

ALESSANDRO DE FRANCESCO

Continuum 2

Writings - Scritti - Écrits
2015-2022



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CONTINUUM 2

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First edition published in 2024 by Uitgeverij
An imprint of punctum books, Earth, Milky Way
<https://www.punctumbooks.com>

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-148-1 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-149-8 (ePDF)

DOI: 10.53288/0463.1.00

LCCN: 2022939164

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from the
Library of Congress

Book design: Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

Cover art: Francesco Maria Mazzola detto Il Parmigianino, *Autoritratto in uno specchio convesso*, 1523–24, oil on wooden panel, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

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Foreword

Seven years have passed since the previous *Continuum*, also published with Uitgeverij. Also in this case it was a question of bringing together in one volume the diverse essays I produced in the previous years. If the first *Continuum* brought together texts produced between 2007 and 2015, the texts contained in this volume date back to the period 2015–2022. The title could only be *Continuum 2*, given that the underlying concept remains the same: to testify to the seamless continuity of my commitment to poetry and art over the years, and to reaffirm at the same time, on a theoretical level, a model of creation and of thought as a continuous flow, not discretized, not quantized, but organic, liquid, without end or beginning; a kind of linguistic translation of the space-time in which every text, like every other object, is necessarily immersed. The subtitle is no longer “Writings on Poetry as an Artistic Practice,” as in the previous volume, but not because this theme is not widely present in the works gathered here. On the contrary, in a certain sense it is even more explicit here than before, like in the eponymous piece “Poetry as Artistic Practice,” reproduced here. However, other approaches and other themes interfere in this volume, in particular open research on seventeenth-century poetry, art, and epistemology that occupies the third part, to which I gave the title of “On the Baroque.” This research is still ongoing today and

it presents intersections with but also divergences from the reflections I propose on the modern and contemporary era. Similar considerations apply to the first text in this volume, “Propositions on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry,” which refers to the philosophical poetry of Parmenides and Lucretius. It is particularly dear to me, as it sums up my overall conception of poetry in a weird but hopefully meaningful way. As a result, also in order not to repeat myself unnecessarily, it seemed more sensible to use the rather generic and open subtitle “Writings 2015–2022.”

Another difference with respect to the previous collection of essays consists in the method of choosing and organizing the materials gathered here: this volume, shorter than the previous one, contains only a part of the theoretical writings, essays, articles, and interviews I produced since 2015. I chose to include only writings that could have an autonomous structure (I therefore excluded prefaces, reviews, and other works of this sort) and that resonate, at the same time, with each other throughout the course of the book. I have no shortage of unpublished works, in particular taken from conferences, among which I would like to highlight the last text, in French, on infinity in seventeenth-century poetry and philosophy, and the English version of an essay already present in French in the previous *Continuum*, which brings together in a few lines some of the guiding themes of my theoretical investigation of modern poetry (“Designification, Grammooclasm, Alterlegible/sayable: To Give Words to the Subversion of Poetics”). Depending on the nature of the invitation and the context that generated these different texts, their stylistic approaches can be quite diverse: from the free essay, almost in poetic prose, to the scientific article with notes and

bibliographic references. I have chosen not to standardize these registers, and indeed to let them interact in all their diversity within the collection.

This volume is articulated in three parts: the first, entitled “Poetics,” contains a miscellany of essays and writings stemming from my vision of poetry and artistic practice, composed of two layers: reflections on my work as a poet and artist; and reflections on the work of other poets and artists. However, this duality is merely descriptive, given that in many of these writings historical and theoretical considerations on other authors are, sometimes dangerously, interwoven with my own conception of the poetic activity. I fully assume such a risk, which is always lurking for every poet who writes about poetry, in all its inevitable stumbles. The second part, “Two Interviews,” acts as a short interlude and is basically a continuation of the poetic considerations expressed by the writings gathered in the first part, with the difference that these are two interviews carried out on two very different occasions, one more literary, the other in the context of contemporary art. The third part, which I have already mentioned, retraces the work I have done so far on the poetry, art, and thought of the seventeenth century and more generally on the period spanning from Mannerism to the Baroque. This line of research was in its infancy at the time of the publication of the previous *Continuum* and has notably developed over the past five years. In the future I hope to be able to publish a larger monograph on the themes already presented here *in nuce*, such as, in particular, those of convexity and infinity in the aesthetic and cosmological models of that historical period.

Each of the three parts follows a reverse chronological order, from the most recent to the oldest essay, covering nearly eight years of work. If, as I hope, having these writings gathered here, rather than scattered in journals and in some cases unpublished, will be useful to those who are interested in the theory of poetry and the history of forms and processes in artistic production and philosophical thought, on a personal basis this was a precious opportunity to take stock of a series of issues dear to me but scattered themselves in my mind, and to rediscover a certain – albeit fragile – internal coherence in a theoretical production that has always accompanied the artistic one. In line with the spirit of *Uitgeverij* and of these same works, this volume, like the previous one, is strictly multilingual and therefore reproduces the texts in the language in which they were originally written, although introducing, where necessary, small additions, changes, and corrections. The readers will notice an increase in English writings compared to the previous collection, followed by Italian and then by French. This linguistic distribution randomly follows invitations, collaborations, and contexts of work and dialogue that have arisen in recent years, which are briefly mentioned in the descriptive paragraphs (always written in English) at the beginning of each essay, whose purpose is precisely to indicate the context of edition or transmission of the contents that are republished or published for the first time here.

– Alessandro De Francesco, September 2022

Introduzione

Sono trascorsi sette anni dal precedente *Continuum*, pubblicato sempre con Uitgeverij. Anche in questo caso si è trattato di riunire in un volume gli scritti collaterali e i saggi realizzati negli anni precedenti. Se il primo *Continuum* riuniva testi prodotti tra il 2007 e il 2015, i testi contenuti nel presente volume risalgono al periodo successivo, 2015-2022. Il titolo non poteva che essere *Continuum 2*, dato che il concetto di fondo rimane lo stesso: testimoniare la continuità senza soluzione del mio impegno per la poesia e l'arte nel corso degli anni, e riaffermare allo stesso tempo, sul piano teorico, un modello della creazione e del pensiero come flusso continuo, non discretizzato, non quantizzato, ma organico, liquido, senza fine né principio; una specie di traduzione linguistica dello spazio-tempo nel quale ogni testo, come ogni altro oggetto, è necessariamente immerso. Il sottotitolo non è più "Scritti sulla poesia come pratica artistica", come nel precedente volume, non perché questo tema non sia ampiamente presente anche nei lavori qui riuniti, anzi, in un certo senso è ancora più esplicito in alcuni dei saggi più recenti, a cominciare da quello eponimo, "Poetry as Artistic Practice", qui contenuto. Tuttavia, altri approcci ed altre tematiche vengono a interferire nel presente volume, in particolare una ricerca aperta sulla poesia, l'arte e l'epistemologia del Seicento che occupa la terza parte, intitolata non a caso "Del Barocco". Una ricer-

ca in corso tutt'oggi, che presenta intersezioni ma anche divergenze rispetto alle riflessioni che propongo sull'epoca moderna e contemporanea. Simili considerazioni valgono per il primo scritto di tutto il volume, "Propositions on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry", che si rifà alla poesia filosofica di Parmenide e di Lucrezio e al quale tengo particolarmente poiché riassume – in modo forse maldestro ma, spero, non incongruo – la mia concezione d'insieme della poesia. Cosicché, anche per non ripetermi inutilmente, mi è sembrato più sensato utilizzare il più generico e aperto sottotitolo "Scritti 2015–2022".

Un'altra differenza rispetto alla precedente raccolta di saggi consiste nella modalità di scelta e di organizzazione dei materiali qui riuniti: il presente volume, meno lungo del precedente, contiene solo una parte degli scritti teorici, dei saggi, degli articoli e delle interviste da me prodotti dal 2015 in poi. Ho scelto di includere soltanto scritti che potessero avere una struttura autonoma (ho escluso quindi prefazioni, recensioni, e altri lavori di questa sorta) e risuonare, allo stesso tempo, gli uni con gli altri durante tutto il corso del libro. Non mancano alcuni inediti, in particolare tratti da conferenze, tra i quali desidero far risaltare l'ultimo testo, in francese, sull'infinito nella poesia e nella filosofia del Seicento, e la versione inglese di un saggio già presente in francese nel precedente *Continuum*, che riunisce in poche righe alcuni dei temi-guida della mia indagine teorica sulla poesia moderna ("Designification, Grammo-clasm, Alter-legible/sayable: To Give Words to the Subversion of Poetics"). A seconda della natura dell'invito e del contesto che hanno generato i differenti testi, i registri utilizzati possono essere molto diversi: dal saggio libero, quasi in prosa poetica, all'articolo scientifico con

note e riferimenti bibliografici. Ho scelto di non uniformare questi registri, ed anzi di lasciarli interagire in tutta la loro diversità all'interno della raccolta.

Il volume è organizzato in tre parti: la prima, intitolata "Poetica", contiene una miscellanea di saggi e scritti sulla mia visione della poesia e della pratica artistica, articolata in due forme: riflessioni sul mio lavoro di poeta e artista; e riflessioni sul lavoro di altri poeti e artisti. Tale dualità è però meramente descrittiva, dato che in molti di questi scritti considerazioni storiche e teoriche su altri autori vengono a mischiarsi, talora pericolosamente, con la mia propria concezione dell'attività poetica. Un rischio, questo, sempre in agguato per ogni poeta che scrive sulla poesia, e che assumo qui pienamente, in tutti i suoi inevitabili inciampi. La seconda parte, "Due interviste", funge da breve intermezzo ed è in fondo una continuazione delle considerazioni di poetica espresse dagli scritti riuniti nella prima parte, con la differenza che si tratta appunto di due interviste realizzate in due occasioni ben diverse, una più letteraria, l'altra nel contesto dell'arte contemporanea. La terza parte, alla quale ho già accennato, crea una traccia del lavoro svolto finora sulla poesia, l'arte e il pensiero del diciassettesimo secolo e più in generale sull'epoca che va dal Manierismo al Barocco. Questa linea di ricerca era agli albori al momento della pubblicazione del precedente *Continuum* e si è sviluppata in particolare negli ultimi cinque anni. In futuro spero di poter pubblicare una più ampia monografia sui temi qui già presentati *in nuce*, quali in particolare quelli della convessità e dell'infinito nei modelli estetici e cosmologici dell'epoca in questione.

Ognuna delle tre parti segue un ordine cronologico inverso, dal saggio più recente a quello meno recente, co-

prendo quasi otto anni di lavoro. Se, come spero, avere questi scritti qui riuniti, anziché sparsi e in alcuni casi inediti, potrà essere utile a coloro che si interessano di teoria della poesia e di storia delle forme e dei processi nella produzione artistica e nel pensiero filosofico, a titolo personale questa è stata una preziosa occasione per fare il punto su una serie di tematiche a me care ma sparse esse stesse nella mia mente, e per riscoprire una certa – seppur fragile – coerenza interna in una produzione teorica che ha sempre accompagnato quella artistica. In linea con lo spirito di *Uitgeverij* e con l'anima di questi stessi lavori, il presente volume, come il precedente, è rigorosamente multilingue e riproduce quindi i testi nella lingua in cui sono stati originariamente scritti, seppur introducendo, laddove necessario, piccole aggiunte, modifiche e correzioni. Lettrici e lettori noteranno un incremento di scritti in inglese rispetto alla raccolta precedente, seguiti dal francese e quindi dall'italiano. Tale ripartizione segue casualmente inviti, collaborazioni e contesti di lavoro e di dialogo che si sono presentati in questi anni, a cui accennano brevemente i paragrafi descrittivi (redatti sempre in inglese) all'inizio di ogni saggio, il cui scopo è appunto quello di indicare il contesto di edizione o di trasmissione dei contenuti qui ripubblicati o pubblicati per la prima volta.

Alessandro De Francesco, settembre 2022

Introduction

Sept ans se sont écoulés depuis le précédent *Continuum*, également publié chez Uitgeverij. Il s'est agi, ici aussi, de réunir en un seul volume les essais que j'ai produits pendant les dernières années. Si le premier *Continuum* rassemblait des textes produits entre 2007 et 2015, les textes contenus dans ce volume datent de la période 2015-2022. Le titre ne pouvait être que *Continuum 2*, étant donné que le concept sous-jacent reste le même : témoigner de la continuité sans faille de mon engagement poétique et artistique au fil des ans, et réaffirmer en même temps, sur le plan théorique, un modèle de la création et de la pensée comme flux continus, non discrétisés, non quantifiés, mais organiques, liquides, sans fin ni commencement ; une sorte de traduction linguistique de l'espace-temps dans lequel chaque texte, comme tout autre objet, est nécessairement immergé. Le sous-titre n'est plus « Écrits sur la poésie comme pratique artistique », comme dans le volume précédent ; non pas que ce thème soit peu présent dans les ouvrages réunis ici, au contraire, dans un certain sens, il est encore plus explicite. Il suffit de lire l'essai éponyme, « Poetry as Artistic Practice », ici reproduit. Cependant, d'autres approches et d'autres thèmes interfèrent dans ce volume, notamment une recherche ouverte sur la poésie, l'art et l'épistémologie du XVII^e siècle qui occupe la troisième partie, que j'ai intitulée « Du Baroque ». Cette recherche, toujours

en cours aujourd’hui, présente des croisements mais aussi des divergences par rapport aux réflexions que je propose sur l’époque moderne et contemporaine. Des considérations similaires s’appliquent au premier écrit du volume, « Propositions on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry », qui se réfère à la poésie philosophique de Parménide et de Lucrèce et auquel je tiens particulièrement parce qu’il résume – peut-être d’une manière maladroite mais, j’espère, pas insensée – ma conception d’ensemble de la poésie. Si bien que, aussi pour ne pas me répéter inutilement, il m’a semblé plus judicieux d’utiliser le sous-titre plutôt générique et ouvert d’« Écrits 2015–2022 ».

Une autre différence par rapport au précédent recueil d’essais consiste dans la méthode de choix et d’organisation des matériaux réunis ici : ce volume, plus court que le précédent, ne contient qu’une partie des écrits théoriques, essais, articles et entretiens que j’ai réalisés depuis 2015. J’ai choisi de n’inclure que des écrits caractérisés par une structure autonome (j’ai donc exclu les préfaces, les compte-rendus et d’autres ouvrages de ce genre) et résonner, en même temps, les uns avec les autres tout au long du livre. Les inédits ne manquent pas, notamment tirés de conférences, parmi lesquels je souligne le dernier texte, en français, sur l’infini dans la poésie et la philosophie du XVII^e siècle, et la version anglaise d’un essai déjà présent en français dans le précédent *Continuum*, qui rassemble en quelques lignes quelques-uns des thèmes de fond de mon investigation théorique sur la poésie moderne (“Designification, Grammoclasm, Alter-legible/sayable: To Give Words to the Subversion of Poetics”). Selon la nature de l’invitation et du contexte qui ont généré les différents textes, les registres utilisés peuvent être très divers : de

l'essai libre, presque en prose poétique, à l'article scientifique avec notes et références bibliographiques. J'ai choisi de ne pas standardiser ces registres, mais au contraire de les laisser interagir dans toute leur diversité au sein de la collection.

Le volume est organisé en trois parties : la première, intitulée « Poétique », contient un ensemble d'essais et d'écrits sur ma vision de la poésie et de la pratique artistique, articulé en deux approches : des réflexions sur mon travail de poète et d'artiste ; et des réflexions sur le travail d'autres poètes et artistes. Cependant, cette dualité n'est que descriptive, étant donné que dans nombre de ces écrits des considérations historiques et théoriques sur d'autres auteurs viennent se mêler, parfois dangereusement, à ma propre conception de l'activité poétique. Ce risque, toujours présent pour tout poète qui écrit sur la poésie, est ici pleinement assumé, dans tous ses trébuchements inévitables. La deuxième partie, « Deux entretiens », fait office de court intermède et s'inscrit essentiellement dans la continuité des considérations poétiques exprimées dans la première partie, sauf qu'il s'agit précisément de deux entretiens menés à deux occasions différentes, l'une de plus littéraire, l'autre dans un contexte d'art contemporain. La troisième partie, à laquelle j'ai déjà fait allusion, retrace le travail effectué jusqu'à présent sur la poésie, l'art et la pensée du XVII^e siècle et plus généralement sur l'époque allant du maniérisme au baroque. Cet axe de recherche en était à ses balbutiements lors de la parution du précédent *Continuum* et s'est notamment développé au cours des cinq dernières années. J'espère pouvoir publier à l'avenir une monographie plus large sur les thèmes ici présentés en quelques lignes, tels que ceux de la convexité et de l'infini

dans les modèles esthétiques et cosmologiques de l'époque en question.

Chacune des trois parties suit un ordre chronologique inversé, du plus récent au plus ancien essai, couvrant près de huit années de travail. Si, comme je l'espère, ces écrits rassemblés ici, plutôt que dispersés et dans certains cas inédits, pourront être utiles à celles et à ceux qui s'intéressent à la théorie de la poésie et à l'histoire des formes et des processus dans la production artistique et dans la pensée philosophique, celle-ci a été pour moi une occasion précieuse pour faire état d'une série de questions qui me sont chères mais qui étaient elles-mêmes dispersées dans mon esprit, et de retrouver une certaine – bien que fragile – cohérence interne dans une production théorique qui a toujours accompagné ma production artistique. Conformément à l'esprit d'*Uitgeverij* et de ces mêmes ouvrages, ce volume, comme le précédent, est strictement multilingue et reproduit donc les textes dans la langue dans laquelle ils ont été écrits à l'origine, tout en introduisant, le cas échéant, de petits rajouts, changements et corrections. Les lectrices et lecteurs remarqueront une augmentation des écrits en anglais par rapport à la précédente collection, suivis du français puis de l'italien. Cette répartition suit au hasard les invitations, les collaborations et les contextes de travail et de dialogue qui se sont présentés ces dernières années, qui sont brièvement mentionnés dans les paragraphes descriptifs (toujours rédigés en anglais) au début de chaque essai, dont le but est précisément d'indiquer le contexte d'édition ou de transmission du contenu ici republié ou publié pour la première fois.

Alessandro De Francesco, septembre 2022

Poetics
Poetica
Poétique

Propositions on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry

[Originally published in *Crisis and Critique* 9, no. 1 (2022)
“The Present of Poetry,” eds. Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda.]

INTRODUCTION

During a conversation I recently had with my partner, I realized with even more clarity than before that if I had to identify a gesture uniting all the diverse, chaotic, and scattered pieces of my work as a poet, artist, and theorist, I would say that all these years I’ve been ultimately trying to produce (new forms of) philosophical poetry. A set of processes using the both abstract and sensual nature of the poetic language in order to create concepts, generate feelings, and invent knowledge. These *Propositions* – or rather “proposals,” in the sense that they propose something to be collectively thought – aim at summing up, in a very general way and from the unavoidably limited perspective of my own practice, what I think I understood over the years about poetry as a form of philosophical inquiry. Although each proposition is connected to the next one, there is no linear order in the argumentation and several key themes come back at different places so that they can be further articulated through new remarks. The risk of perceiving these propositions as peremptory, which is inevitable given the form of this text, will hopefully disappear once it is read from the beginning to the end (appendix included).

A few more words about the approach I adopted: when I use the term “poetry,” I intend a set of language-based practices including also non-narrative forms of prose, multimedia, and post-genre writing, sharing with each other a certain approach to language and knowledge that this text aims at describing. In other words, what I write in this text about poetry aims at defining the kind of poetry I am writing about, in a hopefully productive tautology, as it were. Therefore, even though I often just say “poetry,” I do not intend any kind of poetry, but the – certainly numerous – kinds of poetry that are defined by the properties that I try to highlight in this text. On purpose, I do not quote many authors, since I would like these considerations to be as general as possible, and to be filled by the readers with their own references. Also, this text is neither written without a kind of scientific purpose, nor does it have the structure of a scientific article. It lacks bibliographical indications and notes, but for a good reason: I would like to invite the readers to go with the flow of thought while reading, rather than stumbling on this or that reference which would in any case remain arbitrary and partial.

There is another preliminary consideration, which will hopefully avoid misunderstandings: if, on the one hand, the poetry I talk about does not belong to a given era or style (the frame of reference goes from Parmenides to the contemporary period), on the other hand I am in the difficult place of sharing a vision of poetry as a poet before anything else. Such vision is thus clearly biased by my own practice, as I already said, but does not describe my own practice either, or at least not only. It is a vision of poetry – and of poetry as philosophical practice, or perhaps

also of philosophy as poetical activity – which stems from my work as a poet in the sense that I am formulating such vision from this position, with all the contradictions and approximations that this entails. So that my practice acts as a sort of filter, or magnifying glass if you will, through which I strive to formulate general remarks about the philosophical nature and power of the poetic language. The number of the propositions is completely arbitrary and I could have gone on, but at some point I decided to stop because I had the feeling that I said enough for this time. Nevertheless, as any list of this sort, it is subject to be continued in a next occasion and it is never really finished.

PROPOSITIONS

1. Poetry exists to say a multiplicity of things that could not be said otherwise. There (among other places) resides its gnoseological power.
2. Hence, as many have claimed, form and content are inseparable in poetry (and it might be even senseless to use these words in a poetic regime).
3. When poetry and philosophy converge (which is not always the case, of course), they show that there is beauty in conceptualization and abstraction, and that poetry is animated by a noetic and gnoseological necessity.
4. Because “things” (in the ontological, continental sense of this word) and the ways in which they are said are inseparable in poetry, poetry is not defined by metaphoricality (in contrast with the structuralist cliché).

5. A fundamental misunderstanding at the origins of the opposition between poetry and philosophy consists in believing that poetry is a matter of hiding things behind language, or at least of saying something while meaning something else, whereas it is exactly the opposite.
6. The adherence of poetry to its enunciative gesture excludes metaphoricity, and also fiction and representation, as defining paradigms of what poetry is: “poetry is a matter of perception, and not of representation.”¹
7. Once we free ourselves from the preconception that poetry is necessarily and inevitably related to fiction and representation, the Platonic traditional opposition between poetry and philosophy is overcome.
8. Poetry performs, as such, the most extreme degree of adherence between language and world. In this also resides its philosophical potential.
9. “Never words over world but words as world.”²
10. Poetry is not “obscure”³ by choice as much as it is not defined by metaphoricity, although it can of course make use of metaphors, yet not more than other kinds of language; but it can be difficult to read because it deals with complexity (in the epistemological sense) even when it looks simple.
11. Epistemological complexity implies unpredictability and can only be assessed by the human brain in terms

1 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La poésie comme expérience* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1986), 99.

2 Charles Bernstein, introduction to Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), X.

3 Stéphane Mallarmé, Letter to Edmund Gosse, January 10, 1893, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 807.

of probability. This has something to do with poetry's refusal of predefined (linguistic, political, gnoseological) codes and rules.

12. In other words, the difficulty one encounters in reading poetry is bound to the complexity of the things poetry tries to say.
13. In this attempt lays perhaps the misunderstanding of poetry as fiction, or the belief that poetry deals with parallel worlds, whereas it tries to say things of *this* world that were still unimaginable before they were said by poetry.
14. This is why poetry can be at once very complex and very simple, polysemic and straightforward, articulated yet always synthetic.
15. There isn't any story in poetry, even when there is one. The narrative patterns in poetry are not dependent on those of fiction, except in some cases of epic poetry, which we can rather describe as a form of novel in verses before the birth of the novel, and as such exclude from the kind of poetry we are referring to here. This does not mean of course that epic poetry and novels cannot contain philosophical elements, but such elements would pose questions that differ from those that are tackled here.
16. Similarly, the myth, which is sometimes assimilated to poetry by the philosophical discourse, is not necessarily a poetological form. Its features are normally, yet not always, rather on the side of fiction (story, characters, chronotope, etc.).
17. The definition of epic poetry as "novel in verses" does not concern Lucretius, since even though *De rerum natura* is written in epic verse, it neither features dieg-

esis, nor characters. This definition also excludes epic poems with a diegetic framework whose concentration of meaning is nonetheless mainly focused on other aspects. A perfect example of this category would be John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for its philosophical and epistemological density largely outweighs the narration (and as such it responds to many considerations that are proposed here).

18. There isn't any character in poetry, even when there is one. This includes the so-called "lyrical I." The lyrical I is neither a fictional character nor a mirror of the poet themselves. Poetry brings back the subject (and the psychologism going with this notion in a literary framework) to its textual, as much as objectual, functions.
19. "I is a word like any other."⁴
20. Poetry takes advantage of the fact that human language is not made by direct visual images so as to deal with the unimaginable, the unrepresentable, and the unknown. This is valid even when poetry deals with ordinary things.
21. On the other hand, poetry is not a notational system either; there isn't any mediation between the poem and its execution, as there is in musical scores or in spatial mapping. In poetry, the accomplished work of art is the poem itself.
22. At the same time, because the poetic text is always a form of experience, rather than of mere signification,

4 Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 217.

- poetry is supposed to engender (inner and/or outer) action in those who take it seriously.
23. Experience, action, knowledge, and emancipation are intrinsically related in poetry.
 24. Differently from mathematics and logic, poetry doesn't necessarily need special signs to formulate its processes. In most cases (yet not always, as asemic writing, for instance, shows), it prefers to redefine ordinary language.
 25. Everything, in poetry, has to do with the unknown, because even the most banal object is seen by poetry with wonder and complexity. Here resides another deep connection between poetry and philosophy, since they both stem from the astonishment generated by what exists (Thales, Aristoteles).
 26. By the same token, poetry also transfigures ordinary language by giving each word we use every day an otherwise unseen depth. Philosophically speaking, poetry expands knowledge by expanding our understanding of ordinary language.
 27. Poetry refuses (or should refuse) the normalization and the formalization of any kind of language, including ordinary language.
 28. Poetry subverts the codes of language, speech, and imagination, even those previously set by poetry itself.
 29. Poetry *misuses* language: it is a permanent subversion of the rules of language – and thus of any kind of imposed rule or predetermined code, in a grammatical as much as political sense.
 30. Poetry therefore makes us discover new possibilities not only of meaning, but also of knowledge and ac-

tion. It puts language in relation to domains of human experience that do not pertain to language as we usually understand it.

31. Even the most banal linguistic segment, when activated by poetry, escapes the borders of transitive communication. As much as poetry is not about fiction and representation, it is also unrelated to communication.
32. Although it can be found useful in retrospect, poetry doesn't communicate any useful content. It rather aims at creating the conditions for an intensified experience of reality.
33. Hence, there is no space for moralism in poetry, although there is space for ethics in the gnoseological and ontological intensity of the poetic experience.
34. This intensification of experience through language is related to the opening toward the unknown that is performed by poetry and explored by philosophy.
35. The unknown in poetry and philosophy is not a double of reality, but rather a previously hidden angle of it. In this aspect could reside a "non-dualist" conjunction between physics and metaphysics: poetry perhaps suggests that the metaphysical is the unseen angle of the physical.
36. Poetry contributes to make the metaphysical present and the physical multi-layered.
37. If, as someone said, philosophy sets in when science is not able to formulate verifiable statements of truth, poetry sets in when philosophy is not able to ground its gnoseological processes on strictly rational thinking.

38. This does not imply that there is a hierarchy between those three areas of human understanding; we need all of them. It doesn't imply either that poetry doesn't have any capacity to influence knowledge. It rather means that poetry uses logical, semantical, and linguistic processes that differ from any other kind of human thinking.
39. Poetry stems from human language, but it permanently aims at trespassing the edges of human knowledge and logic.
40. Consequently, poetry is by definition problematic and unresolved. The poetic practice is full of uncertainty, full of risk, full of unsolved issues, full of chaos (in the epistemological sense), because it's full of life.
41. *Omnia licet poetis*: everything is allowed to the poets not because poetry is allowed to make statements and cross boundaries that philosophy or science, following the paths of reality, are not allowed to cross (this would be the position of Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Valéry among others), but because it prospects modes of knowledge and alternative logics that are the direct consequence of its unusual, and sometimes extreme, treatment of language and thought.
42. Thus *omnia*, everything, can be understood in terms of totality, that is, the continuity that poetry is able to establish between language, thought, and the world in its widest manifestations, particularly when it comes to its less representable and observable parts.
43. Despite poetry's proximity to thinking and perceiving, poetry is a powerful tool against correlationism (as intended by Quentin Meillassoux). Poetry loosens the ties between thinking and being since the poetic

investigation aims at re-placing language in the world, beyond the relativity of its point of view.

44. Poetry recognizes being as independent from subjectivity. In poetry, language, thought, and subjectivity itself do not produce being, but are a consequence of it.
45. Poetry overcomes hypostatic distinctions between subjects and objects, to the point that - after the “objectivist” experiences in the 20th century (American Objectivists and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, concrete poetry, French literalism, etc.) and their reactionary subject-oriented counterparts (often dubbed “lyrical”) - poetry shows that today these two terms, *subject* and *object*, and their dualistic opposition, have become both philosophically and poetologically obsolete.
46. Although poetry tries to embed being in the immaterial “objectness” of the text-as-thing, it never tries to isolate a part of being into a specific textual manifestation. On the contrary, it shows, through language, how everything is connected to everything else.
47. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to observe and verify things like the multiverse or geometrogenesis (the fact that time and space are contingent, that is, that they might be only one of the possible structures of reality, the one that emerged in this portion of the universe). Poetry - where logical and illogical (or beyond-logical) thinking converge into language - produces a perceptual glimpse of such conditions.
48. The phylogenesis of our brain is too recent and too connected with the needs of survival to understand infinity in a rational and all-encompassing way. We

need poetry, together with other forms of thought, to think at such scales and contribute to the future evolution of the brain.

49. In poetry, the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, abstraction and sensation, conceptualization and emotion, here and there, language and world, and again physics and metaphysics, are not distinct instances.
50. There isn't any material *atom* that, in spite of etymology, is not at least conceptually divisible. Thus, the essential singular entity cannot be material.⁵ Poetry shows that reality is a *spectrum* of phenomena in which immateriality and materiality are in a continuous, instead of discrete, relation.
51. This could help to tackle the Leibnizian problem of the communication among substances, not just between body and soul, but among all the different degrees of immateriality and materiality.
52. Poetry is *semi-immaterial* because it situates itself at the encounter between thought and matter, immateriality of language and materiality of the written sign, but it is not *semi-material*, because it always tends toward immateriality if compared to other forms of art. It doesn't need images or objects, it doesn't need instruments to be executed, etc.
53. Poetry is *semi-immaterial* insofar as it tries to reproduce in language the speed and the multidimensional complexity of thought.
54. On the other hand, the poetic text is like a stone, or an organism. It does not mean anything beyond its existence. Does this constitute a paradox with respect

5 Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I, 589f.

to the semi-immateriality of poetry? Perhaps not that much if we consider again what we could call *the ontological spectrum*.

55. Poetry is an art of time, because the text is read, albeit often in a non-linear way, and it is an art of space, because the text is spatially composed, albeit often in a non-linear way.
56. The poetic text is immersive even when it remains on the page. Poetry always embodies textual spacetime, at least in this universe.
57. The non-linearity of poetry is deeply connected to its proximity with epistemological complexity. If the world is complex, then poetry is complex.
58. Poetry rediscovers language as part of nature since language is part of the world at the same ontological level as all the other things, but poetry also stretches our (cognitive, emotional, political) understanding of language toward unexpected dimensions.
59. The notion of *mimesis* is therefore not appropriate to describe poetry: poetry does not attempt to imitate or represent nature, but rather to intensify our experience of it through an intensified experience of language as nature.
60. In poetry, the opposition between *nature* and *culture*, and ultimately the very meaning of these two words, is irrelevant, when not inexistent. We should rather speak of “world,” or “real.”
61. Poetry is never only made by the subject who writes it, for two reasons: because the poet can only borrow language as a set of signs that is collectively and historically evolving; and because language is ontologically

resituated in the world by poetry itself, i.e., as part of the world and not as a representation of it.

62. The best situation for a poet is when they don't have to decide what to write because they can just feel how to *de-code* (not much in the sense of decipher, but rather of subverting the code) the world into language.
63. The poet is always, and only, a *passeur*.⁶
64. Pessoa's notion of *fingidor* gives fiction a meaning that differs from what Plato intended. Pessoa's heteronyms disperse linguistic subjectivity to encounter the world.
65. The poet is a collective figure and an emanation of nature (in the complex epistemological sense suggested above).
66. It is true that poetry doesn't always have to trust language, but the *arbitraire du signe* doesn't necessarily imply that poetry is insincere, as Marcel Broodthaers put it, once we realize, through poetry itself, that language and imagination ontologically belong to nature.
67. The evolution of plants and microorganisms is much older than the evolution of the brain. As such, plants are aware of more configurations of reality and manifestations of the truth than human beings. They cannot tell us about them in our language, but we can use poetry to listen to theirs.
68. Poetry is *Dichtung*, the place where language and meaning are concentrated in their highest densities. The accuracy of this otherwise false German etymology is proven by the nature of poetry itself. *Dichtung* contains the adjective *dicht*, "dense." The allegedly

6 Cf. Judith Balso, *Pessoa, le passeur métaphysique* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

right etymology is much more problematic: *Dichtung* would originate from the Latin *dictare*, which is also where the word “dictator” comes from.

69. The etymology of poetry as *density* allows us to see poetry as a non-authoritarian and horizontal language, as it actually is.
70. Poetry is defined by density, not by rhythmic “scansion,” metrics, rhyme, or rhetorical figures, as we were taught at school, as much as painting is not defined by its capacity to depict objects as we see them or by the pigments it uses. If it were so, they would have both long since ceased.
71. György Ligeti said that “there is no pulsation”⁷ in music, and the same goes for poetry. In mathematical terms, poetry is a *continuum*.
72. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of “philosophy as poetry,”⁸ *Dichten*, is ambiguous. It has been explained in the sense of composing concepts as characters in a story, which would take us away from poetry as intended here. But it could also mean that we need poetry in order to formulate new forms of philosophy, or simply that philosophy is not an autonomous endeavor after the end of onto-theology.
73. As Alain Badiou points out, philosophy arises via certain *conditions*.⁹ One of those is, precisely, poetry.
74. Poetry is a form of thought and an art form rather than a literary genre, for it concentrates in the text the

7 Michel Follin, dir., *György Ligeti: Portrait* (Abacaris Film et al., 1993), http://www.ubu.com/film/ligeti_follin.html.

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 483.

9 Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2009).

excess of the real, that is, what it appears impossible to say via a logical sentence, a consequential discourse, or a more or less linear story (be it real or fictional).

75. In this excess resides one of the major paradoxes of poetry. It is an art form based on language, and yet it eminently and permanently deals with the nonverbal.
76. Poetry contradicts the analytical assumption according to which language and thought are identical, for it tries to give a linguistic form to the multidimensionality, the speed, the synthesis, and the non-linearity of thought and perception when they are still formulated in our heads, *before* their grammatical organization.
77. A poem can condense in its own way both the spatial and temporal infinity of the “substance,” in Spinozian terms.
78. A pebble, a leaf, the gaze of a bird, a group of people, a faraway quasar, William Carlos Williams’s plums in “This Is Just to Say”¹⁰: in poetry, all this matters with the same intensity, because these are all parts of the same infinite substance.
79. Poetry’s intensity is not the intensity sought by the *society of the spectacle*, but its opposite. By challenging the interfaces between language, perception and world, poetry helps us to rediscover intensity everywhere, in the calmest day, in the emptiest space. Po-

10 “I have eaten / the plums / that were in / the icebox // and which / you were probably / saving / for breakfast // Forgive me / they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold.” William Carlos Williams, “This Is Just to Say,” in *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 55.

etry is a desk-based, sofa-based, meadow-based revolution.

80. As it has been noticed, the semantical field of the word “art” is, like the real etymology of *Dichtung*, quite unfortunate, since it presupposes the modern view of the work of art as something artificial, separated from nature. Several theorists propose the term *poiesis* in order to describe this other possibility for the work of art to be embedded in nature and history, and to enhance its proximity with poetry.
81. *Poiesis* comes from the ancient Greek “to make”: to make with the substance of the universe. This *i* that fell from *poiesis* to *poesis* indicates that a historical difference persists between the making of art with objects and actions and the making of poetry with words and semantics. Yet these gestures are united by three fundamental elements: feelings, concepts, and the whole substance of the universe of which they are a direct manifestation.
82. To create while conceptualizing, to put synthesis before analysis, doesn’t mean, as believed by some, to produce a philosophical fiction. It is, on the contrary, a *poiein*, a way of making in the real, so as to rediscover that thought is a part of nature, not a discourse on nature, but also not a mere analytical reorganization of collected data.
83. There is always extension in thought, as much as there is in poetry. Even thinking is not ontologically separated from the *res extensa*, since at least a part of thinking involves a complex set of chemical and physical processes. Yet thinking and poetry, given their *semi-immaterial* character and given the fact that they

do not depend on images, are privileged playgrounds to explore the abysses of the undetectable and the irrepresentable.

84. In the traditional, Platonic conception, art imitates nature. In the modern conception, art, in the wake of the traditional dualism *nature vs. culture*, is opposed to nature. In both cases, nature and art are clearly differentiated. Hence the ancient Greek term of *technē* for “art,” which is of course at the origin of the words “technique” and “technology,” and the already mentioned modern etymology of “art” as the same as the word “artificial.” Giordano Bruno writes in one of his philosophical poems: “Art, while operating, activates and thinks of itself in a discursive way. Nature operates in an intensive rather than discursive way. Art handles foreign matter, nature handles its own matter; art is applied to matter, nature is inherent to matter, as it is actually matter itself.”¹¹ This is, wonderfully put, the premodern and modern conception of art as opposed to nature. But in a “substance-oriented” paradigm, art operates in an intensive way, in the sense of the contemplative, vulnerable *intensity* that I connected with the *density* of the poetic gesture. And art is matter itself and handles its own matter, because it belongs to the substance and arranges things at the same level of nonhuman, natural instances such as plants, animals, celestial bodies, and void. Artists, then, are *passeurs* also insofar as they arrange things. In other words: art is nature, since it is a manifestation

11 Giordano Bruno, *De Immenso et Innumerabilibus, seu de universo & mundis* (1591; repr. La Spezia: Agorà Edizioni, 2000), section 8.10.

of it, including of course its scariest, most violent, and most contradictory parts.

85. Art is one of the main ways in which humankind embodies nature through a highly complex set of cultural practices.
86. To be empathic means to feel the other not as another, but as the whole, as everything, and thus to feel myself and all the rest as exactly the same substance, the same object, the same ecosystem, the same universe, concerned by the same movements, the same history, the same problems, the same possibilities. Both in empathy and in poetry, everything is *here*, there is no *there*. Empathy and poetry are therefore deeply connected, and in turn their connection connects ontology, ethics, and politics.
87. Poetry always occurs beyond our own (author or reader) individual experience or feelings for this infinity and this totality, as much as language does not belong to anyone since it is a collective asset that poetry uses to condense an experience which is, necessarily, the experience of everybody and the experience of everything.
88. Hence, in poetry, any known object is in permanent relation to the unknown, to the whole “substance” of the universe, toward other instances that we cannot even imagine.
89. *Poetry is a translation of everything*, as it brings into each text or even portion of text the recognition of this totality.
90. This is also why in poetry we are out of the realm of representation, because within its horizontal, infinitely signifying, non-normative, and non-authori-

tarian linguistic processes we can say and think what is not representable, either cognitively, politically, or both.

91. From this perspective and in such a connection with the unrepresentable, one might say that poetry is, and will always be, searching for truth.
92. Those who refuse the word “truth” in connection with poetry are afraid of all the colors of the *ontological spectrum* that exceed visible light.
93. On the other hand, even if everything, even if a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning and things is contained in the poetic expression, poetry teaches the poet how to choose and distinguish among things.
94. Poetry needs choices and therefore needs those who write it to learn what a choice is. This can sometimes be very painful, other times liberating.
95. Poetry is always questioning the mystery of language as such. Even when it doesn't overtly speak about language, poetry, in any language, always asks: why are words the way they are? Why is written and spoken language shaped as it is? Where does language come from, and how can we put it back in the world?
96. Because of all this, any form of contemporary poetry worthy of the name should avoid the easy ways of sentimental lyricism and reactionary modernism, but also of epigonistic avant-garde postures and outdated formalisms.
97. Contemporary poetry does not need to decide between conceptuality and emotionality, abstraction and sensuality. On the contrary, its task in the 21st century (and after the 20th) is to join these dimensions in new, original ways.

98. I have claimed in the past that poetry as we intend it today and is also intended in these lines is a relatively recent art form, starting with the subversion of formal structures at the beginning of the 19th century (the practice and theory of free verse, Novalis's and then Charles Baudelaire's poetry in prose, Giacomo Leopardi's non-metaphoric language, and a little later Emily Dickinson, Stéphane Mallarmé, and what both Julia Kristeva and Francis Ponge have dubbed "revolution of the poetic language,"¹² referring to how rhetoric is reshaped by poetry in the second half of the 19th century). On the other hand, I believe that these considerations on poetry, especially in their philosophical implications, can also apply to many previous examples of poetic practice. I already quoted Lucretius and Bruno, but the first and foremost example is certainly Parmenides, at least in the Western tradition.
99. Parmenides, Lucretius, and Bruno have one thing in common: they need poetry philosophically to explore the unknown in its widest manifestations. They need to formulate their exploration *poetically* for it to continue. This is, still today, one of the essential tasks of the poetic practice, although many among us are afraid of it and try to avoid it by pursuing more contingent literary or artistic goals, with the excuse of refusing pretentiousness. Such a task can indeed be quite scary, although the unknown ultimately scares only those who need control.

12 Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), and Francis Ponge and Philippe Sollers, *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers* (Paris: Gallimard / Seuil, 1970), 89-90.

100. Another major poet-philosopher of the ancient times, Empedocles, formulated what I called the poetic *continuum* between thought and language, immateriality and materiality, abstraction and sensuality, in the following terms: “blood flowing to the heart is properly thought.”¹³
101. The problem of “being” is at the foundation of both the poetic and the philosophical investigations. This starts indeed with Parmenides. On the other hand, also for Parmenides, just like Empedocles, the poetic and philosophical investigation of ontology is not separated from the investigation of the physical manifestations of nature. Again, this convergence of physics and metaphysics, senses and concepts, animates the encounter between poetry and philosophy, and should be reactivated today with a renewed attention.
102. This vision, in which ultimately feeling and thinking, body and mind (or soul) are not distinct instances either, does not endorse contemporary mechanist or neopositivist visions such as those of computational cognitivism, whose limits are merely their own self-imposed limits, but rather shows the connections poetry is able to engender when it’s taken seriously by philosophy.
103. The mystery of the *continuum* (also physically intended, thus beyond quantum mechanics) cannot be exhausted by scientific discoveries, because those are still – necessarily and usefully – embedded into predefined ontological schemes. Poetry can help us

13 Empedocles, *Peri Physeos - Of Nature*, B 105 = D 240.

to change our ontological disposition and as such inform knowledge from a different point of view.

104. Poetry, therefore, is an antidote against the philosophical ingenuousness of some epistemological assumptions.
105. Two relevant concepts in this framework are those of “infinity” and “life.” For some scientists, an infinite universe implies the logical consequence that every person or moment should repeat itself an infinity of times in different locations. This is a typical example of application of a concept within an inappropriate ontological, and logical, regime. The infinite emerging in (philosophical) poetry, ever since Lucretius, is of a different order. It doesn’t end in the boundaries of human codified understanding.
106. By the same token, the concept of “life” is too often automatically assimilated to biological forms and processes we already know (in spite of, for example, quantum-mechanical findings that were able to trace a continuum between the inorganic level of the quanta and the emergence of organic molecular life).
107. Poetry is essential for ontology not because, as Martin Heidegger famously put it, “language is the house of being,”¹⁴ but because it permanently tries to expand, through its treatment of language, our understanding of being.
108. In poetry, the notions of “being,” “substance,” “world,” “language,” “nature,” and “reality” are ultimately interchangeable, given the *continuum* that poetry embodies and realizes.

14 Martin Heidegger, “Brief über den ‘Humanismus,’” in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 313.

109. If we want to investigate being, we need to explore even its most enigmatic and invisible manifestations. We need to push thought and language where we've been told – or are afraid – to stop, not to justify the arbitrariness of religion, but to pursue knowledge. There is no *hubris* in poetry, precisely because its language is horizontal and inclusive.
110. Metaphysics, today, concerns poetry and gnoseology more than theology.
111. "Poetry, for me, is still global, total, and as such it could be said metaphysical, since it always bumps against the limits."¹⁵
112. Also in this extent poetry is a paradox and somehow a failure that is as inevitable as indispensable, since it tries linguistically to formulate what escapes verbalization and representation.
113. Another paradox that is intrinsic to poetry is what we could call at this point the *paradox of double uninterpretability*: on the one hand, poetry is not interpretable because the poetic text is self-evident, it just says what it says, as many poets have claimed (hence also the frequent refusal of metaphoricity to describe poetic strategies); on the other hand, as *translation of everything* the poetic text is a surface in which a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning takes place, so much that no hermeneutic process can satisfactorily unveil all its multidimensional ramifications.
114. Poetry's language is intensive and multidimensional, verbal and yet extra-verbal, neither subjective nor ob-

15 Andrea Zanzotto, "Il mestiere di poeta," in *Le poesie e prose scelte* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 1133.

jective, contingent, timeless, corporeal, incorporeal, to be read in silence, to be vocalized.

115. There, on the borders of language and what exceeds it, inside words that are incorporated into something that is not properly a language, a provisional ontology can perhaps arise from the *continuum* between language, being, and nature. Is this what the poet-philosopher Parmenides also meant in *Peri Physeos* with his key concept of the “One”?
116. Of course, the fact that Parmenides’ (as Empedocles’ and many others’) philosophy is written in verses confirms, but doesn’t entirely explain, his choice to write philosophy as poetry. Again, there is much more than metrics and versification in poetry. Its density, its power to condensate the whole in the linguistic expression, is what makes poetry a powerful tool of philosophical inquiry, ever since the beginnings.
117. Poetry helps to think outside of our modes of perception which, despite the instruments used to expand and augment them, still only see part of the spectrum of things – literally, if we think again of the electromagnetic spectrum.
118. As such, poetry constitutes a junction between the physical and the metaphysical also insofar as it produces, through language, a sensorial approach to what would otherwise exceed perception and experimental knowledge.
119. Thus, poetry helps us to expand our experience beyond three intertwined obstacles: the *cognitive* obstacle, caused by the limitations of our senses and logical processes; the *emotional* obstacle, caused by the reduction of the intensity of our capacity to feel; the

political obstacle, caused by the limitations of knowledge and the manipulations of information that are artificially produced by power.

120. Poetry is always *another* language that follows the movements of thought, a multidimensional syntax that can replace codes, almost like a notational system that eludes its own rules and can only be performed inside and within thought and feeling.
121. Poetry makes vibrate, resonate together, thought and feeling, or rather thought as feeling and feeling as thought, until they become signs that (re)produce and (re)generate thoughts and feelings, in a seamless cycle.

APPENDIX: A BRIEF STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS ON BEING AND INFINITY

One of the key aspects I tried to highlight in the previous lines is that we need poetry in order to deal with the ontologically irrepresentable. In Bruno (and in some way in Lucretius), this aspect is a consequence of the infinity of the universe. As Bruno puts it in his philosophical poem *De immenso*, the *infinite* gives itself to the human intellect as *indefinite*. We could say today that this is due to the current evolution of the human brain, and perhaps the relationship between infinite and indefinite will change over time. Still, it remains a major ontological problem. Also because of our limited comprehension of infinity, it is difficult to decide whether the totality of being is finite or infinite. In Bruno and, in a much more philosophically formalized way, in Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the relation between being and (also temporal) infinity is a

logical consequence of their respective – and indeed very different – ontologies. As a poet who, so to speak, works philosophically, this has increasingly been a guiding conception for me, especially ever since I realized that infinity is already present in the way in which poetry deals with meaning. Even the most literal poetic object contains in itself a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning, exceeding not only the author’s intentions, but also this or that line of interpretation. Poetry literally contains ontological infinity in its treatment of language and signification. It is what I called semantic *multidimensionality*: meaning in the poetic language is like multidimensional space in geometry. In order to represent multidimensionality in a drawing one has to flatten and repeat some surfaces in the same space. The same goes for poetry: the text is the phenomenal surface beneath which a much wider unfolding of meaning (and experience through language) is deployed. The multidimensionality of meaning in poetry is potentially endless. Depending on the text, it is possible to dive deeper into increasingly encompassing sets of relations. This is also why I am claiming that poetry is a *translation of everything*. As many have argued, it is also very difficult not to imagine that the totality of being is not endless, since if it were finite there would always be something outside of it, and therefore it wouldn’t be a totality. The logical unicity of this totality (in Spinoza’s argumentation, if the substance is all-encompassing, there cannot be another substance that is not comprehended in this substance) depends on the other hand on what we intend by “unicity.” In this totality there is also necessarily an infinite plurality. But we also have to decide what is meant by “infinity” in an ontological scenario, besides its different mathematical

orders as shown by Georg Cantor. From a temporal point of view, we could say that eternity, the infinity of time, could either be a temporal flow with neither beginning nor end, or the absence of time itself. Since, according to modern physics, time and space are the same entity, the same distinction could be applied to space, albeit in a less intuitive way. I find the notion of *geometrogenesis* fascinating in this sense, as it allows us to understand infinity not only as something that has no end in time and space (temporal or geographical endlessness), but also something that, in certain physical conditions that are different from the ones we observe in this (portion of the) universe, is out of time and has no place. This, incidentally, can be connected to the very important – and in this case at least partially observable – notions of “non-locality” and “quantum consciousness,” which seem equally appropriate for poetry and for the universe’s behaviors, as poetry also spreads beyond predefined spatio-temporal, geographical, psychological, individual, grammatical, semantical, and figural coordinates. Is the infinity of being somehow independent from the contingent configuration of time and space in this specific portion of the universe? Could being preexist to spacetime? And how could such a conception be connected to language? Are these models of infinity embedded into the semantical infinity of the poetic text? These seem to me major poetological questions in the 21st century. They might appear somewhat abstract, but they also have, I firmly believe, strong political implications. The opening of meaning toward infinity, and therefore of the possibilities of meaning, is, in my opinion, an essential step toward the creation of new political models, as much as it constitutes agnoseological expansion toward a wider

understanding of being which is not less real just because it hasn't been figured out (in the literal sense) so far. In all the local and miserable sorrows, abuses, hierarchies, and conflicts that we observe at the human scale, there is a desperate need to look inside the sky for something present and yet irrepresentable. The irrepresentable in this sense has a deep connection with what Judith Balso calls "the impossible" in her political theory: we have no choice but to rely on the inexistent and the impossible ("*compter sur l'impossible inexistant*,"¹⁶ as she writes) to formulate new political scenarios, just like we have no choice but to rely on the irrepresentable within the realm of poetry. I have been claiming over the years, and striving toward this in my own practice, that poetry overcomes obstacles: cognitive, political, and emotional obstacles put by power, or by ourselves, inside language, imagination, and feeling, that can be subverted by the freedom, the variety, and the multidimensionality of the poetic approach to reality. I have also mentioned above the horizontality and the refusal of authority that are typical of the *Dichtung*, as well as its intrinsic subversive features. The different levels of – also semantical – infinity are, *together with* the question of being, at the core of the interaction between poetry and philosophy. This, in turn, is deeply connected to the creation of possibility from the impossible, within and without language. I would thus like to go back to the first text of the Western tradition in which poetry and philosophy operate together to question the nature of everything: Parmenides'

16 Judith Balso, "Compter sur l'impossible inexistant – To Rely on the Inexistent Impossible," in *Pedagogies of Disaster*, eds. Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, Adam Staley Groves, and Nico Jenkins (Earth: punctum books, 2013), 495–526.

philosophical poem, often titled (not by himself) *Peri Physeos* (*On Nature*). Like many poets and philosophers, I am deeply fascinated by the fragments of this text and by the fact that Parmenides was the first to understand that poetry is indispensable to question being. The main reason why I am thinking of Parmenides again here is that I am troubled by the traditional interpretation of his notion of *being as finite*, in opposition to his disciple Melissos's. As it is widely known, Parmenides compares being to a sphere. I think that a too strictly geometrical interpretation of this comparison led traditional scholarship potentially off track.¹⁷ First, let us recall that, from Nicholas of Kues and Neoplatonism onward, the paradoxical possibility of an infinite sphere has been widely envisaged in order to represent the universe, the substance, and God, particularly when those instances exceed our imaginative coordinates. This image comes back in a famous fragment by Blaise Pascal ("une sphère infinie dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part"¹⁸). This notion of an infinite sphere seems to me very close to the paradoxical nature of poetry as nonverbal language, immaterial materiality, and translation of everything I tried to express above. I think that Thomas Traherne's poetry confirms this connection:

'Twas not a sphere,
Yet did appear,
One infinite. 'Twas somewhat everywhere,
And tho' it had a power to see

17 Like other scholars, I have also doubts about Parmenides' correlationism, but I will leave this to another time.

18 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Michel Le Guern (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), Fragment 185, 167.

