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On Borderlines: Creativity and Permeability in Ponge, Giono, and Duras

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An abstract of  
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## Abstract

### On Borderlines: Creativity and Permeability in Ponge, Giono, and Duras Gina Stamm

This dissertation develops the thesis that in the period following World War Two, there was widespread cultural preoccupation with the idea of the borderline between the inside of the individual (especially the body) and the outside world. This anxiety was spread over multiple disciplines, including literature and art, philosophy, natural sciences, and psychoanalysis. So far, psychoanalysis is the only discipline to have officially thematized this phenomenon and to have provided a vocabulary for it in response to an influx of new patients requiring this new theoretical approach. I offer an overview of this work, as well as its relationship to the larger question of language's place in creating borderlines between the self and the outside world. Beyond this, I provide a close reading of the work of three very different authors of the postwar period, all of whom use a coherent set of motifs in both their work and critical writing to describe how they use language as a border between themselves and the outside world. This use has concrete implications for what they see as the possibilities and responsibilities of the author in society. The poet Francis Ponge sees literary or artistic creation as the movement of material from the inside of himself to the outside, to form a shell that will change the overall organization of the outside world little by little, with eventual revolutionary consequences. Jean Giono was interested less in creating boundaries than in opening up separate subjective "worlds" between people and in opening oneself to integration with the natural world. The violent gesture of artistic or sensual opening was meant to displace inherent human violence from the political sphere to the artistic. For Marguerite Duras, however, writing requires the creation of protective borders *against* the outside, and shows how these same structures can turn destructive. In her work, images of walls and houses attempt but do not succeed in shoring up barriers to the exterior to make space for writing, and they distance her from the outside world.

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## **Introduction :**

Après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale et les traumatismes majeurs qu'elle a produits, le réaménagement des espaces culturels, les bouleversements des garants métasociaux et métapsychiques ont suscité chez quelques analystes des recherches décisives, même si certaines d'entre elles demeureront ignorées ou marginales longtemps [...] Les artistes [...] ne témoignent pas d'autre chose: un monde disjoint et sans limites, un monde labyrinthique d'où la contenance du sens s'est échappée. Les pathologies du nouveau malaise dans la civilisation sont celles de sujets sans limites et de sujets borderline. (René Kaës 78-9)

The psychoanalyst René Kaës here identifies a conflict central to the latter half of the twentieth century, and that at the heart of this dissertation. The years following World War Two were filled with an extreme reorganization of political, social, and cultural borderlines, including technological and other changes that challenged the borders of the human body itself. These changes were naturally reflected in the psychic life of the individual as well. In situating developments of psychoanalytic theory within this larger historical context, Kaës also manages, perhaps unwittingly, to evoke the complexities that make the concept of the borderline both fundamental to understanding this period and particularly difficult to analyze. First, he rightly does not limit the importance of borderlines or limits to this period, but asserts that the upheaval of the time put into relief this importance through the effects of their restructuring. Second, while psychoanalysis was able to name this phenomenon, it extends beyond the realm of the clinic, and beyond



the realm of psychoanalytic critique of the art world. Artists and writers themselves recognize and portray the role that they see both borderlines and their rupture playing within the larger world and, specifically, in the production of their own work. It is this exploration of the relationship between subjective limits and creativity that took place in the wake of the Second World War that is at the heart of my project. The vast majority of the theoretical and literary works touched on here were produced in this key period of 1945-85, although a few anticipated these realizations, and work reflecting this shift continues today. The authors that I have chosen here are far from the only ones whose work shows the influence of this conflict, but their work is exemplary in that all of them explicitly address the role of some variation of the borderline motif within their own work and in reflection on their creative process. They also indicate the diversity of ways that changes in subjective limits can be experienced in this process.

First theorized in the Anglophone sphere of psychoanalysis, the topic of the borderline and recognition of its importance soon spread to France, although it is less well-known than other developments coming from continental psychoanalysis. Otto Kernberg (Austrian-American, b.1928) and Donald Woods Winnicott (British, 1896-1971) are clinicians who pioneered the study of these so-called “borderline” cases within the clinic and in their work in the theory of object relations. Kernberg authored the first serious attempt at a structural diagnosis of borderline conditions; this set out the basic characteristics and effects of the disorder(s). D.W. Winnicott was a founding member of the “Middle” or “Independent” group of analysts in the British Psychoanalytic Society. His work with children and borderline cases led to a number of theoretical developments about the relationship between the emerging pathology and the physical experience of

space and contact with the outside world. He also began to discuss these experiences' effects on cultural and symbolic production.

When these ideas were embraced in the French sphere, it was likewise by analysts unaligned with a dominant figure (in this case Jacques Lacan and later Jacques-Alain Miller). André Green (French, 1927-2012) studied under Lacan during the 1960s but later distanced himself from this school of thought and grew closer to British analysts such as Winnicott and Wilfred Bion. He was a leading figure in the *Société Psychanalytique de France* and the *Institut de Psychanalyse de Paris* and later moved his affiliation intellectually and geographically to the University College of London. Working with concepts from Winnicott and Bion, among others, as well as classical Freudian theory, he explained how borderline patients' difficulties in the use of language illustrate how language itself functions as a kind of borderline structure between individuals. Didier Anzieu (French, 1923-1999) was a founding member of the *Association Psychanalytique de France* and the *Syndicat des psychologues psychanalytiques*. Like Winnicott, he spent a great deal of his practice working with children and with patients suffering from physical ailments (in his case, dermatology). These experiences led to his concept of the *Moi-Peau*, which shows the ways in which the experiences and functions of the physical barrier of the skin reflect those of the ego. The innovative power of Anzieu's work on this concept is twofold: 1) that he seeks to found the imaginary border "à l'assise biologique assure" (Anzieu 1995, 25) and 2) he elevates to the level of the reality and pleasure principles what he describes as "un principe de différenciation interne et un principe de contenance, l'un et l'autre entrevus par Freud (1895)" (*ibid.* 27). He demonstrates the importance not only of the fact that a border exists, but also the

structure of that border itself and the role it plays in the interaction between the two sides. Anzieu's work also addresses not only the production of language, and the function of metaphor and analogy between the linguistic and the physical, but also its use in the creation of something new and its reception in the outside world.

Francis Ponge (1899-1988) was a writer and educator who, throughout a career beginning at the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, was affiliated with such figures as Jean Paulhan, the Surrealists, and Philippe Sollers, without ever declaring his affiliation with any particular literary movement. His contribution to the exploration of the idea of the borderline is not psychoanalytic in nature, but rather immediately artistic and political. While some of his early poems are well-known to students of French, less commonly read is his more experimental poetry, as well as his literary, artistic, and cultural criticism, all of which is highly political in nature. Using models of change and growth taken from his observation of the natural world (and from theories of the natural world taken from the ancient Epicurean philosophers), Ponge developed a theory of the revolutionary power of art. Shells, skins, and the surface of stones—among other images—are used to describe the ways in which the poet or artist creates a new work that serves as a surface of contact between himself and the outside world. The insertion of this new work into the world restructures it upon contact, changing both the physical and social constitution of that world. The revolutionary capacities of poetry and visual art are also reflected in the constant formal innovation he both encouraged and practiced.

Jean Giono (1895-1970), although more traditional from a formal perspective, was also highly political thematically. It is in fact his politics that have caused him to be often ignored by the scholarly community. His refusal to join the Resistance in World

War II has created something of a taboo around him, but it did not come from any sympathy for Fascism. Rather, it came from the aftermath of his experience as a soldier in World War I, where he developed a deep sense of the necessity of pacifism that stemmed from a specific point of view regarding the relationship between human beings and the outside world. While these themes appear in his writing prior to World War II, it is really in 1947 with the novel *Un Roi sans divertissement* that he begins to seriously examine his role as a writer in forging connections or contacts between human beings and nature. He did not believe that mankind's nature was inherently pacific, but brutally violent, stemming from a desire to see under others' skin, to rip them open (this is related to a need to be deeply rooted in an intense sensual experience of the natural world, to be permeated by that world). He saw the role of the writer being to displace that violence and violation of limits from the political sphere to the artistic one, to open connections between the separate worlds inhabited by individuals, as well as to reinforce the contacts between individuals and the natural world. This connection to nature has also been seen as a reason to marginalize Giono as a regionalist, but although he does set many of his works in his native southern France, the relationship between the individual and the environment is equally significant wherever one lives. Breaching these surfaces or barriers in order to come into contact with nature or with the internal world of others allows for an immersive and rich sensory experience that is the only cure for the radical alienation and unhappiness that he calls *ennui*.

The final writer in this study did not find the same solace. Nor was she invested in using her literary or cinematic activities to create contact with the outside world. Marguerite Duras's (1914-1996) work is as preoccupied with the tropes of borders as that

of the other authors we have seen, but for her their value lies in their capacity as barriers rather than interfaces. The constantly shrinking spaces portrayed in her works and in her personal writing show a concern with *reinforcing* protective boundaries to the point of isolation in both a physical and an emotional sense. Trying to shut herself off from the world in order to write, and then using her writing to further distance herself, however, proves to be only temporarily effective; protective spaces as portrayed in her work get smaller and smaller, but at the same time less and less functional, allow in more and more of a threatening presence. Although of the three writers seen here Duras is most widely recognized as an innovator (and indeed, most widely recognizable overall), this use of creative work as a barricade rather than a surface of contact changes the way she is able to make use of that work.

Overall, the analysts and writers seen here provide a clear picture of different ways of envisioning and addressing one's relationship to the outside world and other individuals in it, as well as the relationship to the dividing line as well. While not exhausting the possibilities of these relations, they give a broad view of the challenges posed by changes in one's perception of the borderline as well as the importance of creativity in managing them.

## **Chapter I: The Conceptual and Clinical Borderline and the Creative Process**

“Notre figure est aujourd’hui Hamlet plutôt qu’Œdipe.” (André Green 1990, 121)

André Green condenses in this short proclamation a number of sentiments that had been articulated in various forms across the psychoanalytic community. Identifying Hamlet as a “cas-limite” or “état-limite,” he marks a shift in the focus of that community from the Oedipal neuroses that had previously dominated the field’s subject matter. The text in which this citation appears was published in 1976, but his “aujourd’hui” refers more generally to a period beginning after the Second World War. The importance of this change goes beyond the clinic, although it is certainly true that the patients coming to analysts during this period are indicative of the larger trend. Hamlet has not only replaced Oedipus as the dominant *pathology*, but as the “figure mythique” belonging not only to the analytic community but to society as a whole. The mythological figure is one whose explanatory power goes beyond illness to help define health as well as the familial and societal structures within our development that help create the former two.

Psychoanalysis has, however, been able to develop a vocabulary and a body of theory that are useful for articulates what is at stake in this “mythical figure” of the “état limite.” Before proceeding to look at ways in which this figure is used outside of psychoanalytic circles, we will proceed in this first chapter to discuss the evolution of the term within psychoanalytic theory and in particular its value for language and the capacity for creativity.

The problem of the borderline case (because problem it in fact is), known in French as the "état-limite" or "cas-limite", became a fixture of the psychoanalytic theoretical landscape following World War II. Although it was first explicitly addressed as such as early as 1938 by Adolph Stern, it was only in 1953 that Robert Knight recognized that it had become the primary pathology of the postwar years. Not, however, until the 1960s would Otto Kernberg attempt to introduce rigor into this diagnostic category. Previous to this, in rigorous theoretical discussion (and even sometimes in contemporary American psychoanalytic circles for various reasons<sup>1</sup>) it seems to have often been preferable to avoid using the term "borderline" as it has been sometimes seen to refer broadly to a group of disparately-presenting patients, with no meaning being assigned to the term itself. Without a profound and attentive investigation of the common symptoms and origin of all of these patients' difficulties, it risked remaining a diagnosis that adds little insight to the condition and experience of the person to whom it is applied. While this may seem at first to be a problem somewhat parochial in scope, limited to the technical definitions of pathology in a therapeutic practice, it is my contention that the structures emerging on the couch as a diagnostic problem were also at the same time making themselves evident in the intellectual sphere in various other ways, particularly in the psychic structures and movements implicated in the experience of artistic and literary creation.

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<sup>1</sup> "As might be guessed, the group burst into laughter, which seemed full of both anxiety and relief. But they then began to use clinical-descriptive terms that had precise meaning in the data of the presentation and, even more important, with which the patient herself would almost certainly have agreed on the basis of her own subjective experience...It is my guess that, no matter how vast our literature on this topic, no clinician has ever had a patient enter his or her office and declare "I feel so borderline today," whereas we have all heard people speak easily of *obsessing* or being *narcissistic* or feeling *depressed* or *manic*, *paranoid*, *phobic*, *hysterical*, and even *schiz-y*. In other words, there seems to be no ready or obvious affective or action referent in the patient to which the word borderline gives a name." (Fromm 1995, 234)

Before addressing how the borderline is or was also a literary problem, we must first address the ways in which it was a psychoanalytic problem. This question can be addressed in two ways. The first is that it was a problem for psychoanalysis in that it could not be addressed solely with the metapsychology inherited from Freud. The borderline cases received this name at first because they seemed to fall into a gray area between the better-defined categories of neurosis and psychosis. The second is a corollary to this issue: whether these new patients were indeed "a problem for psychoanalysis" in the sense that it might or might not be a problem that analysis as a practice was equipped to treat or even describe accurately.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the latter of these issues was attempted, however, that the former was explicitly addressed, and any sort of metapsychological description of the stakes of this condition could be elaborated.

It would take nearly 30 years and a multinational group of analysts working from many different theoretical backgrounds and with diverse methods of treatment to finally elaborate models that would respond both to the observations made in the clinic and the techniques they proposed to treat these patients. While significant contributions were made by Wilfred Bion, the Hungarian analysts Enid and Michael Balint, the French "psychosomaticians" (such as Pierre Marty, Christian David, Michel de M'Uzan, and, particularly, Joyce MacDougall) and other post-Lacanian French analysts like Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, the main contributions to the elaboration of the "borderline" pathology and the structures underlying it came through the work of Donald Woods Winnicott and associated "Middle Group" British analysts, and their reception in France by, among

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<sup>2</sup> It must be remembered that at this time, those following Freud's practice saw psychosis as untreatable by means of analysis (Freud 1924) and in fact those cases deemed appropriate for an attempt were in most instances limited (within the larger category of the neuroses) to the "psychoneuroses".



others, André Green (himself a devoted reader of Winnicott and later a lecturer and analyst at the Squiggle Foundation) and Didier Anzieu, an analyst who began his career in philosophy and managed to maintain ties to multiple disciplines and analytic traditions in his work on the "Moi-peau" (a concept to be more fully discussed later on) and on creativity. A brief summary of Otto Kernberg's work on the subject will be necessary because his structural diagnosis of borderline patients was invaluable in opening the door to recognition of and further research on this category. Both this diagnostic rubric and his subsequent work, however remains primarily rooted in the empirical observation of his patients and their treatment. Such work, while obviously of great practical value, contributes only indirectly to the metapsychological understanding of these patients as developed by non-lacanian French analysts.

D.W. Winnicott is both the first chronologically of those analysts whose work is immediately germane to our discussion, and the first logically, insofar as it is in great part on the foundation laid by his work that Green and Anzieu were able to build their own theoretical models.

### Kernberg's Structural Diagnosis and Winnicott's Clinic

Winnicott himself rarely used the term "borderline," in part because the largest part of his own work was done prior to Kernberg's structural description, which would gather under one umbrella a number of related disorders and diagnoses. However, those references from the latter part of his career help us to recognize that this was the issue he was implicitly addressing—at least with his adult patients—throughout his career. One

can also retroactively apply Kernberg's criteria to those patients treated earlier in his work, and see the consistency of their cases with those he treated later on and to whom he did apply this label. A good number of these patients—if they received any label at all—he called "schizoid." This is telling in two ways: first, that these patients could not be classified as having schizophrenia, that is to say, were not obviously psychotic—at least consistently—but did not suffer from an identifiable neurosis.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that schizoid and borderline disorders are necessarily the same, but rather that these patients were already classified in the gray area between the two better-established categories of pathology. "Schizoid" was, in fact, *one* of the diagnoses Kernberg included in the list of those individual and somewhat differently-presenting diagnoses considered in the 1960s to be "borderline" pathologies. These include so-called "ambulatory" or "pseudoneurotic" schizophrenia, patients with "as-if" personalities (a concept developed by the analyst Helene Deutsch) or severe ego distortions. Kernberg lists a number of symptoms that frequently occur in one combination or another in the variously diagnosed borderline patients, but goes further, attempting to describe the psychic structures and functions behind the symptoms, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Nonspecific manifestations of ego weakness

- a) Lack of anxiety tolerance

- b) lack of impulse control

- c) lack of developed sublimatory channels

2. Shift towards primary-process thinking

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<sup>3</sup> While the DSM offers distinct categories both for "borderline" and "schizoid" personality disorders, the two have historically been considered as part of the larger category of related "borderline" disorders, and continue to be considered as such by many analysts outside of North America.

- a) reactivation of pathological early childhood object relations
  - b) reactivation of early defensive operations
  - c) partial refusion of primitive self and object images affecting the stability of ego boundaries
  - d) regression towards primitive cognitive structures
- 3) Specific defensive operations at the level of borderline personality organization
- a) lack of development of the apparatuses of primary autonomy
  - b) constitutionally determined lack of anxiety tolerance
  - c) excessive frustration in reality
  - d) excessive development of aggression (Kernberg 1967)

These abstract parameters can be reduced in concrete terms to four basic processes:

- 1) Splitting—keeping apart introjections and identifications of opposite quality (good and bad objects)
- 2) primitive idealization
- 3) early forms of projection
- 4) denial (*ibid.*)

And it is these processes that we will keep in mind throughout all of the discussion that follows: a regression to primitive forms of object relations in which the objects are split into good and bad—the former of which are idealized—and the partial destruction of the boundaries between these objects and the ego.

The label of schizoid implies that Winnicott recognized that the troubles from which the borderline cases suffered somehow involved splitting. As a trainee in the lineage of Melanie Klein (one of his training analysts was Joan Riviere), the word

schizoid carries with it echoes not only of the personality or ego splitting of the patient with schizophrenic, but also the object-splitting of the child in the paranoid-schizoid position—a symptom of borderline cases that will be taken up later by André Green. More important, however, than the labels he applied to them, are the observations he made of these patients and the conjectures he drew from these observations regarding the normal or abnormal development of ego structures and object relations. These observations are of two types—both the behavior of these patients and their therapeutic needs.

Among the first of these, upon which Winnicott wrote multiple times, is the withdrawal of the patient into an elaborate fantasy world, which effectively inhibits them from satisfactory action in the “real” world or rather in "external reality". This, which follows perhaps logically from Kernberg's "shift to primary-process thinking" and "excessive frustration with reality", is in fact specifically remarked upon and interpreted by Kernberg later in that same article:

Many of these patients, when their efforts to control, manipulate, devalue objects, and direct gratification of their needs through exploitation of others fail, tend to withdraw and re-create in fantasies relationships with others in which they can express all these needs. Some protective withdrawal and gratification in fantasy are usually present even in those borderline patients who superficially may appear as quite "sociable." (Kernberg 676)

Beyond the implication of manipulateness or exploitation of others (beyond that of "manipulating" any object in the outside world), this describes a number of Winnicott's patients. Most particularly it is the case of the woman who became the subject of the

essay "Dreaming, Fantasying, Living" (Winnicott 2005, 35-50)—a woman whose life had been spent, from early childhood, detached from her external circumstances, all the while active in an inner fantasy life. This patient's case illustrates that there is not only a quantitative difference in the amount of withdrawal and fantasy-living done by these patients, but also a qualitative difference. Winnicott marked that difference by labeling the healthy, creative, playful process "fantasy", a process likened to dreaming in that it is symbolic (or alternatively, planning for the future, in which the recognized time delay replaces the symbolic mediation in a tacit acknowledgement of the reality principle, or the distance separating oneself and the realization of the fantasy).

On the other hand, the pathological behavior—which he calls "fantasying"—involves the immediate gratification of hallucination:

Dream fits into object-relating in the real world, and living in the real world fits into the dream-world in ways that are quite familiar, especially to psychoanalysts. By contrast, however, fantasying remains an isolated phenomenon, absorbing energy but not *contributing-in* either to dreaming or living. (PR 36, italics added)

In its relationship to reality and time, dream and "fantasy" (as opposed to "fantasying" or hallucination) operate symbolically ("in ways that are quite familiar...to psychoanalysts"), where one thing is represented by another. Fantasying represents nothing beyond itself:

Fantasying was about a certain subject and it was a dead end. It had no *poetic* value. The corresponding dream, however had *poetry* in it, that is to say, layer upon layer of meaning related to past, present, and future, and to inner and outer and always fundamentally about herself. (48, italics added)

Fantasy or dream is likened here to language itself, and more specifically to creative language or to what Winnicott will elsewhere call "indirect communication" (Winnicott 1965, 190)—one that is replete with multiple layers of signification. He says that it is related to the "past, present, and future, and to inner and outer." The first of these groupings is easy enough to understand, in that the use of the symbolic carries with it a consciousness of the passage of time, and of delayed gratification. It is thus a direct recognition of the reality principle and one that, according to Freud, might also suffice to discharge the energy of repressed affect (Anzieu 1981, 111). In both of these senses, it appears that creative language can subjectively serve the same purpose as 'doing', of acting, and that it can be assigned a temporality, a duration.

But what of the spatial nature of fantasy, dreams, or symbols? How is it that they manage to belong to both the "inner and outer"? While it is true that they bring the dreamer into implicit admission of the reality principle, that reality need not necessarily be external. In order to understand the spatiality of the symbol, we must look to Winnicott's famous "transitional object," an object that the infant recognizes as being outside of itself but lacking its own autonomous existence. This paradox is articulated as the "first possession" (Winnicott 2005, 2) outside of but belonging to the baby/subject. This state is, however, as the name would suggest, a transitional one. The transition is that between a state of primary "omnipotence" and recognition of the existence of objects that exist not only outside one's body and magical control, but outside one's physical control. The transitional object that is created and played with exists on this dividing line—is this dividing line.

The object is a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother). This symbol can be located. It is at the place in space and time where and when the mother is in transition from being (in the baby's mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experiences as an object symbolizes the union of two now separate things, baby and mother, at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness. (Winnicott 2005, 130)

The division between inside and outside is not meant merely metaphorically. This is the distinction between the inside of the body and its outside, the dividing membrane of the skin itself, a distinction that only develops with the gradual disillusionment of the omnipotent union of the baby's own body and that of its mother's, as well as the gradual integration of a body ego based on growing proprioception and a gradual encounter with the limits of its own motility. This "symbol" is, significantly, not only between the baby's interior and exterior spaces, but also between the baby and the mother. It should also be noted that this "state of separateness" is "the separation that is not a separation but a form of union" (Winnicott 2005, 132). It is a symbol that exists on and as the borderline between the two, in an area that Winnicott calls the area of "cultural experience"—that phenomenon that he has taken as the global object of the explorations in this volume.<sup>4</sup>

This border between the two is described in different but not incompatible terms in the essay "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications." In this essay he

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<sup>4</sup> "This book is a development of my paper 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951)... This area of individual development and experience seems to have been neglected while attention was focused on psychic reality, which is personal and inner, and its relation to external or shared reality. Cultural experience has not found its true place in the theory used by analysts in their work and in their thinking... A phenomenon that is universal, like the one I am considering in this book, cannot in fact be outside the range of those whose concern is the magic of imaginative and creative living." (Winnicott 2005, xv-xvi)

describes what happens when the baby tries to manipulate an object as it would a transitional object, only to find that this object cannot, without being destroyed, comply with such treatment. This leads to an acknowledgment of the unassimilable object as such, a relationship that can be described as "use,"<sup>5</sup> or as "love," and which constitutes, for Winnicott, a form of address:

The subject says to the object: "I destroyed you" and the object is there to receive the communication, from now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you!" "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy." Here fantasy begins for the individual. (Winnicott 2005, 121)

The beginning of fantasy, and therefore of symbolic systems, occurs at this point of transition when the subject addresses its object and an external entity is there to receive that address.

At this point the "transitional object," "symbol," "cultural experience," "fantasy," and "play" seem to be, if not the same thing, all occurring at the same place, on the point of contact between the inside and the outside. They serve as an interface between the internal and external world.<sup>6</sup> "Fantasying" of the borderline patient then would be a rejection of all of these activities, a withdrawal from the interface with the outside world,

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<sup>5</sup> This term has been unfortunately too-easily assimilated to the contiguous terms of destruction and aggression, while in fact it represents the most mature, loving, and reciprocal form of object-relating.

<sup>6</sup> The functional or healthy borderline as an *interface* is an idea that will remain essential to this project, in that it allows us to think of a common boundary that allows exchange between two realms at the same time that it divides them from one another (Anzieu 1995, 84-87).



a rejection both of external reality and symbolic, creative play in favor of the hallucinatory satisfactions of "fantasying." It might be objected that many borderline patients *appear* to function actively in the world. How is this possible if they are supposed to be operating in a hallucinatory world of "fantasying"? This occurs through Winnicott's proposed "false self," a layer of automatic or semi-automatic compliance with external circumstances.<sup>7</sup> This compliance may serve some protective function for the "true self" (the innate capacity for creative living or symbolic play) in that it is literally "adaptive" for the survival of the organism. However, unlike creativity/cultural experience/transitional phenomena, this "false self" cuts off the true self from the creative faculty capable of symbolic thought and therefore from any contact with reality. One thing that must be noted here is that the "true self" is never presumed to be in direct contact with the outside world, but always through the mediation of its creativity, symbols, and transitional phenomena: "Although healthy persons communicate and enjoy communicating, the other fact is equally true that each individual is an isolate [...] permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound" (Winnicott 1965, 187). The way in which creative symbolic representation both acts as the interface and is only possible when such a stable limit is in place (the structure of which we will discuss more fully later on) is one of several paradoxes that Winnicott insists must be maintained to conceive of healthy psychic functioning.

The question still remains: under what circumstances will a "false self" develop—an isolating barrier rather than an interface or other permeable border? This can be answered best in Winnicott's case by looking at the therapeutic techniques he finds

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<sup>7</sup> Bion also refers to this level of automatic functioning in his discussion of "unthought thoughts" (Bion 1963).

necessary to give these patients (back) a stable sense of a transitional phenomenon allowing for creative play, symbolic communication between the subject and the outside world, and for the creative use of language. What do they lack that must be supplied? These deficiencies fall primarily into two categories, based on the complaints articulated by these patients themselves. The first category is that of the patient we have already discussed—a sense of overall lack of reality. Winnicott infers from the previously-mentioned patient's fantasizing that she has a highly-developed false self. This (in essence a compliance mechanism to an ill-adapted or -adaptive environment) gives an indication that her primary (home or "maternal") environment was one of impingement, and is borne out by the description she gives of her childhood family life, which:

"Seemed unable to allow her to be formless but must, as she felt it, pattern her and cut her out into shapes conceived by other people" (46). It is in reference to patients of this type that Winnicott later describes the ideal clinical approach, differing from the traditional Freudian or even Kleinian in that it seeks to avoid voicing transference interpretations as the main tool of the cure:

In this kind of work we find that even the right explanation is ineffectual. The person we are trying to help needs a new experience in a specialized setting. The experience is one of a non-purposive state, as one might say a sort of ticking over of the unintegrated personality. (*PR* 74)

By avoiding these kinds of interpretations, the analyst does not repeat the experience of the invasive and controlling developmental environment.

On the other hand, there are also the patients of whom Winnicott writes in the famous essay "Fear of Breakdown." These are patients who suffer from:

- 1) A return to an unintegrated state. (Defense: disintegration.)
- 2) Falling for ever. (Defense: self-holding.)
- 3) Loss of psychosomatic collusion, failure of indwelling. (Defense: depersonalization.)
- 4) Loss of sense of real. (Defense: exploitation of primary narcissism, etc.)
- 5) Loss of capacity to relate to objects. (Defence: autistic states, relating only to self-phenomena.) (Winnicott 1974, 104)

There is some overlap with the previous category here, but what is unique about these patients is the fear of unintegration, or of falling forever. When put together with the conclusion that Winnicott reaches—that the breakdown feared by these patients is one that has already happened in their childhood holding environment. These patients suffer the residual effects of being "let go" when they were young; they were not properly held and supported<sup>8</sup>—the inverse of the experience of the "patterned and cut" patient. The environment has been absent rather than invasive. Rather than a setting that will allow specifically for formlessness, analysis must do two things for these patients. First, it must help them realize that the breakdown has taken place already, not only by acknowledging that it has occurred, but by actually, *affectively*, experiencing it: "The need to experience it is equivalent to a need to remember in terms of the analysis of psychoneurotics" (Winnicott 1974, 107). Secondly, this breakdown must be experienced as a regression to dependence, in which the analyst provides the holding environment for the patient, the framework they need in order to experience formlessness positively. Here

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<sup>8</sup> Please note the specificity of "holding" for Winnicott: while it encompasses the physical practices of holding and handling, it also includes other aspects of adaptation of the environment to the infant's needs and drives.

we can begin to see clearly the origin of some of the individual symptoms identified by Kernberg. However, it will not be until André Green's essay "Le concept de limite" (Green 1990, 121-63) that the ways in which these two seemingly opposed complaints operate can be properly synthesized, and concrete consequences of the relationship between the deficit of a symbolic interface between oneself and the invasive external world and the lack of an experience of this world altogether can be articulated.

### André Green's Concept

While relying in large part on the clinical experience and technique developed by Winnicott, and on his own clinical work, André Green's focus in his writing is much more consistently aimed at developing a conceptual framework that would account for the phenomena described by both Winnicott and Kernberg, and at the same time trying to put this work into conversation with Freud's metapsychology, specifically the first topological model and drive theory—then the focus of most serious theoretical inquiry in France. Over the course of his work on the borderline cases or "cas-limites", he identifies four axes that have appeared organically in writing on this topic, which he summarizes in the 1990 article "La Double limite": the limit, representation, "liaison," and abstraction (Green 1990, 340-3). The first of these naturally receive the most detailed conceptual attention, and it is there that we will start as well.

### The Limit:

He first considers the limit intuitively, saying that the most fundamental limit of a human being of which he can think is the skin itself (an idea much more completely and

systematically developed by Didier Anzieu, who will be the subject of the third part of this chapter), the physical border between the inside and outside:

Il ne faut pas oublier que notre contenant-peau est discontinu. Le tissu cutané est interrompu par d'autres tissus; il est troué. Ces trous jouent le rôle de portes, ou, mieux, de douanes: ce sont les yeux, les oreilles, le nez, la bouche, l'anus, les organes génitaux. Ces zones érogènes fonctionnent dans les deux sens: vers le dedans et vers le dehors. Nous voici donc confrontés à deux problèmes: le premier étant la consistance et la structure de la limite, le second la circulation à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de ces portes. Mais à quoi peuvent bien ressembler les frontières de la psyché? Quelle est la relation entre la psyché (et ses limites) et les portes du corps? Nous connaissons au moins deux types de lois, deux principes de fonctionnement simultanés: le principe de plaisir-déplaisir et le principe de réalité. Ce dernier doit attester l'existence ou le non-existence de l'objet, et par voie de conséquence fixe les limites, les limites du sujet [...] (Green 1990, 125-6)

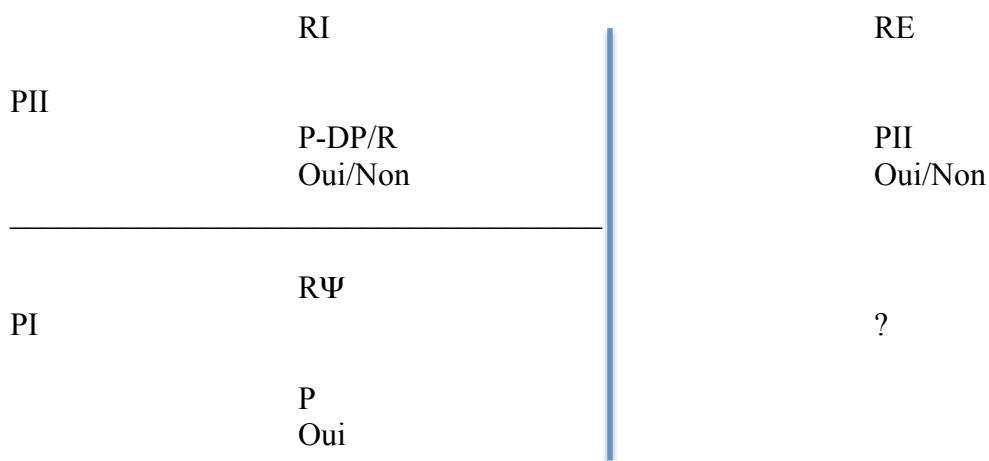
The consistency and structure of this limit is answered even before the question is asked. The skin is a porous limit scattered with ports regulating the flow of substances or other stimuli into and out of the body, voluntarily and involuntarily. It is a mutable and indistinct gray area rather than a fixed line, or, as Green puts it: "[U]n no-man's-land."<sup>9</sup> Être une frontière, c'est s'identifier à une limite mouvante qu'on subit plus qu'on n'en commande les opérations" (Green 1990, 126). More than the fragility of a simple two-dimensional dividing line, the "borderline" (case) has a fundamental structural instability,

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<sup>9</sup> The choice of words here is anything but arbitrary, in that a no-man's-land is not only an apt physical description, but that it belongs to no one (être vs. avoir une limite) and in that it is a site of unresolved and unrelenting tension between the push and pull of both sides.

especially considering the involuntary nature of the opening and closing of the orifices, the determination of the shape of this limit by the objects in the world, to which it must respond (echoes of Winnicott's false self). It can be not only displaced or broken, but its own structure deformed. What Green does not immediately explain, but which subsequently becomes evident, is that passage through the limit in his metaphor of the skin is libidinally invested. The sensation of this border is one of energetic excitement.

While one of the body's borders is naturally the barrier between the inside and the outside of the body, André Green was equally concerned with the border between the psyche and the soma. He combines these two divisions to draw one line between what he, on the example of Winnicott, calls "internal reality" and "external reality;" then, looking to Freud, he asks where a borderline is to be found in the psyche, finding one in between the conscious and the unconscious. The result of combining these models is shown in the following schema:



Experience is divided into four quadrants. RI stands for "internal reality," which can be further divided into consciousness (where secondary processes take place, where the principles of pleasure-unpleasure and reality dominate, where both affirmation and

negation are possible) and what he refers to under the blanket term of "psychic reality," a quadrant where primary processes ruled by the pleasure principle alone, with—like Freud's unconscious—only the answer "yes" at its disposal. The border of the body exists between internal and external reality. The question mark is a placeholder for Green's open suggestion that there may be primary process events that express themselves in external reality (i.e. acting out or somatization<sup>10</sup>). Being at the mercy of stimuli from inside and out, these limit cases, these patients on the limit, suffer from instability of their structures (psychic and physical) brought on by the movement of internal and external objects, the "circulation" of these objects between the inside and outside. To describe the mechanism of this circulation, Green turns again to Freud to try to discover what his concept of the limit might be and how it might be helpful in illustrating what is happening here. What he finds is not only a concept of the limit, but what is in many ways a "*limit-concept*: the drive." Citing Freud in "Instincts and their vicissitudes" (Freud 1955, 121-22), Green breaks the content of this citation down into five components:

1. La pulsion (*Trieb*) est un concept
2. Le concept est à la limite de deux domaines. C'est un concept-limite.
3. Freud oppose *psychisme* (*Seele*) et ce qui est du domaine mental (*psychiche*) à deux mots exprimant la même idée: le *somatique* (*Soma*), le *corps* (*Körper*) [...]
4. La pulsion est le représentant psychique des excitations issues du corps. Ce représentant psychique ne doit pas être confondu avec le représentant-représentation en tant qu'il est opposé au quantum d'affect [...]

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<sup>10</sup> This again can be likened to Bion's  $\beta$ -elements—unprocessed, unthought thoughts, or to the processes articulated in the work of the psychosomatists, for whom unsymbolizable unconscious content will express itself as non-hysterical somatic symptoms (McDougall 1989, 40).

5. La pulsion est définie comme un *processus*, une progression des excitations internes du corps *parvenant au psychisme*, subissant une pression qui appelle une exigence de travail. Il est clair que la mesure d'une telle exigence de travail est de force variable et que les limites entre le corps et le psychisme ne sont pas nettement définies [...] *Il nous faut donc considérer la limite comme une frontière mouvante et fluctuante, dans la normalité comme dans la pathologie. La limite est peut-être le concept le plus fondamental de la psychanalyse moderne. On ne doit pas le formuler en termes de représentation figurée, mais en termes de processus de transformation d'énergie et de symbolisation (force et signification).* (Green 1990, 145-6)

One can see from this breakdown that, regardless of the exclusion of "représentation figurée," the nature of the limit is that it is representation from one side of itself to the other, energy emerging to form a surface. Issuing from one region or structure, it then provides both form for that structure and contact with the outside. In the case of the border between internal and external reality, this would be quite literally structuring the relationship of the self to external objects, and representing internal contents and dynamics to these objects.

