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Special Issue

THE BOOK, INSIDE AND OUT

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COVER DESIGN: Shosaku Arakawa's "16. Review and Self-Criticism" (also called *Courbet's Canvas*) was chosen for the cover because it was seen to represent the perfect synthesis of concerns addressed in the issue, those of language and its illustration. The stenciled text is done in tones of gray, from almost white to almost black, and punctuated by basic colors sometimes crudely applied. Although certainly more salient in the color original, the question of visible — and invisible — language is still posed in the varying gray tones of the reproduction (see p. 441 ff. for further discussion). Reproduction by courtesy of the artist.

The Book, Inside and Out

From time to time, scholars take stock of the situation of the book, reminded by contemporary literary artifacts that books are more than the words that compose them: this issue commemorates one such moment. For books, as we learn in any dictionary, not only *say* volumes, but *are* volumes — spaces to be filled with text, shapes or objects to be seen, read, held or otherwise handled. And it is all the various dimensions of the book that have fired the imaginations of the authors represented in this issue, who consider the book from "cover to cover," so-to-speak. As will be seen in the articles that follow, some focus on its outer surfaces or its shape; others on the typographic letters constituting the text and their relationship to all manner of verbal or visual illustration; still others on projections of the book page in space, such as posters or paintings counterfeiting printed matter. But all are concerned with the palpable dimensions of the book, as mediated through vision, and their influence on both reading and interpretation.

In printed texts, the typographic letter often remains invisible; transparent, its object is to convey a mental image rather than to call attention to its own shape. Conversely, painted letters stand out against a background not so neutral as a page, and are thus endowed with a three-dimensionality untypical of printed characters. However, through a provocative bilingual reading of Beckett's *Mal vu mal dit* ("Samuel Beckett: Color, Letter, and Line"), Tom Conley recreates for printed letters the illusion of painted relief. Colors manifest themselves through the continual process of translation that Conley finds always at work in Beckett's writing: the exotic idiom of the foreign tongue (French) adds color to an underlying English text, which is more clearly articulated, hence closer to the black and white of printed discourse. Conley's sensitivity to the overlay, underlay or projection of one language on the other expands the dimensions of Beckett's book, its single volume doubled by analogy to the second language of painting: in Conley's words, "the palette of colors emanating from the words is manifest in words that self-translate. They invariably self-duplicate; they emulsify their vocables and graphemes into — metaphorically, we must add, — what can be termed a languished paste of letters."

Interested also in the power of letters to represent, Steven Winspur ("Poetry, Portrait, Poetrait") does not treat the pictorial characteristics of

the letter; his essay shows how, through the processes of memory and rhetorical displacement, vestiges (*traits*) of the object or person represented reappear intact in the "poetrait." He traces the roots of the "poetrait" through Court de Gébelin's representational alphabet (which sometimes takes human shapes) to pictographic script and hieroglyphic writing. But, by calling up conventions of literary and pictorial mimesis which motivate links between objects and their representations, thus investing them with the illusion of reality, he questions an oft-assumed fidelity of painted or photographic portraits: exact copies, these reminders of man's mortality fail to render the original model. Winspur suggests that the original, present to imagination or memory in an idealized form, is only captured in the metaphorically-penned literary portrait of a Montaigne, which privileges identification by connotation (personality traits) over denotation (family name, title, or history), or the "poetrait" of St.-John Perse's *Oiseaux*, brushed in figurative language.

Conley's and Winspur's reflections are made possible in part by recourse to a dual-purpose terminology serving both painting and literary texts. Carol James ("'No, says the signified' / The 'Logical Status' of Words in Painting") finds that in Shosaku Arakawa's work, inspired by the punning inscriptions of Duchamp's readymades, the line of demarcation between writing (language) and painting is blurred not only by conventions of theoretical discourse, but also by design. Using the Duchampian term of the *regardeur* ("the viewer/reader who creates"), James examines the interdependence of language and image in Arakawa's poster series entitled *The Mechanism of Meaning*, where words are aligned as in texts and stenciled in the same typewritten or cursive characters. The collection of posters thus appears as a series of disconnected pages from the same book, which cannot be read without reference to other books — dictionaries, anthologies of famous sayings, quotations, maxims, etc. — repositories of common culture that enable us to decipher what we see and read. As James puts it, Arakawa's work is "far less art about art than Duchamp's and far more 'art about discourse'." She relates the displacement of writing from the book page to Arakawa's human-sized canvases or posters to theories of performative language in order to show the degree to which Arakawa's work is itself performance, and how verbal commands displayed *art*ificially involve the *regardeur* in the performance while putting into question their own meaning, as well as meaning-creating systems.

Laurie Edson ("Visible Language in Contemporary Culture") studies both sides of the question of verbal and visual languages to show how influences external to text or painting pre-form interpretations. She invokes secondary semiological systems which determine — from the very moment of first impressions — subsequent interpretations of artistic works

and confer upon them an aura of truth. The image that initially greets the eye calls into play the myths and fictions that form any culture's vision of the real, thus giving the works the illusion of reality. The cover design of the Vintage Press paperback edition (1980) of Manual Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* sets just such a trap: the curvaceous female figure, which seems to have stepped right off a movie poster, embodies both male and female fantasies of seduction. In Edson's analysis, the intermediary images of movie posters and, by extension, movies themselves, shape the reader's initial impressions of the book just as, in the novel, they contour and channel the main character's fantasy life before it spills over into reality. Edson's detailed and nuanced reading of Roy Lichtenstein's canvases as single frames isolated from their serialized comic book context illustrates the process in reverse. Their verbal clichés summon up stereotyped notions which ensnare the viewing subject into the contemplative act with the lure of the commonplace and dime-novel romances.

The remaining three essays treat other forms of illustration and the book, particularly the role illustration plays in the creation of tradition-breaking publications. Centering her analysis on a book that was considered something of a novelty in its time, Anne-Marie Christin ("A Visionary Book: Charles Nodier's *L'Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux*"), muses upon the nature of the book and the questions it raises with respect to reading visually. According to Christin, Nodier's *Roi de Bohême* anticipates Mallarmé in that it reveals a conception of the book as an enigma or dream, "a conception of writing without a master, or the book without an author." Christin discusses the relationship between its three creators (Nodier, the illustrator Tony Johannot, and the typesetter) and how this triple authorship creates a sometimes discordant interweave of text, typography and illustration. Nodier's verbal account often undercuts, dismisses or otherwise cancels out the visual import of Johannot's illustrations; but it is owing to the mediating influence of typography, half-image and half-word, that Johannot's images are integrated into the text, sometimes placed between passages or centered on the page, with the text hyphenating itself around them. Christin's initial analysis of the evident use of intertexts (Rabelais and Sterne) — which Nodier calls, more bluntly, plagiarism — prepares the way for her conclusion that authorship is never either individual or definitive: a book such as Nodier's, lacking in pictorial and narrative continuity, gains coherence through a language more visionary than visible, that is, through the agency of a Mallarméan "dreamer" synthesizing the multiple creative influences at its source.

In my essay ("Press Art: Poets and Their Printing Machines") the concept of originality is also put into question, but primarily insofar as print technology has affected creation and production in modern poetry. I begin

with Apollinaire, who was among the first (with the Futurists) to articulate early twentieth-century artists' fascination with machines, and I examine in the works of poets influenced by Apollinaire's *calligrammes* evolving modes of production or reproduction, and how they have favored the development of innovative poetic forms. Part of the "original" artist's dilemma is that working with printing machines involves the collaboration of the sort treated by Christin in Nodier's *Roi de Bohême*; originality has been further problematized in the latter twentieth century by the fact that human collaborators have often been replaced by machines that threaten alienation by the mechanization of artistic creation. Although some examples of such "press art" were originally published in books or pamphlets, others such as Albert-Birot's poster-poems and John Furnival's verbal "structures" have only been reproduced in books, for they were intended — however close their resemblance to book pages may be — to be part of the expanded print environment of placards and billboards. Contrary to general preconceptions, originality of expression has not been lost in the neutral medium of newsprint or advertising text, for it is the poet who has co-opted the medium, to retransform it into art, and not the reverse.

Renée Hubert's essay ("Readable - Visible: Reflections on the Illustrated Book") is concerned with the book as artifact. It studies the author-illustrated book by John Crombie and Shiela Bourne (Kickshaw's Press) not so much as a product of book-making technologies but as a jumping-off point for reflections on textual art of the contemporary avant-garde as exemplified by the "livre detourné," or "deviant" book. In the Crombie-Bourne book, illustration and text are of the same matter — typographical letters. But if theirs seems quite distinct from models of books illustrated by painters such as Miró or graphic artists such as Tony Johannot, it is just as far removed from the typographic illustration found in traditional *calligrammes*, which are simultaneously text and image and generally represent some shape or object referentially or metaphorically present in the text. In the Crombie-Bourne book Hubert finds an almost inimical relationship between text and illustration, which causes the text to efface gradually the heap of jumbled letters pictured at its beginning and to replace it with aligned words evoking the initial image only through the description of crumpled-up sheets of paper — the customary debris accompanying literary creation — that grows in volume with the text. The definition of the text as a visible volume permits Hubert to discard other terms commonly used to classify illustrated books (the *livre de peintre* or *livre d'artiste*, for example) and to identify the Crombie-Bourne book with the "livre detourné," the book turned away from its original function as reading material to become simply matter, or object to be seen. But rather than

portending the end of books as we know them, Hubert suggests that "deviant" books urge the beginning of a different kind of reading which would give visibility to the text itself and would seek out the relationships created between two volumes — the book and its words.

The contemporary reader's experience of books is epitomized in the Barthesian principle of textual pleasure, which doubles the reader's delectation in the text with that pleasure derived from an appreciation of the esthetic, cultural and physical spaces in which it has evolved and is to be constantly reinterpreted. This is, indeed, the conclusion to which a reading of the essays contained in this book has led me. Having reached it, I wish now to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the production of this issue in ways material and immaterial and to invite our readers to confirm my own pleasure, preferably from within the issue as well as from without!

Judith Preckshot

Visible Language in Contemporary Culture

Laurie Edson

ABSTRACT. Visible language appears in many forms in our society and serves a wide variety of functions. More often than not, it is built into an aesthetic design to serve a graphic as well as a referential function, as in posters, tee shirts, restaurant menus, or graffiti in New York's subway stations. This article focuses on specific instances in which visible language works with or against an accompanying image to produce certain effects on the reader/spectator by playing with conventions of representation. By exploring the book cover of Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (with its reference to movie posters of the 40's) and various "comic strip" paintings by Roy Lichtenstein, the article investigates the extent to which myths and fictions invade and play dominant roles in our daily lives.

At no time in history has language bombarded us visually to the extent that it does in the 1980's. On an average day, an average person is unconsciously besieged by an extraordinary quantity of visual language exorting him or her to think certain thoughts, perform specific acts, play various roles, eat certain things, "buy" various ideologies. In our consumer society, advertising has never had it better. Through various juxtapositions of text and image, the power elite continues to develop markets and convince John or Jane Doe that the products being sold are necessary to their lives, capable of winning friends, prestige, and influence, or likely to make them more attractive to their mates.

Visible language so saturates our world that sometimes we hardly notice its existence. We usually go about our business relatively unaware of its presence and its effects upon us, but its absence can paradoxically be the source of extreme disorientation, as anyone trying to find his or her way through the maze of unmarked city streets of Boston knows. Some types of visible language are so non-obtrusive and repetitive that we fail to notice them anymore, like the message on the side of the cigarette package warning that what we are about to do may be hazardous to our health. Other types of visible language literally dominate our lives by looming large on obnoxious billboards along roads, interrupting our favorite cops-and-robbers television show at inopportune moments to tell us that "Coke is It," peering at us from car bumpers exorting us to "Have a nice day," reminding us that the shoes we are wearing are "Bass" and that our jeans are "Gloria Vanderbilt."

Visible language appears in many forms in our society and serves a wide variety of functions. More often than not, it is built into an aesthetic design

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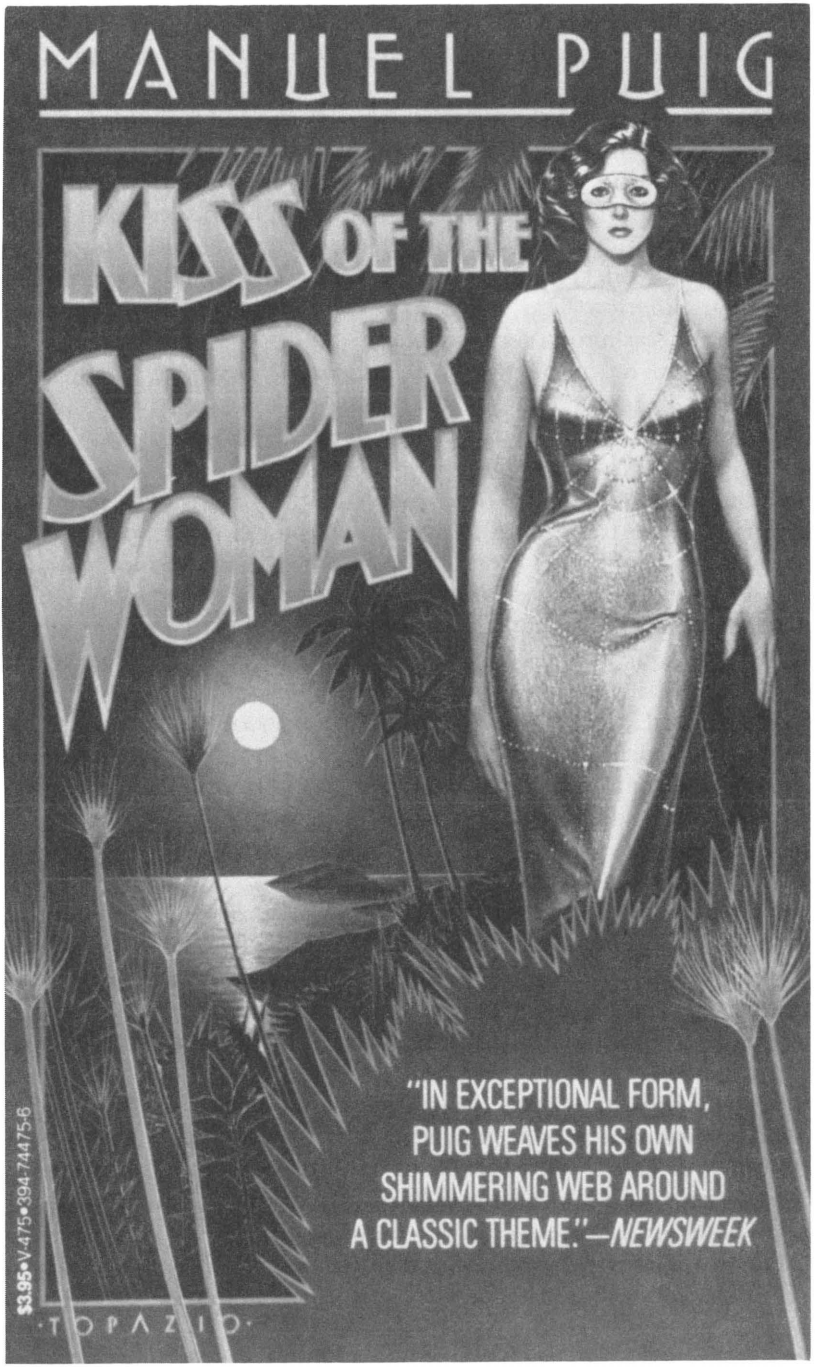
to serve a graphic as well as a referential function, as in posters, tee shirts, restaurant menus, or graffiti-art in New York's subway stations. The American Institute of Graphic Arts even established a separate category for bookjackets and paperback covers for the first time at their 1983 annual competition, recognizing the growing trend of publishers to try to sell books by "packaging" them in provocative or evocative cover designs.[1] This article will limit its field of inquiry by focusing on specific instances in which visible language works with or against an accompanying image to produce certain effects on the reader/spectator by playing with conventions of representation. The "texts" to be explored — and here I am using the word in the Barthesian sense to refer to anything that is apprehended, decoded/encoded, or interpreted (*given* meaning) by a reader, whether it be words, images, behavior, or events in the world[2] — are the cover designs of Manuel Puig's books, especially *Kiss of the Spider Woman,* and selected paintings by Roy Lichtenstein.

The double focus on Puig's book covers and Lichtenstein's paintings may initially seem strange, but I have chosen these two examples because each provides a clear illustration of what Barthes, in his *Mythologies,* has termed a "second-order semiological system."[3] Stated in another way, Puig's book covers and Lichtenstein's paintings are *metalanguages:* each is a language *about* another language that precedes it, so that the relationship between the two different languages, or semiological systems, becomes an added factor in interpretation. Puig's book covers, in addition to carrying the title of the book and an image, also signify "I am a movie poster." Certain paintings by Lichtenstein, in addition to incorporating words and images, also signify "I am a comic strip."

Manuel Puig

One of Manuel Puig's trademarks is the incorporation of phenomena from popular culture into his novels; in this respect he can be compared to the American Pop artists of the 1950's and 60's. *Heartbreak Tango,* for instance, emphasizes the way in which radio soap operas, movies, songs, and women's magazines create myths about behavior and society which then control the lives of the characters. The chapters of *The Buenos Aires Affair* begin with quotations from film scripts, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* revolves around the narrating of film plots as a homosexual window dresser and a Marxist revolutionary pass time together in prison. By juxtaposing film plots (conspicuously fictive) with a story of two people who have transgressed accepted norms of behavior (values which are less conspicuously, but equally, fictive), Puig explores the way in which myths can and do function for politically and socially repressive ends.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A popular saying advises that one shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but the covers of Manuel Puig's books are designed with exactly that in mind: to make the book look as interesting as possible so that the casual bookstore browser will pick it up and take it home. The cover of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is one of the most intriguing of all (Figure 1).[4] The peculiar shape of the letters forming the title, with their exaggerated points and angled positioning, recalls lettering used in films and film posters of the 40's. Although there was, to my knowledge, no actual movie called *Kiss of the Spider Woman* preceding Puig's book, the title is clearly recognizable as belonging to a specific film genre (in 1944, for instance, Gale Sondergaard starred in a popular Sherlock Holmes movie called simply *Spider Woman*). The words of the title, then, relay two kinds of information, one by their content and one by their form and context. We are being told in various ways that this book will have something to do with movies, with popular culture, and with the pleasures — and dangers — of story-telling.

Instead of separating the words of the title from the image, which is the usual format of most book covers, the designer has incorporated words and image together in the same space, as is often done in movie posters. What is represented is not the kiss of the spider woman, but the spider woman herself. It is left to the spectator to imagine being kissed by such a woman (or to imagine what effect the kiss of the spider woman would have on a human being). The woman on the cover seems innocent enough and, except for her bizarre dress and her mask, she is meant to represent a recognizably "pretty" woman with traditionally well-balanced facial features and healthy looking jet-black hair. Without the words "spider woman" on the cover, a spectator might not even notice the threat posed by this woman. When the words are taken into account, though, the co-presence of text and image suggests something to the reader/spectator that goes beyond either the specific words or the image. To state it differently, the words of the title, "Kiss of the Spider Woman," would not seem so enticing if they were accompanied by an ugly, repelling insect or if they appeared without an image. What makes the book cover so striking is the presence of an evocative title suggestive of danger and possible death, and the simultaneous representation of a pretty woman.

The other feature on the book's cover that is meant to be enticing is the publicity blurb from *Newsweek* announcing: "In exceptional form, Puig weaves his own shimmering web around a classic theme." White letters on a brown ground which is delineated from the rest of the image by a spikey

Figure 1. Front cover, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Random House, Vintage Books Edition, 1980.

red outline (meant to echo the effect of the moon's silvery backlighting on the trees and shrubs), the quotation from *Newsweek* figures prominently on the front cover. The designer undoubtedly chose these words because of their resonance with the title, and the endorsement seems even stronger because of the echo. Publicity blurbs probably do help sell books, especially since people have come to expect endorsement by "authorities" before reading or seeing the many books, movies, or plays that compete for their attention. That expectation, interestingly enough, has been created by the critics themselves, who now often hold a disproportionate amount of power in these matters.[5] *Newsweek* is right to compare Puig to the spider woman in that he weaves a web, but I shall argue later that this web is not spun around a theme, but around the reader.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger discusses how, in the history of Western painting, women, and particularly nude women, have been the object of men's (the spectator-owner's) gazes: "Almost all post-Renaissance European sexual imagery is frontal — either literally or metaphorically — because the sexual protagonist is the specator-owner looking at it."[6] In these paintings, the nude was most often depicted as submissive, passively looking out at the spectator who stared at her nakedness. Because she was on display for the always-absent and fully-clothed male spectator, she was a powerless object. But this is clearly not the case with the Spider Woman on Puig's cover. Even though she is portrayed frontally and erotically, and even though she wears a slinky silvery dress that is meant to reveal voluptuous curves underneath, it would be inappropriate to call this woman powerless. Unlike the reclining nudes of the tradition, she is clothed and standing rather defiantly with a cool, controlled look about her masked face. The mask is a crucial feature: she sees us, but we cannot see her. The old power structures are reversed so that we, as spectators, are meant to feel threatened, less powerful, and unsure of what we are dealing with.

This book cover is a good example of what Berger means when he says that publicity images "stimulate the imagination by way of either memory or expectation."[7] On the one hand, bookstore browsers will probably, upon seeing this book advertised on the shelf, consciously or unconsciously classify it in relation to what they already know and remember: a slinkily dressed woman promises eroticism and seduction, but a spider-webbed dress and a mask simultaneously mean danger. The picture teases the spectator and introduces feelings of uneasiness by presenting a dangerous enticement. Even the full moon and the way it backlights the spikey trees, plants, and grasses signifies strangeness, possible danger, and possible romance — certainly a privileged time of the month when things are out of the ordinary. Seduction, enticement, power, strangeness, possible duplicity, exoticism, and eroticism are all advertised by the cover design.

What is promised by the cover, then, but only to a reader who does not already know Puig's work, is pure escapism. Mark Roskill and David Carrier, authors of *Truth and Falsehood in Visual Images*, have suggested that fantasy serves a social function and that "one of the key functions of fantasy in any form must inevitably be the provision of an escape mechanism, for those who need to step outside the concrete and limited possibilities of their work or life situation. Science fiction illustrations and posters, which deal in the suggestion of impossible rather than possible worlds, would then be forms of fabrication catering directly to such escapist social needs."[8] Although Puig's book covers do not fall under the category of science fiction illustration, the types of images represented on them come from this same "impossible world" — the fictionalized world of movies into which we can temporarily escape from our lives. This is, ostensibly, the reason why the two prisoners in the book engage in the recounting of movie plots.

But Puig's books are anything but escapist. Once Puig, as spider man, has lured us into the web of his unravelling story, the politically radical nature of his enterprise becomes clear and poignant. In the midst of seemingly innocent story-telling of movie plots, other stories of political repression, terror, torture, and coercion insert themselves, interspersed with political and social criticism by Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and others. Although the book cover may promise escapism by building on the conventions we normally associate with fantasy, what we get is something quite the opposite. Those who judge the book by its cover will find that they have been too easily taken in. But that is precisely the point.

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger has shown how publicity images are often nostalgic, resuscitating works of art of the past in an attempt to sell the future: "Publicity is, in essence, nostalgic.... It cannot itself supply the standards of its own claims. And so all its references to quality are bound to be retrospective and traditional. It would lack both confidence and credibility if it used a strictly contemporary language."[9] Berger's words about nostalgia ring especially true in the contemporary culture of 1985, where an ever-increasing number of television commercials are incorporating songs from the 60's (encouraged by the success of *The Big Chill*), where clips from old television shows like *Leave it to Beaver* are cut into potato chip commercials, where women's clothes and hairstyles take on looks from the 20's, 30's, 40's, and 50's, where Art Deco graphics and jewelry have again come into vogue. The cover of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* with its 40's graphics and reference to old movies is part of this general trend of quoting the past. Yet it is not so much a nostalgic return to some better time that is at stake here as much as a critique of the ways in which movies and the myths they perpetuate have influenced the way we see the world.[10]

Roy Lichtenstein

While the covers of Puig's novels play with signifying systems of cinema, Lichtenstein's paintings refer to yet another aspect of popular culture: comic strips. Comic strips are only one of the many kinds of objects taken from the culture of mass-production that Lichtenstein and other Pop artists chose to depict in the early 60's. Perhaps the most famous of all are Andy Warhol's Campbell soup cans, but other important examples include Rosenquist's billboards, Jasper Johns' flags, Oldenburg's giant hamburgers, or Rauschenberg's collages of objects and images of contemporary culture. Lichtenstein was fascinated with, and reproduced, furniture and other material found in magazine advertisements (a kind of extension of Duchamp's readymades), claiming that it was above all their artificial appearance that intrigued him.[11] Given his desire to comment on the artificiality of mass-production, it is not surprising that comic strips would attract him with their stylization, limited color scheme, minimal indication of volume, impersonal treatment of the great themes of love and war, and especially the benday dot pattern required by the printing process.

The comic strips also provided him a means of rejecting the inward, private emotional emphasis associated with Abstract Expressionism (because any emotion portrayed in comic strips is so universal, conventional, and impersonal) while they furnished him with a model to paint representational images in an artificial, highly stylized way that is neither abstract nor realistic. The limited color scheme of red, blue, yellow, black, white, and sometimes green was also a reaction against Abstract Expressionism and its seemingly unlimited palette of color to convey emotion. Finally, the plain, straightforward style of lettering found in advertisements and comic strips (unlike, for example, the artful use of lettering in Cubist, Dadaist, or Futurist collage) corresponded to the impersonality of the mass media that Pop artists embraced. As Lawrence Alloway points out in his recent book on Lichtenstein, the artist's use of words in his paintings implicitly resists the twentieth-century theory of "medium purity" by introducing elements from culture and advertising (low art) into easel painting, or what is supposedly high art.[12] By "quoting" a mass-produced comic strip in a single easel painting, Lichtenstein invites a reconsideration of the very distinction between what has conventionally been called high and low art.

Lichtenstein's earliest comic strip paintings depicted recognizable characters such as Dick Tracy (1960), Mickey Mouse, and Donald Duck (1961), but soon he opted for the more anonymous characters found in love or war comics of the period. Unlike Rauschenberg, whose collage canvases contain fragments of recognizable realistic scenes or images of real figures

such as John F. Kennedy, and unlike Warhol, whose silkscreens portray images of real objects such as Campbell's soup cans or real people like Marilyn Monroe, Lichtenstein has drained his images of literal reference so that there is no doubt that what we are seeing is something artificial, or, at best, the representation of a stereotype ("the representation of a representation," as Donald Judd has called them.[13]) The women in Lichtenstein's comic strip paintings are all recognizable types, and they are always caught in the midst of some dramatic situation. One might even say that the genre preferred by Lichtenstein in these paintings is melodrama: exaggerated situations full of cliché, usually about amorous intrigues in which 1) the woman is left alone to suffer in silence (*Drowning Girl*), 2) the woman wants to be alone to suffer in silence (*Eddie Diptych*), or 3) the woman finds ecstatic fulfillment in coupledom (*We Rose Up Slowly*). Just as Lichtenstein exaggerates and intensifies emotions in his canvases, so too does he enlarge the scales of the paintings from tiny comic book size to full-blown wall size. The panels of *We Rose Up Slowly*, for instance, measure 68" x 24" and 68" x 68".

Most often, but not always, the situation depicts anxiety and crisis so that what ultimately emerges is a sense of the incongruity between the subject matter (anxiety) and the cool, impersonal, mechanical style in which it is portrayed.[14] Lichtenstein seems to be parodying emotions at the same time that he comments on the mechanical perfection of mass media reproduction. The emotions, though, are not those of real people or even real characters; they are the stereotyped emotions of stereotyped, anonymous cartoon figures.[15]

Lichtenstein's comic strip figures are always already "in situation," always in a context that is not too difficult to decipher. This is not surprising, since a real comic strip is composed of a band made up of several individual frames that are meant to be read horizontally from left to right, as in any conventional narrative. Each individual scene, or frame, only makes sense in the context of the whole band. Similarly, just as individual frames are read in the context of the band, so too is each band only a fragment of a larger narrative, the one that develops in time in successive newspaper editions. By excerpting a single frame from an imagined band and isolating it on the canvas, Lichtenstein invites us to reconstruct the situation and to supply the contextual information we need for interpretation to take place. Because we know the conventions of comic strips so well and because these are such stereotyped situations, we have no difficulty in imagining the required context.

I turn now to three examples of Lichtenstein's incorporation of visible language in comic strip paintings to explore the various ways in which his words and images interact. Since the relationship of text to image often

Figure 2. Roy Lichtenstein, EDDIE DIPTYCH, 1962. Oil on canvas, 44" x 52" (2 panels). Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

influences the way an image is read, it seems important to consider both carefully. The first example, *Eddie Diptych* (Figure 2), is composed of two separate panels, the one on the left containing words and the one on the right containing a combination of words and images. As is customary, we start reading in the upper left hand corner and discover that the words on the left serve as a narrative introduction to the situation portrayed on the right, with the "I" clearly referring to the daughter: "I tried to reason it out!

I tried to see things from mom and dad's viewpoint! I tried not to think of Eddie, so my mind would be clear and common sense could take over! But Eddie kept coming back . . ." We read four separate sentences on the left, each one punctuated with an exclamation point except the last. The lack of exclamation point and substitution of the ellipsis marks this sentence's difference from the others; it is also the only one that does not begin with "I". Instead of showing final resolution at the end of the sentence with a period, Lichtenstein uses ellipsis to indicate a lack of resolution that corresponds with the sentence's content, "But Eddie kept coming back . . ." In addition, the ellipsis trailing off to the right invites us to turn our eyes to the panel on the right for further reading.

Following the conventions of comic strips, Lichtenstein portrays speech by enclosing words in a balloon and including a directional indicator under the balloon that points to the person speaking. In this example both people speak, although it is clear that the mother's speech precedes the daughter's because her balloon is on top (convention dictates that we read from top to bottom). Her words, "I have something for you to eat in the kitchen, dear . . ." trail off in ellipsis to indicate either a hesitation on her part (she is playing the role of the mother trying to be helpful but not knowing what to say) or else an interruption on the daugher's part (given the fact that the daughter's balloon follows immediately). The wrinkles on the mother's forehead signify her concern for her daughter's plight, but she falls into the cliché of the mother who believes that feeding her children will cure all their problems, or at least keep their minds off their problems. The daughter, eyebrows knit in obvious emotion (although it is difficult to tell if it is sadness, anger, pain, frustration, or stubbornness), rejects her mother's irrelevant offer: "I'm not hungry mother! PLEASE, I just want to go to my room!" The letters in the word "please" are bolder than the others, boldface type being the sign of a more emphatic voice, and the exclamation point reinforces the sense of melodramatic intensity. This daughter just wants to be by herself so that she can think about Eddie, although she pretends the opposite and denies her desire in the panel on the left ("I tried not to think of Eddie"). While the left hand panel indicates an attempt at a more rational mode of behavior with words like "reason," clear [mind]," and "common sense," the right hand panel portrays emotion.

It is interesting that the conventions of comic books call for speech to be represented by a directional indicator attached to balloons containing words rather than by open mouths. Although both mother and daughter speak in *Eddie Diptych*, their mouths remain shut. Sometimes words enclosed in balloons are meant to represent thought instead of speech, and this is done by connecting the balloon to the person thinking with a few

Figure 3. Roy Lichtenstein, DROWNING GIRL, 1963. Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 67 5/8" x 66 3/4". Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund (by exchange) and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright.

mini-balloons, as in *Drowing Girl* (Figure 3). Paradoxically, although the woman in *Drowning Girl* is thinking instead of speaking, Lichtenstein has painted her with an open mouth.

Drowning Girl is another of Lichtenstein's canvases of exaggerated emotion. In this painting the image occupies most of the canvas while the balloon's size is reduced to a very small area. Its size and position in the upper left portion of the painting balances the hand with rounded fingers emerging from the water in the lower right portion. The image depicts a female head surrounded by swirling water and Hokusai-like waves, her rounded shoulder and hand emerging from the waves. There are no straight lines in the picture: shoulder, fingers, hand, and hair all repeat the wave motif that dominates throughout. Even the balloon of words with its rounded contours fits pictorially into the overall design, as do the round mini-balloons that signify thought. Lichtenstein has painted tears underneath the woman's closed eyes so that the water on her face, associated metaphorically with the water surrounding her, suggests that she is drowning in her own grief. Her thoughts, "I don't care! I'd rather sink -- then call Brad for help!", reveal the stereotypically distraught female so characteristic of comic strips of the period. Exclamation points at the end of sentences again serve to intensify emotion, while the relatively small, than lettering seems to suggest a lack of strength or vigor, an inability to deal actively with the situation ("I don't care"). The two dashes after the word "sink" may signify a time lapse (the passage of time between thoughts) or else the presence of something like a sniffle between thoughts. In either case the dashes interrupt the sentence and create an effect of discontinuity that is at odds with the wavy continuity of the image.

Although the title promises a turbulent subject, the compositional elements of *Drowning Girl* are anything but turbulent. Her hair is absolutely in place, and her relaxed hand and head resemble the posture of a peacefully sleeping figure snuggled up against a pillow. Without the knitting of the eyebrows and the lines between the eyes and eyebrows, the face would appear calm — perhaps even eroticized. Everything in the painting suggests a calm, posed image, with no sign of danger and no potential for drowning. Lichtenstein has even used compositional elements to create depth in the traditional way (by overlapping forms) so that the viewer's eye is easily directed into the painting without ambiguity or conflict.[16] In this painting, the spectator's response to the visual material is quite different from our reaction to the verbal material.

In *We Rose Up Slowly* (Figure 4), Lichtenstein has separated the words from the image by creating two separate panels to hold each. The panel on the right depicts a highly stylized embracing couple caught in the ecstasy of anticipation: eyes closed, lips parted, heads positioned for what promises

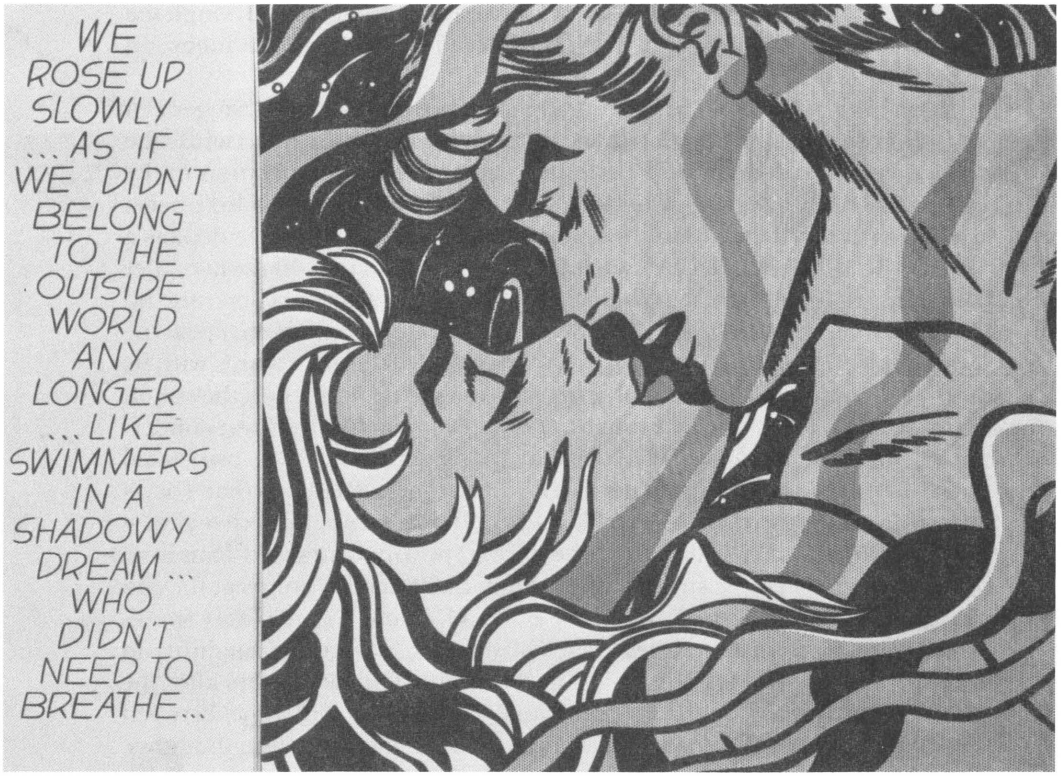

Figure 4. Roy Lichtenstein, WE ROSE UP SLOWLY, 1964. Oil and magna on canvas, 68" x 92". Collection Karl Stroher, Darmstadt. Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

to be a passionate kiss, they seem oblivious to the rest of the world. They are submerged in water, the blond locks of hair echoing the ribbon-like wavy patterns of seaweed and underwater currents that Lichtenstein has painted in black, white, and fields of benday dots. White bubbles scattered throughout reinforce the underwater quality and recall the benday dots, although they are printed on a much larger scale. Stylistically, Lichtenstein has included many of the conventions used in comic books to represent handsomeness or beauty, for instance, his thick neck and square jaw, or her long eyelashes, delicate nose, and full red lips. The panel is perfectly square so that neither horizontal nor vertical elements can compromise the overall way fluidity.

