

‘Dans le tissage de la vie’: The Poetic Notebook as an Ecological Form of Exploration

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Throughout the twentieth century, two important Francophone traditions of diaristic writing, the *journal intime* and the *carnet* (or notebook), have emerged in parallel but with little dialogue between them. Prose writers and novelists have been the main practitioners of the *journal intime* and poets the main practitioners of the *carnet*. To name only a few celebrated works, we can point, on the one hand, to Gide’s *Journal des faux-monnayeurs*, Duras’s *La Douleur*, Ernaux’s *Journal du dehors*, Barthes’s *Journal de deuil* and, on the other hand, to Valéry’s *Cahiers*, Reverdy’s *Livre de mon bord*, Ponge’s *Le Carnet du bois des pins*, Jaccottet’s *La Semaïson*, or Pesquès’s *La Face nord de Juliau* series. Although both these traditions have been cultivated by canonical writers, they have been slow to receive critical attention. Their treatment has not been equal, however. Whereas the *journal intime* has benefitted from a slow but steady stream of critical studies since the mid-twentieth century and is attracting more attention recently owing to the surge of interest in life writing,¹ the *carnet* has been the subject of remarkably few studies.² And yet, these two writing practices have much in common. Both eschew established genres and experiment with flexible writing practices that respond to everyday encounters as they arise. Both tend to present the writing subject, not as a transcendental consciousness with an overview of existence, but as a contingent being who is immersed in the world’s complex systems. And both embrace the equivocations of the writing process itself, using its hesitations to convey the vicissitudes of a human consciousness grappling with experience. In doing so, they valorize contingent and fragmentary forms of writing and usher in new definitions of the literary.

We start to understand why there should be such disparity in their treatment, however, when we reflect on how these practices differ. Although no strict opposition between them can be maintained and there will always be areas of overlap, Philippe Met identifies two key distinctions that arise in practice. Firstly, he suggests that the *carnet* tends to be more eclectic than the *journal intime*, that it tackles a wider range of topics and accommodates more diverse writing styles.³ Because the notebook’s form is not dictated by chronology, it is less linear and more discontinuous in structure. Notes are often grouped together very loosely, sometimes by month or year, sometimes with no temporal marker at all, and so different ideas and forms of experimentation fall side by side on its pages. We can feel the influence of a poetic tradition that is used to gathering diverse material together in collections or albums. Certainly, it is

¹ Sam Ferguson surveys the key twentieth-century studies of the *journal intime*, highlighting: Alain Girard’s *Le Journal intime* (1963), Béatrice Didier’s *Le Journal intime* (1976), Pierre Pachet’s *Les Baromètres de l’âme* (1990), Philippe Lejeune’s *Le Moi des demoiselles*, and Michel Braud’s *La Forme des jours* (2006) (Sam Ferguson, *Diaries Real and Fictional in Twentieth-Century French Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 5–12).

² See *Le Carnet pour lui-même*, ed. by François Dumont (*Études littéraires*, 48:1–2 (2019)); Philippe Met, ‘Fausses notes: pour une poétique du carnet’, *French Forum*, 37.1–2 (2012), 53–67.

³ Met, ‘Fausses notes’, p. 59.

important to stress that the *carnet* is used by poets to cultivate an alternative process of poetic exploration and not simply to develop a new form of prose writing. The notebook writer resembles Baudelaire's figure of the *chiffonnier*, with his ragbag of assorted materials.⁴ Jaccottet sums up the *carnet*'s miscellaneous nature with the words: 'Choses vues, choses rêvés, choses lues'.⁵ And secondly, Met points out that the *carnet* does not privilege introspection to the extent that the *journal intime* does.⁶ The *carnet* is not principally devoted to scrutinizing the inner workings of human subjectivity, nor how social and cultural forces shape human subjectivity.⁷ Met suggests that the poetic notebook has 'une orientation vers le dehors'.⁸

The 'orientation vers le dehors' that Met describes here can take many different forms but in the work of a substantial number of poets, such as Eugène Guillevic, Philippe Jaccottet, Michel Deguy, Lorand Gaspar, or Nicolas Pesquès, it manifests itself as a desire to reach out towards the things of the physical world in their autonomy.⁹ The notebook is used to interrogate the reality of a formation of rocks, the movements of an insect, or change in the weather, just as easily as a talk with a friend, a piece of music, or a scientific idea. Because it tackles a diverse range of phenomena and treats them all with equal seriousness, the notebook can cultivate a horizontal or ahierarchical view of worldly existence. This means refusing to situate human subjectivity at a vantage point above material existence and, instead, embracing our immersion in it. If the *journal intime* often shows us a writer caught up in interpersonal, social, or cultural events, the *carnet* very often presents a writer caught up in a world of diverse material processes. This non-anthropocentric stance is clearly at odds with the *intimistes*' preoccupation with human stories and one might wonder whether this is the reason that the *carnet* has been overlooked critically. Certainly, the widespread interest in new materialisms and flat ontologies that has overtaken the humanities in recent decades has been slow to shape Francophone criticism. And yet, the *carnet*'s decentred and heterogeneous writing practices often seem to anticipate the conceptions of distributed agency that we encounter in the work of thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, and Karen Barad.¹⁰ In Anglophone criticism, the use of the term 'life writing' to discuss diaristic or day-to-day writing reveals the same anthropocentrism. 'Life writing' often refers to the use of various kinds of documents to tell

