frévent viendra se glisser derrière son dos.”(55) As far as imagining what his life would be in Frévent, Jouet admits to having thought about it merely as a kind of intellectual exercise, or “cliché de la sagesse.” (55) He imagines purchasing a house in the tranquil countryside around Frévent, but then rejects the idea, imagining driving home from Paris, Arras or Amiens, in the cold and rain: “je ne suis pas un sage, alors je m’ennuierais.” (55)

In response to this same question (“peux-tu t’imaginer dans une vie sociale à Frévent?”), Capdeville admits that she never thought about it while she was actually in the town, and contends “Frévent m’a paru une petite ville plutôt terne, avec peu de gens dans les rues, repliée sur elle-même. Y a-t-il une place pour quelqu’un venu d’ailleurs?” (59) Indeed, the image of the town as distinctly vacant and empty, not only at the level of the streets but also at the level of industry and economy, along with the relative difficulty of getting to the town, begs the question as to whether anyone relocates to Frévent from elsewhere, and if so, how many? These conditions lead Capdeville to claim that “ce serait une obligation impérative (assignée à résidence par exemple) qui me ferait habiter à Frévent. Alors bien sûr je m’y ennuierais, j’achèterais la télé.” (59) But then almost as a concession to the idea of a travel project like *Frévent*, Capdeville suggests “on peut imaginer qu’il existe une joyeuse bande de copains qui y travaille, s’y amuse, fait des sorties culturelles et

autres, et être sûr que les conditions de vie matérielles (espace et nature) sont incomparable avec celles de Paris.” (59)

At around the same point in the development of the project and at precisely the same point where participants begin to imagine various potential realities from the ‘stock footage’ of Frévent, there is also a tonal shift from casual questions about various observations and a focus on storytelling, to a more concerted inquiry about how certain facts presented in these letters came to be known. For example, how did Laurent find out that the patronne of the café was named Claudine and the train master in Saint-Pol, Ferdinand? Attendant to this shift in textual analysis is a more confrontational, contrarian, and interrogative tone. This investigative tone is perpetuated by Jouet’s textual sleuthing which allows him to use previous statements in the letters to discredit subsequent assertions. In question 23, Jouet has discovered an inconsistency in Laurent’s testimony and asks “doit-on vraiment ajouter foi à tout ce que tu nous as raconté, si tes réponses sont, d’un jour à l’autre, aussi étrangement contradictoires?” (55) For Jouet, it becomes a question of whether it is possible to “connaître la vérité” of these experiences through their textual construction and reconstructions. The tone becomes almost hysterical at points where Jouet’s attempts to establish the truth of the accounts simultaneously open these accounts to extreme doubt and suspicion. Under the supervision of Jouet, there is a desire to maintain the reliability of the information.

Along these lines, Jouet first queries Laurent's route from Frévent back to Paris because in one response he affirmed that it was via Amiens, whereas in an earlier response it was via Arras. (55) Jouet's accusation is easily legitimized because one can easily flip back to the relevant response by Laurent and see exactly how it occurs in the text.

Arras, une bonne heure d'attente, rapide promenade en ville; les rues qui se vident, le théâtre où les gens se pressent à un gala de fin d'année, la grand place si belle. La gare de nouveau, du retard, le chef de gare (c'est Ferdinand) arpente le quai.(43)

Pour ce qui est de Ferdinand, il arpentait le quai de la gare d'Amiens avec la supériorité sereine de celui qui sait que le train ne peut pas partir sans lui. Le talkie-walkie suspendu à son cou grésilla, un collègue l'appelant pour lui annoncer que l'express de Paris (en retard) arrivait.(51)

What seems to have happened is a forgivable mis-remembrance of the actual name of the town. Indeed, it is a rather human and excusable error to confuse Arras and Amiens in this way. However, Laurent, had already come under scrutiny from Capdeville for knowing the name of the conductor and the patronne of the restaurant "en si peu de temps." So the confusion about the names of the towns suggests to the other participants that Laurent actually made two trips to Frévent, thus explaining how he was able to collect such seemingly detailed information. But it also suggests that he broke the constraints of the project, thus bringing about a radical scepticism on the part of the other participants.

Given the dialogical structure of the text, Laurent is granted the opportunity to respond to such accusations. He does so on two separate occasions where it becomes clear that variations in his story persist and remain an issue for the other participants in the project. In his first response, he admits to being embarrassed and tries to draw Jouet into his confidence, because he already feels persecuted by Capdeville's belief that he had taken two journeys. He affirms that he took one journey and that it passed through Arras. After a second query about his routes by Jouet, Laurent decides to reread the entirety of the correspondence to date. He describes this process as follows: "J'ai eu l'impression de repartir de Frévent une seconde fois. Relire tous les textes, refaire le voyage, le sien, celui des partenaires, ce qui s'est passé depuis le début de cette correspondance et qui est aussi un parcours."

(63) What is interesting about his conception of the project of rereading is that the practice of actually going to Frévent is conflated with the project of writing about that practice. Reading is figured as a *parcours*, which, it is suggested, is as relevant a 'route' as that of the actual journey. The record of the original participants' journeys to Frévent enables the town to be traced out by the reader: in a sense, the reader goes over the spaces again. The itinerary (as a record of travel already taken) serves as an imaginative sounding board for further reminiscences, or indeed (for Barandard at least) as a plan for future travel. In a rather spry move, Laurent is able to both undermine the relevance of Capdeville and Jouet's accusations while underscoring the

greater importance and value of the project as a new genre. The inference drawn by Laurent is that the participants have become too pre-occupied with the details of each other's accounts and have lost sight of the positive potential that inheres in projects like this one. (5)

On découvre des choses sur l'autre, on se dit qu'on s'en doutait un peu et on a l'impression d'être intelligent. Et puis, finalement, sait-on ce qui s'est passé vraiment? [...] on pense tout de suite à une réponse pleine de sentiments élevés, réflexions sur le temps, le lieu, la mémoire, tout ça... Et je ne me vois ni ne me sens capable de philosopher sur Frévent.(63)

What Laurent is suggesting is perhaps that having subjected each other's experiences of the town to such forensic scrutiny through the letters it is no longer possible really to think about Frévent separately from the various doubts which arose after Frévent, as the ostensible object of study in this experiment has vanished under the weight of three distinct, subjective experiences of that town.

In another curious inquiry, the question is raised as to whether Capdeville in fact fulfilled the requirements of the project. It is revealed that she did not spend the minimum and mandatory 10 hours in Frévent. Having realised that there was no way of taking the train directly to Frévent, Capdeville decided to walk from the nearest station at Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise, approximately 15 kilometres away. She claims that this decision "s'est immédiatement imposé à moi, avec une sorte de soulagement: j'aurais à passer d'autant moins de temps dans les rues où d'avance je me sentais désespérée." (11) She openly admits that for her

“l’intérêt de ce projet se concentrait sur l’ensemble des déplacements linéaires à effectuer,” rather than any genuine interest in inhabiting or occupying the spaces of Frévent (11). Her plan was to “errer le minimum raisonnable dans le bourg et « l’aventure » reprenait avec le retour vers Paris.” (11) When asked by Pierre to expand upon this sense of being “désemparée,” Capdeville explains: “Tout lieu inconnu, quel qu’il soit, provoque en moi a minima une sorte de vacillement d’insécurité, de perte des repères avec l’envie d’en finir le plus vite possible, mais aussi une fascination pour cela.”(19) It is clear that Capdeville’s decision to ‘cheat’ the project is less about being intentionally obfuscating or testing the limits of the project in any objective sense. Rather, her decision to spend the major part of her ten allotted hours travelling to and from Frévent by foot is an attempt to thwart the affective potential that such a project might generate. Driven by the anticipation of a whole range of negative affects, Capdeville inadvertently turns the project into a test of her own affective ground, approaching the limit of feeling ‘désemparée’ without actually giving herself over to the source of those affects. There is another accusation that Capdeville has transgressed the boundaries of the project later in the book. Jouet demands to know why Capdeville agreed to the initial terms of the project only to disobey the constraints in the process.

Tout de même Claudine, plusieurs questions: pourquoi, alors que nous avons expressément décidé que chacun de nous devait passer dix heures à Frévent, à l’exclusion du temps de voyage nécessaire pour s’y rendre ou en revenir, pourquoi

n'as-tu passé que si peu de temps dans les lieux? Tu t'en es expliquée plus haut, d'accord, mais alors, pourquoi as-tu ainsi bafoué nos accords?(45)

Jouet's spirit of questioning eventually leads to the more radical question: "As-tu envisagé de ne pas aller à Frévent, et de prétendre le contraire?" (65) From this provocation, Jouet and Laurent launch satirical requests for written confirmation that could attest to her presence in Frévent. They suspect (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) that perhaps she never made the trip at all. In this respect, if at least a part of the Frévent project was about negotiating a range of negative and positive affects caused by solitude, unknown spaces, or duration, then certainly Capdeville's interpretation of the project missed the point entirely. And yet, she is the one participant who seems ready to admit that the mechanics of the project already presupposed certain kinds of safety and self-mastery that perhaps are not as available to the experience of the only female to participate in the project.⁰

One of the most intriguing features of the *Frévent* text is the "Lettres aux auteurs" written by Alain Barandard. Included at the end of the correspondence section of the text, as a kind of postface to the project as a whole, while it also works through the questions posed by

⁰ In this respect I am thinking of the work of Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. While the text does not explicitly engage with issues attendant to gender, her project, which posits the healthy city as one which has the fewest divisions between the public and private spheres of life, clearly holds the potential for gendered readings. If "the bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among strangers," (Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1993), 39) then where women walk and feel comfortable walking should be of primary concern for urban planners and art projects alike.

the text and specifically works to resolve the rather sniping tone of the correspondence that I have just outlined. After having read the entirety of the project himself, Barandard not only travels to Frévent but responds to the participants of the project describing his role as an attempt to “vérifier vos observations et d’éprouver vos thèses.” (93) Following the fugue-like dialogue (marked by increasing doubts and more adamant calls for proof, or what Barandard describes as “l’angoissante incertitude où vous plongez le lecteur dès la page 65”) Barandard’s intervention works to settle the score by assessing the project as a whole from the position of outsider. Barandard describes his own experience of reading the text as follows:

je n’ai pas douté un seul instant que vous étiez allés à Frévent. J’ai douté, par contre, que Frévent existe. [...] L’idée même effleurée que vous n’existiez pas non plus. Trois personnes différentes? À d’autres! C., P. Et J. Ne sont-ils les composantes essentielles d’une personnalité s’essayant à désintriquer ses strates constitutives? (96-97)

If the project was set up as a modest local journey and the subsequent descriptive exchange about that experience, then the dialogue itself has revealed levels of calculated misprision through the concealment of facts that were unanticipated at the outset of the project. The weirdness of the project’s scientific ambition is brought out as the value of its truth claims come into question.

Upon arriving in Frévent Barandard describes “cette étrange sensation d’accompagnement qui m’a tenu l’oeil attentif plus que de

coutume, que de raison.”(98) This is undoubtedly because, having already read the text, going over the actual streets and spaces of Frévent, reminds him of the letters. They haunt his experience of the town. Yet, Barandard’s letter certainly works as a verification of certain facts expressed in the correspondence dialogue. For example, Barandard agrees that “la guerre est toujours présente” just as “vous avez si bien dépeint l’atmosphère de ce lieu où s’intriquent civils et militaires dans la boue et les bourrasques.” (page 94-95) In much of the “Lettre” he methodically goes through a number of the responses given by the participants and simply verifies their observations as he explicitly set out to do.