The panel on the left contains the words that are meant to serve as the caption for this image: "We rose up slowly ... as if we didn't belong to the outside world any longer ... like swimmers in a shadowy dream ... who

didn't need to breathe . . ." Unlike the two earlier paintings, the words of *We Rose Up Slowly* are not enclosed in a balloon and do not occupy the same physical space as the image. The convention of representing thought by connecting the balloon to an area near the thinker's head with a few mini-balloons (as in *Drowning Girl*) and the convention of representing speech by appending a directional indicator at the bottom of a balloon (as in *Eddie Diptych*) are both absent here. As a result, it is impossible to know with any certainty who these words belong to, although one can safely assume, given the proximity of the impending kiss, that they represent thought, not speech. The juxtaposition of the two panels seems to indicate that these are the thoughts of one member of the couple, and familiarity with the conventions of comic strips would lead us to associate the romantic, dreamy content of the words with the female rather than the male. Once again, it is clear that the convention of representing speech or thought in comic book images is completely separate from the content of the image (i.e., the presence of an open mouth).

Because the words of the sentence are spearated into four fragments and visually divided from each other by ellipses, the impression created is one of slow abandon, timelessness, and weightlessness, with the end of the sentence trailing off into infinity. The same effect is obtained in the panel with the image. Although Lichtenstein has depicted his romantic couple in a close-up view and has cropped their heads and bodies so that the kiss occupies the very center of the frame, the passionate intensity of the moment paradocially translates into the same timelessness, weightlessness, and abandon suggested by the form and content of the visible language in the other panel. Similarly, ribbons of swirling water currents, seaweed, and flowing waves of hair contribute to the overall sense of freedom from constraints. Even though the subject matter of the painting is designed to depict timelessness, Lichtenstein's use of the iconography of mass-produced comic strips plunges his painting right back into a specific time: the time that we now associate with popular culture of the 50's and 60's.

Verbal and visual discourse operate together in several different ways in this painting. At the simplest referential level, various elements in the image become recognizable thanks to the accompanying words, such as the fact that the couple seems suspended in water ("like swimmers") or that the darker ribbon-like patches of benday dots crossing the bodies may be shadows of seaweed or water currents ("in a shadowy dream"). Some of the words serve as ironical self-commentary on the status of the painted figures who literally do not "belong to the outside world" (outside the world of the painting, that is) and who literally do not "need to breathe." The verticality of the panel on the left with its vertical arrangement of words serves

an important function as it forces the eye of the reader/viewer to plunge from top to bottom, contradicting the directionality indicated in the title and the opening fragment, "We rose up slowly." And finally, by juxtaposing verbal and visual signifying systems, Lichtenstein has underlined the essential difference between language, which is directional in syntax, and this specific visual image, whose subject matter, pictorial elements, and square frame all work together to subvert a fixed directionality of reading, emphasizing instead a harmonious, spatial simultaneity.

Although the images offered on the front covers of Puig's novels and inside the frames of Lichtenstein's paintings are false in certain respects, they are true in others. Many critics have formulated theories about truth and falsehood in visual images, and the recent study by Roskill and Carrier has explored this issue in some detail, mapping out the different ways in which images can be true or false. The authors contrast "correspondence" theories of truth (which stress truth of representation and concern themselves with likeness or verisimilitude of behavior) with "coherence" theories of truth (which stress the way the work of art offers an insight into reality). A coherence theory, for example, might focus on the way something is framed, such framing being the expression of political, social, and cultural interests of a class of society. The example of the engagement photographs of the Prince and Princess of Wales, in which the Prince was positioned at a slightly higher level than the Princess, makes this point clear. Although the image is false with respect to the facts (the actual heights of the two individuals), it is true in terms of the prevailing male ideologies of the time, which sought to establish the male as taller and physically dominating (and thus superior to) the female. The same image may thus be both true and false at the same time, depending on the criteria being used to evaluate it.

It is in this respect, then, that the images on Puig's covers, with their reference to movie posters, and those in Lichtenstein's paintings, with their reference to comic strips, can be said to be true. Not only do they reflect the way all art involves a reworking of something that exists previously (literary critics use the concept of "intertextuality" to deny the self-sufficiency of any text and to affirm instead the dependence of a given text on a number of other texts already in place), but they serve to emphasize the extent to which myths and fictions invade and play dominant roles in our daily lives. As metalanguages, these semiotic systems function precisely because we are so familiar with the stories they tell.

1. David R. Brown and Steven Heller, *AIGA Graphic Design USA: 5* (Annual of the American Institute of Graphic Arts) (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1984).

2. See, for example, Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974). "Why not forgo the plurality of the 'arts' in order to affirm more powerfully the plurality of 'texts' "? (p. 56). Barthes develops his definition of "text" in "From Work to Text," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 155-164.

3. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 114-15.

4. Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (New York: Vintage Press, 1980).

5. Tom Wolfe provides a satiric account of how artists have conformed to the theories of prominent critics (Greenberg, Rosenberg, Steinberg) in *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976).

6. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 56.

7. Berger, p. 129.

8. Mark Roskill and David Carrier, *Truth and Falsehood in Visual Images* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p. 90.

9. Berger, p. 139.

10. The power of film to alter perception is discussed by Walter Benjamin in his well-known essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zorn (New York: Shocken Books, 1969). See especially his remarks about reception in a state of distraction, pp. 239-40.

11. Many critics have commented on this aspect of Lichtenstein's work. See, for instance, Lawrence Alloway's interview with the artist in his *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), and Robert Rosenblum, "Roy Lichtenstein and the Realist Revolt," *Metro*, no. 8 (April 1963), reprinted in John Coplans, ed., *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), pp. 115-36 (especially p. 134).

12. Alloway, p. 24.

13. Donald Judd, *Arts Magazine*, 38 (Nov. 1963), p. 33, quoted in Diane Waldman, *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1971), p. 10.

14. Diane Waldman has spoken of the contrast between the "hot" subject and the "cool" style (p. 13).

15. Cartoon figures have become a "serious" subject of study recently; Umberto Eco analyzes the various types portrayed in Charles Schultz's Peanuts and Krazy Kat comic strips in the *New York Review of Books*, 32, No. 10 (June 13, 1985), pp. 16-17.

16. Diane Waldman points out the "series of overlapping forms that direct one's attention into the painting: a wave uncovering the girl's hand at the wrist, the tip of her thumb touching her face, the top of her shoulder covering her hair, etc." (p. 15)

Poetry, Portrait, Poetrait

Steven Winspur

ABSTRACT. The aim of this essay is to show how a writing of visible traits has been an ideal shared by writers of (and commentators on) French poetry for at least the last two hundred years. I use the term *trait* in its various meanings, both as personal attribute and as written or, especially, painted trace: according to the etymology of por-tray, the trait "drawn forth" in a painting or what I call a "poetrait," preserves some vital element of the object or person portrayed. In order to define this writing of traits, I begin by examining some early texts of the 18th and 16th centuries that propose such a writing. After contrasting the trait with the concept of an arbitrary linguistic sign, I go on to show how the trait depends for its existence on the displacement of meaning inherent in figurative language, and especially in poetry. An analysis of poems by Eluard and Saint-John Perse forms the basis for my argument that a poetic writing of traits, inviting the reader to seek meaning in a poem's visual form, rests on a myth of the portrait whereby the marks of a written language are drawn directly from nature.

The eighteenth-century notion of a pictographic script that preceded and gave birth to the earliest written alphabet still exerts a hold on the popular imagination of today, despite attacks against the philosophical and linguistic premisses of such a view that have been made over the last twenty years.[1] The fact that this notion has not undergone radical reform over the last two hundred years can be seen from the two juxtaposed commentaries on the origin of writing that follow — the first from de Brosses's two-volume *Treatise on the Mechanical Formation of Languages* that was published in Paris in 1765,[2] and the second, the entry for "cuneiform," from *The New Harper's Bible Dictionary* whose eighth edition appeared in New York (Harper and Row) in 1973:

> When the natural figures [i.e. pictograms] were viewed for the first time as symbols of other objects, there were so many things that they could be used to say that it became necessary to simplify, alter and corrupt nature and reduce the figures to simpler traits which made them unrecognizable.
>
> Cuneiform [writing] was the successor of the impractical pictographic, which had devised thousands of symbols made to resemble the house, man, or animal, etc., indicated. In the transition from pictographs to phonetics, the number of symbols was

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> gradually reduced, for the sake of speed, from several thousands to about 150 arbitrary groups of lines; which were still further reduced, after contact with the old Hebrew alphabet, to about 39.

A second notion that is equally long-lasting although, perhaps, less well known is the view that poetry gives us a privileged insight into the workings of these early forms of writing, and especially of hieroglyphic writing (a more developed form than the pictogram proper since the hieroglyph incorporates elements of syntax in addition to the pictorial form of its characters[3]). This is the view expressed, for instance, in the eighteenth century by Diderot when he wrote that poetry is "no longer just a chain of living terms that expose [their writer's] thought with force and nobility, but that it is still a tissue of hieroglyphs piled up one on the other that paints this thought."[4] It is also a view that has been given theoretical respectability recently in France by Julia Kristeva and we see it surfacing in her claim that "phrasographical writing [i.e. hieroglyphic writing with a rudimentary syntax, as in Chinese ideograms] prefigures the type of linguistic mechanism whereby the message is removed from the individual words themselves and is instead transmitted in a trans-verbal articulation that dreams or modern poetry or the hieroglyph of every aesthetic system commemorate."[5]

In the pages that follow I shall examine this notion of poetry's link to a pictographic origin of writing and try to unearth some of the reasons for the hold that it has exerted over critics and poets for the last two hundred years. Rather than look for such reasons in the work of poets who have overtly espoused a pictographic aesthetic — Ezra Pound, for instance, whose 1934 book *ABC of Reading* advocates the invention of poetic ideograms modelled on Chinese characters[6] — I shall concentrate instead on poems and essays that exploit a key term in the quotation from de Brosses that I gave at the outset: the "trait." For it is in the trait, a special written trace that is something more than just an inscribed sign, that I believe hieroglyphic readings of poetry find their authority.

According to the hypothetical birth of alphabetized characters that Antoine Court de Gébelin postulated in his book *The Origin of Language and of Writing*, published in Paris in 1775, ten years after de Brosses's treatise, Roman characters still contain the essential traits of the pictograms from which they were derived. With "each letter being the painting in the object" for Court de Gébelin,[7] and each phoneme being a painting of an medium of sound (appreciated by the ear and not the eye), "the resemblance between two portraits," as Gérard Genette has written, "results only from their equal faithfulness to their common model,"[8] namely the object "painted" by both the sound and the letter. I believe that Genette's use of

the term "portrait" in this remark does not come about by accident. For the hypotheses advanced by such eighteenth-century researchers as de Brosses and Court de Gébelin rest on the supposition that the simplified characters of the modern alphabet still contain "traits" of their natural pictographic predecessors. More specific than a "truth of painting" as Genette has called it (p. 108), this supposition is in fact a "truth of the portrait" or rather, as I hope to show, a *myth* of the portrait whereby the trait that is "drawn forth" in a painting (according to the etymology of por-tray) is believed to be a mark *contained in the original object itself.*

We can see this myth at work if we contrast Court de Gébelin's derivation of the upper-case Roman letter A with the more recent derivation of that character given in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1979 Edition). In the latter volume the modern letter is shown to preserve the ancient Greek upturned V form with its stems joined by an almost horizontal bar:  . This Greek character was formed by turning around through 90 degrees the older Greek  character which in turn was an inversion of the earlier Phoenician symbol "aleph"  , meaning, we are told, "ox." In other words, there is a visible continuity of *traces* between the three lines in the Phonenician to the three lines of the Roman A. In Court de Gébelin's derivation, however, this continuity of traces is replaced by a continuity of *traits:* the Greek character , with the help of its "corresponding" Chinese character , points backwards to an original pictogram of a match stick man with his arms held by his sides while his legs are spread apart, , which obviously represents a person, or more precisely for Court de Gébelin, "*le maître,*" the "master," a meaning whose ideological import is reinforced by the definition of master as "He who has" which contains in its French form the very letter that this speculative etymological journey was meant to explain: "Celui qui A."[9] Reading this etymological derivation in the direction that Court de Gébelin intended (rather than in the reverse direction that our early etymologist followed: from the modern A back to a fictitious origin) we see how the "legs" of our letter A still carry the traits of their original pictogram depicting man himself, the first master of writing and perhaps (although Court de Gébelin does not make this connection explicit) even the very first master (and namer) of all — A-dam. In other words, our modern alphabet is not made up merely of traces or arbitrary lines but of lines drawn by nature herself, or "natural figures" as De Brosses termed them, and then "drawn forth" from nature by the world's first por-traitists, the inventors of pictograms.

To better understand what is involved in this notion of natural traits and also its relevance to theories of poetry, let's pursue a bit further the contrast between trait and arbitrary trace. We can recast this contrast in Saussurean terms by saying that, unlike a sign, that has an arbitrary link between its

signifier (or trace) and its signified (or conceptual meaning), the trait has a motivated link between the two.[10] Court de Gébelin makes essentially the same point when he argues that "what is painted [namely, the original pictogram] could not be arbitrary, since it is always determined by the nature of the object to be painted."[11] In other words, the trait reflects the original scene that it depicts in the same way that we think a picture reflects its original — in a "natural" (non-arbitrary) way. (Incidentally, Saussure himself would appear to be sympathetic with this view since he too used a *picture* of a tree as a symbol for the signified that corresponds to the Latin signifier *"arbor,"* in his famous illustration of the signifier-signified relation.[12]) Why do pictures and traits appear to have a motivated link to their originals? And why do such writers as Court de Gébelin, Diderot (for whom poetry "is a tissue of hieroglyphs [...] that paint thought"[13]), Condillac[14] and Saussure consider *thought* to be reflected in pictures?

To begin with the first question, it is clear that a painting faithfully depicts its object only for a viewer familiar with the specific code of depiction employed in the painting — whether this code be the convention of match stick representations of people (as in Court de Gébelin's alphabet), the convention of a fixed single focus for perspective first established in Italian Renaissance paintings, the convention of movable and multiple foci for perspective (as in Cubist paintings), or any other system of conventionalized rules for representation. We must learn these (arbitrary) codes when, as children, we learn to see a painting as a painting (and not as just another object within our field of vision), but once they are learned such codes become part and parcel of the cultural world in which we live — a world that appears by *necessity* to be the way it is. Just as we tend to feel, in our monolingual moments, that a spade must indeed be called a spade, so our imaginary pictures of spades (like Saussure's tree picture) seem to denote the meaning of the term with even more necessity — merely because the codes of visual depiction are learned earlier than the codes of verbal designation (a fact about the acquisition of *cultural conventions* that is often distorted into a "fact" of nature expressed in such truisms as "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak."[15]). In short, the appearance of a necessary or motivated link between a picture and what it represents can exist only *within* an arbitrary or coded system of meaning, and yet this is not to say that there is no motivation between a painting and its object. Motivation inevitably comes into play (as in the case of calling a spade a spade) because cultural life, as Ludwig Wittgenstein points out, is the ground for all necessity — so much so that even a style of painting within a certain culture at a given time cannot be seen as interchangeable with another style.[16] What this all points to is that the "natural" motivation between a pictogram and the scene it

depicts, a motivation posited as the hypothetical inauguration of both writing and painting by thinkers from Warburton and Condillac onwards,[17] is not natural at all but rather a fictional *ideal*.[18] Moreover, it is precisely the ideality inherent in this notion of motivation that is expressed in the logic of the trait, according to which a trait is not just any old line inscribed arbitrarily by a human hand on a surface but is rather a trace drawn forth from nature itself (and hence motivated to an *ideal* degree), carrying in its very inscription a guarantee of its own truthfulness.

Such a writing of traits (that guarantee their veracity, unlike everyday writing composed of signs) is what Montaigne wanted to approximate in his *Essays*: "Or les traits de ma peinture ne fourvoyent point, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient" ("Now the traits in my painting are never at fault although they change and vary"), he writes in his essay "On Repentance."[19] The painting he refers to here is his written self-portrait that is the *Essays* in their totality.[20] In his preface to the reader he gives one reason for composing such a portrait: "I have intended it solely for the pleasure of my relatives and friends," he writes, "so that, when they have lost me — which they soon must — they may recover some features of my character and disposition [aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs], and thus keep the memory they have of me more completely and vividly alive."[21] The written traits, then, will ideally embody that other, natural, writing of traits whose characteristics (like an early version of DNA) make up the person Michel de Montaigne. These natural traits are inscribed in him in an ever more profound way than his own name that smacks of the cultural arbitrariness that I discussed earlier: "I have no name that is truly mine: of the two that I have, one is common to all my blood relatives, and even to others [...]. As for my other name, it is there for anyone who will want to take it for himself."[22] What is particularly interesting is Montaigne's notion of how his literary language of traits will capture the inscribed traits of nature. For although the comparison between writing and painting is ever present in the *Essays*, it is really a comparison between painting and a specific type of writing — figurative writing, whose model is poetry. While writing about "poetic flashes that enrapture their author and transport him outside himself," Montaigne adds that "It is the same thing in painting when certain marks escape sometimes from the hand of the painter [qu'il échappe par fois des traits de la main du peintre] surpassing his creativity and knowledge and provoking in him both admiration and astonishment."[23] The painted trait and poetic trait point to a common source.

The French surrealist Paul Eluard thought he had rediscovered this source when writing his book of poems and essays *Donner à voir*. "Quel est le trait qui dit je t'aime sans qu'on puisse en douter?" ("What is the trait that says I love you so that it cannot be doubted?") Eluard asks rhetorical-

ly.[24] Like Montaigne before him, Eluard is dreaming here of a writing of traits that would guarantee truthfulness and he believes he has found it in the figurative nature of poetic language. For in the next sentence he writes: "Words win. One can see what one wants to see only with closed eyes, everything is expressible in a loud voice." (p. 71) Poems allow us to see things other than with our eyes since the language of poetry, *via* its use of metaphor and comparison, recreates the traits of the particular object or person that is the text's subject and yet is, by necessity, absent from the text's verbal medium: by comparing person A to objects *c*, *e* and *f* we arrive at a unique description of A which may, depending on our talent with comparisons, just capture A perfectly. The true portrait, then, is not a literal copying of a subject but rather its transcription *via* the rhetorical displacements of literary language, and the true trait will be a *figure* of its original mark, "drawing out" this original mark by comparing it to another, or by highlighting it through exaggeration (just as skillful cartoons — a form of drawing praised by Baudelaire for its supreme artistry[25] — capture their subject by displacing it.)[26]

One of the clearest illustrations of Eluard's 1939 theory of the poetic trait is Saint-John Perse's 1962 poem *Oiseaux* (*Birds*) which offers its reader a model of how to read poetic traits, or what I shall henceforth call "poet-raits." This model is *Oiseaux*'s own reading of the twelve highly stylized etchings of birds by Georges Braque that accompanied the first edition of the poem — a reading summed up in the following lines from section III of *Oiseaux:*

> All things [i.e. facts about the birds' anatomy and aerodynamics] known to the painter at the moment of his rapture, but which he must leave out of consideration in order to yield in a stroke [pour rapporter d'un trait] on the flat tint of his painting, the true sum of a thin spot of colour.
>
> A spot struck, as if by a seal, that is neither a cipher nor a seal, being neither a sign nor a symbol, but the thing itself in its fated actuality — living thing, in any case, and taken live from its native tissue [...]
>
> From the tragic shores of reality up to this place of peace and unity [...] the bird follows [the painter] towards a new world without breaking any of the ties with its original milieu [...] A single poetic space goes on to ensure this continuity.[27]

It is the curious configuration of "poetic space," then, that allows traits to pass, as if by magic, from nature to art, and allows the "bird, outside its migratory flight and thrown down on the painter's etching plate, [to] beg

[in] to live the cycle of his mutations [i.e. in Braque's series of etchings]." (p. 413) Just as Braque's brush-strokes are said to bring forth traits from the living birds themselves, so Perse's poetraits present themselves as the very invocation of these same originals.

> Formerly [birds] took part in the poetic adventure, along with the augury and the haruspex. And here they are [i.e. in Perse's poem], words subjected to the same sequencing, for the distant exercise of a new divination ... At the twilight of ancient civilizations it was a wooden bird, its arms crossed over and gripped by the officiating priest, who had the role of the scribe in mediumistic writing [...] (p. 417)

> Birds they are of a true fauna. Their truth is the unknown element of every created being. [...] They are not drawn from any literature [...] But from reality they come, not from the fable of any story, they fill the poetic space of man, carried in a true trait [portés d'un trait reél] up to the fringes of the surreal. (pp. 424-5)[28]

Like the mediumistic writing referred to in the first of these passages, a writing of poetraits rescues beings from the dead. For the birds drawn forth by Perse's poem are not the inert birds of past literature but, we are told, the living birds of the real world. Similarly, the written traits of Montaigne's essay served as a way for the author's family to bring back to life their dead realtive (see discussion of Montaigne above), and the original pictographic traits in Court de Gébelin's etymological alphabet were the key to rescuing the original "living" meaning that is almost lost in the "dead letters" of the modern writing system.[29]

The trait's capacity to bring the dead back to life highlights, among other things, an apparent contrast between photographs and painted portraits. For however life-like a photo of someone may appear, it carries within it what Susan Sontag has called an "inventory of mortality"[30] in its fixed, frozen image of the human body that is "taken" (away) from a person's life. Photographs, then, turn living beings into shadows of their own mortality, which is probably one reason why some people prefer painted or sculpted portraits of their lost companions — portraits that remind their owners of the *life* they are missing rather than of the *absence* of this life. How do painted portraits and written poetraits achieve this effect of infusing life into representation? First of all, the painted trait and written trait are both figurative displacements of their subject, not literal copies, like a photographic negative, that are "taken" mechanically from the subject. Both the accomplished painting and effective literary portrait capture

their subject by translating its features metaphorically — the painting exaggerating certain features and effacing others, the text inserting the features into various codes of meaning. In this way the portrait conveys the apparent uniqueness of its sujbect while a literal photographic copying of the subject reduces the subject to the rank of one person among the millions of others already framed in snapshots — all of them looking the same.[31] More importantly, however, the painted portrait contains in its very brush strokes a sign of life: the life of the hand that painted them and, by extension, of the painter's mind that, we suppose, directs the hand. Functioning as a metonymy for the very moment of inscription the painted trait points us to the living presence on which the act of inscribing would appear to depend — the presence of thought, that is, of thinking ideally close to itself and animating the inscribed mark.

In his recent book *Miroirs d'encre* Michel Beaujour has argued that the literary genre of the self-portrait is generated from a writer's desire to express "What I am now, while I'm writing this book"[32] and we can see that this moment of writing is for the literary self-portraitist what the moment of inscription is for the spectator of a painted portrait: namely, the ideal moment of the trait's inscription (it is not by accident that Beaujour calls the works he analyzes "self-*portraits*"). For in this moment outside time (when thought and the tracing hand are in perfect union, with no time-lag from one to the other[33]), Court de Gébelin's etymological dream and the Diderot-Kristeva ideal of a poetic hieroglyph appear to come true. The figurative inscription of the trait accomplishes "the dream of artistic creation"[34] which is "nature at last recaptured by thought"[35], or the inert body of someone in a painting brought back from the dead and made present, the words of the literary self-portraitist infused with life, or the letters of our alphabet animated with their original thoughts.

As I have tried to show, this dream of the trait is made possible only through poetry — that is, through a type of writing that parades its figurative nature. More precisely, it is made possible by poetry that refers to the act of inscribing traits (as in the extracts from Eluard and Perse that I quoted) and thus appears to catch the hand bending back on itself and writing about what propels it — the thought of the artist.[36] Poetraits appear to capture the thought expressed in each of their words but they do so only by silencing these words, or purveyors of arbitrary meaning, and by focusing our attention instead on their visible tracings. While these tracings are, in themselves, meaning*less*, the very fact that they attract the reader's gaze bestows on them the potentiality for meaningfulness. Such a silencing of language while simultaneously making it visible is the narrator's expressed aim in this final quotation from Eluard:

Eye of a Deaf Person

Do my portrait.
It will alter itself to fill up all the gaps
Do my portrait without any noise, only silence
So long as — if it — except — provided that —
I don't hear you.

It all concerns, it no longer concerns.
I would like to resemble —
Annoying coincidence, among other important matters.
With no tiredness, heads tied
To the hands of my activity.[37]

Confronted by these disjointed sentence-fragments (that help produce the illusion of thought-flashes transmitted instantaneously through the tracings of the poem), it is precisely *our* heads (or our imagination as readers) that are "tied to the [...] activity" of the poet inscribing meaning. The *readers'* heads and not the poet's are what produce Eluard's (and, indeed, every) literary portrait.[38]

1. The most far-reaching critique of the notion of an original language of pictograms is in Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), translated into English as *Of Grammatology* by Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), Part 2, chapter 4. Another, more recent, work that situates the eighteenth-century debate on hieroglyphics within a long literary tradition of works positing a mimetic relation between words and what they denote is Gérard Genette's *Mimologiues: Voyage en Cratylie* (Paris: Seuil, 1976). I shall refer to both of these works in the course of my essay.

2. De Brosses, *Traité de la formation mécanique des langues* (Paris: Saillant, Vincent et Desaint, 1765), vol. I, p. 307. Translations from this and all other French works cited in the present article are my own, unless stated otherwise.

3. For this difference between hieroglyph and pictogram as well as for other useful distinctions between the many varied types of writing commonly grouped under the heading of "hieroglyphics," see Julia Kristeva's *Le Langage, cet inconnu* (1969; rpt. Paris: Seuil "Points," 1981), pp. 33-35.

4. Diderot, "Lettre sur les sourds et les muets," in his *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. Assézat and M. Tourneaux (Paris: Garnier, 1875), vol. I, p. 374.

5. Julia Kristeva, *Le Langage, cet inconnu*, p. 323. In his article "Readable/Writable/Visible" published in *Visible Language* XII 3 (1978), pp. 231-244, Leon Roudiez has applied Kristeva's theory of "trans-verbal articulation" to an analysis of some works by, among others, Maruice Roche and Michel Butor, and has argued that Kristeva's theory helps us explain the "visibility" or "fullness" of these works. In the present essay I attempt to get behind Kristeva's theory, so to speak, in order to examine some of the assumptions on which it rests.

6. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 21-24. Raymond Queneau is another poet intrigued with ideograms. For instance, in the section called "Pictogrammes" in his *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), pp. 208-217, he offers some examples of pictographic poems that he composed using some elementary American Indian hieroglyphs.

7. Court de Gébelin, *l'Origine du langage et de l'écriture* (Paris: 1775), p. 402, quoted by Genette, p. 143.

8. Genette, p. 143.

9. Court de Gébelin's "Hieroglyphic and Primitive Alphabet of 16 Letters" (beginning with the letter A) is reproduced in Genette, pp. 144-145.

10. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (1959; rpt. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1974), p. 67 for the distinction between signified and signifier.

11. Court de Gébelin, p. 275, quoted by Genette, p. 120.

12. Saussure, p. 67.

13. Diderot, "Lettre sur les sourds et les muets," p. 374. See above for the complete quotation.

14. "the first attempt at writing was a simple form of painting. It is probably to the necessity for tracing our thoughts in this way that painting owes its origin." Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746; rpt. Paris: Galilée, 1973), p. 252. As the editor of this recent edition of Condillac's work, Charles Porset, points out in a note on p. 252, Condillac's theory of the origin of writing (as well as those proposed by De Brosses and Court de Gébelin) was directly influenced by Bishop William Warburton's *Essay on Egyptian Hieroglyphics* ... that appeared in England in 1737 and was translated into French in 1744.

15. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC/Penguin, 1972), p. 7.

16. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 230, where Wittgenstein writes: "Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance.) Is it merely a question of pleasing and ugly?" I develop the argument that cultural forms of life are the ground for the related terms arbitrary/motivated in my article "Wittgenstein's Semiotic *Investigations*," *American Journal of Semiotics*, III 2 (1984), pp. 33-57.

17. See the quotation from Condillac, pp. 252-3, that I gave earlier and that identifies the first form of writing with the first form of painting: "the first attempt at writing was only a simple painting [and it is to this attempt] that painting owes its origin."

18. In *De la grammatologie*, p. 412, Jacques Derrida gives another crucial argument against the possibility of an original pictogram that would supposedly have transcribed a unique scene: the transcription of this scene necessarily implies its duplication or repetition, which in turn entails both an element of translatability or metaphoricity as well as the impossibility of the original pictogram being "uniquely" tied to its original depicted scene and hence of its being a unique, one-off pictogram. I shall pick up the question of a metaphorical element in depictions *via* traits later in this essay.

19. Montaigne, *Oeuvres complètes* ed. by. A. Thibaudet and M. Rat (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1962), p. 782.

20. From the statement in his opening paragraph that "it is myself that I am painting" (Montaigne, p. 9), onwards right through the *Essays*, there are many uses of the words "painting" and "portrait" and other related terms. See, for example, pp. 126, 147, 1082.

21. *Essays*, translated by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 23.

22. *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 610.

23. *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 126. The French critic Du Bos gives prominence to Montaigne's paragraph in his *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, trans. by Thomas Nugent (London: John Nourse, 1748), vol. II, p. 13.

24. *Donner à voir* (1939 rpt. Paris: Gallimard "Poésie," 1978), p. 71.

25. See Sima Godfrey's discussion of Baudelaire's interest in cartoons and drawings by Daumier in her article "Baudelaire's Windows," *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXII, no. 4, pp. 83-100.

26. See *Donner à voir*, pp. 69 and following, where Eluard writes of how painters since Picasso have understood "the absolute poverty of literal illustrations" (p. 71) and that a true vision of a scene springs primarily from the painter's imagination. The painter, he concludes, should be "in front of a poem just as the poet is in front of a painting." (p. 72)

27. Saint-John Perse, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1972), p. 411.

28. My argument in this paragraph extends in the direction of a theory of the trait material that I used in my article "Saint-John Perse's *Oiseaux*: the Poem, the Painting and Beyond," *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXII no. 4 (1982), pp. 47-55. There I focus on the specific relationship between the twelve Braque illustrations and the overall meaning of Perse's poem.

29. One of the most sustained reflections on the apparently "dead" letters (*lettres mortes*) of language is given by the poet Yves Bonnefoy in a 1958 essay where he writes, "but 'all that' [i.e. a living world of presence] can suddenly just as well evaporate and signify a *dead letter* once an attachment has been broken" — "Les Mots et la parole dans la *Chanson de Roland*," *Le Nuage rouge* (Paris:

Mercure de France, 1977), p. 175. Bonnefoy is much more pessimistic than Eluard about poetry's ability to constitute portraits, as can be seen in the following comment: "*Now it's night:* if by these words I think I am expressing my sensorial experience, they become suddenly no more than a frame from which presence evaporates. The portraits that we believed to be the most life-like show themselves to be merely stereotypes." *L'Improbable* (1959; rpt. Paris: Mercure de France, 1980), p. 114.

30. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1973), p. 70. For similar comments on photography's "killing" its subjects, see Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) and especially his comments on pp. 9 and following about "that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead." (p. 9)

31. For an eloquent description of this "sameness" of snapshots, see Kierkegaard's rather prophetic comment made in 1854: "With the daguerrotype everyone will be able to have their portrait taken — formerly it was only the prominent; and at the same time everything is being done to make us all look exactly the same — so that we shall only need one portrait." (quoted in Sontag, p. 207).

32. Michel Beaujour, *Miroirs d'encre* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 13.

33. It is this ideal a-temporality of the trait that Barthes admires in Japanese interior design when he comments that "everything here is *trait*, as if the entire room were written in one single stroke of the paint brush." *L'Empire des signes* (1970; rpt. Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 58.

34. Saint-John Perse, p. 427.

35. Saint-John Perse, p. 414.

36. These arguments on the importance of the inscribing hand for the myth of a writing of traits are inspired (as is the entire essay) by Jacques Derrida's comments on painterly traits in his *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978) — especially by his comments on the direction of the hand, or *ductus*, on pp. 220-222, and other comments on pp. 15 and 181 concerning the purity of the painted trace. By focusing on poetry in this essay I am developing a remark made in passing by Derrida concerning the historical "subordination of all the arts [...] to poetry": for it is in a certain view of poetry's figurative nature that the myth of the painterly trait, as I hope to have shown, finds its strongest justification. In an earlier study of an entirely different nature Mario Praz comes round to a similar view of the domination that the act of inscription exerts over Western art: "we wonder," he writes, "whether the secret of the parallel between the arts might actually turn out to be only a secret of calligraphy," *Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, Bollingen Series, 1970), p. 25.

37. "Oeil de sourd," *Répétitions* (1922) in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1968), vol. I, p. 119. The symmetrical typography of this poem (arranged around an invisible vertical axis) heightens the reader's awareness of the poem as a visible trace, while its disrupted syntax almost "silences" the message carried by these words — that is, the everyday (arbitrary) meaning of the signs of the language in which the poem is written. For a more developed discussion of Eluard's use of typo-

graphy in other poems of the 1920s, see my essay "Reading a Poem's Typographical Form: the Case of Paul Eluard," *Teaching Language Through Literature*, XXIII no. 1 (1983), pp. 38-46.

38. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual Convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association in Philadelphia in March 1984.

"No, says the signified" The "Logical Status" of Words in Painting

Carol Plyley James

ABSTRACT. Following the lead of his mentor Duchamp, Arakawa carries on the deconstructive play of non-art (readymades) and the non-visual (enigmatic texts) on his canvasses and posters, operating in the humorous vein of affirmative irony that Duchamp had mined in the Dada generation. Going beyond the reiteration of the disruptive effect of words in painting, his book, *The Mechanism of Meaning*, combines pictorial and textual elements in a complex investigation of meaning where the apparent simplicity of the literal is undone by the spectator's interactions with the contradictions of words and images. An examination of some of its pages attempts to show how Arakawa's work glosses Duchamp's concept of the *regardeur*, the indeterminable reader/spectator, by performing a critique of the speech-acts theory of meaning. The performative in meaning is shown to be a rhetorical, not a discursive, movement where intention and convention are inoperable.

Soon after his arrival in New York from Japan in 1960, Shosaku Arakawa began painting large-scale canvasses done in a subdued palette with meticulous mechanical drawing. His usual method was to overlay a background of grays or pastels with abstract geometrical designs and neatly aligned words which spell out laws, poems, quotations, maxims of genre: sayings we could call epistemological puzzles. The paintings contain a touch of humor — an awkward dribble of color, a dangling line, a hand-written *graffito* — which breaks up the compositional severity and philosophical seriousness that a perfect or complete rendering would entail. The words across the canvasses and prints resemble one another in their stenciled, typewritten, or cursive form as if the whole corpus were to be read as an ensemble, and identical texts or fragments recur in various colors and places. Displacing visual and textual experience into a single space, Arakawa questions the traditional ways by which we try to know the world by looking for its reflections iconographically in pictures and conceptually in texts.

Linguistic elements in pictures disturb the pictorial code, words themselves being considered aribtrary signs which have no visual worth: reading is generally a visual experience only physiologically. The Dadaists first radicalized the status of pictured writing. Until then pictured words were managed into readable contexts in books or on banners, as inscriptions on buildings or tombs by picture viewers who had learned to integrate them

Visible Language XIX 4 (Autumn 1985), 439-461.