⁴ See Antoine Compagnon, *Les Chiffonniers de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).

⁵ Philippe Jaccottet, 'Prière d'insérer', in *La Seconde Saison: Carnets 1980–1994* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

⁶ Met, 'Fausses notes', p. 59.

⁷ Versions of the *journal intime* do look outwards in order to explore how social discourses and institutions shape the textual subject, those written by Barthes and Ernaux in particular. But whereas the *journal intime* often explores the boundary between the personal and social, private and public in this way, the *carnet* is often far more preoccupied by the boundary between the human and the nonhuman.

⁸ Met, 'Fausses notes', p. 59.

⁹ For analysis of how Michel Deguy and Philippe Jaccottet do this in their notebooks, see Emily McLaughlin, 'The Practice of Writing and the Practice of Living: Michel Deguy's and Philippe Jaccottet's Ecopoetics', *Fixxions*, 11 (2015), 38–48.

¹⁰ See Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Jane Bennett, *Influx and Efflux: Writing up with Walt Whitman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

stories about human lives.¹¹ The term has the potential, however, to be far more capacious and encompassing. An analysis of the *carnet* might allow us to develop a different conception of ‘life writing’, one that decentres the human perspective, reinvents concepts like vitality or intimacy, and explores the distributed nature of worldly agency.

Of the notebook writers cited above, the Francophone poet Lorand Gaspar is arguably the one who experiments most boldly with the *carnet*’s heterogeneous form. From one entry to the next, and even within individual entries, he intertwines different perspectives, styles, and knowledge systems. As he does so, he probes the many different forms of worldly activity in which the human subject finds itself embedded. He uses the *carnet*’s protean form to explore the multiplicity of human modes of perception and investigation, their entanglement with one another, and their entanglement with the myriad dynamics of material existence. Whilst all Gaspar’s notebooks from *Feuilles d’observation* (1986) to *Carnet de Patmos* (1991) to *Carnet de Jérusalem* (1997) probe the intimate way in which the human and the nonhuman are entangled, it is *Feuilles d’observation* that is most diverse in its composition. In this respect, it has much in common with Gaspar’s early collection of free verse poetry, *Sol absolu* (1972). Gaspar prizes the capaciousness and flexibility of *both* free verse and the poetic notebook but it is undoubtedly true that the notebook dominates the later stages of his career, perhaps because it has even greater scope to accommodate a wide range of modes such as the analytical and the anecdotal. *Feuilles d’observation* combines stories from Gaspar’s professional life as a surgeon, descriptions of journeys he makes, detailed accounts of landscapes, poetico-philosophical meditations, and considerations of other writers’ work. It incorporates ideas and images from a wide range of disciplines: literature, history, and science. It draws in particular on a remarkably wide range of scientific disciplines: medicine, biology, biochemistry, physics, and geology.

Given the way that Gaspar weaves together so many different styles and methodologies, his use of the notebook form is redolent of the etymology of the word text. ‘Text’ comes from the Latin ‘textus’, the past participle stem of ‘texere’, ‘to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave, construct, fabricate, build’.¹² Gaspar’s notebook is ‘a woven thing’.¹³ Gaspar makes it very clear in his *carnet*, however, that he does not conceive of this dynamic of weaving merely as a principle of poetic composition but as a dynamic of worldly composition. In *Feuilles d’observation*, Gaspar observes that we are never as detached from the physical world as we assume but that humankind ‘s’insère dans le tissage de la vie’.¹⁴ The human subject emerges from a crisscross of material, energetic, microbiological, cultural, and political forces. And so, if Gaspar’s notebook mixes different disciplines, ideas, and styles of writing, it is in order to explore this worldly ‘tissage’. He probes the composite nature of human existence, the

¹¹ Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford, OUP 2010), p. 4.

¹² ‘Text’, in *Online Etymology Dictionary* <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/text>> [accessed 13 February 2021].

¹³ This etymology is widely cited in theoretical texts in the 1960s and 1970s. Barthes famously uses it in *Le Plaisir du texte* (Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 100–01)).

