Patterns of Exchange: Translation, Periodicals and the Poetry Reading in Contemporary French and American Poetry

By

Matthew Bingham Smith

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Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Lucey, Chair
Professor Mairi McLaughlin
Professor Ann Smock
Professor Lyn Hejinian

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Abstract

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My dissertation offers a transnational perspective on the lively dialogue between French and American poetry since the 1970s. Focusing on the institutions and practices that mediate this exchange, I show how American and French poets take up, challenge or respond to shifts in the poetic field tied to new cross-cultural networks of circulation. In so doing, I also demonstrate how poets imagine and realize a diverse set of competing publics.

This work is divided into three chapters. After analyzing in my introduction the web of poets and institutions that have enabled and sustained this exchange, I show in my first chapter how collaborations between writers and translators have greatly impacted recent poetry in a case study of two American works: Andrew Zawack's *Georgia* (2009) and Bill Luoma's *My Trip to New York City* (1994). Following the trajectory of these works as they move through different contexts and languages, I investigate the shifting meanings of poetry as it circulates through various spaces. I also move outside the traditional paradigm of translation studies: rather than a comparative textual analysis, I examine how these poets respond to the new set of circumstances created by the institutionalization of translation.

In my second chapter I draw on two influential periodicals— *La revue de littérature générale* (1995-1996) in France and *Chain* (1994-2006) in the U.S.— to show how the periodical at once facilitates and troubles transnational exchange in contemporary poetry. I demonstrate that these two reviews redefine their respective poetic fields by working both within and against larger cultural institutions and technologies. I argue that each journal creates a new context for its poetry by defying larger structures of power, such as Jack Lang's cultural policies in the case of *RLG* and the institutional forms of capital tied to the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo and its use of the listserv with *Chain*.

In my final chapter I examine the influence of the American poetry reading in France. I argue that the reception of the poetry reading in France has given rise to new "oral-centered" writing practices. In particular, I show how Jacques Roubaud's experiments with "improvised prose" and oral performance developed as a response to the professionalized, American-style poetry reading. Through my reading of Roubaud, I complicate the myth of the poetry reading as a more authentic experience of poetry and call into question established notions of orality.

The specific case studies of my dissertation open onto a field of larger questions concerning how modes of circulation in our globalized world are transforming poetry. These questions are further explored in a coda that closes my dissertation.

Introduction

　　"Mon vrai plaisir" Emmanuel Hocquard confessed, "est de lire de la poésie américaine *en français*. Mon contentement pourrait s'exprimer dans ces termes: *ça, jamais un poète français ne l'aurait écrit.*" The obverse, he tells us, is also true: "Peut-être pourrait-on exprimer la même chose de cette façon: *ça, jamais un Américain ne l'aurait* écrit" (*Ma Haie* 519). For Hocquard, this poetry is expressive of neither a French nor an American tradition; it doesn't bear the mark of a given author or derive from a deliberate esthetic. On the contrary, it is an accident of an encounter between French and American poetry. This interest of Hocquard's attests to a new shift in circumstances, one that concerns the way poetry circulates between France and the United States. More importantly, it concerns a new imagined public.

　　There is perhaps no one more central to this encounter between French and American poetry than Hocquard himself. Since the 1970s, he has invited American poets to read at various institutions (most notably, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where he curated readings and literary events for fifteen years) and to collaborate on collective translations at the Royaumont Abbey through the organization he founded in 1989, *Un Bureau sur l'Atlantique*, the principal aim of which was to strengthen the ties between French and American poetry. He has translated several American poets—including several works by Michael Palmer—and co-edited with Claude Royet-Journoud two anthologies of previously untranslated American poetry (*21+1 poètes américains* in 1986 and *49+1 nouveaux poètes américains* in 1991). Hocquard is not the only person playing many roles—in this case, poet, translator, publisher, curator and critic—in this exchange. Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach, Cole Swensen, Norma Cole, Pierre Alferi and Stacy Doris, among others, are no less important in this regard. That many of these writers know each other personally and are on intimate terms is not without significance. In many cases, and unsurprisingly, their informal relations have determined the nature of the exchange.

　　The friendship between the Waldrops and Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach, for instance, finds expression in the mutual influence they have on each other, most notably through the translations they have made of each other's poetry. Their friendship also marks the beginning of this exchange. In 1971, the Waldrops met Royet-Journud and Albiach during a poetry reading Keith and Rosmarie were hosting at the apartment they were renting for the year on Rue des Saint-Pères in Paris. When Royet-Journoud found out that Rosmarie was translating Edmond Jabès' *Book of Questions*, he took an immediate interest in her. Keith and Rosmarie also discovered that same night that Albiach's *État*, her second full-length work of poetry, had just come out. They bought a copy before the night ended, and, wasting no time in reading it, were immediately "overwhelmed by its intelligence, its energy, its sheer beauty," as Rosmarie recalled (*Ceci n'est pas Keith* 82). Keith would later translate this work—one of the most striking translations that has resulted from this exchange—and Rosmarie used the book's grammatical structure "as a matrix" for her own book *When They Have Senses*, discovering in the process that "the discrepancy between French and English grammar made for a fruitful tension" (82). Many similar encounters took place after 1971, and frequently these happened at poetry readings—Roubaud's meeting with Jerome Rothenberg in Paris in 1974, for instance, or

Emmanuel Hocquard's encounter with Michael Palmer at Robert Duncan's place in San Francisco in 1981 are cases in point.[1] But more important to this exchange than these personal encounters and informal relations are the institutions, sites and practices that these writers helped to establish and continue to sustain. It is by means of these that poetry circulates widely and rapidly between the two countries.

These include small presses, periodicals, anthologies, reading series, conferences and translation workshops. My aim in this work is to show how new patterns of exchange and circulation enabled by these institutions find expression in contemporary French and American poetry. While an exhaustive history of this exchange would document all these mediating institutions and practices, I have chosen to focus on what I take to be the three primary sites and channels by which poetry travels between France and the United States: translation, periodicals and the poetry reading.[2] While the terms and means of exchange between these two poetries are representative of larger global trends, the intensity of the exchange is perhaps unique. This has led Bennett and Mousli to claim that, after a flowering of mutual interest began in the 1970s, which is attested by an increase in poetry translations in France and the United States, the two poetries became so intertwined that they no longer seemed distinct, with "each following the trajectory of its own particular evolution," but rather appeared "as two parts of what has virtually become the same poem, written simultaneously in two different languages" (89-90). Though I agree with Bennett and Mousli that much of this poetry shares a common context of exchange, I believe that this shared context has given rise to a wide range of greatly distinct work. The works I set out to analyze will not only show, then, the commonalities between French and American poetry, but their seemingly incommensurable and striking differences.

Of particular significance is the public this poetry addresses. Highly stratified, culturally divided, small-scale and local in its activities but international in scope, this public is rife with contradictions. Identifying the conflicting layers of this public—or series of overlapping publics—illuminates this poetry in a new way. But it also offers a way of interpreting contemporary poetry understood more globally in an international context. To be sure, deeming a body of poetic works "French" or "American" is to take for granted their inherently composite

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[1] Roubaud's encounter with Rothenberg will be taken up in chapter 3.

[2] For a good overview of the periodicals central to this exchange, see Bennett and Mousli. The most significant anthologies include, in France, *Vingt poètes américains*, edited by Jacques Roubaud and

Michel Deguy, *21+1 poètes américains* and *49+1 nouveaux poètes américains,* edited by Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet-Journaud. Jacque Darras' *Arpentage de la poésie contemporaine* also includes many writers central to this exchange. In the U.S., many anthologies are published by way of a special issue of a journal. Some of the more significant contributions among these include *Tyuonyi* ("Violence of the White Page: Contemporary French Poetry"(no.9/10, 1991)), *Raddle Moon* ("Twenty-Two New (to North America) French Poets"(no.16, 1997), *The Germ* ("Le Germe"(no.5, 2001)*, and Aufgabe* ("Small Press Publications from France"(no.1, 2001) and "French Poetry"(no. 10, 2011). Among the presses that specialize in French poetry, there are Burning Deck, La Presse, Black Square Editions and, to a lesser extent, Counterpath Press, The Post-Apollo Press, Green Integer Press. In France, there are Editions de l'Attente and Contrat Maint and to a lesser extent, P.O.L and Le Théatre Typographique. Translation seminars and workshops were regularly organized by Un Bureau sur l'Atlantique, which started in 1989 and Format Américain and continue to take place at Reid Hall in Montparnasse and published in the journal READ. There are also bi-lingual reading series such as Double Change and Ivy Writers Reading Series, both of which are based in Paris.

and divided character. A so-called American poem doesn't always imply a corresponding American public. Even if a given poem begins in English, it might be envisioning at the outset a particular French public. As though in anticipation of being translated and rewritten in the course of its trajectory, the poem may thus strive to address its own future circulation through various domestic and foreign contexts (Andrew Zawacki's *Georgia*, examined the first chapter, is a particularly telling case in this regard). But it's not only texts that circulate between France and the United States. People do too. By their own means or by invitation, poets are traveling much more frequently between France and the United States than there were before the 1970s. Interacting with their contemporaries from the other side of the Atlantic at poetry readings, workshops, academic conferences and other cultural events is by now a regular occurrence. In this contemporary period, it is not uncommon to experience poets reading their own work in person. And as these are filmed, recorded, and often now digitally archived, the records of these events are capable of circulating all the more freely. This rapid circulation of texts, people and digital recordings has not only changed the way poetry travels, but also how it is conceived, written and received.

Arjun Appadurai's claim, made almost twenty years ago, that "the era in which we could assume that viable public spheres were typically, exclusively, or necessarily national could be at an end" (22) rings especially true today. Of course, to view poetry as integral to—or even marginally part of—a viable public sphere may exaggerate its actual social significance. And the notion of a "viable public sphere" may be no less fanciful. This is because in contemporary culture the public sphere is often confused, for good reason, with mass culture.[3] As contemporary poetry is often considered, rightly or wrongly, to be at odds with mass culture, whose global reach is widely understood and accepted, it often falls outside the framework of a transnational or comparative analysis. Thus, contemporary poetry is often read within a national framework. Jahan Ramazani has called attention to this tendency, noting that "studies in cultural transnationalism have recently proliferated in a variety of humanistic subfields, but in studies of modern and contemporary poetry in English, single-nation genealogies remain surprisingly entrenched: an army of anthologies, job descriptions, library catalogs, books, articles, and annotations reterritorializes the cross-national mobility and migrancy of modern and contemporary poetry under the banner of the single-nation norm" (331).[4] To be sure, there are countless studies—too many to name here—where poets of different nationalities, cultures and historical periods are read together as embodying a similar esthetic, sensibility or ideology. But by failing to account for the social conditions of these works—or their respective field of possibilities, to borrow a term from Pierre Bourdieu—, this universalist approach obscures the motivations and relevancy of these works in regard to their own social context.[5]

There are many notable exceptions to these tendencies, some of which treat specifically the Franco-American context in question. Marjorie Perloff's *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, for instance, convincingly establishes a French lineage for modern and contemporary American poetry. Perloff has also written insightfully on the reception of American poetry in France and that of French poetry in the United States.[6] Following Perloff's lead, others have also noted the

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[3] See Warner "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject" in *Publics and Counterpublics*.
[4] See also Huk.
[5] See Pierre Bourdieu *Les Règles de l'art*.
[6] See her "Traduit de l'américain." See also "Playing the Numbers"; "'But isn't the same at least the same?'"

influence of French modernists on American poetry and that of American modernism on French poetry, and some have even called attention to the relations between contemporary French and American writers. I'll speak more about these studies shortly. The question of influence, though, continues to pose theoretical challenges. This is because the various social contexts that underlie and often determine questions of influence either remain under-examined or, conversely, the social contexts are analyzed independent of the formal or esthetic choices of individual authors.[7]

One potential solution to this problem has been to draw on the notion of community in the discussion of contemporary writers. But the writers belonging to these so-called communities are themselves suspicious of the term, and the misunderstandings that arise from geographic distance and cultural differences undermine the social coherency implied by the idea of community. The problems of how to talk about two distinct yet similar poetries remain unresolved in this Franco-American context.

To reframe this issue as one of circulation may not allow us to solve these problems altogether, but it does lead us to address a different set of probing questions. This is why the concept of a public—rather than that of community—is central to my analysis here. The notion of a public accounts for the many forms of mediation that connect or divide different social constituencies. In the case of French and American poetry, these texts circulate beyond the networks created out of friendship and community. In other words, the public imagined and enabled by this poetry is larger, and more tenuous, than that of any given community, just as the poetry enabled by this public may bear, at first glance, very little relation to any Franco-American context. The circularity of this last statement, as we'll see, is due to the paradoxical nature of a public as a cultural form.

My understanding of the term *public* is indebted to Michael Warner, who in turn is drawing on Jürgen Habermas's account of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Unlike Habermas, Warner is concerned not only with the public sphere in the singular, which for both Habermas and Warner functions as an ideal horizon rather than a determined social entity, but also with a multiplicity of publics and counterpublics. Warner carefully explains the many peculiarities of a public as a cultural form, many of which will be central to my analysis. Chief among these is its inherent lack of a defined social constituency. According to Warner, "in modern societies, a public is by definition an indefinite audience rather than a social constituency that could be numbered or named" (55). This is an important fact for what follows. Although many writers I examine can be seen to belong to specific poetry communities, which are made up of friends and familiar acquaintances and connected through shared social spaces and practices, the circulation of their poetry always exceeds—or always has the potential of exceeding—the boundaries of their own social constituencies. This is often true even in spite of a poem's deploying a specific mode of address, or alluding to an identifiable addressee. As these poems are mediated by a vast array of forms, practices and spaces, their public remains always in excess of any identifiable reader or group of readers. Once a poem is published, which is to say made public, anyone can become part of its potential public. Indeed, any form of active uptake qualifies one as part of a given public. This openness of its existence, along with the need to include strangers in its address, are two of the defining features of this

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[7] These two positions correspond in general terms to what Bourdieu has deemed internal and external analysis. The first views the individual text as self-sufficient; the second as a direct reflection of the social or historical largely construed. See *Les règles de l'art*, pp. 318-339. An example of the first is found in Easton. Bennett's and Mousli's work is an example of a purely external reading of this context, with no claims or attempts to analyze individual texts in light of the context they elaborate.

modern cultural artifact. A public, Warner tells us, "comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers" (120). For this reason, it is "as much notional as it is empirical," as it is created by a self-organizing discourse and exists solely "by virtue of being addressed" (72). The logic of a public is thus necessarily circular in order to account for an existence that is at once real and imaginary. "A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence" (67).

This reflexivity of a public has profound consequences for the way we understand different discourse genres, including poetry, whose public can be distinguished from that of other genres not in any quantifiable manner but through its social conditions and its manner of address. As Warner explains, "publics do not exist simply along a continuum from narrow to wide or from specialist to general, elite to popular. They differ in the social conditions that make them possible and to which they are oriented" (147). Their manner of orienting themselves to particular social conditions is accomplished by projecting a public through discourse. In this way, the discourse—be it a poem, a speech, or a treatise—has already provided at least one potential, though notional, map of its circulation. As Warner suggests, there is no text, speech or performance addressed to a public "that does not try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive claims—of the kind that can be said to be oriented to understanding—but through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality, mise-en-scène, citational field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on. Its circulatory fate is the realization of that world." (114).

Although the public is essentially a mobile construct that can never be fully contained within any institutional framework—the state, the nation, the academy, even the market—and although its members can never be determined by any positive, categorical qualifications, such as race, class, or ethnicity, it is nonetheless subjected to many constraints. Indeed, material limits—"means of production and distribution, the physical textual objects, social conditions of access"—work together with internal ones, including "the need to presuppose forms of intelligibility already in place, as well as the social enclosure entailed by any selection of genre, idiolect, style, and address" (99) to impose constraints on circulation. This is of no small significance for the works considered here. Not only are these works often printed in small editions, but their esoteric subjects and complex styles presuppose a very particular set of interests, sensibilities and education—not to mention time and patience —on the part of their readers.

Poets in the United States may share this set of interests with their contemporaries in France, and the intensity of their exchange has allowed them to cultivate, to a large extent, what might be understood as common sensibility. Nonetheless, they remain divided by linguistic and cultural barriers, which are exacerbated by the distinct condition of possibilities of their respective literary fields. Consequently, in the poetry that circulates between these two countries there are overlapping publics, which are often at odds in any given poem. In other words, at the margins of one public may exist another, often troubling the boundaries of where one begins and the other ends. This is not entirely lost on the writers I examine here. Due to new patterns of exchange, these writers have developed a self-reflexivity regarding the way their poetry circulates between France and the United States. Warner explains how this can give rise to a sense of social belonging: "The notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity"

(11). This social entity, it bears repeating, is not the same as an identifiable community, as its boundaries remain fluid and its membership, no matter how many actual participants it includes at any given moment, remains in part a projection. But as these writers strive to account for scenes on the margin of their own immediate public—places where their texts may travel but fail to capture as their addressee (Warner 109)—feedback loops are created. It is precisely these feedback loops that distinguish this writing from poetic exchanges from previous periods. And identifying these feedback loops through the imagined publics of these poems allows one to understand influence not as some intangible quality but as a direct result of new patterns of exchange.

Hocquard's preference for poetry in translation attests to the importance of these feedback loops for contemporary poetry. As we've seen, for Hocquard, poetry that he can, and does, read in its original language pales in comparison to its translation. But after passing through the translated text and returning back to the original—creating a feedback loop— something else happens altogether. For example, Hocquard admits he wasn't "impressed" when he read Palmer's *Sun* in its original.[8] "En américain, *Sun* aurait pu m'influencer. *Sun* m'a impressionné quand j'ai traduit *Série Baudelaire* [one of *Sun's* five sections] en français. En traduisant *Série Baudelaire*, j'avais le sentiment, comme dans un rêve, d'écrire un livre que je n'écrivais pas" ("Un malaise grammatical"). Having passed through French, he sees the original in a different light. This is not just a consequence of a single occasion of translation, but consists of a series of moves between Hocquard and Palmer that were played out over a longer stretch of time. Each made decisions in light of what the other was doing in his writing or translations. This is key to understanding the nature of this exchange. Palmer published *Sun* in 1988, and already in 1989 Hocquard began its translation.[9] After completing and publishing a section of this translation—*Série Baudelaire*—Hocquard continued to work on the rest of the book over the course of several years before publishing it in 1996. In the meantime, the process of exchange continued unabated. While translating this work, Hocquard wrote *Théorie des tables*, which appeared in 1992, as a response to Palmer's *Sun*. Palmer in turn translated Hocquard's *Théorie des tables*, which was published in 1994 by o-blek. This back-and-forth exemplifies the pattern of these exchanges: translation or new work is never a single, closed response, but a response in a potentially endless and open series of future moves and counter-moves.

As a consequence of these feedback loops, a certain anticipation of a work's reception— often outside its immediate context—is often present at the outset. "Le message c'est le destinataire," Hocquard claims (*Ma haie* 416). He is referring to the importance of the work's addressee or recipient. Palmer echoes this sentiment: "Though poetry is often considered a solitary art, and it may well contain an element of isolate making, it is always, from its inception, in conversation […]. Poetry does not exist without a recipient, who must complete the circuit in his or her own manner and read among its various meanings"(qtd. in Lang 81). To be sure, the notion of an identifiable recipient and the ideal of a conversation are mere conceits. Not only is direct and unmediated communication impossible, but also, at least for Hocquard, undesirable. He insists that between French and American poetry there are no "terrains de rencontres,

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[8] It is important to note that Hocquard distinguishes the term "impression" from "influence", with the former denoting a much greater impact than the latter.

[9] This was undertaken with Philippe Mikriammos during a translation workshop at the Abbey of Royaumont, which resulted in the publication of *Série Baudelaire*. Hocquard completed the translation of *Sun* in 1996 with Christine Michel.

d'échanges, de dialogues, de discussions, d'influences, bref de communication" ("Taches blanches" #4). The way he characterizes his relationship with Michael Palmer, which is rendered all the more impersonal through its third person narration, is telling in this regard: "Ils n'ont rien à se dire ni à échanger, surtout pas de points de vue sur quoi que ce soit, même sur la traduction. À l'occasion de rares et de brèves rencontres au hazard de voyages, ils règlent ensemble, sur un coin de table d'hôtel ou de café, des point précis de traductions en cours. C'est tout. À part ça, chacun joue seul de son côté. Jeu décalé, à distance, de la distance" ("Tache blanche"#17).

Any conventional understanding of community will not account for this kind of exchange.[10] The notion of a public, however, embraces in its very definition this "jeu décalé". It allows us to identify a social entity, and at the same time to recognize this social entity as a trick of discourse—the conceit of address—one that must include an unidentifiable "other". As Abigail Lang claims in regards to this relation between Hocquard and Palmer: "Il faut de la distance pour qu'il y ait réverbération ou écho, il faut de la solitude pour qu'il y ait rencontre véritable"(20). The way these texts circulate as they pass rapidly between French and American contexts, then, is tied to their discursive forms of address.

As mentioned, this is what distinguishes this poetry from that of earlier periods. To be sure, the confluence of multiple cultures and languages is vividly present in poetry from many historical periods. But it is the way this confluence finds expression that has changed. Consider the arch-modernist Ezra Pound, for example, whose multi-lingual poetry is often held up as an emblem of this period's global character. Indeed, the *Cantos'* display of linguistic diversity remains unmatched:

> Sound slender, quasi tinnula
> Ligur' aoide: Si no'us vei, Domna don plus mi cal,
> Negus vezer mon bel pensar no val.
> Between the two almond trees flowering,
> The viel held close to his side;
> And another: s'adora.
> "Possum ego naturae
> non meminisse tuae!" Qui son Properzio ed Ovidio
> > (qtd. in Kenner 112)

This fascination with the multiplicity of languages is at the core of many modernist projects. And as this excerpt from the *Cantos* demonstrates, it finds expression principally by way of citation. These fragmented citations are assembled so that they intersect and overlap as in a collage. But each individual citation performs a particular function for Pound. Each is what he calls a "luminous detail." As Hugh Kenner explains, drawing on statements Pound made in a series of articles published in the weekly *New Age* between 1911 and 1912, luminous details are "the transcendentals in an array of facts: not merely 'significant' nor 'symptomatic' in the manner of most facts, but capable of giving one 'a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law.'" (152). Whether a single word, phrase or couplet, these luminous details are carefully plotted throughout Pound's poetry, and most are citations from another language. For instance, rather than find an English equivalent for Homer's "poluphloisboio"—"Para thina *poluphloisboio* thalasses: the turn of the wave and the scutter of receding pebbles"—Pound frequently uses this Anglicized form of the word: "he lies by the

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[10] Lang strives to overcome this obstacle through the notion of "negative community".

poluphloisboious sea-coast" ("Moeurs Contemporaines" VI, qtd. in Ruthven 173). The *Cantos* are nothing if not assemblages of these luminous details, where the distinction between citation and "original" writing becomes blurred.

Pound and Hocquard make for a fruitful comparison, one that is particularly illustrative of the differences between the modern and contemporary periods. If Pound's is a poetic of citation, Hocquard's is one of address. This can in part be explained by the writers who exercise the greatest influence over their work. For Pound, there is an uncontested canon of poetry masters. The troubadour Arnaut Daniel, "il miglior fabbro", and other "vernacular" writers such as Dante and Calvacanti rank high in this canon, as do Greek and Roman writers from the classical period, including Homer, Sappho, Catullus, and Sextus Propertius and 19ᵗʰ century writers such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Théophile Gautier. These writers appear often in Pound's work in their own words, so to speak, via citation. This is because Pound is attached to a certain precision of vision that he believes inseparable from a poet's original expression. One must read Provençal, for example, to fully appreciate Arnaut Daniel's "technical skill in rimes, and more especially in onomatopoeia"(*Spirit of Romance* 19). A case of the latter is found in Daniel's line "*En breu brisaral temps braus*", which, according to Pound, unmistakably "suggests that 'harsh north-windish time' whereof is the song"(*Spirit of Romance* 31).[11] These ostensibly untranslatable citations, each constituting a luminous detail in its own right, are strewn throughout Pound's writing. Indeed, his relation to his own canon of writers is repeatedly expressed through this manner of citation. Besides, what other kind of relation can one have with writers who are no longer living?

This raises many questions concerning Pound's relation with his contemporaries. There is little doubt that Pound's relation with figures such as Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, H.D., Williams and, above all, Gaudier-Brzeska and Wyndam Lewis all helped shape—through their negotiated similarities and differences—his writing. But apart from an ex-pat community living in London, no contemporary writers working in other languages ever sustained his writing to the same extent. Consider his relation to his French contemporaries. In "The Approach to Paris", a series of essays that set out to define contemporary French poetry,[12] Pound speaks enthusiastically of Rémy de Gourmont, Jules Romains, Charles Vidrac, Francis Jammes, Henri de Régnier, Tristan Corbière and Laurent Tailhade, among others, but he makes no mention of his French contemporaries who we now see as central to French modernism. Reverdy, Apollinaire and Cendrars, for example, who were all born in the same decade as Pound (as well as Joyce and Eliot), remain outside the scope of his essays. In spite of his attempts to assess the contemporary scene, Pound's France was essentially a Symbolist one of a previous generation (Théophile Gautier and Rémy de Gourmont are constant points of reference).[13] Though familiar with the many French groups and coteries referred to as post-symbolists—*unanimisme, néo-Mallarmisme, néo-paganisme, paroxysme, fantaisisme*—these served more as foils than as

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[11] Pound first translated this line "Soon will the harsh time break upon us" which he later changed to "Briefly bursteth season brisk" to keep the consonantal alliteration (Wilhelm 169).

[12] These were published in the *New Age*, from September to October, 1913.

[13] His relation to both symbolist and post-symbolist French poetry was mediated through the work of F.S. Flint and Arthur Symons, whose essays on French poetry determined in large part Pound's thoughts on the matter. The anthology of symbolist poets, *Poètes d'aujourd'hui*, was also a frequent point of reference (Pondrom 25-38; 172-174).

sources of direct influence.[14] The same is true for T.S. Eliot. "I look back to the dead year of 1908" Eliot wrote in 1929, "and I observe with satisfaction that it is now taken for granted that the current of French poetry which sprang from Baudelaire [Eliot's Baudelaire is the original Symbolist] is one which has, in these twenty-one years, affected all English poetry that matters" (qtd. in Pondrom 1).[15] The gap between Pound and Eliot and their Symbolist counterparts in France is generational. As many of the poets who had the greatest impact on their work were no longer living when Pound and Eliot began to write, this influence was one-directional. They can only be cited, referred to, or imitated—but never, strictly speaking, addressed.

This form of generational influence exemplifies a pattern of relations between French and American poetry. It is characterized by a delay of at least twenty to thirty years. Just as Pound and Eliot were impacted by the work of symbolist writers from a previous generation, a later generation of American poets was greatly influenced by the French contemporaries of Eliot and Pound. Poets associated with Dadaism and Surrealism of the 1910s and 20s, for example, provided a foundation for the so-called New York School Poets in the 1950s and 60s. Pierre Reverdy, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob and Blaise Cendrars, all but unrecognized by Pound and Eliot, became central figures for poets such as Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, and John Ashbery thirty years later.[16] Indeed, Robert Motherwell's anthology of Dada poets and painters served as a handbook for aspiring New York poets with an experimental bent such as Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett. In France, Pound's influence wouldn't be felt until the 1960s, when Denis Roche brought attention to his work in the pages of *Tel Quel*. For many French poets writing in the 60s Pound's *Cantos* offered new possibilities in poetic experiments. Joseph Guglielmi recalls that "it was the *Cantos* that—and it is so common to say this—opened the door to this huge and contradictory domain [of American Poetry]" (Mousli 15). But Pound wasn't the sole source of their inspiration. Many other American modernists had a major impact on French writers in the 60s. Gertrude Stein and the Objectivists, most notably George Oppen and Louis Zukofsky, were instrumental for a whole host of French poets, including Emmanuel Hocquard and his contemporaries Claude Royet-Journaud, Anne-Marie Albiach and Jacques Roubaud. In all these relations, the influence, as with Pound and the symbolists, is by necessity one-directional.

As I've argued, beginning in the 1970s, this pattern changed. Rather than a model of one-way influence, there was now one of dynamic exchange between contemporaries, even if this exchange was carried out as a sort of "jeu décalé". New informal relations were forged between French and American poets, and institutions were soon established that enabled and sustained these cross-cultural networks of exchange. The poetry I analyze here addresses this context as its scene of circulation. This is all the more surprising in that, apart from Jacques Roubaud, the central figures of this dissertation—Bill Luoma, Andrew Zawacki, Pierre Alferi, Olivier Cadiot, Juliana Spahr, Jena Osman, and David Antin—are not those at the center of this exchange. It would be no surprise to find appeals to a Franco-American context from writers such as Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud and Michael Palmer, all of whom are directly engaged in sustaining this exchange. But the pertinence of the Franco-American context extends beyond the work of those most involved in maintaining it. This is a telling reminder of its significance. The mere fact that writers working at the margins of this

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[14] Pound came up with the term *imagisme* specifically to distinguish his group "from any of the French groups catalogued by Flint in the P[oetry] R[eview]" (qtd. in Kenner 178).
[15] See also Greene.
[16] See Guiney.

exchange can presuppose a Franco-American context speaks to its reach. What's more, by virtue of their position outside the immediate circle of friends, these writers are able to call attention to the assumptions and limitations of this exchange.

Indeed, the feedback loops that arise from this exchange are all the more surprising and pronounced when they occur between "strangers" rather than between close friends. The role translation plays in creating these feedback loops is the subject of my first chapter. To show the variety of possible responses to this new set of circumstances, I contrast two works of poetry, Andrew Zawacki's "Georgia" and Bill Luoma's *My Trip to New York City*. These works share a similar fate of circulation. First published in journals and as chapbooks in English, they were soon translated into French, and subsequently modified or rewritten in English in response to their translations. Although both texts follow a similar trajectory, each writer responds differently by addressing a distinct public. In many respects, Zawacki's *Georgia* had anticipated and facilitated its French reception. The poem began as a translation of Philippe Soupault's poem by the same name, which he was encouraged to read by his friend, the French poet Sébastien Smirou, whose poetry Zawacki was also translating at the time. Both this intertext and the social circumstances surrounding the poem's conception inflect Zawacki's poem, as the many Gallic expressions and references strewn throughout the poem attest. When Sika Fakambi translated the poem into French, Zawacki worked alongside her, answering questions and suggesting solutions. In the process, he made discoveries in the French version that made him reconsider choices he had made in English. Similar to Hocquard, reading his own poem in French had changed the way he conceived it in English. He then changed his original in response to the translation. (He joked shortly after this that he'd never publish anything again in English without having it translated first). Though subtle, these changes were telling. Considered together, they accomplished two things: they increased the poem's semantic possibilities by creating more visual, acoustic and semantic "rhymes", and they accentuated the poem's Gallic character. As a result, there is a marked symbiosis between the two publics Zawacki addresses. After the poem's translation and the subsequent reworking, the public imagined and enabled in an American context is made to align all the more closely with its French counterpart.

The opposite is true for Luoma's *My Trip to New York City*. In this case, two publics are explicitly pitted against each other. Luoma's poem was originally written for a small group of friends. It is a coterie poem filled with gossip, in-jokes and casual commentary addressed to specific and identifiable people. The circumstances surrounding its translation into French are also markedly different than those concerning Zawacki's *Georgia*. Luoma's translators—a group led by Emmanuel Hocquard, no less—sent Luoma a set of numbered questions, to which he responded with a list of corresponding clarifications and remarks. Luoma then published his list of responses in its original form, which he titled "The Annotated My Trip to NYC". Published as a list poem, these annotations are ostensibly addressed to an American public, but a phantom French public unmistakably haunts the poem. Indeed, by publishing the responses to his translators' questions, Luoma documents the reading habits of this French public by highlighting the limits of their understanding. What's more, by addressing its own circulation as it moves in and out of various contexts, Luoma's poem bears witness to the way translation structures the new set of relations between French and American poetry.

Translation itself is also subject to a set of material conditions. Chief among these are the site and form of a translation's publication. In this Franco-American context, most translations appear in periodicals. Indeed, both in print and digital form, the periodical has served as a major channel that connects American and French poetry. In the second chapter, I show how the

periodical at once facilitates and exacerbates this exchange. But rather than focus on periodicals devoted to a "free and open" exchange, I look at two journals that question and challenge the way texts circulate. Pierre Alferi's and Olivier Cadiot's *Revue de littérature générale*, for instance, calls attention to the role of the editor by foregrounding the conditions of legibility of the texts. This is done with a wide-range of texts, including contemporary American poetry. Rather than presenting this poetry as such and letting it "speak for itself", it is deformed, distorted or reworked through a series of procedures and devices. This is especially the case with Charles Bernstein's "Vers Introjectif". Written as a response to the editors' request for a piece on Charles Olson, Bernstein rewrote Olson's "Projective Verse" by replacing Olson's terms with his own, all while keeping the syntax and the form of the original piece more or less intact. However, rather than showcase Bernstein's virtuosic text, the editors created a new text altogether. Bernstein's open-verse form, with its sprawling text and choppy syntax, was translated and fit into a tight grid of lineated alexandrines. Presented in this way, Alferi and Cadiot articulate a distinctly French poetics through an American poem. As a result, the editors address an American public through French translation—this is their contribution to the dialogue between Bernstein's generation and that of Olson's—while at the same time addressing a French public through an American poem. This desire to address an American public in French and a French public through an American poem speaks to the significance of the feedback loops created by these networks of exchange. Rather than simply facilitate this exchange, *RLG* signals the limits of address through the textual changes and semantic distortions it occasions.

As with *RLG*, Juliana Spahr's and Jena Osman's journal *Chain* is interested in upsetting conventional patterns of circulation. Indeed, the notions of exchange and circulation are at the core of their journal. As its name indicates, the premise behind the journal was to find its contributors by way of a chain letter. With an interest in both undoing a poetry field dominated by men and in ridding their journal of other forms of editorial bias, the editors began by sending requests for writing to a randomly selected group of women poets. After completing their pieces, these poets were in turn asked to send out the same request, along with their poems, to another woman writer of their choosing. In this way, each contributor would also be an editor, since after penning her piece she could solicit work from a writer she elected to participate. The chain would thus continue to forge links in many different directions at the same time. Although the results of this experiment fell short of the editors' ambitions, they nonetheless provoked important discussions about how poetry circulates and shed light on the possibilities and limitations of the poetry periodical in a digital age. Unlike the other works taken up in this dissertation, this journal doesn't participate in the Franco-American exchange. By virtue of this fact, it serves as a revealing counter-example by shedding all the more light on the limitations of the periodicals central to this Franco-American exchange.

If my first two chapters are primarily concerned with the way texts circulate, my third considers the movement of people, namely, the poets themselves. Since the 1970s, it is not rare for poets to travel almost as far and as frequently as their poetry. This is due to the prominence of the poetry reading. Primarily associated with American poetry, the reading is an increasingly global phenomenon. For Jacques Roubaud, as for many other French writers, though, it remains an American phenomenon. Since the 1970s, Roubaud has witnessed and participated in countless poetry readings. This has had a profound impact on his work, above all his collection *Dors: Précédé de Dire la Poésie*. In contrast to the oral forms and practices that have arisen in American poetry as a consequence of the poetry reading, Roubaud's work lacks the immediacy, interpersonal forms of address and performative qualities of those works. This is a deliberate

decision on Roubaud's part, and it speaks to his relation to the poetry reading. When reading in public, Roubaud ignores the presence of his audience, letting himself be distracted by external phenomena, sunlight and shadows, the sound of the wind, passing thoughts. In this way, he turns the public performance into a private occasion. The contrary, though, is also true. When in the solitude of his own home, he performs as though in public, improvising an "oral prose" under the constraint of a fixed duration of time. In both cases, the poetry reading functions as the poems' most immediate, though absent, context. Although he never directly addresses this poetry reading public—which we are made to believe is American—it nonetheless haunts his work due to his constant insistence on its absence. In other words, by the very deed of his explicit neglect, Roubaud conjures up the presence of a poetry reading context.