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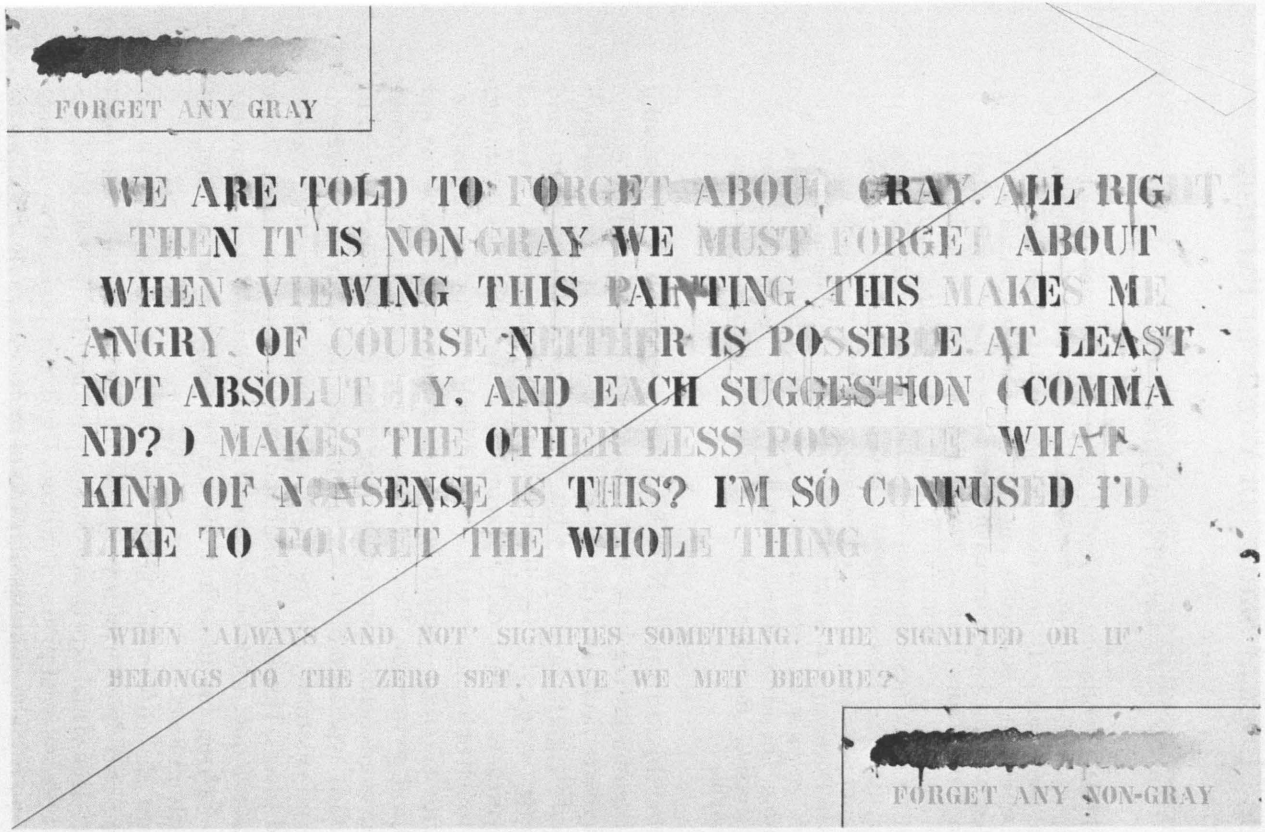


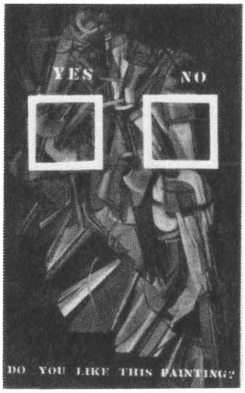
A condition of suspended confusion through which "I" may shift under observation. Or a means for viewing thoughts which might pass between "I" and "me". So, from irregular or parallel intentions, something slowly is forming....

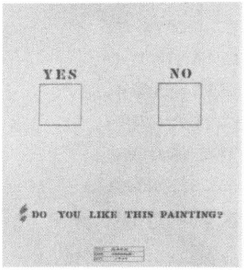
unproblematically into the iconography and interpretation of the visual elements.[1] This practice of reading a work of art as a whole persists today even as the ironies of modernist art and the post-ironic serialism and decorativism of postmodern art refuse to guarantee the integrity and authenticity of contexts in general. What function can Arakawa's words have beyond a performance of Dadaist nonsense or the metalinguistic anarchy of his oft-repeated solecism, "the signified of if"? Our attempt to work out this question will involve the examination of several earlier works and his more recent collection of posters, *The Mechanism of Meaning*.[2]

Throughout his work Arakawa has engaged a playful hermeneutic of time and gaps, exploiting the problematics of memory, error, and the distance between thought and language. The deliberate inexactitude of his geometric drawing, the science fiction flavor of titles like *Reflexis of the Model/The Artificial Given* or *Air: The Diagram of Meeting*, and the verbal visual non-sequiturs created between text and image furnish a sophisticated questioning process directed against accepted conventions of the purposes and intentions of language. An example of the latter can be found in a print, *A Forgettance (Exhaustion Exhumed)*, whose humors title combines a neologism of mock conceptual importance and a pun on Hume whose text is quoted twice on the print. The quote from *A Treatise of Human Nature* uses metaphors, "the memory ... paints its objects in more distinct colors than [the imagination]" and a memory "flows in upon a mind ... whereas in the imagination the perception is faint and languid," to explain "a sensible difference between one species of ideas and another." In his rendering of the text in color on paper Arakawa can literalize these metaphors, but his materialization creates a semantic contradiction between text and picture when the phrase "memory ... distinct colors" is pale and nearly invisible. The ontological imbalance of figurative language is humorously exposed.

To further illustrate Arakawa's capacity for setting up verbal-visual mind bogglers, consider two nearly identical canvasses which "quote" Courbet. One is *Courbet's Canvas* and the other is reproduced without title in *The Mechanism of Meaning* (Figure 1). The imperative "Forget about gray" is grammatically (but conceptually?) contradicted with "Forget about non-gray" in the opposite corner. These imperatives are colored mostly gray, as is the smaller-lettered text near the bottom. The multicolored main text, *read* as a commentary on the commands, *pictures* the impossible forgetting of non-gray. The diagonal line suggests a cancellation but the visual object, *raturé*, remains and joins the joke, "I'm

Figure 1. S. Arakawa, *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 90
"16. Review and Self-Criticism" (also called *Courbet's Canvas*)





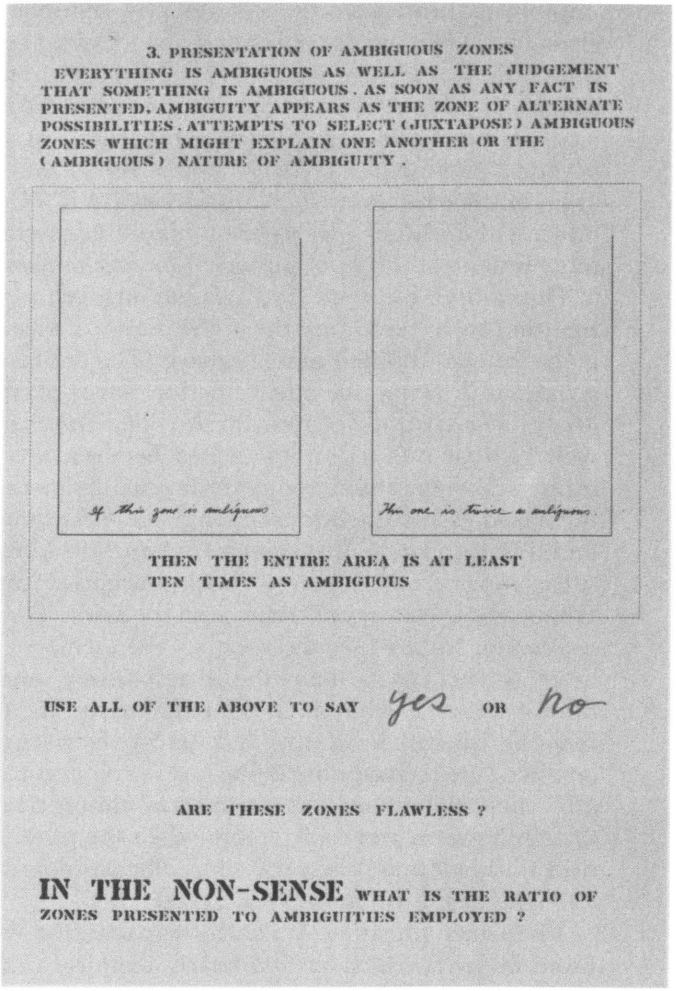


Figure 2. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 15
"3. Presentation of Ambiguous Zones"

Figure 3. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 37
"7. Splitting of Meaning"

7 SPLITTING OF MEANING

EXERCISES TO DEMONSTRATE THE SEPARATION, DISJUNCTION, DISASSOCIATION, ABSTRACTION, BRANCHING AND RAMIFICATIONS PERTAINING TO SIGNIFICATION. ADDITIONAL EXERCISES MAY ATTEMPT TO INDUCE FURTHER "UNNATURAL" SPLITTING.

PORTRAIT OF MONA LISA (SEE ABOVE)
BY La Gioconda

so confused I'd like to forget the whole thing." Even where writing is reduced to self-contradiction from a logical point of view, readability can be translated to a different level by concrete rendering such that, here, both the necessity and impossibility of forgetting are asserted. The "zero sense set" referred to can include all illogical sentences, such as "When 'always and not' ..." (the sentence it occurs in), or unreadable, undecidable, propositions like "Forget about gray," "Forget about non-gray" whose form plays against their meaning. The tag "Have we met before?" lacks contextual reference, except as a serially recurring fragment on Arakawa's work, an index of self-reference. The caption under the painting might be taken as the program for *The Mechanism of Meaning* in which "a means for viewing thoughts" is presented as a shift between visual and mental planes, between subjective and objective interpretation, to show that meaning does not emerge to leave confusion behind but remains an exchange of contradictions and blurs.

Arakawa's endless self-references assume an ironic tone, a Duchampian irony of affirmation. As if introducing "I" and "me" ("Have we met before?"), he mocks both his own confusion and the view of art as willful self-realization. Having regularly played chess with Duchamp, Arakawa could be called a legitimate heir to New York dada. Direct allusions and glosses turn up everywhere. Just two examples from *Mechanism*: a reproduction of *Nu descendant un escalier* to which he has added large boxes labeled "yes" and "no" and the question "Do you like this painting?"; and Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* labeled as "Portrait of Mona Lisa by la Giaconda" reminding us of Duchamp's Mona Lisa "misnamed" as *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Figures 2 & 3). In a letter to "Dear Rrose Selavy, Dear Marcel," dated four years after Duchamp's death, Arakawa concluded as he does on *Courbet's Canvas*, "When 'always and not' ... *Have we met before??*"[3] The same ironic stance and jokey disrespect that set Duchamp apart in 1920 gives Arakawa today an approach so different from the neo-realism and serious postmodernisms of his contemporaries. His verbosity has tenacious roots in Duchamp's punning and his abstract geometrics go about merrily illustrating Duchamp's pataphysical notes on perspective and higher dimensions. Even as Arakawa might seem to fashion himself as a Duchamp readymade, he is not a shadow of Duchamp and his use of language in particular sets him apart from Modernism; his words may be said to set up a "rules of the road" for mapping post-Duchampian art. He is less concerned than the Modernists with art's own means and status and more broadly engages understanding and knowledge, meaning as it functions in all aspects of life. His is far less art about art than Duchamp's and far more "art about discourse": playing on the conventions of current academic and pop discourses — art-historical, psychoanalytic,

structuralist, phenomenological — he uses visual language as "aids" to question the categories of language acts we use in our attempts to deal with the world. Where Duchamp's was a critique of categories of thought involved in aesthetics (consciousness, truth, self, creation), Arakawa's is a critique of how language is used to enact any such critique, including his own. Some further comparisons between the two may help to elucidate these differences.

Arakawa's painting title *Tomb of Chance* echoes Duchamp's *Tu m'* (Figure 4), his last canvas, where meticulously laid-out images momentarily banned his usual aleatory procedures. A kind of summary of methods of perspective projection, *Tu m'* compresses shadows and stencils of readymades, geometric designs (that more resemble Arakawa than Duchamp), trompe-l'oeil elements ("torn canvas" background), and anti-trompe l'oeil readymades (pins in the tear, a bottle brush, a hand painted by a sign painter) into an anamorphic painting that must be viewed from various angles. Arakawa's title *Insertion Within a Temperature / We* (Figure 5) likewise includes a verbless subject, one that might be a we/*oui* with/for Duchamp's *You ... me (Tu m')*. Also a broad horizontal, *Insertion* is divided into four panels with geometric forms — cones and cylinders — rendered in classical perspective. "Behind" these forms, color blocks varying from bright to pale hues in the left section and pale solid blue and gray in the other panels remind us again to forget about gray or non-gray. What appears to be symmetrical is not, and lines trail off like the loose falling threads Duchamp called his "Standard Stoppages" or units of measure. "Over" the two left panels a thirty-three line text with the Godardesque beginning "Two or three points of departure" and multicolor ending "The call of continuity" is replete with geometric metaphors and ignores temperature except as a pun on "volumes of degrees." The pale pink and blue letters are so faint as to be nearly unreadable. Both *Tu m'* and *Insertion* are cryptic commentaries, Arakawa's verbal and pictural, Duchamp's wordless except for A. Klang (the sign painter's signature), on the artists' spatial and anti-representational preoccupations.

To emphasize the visual and mental difficulties of reading *Insertion*, Arakawa placed a regulation black and white eye chart at the far left. It is an oculist witness like Duchamp's "Témoins oculistes" (Figure 7), optician's charts he used in the glass paintings *A Regarder d'un oeil près pendant plus d'une heure* and *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. Arakawa used two oculist charts in another work, *Test Mirror*, but generally his works before *Mechanism* were, apart from the "messages," abstract. The posters of *Mechanism*, however, are so full of readymades — shoes, cutlery, wood boxes, maps, other artists' work, and so forth — that it seems at first one is dealing with objects and their captions in a conventional way.

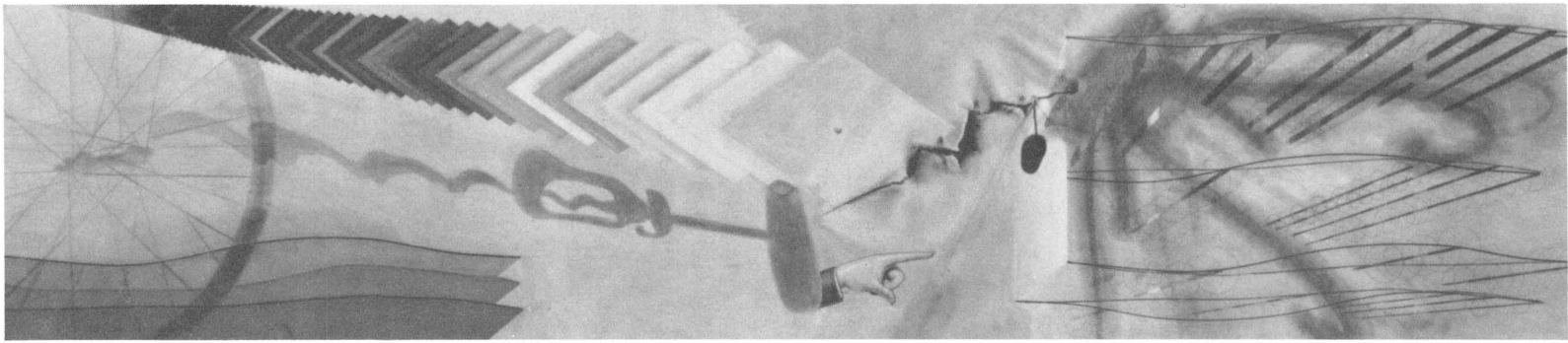
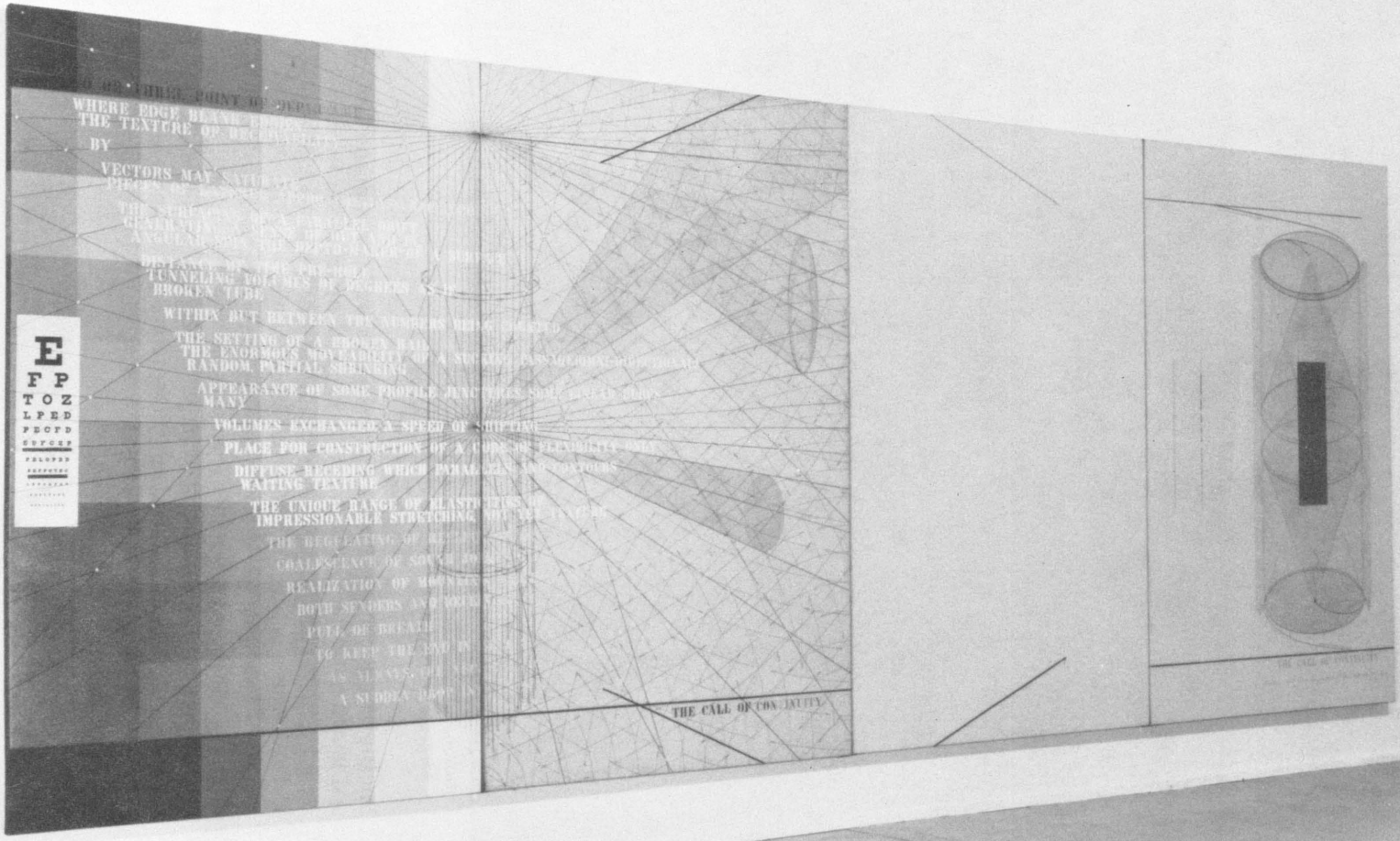


Figure 4. Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m'*. 1918. Oil and pencil on canvas, with bottle brush, 3 safety pins, and, a bolt, 27 1/2 x 122 3/4 in. Yale University Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier.

Figure 5. S. Arakawa, *Insertion Within a Temperature/We*, 1979-80


WHERE EDGE
THE TEXTURE
BY
VECTORS MAY
TUNNELING
BROKEN TUBE
WITHIN BUT BETWEEN
THE SETTING OF A
THE ENORMOUS
RANDOM, PARTIAL
APPEARANCE OF SOME
MANY
VOLUMES EXCHANGE
PLACE FOR CONSTRUCTION
DIFFUSE RECEDING
WAITING TEXTURE
THE UNIQUE RANGE
IMPRESSIONABLE
COALESCENCE
REALIZATION
BOTH SENDERS
PULL OF
TO KEEP
THE CALL OF INTUITY

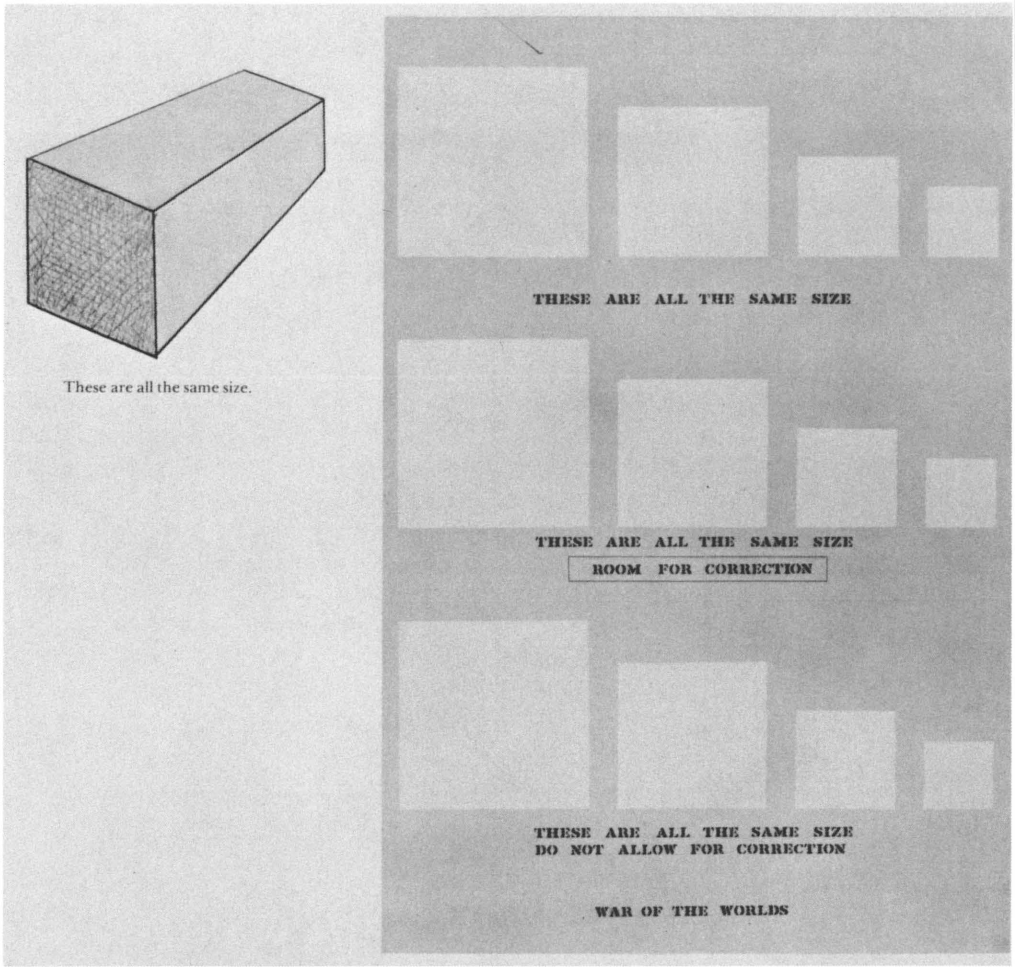


Figure 6. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 27
"5. Degrees of Meaning"

But Duchamp's passage through the art world disallows that and demands a different relationship between image and inscription. Readymades, according to the commonly quoted definition given them by André Breton, are "un certain nombre d'objets tout faits (ready made) dignifiés *a priori* par la seule vertu de son choix"[4], and Duchamp later said the choice was based on "une réaction d'indifférence *visuelle*, assortie au même moment à une absence totale de bon ou mauvais goût."[5] In fact, a readymade is not a surrealist found object and is often neither found nor an object in the usual sense. Early readymades *were* common objects, usually with a punny or

enigmatic inscription, of which the urinal called *Fontaine* and signed "R. Mutt" is perhaps the best known. Soon readymades were commissioned or completely designed and hand-made by Duchamp. The readymade came to be a category, a name, a concept, rather than a process.

This new and problematic status of non-art has a corollary in Duchamp's idea of the *regardeur*, the viewer/reader who creates: "Ce sont les regardeurs qui font les tableaux."[6] The artist's choices and intentions are abandoned with the finished object and the receiver must become active in the creation of the work's meaning. Along with his "alter-ego" Rrose Sélavy, the *regardeur* is one of Duchamp's radical moves to de-name and name new categories that challenge the selfhood of the artist, and even all manifestations of the Cartesian ego. In *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Arakawa combines the discursive with readymades and visual tricks in a immensely complicated system to demonstrate how the *regardeur* operates, how on many levels meaning intertextualizes between the visual and the verbal. In the book, photographs of spectators dealing with the five and one-half by seven and one-half-foot panels show what cannot be ascertained from the panel reproductions on the page, in effect demonstrating the inadequacy of a single point of view. The *regardeur*, a critique of the classical perspective based on the idealized spatial relationship between a flat work and a monocular view, is neither an ideal or a "typical" viewer, nor is it an empirical aggregate of all viewers or their opinions. In *Tu m'* Duchamp's anamorphic projections are one method used to cause shifts in the subject-object positions — "you" becomes "me." Arakawa tends more to use words like those in the caption under *Courbet's Canvas* to destabilize the writer/reader balance, but he also plays text off images to challenge the givens of perception and understanding. To have an example of a deconstruction of perspective, consider a panel where the written statements, "These are all one size," are invalidated by the shapes so labeled (Figure 6). The beam drawn to the left of the panel is rendered by conventional perspective drawing, reminding us that objects of differing sizes are understood to be of equal size if they are correctly depicted in a given space: there is an accepted relativity of size and distance that Western spectators have learned to read which tells them the small squares are not smaller, just farther away. The program of "Degrees of Meaning" is given a very literal demonstration. The important thing here is that the mind operates spatial manoeuvres as easily as semantic manoeuvres and the *regardeur* operates in both modes at once. Duchamp's readymades undermined the exalted status of the artist and his object of creation. By picturing discourse Arakawa challenges the concepts that guide our understanding of art (and all visual processes) and any will to communicate via a transparent writing system.

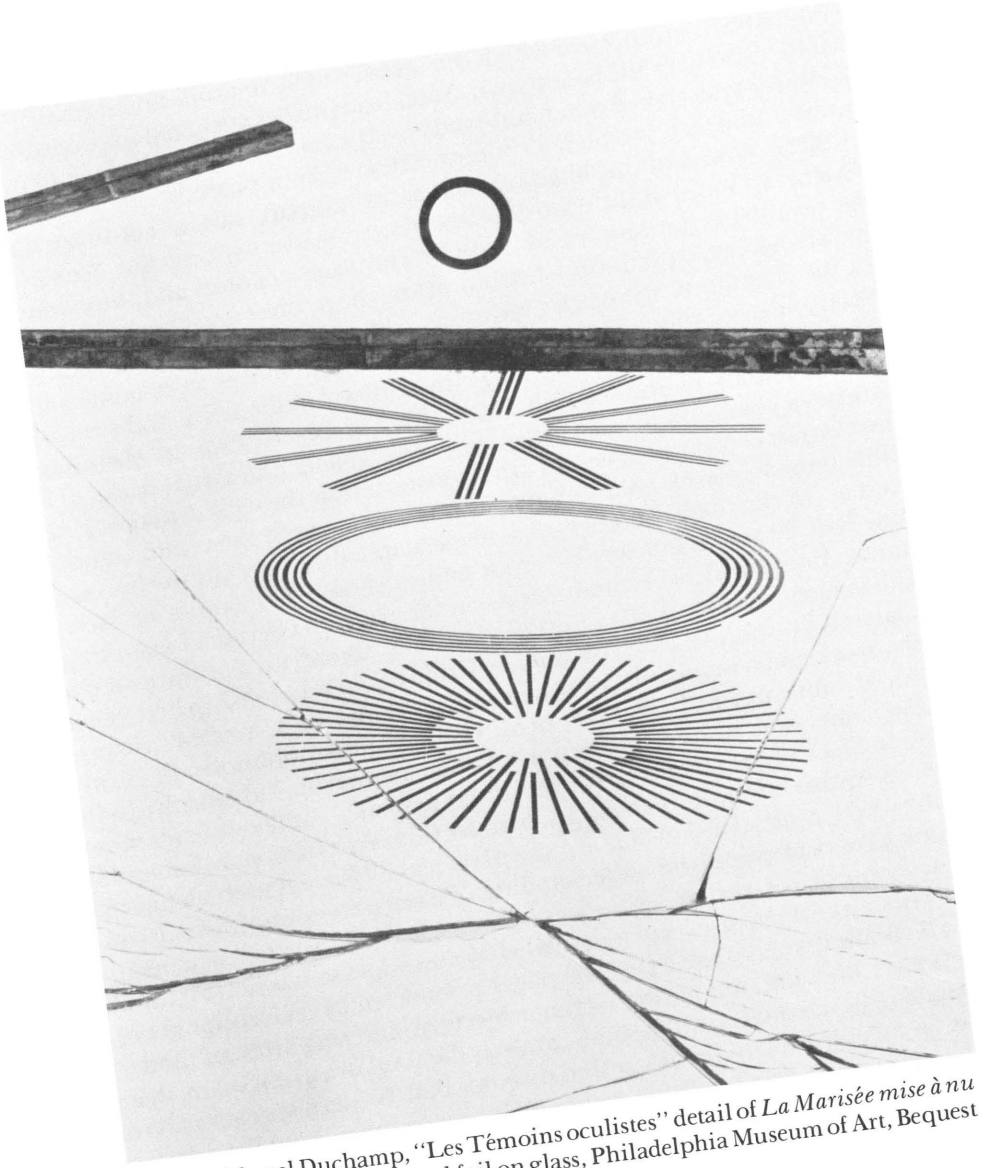


Figure 7. Marcel Duchamp, "Les Témoins oculistes" detail of *La Marisée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, lead foil on glass, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier

Although Duchamp's title *La Mariée mise à nu* . . . has been the subject of reams of commentary, the actual picture on glass contains no written words except the title and signature on the back. The narrative fragments must be read among the notes of the Green Box of the same name.[7] The critical function of one of the components of the *Bride*, the *Oculist Witnesses* (Figure 7), can be compared to Arakawa's works that use eye charts or mirrors. Duchamp's Witnesses are silvered disks of the type used to test camera focus or astigmatism. Within the perspectively-drawn lower half of the glass, or "Bachelor Apparatus," they are tilted to reflect upward to the Bride half, across the center "Horizon" line or "Bride's Garment." The witnesses are *auculistes*, voyeur-agents of the Bachelors, and fragmented reflections of the viewer and as such avatars of the *regardeur*, a figure whose place is indeterminable. Again, the Witnesses serve to undermine certain visual traditions and their punning name is the stab of truth about the fetishizing of images.

Arakawa plays with the *regardeur* when he puts commands on a panel of *Mechanism*, "Open this to have a déjà vu," where mirrors inside two boxes send back the spectator's own face (p. 28). As Duchamp did with his work, *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?*, Arakawa subverts an involuntary experience by changing its syntax. In the "Feeling of Meaning" series he gives another command, "Pull," to apply to a tangled mass of string that is drawn on the board (Figure 8). A mirror above reflects the puller's hand so that one might ask whether the pulling is meaningful because it is reproduced, whether the feeling of pulling is meaningful or merely pretend, whether the command should not rather have been placed below the hanks of hair, and so forth. The visual position of the commands (one can immediately gauge the futility of pulling the "string" or of rearranging the cutlery below) alters their logical status of meaningfulness: something changes, as in Arakawa's caption on the lower right, "in . . .out from what is perceived." Arakawa's eye chart (Figure 5) is the optician's *letter* chart, the one that tests reading; Duchamp chose the test that measures visual distortion. The Oculist Witnesses comment on the distance between art and viewer, pointing out faults in artists' and critics' perception. Arakawa changes focus, so to speak, placing the easy-to-read but meaningless text next to a barely legible but "literate" text. Duchamp's texts generally retain an iconoclastic force whereas Arakawa's tend to work the other way, throwing into doubt writing as a medium for any intention to signify in a clear, direct manner.

The caption above the "Portrait of Mona Lisa" (Figure 3) introduces the section on "Splitting of Meaning": "Exercises to demonstrate the separation, disjunction, disassociation, abstraction, branching and ramifications pertaining to signification. Additional exercises may attempt to induce

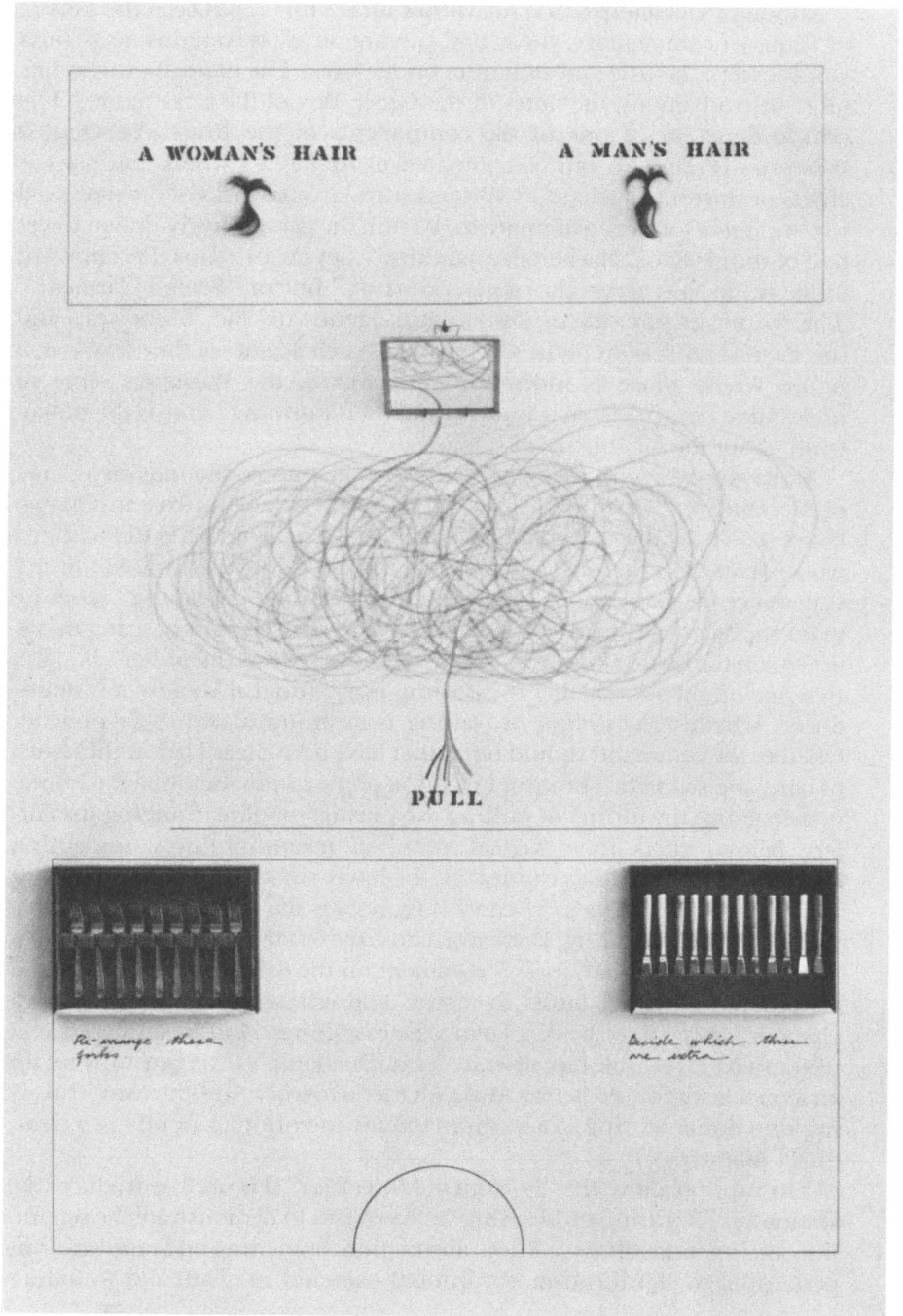


Figure 8. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 72
"12. Feeling of Meaning"

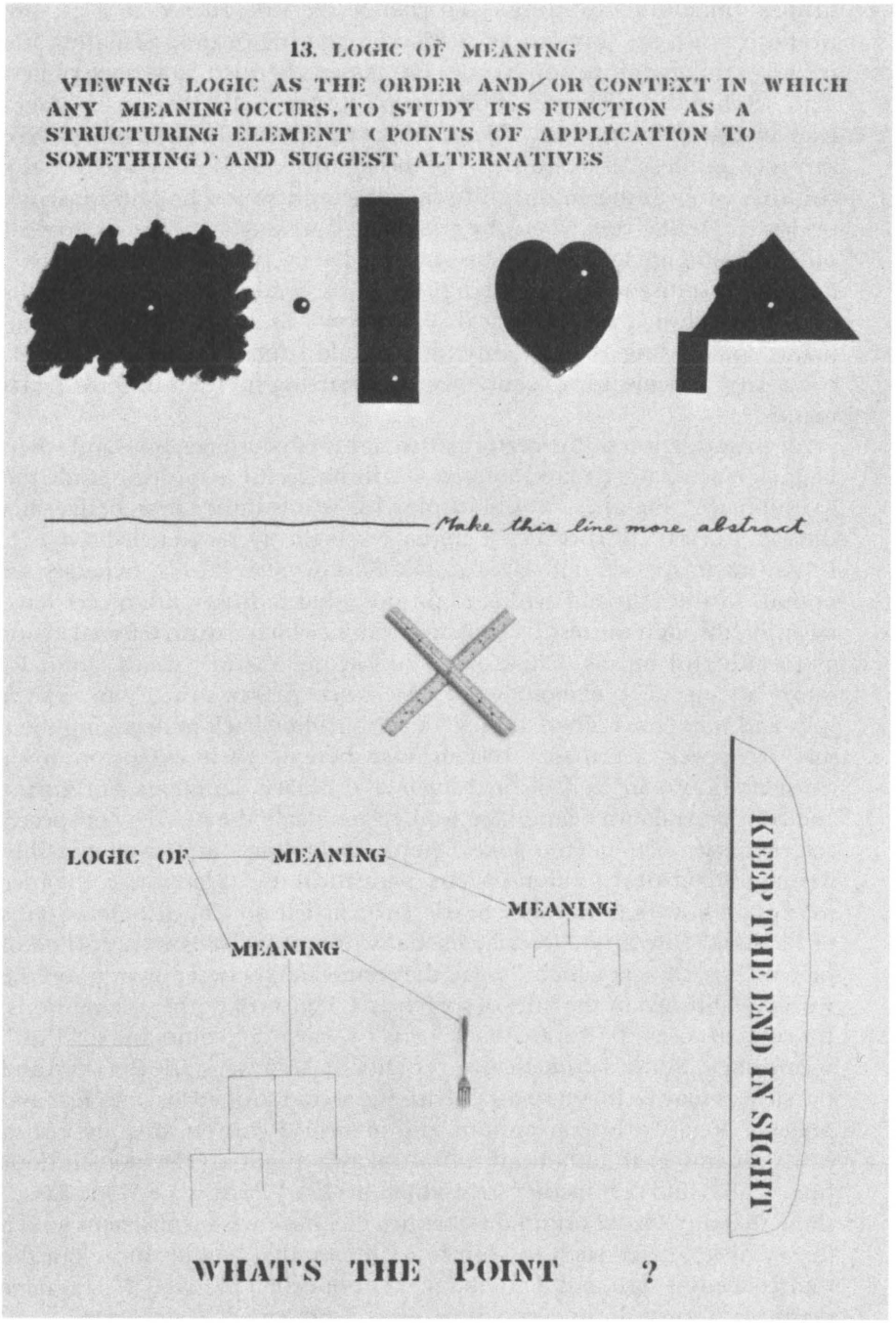


Figure 9. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 73
"13. Logic of Meaning"

further 'unnatural' splitting." To change the title affixed to a picture would be such an "unnatural" split, and altering or misassociating the names of things or functions is one of Arakawa's frequent language games. The "Splitting" section includes two posters with dictionary page readymades and a caption, "Name Impasse" (p. 39). In the phrase, "No, says the signified," the signified, not the signifier, is given a voice. But the splitting of meaning into signifieds and signifiers is a hopeless task for readers of *Mechanism*, where the grammar of art and language, the logical ordering of language function, is subverted at every turn. If *Mechanism*'s expository or discursive use of language as a critical tool to illustrate splitting seems clear, the ontological status of words as art remains problematic: does writing as a decorative display add a dimension to meaning or, contrarily, does meaning occur only when writing succeeds in showing its mark?