Barandard sees in the project a hybrid form blending “la monographie de l’ethnologue et le dialogue platonicien.” (93) He consistently compares the project’s aims to those of science and treats the repetition of the journey that he makes as a kind of scientific experiment in itself—as if he were repeating the experiment to test its results. In rather metaphorical language Barandard suggests the ways that the project and the participants have “très bien montré que les routes qui traversent Frévent mènent ailleurs.” (95) But he also underscores the precise implications of the project more broadly:

Ces errances pourront paraître extravagantes mais n’avez-vous pas montré qu’il faut passer par l’épreuve du doute pour établir les plus solides réalités? Ce n’est pas le moindre mérite de votre ouvrage, en effet, que d’avoir renouvelé le principe de l’observation scientifique en vous attachant à scruter les

observateurs autant que l'objet observé. Permettez-moi d'y voir une sorte de révolution copernicienne promise à de fructueux lendemains. (97)

In rather lofty language, he goes on to suggest that, "vous avez cernés [les sujets] avec une précision étonnante, par petites touches discrètes anodines en apparence mais qui atteignent à l'Essentiel." (97)

Conclusion

Through the motif and trope of the itinerary the projects discussed in this chapter establish a complex interplay between practices and poetics. The initial plan for the journey is devised as a stratagem for the production of literary and artistic works. As such all of these texts share in an enlarged notion of formal constraint.⁰ Acting as a summons to creation through the proxy of the journey, the realisation of the itinerary thus becomes an indirect gauge of the success or failure of creative action as it was, rather curiously, mandated by the initial formulation of that itinerary itself. Any unforeseen outcome becomes a measure and assurance of the creative value of the action, testifying to the potential for new practices and new poetics to emerge from pre-existing structures of form and experience. This occurs quite literally at points where the journey strays from its intended course and produces unanticipated effects, but it also happens in a more abstract sense, whereby the inefficiencies of the initial plan are bolstered by that which escapes the constraints of the plan itself. Because the frequent use of the itinerary as a device for contemporary creative activity also requires the writer or artist—or indeed sometimes the reader and viewer—to submit themselves to a planned experience, these itineraries can serve a

⁰ This notion of “élargissement du champ de la contrainte” is taken from an interview with Jacques Roubaud by Camille Bloomfield cited in Abigail Lang, “Oulipo et oralité,” in *Oulipo@50 – L’Oulipo à 50 ans*, 58. Lang goes on to situate the expansion of concept of constraint in the works of Jouet and Roubaud.

restorative and therapeutic function for artists and writers. By mobilizing creative production through unassuming projects involving local travel, these projects diminish the seriousness of creative production. By establishing tasks in advance, these projects allow for authors and artists to use relatively humble methods because if one simply follows the plan and sticks with the programme then the project is already a success.

As Bénédicte Vignier claims in her preface to *À Lorient*, the Oulipo “invente de drôles de parcours, modifie la perception et révèle une mémoire devenue invisible et pourtant active de signes qui envahissent le quotidien.”⁰ As such what is foregrounded in these projects is the potential for literature to restore vitality and temporality to urban space through direct, material encounters. These projects can be thought of as itineraries that trace the spatiotemporal passages of the author through narratives forged out of encounters that are generally characteristic of many ordinary experiences. The projects achieve this by unravelling the embedded threads of history that can be found by walking through the towns, and they therefore work against the overriding sense that the towns have somehow lost their vitality and life force. In these projects, history is brought to life, made new. Moreover, these literary texts subvert and transform the notion that economic growth and regeneration are the only signs of a developing urban landscape, or at

⁰ Vignier, Preface to *À Lorient*, 5.

the very least they deconstruct conventional understandings of what constitutes development and change, insisting rather on what Ernst Bloch calls “the dialectical links between growth and decay.”⁰ These poets turn their attention towards those elements of the city which have become outmoded by the simple progression of time, and in so doing they demonstrate the potential for those very signs of degeneracy and alienation to be reanimated, becoming the very forebears of potential, if not actual growth. The embedded textual residues of history are thus excavated from urban surfaces and salvaged as a necessary part in the process of textual refurbishment. By addressing the textual traces of the past as they persist in the mundane and everyday dimension of Lorient and Frévent, these texts work to restore hidden potentials of signification within the cityscape thus bringing some significance back to them.

The site-specificity that inheres in one itinerary often catalyzes acts of remembrance or association. Similarly, previously accomplished itineraries will affect future journeys. The travel projects discussed in this chapter implement alternative criteria, shifting the focus of travel from the exceptional and foreign to the mundane and near-at-hand. By analysing *Frévent* and *À Lorient*, I have not only taken an interest in two under-theorized and recent oulipian texts, but I have effected a shift in the existing discourse of walking and urban practices away from Paris.

⁰ Ernst Bloch, “Discussing Expressionism,” in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977), 22.

In the post-industrial landscapes of northern France, such aesthetic practices reveal a different vision of rural French reality, one that demanded new methods of approach and creation.

4

Le quotidien météorologique

What Weather Might Report

“For who can say more of his own existence than that it has passed through the lives of two or three others as gently and closely as the weather?”

Walter Benjamin, “One Way Street”

Introduction

This chapter moves from a consideration of the uses and meanings of itineraries in literary and artistic projects to projects that engage with the weather. The temporal dimensions of the weather feature a sense of unfolding and subtle change that makes them particularly interesting to consider within the context of affect. Because the weather is experienced through temperature, wind, and moisture levels, it requires a constant checking-in with the self, a kind of homeostatic regulation, negotiated across the skin, the surface gradient of the internal body and the external world. All of the works discussed in this chapter demonstrate how the weather is also a powerful mode of expressing affects that similarly unfurl and transform. Registering these affects requires a kind of barometer, and this will become apparent in my

discussion of Pierre Pachet's *Les baromètres de l'âme* in the second part of this chapter. During the Enlightenment, for example, meteorological metaphors were used to articulate internal states of being, but as the science of meteorology developed, its tools (such as the barometer) were then figuratively applied to the soul in order to register subtle changes in temperament, just as those tools would have been used to register subtle changes in the weather.

In many of his texts Jacques Roubaud steadily conjures images of the clouds. Most notably in *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* (John Constable) but also in works as diverse as *La pluralité des mondes de Lewis*, *Dors*, *Éros mélancolique*, and *La boucle*, it is through clouds that Roubaud meditates on the paradoxes of the instant—the fleeting qualities of the moment that are impossible to give form to textually. Moreover, clouds bear heavily upon his conception of memory, and the interplay of the visual and the oral in poetry. In so doing they reveal a complex conception of poetic form. In this chapter, I am particularly focused on the way that *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* appropriates the history of meteorology and uses it to approach memory, and its embedded affects, but the crucial point is that it does so in a circumspect manner. The text also serves to explicate elements of Roubaud's system of auto-reference that centre around the character, or persona, of Mr. Goodman and the frequent but elusive references to John Constable and Luke Howard in his texts.

Of course, the weather and its relationship to poetry and the arts has a long history and there are a number of ways of approaching the subject in its historical emergence. As early as the Hellenistic period, the convergence between literature and meteorology was apparent and helped forge important epistemological frameworks for the time. For example, the second section of Aratus's *Phaenomena* (c. 310-240 B.C.), "Weather Signs: Proem," was a practical manual (in the tradition of the farmer's almanac) in verse which taught the reader to identify wind signs, rain signs, signs of fair and foul weather, and signs of the seasons.⁰ As Douglas Kidd explains, during the Hellenistic period, "with the growth of science, the natural world is better understood, and Zeus is now a helpful rather than a hostile force."⁰ Through the recurrence of signs in the natural world, weather events could be read and Aratus's text stresses the predictive value of observation. Markers, omens and signs must be learned so that "a little bit of watchfulness will reap/ boundless rewards."⁰ Katharina Volk claims that "the main appeal of didactic poetry in the Hellenistic age lay in the very fact that Poets attempted to tackle such unwieldy, unpoetic, technical subjects,"⁰ as part of a larger epistemological project which produced the Hellenistic world-view.

⁰ Aaron Poochigan, "Introduction," in *Aratus: Phaenomena*, trans. Aaron Poochigan (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), ix.

⁰ Douglas Kidd, "Introduction," in *Aratus: Phaenomena*, trans. Douglas A. Kidd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.

⁰ Aratus, *Phaenomena*, trans. Aaron Poochigan line 815-816.

⁰ Katharina Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 55.

But this harmonious vision of a predictable world belies a concomitant dimension of the weather—namely, that the weather can manifest discontinuity and unpredictability as much as it can signal continuity and regularity.⁰ As will be shown throughout this chapter, the weather is consistently represented as both distinctly rational and profoundly disruptive. Arden Reed's book *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire*, is a study of what he calls the "meteoric tradition" in which the weather is characterized "as a kind of static or interference that distorts clear and distinct understanding."⁰ While the emergence of modern empirical science "depended on exact, rigorous measurement of a wholly regulated environment," studies of the weather must acknowledge chaos and conflict.⁰ "We can," Reed suggests, "regard the weather as manifesting either continuity and regularity or discontinuity and unpredictability."⁰ For Reed, meteorology emerges in literature as a move away from "the clear and distinct, the orderly, the formal, and the necessary, and toward the uncertain, the disordered, the shifting, and the contingent."⁰ In representation, the weather serves to disrupt the boundaries between order/disorder, subject/object, inside/outside.

⁰ Arden Reed *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire* (Rhode Island: University Press of New England, 1983), 8.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

For the purposes of my research, the weather is significant because it has been explored by writers and artists as much as it has been investigated by natural philosophers and scientists. When taken in the context of contemporary aesthetic practice, meteorology therefore emerges as a ‘weird science,’ having an established relationship to both affect (that which gets in the way of clear, rational thought) and epistemology (knowledge produced nonetheless). This chapter will explore the ways that contemporary literary and artistic projects have taken up the weather, sometimes through explicitly appropriating its historical discourse, sometimes through employing the daily, observational tactics of meteorology itself. In both cases these experiments produce powerful insights into the persistent connection between the weather and the expression of affect.

In reading through the now vast bibliography of ‘the affective turn’ in theory, it is surprising how frequently the articulation and description of affect is mapped onto the language of weather. This is for good reason: like the weather, affects can be ineffable and they thus share certain typologies and forms. In “Modulating the Excess of Affect,” Ben Anderson contends that affects are “impersonal intensities that do not belong to a subject or an object, nor do they reside in the mediating space between a subject and an object.”⁰ Rather they are a kind of nearness or proximity that permeates the body, changing it, impressing

⁰ Ben Anderson, “Modulating the Excess of Affect: Morale in a State of ‘Total War,’” 161.

upon it, affecting it, sometimes without ever being acknowledged. Similarly, in the Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth describe affect as follows:

affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-. Affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness*. Affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to compartments of matter of virtually any and every sort. Hence, affect's always immanent capacity for extending further still: both into and out of the interstices of the inorganic and non-living, the intracellular divulgements of sinew, tissue, and gut economies, and the vaporous evanescences of the incorporeal (events, atmospheres, feeling-tones).⁰

In this passage affect takes on alchemical forms, evanescent into atmospheres but also becoming molecular events in the body. It is both an external phenomenon, and one that exerts palpable forces on and in the body; it is thus neither wholly external nor entirely contained within. As such, affects are often first experienced as surface effects, happening in the permeable zones and junctures where 'internal' emotion is expressed and external events are internalised. Like affect, the weather also has its "supple incrementalism" and its own tools for measuring the "rises and falls" of its regular vicissitudes.

The language used in the above passage is unmistakably Deleuzian in that it addresses intensities and vitalities. It describes a

⁰ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 2.

distinctly Deleuzian conception of the body, composed of moving assemblages, contingently bounded and ripping through bodily integrities, where affect neither impinges upon the body from the outside nor erupts from within.⁰ While Deleuze has had an incalculable impact on affect theory, my own interest in affect theory lies more in its development of theories of embodiment inherited from feminism. This particular model of affect illuminates various ways that people endure the present, that people find ways of getting on with the business of getting on. As affect theorist Lauren Berlant admits, such worldly work, “requires finding one’s footing in new manners of being in it.”⁰ Indeed for Berlant, echoing the airy language of the weather itself, “change is an impact that is lived on the body before anything is understood, and it is simultaneously meaningful and ineloquent, an atmosphere.”⁰ Once again “atmosphere” is evoked to get at the ambience of affect. It comes across obliquely as tone or mood through sets of associations and intuitions that are meaningful in themselves, rather than as something named and known. As such, it becomes possible to assert, as scholar Kathleen Stewart does, “everything depends on the feel of an atmosphere.”⁰ If theorists readily use weather language to describe affect’s general traits then looking at literary and artistic projects that

⁰ Elspeth Probyn, “Writing Shame,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 76.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 196.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” 108.

⁰ Kathleen Stewart, “Afterword: Worlding Refrains,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 340.

engage with the weather might reveal hidden affects or alternative modes of engaging them.

Even with so much talk about the weather, its role in what Lauren Berlant has called “the lived commons” of embodied interpersonal experience is difficult to grasp.⁰ The weather is not only a convincing example of the power of the everyday, but it also makes significant contributions to conceptions of the common. People talk about the weather, but its mutability renders its meaning perpetually unclear. It always necessitates further articulation and description, or simply more discourse, as if discourse was trying to catch up with what has always already escaped its grasp in the perpetual transformations of weather. What is common is always first intuited, registered as an affective atmosphere, since there can be no real proof of it. And yet the physical experience of the weather works to “revisceralise the commons,” making at least one aspect of what is common palpable and present.⁰ This is especially true in the artistic projects by Roni Horn discussed in the second part of this chapter, where a profound confusion between weather events and affects emerges from her artistic experiments. In a sense, to address the weather as a subject of critical interest to literary studies today requires a kind of attention not often granted to subjects that are at once as collective, as common, or as contingent and as steeped in the history of literature.