¹⁴ Lorand Gaspar, *Feuilles d’observation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 107. All subsequent references to this work will appear using the abbreviation *FO*.

different modes of perception and exploration that emerge side by side within us. And as he shifts between one mode of investigation and another, he exposes the transversal material currents that crisscross human perception. A ‘transversal’ force is mobile, distributed, and protean. It cuts across the stable conceptual categories, such as the body, the individual, the object, or the species, that we use to divide up the world. The poet’s notes trace, for example, the ebb and flow of mineral life as it assumes different forms in human bodies or rock formations, exploring how historical and personal processes intermingle with geological ones. His writings track thermodynamic currents of energy that traverse bodies and objects. They probe the infinitely diverse host of micro-organisms that inhabit us. The poet uses his diverse faculties to probe many different volatile spheres of activity in which we are embedded.

This reading of Gaspar’s *Feuilles d’observation* runs counter to the studies that use Romantic and humanist tropes to analyse Gaspar’s accounts of the embeddedness of human existence.¹⁵ Dominique Combe proposes that Gaspar embraces the immanence of worldly existence but that humanity plays a unique role by perceiving correspondences between the different spheres of being. Combe states that Gaspar’s work is dominated by ‘une métaphore animiste’, suggesting that it is the human act of tracing the connections between things that *enlivens* the material world.¹⁶ This article argues instead that Gaspar perceives the material world as lively on its own terms.¹⁷ The animism in his work is not to be read figuratively but literally, as an exploration of the distributed agency of the world’s material processes. Gaspar is not the poet of analogical connection but of embeddedness, complexity, and developmental indeterminism. The *carnet* is one of the key forms that Gaspar uses – alongside the free verse poem – to cultivate an immersed perspective in which humanity only gets fleeting and imperfect glimpses of the symbiotic processes that shape its existence. In this respect, Gaspar’s interdisciplinary, poetico-scientific work has more in common, not with traditional humanisms,

¹⁵ Gaspar does describe himself as ‘un humaniste’ but does so to situate himself within a tradition of Enlightenment interdisciplinary thinkers and to urge contemporary writers to embrace the full range of their capabilities. He qualifies the term and says he would prefer ‘un humain’ (Lorand Gaspar, ‘Poésie et médecine’, *Estudos em homenagem a António Ferreira de Brito* (Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2004), 111–14 (p. 114).)

¹⁶ Dominique Combe, ‘Poétique et poésie’, in *Lorand Gaspar: transhumance et connaissance*, ed. by Madeleine Renouard (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1995) 216–22 (p. 68). This tendency to tame Gaspar’s account of the embeddedness of human existence is evident in seminal critical works on Gaspar’s poetry. Maxime de Fiol’s *Lorand Gaspar: approches de l’immanence* has been crucial in allowing us to perceive how Gaspar affirms that human existence is part of a universe that is unified, continuous, and infinite. However, notions of totality, unity, continuity, and infinity are foregrounded throughout his study in a way that is redolent of the Romantic conception of cosmic unity. Although Fiol does argue that Gaspar celebrates the limited and provisional nature of the human perspective, this state of contingency tends to be perceived in relation to the whole, as a way of residing in a state of exposure to an ungraspable oneness. By contrast, this article explores how Gaspar inverts precisely these kinds of totalising cosmic or aerial metaphors. It suggests that the poet does not invite us to soar or swoon into the wholeness of existence but, rather, to perceive our existence as *tangled up* in the world’s illimitable material and immaterial processes and to become aware that we perceive a select few of the myriad processes that go on around us and traverse us (Maxime de Fiol, *Lorand Gaspar: Approches de l’immanence* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), pp. 87, 128, 269).

¹⁷ This is not to suggest that Gaspar is a materialist. Fiol points out quite rightly that Gaspar insists on the importance of acknowledging the diversity of existence and never suggests that material processes alone produce all phenomena (Fiol, *Lorand Gaspar*, pp. 89, 137). It should be noted, however, that Gaspar’s conception of the continuity of life and matter means that he foregrounds notions of entanglement, immersion, and emergence in a manner that is similar to the way in which they are foregrounded in the work of new materialists or posthumanists such as Barad, Bennett, and Haraway.

but with contemporary post-humanisms or new materialisms. His notebook moves sinuously between different perspectives, methodologies, and styles in order to explore how diverse processes co-evolve, entangle, and nest within us and within the physical world. His diverse collection of notes explores how all things – the text itself, the human subject, worldly phenomena – emerge from an unpredictable and open-ended weaving motion.