Far more, yet still it shin'd
And was a mind
Exerted for it saw Infinity.¹⁹

Incidentally, in this “everywhere” we could spot an *ante-litteram* understanding of quantum non-locality. Poetry often precedes other forms of understanding. *Omnia licet poetis*: although I am not a Parmenides scholar, as a poet I dare to find not only in Traherne’s, but in Parmenides’ lines themselves the reason to question the finitude of being in his philosophy. Some terms Parmenides uses to qualify being – οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον, οὐκ ἐπιδέξ, τετελεσμένον – indicate that it is rather “not incomplete,” which is different from finite. Being can be complete as totality and yet be infinite in a sense that, precisely, exceeds our contingent, mathematical understanding of endlessness. This state of completeness of being implies, writes Parmenides, that it is ἄπαστον and ἄναρχον, “without end” and “without beginning,” which seems to me much closer to an idea of temporal infinity as described above than to a conception of being as finite. I cannot help to notice that being as ἄναρχον allows us to trace yet another connection between the openness toward infinity and political subversion as refusal of hierarchical governance, since the very beginning of both philosophy and poetry. Being is also, according to Parmenides, συνεχές (“continuous”), another feature that I myself used in order to show the contribution that poetry can bring to non-dualistic metaphysical models (what I called *continuum* and *ontological*

19 Thomas Traherne, “My Spirit,” Section VI, in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne (1636?–1674), from the Original Manuscripts*, ed. Bertram Dobell (1906; repr. London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 46.

spectrum), which, especially since Spinoza, are connected to a conception of being, or substance, as infinite. Above all, the possibility to reconsider the infinity of being in Parmenides' poem could solve a philological puzzle. According to one of the most accredited readings, the one by the Byzantine philosopher Simplicius, being is ἡδ'ἀτέλεστον, "without an end."²⁰ Some scholars, like Barbara Cassin, proposed to replace this reading with οὐδ'ἀτέλεστον, "not endless"²¹; others, like Leonardo Tarán, with ἡδὲ τέλεστον, "and complete."²² Could it be that those replacements are not necessary? Could it be instead that, ever since their common beginnings, poetry and philosophy have investigated being and infinity together, reminding us that no limit should stand between us, the understanding of this world, and the way in which we can act within it? Or that, if not Parmenides himself, at least Simplicius's reading opens this possibility? Whatever the right interpretation, the possibility of a deep convergence between being and infinity, between what is here and what cannot even be imagined, traces back to the dawn of thought the non-dualistic convergence of ethics and ontology, primarily embodied by poetry.

20 Parmenides, Fragment 8.

21 Barbara Cassin, ed., *Parménide: Sur la nature ou sur l'étant. La langue de l'être ?* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 85n.

22 Leonardo Tarán, ed., *Parmenides: A Text with Translation, Commentary and Critical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 85.

Matières noires

[Originally published, in a different version, in *HKB-Zeitung - Journal of the Bern Academy of the Arts* 4 (2020).]

1.

La matière noire doit être postulée en astrophysique afin de comprendre certains comportements fondamentaux de l'univers, tels que le mouvement des galaxies et les rapports gravitationnels entre celles-ci, et afin que le calcul de la masse et des fluctuations de densité de l'univers observable depuis le Big Bang soit correct, comme l'ont compris entre autres Fritz Zwicky et Vera Rubin. Plusieurs phénomènes obligent à reconnaître l'existence d'une matière d'un ordre différent par rapport aux types de matière connus, une matière, ou des matières, qui influencent de façon inattendue les modes de manifestation de la nature.

Vera Rubin, par exemple, découvre pendant les années 1970 que les étoiles se trouvant aux marges de notre galaxie, la Voie Lactée, au lieu de tourner plus lentement que les étoiles plus proches du centre – ce qui serait la prédiction logique selon les lois newtoniennes de la gravitation universelle –, tournent à peu près à la même vitesse, comme s'il y avait un surplus de gravité.

On a détecté à l'infrarouge, dans des amas de galaxies, des températures de plusieurs millions de degrés qui peuvent être justifiées seulement par des champs gravitationnels beaucoup plus grands que ceux que l'on peut

observer dans la matière lumineuse (des forts champs gravitationnels chauffent et excitent les particules).

On a observé des phénomènes de lentille gravitationnelle – à savoir des modifications de trajectoires de la lumière dans l'univers en présence de forts champs gravitationnels (car la lumière est, elle aussi, affectée par la gravitation) – en absence de champs gravitationnels visibles, ce qui oblige à postuler la présence de densités de matière, et par conséquent de champs gravitationnels, aussi invisibles qu'importants.

La matière noire est une histoire d'attractions et de densités, et en même temps elle est à ce jour indétectable, elle ne peut qu'être déduite à partir d'autres phénomènes. La poésie, elle aussi, est une histoire d'attraction et de densité, elle est une *Dichtung*, une façon de former des densités dans et avec la signification, et elle aussi se dérobe à toute définition unique.

Des convergences, des agglomérations, des façons d'être ensemble.

L'énergie noire – qui est postulée pour expliquer l'expansion en accélération de l'univers et qui occupe un statut ambigu entre mouvement et matière – et la matière noire elle-même constituent ensemble le 95% de la matière peuplant l'univers. Le 5% restant peut être qualifié de « matière ordinaire ». Font partie de la matière ordinaire tous les corps célestes, tels que les planètes et les étoiles, et toutes les particules connues à jour, y compris celles qui forment les tissus organiques. Selon certaines estimations, les trous noirs occuperaient plus de 90% de matière ordinaire. Le reste est occupé par les étoiles et seulement une partie infime de la matière appartient aux planètes. En outre, l'univers est en grande partie constitué de vide.

La mécanique quantique nous apprend qu'il se passe des choses dans le vide, qu'il y a des charges, des énergies. Toujours est-il qu'en termes quantitatifs, les planètes, avec ou sans vie, sont donc des exceptions rarissimes. De plus, la matière « brillante », c'est-à-dire émettant de la lumière ou de la radiation électromagnétique, est une partie vraiment minuscule de ce qui existe. Les planètes elles-mêmes sont quelque part des corps noirs, car s'il est vrai qu'elles possèdent parfois des champs électromagnétiques, elles n'émettent tout de même aucune lumière directe. En revanche, elles la reflètent, et c'est bien cette réflexion, ce renvoi, ce refus d'une portion de lumière, qui les rend détectables. Parfois, au contraire, en passant devant une étoile une planète lointaine réduit pour un instant, et très faiblement, sa luminosité, et c'est ainsi que la plupart des planètes extrasolaires ont été découvertes.

La matière noire est indétectable car elle n'émet aucune radiation, elle ne reflète pas la lumière, elle n'est reflétée sur aucune surface, elle ne cache aucun corps, elle ne diminue aucune intensité, elle ne révèle aucune forme mais elle est en revanche révélée par d'autres événements. Elle n'agit que sur des relations, des attractions, des quantités, des densités entre les objets.

Les trous noirs que nous pouvons aujourd'hui observer, tout en étant composés avec toute probabilité de matière ordinaire puisqu'ils sont formés par des étoiles massives qui s'effondrent sur elles-mêmes, sont (dans la majorité des cas) noirs car leur champ gravitationnel est tellement intense que même la lumière y est engloutie. Si à cela on ajoute le vide, la plupart de l'univers est donc sans lumière. Et, même en regardant à l'intérieur de la lumière, les êtres

humains ne peuvent voir à l'œil nu qu'une portion minuscule du spectre émis.

Beaucoup de matières et d'énergies nous traversent sans que l'on puisse les détecter. La plupart de la matière semblerait en fait « immatérielle », dans le sens qu'elle se dérobe aux qualifications traditionnelles de la matière : être baryonique (c'est-à-dire être constituée de particules qui se comportent comme celles que nous connaissons), pouvoir être observée ou ressentie d'une manière ou d'une autre, avoir un poids et une consistance, même sous forme de radioactivité. Pourtant, la physique définit la matière comme quelque chose qui a une masse.

Et qu'en est-il d'une pensée, des réactions chimiques et électriques invisibles qui l'accompagnent avant qu'elle ne devienne langage ?

La matière noire n'est en vérité pas « noire » comme les trous noirs sont noirs. Elle est, au contraire, indétectable, transparente, immatérielle. Si elle était noire, on pourrait la voir engloutir la lumière. Et le vide, est-il noir ?

Cependant, la matière noire crée des champs gravitationnels. C'est ainsi qu'elle se manifeste. Les champs gravitationnels, selon la théorie de la relativité générale, sont avant tout des courbures dans l'espace-temps. Plus un champ gravitationnel est fort, plus intense sera l'attraction vers sa source, et plus lent sera le temps. Il est possible aujourd'hui de vérifier qu'une montre posée sur la mer avance plus lentement, même si de façon négligeable pour les êtres humains, que la même montre posée en haut d'une montagne. À l'intérieur, tout au fond d'un trou noir, la gravité serait si grande qu'il y aurait ce que les physiciens appellent une « singularité », c'est-à-dire un état où, du fait de la puissance du champ gravitation-

nel, le temps ralentit tellement qu'il cesse d'exister, et où pour les mêmes raisons la densité de la matière est infinie. L'infini et l'éternel se rejoignent dans la densité de la nature, *eine unendliche Dichtung der Wirklichkeit*. Le temps, lui aussi, est indétectable comme matière, mais il est quand même modifié, courbé, dilaté ou accéléré par la matière et l'énergie. Le temps n'est pas séparable de l'espace. Le temps et l'espace sont, on le sait aujourd'hui, deux composants de la même entité.

Nous pouvons regarder le commencement de l'univers, à un endroit situé à une distance de 14 milliards d'années-lumière, 14 milliards d'années étant l'âge de notre univers. D'autre part l'univers est en expansion et en accélération, ses coordonnées spatio-temporelles ont changé par rapport à nos prédictions, et nous ont obligé-e-s à postuler l'énergie noire, ce côté cinétique, historique, du réel indétectable. L'univers est entre-temps devenu beaucoup plus grand. Mais au-delà d'une certaine distance, notre capacité de voir s'arrête, non pas parce que nous sommes incapables de voir si loin, mais parce que regarder au-delà de cette distance – c'est-à-dire d'une sphère hypothétique qui nous entoure dont le diamètre est d'environ 93 milliards d'années-lumière – signifierait regarder avant le Big Bang, avant que les phénomènes que nous observons aient eu lieu, donc quelque part regarder dans le futur en regardant le passé, ou regarder un état inconcevable avant l'existence du temps, car le temps tel que nous le connaissons est lié à l'existence de l'espace. Il s'agit ici d'un autre indétectable, radical, insoluble, celui d'un réel informe, inarticulé, qui n'existe pas encore et qui est pourtant avec nous et auquel nous appartenons.

Nous perdons parfois notre capacité de voir, nous essayons de regarder des choses qui ne sont pas encore arrivées, ou de voir un visage qui est trop près du nôtre pour que ses traits puissent être distingués. Nous tournons en rond les yeux couverts, nous orbitons sur nos pertes et sur nos commencements. Mais c'est peut-être là qu'une autre façon de percevoir peut surgir, une perception sans représentation, une expérience sans médiation, sans interface, sans préjugé. Au fond, la nature nous invite à choisir de tomber, à apprendre que nous ne sommes ni jugé-e-s ni juges, car une vaste majorité du réel ne fonctionne pas comme notre cerveau, et pourtant, de ce point de vue, tout est si proche et si loin à la fois, comme lorsque j'essaie de rattraper une odeur ou un sentiment éprouvé un soir, en rentrant de la mer, marchant près des rails, les arbustes ondoyaient, le soleil jaunissait et devenait oblique.

Y a-t-il du temps noir ? Une pensée noire ? Des ondes noires, des vagues noires ? Nous sommes peut-être enveloppé-e-s par des membranes indétectables, des sphères malléables et transparentes. Si nous étions nous-mêmes des méduses ? Quand est-ce qu'une méduse décide où se laisser transporter ? Quand est-ce qu'une plante décide de créer une nouvelle feuille ? Ou un oiseau de quitter une branche même en absence de nourriture ou de ses compagnons ? Y a-t-il une réaction chimique décisive qui détermine l'effondrement imminent d'une étoile ? Et si l'on regarde de très près une surface d'eau, de beaucoup plus près que ce dont nos yeux sont capables, nous apparaîtrait-elle toujours comme une surface ? Il n'y aurait sans doute plus un dehors et un dedans.

La végétation reflète la lumière d'une façon particulière, c'est l'albédo. Un jour on pourra comprendre s'il y

a de la vie au sens où nous l'entendons – car il pourrait y avoir d'autres formes de vie, elles-mêmes indétectables, peut-être déjà ici, maintenant, avec nous – en regardant comment les planètes extrasolaires reflètent la lumière. Selon comment la lumière est renvoyée par une planète donnée, des plantes pourraient être présentes. Planète et plante, lumière renvoyée et donnée, enlevée d'une surface, rendue invisible à elle-même mais faisant apparaître des choses et des formes de vie à travers leurs couleurs, leurs façons d'être ensemble et de se développer sans autre but que la vie elle-même.

Parfois il arrive de se sentir plus comme des baies sur un arbuste au bord d'une route qu'un arbre dans la forêt : colorées, exiguës, exposées au passage des choses, mais ensemble. Les baies et les fruits sont souvent sphériques, comme une pierre arrondie par le passage de l'eau, et comme les feuilles et les branches les baies, les cailloux et le sable forment des groupes, des communautés, des coexistences. Les corps célestes sont, eux aussi, sphériques en raison de l'équilibre hydrostatique entre la pression, qui tend à pousser la matière vers l'extérieur, et la force de gravité, qui tend à l'attirer vers l'intérieur. Les trous noirs aussi sont sphériques, ils sont des sphères noires, autant que des trous, dont la masse est souvent de plusieurs milliards de fois plus grande que celle du soleil. L'énergie noire nous aide à expliquer l'expansion en accélération de *notre* univers, car il y a sans doute beaucoup d'autres univers, si bien que l'on parle aujourd'hui de multivers. Il n'y a jamais une seule identité, même à l'intérieur d'un sujet. Un multivers a une direction multiple, ce sont, pour le poète aussi, des vers en directions multiples, parfois en divergence, d'autres fois en convergence. La matière noire jus-

tifie la tendance qu'ont des grandes quantités de matière observable à se regrouper, à tourner en rond, à s'attirer par la gravité. L'équilibre, à toutes les échelles, n'est peut-être que le résultat d'un conflit qui tient ensemble, la tension permanente entre deux forces contraires. Mais aucun état n'est au fond permanent, et il arrive que la gravité gagne sur la pression. Alors une étoile se transforme et s'éteint, générant parfois un trou noir lorsqu'elle s'effondre sur elle-même, si sa masse est suffisante. Sinon elle deviendra autre chose, une étoile à neutrons par exemple. Parfois chuter, tomber, s'effondrer, a quelque chose de juste et de nécessaire. La matière est pourtant maintenue, un équilibre secret subsiste dans la présence, même quand on arrête de tenir et on se laisse aller dans le noir.

La matière noire est inconnue, elle est presque une image sans image de l'inconnu, mais elle est partout, même ici, maintenant. Elle n'est pas juste là-bas dans l'espace, elle traverse tous les corps célestes, y compris le nôtre. Elle nous rappelle ainsi que la portion la plus éloignée de l'univers est aussi présente que nos organes, nos affects, nos pensées, et aussi proche qu'un arbre découvert à l'orée d'un parc. Toute la matière ordinaire est d'ailleurs toujours constituée des mêmes particules et des mêmes molécules. C'est la poussière expulsée d'une étoile comme le soleil qui, en tournant et en orbitant à travers des champs gravitationnels, s'est accrue jusqu'à former les planètes. La vie telle que nous la connaissons n'est qu'une phase ultérieure de ce processus de modification d'une substance primaire provenant des étoiles. Et qui nous dit que la matière noire, bien qu'immatérielle au sens conventionnel avec lequel nous entendons la matière, n'ait aussi un rôle dans la formation de la vie, qu'elle ne fasse pas par-

tie d'une même substance de base, de laquelle font partie et participent les particules aussi bien que les matières et les énergies inconnues qui se déroberont à la lumière ? La vie elle-même ne se manifeste peut-être pas que comme une agglomération d'eau, une narration de molécules, une réception de chaleur.

Si l'univers n'était pas noir, verrait-on la matière noire ? Nous semblerait-elle comme les phosphènes qui restent dans notre cerveau et derrière nos paupières quand nous fermons les yeux et cherchons à voir sans regarder ?

Selon une certaine théorie, la matière noire est le résultat de plusieurs petits trous noirs qui se seraient formés lors de l'origine de l'univers et qui sont invisibles. Mais si nous pouvions former un petit trou noir au laboratoire, ce qui n'est pas possible pour l'instant, il apparaîtrait blanc, il serait un trou noir blanc à cause du spectre électromagnétique de son évaporation, car même les trous noirs émettent de la radiation et s'évaporent, comme l'a découvert Stephen Hawking. Comment ces petits trous noirs seraient donc invisibles ? Parce qu'ils se seraient dispersés après s'être connectés entre eux, il y a des milliards d'années, avec le mouvement du temps et de l'espace, jusqu'à former une poussière, ou une poudre résiduelle. La matière noire serait donc faite de grains de trous noirs dispersés, perdus, avec leurs fluctuations gravitationnelles et de densité. Du sable transparent, des coexistences invisibles. S'il en était ainsi, la matière ordinaire et la matière inconnue seraient unies sous l'égide de l'invisible, du sans-lumière, et les objets seraient le résultat de pertes et de donations entre des agglomérats et des masses.

Et la lumière elle-même, composée de photons sans masse, étant aux marges de ce qui peut se dire « matière »,

est-elle aussi noire que la matière noire, c'est-à-dire indétectable dans son essence ? Les photons sont des particules dont le comportement quantique est encore en partie mystérieux, tout comme les particules qui pourraient composer la matière noire, dont nous n'avons à présent aucune idée précise. Il y a une indécision fondamentale entre la nature ondulatoire ou corpusculaire de la lumière : lorsqu'on l'observe comme onde, elle se comporte de façon corpusculaire, lorsqu'on croit la saisir dans sa nature corpusculaire, elle se manifeste comme onde. La lumière donne à voir, mais en soi elle est peut-être invisible et incompréhensible, sa légèreté frôle l'inexistence.

Dans cette oscillation de la nature entre visible et invisible, matériel et immatériel, présent et inconnu, séparations et continuités, individus et agglomérations, dans cette ouverture vers la matière indétectable il y a aussi une autre oscillation, ou plutôt une cohabitation : celle entre le physique et le métaphysique, entre la nature et ce qui se trouve au-delà des corps. Ou s'agit-il juste d'autres corps et d'autres matières qui nous sont encore inconnus ? L'immatériel, l'indétectable, l'inconnu, l'incompréhensible et l'indéfini justifient cette cohabitation voire cette identité ontologique entre le physique et le métaphysique que Spinoza appelait *Deus sive natura* – Dieu et la nature s'identifient, ils sont la même chose. Serait-il une autre façon de dire qu'un phénomène physique a besoin d'un observateur, même non-humain, même inorganique, afin de pouvoir advenir ? Sans observateur, nous dit la mécanique quantique, un événement reste indécidable.

Dieu n'est que l'infini et l'éternel de la substance selon Spinoza, le degré ultime de ce qui se dérobe à nos catégories de perception pratique. Le métaphysique ne se situe

pas sur un niveau ontologique autre, il n'est que le degré le plus infini et inconcevable de ce qui est en réalité ici avec nous. Il n'y a pas de séparation essentielle entre un objet qui est devant vos sens, le mouvement inobservable de la matière noire, et des instances infinies et inimaginables qui restent encore à nommer. Ce ne sont que des manifestations différentes de la même substance ; tout est là, et nous faisons heureusement partie de ce tout bien au-delà de notre individualité et de notre identité.

Ceci a des implications politiques majeures : il n'y a pas de conflits réels entre les identités car les différences relèvent toutes de la même substance, moi je suis la matière noire et la matière noire est moi-même, car nous sommes toutes et tous des manifestations différentes d'une substance (une matière ?) unique. L'environnement, ce qui m'entoure, n'est pas autour de moi, mais je suis dedans, il n'est pas un dehors, un là-bas, mais une autre manifestation de la même substance par laquelle je suis moi-même constitué, qui m'est en partie connue, en partie inconnue, jusqu'à l'intérieur de moi-même, à mes tissus, à mes membranes, à mes désirs, à mes souvenirs engloutis dans un arbuste, au bord d'une route près des rails, derrière la lumière de fin d'après-midi, sous des surfaces mobiles.

Notre perception a des degrés différents d'exactitude, et plus on va dans l'infini (infiniment petit, infiniment grand), plus cette perception de départ est susceptible de buter. Leibniz compare notre façon d'appréhender l'infini à la position de quelqu'un qui se trouverait au bord de la mer : nous voyons les vagues, nous les entendons, mais nous ne pouvons pas les distinguer nettement les unes des autres. Or nous ne voyons même pas la matière noire, elle n'émet aucune image, aucun son, mais elle influence

tout de même le mouvement des choses. Le problème c'est que notre cerveau n'est pas fait pour la voir, notre cerveau s'est évolué pour nous défendre des dangers imminents à la sortie d'une caverne, pour nous orienter dans l'espace environnant. C'est pourquoi certains concepts ou manifestations du réel nous paraissent difficiles, voire inacceptables, parce que même si la pensée occidentale n'a cessé de positionner les êtres humains au centre de l'univers, nous ne sommes en réalité qu'une des manifestations possibles de ce réel. Il y a beaucoup de degrés du réel qui agissent de façon totalement indifférente à notre perception, c'est « l'infinie immensité des espaces que j'ignore et qui m'ignorent »²³ dont parle Pascal. Cependant, il serait erroné de penser que ces espaces ne nous concernent pas, car si leur existence n'est pas faite pour nous (et nous ne sommes pas faits pour eux), nous participons néanmoins du même réel. Ce n'est pas peu dire. Après tout, même la matière noire au bord d'une galaxie est une forme de l'espace environnant dans lequel il s'agit d'apprendre à nous orienter. Il est difficile, voire impossible d'imaginer qu'un événement n'existe pas tant qu'il n'est pas déterminé dans sa manifestation par un observateur, même lorsqu'il n'est pas observable. Il est difficile voire impossible de ressentir ce qui se passe lorsqu'on franchit l'horizon des événements d'un trou noir et le futur est aplati sur le présent, mais ceci n'est au fond qu'une modification particulièrement extrême – extrême pour nous d'ailleurs mais peut-être pas pour d'autres êtres – de l'environnement dans lequel nous nous trouvons déjà.

23 Pascal, *Pensées*, Fragment 64, 99.

Stéphane Mallarmé voyait les astres comme un alphabet qui s'écrit blanc sur noir, et la tâche du poète, écrit-il, est celle de « poursui[vre] noir sur blanc ». ²⁴ Mais le texte est peut-être du même ordre. Quand je pense et je produis un texte sur une page ou même dans ma tête, il est déjà espace et temps. Quand je produis un livre qui, tout en occupant une portion d'espace, crée peut-être une ouverture pour que cet espace se manifeste autrement, ou quand je réalise un environnement immersif, je donne une possibilité à ce dialogue entre l'espace et l'œuvre, complices dans le même discours. J'approche et je rapproche pour mes compagnons l'horizon des événements, je forme ce qui se dérobe à mes sens et à ma compréhension comme on forme une matière qui est sous nos mains et qui se donne à nous dans ses possibles.

N'est-ce pas le rôle de l'artiste, au fond, d'élargir cet espace environnant en appelant une vision plus étendue des choses sans les éloigner, mais au contraire en les rendant présentes et nécessaires aussi pour les autres ? Les artistes et les poètes que nous cherchons à être ont eux aussi, encore aujourd'hui, malgré tout ce qui passe et en dépit des modes passagères et des sophistications momentanées, la tâche de chercher la vérité, ce qui veut dire embrasser l'inconnu dans toute sa densité, donner de l'espace à ce qui, de ce réel, n'a pas encore été imaginé, se jeter dans l'indétectable pour le tisser en langage et le recomposer sous forme de donation et de coexistence, l'offrir à tout le monde comme on offre un cadeau, rendre familières les formes du tout pour se reconnaître et se libérer, enfin pour s'accepter.

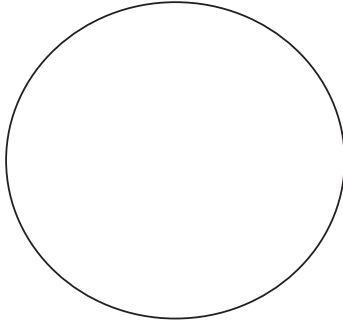
24 Stéphane Mallarmé, "L'Action restreinte," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 215.

La pratique artistique n'est au fond qu'une possibilité de former ces matières noires avant même de savoir ce qu'elles sont, en se réjouissant qu'elles nous soient inconnues et que leur comportement échappe à ce que nous croyions pouvoir contrôler. Je dis bien en se réjouissant, car une composante est certaine dans cette matière noire qui se dérobe pourtant à nos catégories perceptives : c'est la joie d'être une manifestation de la nature, comme un arbuste se réjouit de croître et de se multiplier, comme une méduse se réjouit de se laisser porter par le courant, comme un lémurien se réjouit de manger ou de regarder dans la nuit, comme je me suis moi-même réjoui en laissant naître ce texte.

2.

près d'une arche de brique dans un parc de banlieue
sous le soleil jaune en fin d'après-midi
un agrégat de matière attend

3.



au passage

être aveuglé

au passage

être aveuglé

Empathy and Density

[This text was written in 2020 during the Covid pandemic and never published before.]

1. PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

Much has been said about the concept of “empathy” in several domains of the arts, humanities, law, neurology, psychology, and environmental sciences to the point that this notion risks becoming an empty slogan, missing its initial reason of existence – stemming from its very etymology – of drawing our attention to the necessity of “feeling inside,” inside the other, in ourselves, within a community, together with a suffering or even simply feeling being, or ecosystem, and so on. Rather than adding yet another layer, yet another application of this notion, I would like to reactivate it here, to give back to this concept its initial power, by making it resonate with my main field of action and understanding of the world: poetry. Poetry is, even more than empathy, an overused word, subject to many misunderstandings. It is then worth specifying from the outset that I intend “poetry” in its somewhat gnoseological, if not technical, sense, as a series of verbal approaches to reality and life also stemming from the original etymology of this word: the Greek *poiein*, “to make.” To make with language, then, but in a different way, for instance, than

the present essay, or than a journalist's article, or a novel, because of two features:

1. Poetry *misuses* language: it is a permanent subversion of the rules of language – and thus, politically speaking, of any kind of imposed rule or predetermined code. Poetry therefore makes us discover new possibilities not only of meaning, but also of knowledge and action, and puts verbal language in relation to domains of human experience that do not pertain to language as we usually understand it;
2. This is achieved through multiple sets of textual operations that are very different from each other depending on the author, the historical period, and the text itself, but that are all defined – I will claim – by one common feature: concentration of meaning. There is no point in making poetry, in undergoing the challenge of producing, or reading, such a difficult set of textual processes, if the same content could be said in other ways. But it can't. Poetry, like no other form of verbal – and perhaps human *tout court* – expression has the cognitive²⁵ and emotional power of synthesizing an otherwise conceptually unsayable amount of meaning and experience. I intend “unsayable” with no superficially mystical connotation, but, again, in a specific sense. There is no way to say all this outside the poem undertaking the difficult task of trying to say it. In order to achieve such result, poetry allows

25 I intend “cognitive” here not in the sense of cognitive sciences, but as related to knowledge, somewhat as a synonym of “gnoseological” (“cognitive” comes from the Latin *cognoscere*, “to know”).

the text to embody its content. It makes the text ontologically inseparable from its meaning and experience, or, better, meaning as experience. In short, poetry makes language ontologically inseparable from the world (and the experience of the world) of which the text becomes a portion. It re-discovers language as part of the world, not as a representation of it.

This is why Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, writing about Paul Celan, claims that “poetry is a matter of perception, and not of representation,”²⁶ and that Celan’s poetry is a form of experience, as the title of Lacoue-Labarthe’s book, *Poetry as Experience*, indicates. This is why a poetic text cannot be other than what it is. As many poets have claimed before me, “poetry says what it says in saying it.”²⁷ And this is also why so-called “paraphrasis” should be banned from school. There is no way of paraphrasing a poem without losing not only its content, but most of all its necessity, which is concentrating an amount of information that is otherwise impossible to handle, let alone explain. This power of concentration that human beings found in poetry gave birth to a fake yet fascinating – and also overused – German etymology: poetry is called *Dichtung* in German, and as such it is the place where language becomes *dicht*, which in German means “dense.” Poetry is the place where language and meaning are concentrated in their highest densities. This etymology is so much better than the right one, according to which *Dichtung* comes from the Latin *dictare*, “to repeat,” “to dictate,” “to compose in writing” (our

26 Lacoue-Labarthe, *La poésie comme expérience*, 99.

27 Cf., e.g., Jacques Roubaud, *Poésie etcetera: ménage* (Paris: Stock, 1995), 77.

meaning), and “to prescribe,” which is also where the word “dictator” comes from. So that the etymology of poetry as *density* would allow us to conceive poetry as a non-authoritarian and horizontal language, which will be one of the aims of this essay. Besides Celan and a few others, I won’t mention almost any poet or poem in particular, not only because this is not a literary essay, but most of all because I would like the readers to concentrate on the concepts that I try to explore here rather than on specific texts. I then encourage the readers to fill this voluntary lack of textual examples with their own examples. Arguably any good, especially modern, poem will do the trick.

As a site of density, and as a way of pushing language beyond its usual boundaries so that it can say what it would be otherwise unable to say (what I called *misuse* of language), poetry is not, intrinsically, a matter of rhythmic “scansion,” nor it is a matter of metrics, rhyme, or rhetorical figures, as we were taught at school. If it were, poetry would have long since ceased, since rhythm and metrics are not strictly ruled anymore. György Ligeti said that “there is no pulsation”²⁸ in music, and the same goes for poetry. In mathematical terms, poetry, in the view I will share here, is a matter of continuum of text and world, not of *discretization*, of separation between this or that part of the world, this or that part of language, this or that part of voice. Rather, in rediscovering language as part of the world, not as information about it, and in concentrating a potentially infinite and otherwise unsayable amount of meaning and experience, poetry finds its necessity in this *continuum* and in this *density*, from which also stems its

28 Follin, György Ligeti.

political relevance. My hope is that this approach to poetry will help us reactivate the notion of *empathy* and its potential impact on all of us. One final preliminary remark: I intend “poetry” here as a collection of deep and sophisticated textual practices that, like the aforementioned Celan, have nothing to do with the conventional view of poetry, or of the “poetic,” as something easily sentimental or emanating from the individual experience of the poet. It will become increasingly clear how poetry, in the vision that I am proposing here, is a form of artistic practice and of philosophical inquiry in its own right.

2. NO REPRESENTATION

A first, important aspect of *empathy* that poetry can help us understand in depth is the fact that no real, authentic empathy can occur within a regime of representation. Poetry, intended as mentioned above, uses language out of representation, because it is not determined by the rules of fiction or by interfaces between language and world. In a play or a film, we can empathize with this or that character, and a story can even move us to tears. Yet this empathic reaction – notwithstanding the indisputable and much more durable collective cultural value of any work of art in any artistic medium – doesn’t cause us to change our behavior in response to a character or a story, for the very simple reason that we know it is fiction. We are in a regime of representation, and we know that we are *here* and the characters are *there*, in the fictional world. This is inevitable in spite of the traditional theory of drama which, ever since Greek tragedy, saw in theatrical representation

a possibility of educating people and changing society. It is certainly true that fiction can influence us deeply, and it can say a lot about the world, but it will not generate an empathic reaction durable enough for us concretely to change our emotional and behavioral habits as if the fictional stories and characters with which we empathized concerned our own lives in a direct and irreversible way, as would, for example, the death of a friend, or a separation. If every representation so moved us, it would mean that we would have major cognitive problems in discerning reality from fiction.

The fictional process is similar with televised news and social media, because our brain, and our body as a whole, perceives what is on a screen as representation, even when these representations actually correspond to real events. Tele-vision: distanced vision, the events are *there* and not *here*. Scrolling through Facebook, for example, we can encounter a video of children playing in a refugee camp and be moved by it, but cognitively speaking this will be put on the same level as the sneakers advert that comes after, because both messages are brought on the same representational level by the device. Moreover, the interface of Facebook or of any other screen-based mass media is also graphically conceived to put all content on the same level. Graphics and economy resonate with perception and cognition. In other words, through representation we perceive reality as a kind of fiction even when it is not. This makes a durable, deep empathic reaction almost impossible. If it were otherwise, we would already know, because the world would be much different than it was before these interfaces existed. Yes, social networks and telecommunications bring people together in a general sort of way,

and can be useful to exchange important information, but over the years they simply have not caused any substantial societal or political change against the status quo of power, this is a fact in the third decade of the 21st century.

On the contrary, the passion that media and power share and foster both for violence and superficiality (the “spectacle,” to use Guy Debord’s term) creates what I would call a *simulacrum of empathy*. We believe we empathize, but in reality we are stuck in what Spinoza called the sadness of power. Power needs people to be sad in order to control them, and power is sad in itself. This sadness can be embodied by very different things: the kids in a refugee camp, yet another man killing his wife in the outskirts of a city, an article on climate change, the desire for money we don’t have to buy goods we don’t need, and now, in a massive way, the collective fear of Covid-19. In all these potential situations, feeling sad makes us believe we empathize, and at the same time this kind of sadness makes us feel paralyzed. This sense of impotence is connected to the superficiality of representation, because a real, deep sadness that is not induced by representation – as much as an equally deep sense of happiness and possibility – would of course drive us to change things, to reactivate our vision of ourselves and of the world, and authentically empathize with each other and with all beings until the paradigm is shifted out of the inequalities, hierarchies, surveillances, wars, exploitations, interests, and discriminations that still populate the world today. We nevertheless still have to define what “empathize” means here, and I will come to that progressively.

Through power-unconscious or power-driven media, *representation* can be understood not only as the process

which makes us perceive any kind of situation as fiction, be it real or not, but also, by the same token, representation engenders *projection* instead of empathy: projection of ourselves in the “tele-vised” situation, projection of our emotional incompleteness in goods to buy or money to make or prestige to acquire, projection of our own suffering in the gaze of a starving child in Africa. But this is not empathy even if we think we authentically feel for that child, even when we sign yet another petition, because, unless we change the paradigm, what we see is not real. That child is, cognitively speaking, like a character in a film on which we can project our unresolved needs, and the representational codes and interfaces of media fuel this misunderstanding. This doesn’t mean that if we could meet that child in person or spend some time traveling to certain places our understanding of critical situations and our ability to empathize would automatically improve. Emotional distance can be maintained even in the closest presence, if there is no deeply felt need to overcome it. But whereas when we are present we can choose whether to represent or to be present, when we are in front of a predefined interface what happens behind the screen is always *out there*. It is a cognitive, emotional, and perceptual matter, as much as a political one.

My position is not against technology, internet, or information as a whole, nor do I believe, of course, that theatrical, filmic, or journalistic representations and fictions are “bad.” I myself make a wide use of mainstream technologies for my own work as an artist, from graphic design software to virtual reality, and I am an avid film-watcher and news-reader. I am making a specific point about the question of empathy, and about how contents

are processed by mass media, even unintentionally: we don't need conspiracy theories, we just have to observe the cognitive structures and political grammar of media, business, and power today to understand how far they are from generating authentic forms of empathy. Empathy is based on horizontality rather than hierarchies, on a continuum between ourselves and the other until the other is not othered anymore, a continuum between ourselves and the world as a whole rather than on the discretization of editing and "montage" of content for the sake of representation. There is no separation in empathy as I am trying to describe it here, no interface, no hierarchies among the points of view, no *here* and *there*. If empathy means "to feel inside," then everything is *here* when a proper *empathic condition* is engendered. While watching a film or the news there can be a temporary *empathic reaction*, but they do not engender the persistence of an *empathic condition*, which is a very different thing, as it implies a steady paradigm shift. Because of all this, I am particularly skeptical of social networks, because I am scared by the illusion of community and friendship they provide through their interfaces, an *illusion of continuum* among all of us that is nothing but the obverse side of what I called the "simulacrum of empathy." This digital, fictional illusion of community is of course becoming even more dangerous now, in Covid-19 times, and it also involves the even more dangerous shift toward distance e-learning, which, being a committed teacher, I see as a true social and cultural catastrophe, precisely because of the reasons I started to sketch out here.

In this setup, if empathy means to deeply feel ourselves and in ourselves, and at the same time to feel the other, in the other and with the other, be it a living being, an ecosys-

tem, the whole Earth, or the whole universe, and despite the fact that there are certainly, and luckily, many deeply feeling people around, we are still far away from a general *empathic condition* as a collective paradigm. Just because of its inability to address the question of representation and media-induced projections, Jeremy Rifkin's cultural genealogy of empathy,²⁹ even if it wasn't so confused, journalistically superficial and superfluously long as it happens to be, completely misses the point. His almost uncritical acceptance of media technologies, particularly social networks, as a vehicle for empathy, stands for his inability to see in representation one of the foremost obstacles, a proper barrier indeed, to collective empathic forms. On the other hand, the accent Rifkin puts on mirror neurons as a means of empathy doesn't help at all, because, as he himself recalls, mirror neurons can be activated by temporary identifications with characters of fiction. Mirror neurons perform representation in our head, they create a copy of the situation so that we can understand it, feel it, and emotionally interact with it. But, as such, and independently from the importance of this discovery, this has nothing to do with empathy, as I will try to further describe it in this essay, in its deepest sense of being able to change our perceptual and emotional paradigm through a communal feeling for people and things outside our own projections and unconscious needs. Furthermore, there is no point at this stage in trying to establish empathy, as Rifkin does, as a natural feature of humankind, if we assume once and for all that being cultural is natural for hu-

29 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc., 2010).

mans, and that we then “just” have to find the best cultural scenarios we can think of all together and put them into practice not as a moralistic set of values nor as a jurisdiction (the other etymology of *Dichtung* hits again here), but as something deeply felt as a possibility for emancipation and peace. Empathy is certainly one of those scenarios. An authentic understanding of this very simple aspect would greatly help to overcome many still quite ingrained conceptions – in spite of the work done by theorists like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway – such as, for instance, that sex is “naturally” meant for procreation, that the only two “natural” genders are “male” and “female,” that human beings are “naturally” meant to kill and eat animals or to be “empathic” or else “cruel” to each other, that men are “naturally” meant to dominate over women or other men or to defend their territory, or that human beings “naturally” need leadership, control, and hierarchy – projections and representations that are often erroneously, if not hypocritically, derived from the so-called “animal world.” I will return to the question of nature at the end of this essay.

Luckily, poetry was never the solution for anything and, hopefully, it will never be. Nevertheless, its way of dealing with language and meaning can perhaps help us understand how to get rid of representation in order to clear the way for empathy. I claimed before that poetry rediscovers language as part of the world, not as a representation of it, and that it allows us to see language as an experience rather than a system of representations, i.e., a fiction. I also claimed that poetry constitutes a *continuum* between language and the environment and that a poetic text concentrates a potentially infinite amount of meaning, as somehow both causes and consequences of the fact

that what poetry says could not be said otherwise. “Continuous” as opposed to “discrete,” to be intended now also as the editing performed by fictionalized, media-driven interpretations of reality. But what exactly does this mean, and why should such an understanding of poetry help us to redefine the extent and the impact of the notion of empathy?

3. DENSITY AND INTENSITY

As opposed to theater, film, or novel, non-epic poetry is not defined by fiction. It can sometimes contain narrative sequences or characters, but those don't define the nature of the poetic text overall, nor, as claimed above, do the traditional poetic features of metrics, rhythm, and rhyme. What defines poetry, again, is its power to concentrate, in a more or less limited amount of text, an immense, if not infinite, amount of meaning and experience: a *density*. In this view, poetry is an art form, like painting, sculpture, conceptual art, or music, rather than a literary discourse, for it concentrates in text the *excess* of the real, that is, what appears impossible to say via a logical sentence, a consequential discourse, or a more or less linear story (be it real or fictional). Poetry accounts for that part of language that tries to give a voice to the *too much* of our experience of the world and of language itself as part of this world. Hence its density, hence the fact that it cannot say what it says in any other way. Because each poem as I intend it here, and certainly try to write in my practice, condenses in its own way both the spatial and temporal infinity of

the “substance,” in Spinozian terms,³⁰ i.e., all that exists as expression of one unique element or universe or nature. As such, poetry always occurs beyond my own (author or reader) individual experience or feelings for this infinity and this totality, as much as language doesn’t belong to me since it is a collective asset. I just temporarily use, as a poet, its potential to condense an experience that is the experience of everybody and the experience of everything.

In spite of, or perhaps thanks to, such overwhelming *excess* and *density*, poetry is also a very powerful form of philosophical inquiry. Its strength consists precisely in the direct relation that it engenders between language and world, and in language as world.³¹ At the same time, poetry is made with the same words we use every day. In many cases, poetry doesn’t generate new forms or sounds; it rather reuses an already existing material – words – whose owners are all of us. Language is the most property-free thing we have, even more than air in these times of climate crisis. Poetry is not a parallel language, like notational systems or mathematics, nor does it produce a parallel world, in spite of the clichés around the “poetic.” Instead, poetry challenges – or *misuses*, as I claimed above – language in order to extend its cognitive reach and in order to subtract it from the tyranny of the codes of representation that are necessary for a system to be functional, the codes that are necessary to program an interface, the codes that are necessary for control. Because of its very semantic functioning, poetry is eminently, if not ontologically, *subversive*, po-

³⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, I.

³¹ As Charles Bernstein writes referring to the objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky: “never words over world but words as world.” Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +, X.

litically as much as cognitively as much as emotionally. By the same token, poetry is always questioning the mystery of language as such. Even when it doesn't overtly speak about language, poetry, in any language, always asks: why are words the way they are? Why is written and spoken language shaped as it is? Where does language come from, and how can we reposition it as one of the things of the world? In poetry, the text becomes independent from its author and from any subjectivity, discovering itself as a thing of our world that gives language back to the world – as one of the things of our world – and the world back to language.

Because of the cognitive and experiential *continuum* engendered by poetry's misuse of language, which leads to the sometimes painful, other times joyful, and always overwhelming acknowledgment of the excess of the real in all its extension, the density of the poetic experience cannot be separated from the *intensity* of the experience it initiates, or reflects, for human beings. Here I have also in mind Gilles Deleuze's understanding of "intensity," somehow in opposition to Tristan Garcia's use of this term to describe the insatiable need of modernity for always more than before: always more power, always more things, always more danger, always more thrill and adrenaline.³² Poetry's intensity is not the intensity sought by the *society of the spectacle*, but its opposite: by challenging the interfaces between language, perception, and world, poetry helps us to rediscover intensity everywhere, in the calmest day, in the emptiest space. Poetry is a desk-based, sofa-based,

32 Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense: A Modern Obsession*, trans. Abigail RayAlexander, Christopher RayAlexander, and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

meadow-based revolution. Through poetry, everything is intense because the text is not a form of mediation, but rather is itself an experience, a way of enhancing our capability for life, not with artificial and transitory means (e.g., drugs), or emotional projections of the sort described above, but in a deep, permanent state.

This enhancement is then not really an enhancement. It is just a way of taking us back to feeling life and the world with fewer barriers, starting from what is around us. Suddenly, in what I would call *the poetic state of language and life* – which is ultimately another way to describe the *empathic condition*, as we shall see – nothing is disconnected or separated. A pebble, a leaf, some garbage left in a corner, the gaze of a bird, a group of people, a faraway quasar: in poetry, all of this matters with the same intensity, because these are all parts of the same infinite substance. Poetry is dense because each time it condenses the whole universe into text, it records and provokes in human beings the intensity of the experience of life – any experience, and any moment, any detail – as part of the whole. There are certainly other means of accomplishing this, but poetry interests me here because it is based on human language, and furthermore because it permits us to escape the representation and codification of meaning. It is then this definition of poetry that helps me to define *empathy* more precisely through its very etymological roots: “to feel inside.” Inside what? Inside the whole. To be empathic means to feel the other not as another, but as the whole, as everything, and thus to feel myself and all the rest as exactly the same substance, the same object, the same ecosystem, the same universe, concerned by the same movements, the same history, the same problems,

the same possibilities. Everything is *here* in empathy, there is no *there*. I am here sitting at this desk, a tortured political prisoner is here, the Amazon rainforest is here, a cloud on Uranus is here, a stone on the surface of an exoplanet is here, the movements of the stars rotating inside a galaxy and around a black hole are all here. This doesn't mean that everything is the same, but that in all the differences populating the world everything is equal, hierarchically speaking, as expression of the same underlying substance. The gnoseological and emotive awareness of this equality is the ground on which empathy can take place.

Empathy is not an enhancement of feeling nor it is a "natural" feature of evolution that can be augmented by digital or non-digital means. Rather, it is the naked experience of everything without representation, interfaces, barriers, interests, as much as possible. I am not talking about a new-age fusion with the universe, but of a cognitive and emotional state that is the most real one can imagine. Empathy is nothing but the emotional result of acknowledging the real as it is, in all its contingency, in all its immensity, and in all its independence from me if I think of me as a separated individuum, but not if I think of me as this same real, i.e., as a changing form (Spinoza, again, would say a "mode") of the whole. I am finite if I think in terms of before, during, and after my life as an individuum, but I am infinite as an expression of the life of the whole, like any other animate or inanimate entity. Hence, there is no moral or natural prescription in being empathic for a human being, just the rediscovery that this world is me and that I am this world, and that categories such as "me" and "world" are models, but they do not function at a deeper level of totality and infinity

where it doesn't make sense not to feel *with*, not to feel *in*, not to feel *tout court*, because there is a total *continuum* between everything, every one of us included. By recognizing this, our behavior in and for the world can change for good, if it was not already guided by empathy. It will not change because of moral or religious values, or of a capitalistic, positivistic, Rifkin-like genealogy of a "caring community" with certain shared interests. It will change because it is about all of us as basically the same thing. At this level, whether empathy is a natural or cultural feature is of course a senseless question.

On the individual level, empathy is also the emotional result of being able to get acquainted with one's projections, fears, idiosyncrasies, closures, frustrations, unmet needs – the manifestations of one's inner suffering – in order to accept and to know them, to grow through them, and to overcome them as much as possible. There is no empathy without a parallel augmentation of my knowledge of myself, of others, and of the world; a parallel opening inside me and toward the outer world, or rather inside the world, without solution of continuity among those levels. The more I get to know myself, the more I can avoid projecting myself onto the outer world, and instead experience it in all its reality, intensity, and contingency. Then I can rediscover myself as part of it, not because of a projection, but because of the *empathic condition* in itself. Again, there is no proper enhancement through empathy, just the possibility of regaining a way of feeling *inside* everything, starting from myself. As much as inside and outside go together, a human being cannot choose between joy and pain. If there is pain to be felt, it must be felt, but precisely there joy also comes in, joy as opposed to the aforemen-

tioned sadness of power, joy as possibility, joy as feeling with and inside everything, which elevates the sense of pain through feeling and, by the same token, doesn't wish to produce additional, unnecessary suffering in oneself or in other individuals – animals and plants included – since through empathy they can be recognized as the same substance to which we all belong.

4. POETRY AND EMPATHY AS “TRANSLATIONS OF EVERYTHING”

Poetry and empathy have this in common: they are *translations of everything* into each text, each moment of perception, each experience. The former is primarily a state of language, the latter a state of feeling, but they can certainly trigger one another. They both show, on different levels, that it is possible to develop a certain relation to life in which every portion of the world and of language contains all the rest, the infinite extension of everything well beyond our knowledge of it and, luckily for all of us, beyond the lifespan of an individual. This, by the way, is why biographical interpretations never work for poetry: because the poem – as translation of everything into a portion of universe and meaning, of meaning as universe, that we call *text* – knows much more than the author who wrote it does, widely exceeding their intentions. The unfolding of meaning from a poem is potentially infinite precisely because the kind of language defined as poetry contains in each portion the infinity of the universe.³³ Similarly, any

33 I am using the term “infinity” here both in its spatial and temporal

object that is empathically felt is both a part and an expression of the universe, both because empathy makes it so and because empathy is only possible under these conditions.

The notion of “part” is itself a merely conventional model. Poetry gives us the possibility of extending our semantic and experiential reach of and through language, helping us to think any object – a berry, a tree, a stone – in relation to other known and unknown objects and worlds, and to the whole “substance” of the universe, toward other instances that we cannot even imagine. This is also why in poetry we are out of the realm of representation, because within a horizontal, infinitely signifying, non-normative, and non-authoritarian language like poetry we can say and think what is not representable, either cognitively or politically or both. The extension and intimate relation that poetry helps us to create with this scale of perception, feeling, and experience of all that exists even beyond our cognitive reach has a relation to empathy as I describe it here, precisely because in this *translation of everything* any portion of the whole is not anymore a part of it, but the whole itself. The *density* of poetry confirms *empathy* as the possibility to think and feel *everything* – language, a fruit, an animal, an exoplanet, a given community – in an ontological continuum, without solution of continuity, i.e., without any *discretization*, editing, montage, or interface given by our position and our contingent perception. At least, we can tend toward this horizon. It is perhaps an

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signification and in relation to the Spinozian “substance,” beyond the scientific debate around the infinity of *this* universe, which is in itself, as claimed at least since Giordano Bruno in the 16th century, only a part of a universe that must be infinite by definition, if we consider it as ontological *everything*, as the whole with no boundaries.

asymptotic movement, to use another mathematical term, but a relevant one.

In this conception, which certainly draws on so-called “object-oriented ontology” (ooo) and “post-humanism,” poetry reminds us, at the same time, of the importance of humanity, for there is no poetry without human language, perception, feeling, and experience. If human beings are part of this whole, then we can consider them at the same ontological level as all other beings, and as such acknowledge their most distinguishing features: verbal language, logical thinking, and empathic feeling, the latter being a feature of all other beings too, albeit in configurations that are often different from the human one, which are not the aim of this paper to discuss in detail. I would nevertheless like briefly to mention the widely read *The Life of Plants* by Emanuele Coccia,³⁴ which has the merit of developing an original, empathy-oriented cosmology starting from one fundamental set of beings. Coccia recognizes plants as the source of our ecosystems and analyzes their behaviors and components, such as leaves and roots, as languages, communities, and cognitive structures in their own right, different and independent from, yet deeply interrelated with, human beings. Plants are for Coccia a biological and ontological expression of the whole universe because of their direct, elementary, and elemental connection with the atmosphere, because of their purely contemplative presence in the world, living just for life itself, while they generously produce, at the same time, air that is breathable by other living beings on Earth. Coccia defines their interaction with the universe as “mixture,” that is, a con-

34 Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2018).

stant, completely exposed, non-representational and extremely vulnerable interchange of the basic universal elements of air, light, water, and earth with and inside all the other elements of the universe. Plants' horizontal, open, vulnerable, generous, and always evolving way of living, acting, and interacting with the world, or rather *as* world, through forms of language that are very different from human language but ought to be recognized once and for all as no less sophisticated – by the way this is valid, in my opinion, for any non-human organic way of interaction as well – teaches us, in Coccia's thought, how to formulate an ontology as cosmology, able to overcome Kantian philosophy and transcendental phenomenology based on positional, dominant, hierarchical relations between the (human) subject and the world.

Given his claims, it is astonishing that Coccia never mentions Spinoza and Deleuze, and that he relegates ooo and speculative realism to two very short endnotes in which he distances himself from these paradigms, just like ooo philosophers rarely mention Spinoza and sometimes refuse to be considered as parts of this “movement” in continental thought. To paraphrase Harold Bloom, there is clearly an *anxiety of influence* affecting philosophers, both with regard to historical figures and to their contemporaries. Since I am not a philosopher and I speak from the point of view of poetry, theory, and artistic practice, I can instead see a deep connection between Spinoza's notion of “substance,” Deleuze's reactivation of Spinoza and theoretical models of non-hierarchical horizontality, non-dualism, and intensity, and post-Kantian models such as those of Coccia and ooo philosophers like Bruno Latour and Graham Harman. In all these cases there is an attempt

to overcome metaphysical Cartesian and Kantian dualisms such as *body-mind* and *subject-object* in order to reattribute ontological dignity, so to speak, to the whole world beyond human modes of understanding and influence.