⁰ Lauren Berlant, “The Commons Sense: A Poetics from Emerson to Spahr” (lecture, Cornell University, Ithaca NY, June 26, 2012).

⁰ Ibid.

Weather is an ubiquitous subject, found in the most mundane conversations and featured hourly on the news. In a 1987 issue of *Yale French Studies* devoted to the idea of everyday life, Tom Conley argues that the weather is “a most extraordinary and most everyday production of *le quotidien*.”⁰ While much of his article considers the figure and trope of the weatherman (and specifically Bud Kraehling), Conley reminds us that the meteorologist subjects the news “to daily rhythms seemingly more timeless than the present currents of international events [...] folding them into patterns of the everyday.”⁰ Therefore, by providing historical precedents (ranging from the previous day to the record temperature), the weather report functions to assure future rehabilitation and situate the present climate in relation to a much longer, historical, if not geological, time. In “The Weather: A Report on Sincerity,” poet Lisa Robertson also foregrounds the quotidian aspect of the weather by equating it with “the mythic equilibrium of the social, rising and falling in the numbly intimate metres of the commonplace.”⁰ Such “rising and falling,” (here, again, used to describe an aspect of the weather), echoes the language of affect previously cited. It is precisely this anaesthetic quality of the weather that marks it as distinctly ordinary and utterly hegemonic:

The history of meteorology shows that the idea of “the weather” has consistently been appropriated to a dominant

⁰ Tom Conley, “Le quotidien météorologique,” *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 228.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁰ Lisa Robertson, “The Weather: A Report on Sincerity,” *Chicago Review* 51/52, no. 4/1 (2006): 28.

status quo. In the encyclopaedic empire of taxonomies, weather gained a scientific nomenclature. In the culture of warfare, forecasting was absorbed into governmental budgets. In the incipience of the nation state, as governments gained economic interests in aviation and agribusiness, the weather became a department of government.⁰

In this respect, the cultural studies practice of reading against the self-evident and natural, to uncover a political or ideological consequence, reveals the extent to which weather impacts political bodies.

Ecocriticism has also brought the weather back into literary debate. Ecocriticism typically considers the weather as it is represented in texts that address what are already ecological concerns, such as climate change. Either canonical texts are read through tropes of the environment,⁰ or minor authors are explored specifically because of their engagement with global concerns about the environment and the future of human existence.⁰ In *Ecology without Nature*, literary ecologist Timothy Morton pushes for an ecological imaginary that moves “beyond the simple notion of ‘environmental’ content and toward the idea of environmental form.”⁰ Significantly, such a move, Morton contends, would involve attuning ourselves to ecology’s ambience and conjuring a sense of a surrounding atmosphere.⁰

⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁰ See, Heather Sullivan, “Ecocriticism, the Elements, and the Ascent/Descent into Weather in Goethe’s Faust” *Goethe Yearbook* 17, (2010); Paul Davies “Strange Weather: Beckett from the Perspective of Ecocriticism,” in *Beckett After Beckett*, ed. S. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.)

⁰ Lisa Robertson, *The Weather* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2007).

⁰ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

⁰ Morton describes such writing as “a way of registering the feeling of being surrounded by others, or more abstractly, by an otherness that is not the self.” (Ibid., 17)

This chapter is divided into two parts.⁰ In the first part, I analyse literary works by Jacques Roubaud which reappropriate meteorological history and reanimate it in the space of contemporary fiction, even if current meteorologists would consider this prehistory “pittoresque et pathétique.”⁰ Roubaud uses pre-existing weather discourses to meditate on variegation, experience, memory and subjectivity through the motif of clouds. In the art and literature discussed, the meteorological is not invoked symbolically or metaphorically per se, but is enlisted as a way of meditating upon transient states of being. I historicize the relation between the weather and literature by considering the Romantic tradition and the way weather has consistently been represented as a disruptive force—transgressing the boundaries between order/disorder, inside/outside and subject/object. In many respects, the nineteenth-century Romantic period provides a historical precedent for the affective and epistemological tensions identified in the contemporary literary and artistic projects. I historicize Ruskin’s essay “Of the Pathetic Fallacy,” showing how it is at the exact historical moment when the device is degraded in literature that weather is taken up as an object of scientific

⁰ As I began to research this subject it became clear the extent to which the weather is being taken up as a subject of investigation in aesthetics and the following are a list of other potential projects to be explored: John Cage’s *Lecture on the Weather* (commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) subjects a number of Thoreau’s texts to the chance of the I Ching to obtain collage texts performed for the radio; Kenneth Goldsmith’s *The Weather*, which takes the hourly weather bulletins (durations of a minute air time) over the course of a year and transcribes each of these into a paragraph; Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* at the Tate Turbine; Ted Kooser’s *Weather Central* or Lisa Robertson’s *The Weather*, (a book of poetry based on the BBC’s shipping news), or titles yet to be explored: Jo Shapcott’s *Of Mutability*, Michael Longley’s *The Weather in Japan*.

⁰ Stéphane Audeguy, *La théorie des nuages* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard), 280.

inquiry. As one of the most cited texts on meteorology, and probably the founding text of nineteenth-century meteorology, I discuss Luke Howard's *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* and demonstrate its lasting influence in European culture by looking at Goethe's poem on Howard himself.

In the second part of the chapter, I look at visual artist Roni Horn's projects in England and Iceland which show the extent to which affect can be articulated in terms of weather phenomena and likewise for weather effects to act contagiously on the spirit.⁰ In this section I discuss five projects by American artist Roni Horn: *You are the Weather*, *Clowd and Cloun*, *Dictionary of Water*, *Another Water*, and *Weather Reports You*. Horn's projects consistently register mutability through different procedures which give visual representation to variegations, most evident in the selection of the weather as her primary motif and subject. Through the use of an experimental model of investigation over time, Horn's work queries ideas of subjectivity, multiplicity, identity, location, and experience, and her work often effects these queries through direct engagement with the weather. To provide an enhanced context for such artistic practices, I draw on Pierre Pachet's beautiful essay *Les Baromètres de l'âme*, which argues that in the private diary, or *journal intime*, states of being are consistently registered in meteorological

⁰ This contagion of emotion is further emphasised in George Kuchar's *Weather Diaries*, a project which I have not discussed in the chapter. In order to produce his films, Kuchar spent lengthy periods of time in Tornado Alley during tornado season. He stayed in cheap hotels, and documented the atmosphere, the media coverage of tornadoes as they unfolded and, collaterally, his often very visceral responses to them.

terms. Much like meteorology, these texts involve a task of daily observation, an exercise of duration and repetition through which nuanced differences emerge. Moreover, the *journal intime* betrays a simultaneous tendency towards spiritual improvement and towards a rational understanding of the soul. I also consider how early meteorology used the diary format to collect data about the changes in weather. This section explores the ways that representations of weather complicate conventional dichotomies and insists upon the positive, pathetic implications of this type of permeability. I first discuss this with respect to the development of the *journal intime* and then consider a number of implications this may have for theories of affect.

Nuheures: Thinking Through the Clouds with Jacques Roubaud

If, as the backmatter indicates, *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* “est un récit «autobiographique» dans la grande tradition des livres de prose de Jacques Roubaud,” then perhaps it is necessary to nuance Roubaud’s particular style of autobiographical writing by exploring the extent to which it emerges through an imbricated set of discourses—some of which are represented by and continue his extra-textual and ongoing writing projects in other books, and some of which reflect a larger set of social and epistemological interests. While it is widely accepted that Roubaud’s ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ is an autobiographical project involving mathematics, poetry, and prose, in considering *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* it becomes necessary to imagine Roubaud’s autobiographical oeuvre as a much larger system of interconnected and overlapping textual elements in which a multitude of discourses converge and diverge, depending on the text in question, and which function to problematize the limits of autobiography, fiction and epistemological enquiry in Roubaud’s work. Moreover, when seen as a literary project, *Ciel et terre* also presents the possibility of understanding at least a part of Roubaud’s work as a consistent attempt to bring a variety of scientific and mathematical discourses into contact with aesthetics. In *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel*, for example, Roubaud’s interest in clouds is scripted through an engagement with a set of pre-existing intertexts: Luke Howard’s *Essay on the Modification*

of *Clouds*, John Constable's cloud studies, and the general experience of weather in England, Scotland and the south of France respectively. What problematizes the notion of autobiography in *Ciel et terre* is the fact that these intertexts are enlisted to produce an autobiographical account of Roubaud's recurring fictional character Mr. Goodman. While there are clear resonances between the life of Mr. Goodman described in the text and Roubaud's own autobiography as it emerges from '*le grand incendie de londres*,' it is nonetheless problematic to consider this text autobiographical in any straightforward sense. Rather, Goodman can be seen as a fulcrum on which a set of Roubaud's investigations into poetics, philosophy and science can be tested and balanced within the space of fiction.

Originally produced for Éditions Flohic, in 1997, and subsequently republished by Argol Éditions, *Ciel et terre* is part of a series which invited writers to engage with the work of an artist of their own choosing: the textual outcomes of this engagement were open and were determined by each author. By extension, the impetus for *Ciel et terre* must first be considered in this context because it is only through acknowledging that the text was intended to be an engagement with John Constable that the extent to which it produces a hybrid, permeable and multiple or multiplying discourse can be seen. By enlisting intertexts such as Luke Howard's *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* and Mr. Goodman's fictional autobiography, Roubaud's text is interpellated by

and participates in an extant discourse on clouds, form and formlessness, that thereby complicates any direct engagement with Constable. Rather, Constable is mediated through these figures whose knowledge is brought to bear on *his* works, even while the text is said to be about Constable himself. Therefore the text can be seen as an experiment in forms of *ekphrasis* and is set up as a way of probing the extent to which *ekphrasis* can move beyond straight description by giving the work of art a complex narrative context in which readers, much like art-goers, might encounter the piece and more importantly might be given a poetically imbued and privileged sense of the clouds which inspired it.

Unlike '*le grande incendie de Londres*,' the text is narrated in the third person. This is not the autobiographical "je" of Roubaud, but rather the "il" of Roubaud's "alter-ego" Mr. Goodman. The book begins in September 1943. Roubaud's protagonist is depicted in exile in southern France, waiting to flee from the war into the Spanish Pyrenees and on to England. In the interim there is really nothing to do except watch the clouds pass and the young boy (Goodman) explores the garrigue as if it were "son territoire personnel, la tranquillité sans menaces, la solitude, son bien."⁰ The boy returns daily to the same part of the garrigue where "comme répondant à son appel chaque jour, arrivaient les nuages."⁰ Of interest to the boy are clouds that are "sans affectation"—not rain

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* (Paris: Éditions Argol, 2009), 12.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

clouds, but rather those that are “sans responsabilité, des nuages gratuits, des nuages de promenade. Des nuages passant sur le paysage. Comme lui.”⁰ This pathetic fallacy is built into Roubaud’s text: the clouds are already self-consciously reflective of the boy’s predicament, yet Roubaud complicates pathetic fallacy by bringing in various other texts on the clouds and by insisting on the weather’s ability to trigger remembrances.

For the purposes of my research on weird science and affect theory, it is important to note that even in early discussions the discourse of pathetic fallacy was staged as a debate about the measured expression of emotion in literature and art. It was a question of how an artist or writer might strike the right balance between feeling and thought in the creation of a work. John Ruskin’s “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (1856), in *Modern Painters Vol. III*, relates the device to problems in metaphysics articulated through the “troublesome” boundaries between objectivity and subjectivity, which are themselves troubled by the concept of pathetic fallacy.⁰ Ruskin sets about distinguishing between “the ordinary, proper and true appearances of things” and “the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the experience

⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁰ John Ruskin, “Of the Pathetic Fallacy,” in *Modern Painters Vol. III*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1865), 157. I will go on to explore the productive confusions between a series of dichotomies (objective/subjective and internal/external) that are almost always at play in contemporary literary representations of weather. This ‘trouble’ is also apparent in Michel Serres’s ideas about science: “Parce qu’il est le temps des nuages et qu’il ne faut pas y avoir la tête ni les avoir dans la tête.” In *La naissance de la physique dans les textes de Lucrece*. (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1998), 86.

of emotion or contemplative fancy.”⁰ Ruskin goes on to suggest that it is only poets of the ‘second order’—here he is thinking of Keats and Tennyson!—who “admit certain expressions and modes of thought which are in some sort diseased or false,” that is, who accept pathetic fallacy.⁰ Famously, Ruskin claims “the temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy, is that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or *over-clouded*, or over-dazzled by emotion.”⁰ While Ruskin permits the idea that “the emotions should be strong enough to vanquish, partly, the intellect,” he still insists that it is a “grander condition when the intellect also rises” in order to assert its rule over the passions.⁰ Interestingly then, even in the nineteenth century, discussions of weather in literature (in the specific formulation of pathetic fallacy) were also part of a larger discourse on the right dosages of emotion and reason. And yet in considering pathetic fallacy, Ruskin intuits that to confuse outer and inner states (objective and subjective conditions) is a symptom of modernity. This confusion is consistently expressed in literary and artistic movements (perhaps epitomised in psychoanalysis) of the early twentieth century, even if, as Josephine Miles suggests, these are not explicitly figured in terms of pathetic fallacy and the weather.⁰ Ruskin’s concern is perhaps less about

⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁰ Ibid., 165.

⁰ Ibid., 163. (My italics.)

⁰ Ibid., 163.

⁰ In her 1942 study of pathetic fallacy, Miles has suggested that for modern poets “the power of the fallacy is close to none at all.” (183) Of course, Miles’s main interest is the way that pathetic fallacy can be seen to register a transformation in poetic articulations of sense perception throughout the nineteenth century, and she makes no real claims

the use of pathetic fallacy, than about the possibility that its usage represents a cloudy kind of thinking—a move away from reason in its Enlightenment formation.

Ruskin is, of course, making a concerted effort to distinguish his contemporaries, and specifically J.M.W. Turner, from a previous generation of Romantics, who he believed had given themselves over to the elemental, material sphere. The modern painting of the Romantic Revival, according to Ruskin, would therefore display a tension and double tendency towards both “emotional exuberance and rationalism.”⁰ In this period, to be truthful in art “it had become impossible to create without coming to terms with scientific methods and results.”⁰ Kurt Badt argues that artists and poets of Ruskin’s time:

bring their own feeling to terms with the scientifically verifiable conceptions of nature and reality, to check the validity of their own purely subjective feelings by bringing them into line with general experience and to extend their intuitive abilities by testing them against the results of

about the twentieth century other than that cited above. For Miles, modern poets themselves have overlooked the power of pathetic fallacy. However, it seems more productive to suggest that the modern period with its social, political and technological transformations –all of which, it should be noted, have had an equally transformative effect on conceptions of nature and the weather–would necessarily have manifested these changes in the uses of pathetic fallacy. It would be more appropriate to contend that pathetic fallacy may have been transformed radically in modern literature such that its forms cannot be recognised using the old conventions. Indeed, rather than suggest a widespread turn away from the device itself, I think there is an argument to be made that symbolisation and metaphor have been more broadly transformed by experiments in modern literature, and there would have been an attendant transformation to pathetic fallacy. (Josephine Miles, *Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of a Changing Relation Between Object and Emotion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942))

⁰ Kurt Badt, *John Constable’s Clouds*, trans. Stanley Godman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 6-7.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

scientific research. It is the men who pursued this idea for whom clouds present a specially acute problem.⁰

In this respect, it is precisely at the historical moment when pathetic fallacy is degraded as a literary device that weather as a scientific and experiential phenomenon (the clouds) is taken up as material for artistic and literary exploration. Moreover, the weather as it is figured in the texts of the time also registers a broader epistemological crisis in the representation of emotion, which itself may be indicative of a broader historical dialectic potentially active into the present. The 'return', as it were, to the weather in contemporary literary and artistic projects either indicates a current crisis in the representation of emotion or it augurs its end.

In *Ciel et terre*, the boy tries to grasp the clouds in "l'instant de l'apparition,[...] frontière entre le sol sombre et le ciel" from which each cloud, this "personnage mystérieusement impalpable," appears.⁰ For Roubaud, each cloud remains different from itself: "jamais un nuage n'était vraiment le même qu'un nuage vu la veille, ou une minute auparavant."⁰ Even with the degree of attention given to the clouds that is evident in the passages here, "il n'était jamais certain de ne pas avoir laissé, en un instant de distraction, son regard passer sur un autre nuage, entièrement différent du premier."⁰ Clouds perpetually differ from themselves: they frustrate fixity and they inevitably escape. This

⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁰ Roubaud, *Ciel et terre*, 15.

⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁰ Ibid., 18.

leads to sentiments like the following: “il aurait voulu les retenir, les immobiliser, les coller à jamais dans le ciel, les accrocher à quelque point fixe de l'éther bleu.”⁰ But of course, this desire is constantly frustrated by the constant transformations of clouds themselves.

In Roubaud's texts, clouds also condense and stimulate memory. As each new cloud appears to the young Goodman “il avait d'abord le sentiment de la reconnaître.”⁰ In Roubaud's work clouds, and weather phenomena more generally, set off remembrance. Specifically, in *Éros mélancolique*, another of Roubaud's texts that features Goodman as the protagonist, it is revealed that one of the peripheral characters has written a thesis on John Constable's clouds.⁰ When Goodman discovers this, it is the mention of Constable's name that calls to mind a nearly lost memory: “Un souvenir peuplé d'images. L'une d'elles lui revenait avec toute la violence d'un passé qu'il interrogeait rarement. Février 44.”⁰ That is to say, it recalls precisely the time figured at the opening of *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* when the young Goodman not only spent his time watching the clouds pass, but also had a copy of a painting by Constable on his wall. This, too, is roughly the same period during which Goodman's mother disappeared, after which point his life changed drastically and he moved to Edinburgh to live with his aunt and uncle.

⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud and Anne F. Garréta, *Éros mélancolique* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2009), 74.

⁰ Ibid., 74.

Nelson Goodman and his paradox are a likely inspiration for the name of Roubaud's Mr. Goodman. Goodman's paradox in a generalised and simplified sense involves the choice between two separate and provable statements: 1) all emeralds are green and 2) all emeralds are blue, Goodman argued rather that all emeralds are "grue," simultaneously green and blue, yet not wholly either.⁰ The paradox lies in the impasse where the similarity between an object's past and future instances (its relationality) can neither be proved nor disproved for the simple reason that they are relational. Taken in the context of clouds, then, one of the major paradoxes for artists' and writers' attempts to represent clouds is the difficulty of representing in fixed form what by its very nature is perpetually evolving. The question is how to figure this element of multiplicity, this "grue." Ann Smock has claimed that in Roubaud's texts, Mr. Goodman represents "this vaporous, indefinite side of Roubaud's work," and I would add also that whenever clouds appear Roubaud is also thinking about form in poetry and memory.⁰

Roubaud's personal interest in the clouds led him to conceive of an alternative system of time measurement specific and appropriate to the act of observing clouds called *nuheures*. The idea of *nuheures* appears in *Ciel et terre, et ciel et terre, et ciel* as well as '*le grand incendie de londres*': "Une «nuheure» serait le temps que mettrait le plus

⁰ Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*. Fourth Edition. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 74.

⁰ Smock, "Cloudy Roubaud," 146.

merveilleux des nuages à traverser le ciel,” and in both texts Roubaud provides marvelous descriptions of his observations of clouds.⁰

Je les vois surgir dans le ciel clair, léger [...] ils apparaissent, hésitent, puis s’élancent, tombent un peu, se jettent dans la cuve d’eau bleue du ciel[...] et je les suis des yeux dans leur navigation continue [...] jusqu’à ce qu’ils disparaissent. [...] Je laisse passer du temps et des nuages.⁰

In some respects, clouds are the perfect emblem for Roubaud’s project ‘*le grand incendie de londres*’ because of their “inachèvement perpetuel,” and by extension they are a metaphor for any ongoing project.⁰ This unfolding seems to be an apt model for what Roubaud calls the *arborescence* of his project, so that in some ways the structure would seem to be equally indebted to the form or formlessness of clouds.⁰ Indeed, as Ann Smock has suggested, “it is not too unusual to encounter, implicated well in advance, a crucial development that has yet to be written.”⁰ By extension, when Smock claims that “there never seemed to be an instant in the life of a cloud when it wasn’t imperceptibly changing shape and differing,” this image could equally apply to the structure of Roubaud’s “*le grand incendie de londres*.”⁰ Not only is Roubaud’s oeuvre “cloudy. Clouds, incalculable quantities of

⁰ Roubaud, *Ciel et terre*, 21.

⁰ Roubaud, *le grand incendie de londres*, 781.

⁰ Ibid., 1828.

⁰ Audeguy’s remarks on Goethe’s interest in the clouds revealing a language and understanding of ‘arborescent’ thought and clouds, that is similar to the structure of Roubaud’s project : “Goethe rêve que la pensée elle-même se développe non pas comme disent certains, à la façon d’un édifice de pierres, mais bien plutôt comme des arborescences nuageuses qu’il admire.” (Audeguy 63)

⁰ Smock, “Cloudy Roubaud,” 142.

⁰ Ibid., 145.

them drift through his books,” but the structure of the texts, despite all evidence to the contrary, is preoccupied with a kind of formlessness and the paradox of how to represent, in fixed form, what is always evolving.⁰

What I want to suggest is that *Ciel et terre* is demonstrative and performative, in the sense that it allows Roubaud to work through a set of overlapping discourses that he here articulates through the emblem and motif of clouds. While Constable’s attempts to paint clouds at various stages of their development was informed by Luke Howard’s *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, it must also be noted that Roubaud was clearly interested in Howard’s *Essay* and effected research on it in order to produce *Ciel et terre*.

Howard’s *Essay* is, on one hand, an attempt “to introduce a Methodical nomenclature, applicable to the various forms of suspended water, or, in other words, to the Modifications of Cloud,” and on the other hand, it is an attempt to systematise meteorology as a scientific discourse rather than as a set of aphorisms inherited from specialised fields such as seafaring and husbandry, essentially a local and folkloric tradition.⁰ By contrast, Howard’s aim was directed at a more general set of weather patterns which could be recognized by all. He also published *The Climate of London* which represented a synthesis of meteorological observations of the sky that he collected over a thirty year period.

⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁰ Luke Howard, *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, Third Edition. (London: John Churchill & Sons, New Burlington Street, 1865), 3.

Interestingly, these types of daily record (like a *journal intime* of weather) were frequently kept by men of science throughout Europe: “À tenir un journal du temps, comme on dit à l’époque: c’est-à-dire qu’ils notent, jour après jour, la direction des vents, l’état du ciel le matin et le soir, les quantités d’eau tombée, le cas échéant.”⁰ So, in this sense while aspects of the *journal intime* were informed by meteorology and its tools, so too was meteorology influenced by the tradition of the journal.

The *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* succeeded in popularizing the nomenclature of cloud categories (stratus, cumulus, cirrus, nimbus) which are still in use today. Through the clouds this work established important connections between literature and scientific inquiry about the natural world. Howard caught the attention of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who wrote a poem in his honour.⁰ The first stanza of this poem describes the imagination’s activity when looking at clouds, the “formless masses of the hour”— “here lions threat, there elephants range” and “camel-necks” change to “vapoury dragons.” But for Goethe the value of Howard’s work was in its ability to clarify and formalise a discourse and morphology of clouds:

But with pure mind Howard gives us
His new doctrine's most glorious prize:
He grips what cannot be held, cannot be reached,
He is the first to hold it fast,
He gives precision to the imprecise, confines it,

⁰ Audeguy, *La théorie des nuages*, 75.

⁰ Goethe and Howard exchanged letters from as early as 1822. See: John Hennig, “A Note on Goethe’s Relations with Luke Howard,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1951): 446.

Names it tellingly! –yours be the honour!—
Whenever a streak (of clouds) climbs, piles itself together,
scatters, falls,
May the world gratefully remember you.⁰

Forging important connections between disciplines, Goethe was a scientist and amateur meteorologist himself: “tous les matins, dans son journal, ce grand homme note soigneusement, l’état du temps, la vitesse du vent et sa direction, la configuration des nuages, la température qui règne sur le grand-duché de Weimar.”⁰ However, Goethe’s interest in Howard may have had less to do with the progress of western thought generally, than with Howard’s method, which paralleled in many respects, Goethe’s own approach, which he described as “*zartre Empirie*,” a delicate or tender empiricism.⁰ Such an approach provided an alternative epistemology to conventional scientific practice that instead valued the intuitive perception of the world, using “rigorous attention to direct experience, empathy, intuition and imagination.”⁰ In this respect, Howard’s naming of the clouds would have fascinated Goethe as an amateur meteorologist, but would also have given him a tangible example of his conception of natural form: “Form is a moving, a becoming, a passing away. The study of form is the study of transformation. The study of metamorphosis is the key to all the signs of

⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “To the Honoured Memory of Howard,” Trans. Kurt Badt, in *John Constable’s Clouds* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950.) 12-13.