#### Representation:

Green draws a distinction between psychic representation as this "processus de transformation d'énergie et de symbolisation" and what he calls "représentation figurée" or "le représentant-représentation en tant qu'il est opposé au quantum d'affect."<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> This language of force, representation, and signification is shared with contemporaneous uses in Deconstruction, specifically in the essays "Force et signification" and "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" in *L'Écriture et la différence* by



limit or borderline—as manifested in the drive existing on and as this limit between the body and psyche, between the conscious and the unconscious—is a matter of affective energy to be worked upon. It is not figurative representation in so far as it is pure affective charge; it is a representation merely in terms of surface location and quantity of energy that appears on the surface, or, rather, that becomes the surface. One might characterize this relationship as synecdochal rather than metaphorical or poetic. It is part of the whole rather than a “figured” representation of something else.

While the drive, the limit, may *not* be made of “représentation figurée,” it cannot, however, be unrelated to it. Those who suffer from the malfunction of their borders also present their analyst with a lack in this other area of functioning. Keeping in mind that part of the reason that borderline patients have historically been a problem for psychoanalysis on a technical level, allegedly in part because of their inability to form a transference as it was historically conceived of, to make figured representations, or to articulate their experience on even a basic level in language (Green 1990, 91). This leads to changes in the frame of the analytic situation, which, as we mentioned earlier, were commensurate with the patient's need for non-intrusive holding, to repair the damage done by the original object(s).

Green's patients, as we shall see, present similar needs of adaptation, but he is more explicit about the link between causes and treatment, that is, the specific symptoms and behavior of the patients in analysis. He describes a phenomenon he calls “psychose blanche” (Donnet & Green, 1973), a state in which the patient suffers both from “délire”

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Jacques Derrida. The latter text, in fact, was given as an invited lecture at André Green’s seminar at the *Institut de Psychanalyse*.” In these texts he discusses the need to consider force or energy as well as form when discussing signification.

and from a "primary depression." What this means from a dynamic perspective is that this person is dealing with an ever-present, intrusive "bad object", and at the same time assigning the value of "good object" to one that has always been absent—whence the term "primary depression," indicating its logical priority to the depression resulting from the loss of an object once possessed (these objects are in reality the result of a splitting of a single whole object, usually embodied by the patient's parents, a process Green describes as "bitriangulation"). The lack of proper representation of "forces" (as the contact of one region with another [ucs/cs, inside/outside]), entails a state where there is a lack of distinct subjective borders, in which mental representation of another kind becomes impossible. An object that has been present but is now absent remains as a memory, a mental representation. The ability to form and maintain these is an important landmark in the development towards psychic maturity. For Winnicott, the transitional object also serves this function as the "first symbol." A possession of the child existing as a transitional phenomenon between the baby and the outside world, the mother, it is the emergence of one into the other, the representation as a concrete, non-figurative symbol of one to the other. This is not available to the borderline patient suffering from *psychose blanche*. The bad object never having left, it cannot be represented in its absence; the good object never having been present, it has no way of being represented.

This lack of mental representation again has repercussions beyond the representation of quantities of forces of the drive, beyond a sort of blank mental landscape occupied by an unrepresentable invading bad object. The patient with this pathology is in fact unable to speak, to formulate any linguistic or figural representation of their internal life (Green 1990). They literally cannot speak to their interlocutor. Their

symptoms become, in a way, flattened, dis-figured, literalized, deprived of any symbolic value. There is no movement out towards the object—no surface, no contact barrier, so to speak, between the subject and object. The clinical result of this lack is the inability of the patient to form words, to represent in any fashion, no matter how indirect. The content of the patient's object relations is not available for analysis, only the structure of those relations as revealed by the space of their absence, requiring the use of the countertransference to make any kind of intervention in the cure.

Green formulates this in terms of Winnicott's work on potential and cultural space, designating:

*[D]eux "aires-limites" dans l'appareil psychique: tout d'abord, l'aire intermédiaire dans l'espace du dedans, entre l'inconscient et le conscient-préconscient: sa création est le rêve; ensuite, l'aire intermédiaire entre le dedans et le dehors que décrit Winnicott: l'aire de jeu, de l'illusion, les créations de ce qu'il a appelé— l'espace potentiel. Nous proposerons la formulation suivante: les cas limites sont caractérisés par l'incapacité fonctionnelle à créer des dérivés de l'espace potentiel; au lieu de phénomènes transitionnels, ils créent des symptômes qui en remplissent la fonction. (Green 1990, 158)*

This brings the problem of the borderline case out of a more generally psycholinguistic problematic and into the more specific field of creative symbolic representation (dreams and cultural production, etc.). This is, in other words, the malfunctioning of structures necessary for, but equally created by the creative use of language in cultural or potential space—that is to say, among other things, the work of the writer, in which process: "Un lien métaphorique entre écrivain et lecteur, constitutif du champ de l'illusion dans la

vénération d'un *objet transitionnel transnarcissique*" (Green 1992, 29). The idea of a "transnarcissistic object" is one that arises several times in Green's work with reference to the result of creative work, and particularly in reference to the relation that both the author and the reader have with the literary text (Green 1992, 56).

Liaison/binding:

This brings us to the third characteristic identified by Green as one of the fundamental four axes of research on borderline cases: "la liaison." In "La Double limite," where it is mentioned along with the others, he gives it little attention in comparison with the previous two. It does, however, begin to fill the void left in the definition of representation given earlier: "Représenter, c'est déjà lier, mais penser c'est re-lier les représentations sur un mode non-spéculaire...Je rattacherai la symbolisation aux processus de liaison, comme cas particulier de cette fonction" (Green 1990, 341-2).

*Liaison* manages to bridge the gap indicated between representation as a process of transformation of energy, and what he refers to as "représentation figurée." *Liaison* is first operating in the formation of the borderline, and then at a more complex level in the structuring of that surface, the formation of figured representation or symbolization.

Symbolization, as a special case of representation, in binding together the quanta of energy that emerge on the limit, adds quality to the quantity that was there before.

Elsewhere, Green links this *liaison* to the concept of secondary processes:

L'analyste à partir des traces qui demeurent offertes à son regard-écoute, ne *lit* pas le texte, il le délie. Il brise la secondarité pour retrouver, en deçà des processus de liaison, la déliaison que la liaison a recouverte" (Green 1992, 20).

The relationship between *liaison*/symbolization and other representation is equivalent, according to some explanations of these phenomena, to that between word- and thing-representation, respectively.<sup>12</sup> It would also then be the equivalent of the distinction Winnicott made between fantasy and fantasizing, to bring these distinctions back from the purely theoretical to the clinical. These “axes” of research on borderline cases illustrate exactly where the breakdown occurs in the formation of the pathology. It is worthwhile to note, however, that Green saw this also as the point at which the crisis of contemporary literature occurs:

Il me semble que cette évolution, ou cette révolution, a consisté en majeure partie à rompre avec une certaine conception de la liaison, dans la mesure où celle-ci obéissait aux critères qui définissaient les liens de la liaison et de la secondarité, donnera lieu à deux types d’entreprises: d’une part au recours à un mode d’écriture beaucoup plus proche du fantasme inconscient dans ses aspects les moins représentatifs, d’autre part à une évacuation de la référence à la représentation dans l’écriture (*LD 32*)

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<sup>12</sup> “If now we put this finding alongside the hypothesis that in schizophrenia object-cathexes are given up, we shall be obliged to modify the hypothesis by adding that the cathexis of the word-presentations of objects is retained. What we have permissibly called the conscious presentation<sup>1</sup> of the object can now be split up into the presentation of the word and the presentation of the thing; the latter consists in the cathexis, if not of the direct memory-images of the thing, at least of remoter memory-traces derived from these. We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation [see p. 176]. The two are not, as we supposed, different registrations of the same content in different psychical localities, nor yet different functional states of cathexis in the same locality; but the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. The system Ucs. contains the thing-cathexes of the objects, the first and true object-cathexes; the system Pcs. comes about by this thing-presentation being hypercathexed through being linked with the word-presentations corresponding to it.” (Freud 1915, 201-202)

This “révolution”, referring specifically to the work of Blanchot, occurred, according to Green, in tandem with the emergence of the *cas-limite* as the major pathology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both historically and structurally.<sup>13</sup> This is a historical argument that is not the focus of the present work, but it does explain what Green sees as the two separate problems presented to the contemporary writer that are useful illustrations of the concepts he is developing. On one side:

L’écriture pure, délivrée du signifié, libérée de la représentation a rompu ses amarres avec l’objet, elle est son propre objet. Par une comparaison qui, comme toutes les comparaisons, est imparfaite, nous dirons que la réalisation hallucinatoire du désir qui fait apparaître l’objet absent a cédé le pas à l’hallucination négative. Il s’agit non seulement de tuer dans l’oeuf la représentation de l’objet, mais aussi celui pour qui un objet existe comme objet de désir. Le seul désir est le désir d’écrire, sans objet. (LD 36)

On the other side:

[N]ous retrouvons le même mouvement en deux directions opposées pour évacuer la représentation. Vers le corps, l’écriture voudrait bien dire le corporel brut, mais elle ne peut que le représenter de la même façon que l’activité corporelle doit être transcrite dans le langage de la représentation pour être communiquée. (LD 38)

These passages point out what is at stake in questions of writing that are in fact questions of *liaison* and *déliasion*. Specifically, the focus is taken away from the literary object as

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<sup>13</sup> “Or, il n’y a pas là d’idylle, mais une entreprise aléatoire toujours menace, à tel point que pour certains elle peut tirer de ses risques mêmes une part de sa dignité. C’est le cas d’une tendance littéraire actuelle—je pense, par exemple, aux travaux de Maurice Blanchot, de Bataille, etc.—qui va jusqu’à voir dans la difficulté, le blocage, l’inhibition, l’âme même du travail authentique.” (de M’Uzan, 4)

such, and the *act* of writing becomes in this context at once the object of investment, the object of the text, and that which is jeopardized when the conception of the borderline is troubled, both in the movement from representation to *liaison* and in that from *liaison* to the last axis of borderline research: abstraction.

Abstraction:

Abstraction moves from the quanta of affect represented in the “limite”, through the non-specified quality acquired through *liaison*, to a radical change in quality—one that cannot convey the “corporel brut.” It is: “le fruit d’une mutation par rapport à la représentation qui ne peut s’expliquer que par une rupture instaurant une discontinuité, avec effacement de celle-ci” (*FP* 342). In order to write, language must both *symbolize* the body writing it and those about which it is writing (*liaison*) and *abstract* that body from its physical entanglement with the words it is writing. As Green says of the analytic situation:

[L]a pensée, en analyse, exige à la fois la séparation d’avec le corps et sa constant réunification avec lui. Or le corps ici n’est jamais, pour ces patients, ce présent-absent qu’il devrait être. Il est tantôt exclu, tantôt submergeant sous la forme de l’angoisse. Cette angoisse du corps est confondue avec l’objet. (*FP* 351)

The problem of writing, of the act of creating a literary object—or even, indeed, of any figurative and abstracted language production—is one that requires a careful balancing act in relation to the body and to the object, whether that object be the addressee of the text, with whom the writer is communicating symbolically, or the text as the object of desire itself—brought into being by the writer in a libidinalized process. We begin to see how writing about writing—not the written object or the nature of the literary thing as

such, but the process of writing and the relationship of one's physical body to that process—becomes a discussion of the borderline and its function.

Didier Anzieu and the Work of Creation:

For André Green the question of symbolic representation is one of *liaison* and *déliation* of the “representations” of quanta of energy on/as the surface between the soma and the psyche—which is at the same time on the surface of the body. This proposition rejoins at two points the thought of the final theorist whose work is under discussion here. Two of Didier Anzieu's many contributions to psychoanalytic thought are the ideas of the *Moi-peau* and of the “work of creation” (specifically literary and intellectual creation) as one of the fundamental psychic processes on par with the work of mourning or the dream work. While his idea of “creation” (of which he identifies five separate stages) goes beyond that of the “creativity” we have heretofore dealt with in that the “creation” must “apporter du nouveau...[et] en voir la valeur tôt ou tard reconnue par un public” (Anzieu 1981, 17), one of these stages must of course involve the actual production of the text or other product: the *work* of creation. This is a process that Anzieu raises to the status of the other two kinds of work identified by Freud as fundamental to psychic functioning and to our observation of it and of the psychic structures involved:

Rêve, deuil, création ont en commun qu'ils constituent des phases de crise, il y a un bouleversement, une exacerbation de la pathologie de l'individu, une mise en question des structures acquises, internes et externes, une régression à des ressources inemployées. (Anzieu 1981, 19)



The production of a creative product is not merely the eruption *ex nihilo* of that product, but requires a fundamental rearrangement, reordering, of the psyche. Whether this reordering is the cause or the effect of the work, the creation of something new requires shift and recombination of the existing parts of the self and its objects.

There are five steps identified by Anzieu as the steps of creation:

L'état de saisissement, l'appréhension d'un représentant psychique inconscient, sa transformation en code organisateur, la donation d'un corps à ce code, and l'affrontement imaginaire puis réel à un public. (Anzieu 1981, 93-211)

For Anzieu, creation (rather than the “ensemble de predispositions du caractère et de l'esprit” [Anzieu 1981, 17] or general way of living life identified by his contemporaries) is triggered as a response to a crisis, and the function of creation is to bring resolution to this crisis. He cites fellow APF member René Kaës when describing the characteristics of a crisis:

- Sa pluridimensionnalité [...]
- La perte du plaisir de fonctionnement [...]
- La reviviscence des ruptures [...]
- La prédisposition originaire à la crise [...]
- La défaillance du cadre [...]
- L'appel implicite à la symbiose [...]
- Le dépassement créateur [...]
- Les fonctions à rétablir. (Anzieu 1981, 21-23)

This list emphasizes that creation is a response to loss of functioning coinciding with a break from the outside world and failure of the subject's own boundaries. Anzieu echoes

Green's warning that symptoms can take the place of symbolization here, adding his own caution against the possible failure of creative work:

Le travail créateur peut permettre à l'auteur de faire l'économie d'une pathologie mentale organique ou comportementale plus sévère: il peut n'être qu'un palier provisoire retardant l'établissement définitive de cette pathologie. (Anzieu 1981, 95)

Frequent collaborator Michel de M'Uzan also spelled out explicitly the possibility not only that the relief from psychic distress through creation might be temporary, but that it might be inaccessible even when the product of artistic creation is produced:

[S]i certains doivent recourir à une opération supplémentaire pour régler l'une des situations que j'ai évoquées, il faut croire qu'ils y sont conduits par un défaut de leur système d'élaboration, c'est-à-dire, paradoxalement, par un échec relatif de leur vie imaginaire. Tout se passe comme si l'artiste en puissance, qui justement, est capable d'une activité fantasmatique particulièrement bien développée et, en principe, toujours disponible, n'était pourtant pas à même de s'en servir efficacement pour assurer l'intégration de ses tensions et de ses conflits. Ou plutôt, son effort échoue en partie parce que dans la situation critique où il se trouve, il réagit par une prolifération d'images qui l'envahissent et peuvent même le submerger. (de M'Uzan 16)

While it may be true that the other stages (*décollage*, etc.) are indeed necessary for arrival at a finished product, it does seem that the only one of these steps in which the self itself seems to be involved in a more active manner is that of coding and decoding. This is a process we have already seen in Green's use of *liaison* in the process of abstract

representation—at least in “traditional“ prose where the work of the author is that of liaison between different representations and between the surface of the soma and/or the psyche with the outside world of objects. This view of creation or creativity as work in conjunction with the reorganization of the self differs already from a number of other such theories.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it necessarily an outlet for sublimated sexual impulses, or for the need to produce the work as a phallus as production of gifts from the inside of the body to the outside world. This is itself an idea evocative of the idea of reparation or of contributing-in developed by the Kleinian and Winnicottian traditions respectively, as at least partial explanations of the production of publicly valued works of art, and one rejected by Anzieu.<sup>15</sup>

We saw that Winnicott was careful to separate the public reception of a work of art from the activity of creation or creativity, which operate independently of each other. For Anzieu, however, contact with an audience was important, although the idea of what constitutes this “affrontement...à un public” both in terms of what constitutes “affrontement” and “public” is somewhat ambiguous. It is important to mention also that the time from for this “affrontement” is flexible. “Tôt ou tard” allows for a great deal of leeway in the movement from the imaginary to the real audience. This imaginary audience often first takes shape, according to Anzieu, with the appearance of a “double” in the psyche of the creator, one who is both object and ego ideal (Anzieu 1981, 62-68)

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<sup>14</sup> Unlike the process as it is described by Christopher Bollas, creativity would not be part of an internal drive on the level of eros or the death drive: a drive to actualize the self’s personal “idiom” as Bollas terms it (Bollas 1989). Whether or not this kind of a “drive” could be even considered one in the sense described by Freud is unclear, in that the somatic source of which it would be a psychic representative is not determined.

<sup>15</sup> “Il en va différemment si le sujet [...] crée pour sortir de la position paranoïd-schizoïde. C’est à mon sens, l’ombre de la violence qui tombe sur lui, et il la vit comme le mal absolu.” (Anzieu 1981, 54)

This possibly restrained idea of a public evokes the ideas of Green, where creation emerges as the point of contact between the self and the object—those “tertiary processes” that function as intersubjective links. The recognition given by that public is important for the success of the work as a point of contact between the self and the outside world. It seems somewhat incongruous that a process with the primacy of dream or mourning work would be available only to such a select few as were able to coordinate both internal and intersubjective processes to their advantage. However, this has to do not with the capacity to begin this work but with that to successfully conclude it. Creativity is constant activity that may end in the creation of an object that functions as a transitional or “transnarcissistic” object for both the creator and the public. Expressed otherwise:

L'écrivain, en effet, écrit pour s'exprimer, mais il ne le peut de façon efficace que si son expression est recevable comme preuve de son existence, autrement dit capable de plaire. C'est là dès le début une situation gravement conflictuelle, car s'exprimer, c'est modifier de vive force les rapports existant jusque-là entre le monde et le sujet, c'est attaquer et jusqu'à un certain point annuler les autres, mais comment dans ces conditions obtenir d'eux reconnaissance et amour? (Anzieu 1981, 17)

This stage is an addition in which, while it perhaps allows for a better understanding of the relationship to the work from the perspective of the audience, seems strange that the public judgment of the work of art should play such a role in the “work” of creation. Even without any widespread efficacy, it would seem that the work of creation would go on anyway, once the “décollage” had occurred.

*Coding* and *decoding*, for Anzieu, take place on the surface between the unconscious and the conscious, between the pleasure principle (internal) and the reality principle (external):

Le Surmoi impose en force son code, qui est d'ordre juridique et éthique et qui est aussi celui du langage, et il essaie de déprécier, de nier, d'étouffer le code logique singulier et nouveau, l'idiolecte, le style personnel de discours ou d'expression que le Moi du créateur est en voie d'inventer. (Anzieu 1981, 65)

Anzieu here introduces a term that may be a bit more in line with the use of creativity by other theorists: *inventer*. This fortuitous word, carrying with it Winnicott's paradox of that which was at once created and found, corresponds to the "idiolect" or "style" proper to each person, to the (true) self, that must combine with the juridical code of language imposed by the Superego to form the creation. The practice or activity of creation, its work, is a negotiation between multiple codes in the process of a rearrangement of the parts of the psyche. This also recalls the language used by Winnicott to describe the true and false selves, the negotiation between the creative play of the non-communicating core and the compliant but protective external shell<sup>16</sup> that could be seen as the juridical or ethical element of the self—that adapts to and is ruled by the contact with the outside world. The true-self/false-self dichotomy, the relation between different codes in languages, would then be articulated quite otherwise by Anzieu in a manner that is at

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<sup>16</sup> "Le créateur tire souvent des matériaux pour son oeuvre de certains processus ou états en jeu dans ce travail même, ou de régions-frontières du Soi tenues jusqu'ici à l'écart de tout lien avec sa pensée et ses comportements (sa vie peut fonctionner, en termes winnicottiens, sur un schème fourni par son faux-Soi tandis que son oeuvre tentera d'établir le contact avec son Soi caché." (Anzieu 1981, 67)

once more literal and more figurative—two registers whose relationship will be essential for understanding Anzieu’s view of language.

This surface of contact with the outside world, rather than being a “false self,” is for Anzieu the *Moi-peau*, at once the skin and the psychic structure it models. Note that it is not a skin *for* the self, *for* the ego, but a *skin-ego*. It is not a barrier over the ego or even a part of the ego serving as a barrier. The ego and skin are assimilated in a complex relation that will be discussed in depth later on. The development of this term allows for two things. First, it enables Anzieu to articulate eight essential functions of the ego that map onto the functions of the skin and that each correspond to *malfunctions* that have diagnostic and explanatory value for various psychopathologies. These functions are: *maintenance, contenance, pare-excitation, individuation, intersensorialité, soutien de l’excitation sexuelle, recharge libidinale, and inscription des traces* (Anzieu 1995).

Borderline cases can have disruptions to all of these functions, since the entire structure of the *Moi-peau* has been somehow deformed:

[D]ans les états limites, l’atteinte ne se limite pas à la périphérie; c’est la structure d’ensemble du *Moi-peau* qui est altérée. Les deux faces du *Moi-peau* n’en font qu’une, mais cette face unique est tordue à la manière de l’anneau décrit par le mathématicien Moebius et auquel Lacan a le premier compare le *Moi*: d’où des troubles de la distinction entre ce qui vient du dedans et ce qui vient du dehors.

(Anzieu 1995, 150)

In this passage, Anzieu refers to the “deux faces du *Moi-peau*.” He distinguishes between the *Moi-peau* as a *membrane* as opposed to a film (*pellicule*). A membrane has two sides—one facing in and one facing out—that are in fact two separate layers integral to

the proper functioning of the (*Moi*)-*peau*: “L’écart entre le Feuillet externe et le Feuillet interne laissé au Moi, quand il sera davantage développé, la possibilité de ne pas se faire comprendre, de ne pas communiquer (Winnicott). Avoir un Moi, c’est pouvoir se replier sur soi-même” (Anzieu 1995, 84). These two surfaces also correspond to two of the functions of the *Moi-peau*: excitation and communication. In addition to the double limit as proposed by Green (two limits), Anzieu’s double limit is also in fact a limit that is itself double. Libidinal excitation must be held at a distance, able to be modified, if communication of content is to occur. We have seen this dynamic before with Winnicott’s and Green’s descriptions of the intrusive object that does not allow for fantasy or representation:

[U]ne *pathologie de l’écart* entre les deux surfaces, d’excitation et de communication... se manifeste par l’absence ou l’insuffisance de l’aire transitionnelle et donc par l’absence ou l’insuffisance de sa conséquence qui est la fantasmatisation [...] les échanges avec autrui se réduisent à des communications sans émotion et sans imagination. (Anzieu 1990, 72)

This brings Anzieu’s psychopathology of the borderline case more or less in line with that of our other theorists, both in terms of the metapsychology and the aetiology of the disorders. Is the *Moi-peau*, then, nothing but an elaborate metaphor for concepts already developed by these other theorists?

This brings us to the second of the most significant aspects of the *Moi-peau*. The development of the *Moi-peau* as proposed by Anzieu allows for an unprecedented mobility between concept, language, image, and tactile impressions among other registers, and it founds a distinctive point of view of the mind-body connection. This is a

subjectivity modeled on the physical body and based on the author's reading of Freud and Spinoza:

“Spinoza décrit un *esprit* en le caractérisant par une *activité* et non pas par une choseité.” (Misrahi 61). L'esprit est activité de penser un objet (c'est-à-dire d'être conscient ou, selon le terme même de Spinoza, repris par la philosophie empiriste anglaise, de se faire une *idée* (idea): quel est l'objet premier du penser (au sens d'objet épistémique, ou objet à connaître, non au sens freudien d'objet investi d'une pulsion [...]) Le corps [...] est à l'origine de l'idée de nous-mêmes comme individu (sic?). Spinoza ajoute une précision importante: “La conscience du corps est la *conscience des mouvements qui affectent le corps* [...]. L'esprit est l'*idée des affections* du corps et non pas simplement l'idée du corps.” Penser, c'est penser ce qui affecte le corps (sensations, émotions, actions). Le corps est à l'origine des idées dont les pensées constituent l'esprit [...] Ce n'est pas parce que je pense que je suis. C'est mon corps, ce sont les corps qui existent en premier, et je leur dois les trois sentiments de ma propre existence en tant que corps, de l'existence (La fonction contenante de la peau, du moi et de la pensée: conteneur, contenant, contenir). (Anzieu 1993, 17-8)

The self is grounded somehow not in abstract thought, but in an *idea*: that is to say, a representation, an image of the body and its affects and emotions. The self—the mind even, if one is to adopt the Spinozist vocabulary—is an image, a concrete spatial representation of the physical proprioceptive experience of the body. On such a basis, he describes the *Moi-peau* as:



[U]ne *figuration* dont le Moi de l'enfant se sert au cours des phases précoces de son développement pour se représenter lui-même comme Moi contenant les contenus psychiques à partir de son expérience de la surface du corps. Cela correspond au moment où le Moi psychique se différencie du Moi corporel sur le plan opératif et reste confondu avec lui sur le plan figuratif” (Anzieu 1995, 61, italics added)

What we need to be able to do here is to unpack what Anzieu means by “le plan figuratif” and the “plan opératif,” which he uses to describe the relationship between the psychological and corporeal egos. He uses this same vocabulary elsewhere to describe the relationship between what he calls the *moi pensant*, pure mental activity,<sup>17</sup> a container or containing mechanism for mental or psychological contents:

[L]e moi pensant cherche à se présenter comme un triple microcosme. En intersection avec le moi corporel, il serait un analogon *opératif* du monde des corps. En intersection avec le moi psychique, il serait un analogon *figuratif* du monde des images mentales et au sens large, des contenus psychiques.

Intersection avec le surmoi, il serait un analogon génératif du registre des codes.  
(Anzieu 1994, 5)

Leaving aside the “moi-pensant” for the moment, this juxtaposition allows us to articulate better the relationship between these different structures: the corporeal self, the psychological self, and the superego. The register of the corporeal body is that of the *operative* that of the psychological is the *figurative* and the superego is *generative* (of codes). The physical self has, however, a figurative aspect itself in that it appears in the world, in space, as an

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<sup>17</sup> Essentially Bion’s “alpha function” (Bion 1963), that is to say, an apparatus for thinking thoughts.

object with the qualities allowed by that spatiality, and it is on this level that the psychical joins it to become the *Moi-peau* (before the ego solidifies as itself, one might consider the psychical as operative as well, in that the infant exercises the so-called “omnipotent” control over the world associated with primary narcissism). What, then, is this register of the figural where the physical and psychical join? What does this mean for the relationship between the metapsychology discussed here and literature?

*Figure* [...] est une forme ou une représentation de forme; la sculpture, le modelage “figurant” des êtres. La figure est aussi l’aspect, le mode d’expression, la physionomie (sic?): c’est le visage. Le mot latin *figura* est formé sur le radical *figere*: modeler dans l’argile, qui aboutit en français à “feindre.” Figurer, étymologiquement, renvoie à l’aspect du discours les tropes, les formes du discours enveloppent les contenus psychiques, les pensées. La figure est donc la forme contenant du discours [...] devient la forme du discours, des relations entre les mots et les phrases. (Anzieu et al 2003, 10)

Form and code together make up language, and the form of the discourse is figural or tropological.

Figure and form are not only tropological, but topological in nature; spatial metaphors themselves, they allow for consideration of the spatial in any concept into which they are introduced. This is one of the main contributions made by the *Moi-peau*, although its significance has perhaps been lost underneath the clinical advances allowed by such a conceptualization. What Anzieu is essentially doing is rehabilitating the much-maligned second topological model, which he specifically cites as a representation of the structure of the self analogous to the *Moi-peau*, where the ego is situated on the surface

instead of in some hidden core. He refers specifically to the diagram on page 24 of *The Ego and the Id* (which he cites on page 104). Jacques Lacan's objection to this model was based on what he considered to be an erroneous attempt to think spatially about something that had no volume and was located nowhere. This type of portrayal of the ego as a surface covering the self gave a false idea of a unified ego,<sup>18</sup> which lent itself to the practice of ego psychology, whose therapeutic practices focused on adaptation before all else. Anzieu's preference for this model is not only determined by the extensive use he makes of the different psychic agencies, but also by the fact that he actually finds the psychical apparatus and in particular the ego best represented by spatial language—a language of figure and form. This essentially for two interrelated reasons.

First, any language is always already figural in that all language is both form and code. Even were one to imagine that form could be stripped from language, it would at the same time be divested of its expressive power. As Evelyne Séchaud, the author of the introduction to the *Moi-Peau* wrote:

Didier Anzieu disait que la métaphore est à l'origine même du sens, et il ajoutait que le travail de recherche s'effectue entre deux pôles, le pôle de la métaphore et le pôle du concept, plus abstrait, qui garantirait une certaine rigueur. Mais ce que l'on gagne en rigueur, on risque de le perdre par appauvrissement. (Anzieu et al 2008, 24)

Therefore, it is useless to pretend that one could give an adequately complex definition of the ego without resorting to language that is inherently figural. In order to become a concept, perceptions and sensations must pass through a schema:

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<sup>18</sup> Lacan 1949

Avec le schème, la sensation, processus à l'origine plutôt réceptive, devient représentation active et prépare l'élaboration du concept. Le schème est un exemple des processus intermédiaires [...] Le concept est une réalité psychique opératoire permettant l'action sur le monde, les autres, les pensées. (Anzieu et al 2003, 4)

The schema is an intermediary process, both in that percept/cs information itself must be reduced to a schema before it can be conceptualized and in that it must pass through the intermediary process, itself a schema, on the surface, between the external and the internal. A figurative formation—that is to say, the ego itself. Second, Anzieu's adherence to Freud's assertion that the ego is first and foremost a body ego and that its development along the Spinozist lines described earlier means that the ego, while lacking in a kind of manifest corporeality, itself adheres to the structure of the body, made up before anything else by bodily perceptions. Also, with its attachment to the body, it is physical at least in its contact to the physical, contact at the limit, at the surface that is the *Moi-peau*:

De cette origine épidermique et proprioceptive, le Moi hérite la double possibilité d'établir des barrières (qui deviennent des mécanismes de défense psychiques) et de filtrer les échanges avec le ça, le surmoi, et le monde extérieur [...]

Conséquence ultérieure. Le Moi-peau fonde la possibilité de la pensée (Anzieu 1995, 62)

It is for this reason that he can claim that “La vie psychique est une affaire de relations entre des surfaces. Ces relations sont à explorer du point de vue topographique” (Anzieu 1990, 43-4).

The relationship between the *Moi* and the *peau* is not only generative, the contact between surface is described by Anzieu using various rhetorical figures for which the hyphen separating *Moi-peau* becomes shorthand:

Avant d'être une métaphore (le Moi est comme une peau), le *Moi-peau* est une forme d'ellipse qui consiste à supprimer les liens logiques et les connecteurs entre deux termes, une figure que la rhétorique nomme asyndète. *Moi-peau* s'écrit avec un trait d'union, il forme un mot composé. Il est une juxtaposition de zones qui appartient à des univers distincts et différents [...] La juxtaposition permet de penser le lien entre deux ordres de réalité discontinus mais articulables dans une formation qui laisse en suspens les modalités de l'articulation en préservant éventuellement le caractère paradoxal de leur rapport: trouver-crée (Winnicott), sein-toilette (Meltzer), personne-groupe (Bion). Si nous y regardons de près, le trait d'union prend en charge quelque chose de plus primitif: une cicatrice, la conjonction-disjonction indique cela même que prend en compte le pictogramme, c'est-à-dire l'union-rejet. L'écriture du *Moi-peau* contient le développement du concept de signifiant formel. (Anzieu et al. 2008, 82-3)

This asyndeton, while ostensibly suppressing the logical connection between the two terms, and between the two objects to which they refer in the physical world can stand in for multiple simultaneous relationships. The first of these is the analogy, which, for Anzieu, is necessary to defend against its misuse:

Analogique, ou encore “proportionnel”, ou “proportion harmonique” (cf la section d'or) dénote l'identité des rapports entre les termes de deux ou plusieurs couples d'éléments (en mathématiques), ou l'identité de structures et de fonction (en

sciences naturelles). L'auteur du présent ouvrage s'élève avec force contre la tendance contemporaine à l'affadissement du sens du mot analogique, réduit à dénoter une vague ressemblance. (Anzieu 1994, 13)

This analogical relationship causes Evelyne Séchaud some hesitation, asking in the introduction to the *Moi-Peau*: “S’il y a analogie, stricte analogie entre le Moi et la peau, ne prend-on pas le risque de réifier le moi?” (Anzieu 1995, 6). This seems on its face to be a legitimate question. Even when the ego is an analog in a different register from the body, assuming that it has the same structure and function, that sounds suspiciously like it would be giving too much solidity to the ego within the corporeal register. *However*, the nature of the register in which the (*Moi*)-*peau* operates is not *purely* mental or conceptual, as we have already established:

Le Moi-peau est une réalité d’ordre *fantasmatique*: à la fois figurée dans les fantasmes, les rêves, le langage courant, les attitudes corporelles, les troubles de pensée, et fournisseur de l’espace originaire constituant du fantasme, du rêve de la réflexion, de chaque organisation psychopathologique. (Anzieu 1995, 20, italics added)

There is not a dualistic division between the physical and the mental; the fantasmatic occupies perceptual space without having a place in the corporeal world in the same way that the physical body does. The relationship *Moi/peau*, however, is not only analogic. This fantasmatic, figural register occupies the intermediary (“transitional”?) register between the physical and the conceptual—this borderline, the space of language that is both code and figure:

Le modèle originaire de toute idée du corps est ternaire (et non pas dyadique): l'objet. Transposée de la description à la définition, la *triade cognitive* devient: le dehors, le dedans, le milieu. Passer de décrire à définir, c'est passer de l'idée du corps (c'est-à-dire d'une métonymie). Par exemple, dans la triade "contenant, contenu, intériorisation de la relation contenant/contenu," contenant et contenu sont des dérivations métaphoriques de la peau: leur interrelation est une dérivation métonymique du moi. (Anzieu et al 2003, 8)

The space of language, the *Moi-peau*, the border, the container is this fantasmatic space that is both figural and coded. This is, of course, not just a border, a barrier, an intermediary stage, but also an interface. The communicative function of the ego and of language is not ignored either. As described by Evelyne Séchaud, the asyndeton takes the place not only of analogy, metaphor, and metonymy, but also of circularity or circulation

Didier Anzieu a précisé qu'entre le moi et la peau fonctionne une triple dérivation [she neglects the distinction between metaphor and analogy, which would make it four] : métaphorique (le Moi est une métaphore de la peau), métonymique (le Moi et la peau se contiennent mutuellement comme tout et partie), et en ellipse : le trait d'union entre Moi et peau marque (figure englobant à double foyer : la mère et l'enfant).

Le Moi-peau est d'abord une métaphore et c'est là qu'il trouve son assurance et sa rigueur conceptuelle ; sa figuration en ellipse le fait sortir du solipsisme et l'engage dans la relation à l'autre. (Séchaud in the preface to Anzieu 1995, 5)

The conversion of affect to language, this engagement in the relation to the other, is a problem whose intricacies become visible in the study of the *cas-limite*. While it is

possible, as Green did, to describe the difficulties faced by these patients in terms of the first topological model (that is to say, in reality an economic and dynamic model of psychic functioning), as soon as one starts to speak about expression, and about creative uses of language, one is already speaking of forms and surfaces. The topological/tropological and figural are already implied, and one can only speak about them in their own manner: figuratively. The distinction Anzieu makes between the figural and the corporeal or the operative will help ease some concerns about the spatialization of discourse about the psyche, in that one allows for a perceptual/fantasmatic space that operates on a different level from the operative. In *La peau psychique* Anzieu identifies five “psychic processes” that strongly resemble philosophical categories of the possibility of thought: dynamic (quality), economic (quantity), topological (spatial), genetic (temporal), and adaptive (inside/outside) (Anzieu 1990, 57). Without a topological and adaptive model for psychic functioning, one closely resembling that of the body, creative use of language, figural coding, writing, cannot be thought through. To leave aside temporarily the language of the *Moi-peau*, language, like the skin, and as the skin, is the psychic and figural envelope. The envelope exists in both the corporeal and the figural registers.