On the other hand, if we want to reintroduce empathy, we need to refocus on feeling and perception too, not in order to reaffirm a metaphysical division between subjects and objects or the supremacy of the human subject over the world, but to complete this gesture toward the understanding of any being – including human beings and from our perspective of human beings rather than mere subjects – as whole. Coccia is against perception as being precisely based on the Kantian perspectivist, human-oriented position of the subject in the world, but if we really assume that human beings are situated on the same ontological level as all other components of a same substance, then the equation between subjectivity and humanity is overcome, and perception can help us empathically to feel this ontological legitimacy of everything, human beings and their culture included. The anxiety of overcoming the subject doesn't have to take with itself the end of feeling and perception as fundamental features of empathy, as possibilities of living inside the universe in the widest and most honest way that is given to us as humans. What changes in this vision is that the dualistic opposition *subject-object* is overcome and, together with it, a *frontal* perceptual paradigm. Etymologically, an “ob-ject” is something that is thrown before my eyes. With it, we are somehow back to representation and to the interface. But an empathic perception is an immersive one rather than a frontal one, a perception that includes the feeling for everything and inside everything. This is why, as a poet – to return to the

digital - I have been developing immersive poetry reading environments where the text is no longer just in front of us and where the visitors of the installation rather find themselves *inside* it (for instance via virtual reality and voice processing in surround sound). It is a way of reminding us that both we and the text are inside everything, simply because we are everything.

When the dualism *subject-object* is already overcome, perception is essential for empathy because it is only through perception that we can empathize with feeling and suffering beings. Philosophical understanding (the *res cogitans*) is not enough since, moreover, the Cartesian dualism *body-mind* is overcome in this same ontological model. In this deepest conception of empathy, it is the perception of feeling and suffering of the whole substance that brings the feeling and suffering of other beings inside myself until I am able to exit my status of separate subject or identity and to rediscover myself as world. I am made of the same substance as all these other beings, thus they are no longer others, even the farthest ones, even those I cannot perceive. *Translation*, then, means here to bring into each text, each feeling, the empathic recognition of this totality. This is why poetry is *density*, and why it is not a matter of representation: because it contains all the time - in its semantic processes, in its rhetorical structures, in the infinite unfolding of meaning - the presence of everything as being *here* and not *there*.

5. ART IS A MANIFESTATION OF NATURE

Much of what I have written here is about increasing our empathy for nature and the environment, as a theoretical participation in the now luckily widespread sense of urgency for the danger of climate crisis. *Empathy* as I intend it here means to feel ourselves always inside nature, and more than that, *as* nature. Only if we trespass the interface between our representations of nature and nature itself – including environmentalist narratives – can we intimately and collectively understand that taking care of our planet means taking care of ourselves as much as of everything else. The notion of poetic *translation of everything* into our language and perception can perhaps help us reach a very much needed paradigm change not only from a poetic and theoretical, but also from an environmental and societal point of view, because we discover that the distinctions among beings are valid and necessary from a scientific point of view, but provisional and purely practical from an ontological point of view. We, in fact, are just a *we*, we all are the same underlying substance. As much as, in what I called the *empathic condition*, everything is *here* and not *there*, identity conceived in terms of *us* vs. *them*, identity as a justification for othering, is not acceptable anymore. Belonging to the same substance is what makes possible any kind of difference, any kind of diversity that is not harmful to the substance itself. “Love and do what you will,”³⁵ to put it with Augustine. Once more, the empathic condition does not imply the end of difference, but fosters

35 Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, eds. Edmund Hill, Allan D. Fitzgerald, and Boniface Ramsey (New York: New City Press, 2009), Homily 7 on 1 John 4:4-12.

it, instead, as a we. In empathy, our diversity is legitimized not by minority, not by a claim of identity – as we still often see in some recent mainstream cultural demonstrations – but by this *we* as a form of communal belonging to the whole. To feel (inside) this whole, to translate this everything in ourselves, is much more natural than trying to establish metaphysical or phylogenetic naturalizations of empathy for human beings or animals, simply because, to paraphrase Jackson Pollock, “we are nature,”³⁶ and this concerns even the most sophisticated cultural processes. Empathy in itself, even if achieved via a complex cultural operation, doesn’t lose any of its naturalness because it is ingrained in an ontological disposition and feeling of the whole.

For instance, to think and feel this level of belonging makes it impossible, in my view, to keep exploiting, killing, and eating animals, especially on an industrial scale, because in this paradigm it becomes absolutely senseless, self-harming, auto-destructive, and morbid. Vegetarianism and veganism, much like the fight for the end of slavery and of racial and sexual inequalities, are highly sophisticated modern behaviors, yet they stem from a regained elementary empathy for the whole. And it is not convincing to try to naturalize the dominant discourse by saying that there are other carnivorous animals or that there are clear gender hierarchies among other animals, because those animals function with different logics; their

36 Pollock’s original quote is: “I am nature.” This was his reply to Hans Hofmann who warned him he should paint “from nature.” See Lee Krasner, “Interview with Bruce Glazer,” *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 28.

feelings and behaviors, including their capacity for empathy, cannot be described by human categories, nor can they be considered inferior for this same reason. By the same token, it is useless at this level to try to naturalize vegetarianism or empathy itself. What is important for humankind is that a cultural awareness for empathy, basing itself on the natural – in this case, yes, natural – human capacity to *feel*, can instigate a horizontal, equality-oriented view of all organisms, objects, and ecosystems. And here, once more, I am using *nature* and *culture* as artificially opposed terms, whose dualism disappears at the ontological level that I am trying to convey in this contribution. Furthermore, we could argue that, in contrast with all other animals, humans have a tendency toward morbidity and self-destructiveness, but in this scenario empathy, again, meant as courage to face one's fears and unsaid pain, is a very powerful antidote. In an empathic environment, there is of course no destruction other than self-destruction. Each time that we destroy, we destroy ourselves; each time we kill, we kill ourselves.

Pollock's famous answer "I am nature," said in the context of abstract expressionism, had a "subjectivist" and romantic connotation that art doesn't need to endorse any longer. Art can be increasingly conceived as a collective effort for empathy. This is not always the case, of course, but it is a possibility that we now have, and a very precious one. Still, Pollock's claim is relevant here as it reminds us that an important shift occurred over the centuries in the way we conceive the artistic practice and its relation to the world. In the traditional, Platonic conception, art imitates nature: *mimesis*. In the modern conception, art, in the wake of the traditional metaphysical dualism *nature*

vs. *culture*, is opposed to nature. In both cases and in all the differences between these models, that I am of course terribly simplifying here, nature and art are clearly differentiated. Hence the ancient Greek term of *technē* for ‘art,’ which is of course at the origin of the words “technique” and “technology,” and the modern etymology of “art” as the same of the word “artificial.” Here we need some Giordano Bruno’s philosophical poetry:

Art, while operating, activates and thinks of itself in a discursive way. Nature operates in an intensive rather than discursive way. Art handles foreign matter, nature handles its own matter; art is applied to matter, nature is inherent to matter, as it is actually matter itself.³⁷

This is, beautifully described, the pre-modern and modern conception of art as opposed to nature. The contemporary conception I have been trying to deliver here through a poetological model could be extended to art as a whole, using Bruno’s terminology. In an empathic, “substance-oriented” paradigm, art operates in an intensive way, in the sense of the contemplative, vulnerable *intensity* I connected above with the *density* of the poetic gesture. Art is matter itself and handles its own matter, because it belongs to the substance, it is an expression of everything at the same level of non-human, natural instances such as plants, animals, celestial bodies, and void. In other words, art is nature, since it is a manifestation of it; art is one of the main ways in which humankind embodies nature through a highly complex set of cultural practices.

³⁷ Bruno, *De immenso*, 8.10. My translation.

Wassily Kandinsky's and Piet Mondrian's conceptions of abstraction in painting – if we put aside for a while their outdated spiritualist views – are in this sense perhaps more modern than those of abstract expressionists, because they are less subjectivist. The former considered abstract painting a way of penetrating the secret of nature instead of representing it; the latter started his whole operation of abstraction from painting studies of a tree, as is magnificently shown by the chronological Mondrian collection at the Kunstmuseum in The Hague. And Mark Rothko, a bit later, chose abstraction for another reason, somewhat similar to Celan's apparently obscure poetry, and one that is highly empathy-oriented. Abstraction and linguistic complexity were the only ways for the artistic gesture to engage with the Shoah. No representation, once more, was possible, not only because in a regime of empathy it is unacceptable merely to represent something of this sort, but also because representation would have taken away the multiplicity of this set of events, thus re-installing an authoritarian view of just one aspect of it, rather than keeping a much deeper horizontal, universal, semantically open, and vulnerable relation to it for the present and for all the generations to come. Alberto Burri let the work of art function with the mysterious rules of chance that regulate nature by heating plastic panels without controlling the forms the surface would take while burning. Ewa Partum materially spread the letters of a poem in a forest, letting their disposition among the trees and on the land be decided by the complex physical phenomena involved by the act of throwing the letters in the air. Lee Ufan affirmed with an extraordinary lucidity the belonging of the materials he uses in sculpture, par-

ticularly stones and steel, to the infinity of the universe, by describing the artistic gesture as a way of “not-making,” that is, of rearranging those bits of matter in the simplest yet deepest way possible. All these gestures, although belonging to a widely Western, widely masculine, and widely institutionalized artistic canon, are indisputably among the first and most popular attempts made by artists to reduce the subjective domination and authority of their gesture. These processes let art be a manifestation of nature as much as history and chance – and here we can also think of Mallarmé’s celebrated poem *A Throw of Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*³⁸ – thus enhancing a horizontal empathic awareness for the totality in which it is inscribed.

Today we can of course go – and are going – much further in this paradigm, accepting that there isn’t such a thing as an ontological opposition between art, or culture, and nature. Making art and building cultural settings is natural for humankind, and the work of art, even when it takes the form of a text, or of a thought, is made with the same substance with which all other beings and objects are made, the substance of everything. As it has been noticed, the semantical field of the word “art” is, like the real etymology of *Dichtung*, quite unfortunate, since it presupposes the modern view of the work of art as something artificial, separated from nature. Several theorists, such as Fabien Vallos, proposed the term *poiesis* in order to describe this other possibility for the work of art as in-

38 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (Paris: NRF, 1914), and see the exhibition *Un coup de dés* curated by Sabine Folie in Vienna, also containing Partum’s piece and many others inspired by Mallarmé’s seminal gesture (catalogue published in 2008 by Walther König).

scribed in nature and history, and to enhance its proximity with poetry. *Poiesis*, of course the root of our word “poetry,” comes, as recalled above, from the ancient Greek “to make,” to make with the substance of the universe. This *i* that fell down from *poiesis* to *poesis* indicates that an important historical difference persists between the making of art with objects and actions and the making of poetry with words and semantics. Yet these gestures are united, through empathy, by three fundamental elements: feelings, concepts, and the whole substance of the universe of which they are a direct manifestation. In this sense, there is nothing more direct, nothing more honest, natural, and necessary than poetry and art for human beings to remind themselves not only *who*, but also *what* they are.³⁹

39 Thanks to Max Norman for his precious remarks and editing contribution, and to Giulio Carmassi and Antonio Pisanò for their observations.

Problemi dell'*Uncreative Writing* di Kenneth Goldsmith

[Originally published in *Semicerchio* 57 (2018).]

La poesia ha forse da sempre tentato di ampliare i confini della soggettività. Forzando di fatto tutti i limiti del rapporto linguaggio-mondo, il soggetto è inevitabilmente parso alla poesia come esso stesso un limite da valicare, o da disperdere. Dal Novecento in poi, il problema del soggetto in poesia è diventato un tema centrale, un oggetto di dibattito poetologico, nel senso della “morte dell’autore” barthesiana, così come del ruolo della soggettività all’interno del testo poetico. Lo smembramento del cosiddetto “io lirico”, uno dei processi cari all’avanguardia, ha coinciso con la ridefinizione – e talora con il rifiuto – della nozione stessa di “poesia lirica”. Forse una delle espressioni più felici per definire la soggettività poetica moderna è stata coniata da Antonio Porta, che in un’intervista ha descritto la sua visione del soggetto in poesia come un “campo di tensioni”:

All’io tradizionale si sostituisce un “campo di tensioni” in cui il linguaggio può agire indisturbato, per così dire. L’io diventa il punto delle interazioni, come lo definisco oggi, anche linguistiche, in funzione di una nuova conoscenza.⁴⁰

40 Intervista tra Luigi Sasso e Antonio Porta, *Il Castoro* 166 (ottobre 1980).

Questa concezione dell'io come "campo di tensioni" è, mi sembra, ancora molto attuale, se non altro perché la problematizzazione della soggettività poetica è ancora oggi una delle preoccupazioni fondamentali della poesia, ed è alla base di uno dei più influenti tentativi contemporanei volti a rendere il linguaggio, appunto, "indisturbato": l'*uncreative writing*, secondo il termine – difficilmente traducibile in italiano – proposto da Kenneth Goldsmith.⁴¹

Con questa nozione, il poeta e studioso americano critica innanzitutto l'ideologia *espressiva* e lo psicologismo alla base della "scrittura creativa" come essa è insegnata nelle università anglosassoni, iscrivendosi altresì in una tradizione che non è solo quella del modernismo, ma anche e soprattutto della scrittura concettuale, ovvero di tecniche poetiche di tipo processuale – ancora troppo poco conosciute in Italia –, sviluppate, più che da poeti, da artisti che a un certo punto della loro carriera, spesso e volentieri negli anni 1970, hanno scelto sistematicamente il medium della scrittura: Vito Acconci, Robert Barry, Yoko Ono, Bernar Venet, per citare, tra i tanti possibili, alcuni degli artisti particolarmente cari a chi scrive.

Ma il modello di Goldsmith mi interessa soprattutto qui perché, lungi dal volersi proporre quale nozione teorica volta a sussumere l'intenzione alla base della scrittura concettuale così come essa si è configurata una cinquantina di anni fa negli Stati Uniti – anche perché esso non sarebbe adatto a tale scopo –, l'*uncreative writing* è da concepirsi piuttosto, secondo il poeta americano, quale vero e proprio cambio di paradigma per la scrittura del XXI secolo. Con un *parti pris* il cui radicalismo oggettivista ha qualcosa di

41 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing. Managing Language in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2011.

flaubertiano, per Goldsmith lo scrittore del presente deve diventare un mero “word processor”, ovvero un *porteur* di materiali verbali già esistenti, dove l’intervento della soggettività scrivente è limitato alla trascrizione e alla riorganizzazione di linguaggio già prodotto. Nella sua raccolta di saggi del 2011 *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*, Goldsmith si pone la seguente domanda: cosa può diventare la scrittura in un’epoca di *big data*? Come può reagire la poesia all’ipertrofia dell’informazione, verbale quanto iconografica, che cresce ogni giorno in particolare nel web? Riorganizzando appunto questi dati anziché aggiungendone di nuovi, rifiutando la visione romantica dello scrittore ispirato e vedendo invece la poesia come una tecnica di filtraggio critico dell’informazione per dare a vedere connessioni che non verrebbero altrimenti notate.⁴²

Ora, se il rapporto della scrittura all’informazione e alla tecnologia non può essere trascurato nel XXI secolo, così come non si può certo snobbare l’importanza della scrittura concettuale e processuale nell’evoluzione della poesia degli ultimi decenni, e se in generale è impossibile ignorare l’influenza ormai profonda della tesi di Goldsmith, ritengo – sia come poeta e artista, anche “concettuale”, che come teorico – che la nozione di *uncreative writing* sia in realtà inadatta a proporre un paradigma poetico in grado di emanciparsi dall’*anxiety of influence* proveniente dal secondo Novecento e di entrare infine nel contemporaneo, e vorrei spiegare la mia posizione in questa sede.

Come detto, nell’*uncreative writing* la necessità di ripresentare criticamente e sotto una luce diversa un certo

42 Ibid., *passim*. Da ora in poi citato nel testo con “Goldsmith” più numero di pagina.

contenuto è finalizzata a rivelare connessioni e implicazioni politiche più o meno nascoste in esso, senza per questo assumere una postura esplicitamente giudicante che scaturirebbe da una maggiore presenza di soggettività nel testo. Di conseguenza, l'*uncreative writing*, nelle sue forme iniziali, consiste sostanzialmente in una serie di azioni più o meno elaborate di copia-incolla. Per fare due esempi tratti dall'opera dello stesso Goldsmith, si pensi a *Day* – un libro costituito dalla trascrizione integrale dell'edizione del *New York Times* di venerdì 1 settembre 2000⁴³ – o al più recente *Capital*, una collezione di più di novecento pagine di citazioni eterogenee sulla città di New York, organizzate in sezioni con titoli diversi quali “Sex”, “Gentrification”, “Advertising” e “Mapplethorpe”.⁴⁴ Tra gli esempi possibili di altri autori che praticano l'*uncreative writing* e su cui Goldsmith si sofferma nei suoi saggi, uno dei più degni di nota è certamente *Statements of Facts* di Vanessa Place:⁴⁵ in quest'opera l'autrice ha trascritto fedelmente gli atti di vari processi penali per aggressione sessuale ai quali ha partecipato in quanto avvocato, sopprimendo soltanto i nomi delle persone implicate per ovvie ragioni di privacy, e trasformando il font con le grazie tipico dei documenti dei processi in un libro sperimentale con un font senza grazie. Secondo Goldsmith, il semplice atto di trasferire questo materiale verbale in un volume di poesia e in sans serif mostra il suo contenuto da una prospettiva comple-

43 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Day* (Great Barrington: The Figures, 2003).

44 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 2016).

45 Cfr. “Vanessa Place”, *UbuWeb*, <http://www.ubu.com/contemp/place/index.html>.

tamente nuova e lo consegna altresì a una comunità ricevente totalmente diversa.⁴⁶

Se l'esempio di Vanessa Place è ben più articolato rispetto ai processi di *cut-up* piuttosto tradizionali, in fondo, rappresentati dall'opera di Goldsmith poeta e da altri *uncreative writers*, d'altro canto mi sembra che vi sia in tutti questi processi un rischio formalista palese, quindi molto novecentesco, perché posizionato dogmaticamente rispetto al rapporto tra scrittura e soggettività, e perché il rifiuto del cliché romantico dell'ispirazione porta a sostituire quest'ultimo con un altrettanto antiquato processo di scrittura fondato su regole e temi interni. Contro un tale approccio potrebbe essere diretta l'affermazione critica di Christian Prigent secondo la quale lirismo e formalismo sono "les deux faces de la monnaie dont la poésie fait le plus souvent son commerce".⁴⁷

Un secondo problema, in fondo anch'esso legato a questo formalismo più o meno riconoscibile dell'*uncreative writing*, è che una volta messi in atto questi processi non mi sembra che si possa andare molto più avanti di così, cioè non vedo come una scrittura in cui il gesto poetico è relegato unicamente all'organizzazione di materiali preesistenti, per quanto le permutazioni possano essere infinite, possa evolvere e modificarsi ulteriormente in qualcosa d'altro; una prerogativa che dovrebbe invece essere, credo, la condizione *sine qua non* di un vero e proprio cambiamento di paradigma: si apre una via, e quindi non si sa dove porta. Mentre qui si sa benissimo, perché il metodo impiegato è di fatto chiuso in se stesso.

46 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 103 s.

47 Christian Prigent, *Ne me faites pas dire ce que je n'écris pas. Entretiens avec Hervé Castanet* (Paris: Cadex, 2004), 8.

Ma queste, si potrebbe dire, sono considerazioni tutto sommato personali. Da un punto di vista storico-critico, la teoria di Goldsmith presenta tuttavia un problema ancora più visibile. Secondo Goldsmith, e su questo gli si può forse dare ragione, la letteratura è rimasta storicamente arretrata rispetto alla pratica artistica. In arte, già Marcel Duchamp e Andy Warhol – le cui pratiche rispettive sono alla base dell'*uncreative writing*⁴⁸ – hanno notoriamente prodotto opere a partire da oggetti, immagini e processi preesistenti. Secondo Goldsmith, l'*uncreative writing* deve oggi operare similmente a Duchamp e Warhol, ma rispetto al linguaggio anziché rispetto agli oggetti e alle immagini, riallineando quindi la letteratura ad un approccio che invece è già storia nel mondo dell'arte moderna e contemporanea. È, anche qui, chiaramente impossibile ignorare il cambio di paradigma rappresentato innanzitutto dall'opera di Duchamp e può certamente essere fruttuoso applicare tecniche di *cut-up* e *readymade* alla scrittura poetica. Ma, al di là del fatto che questa convergenza di *cut-up* e *readymade* verbali esiste già in opere di scrittura come ad esempio i *Dépôts de savoir & de technique* di Denis Roche, pubblicati nel lontano 1980,⁴⁹ ciò che mi sembra paradossale è il tentativo di attualizzare la pratica poetica con metodi sviluppati nelle arti visive appunto molti decenni fa, metodi certo ancora attivi ma da tempo non più unici nella definizione della creazione artistica contemporanea. Non più unici perché – ed è forse qui il segreto dell'“uscita” dall'*anxiety of influence* avanguardistica – siamo, mi sembra, arrivati ad un punto in cui non abbiamo più bisogno di prescrizioni o teorie circoscritte per procedere. Inoltre,

48 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 125 s.

49 Denis Roche, *Dépôts de savoir & de technique* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

tale contraddizione nella tesi di Goldsmith, consistente insomma nel voler attualizzare la pratica poetica nel XXI secolo facendo uso di metodologie sviluppate nelle arti visive molti decenni fa, rimane anche quando l'*uncreative writing* si misura con materiali contemporanei quali *social networks* e *data clouds*,⁵⁰ perché il problema sta in realtà visibilmente nell'approccio e non nelle sue applicazioni.

Vi è infine un ultimo elemento problematico che vorrei evidenziare in relazione all'*uncreative writing*, un elemento più strettamente poetico in un certo senso: quello dell'*emozione*. Non è mia intenzione ovviamente opporre un lirismo trito all'*uncreative writing*, ma piuttosto mettere in evidenza quanto la dimensione emotiva generata da un processo di linguaggio poetico possa essere di una complessità e potenza la cui controparte concettuale non è peraltro sfuggita ad artisti come quelli menzionati sopra. In poesia, proprio perché il centro è nel linguaggio, emozione e concetto non sono separati, ma si informano reciprocamente in permanenza. Ridurre l'atto poetico a una pura organizzazione di materiali preesistenti – con il pretesto di criticare la soggettività da un lato e l'informazione dell'altro – mi sembra che comporti il rischio di ridurre a una dimensione molto limitata le potenzialità emotive e quindi concettuali, concettuali e quindi emotive, del testo poetico.

È invece forse possibile immaginare oggi dei dispositivi poetici più sofisticati, nei quali la coscienza della necessità innanzitutto politica di disperdere e criticare la soggettività, l'identità, l'ideologia, l'emotività codificata, l'informazione e la concezione – in effetti molto limitata e limitante – del linguaggio come comunicazione non è messa da

50 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 175 s.

parte o sostituita da un ritorno a forme poetiche meramente liriche o da canzonetta, né a rimembranze moderniste, ma non è allo stesso tempo relegata a una postura dogmatica ed avanguardistica fuori tempo massimo che trova come sola via l'imitazione letteraria di una forma specifica di arte concettuale postmoderna. Non si tratta di riaffermare una soggettività forte o ideologica nel processo poetico, né di rivendicare – come è stato spesso fatto in questi ultimi tre decenni – una visione anti-avanguardistica reazionaria, anzi revisionista, della poesia, ma di trovare piuttosto una terza via di emancipazione dall'avanguardia nella coscienza della rivoluzione del soggetto e dell'oggetto che essa ha generato in poesia (e al di fuori della poesia).

Questa via, pur non escludendo l'*uncreative writing* tra le sue pratiche possibili, non potrà tuttavia limitarsi ad essa. Si tratta a mio avviso di superare i tentativi di riattualizzazione di dogmi postmoderni destinati a spegnersi nel loro proprio fuoco, e di pensare invece dei dispositivi molteplici, dove la soggettività e la tecnologia possano assumere più ruoli a seconda delle esigenze. Se c'è qualcosa che la poesia può imparare dall'arte contemporanea, è appunto la scoperta della possibilità di utilizzare una grande diversità di media, tecniche, approcci, senza limitarsi ad un'unica regola per definire il proprio campo di azione. Ci troviamo, da questo punto di vista, in poesia come in arte, in una situazione di libertà in un certo senso appassionante quanto terrificante, perché non sappiamo più, in fondo, qual è l'innovazione da operare in quanto non sappiamo più qual è la tradizione da combattere. È forse in parte il cambio di paradigma sta proprio nel tentativo di assume-

re una posizione multidimensionale anziché definitiva, insomma di gettarsi nel vuoto.⁵¹

51 Non è questa la sede per sviluppare adesso un discorso sui miei propri modi di affrontare e ricercare questa “terza via”, per i quali rinvio ad alcuni miei articoli recenti che trattano diffusamente della questione anche in riferimento alla teoria di Goldsmith [qui riprodotti]. Nella nozione di “poesia come pratica artistica”, che utilizzo ormai sistematicamente per descrivere il mio lavoro, ma non, a differenza di Goldsmith, anche quello di altri poeti, l’equazione arte contemporanea - poesia è ribaltata rispetto al modello di Goldsmith: anziché utilizzare metodologie dell’arte moderna per definire il campo di azione della poesia contemporanea, concepisco invece la pratica poetica come una delle pratiche artistiche possibili nel contemporaneo. Ciò permette – riattivando l’attenzione concettuale per il linguaggio e per mezzo di dispositivi specifici (letture collettive, elaborazioni digitali della voce parlata, particolari forme di design tipografico, ridefinizione delle figure retoriche e dei rapporti semiotici e semantici, ecc.) – di utilizzare il linguaggio come reazione critica alla società dell’immagine e dell’oggetto, e di fare interagire altrimenti l’immaterialità del concetto e dell’emozione con la materialità del testo, senza limiti dogmatici e nel rifiuto totale del formalismo. La ridefinizione del soggetto, l’oggettivismo e l’eredità avanguardistica, come anche porzioni stesse di *uncreative writing*, non sono assenti da queste pratiche, ma non per questo le guidano, non ne sono il fondamento. Forse queste pratiche non hanno fondamento, o forse invece il loro fondamento è semplicemente nell’esplorazione dell’ignoto e in una concezione della poesia come esperienza.

[Originally published in *L'Esprit créateur* 58, no. 3 (2018): 378–57. DOI: 10.1353/esp.2018.0031.]

In this article I will situate my practice as a poet and artist within a contemporary framework, so that the reader will be able to see in my considerations a possible starting point for a more general analysis of some of the questions raised by poetic practice in the twenty-first century. The most visible question is perhaps the “anxiety of influence” – to paraphrase Harold Bloom who famously used this notion in a different context⁵³ – toward the avant-garde. The notion of *poetry as artistic practice* aims at distinguishing the nature of (a part of) my practice today from three interwoven approaches – still very much embedded in the twentieth century, as I will show – with which it maintains nonetheless a profound relationship: 1) so-called experimental poetry; 2) conceptual writing (from, say, Vito Acconci and Robert Barry to Vanessa Place and Kenneth Goldsmith); 3) the multiple uses of language in the visual and conceptual arts, from the works of, for instance, Lawrence Weiner, Marcel Broodthaers, and Rémy Zaugg up to Joseph Kosuth,

52 [This essay was written in the attempt to further focus on the question of poetry as artistic practice that started in the past with other writings reunited in the previous *Continuum: Writings on Poetry as Artistic Practice* (Earth: punctum books, 2015).]

53 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

and even Tino Sehgal. I will also show why what I do is different from what Jean-Marie Gleize calls “post-poésie.”⁵⁴

1. POETRY AS ARTISTIC PRACTICE: KEY THEMES

Starting *in medias res*, I would first like to propose a series of statements whose aim is to reveal the perspective from which I am thinking about the basic specificities of my poetic practice.

1. To see my poetry as an artistic practice means to underline the possibilities of poetry as a particularly powerful form of conceptual art, to choose poetry as a form of language-based immaterial, or semi-immaterial, artistic act rather than a literary genre. *Semi-immaterial* because language is at once material, through writing, voice and body, typography, etc., and immaterial, since its conceptual, cognitive, and emotional functions and impact on the world cannot be reduced to its manifestation as a sign.
2. This conception entails a particular attention to the immaterial, or again, *semi-immaterial* properties of the digital, although I conceive of digital devices as mere – yet highly significant – instruments among others, rather than as a possibility for poetic revolution. I do not consider myself a digital or technological poet whatsoever, and my work has no relation to positions such as those of Eduardo Kac or C.T. Funkhouser, whose weakness, in my opinion, is to consider the ex-

54 Jean-Marie Gleize, *Sorties* (Paris and Lyon: Questions Théoriques, 2009).

periment, the medium, and thus the form as the ultimate aim of the poetic experience. Such a problematic inversion can be more generally ascribed to any formalist approach, hence my distance from OuLiPo or any similar experiment. From this point of view, I entirely subscribe to Christian Prigent's position when he writes, "évacuer la position spontanément 'lyrique' (la plénitude du sujet et l'expressivité sensible) et son envers 'formaliste' (les jeux de langage immunisés de la pression de la subjectivité) – qui constituent les deux faces de la monnaie dont la poésie fait le plus souvent son commerce."⁵⁵

3. On the other hand, poetry is for me a form of volume made with words; it is at once concept, object, environment, and immersive space. My books, and my texts within them, are typographically conceived as sculptures, not only because of the attention to page and book design, but also because of the intrinsic non-linear and pluri-linear textual, rhetorical, and narrative features of my poetry. There are texts – and this is often the case in my work – that can be read as one observes an image or an object, thus not only from upper left to lower right, but from any direction and perspective. Moreover, the notion of *poetry as artistic practice* involves a conception of poetry as matter and space, in a position of complete continuity between the book and other poetry-based objects to which I will return later.
4. I therefore believe that a rigid opposition between materiality and immateriality in the arts, as well as

⁵⁵ Prigent, *Ne me faites pas dire*, 7–8.

between conceptual and aesthetic approaches, is not necessary anymore in the twenty-first century, as it relates to ideological *partis pris* inherited from the twentieth century's avant-garde, although language-based arts will always tend toward immateriality. That is why I prefer to use the term of *semi-immateriality* rather than *semi-materiality*, because the immaterial aspect certainly occupies, in poetry, a higher percentage. I find that such semi-immaterial property of language, conceived as much politically as artistically, is a particularly critical statement in a late-capitalist society where the "system of the objects"⁵⁶ still rules, while being regulated by the immateriality of finance.

5. By the same token, I think that it is time to overcome any rigid distinction between subjective or objective, emotional or "cold" approaches to writing, not only in the terms of modernism, or of a sometimes reactionary "neo-lyrical" opposition to it, not only in the Barthesian sense of the "death of the author"⁵⁷ and of a "zero degree of writing,"⁵⁸ not only in the sense of avant-garde objectivism, but also in the more recent sense of conceptual writing and cut-up, when those practices dogmatically refuse the role of the subject in poetry and of the author in the act of writing, like for instance in Kenneth Goldsmith's notion of "uncreative writing" (which I will discuss below). On the other hand, I think that the very notions of subject and text were irreversibly subverted and reorganized

56 Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

57 Cf. Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," in *Le bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 64–69.

58 Cf. Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

by modernist and conceptual practices. Any – at least Euro-American – poet worthy of the name should keep that in mind before starting to write.

6. Although an admirer of concrete poets (from Eugen Gomringer to Aram Saroyan, amongst others), of conceptual writers and of artists making a wide use of language, such as those mentioned above (Weiner, Zugg, Barry, but also Mira Schendel, Dieter Roth, and Bernar Venet, to name but a few), I always felt a little frustrated because of the shortness of the message in their language-as-material works. What I do with the idea of *poetry as artistic practice* is to inject into the artistic practice a more deployed and complex poetic discourse, basing myself on the increasing openness of language-based practices of these last decades, and confident in the fact that, counter to the messaging and Twitter culture, people will want to follow an articulated text that is proposed at the same time as a fully-fledged artwork. In parallel, I aim at renewing the approach to writing by attempting to find a middle point between a conceptual and a subjective poetic approach.
7. My conception of *poetry as artistic practice* does not substantially modify the form of the poetic text, apart from the visual project *Augmented Writing*, which I will briefly discuss below, and, within the poetry book, some minimal, although significant, typographical processes, such as the use of superimposed words and letters, simultaneous narratives represented by columns of text, and sometimes the layout of the text in different directions. Poetry is preserved as a collection of relatively recognizable structures and, in

contrast to concrete poetry, I rarely make use of different fonts or font sizes. Yet the rhetorical and narrative nature of the text under the form is, I believe, profoundly modified by this shift of poetry from literature toward artistic practice. I will show how and why I conceive the textual work *poietically* (from the Greek *poiein*, “to make”), as a making in-the-real, and as a collective, worldly experience where traditional forms of subjectivity in writing are expanded through artistic paradigms and devices such as collective multilingual performances and text digital processing. Still, while being transferred and redefined in the field of contemporary art, for me poetry also remains what it is: poetry is at once, so to speak, *poiesis* and *poesis*. As for the immateriality of poetry as a conceptual and political act, this cohabitation of *poiesis* and *poesis* in *poetry as artistic practice* implies a deep criticism – operated through language – of the image as dominant, power-led artistic material. Similarly to other poetic statements in modernity, frequent in France (André Du Bouchet, Claude Esteban, Jean-Marie Gleize, Pierre Guyotat, Denis Roche, Claude Royet-Journoud), the notion of *poetry as artistic practice* is intrinsically iconoclastic because, to put it in Jean-Marie Gleize’s terms, poetry “replace[s] the image with the word ‘image.’”⁵⁹ But it is also – as I like to say with a neologism I created to describe the works of other poets too – *grammoclastic*, that is, its critique is directed toward the image as much as toward codified and normalized linguistic constructions.

59 Jean-Marie Gleize, “Simplifications/Conversions,” *Formule* 13 (2009): 255.

8. The conception of *poetry as artistic practice* entails for me a progressive change of publication policy: I am preparing my forthcoming book, entitled (((, as an international and multilingual publication with an art publisher. Instead of first publishing the book in Italian – the language in which it was initially written – with an Italian poetry publisher recognized as such, and only later in translation, (((will be published *d’emblée* in three languages (Italian, French, English) by an art publisher with international distribution, with a specific layout and with my active collaboration in the translation process both in French and English.⁶⁰ Previously, my book *Remote Vision* was realized in a dual-language English–Italian edition (each section first entirely in English then entirely in Italian) with the American publisher punctum books, long before its recently published Italian equivalent.⁶¹
9. Although I am certainly intrigued by sound poetry, performative poetry, visual poetry, and other hybrid poetic forms, the notion of poetry as artistic practice that I ascribe not only to my books, but also to my own writing-based performances, installations, sound pieces, videos, and two- and three-dimensional works, precisely aims at distinguishing my practice

60 [Because of editorial vicissitudes, (((was finally first published in Italian in 2020, and then in trilingual edition by punctum books in 2021.]

61 Alessandro De Francesco, *Remote Vision: Poetry 1999-2015* (Earth: punctum books, 2016) and *La visione a distanza* (Osimo (Ancona): Arcipelago Itaca, 2018). It is worth noting that, although based in the us, punctum expressly requires bibliographical references to their books to be simply situated on the planet Earth and within our galaxy. It has to do with the change of publishing policies I discuss here.

from a tradition to which it only loosely belongs. My texts are not initially written to be performed, there are no particular visual or sonic word games within them, nor am I particularly interested in “inside vs. outside the book” narratives, which I also consider as a hypostatized heritage of the avant-gardes. Similarly, I tend to avoid as much as possible the use of the terms “installation” and “performance,” to which I prefer “reading environments” (spaces in which a poetic-textual experience is produced) and, more generally, “text-enhancing devices” (digital and analogue devices that are applied *a posteriori* to the text or with which preexisting text is confronted). I shall return to these notions in the last part of the article.

10. As already stated, and as will become clearer in the next section, *poetry as artistic practice* means for me to shift the conception of poetry as a literary genre toward contemporary artistic practices. In my writing it is difficult to find typical poetic-lyric automatisms, not only those of classical poetry (meter, rhymes, standard rhetorical figures, exclamations and invocations, etc.), but also those of experimental poetry (deliberate analytic coldness, displayed multiplicity of meta-poetic references, wordplay, grammatical and linguistic assertions *à la* Gertrude Stein, lists and repetitions, and other similar poetic processes that systematically recur in modern and contemporary poetic practice since the second half of the twentieth century). I believe that none of such features are identifiable in a text like the following:⁶²

62 Alessandro De Francesco, (((, trans. Andreas Burckhardt and Alessandro De Francesco (Earth: punctum books, 2021), 37

late afternoon coming home from work he realizes
that a highly dense body stands motionless in the door's
arch between rooms it seems to be observing him
but it doesn't have eyes nor a definite shape it doesn't
say anything doesn't want anything it's a
territory of tissues

I would now like to substantiate these claims further with some historical and theoretical considerations.

2. A) POETRY IS A RECENT ART FORM

The common ground between the practice of several contemporary poets and the modern Western tradition – from which my practice also stems and after which it tries nonetheless, like others, to produce a further change of paradigm in the twenty-first century – could be summarized by the following claim: poetry as intended in modernity is a relatively recent art, just a little older than photography, because there is an unprecedented direct correspondence between events such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolutions; scientific discoveries such as the theory of the species, radio waves, and atomic fission; the two World Wars; and the evolution of modern poetry in forms like free verse, poetic prose, Romantic and then Modernist meta-poetry and theoretical self-awareness, typography-based poetry, and later the use of language in conceptual art, concrete poetry, and post-genre and conceptual writing. In other terms, post-lyrical and/or post-metric paradigms – originating from works like Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* and his philosophical, often

anti-metaphorical “canzoni libere,” Hölderlin’s *Hälfte des Lebens* and poems from the tower, Charles Baudelaire’s *Petits poèmes en prose* and later Mallarmé’s *Coup de dés*, which led to the twentieth-century historical avant-gardes, then to post-war experimentation – changed so deeply the very nature of poetry because the poetic forms themselves were changed by modern history in a newly direct way.

There are several theoretical statements supporting such a model that could help us further to clarify this background and then a possible passage toward the notion of poetry as artistic practice. First of all, a very important statement by Francis Ponge that is worth quoting entirely:

Donc, on a vécu, l’homme a vécu, dans la civilisation occidentale, depuis deux, trois millénaires, sur des figures de rhétorique qui sont les mêmes que les figures de géométrie. Tout cela date de Thalès et d’Euclide, et il se trouve que maintenant, on sait bien que la géométrie actuelle n’est plus la géométrie euclidienne. La physique, la même chose; on ne vit plus sur la même physique, il se trouve que le monde n’est plus compris, que les relations d’homme à homme et d’homme à monde, on ne peut plus du tout en rendre compte, on ne peut plus du tout y vivre, on ne peut plus voir le monde, on ne peut plus agir dans le monde selon ces règles et selon ces figures. Même chose, naturellement, pour l’art et pour les lettres, pour la rhétorique.

Tout cela a changé. Nous vivons, depuis à peu près un siècle maintenant, un peu moins d’un siècle, une sorte de révolution dans la conception de l’homme par l’homme, et du monde par l’homme, qui n’a pas eu d’égal depuis plusieurs millénaires. Des choses

comme l'arrivée du christianisme, des choses comme la Renaissance sont des événements beaucoup moins importants, parce qu'ils se placent encore à l'intérieur (civilisation occidentale) de la géométrie et de la rhétorique des Grecs. Nous vivons un remue-ménage beaucoup plus profond.⁶³

Even though, similarly to Julia Kristeva,⁶⁴ Ponge ascribes such a major epistemological and rhetorical change to the end of the nineteenth century, his claim could be extended both to the nineteenth century in general as well as to the historical period from which he is writing, the post-war neo-avant-gardes. Most significantly, Ponge puts such a revolution of both poetry and epistemology in relation with the end of Euclidean geometry and reminds us of the necessity of creating new rhetorical paradigms in order to read modern poetry, a challenge that I took up in my PhD thesis (the notion of *grammoclasme* mentioned above stems from this task).⁶⁵ Yet we must retain here the intensity of Ponge's emphasis on the paradigm shift that we are indeed still facing and that is still evolving more or less two hundred years later, and on the necessity of positioning ourselves within it. From this perspective, the work has, in my opinion, just begun, and such work could justify in itself – because of the caliber of the change it reflects – the necessity of further broadening the practice of poetry beyond the boundaries not only of literature in general,

63 Ponge and Sollers, *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers*, 89–90.

64 Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*.

65 Alessandro De Francesco, *Pour une théorie non-dualiste de la poésie (1960–1989)* (Paris: Éditions MIX, 2021).

but more specifically of the avant-gardes too, since the latter constitutes a historically connoted part of a much wider phenomenon.

I will now consider two other milestones of twentieth-century aesthetics in order to observe these questions from another angle. The first is Michel Foucault's notion of literature as expressed in *Les mots et les choses*. There Foucault identifies in the modern, bourgeois notion of literature the birth of a specific form of intransitivity of language due to the way in which language reacted historically to what Foucault calls the *nivellement* (often translated in English as "demotion," but perhaps better translated as "normalization") of language in modernity.⁶⁶ I will summarize this famous thesis very briefly. According to Foucault, the pre-modern conception of language as a form of knowledge through correspondence is replaced in modernity by a lack of transparency between language and the world that is related to the reconnotation of language as an object of knowledge in itself. Foucault identifies three strategies through which, since the nineteenth century, language aims at reactivating its cognitive power within and against its historical normalization: logic, interpretation (Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud), and literature. Literature is the most powerful intransitive reaction of language:

Au moment où le langage, comme parole répandue, devient objet de connaissance, voilà qu'il réapparaît sous une modalité strictement opposée: silencieuse, précautionneuse déposition du mot sur la blancheur du

66 Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 309f.

papier, où il ne peut avoir ni sonorité ni interlocuteur, où il n'a rien d'autre à dire que soi, rien d'autre à faire que scintiller dans l'éclat de son être.⁶⁷

In this conception of language as *parole répandue* one can easily spot the echo of Stéphane Mallarmé's *universel reportage*. Foucault is thinking not of Mallarmé in general, but of Mallarmé as a poetic paradigm in the second half of the twentieth century, representing a necessarily auto-referential and intransitive reaction to the modern normalization of language. Theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida read Mallarmé, as well as contemporary literature, in similar ways. In other words, in this model, modern literature manages to avoid ordinary language by avoiding at the same time a transitive relationship to the world. In my opinion, instead, in agreement with other scholars like Marjorie Perloff,⁶⁸ certain forms of post-war poetry until today, while still resisting the *universel reportage*, show other paradigms of connection between poetic language, ordinary language, and the non-linguistic world by developing specific textual and rhetorical (in Ponge's sense) strategies. One can think then of Paul Celan's famous question: "do we have [...] to think Mallarmé until the most extreme consequences?"⁶⁹ Such a question entails the possibility of a "new transparency" of language – also close to French "literality" (Gleize, Roche, Royet-Journoud) – and of a regained connection between language

67 Ibid, 313.

68 Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*. See in particular some comments on Robert Creeley's work (191f.)

69 "Sollen wir [...] Mallarmé konsequent zu Ende denken?" Paul Celan, *Der Meridian - Le méridien*, in *Le méridien et autres proses* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 68.

and the real under the light of a different poetic approach. But, by the same token, the belonging of poetry to literature as intended by Foucault is also automatically questioned. With the notion of *poetry as artistic practice* I wish to affirm and further radicalize this regained relationship between language and the real through poetry and against an auto-referential notion of literature. As stated above, *poetry as artistic practice* is not only *poesis*, but also *poiesis*.

Such a process originates in Ponge, Foucault, Celan, and Perloff (as a reader of conceptual writing and modernist American poetry), but also in a major artistic position of the second half of the twentieth century: Broodthaers's letter announcing the opening of his imaginary museum, the Department of the Eagles, dated September 7, 1968. In Broodthaers's words, the ultimate task of his project was to "show in all their splendour, hand in hand, poetry and the visual arts."⁷⁰ I owe thanks to the French philosopher Fabien Vallos for the possibility of studying Broodthaers's writings on several occasions of collaborative work, and Vallos's reading of this enigmatic affirmation will help me here further to define the notion of *poetry as artistic practice*. According to Vallos, Broodthaers allows us to reunite poetry and the visual arts under the aegis of *poiesis*. Poetry is reactivated by the eminently "poietic" activity of the visual arts, whereas the visual arts are given back, through poetry, and as *poiesis*, a certain notion of value and appreciation that emancipates them from capitalist systems of value.⁷¹ In this union, poetry and the visual arts thus reveal

70 Marcel Broodthaers, *Works and Collected Writings*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2013), 198.

71 Fabien Vallos, *Chrématisitique et poiésis* (Paris: Éditions MUX, 2015), 154 f.

themselves as substantially the same thing, a *poietic* activity with a common political and cognitive strategy toward reality.

This is probably true in relation to Broodthaers, and Vallos's reading is innovative. Yet my notion of *poetry as artistic practice* does not coincide with this interpretation of the relationship between poetry and the visual arts, and it is perhaps precisely this non-coincidence that emancipates it from the twentieth-century avant-gardes. Vallos's interpretation of Broodthaers implies that poetry and the visual arts are fundamentally the same thing because the notion of *poiesis* substantiates them. On the contrary, my conception of a poetic shift toward artistic practice implies that a distinction between poetry and the visual arts is kept, otherwise such a shift cannot occur. Poetry can be *poiesis*, but in order to highlight its *poietic* value we do not need to negate its *poetic* nature. On the other hand, the *poietic* value negates the *literary* value in the Foucauldian sense, but not automatically the specificity of poetry. It is the paradigm shift in aesthetics and epistemology, occurring since the nineteenth century while the modern notion of "literature" is forged, that authorizes us to think about poetry in a non-literary and thus artistic way.

The deepest object of poetry is not the image or the material, nor is it the phantom of pure immateriality of conceptual art, but something semi-immaterial stemming from a system of signs: a mental image, a thought or an emotion obtained through typography or hand writing. Conceptual art is closer to such a point of view, but its starting point is different, since it essentially resides in (a disruption of) representation: the object on the one hand, even in Broodthaers, Joseph Kosuth, and Barry, and an im-

material *parti pris* on the other, for instance when Barry liberates a gas in the desert (and still needs objects in order to do it).⁷² Barry's conceptual poetry is one of the strongest historical examples, in my opinion, of a both typographically material and conceptually/emotionally immaterial form of poetry, in texts such as the following:

ALL THE THINGS I KNOW
BUT OF WHICH I AM NOT
AT THE MOMENT THINKING —
1 : 36 PM : JUNE 15, 1969.

Fig. 1. Robert Barry, *All The Things I Know But Of Which I Am Not At The Moment Thinking* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1974), cover (detail).

The *poiesis* of the visual arts is not initially based – as poetry is – on language and on its still unsolved enigma. That is why it is possible to operate this passage from poetry to artistic practices, because poetry in this sense is not art, as it is not literature either. Let us take this possibility of “going hand in hand” for poetry and the arts in a different direction: for me it is not about considering that through the lens of *poiesis* poetry and the visual arts operate in the same way, but rather to liberate poetry from literature and reactivate it as *one of the possible* contemporary artistic practices – a politically very powerful one, different from others precisely thanks to the convergence of iconoclasm and *grammocasm* mentioned above – through a series of

72 Robert Barry, *Inert Gas Series*. See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/109710>.

rhetorical, conceptual, typographical, aesthetic, and sociological processes.

2. B) “POST-POÉSIE” AND “UNCREATIVE WRITING”

Clearly, the historical interpretation that I have just summarized, even if we do not entirely embrace Fabien Vallos’s thesis according to which poetry and the visual arts operate in the same way, cannot be contained inside a still very literary and modernist conception of experimental poetry. The questions stemming from the considerations of the previous section are therefore the following: what can we make today, in the twenty-first century, of this particular history underlying some poetic forms? What has really changed since Broodthaers and Celan? Does this poetic historiography bring us toward a post-generic conception of writing, if not of artistic practice as a whole, and how much, on the other hand, can we still keep of poetry’s intrinsic specificities? I would now like to examine two contemporary theoretical models that give an answer to these questions, and to position myself in respect to them.

The first is Jean-Marie Gleize’s notion of *post-poésie*. If what Gleize calls *néo-poésie* is the contemporary inheritance of experimental poetry in its different manifestations, *post-poésie* is a contemporary evolution of poetry within a tradition that he also roots in the nineteenth century (Rimbaud in particular) – although in an almost exclusively Francophone canon – leading to a point where poetry is “liberated from itself.”⁷³ When – for example dur-

73 Gleize, *Sorties*, back cover.

ing a debate in March 2017 at the University of Siena – I objected to Gleize that all poetry, especially in modernity, is in a relationship of evolution and liberation from its older structures, Gleize explained that the notion of *post-poésie* is different because, refusing the ideological residue contained in the notion of “poetry” (that I ascribe through Foucault to the notion of “literature”), *post-poésie* implies a collection of practices that have basically no relationship to poetry as a form and sometimes to language in general. Examples could be Gleize’s own *prose en proses* or any kind of post-genre writing, but also experiences straddling conceptual writing, theory, performance-installation, and sociology such as those by Christophe Hanna and Franck Leibovici, or Olivier Quintyn’s noise performances, which are entirely language-free. These *sorties*, these ways out of poetry come from poetry but go somewhere else; hence the word “poetry” is at once still contained and negated in the notion of *post-poésie*.

As a theorist, my overall position on this notion could be the subject of another paper, and I have already expressed both my interest and my perplexities elsewhere.⁷⁴ What is important to emphasize here is that, although the notion of *post-poésie* is a significant attempt to engender a paradigm shift, it goes exactly in the opposite direction of what I have called *poetry as artistic practice*. “Post-poetry” creates a relationship between poetry and contemporary art by liberating poetry from its focus on language until, somewhat like in Vallos’s interpretation of Broodthaers, poetry and other artistic or even sociological strategies converge into the same mold. I, however, wish to bring poetry into

74 “De Francesco, Gleize, Gräf e la post-poesia,” dossier, *Semicerchio* 40 (2010): 42–53.

the field of contemporary art while maintaining poetry as a language-based process and by enhancing some features of the poetic discourse, such as conceptual and semi-immaterial implications, non-linear and parallel narratives, redefinition of rhetorical processes and text and voice processing. Furthermore, in the *post* of *post-poésie* there is still an avant-garde teleological position whose risk is to go against its initial scope, which is to liberate poetry from standardized molds. I think that the aim in the twenty-first century is no longer to liberate poetry from itself, but rather to redefine its possibilities from the inside. It is necessary to underline in this respect, independently from the theoretical positions of the authors, that for instance Gleize's own prose (like his ongoing cycle published at Fiction & Cie) and Franck Leibovici's work (books-projects such as *Portraits chinois*, (*des formes de vie*), and *Bogoro*) are both examples of a redefinition of poetry that cannot, in my opinion, be restrained to the "post" of "post-poetry."

Leibovici's work is also a particularly complex and articulated example of another influential paradigm in contemporary poetics: *uncreative writing*. According to the American poet and theorist Kenneth Goldsmith who invented this notion,⁷⁵ the amount of information produced in the digital age is so hypertrophic that the role of the poet today cannot be one of authorship anymore: instead of adding more words to the world, the role of the poet should be as a "word processor" (his expression), that is to say to reorganize already existing verbal material so as to reveal hidden connections and political implications, in order to filter the amount of data we are exposed to and re-

75 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*.

expose it to the reader under a new light. *Uncreative writing* in its most essential forms consists in mere acts of copy-paste, like Goldsmith's piece *Day*, in which he simply copied and typographically reorganized into a book the daily issue of the *New York Times* of Friday, September 1, 2000,⁷⁶ or *Statements of Facts* by Vanessa Place,⁷⁷ where the author faithfully reproduced in sans serif font the proceedings of several sexual assault trials in which she took part as a lawyer (her daily job), only removing the names of those involved for reasons of confidentiality. According to Goldsmith, the simple act of transferring this verbal material into a poetry book and into sans serif throws a completely new and profoundly critical light on its contents while delivering them to a different receptive community.⁷⁸

In other words, if, *mutatis mutandis*, Tino Sehgal claims for his "constructed situations" that there are too many objects in contemporary art and we therefore need, instead of adding new ones, to create works that are entirely made of human relations,⁷⁹ Goldsmith claims that the poetry of today needs to reorganize the relationships among verbal materials rather than add new "original" content. It seems to me that his position – maybe like Sehgal's – is also still largely embedded in a classical avant-garde paradigm. Uncreative writing is first of all an evolution of American conceptual writing, dating back to the 1960s by artists such as Acconci, Barry, John Cage, and Bernadette Mayer. Goldsmith openly belongs to this tradition and is the co-

76 *Ibid.*, 118f.

77 Vanessa Place, *Statements of Facts* (New York: Ubu Editions, 2008).

78 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 103f.