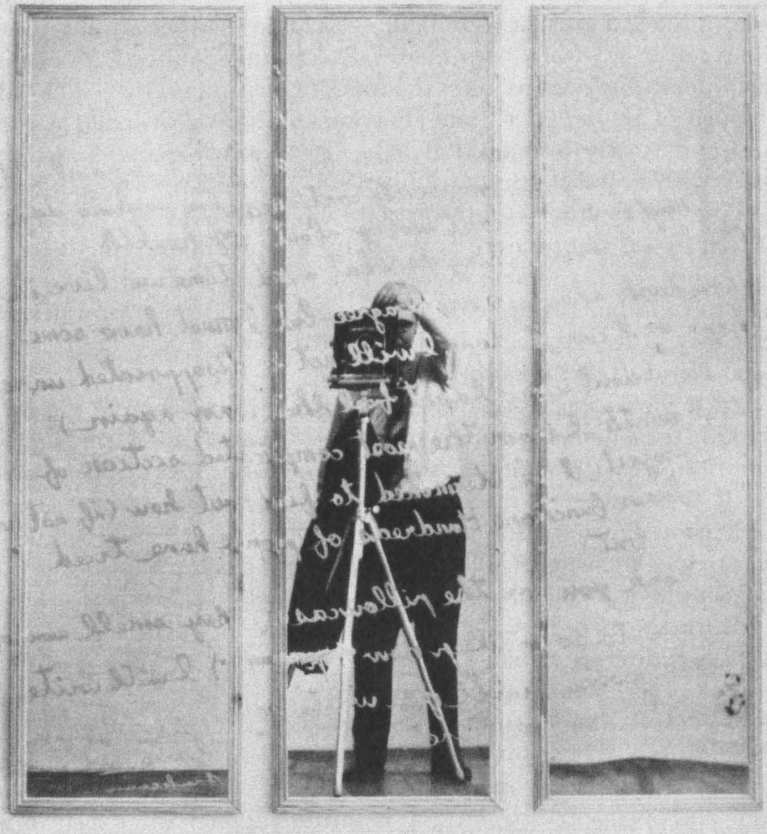
An investigation of the performative status of language, how and when language acts rather than represents, will be useful in putting aside the question why the artist would display his words rather than deliver his theories in essays or speeches. Language acts theory, as sketched out by J. L. Austin in the seminal *How to Do Things with Words*, bypasses all notions of the sign and syntax to propose that ordinary utterances have meaning through the results incurred, results which Austin referred to not as meaningful but as "felicitous." Following Austin's death, John R. Searle attempted to elaborate and systematize Austin's theory in *Speech Acts* and numerous other studies.[8] A serious drawback in applying their sort of speech act theory to our case here is their exclusion from consideration as an "act" of anything but "ordinary" language. For Austin and Searle, Arakawa's language would be outside the purview of speech acts because, like poetry, jokes, puns, metaphors, and even possibly writing, it constitutes a non-serious, parasitical use of language. In order to explain how fiction works, Searle, in an article on "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," concludes that works of fiction are comprised of pretend speech acts which "break the connection between words and the world established by the rules of speech acts"[9] but evoke other conventions. It would of course be impossible to classify Arakawa's command to "Pull" according to Searle's mimetic theory of fiction because, while the word and the strings may be in/on a work of art, the action solicited is both real and pretend. Real-world conventions and art-world conventions are not so easily separable: an unnatural split, Arakawa might say. Demonstrations like "Pull," and "erroneous" reproductions like "Portrait of Mona Lisa," show that any sort of original vs. replica dichotomy is inconsistent with a theory of language such as speech act theory that would throw out the transcendental sign and deny the referent outside language. If language performs it must do so everywhere, even if presented as a picture.

One of the most salient attacks on speech act theory has come from Jacques Derrida, who nevertheless has some sympathy with it and acknowledges its philosophical importance.[10] He points out the logocentrism of Austin's argument wherein only the spoken word is used as a model; and writing, as the trace of mark of the visual, concrete foundation of meaning, is ignored. Derrida's commentary on Searle, which quotes Searle's reply to Derrida's piece on Austin in its entirety, addresses the question of parasitism and discusses Searle's simplistic understanding of intention. Derrida's grammatological approach to understanding meaning considers the gap between emitter and message to be inevitable and necessary, a condition impossible in Searle's system where the speaker's intention structures both the speech act and the response. Derrida: "My communiation must be repeatable — iterable — in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability ... structures the mark of writing itself."[11] The "absolute absence of the receiver" and its concommitant absence of a conscious subject is exactly the condition of the *regardeur* who remains an imaginary space with an indeterminate point of view. The possibility of the *regardeur* becomes the enabling condition of the work and not vice-versa. The "mark of writing" is not necessarily language but any mark lying between subject/origin and *regardeur*. Works like those of Duchamp and Arakawa, which combine writing with other visual elements, perform iterability in that they prove writing to be no more (or less) parasitic or arbitrary than other forms of signification.

Searle views speech acts as having a vertical relation to the world (he actually uses directional arrows to symbolize the "fit" of words to world[12]) determined by the speaking subject's intention (illocution) to direct the result (perlocution) of the act. The performative is thus tied to a rhetoric of persuasion based on language-as-representation: either the speaker wants to convince the listener that the world is as he says (he makes, say, a statement) or he wants the listener to change the world (he gives a command). But in cases such as Arakawa's "statements" or "commands," reference and illocution are at odds: one is asked to read both literally and figuratively, to "pull" and see the illogicality of it at the same time. Everything pulls at everything else in a state of what Paul de Man called "referential aberration," "When it is impossible to decide which of the two meanings (that can be entirely contradictory) prevails. Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration."[13] If rhetoric is understood to extend beyond the persuasive to include that over which a speaker has no control — figural conventions, the unconscious, the *regardeur* or indeterminable receiver — the notion of performance is broadened from simple action upon others to a more adequate theory of meaning. De Man explained:

14 CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEMORY OF MEANING

A STUDY OF MEMORY: ITS OPERATIONS, ITS SCOPE, ITS ROLE IN THE REALIZATION OF MEANING. TOWARD THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TOTAL SITUATION IN WHICH MEMORY CAN REMEMBER ITSELF (ITS OWN OPERATIONS)



NIGHT

> Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative but when considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance. Rhetoric is a *text* in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding. The aporia between performative and constative language is merely a version of the aporia between trope and persuasion that both generates and paralyzes rhetoric and thus gives it the appearance of a history.[14]

The theory of meaning Arakawa is working toward is one that accepts the fallibility of intentionality and readability and understands that rhetoric is not simply the vehicle of intent but the whole difference between what Searle calls "sentence meaning" and "utterance meaning."[15] In other words, the performative is rhetoric, that which suspends grammar and cognition, plays with reference, and defines meaning in terms of effect.

Arakawa's words and images in *The Mechanism of Meaning* interract rhetorically to demonstrate how "sentence meaning," or literal meaning, really has no meaning in and of itself. In saying that "sentence meaning" is what the sentence "actually means" because "sentences and words have only the meanings that they have,"[16] Searle is, quite contrary to speech act theory, giving words meaning outside usage and, again, establishing an idealistic normative status for statements as "everyday language." Arakawa, however, constantly problematizes language's relation to reality, in particular by clashing the most prosaic of literal words against the visual. A command like "Laugh only along your left side" (p. 42, "Splitting of Meaning"), a catachresis, or a label "Empty texture" (p. 64), an oxymoron, mock literality with conventional rhetoricical figures, but their shape and position on the posters further the disparity between word and world. The first panel of the series "Construction of Memory of Meaning" is a photograph of a glass panel in front of three mirrors (Figure 10). Words written on the glass in white face the mirror and are unreadable unless held up to a *real* mirror. The message is a letter to Arakawa's mother, incredulously dated 1915, as if the mirror of memory were turned backwards to the time Duchamp was beginning to think of glass. That the "proper" reading of a text is destroyed by a mirror image reminds us, as did the Oculist Witnesses, that mirrors trick the eye and there is no adequate form of reproduction or memory. Reading the pages of *Mechanism* we understand again and again that, as De Man recognized, "it is not

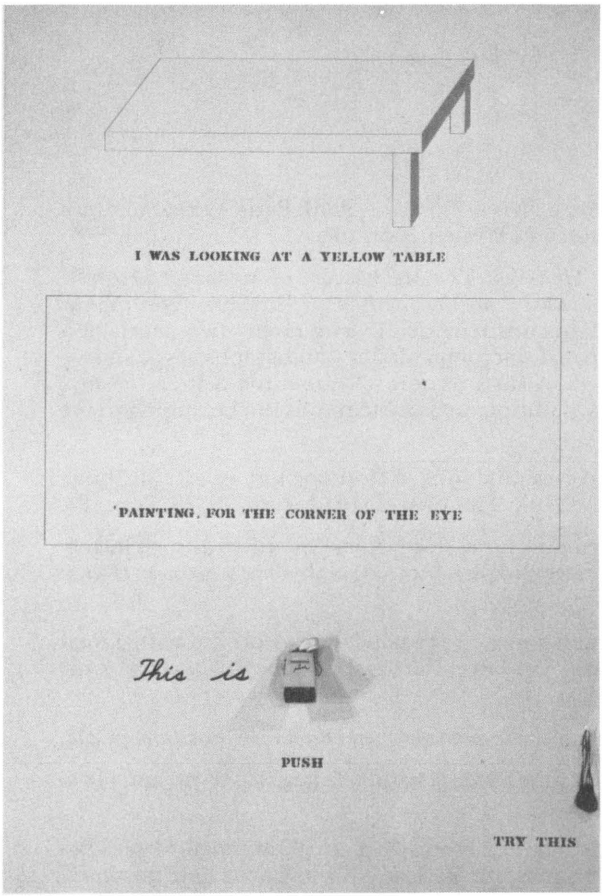
Figure 10. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 77
"14. Construction of the Memory of Meaning"

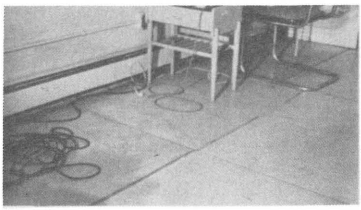
necessarily the literal reading which is simpler than the figurative one" nor is the literal reading the origin or abstracted "sentence meaning" of the figurative.[17] Arakawa problematizes the literal in language by using simple, logical-seeming commands and labels alongside visual elements that are equally obvious in the interpretation but have no logical match to the words. The pictures both literally depict a fork, a list, a blob, or whatever, and the readymades "represent" themselves all in order to deconstruct what we take to be figurative uses and show the literal to be the unreadable.

When the qualities of pictures and words are compared, a hierarchy develops: pictures are primary, present, clear; words are secondary, abstract, mediated. Arakawa undermines the "specific difference" of writing, its "absence" (absence of the emitter, of the referent)[18] turning words into visual elements and forcing a reading of pictorial elements as part of a written context. He shows how his visual forms which may be without reference, perform as writing: they take meaning from the dissemination of all the elements, visual and textual, across each other, generalizing the traits of writing, and give writing its materiality, its marks.

The Mechanism of Meaning is anything but a Cartesian discourse on "The Method of Arakawa." The thirteenth section, "Logic of Meaning," begins with a panel opposite the "Pull" the fake string (Figure 9). Following its heading, "Viewing logic as the order and/or context in which any meaning occurs," we might place Arakawa's texts, which perform rhetoricically, not cognitively, in a logical status of a "zero set." Where intention or "illocutionary point" (Searle) is set adrift, the sideways command "Keep the end in sight" mocks the supposed linearity of language acts. The branching schema of logic forks off into a fork, humorously illustrating a supposed distinction between a literal and a figurative representation. When Searle proposes that "[t]he central problem of the philosophy of language is to explain how the physical can become intentional, how the mind can impose intentionality on objects that are not intentional to start with, how, in short, mere things can *represent*," he assumes that the *point* of representation is to embody intentionality and that "mere things" like "our utterances, writings, and pictures"[19] have a pre-intentional or meaningless state. Is the pre-representational status of the fork that of the eating instrument? Surely not, for its precarious position over the word "point" reminds us of its stabbing, consuming function. Is it that of a piece of metal in a certain shape, as seen by some primitive who has no idea of a fork? But one could imagine it as an art object without guessing its "proper" meaning. These paradoxes and anomalies Arakawa methodically (if not logically) puts before us show the inadequacies of representational systems, be they pictorial or linguistic, and the impossible "fit" of

Figure 11. *The Mechanism of Meaning*, p. 40
"7. Splitting of Meaning"





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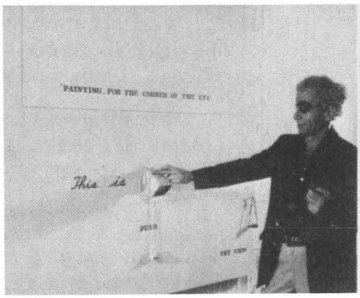

phenomenon and intention. Meaning never works as a one-way street with an end or point. A theory of performative language must be able to account for what seem to be nonsense, abnormalities, and illogicalities; parasitical, substandard, and figurative usage is, as we have seen, quite as originary to meaning as "speech." Arakawa clearly distinguishes meaning as a mechanism or movement or action, an unstable performance that leaves us perplexed, laughing, and even vaguely more knowledgeable than before. *The Mechanism of Meaning* is not a book or an exhibition but an ongoing performance of meaning between the artist, his posters, his spectators, and his readers. Every page is a "Painting, for the corner or the eye" (a phrase borrowed from Duchamp[20]) like *Tu m'* or page 40 (Figure 11) where the eye patch in the corner (*le coin*) and the slide viewer invite a *clin d'oeil*, a wink, from the *regardeur* who manipulates for herself the elements of meaning.

1. Michel Butor's study, *Les Mots dans la Peinture* (Seuil: Paris, 1969), examines the various uses of such words in Western painting.
2. S. Arakawa and Madeline H. Gins, *The Mechanism of Meaning: Work in Progress (1963-1971, 1978). Based on the method of Arakawa* (New York: Abrams, 1979). The book contains reproductions of eighty-two panels of a series begun in 1963. Each panel is accompanied by photographs, texts, and/or drawings on the same page. A final section, "Review and Self-Criticism," reproduces eight drawings, paintings and photographs not belonging to the series.
3. The letter is reproduced in facsimile in A. d'Harnoncourt and K. McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 181.
4. "... a certain number of manufactured (readymade) qualified as such merely by virtue of choice," in André Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris: Pauvert, 1966), p. 356.
5. "... a reaction of visual indifference, at the same time associated with a total absence of good or bad taste," in Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe: écrits* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 191.
6. "It is the *regardeurs* who make the pictures," in *Duchamp du signe*, p. 247.
7. The principal texts relating to the *Large Glass* are on pages 54 to 101 and 118 to 120 of *Duchamp du signe*.
8. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

9. *New Literary History*, 6 (1975), p. 326.

10. "Signature Evénément Contexte" in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 367-393, on Austin. The English translation, "Signature Event Context," is in *Glyph 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 142-197. "Limited Inc abc ..." in *Glyph 2* (1977), 161-254, was published in the original French as a *Supplement to Glyph 2*. The latter piece was written in response to Searle's "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," in *Glyph 1*, pp. 198-208.

11. "Signature Event Context," pp. 179-180.

12. "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," in Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. III: *Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, ed. Keith Gunderson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 354-361.

13. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10.

14. *Allegories of Reading*, p. 131.

15. "Metaphor," *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 76-116, passim. See also the following chapter, "Literal Meaning."

16. "Metaphor," p. 77.

17. *Allegories of Reading*, p. 11.

18. See Derrida, "Signature Event Context," pp. 179ff.

19. J. R. Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1980), p. 480-481.

20. *Duchamp du signe*, p. 119.

A Visionary Book: Charles Nodier's *L'Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux*

Anne-Marie Christin

ABSTRACT: Charles Nodier's Histoire du Roi de Bohême is original in several respects: it is the first French Romantic illustrated book; it introduces into writing a completely new typographic expressivity; and it represents an aside in the *oeuvre* of an author torn between "bibliomania" and the love of fantastic tales.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the various functions of the image and the typography within *L'Histoire du Roi de de Bohême*, and to show that these visual representations of the written word, which give the effect of both spectacle and plastic utterance, mark the beginning of a quest that will find its completion many years later. It will also be seen that the author who is thus dispossessed of his control over narration is the very same who is fascinated by the "dispossession" of dreams; and that for him, a compelling necessity links this book to the oneiric inspiration peculiar to his tales.

In January of 1830, when *L'Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux* was beginning to appear in bookstores, Charles Nodier wrote: "This is a work which does not strike a responsive chord in any mind, and which is not of this era."[1] In point of fact, the book was a commercial failure, and it even bankrupted its publisher, Delangle, who fell victim to the considerable expense of its production. "To the loony bin with the King of Bohemia!" was the refrain with which, in a satire by Scipion Marin two years later, several well-known literary figures attempted to drown out the litany of Nodier's onomatopoeias and quotations assaulting their ears.[2] Champfleury, analyzing the principal illustrated books of the Romantic era — of which Nodier's was the first — confirms the book's misunderstood nature: "By its printing, by the accents of its vignettes, the *Roi de de Bohême* continues to be a most singular note in the world of the Romantic book"; but, he adds, "Nodier wished to be read.... He was mistaken."[3]

Accustomed as they were to more unified works, it was probably inevitable that the public would be put off by the narrative incoherence, visual games, and typographical disorder of this "espèce de rébus."[4] The artists who frequented the Arsenal probably did not share the public's misgivings; however, the diversity of artists' tributes to the book suggests that the author did not find evidence among them, either, of a common accord with his work. According to Balzac, "This book belongs to the school of *disenchantment*. Nodier arrives, casts a glance on our city, our laws, our sciences, and, through his spokesmen Don Pic de Fanferluchio and Brelo-

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que, he says to us, with a shout of laughter: 'Science? — Foolishness! What's the use of it? What is it to me?' He sends the Bourbons to die in the stable, in the form of an old aristocratic mare."[5] Of Tony Johannot's illustrations of Nodier's "poignant mockery," Balzac refers only to those in which he can point out a political intention. Delacroix's point of view is quite different: "You have given form to my dreams," he writes, "and the true effect of this will be to raise me from discouragement each time I think of your book."[6] The novelist privileged the author and his ideas; the painter — no doubt more attracted by the visual structure of the book because he had just finished illustrating Goethe's *Faust*[7] — was most interested in the immediate, and plural, reality of the book, and in the effects of its novelty on the reader.

To be sure, the *Roi de Bohême* is unusual — even within the *oeuvre* of Nodier. Its typographical *tours de force* seem totally inconsistent with the curses Nodier was at the same time heaping on the innovations of the printing industry. Did he not write in 1832 the Gutenberg's invention "accelerated civilization in order to hurtle it towards barbarism, just as opium taken in strong doses accelerates life in order to hurtle it towards death"?[8]

In the same way, it is surprising to note that this creation by the triune of author, illustrator, and typographer[9] — which made the *Roi de Bohême* a first not only in the history of French publishing, but also in the history of French literature and art — did not inspire in Nodier a desire to repeat the experiment. He had no doubt undertaken this book as an unpretentious bit of literary dabbling, a "bluette."[10] It was also no doubt very unlikely that any other publisher would have run the risks that ruined Delangle. However, these considerations did not figure in Nodier's decision to return to traditional literary forms immediately after writing *Roi de Bohême*. The effect of this experimental book was to prompt him to go back to telling stories in the old way. That the author of *Smarra* and *Trilby* could forget that the tale-teller in him had been awakened ten years earlier is evidence that the *Roi de Bohême* was certainly the direct cause of such a choice, paradoxical as that might be: "Unfortunately," he explained in December of 1829, "at first I paid no heed to the fantastic tales and fairy stories in which I now delight. I threw myself into one of those rambling plans (the *Roi de Bohême*) where mediocrity is not permitted. Now that the book is done, and what is worse, printed, I am wonderfully aware that it is as bad as it is possible to be."[11]

Of course, these contradictions are not unimportant. They show us that the *Roi de Bohême* is at the center of various undertakings that Nodier may have thought — rightly or wrongly — were no longer worthy of being backed, or that ought to be displaced to a different system.

Indeed, *displacement* is one of the principles of the work. It is remarkable, for example, that the very plurality of authors that gives it originality on the level of its conception as a *book*, reflects, on another level, one of the fundamental givens of the *text*. Nodier confirms that this was his idea — "the best, if not the only one."[12] This story, he tells us, is "a succession of reveries, *'aegri somnia,'* in the midst of which I lose myself in three personae, that is, in the three principal figures that all educated men are able to distinguish in the phenomenon of their intellect — Imagination, Memory and Judgement. In my specialty, this ill-matched trinity is composed of a bizarre and capricious fool, a pedant with a smattering of erudition and nomenclatures, and a weak and sensitive "honnête garçon," whose impressions are each modified by the other."

But Don Pic, Breloque and Théodore were not created by Nodier alone. They too find themselves in a certain way *displaced* outside of the personalities they incarnate. An entire literature animates them, permeating their names, their adventures, their fantasms, and dispersing this multiple "I" — where Imagination was already reckoning itself a zero (p. 20) — in a floating, archaic architecture of memories and quotations. The glitter displayed on the surface of the book disappears in its depths. However, the reader should not conclude from this, as does one of the book's internal critics (guided by the narrator's pen): "Well, sir, I see what this is! Yet another bad pastiche of the countless pastiches of Sterne and Rabelais!" (p. 22). These obvious borrowings, these allusions, are not a sign of weakness, but rather of a new kind of lucidity. They mean to show that, at this outermost limit of the decadence of the society in which the book was conceived, it is necessary, once and for all, to give up belief in the possibility of original thought, even the most personal thought of its author — indeed, even his own portrait. Nodier imitated Sterne early on — he begins with the little matter of a slipper[13] — but he imitated him as one who mocks antiquated civilizations, who knows that the only thing left to distract his gloominess is to "make puppets dance."[14] "When an order of things dies, there is always some ingenious demon present, smiling all the while, to watch the death-throes and give it the coup de grâce with his jester's scepter."[15] Such is the author of *Tristram Shandy*, "one of those graceful moralists who cheers with a grave smile the agony of moribund peoples, and who scatters rose-petals on their shroud."[16] To imitate Sterne means to borrow not themes or words from him — for these are never more than subordinate indices — but to borrow the *dynamic* which supports them, and to exploit this dynamic to a point that justifies a derision even greater than Sterne's. This entails, for example, breaking into the flow of the stories at the very moment of their beginning or, what amounts to the same thing, *reclosing this beginning on itself*, like a useless treasure, like the beautiful

title of a fable that will never be told, — like this "story of the king of Bohemia and his seven castles," which disappeared a first time with Trimm's memory, and which Nodier will not recount any further but will, in homage, have his book engraved with two frontispieces of choice typography instead of one, and upon which he will bestow one of those journalistic condemnations that stigmatizes the completed work, even when that work does not exist.

For it is here that the only possible originality arises: in appearance; in form. "In everything, from now on, nothing will ever be able to be novel except in its form," Nodier will say in the Introduction to his *Notions élémentaires de linguistique*,[17] adding that this form must be simple and manifest: "Of all possible forms, in a civilization breaking down, the simplest is necessarily the most novel."

We lack the documentation to prove that Tony Johannot's vignettes — themselves "novel" for the conception of illustration that they inaugurated in France, and "simple" because the wood-engraving technique used to reproduce them is the most traditional of book-producing techniques,[18] — were solicited by Nodier to bring to his text an originality that thought, in his opinion, was no longer capable of proposing. Yet it seems to me that the *Notions élémentaires* allows us to draw out some arguments that confirm this hypothesis. In this text, Nodier examines the origins, first of the spoken word, then of writing. According to him, painting is the intermediary that leads from one to the other. The poetic spoken word of primitive peoples (whose language, unsophisticated by nature, led them almost immediately to invent metaphor, which alone allowed them to express themselves with precision) was naturally to be followed, he explains — when the number of people and the distances that separated them made manifest the insufficiencies of oral transmission — "by a mode of communication that was comprehensible to the eyes, and painting provided it."[19] We know that Nodier imagined no other origin for languages than an imitative one. It is much the same, according to him, for painting: "As the figurative possibilities of language lent themselves admirably to varying the accepted meanings of the spoken word, no one sought any other technique — namely, painting — for varying the accepted meanings of the written word. Man's most abstract perceptions were reclothed in intelligible images, allegory was invented . . . ; from which results the antique use of the emblem, the metaphor of painting. From that time on, as in the time of Horace, painting and poetry were the same."[20]

In this perspective, the image is defined as *the visual equivalent of the spoken word*. Sterne, too, had anticipated this, but in a purely abstract way. In *Tristram Shandy*, a page printed in black faces one announcing the death of "poor Yorick" (Book I, Chapter XII); another page, of marbled

paper, must be interpreted as the "marbled emblem" of the work (Book III, Chapter XXXVI); while elsewhere wandering curved lines represent imaginery itineraries (Book VI, Chapter XL). Tony Johannot's images have a more complex function. This is no doubt because they are figurative, and because, for this reason, they suggest motifs, a graphic style, that superimposes itself upon the text; but above all it is because insertion of Johannot's images into the very heart of the text, by thus confirming its discontinuities in a spectacular manner, also *displaces its reading*, disturbs it, and rewews it by means of parallel commentaries.

In this respect, nothing is more significant than the series of vignettes that gives rhythm to the *Histoire du chien de Brisquet*. At first glance, we find before us an exemplary case of *illustration*, quite as exemplary as — according to Breloque, in any case — this little tale claims to be. Indeed, it is a matter of beautiful images that support and articulate the text with a scrupulous appositeness. In the first place, they are situated at critical moments in the narration: the presentation of the hero (a portrait of the dog, la Bichonne [p. 364]); then, portraits of the other principals in the drama (a family scene in a rustic cottage showing parents, children, and dog, in which it is clear that the father is advising the mother to forbid the children to go out, while the children are begging to be allowed to do so [365]); a dramatic scene (the father strikes down the wolf with an axe-blow, his children are cowering against him and the dead dog is lying on the ground [Figure 1]); the epilogue (the dog's tomb [p. 370]). Besides this quality of narrative punctuation, these vignettes also possess a realism — most useful, as we all know, to the comprehension of a story — which, in the second vignette, comes quite close to folkloric minutiae in its excess of authentic detail. We will see this passion for detail again later on with Tony Johannot's illustrations of Breloque's claim that his tale would be sufficient to permit recognition in real life of the house and characters he is describing; Tony Johannot will illustrate these claims with a hut whose thatched roof, exposed beams and casement windows ought to fulfill the avidity for "real" information of the most interested reader of such tales, so precise are the details in the drawings (p. 375).

But the reader of the *Roi de Bohême* remains ill at ease. This perfect illustration, of an admirable docility, introduces into the text an excess which contradicts the style of the text and holds it up to ridicule. Conversely, the simplicity of the narration renders derisory and suspect the details of the image that would have seemed quite amusing considered apart from the narration — *Whom to believe?* The popular success of the *Chien de Brisquet* seems to favor Breloque's point of view.[21] But Johannot's images make us understand that such was not, in truth, Nodier's own opinion, and that for him, this story is the same as another later anthology-piece,[22] the

Amours de Gervais et d'Eulalie (a tale illustrated with the same parodic fidelity, although in a different style: this time the subtle contrast of tones, the intense effect of a beautiful black underlines a "romantic" intention [pp. 56, 138]). In these two stories text and image ought to be *read* as one. By itself, the text does not provide the criteria that allow one to appreciate it: these are revealed in its illustrations. Although one might have expected of these illustrations an authentication of the discourse — as they pretend to provide — instead, they demystify its principles and by their proximity give rise to an irony that attacks both when discourse and illustration are paired, but that spares them when each is considered individually.

Thus we see where Nodier's equating of the visual and the word leads: to the provoking of *creative associations*. The image, in essence similar to discourse because it is a "written thought," must work in conjunction with discourse in the metaphorical mode, a process of composition common to both of them, and which constitutes for both a source of innovation. Thus an entire play of diverse complementarities turns the *Roi de Bohême* into a

Figure 1. Charles Nodier, *Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux* (Paris: Editions PLASMA, 1979), p. 369.

Mais qui diable pourra me dire ce que c'est qu'un cheval pâle?

Figure 2. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 288.

symphonic madness in two registers, each of which brings out the aberrations of the other, underlining them or contradicting them. "Who the devil can tell me what a pale horse is?" asks Nodier. — Never mind, here it is, and it is indeed exceedingly "pale" because the vignette shows it capering about in a skeletal state, guided by a cavalier in a similarly ascetic guise (Figure 2). Further on, the name Venice so inspires the illustrator's zeal that it also overtakes the writer, who finds himself describing, instead of the city itself, the engraving of Venice before him (p. 44). And when the writer evokes Byron and Delacroix in connection with Venice, Johannot enthusiastically interrupts him to pay homage to them with a medallion uniting Byron's and Delacroix's two profiles (*ibid*). Or again, if it is a question of showing the reader a document, even one that the writer dreamed of, he yields the initiative to the painter, the only one who is capable of reproducing the hieroglyphs of the death certificate that the mummy of *Alma Popocamba* preserved in its entails (p. 288). In the same way, the writer leaves to the illustrator the task of completing the chapter in which he has just awakened — the writer being at that moment in a distracted state of mind most inauspicious for writing, as will be demonstrated two pages later (Figure 3). However, it also happens that the author will nullify with a single sentence the superb stage-setting invented by the illustrator to serve his imagination. Thus, hardly have we had a chance to appreciate another illustration, the impressive spectacle of a barbaric-looking charac-

Figure 3. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 288.

ter and an open-mouthed crocodile meeting along a river, before Nodier quickly adds: "I cried out, but everything had disappeared" (p. 117).

For it is clear that, in this venture, each follows his own preferences and tastes without always heeding those of the other. Théodore's imaginary conveyance isn't a sleigh, is it? — but be that as it may, here is an illustration of one, and quite a nice one at that (p. 6). Looking at the illustrations, might not a scholar mistakenly think that Noah's dove was a seagull? Nevertheless, a fine pretext for a fantastic nocturnal vision (p. 149). The lists of names of flies and butterflies are the ravings of an entomologist-turned-storyteller. Harlequins, fools, playing-card jacks, puppeteers —not to mention that remarkable illustration (albeit unnecessary for the plot) of the Dome of Milan (p. 207) — all of these are the ravings of the illustrator.

But the advantage of this procedure is that it permits author and illustrator alike to enrich the text by adding to it elements exterior to the fiction, determined entirely by the capabilities of their arts, and to make each element in its turn take part in this incongruous dialogue. For his part, Johannot tends to slide from the imaginary towards the real, and to substitute portraits of his friends for the faces called for by the narration. Delangle lends his features to Popocambou-the-Hairy in the vignette on the title-page. Nodier and Jules Janin appear in the salons of the marchioness of Chiappapomposa (pp. 302, 311). The magician who identifies Popocambou's jaw seems to have been the illustrator's father; and, according to S.

amis de ma jeunesse. A vingt-cinq ans, je n'avois jamais recherché d'autre conversation que la sienne, et quelle conversation !

L'homme le plus long, le plus mince, le plus étroit, le plus géométriquement abstrait dans toutes ses dimensions—le plus frotté de grec, de latin, d'étymologies, d'onomatopées—de thèses, de diathèses, d'hypothèses, de métathèses—de tropes, de syncopes et d'apocopes—la tête qui contient le plus de mots contre une idée, de sophismes contre un raisonnement, de paradoxes contre une opinion — de noms, de prénoms, de surnoms — de titres oubliés et de dates inutiles — de niaiseries biologiques, de balivernes bibliologiques, de billevesées philologiques — la table vivante des matières du *Mithridate* d'Adelung et de l'*Onomasticon* de Saxius !...

Le second, créature bizarre et capricieuse —

Jeune, the illustrations, considered as an ensemble, constitute a veritable "family portrait" (p. 276).[23] Disorder? Insolence? Such is the essential law of the game that underlies the *Roi de Bohême*: to disturb norms, to upset categories. This is the price of creativity. Split into three persons by his own creation, the author retrieves his physical identity thanks to the image, but this identity is displaced within the interior of a lie. Between the real and the fictional, there is an intense, nurturing cohesion, a fraternal complicity: however, only the image has the power to show this. Though it may be nothing more than ink and paper, it possesses the absolute gift of *presence*: truth recognizes itself in the image, even as mirages endure. The porous narration of the *Roi de Bohême*, while welcoming its spectacular ambiguities, concretizes its own liberty within it.

For his own part, the writer prolongs the visual game with typography. Revealing itself as the much desired innovative "novelty of form," illustration reintroduced a certain state of innocence into the domain of printing, and raised the possibility of using printing in a creative way. "The first written book was itself nothing more than a pastiche of tradition, a plagiarism of the spoken word" (p. 26): *seeing* will replace *writing*, which will have been worn down by this tradition that has never been self-renewing. "Alas! my dear Victor, I have neither your golden pen nor your thousand-colored inks; my dear Tony, I do not have that palette even richer than the rainbow in which you dip your brushes" (pp. 13-14); but it still remains to try to *paint his thought with letters*, to lead a technique of banal perfection astray by making it *change writing* instead of merely serving to reproduce useless and chatty discourse. The journalistic "Transcription" that flays the *Roi de Bohême* is completely apropos when it vilifies its pages, "black with printer's ink to civilization's shame" (p. 78). The printing in question is in no way trying to be "civilized": it has taken the image as its guide, and seeks in its paradoxes to restore to written expression the poetry that was part of early cultures.

Writing will thus be new through its form — that is, through its typography. The chapter entitled "Protestation" affirms this, and the layout of its first paragraph in the form of stair-steps proves it, commenting on its own lines which are subject to "rules of layout so bizarre, or, better said, so madly irregular," like the large capitals in shadow type ("en caractère éclairé") — a creation of the advertising of the era — which give to the adjective NOUVEAU the amplitude of a poster headline (p. 41). But these lettrist exercises form the subject, on Nodier's part, of an ambiguous conviction. It is certainly not by chance that the portrait of Don Pic is its first support. Here and there near the vignette that shows the character's

Figure 4. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 12.