What is essential to understand is that while the term “borderline” is used to refer to a pathology, it actually names a psychic structure and a principal of mental functioning fundamental to our ability to maintain a stable sense of a self that remains in contact with the world. The clinical “cas-limite” or “état-limite” are examples of when this structure does not develop optimally, showing the functions of this structure in the effects of its breakdown. In addition, the introduction of the strong sense of analogy between the



physical world, language, and the psychical as a fundamental part of the notion of a borderline allows us to move with it among those registers *and* from one discipline to another. As Anzieu says: “La notion d’enveloppe est ce qu’Isabelle Stengers a appelé un ‘concept nomade,’ importé d’une science dans une autre; ici de la biologie en psychologie” (Anzieu 1990, 58). We have seen that this concept, from biology to psychology, has now led us to language, and specifically to the creative inscription of language—to literature. The task of the next chapters will be to analyze these structures as they appear in the texts of authors taking literary creativity as their subject matter, and to see into what registers this nomadic concept of envelope will lead.

## **Chapter II: Francis Ponge's Revolutionary Physics of Writing**

Literary creation, or, more broadly, artistic creation, is one of the primary concerns of the first writer whose work we will examine: Francis Ponge. Traditionally considered to be a “poet of things,” his poetry deals with the *surfaces* of these things, with the contact between things and world, between writer or artist and things. This contact is at its most profound not in some intuitive communion with the thing, but in this surface contact, in the “corps-à-corps” with the world. As in the psychoanalytic literature, in Ponge’s work language plays a fundamental role in understanding the contact and material relationship between the poet or artist and the world. While his interest lies in the production of artistic works, he most frequently describes this process not as “creation” or “creativity” but as *expression*, the specificity of which will be one of the focal points of this chapter. “Expression” (cf Littré) is primarily concerned with the *movement* of something from the inside to the outside, rather than the creation of something out of nothing. We saw in the last chapter that in Didier Anzieu's work the work of creation (like that of the dream work or of mourning) entails a reorganization of the psyche. For Ponge as well, these two phenomena are linked, but their logical relation is different. Rather than reorganization being the *result* of the birthing of a creation, it is the restructuring of the subject or the thing in their relation to each other and/or to the world around them that is not only the process of creativity but its end product, the work of art. Our first task here is to ask what exactly then expression means for Ponge and what figures he uses to portray it. Second, we will explore the cosmological framework that takes shape around the reality of “expression.” Third, we will attempt to define the

role of the writer or artist within such a framework. How is Ponge's ethico-political agenda articulated through this discussion, and why is "expression" the privileged mode for creation of new work(s)?

### Ponge's Expression

When one looks closely at Ponge's use of the terms "creation" and "expression," even on a purely quantitative level, the latter appears far more often and in more diverse contexts than the former, and remains a main theme even into his final works. It appears in both its explicitly transitive (*exprimer les choses*) and reflexive (*s'exprimer*) verbal forms, as well as in its substantiated form as "expression"—that is to say, the substance that results from something that has been expressed or something that expresses itself. The importance of these multiple—both physical and figurative uses—is that they impress upon the reader a very basic difference of expressions from creations: it is primarily a function of a kind of law of conservation of matter, in which nothing is ever created or destroyed, but merely rearranged. A movement occurs from the inside to the outside of elements that were already there. Neither is it merely a tabulation, a sort of passive recording or transcription of what is there; it is *active*: "[E]xpression est plus que connaissance; écrire est plus que connaître...c'est *refaire*" (I, 219, italics added).

While expression is an *act*, it is important to note that it makes nothing (and here English makes a semantic distinction that would perhaps be helpful between *faire*/do and *faire*/make) but *re*-makes something that is already there. Jean-Marie Gleize describes the process thus:

Il y a, de fait, pour Francis Ponge, une corrélation nettement exprimée entre l'objet de la pratique artistique—changer le monde, c'est-à-dire d'abord changer les figures qui permettent de représenter le monde, de se représenter le monde, de se représenter dans le monde—et la pratique artistique elle-même comme pratique précisément, comme acte. Pour préciser: le texte "moderne" (c'est-à-dire: adéquat aux exigences de notre époque) ne doit ni représenter (décrire; illustrer, montrer) ni expliquer (interpréter), mais agir et montrer cet acte, ou cet agissement (l'acte étant par définition tendu vers la positivité—faire surgir de nouvelles figures—et essentiellement négatif, critique, iconoclaste, destructeur des vieilles représentations). (Gleize 1983, 166)

While Ponge was notoriously resistant to being called a poet and his works poems, he was much less reluctant to identify with the "pratique artistique" of such painters as Braque and Fautrier, whose working process took on the more artisanal and unpretentious form of activity adequate to the "ateliers" in which it took place (Braque himself being called variously a sailor and a gardener). For this and other reasons that we will see later, this "pratique artistique" applies to Ponge's own writing. An important distinction not addressed by Gleize, however, is the precise definition of the word "moderne." He seems to equate modernity with a historical period, by some quantitative measure of newness rather than by the qualities that might be inherent in that concept. Ponge himself explains his understanding of what constitutes modernity in a section of *Méthodes* called the "Le monde muet est notre seule patrie:"

[C]e qui est essentiellement MODERNE: comment naissent, vivent et meurent les civilisations. Nous savons qu'après une période de découverte des nouvelles

valeurs (toujours prises directement au cosmos, mais de façon magnifiant, nonréaliste) vient leur élaboration, élucidation, dogmatisation, raffinement [...]ABOLIRONS-NOUS IMMEDIATEMENT LES VALEURS, en chaque oeuvre (et en chaque technique), DANS LE MOMENT MEME QUE NOUS LES DECOUVRONS, ELABORONS, ELUCIDONS, RAFFINONS [...] la fonction de la poésie. C'est de nourrir l'esprit de l'homme en l'abouchant au cosmos. Il suffit d'abaisser notre prétention à dominer la nature et d'élever notre prétention à en faire physiquement partie" (I, 630)

Ponge equates the "elaboration, elucidation, and refinement" of civilizations and values after one has discovered them in the cosmos—that which must be constantly overthrown by specifically the same procedures—to the function of poetry. This function seems to stand somehow apart from all of these values, underlying their very possibility by opening man's mind to the cosmos, source of all values.

The action of the modern work of art or writing (of creativity if not of creation) is that of constantly overturning a system of values, modernity being the recognition of this constant revolutionary state of being. Before we delve too far into a discussion of the system (or destruction thereof) of Ponge's expressions, let us take a closer look at the act of expression as portrayed in his work before it becomes explicitly thematized as a political act. The most obvious occasion is in the title of his 1952 volume *La Rage de l'expression*. While unexplained in this volume itself, the expression resonates with an earlier description of the work of the painter Jean Fautrier: "Fautrier n'a donc pas craint le sujet. Il y a chez lui *la rage de l'expression* (du tube de couleur)" (1, 109, italics added). This ambiguous double genitive allows for multiple possible readings. Is the "rage" that

of the artist to "express" the tube of paint? Is it an impulse to move what is inside the object or thing to the outside, the uncontrollable urge to reorganize the outside world, or is it the rage *proper* to the tube of paint, a need to move what is inside itself to the outside? Or rather, is it the two at once? In what sense are we to take the word "rage"? Is it anger or madness, a compulsion, a *pulsion*?

But is he staking a claim for things or describing the claim staked by these things on their own behalf? Ponge's own investment in the "Parti pris des choses" testifies that it must be at least partly the rage to express the thing itself, to move its insides to the outside, to the surface. Using words<sup>19</sup> to express things as they are inside, to make them reveal their insides, the image of the tube of paint is one that does a lot of work for Ponge, and it is certainly true that the "parti" being taken is one that has its own measure of rage for autoexpression. For example, in the poem (if so it may be called) "Le mollusque:"

Le mollusque est un être—presque une—qualité. Il n'a pas besoin de charpente mais seulement d'un rempart, quelque chose comme la couleur dans le tube. La nature renonce ici à la présentation du plasma en forme. Elle montre seulement qu'elle y tient en l'abritant soigneusement, dans un écrin dont la face intérieure est la plus belle. (I, 24)

He goes on to describe the mollusk as having "secreté sa porte." It is not imprisoned in the shell, which would seem to be the exact *opposite* of expression; a model in which the mollusk, in order to express itself, would have to break free of the shell or be broken out and "expressed" by the consumer (who, while not appearing in this particular text, is

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<sup>19</sup> "Raisons de vivre heureux" in *Proèmes* (I, 198)

featured in the thematically similar "Huître"). In the case of the oyster and the mollusk, the shell is not only expression but resistance against being forced to "express" from the outside. The mollusk, having secreted its own "door," has already expressed itself. It has moved something from the inside to the outside. The shell was neither imposed upon it nor created from nothing. Like the paint in the tube, the mollusk has a drive to express itself, to reify that expression in the work of art. In the mollusk's case, this is the shell, the inside of which is covered with mother of pearl: a shining and beautiful surface in which the oyster can see itself externalized and distorted. There is, however, a danger that externalization of one's insides in this fashion risks isolating oneself from the outside world, reflecting back at oneself, but only if the door is held closed.

This image of the shell as the model of the work of art appears in what is perhaps the most overtly polemical of the *Parti pris des choses* (and one in which it is much less a question of the *chose* than of the human being), "Notes pour un coquillage." In this text, Ponge holds up the shell of a mollusk as the model of the work of art, specifically of the monument.<sup>20</sup> While in general Ponge claimed to eschew explicit analogy, he admitted to favoring it when it put into relief the differences between two things more than their similarities (I, 536-7). And that is exactly what he does here. The analogy between the shellfish and the human being begins with them both as creatures of expression from

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<sup>20</sup> Ponge's model for his own writing was that which both purported to immortality and announced its own impermanence (SCVLPTVRE [II, 5823]), which would seem to contradict his belief in the revolutionary, temporary nature of the work; but one must keep in mind that this does not make the work of art any less likely to be the creation of a new system in which revolution automatically and continuously takes place, stone being something whose destruction and recreation is inevitable--and perhaps more inevitable than most as it is subject without mediation to the laws of nature, which, as we will see, are those of continuous revolution and recombination. A monument is therefore more than anything else, a work of art that, while dedicated to some contemporary event or personality, is a tacit acknowledgement of the cycle of nature.

which point they immediately diverge—much to the disadvantage of the human "mollusk." The important things about creating a work of art, as articulated by Ponge in this text, are 1) that it be proportional to the human being's size or scale; 2) that it be made of materials proper to "man," its creator. For him, this means words or, if one is to be more precise, acts of speech—e-nunciations—movement of words inside each human being towards the outside. These secreted words do not move outside and then go off on their own;<sup>21</sup> they form a built-up shell around the person or animal producing them. Inside they form a pearl: a process provoked by the infiltration of matter from the outside in, also causing a reformation.

In "Notes sur un coquillage," Ponge contrasts two kinds of remains that one can leave behind, two different kinds of monuments. The first are what we call monuments or statues (e.g. the Roman ruins at Nîmes or Michaelangelo's statue *David*), which he likened respectively to pieces of disproportionate skeleton strewn about the countryside and to "simples représentations" (I, 40). The others are the preferable:

[E]spèces de niches, de coquilles à sa taille, des choses très différentes de sa forme de mollusque mais cependant y proportionnées [...], que l'homme mette son soin à se créer aux générations une demeure pas beaucoup plus grosse que son corps, que toutes ses imaginations, ses raisons soient là comprises, qu'il emploie

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<sup>21</sup> Unlike the secretions of the escargots who instead of the rage de l'expression has the "orgueil" to leave a trail everywhere attracting predators who can smash their inadequate shell: "Ainsi en est-il de tous ceux qui s'expriment d'une façon entièrement subjective sans repentir, et par traces seulement, souci de construire et de former leur expression comme une demeure solide, à plusieurs dimensions. Plus durable qu'eux-mêmes. Mais sans doute eux, n'éprouvent-ils pas ce besoin. Ce sont plutôt des héros, c'est-à-dire des êtres dont l'existence même est oeuvre d'art,—que des artistes, c'est-à-dire des fabricants d'oeuvres d'art " (1, 27).



son génie à l'ajustement, non à la disproportion,—ou, tout au moins que le génie, à se reconnaître les bornes du corps qui le supporte. (I, 40)

The aspect of the *demeure* is emphasized here as well as in the *mollusque*. The latter text, however, points out that the animal not only lives within its shell but also dies there. The shell is a "tombeau" (I, 24) as well as a house. "La moindre cellule du corps de l'homme tient ainsi, et avec cette force, à la parole,—et réciproquement" (I, 24). This shell of words is a house: it provides a place to live, a *chez-soi* adapted to its creator/inhabitant. It provides protection. It is a tomb: a final resting place, a "monument" that both marks the existence of the living creature and outlasts it, but is bound eventually to reenter the recombinatory cycle of nature.<sup>22</sup> It is made exactly to the shape of the mollusk/man. While not an exteriorized representation of its content/creator, it provides a roughly representational image; or, as when Ponge discusses the work of the modern artist using the example of Braque: "[I]l ne *représente rien*. Bien sûr, puisqu'il vous présente l'avenir. L'avenir de la nature, l'avenir de l'homme" (I, 138) (in this case the future being the tomb, the monument in all its permanent impermanence—that is to say that in its modernity it establishes an order that will be overturned). The interior face of this shell being "la plus belle," one should remind oneself that the material being expressed does not settle uniformly (as with a real painter, where: "La peinture sort de la tube, elle s'étale par endroits, ailleurs elle se masse" (I, 108), but instead forms something that seems to be qualitatively different to those seeing it from inside and outside. For the person who

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<sup>22</sup>Après la fin de tout le règne animal, l'air et la sable en petits grains lentement y pénètrent, cependant que sur le sol il luit encore et s'érode, et va brillamment se désagréger, ô stérile, immatérielle poussière, ô brillant résidue, quoique sans fin brassé et trituré entre les laminoirs aériens et marins, ENFIN! *l'on* n'est plus là et ne peut rien reformer du sable, même pas du verre, et C'EST FINI!" (I, 41)

expresses it, the shell is beautiful mother of pearl, an object of value. Not only that, but he or she can see their own distorted but embellished image in the mirror of their own expression.

The one characteristic or avatar of the word-shell that has not yet been evoked (we have seen the house, tomb, fortress, objet d'art and representation) is that first mentioned in the description of the mollusk: "Ce n'est à vrai dire qu'un muscle, un gond, un blount et sa porte. Le blount ayant sécrété la porte. Deux portes légèrement concaves constituent sa demeure entière" (I, 25). The door is not only that which protects one from the world, that behind which one can close oneself off, but also that which allows communication and contact with the outside world. This shell of speech that is expressed from the inside of the human being is that which provides the opportunity for any contact with the world. It allows one to take one's place within the world, as a part of and actor in it. This becomes the theme of another of the texts in the *Parti pris*:

#### LES PLAISIRS DE LA PORTE

Les rois ne touchent pas aux portes. Ils ne connaissent pas ce bonheur: pousser devant soi avec douceur ou rudesse l'un de ces grands panneaux familiaux, se retourner vers lui pour le remettre en place,—tenir dans ses bras une porte.

[...] Le bonheur d'empoigner au ventre par son noeud de porcelaine l'un de ces hauts obstacles d'une pièce; ce corps à corps rapide par lequel un instant la marche retenue, l'oeil s'ouvre et le corps tout entier s'accommode à son nouvel appartement.

D'une main amicale il la retient encore avant de la repousser décidément et de s'enclorre,—ce dont le déclic du ressort puissant mais bien huilé agréablement l'assure (I, 22)

The theme of the pleasure or happiness of the procedure or the good fortune attending the privileged door-opener evoked here is one that becomes of paramount importance in Ponge's later work, and will be examined more closely at the end of this chapter. What is striking in this text in relation to our current discussion, however, is the particular category of persons excluded from the pleasure of moving of their own accord from one space to another, of operating the physical machinery, which, in this case, is the language-mollusk shell expressed by each human being. The king is the person who cannot admit his commonality with the world around him, cannot take his place as an agent in the world around him, cannot enter in contact or communication with that world, neither in a physical nor a verbal sense. On the other hand, in his quality as monarch, as long as he *is* a king, he cannot completely separate himself from the status quo. They cannot "s'enclorre" in their new living space, shutting themselves off from the previous order to which they belonged.

One cannot forget in the context of a discussion on the shell and expression the seemingly less happy example of expression that is "L'Orange," where the internal contents are forced out and the shell or peel broken beyond repair: "L'orange [...] est trop passive,—et ce sacrifice odorant...c'est faire à l'opresseur trop bon compte vraiment" (I, 20). This evaluation of the attitude toward "expression" would seem to be reasonable were it the final word on the subject, but the text does not end there. First:

Il faut mettre l'accent sur la coloration glorieuse du liquide qui en résulte, et qui, mieux que le jus du citron, oblige le larynx à s'ouvrir largement pour la prononciation du mot comme pour l'ingestion du liquide. (I, 20)

While this movement from the inside out has been forced, "prématuré," the orange is still in a position to make its own place, to determine the surface in contact even with the person who forced it to express. The second reason that a reading of the orange as a decorative but weak and passive submission to oppression is most likely itself premature is that intact at the end of the text is the orange seed:

Ce grain, de la forme d'un minuscule citron, offre à l'extérieur un vert de pois ou de germe tendre. C'est en lui que se retrouvent après l'explosion sensationnelle de la lanterne vénitienne de saveurs, couleurs, et parfums que constitue le ballon fruité lui-même,—la dureté relative et la verdeur (non d'ailleurs entièrement insipide) du bois, de la branche, de la feuille: somme toute petite quoique avec certitude la raison d'être du fruit. (I, 20)

What has been expressed is in fact the essence of the fruit, in the sense of the externalization of a microcosm of itself. Its own potential for regeneration has not been diminished.

## The Materialism of Speech

If the movement between the verbal and the physical seems to take place too easily, this is not accidental. The distinction between the two of these is not as self-evident for Ponge as it might seem to others. This is suggested first of all by the qualities that he ascribes to words when describing his project in the *Parti pris des choses*, as to why he might choose the side of things rather than that of people, or—as a writer himself—that of words.<sup>23</sup> Words can be dirtied, they can accumulate qualities (physical, moral, etc.) from the ways in which they have been used.

The source of this similarity or even equivalence between words and things is described using an analogy to the relationship between different states of matter in the long text *La Seine*, of which the overall project is not only to present that river, but to explain how a text is in fact a river itself. Here he explicitly addresses the objection of those who would question the ability of language to do anything but describe, who would doubt the immediate efficacy of an enunciation acting on the world<sup>24</sup>:

Il est un état de la pensée où elle est à la fois trop agitée, trop distendue, trop ambitieuse et trop isotrope pour être du tout exprimable,—et cet état correspond à

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<sup>23</sup>“N’ en déplaise aux paroles elles-mêmes, *étant donné les habitudes que dans tant de bouches infectes alors ont contractées... Un tas de vieux chiffons pas à prendre avec des pincettes.*” (I, 196)

<sup>24</sup> One of the most well-known of these would be Maurice Blanchot who, while at the same time praising the virtuosity of Ponge's writing ("Ponge surprend ce moment pathétique où se rencontrent, sur la lisière du monde, l'existence encore muette et cette parole, on le sait, meurtrière de l'existence. Du fond du mutisme, il entend l'effort d'un langage venu d'avant le déluge et, dans la parole claire du concept, il reconnaît le travail profond des éléments" [Blanchot 1949, 337]) challenges the claim of avant-garde artists to effect actual change in the physical or social world, that changes in words in speech and writing can affect the extra-linguistic world (Blanchot 325).

celui d'un gaz nettement au-dessus de sa température critique, alors qu'il n'est pas liquéfiable, au vapeur; un autre état de la pensée où elle se rapproche de l'exprimabilité; il suffit que la pression s'accroisse et que la température s'abaisse encore, pour que la parole à ce moment puisse apparaître...puis apparaît une surface de séparation...Dès ce moment, et malgré la très certaine non-discontinuité entre la pensée et son expression verbale, comme entre l'état gazeux et l'état liquide de la matière,—l'écrit présente des caractères qui le rendent *très proche de la chose signifiée*, c'est-à-dire des objets du monde extérieur, tout comme le liquide est très proche du solide. (1, 251)

Ponge gives this "parole" an intermediate status on a continuum between thought and solid matter, but a status that indicates that instead of the diaphanous if ultimately "material" status of a gas, it is immediately tangible to the human being. Specifically, he compares speech or writing to liquid, in this case to a river, which, among its other characteristics shared with the "Verre d'eau," etc., also has the potential to move and change solid masses. In the case of the shellfish the secretions are liquid as well, but harden immediately into a solid shell, a monument.

It should be noted that when Ponge writes about language and the material quality of elements, he does not in general refer to "mots" or to individual words in isolation, but rather to "paroles" or "langage," to the use or instantiation of words in a human act:

Car l'oeuvre d'art prend toute sa vertu à la fois de sa ressemblance et de sa différence avec les objets naturels. D'où lui vient cette ressemblance? De ce qu'elle est faite aussi d'une matière. Mais sa différence?—D'une matière expressive, ou rendue expressive à cette occasion. Expressive, qu'est-ce à dire?

Qu'elle allume l'intelligence (mais elle doit l'éteindre aussitôt). Mais quels sont les matériaux expressifs? Ceux qui signifient déjà quelque chose: les langages. Il s'agit seulement de faire qu'ils ne signifient plus tellement qu'ils ne  
 FONCTIONNENT. (I, 628)

It is Ponge's goal to make language not made out of words alone but out of *expressive* linguistic acts. This answers the possible objection that one might make to the line drawn between thought and acts of language (cf. Merleau-Ponty) in which thought must already be in words, in language, as the coexistent mode of human cognition. Here Ponge is breaking down—as we saw André Green do, if in a different way—any qualitative distinction between thought, verbal thought, and material. He places thought (in two different forms), expression, and solid matter ("la chose signifiée," "les objets du monde extérieur") on a continuum. While the "reality" of any of these things is unquestionable, and although they all exist along the spectrum of varying materiality, their similarity or dissimilarity depends rather upon their existence outside the human body and in the range of sensations perceptible by that body: that is to say, their actions upon that body.

Il est loisible à l'esprit humain de se dire que la peinture n'existe, ou plus exactement, qu'elle n'a lieu, qu'à un certain niveau, entre tel ou tel barreau de l'échelle infinie des possibles. Très exactement, ceux entre lesquels se trouve limité le regard humain lui-même, on les sait de l'infra-rouge et l'ultraviolet. Oui, il est loisible à l'esprit humain de se lancer, à corps perdu, je veux dire à corps oublié, dans la métaphorique, dans l'indicible (l'innommable). Idéologies, théologies, théories, religions aussitôt s'ensuivent [...] Mais le corps, les corps, ne se laissent pas longtemps oublier. Il réagit, ils réagissent (I, 599-600)

This passage, while describing painting and thus “*significatif*” *sights* rather than sounds, is in principle true of sound as well—perhaps more so, given that the sounds of language must not only be within the realm of human physical perception, but also human ability to create them. They must be physically appropriate to or *like* the human body if they are to come from it. As long as it is not *expressed*, exteriorized, language may be *significant* but it is not functional or effective. Up until that point it may be material but does not have any efficient power in the material world: "Que sont les mots, sinon des choses? N'ont-ils pas plusieurs dimensions, à cause de leur épaisseur sémantique [...] Il s'agit d'en jouer comme des choses" (II, 1187):

*Le fait de l'écriture (de la production, création textuelle, scripturale) est la lecture d'un texte du monde. Que les choses, telles que nous les distinguons, reconnaissons—et telles que nous les distinguons, reconnaissons—et telles que nous les aimons—que les phénomènes du monde physique, du monde dit extérieur, soient déjà des mots [...] Le mouvement (l'émotion) qui se fait en nous (qu'elles suscitent en nous) et qui nous les fait à la fois re-connaître comme semblables à leur nom et connaître (avec surprise) c'est-à-dire découvrir comme différentes de leur nom, qui nous fait désirer les nommer mieux se "traduit," en fait, par une attention redoublée à leur nom, qui serait tout simplement à rendre à signification première (ou complète, afin de le rapprocher à nouveau de la chose, conçue dans son épaisseur et sa différence véritables: celles qui la caractérisaient quand elle fut nommée pour la première fois, celles qui provoquèrent le besoin, le désir de la nommer. En somme les choses sont, déjà, sont autant choses que*



*mots...* Il s'agit de les faire *rentrer* l'un dans l'autre: de n'y voir plus *double*: que les deux apparences se confondent. (II, 431)

An asymptotic relation is established between the thing and the word, and it is the job of the poet to struggle to bring these two asymptotes together, even though they will never exactly coincide. This quotation also emphasizes that things are part of a non-symbolic universe, but one whose systematicity makes it a language made up of non-signifying, non-expressive parts, over which speech, "paroles" have the exclusive domain. These things must be brought into reflective, homologous roles as lines of print on opposite sides of the page in a book.

Words and things must not only reflect or represent, but accompany and correspond to each other:

[L]a nature entière, y compris les hommes, est une écriture, mais une écriture non significative, parce qu'elle ne se réfère à aucun système de signification, du fait qu'il s'agit d'un univers infini, à proprement parler immense, sans limites.

Tandis que: qu'est-ce qu'un langage, sinon un univers comme l'autre, mais un univers fini, qui comporte moins d'objets que l'autre [...] quelle est la particularité du langage qu'emploient les écrivains, les poètes (non plus les musiciens, les peintres ou les architectes ou les mathématiciens)?

Eh bien, c'est que leur langage: *la parole*, est fait de *sons significatifs* [...] Si bien qu'il s'agit là d'objets très particuliers, particulièrement émouvants: puisque à chaque syllabe correspond un son, celui qui sort de la bouche ou de la gorge des hommes pour *exprimer* leurs sentiments intimes—et non seulement pour *nommer* les objets extérieurs...etc.

Si bien qu'il suffit de *nommer* quoi que ce soit—d'une certaine manière—pour *exprimer* tout de l'homme [...] (I, 647-48)

Although both "sons" and "significatifs" are emphasized here, what is distinct from the language of mathematicians, painters, and musicians—all of whom also use systems of signification—is that the elements of signification are sounds actually coming from the inside of the human body at the same time that they are coming from internal mental or emotional life (although he relaxes the rules about appropriate methods of expression to the human body in his later works on various artists). Ponge sidesteps the question of whether or not language itself (and certainly any particular language, although again, there are times when what Jacques Derrida calls Ponge's "phallogallogocentrism" asserts itself [Derrida & Farasse 2005]) as a system natural to humans by saying that "parole" is what is proper to us—between the two poles of "sentiments intimes" and "objets...émouvants." Ponge's focus on the sounds of words as well as their "semantic thickness"—particularly evident in his treatment of the "Pré" (II, 445-51) through its homophones drew some criticism from those who found his work too concentrated on the culturally contingent signifier and on the etymological and specifically phonetic diffusion that is possible from that starting point to be a truly universal theory of expression. Some argue that Ponge's concentration on the dictionary when writing about a thing rather than a meticulous and potentially scientific observation of the object itself ignores the very thing whose side he is supposed to be taking by focusing on the signifier at the expense of the signified, let alone the referent. He responded to such alleged criticism with the following:

[J]e ne suis pas le moins du monde hostile à la manifestation du signifié. Mais lecteurs et critiques ont souvent mal à se détacher du signifié. Le signifiant emporte le signifié et détruit le signifié auquel nous sommes habitués [...] J'utilise le terme [signifiant] parce qu'il est courant de le faire dans la pratique linguistique. Le signifiant est le matériel verbal dont nous faisons usage. Le signifiant pour le peintre est la peinture à l'huile, à l'extérieur du tube. C'est le moyen de l'expression comme tel. (II, 1410)

The *parti pris des choses*, by taking into account the means of expression, rather than ignoring the thing itself, is paying attention at once to the medium as a thing in itself and to the result of the expression as a thing, a concentration that partly explains his interest in the product of artistic expression as not only a sort of metacommentary on other “things” but also on their status as things in their own right, as well as the use and functioning of the medium in the creative process. The words of a literary creation are those that do the double duty of naming/signifying and of self-expression. For Ponge, at least, it is important to do this without doing violence either to the thing being signified or to the signifier. After all, the counterpart to the “*Parti pris des choses*” is the “*compte tenu des mots*” (I, 522). These are not the same thing, or merely a clever play on words, but rather this equation means that in order to take the side of things against the callousness usually inflicted on them, making them into signifiers of some subjective state or opinion of the writer (the anthropomorphism into which Sartre accused Ponge of lapsing despite his best intentions [Sartre 1947]), one must take into account the weight and quality of the words one has to work with—their semantic thickness as well as their

visual and auditory qualities.<sup>25</sup> It is for this that Ponge so often has recourse to the *Littré* dictionnaire to enrich his response to certain words and things, to explore their semantic thickness or density.

### La Chose

In fact, it is this *parti pris* or *compte tenu* that transforms words and things from phenomenological *objects* into entities existing in their own right. Pierre Fédida describes the distinction between thing and object thus:

La chose se distingue de l'objet en ce qu'elle participe d'une communication élémentaire entre sentir et se mouvoir (Erwin Strauss, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*): elle est réalité antéprédicative et préconceptuelle. L'horizon des potentialités ou marginalité (cf. Husserl, Maldiney) sous lequel se découvre la chose est Umwelt au fond du monde qu'on peut nommer réalité (cf. Merleau-Ponty). (Fédida 1978, 111)

This definition, while at first perhaps somewhat opaque, manages to join two important characteristics of *chose*. The first is the aspect evoked by Derrida in his text *Signéponge*, where he explains that the *chose* for Ponge is the thing insofar as it escapes being *our*

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<sup>25</sup>“On a souvent relevé dans les commentaires sur Ponge un aspect de son travail qui prend tout son sens dans le cadre cognitive de la chose-texte; un aspect qui a en fait deux versants, le mimétisme et ce qu'il appelle la distinction entre le mot et l'expérience de la chose, que ce soit une expérience visuelle comme la surface du pain qui donne une "impression quasi panoramique" (PPC, 51); ou auditive comme dans "L'huître", où la prédominance des sons en "r" reproduit les grincements, la résistance et la friction qui ont lieu quand on ouvre une Huître.” (Lévy 1999, 70-1)

object, insofar as it resists conceptualization or idealization of it<sup>26</sup>—the "predicates" and "concepts" one could ascribe to it. The second aspect of the *chose* evoked by Fédida is the "communication élémentaire entre sentir et se mouvoir" that takes place against the environment of reality and emphasizes the spatiality of this interaction. *La chose* unites sensation and movement, although whether it does that in itself (i.e. the thing itself both feels and moves) or in the human sensing it), or both at once. In either case, contact between the person and *la chose* is one not only of sensation, but also movement, an encounter in space "du fond du monde qu'on peut nommer réalité. The thing is that with which we come into contact in movement in the world. Sense, movement, and expression (of the thing, of ourselves) are all communicating in the sense that they share space and pathways; all of these occur at once. Movement out towards the thing is expression, it encounters the sensation of contact with the thing that is also expressing itself, sensation that provokes more movement. And, in line with what we saw for the encounter between the self and the object with Winnicott, where it is as a result of one's own mobility that one encounters other objects in the world and that they eventually come to exist *not* as our objects alone, but as independent beings in their own right, as "choses."

Closing the parenthesis regarding the *chose*, we can see how the "parti pris des choses" would imply taking an account of what aspects of the thing words would be able to express, to remake, where "exprimer la chose" and "s'exprimer" (I, 212) would establish a surface of contact between the writer and the thing. Additionally, because words themselves are things, one must take into account the part of them that will escape

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<sup>26</sup> "La chose n'est pas quelque chose qui se conforme à des lois don't j'aurais à parler de façon objective (adequate) ou au contraire subjective (anthropomorphique). D'abord la chose est l'autre, le tout autre qui dicte et qui écrit la loi." (Derrida 1988, 17)

the writer's grasp, as well as their adequacy (mimetic, etymological, etc.) to the thing being defined. This resistance of words themselves is not only that documented in the resistance of the words "soiled" by their use and abuse (cf. "Les écuries d'Augias"), but that of any attempt to use words to fully *rendre compte* of the *chose*:

Tel est sans doute un des aspects premiers de la résolution poétique vers laquelle s'efforce toute l'oeuvre de Ponge, ce détour par objet qui devient retro réflexif de la conscience poétique [...] il s'accompagne au contraire souvent chez Ponge de prudence de réserve, d'"humilité". D'autre part, alors que, sévère pour le passé, le manifeste affirme sa foi dans les valeurs qu'il découvre, les textes de Ponge ne plaident que pour "la parole fautive" (La chèvre), proclament la maladresse et la pauvreté, disent la quête plus que la réussite, la mouvance d'une recherche plutôt que la tranquille assurance d'une victoire. (Beugnot 1989, 137-8)

“La tranquille assurance d’une victoire” would in fact negate the thing as thing. Ponge would have succeeded in thoroughly objectifying it, thematizing it, if his parole were anything but *fautive*. What is "pris en compte" in Ponge's writing is the resistance of words and things to domination by the writer:

[U]ne nouvelle image annule l'imagerie ancienne [...] la constante insurrection des choses contre les images qu'on leur impose. Les choses n'acceptent pas de rester sage comme des images [...] Quant à la forme, je dois dire ou plutôt répéter que j'y vois plus que la peau des choses: le cerne de leurs limites, dont on ne m'enlèvera pas l'idée qu'il définit l'essentiel. (I, 689)

It is not just the qualities of the surface that one can see, but their limits' shadows. Ponge here contrasts two kinds of images: a new image throwing off the “sage,” outwardly-

imposed one, the *cerne* of their limits as well as their surface. Although the inside or the back of something may be hidden, although it escapes objectifying human domination, something about that surface is the expression of the essential found in the *limit* of the thing, in its interaction with the world around it, in its *functioning* within the world. The distinction between things as images and things as having limits is essentially a distinction between the two- and three-dimensional. The sensory and semantic depth of words-things moves them closer not to the substance (to which they already belong), but to the qualities of solid matter with which they can interact. The closer they get to the quality of solid matter the more they are able to *function* by acting upon it with some efficient force. The *limit* of the thing is the form that the surface takes along which it comes into contact with and interacts with the world, is that part of it that is essential in the world.

### Cosmology

Ponge's way of describing the world in terms of function, in terms of the interactions of bodies and surfaces, leads us to ask what kind of a world view is being expressed through it. The obvious answer to such a question is that all of Ponge's writing is based on the premise of a particular version of physics: that of the Epicureans and in particular, Lucretius. This is obvious in that it is not new to state Ponge's affinity for Lucretius, since even he himself is explicit on this point: "Je voudrais écrire une sorte de *De natura rerum*. On voit bien la différence avec les poètes contemporains: ce ne sont pas des poèmes que je veux composer mais une seule cosmogonie" (I, 204). Ponge wrote

not only a philosophy of language in which language or at least acts of language have a materiality comparable if not equivalent to that of things, but a physics that describes the conditions of that materiality itself. The first of Ponge's premises is that the physical world has an objective existence:

C'est-à-dire, reprenant, par exemple, la parole de Théophile Gautier, je suis quelqu'un pour qui le monde extérieur existe, ce qui est alors une sorte de réalisme, eh bien! Je m'en approche et je m'en éloigne, à la fois, en considérant que le langage, les mots sont aussi un monde extérieur et que je suis sensible, si vous voulez, à la réalité, à l'évidence, à l'épaisseur, de ce monde verbal, au moins autant qu'à celui des objets du monde physique. (Ponge & Sollers 1970, 169)

This attitude is, on one hand, able to support the idea that we do not come into contact with every facet of every thing that we encounter in the world. On the other, it supports the idea that words do not belong to us but have an objective existence outside of us.

In order to describe this world that for Ponge "existe vraiment," he needs a specific kind of philosophical system. He treats metaphysics with such distaste, among other reasons for its relation to the "idea," which, in any other sense than the Spinozist one of an image described in the previous chapter, sits uncomfortably with Ponge (I, 213). Whenever the idea of a metaphysics arises in Ponge's writing, he suggests replacing one of its parts. Either he recommends a "metalogic"—a concept he never fully makes clear<sup>27</sup>—or, in the fragments that make up *La Table*, where he keeps the latter half of the word rather than the former: "Ce n'est pas sur une métaphysique que nous appuierons

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<sup>27</sup>«Il y a dans *Le Parti pris* une déprise, une disaffection à l'égard du casse-tête métaphysique [...] *Par creation HEUREUSE du métalogue.*“ (I, 215)



notre morale mais sur une physique, seulement (si nous éprouvons le besoin), Cf. Epicure et Lucrèce" (II, 931).