79 See "Tino Sehgal in an Evolutive Discussion with Hans-Ulrich Obrist," *AnOther Magazine* (Fall/Winter 2013), <https://z.umn.edu/3mii>.

curator of a discussed anthology of conceptual writing.⁸⁰ Moreover, differently from some of these previous experiences, Goldsmith's work, such as the aforementioned *Day*, presents quite traditional formalist constraint-based procedures. Above all, according to Goldsmith himself, the notion of *uncreative writing* openly stems from the work of two major twentieth-century artists, Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, who already used sampling techniques comparable to those of uncreative writing but with images and objects as core materials.⁸¹ According to Goldsmith, literature, especially in its mainstream manifestations, historically remained underdeveloped in comparison with the visual arts, and it is now its task to update itself following the latter. If, on the one hand, it is impossible to ignore such crucial approaches and it can be fruitful to apply them to poetry, on the other, is it not problematic to operate this update of poetry with paradigms that were developed in the arts decades ago? This contradiction remains even when *uncreative writing* deals with contemporary material such as social networks and data clouds,⁸² because it is a matter of method and not of subject. Instead of using paradigms pertaining to the past of the visual arts and injecting them into contemporary poetry, with *poetry as artistic practice*, I would rather propose to inject poetry into the visual arts, to operate a displacement of poetry as a possible new paradigm for contemporary artistic practice. I also do not agree with the fashionable yet tired and

80 Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, eds., *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

81 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 125f.

82 *Ibid.*, 175f.

tiring postmodernist claim according to which all we write is plagiarized from previously existing texts that we keep reorganizing. I think on the contrary that there are different levels of subjectivity and objectivity in writing, and that it is precisely these levels that can make the richness of poetry today.

Another risk of the dogmatic elimination of subjectivity in *uncreative writing* is, in my opinion, like in other manifestations of contemporary art, the loss of emotional depth and intensity. It is certainly necessary to nuance this statement when reading works like Vanessa Place's *Statements of Facts* or Franck Leibovici's *Bogoro*.⁸³ In both cases, one could argue that the objective transcription of dramatic trial cases (*Bogoro* features a complex methodology of transcriptions of trial proceedings at the International Criminal Court in The Hague on crimes perpetrated in the Democratic Republic of Congo) enhances the emotional intensity of the recounted facts. Yet my claim is that the introduction of a new interaction between subjectivity and objectivity in writing, which is a core feature of my conception of *poetry as artistic practice*, would allow a further evolution of poetry from the military boundaries of the avant-garde narrative. No matter how sophisticated, a mere transcription of verbal material will always respond to a tradition of objectiveness and coldness embedded in the ideology of the avant-gardes, even if affirmed otherwise. I propose a third way that integrates the change of paradigm operated by conceptual writing and yet takes it in a less dogmatic direction, reintroducing forms of authoriality, direct emotionality, and subjectivity in paral-

83 Franck Leibovici, *Bogoro* (Paris and Lyon: Questions Théoriques, 2012).

lel to word processing. I argue that these two paradigms, subjective writing and conceptual-objectivist writing, do not need to be opposed anymore: the posture of the twentieth-century avant-gardes can be at once integrated and overcome by an open approach in which different layers, techniques, and positions can be finally employed freely. This is what I do in my work, and this is one of the definitions of *poetry as artistic practice* in the twenty-first century: forms of poetry in which subjects, objects, and language are reorganized into open scenarios of possibility, individual and collective, spatial and conceptual; scenarios in which language is not a system of representation, but a living organism and an intrinsic part of the real. As a conclusion, I will now refer to some of these scenarios that I have created in my work.

3) TEXT-ENHANCING DEVICES

The aim of this article was not to describe in detail my artistic work but rather to give a theoretical overview of one my guiding notions and to explain why it is so important for me. Thus, I will just briefly evoke some examples of recent works that could exemplify some of my previous claims.

My work as an artist is entirely based on poetry as a conceptual gesture and on the expansions of my texts from the typographic composition inside the book toward other digital and non-digital media in which the text remains nonetheless the main material. I see those media not in opposition to, but as a continuation of the book, as con-texts for an augmented poetic experience. The texts that I use

for such augmentations are often initially written within and for the book, and they are only later reactivated by other apparatuses, such as readings with digital text and voice processing, collective and multilingual readings-performances, virtual reality environments, prints on paper and videos.

In the first section of this article, I mentioned some minimal typographical processes applied to the text, and later on I discussed the importance of a convergence between subjective and objective, conceptual and emotional approaches to writing. The following poem, from ((, condenses quite evidently these two instances, together with a proximity to a sort of poetic Object Oriented Ontology to which the whole book and perhaps a larger part of my current work – as I kept noticing afterwards – is relatively close, precisely in the terms of a disruption of the traditional dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity:

an array of ~~substances~~ and darkly colored bubbles
extends irregularly over the green space from above
it is possible to observe the result of the explosion
a mark ~~is positioned~~ in the lower right corner of
the image the set of ~~substances~~
elliptically shaped with variations of color tending
towards white

the highest percentages of materials found are
fragments of tissues and heterogeneous objects at
times fused together on the field surrounding
the set of ~~substances~~ some animals are moving
imperceptibly in multiple directions observing the
change of color and depth of the central terrain

The encounter between not only objective and subjective, but also between authorship and uncreative writing techniques, is particularly visible in my previous book *Remote Vision*, where a section made of free verse poems from my first book, *Objects Displaced*, is followed by *Inhabited Spaces*, which features a double narrative represented by two columns of text concerning different places in crisis situations (left column) and gynecological ultrasound reports (right column). All the verbal material from this section, differently from the previous one, is sampled from preexisting documents.⁸⁴

In my *Augmented Writing* project, which exists in print as well as exhibited forms mostly as large digital prints on paper, three methodological levels are involved: *uncreative writing*, authored poetry, and the restitution of the complex conceptual process underlying these pieces into an immediately recognizable textual-visual form consisting of bulging, semispheric superimposed textual layers.⁸⁵ Outside the avant-gardes, again, I claim that conceptual and aesthetic dimensions can cohabit and interact. In this example, cut-ups of news found on the web, handwritten report texts about 3D glasses also found on the web, and digital writing of original poetry are literally interwoven until they create a visual, as much as conceptual, multilingual and multidimensional narrative (fig. 2).

Often, although not always, parts of my poetry that were contained in my earlier books come to inform the “Augmented Writing.” In my performances and installations, which, as mentioned above, I prefer to call *reading environments*, this is even more frequent. There is a direct

84 De Francesco, *Remote Vision*, 275f.

85 See *Augmented Writing*, <http://www.augmentedwriting.com/>.

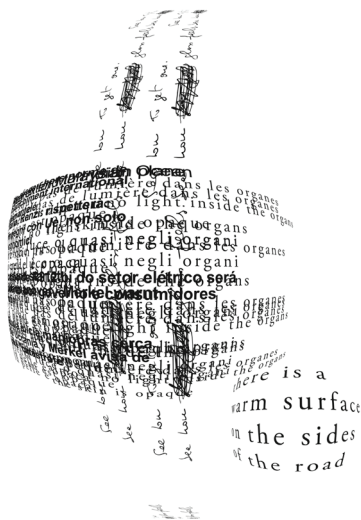


Fig. 2. Alessandro De Francesco, *Augmented Writing - AWO_11*, digital print on paper, variable dimensions, 2016.

passage from the book toward the *reading environment* (henceforth, RE), that I conceive as a collective experience of textual reception. The majority of my REs can be of two sorts: for digitally processed voice and text; and/or for groups of multilingual readers-performers. An example of the first kind could be *Foreign Body in Ascending Motion*, realized for the first time in 2014 in French (as *Corps étranger en mouvement ascensionnel*) upon invitation by Jérôme Game at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, then repeated in other languages and venues (fig. 3, overleaf).



Fig. 3. Alessandro De Francesco, *Foreign Body in Ascending Motion*, live reading environment for digitally processed spoken voice, ca. 45'. Auditorium of the Fondation Louis Vuitton, 2014. Photo by Laila Dell'Anno.

The visitors are immersed in a quadraphonic surround environment that is controlled and modified live by the performer, so that each RE is different from the other, and there is an aleatory factor related to the use of live electronics. The performer reads at the same time a selection from the eponymous prose. The corresponding text is projected on a screen located behind the performer. The two layers – the live digital processing of an audio data bank and the live poetry reading – interact permanently, creating a language that is completely different from any kind of sound poetry piece, since it does not involve any particular vocalization or bodily gesture. The intensity of this piece is entirely delivered by the text itself, the human presence of the performer, and especially by the digital soundscape evolving

live. All sounds are created through morphing, stretching, and filtering techniques applied to my own spoken voice that is nevertheless unrecognizable as such, in the sense that not only the underlying text hidden in the soundscape is unrecognizable, but the soundscape itself does not sound like human voice; it is rather a fabric of liquid sound pads broadly made up of deep bass frequencies and sinusoids.⁸⁶ Yet I claim that the listener is unconsciously aware that those sounds are nothing but human voice, although it is impossible to reconstruct the text that is hidden in this preverbal, or rather postverbal, narrative that questions the boundaries of subjectivity and the origins of the articulation of human language.

An example of the second kind is *Remote Vision – A Collective Reading Environment*, realized in several venues and initially produced in 2016 at the Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (fig. 4, overleaf).

This piece does not make use of digital voice processing and is not based on one reading voice only: rather, it features the collective human presence of a group of readers-performers and the simple resonance of their voices and bodies in space. *Remote Vision* is a collective, multilingual, modular, and thus continuously evolving reading environment, based on poetry and conceptual writing contained in several of my books. It proposes a human and immersive experience of the verbal matter: the text circulates in

86 Audio samples of this reading environment, recorded during a live performance at the Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in 2015, are available at <http://www.alessandrodefrancesco.net/flv.html>. Please note that only the two frontal speakers were recorded for stereo listening, so that in this recording it is impossible to hear the sound coming from the rear speakers at the time of the performance.



Fig. 4. Alessandro De Francesco, *Remote Vision - A Collective Reading Environment*, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, 2016. Photo by Karin Ospelt.

space through the voices of a community of performers that is distributed throughout the audience, like a part of the audience itself. Sometimes the reading is simultaneous, other times the texts are read one after the other in different languages, depending on the available translations and on the languages spoken by the performers. Parts of *Foreign Body* are also contained in this RE.

I am currently preparing an RE with an entirely simultaneous reading by a choreographed spoken choir.⁸⁷ Recently I have also been working on an RE in virtual reality (VR). My most advanced work in VR as of today is *Sans besoin de voir*, an RE with motion tracking via an occipital sensor. When wearing a special VR viewer (Occipital Bridge Viewer), the text simulated below appears frontally

87 [Since the publication of this article, realized in several venues.]

to the visitor, written white on black. The surrounding virtual room is entirely black. The voice-over of a woman, heard via Bluetooth headphones and filtered as if she left a message on an answering machine, reads the text in loop. Because the text is quite small at the beginning, the visitor will be tempted to approach it. By doing so she will discover that the text behaves in fact like a real object in space, but as a semi-immaterial one. She will be able to approach it, watch it from the sides, from above and below, etc., and then go through it. The sound of the voice-over reacts spatially to the movements of the visitor's head and body. If she breaches the text and looks behind her, the visitor will see the letters written on the reverse side. Even though this piece exists thanks to a very recent and advanced device, such technology is quite underused, when not misused. Instead of focusing on the spectacular potentialities of VR environments with wireless motion tracking, technology is employed in order to obtain a result that, in a conceptual hierarchy, comes long before the device as such. The text's content dictates the nature of the device and of the environment, not the other way round: this environment is specific, for evident reasons, to the matter of this text, which is also taken from *Corps étranger en mouvement ascensionnel* (fig. 5, overleaf).

The *reading environments* are not "writing environments": they are focused on the community of readers (both the public and the performers) rather than on the individuality of the poetic act, and this feature is completely independent from the degree of "uncreativity" of the presented texts. Because the scope of the RE is to enhance the textual matter already contained in my books, authored poetry, conceptual writing, and *uncreative writing* coexist

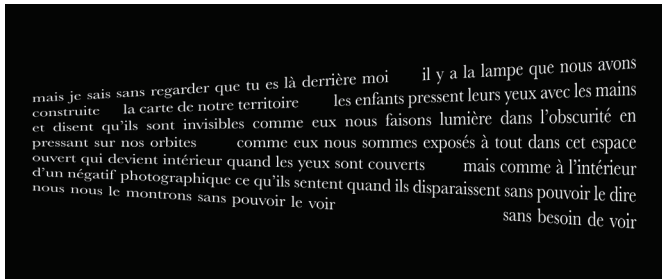


Fig. 5. Alessandro De Francesco, *Sans besoin de voir / Without Need to See*, VR textual environment with motion tracking, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and Anima Ludens, Brussels, 2017-2018, screen simulation.

freely and without excluding each other, exactly as in my written production.

I first used the term of “text-enhancing devices” to describe this kind of work for an open lecture I gave at the European Graduate School in 2013. At the time, Avital Ronell, present in the room, publicly criticized this terminology after my lecture because she saw in it masculine dominant semantics such as those of “penis-enhancement pills” and the us army’s “enhanced interrogations.” On the contrary, as I already tried to explain on that occasion, I think that a poetologic and conceptual approach to the notion of “text-enhancing device” shows its potential significance in another light, pertaining to the use of language as a mode of intensification of the experience of perception and of life in general, and to the use of certain devices as modes of textual expansion, that is, of activation of scenarios of possibility within the poetic text. These expansions, intensifications, and augmentations, instead of representing a semantics of domination, testify to the open vulnerability of poetry when it is confronted with

such scenarios of possibility, in the wake of this very important annotation by Celan: “la poésie ne s’impose plus, elle s’expose.”⁸⁸ Celan wrote this sentence in French in his notebook because he was aware of the double meaning of the French word “exposition”: exposition as vulnerability, and exposition as exhibition of a work of art. As such, it can be seen as a remarkably powerful definition of what I call *poetry as artistic practice*.

88 Handwritten note, March 26, 1969.

Poésie et poièsis.

Degrés de matérialité du langage, de l'objet et de l'image

[Originally written for a lecture at the Fondation LUMA Arles in February 2018, upon invitation by Fabien Vallos and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Photographie d'Arles for the symposium *Arts et langages*, then published the same year in the eponymous proceedings edited by Fabien Vallos for the ENSP press.]

« L'acte poétique consiste à percevoir,
non à représenter »⁸⁹

De la même façon, quelque part, dont la notion grecque de *technè* s'est scindée depuis la culture latine en celles d'art et de technique, la notion de *poièsis* s'est dissoute dans la différence entre arts plastiques et poésie, mais avec des conséquences presque opposées. Là où la différence entre art et technique a permis, du moins historiquement, l'affirmation de la pratique artistique comme discipline dont la finalité est en elle-même, celle de la technique comme discipline dont la finalité est transitive (y compris pour la réalisation de l'œuvre d'art) et celle de la technologie comme discipline dont la finalité est utilitaire (y compris pour la réalisation de l'œuvre d'art), la disparition de la notion de *poièsis* a, quant à elle, éloigné la poésie et les arts plastiques d'un geste originaire commun : celui du « faire ».

89 Lacoue-Labarthe, *La poésie comme expérience*, 99.

Cet « i » qui est tombé de « poiesis » à « poesis » trace l'histoire d'une différence historique entre la poésie et les arts plastiques que Fabien Vallos, en référence à Martin Heidegger, qualifie d'ontologique. Selon l'analyse de Vallos,⁹⁰ il s'agit d'une scission qui a trait aux modalités de détermination de la valeur, et donc aussi de la dimension matérielle du faire et de l'œuvre en tant que produit du faire. De ce point de vue, la notion de « différence ontologique », qui s'articule autour de la matérialité de l'étant et de la soustraction immatérielle de l'être, est d'autant plus pertinente. Le lettre de Marcel Broodthaers annonçant en 1968 la création du *Département des aigles*, et notamment le passage où Broodthaers annonce vouloir quelque part annuler cette différence ontologique en faisant « briller main dans la main » les arts plastiques et la poésie, est devenue une référence centrale aussi pour mon travail, qui se situe précisément, depuis le début des années 2000, à la rencontre entre la poésie et la pratique artistique. Cependant, là où pour Fabien Vallos la lettre de Broodthaers permet quasiment de tracer la possibilité d'une nouvelle identité historique entre la poésie et les arts dits plastiques sous l'égide d'une redéfinition de l'économie de l'œuvre, pour moi – et j'essaierai d'approfondir ici cette lecture – elle signifie aussi le maintien d'une différence, et ce au-delà des intentions de Broodthaers en 1968, mais plutôt dans la perspective de l'art d'aujourd'hui et même dans la possibilité d'une pratique artistique contemporaine qui soit en mesure de redéfinir son rapport au 20^{ème} siècle. Cette différence ne sera pas ontologique ici car, contrairement à Heidegger, je ne crois pas que la poésie soit le degré ul-

90 Vallos, *Chrématisation & Poiesis*.

time et en même temps impossible de manifestation de l'être en soustraction mais habitant le langage, une position dont les résidus métaphysiques me paraissent en forte contradiction avec une vision *poiétique* de cette pratique humaine.⁹¹ Cependant, c'est une différence qui se fonde, elle aussi, sur différents degrés de *matérialité* de l'œuvre.

La poésie est une activité que je qualifierais de « semi-matérielle » : d'une part, la forme du texte, la typographie, la voix en tant qu'expression du corps et même l'encre, le papier et l'objet-livre ont assumé, au fil des siècles, une importance croissante pour les poètes, dès le poème typographique séminal qu'est le *Coup de dés* de Mallarmé ; d'autre part, dans toute formation langagière, le sens et ses conséquences excèdent en permanence la manifestation physique de l'écriture et de la voix, et ceci est d'autant plus vrai lorsque l'on observe les structures rhétoriques complexes qui sont à la base du langage poétique. Le caractère objectal du langage sera, par la force des choses, toujours moins matériel que celui des objets mêmes. D'où, on le sait, l'intérêt de l'art conceptuel pour le langage et l'affirmation récurrente de Joseph Kosuth que l'art conceptuel se fonde essentiellement sur la signification.⁹² Ces caractéristiques à la fois matérielles et immatérielles du langage, augmentées par la liberté et la complexité propres au langage poétique en particulier, ont été davantage marquées depuis le 20^{ème} siècle par des phénomènes tels que la poésie concrète et la poésie conceptuelle, la première étant le

91 Pour une critique de cet aspect de la réflexion poétologique de Heidegger, cf. Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique V : poésie sans réponse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

92 Cf. p. ex. Belvedere 21, "Lecture von Joseph Kosuth," YouTube, 10 octobre 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yysDHJ1BvPg>.

degré ultime de matérialité typographique du geste poétique, la seconde reproduisant les fonctionnements de l'art conceptuel, immatériels et processuels, dans la pratique poétique.

Je suis en même temps de ceux qui pensent, comme par exemple Emmett Williams, que ce genre de définitions, « concrète », « conceptuelle », ne distinguent que très artificiellement ces formes d'autres qui seraient plus traditionnellement poétiques.⁹³ Dans la notion de poésie, d'autant plus si l'on la conçoit comme *poiësis*, il y a la place pour des phénomènes langagiers très divers. Ce qui reste, pourtant, c'est que la base de la poésie étant le langage, même lorsque la poésie se sert d'objets ou d'autres dispositifs, le degré « semi-matériel » propre au langage qui est mis en évidence par la poésie sera toujours moins matériel que toute pratique plastique, y compris conceptuelle, se servant d'objets afin d'exister. Lorsque Robert Barry – dont la production poétique des années 1970 est par ailleurs l'un des exemples les plus remarquables de jonction entre le geste poétique et le geste conceptuel sous l'égide de l'immatériel et de l'indéterminé – libère des gaz dans le désert comme geste ultime de l'immatérialité conceptuelle dans les arts plastiques, il se sert néanmoins d'objets afin de produire ce geste.⁹⁴ Si bien qu'il faudrait plutôt dire que la poésie est une pratique « semi-immatérielle », car, à la différence des arts plastiques, la prépondérance du langage dans la poésie implique finalement une priorité de l'immatériel sur le matériel. Cette immatérialité du langage, c'est le déploiement du sens excédant à travers le système des

93 Emmett Williams, introduction à *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), VI sq.

94 Barry, *Inert Gas Series*.

signes, une propriété qui reste valide même dans les cas les plus extrêmes, tels que l'écriture asémantique. Une telle *excédance* de la possibilité de signification est bien entendu beaucoup plus intense dans la poésie que dans les autres modes de manifestation du langage.

L'image est un troisième élément dont il faut tenir compte outre au langage et aux objets : du point de vue sémiotique, l'image est à la fois un objet et un système de symboles et de représentations, de même que le langage est un objet en tant qu'écriture, ainsi qu'un système de signification et aussi de représentation. C'est là où la notion de *poièsis* peut jouer un rôle cognitif et politique central, car elle permet de distinguer la poésie des autres formes langagières aussi bien que des images et de ramener le langage, indépendamment de la complexité significationnelle en jeu, à l'unicité anti-représentationnelle de son geste : une poésie conçue comme *poièsis* trouve en elle-même la raison de son existence et ne peut exister dans d'autres formes que celle de son mode de *présentification*. Elle est, de ce point de vue, éminemment anti-représentationnelle, elle ne se prête pas au processus interprétatif, elle n'est pas métaphorique, pas métaphysique, et la rhétorique standard n'est pas appropriée afin de définir ses fonctionnements.⁹⁵ D'où son caractère à la fois iconoclaste, contre

95 « L'image poétique n'est donc nullement identifiable à la métaphore, laquelle ne représente au mieux qu'une translation de matériaux inertes, un déplacement de résidus fossilisés dans les couches anciennes de la conscience. La métaphore suppose une histoire, un passé culturel dont cette opération essentiellement rhétorique tire un parti déjà codifié ». Claude Esteban, *Critique de la raison poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 113. J'ai tâché d'explorer la question rhétorique de la poésie de la modernité dans *Pour une théorie non-dualiste de la poésie*.

les représentations et les projections engendrées par les images,⁹⁶ et – selon un néologisme que j’ai proposé d’utiliser dans plusieurs occasions – *grammoclaste*, c’est-à-dire que la critique *poiétique* de la représentation s’adresse aux images aussi bien qu’aux constructions langagières codifiées.

Les arts plastiques, tout en se fondant aussi, par définition, sur le « faire », peuvent s’approprier cette modalité particulière du faire qu’est celle de la poésie, en faisant pénétrer autant que possible la semi-immatérialité iconoclaste et *grammoclaste* du langage poétique dans leurs démarches. La poésie, à son tour, est modifiée par la relation aux objets et aux images entretenue par les arts plastiques, jusqu’à faire évoluer en conséquence, comme on le verra mieux par la suite, son rapport à la littérature, ses stratégies de prise langagière sur le monde et les modes de manifestation du sujet. Tout cela est finalement la preuve d’une différence qui demeure, d’autant plus que toutes les démarches plastiques depuis Broodthaers n’ont finalement pas choisi la voie de l’immatériel. Le caractère immatériel, ou, mieux, « semi-immatériel » de la *poièsis* n’est paradoxal qu’en apparence, et il en va d’une critique de la représentation qui est d’autant plus cruciale aujourd’hui. Mais afin que cette critique puisse être pleinement réa-

96 Cette citation de Pierre Guyotat me paraît bien résumer ce que j’appelle « unicité anti-représentationnelle » et « iconoclastie » de l’écriture poétique : « Je crois que l’image n’est plus possible. Dans mon texte je me suis efforcé de supprimer[r] toutes les images. Le recours à l’image oblige à dire : comme. Pourquoi désigner une chose par l’intermédiaire d’une autre ? On doit pouvoir l’exprimer sans sortir du mouvement normal de l’affirmation. Tel geste doit être dit, telle chose doit être citée, purement et simplement ». *Littérature interdite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 11.

lisée il est nécessaire, à ce niveau, de maintenir la différence entre la poésie et les arts plastiques car ces derniers opèrent tout d'abord à partir d'une fonction critique des objets et des images, ce qui est tout aussi nécessaire mais intrinsèquement différent d'une pratique qui opère à partir du langage, pour objectal qu'il soit. Cela serait peut-être une manière d'instaurer une nouvelle forme de sincérité après que Broodthaers a ouvert le champ à une réflexion sur l'insincérité du geste artistique.⁹⁷ L'iconoclastie et la *grammoclastie* parallèles que le geste poétique est susceptible d'amener au geste artistique sont à mon avis, de par leurs possibles critiques et dans la connexion profonde entre langage et réel qu'elles déploient, des modes de cette nouvelle sincérité.⁹⁸

Je voudrais maintenant, en guise de conclusion, approfondir cette question en analysant brièvement deux paradigmes parallèles à celui de Broodthaers. Le premier, proposé par Kenneth Goldsmith avec la notion de « uncreative writing », ne mène pas la poésie et les arts

97 Vallos, *Chrématisation & Poïèsis*, 158.

98 En passant, il faudrait peut-être remarquer une autre différence, celle entre les termes d'« arts plastiques » et d'« arts visuels : » contrairement à la mode actuelle qui vise à refuser le premier terme au profit du deuxième, je préfère le terme d'« arts plastiques » car il se fonde précisément sur le *poïein* plutôt que sur les modes de représentation, sur les matériaux nécessaires à la création des images et des objets plutôt que sur le rapport aux images en soi, sur le réel plutôt que sur la fiction. C'est d'ailleurs cette plasticité du faire qui peut sans doute renforcer la connexion entre la poésie et les arts plastiques, où ce geste d'aller « main dans la main » témoigne en même temps du maintien d'une différence active. Il serait intéressant, à ce propos, de développer une réflexion spécifique sur les évolutions de la sculpture et du volume en tant qu'autres modalités de critique de la représentation, notamment en relation aux observations sur la vie des objets formulées dernièrement par l'ontologie orientée objet.

plastiques « main dans la main », mais il active, plutôt, des modalités propres aux arts plastiques à l'intérieur de la poésie. Le deuxième, résumé par ma propre notion de « poésie comme pratique artistique », renforce la possibilité du passage inverse, celui de la poésie comme pratique littéraire à la poésie comme l'une des pratiques plastiques possibles, demeurant fondée sur le langage.

Selon Kenneth Goldsmith,⁹⁹ la littérature se trouve dans une position historiquement arriérée par rapport aux arts plastiques, notamment lorsqu'il est question de subjectivité : la littérature, à la différence des arts plastiques, ne se serait pas aperçue du fait que dans la modernité l'hyper-trophie de l'information ne justifie plus un geste d'ajout autorial et subjectif à la matière-langage, si bien que l'écrivain du présent et du futur, au lieu d'être un auteur, doit devenir ce que Goldsmith appelle un « word processor », à savoir un réorganisateur de matière verbale préexistante, en particulier dans le web. La poésie, dans ce cadre, doit répondre aux critères d'une écriture non-créative (*uncreative writing*), c'est-à-dire non-autoriale. Goldsmith justifie sa position en se basant sur deux pratiques majeures du 20^{ème} siècle, celle de Marcel Duchamp et d'Andy Warhol, qui ont opéré de façon similaire à ce qu'il appelle « uncreative writing » non seulement avec le langage, mais surtout avec des processus, des images et des objets. Je trouve que la thèse de Goldsmith, pour intéressante et influente qu'elle soit, présente plusieurs inconvénients, justement, *poiétiques*. Le premier, et le plus évident, c'est qu'afin de renouveler les démarches poétiques au sein du discours artistique au 21^{ème} siècle, Goldsmith se base sur des pa-

99 Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* (je résume ici l'ensemble de la thèse exprimée dans ce recueil d'essais).

radigmes qui appartiennent bel et bien au 20^{ème} siècle ; non seulement Duchamp et Warhol, mais aussi certaines formes d'écriture conceptuelle américaine d'où l'*uncreative writing* clairement découle. Le deuxième, c'est que cette position entraîne facilement des processus d'écriture formaliste à contrainte, ce qui est souvent visible dans le travail poétique de Goldsmith lui-même, par exemple dans des œuvres telles que *Soliloquy* – un livre où sont transcrites toutes les phrases énoncées par l'auteur dans le laps d'une semaine – et *Day* – où Goldsmith a entièrement recopié et réagencé typographiquement l'édition du *New York Times* du vendredi 1^{er} septembre 2000. En outre, le dogmatisme de ce positionnement anti-subjectif peut facilement exclure des manifestations d'intensité émotive qui ne sont pas juste une vieillerie du passé, mais l'une des caractéristiques les plus puissantes de la semi-immatérialité du langage poétique, au même titre que ses implications conceptuelles.

C'est pourquoi, et c'est ma proposition d'une pratique poétique au 21^{ème} siècle, tout en reconnaissant l'importance du *word-processing* et tout en le pratiquant moi-même, je crois qu'il faut se dérober au dogmatisme des avant-gardes en ne pas excluant le retour à des formes poétiques où l'autorialité, la subjectivité et l'émotivité sont à la fois réintroduites et modifiées, c'est-à-dire rendues plus sophistiquées, par les paradigmes de l'art moderne et contemporain. C'est ce que j'appelle « poésie comme pratique artistique : » en son sein, un passage s'opère sur la base des possibilités semi-immatérielles de la *poiësis* poétique, un passage, et une nouvelle forme de « sincérité », qui visent à maintenir la complexité et la diversité du discours poétique en le soustrayant, en même temps, aux

risques formalistes des évolutions actuelles de l'écriture conceptuelle ainsi qu'à la brièveté et à l'itérativité des messages poétiques typiques des usages « classiques » du langage dans l'art contemporain – néanmoins très importants pour beaucoup de poètes, dont moi-même – de Lawrence Weiner à Rémy Zaugg, de Yoko Ono à Bernar Venet.

Ce passage et cette nouvelle sincérité de la poésie comme pratique artistique permettent non seulement de redéfinir la présence de la poésie dans l'art contemporain simplement comme l'une des pratiques possibles – dont la puissance est précisément fondée sur la spécificité d'un certain traitement complexe de l'écriture, de la voix et des matériaux qui peuvent y être rattachés, en tant que véhicules de concepts et de sentiments –, mais aussi de redéfinir le rôle de la poésie en dehors des lisières de la littérature au sens moderne, sous l'égide de la *poièsis*. La littérature, comme le rappelle Michel Foucault, est une notion moderne, qui est née dans un contexte bien précis : celui de la réaction du langage à l'objectification et au « nivellement » auxquels il a été soumis dans la modernité.¹⁰⁰ Selon Foucault, la conception pré-moderne du langage comme véhicule de connaissance du monde cède la place, à l'époque moderne, à une prise de distance cognitive entre le langage et le monde car le langage devient lui-même un « objet de la connaissance »¹⁰¹ parmi d'autres. Cette prise de distance, qui est vécue comme la fin de l'époque de la « nomination », où le monde pouvait être nommé par le langage, rend ce dernier un objet et, tout en le plaçant parmi les autres objets, réduit son pouvoir cognitif et sa

100 Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 309.

101 Ibid.

« transparence »¹⁰² envers le monde. Il y a, selon Foucault, trois modalités par lesquelles le langage parvient, depuis le 19^{ème} siècle, à réactiver ses possibilités cognitives à l'époque moderne et à se dérober au nivellement de son objectification : la logique, l'interprétation (que Foucault repère historiquement chez Marx, Nietzsche et Freud) et la littérature. Or, dans les trois cas, cette réflexion nouvelle du langage sur ses propres modes de fonctionnement implique un mouvement auto-référentiel qui l'éloigne de sa transitivité vers le réel. La littérature est le cas le plus éclatant d'auto-référentialité :

Au moment où le langage, comme parole répandue, devient objet de connaissance, voilà qu'il réapparaît sous une modalité strictement opposée : silencieuse, précautionneuse déposition du mot sur la blancheur du papier, où il ne peut avoir ni sonorité ni interlocuteur, où il n'a rien d'autre à dire que soi, rien d'autre à faire que scintiller dans l'éclat de son être.¹⁰³

La littérature, de ce point de vue, serait ni plus ni moins définie, dans la modernité, par son auto-référentialité, de laquelle elle est par conséquent inséparable. Plutôt que de questionner l'extension de la position de Foucault dans le champ littéraire, deux choses importent ici : tout d'abord, il faut préciser que la question du réalisme n'a aucune incidence dans le modèle foucaultien, car le problème de l'auto-référentialité n'a pas de relation véritable à ce que la fiction peut opérer depuis le champ littéraire. Foucault soulève plutôt un problème de langage et de prise ontolo-

102 Ibid., 308.

103 Ibid., 313.

gique des dispositifs signiques en relation au monde. Par conséquent, une conception *poiétique* de la pratique poétique, de laquelle participe la notion de « poésie comme pratique artistique », subvertit précisément le caractère auto-référentiel et intransitif du discours littéraire en tant que distanciation du réel et du monde, en réinstallant, dans le *faire* poétique et artistique, la possibilité d'une prise cognitive, émotive et politique à partir du langage.

De ce point de vue, tout en gardant sa spécificité discursive dans le champ plastique, la poésie ne relève pas – ou plus – de la littérature. L'espace qui reste entre deux corps procédant « main dans la main », et en même temps leur proximité, leur contact, peut tracer, dans le contemporain, les contours d'un interstice de redéfinition réciproque, dans et pour le monde. Ceci ne peut avoir lieu, aujourd'hui, sous aucun dogme avant-gardiste. L'enjeu est trop grand : il en va de la possibilité de réagir à la fiction et à la représentation en affirmant, au contraire, l'appartenance du langage à l'énigme du réel. C'est précisément cela que j'appelle une nouvelle sincérité.

La poesia è una traduzione del tutto

[Originally published in 2017 in the Milan-based journal *I Molti*, edited by Maries Gardella and Andrea Parravicini.]

In questo breve testo rivendico il diritto di un linguaggio semplice finalizzato a riattivare delle nozioni che ad alcuni potrebbero sembrare datate o discutibili, ma che invece secondo me portano ancora – se opportunamente ripensate – i semi di una poetica contemporanea. Anni fa, durante una cena a Parigi, mi capitò di chiedere al mio interlocutore – un professore universitario specialista di poesia moderna e contemporanea – se fosse mai stato tentato di scrivere poesia lui stesso. Mi rispose che dopo alcuni tentativi giovanili ci aveva rinunciato, adducendo come ragione principale il fatto che la sua vita era troppo felice per poter essere una vita di poeta: “j’ai une vie trop heureuse, Alessandro, j’ai une vie trop heureuse”, ripeté. Gli risposi che la nascita era un trauma sufficientemente grande per poter giustificare la produzione di poesia durante tutta una vita. Forse oggi avrei risposto altrimenti. Avrei detto che la poesia può benissimo nascere anche dalla felicità, e che anzi la felicità è per me un motore essenziale di poesia. Che se è vero che non si può essere poeti senza dolore, non lo si può neanche essere senza felicità. All’epoca non avevo ancora ben capito (la mia poesia invece forse sì, prima di me) che il pacchetto del sentire viene tutto insieme, dolore e felicità, né che la poesia, attraverso il sentire trasferito, tradotto in parola, supera la stessa distinzione ontologica tra dolore e felicità.

La poesia supera molte distinzioni di questa sorta, è una macchina contro i dualismi.

Ma anche la risposta che diedi all'epoca aveva forse un senso: la poesia, traducendo il sentire in parola, traduce anche quanto precede il linguaggio. È una questione fisica oltre che emotiva. Come rendere parola ciò che parola non è? Questa è, credo, una delle domande fondamentali della poesia. Tra i linguaggi non verbali c'è quella fase della vita, dal feto ai primi mesi, in cui la pura percezione precede l'organizzazione sintattica. Per questo, anche, la poesia fa vacillare la lingua e i modi organizzati della rappresentazione. La poesia è il linguaggio meno linguistico e meno verbale che vi sia. È quel gesto che sta precisamente al punto di sutura, o di rottura, tra ciò che è linguaggio e ciò che non lo è. Inversamente, il linguaggio della poesia è molto più che parola. È uno spazio che unifica e che traduce, sotto la superficie della parola, l'enigma del reale e l'orizzonte del possibile. È competenza della poesia tutto ciò che è possibile al di là di quanto le nostre forme di rappresentazione organizzata individuano come reale, e quindi l'estensione della nozione di reale attraverso quella di possibile. Ricordandoci in permanenza la natura misteriosa e ancora completamente inspiegata della parola, la poesia, lo si è detto spesso, ne sovverte i limiti. Se è vero che la poesia può suscitare emozioni, essa si situa dapprima, a mio avviso, a uno stadio ontogenetico del linguaggio che precede l'emotività e la verbalità e che è per questo essenzialmente fisico e percettivo. La parola poetica ha un rapporto profondamente fisico e materiale con il linguaggio e il reale, di cui scopre il linguaggio come una porzione, come un organismo in evoluzione permanente.

Qualche mese fa, scendendo in macchina dai Grigioni accanto alla mia compagna, dopo aver passato molto tempo a contatto con gruppi di animali, in particolare pecore, la seguente frase è balenata nel mio cervello e non se n'è più andata: "la poesia è una traduzione del tutto". In cosa? In linguaggio verbale, o semi-verbale, mi verrebbe da dire. C'era già il tutto in quel momento: l'amore, il toccare e gli altri sensi, il sentire e il comportamento non verbale, il fuori del mondo, il dentro della vita, lo spostarsi nello spazio. E poi c'è il tutto al di là di quel momento, e soprattutto di quel momento mio: la poesia non è mai una questione di storie individuali. Da ogni particolare, frase o situazione, la poesia dà vita al generale, al tutto appunto. La poesia è come una specie di immensa sineddoche, ogni parola porta con sé tutta la storia e tutto il possibile, "come un gesto porta talora tutta la verità di un uomo".¹⁰⁴ Se, come magari farò, dovessi tentare di tradurre in poesia quel momento di tutto, il mio testo racconterebbe qualcosa di completamente diverso e di molto più grande della mia esperienza individuale. Al solito, serve a ben poco indagare la biografia dei poeti per capirne la poesia.

Nella traduzione del tutto, delle parti di tutto vengono inevitabilmente a perdersi. Si tratta, come in ogni atto di traduzione, di un atto asintotico, gioiosamente cosciente della propria perdita. La poesia, nell'atto di tradurre il tutto in linguaggio, ci avvicina al tutto nel momento stesso in cui smarrisce dei pezzi di tutto nel tentativo di renderlo parola. Tradurre il tutto significa saper fare delle scelte, quindi paradossalmente ridurre il tutto a una porzione, spesso molto ridotta, di testo. Questo conflitto tra scelta e

104 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 124.

tutto è intrinseco all'infinita stratificazione di senso della poesia. Ma ciò che resta di questo atto di traduzione è non la rappresentazione, bensì la penetrazione, l'osmosi linguistica con il reale e il possibile articolati nei temi di fondo dell'esistenza, sempre quelli, sempre più grandi mano a mano che si va avanti, sempre più enigmatici eppure più chiari e semplici, sempre più articolati nella loro disarmante semplicità.

Nel XXI secolo e in mezzo a tutte le violenze e incertezze della nostra epoca, si tratta forse di integrare ulteriormente questa presa di coscienza. Se il Novecento è cominciato - secondo una famosa tesi - nel 1914, allora il XXI secolo non è ancora iniziato nel 2017, al di là delle innovazioni tecnologiche, unico aspetto del mondo attuale ad aver subito un'evoluzione continua e radicale. Ma la creazione artistica non ha certo conosciuto un simile cambio di paradigma da almeno cinquant'anni. Si parla ancora, e giustamente, di arte contemporanea rispetto all'arte concettuale degli anni 1960-70 e ci troviamo ancora dentro, soprattutto in Europa, una dialettica di avanguardia e reazione, da superare con urgenza, come alcuni autori hanno fortunatamente cominciato a fare.

Nel proseguire in questo XXI secolo, è necessario lasciare davvero andare appigli ormai inutili, come quelli che portano alcuni di noi ad identificare ancora l'unicità della poesia rispetto alla prosa nel ritmo, nella metrica o nella musica della parola, oppure, come alcuni strutturalisti credevano, a definire la poesia secondo il suo grado di metaforicità. Ma anche a dire, con categorie ormai obsolete, che la poesia è un'espressione del soggetto (lirismo) o dell'oggetto (oggettivismo, avanguardia), ecc. L'innovazione si trova - solo in apparenza paradossalmente - in

rapporto con una filiazione che unisce la poesia del passato (chi legge penserà ad autori a piacimento, chi scrive pensa da Basho a Mallarmé, dal Barocco al Modernismo americano, da Leopardi e Hölderlin alla poesia concettuale, ecc.) alla poesia del presente. In cosa dunque la poesia, del passato e del presente, è diversa dalle altre manifestazioni linguistiche?

Sono la sintesi e la concentrazione di senso dovute alla “traduzione del tutto” che distinguono eventualmente la poesia (e la poesia in prosa nelle sue varie forme) dalla prosa narrativa o dalla narrazione poetica di tipo epico, non il metro o quant’altro. La poesia “concentrativa” (per non dire lirica, una parola compromessa nelle lingue latine, meno in tedesco) è più distante dalla poesia epica di quanto la poesia epica non lo sia dal romanzo. La poesia come traduzione del tutto sintetizza in un numero più o meno limitato di parole un abisso di reale e di possibile che va estendendosi mano a mano che si scende nel testo. Per simili ragioni anche credo che la poesia abbia un futuro come pratica artistica, plastica, riprendendo dei paradigmi propri all’arte concettuale e alle varie forme di astrazione dell’arte visiva moderna e contemporanea, piuttosto che continuare a iscriversi in una tradizione prettamente letteraria e discorsiva.

Questa sintesi, concentrazione e stratificazione di senso sovverte – come il reale e il possibile che cerca di rendere parola – l’organizzazione dell’immaginario, la sintassi dello sguardo o della scrittura, la rappresentabilità e la dicibilità. Il reale come tutto sovrasta la realtà. Ciò avviene sia all’interno del soggetto che all’esterno del corpo. Nel creare questo ponte con il tutto la poesia ci dà la possibilità di passare, di trasudare dal reale come proiezione di un

bisogno individuale al movimento generale delle cose del mondo. È in questo senso uno strumento molto potente contro la paura. Per simili ragioni si tratta, anche e soprattutto con la poesia, di intraprendere d'ora in poi quella che Judith Balso definisce una "rivoluzione delle soggettività", la sola rivoluzione reale. La traduzione del tutto non può avvenire senza che un profondo divenire delle soggettività non informi il linguaggio della poesia.

Concrete Poetry Doesn't Exist

[Lecture at the CNEAI, Paris, in 2017, for the international postmaster "Art by Translation" curated by Sébastien Pluot and Maud Jacquin. Text exhibited in the archive of Alison Knowles's 2017 exhibition at the CNEAI.]

1. CONCRETE POETRY DOESN'T EXIST

Both French literary theoretician Henri Meschonnic and American poet Emmett Williams, curator of the celebrated 1967 *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, claim that concrete poetry perhaps doesn't really exist. Meschonnic writes in his magnum opus *Critique du rythme*: "il n'y a pas davantage une poésie concrète et une poésie abstraite"¹⁰⁵ ("there is no such thing as concrete poetry or abstract poetry"). Williams writes in his introduction to the *Anthology*: "The editor's own definition - were he to attempt one - would place the emphasis on *poetry* rather than on *Concrete* [sic]. Concrete as opposed to what? Abstract?"¹⁰⁶

Yet they draw two opposite conclusions from this remark: Meschonnic maintains that no self-called concrete (or conceptual or sound or visual) poetry can be considered poetry, thus reducing, when not annihilating, the importance and the role of such forms in the history of poetry, or, as we should say to further explain Meschon-

105 Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1982), 641.

106 Williams, *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, V.

nic's claim, of what I call *poetry-poetry*, the only poetry that counts in Meschonnic's theoretical system. Whereas Williams wants to inscribe such forms, with an accent on their transnational and multilingual nature, in the history of poetic forms at the same level as any other.

Needless to say, I disagree with Meschonnic and I agree with Williams, and perhaps I would go even further: from the perspective of a poet and artist working with language in 2017 instead of in the middle of the neo-avant-garde, like Williams was, concrete poetry (and of course conceptual, performative, and sound poetry) is really just poetry at least like any other form of modernist or experimental poetry of the 20th century. Many of us, when we work, don't feel like doing concrete poetry, we just write poetry. By the same token, I don't feel there is a separation between my visual or installative work, my performative work, and my texts published in books. Everything is part of the same gesture. I think that the notion of concrete poetry describes a moment in the history of the arts that is now gone and maybe it was somehow already gone at that time, as Williams seems to grasp in his introduction to the *Anthology*. With an *a posteriori* insight, Williams could have done an anthology of experimental poetry where he could have included more traditional poets such as Paul Celan or the Language poets, or even an anthology of what I like to call "Language Art," where Haroldo de Campos and Eugen Gomringer, but also Celan and Charles Olson, could have been together with artists-poets like Vito Acconci, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Barry, Alison Knowles, and Bernadette Mayer.

In other terms, concrete poetry is a historically denoted term, but what it shows, together with other experiences

of the same period, is something bigger than its initial definition: new possibilities of interaction between poetry and the visual arts (or better said in French: the *plastic* arts in all their forms, that is also sonic, audiovisual, sculptural, etc., inside as well as outside the book). Similarly, when French sound poet Bernard Heidsieck preached in the 1950s what he called *poésie-action* and the *sortie du livre*, i.e., the necessity for poetry to exit the form of the book, he was expressing an important historical inquietude and at the same time limiting his action within the framework of the neo-avant-garde. It is not by chance that Heidsieck finally kept publishing his work in books until the end of his life.

From Williams's remarks in the introduction of the *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* we can delineate two levels:

1. the level of historicity, in which the avant-gardistic need for rupture played a crucial role, which led to the reclassification of its gestures into terms such as concrete poetry and action poetry;
2. and the level of forms seen from where we are now, in which it is much more interesting to analyze poetry and language-based works of the last sixty years all together, without solution of continuity.

I will try to briefly show why and how a concrete poetry piece by Timm Ulrichs or George Brecht can't be really separated, in terms of linguistic output and relations between poetic form and outer reality, from a poem by, say, Jean Daive or Lyn Hejinian. But I will then also try to propose a more updated classification of language-based forms and experimental poetic devices which should al-

low us to move more freely among the different traditional distinctions.

2. IT IS ALL ABOUT THE REAL

Concrete poetry emphasizes the materiality of the text, thus trying to reduce the distance between language and world. In concrete poetry language becomes both an object and a body acting within a world of which it discovers itself as a part. Semiotically speaking, these are indeed very particular ways of manipulating language. At a deeper level though, I believe that there is a common ground between these kinds of actions and other poetic forms of the same period, a deeper ground which allows us not to consider concrete poetry as a mere collection of formal games or of visually mesmerizing typographic gestures. This common ground is given in my opinion by how poetry in general reacts, in the second half of the 20th century, to major epistemological and historical changes.

Such a common ground could be defined by the following paradigm: approaching the real / subverting the real. There is a desire, and a need, in all post-1945 experimental poetic forms, to create new relations between language and the real, to discover language as a part of the real and to interact with the real through language, not only in order to dig inside it more deeply, but also to cognitively and politically subvert it.

ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	unordn g
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung
ordnung	ordnung

Fig. 6. Timm Ulrichs, *Ordnung Un/ordnung* (as in Williams’s *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*)

By “real” I intend both what I call the *real-real*, that is, the non-verbal, mysterious, pervasive, and uninterrupted flux of the world (the “flux of the real,” in the terms of Celan), something that exceeds language and perception; and what I call the *real-world-history*, that is, the spatio-temporal, verbal, historical, and societal ways by which human beings organize the *real-real*. Modern poetry as Language Art is “exposed” – to use a famous Celan’s expression (“poetry no longer imposes, but exposes itself,” handwritten note, 1969) – to the real in these two senses, and it employs for both layers very similar textual techniques. The term “exposed” is intended by Celan in the sense of vulnerability, of a new vulnerability of poetry. But we can also think the *exposition* (French), i.e., the *exhibition*, as a context of exposition, of exposition of poetry as art. Exhibition and vulnerability, exhibition as vulnerability.

Like many, I distinguish between “real” and “reality” because by “reality” I intend the first step of linguistic representation of the real, the way in which we select portions

of the real in order to make them fit into our perceptive faculties, into our mental projections, and into our desires and beliefs. Post-1945 poetry develops very specific ways of overcoming reality in order to discover a deeper relation to the real.

In terms of the *real-real*, French poet Francis Ponge described in a very convincing way, in an interview with Philippe Sollers, the epistemological and cognitive shift that affected modern poetry:

So we lived, humankind lived, in Western civilization, since two, three millennia, on figures of speech that are the same as geometrical figures. All this dates from Thales and Euclid, yet now we know that today's geometry is not Euclidean anymore. For physics it is the same thing: we don't live anymore on the same physics, the world is not understood anymore according to these rules and figures, and so are not the relations among human beings and between humankind and the world, and the way in which we *live* in this world and we *act* in this world. Same thing, of course, for the arts and letters, for rhetoric.

All this has changed. We live, since more or less a century now, a little less than a century, a sort of revolution in the conception of humankind by humankind, and of the world by humankind, which had no equal since millennia. Things like the advent of Christianity or the Renaissance are much less important events, because they were still situated within Greek geometry

and rhetoric. We are currently living a much deeper upheaval.¹⁰⁷

From this remark by Ponge we can draw the consequence that literary theory needs new figures of speech in order to describe how poetry reacted to such a massive epistemological change. That is what I have been trying to do in my theoretical work, and therefore also in this text.

In terms of the *real-world-history*, I pointed out in many occasions that post-1945 poetry responds to two historical events that had an archetypal impact on modern poetic forms themselves: the Shoah and the introduction of mass media. Poetry responds to the famous remark by Theodor W. Adorno, according to which “it became barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz,”¹⁰⁸ by saying: it is not barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz; on the contrary, it is necessary, yet everything changed, so that the form of poetry itself had to change.

Before Auschwitz there was the industrial revolution and the *Coup de dés* by Stéphane Mallarmé. And of course poetry, even in antiquity and early modernity, always radically changed its forms according to history. But these three events of modernity in particular – the Industrial Revolution, the Shoah, and introduction of mass media – have changed poetry so much that I claim that poetry as we mean it today is a relatively recent art, a fact shown by many of its forms that are still in use today and that were

107 Ponge and Sollers, *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers*, 89–90.

108 Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 30.

born in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as free verse, prose poetry, and typographic compositions.

The Shoah, in our context, has to be intended, besides its effective historical impact, as an archetypal technological crime which directly affects the shape of the text, then also as an archetype of several subsequent fascist technological crimes one major consequence of which is the radical modification of language, of what language can say or describe, and thus of the role poetic language can play in modernity.

In my opinion, the transformation of language entailed by the introduction of mass media, from the widespread use of television to the use of digital social networks at a global scale, marked, together with the Shoah, the other main milestone related to the formal evolution of poetry in which concrete poetry is embedded. In all hybrid forms of interaction between poetry and the visual arts, the use of more or less technological or technical devices is animated by a radically critical approach to technology and to language itself, for these very historical reasons.

Probably in an unprecedented way, poetry has found itself dialoguing with historical, epistemological, political, and technological events that have impacted in a quite direct way the structure of the text, its prosody, metric, syntax, and rhetoric, and this certainly also is a reaction to the emergence of the modern novel as the dominant literary genre. While the novel produced fiction, poetry reacted by turning to the real, letting itself be “troubled by the real,”¹⁰⁹ in Celan’s terms, instead of narrating it, instead of reorganizing it through fiction.

109 Celan, *Le Méridien & autres proses*, 58.

To sum up: from the 1950s-60s onwards, the memory of the Shoah and the increasing impact of mass media affected poetry in a particularly radical way, which led to the development of many new forms and procedures. Now, I propose to name *designification* and *grammoclasm* – two neologisms that I created – the two interwoven processes operating in the subversion of poetics which has been going on since the 1960s because of the historical context I just described.

The notion of *grammoclasm* defines the disruption of language at work since post-war poetry until today as a parallel to an equally powerful – and much more often mentioned – *iconoclasm* operating in many poetic and artistic strategies of modernity. *Grammoclasm* operates not so much at the level of the grammar understood in its common sense, but rather at the level of language as a codified and politically heteronormalized system. I then propose to name *grammoclasm* the ensemble of processes of perturbation, distortion, and at times destruction of codified forms of language. As much as iconoclasm, poetic *grammoclasm* is a reaction toward the political propaganda, toward a consensus that is more or less slyly imposed, toward the televisual convention of mass media and, before it, toward what already Mallarmé called the “universal reportage,”¹¹⁰ even though with an essential difference I will summarize in a simplified way. While Mallarmé, with the intention of reacting to the universal reportage, prospected a poetic language separated from ordinary language, the post-1960 forms of *grammoclasm* make a recurrent use of semantic fields belonging to ordinary language in order to submit

110 Stéphane Mallarmé, “Crise de Vers,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II, 212.

it to a process of disruption and reactivation, as if saying: we are still inside the real.

Grammoclasm is the expression of a process of *designification* occurring in the poetic text. By *designification* I mean a process by which meaning is reduced and the signic codification of meaning is dismantled. In order to identify the reason beyond this other notion, it is necessary to differentiate between a *positive designification*, resulting from the dismantling of the codes of language and of social imagery operated by the poetic language, and a *negative designification* resulting from the lack of meaning caused by the technological violence proper to modernity of which the Shoah is an archetypal model.