It is precisely this kind of complex play of publics—at times explicitly addressed, at others implicitly evoked—that motivates my analysis throughout this dissertation. It is my hope that, by better understanding the relation between this particular poetry and its various publics, not only will the stakes of poetry written in this Franco-American context become clearer, but so too will the way new patterns of exchange are changing the conditions by which contemporary poetry is conceived, produced and received throughout the world.

Chapter 1: Translation

Returning Home after Translation: On Andrew Zawacki's "Georgia" and Bill Luoma's My Trip to New York City

A little before the poet Andrew Zawacki published "Georgia" in his book, *Petals of Zero, Petals of One* in 2009, he sat side by side with his French translator, Sika Fakambi, in her sunny house in Fresnes, working "over many days and many drafts" to translate his poem into French, "hashing out lines and ideas and sonic analogs"("On Slovenia"). Through the course of these sunny meetings, Zawacki made many promising discoveries in the French translation; in fact, so pleased was he with what he found that he reworked many lines in the original, which was first published earlier that year in the journal *1913: A Journal of Forms*, according to their French translation. "I vowed," he later stated, "that I should never publish anything before it got translated!"("Tremolo"). Thirteen years prior to this, Bill Luoma contemplated a list of 101 questions sent to him by a group of translators working collectively to bring his *My Trip to New York City* into French. Luoma later compiled his responses to their questions to create a list poem. Much has been written about what happens to a text in translation. But what to make of texts such as these when they come, so to speak, back home?[17]

Questions of how poetry circulates and who constitutes its publics loom large in these works. Not least because translation, as a practice with growing prestige and as a prominent discourse in both commercial and academic spheres, has increasingly larger stakes in poetry's circulation.[18] This is especially the case in the Franco-American context where a strong mutual interest is enabled and facilitated by a network of institutions, funding agencies, presses, periodicals and reading series, not to mention an overlapping canon of writers and a long history of exchange.[19] Translation, then, has given rise to a new set of circumstances for poetry: not only is it something that happens to poetry, but its questions and problems often become matters for poets to take up, reexamine and respond to in their work. Questions of circulation and publics, though, are no less present at a work's inception, as a writer's choices—from style to publication contexts—orient a work's possible trajectories. My intention is to track these two poems as they move from journals and chapbooks into French translation and then back into English in subsequent books.[20] As two American poets writing roughly in the same period, Zawacki's and Luoma's approaches—borrowing from Bourdieu, we could use the term dispositions—stand in stark contrast. If Zawacki's poetry has a more universal impulse with its ontological concerns and its desire to dazzle and disorient with a barrage of linguistic devices, Luoma's work is involved more with local questions of social communities whose activity he documents with a

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[17] Luoma's poem was first published as a chapbook in 1994 and subsequently reprinted in his first full-volume collection, *Works & Days*. All citations will be from its later reprinting. "The Annotated My Trip to NYC," was also published in *Works & Days*.

[18] On the growth of translation studies as an academic discipline see Baker's introduction to the four-volume collection *Translation Studies*.

[19] For a tentative list of these institutions, see introduction. For a fuller treatment of the social questions concerning translation, see Sapiro.

[20] I owe much here to Peter Middleton's notion of the "long biography of the poem."

sort of plain-speech esthetic of casual, off-hand commentary. In other words, Zawacki's text can be characterized in general by an excess of stylization; Luoma's by its absence. The publics these opposing styles both imagine and enable are fundamentally at odds. This is expressed in their poetic practices—encompassing choices at once stylistic, ideological and pragmatic—and, ultimately, in how they respond to the set of circumstances created by the practices and institutions of translation.

To be sure, there is a long history of fruitful exchanges between poets and their translators. But for the exchange itself to become matter—the subject, even—for new poetic experiments attests to a new shift in social circumstances. In the contemporary Franco-American context, it is not uncommon for poems or whole works to appear first in translation.[21] And although many writers have drawn on, and continue to draw on, translation in their poetry in diverse ways, few to my knowledge have approached translation from this angle.[22] Bill Luoma and Andrew Zawacki both exploit the opportunity afforded by these new circumstances of circulation between France and the United States in distinct ways. Whereas Zawacki's estheticizing approach to translation leads him to enrich and embellish his original poem, Luoma turns his attention to the social labor of translation by exposing the reading habits of his translators in a new work.

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Before Andrew Zawacki sat down with Fakambi to work on the translation of "Georgia", his poem had already appeared as the co-winner of the 1913 prize in *1913: A Journal of Forms* in early 2009.[23] By this time, Zawacki had already published two full-length poetry books, *By Reason of Breakings* (2002) and *Anabranch* (2004), which were received by poetry enthusiasts with great acclaim and which won distinguished awards and prizes. His first published work, however, was a volume of Slovenian writing from 1945-1995 which he edited (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 1999). Since the mid-nineties, he had been—and continues to be—actively involved in the field of poetry as an editor, translator and critic (he is currently an Associate Professor of English and the Director of the Creative Writing Program at University of Georgia). He has also published several chapbooks and another full-length collection, *Videotape* (2013), since his third book, *Petals of Zero, Petals of One*, came out. When Zawacki began writing "Georgia", he probably hadn't given much thought to how the poem would be impacted by its future French translation. But translation of another sort was clearly on his mind at the outset. According to Zawacki, "Georgia", a poem of twenty-six pages (548 lines), began as a translation of Philippe Soupault's smaller poem of the same name and expanded into its own while remaining loosely patterned on the original's anaphoric repetition of the word "Georgia".[24]

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[21] This is most notably the case for Keith Waldrop's *Falling in Love with a Description*, which was first published in French translation by Françoise de Laroque (Paris: Créaphis, 1995), before being published as part of *Transcendental Studies: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009), the winner of the National Book Award for Poetry in 2009. Many of the poems written by Americans in Emmanuel Hocquard's and Claude Royet Journoud's two anthologies—*21+1 poètes américains* in 1986 and *49+1 nouveaux poètes américains* in 1991—were also first published in French translation.

[22] Charles Bernstein's "A Test of Poetry", discussed below, treats translation in a way similar to Luoma.

[23] Unless otherwise noted, all citations will be from its republication in his book *Petals of Zero, Petals of One*, hereafter cited as "G".

[24] Zawacki discusses the origin of the poem in an interview with Leonard Schwartz. Given that Zawacki had recently accepted a teaching position at the University of Georgia, his interest in Soupault's

Though broken up and slightly modified in translation, Soupault's entire poem of 28 lines makes it into Zawacki's "Georgia". The decision to use a modernist poem as a sort of anchor is not without significance. To start, it provides a clear intertext for Zawacki's poem, signaling in this way that "Georgia" is to be read in relation to other modernist poetry. Soupault's poem isn't the sole intertext. Zawacki also cites Maurice Blanchot, Louis Zukofsky, Williams Carlos Williams, among others. It could hardly be said that Zawacki's poem is addressing these poets, but it is certainly indexing them, such that high modernist poetry is offered as one of many possible interpretative frames for understanding the poem's orientation.

One can readily identify traces of Soupault's style throughout Zawacki's poem. The flashy, incongruous metaphors, the jarring juxtapositions, and the spew of colorful descriptive adjectives of Zawacki's "Georgia" strike a strident Surrealist note.[25] Consider, for example, the visual clash and simultaneous merge of opposites in "the skuzzy drag queen dawn" (4) where a traditional poetic subject or symbol—dawn—has anthropomorphized into a socially marginalized figure such that, in spite of its resultant connotative sparks, the two images remain fundamentally irreconcilable. Notice, too, the overlay of horticultural and bodily images as well as the violent corporeal transfiguration in the lines: "I prune your buds/ unbutton my ribs/ pot you inside like a bonsai Georgia" (8). This sort of bodily transformation seems almost cartoonish, and Zawacki, acutely aware of this—"it's not unlike a kiddie cartoon/ fluorescent way out of proportion"—continues to multiply its effects until it becomes unimaginable: "I see horses/ running through diamonds Georgia I/ can't hold/ it all in my head" (25). This is characteristic of Zawacki's style. Rare words and garish metaphors always trump plain, unadorned language, just as figurative modes of expression are favored over their literal counterparts.

This also holds true when Zawacki resorts to translation. While at times Zawacki modernizes Soupault's poem—"Je lance des flèches dans la nuit Georgia"(*I shoot arrows into the night*) is rendered "I shoot bullets into the dark" (3)—most of Zawacki's decisions display a brazen Gallicizing tendency. Soupault's "Je *marche à pas de loup* dans l'ombre Georgia" becomes, for instance, "I walk *wolfstep* into the shadow Georgia" (4, my italics). Instead of drawing on a more natural idiom such as "I creep into the shadow" or "I slip into the shadow," Zawacki translates the words literally to create a jarring neologism of a highly figurative nature. Similarly, Soupault's "Je vois la fumée qui monte et qui fuit Georgia"(*I see smoke rising and drifting off*) is rendered "I see smoke it rises it *quadrilles* Georgia" and "Et le froid et le silence et la peur Georgia"(*And the cold and the quiet and the fear*) as "And the cold and *soundless decibel*" (4, my italics).[26] French clearly inflects Zawacki's choices here (as do specific phonetic concerns to which I will return shortly). *Quadrilles*, an imaginative evocation of swirling circles, derives from French and visually flaunts this belonging with its "qu-" and "ll"; and *decibel* echoes faintly the French *–dicible*, as in *indicible* (unspeakable, unsayable), thereby creating a neat contrast with *soundless*. These translation choices may seem overreaching when viewed in isolation, but they are consonant with the poem's overall style, a style that depends on many

"Georgia" is perhaps more biographical than esthetic, a point made explicit by his deeming the poem of little poetic value. In any case, it's clear that *Georgia* stands for far more than a geographical location in the poem. See below where I discuss its importance as a framing device**.**

[25] Andrew Joron mentions Zawacki in a list of contemporary poets who bear the mark of Surrealist influence in his survey of Surrealism in American poetry from the period 1966-1999.

[26] I cite here its publication in *1913*, as this line is revised when republished in *Petals of Zero, Petals of One* to read "cold the inaudible decibel." I discuss the significance of this change below.

forms of inflated expression—hyperbole, adynaton and, more generally, a conspicuous, self-conscious mannerism.

If drawing on Soupault gives Zawacki's "Georgia" a clear intertext, then his tendency to over-translate in favor of French as well as to stud the text with French expressions and rare words gives the poem a cosmopolitan air of linguistic sophistication. (I should mention that the poem is dedicated to Zawacki's wife, Sandrine, who is French). But appropriation, Surrealist metaphor and Gallic inflections are only three of the numerous poetic strategies Zawacki deploys in this poem. Indeed, although there is a general absence of meter and its traditional trappings, Zawacki exploits a wide range of linguistic and literary phenomena with panache and flair. This is perhaps made possible by the framing device of the poem: the repeated apostrophe to "Georgia." Although staged as a direct address, the poem has none of the urgency or intimacy associated with this device. Rather, the addressee functions as a stylistic placeholder, a sort of steady beat whose expected return and regularity binds together the vagaries of Zawacki's style. And these vagaries are many. Just a partial list of linguistic and literary devices used in the poem would include word-play, assonance, alliteration, rhyme (slant, internal and external, *rimes riches*), anagrams and visual puns ("it's aliment vs. ailment Georgia" (9)), shifts in register, phonetic, morpho-syntactic and lexical disjunction, asemantic and non-sense speech, and a plethora of "performative language" where the text acts out what it says ("I'm an echo playing bumper cars in basilicas of Georgia Georgia" (24)). Within the larger apostrophic structure, none of these features dominates the poem; instead, no sooner does one feature flash forward than it fades and gives way to the next one, usually triggered by a sort of associative or metonymic link.[27] It's necessary to quote the poem at length in order to witness this at full effect:

> a façade Georgia
> a fusillade
> the firing squad and the wall Georgia
> a cenotaph
> in the aftermath
> of petty Georgia
> your petticoat slipping
> pussy- and pistolwhipped son of a Georgia
> if I ever
> I swear if I
> if you ever so much as hint at Georgia
> I don't know what I'd fixin' to fix you
> know not what I would do
> but no one's ever sure what they're capable of
> so I try Georgia
> I try to remit
> this dragnet that dredges the ends of an earth
> what is it Georgia
> is it Georgia
> or is it not
> I can't figure it Georgia

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[27] There are no fewer emotional registers and tones than there are poetic devices, as the speaker shifts from expressions of sadness to those of anger, arousal, contemplation, joy, pain, etc.

>'twon't stay in focus
>it doesn't possess a center or an outside
>or an in
>like skipping a stone and the shale doesn't sink
>or taming a tidal wave with a riding crop
>or swimming inside a prism Georgia
>
>   (19-20)

With its abrupt shifts, following the course of the excerpt is no easy task. From *façade* the poem moves via phonetic likeness to *fusillade* (note, again, the Gallic inflection), and from *fusillade* it opens through a semantic channel onto a scene of an execution (while maintaining a surface continuity through rhyme: *façade, fusillade, squad*). This scene is given period detail by the mention of the "petticoat slipping"—*petticoat* having sprung from the near homonym *petty* of the previous line—but no sooner is this scene offered than withdrawn, as the poem quickly shifts along thematic lines to a more contemporary depiction of violence with "pussy- and pistolwhipped son of a Georgia." A first person subject enters here as an irate Southerner whose threats suggests impending violence. Zawacki is careful here with his line breaks, granting a pause where the speaker's temper might cause him to stutter:

>if I ever
>I swear if I
>if you ever so much as hint at Georgia
>I don't know what I'd fixin' to fix you

This low, regional register gives way to an arch and archaizing syntactic inversion—a clear signal of a higher, literary register: "know not what I would do." (This is echoed a few lines later with *'twont*). Then, after introducing a new, more contemplative first-person, the poem slips into poetic metaphor with "this dragnet that dredges the ends of the earth." The speaker waxes philosophic for the next seven lines, mulling over an unspecified phenomenological paradox in terms reminiscent of Blanchot (whom, it bears repeating, Zawacki quotes elsewhere in the poem):

>it doesn't possess a center or an outside
>or an in

It ends with three jarring poetic analogies, each of which seems to have abandoned its related term or explicatory purpose and drastically veered off in a different semantic direction, demonstrating in this way the speaker's expressed lack of focus ("I can't figure it Georgia/ 'twont stay in focus"). It's also worth noting the surrealist bent in the final two analogies where the absurdity reaches new heights with impossible acts: taming a wave with a riding crop and swimming in a prism.

This excerpt illustrates what the poem does as a whole. It moves between a variety of thematic materials—in this case from violence to philosophical aporia, elsewhere it dwells on the tension between technology and nature and man's fraught relationship to both—all while foregrounding a wide-range of linguistic and poetic concerns. As can be seen, the poem doesn't proceed in any linear manner nor does it follow any narrative arc. What's more, no stable or coherent subject stands behind its language; instead, the many appearances of a first person

pronoun posits as many possible subject positions rather than a single, socially identifiable, speaker (at one point, the speaker states, "I is a shotgun shell" (11)). Semantically troubling, non-linear and disjointed, "Georgia" displays many characteristic traits of the experimental poetry of previous decades, beginning with the many Modernist movements at turn of the century and extending up to the Language poets of the 1970s and 80s. And yet there is no mistaking the fact that Zawacki's poem, though greatly influenced by these writers, belongs entirely to another tradition.

The reasons for this are many. For one, the devices Zawacki employs are used for different purposes and therefore serve different ends. Whereas the Language poets, for example, had theorized and politicized their use of certain poetic strategies—and these were by no means wholly novel nor did they constitute a fixed, identifiable repertoire—Zawacki's use of these same devices does little more than attest to a knowing poetic style. In other words, Zawacki showcases a sort of virtuosic savoir-faire—thereby signaling his poetic skill—but the tightly stitched surface of his style obscures his other ostensible concerns. Behind this stitching may lurk a whole host of ontological and metaphysical concerns related to the kind of negative theology that he has repeatedly alluded to in interviews and essays—and I trust his engagement with Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot and Jean-Luc Marion to be deep and sincere—but only infrequently do these concerns find just articulation.

What Zawacki's poem accomplishes, then, is seemingly at odds with what he considers to be the objective of poetry. Indeed, the various interpretative paths made possible by his virtuosic display of style are overwhelmed, in his own conception of poetry, by metaphysics. Glossing Heidegger's "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Zawacki claims that "the poet's role is to heal the ontological rift that has occurred since mortals took leave of Being and the gods fled the world" ("The Break is Not a Break" 165).[28] The poet accomplishes this, according to Zawacki, through love, as this concept is articulated by Kiekegaard and Heidegger: "The poet's ontological project of recovering Being of both the men and gods is, then, a type of love, as he converts the break that each has effected toward the other into a distance that promotes the possibility of a reunion with their own respective natures and with one another" (169). This is what Heidegger professes when he states: "To be a poet in destitute times means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods" (qtd. in "The Break is Not a Break" 168). The poet is the only one capable of accomplishing this fundamentally solitary task, since it is in him that the holy resides. As Zawacki makes clear, "By stepping forward, in a solitude occasioned by his fellow mortals' amnesia and the god's deliberate default, the poet entrusts himself to the holy that entrusts itself to him." Although without relying on the facile notion of personal experience or without taking for granted a determined self, since, for Heidegger, the self is sacrificed as he steps into Being or into the Open, Zawacki's understanding of poetry remains steeped in a traditional romantic ideology whereby the poet is a bard whose privileged position gives him a noble, even holy, purpose. Since the privileged poet must step forward "in a solitude occasioned by his fellow mortals' amnesia," he thus turns away from the world of social relations toward an abstract category of Being. Following this line of thought, the poem must suspend its personal or social modes of address. It is in this respect that, in spite of his seemingly defiant style, Zawacki inscribes his work into poetic tradition in which the poet plays the noble role of philosophic bard,

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[28] Hereafter cited as "BNB".

one who addresses not the members of his society but absent gods.[29] Although "Georgia" takes the form of a second-person mode of address, the addressee, like a transcendent deity, remains abstract and absent as a mere stylistic ploy. In this way, the poet's metaphysics overshadows the social relevance of his poem, as the poem is meant to be read more as an unanswerable prayer than an intervention in a given cultural context. Jacques Roubaud's *Dors* and *Dire la poésie*, taken up in chapter three, pose similar problems of address. But in Roubaud's case metaphysics plays no role. When pitting a private setting against a public one, Roubaud has in mind a mountain hut or a pasture rather than a public reading in a city. His imaginary audience is composed of sheep, not fleeing gods.

Combining experimental devices with traditional poetic objectives defined much of the poetry of the 90s in the United States and continues to this day. Zawacki himself acknowledges this in the work of Gustaf Sobin, a poet whose work stands as a major point of reference and source of inspiration for Zawacki, and in whose work he detects "the sense of being both archetypal and avant-garde." This is because, for Zawacki, "Sobin's poetry dances on a wire between largely traditional aims and an innovative style which, while emergent from Duncan, Olson, and Char and embraced by experimental writers, is as internally consistent and recognizable as Hopkins or Heraclitus"("Towards the Blanched Alphabets").[30] The critic Stephen Burt gave wider recognition to this phenomenon in his 1998 review of Susan Wheeler's *Smokes* where he labeled this new tendency in poetry "Elliptical." Here's how he describes it: "Elliptical poets try to manifest a person who speaks the poem and reflects the poet while using all the verbal gizmos developed over the last few decades to undermine the coherence of speaking selves. They are post-avant-gardist, or post-"postmodern": they have read (most of them) Stein's heirs, and the "language writers," and have chosen to do otherwise". Additionally, "Elliptics seek the authority of the rebellious, they want to challenge their readers, violate decorum, surprise or explode assumptions about what belongs in a poem, or what matters in life, *and to do so while meeting traditional lyric goals*"(my italics). As for what he means by traditional lyric goals, Burt says little. But he does make the surprising claim that these poets "want to entertain as thoroughly as, but not to resemble, television."[31]

Zawacki might contest any affiliation with Elliptical poetry, not to mention the notion of poetry as entertainment. But Burt's brief sketch of Ellipticism provides a set of fitting terms for describing "Georgia" (as well as many other works, which explains its unexpected popularity).[32]

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[29] Zawacki notes this desire to address "invisible auditoria" in Gustaf Sobin's "lingering religiosity"("Vertical Tracking"). For a stark point of contrast, see the social function of poetry and love in Frank O'Hara ("Personism: A Manifesto" 499).

[30] Sobin's influence on Zawacki can be noted both stylistically and ideologically. The above discussion of poetic address echoes Sobin's "invisible auditoria." See Andrew Zawacki, "Vertical Tracking".

[31] Burt refined his idea on Elliptical Poetry in "The Elliptical Poets".

[32] Although not identifying it as "elliptical," Jennifer K. Dick situates Zawacki in this hybrid tradition when reviewing his second collection, *Anabranch*: "There is a richness in what is possible in American poetry today where a single movement is un-locatable among the clamoring groups proclaiming their affiliation with new formalism, revitalized narrative, postmodernist or post-post modernist works, LANGUAGE or post-language, lyric-language, post-beat, next New York generation or groups after-this-or-that poet, as in, in the vein of Zukofsky, etc. etc. Among this gluttony of poetries, exciting young writers are learning to read widely and enrich their work with the poetic gestures and modes of expression from each and every one of these groups and their strings of tradition. Among them we find Andrew

We have already noted the way Zawacki's poem challenges the reader and how it undermines the notion of a coherent speaker. But there are many other features of "Georgia" that are helpfully explained by Burt's Ellipticism. Here's Burt: "Elliptical poets create inversions, homages, takeoffs on old or "classic" poems"(Zawacki's use of Soupault's poem is clearly an instance of this); "Elliptical poets like insistent, bravura forms, and forms with repetends— sestinas, pantoums, or fantasias on single words"("Georgia" is unmistakably a case of the latter, with its title serving as the repetend); "Ellipticals love poems that declare 'I am X, I am Y, I am Z' where X, Y, Z are incompatible things"("I'm an echo playing bumper chars in basilicas of Georgia Georgia/ a silhouette/ I'm a satin flower/ I'm a sick bag and the sick Georgia/ an avalanche an insomniateque/ a ruby-throated humming" ("Georgia" 24-25)). Burt's catalogue of tendencies also includes jump-cut transitions—"one thought, one impression, tailgates another"—and shifts in register, "between low (or slangy) and high (or naively "poetic") diction." Both disjunctive transitions and shifts in register are vividly present in the excerpt of "Georgia" cited above.[33]

But if Zawacki's "Georgia" can be read within the framework of Ellipticism it is not for its stylistic choices alone. By appealing to "the poetic" as a set of devices with little or no bearing on social matters, Ellipticism necessarily underplays the role of its own social context and mode of address. Indeed, its position depends on this very fact. Nonetheless, this poetic ideology arises within very specific institutional settings (remember Burt is a Harvard professor, prominent reviewer and a poet himself). Indeed, the publishing context of "Georgia" supports and throws into sharper relief the esthetic features I've highlighted.

As the co-winner of the 1913 Prize for Poetry, "Georgia" first appeared already wearing a ribbon. In a field where blurbs by well-known poets and prizes granted by esteemed judges are increasingly the means of poetic legitimization, its introduction and endorsement by the poets Peter Gizzi and Cole Swensen already guarantees it a public for whom those standards of qualification matter.[34] Gizzi's praise of the work is telling: "[Zawacki] has defiantly written a new anthem to his new home, poetry, an ever present subaltern house of the blues and anvils, house of song, of sting and sung, of bling, and of sorrow." Following this reasoning, "Georgia" is written *for* and *about* poetry itself. More importantly, it is written *by* one of poetry's newest members. By committing himself to style, and style alone—a standard practice of Elliptical poetry—Zawacki's "new home" appears less a "subaltern house of the blues and anvils", as Gizzi would have it, than a prison-house of poetry.

Yet, if "Georgia" is an "anthem" to poetry without overtly speaking about poetry itself, then it must signal its subject, as well as its belonging, in other less obvious ways. As I've noted, by passing quickly through a range of poetic devices, emotional registers and topical themes, so quickly, in fact, that no single poetic strategy within its apostrophic structure can be isolated and deemed emblematic of the poem, Zawacki's work is poetically pluralistic. This pluralism is matched and accentuated by the journal in which it appears. Founded by Sandra Doller in 2003,

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Zawacki, who is just over thirty years old, with *Anabranch* his second collection following *by reason of breakings* (University of Georgia Press, 2002). "

[33] For a pointed critique of Elliptical and hybrid poetry, see Craig Dworkin, "Hypermnesia".

[34] On the impact of the prize structure in contemporary poetry, see Steven Evan's compelling analysis in his "Field Notes, October 2003-June 2004". My reading of the pluralist tendency of *1913: A Journal of Forms* is greatly indebted to this article as well as to his "The Little Magazine: A Hundred Years On: A Reader's Report" and, above all, to his "The Resistible Rise of Fence Enterprise" and the discussion this provoked. These articles are archived on his website *Third Factory*.

1913 has an expansive board of directors, a team of interns, and a tendency to fill its pages with a wide and eclectic mix of writers, styles and forms. With most of its issues nearing 300 pages, it is a big journal, one that finds its contributors through open submissions and regular prize contests. Casting such a wide net doesn't exclude the possibility of identifying preferred tendencies, stylistic tics or related themes in each issue. The very nature of a journal where a diverse group of writing is published together encourages some sort of pattern recognition. The issue in which "Georgia" appears, for example, shares with this poem an interest in appropriation, translation, Surrealism and linguistic cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the many overlapping frames of reference suggested by much of the work remain within the field of aesthetics (visual art, poetry, music, etc.).

For a closer comparison of "Georgia" and the journal, consider Zawacki's use of Soupault. This decision to draw on the text of a modern Surrealist writer resonates both with the journal's fascination with all things modern as well as its interest in practices such as collage and appropriation. Just as Zawacki's "Georgia" is "after Soupault," so too are many poems in the issue "after" another writer or artist, such as Shin Yu Pai's "Métaphysique d'éphèmere" written "after Joseph Cornell" or Renee Gladman's piece "after Pina Bausch" (there are also poems written "after Donne" and "for Zukofsky"). No less represented in the issue are practices of ekphrasis and found language.[35] Similarly, Zawacki's surrealist language is complemented by this issue's translation of the one-time friend of André Breton and co-founder of the Surrealist movement in Czechoslovakia, Viteslav Nezval. His piece "Parrot on a Motorcycle, or on the Craft of Poetry," offers fanciful definitions of poetic terms such as "image", "association", "rhythm", "rhyme", "assonance" and "metaphor", all of which shed light on Zawacki's "Georgia" when the two pieces are read in conjunction.

1913: A Journal of Forms also shares Zawacki's enthusiasm for French. In addition to the quirks of the *editrice*, as Doller refers to herself (the board is also *le board* and the journal "an international *fancy feuilleton*"), the journal and the press publish the results of a week-long translation seminar and workshop held annually in Paris at the Columbia affiliated Reid Hall where six Francophone poets are paired with six Anglophone poets in order to translate each other's work.[36] This certainly speaks to the journal's purported international scope. It also demonstrates a curious shift in journal publication where, instead of acting primarily as an inaugural venue for poetry—that's to say, the site of its emergence—the journal retrospectively reports on or reproduces work produced elsewhere, not altogether unlike an exhibition catalogue. Bringing together the local and foreign, the past and present, agrees with journal's larger eclecticism. An eclectic journal of this scope—it counts fourteen interns among its staff— naturally suffers a loss of conceptual and contextual focus. In brief, the pluralist tendencies of the journal, its panoply of forms and esthetics, mirrors Zawacki's own style, with its myriad poetic devices and its appeal to modernist techniques. This style, combined with Zawacki's desire to dazzle, is precisely what situates "Georgia" within the objectives and criteria of contemporary poetry's more accepted ideologies and institutions. In many respects, this is what wins prizes.

But Zawacki's rise within the institutions of poetry began even before the appearance of "Georgia" in *1913: A Journal of Forms*. His second collection had won the endorsement of John

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[35] There are two consecutive essays on Ronald Johnson, both of which emphasize his use of found language and procedures of erasure, as well as a handful of "ekphrastic pieces" such as Noah Eli Gordon's, Jeremy Prokosch's and Valerie Mejer's.

[36] Cole Swensen and Sara Riggs direct this series and the result of this work is published in a volume called *READ*. It's worth noting that Zawacki has participated in this workshop.

Ashbery—"Reading *Anabranch* is like being rowed along the corridors of a flooded palace"—and C.D. Wright, who awarded one of the book's sections, "Masquerade", the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award on behalf of the Poetry Society of America, a controversial organization which also granted Zawacki's poetic sequence *Viatica* from the same book the 2002 Cecile Hemley Memorial Award.[37] Zawacki's poem "Fermata" from this collection was also published in the esteemed pages of *The New Yorker*.[38] Additionally, selections from "Masquerade" appeared in *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present* published by the commercial publishing house Scribner. Endorsements by star poets, prizes conferred by the oldest and most established Poetry Society in the United States, publication by a commercial publishing house and a large-circulation, highbrow magazine—Zawacki's work had already begun circulating among the recognized venues of established poetry.[39]

Readers of Zawacki's third full-length collection, *Petals of One, Petals of Zero* in which *Georgia* appeared in book form, were quick to praise the work's artfulness. They compared the poem to surrealism ("like good surrealism, [his poetry] is motivated by desire our world is hard-pressed to match" (Zavich)) and commented on its philosophical undertakings ("[Zawacki] takes on the problem of 'I', of 'what is'" (Mattraw)); they noted the poem's exploration of language ("it focuses on the potential of language itself" (Mattraw)) and Zawacki's linguistic skills ("Zawacki flexes his linguistic muscles" (Mattraw)) as well as the poem's "inventive word play and sonic sculpting" (Shoemaker). They also called attention to its "words [that] look and sound beautiful" (Mattraw). There was no mistaking, as one readers put it, "the deliberate craft of language" (Wong). And most readers happily concurred: "[Zawacki's] deft use of language saturates this book and begs for revisiting. Each subsequent reading enjoys melodic changes due to the abundant word and line play" (Shoemaker).

"Melodic" signals that other feature of the poem the readers found worthy of comment: its music. Indeed, in these readers' comments the word "music" is used to laud the poem's linguistic accomplishments, as if the word itself stood for some unidentifiable linguistic feat. Many readers noted the poem's "innate musical sense," (McFadden) its "innovative music and dissonance" (Mattraw) or referred to the poem as "an incantatory romp" (McFadden) or "a feast of song" (Mattraw). "The point?" one reader asks, "to make music of course" (Mattraw). In other words, Gizzi's anthem could be heard loud and clear.

Clearly this speaks as much to the conventions of poetry reviews and blogs as it does to Zawacki's poem itself. But it also attests to the categories by which a certain type poetry is both produced and evaluated. "Craft of language" is a category bolstered by a group of assumptions concerning those concepts I've continued to highlight—wordplay, neologisms, shift in register—

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[37] The PSA was in the headlines in 2007 after awarding the Frost award to John Holland, a conservative poet who had once referred to "cultures without literatures—West Africa, Mexican and Central America" and who, in an interview, had stated, "there isn't much quality of work coming from nonwhite poets today." See Rich.

[38] Published the month before the 2003 invasion of Iraq—one of the issue's featured articles details in mildly critical terms the Bush's administration's justification for war—Zawacki's poem about personal memory and fragmented subjectivity unfolding under "olivine clouds, / clouds of cerise, a courtesan sky" with fishermen and windmills and a family gathered at a dock at twilight strikes one, at least in hindsight, as a curious choice on the part of *The New Yorker* editors. It's interesting to note that the same month of that year Leslie Scalapino and Rick London published an anthology of highly politicized poetry: *Enough* (Oakland: O Books, 2003).

[39] The public success of *Georgia* can be measured by its reviews, many of which are archived on Zawacki's own webpage.

especially when such concepts are drained of a larger social significance. It also emphasizes certain aspects of language at the expense of others. Phonological, visual, morpho-syntactic and lexical areas of language are privileged over its pragmatic use. What's more, "craft" harks back to traditional notions of poetry associated with the school of New Critics, such as that of the poem as a "well-wrought urn." Regardless of the terms each reader uses to describe Zawacki's work, there is a general recognition of its *poetic* quality. This stems directly from Zawacki's very mannerism, his flamboyant use of devices that are meant to enchant the reader. One reader identifies this in terms of Zawacki's "commitment to poetry as a high-art" ("Petals of Zero, Petals of One"). But perhaps another reader puts it best. After confessing her need to look up many of the words Zawacki employs, Shaindel Beers encourages other readers to be patient with Zawacki's book, since "just as someone who doesn't *get* modern art can tell that there's something brilliant going on in Kandinsky, I can tell that Andrew Zawacki is someone I *should* be reading."

Given that the ground had been laid for a favorable reception of "Georgia" within certain poetic institutions in the United States, these enthusiastic readings of "Georgia" are not too surprising. What's more, its engagement with French writers and the French language—exemplified by its translation of Soupault—began to imagine a French public, which it would soon find. By the time Sika Fakambi began translating "Georgia" in 2009, Zawacki's poetry had already appeared in various French journals such as *Action Poétique*, *Passage à l'Acte*, *Le Nouveau Recueil* and *Vacarme*, and Zawacki had started translating works by the French poet Sébastien Smirou into English. Zawacki was thus amply prepared to assist Fakambi with her translation. In the process, he became aware of new possibilities for his original, and he took advantage of the fact that his poem had yet to be collected in a book to make small but significant changes.

This situation speaks to the new patterns of exchange between French and American poetry. That Zawacki can collaborate with his translator on the French version of his poem even before it has been published in book-form in English attests to the speed at which poetry travels between the two countries. The changes Zawacki made in light of this translation are revealing of his own approach to this pattern of exchange. In almost every case, Zawacki replaces a word with a new term that not only frequently reflects its passage through French, but also that intensifies the poem's semantic possibilities in English. Consider the following changes: what was "an explosive *rigged* in a micro chip" in the journal becomes "an explosive *packed* in a microchip" in the book (7); "all *haunted*like Georgia" changes to "all *haggard*like Georgia" (16); "lean out *to know* the distance" to "lean out *to inquire of* the distance" (17); and "the cold and *soundless* decibel" to "cold the *inaudible* decibel" (9). Zawacki cites this latter change while discussing the productive relationship between translation and writing in an interview.