It is not by chance that Ponge picks these two writers as the example for the basis of a moral philosophy. First, they are two of the most well-known philosophers to have explicitly based their systems of moral and religious thought—their idea of what constituted the good life—on their understanding of the physical world. Secondly, their physics and ethics appeal most particularly to Ponge, to which his repeated citation of both would attest. Patrick Meadows has already shown quite persuasively in his work on Ponge's place in the materialist tradition that from a stylistic point of view he is reflecting the cosmological worldview of these thinkers of late antiquity. The texts he produces are repetitions and variations—new textual objects made up of the same elements in new permutations. The paradigmatic example of this procedure is in the text "Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi," where all of the elements of "La figue (sèche)" are rearranged and reorganized to create several new ways of writing. The other consequence of this is the change in Ponge's writing from what his interlocutor had accused of "une infaillibilité un peu courte" (I, 165) of the *Parti pris* to the evolutive and certainly fallible "tentative" style evident in much of his later work, where the work of the writing process is on display, where one sees all the moving parts and where, more importantly, there is no teleology but merely the process itself. One might be tempted to object that an apparent goal of Ponge's work is the adequacy to the thing of which we have spoken at

great length. This, however, must be recognized as a moving target in light of the constant atomistic movement of the universe.<sup>28</sup>

Before going any further, it is necessary to describe briefly what exactly this physics includes. First of all, in a tradition inherited from Democritus, among others, Epicurus and Lucretius are *atomists*, that is to say that they believe that all matter is divisible into atoms located in empty space. These atoms are infinite in number but limited in kind (Epicurus's 4<sup>th</sup> letter to Herodotus) and it is the combination and recombination of these atoms that make for the variety of shape, size, and qualities of the various entities in the world around us. Lucretius's lengthy poem *De natura rerum* developed, among other things, explanations for the natural phenomena observed by his contemporaries as caused by the physical world thus understood.

The first consequence of this is that nothing is truly created or destroyed, but merely changes form through a rearrangement of its parts. There is no transmutation, only reformulation. This fits very well with Ponge's attitude toward creativity as movement rather than creation *ex-nihilo*. Here we literally have the conservation of matter expressed by his earlier work in its use of the word "expression". If one is to take this rule to its most extreme interpretation, it would imply that the production of something (a work of art, literature, etc.) being the movement to the outside of something that had been in the rearrangement of atoms from the inside to the outside. This implies

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<sup>28</sup>Guy Lavoire sees no contradiction between the two models. For him: "La première est, si l'on veut, statique. C'est le modèle du "fonctionnement". L'oeuvre comme "une seule cosmologie", et fonctionnant elle-même comme un cosmos, autour du Soleil, pour exemple, une fois celui-ci mis à sa place (dont dépendent tous les autres. Dans une sorte de mobilité immobile [...]) Le second modèle, c'est celui, esquissé dans certains livres de la chronologie. De même que les textes comme le Verre d'eau sont des suites de fragments datés, de même 'Le livre pourrait se concevoir comme la restitution de l'ordre chronologique de tous les textes et fragments'." (72-3)

that the equation of thought and speech to different states of matter is actually far more than metaphorical for Ponge. It is an analogy in the hard sense that we saw in the work of Didier Anzieu. The human individual is a condenser of the atoms of the spirit or soul from their nebulous diffuse state throughout the body into *paroles* with auditory and perhaps visual qualities adequate to the body from which they came, as part of that body itself (Epicurus's 5<sup>th</sup> letter to Herodotus).<sup>29</sup>

The problem to be solved for Ponge—as for his antique predecessors—is that of accounting for the movement that would cause and result from the combination and recombination of atoms. What could be the trigger for this perpetual motion machine? Atoms, for these thinkers, are *always* in motion. Specifically they are always in motion towards the earth. If this were true, how would any atoms ever find each other? Bodies falling on parallel tracks at the same speed should never, in principle, encounter one another. The solution found by the ancients and adopted by Ponge, is that of a disturbance in the downward motion of all atoms, which takes place in the form of a "swerve" (Epicurus's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Herodotus). This swerve moves the atoms from their parallel paths and into compounds that make up the world around us, and then forces them to break apart. This cycle of coming together and breaking apart is hardly unknown to Ponge, as in the cycle of stone agglomeration and dissolution of the "galet" or the monument, the stone whose illusion of permanence hides how deeply embedded it is in the cycle of combination and recombination inherent in nature, the recognition of which cycle being that makes us essentially "moderne" in the way he defined this in *Méthodes*,

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<sup>29</sup> "The soul is material, composed of finely divided particles, some like breath, some like fire, and some of a third, unnamed kind." (Epicurus 23)

"The term 'incorporeal' is properly applied only to the void, which cannot act or be acted upon. Since the soul can act and be acted upon, it is not incorporeal." (Epicurus 25)

which allows us to attach ourselves to the cosmos, source of all the values subsequently adopted by mankind.

Lucretius (Book 2 lines 251-62) equates any concept of free will to this *clinamen*, the infinitely variable swerve of the atoms of the soul. This idea is not incompatible with Ponge's idea of what allows for change in the world. That is to say, expression: swerve within the body (towards the outside), or the combination, destruction, and creation taking place around the human body. "The poetic function" would be to put one in contact with the cosmos, to allow humanity to take its position as an object among others: "d'abaisser notre prétention à dominer la nature et d'élever notre pressentiment à en faire physiquement partie" (I, 630). This *abaissement* and *élévation* should happen not only in our consciousness, in the amount of effort we put forth toward these activities, but also in our esteem. Effort to dominate nature will do us little good and can ultimately have little effect, as we will have then established no knowledge of our interaction with the universe we hope to dominate. On the other hand, to "nourrir l'esprit de l'homme en l'abouchant au cosmos" (I, 630) is to allow humankind to actually become conscious of the role it has in that cosmos—that is to say, equally a force for change, the source of a swerve that could change the arrangement or makeup of that cosmos. It is not for nothing, moreover, that Ponge uses the word "abouchant". The human being is open to the values of the cosmos through poetic functioning, *through the mouth*, as with the juice of the orange.<sup>30</sup> Our pressure on the world and its expression passes through our mouth as we open it toward the world, and it is through our mouths that we incorporate. Allowing this

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<sup>30</sup> "Il faut mettre l'accent sur la coloration glorieuse du liquide qui en résulte, et qui [...] oblige le larynx à s'ouvrir largement pour la prononciation du mot comme pour l'ingestion du liquide." (I, 20)

bidirectional flow to happen allows us to become conscious of the role we play in the combination and recombination of matter. We become conscious of the part of the *clinamen* that our expression has in the world, our part of the larger machine of interactions.

This consciousness becomes not only raw knowledge, but a complex philosophy with multiple branches. As Christiane Vollaire asserts: "[L]'atomisme épicurien est un humanisme parce qu'il fait coïncider physique et épistémologie, l'atome devenant le lieu de cette coïncidence temporelle" (Vollaire 2004, 67). The question that poses itself next is in what way this coincidence of physics and epistemology (and aesthetics, eventually) joins with the relationship already asserted between moral philosophy and the physics upon which it must rest. This question can best be addressed by examining the points at which Ponge himself becomes moralizing, and asking how such a moral would relate either to the physics or epistemology already articulated, or to that implied via the affiliation with Epicurus or Lucretius. Ponge's moral philosophy comes from another coincidence—not in the sense of chance, but that of two things occurring simultaneously. At the risk of articulating nothing but a pleonasm, an artist or a creator is only one if he does what he must: what he must do to become one of these things, and at the same time what he *must* in the sense of a moral imperative. A creator cannot allow himself to fail at his task (deontologically but also logically). He is no longer an artist if his work does not function in very specific ways.

### What an Artist Must Be

The role of the artist is at first described as a task of all human beings toward progress—a progress that must of course be understood to avoid the cyclical nature of dogmaticization of newly-discovered values that occurs without the "modern" consciousness of this cycle. One of Ponge's most grandiose statements comes in “Notes prises pour un oiseau” in the *Rage de l'expression* where he exuberantly claims that:

Nous ferons des pas merveilleux, l'homme fera des pas merveilleux s'il redescend aux choses (comme il faut redescendre aux mots pour exprimer les choses convenablement) et s'applique à les exprimer en faisant confiance à la fois à son oeil, à sa raison, et à son intuition [...] Mais il faut en même temps qu'il les refasse dans le logos à partir des matériaux du logos, c'est-à dire la parole. (I, 355)

There seems at first to be little new in this citation beyond the basic methodological descriptions that fill Ponge's writing, but what is introduced here is the imperative notion of any kind of progress.<sup>31</sup> This equivalence is between “raison” and “réson,” materialization of reason and language in the movement of resonance. He attributes the understanding of this identity to the classical poet Malherbe, and it is this that prompts him to consider Malherbe as his own precursor and as essentially modern, despite the accusations of classicism that the text *Pour un Malherbe* (II, 164) drew.

The second of the explicit commands issued by Ponge is of a far more technical and methodological bent:

Tout le secret du bonheur du contemplateur est dans son refus de considérer comme un mal l'envahissement de sa personnalité par les choses. Pour éviter que

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<sup>31</sup> Progress contingent on the same polysemy of the "pas" associated with the Surrealist movement in André Breton's *Nadja* (Breton 697), “pas” meaning not only a movement forward, a step, but also a negation, constant negation necessary in order to advance, echoing his earlier argument for constant rejection of established values.

cela tourne au mysticisme, il faut: 1. se rendre compte précisément, c'est-à-dire expressément de chacune des choses dont on a fait l'objet de sa contemplation; 2. changer assez souvent d'objet de contemplation[...]le plus important[...]est la nomination, au fur et à mesure, de toutes les qualités qui le TRANSPORTENT, le transportent plus loin que leur expression mesurée et exacte [...] la contemplation d'objets précis est aussi un repos, mais c'est un repos perpétuel des plantes adultes, que porte des fruits. Fruits spéciaux, empruntés autant à l'air ou au milieu ambiant, au moins pour la forme à laquelle ils sont limités et les couleurs que par opposition ils en prennent, qu'à la personne qui en fournit la substance. (I, 203-4)

Here Ponge is responding to potential criticism of two kinds. The first is of a sort of quietism linked to certain spiritual disciplines whose ex-static practices eliminate the need for any kind of outward action on the part of the practitioner. His response to this is first in that his contact with the choses it is the thing that comes toward him and not the contrary. The things invade, as he says his personality, his person-ness, what makes him a person, and change his makeup. To avoid falling into mysticism he has to become conscious of exactly the material effect that each thing has on him and the world, and to recognize the aspects of that thing that create a disproportionate effect in comparison to its size: the repose that is contemplation has the potential to bear fruit. The other is the criticism implied by the writers, both existentialist and absurdist, who would make of the contemplation of the object either of an attempt to grasp futilely at the solidity of an external object or an occasion for horror and physical vertigo or nausea while pitching on the edge of an abyss of nothingness that is the *chose* behind the object. As he writes to Camus, who accused him of trying to create a false sense of unity in the world, in *Pages*

*Bis*: "La 'beauté' de la nature est dans son imagination, cette façon de pouvoir sortir l'homme de lui-même, du manège étroit, etc. Dans son absurdité même... 'Nostalgie de l'unité' dites-vous—Non: de la variété" (I, 217). The encounter with the thing is an occasion for rejoicing rather than horror.<sup>32</sup> This resistance on one side to the abyss of the *nausée* or the absurd, and on the other the abyss of Pascal (and for a moment, the parallel between his adored Lucretius and Pascal claimed by Dr. Logre in the book *L'Anxiété de Lucrèce* [Ballestra-Puech]) was to continue even after his correspondence with Camus forced him to defend himself:

[M]on idée la plus originale—par laquelle je me distingue à la fois de Lucrèce et de Pascal et me place aussi loin de l'un que de l'autre—est celle que notre faculté de refaire (artistiquement) la nature et les jouissances que nous connaissons dans l'exercice, de cette faculté doivent nous ôter tout complexe d'infériorité à son égard [...] ce qui est moderne, c'est le sentiment que l'art est la nouvelle valeur [...] Nous (l'homme) jouissons (franchi son pessimisme, son désespoir) à l'idée que nous pouvons refaire la nature. Mais la considérant pour la refaire, c'est alors que la nature nous inflige sa rigueur, ses critères, se réintroduit impérieusement en nous.

Nous devons reconnaître bientôt l'impossibilité de la refaire. Nous subsistons dès lors dans le *succès relatif* et l'effort continu. Et le souvenir des perfections anciennes. (II, 1008-9, italics added)

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<sup>32</sup> "Que fait un homme qui arrive au bord du précipice, qui a le vertige? Instinctivement il regard au plus près—vous l'avez fait, vous l'avez vu faire. C'est simple, c'est la chose qui est la plus simple. On porte son regard à la marche immédiate ou au pilier, à la balustrade, ou à un objet fixe, pour ne pas voir le reste. Cela est honnête, cela c'est sincère, c'est vrai. L'homme qui vit ce moment là, il ne fera pas de la philosophie de la chute ou du désespoir." (II, 659)



Ponge places himself in a much more pedagogical role, one with which he was comfortable historically ever since he made the experiment of the "Tentative orale" and accustomed himself to the genre of the *tentative* in general. He is the master without *maîtrise*:

Rhétorique est une notion qu'il réinvente. Il n'est pas question, rhétoriquement, de soumettre les autres, de les subjuguier, mais de rendre qui le peut, qui en ressent le désir, maître de soi-même, actif et productif, authentiquement "parlant". Cette fonction que j'ai improprement appelé "didactique" et qui est peut-être pour Francis Ponge de l'ordre de la responsabilité politique de l'écrivain, il en parle comme d'un travail de "suscitation". (Gleize 1988, 76)

Again, this goes back to a personal use of rhetoric to establish one's own individuality rather than to impose on the other, and it is for this that Gleize steers away from the term "didactic" (outside-in) to that of "suscitation" (inside-out). Not only does this resist the traditionally pejorative connotation of "rhetoric" as the art of persuasion: it nuances the idea of "authenticity," which we were forced to confront as well in the work of Winnicott. Like "creativity," the fraught term of authenticity seems to be brought back to a description of movement directed inside-out rather than the inverse.

This "suscitation" comes, however, both with counsels as to the life practices to be adopted toward this goal, and cautions against the hubris that could potentially accompany the consciousness of one's privileged place in the modernization of society.

[Q]uelque chose après tout de plus matériel et de plus opaque, de plus complexe, de plus dense, de mieux lié au monde et de plus lourd à déplacer [...] le lieu [...] où les sentiments se confondent et où se détruisent les idées...ouvrir un atelier, et

y prendre en réparation le monde, par fragments, comme il lui vient. Non pour autant qu'il se tient pour mage. Seulement un horloger [...] le pouvoir [...] lui vient sans doute d'abord d'une sensibilité au fonctionnement du monde et d'un violent besoin d'y rester intégré, mais ensuite [...] d'une aptitude particulière à manier lui-même une matière déterminée. (I, 627-8)

Unlike the mage, who can in principle conjure up something from nothing, or totally transmute one type of matter to another (i.e. change one kind of atom to another), the watchmaker is the one who resets the finite parts of a system that already functions according to certain principles. Ponge therefore cautions a certain amount of humility with regard to one's own task and powers, a humility that must inspire dedication in those who truly wish to become poets or artists of any kind:

Les créateurs (ceux que l'on nomme ainsi) sont ceux qui éprouvent à la fois beaucoup de difficultés à s'insérer dans le monde, et beaucoup de persévérance et de pouvoir à s'y insérer...Quand je dis qu'il leur faut du pouvoir à s'y insérer, c'est que ce pouvoir seulement les distingue des utopistes ou des simple fous [...] les artistes (et les révolutionnaires) changent le monde. Ils changent la demeure humaine. (I, 138)

Despite the humility and perseverance advocated by Ponge in relation to the task of artistic production, he in no way denigrates the effect that such production, or rather expression, can have on the world as a whole. The artist or poet who succeeds in finding a chink in the machinery of the world into which to insert his expression can have an exponentially magnified effect compared to the size of that insertion, in a sort of chaos theory vision of the world in which the smallest change can reorganize the whole system.

He formulates this theory in a sort of challenge to the reader à propos the effective power of his own humble creations:

Allons! Cherchez-moi quelque chose de plus révolutionnaire qu'un objet, une meilleure bombe que ce mégot, que ce cendrier. Cherchez-moi un meilleur mouvement d'horlogerie pour faire éclater cette bombe que le sien propre, celui qui à vrai dire ne le fait pas éclater, mais au contraire le maintient [...] un mécanisme d'horlogerie (je parlais de bombe) qui au lieu de faire éclater, permet à chaque objet de poursuivre en dehors de nous son existence particulière, de résister à l'esprit. Ce mécanisme d'horlogerie c'est la rhétorique de l'objet. La rhétorique, c'est comme cela que je la conçois. C'est-à-dire, que si j'envisage une rhétorique, c'est une rhétorique par objet. Il faut que ce mécanisme d'horlogerie (qui maintient l'objet) nous donne l'art poétique qui sera bon pour cet objet. (I, 668)

What Sydney Lévy suggests is that the entire *oeuvre* of Ponge, from his less-explicitly engaged works to the vehemently political ones that arrived later on, is part of one whole machine, one whole bomb whose mechanism began to take shape from his very first poems. In this case, a time bomb functioning along the confines of its machinery until the payoff of its expression fully takes shape. This follows the sentiment expressed earlier that the qualities of the chose act like plants that bear fruit with a disproportionate effect to their original size. It would seem as well that this chapter has followed the same trajectory:

Ce que Ponge ne dit pas explicitement (quoique son expression "faire tourner cela" le suggère) est que le résultat de cette amplification, de cet agrandissement,

de ce qui s'apparentait déjà à une bombe à retardement dans le Parti pris, une fois disséminé dans les phrases suivantes se répercute en boule sur ce même Parti pris pour lui donner un sens nouveau. Chacune des phrases que nous avons pu identifier dans son œuvre rétroagit, pour ainsi dire, sur la précédente et toutes forment entre elles une boucle temporelle. En ce sens, la première phrase, le parti pris, cette « bombe », est ce que l'on pourrait appeler, pour tenir compte du faire clairement associé à la connaissance chez Ponge, un « compacte », un acte de compréhension lourd de sens et d'actes encore à venir. (Lévy 1999, 26)

Ponge himself has a particular way of describing the expressions of his watchmaking, and this is one of his reasons for resisting the title of poet, which at times seems to be equivalent to that of the mage.

### The Pleasure of the Text

Rather than the name of "poem", which supposedly aspires to high art, the *objeu* is the name given by Ponge to the texts he produces. It is the play of the *parole* and the *chose*, the game of the object. According to Marcel Spada—one of the few critics to recognize the importance and the prevalence of pleasure in Ponge's texts: "Le mot OBJEU dit à la fois les règles d'un fonctionnement complexe et le plaisir de ce fonctionnement, hors de toute métaphysique" (Spada 1974, 33). The *objeu* is the rapprochement between language and the thing in Ponge's physics—the surface that

forms when thought is expressed in the materiality of the *parole*. This is, according to Ponge, of words: "Non pas seulement donné[s] à voir, donné[s] à jouir à la vue (de la vue de l'esprit), non! Donné[s] à ce sens qui se place dans l'arrière-gorge: à l'égale distance de la bouche (de la langue) et des oreilles. Et qui est le sens de la formulation du Verbe" (I, 523). This encounter with the thing, the functioning of the system of this game being played with language and the thing, is a feeling, a feeling felt, as Ponge says, in the back of the throat, as, for example, when it opens to drink the expression of the orange.

This activity become emotion is described by Spada in his discussion of the text *le Savon*:

Le savon est remis en activité par chaque lecteur dans l'éternelle consommation de livre qui transforme l'objet, par le fonctionnement de l'objeu en OBJOIE [...] procure le sentiment de pureté intime qui place en nous la réalité du savon et remplace l'objet par une jubilation tout pur. (Spada 1974, 42)

Intimacy is that characteristic of the *objoie*—that "contact direct avec l'efficace"—that occurs when the writer or artist recognizes himself as part of the system of the *objeu*, the physical world in which both the thing and speech exist:

Ponge définit ainsi la double fonction du texte littéraire: ébranler et armer la sensibilité, porter à l'extrême le bouleversement intérieur et, en même temps, organiser dans ce trouble la jouissance parfaite. C'est bien un leitmotiv de l'oeuvre: "donner à jouir à l'esprit humain" "faire jouir mes spectateurs". (Spada 1974, 68)

This is why when Ponge says that a work of art should of course change him, but even before that *plaire*, he is not saying that the work's top priority is to please, but rather that the work, before it is able to effect any change, must come into contact with and touch

the sensitive surface of the observer. Ponge himself explained this to Philippe Sollers in more extreme terms:

[N]'importe quelle structure puisse se concevoir comme telle, et se vouloir comme telle, s'accepter et s'avouer, et se donner, se déclarer hautement pour ce qu'elle est, c'est-à-dire [...] comme conventionnelle par elle-même. eh bien! si elle peut trouver le signe de cela, à ce moment là il y aura une espèce de transmutation, alors vraiment heureuse, jubilante: c'est ce que j'appelle objoie.

Il y a là une sorte de morale qui consiste à déclarer qu'il faut qu'un orgasme se produise et que cet orgasme ne se produit que par l'espèce d'aveu et de proclamation que je ne suis que ce que je suis, qu'il y a une sorte de tautologie.

(Ponge & Sollers 1970, 190)

It may seem surprising that the “moral” or “morality” of both play and joy in Ponge is the result of an orgasm—not the ambiguous “jouissance”, which in theory could refer to non-corporeal pleasures or enjoyment, but the physiological term for sexual discharge. This is not only an orgasm, but also a “tautology”, a sort of self-affirmation that would apparently undermine the whole “parti pris” that Ponge has affirmed.

There is pleasure both in the contemplation of the work of art and in the production of it, when this contact is achieved by expression of the thing and expression of the self afterwards:

Voici comment je ressens l'inspiration:

L'esprit longuement nourri et excité, la jouissance extériorisatrice et créatrice peut se produire. A propos d'une idée quelconque. Il faut dire cependant que c'est généralement l'idée qui a excité longuement l'organe qui profite de sa semence

quand il éjacule, mais j'ai fait l'expérience que la puissance de l'esprit bandée par les attaques d'une idée peut se retourner vers une autre idée et l'en faire profiter.

(II, 1019-20)

The artist or writer thus becomes the receptor for the expression of the thing and then expresses him or herself through speech that goes to meet the thing in the *objet*, to create a work of art that will then become an object of pleasure, a *thing* for someone now. The whole is part of the playful, joyous system of the *objet-objet*.

L'écrivain devient alors un ordonnateur qui favorise l'orgasme du langage[...]Cet orgasme où les choses sont dans une espèce d'état d'indifférence [...] Le vieux mythe de l'inspiration est renouvelé. Celle-ci est moins la découverte de quelque idée originale que le pouvoir d'ouvrir l'objet littéraire au(x) sens (afflux et pléthore de sens). (Spada 1974, 24)

Ponge does seem to make of the writer this kind of "Ordonnateur," a cog in the system between thing and art, between thing and *parole* (a cog in a machine where every part, however, can actively have pleasure in its function<sup>33</sup>), and this is the *parti pris* where he facilitates the coupling of the thing and the word that is itself a thing:

La production de son propre signe devenant ainsi la condition de l'accomplissement de quoi que ce soit...Oui! Oui! c'est bien ainsi qu'il faut concevoir l'écriture: non comme la transcription, selon un code conventionnel, de quelque idée (extérieure ou antérieure), mais à la vérité comme un orgasme:

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<sup>33</sup> “[J]allais donc[...]à donner forme matérielle et durable, et force communicative d'autant, à des soucis ou des élans originellement tout *analogues* et, dans les meilleurs cas, finalement à des orgasmes rigoureusement *homologues* au miens...Le présent volume n'est que le recueil complet de toutes les petites ou moins petites machines verbales de ce genre que j'ai agencées et laissées s'échapper de chez moi.” (II, 566)

comme l'orgasme d'un être, ou disons d'une structure, déjà conventionnelle par elle-même, bien entendu—mais qui doit, pour s'accomplir, se donner avec jubilation, comme telle: en un mot, se signifier elle-même. (II, 415-6)

The relationship of the writer to things can be summed up as follows:

Nous les invitons, par notre seule présence, les provoquons, les incitons à se connaître, à se révéler à leur disposition; s'ouvrir à leur profondeur. Nous suivons leurs contours, nous les invitons à se parcourir, à jouir, à jubiler d'elles-mêmes. (II, 59)

*Jubilation* or *jouissance* occurs through the establishment of a new relationship of the thing to itself: self-knowledge and self-expression. This pleasure of expression is not merely a byproduct of the process but its very driving force. Ponge's work again echoes the description of the universe from *De Natura Rerum*, where this movement of all the atoms in the universe is attributed to "Venus," to whom the opening hymn is addressed. Venus is the motive force behind the entire process, behind all expression, all movement of *matériel expressif*, the reordering of all material in general. This *rage de l'expression* has another name given by Marcel Spada:

La pulsion de l'écrivain, avec sa riche énergie culturelle et fantasmagique porte encore pour Ponge le nom d'Eros. Je l'ai entendu dire, aussi nettement que dans ses entretiens avec Philippe Sollers—c'était auprès d'une vigne vierge—que toute oeuvre, y compris le Discours sur la méthode, était érotique. Cette pulsion, a-t-il ajouté en un autre lieu—ce jour—là, il tenait à la main un tuyau d'arrosage—, si elle n'aboutit pas toujours à féconder l'objet du premier désir, trouve une autre explication. (Spada 1977, 163-4)



It is important to keep in mind that an orgasm here is not merely pure pleasure, but the joining of two parts of a system to rearrange the order of things in the world and to make something new. Pleasure is always fecundation at the same time:

L'Eros de F. Ponge est bien distinct de celui qui remet en cause, par la violence et le crime, la nature de la Nature et le statut social...Ecrire, c'est vaincre les choses, leur faire toucher le sol des épaules, nécessité d'autant plus impérieuse que l'agressivité s'éprouve comme réciproque [...] De même dans l'Anus solaire, Georges Bataille réduisait le coït à la parodie du crime. Ponge y répond dans son Pré en inversant les termes, le duel devenant "un acte d'amour". Pour lui, l'acte sexuel vise moins la destruction réciproque du couple qu'une appropriation des vertus de l'autre. Répétition à diverses reprises qu'il veut tirer de chaque objet jouissance et leçon, il laisse entendre le double sens de volupté et de propriété contenu dans cette jouissance.

Eros gastronome triomphe ainsi non pas dans la goinfrerie et les saouleries des érotomanes mais par une lente prise de possession délectable que le gourmet expérimente dans un espace et un temps buccaux. (Spada 1974, 20)

Spada uses the language of "L'Escargot" (in which the snail is the "ordonnateur" *par excellence* of the earth, both taking it in and expressing it) to talk about an Eros that consists in taking in the expression of the Thing, in taking it, so to speak, into one's mouth, in sensing it on an internal surface: not in digesting it and destroying it but in coming to know it intimately in the *objoie*:

Dirai-je qu'il me semble qu'une reconversion totale de l'industrie logique s'avère pour que la fonction positive de la poésie s'exprime enfin et non seulement son

rôle négatif. Lorsqu'un germe animal ou végétal se développe, non seulement il disjoint et culbute le monde à l'entour de lui, mais il se construit lui-même selon sa nécessité interne dans la générosité, jusqu'à atteindre ses limites spécifiques, sa forme. Il y a la joie et l'audace autant qu'exécration et révolte. Il y a jubilation, floculation, et semence. (I, 688)

When any kind of germination takes place, it is not only the elements that make up the new organism that are rearranged, but the whole world surrounding it in order to accommodate the new. Here sexuality rejoins the revolutionary activity required of any creator.

Even in nature, sexuality and fertilization are seen as being loaded with revolutionary power and violence. The crux of this argument is to be found in the essay "L'Opinion changée quant aux fleurs," where Ponge explains how the sensual pleasures offered by flowers are merely precursors to their reproductive and revolutionary activities that will ultimately result in their death and dissolution, like the *gallet*, into the cycle of redistribution of atoms:

Voici ce que nous aimons surtout dans les fleurs: paradoxalement, leur durée. Le sentiment qu'elles donnent d'un pouvoir dans le temps, disséminé dans l'espace. Leur côté bombes de graines. Le mouvement vers l'avenir que cela comporte, et suscite en l'esprit. Leur côté bombes qui vont éclater, la connaissance de leur pouvoir, de leur charge de semence. (II, 325)

This return of violence in the midst of pleasure, the combination of revolt and fecundity, returns with more explicitly revolutionary language in the text "Pratiques d'écriture", where "La valeur résidant pour nous dans l'art même d'atteindre aux valeurs puis de les

abolir (avorter), de les enfanter puis avorter" (II, 1008-9). To return also to the language of the atomists, in order for the new arrangement of atoms to come into being, the old one must break apart. Eros, in the *rage de l'expression* is at the same time a drive toward eventual autodestruction:

[S]ait bien qu'Eros ne peut se concevoir sans Thanatos et à la suite d'Epicure, il comprend la dialectique du plaisir et de la douleur. Loin de désespérer sur la résistance des objets, il s'en réjouit, recherche leur "outrage"...il a également le "plaisir" de ressentir "une succession de petites convulsions (voire jubilations) de détail. (Lavorel 1986, 95)

This "outrage" of the thing is at the same time the constant outrage of the writer or artist, their gradual self-expression into the shell that is both their surface of contact and pleasure with the outside world and their germination with it. In being *outré*, expressed, they gradually autodestruct within their shell of *paroles* that becomes their monument.

One cannot, however, allow this line of thinking to become too abstract. The Eros that is experienced in writing, in revolutionizing the cosmos, is the exact same as that experienced through the physical body. As Marcel Spada cautions:

[C]es mots que Bataille qualifie de "fourmis" sont souverains dans son écriture [à Ponge]. Comme Marguerite Duras, il leur attribue une réalité substantielle faite aussi de notre propre chair et loin d'abolir les rapports efficaces, il ne songe qu'à les multiplier. Qu'est-ce que la description-définition chère au Ponge de *My creative method*, sinon une manière unique de mieux voir l'objet et de le posséder? Le plaisir de l'imitation affirmé par Aristote et que Pascal jugea incompréhensible, trouve là un de ses secrets. Avec ces termes de "chair",

"rapport" (charnel, bien entendu) et "possession" sommes-nous dans un registre purement métaphorique? (Spada 1977, 165)

The whole system of inserting one's expression with a "grincement" into the machinery of the world and making small but revolutionary changes that result in fertilization and eventual reorganization of the entire world including one's own dissolution is not one that takes place merely at the level of the atom or the world:

En même temps et aussi à une perle (perle d'huître), donc un bouton encore:  
bouton de manchette, bouton de col ou de plastron de chemise.

Et il me donne à imaginer une étude ou poème basé sur les rapports de la perle avec la graine, de ce qui est bouton de fleur (d'oranger) avec ce qui est bouton de commutateur (aspérité accrocheuse au doigt et dont l'action sera décisive, illuminera ou plongera dans l'obscurité un immense espace, ciel et monde alentour), avec ce qui est grain, pépin de fruit, avec ce qui est perle, ornement de plastron.

[...] Pourtant, ceci encore: comme je m'aperçois qu'il y a autour de ce bouton une petite zone de verdure plus sombre, cela m'amène à le considérer comme un clitoris, une petite verrue. Une petite induration de chair nacrée, émouvante [...]

Autre sorte de commutateur, bien entendu [...] ou de bouton de fleur d'oranger. (I, 542)

All of Ponge's revolutionary physics and aesthetics, his model of the artist's ethical responsibility in creation is based on the model of mutual orgasm, and on the belief that this can lead to real and permanent change. It is not arbitrary that the example of practical, if relative change held up by Ponge against Camus's Sisyphus is that of mutual

orgasm.<sup>34</sup> It is the flipping of a light switch, but as that of the first light switch, after which one can never really return to the world as it was before.<sup>35</sup>

Il est évident que c'est seulement dans la mesure où le lecteur lira vraiment, c'est-à-dire qu'il se subrogera à l'auteur, au fur et à mesure de sa lecture, qu'il fera, si vous voulez, acte de commutation, comme on parle d'un commutateur, qu'il ouvre la lumière, enfin qu'il tournera le bouton et il recevra la lumière. C'est seulement donc le lecteur qui fait le livre, lui-même, en le lisant: et lui est demandé un acte [...] un acte révolutionnaire, au sens de la gravitation universelle, un acte qui comportera le risque de se révolutionner soi-même. (Ponge & Sollers 1970, 192)

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<sup>34</sup> “[I]l ne faudrait pas, comme [Camus] semble le faire quand il critique l’interprétation de don Juan comme un perpétuel insatisfait, laisser croire que don Juan satisfasse un besoin d’absolu. Il obtient un résultat pratique, voilà tout: 1° son propre orgasme; 2° l’exhibition de son orgasme; 3° l’orgasme de sa partenaire; 4° la contemplation de cet orgasme. C’est déjà grand-chose, nous sommes d’accord.” (1, 208)

<sup>35</sup> “C’est que l’électricité est une définitive merveille, non seulement parce qu’elle conditionne notre conquête de l’avenir, mais parce qu’elle ne nous empêche en aucune manière de goûter les plaisirs du passé.” (1, 503)

### Chapter III: Opening the *Grande Barrière*: Giono's "Théâtre du Sang"

Unlike Francis Ponge, Jean Giono is not a writer known for his revolutionary political ideas. On the contrary, to the extent that his politics and philosophy about writing are known to the public, they are widely considered to be conservative, if not downright regressive. This attitude is mostly attributable to his entrenched pacifism coming into conflict with anti-fascism, as well as the early subject matter and tone of his work (which lent itself to appropriation by proponents of "back to the land" movements) and an apparent adherence to traditionally narrative novelistic forms. However, his firm rejection of involvement in either national or party politics, and his rejection of the artificial boundaries over which his contemporaries were fighting in favor of a concentration on relationships with the natural world, are in fact highly radical moves in themselves (the latter making Giono particularly relevant to contemporary interests). The borders that concern him are not those between states or ideologies, but between human beings and the natural world, a separation that he saw becoming more distant and difficult to cross as industrial and technological progress grew. Both thematically and formally Giono's work sought contact and engagement with the outside world, and particularly with the environment. Separation or alienation from nature and reality as a whole was for him, as we shall see, a form of *ennui*, which for him was defined as a radical alienation from the world(s) in which one lives, a denial of pleasure from sensory experience of that world, and an absorption in vain, purely illusory spectacles of imagination. The two solutions he proposes for avoiding this *ennui* are the opposite poles of *travail* and *spectacle*. Both of these, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, involve

physical, multi-sensory engagement with the world. The need for spectacle, beyond mere integration with one world, demands the opening up of new worlds, a desire for the monstrous or alien. Giono shows how this need for spectacle can lead to a demand for violence—the spectacular violence of Aztec sacrifice or murder. While acknowledging an all-too-human thirst for this violence and the attraction that it has (especially for those who have once been exposed to it), Giono in his descriptions of the writing process and the experience of spectatorship shows a way in which spectacle may be experienced and provided without bloodshed, and the relationship between spectacle and the work of the writer.

#### What is a “Natural” Border?

Giono only invokes political borders to reject them. The character who best embodies this across the span of several volumes is the ex-carbonaro Angelo Pardi, whose ties to his country and his republican party are quickly shown to be illusory. The novel *Angelo* opens with the moment when the eponymous protagonist crosses the border between Italy and France, against the remonstrations of the border guard, with one smooth bound of his horse (IV, 1-6, *Angelo*). Politically drawn borders are meant to be violated. From his leap on horseback out of Italy to his triumphant return, from the roadblocks set up to slow the spread of cholera in *Le Hussard sur le toit*, to the front of the Austrian army in *Le Bonheur fou*, frontiers are arbitrary lines limiting the individual (Angelo) in his freedom to go where he will and live as he pleases. The army lines attempt to limit the spread of "liberty" (or what the hero takes to be liberty) in Italy, and

with it Angelo's chances of living freely and in fact of living *at all* as he flees from the cholera-plagued South of France to the mountains. Needless to say, all these boundaries fail to stop not only Angelo but also the spread of revolution and cholera.