Gaspar's varied writing practice emerges from his own multifaceted life. He grew up in what is now Târgu-Mures in Romania, spoke Hungarian, Romanian, and German as a child, and then learned French and English. He studied medicine in France, became a surgeon, and then held posts in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tunisia, and Lebanon. He published poetry in his adopted literary language, French, translated from Hungarian and English into French, practised photography, and travelled extensively. In essays and interviews, Gaspar always insists that his diverse activities have always been part of the same process of exploration. In the essay 'Sciences, philosophie et arts', he explains that although we practise different disciplines, we always ultimately aim to 'mieux connaître l'homme et cette vie finie qui s'offre à lui, une vie que seule une meilleure connaissance de la nature du monde et de la nature humaine (faisant partie du monde) pouvait à mes yeux éclairer'.¹⁸ We seek to understand our existence, the nature of the world, and our implication in it. This essay counters the prevailing tendency to polarize the different domains of human knowledge, pitting science against the arts. Gaspar argues that to do so is to fail to see how both forms of enquiry emerge side by side within us, produced by similar processes of cooperation, as our multifaceted brains collaborate with diverse bodily systems in particular ways. We are a 'corps-cerveau', he writes, '[un] corps doté d'un cerveau sensible, pensant, et moteur, doté de plusieurs sortes de mémoire et capable d'un grand nombre d'apprentissages – empiriques, logico-mathématiques et artistiques' (*SP*, 106).

This essay helps us to understand why Gaspar prizes the *carnet's* eclectic form so highly. It reveals that multiplicity is crucial, not only to his understanding of his own life, but to his understanding of human subjectivity and worldly existence in general. Gaspar proposes that all forms of investigation – scientific, philosophical, or artistic – explore how human existence emerges from an overlapping set of configurations and how these configurations themselves emerge from myriad other configurations:

L'homme est une de ces choses, un de ces ensembles corrélés, qui s'articule à l'intérieur d'autres ensembles et ensembles d'ensembles sans que se rompe à aucun niveau le tissage plus ou moins serré, plus ou moins apparent du déploiement d'un individu humain, de l'humanité, de la nature sur la planète Terre, dans l'Univers qui nous est accessible et dans tout ce qui ne l'est pas. (*SP*, 107)

Gaspar argues that all existence is ecosystemic, that it is an infinite regression of systems of cooperation and exchange. And he situates humanity within this schema, reminding us that we emerge from these endless chains or spirals of influence. But even here, he insists, we can still identify a dynamic that is common to all existence:

¹⁸ Lorand Gaspar, 'Sciences, philosophie et arts', in *Lorand Gaspar*, ed. by Daniel Lançon (Cognac: Le Temps qu'il fait, 2004), 105–20 (p. 106). All subsequent references to this work will appear using the abbreviation *SP*.

Nous ne pouvons donc concevoir cette succession, cette étoffe qui se déploie indéfiniment dans les dimensions ou expressions qui nous sont connues, qu'en admettant l'existence d'une dynamique intrinsèque, commune à toute chose, produisant sans commencement ce 'tissu' de matière-énergie, de pensée (et de tant d'autres réalités que nous ignorons), de même que les lois inhérentes à son activité qui se développe dans ce que nous percevons comme des transformations et des assemblages sans nombre. (*SP*, 109)

In the coming together of 'ensembles', in the collaboration that occurs between one system and another, Gaspar discerns a universal weaving motion, 'produisant sans commencement ce "tissu"'. He argues that this dynamic gives rise to material processes, ideas, or patterns of development. And he suggests that his task as a poet, but also as a scientist, is to interrogate how its weaving motion traverses us and brings us into being.

This conception of human subjectivity as multiple and endlessly embedded plays out in the pages of *Feuilles d'observation*. Gaspar uses his notebook to explore his many different perspectives, passions, and forms of training. Because Gaspar groups notes together loosely according to the years in which they were written, sections encompass very diverse materials. The section '1973–1974', for example, begins with a philosophical reflection on humanity's position in the world. Gaspar observes that the sense of alienation that people so often feel towards material existence is alien to him. He has always been aware of 'les intensités' and 'les rythmes du monde' that traverse his being (*FO*, 63). A subsequent note is closer to literary criticism. It describes a disappointing conference on objects and everyday life and laments the sterile kinds of textual formalism that dominate conversation, 'cette petite guerre de mots, de formules, d'attitudes' (*FO*, 65). There is then a story from his work at the hospital: he sees a patient close to death, amidst a tangle of cables and humming machines, and marvels at the man's smile, struck by the brightness of his gaze in the midst of such suffering, 'le signe aérien d'un sourire issu de la pesanteur, de la finitude' (*FO*, 64). Several other entries are more traditional poetic evocations of natural phenomena: a blade of grass illuminated by a sunbeam in the garden or the experience of darkness closing in upon his house, peopled with noises, scents, and sensations (*FO*, 68). From just this brief survey of one section of *Feuilles d'observation*, we can see how it weaves together different forms of exploration. The poet uses different faculties and engages with different facets of existence, without imposing any hierarchy on them. Rational consciousness does not intervene to synthesize and interpret these happenings. Experience is allowed to remain various. We are reminded of Reverdy's axiom: 'Je ne pense pas, je note'.¹⁹