⁰ Audeguy, *La théorie des nuages*, 23.

⁰ The full quote reads: “There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory”. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe: Scientific Studies*, trans. D. Miller (New York: Suhrkamp, 1988: reprinted by Princeton University Press, 1994), 307.

⁰ Daniel C. Wahl, “‘Zartre Empirie’: Goethean Science as a Way of Knowing,” *Janus Head* 8, no. 1 (2005), 60.

nature.”⁰ Starting with Goethe then, Howard’s ‘after-life’ in literature may be far more vital and persistent than his reputation in meteorology.

Roubaud’s work is also preoccupied with the idea of form as movement. “Les nuages/changent,” reads the last poem in Roubaud’s *Dors*.⁰ As Ann Smock has argued, clouds allow Roubaud to think about the paradox of the instant, “the basic puzzle is that ‘the instant is not,’ for it differs continuously from itself.”⁰ Even in spite of his daily regimes and practices, his use of constraints in literary practice and the sometimes very formal feel of his literary works, clouds seep in and “indicate an indefinite blur around the edges of the exact and inalterable state of things.”⁰ But there is also what she terms a “cloudy side to Roubaud’s thinking.”⁰ Roubaud’s works often amble along, without clear purpose, sometimes getting muddled and doubling back, mired in a strange fog, or listlessness. This Roubauldian style can be situated in what poet Lyn Hejinian has called ‘Strangeness,’ which she derived from tropic associations between poetry and science “which are not themselves scientific.”⁰ Hejinian provides a lovely account of apprehension as the act of perceiving or comprehending, and an anticipation of that comprehension, a kind of expectant knowledge.⁰

⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Morphologie,” in *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 1977), quoted in translation in Daniel C. Wahl, “‘Zartre Empirie’: Goethean Science as a Way of Knowing,” 66.

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, *Dors: précédé de Dire la poésie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 142.

⁰ Smock, *Cloudy Roubaud*, 147.

⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁰ Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 135.

⁰ Ibid., 139.

Such knowledge-making, where peripheral elements may become central later on, necessitates an open form from which various potentials emerge. Roubaud equates this murkiness with “the formlessness that form in poetry inevitably exposes. [...] Poetic form in his conception might be understood then in part at least as the paradoxical relation of the indisputable way things are with their cloudy indetermination.”⁰ In her article, “Oulipo et oralité” Abigail Lang suggests that *Dors* “cherche à capter le changement sans le figer, tâche impossible à l’écriture et donc exaspérante. *Dors* est une exploration de la fluidité de la forme, de la forme fluide.”⁰ Where clouds appear in Roubaud’s work, then, he is also perhaps thinking about the fluidity of form, the impossibility of form. If we are to believe Lyn Hejinian, “form is not a fixture but an activity,” and so the problem of form, may also be a problem of approach.⁰ The poetic forms are found lacking, Roubaud’s work takes up meteorology as a way of resolving the problem.

What would interest Roubaud about Howard’s *Essay* is that, on the one hand, it marked a major scientific breakthrough in the classification of clouds, which remains in use in current meteorological discourse. And, on the other hand, it was already a kind of poetic practice in so far as Howard’s method was observational in nature—it required modes of attention to transience and variegation that were already distinctly

⁰ Smock, *Cloudy Roubaud*, 161.

⁰ Abigail Lang, “Oulipo et oralité,” In *Oulipo@50 - L’Oulipo à 50 ans*, 57.

⁰ Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 47.

poetic—and led to the articulation of these differences which had previously lacked a distinguishing language. Howard’s task was, in this respect, profoundly poetic in so far as poetry gives voice to what is most ineffable in nature and experience. Yet Roubaud’s text launches us into a meditation on mutability endemic to both Howard’s scientific work and that of art and literature.

Not unlike Roubaud’s intertexts in *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel*, the narrative of *La théorie des nuages*, Stéphane Audeguy’s first novel, emerges through a proliferation of pre-existing texts on clouds and meteorology. It has been described as an “histoire poétique d’un passionné de cumulonimbus et flocons blancs qui parsèment le ciel.”⁰ At one level it is the story of Virginie Latour, a young librarian in contemporary Paris, enlisted by Akira Kumo to organise his archive of historical documents and materials on the history and theory of clouds. Her position necessitates that she understand the history of clouds and meteorology, and, over the course of the book, Kumo narrates this history within the story itself.⁰ At least a part of Audeguy’s task, therefore, is to resurrect interest in clouds themselves and he does this by telling the stories of the intriguing scientists and marvellous thinkers who were fascinated by them.⁰ However, Audeguy’s research extends

⁰ Stéphane Audeguy’s biography on *Le Figaro*’s website, accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.evene.fr/celebre/biographie/stephane-audeguy-23593.php>

⁰ The novel’s interest to me, and I think to a wider audience, is actually the history of clouds and meteorology provided by Kumo. The narrative elements which frame these passages, seem to be just that—framing devices.

⁰ Audeguy provides accounts of the research and biographies of Luke Howard, John Constable, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Svensson Willianson, Lewis Fry

beyond Luke Howard's *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, to provide extensive biographical accounts about Howard and a number of other meteorologists as well. In so far as *La théorie des nuages* is a novel, the narrative of Akira Kumo and Virginie Latour appears as a kind of artifice on which and through which Audeguy can organize historical research on meteorology. Indeed, Audeguy is extremely successful at insisting on the beauty, intrigue and mysticism of clouds and their history, and the history of meteorology as it is represented in the text is already overlaid with explicit connections to aesthetics.

Both Roubaud and Audeguy use clouds to open a meditative and contemplative space in which to launch an enquiry into ideas about mutability itself. As Akira Kumo suggests in Audeguy's novel, "il faut être un peu bête[...] et l'être avec une sorte d'obstination irraisonnée, pour s'intéresser aux nuages."⁰ For both Audeguy and Roubaud there is some element of thought which is, and should remain, insubordinate to reason. In section 33 of '*le grand incendie de Londres*', titled *La méditation*, Roubaud describes his regular habit of cloud watching:

Dans la fin d'après-midi, allongé sur le lit de cuivre de ma chambre avec un roman anglais, [...] je me laissais reprendre, délaissant mon livre, par la même question, que je me suis posée souvent, et de manière récurrente, dans les mêmes

Richardson and Richard Abercrombie. But, Audeguy does not footnote any of his research, which complicates the boundaries between fiction and fact in his reports, and yet all of the data presented, at least that which I have verified, is historically accurate in itself.

⁰ Audeguy, *La théorie des nuages*, 46.

circonstances: je voyais, dans le haut de la fenêtre, dans un carreau de ciel, les passages souverains des nuages.⁰

For Roubaud, “tel était le lieu de [sa] *contemplation*. Et de cette contemplation [sa] *méditation* se fixait.”⁰ In Roubaud’s *Ciel et terre et ciel et terre, et ciel* meditating on Constable’s clouds involved an experimentation in forms of *ekphrasis* which allowed Roubaud to move beyond description, and create contexts in which readers might meditate upon the clouds which inspired both Roubaud and Constable. In Audeguy’s *La théorie des nuages*, a similar space for contemplative thought becomes available to readers, and the text creates an occasion in which we can become “touchés par la beauté absolue des nuages.”⁰ In this respect, both texts work towards a revaluation of species of experience and types of human activity whose value is not immediately apparent. Importantly, such contemplative spaces are created via the literary exploration of historical scientific discourse. The impetus behind a return to this particular history, however, is distinctly affective, marked in both texts by World War II. It suggests a tendency in contemporary French fiction for difficult emotions to be expressed through the regulatory forms of science and history. By staging these narratives as kinds of inquiry about the relatively neutral history of meteorology, Roubaud and Audeguy generate alternative ways of

⁰ Roubaud, ‘*le grand incendie de Londres*’, 95.

⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁰ Audeguy, *La théorie des nuages*, 45.

considering mutability, a need perhaps only necessitated by the kinds of loss and displacement described in both texts.

Roni Horn's Weather: Affect Experiments

In many of her projects, Roni Horn takes the weather and its manifestations as her subject, such that she has been called a “connoisseur of the weather; she absorbs and records the effects of minute climactic changes—the passage of a cloud over the sun, a directional shift in the wind, the first drop of rain.”⁰ In order to register these subtle differences, Horn has developed ongoing projects that document and record information about the weather. Similar to more conventional meteorological monitoring, Horn's projects are devised in order to register the variations in weather patterns, but Horn's weather projects also reflect the state of the observer or participant. They reveal the perviousness of subjectivity to climatic conditions:

Weather is a metaphor for the atmosphere of the world, for the atmosphere of one's life : weather is a metaphor for the physical, metaphysical, political, social and moral energy of a person and a place.⁰

For Horn, there is a fundamental porousness to the weather, whose meanings, expressions, and moods, seep into other ontological categories through the concomitant dimension of atmosphere which seems to expand to encompass and surround all other dimensions of experience. Unlike the minimalist and post-minimalist artists of her

⁰ Donna De Salvo, Carter E. Foster and Mark Godfrey, in *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, Ex. Cat., ed. Donna De Salvo, Carter E. Foster and Mark Godfrey (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2009), 199-200.

⁰ Roni Horn, in *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, 18-19.

generation, Horn's work welcomes the lyrical components of metaphor and allusion, while retaining a preoccupation with linguistics and semantics that more properly characterised the early conceptual art movement.⁰ There is a sense, therefore, in which the constant unfolding of weather patterns becomes an emblem of these same characteristics of personal becoming, and, simultaneously, a vehicle for articulating these transformations. Horn's work explores a closely related set of ideas best understood as the variegated relationships between multiplicity, subjectivity, identity, location and experience, and it does so through forms of experimentation. Horn's work provides an alternative discourse about the weather that makes use of a scientific model of collecting data, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, ultimately insists on the potential for this information to evoke profound insights into the nature of affect.

Roni Horn's *You are the Weather*, is a photographic series of 100 prints taken in 1994 over a six-week period of travel through Iceland. Using the geothermally heated outdoor pools as settings, Horn photographed the face of the same female subject—a blonde-haired, blue eyed young woman—seated in these pools. Each photo is taken from roughly the same distance and with the same basic framing, but each image is clearly distinguished from the others by light effects and the

⁰ In this respect her work can be brought into relation with artists like Joseph Kosuth in *One and Three Chairs*, but can be said to depart from this type of tautological linguistic and semantic loop by also incorporating an ethos of land art which maintained a romantic ideal of going out into the world in order to produce works.

weather on that particular day. For Horn, the woman's face reveals a kind of situatedness: "those changes, that range of emotion... were in fact provoked by the weather. It's the sun in her eyes, it's snowing, it's windy."⁰ Each photograph thereby registers not only the girl's facial expressions, but registers these as responses to varied weather conditions. The more radical implication attendant to this piece, and to much of Horn's work is that "looking outward is a way of looking inward."⁰ In this respect the young woman's outward expressions also produce the effect of an inward state of being, complicated, of course, by the fact that what she is actually responding to is the weather. The woman's affective facial expressions respond to and reflect weather conditions in a way that most of us would be familiar with, but the expressions represented in the images can be understood as either the emotional vicissitudes of life or as experiences of weather. For Horn "it's as though you've provoked those responses, [as the viewer] you become the weather," because the young woman's gaze is towards you as the viewer.⁰ Obviously, viewers become imbricated in the work by being addressed ("you"), but also because the boundaries between one's ability to perceive and generate emotional responses are complicated by the framing of the subject. "We are the weather", in so far as it appears that the young woman is looking at and responding to us, but collaterally the

⁰ Roni Horn, "Weather Girls: An Interview with Roni Horn by Collier Schorr," *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 32, January-February, 1997, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/weather_girls/.

⁰ Briony Fer, "Complete with Missing Parts," in *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, 24.

⁰ Horn, "Weather Girls."

viewer also responds to the images creating an affective feedback loop between the image and the viewer.