> To give a brief example of translating becoming writing: I had a line in "Georgia" that read, "and cold the noiseless decibel." In Sika's version, the phrase became, "*et ce froid et ces décibles inaudibles*." When I looked at that, the future of the so-called "original" phrase suddenly clarified itself: "inaudible decibel." Beyond the not-so-striking oxymoron of a silent unit of noise, which is all the phrase initially had to recommend it (if that much), now a pair of –el sounds were in play—and more sexy to my eye for their ending anagrammatically: -le and –el. Moreover, "decibel" literally contains the other word's "-dible," although in a scrambled way, or rather "inaudible" seems to bloom into "decibel," as silence might burst into sound. So thanks to the relative closeness of French and English and especially to Sika's ear (or her eye?), I changed the line according to the phrasing she'd found—the translation as haint, come back to haunt its

antecedent into surrogate, secondary speech. There were other cases like this throughout "Georgia"—I call them backdrafting and imagine them as filaments of smoke causing fire—, and I felt lucky the poem hadn't been published in English yet. In fact I vowed, reversing the terms, I should never publish anything before it got translated! So maybe Benjamin is right, that a translation invigilates the "maturing process of the original language," and that "the original undergoes a change" only in its "afterlife" as a translation. That a poem can't arrive until it's been carried into another language—this passage is what allows it to begin. ("Tremolo")

Zawacki's rich metaphors of backdrafting and haunting can be restated in plainer terms. What Zawacki means by "the future of the so-called 'original'" is simply that through translation he is able to further craft his writing according to the stylistic principles and aesthetic effects that most interest him. With *inaudible*, his objective seems to be to compress as much semantic, acoustic and visual information into this line as possible, not to mention the gain from the marked French inflection, so that it resonates more with its surrounding text. The other changes can be characterized in the same way. Replacing *rigged* with *packed* in the line "an explosive packed in a microchip" gives rise to a semantic contrast between the outward-expanding motion of exploding and the inward-contracting motion of packing. Additionally, the *k* sound of *packing* amplifies the crackle—"the racket" and "clatter"—taking place before and after this line with its surplus of voiceless velar stops. Observe the sound patterning in the sequence that precedes the line in question:

> they bi*ck*er and *c*li*ck*
> the *c*lamors I mean
> blur as if stru*ck* with a Lu*c*ifer match
> guesswor*k* Georgia
> netherlight's jo*ke*
> I see smo*k*e it rises it *qu*adrilles
> <div align="center">(4, my italics)</div>

Words such as *shella*c*ked*, *s*k*uzzy*, *fris*k*ing*, *pi*x*eled*, are carefully plotted throughout the next few lines only to be followed by phrases such as "a dumdum blan*k* to the *c*lavi*c*le Georgia" and "the *c*langors *c*lang if you hear*k*en Georgia" (5, 6). This dense patterning of sound is reflected on a thematic level, too, with frequent references made to noise and feedback ("the feedback Georgia/ the anvil's hymnal/ a dial-tone looped in a flophouse Georgia" (6)). The same can be said with Zawacki's choice to change "all hauntedlike Georgia" to "all haggardlike Georgia" based on the French "hagard ou tout comme Georgia," only this time the sought-after sound pattern is the voiced velar stop *g* ("fra*g*"; "blitzkrie*g*"; "slu*g* cocked snu*g* in the six-shooter chamber") with the additional advantage of visually rhyming while phonetically clashing with the following two lines: "a hangman Georgia/ a hanged man Georgia" (16). Finally, the change from *know* to *inquire of* in the line "lean out to inquire of the distance" (17) (the French has *évaluer le distance*) illustrates Zawacki's predilection for stylization and falls in line with his unabashed taste for neologisms, compound formations and Latinate constructions. Moreover, *inquire* is more speculative and also belongs to a higher register than *know*.

On the whole, the rewritten version of "Georgia" varies only slightly from its first edition, and thus seems to have passed through French and returned to English relatively unscathed, even with a few new spoils. But these changes are telling. The circumstances and context of the poem's French translation—Zawacki and Fakambi sitting side by side at

Fakambi's sunny house in Fresnes—offers Zawacki another opportunity to expand and refine the original objectives of his poem, as he keeps his gaze fixed on the formal properties of language ("On Slovenia"). In this respect, Zawacki benefits in many ways from the circulation of "Georgia"—gleaning things here and there, touching up a few rough patches—all while embracing and using to his own advantage what translation offers him: namely, a writing workshop for fine-tuning his poem.

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"If the house is just poetry/ we're in trouble"
        -Rod Smith, *The Good House*

        Bill Luoma's *My Trip to New York City* and its companion piece "The Annotated My Trip to NYC" are written with a whole set of choices, concerns and poetic strategies fundamentally at odds with those we've witnessed thus far in Zawacki's "Georgia". Whereas Zawacki's projected public is hemmed in by fixed assumptions concerning the nature of the poetic—since, as we've seen, the addressee of the book is no other than an abstract notion of poetry itself—, Luoma's work addresses an identifiable social group in a mode that at first glance seems more communicative than poetic.
        First published as a chapbook in 1994, Luoma's *My Trip to New York City* was subsequently translated into French as *Mon Voyage à New York* in 1997, and then reproduced in Luoma's first full-length book, *Works and Days*. "My Trip to New York City"—now a poem in a collection—opened the book and "The Annotated My Trip to NYC", published here for the first time, closed it. If the first piece is ostensibly about a poet's trip to New York, the second is about a poem's trip to France. Despite this difference of subject, both pieces address, and consequently enable, very distinct publics.
        Bill Luoma began publishing poetry in little magazines—mainly in cheaply produced mags edited by, and printed for, friends—and as small chapbooks in the late 1980s, but it wasn't until 1998 that his first full-length publication, *Works & Days*, was published. He has since published a chapbook titled *Dear Dad* (Tinfish, 2000), which consists of a series of notes, reflections and casual comments addressed to the author's dying father, and in 2011 he published his second full-length collection, *Some Math* (Kenning Editions), a set of neo-dada sound poems that draws on a vast array of jargon from various scientific and cyber-techno fields. Whereas Zawacki is in many respects a career poet—a professor of poetry and creative writing whose regularly published works have gained increasing recognition—Luoma has remained an amateur poet who is employed by other means than his writing and who publishes only occasionally. His work has yet to gain a wider readership and has received very little critical attention other than that from his own circle of friends. His poetic practice, as I will attempt to demonstrate, is both a cause and consequence of this.
        "My Trip to New York City" is written in an unmistakably flat style. There are few complex constructions, polished turns of phrase, shifts in register, instances of word play or marked displays of erudition. It is composed of brief prose paragraphs, each between three and eight sentences, each left justified and separated by an inch of white space. Rather than

subordinate clauses there are strings of paratactic remarks—each of which remains stubbornly straightforward and unassuming:

> Douglass has a picture of his father on the wall. It is a fishing picture and his dad was smoking. Sometimes he imitates his father by putting a cigarette in his mouth and pretending that a lot of ash has built up. His father would trick him sometimes.
>
> (15)

There is seemingly nothing particularly jarring about this paragraph. Each sentence seems to belong to the same context. And yet, the more one considers that last sentence—"His father would trick him sometimes"—, the more intractable it becomes. How would his father trick him? It's unclear whether this is related to what his father does with a cigarette or if it opens onto another subject about which the reader remains in the dark. This is typical of this piece. One sentence, often the last, seems both to belong to the context of the paragraph and to lie outside of it. There are other paragraphs that are more semantically disjointed. Consider the following:

> Around us was Snet because they can reach beyond the call. We were cautioned of the depressed storm drains. One time Douglass touched a trend.
>
> (21)

We learn from the annotated poem that the first two sentences are species of found language—of which there is abundance at the end of the piece—while the last sentence can only be associated with the previous two by means of associative links ("touch" is related to "reach," for example). The stylistic influence of Language poetry, where sequential sentences elicit different frames of reference, is well noted in this particular paragraph. But once this paragraph is placed back in its larger context this influence appears less significant. There is, after all, a narrative arc to which all the sentences, no matter their semantic disparity, belong. In keeping with this being a trip to New York City, the found language here comes right off the streets of New York: Snet is a phone company whose advertisements blanket public space and the narrator is cautioned of depressed storm drains by road signs. What's more, the narrative "I' is hardly troubled or called into question—a supposed hallmark of Language poetry which Zawacki also exploits—as each paragraph relates to the fixed perspective of the first-person narrator.

On the whole, even if there is much temporal ambiguity—we come to find out that the trip to New York is actually two trips, for example—and even if certain moments shake the work's narrative continuity, these are never so pronounced so as to make one lose sight of what, in the end, the piece is about. Rupture, disjunction, radical incoherency, all key words often used in describing Language poetry and other experimental practices, are here significantly pared down.

If the influence of Language poetry is notably muted in this work, it's because Luoma was primarily writing for an emergent group of poets who were trying to find a foothold in the field of poetry. Breaking from the Language poets while remaining experimental is not a matter of any radical esthetic move on Luoma's part but rather a simple shift in terms of address. Luoma makes this clear in his piece "Illegal Park". When asked at a poetry reading if he considered himself a Language poet, he responds (or reports to us his response): "I say I can't be a language poet because I wasn't there then. I say language poets were some of my teachers and I was receptive to the work because I had no poetry background having just come from the

sciences. It wasn't all fluffy and stuff I say. I also say that I admire their community model but don't feel any compulsion to replicate their forms" (*Works & Days* 99). That Luoma sees himself belonging outside of the Language poetry tradition as a simple matter of time and place is an obvious, but significant point to be made (his way of embedding his own "I" through self-citation also curiously distances himself from his own comments). He suggests that poetic traditions originate within a specific social context and are thus often bound to defined periods and geographic locations. Moreover, what he recognizes and values in Language poetry is not their poetic forms but their social formations, which recalls Ron Silliman's claim that the coherence in Language poetry is to be found "not in the writing with its various methods and strategies, but *in the social composition of its audience*" ("Realism" 64).[40] Published by The Figures, a small publishing house with strong ties to Language poetry, Luoma's chapbook reflexively positions itself in relation to his predecessors all while addressing a new public of writers and readers. Whereas Luoma's take on the New Sentence recalls the dominant, though largely misunderstood, experimental tradition of Language poetry and evokes the publishing context of his own work, his use of gossip, in-jokes and group talk both imagines and realizes a new poetry public.[41]

The guiding metaphor of Luoma's poem is alluded to in the last paragraph of the work:

> Scott's voice was broadcasting on the phone when I got back from New York. Sometimes I crack jokes around Scott. His wife is very beautiful. He wants me to send him some slides.
>
> (26)

This is a suggestive metaphor for both the content and structure of the book. It is easy to imagine each paragraph as a slide and each slide as a discreet moment from the trip. More importantly, though, this is a slide show *for* Scott (which refers to Scott Bentley, another poet and friend of Luoma's, to whom the book is also dedicated). Since Scott was unable to join him on the trip, Luoma is ostensibly telling him what happened.[42] This framing device provides a specific social context for Luoma's anecdotes. It also accounts for the intimate details and gossip that give the work a sort of insider feel. Consider the following paragraph:

> I asked Cindy where all the power lines were. A stranger can point things out. You can't jump as high in New York, for example. She was sorry that she smelled so bad because of the shrink and the video producer. Actually, her skin smelled well good. I've admired

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[40] Silliman also insisted on the important of creating a public for Language poetry: "To a degree that may be unmatched by any other tendency in contemporary verse, these writers have consciously shared the responsibility of creating the institutions through which the work can be made public" ("Realism").

[41] The New Sentence is a term created by Ron Silliman to describe the style of many Language poets, himself included. It refers to these poets' use of the sentence, and by extension the paragraph, rather than the poetic line and the stanza, as the basic units of their poetry. The New Sentence functions by toying with the expectation of continuity provided by a series of successive sentences. The transition from one sentence to the next in this poetry tends to be unexpected: at times it is semantically fluent, at others disruptive. See Silliman's *The New Sentence*.

[42] Many of Luoma's poems are also *for* someone who couldn't be at the event he is describing. See, for example, "97.5 KPOI The Rock You Live On" (*Works & Days* 103-109).

her work for a long time. Bob with Chicken made me laugh more than Hollywood doing
Charles Nelson Riley.

(13)

Many things are obscure here. Not the least of which is the last sentence—"Bob with Chicken
made me laugh more than Hollywood doing Charles Nelson Riley." It's hard to know if this
relates to the previous sentence, and thus refers to Cindy's "work"—which also isn't specified—
or if there is some other suppressed context that would clarify this. The annotated poem does
indeed fill us in, letting us know that this is a "twisted 'in-joke' that only Douglass and Brian and
Chris and Dave would get" (128). In this companion piece, Luoma explains the joke, telling us
that Cindy is a painter who lives in Williamsburg and that she had made a funny painting of
Douglass as part of a series. That only a small group of people would get this in-joke naturally
excludes many readers from this sort of interpretative possibility. In other words, this paragraph
offers a very specific reading for only a small, determined group of friends.

In-jokes are only one way of expressing the social relations of this small group, as it is
only a subcategory of a larger discursive form central to the poem—namely, gossip.

Margot lives in San Francisco and she currently has a boyfriend. We went to the bar and
watched a band that Margot's friends were in. I liked Carla who sang some songs. Brian
had a crush on Rachel. Margot's old boyfriend Bob was there and Brian blurted out
something about Margot moving to New York because her boyfriend just got a job at
Columbia. I guess it didn't matter because Bob was dancing with a tall woman. When
Margot questioned Brian about her looks on the phone, Brian asked me. I said I thought
she was good looking. That was the wrong answer.

(13-14)

Crushes, jealously, social blunders, intimate personal opinions, he-said-she-said talk—under
what conditions does one typically encounter this type of discourse? In keeping with Luoma's
structural metaphor, this is precisely the kind of language one might use with friends as a sort of
running commentary while showing a series of slides. Except that as readers we don't really
know who Margot and Carla and Brian and Bob are, and, unlike in a novel where names can
become fully fleshed out characters, here they remain mere ciphers, some of which are repeated
in the work, while others are only given mention in this paragraph. This is pure gossip. And as
gossip is only meaningful when you know the people involved (or at least "know of" the people),
this language seems directed at someone else. We know that this poem was ostensibly written as
a sequence of metaphorical slides for the poet Scott Bentley. But who else is part of this poem's
intended public? And what is at stake in using gossip as a poetic mode?[43]

As Michael Warner argues, the concrete public of a text can never be fully determined by
any quantitative measure (see Introduction). But any and every move a writer enacts implies or
imagines a corresponding public for which that move would be meaningful, regardless of
whether this public becomes realized or not. Warner explains this clearly: "Every cultural form,

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[43] Luoma isn't the first to use gossip as a poetic mode. Frank O'Hara frequently used gossip in his poetry,
as in the poem "Adieu to Norma, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" where he writes, "and Allen is back
talking about god a lot/ and Peter is back not talking very much/ and Joe has a cold and is not coming to
Kenneth's/ although he is coming to lunch with Norman/ I suspect he is making a distinction/ well, who
isn't" (328). For more on O'Hara's use of gossip see Wolf 16-21.

be it a novel or an after-hours club or an academic lecture, indexes a virtual social world in ways that range from a repertoire of styles and speech genres to referential metaculture" (198). As we saw with Zawacki, the meaningfulness of his poetic gestures depends precisely on one's ability to recognize them as indexes of the "poetic." Abstracted from any identifiable social context, these gestures are read as an accumulation of devices—devices bound to widely accepted categories and conventions of poetic expression (with this latter term being a loosely defined category in its own right). The value and significance of Zawacki's poem thus relies on the institutions that establish these categories since Zawacki's sympathetic readers must in some way be connected to or instructed by these same mediating institutions. The meaningfulness of Luoma's gossip, on the other hand, depends more on the social relations of a tight knit circle of friends (and, we might add, this group's knowledge of the importance of coteries in the history of poetry). Although certain features of his work take up practices established by experimental writers, such as gossip in Frank O'Hara's and Joe Brainard's writing or the abrupt non-sequiturs between consecutive sentences in the work of many Language poets, Luoma's poem by no means depends on the shared recognition of these conventions for its success. Those who recognize the personal references and the in-jokes and who take interest in the gossip are the same people about whom and for whom the poem is ostensibly written. Whether belonging to this group or not, one cannot fail to notice the poem's restricted field of reference and its imagined public. (There are of course other overlapping publics imagined in this work, a point to which I will return shortly).

The proper names strewn throughout Luoma's piece—Scott, Douglass, Lee Ann, Jennifer, Steve, Monique, Cindy—constitute not only a group of friends, but a network of emerging and amateur poets, critics and painters. It's important to keep in mind the publishing context of this work. Printed in an edition of only 200 copies, the restricted public indicated by the style and content of the book is also reflected in its limited distribution range. As Warner reminds us, these material limits, along with internal ones presupposed by stylistic choices, constrain circulation. And in this case, given these limits and constraints, it's fair to call this group a coterie. This is easy enough to do, since we can identify a small group of like-minded friends whose work is often occasional and is created out of an impulse to share or dispute ideas with one another and to maintain or question certain social relations with each other.[44] In fact, as Reva Wolf argues in respect to poetry and art in the 1960s, gossip serves just this purpose: it's a form of bonding that can keep social groups together when their ties are threatened by external forces. It is also, and often quite intentionally, comprised of exclusionary tactics that prevent others from participating, or at the very least offers a highly stratified structure of participation.[45] Contrary to the common association of coteries with high society, as a social formation they are essential to writers who wish to enter the poetic field without participating in the established rituals of recognition, e.g. writing according to market trends, striving toward self-distinction with a competitively innovative personal style, submitting poetry to prize contests and recognized journals or publishing houses, attending a distinguished writing program, etc. This is not to say that the writers in Luoma's coterie did none of these things, only that this close group of poets sought to create their own sub-system of circulation and recognition.[46] Of course,

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[44] For more on poetry and coteries, see Shaw. My argument here is greatly indebted to Shaw's study.

[45] See Wolf 15. This argument has its origin in Max Gluckman's seminal "Gossip and Scandal".

[46] Given that this particular group held no institutional power and did not occupy a dominant position in its field at the time of the book's publication, it would be a mistake to consider this coterie elitist. For a reading of the coterie as an elite phenomenon in a modernist context, see Rainey 146-168.

belonging to a coterie itself may also constitute an important ritual of recognition—a point surely not lost on this particular group—, but the rules of coterie formation remain less apparent than the other established means of poetic legitimatization.

This is where the names and social relations mentioned in the poem take on greater significance. As previously mentioned, Scott is Scott Bentley, poet and founder of the little magazine *Letterbox*, to which Luoma and many of the poets mentioned in the poem regularly contributed. Lee Ann is Lee Ann Brown. She is a poet and the editor and founder of Tender Buttons Press. Jennifer is Jennifer Moxley, a poet whose small-circulation, stable-bound magazine *The Impercipient* was an important outlet for this group of friends and a common point of reference for Luoma.[47] Douglass is Douglass Rothschild, whose first chapbook was published three years after *My Trip to New York City* by Situation Press in an edition of 500. Another important figure is Steve. Steve is Steve Evans, a poetry critic and English professor at the University of Maine whose authority is alluded to when the narrator states, "I want to listen when Steve talks. Even Douglass listens to Steve" and also at the end of the piece when he mentions, "In Providence I read the Frank O'Hara poem that Helena read me when we got married. Steve knows the title"(16, 24). As a critical voice, Steve is in many ways the spokesperson for this coterie. In an article written in 2003 he attempts to make a case for a post-Language avant-garde poetry by assessing new poetic practices in the work of six writers, all of whom he counts as friends, including Bill Luoma, Lee Ann Brown, and Jennifer Moxley ("The American Avant-Garde after 1989"). There are also various amateur painters and artists mentioned throughout Luoma's piece such as Monique Van Gerderen.

This coordinated network of poets, critics and painters, all of whom have relations of varying proximity to small presses, poetry magazines, reviews, galleries and academic institutions provides a sort of map of this poetry's conditions of possibility. Together, they create a multi-contextual space through which their writing can circulate, and, through repeated circulation, this group can begin to imagine itself as a self-contained public. But it's important to stress that "My Trip to New York City" isn't written only *for* this context, as if this were preexisting, but rather the poem helps enable it by designating it as its addressee. Considering the year of its publication, it's true that Lee Ann Brown had already established her press a few years prior to this book's publication and Moxley's and Bentley's respective magazines had started publication two years prior in 1992. But by 1994 these poets still belonged to an emergent group: Scott Bentley published his first book-length work the same year with O Books; Lee Ann Brown's first book-length work *Polyverse* was published in 1995 by Sun and Moon Press; Jennifer Moxley's, *Imaginative Verses*, was published by Lee Ann Brown's press Tender Buttons, in 1996; Steve Evans assumed his academic position only in 2000 and wrote the previously mentioned article in 2003.[48] Bill Luoma himself didn't publish his first full-length collection, in which *My Trip to New York City* is included, until 1996.

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[47] As one of the major contexts of Luoma's collection *Works & Days*, it is interesting to contrast Moxley's *The Impercipient* with *1913: Journal of Forms*. Whereas *1913* is a big endeavor with interns and a board and a long and eclectic list of contributors, *The Impercipient* was run by Moxley herself, printed cheaply and had an extremely small distribution range. It never appealed to the authority of established poets by asking for their contributions but rather printed only Moxley's close friends who were all emerging poets at the time. The consequences of such editorial strategies will be taken up in the next chapter.

[48] This delay of recognition is even more marked for others mentioned in the book. Douglas Rothschild, for example, didn't publish his first book-length work until 2009.

Luoma's work, then, both represents and enables this social base of writers by imagining it as the parameters of its own space of circulation. To be sure, this doesn't mean his work won't circulate outside its intended field of reference. No cultural work can ever fully determine its public in advance. As Warner makes clear, a public by definition is always in excess of its known social base. This means that "a public must be more than a list of one's friends. It must include strangers" (74). This is because a public's existence is contingent solely upon the participation or uptake of social agents. And any social agent can potentially become part of a work's public.

This is what happens when Luoma's coterie poem elicits the interest of the French poet Emmanuel Hocquard. As a prominent poet, translator and editor, Hocquard is largely responsible for the growing interest in American poetry in France. His strong interest in American poetry helps explain how he could come to discover a relatively obscure work published primarily for a small circle of friends in the United States. But this isn't as fortuitous as it may seem. Embedded within the poem's coterie public is another public bound to a whole different set of concerns. These are related to the poem's negative space—that's to say, not what the poem says or does, but what it withholds and refuses to do. And what this poem clearly does not do is employ those poetic devices recognized by established poetic institutions. In fact, one might say that rather than appropriating a slew of poetic devices, as Zawacki does in "Georgia", Luoma flatly negates them. Of course to write without style is itself a demonstration of style, and Luoma's use of gossip and the structure of the New Sentence derives in part from the New York School (gossip) and the Language poets (New Sentence). But the fact remains that, seeking to escape the "poetic"—understood here as a quality abstracted from its social significance—Luoma turns to those modes and strategies that are direct—gossip, casual remarks, frank opinions—all while complicating their immediacy with irregular sequencing on the level of the sentence. Due to the weight of tradition, any blatant absence of conventional devices, which are themselves constantly in flux, signals a practice of restraint and willful opposition. It is this absence of the "poetic" that must have interested Emmanuel Hocquard.

Since the 1970s Hocquard and other French writers of his generation such as Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach have sought to negate the poetic by advancing a practice of literalism. Against metaphor, analogy and other forms of poetic connotation, these writers have relied on a diverse set of strategies in order to eschew the traditions and expressive possibilities with which these forms are closely associated. Rosmarie Waldrop has shown how Royet-Journoud strives to eliminate from his texts metaphor, assonance, and alliteration "in order to get down to a flat, literal language" (Waldrop *Dissonance*, 107). Hocquard further reinforces this point by soliciting a shift in reading, suggesting that if his reader were to view his texts as mere copies—"All my books are to be read as copies. I am the copier of my books"(*Ma haie* 98)—she wouldn't find metaphors where none exist.

The appeal of Luoma's text to Hocquard, then, is clear. But when Hocquard organized a collective translation of Luoma's poem, he was faced with the same challenge that any 'outsider' has when confronting this work: namely, the countless allusions, in-jokes, gossip and group references. As previously mentioned, Hocquard and the other translators approached this problem by sending Luoma a list of questions to which he duly responded (albeit often with tongue-in-cheek). Luoma then compiled his list of 101 responses to create a new serial poem— "The Annotated My Trip to NYC"—which he dedicated to "the French who asked me 100 questions about the little book" (123. Luoma rounded the number down). Each numbered

paragraph provides a response to the translators' corresponding question. In this piece, however, the questions are withheld.

Luoma prefaced his list of responses with a letter to his translators. A modified version of this is reproduced at the beginning of the annotated poem. After speaking to the difficulty of understanding the many in-jokes and specific allusions, Luoma states: "Please don't be overly swayed by my responses. Consider that writers tend to say misleading or unhelpful things about their own work […] I believe you will have to lie to the French reader when you translate; that is, please be unfaithful to my text and make the French have multiple meanings. Make it yours. It is the reader who knows nothing of the glee club whom you must please" (125). This prefatory letter demonstrates Luoma's attitude toward the translation of his poem. Since the strategies and objectives of the original are bound to the social group—the glee club—to which it is addressed, there is little he can offer by way of help to his French translators. His role as "annotator", then, is an ambiguous one. He speaks with authority as to the poem's initial context all while remaining deeply skeptical about its meaning or purpose in its future French setting. On the whole, when read as an annotation, this poem shines no more than a fitful light on the obscure references and intimate details of "My Trip to New York City". At times the narrator explains much more than required, offering far too many interpretative paths; at others he says far too little, merely repeating the original poem. And sometimes, even when he explains too much, it turns out he's said very little of importance:

> #53: level cut: a hitting term in baseball. there are three basic types of swings, or 'cuts.' uppercut, level, & down. when you uppercut you hit fly balls and home runs. for big guys. level you hit line drives, for regular guys. down you make ground balls, for fast guys. however there are many theories of hitting and I have given you a false sense because every hitter must employ variations on every type of swing. I have also imparted to you the notion that hitting can be described.
>
> (134)

Here Luoma sketches a schema then, as though defeated by the task, quickly disavows it. This sense of defeatism runs through the annotations, deflating whatever aura of authority a given annotation may evince at first glance.[49]

Whether in the spirit of defeatism, sincerity or play, Luoma often relies on terse explanations by way of repetition in his annotations. This creates many ironic tautologies throughout the annotated poem (another feature Hocquard is particularly fond of).[50] Consider the following from the first poem:

> Brian has three sisters, Ann, Margot, and Alison. They are always on the phone and Brian calls Ali honey. I think he'll probably get married.
>
> (13)

Here's the annotation:

> #21 married: one day Brian will get married.

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[49] The French translation of this annotation opens Hocquard's *Ma haie*. One can imagine Hocquard appreciating this annotation on two levels: first, for the specificity of the language game it instantiates, and second, for the distance created by Luoma's disavowing its explanatory force. Hocquard also briefly discusses the collective translation of this piece (*Ma haie* 522-523).

[50] See his *Un test de solitude*.

The shift from "They are always on the phone and Brian calls Ali honey" to "I think he'll probably get married" is one of those inconspicuous transitions that only becomes jarring when one takes account of the small but significant absence of some kind of temporal clause, such as "one day" or "in ten years" between the two sentences. It's easy to imagine the scrupulous French translators not wanting to miss anything and wondering if "married" is used figuratively or idiomatically. No, Luoma reassures them, "married [means] one day Brian will get married." There are many of these responses in the annotated poem, several of which consist of a concise repetition, such as that of #23: "Being tall: she is very tall" (129).

Taken together these responses function as a deliberate reversal of some common assumptions of literary translation, especially as they relate to poetry. Indeed, the multiplicity of meaning springing from the interplay of the linguistic sign's various features—visual, phonic, grammatical, semantic, etc.—is often cited by theorists and translators alike as the principle challenge of translating poetry. "The textures of a language, its musicality, its own specific tradition of forms and meters and imagery, the intrinsic modalities and characteristic linguistic structures that make it possible to express certain concepts, emotions, and responses in a specific manner but not in another—all of these inhere so profoundly in a poem that its translation into another language appears to be an act of rash bravado verging on the foolhardy" (Grossman 94). Edith Grossman, a prominent translator of both prose and poetry, is expressing a widespread belief here, one that depends on a certain tradition of poetry and poetics. Luoma is clearly working outside of this tradition, and so the problems his translators face is of an entirely different sort. What's more, Luoma significantly exacerbates these problems by providing misleading information. For instance, although he encourages his translators to "make the French have multiple meanings," as an annotator he often does just the opposite by stripping the poem of any figurative or connotative dimension, thereby restricting its meaning. The oft-cited difficulty of translating poetry's polysemy is therefore not taken here as the translator's dilemma but as her false assumption. If Zawacki uses the circumstances of translation to make his poem "mean more," Luoma responds to the same circumstances by countering poetic abstraction and polysemy with direct referential meaning, as in annotation #22, which informs us that "park" refers to "central park" (129).

The significance of "The Annotated My Trip to NYC" lies, then, in the ways in which it fails as an annotation. For if Luoma's responses serve a precise function for his French translators, how are they to be read when framed as a poem for English readers? Most American readers don't need to know that *ump* means *umpire* or that *shrink* means *psychoanalyst*. Motivating such responses are the questions and misunderstandings of the French translators. In other words, the annotated poem documents the reading habits of the French translators by highlighting the limits of their understanding. Luoma capitalizes on this context to create a poem that moves between frank literal statements and other tangential narrative developments, all written with the same sprezzatura that characterizes "My Trip to New York City".

Luoma's annotated poem, however, is no postmodern pastiche of annotated works. The poem doesn't imitate a given style nor does it borrow or abstract its form from another discourse genre, as, say, the epistolary novel does with correspondence. In fact, Luoma's piece wasn't written as a poem at all. It was only framed as such subsequently. Removing these responses from their initial social context and presenting them as a poem has many interpretative consequences. On one level, as a record of the social process of translation, the trivial details,

false steps and meticulous work of translation are made visible in the poem. In this way, Luoma's poem is a partial archive of the one thing that often escapes theoretical discussions of translation: the plain fact and history of the translator's painstaking labor. Like the poem itself, this is at times intellectually engaging, surprising, even funny, and at others profoundly trivial and boring. Another consequence of this procedure is that it brings two cultural contexts together and therefore causes two distinct publics to overlap. Published as a poem in English by a small press, its American readers will take themselves as the public of the work—and not without reason—all while continuing to recognize this phantom French public inscribed in the text itself. In this respect, Luoma's annotated poem complements Charles Bernstein's 1993 poem "A Test of Poetry." In this poem, Bernstein arranges in lineated verse the questions his translator, Ziquing Zhang, posed when translating poems from Bernstein's *Rough Trades* and *The Sophist* into Chinese. Bernstein also lifted this piece from personal correspondence, but as opposed to Luoma, he withholds his responses, so that we only have the voice of his translator:

> What do you mean by *rashes of ash*? Is *industry*
> Systematic work, assiduous activity, or ownership
> Of factories? Is *ripple* agitate lightly? Are
> We *tossed in tune* when we write poems? And
> What or who *emboss with gloss insignias of air*?
>
> (*My Way* 52)

Perhaps we're witnessing a burgeoning genre where the circulation of one's own poems are documented and reimagined through the reading habits of others. Similar to other poetic experiments in translation and multi-lingual writing, this kind of writing arises from the increased contact and collision of various cultures in a globalized world, and offers a critical response to the impact of the circulation of texts on contemporary poetry. But unlike Bernstein's poem, Luoma's annotations take us back into the social world of his circle of friends. And although it is not a coterie poem per se, it specifically addresses the intended limits of Luoma's social poetic practice. These limits—we can call them limits of address—are brilliantly illustrated, in negative as it were, by the translators' unstated questions that structure and motivate the annotated poem.

Just as "My Trip to New York City" attempts to document and enable the activity of a given group of poets by designating and creating a space of circulation for them outside the framework of larger institutions (major publishing houses, wide-circulation journals, academia, etc.), "The Annotated My Trip to NYC" documents and interrogates the stakes of circulation once it becomes mediated by these same institutions. For, as I've argued, translation plays an increasingly significant role in the circulation of poetry. By addressing the circumstances of his own poetry, Luoma takes stock of poetry's conditions of possibility. In so doing, he points toward new areas of poetic production, namely those that reflexively engage with poetry's circulation. Thus, whereas Zawacki approaches translation as a writing workshop for refining formal linguistic matters, Luoma approaches it as a set of social conditions with its own assumptions, practices and consequences, all of which become new matter for poetry.

Although Zawacki and Luoma both produce different or new poems as a result of translation, the concerns of each remain fundamentally the same. Zawacki's interest in expressing ontological experience with a virtuoso poetic style situates his poem "Georgia" at the

intersections of various discourses (Ellipticism), just as its initial publication context as a prize-winner of a large and eclectic journal invites a certain kind of reading and circulation where matters of style and individual talent are duly recognized by both knowing and curious readers alike. The circumstances surrounding the translation of "Georgia" allow Zawacki to draw on French in order to accentuate his initial stylistic objectives and concerns. For Zawacki, there was always just a single poem, such that whether in French or a revised English, "Georgia" was written in order to transcend its various contexts, even if it drew on these same contexts in its own development or refinement. Luoma's engagement with documenting the activity of his own social group of writer and artist friends situates his poem more within the framework of poetic praxis rather than poetic style. The discourses and institutions with which his poem intersects are those he attempts to create and designate for it. If Luoma is influenced by O'Hara's use of gossip or by Silliman's New Sentence, it is not because he wishes to distinguish his writing by appealing to these well-known figures, but because he believes these methods may be best suited for his purpose of addressing and enabling a writing community, an achievement for which both O'Hara and Silliman are widely recognized. If for Luoma poetry must address its circumstances, then the translation of his "My Trip to New York City" is nothing but another occasion to document and question in the form of a new poem. Addressing this new set of circumstances, however, calls for new methods. For this reason, even though Luoma's style and overall objective may remain the same in both pieces, he changes from using gossip and a "New Sentence" structure to found language (albeit his own) and the list form. Zawacki's "Georgia" and Luoma's "My Trip to New York City" and "The Annotated My Trip to NYC" thus reflect in contrasting ways their imagined publics and the scene of their circulation. But whereas Zawacki's poetry does this by transcending its social circumstances, Luoma's does it by confronting them head-on.

Chapter 2: Periodicals
Creating New Poetry Publics: Revue de Littérature Générale *and* Chain

The trajectory of the poems from the previous chapter—to France and back to the United States—is an increasingly common one for contemporary poetry. But the form and means of travel of those particular works by Zawacki and Luoma—published as chapbooks and in full-length collections—is less so. Translation happens in a variety of media, but the primary vehicle of exchange between French and American poets is not the book, chap or otherwise, but the periodical. It is by means of the periodical that translated and original poetry circulates between France and the United States. As a nodal point in the network of poetic activity, the periodical, whether in the form of the little magazine in the United States or of *la revue* in France, serves many enabling functions. In addition to providing an outlet for emerging writers and connecting literary communities, it also helps shape a flexible poetic discourse and, in so doing, imagines a public—or a set of competing publics—for poetry. This is particularly true in the Franco-American context in question.

But although the periodical has enabled a lively exchange between French and American poetry, the way poetry is trafficked back and forth between the two countries follows an increasingly rigid pattern. Special issues are often organized by one of a handful of guest-editors; individual works are presented with little cultural context; and although the works are often ably translated in linguistic terms, the significance of formal decisions is rarely addressed in translation. This results in a fixed and biased selection of writers whose work is stripped of its context and reduced to a set of formal procedures.

There are, though, exceptions to this pattern. Pierre Alferi's and Olivier Cadiot's *Revue de littérature générale* (1995-1996) in France and Juliana Spahr's and Jena Osman's *Chain* (1994-2006)[51] in the United States demonstrate an international scope all while remaining committed to local matters within their respective literary fields. This is because both *RLG* and *Chain* are defined against larger institutional practices in their respective countries. Whereas *RLG* counters, on a much smaller scale, the cultural policies and art administration of its own time, *Chain* responds to its host institution—the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo—and its use of the listserv. *RLG* carries this out by imagining a complex relation between a whole host of disciplines and practices. This gives rise to a lively and shifting context for poetry, one that forces readers to think about it alongside and against the work of composers, painters, land and visual artists, naturalists, philosophers, linguists, historians and novelists, with all the various methods of transcription and organization of information each employs in its respective field forming a backdrop for and impetus to poetic writing.

Chain also attempts to create a new context for poetry but takes a different tack. Reacting against established hierarchies in the poetic field, *Chain* begins by advancing an "anti-editorial" form of collecting poetry via a self-propagating, lateral moving system modeled on the chain letter. It also strives to give poetry a political valence by granting it new social functions, such as

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[51] Although *Chain* as a poetry periodical came to an end in 2006, a closely related project, called *Chain Link,* was established shortly thereafter and continues publish new material to this day.

documenting and reporting facts and establishing new networks of private and public communication. By interrogating and changing the way poetry circulates between different domestic and international constituencies, *RLG* and *Chain* call into question the patterns of exchange mediating the production and reception of contemporary poetry in an international context.