In *negative designification*, poetry reflects the impossibility to express in a transitive way the violence of the historical effacement of which modernity is the product, giving itself to heterogeneous linguistic processes of interruption, distortion, inversion, cancellation, reorganization, and decodification of the signic space. In *positive designification*, poetry implements textual techniques against the codes of the mediatized *doxa*, against the standardized signification of shared conventions which, in modernity, are conveyed by mass media. Mass media are, in turn, at the origin of a process of *negative designification* engendered by the hollowing out and the codification of meaning which supports and confirms them as an instrument of political control in the Western democratic, post-dictatorships era.

All this is at stake when we read a poem by Celan or when we watch or read a constellation by Gomerger, for example. There is always, in my opinion, this subversive substrate without which all the verbal operations classi-

fied as concrete or conceptual or visual writing could not be understood in their deepest reason of existence and in continuity with the other poetic forms of modernity. This is what Henri Meschonnic was unable to understand in his critique of concrete poetry. What is true, on the other hand, is that there are many different levels of quality and that in many cases concrete poetry stopped at a more superficial level, without itself grasping its deepest necessity and reason of existence, thus falling into a merely ludic approach.

3. LANGUAGE ART DEVICES

With all this in mind, I will show some ways in which hybrid forms of poetry function, among which we find concrete poetry and many other Language Art devices. I will propose some notions and tools that I initially developed for two reasons: in order to try to understand and explain my own work as an artist; and to identify the common points between poetry and artistic practice not only in my own work, but also in the work of other artists and poets.

From this perspective, the notions and tools I will propose here stem from two principles: *poiesis* (from *poiein*, “to do” in ancient Greek, i.e., a conception of poetry as a productive methodology within the real); and *creation of possibility*, within language, through language, through a subversive and *poietic* approach to language. Most importantly, they are of course all examples of *grammoclastm* and *designification*, in the historical sense I just evoked.

I propose the following comprehensive and intertwined classification for sound, visual, and concrete poetry (in

many of these cases one could also speak of verbal installations or verbal performances):

Internal and external devices

- *Internal* devices manipulate writing, typography, space of words on the page (*page design*).
- *External* devices add to the written text sonic, visual, objectal elements that can be either analogue or digital, or both.

Immanent and additive modes

- An *immanent* mode is a way of processing the text without adding elements to it. An *internal immanent* mode is then a way of processing typography itself for instance, whereas *external immanent* modes are for example those kinds of sound poetry where the only material is voice or where the machine processes uniquely the text.
- An *additive* mode adds to the text some non-textual elements, such as sounds of planes or telephones in Heidsieck's performances (*external additive*), or documents, maps, pictures, etc. in poetry books (*internal additive*).

Here are some examples of each one of these categories:

*Internal immanent: Vito Acconci, I am going from one side to the other, early 1960s (fig. 7).*¹¹¹ Here the typographic device realizes the page-based performance without any other added process.

I am going from one side to the other.

am

going

from

one

side

to

the

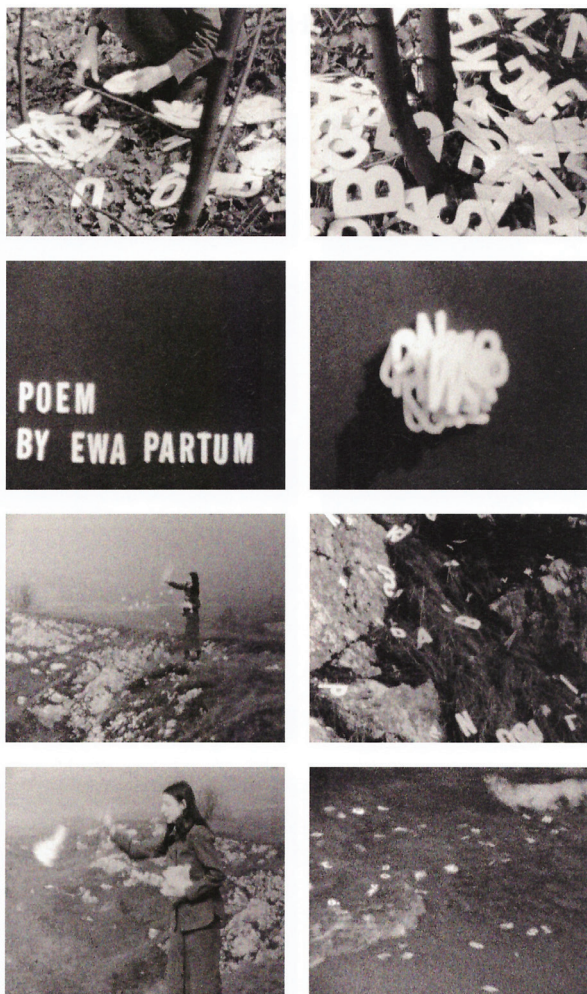
other.

¹¹¹ Reproduced in Vito Acconci, *Language to Cover a Page: The Early Writings of Vito Acconci*, ed. Craig Dworkin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 69.

Internal additive: George Maciunas, Musik für Jedermann, 1961 (fig. 8, as reproduced in Williams's *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*). The score and the visual structure of the piece adds a layer to its poetic operation from the space of the page itself.

BELEBTE – MENSCHLICH	
kehle	atmen
	husten
	lachen
	lungenhusten
	räuspern
	schnarchen
	kehle tickeln, glucksen
	zunge tickeln, schmatzen
	gurgeln
	trinken
	stimme: buchstaben – mit – und ohne tonhöhe
mund	mit flüssigkeit spülen
	eßbewegung
	zungenschlag
lippen	zischen
	luftfeinziehen mit oberer über unterer lippe
	durch spucke an lippen blasen
	lippenfuz
	saugen
	speien
	blasen
	flöten
	schmatzen wie wassertropfen
	buchstaben erklingenlassen – mit – und ohne tonhöhe
	niesen

*External immanent: Ewa Partum, Aktive Poesie, 1971–73 (fig. 9, as reproduced in *Un coup de dés: Writing Turned Image. An Alphabet of Pensive Language* [Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2008]). In this filmed performance, the artist scatters in a wood a series of letters composing a poem. There is nothing added to the text besides the support itself.*



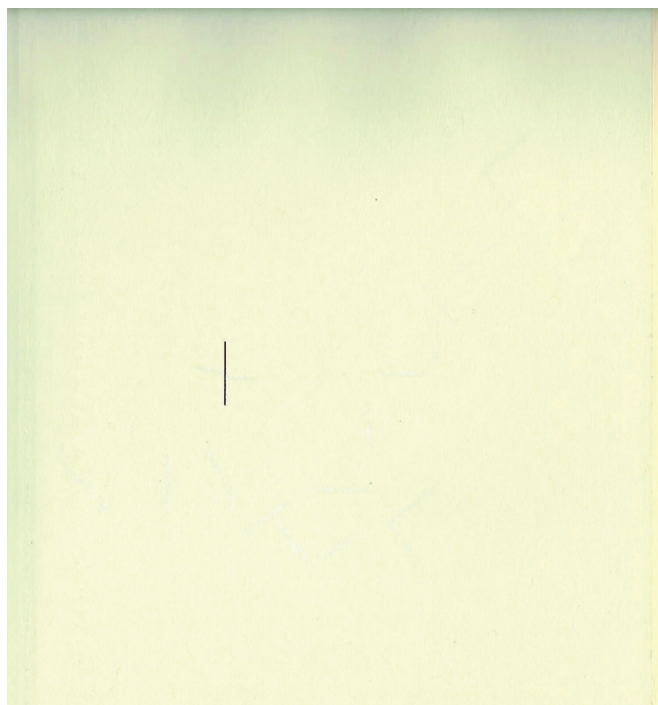
External additive: Alison Knowles, *House of Dust*, 1967 (fig. 10, image courtesy of Alison Knowles and James Fuentes, New York). As one of the first computerized poems ever created and as a physical place where the poem gave way to exchanges and dialogues among a community of participants, *House of Dust* is a perfect example of *external additive* poetic device.

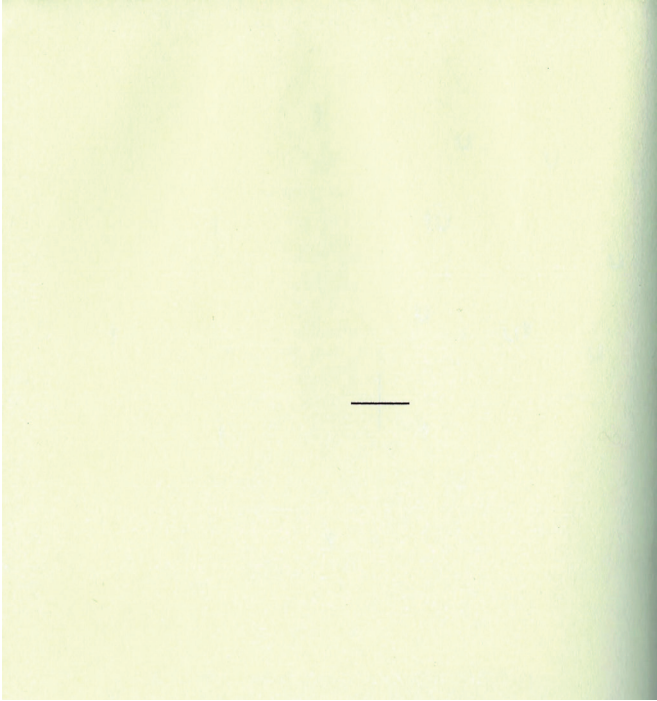


Another distinction I proposed at first in relation to some more orthodox poetry examples, which could be applied to basically any kind of language-based practice, is the one between *proliferation* and *rarefaction*, where the first term indicates several modalities of emergence and interrelation of verbal matter, and the latter describes forms of reduction of verbal matter, either by the use of a few signs or by the effacement *a posteriori* of a previously larger amount of signs. In all cases, narration is crucial. I would even claim that proliferation and rarefaction are two modes of interaction between poetry and narration. What is at stake is again history and knowledge in terms of what can or cannot be written or grasped by language, and therefore of *grammoclasm* and *designification* as subversive poetic processes operating in these forms. For all the following sub-categories, I will propose examples taken from the concrete poetry world, but again, the same notions could also be applied to more traditional forms of poetic composition.

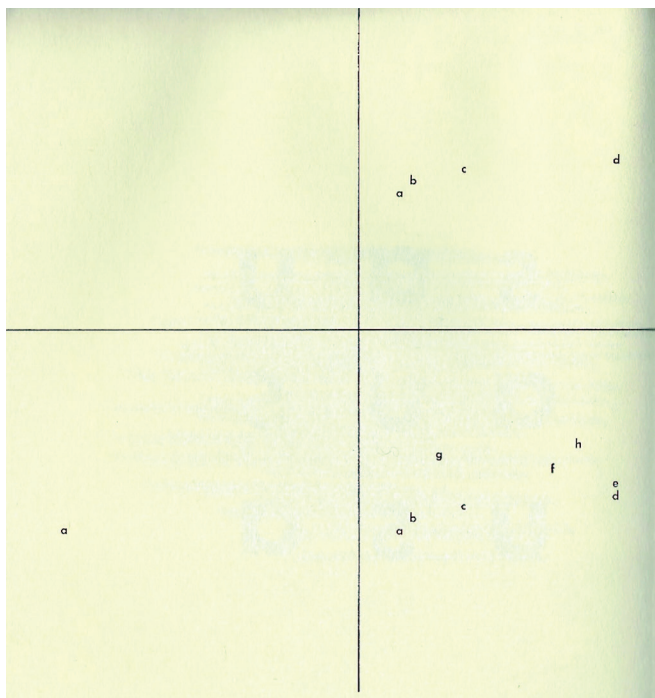
I distinguish between:

1. *Rarefaction a priori*. The white of the page and the reduction of verbal matter hints at a yet-to-occur narration, at a creation of possibility through language. The vertical and horizontal lines in Dieter Roth's *Two as One, One as Two*, 1956 (fig. 11, overleaf), here scanned from Williams's *Anthology*, are an extreme example of rarefaction a priori:





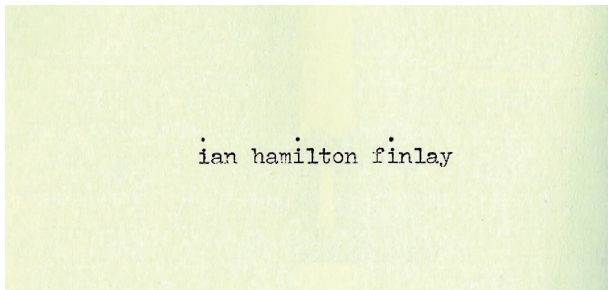
2. *Rarefaction a posteriori*. Here a narration has been erased after the constitution of the text, because something cannot be said with words anymore, like in this 1964 work by Hansjörg Meyer, also reproduced in Williams's *Anthology* (fig. 12):



3. *Rarefaction per se*, where the brevity is inherent to the verbal system of the composition. An example of *rarefaction per se* I dedicated many pages to is Aram Saroyan's *m* with four legs, 1968 (fig. 13¹¹²):



4. *Paralipctic*¹¹³ *rarefaction*. In the narratological paralipsis, the narration hints at a hidden event by telling marginal events occurring around the main event. In the paralipctic rarefaction, the brevity of the text itself hints at a narration hidden behind it, like in Saroyan's *ian hamilton finlay* (fig. 14), also reproduced in Williams's *Anthology*, where the name of the Scottish poet written in lowercase letters with two dots on each "i" tells a story without at the same time telling it:



112 Reproduced in Aram Saroyan, *The Complete Minimal Poems* (James Hoff, ed., New York: Ugly Duckling, 2007), 28.

113 From Gérard Genette's notion of *paralipse* expressed in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 93.

5. *Effective proliferation*, where “effective” has to be intended through its etymological origin of *ex-facto*, from the fact. In this first category of proliferation, the multiplication of the verbal matter is evident, intrinsic to the work, and potentially always growing, as it is generated through procedures such as lists, repetitions and superimpositions, which are very frequent in concrete poetry. See for example the following Gomringer’s list, reproduced in Williams’s *Anthology* (fig. 15):

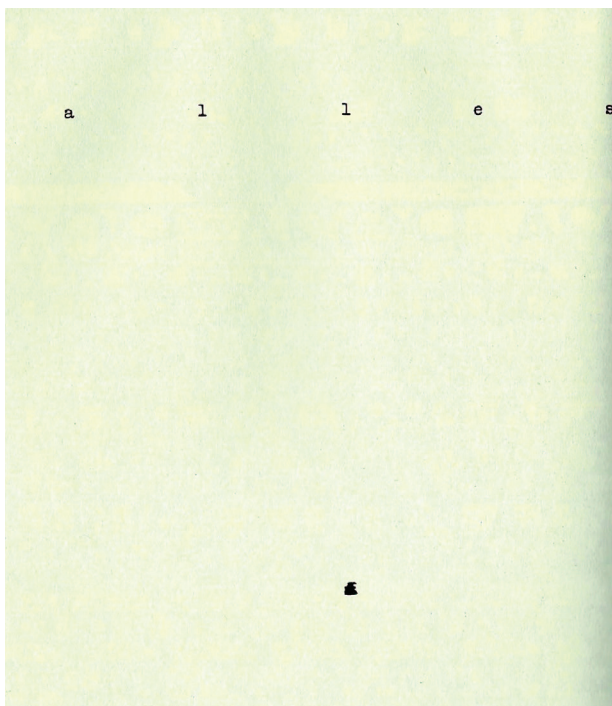
Eugen Gomringer (1961)

snow is english	snow is civil
snow is international	snow is smooth
snow is secret	snow is amusing
snow is small	snow is epidemic
snow is literary	snow is hereditary
snow is translatable	snow is risky
snow is everywhere	snow is analysable
snow is ridiculous	snow is satisfactory
snow is difficult	snow is catholic
snow is modern	snow is tasteless
snow is hindering	snow is elegant
snow is senseless	snow is absolute
snow is musical	snow is experimental
snow is gorgeous	snow is neurotic
snow is sedimentary	snow is instructive
snow is meaningless	snow is selfish
snow is elemental	snow is unique
snow is fantastic	snow is prepared
snow is curved	snow is expensive
snow is unauthorized	snow is alphabetical
snow is disgusting	snow is unsocial
snow is ignorant	snow is sexless
snow is irresistible	snow is political
snow is rare	snow is provisional
snow is exhausting	snow is predominant

6. *Out-of-text proliferation*, in which the readable text is an already saturated portion of a much greater amount of text graspable through the presented text itself. Denis Roche's *Antéfixes* in the *Dépôts de savoir & de technique* (1980) are an excellent example of this kind of proliferation, for the page is filled with lines that are interrupted both at the beginning and the end, thus hinting at a wider portion of text which could not be contained in the printed text (fig. 16):

Ah!... non mourrai!... in quegli accenti,... Nè ciel, nè terra...¹
 La voici en effet, fracassant les arbres, foudroyant les murs²
 ans succès des mangosteens & on achète 1 pet^{te} maison en arge³
 ec ton ventre, mais c'est bob, continue mais fais-le bien cri⁴
 ar le mur du Sud. D. TOUR DE GALATA. Appelée autrefois « tour⁵
 que ce sont les + vivants portraits que la littérature ait ja⁶
ibl. Orient. p. 930. Hyde, *de Rel. v. Pers.* c. 24. Prideaux, *H*⁷
 sur l'allée étroite goudronnée du Lux^{brg} lui à g. ds les arbr⁸
 & le corps silencieux écrire c'est la voix et le son bruyants⁹
 omprends c'est la 1^{re} fois pour elle et elle a un peu peur, t¹⁰
 à cette femme qu'on possède, qu'on caresse, qui lit et qui co¹¹
 un an plus tôt par le « Frate' nnamorato » du même Pergolesi. C¹²
 hoto après photo & encore du grand cul blanc chevauchant suan¹³
 leur chemin vers le positif. Ainsi la lumière bleue immobilis¹⁴
 négatif qui, sa mission accomplie, ne doit plus être visible.¹⁵
 Je m'allonge il me téléphone de la gare pour tendresses je m'¹⁶
 de froid qd j'appuie mes fesses sur la porcelaine du lavabo &¹⁷
 acing this nude on a Manhattan rooftop at dusk, Michals creat¹⁸
 à la main dr. l'accord : si - ré -fa et jouons à la main g. l¹⁹
 sûre sur le bitume mouillé. L'oreille du musicien d'aujourd'h²⁰
 files de crânes (d'où le nom popu. de *caritas* ou pet^s visage²¹
 HERODES : Man tôte dieses Weib! (*The soldiers rush forward an*²²
 his libretto is publi^d by permisⁿ of Boosey & Hawkes Ltd., 2²³
 place à son cul, face aux arbres, admire les fesses qui suent²⁴
 maison est très belle, dans ce jardin Lucrece redevient lisib²⁵
 le voici en effet, fracassant les arbres, foudroyant les murs²⁶
 la voix & le son bruyants, photo après photo du gd cul blanc!²⁷

7. *Unwritten proliferation.* Here the proliferation is contained in the polysemy and complexity of a relatively short amount of verbal matter. Heinz Gappmayr's *Alles*, also taken from Williams's *Anthology*, is an extreme example of this form, for the word *alles* ("all" in German) literally contains in the page all the unwritten possibilities of its (de)signification, furthermore augmented by the asemic sign at the bottom of the page (fig. 17):



As it is possible to intuit from this last example in particular, these categories are intersecting and are not rigid. Depending on the theoretical point of view, the *unwritten proliferation* in Gappmayr's *Alles* can also be seen as a *rarefaction a posteriori* or *a priori*. In this sense, Bernar Venet's *Black Book* (2012) could function as a provisional conclusion to these notes, for it is not only a beautiful example of *external immanent* device, but also a remarkable condensation of several categories of rarefaction and proliferation. The pages of Venet's book are not only entirely black, but they are technically *printed* in black, hence each page is slightly different from the other, depending on how the black ink covered the paper during the printing process. For the same reason, each copy is slightly different from the other. Because it is printed as a text, Venet's black book is a powerful form of *grammoclasm* and *designification*, and a poetic form of saturation, rarefaction and proliferation. For instance, it easily falls under the sub-categories of *rarefaction a priori* (black as void, as beginning of meaning), *rarefaction a posteriori* (black as effacement of previously graspable content), *effective proliferation* (black as a maximal saturation of previous textual information), *out-of-text proliferation* (black as a portion of a larger letter or text out of the book).

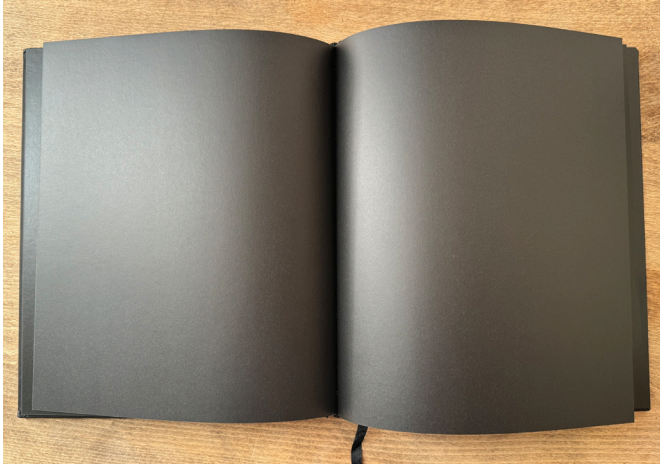


Fig. 18. Bernar Venet, *The Black Book* (Paris: Bernard Chauveau Editions, 2012)

L'adresse comme possible

[Lecture at the Fondation Lafayette Anticipation, Paris, June 24, 2016, upon invitation by Fabien Vallos for a workshop on the notion of “addressing.” Previously unpublished.]

Il s'agit avant tout de perdre l'adresse de destination, pour que le message ne soit pas envoyé à quelqu'un, mais à tout le monde.

Envoyer le message à tout le monde signifie ne jamais renoncer à soutenir que la pratique artistique et la communication n'ont aucune relation. L'art ne communique pas, son message – mot aimé de Pessoa – son message n'a ni d'adresse spécifique ni de but en dehors de lui-même.

La *poiësis* n'a pas d'autre mouvement qu'elle même. La *poiësis* est non-dualiste, elle est contenue dans son processus.

Il peut bien sûr y avoir un partage *de* et *dans* la *poiësis*. Des objets ou des dispositifs qui construisent et demandent un partage.

Un partage, plutôt qu'une interaction, car l'interactivité côtoie le ludique, tandis que l'enjeu de l'art est un jeu sérieux.

Ou bien il s'agit peut-être de retourner à l'adresse, aujourd'hui, dans la phase qui précède la destination. Quand la lettre est posée sur notre table ronde mais l'enveloppe n'est pas encore constituée, et l'adresse est inconnue.

Elle est inconnue parce qu'elle est totale, universelle, n'ayons pas peur de le dire. Elle est inconnue car elle

s'adresse à l'inconnu, en cherchant non pas à le rendre connu, mais à créer un espace commun avec l'inconnu, à se familiariser avec un inconnu qui est avant toute autre chose l'inconnu du réel qui nous entoure, nous contient et nous amène à agir.

Quand je vois un objet, il est pour moi toujours et tout d'abord inconnu.

L'adresse de la *poièsis* n'a pas de destination car elle n'a pas de destinataire, et elle n'a pas de destinataire car son destinataire n'a pas d'identité, pas de pièce d'identité je veux dire avant tout.

S'il s'agit, par la question de l'adresse, de chercher aussi à définir, encore une fois, le domaine d'action voire même le statut de la pratique artistique, et si cela nous paraît une fois de plus impossible, nous pouvons cependant définir et *adresser* la pratique artistique comme la modalité suprême, au sein de l'humain, de démembrement des identités au profit d'un modèle fluide, continu, organique, horizontal – et non pas discrétisé, normalisé, réglé et hiérarchisé – de notre rapport au réel.

Si bien que le destinataire de l'adresse est peut-être en fin des comptes non pas une altérité, mais *l'*altérité que je reconnais comme telle, dans son droit à être avec mon œuvre tout en demeurant altérité, à être donc aimée par mon œuvre, à être critiquée et déstabilisée par mon œuvre, en quoi elle demeure altérité.

Si bien, aussi, que l'adresse au réel et à l'altérité est le produit du même geste, un geste unique, identique cette fois-ci à lui-même en tant que non-dualiste, un geste qui m'amène maintenant à saisir, de façon permanente car *poiétique*, les écrans et les vitrines et à vouloir les démem-

brer jusqu'à les rendre à leur état liquide, ou dépolarisé en grains et sable originels.

Et plus précisément pour moi cela passe par le langage verbal, ce dispositif humain tellement étrange, tellement différent de toutes les autres choses du réel, ce dispositif qui conserve encore aujourd'hui, entièrement intacte, son énigme.

Ce dispositif qui est en même temps le véhicule par excellence de la normalisation, par le biais de la règle grammaticale avant toute autre règle, qui devient cependant, dans les mains non pas du poète mais de la poésie, une *koinè* mobile.

Non pas un espace de communication, mais un espace de partage, de partage d'une multiplicité inépuisable et d'une unité irréductible à autre chose que son propre geste, irréductible donc tout d'abord à la représentation de l'identité.

Dans un jeu de langage, la notion d'*adresse* comme adresse plastique et poétique peut être pensée avec un « a » privatif, un « a » qui dérobe et nie tout ce qui est dressé et tous ceux qui sont dressés à obéir à des règles qui sont à l'opposé de la *koinè* mobile où nous pouvons aimer et où l'œuvre peut aimer le destinataire infini de son adresse ouverte.

Cet « a » privatif qui est aussi la négation du *dress*, du vêtement et du revêtement, du masque de l'identité et de la représentation, dans une époque de l'histoire où les identités et les représentations sont précisément forgées afin de dresser l'humanité à respecter des règles qui n'ont pas lieu d'être en dehors d'une forme particulière de la peur : une peur de l'enfance – dans les deux sens à la fois qu'elle provient de l'enfance et qu'elle indique une terreur de l'en-

fance – qui est transformée par le pouvoir en simulacre et en projection adulte, glissant en permanence d'un objet à un autre.

Une peur qui empêche d'éprouver le désir dans la présence, car elle relègue le désir à sa forme la plus classique et la plus sordide, elle relègue le désir à l'absence de l'objet ; tandis que l'inconnu de l'objet présentifié ici est nié par son rôle, par son usage, oui, par son commerce.

Donc une peur qui empêche d'aimer, et qui soustrait à l'adresse sa possibilité d'aimer. Aimer un objet qui, parce qu'il est infini et total dans ce geste de l'adresse, il est d'autant moins absent.

Une peur qui amène à fuir sans s'affranchir, une peur qui nous rend reconnaissables, finis, c'est-à-dire opposés à l'infini qui est porté par la *poièsis*, et arrivés à terme de notre possible.

Une peur qui conçoit le *possible* comme seul horizon du possible à la place de l'impossible, qui est en revanche le lieu du vrai possible, car il n'est pas de vrai possible sans *penser l'impossible comme possible*.

Tout comme l'infini est le lieu de signification de cette *koinè* mobile du sentir et du dire qui existe dans la poésie et qui s'oppose à la *koinè* de la représentation.

Un infini de la signification contre la rhétorique, et de la destination contre la représentation. Un impossible qui fonde le possible de la *poièsis*.

L'espace est courbé, une autre face de sa géométrie peut être montrée. Sa courbe est inépuisable et luisante, stratifiée et compacte.

Le caractère originellement impossible de ce possible fait qu'il ne coïncide pas non plus avec un futur, si par « futur » nous entendons la transformation que le pouvoir

opère de la peur et du besoin dans la projection d'un état de réalisation où nous serons enfin sauvés car, au fond, nous serons aimés.

Cette projection, qui est celle qui tient les peuples sous le joug du travail et du désir de l'absence, donc de la consommation, empêche le mouvement même de réalisation qu'elle promet, car celui-ci ne peut se concevoir que dans l'absence d'une possession.

L'adresse de la *poiësis* condense en revanche le possible dans le présent en état d'événement permanent, car la *poiësis* construit son possible au moment même où elle se forme et se dit, c'est-à-dire où elle se produit en tant que telle. L'adresse de la *poiësis* ne peut pas – ni ontologiquement, ni techniquement – être dérobée à son présent, si bien que son avenir est construit dans le présent de sa venue au monde, comme évolution, comme devenir de son geste et de son être.

L'avenir de l'adresse n'est pas une forme du futur où le pouvoir a opéré son déplacement sournois de la douleur et du besoin d'être aimé, mais il consiste plutôt dans le déploiement infini et pourtant compact – c'est-à-dire contenu dans l'œuvre – du sens qui advient dans la création artistique.

L'avenir de l'adresse est la construction permanente du possible, au point où l'adresse et son avenir ne seront plus distinguables.

L'adresse ouverte de la création construit des *alter-possibles* à la jonction du possible et de l'impossible, et donc une forme d'amour où le désir est animé par son présent, par sa réalisation progressive dans le devenir, plutôt que dans l'adoration d'un objet absent, quel qu'il soit.

Ce processus de devenir du présent et de construction du possible dans le présent est ce qui fonde, selon moi, le processus toujours en cours de l'adresse dans l'art contemporain, et ce par quoi l'art qui se fait dans ce présent peut être dit contemporain et continue d'être contemporain.

En paraphrasant Benedetto Croce, qui affirmait cela à propos de l'histoire avec des intentions complètement différentes, je dirais que la question de l'adresse nous montre que toute œuvre d'art est une œuvre d'art contemporain, c'est-à-dire que toute œuvre d'art qui a été pensée et créée comme un devenir, comme un possible, comme une adresse ouverte et infinie, demeure contemporaine sans solution de continuité.

C'est pour cela que l'art n'est pas communication. Parce que la communication se fait dans la contingence d'une époque, et prévoit que le message ait un code et une fonction déterminée. C'est une évidence voire une banalité.

Nous avons aussi déjà mentionné la destination. Ça tombe sous le sens de souligner qu'il y a une différence substantielle entre l'absence de destinataire en tant qu'absence au sens de la projection du désir d'ordre capitaliste ou religieux et l'absence du destinataire de l'adresse en tant que transformation de l'identité et de la subjectivité – selon l'expression du poète italien Antonio Porta – en un « champ de tensions ». Un champ de tensions qui est rendu par la *poièsis* infiniment ouvert à la signification.

Un tissu liquide, une surface qui est aussi sa propre profondeur, qui refait son histoire.

Qu'en est-il enfin des notions, que vous avez aussi évoquées dans votre invitation, d'échange et de transmission dans l'adresse ?

Si échange il y a, c'est dans le concept d'amour que nous pouvons le retrouver. Mais c'est l'œuvre qui aime le destinataire infiniment absent et pour cela indéfiniment présent de son adresse, et celui-ci ne peut aimer l'œuvre que dans cette unité non-dualiste du geste artistique, donc en tant que déjà intégré dans le corps de l'œuvre.

Ou alors on entend le concept d'amour dans un sens différent, et dans une contingence expérientielle qui n'a rien à voir avec la vulnérabilité, la fragilité de l'œuvre lorsqu'elle s'expose et, en s'exposant, s'adresse en permanence.

L'échange ne peut se faire que dans la transformation, dans le changement de l'impossible en possible, et du destinataire en œuvre. L'échange est ce qui, en ouvrant à l'infini la destination de l'adresse, change le destinataire en œuvre, c'est-à-dire que le champ de tensions de l'œuvre et du destinataire ne permet plus de distinction discrète entre ces deux instances.

Paul Celan : « la poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose ». Ceci est le commencement d'une expérience plus profonde. Ceci ne termine rien, mais indique au contraire qu'il y a eu un ajout.

L'exposition dans ce sens, comme on expose un organe, une surface et une concentration sous le derme de la perception, l'exposition dans ce sens, qui est le sens même de l'adresse, est transmission.

Mais « transmission » n'est peut-être pas, au fond, le bon mot. S'il s'agit de mettre de travers et de traverser un espace qui n'est pas polarisé en identités finies ou en interlocuteurs définis, ce qui sera mis de travers sera plutôt un corps étalé, une profonde surface étendue, une *étendue* donc plutôt qu'une transmission.

Une étendue courbée comme dans les géométries non-euclidiennes, une étendue comme champ de tensions. Une étendue convexe et turgescente parce que poussée en multiples dimensions et directions par la polysémie infinie de l'œuvre, qui incarne le *désir de présent*.

Une étendue élargie en permanence par le processus poïétique qui a lieu dans le présent absolu de l'œuvre, un présent qui sera donc lui aussi étiré, étendu, sur et vers le possible.

Designification, Grammooclasm, Alter-legible/
sayable: To Give Words to the Subversion of
Poetics

[Published in French in *Continuum. Writings on Poetry as Artistic Practice* (The Hague/Tirana: Uitgeverij, 2015), this text was initially written for a lecture at Birkbeck, University of London, delivered on February 13th 2015. This English translation is by Céline Coderey.]

To think the relationship between poetry and politics means, for me and for many of us, to create concepts apt to conceive the subversion of poetics. There are two ways in which the subversion of poetics can be understood: as a subversion operated *by poetics*, and as a subversion operated *toward poetics*. Both modalities will be considered here as they are inseparable. The reason for this is primarily an historical one. We could claim that *poetry is a relatively recent art*: it is in fact only in the 19th century, during the Industrial Revolution, that poetic language has been systematically and (self-)consciously brought to open its forms once and for all through the open verse, the prose poem and, a bit later, the first great topographic poem, the *Coup de dés*. This trend has continued ever since. The historical avant-garde which existed during the First World War, the socialist revolution and the great scientific evolutions, went on “dismantling the codes” (“défaire les codes”) according to an expression that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use precisely in reference to the epistemo-

logical field.¹¹⁴ It was then the turn of the Shoah to impose itself – as attested in Paul Celan probably more than in any other author – as an archetypal technological crime which directly affects the shape of the text, followed by several others fascist technological crimes one major consequence of which is the radical modification of language as well as of the role poetic language can play in modernity. In my opinion, the transformation of language entailed by the introduction of the mass media, from the television in Europe in the 1960s till the social networks at the global scale, marked, together with the Shoah, the other main poetic crux related to the formal evolution of post-1945 poetry, and I will briefly try to show why. Despite some restorative efforts, this evolution is still going on and yet, as of 2015, it has not succeeded in modifying again its paradigm, with the exception of some isolated cases. Yet a paradigm shift can't be generated by isolated cases, as it is indeed the expression of a collective realization within language rather than a matter of individual authors.

Probably in an unprecedented way, over the past two hundred years poetry has found itself dialoguing with historical, epistemological, political, and technological events that have impacted in a quite direct way on the structure of the text, its prosody, metric, syntax, and rhetoric, and this certainly also as a reaction to the emergence of the modern novel as the dominant literary genre. While the novel produced fiction, poetry reacted by turning to the real, letting itself “troubled by the real,”¹¹⁵ to put it with Celan, instead of narrating it, instead of reorganizing it through fiction.

114 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 392.

115 Celan, *Le Méridien & autres proses*, 58.

Yet of course, on the one hand with Flaubert and later with Proust, Joyce, and Musil and, on the other hand, with the extinction of “poetry” as a clearly identifiable genre precisely because of the radical formal transformations which affected it, this opposition can’t be clearly defined. It could be the aim of another communication to treat this topic in details.

In order to define what has occurred in poetry during the last two hundred years, I propose to speak of an *overtaking of the ontological distinction among aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology*. Contrary to Paul Valéry’s claim that the field of expertise of poetry consisted in “illusions” that “shouldn’t be disdained”¹¹⁶ – Valéry who has in the same time contributed in a significant way to a new theory of the role of language in modernity – poetry produces investigations, efforts to modify the state of facts and modalities of knowledge just like other processes of thought and action. But what makes it different from these other processes? The fact that the manipulation of language – a language that, during the 20th century, becomes more and more a language-matter – is the main aspect of this epistemological overtaking. What happens in this language? We will see that this question entails some direct political consequences under the aegis of what I have called the *subversion of poetics*, in both aforementioned senses (subversion of poetics and subversion by poetics).

It seems to me that it’s first of all necessary to make a clear distinction between before and after 1945 or certainly between before and after 1960, because the poetic language needed certainly more than one decade to be affected by

116 Paul Valéry, *Cahiers (Textes choisis)*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 684.

the real in which it was immersed up to the point of modifying its coordinates.

I have proposed the idea that an important change of the poetic paradigm occurred in relation to the Shoah as a technological archetypal crime and to the introduction of mass media. It's not by chance that at the same time poetry starts theorizing its political role in a systematic way (two examples of this are *Tel Quel* in France and *I Novissimi* in Italy) and that it evades from a straightforward generic identification through the emergence of the so called *post-generic* writing as well as with practices such as poetry-performance, conceptual poetry, and concrete poetry, among others.

I propose to name *designification* and *grammoclasm* the two processes that operate in the subversion of poetics which has been ongoing since the 1960s. The description of these two processes is related to the important emergence of two main poetological issues that – as I will show – are strictly interrelated: the issues of the *legibility* of the modern and contemporary poetic text and of the *sayability* of the contents poetry measures itself with.

In this model, what I call *grammoclasm* seems to me to be the most general concept which, as a reader of contemporary poetry, I always take into consideration. Pierre Guyotat and Jean-Marie Gleize – to limit ourselves to a field of writing which, although related to the post-generic, still keeps its poetic nature in the broad sense of the term, a sense which, precisely, is widened by the historical paradigm shift that I try to bring back here – have often highlighted the iconoclastic program of their writing. Guyotat:

I believe that the image is not possible anymore. In my text I made the effort to remove all the images. Resorting to the image forces to say: *as*. Why designate something by the means of something else? We should be able to express it without renouncing to the normal movement of affirmation. That gesture should be *said*, that thing should be *named*, purely and simply.¹¹⁷

Gleize often uses the expression “to replace the image by the word ‘image’.”¹¹⁸ This refusal of the image as representation and metaphorization of the real seems to me to be a direct consequence of the awareness that poetry had and still has today, on the one hand, to react to the domination of the media-based *société du spectacle* and, on the other hand, to embrace the non-representability of the historical violence. Now, it seems to me that something similar occurs not so much at the level of the grammar understood in its common sense but rather at the level of the language as a codified and politically heteronormalized system. I then propose to name *grammoclasm* the ensemble of processes of perturbation, distortion and eventually destruction of codified forms of language (including forms we could call *vetero-poetic*, in the sense of the subversion of poetics) which are fated to hold a *koinè* of social imagery and representation, thus sharing the same destiny of the image against which the poetic iconoclastic stands. As much as the iconoclasm, the poetic *grammoclasm* is a reaction toward the political propaganda, toward a consensus which is more or less slyly imposed, toward the televisual convention of mass media and, before it, toward what already Stéphane

117 Pierre Guyotat, *Littérature interdite*, 11.

118 Gleize, “Simplifications/Conversions,” 255.

Mallarmé called the “universal reportage,”¹¹⁹ even though with an essential difference I will summarize in a simplified way: while Mallarmé, with the intention of reacting to the universal reportage, prospected a poetic language separated from the ordinary language, the post-1960 forms of *grammoclasm* make a current use of semantic fields belonging to the ordinary language in order to submit it to a process of destruction and reactivation.

The contemporary *grammoclasm* too reacts again to the recurrent restoration – that we experience at all levels – of the order of a literary narrative, mainly fictional, carried out on the basis of commercial criteria and under the demagogic pretext that some literary forms would be better “understood” by the community than others. Of course this pretext doesn’t take into account the degree of emancipation of the mass of readers (including many educated readers), neither of the orientation mechanisms of the *doxa* acting in the context not only of authoritative regimes but also of the so-called “democratic” regimes to which Western society is subjected since the end of the Second World War.

Grammoclasm is the expression of a process of *designification* which occurs in the poetic text. By *designification* I mean a process by which the meaning is reduced and the signic codification of the meaning is dismantled.

In order to identify the reason beyond this other notion, it’s necessary to differentiate between a *positive designification*, resulting from the dismantling of the codes of language and of social imagery operated by the poetic language, and a *negative designification* resulting from the

119 Mallarmé, “Crise de vers,” 212.

lack of sense caused by the technological violence proper to modernity for which the Shoah is the archetypal model. In the *negative designification* poetry reflects the impossibility to express in a transitive way the violence of the historical effacement of which modernity is the product, giving itself to heterogeneous linguistic processes of interruption, distortion, inversion, effacement, reorganization, and decodification of the signic space.

In the *positive designification* poetry implements textual techniques against the codes of the mediatized *doxa*, against the standardized signification of shared conventions which, in modernity, are conveyed by mass media. Mass media are, in turn, at the origin of a process of *negative designification* engendered by the hollowing out and the codification of meaning which supports and confirms them as an instrument of political control in the democratic era. This designification adds on and mixes up with the violence of terrorism – whose persistence depends on its mediatization – and of globalized wars whose *designificant* dictatorial violence is strongly tied to the democratic designification. It is then clear why, in the historical and political perspective that I propose here, the change of poetic paradigm is irreversible.

Grammoclasm and *designification* are often at the origin of the “obscurity” and the “illegibility” that poetry of modernity has often been accused of. Nevertheless, from the theoretical point of view that I am trying to outline, this accusation has no reason to stand. The hypothesis I propose as a conclusion is that a redefinition of this question, leading somehow to its invalidation, entails some important political consequences. More precisely, my hypothesis is that in modern and contemporary poetry the question of

the illegible and of the unsayable are strictly interrelated with each other.

The illegibility engendered by the *grammoclasm* and the *designification* finds its roots in an urge which is historically connoted: the urge for poetic subversion. Therefore, it is a phenomenon which leads not to a deliberate impossibility of reading but rather to a shift of the paradigms of reading because of the evolution of the forms occurring under the aegis of the phenomenon that I have designated as the overtaking of the ontological distinction among aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology. I thus propose to replace the word *illegible* by *alter-legible*, a term which refers to this change of paradigm, to this creation of an alternative in language that is political as much as cognitive. The question of the apparent illegibility of contemporary poetic texts is related to the question of the unsayable in a sense which moves away from the metaphysical cliché ironically criticized by Christian Prigent when he speaks of the “as a specialist reporter of the *Unsayable*”?¹²⁰ In the context of the subversion of poetics, poetry tackles the unsayable in another sense or, rather, on several intertwined levels. The unsayable is first of all the unsayable of the violence of a crime like on the page of *Théorie des prépositions* by Claude Royet-Journoud where only the number “43525” appears.¹²¹ This number indicates the number of shoes Americans are supposed to have found in Auschwitz, and in Royet-Journoud’s book it is surrounded by a white page given that nothing else, in this place, can be said apart from this num-

120 Christian Prigent, *Une erreur de la nature* (Paris: POL, 1996), 37.

121 Claude Royet-Journoud, *Théorie des prépositions* (Paris: POL, 2007), 70. English trans. by Keith Waldrop as *Theory of Prepositions* (Albany: La Presse, 2007).

ber which actually says everything by itself. The unsayable is also the unsayable of the absence of information caused by the mediatized manipulation of information as well as by the normalizing hypertrophy of data in the technological era, like in the cases of Franck Leibovici's *Portraits chinois* that remain empty.¹²² The unsayable stems also and more generally from the main cognitive question that, in my opinion, modern poetry has never stopped addressing: how to say this enigmatic, extra-linguistic, multiple, elusive, and yet omnipresent real that we try at the same time to modify and to affect when not, precisely, to subvert?

If the notion of *alter-legible* expresses a *change of the paradigms of reading* engendered by the historical, political, and cognitive evolutions and questionings of the language of modernity, the notion of *alter-sayable* will intervene in parallel in order to indicate non a metaphysical impasse but rather a *change of the paradigms of writing and enunciation* because of the these very evolutions and questionings which affect the poetic text.

The notions of *alter-legible* and *alter-sayable*, which therefore are the direct result of the *grammoclastic* poetic behavior, express the necessity – a necessity which is still active today and subject to further evolutions – of creating alternative language conditions as new possibilities in the history of meaning. Such cognitive and political possibilities affect the aesthetic as well as the ethical and the epistemological fields, because of the ontological overtaking of these categories we have identified in the poetic discourse.

122 Franck Leibovici, *Portraits chinois* (Marseille: Al Dante, 2007), *passim*. Available on line at Ubuweb: <http://www.ubu.com/contemp/leibovici/index.html>.

Two interviews
Due interviste
Deux entretiens

Un'intervista su (((

[Interview with Gianluca Garrapa released on the Italian online literary magazine *Nazione Indiana* in 2020. The occasion was the book (((, published in Italian by Arcipelago Itaca in 2020 and in trilingual English-Italian-French edition by Uitgeverij in 2021.]

Gianluca Garrapa:

la scrittura cuneiforme è basata sulla ripetizione di una forma unica una serie di vettori a quanto pare provenienti da linee continue il senso è dato dall'orientamento orizzontale o verticale e dalla quantità dello stesso segno

Ho appena letto (((e il primo pensiero, o meglio sentiero, poiché è il sentire che muove questa poesia, credo, è che poesia sperimentale è, con molta probabilità, scoprire altre forme di orizzonti lontani da casa e un'altra forma prima sconosciuta di dire il desiderio; la poesia di Alessandro De Francesco è proprio una stratificazione ben resa dal titolo (((: un discorso che include un discorso che include un altro discorso. E la macchina desiderante che mette in moto è un congegno a orologeria in cui ogni significante, che ruota attorno all'impossibile dire, è strettamente connesso a ogni altro significante. È così? e come mai ha deciso di utilizzare un segno grafico per titolare il tuo lavoro?

Alessandro De Francesco: Sono d'accordo che sia il sentire che guida la poesia. Proprio per questo, se di congegno si tratta è un congegno aperto, lontano dall'essere perfettamente funzionante: le tre parentesi del titolo indicano altrettanti piani percettivi, quasi narrativi, che questo libro apre senza chiudere: un piano storico-politico, focalizzato in particolare sul rapporto anche emotivo, anche psicologico, tra infanzia e guerra, e in generale su situazioni di conflitto; un piano "metafisico", che cerca di raggiungere con il linguaggio sfere di per sé non linguistiche, forme informi, spazi immateriali, corpi indefiniti e infiniti; e un piano "animale", in cui si indaga il comportamento di alcuni animali più o meno identificabili e la loro relazione con l'ambiente. Il segno grafico della parentesi, che ha peraltro una lunga storia nella poesia italiana, rinvia inoltre ad elementi fisici quali la curvatura dello spazio-tempo, la curvatura delle superfici dei pianeti, delle stelle e dei satelliti (e in generale all'equilibrio idrostatico, che dà una forma sferica alla maggior parte dei corpi celesti), la curvatura del bulbo oculare, del cranio, delle colline, e di altre forme sferiche o convesse di cui queste parentesi, similmente alla dimensione narrativa incompleta e non lineare di cui sopra, percorrono un arco parziale e talora impossibile. Non so se si può parlare di poesia sperimentale in relazione a (((. È però certo una poesia che ricerca, che esplora, è un modo, come dici tu molto giustamente, per scoprire orizzonti lontani e, aggiungerei io, riscoprirli come vicini a noi, riportarli qui attraverso la poesia.

G.G.:

l'incontro degli sguardi è prolungato gli occhi traslucidi dell'animale hanno un'espressione morbida ma impersonale come se l'emotività nel guardare fosse di un tipo diverso ci chiediamo se meno intenso ma una risposta certa non è data l'animale rimane nella sua posizione e ogni tanto emette degli schiocchi sordi con la bocca il suono del suo corpo contro l'erba è amplificato dal vuoto delle colline circostanti benché il moto generale sia quasi impercettibile

Il testo rimanda a flash e bulbi oculari, a paesaggi reali, bambini, storia e animali, frammenti di memorie inesplose che la parola riporta a galla nel caleidoscopio della scrittura. Sulle prime si ha una sorta di difficoltà nel percepire simultanee visioni, un po' come vedere attraverso ommatidi, un occhio di insetto che selezioni ologrammi e mantenendoli nella moltitudine in uno stesso campo visivo. Una coralità che sborda oltre il corpo del poeta, della terra, del passato, del cosmo. Quali sono i temi intorno cui hai lavorato?

A.D.F.: Assolutamente sì, c'è una dimensione corale, multipla, inesauribile, e come dicevo sopra non lineare, in questo lavoro. Come spesso nei miei libri, la poesia incarna un succedersi di piani percettivi, spaziali, temporali, storici, emotivi, cognitivi, che non potrebbero avere luogo con questo grado di sintesi, di esattezza e allo stesso tempo di confusione, se questi non si trovassero condensati nella poesia. Per me la poesia è davvero una *Dichtung*, una densità, secondo la falsa ma splendida etimologia (da *dicht*,

che in tedesco significa “denso”) che possiamo scegliere di trovare in una delle parole che nella lingua tedesca significano “poesia”. Questo libro tenta di aprire nuovi scenari e possibilità di dialogo tra piani tematici molto diversi, brevemente già indicati nella risposta precedente in quanto profondamente legati al titolo. Ad esempio, il testo da te appena citato appartenerrebbe alla linea tematica che ho definito “animale”. Nell’insieme, e attraverso l’interazione tra i vari piani tematici, questo libro pone, direi, una domanda sostanziale: come mettere in relazione l’esperienza umana, anche nei suoi lati più sordidi e drammatici, oppure anche semplicemente quotidiani (il frigorifero, la doccia, eccetera), con la gioia che provoca l’esistenza del tutto, delle stelle, dei pianeti, delle cose organiche, ma anche di ciò che è inconoscibile e inosservabile?

G.G.:

170 cm di corpo con salario 171 cm di corpo con salario
172 cm di corpo con salario 173 cm di corpo con salario
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166 cm di corpo con salario 167 cm di corpo con salario
168 cm di corpo con salario 169 cm di corpo con salario

Come nasce questo lavoro e come si colloca nell’insieme della tua arte, quella che precede e quella che seguirà questo testo?

A.D.F.: Questo testo fa parte di quel gruppo di poesie di (((che maggiormente si avvicinano alla cosiddetta “scrittura

concettuale”, poco praticata in Italia ma molto importante in particolare nella storia della poesia americana e francese. Si tratta di una scrittura che nasce dal suo proprio processo, e dal concetto che, come anche in arte concettuale, dà vita all’opera. In questo caso il testo è nato come conseguenza di un altro testo, ispirato a sua volta da una foto che ha fatto il giro del mondo, quella di un bambino morto a faccia in giù sulla battigia di una spiaggia, uno dei tanti che non ce l’hanno fatta ad arrivare sull’altra riva. In (((ho cercato sia di rendere conto di queste realtà che di criticare il loro divenire immagine, e quindi spettacolo. Il corpo di quel bambino è diventato, in questo altro testo, una misura, una lunghezza, in quanto parte del tutto e non più individuo separato dagli altri, ma anche in quanto mera immagine svuotata dall’empatia che questo evento genererebbe nella maggior parte di coloro che ne facesse un’esperienza diretta. Ho poi scelto di estendere questo passaggio dalla concezione di un essere umano come individuo verso quella dell’umano come porzione del tutto – quindi misurabile in fondo solo per convenzione – anche al mondo del lavoro, scegliendo una statura media che può far pensare in particolare a quella di una donna. L’effetto di questi due testi, almeno così ritengo e spero, è quindi sia quello di proporre una percezione universale dell’essere umano come parte del reale e della storia, sia quello di conferire a queste pur diversissime condizioni – una morte ingiusta, lo sfruttamento sul lavoro – il carattere stranianti e violento che effettivamente hanno nella realtà.

G.G.:

un insieme di ~~superficie~~ e di bolle di colore scuro si distende in modo irregolare sullo spazio verde è possibile osservare dall'alto il risultato dell'esplosione un marchio ~~è posto~~ in basso a destra dell'immagine l'insieme di ~~materiali~~ ~~substanzie~~ presenta un rilievo centrale di forma ellittica con variazioni di colore verso il bianco

le percentuali più elevate dei materiali ritrovati sono frammenti di tessuti e di oggetti eterogenei talvolta fusi insieme sul prato che circonda l'insieme di ~~materiali~~ ~~superfici~~ alcuni animali si muovono impercettibilmente in più direzioni e osservano il cambiamento di colore e di spessore del terreno centrale

Poi abbiamo una stratificazione di significanti, come successivi livelli di plastica scenografica. Sulle prime ho pensato come si potessero leggere, nel contempo, tre significanti graficamente sovrapposti. E come fosse distante il visitare il senso dal renderlo esplicito. Il significante mentale che ne risulta, non è una mera sovrapposizione di parole che perdono forma e senso l'una dell'altra, ma proprio, mi pare di aver scorto, quel meccanismo del fondale barocco, di scenografie mobili, o come strutture collocate a profondità diverse che creano, una dietro l'altra, una visione prospettica. È prospettica la scrittura di (((. Sovrapporre i significanti è una scelta visuale o un ulteriore possibile forma di c-oralità?