While Paulo Kerkenhoff is correct in asserting that the piece is an “encyclopedia of identity,” it is also an identity which emerges from subtle differences made apparent by their presentation in series. In this ways, subjectivity is imagined as a set of surface differences.⁰ But, as Briony Fer has argued in her article “Storm of the Eye,” “minute shifts in the arrangement of her features seemed to mimic the conditions outside of her. This both inscribes her as a subject ... and effaces her.”⁰ Moreover, “rather than being all inside, the range of emotion here is all outside, registered on a face like a surface impression.”⁰ In a similar way, then, affect is neither posited as beyond these surface expressions, nor can it properly, or exclusively, be understood merely as the accumulation and expression of them. In presenting the images in serial form, both in the space of the gallery and in book form, each image of the young woman becomes too complex to be itself only, to be self-similar. Rather, identity and subjectivity reside somewhere between each of these images. In their variegated multiplicity over time they negate the possibility of an essential identity existing somehow separate from the multitude of surface expressions. By establishing the

⁰ Paolo Herkenhoff, “The Elusive Treasure of Roni Horn,” in *If on a Winter's Night...Roni Horn*, ed. Urs Stahel (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag and Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2003), 103.

⁰ Briony Fer, “Storm of the Eye,” in *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* (London, Artangel, 2010), 22.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

parameters of the project-taking photographs of the same subject in various hot pools in Iceland—the artist posits her work as an inquiry about the limiting conditions between sameness and variegation, between expression and impression, surface and depth, subjectivity (as inwardness) and experience (as situated). It is only in repeatedly setting up what is ostensibly the same subject, that difference emerges, and in *You are the Weather* this difference is visualised through the subject's subtle range of expressions.

In his 2001 text on the emergence of the *journal intime*, *Les Baromètres de l'âme*, Pierre Pachet suggests that in this genre, states of being are consistently registered in meteorological terms. In the diary there are “les différences nettes entre trois attitudes: étudier les rapports entre les circonstances, en particulier atmosphériques, et l'état de l'âme ; considérer l'humeur psychique, à l'instar de l'air, comme une substance dont un instrument adéquat, un ‘baromètre’, pourrait enregistrer les variations; considérer l'âme comme atmosphérique, nuageuse, ‘nordique’ en quelque sorte.”⁰ Tacitly then, the *journal intime* acts as a record of the inexpressible and ineffable qualities of being and articulates these in terms of their changeability through meteorological figures. Accordingly the *journal intime* serves as both a measuring device for these states by figuratively applying meteorological tools (i.e.

⁰ Pierre Pachet, *Les Baromètres de l'âme: naissance du journal intime* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2001), 63.

“les baromètres”) , and an archive of previous states of being once measured and recorded.⁰

Pachet’s model draws on Rousseau’s *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* in which Rousseau articulates his task in precisely these terms.

Je ferai sur moi-même à quelque égard les opérations que font les physiciens sur l’air pour en connaître l’état journalier. J’appliquerai le baromètre à mon âme, et ces opérations bien dirigées et longtemps répétées me pourraient fournir des résultats aussi sûrs que les leurs.⁰

Much like meteorology, then, the *journal intime* is a task of daily observation:

un souci quotidien de son âme, considère que le salut ou l’amélioration de son âme se fait au jour le jour, est soumis à la succession, à la répétition des jours, source de permanence et de variation.⁰

By extension, the diary’s ethos is an exercise of duration and repetition, much like meteorology, through which nuanced differences emerge as a result of steady, consistent observation.

For Pachet, what is interesting about the *journal intime* as a genre is the way it can be seen to mediate between a strictly religious, introspective contemplation of the soul—one which could be subjected to a variety of monastic disciplines carried out over time that would ultimately serve to tame or moderate the extremes of emotional and spiritual being — and a modern tendency to subject the mutability of

⁰ Ibid., 70

⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972), 42.

⁰ Pachet, *Les Baromètres de l’âme*, 12.

being to a scientific or epistemological discourse of classification and categorization, albeit one which was distinctly private. The former suggests the submission to spiritual asceticism, while the latter suggests domination through rational discourse, even while both can be seen to operate as instruments of ethical improvement and often occupy the space of the very same text. The *journal intime*, at least for a time, seems to have registered a simultaneous tendency in both directions—towards spiritual improvement and towards a rational understanding of that soul itself. And yet, Pachet claims that it is not in the “cadre d’une progression” of asceticism that the *journal intime* participates, but rather:

parce que cette succession est source d’imprévisible, parce qu’elle témoigne à la fois de l’effort des hommes pour imposer leur emprise sur le temps (c’est le sens de l’entreprise de Franklin) et de ce qui leur échappe inévitablement de leur propre nature, inconstante, météorologies d’une variabilité sans règle.⁰

What is also apparent in these meteorological metaphors is a fundamental analogy between internal states of being (emotions, psychology, affects) and external phenomena. The way that interior ‘fronts’ come into being, manifest and exhaust themselves, therefore finds the perfect, if not primary, expression in the natural phenomena of weather. So that for Joubert in 1786, “la variabilité météorologique n’est [...] qu’un autre nom, ou un autre aspect, du surgissement accidentel des

⁰ Ibid., 12.

pensées.”⁰ Indeed for Joubert “la pensée se forme dans l’âme comme les nuages se forment dans l’air.”⁰

At the time Joubert was writing, however, the formulation and modification of clouds had not yet been defined. To suggest that thoughts form in the spirit the way clouds form in the air, is actually more ethereal and poetic than it is scientific; the elements, in a sense, were as ineffable as the states of being that they purported to describe. In fact, when Luke Howard published his famous *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, 17 years later (1803), a similar analogy emerged revealing a fundamental confusion as to whether meteorological phenomena describe internal states or vice versa. “[The clouds] are subject to certain distinct modifications, produced by the general causes which effect all the variations of the Atmosphere : they are commonly as good visible indications of the operation of these causes as is the countenance of the state of a person’s mind or body.”⁰ Howard describes changes to the clouds in terms of changes in human countenance, whereas the *journal intime* typically described changes in countenance in terms of meteorology. The two-way analogy, therefore, suggests that the only way to describe “ce qui leur échappe inévitablement de leur propre nature, inconstante, météorologies d’une variabilité sans règle,” must be figured in terms of other phenomena which similarly escape

⁰ Ibid., 80. Quoted by Pachet.

⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁰ Howard, *Essay on the Modification on Clouds*, 1.

definition.⁰ For example: storms rage, ideas are clear as day, *bonheur sans nuages, être dans les nuages*. Apparent, therefore, in meteorological discourse as much as that which describes states of being, is a confusion about contingent states, and this is most evident in the subjective/objective and internal/external relations discussed through tropes of weather and being.

Similarly, Horn's ongoing project, *Weather Reports You* is a collection of oral reports taken on location in Iceland which were then transcribed and edited and have since been collected into a book.⁰ The reports themselves are fascinating discussions of the external climate and, in particular, the suddenness of its changeability in Iceland. The extremes of the fronts that move over and through Iceland are of interest for their sheer drama, but there is also a tendency for the reports to slide from discussion of the external phenomena to internal states of being. In some reports a psychosomatics of weather becomes apparent. Describing a "terrifying experience with the weather," one interviewee freely discloses the visceral responses one can have to weather phenomena: "I wouldn't say I was hysterical but my stomach was in knots. The weather was crazy too."⁰ Here the fact that the hysteria and the physical state of the stomach emerge syntactically before the weather's terror, demonstrates the cyclical nature of weather

⁰ Pachet, *Les Baromètres de l'âme*, 12.

⁰ Some of these are posted on the Library of Water web site, accessed May 7th, 2011, http://www.libraryofwater.is/weather_reports_you.html.

⁰ Roni Horn, "Weather Reports You," in *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* (London: Artangel, 2010), 127.

phenomena and our responses to them. In this case, the weather's description seems secondary to the emotional and visceral responses and this is reinforced by the "too" which makes the terrifying weather seem like an afterthought, even though what is meant to be described in the interviews is the weather.

Another report from the same project describes the risks of collapsing the boundaries between self and world.

The weather's like that. If you don't fight it, you become one with it and vanish. You cease to exist if you don't show resistance and cunning. Some people are said to have an eye for the weather but that goes hand in hand with having an eye for life in general.⁰

In this passage, the subject's existence in the external world is again figured as a collapse of boundaries between the internal climate and that outside. It is not only a threatening force of self-negation, but fighting against it is an acquired skill; one can have an "eye" for weather and for life. I want to suggest that Horn's weather projects can be seen as a kind of technique for developing just such skills. For Horn, experiencing the Icelandic weather by going out into the natural landscape is a way of becoming "present in the here and now, [she] learned the unchangeable nature of each moment as it passes [...and] the importance of being in the place, of paying attention."⁰

⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁰ Roni Horn, "Keynote Speech: Graduating Class of 2006, Iceland Academy of the Arts, Reykjavík", Artangel Web Site, accessed January 15, 2014, http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/2007/vatnasafn_library_of_water/about_roni_horn/speech_to_the_reykjavik_arts_academy

In a keynote presentation at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Horn can be seen to participate in a type of meteorological poetics when she claims that:

I have always taken the weather personally....It's no longer simply an occasion for small talk. It is constant in its indifference to us and unpredictable in every other way. It keeps circumstance complex and beyond our final control. I think it is essential to have something that tells us who we are. And weather has a way of doing this.⁰

In this passage, there is an apparent interest in phenomena which escape finitude and objectivity and yet for Horn, such phenomena are profoundly personal. Horn uses weather as a synecdochic language for discussing a set of mutable conditions which tend to escape linguistic expression, and yet whose explanatory power lies in their ability to tell us "who we are." Here, the crux of identity is figured as what escapes control; what reveals identity is that which cannot be posited in any final sense. As Briony Fer suggests in her article "Complete with Missing Parts," Horn's work demonstrates "precisely what it means 'to center': oneself, a place, a shape."⁰ But in this case, centring is "not about finding a single revelatory truth," rather, in its sharp focus on geological and meteorological phenomena, Horn's work underscores the mutability and contingency of any such project of centring.⁰ However, in the passage cited above, and in much of Horn's work, the way that the weather becomes informative about the nature of subjectivity ("who we

⁰ Ibid.

⁰ Fer, "Complete with Missing Parts," 23.

⁰ Ibid., 23.

are”) remains ambiguous and Horn never fully articulates her understanding of this relationship. However, the idea of the weather as having a relation to subjectivity can be seen in all aspects of Horn’s work, beginning, of course with the titles of the pieces, which conflate, and thereby destabilize, subject and object positions with respect to the viewer. For example, *You are the Weather* and *Weather Reports You are* titles which engage with viewers in a way that opens up an ambiguity between the artist and viewer and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the weather and the self. Horn’s work picks up on affect as a “reverse flow between these lines of inquiry—a certain inside-out/outside-in difference in directionality.”⁰

Many of Horn’s projects use techniques of doubling or serialisation to complexify subject matter. What in its singular form may be straightforward and self-evident becomes unsettled by being figured among multiples that negate the possibility of self-identity or ‘centring’. Indeed, the visual confusion created by the presentation of seemingly identical objects, acts upon the viewer such that the experience of the works “is often an unsettling one that raises questions about location, memory, and identity.”⁰ Here again affect theory can illuminate these types of interrelation so that what Horn’s work picks up on is the fact that “with affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in

⁰ Gregg and Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” 6.

⁰ Donna De Salvo, Carter E. Foster and Mark Godfrey, in *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, 20.

its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.”⁰ In this respect, Silvan Tomkins’s notion of “affect contagion” is important to consider. For Tomkins, affects are transmitted between bodies through bioneurological elements, communicated rapidly and automatically through the face and voice, as well as other indicators (such as temperature which affects complexion and is communicated through blushing). As Anna Gibbs describes in “After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony and Mimetic Communication,” each affect has a distinct neurological profile that is “correlated with particular physical sensations, including muscular and glandular and skin responses.”⁰ Affective contagion has been further elaborated by scholars like Sara Ahmed.

Thinking of affects as contagious does help us to challenge an ‘inside out’ model of affect by showing how affects pass between bodies, affecting bodily surfaces or even how bodies surface. However, I think the concept of affective contagion tends to underestimate the extent to which affects are contingent (involving the hap or a happening): to be affected by another does not mean that an affect simply passes or ‘leaps’ from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contingency of how we are affected, or only as an effect of how objects are given.⁰

In Ahmed’s framework of affective contagion, affects shuttles across surfaces without being a necessary consequence of their occurrence in one body or another. Moreover, Ahmed underlines the contingency of affect; its peculiarly fleeting and impermanent temporality that

⁰ Anna Gibbs, “After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication,” 191.

⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁰ Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 36.

reinforces the fact that whether it affects the body and the subject really is a question of timing.