Et s'il me plaît de m'ennuyer ce soir, pensai-je en traversant le carré, n'est-ce pas jour de Bouffes et séance à l'Athénée? D'ailleurs, repris-je en

descendant

les

sept

rampes

de

l'escalier.

— D'ailleurs, la semelle de Popocambou n'étoit pas de liége. Elle étoit de cabron.

Que dit monsieur? demanda le portier en ouvrant son vasistas, ou was ist das de verre obscurci par la fumée, et en y passant sa tête grotesque illuminée de rubis d'octobre.

— Je dis qu'elle étoit de cabron.

ungainly and pedantic silhouette, two formalisms oppose each other: the one, Don Pic's, a formalism of words, of their etymological and vocal mimetism, of their rhetorical *figurability*; and another formalism that permits the fragmenting of words in an optical fashion, according to the material laws of framing [*parangonnage*] — that is to say, with a total disregard for their pronunciation, their meaning and their history (Figure 4). Nodier holds the first up to derision, the way we speak ironically about a passion that has been enslaving us for a long time, but it is not certain that he wishes to risk himself completely in the second. An earlier episode in the book reproduces the same dilemma in a more explicit fashion. What, he asks, is the correct etymology for "pantoufle" ("slipper")? Exasperated by his own hypotheses, by the Syriac, Italian, and Greek in which he seeks the origin of the term, the narrator suddenly decides to leave his apartment in order to "escape the demon who is nailing him to his absurd etymology" (p. 106). His hasty exit will be in order to take, on the other page, a stairway of seven steps formed by the words that designate them, and under which appears, at the bottom of the page, framed in a droll vignette, the face of the building's porter, who is apparently emerging from his dwelling at the moment the tenant reaches the landing. Are we abandoning the old passion in favor of a new one? Abandoning the taste for semantic origins in favor of graphic plasticity? Not at all: for the porter's "vasistas" itself provokes the narrator's etymological commentary in German (transcribed in gothic letters, it is true, and also revolving around a play on words): *was ist das* (Figure 5).

Nodier's expressive typography obeys two principles: those of *motivation* and *debris*. We recognize in the first the basis of the writer's theories concerning language and painting. This is also what grounds his conception of writing. Being "hieroglyphic," writing first appeared as an abstraction of painted expression. "In the sense that it was *real*, that is, that it expressed things themselves, independent of the various appellations that each of them had received from men, ... it was thus able to be universally intelligible to whoever possessed the key to its emblems."[24] If only the laziness of an overly-advanced civilization had not deformed the system at the very moment of its creation, the alphabet ought to be writing's perfected formula, but identically conceived: "The rational sign that designates itself is what best awakens the idea of sound through a visual analogy, and which one might call its *rebus* and its hieroglyph."[25] The ideal alphabet, which Nodier calls a "grammataire" would be a "purely real" conventional language, "restrained but sufficient; material, if one may put it that way, and nonintellectual, but one that would effortlessly include in its

Figure 5. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 107.

narrow sphere all of the physical dealings of man with man; . . . a cosmopolitan language that would require barely a few days' study by civilized peoples, and that would open to all travelers the route to all countries."[26]

These hypotheses traverse and explain Nodier's games with letters in the *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*. The episode of the hieroglyphic document discovered in the mummy's body manifests this privileged ambivalence of the figure which, besides possessing the power to render fiction real, is also the holder of the initial secrets of writing. However, it also proves that this written representation will remain an image — which it actually is in the book (see Figure 3) — for all those (and they are the most numerous) who have not been initiated into the deciphering of its emblems (pp. 288-289). The letter has at its disposal the same iconic virtues, but in order to exploit them, it must reanimate in itself a certain emblematic quality. The "grammato-maniacal" folly (if I may be allowed to use that expression) of the "great logarithmer" Abopacataxo, who breaks down and analyzes the most infinitesimal material elements of Breloque's thesis (disregarding, for all that, "the commas, the periods, the minus signs, the spaces," etc. [p. 176]) all the while neglecting the text, is just as derisory as the formal erudition of Don Pic: the monumental, gesticulating vignette that Johannot devotes to him bears this out (p. 173). To be sure, the magic of a sorcerer's scribbles lies above all in its graphism. However, as Nodier will demonstrate a bit later in another tale (*L'Amour et le Grimoire*, 1832), this magic is useless — not so much because it could upset the healthy equilibrium of life as because it conceals the way to its real, but more modest, mysteries. The visual use of the letter implies that in virtue of its own peculiar capabilities (which are in effect different from those of words), it delivers an immediately accessible meaning. It does so in two different ways: with combinations of phonetically imitative syllables as in onomatopoeia, or by participating in a structure that is itself sufficiently hieroglyphic to be able to signify.

Onomatopoeia, of course, is in very special favor with the writer, and the marvelous chapter *Invention* is a truly felicitous piece of sonorous poetry, as audacious as it is ephemeral; conducted to the rhythm of a postchaise, it comes to take the place of the two tales that were denigrated — one by Breloque, the other by the Johannot's parodic illustrations — and it clearly indicates, at the end of the book, that such is the path down which Nodier was then dreaming of steering writing (pp. 377-378).

But if he hesitates to follow all the way to the end the adventures of a letter abandoned to the abstract hazard of page layout, the writer is on the other hand too frequent a visitor to the print-shop[27], too initiated into the manipulation of type and forms (in which a historical memory put on alert by the new possibilities of publicity invests itself during his era) not to be

attentive, with equal perspicacity, to the visual mimetism inherent in typography, and not to explore its registers in a rather innovative manner.[28]

This typographical mimetism, as is shown by the page where it coexists with a vignette, can naturally take the form of an illustration: here it will illustrate Pulchinello's "parallelogrammatic theater box," which inscribes itself around the rectangle delimiting the space (p. 216). But it is evident, too, that the function of mimetism is to supplant the illustration. Oversized Italian-style capitals printed in bold-face are reproduced in the most novel style and in a manner as paradoxically truthful as a fictional image, since we are told that the inscription, OCTROI D'URANUS (URANUS' TOLL), that the narrator claims to have seen during one of his oneiric voyages (p. 7), was written "in letters of a form and color unknown on earth." "QUELLE PITIE." — this also in capitals, but in the same font (*didot*) as the text — translates "into the vernacular," Breloque's expressive gesture signifying that he is dying of boredom (p. 358).

However, this last example remains rather surprising, because Breloque's extravagant attitude should have called for a vignette as well. Is this absence meant to signify a whim on the part of the illustrator? To make us understand that the overly-precise description is self-sufficient to the point of excess? I prefer to think that the absence serves to accentuate Nodier's intuition concerning the various functions of graphic expressivity; this intuition, grounded in a comparative reflection of word and image, led him in this case to knowingly choose to privilege only the typographical form. The image suggests — or creates — objects and people. Through typography, an *enunciation* concretizes itself. This enunciation can transpose the gift of objectivity it derives from its iconic function into what is the most characteristic of discourse, and create, using only the play of its artifice, a *speaking individual*. The chapter entitled *Distraction*, printed upside down in relation to its title because the not-yet-awake narrator has no sense of orientation, is a picturesque example of this capability. (p. 297). *Conversation* offers a more subtle example: its five pages organized like any play script — speakers' names in gothic type, stage directions indicated below in smaller-sized roman type than the lines of dialogue — contains a series of mottos (which are the theme of the dialogue), transcribed in tiny capitals to indicate that they are quotations. But are they spoken? Or are they inscribed? Breloque's own motto, which ends the chapter rather like a concluding illustration, is more remarkable still. Indeed, it is reproduced in "ultra-capital letters" and set on three lines, each one more monumental than the last: WHAT - IS - THAT - TO ME? — an expression that, as we have seen, was to fascinate Balzac (Figure 6). It is not immaterial that, in this case as in the one mentioned above, the typographical manifesto was preferred by the author over an illustration that, here as well, would have

been perfectly justified. (Breloque has, as a matter of fact, just described in great detail the emblematic portrait that hangs above this motto.) But one necessarily excludes the other. An image gives life to that which discourse could only allusively evoke, but images do not possess the power of speech. Here, the word is the most important, and Nodier knows that he has at his disposal specific and perfectly adequate means of *showing* this.

Thus, the image is the doman of medallions, emblems, and blazons, and typography is the domain of mottos. The image awakens the "luminous secret" of the icons on the surfaces of the book;[29] typography breaks discourse into fragments of truth which are also capable of translating, beneath their expression, the *very voice*, real or fictitious, that articulated them. Only the alphabetical word has this power, for it is at the same time a bearer of meaning and, in its disparate elements, of abstract power — that is, it is capable of transmitting every intentional color, even the most unconscious, linked to a particular individual's taking charge of it.

That is why Nodier tends to slide so spontaneously from the typographical motivation toward *debris*. The pure letter, not having been invented by man according to the "natural" rules of mimology, could be nothing more than decorative. The word in isolation, on the other hand, escaping from

Figure 6. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 84.

QU'EST-CE QUE

CELA

ME FAIT?

conventions both of syntax and of controlled thought, gives access to a sort of *naive fullness* of meaning. Writing, and especially typography, makes the word an assertive unity completely apart, supported by something other than the spoken word, a support richer and more ambiguous because it is of a spatial nature and not simply determined by temporal continuity.

This seems to me to be the lesson of the chapter *Exhibition*, wherein that unhappy manuscript — that was supposedly reduced by fire to "twenty-two little fragments burnt around the edges ... between which there exists no ... feeble point of moral contact, no slight philosophical analogy, no vague possibility of oratorical association or of grammatical relationship" (p. 93) — will take on, through the fate that supposedly guides the hand of the writer-typographer as he distributes the words on a page, *the authority of an objective message* (Figure 7). These "debris of written thought" become its spectacle. Must we believe, as certain of his commentators claim,[30] that these debris reveal unconscious mechanisms, requiring this page to be read in a linear and descending fashion — above, the super ego ("science," "philosophy"), and below, that libidinal "slipper" that might reveal hidden obsessions? To adopt this reading is to forget that spatial relations are completely different from those that govern a line of reasoning. As Johannot presents it, a figure in the heraldic decoration [*escarboucle*] bordering the page, that slipper becomes the carbuncle [*escarboucle*], a secret key, but also the radiant emblem of fairy tales, which can be seen equally as a base or as a summit.[31] In fact, I believe that the purpose of this page layout is more to underline the derisory equivalences established in the progression of terms leading up to "pantoufle." The equivalent of figures, or forms, is indeed the principle that structures every *tableau*.[32] The elaboration of their meaning is to be found outside of them; they rest in the interpretations evoked in the spectator by the association that he makes between these distinct elements thus placed in a *situation of identity*. Here, all that is circulating from one word to the other, with the exception of the last one, are differences obtained through synonymy, paranomasia, or metonymy — that is to say, through rhetorical strategies that are all, at different levels, concerned with *proximity* and thus imply a partial similarity of one to the other. The autonomy that these differences support leads only to a tautology: if "science" *is* "mystification," and the "coquecigrue" *is* "slipper," *therefore* "science" itself *is* "slipper." The stage setting is rather ironic — because this page wishes to be taken equally as farcical and innovative — but it is in no way constructed according to the model of either discourse or diagram. Like the onomatopoetic *Invention* which closes the text, and in the same spirit of parody, Nodier here proposes a *creation*, a creation that is just as original for him because it also rests on a manipulation of *forms*, and not on *ideas*.

Figure 7. *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 95.

We must still consider why, having thus discovered such new principles of expression, Nodier was later to renounce them, and with so few regrets. I see two reasons for this. The first is that illustration and typographical play are too complementary in the *Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, so much so that the author was thereafter unable to envisage exploiting them separately to the same advantage. These procedures had been evoked jointly, like two techniques that permit the writer visibly to fragment writing, and to carry on Sterne's work by making the effects more explicit and more spectacular. The experiment had a theoretical origin — to be sure, never very clearly formulated — which, beneath its apparent disorder, supported the adventure of the experiment.

On the other hand, as we have seen, Nodier is not dreaming of lettrism or concrete poetry, but rather of literary creation: the difference is important. It means that novelty of forms is only justified in his eyes by the ideas that it brings to light. This is the second reason that must have made him indifferent to his technical discoveries: for him, their value did not derive from their innovative character, but from the *subjective intimacy* that expressed itself through this novelty of forms. By displacing on the surface of the book this fragmentation that was first sought after by way of provocation, by way of a challenge issued both against a past that had become useless

and against a chattering modernity, image and typography had served to confirm the effectiveness of procedures that were not exclusive to them, but that allowed for the renewal, not only of the form of a text, but also of its thought and even of its very author. The autonomy of fragments thus set apart or imposed upon the continuity of discourse offered access to equivalents and substitutions of meaning that traditional literature was not able to authorize. The combination of these fragments, produced so naturally in the reading of the *Roi de Bohême* in spite of their heterogeneity, made credible the possibility of a true syntax worked out in discontinuity, whose unity is the doing of the reader, and not of the narrator.

In truth, the *Roi de Bohême* represents the decisive manifestation of a step that *Smarra* already allowed us to anticipate, but this time it is more personal — decisive because here it takes on an experimental form which makes it escape from its author.[33] Is this manifestation precisely that of the dream? The *Roi de Bohême* tells us that it is, more essentially, that of *seeing*, of vision considered as a mysterious but absolute mode of thought.

For vision plays a fundamental role in the *Roi de Bohême*; it does more than simply determine its forms. The story of Gervais and Eulalie rests entirely upon the notion of vision. Gervais kills himself for having divined what "dangerous fascination ... passions exercise through the glance" (p. 134), and for having understood that his beloved, from the moment she regained her sight, became accessible to others more adept at seducing her, "to those who have their spirit and their soul in their eyes, to those who speak by means of glances, and who cause women to dream with one of those darts that shoot forth from their eyes" (pp. 183-184). But it is not simply this psychic fatality of the glance that is emphasized by the story. Through the new reading materials now available to Eulalie, Gervais also comes to understand that the pleasure they had shared in discovering texts by skimming them with their fingers is nothing compared to the pleasure provided by the visual approach. The sensations of the reading glance are "much more intense, much more rapid than those of the sense of touch" (p. 190); they give to the imagination and to the feelings a richness and a mobility that are otherwise inconceivable. "What a vast region of magnificent thoughts and touching meditations is open to that favored being who has received from heaven the organs to read, and the intelligence to understand!" (p. 191). The eyes awaken the spirit: the young blind man remembers having had the experience as a child (p. 186); Eulalie's words confirm it to him, "bewitching [his ear] with the impressions that she gather[s] in at the sight of all of the marvelous painted pictures that sight reveals to thought" (p. 189). And Don Pic, devoting one of his essays to color (an essay itself laid out on the page in the form of a *tableau* [p. 147]), does not hesitate to go still further, asserting that "plastic ideas" are the basis of all

of man's spirituality. It is on these plastic ideas that "have been molded all typical forms of thought, in its indefatigable and persistent creativity" (p. 148).

Such is clearly the revelation we owe to our dreams. They only serve to amplify monstrously, to the point of rendering it hallucinatory, this visual thought of which our consciousness is unaware, but which is nonetheless essential to it. That is why Nodier was able to define *Smarra* as both imitation — since no original writing is henceforth possible, according to him — and as an original work. He said: "My work on *Smarra* is . . . nothing but a verbal exercise, the work of an industrious schoolboy."[34] But he had borrowed the elements and structures of this visual and oneiric thought, too rarely recognized by the poets as their true source of inspiration, from the authors of antiquity; he was the first to have wanted this visual and oneiric thought to be read *for its own sake*. It was surely not by chance that he again took up this project, with *La Fée aux miettes*, immediately after the *Roi de Bohême*.[35] This book of images and fragments represents a comedic homage — but "sleep is comical" (p. 261) — to the "irrational soul that wakes in us when we sleep" (p. 260).

"Dreams are the parody of life" (p. 260): this explains why Nodier placed the *Histoire du Roi de Bohême* under the sign of parody. But the formal diversity of the work and its narrative casualness are also the sign of a more serious and troubling sensitivity to the consequences of this "bizarre play of the dazzling prism of dreams" (p. 261) on the personality of the dreamer. The coach of the imagination, the "pretty carriage, the one that brought us back from Timbuctoo and that will perhaps one day take us to Bohemia" (p. 342), is also a "nautical conveyance" (p. 344) — a *bateau ivre* — or "the spiraling fall of a winged linden seed" (p. 345). But does the carriage offer us a voyage, or a series of metamorphoses? *Who* is thus pulled into these unstable mirages? And also, *who* is the author of this book in which we see the mirages escaping from our grasp? By making a spectacle of writing in the name of visual thought, Nodier displaces the literature of the authoritarian world of discourse toward that of reading and of its willful mishearings — not only because he senses that certain of his readers will "begin the book at the end" (p. 109), but because the very condition of the dream is that it belongs to no one, and delivers the individual from all subjugation, even that of his own consciousness. It is the same for the book that claims to show this. We can say of the book what Nodier says about Pulchinello: "What does it matter whose hand makes him dance, and in whose mouth is placed the sharp and strident *articulations* that will give him voice" (p. 208). What does it matter whether the *Roi de Bohême* has one or several authors, and whether each of them has many faces. The truth of a text, if it is a dream — that is, if it is a visible language rather than a spoken

language — belongs to each person who follows its pathways. Beneath its fantasies, even the most superficial of them, the *Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux* reveals a conception of the book already that of Mallarmé, that of the "book taken from here and there, guessed at like an enigma, whose aspect changes — a book that is almost remade in one's [the reader's] own image": a conception of writing without a master, of the book without an *author*.

Translated by Janet Solberg

1. Letter of January 12, 1830, *Correspondance inédite de Ch. Nodier* published by A. Estignard, Moniteur Universel, 1876, p. 228.
2. J. Larat, *La Tradition et l'exotisme dans l'oeuvre de Ch. Nodier* (Paris, E. Champion, 1923), pp. 422-423.
3. Champfleury, *Les vignettes romantiques* (Paris, E. Dentu, 1883), pp. 305-306.
4. In Champfleury's words, *ibid.*, p. 8.
5. Article of January 9, 1831 in *Le Voleur*, reprinted by J. Richer, "Autour de l'*Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, Charles Nodier 'dériseur sensé,'" *Archives des Lettres Modernes* (Paris, 1962), 2, no. 42, pp. 22-23.
6. Quoted by S. Jeune, "Plus jeune qu'à sa naissance, le *Roi de Bohême* a cent cinquante ans," *Revue Française d'Histoire du livre* (Paris, 1980), no. 28, p. 499, n. 1.
7. E. Delacroix, le *Faust de Goethe*, 18 lithographs published by Motte in 1828.
8. "De la perfectibilité de l'homme, et de l'influence de l'imprimerie sur la civilisation," Ch. Nodier *Oeuvres complètes*, Renduel, 1832, Vol: V, p. 262.
9. However, the collaboration is not quite equal, since the author also participates in the typographer's work.
10. Letters of March 8, 1828 (*Correspondance, op. cit.*, p. 209) and December 19, 1829 (quoted par J. Richer, *op. cit.*, p. 8).
11. Letter of December 19, 1829, *ibid.*, p. 9.
12. *Ibid.*

13. "La plus petite des pantoufles" was written in 1805. See J. Richer, *op. cit.*, p. 29 ff.

14. "Miscellanées, variétés de philosophie, d'histoire et de littérature," *Oeuvres complètes, op. cit.*, p. 17.

15. "Du fantastique en littérature," *ibid.*, p. 86.

16. See article cited in note 14, p. 20.

17. "Notions élémentaires de linguistique, ou histoire abrégée de la parole et de l'écriture, pour servir d'introduction à l'alphabet, à la grammaire et au dictionnaire," *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. XII, 1834, p. 3. Cf. also l'*Histoire du Roi de Bohême*, p. 361: "The subject is not new, and I wish that it were still less so."

18. Indeed, it is this technique that permits a simultaneous printing of text and image. The wood engraving process used by T. Johannot introduces, however, some completely new possibilities of expression. This process was invented by Th. Bewick at the end of the 18th century.

19. *op. cit.*, p. 87.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

21. The *nouvelle* was reprinted separately, after Nodier's death, in the *Contes de la Veillée*.

22. The story also reappeared in the *Contes de la Veillée* under the title, "Les Aveugles de Chamouny."

23. S. Jeune, "*Le Roi de Bohême et ses sept châteaux:* livre-objet et livre-ferment," *Charles Nodier*, conference proceedings, (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1981), p. 202.

24. "Notions élémentaires de linguistique...," *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

27. See, for example, the chapter *Verification*, pp. 167-170. We also know that Nodier founded *Le Bulletin du bibliophile* in 1834.

28. Regarding this subject, see my article on "Rhétorique et typographie, la lettre et le sens," *Revue d'esthéthique*, 1979, 1-2, Paris, U.G.E., coll. 10/18, pp. 297-323.

29. Mallarmé used this expression referring to Berthe Morisot. See *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés* (Paris, Poésie/Gallimard, 1976), p. 166.

30. On this subject, see S. Jeune article cited note 23.

31. We shall note, by the way, that the slipper's owner, Popocambou, has in fact illustrated his reign by having a pyramid built standing on its point. (p. 99.)

32. Regarding this problem, see my article on "La déraison graphique," *Textuel*, no. 17, Université Paris 7, 1985.

33. It is nevertheless in the guise of a translation that Nodier presents *Smarra* in 1821. He will abandon this pretense in the 2nd preface to the tale in 1832.

34. Second preface to *Smarra*, in Ch. Nodier, *Contes*, ed. by P.G. Castex (Paris, Garnier, 1961), p. 41.

35. What is more, in the *Roi de Bohême* one finds in the character of Alma Popocamba the same equivocal alternation between youth and advanced years as in Nodier's *La fée aux miettes*. (see pp. 281, 284)

Samuel Beckett: Color, Letter, and Line

Tom Conley

ABSTRACT. Samuel Beckett is portrayed as a supreme "colorist of prose" through a decoding of the letter in the text. A critical spotlight is focussed on the subtle nuancing of monochromatic black on white lettering in Beckett's *Mal vu mal dit* and on the shading arising from an overlay of the French on Beckett's own translation into English (*Ill Seen Ill Said*) and the bilingual punning that results. The text and its subject hover between two languages in complementary and conflictual relation to each other, and between two arts. The fundamental ambiguity in the text and lack of definition of the subject — whose pronoun shifts from *I* to *he*, to *she*, to *we* — are amplified by the translation from the affective ("colored") French to terms of clearer articulation, in the black on white of Beckett's native English. *Mal vu mal dit*, the text that embodies the subject, hesitates between the now fading vision that inspired it and the act of articulation and is thus both "ill seen" and "ill said." To conclude, the blue that colors the beginning of Beckett's text is defined in Cezanne's terms, as an atmospheric tone evoking a super-nature and the illusion of infinite depth. Awash in this bluish cast (bleuté), *Mal vu mal dit* is thus divested of semantic distinctness and permits the play of, and play with, visible signifiers, or letters.

Critics argue only occasionally that Samuel Beckett is a superficial writer. His vision has often been burdened with tragedy, melancholy, despondency, anguish and existential pathos. This may be for the good reason that his work tells us how frail is the first person singular on which speech and meaning are based. The paragraphs to follow intend to specify some literal aspects of the art of Beckett's style. They will posit that his diction is inherently bilingual, and that the bilingualism engenders a visible writing, in which words can be seen disintegrating into letters; in turn, these become agents refracting unconscious rhetorical "colors" from the lines of words printed between English and French. The style is therefore composed in the manner of a rebus.

The process releasing colors from words depends on a simultaneously *regressive* reading and viewing of Beckett's writing. Letters can be pictograms, transitional or intermediate figures of poetric dialogue.[1] They hint at a number of virtual languages both within and beyond the characters of individual words; they cast writing into concrete shapes.

Beckett's *oeuvre* always stages scenes of regress to a child-like sensibility of language. A sort of reverse psychogenesis takes place when characters, looking for themselves or some ultimate essence, are reduced to a condition

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of visible letters that are situated between English or French. They progressively lose their national appendages (or their mimetic virtue) as they are reduced to simple traits (as in the instance of an I in upper case which becomes suggestive of a brushstroke). In their intermediate condition, the characters embody a sensibility that allows readers to behold them in their infantile, dialogic, transitional state suspended — if a Freudian ideolect can be used — between primary and secondary process. Here consequences are manifold for a poetics of visibility. The texts body forth an opulence of abstract shapes and forms that are apprehended with simultaneously tactile, visual and aural sensibilities. Language is freed of semantic order; it releases sensation and savor through a free play of syntax and concrete tensions that are of a poetic order — unstable in form, both tender and sadistic in affect, and of an always indeterminate eros and drive. That color and line commingle in the work is particularly important for the study of the letter as a minimal but essential raw matter of literature.

Multilingualism, letters, colors and a tabular feel for the printed page motivate much of Beckett's style. The dynamics are as old as those of Dante, but the combinations of words and their rhythms have no equivalent in the literary tradition. These pervade the oeuvre so much that it would be impossible to detect much evolution in the style or work in either French or English. *Premier amour* (1970), a text about ambivalent beginnings, illustrates the point. Early in the work the narrator recalls childhood prior to the sentimental education announced in the title. Memories of his relation with his father precede tales of loves lost in later years. His narrative of a "first love" antedated whatever the narrator sought to record in the disastrous aftermath of romance. The child's relation with the father was indeed the basis for the heterosexual miasms of the life that followed. With feigned nostalgia, the voice returns to the paradise garden of his childhood, then figured as a kind of greenhouse or closed area bathed in light.

> Il n'y avait que mon père et moi pour comprendre les tomates, dans cette maison (p. 14).
>
> [Only my father and I could understand tomatoes in this household.]

The narrator seizes upon the memory of *tomatoes*, but with a flair that seems uncharacteristic of most of Beckett's prose, since the range of colors in most of the work includes only black, white and grey. When a figure suggesting green or red is inserted over an austere background of absolute light and its contrary, the color hints that some play of language or letters is inspiring the representation. In the context of the narrative still-life,

tomates refers not just to tomatoes but, through amphiboly in English, to "two mates." Two mates live their subjectivities in the closure of a greenhouse. With the imaginary palette of red or green cast over the white and black, colors surge through the bilingual discourse and heighten our pictural relation with the writing.

Between the English and French of tomatoes and *tomates* letters slip and glide; they fracture the memory of the Oedipal scene (as well as its own theatricality), and in the comedy of Eros, they establish a tonal range in writing. If, as the sentence suggests, words are sometimes exploded in the collision of English and French, and if, too, an unconscious dimension of color emerges from their identity in the *jeu de mots*, it may also be that *tomates* includes the pictural dimension of *matting*, of flattening, or of working with matte-boards on which illusory three-dimensional scenes can be staged. *Tomates, to matte*: from words and phychic scenes we regress — salubriously — to letters, pictures and accretions of ink and pigment.

The implied presence of red tones acquires an almost identical function in another scene of Oedipal torture in *Endgame*. Once again, colors refract from the bilingual stamp of the discourse. Seen in English, blood drips from a speech in *Endgame* (1957) when Hamm starts to finish a soliloquy:

> Where was I? (*Pause. Gloomily.*)
> It's finished, we're finished. (*Pause.*)
> Nearly finished. (*Pause.*)
> There'll be no more speech. (*Pause.*)
> Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles.
> (*Stifled hilarity of Nagg.*)
> Splash, splash, always on the same spot. (*Pause.*)
> Perhaps it's a little vein. (*Pause.*)
> A little artery. (*Pause. More animated.*)
> Enough of that, it's story time, where was I? (*Pause. Narrative tone.*)
> The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. (...)

Memories of *Macbeth* become derisory. The pun on *vein* and *artery* — art in a comic vein, or a little vain art-ery in a Shakespearean vein — releases a glimpse of red over a somber decor of black. Allusion to the fontanels, or six membranes of the cranium of a fetus that has not yet ossified, emphasizes the regressive sensibility confusing that growth and psychogenesis usually differentiate. The speech graphically leads writing to a field of intermediate play of language and letters.

Both in *Endgame* and *Premier amour* the palette of colors emanating from the words is manifest in words that self-translate. They invariably self-duplicate; they emulsify their vocables and graphemes into —meta-

phorically, we must add, — what can be termed a languished paste of letters. Colors become palpable when letters and words betray themselves, when their minimal units of signifying force — which is to say their form, corporal aspect or composure as recognizable units separated from others both in sound and in visible shape — move back and forth from one semantic field to another. When words are in a state of amphiboly, or when they have a kind of "amphibious" condition (when they "reptate" or glide), they turn into letters which concretize the entire field of symbolic tension elaborated elsewhere or on other levels in the writing. In identical fashion we can discern the iridescence emanating from the seemingly toneless script of *Mal vu mal dit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

From the first sentence of this work, the narrative appears to tell of the problems encountered in a hypothetical description of a Botticelli Venus. The sculpture made from the painting is either a radiant mass of varnished, cerulean tints visible in most prints of the famous picture or, simply, a star heralding the evening from the deep Limbourg blues of a winter horizon at dusk giving way to the black of night. Both a color —blue — and a form reducing itself to the all-or-nothing of starry presence, the text begins, "De sa couche elle voit se lever Vénus. Encore. De sa couche par temps clair elle voit se lever Vénus suivie du soleil" (p. 7) [From her bed she sees Venus rising. Still. From her bed in clear weather she sees Venus rising followed by the sun]. The description implies that the scene is under the star of Midnight. A reader who has just opened the book cannot help associating the tableau with the star at the center of the frame of white surrounded by blue borders on the cover of the book. In question is the emblem of Les Editions de Minuit, now *mal vu* in light of the confusion of the memory-image of the first impression of the cover with the descriptive scene. Venus will be engendered in the white of *minuit*, but *mal dit* because the words have an inevitably pictural relation with the frame or typographical "support" of the Midnight Editions. The entire narrative seems to be a project that varies on descriptive and minimally narrative changes that are made through reiteration, including reference to the format of the book itself. The scene is repeated in such a way that the text amounts to an often comic exercise in graphic palinody.

Now in the fragments ending the first paragraphs or tableau of text, a color appears only in order to disappear into the prose of the rest of the work.[2]

> pour quel motif. A genoux surtout elle a du mal à ne pas le rester pour toujours. Les mains posées l'une sur l'autre sur un appui quelcon-que. Tel le pied de son lit. Et sur elles sa tête. La voilà donc comme changée en pierre face à la nuit. Seuls tranchent sur le

noir le blanc des cheveux et celui un peu bleuté du visage et des mains. Pour un oeil n'ayant pas besoin de lumière pour voir. Tout cela au présent. Comme si elle avait le malheur d'être encore en vie. (p. 8)

[for what motive. On her knees especially she has difficulty in not remaining so for-ever. Her hands placed one above the other on a some kind of support. Such the foot of her bed. And on her hands her head. There she is therefore as if turned to stone facing the night. Solely cutting through the black the white of her hair and that of a little blue of her face and hands. For an eye not needing light in order to see. As she had the malediction of still being alive. (tr. mine)]

The words seem to be providing implicit directions about how to stage a *tableau vivant*. Black should background the white of the sculpted body illuminated by floodlamps casting intense reflections from the white wig over the actor's head in a Venetian — as Venus is the figure in question — style of portrayal. The body acquires pallor under the bluish light thrown on the face and hands covered with flesh losing its sanguine pink and, in the general aura of the scene, dissolving into an icy blue-black (reminiscent of Philippe de Champaigne's later paintings of corpses).

Where the text is not exactly a painting projected onto theatrical space (in the block of prose), tonalities emerge through the texture or "paste" of its discourse. As in every one of Beckett's works, pains are taken to limit a scene. Here a rectangular cast surrounds the words with a bluish frame. The bedstead serves as an interior perimeter for what will happen to become a description. But the text reduces its colors — and loses its sense of blue — when the corners or *appuis quelconques* [some kind of support] of the words, the evanescent base of the sculpture that projects it into eminence and light — are lost in the pronoun standing in its place, which in turn succeeds, represents and replaces it. *Elle, qui a du mal à ne pas rester pour toujours* (She, who has difficulty in not remaining forever], stretches into a divided shape within the frame,

Tel le pied de son lit.
[Such the foot of her bed]

"Et sur elles sa tête:" [And on her hands her head:] Visual and verbal confusions are such that *elle* and *telle* redound. The next phrase forces *elle* to stand not on the trumeau of the tabular, erectile T that would hold *elle*, the sculpted Venus in the limelight on stage, but be divided and mirrored as an

echo of the letter that has just lost its plosive sign heralding meaning to follow. T beckons L, no doubt because the context confuses the hand with the Venetian portrait with the head. Blue members are perched on the head in a pose of meditation on death (borrowed from any number of samples from the *vanitas* tradition and its theatrical iconography) with reduction into two identical halves of itself.

The divided *T-el-le-pied* turns into the hands, the head and skull that inaugurated the description. But, thanks to the confusions of *elles*, regress to the beginning occurs only through the fracturing of the scene by way of the letter L. The senescent Venus we imagine is on her knees, but their juncture (or articulation) in the underlying "artery" of the description dictates the order and color of decomposition through its relation with the third person pronoun, *elle*. A border, an L, is a shifter between word and image, *elle*. That she is Venus is clear, since "quelconque" resounds the echo of the sight of the *conque* or cockleshell on which the classical frame is based. The first and second persons, *je* and *nous*, are conflated in *genoux* which fractures and connects human forms to the surface that the text has partially staged. Given the shift of attention from remainders of a description to a scene of pronouns visualized as disjointed letters (rather than sites from which voices emanate), L can be nothing other than the literal edge of its own frame, a paginal or painterly angle, an edge, or a corner disallowing any representation to overtake its own visualized, literal remainder of visibility. Physical apprehension of the letter occludes the reader from engaging in a narrative or a theatrical scene it might lure us into imagining *pour un oeil n'ayant pas besoin de voir* [for an eye not needing to see].

Keeping the scene from acceding to a coherent representation, reading and framing the block of words as it does, Beckett's L projects language into a realm of *tonal* force. Perhaps the most fruitful way of discerning a palette radiating from the words is to reread the pronoun *elle* in terms of the title and its translation. We know that every work of art becomes literature (and vice-versa) when the title is tipped, slanted, shunted, adjusted, or drawn into a work. Painting cannot ever be free of writing because letters or words assure it of its alterity in respect to all description. Most works in the mimetic tradition reproduce what their title encapsulates or simply "stands for," while abstractly expressive pieces try to deny or disavow any relation between the heading and the work (*e.g.*, an untitled composition or a work named only by a serial number). A few dare to make the difference of one and the other identical and maddenly congruent, where letters *are* pigments, and pigments are letters.

Such the case of the same segment taken from *Mal vu mal dit*. The English translation acts, as it were, as an *other* title hinting at the visibly

unconscious shapes of pigment or wash of the French text. Where Beckett's English would be literature, his French avers to be painting, and vice-versa. *Ill Seen Ill Said* figures as a nicely literal rendering of the French. Wherever pronouns disaggregate into tonal relations or colors embedded in the unconscious of language, they lose their function as shifters. Grammatical, cardinal and topographical functions no longer hold; the pronoun does not maintain a structural or mimetic role allowing discourse to "take place." Simultaneous cross-translation at the junction of the pronoun allows color to radiate in the course of its loss of meaning.

Bilingual readings allow a palette of colors to flourish along the lines of letters. This can be explained by the fact that the movement from *a*) writing or a field of meaning (in a grammatical sense) to *b*) apprehension of letters and, finally, *c*) their figures as simple strokes is ostensibly regressive. In following this backward path, the words and letters suggest that a primary process always works in the secondary or intellective process of literature. Clearly, Beckett inspires his readers to follow the course of an analytical scene in which a patient permits an intermediate or transitional sensibility to take over. In the course of rewriting or re-scripting primary material (colors, or elemental secondary impressions), pictograms, ideas and infantile originary figurations are mixed. Taking up the clinical experience in terms that are uncannily close to Beckett, Piéra Aulagnier notes, à propos of patients who recover their first lines of poetic access and self-defense in their rapport with the world,

> Entre le début et la fin de partie, le jeu n'en reste pas moins mouvementé et imprévisible: L'idée-pensée, la mise-en-scène figurée, le pictogramme coexisteront côte à côte. L'expérience corrélative à cette rencontre continue entre le sujet et le monde se traduit de manière tout aussi continue par ces trois productions. Aucune d'elles n'abandonne jamais sa tendance et son espoir d'abolir toute concurrence, d'obtenir une satisfaction qui ne pourrait être totale que si elle était seule présente, et si elle pouvait réduire au silence les exigences des autres processus et instances psychiques.
>
> C'est pourquoi la pensée, la figuration primaire, le pictogramme gardent, plus ou moins ouvertement, une relation confictuelle. Ce qui oblige à privilégier l'idée-pensée dépend de la relation spécifique liant l'activité du secondaire à la connaissance et, aussi, du paradoxe propre à cette relation.[3]

> [Between the beginning and the endgame, the play is less active or unpredictable. The idea-thought, the imaginary stage, and the

pictogram exist side by side. Continuous experience correlative to this encounter between the subject and the world is translated in such a way that is equally continuous through these three productions. None of them ever entirely abandons its tendency and its hope to abolish all rivalling parties, nor to obtain a satisfaction which would only be total if it was sovereignly present, and if it could reduce the requirements of the other processes and psychic instances to utter silence.