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Despite their differences, the American little magazine and the French *revue* have been crucial in defining the conditions of poetic possibility in each country. In France, this began in the late 19th century with the Symbolists and in the United States at the turn of the century with emblematic modernists magazines such as *The Dial* and *The Little Review*.[52] Since then, the role of the poetry magazine has been as varied and contradictory as the guises under which it has appeared. Indeed, the difference between little magazines, commercial magazines, reviews, journals and periodicals that go by other names is not always clear-cut.[53] To further complicate matters, poetry cannot always be easily isolated from other forms of writing, especially in France where distinctions between poetry and prose have been repeatedly undermined by conceptions such as *textualité* and *écriture*. This often makes distinguishing between a poetry review, a literary review or even a critical journal a difficult process. For instance, no one would question that *L'éphémère* (1966-1973) is best understood as a poetry review. But what about *Tel Quel* (1960-1982)? Although it may very well be one of the most important reviews *for* French poetry in the second half of the twentieth century, even if it serves more as a counter-model to other forms of writing, it is not properly speaking a *poetry review*, nor would anyone consider it as such. In spite of these difficulties, and in spite of a shifting set of historical variables, one can nevertheless identify several enabling functions of the periodical—specifically the poetry review but also those which can't be properly categorized as such but which contributed to the field of poetry no less. It is important to bear in mind that the functions I'm going to discuss are not consistently or even ever fully exploited by individual periodicals. Rather, they represent a set of possible uses, historically defined but not always actualized.

Many writers and critics have emphasized the importance of the periodical on account of its serving as an inexpensive outlet for emerging writers and as a community-building tool. These functions are undoubtedly central to the periodical's usefulness for writers. But little attention has been given to another, no less significant, purpose of the periodical. This consists of its ability to create a self-reflexive and elastic discourse for poetry and, consequently, to imagine a context and public for poetry's reception and appreciation.

Indeed, periodicals create the very conditions by which poetry can be read, debated, understood or misunderstood. By presenting poetry alongside other genres, by commenting on what it does or fails to do, by insisting on its marginal status or its political potential, periodicals offer useful meta-pragmatic qualifications. In other words, they produce a discursive field with coordinated points of reference, sets of qualifying terms and a whole array of self-reflexive, socially charged positions and stances one can take toward any given work of poetry, even toward any given utterance or critique taken up within its field. For example, one could glean the

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[52] On Symbolist reviews see Cornell 90-101. On *The Dial* and *The Little Review*, see Golding "*The Dial, The Little Review* and the Dialogics of Modernism." See also Rainey 77-107.

[53] It bears mentioning that the 'little' in 'little magazine' traditionally refers not to its size but to its distribution, especially as compared to mass-market magazines.

stakes of a politically engaged literary practice from the fierce debates between *Tel Quel* and *Change* in the 1970s, and, drawing on the terms and analyses offered in their respective attacks, one could thus "read poetry" in relation to such things as class struggle, materialism, art activism or political posturing. One could also identify a text as "avant-garde", "illisible" or "petit-bourgeois", since these categories were regularly used to describe various literary works and as such constituted a sort of descriptive economy for readers. Through debates such as these, not only are readers provided with a differential taxonomy of descriptive terms, they are also offered a stratified space of social positions linked to the very use of these terms. In this way, the use of a given term to describe writing—"petit-bourgeois", for example—simultaneously situates the text *and* the speaker or writer who uses this term.[54]

The discursive field projected by the periodical presupposes a public for whom this writing and activity would be meaningful. In fact, periodicals fully depend on this public, whether it actually exists or not. As Warner makes clear, any form of discourse meant to circulate among strangers is enabled and characterized by the public it imagines.[55] Seen thus, periodicals are fundamental in imagining a public for poetry, and, consequently, they create the context and frames of reference necessary not only for its reception but for its very existence and circulation. This can be explained by the fact that periodicals—unlike books—rarely attempt in principal to be an end in themselves. Through book reviews, notices of recent or future publications, mention of publishing houses and other journals, as well as conference or reading reports, periodicals show where poetry is taking place outside of its own pages, and, in so doing, imagine a multi-contextual space—which is to say a public—where poetry circulates. As Warner explains: "No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Not texts themselves create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public"(90). No single periodical, then, creates a public on its own. Rather, a network of periodicals connecting people, social spaces, institutions and texts gives rise to a self-reflexive public. What is known now as Language poetry can be traced to this sort of multi-contextual field mediated by a nexus of magazines, which includes *Tottel's*, *Hills*, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, *A Hundred Posters*, *This*, *Roof*, *The Difficulties*, *Poetics Journal*, *Temblor*, *Lucy*, *Jimmy's House of 'K'*, *Ottotole*, *Miam*, *Qu*, *Joglars*, *Paper Air* (Dworkin "Hyperamensia"). These in turn were tied to presses such as The Figures, Tuumba, This Press and Sun & Moon Press and social events such as Bob Perelman's Talk Series in San Francisco and Ear Inn Reading Series foundedy by Ted Greenwald and Charles Bernstein in New York.

This spatial network connected by means of the periodical depends on an indispensable temporal component. Warner's mention of time regarding publics—specifically, that it's the concatenation of texts through time that constitutes a public—is of utmost importance here. As he makes clear, the regularity of circulation helps define a public by punctuating the flow of discourse. In this way, a given discourse can be tracked, followed, anticipated, and seen to

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[54] This is what Michael Silverstein calls the "register effect": "A word used in a certain descriptive way categorizes or classifies both things-in-the-denotable-world (whether 'real' or fictive/imagined)" by indexing "a schema of *qualia*. But additionally, the particular differential application of the word at the same time reveals—it points to, or indexes—the social identity, the category of person, who would stereotypically invoke such a use of the word" (349).

[55] See Introduction, iv-vi and chapter 1, 16.

evolve and change under identifiable sites of pressure or discreet moments in time. Thus, "the punctual time of circulation is crucial to the sense that discussion is currently unfolding in a sphere of activity" (96). This is one of the periodical's defining traits and what distinguishes it from other non-serialized forms of literary production. Perhaps no one puts it better than Steve Evans, the so-called "spoke person" for Bill Luoma's coterie.[56] In a piece for the poetry journal *The Poker*, Evans reflects on the impossibility of giving an exhaustive account of both the poetic and political events that had transpired since the journal's previous issue. He confesses that a quick and partial treatment is all he can offer, and he sees this not as a shortcoming of the journal's format but as its advantage over other forms of publication: "For while books and anthologies seek to arrest time—or better, to abolish one temporal register (the non-literary quotidian) so that another, textually immanent one, can be inaugurated—journals take time as their medium, unfolding within it episodically and creating thereby a kind of percussive temporality consisting of beat (new issue) and interval (the time between)"("Field Notes" 66). Warner expresses a similar idea: "The temporality of circulation is not continuous or indefinite; it is punctual. There are distinct moments and rhythms, from which distance in time can be measured" (95).

Savvy poets and editors repeatedly exploit this quality of the periodical. As Ron Loewinsohn remarks recalling his own involvement with many post-war periodicals: "More important than the quality of [magazines'] contents was the fact of their abundance and speed. Having them, we could see what we were doing, as it came, hot off the griddle. We could get instant response to what we'd written last week, & we could respond instantly to what the guy across town or across the country had written last week" (qtd. in Clay 14). In this way, poetry can be seen as participating in a sphere of activity where the interventions of individuals or groups are recorded in relation to time and linked to a larger network of writers, institutions and literary activity. Indeed, literary debates and feuds, the formation and dissolution of alliances, all take place principally in the pages of periodicals. One witnessed an endless series of attacks and counter-attacks between *Tel Quel* and *Change* staged at increasingly shorter intervals as their debate became more and more heated after 1968. In addition to using the space of their own reviews, Philippe Sollers and Jean-Pierre Faye granted interviews or wrote responses in various outlets of the press, with *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *La Quinzaine littéraire* and *L'Express* all taking part in the debate. *Tel Quel*'s fervid embrace of Maoism—given full expression in its *Le Bulletin du Mouvement juin 71*—led to its eventual split from the Parti Communiste de France all while eliciting the support of other literary reviews such as *Promesse*, *Mantéia* and *TXT*. Meanwhile, alliances formed between the literary reviews *Change* and *Action Poétique* and reviews or dailies associated with the PCF such as *La Nouvelle Critique*, *France-Nouvelle*, *L'Humanité*, *Les Lettres Françaises*. The poetic field is shaped and structured through such interventions and position taking. The pattern of response and counter-response, the sense of simultaneity and discord between debates and events at once political, social and literary, the incessant questioning of poetry's purpose and importance amid and in relation to such matters— all of this gives poetry a defined place and public, a feat made possible by the temporal "beat" of periodical publishing. Thus, following periodicals as they unfold in time amounts to being in the know—and it is this very possibility that gives rise to a public.[57]

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[56] See chapter 1.

[57] Cid Corman demonstrates an acute awareness of the importance of publication pace for creating and maintaining a public: "The speed […] of a quarterly—of transferring writing to the page to the reader— while not that of a newspaper or weekly—is ideal. The material is taken out of the merely passing or

These are the theoretical stakes of periodical publication. The ability of a periodical to create a flexible discourse and a public is essential for the very existence and circulation of poetry. This is in no way meant to suggest that this ability is always exploited. Periodicals surely fail to fulfill this purpose just as much, if not more, than they succeed. Besides, according to Michael Anania, "each year hundreds of magazines are born and die with one or two issues that never find their way onto lists or into copyright registry" (10). Nor do I wish to imply that the material and social conditions of periodicals remain the same over time. Throughout the twentieth century and depending on the type of periodical, poetry shifted between being the focus of a magazine to being a more minor feature in a general review. According to Jeffrey J. Williams, what he calls the "little magazine" (by which he is actually referring to what is generally understood as the "academic quarterlies" such as *Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Sewanee Review* and *Hudson Review*) gave way in the mid-century to two different type of journals, the "theory journal" and the "creative writing journal", "which basically split the functions that little magazines like *Kenyon* and *Partisan* performed, the former taking the critical side and grafting it to the platform of the scholarly journal, and the latter taking fiction and poetry and separating them out in a primarily literary magazine." What's more, these new journals "paralleled a rising division in literature departments, as creative writing was taught progressively more by a separate faculty and criticism became the domain of theorists" (404).

Alan Golding also speaks of a shift in circumstances, but in entirely different terms. For Golding, the same university-sponsored magazines to which Williams refers are not supplanted by something new but rather imitated and expanded upon: "Since this explosion of magazine publishing began in the 1960s, and since many more universities began to sponsor literary magazines, the formerly sharp lines between academic quarterlies and little magazines can no longer be clearly drawn. In particular, it has become much more difficult to locate any one magazine or group of magazines at the center of American literary culture. That culture no longer has a center" (*From Outlaw to Classic* 114). The biggest shift, though, may be one of numbers. When different types of periodicals are considered together, there was unmistakably a considerable increase in production. Whereas in 1952 there were 182 magazines, by 1987 there were 5,000. The reasons for this are many. As Anania states, "an explosion in little-magazine publication occurred in the late sixties and continues. It is supported in part by the availability of grants—from CCLM, state arts councils, and the National Endowment for the Arts—but depends, as well, on a growing population of writers and on access to various kinds of printing technology" (10). Despite theses changes, though, the periodical remained the principal home for poetry throughout the twentieth century.

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"I have always felt that writers everywhere should be aware of and stimulated by each other— beyond camps. And beyond special issues of little mags…As if French poetry or that of any other country were a package and had to be treated as such—and then forgotten.
—Cid Corman (qtd. in Bennett 79)

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fashionable and given a larger hold—while at the same time not holding up work for a year or years—as is the case with book publication generally." Not so routine to become trivial nor so irregular to become irrelevant, the quarterly, according to Corman, offers a forum for poetry and poetics where the points of discussion and debate can be willfully taken up, argued in favor of or challenged by the issue's public.

In addition to the theoretical stakes outlined above, the periodical has also served as the primary channel between French and American poetry. Beginning with the rise in art periodicals in New York and Paris at the turn of the century and continuing with web publications today, the exchange has remained vibrant and active. This is due in part to the role played by important intermediaries—foreign correspondents, *passeurs*, editors, publishers, organizers of conferences and readings series, etc. (Ezra Pound, Valery Larbaud, Jean Catel and Philippe Soupault were among the most prominent of these during the first half of the twentieth century.[58] Claude Royet-Journoud, Emmanuel Hocquard, Juliette Valéry in France and Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, Norma Cole and Cole Swensen in the United States have done much to expand the networks of this exchange since then). A host of periodicals have also played a significant role in this exchange, including, to name just a few of the more prominent ones, *Locus Solus*, *Siècle à Mains*, *Invisible City*, *Sulfur*, *in'hui*, *oblek*, *Avec*, *Java*, *If* and *Action Poétique*.[59] But although the editorial strategies of these periodicals differ to some extent, most of the exchanges between French and American poetry have been defined by a strong trend. Namely, French and American poetry continues to be shipped in seemingly prepared packages.

With few notable exceptions, poetry is trafficked back and forth between these two countries by means of special issues, many of which are often overseen by guest editors. To a great extent, this was always the case in periodical publication. *Fontaine* put out an American issue in 1943 (*"Écrivains & Poètes des États-Unis"*) as did *Cahiers du Sud* in 1956 (*"Jeune poésie américaine"*). Maurice Nadeau's *Les Lettres Nouvelles* had a special feature on the Beats in 1960, introduced "Cinq poètes amércains" in 1968, and then in 1970-71 published the wide-ranging "41 poètes américains d'aujourd'hui"(these last two were both guest edited by Serge Fauchereau whose *Lecture de la Poésie Américaine* was to have a big impact on writers interested in the American scene). In the United States, *Poetry* devoted a special issue to France in 1945 and then again in 1952 (edited by Wallace Fowlie), as did *View* in 1946, *The Sixties* in 1961 and *Tri-Quarterley* in 1965. As can be expected, some editors refused this practice altogether, as the above quote by Cid Corman makes clear. But more commonly French and American poetry continued to be shipped in packages. In France, these often appeared in the form of book anthologies, from Jacques Roubaud's and Michel Deguy's influential *Vingt poètes américains* (Gallimard, 1968) to Emmanuel Hocquard's and Claude Royet-Journoud's *21+1 Poètes américains d'aujourd'hui* (1986) and subsequent *49+1 Nouveaux poètes américains* (1991).[60] In the United States, various journals have continued to devote special issues to French poetry. Some of the more significant contributions among these include *Tyuonyi* ("Violence of the White Page: Contemporary French Poetry"(no.9/10, 1991)), *Raddle Moon* ("Twenty-Two New (to North America) French Poets"(no.16, 1997), *The Germ* ("Le Germe"(no.5, 2001)*, and Aufgabe* ("Small Press Publications from France"(no.1, 2001) and "French Poetry"(no. 10, 2011)).[61]

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[58] Pound surveyed the French scene for *The Little Review* (1914-1929) and *The Dial* (1916-1929); Larbaud contributed articles to the *Revue de France* ("Renaissance de la poésie américaine") among others; Catel wrote *chroniques* on American poetry for *Les Marges* and *Mercure de France* and Soupault served as a correspondent for *Paris-Soir*. Soupault also contributed an article entitled "La nouvelle littérature américaine" to *Europe* in 1934.

[59] This is amply documented by Bennett and Mousli.

[60] This latter volume had its origin in an issue of *Action Poétique*.

[61] *Raddle Moon* is technically a Canadian magazine but many of its poets are from the United States.

What's more, many recent serial publications in the form of chapbooks or web publishing have not only given pride of place to this Franco-American exchange of poetry but even made it their exclusive focus. The most prominent examples are Juliette Valéry's Format Américain, Cole Swensen's READ and the Franco-American organization Double Change. The first was founded in 1993 as a branch of Emmanuel Hocquard's Un Bureau sur l'Atlantique and deems itself "an anthology in progress" devoted exclusively to American poetry in French translation. Swensen's READ stems from a weeklong translation workshop held annually at Reid Hall in Montparnasse in Paris. French poets are paired with American poets and together they translate each other's work. The results of the English translations were first published in *1913: A Journal of Forms* (no. 2, 2005)—the same periodical in which Zawacki's "Georgia" first appeared—and those of the French translations in *Action Poétique* (no. 186, 2005). Since then, the results have been published independently by 1913 press in a journal entitled *READ*. Double-Change began as non-profit organization with similar ambitions in 2000. It hosts regular readings of American poets in Paris (most of which are then archived on its webpage) and puts out an irregular web journal of French and American poetry.

To be sure, these periodicals and organizations offer countless cultural benefits, not least by defying a narrow nationalism. But as the French and American poets become increasingly packaged and shipped like traveling museum shows and institutions are created in their sole honor, significant matters become obscured by these patterns of exchange. For one, the sample of poets from each respective country is inevitably skewed toward those who speak the other country's language or participate actively in its culture (the relative popularity in France in experimental circles of John Ashbery, Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, Cole Swensen, Norma Cole and Peter Gizzi attests to this fact). More importantly, admirable as these efforts are for creating an international context for this poetry, what gets lost are the conditions in which and against which this writing emerges, conditions essential for assessing the relative value of esthetic choices. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, as texts circulate "without their context" into a new field of reception much confusion may arise: "Le fait que les textes circulent sans leur context, qu'ils n'emportent pas avec eux le champ de production […] dont ils sont le produit et que les récepteurs, étant eux-mêmes insérés dans un champ de production différent, les réinterprètent en fonction de la structure du champ de réception, est générateur de formidables malentendus" ("Les conditions sociales" 4). The consequences and implications of, say, writing a sonnet in French in the 1990s are not the same as one written by an American poet at the same point in time. Likewise, the notion of lyric, adamantly rejected by many French and American poets of the same generation, has a different meaning and history in each country. Thus the so-called anti-lyric poetry of the Language poets differs greatly from that of their French contemporaries (Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Anne-Marie Albiach, etc.) despite their similar ambitions. Their differences are easy to overlook when they are read in tandem in a markedly transatlantic journal such as *oblek*. But when read separately, in the contexts in which they initially emerged, one becomes aware precisely of those things these poetries are defined against.[62]

Moreover, these periodicals rarely serve emerging writers, and the publics they represent or imagine remain only loosely associated, since the social circumstances and local conditions of French and American poets are often at odds. As for their poetic discourse and corresponding

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[62] In the case of the Language poetry, its anti-lyricism becomes a poignant critique of the concurrent rise of writing workshop programs in the university and the predominance of confessional poetry in the United States.

publics, lacking in a shared social experience shifts the discussion—when there is one—closer to formal esthetics than institutional and cultural conditions.

To compare the scope and limitations of French and American poetry, then, we would do better to consider not only the places where they cross and intersect, but also those where they diverge. This is because the editorial decisions and poetic strategies of French and American periodicals that address their own local institutional and social circumstances will inevitably be to some degree incommensurable. This is the case with Pierre Alferi's and Olivier Cadiot's *Revue de littérature générale* and Juliana Spahr's and Jena Osman's *Chain*. Only intermittently do these periodicals include foreign poetry, and when they do, their selections are never predetermined by guest-editors nor packaged and labeled as "French" or "American." Although each has a decidedly international scope, neither has relied on this for its conceptual focus. On the contrary, both draw on international matters and material only to throw into starker relief local concerns. If, as Charles Bernstein states, "poetics is an ethical engagement with the shifting conditions of everyday life" and an "informed response to emerging circumstances", then these two periodicals are exemplary in that they shed light on the relation of poetry to the social world in which it circulates (*Attack of the Difficult Poems* 78). It is to these periodicals—and to the shifting conditions of their social circumstances—that I will now turn.

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Pierre Alferi's and Olivier Cadiot's *Revue de littérature générale* was an ambitious endeavor. Its collection of a vast range of material from a variety of contributors—visual artists, historians, ornithologists, landscape designers, poets, linguists, musicians, etc.—makes a strong statement about the state of cultural practices in contemporary France. Indeed, the editors' selection of a diverse set of avant-garde practices stands in stark contrast to the increasingly commercial trends of France's literary culture. As it appears at a time of intense cultural debate and change in France, *Revue de littérature générale* can be seen to offer a counter-discourse to the market-oriented policies of the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang.

In light of Lang's grandiose attempts to turn culture into readily identifiable spectacles of great scale and significance, Alferi's and Cadiot's *RLG*, filled with "objets verbaux non identifiés" of diverse origin, serves as a stubborn, intransigent rejoinder to Lang's imperious ambitions. It does this by troubling the categories of perception by which cultural objects are conventionally understood, assessed and valued. As texts, musical scores, photographs and drawings are repeatedly subjected to a series of distortions and contextual shifts, one is forced to grapple with conflicting conceptual frames of reference while trying to situate a work within a certain context. What's more, rather than articulate a clear and complementary relation between various cultural practices, the editors accentuate the tension between them. As a result, *Revue de littérature générale* offers a repertoire of radical alternatives to France's commercial culture of the 90s. Chief among these alternatives is a critical approach to how texts circulate. Alferi and Cadiot call attention to the shifting material conditions of textual objects as they pass through various stages of production and dissemination. By amplifying the informational noise caused by overlaid edits, typographical oddities, linguistic aberrations and cultural misunderstandings, Alferi and Cadiot show how texts can bear the trace of their own development and circulation.

Like many little magazines, the *Revue de littérature générale* was short-lived. Its first issue appeared in 1995, its second in 1996, and in spite of these having been received with great acclaim, its third was never to come. What's more, it never operated out of an office, like many

of the more official French *revues*. Unlike many little magazines, its print-run was exceptionally high as was its popularity. Its first issue was printed in an edition of 4,500 copies; its second, 6,000. Both were soon sold-out (Mesnard). Its sheer size and volume are also remarkable. Each issue exceeds 400 pages, with the first containing thirty-six different contributions and the second forty-nine.[63] And although poetry remains its main focus, many of the contributors come from other fields. Together, musicians, visual artists, photographers, landscape designers, historians, philosophers, literary and film critics, novelists and translators far out number the poets, who, when considered in a strict sense as those who publish work intended as poetry, constitute a relatively small group. This diversity of contributors speaks to the magazine's ambition: namely, to place poetry, in theory and practice, in relation to other cultural practices. For this reason, as one reviewer explains, this was not "une révue à usage interne." In fact, it was "mieux reçue par des artistes ou des amateurs de littérature que par les écrivains eux-mêmes" (Mesnard). This favorable reception can be explained by examining the *revue*'s conditions of emergence.

The editors are acutely aware of the various positions offered by the current state of the literary field. They return on several occasions to the previous and current practices against which they wish to define their periodical. "En ce moment," the editors state in an introductory preface to the first volume, "aussi bien sur son aile marketing que sur son aile ex-avant-gardiste, la littérature s'affiche hors esthétique. Ne rien en dire redevenant le garant du bien-écrire. Dans l'expérimental ou dans le néo-classique, il y a encore l'idée du naturel qui revient au galop. **Comme par magie**, comme l'alexandrin dans le pseudo-vers libre. Le retour de la moyenne (voir: Une famille en or, TF1). Il faudrait retrouver un b.a.-ba, non pas pour faire une « théorie d'ensemble », mais simplement pour sortir de cette récession conceptuelle" (4). This densely allusive passage is representative of Alferi's and Cadiot's style throughout the two issues. Through a wide range of cultural allusions and references, from television programs to *Tel Quel*'s theoretical treatise, *Théorie d'ensemble*, and Jacques Roubaud's study of poetics, *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*, the editors are indexing their own social position. According to the editors, the period is thus marked by a disavowal of the avant-garde (often by former members of a so-called avant-garde itself) and an unwitting return to conventional literary ideologies and practices. This trajectory is repeatedly represented by two extremes: the overtly theoretical writings of *Tel Quel* and the commercialized literary culture "as seen on TV." If at some point these extremes were markedly distinct, now, they argue, this is no longer the case:

> Il y a un **trou** dans le discours. D'un côté, souvenir d'une parole très théorique sur la littérature, qui joue encore comme implicite dans certaines occasions mondaines. De l'autre, bavardage gâteux sur le roman, qui bat (par exemple dans les nouvelles émissions « littéraires »: « Cercle de minuit », « Un livre un jour », « Ah quels titres ! ») le record du « Je me suis laissé emporter par mes personnages » de Pivot. Le comble, c'est que les positions peuvent s'échanger : les ex-avant-gardistes devenir des vétérans attendris, les marchands de soupe découvrir la Théorie.
>
> (vol. 1, 13)

The history of *Tel Quel* is a turbulent one, but its ending is perhaps emblematic for the time (remember, we're in 1994-5). Chief editors and contributors Denis Roche and Philippe Sollers

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[63] The number of contributors is hard to determine, since some, especially Cadiot and Alferi, had their hand in several unattributed pieces.

ended up embracing the theories and practices they once vehemently attacked, with Sollers welcoming the glitz and glamour of commercial culture. As a result, "en préférant la representation à l'écriture, les **ex-iconoclastes** (Sollers, Roche, etc.) servent finalement—parce qu'ils s'appliquent à bien fermer derrière eux la parenthèse d'une avant-garde—ceux qui trouvent l'idée même d'expérimentation ringarde" (22). While former avant-garde figures have performed an about-face, television personalities like Bernard Pivot have saturated the literary and intellectual field with the language of marketing and sentimentalism, a phenomenon no doubt "symptomatic of the intellectual shift towards a media-based oligarchy" (Reader 25).[64]

In the wake of *Tel Quel* are those who have *thematized* the theories of an earlier generation, and in so doing turned them into decorative and stylized ornaments. This can be seen, for example, with writers who have expressed the ideas of Maurice Blanchot rather than adopt his writing practice: "On a été impressioné comme d'autres par la méthode de la "contrariété" de Blanchot: déployer en des **temps fictifs** des moments simultanés de l'écriture. Découper un plan-séquence. Technique de la fuite théorique en temps réel ou de l'éternel remords: ni ceci/ni cela. Une politique du pire. Dommage que des disciples trop pieux aient confondu cette méthode avec une thématique poétique. Les poètes n'y ont souvent gagné qu'un surcroît de métaphysique ordinaire. (A mettre au chapitre: "La poésie comme farce de la pensée")" (4). Cadiot and Alferi argue that concepts and practices of an earlier generation have been co-opted and, as such, disguise otherwise traditional literary aims, from sublime transcendence and spontaneous inspiration to authentic, lived experience:

> L'énergie motrice de l'écriture fut si souvent pensée en termes négatifs qu'il s'est développé une sorte de vulgate du « manque » propre à la France littéraire. Elle a réinjecté de la transcendance, du mystère et de la piété, en détournant de grands concepts négatifs élaborés rigoureusement dans des contextes bien particuliers (l'impossible, la limite, l'innommable). Loin de ce qui faisait la force et la pertinence de ces concepts, la vulgate du « manque » les a réduits à une seule thématique grandiloquente pour recréer une scène illusionniste de l'écriture. Le vague permet d'ailleurs tous les espoirs : comme l'écriture prendrait sa source dans une négativité radicale, elle serait en soi subversive. Or il est frappant de voir, au contraire, le poncif bourgeois de l'inspiration. Et même les nouveaux romanciers réalistes, quand ils courent après le « vécu », partagent cet espace muré, le « règne de la séparation.
>
> (vol. 2 sect. 49)

The ambition of *RLG* thus runs counter to this tradition by turning away from philosophies of "the negative" or "emptiness" and drawing on a full and expansive repertoire of devices, practices and ideas : "Plutôt que d'un appel du vide (dont il n'y rien à dire à moins de verser dans une pénible mystique de l'écriture), partir d'un rejet du plein et du disponible."

The disappearance of the avant-garde, the penetration of the market, the return to ideas of transcendence as well as "les appels à l'artisanat mystérieux, le jargon de l'authentique, le retour à la vraie littérature…, le ressentiment qui oppose technique et écriture" (vol. 1, 8)[65]—together

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[65] The contemporary *récit de voyage* is also part of this list, with a scathing critique of its principle practitioners—Olivier Rolin, Alain Borer, Patrick Boman, Gil Jouanard—given by Etienne Rabaté, who sees in its writing "un académisme de l'adjectif gourmet, de la phrase balancée qui consonne justement

these form the background and context of *RLG*'s emergence. Often the editors link these trends to concrete names—Christian Bobin (transcendence), Djian [Jean] Rolin (unmediated experience with the real), Milan Kundera (unapologetically rear-guard), Philippe Sollers and Denis Roche (ex-iconoclasts) as well as other figures related to the press and media such Jean-Philippe Domecq, Nicolas Domenach and Bernard Pivot (a stand-in for all the newly popular "emissions littéraires").[66] But at all times these trends seem to be mere instances of larger cultural changes taking place in France. Much of what occurs in the literary field, then, must be seen as a consequence of changes happening in the field of power (as Bourdieu would call it), signaled not the least by new cultural policies and ideologies originating in the 1980s and rising to prominence in the 90s.

To understand these changes, rather than turn to the policies of the current Minister of Culture at the time, we would do better to consider those that were still being implemented and fiercely debated from the influential and long-lasting ministry of Jack Lang (1981-1986; 1988-1992). Lang's ultimate legacy has yet to be fully determined. Although he was able to manage a significant increase in the Ministry of Culture's budget, many question his initiatives and policies. From Mitterand's grand architectural projects such as the Opéra-Bastille, the Institut de Monde Arabe (IMA), and the Louvre Extension in the Cour Napoléon to Lang's most visible achievements such as the Fête de la Musique and Le Zénith at La Villette, Lang's ministry under Mitterand quickly became seen as grandiose, spectacular, even imperious. As David Looseley remarks: "One of the most commonly felt concerns among surveyors of cultural policy in the 1980s and early 1990s was that it had become so fascinated by image, enterprise and spectacle that it had lost sight of its social mission" (213). As Lang strove to widen the domain of culture during a time of mass industry and leisure, instead of trying to bring high art to the masses, which had been the policy of France's first Minister of Culture André Malraux (1959-1969), Lang gave increasing support to many 'popular' arts: puppet theatre, operetta, circus, cookery, *bandes dessinées*, jazz, chanson and variety, and he even created institutions such as the *École nationale des arts culinaires* near Lyon, the *Centre national supérieur de formation aux arts du cirque* in Châlons-sur-Marne and the *Centre national de la BD [Bande Dessinée] et de l'image* in Angoulême in their favor.[67] This policy was known as *décloisonnement*, or decompartimentalisation (123). As Looseley explains, "*décloisonnement* was polysemous, signifying the breaking down of barriers between art and the people, artistic disciplines, the amateur and the professional [...]. But it chiefly came to mean doing away with the hierarchy between 'high' and 'low' cultures. Rather than batter heroically at the non-public's door as the Ministry had habitually done, Lang very soon began to look for another way in, tackling the problem of cultural inequalities not in terms of audiences but of creative forms" (123). Lang's

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avec la notion d style, personnalisée et humaniste, avec la notion de paysage, qui fonde la representation de l'ailleurs comme toile peinte" (*RLG* 2, sect. 34).

[66] In her contribution, Pascale Casanova identifies and satirizes "World Fiction" trends through micro-definitions of a whole host of literary genres such as "Le Kitsch colonial", "La Mythologie portative", "Le Privé universel", "L'Internationale académique", "Le Dix en un", "Le National-réalisme", "La Pluralité (synthétique) des mondes", "Le Classicisme moralisant", "Le Grillon des Foyers", etc. (vol. 2 sect. 6).

[67] This increased support shouldn't be confused with the idea of equal support: "The 19 million francs spent on jazz, chanson and variety in 1985 were 10 million below the subsidy to Boulez's experimental music centre (L'IRCAM) alone, and represented under 5 percent of total ministry spending on opera" (125).

challenges were formidable. Not only did he need to embrace the popular arts mentioned above, but he also had to find a way of dealing with the larger cultural industry as a whole. As Looseley makes clear, "to decompartmentalise any further in the high-tech 1980s, the Ministry was obliged to grasp the nettle of mass-cultural, industrially produced forms which operate in a market economy and which have no public-service mission" (123). For Lang, "it was time […] for the state to acknowledge the private sector 'without complexes' and to have dealings with it that were 'adult' and 'serene' and he spoke of reconciling 'création et production marchande', implying that the cultural industries were not just means of *diffusion* but could be creative forms in their own right" (123). A new mixed economy was thus set in place where the state and the market would collaborate to fund the arts and cultural industries. Thus new budget laws were established that encouraged corporate sponsorship by making donations entirely deductible from taxable profits (130) and conventionally subsidized institutions were effectively turned into *entreprises culturelles*.[68] Moreover, already profitable industries such as advertising, industrial design and fashion were given further attention and financial support (126).

Lang's willingness to embrace these industries gave rise to the pejorative media label *le tout-culturel* (127). His own position regarding the matter of what constitutes the limitless reign of culture is summed up in a statement he made in June 1982: "il peut y avoir autant acte de culture dans le dessin d'une robe, le design d'un objet ou l'élaboration d'un film annonce-publicitaire que dans l'écriture musicale, l'art graphiqe ou l'architecture" (qtd. in Loosely 127). Culture, then, is less defined by function than by a certain skill and touch. The increasingly expanding field of culture can thus account for a whole slew of objects, devices, ideas, technologies and products.

At a cursory glance, this expansion of culture is, theoretically, not unlike Alferi's and Cadiot's attempt to expand the application of 'poetry.' For Alferi and Cadiot, no field of knowledge, no use of language (commercial, technical, scientific, etc.), is prohibited from becoming poetry. The combinations that create "objets non identifiés"—a specious avoidance of terms such as 'poem' or 'text' or 'artwork'—are numerous. "Voilà des formations provenant de domaines de savoir très éloignés mêlant des éléments qui appartiennent à des registres aussi divers que possible, et la fiction les utilise au même titre […]. Elle gardent la trace de toutes sortes de hiérarchies, mais les suppriment entre elles: déhiérarchisation." Is this a sort of *tout-fictif*, a redefining of literary possibilities on par with the great sweep of Lang's *tout-cultural* ? In *RLG*, there is a clear theoretical leveling out of distinctions in terms of fictive matter and material. "Pour traiter les choses de la "culture" littéraire comme un simple matériau, il faut oublier à la fois leur prétendue supériorité et les relations hiérarchiques entre elles, à tous les niveaux" (vol. 1, 16). The goal then is to find "dans ce nivellement positif le point de départ d'une sorte de mixité laïque pour la fiction" (16). The range of possible poetic material—from a treatise on animal tracks to Flaubert's manuscripts—is as wide as the possible poetic treatments of source texts ("agglutiner, agrandir, anamorphoser, automatiser, baptiser, boucler, bricoler, cadrer, chiffrer, cliquer, compresser, couper, etc.").[69]

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[68] Loosely explains the consequences of this: "Since public funding was no longer given permanently to an institution but on the basis of a specific, finite undertaking, it became selective rather than automatic. In this way, the subsidized sector was to be kept on its toes by making creators rediscover a degree of competition, accountability and responsiveness to public demand, instead of languidly relying on a guaranteed income" (108-109).

[69] See the full list in the index of vol. 1, 414-415. This list echoes Richard Serra's "Verb List" from 1972, a work that fits comfortably in the *RLG*'s field of artistic references, many of which are from 60s and 70s

Yet in spite of their apparent ideological similarities, Lang's *décloissonement* and Alferi's and Cadiot's *déhiérachisation* are not homologous, nor do they result in similar practices. Instead, Lang's policies serve as a significant foil to *RLG*'s ambitions. This should come as little surprise. The market-oriented ministry of Lang stands in stark contrast to *RLG*'s resistance to the increasingly commercial practices of France's literary culture, from televised literary programs to kitsch world literature. What's more, the relation between poetry and other practices in *RLG* is not so much *décloissonée* but openly and productively antagonistic. Alferi and Cadiot do not strive to resolve the differences between the arts and various disciplines, but to accentuate them all while considering each in dynamic relation to one another. At times complementary, at others conflicting, poetry's relation to other practices is constantly shifting throughout *RLG*'s two issues, as Alferi and Cadiot offer an endless series of metaphors, ideas and practices as a flexible context for poetry ("Une théorie fictive, jetable. Puis une autre s'il le faut, et une autre")(vol. 1, 3). Most importantly, *RLG*'s creation of a space where the very relations between the arts and other disciplines can be imagined and realized outside the reach of the market offers a contrast to the collapse of the commercial and artistic spheres under Lang's cultural policies.