While some of Horn's work clearly focuses on human expression, as in *Weather Reports You*, it nonetheless opens possibilities for thinking about nonhuman affects. Gibbs describes the concept of mimetic communication as a corporeal form of imitation (both voluntary and involuntary) which involves visceral levels of affect. Facial expressions, she claims, tend to elicit the same affects in observers; "it is very difficult not to respond to a spontaneous smile with a spontaneous smile of one's own."⁰ Gibbs thus remarks on the tendency towards emotional convergences between things involved in a particular situation or atmosphere.⁰ In such scenarios, Gibbs contends, "the human face seems to diagram itself onto the sensuous qualities of other images in which it does not explicitly appear: landscapes, houses, food, animals, skin, and choreographed bodies, so that the world can be facialized in the absences of faces."⁰ This interplay is operative in Horn's project *Another Water*, which is an investigation of the surface of the Thames river under variable conditions and supplements these images with forensic reports about the suicides of persons who drowned in the river. The images of the Thames have few indicators of scale and are interested primarily in the surface effects of the water. The natural phenomena captured are

⁰ Gibbs, "After Affect," 191.

⁰ Ibid., 186.

⁰ Ibid., 191.

strange: what may be a tiny ripple on the surface could just as easily be a tsunami viewed from a great distance. The variety of weather effects captured in the images show the Thames in a multitude of forms and under different conditions: frozen, in the rain, reflecting the sky, in different light, in various types of wind, sometimes with wind so fierce that the Thames looks muddy. The photos serve as “a kind of barometer that registers the subtle changes of the water below and the sky above.”⁰ At the same time, by providing forensic details about the victims (their bodies, clothing, preparations they made for suicide), *Another Water* transforms the absence of the victims through the images of the river where their lives ended. The images become “analagous with the movement of the body,” approaching human affects through the nonhuman surfaces of the river.⁰

“Clowd and Cloun” is a series of 32 photographs, which Horn printed in three separate series: one each in colour, blue, and gray tones. Sixteen head shots of a clown in the midst of performing various expressions are sequenced between sixteen photographs of a cloud drifting in the sky. Paulo Herkenhoff claims that “Clowd and Cloun turns the viewer from a wanderer into a epistemological agent, a linguistic player, a visual laborer.”⁰ The title imbricates the subjects (clown and cloud) in a linguistic game which accurately maintains the phonetics of

⁰ *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, Ex. Cat., 195.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁰ Herkenhoff, “The Elusive Treasure of Roni Horn,” 104.

each object, while rendering the meanings of each word unstable due to their misspelling. Cloud and Clown are recognizable in the linguistics of the title, and yet both are defamiliarized and made uncanny by their proximity—in seeming to supplement each other an effect of dyslexia is created. Interestingly, to rectify the spelling, one could switch either of the last two letters of each word, making the titles either “Cloudu and Clownn” or “Clownn and Cloudu.”

What is suggested by juxtaposing the clown and the cloud in visual form is that just as the cloud represents an incremental series of changes and transitions between various present moments, the sequence of images represents discrete emotional stages of the clown—different states of being and becoming. There is an experience of time in both sets of images, that reveals a kind of affective investment and anticipation, and which emphasizes the interstitial in both emotion (in the images of the clown) and weather (in the images of the cloud) alike. Depending on how you think about the images, the clown and the cloud are either beautiful or ominous—fragile in themselves or perilous to ideas of stable subjectivity. Or perhaps their importance lies in the fact that in so far as it is possible, these images of variegated expressions of the clown and the mutability of the cloud, are both.

In repeatedly focussing on and representing the same objects, this piece—and many of Horn’s pieces—upsets the boundaries of identity and implicates the viewer in the process. By consistently depicting what are

ostensibly the same subjects, the pieces constantly call into question the sameness which is purportedly figured, thereby encouraging comparison and attunement to subtle differences on the part of the viewer that make the subjects both the same and different. Where a clinical gesture might submit the same subject to varied conditions in order to test the truthfulness or limitations of a hypothesis, Horn's piece tests a hypothesis about the sameness of human matter over time and the effects of repetition on modes of identification.

In the exhibition catalogue from Horn's show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the connection between weather and feeling is highlighted in Horn's notes, where she collects "adjectives that apply to humanity and the weather equally."⁰ In a flowing accumulation, Horn reveals the wealth of descriptors that fall into this category:

bad; balmy; beautiful; bitter; breezy; bright; brisk; brutal; calm; changeable; chilly; clammy; clear; cold; cool; crazy; crisp; cruel; destructive; dreary; dry; dull; extreme; fair; fierce; fine; foggy; foul; frigid; frosty; gloomy; good; gorgeous; gray; harsh; heavy; horrible; hot; icy; mild; moderate; moist; nasty; nice; ominous; oppressive; quiet; rough; serene; severe; steamy; stormy; sultry; sunny; temperate; tempestuous; thick; threatening; torrid; tranquil; unpredictable; violent; warm; wet; wild.⁰

⁰ *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, Ex. Cat., 198-199.

⁰ Scholar and affect theorist Ben Highmore describes affect in a similar way: "The cold, acrid sweat that runs down my side, the bundle of bees nesting in my stomach tell me I am anxious. The wind that bites, that gets under my skin and gnaws at my bones with its bitter chill is a memory or a foretaste of a terrible coldness that is the feeling of isolation, homesickness, alienation, despair. The register of hot and cold, of warmth and frost, of passion and dispassion is an emotional and affective register. It is also, as is immediately suggested, a register of sensorial perception, and sensual expression." Ben Highmore, "Bitter Aftertaste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 121.

Neville Wakefield, the New York based curator of PS1 MOMA and Frieze Art Fair, argues that in Horn's work "the language of the weather is also that of our own condition," such that in the weather pieces, "somewhere between these climates is the meteorology of self."⁰ For Wakefield, the value of Horn's work is in its ability to register "subtle shifts of affect." Speaking of Horn's work with lyrical precision, Wakefield writes:

like the punctuation that changes the direction of a sentence, of clear blue skies, there are changes so small that they often go unseen. But they contain the balance and composition of lives measured according to the correspondence of conditions.⁰

Here the textual proximity of the ideas of measurement and balance to the idea of the "composition of lives," exemplifies a collateral effect of project-based work, namely its capacity to provide a framework for living itself.

⁰ Neville Wakefield, in *Roni Horn AKA Roni Horn*, Ex. Cat., 180-181.

⁰ Ibid., 180-181.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the various ways that contemporary literary and artistic projects engage with the weather—sometimes through appropriating elements of the history of meteorology, sometimes by employing the meteorologist’s tools and tactics. The staging of poetic and artistic experiments in the natural world demonstrates the extent to which science can be enlisted in the service of aesthetics. Through appropriating the tropes of scientific experiment, Roni Horn’s work betrays a scientific attitude of inquiry, but it is one that does so in order to reveal hidden ranges of affect and new modes of considering the subtlety of emotional expression. In the first part of this chapter, I considered the appropriation of meteorological history in the space of contemporary fiction and showed how its re-animation opens spaces in which to contemplate ideas of mutability, form and memory. I considered how a burgeoning meteorological discourse on clouds, begun by Luke Howard, influenced the German Romantic poet, Goethe. This marks the first known instance of Howard’s influence in literature and the arts, and I continued to explore his ‘after-life’ in the discussion of Roubaud and Audeguy. In looking at John Ruskin’s critique of pathetic fallacy it seems that the problem was less with the device itself, than its implicit avowal of a move away from Enlightenment rationality. Ruskin’s discussion therefore touches on one of the central concerns of this thesis—the possibility that the contemporary resurgence of scientific method and

mathematical constraint in literature and art register a crisis in, and possible solution to, the representation of emotion. In the second part of this chapter I discussed the ways that Roni Horn uses methods of scientific experiment and enlists these to spur a reconsideration of affect. Her work consistently engages with the weather as an affective and subjective experience. I related her projects to one particular notion of the *journal intime*, taken from Pierre Pachet's *Les baromètres de l'âme* which shows how, in the diary, states of being are consistently figured in meteorological terms.

In this chapter I have shown a variety of ways in which contemporary artists and writers engage with weather and, to varying degrees participate in a meteorological poetics that can be traced back to the ancient world—a world in which poetry and practical information were not as distinct as they have become today. Various weather phenomena present a number of paradoxes that have fascinated artists and writers, and inspired scientists and mathematicians for centuries. Indeed, the weather, in some ways, is a topic of endless fascination even today, and is discussed with as much, if not more frequency than ever before. But, as I have argued, the weather must be considered in both lyrical *and* scientific terms, and doing so provides new insights into affect's relationship with weather phenomena.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated affect and epistemology in contemporary literary and artistic projects. Taking Jacques Roubaud's oeuvre as the central touchstone, I have established a broad context for his work that explores its multifaceted (literary, theoretical, philosophical and mathematical) dimensions, while still being attentive to the formal concerns of oulipian constraint. My research has highlighted the numerous ways in which creative experiments framed as projects are being conducted in the literary and visual arts, and elsewhere. This set of practices counters the coolness of postmodernism with a kind of low-theory—an insistence on the modesty of the trial experiment and the humble textual and visual outcomes it makes possible. This thesis has suggested that projects have transformative potential particularly in moments that seem to lack an affective charge. The important point is that potential often appears as a secondary concern and as the collateral effect that emerge from the tests and procedures of the experimental model. I have identified an emergent trend in contemporary literary and visual works that expresses affect indirectly, passing feelings through a scientific impulse. This thesis has established the unexplored relationship between affect and epistemology in oulipian texts and contemporary visual practices. It has carved out a broad cultural context for the consideration of such texts (most notably through an interdisciplinary approach) and it has provided further elaboration of the

idea of 'projects' previously begun by Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham in *The Art of the Project*.

Each chapter of this thesis has focused on a particular area of inquiry: numbers, lists and surveys, itineraries, and weather. The initial question of how to conceptualise these projects with respect to both affect and epistemology, was resolved through the overarching concept of 'weird science,' which I define as literary and artistic projects that implement protocols and rules as an integral part of their aesthetic investigation. Such projects might be considered scientific in their elaboration of carefully considered mathematical models (as in chapter one); in their inquiry into the nature of measurement and classification (as in chapter two); in their formulations of hypotheses and the subsequent testing of such hypotheses through experiment (as in chapter three); and in their observation of objective, natural phenomena (as in chapter four). While each of the areas explored in this thesis has been addressed to varying degrees in scholarly research, I set out to test how these elements might be recast (and thus differently understood) as 'weird sciences'. The chapters on numbers, lists, and itineraries were firmly grounded in existing scholarly research, but developed it in new ways that led me to hypothesize about weather and census-like data which have not been explored previously. The selection of my areas of inquiry (chapter subjects) is not exhaustive and came at the expense of exploring other equally viable projects.

Each chapter of this thesis demonstrates the various possible ways that contemporary literary and artistic projects encounter various scientific methodologies and affects. In her essay “La Faustienne,” Lyn Hejinian characterizes the relationship between knowledge and what she terms ‘the literary imagination’ as a “relationship in which knowledge may be the object of literary effort,” reminding us that literary works can have an epistemological dimension.⁰ But for Hejinian, and importantly for the kinds of projects discussed in this thesis such knowledge also “constitutes a sort of unknowing”: it relates to knowledge produced via doubt, hypothesis, and speculation.⁰ The challenge of this thesis has been to situate projects as particular kinds of worldly work, related to science in so far as they explore the natural world using its methods, but distinct in so far as they create artistic and literary outcomes from those methods. This leads to the overall impression that the works are dispassionate and disaffected, a feature evident in many of the texts and projects by Roubaud. I hope to have shown that these projects can be read as having various degrees and kinds of affective charge. As Ben Highmore observes:

Aesthetics covers the terrain of both “the vehement passions” (fear, grief, rapture, and so on) and the minor and major affects and emotions (humiliation, shame, envy, irritation, anxiety, disdain, surprise, and so forth). It is attuned to forms of perception, sensation, and attention (distraction, spectacle, concentration, absorption, for example); to the world of the

⁰ Lyn Hejinian, “La Faustienne,” *The Language of Inquiry*, p.233.

⁰ Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, p.2.

senses (haptic, aural, gustatory, olfactory, and visual experience); and to the body (as gestalt and in pieces).⁰

In this respect, the affective range of literary and visual texts is expanded beyond the identifiable emotions and opens onto levels of feeling that are intuited or that pass beneath the surface of the conscious mind. What 'projects' bring to affect theory however, is a mode of relating to and inhabiting various ways of producing knowledge of such affects and this is specific to 'weird science'.