One of the effects of shifting between different modes of investigation in this way is that it allows Gaspar to explore how we are embedded in many different kinds of worldly activity. Whereas late twentieth-century writers of the *journal intime*, such as Roland Barthes or Annie Ernaux, use this kind of technique to explore how we emerge from a nexus of linguistic, social, political, and cultural forces, Gaspar uses it in *Feuilles d'observation* to explore how we emerge from a mesh of human and nonhuman, cultural and material forces. The section '1975', which describes a journey in the Judean desert, intertwines notes about geological, historical, and personal phenomena. Gaspar places heavy emphasis on the geological from the outset. The

¹⁹ Pierre Reverdy, *Le Gant de crin* (Paris: Plon, 1927), p. 1.

opening entries state the poet's desire to attune himself to 'les travaux fervents de chaque molécule de terre' (*FO*, 83) and suggest that what touches him about this place is 'cette âme granuleuse que lève dans les choses les plus simples, apparemment les plus immobiles, la lumière' (*FO*, 83). A later entry describes the streaks of red in the sandstone landscapes of Wadi Rum and the Gulf of Aqaba as vital red arteries that sweep the poet and his companions down to the sea, 'zébrées d'intrusions de basalte qui s'ouvrent de leurs veines au couchant dans la mer' (*FO*, 85). Stony landscapes are presented as lively presences. Even within the stone, streaks of minerals interlace and reveal ancient processes of geological mixing. When the poet evokes the historical monuments he encounters, they too are seen to emerge from this dynamic landscape. The palace at Petra is cut out of a ragged cliff and glimpsed through the narrow slit of the immense Siq gorge. He describes its Byzantine engravings, 'bandeaux fleuris, lions, taureaux et beliers' (*FO*, 86) and muses about the stories told about this place, imagining 'les cavaliers féroces de Baïbars' who disappear into the desert 'après le saccage' (*FO*, 86). The human presences he describes, however, are always intertwined with nonhuman ones. The funereal chambers are 'tapissées de crottin de chèvre', lit up by a 'flaque bleue de mourons et de vipérines' (*FO*, 86), or reveal 'lacs concentriques et plis glandulaires dans le derme minéral' (*FO*, 86). The few personal interventions that the poet makes quickly shift the emphasis towards the affective charge of the rocks and mountains. The poet refers allusively to 'mes obscurités'. He admits briefly that these days 'n'ont pas été avarés en jours sombres' but concludes that he has confided this sadness 'à ces feux presque verts des fonds de l'aube, à ces ferments qui bougent dans les flancs des montagnes' (*FO*, 87). An emotion that he cannot verbalize is explored in physical terms as he watches the play of light on the mountainside. Gaspar explores how his most private feelings migrate between mind and body, body and landscape.

As we shift constantly between notes on stones, monuments, and the poet's life, we are encouraged to attribute to the mineral world the kind of dynamism we attribute to our own lives. Gaspar explores how human emotions resonate through material landscapes, how human and nonhuman forces intermingle in the most celebrated of human creations, and how historical events are swept up in waves of geological activity. A deliquescent and even animist imagery of pulsing veins of blood, lakes, or 'plis glandulaires' encourages us to see its mineral formations not as objects but as events. At the start of this section, Gaspar observed: 'C'est ici, mêlé au désordre des pierres, à celui des hommes, que mes esprits animaux et autres si avides de mouvement et de clarté, ont trouvé sinon la paix, un lieu d'adhérence intime, d'acquiescement peut-être' (*FO*, 83). Aligning the chaotic processes of mineral and human life, the poet suggests that he is implicated in both. This realization produces a sensation 'd'adhérence intime'. The poet becomes aware that his existence is not separate from material existence, just as human history is in no way separate from geology. The personal, historical, and geological all interlace and human subjectivity emerges from their weave. Strikingly, the poet describes himself here not as an individual but as a composite: 'mes esprits animaux et autres si avides de mouvement et de clarté'. We are reminded of his description of a human being as 'un de ces ensembles corrélés, qui s'articule à l'intérieur d'autres ensembles et ensembles d'ensembles'. The poet realizes that everything – including him – emerges from the cooperation between parts.