That is why thought, primary figuration and the pictogram more or less overtly maintain a conflictual relation to each other. What requires the idea-thought to be favored depends upon the specific relation binding the activity of the secondary process to knowledge and, too, of the paradox belonging to this relation.]

Regressive scenes liberate the rhetoric or "colors" of letters through stagings, or "scenes of writing" (*mises-en-scène*). That Aulagnier initiates the return to this transitional consciousness through a — maybe unconscious — reference to Beckett's theater — *Fin de partie* — seems appropriate; it explains the literal process of inscription and effacement of letters and colors in a staging of ever-primary encounters with the world. The shift through registers of English and French simply gives definition to the process.

In English, *Ill Seen Ill Said* closes the frame of the "original" French by implying that the figure of L is grounded in *elle* in the translation. The absent apostophe between the I and the double ll emerges as a meaningless but urgently pointillistic brushstroke, for when we misread "I'll Seen I'll Said," I and L become identical in voice. Once more, characters function not only syntactically — along a linear or directional axis that would be "opposed" to a tabular or uncentered sense of plastic extension with minimal support — or semantically (in the realm of meaning), but also in both directions at once.

"I'll Seen I'll Said" folds an abrupt passage of the future and the past tenses into each other. By the time I-L-L are scripted, painted on the page, or seen having been marked by an order of succession, the intention behind a vision — of writing or painting an aesthetic object — is past, already *said* and already *seen*. A "anterior" or pictural view of the graphemes closes the vocables into the frame of the text and furnishes an area for a scansion of a future in the past. A typological, typographical, thoroughly animistic view of time triumphs in the rupture of grammar.

The same process informs the *Unnameable*. In French it reads *L'Innommable*, but the English bodies forth a more strongly metaphysical dimension of the self, I, as the absolute zero-degree of language and being. The

tourniquet of French and English generates other tones, however, that tighten the constriction of unnaming a name in a text of proper names, since *L'Innommable* carries with it, first and foremost, the L, the *il*, the *il*(l) or the mannequin of ILL (*L'InnommabLe*), of *Ill Seen Ill Said* in anagram. Seen as a jumble of strokes and marks, it can be said,

L: I now 'm able

and

L: I now 'num able

as both signalling, with the triumphant inscription of the first and last touch before and after completion of the work, the will to begin. L'*I now am able*. Or the sign of failure — the author is tired, supine, done, numb, *unable*; or, now that there is nothing more to be seen or said, *I* is now able to begin the work of negation, of *un*-naming. In the title M and N toss in the same abstraction of I and L, *il* and *elle*, making of "man" no more than a skeletal letter. The transliterated title designates how ambiguous is an enterprise of writing about an I that has to be framed by the four corners of a frame marked by L — that is, by the visible angularities of the four corners of the frame. With that letter the four corners of *Ill Seen Ill Said* are scripted as a frame; a sort of fantasized reversal of the letter L moves from one unit of the title to the next. Its passage allows the four cardinal points of the book (and bluish outline of the title-page) to be associated with each of the descriptive units of the work itself. The latter shift back and forth from a grammatical to a pictural view, in which a tabular condition of writing defines much of the shape of the discourse. In a sense, the vision is thoroughly grammatical insofar as grammar, in a strict historical sense, involves the tracing of letters along straight lines.[4]

Ill of *Ill Seen* ... and *Mal* of *Mal vu* ... function identically as both adjectives and substantives. In this field of ambiguity, the "ill" or "mal" that is seen and spoken first evokes problems of originary sight and sound, but subsequently, issues of creation — of the seeming anguish of the white page or the white canvas facing the artist — take over. *Mal vu mal dit*: there seems to be an enthusing sense of *malédiction* in the scansion, where the malediction — the improper, poor, even hesitant diction — of French through the English is enough to motivate a collective guilt about an Anglophone's uneasy relation with French.

Also implied is a critique of a pristine, monolingual clarity that French has historically ascribed for itself since the Cartesian revolution. A white language of absolute expression, it begins to be colored only when it is

badly — or artfully, even bilingually — seen and said. To pronounce and to behold French as just another foreign language is to destabilize the authority of its literary and diplomatic traditions. It also invites the schizophrenia that goes with its institution of letters. Implied is the fact that the artist must color language with tones of an unconscious rhetoric coming from other shores and other linguistic frames.

The point where the manifold languages and painterly lines meet and separate is along the literal trace of the letter. *Mal vu mal dit*: M, a code used to retrieve all the dead characters from the bookish caskets of the fiction, is the visual figure of mimicry, of the integuments of "man" or all the dead souls encrypted in the narratives, whether Malone, Mahood, Moran, Molloy, Mercier or others. In one mark M scripts and inaugurates a figure of plastic extension. Figure is ground and vice-versa. An anguish of angularity,[5] the moment when sound and sight are one — ill said and ill seen — is framed, expressed and immobilized. An effect of what an eye will have seen, *mal* traduces *ill* before any completion of its accession to vision. At the point when a spectator sees the letters of Beckett's text shifting between their vocal form and their seeming visiblity, the words perform the very regess to the origin of art and biological life that is simultaneously being treated thematically in the narratives (for example, in the tale of two letters in quest of each other in *Molloy*). The letters are suddenly, maddenly, autonomous and self-contained as graphemes and "vehicles" of narration; the prose becomes a work of scripture practically unmediated by the metaphors it puts forward.

The "anguish" of a mix of letters independent of voice can be elucidated through appeal tó the concept of *le moment régressif*. According to this concept, we are sempiternally returning, at every moment in our total everyday lives, to seizure of the palpabilities of language. Verbal textures, the sounds that tell us where and what we are, are treated *as if* they were extensions of ourselves, or free of the constraint of voice that endows them with gratuity of meaning.[6] In these moments we apprehend what indeed is "secondary" narcissism, a stage of development when we articulate language with our bodies or our ken, but with the realization that the motivation is based on an entirely arbitrary relation that exists between symbolic forms and ourselves. A dazzling and deadening freedom: at play is a sort of liberation from a single language dictating the order of the world. Orthogonal or unilateral meaning is undone by the artful use that is made of the tactile shapes of letters. Beckett reproduces scenes of regression that scatter hierarchies which maintain semantic and logical orders.

Yet the title cannot solely be seen as a supreme plastic moment to which a reader must return in order to make any allegorical sense of Beckett's work. Better to see the heading *refracted* through the prose, in parcels that

textualize the mimetic or even dramatic sides of each composition. In the case of *Fin de partie* recidivism is witnessed in the contiguous monologues of Hamm and Nagg, exactly where they discern what was artfully located in the bilingual, dialogical scansion of the title. *Fin de partie* opens onto an imperative asking the viewing reader to *fin(d) a part I*, or to *find uh part-y*. The Y is a divided I in the vain endgame of art(er)ie through the mix of voices.

Already in the first unit of *Mal vu mal dit* we saw variation on the four words that had informed them. Now we can see how letters project over the surface of the work. "De sa couche elle *voit* se lever Vénus. Encore. De sa couche par temps clair elle *voit* se lever Vénus suivie du soleil." [From her bed she *sees* Venus rising. Still. In clear weather from her bed she *sees* Venus rising followed by the sun]. L or *elle*, the I of ill, ill sees Venus rise, or sees her well when the sky is clear. But the *elle* has difficulty in spotting the goddess from the bed that provides a point of view; or else Venus — we cannot tell if *elle* is she or we — is tired of sitting for the pose that the painter requires in order to endow her image with form and color. *A genoux surtout elle a du mal à ne pas le rester pour toujours* [on her knees especially she has difficulty in not remaining so forever]. And all this in the present, "comme si elle avait le *mal*heur d'être encore en vie" ["as if she had the malediction of still being alive"]. Clearly, as it were, the text varied on the letters and fragmentary marks of the title. *Mal* and *voir* recur obsessively throughout the fiction. Shapes are rearticulated so often that only a certain melodic configuration will emerge from the unconscious of so many repetitions of the same design.

Having momentarily forgotten the title because it has been reiterated to the point of invisibility, we finally glimpse its momentary integrity in the text, fifty pages below the title. The inner voice reveals, "Voilà le logis *mal vu mal dit*. Extérieurement. Il était temps" (p. 54, underlining ours). [There is the cabin ill seen ill said. Outwardly. It was about time.] Yes, it was *time* to repeat, insists the narrator in a sort of telepathy with the impatient reader. If such a narrative depends on the recurrence of the plastic shape of the title in the expressive texture of the work's words, it happens only to frame the scene that had begun with the coming of Venus or a past participle. Venus moves with time, coming and going as the morning and evening star, as a letter that appears and disappears.

Mal vu mal dit engages visibility such that a ground is identical to the figures of letters placed upon it. Hence the beginning of the second unit draws us back to the colors of the letters that are released when words are repeated twice:

Le cabanon. Son emplacement.
Attention. Aller. Le cabanon. A
l'inexistant centre d'un espace sans
forme. (pp. 8-9)

]The cabin. Its placement. Watch out.
Let's go. The cabin. In the inexistent
center of a space without form.]

The *cabanon* figures incipience itself, the lean-to stayed by the *c-a-b-a* of writing that is denied in a tonic accent, in the following *non* voiced at the end of the word. Seen in this light, the space of the description leading to narrative — or oblivion coded as invisibility — is always displaced by the presence of some literal form which marks it as illusory. The beginnings recur insofar as words continually redefine the paginal space of each paragraph or creative block in the text.

This is not to imply that color can be reduced or expanded to black and white or black *et blanc*.[7] *Bleuté* figured prominently — like tomatoes in the *First Love* — in the initial sequence of *Mal vu mal dit*. *Bleuté* returns not as if it were a word reproducing our sensation of flesh veiling the pale red of tired blood, but rather as a tint having a forceful tonal register in play with black and white at the limits of the palette. The most daring and inventive painters in the modern tradition have conferred uncanny force on the spectrum through insertion of black and white into highly colored compositions. In opulent paintings, black and white tend to essay colors by placing them out of a field of representation. Black and white bring abstraction and paradoxically extended ranges into canvasses using tonal field of color. Beckett's use of *bleuté* functions identically to the great blacks and whites in the works of Rembrandt, Goya and Manet, but now from an absolutely opposite direction, as they expand and reduce the range of infinitely varied tones that reside in the description. With such insistence on typography, the world is deprived of vegetation or any sensorial material outside of the shapes of letters.

It may be that Beckett's use of *bleuté* is motivated in some distant but significant way to Cézanne's famous remark to the effect that blue is the only color which can emerge from a picture of infinite extension and depth of field. Or, too, that it can be the only imaginary accretion of nature which can emanate from strictly formal compositions of line and surface. "Les lignes parallèles à l'horizon," wrote Cézanne to Emile Bernard in 1904,[8] "donnent l'étendue, soit une section de la nature ou si vous aimez mieux le spectacle que le Pater omni-potens, oeterne Deus, étale devant nos yeux. — or la nature pour nous-hommes est plus en profondeur qu'en surface, d'où

la nécessité d'introduire dans nos vibrations de lumière, représentées par les rouges et les jaunes, une somme suffisante de Bleutés, pour faire sentir l'air" (*sic*) [Lines parallel to the horizon furnish extension, either as a section of nature or, if you prefer, the spectacle that the omnipotent Father, the enternal God, stretches before our eyes. — so nature for us-men is more in depth than in surface, whence the necessity of introducing light into our vibrations, represented by reds and yellows, a sufficient sum of Blue tones to make us feel the air.]

Cézanne intimates that bluish tints are a sort of *corrective* to nature, both reflective of the humid depth of field we tend to invest in it, a synthetic tone affirming a distance taken from it, flattening it and, paradoxically, heightening its sensorial extension. *Bleuté* emerges from the mediation of horizontal definition of a frame with vertical lines, but it also keeps painting superficial and formal, always devoid of spatial illusion. The painter introduces *Bleuté* to divest red and yellow of their natural tones by arranging rapport with the primary axes of lines. It emanates as an eminently typographical color. A product of the book, it is a chromatic analogy to a depthless field of characters and an entirely paginal extension.

In *Mal vu mal dit* the linear configuration of a frame that is at once a figure and ground of words (which in turn are both figures and grounds of themselves) is best seen in the blocks of paragraphs establishing the support and frame of each textual unit. In the initial segment, the word *bleuté* seems to function somewhat less as reference to fleshtones than to the denaturing instance of Cézanne's mention of the color that maintains a primacy of surfaces over a perspective evoking depth. Where the artist had introduced a "sufficient sum of Bluishness" into his work to have us "feel the atmosphere" (*sentir l'air*), the writer strokes it into the composition in order to have tones of a sort of reductive expansion resonate everywhere. *Bleuté* tells us how to read Beckett as a supreme verbal colorist. Artfully juxtaposing white, black and blue in the same Venetian tradition so adored by Cézanne, Beckett also defines the linear extension of the closed unit of prose that is of absolute and rich color exactly *where it is never designated*, or never named: color varies on what defiens naming in *L'Innommable*.

Bleuté, of vivacious and bold beauty, is tipped into *Mal vu mal dit* at the very beginning, and with almost crucial intention. It comes close to naming the formal tonal palette within the letters but without forcing the writer to take recourse to mimetic urges of description. From this instance of *Mal vu mal dit*, no single reference to nature can be endowed with color exclusive of the black and white of lines, characters, or the white of the page. In the same fashion, the function of the pronoun I no longer plays the role of a "shifter,"[9] or, in Cézanne's terms, of a *vertical line* which would confer volumetric, psychological or theatrical depth upon the plastic configuration of the writing.

The I is not just a sign of subjectivity. Its erectile form at the incipient moment of a confessional discourse confers depth of field upon the page both in relation to characters in lower case and to its own eminence. The text puts in question all unconscious association of volume and psychology with the first person singular. The consequence in visual terms is that the I does not establish perspective; it bars illusion in its shape as a stroke. The letter denies the landscape that its own form would frame. After Proust, only Beckett — and possibly no other writer in the modern canon — would make an identity of (I) a pronoun identifying the self as a vertical line. By doing so, in the act of their writing, they produce landscapes deprived of depth. That Beckett writes in the mode of Cézanne seems clear. But that his written expression embodies a sensorial beauty in austerity or verbal paucity is not: for Beckett's erasure of the I might be likened to its bleeding into the pores of absorbent watercolor paper. The I dissolves and therefore is divested of centrality, topicality, verticality or even the positionality that practical usage of language had invested into the dynamics of pronouns, or that the mimetic tradition had assigned to perspective and to color in the tradition of painting. The alienating property of his verbal pictures offers avenues of escape from the idea that a pronoun is engaged in an existential relation with other shifters or referents having human aspect or flesh tones of pink and tan.

1. The crucially poetic and plastic area of the intermediate, or "dialogical" imagination is studied carefully in Gabriele Schwab, "Genesis of the Subject, Imaginary Functions, and Poetic Language," *New Literary History*, 15 (1984), 453-74. Her work provides a precious background for the style of all of Beckett's narratives.

2. Titles are "tipped" into the prose in order to recur or to be reiterated or shifted according to contextual changes. The anticipations and delays — or more simply, the aesthetic effects — of the gaps between title and text in Beckett are studied in our "Crutches," *Chicago Review*, 33 (1982), pp. 84-92.

3. *La Violence de l'interprétation* (Paris: PUF, Série "Le Fil rouge," 1976), p. 126.

4. "Grammar is not only the art of straight speech and writing (*recte loquendi scribendique*)," notes R. Howard Bloch of language in the High Middle Ages, "but the science of literal meaning. The function of early medieval grammar is thus the delineation of straight paths, the creation of linear links between symbols, sounds, and letters as well as between words and the physical property of things," in *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 52.

5. *Angle* and stress are of the same etymology. Return to origins of vision entails *an*guish. Lucette Finas provides a gloss of *angle* to initiate a visual reading of Georges Bataille in *La Crue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 20. Beckett shares the same visibility in his work.

6. Michel de Certeau writes of Merleau-Ponty in terms that approximate the scenes of language in Beckett's prose: "To see is already an act of language. This act makes of seen things the enunciation of the invisible texture that binds them. It is the perception of an invisible solidarity by and in the 'terms' of seen objects. It is word, but silent still. It is already of the order of language; it represents a mute stage of language, which precedes its verbal stage. Thought is born with this silent 'pact' between things that is the infrastructure of vision. Conversely, it could be affirmed that visual experience still haunts verbal language. It is the infancy (*in-fans*, it cannot talk yet) that language represses and that keeps coming back, which is why we must retrace our steps up (or down) to that point — to that vision which has been effaced by verbal discourse but which inaugurated the structure that the latter repeats — in order to grasp in its primal scene the dialogue between language and the real. This scene remains the theater of everyday life, its ordinary landscape," *in*: "The Madness of Vision," *enclitic*, 7 (1983), p. 29.

7. The pun of *blank* and *black* is typographic; white becomes black and vice-versa. The persistence of the combination echoes in common speech. At a liquor store in Walker, Minnesota (on Leech Lake), one evening the author heard a drunken musky fisherman ask a clerk for some white wine. The salesman uttered, "How about a Colombard Blanc?" To which the fisherman replied, "I always thought white wine was black, at least in the country I come from" [that is, from a metaphysical landscape of words rather than woods, forests or the land of sky blue waters.]

8. In *Conversations avec Cézanne* (Paris: Editions Macula, 1978), p. 27. The reflection is somewhat altered in Raymonde Carasco's productive "Journeaux-aquarelles de Joë Bousquet," *Critique*, 433-34 (June-July, 1983).

9. At least in many readings of Emile Benveniste, "La Nature des pronoms," *in: Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 251-57.

Press Art: Poets and Their Printing Machines

Judith Preckshot

ABSTRACT. Inspired by technology, twentieth-century poets have exploited its instruments through a medium which may be called "press art." They have circumvented what Marshall McLuhen perceives to be the inimical influence of the printing press, to retransform mechanical operations into artisanal handwork and thus to restore originality to products of the press. Language, and the process of its use, has been rendered visible through their innovations. This is shown through an examination of esthetic predispositions and procedures that have entered into the creation of the visual poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Albert-Birot, Pierre Garnier, and John Furnival, and through an assessment of these artists' roles with respect to the secondary production level involving printers or printing machines that enabled the creation and their works' status as "original" within this context of collaboration and mechanical reproduction.

"Typographic Man": classified, columnarized, paginated being deprived of his capacity for direct and natural (i.e. oral) expression; victim of the increasingly standardized, rationalized and depersonalized language of print. Such is Marshall McLuhan's depiction of the catastrophe wrought by the invention of moveable type. But the electronic age, prophesies McLuhan, will bring salvation in the form of a reconstituted, "full" language, which will draw not just on graphic, but also oral and other visual media, to retrieve exactly that mythic dimension which McLuhan associates with the traditions of oral cultures and an idealized past missing in societies dominated by the single dimension of the printed page.[1] That an evolution in technology can rectify the perceived alienation of man from his means of self-expression and inter-communication, which technology has itself brought about, is debatable; nonetheless, such visions of technologically-inspired millennia hold an undeniable fascination for philosophers and poets, particularly those who encounter in the printed word both muse and obstacle to creative activity. A similar rhetoric was heard in Guillaume Apollinaire's 1918 speech, "L'Esprit Nouveau et les poètes," in which he predicted that the technological advances of his day — telegraph and telephone, airplanes, the phonograph and cinema — would be the source of a new lyricism wedding art to technology. This marriage would bring poets, seen to lag behind the inventors of these machines, out of the "incunabula stage." They would be moved by the "New Spirit" to emulate scientist-technicians, the real prophets of the twentieth century, to "... master prophecy [...] in short, to mechanize poetry as the world has been mechanized."[2]

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Despite Apollinaire's invocations of diverse modes of mechanical or electrified communication, he did not specifically envision areas of innovation for his new Prometheans beyond "typographic artifices" such as the visual onomatopoeias and typefaces of commercial advertising with which Futurist and Dada poets were already experimenting. By and large, for Apollinaire and those of his followers chosen for this study of what I have baptized "press art," print mechanisms have remained the focus of the poetic revolution.[3] The consequences of serious and systematic attention to the typographic detail are multiple: it has awakened a consciousness that the printed text can be more than the transcription of a manuscript; it also altered radically the poet's relation to his means and/or agent of production; not unimportantly, it has prepared a return to the forgotten simplicity of artisanal acivity in which creation and production, too often viewed as the separate provinces of author and printer, are indivisible; and it has helped to foster the myth of a modern "author-scribe" who will once again be master of his own writ by controlling both theoretical and practical aspects of textual production.

It is a common perception that the sort of collaboration generally accepted for performance artists inappropriate for painters, whose work is usually associated with the concepts of individual expression and originality of style.[4] If this perception is true for visual artists, it is doubly so for poets, who, since the romantic era privileging private communion with nature, are seen to be engaged in solitary artistic endeavor. Yet both these collaborations have occurred, from the time of Cubist and Dada artists to the Concrete poetry of the fifties and sixties, with the most dramatic experiments being, perhaps, the Surrealists' joint creations of the *cadavre exquis* and automatic writing. Artistic collaboration seemed a natural consequence of the many -isms of the 20th century, artists' collectives dedicated to the dissemination of a common esthetic transgressing boundaries of genre as the artists did the rules of the socio-political establishment. Their works are penetrated by the double and paradoxical notion that the work of art is the result of both an individual creative flash and a communal effort, be that only at the level of dialog, inspiration, or shared discovery. What poets, in particular, have learned from their painter-coinspirers is not just a heightened awareness of the visual in language, but an appreciation for manual labor, for techniques of *mani*pulation that could be applied to their poetic texts — to the *hand*-working of words and verbal concepts.

In the pages that follow, I would like to examine twentieth-century poets' inspiration in technology, their exploitation of it to render language visible, and the various sorts of collaboration it invites. It is a modern phenomenon that poets conceive of machines designed for mass production as instruments for authentic, artistic creations — machines that either

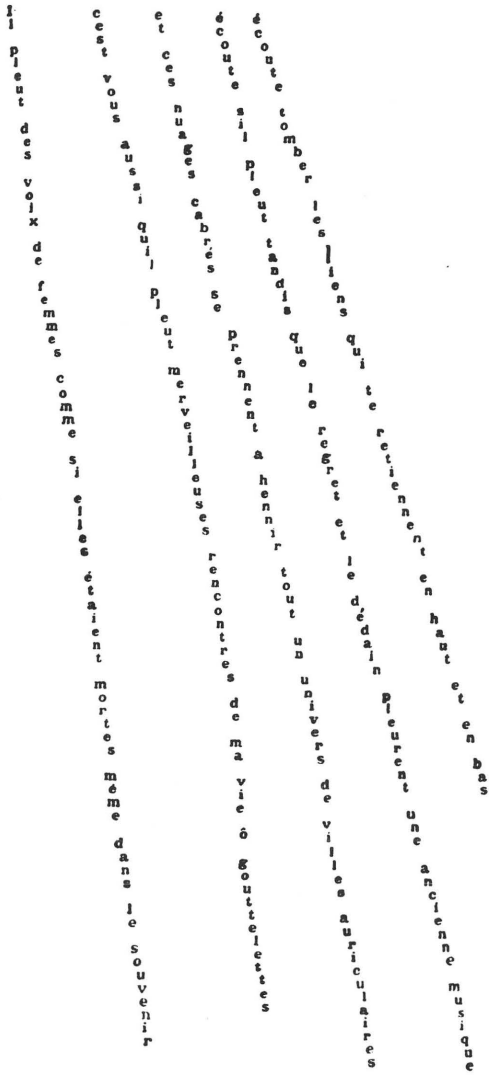
require the intervention of a technician to operate them or enter into the creative process themselves as mechanical "collaborators." And it is particularly with visual texts requiring mechanical support to produce them that the collaborative relationship takes on greater importance. In these texts, the typesetter's role is analogous to that played by the cutter of a wood-block with respect to the woodcut designer. It may involve the modest task of reproducing a manuscript or the greater creative responsibility for re-interpretation, i.e. for giving material reality to visual concepts provisionally drafted in the author's hand. As will be seen in Apollinaire's collaboration with Pierre Albert-Birot, the function of word- and print-manipulation case become enmeshed to the degree that the relationship between the poet-artist and printer-artisan tends towards identity, as the one threatens to eclipse the other. Collaboration in Pierre Garnier's machine-assisted "typewriter poems" entails a matching of the human with mechanical capabilities in a direct interaction with the instrument of production, resulting in the spontaneous creation in the poet's print "idiolect." In the can of John Furnival's newspapered surfaces, collaboration occurs at one remove from the original time and place of the production. Although his persistent recourse to quotation suggests an impoverished imagination, Furnival's hand reprints of newspaper articles does just the opposite, reaffirming in an ironic mode the existence of the hand-made artifact in a mechanized world.

I. The Poet-painter and the Typographer

Guillaume Apollinaire, born Kostrowitzky, alias Croniamantal, the "assasinated poet," was haunted by the desire to be other. But the persona of the other projected in his ideogrammatical poetry cannot be found in either a fictional personage or Rimbaldian visionary; it surfaces, rather, in an image of self beyond fiction or poetry: the painter. Spokesman and elucidator for the Cubist painters, Apollinaire gravitated naturally towards creators of polychrome visions such as Pablo Picasso and Robert Delaunay. The poem "Les Fenêtres," written to accompany the catalog for Delaunay's 1913 Berlin exposition, celebrated Delaunay's series of paintings depicting "Simultaneous windows." In the word-pictures of *Calligrammes*, Apollinaire pushed his relationship with painters beyond association into identity, writing *as if* he were painting. The title under which he originally intended to publish five of the early *calligrammes* says as much: "Et moi aussi je suis peintre."[5] The title proved to be unnecessary, for the representational quality and visually figurative power of these *calligrammes* clearly express his penchant for painting. One of the five ideo-

grams, "Lettre-Océan," first appeared in *Soirées de Paris* (June 1914), alongside the essay '—'Simultanisme-Librettisme," Apollinaire's contribution to the polemic surrounding the concept of simultanism and multimedia approaches to verbal art. In this word picture, perhaps his most ambitious, Apollinaire performed functions of both poet and painter. This

Figure 1. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Il Pleut," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Ps.: Gallimard, 1956), 203.



was not the case in what was touted as the "First Simultaneous Book," *La Prose du Transsibérien et la petite Jehanne de France* (1913), which had required the collaboration of the poet Blaise Cendrars and the painter Sonia Delaunay to effect a poem that could be read and seen simultaneously.

According to Pierre Albert-Birot, in whose literary review *SIC* "Il Pleut" and other calligrams were first published, Apollinaire showed little interest in typographical interpretation. For "Il Pleut," Apollinaire apparently furnished only a manuscript, hastily penned on notebook paper in red ink, with words sometimes retraced in black for clarity. It was left to the typographer to give typographic representation to the text miming the action of falling rain as it was traced out on the manuscript and evoked in the language of the poem (Figure 1).[6] Apollinaire's visual artistry should not be in dispute; however, his ability to pre-view his *calligrammes* in terms of the typographer's spatial economy or "color" palette of type fonts might be. His calligrams do not reveal the visual geometry of Dada poems (Tzara's "Bilan," for example), informed by the newspaper advertising formats which inspired them; nor do they openly proclaim "le projet typographique au travail dans l'écriture" in the way that Francis Ponge's "Le Pré" does.[7] There, the typographic concept is clearly a forethought, embedded in the text. Ponge actually instructs the typographer, in the specialized vocabulary of the *métier*, how (in the lower-case letters) and where (at the end of the text) to set his name:

> Messieurs les typographes,
> Placez donc ici, je vous prie, le trait final.
>
> Puis, dessous, sans le moindre interligne, couchez mon nom,
> Pris dans le bas-de-casse, naturellement,[8]
>
> [Typographers, Sirs:/Put here, accordingly, I beg of you, the final mark
> Then, without the slightest space, place my name below/Set in the lower case, natural.]

While Ponge may conceive of writing as expression, a process of giving material form to verbal structures ultimately destined for print, Apollinaire might have defined writing in Roland Barthes's terms, as *scription*, a manual tracing of intellectual and sensual impulses combined: "Writing is the hand; it's therefore the body: its impulses, its checks, its rhythms, its weight, its glide, its complexities, its flights — in short, not the *soul* (graphology matters little), but the subject ballasted by his desire and his unconscious."[9] The breadth of the stroke, the letters of unequal dimen-

sions, the uneven or curving lines of the five hand-scripted ideograms published in the 1918 edition of *Calligrammes* betray Apollinaire's painterly aspirations executed through the calligraphic project, or "beautiful writing," implied in the title. Words shrink or expand in dimension to fit the contours of the figures; graceful traces of ink or brashly expressive brush strokes paint a picture stamped indelibly with the character — signature — of their author-*cum*-painter. The supple plasticity of the handworked *calligrammes* contrasts dramatically with the orderly linearity of those recast in print. A comparison of the typeset versions of other *calligrammes* with their manuscript originals shows that Apollinaire's conception was pictorial, and not specifically typographic. In his manuscripts, letters mold themselves into contoured objects, into distinctly representational forms, which often lose their identity when set in type. For instance, what is immediately recognized as a pistol in the manuscript version of "Aussi bien que les cigales" only vaguely evokes a firearm in the typographic revision, where letters line up horizontally, and with consistent regularity — more legible, readable, and textual. Credit for this printed page belongs at least in part to the typographer.[10]

If Apollinaire is an example of a visual poet without the typographer's vision, Pierre Albert-Birot exemplifies the poet whose inspiration proceeds from the graphic designer's sense of the page as decorative space, framed by fanciful borders, and within which letters generally respect the usual geometry of printed matters. The model that bespeaks Albert-Birot's particular originality is the "poème-affiche" or "poème-pancarte," rubrics that identify certain of his whimsical visual poems as public announcements. These poetic placards bear cryptic inscriptions of "public interest," sometimes exhorting automobilized readers to exercise caution ("Slow down; don't destroy the countryside") or announcing to sun-worshippers that "The sun is in the stairwell; for information, enquire further on at the wine merchant's."[11] Reminiscent of the yet-to-come surrealist calling cards, Albert-Birot's work is distinguished by its visual cleverness, often to the detriment of verbal creativeness. Indeed, if there is a constant that givers stylistic unity to his heterogeneous collection of poems (*Poésie, 1916-1924*), it is the subordination of the text as a semantic unit to visual patterns. Some sketch out rebuses, labyrinthine structures that force reading along tortuous paths, frustrating the reader's desire to make sense. In his phonic poems composed in Dada style ("Poèmes à crier et à danser"), prolonged vowel sounds and nonsense syllables are orchestrated with verbal chains which are rendered almost unreadable by the absence of spaces between words. Other texts simply frustrate the desire to read: the non-ideogrammatic texts originally published under the title "La Joie des 7 couleurs" are printed in upper-case letters, their lines monolithic in

appearance, many right- and left-justified, the words separated by uniformly equal spaces. No indentations create openings into the text; no visual pauses give respite to the eye; no variations invite the reader to penetrate the wall of words. A justification of a creative plan which privileges form over linguistic substance and ultimately releases the poem from any obligation to be intelligible can be read in Albert-Birot's explanation of the emblem adorning the cover of his literary review *Sic*. Having centered the affirmative sign *SIC* (lat.: "yes"), also the acronym for the formula *S*ounds, *I*deas, and *C*olors, he then thought to frame the core emblem with a capital F on the left side and its mirror image on the right side, so that the whole would thus be "contained by the form."[12]

Albert-Birot's "Promethean poem" of the same volume (p. 348) illustrates just how the disposition of lines and stanzas, that is the visual structure of the poem, can take precedence over verbal metaphors (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Pierre Albert-Birot, "Poème prométhée," in *Poèsie*, 1916-1924 (Ps.: Gallimard, 1967), 348.

LES MOTS QUI COURENT OÙ VONT-ILS

Je vois	Le pote	Sonori	Gent m
passer	au n'est	t é d e s	ais l'ou
rires et	pas très	c l o c h	rs g r i s
pleurs	d r o i t	es d'ar-	est l a s
Tac tac	Reviens	z s z s z s	Verts c u
tactactac	ne peux	z s z s z s	ls de bou
tactactac	me pas-	z s z s z s	teilles à
tactactac	ser de	z s z s z s	l'envers
Fil d'a-	T u n' a s	Le globe	De mots
m o u r	p a s l e	e s t u n	et moi
fils d'ar-	p a s s o	gros pe-	je suis
g e n t	u r d o u	l o t o n	le chat
Spatia	Tactactac	Tac tac	Est mor
lité san	tac tac	où est le	te je sui
s i n c o	tac tac tac	chatnotr	s pris da
n n u e s	mademoi	e Jeanne	ns les fils

P I E R R E A L B E R T - B I R O T

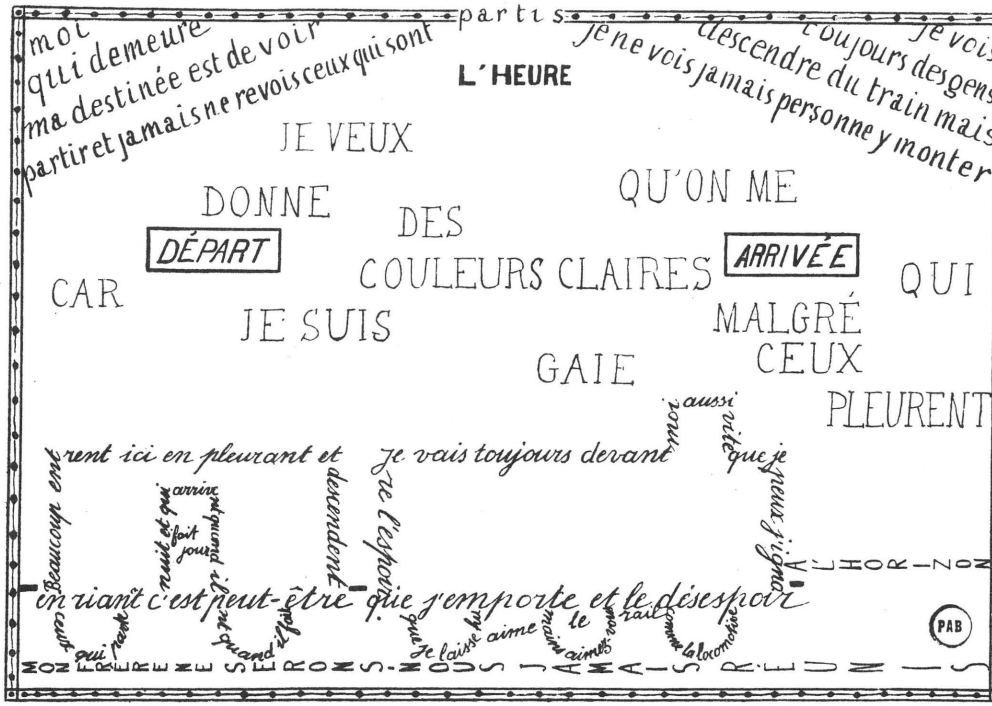


Figure 3. Pierre Albert-Birot, "L'Heure," in *Poésie*, 1916-1924 (Ps.: Gallimard, 1967), 165.

The title, "Poème-Prométhée," must be taken as a sort of classification, like the term sonnet, rondeau, or *calligramme*. It designates a more or less standard four-quatrain poem in which the visible aspects of lines and stanzas have been interchanged: the heterometric lines are condensed into blocks four-lines deep and just as wide; the stanza, which customarily appears as a rectangle surrounded by white margins, is here composed of four mini-blocks arranged in a line, to be read in either the horizontal or vertical dimensions, depending on the reading axis selected. The enjambement of the "Cloches d'argent" in the first set of squares and "notre Jeanne est morte" in the last suggest a horizontal reading orientation, from left to right, one mini-block to the next; but other semantic or syntactic discontinuities in this proto-Rubick's cube indicate that multiple readings are possible — along a diagonal, or in hop-scotch fashion. Indeed, the word groupings appear to be little more than random associations, and the title in the interrogative, "Les Mots qui courent où vont-ils?" vincidates that interpretation; the title also forms, with the author's name imprinted

below, a semi-frame around an inner textual square whose ostensible shape simply reflects the essential structuring principle of multiple blocks. The text thus squared (4 cubes x 4 cubes) is blocked out according to a grid that magnifies and repeats the mini-checkerboard of alternating *s*'s and *z*'s at its center. If there is any synonymy between this and other cubes, it has to do with garbled — "blocked out" — messages. Or, as it might be inferred from the evident *z*'s, the repetitive pattern of squares may act as a visual soporific, putting interpretative faculties to sleep.