A.D.F.: In effetti i termini sovrapposti, in tutti i miei lavori, sono pensati per essere letti da più persone simultaneamente. Dal punto di vista visivo, non si tratta di una

forma per così dire minimalista di poesia visiva o concreta, quanto piuttosto di un espediente semantico, poetico e narrativo che pensa la pagina come spazio, e la poesia come un linguaggio multidimensionale, in cui le lettrici o i lettori sono invitate/i ad immergersi. C'è inoltre per me una continuità assoluta tra la pagina – di cui questi semplici espedienti tipografici rivelano ulteriormente la spazialità – e le mie installazioni audio, video o in realtà virtuale, o appunto le letture-performance corali, dove il testo poetico, spesso anche lo stesso testo che si trova nel libro, viene esperito spazialmente e collettivamente. Il testo poetico si rivela per quello che è: spazio e mondo. La sovrapposizione delle parole ha, come tutto il resto del testo, una necessità strettamente poetica, scaturente dal presupposto che certe cose possono essere dette solo in un certo modo, ed è precisamente per questo che esiste la poesia. La poesia emerge quando è necessario dire cose che non possono essere dette altrimenti. Il barocco, infine, è certamente presente nella mia ricerca, nella sua capacità di creare profondità, che qui però non sono *trompe l'œil*, ma realtà della parola, ed anche nella capacità che ha la poesia barocca di inventare dei legami cognitivi con l'inconoscibile e l'immateriale: penso a Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a Thomas Traherne, a Margaret Cavendish, a Pierre Le Moyne, allo stesso Milton, e a tanti altri poeti del Seicento.

G.G.:

da lontano la buccia porosa sembra una bolla lucida una superficie da cui vedere tutte le finestre ma senza potervi leggere dentro quando il tuo volto è contro il mio non posso vederti il tatto questo atto di trasportare masse organiche fuori dal recipiente

Per te la poesia è più legata all'immagine o alla parola? e a proposito dell'immagine, cosa ci dici della tua copertina [dell'edizione italiana] - mi evoca un'olografia, un uno nel tutto e viceversa - elaborata insieme a Laila Dell'Anno?

A.D.F.: Quando definisco la mia poesia come pratica artistica intendo, tra le altre cose, che la poesia è per me un modo per generare delle immagini mentali che sono libere dalla rappresentazione. È il linguaggio che ci permette di creare delle immagini fluide, non definite, non fisse, in evoluzione e in connessione diretta con concetti e sentimenti, e la poesia è la forma linguistica più sofisticata e più potente per ottenere questo risultato. Inoltre per me la poesia è un paradosso: usa il linguaggio per raggiungere una percezione del reale che si sottrae al linguaggio stesso, oltre che talora al visibile e all'immaginabile. Per cui direi che per me la poesia, compresa ovviamente la poesia di (((, non ha a che vedere né con l'immagine, o con la parola, come rappresentazione o finzione, né con la parola nel senso novecentesco-heideggeriano di una parola poetica assoluta sull'orlo dell'indicibile, ma piuttosto con un continuo fluido tra immagine mentale, emozione e concetto che produce orizzonti cognitivi intensificati e orizzontali, aperti.

Detto questo, è vero che mi capita di utilizzare, all'inizio dei miei libri e per la prima volta qui in copertina, una fotografia che è una sorta di chiave di lettura, o meglio di visione sincretica, di alcuni aspetti tematici dei testi a seguire. In questo caso si tratta di una sovrapposizione digitale tra la fotografia di una pietra trovata su una spiaggia in California all'interno di una polla circolare e la fotografia di una sfera di vetro. Questi oggetti sono evocati nel libro, in testi in cui si parla di peso, di mano, di rapporto tra organico e artificiale, e di livelli della sostanza e della materia, dalla pietra al pianeta.

G.G.:

si tratterebbe di un pianeta trasparente il cui centro vuoto sarebbe visibile dalla superficie la lentezza del suo moto distorce da milioni di anni quella struttura buia dietro lo spazio convesso

Il desiderio - *de-sidus* (*sidus* = stella): cessare di contemplare le stelle a scopo augurale - è quella vacanza spostata più in là e mai pienamente godibile. Ecco perché l'andamento di (((mi pare quello di un giallo, il senso slitta sempre più in là e ci comporta in una semantica sensoriale che destabilizza armonicamente la di-visione del mondo appena appresa. C'è quel mondo di cui si parla, c'è nel bulbo dell'animale, nel muto procedere del tempo. Perché hai desiderato proprio (((?

A.D.F.: Direi che (((esprime un desiderio di presenza, di reale, di qualcosa che c'è già. Per una volta ciò che è desiderato non è qualcosa di spostato e mai pienamente rag-

giunto, definito dalla sua assenza, ma il tutto che esiste, tutto quello che c'è, nella speranza che riusciremo sempre meglio, anche noi esseri umani, a sentirlo e ad abbracciarlo, a cominciare dal linguaggio. Così la stella più lontana o il fenomeno inosservabile diventano in (((materia e sostanza che si trovano sullo stesso piano ontologico e hanno lo stesso grado di presenza rispetto a un animale o alla pietra di cui sopra. Il laggiù – gli orizzonti lontani di cui hai parlato – è qui in quanto materia, e l'inosservabile e l'immateriale sono anche loro sostanza che partecipa alla vita del reale. Tutto è nel tutto, senza soluzione di continuità. Il senso, aperto, multidimensionale, contenuto in questi testi, cerca di evidenziare questa presenza, e di farne parte, fosse anche come piccola porzione, come momento. Per questo mi piace dire che la poesia, da questo punto di vista, è una traduzione del tutto. Vogliamo inventare un neologismo, e dire che (((, anziché un “de-siderio”, è un “siderio”, un tentativo di siderare senza spostare né spostarci, anche nel senso della *Verschiebung* freudiana? Lo spostamento certo però avviene sul piano strutturale e narrativo, perché è solo con un andamento non lineare, rizomatico, inconcluso, e talvolta indefinito benché, come ricordi tu, sempre sensoriale, che può avvenire questo invito ad un'esperienza simultanea, multipla e corale del mondo e del linguaggio. L'elemento quasi da libro giallo, che osservi giustamente, viene secondo me proprio dalla successione e dalle relazioni “non lineari” tra i testi di (((. Ma lo stesso reale è non lineare, in quanto aperto, imprevedibile, contingente.

G.G.:

~0.00002 R 3 gyr pulsar rotatore obliquo radiazione
irradiazione di archi di luce ai lati della
strada che sale nel buio PSR B 1620 - 26b è un pianeta
antico quasi quanto l'universo la sua origine sarebbe
avvenuta quasi 13 miliardi di anni fa 12400 ly 1.35 / 0.34
M 2.5 ± 1 Mj ? / 13 gyr PSR B 1620 - 26b è una massa
che orbita in un sistema altrimenti ignoto da cui verrà
eiettata in un fenomeno di spostamento interstellare
permanente nel vuoto curvo ai lati della strada che sale
gli alberi

Ouspensky nel suo *Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto* - mentre leggevo (((l'ho aperto a caso come spesso faccio tra le varie letture - ho letto che se un uomo comincia a sentire la vita dei pianeti comincia simultaneamente a sentire la vita degli atomi. Non tanto di oroscopi, o forse sì, si tratta, quanto di un'idea panica di congiunzione astro-fisica: in (((si percepisce quest'apertura all'altro grande e all'altro piccolo, nello stesso tempo, e non v'è gerarchia che collochi su diversi piani le qualità, e non c'è modo di svilire una de-scrittura totale del caosmo poetico. Il corpo e i corpi celesti. Il corpo terrestre e la terra che lo ospita. Cosa è la voce in una poesia che diventa collezione di strati, dialettica di sguardi e significanti multipli?

A.D.F.: È una poesia del reale, un inno alla vita e a quello che c'è, laddove, in questo c'è, c'è anche l'impossibile, l'inosservabile, l'impensabile, il reale in tutte le sue estensioni, la sostanza spinoziana che unisce fisica e metafisica, corpo e immateriale, e certo anche la fisica teorica moderna che

sempre più tende ad unire, con modelli simili, l'infinitamente piccolo e l'infinitamente grande. Ricordiamoci però che più del 90% del cosmo è costituito da due forme della materia, le cui proprietà ci sono ancora oggi sostanzialmente sconosciute, che i fisici chiamano per convenzione "materia oscura" ed "energia oscura". Esse non hanno nessuna relazione con la fisica delle particelle come la conosciamo oggi. Anche di queste dimensioni inosservabili rende conto la poesia, ma le riporta qui, le mette, come direbbe Wittgenstein, sullo stesso piano della lampada, del tavolo, della porta, degli oggetti e degli eventi che ci circondano, e poi anche degli eventi storici collettivi e individuali, e dei traumi ad essi legati. Tutti questi piani sono appunto connessi, con-fusi. Per questo gli strati semantici di questa poesia sono multipli, se non infiniti. La voce quindi è la voce del tutto ancora una volta, a cominciare dalla voce di noi umani, perché la poesia spera sempre che il linguaggio possa unirci al di là dei nostri biechi e meschini conflitti contingenti, e superare le gerarchie e le frustrazioni del potere. Un'unione orizzontale, non autoritaria, molteplice, come lo stesso ingranaggio poetico attivato, almeno così spero, in (((.

G.G.:

l'appartamento è vuoto da sempre le luci sono accese in tutte le stanze e non ci sono interruttori per spegnerle il quadro elettrico è assente in un angolo di una stanza non lontano da una finestra una palla respira la superficie è interamente ricoperta dal derma e innervata da un sistema circolatorio piuttosto visibile sotto lo strato della pelle la sfera misura 18 cm di diametro non ha orifizi e non emette suoni il suo unico moto è dato dal rigonfiamento ritmico a intervalli di circa 4 secondi dovuto alla respirazione

Appare la mano, il suo gesto, la grafia di un corpo che oppone il suo Reale pulsionale insimbolizzabile. Non credo che il significante *palla* sia solo una presenza visiva, ma invece testimonianza dell'assenza creativa, del vuoto potenziale, simbolo del corpo. Una ferita della mano nel corpo digitato dalla macchina. Alla macchina che omologa i segni del desiderio, la mano-palla oppone, dialettica, la macchina del desiderio, della carne. Che rapporto ha (((, e più in generale la tua arte, con il corpo?

A.D.F.: Innanzitutto tengo a precisare che questa parola scritta a mano, che definisci in modo molto bello ed esatto come "ferita nel corpo digitato della macchina", indica, sul piano del significante, la palla (ancora una volta anche sfera, corpo celeste) di un bambino o di una bambina, altrove nel libro anche *giocattolo* che questo bambino o bambina – che non è ovviamente un personaggio ma una classe, per così dire, di persone e di eventi – tiene stretto vicino al corpo durante una situazione di conflitto armato, o mentre

non può più parlare quando le vengono fatte domande su qualcosa che è accaduto. L'autorità, la violenza, la guerra, il trauma, l'ingiustizia, si amplificano quando perpetrati a danno dei bambini, e lasciano segni da generazione in generazione, come una tragedia greca, e di questo anche parla (((. Ma questa palla è anche una possibilità futura, è la riscoperta di uno spazio e di un corpo che nonostante tutto respira e vive, anche se è indefinito e indefinibile, inarticolato; la vita dell'inosservabile, l'esistenza di un'alternativa che non si trova, ancora una volta, su un piano diverso, ma qui con noi, se la vogliamo intraprendere. Perciò, forse, le poesie più corporee di (((sono spesso anche le più astratte e indefinite. Perché questi corpi contengono tutti i corpi possibili, anche quelli ancora inimmaginabili. Ed anche perché la poesia cerca di rendere linguaggio ciò che non può essere immaginato, ovvero di fondare la sua azione sull'impossibile e sull'ignoto. In questo stanno, a mio avviso, sia la sua potenza che il suo scacco.

Su un piano pratico, che è però legato a questa dimensione concettuale, e dal punto di vista della mia pratica artistica in generale, il corpo ha una posizione anche qui molteplice: innanzitutto è il corpo di una parola che si scopre materia e spazio, mondo ed ambiente. Inoltre è il corpo del performer che però si cancella dietro l'enunciazione stessa; il corpo individuale cede il passo al corpo corale, e alla voce stessa come corpo, che si fa presenza immateriale al posto del corpo. Tale traduzione del testo nel corpo, nello spazio e nella voce, a cominciare dall'oggetto-libro stesso, che concepisco né più né meno come una scultura, rende conto di questa oscillazione tra materia e immateriale nel corpo del testo, di questa interazione vitale tra l'indefinito, l'astratto, l'orizzonte inconoscibile, e l'*hic et nunc*, la pre-

senza del reale, della natura e delle cose, in potenzialmente tutte le sue manifestazioni.

Entretien pour le projet *Vues & Données*

[Interview with Aurélie Pétreil and Fabien Vallos for the research project *Vues & données (Prise de vue - Prise de données)*, about the relation between the notions of “image” and “data,” at the IRAD, Haute École d’Art & Design HEAD HES-SO, Geneva, 2020.]

1. *Comment définiriez-vous la « donnée » ?*

La « donnée », malgré le caractère passif de ce terme, aussi dans d’autres langues (« il dato », « the data ») peut ne pas être quelque chose qui nous est simplement donné. Il en va de notre rapport à la technologie et à ses systèmes de représentation imposés à travers les données. Pour un-e artiste, la donnée peut en revanche faire l’objet d’une donation, c’est-à-dire que la donnée est une fonction avant même qu’une information ou une série d’informations. La fonction est un conteneur vide, que nous pouvons modifier et faire évoluer. Je définirais donc la donnée, du point de vue qui est le mien et donc en tant qu’artiste, comme une *fonction en évolution qui s’offre à une communauté*.

2. *Comment définiriez-vous le concept de « prise » (tel qu’on peut l’entendre par exemple dans « prise de vue ») ?*

Comme votre texte de présentation l’indique, la « prise de vue » n’est aujourd’hui plus forcément une question de *représentation*. La prise n’est pas nécessairement le résultat d’un angle de vision symbolique sur le monde.

« Prise » peut être entendu au véritable sens de « prendre du monde ». Prendre ne signifie pas non plus soustraire, cependant. À travers une prise de vue, l'artiste ne soustrait pas le monde au monde, mais le prend, plutôt, afin de le montrer. De le donner non seulement à voir, mais aussi à sentir, à percevoir. Donner à percevoir : *donnée* à percevoir. L'œuvre d'art donne à percevoir le tout dans une portion de ce tout qui est constituée par son existence même. Je définirais donc la « prise » au sens artistique comme une *donnée à percevoir qui engendre une modification de paradigme perceptif sur et dans le réel*.

3. *Comment la donnée et la prise modifient la « production » et la « co-production » ?*

Dans cette conception active et participative de la donnée et de la prise, qui refuse la dominance de la représentation (et la dominance tout court) dans la démarche artistique, tout est production et co-production. Production non pas dans le sens d'un produit *donné*, mais d'une production *qui se donne*, en se dérobant à chaque fois, à chaque prise, à son être-produit codifié. C'est pourquoi il n'y a pas, en art, de production sans *co-production*. C'est le caractère collectif et collaboratif de toute œuvre d'art qui réactive la notion de *donnée* au-delà du produit et celle de *prise* au-delà de la représentation, et les deux ensemble rendent l'œuvre d'art une histoire d'horizontalité plutôt que de hiérarchie et de domination. Je dis bien toute œuvre d'art, même celles qui ne sont pas conçues collaborativement, car la collaboration advient de toutes façons entre l'artiste, l'observateur et l'œuvre elle-même. C'est une question d'influence réciproque, comme dans un système planétaire. L'artiste et

l'observateur font à leur tour partie d'une communauté vivante et leurs actions sont inscrites, c'est-à-dire *orbitent*, dans le *tout* de cette communauté.

4. *En quoi cela change les conditions de la réception et de la perception ?*

Je ne crois pas que l'œuvre d'art – dans ce contexte théorique et pratique découlant des notions de *prise* et de *donnée* telles en tout cas qu'il me semble pouvoir les entendre et me les approprier à partir de votre proposition – soit soumise aux conditions de sa réception, précisément parce qu'elle modifie en permanence les paradigmes et les protocoles de son action dans le réel. Je crois que l'œuvre s'autonomise en permanence de la réception si l'on entend ce terme comme un ensemble de critères sociaux d'interprétation, de compréhension et de situation. Je dirais même que cette autonomie des codes, que je n'hésiterais pas à qualifier de « subversive », implique que le concept de « perception » remplace celui de « réception ». L'œuvre est une prise de réel qui se donne à percevoir potentiellement à tout le monde ; par conséquent, les conditions de sa réception sont secondaires, alors que la perception est elle-même une condition d'existence de l'œuvre, car celle-ci prend une partie de ce *tout* pour le *donner à percevoir* à une communauté potentiellement infinie et anonyme de destinataires. Pour le reste, c'est un problème d'éducation. C'est pourquoi certain-e-s d'entre nous estiment qu'enseigner ne peut ni ne doit être séparé de notre pratique artistique.

5. Quelles modalités d'invention pour (choisir parmi ces quatre questions)

- les modèles artistiques ?
- les modèles théoriques ?
- les modèles épistémologiques et scientifiques ?
- les modèles curatoriaux ?

Question très difficile, à laquelle je ne crois pouvoir apporter que quelques mots sur ma propre démarche artistique : la relation entre le texte, les corps et l'espace. Si nous pensons l'œuvre comme co-production et au-delà de la représentation, comment est-ce qu'une œuvre peut ne pas faire image et pourtant engendrer une *prise* et se *donner*, peut-être en réactivant autrement les données elles-mêmes ? Ces questions sont intrinsèquement liées à ce que j'appelle pour ma part « poésie comme pratique artistique ». Je conçois et je perçois mon activité poétique comme une *traduction* langagière *du tout* dans lequel elle s'inscrit. Pour moi le texte n'est pas distingué du monde, mais il est monde lui-même, il est corps et espace dès qu'il apparaît sur la page, et ses multiples dimensions corporelles et spatiales sont augmentées par les lectures chorales et collectives qu'il engendre, ainsi que par les espaces immersifs de type virtuel et/ou sonore multicanal dans lesquels il est à son tour traduit par une utilisation impropre – Fabien Vallos dirait un « mésusage » – des données sémiques et numériques. La modalité d'invention serait donc la suivante : s'immerger dans un texte – qui n'a d'ailleurs rien à voir avec la poésie dite « concrète » ou « sonore », que cela soit souligné pour éviter des malentendus – dont le caractère visuel est beaucoup moins important que son caractère « perceptuel » et immersif, corporel et spatial,

expérientiel et collectif. Ainsi, le langage est-il redécouvert et réactivé en dehors de l'image, de la représentation, du fétichisme du signe et de la fiction narrative, et c'est par le biais de ces processus qu'il peut engendrer une *prise* sur le réel ; un réel dont l'extension et la signification infinies sont traduites dans la portion d'existence et d'expérience que la poésie engendre et donne à co-produire en permanence.

On the Baroque

Del Barocco

Du Baroque

Perception and Imagination of the Moon in
Giordano Bruno's Philosophical Poem
De Immenso (with Laila Dell'Anno)

[This article was written in collaboration with Laila Dell'Anno for the international symposium *Fly Me to the Moon: The Moon in Human Imagination*, held at the University of Genoa in 2019, then published in 2022 in the eponymous symposium proceedings edited by Luca Beltrami, Lara Nicolini, and Lara Pagani for Genova University Press.]

INTRODUCTION

In 1591, Giordano Bruno publishes, as part of the Frankfurt trilogy, the philosophical poem *De Immenso et Innumerabilibus, seu de Universo et Mundis*, revisiting the arguments he had put forward seven years earlier in his vernacular dialogue-treatise *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*. In Books 3 and 4 of his 1591 poem, the Nolan embarks on an imaginary journey to the moon which is at the very heart of these sections. In the following, we are going to investigate how this flight to the earth's companion engenders not only a perceptual but also a gnoseological shift and how it becomes a decisive moment in the exposition of Bruno's main claims, that the universe is infinite and without a unique centre.

1. FROM COSMOLOGY TO POETRY AND FROM POETRY TO
THE COSMOS

With his *De Immenso*, Bruno takes up the legacy of Lucretius and his didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* (henceforth *DRN*). As Yasmin Haskell observes, what Lucretius does with Epicurus, Bruno does with Bruno, that is, translating his philosophy into didactic verse.¹ In this sense, the formal shift from philosophical dialogue (*De l'infinito*) to didactic poetry (*De Immenso*) must be seen in the wake of Lucretius's own undertaking. However, we would suggest that in Bruno's poem, the function of the poetic form goes beyond an *emulatio Lucretii*, and acts as an epistemological tool.² From the very outset of the poem, Bruno activates a *topos* recurrent throughout ancient literature, that of the winged poet (1,1,1-24):

*Est mens, quae vegeto inspiravit pectora sensu,
quamque iuvit volucres humeris ingignere plumas,*

- 1 Giordano Bruno, *De Immenso et Innumerabilibus, seu de universo & mundis* (1591; repr. La Spezia: Agorà Edizioni, 2000). See also Yasmin Haskell, "The Masculine Muse: Form and Content in the Latin Didactic Poetry of Paligenius and Bruno," in *Form and Content in Didactic Poetry*, ed. Catherine Atherton (Bari: Levante, 1998), 137. On interactions between Bruno and Lucretius see also Haskell, "Poetic Flights or Retreats? Latin Lucretian Poems in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, ed. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92-121; Haskell, "Conjuring with the Classics: Neo-Latin Poets and Their Pagan Familiars," in *A Guide To Neo-Latin Literature*, ed. Victoria Moul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 17-34; and Hilary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 70-90.
- 2 For the use of poetry in *De Immenso* see also Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, *Parodia e pensiero: Giordano Bruno* (Milan: Greco e Greco, 1997), 19.

*Corpus ad praescriptam celso rapere ordine metam:
 Unde et Fortunam licet et contemnere mortem;
 arcanaeque patent portae, abruptaeque catenae, 5
 quas pauci excessere, quibus paucique soluti.
 Secla, anni, menses, luces, numerosaque proles,
 Temporis arma, quibus non durum est aes adamasque,
 Immunes voluere suo nos esse furore.
 Intrepidus spacium immensum sic findere pennis 10
 Exorior, neque fama facit me impingere in orbes,
 Quos falso statuit verus de principio error,
 Ut sub conficto reprimamur carcere vere,
 Tanquam adamanteis cludatur moenibu' totum.
 Nam mihi mens melior; nebulas quas dispulit illas, 15
 Fusim, qui reliquos aretat, disiecit Olympum,
 Quando adeo illius speciem vancscere fecit,
 Undique qua facile occurrit penetrabilis aer.
 Quapropter dum tutus iter sic carpo, beata
 Conditione satis studio sublimis avito 20
 Reddor Dux, Lex, Lux, Vates, Pater, Auctor, Iterque:
 Adque alios mundo ex isto dum adsurgo nitentes,
 Aethereum campumque ex omni parte pererro,
 Attonitis mirum et distans post terga relinquo.*

There is a mind, which has inspired my breast with lively perception, and which delights to implant swift wings on my shoulders, transporting a lofty heart to its predestined goal, whence it can scorn Fortune and Death. And the mystic doors are opened, and the chains broken, which few have escaped, from which few are released. Centuries, years, months, days, and countless generations, the weapons of time, to which steel and diamond are not hard, have wanted us to be free from

their folly. Thus, undaunted, I rise up to cleave vast space with my wings, nor does rumor make me dash against those spheres which true error has built on false premises, that we might in reality be restrained by a fabricated prison, as though the universe were shut in by walls of adamant. For I have a better understanding which has driven away those fogs, the permeable air which, pouring out, shuts all others in, has torn down Olympus, since wherever it comes into contact with it, easily, from every side, it makes it vanish. Herefore, while I safely plot my course, on high, following my heart's desire, happy enough in my lot, I am returned as Leader, Law, Light, *vates*, Father, Author, and Path: and as I rise up from that world into other gleaming worlds, and wander the ethereal field in all directions, I leave it far behind, a wonder to the wondering.³

The moment of breaking out of the commonly known world and going beyond its limits is, as many have observed, reminiscent of *DRN* 1,62–97, but in Bruno's wording it is also strongly evocative of the poetic flight of the lyric *vates* in Horace's *Odes*.⁴ Thus, the lyric "I" of *De Immenso* presents himself from the very outset as divinely inspired *vates*, an identification which is affirmed in line 21, where this title occupies the central position. By implicitly activating the motif of poetic flight, itself absent from *DRN*, Bruno reveals himself not only as a successor of Lucretius,

- 3 Translation with alterations from Haskell, "Conjuring with the Classics." Latin text cited from *Jordani Bruni Nolani opera latine conscripta*, ed. Francesco Fiorentino (Florence: Le Monnier, 1890).
- 4 Compare, for instance, Bruno *op.lat.* IV,1,1,24 with *Hor.carm.* 2,20,1–5; *op.lat.* IV,5,1,1 with *Hor.carm.* 3,1,1.

but of the lyric tradition as well. Indeed, flight and poetry are inseparably linked, as Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer has observed, since the invitation to fly to the Moon and the description of the flight are limited to the verse passages.⁵ Together with the boundless reach of reason, it is poetic license, then, that allows the author, over the course of Books 3 and 4, to operate an epistemological shift: in 3,2,23-31 the poet enthusiastically revels:

*Num quo non pedibus liceat Telluris ab orbe
 Non iuvat ingenii cursum intentare per alas?
 Eia igitur fingas primum (si nolle fateri 25
 Certum est) confingas inquam te linquere nostrae
 Telluris sedes, et recta scandere versus
 Finitimum Lunae corpus. Dic numquid eunti
 sursum (si sursum liceat plus dicere forsan)
 Accidet ut magno consurgat corpore tellus 30
 Amplius? An maior terrae apparebit horizon?*

Wouldn't it be helpful to venture with the wings of the mind where your feet cannot take you, beyond the Earth's orbit? Imagine then, first of all (if you don't want to admit that it's true), imagine, I say, to leave the regions of our Earth and ascend straight up towards the neighboring body of the moon. Say, now that you are going up (if it is still valid to speak of "up"), will not an increasingly wide part of the Earth be visible? And will not the Earth's horizon appear larger?⁶

- 5 Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer, "Poetische Darstellungen des Kosmos in der Nachfolge des Lukrez," in *Der Naturbegriff in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Thomas Leinkauf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 132.
 6 Trans. by the authors here and when not indicated otherwise. On the direction of movement cf. *op.it.IV,2, 131-32*.

Bruno openly negotiates the meaning and epistemological value of the *ingenii alae*: although it is clear that the wings are implements of the mind and the voyage to the Moon only imaginary, the poet emphasizes – with the climax *fin-gas, confingas inquam* – its fictional status, adding only as an afterthought what will become a fundamental argument in the following passages: that what they are about to imagine is in fact the truth. Doing so, Bruno gently guides his reader into a thought experiment, which is about to metamorphose into a real expedition.

One book further, in the third chapter of Book 4, this gnoseological shift becomes apparent. Whereas in the *passus* quoted above, the journey was declaredly imaginary, the heading of 4-3 reads: *De ascensu in caelum et vera mundi contemplatio, et primo Telluris species ab orbe Lunae prospicitur* – “On the ascent into heaven and the real contemplation of the world, and first the appearance of the Earth is observed from the circle of the Moon.” No longer the flight to the Moon is covered by the mantle of fiction, but it is recounted as a true expedition. In the first lines of the chapter (4,3,1-9), the importance of the epistemological shift is underlined:

*Eia age conscendas, statuum te in corpore Lunae;
 Aptato sensus, aptem rationis ut alas:
 Pergito, perge, ducem certum securus adusque
 Persequitor, te non ceratis Dedala plumis* 5
*Ulla manus tollit, vel stulti techna Menippi;
 Unde vel Icarium formides optime casum,
 Insulsas Lucii vel sannas Samosateni:
 Sed veri species, naturaeque inclitus ordo
 Est tibi dux aegro, incolumem qui deinde reducet.*

Come, then, hop on, I will place you on the body of the Moon: equip yourself with the senses, so that I can equip you with the wings of reason. Go on, follow safely a reliable guide, not the Dedalian art of the waxen feathers will lift you up, nor the artifices of silly Menippus, from where you might fear the Icarian fall or Lucian of Samosata's vain grimaces, but the sight of true things and the renowned order of nature are a guide to you, invalid, and will finally bring you back unharmed.

Imagination has been replaced by contemplation: fiction gives way to truth (*vera contemplatio; species veri*). Unlike Icarus's or Menippus's fabricated wings, Bruno's *alae rationis* cannot be damaged, since they are not a product of fiction. In fact, the mention of *fictio* in 3,2 is surprising, for, throughout *De Immenso*, Bruno insists upon the difference between his own and the Aristotelian method: whereas Aristotle is repeatedly accused of applying *phantasia*, *fictio*, and *farcimina mille* in his cosmology, in short, of telling *stultitiae*,⁷ Bruno uses for his exploration of the cosmos *ratio* and *sensus* itself.⁸ In doing so, he transposes the exploration from a fictional level to a concrete one, so that in the subsequent prose passage the author can state (4,4, gloss): *Visumque est qualis Telluris explicetur facies illi qui orbem Lunarem teneat* – “It has been shown what the face of the Earth looks like to the one that is in the lunar orbit.” At the intersection of philosophical and scientific treaties and poetry, Bruno uses the poetic wings to *contemplate* rather than *imagine* the cosmos. His findings are

7 *Op.lat.IV,3,2,10; 3,3,9.*

8 *Op.lat.IV,3,3,9.*

not *phantasmata* nor *ficta* but sensory experience, and we shall see that this aspect influences in-depth the form of the poem.

2. THE MOON AND THE UNIVERSE IN *DE IMMENSO*

The journey to the Moon allows a new perspective on the world and indeed the universe. From the very lift-off the earthbound perspective is questioned when in 3,2,29 Bruno parenthetically adds “if it is still valid to speak of ‘up.’” Further away from the Earth, a radical shift in perception is taking place. The Earth is no longer an imposing and all-encompassing presence but shrinks to a little dot in the vastness of the universe: *Viden ut modo vasta / Machina in exiguam molem contracta videtur?* – “Do you see that now the machine [of the Earth] seems to be contracted into a tiny mass?” (4,3,14-15). The perceptual shift runs parallel to the physical passage from Earth to Moon. Ascending into the heavens and looking back at the Earth, the poet states: *iam tibi non Tellus sed vere Luna videtur* – “It does no longer seem to be the Earth but the Moon” (4,3,23), and a few lines later, drawing closer to the Moon: *iam tibi non Luna sed Tellus videtur* – “it no longer seems to be the Moon but the Earth” (4,3,31). In the space of merely nine verses, the perception of the cosmos has been radically overturned. Earth and Moon have been interchanged and not just semantically but also, and most importantly, ontologically. *Tellus* and *Luna* no longer designate particular celestial bodies, but rather the relations between *astera*.⁹

9 Cf. also *op.lat.IV,4,3*, gloss: *Illic iuxta physicae veriorisque philosophiae*

The interchangeability of Earth and Moon is fundamental for the poet. He emphatically insists on this aspect, which entails several consequences.¹⁰ First of all, according to Bruno, the Moon is inhabited, just like the Earth, as are other celestial bodies such as Venus and even the Sun. Indeed, the passages of *De Immenso* mentioning the inhabitants of the Moon are numerous. Let us quote from the gloss at 3,8:

[Q]uod nobis est eclypsis Lunae, lunaribus est eclypsis solis propter telluris interpositionem inter eorum oculos atque Solem. Similiter Lunaribus apparet umbra in corpore telluris, quando a tergo illorum est sol; sicut et nobis a Luna tenebrae diurnae siunt. Quid ergo prohibet ne ad eandem speciem substantiae referas hunc mundum atque illum?

.....
principia, eodem nomine Lunam appellat quo et Tellus appellari solet, frequentius enim Cererem Tellurem dicimus – “According to the principles of physics and of the truest philosophy, the Moon is called by the same name as the Earth is usually called, for very often we call the Earth Ceres.” See also Mahlmann-Bauer, “Poetische Darstellungen,” 134, where she speaks in terms of “change of perspective” and “relativity of perception,” precisely in relation to the *De Immenso*.

- 10 *Op.lat.IV,3,8, gloss: [...] videmus eadem omnino sub analogia tellurem esse atque lunem ad solem et ad aethereum spacium [...] et diximus et dicemus iterum quae aliquando una vel alia via haerere animo faciamus ut tellus atque luna ab astro Veneris et Mercurii necessario in eorum qua duo illi planetae nobis videntur specie debent omnino fulgida astra apparere. – [...] “we see that the Earth and the Moon are comprised in the same analogy in relation to the Sun and the ethereal space [...] We have said it and we will say it again, so that one way or another it will eventually be carved into our minds: that the Moon and the Earth, seen from Venus and Mercury, must necessarily appear entirely as glowing stars, in the same way as those two planets appear to us.”*

[W]hen for us there is Lunar eclipse, for the inhabitants of the Moon there is a Solar eclipse because of the interposition of the Earth between their eyes and the Sun. Likewise, a shadow appears on the body of the Earth for the inhabitants of the Moon when the Sun is in their back; as for us the darkness during the day comes from the Moon. What then forbids you to assign the same type of substance to this world and that [world]?

Here we can observe once more the shift of perception engendered by the voyage to the Moon, put in relation with one of the key concepts of Bruno's theory, i.e., the *analogy*.¹¹ Both the shift of perception and the analogy among different parts of the universe are enhanced by the considerations pertaining to the Moon's inhabitants: the Moon is analogous to the Earth; *Tellus* and *Luna* are both *mundi* with inhabitants and with their respective moon (in Bruno's system, they orbit around each other). In this sense we can also read the considerations at the end of the passage. As Bruno claims also elsewhere in the third Book: *Cum Tellus sit eiusdem speciei atque luna reliquique planetae* - "The Earth is of the same species as the Moon and all other planets" (3,4, gloss). If Bruno is wrong in considering that the Moon is a planet, his intuition about the (rocky) planets' and the Moon's similar substance and uneven surfaces - another feature of his theory of the analogy in the universe - would be confirmed several years later by Galileo's observations.¹²

11 For the analogy argument in *De l'Infinito* see also Laurence A. Breiner, "Analogical Argument in Bruno's *De l'infinito*," *MLN* 93, no. 1 (1978): 22-35.

12 See Pietro Greco, *L'astro narrante. La Luna nella scienza e nella let-*

This revolution of perception, occurring on different levels, is the cornerstone for Bruno's most important claim: the infinity of the universe. Under the light of the Copernican revolution, Bruno's use of the analogy permits thinking beyond Copernicus's theory itself and toward the infinity of the universe. Moving from Earth to Moon (4,3), and from there on to Venus (4,4) and the Sun (4,7), it becomes apparent not only that the Earth is not at the center of the universe, but that there is no unique center at all (*ubicumque sies centrum constabit ubique* – "wherever you might be will be the center" (4,6,5)), precisely because of the universe's infinity.¹³ The travel to the Moon is the first step towards Bruno's model of the infinite universe under the premise of his theory of the analogy and of the continuity of substance among the celestial bodies. From one celestial body to the other, the universe repeats itself *ad infinitum*, and it could not be otherwise since Bruno does not admit the presence of pure void beyond the universe's boundaries (4,13,1-4):

*Ergo ubi concepi spacium sine fine profundum
 Inde una perseverans specie atque colore:
 Continuum minime dubitem comprehendere quiddam
 Quod semper parteis integrant consimilares.*

Therefore I have conceived the deep space without end,
 and from that constant in its appearance and color: I

teratura italiana (Milan: Springer, 2009), and Simonetta Bassi, "Immagini della Luna fra '500 e '600," in *Il pensiero simbolico nella prima età moderna*, eds. Annarita Angelini and Pierre Caye (Florence: Olschki, 2007), 272.

¹³ Cf. also *op.lat.IV,1,3*, gloss.

wouldn't doubt in the slightest to understand it as a certain continuum that is constituted by always identical parts.

Once more, we could then argue that the infinity of the universe, claimed all the way through *De Immenso*, is a direct consequence of this eminently modern cosmological displacement of perception starting from the travel to the Moon. Furthermore, the loss of centrality of the Earth, the infinity of the universe and the imperfection of the surfaces of celestial bodies resonate with a metaphysical model in which humankind is just one of God's creatures among others, lost in the infinite unknown of the universe. The physical infinity of the universe reflects a new form of metaphysical immensity, and, *mutatis mutandis* similarly to Spinoza's later theories, the property of infinity unites, if not identifies, God and the universe.¹⁴ As Mahlmann-Bauer puts it: "in a sort of process theology, Bruno transfers here the divine predicate of *immensitas* into the universe itself, where the creator is recognizable through its agency."¹⁵ How does all this affect the poetic text on the one hand, and, on the other hand, justify the use of poetry in such epistemological and philosophical contexts?

14 Cf. for example *op.lat.IV,3,1*, gloss and *op.it.IV,1*.

15 Mahlmann-Bauer, "Poetische Darstellungen," 138: "In einer Art Prozeßtheologie überträgt Bruno hier das traditionelle Gottesprädikat der *immensitas* auf das Universum selbst, in dem der Schöpfer an seinen Wirkungen erkennbar ist."

3. POETRY AS A WAY TO SAY THE UNREPRESENTABLE

The apparently general concepts expressed by the title of this paper, that is, those of “perception” and “imagination” of the Moon, assume very specific traits in Bruno’s poem. As we have observed, the necessarily imagined travel to the Moon and then across the universe does not entail an imaginary travel in terms of fiction. Rather, Bruno aims at substantiating imagination as much as possible with theoretical and epistemic *exempla*, so that the imagination of cosmic objects and relations is used as a means of perception of what cannot be seen by the eyes, which, as Bruno states in several passages, are nothing but an often misleading way to look at nature.¹⁶ Bruno’s poetic imagery is as much as possible precise and scientific,¹⁷ in other words it aims at transforming imagination into perception. And yet, paradoxically, it is at the same time highly abstract and conceptual, because it deals with things that not only cannot be seen, but not even imagined. We could then argue that Bruno chooses poetry, among other reasons, in order to embrace such paradox, that is, in order to give a verbal shape to the (infinite) universe as something that cannot be exactly known, let alone described, neither by science nor philosophy. When thinking about Bruno’s poetic de-

16 E.g. *op.lat.IV,4,3*, gloss.

17 Cf. Breiner’s analysis of the Brunian language: “The words we read as concrete – path, direction, distance, goal – are actually very neutral general terms, terms at home in a variety of contexts, but with an equivalent significance in each of them. Words like these, with simple meaning and open valence, are an important resource for Bruno. Each one is at once simple and clear and broadly suggestive, and when they are brought together into a picture, like this simile, the same qualities are extended to the composed group.” Breiner, “Analogical Argument,” 26.

vice, one has to bear in mind, once more, that his claims are historically ahead of Galileo's telescopic observations. The poem is a way of perceiving, through imagination, an otherwise unrepresentable and unobservable universe.

In this aspect resides a striking difference between the *De Immenso* and *DRN*: Bruno's poetry can only exist within the Copernican revolution and even beyond Copernicus, because in Bruno's notion of infinite universe the sun is only the center of the solar system, but of course not of the whole universe. Although Lucretius also affirms the infinity of the universe and the existence of other inhabited worlds,¹⁸ his poem is not motivated by the attempt to give such a spatial and temporal infinity a linguistic, and thus poetic, form as a new possibility of cosmological observation, perception and imagination, nor, obviously, to defend the Copernican revolution in the first place. Furthermore, Bruno's insistence on the loss of a unique center within the infinite universe – and subsequent affirmation that the center is everywhere¹⁹ – is eminently early modern, if not “pre-baroque,” because it corresponds to an irreversible shift in the conception of the human position in the universe which is confirmed by the image of the “infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and its circumference is nowhere,” according to Pascal's (and others') famous formulation.²⁰ Finally, unlike Lucretius's poem, Bruno's proj-

18 Lucr. 2,1048–89.

19 See for e.g. *op.lat.* IV,4,6,5.

20 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Michel Le Guern (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), Fragment 185, 167. For a study of this notion until Pascal, see Maurice De Gandillac, “Sur la sphère infinie de Pascal,” *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie* 33 (1943): 32–45. For a passage of *De Immenso* on the perceptual shift in the infinite space also involving the figure of the sphere, see Bruno *op.lat.* IV,1,12.

ect is, although epistemologically rigorous, not a materialistic one. In his monistic vision, as already mentioned above, the infinity of the universe accounts at the same time for its metaphysical status, and no solution of continuity can be traced between the infinity of the universe and the divine design which engendered it. As the Nolan states very clearly in the last chapter of the poem (8,10): *Deum esse infinitum in infinito, ubique in omnibus, non supra, non extra, sed praesentissimum, sicut entitas non est extra et supra entitatem, non est natura extra naturalia [...]*. – “God is infinite in the infinite, He is everywhere and in all things, not above or beyond them, but in them absolutely immanent; similarly the essence is nothing beyond and besides the beings [...].”

Because poetry is used by Bruno both as a linguistic and conceptual device, the physical observation expands from the Moon toward the exploration of the infinity of the universe, and, at the same time, the scientific observation of the universe expands into its metaphysical counterpart under the aegis of poetry and infinity, of poetry as an exploration of infinity and unknowability. In this sense, it is worth reminding once more that Bruno composes and publishes the *De Immenso* (1591) several years later than *De l'infinito* (1584), as if poetry was necessary in order to confirm and further expand his cosmological positions.

This does not imply, as one could expect from this convergence between physics and metaphysics, that Bruno's use of poetic representation of the universe is rhetorically charged or highly metaphoric. Quite the contrary: Bruno's poetry, because of its scientific and philosophical nature, is often literal, its use of metaphors very circumscribed and its metaphors easily detectable and interpreted.

table, since they also have a precise epistemic function.²¹ The conceptuality and literality of Bruno's poetry stem from the epistemic rigor and the cognitive – not only aesthetic – value he attributes to poetry. Poetry is an invaluable instrument of intellectual inquiry, to the point that, as we argued, Bruno needs poetry in order to say and to give shape to things that could not exist in other linguistic or imaginative forms. We could argue in conclusion that Bruno chooses poetry in this context in order to expand the possibilities of thought and of scientific observation. Poetry intervenes when the latter fails to provide enough evidence and gives presence to the former, as such positioning itself on the same level of epistemological truth as astronomy and philosophy. Such approach to poetry as a gnoseological instrument accounts for his, not only scientific, but also poetic modernity far beyond the century he was not allowed to enter.

21 On Bruno's distrust – and/or instrumental use – of metaphors and on his critique of representation, see Gatti, *Essays*, 297–306. For some remarks on Bruno's style in *De Immenso* see Mahlmann-Bauer, "Poetische Darstellungen," 125.

Convexities

[This essay-poem was written for the co-authored publication *Hephaestus Reloaded: A Book for Ten Hands* (punctum books, 2019) (by Adam Berg, Brunella Antomarini, Vladimir d'Amora, Alessandro De Francesco, and Miltos Manetas). It also features some former versions of poems from ((((punctum books, 2021). The text tries to reflect upon possible interactions between posthumanism and the baroque. Some of its, potentially cryptical, references to the baroque are clarified in the following essays.]

often spherical volumes weigh down the tree's branches at
times they are made of convex leaves that give rhythm to the
landscape at other times of white condensations
where galleries are excavated then the branches trace vaults
passages below elongated wedges

inside the volumes in the fissures excavated by vectors or in the
empty den covered by leaves perhaps lenses are positioned embracing
a wide range of landscape searching information

Bending toward the fridge I now perceive two kinds of convexity. This body expanding toward the outside, bulging out of the wall, can contain or seek information, but in one case this convexity is due to the swelling of this pulsation that looks for the real, that tries to touch the real and to come out of itself; it is due to the perception of oneself as identity in order to create experience and encounter. This convexity can augment perception in the experience of

perception: augmented real. And, with it, a non-projected desire, rather actual: love.

Or well it is a convex objective, a fisheye which collects data and traces an increasingly wide angle of representation, or, better, it gives this possibility to those who are able to exploit it, because there is no representation without editing. The editing occurs afterward. In the tele-visioned image editing and production do not go together like in a factory; post-production enters the stage. Once left that dark corner in the kitchen, that moment of aperture, a history is built with the collected data. A story that, even when it is not sold as true – no matter then if fiction or journalism – edits reality after being edited. Because this story builds up a representation of the real, and, with it, projections of identity, since it is itself based on a pre-existing grammatical code.

Art, in this sense, is paradoxical. It is iconoclastic with images, *grammoclastic* with language. And it edits too, certainly less with the readymade than in certain films, yet art seizes portions of the real and isolates them in order to put them in another relation. I will call this paradox the *editing paradox*. To cut up the real in another way, against the codes of consensus, against the rhetoric of the spectacle, to cut up the real with language in order to get closer to it, to get closer now, to edit perception against the editing, is this not a way to master the real again? It is about creating experience, but not as interactive entertainment. The *interactive* installation: another *interface-intraface*. It is rather about creating experience for a possibility of seeing, better: of feeling. It is perhaps possible to do it even with the screen and its “augmented” extensions.

a transparent thread vibrates it does not seem to be attached to anything neither from upside nor from the bottom and it is very difficult to identify its height its undulation is not due to the air and it has something corporeal also when touched sometimes the vibration becomes trembling other times it is motionless and seems to wait over the time the thickness increases then it decreases then increases again

There are two ways of becoming as there are two kinds of virtual. Permanently becoming something else has a relation to external forces that transcend us even if we think we made them ours: it is a projection. One becomes something or someone else because one wants, or must, conform himself or herself to models that are themselves permanently changing, also in our mind. Becoming in the *real*, on the contrary, means to descend into the tube, in the hourglass of veins, to discover that that cloud of thoughts in the morning, still in bed, will contribute months after, together with other clouds and other architectures, to a change. In the first case to become means to become precisely someone else, in the second to become oneself. To become in the *real* means to stop on that *apnoea* of perception and enlarge it until flowing. Above all, it means learning to choose, and discovering that what we think today as a choice is not a real one, because it is sold to us as a choice. “To sell” and “as” are two often complementary words.

By the same token, the digital virtual has no relation to the virtual in Deleuze’s sense. The first one is – maybe not on an ontological layer, but certainly on a political one (although Pasolini already asked in relation to television where one layer begins and the other ends) – a way of reifying into the interface the projection of the non-chosen

becoming. Lately the virtual becomes augmented, thus confirming this process. Augmented reality is not augmented real. Augmented reality does not augment perception, but it simply adds a portion of digital environments to the environments we can already experience. It is a supplement. With devices such as the HMD (head-mounted display) and 3D cinema technology, it tries to reduce the frame that has been traced with the screen already more than one century ago, and for a longer time with theatre and painting, all the way back to Plato's cave. Yet the ontological layer remains the same.

To jump in curved space.

With cellphones the screen becomes a much more direct prosthesis, even though it remains frontal, for now. The interface progressively becomes an *intraface*. In this way the projection reifies itself and reality, independently from its cognitive level, and tends to become the real. Tends. Tents, moving with the night's wind. The window is open, torn apart, it is a hole and a sphere too, a convex abyss, an objective rather than a perspective.

Instead, with the other virtual a scenario of possibility within the real unfolds itself. Also because possibility can't exist but in the real, otherwise it is not possibility, it is representation. Imagination is not imagery, it is not a projecting *koinē* made on the basis of a linking algorithm. In this virtual world the HMD is made of flesh, it has no definite form and disappears in the brain. It is a way of looking without image. This other virtual is virtual because it proposes an alternative which does neither belong to a code nor to a criterion. There is neither canon nor democratic consensus, the community would rather be united in possibility.

Hence, there are two very well differentiated kinds of non-dualism. Or, better, non-dualism 1, that I will call non-dualism 2 because it is a dualism (I should have inverted the order of the two forms of becoming and of virtual as well, in order to make everything clear, but when everything is clear...), is precisely not a non-dualism. Non-dualism 2 is in a way the one of the cyborg. Thierry Hoquet believes that a “cyborg philosophy” means “to think against dualisms,”²² or at least to introduce a perturbation in thought, but he forgets representation. If the cyborg exists, then it is simply part of the existent. The fact that it is difficult to decide whether the prosthesis is the organic or inorganic part is a secondary problem, that I will leave to the cyborg, who has already many problems by the way. If then such a cyborg manages to free itself from dualism as construction of a consensus of imagery, representation, and (pseudo)choice, so much the better. If the cyborg does not exist or exists as concept, then it cannot move the old categories at all. Rather than a non-dualism, it is in this case a metaphor (which is the dualist figure par excellence), i.e., a projection of union of opposites unable to introduce any perturbation in the script.

at the Amsterdam central station the yellow and ovoid plastic boxes protect the circuits connecting the convex objective to the surveillance screen and probably also the engine allowing the camera to rotate the curve of this object bulging out of the ceiling and the color of its surface make it visible to all data is registered

22 Thierry Hoquet, *Cyborg philosophie: Penser contre les dualismes* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

To think against dualism or, better, beyond dualism, requires a much more sophisticated and in a way tormented operation. The more we will have been used to interfaces and *intrafaces*, the more tormented it will be. The union human-machine, from William Gibson to Kraftwerk, does not belong in itself to a non-dualistic narrative. It belongs to it only if this union, whether prosthetic or frontal, additional (like in the HMD) or incarnating (like in the cyborg), fosters a critic of representation. To think in a non-dualist way has only to do with becoming and with possibility. It is both a cognitive and political factor, indissolubly, because in non-dualism perception is connected to choice.

It is about introducing oneself in the esophagus, in information, in the script, and to handle with extreme care and concern the materials that are given to us.

The risk is big. Data is given by external forces which transcend us and the machines themselves, just like stock exchange transcends economy. Even the subjectivities, if any, that provide data are transcended by it, given by data. Data is a mutating organism which rarely knows its total architecture and is much more conscious of its contingent formations, of its information canned in prefabricated algorithms, as language in journalism is already formatted in order to transmit information in a certain way, with a sure effect on the *doxa*. But who is the subject of this knowledge? After all, journalists are mere executors of their language, they are spoken by their language. To speak or to be spoken, the typical major problem about which talks, among others, Robert Blaser quoted by Judith Balso.

It is then about appropriating language, today more than ever. Not only by learning it, but by blowing it up in order to create our own language.

We were all in the dark. Somme lulled
by ignorance to sleep; and paid
musicians made shameful sleep sweet.
Those who were awake stole honors,
stuff, blood, or made themselves spouses
of every sex, and derided the unfortunate people.
I turned on a light: there! Like a swarm of exposed bees,
deprived of their advantageous night,
thieves and the envious took revenge on me,
their wages interrupted and the joys
the ugly dozers got from their bestial sleep.
The sheep went along with the wolves
against the valiant sheepdogs;
then they became the prey of their own greedy entrails.²³

In all this there is a visible problem, well seen by the Baroque. Where does augmentation begin and where does distortion end? Or well, even more simply put: is augmentation distortion? And is the subversion of the code on the side of augmentation or of distortion? And, finally, what is distortion as a concept?

The famous Mannerist painting *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, by Francesco Maria Mazzola known as Il Parmigianino, is not a normal painting. Not only because a painting, as the window up on the left seems to remind,

23 Tommaso Campanella, *Selected Philosophical Poems of Tommaso Campanella*, trans. Sherry Roush (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 143.

is square or rectangular, especially at that time. But also because the image is in reality painted on a wooden hemisphere. The image becomes object, from two to three dimensions it ventures into the real, it bulges towards the real thanks to Francesco's hand painting himself, this hand that John Ashbery compares to a whale, this hand-prosthesis with the paintbrush-prosthesis of a Cyborg-Parmigianino, this hand bigger than anything else, tracing the gesture of salvation. That is why there is more augmentation than distortion here, augmentation of life.

Yet, in order to realize this work Mazzola placed himself in front of a convex mirror, looked at himself, reflected himself on this distorting device together with the room behind. Does then the mirror distort, and the artist's hand augment? There perhaps Mazzola got to know himself, discovered himself, not really by looking at his image distorted in the mirror, but rather by tracing this augmented union between himself and the environment, the room behind with the window, this extraordinary room, a post-Euclidean room where the script undergoes an irreversible perturbation, and identity as well. The serene gaze of the young Francesco suggests that something has been discovered in this expansion of perception, first of all of himself, of himself in relation to the environment, in this passage from two to three dimensions which is nothing but a becoming as becoming oneself, in this geometry that creates a possibility. The young Francesco dissolves his own fixed identity in this augmentation, in this moment that he chooses to expand forever, while becoming who he is.



Fig. 19. Francesco Maria Mazzola detto Il Parmigianino, *Autoritratto in uno specchio convesso*, 1523–24, oil on wooden panel, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

This augmentation has nothing of an excess, of a capitalist inflation, of a *more*, a superfluous addition, but it is an expression of the real, an expansion that creates the possible in the real. The mere distortion as supplement, as gadget of the imagery, gives way to the activation of another convexity. In this case too the augmented real reacts to augmented reality, the baroque *trompe l'œil* is not anymore what it is when experience regards the light. An augmented, an enhanced perception, until something that was not previously felt is revealed. These are slow, inter-

nal, non-verbal processes which become language sometimes, or well object-image, like here.

If the addition-supplement is consumerist, capitalist, distortion is spectacle. Distortion in itself is not a perturbation of the script, and certainly not subversion. It creates a parallel world, an addition of data, while to perturb, to subvert, means to generate possibility in the real.