The artificiality, arbitrariness, and inefficacy of political borders portrayed in these novels echoes Giono's views of this type of frontier in the world of modern Europe, as he explains in a number of essays written during the buildup to World War II in the 1930s, notably in the pacifist call to civil disobedience *Refus d'Obéissance*, where Giono calls on all "peasants," farmers, people of the land, etc., to refuse the call to arms issued by the urban capitalist classes. Having served in the trenches in the first World War, including among the Russians (an experience chronicled in the short story "Ivan Ivanovitch Kossiakoff"), Giono had concluded that the political and supposedly national divisions separating countries mattered far less than those between classes, divisions that he reinforces by claiming that "La paysannerie n'est pas une classe; c'est une race" (VI, 500).

Far less arbitrary, however, are naturally occurring geographical dividing lines such as the Alps or the Durance river. Geographical or geological features take on a life of their own, and they also exercise an effect that is neither artificial nor arbitrary on their inhabitants. This is expressed as what Philippe Bonnefis described as Giono's "subjectivité géographique," visible throughout the author's work—from the enormous, destroyed matriarchs of *Ennemonde et autres caractères* to the voiceless, harmonica-playing villagers of Baumugnes in *Un de Baumugnes*; from the face of Quéréjéta in *Fragments d'un paradis*, which takes on an increasing resemblance to the high rocky outcrops of his native Basque Country to the contemporary example of the murderer of



the "Affaire Domenici," whose seemingly motiveless crime Giono attributed to the influence of the physical environment.<sup>36</sup> Differences exist, but they are part of the natural physical world, rather than any imposed separation. To distinguish these geographical borders from political ones, it may be helpful to consider them as geological or climatological divisions, which points out the primacy that Giono attributed to *qualitative* divisions rather than geographical divisions that could be politically manipulated. Nature (in the sense of the existing natural environment rather than heredity) is the primary influence on character(s) rather than culture, except insofar as the degree of culture conceived of as industrialized civilization affects or destroys one's relationship to nature or consciousness of it (this in spite of Giono's fondness for portraying local dialect and customs).

The existence of such geological or climate-based divisions for Giono brings out two other divisions essential to understanding his writing: the difference between the self and the surrounding world, and that between "man" in a general sense and nature. Both of these divisions draw their measure of reality from the permeability or impermeability of the human body to the rest of the world. Giono emphasizes the necessary porosity of the body to the surrounding world in his idea of the "chant du monde," most notably in the novel of the same name:

Il faut, je crois, voir, aimer, comprendre, haïr l'entourage des hommes, le monde d'autour comme on est obligé de regarder, d'aimer, de détester profondément les hommes pour les peindre. Il ne faut plus isoler le personnage-homme,

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<sup>36</sup> "Les lois naturelles qui déterminent la forme, la couleur, le tempérament d'une région déterminent le tempérament de ses habitants... Les vastes horizons donnent une âme; les vallées profondes, les vallons étroits en donne une autre." (*Journal, poèmes, essais* 707, "Essai sur le caractère des personnages")

l'ensemencer des simples graines habituelles, mais le montrer tel qu'il est, c'est-à-dire traversé, imbibé, lourd et lumineux des effluves, des influences du chant du monde. (I, 537, *Le Chant du monde*)

This passage tells us two things: first, that not only is "man" traversed by the song of the world, but that portraying this continuity is part of Giono's writing practice, and one that he finds necessary to do in order to bring about change both in the way that novels are written and (thus) in the way that people are perceived. The second thing that this passage indicates is that the influence of the world is seen as a song, that is to say: tonal, rhythmic, and potentially linguistic. In any case, it is sensory, sensuous, and possessed of aesthetic value. The interpenetrability of the human being and the world is assured by our multi-sensory perception of that world. This idea is further developed in the autobiographical *Jean le Bleu*, where the author discusses awakening to "sensuality:"

Cette sensualité qui me faisait toucher un mur et imaginer le grain de pore d'une peau. Cette sensualité qui m'empêchait d'apprendre la musique [...] cette sensualité qui faisait de moi une goutte d'eau traversée des formes et des couleurs du monde, portant, en vérité, comme la goutte d'eau, la forme, la couleur, le son, le sens marqué dans ma chair. (II, 96, *Jean le Bleu*)

Form, color, sound, and sense together show that the drop of water is not merely a visual prism for the light of the world, but also the shape and sound, which are equally implicated in the creation of meaning in the world. This relationship, however, is asymmetrical:

[T]out ça n'était pas seulement une image perçue par nos sens, mais une existence, une pâture de nos sens, une chose solide et forte qui n'avait pas besoin de nous

pour exister, qui existait avant nous, qui existait après nous [...] celui qui ne boira pas aura soif pour l'éternité. Celui qui boira aura accompli son oeuvre. (II, 98, *Jean le Bleu*)

The world has no specific need of us, whereas without it we would not survive. The world enters us and feeds us through our senses, quenches our thirst, satisfies us (Giono frequently uses the term *assouvir* to describe our relationship to sense experience) and also permits the accomplishment of one's work. Notable also is the distinction between "une *image* perçue par nos sens" (italics added) and the way he believes that the senses actually function, as "une pâture," a concrete substance *feeding* the senses. However—unlike in the worldview of Francis Ponge—we do not influence it in the same way. We are not uniform or continuous with nature, only indicative of it. The relationship between the two is one of indication and influence:

[P]our montrer de quelle façon nous sommes faits d'univers, tous les atomes de notre corps devraient être ainsi marqués d'abord d'une flèche, puis de nouveau chaque atome devrait être marqué de l'ensemble des flèches portant tous les symboles des raisonnements stellaires. (*Récits & Essais*, 477-78, *Le Poids du ciel*)

This denigration of the purely visual image fits with Giono's general suspicion of the visual and of the imaginary, the significance of which we will discuss later in this chapter. Throughout his work, the visual, while rich in imagery, is the sense with which he dispenses the most easily, with a number of blind characters whose other senses compensate for the loss featuring prominently in his novels (e.g. Clara of *Le Chant du monde*, Caille of *Mort d'un personnage*), and who have in no way lost communication with the world. In fact, Clara is in many ways much more attuned to her environment

than either of her sighted companions (I, 404, *Le Chant du monde*). It would be difficult, however, to imagine a non-sensual Giono—one where touch or smell, for example, were suppressed. This suspicion of the visual also appears in the examples Giono gives of how *not* to write, how *not* to view the world, which he equates with a scientific perspective:

On ne peut pas connaître un pays par la simple science géographique. On ne peut, je crois, rien connaître par la simple science; c'est un instrument trop exact, dur. Le monde a mille tendresses dans lesquelles il faut se plier pour les comprendre avant de savoir ce que représente leur somme [...] Quoi qu'il fasse, le savant s'approche toujours du monde comme l'astronome s'approche de la nébuleuse: avec un télescope. Il a beau multiplier les grossissements, il regarde toujours un reflet dans un miroir; il est d'un côté du miroir avec son corps entièrement fermé, tout clos, tout maçonné, tout cimenté, sauf la petite ouverture de la cervelle, et, dans le miroir qu'il regarde, il n'y a rien: c'est seulement à l'autre bout de la ligne d'angle d'incidence qu'il y a quelque chose dans l'infini, du fond du ciel. (III, 205, *L'Eau vive*)

This distrust of "visual" science is also reflected in his treatment of various incarnations of the figure of the *savant*, in the power and wisdom of the healer by touch such as Toussaint in *Le Chant du monde*, versus the ineffectual—if sympathetic—Casagrande of *L'Iris de Suse*, whose devotion to science has eventually led to him literally withdrawing from the world, where it cannot actually help him to protect the *baronne* from hurtling headlong to her death, and M. Hour of *Fragments d'un paradis*, who makes himself ridiculous as he insists on rational but manifestly incorrect explanations of the bizarre phenomena that befall the ship.

Another problem of modern science, or of the scientific worldview in general, is the way in which it tries to express nature in condensed terms that are fundamentally incompatible with what they are meant to express:

Pour que nous puissions seulement lire les nombres mesurant cet univers  
 subjectif : la nuit qui est maintenant contre moi avec toutes ses constellations, il  
 faut les abrégé et abrégé encore leur abrégé. Il faut les réduire jusqu'à des points  
 sans dimensions. Alors, ils sont lisibles et visibles, mais ils sont devenus  
 semblables à nous-mêmes : l'univers, ils le contiennent, mais si logiquement  
 assujetti à leur taille qu'il continue à l'infini dans leur matière l'insaisissable  
 infini. (R&E, 467, *Le Poids du ciel*)

The problem is not expression with words, but the pretension to express *the universe* with words. Unlike Francis Ponge's world—where words are elements of the physical world on equal standing with other parts of the universe—in Giono's way of thinking, words have a radical incompatibility of scale with the rest of the nonhuman universe; there is a radical break between the human and the natural universe.

### *La Grande Barrière to Be Breached*

This porosity with the outside world via the senses, however, is not complete in all cases. Between the individual human being and certain other entities there exists an insurmountable barrier, as described in an encounter between the narrator and a rabbit in an essay included in the collection *Solitude de la pitié*. Holding the rabbit in his hands after rescuing it from a predator, he realizes that:

Ce n'était pas de l'apaisement que j'avais porté là, près de cette agonie, mais terreur, terreur si grande qu'il était désormais inutile de se plaindre, inutile d'appeler à l'aide. Il n'y avait plus qu'à mourir. J'étais l'homme et j'avais tué tout espoir. La bête mourait de peur sous ma pitié incomprise; ma main qui caressait était plus cruelle que le bec du freux. Une grande barrière nous séparait. (I, 523, *Solitude de la pitié*)

If the human being is water traversed by the sense impressions of the world, what then is the nature of this barrier between the narrator and the frightened animal? This distinction, while it seems at first to rely solely on the difference between the two species, is actually much more complex. The collection of stories in which "La Grande barrière" is found is essentially an exposition of the idea expressed in the title: the solitude of the emotion of pity, of the isolation experienced even in relation to others:<sup>37</sup>

[L]a pitié est vaine puisqu'elle s'exerce dans la solitude [...] il importe d'être seul, puisque c'est là l'unique situation qui autorise cette forme essentielle de l'amour qu'est la pitié, la plus pure parce qu'elle n'attend rien en retour (I, 1058-9)

This form of love that expects nothing in return is the degree zero of love, of a relation to another person or thing, but it is also a total remoteness, an asymmetrical relating *to* rather than relation *with*. How is it possible to be at once part of "le grand Tout", the world, and at the same time to be isolated from the objects of one's pity and from small creatures such as the frightened rabbit by the "grande barrière"?

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<sup>37</sup> This passage evokes the two essential elements of tragedy according to Aristotle's aesthetics: terror and pity. Both of these are for Giono essentially functions of separation on opposite sides of one of these fundamental barriers. As we shall see, Giono considers that tragedy is brought about by a failed attempt to cross one of these barriers. Unlike Aristotle, however, he separates these aspects of the tragic from the idea of a true spectacle, which would be the *successful* breaching of these barriers.

In order to answer this question, a clarification must be made regarding the sense of the "world" for Giono. While at certain points Giono does indeed engage in passionate defense of an agrarian lifestyle in close contact with the natural world as opposed to civilized or industrialized society, this is only one part of the fundamental conflict at work in his writing. Humans are permeable to and permeated by the "world" in all of the sensory "pâture" it offers them. However, the "world" has a very specific connotation for Giono. The world or the universe refers not to infinite space and time and all that these can contain, but rather to totalities contained within the infinite organizations of space and time particular to one or multiple entities. The barrier between those operating on different principles of organization is greater than any species or physical barrier possible. As Jacques Chabot describes in his work of speculative criticism *L'Imaginaire*:

“Un monde” c'est la réalité à laquelle nous nous ajoutons, avec quelque chose en plus: notre point de vue. Qui n'est pas une opinion, mais une accommodation, pour y voir plus clair; et surtout avec ses propres yeux. (30)

The divisions between these coextensive worlds are the hardest to comprehend, marked as they are by a difference in organizing principles, what Chabot refers to as the "point de vue" and what Giono himself calls a "système de mesures" or "système de référence."

It should be noted that when Giono refers to the "real," it is not necessarily a reference to concrete, external, earthly realities, but rather to any part of one of these systems (meaning therefore that he is open to the existence of multiple realities), within each of which everything is self-sufficient and "natural," so that even within fictional worlds everything that exists is "natural" to that world and requires no comparisons to the system of measurement of everyday life, or what Giono refers to as "la terre." These

differences in measurement refer to measures of all sorts of values, both numerical and moral or aesthetic:

Il existe, évidemment, un système de référence comparable, par exemple, à la connaissance économique du monde et dans lequel le sang de Langlois et le sang de Bergues ont la même valeur que le sang de Marie Chazottes, de Ravanel, et de Delphin-Jules. Mais il existe, enveloppant le premier, un autre système de référence dans lequel Abraham et Isaac se déplacent logiquement, l'un suivant l'autre, vers les montagnes du pays de Moria; dans lequel les couteaux d'obsidienne des prêtres de Quetzalcoalt [sic] s'enfoncent logiquement dans des coeurs choisis (III, 481, *Un Roi sans divertissement*)

The husband of the Marquise Céline de Théus inhabited a different system of measurement, antiquated system of values alien to those of both his wife and the revolutionaries who eventually beheaded him.<sup>38</sup> As evidenced by this example, the same event can exist simultaneously with different values in multiple systems of measurements with radical differences in point of view.

Je me suis déjà servi d'une image faite avec les systèmes de références qui diffèrent les uns des autres et font varier de dimensions les mesures qui paraissent les plus stables. Je l'ai fait à propos de M.V., et pour donner une vague idée du monde réel, ce que Sophocle appelle la *démésure* (ce qui, d'après lui, est irrémédiablement puni par les dieux) n'est que l'ensemble des mesures d'un

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<sup>38</sup> “Il eut de la chance jusqu’au bout. Il finit par avoir la certitude de sa force; c’était au fond l’épreuve qu’il avait cherché désespérément toute sa vie: il se fit très noblement couper le cou pendant la Révolution de 89. Céline eut en revanche la certitude qu’il l’avait trompé de façon totale. Ils avaient ainsi pris tous les deux la guillotine comme appareil de mesure dans deux systèmes différents.” (IV, 17, *Angelo*)



système de références différent de celui dans lequel nous avons l'ensemble de nos propres mesures. Antigone qui prend la terre dans ses mains et en couvre le corps de Polynice n'a pas les mêmes mesures que Créon pour juger de la chose en particulier; et par conséquent des choses en général. C'est ce que veut exprimer la sagesse populaire quand au sujet de choses extraordinaires, elle s'exclame [...] c'est un monde! [...] Oedipe, Hamlet, Antigone trouvent tout naturel de faire une tragédie. Hamlet se serait écrié: "J'écrabouille Ophélie, je tue ma mère, j'étripe mon oncle (entre autres), et vous en *faites* une tragédie. Mais c'est un monde! Rien n'est plus naturel!" En effet, pour lui, rien n'est plus naturel. (III, 621, *Noé*)

The gulf between Antigone and Creon, between Hamlet and his audience is as great as that between the narrator of "La Grande barrière" and the frightened rabbit. They share no common measure by which to judge the narrator's actions. The same kind of differend exists between animal life and the mineral world, which is a source of great anxiety for Giono and his characters, who cannot imagine what the existence of the earth itself must consist of, and anxiety present from the very beginning of Giono's career as a writer:

Cette terre qui s'étend, large de chaque côté, grasse, lourde, avec sa charge d'arbres et d'eaux, ses fleuves, ses ruisseaux, ses forêts, ses monts et ses collines, et ses villes rondes qui tournent au milieu des éclaires, ses hordes d'hommes cramponnés à ses poils, si c'était une créature vivante, un corps? [...] De la vie? Mais, sûr! Car elle bouge, cette terre. (I, 148, *Colline*)

It is a life entirely alien to that of the humans it threatens, as in a text titled simply *La Pierre*.<sup>39</sup>

This is an essential part of the idea of disparate worlds, a concept that goes far beyond merely differing perspectives. Inhabitants of one world are inherently threatening to or threatened by those of another—whether it be Creon who finds Antigone's code of action threatening to the order he is establishing in Thebes (as well as being incomprehensible), or the rabbit shrinking before the narrator's effort to comfort it, or the villagers of *Un Roi sans divertissement* and their uncomprehending fear when faced with the seemingly irrational killing of M.V. These threats are not only perceived but real—the unknowable is not feared merely through incomprehension but also because it presents a concrete menace. Any effort to come into contact with another world, to enter into this new space and to measure oneself against a different system of measurement is met with disaster (or, more precisely, with tragedy).

Tragedy and its relation to *mesure* and *démésure* have already been evoked in relation to a number of classic dramatic works (the *Oedipus* cycle, *Hamlet*). While the actions of the tragic hero may seem incomprehensible, within the system of value or reference proper to these characters, their actions are *natural*, that is to say, coherent with their own *point de vue*:

Hamlet se serait écrié: "...Rien n'est plus naturel!" En effet, pour lui, rien n'est plus naturel. On me dira: c'est précisément là qu'est la tragédie. Je m'en doutais. C'est un peu pour ça que je me suis décidé à écrire ce que j'écris. Non pas que je

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<sup>39</sup> “Je trouve qu’on a toujours un peu trop confiance dans l’inertie des pierres; qu’on les traite avec trop de mépris [...] Peut-être tout ça doit se payer?” (*Journal, poems, essais* 741, *La Pierre*)

considère mon aventure comme une tragédie, mais ça peut poser pour un curieux opéra-bouffe. (III, 621, *Noé*)

On one hand, the *démésure* of the tragic hero can be a relation to a *divine* world, an aspiration to a higher plane of existence than that to which they as humans are naturally adapted. Pan and Dionysus, recurrent figures throughout Giono's work, are the only personified representatives of this divinity. They are both figures embodying chaos, disorder, and ecstasy as well as uncontrolled violence. They also represent both the desire to integrate one's self into "le grand Tout," the world, and the incapacity not only to do that but to find any common measure with the world they are trying to attain

Pan, Dionysos, symbolisent tous deux la vie universelle où l'homme essaie d'intégrer. Michelfelder, feuilletant l'exemplaire du *Rameau d'or* de James Frazer, que lui a prêté Giono, découvre en tête d'un chapitre traitant des "dieux incarnés", cette phrase écrite à la main du romancier: "collés au surnaturel comme la chair contre l'os". La mythologie et la tragédie grecques ont fourni depuis longtemps à l'imagination de Giono des dimensions qui satisfont pleinement son sens de la *démésure* et de l'épique. (II, 1330)

When contact between two incomprehensible orders is tragic, it is *monstrous*:

J'avais incontestablement là un *démésure* qui portait la marque olympienne: elle était entièrement installée dans l'ordinaire, le portatif et le quotidien; elle surprenait par son degré de monstruosité; rien de plus monstrueux que les langues sans chien. Des baisers sans *arrière-pays*. (III, 681, *Noé*)

The monstrosity, the *démésure* is not based purely on immense size, not a *quantitative* incompatibility, but on the lack of comprehension that is equivalent to the inability to see

beyond a barrier that exists even *within* the space that makes up our own world. This idea of a total lack of comprehension or recognition of the background of the monstrous emerges again in relation to Pauline de Théus as seen by her grandson Angelo III:

Derrière ses yeux, il y avait un endroit où l'on ne peut pas vivre: Un endroit où tout ce qui appartenait à la terre se volatilisait, comme se volatilise une goutte d'eau qui tombe dans une fournaise si ardente qu'elle dévore à la même seconde l'eau et la vapeur. Derrière les yeux de grand-mère, il y avait un endroit où l'on ne pouvait vivre que d'une façon inimaginable, en perdant à la même seconde à la fois le corps et l'esprit tels qu'on les a sur la terre. Peut-être alors rencontrait-on dans cet endroit-là des bosquets, des prairies d'asphodèles, des ruisseaux, des tertres, des collines, des vents, et des pluies; la douceur et la paix en tout cas, par rapport aux équivalents de la terre, des monstres qui tenaient lieu de ces éléments de notre vie. Si on acceptait de perdre son âme, si on arrivait à perdre son âme, si on arrivait à perdre cette préférence désespérée pour les objets de la terre, on devait pouvoir vivre parmi ces monstres, puisque grand-mère y vivait. Ils étaient peut-être là-bas tout à fait naturels; c'est même la certitude de ce monstrueux naturel qui terrorisait. Ils devaient composer des paysages aussi paisibles que les paysages de la terre [...] c'était peut-être aussi simple que ça, mais l'étrange endroit derrière les yeux de grand-mère dans lequel personne ni aucune chose de la terre ne pouvaient vivre était peut-être bien différent. On ne pouvait pas savoir.

(IV, 195, *Mort d'un personnage*)

The monstrous, however, exists only in one world relative to another. It is not necessarily repulsive. Despite the evocation of a warm oyster like a dog's tongue with nothing behind

it, the monstrous is most often the object of desire, a condition exemplified in *Moby Dick*, a novel that became for Giono the paradigm for desire inaccessible to the other:

L'homme a toujours le désir de quelque monstrueux objet. Et sa vie n'a de valeur que s'il la soumet entièrement à cette poursuite. Souvent, il n'a besoin ni d'apparat ni d'appareil ; il semble être sagement enfermé dans le travail de son jardin, mais depuis longtemps il a intérieurement appareillé pour la dangereuse croisière de ses rêves. Nul ne sait qu'il est parti ; il semble d'ailleurs être là ; mais il est loin, il hante des mers interdites. Ce regard qu'il a eu tout à l'heure, que vous avez vu, qui manifestement ne pouvait servir à rien dans ce monde-ci, traversant la matière des choses sans s'arrêter, c'est qu'il partait d'une vigie de grande hune et qu'il était fait pour scruter des espaces extraordinaires. Tel est le secret des vies qui parfois semblent nous être familières ; souvent le secret de notre propre vie. Le monde n'en connaît jamais rien parfois que la fin : l'épouvantable blancheur d'un naufrage inexplicable qui fleurit soudain le ciel de giclements et d'écume. Mais même, dans la plupart des cas, tout se passe dans de si vastes étendues, avec de si énormes monstres qu'il ne reste ni trace ni survivants. (III, 4, *Pour saluer Melville*)

The other's private world is represented by the desire for the destructive monstrosity of the other side of the ocean's surface.

As in the case of the elderly Pauline de Théus, the point of suture between different worlds, coextensive though they might be, is the face or the *regard*. Denis Labouret, in his essay "Le Visage et le visible dans *Noé*," discusses this transcendence behind the face or the eyes:

Il est donc temps de dissocier le visage du visible. A la suite de Levinas, Catherine Chalier écrit que "le visage, contrairement à l'image, ouvre une voie vers l'invisible dans ce volume consacré au Visage qui porte le beau sous-titre: "Dans la clarté, le secret demeure. "Giono retrouve l'humanité du visage dans Noé, moins par le retour à une conception idéaliste du caractère que par l'art de suggérer sa surprenante singularité, son épaisseur temporelle et le secret de son altérité [...] le trait retenu, loin de renvoyer à un signifié univoque, suggère alors en peu de mots un être univoque dont il préserve le mystère [...] La figure (de style) dépasse la figure (visible), permet de singulariser un visage sans pour autant le rendre représentable." (Labouret 1997, 92-3)

The face or the gaze is for Giono less a point of access to the world of the other's desire, than an indication *that it is there*—that at the same time as we calmly work in our garden, there is an imminent and potentially threatening reality, of which we can have no possible comprehension. The "croisière de ses rêves" menaces even him or her who takes that voyage, since it is without common measure with the capacities of the human being who seeks it.

### The Writer and the Spectacle of Violence

One can have multiple points of view available to them at a time, and such is the case of the writer. When writing about his own process, Giono recounts watching the story play out before his eyes, in his personal space. He clarifies, however:

J'ai peut-être donné l'impression que j'avais installé autour de moi un décor, un diorama, un vaste paysage *en réduction dans un petit espace*. Si je l'ai fait, c'est que je me suis mal exprimé, et que j'ai mal exprimé la chose...Car, pas du tout. Il ne s'agissait pas d'une *construction* semblable aux crèches de Noël où l'on installe toute la Judée et les déserts d'Arabie sur une table de cuisine (et, dans ce cas-là, les choses sont bien séparées sur la table, Nazareth vu par le gros bout de la lorgnette; autour de la table, le monde ordinaire vu à l'oeil nu). Il ne s'agissait pas non plus du système employé par Eugène Sue et Ponson de Terrail: de petites marionnettes de trente centimètres de haut représentant les personnages (enfin, de fer plastique pour qu'on puisse leur faire prendre toutes les attitudes). Pas du tout, ce qu'il faut bien comprendre, c'est que mon paysage était grandeur naturelle aussi. (III, 621, *Noé*)

Once more we have the word "natural," which, instead of meaning earthly or of common human measures, means rather that it is consistent with the internal system of reference of the world he describes in his novels—in this case *Un Roi sans divertissement*.

Although he sees the two systems superimposed, one upon the other, their scale has no common metric, and so it is useless to compare the two. His own body, perceptible in both of these systems, appears in the fictional world with Gulliver-like monstrosity by virtue of its origin in another world, but can establish no generalizable comparison of size between the two. Giono describes his process as follows:

J'ai ma vision du monde; je suis le premier (parfois le seul) à me servir de cette vision, au lieu de me servir d'une vision commune. Ma sensibilité dépouille la

réalité quotidienne de tous ses masques: et la voilà, telle qu'elle est: magique. Je suis un *réaliste*. (III, 705, *Noé*)

For Giono, there is no contradiction between the real and the magical. Writing is not a question of creation or of imagination, but rather the description of a reality incommensurable with the shared vision of the world. In the previous citation, it is evident that he emphasizes the fact that the novelistic world is not a *construction*. He does not fabricate, but merely learns or observes and attempts to express.

Recall that for Giono as well, imagination is a purely visual phenomenon inadequate to the richness of experience available in any of the possible worlds. Ventriloquizing the captain in *Fragments d'un paradis*, Giono remonstrates against the use of purely imaginary or visual stimuli to try to replace the "pâtüre de nos sens" that the real world is:

La plupart, s'ils deviennent des hommes de qualité, ne pourront plus vivre qu'en imagination. *Il faut qu'ils sachent que la réalité est plus fantastique que l'imagination*. Qu'ils vivent dans un monde plus coloré qu'une carte à jouer et plus savoureux que cette sauce aux poissons de Quéréjéta. Je veux les délivrer du jardin potager, de la boule de verre, de la succursale d'épicerie, du guichet de chemin de fer, de tout ce qui conditionne leur jardin d'Armide. (III, 967, *Fragments d'un paradis*)

The "boules de verre" are a recurring topic in the book, as a poor distraction (purely visual) from the blandness of everyday life—a substitute for the truly magical reality ignored by the inhabitants of the country.



The image of the *boules de verre* evokes the opposition of two themes recurrent in Giono's work: *ennui* and *spectacle*. The captain shows the link between the two in

*Fragments*:

Il n'est pas possible que la vie soit seulement ce que nous avons vécu jusqu'à présent...Je parle d'une pauvreté d'âme, et d'une *pauvreté de spectacle*. Je ne suis pas un philosophe: je m'*ennuie comme tout le monde*. Le spectacle de mes concitoyens me donne simplement cette sensation de mépris si terrible par l'isolement qu'elle procure instantanément. En face de moi, d'autres méprisent le reste de l'humanité dans lequel je me trouve, et sont aussi isolés que moi. (III, 900, *Fragments d'un paradis*)

*Ennui*, for Giono, is the primary motivation for action. It has often been remarked upon that he himself found writing to be a remedy for his own ennui and melancholy; he found writing and interacting with the characters portrayed in his books to give him enough food for his senses, rather than being tantalized by a spectacle made entirely of images. André-Alain Morello, in the notice to *Le Désastre de Pavie*, situates Giono in a current of thought in which ennui is a historical force, beyond merely a personal stimulus—thus lending more weight to the actions of the tragic hero:

Le divertissement, moteur de l'histoire: c'est pour lutter contre la passion de l'ennui que l'homme cherche inlassablement du nouveau. Il y a cette vision de l'histoire, inscrite au coeur de toute l'oeuvre de Giono, des accents de Cioran: "L'histoire ne serait-elle pas, en dernière instance, le résultat de notre peur de l'ennui, de cette peur qui nous fera toujours chérir le piquant et la nouveauté du désastre, et préférer n'importe quel malheur à la stagnation?" (*JPE* 1539)

Ennui has a specific sense for Giono, which he attributes to Pascal,<sup>40</sup> whom he cites at the end of *Un roi*, and whom he discusses in detail in his interviews with Jean and Taos

Amrouche:

C'est l'absence de divertissement dont parlait Pascal, simplement: l'absence de divertissement. Pascal dit: "Un roi sans divertissement est un homme plein de misère." Eh bien, voilà, cette absence de divertissement, pour moi je l'appelle "ennui"...le travail est à mon avis le seul moyen pour chasser l'ennui. Je vous ai dit l'action (le travail tombe dans l'action) ou le sommeil. Mais le travail, magnifiquement, vous emporte en dehors de l'ennui. Faisons une petite parenthèse: dès qu'on a organisé socialement le travail et les loisirs, des deux côtés, nous avons assisté à ce spectacle de gens qui à la fin de leurs travaux ne savent plus quoi faire, et à ce moment-là, s'ennuient. (Giono & Amrouche, 1990, 68)

For Giono, work has a special significance that is imbricated with the idea of the *métier* or artisanal work, which is rooted in the bodily apparatus of the worker:

C'est la grande importance du métier, et combien l'homme devient étrangement lumineux et attachant dès qu'avec ses mains et la science qu'on lui a transmise des générations mortes il transforme la matière en quelque chose d'utile pour tous. (R&E 670)

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<sup>40</sup> It will scarcely escape the reader's notice that Giono repeatedly makes reference to *ennui* as his prime motivating factor without ever mentioning the name most famously associated with that word: Baudelaire. While seeming to ignore the poet, his description of the phenomenon rejoins that of Baudelaire at several points: *ennui* is portrayed as a serious vice and a danger. *Ennui* is also linked for Giono with modernity—specifically with new technology and alienation from the senses. In fact, in addition to its links to Baudelaire, *ennui* could be seen the motivating factor for the same kind of perpetual revolution or rupture of values identified by Francis Ponge as modernity itself.

Real work, *métier*, is proper to each person, part of their patrimony, specifically in their blood: "On les fait [les enfants] comme on est et ce qu'on est on ne sait pas. On a tant de choses dans son sang" (II, 281, *Le Chant du Monde*). Work is performance of a *métier* rather than merely labor, the artisanal work that he praises in *Les Vraies Richesses*. Work, like exposure to a full sensory spectacle, is an assertion of one's own integration into the world in which one lives.

As the title of *Un Roi sans divertissement* suggests, ennui is the driving force of the plot. Both M.V. the murderer and Langlois the gendarme suffer from intense ennui when faced with the blank white canvas of the long winter's snow. What many critics have noticed is that the two men are looking for spectacle, looking for color and beauty as a "divertissement." What they fail to examine, however, is the difference between a sufficient and an insufficient spectacle. What *kind* of display would the two men need to be satisfied? The colors and polished brass of the Christmas mass are able to distract the killer temporarily from his desire to spill blood. However, this is only temporarily. Monica Kelley, among others has made the argument that Langlois's suicide is an eventual consequence of his visit to M.V.'s widow because he realizes that M.V. was "un homme comme un autre" with people who loved him and that Langlois could just as easily become a killer. Langlois already knew, however, that M.V. was an ordinary man, even before he caught him, before he knew who the killer was: "*Je ne crois pas, moi, qu'un homme puisse être différent des autres hommes au point d'avoir des raisons totalement incompréhensibles. Il n'y a pas d'étrangers.*" (III, 550, *Un Roi sans divertissement*). What Langlois saw in the widow's house was the overload of visual stimulation, from the wife's embroidery to the portrait of M.V. hanging on the wall. The

widow's eyes are red and worn from overuse. What he sees in that house is that visual distraction is not enough to conquer ennui, and in fact whets this appetite.

The "pauvreté de spectacle" spoken of by the captain in *Fragments d'un paradis* is not only a lack of spectacle but also the impoverishment of spectacle. Image alone cannot satisfy (*assouvir*) the need for distraction. If it could, M.V. would have been less likely than anyone else to seek distraction elsewhere. Langlois, instead of looking for visual distraction, looks for a wife, specifically one who is not beautiful and who doesn't "entoure" him with visual stimuli (III 583, *Un Roi sans divertissement*), indicating that what he comes to realize is that visual distraction can only sharpen the appetite for a more complete spectacle. He needs a "spectacle" that, despite the visual nature suggested by its name, is in fact a "pâture" for all of the senses. Rather than being just a visual image, it is a world that can enter into him via all of senses, with which he can be traversed, of which he can be a part. Jean-François Durand explains the problematic nature of the impoverished spectacle as a matter of *distance*:

La métaphore théâtrale est omniprésente. Elle est en elle-même créatrice de distance, elle insiste sur une visibilité du monde qui peut très bien se conjuguer avec le désenchantement car, lié au regard, l'univers peut perdre sa dimension olfactive et sonore, devenir objet d'intellection, et non pas matière à sensation.  
(58)

In his journal, written at the same time that he was writing *Fragments d'un paradis*, Giono clearly formulated his goal in writing:

Théorie: *Il n'y a pas de mondes imaginaires*. Tout dans ce livre doit être travaillé dans le sens de l'image. Il n'y a que le monde réel. Se garder de tout ce qui

pourrait faire ressembler *Fragments* à un roman utopique [...] rien que la vérité, et à ce sujet refaire soigneusement la psychologie des personnages humains, les rendre *très ordinaires*, pas d'exceptionnel en rien, sauf dans la *Conception du réel* [...] La révolution, la nouveauté, la *renaissance* doit être dans la *Conception du réel* ou une façon nouvelle pour l'homme de *rencontrer le réel* (nouvelle ou *renaissante*). Pas d'opposition entre le *réel* et l'*idéal*. Au contraire le réel plus étrange que l'idéal (fruit de la simple imagination humaine, tandis que le réel...).  
(*JPE*, 316, *Journal de l'Occupation*)

The worlds occupied by the writer are experienced fully, not just seen. Rather than merely playing out in front of him, they have depth and density: moving about his office, Giono tells how: "J'ai traversé la forme vaporeuse de M.V. A un moment même, nous avons coïncidé exactement tous les deux; un instant très court parce qu'il continuait à marcher à son pas et que moi, j'étais immobile. Néanmoins, pendant cet instant [...] j'étais M.V." (III, 615, *Noé*)

#### Distraction and Work : A *Pâture* for the Senses

Distraction and work are the two things that can keep the *ennui* at bay—or, as Robert Ricatte calls it in the notice to the pléiade edition, the "malheur radical" (VI, 882), radical separation from the world. It may seem paradoxical to couple the image of imbrication with the world with the separation of the individual worlds that Giono describes as the "croisière de ses rêves." This paradox is articulated in two different ways by Giono. First :

L'âme est la composante de tout. Elle organise; elle ordonne, elle unit, elle rejoint, elle se marie, elle se mélange. Pure, elle attache les hommes solitaires dans la compagnie du monde. Elle en fait comme des oiseaux couverts de racines. Je joins raisonnablement ces deux mots dont l'un est vélocité, l'autre immobilité; un l'image même de la danse, de la joie, de l'heureuse vanité du vent; l'autre, l'image de la plantation, de la cimentation, de la crispation profonde, de la force, éperdue qui serre le monde matériel, l'image de l'amour féroce, l'image de la nourriture.

(*R&E*, 335, *Le Poids du ciel*)

The other is that of the *voyageur immobile*, famous title of a short essay in which Giono describes himself as a child hiding in an *épicerie* and in his mind traveling to China. This image has been used by critics to describe the author as an adult writing about sea voyages while never leaving land, about historic battles in Italy, where he had made only cursory voyages. This oxymoron can also be taken derisively, to qualify Giono as something like an armchair philosopher, to further marginalize him as a regionalist.

Louis-Renée Kaspar's essay on "Le Petit garçon qui avait envie d'espace" makes the same point relative to commentary on the dream of the young boy in the title, refuting criticism that would trivialize the meaning of the nested spaces.<sup>41</sup> This title has a very precise meaning, however, relative to his conception of paradoxically coexisting spaces or

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<sup>41</sup> "Le texte de son rêve, familier et pourtant plein d'invention, est pure fiction. Donc il ne se réfugie pas dans le rêve: c'est grâce à ce rêve qu'il découvre que l'espace libre auquel il aspire est contenu dans le tout petit espace clos de son moi. La découverte de l'ambivalence spatiale libère en lui les pouvoirs de son imagination, expérience qui ne manque pas de nous faire penser à Giono de grand voyageur immobile, donnant libre cours à son imagination au fond de sa prison...L'immensité contenue dans une petite cervelle voilà le paradoxe qui le rend sensible à l'ambivalence et qui ouvre les portes de la création littéraire. Il suffit que l'imagination donne une forme à l'espace qui se trouve en lui." (100)

worlds with radically different systems of measurement. The writer can remain immobile in one world (e.g. the earth where he sits at his desk writing) and at the same time be fully experiencing movement through the novelistic world, or the movement of that world around and through him. This experience of velocity goes well beyond a voyage in one's mind's eye, so to speak. It is a vertiginous, multisensory phenomenon:

Si l'écriture peut vaincre l'ennui, c'est [...] qu'elle triomphe de la distance, c'est qu'elle introduit le mouvement dans le repos, la liberté dans la réclusion, c'est qu'elle domestique l'espace" (Neveux 1990, VI).