My research focused on an often difficult and sometimes dispassionate corpus of contemporary artworks and literary texts. Where such pieces fail to either meaningfully represent or induce strong emotions, this thesis has demonstrated that they will be unsuccessful in interesting and important ways. Chapter one, "From Mathematics to Numerology: Recuperating Pathos in Jacques Roubaud, Roman Opalka and On Kawara," considered works whose ongoing nature and duration gave form to experiences that lacked a dramatic conclusion or cathartic form of release. Such projects insisted on the non-revelatory, through a set of repeated literary and artistic procedures. In so doing these experiments situated the work in a projected and virtual trajectory, opening the potential for transformation through persistence and work, even though such projects may never achieve completion. We have learned that when emotions cannot be adequately expressed and represented, they can be filtered through the competing discourse of

⁰ Ben Highmore, "Bitter Aftertaste," *The Affect Theory Reader*, p.121.

scientific reason and mathematics—as a technique for mitigating and managing such emotions. The projects discussed in chapter one explored, to use the words of Sianne Ngai, “affective gaps and illegibilities,” and ways that the projects were conceived to “interfere with the outpouring of other emotions.”⁰ Ngai’s work has been crucial to my reconsideration of these projects, particularly the idea that noncathartic feelings can “give rise to a noncathartic aesthetic: art that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release.”⁰ Thus Roubaud’s use of numbers in *‘le grand incendie de londres’* was deployed to manage negative affects once the trauma of loss gave way to an ordinary form of suffering. Such strategies of self-abeyance and self-suspension can be read in the halting narrative progression of the text even while significant realizations might emerge as the collateral effects of the project. Projects are designed as a sounding board, an experiment that will analyse a particularly ossified mode of feeling, thinking or producing and seek new strategies to overcome it, however incrementally.

As discussed in previous chapters, ‘the affective turn’ insists on issues of emotion, embodiment and affect. Yet what has also emerged from the literary and artistic projects discussed is the prevalence of materiality, particularly its role in the production of knowledge and affect. Discussing Jacques Réda’s project *Le Méridien de Paris* (1997),

⁰ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 1, 6-7.

⁰ Ibid., 9.

Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham suggest that at least a part of the intrigue, beauty and value of Réda's project (walking the meridian and then writing about it), is that it makes physical (both by the writer's walking and by the textual trace of that walk) something that is an inherent abstraction.⁰ In this respect projects become "a space of interaction, an interface between the abstract and the concrete, art and science, the material and intangible, the mental and the physical, and ultimately the human and the inhuman."⁰ When conventional knowledge becomes abstracted, these projects act as potential correctives because of their ability to materialise such abstractions, (through experimentation but also through play), demonstrating the bodily and subjective consequences of various kinds of logic. Projects lend visibility to conceptual and epistemological frameworks through insisting on their relationship to bodies.

Following from these insights, chapter two "The Forms of Fact", demonstrated how projects can reconfigure understandings of classification and measurement, through an analysis of *Vertige de la liste*, an exhibition at the Louvre that was curated by Umberto Eco. The exhibition provided a way into the problematic of listing, but was also a kind of project in itself. Lists insist on the present, creating moments of epistemological uncertainty where a particular conceptual framework stammers and gets tripped up. The exhibition of lists therefore enabled a

⁰ Gratton and Sheringham, "Tracking the Art of the Project," *The Art of the Project*, 15.

⁰ Ibid.

reconsideration of museological practices. Jacques Roubaud and Christian Boltanski's *Les habitants du Louvre* (produced as part of the multidisciplinary, thematic programming) pointed out patterns of association by halting the established flows of thought. The second part of this chapter considered *107 âmes*, a book project by Jacques Jouet that collected alternative types of census-like data and turned this data into *poèmes-biographiques*. That project staged a confrontation between subjectivity and data, but resolved it through poetic forms that created new, imagined communities more attuned to the survey data collected. In these projects (and others mentioned in the chapter) scientific strategy is not used to cool down affective intensity or protect subjects from too much feeling (as was the case in chapter one). Instead scientific processes were used to ground a surprising amount of fellow feeling, inspiring a sense of commonality.

Similar strategies were also apparent in the *Frévent* project discussed in chapter three, "The Practices and Poetics of the Itinerary," because the structure of the project (as both a constrained journey and the year-long exchange of letters), enabled an interrogation into three distinct subjective experiences of the town of Frévent. The projects discussed in chapter three set up specific journeys as kinds of experiment and these journeys are updated forms of scientific exploration. The idiosyncrasies of these itineraries underscore the role of subjective experience in producing topographical information. In so

doing, these works are not direct critiques of existing spatial knowledge so much as propositions for alternatives that might generate alternative modes of being, thinking and feeling in and through social space. *À Lorient* and walking projects by Francis Alÿs, Richard Long and On Kawara can be said to work towards embodying the ‘mind’—acting as a safeguard against the idea that “as soon as knowledge is seen as purely conceptual, its relation to bodies, the corporeality of both knowers and texts, and the ways these materialities interact, must become obscure.”⁰ Rather, their work lends visibility to conceptual and epistemological frameworks precisely through insisting on their relationship to bodies and affects. These projects also tacitly implicate the body of the experiencing subject through modes of attunement and repetition—at times suggesting that a reader or viewer might also conduct a similar project of their own. Indeed, this is a well-established oulipian tactic and is central to the group’s ongoing collaborations wherein various members attempt to employ the same constraint but to variable textual outcomes and it is also characteristic of many conceptual works that commonly operate through a set of instructions for viewer/participants.

Theories of affect often have a material basis yet they depart from issues of embodiment insofar as they seek to describe experience rooted in an individual scene of becoming, and in more inchoate modes of shared experience or commonality. Affect theory thus neatly side-steps

⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, “Refiguring Bodies,” *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 5.

problems associated with positing subjectivity as the source of a material body or as the product of that body. Rather, affect operates on a different scale of attachment, and one which allows consideration of changeable and intangible (though nonetheless palpable) states such as atmospheres and moods. Chapter four, “*Le quotidien météorologique*, or What Weather Might Report,” took up the idea that there is a porousness between interiority and exteriority, individuals and collectives, by considering a series of contemporary literary and artistic projects that used aspects of the weather (either the history of meteorology or the daily tactics of weather monitoring). This chapter tested a hypothesis about the experience of weather as deeply affective and one which thus operates as a hinge between subjectivity and a larger social commons. As Teresa Brennan provocatively queries in the opening of *The Transmission of Affect*: “Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere’?”⁰ My chapter investigated how such collective experiences of affect might come to be expressed in terms of the weather. Focussing on the weather as a kind of infrastructure that foregrounds the relationship between feeling and other ethereal states, it also revealed affect as a subjective set of experiences that relates to a social commons. Moreover, as scholar Ben Anderson contends, affect:

has come to name the aleatory, open nature of a social [world]
that is always in the midst of being undone. Hence the intense

⁰ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

focus in work on affect and ordinary life on the creative opening to an outside in moments of rupture, instances of discontinuity...⁰

While clearly thinkers of affect have coded such ruptures and discontinuities in positive terms—seeing some transformative potential in them—the weather recalls just how mundane such discontinuities may be.

The projects analysed in this thesis suggest the lively cultivation of alternative knowledge-making practices bound to embodied, affective experience. This mode of cultural production involves a peculiar dynamic between detachment and investment—the critical distance and disengagement afforded by the use of aspects of the scientific model is then troubled by the aesthetic encounter with authentic emotion. What such projects demonstrate is the extent to which the presentation of facts can induce affective responses and, at the same time, how the setting up of constraints, rules, procedures and models of investigation is not merely a gimmick, but can be called into the service of affect. Initially this research approached literary and artistic works that seemed profoundly tied to a contemporary aesthetic practice. However, in developing the project it became apparent that many contemporary projects are inspired by natural history and stage complex parallel investigations in the contemporary world. Contemporary artists and writers thus seem to be involved in processes that Goethe defined as *“zartre Empirie,”* a delicate or tender empiricism. Such an approach

⁰ Ben Anderson, “Modulating the Excess of Affect,” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, 166.

allows one to follow a hunch and maintain a speculative approach to the natural and social world without succumbing to more radical forms of scepticism. Indeed the amateur and craftsman-like quality of many contemporary projects is directed towards exploration and learning rather than mastery, but in using such naive approaches and aesthetics these writers and artists often participate in a return to historical approaches to various subjects as if to test them once again.

A significant finding has been the vast number of contemporary literary and artistic projects that fit, albeit awkwardly at times, into the category of weird science. Further research would thus isolate new axes within the field. A surprising secondary finding has been the frequency with which contemporary literary and artistic projects draw inspiration from natural history and areas of study that emerged in the nineteenth century. As such further research might consider projects that experiment with botany, geology, archaeology, medicine and crystallography. One specific example would analyse projects involving insects, as a kind of ‘weird entomology.’ Artist Herbert Duprat experiments with insects by providing caddis flies with gold and gemstones that they then glean as materials for building their tiny homes. Similarly, artist Rivane Neuenschwander’s “Second Stories” is a video of ants carrying colourful confetti (which she covered in sugar) back to their colony. In literature, Pierre Alferi’s *Le chemin familial du poisson combattif* deploys theories of animal and insect behaviour in

dynamic ways that could prove to be interesting developments on the central claims of this thesis because they would stage an encounter between affect and the non-human world.

Another possible area of research would centre on the *oulipiennes*. Historically, emotion has been gendered as female, while the Oulipo is often mistaken as a group of rather cerebral white men. As such a sustained feminist reading might follow from the relationship between affect and epistemology established in this thesis. The methodology behind such a study would move beyond explicitly gendered readings and towards a more complex consideration of the ways that oulipian practices reconfigure conventional hierarchies of knowledge and affect. For example, how does the structuring of Jacques Jouet's *La république de Mek-Ouyes* as a daily *roman feuilleton* with various decentralised authorial voices (sometimes multiple authors as well) undermine the central laddish conceit of masculinity implied by the pronunciation of the central protagonist's name (*mes couilles*)?⁰ Is Mek-Ouyes really master of his own domain (or republic) or does this structure imply rather that he is a symbol of a failing kind of masculinity in contemporary culture? How might this reflect on widely held conceptions of the Oulipo? Even more importantly there has been no study to date on the works of Anne F. Garréta, Michèle Métail, Michelle Grangaud and Michèle Audin—the four published female members of the Oulipo. Therefore another

⁰ Jacques Jouet, *La république de Mek-Ouyes*, (Paris: POL, 2001).

possible and valuable outgrowth of this thesis would be research devoted to the *oulipiennes*. How does affect and emotion emerge from the constraints used by these writers and how does it differ from the male writers explored in this thesis?

In oulipian literary works experimentation is often carried through to the physical qualities of the books. Not only challenging expectations about how literature gets written and how genre conventions might be bent, the Oulipo has also challenged perceived limitations in publishing. Texts like *La Dissolution*, *Ode à la ligne 29 des autobus parisiens*, and *Éros mélancolique* make use of margins, colour and various font sizes in ways that draw attention to the physicality of the book and connect this physicality to the development of both formal and narrative experiments. Roubaud's *La Dissolution* and *Ode* texts are developments of his use of numbered *incises* and *bifurcations* discussed in chapter one. Through the added use of colour and steadily increasing margin sizes, each of his parenthetical openings recalls digital hyperlinks, but at the same time Roubaud could only find one publishing company who could manage the complicated task. Moreover, while the materiality of the text is markedly visual, Roubaud contends that at least as far as the *Ode* is concerned, "une lecture à voix haute permettra au lecteur d'apprécier pleinement l'attrait de ce parti pris."⁰ In the age of digital publishing, Roubaud uses

⁰ Jacques Roubaud, "Note Préambulatoire," *Ode à la ligne 29 des autobus parisiens*.

the visual component of the printed text to insist on its value as an oral document.

In appropriating the forms of rigorous methodology and scientific constraint, contemporary literary and artistic projects invite other disciplines into the service of affect. In so doing these projects offer alternative modes for its expression and thus different avenues for considering the relationship between feeling and thought as they commingle in cultural contexts. The use of systematic artifice in literary and artistic works—sometimes envisioned as extreme formalism, sometimes as a fixed method or process of creating—encourages the encounter between science and creative practice in ways which have profound implications for our understanding of the role of affect in contemporary culture. It also enables a consideration of a whole range of attendant concerns not conventionally associated with, or explicitly at play in, literary and artistic works. Phrased differently, these literary and artistic projects begin with the belief that experiments can produce various kinds of knowledge, but they ultimately risk it in speculating that any knowledge produced without cognates such as intuition, feeling, and affect is sure to be short-lived. Weird science is the study of a set of literary and visual projects that take this risk. Weird science analyses how such a bargain enriches the economy of knowledge. By softening the edges of the knowable, weird science reminds us about things that

matter and about kinds of understanding that require affects, emotions and intuitions as much as facts and figures.

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