A set of devices uses, instead of augmented reality, images apparently coming *from here*: the social networks. Just like standard journalism, social networks give an illusion of presence by following a simplistic informational paradigm. Facebook and LinkedIn are the contrary of Parmigianino's self-portrait. They reduce the self to a codified and regulated interface, made of tastes or certificates, of messages that are sent and received on the basis of a protocol and of images. Furthermore, this information is available. It is too easy to say that "we know it" and that we therefore should take these things "at the second degree," in order to fill up the anguish of death. Too easy because we tend to forget the power of representation, especially when it is *sold* as reality. But at the end reality is already inside the social network: reality is the first degree of representation of the real. Representation often bases its strategies on its discreet presence, which tends to disappear. Tents. A tent with two interlaced bodies inside, two bodies that are not one. This time dualism is important, against a fusion that makes the other disappear in what we thought to be love.

But is to be two really *being-two*? Even to feel the other is discovered as non-dualism, for to feel the other means to negate their representation, i.e., a rigid identity built on the basis of formatted criteria. Social networks produce

reality with imageries that are based on something very similar, at the end, to the virtual 1. Identity is also the one between each individual and their corresponding page. It is no coincidence that on Facebook this is called “wall.”

“To augment” means then to restore a continuum on the discrete? A flux of experience/perception? A really continuous flux, not an RSS flux, neither a hyper-realist editing. How to do it? How to live with it? How to descend into the tube, in the hourglass of veins? Do we have to go there, to push our convexity towards events on which we received edited information in order to feel them rather ours?

She saw me. Who saw who? And what does “to see” mean? The *voder*,²⁴ the first vocal synthesis machine in history, reveals two problems as linguistic problems: the subject (and, with it, identity) and the sight (and, with it, the seeing as, which can be intended in two senses: seeing as representation, and seeing as as change of paradigm, in the sense of Wittgenstein’s Indian mathematicians. Once more, the choice is between reality and the real-possibility).

Voder stands for *Voice Operating Demonstrator*. The better known *Vocoder* stands for *Voice Encoder*. These two devices, having an almost identical name, producing a relatively similar sound and both created by the Bell Labs, do two very different things. The vocoder codifies a sound signal through a series of bandpass filters and on the basis of algorithms among which we find also those of the GSM systems (cellphones). Used for message encryption dur-

24 See ToneSpectra.com, “‘Voder’ - An early Vocoder Machine,” *YouTube*, June 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMOhxpfoowo>.

ing the Second World War (the so-called SIGSALY system), the vocoder is today mainly a sonic filter for human voice, to which it gives a robotic sound (Joe Zawinul, Kraftwerk, Daft Punk). The voder, on the contrary, is a system based on electrical – and more recently digital – impulses imitating human voice. Thus, if the vocoder is a voice-based analysis-synthesis device, the voder is a synthesis-only system. In the voder there is no vocal input signal. The voder is activated by an operator who pushes a series of buttons simultaneously.

Language, so far an exclusive quality of humankind, is primarily articulated by voice. In the vocoder the timbre is codified until distorted. In the voder there is no voice starting the process other than the one produced by the impulses of the machine itself. A transcending or a transcended subjectivity? To speak or to be spoken? Both devices produce a distortion of human voice but they operate at two different ontological layers of reduction/redefinition of subjectivity, of language transfer from the subject to the appliance, and of concentration on enunciation. Who thinks? Who speaks? Who sees? Who understands? What are we telling each other, whom are we talking to, and who are we through the device? What is our message? The vocoder and the voder reveal this passage, whereas many other devices for information, data conversion, and production of language and images are normalized, naturalized at the very moment of their diffusion; until fictive identities, individual or collective (in the masquerade of terrorism for instance) are created, or in order to isolate potentially dynamic individuals by making them believe that their message will be heard, as part of a community.

I now understand, moving in the room, why the volume of a voice is called volume. Your message while you are talking to me is a body pushing the space, like in *I Am Sitting in a Room* by Alvin Lucier, a story that saturates and inflates the room, that augments it, expands it; language injects light from the window up on the left, producing a convexity that is also an intensity, a way of touching and listening, of being together, of holding.

Who is there together with Francesco, with Alvin Lucier, with us in the rest of the space? Until which point can our perception go?

the whole room is wrapped inside an immense surface that is observing without asking anything it is waiting touch the stream build liquids

cuneiform writing is based on the repetition of only one form a series of vectors coming as it seems from continuous lines the meaning is given by the horizontal or vertical orientation and by the quantity of the same sign

Walter Benjamin's Allegory and Baroque Lyrical Poetry: A Study in Rhetoric

[Originally published in *Semicerchio* 31 (2018).]

“For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love, still telling what is told.”

– W. Shakespeare, *Sonnet 76*

1. INTRODUCTION

This study chooses Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory as a possible guideline into some examples of baroque lyrical poetry and is conceived as a starting point for a wider project of studies on the Baroque that I would like to undertake from now on. As a matter of fact, Benjamin developed his conception of allegory in narrow relation to the baroque theater and, when it came to lyrical poetry, Charles Baudelaire – whom he saw as a baroque poet *post-literam* – was at the core of his investigations. No work left by Benjamin is entirely devoted to an analysis of his conception of allegory in relation to baroque lyrical poetry. Nevertheless, Benjamin often refers with general theoretical and rhetorical considerations to baroque playwrights who also had a practice as lyrical poets, such as Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, and William Shakespeare. Regarding Shakespeare, more-

over, Benjamin wrote in a 1921 letter to Gershom Scholem that he was projecting an entire study on the *Sonnets*: “Abgesehen von angekündigten Arbeiten, wie einem großen Aufsatz über Shakespeares Sonette.”²⁵ Given such an intention directly expressed by Benjamin and the importance of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* for the history of poetry, this study will focus in particular on this relation, with some incursions into Gryphius’s poetry as well, Gryphius being the most cited poet in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (henceforth, *OGT*)²⁶ in considerations not only pertaining to the *Trauerspiel*, but also to general poetological issues. I will consider Shakespeare as a baroque poet *à part entière*, although his name is often missing in baroque poetry anthologies, even those published in English.²⁷ This phenomenon is mainly due to the immense gap among Shakespeare and other English poets of neighboring generations in terms of quantity of studies, publications, and influence, but also to the fact that Shakespeare is often referred to as a Renaissance poet. Thus, this choice requires some preliminary explanation.

First of all, Shakespeare, together with Pedro Calderón de la Barca, is the most frequently cited foreign baroque

25 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), II:987 (henceforth, GS I–VII). “Foresight of works to come, such as a big essay on Shakespeare’s sonnets.”

26 In GS I for the German version. *Die Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* was published in English by Verso in John Osborne’s translation: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998). Although I always took Osborne’s translation into account, I have decided to propose my own translations of the passages quoted from this work.

27 See, for instance, Harold B. Segel’s seminal anthology *The Baroque Poem: A Comparative Survey* (Boston: Dutton, 1974).

playwright in *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, as a counterpart to the German playwrights studied by Benjamin. Secondly, and in relation to that, baroque is, chronologically as well as aesthetically speaking, a hazy phenomenon in spite of some major recurring themes, and the term itself has been widely debated since its inception. The notion of “baroque” is often extended from 16th-century mannerism in painting to 18th-century music, with baroque architecture and literature mostly located, within reason, in the 17th century. Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* respect this periodization, since the first edition was published in 1609, thus symbolically opening the 17th century as the core period for baroque poetry. Finally, and most importantly, Shakespeare’s plays and poems are inhabited by themes, imageries, forms, and rhetorical figures that clearly fall under what might be called baroque aesthetics. It will then be one of the aims of this study to investigate some implications of this affirmation under the aegis of Benjamin’s notion of “allegory,” which will then be taken into account both as a rhetorical figure and as a guiding notion for an analysis of baroque poetics.

In the wake of Benjamin’s method itself, my analysis will be conducted as a research in literary theory in which I will try to propose an original rhetorical and theoretical approach to baroque poetry and aesthetics. Although specifically focused on poetry, this study has been conceived in the wake of previous major theoretical works on the Baroque, such as Gilles Deleuze’s *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* and Francesco Orlando’s *Illuminismo, barocco e retorica freudiana*, as well as of recent developments in neo-baroque aesthetics, such as William Egginton’s *The Theatre*

of *Truth*.²⁸ Hence, one of the aims of this study is to propose some outlines of a rhetorical and theoretical model of the Baroque, in which the notion of *convexity* will be added to Benjamin's allegory, but also to Deleuze's fold and Eggington's holes and gaps, as a way of describing the epistemological implications of baroque aesthetics.

2. BENJAMIN'S ALLEGORY AS A NON-DUALISTIC FIGURE

Benjamin's allegory is not to be intended as an emanation of the allegory as a figure of rhetoric, but rather as a definition of a whole rhetorical and epistemological system describing the way baroque poetics functions. Although it preserves some features of the so-called "traditional" allegory – such as the hermeneutic necessity of developing an argument in order to understand the figure and the consequent arbitrariness of the symbolic relations that it evokes, to which I will go back – Benjamin's allegory is primarily an inquiry into the relations language–world as they can be redefined by the poetic practice. As several scholars have pointed out,²⁹ Benjamin's allegory has multiple possible implications and the risk of misunderstanding them is very high. Nonetheless, it seems to me that a major feature of Benjamin's use of the allegory is its *non-dualism*, especially when its rhetorical behavior is

28 I intend to examine all these works more closely than in this essay in separate studies to come.

29 See Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter, 1981): 109–22, and Matthew Wilkens, "Toward a Benjaminian Theory of Dialectical Allegory," *New Literary History* 37, no. 2 (2006): 285–98.

observed under a poetological perspective. By *non-dualism* I mean that Benjamin's allegory produces a reduction of ontological dichotomies typical of the Western metaphysical tradition such as subject and object,³⁰ image and word, body and mind, terrestrial and spiritual, language and world and, ultimately, rhetorical representationality and "degree zero." To understand such a feature means to understand, but also to redefine, the rhetorical as well as the epistemological implications of baroque poetics, with major consequences that have been barely explored so far. Let us now follow Benjamin's argumentation.

Benjamin refuses the traditional conception of allegory as "a conventional relationship between a designating image and its signification," that he attributes to W.B. Yeats among others (OGT 339³¹), because, unlike the metaphor, the interpretation of an allegory is not grounded on the recognition of a signification *koinē*, but rather on the arbitrariness of a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning. Thus, "the allegory, in 17th century, is not a convention of the expression, but the expression of a convention" (OGT 351³²), which means that the allegory creates its convention each time that it appears as a figure of speech in baroque poetics: the allegory is a "created convention" (OGT 351³³). Benjamin's allegory, to put it with Wittgenstein, is a *rule following* in which "at each point a new decision is

30 See Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 174.

31 "ein konventionelles Verhältnis zwischen einem bezeichnenden Bilde und seiner Bedeutung."

32 "Die Allegorie des XVII. Jahrhunderts ist nicht Konvention des Ausdrucks sondern Ausdruck der Konvention."

33 "geschaffene [...] Konvention."

necessary.”³⁴ The allegory produces its own open system of references, rather than basing itself on a preexisting convention. The rule following is not a way of respecting a preconceived rule, but rather of producing a paradigm, a continuously renewed process within and during the movement of language. So that, pushing forward Wilkens’s claims on this subject,³⁵ I would say that baroque allegory, according to Benjamin, deconstructs the duality between convention and expression in favor of a unique poetic gesture in which the expression establishes an unconventional convention. As both Jean-Marie Gleize and Jacques Roubaud affirmed separately in relation to their respective poetic practices: “la poésie dit ce qu’elle dit en le disant,” *poetry says what it says in saying it*,³⁶ which is particularly true for Benjamin’s conception of allegory applied to baroque lyrical poetry, as I will try to show further through some examples. Benjamin himself states it clearly

34 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen – Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §186.

35 “Unlike the symbol, the effectiveness of which was based on the unifiability of vehicle and tenor (and of author and reader), Baroque allegory maintained the divisions between them without displacing entirely the idea of their relationship as supplied by the formal dialectic between convention and expression, itself allegorized for the Baroque through the interplay of history and nature in the ruin. Convention, the reified form of historical consciousness, found its form in the unified and orthodox object of human agency, whereas expression, its necessarily fragmentary and heterodox antithesis, consisted in the uniquely determined, individual disintegration of that object.” Wilkens, “Toward a Benjaminian Theory of Dialectical Allegory,” 290.

36 Roubaud, *Poésie etcetera*, 77, and Jean-Marie Gleize, interview with Lionel Destremau, *Prétexte*, Hors série 9 (1998), http://pretexte.perso.neuf.fr/PretexteEditeur/ancien-site/revue/entretiens/discussions-thematiques_poesie/discussions/jean-marie-gleize.htm.

by the way: “allegory is both convention and expression” (OGT 351³⁷).

What we might call the *rule following* of Benjamin’s allegory is an eminently non-dualistic procedure, because no ontological distinction is given between the poetic gesture and its system of meanings and references. This is the reason why Benjamin claims that the baroque allegory should be understood *as a sign* in its own right (OGT 340), and that its character of “expression” means that it should be compared to a whole system of signs, “just as speech is expression, and also writing” (OGT 339³⁸). Benjamin overtly states that “baroque lyrical poetry enjoys the same movement” of what we proposed to call the non-dualistic *rule following* of Benjamin’s allegory, in which “in order to counterbalance the immersion into the abyss, the allegoresis must ceaselessly unfold in new developments, it must ceaselessly surprise” (OGT 359³⁹). Such a permanent renewal of the rhetorical developments of the baroque allegory is then at the inner core of its non-dualistic properties, and the movement of surprise which engenders from it is nothing but a widely recognized consequence of baroque aesthetics, here showing a somewhat hidden face.

To the signical conception of the allegory corresponds a likewise iconoclastic conception of writing expressed by Benjamin, in which the ontological dualism between language and image is deconstructed: “externally and stylistically – in the drastic use of typography as in the

37 “die Allegorie ist beides, Konvention und Ausdruck.”

38 “so wie Sprache Ausdruck ist, ja so wie Schrift.”

39 “Der barocken Lyrik ist die gleiche Bewegung eigentümlich [...]. Um der Versenkung Widerpart zu halten, hat ständig neu und ständig überraschend das Allegorische sich zu entfalten.”

overloaded metaphors – writing tends to impose itself as image” (OGT 351⁴⁰). Contrary to how it could appear at a first glance, Benjamin’s conception of allegory is iconoclastic rather than representational, and his conception of writing is material and objectual rather than image-oriented, precisely because the dualism between writing and image is dismantled by this unprecedented rhetorical engine: “in the field of the allegorical intuition, the image is a fragment, a rune” (OGT 352⁴¹). And, quoting Carl Horst: “he [Horst] claims that the allegory ‘always reveals a “crossing of the borders of the other mode,” a transposition from the visual arts into the field of presentation of the arts “of language” [...]” (OGT 353⁴²). The notion of “arts of language” (*redende Künste*) will play a major role in this study, because the “transgression” (OGT 353⁴³) of the dualism between writing and image, poetry and visual arts, has an anti-representational power – confirmed by the use of the term of “field of presentation” (*Darstellungsgebiet*) rather than “representation” – which, as such, has also a non-dualistic power. Just like the dismantling of the dualist referentialism of the convention, the baroque allegory *presents* its object in its own *rule following*, rather than representing it through the reference to a codified and predefined system.

40 “Äußerlich und stilistisch – in der Drastik des Schriftsatzes wie in der überladenen Metapher – drängt das Geschriebene zum Bilde.”

41 “Das Bild im Feld der allegorischen Intuition ist Bruchstück, Rune.”

42 “Dem ungeachtet heißt’s von der Allegorie, daß sie ‘immer ein “überschreiten der Grenzen der anderen Art,” ein übertreten der bildenden Künste ins Darstellungsgebiet der “redenden” zu erkennen gibt.”

43 “Grenzverletzung.”

The non-dualist power of the allegorical approach to the “arts of language” is confirmed by a further fundamental passage from the image to the *object*, which is already evoked by the expression “brutal evidence of typography” in the passage quoted above and is highlighted by the following claim (OGT 360⁴⁴):

The function of the baroque Bilderschrift is almost a denudation [*Entblößung*] rather than an unveiling [*Enthüllung*] of sensory objects. The emblematiser doesn't give the essence “behind the image.” It is rather as writing [*Schrift*], as caption [*Unterschrift*] intimately connected to the presented object in the books of emblems, that he forces the essence before the image.

The baroque emblems – to which Benjamin often returns as a key to his investigation of the allegory – express, together with the physical materiality of typography, the non-dualistic redefinition of the relation *language-image-object*. Non-dualistic because baroque rhetoric performs a movement of *presentation* and of *denudation*, rather than of *representation* and *unveiling*. There is no ontological distinction between image, language, and object as there is neither a process of unveiling of a preexisting degree zero nor of reference to a preexisting convention or rule. All is in the expression itself, in the signic as much as objectual traits of the allegory.

44 “Nicht sowohl Enthüllung als geradezu Entblößung der sinnlichen Dinge ist die Funktion der barocken Bilderschrift. Der Emblematiker gibt nicht das Wesen ‘hinter dem Bilde’. Als Schrift, als Unterschrift, wie diese in Emblemenbüchern innig mit dem Dargestellten zusammenhängt, zerrt er dessen Wesen vors Bild.”

Another term employed by Benjamin together with the recognition of the materiality of language is “overloaded metaphors” (*überladenen Metapher*). The notion of metaphor disturbs, in some way, this rhetorical model. The metaphor is indeed the dualistic figure *par excellence*, because it requires an image-oriented conception of language and, by the same token, an unavoidable and structural difference between the expression and its field of representation hinting at a signification behind the poetic image. In other words, the metaphor does not work without a preexisting convention. Hence, a particular attention should be devoted to the notion of “overload,” which actually condenses the baroque mistrust for the metaphor, highlighted and studied among others by scholars such as Jean Rousset, in the chapter “La querelle de la métaphore” of *L’intérieur et l’extérieur*,⁴⁵ and Francesco Orlando, in a chapter of *Illuminismo, barocco e retorica freudiana* entitled “Che la metafora può non essere la regina delle figure” (“That metaphor might not be the queen of figures.”)⁴⁶

A fundamental distinction should be traced between *metaphor* and *metaphorical overload* on the one hand, and between *finite polysemy* and *infinite polysemy* on the other hand. Such a double distinction will allow further understanding of the rhetorical way of functioning that is at stake in this model, and also of why this model is particularly powerful in relation to lyrical poetry. The *metaphorical overload* destabilizes the metaphor in its conventional nature – as part of the *rhétorique restreinte*, to say it

45 See Jean Rousset, *L’intérieur et l’extérieur. Essai sur la poésie et sur le théâtre au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Corti, 1968), 57f.

46 Francesco Orlando, *Illuminismo, Barocco e retorica freudiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 74f.

with Gérard Genette⁴⁷ – until it deforms and disrupts it into something else: the infinite display of possible meanings of the baroque allegory. This act of overloading the metaphor implies that the metaphor is transformed into something else, because the duality of its referential system based on a representational convention, which then splits the expression between an image and its zero degree, is subverted in favor of the creation of a new field of possibility. What does the metaphor become when its field of reference, when its *koinē* – i.e., its common signifi-
cational ground upon which it is recognizable as such – is subverted? This is perhaps the most important question to be asked in relation to the rhetorical inventiveness of baroque poetry, and of baroque lyrical poetry in particular, because of the degree of concentration (cf. the false yet meaningful etymology of *Dichtung* as *density*) of the lyrical expression.

The notion of *metaphorical overload* is then connected to a likewise crucial rhetorical distinction to be traced in this framework: the one between *finite* and *infinite* polysemy. If the finite referential system on which the traditional metaphor relies is shaken and redefined by the baroque poetic inventiveness (the metaphorical overload), the signification is also extended into a potentially infinite unfolding of meaning. Such a phenomenon takes place in this way because of the non-dualist rhetorical *rule following* operating in this context, since the baroque allegory subverts at once the system of references and the traditional metaphysical oppositions contained in a strictly metaphorical view of the poetic language.⁴⁸ It therefore carries an intrinsi-

47 Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 21f.

48 We are not far away from Heidegger's claim according to which

cally political overtone: the allegory as potentially infinite polysemy opens up a scenario of possibility by irreversibly subverting the perceptual coordinates of language. This is one of the deepest reasons why Benjamin, in opposition to the coeval scholar Hermann Cohen, refuses to attribute to the allegory a dimension of “ambiguity” (OGT 352⁴⁹). Ambiguity is, by definition, the basic feature of polysemy in standard rhetoric, which we will then call *finite* polysemy, to distinguish it from the completely different phenomenon manifesting itself in *infinite* polysemy, so that the etymology of the word “polysemy” acquires here a double implication: polysemy as ambiguity and oscillation between one meaning and the other, or polysemy as *poly-polysemy*, i.e., as multiplication of the signification of the baroque allegory and of the metaphorical overload until a possible final point of multiplication and stratification of meaning that I call infinite polysemy.⁵⁰

For very similar reasons, Benjamin’s allegory is permeated by *universality*. In this framework, universality is directly opposed to ambiguity. Universality is the direct consequence of the unfolding of infinite meaning occurring in the baroque allegory, according to which “the detail hasn’t any actual importance,” since “the accessories of signification, by referring to other objects, grow such a

“the metaphorical exists only within the metaphysical” (*Der Satz von Grund* [Pfullingen: Neske, 1957], 89), criticized by Paul Ricœur who, at the same time, as I tried to show in another work, struggled to propose an alternative model. See Alessandro De Francesco, *Pour une théorie non-dualiste de la poésie (1960-1989)* (Paris: Éditions MUX, 2021), 234f.

49 “Zweideutigkeit.”

50 I thank Judith Balso for having guided me toward the proposal of this important distinction during our common work at the European Graduate School.

power that they become incommensurable with respect to profane things and they are elevated to a higher level, which at times can also be sacralized” (OGT 350–51⁵¹). The *infinite* polysemy of the allegory opens up a space of possibility in which the language and the objects acquire, at the same ontological level, unprecedented relations. Thus, a non-dualistic feature of Benjamin’s allegory can also be grasped in its deep connection to the objectual space of the real, which is neither concealed nor hinted by the standard rhetorical dualism, but rather submitted to a process of both *denudation* and *augmentation* of its universal potentiality. Such a process of signification reveals, on the one hand, the *topos* of the transitory character of this world, but on the other hand, in a contradictory movement which is typically baroque, raises the terrestrial to the celestial heights of (polysemic) infinity.

I prefer to employ the notion of “real” rather than “reality,” because it connotes with more precision the non-verbal enigmaticity of nature and time to which language is permanently confronted. The real is opposed, almost, to the notion of “reality” as first degree of linguistic and imaged representationality of the raw matter designated as “real.” The real appears consequently as a non-dualistic counterpart of language, because language itself is immersed in it, and because one of the core aims of the rhetorical devices described here is to create, through the poetic *rule following*, an alternative modality of connection

51 “es aufs Detail so streng nicht ankommt [...] jene Requisiten des Bedeutens alle mit eben ihrem Weisen auf ein anderes eine Mächtigkeit gewinnen, die den profanen Dingen inkommensurabel sie erscheinen läßt und sie in eine höhere Ebene hebt, ja heiligen kann.”

between the representational system at work in language and the unrepresentability of the enigmatic surrounding environment in which we all find ourselves.⁵² Such an attention for the notion of “real” in the baroque context can also be read in the following claim by Benjamin about the relation between nature and signification:

For the Baroque, the finality of nature is the expression of its own signification, the emblematic presentation of its sense, which, as allegorical, remains irrevocably separated from its historical realization. History, in its moral examples and its catastrophes, was considered only as a material moment of the emblematic. (OGT 233⁵³)

The real, here called “nature,” embraces signification as an inseparable part of itself and the allegory *presents* it, instead of representing it: a non-dualism. History assumes by the same token purely material traits in the signifying system of the baroque allegory, as a diachronic realization of this synthesis between nature and signification embo-

52 For studies on the notion of “real” under similar angles, cf. classical works such as Clément Rosset, *Le Réel : traité de l’idiotie* (Paris: Minuit, 2004); Jacques Lacan, *L’Identification, séminaire 1961-62*, <http://staferla.free.fr/S9/S9.html>; Deleuze and Guattari, *L’Anti-Œdipe*, 103f.; and, more recently, Alain Badiou, *À la recherche du réel perdu* (Paris: Fayard, 2015). For poetological studies on the notion of “real,” cf. Christian Prigent, *L’Incontenable* (Paris: POL, 2004), and De Francesco, *Pour une théorie non-dualiste de la poésie*.

53 “Denn dem Barock gilt die Natur als zweckmäßig für den Ausdruck ihrer Bedeutung, für die emblematische Darstellung ihres Sinnes, die als allegorische unheilbar verschieden von seiner geschichtlichen Verwirklichung bleibt. Geschichte galt in den moralischen Exempeln und den Katastrophen nur als ein stoffliches Moment der Emblematik.”

died by the emblem. Nonetheless, as I will try to show later, a deeper layer of historicity appears in the allegory, a universal as much as personal historicity, an enigmatic historicity of the real, presented, according to Benjamin, by the figure of the skull (OGT 343).

There is an evident risk of confusion in employing traditional terms (metaphor, polysemy) in order to describe patterns so unusual and radical that those terms themselves undergo a complete redefinition. Does the notion of allegory itself then, although so radically redefined by Benjamin, fall under such an impasse? This question proves to be extremely important, since the potentially contradictory features of Benjamin's allegory are visible in two crucial issues making the notion of allegory appear problematic for the aspects of this model that are at stake in this study. The first contradiction, which is almost a paradox, is that what I called the *poly-polysemy* deployed by allegory also entails, according to Benjamin, a blatant arbitrariness: "every character [in the *Trauerspiel*], every object, every combination can signify any other" (OGT 350⁵⁴). Even more so, the arbitrariness of the signification provokes a loss of signification itself, bringing in a self-referential sphere that is not far away from a Derridean "renvoi indéfini de signifiant à signifiant"⁵⁵: "from now on, it has become impossible to emit a signification, a meaning; the only signification is the one given by the allegorist" (OGT 359⁵⁶). The extreme consequence of a non-dualistic

54 "Jede Person, jedwedes Ding, jedes Verhältnis kann ein beliebiges anderes bedeuten."

55 Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 42.

56 "eine, Bedeutung, einen Sinn auszustrahlen, ist er von nun an ganz unfähig; an Bedeutung kommt ihm das zu, was der Allegoriker ihm verleiht."

approach is that everything pertains to the arbitrariness of the signifier. Yet the contradiction here is that the equation traced by Benjamin between the arbitrariness and the self-referentiality impedes the opening of a space of possibility in the real given by the subversion of the dualism between expression and convention, thus weakening the ontological and political implications of such a model.

The second contradictory aspect intrinsically resides in the etymology of the term “allegory.” The movement of the *allōs agoreuein* involves, just like the metaphorical, a double level: the one of the expression and the one of the “other space” – linguistic, representational, historical – both dissimulated and hinted by the expression. The rhetorical dualism of the allegory is dismantled, in Benjamin’s model, by the arbitrariness of the allegoresis and, in the interpretation proposed here, by the infinite polysemy of the non-dualist *rule following* entailed by it, because Benjamin’s claim that “every character, every object, every combination can signify any other” neither necessarily implies that such a poly-polysemic system of references is self-referential nor that it is arbitrary. Rather, such a loosening of the referential convention is the key to the opening of the poetic possibility, and of the possibility that the non-dualist infinite polysemy operates inside and toward the real instead of remaining trapped into the formal play of the signifier. Here is the interest of thinking this rhetorical model in relation to baroque lyrical poetry, because the rhetorical inventiveness of baroque lyrical poetry allows us to draw such an alternative consequence out of Benjamin’s allegorical model.

Two major reasons for this appear to be the following: first of all, the fact that the absence of characters in lyrical

poetry, or, better, the replacement of characters with less defined and more *poly-polysemic* instances entails both a reduction of the dualistic representationality and of the self-referential arbitrariness of the allegory when it operates in the *Trauerspiel*. There is a difference between saying that “every character can signify any other” and that “every object or combination can signify any other.” The two abstract instances (object and combination), more than anything else present in lyrical poetry, involve a totality, a *universality* which is not representational but that, on the contrary, *presents* a potentially infinite opening of meaning and action. As a direct consequence, the rhetorical engine of lyrical poetry tends to reduce, when not to nullify, the dualistic representationality of the fictional level which is on the contrary the basis of baroque theatre and of any other narrative device recognizable as such.

The second factor is that there is a radical difference between the movement of the *allös agoreuein* and the concentration (*Dichtung*) operating in lyrical poetry, so well that while the *poly-polysemy* of the *allös agoreuein* leads the expression towards a parallel referential sphere, no matter here if recognizable or arbitrary, the *poly-polysemy* of the *Dichtung* is always concentrated in the textual sphere itself. A textual sphere that, at the same time, is not self-referential: while the *allös agoreuein* invents a system of references, the *poly-polysemy* opens up the possibility of references. Benjamin’s allegorical model allows one to observe baroque lyrical poetry as a complex linguistic and rhetorical process which reactivates and augments the cognitive and political relations between the language and the real through the opening of a space of possibility implied by the non-dualistic *rule following*.

3. FROM CONVENTION TO DENUDATION

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red, than her lips red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,
As any she belied with false compare.

Shakespeare's sonnet 130 is not only a semantical reversal of some *topoi* of the Petrarchan tradition, but also a first, perfect example of one of the ways in which poetic language recreates an unconventional convention in the baroque age. As Joel Fineman remarks, it is not only that the mistress's bodily features do not correspond to the natural conventional comparisons, but the real itself appears here out of its conventional simplifications. As the poet writes, snow is not white in reality, and hairs are not wires.⁵⁷ The reversal of the convention implies what I have called a non-dualist approach to the real and a parallel dismantling of representation, so that the 12th line can be read as physical and poetological at once: against the dualism of the

57 Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 182.

metaphorical *koinē* (“But no such roses see I in her cheeks,” the rose being the metaphorical reference *par excellence*), poetry, like the mistress, “treads on the ground.”

Fineman gives an appropriate definition of the act of dismantling the rhetorical code in sonnet 130: “Thematically, the sonnet writes *against* a poetics of visual comparison and *for* a poetics of verbal disjunction that foregrounds the diacritical difference built into familiar similarities.”⁵⁸ It is another way of describing the passage from the visual arts to the arts “of language” that Benjamin denoted as one of the features of his allegorical model. The “verbal disjunction” engendered by the arts of language disrupts the representational automatism and provokes a perceptual shift, an alternative rhetorical approach to the real, a *rule following*. What is at stake here is a process of *intensification of perception* of the real through the disruption of the convention and the construction of an independent rhetorical paradigm. Such an augmentation is also a direct consequence of the process of baroque *denudation* (*Entblößung*), in Benjamin’s terms; a denudation, as well as a presentation, of a most direct relation between the language and the real, against metaphorical and representational conventions.

Such a process might appear contradictory if confronted with what I chose to call with Benjamin the “metaphorical overload” and the consequent *poly-polysemy* or even *infinite* polysemy of baroque figurality, but it is not the case. The connection between *augmentation* and *denudation* shows the common link between a process of anti-metaphorical monism and a process of both rhetorical and

58 Ibid., 183.

perceptual enhancement of the poetic language, because they are both a result of the rule following as a creation of unconventional conventions. Precisely in this sense, the semantical concentration of lyrical poetry proves to be an essential feature for such a (re)definition of the baroque rhetorical paradigm, because the *Dichtung*, the density of the lyrical expression, both reduces the metaphorical distance from the real and unfolds, by the same token, a new level of possibility of meaning and perception. This phenomenon manifests itself in the Baroque maybe for the first time in the history of modern poetry, because it is a direct consequence of an eminently *subversive* approach to representation which probably never occurred before with such an awareness. A subversive approach whose systematicity is also given by the Europe-wide extension of baroque thought, and especially by the support of a similarly subversive epistemology, entirely based on the production of paradigms and devices for an augmented and intensified perception of the real. I am thinking of the historically painful affirmation of the Copernican system, of the Galilean and Newtonian discoveries of the universe, of Van Leeuwenhoek's invention of the microscope, of Giordano Bruno's theory of the infinite.

Let us read, having this in mind, Shakespeare's sonnet 119:

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears
Distilled from limbeckes foul as hell within,
Applying fears to hopes, and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win!
What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never!
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted,

In the distraction of this madding fever!
O benefit of ill! Now I find true
That better is by evil still made better;
And ruined love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent.

The first two lines of this sonnet are a remarkable example of *Dichtung* as lyrical *concentration* and of metaphorical overload producing *poly-polysemy*. The system of references is opened and subverted to the point that it is not possible to detect a recognizable convention out of the *rule following* of the poetic expression itself. If the alchemy-like semantics and the presence of the mythological figure of the siren could appear as a possible referential *koinē* at the beginning, the hermeneutical process is contrasted by the impossibility of delineating a unique degree zero of these lines which, as such, are neither a metaphor nor an allegory, but perhaps a new combination of the two. The following part of the poem allows us to explain the reason of its beginning. The experience described could never be as universal – also in the sense of Benjamin’s allegory – nor would it grasp so closely the becoming of a subject into a deeper knowledge of the self, and therefore of the real (“Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater”), if the figural landscape of the text allowed a finite number of interpretations. It is of course possible to realize that this sonnet describes an experience of crisis in love, of difficult relation, maybe of betrayal like in other sonnets, in any case of loss of the self in the dark spaces of extreme feelings until a new cognitive and emotional status is ac-

quired. Yet, what makes this text, and the experience of this text, so innovative and so subversive is its ability to redefine, through its *poly-polysemic rule following*, such an emotional status as an additional space of possibility. Perception and signification are augmented together with the knowledge of the real, through the experience of the text, and through the text as experience: a *denudation*. Thus, the line “How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted” doesn’t only describe the extreme nature of this experience of knowledge, but also the impossibility of representing it through standard poetic devices.

This consideration brings up another difference, outlined in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, between the arts of the image and the arts of language:

The “passion for the organic,”⁵⁹ which has often been evoked in relation to the baroque visual arts, is not so easy to seize in the domain of poetry. On that note, it is necessary to observe that these words⁶⁰ refer less to the external form than to the mysterious spaces of the organic. It is from these internal spaces that the voice comes from. (OGT 385⁶¹)

59 Benjamin’s quote is from Wilhelm Hausenstein’s *Vom Geist des Barock*, 1921.

60 The words of the choir in the pastorale and the opera.

61 “Die ‘Leidenschaft für das Organische,’ von der man längst beim bildlichen Barock gesprochen hat, ist nicht so leicht im dichterischen zu umreißen. Und immer wird dabei zu merken sein, daß nicht so sehr der äußeren Gestalt als der geheimnisvollen Innenräume des Organischen in solchen Worten zu gedenken ist. Aus diesen Innenräumen dringt die Stimme [...]”

Although Benjamin here directly refers to the baroque vocal music, it seems to me that his remark on the voice as a language art device, exploring “the mysterious spaces of the organic,” could very well be applied to the deepest signifying layers of the sonnet 119, as well as to other similar baroque lyrical densities very well known by Benjamin, such as, in some cases, Gryphius’s poetry. Yet, Gryphius’s poetic results are mostly weaker than the ones reached by Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. The reason of such a disparity also resides in the fact that, although Gryphius’s baroque inventiveness is undeniable, the rhetorical figurality of his poetry is not as innovative as Shakespeare’s, as it is much more limited by a schematic religious ideology. It is as if Gryphius were about to jump over the representational obstacle without at the end being free enough to create completely new relations. This phenomenon does not concern Gryphius only in the German context of the same years and it has broader historical reasons that will not be investigated further here.⁶²

Some of Gryphius’s most relevant lyrical examples of this exploration and denudation of the mysterious “internal spaces” are often permeated by strong chiaroscuro effects and, as in Shakespeare, by the poly-polysemic pres-

62 They have been widely explored by Benjamin, who cites Gryphius together with Lohenstein and Opitz as examples of higher literary quality compared to other German poets and playwrights of the same period and of lower inventiveness in comparison to Spanish masters such as Calderón and Lope de Vega, or to Shakespeare himself. Such an inferiority in respect to the foreign masters incarnates, according to Benjamin, the difference between the intrinsically ideological German Trauerspiel and the greater freedom of expression of the European baroque tragedy and comedy (*OGT, passim*).

ence of the night, like in the two final tercets of the Sonnet II-1, *Morning Sonnet*:

Vertreib die dicke Nacht / die meine Seel umgibt /
Die Schmerzen Finsternüß / die Hertz und Geist
betrübt /
Erquicke mein Gemütt / und stärke mein Vertrauen.

Gib / daß ich disen Tag / in deinem Dinst allein
Zubring: und wenn mein End' und jener Tag bricht ein
Daß ich dich / meine Sonn mein Licht mög ewig:
schauen.⁶³

Here the night is both internal and external, like the morning, in the rest of the sonnet, is both terrestrial and divine. The last line performs a reversal of the chiaroscuro proportions, because the night of death becomes morning light in the presence of an intensified layer of perception which in Gryphius corresponds at once to the knowledge of the self and to the spiritual elevation of the soul. This, also rhetorical, upheaval of light and dark is condensed by the famous oxymoronic formulation which begins and ends the sonnet I-3, *On the Birth of Jesus*. Let us read the first quatrain and the last line:

63 Marvin S. Schindler, trans., *The Sonnets of Andreas Gryphius: Use of the Poetic Word in the Seventeenth Century* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971), 152, slightly adapted: "Drive out the heavy night that holds my soul in bondage, / The gloominess of pain that darkens heart and mind. / Restore my weary spirit, make strong my faith. / Allow me this one day at your command alone / To serve; and when that day arrives that marks my end, / then grant, my sun, my light, eternal sight of you."

Nacht / mehr denn lichte Nacht! Nacht / lichter als
 der Tag /
 Nacht / heller als die Sonn' / in der das Licht geboren /
 Das Gott / der Licht / in Licht wohnhaftig / ihm
 erkohren:
 O Nacht / die alle Nacht' und Tage trotzen mag.
 [...]

 Nacht lichter als der Tag! Nacht mehr denn lichte
 Nacht!⁶⁴

The spiritual experience, here incarnated by the night of the birth of Jesus, is Gryphius's preferred vehicle towards his own *rule following*. The rhetorical disruption is provoked here by the paradoxical oxymoron guiding the whole sonnet and by the cyclic structure of the poem. This night which is "shining more than day" is not only an allegory of Jesus's glory, but it is also a real phenomenon, a phenomenon of the real, an *augmented* perceptual as much as spiritual experience engendered by the *Dichtung* with its specific rhetorical engine.

Yet, Gryphius's night is not as *poly-polysemic* as many dizzying Shakespearean lines like the following from the sonnet 27:

Save that my soul's imaginary sight
 Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
 Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,

64 Trans. Schindler: "Night, more than brilliant night! Night, brighter than the day! / Night brighter than the sun, a night on which was born that light / Which God, Light of Lights, had chosen as His light. / O night, which proudly can defy all nights and days [...] Night, brighter than the day! Night, more than brilliant night!"

Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.

As another example of the parallel baroque passage from the external to the internal experience of the self and from the visual arts to the arts “of language,” sight is transfigured here into the “sightless view” of the soul during a poly-polysemic night. The poly-polysemic nature of the night is embodied by the most interesting expression, in this passage, from the point of view of rhetoric: “like a jewel hung in ghastly night.” The metaphorical interpretation comparing the shadow of the beloved woman to a jewel appearing in the night barely scratches the surface of this figure. The adjective “ghastly” condenses the layered and enigmatic nature of this external and internal night, night of the self, night of imagination and perception, opening another way of looking at the dark space of the organic, in Benjamin’s terms. And why is the jewel “hung” then? Is the degree zero to be intended as: the night is like an ear? Is the image of the beloved “oscillating” like an earring? More than that, as it is possible to detect through the analysis Francesco Orlando gave of these very similar lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, that Shakespeare certainly had in mind when he wrote sonnet 27:

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope’s ear⁶⁵

It is worth quoting almost the entire analysis by Orlando of the rhetorical structure of these two lines, in a remarkable

65 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1, Scene 5.

passage which tells a lot about what we called *poly-polysemy*, *lyrical density*, *metaphorical overload*, and *rule following*:

An elaboration of the oneiric kind – which tends to condensate the similar into the identical – organizes correspondences among three couples of similar elements and fantastic equations with four terms: the splendor of the young lady is to the one of the jewel what the black of the night is to the color of the skin of an Ethiopian woman. But the fact that the jewel is an earring overdetermines the equation, inserting in the metaphorical relationship the metonymy of the ear, engendering by symmetry the cheek on the other side, and introducing from both sides the predicate of taking. Yet what makes even more peculiar and exotically concrete the comparing image, by duplicating into the (imaginary) reality of the compared things, makes those absolutely undetermined and incredible: the most surreal line is the first, in which – without a “like” – a cheek is attributed to the real night, a cheek on which, by poetic invention, the real young lady hangs; and as it was not enough, this first line precedes the comparative line, even though it became the reflection of the latter. It is as if, by contagion, the common attributes invaded the space of the uncommon attributes, undermining the identities guaranteed by such a space.⁶⁶

About the line of sonnet 27 intertextually quoting the two lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, I will add that it eliminates further the factors of comparison, as well as the metaphori-

66 Orlando, *Iluminismo*, 117. My translation.

cal and metonymical nature of the image, thus even more radically undermining the identities and the conventional attributes in favor of an *infinite* polysemy.

In terms of powerful freedom of the *rule following*, but further away from *infinite* polysemy, a remarkable example can also be found in Gryphius, in a famous, courageously deconstructed sonnet entitled *Die Hölle (Hell)*, in which, as the title indicates, the metrical and rhythmical process (of the first lines in particular) has been conceived in order to give a perception as *real* as possible of the infernal world:

Ach! und weh!
Mord! Zetter! Jammer! Angst! Creutz! Marter!
Würme! Plagen.
Pech! Folter! Hencker! Flamm! Stanck! Geister! Kälte!
Zagen!
Ach vergeh!
Tieff' und Höh!
Meer! Hügel! Berge! Felß! wer kan die Pein ertragen?⁶⁷

Each word here contributes to perform a primordial rhythmicity. The violence of the rhythmical repetition is mirrored by the unique semantical field to which all the words belong until the penultimate line of the quote, even though

67 Trans. Schindler (to which I added a line – the last one of the quote – which has been astonishingly omitted by the translator): “Moans and pain! / Murder! Screams! Affliction! Woe! Anguish! Torture! Worms! Torment! / Pitch! Hangman! Spirits! Stench! Rack! Cold! Quaking! / O pass from sight! / Depths and heights! / Sea! Hills! Mountains! Rocks! Who can bear the pain?” Another translation and comment of this poem is to be found in Henrich F. Plett, *Literary Rhetoric: Concepts, Structures, Analyses* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 250f.

with some refined zeugmatic slippages, such as the introduction of “Würme” between “Marter” and “Plagen.” In the last line of this passage, although the rhythmical structure of the poem remains the same, the reader witnesses an astonishing reversal: under the uninterrupted *rule following*, earthly objects such as the sea and the mountains appear under the same painful light of the previous infernal elements, thus creating a deeper conjunction and *denudation* of the relationship between life and death, this world and afterlife, under the aegis of an interrupted sinful sorrow between the two stages. Many of the words of the previous lines then assume a deeper signification, both earthly and spiritual, physical and metaphysical. Although the metrics and the rhymes are respected, the effect is powerfully experimental and sensorily perceptual. Here, even in the core of German Christian ideology, the *rule following* shows a deeply baroque oscillation between the creation of an unconventional convention and a freedom of thought and artistic practice which certainly occurred as a complex response to the Counter-Reformation, but whose innovatory results were first of all encouraged by one of the most radical epistemological and cognitive subversions in modernity. A subversion in which the cosmological balance between mankind and the surrounding world was shaken by a sudden cognitive instability and sense of infinity deriving from a both theoretical and technological *augmentation* of the perceptual relations to the outer and inner spaces.

Rule following as unconventional convention and as subversion, augmentation and denudation, metaphorical overload and reduction of metaphoricity, exploration of the real and of the internal dark organic spaces of the

self, allegoresis and literalness, *Dichtung* as concentration and *poly-polysemy* as multiplication of meaning: these complementary oppositions, rather than being in contradiction, illustrate the subversive character of the baroque approach to knowledge and the opening of a space of possibility ensuing from it.

4. THE VANITAS AND THE SPHERE AS DENUDATION, AUGMENTATION, AND CONCENTRATION

In this perspective, the baroque *topos* of *vanitas* assumes a deeper signification. This *topos* is largely present both in Gryphius and Shakespeare, as well as in many other baroque poets.⁶⁸ Let us first read the two final tercets of Gryphius's sonnet II-6, *Einsamkeit (Solitude)*:⁶⁹

Die Höl' / der rauhe Wald der Todtenkopff / der Stein /
Den auch die Zeit aufffrist / die abgezehrten Bein
Entwerffen in dem Mutt unzehliche Gedancken.

Der Mauren alter Grauß / diß ungebau'te Land
Ist schön und fruchtbar nur / der eigentlich erkant /
Daß alles / ohn ein Geist / den Gott selbst hält / muß
wancken.

68 Such as Luis de Góngora, a true master of the poetic *vanitas*.

69 Trans. Schindler (slightly modified): "This cave, the wild forest, the skull, the stone, / Devoured too by time, the fleshless unknown bones, / All these have filled my mind with countless thoughts. / The gloom of these old walls, the uncultivated land, / Holds beauty and great value for one like me who knows / That no soul can sustain itself without a life in God."

The forest, the cave, and especially the skull are baroque allegories in Benjamin's terms (OGT 343). They are preceded by two quatrains in which the poet meditates, in a desert land, on the "Eitelkeit," the *vanitas* of everything. The act of denudation, of which the skull is the ultimate and most evident level, is "schön und fruchtbar" only to those who are sustained by God. The "unzehliche Gedanken" are as numerous as the potential amount of signification contained in those allegories, and they are "entwerffen in dem Mutt," i.e., in the dark and mysterious spaces of the inside, spaces that are almost non-verbal and also not representable. The poet, in fact, neither says, nor maybe cannot say more about them.

In Shakespeare, the meditation on the *vanitas* can also be a vehicle for the creation of an independent rhetorical *rule following*, like in sonnet 5:

For never-resting Time leads summer on
To hideous winter, and confounds him there,
Sap checked with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'er-snowed and bareness every where.
Then were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft

From the point of view of this study, the epithet of summer as "a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass" is the core moment of these lines and it appears to be not less powerful, in terms of its rhetorical openness, than the "limbecks foul as hell within" or the "jewel hung in ghastly night" that I analyzed above. These two first textual examples suggest

that the *vanitas*, under the light of the model that I am confronting with Benjamin's theory of the baroque allegory, is not only a meditation on the fleetingness of things, but is itself a process of denudation, a non-dualist approach to the real, because it reduces the distance between language and world by revealing a deeper and more complex nature, out of the metaphorical convention. In order to accomplish this action, poetry has to produce its own *rule following*, which consists, like in these Shakespearean lines, in a process of *concentration* and of simultaneous *augmentation* of the layers of signification of the poetic expression and of the intensity of the perceptual experience engendered by them.

It is worth noticing that where for Gryphius God is the only solution to the fleetingness of life, for Shakespeare poetry can perpetuate what time destroys. Shakespeare has a stronger faith in poetry as an instrument against decay, whereas for Gryphius the only way of defeating time is purely metaphysical, like sonnets I-8 and II-6, for instance, show. If in Gryphius there is no human activity that can defeat the decay of time, in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* the recourse to poetry as a solution to the violence of time is a true *leitmotiv* running all along the book, from sonnet 15 to 77, and in most cases it is connected with another recurring theme: the color black. Black, in Shakespeare, is an eminently poly-polysemic instance: the black of the night and of the mysterious spaces of the inside; the blackness of the dark lady in the last sequence of the *Sonnets*; and, in the *vanitas* sonnets, mostly featured in the "homoerotic" series, the black of the ink in which poetry is written (but also the white of the page in sonnet 77) and therefore left to posterity. At the end of sonnet 63, for example: "His

beauty shall in these black lines be seen"; and at the end of sonnet 65: "That in black ink my love may still shine bright." The blackness of ink clearly is, in both passages, a poetic warranty of permanence against the transience of the body. Ink replaces body when the latter decays. Poetry, in Shakespeare, stands against *vanitas* while at the same time revealing it (see also, e.g., sonnets 15 and 60). Such a revelation is, one more time, a *denudation* rather than an *unveiling*, a distinction which can be applied to the concept of *vanitas* itself. Under this light, *vanitas* could be considered as a process where poetry, similarly to sonnets 130 and 119, aims at creating an intensified – and therefore terrifying – relation to the diachronic historicity of the real by reducing the dualism between expression and convention or by creating an *unconventional convention*. My claim, in other words, is that *vanitas* is not just a *topos* of the fleetingness of things; it is a process showing a deeper layer in the historicity of the real.

The question of the conventionality of the emblems and allegories hinting at the *vanitas* remains nonetheless problematic. Such objects had to belong somehow to a signification *koinē* in order to be understood. Yet the skull is, according to Benjamin, one of the most relevant manifestations of the baroque allegory because it is a syncretic presentation of a universal historicity, and, as such, may be seen as an *unconventional convention*. It would be probably possible to state the same for many other objects, for instance those recurring in baroque still life paintings, and this could be the topic of a whole other study. On the other hand, in a famous later annotation Benjamin states: "Baroque allegory sees the corpse only from out-

side. Baudelaire sees it also from inside,⁷⁰ thus identifying a conventional character in the symbolical or allegorical historicity of the body in baroque aesthetics. But besides the open question of the conventional or unconventional nature of the baroque allegory in Benjamin's analysis of the *Trauerspiel*, what I argue is that in baroque lyrical poetry the degree of rhetorical unconventionality of the *topoi* and of the allegories is higher. In order to understand this further, it is necessary to stress the connection between *vanitas* as described here and another baroque *topos*: the *sphere*. This essential connection can be presented for instance through a painting which, interestingly enough, is also reproduced on the cover of the French edition of Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. It is a *Vanitas* by Flemish painter Vincent Laurentz van der Vinne I (fig. 20):

The *topos* of the *sphere*, also often associated, together with *vanitas*, to the neighboring *topoi* of the *lather*, the *dew* (see, e.g., Gryphius's sonnet I-45), the *tears* and the *pearls* (see, e.g., Shakespeare's sonnet 34, or well one of John Donne's most remarkable poems, *A Valediction: Of Weeping*), carries two features that are essential for my approach and through which it is possible to provide a deeper explanation of the reason why the *topoi* of *vanitas* and the *sphere* are so strongly interwoven.

First of all, the baroque *sphere* is a *concentration*. In OGT 327, Benjamin connects the *topos* of the *sphere* to baroque cosmology, attributing the spherical form of the planets to a power of concentration of matter. Also, the *sphere* can then be considered as a *Dichtung*, an image of the poetical

70 Trans. Cowan in "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," 121. "Die barocke Allegorie sieht die Leiche nur von außen. Baudelaire sieht sie auch von innen" (GS I, 684).



Fig. 20. Vincent Laurentz van der Vinne I, *Vanitas*, Oil on canvas, 17th century, Pushkin Museum, Moscow. Detail.

density and of the signification concentration at work in the baroque metaphorical overload. But the sphere is also an *augmentation*: it bulges toward the surrounding environment from the unconventional perspective of its geometrical curve, and by doing so, it reveals a deeper layer of the real, just like *vanitas* reveals the real in its mysterious yet inevitable historicity. Hence, in this *Vanitas* by Van der Vinne I, the reflection of the painter himself contained in the sphere, in a typically baroque mirroring to which we shall also return. The subject (and the artist) is subject to the convexity of the sphere because it is there shown under a different way of looking, in a modified and intensified perceptual and experiential relation to the real, and as such exposed to a process of *augmentation* and *denudation*. Like in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, the fleetingness of the body

is at once exposed and negated by the work of art, and, like in sonnets 119 and 27, the subject undertakes, through the geometry and the reflection of the sphere, a path of augmented knowledge of the most enigmatic inner and outer spaces and of the unrepresentable historicity of the organic: "How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted," in Shakespeare's terms.

Hence, the convexity of the baroque sphere is not a distortion, although it is a transgression of the convention. Unlike the metaphor, the sphere neither alters the nature of the real nor does it perform a separation between the world and the image it gives of it. As an allegorical and, as such, a rhetorical form, the sphere is rather a non-dualistic unity in which the concentration and the multiplication of meaning, the augmentation and the denudation, the metaphorical overload and the allegory converge by showing the epistemological turn embodied by the Baroque. A bending, a convexity, an *infinite* polysemy as Bruno's infinite universe, a lens of Van Leeuwenhoek's microscope, or of Galileo's telescope, through which the perception and the experience of the real underwent an irreversible change.