It is by intertwining personal, historical, and geological notes that Gaspar cultivates a formal weaving motion that allows him to explore the complex mesh of processes in which he is immersed. He constructs a text that *adheres to* the worldly dynamics of cooperation that go on around him or within him. He not only cultivates this kind of weaving motion from note to note, however, but within individual notes or even sentences. As he explores different kinds of worldly activity, or a tumult of bodily sensation he barely understands, he slips rapidly between many different perspectives, most often those of a scientific nature. We get a series of glimpses of the very different processes revealed to us by medicine, biology, physics, chemistry, and geology. Tapping into different strata of experience, Gaspar's notes tease out the complex network of agencies that are active in a scene. For example, in the section 1960–1966, Gaspar recounts watching the sunset in the Judean desert. Once the sun has disappeared, he has the impression that the limestone formations in front of him are radiating light:

Chaque grain de minéral émet une vibration, et l'œil qui voudrait en saisir la source se perd comme dans l'étendue. La rumeur monte, l'air devient visible, on peut toucher la musique qui bout doucement dans les alvéoles. (FO, 16)

This light is perceived as a vibration, released from every particle of the rocks. Gaspar uses a vibratory and sonorous imagery to suggest how this force frustrates the visual sense. The eye would like to locate its origin but it cannot pin down this diffuse presence. Using the language of physics, of vibrating particles, Gaspar explores how this transversal force dissolves the stable visual field that we map. The eye is lost here, the poet immersed in the very phenomenon that he would like to delimit. As the vibrations grow, there is a rising sound that thickens the air, almost like a heat haze. We reach a kind of denouement as '[l]a rumeur' that has been growing is described as 'la musique'. At this point, the scientific idiom changes again. The emphasis shifts from the thermodynamic currents animating the air to biochemical processes occurring in the lungs. The current of energy that the poet is tracking penetrates his body. The resonant air grows so palpable that the poet can almost feel it boiling or bubbling as it inflates the alveoli and passes into the blood.

In notes such as these, Gaspar's perception of the physical world is enlivened by scientific understanding, and scientific understanding is in turn brought to life by imagination. The poet tracks a current of energy across different scientific idioms. He explores its radiance, then its thermal vibrations, then its biochemical transformation in the lungs. As he draws these processes into some kind of horizon of affective, bodily awareness, Gaspar accepts that he is immersed in this resonant field. He knows that he can never get a clear or all-encompassing view of their activities but he tentatively feels his way towards some kind of intimacy with them. Another entry uses the image of a ferment to describe this state of immersion:

Le soleil couché, les calcaires dépensent lentement leurs réserves de clarté. Ce sont des moments d'une ferveur tactile, d'une fermentation visuelle inoubliables. Tout un monde massif et opaque s'aère dans une porosité pulmonaire. Dans chaque molécule de lucidité on sent enfler le désir d'une ouverture sur lequel il n'est plus question de revenir. (FO, 15–16)

As the light emanates from the rocks, everything is enlivened by a kind of contagious energy, 'une ferveur tactile'. It is as if the poet suddenly senses the ongoing vibratory contact between all things, between the air, the rocks, and his body. And as the line progresses, 'une ferveur

tactile' becomes 'une fermentation visuelle'. Once again, the reverberations break down the stable visual field and its discrete forms. The poet finds himself immersed in an energetic ferment: a world of reactions, exchanges, and transformations. As he does so, we slip from a thermodynamic imagery to a metabolic one; a language of vibrating particles gives way to a language of bacterial activity. And with the evocation of this 'ferment', the whole landscape starts to feel permeable. Everything seems to open onto everything else. It is as if a sudden levity and luminosity overtakes all things. This porosity is described using the physiological term 'pulmonaire'. The poet seems to intuit that everywhere there are lung-like interfaces where symbiotic processes flourish in a perpetually open-ended state of becoming.

As Gaspar weaves together many different strands of imagery and evokes currents of energy that reverberate between many different bodies, he intersperses these notes with poetico-theoretical texts about his own writing practice. He considers how his writing approaches the physical world, what form of knowledge it produces, and what kind of poetic subject it gives rise to. Gaspar expands upon the definition of poetry that he offered in 'Sciences, philosophie et arts' in which he suggested that poetry explores our imbrication in the physical world. As he reflects on the poetic practice of note writing that he has been developing in *Feuilles d'observation*, he develops this definition further and suggests that poetry explores its imbrication in the physical world by cultivating a process of interweaving:

Le poète fait de la poésie sans d'abord se poser de questions. Il est ce faire enraciné dans la poussée de son être total où corps et pensée, l'acquis et l'inné sont solidaires dans la même montée vers le jour. Il y a un savoir dynamique dans les épaisseurs du corps, une veine d'énergie, d'invention et de soif immémoriales. Chaque cellule, chaque particule dans chaque cellule sont des figures de la danse, sont vibration, rythme et idée qui s'imbriquent dans l'intensité de la 'scène' changeante que nous sommes. (FO, 57)