Writing must take the whole body into account: not only in the sense that it must give an account of the sense data from the whole body (although Giono is also well-known for the density and vividness of his descriptions of scent, sound, and tactile sensations, etc.). Writing itself, if it is to be work, *métier*, distraction from *ennui*, must be a physical practice, which the *voyage immobile* permits. For Giono, pleasure or joy is natural to the body through sense experience. That this joy, beyond mere satisfaction, is natural, leads him to elevate these pleasures and the distraction they provide from the disdain in which they are held by Pascal:

Il est facile d'acquérir une joie intérieure en se privant de son corps. Je crois plus honnête de rechercher une joie totale, en tenant compte de ce corps, puisque nous l'avons, puisqu'il est là, puisque c'est lui qui supporte notre vie, depuis notre naissance jusqu'à notre mort. Contenter l'intelligence n'est pas difficile, contenter notre esprit n'est pas non plus trop difficile. Contenter notre corps, il semble que cela nous humilie: Lui seul connaît cependant une éblouissante science. (II, 1352)

Giono recognizes, however, the difficulty of communicating the fictional worlds he experiences with others when his only tool is language. If we recall that, for Giono, words are an instrument on a merely human scale that make everything resemble the person using them rather than what they describe, worlds are an adequate medium for expressing one's own world, one's point of view, although they cannot pretend to absolute truth or adequacy:

Avec l'écriture on n'a pas un instrument bien docile. Le musicien peut faire entendre simultanément un très grand nombre de timbres. Il y a évidemment une limite qu'il ne peut pas dépasser, mais nous, avec l'écriture nous serions même bien contents de l'atteindre, cette limite. Car s'écrivent les uns à la suite des autres et les histoires, tout ce qu'on peut faire est de les faire enchaîner. Tandis que Breughel, il tue un cochon dans le coin gauche, il plume une oie un peu plus haut, il passe une main coquine sous les seins de la femme en rouge et, là-haut, à droite, il s'assoit sur un tonneau en brandissant une broche qui traverse une enfilade de six beaux merles bleus. Et on a beau ne faire attention qu'au cochon rose et à l'acier du couteau qui l'égorge, on a en même temps dans l'oeil le blanc des plumes, le pourpre du corsage (ainsi que la rondeur des seins pourpres), le brun du tonneau et le bleu des merles. Pour raconter la même chose je n'ai, moi que des mots qu'on lit les uns après les autres (et on en saute). (III, 642, *Noé*)

Breughel is Giono's model in art, not only because of the thematic similarity of their work, but also because Breughel succeeds in creating an aesthetic density, contrast, and interconnected structure of multiple parts. That allows for mobility of the viewer rather than static contemplation of the "impoverished" spectacle of an image alone. Like



Breughel, the painter described in Giono's *Le Déserteur* manages to create a sense of depth and movement with the disposition of paints:

[L]e Déserteur offre aux sens et à l'esprit ses beaux petits tas de couleur pure, organisés sur la page blanche par ses doigts adroits, laborieux et inspirés, en un "grand théâtre" magnifique. Ces mains blanches (qui sont comme l'emblème du Déserteur) sont aussi des mains de thaumaturge, et c'est là un des traits avec la solitude et la souffrance, qu'il possède en commun avec Toussaint, l'ermite du *Chant du monde*, un des personnages clefs de l'oeuvre de Giono. D'ailleurs l'écrivain ne fait que suivre la légende qui fait du peintre de Nendaz un sorcier bienfaisant et veut que les formules écrites sur de petits papiers de même que la terre où se repose son corps, aient conservé jusqu'à nos jours des vertus thérapeutiques éminentes. (VI, 948)

The physical medium of paint allows for the building of a spatial, textured reality to be experienced fully by its audience. In the notice to the *pléiade* edition, Henri Godard suggests the following way in which words could be used to the same effect:

"[P]our qu'il puisse supporter le fait que le monde a été créé, il est obligé chaque jour, parfois chaque heure, à tout moment, de refaire en lui-même la création du monde." Écrire, c'est donc relever le défi, en opposant au monde qui existe ces mondes imaginaires qui ne sont fait que de mots, dont les rapports internes sont ceux qui s'établissent entre les mots, et les lois, celles qui régissent cet usage particulier du langage, qu'est la littérature—mondes invisibles, impalpables, mais qui, dans l'esprit des hommes peuvent n'avoir pas moins de réalité que l'autre. Mondes, ceux-là, créés par l'homme tout entiers nécessaires et transparents (ces

cristaux, disait Valéry du poème), dont l'existence, par moments, balance celle de l'univers" (III, 1112)

This critique proposes an interesting solution to the problem of how words can create a spatial reality with different laws and spatial relationships as being constitutive of literature itself, that figures and grammar are the governing structures of this world. The degree to which texture of the *oeuvre* as a whole can also be seen as increasing with the complexity and intertextuality of the work.<sup>42</sup> One goal of Giono's—not completed—was to structure the *Cycle du Hussard* in such a way that the relationship between time and space between the different parts of the narrative would be woven together with a new kind of novelistic texture. However, Godard errs in calling these worlds "invisibles" and "impalpables" and locating them within the "esprit," both of which seem to undermine the spatial reality of the text.

The sheer difficulty of creating a text that allows access to another world or universe using only words is not the only problem facing the writer. If we recall the original discussion of *démésure*, the move between worlds is a dangerous one. Measuring oneself against the standards of a non-human world is punished by the gods as hubris. The paradigmatic examples of the sin of *démésure* are all cases from Greek mythology—specifically the case of Prometheus, who dared to try to measure himself against the gods, stealing fire from the gods to give to man, transgressing the limits between systems of reference in both directions, but in the end failing to successfully bridge the gap between

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<sup>42</sup> Another aspect of texture in Giono's work, in addition to the density and interconnectedness of the sensory details he provides, is his use of intertextual references. In addition to the explicit allusions to Homer, Virgil, Sophocles, Pascal, Melville, etc., these texts are full of hidden references to other authors and historical events. His textual worlds exist in relation not only to the earthly exterior world, but also to other literary worlds.

the two. Giono claimed to have experienced an awakening at a young age to what the capital sin within his worldview would be and what his relationship to that sin would be:

Prométhée! C'était un pêcheur! il était puni, on lui faisait dévorer son foie par un vautour! Il était dans un enfer perpétuel. Voilà un pêcheur! Alors, je comprenais...c'était le péché le plus terrible: la démesure. C'est un péché que je connais parce que c'est un péché que je commets constamment. D'ailleurs, je vous l'ai montré pendant tous ces entretiens, en parlant très rapidement, je ne parle pas de ce que j'ai dit, je parle de la façon dont je l'ai dit, avec cette hâte. J'aurais pu prendre mon temps, j'aurais pu mettre des repos, j'aurais pu le prendre à mon aise. Mais je me suis précipité, au contraire, à vous raconter. Ça, c'est de la démesure! C'est une démesure physique. C'est un très grand péché et j'en souffre. Je suis un pêcheur de démesure (Giono & Amrouche 1990, 138)

In addition to the content and structure of his language, and the speed with which he produces it, the velocity of the movement that is literary production is in itself excess.

Giono is conscious not only of his portrayal of other worlds in prose, but also of exceeding the dimensions of his own personal world, of being disproportionate in a way of which Ponge would have approved (in the sense of the seed or the bomb that contains within it the potential for much greater effect proportionate to its size).

Other classical examples he cites are Priam and Antigone. For both of these, the penalty for trying to measure themselves in the system of reference of the gods or of justice in some other scale than the human, is death. For the husband of the Marquise Céline de Théus in *Angelo*, his desire to be measured by the standards of the dead social order entailed beheading at the hands of the revolution. Captain Ahab tried to test himself

against the monstrous depths of the sea, where the creatures have no common measure with the *terre*, with the common world of humans. Giono himself claims, however:

Je n'ai pas de vautour. Je ne m'ennuie pas. J'ai posé le principe de l'ennui au début, pour vous expliquer pourquoi j'écris et pourquoi je me distrais en écrivant. Il n'y avait pas de vautour, mais j'imaginai que je pouvais être à la place de Prométhée, à ce moment là, mes images prenaient un autre sens! Pour moi, puisque j'étais sans Dieu, ce qui me paraissait le plus terrible, c'était de se bagarrer contre la vie. Le vautour, c'était la vie elle-même, et moi j'étais le petit Prométhée, le tout petit Prométhée dont le vautour pouvait dévorer, le foie. Mon foie était dévoré par la vie [...] Brusquement, j'apprends que je peux être puni pour un péché, je sais que je suis doué pour le commettre. C'est le péché de démesure" (*ibid*, 139-40)

Giono describes a moment at which he became conscious of the risk that he runs in life as someone with the gift of *démesure* that he exercises as a writer (“mes images prenaient un autre sens”). He conflates several things here: the vulture gnawing at Prometheus’s liver, *ennui*, and life itself. Giono envisions a world in which he could be punished with life itself, full of *ennui*, as the instrument of punishment, a fate he only escapes through working. It is not quite clear whether when he calls himself “le petit Prométhée,” he is referring only to size, or whether he is seeing his future. Rather than the immediate death of his other examples of tragedy, one alternative is evisceration and exposure with the possibility of being eaten alive. The exposure of his insides, though, is in fact central to Giono’s identity as a writer. Prometheus stretched open across the hills of Provence is a spectacle himself.

A less incredible, more concrete example of the consequences of being trapped between two different worlds is the fate of the elderly Pauline de Théus in *Mort d'un personnage*. As we have already mentioned, Pauline's interior life appeared monstrous and alien to her grandson as she sought for a way to rejoin her dead lover Angelo:

Il était manifeste qu'elle cherchait quelque chose. Elle avait dû d'abord le chercher longtemps en elle-même, puis autour d'elle, dans ce château de Rians, les terres, les collines, et les forêts qu'elle avait vendues en un jour avant de venir chez nous chercher plus loin. De plus en plus loin, et de plus en plus avidement, à mesure que le temps passait: depuis qu'elle était certaine qu'aujourd'hui était toujours vide, que demain était son seul espoir. A-t-elle fini par comprendre que la mort seule pouvait le lui faire rejoindre? Je ne crois pas: elle aurait sauté dans la mort.

(IV, 157, *Mort d'un personnage*)

Pauline existed in two different worlds, but her investment in the world to which the narrator has no access drains her physical presence from the earthly world, despite not being able to access the world she desires, where Angelo I (the grandfather of the narrator) would be:

Ma grand-mère jouissait d'une sort d'exterritorialité universelle. A part sa poigne, à part son pas, à part son coeur, elle n'était que fumée. Son corps n'existait que par la grâce du dessin qu'elle avait tracé. (IV, 159, *Mort d'un personnage*)

The author, who has access to those multiple worlds as well, runs the risk of his own body being drained by its position in another world, of being unable to feed on the sense perceptions offered by this world. As Giono describes with Pauline:

"Rien de ce qui existait sur terre ne pouvait vivre dans ma grand-mère, de l'autre côté de ses yeux...Rien. Elle ne pouvait être habitée que par elle-même, jamais par une image, jamais par la consolation d'une couleur, d'un son, d'une odeur dont la modulation s'ajoute à la modulation du sang...jamais par une association d'idées qui éclaire, et l'ont fait un pas enchanté. Elle était aveugle du coeur. Elle ne pouvait rien connaître" (IV 193 *Mort d'un personnage*)

Giono's own attachment to his private worlds runs the risk of distracting him *too* much, of detaching him from the concrete earthly reality he values so highly.

The themes of tragedy and distraction come together in what Giono calls the "theater of blood." The bleeding out into the universe that is the result of tragedy, the punishment for *dém mesure*, the exposure of one's insides to the public in need of distraction; it is the opportunity to move beyond purely visual representation of the impoverished spectacle. Beyond providing mere food for the senses, it gives the spectators the opportunity to sate themselves thoroughly on the blood being spilled for their distraction. The two kinds of tragic hero presented by Giono are those who bleed out into this world (as is the case with Langlois's exploding head)—or those who bleed their essence into an interior world, e.g. Pauline. Giono, writing in *Pour saluer Melville*, explains that this is the person who is on the *dangereuse croisière de ses rêves*. As Robert Ricatte describes in the preface to the entire pléiade collection of his work

A propos du terme *s'assouvir* qu'il emploie pour les bergers éventreurs—pour le spectacle qu'ils se donnaient ainsi, Giono *étend* le terme et la chose à toute représentation théâtrale, qui a pour lui quelque chose de violent et de sexuel, à tout rideau qui s'ouvre et livre à l'espace du dehors l'espace du dedans: "en réalité

on s'assouvit aussi quand on est dans un fauteuil et qu'on regarde le spectacle [...]  
 Ça c'est ouvert! On s'assouvit. C'est fini. On sort [...] et c'est *animal post coïtum*  
*triste*[...].Le spectacle est toujours érotique:

Mieux: il explique comment s'opère dans le personnage qu'il compose une sorte  
 lui est dû, en sa profondeur et en son étendue: "J'ai besoin à un moment de donner  
 une échelle d mon personnage et je fais alors apparaître le thème du sang. C'est un  
 tout petit passage, mais il y est, car c'est l'*étiage*. Je vais ouvrir les avenues du  
 personnage pour que nous entendions ses échos. (I, xvi)<sup>43</sup>

The theatrical spectacle has the same limits of any distraction that is event and not  
 a constant activity. The eroticism of the spectacle is only in the punctual, fleeting nature  
 of the sensual pleasures it offers. However, it is also true that any spectacle *worthy of that*  
*name* will offer the same kind of multi-sensory satisfaction that ends in a sensual-sexual  
 release for the spectator. However, blood is not merely an example taken at random or  
 meant only to shock. This is nowhere more evident than in the short story "Silence" from  
*Faust au village*:

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<sup>43</sup> Ricatte broaches the question of eroticism here, a question rarely addressed directly by Giono himself. Doubtless there is an erotic current at work throughout Giono's literary production, inextricable from the *sensuality* he would more readily admit. Both his characters and the structure of his works build to a pitch of stimulation that resolves itself in the *assouvissement* offered by true spectacle. Giono's sexuality, however, rather than that of an adult, is concentrated in any stimulation—in the contact and interpenetration of the self and the world. It is also inseparable from the nutritive function, regarding both the nutritive value of blood (about which we will see more momentarily) and the nourishing maternal body (the grotesquely obese Ennemonde, Saucisse, etc.) Giono's sexuality/sensuality is therefore not exclusive in its object choice. It is equally as easy to find examples of homoeroticism in his work as heterosexual desire, but all of them prove to be examples of a far more infantile form of sexuality, the polymorphous perversity that finds satisfaction in stimulation and feeding of all the senses.

"Le sang est la grande distraction. Travailler, ça mène à quoi? Alors si vous faites un trou dans quelqu'un—et ça se fait sans peine—dès que le sang coule, on est tout de suite un autre homme. Voilà qui distrait du train-train quotidien. Ne parlons pas des bénéfiques. Parlons simplement du sang quand il est versé; tel qu'il est par exemple, là-haut dans la grande salle de Silence, répandu par terre et ruisselant. Quelle admirable propriété! Quel splendide pays! Quelle province, quel beau duché, quel nouveau monde! Cherchez, dans toute la création; à la longue vous ne trouvez rien. Le paradis recule comme une carotte attachée devant le nez d'un âne, et pour arriver, à ce zéro, que de peines.

"Où sont les gras pâturages des hommes? Dans le sang versé. Mais il n'est pas jusqu'aux hirondelles d'Afrique qui n'y soient dorées, qui ne partent de plus loin que le lever du soleil pour venir y faire leurs danses, et leurs voltiges. Et les cailles? N'y a-t-il pas dans le sang versé les cailles les plus grasses pour fournir la fine chère à tous ceux qui y chasseront? Le sang versé? Mais les mésanges, les canaris, les canards siffleurs, les oies sauvages ne viennent-ils pas d'au-delà des montagnes après avoir franchi tant de frontières pour enrichir finalement quoi? Le sang versé! Et pour y faire quoi? Pour s'engraisser, devenir désirables, et représenter les vastes étendues des espaces et des forêts qu'on peut juger d'un clin d'oeil ou d'un reniflement de narines. Le sang versé? Ah! le bon air qu'on y trouve. Quand quelqu'un est mal en point, ou ramolli, ou qu'il a des plaies au derrière, s'il s'y fait porter, le voilà guéri. Le sang versé? Quel pain on y boulangé! Un pain surfîn, à la croûte de miel craquant, et la mie est comme un nuage de mai. Et le vin qu'on y presse qui crie: "Bois-moi" et qui saute tout seule dans les verres.



Ah! Le sang quand il est versé est le plus beau pays du monde. C'est le sang où l'on soit vraiment à son aise" (V, 176-7, *Faust au village*)

The first characteristic of the blood here is its multisensory nature--not only that it appeals to all the senses, but that it feeds them with bread, wine, and fatty "cailles." It is the *pâture par excellence* for the senses. Its second characteristic is the fact that it is a new kind of space, a new world, an opening to the interior world of the other, the monstrous, the "paradise" that is found on the other side of the other person's skin. The spilling of blood as spectacle is the opening onto the world of the other. This allows the spectator to be the complement of the tragic hero or the writer being opened onto the world. In this sense all spectacle, tragedy, poetry, literature that is worthy of that name in its appeal to all of the senses is the spilling of blood, the opening of the interior world to the outside is the essence of the theater of blood that is the work of Jean Giono.

#### Politics, Pacifism, and The Theater of Blood

It may seem strange that an author so well known for his militant pacifism on both the state and personal level should wax poetic about spilled blood. How can someone who claims to have refused completely to fire his weapon during World War One (*Récits & Essais* 263, *Refus d'Obéissance*) and who refused as well to take a combat role in the local resistance during World War Two, despite his obvious sympathies in that direction and provision of material aid to the resistants (Giono & Amrouche 1990, 258-283), find the idea of spilled blood so seductive to all the senses, one of the two solutions to the ever-encroaching *ennui* of a non-integrated life in search of distraction. Whenever

mass death is at stake, however, it seems not to have quite the same kind of seductive power. The carnage featured in the trench scenes of *Le Grand Troupeau* and in the abandoned houses filled with the victims of cholera is nothing but disgusting: while one might find a certain level of sublime terror, there is nothing in it to rejoice the senses, almost at times seeming to come from a célinian world of constant disgust and nausea. The body, rather than being nurtured, vomits out its substance in response to what is presented to the senses.

The main difference seems to be the presentation of the body and the blood. It is the red blood spilled to become itself the spectacle—its continued existence as a monstrous world opened into this world rather than merely another element of filth mixed in with the mud and rain and vermin of this world. The blood on the floor of *Silence* is its own spectacle. The blood spilled first by M.V. and then by Langlois in *Un Roi sans divertissement* on the snow is evaluated only in terms of the beauty and satisfaction of the individual spectacle ("parlons en peintre"<sup>44</sup>) rather than the total social phenomenon of the war, of the epidemic. Only insofar as it is a separate *aesthetic* incident separated from the political dimension can death become beautiful, be experienced fully as its own sensory phenomenon. This is evoked multiple times in the *Hussard* cycle, in the contrast between the *belle mort* Angelo felt compelled to give the Baron Schwarz/Swarz and the death from which he tried to save the choleric, regardless of their moral character. Regarding the Baron, even with the risk of his own exile and possible death

en le blessant à l'endroit qu'il avait visé, Angelo n'était pas animé par le dessin de tuer, car il aurait alors visé le coeur--mais par celui de *faire beau*. Non pas

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<sup>44</sup> III, 480

*fascination cruelle* de la tâche rouge sur le blanc de neige, mais contemplation esthétique de l'artiste disposant sur le blanc de la toile ses teintes rouge et or, mêlant, si l'on préfère, l'explosion rouge à l'éclaboussement d'or (Pinchon 2005, 58)

This "explosion rouge" and "éclaboussement d'or" are also the images associated with several suicides in Giono's world, most famously that of Langlois:

Il y eut, au fond du jardin, l'énorme éclaboussement d'or qui éclaira la nuit pendant une seconde. C'était la tête de Langlois qui prit enfin les dimensions de l'univers. Qui a dit: *Un roi sans divertissement est un homme plein de misère?* (III, 606, *Un Roi sans divertissement*)

A previous incarnation of this scene was the suicide of Aurore in *Que ma joie demeure*, where her inability either to integrate herself in the world or into Bobi's interior world ended when "Aurore était tombée à la renverse. Elle s'était tiré un coup de fusil dans la bouche. Elle n'était plus une femme. Avec ses éclaboussures de cervelle et de sang rayonnant autour d'elle, elle éclairait l'herbe et le monde comme un terrible soleil" (II, 272, *Que ma joie demeure*). These suicides are in each case an opening up of one's own body, one's own world as a spectacle—making a hole in someone who happens to be oneself. Giono also demonstrated a fascination with the idea of Aztec sacrifice, where evisceration was individual, personal, solemn, and seen as important on an individual level. It was also a sacrifice where the aesthetic element was brought to the fore in the selection of perfect physical specimens for its victims.

On the contrary, in the case of cholera, the individual event of the death is effaced by the unremarkableness of being one among innumerable others, who will all be burned

together or buried in a mass grave, but even before death the individual esthetic experience of the face is erased by the nature of the disease:

Le cholérique n'a plus de visage: il a un *faciès*, un *faciès éminemment cholérique*. L'oeil enfoncé dans l'orbite et comme atrophié est entouré d'un cercle livide et à moitié couvert de la paupière supérieure. Il représente ou une bien grande agitation de l'âme ou une sorte d'anéantissement. (V, 620-1, *Le Hussard sur le toit*)

An agitation of the soul and annihilation are hardly incompatible, and indeed it is the annihilation of the individual face, coupled with the abject nature of the fluids disgorged by the choleric—instead of bright red blood there are feces and grainy vomit the texture of rice pudding. There is nothing artistic about these dejections compared to the intense pigments of blood—blue-green in the veins of Giono's milky-white women, crimson on the white snow. Another effect of the cholera was another kind of isolation:

Un phénomène qui inquiéta tout le monde: la voix ne portait plus. On avait beau essayer de parler à quelqu'un, on continuait à se parler confidentiellement à soi-même. L'interlocuteur vous regardait en silence et, s'il se mettait lui aussi à parler, on ne voyait que sa bouche qui remuait et c'était toujours le silence, un silence un peu grondant. Si on criait, le cri vous claquait près des oreilles mais vous étiez seul à l'entendre. Et cela dura plusieurs jours. Naturellement, l'air étant fait de plâtre, la vue était très limitée. Si on voulait voir loin, on était obligé de se baisser comme pour regarder par-dessous une porte. (IV, 451, *Le Hussard sur le toit*)

The epidemic took away not only the appearance of difference, of individuality, but also the ability to open one's world to others in any way.

Another related distinction between the violence of war and that of murder, dueling, and human sacrifice is that between spectacle proper and mere visual stimulation. The distraction offered by blood in war, while never being fully able to satisfy the senses in the way that full or non-impooverished spectacle, resembles the flattened spectacles of imagination in that they whet the appetite for the real thing. As when in *Deux cavaliers de l'orage*, Marceau Jason gets a taste for blood and combat in his fight against the wild horse and in his burlesque fights with Clef-des-coeurs and village strong men, it can only be satisfied (*assouvi*) in a fight to the death with the most beautiful person he knows, to spill his beautiful red blood on the white snow: it is fake fighting without personal risk involved will only lead the real violence and bloodshed. Once one has become a murderer in the non-satisfying sense of war, there is a possibility that, like M.V. surrounded by the embroidery of his wife, one will seek a better solution—either something that better satisfies the artist's eye that has been awakened in him, or to purge the memory of the disgust awakened by the mixed blood, mud, vomit, and rot, the babies whose heads are smashed like "soft cheeses." Giono explains the selfishness satisfied by violence in his description of the temperament inherent in the climate of Provence. This temperament is the result of a sharpening of the desire for stimulation under the Provençal sun, a hothouse for violence and spectacle. In these same hills where he saw Prometheus stretched out with the vulture eating his liver:

"Si j'ai parlé de ce théâtre, c'est que nous sommes dans une dramaturgie générale comme dans tous les pays à soleil [...] Théâtre direct à base de sang et de

violence, puisque c'est le moyen le plus direct de se procurer du sang. Les pays à lumière grise ont le temps prolongé qui permet la patience génératrice de diplomatie et par conséquent de société; les pays à soleil vivent vite, obligent à la violence et à la solitude. Cette rapidité de vie produit le mensonge. Non pas le contraire de la vérité, mais le mensonge général, c'est-à-dire la création d'une autre vérité." (VI, 337, *Ennemonde et autres caractères*)

He further clarifies, in his interviews with Jean and Taos Amrouche, what makes these lies a kind of truth, another world or universe:

Je crois que la vérité d'une image, la vérité du mensonge, quoique ce soit une phrase paradoxale, la vérité du mensonge, vient de ce que les sensations qu'on ajoute sont exactement du même ordre que les sensations véritables auxquelles on les ajoute. (107)

Angelo after his traversal of cholera-ridden France, despite his general disillusion with the movement for independence, has an immediate impulse to rejoin the fight in Italy where he can reregulate his relationship to death and killing. As Philippe Pinchon says in his article "Tuer dans *Le Bonheur fou*: un ouvrage d'homme":

C'est à Angelo que Giono confie le soin de formuler la grande règle et maxime militaire: à la guerre, il faut tuer posément, sans se presser, comme on *travaille* [en italique dans le texte, 820]

L'expression mérite explication: elle ne résume pas, bien sûr, l'idéologie de Giono, mais seulement l'imaginaire du chapitre: tuer comme on travaille, c'est tuer non pour *se divertir*, se contenter, s'assouvir égoïstement—la réflexivité est la forme syntaxique de l'égoïsme—mais tuer en "s'oubliant" [...] c'est obéir non pas à

d'obscures pulsions issues de l'être intime, mais à un ordre clair venu d'une personne extérieure; non pas à l'ardeur du sang, comme des pur-sang, comme celui de *Deux cavaliers ce l'orage*, mais à la froideur, comme des serpents." Il faut—toute rêverie se nourrissant d'antithèses—dans le *feu* même de l'action—surtout quand cette action est elle-même "feu commandé" ou "feu allumé."  
(Pinchon, 2005, 52)

While Pinchon rightly points out the importance of "travail" in this description of killing, he fundamentally misrecognizes the relationship between work and "distraction" for Giono as well as the "froideur" involved with taking orders. Work and distraction have, as we have shown, a certain equivalence in that work provides the active, multi-sensory, stimulation necessary for distraction from *ennui*. Distraction is not vain. Work is being done. Movement is being made.

Killing as distraction is an *assouvissement*, is the most selfish thing that one can do, in the sense that it is what saves one personally from *ennui*, but on the other hand, it is exactly that that connects one to the world, that allows that world to permeate the self via the senses. M.V., who killed "en peintre," killed "posément, comme on travaille" as well, but was also the prime example of a passion whetted by the sterile imagery of tapestry, that could only be satisfied by the steaming red blood splashed across the cold snow, the bodies stashed in the fork of a tree. This is *not* the same kind of *froideur* that comes from obeying an exterior order. An exterior order is the same kind of order against which Giono exhorted the "peasants" in his 1937 text *Refus d'obéissance*, the kind of social order feared by Martial/Langlois in *Les Récits de la demi-brigade* when questioning his orders at the end of the book:

"On m'a répondu: "Vous n'avez pas à choisir entre une belle mort et une miteuse. C'est nous (c'est-à-dire l'État ou les quelques types qui en tiennent lieu), c'est nous qui avons seuls le droit (et le devoir, a-t-on ajouté) de vous envoyer à la mort la plus utile." J'ai eu encore la bêtise de demander "Utile à qui?" On n'a pas daigné me répondre. J'ai dit: "Oui, mais alors, la mort au champ d'honneur, qu'est-ce que ça devient?" On m'a répondu: "Ça devient mort en service commandé [...] Ça va se généraliser, vous savez? On devient moderne!" Je répondis au bout d'un moment: "Dans cent ans, il n'y aura plus de héros". (V, 120, *Récits de la demi-brigade*)

Giono echoes the sentiment in his own voice as he writes about the relationship between the death of heroism and the material world in his *Journal de l'Occupation*

De chaque côté le matériel tue l'héroïsme. Et si je me réjouis de la mort de l'héroïsme militaire [...] je regrette la mort de l'héroïsme tout court. C'était la plus haute situation poétique que pouvait atteindre l'homme. Et l'homme moderne va mourir par hémorragie de poésie [...] Ils croient habiter un monde où tout est réduit au matériel. Quand ils ne se rendent pas compte que le matériel lui-même le plus compact, est plus pertuisé et plus inconsistant qu'une éponge et comme elle au fond des gouffres de la mer, baigné, parcouru, gonflé, vivifié d'esprit et de mystères salés. Et qui peuvent d'un moment à l'autre être bouillonnants de typhons invisibles" (*JPE 316, Journal de l'Occupation*).

Modernity, progress, the scientific point of view on the material world exclude the sensual, exclude access to worlds other than the common reality of the world. It loses its poetry



It is necessary, however, to qualify the sort of heroism championed by Giono. It is a quality that, while offering up a proper spectacle, is not necessarily “spectacular” or prodigious. Rather, it comes from work. In one of his notebooks, Giono wrote:

Un poète n'a pas d'ailes. Il travaille. Rien ne se fait par inspiration. Tout se fait par le travail le plus conscient et le plus lucide qui soit. Pas d'ivresses, pas de grands coups d'ailes, pas de fuites. Des racines, un travail constant, une discipline poussée jusqu'à l'héroïsme et un petit truc dont vous ne parlez jamais mais qui compte: choisir. Choisir entre la vie (avec un grand V) et l'oeuvre. Si vous vivez vous ne pourrez pas écrire et si vous écrivez vous ne pourrez pas vivre. (Carnet [op.36] 41)

This is one of the few places where Giono admits that the work of the writer exposed constantly to non-earthly personal worlds, possesses the kind of heroism that Pauline de Théus has—one in which the struggle toward another world, another system of reference, results in withdrawal from the living world. Giono is therefore proposing a world where, unlike Ponge, the author or poet plays the role of hero, as an exception both to the norms of what human beings are and what they should be, while for Ponge the poet was perhaps an extreme example of human integration into the world of which they are part. Any words can move the atoms of the world around. The revolutionary intent and/or effect is what qualifies the performer as an artist or poet. This comes at no detriment to the artist's person. It is a constantly regenerative, recombinatory process. For Giono's poet, however, to push his work to heroism is potentially to deny their earthly life (on the model of Pauline de Théus).<sup>45</sup> The poet, while enriching the lives of his audience by bringing them

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<sup>45</sup> “L'artiste est à la fois l'ogre qui dévore le réel pour le transformer en matière

into contact with multiple worlds, enriching the "pâture" for their senses, risks having the physical, sensory "work" of experiencing and recreating concurrent worlds drains his own presence from life on earth:

Exprimer par sa voix plus que soi-même, être le medium par lequel se communiquent aux hommes la grandeur et la beauté, c'est savoir se perdre, pour accéder à un mystère supérieur: l'artiste est par excellence celui qui laisse s'abolir sa subjectivité dans le Tout qui l'intègre. C'est bien une forme de monstruosité, cette connaissance qui est naissance avec le monde, avec le chaos des formes dans leur mouvement primordial, et qui exige que l'individu renonce aux barrières de son identité humaine (Labouret 1994, 57)

L'idéal de l'artiste selon Giono dans les années trente, est d'opérer cette assimilation du monstrueux qui suppose dans la plongée au coeur du monde et la reconstitution d'un sujet capable de comprendre et de nommer. A cette condition, le poète peut "chanter le rythme mouvant et le désordre," ainsi que peut conclure le texte "Aux sources même de l'espérance" (III, 204) après avoir défini sa nature et sa mission au-dessus et au delà de l'humanité commune: "Le poète doit être un professeur d'espérance [...]. Il est une sorte de monstre dont les sens ont une forte personnalité; lui, le poète, il est là au milieu de ses bras, de ses mains, de ses yeux, de ses oreilles, de sa peau, comme un petit enfant emporté par des géants. Il est obligé de voir plus loin, il est obligé de pressentir. Il est là-haut sur de formidables épaules et l'horizon s'étant abaissé, son regard vole jusqu'au bout de l'horizon des

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romanesque et le fantôme qui succombe à la tentation des 'baisers sans arrière-pays' (III, 681); de sa création et l'absent parti intérieurement 'pour la dangereuse croisière de ses rêves' (III, 4).“ (Labouret 1994, 76)

poètes, et le parfum des étoiles tombe sur lui" (203). A travers cette représentation du poète comme phare et comme prophète, Giono propose un autoportrait en "monstre" qui résume assez bien les finalités qu'il assigne, avant 1940, à son travail créateur (*ibid* 59-60)

This description does not change greatly in the years following 1940, except that it is no longer hope of which the poet is a professor, but merely the physical sensations to which he is privy, as the child riding on the shoulders of a giant, image which, along with that of Prometheus stretched out on the hills of Provence, evokes a christlike self-sacrifice on the part of the writer, but this time one that stems from a purely selfish motive. In his flight from *ennui*, the author acts as a messenger between two orders of reality—between those whose point of contact is the body of the author who experiences both worlds, whose self, ripped open by his text, provides a conduit from one world to another.

**Chapter IV: L'Anonymat Sacré et L'Ombre Interne: *Ecrire* at Home with  
Marguerite Duras**

Within the large body of secondary literature focusing on the work of Marguerite Duras, the prominence of place or space has been recognized, to the extent that one of the most frequently cited commentaries on that work is entitled *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*. While these studies have done much to explore the role of individual places in both the work and biography of the writer<sup>46</sup> or the symbolism to be associated with certain features of the physical environment, little attention has been paid to space[s] as an object of desire, space[s] that will serve a particular purpose. What I propose here is that the desire for a private or anonymous space plays as fundamental a role in the motivation of both the characters and the writer's creation of the work itself as does the desire between people, a motive identified in many critiques of her work.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the two are often intertwined, in that a space of *intimité* is frequently sought to offer a place for *intimité* (intimacy) between two or more people, or to offer a refuge from an intimacy that has become stagnant or toxic. What are Duras's characters looking for in these places of retreat, and are they able to find them? In her book entitled *Marguerite Duras*, Christiane Blot-Labbarère opposes two kinds of spaces found in the author's work:

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<sup>46</sup> See Marini 1977, Cerasi 1993, Casirame 2004, de Chalonge 2005, Vircondelet & Steinlein 2006, etc.

<sup>47</sup> "In her texts of the 1980s and 1990s Duras embarked on what amounts to a complex restatement of many of the concerns that were at the center of her earlier work. Once again, as in the 1950s and 1960s, the theme of the couple predominated" (Hill 1993, 137). For more on this see Lacan 1975, Cohen 1993, Anderson 1995, David 1996, Fan 2007, Haskett 2011, etc.

A la dispersion succède l'engouffrement en soi-même. La métaphore d'un espace clos s'impose, la "chambre noire", le "logement en soi" où se foment l'écrit (*Le Camion*, p. 103). Dans l'oeuvre, elle a recours à deux types de lieux. Soit un lieu ouvert, public, comme la plage, le bord des fleuves, la ville, le parc ou la forêt, le square, soit un lieu fermé, bar ou paquebot, maison, chambre. Ceux-ci représentent une "clandestinité et font une invite particulière". Or, écrire n'est rien d'autre qu'une clandestinité. (13)

This opposition between public and private spaces is less clear-cut than Blot-Labbarère would have it. There *is* a constant search for a private space in Duras's work that is also reflected in her own need for private space to write. However, what she considers to be « lieux fermés » prove themselves to be more open than originally imagined, and therefore become dangerous. Under what conditions is the private space sought by Duras possible, and is the model of writing as a dark room inside a dark room a sustainable one for the writer.