A periodical is thus an apt choice for what Alferi and Cadiot wish to accomplish. As their aim is not only to create new poetry but, more importantly, to establish a new context and scale of values for reading and assessing poetry, a periodical allows them to set innovative writing against a whole array of contrasting or complimentary practices and ideologies. Throughout the two volumes, it bears repeating, poetry is placed among a rich selection of other kinds of work by people from other fields: a composer displays visually striking scores and discusses the relation between music and weather, a landscape artist gives instructions to create "moving gardens", a linguist transcribes, translates and glosses excerpts from Inuit, an American poem undergoes a "torture test" by a series of translators, a conceptual artist converts a Cezanne painting into a concrete poem while a scholar creates visual streams of data from Racine's plays, a naturalist diagrams and reads the tracks of various mammals, an ornithologist presents a new method for transcribing birdcalls, an art historian offers a reading of Vito Acconci's work. All of this is chock-full of images, diagrams, sketches, notes, charts, reproduced facsimiles, written in varying fonts with jagged margins in both prose and lineated verse with a lively and loud margin where text or images appear as if at will. In this wealth of writing, it soon becomes unclear which entries belong to which genres (poetry? science? musicology? linguistics?) as each seems to exercise a strong pull on the entry before and after it, such that one is encouraged to identify similarities between different entries. For example, a musician's discussion of feedback (Rodolph Burger) can be applied to an entry where Freud's shorthand is overlain with glosses and corrections, so that the musician's entry provides terms and concepts—in this case, a "feedback effect"—by which to read Freud's. In this way, what may seem like an eclectic mix of material when considered in isolation becomes a concerted play of concepts and practices, all of which are mobilized in the interest of imagining new poetic possibilities.

Although many concerns become apparent in *RLG*—methods of transcription, theories and devices of speed and compression, the layering of information in edits, drafts and marginalia, invented or distorted languages—the editors go to great lengths to disrupt or slightly alter the flow of the material with sudden "frame breaks" so that a fixed set of themes is never allowed to fully materialize. Throughout *RLG*, many features serve this purpose. Take the

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American art: "To Roll, To Crease, To Fold, To Store, To Bend, To Shorten, To Twist, To Dapple, To Crumple, To Shave, To Tear, To Chip, etc." (*The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies*).

marginalia from the first issue's introduction. Whereas many of the marginalia unquestionably have an explanatory function—by means of reference, exemplification, amplification or expansion—some have no discernable correspondence to what is being said in the text of the main body. For example, on the fifth page of the introduction one finds, along with three explanatory notes in the left margin, two images in the right: one of Laurence Sterne's famous "black page" from *Tristram Shandy* and another of Joseph Beuy's *Noiseless Black Board Eraser* (1974). These floating references neither explain nor exemplify what is said in the text itself, which proceeds, as though indifferent to these images, with its own metaphors, examples and suggestive descriptions. The metonymic or associative link between text and image here is tenuous at best. And yet one continues to puzzle over the very stubbornness of these references, imagining various lines of inquiry that could shed light on their presence here. Whether or not the reader chooses to pursue these lines of inquiry, the images interrupt the text like small "objets-freins", and thus force the reader to pause, however fleetingly, at this "arrêt de la poésie."

This is a clear demonstration of how Cadiot and Alferi place poetry in relation to other arts and practices. If they draw on so many distinct disciplines, it is not, as they make clear, out of an "obsession pluridisciplinaire." Their aim to situate writing among "la pluralité des arts" is accomplished precisely by making an "arrêt sur l'image" simultaneously an "arrêt de la poésie." Momentarily suspending writing then is a way of creating a complex context in which one textual or visual feature necessarily interrupts another, and thus the relation between them becomes defined by a repulsive force. Just as the visual reference to Sterne's "black page" stops the reader in her tracks, perhaps even inciting her to change course, so too does an entry on taxidermy replete with storyboard drawings as it causes the reader to pause and contemplate the sweep and swift reversals of the review's focus. Patterns and parallels do present themselves— as I suggested by reading Freud's notebooks as "feedback" in relation to Rodolphe Burger's technical discussion of this effect in music—but only after an initial, often sustained, delay.

This strategy of interruption is in fact one of the defining tendencies of *RLG*, as can be seen both on the macro-level of the review's organization and on the micro-level of its individual entries. The result of this strategy is what disturbs the surface of the text, a process described by turns as striating, ruffling, pleating and unpleating, or braiding: "Il s'agit de tressage: une ligne empiète localement sur une autre qui semblait la maintenir en arrière. Un relief apparaît, puis se résorbe dans la surface parce qu'il n'y a pas de fond" (vol. 2 sect. 49). What the editors strive to illustrate through a profusion of metaphor is the way non-semantic features can mimic, imagine or alter reading habits. Throughout *RLG*, texts are interrupted by, or overlain with, a diverse set of markings—blots, asterisks, the stray swirls of handwriting, the scrawl and scribbles of edits, internet code seemingly gone awry with its Greek letters, apple icons and diacritics. All of these markings serve to the shift the reader's attention to other processes of signification.

RLG's esthetic thus operates by foregrounding the editorial function. Editors traditionally adjust the textual conditions of a work to better convey the author's intended message. This means treating and often obscuring matters such as self-correction, replays, reflexive comments, slips and improvised remarks. Rather than mask this process, Alferi and Cadiot expose it through their own editorial interventions or by accentuating those of their contributors. As a result, they set out before the reader the seemingly infinite array of choices, guesswork, hesitations and mistakes with which a work is beset. Through additions, marked removals and glosses we witness not how a text is written, but how it is framed and reframed (and reframed again) according to specific reading practices and conditions of legibility, which Alferi and Cadiot continually tinker and toy with to create an effect of exaggerated emphasis.

Emblematic of this style is Louis Wolfson's appendix to *Le Schizo et les langues*, which appears in the second volume. Wolfson's writing brims with abbreviations, diacritics and glosses. More importantly, not only does Wolfson impose his own idiosyncratic spelling reforms, but he signals these with an asterisk. Thus every aberration is redundantly framed as an aberration:

Un complexe de persécution peut-être s'y mêlait, *e sans doute sa sensibilité très *acrue. Tout au moins le jeune *öme *sqizofrène pensait-il fréqëment qe son *bea-père essayait de le surprendre d'une manière sournoise. C'était un petit *öme bien obèse qi, d'*abitude, faisait, & surtout dans l'*apartement, *beaucou de bruit en marchant— cela outré les grinchements formidables qand il mettait le pied sur une des nombreuses planches lâches—, car il avait l'*abitude assez étrange de marcher en traînant les souliers, les pantoufles, les *chaussètes (*cèles-ci *come une couple de *chifons), même les plantes nues, ne levant donc pas les pieds du plancher, les glissant en avant *e les traînant d'en *arière, alternativement, d'une manière faisant penser à un patineur, *e semblant bien incapable de marcher *corectement, c'est-à-d. *come la plupart des autres gens, & jusqu'au point peut-être d'inspirer une forte pitié.

<div align="right">(vol. 2 sect. 48)</div>

Although Wolfon's style is not without its own flourishes and witty asides ("*cèles-ci *come une couple de *chifons"), it is the very redundancy of the intermittent asterisks and their visual glimmer that must appeal to Alferi and Cadiot. Presented as such, the editors propose to read this text with all its odd editorial excesses as a poem, thus challenging Gilles Deleuze's claim that "le livre de Wolfson n'est pas du genre des oeuvres littéraires, et ne prétend pas être poème" (21).

Michel Gresset's translation of William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* exhibits a similar interest in framing and accentuating editorial acts. Translating from the manuscript version, Gresset includes the variants, additions, and illegible moments in the text of his translation (as opposed to the conventional scholarly practice of placing these in notes or appendices). These bracketed notes and glosses repeatedly interrupt the text: "Elle était couchée dans l'eau, la tête sur le banc de sable et l'eau coulant de part et d'autre <de ses hanches et de ses jambes [addition marginale]>; "Son visage faisait une tache blanche que ses cheveux [sept mots biffés] encadraient sur le fond du sable"; "Je pouvais l'entendre dans l'ombre de la [un mot illisible]" (vol. 2, sect. 12). These accidents and revisions are a source of esthetic potential for Alferi and Cadiot as they make visible repressed and excluded material, thereby calling into question the integrity of the so-called definitive version.

Another example where the process of editing and writing are superimposed and seemingly at conflict can be found in the manuscript facsimile and proofs of Proust's *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, reproduced in typescript with all its erasures and revisions:

Ce jour là, comme les précédents, ~~Re~~ Saint-Loup avait été obligé
<div style="text-align:center">toujours   jusqu'à la fin de l'après midi</div>
d'aller à Doncières où on aurait besoin de lui maintenant ~~jusqu'à ce qu'il~~

~~y rentrât tout à fait~~ avant qu'il y rentrât ~~son abs~~ tout à fait.

<div align="right">(vol. 2 sect. 31)</div>

This series of false starts and forked possibilities creates a bifurcating text, one whose flow is broken, almost reversed, at irregular intervals in diverging directions. A similar, though much more subdued, effect is found in Sigmund Freud's "Notes de Séances" (to which I referred above). This entry translates Freud's process notes—the only ones that survive—for his treatment of the "Rat Man." The notes are written in shorthand with all Freud's abbreviations and spelling errors explained and corrected directly below the main text. Unsurprisingly, this format was chosen by the editors "pour retrouver l'effet de lecture dédoublée":

> Le Dr   Lehrs   29   ½   souffrirait d'Obs
>   Docteur   , âgé de   ans et demi   de représentations obsessionnelles,
>
> particulièrement fortes depuis 1903, mais   datent   enfance.
>   qui   de son
>   (vol. 2 sect. 14)

These three levels of mediation—process notes, publisher's edits, translation—are superimposed to produce the doubling, or tripling, effect that the editors prize. Like the other entries, the text here is subjected to a lattice pattern of layered frames.

These texts recover the byproduct of different modes of writing and transcription. Asterisks, glosses, crossed-out words and sentences, abbreviations, these editorial methods, which fulfill a host of functions—framing, reminding, removing, explaining, clarifying—and which are normally abandoned once they've served their transitional function, become significant poetic devices in themselves. By accentuating these features, Alferi and Cadiot call attention to the "effet-transcription," as when, for example, "l'oral fait irruption au milieu de l'écrit" and "une certaine surface en force une autre et l'emboutit." Perhaps there is no contribution in *RLG* more insightful on the practice of transcription and editing than Pierre Bourdieu's (vol. 2 sect. 2). The piece, entitled "Juin 1991: *Ahmed X*", presents the original transcript of an interview Bourdieu conducted for his book, *La Misère du monde*, and ends with a brief sketch of the stakes and risks of transcription, an issue given fuller treatment at the end of his book (903-939). Even a cursory comparison of the interview published in *La Misère du monde* with that published in *RLG* reveals considerable differences and discrepancies. Whereas the former follows the typographic conventions of published interviews, all while allowing here and there certain grammatical aberrations—suppression of the pleonastic negation "ne", pauses and interruptions signaled by ellipses, allowance of certain gap fillers or "disfluencies" such as "ben"—the latter is dominated by white space, dotted lines, marginal notes as well as a liberal use of brackets, parenthesis, dashes and underlines used for emphasis or clarity. In other words, Bourdieu's initial transcript (which appears in *RLG*) uses several analytic tools to parse the interview, which will later be abandoned when published in *La Misère du monde*. This should come as no surprise. *La Misère du monde* is destined for a specific public and it must therefore conform to a set of expectations, if it wishes, as it clearly does, to be read as a popular work of sociology. Thus, it uses "global folk categories", like interviewer and interviewee, rather than, as Erving Goffman suggests, "decomposing them into smaller, analytically coherent elements" (129). As Bourdieu explains, this is because "les contraintes de lisibilité qui se définissent en relation avec des destinataires potentiels aux attentes et aux compétences très diverses interdisent la publication d'une transcription phonétique assortie des notes necessaires pour restituer tout ce qui est perdu dans le passage de l'oral à l'écrit, c'est-à-dire la voix, la prononciation (notamment dans ses variations socialement significatives), intonation, le rythme (chaque entretien a son

tempo particulier qui n'est pas celui de la lecture), le langage des gestes, de la mimique et de toute la posture corporelle, etc." (*Misère* 921). Thus, in order to avoid upsetting a general reading public's expectations, Bourdieu concedes, "on a dû parfois prendre le parti d'alléger le texte de certains développements parasites, de certaines phrases confuses, des chevilles verbales ou des tics de langage (les "bon" et les "euh"), qui, même s'ils donnent sa coloration particulière au discours oral et remplissent une fonction éminente dans la communication, en permettant de soutenir un propos qui s'essoufle ou de prendre l'interlocteur à témoin, brouillent et embrouillent la transcription au point, en certain cas, de la rendre tout à fait illisible pour qui n'a pas entendu le discours original" (921-922).

  With Alferi's and Cadiot's interest in signaling and testing various conditions of legibility, the appeal of Bourdieu's original phonetic transcript becomes clear, as it has kept intact the verbal tics, the micro-shifts in tone, the multi-channel play and the moments of incomprehension, displaying in this way the poetic features prized throughout *RLG*. Like stage directions, notes in the left margin describe the "footing" of the participants (body language, tone, visual cues, etc.): "la voix monte"; "en prenant Denis à témoin"; "Ahmed fait un movement pour parler—s'arrête—regarde son copain qui esquisse un mot et s'arrête"; "Wouih! (avec une sorte de rire)"; "tapote un rythme de batterie avec ses ongles sur la table." These also include Bourdieu's personal phonetic renderings of certain words and expressions—"mêmin" [*même hein*], "desfillin" [*des filles hein*], "habitchué" [*habitué*]—and even his own difficulties while transcribing—"inintelligible à première écoute/dois réécouter plusieurs fois"—which serve as an important reminder of the imperfections of recording devices and the difficult of transcribing spontaneous speech.

  In the original transcript Bourdieu also experiments in spelling in the main text, as he borrows or improvises ways of indicating elision and accent: "A i s'en fout' les profs……."; "A lui i rent' pas lui si je rent' pas i rent' pas"; "y sont remontés, pi y nous ont cherchés pi nous on parlait pas (pô)…….tous ceux qui étaient entrés y zont sifflé y sont revenus y zont mis du lacrymogène y sont partis." This manner of transcribing speech is hardly shocking. (Especially when compared with other texts in *RLG*, where you find such fanciful constructions as "cètamoidparlé? alé chpran" [*c'est à moi de parler? Allez je prends*], "kanton noudi" [*quand on nous dit*] and "ébin, janépami" [*eh ben, j'en ai pas mis*]). Because of Bourdieu's inconsistency with this method, these brief spelling quirks serve as slight interruptions in the text, giving rise to momentary "reliefs" in the voice of the speakers. Unseemly in a popular sociological study, these aberrations accentuate the poetical quality of the text when framed as a literary document.[70]

  The anomalies in the transcript are many: question marks indicating Bourdieu's own confusion while transcribing (“**Denis (?) Ahmed (?)** – Beaucoup de fois [inaudible] ça……."), voiced pauses ("Pff", "ben", "hein"), abrupt interruptions ("Ben le…….”; "Qu'est ce que j'vais dire h…….”), extended ellipses to signal silence. Most notably, there is an excessive amount of repetition, of stopping and starting, the majority of which is removed from the published

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[70] Bourdieu is right to omit them in *La Misère du monde*. What was written in the interest of authenticity (a false ideal Bourdieu is acutely aware of) could easily be read as literary posturing or farcical caricatures, since the long tradition of vernacular writing and its inherent assumptions would weigh heavy on Bourdieu's attempts. Bourdieu is enlightening on this matter when he speaks about the "danger d'épingler" the transcript: "Par exemple: j'entend "j'y dis". Faut-il écrire "j'y dis"? Convention employée par la mauvaise littérature pour marquer le parler populaire. Bien sûr, je puis transcrire mes interventions de la même manière: izont ou j'ai pas fait. Ça risque de ne pas faire disparaître l'effet de stigmatization (et de l'attirer aussi sur moi! alors que nous parlons tous comme ça…)."

interview. Compare the following exchange in both versions. The first is from *La Misère du monde*:

> **Ali** – On faisait des conneries.
> --*Mais quoi par exemple? Tu peux dire, hein, vraiment: je ne suis pas de la police…*
>
> (89)

You can see here that Bourdieu has gone to great lengths to keep a spoken quality to the published transcript by allowing words such as "hein" and "vraiment" as markers of tone and pace, as well as adding ellipses to signal a drifting off of speech rather than using a period to mark a full-stop. Now here's the transcript in *RLG*:

rougit en regardant *son copain*	**Ahmed** – [On faisait] des conneries
	PB -- Ah c'est ça oui………..mais quoi par exemple …………………… ……………………… ………………………..tu peux dire hein vraiment je suis pas je suis pas de la police………………………………si tu parles vraiment…..je peux te l'écrire……t'as pas besoin de……

In addition to removing his notes on the visual behavior of the participants, the interview in *La Misère du monde* has eliminated Bourdieu's insistent and careful prodding to get his subjects to say more about what they may be otherwise more reluctant to speak. From displays of attentiveness and encouragement—"Ah c'est ça oui"—to baiting further response, "Si tu parles vraiment…..je peux te l'écrire……t'as pas besoin de……", this transcript depicts the loose texture of speech, with its frayed edges and stray strands given equal attention as its more fluid patterns. Indeed, questions are shown to be prepared, padded and pursued with no small amount of repetition, hesitations and hedging.

The effect of repetition, whether calculated or accidental—"je suis pas je suis pas de la police"—is that it creates a sort of textual stutter. This stutter effect is expressed both through repetition—"Pour le……pour le jeu quoi"—and through uncertain and hesitant shifts in direction, "Tu veux dire quoi…….qui…….en……". My reason for calling attention to this textual stutter is that it has become a central feature of contemporary French poetry. Practiced first by Gherasim Luca and Bernard Heidsieck and given theoretical support by Gilles Deleuze, many French poets have since deployed various strategies of stuttering. From Eric Suchère's *Lent* (Le Bleu du Ciel, 2004) and Michelle Grangaud's *Le bébégaiement de beau Beaubourg* (Éditions de l'Attente, 2001) to Jérôme Game's *ça tire suivi de Ceci n'est pas une liste* (Al Dante, 2008), stuttering has become a clear marker of poetic style. Indeed, Deleuze's oft-cited claim—"ce n'est plus le personnage qui est bègue de parole, c'est l'écrivain qui devient *bègue de la langue*: il fait bégayer la langue en tant que telle" (135)—has provided an ideological justification for many stylistic choices. But Alferi and Cadiot are not interested in language in and of itself or in variability as such as described by Deleuze. As they make clear, the material of literature and poetry is not "la langue comme telle" but rather "des objets à la fois complexes et déhiérarchisés—'objets verbaux non identifiés'"(vol. 2, sect. 49). The object in question, the phonetic transcript of Bourdieu's interview, is complex in that it arises from a given social occasion and it is *déhiérarchisé* by avoiding the conventional framing apparatus of published interviews. The stutter here is anchored to actual speakers in a given speech genre—the interview—and then further exacerbated by being transcribed from an imperfect recording device. In contrast to using the textual stutter as a poetic device, where it acts as a sort of posture

or pastiche, here stuttering is "captured" rather than imitated. In other words, language doesn't stutter, speakers do. And poetry can be just as effective, Alferi and Cadiot seem to suggest, when it registers and reinterprets speech phenomena as when it strives to distinguish itself from spoken language. This is what separates *RLG*'s poetic practice from that of its contemporaries and successors: rather than "showing off the latest style" with the "umpteenth pose" and an "estheticism of linguistic jewels," Alferi and Cadiot rely more on "l'inventivité des methodes" and on "techniques de capture"(vol. 1, 10). "Capturing" an interview overlain with a lattice of interpretative devices and then transferring it into a poetic context both accentuates previously unseen layers of the interview itself and questions or redefines the genre of poetry. As Bahktin states: "The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre" (66).

But the visual sprawl created from the accidents and excesses of speech in Bourdieu's phonetic transcript is set against many other compositional and editorial methods in *RLG*. As Cadiot and Alferi remind us, "les Objets peuvent aussi bien être des trouvailles que des lieux communs, aussi bien des agglomérats inédits que des bouts surcodés, aussi bien une bizarrerie ou un accident syntaxique qu'une phrase morte qu'on exhume"(vol.1, 10). If Bourdieu's contribution reads like an "agglomérat inédit", then that of the American poet Charles Bernstein (vol. 2 sect. 5)—whom I will further discuss in my analysis of *Chain*—can be seen as a "bout surcodé." To move from Bourdieu's piece to Bernstein's is to transition from the blissfully accidental to the exaggeratedly controlled. What's more, the treatment of Bernstein's piece is indicative of the manner in which American poetry gets filtered and manipulated throughout *RLG*.

Bernstein's "Introjective Verse" was first written as a response to Alferi's and Cadiot's request for a piece about "[Charles] Olson and Projective Verse." Bernstein's piece is a tongue-in-cheek reversal of Olson's famous essay, "Projective Verse", where every sentence of Bernstein's has its origin in Olson's essay, but each has undergone a radical transformation by negating, subverting or mocking Olson's original language. Bernstein does this through a series of different moves. Often he simply negates a sentence: "It comes to this" becomes "It's hardly this" and "This is not easy" becomes "It's all so easy". At others he finds counter terms, such as "babble" for "listen" or "profanest" for "proudest"(thus Olson's "Language is one of [man's] proudest acts" becomes "Language is our profanest act"). Gender pronouns are also switched—a not so subtle critique given Olson's overtly masculine personality and poetics[71]—and 'man' becomes 'baby' while 'nature', unsurprisingly, becomes 'culture.' To gauge the extent of Bernstein's reversals, consider the opening of each piece. Here's Olson:

(projectile   (percussive   (prospective

                          vs.

                     The NON-Projective
Now here's Bernstein:

)introversive   )implosive   )introspeculative

incorporating

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[71] For a feminist critique of Olson's masculine poetics see Duplessis.

The Rejected

Olson's heavy-handed use of open, or unclosed, paragraphs to set the stage for his projective poetics is duly inverted by Bernstein. Moreover, what's set up as a clear binary in Olson—open vs. closed—is presented as a mutually constitutive paradox in Bernstein. Elsewhere, Bernstein selects words and phrases that are not so much opposed to Olson's text but phonetic off-shoots, near homonyms and rhymes: 'sprawl' changes to 'squall' and 'track' becomes 'tack'. He also adds prefixes and suffixes to words to shift their meaning drastically, as when he subverts Olson's famous dictum (borrowed from Robert Creeley), "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" with "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF *MAL*CONTENT"(*My Way* 111, my italics). In light of the criticism leveled at Olson for his male-centered poetry and his naive assumptions concerning "speech" and "naturalness," Bernstein's reversals are hardly gratuitous. Rather, they function as pointed rebuttals of the ideology and assumptions underpinning Olson's entire poetics. Consider the following from Olson: "Because breath allows *all* the speech-force of language back in (speech is the "solid" of verse, is the secret of a poem's energy), because, now, a poem has, by speech, solidity, everything in it can now be treated as solids, objects, things." Now compare with Bernstein's reworking of this same sentence: "Because the centripetal questions the speech-force of language (speech is the "red herring" of verse, the secret of the poem's delusions), because, then, a poem has, by language, evanescence, nothing that can be mistreated as solid, objectified, thinged" (*My Way* 111). Speech is no longer the "solid of verse" but its "redherring"; not the "secret of a poem's energy" but of its "delusion." As Bernstein has stated elsewhere, "Voice is a possibility for poetry, not an essence" (*Content's Dream* 45).[72] Moreover, poems are no longer solid objects but evanescent acts. The only feature of Olson's text that remains intact in Bernstein's piece is his choppy syntax where commas, functioning like line-breaks, isolate a myriad of words and sentence fragments in order to better control the pace, or "breath," of his writing.

But this syntax, along with the opening title parody, is left out of the French translation in *RLG*. The reason is clear enough. Most of Bernstein's neat reversals only work when read against Olson's original, and because the former is so enmeshed in the language of the latter it is impossible to recast this text in a foreign tongue without obscuring its main objectives. Translated by Jean-Paul Auxeméry and further 'mirlitonné', or put into doggerel, by the editors, Bernstein's imitative staccato syntax is fit snug—or squashed, as we'll see—into a tight alexandrine meter. With the irony of Bernstein's specific stylistic and lexical choices necessarily muted, the choice of placing a text 'about' Olson, the strongest proponent of breath-oriented, typewriter-enabled, free verse, into a strict meter with a flush left-margin patently expresses its own irony, as though to compensate for the loss of Bernstein's.

But irony is only one of the effects of this decision. The alexandrine has a long and rich tradition in French poetry. As Jacques Roubaud has shown in an influential study, meter never disappeared from French poetry; rather, it was disguised, displaced or re-imagined, and it has haunted in phantom form much of the so-called free verse of twentieth-century poetry in France (*La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*). Roubaud himself, a contributor to both issues of *RLG*, experiments with metrical constraints throughout his work, and many French poets have followed suit,

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[72] One is reminded of Robert Grenier's oft-cited response to the "New American Poets"(which has itself become a sort of an emblem for Language poetry): "I HATE SPEECH."

including Pierre Alferi.[73] Although the specific appeal and use of meter is different for each contemporary poet, the effect of enjambment—understood in a very general sense—has been given special attention, even when there is no meter present. Claiming that "la poésie peut se passer d'accompagnement sonore, de musicalité métrique: ne lui est essentiel que l'enjambement", Alferi calls attention to enjambment as an "indice sonore d'une crise snytaxique" (26). This idea has been popularized by Giorgio Agamben, in whose work Alferi most likely first encountered it.[74] "No definition of verse is perfectly satisfying unless it asserts an identity for poetry against prose through the possibility of *enjambment*. Quality, rhythm, and the number of syllables—all elements that can equally well occur in prose—do not, from this standpoint, provide sufficient criteria. But we shall call poetry the discourse in which it is possible to set a metrical limit against a syntactic one" (Agamben 39). Agamben explains the crisis to which Alferi alludes in the following way: "*Enjambment* reveals a mismatch, a disconnection between the metrical and the syntactic elements, between sounding rhythm [*ritmo sonoro*] and meaning, such that (contrary to the received opinion that sees in poetry the locus of an accomplished and a perfect fit between sound and meaning) poetry lives, instead, only in their inner disagreement. In the very moment that verse affirms its own identity by breaking a syntactic link, it is irresistibly drawn into bending over into the next line to lay hold of what it has thrown out of itself. It hints at a passage of prose with the very gesture that attests to its own versatility" (40). Thus, "the versura, the turning-point which displays itself as metrics, constitutes the core of verse. It is an ambiguous gesture, that turns in two opposed directions at once: backwards (*versus*), and forwards (*pro-versa*)" (41). As such, enjambment, according to Agamben, "brings to light the original gait, neither poetic or prosaic, but boustrophedonic, as it were, of poetry."[75]

Like Deleuze's linguistic stutter, this idea of poetry's distinctive feature is less significant for its theoretical import than for the way it translates into poetic practice in France. Enjambment has been a central feature of lineated verse since the beginning of poetry, but in France it has taken on a new significance for contemporary writers, beginning with Denis Roche who, like e.e. cummings before him, uses line-breaks to split units of meaning into infinitely finer parts across two lines (sentences, words, morphemes, even letters and diacritics) (Roubaud *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*, 170-177). Since Roche, Jacques Roubaud, Anne Portugal, Pierre Alferi, David Lespiau and Sébastien Smirou, among others, have effectively exploited this device.[76]

As it is precisely this feature that is so spectacularly and wittily explored in this piece, the poem signals its belonging to a certain strand of French experimental poetry. Most of the enjambments here lead to a profusion of meanings.

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[73] Alferi's *Kub Or* (POL, 1994) is work of seven-sections of seven poems, each containing seven seven-syllable lines. But instead of understanding the form as an enabling constraint (as Oulipo typically defines it), Alferi imagines it rather as a container, "a cubic box where anything—junk or gold—can be squeezed in and everything has to co-habitate" ("The Language of Contemporary French Poetry: A Dialogue with Pierre Alferi").

[74] Agamben's *Idea Della Prosa* (1985) was published in French translation in the same collection as Alferi's *Chercher une phrase* three years prior to the latter's publication (*L'idée de la prose*. Tr. Gerard Macé, 1988). Alferi also translated Agamben's *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz* (2003).

[75] Enjambment is central to Alferi's first book of poetry, tellingly entitled *Les Allures Naturelles* (P.O.L 1991).

[76] All of these writers appear in *RLG*.

> Je ne veux pas montrer ce qu'est le vers intro
> Jectif, ou CENTRIPÈTE, comment il se laisse
> Aller à son destin de decomposition

The twelve-syllable grid cuts the word 'introjectif' in two parts, so that 'intro' closes the line by turning inward while 'jectif' (from Latin, *jacere*, 'to throw') is tossed over the edge only to be thrust forward in the next line, as though the word itself, split in two, were expressing its own "fate of decomposition." Similarly, in the following four lines, the poem uses enjambment to comment self-reflexively on its 'closed' structure:

> 2zio, je me retiendrai
> De suggérer quelques contradictions sur la
> Manière dont l'exubérant déni de ré
> Alité retire à ce vers toute créance,
> Ce que provoque cette aversion, aussi bien
> Pour le poète que pour ses non-lecteurs.

The negative pull of these lines, its 'implosive' force, is illustrated by its lexical choices—'se retenir', 'déni', 'retirer', 'aversion'—which is accentuated in the intra-lexically enjambed 'ré/Alité.' Here Olson's "stance toward reality", along with his salubrious language of nature, kinetic energy and life-giving breath, is undermined, or laid to rest, by making 'reality' 'bedridden, again' (with the Procrustean bed as an apt metaphor for meter here).[77] The performative aspect of enjambment is even more marked in the last lines of the poem where we encounter the following:

> Le poète va
> Cille depuis les défaillances de ses propres
> Hâbleries jusqu'à cette syntaxophonie

The word 'vaciller' literally blinks ('cille'). Or, to put it another way, it stumbles mid-stride as it steps over (*enjambe*) the line. Given the importance of enjambment to contemporary French poetry, this piece reframes the decidedly American debate between open and closed verse, between finding and refusing one's voice in poetry, in unmistakably French terms.

Such is the case with most of the American writing that appears in *RLG*. Never is it presented as though pre-packaged, which is most commonly the case when journals deal with international poetry. Instead, it is tested against a new set of parameters. This forces it to enter into dialogue with contemporary French writing and express or challenge its most pressing concerns. This often occurs through experiments in translation, as we've seen in both the Faulkner entry and Bernstein's. But translation isn't the only way this is accomplished. American writers also pen their entries directly in French, defamiliarizing the language of their hosts. From Wolfson's spelling reforms and Chet Wiener's glosses on Montaigne to Stacy Doris's experiments with her slow-moving, academic prose, these Americans inflect French in ways native speakers could never do without coming off as affected or mannered.[78] From experiments in translation and writing in a foreign language to appropriating Americana, *RLG*

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[77] This compensates for the play between "a verse" and "aversion" in Bernstein's text, which is also meant to signal his "turning away" (*avertere*) from Olson's projective verse.

[78] I'll return to Doris's French prose in the conclusion.

refuses to take American writing and traditions for granted. Instead, it re-inscribes them in French poetic practices closer to Alferi's and Cadiot's concerns.

As I've shown, those concerns extend beyond the traditional reach of poetry or esthetics. By including a wide variety of practices and fields in their two issues, Alferi and Cadiot strove to create a dynamic and elastic context for poetry. But rather than adopt a *tout-culturel* approach where different practices fit together seamlessly and where the distinction between culture and commerce ceases to exist, Alferi and Cadiot used *RLG* to pit different disciplines and practices *against* each other, and in this way they challenged the reigning cultural policies and ideologies of their period. I've described their editorial method as one of interruption: one practice or idea or art form repeatedly interrupts another, holding it in suspension, only to be interrupted itself, in an endless series. Common themes and concerns readily emerge, but the practices themselves remain profoundly incommensurable. This is equally expressed in the esthetic of the individual entries where the procedures of editing are displayed in a panoply of forms and styles, each giving rise to a lattice work of competing frames. What's more, just as various practices are pitted against one another, so too are different languages and cultures, such that American writing and culture are presented through and against current French categories. In this way, *RLG* offers a unique way of imagining poetry's place among a mix of arts, practices, languages and cultures.

But there are also limits to *RLG*'s achievements. With only two issues and without a regular publication cycle, how could *RLG* establish a beat or pulse in circulation necessary for the creation of a public? Moreover, the size alone of each issue gives it the heft and weight of an anthology, and as such may do less to give rise to a new group of emergent writers than to signal retrospectively the establishment of some of France's most prominent experimental poets. The effectiveness of its multi-media angle also raises doubts. Its mix of text, music and visual art and its "hyper-linked" model look forward to the rise of the Internet and digital media, but one wonders, at least in hindsight, how much their high-tech ambitions were compromised by low-quality print media. Poetry journals are still being produced in France, and many have found ways of exploiting the resources of the web. More common, though, is the individual poet's blog, the consequences of which are yet to be fully recognized. Still, it's unfair to criticize *RLG* from today's perspective. After all, its format and style look forward to changes in poetry and publication while at the same time providing a test case for the validity of a poetic institution—the poetry periodical—possibly on its way out.

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WITH LOVE ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. THIS PAPER HAS BEEN SENT TO YOU FOR GOOD LUCK. THE ORIGINAL IS IN NEW ENGLAND. IT HAS BEEN AROUND THE WORLD NINE TIMES. THE LUCK HAS BEEN SENT TO YOU. YOU WILL RECEIVE GOOD LUCK WITHIN FOUR DAYS OF RECEIVING THIS LETTER, PROVIDED IN TURN YOU SENT IT ON. THIS IS NO JOKE
--*Chain*, vol. 1

Juliana Spahr's and Jena Osman's *Chain* throws a starker light on the status of the little magazine at the cusp of the Internet's rise. It began by attempting what the internet, for many, had promised: a lateral-moving, flexible distribution of information (poetry) through various communities of writers and readers, one that would betray a fundamentally anti-hierarchical

organization. But the internet as such is less important for understanding *Chain*'s aims than the way it was being used in poetry circles at the time of its emergence. This leads us to the most prominent context for *Chain*: the Poetics program at SUNY-Buffalo where the periodical was housed. This program's support for emerging poets, its history, its resources and its faculty were instrumental in giving shape to *Chain*. But of particular interest is the use this program made of the internet through the listserv. The choices of the editors, their style and goals, can best be understood when defined against this university program and its use of the new distribution model and conversational platform it discovered in the listserv. Leaning heavily on a utopian logic of cyberspace, *Chain* sets out to change the way poetry circulates both in the United States and abroad.

Like *RLG*, *Chain* began in 1994. By the end of its run as a periodical in 2005 it had put out twelve issues (after this date, *Chain* became *Chain Link*, a project with similar ambitions but with a commitment to publishing full-length books). Each was organized around a special theme or topic and printed in editions of 1000: Gender and Editing (Spring/Summer1994); Documentary (Spring 1995); Hybrid Genres/Mixed Media (Double Issue, Spring/Fall 1996); Procedures (Fall 1997); Different Languages (Summer 1998); Letters (Summer 1999); Memoir/Anti-Memoir (Summer 2000); Comics (Summer 2001); Dialogue (Summer 2002); Translation (Summer 2003); Public Forms (Summer 2004); Facts (Summer 2005). It remained throughout remarkably transparent about its procedures, policies, and politics. Its last issue is exemplary in this respect. This issue published its own "fact sheet" presenting its numbers including operation costs, funding, publishing demographics (it published, for example, 898 writers, 539 of which were women and 359 men) and other conventional as well as ironic statistics ("Number of corporate jets and sushi lunches: zero (Although we did hold our 2005 meeting in Desert Hot Springs but we paid for it out of pocket)"). From the outset its intentions were clear: "Brecht used a half-curtain in his performances so that you knew the scene was over, but you could see the scene being changed. No magic, no Hollywood, no illusions that there is such a thing as seamlessness, that there's an appropriate time to suspend your disbelief. In creating the structure that we have for *Chain*, we're attempting an editorial equivalent of the half-curtain" (vol. 1, 130).