A second example shows the application of the typographic grid to a picture-poem of more pictorial inspiration. Although the letters of Albert-Birot's "L'Heure" (Figure 3) are hand-done, they have been executed with such precision — the letters uniform in height and style and perfectly aligned — that it gives the impression of type. Script tracing the outlines of a train, so inexpressive in its regularity, does nothing to dispel that impression of print, however ornamental it might be. One is immediately struck by the decorative value of "L'Heure": its visual literalness has that whimsical charm of embroidery patterns destined for the nursery, and the sentiment expressed in the text is one to match with its series of vulgarized symbolist oppositions (day/night, hope/despair, laughter/tears, joy/sadness) and the over-used euphemisms of the voyage to dress up death in brighter colors ("les couleurs claires").

The impoverished verbal lyricism does not necessarily detract from the interest or artistry of the piece, for the coordination of text and image presents certain complexities which engage the attention of the reader. The picture seems to be organized into distinct spaces: the top and bottom correspond to the positions of text-signs and image-object (the train); the left and right sides are identified with areas designated for departures and arrivals in a train station. But these separations are not categorical, and terms of sadness and joy, hope and despair appear in both sectors, as if to show that such sentimental associations are really a question of perspective. The train is itself not decisive, both coming and going. The slant of the script propels it off to the right, but the empty space at that edge suggests that it might be travelling in the opposite direction. This indecision affects the substance of the text, for the graphic elements work to discredit the words by rendering them ambiguous or by disrupting sentence continuity. Words trace out the shape of the train, only to complete the picture without completing the sentence; the sentence may continue, cut off, in another space not necessarily contiguous. For instance, the fragment forming the left box-car wheel is left hanging; although the upward curve sends the reader's eye first to the group of words sketching out the door, he must jump to the second wheel to complete the verb and to continue a reading following a visual analogic which links

round forms to round forms. A glance back to the box car door, significantly the symbol of openings and closings, permits the reader to finally complete the sentence. The elements of the text are displaced to create an esthetically correct image, a puzzle which is visually complete but whose units of meaning must first be recognized and then reconnected into a comprehensible verbal whole. It is not inappropriate that this picture-poem foregrounds the image of a train with its boxcar-container — thus emphasizing the importance of the visual vehicle over its linguistic load and Albert-Birot's greater sensitivity to the language of print.

II. The Poet and the Type-Writer

Heavily inked-over author's manuscripts have a fascination for critics because it is believed that the nuances revealed by erasures and insertions furnish clues to authorial intentions not found in pristine published texts. If the manuscript has, in Walter Benjamin's terms, an "aura" that reproductions do not, it is precisely because it can be authenticated as an "original," drafted by the very hand of its creator. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin suggests that new instruments of multiple reproduction may pose a challenge to that generally accepted concept of authenticity embodied in the "one-of-a-kind" creation, reproducible yet inimitable. "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity. Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century. The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical — and, of course, not only technical — reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so *vis a vis* technical reproduction."[13] He goes on to explain that technical reproductions, such as photographs, duplicate the artwork without counterfeiting it. Indeed, the camera lens can transform a painting by focussing on a detail with such a degree of magnification that it reveals elements hitherto unseen by the naked eye; its colors are often altered through the chemical processing of the film. There is thus never danger of confusion between the original still hanging on the museum wall and the reproduction on a poster, postcard, or art-book.

A crucial distinction must be made between the original in the visual arts and that in literature, for the manuscript is more comparable to the artist's preliminary sketch than it is to the finished painting. The post-Gutenberg manuscript does not have the same status as a work of art — that is, unless the manuscript is conceived as a painting and as a sort of reproduction,

executed by means of the very instruments of duplication which normally threaten claims to originality. Such would be Pierre Garnier's "mechanical" poems, composed free-hand at the keyboard of a typewriter and destined to be multicopied photographically without, however, any alteration of the original. Like printing presses, the typewriter transforms manuscripts from documents bearing a personal imprint into papers "written" by a foreign hand, neutralized in the impersonal script of a mechanical scribe. Michel Butor notes that the first sight of their texts in print encourages in authors "un travail intense de réappropriation," and he cites Balzac's heavily rewritten galleys as proof of this need to repossess them. Butor sees typescript as a "pre-printing': the typewriter simply speeds up the dialog between author and a text perceived to be already slipping out of his hands. The purpose of the dialog is the reimposition of the author's idiom. Because it retains the ambiguity of type and writing, Butor prefers the English *type*writer to the French "machine à *écrire*".[14]

Spatialism, defined as "the poetic animation of linguistic elements without exception,"[15] is Pierre Garnier's contribution to the Concrete Poetry movement's efforts to break the dominance of semantic and syntactic structures in the perception of words. Garnier seconds Max Bense's perception of a visual text as an "esthetic communication scheme," rather than a text, stating that it is not *read*: the "reader" receives first a general impression of the whole picture before taking into account individual words; he then proceeds to analysis of the "microelements" (as opposed to more visible macrostructures), that is, the word broken up into its individual letters, or fortuitous combinations of vocalic and consonantal components, which support the initial impression received. (136) The matter of these poems, conceived and produced on a typewriter, is realtively simple: one or two words broken down into their compositional elements — syllables and homophonic variants, letters, punctuation marks — recomposed according to a visual plan, abstracted from extraneous — semantic, syntactic or symbolic — influences that would lessen the visual impact of characters typed in space.

Garnier does not treat typewriting as an alien script; in his usage "originality" is guaranteed by the human type-writer's idosyncratic touch on the keys. Furthermore, typescript represents more than a reproduction; photographically copied as is, with errors intact, the machined poem is the original and final product of a process of synthesizing both mechanical and organic forces of expression: "In the mechanical poem this unity enters into the very conception of the work: since the poem is only reproduced by means of snapshots, the poet himself becomes a typographer, uniting the two crafts." (98) Garnier likens writing to what he calls "digital poetry" to the work of other artisans — needleworkers,

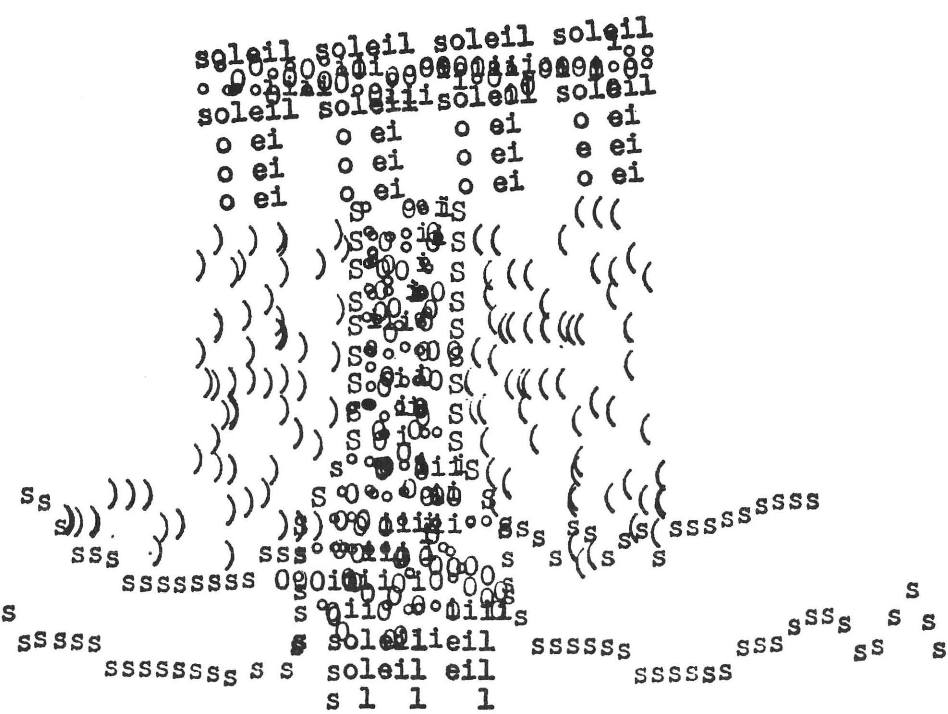
woodcutters, or calligraphers — because it is above all "an art of the hands and fingers," (22) and a question of manual dexterity. Unlike pens or brushes, however, the typewriting machine is not merely an extension of the writer's hand; it acts as a collaboration, sensitive to the author's touch and guided by his eyes, but responding in its own language: the "eye perceives in these poems a movement, or rather a series, of pulsations transmitted by the typewriter and by the slender personality retained by the letters. The author strikes his own impulses on the machine's keyboard; the eye serves as a regulator. There, too, dense zones appear, bright pathways, forms brought forth by the intensity of the touch, geologies, strata and concretions." (65)

Garnier's digital poetry could not be executed on any of this decade's sophisticated electronic typewriters or —worse yet! — printers attached to computers designed to eliminate imperfections. Garnier requires a manual model which not only transcribes the variable personal energies of the individual typist in the lightness or heaviness of the character imprint, but allows for machine-inspired improvisation: it leaves room for creative typos and provocative misalignments. In Figure 4, "Blason du soleil," what would normally be classified as bad typing — "irregularity of impression, irregularity of spacing, unevenness at the beginning of paragraphs, lines of typing not parallel with the top edge of the paper, uneven spacing between the lines, misuses of certain characters, . . ."[16] takes on poetic attributes, and serves to generate the visible text much in the way "ungrammatical" features generate poetic texts for Michael Riffaterre.[17] The disintegration of the word *soleil*, evoking the solar life-source and universal figure of cosmic progenitor, tells the story of mistaken alliances, of illegitimate associations, that call heraldic integrity into question. One sees the major outlines of an escutcheon formed by a horizontal band of *soleils* under which descend four vertical bands of the vowels *o* and *ei*, which seem to have lost the consonants that would allow the world *soleil* to be reconstructed. The lower two-thirds of the escutcheon is divided vertically into three parts: on the left and right the parenthetical symbols — half-moons — are reversed, as if to portray the sun broken up into disconnected halves, while in the middle a repeated series of strident *SOS*'s stand out among half-obliterated letters like a garbled call for help. The escutcheon loses its visual and symbolic point towards the bottom, as serpentine squiggles spread out laterally, their hisses warning of the dangers of misalliance. The circular forms associated with orbs, orbits and unions are ubiquitous and varied: the innocuous lower case *o* which is part of *soleil*; the upper case O of the distress signal; and a much smaller °, suggestive of the intense solar heat and/or passion, cause for the blot on ancestral purity.

The terms bastardization and adulteration immediately spring to mind

when it comes time to speak of metatechnical considerations, for "Blason du soleil" does evoke a more ancient poetic form that has, by the imperfect nature of the poem "dashed off" on the typewriter, been debased as it has been ennobled. More than a figure of heraldry, a *blason* is also a short versified piece of rhyming couplets either extolling the virtues or lamenting the faults of a person or object. It reflects the passing of a certain order — of expression rationalized in poetic syntax and figurative formulae and as a production hierarchy — and the establishment of a new one: "In the new poetry, the subject, verb, and object are no longer articulated. The word reclaims its solar position." (134) Concision, speed and spontaneity are the distinctive traits of the mechanical poem whose play of morphemes, phonemes, and lexemes by-pass verbal receptors to create an immediate visual link between typed figures and concepts. No pedigree is required for the composers of such readily (re)produced works, for their substance is the commonplace of typewritten characters; all the originality lies in touch and arrangement.

Figure 4. Pierre Garnier, "Blason du soleil," in *Spatialisme et poésie concrète* (Ps.: Gallimard, 1968), 167.



III. The Poet as Reprinter, or Second-hand News

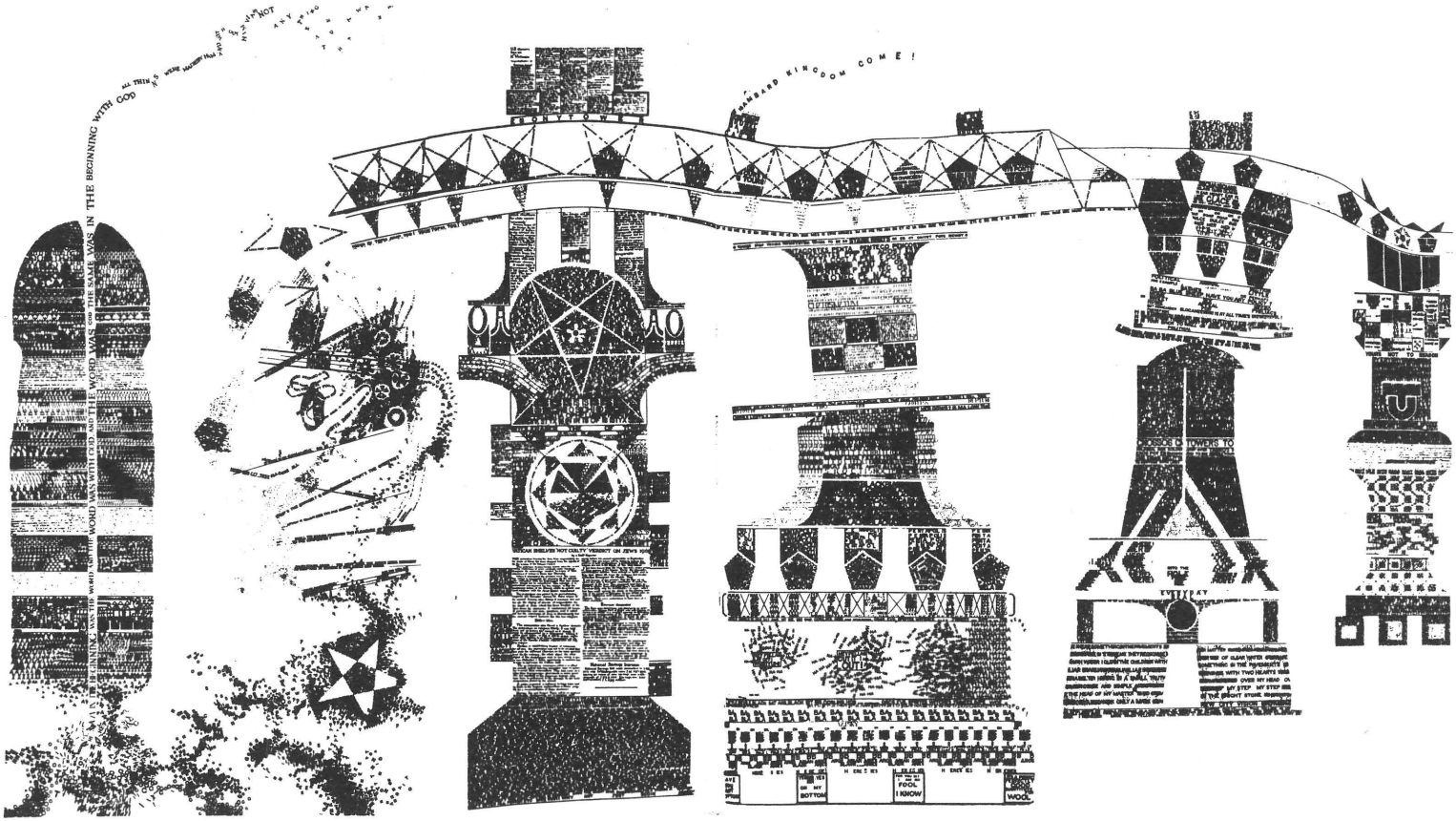
In John Furnival's expansive visual poems, words step off the page into the environment, invading living space. His *Tours de Babel changées en point* (Figure 5) was drawn or stamped on wooden doors each six and one-half feet high and two feet wide; the six panels are usually displayed in a semi-circle to create an environement papered with print, which surrounds the reader/viewer.[18] The doors imprinted with word-bridges — both symbolic points of passage — let in an outer world which has already been transformed by posters, newspapers, or billboards into a typographic space, seemingly realizing Apollinaire's vision in *Zone*, that the literature of the 20th century would reflect the printed matter of lived reality:

> ... les prospectus les catalogues les affiches qui chantent tout haut
> Voilà la poesie ce matin et pour la prose il y a les journaux
>
> [... Handbills catalogs posters singing out loud/That's poetry this morning and for prose there are newspapers]

The dimensions of the *Tours de Babel* are such that it is impossible to read it like a book — comfortably, one page at a time. It is a sort of verbal architecture whose six connecting towers have visual clarity when seen at a distance but whose text is only legible, close-up, to the perambulating reader who takes in the printed matter forming the towers in serial fashion, more or less like a book projected, and enlarged, on a wall. The barrage of visual information creates a sense of confusion, and the overwhelming scale of this text reinforces the perception of babble made visible.

A collage of texts, sayings, influences that have entered into the public domain, Furnival's *Tours de Babel* constitutes a collaboration with past authors, identifiable or anonymous. The use of quotation and borrowed phrases is consistent with Furnival's reinterpretation of the history of letters as founded in babble, that is handed-down and overlapping tongues. The very title of Furnival's work is borrowed: the line taken from Apollinaire's "Liens," the opening poem of *Calligrammes*, is a reflection on how men are "linked" to each other and to history by their languages. Furnival's subject is the evolution of language: the "seminal" words ejaculated through the first phallic tower ("In the beginning was the word and

Figure 5. John Furnival, *Tours de Babel changées en pont* (1964).

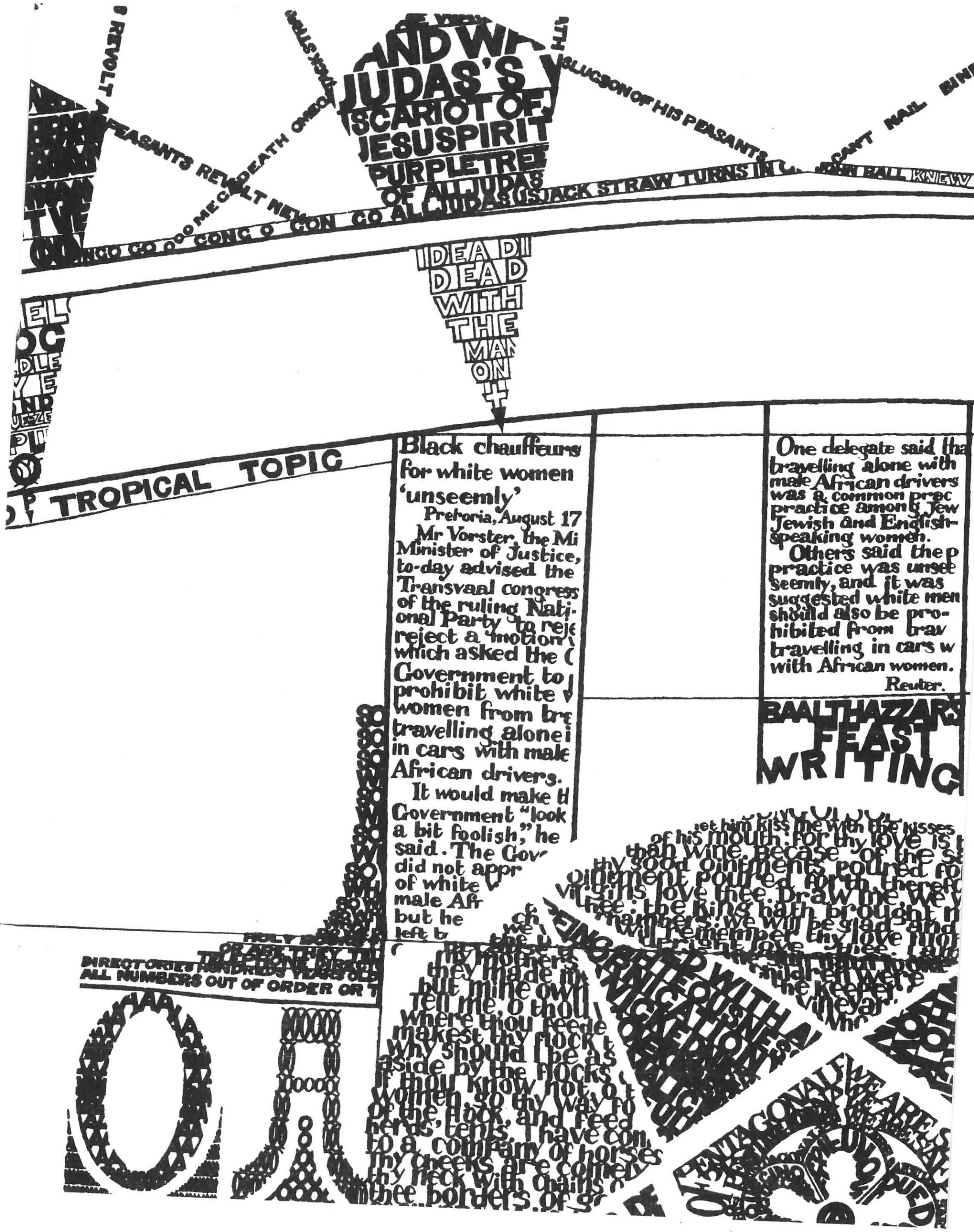

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD THE SAME WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD
THY KINGDOM COME!
I KNOW

the word was with God and the word was God.....") invoke a time before language; out of the chaos of noises, loose letters and half-formed phrases trying to get into a shape, a word-bridge coalesces which will connect these first two towers to the other four, constructed from quotations, newspaper clippings and polyglot punning. As the very first decipherable words indicate, quotations play a significant role; the reference to the Book of Genesis alerts the reader immediately to Furnival's preoccupation with the essential *un*originiality of verbal creations. The texts that follow Furnival's salute to Biblical creation — popular songs, news items, idiomatic expressions — are but a copying of things said or written before. Originality must thus be expressed in the manner of reproduction. Contrary to computer printouts, electronic typescripts or photocopies, Furnival's reproductions are not limited by machine parameters governing the dimensions of the page, typeface or format. Hand-stamped or hand-scripted to look like a printed text, only magnified, *Tours de Babel* is a throwback to another, pre-electronic age, to the era of the public scribe. Described in 20th-century terms, the originating author would be a human duplicating machine, whose function is to reproduce an already existing text.

The third tower dubbed "EBONYTOWER," is supported by columns of text, facsimiles of newspaper articles, either real or imagined. There Furnival counterfeits the newspaper's look and its non-directed reading format: "Like a modern newspaper, *Tours de Babel* breaks strictly linear reading habits, as it must be scanned form top to bottom and bottom to top, as well as right to left. All this communication is realized with an originality and economy that is continually impressive."[19] Also like a newspaper, the various items reported deal simultaneously with timeless human questions and with topical problems of the latter 20th century. From a moral standpoint, these are subjects that bear repeating; creative principles also dictate continual reiteration, if one can judge from the stuttering effect of the type constrained to repeat itself, forced into the justified margins of a newspaper column as unyielding as the racism recounted in the story, "Black Chauffeurs for White Women 'unseemly'." (Figure 6)

The black/white opposition evident in the racial issues presented is but one manifestation of a newsprint motif, which surfaces as correct or incorrect spelling ("I must not spell there their"), or as right and wrong, sometimes mistakenly assimilated: the black magic associated with the pen*tacle* can be confused with the "white" thaumaturgy implied in the word Pen*tecost*. It is kept alive in a parody of the ditty "Bah Bah Black Sheep,

Figure 6. John Furnival, *Tours de Babel changées en pont* (detail).



AND WE
JUDAS'S
SCARIOT OF
JESUSPIRIT
PURPLETREE
OF ALLJUDAS
PEASANTS REVOLT NEW
REVOLT
SON OF HIS PEASANTS
JACK STRAW TURNS IN
JOHN BALL KNEW
CAN'T NAIL
CONG O CON GO ALLJUDAS
IDEA DI
DEAD
WITH
THE
MAN
ON
+
TROPICAL TOPIC
Black chauffeurs for white women 'unseemly'
Pretoria, August 17
Mr Vorster, the Mi Minister of Justice, to-day advised the Transvaal congress of the ruling Nati- onal Party to reje reject a motion which asked the Government to prohibit white women from tr travelling alone in cars with male African drivers.
It would make the Government "look a bit foolish," he said. The Gov did not appr of white male Afr but he left
One delegate said that travelling alone with male African drivers was a common prac practice among Jew Jewish and English-speaking women.
Others said the practice was unseemly, and it was suggested white men should also be pro-hibited from trav travelling in cars with African women.
Reuter.
BAALTHAZZAR'S FEAST WRITING
let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is than wine. Because of the thy good ointments poured forth, therefore virgins love thee. Draw me, we thee: the king hath brought chambers: we will be glad and will remember thy love more
my mother's they made me but mine own Tell me, O thou where thou feedest makest thy flock why should I be as aside by the flocks If thou know not, O women, go thy way of the flock, and feed herds' tents. I have com to a company of horses thy cheeks are comely thy neck with chains thee borders of
HOLY
DIRECTORIES HUNDREDS YEARS OLD
ALL NUMBERS OUT OF ORDER OR
PENTAGONAL WE ARE

Have you any wool?", whose words suffer material and chromatic alteration ("Have you any cotton,"); the song further degenerates into "Ba Ba Blue Sheep, Have you any Policy," or simply BAB/BLA, or "blah-blah", an ironic commentary on politicos' babble reported by the press. The whole text is permeated with a black humor that explodes into a multitude of HA HA's which black out the desperate call ("Hey Fellas, cut it out!") for silence and white spaces.

A certain critical tradition would dispute the poetic inspiration in newspapers designed, for economic reasons, to appeal to a mass audience and for readers with a short attention span. Indeed, the newspaper is the pejorative term of comparison that has been used to depreciate Apollinaire's poem "Il Pleut." Leon Roudiez criticizes the too mimetic quality of that calligram, which gives an excessively literal visual interpretation of rain dripping down the page in liquid lines. He notes, in contradistinction, that in Michel Butor's *Mobile* "lists of birds are disposed (...) in such a manner as to suggest a flight rather than picture it"; he suggests that the more subtle use of typography imbues Butor's text with a "visual evocative power" and confers on it a poeticity that would vanish, along with semantic features, should the words become pictures.[20] In "Il Pleut," too overtly mimetic factors cause the text to disappear in the image, thus interfering with a multi-levelled reading of the text: Roudiez *sees* "a representation of rainfall while the language of the poem disappears from [his] sight as readily as that of a newspaper item." (234)

As for vertical letters and worded columns — Mallarme had already given a pejorative slant to the vertical line, associating it with newspapers and the banality of that discourse. In John Furnival's press art, the newspaper does not serve as a point of stylistic comparison, but is the actual model imitated, and transformed. Larger than life, his monolitho-graphic visual text doubles its referent in the mass-produced printed text with *the* manuscript original, and newsprint becomes the equivalent of Scripture. Thus is (hand)writing repersonalized through the detour of machine-assisted or -inspired creation. The selection of newspaper clippings that find their way into Furnival's towers are used to undermine the political stances they reflect; his imitation of the newspaper format is also subversive and is perhaps an even more effective weapon against the printing press than Marshall McLuhan's head-on attack. Imitation — mimicry, rather — is the stuff of art and the gesture by which this "typographic man" reclaims mastery over the machine. He does not seek to shake off the chains of his literate past; he is exuberantly linked to it.

1. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy; The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962), pp. 3-9.

2. "L'Esprit nouveau est celui du temps même où nous vivons. Un temps fertile en surprises. Les poètes veulent dompter la prophétie, [...] Ils veulent enfin, un jour, machiner la poésie comme on a machiné le monde. Ils veulent être les premiers à fournir un lyrisme tout neuf à ces nouveaux moyens d'expression qui ajoutent à l'art le mouvement et qui sont le phonographe et le cinéma. Ils n'en sont encore qu'à la période des incunables." Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes," published in *Mercure de France*, 1-XII (1918), p. 376.

3. I am speaking of texts which remain within the traditional framework of works to be seen or to be read; literary creations destined for performance, such as Lettriste spectacle or recorded phonic poetry recorded on tape or in print, fall outside the scope of this discussion.

4. See the catalog for the exposition organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden on collaboration among visual artists (June 9-August 19, 1984): Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, ed., *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century* (Wash. D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984).

5. The five calligrams were: "Paysage," "Voyage," "Coeur couronne miroir," "La Cravate et la montre," and "Lettre-Océan."

6. Stefan Themerson, *Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms* (London: Gaberbocchus Press Ltd., 1968), p. 23. The implication that Apollinaire was insensitive to the effect of typographic disposition has been disputed: Greet and Lockerbie argue that the printer's version (Figure 1) remained faithful to the major design lines sketched out in the original manuscipt of the ideogram. See Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, trans. Anne Hyde Greet and edited jointly by Greet and S. I. Lockerbie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 402.

7. Roger Làufer, "Texte et typographie," *Littérature* 31, p. 106.

8. Francis Ponge, *La Fabrique de pré* (Geneva: Skira, 1971), p. 197.

9. Roland Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix* (Ps: Editions du Seuil, 1981), p. 184. Unles otherwise indicated, this, and all translations are mine.

10. For accounts of visual discrepancies occurring in the translation of Apollinaire's manuscripts into typeset ideograms, see Themerson, p. 27 ff., or David Seaman, *Concrete Poetry in France* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp. 179-83.

11. Pierre Albert-Birot, *Poésie, 1916-1924* (Ps: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 404 and 406.

12. "Je gravai sur bois un grand SIC central dont l'encadrement était fait à peu près de deux F, ce qui donnait le OUI central, plus SONS — IDEES — COULEURS, le tout contenu dans la FORME." [I engraved in wood a large SIC in the center of a frame formed more or less by two F's, which produced the central YES, plus SOUNDS — IDEAS — COLORS, the whole contained in the FORM.] Pierre Albert-Birot, "Naissance et vie de SIC," *Les Lettres Nouvelles* no. 7 (Sept. 1953).

13. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 220.

14. Michel Butor, "Eloge de la Machine à écrire," in *Repertoire* IV (Ps: Minuit, 1974), p. 428.

15. Pierre Garnier, *Spatialisme et poésie concrète* (Ps: Gallimard: 1968), p. 9. Pagination for further references given in text.

16. Sue Walker, "How Typewriters Changed Correspondence: an Analysis of Prescription and Practice," *Visible Language* XVIII 2 (1984), p. 103.

17. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics in Poetry* (Bloomington, Ind.: Ind. University Press, 1978), ch. 1 ("The Poem's Significance").

18. The six panels have been reproduced (with selected close-up details) in Richard Kostelanetz, *Imaged Words and Worded Images* (N.Y.: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970).

19. Richard Kostelanetz, *Metamorphosis in the Arts* (N.Y.: Assembling Press, 1980), p. 182.

20. Leon Roudiez, "Readable/Writable/Visible," *Visible Language*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (Summer 1978), p. 236.

Readable - Visible: Reflections on the Illustrated Book

Renée Riese Hubert

ABSTRACT. A product of post-modernism, the avant-garde illustrated book, or the "livre detourné," shares this era's preoccupation with the absence of traditional generic distinctions and its questioning of reading conventions. This is evidenced in the indeterminacy of the text (is it to be read or to be seen?) and its relationship to illustrative elements, as well as in its shape. The "deviant" book, as exemplified by Lohr and Kristofori, has the status of an object and is thus perceived more in relation to three-dimensional artifacts than to paintings which have traditionally served as models for illustrated books. As exemplified by the Kickshaws Press productions, where typography dominates, the text is read, and unread, through the letters that give, take and lose shape as the book progresses. This tension between text and typography, which replaces drawn or painted images, reinforces the underlying significance of the text as *écriture*, thrusting it into the mise-en-abyme of sui-referentiality from which more pictorial illustration — particularly that which seconds metaphoric or symbolic interpretations in the text — gives the illusion of escape.

> *Un rouleau, un kakémono l'aurait rendu mieux qu'un livre, à condition de pouvoir se dérouler, ou un volume à page unique indéfiniment dépliée.*
>
> Henri Michaux, *Paix dans les brisements*

The range of the illustrated book since the beginning of the century is so vast that by examining models of this hardly codified genre, which manifests itself in popular as well as elitist forms and which more than any other artifact combines the verbal and the visual, it would be possible to trace repercussions of all 20th-century experimentation. Studies on the illustrated book usually stress documentation and historical development.[1] But once the necessary historical data had been established and the conditions of production clarified, scholars ventured into areas of interpretation and established various methods of relating text and image.[2] Interpretation becomes particularly challenging when its object is the modern book which has, either in its verbal or in its visual manifestation and frequently in both, reduced mimetic and even referential dimensions.

Since illustration ceases to capture action, characters or landscapes, the liberated graphic artist in his response no longer prides himself on remaining a faithful servant in search of visual equivalents to the literary text. He

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asserts in his response a stronger form of mediation which enables him to proclaim his otherness and to channel the verbal into new areas. The illustrated book has to some extent remained a marginal genre. Aesthetically it would appear to suffer from a duality in representation; culturally, especially in its most ambitious manifestation: *le livre de peintre*, it suffers from a lack of accessibility, so much so that it becomes a private, if not a sequestered art form. It poses also the problem of reading in a more acute sense than any other work of art; it is composed of text and image, capable of subverting one another or at least substituting tension for harmony.

Recent book artists have gone beyond the substitutions and subversions typical of the avant-garde *livre de peintre*, by asserting as it were an uncompromising marginality. Caroline Corre, in her gallery on rue Guénégaud, entitled one of her exhibits *Le Livre Détourné*. A casual visitor may have concluded that this was a distorted way of challenging a blasé public, more or less capable of being aesthetically titilated by the seductive and mildly erotic displays featured in neighboring galleries. It so happens that Caroline Corre is by no means an isolated case. From the point of view of the theme of her exhibit, museum shows disposing of greater space have been organized in the last year or so.[3] Indeed, in June 1985 Caroline Corre herself participated in a show at the Musée Pompidou. This impressive exhibit goes under the questionable title of *Le Livre d'Artiste* which the curator arbitrarily distinguishes from *le livre de peintre: "Oeuvre par elle-même, le livre d'artiste est né avec les avant-gardes des années 60. Les mouvements les plus divers y participent (minimal art, popart, etc)."*[4] The *livre détourné*, situated at the forefront of post-modern displacement is practiced in variegated ways by many French, Czech, American, German, Swiss and Japanese artists.

In an art gallery we come to see and, if we are experts, read art works; if the exhibit turns out to be books, our reading possibilities paradoxically are curtailed. When a *livre de peintre* is displayed, be it in a museum or in a gallery, we are expected to view at the speed normally devoted to art works, not literature. We are asked to focus on pages selected for us. Text and image, in such great 20th century books as Eluard and Miró's *A toute épreuve* or Lautréamont and Dali's *Chants de Maldoror* provide a context which subordinates our perusal to the illustration and situates the text exclusively into that context, as spatial or typographical units.[5] In the postmodern era the graphic and the verbal can of course encroach more readily on each other's territory. The illustrated book, whether in its conventional or avant-garde format, is by no means the only art form combining word and image, and displaying by provocative means transgressions rather than correspondences or neutral differences. Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg among others, in their legible or illegible canvases, suggest pages in books.[6]

Le livre détourné by simultaneously operating through visual and verbal signs problematizes legibility.[7] It is an artifact which assumes the appearance of a book or a series of pages and whose function has been deviated or displaced, but differs of course from those old book bindings transformed by clever artisans into useful boxes. We recognize a familiar object: cover, page, binding, but we cannot "use" it as such. We are kept outside. The object prevents us from being anything but passive or puzzled observers. It eliminates active participation in regard to the "book," a participation necessary to understanding the artwork. The object in one way or other repulses us as readers, instead of seducing us or at least allowing us, according to our habit, to follow our propensity to read. Color splashes may clash with the printing or eliminate it altogether, the book may be tied or locked up in such a manner that opening it becomes an impossible act, a destructive transgression, as in the case of Helmut Lohr's *Livre objet* (Figure 1). The lines of the pages created by Nicole Morello may have been produced by the regular and mysterious passages of a family of famished bookworms or a single mole, whereby writing becomes equivalent to the destruction of matter, and in the literal as well as figurative sense of the word, a trace.[8] These are representative cases indicating not merely that the books are illegible because we have no access to their signs or codes, but that they have ceased to be books. They are in a sense not unlike Man Ray's object entitled *Gift*. The iron studded with nails has become useless in bourgeois society as it refuses to iron out or to flatten things. It shows an aggressiveness heretofore repressed or inverted. Books we cannot possibly read, the *nec plus ultra* of undecidability, speak perhaps of a defunct servitude to the act of reading, defunct because of our own ambivalence in regard to all cultural acts in an age of nuclear crisis or because of the threat of mechanization. As René Huyghe showed some thirty years ago in his *Dialogue avec le visible*, the 20th century has gradually converted into an age where reading is diverted or dominated by seeing.[9] The *livre détourné* produces an almost systematic clash between the book as object and its intellectual, aesthetic and cultural dimensions. It plays art against functionalism, originality against intentionality, reading against looking. It ties together the concept of the book and that of illustration or rather self-illustration.