One of the most persistent searchers is the Laotian woman of the India cycle, who "demande une indication pour se perdre" (II, 1532, *India Song*) Literally, she is looking for any place to rest, any place to stop walking on her rotting foot, any place to put down her baby, to get something to eat. She, like many others in this group of works, ends in the Prince of Wales hotel, in the islands off the coast of India—a place with razor wire fencing meant to keep the hotel as a place of calm refuge for the beautiful people who come to the hotel to get away from both the heat of the mainland and the squalor of the cities, cities where the vice-consul feels compelled to fire on the lepers who have infiltrated the gardens of the Shalimar just as their own bodies have been infiltrated by

the disease that makes their skin weep, their bodies exploding back into the dust of the street (II, 603, *Le Vice-Consul*). The beggar woman of Savannakhet has the same fate as the others, despite their different origins.

### Hotels

From nearly the beginning of Duras's career, the hotel has been a desired destination; many of her characters feel the need to get away, to take a rest.<sup>48</sup> Despite being eventually rejected from the boarding house for her supposedly callous attitude towards the fellow guest she watched drown, Françoise of *La Vie tranquille*<sup>49</sup> goes to the seaside and manages to find some kind of solace or transformation there after the death of her brother. She is able to see herself as she is in the mirror of her wardrobe, and to say

De là sans doute le sentiment d'être une voleuse d'air. Maintenant on le sait et on veut bien être venue au monde. Je la vole ma place à l'air, mais je suis contente.

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<sup>48</sup> Exactly what one is resting from, however, is often ambiguous. One rarely sees Duras's characters doing any kind of physically taxing labor. They are on vacation because it is "les vacances," fleeing one oppressive climate for another, attempting to leave a toxic relationship, convalescing from an unnamed illness or vague trauma.

<sup>49</sup> While it is customary to consider Duras's work as consisting of either two or three distinct periods with distinct stylistic characteristics (See Guers-Villate 1985), spanning all her work has been a consistent preoccupation with the need for a space of one's own, although the attitude towards the possibility of and reason for this space change throughout her career, and the spaces sought become overall more and more restricted. Their physical dimensions become more humble as their necessity for the writer becomes more central. There is, however, a certain optimism present in the earlier work that later disappears. As Micheline Tison-Braun described it: "Nowhere in Marguerite Duras' work is there a clearer statement of her existential experience and the implicit act of faith that underpins it" (33).

Voilà. Me voilà là. Je métier. Il fait beau. Je suis une farine au soleil. (*La Vie tranquille*, I, 230)

In *Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia*, the hotel is represented as one of the only places where one can find a bit of refuge from the murderous Italian sun:

Directement sur la place donnait l'hôtel, les tonnelles de l'hôtel, la seule ombre véritable de l'endroit, là où tout le monde, à toute heure, se retrouvait, le lieu, géométrique et nécessaire des vacances. Sara s'arrêta donc. Il était impossible qu'elle ne s'y arrêta point, comme tout le monde, dix fois par jour. (*Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia*, I, 832)

At this point in Duras's writing it seems that the hotel or boarding house, the vacation destination, is still held out as offering the possibility for privacy, for the solitude one cannot find in the home. Even in her own room Françoise can still hear everything happening on the other side of the wall. The families of this novel as well as the diplomats of the India cycle and others in Duras's fictional world are looking not only for a rest from their everyday lives, but for relief from the extreme and oppressive weather conditions that drive them from the outdoors: the blistering sun of Italy and India, the torrential rains of Spain in *Dix heures et demie d'un soir en été*.

The hotel, however, is more than just a place to rest or to spend the night after the exhausting ordeal of travel. It is a temporary space of anonymity where certain things can be avoided, certain things can be allowed:

Cette envie de vivre à l'hôtel n'avait rien à voir avec les sentiments que Sara avaient pour Jacques, mais seulement avec ceux que personnellement elle s'inspirait, elle et la vie, depuis quelques années. Outre qu'elle croyait que c'était

pour elle le moment de vieillir et qu'elle eût préféré que cela se passât ailleurs, loin de Jacques,—car Sara en était encore quand même encore là, à croire que, l'amour, lui, ne pouvait vieillir—elle désirait ardemment ne plus importuner personne avec son caractère difficile. A l'hôtel, elle n'en aurait fait souffrir personne. Et les caractères difficiles s'épanouissent mieux qu'ailleurs en raison de cela même [...] Il en est des caractères difficiles comme des autres. L'envie vous en vient parfois de les faire s'épanouir. L'hôtel est fait pour cela. (*Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia*, I, 857)

Sara is looking for the same kind of moment of self-actualization that Françoise experienced, respite from the feeling of self-restraint or censorship she finds necessary while experiencing aging in the company of her husband. Love for her is an oppressive bond that a lack of permanent residence would preclude. The narrator of the short story “Le Boa,” a stand-in for the author herself as a young adolescent, imagines another kind of self-actualization in another kind of hotel, in another place of passage: a *maison de passe*:

Je me le représentais comme une sorte de temple de la défloration où, en toute pureté (je n'appris que bien plus tard le côté commercial de la prostitution), les jeunes filles, de mon état, auxquelles le mariage n'était pas réservé, allaient se faire découvrir le corps par des inconnus, des hommes de même espèce qu'elles. Sorte de temple de l'impudeur, le bordel devait être silencieux, on ne devait pas y parler, tout étant prévu pour qu'il n'y ait pas lieu d'y prononcer le moindre mot, d'un anonymat sacré. Je me figurais que les filles se mettaient un masque sur le visage pour y pénétrer [...] Le bordel, peint en vert, de ce vert végétal qui était



celui dans lequel se faisait la dévoration du boa, et aussi celui des grands tamariniers qui inondaient d'ombre mon balcon du désespoir, avec des séries de cabines ranges côte à côte dans lesquelles on se livrait aux hommes, ressemblait à une sorte de piscine et l'on y allait s'y faire laver, se faire nettoyer de sa virginité, s'enlever sa solitude du corps. (I, 1045)

Only later does she find out about the transactional nature of the brothel and its status as a most definitively public place.

The anonymity of the hotel also appeals to Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl in *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*, who hold their trysts at the *Hôtel des bois*, and to Jacques Hold and Lol V. Stein, for whom the place of anonymity becomes a place of polynymy, where instead of having no name she can take by turns the name of Lol V Stein and that of Tatiana Karl (II, 387). In *Hiroshima mon amour*, the anonymity offered to the temporary fling at the hotel goes so far as to take away the names of the characters entirely, leaving them just “elle” and “lui” who can adopt and shed multiple identities over the course of the film (*i.e.* “Tu es comme mille femmes ensemble” [II, 23, *Hiroshima mon amour*]).

Others are also looking, not necessarily for the positive freedom to actually accomplish some greater communion with oneself or a lover, but instead freedom *from* any attachment or permanence. Despite the general disgust Sara expresses with vacation as such, she desires the kind of space it provides:

Vivre dans les hôtels, ça doit être épatant, dit Sara. Diana vit beaucoup dans les hôtels, au fond.

—Oui. Je crois que ça lui est plus indispensable qu'à une autre.

—Sans doute. J'aimerais bien aussi quelquefois. En ce moment, par exemple.

Pourquoi ça lui est plus indispensable qu'à une autre?

—Comment dire? Peut-être qu'elle répugne plus qu'une autre à s'y installer dans la vie... (I, 902, *Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia*)

The character of Diana seeks, not personal actualization or expansion, but exactly the opposite—a lack of formal establishment in life, a lack of the ties that make Sara begrudgingly aware of her own aging in the life in which she is “installed”.

It is this same freedom from all ties, and significantly from the codification or quantification of one's life and status that is sought by the narrator of the *Marin de Gibraltar*, for whom the hotel is not enough of an escape. He walks out on a vacation in Italy to go sea with a mysterious woman searching for the titular sailor who she claims is a former lover. While it is clear that he desires Anna, that he is following her and helping her in her quest, he was pushed away from his previous existence even before knowing her, repelled by his dreary job with the “état civil.” An attraction equally as great as Anna's beauty and personal intrigue is the nomadic existence she lives on her mysterious yacht, as he expresses to the partner whom he leaves for her:

—Et toi, tu crois trouver le bonheur en lavant les ponts?

—Je ne sais pas. Un bateau, c'est un endroit sans papiers, sans registres. (I, 603, *Le Marin de Gibraltar*)

In the notice to the *Pléiade* edition, Bernard Alazet notes that the quest for the sailor is equal to the quest for complete freedom, the freedom that they have *in searching* for him.

C'est bien comme un archétype qu'est construite la figure du marin... il incarne pour Anna une exigence de liberté qui ne veut connaître aucune limite: “Il

ressentait les frontières, comme d'autres, je ne sais pas, les grilles des prisons.” (I, 1497)

On the other hand, a boat shows most clearly the possibility of diverting these resting places or places of freedom from their desired purpose. Emily L.'s boat in the novel of the same name, the yacht in which the captain drags her around the world to try to keep her away from the possibility of writing and the memory of the poem he destroyed, shows how the pleasure cruise becomes a prison stay, how what was once the escape from conflict with her parents becomes a way to keep her locked up until she dies.

Two other episodes occurring on boats emphasize their ambivalent function. The first is the encounter on the “bac” of the *enfant's* Chinese lover in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. The *bac's* ambivalent nature is emphasized by the fact that the lover is there in his car; the boat is not a place to rest, nor even properly the same kind of liminal space that a yacht would be. Also, as opposed to a yacht, the *bac* is an open space free to the public. It is an immediate means of transport and also containing another means of transport, and one that more closely resembles the luxury yachts in its destination status. It recalls also the property belonging to Suzanne's mother in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, which exists only to be traversed by the traffic between Ram and Kam. Rather than any kind of container or protection, it acts more as a sieve:

[I]ls se sentaient moins seuls, relies par ce cheval au monde extérieur, tout de même capables d'en extraire quelque chose, de ce monde, même si ce n'était pas grand-chose, même si c'était misérable, d'en extraire quelque chose qui n'avait pas été jusque-là, et de l'amener jusqu'à leur coin de plaine saturé de sel, jusqu'à eux trois, saturés d'ennui et amertume. C'était ça, les transports: même d'un

désert, où rien ne pousse, on pouvait encore faire sortir quelque chose en le faisant traverser à ceux qui vivent ailleurs, à ceux qui sont du monde. (I, 281, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*)

The *bac* becomes just another one of these spaces where the *enfant* is able to extract something from a passerby, rather than a space that provides her something by itself. The one time when Suzanne/*l'enfant*/Duras (depending on which version of the story one reads) is herself *de passage* is on the boat back to France, and Duras recounts, both within her fiction and as if it really happened while she was making this trip, a stark reminder of the lack of even physical protection on this floating hotel that has all of the disadvantages of close-quarters living of the land-bound hotel. She tells the story of a young man who hurtled by the startled passengers and threw himself into the sea (III, *L'Amant*, 1522).<sup>50</sup>

The last example, and one that has a curious status due to its purely metaphorical use of the word *navire* is, of course *Le Navire Night*. In this story of a faceless love story of two people who connected over unassigned numbers on the Paris telephone system, they are shut up together in the darkness of their bedrooms, in the privacy of the telephone lines, as on a night boat. The same risk of a sudden disembarkation, of one

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<sup>50</sup> While this suicide is unexplained, it emphasizes the idea that any isolation offered by the boat, the sort of false civility or society created amongst the passengers offer no protection against immanent death and may in fact be the cause of that death. What is itself an escape for Duras or for Suzanne from the limited possibilities offered by colonial life provokes the search for the same death found by the Laotian woman and Anne-Marie Stretter, as well as the young mother of *Savannah Bay*, all of whom are already away from home and all of whom “enter the ocean.” In an interview Duras denied that Anne-Marie Stretter’s death was in fact a suicide claiming instead that she had merely entered a new space. If this can be generalized to all such suicides, does the sea—outside of the artificial space of the boat—represent the actual possibility of a space of escape, the final vacating of one’s life?

person being left adrift, exists in both cases. It may seem paradoxical to say that someone looking for freedom on a boat and someone looking for repose in a hotel are looking for the same thing, but all are looking for their own space, for freedom from outward constraints, for a certain degree of anonymity or the ability to change one's identity or partner. The hotel allows for the kind of break from one's daily existence as well as from the conventions of the place in which it is located that the ship has.

This anonymity, however, this break from one's normal ties, is not necessarily solitude or liberty. Its greatest danger is that, even while maintaining the sort of liminal, free nature previously evoked, the promiscuity of life at the hotel manages to drag one into other entanglements, complicating the status of the hotel as a refuge. Duras emphasizes this aspect more and more in her later works compared to most of those already cited. Hotels, with their common spaces, offer the opportunity to observe and be observed. For example, in *Dix heures et demie d'un soir en été*, Maria and her family seek shelter from a rain storm in a hotel that, tellingly, can only offer them accommodation in public spaces, in the dining room and in the corridors where they all have to lie down together:

[Maria] allait voir comment était fait cet hôtel. Il y a beaucoup de couloirs. Ils sont circulaires pour la plupart, certains débouchent sur les champs de blé. Certains sur la perspective de l'avenue qui coupe la place. Personne n'y dort encore. Certains autres aboutissent à des balcons qui surplombent les toits de la ville. (I, 1315, *Dix heures et demie...*)

The hotel is a panopticon stripped of the simple clarity of that structure. The hotel seems to be made for observing unobserved, but without ever being able to form a synthetic

picture of everything happening at once. Maria becomes this spy as she observes both the burgeoning affair between her husband and their traveling companion Claire as well as the game of cat and mouse between the local police and the murderer Rodrigo Paestra.

D'autres balcons que celui-ci, où se tient Maria, s'étagent sur la façade nord de l'hôtel. Ils sont vides, sauf un seul, un seul, à la droite de Maria, à l'étage supérieur. Ils doivent y être depuis très peu de temps. Maria ne les a pas vu arriver. Elle recule légèrement dans l'embrasure du couloir où, maintenant les gens dorment. Ça doit être la première fois qu'ils s'embrassent. Maria éteint sa cigarette. Elle les voit se détacher de toute leur hauteur sur le ciel en marche—Les éclairs rendent la ville livide. Ils sont imprévisibles, arrivent suivant un rythme désordonné. Lorsqu'ils se produisent ils rendent leurs baisers livides aussi, ainsi que leur forme, maintenant unique jusqu'à l'aveuglement. Est-ce sur ses yeux, derrière l'écran du ciel noir, qu'il l'aura d'abord embrassée? On ne peut pas le savoir [...] Non, elle ne peut pas se passer de les voir. Elle les voit encore. Et leurs ombres sont sur ce toit. Voici que leurs corps se descendent. Le vent soulève sa jupe et, dans un éclair, ils on tri. Le même vent que celui sous sa jupe, traverse de nouveau toute la ville, cognant aux arêtes des toits. Dans deux minutes l'orage va venir, va déferler sur la ville entière, vidant les rues, les balcons. (I, 1324, *Dix heures et demie...*)

Maria believes that she can save Rodrigo Paestra by bringing him through the hotel, by assimilating him to the mass of tourists piled on top of one another in the corridors, but this too is a disappointment, as she takes him out of the city only to have him kill himself in a field. Even this death, which is the most violent of the many suicides written by

Duras, is hidden from the reader. Rather than the aestheticization of suicide and murder by Giono, death is erasure rather than spectacle.

The next hotel where they stop, a “parador,” seems even more securely closed off from the outside world. They need to hide here from the sun (a recurrent motif in Duras) rather than the rainstorm of the night before. However, it is the place where Maria is in fact most vulnerable:

Il y a, dans ce parador dans cette demeure close sur l’été, pourtant, des ouvertures sur cet été. Il doit y avoir un patio. Des couloirs qui tournent et meurent vers des terrasses désertées où des fleurs, chaque jour, en cette saison, se meurent aussi, en attendant le soir. Dans ces couloirs, sur ces terrasses, personne n’y va dans la journée. (I, 1376, *Dix heures et demie...*)

This building, hermetically closed against the summer heat, is where Maria comes to feel definitively excluded from her marriage, whether the scenes of the consummation of the affair between her husband and Claire are real or part of an alcohol-fueled fever dream. This hotel, rather than allowing her to hide, rather than the panoptic nature of the first one, allows her husband to hide from her, it is literally a dead end for her vision, in the same way that the field hiding place for Rodrigo Paestra becomes a dead end. While their responses to the discovery of the intrusion of a third into the intimate space of their marriage is quite different, neither can live separate from this shared space. Unlike the disappearance into the water offered by suicide by drowning (Duras’s preferred method) Paestra cannot separate his body from that of his victims, and in doing so, kills himself by the same means. In this way he resembles the gunman of *Moderato Cantabile* who cannot be dragged away from the body of the lover he has just killed.

Hotels offers the perfect situation for the characters to form love triangles that then become entangled, to hurt each other. Every day in the common dining room Max Thor watches Elisabeth Alione in *Détruire, dit-elle*, the way the protagonist watches the dark-haired girl in “Le Chantier”. They think they come to know these women through their observation, through their desire, regardless of the desires or well-being of these women or of their own partners. The most extreme example of the dangers of the kind of life in immediate, voyeuristic proximity to others is in *Theodora*. The fascination of the protagonist with the interactions of the widowed Madame Mort and her children, with their young governess leads not only to his desire for her young daughter, but his belief in his own power to intervene as an instrument of judgment in their lives, his sadistic encounter with Madame Mort, her death, the young girl’s alienation, and his own physical collapse.

Even when a hotel is friendly, the proximity it can bring on is poisonous. When in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* Suzanne and her family go to the city and stay in a hotel run by friends of the mother:

Lorsque Suzanne rentrait, Carmen l’entraînait dans sa chambre, et la questionnait. La chambre de Carmen était le point faible de son existence. Elle avait résisté à bien des choses dans la vie, mais pas au charme des divans croulant sous des cousins peints à la main, aux pierrots et arlequins, vestiges de bals anciens, accrochés au mur, aux fleurs artificielles. Suzanne y étouffait un peu. Mais il était quand même préférable d’y coucher que de coucher dans la chambre de la mère. Suzanne savait que c’était dans cette chambre que Joseph avait couché avec



Carmen. Lorsque Carmen se déshabillait devant elle, elle y pensait chaque fois. (I, 396, *Un Barrage*)

The enclosure with the older woman's oppressive sexuality and the stifling atmosphere accompanying it recall the room of the director of the *pensionnat* where the narrator lives in the short story "Le Boa." There, a nearly identical crowded room with its reminders of its owner's stunted sexuality has an atmosphere poisoned by the odor of her breast cancer, the odor of death. The room, rather than being a refuge from the outside world, is a prison with a predator, like the cage of the boa constrictor at the zoo where the director takes her on Sundays to watch the snake devour its prey.

The pathological nature of this room is not exclusive to the physical pathology seen here.<sup>51</sup> The hotels are not only places of convalescence bearing the memory of the tragedies that came before but are threatened by the immanent physical proximity of danger or death: the *chantier* of the short story of the same name or the forest in *Détruire, dit-elle*. As with many forests in Duras's work, starting with *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, the forest of *Détruire* is full of danger:

Dans *Jaune le soleil*, il y a un parc noir où il y a les chiens des juifs. La forêt, c'est l'interdit. C'est-à-dire, je ne sais pas exactement ce que c'est que cette forêt de *Jaune le soleil*, que j'appelle la forêt du nomadisme, la forêt des juifs, je ne sais pas quel est le lien entre cette forêt et la forêt de *Détruire*, dont les gens ont peur. Dont une certaine bourgeoisie a peur, dont les hommes ont peur et qu'ils massacrent. Nous, on s'y insère, dans la forêt, on s'y faufile, voyez. Les hommes

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<sup>51</sup> Many of the hotels appearing throughout Duras's oeuvre strongly resemble not vacation spots but the half-sanatorium institutions for returning deportees where the author went with Robert Antelme to help him regain his health.

y vont pour la chasse; pour sanctionner, surveiller. (II, 184, *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*)

The forest represents both exile and a specifically masculine danger, the danger of violence that Duras seems to accept only in relation to resistance to Fascism and in sexual relations.

La violence habite la forêt. Dans *Détruire*, la violence doit habiter la forêt mais, dans *Détruire*, quand Alissa et Stein vont s'aimer, eux, ils vont dans la forêt [...] Les autres, non, Les autres regardent la forêt de loin, mais n'y entrent pas, la forêt, c'est la forêt de mon enfance [...] C'est après, après coup, que j'ai eu peur de ce que nous avons fait. Donc, la forêt est aux fous, voyez et dans ma vie elle a été à l'enfance. (II, 189, *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*)

Also, in stark contrast to the enclosed structures sought out by Duras and her characters, the forest and the fields (where Rodrigo Paestra dies, where Lol ends up) are open spaces offering no shelter from the dangers that might lurk there, including the dangers that come from the inside of the characters, the violence and tragedy they carry with themselves, the interior world from which there can be no escape, as will become evident later on in the author's own description of her place in the world. Although this seems to be a place of fascination for Stein and Alissa as well as for Elisabeth Alione, who doesn't manage to force herself to go in. The link of danger with the liaison between the Thors and Stein cuts both ways. While on one hand, facing the danger of the forest and the fear it inspires could be liberating, the "destruction capitale" sought by Alissa and Stein in particular, leads them into the forest, where no one ever goes, and where they cannot be followed—where for Duras traditionally snakes and panthers live, leprosy and madness,

the bald beggar woman of Savannakhet. Reporting an episode from Michelet to which she referred on multiple occasions (and which would give a name to the journal *Sorcières*, with whose publication Duras was heavily involved):

Michelet dit que les sorcières sont venues comme ça. Pendant le Moyen Âge, les hommes étaient à la guerre du seigneur ou à la croisade, et les femmes dans les campagnes restaient complètement seules, isolées, pendant des mois et des mois, dans la forêt dans leurs cabanes, et c'est comme ça, à partir de la solitude, d'une solitude inimaginable pour nous, maintenant, qu'elles ont commencé à parler aux arbres, aux plantes, aux animaux sauvages, c'est-à-dire à entrer à, comment dirais-je, à inventer l'intelligence avec la nature, à la réinventer. (III, 182, *Les Parleuses*)

This citation also highlights the ambivalence of Duras's attitude toward the effects of isolation. It is at once necessary for the development of this "intelligence," but also born of isolation and abandonment, and the source of additional ostracism. The presence of the hotel in "Le Chantier" does not keep the *chantier* from being excavated nearby, despite the surprise of the clientele that such a thing could be built there, spoiling the view. Here too the *chantier* (which is supposedly a cemetery) abuts a forest. At first the girl tries to ignore that it is there, to pretend she hasn't seen it, but in the end she cannot ignore it even when it has walls around it and is supposedly out of sight and out of mind.

While the infidelities of Alissa and Max Thor of *Détruire, dit-elle* do not have the same emotional impact as those of *Dix heures...* the hotel has exactly the opposite effect on their lives as its ostensible purpose. The rest and quiet sought at a hotel specializing in convalescents elude them. Max Thor and Stein are unable to write; Elisabeth Alione does

not forget the loss of her baby or the death of the young doctor who was in love with her. Nor do they participate in the life of the hotel itself, the game that it always present in the background, represented by the constant sound of tennis balls being hit back and forth by the unseen residents of the hotel. Max Thor stalks Elisabeth Alione, Stein stalks Max Thor and Alissa, and Alissa herself stalks Elisabeth Alione.

In addition to the public spaces where they encounter each other, their private rooms are anything but:

--Nous faisons l'amour dit Alissa, toutes les nuits nous faisons l'amour.

--Je sais, dit Stein. Vous laissez la fenêtre ouverte et je vous vois.

--Il la laisse ouverte pour toi. Nous voir.

--Oui. Sur la bouche dure de Stein, Alissa a pose sa bouche d'enfant. Il parle ainsi.

--Tu nous vois? Dit Alissa.

--Oui. Vous ne vous parlez pas. Chaque nuit j'attends. Le silence vous cloue sur le lit. La lumière ne s'éteint pas. Un matin on vous retrouvera, informes, ensemble, une masse de goudron, on ne comprendra pas. Sauf moi. (II, 1115, *Détruire, dit-elle*)

When Elisabeth Alione and her husband leave the hotel and go off on their vacation in the South, and Max Thor, Stein, and Alissa plan to follow her, the hotel becomes no longer a place apart, but a total reconfiguration of a permanent social group. As Duras herself explained, Alissa as a young student is disrupting the bourgeois lifestyle and mindset of Elisabeth Alione, forcing her to physically reject the mores of her staid capitalist husband. However, as Gilles Philippe interprets it:

[L]a première destruction qu'annonce, qu'appelle ou signifie *Détruire dit-elle*, ce n'est pas celle d'un genre en particulier, c'est celle de la littérature en général: "Je ne crois plus au livre, je crois qu'on ne lira plus, très vite." Duras le dira encore 1972: la première destruction à l'oeuvre dans le livre c'est celle-là même de l'écrivain. Le thème est d'époque, bien sûr (en 1968 Barthes n'avait-il pas proclamé "la mort de l'auteur"?), mais la formulation qu'en donne Duras n'est pas théorique. (II, 1794)

What should be noted though, is that not only does *Détruire* find itself situated between genres, "destroying" the boundaries of generic convention, but the situation at the hotel keeps both Max Thor and Stein from writing and Elisabeth Alione from reading. The relationship to the written word is destroyed within the work.

While this destruction of the written word may be seen as a political end in itself, and one to which Duras repeatedly makes reference—the desire not only to move beyond the genre of the novel, but to move beyond the word, beyond representational image, as she tries to make a new kind of cinema that resists the traditional narrative and filmic conventions (black screen, images unrelated between each other and/or to the sound, the filmed table reading of *Le Camion*). A certain reading of Duras's work would have this be a feminist resistance to the male desire to narrativize,<sup>52</sup> and as far as this concerns purely narrative forms, this may be true. But it is at odds with Duras's own dependence

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<sup>52</sup> "The operation of the unconscious upon memory and its impact on telling tales and writing narratives is one of Freud's great themes. It is also a central theme in Duras's work where her male narrators demonstrate an unwavering faith in the restorative powers of language. For the Durasian heroine, however, the domestication of memory in language dilutes the intensity of the lived event. Duras's ravishing and ravished heroines are suspended in the timelessness of their memories and emotions. They defy the male narrators who would exorcize their fascination with the past by telling their stories." (Glassman 13)

on her continued ability to write, and on her reiteration of Raymond Queneau's insistence in his interview with her on the subject of the editorial tasks, that all writers worthy of the name must take into account that they are writing in a community and in a certain tradition, and there is a necessarily communicative or communitarian value to their work.

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The idea of some kind of sacred space and time, of this kind of "anonymat sacré" sought by the narrator of "Le Boa" is a vain dream. The hotel as a time and place apart, as a place one would seek out apart from one's daily life or as a place to recover from personal trauma, is impossible. The hotel or the yacht is not truly separate from the world from which it is seen as an escape. It is always invaded by the idea of what one is running from or by the danger of what one is looking for—as is the case for Lol V. Stein, who follows her visions back to the scene of her original abandonment at the Casino at T Beach with Jacques Hold. There he becomes her prison guard, keeping her in T Beach by telling her that the police are outside the door. She gets what she wants on one level, seeing the casino again, "replacing" Tatiana Karl in Jacques Hold's arms as she had been replaced by Anne-Marie Stretter at the same casino years before. But what starts as a game<sup>54</sup> quickly becomes destruction rather than play, as in fact it had already been for

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<sup>53</sup> "Un écrivain, c'est quelqu'un qui se rend compte qu'on n'écrit pas seulement pour se faire plaisir à soi-même, quelqu'un qui a la conscience de ne pas être seul. L'homme ou la femme, qui est véritablement intéressé par l'écriture, sait qu'il appartient à la communauté des autres écrivains, qu'il a des contemporains qui le jugeront, qui le critiqueront, qui écriront parallèlement à lui. L'amateur, c'est malheureusement quelqu'un qui reste en lui-même, qui peut écrire des choses agréables, mais qui n'a pas la puissance nécessaire pour communiquer avec les autres, avec le public, même avec un public restreint." (III, 731, *Les Yeux verts*)

<sup>54</sup> "Lol passe la tête à chaque issue et rit, comme enchantée par ce jeu de revoir. Ce rire me gagne. Elle rit parce qu'elle cherche quelque chose qu'elle croyait trouver ici, qu'elle devrait donc trouver, et qu'elle ne trouve pas. Elle vient, revient, soulève le rideau, passe

Tatiana Karl who, going to the Hôtel des Bois to meet her lover, finds her face covered up as Jacques Hold makes love to another woman who is not there. The Hôtel des Bois may face out onto a barley field rather than an actual forest, but it too, like the hotels of “Le Chantier” and *Détruire, dit-elle*, is menaced by its natural environment, by the open space, by its proximity to the field where Lol lies watching:

Je lui ai demandé de venir avec moi à la fenêtre, un moment. Tatiana est venue. Je la lui ai montrée... “Nous ne regardons jamais. C’est assez beau de ce côté-ce de l’hôtel.” Tatiana n’a rien vu, elle a regagné le fond de la chambre. “Non, ce paysage est triste.” (II 349, *Le Ravissement*)

Like Lol and Tatiana, Anne-Marie Stretter does not find whatever it is she is looking for at the Prince of Wales, where she goes with her old and new lovers, where they are unable to escape the heat and the leprosy that oppressed the vice-consul in the novel of that name, along with his desire for Anne-Marie Stretter, to the point of screaming in the night and firing on the lepers of the gardens of the Shalimar. It is in the islands that she “enters the ocean.”<sup>55</sup>

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le nez, dit que ce n’est pas ça, qu’il n’y a pas à dire, ce n’est pas ça. Elle me prend à témoin de son insuccès à chaque retombée du rideau, elle me regarde et elle rit. Dans l’ombre du couloir ses yeux brillent, vifs et clairs.” (II, 382, *Le Ravissement*)

<sup>55</sup> The Laotian beggar woman and Anne-Marie Stretter seem at first to be opposed in nearly every way. While they are both mothers, they represent a split vision of maternity that Duras identifies as originating in her own childhood. The Laotian woman is both rejected by society and rejecting of her child, a bogeyman based on a bonze woman she encountered as a young girl, infirm, unable to nourish herself or her child, and physically repulsive. At the other extreme is Anne-Marie Stretter, who represents the picture of perfectly poised and present maternity, as well as a desirability so extreme that someone would kill himself over her. In her fictionalized iteration, Anne-Marie Stretter was given the most positive of Duras’s own mother’s characteristics—her generosity towards the indigenous children, including the baby of the Laotian woman she takes in and cares for until it dies. The two halves of the maternal figure come together only at the end of their lives when they both enter the Indian ocean

In *L'Amour*, we are once again in S. Thala, with the hotel at the center of the town, a hotel which, in *La Femme du Gange*, becomes an actual mental asylum. It seems that *L'Amour* and *La Femme du Gange* mark a point in Duras's writing where any hope that the hotel represents any kind of salvation or respite seems to be dead. Time has essentially stopped in S. Thala. Rather than being a sacred or separate space, the residents are there permanently—unable to leave or even to kill themselves. And it is at this point that the hotel itself burns down, as if to eliminate the potential it previously presented. Both sides of the hotel walls, both sides of the town walls, are equally bleak. The hotel is no different from any other of the spaces listed:

Il montre à nouveau au voyageur l'enchaînement continu :—Elle a habité partout, ici ou ailleurs). Un hôpital, un hôtel, des champs, des parcs, des routes—il s'arrête—un casino municipal, vous le saviez? Maintenant, elle est là. Il désigne l'île. Le voyageur demande :—Prison dehors les murs. —C'est ça. —Dans les murs c'est le crime? Il répond dans la distraction :—Le crime et caetera. Ils marchent encore. Le voyageur prononce certains mots.—Dehors, internement volontaire.  
(II, 1292, *L'Amour*)

Although the *voyageur* can make a distinction between prison and « le crime et caetera, » the movement of the mad people defies any such distinction. As Blot-Labbarère says, to double effect : “Chez les fous de S. Thala, l'espace du dehors et l'espace du dedans coïncident” (135).

### Houses and Homes



If a hotel can't act as the place of refuge or repose that it is supposed to be, the next question is whether any more refuge is to be found anywhere—specifically in one's own house. The same kind of privacy and anonymity are only to be found there on the condition of not going out and knowing one's neighbors, at the very least. But it seems as if there would be theoretically the possibility of more privacy and protection than the temporary refuge provided by a hotel, if not the same kind of holiday possibilities for pleasure and escape. Certainly, the desire for a house is at least as strongly expressed in her work as that for a more temporary shelter is.

Houses can also serve the function of a vacation home, but neither do these houses offer more separation or privacy than those offered by a hotel. In *Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia*, Sara and her husband and son have chosen to rent a house, which turns out to be infernally hot, to the point where she cannot keep milk in it for her son. Every day they must leave to go to the shore to keep cool, to the hotel to eat. This house cannot actually offer the sufficiency and safety one would expect from a house, what Duras refers to as “autarcie:”

J'ai ce gout profond de gérer la maison. J'ai eu ce gout toute ma vie. Et il m'en reste encore quelque chose. Maintenant encore il me faut savoir ce qu'il y a à manger dans les armoires, s'il y a tout ce qu'il faut, à tout moment pour durer, vivre, survivre. Moi aussi, je cherche encore l'autarcie du bateau, du voyage de la vie, pour les gens que j'aime et pour mon enfant. (IV, 336, *La Vie matérielle*)

In *Suzanna Andler and Baxter, Vera Baxter*, the title character is looking for a new house to rent after giving up her old vacation home, at the same time that she is contemplating an adulterous affair for the first time in her life—despite her husband's numerous

infidelities, business absences, and financial reversals. Rather than the choice of the house in the company of her lover being a move toward independence from her philandering husband, she finds out that in fact the whole situation had been orchestrated by her husband, although his motives for doing so are somewhat ambiguous. Even if they are benign, she has been stripped of the autonomy that theoretically the selection of a new house for her and her children would offer. The house can scarcely be described either as home or as any kind of vacation. The woman and her lover are there in the off-season, when it is cold, windy, dark, and abandoned. Even the isolation of these houses cannot preserve their anonymity, however, in the sparsely populated beach town.

From the very beginning of her writing career, Duras already expressed the obsession with having property to go to, to retreat to. In *Les Impudents*—the first novel she published as herself—the Taneran family, and in particular the matriarch, have held onto their country house, bought years before and left unoccupied. When the death of the eldest son's wife and his profligacy make remaining in the city unsustainable, the family retreats to this house only to find it unusable:

Les Taneran ne purent se loger dans leur maison abandonnée depuis dix ans et devenue inhabitable. Les plafonds prenaient l'eau, l'herbe poussait entre les dalles des chambres. Le chais et le séchoir à prunes étaient seuls en bon état, parce qu'ils étaient d'usage commun aux métayers et aux propriétaires. (I, 23, *Les Impudents*)

The parts of the house that make it a *house*, a living space, are no longer functional, and the family is forced to split up among the houses of its hostile neighbors. Only the daughter Maud stays in the one semi-intact room alone, sleeping in the dark, in a child's bed. While the house does allow her some measure of protection and autonomy from her

family, and facilitates her rejection of the overwhelming influence of her mother and older brother, as well as her sexual awakening, it also hastens her transfer to what is essentially captivity in the house of her lover, which she cannot leave for fear of a scandal. Eventually the house itself is sold to the neighbors, removing even that possibility of refuge, and Maud is sent back by her mother to her lover's house to stay there permanently.

Beyond the desire to simply use houses temporarily, however—and shown already in the stubborn insistence of the mother in *Les Impudents* on the value of their property—is the overwhelming, rapacious need to own property. The most evident examples of this are, of course, in the works based on the author's own biography—both her mother's acquisition of multiple properties in Vietnam and Laos, recounted in the so-called Indochina cycle and in her non-fictionalized accounts of her own childhood, as well as in the interviews in which she describes her own acquisition of property as an adult.<sup>56</sup> These will be discussed in more detail later on, but to them can be added the purely fictional case of the house in *L'Après-midi de M Andesmas*. In this book, the title character has bought a house for his daughter Valérie, and wants to improve it by adding a terrace. The novel takes place entirely during an afternoon where he waits outside for Valérie and the contractor who is supposed to build the terrace. Andesmas fantasizes about being able to live peacefully in the house with his daughter, who is the one who wanted to buy it in the first place, along with other properties in the area,<sup>57</sup> living out the

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<sup>56</sup> *Les Parleuses, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras, La Vie matérielle*

<sup>57</sup> --C'est de Valérie que je vous parle dit-elle en souriant, vous vous trompez. Pourquoi achetez-vous tant de terres, tant et tant, de cette façon indifférente?

--Valérie veut tout le village.