Chain emerged at a time of general confusion for contemporary poetry in the United States. Emerging poets passed increasingly through the established circuits of MFA programs and were struggling to figure out what kind of writers they wished to become.[79] How should they see themselves in relation to previous generations of writers or even to their own supporting institutions? Who are their contemporaries and how do they find them? What are the theoretical concerns, practical choices and future possibilities for a new generation of poets? These are questions most young poets had on their minds in 1990s.[80] It is no accident that the "Writing from the New Coast" (*oblek*, vol. 12), heralded as the poetry of the next generation after a conference in Buffalo in 1993, was defined by its "hatred of identity." Strictly speaking, it had none. At the time, a market-logic was saturating the poetic field, strengthening a prize-based

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[79] As Jeffrey J. Williams notes, this is tied to a "rising division in literature departments, as creative writing was taught progressively more by a separate faculty and criticism became the domain of theorists." He supports this by citing the increase in creative writing programs: "Creative writing programs issuing degrees increased from 79 in 1975 to 315 in 1984, 534 in 1994, and 715 in 2004" (404). In 2010 the number of degree-conferring creative writing programs rose to 852 (Onishi "Recognition Grows for Poets of Streets, Main or Otherwise").

[80] See Wallace and Marks; see also Jarnot.

publishing structure with an accompanying formal system of accreditation, acceptance and promotion (the traditional MFA writing program not the least of these).[81] Confessional poetry and new formalism represented the stronger currents of the main stream, while Language poetry, though greatly misunderstood, had become the dominant discourse for experimental poetry, with many of its most prominent members securing teaching positions at various universities. The writers who embraced the experimental traditions of times past struggled to conceptualize and define their own. Steve Evans, an otherwise eloquent spokesperson for this generation, could find no better way of categorizing the eclectic mix of young writers in the *oblek* anthology than by their so-called anti-capitalist, utopian visions, expressing thus a common difficulty of the time to find adequate terms of describing the work of a new generation.[82]

This is the general context at the time of *Chain*'s emergence. But these questions and issues were further mediated through another central institution for *Chain*: the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo where both Spahr and Osman were graduate students when they began their periodical. As a central hub of poetic activity, the university provided Spahr and Osman with a generous amount of resources, at once economic, social and symbolic. The program was founded in 1991 by a group of poets and scholars, all of whom belonged to distinct but overlapping poetry traditions: Robert Creeley, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Dennis Tedlock and Raymond Federman. This group of writers brought together a mix of influences and experiences—from the infamous Black Mountain School (Creeley), ethnopoetry (Tedlock), Language poetry (Bernstein), visual poetry (Howe), the experimental novel and translation (Federman)—and gave the program an impressive range in experimental writing.

But the rich history of poetry in Buffalo (the city and the university) extends even further back. In 1935 the librarian Charles Abbot together with Mary Barnard and the help of a Carnegie grant sought to create an expansive archive of twentieth-century poetry for the University, one of the first of its kind. They collected manuscripts, first editions and poetry ephemera (notebooks, drafts, letters, etc.) by writing to "thousands of poets requesting the contents of their waste baskets, before other libraries had begun to consider such documents valuable" (Barnard 236).[83] After becoming a State University in 1962, which gave rise to an influx of funding, and after Albert Cook became Chair of an expanding English Department, poets were recruited as scholars not to teach writing, but to teach literature. And so the poet and one time Rector of Black Mountain College, Charles Olson, was hired as a Visiting Professor of English in 1963. Robert Creeley was hired to teach part-time in 1966, then became a full-time professor in 1968. Beginning at this time and continuing through the following decades poetry readings were frequently held, with contemporary writers coming out of a vast experimental tradition among the most regular guests (Ed Dorn, Robert Kelly, LeRoi Jones, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery, Gary Snyder, Diane Wakoski, Diane di Prima, Ted Berrigan, Anne Waldman,

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[81] This has only increased since the 90s. At present, for example, there's an unprecedented rise in poets laureate with all but six states having a poet laureateships as well as at least 35 larger cities and many uncounted smaller ones, including Boise, Idaho; Key West, Fla; McAllen, Tex; and San Mateo County, CA. See Onishi.

[82] As Steven Evans claims in the introduction to *Writing from the New Coast*: "The 'new coast' is only another name for the increasingly real possibility of overshooting the narrowly contracted band of relations—between bodies, between words, between objects and environments, between worlds—that Capital can annex in accordance with its interests" (Gizzi 11).

[83] Mary Barnard discusses the novelty of collecting poetry and ephemera by modern, living writers at the time in her memoir *Assault on Mt. Helicon*.

among others). Experiments in electronic and recorded poetry were common, and artists housed in other departments such as Morton Feldman and Hallis Frampton added to the diversity of the scene.

When the Poetics Program began in 1991 it strove to keep this tradition alive while formally distinguishing itself from traditional MFA programs and creative writing workshops. Although housed within the English department where students in the Poetics Program received their PhD, it also distanced itself from the literary criticism traditionally offered in this department. Its focus on teaching "creative reading" rather than "creative writing", with a strong emphasis on poetics, while encouraging and funding writing and editorial activity outside of class, favored the development of the poet-scholar. This was a deliberate attempt to avoid what Bernstein and the founders saw as the inflated self-involvement and intellectual narrowness of conventional writing programs: "While we encourage active questioning of the conventions of critical and scholarly writing, we remain committed to the practice of poetics as something distinct from, even though intersecting with, the practice of poetry" (*Attack of the Difficult Poems* 23). Marjorie Perloff lauds the program, since "rather than teaching poetry as this genteel craft off to the side, or teaching how to write a good rhyme, they are asking large questions about the role of poetry in society," which makes it, according to her, "the most exciting thing in the country as far as poetry goes" (qtd. in McMillan).[84] Complementing this focus are the funding, support and resources of the program. In addition to providing students funding for their own magazines and conferences, the program hosted its own weekly reading series ("Wednesdays at 4"), a radio program (LINEbreak hosted by Charles Bernstein), and ran a digital resource center for poetry and poetics (EPC) and a lively and polemic listserv (the Poetics List, more on this later).

An expansive poetry archive housed both in the Special Collections library and the Electronic Poetry Center, weekly readings, radio programs, publishing opportunities via university-funded magazines and small presses, a long-standing commitment to experimental poetry and a faculty whose diversity accounts for some of the more prominent experimental practices in the second half of the twentieth century—together these create the favorable conditions for a magazine like *Chain* to flourish at Buffalo. It is hardly surprising, then, that *Chain* is only one of many magazines to benefit from Buffalo's support. In addition to the variety of broadsides, little magazines and presses that preceded *Chain* at Buffalo, there were several active publishing projects at the time of *Chain*'s beginning, many of which Juliana Spahr had contributed to in one way or another.[85] The impossibility of any one magazine or press being representative of Buffalo is expressed by the very diversity of its publications, a fact made clear when one compares the stated goals and practices of *Chain* with those of its exact contemporary at Buffalo, *Apex of the M* (1994-1997). Still, one can detect the influence of Buffalo's Poetics Program throughout *Chain*.[86]

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[84] See also Schultz; Kimball and Brady; Quinn; and Ingalls..

[85] Spahr was an editor at Leave Books where she edited *A Poetics of Criticism* (1994) with Mark Wallace, Pam Rehm and Kristin Prevallet, and she co-edited with Peter Gizzi the final issue of the journal *o-blek* ("Writing from the New Coast"). The first issue of *The Rusty Word* (ed. Joel Kuzsai, 1995) was dedicated to her work and she published a chapbook with Meow Press. She also contributed work to Buffalo Vortex and Channel 500. See Prevallet.

[86] Perhaps it's no coincidence that some of the topics for *Chain*'s issues are also subjects of classes taught at Buffalo during the time of its publication. Compare issue 2, 4, 5 and 10 with classes such as "Resisting Translation" by Charles Bernstein (Fall 1996), "Poetry and Documentary" by Susan Howe (Spring 1995),

But while *Chain* benefited greatly from Buffalo's support and resources, and while the program's influence is visible in many of *Chain*'s issues, Spahr and Osman sought nonetheless to defy the institution's otherwise flexible boundaries by forging a space outside of its reach. Whether they were able to achieve this is open to debate. But the way they sought to do so is worth dwelling on, as it expresses an alternative to conventional publishing practices and methods of entering, and appropriating the resources of, the poetic field. As I've argued, many emerging poets find their start in little magazines. In the previous chapter, we saw two conflicting trajectories for emerging poets: one via publishing in a mid-sized, prize-conferring magazine that holds open submissions and appeals to an uneven mix of writers, esthetics and ideologies (Andrew Zawacki and *1913: A Journal of Forms*); the other via a coterie poetics in close affiliation with a little magazine published among and for a small group of like-minded initiates (Bill Luoma and *The Impercipient*—I should note here that Spahr has had much interaction with this group). There is also a third method, which I will not go into at length here but which nonetheless deserves mentioning. This consists of articulating and codifying a certain esthetic, then identifying a varied and open set of writers (both living and dead) as its practitioners and proponents. This is the case with "Conceptual Poetry."[87] Spahr and Osman refused each of these choices. Instead, they strove to create a socially bound, self-propagating editorial practice that wouldn't depend on prize structures, accumulated intellectual capital, coterie formations, established institutional hierarchies or fixed esthetic positions.

Motivating this strategy is a desire to undermine an experimental poetry world dominated by men and to imagine in its place a utopic one where opportunity and poetic expression would be disassociated from taste, power and capital. If many poetic interventions had taken the initial steps in upsetting a male hierarchy in the 1970s, they had not gone far enough to redress the issue, especially in experimental circles where feminist discourse arrived rather late in the game. To get a sense of the gender dynamic informing *Chain* at this time, we need look no further than the number of men among the faculty at the Poetics Program as well as the history of its invited guest poets. As the editors' express in their final issue, when starting *Chain* "[they] felt [they] needed to talk to women, to extend [themselves] beyond Buffalo's great male poet heritage"(vol. 12). Beginning with a women-only issue, Spahr and Osman joined a tradition of women-centered, experimental publications starting with Kelsey Street press, which was founded in 1974, and spreading in the 80s with poetry journals such as *Raddle Moon*, *how(ever)*, *Poetics Journal*, *Mirage*, and *Big Allis* (these last three all published their own women-only issue).[88] But gender wasn't the only issue at stake for Spahr and Osman. Spahr's experience editing "Writing from the New Coast", the issue that was meant to usher in the next generation of experimental poets, left her dissatisfied with the journal's inherent claims of authority (vol. 1, 129). In their first issue, Spahr and Osman addressed these related problems on two fronts: the first was by asking a large group of women editors to speak about the relation between publishing and gender politics and then collecting them and printing them together in the first section of the issue; the second was to solicit work from women writers through a chain letter. Through the latter, each contributor would also be an editor, since after penning her piece she could solicit work from anyone of her choosing ("The chain letter is a skewed form of communication. But once it is out

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and "Procedural Poetics" by Loss Glazer (Spring 2001). The descriptions and syllabi for these classes can be found on the Electronic Poetry Center's website.

[87] To see this method at work see Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*; Fitterman and Vanesssa Place; Dworkin and Goldsmith; Bergvall.

[88] Many similar journals and projects have followed suit. See Spahr and Young.

there, it is up to each receiver to determine its fate" (134)). This form is thus meant to respond to the editors' explicit concerns over the limitations and consequences of their own involvement: "How can the poems inside a structure activate their own juxtapositions, their own presentational form? How can they lose the slick editorial veneer of self-containment and become interactive?" By creating a linked system of collective participation and solicitation they hope to generate a conversation among equals: "Linked forms are places for conversation, for a (to some extent) non-hierarchical development to occur. Such development is almost always missing from editorial considerations" (135).

Here's how it worked. The editors sent a letter to a group of randomly selected women poets asking them to begin a chain series (this letter is reproduced in the first issue, but how the "random selection" was carried out remains unclear). The instructions were stated as follows: "We are asking you to write a poem that will begin a series, or, if you are not able, to forward this letter to someone who will. After your poem is written, please send it on, along with this letter, to a woman poet whose work you're interested in. That second writer will write a poem in "response" to yours. The second writer will send the two poems on to a third writer, etc., until the chain is completed" (136). Participants were limited to five pages of printed matter and were asked to send a copy of their poems to the editors in case certain links were broken.

The collaborative nature envisioned by this project has a long history in literature. From Japanese Renga and Surrealist games of sequence such as "le cadaver exquis" to mail-art, there have been many ways of engaging a larger group of writers in a collective writing project. In 1940 taking his lead from the so-called VOU group of Japanese poets, Charles Henri Ford even initiated his own international chain poem. But Ford's collaborators were predetermined (many from the VOU group itself) and each only contributed one line (Duhamel 1-2). What is unique with *Chain*, though, is its attempt to avoid pre-determined social groups all while drawing on explicit social relations to form linked pools of women writers. At the time when *Chain*'s first issue was being prepared, this type of desire was finding expression in what many understood to be the logic of the internet. Spahr and Osman would have heard much of this talk at Buffalo where the Poetics Program was already pioneering ways of exploiting the possibilities offered by new media. In April 1994, Spahr's and Osman's teacher Charles Bernstein presented a paper on this very issue ("I Don't Take Voice Mail" in *My Way* 73-80). Providing an account of the challenges and opportunities of the internet, one that looks surprisingly sober compared to the internet euphoria at the time, Bernstein signals the importance of interactivity, made available by such things as hypertext and list-serves as well as "bulletin boards, newsgroups, and group-participation MUDs (multi-user domains) and MOOs and other 'real-time' multi-user formats" (78). Regarding hypertext, Bernstein explains that it "involves the lateral movement and linking of a potentially infinite series of data pools. It allows for non-linear explorations of a range of data bases; that is, unlike presentational modes, in hypertext there need be no established forward path through the data" (77). As for the latter forms, they allow for "works of collaboration, linking, and exchange, as well as the possibility of simultaneous-event or immediate-response structures" (78). More important is the idea that "at every point receivers are also transmitters" and that the internet is thus "a medium defined by exchange rather than delivery; the medium is interactive and dialogic rather than unidirectional or monologic" (75). Although there is no explicit mention made to the internet and its capabilities in *Chain*, this logic of laterally connected communities of exchange is certainly informing Spahr's and Osman's editorial project.

Utopian ideas, though, are bound to disappoint in practice. The editors sent out their initial request to eighteen participants, each of whom originated their own chain. Rather than a single point of origin expanding in a network of connected parts, there were multiple beginnings, many of which remained stunted and disconnected from the others. Of the eighteen chains, eight consisted of only two participants (those with three participants numbered five, those of four four, there were none with five and only one with six). And as proof that randomness is no less vulnerable to pre-determined acts, five of the participants were solicited more than once and thus contributed more work than the others. In other words, these chains were quickly and easily broken, with all but one no longer than four links, and with others joining previous links instead of forging new ones. What's more, seventeen out of the twenty-nine writers were featured in the "Writers from the New Coast" anthology. So much for Spahr's wish to escape the constraints of her own tastes. In spite of her feeling "farther away from the product, detached as it were, from [her] claims", the results of the chain letter reflect in many ways the social and professional ties of a small group of women writers (no one passed the letter on to a non-poet or an untrained writer, for example, such as to a younger sister or a dairy farmer or market analyst whose response would add a different type or class of poetry to those we find in the issue).

This failure doesn't go unnoticed by the editors. In fact, true to their principle of editorial transparency, they dispute this experiment's success in the same issue in which they publish its results. One of them writes (most likely Osman): "The intent of our format was to open up the journal to other writers whose work we might not know. It has been successful at this." To which the other (most likely Spahr) responds: "I disagree with the idea that we've been 'successful' at opening up the journal to unfamiliar voices. Or at least it hasn't happened to the degree that we had hoped for when we came up with the concept. Writers we were less familiar with were more hesitant to respond. Or writers whom we were depending on to introduce us to new poets ignored our request for work in the way that many of us ignore the requests made by actual chain letters" (132-133). One, perhaps perverse, way to look at this would be to consider it as a sort of failed multi-level marketing experiment or pyramid scheme, without, of course, any desire for or expectation of economic profit. Seen in this way, no distributor generated a significant 'downline' through successive recruitment. A rich market of potential poets, who in turn would identify and recruit more poets, who in turn would do the same, and so on, was never discovered.

My use of a marketing metaphor is not meant to disparage the editors' ambitions but to call attention to the precariousness of the conceit they chose. But there is another crucial factor that may explain the chain letter's failure and shine a more benevolent light on the editors' aims: The listserv. Bernstein's 1994 paper "I Don't Take Voice Mail" has much to say about the listserv. As he makes clear, "at this moment [April 1994], the most interesting format on the internet, apart from the basic electronic mail function, is the listserve [sic]: a series of individuals join a list—any post to the list address is immediately delivered to all list subscribers. Individuals can then post replies to the entire list or to the individual that sent the post. Lists may be open to anyone to join or may be private. The potential for discussion and collaboration is appealing— the format mixes some of the features of correspondence with the discussion group, conference call, and a panel symposium (with the crucial difference that the distinction between audience and panel is eroded)" (*My Way* 75-76). Elsewhere, in a paper presented at the MLA in 1993, Bernstein mentions the listserv as a potentially powerful poetry institution as it provides an "intriguing mix of newsletter, group letter, and bulletin board" ("Provisional Institutions: Alternative Presses and Poetic Innovation" in *My Way* 152). Spahr and Osman were no doubt fully aware of resources of the listserv, as they both were part of the Poetics listserv started by

Bernstein at Buffalo in 1993.[89] Although their engagement with the listserv was intermittent and uneven, it is also representative of the listserv's essential functions. Take a sample of Spahr's posts, for example: On 17 Feb 1995, Spahr responded to Ron Silliman's question regarding the lack of women's voices on the listserv; then on 24 June 1995, she joined a thread concerning favorite bedside books; after a long hiatus, she responded to a post concerning editing practices and cultural politics (September 26, 1997). A month later, she contributed a "reading report" (a mix between a field report and travel diary) from her initial experiences from poetry readings in Hawaii (31 October, 1997). A month after this, she described in detail a "prayer protest" concerning the building of a new bridge in Hawaii (15 December 1997). Interspersed between all these, she announced upcoming readings and publications and she provided or requested contact information of other people. Although Spahr participates less than others, the various types of responses she shares express the range of comments on the listserv: from announcements, news and gossip to sustained analysis and lively debate. It is important to note, too, that all of this is produced frequently and in bulk (archived material from the first two years alone accounts for an estimated 10,000 printed pages).

The poet and critic Barrett Watten describes the significance of the Poetics Listserv in terms of its demonstrating a "multi-authored textual practice." Analyzing the month of April 1999, in which there were 461 posts from 167 authors on 330 topics, Watten found it to be a "site where the radical strategies of the avant-garde have continued in a form of intersubjective dialogue" (94). The reason, he explains, is as follows: "Deeper questions, such as the nature of class, occur in the context of a barrage of information, publicity, and small talk: the everyday life of poetics," with the whole creating "a centrifugal/centripetal dynamic of information spinning away from a common thread but finally returning to define it" (96). This play between different types of discourse—debate, trivial questions, announcements, jokes, analysis, rumor, etc.— creates within the listserv a vibrant context for poetry, providing the means to respond to poetry and relate it to a diverse set of practices and concerns. This, together with its regular and frequent posts, makes poetry part of the fabric of everyday life—or at least the daily life of a particular demographic—, and as such it is capable of speaking for and from the perspective of the quotidian. More importantly, it achieves the level of conversation to which *Chain* aspires, since there is little that could qualify as genuine conversation in *Chain's* first issue. By contrast, the threads throughout the Poetics listserv demonstrate the attributes most often associated with conversation: direct address and response, turn taking, solicitation of sympathy, approval and agreement from co-participants, and even a smattering of small mistakes, typos and other communication blunders that give it the roughness and looseness of extemporaneous talk.[90] Charles Bernstein valued the Poetics listserv above all for precisely this quality: "Initially, I was amazed at how close the Poetics List mimed 'live' exchanges in bars, cafes, readings, and

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[89] On April 20, 1994 Bernstein distributed his paper "I Don't Take Voicemail" via the still relatively new listserv. Spahr also wrote about *Chain's* first issue on the list, providing information regarding its goals, its organization and purchasing details (23 Oct. 1994). Both Osman and Spahr engaged in a heated debate with Ron Silliman via the listserv over the issues of generational identification and the relation between poetic practices and politics (31 Oct. 1994), differentiating *Chain* from another Buffalo magazine, *Apex of the M*, and justifying or disavowing choices made in the New Coast anthology.

[90] The roughness was also a consequence of the primitive email programs which many users were using at the time to write their responses. As Bernstein notes, "a number of people on the list, working with email systems that had no text buffers, could not retype the lines prior to the one they were typing—making a post to Poetics more like a telegram than a letter" (see his preface in Kuszai 6).

apartments that so characterize the social environment of poetry. It was all here: the quick dismissals and the brilliant précis, the idle chat and the meticulous scholarship, the silly and the self-important, the smug arrogance and the startling generosity, the noise and the music" (Kuszai 6).

And yet, this conversation on the listserv is seemingly surrounded by an impenetrable boundary, one whose contours become visible only once we ask the following question: who is the public of this conversation? The problem of circulation is crucial here. Although anyone can potentially join the listserv, it circulates among a select group of members (around 150 at its beginning in 1993; by 2008 it had 1500 subscribers). Remaining hands-off for the most part, Bernstein, as the moderator, at times would take steps to keep the group to a manageable size and to link the discussion to relatively local concerns: "I have always confused the local and the, what?, nonlocal myself and it may be that everyone on this list should post local events so we find out what is really happening. But as it is this list is mostly nonlocal and getting moreso everyday. Can anyone tell me where to get some gas? Dinner will be at 7" (12 April 1994). And on 12 May 1994 he adds a note to his post saying: "As new people join Poetics@UBVM I ask them not to mention the list on any public internet space (BBS, listserve, etc) in order to keep this particular group to a relatively small scale. This is not to discourage people from recommending the list to others but to keep the list to people who have a direct involvement with its current constituency (however undefined that may be)." Bernstein was thus always explicit about the limits of the listserv. As he later explained, "the Poetics List, while committed to openness, has always been a private list with an articulated editorial focus and a restricted format" (Kuszai 9).[91] Only when the listserv becomes archived and made accessible online, or when a sample becomes published in a book, does it circulate or have the potential to circulate outside of its immediate constituency.[92]

This brings us back to the premise of the chain letter. Although the listserv promises conversation, that conversation is never among equals as the medium itself is no less subjected to inherent power structures than any other form of conversation (see the thread concerning male dominance within the listserv, 'boy talk'). Moreover, the listserv operates within a closed circuit not unlike a coterie or clique structure. Even a cursory glance at its language signals this type of talk with its abundant use of shorthand, in-jokes, personal and private allusions and familiar speech. The relationship between *Chain*, a print journal deploying an almost aleatory distributional method, and the Poetics Listserv, an electronic forum for a select group of participants, is thus both complementary and antagonistic. The listserv allows for the conversational capacity *Chain* can only reference metaphorically. Its notices of events, its small talk, its shifting focus as well as the frequency of its activity creates the impression that poetry is taking place in the same realm as everyday life, whereas *Chain*'s biannual publication schedule conveys the sense of poetry's belonging to a slower-paced, distant realm of detached activity. But if the listserv's closed-circuit conversation supplements the production and distribution of poetry, connecting it to specific locations and concrete times, it was never meant to replace other

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[91] In 1999, as Christopher Alexander replaced Bernstein as the moderator and editor, the "immediacy" of the conversation was sacrificed for a sharper focus as subscribers were no longer able to post directly to the list.

[92] But even then it circulates under a new set of constraints imposed by the form of its publication. Joel Kuszai's *Poetics@*, stripped of all its quotidian quality—announcements, requests, chitchat, minor squabbles, even the date of each entry—becomes a highly partisan take on the Poetic list rather than a representative sample of the archive or even a demonstration of its participatory framework.

publication outlets, a point made explicit by its lack of, well, poetry. *Chain*, though lacking the quotidian aspect of the listserv, sought to bring together an ever-expanding mix of poets and poetry in a way that works deliberately against the grain of traditional methods of collecting and editing poetry—neither community-centered nor based on matters of taste.

As I've shown, this method came up short. But *Chain's* tireless pursuit of poetry that exceeds its own frame yielded impressive results nonetheless, as though the very failure of the chain experiment prodded the editors to seek out new means and methods of poetic engagement. Although resorting to the traditional form of open submissions (with an occasional commissioned experiment), *Chain* managed to shape the practice and discussion of experimental poetry in the 90s and 2000s by bringing together the voices, opinions and practices of various generations of poets around critical issues. In order to do this, the editors had to abandon their hands-off approach and wield the authority granted to them by their institutional settings (what Bernstein says in reference to the listserv equally applies here: "In the age of the Internet, more editing not less is required" (Kuzsai 13)). Thus, not only did the faculty at Buffalo help fund *Chain*, they (and their contemporaries) were also regular contributors (Bernstein (vols. 3, 10 and 12,), Loss Glazier (vol. 4) and Robert Creeley (vol. 8) all appeared in its pages).

The main topics of each issue are telling. Key matters associated with earlier avant-garde practices were reexamined, such as "procedures" (elaborated by Jackson Mac Low, taken up by Language poetry, and brought into sharper focus with a new generation of conceptual poets) and "multi-media/mixed genres" (the primary impetus behind Fluxus art and poetry and a way of connecting current poetry to other arts and writing practices); and new areas for poetry were explored, such as in the "comics" issue. Throughout *Chain*, language remained a central concern, but the accent was placed less on its material texture than on its social function ("dialogue", "memoir/anti-memoir", "letters", "public forms", "documentary"). Attention was also given to the trafficking of poetry between different languages and cultures ("translation", "multiple languages") and the consequences of writing in the language of empire were repeatedly treated. Most significantly, though, the editors sought ways to give poetry a social and political charge, extending their reach into untried areas of poetic expression while testing out old and new experimental devices to see which ones threw into greatest relief the social issue at hand.

The final issue, "Facts", is a case in point. There is perhaps no single concept more antithetical in the history of poetry and poetics than that of facts. Conventionally assigned to the domains of science and reporting, a so-called fact found in a poem would rarely be considered as such. Thus, by requesting "factual" work from a group of poets concerning resource consumption in their final issue, the editors are asking that poetry take on a new function. Unsurprisingly, the results are mixed. Some entries include traditional facts while others play ironically with the very concept of the factual. Robert Fitterman's "LULU (Locally Unwanted Land Use)" consists of minimalist poems documenting the "top 12 items found in May 2002 litter counts." They are appropriately presented in small, compact junk heaps:

Cigarette	Other paper	Confection-
Butts 9358,	2869,13,45%.	ary wrappers,
43.87%. Plas-	Bottle and can	1539, 7.21%.
tics (miscellany)	tops 745,3.49%.	Paper cups and
1198,5.61%.	Plastic bags	containers
Cigarette	463,1.89%	405,1.8%.
packets	Milk and	Straws

<pre>
        juice   436
        cartons   2.04%.
        395,1.85%.   Commer-
        Tickets, ATM,   cial packag-
        vending 323,1.5%.   ing and boxes
        Clothing and   219,1.13%.
        materials   Plastic
        300,1.4%.   to-go
</pre>

(260)

Other poems in the issue work more indirectly. Bill Berkson's entry, for example, strives to evoke the horrors of the Holocaust with a single detail taken from an interview with an Auschwitz survivor:

> Q: What has changed since you were here?
>
> A: The grass.
>
> Q: What's different about the grass?
>
> A: There wasn't any.
>
> Q: No grass?
>
> A: The Jews ate it.

("Hearsay (version of American tv interview segment with Auschwitz survivor January, 2005)" 236).

Berkson draws on a standard Q&A form of reportage to recast the universalist cliché of seeing the world in a blade of grass in a darker tone. Whether one finds these poems compelling or not, they raise two important and complementary questions: what does it mean to write and read poems factually? And, what does it mean to write and read facts poetically? They also serve as a clear rebuttal of a common sentiment, expressed best by William Carlos Williams in his poem "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower":

> It is difficult
>   to get the news from poems
>   yet men die miserably every day
>   for lack
>   of what is found there.
>   (337)

In "Facts", not only is news delivered in poems but also men and women die precisely from what is found in them (over-consumption, political violence, etc.).

These kinds of questions are posed throughout *Chain*. But the editors also go beyond asking what can happen within the space a poem; they also question poetry's relation to its various publics. They do this by seeking out writing and art produced, performed and

disseminated in non-traditional ways and spaces. As they explain in their issue "Public Forms", they began by taking an interest in "various forms of art that happen outside of usual performance and publication contexts such as street art, political speeches, poster campaigns, architectural design, mail art, community theater, speaker's corners, poetry written for specific public occasions, etc. In other words, we wanted an issue that would investigate art that is created by/for communities or "the public" in its broader definitions" (vol. 11 "Editors' Notes"). In this way, poetry, or a set of competing poetries, takes on a whole host of functions, and thus expands the field of its applicability. This is not an easy task. The "public forms" issue is accordingly as much about the limits to public art and poetry as about its potential. Consider Jana Brancha's piece, "Quite Specific", for example. Brancha begins her piece with some prefatory remarks concerning the challenges of public art: "Since public art is so often a lightning rod for clamorous radio and newspaper rants about wasted public funds, it's too risky to give an artist an open opportunity to think something up out of thin air, let it loose, and just watch what happens. So one popular solution is to let large committees of city officials, architects, and real-estate developers choose the site, the concept, and often the form, and then simply ask the artists to execute their ideas" (47). To illustrate this, she presents a sort of catalogue of "RFQ's" (Requests For Qualifications), each as equally absurd and confining as the next. Here's the full request from the City of Minneapolis:

> *Call for Artists—City of Minneapolis*
> *PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS*
> A. *Bronze sculpture of the television character Mary Richards tossing her hat in the air from the opening credits of The Mary Tyler Moore Show.*
> B. *Sculpture is to be an exact, realistic, life-like rendering of Mary Richards.*
> C. *Larger than life representation. Size requirements will be provided…*
> D. *Bronze sculpture style and patina to match the Ralph Kramden sculpture.*
> E. *Artist to provide base for sculpture with approval…*
> F. *The following stages will be reviewed and approved….Mini-clay rendering, full-scale model (multiple reviews), wax model, and final bronze sculpture….The selected artist will be required to submit photos (preferably digital) of the work in progress on a bi-weekly basis.*
> *APPLICATION MATERIALS*
> *A narrative description of the artist's approach to the project…This section should address how the approach will technically portray Mary's hat in connection to the figure. Not to exceed three letter-sized pages.*
>
> (47)

Fastidiously controlled requests such as this highlight the institutional limits of public art. The list of requirements, tests and approvals overseen by a committee of city officials, real estate investors and architects does not bode well for public art, especially when the committee dictates a strict set of guidelines according to a conservative notion of "life-like" art. On a more fundamental level, this piece, and many others like it included in this issue, shed light on the conditions of possibility of public art and poetry. It is by calling attention in this way to centers of power and institutional conditions within the poetic and artistic field that *Chain* succeeds in finding a political tenor for poetry.

Beginning, then, with the so-called unmediated approach of the chain letter, Spahr and Osman ended up wielding impressive authority in requesting, arranging, and analyzing their subsequent material. The lesson learned from the failure of the chain letter is that unless one establishes through direct means new spaces and publics for poetry, it will inevitably fall back on

previously organized patterns of circulation, just as if one fails to create public art outside the system of RFQ's then the results will be confined to the pre-determined restrictions and conservative ideologies of its overseers. It is perhaps with this desire to seek out new spaces and functions for poetry and political engagement that in 2006 the editors ended up leaving behind the journal form altogether in favor of the pamphlet and small book series.

I won't speculate here about the many reasons for this. But it's safe to say in general that the editors felt the journal had exhausted its possibilities, and they wished to test the potential of a new form, one that would offer a more sustained and pointed engagement in critical matters. Announcing this move, they state: "We want to forget art for art's sake. We want to forget the idea of legacy and permanence. Instead, we want work that recognizes that we, all of us on this small earth, are alive in a time of crisis. It is our hope that each of these books (which will be no more than 100 pages) will address a particular topic with an interdisciplinary focus" (vol. 12 "Editors' Notes"). Note that there's no mention of poetry here. Indeed, in the works that ensued in their new series, poetry is in no way the overriding focus; rather, it participates alongside interviews, artwork, essays, and critical studies by artists, activists and scholars. When poetry does appear, it's presented as a critical tool. This is often literally the case, as with Amy Sara Carroll's participation in the "Transborder Immigrant Tool" which is a "GPS phone that uses poetry to lead the disoriented and thirsty to water caches and safety sites in the US-Mexican borderlands."[93] But it is also true in *A Megaphone: Some Enactments, Some Numbers, and Some Essays about the Continued Usefulness of Crotchless-pants-and-a-machine-gun Feminism* where Spahr and co-editor Stephanie Young return to some of the principle concerns of *Chain*, from gender politics (vol. 1) to facts (vol. 12) and their respective place in relation to poetry. This latter work takes up the tools being honed and developed throughout *Chain* and puts them to effective, sustained use: one piece in the book is a feminist critique (or "enactment") of the male-centered, abstract quality of OULIPO and Conceptual Poetry, which generated a considerable response; another piece collects and analyzes publishing statistics to contest the oft-cited belief that the gender dynamics of the poetry world have fundamentally changed. In this way, *Chain* laid the groundwork for further poetic engagements. Like many periodicals, it served as a sort of breeding ground for future projects both for the editors themselves and for the journal's contributors, which were bolstered by the social relations and networks established via the journal between a varied set of poets.

Chain, like *Revue de littérature générale*, also had many shortcomings. The conversation it wished to establish found a better outlet in the Poetics Listserv (and the other listservs generated from this). And in spite of its efforts to widen the focus of poetry, the journal published relatively few non-poets, a fact remedied in part by the eventual switch to its new book format. Still, its achievements are admirable, especially when considered against the rise of new media and the shift this would cause (and continues to cause) in the production, distribution and circulation of poetry.

The patterns of circulation of *Revue de littérature générale* and *Chain*, both beginning at the same time, hardly overlap. Their ambitions and achievements are in many respects even incommensurate, since each depends on a different set of social circumstances. In many ways, they both undermine the ideal of free and open exchange between different poetry communities. This is because, as each is acutely aware of how circulation is tied to the construction of a public, they repeatedly call attention to the limits of address. *Revue de littérature générale* does this by

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[93] See Kuppers.

playing with the conditions of legibility of its texts. Alferi and Cadiot aim to imagine a new public for poetry not through any form of direct address, but by creating a complex layer of multiple addresses through the voice and writing of others. Surprisingly, their strongest statement of poetics uses an American's words—rearranged and distorted—to speak more convincingly to a contemporary French public (I'm referring to Bernstein's "Vers Introjectif"). As for *Chain,* it strove to create an ever expanding public of women writers and readers through the conceit of the chain letter. When this didn't work, the editors shifted their focus to other power structures that mediate and limit the circulation of poetry, including those informed by narrow ideologies of poetry's function or place in society (bearing on the relation between poetry and facts, for example, or the conditions of public art). As *Chain* is working outside the Franco-American context, it sheds all the more light on the latter's limitations. In this way, it is an exemplary counter-example to the pattern of exchange between French and American poetry as it is carried out via the periodical. As with *RLG,* it shines a revealing light on the limitations of this context by offering strategies that deliberately counter its patterns of circulation and the publics it imagines.

Chapter 3: The Poetry Reading
Saying Poetry: Jacques Roubaud and the American Poetry Reading

"Dire la poésie n'est pas une chose privée   dire la poésie n'est pas une chose publique" (*Dire la Poésie*, 22)

If the periodical facilitates the circulation of texts between France and the United States, the poetry reading, and devices such as the tape recorder that allow for its remembrance and future dissemination, enable the circulation of poets and of their voices. But whereas the periodical has a long history in this Franco-American exchange, the international poetry reading is a new phenomenon. Jacques Roubaud's memory of a poetry reading in Paris in 1974 expresses the novelty, even exoticism, of this cultural practice. As Roubaud recalls, on this particular spring evening in 1974, Jerome Rothenberg, an American poet, took a pumpkin out of his bag and started shaking it before a small audience of twenty some people. He began to chant while continuing to shake the pumpkin. Although the words of his song were difficult to understand, the modulating tones of his voice, its nasal droning punctuated by sudden guttural stops, made for a captivating performance. He was performing "horse chants" based on recordings from the Navajo singer Frank Mitchell. No sooner had Rothenberg begun singing than the audience, rapt, was transported "parmi les chevaux" (*Partition Rouge* 4).