Gaspar suggests that poetry is not produced by cool and detached reflection but that, rather, it is an activity that explores the interactions that occur between mind and body, culture and biology, 'l'acquis et l'inné'. This activity is 'enraciné' in the very dynamics of exchange by which these processes shape one another. Presenting it as 'une *veine* d'énergie, d'invention et de soif immémoriales' (my italics), Gaspar indicates that its creative and desirous force thrives in the interface between systems. It is an active way of knowing, embedded in the poet's body, 'un savoir dynamique dans les épaisseurs du corps', that explores the emergent force of existence. The emphasis that Gaspar places on dynamism throughout this passage culminates when he presents poetry as a dance. This is a dance, he insists, in which every cell and particle in the body participate. How are we to read this image? How can he claim that every bodily particle figures in this dance? What Gaspar seems to be suggesting is that, as poetry explores the 'traffic' or the 'back and forth' between systems, it stands to reason that every element in the system, however small, contributes to this dynamic of coarticulation. Every cell is caught up in rhythms of exchange and transfer: 'vibration, rythme et idée qui s'imbriquent dans l'intensité de la "scène" changeante que nous sommes'. Gaspar reaches for a theatrical image at the end. He suggests that what we *are* is only ever a fleeting set of configurations, briefly improvised, always changing. And he proposes that the poetic notebook improvises in the same way. This is why he perceives the poetic process of exploration that he undertakes in his *carnet* as ecosystemic or even ontological. By intertwining different styles, methodologies, and

perspectives, the *carnet* experiments with the very rhythms of exchange that continually make and unmake us.

By cultivating a weaving motion within his texts, Gaspar probes the worldly weaving motion that gives rise to human subjectivity. He tracks discreet physical forces that crisscross the body and explores the complex ways in which human and nonhuman forces entangle. By doing so, he manages to view the material world and its processes without retreating to an exterior vantage point. He describes this mode of exploration as a way of plunging deep into the material world or even letting it plunge into us. It is ‘une sorte d’approfondissement, de creusement sans fin de la matière, l’élucidation d’un mouvement interne sans point de départ’ (FO, 73). He embraces his immersion in material dynamics over which he has no mastery. He looks inward, only to see any conception of origin or centre dissolve entirely. It is in this way that he embarks on ‘un mouvement interne sans point de départ’. He finds no foundation or essence to which he can hark back, either in worldly experience, or within himself. Forces strike out in all directions, traversing us, constituting us, and also exceeding us. The more he delves, the more this space opens outwards vertiginously. In another entry, Gaspar suggests how the poet manages to work in this disorienting space:

Tout au fond – un fond sans profondeur ni surface – je dois sans cesse refaire le chemin, radoubler la barque de toutes parts menacée de la confiance, vérifier, remettre en place les joints pour que la pulsation passe. Puis c’est encore et encore la nuit, les épaisseurs confuses, le labyrinthe. (FO, 58)

In a space whose contours remain untraceable, the poet works tentatively, trying out different paths. He likens this hesitant process to patching up a rickety boat, drawing on the myth of the Argo (as Barthes does later),²⁰ the ship endlessly repaired until none of the initial pieces remains the same. He suggests that to write poetry is to keep improvising, cobbling parts together here and there in temporary configurations ‘pour que la pulsation passe’. Gaspar uses the image of the boat in a way that transforms the traditional conception of travel: the poet does not build a ‘craft’ so that it can transport him elsewhere. He builds, and keeps building, and the process of assembling and reassembling takes him forward. By weaving together disparate materials, he feels the rhythm of cooperation, ‘la pulsation’, that takes all existence forward. And when he tires or falters, and the surge of energy subsides, he finds himself in the labyrinth once again. The world feels like an immense maze, one where there is no single thread to guide us, only the myriad mycelial- or rhizomatic-like threads that run all through us and all around us, linking diverse spheres of existence, connecting us to more systems and processes than we can fathom.²¹ And, here, tentatively, the poet starts to reach again, working with what is at

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 55.

²¹ Images of rhizomes and mycelia help us to envisage how transversal connections and distributed agency can operate. Deleuze and Guattari use the image of the rhizome to describe a network that has endless points of conjunction that go out in all directions. This is a system with no beginning or end, that is always in process (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Milles plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie II* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), pp. 9–37). The biologist Merlin Sheldrake suggests that mycelia’s networks of fine tubular veins that branch endlessly outwards can help us to understand the dispersed nature of certain forms of agency and even sentience. Sheldrake describes mycelia as ‘a living growing opportunistic investigation, speculation in bodily form’ (Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our Worlds, Change our Minds, and Shape our Futures* (London: Vintage, 2021), p. 58).

hand, trying out different paths, probing for connections in the dark spaces between things.