Corre's exhibit does not limit itself to these provocative transformations, to the truly anti-art object. It does not merely spring these examples on the viewer, but makes desacralizing statements capable of reducing the arty *livre de peintre* to obsolescence and turning the niceties of printing, binding and even collecting upside down. Many of Corre's books are boxes, e.g. Lohr's black box in which he encloses under glass and at a distance from the would-be reader an album and a manuscript. These lofty forms, so

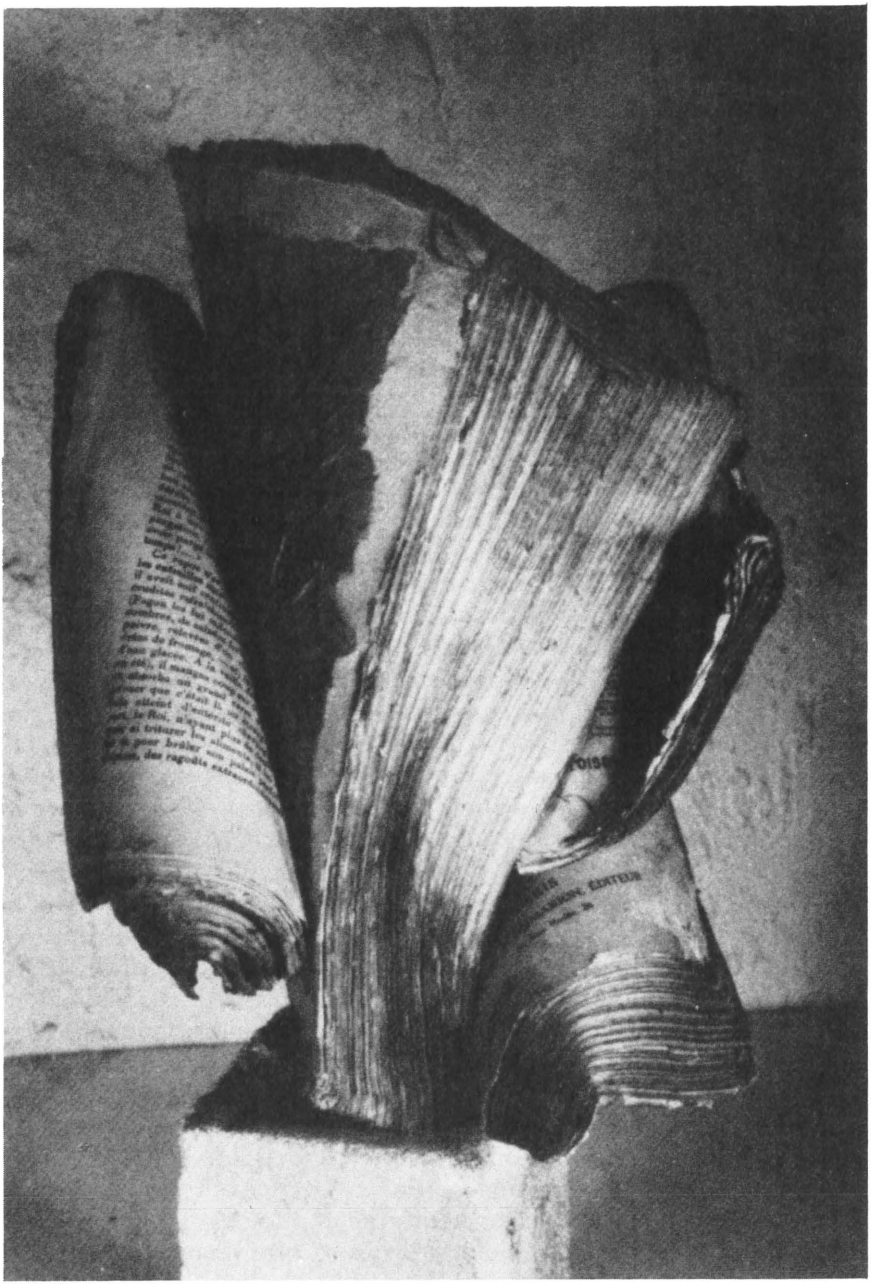

Figure 1. Helmut Lohr, *Livre-objet* (n.d.).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

representative of book art with its claim to individuality and originality have in this box been radically transformed. We as viewers are provided with a double peep show since the glass pane suggests an exhibit of doubtful value in an artshow while the cutting open of a section of the cover gives a privileged view of a document. However, visibility leads away from legibility. The open book, exposed and framed (which prevents us from turning its pages) constitutes a visual representation and its transformation into a mere essence, the visibility of the nonbook.

We can consider Lohr's box a devaluation of the illustrated book which normally requires of the reader a deciphering act capable of interrelating, if not integrating, "discourse and "figure," where the aesthetic and cultural assumptions introduced through the visual corroborate the verbal and bring out much of its potential. It has, however, a considerable number of forerunners, beginning with Duchamp's *Green Box* and its long unread documents and many of Joseph Cornell's boxes. The latter did not consciously replace or modify the illustrated book by creating boxes such as *Les Trois mousquetaires*, but the analogy with the book cannot be denied, especially in an age which constantly stresses the important presence of the object itself.

Cornell's boxes invite us to look inside, to interpret an assortment of fragments of texts and objects and to arrange or complete whenever possible their evocative context or hints. Cornell reduces what could be termed the basic components of the illustrated book so as to encourage the viewer to recreate or restore absent parts of texts or objects. We transform what visibility offers us into an otherness consolidating in many cases distances, relevant to referentiality and memory. Jan Kristofori, who arranged little boxes seemingly lifted from an alchemist's kitchen, perpetuates and transforms Cornell's practices (Figure 2). He participated in the Corre show, but the Flatbush artist, although he uses text and even illustrated texts from such famous works as *Paul et Virginie*, segmenting them, turning them into lining, may appear somewhat out of place in the present context for he does not truly subvert them, but restores them to our memory and preserves them as relics.[10] By the distance he imposes upon the viewer in regard to the object, by the modest size of the printed material, by its signs of erosion and its mutilation by means of scissors, Cornell requires that we modify our conventional act of reading, but unlike Kristofori he does not indicate that cultural progressions or aberrations have fostered such requirements.

There are many *livres détournés* which function both as *livres-objets* (they require that we view them as statues or collages) and as books (they invite us to read them in their own deviant way). A rather appropriate example is provided by Janko Stanovnik's *Les Manoeuvres de Barba Morroko*.[11] The book opens like a screen, but we can also turn the pages. Its

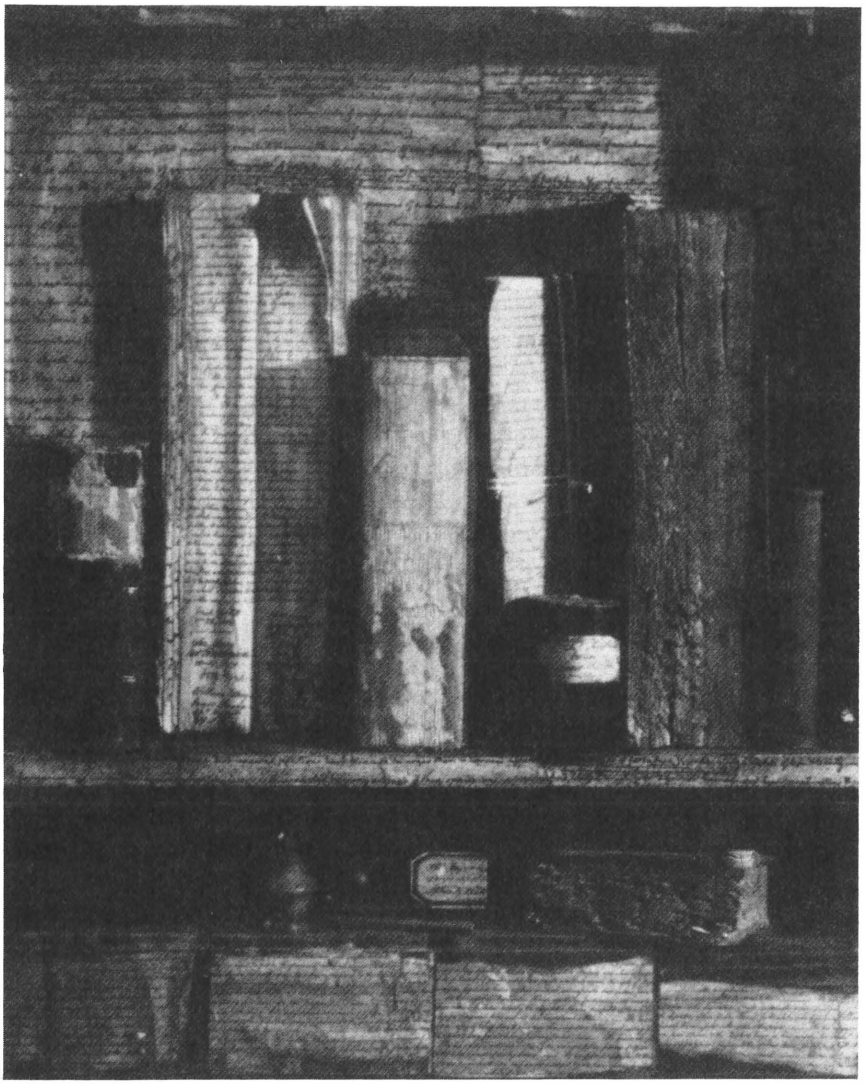

Figure 2. Jan Kristofori, *Livre-objet* (n.d.).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

text is composed of undecipherable graphic scenes suggesting dynamic action and ever revolving processes. Each page is composed of four subtexts which we can read in a conventional left to right, up to down motion. But another reading is equally possible; decomposing the text into four horizontal sections we would encounter other rhythms, other speeds, other

continuities and ruptures. Both pages are covered by what are simultaneously graphic and verbal signs, but which preclude meaning or tangible codes in either of these languages. Perhaps Morroko aspired to read on a level where verbal and visual, beyond the limits of referentiality, have attained a common denominator.

An untitled volume published by the Kickshaws press happily provides clearly formulated statements concerning recent manipulations and experiments in book illustration: "Kickshaws books are entirely or largely hand made. Illustrations and text are printed by the artist and author from lino or metal cuts and handset type, and the books are also bound by hand."[12] Kickshaws books draw our attention to the importance of their craft rather than to their relation to more popular forms of culture. It seems an enterprise for the happy few. The untitled work by John Crombie and Sheila Bourne presents itself as an elegantly shaped volume. The title might of course be *Kickshaws*, in which case the volume would have simultaneously published and entitled itself! Its lack of title challenges a key tradition both of art and literature as the book remains nameless, almost genreless. The producers' names are introduced in such a modest and unobtrusive way that the work borders on anonymity and non-existence. The cover page, which almost denies its own function, displays a heap of jumbled letters and only the collaboration between John Crombie and Sheila Bourne clearly stands out despite the fact that the nature of their respective contribution remains unknown (Figure 3).[13] The book not only challenges differentiation between illustrator and author, but might even eliminate any distinction between text and image. Conversely, there are clear implications that text and image have generated one another according to postmodern canons.

Nor can we know which came first: text or image. In fact, this basic question regarding illustrated books may be irrelevant in this instance, for we deal with a truly simultaneous production where precedents seem to be even less of an issue than in *Les Malheurs des immortels*, jointly wrought by Eluard and Ernst.[14] Let us first comment on what we shall at least provisionally call the text, but without in any way suggesting that the book originated from it, for actually the opposite origin may make more sense. The text is possibly the less debatable part in so far as the imagery, if we can define it as such, consists entirely of letters, a fact that problematizes the classification of the work as an illustrated book. Moreover, the text by materializing as image or the image by materializing as text defies the very act of reading. Starting with page 3, the text emerges line by line each time we turn a leaf (Figure 4). Authority thus lapses into its etymological meaning of increment. Written in the first person, it is the autobiography of Miles Grimshaw, almost homonymous with Kickshaw, beginning with

the articulation of his first sounds as he comes into this world, continuing until he is nothing more than a little m. He gives a precise account of his childhood, family, career and authorial ambitions. The autobiography, told in a single long paragraph, in one protracted breath, avoids waste motion, flashbacks, hesitations. But the straightforward text has its most revealing discontinuities which tell us that matters are far less direct than they appear.

Every now and then the typography changes; at the same time the first person narrative shifts to a third person statement. This change of perspective manifests itself in the move from the I to a publicly named person or persons such as Mr. & Mrs. Miles Grimshaw, which means that a confession has become indistinguishible from a public declaration. Public pronouncement undercuts the confession; and the emotional post-romantic voice of the child-father-lover-poet is superseded and displaced by whatever happy occasion requires an announcement, for the prose describing or summarizing the trials and tribulations of Miles remains highly ironic throughout. Confessional literature which normally dallies though hundreds of self-indulgent pages here rushes by at computerized speeds. Through concision, which makes schooling, marriage, divorce almost simultaneous, the text produces a subversive reduction of a certain type of fiction outmoded in the context of postmodernism and thus it serves to deviate and displace the literary genre which it exemplifies. As we read the linear and monolithic narrative, it seems to split open for the speed imposed from the outside runs contrary to the inner need of the narrator as well as the convention of the text he would be prone to write. It rushes by; it grows from a jumbled nothingness with an impeccable mechanical regularity inimical to the autobiographic genre.

But the growth of the text within the same paragraph imposes its limits. The typewriter, or for that matter the computer, which normally does not step out of its linear efficiency, produces one line at a time. In fact, the text hints at a storehouse always readily available at the push of a button. The interspersed announcements — happy or sad family occasions — equate ready-made words with ready-made printing. The text exemplifies not only a certain type of novel which suffers a cultural displacement, but provides a causality which would indicate a naïve and stubborn adherence to values and habits, artistic and bourgeois, without taking into account changing contexts. The voice of the speaker, which we hear through a screen darkly, is interrupted now and again by what threatens an irremedi-

Figure 3. John Crombie and Sheila Bourne: cover page of untitled work published at Kickshaws Press (Paris, 1983).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

done to pace and write to my heart's content. Some days my hand was quite aching by the time she returned, she had only to take it in her own two and tenderly squeeze to bring tears into my eyes. Other days I'd spend more time just crumpling sheets into little balls, for hours afterwards they creaked and squeaked, easing their creases. Slowly, though, the tiny pile mounted, until the great stone paper-weight ceased to look quite so improbable atop it. However, by the time the first ten chapters were written it was clear to me that not the twenty originally planned but at least thirtz ckapbrs akæm&x oqiuplvyse&qm blblahBlœxz&ooqy *EMMA & MILES GRIMSHAW ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF A SON GILES* for weeks after the happy event I was still thrusting Havanas into the breast pockets of chance acquaintances!

able halt of operation: the typo or maybe a glitch. Every now and then, the wrong keys have been touched; the expert typist persists; he/she never notices any errors and presents the reader with several lines, illegible because all the letters have been displaced on the keyboard. Thus we face the first type of illegibility. The typos play a significant part. They always precede an announcement so that the latter may result from the malfunctioning of the typing or the machine: the text gets out of joint. The machine age hygenically flaunts its flaws. Wrong letters or false keys appear with such regularity that they equate the official and private text, the error and the intended meaning.

The narrator-poet was not born with a typewriter or computer screen. He has indeed all the shortcomings of a writer who must eternally struggle with pencil and paper. In fact, he was endowed with large ears, behind which at an early age he could store pencils: the modern equivalent of being watched over by a muse. Writing for him was an imperative, almost from birth. His room littered with crumpled balls of paper points toward the infinite reduction of his work as well as his struggle with idiom if not with form. He writes in rimed sestinas, proving his allegiance to the most dignified traditions of literature. He let a persuasive secretary take charge of typing his manuscript and completely lost contact with it as it departed for publication. The text shifted away from its relation with the muse. It ceased to be the immediate transcription of a genuinely lived experience expressed in naïve, tearful clichés: a melodramatic voice inherited from dimestores, tearjerkers and Hollywood movies which have long since overhauled the poetic manfestations of romantics and post-romantics alike. Moreover, as Miles aligns plays, novels and poems, all literary genres collapse by turning into non-literature. Ironically, the narrator makes up for the seeming lack of title by painstakingly informing us of the titles of the books he himself writes. Titles are inside the book, not outside.

So much for the text. Now let us turn to the other part of the lettering, the part we are tempted to consider illustration. Unaligned, jumbled letters, letters shown in what seems to be a bag, precede the appearance of the organized script. The first page presents nothing but huge quantities of letters stuffed in an elliptic if not phallic shaped container. This presents the first and strongest challenge to the reader: the denial of a sense of orientation. The upper part of the page is occupied by an empty white space, a space about which Mallarmé theorized, to which he aspired, which caused him anguish from a metaphysical as well as an aesthetic point of view. In the Crombie-Bourne book the blank space is gradually eliminated by the

Figure 4. Crombie-Bourne (no pagination).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

lack of titles!—with perhaps a glimmer of the old fire when I burned to be done. Pull out the old fireproof trunk and sift through my papers, juvenilia, senilia, all grist to the mill, sit scribbling away till all hours, no sound save the crepitation of all thesE crumplEd balls of papEr, faint mocking chorus of crinkling onionskin, from now on I shall just rip all rubbish to bits. Dim light dying till so dark I'll ruin my optics as Dad was always warning I woUld or jUst lost in visions, visions of my inward optic as I sift this drift this shallow drift of skimmings all grist to my mill—how quill will gO dribbling On 'twixt inky digits!—till my fist starts aching and bad pain in my brAin And my slim pickings dwindling dwindling till by & by nix! Spirit willing (mind wilting!) i'll trY & finish it scribbling it bit bY bit till i'm quit i'll finish it still if it kills m

waxing text. The whiteness of the page is explicitly made functional. The letters in the container are recognizable, tossed about in many directions, often overlapping. Up and down, right and left, the fundamental sense of orientation becomes irrelevant. We have no way of separating or assembling them. We depend on the space between letters to decipher them; its absence makes us inoperative as readers and whatever way we may turn the book we encounter an overabundance of letters which defy readability, because they move in wrong directions from the vantage point of the surrounding text. They are cut off by others before the partial identity of the word can emerge. We are frustrated by our inability to relate our own familiar alphabet which assumes all the more strength as we see our mental faculties diminish in front of this completely dismantled jigsaw puzzle. The letters do not lie flat on the page where we would normally see them from the perspective and distance to which we are accustomed. The act of reading has become impossible.

This overwhelming obstacle is further enhanced as the letters in the bag are endowed with threatening vitality. They stubbornly refuse to constitute textuality. They simply are, they reject verbal subordination. All letters of this alphabet remain intact, but their relation is totally subverted because the reader must depend upon combinations foreign to textuality. The heap of words reminds us of Claes Oldenburg's *Alphabet* with its multiple letters squeezed into a plastic popsickle. It also has affinities with Ionesco's overcrowding of the world by both words and objects. The postmodern reader is a disturbed audience in a dual sense. Alienation is exemplified by the act of reading — at once its cause and its effect.

The cover serves warning that we are in a world of *livres détournés*; it entices us to read while preventing us from doing so. Gradually, as we have seen, if we patiently turn the pages instead of being discouraged by our initial defeat, a legible text will progressively materialize. The juxtaposition of readability and unreadability remains enigmatic. The bag holds in check a dangerous chaos eager to move in unpredicatable directions. Nonetheless, this confined and firmly contained menace never invades but merely contrasts with the perfectly aligned, systematic text whose progression is imposed from without. The edges of the bag provide a cutting line where the visibility of the letters ends and shifts into invisibility. The reader moves from illegibility to an invisibility which could at best prolong it.[15] If we turn the pages, the bag of chaotic letters diminishes gradually as the well aligned, well ordered lettering increases. The shape of the container changes, flattens itself, tends toward wavy and ulitimately

Figure 5. Crombie-Bourne (no pagination).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

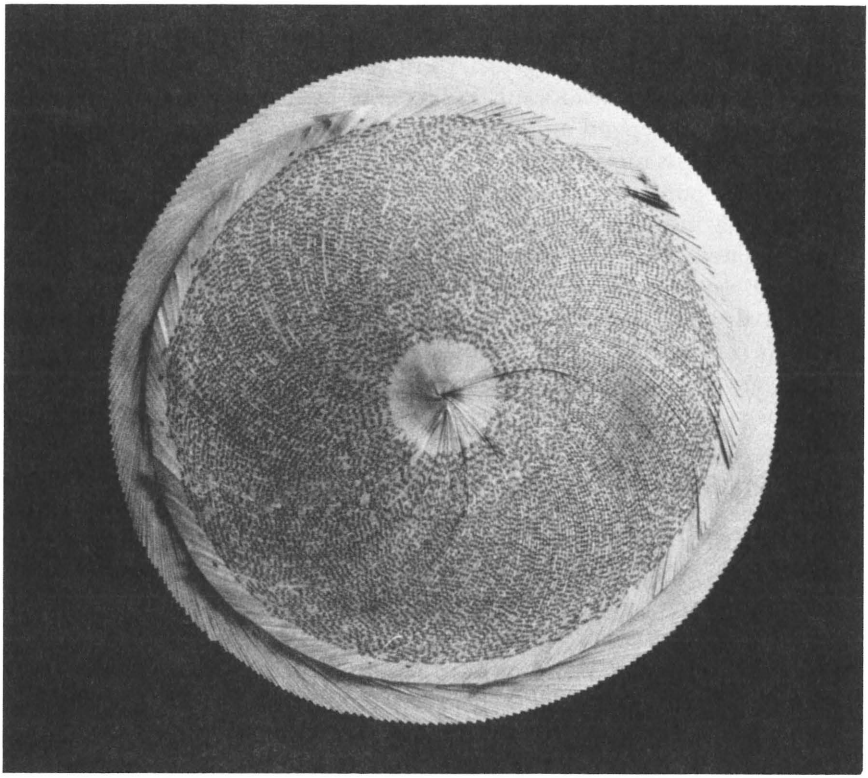

Figure 6. Helmut Lohr, *Telephone Book Circle* (1982).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

zigzagging lines while asserting its separation as well as its difference from the text (Figure 5). The bag full of letters has suggestive outlines: a hand, a ball of paper, a penis, a womb, a truncated glob always slightly distorted and gradually pressed out of shape.

Taken as a whole, Mr. Grimshaw's autobiography has of course affinities with other postmodern, hybrid enterprises. We have noticed the importance of mechanization in this handcrafted work of art together with the undecipherable bag of words, both of them pertaining to various experimental trades in the visual arts, especially those where the verbal and the visual intermix. A palm-shaped figure circumscribed and filled by letters has certain features of the modernistic *calligramme*. As we thumb through the pages we see a succession of calligrammatic figures instead of a single shape. But even on the very first page the words are not constellated in order to outline the physical appearance of the object. The *calligramme* invites a reading ordered not by a linear process but by the spatial contours

of the object; it literally shapes our reading as it attempts to collapse the verbal and the visual. Since the form of the *calligramme* strongly upheld by the form itself promises legibility, the undecipherability of the Crombie-Bourne book would seem to eschew such norms.

Concrete poetry, which insists on the role of the letter rather than of the word, has been rigorously defined by theoreticians such as Bense, Gomringer, Garnier, and Mary Ellen Solt.[16] The range of this poetry is broad; it abandons the mimetic element of the *calligramme*; it undercuts referentiality as much as possible in asserting the concreteness of language itself, yet it also conceptualizes it strongly. It suggests potentials by building visual blocks with letters that usually proclaim their identity through line, shape and constellated patterns. Concrete poetry diminishes the specifically verbal quality of the letters by overdetermining their visibility. This provides an analogy with the cover figure of the Crombie-Bourne book (Figure 3). But whereas concrete poetry tends to stress the geometric aspect of language by the very nature of its lay-out and its spatial relationships as well as by immediately recognizable repetition, in the cover figure the relations of the letters to one another hardly foster geometric stability or dynamism, but unknown organic movements with which we become more and more familiar as we move from page to page. Our association with concrete poetry becomes somewhat flimsy as we feel the dramatic presence of inner stirrings, of wavelike impulses. The organic element so clearly displaced in the text re-emerges in the figures occupying the lower part of the pages.

The frontier between the *calligramme* and the concrete poem is not always as clearly marked. Jérôme Peignot in his book on the *calligramme* includes examples which also appear in studies on concrete poetry.[17] Kriwet is eagerly welcomed by both, perhaps because he succeeded in transgressing even a minimal definition of either genre. Moreover, Caroline Corre has included him in her exhibit, and like Lohr's *Telephone Book Circle*, his volume is represented by a single page (Figure 6). In Kriwet's circular poems, which disrupt our relation to the page, letters subjected to an apparent rotation move toward collision. This tends to obliterate the individuality and the autonomy of the letter; it suppresses space between letters. Kriwet creates a language in the throes of change, a language that becomes disproportionate, for it combines stellar configurations with everyday arrangements, thus twice excluding us as readers. It demands our detachment from the motionless alphabet which it replaces by rotating patterns. Made inaccessible by its circular divisions it offers, as does the Crombie-Bourne book, an impenetrable code. Why should the circle not replace the rectangularity of the page since it is a more fundamental, a more archetypal shape? The question is raised by Kriwet and Lohr (who turns a phonebook into a wheel) and even more so by Gérard Duchêne with

his *Livre-Boule* or Sylvia Echar with her *Livre Sphérique*.[18] And do the books we fail to decipher also cope with the incompatibility of the circle and square which might contribute to its obsolescence? Kriwet, Lohr, Crombie and Bourne withhold readability from the viewer by excessive accumulations of letters, by spatial disproportions. They suggest that many letters remain hidden and invisible, e.g. the open-endedness of the lower edge of the Bourne-Crombie book suggests that letters constitute an unending series. Is this illustrated book not meant to overwhelm the reader instead of luring him on to aesthetic ambiguities, mystery or paradox? The presence of both the verbal and the visual is maintained in all the examples we have provided, but they cease to function as compatible partners. We are disarmed when it comes to the fundamental act of translation, for language can be manipulated and spatial forms can in their turn lose some of their autonomy.

The illustrated book has been modified by a constant series of experiments. Its basic patterns recurred up to the 19th century, that is as long as the verbal and the visual retained their assigned space and function, confronteach other on opposite pages or in horizontal juxtaposition. Illustration included both ornamental and stylized parts as well as full page interpretative plates often tending toward the painterly. They all aimed at enhancing the prestige of the text. The illustrations sought to give the visual equivalent of the words to which they were subservient. Cubist books introduced in most cases poetic texts which defied a mimetic approach. As in the paintings of Braque, Gris and Picasso, illustrations introduced multiple perspectives which produced structural analogies with the text. The relation between the printed page and graphic representation became a prime consideration. In more than one case, the spatial architecture of the text was orchestrated with that of the illustration. Cubist painters, who often introduced letters and numbers into the very structure of the work, here and there considered that the visual surface of the text was to be rewritten by them in order to be incorporated into the illustration. Visibility and readability thus assumed closer ties.

Fernand Léger's illustrations of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* provide a rather extreme example of such Cubist tendencies.[19] The poem *H* emphasizes the importance of the letter both in its spatial form (parallel unending lines) and in its inherent mysteries, for it stands for an absent woman, Hortense. It points towards explosion or destruction, "hydrogène" as well as "hygiène," purification. The illustration corresponds basically to a transcription by Léger who handwrites the text; thus he joins visibility and legibility.[20] However, he does not by this transcription seek mimesis in merely repeating the printed word. He avoids simple linearity which would nail the word to the page. He animates his text by rhythmic curbs which compose and decompose nestlike forms. Words receive different stresses, dif-

ferent levels of concreteness which correspond to the very duality we have detected in the Rimbaldian text. Three colored panels cut across the page, sliding sometimes under, sometimes over the writing, adding to the written text a poetic dimension characteristic of painting.

In the surrealist book, artists such as Masson, Ernst and Miró asserted every form of freedom and experimentation in order to modify the relation of the written text to the graphic signs, constituting by constant transgression a domain which belongs simultaneously rather than alternatively to the visual and the verbal. Undoubtedly the most remarkable example of linking the two languages so that their barriers become almost nonexistent is Max Ernst and Iliazd's *Maximiliana*.[21] The words and charts of an obscure astronomer are transformed into the indissociable text and images of the *livre de peintre*. Text and design present everchanging rearrangements, never repeated patterns in which verticality gradually prevails over hoirzontality. Ernst and Iliazd have studiously avoided the usual parallel black lines of ordinary letterpress on white paper, for they have transformed each page into a three dimensional space. Various types of discourse (scientific, poetic, biographical) are printed in always renewed spatial arrangements and typographical characters. Most pages are broken up into several juxtaposed sections: typography and etching, typography and collage, or two different types of typography, including printed characters, mysterious figures and hand-drawn letters. The pages propose graphic images even when they are primarily composed of a printed text. A secret writing bridges the gap between the visible and the invisible composed as it is of signs which simultaneously belong to visual and verbal codes. The writing which functions throughout as a visual sign creates the momentary illusion that it is decipherable, that the letters or shapes may somehow yield a meaning. On densely covered pages this visible language seems to withhold with even greater stubbornness its message. Its "écriture" transmits the language of the unknown without in any way sacrificing its enigmatic qualities. Such processes disturb our habitual reading. As alternatively we read, decode, decipher, we deviate from the accustomed manner of reading, abandon all parallelism and change our course. We read as we journey through space. The book also embraces a wide range of written or scribal artforms which invite the viewer to create other combinations and constellations. Here, as words illustrate representations which are mirrored in both text and image, the illustrated book abolishes the distinction between verbal and visual.

Do some of the problems we have raised in regard to the Crombie-Bourne book not remind us also of the *Mécrit* by Denis Roche? This famous document is composed of a preface, a declaration of cultural revolution followed by two inscriptions and six pages of text, which puts into practice revolutionary tenets. They are destined to replace poetry,

which conveys meaning, which follows set patterns, which situates itself comfortably in a stable and false cultural tradition: "alors qu'il faut, pour mieux disposer du spectacle de l'écriture, par le travers des données où s'emportent nos signes, tendre à ramener la production poétique vers son point de plus extrême *méculture*, le point zéro, à l'évidence, de la poécité."[23] Roche obviously destroys readability by disruption, discontinuity, displacement. He destroys the conventional page by transforming radically its margins and marginality. The text is composed of a center which is decentered and, in several instances, a margin which provides more text instead of a relieving border. The two interact without establishing patterns of continuity. Constant recurrence of misplaced capitalization, punctuation, intrusions of typographical signs multiply ruptures which invalidate our act of reading. Two pages of inscription in Chinese and Etruscan stress the impact of visibility as contrapuntal to legibility.

We do not claim that the Crombie-Bourne book, which also places different kinds of typography into different spatial arrangements acting against each other, is also destined to function as a document of cultural revolution.[24] In the Crombie-Bourne volume we witness the gradual passage from unaligned letters to aligned words. The book opens on a preliterary but not pre-linguistic stage of communication. Letters in a womb are ready to enter the world. The authors and designers of the volume seem to implant a rather conventional concept of language as it comes out by inches as though following a sort of algebraic progression, We have to look at the text beyond its spatial expansion. It moves not only from preconscious to conscious, pre-birth to birth through various stages of life, but it even comments on itself as the bag changes shape and its roundness waxes and wanes. The physical or spatial grouping of words provides an image or illustrates what the text expresses verbally.

If we consider the unorganized verbal reservoir as figure, the illustration precedes the text in this book which we labeled as the simultaneous creation of two artists. To a certain extent it becomes a pretext and as such must peter out in giving rise to the text, which repeatedly refers to the illustration, showing by various devices that one acts as a transformation of the other. Does the heap of words not give the visual image of the many paper balls that Miles threw away as unwanted, unsuccessful parts of his efforts at writing? The text is basically about the trials and tribulations from birth to death of writing. Ironically, the book, which creates a maximum of interdependency between literature and art, between text and image, which questions their autonomy, also brings about a greater separation. The word heap suggests the organic, fluctuating elements of the unconscious, whereas the incremental text shows the organized, institutionalized and reductive aspects of language. It eliminates the invisible parts of both text and image.

As the letters turn into a legible text by a double descending and ascending motion, the viewer faces an emptying out of the chaotic full-bodied language, a verbal and visual denial of its potential. By focusing metacritically on the very problem which constitutes the illustrated book, by bringing it into a state of tension, it undercuts its status as a work of art for which it substitutes announcements and visiting cards. By problematizing again and again the act of reading, the illustrated book, as so many other genres, may have created its own *mise en abyme*, while shunting off perhaps toward a postmodern impasse.

1. W. J. Strachan, *The Artist and the Book in France*, N.Y., Wittenborn, 1969; John Harthan, *The History of the Illustrated Book*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1981.

2. Thomas Hines, "René Char and Joan Miró: *A la santé du serpent*," *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, 1981, No. 1, pp. 44-74; Anne-Marie Christin, "Images d'un texte: Dufy illustrateur de Mallarmé", *Revue de l'Art*, 1979, No. 44, pp. 68-84; Ségolène Le Men, "Quant au livre illustré", *Revue de l'Art*, 1979, No. 44, pp. 84-104.

3. *Livres-objets*, Exposition réalisée par Caroline Corre, Paris, Bibliothèque-Discothèque Faidherbe, March, 1985; *Livres mis en scène*, Exposition organisée par le Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris, Jan. 1985; *Livres-objets*, Galerie du Centre d'Action Culturelle Pablo Neruda, Paris, Dec. 1984. In New York, Katrin Markel exposes books made by artists.

4. "A work by itself, the *livre d'artiste* was born with the 1960's avant-garde movements, among which the most diverse participated (minimal art, Pop art, etc.)." Anne Moeglin-Delcroix is curator of the exhibit and author of the catalogue. While admiring her selection, we do not agree with some of her classifications. She sees the sudden emergence in the sixties of a certain type of book originating primarily with the works of Dieter Rot. We believe that these innovative practices occurred at least sporadically much earlier. She opposes the *livre illustré* to the *Livre d'artiste*, omitting from her discussion the *livre de peintre*.

5. Paul Eluard, *A toute épreuve*, Genève, Cramer, 1958; Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Paris, Skira, 1934.

6. Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, N.Y., Abrams, 1977; *Robert Rauschenberg*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, 1976; Yvon Lambert, *Cy Twombley: Catalogue raisonné des oeuvres sur papier*, Milano, Multipla Edizione, Vol. 6, 1973-76.

7. One may argue that the problematic of the *livre détourné* is inscribed in the first page of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. "Dans cette dynamique et par elle se définit une nouvelle typologie des lectures et des lecteurs. Le lecteur qui lisant ne lit pas puisque la page est détournement du livre ...", Michel Charles, *Rhétorique de la lecture*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 22.

8. Claude Maillard provides another example. One of her books clamped together in the middle and open on both sides incarnates the almost inevitable secrecy of the book.

9. RenéHuyghe, *Dialogue avec le visible,* Paris, Flammarion, 1955.

10. Cornell used illustrations based on the Curmer edition, 1838.

11. "Achevé d'imprimer pour Pipette en décembre 1984 et tiré à 500 exemplaires".

12. John Crombie & Sheila Bourne, Paris, Kickshaws, 1983.

13. To a certain extent this volume corresponds to the definition of the *livre d'artiste* given by Moeglin-Delcroix: "Le *livre d'artiste* est, en sa totalité, conçu par un artiste à qui appartient la responsabilité de l'idée et de son exécution; l'auto-édition est d'ailleurs un phénomène fréquent." ("The *livre d'artiste* is, taken as a whole, conceived by an artist who must take responsibility for the idea and its execution; the self-publication is, anyway, a frequent phenomenon.") In *Livres d'artistes,* p. 10.

14. Paul Eluard & Max Ernst, *Les Malheurs des immortels,* Paris, Librairie Six, 1922.

15. In *Overcoated,* Paris, Kickshaws, 1982, John Crombie renders the letterpress gradually illegible by "overcoating" the text with the emerging image of a coat.

16. Cf. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970. Both concrete poetry and the *livre détourné* disturb accepted methods of communication, usually by avoiding the semantic aspects of language.

17. Jérôme Peignot, *Calligramme,* Paris, Chêne, 1978.

18. Sylvia Echar exposed at the Galerie Caroline Corre, and Gérard Duchêne at Pompidou.

19. Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Illuminations avec lithographies de Fernand Léger,* Lausanne, Grosclaude, 1949.

20. Renée Riese Hubert, "Graphisme poétique et poésie graphique: *Les illuminations* de Fernand Léger" in *Rimbaud maintenant,* Paris, SEDES, 1984, pp. 149-59.

21. Max Ernst & Iliazd, *Maximiliana ou l'exercice illégal de l'astronomie,* Paris, Le Degré 41, 1964. Cf. Anne Hyde Greet, "Iliazd and Max Ernst," *World Literature Today,* Winter, 1982, pp. 10-18; Renée Riese Hubert, "Max Ernst: the Displacement of the Visual and the Verbal," *New Literary History,* Spring, 1984, No. 3, pp. 575-607.

22. Denis Roche, "Le Mécrit", *Tel Quel,* No. 46, Summer, 1971.

23. Ibid. p. 91. Cf. Joan Brandt, "The Theory and Practice of a 'Revolutionary Text': Denis Roche's *le Mécrit*", *YFS,* No. 67, 1984, pp. 207-25.

24. John Cage's *Notations* with its variegated typography assumes both verbal and visual (as well as musical) dimensions, which play against each other.

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