The sense of marvel in Roubaud's account may owe less to the Rothenberg's unusual performance than to the mere fact that a group a people had gathered together to witness a poetry reading. Of course, Paris has a rich history of public performances, and in the 1970s there was no shortage of concerts, operas, dances and plays going on at any one time. But the poetry reading was a novel type of performance. As Roubaud remarks casually, "en ce temps-là il y avait peu de lectures de poésie en France et on les faisait chez soi" (4). Although new to France, the poetry reading had exploded in the United States twenty years earlier. There, what was once a stately affair carried out among distinguished poets in lecture halls and at official occasions became a popular event performed in coffee shops, bars, galleries, cultural centers, churches, even street corners. This tradition has been widely recognized. Indeed, critics have started to acknowledge the poetry reading's importance for postwar American poetry.[94] But its significance for French poetry has been greatly overlooked. It is safe to assume that, before the 1970s, most American poets were known in France only through their writing. Poets were read either in the original or in translation, but rarely did one see them perform their poetry in person. This changed quickly. International poetry festivals began bringing diverse groups of poets together and readings were soon being organized in many different cities across the world. Americans were reading regularly in France at this time while French poets began organizing their own readings, too.

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[94] Two of the more influential studies for my own purposes have been Peter Middleton's *Distant Reading*: *Performance, Reading and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry* and *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, edited by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin.

My contention is that this new popularity of the American poetry reading led to new experiments with orality in French poetry. This is not a matter of the influence of one writer's style on another, or even the impact of an American literary movement in France. Rather, this concerns the way a set of practices, collectively defined here as "the American poetry reading", established many of the conditions by which poetry came to be produced, disseminated and understood in France. There is no better example of this than the work of Jacques Roubaud, whose two companion pieces, *Dors* and *Dire la Poésie*, are a direct consequence of his encounters with the American poetry reading.

These two works were published together in 1981 with three other short pieces, *Tombeaux de Pétrarque*, *Neuf éclats de l'âge des saints* and *La piste du vent*. All five of these works share an interest in different aspects of oral poetry, but *Dire la poésie* and *Dors* are the most explicit in their oral undertakings.[95] Whereas *Dors* consists of a series of minimalist poems that were developed through successive readings over several years, *Dire la poèsie* is a sort of written record of an improvised oral experiment—or, as Roubaud calls it, "de la prose existant oralement" (33).

Both of these works are concerned with what it means to say poetry—*dire la poésie*—which is not the same as to recite it. Nor is it the same as chanting, singing or simply reading poetry. What's more, it is not completely a public matter, but nor is it a private one. I'm rehearing Roubaud's own thoughts on this subject. His reflections on oral poetry, and his poetry that springs from these, are fraught with these kinds contradictions and negations. Needless to say, although his understanding and practice of oral poetry is not easily accommodated by the conventions of the poetry reading, they are nonetheless in direct dialogue with its varied practices

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Before treating *Dors* and *Dire la Poésie*, I would like to take a brief look at a more recent collection of Roubaud's where the influence of the American poetry reading is unmistakable: *Churchill 40 et Autres Sonnets de Voyage: 2000-2003*. As the title indicates, this book is principally made up of travel poems. Many of these poems end with the date and place of composition, and include cities such as London, Tokyo, Rome, Copenhagen, Berlin, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Seoul and Skye, Scotland, not to mention many locations across the United States. Given the occasions, settings and hosts mentioned in many poems, we know the poetry reading plays an important role in many of these trips. As Roubaud explains in reference to his trip to the United States: "c'est un voyage, explicitement, de poésie, pas de poétique, pas de conférence, pas de colloque: lectures" (*La Dissolution* 111).[96]

This is especially true for the sequence "Bus-Stop: Infinity." All of the poet's observations in this section of the kitsch Americana—the pancakes and root beer floats, the

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[95] "Orality" often refers to one or more stages of a given work's production and performance. An oral work can be composed orally in private and then subsequently written; written and then subsequently performed orally; or composed by and through its oral performance. I will draw on all these understandings of orality below with a special emphasis on the final one, which finds its clearest definition in Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales*. It is important to bear in mind that the concept of orality cannot be separated from that of writing, as the two depend on each other conceptually and often complement each other in practice. See Finnegan.

[96] Many of these trips are discussed or alluded to in *La Dissolution*, the last volume in Roubaud's autobiographic prose series.

airports and car-culture—all of these observations collected and staged in the various "sonnets de voyages", result from the labor and leisure of a traveling poet who is following a circuit of readings at universities, bookstores and French cultural centers throughout the United States, from New York, Cambridge, Boston and Philadelphia to Atlanta, Cincinnati, Denver, Boulder, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Like the troubadours and *jongleurs* of the medieval period traveling from court to court to perform their songs, this is the career of the contemporary poet, often to his or her dismay: moving from one reading to the next, hosted by universities, governmental cultural programs or festival organizers.[97] It comes as no surprise, then, that many poems in *Churchill 40* are dedicated to Roubaud's hosts: Warren Motte, Cole Swensen, David Bellos, Paul Fournel. These aren't wealthy patrons whose manors are praised as in such poems as Ben Johnson's famous "To Penhurst". Rather, they are literary critics and poets employed as faculty at American universities or writers working for government agencies. Together, they represent a sort of minor patron who provides the occasion and support for poets to share their work at public readings.

The poetry reading, then, enabled several poems in "Bus-Stop: Infinity". Although, as thematic material, the poetry reading remains for the most part slightly out of frame, on a few occasions it is brought to the forefront. In these poems the contradictions arising from Roubaud's encounter with the American poetry reading are put on vivid display. Most significant among these is the tension between the controlled discipline of solitary writing and the improvised spontaneity of public performance. Consider the sonnet Roubaud composed in early March 2000. The poem takes place at an iconic site for the experimental American poetry scene: Saint Mark's in the Bowery in the lower-east side of New York City. This setting—noted at the outset— inflects the whole style of the poem:

> *St Mark's on the Bowery*. C'est tout près *St Mark's*
> *Place. I remember (a sweet and sour remembrance)*. Louise.
> Ted sur son lit. Buvant des pepsis. Annabel me rappelle
> Une visite chez elle. *Her name now is Annabel Lee.*
> *(Married Mr Lee. divorced. but kept the name. Of course.*
> *Discussed we had, then, composition by numbers. She still does, she says.*
> *34s? 44s? I mumble something about 31,53,37&73 Queneau numbers, etc.)*
> *Ted wrote to me after Alix's death. Then died: (too many pepsis).*
> *Was buried to the sound of guns (he had been a marine*
> *Ron (Padgett) told me. Ron is here tonight).*
> *I sit next to jackson mc low. He writes*
> Sans arrêt dans un cahier pendant les lectures:
> *Words he hears, or thinks of, listening, I think.*
> *I walk back*

The setting of the poem is telling. Indeed, there is perhaps no place more emblematic of the alternative poetry reading scene in the United States than St. Mark's.[98] As Daniel Kane makes clear, the Poetry Project at St. Marks is "a nerve center, social meeting ground, and barometer of the contemporary American alternative poetry scene, and one looks to it to see in part what has happened and what will happen" (xviii). (Kane was making this statement around the same time Roubaud was composing his poem). The mere frequency of readings alone is a reminder of its significance: "Since the fall of 1966, St. Mark's has had about three poetry readings a week, along with related poetry workshops and special events, making it a place that, on average, has perhaps held more readings than any other reading series in the twentieth century" (xviii). But St. Marks isn't only significant for its popularity. It also represents a certain type of poetry reading. At its origin, the reading series at St. Marks stood in stark contrast to "establishment" readings uptown at places like the 92nd Street Y and the Guggenheim Museum (Kane 139). Unlike the polite readings held at those establishments, readings at Saint Mark's were often boisterous occasions where many of the performing poets were on intimate terms. This led to a casual environment with theatrical, rowdy, and ultimately unpredictable performances. The poetry performed there reflects this. Written or improvised in the present moment, these poems are often casual and chatty, frequently addressing or mentioning close friends and familiar hangouts, and making inside jokes.

With its casual tone, its name-dropping of poet friends and acquaintances, its insistence on spontaneity, even its use of English, Roubaud's sonnet pays homage to this tradition. The poem is both personal memoir and pastiche. The poet's "I remember" in the second line, for example, at once recalls an earlier trip Roubaud took to the United States and alludes to Joe Brainard's famous poem sequence by the same name.[99] This allusion isn't gratuitous. Brainard was a major figure of the Lower East Side poetry scene where this poem takes place (in fact, he read from *I Remember* at the same setting in 1971), as are many of the other figures that appear by first or full name in the poem: Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett and Jackson Mac Low. The casual, offhand appearance of these names is in keeping with the breezy tone of the poem, a tone that characterizes poetry of the so-called New York School. The same breeziness marks the small talk and minor events of the poem, which are recounted without the slightest trace of nostalgia, excitement, or self-analysis. Even the death of Roubaud's wife—Alix Cleo Roubaud—is passed over quickly while Berrigan's own death is robbed of solemnity by the parenthetic "*too many pepsis*"(which is also both a pop reference and insider knowledge of Ted Berrigan's personal habits). Indeed, the poem's nonchalant demeanor, its casual mention of poet friends and the small-talk carried out between them, its setting at a social event, and, most importantly, the fact that the poem is unfolding in the present moment—"Ron is here tonight"—all of these signal unmistakably the style of the New York School of poets, most notably that of Berrigan and Padgett.[100]

Clearly, Roubaud's decision to stage this poem here, in the present moment, surrounded by New York poets, evokes an oral tradition strongly associated with St. Marks. The setting alone evokes improvised acts, dramatic reading styles, breath-oriented, "open-field"-style poems,

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[98] This isn't Roubaud's first time at Saint Marks. He gave a reading there in the early nineties, too (*Poésie: récit* 17).

[99] For more on this poem, see Roubaud, *Le grand incendie de Londres* 379-392.

[100] The excessive use of parenthesis and the remembrance of the death of friends and loved ones in particular recall poems from Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets* (see "Sonnet LXXIII" and "Sonnet LXXX" for example).

chants and audience-oriented performances (Kane 183-186). But as much as Roubaud pays homage to this tradition, he also resists it. Indeed, for all its breeziness, one is immediately struck by how difficult it is to read the poem orally. This is due to the uncertainty of pronunciation caused by the sudden shifts between English and French. For instance, as the opening line is divided into two equal hemistiches, the first in English, the second in French, one is tempted to pronounce the first appearance of *St. Mark's* at the line's opening in English and its second appearance at the line's end in French. This instance of the same word given a distinct articulation is indicative of a varying pace and tone throughout the poem. What does it mean to read a poem, such as this, in two voices, especially when the cues to switch from one to the other are not always so clear? As we'll see below, uncertainty concerning the reading aloud of a poem is central to Roubaud's conception of orality.

This problem is exacerbated by the poem's written form. The sonnet form Roubaud uses seemingly clashes with the occasion. Its grid-like, regular structure and its association with the page make it a poor host for an oral poem. But this is not really an oral poem, nor is it a regular sonnet. True to form, there are fourteen-lines, but these are uncharacteristically of variable length. End rhymes are replaced by uneven internal rhymes—"Annabelle me rappelle/ Une visite chez elle"—and the syntax pays no heed to end-stops and line breaks, as the sentences stop and start at an irregular pace. In spite of these idiosyncrasies, Roubaud's decision to make this poem a sonnet speaks to his interest in poetic form. Yet these idiosyncrasies, as well as the spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment quality of the language also reveal, as Ann Smock puts it, Roubaud's "cloudy side". In other words, the poem's present tense leads one to believe it is being written *now*, with all the artless and unexpected consequences that this entails (jagged lines, repetition, parenthetical remarks, awkward phrasing). At the same time, though, as a sonnet, we are reminded that this poem has a given structure, even if we are only made aware of this by the absence of its expected form ("Form is like an absent meter" Roubaud says elsewhere).[101] This formless moment caught in the form of a sonnet, then, can be seen as a performance at once improvised and controlled.

Roubaud finds an additional way to subtly stage an act of resistance to the American public performance. He does this by robbing it of its spectacle. The poet, after all, isn't performing. He is a mere member of the audience. What's more, he never makes the slightest mention of the reading itself. Rather, the poet is more distracted by what is happening around him, as are the other members in the audience—Jackson Mac Low is just as caught up writing his own poems as listening to those being performed (distraction, as we'll see, is key to Roubaud's oral practice). On this occasion at St. Mark's, there is no electricity in the air, no awe-inspiring performance, no group gestalt, no wild interruptions or unusual behavior by the crowd or the reader. In short, there is no spectacle. This runs counter to the lavish myths making up the popular history of the poetry reading. We are far from the drunken fervor of the infamous Six Gallery Reading in 1955 or the mass spectacle of the Three Penny Poets Reading at the Fillmore East in New York at the height of the Vietnam War. The stunts, drugs and memorable performances associated with St. Mark's are also absent. This reading shares little with Fluxus inspired happenings, contemporary sound or muti-media performances, or the political theater of engaged poets. But nor does this bring us closer to the supposed opposite of these: the stately reading at polite lecture halls, elite social clubs or official ceremonies. The wealth of terms critics use to describe the full-spectrum of readings—from solemn and sanctified to boisterous

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[101] *La pluralité des mondes de Lewis* 73, qtd. in Smock 150.

and bohemian—simply do not apply here.[102] This reading, it seems, is neither sacred nor profane. And though it is public, the poet has a fraught relation with the conditions of its publicity.

The contradiction between control and spontaneity, between public performance and private meditation, is at the core of Roubaud's work. Although it continues to resonate in his most recent works, it is most pronounced in his collection *Dire: Précédé de Dire la poésie,* a collection that sprung from Roubaud's mixed feelings toward the American poetry reading in the mid seventies.

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Jerome Rothenberg's reading that May evening in 1974 had a lasting impact on Roubaud's work. Upon leaving Paris Rothenberg left Roubaud with material he had compiled on what he was calling "ethnopoetry." This was principally work collected from Native American oral traditions. In this work, Rothenberg strove to recover the poetry's performative aspect, and, as opposed to the florid and tightly structured forms given to Native American writing by early colonists and ethnographers, he turned to experimental practices—dada concerts, concrete poetry, fluxus happenings—to give the writing a more "open form."[103]

The idea of open form poetry was popularized by Charles Olson, whose "Projective Verse" served as a foundational statement for a new poetics.[104] According to Olson, the new technology of the typewriter allowed writers to create a poetic form more in tune with the nature of speech, as line-breaks and spacing could now be easily determined by the writer rather than the printer and could thus be made to reflect the irregular pattern of "breath." This idea appealed to many experimental writers at the time who felt confined by the conventional constraints of so-called academic poetry. The reasons for this are many, but one of the principle factors behind this appeal concerns the new social circumstances created by the poetry reading. In the decade following the publication of Olson's "Projective Verse", the poetry reading had gone from a polite activity carried out by a handful of elite poets to a popular event staged for large crowds in countless venues. Even poets who had little concern for oral poetry or public readings were caught up in the frenzy of readings. John Ashbery is a case in point: "In 1963, when I returned from Paris where I had been living for five years, I wasn't aware that anyone was reading my poetry. When I left, poetry readings were solemn and official events given by elder statespersons of poetry, like Auden or Eliot and Marianne Moore. Then the "Beat revolution" happened to take place while I was away, and when I got back—although I wasn't aware of it—everyone was giving poetry readings everywhere. I was astonished at being asked to give one, until I realized I was one of about a hundred poets one could have heard that night in New York" (qtd. in Kane xvii). As the American university became flush with funding during the rise of the cold war and agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts were created to support contemporary artists and writers, a network of venues were established where readings, talks and performances were encouraged. Add to this the large-scale transformation of once industrial spaces and

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[102] For a clear instance of the latter terms, see Vincent.

[103] See his *Shaking the Pumpkin*: "the range of the tribal poets was even more impressive if one […] worked empirically or by analogy to contemporary, limit-smashing experiments (*as with concrete poetry, sound poetry, intermedia, happenings, etc.*). Since tribal poetry was almost always part of a larger situation (i.e. was *truly intermedia*), there was no more reason to present the words alone as independent structures than the ritual-events, say, or the pictographs arising from the same source" (xxii, my italics).

[104] This is the same piece Charles Bernstein parodies in "Vers Introjectif". See chapter 2.

neighborhoods into cultural centers, museums and galleries, flanked by coffee shops and bars with regular readings, and the groundwork had been laid for an oral poetics.[105] Perhaps more important than the typewriter for this poetics was the tape recorder, which allowed poets to focus on new phonological aspects of the reading and performative voice. As the tape recorder is central for Roubaud's poetry, I will return to this matter below.

Looking back on Rothenberg's work from today's perspective, one feels closer to the poetry reading in New York in the 60s and 70s than to the Seneca reservation where Rothenberg lived in upstate New York for a year. Rothenberg's reworking of Native American chants, spells and stories are infused with the spirit and character of experimental performances that were taking place in New York at the time. This is no less true for Roubaud, whose enthusiasm for Native American poetry owes much to Rothenberg's ethnopoetics. Indeed, Roubaud drew on Rothenberg's *Shaking the Pumpkin* to co-edit an anthology of Native American poetry, *Partition Rouge*, which he compiled and translated with Florence Delay. Echoing Rothenberg's more exuberant claims concerning orality, Roubaud was drawn to the spoken aspect of Native American poetry ("Un aspect important de la pratique poétique indienne dont il faut essayer de rendre compte est sa dimension orale"). Charmed by the so-called magic of spells, curses, prayers and chants, Roubaud agreed with the widespread belief that "l'acte de parole indien c'est que le dire est le faire" (9).[106]

Roubaud became convinced through this encounter with Native American poetry via Rothenberg that "l'écriture poétique du dire est une partition." His method of transcribing and translating Native American poetry strove to highlight its oral qualities: "il faut essayer, dans la mesure du possible, de transcrire les intonations, les silences, distinguer ce qui est crié de ce qui est chuchoté, ce qui est lent de ce qui est rapide et, par-dessus tout, conserver la magie de la répétition ainsi que les syllabes dites non-signifiantes qu'ethnologues et linguistes allégrement supprimaient de leurs études" (9). He would apply this same idea in his own writing a few years later by conceiving of *Dors* and *Dire la poésie* as scores for oral performances. But his ideas concerning orality were greatly tempered by the time he began to compose these last two works. As we'll see, his score for these poems bears little resemblance to those of ethnopoets or fluxus performers. Nevertheless, the influence of Rothenberg's ethnopoetry on the five pieces comprising *Dors: Précédé de Dire la Poésie* is unmistakable. The final section of the collection, *La piste du vent*, consists entirely of poems culled from Native American texts. With their brevity, simplicity and use of repetition, this writing shares many of the formal features of the minimalist poems of *Dors*. The poems of *Dors* could also be said to share the ostensible motivation of much of the Native American writing collected in his anthology. For what are these nighttime poems if not spells and chants to ward off insomnia and induce sleep? This would explain their anti-lyrical mode of address:

> dors
> tu dormi
> ras
>
> tu
> le sais tu

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[105] For an enlightening case study on this phenomenon, see Zukin.
[106] This statement recalls J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, which could have also influenced Roubaud at the time. See *How to do things with words*.

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But the spell of the poetry reading and the more romantic claims associated with its performance quickly wore off, as Roubaud soon grew weary of the form it was taking in an increasing number of venues. If the poetry reading was a novelty for French poets in 1974, in the span of just a couple of years it was becoming a widespread phenomenon. Indeed, in 1976 an annual International Poetry Festival began in Cambridge, England. Roubaud attended the festival's second year in 1977, as did many other French poets. The contrast between Rothenberg's esoteric performance in 1974 and the well-administrated weekend event with numerous participants, organizers and sponsors couldn't be starker. If Rothenberg's reading in Paris sparked an initial interest in Roubaud for the poetry reading, it was here, only three years later, where Roubaud developed a strong and lasting aversion to the "professional" reading. It was also here where Roubaud began to work out his own conception of orality, which he would soon put into practice.

Roubaud's dismay over the "professionalisation extrême" of the poetry reading can be attributed principally to one feature: audience-oriented theatricality. He sees this primarily as an American phenomenon. The festival's dramatic readings fit comfortably alongside the many concerts, dances and films celebrating poetry. This spectacle of poetry had been long in the making in the United States. As Roubaud himself notes, in the wake of the infamous Six Gallery reading in 1955, there was a chain reaction that caused the poetry reading to spread throughout the United States (*Vingt poètes américains* 13). The popularity of jazz readings, Beat performances, and coffee house gatherings had given rise to more theatrical poetry performances. Greater audiences were drawn to this new form of poetry. In the Bay Area, one estimate has it that 500 to 1,500 people were attending readings each week by 1973 (Vincent 40-41), two years prior to the first Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975. And "between 1972 and 1976, rarely was a day of the week free of a reading or poetry event somewhere" (40). These readings in the United States took place in a myriad of venues, from small, informal settings to larger institutions, including universities, churches, museums and converted working-class spaces such as the Longshoremen's Hall (where thanks to its large size rock concerts were also regularly held).[107] This became the "era of the big reading" (Vincent 43).[108] San Francisco even initiated its own annual poetry festival around this time. As a result, new audience-oriented reading styles were readily adopted. As Stephen Vincent explains, "given the emphasis on and public success of readings, some poets naturally began to expand the format and shape of their work in order to involve actors, musicians, dancers and their own instruments. Apart from the challenge of new forms, it was clearly a way to expand an audience that could grow tired of the poet-in-the-pulpit format" (Vincent 45). In 1975 George Economou outlined the principal concerns of what he called "the New Oral Poetry", which was consequence of these changes. He was referring to "poetic work made specifically, but obviously in varying degrees, with an

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[107] Deindustrialization has led to this conversion of industrial spaces into cultural venues, even in France. In Paris, Oulipo has held many performances at the "halle Saint-Pierre" since 1996 (Roubaud *Poésie*, 389).

[108] In the 70s an estimated 1,500 people would attend weekend readings at Glide Church in San Francisco (Vincent 44).

awareness of a *live* audience to whom that work could be read aloud, or of a reader-audience who could interpret that poetry in print in such a way as to approximate in the mind's ear an oral performance of it in any voice the reader-audience chooses but ideally in the voice of the poet him/herself." (653). Clearly such thoughts underlie Roubaud's understanding of the American poetry reading.[109]

Poetry took on new forms in the United States just as it also settled comfortably into new institutional settings. Indeed, the rise of poetry readings coincided with an increase of creative writing programs in universities. Roubaud sees them both as an unfortunate process of professionalization, of which he is quick to express his disapproval. Commenting on the latter, he professes his commitment to amateurism as a counter to excess professionalization: "L'invraisemblable multiplication usa-ienne des ateliers de 'creative writing', ces workshops innombrables et parfois lourdement payants où on apprend à faire poète, à faire romancier et nouvelliste (ce qui comporte des leçons sur la manière de s'adresser à un éditeur, de choisir un agent littéraire, de composer son curriculum vitae, et autres choses semblables), produisant des fournées mal cuites de clones de Raymond Carver (et autres), m'enfonce résolument dans cette postion [d'amateur]" (*Poésie: récit* 416). According to Roubaud, the American poetry reading, "où ne s'endort nul auditoire" has an equally detrimental effect on poetry (*Dire* 14).

This distaste for the professional reading encouraged Roubaud to seek out other types of readings at the Cambridge Festival. He recounts this experience in *Dire la poésie*. In particular, he singles out many readings where something goes wrong—the poet can't be adequately heard, or fails to perform, or doesn't even show up. Jean Daive, for example, read his *décimale blanche* in its entirety, but his voice was often drowned out or interrupted by his translator. Fielding Dawson stood drunk and speechless before a microphone, only speaking into it to complain about the harsh light:

> personne ne parlait
> à sa place   ne bougeait   personne ne disait rien ne
> faisait rien   pour l'empecher de se débrouiller de son
> silence ivre   tout le monde   dans la salle   se taisait
> en anglais   c'était une fort intéressante expérience
> (12)[110]

Roubaud was looking forward to hearing Denis Roche read on another occasion. But at the last minute Roche didn't show, explaining his absence by way of a terse telegram: "grand-mère malade" (12). Interrupted, inaudible, confused or cancelled, these readings are all subject to some kind of interference. And it is precisely these interferences that interest Roubaud, as they keep the spectacle of the poetry reading at bay.

Roubaud also expresses this interest in interference during his own readings. Once at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, the poet scheduled to read didn't show. Together with Joseph Guglielmi, Roubaud improvised a reading in place of the poet who couldn't make it. They read poems from Pierre Reverdy's *Plupart du temps*. As Roubaud explains:

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[109] There is reason to believe that Roubaud read this article, as he refers the reader to the issue of *Boundary 2* where it first appeared in his introduction to *Vingt poètes américains*.

[110] The unusual textual formatting of *Dire la poésie*, with its phrasal clusters and irregular spacing, is not without significance. This will be discussed below.

> Nous nous sommes mis à lire Reverdy   poème
> après poème   sans ordre   parfois nous lisions chacun
> le même   parfois nous relisions un poème déjà lu
> nous alternions   nous avons lu ainsi   assez longtemps
>   plus d'une heure   la personne qui devait venir
> n'est pas venue   et nous n'avions nullement préparé
>   cette lecture
>
> (20)

The casualness of the occasion and the decision to read these poems on a whim caused Roubaud and Guglielmi to confuse certain words, to mispronounce or muffle a syllable, even to skip entire lines. Had this reading been recorded, Roubaud tells us, one would notice many obvious discrepancies between the performance and the text. These discrepancies may point to a certain instability in the text; or they may simply result from the circumstances of the occasion. Either way, Roubaud strives to encourage these discrepancies between a text and its performance in his own reading practice. He does this through what he calls "la stratégie de l'inattention" (20).

This strategy is linked in part to the casualness Roubaud and Guglielmi expressed toward their own performance. It is the same nonchalant approach Roubaud witnessed during the botched readings at the Cambridge Festival. These performances undermine the myth of the poetry reading as a more authentic or richer expression of the poem. In these cases, rather than the performance embodying the poem, there is a strong disparity between the two, as though the performance strayed off in a direction not offered by the poetry itself. And yet, as we'll see, it is not so much the performance led astray that interests Roubaud, but the poetry abandoned, so to speak, by its speaker. At the festival, Roubaud became acutely aware of this discrepancy between poetry and its performance. He noticed it by way of contrast in two readings fundamentally at odds. The first was by the Russian poet Bella Akhmadulina. Akhmadulina recited her poem from memory, or, "par coeur" ("par, peut-être à mon goût, trop de coeur" Roubaud remarked). This poem was "lancé debout le plus sonorement du monde, dans cette "manière" que nous disons "théâtrale" mais qui me paraît plutôt liée à une conception métrique traditionnelle d'un vers où demeure, dans une forte stabilisation, la *rime*" (*La Vieillesse* 120). Poetry sung sonorously, then, with an apparent attachment to rhyme and meter. One can imagine the metrically significant moments being accented—in pitch, intensity or speed—by the poet. In this way, the performance was made to reflect the poem.

The other reading was by the American poet Robert Creeley. Creeley was seated, "la tête couverte d'un *cap* verdâtre, très près d'une lampe assez forte qui éclairait le livre ouvert dans lequel il *lisait*." Whereas Akhmadulina seemingly gave a great public performance without relying on any textual aid, Creeley, his cap hiding his eyes from his audience, read under the lamplight as though he were in his own solitary study. Roubaud had little doubt that Creeley, like Akhmadulina, knew his poems by heart. But remaining seated with a book in hand didn't make Creeley's reading any less oral. In fact, Roubaud found this style befitting "la juste nature du vers de Creeley", which he deemed "l'un des plus *oralement* placés de la poésie américaine du XXe siècle" (*La Vieillesse* 120).

Creeley's reading doesn't fall short in the same way as Fielding Dawson's or even Denis Roche's. Nor is it subject to the interruptions and interference of the joint reading between Jean Daive and his translator or the one performed by Roubaud and Guglielmi. But Creeley's shielded eyes, the lamplight and especially the open book, cast the reading in a private, solitary setting.

Creeley did not try to connect with his audience, but turned away from it, hiding behind his props. Still, the poems themselves remained intensely oral for a listening public, as though betraying their performance. In this way, there is a strong discrepancy between Creeley's oral poetry and its performance—and this betrayal, this discordance not only best serves the poetry, but calls attention to an intractable quality inherent in it, which, we are led to believe, would otherwise remain unnoticed.

Like Creeley, Roubaud has also gone to great lengths to detach himself, so to speak, from his own readings. This is usually more of a mental exercise than a physical act. Rather than props, Roubaud keys in on ambient distractions. In *Dire la poésie* Roubaud recounts a memorable reading he gave at the charterhouse of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon one July afternoon. Twenty or thirty people sat on cushions listening to him read from *Dors*, which he did slowly, deliberately, in a steady voice. But instead of concentrating on his poems or gauging the audience's reaction, Roubaud was drawn to the rustle of the wind and the varying shades of light entering the room where he read. The windows of this second-story space were covered with translucent paper, and as the wind shook the branches of a nearby tree, the light shining through the branches would disperse and fracture through the filter of these paper windows. Green and violet light entered the room, and the sound of the wind mixed with the light, "comme si la lumière   en frottant les arbres   en se décomposant   pénétrait avec le bruit   lui aussi brouillé" (10). While he continued to read in a steady and deliberate voice, his attention was absorbed by this quiet spectacle of refracted light. The paper windows, Roubaud recalls, were like "feuilles de buvard de l'attention" (11). The language Roubaud uses to describe this experience in *Dire la poésie* reflects his state of distraction, as various terms become confused in an intricate mesh of synesthetic language:

> Cependant que je parlais   à travers   les feuilles
> de papier   translucides du silence   que [les poèmes] parvenaient
> aux têtes intraduisibles me faisant face   les couleurs
> chahutées   froissées   d'un arbre de voyelles
>
>   (11)

This source of distraction is important for Roubaud. As he read these poems aloud during the early stages of their composition, he would seek out a similar type of distraction, whether he was in front of an audience or, which was more often the case, in the solitude and silence of his apartment. Once, while at his childhood home near Carcassonne, he sat watching clouds pass outside his bedroom window, as the evening light fell on a distant row of cedars and the wind shook the nearby pine and pomegranate trees. Similar to his experience at the charterhouse of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, he yielded to distractions while he recited the poems, preoccupied this time by the direction of the wind:

> Je me demandais   comment   sans voir   les
> nuages bouger   s'il n'y avait pas de nuages par
> exemple   ou   si j'étais placé de telle manière que je
> ne pourrais pas les voir   comment   s'il n'y avait pas
> le silence de nuages en mouvement   ni les bruits
> localisables des branches   de la branche de grenadier
> frottant les vitres basses   je me demandais comment

je saurais   d'où venait le vent

<div align="center">(16)</div>

Roubaud contemplated this "utterly vain" question while reading his poems. The question, he tells us, had little or nothing to do with the subject of the poems. As such, it distracted him from what he was reading, allowing him "à dire   sans voulour dire." The irrelevancy of Roubaud's contemplation stripped his reading voice of intention. This affected the quality of his voice, which he captured with a tape recorder. He explains this experience in more detail in *Le grand incendie de londres*:

> Ma lecture était lente, sans conviction, j'avais du mal à me relire, et, comme j'avais oublié à Paris le micro du magnétophone, il me fallait tenir l'appareil assez près, tourner les pages d'une main, et ma voix réapparaissait, assourdie, accompagnée de la rumination intérieure, comme intime, de l'appareil (qui s'enregistre lui-même enregistrant, au micro intérieur) et des innombrables commentaires que faisait le monde hors les murs: les secousses du vent abordant de front le mur du jardin, l'enchevêtrement des cèdres, les branches trouées de soleil frottant l'une sur l'autre, ces branches qui tout à l'heure deviendraient noires.

<div align="center">(105)</div>

Here too, the sound and light of the natural world—the wind, the rows of trees and tangle of branches, the play of light and shadow in the fading sunlight—was essential to Roubaud's reading of these poems.

Perhaps even more essential to his understanding of this experience is the tape recorder he mentions. By recording himself reading his poems, Roubaud is able to scrutinize his own voice. Roman Jakobson credits the rise of phonology to the tape recorder for this very reason: it allowed scholars to perceive nuances in the voice that had previously gone unnoticed.[111] For Roubaud, the value of the tape recorder lies in its ability to expose all of the voice's vulnerabilities, its fragility, its hesitations, its false-starts: "Le magnétophone prend une parole immédiate et sans contrôle, sans ratures, sans repentirs ou retours" (*Le grand incendie* 97). As he makes clear, it also catches all the ambient noises, including the sound, or hiss, of its own functioning. More importantly, it renders perceptible minor variations in the poems themselves. Roubaud's distraction—his attention caught and absorbed by the natural phenomena of his surroundings—causes these variations, as his voice pauses over certain words or slightly extends the length of a syllable. Roubaud wasn't the only one undertaking these experiments. As I will show shortly, the tape recorder at this time had become an important tool for many poets and scholars—linguists, anthropologists, folk historians, philosophers—as it gave rise to an awareness of an inherently unstable, irregular voice. As a result, it allowed poets to focus on the tone and duration of their poetry as they read it aloud.

If the tape recorder captures vocal variation, distraction, according to Roubaud, causes it. The sources of distraction were many for Roubaud. The romantic surroundings of the French countryside at sunset were not always present while Roubaud composed *Dors*. He also read and reworked these poems at his apartment in Paris where there were no pine trees or rows of cedars, no clouds or waning sunlight. Instead, Roubaud would wake up in the dark and read these poems by the light of a single lamp. A leaky faucet punctuated his reading voice and absorbed his

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[111] See his *Six leçons sur le son et le sens*.

attention. Waiting for the next drop to fall from the faucet would mentally dislodge him from his own poems. Meanwhile, his voice carried on, repeating or skipping a word here and there, speeding up or slowing down between the intervals created by the faucet's irregular drip. This dark and quiet apartment is perhaps a better fit for the poems of *Dors*. It corresponds more to poems' subject, tone and purpose, as one can easily imagine a restless Roubaud reading these poems aloud as he confronts the impenetrable darkness of the night and the anxiety of insomnia. "Dors" he says aloud, "tu dormiras, tu le sais, tu dors."

This setting does in fact make it into the poems—the dripping faucet, the darkness, the yellow glow of the timed light. But the conditions in which the poems were composed and read serve other purposes than that of providing subject matter. This isn't a question of poetry reflecting place in any straightforward manner. Roubaud's surroundings absorb his attention, but leave very few tangible traces on the poetry itself. Rather, the impact of his surroundings, though harder to measure concretely, is related to two effects difficult to perceive in any given poem: namely, a voice unmoored from a speaking subject and the variability of the poems themselves.