--Depuis longtemps?

fantasy of “autarcie” Duras articulated But the house does not function as such: M. Andesmas must stay outside waiting for someone to come complete it who never arrives, while the property is traversed first by a dog, then by a child, then by the wife of the contractor, who talks and talks, destroying M. Andesmas’s illusions about his daughter, and who herself, despite having linked herself to a builder of houses, is lacking in the supporting structure that would keep her whole:

Elle s’approche du gouffre à pas mesurés, n’attendant aucune réponse de M. Andesmas. Celui-ci craint qu’elle lâche ses épaules, il croit qu’une fois ses épaules lâchés par elle-même rien ne la retiendra d’aller un peu plus avant vers le gouffre. (II, 267, *L’Après-midi...*).

The support sought in the external structure has failed, and the stakes of this failure are clearly laid out, stakes that apply to M Andesmas himself. The “gouffre” into which he will undoubtedly fall upon the functional failure of this house as a home for himself and his child is one familiar to Duras, one whose presence becomes more and more pronounced in her writing.

Valérie herself, who never appears, does not use the house as a house, but rather both as a symbol and a tool for the facilitation of the fulfillment of another desire altogether. The design of the house itself can be a source of despair, as the ex-wife of another builder explains regarding the houses built by her husband, in one of which they themselves had lived:

Je ne comprends plus comment on a pu aller habiter dans cette maison. De damnation. D’horreur. Comment on a pu rester dans une maison aussi triste

pendant des années [...] C'était votre métier de faire des maisons pareilles... de faire le malheur des gens. (IV, 185, *La Musica Deuxième*)

Although she does not explain exactly what she means, what we know about their house is that someone else lives there now and she goes to see it between the hearing announcing her divorce and returning to the hotel that night. The ability to spy or be spied upon in one's own house will be discussed at length later on. It doesn't protect the occupants from constantly being observed by those outside, a fault of the house that will be discussed in detail later on.

“La mère” of the Indochina cycle, however, very clearly wants both the property and the use of it, the “autarcie.” She wants the house as a place to live with her children and to welcome those in even greater need. As well as buying a house in Hanoi that she would later make into a school, the first thing she did upon getting her “concession” was to build a bungalow—a bungalow that she would cling to as a sign of the value of the property as a whole, what she had created, although it was never finished. She wanted to make the land a generator of prosperity and concrete sustenance for herself and her children. To do this she had to construct another kind of structure. This time rather than keeping the elements off her and her children directly, it needed to keep the Pacific Ocean away from her rice paddies:

Et pourtant la mère n'avait consulté aucun technicien pour savoir si la construction des barrages serait efficace. Elle le croyait. Elle en était sûre. Elle agissait toujours ainsi, obéissant à des évidences et à une logique dont elle ne laissait rien partager à personne. Le fait que les paysans aient cru ce qu'elle leur disait l'affermait encore dans la certitude qu'elle avait trouvé exactement ce qu'il

fallait faire pour changer la vie de la plaine. Des centaines d'hectares de rizières seraient soustraits aux marées. Tous seraient riches, ou presque. Les enfants ne mourraient plus. On aurait des médecins. On construirait une longue route qui longerait les barrages et desservirait les terres libérées. (I, 308, *Un barrage...*)

The walls are not enough to keep the sea out, not enough to protect what is inside. The mother and the property are coextensive, in that the property that was supposed to sustain herself and her children coincides with her own and her children's conception of her self. Damage to this property, its neglect by the corrupt colonial administration, is experienced as a physical wound:

La maison va jusqu'à là, elle se répand au-dehors aussi. C'était le cas. Très tôt dans notre vie nous avons été conscients de cela et nous en avons eu une très grande reconnaissance pour ma mère. C'était tout à la fois la mère, c'était la maison autour d'elle, c'était elle dans la maison. Elle s'étendait donc au-delà d'elle-même avec les prévisions des temps mauvais. (IV, 336, *La Vie matérielle*)

The integrity and fertility of the land is at the same time that of the mother's body as well. The hospitality of her own relation to her children is equal to and dependent on that of the property. The denial of her appeals by the colonial administration in *Un Barrage* in fact leads to her ultimate decline and death.

The walls of the house itself are also porous, allowing the lecherous M. Jo to see Suzanne's naked body in the shower. The children are the ones who, despite the mother's desire to control and protect them, wander out into the jungle and let in M. Jo, the intruder from the outside world. Sometimes the porosity of the house can seem to have a positive side, as when the washing of the entire house with buckets of water until it ran

out the doorways and between the floorboards was the occasion for festivity, when the mother played the piano, sang, and danced, and the house smelled like flowers (III, 1491, *L'Amant*). The house is only functional as a home when it becomes something else altogether.<sup>58</sup> Were it to be stable and solid, it would be impossible to have these moments of joy, of play, of community. And at the end of this festive episode, normality invades again and *l'enfant* and her younger brother flee into the jungle.

The building of walls, as with any desire, is one that can become a vice when amplified:

C'était une vice incurable: "Je suis sûr que toutes les nuits elle recommence ses barrages contre le Pacifique. La seule différence c'est qu'ils ont ou cent mètres de haut, ou deux mètres de haut, ça dépend si elle va bien ou non. Mais petits ou grands, elle les recommence toutes les nuits..." (I, 442, *Un barrage...*)

This vice, the vice of always thinking of the same thing, is shared by another famous *vicieuse*<sup>59</sup> of Duras's corpus: Lol V. Stein:

Il aurait fallu murer le bal, en faire ce navire de lumière sur lequel chaque après-midi Lol s'embarque mais qui reste là, dans ce port impossible, à jamais amarré et prêt à quitter, avec ses trois passagers, tout cet avenir-ci dans lequel Lol V. Stein maintenant se tient. Certaines fois, il a aux yeux de Lol le même élan qu'au premier jour, la même force fabuleuse. (II, 309, *Le Ravissement*)

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<sup>58</sup> Houses, like hotels, can imprison people inside them in toxic relationships, rather than protecting them: "Dans une maison, il y a aussi l'horreur de la famille qui est inscrite, le besoin de fuite, toutes les humeurs suicidaires, et les envies de meurtre des couples qui vivent dans l'enfermement, et la violence qui surgit sans autre explication que l'écrasement par l'oppression, du quotidien dans un univers clos, ce crime sans mobile apparent que Marguerite Duras avait exposé dans *Les Viaducs de la Seine-et-Oise*. (59-60)

<sup>59</sup> II, 307, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*

We find here again the image of the *navire*, another *Navire night* in its illumination, where she is separated from the world around her, held with the two lovers in the scene of her own desire.

Like the mother in the Indochina cycle, Lol is obsessed with the creation of an extremely orderly household, with building walls against the outside world:

Un ordre rigoureux régnait dans la maison de Lol à U. Bridge. Celui-ci était presque tel qu'elle le désirait, presque, dans l'espace et dans le temps. Les heures étaient respectées. Les emplacements de toutes choses, également. On ne pouvait approcher davantage, tous en convenaient autour de Lol, de la perfection. (II, 298, *Le Ravisement*)

Lol V. Stein installa sa maison natale de S. Tahla avec le même soin très strict que celle de U. Bridge. Elle réussit à y introduire le même ordre glacé, à la faire marcher au même rythme horaire. Les meubles ne furent pas changés. Elle s'occupa beaucoup du jardin qui avait été laissé à l'abandon, elle s'était déjà beaucoup occupée de celui qui avait précédé, mais cette fois elle fit, dans son tracé, une erreur. Elle désirait des allées régulièrement disposées en éventail autour du porche. Les allées, dont aucune ne débouchait sur l'autre, ne furent pas utilisables. Jean Bedford s'amusa de cet oubli. On fit d'autres allées latérales qui coupèrent les premières et qui permirent logiquement la promenade. (II, 301, *Le Ravisement*)

Lol tries to reinforce spaces where one is separated from the world, which she cannot be forced to leave as she was forced to leave the ball at T. Beach, the ball that she tries to wall up in her mind every afternoon. Her desire is to be with Michael Richardson and



Anne-Marie Stretter forever. While to prolong this moment would be, as Deborah Glassman says<sup>60</sup>, to avoid her own effacement, it is also to preserve the structure in which she is alone with them forever. Did she make the blind alleys in her garden on purpose, so that no one could get in or out? It isn't until after the alleys are joined that Lol is jolted out of her quiet existence by the couple presumed to be Tatiana Karl and Jacques Hold, who see the renovation of the house and garden and start to speculate about Lol herself. In the text entitled "La vie matérielle," Duras acknowledged the importance with which she invested the house:

S'emparer du réel, comme de l'existence, sous l'angle de la matérialité apparaît avec évidence dans le texte le plus long du livre, et qui en constitue comme l'armature: "La Maison". Si la "vie matérielle" s'identifie à la maison, elle fédère plus largement bon nombre de textes, de ce qui sont consacrée...(IV, 1379)

She acknowledges an abjectness to the disorder Lol V Stein worked tirelessly to avoid, the material disorder that for her is not the same as the possibility of madness, but rather, Duras goes so far as to call these women: "[F]emmes qui ne sont pas tout à fait femmes, qui sont légères, qui font des fautes graves dans leur gérance" (IV, *La Vie matérielle*, 338-9):

Il y a beaucoup de femmes qui ne résolvent pas le désordre, le problème de l'envahissement de la maison par ce qu'on appelle le désordre dans les familles. Ces femmes savent qu'elles n'arrivent pas à surmonter les difficultés incroyables que représente le rangement d'une maison. Mais de le savoir ou non, rien n'y fait. Ces femmes transportent le désordre d'une pièce à l'autre de la maison, elles le

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<sup>60</sup> Glassman 47

déplacent ou elles le cachent dans les caves ou dans des pièces fermées, ou dans des malles, des armoires et elles créent comme ça, dans leur propre maison, des lieux cadenassés qu'elles ne peuvent plus ouvrir, même devant leur famille, sans encourir une indignité. (IV, 333, *La Vie matérielle*)

Again we can see the ambivalence of her attitude toward the relationship women have with their domestic space, valorizing this relationship and the proper way of conducting it while condemning the division of labor that leaves the woman at home in the house. Her disgust at women who do not keep clean houses makes it difficult to tell whether the “indignité” associated with disorder is society’s view or her own.<sup>61</sup> This sort of judgment of women who do not take care of their households goes along with her view of the woman as coextensive with the house or the property, as was the case with the mother of the India cycle, and with Isabelle Granger, whom she called:

[P]risonnière de cette demeure-ci, prisonnière d'elle-même de sa vie, si vous voulez, de cette espèce de circuit infernal qui va de l'amour de ses enfants à ses devoirs conjugaux, comme on dit, vous voyez, et que c'est tout ça, tout ce contenu justement de sa vie, qui est enfermé. C'est comme quand elle déambule là, dans la maison, c'est comme si elle passait autour d'elle-même, comme si elle contournait son propre corps. Isabelle Granger m'apparaît comme habitant totalement la maison comme si elle en épousait le contour, comme si la maison elle-même avait forme de femme [...] Seule une femme peut y être, peut y

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<sup>61</sup> “La contradiction n’était pas absente non plus de la manière dont Marguerite Duras réglait la part matérielle de sa vie. Elle affirmait la nécessité du rangement, et le besoin, régulièrement, de jeter, elle supportait mal le déplacement d’u objet qui, une fois pose sur un meuble, y restait de façon presque immuable.” (Armel 1998, 64)

adhérer complètement, oui, sans s'y ennuyer [...] l'homme ne peut pas partager.

(III, 187, *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*)

Lol dreams of the possibility of total enclosure, the kind of security one gets from a solid structure with no outlet, but is forced to turn outwards, to open the memory of the ball:

Elle sourit, certes, à cette minute pensée de sa vie. La naïveté d'une éventuelle douleur ou même d'une tristesse quelconque s'en est détachée. Il ne reste de cette minute que son temps pur, d'une blancheur d'os.

Et cela recommence: les fenêtres fermées, scellées, le bal muré dans sa lumière nocturne les auraient contenus tous les trois et eux seuls. Lol en est sûre: ensemble ils auraient été sauvés de la venue d'un autre jour, d'un autre, au moins.

(II, 308, *Le Ravissement*)<sup>62</sup>

The encounter with Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl is decisive. With it Lol ventures not only out of her house, but out of the regulated part of the city:

Le centre de S. Tahla est étendu, moderne, à rues perpendiculaires, le quartier résidentiel est à l'ouest de ce centre, large, il prend ses aises plein de méandres, d'impasses imprévues. Il y a une forêt et des champs, des routes, après ce quartier. Lol n'est jamais allée aussi loin que la forêt de ce côté-là de S. Tahla. De l'autre côté elle est allée partout, c'est là que se trouve sa maison, enclavée dans le grand faubourg industriel. (II, 304, *Le Ravissement*)

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<sup>62</sup> Evident in the desire for isolation expressed in *Lol V Stein* is a reason for that desire to which we have already alluded: both in the escape sought by Sara in *Les Petits chevaux* and in the temporal suspension of the vacation or holiday time sought by other characters. Lol seeks to stop the passage of time, movement to which she becomes physically sensitive only upon her move back to S. Thala, one that renders her own body a burden to her, and one she will try to evade both physically and mentally.

After following Jacques Hold from the center out to the suburban fields where she spies on him and Tatiana, she begins to break into other people's private lives and spaces. In addition to watching Jacques and Tatiana through the window of the hotel, Lol enters Tatiana's home, through its locked gate after spying on it for several days. Tatiana herself has never had the dubious luxury of being containable:

Le soir, Tatiana s'attristait toujours. Jamais elle n'oubliait. Ce soir encore elle regarda un instant au-dehors: l'étendard blanc des amants dans leur premier voyage flotte toujours sur la ville obscurcie. La défaite cesse d'être le lot de Tatiana, elle se répand, coule sur l'univers. Tatiana dit qu'elle aurait voulu faire un voyage. Elle demande à Lol si celle-ci partage ce désir. Lol dit ne pas y avoir encore pensé. (II, 327, *Le Ravissement*)

Before Tatiana puts the idea into her head, either by the direct question or by Tatiana's mere presence, Lol had never thought about taking a trip. After, she wants more than anything to return to T. Beach.

In addition to leaving her house, she lets others in, inviting Jacques Hold, Tatiana Karl, the latter's husband, and Jean Bedford's musical friends. Even then, on the night of the dinner party, Lol is still able to express her horror at the occupation of what was once her private space being occupied by new people. After discovering that her former house in U. Bridge is newly inhabited, that her order has been disturbed, Lol declares: "On doit détruire les maisons après son passage. Des gens le font" (II, 362, *Le Ravissement*). Later that same evening, however, her house becomes, rather than a stable isolating shelter, a means to let people see and be seen through its walls:

Lol caresse toujours les cheveux de Tatiana. D'abord elle la regarde intensément puis son regard s'absente, elle caresse en aveugle qui veut reconnaître. Alors c'est Tatiana qui recule. Lol lève les yeux et je vois ses lèvres prononcer Tatiana Karl. Elle a un regard opaque et doux. Ce regard qui était pour Tatiana tombe sur moi: elle m'aperçoit derrière la baie. Elle ne marque aucune émotion. Tatiana ne s'aperçoit de rien. Elle fait quelques pas vers Tatiana, elle revient, elle l'enlace légèrement et, insensiblement, elle l'amène à la porte-fenêtre qui donne sur le parc. Elle l'ouvre. J'ai compris. J'avance le long du mur. Voilà. Je me tiens à l'angle de la maison. Ainsi, je les entends. Tout à coup, voici leurs voix entrelacées, tendres, dans la dilution nocturne, d'une féminité pareillement rejointe en moi. Je les entends. C'est ce que Lol désirait. (II, 332-3, *Le Ravissement*)

The house becomes a theater, a cinema, the « cinema de Lol V. Stein » where a drama is played out on one side of the windows for the benefit of those on the other. In addition to Jacques Hold, who spies on Lol's house on more than one occasion, he watches her outside from the interior of the hotel room. Lol watches him and Tatiana in the room at the *Hôtel des Bois*; she watches Tatiana's house before finally going to see her officially. Rooms become a kind of guignol where the lives of others are played out, although only Lol and Jacques seem to be aware of it.

The same kind of silent watching takes place in another of Duras's books: *Moderato Cantabile*. While the inciting incident of the plot is the murder of a young woman in a café by her lover, Anne Desbaresdes will make another shocking discovery when she returns to the café looking for answers. The man she meets there, who claims to

be looking for the same information, has seen her before, knows what the inside of her house is like, has watched her host a reception for her husband's employees (I, 1223). He tells her stories about the house and its previous inhabitants, stories that could be true or false or symbolic, but the stories he tells her of the house come to be as true as those he tells about the murdered woman. She acts out the love story of the young woman with him in the café, but equally the story he tells her about herself. She acts the role of Anne Desbaresdes for him in front of the windows of her house, fragile barriers to the outside world, one of which had already shown its vulnerability when a tree had smashed through it the year before. The story she is acting out with this man follows her home to the dinner she is hosting in real time, where the alienation and alcoholism she is developing in his presence become part of her home life.

The porosity of the house is equally apparent on film, from the crumbling walls of the French consulate in *India Song*, where mirrors multiply the doors and windows, to the constant circulation of the camera and characters of *Nathalie Granger*. People and animals appear and disappear inside and outside the house as if walking through walls. Despite the murderers at large against whom the radio constantly warns, the doors are left wide open to the world. The traveling salesman played by Gérard Dépardieu enters and leaves unimpeded. This becomes the “maison des femmes” in Duras's discussions with Xavière Gauthier and Michelle Porte. As we have seen earlier, women maintain a relationship to their house that men cannot take part in. But that leaves them vulnerable in ways that men are not to disruptions of this space:

M.D.: [...] Et moi, je crois que la maison de *Nathalie Granger*, c'est une caverne, c'est une grotte.

X.G.: Ah oui, c'est ce que je vous disais un peu tout à l'heure. Ce serait un utérus avec deux jumelles qui flottent un peu dans ce liquide-là [...] Les eaux, ah, oui, parce qu'après on dit que la poche des eaux se rompt. Ce serait à la fin quand les portes s'ouvrent. Et vous disiez aussi après, quand on allait vers *La Femme du Gange*, ça éclat.

M.D.: Ça explose [...] C'est une parole qui s'adresse aux autres quand même.

X.G.: Oui, alors que, dans *La Femme du Gange*, tout ça s'est rompu, éclaté.

M.D.: Oui, c'est un bateau...qui est parti. C'est le contraire de la maison, ils ne rentrent plus nulle part. (III, *Les Parleuses*, 54-5)

The house is not only where the women live, it is a maternal body itself. The openness of the maternal body to the outside world seems like a failure to protect those living within the walls, within the body.

X.G.: Oui, mais est-ce qu'elles ne sont pas aussi isolées que les autres femmes?

M.D.: Oui, elles sont isolées.

X.G.: Si elles restent dans leur maison est-ce qu'elles peuvent faire quelque chose? Et après vous dites—on en arrive maintenant..—vous dites: “Il faut casser la maison.”

M.D.: Oui, mais c'est...La maison de *Nathalie Granger* est une maison qui se casse à la fin, elle se casse, elle est détruite.

X.G.: Elle s'ouvre.

M.D.: Tout le monde y rentre. Elle est ouverte et c'est ce petit accident qui fait que la petite fille n'ira plus à l'école, dont on ne sait plus du tout ce qu'elle va devenir, qui fait que la maison se casse. Dans la chaîne, ce chaînon qui manqué

justement, la petite délogée du social, ça fait casser le reste...Elle s'ouvre. Ah non, je n'aurais pas pu faire un film où la maison se serait renfermée. Ma maison est toujours ouverte [...] Je ferme la nuit. Ou quand je suis complètement seule. (III, *Les Parleuses*, 78)

### A Room to Write

The claim that her house is open except when she is completely alone is both disingenuous and rather meaningless, in that the house eventually becomes the space of solitude, which is the only place where she can successfully write:

C'est dans une maison qu'on est seul. Et pas au-dehors d'elle mais au-dedans d'elle[...]On n'est pas seul dans un parc. Mais dans la maison, on est si seul qu'on en est égaré quelquefois. C'est maintenant que je sais y être restée dix ans. Seule. Et pour écrire des livres qui m'ont fait savoir, à moi et aux autres, que j'étais l'écrivain que je suis. [...]J'ai compris que j'étais une personne seule avec mon écriture, seule très loin de tout. (IV, 843, *Ecrire*)

The only writing that takes place outside of this space is that produced from “places for not writing” (the kinds of spaces she only accesses in Paris when she is unable to be alone in her house); it is writing that does not fully qualify as such. This kind of writing is what she classified as “outside” writing, articles for newspapers and journals that were very different from her production as an “écrivain de livres:”

*Vous voyez, quelquefois je faisais des articles pour les journaux. De temps en temps j'écrivais pour le dehors, quand le dehors me submergeait, quand il y avait*



*des choses qui me rendaient folle, outside, dans la rue—ou que je n’avais rien de mieux à faire. Ça arrivait.*

*J’ai donc écrit des articles dans les journaux pour diverses raisons. La première étant sans doute en effet de sortir de ma chambre. A ce moment-là, j’écrivais des livres huit heures par jour. Quand j’écrivais des livres, je ne faisais jamais d’articles. C’est dans les creux, les moments vides, que j’étais appréhendée par le dehors. Quand j’écrivais des livres, je crois que je ne lisais même pas les journaux. Ça ne s’inscrivait pas, je ne comprenais pas ce qui se passait. Écrire des articles c’était sortir au-dehors, c’était mon premier cinéma. (III, 868, *Outside*)*

This “outside” writing is unique, seen as distinct from her more serious work as an “écrivain de livres.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike her other work, it is not an end in itself, it is subordinated to the need for self-preservation, both in its “alimentary” nature (III, 868) and that it forced her into contact with the outside world, a contact she explicitly rejected with regards to her other production. The writing of *Outside* and of *L’Été 80* forces her as much as possible to live and to live in the world, which becomes intolerable to her later on.

*Quand j’écris à Paris, il me manque le dehors, de sortir. Autour de moi personne ne peut supposer à quel point j’en suis privée. Dehors, je ne peux pas écrire. J’ai autant besoin des endroits pour ne pas écrire que des endroits pour écrire. A Paris c’est difficile pour moi de sortir. (IV, 373-4, *La Vie matérielle*)*

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<sup>63</sup> A la sobriété de son écriture littéraire—celle-là seule, il est vrai, qu’elle appelle “écrire”—s’oppose la prolifération désordonnée des discours qu’elle a proférés dans et pour “le monde extérieur [...] *Le Monde extérieur* et *Outside* sont les titres de deux de ses livres, recueils de textes au statut indéfini—ni vraiment discours factuels, ni vraiment textes “littéraires.” Dans ce “non-lieu,” ce “Lahore” de l’écrit, Duras a souvent été accusée de se contredire. (Borgomano 13-14)

But rather than stay in Paris where she is forced outside, or in Trouville, where, looking out onto the beach she was able to write for *Libération*, for what later became *L'Été 80*, she sought out the solitude necessary for her writing, where the only relation to the exterior is in its total absence. Xavière Gauthier tried to compare her house to the house in *Nathalie Granger*, which eventually opens to the outside world:

M.D. : C'est ça, ça va. Ça n'avance pas. Ça va nulle part, ça bouge.

X.G. : [C]'est peut-être ça aussi cet espace qui se développe, très particulier à vous, il me semble, un espace à la fois très épais [...] et puis qui est à la fois clos et puis on sait qu'il y a un extérieur.

M.D. : Oui, mais est-ce qu'il y a une pression de l'extérieur sur l'endroit ?

X.G. : Oui, c'est l'extérieur qui fait que l'espace se clôt.

M.D. : Oui, mais il n'est pas du tout présent quand j'écris.

X.G. : Ah, si.

M.D. : Moi, je l'oublie. J'entre quelque part et ça se ferme.

X.G. : Complètement ?

M.D. : Oui. C'est pas là que c'est dangereux, c'est quand on sort, voyez.

X.G. : Quand vous retrouvez l'extérieur.

M.D. : Oui.

X.G. : Et il n'est même pas présent comme une menace quand vous êtes à l'intérieur ? Il n'existe plus ?

M.D. : Non à l'intérieur c'est une surveillance extrême pour que rien n'échappe.

(III, *Les Parleuses*, 11)

Duras insists that it is not the inside that is dangerous, but the moment when she would exit and rejoin the outside world. From the hotel to the house, we have followed her through more and more restricted spaces to this hermetically sealed house or room where writing for its own sake becomes possible. It is, however, at odds with the necessity for opening or rupture she saw at the end of *Nathalie Granger*, although the rupture of the house containing the family there is seen as a rupture with the social also, and in that way is also at once an dispersal of intimate space and a break with the larger human world. In addition, to claim at this point in their dialogue that being in the enclosed space of writing is not dangerous so long as one stays there seems disingenuous. In fact, this solitude seems to be the very definition of danger: the ever-present threat of destruction: “La solitude, ça veut dire aussi: Ou la mort, ou le livre. » (IV, 847, *Ecrire*).

Although she poses writing as what will save her from death as long as she manages to write, that each book once completed becomes a *raison d'être* (IV, 847), physically dying is not the only danger: “Écrire, c’est se tuer, mais pas par la mort. Les vrais écrivains n’ont pas de vie du tout. La vie qu’ils vivent ils ne peuvent pas la communiquer” (IV, 211). The writer is removed from life, even if not actually dead :

Il n’y a pas d’écriture qui vous laisse le temps de vivre ou bien il n’y a pas d’écriture du tout, c’est ce que je pense. Puisque ce que vous mettez dans le livre, ce que vous écrivez, ce qui sort de vous, ce qui en passe par vous plutôt, c’est ça en définitive le plus important de tout ce que vous êtes [...] Et plus on est quelqu’un dans les livres, moins on l’est dans la vie vécue. (III, 545)

The metaphors for the space of writing that Duras develops over the course of her career are cataloged in Aliette Armel's address at Cérisy entitled "La Force magique de l'ombre interne:"

C'est en 1966 que Marguerite Duras développe pour la première fois la notion d'"ombre interne" [...] le concept d'ombre interne déborde très largement les volontés analytiques d'une époque dont elle rejette maintenant violemment certains maîtres à penser et surtout une façon d'écrire qui cherche à tirer l'obscur du côté de la clarté.

L'écriture, pour Marguerite Duras, part du noir, du gouffre, sans vouloir à tout prix en sortir. En 1964, dans un entretien télévisé avec Pierre Dumayet, elle déclare à propos du *Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*: "C'est un livre obscur, une obscurité limite." A l'image de l'"ombre interne" (1966) succède celle de l'"image noire" (*Navire Night*, 1978), de la "chambre noire" (*L'Été 80*, 1980), du "bloc noir" (*La Vie matérielle*, 1987). (11)

These images of darkness and shadow, of what Armel calls the "gouffre" correspond also to the idea of a black hole drawing in and absorbing everything that comes near it.

When Duras says "ou la mort ou le livre," she is offering a false choice. Writing will not save her, at least not the activity of writing as she envisions it. The idea of being able to "entre[r] quelque part et ça se ferme" is a trap. As we've seen throughout her work, spaces that would allow at the same time for freedom and protection have proven not in fact to offer that protection at all. They don't offer a space where writing books (as opposed to the inferior "alimentary" "outside" writing), the writing that is the designated goal of the narrator of *L'Amant*, the activity of which she tells that Raymond Queneau

said to her “Ne faites rien d’autre que ça. écrivez” (*Ecrire*, IV, 844). Her existence is dependent on her ability to write, but that writing can only take place when she is cut off from the rest of the living world. Like Giono, Duras finds writing to be a kind of death, but rather than one that opens one up to the world, it closes one off. If the dangers of the outside world can be averted that way, solitude itself is a trap: “La solitude, ça veut dire aussi: Ou la mort, ou le livre. *Mais avant tout, ça veut dire l’alcool*” (IV, 847, *Ecrire*, italics added).

J’ai vécu seule avec l’alcool des étés entiers à Neauphle. Les gens venaient aux week-ends. Pendant la semaine j’étais seule dans la grande maison, c’est là que l’alcool a pris tout son sens. L’alcool fait résonner la solitude et il finit par faire que l’on préfère à tout. Boire, ce n’est pas obligatoirement vouloir mourir, non.

Mais on ne peut pas boire sans penser qu’on se tue. (IV, 314, *La Vie matérielle*)

Alcohol is both an effective way of reinforcing solitude and a physical recreation of the mysterious “ombre noir” from which her writing emerges. The works discussed in this chapter have shown over and over again examples of people who have sought some kind of escape or freedom and found only death at their own hand. It would be tempting to say that these are examples people who have not successfully found “le livre.” However, it seems that instead they have found a quicker way to lose themselves in the “ombre noir,” rather than residing there.

This black hole is both internal to the author and a feature of the private space she has created around herself: “Se trouver dans un trou, au fond d’un trou, dans une solitude quasi totale et découvrir que seule l’écriture vous sauvera” (IV, 847, *Écrire*):

J'ai l'illusion que je fais de l'ordre alors que je dépeuple, que je fais de la lumière alors que j'efface. Ou bien on fait toute la lumière et on est fou. Les fous opèrent *dehors* la conversion de la vie vécue. La lumière illuminante qui pénètre en eux a chassé l'ombre interne mais la remplace. *Seuls les fous écrivent complètement*. (II, 35, *Les Parleuses*)

Madness is the exposure of the *ombre noir* where the conversion of lived experience takes place is moved outside oneself (*dehors*). The idea of this conversion occurring outside, in the light, provokes horror for Duras. The exposure of the process of conversion, of the movement from one system to another, of an active place in the movement of the world outside is madness. The intensely private nature of this drive to write is in keeping with the earlier desire for “privacy” or “anonymity,” the desire to wear a mask. The “conversion” is the absorption of experience into the black hole from which it cannot leave:

[L]'écriture, vous dites souvent que c'est quelque chose qui vous traverse.

M.D.: Oui, comme un captage; comme une fonction devenue folle, de captage du dehors, mais, encore une fois, qui en passe par l'engouffrement dans l'ombre interne, qui s'y noie, qui meurt à la mémoire claire et puis qui, un jour, sort, là, devant nous, évidemment méconnaissable, et recouvre le papier blanc. On voit une fleur un jour—une rose—on l'oublie, elle passe par la mort—on la revoit ensuite, on le reconnaît, et on l'appelle Anne-Marie Stretter: le parcours de la rose, depuis sa découverte jusqu'à ce nom, c'est la douleur, c'est l'écrit. Ce qui est douloureux, la douleur—le danger—c'est la mise en oeuvre, la mise en page, de cette douleur, c'est crever cette ombre noire afin qu'elle se répande sur le blanc

du papier, mettre dehors ce qui est de nature intérieure: les fous, je l'ai dit déjà, écrivent complètement. (II, 326, *Le Camion*)

Creating the space of the house, where one has solitude, where one has the empty space that is one's interior space while at the same time allowing for the presence of the blank paper onto which the *ombre interne* can spill already constitutes the first stages of madness:

À vivre comme ça, come je vous dis que je vivais, dans cette solitude à la longue il y a des risques qu'on encourt. C'est inévitable. Dès que l'être humain est seul, il bascule dans la déraison. Je le crois : je crois que la personne livrée à elle seule est déjà atteinte de la folie parce que rien ne l'arrête dans le surgissement d'un délire personnel. (IV, 858, *Écrire*)

The existence of the space in which to write facilitates a private *délire* of the author that is in fact the act of writing itself. Lived experience is sucked into this black hole where it is transformed by its own death, by the author's pain. This is not a traversal that has another side; it is the pure movement of experience into this ravenous black hole that then exists on the page. "L'écrit" is not the finished product, but the material that is being sucked into this pit, its movement, which she likens to that of a train: "C'est le train de l'écrit qui passe par votre corps. Le traverse. C'est de là qu'on part pour parler de ces émotions difficiles à dire, si étrangères et qui néanmoins, tout à coup, s'emparent de vous" (IV, 882, *Ecrire*) :

La solitude de l'écriture c'est une solitude sans quoi l'écrit ne se produit pas, ou il s'émiette exsangue de chercher quoi écrire encore. Perd son sang, il n'est plus

reconnu par l'auteur. Et avant tout il faut que jamais il ne soit dicté à quelque secrétaire, si habile soit-elle, et jamais à ce stade-là donné à lire à un éditeur.

Il faut toujours une séparation d'avec les autres gens autour de la personne qui écrit les livres. C'est une solitude. C'est la solitude de l'auteur, celle de l'écrit. Pour débiter la chose, on se demande ce que c'était ce silence autour de soi. Et pratiquement à chaque pas que l'on fait dans une maison et à toutes les heures de la journée, dans toutes les lumières, qu'elles soient du dehors ou des lampes allumées dans le jour. Cette solitude réelle du corps devient celle, inviolable, de l'écrit. (IV, 845, *Ecrire*)

Être sans sujet aucun de livre, sans aucune idée de livre c'est se trouver, se retrouver, devant un livre. Une immensité vide. Un livre éventuel. Devant rien. Devant comme une écriture vivante et nue, comme terrible, terrible à surmonter. Je crois que la personne qui écrit est sans idée de livre, qu'elle a les mains vides, la tête vide, et qu'elle ne connaît de cette aventure du livre que l'écriture sèche et nue, sans avenir, sans écho, lointaine, avec ses règles d'or, élémentaires: l'orthographe, le sens. (IV, 847, *Ecrire*)

For both Ponge and Giono, literary creation is an engagement with the outside world and with other people, engagement in a physical and political sense, and this shows in their consistent portrayal of borderlines as interfaces with relative fluidity and various modes of exchange between both sides, despite the violence present in Giono's model. This is especially true in their discussions of their own work (both as product and as activity). Duras, on the other hand, sees writing as an essentially unidirectional flow through her into the black hole opening up in her solitude, that is equivalent to that solitude.



Separation from others is both the cause and the (desirable) effect of her writing, a search for isolation with this internal shadow that follows her to narrower and narrower spaces.

While it is true that her books are public and she herself a public figure, any engagement with the world through her texts is seen as separate from creation of her books, a different task from the work of writing, and one towards which she expressed relative ambivalence:

Je crois que c'est un détail ça, qu'un livre soit plus ou moins difficile à mener que la vie ordinaire. Simplement ça existe, la difficulté. Un livre est difficile à mener, vers le lecteur, dans la direction de sa lecture. (IV, 849, *Ecrire*)

This is the fear of self-exposure, of the exposure of the activity with which she identifies. What is expressed at first as an understandable desire for privacy, the claim of a physical space to occupy in the world and one that could sustain its owner, but evolves into a constant existential dread focused on the outside world, convinced that it threatens her sanity and her ability to write. This self-isolation for the sake of work leads to an impasse in her creative process as well as her own physical decline. While not eliminating the possibility that her work might serve as good objects or functional transitional objects for her readers, it does not serve to actually reinforce her sense of a stable identity or her integration into the outside world.

## Conclusion

Having seen the ways that borderlines operate both constructively and destructively in the disciplines of psychoanalysis and literature, we have far from exhausted the usefulness of this image as a heuristic tool. During this same postwar period, philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) proposed a *Poétique de l'espace* that also saw the experience of embodiment in space, and particularly of physical boundaries, as being fundamental to poetic production, although he made a sharp distinction between poetic and scientific modes of thought. Less clearly delimited, however, are the possibilities for borderlines in the work of contemporary philosopher and novelist Michel Serres and philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers. Stengers's "concept nomade" (mentioned briefly in chapter 1) and Serres's "ange" are both ways of envisioning concepts that allow for movement between disciplines. They take into account the liminary status of an idea such as the borderline, which can itself operate as a contact point between systems of thought.

In addition to their more immediate instantiations as skin, shells, houses, etc., borderlines have a larger sense in the twentieth century that it will be impossible to ignore in future research. Although geopolitical boundaries have only been evoked by one of the authors here (and then only in their irrelevance), they are not so easily dismissed by the vast amounts of people whose lives have been affected by them. In the continuation of this project, the ways in which the "réaménagement des espaces culturelles, les bouleversements des garants métasociaux" described in the introduction are imbricated with the shifting of national boundaries during this time period must be

addressed. In addition to the ways in which the corporeal foundations of the borderlines affect and are affected by a primary principle of internal/external differentiation, a study of the ways in which geography and transnationalism change this experience and its role in the creative process will be necessary.

What must also be kept in mind when considering the implications of political borderlines—as well as any other kind—are the ethical concerns that accompany them. Any work that takes seriously the idea of the borderline as a fundamental principle of mental functioning must avoid naturalizing it as an excuse for the impulse to exclude or alien those who find themselves on the exterior of a given border. As we have seen in the work of the various writers here, borders or limits can be used both to exclude and to bring into contact or facilitate exchange. They can be used to create new work and new communication, to change or to rigidify already-existing barriers, but the consideration of them as a fundamental structure of thought and experience offers a new lens by which to interpret literary and cultural production in the postwar period.

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