The weaving motion that Gaspar describes in these poetico-theoretical notes is evident all through *Feuilles d'observation*. For Gaspar, multiplicity and mixing are essential principles, not merely of textual composition, but of worldly creation. In his essay 'Sciences, philosophie et arts', he presents human subjectivity as a diverse set of systems that cooperate in particular ways to produce particular capabilities. The systems that cooperate 'within us', however, are not easy to pin down. When we look inwards, we discover that systems are embedded within systems *ad infinitum*, both human and nonhuman. Gaspar describes these endlessly overlapping and intersecting systems as 'le tissu' of worldly existence and suggests that we exist 'dans le tissage de la vie'. And he proposes that poetry explores our implication in this weave. This is why the notebook, alongside the free verse poem, is one of the most useful modes of writing in his repertoire. For Gaspar, note writing is an art of assemblage, a way of drawing diverse styles, perspectives, and methodologies together in loose formations. It allows him to craft a text, in the etymological sense of the word, 'a woven thing'. From one entry to the next, Gaspar intertwines prose and verse, the philosophical and the anecdotal, the historical and the geological, the scientific and the literary. Line by line, he slips between different scientific lenses and unearths some of the subtle forces that animate the scene of perception. As he does so, he explores the worldly 'tissage' – material, energetic, microbiological, semiotic, historical, political – from which we all emerge. This is why the notebook's mode of exploration is ecosystemic. The text explores how it emerges from overlapping processes, how it too is 'un de ces ensembles corrélés, qui s'articule à l'intérieur d'autres ensembles et ensembles d'ensembles'.

It is important to stress that this is very far from an all-seeing Romantic perspective, attuned to the 'music of the spheres', and able to reveal existence's hidden connections. This is what is missed in accounts of Gaspar's work that present him as the quintessentially humanist poet-scientist who explores the connections that we decipher between the micro and the macro according to a universal law of analogy. Gaspar's perspective is embedded in a world of material process in a way that anticipates what we now call post-humanism or the nonhuman turn. There is no vantage point that allows us to survey the world from above. The 'observations' that he gives us in *Feuilles d'observation* are glimpses, intuitions, and speculations. They come from a humble empiricist, one who is acutely aware of the limitations of his own perspective, who knows himself to be caught up in myriad, multidirectional, overlapping forces. Tracing these forces to the best of his ability, he ends up losing sight of them as their paths grow too distant or too intricate. And when he does manage to tease something of them into view, they disturb the familiar categories that we normally use to divide the world up into stable bodies and objects. The geological events legible in the deliquescent patterns in stone show us how historical and personal events are caught up in and carried within waves of mineral life that we nonetheless struggle to imagine. The thermodynamic waves that enliven the evening air cut through the stable things that we so often take as guarantors of the real. By enlisting our more intimate or penetrative senses, touch and hearing, Gaspar pushes us to unearth a whole host of subterranean processes. He takes scientific knowledge and pushes us towards the edge of its insights, probing their limits. His endlessly ramified imagery briefly taps into one sphere – atomistic, microbial, optic, neuronal, atmospheric – and then just as

quickly slips towards another kind of process. A few intertwined wisps of activity suggest the infinitely larger network of which they are a part.

This practice of note writing allows Gaspar to cultivate a particular kind of practice of attention. For when he brings images of the thermodynamic, the metabolic, and the anatomical alive in quick succession, we follow many divergent strands. The imagery keeps ramifying until we hold many branches in our mind at once. For the reader, it is like listening to a choir in which each singer performs a different piece (to borrow an image from the biologist Merlin Sheldrake and his work on fungi).²² We cannot gather together what we hear in one coherent pattern or take refuge in any central strand. Our attention hovers between processes. Gaspar relishes this hovering motion because it is precisely here that he locates human subjectivity. For him, human existence, and indeed all existence, unfolds in the traffic back and forth between systems. Existence is inherently polyphonic and we emerge from its operatic spectacle.²³ We are all ecosystems within ecosystems, *ad infinitum*. To hold all of this in our minds at once and to resist the processes of focusing and foregrounding that we rely on in everyday life is dizzying. We feel diffuse. We are not quite located where we once thought we were, and nor is the outside world. We realize that everything is mixed. Our vision grows dimmer and thicker. There is an opacity to existence that we are invited to explore. For Gaspar alerts us to the darkness that is at the heart of every symbiotic process. Worlds co-evolve but still remain blind to one another's realities, existences, or desires. We all feel our way forward in the dark. This is what Gaspar's image of the labyrinth suggests. The notebook is thus the form he uses to tentatively feel his way forward, trying out different perspectives, styles, and knowledge systems. Interweaving different materials, the *carnet* probes what we might describe as the dynamics of co-worlding.²⁴ It explores how, in the dark interstices between worlds, life shuffles forward.

²² Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴ Astridis Neimanis offers a useful gloss on the term 'co-worlding' which appears in Haraway's and Barad's work. She writes: 'Rather than two separate entities interacting, they intra-act; they become what they are only in relation' (Astridis Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 34).