5. CONVEXITIES

I chose a detail of a painting in order to express, not without apparent contradiction, a higher degree of rhetorical concentration and augmentation at work in baroque lyrical poetry, as a consequence of a higher degree of rhetorical independence than in other art forms. Although such a theoretical gesture supports the reactivation

of baroque *topoi* and figures shown in this study, it is also true that Van der Vinne's painting is nothing but a representation of a sphere, a bidimensional allegorical interpretation of it. As such, it is an interpretation of a much more layered possibility of meaning contained in this figure, if it is taken literally as a figure of rhetoric rather than a simple baroque *topos*. For it is not just about the sphere as an allegorical item or as a *topos*, but it is about the movement of *convexity* as centrifugal concentration and centripetal multiplication of meaning, as trajectory bulging toward the real and as disclosure of the mysterious layering of the organic, as alternative curve of historicity, as mirror through which the subject comes redefined, as lens through which the world appears augmented and complexified.

Parmigianino's Mannerist painting (fig. 18) about which, en passant, John Ashbery wrote one of his most celebrated poetry books, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975), is not only a painting, it is not only an image. It is – most importantly for us – an object, for it is painted on a wooden hemisphere. The subject physically bulges toward the environment and his hand, which Ashbery compares to a whale, is more visible than anything else on the painting because it shows the painter while he is painting and simultaneously looking at himself in a convex mirror. Hence the title: *Autoritratto in uno specchio convesso* (*Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*).

Besides the iconoclastic power of a pictorial gesture bringing the image into the status of object and having in mind – with the wish to study it specifically on another occasion – the theoretical potentiality of baroque anamorphosis as a mode of denudation similar to *vanitas*, we

could claim that this work of art condenses, in the implications brought by its convex form, several key notions that I explored in this study. Convexity, in Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait*, shows a becoming and a discovery, a perceptual expansion of the subject toward the external and internal spaces of the real, and a parallel expansion of the image into the object. The subject becomes, in the remarkable expression employed by Italian poet Antonio Porta in order to describe his own poetic experience, a "field of tensions."⁷¹ It is no longer a rigid, identifiable subject. Rather, it is, as in the poetic examples examined above, a subject becoming in the real, embracing its own historicity, thus depsychologized, derepresentationalized, turned into an intensified and augmented perception of itself as a portion of the world, through this gesture of bulging toward the world, unfolding an infinite, and infinitely becoming, polysemy.

It is from this point of view that I would like to read Shakespeare's sonnet 77, supposing that the mirror mentioned in it has – perhaps not only conceptually – a convex form. This interpretation is validated by the recurring presence of convex mirrors in Shakespeare's historical period⁷² and by the use of convex mirror devices in Shakespeare's plays, according to Adam Max Cohen's recent study on *Shakespeare and Technology*.⁷³ Let us quote the entire sonnet:

71 Antonio Porta, interview with Luigi Sasso, *Il Castoro* 166 (October 1980).

72 Cf. Arthur F. Kinney, *Shakespeare's Webs: Networks of Meaning in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

73 Adam Max Cohen, *Shakespeare and Technology: Dramatizing Early Modern Technological Revolutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 164, 168.

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste,
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of this book, this learning mayst thou taste:
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show
Of mouthèd graves will give thee memory;
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.
Look what thy memory cannot contain
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book.

Just like Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait*, this sonnet condenses the *vanitas* and the mysterious historicity of the body ("mouthed graves"), the enigma of the real and of its own becoming, the knowledge and evolution of the self, the permanence of poetry against time, and the *poly-polysemy* ensuing from an augmented perceptual and cognitive paradigm, here described in the last two lines as a sort of personal – and as such eminently unconventional – rite. A rite of *denudation* and *possibility*. The notion of *convexity* solves perhaps the paradoxes of Benjamin's allegorical model in the specific framework of baroque lyrical poetry and of its rhetorical way of functioning. Convexity as a rhetorical engine unknots the double risk of self-referentiality detected in the arbitrariness of the allegory as sign and of dualistic contradiction in the movement of the *allōs agoreuein* itself. *Convexity* or, better, *convexities*: the plural contains every manifestation of this movement, from the

thematic level (the sphere, the lather, the pearls, the mirror, the cosmos, etc.) to the multiple rhetorical and epistemological implications of such a figure as a synthesis of a certain baroque approach to *Dichtung*. Convexity, then – this is my hypothesis for future works – can be seen as an alternative and complementary narrative to Deleuze’s model of the *fold* and Egginton’s model of the *hole*.⁷⁴ This notion expresses a narrative of *curves* and *densities* rather than a dialectic of *fullness* and *voids*. Yet, unlike Deleuze’s folds and Egginton’s holes, its rhetorical implications are specifically appropriate for baroque lyrical poetry, of which I only examined a few examples from only two authors and in only one form (the sonnet). In future works, I would like to put this model to the test of a wider amount of 17th-century poetic examples, and to develop further its theoretical implications besides Benjamin’s allegorical model.

In this specific essay, the *convexity* model is a counterpart to Benjamin’s allegory because the act of bulging towards the outside reproduces the movement of the *allös agoreuein* but without remaining in a self-referential negation of possibility and, at the same time, without falling into the risk of a dualistic hypostatization. Every layer of signification is augmented and multiplied, but it is also concentrated and intensified in the density of the poetic language. All the way through and beyond Benjamin’s theory of the allegory, the notion of *convexity* contains at once a rhetorical and an epistemological model at work in poetry yet proper to the baroque thought *in toto* (let us think

74 Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), and William Egginton, *The Theatre of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11f.

again of Van Leeuwenhoek's and Galileo's lenses). From the *vanitas* to the sphere, by showing the relativity of perception, by diving into the illusion, but also by discovering a wider cognitive spectrum through its multiple lenses and by submitting the investigation of historicity to a change of paradigm, this model approaches the enigma of the real through its curved geometry and unfolds, as such, a deeper horizon of subversion and possibility.⁷⁵

75 I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Andrea Parravicini for his precious editing suggestions.

« Dans cet obscur & vaste espace » :
Une étude de la relation entre infini et indéfini
dans la poésie au XVII^e siècle

[Unpublished essay, delivered as a lecture at the annual
symposium of the British Society for Early Modern French
Studies at Peterhouse, University of Cambridge, September
4, 2018.]

« Au rayon ténébreux où se cache l'essence
Dans l'obscurité claire où loge le silence »
- Claude Hopil⁷⁶

1. INTRODUCTION

Cette étude n'est qu'une partie limitée d'une recherche en cours qui est nécessairement beaucoup plus vaste, étant donnée la complexité de la question. Mon point de vue n'est pas celui du spécialiste de l'époque pré-moderne, mais celui du théoricien de la poésie et du comparatiste. En tant que tel, je m'intéresse notamment à la façon dont les structures représentationnelles et rhétoriques au sein du fait poétique répondent à la révolution scientifique et aux changements politiques qui allaient s'esquisser entre la deuxième moitié du XVI^e et le XVII^e siècle, et ce, comme souvent à l'époque dite « baroque », à l'échelle européenne.

⁷⁶ Claude Hopil, *Les divins élancements de l'amour* (Paris: Sébastien Huré, 1629), Cantique LXXXVI, vv. 1-2, 295.

Je tâcherai pour cela de réfléchir à un phénomène qui me paraît majeur dans ce cadre, à savoir comment la nouvelle image de l'infini cosmique découlant des découvertes scientifiques et des modélisations philosophiques de Giordano Bruno et de Galilée et, un peu plus tard, de Pascal et de Spinoza, affecte et résonne dans le langage poétique de la même époque, en me focalisant sur les œuvres de deux poètes : Pierre Le Moyne et John Milton, ainsi que sur quelques exemples tirés des poésies philosophiques de Tommaso Campanella et de Bruno lui-même. Il ne s'agira ici ni de tracer une histoire de ces interactions, ni de vérifier les liens effectifs entre telle ou telle autre figure historique, ni de confronter en détail des positions souvent divergentes, voire opposées,⁷⁷ mais d'analyser comment un climat épistémologique (et poétologique) sans précédents engendre des innovations dans l'imaginaire poétique et dans ses manifestations textuelles. Mon analyse de ces innovations se concentrera sur des exemples de poésie dans lesquels on pourra repérer une caractéristique commune : un degré d'abstraction et d'indétermination très élevé, que je ferai découler précisément de cette nouvelle conception de l'infini née des cosmologies de l'époque, en décrivant ainsi le passage de l'infini cosmologique et métaphysique à l'indéfini poétique qui donne le titre à cette contribution.

Mon hypothèse de départ est la suivante : la notion d'infini dans les cosmologies et dans les philosophies post-coperniciennes constitue une telle rupture épistémologique et désoriente à tel point l'agencement du langage et du sujet que la poésie ne peut répondre à cette rupture – bien

77 Il suffira de remarquer que nous allons comparer ici des œuvres et des pensées provenant de confessions tout à fait hétérogènes : jésuite, janséniste, puritaine, etc.

sûr lorsqu'elle choisit de se confronter à celle-ci – qu'en augmentant radicalement ses degrés d'abstraction figurale et d'indétermination représentationnelle. Il s'agit littéralement de rendre langage ce qui ne peut pas se donner à l'image, de décrire l'indescriptible, de circonscrire dans l'espace du texte ce qui échappe à la représentation même de l'espace chez l'être humain. La *métaphoricité* et l'*allégorèse*, qui ont souvent été identifiées comme caractéristiques de l'époque baroque, ne sont plus centrales dans ce paradigme car elles basent leur possibilité d'interprétation sur des références communes, des images et des « degrés zéro » identifiables, alors que ce régime poétique doit développer des techniques textuelles et rhétoriques tout à fait autres afin de réussir dans une entreprise impossible : donner un corps verbal à l'inconnu. Un inconnu qui a la propriété d'être infini et sans forme définie du fait de ses dimensions et de son mystère ; un inconnu seulement encore entrevu, pour ainsi dire, par les lentilles du télescope galiléen aussi bien que du microscope de Van Leeuwenhoek, et sans doute par celles que Spinoza a polies lors de son travail d'opticien. La poésie se prête à cette tâche impossible plus que les autres arts car sa concentration sémantique permet de ne pas représenter, de ne pas faire image ni histoire, et pourtant de produire du sens et de l'imaginaire. C'est pourquoi le dualisme propre à la fois au *meta-pherò* et à l'*allos agoreuein* ne suffira peut-être pas : si l'on veut atteindre cet infini, on ne peut plus rester dans le régime de la représentation car l'objet même de cette représentation est irréprésentable.

2. DES ESPACES ET DES MATIÈRES INDÉFINISSABLES

Afin d'articuler et de préciser ces questionnements, il faut d'abord laisser parler les textes, en commençant par l'œuvre du poète jésuite Pierre Le Moyne, qui est parsemée à la fois d'images cosmologiques et de formulations dont l'abstraction essaie de rendre compte d'espaces et de matières inconnus et sans forme définie. C'est la tentative de transformer en langage ces nouveaux espaces cosmiques qui donne lieu à des vers tels que les suivants, tirés des *Hymnes, et éloges poétiques* dans l'édition de 1671 :

Elle [la masse du monde avant la création] n'estoit
encore alors,
Qu'un sujet informe & sans corps ;
Qu'une sombre et vague matière⁷⁸

Ou encore, dans le même lieu, le vers que j'ai choisi comme titre de cette étude : « Dans cet obscur & vaste espace ».⁷⁹ Pareillement, dans un autre hymne, *L'Amour divin* : « Dans ces longs & vastes espaces »,⁸⁰ et encore : « Comme un Angle infini de deux Lignes sans fin ».⁸¹ Dans la deuxième partie du même texte : « [...] une obscure & froide matiere : / Et sous l'amas confus de ses divers fragmens [...] ».⁸² Si la plupart de ces exemples – qui pourraient se multiplier davantage – se réfèrent à des scènes de création divine de l'univers, les formes indéfinies qu'elles évoquent décou-

78 Pierre Le Moyne, *Hymnes, et éloges poétiques*, I, in *Les Œuvres poétiques du P. Le Moyne* (Paris : Louis Billaine, 1671), 356.

79 Ibid.

80 Le Moyne, *L'Amour divin*, I, in *Les Œuvres poétiques*.

81 Ibid., I, 360.

82 Ibid., II, 361.

lent tout aussi bien d'un imaginaire cosmique qui, comme Jean Rousset l'avait remarqué déjà dans les années 1950, est récurrent dans la poésie de Le Moyne.⁸³ Il y a en effet une continuité entre ces vers des *Hymnes* et d'autres vers, très nombreux, plus ouvertement scientifiques contenus dans le *Saint Louis* et dans les *Entretiens et lettres poétiques*. En voici un exemple tiré des *Entretiens* dans l'édition de Richard Maber, sur les orbites des planètes :

Voyez-vous l'étendue, oyez-vous les accords,
De ces Pays tournants, de ces immenses Corps ?
L'étendue en paraît hors de toute mesure ⁸⁴

Il y a un élément commun à tous les vers cités : c'est cette « étendue » cosmique « hors de toute mesure » qui engendre l'abstraction de l'imaginaire poétique. La seule manière de transférer ce nouvel univers en langage c'est de ne pas le contenir, de ne pas l'arrêter dans des images définies, à commencer par des métaphores dont la propriété est précisément celle de devoir limiter l'interprétation au degré zéro d'une image définie. C'est pourquoi, ici comme ailleurs, le langage se tient souvent près de la lettre, tout en tâchant de rendre compte d'espaces, de masses et d'états vagues et informes. Encore dans les *Entretiens*, deux vers remarquables dans leur puissance de concrétion de l'indé-

83 Jean Rousset, *La littérature de l'âge baroque en France. Circé et le paon* (Paris : José Corti, 1953), 125.

84 Pierre Le Moyne, *Entretiens et lettres poétiques*, éd. Richard Maber (Paris : Garnier, 2012), I-11, vv. 55-58. Pour une étude spécifique, quoiqu'un peu datée, sur la cosmologie chez Le Moyne, cf. Esther Gross-Kieffer, *Le dynamisme cosmique chez Le Moyne*, Thèse de doctorat sous la direction de M. Georges Poulet (Université de Zurich, 1968).

fini : « [...] jusqu'à ce Désert, où la Nuit est immense, / Où l'espace est sans corps, comme sans existence ». ⁸⁵

Revenons maintenant à des vers des *Hymnes* décrivant le phénomène physique de la lumière :

J'épanchay sur eux [les « cinq corps » célestes] la
Lumière,
Cette ombre visible de Dieu,
Ce subtil habit, ce milieu
De l'Esprit & de la Matière. ⁸⁶

Et à d'autres sur la découverte des taches solaires :

Ces taches qu'il [le soleil] a sur la face,
ne sont pas ainsi qu'on a crû,
Des endroits où mon jour n'ait pu
Entrer plus avant dans la masse :
Ce ne sont ni brèches du Temps,
[...]
Ni souillures de la Matière :
Mais des restes du Rien, d'où ma voix l'a tiré ⁸⁷

Il faut remarquer dans toutes ces citations le caractère abstrait, général et indéfini du champ sémantique – récurrent chez Le Moyne – de la « masse » et de la « matière », ainsi que la tentative de faire dialoguer la création poétique avec les découvertes scientifiques de l'époque. Le dialogue de la lumière avec la sémantique de la nuit, tout aussi fréquente dans cette entreprise de description poétique de l'infini,

⁸⁵ Le Moyne, *L'amour divin*, I-9, vv. 143-44.

⁸⁶ Le Moyne, *Hymnes*, I, 357.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 356-57.

renvoie à un *topos* baroque bien connu, celui du *chiaroscuro*. Néanmoins, cette rencontre entre lumière et obscurité de la nuit, matière et esprit, matériel et immatériel, sous l'égide de l'indéfini, peut dégager de plus complexes considérations ayant trait à la relation entre perception du réel et imagination métaphysique dans la poésie du XVII^e siècle,⁸⁸ car le mystère cosmique se montre aussi bien dans le physique que dans le métaphysique, dans la science et dans la réflexion théologique, sans solution de continuité. La lumière est par définition un phénomène, pour ainsi dire, « semi-immatériel », renvoyant précisément à cet entre-deux de la matière et de l'esprit, de la perception physique et de la réflexion métaphysique. Cet aspect requiert maintenant un certain nombre de considérations.

Richard Maber a largement analysé le rapport étroit entre poésie et science dans l'œuvre de Le Moyne, y compris dans ses textes de poétique, et je renvoie pour cela à sa monographie sur ce poète.⁸⁹ Je rappellerai simplement que la question des taches solaires avait été ouverte par la

88 Dans son article sur « La lumière et la poésie "métaphysique" anglaise : de la magie à la mécanique », in *Le siècle de la lumière : 1600-1715*, éd. Christian Biet et Vincent Julien (Lyon : ENS éditions, 1997), 211-24, Margaret Llasera a étudié de façon approfondie les implications épistémologiques et métaphysiques du phénomène de la lumière dans la poésie dite « métaphysique » anglaise, en traitant aussi de la relation que la lumière entretient avec les *topoi* baroques du miroir et du *chiaroscuro*, ainsi qu'avec la forme convexe, sur laquelle je reviendrai également plus bas. Le proximité de Milton avec la poésie métaphysique pourrait d'ailleurs constituer un autre point de départ pour certains des thèmes étudiés ici, permettant de se focaliser davantage sur la poésie de langue anglaise. Llasera étudie en particulier John Donne et Henry Vaughan.

89 Richard Maber, *The Poetry of Pierre Le Moyne* (Francfort-sur-le-Main : Peter Lang, 1982), 56 sq.

célèbre lettre de Galilée de 1612,⁹⁰ car cela me permet une transition vers Milton, qui, notoirement, mentionne Galilée dans *Paradise Lost* :

[...] his [Satan's] ponderous shield
Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
Behind him cast ; the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
[...] to descry new lands,
Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.⁹¹

Mais le rapprochement entre Le Moyne et Milton ne se limite pas à une simple considération thématique sur leur intérêt astronomique. C'est à partir de là que l'on peut repérer une proximité étonnante entre les deux poètes précisément dans le caractère abstrait et indéfini de leur imaginaire et sémantique poétiques. Ici déjà, dans des expressions telles que « ethereal temper » et « massy »; et davantage dans ces vers décrivant le personnage de la Mort (mais peu importe ici, au fond, le personnage auquel ces vers se réfèrent, c'est plutôt l'imaginaire qu'ils dégagent qu'il faut retenir à ce stade) :

[...] The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,

90 Galileo Galilei, *Prima lettera al Sig. Marco Velsari circa le macchie solari*, Villa delle Selve, 4 mai 1612, in *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari*, éd. Mazzino Montinari (Milan : Feltrinelli, 1982).

91 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete Poems* (London : Penguin, 1998), I, vv. 284-91.

Or substance might be called that shadow seemed⁹²

Ou encore, toujours dans le deuxième livre de *Paradise Lost*, la description cosmique du Chaos résonne avec l'indétermination de la matière de la création chez Le Moyne :

[...] Into this wild abyss,
The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave,
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless th'Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more worlds⁹³

Toujours dans le deuxième livre : « Far off th'empyreal Heav'n, extended wide / In circuit, undetermined square or round ».⁹⁴ Et dans le huitième livre :

When I behold this goodly frame, this world
Of heav'n and earth consisting, and compute
Their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain,
An atom, with the firmament compared
And all her numbered stars, that seem to roll
Spaces incomprehensible (for such
Their distance argues and their swift return
Diurnal) merely to officiate light
Round this opacous earth, this punctual spot
[...] and [the earth] receives,

92 Ibid., II, vv. 666-69.

93 Ibid., II, vv. 910-16.

94 Ibid., II, vv. 1047-48.

As tribute such a sumless journey brought
Of incorporeal speed, her warmth and light ;
Speed, to describe whose swiftness number fails.⁹⁵

Chez Milton comme chez Le Moyne, la découverte scientifique d'un espace cosmique extrêmement étendu et complexe génère cette indétermination des formes de l'imaginaire (« dark materials » ; « undetermined » ; « wild abyss » ; « spaces incomprehensible » ; « incorporeal speed [...] to describe whose swiftness number fails », etc.), ainsi que la perception d'échelles et de dimensions inouïes (« and compute / their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain ») dont la manifestation – chez Milton encore plus que chez Le Moyne pour des raisons évidentes ayant trait à leurs positionnements théologiques respectifs – fait apparaître la Terre, cette Terre post-copernicienne, comme rien de plus qu'un atome dans l'univers.⁹⁶ Au-delà de leurs différences de style et de positionnement cosmologique et métaphysique, les champs sémantiques employés par les deux poètes pour tenter de rendre l'irreprésentable en langage coïncident souvent : la nuit et le noir de l'univers ; des matières et des masses indescriptibles ; le phénomène de

95 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VIII, vv. 15–39.

96 Le débat autour du positionnement de Milton à l'égard de la théorie copernicienne n'est pas central ici, car il s'agit plutôt de comment la poésie reflète et interagit avec tout un climat épistémologique et philosophique en mesure de modifier profondément ses modes de représentation. Cependant, il n'est pas sans intérêt de remarquer que la vision de Milton comme un poète « ptolémaïque » a été mise à mal par des travaux récents, tels que Catherine Gimelli Martin, « "What If the Sun Be Centre to the World?" : Milton's Epistemology, Cosmology, and Paradise of Fools Reconsidered », *Modern Philology* 99, no. 2 (Novembre 2001) : 231–65 et Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1991), 165n.

la lumière dans sa nature semi-immatérielle ; la cohabitation entre terrestre et céleste, physique et métaphysique (« ce milieu / De l'Esprit & de la Matière », écrit Le Moine ; « this world / Of heav'n and earth consisting », écrit Milton). Ces espaces et matières sans forme inspirés par les nouvelles cosmologies de l'époque déterminent l'existence de l'univers à la fois chronologiquement – dans les vers des deux poètes sur la création et le chaos primordial – et ontologiquement, à la fois pour leurs implications métaphysiques et en tant que substances dont le caractère indéfini et inarticulé permet précisément de les appréhender comme matière première, sous-tendant toutes les autres.

On pourrait repérer ici l'écho de la notion de substance chez Spinoza, une substance qui est à la fois métaphysique, étant identifiée à Dieu, et qui fonde en même temps la matière réelle de l'univers. Ce rapprochement a déjà été suggéré par Stephen M. Fallon dans son livre sur Milton et la philosophie : Fallon rappelle que parmi les propriétés fondamentales de la substance spinozienne il y a celles de l'indistinction, de l'unité et de l'infinité, en les reconduisant directement à la métaphysique moniste qui habite également l'œuvre miltonienne.⁹⁷ Il est indéniable que ce rapprochement reflète tout un climat philosophique et poétique d'inspiration moniste propre à l'époque en question, comme en témoigne non seulement Spinoza mais, avant lui, la pensée de Giordano Bruno, par exemple dans le vers suivant :

97 Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 10 sq. et *passim*. Les pages les plus significatives de Spinoza sur l'affirmation de l'unicité et de l'infinité de la substance telle que nous l'entendons ici se trouvent bien évidemment dans la première partie de l'*Ethique*, *De Dieu*. Sur le même sujet, cf. entre autres Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris : Minuit, 1968), 21 sq. et *passim*.

Nempe eadem forma est per totum materisque⁹⁸

Deux questions étroitement reliées vont donc habiter le reste de ma contribution. La première concerne le rapport entre épistémologie et métaphysique à partir du fait poétique au XVII^e siècle, s'articulant autour d'une nouvelle union de type moniste, ou si l'on veut non-dualiste, entre matière et immatériel, sphère cosmique et sphère théologique, substance de la nature et substance divine, sous l'égide du problème de l'infini. Mon analyse tâchera ainsi de répondre à la question que Fallon pose en relation à Milton : « Can a separable, incorporeal substance exist ? Are all substances material ? ».⁹⁹ La deuxième concerne les implications rhétoriques du monisme, que je vais esquisser en conclusion.

3. LA REDÉFINITION DU « CENTRE » : DE LA COSMOLOGIE À LA MÉTAPHYSIQUE

On pourrait affirmer que la découverte de l'espace infini engendre, en poésie, une représentation à la fois informe et uniforme de la matière du cosmos car cette matière étant inconnue et se déroband à l'échelle humaine d'appréhension chronologique et spatiale, il est impossible de distinguer et de décrire nettement ses traits. D'autre part, les vers de Le Moyne sur les taches solaires et ceux de Milton sur la surface lunaire que l'on a cités laissent appa-

98 Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-10, 435, v. 50 : « la forme et la matière du tout sont les mêmes ». Je traduis.

99 Bruno, *De Immenso*, 137.

raître, du fait des découvertes annoncées par le télescope galiléen, un autre niveau de réalité où cette uniformité de l'in(dé)fini est brisée par l'observation de nombreuses imperfections sur des surfaces que l'on croyait parfaites et uniformes.¹⁰⁰ Cette simple constatation épistémologique est une confirmation ultérieure de la rupture cognitive et du déplacement de la métaphysique du sujet au XVII^e siècle : non seulement l'univers se montre dans son énigme ontologique et dans son infinité, mais, lorsqu'il est observable de plus près, il révèle aussi l'imperfection de sa matière et de ses espaces.

Cette incertitude entre uniformité, infinité et imperfection dénote la perte de clarté interprétative de l'univers au XVII^e siècle et le déplacement cognitif du sujet en son sein, si bien que l'on pourrait reconduire à cette problématique l'un des *topoi* poétiques baroques les plus récurrents, celui de l'inconstance et de l'incertitude du réel. C'est ce qu'indiquent les vers suivants de Le Moyne, parmi les nombreux, et les plus beaux, que l'on pourrait citer à ce sujet :

Tout en est inconstant, tout en est imposteur :
Tout n'est que faux-semblant, et que trompeuse fleur :
Le fond en est liquide, et l'image changeante.¹⁰¹

Dans le dernier de ces trois vers, le caractère abstrait et vague à la fois du langage et de l'imaginaire que Le Moyne, comme on l'a vu, emploie pour décrire l'indescriptible de

¹⁰⁰ Pour une enquête épistémologique récente sur ce sujet, cf. par exemple Marco Piccolino et Nicholas J. Wade, *Galileo's Visions. Piercing the Spheres of the Heavens by Eye and Mind* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Le Moyne, *Entretiens et lettres poétiques*, I-10, vv. 123-25.

l'infini, est réutilisé pour affirmer le double *topos* de l'inconstance du monde et de l'incertitude perceptive. La perte de centre et de prise cognitive sur le monde au XVII^e siècle s'avère, par la poésie, être en connexion profonde avec la redéfinition du langage qui se vérifie lorsque celui-ci tâche de représenter l'inconnu et l'infini.

Il est donc question de trois facteurs historiquement connectés : la matière originare de l'univers est indistincte et infinie mais les surfaces cosmiques présentent des imperfections inattendues ; l'univers et Dieu se manifestent comme étant infinis et sans distinction ontologique nette, ce qui est la propriété fondamentale de la notion de substance chez Spinoza ; l'homme n'est plus au centre de l'univers et sa prise cognitive sur le réel devient profondément instable. Dans les trois cas, un gouffre s'ouvre sur l'inconnaissable et l'indéfinissable, un gouffre qui affecte également le langage, et tout particulièrement le langage poétique, dans sa sensibilité pour les phénomènes du réel et, en même temps, dans son élan métaphysique vers l'immatériel. Il s'agit d'un véritable changement de paradigme unissant l'épistémologie et la métaphysique, où la perte du centre et le rapport entre infini et indéfini s'avèrent être en relation étroite, comme en témoignent la philosophie aussi bien que la poésie de l'époque. Pascal et Bruno, deux grands penseurs de l'infini comme indéfini, s'attachent à décrire l'infini comme un espace informe et sans centre, ou plutôt avec un centre multidimensionnel et ineffable. Dans la notion de « sphère infinie » chez Pascal, déjà amplement étudiée,¹⁰² on entend retentir à la fois la cosmologie et la métaphysique sous l'égide de la rupture épistémologique :

102 Cf. Ernest Jovy, *La sphère infinie de Pascal* (Paris : Vrin, 1930) ; Gandillac, « Sur la sphère infinie de Pascal », 32-44 ; Georges Poulet, *Les Métamorphoses du cercle* (Paris : Pocket, 2016), 127 sq.

Tout le monde visible n'est qu'un trait imperceptible dans l'ample sein de la nature. Nulle idée n'en approche ; nous avons beau enfler nos conceptions au-delà des espaces imaginables, nous n'enfantons que des atomes, au prix de la réalité des choses. C'est une sphère infinie dont le centre est partout, la circonférence nulle part.¹⁰³

Bruno :

Neque est quod ad universi speciem magis obtinere medium dicere possis, quam quodcumque aliud ; cum conter circa omnia pariter undiquaque immensum pro innumerabilium astrorum seu mundorum continentia spacium patere.¹⁰⁴

Cette redéfinition de centre au travers de l'infini correspond à une véritable perte, encore une fois cognitive aussi bien que métaphysique, du sujet en tant que centre. Le sujet lui-même, et avec lui le langage, perd, dans l'infini, sa place définie, son être-au-centre. Pascal, encore : « l'infinie immensité des espaces que j'ignore et qui m'ignorent ».¹⁰⁵

Ici aussi, la poésie fait écho à cette nouvelle infinité avec des modalités spécifiques de représentation de l'irreprésentable :

The golden sun in splendour likest Heaven
Allured his [Satan's] eye : thither his course he bends

103 Pascal, *Pensées*, Fragment 185.

104 Bruno, *De immenso*, I-3, 411, glose 10 : « Par rapport à l'univers, tu ne peux pas dire être plus au centre que dans n'importe quel autre lieu ; car il est évident que tout autour, pareillement, de tous les côtés, un espace infini s'ouvre, contenant d'infinis astres et mondes ».

105 Pascal, *Pensées*, Fragment 64.

Through the calm firmament ; but up or down
By centre or eccentric, hard to tell¹⁰⁶

La redéfinition du centre (« by centre or eccentric ») est également rendue par un langage indéterminé (« hard to tell »), révélant un rapprochement profond entre la matière de l'univers et l'immatérialité des espaces métaphysiques : « The golden sun [...] likest Heaven », où la simple métaphore « golden sun » met davantage en évidence le caractère profondément littéral de la plupart des exemples poétiques cités.

La réponse à la question de Fallon sur la lisière entre matière et immatérialité pourrait donc être double : d'une part la découverte de l'infini et de l'immensité inconnue de l'univers engendre une conception tellement étendue du réel que la matière du monde est rapprochée de l'immatérialité métaphysique, ce qui renvoie une fois de plus, *mutatis mutandis*, à la notion de substance chez Spinoza, sous-tendant en même temps le physique et le métaphysique.¹⁰⁷ D'autre part, cet infini, du fait de l'enchevêtrement ontologique de type moniste entre le physique et le métaphysique, dépasse à tel point l'entendement humain qu'il se manifeste nécessairement comme indéfini, comme

¹⁰⁶ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, vv. 572-75.

¹⁰⁷ La vision créationniste que l'on a vu exprimée chez Le Moyne et chez Milton pourrait être en partie conciliée avec le positionnement anti-crétionniste de Spinoza en mettant en évidence précisément le caractère indéfini de la matière originnaire qui habite l'imaginaire des deux poètes, ce qui permettrait de concevoir ainsi la création comme une simple modification de cette substance totale et, aussi chronologiquement, infinie. Un approfondissement de cette question pourrait faire partie d'une étude ultérieure sur le rapport entre le monisme spinoziste et la poésie au XVII^e siècle.

impossible de la représentation.¹⁰⁸ Ceci restera valable un peu plus tard chez Leibniz, malgré toutes les différences connues entre le modèle spinozien de la substance infinie en tant qu'unité et la multiplication de l'infini opérée par celui qui deviendrait le concept de monade : comme Leib-

108 La relation entre ces deux aspects pourrait expliquer une aporie fondamentale que Ferdinand Alquié croit repérer chez Spinoza et qui a trait à l'interaction même de l'infini et de l'indéfini. Alquié rappelle que Dieu est qualifié par Spinoza sous l'égide de l'infini en termes d'infinité de ses attributs, alors que l'homme ne connaît que deux attributs qui sont propres à sa substance : l'étendue et la pensée. Cette infinité d'attributs rend l'être – écrit Alquié – « totalement incompréhensible à la raison » (*Leçons sur Spinoza* [Paris : La Table Ronde, 2017], 105). Cette incompréhensibilité due à l'infinité des attributs justifie, selon Alquié, le fait que Dieu puisse être considéré comme étant « au-dessus de la nature et de la science ». Voici donc l'aporie : si Dieu est au-dessus de la nature, comment expliquer le *Deus sive natura* spinozien qui trouve précisément dans l'unicité de la substance la possibilité de cette métaphysique moniste ? Au-delà des différentes interprétations de cette aporie produites par Alquié, ce qui me paraît significatif en relation à notre sujet d'étude c'est que, vue du rapport entre infini et indéfini, cette aporie ne subsiste pas, car l'unicité de la substance n'est pas mise en question. Au contraire, Dieu et la nature se trouvent sur le même niveau ontologique précisément en tant que substance unique dont l'incompréhensibilité est due à son infinité et à son caractère inconnaissable : à la fois Dieu et la nature dans sa totalité sont infinis et se dérobent à l'entendement humain. L'unicité de la substance ne saurait cohabiter avec une séparation ontologique entre le mystère métaphysique et le mystère heuristique de la nature. Le monisme ontologique, unissant Dieu, l'être et la nature dans leur infinité d'attributs sous l'égide de la substance, exprime l'impossibilité d'une connaissance rationnelle de l'infini, indépendamment du fait qu'il soit physique ou métaphysique : encore une fois, en tant qu'inconnu et infini, l'ontologie ne peut justement pas être articulée entre un niveau et l'autre. Ce ne sont ni la coïncidence ontologique entre Dieu et la nature ni l'unicité de la substance qui sont mises en question de ce point de vue, mais seulement les limites, propres à l'humain, de connaissance et de représentation de leur infinité ainsi que de l'articulation entre les différents degrés de matérialité et d'immatérialité de la substance.

niz l'indique déjà dans le *Discours de métaphysique*, le caractère confus et indéfini de certaines de nos perceptions est dû au fait que chaque « corps de l'univers » reflète l'infinité à la fois physique et métaphysique.¹⁰⁹ Leibniz compare cela, avec une image très parlante pour notre sujet, à la perception des vagues de la mer : nous les percevons, mais nous ne pouvons pas les entendre toutes distinctement.¹¹⁰ C'est ainsi que l'entendement humain de l'infini cosmique et métaphysique se manifeste nécessairement en tant qu'indéfini.

En d'autres termes, *l'infini et l'inconnu au XVII^e siècle mettent à mal l'articulation ontologique entre physique et métaphysique, une donnée qui affecte profondément, à son tour, les modalités de représentation du langage*. Dans la poésie philosophique de Bruno, l'indéfini du langage et de l'entendement est ouvertement fait découler de l'impossibilité d'appréhender la démesure de l'infini :

Licet infinitum pro indefinito a nobis numero sciant excusare, neque enim ita et divina bonitas atque potentia indefinite tantam esse affirmare audebunt.¹¹¹

109 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique suivi de Monadologie*, éd. Laurence Bouquiaux (Paris : Gallimard, 1995), 79 : « c'est pourquoy nos sentimens confus sont le resultat d'une varieté de perceptions, qui est tout à fait infinie ».

110 Ibid. : « Et c'est à peu près comme le murmure confus, qu'entendent ceux qui approchent du rivage de la mer, vient de l'assemblage des repercussions des vagues innumerables ».

111 Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-9, 434, glose : « Bien que la bonté et la puissance divines sachent justifier le fait que nous entendons l'infini comme indéfini, elles n'affirmeront cependant jamais leur grandeur dans le domaine de l'indéfini ».

L'indéfini du langage et de la pensée est dû aux proportions de l'infini à la fois cosmique et divin. Dans cette découverte irréversible de dimensions qui dépassent celles de l'humain, la cosmologie affecte de façon directe la métaphysique. Même lorsque, comme chez Bruno et Pascal aussi bien que chez Le Moyne, la perte du centre est remplie à nouveau par Dieu, l'image de Dieu ne peut plus être la même :

Ce Corps de tous les Lieux, ce Lieu de tous les Corps,
Qui se trouve au-dedans, qui se trouve au-dehors,
Est au Sage un Portrait, quoiqu'il soit invisible,
De cet Esprit immense, ineffable, insensible,
Qui sans sortir de rien, à tout extérieur,
Sans se restreindre à rien, à tout intérieur ;
Est le centre et le lieu, l'espace et la mesure,
Des corps grands et petits qu'embrasse la Nature.¹¹²

Si le centre est réaffirmé ici, il est tout de même déplacé et dispersé, rendu à la fois omniprésent et indéterminé. Un indéfini sans centre pour exprimer l'infini : « Ce Corps de tous les Lieux, ce Lieu de tous les Corps » ; « à tout extérieur [...] à tout intérieur ». Avec une proximité étonnante du Dieu sans volonté spinozien,¹¹³ cet « Esprit » est « im-

112 Le Moyne, *Entretiens et lettres poétiques*, I-11, vv. 403-10.

113 Cf. par exemple l'*Appendice* à la première section de l'*Ethique*. Un Dieu agissant selon une volonté et une fin et non selon sa propre nature immanente et ontologiquement intrinsèque ne correspond qu'à une fausse image humanisée de Dieu : dans sa perfection et dans son infinité spatio-temporelle Dieu ne peut rien vouloir car cela impliquerait qu'il aurait besoin d'atteindre quelque chose qui lui manque, ce qui est absurde et est en revanche une caractéristique propre à l'humain. Cette dimension insensible, ineffable et sans volonté à la fois de la nature et de Dieu que les humains ten-

mense, ineffable, insensible », et sa « mesure » fait bien sûr écho à la perte de mesure cosmologique à laquelle nous avons fait référence plus haut, à la fois chez Le Moyne et chez Pascal.

Ce passage de la cosmologie à la métaphysique sous l'égide de l'infini et l'indéfini justifie déjà, me semble-t-il, le caractère abstrait de plusieurs formulations dans la poésie philosophique de Tommaso Campanella, quelques décennies plus tôt que Le Moyne et Milton. Chez Campanella aussi Dieu habite ce nouvel espace de façon indéfinie et dilatée :

Come lo spazio tutti enti penètra
locando, e d'essi insieme è penetrato,
cosí Dio gli enti interna e'l spazio e passa,
non come luogo, né come locato,
ma in modo preeminente ; donde impetra
lo spazio d'esser luogo, e'l corpo massa ¹¹⁴

Dans la similitude entre espace et Dieu, ces vers de Campanella indiquent la perte et la redéfinition du centre comme étant à la fois omniprésent et dispersé, rempli par

dent à redéfinir selon leurs propres critères perceptifs et éthiques renvoie quelque part à la transfiguration de l'infini à l'indéfini due aux limites perceptuelles de l'humain qui fait l'objet principal de cette étude.

114 Tommaso Campanella, *Del sommo bene metafisico. Canzone. Madrigale 2*, vv. 1-3, tr. fr. par Franc Ducros, in *Scelta d'alcune poesie filosofiche - Choix de quelques poésies philosophiques*, éd. Marco Albertazzi & Franc Ducros (Lavis : La Finestra editrice, 2016), 219 : « Comme l'espace pénètre tous les êtres, / les situe, et d'eux est pénétré, / ainsi Dieu intérieur aux êtres, à l'espace, le dépasse, / non comme lieu, ni comme situé, / mais de façon prééminente ; par qui l'espace / obtient d'être lieu, et le corps masse ».

une image de Dieu qui devient par conséquent abstraite et déconstruite, tout en sous-tendant, dans sa totalité indéfinie, l'entière de la nature. À remarquer aussi, comme on l'a fait chez Le Moyne et Milton, le caractère tout à fait littéral de ces vers, ainsi que les termes intrinsèquement indéfinis et abstraits de « masse » et d'« espace ». Sur la question de l'indéfini du lieu, étroitement reliée à celle du centre et de sa redéfinition, ces vers de Campanella ressemblent fortement au passage suivant de Bruno, toujours dans le premier livre du *De immenso*, que je prends ici à titre d'exemple et préfère, du fait de sa forme principalement versifiée, à d'autres textes du philosophe italien – tels que *L'univers, l'infini et les mondes* – soutenant des thèses semblables :

Adde ut inepta loci est finition qua mihi totum
Concludam nusquam neque dici posse locatum¹¹⁵

Chez Campanella, en outre, ces convergences entre infini et indéfini, cosmique et métaphysique, apparaissent en poésie afin d'expliquer la question du mal. De même que nous ne pouvons ni décrire ni comprendre l'infini, de même nous devons admettre que ce qui apparaît aux hommes comme mal ne l'est pas dans le grand dessein divin :

Se Dio è infinito Ben, non si può dire
che vi sia morte, o male, o Stigia tana,
se non per ben di a chi per meglio s'erra :

115 Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-8, 429, vv. 1-2 : « Ajoute que la définition du lieu est inapte ; j'en déduis que le tout n'est nulle part et que l'on ne peut pas dire situé ce à quoi l'on croit que le nom de tout s'adapte parfaitement ».

rispetto è, non essenza, il mal [...] ¹¹⁶

Et de façon encore plus claire et littérale ici :

e mutasi [la creatura], tua idea rappresentando,
ché in infinite fogge la trastulla,
per non poterla tutta in un mostrare ;

infinità mancando
a questa, nel cui male il tuo ben pare.¹¹⁷

C'est le manque humain (et animal) de capacité perceptive et représentationnelle de l'infini qui empêche de voir comme bien divin ce qui apparaît comme mal, de même que cette incapacité d'appréhender l'infini du divin transforme celui-ci en indéfini pour l'humain. Entre omniprésence et manque, cosmique et métaphysique, matériel et immatériel – et malgré les différences connues entre ces auteurs en termes de génération, langue et positionnement théologique –, la tentative de représenter l'irreprésentable et d'aborder poétiquement l'infini et l'inconnaissable engendre un langage fortement abstrait, où des formes vagues, des matières informes et des concepts immatériels opèrent sur le même plan ontologique et sémantique.

116 Campanella, *Del sommo bene metafisico. Canzone. Madrigale 5*, vv. 3-5, tr. Ducros, 225 : « Si Dieu est Bien infini, on ne peut dire / qu'il y ait mort ou mal ou tanière du Styx, / sinon pour le bien de qui il enferma pour un mieux : / relatif est, non essentiel, le mal ».

117 Campanella, *Canzone seconda della medesima Salmodia (Orazioni tre in Salmodia Metafisicale congiungente insieme). Madrigale 6*, vv. 10-14, tr. Ducros, 375 : « et [la créature] se change, ton idée figurant, / qui en formes infinies en joue / pour ne pouvoir en une fois la montrer toute ; // l'infini lui manquant / dans son mal ton bien paraît ».

Ceci a des implications rhétoriques et poétologiques qu'il convient maintenant d'analyser, en guise de conclusion.

4. UN MONISME QUI EST AUSSI RHÉTORIQUE

Comme on l'a vu, la continuité entre matière et immatériel, physique et métaphysique, sous l'égide de l'infini et de l'indéfini annonce, chez les auteurs en question ici, une forme de « monisme métaphysique » qui, au-delà de ses complexes enjeux philosophiques que l'on a à peine esquissés ici, présente des contreparties textuelles. La tentative de représenter poétiquement l'irreprésentable cosmique et divin peut engendrer la fin même de la représentation en tant que dédoublement entre l'image employée et l'objet décrit, et nous avons à ce propos remarqué à plusieurs reprises la littéralité à l'œuvre dans beaucoup de passages cités. Cette littéralité est elle-même une forme de monisme : le dualisme propre à la rhétorique métaphorique standard ne semblerait pas être suffisant pour donner un corps – pour indéfini qu'il soit – à des espaces qui, « hors de toute mesure » (Le Moyne), se dérobent à l'identité figée d'un degré zéro auquel une image de départ renvoie, même si transfigurée par la complexification du système métaphorique typique du XVII^e siècle. La transfiguration de la métaphore est un problème baroque, qui est abordé cependant, dans les exemples cités, par le biais assez insolite de la littéralité au lieu que par la complexification des figures. Encore plus complexe est la question de l'allégorie, fortement présente chez Milton¹¹⁸ et au moins depuis Walter

118 Cf. à nouveau à ce propos l'analyse de Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 180 sq.

Benjamin identifiée comme chiffre essentiel du baroque. *L'allos agoreuein* présuppose cependant aussi une forme irréductible de dualisme, même si très sophistiquée, dans son mouvement de renvoi entre une instance représentationnelle de départ et une instance représentée à l'arrivée.

La question du non-dualisme rhétorique m'occupe depuis longtemps et j'ai commencé à en traiter en relation à l'allégorie au XVII^e siècle dans un autre article, auquel je me permets de renvoyer.¹¹⁹ Je me limiterai à remarquer dans ces conclusions que la littéralité marquée de la plupart des vers de Le Moyne, de Milton et de Campanella – mais aussi des vers latins de Bruno – que j'ai cités est elle-même plus complexe que ce qu'elle ne pourrait sembler car, du fait de son caractère poétique et de la matière informelle et inconnue dont elle traite, elle ne se borne pas au simple compte-rendu de phénomènes se soustrayant de toutes façons à la prise du langage. Dans ce non-dualisme à la fois ontique et rhétorique, matériel et immatériel, physique et métaphysique, la littéralité est indissolublement liée à un type de polysémie qui, à l'instar du caractère général et indéfini des formes de l'imaginaire qui ont été mobilisées, est elle-même infinie puisque, en se confrontant avec l'infini, elle déploie nécessairement une infinité de significations possibles. *À la place du dualisme métaphorique et allégorique nous nous trouvons donc dans un espace textuel, celui de l'indéfini comme expression de l'infini, qui vise à ouvrir la signification miroitant au niveau des figures l'expansion perceptive de l'univers qui est en jeu dans les cosmologies et dans les philosophies post-coperniciennes.* La surface du littéral in-

119 Cf. Alessandro De Francesco, « Walter Benjamin's Allegory and Baroque Lyrical Poetry: A Study in Rhetoric », *Semicerchio. Rivista di poesia comparata* 31 (2018) : 5-19 [Essai précédent dans ce volume.]

dique donc ici – avec un paradoxe qui n'est peut-être qu'apparent et pourtant irréductible – non pas l'épuisement de la signification, mais, au contraire, l'ouverture de la signification vers l'inconnu et l'infini des possibles en dehors de la rhétorique dualiste. Du fait de l'infini auquel l'indéfini poétique renvoie, le référent ultime n'est plus identifiable dans le système des signes et il est remplacé par une multitude de niveaux significationnels et perceptuels. C'est pourquoi le régime rhétorique est à la fois littéral et polysémique.¹²⁰

L'objet, très présent dans l'imaginaire baroque, qui me semble mieux représenter cette interaction indissoluble entre physique et métaphysique, entre surface du littéral et multidimensionnalité énigmatique de la polysémie infinie au XVII^e siècle, est celui de la *sphère*.¹²¹ La sphère des planètes, des satellites et de l'univers, que nous avons vue évoquée dans plusieurs images cosmiques chez Milton et Le Moyne (les lecteurs de ces deux poètes savent que les occurrences du champ sémantique de la sphère se multiplient d'ailleurs bien au-delà des passages cités). Une sphère de l'univers qui peut aussi être infinie, comme chez Pascal, ou encore chez Bruno :

Nam velut in sphaera longum, latum, atque
profundum
Conveniunt, atque obiectum capiuntur ut unum :
Non secus in mole hac quae non finita probatur

120 Il faut entendre « polysémie » non pas dans le sens rhétorique traditionnel indiquant une simple ambiguïté du sens, mais comme polysémie *infinie* découlant de la rupture d'une rhétorique dualiste, s'appuyant sur la repérabilité d'un référent ultime.

121 Cf. Georges Poulet, « Poésie du cercle et de la sphère », *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 10 (1958) : 44-57.

Altum quod dicis, dicam nihilo minus imum,
Et tibi quod latum est mihi longum est, atque
profundum.¹²²

Traitée ainsi, la figure de la sphère montre que cette perte de coordonnées perceptives dans l'infini, et dans l'infini poétique comme indéfini littéral, constitue aussi une expansion de la connaissance et des possibles de la signification. La sphère indique à la fois la concentration du sens et sa dispersion dans l'infini, la littéralité et la polysémie *infinie* comme *concentrations* significationnelles et, en même temps, perte de coordonnées représentationnelles et multiplication de centres possibles.

Il ne s'agit pas seulement, dans cet imaginaire à la fois poétique, métaphysique et épistémologique, de la sphère comme forme close, traditionnellement identifiable dans l'histoire de la cosmologie, mais plus en général de tout ce qui est *convexe*. « Convexité » est un terme récurrent et étroitement relié à l'imaginaire cosmologique et métaphysique à la fois dans le *De immenso* de Bruno¹²³ et chez Milton :

122 Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-12, 444, vv. 21-26 : « De même que dans la sphère la longueur, la largeur et la profondeur coïncident et peuvent être considérées comme une seule et même chose, de même dans cette masse, qui s'est avérée infinie, ce que tu qualifies de haut je pourrais le qualifier de bas et ce qui pour toi est large peut apparaître à moi comme étant long et profond ». À remarquer ici une fois de plus le recours à la sémantique de la « masse » (*mole*).

123 Cf. par ex. Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-4 et surtout I-6, où l'emboîtement à l'infini des formes convexes de l'univers (corps célestes, dieux, mondes) est utilisé à plusieurs reprises pour affirmer l'impossibilité de localiser le divin et l'univers infini lui-même, car « ce qui le limite n'est ni lieu ni espace » (Introduction).

Meanwhile upon the firm opacous globe
Of this round world, whose first convèx divides
The luminous inferior orbs, enclosed
From Chaos and th'inroad of Darkness old,
Satan alighted walks : a globe far off
It seemed, now seems a boundless continent¹²⁴

L'emboîtement de formes cosmiques convexes amène Milton, dans ces vers, au passage du physique au métaphysique : le monde est « enclosed / From Chaos and th'inroad of Darkness old ». De même, Bruno se demande : « Qu'est-ce qu'il y a au-delà du tout ».¹²⁵ En même temps, ces vers de Milton font advenir, sous l'égide de la convexité, le passage de la forme fermée vers l'infini comme indéfini : « a globe far off / It seemed, now seems a boundless continent ». La sphère cosmique close et la sphère infinie ouverte sont unies ici, une fois de plus, par l'instabilité de la représentation (Milton utilise dans les deux cas le verbe « sembler ») et par l'indétermination de l'imaginaire (« a boundless continent ») ; et cette union de différents niveaux percep-

124 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, vv. 418-23.

125 Bruno, *De Immenso*, I-6, vv. 13-17 :

Quin et dum ratio ulterius perquirat et urget,
Nempe ut convexum primum dicatque locatum,
Ut parteis inquit quae in partibus insituantur;
Inque illa ergo ista est, inque ista est illa vicissim.
Pergo tamen, totum, cupio quoque scire, quid extra est?

« Pendant que la raison continue de rechercher et de se presser, qu'il [Aristote] dise, entre-temps, comment le premier convexe est situé de la même façon dont il dit que les parties qui sont dans les parties étaient situées, celle-ci dans celle-là, et celle-là dans celle-ci réciproquement. Je voudrais savoir : qu'est-ce qu'il y a au-delà du tout ».

tifs et ontologiques de la convexité miroite la convergence entre la matière cosmique et l'espace métaphysique.

Dans ses différentes manifestations et sous l'égide de l'infini cosmique et métaphysique décrit ici, la convexité peut tout aussi bien renvoyer non seulement aux corps célestes et à la sphère de l'univers en tant que telle, mais aussi aux lentilles de Galilée, de Spinoza et de van Leeuwenhoek, aussi bien qu'à la monade leibnizienne, aussi bien qu'aux réfractions de la lumière dans les miroirs convexes – si fréquents dans l'imaginaire artistique pré-moderne¹²⁶ ainsi que dans les études de Galilée sur la surface lunaire^{–127}, aussi bien que, finalement, aux courbures des trajectoires de signification et de représentation dans la poésie en question. Du fait de la convergence qui s'opère dans langage poétique que nous avons examiné entre littéralité et ouverture indéfinie du sens et de l'imaginaire vers l'infini, la sphère et la convexité ne sont pas à concevoir comme de simples métaphores : elles incarnent, plutôt, de façon immanente ce jeu vertigineux entre modification et augmentation, concentration et dispersion, des modes de description de l'univers et du sujet, entre matières sans formes et nouvelles formes conceptuelles au sein du poétique.¹²⁸

126 Par exemple, sur l'utilisation de miroirs convexes dans le théâtre shakespearien, cf. Cohen, *Shakespeare and Technology*. En peinture, il suffira de penser à des tableaux physiquement peints sur des panneaux ou des toiles convexes et à partir de surfaces réfléchissantes convexes, tels que *Autoritratto in uno specchio convesso* de Francesco Maria Mazzola (1523–24), *Scudo con testa di medusa* du Caravage (1598 ca.) et *Santa Justa* de Francisco Pacheco (1612–1618).

127 Cf. Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo Tolemaico e Copernicano* (Florence: Giovanni Battista Landini, 1632) et Picolino et Wade, *Galileo's Visions*, 70 et *passim*.

128 Je compte analyser en détail, dans une étude plus vaste à venir, les différentes occurrences de la convexité dans la poésie, dans l'art et dans l'histoire des idées au XVII^e siècle.

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