It was once again at the Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1977 where Roubaud began to develop his idea of a poetic voice independent of a speaker. It was there where he witnessed a wide range of readings over the course of a weekend full of eight or nine hour days. He heard a vast array of regionally inflected English voices—"voix galloises", "voix angliennes" "voix cumbriques" "voix oxoniennes". Roubaud describes these voices as though they were at the same time emanating and isolated from the speakers:

> J'entendais   sur une durée considérable   des voix
> de poésie   existant à la suite dans l'oreille   et pour
> la première fois   une dimension irremplaçable de la
> poésie dite m'est apparue   qui était   quelque chose
>   de presque invariable s'avalant soi-même de son en
> son   dans la successivité de la voix   se prolongeant
>   de silence en silence   toute seule   comme si elle
> était seule   presque   indépendamment   de la
> presence de l'auditoire
>
> <div align="center">(12-13)</div>

For poetry to exist orally in this way—as a constant and steady succession of sound—there must be few shifts or changes in frequency, pitch or tone. What's more, it must exist as though independent of the audience. For Roubaud, a certain style of reading combined with an indifferent attitude toward one's audience is what gives spoken poetry its autonomy. This kind of reading voice almost lulls to sleep ("vous amener à la proximité de l'endormissement") with its steady stream of sound, which, given Roubaud's general indifference to its listeners, is perfectly appropriate. It is precisely this style of reading that Roubaud was practicing with *Dors*.
As he read these poems, both in private and in public, his voice proceeded "sans exaltation, sans effet, sans echo, sans conviction" (*Dire* 9), encountering no response or resistance from his real or imaginary listeners:

> La diction que j'expérimente   est   au contraire
> monotone   repetitive   imperméable   indifférente
>   endort et attend et récidive
>
> <div align="center">(15)</div>

This unaffected reading style stands in stark contrast to the audience-oriented spectacle Roubaud associates with the American poetry reading. With Roubaud, the audience is encouraged to drift off or follow their own mental ruminations ("écoutant   ou dormant   ou poursuivant quelque voie intérieure parallèle" (*Dire* 9)).

   "La poésie orale peut exister sans auditoire," Roubaud assures us. In contrast to the audience-oriented contemporary reading, there are cultures where poetry recited aloud may not presuppose an audience or organized performance. Roubaud has in mind the Sudanese pastoralists whom Ruth Finnegan discusses in her work on oral poetry. "The Nuer and Dinka pastoralists of the Southern Sudan," she asserts, "sing solitary songs as they watch their cattle." This kind of solitary work song is in fact rather widespread. "There are songs for grinding corn, milking cows, working in the fields, paddling a boat—activities often carried out on one's own" and many cultures practice both solitary and public performances of their poems (Finnegan references Eskimo, Somali and Gilbertese poets, 215). Roubaud might also have in mind here Kamo no Chomei, a 12th century Japanese poet, who retired to live in the mountains north of Kyoto in a make-shift, 10 foot square hut. Chomei would sit alone listening to the wind rustle the katsura trees, plucking his biwa, singing out softly. "My skill is poor", the hermit confessed, "but then I do not aim to please the ears of others. I play alone, I sing alone, simply for my own fulfillment" ("Hojoki" 15).[112]

   Finnegan does in fact concede that most oral poetry has some kind of audience, and even in rare cases such as these, the singers may be singing for themselves or for a supposed or potential audience while at work. What's more, these songs are part and parcel of some kind of activity or labor. Roubaud's reading of Finnegan pays little heed to this concession, nor does it take into account the social function of this poetry. Rather, Roubaud stresses the solitary nature of the shepherd's song:

> ils disent   à haute voix   pour
> eux seuls   chacun dit pour son troupeau lui chante lui
> récite   ils se taisent devant toute présence humaine
> ils disent à haute voix pour eux seuls   et certes on
> pourrait prétendre   que leur troupeau est leur
> auditoire   les têtes troupeau de l'auditoire   Mais ils
> ne disent leur poème que s'il n'y a personne aux
> alentours   que la végétation   les chemins   et le
> bétail
>
> (13)

Roubaud draws on this example during his own, much different, public readings.

>   J'imagine   ces voix crépusculaires   de champ en
> champ   chaque poète avec son propre troupeau   qui
> sert d'oreilles indispensables   mais sans réponse
> J'aime cette espèce de tradition de "broutadours"
>
> (13)

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[112] Roubaud alludes to Chomei throughout his six-volume prose-series, *Le grand incendie de Londres*.

And so while reading *Dors* at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, the light penetrating the transparent sheets, the wind rustling the trees, Roubaud can imagine his audience as "collines moutonnantes" (*Dire* 17). This is also how he imagined the circumstances at the Cambridge Poetry Festival:

> chaque voix anglaise   ainsi en cette semaine de
> Cambridge   était pour moi comme   devant un champ
> de têtes broutantes et ruminantes   dont je faisais partie
>   devant la pure physique laineuse de la parole   de
> la voix vous amenant   à la proximité de l'endormissement
>
> (13)

This is a strange metaphor for Roubaud to force on his settings, and one senses the strain of the mismatch between this fantasy of pastures or mountain huts and the reality of an organized reading throughout *Dire la poésie*. It is this very tension, one that arises from a reading practice at odds with its occasion, that defines Roubaud's sense of orality.

In this respect, these fantasies of open fields or mountain huts are enabling, even necessary, for Roubaud, just as new research on oral poetry and ancient or non-Western cultures was providing models for many poets in France and the United States to emulate at this time. One of the more influential contributions of this scholarship concerns the notions of performance and variability. The popularity of these notions is due in part to the scholarship of Milman Parry and his disciple Albert Lord. This research began in the 1920s when Parry claimed to discover formulaic patterns in Homeric epithets.[113] Parry argued that the motivation behind Homer's oft-repeated, colorful epithets—swift-footed Achilles, resourceful Odysseus, grey-eyed Athena, rosy-fingered dawn—was essentially metrical. These formulaic epithets comfortably fit the metrical scheme of the hexameter, thereby providing the oral poet with a repertoire of substitutable formulas. By arranging these into regular patterns, the poet could quickly put together a poetic line. Parry sought to prove in this way that Homer was an oral poet: these formulas allowed him to perform a lengthy epic without interruption. Parry, together with his Albert Lord, extended this theory to other cultures. His fieldwork in the 1930s in Serbio-Croatia—what was then Yugoslavia—showed that the oral epics being performed there were characterized by a similar use of formulas. The result of using formulas—themselves never fixed but infinitely variable and combinatorial—was that each performance was unique and varied, as the poet or singer composed *while* performing rather than before. The varied circumstances of each performance would thus cause the poet to slightly adapt his material, drawing out or compressing themes, attending to interruptions or distractions from the audience, such that the poem itself was an open-form, adaptable work with a variable length and subject to infinite adjustments.

Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, written as his doctoral dissertation and first published in 1960, became the definitive reference on this matter for poets and scholars. This is especially the case for contemporary poets who found themselves participating more and more in public readings. What does it mean to compose or perform a poem orally? How does the structure and substance of oral poetry differ from that of written poetry? What is the relation to a poem and its

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[113] Critics of Lord and Perry tend to overstate the importance of the formula in this theory of oral composition. As Lord insists, "the formulas themselves are perhaps less important in understanding this oral technique than the various underlying patterns of formulas and the ability to make phrases according to those patterns" (44).

circumstances? Beginning in the 50s in the United States, many poets began asking these questions with increasing frequency in relation to their own work, and after 1960, they often turned to *The Singer of Tales* for answers.[114]

Roubaud's *Dire la poésie* constitutes his own response to these questions. Roubaud, like many poets of his generation, was familiar with Lord's work, and he began to apply Parry's and Lord's findings as well as the methods of their fieldwork to his own poetry (*La Dissolution* 149). This explains Roubaud's use of a tape recorder. For scholars undertaking fieldwork, the tape recorder was an essential tool for understanding the nature of variability in oral poetry. As Ruth Finnegan explains, "[the tape recorder] has helped to show that variability is not just a feature of lengthy oral transmission through time and space but is inherent both in different renderings of one literary piece within the same group and period and even in texts by the same person delivered at no great interval in time" (57). For the same reason, the tape recorder, making this discovery accessible to all who used it, became an important tool for poets in the United States. In 1954, Cid Corman was improvising poems directly into the microphone of his tape recorder; in the 1960s Paul Blackburn was lugging around his own heavy recording device to poetry readings in New York's lower-east side, creating a vast and rich archive of these otherwise fleeting events. At around the same time, Allan Ginsberg experimented with a tape recorder on a cross-country road trip and poets such as David Antin and Steve Benson would also soon record, then transcribe, their live performances, finding their own ways to capture and account for variability in performance.

Just as the tape recorder allowed poets and scholars to account for variability and to begin experimenting with new oral forms, Roubaud's recordings encouraged him to conceptualize and put into practice new ideas about the poetic "voice." As he attended to ambient distractions while reading the poems of *Dors* over six or seven years, he noticed by way of his audio and textual recordings not so much a shift in his voice, which remained calm and steady, but a slight change in the poems themselves:

> Je veux dire que pendant les six ou sept années   où
> ces poèmes ont existé   avant d'être posés en ce livre
>   à chaque lecture   à chaque copie   manuscrite
>   de leur ensemble   quelque chose changeait   je
> leur faisais subir des variations minimales   l'ensemble
> de ces poèmes était   accumulation   de variations
> minimales

(18)

As Parry and Lord, among a host of others, have remarked, this is the nature of oral poetry.[115] With *Dors*, "une circonstance de la parole"—always natural phenomena for Roubaud— "pénétrait un poème pour en changer brusquement   quelque chose   même infime   une lettre,   un point" (19). This observation posed a particular challenge to Roubaud. How could he find a written form for a sequence of poems defined by their constant variability? He gives a hopeful response:

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[114] The appeal of this idea of variability in performance hasn't faded, as it can be seen in a different form in Marjorie Perloff's notion of "differential poetics."

[115] "We shall see that in a very real sense every performance is a separate song" (Lord 4).

> Il est possible d'envisager cela   le maintien de
> poèmes dans un état   de variantes perpétuelles d'eux-
> mêmes   chaque poème   n'est qu'une variante   il
> n'y a pas de vraie version   comme une extension
> relativement mesurée   réglée   intentionelle
> limitée   d'une pratique de lecture   qui est
> extrêmement banale   ancienne   répandue
> quoiqu'en générale involontaire et par hazard
> <div align="right">(19)</div>

His attempt to devise a solution to this problem is a telling reminder of the poetry reading's influence on his writing practice. Indeed, only through successive reading occasions—many of them public—can Roubaud come to understand the shifting, variable nature of a sequence of poems.

The challenge of preserving variability, however, remains formidable. The reading practice can hardly be indicated on the page without a set of instructions or guidelines. As for form, Roubaud doesn't choose a traditional meter but finds inspiration in an American style free verse. *Dors*, he explains, consists of "moments de contemplation de peu de mots, vers courts, lignes presques blanches, silences de la voix plus longs que tous les mots, selon une métrique dont l'inspiration est de William Carlos Williams, à travers Louis Zukofsky, mais s'éloignant à la fois du hasard spontané et du nombre, pour une tentative d'enveloppe rythmique en grande partie contrôlée mentalement" (34). The choice of an American style free verse isn't gratuitous. Roubaud has more faith in the novelty of free verse as practiced by American poets than that employed by French poets. This is because, for Roubaud, the American free verse betrays both an oral and written quality. It is also "freer" with respect to the line.[116] For example, short, unaccented words, such as prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions, are typically located in the final position of the line—a fact rarely seen in French poetry. Roubaud sometimes refers to this at "la variété courte" of free verse, which is characterized by "le choix systématique d'unités plus courtes que les segments ordinaires de vers traditionnels, donc généralement de une à quatre voyelles. De ce système, qui se prête très bien à des recherches rythmiques complexes, on ne peut guère trouver d'exemples (ils abondent dans la poésie américaine, dont le vers libre est beaucoup moins *prisonnier* que le nôtre)" (*La Vieillesse* 191). Roubaud considers Creeley, you will recall, as primarily an oral poet, and he may have Creeley's poetry in mind when he talks about American free verse. Consider Creeley's poem "The Language":

> Locate *I*
> *love you* some-
> where in
>
> teeth and
> eyes, bite
> it but
>
> take care not

---

[116] See Eastman.

to hurt, you
want so

much so
little. Words
say everything.

I
love you
again,

then what
is emptiness
for. To

fill, fill.
I heard words
and words full

of holes
aching. Speech
is a mouth.
                    (91-92)

Creeley's line-breaks cut phrases, even words, into irregular parts. And many lines consists of no more than one or two single-syllable words, many of which do not belong to the conventional "grande catégorie syntaxique" (verb, noun and adjective). Roubaud admired this form of verse and was intimately familiar with it. His translations of this writing introduced many American poets to French readers. Take these lines from Cid Corman's *Out and Out*, for example, which Roubaud translated for the anthology *Vingt poètes américains*.

Why
lift a
leaf
down

O
let it
let
go.
          (160)

Like Creeley, Corman is considered an oral poet, not only for his minimalist verse filled with monosyllabic words, but for his experiments with tape recorders and timed poems, a subject to which I will return shortly. It is from these poets that Roubaud takes his cue. Indeed, *Dors* may even take the "variété courte" to even further extremes. Witness the first poem of the collection:

dormir

dormir
tu
le sais
tu

te fermes
comme
un oeil
dans

les draps
bleus
comme l'
oeil

de l'eau
blanche
où le d
oigt

pénètre
que t
u mouilles
d'u

ne é
cume
tu le s
ais

tu

dors
(43-44)

This poem follows a general syllabic pattern as it alternates between one and two-syllable lines (although "où le d"(ln 15), "tu le s" (ln 23), and "pénètre"(ln 17) strain this rhythm considerably). But the syllables themselves are not clearly demarcated, and the reading voice struggles both in its pacing and its emphasis, a struggle found in almost every poem in *Dors*. This is due to the exceedingly short lines, the unexpected line breaks and the general pattern of repetition with variation. For example, "tu/ le sais/tu"(ln 2-4) is repeated with a different structure near the end of the poem: "tu le s/ais//tu"(ln 23-25). The pronoun "tu" is given varying levels of stress throughout the poem, from being isolated in a line and thus heavily accented (ln

78

2, 4), to being divided into two separate letters across two successive lines, "que t/u mouilles"(pronounced "teh ou", each with a long stress, although the first remains unvoiced), to sharing the line with other units ("tu le s"), to finally finding itself even more isolated as its own stanza (ln 25). The *tu* is also echoed, through position, stress and rhyme, with "d'u"(ln 20), which one is inclined to pronounce as *tu* for the sake of repetition (the difference between the two is a question of a single voiced letter). Thus, "tu" is stressed differently and read at a varying pace each time it appears in the poem. This is to say that each appearance of *tu* in the poem demands a distinct articulation.[117]

       The variability of *tu* within this poem recalls the varied nature of the poem's performance. It is as though these poems dramatized the fact that a shift in the circumstances causes a slight change in the poem, which is expressed by an elided syllable, a drawn out line or a momentary pause. As

         tu
         le sais
         tu

becomes

         tu le s
         ais

         tu

we can detect the poet's distraction, which causes him—or the reader—to lag behind or accelerate forward by turns. This is the mark of the oral poet: "under the pressure of rapid composition in performance, the singer of tales, it is to be expected, makes occasional errors in the construction of his lines. His text line may be a syllable too long or a syllable too short" (Lord 38). In *Dors*, Roubaud is attempting to display this oral principal in a written work.

       This is true not only within many of the poems but across the entire sequence of poems. Repetition with variation occurs in successive iterations of the same or similar poem throughout the volume. Consider the differences between two poems sharing the title "*fenêtre*":

tu ouvres	tu ouvres
une fenêtre	la fenêtre
l'air	l'air
bat.	te bat.
du temps	des yeux
recule	reculent.
(67)	(89)

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[117] The justification for Roubaud's dividing words up this way can be found in his *La vieillesse d'Alexandre* where he states that "le vers libre n'a aucune raison intrinsèque, formellement, de se terminer avec la fin d'un mot" (171).

The entire sequence is built around these kinds of variation: an indefinite article becomes definite, a direct object pronoun suddenly appears, a singular, abstract noun becomes corporeal and plural, a sole syllable is removed from, or added to, a line. Roubaud prepares the reader for this in a brief preface he wrote for *Dors*. The whole sequence of poems, he tells us, riffs on a few words—sleep, night, silence, window. The poems are interwoven with this kind of shared vocabulary, but they also share line length, pauses or blank spaces, and are subject to the same changes in rhythm and meter, to the same invasion or retreat of light and shadow, to the same whims of the weather. These shifts, then, are played out within and across the poems of *Dors*, in the span of a single syllable or the whole of the poetic sequence.

But positional shifts signaling changes of stress and reading pace aren't the only difficulties here. Variation is indeed mimicked in this way, but there remains a fundamental difference between mimicking variation and provoking it. The latter is caused by the uncertainty the reader confronts in reading the poem aloud. Of course, this is true even for the examples cited above—the reader can in no way maintain Roubaud's steady and even voice when negotiating the cuts and unnatural pauses of the visual text. In other words, it is hard to avoid a staccato reading voice, and any straightforward, prose-like reading would require a quick and silent glance ahead before proceeding (we saw this with the abrupt shifts between French and English in Roubaud's "St. Mark's" sonnet above). This point is exacerbated by the line-breaks where standard vocalized continuities, such as liaisons and monosyllabic words, are called into question. Andrew Easton convincingly demonstrates this at work in the poem "nuit", where the final two lines, "son/ongle", trouble—or accentuate—the voiced liaison.

nuit

nuit et

le
noir

pousse

son
ongle
(44)

In the final two lines, a slow reader might momentarily suspend the liaison, thereby adding a dramatic delay to the *n*'s felt but unseen appearance in the last line—and the reader is prepared for this 'n' in the last line by 'nuit' and 'noir'. Whereas an invisible letter is vocally "added" to a line here, in the poem "dors", a visible and isolated letter remains unpronounced: "dor//s".

dors

dors
tu dormi
ras

<div align="center">

tu

le sais tu

dor

s

(47)

</div>

In the former, there is an invisible but pronounced letter; in the latter, a visible but unpronounced one. As Easton remarks, these poems "déterminent une mise en problème de la lecture" (28).

Roubaud has argued that the lack of accepted conventions regarding the recitation of free verse puts pressure on its visual dimension. "En l'absence donc de toute définition sonore, la position du vers dans une page sera sa définition. Elle seule rend possible une diction du vers qui joue, comme il se doit, avec les pauses implicites qu'elle suppose" (*La Vieillesse* 119). And yet Roubaud's irregular and unexpected line-breaks do little to instruct the reader. Instead, these formal choices defy her reading habits, without however providing a clear alternative concerning how the poems should be read. This is what Roubaud is referring to when he states that the singularity of these poems remains invisible:

> C'est pourquoi ces poèmes la singularité de leurs
> mots et lignes et découpages de leurs frontières des
> répétitions des successions ont une particularité
> nécessairement invisible en ce livre et que seule
>   la voix peut essayer de rendre en se
> renouvelant et s'effaçant et que ne pourrait
> approcher qu'une débauche de papier inconcevable
>   celle de ne pas être fixés
>
> <div align="center">(18)</div>

As Roubaud explains, although these poems were composed *for* the reading voice, "le poème dans le livre n'est pas une notation, une partition de la voix; les silences de la voix ne sont pas des traductions des blancs de la ligne" (33). Thus, the voice proceeds—indeed, must proceed—unguided and on its own. In order for this to happen, the written poems must differ significantly from their oral realization. How could variation continue to occur otherwise? The typography and visual design of *Dors*—the split words, the isolated silent letters, the suspended liaisons—at once complement *and* contradict the reading. And Roubaud offers the reader this singular paradox: in order for the oral poem to remain faithful to its oral circumstances, it must be unpronounceable—or difficult to pronounce in a determined way—on the page. This is what leads to its variability.

Easton makes a similar point in his analysis of *Dors*, but fails to note the context in which such a decision is significant. For all the solitude and intimacy of these poems, they are essentially a product of the poetry reading. This is why *Dire la poésie* serves as a vital companion piece to *Dors*, as the latter acts as a response to the set of questions posed by the former. And these questions arose directly from Roubaud's encounters with the poetry reading.

The formal influence of American-style free verse is clear in *Dors*. Roubaud mentions the verse of Zukofsky and Williams as sources of inspiration for his short, minimalist poems, and we've seen how similar in style these poems are to those by Creeley and Corman, not to mention

those of many other poets whom Roubaud translated into French (Oppen, Reznikoff, Blackburn, Rothenberg, among others).[118] While drawing on these poets, Roubaud accentuated the principals and practices associated with oral poetry—namely, those of variation and performance. His performance—or his refusal to perform in a conventional way—counters the audience-oriented spectacle of the American poetry reading, and his solitary poems challenge any fluent, dramatic or embodied reading practice. *Dire la poésie*, however, is a performance of a different sort. Like *Dors*, it is an unmistakable response to the American poetry reading, but whereas the former takes shape through its various performances—both public and private—the latter is a single oral experiment carried out in private. If *Dors* is concerned with American free-verse poetry and the concept of variation, *Dire* draws on a different set of reading practices to explore the notion of duration.

As should be clear, the American poetry reading doesn't represent any one style, but is defined by a host of competing practices. And, like Roubaud, many American poets have reacted against the spectacle of the poetry reading. Charles Bernstein, for example, has spoken extensively about the poetry reading in terms similar to Roubaud's. The reading style he champions in his writing is patently anti-expressive. As opposed to a high-dramatic style, whereby "'acting' takes precedence over letting words speak for themselves (or worse eloquence compromises, not to say eclipses, the ragged music of the poem)" Bernstein prefers a "more monovalent, minimally inflected, and in any case unaugmented, mode as touching on the essence of the medium." As he explains, this style is significant since "poetry cannot, and need not, compete with music in terms of acoustic complexity or rhythmic force, or with theater in terms of spectacle. What is unique, and in its own way exhilarating, about the performance of poetry is that it does what it does within the limits of language alone" (*My Way* 288). The effect of this style bears a remarkable resemblance to Roubaud's reading voice. As Bernstein notes, "the solo voice so starkly framed can come to seem virtually disembodied in an uncanny, even hypnotic way" (287). Like Roubaud, Bernstein relishes spontaneous or willed interruptions in the reading voice. For him, silence or blank spaces do not relieve the voice, but put all the more pressure on it. As is his wont, he explains this in the form of a poem:

blank spaces—
silences or
intervals—serve as ful-
crums for making audible
the rhythmic pulse & phrasing
being played out, at the same
time scissoring
the syntax of the language (that is, cutting
against expected breaks of the
grammatical phrase or unit of
breath). Given these interests, the sound I am
laying down is
not simply that of a
person reading words
in any « straightforward » way

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[118] See Roubaud's *Traduire, journal*.

but playing
each
word
as if a
note or
chord on
the
piano, with slight
pauses creating unexpected
spaces between words, allowing phrases
to veer off into
unexpected sequences of wobbling
sound.

<div align="center">(My Way 21-22)</div>

The veering effect Bernstein mentions is of utmost importance. For if the voice is made to wobble in *Dors*, as we've seen, the movement of the language in *Dire la poésie* follows a necessarily digressive path, veering off into unexpected narrative sequences. I've talked at great length about the composition of *Dors*, and in so doing I've drawn heavily on Roubaud's own comments in *Dire la poésie*. But I've said little of its peculiar style, its mode of composition and its own oral quality. Roubaud doesn't say much about the oral nature of *Dire la poésie*, since its ostensible subject is the composition and performance of *Dors*.

  Dire is not a work, like *Dors*, developed incrementally over several years through repeated public and private performances. Nor is it carefully structured in a numerically patterned set of poems, with a series of variations both programmed and anticipated. Rather, *Dire* has its origin in the moment of its composition. This composition isn't tested against a set of parameters or subjected to an audience or recorded and subsequently repeated with subtle changes. It happens all at once, unbroken in its progression, in the solitude of Roubaud's own home. Most strikingly, it hardly concerns the voice, as it exists first and foremost as a piece of writing. If spontaneity and improvisation are its mode of operation, digression defines the form of its expression.

  Although for Roubaud the idea of "saying a poem" is mostly applied to *Dors* and the public reading, it is an equally apt, if not more fitting, description of what is happening in *Dire la poésie* itself. This is because Roubaud is experimenting with what it means to "say"—not read, not perform, not recite—poetry. The term emphasizes a more vernacular approach and unmistakably recalls David Antin's so-called talk pieces.[119] "If someone came up and started talking a poem at you how would you know it was a poem?" (*Talking*, np). Roubaud takes up Antin's question both conceptually and formally. His answer, as we'll see, is much different from Antin's. But his method and his questioning arise out of the same cultural conditions of the 1970s, during which time the poetry reading came to prominence.

  Antin is in many respects the figurehead of the oral impulse in post-war American poetry.[120] He shares Roubaud's discontent with the poetry reading culture. After creating procedural poems out of found language for almost ten years, Antin suddenly set off in a new

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[119] Marjorie Perloff was the first to call attention to this connection ("Traduit de l'américain" 67).

[120] Roubaud deemed him in the mid 70s "l'un des poètes les plus originaux et les plus provocants aujourd'hui aux États-Unis" (*Vingt poètes américains* 28).

direction in the early 70s to begin doing what he called talk pieces. This began at a reading at SUNY Binghamton when he found himself bored and dissatisfied with the idea of reading poems he had written in another occasion. So he started changing the poems while reading them, modifying them on the spot. This performance was disastrous—resembling the failed readings Roubaud is so fond of—but it led Antin to experiment with composing in the present moment and in a public occasion.

His talk pieces that resulted from this are minimally prepared, orally improvised performances, that usually last between forty-five and ninety minutes. Although he speaks as if giving a conventional public talk, his performances are filled with wonderful ramblings, discursive loops, frequent detours and abrupt endings. Some time after performing, Antin transcribes the talk based on a recording he makes. Although the text doesn't reproduce the talk word for word, its modifications remain minor as Antin strives to capture the "pulse" of the talk. Visually, this means the text has little or no punctuation and no flush margins. The spacing throughout is irregular, as words and phrases are grouped together in clusters that resemble—but do not reproduce—phrasal patterns. In terms of typographic appearance, the layout of Roubaud's *Dire* mirrors Antin's typography. Whether Roubaud meant to allude to Antin's talk pieces is unclear, but his decision to borrow Antin's "talk piece" format and procedure speaks to his desire to give this piece the form of an improvised performance.

Just as the title and appearance of the text recall Antin's talk poems, so too does the method. Like Antin's talk pieces, Roubaud's *Dire* was composed in one sitting. Once he began, he didn't go back and make changes. The unplanned and steady advance of his "prose existant oralement" gives it an improvised quality.[121] This is characterized by excessive repetition, sudden interruptions, inaccuracies and moments of self-doubt ("il y a   ces bergers érythréens ou soudanais(?)   dont parle   Ruth Finnegan" (13)). Throughout the piece, Roubaud changes course repeatedly, excusing himself as a speaker would in conversation, "mais ce n'est pas de cela que je voulais parler" (12). The subject of the piece is brought in and out of focus at irregular intervals, as speculation gives way to anecdote before leading again to other speculations. At times, the anecdote exemplifies his speculation; at others it serves as a springboard for further, divergent trains of thoughts. In this way, memories of particular moments overlap, separate ideas become entangled and narrative threads are left dangling. Indeed, the structure is loose and exploratory as it is made to accommodate false steps, hesitations, backtracking. And Roubaud isn't apologetic of its excesses. On the contrary, its digressive character is what defines it:

> Dans la voix   la méthode de la mémoire   est la
> digression   et ceci   que j'ai placé   en début à ce
> livre   son prologue explicatif   sans intention
> didactique pourtant   est de nature   délibérément
> digressive   l'absence   d'une construction décidée
> ininterrompue   est sa caractéristique première
>
> (25)

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[121] It is as though Antin and Roubaud set out to prove in their own work Lord's insight concerning oral poetry: "If we analyze oral epic texts that are recorded from actual performance rather than texts taken from dictation and normalized to some extent, we can observe the oral poetic language in its pure state, with its irregularities and abnormalities arising from usage" (36).

This leads inevitably to a tangled, branching structure:

> Inlassablement   la pensée de dire s'abandonne à de
> nouveaux commencements   retournant   par des
> chemins de traverse   eux-mêmes multipliés en un
> réseau capillaire   un chevelure de récits   à son objet
> originel
>
> (25)

Antin describes the form of his talk pieces in similar terms. He compares them repeatedly to lengthy walks or exploratory occasions. "All oral work faces the same problem" Antin stated in a letter addressed to a reluctant editor of one of his talk pieces—"the way the mind works at formulating under these phenomenologically more natural conditions—of being up on your feet and talking—is more relaxed and casual, gradually feeling for doors in the wall, say, or the right turn off the commonplace road. Naturally it will also take occasional wrong ones, but to erase the false step will also erase the way of discovery" ("Correspondence with the Editors" 600). Roubaud, who refers the reader to this correspondence and who had translated the piece Antin is referring to here, adopts this way of thinking for his own piece, insisting that "la contemplation orale   reçoit à la fois   l'impulsion de nouveaux departs   et la justification   de sa course irrégulière" (25). Not only is the talking or saying of poetry digressive, it is also ephemeral, vaporous even. Antin's description of its evanescent character—it "goes out into the world and its [sic] gone" (*Tuning* 108-109)—is echoed by Roubaud's depiction of the self-consuming voice ("s'avalant soi-même de son en son" (*Dire* 13)).

It is no accident that Antin's "talk poem" coincides with the rise of the poetry reading. In fact, resistant though it is to a dominant practice of reading, his way of proceeding isn't a total aberration from the art and poetry scene of his moment. Performance art was sweeping through New York at this time. Antin witnessed and regularly participated in happenings, mixed-media theater, Judson Church dance performances and elaborate fluxus choreographies.[122] Poets, too, were developing new theories and methods of orality, both in public occasions and in private settings. Cid Corman, for example, began experimenting with his own oral poems as early as 1954. These were unscripted, improvised performances, which Corman would record with a personal tape recorder.[123] Loyal to their oral beginnings, these poems never found a written form. Corman did, however, publish his reflections on oral poetry in his influential periodical, *Origin,* setting out the key terms and methods that would come to characterize performance art and improvised poetry a decade later. "The oral poem" he stated in 1955, "is created out of a single condition, a run of time that is exactly co-continuous with its expression. The voice has the contingency of this 'condition' or 'pressure'; it is a continually sensed limit" (62).[124] This is the defining condition of both Antin's talk pieces and Roubaud's *Dire*. Corman, too, is well aware of

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[122] See Antin and Bernstein.

[123] "It may be worth being explicit about what I mean by 'improvised poems,'" Corman explains. "The poems are immediate: they are not planned in advance and there is absolutely no text. Naturally, I am thinking of poems all the time and the improvisations are likely to open from some already well mulled base. But the moment the machine is in motion there is no time to reflect—except WITHIN event. And I must be prepared to accommodate the accidental—whatever chance sounds may enter or visual recognitions, etc."(84).

[124] Compare to Lord: "[The oral poet] seeks expression of the idea *under stress of performance*" (44).

the margin of error this condition or pressure creates, and he insists like Antin and Roubaud in preserving it: "The poems have, as it happens, NOT been revised in ANY way and NONE, as it happens, have been erased. For, in such poems, there can be no 'mistake': error is an active component here. It is always likely and always pertinent" (84). Roubaud, like many poets of his generation including Jackson Mac Low and David Antin, was familiar with Corman's ideas on orality from various issues of *Origin* (*Vingt poètes américains* 14). However, the difference between Corman's oral poetics and that of the next generation is that the latter had an audience. Though Roubaud and Antin depend on many of the same procedures for their oral poems, their respective relationship with the audience ultimately distinguishes their two approaches.

As previously mentioned, in the fifties the poetry reading was still a stately affair. There would have been no place for poets such as Corman to perform. In the following decade, however, public readings became widespread. Poets now had a platform and an audience. Antin's talk poems are a product of this shift, even as they were developed to counter conventional reading practices. Not only does he rely on an audience that he can address, but he also needs a space where he can stand face-to-face with a public. In this way, he is able escape the solitary habits of lyric poetry and experiment with an utterly new mode of direct address. This is crucial for Antin: "ive never liked the idea of going into a closet to address myself over a typewriter," he admits. "what kind of talking is that?" Rather, he states,

<div style="text-align:center">

ive gotten into the habit of going
to some particular place   with something on my mind
but no particular words in my mouth   looking
for a particular occasion to talk to particular people in a
way i hope is valuable for all of us
</div>

<div style="text-align:right">

(*talking at the boundaries*, np)
</div>

According to Antin, it is through these public improvisations that poetry can regain its sense of urgency. Indeed, Antin repeatedly contrasts the artifice of the poem written in solitude with his own public performances:

<div style="text-align:center">

ive written
things   before this   in the natural vacuum that is the
artificial hermetic closet that literature has been in for some
time   and the problem   for me   is in the closet
confronting a typewriter and no person   so that for me
literature defined as literature   has no urgency   it has no
need of address   there are too many things   no there are
not too many things there are only a few things you may want
to talk about but there are too many ways you could talk
about them   and no urgency in which way you choose to talk
about them   there are too many ways to proceed   too many
possibilities for making well crafted objects   none of which
seem particularly necessary
</div>

<div style="text-align:right">

(*Tuning* 105-106)
</div>

For as much as Roubaud shares with Antin, this is where they diverge. Whereas Antin comes to depend fully on the circuits established for traveling poets and performing artists,

Roubaud continues to write in the solitude of his apartment. In other words, Antin's talk poems are essentially private occasions in public places, as he titles one of his pieces; Roubaud's *Dire*, on the other hand, adopts a public mode of address in a private place. Unlike Antin, whose talks often register the presence of a public through various forms of interpersonal address, Roubaud insists on "saying poetry" in spite of the presence or absence of a real or intended public. Nonetheless, his poems conjure up a poetry reading setting as their immediate, though absent, context. This is why Roubaud imagines a poetic voice detached from speaker and occasion, neither completely private nor public:

> Dire la poésie n'est pas une chose privée   dire la
> poésie n'est pas une chose publique   dire la poésie
> garde la même voix   et ce n'est pas que la voix de
> dire la poésie est la même   dans la chambre où vous
> êtes seul   et dans la salle où quelques têtes devant
> vous s'endorment   de ce que vous dites la poésie
> parce que   seul   vous dites la poésie   comme si
> vous aviez une foule devant vous   ou
> symétriquement   parce que vous parlez devant un
> auditoire comme si vous étiez seul
>
> Mais   seulement   parce que la voix de dire la
> poésie   n'est pas sensible   à cette différence   de
> situation   qu'elle s'établit   idéalement   dans un
> air   sans obstacles

<div align="center">(Dire 22)</div>

Roubaud doesn't need an audience. This is because, for him, the urgency of poetry is found not in its mode of address, but in the discord between the intended direction of poetic speech and the unpredictable course it adopts in practice. This is what Roubaud means by poetry's autonomous character. It is also what he valued most in Antin's work. Whereas Roubaud sees a direct link between Antin and his predecessors, John Cage and Jackson Mac Low—a connection Antin himself frequently calls attention to—he nevertheless finds that Antin's poetry exemplifies better than his predecessors "l'oralité intrinsèque et infranchissable du 'parlant'." This is due to the fact that, while Cage and Mac Low focus more on "procédures d'exécution" and "*performance* marquées d'une mystique du variable, du non-fixé", Antin is invested in "le rythme qui naît du décalage entre l'intention de la phrase et son déroulement sans repentirs possibles." According to Roubaud, this represents "une des contributions récentes les plus révolutionnaires à l'évolution de la poésie" (*Vingt poètes américains* 30).

For Antin, this is a natural consequence of a talk piece delivered at a public occasion. In *Dire*, Roubaud adapts this principal to his private setting while maintaining the visual appearance—the typographic layout—and textual organization of a public performance.[125] The spontaneity required in public performances is self-imposed and gratuitous here, since nothing prevents Roubaud from editing and revising his work at home (to believe that he didn't do this

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[125] Although Roubaud developed a private form of improvisation no less compelling than Antin's, he would later express regret for never experimenting with Antin's more public mode. See *La Dissolution* 148-152.

already requires a leap of faith on the reader's part).[126] But in spite of the gratuitousness of this constraint—no constraint, Oulipian or otherwise, is in itself necessary—its effect is clear: the poem is given the sense of urgency and immediacy of an improvised public performance.

*

This process of oral composition—for Antin they're poems, for Roubaud prose—becomes increasingly important for Roubaud beginning in the eighties and continuing up to this day. His immense, multi-volume project, *Le Grand Incendie de Londres*, was written in precisely this way. Roubaud makes no mention of orality in this work—except for in the final volume, *La Dissolution*, which is written as a series of informal but scripted lectures, or *bavardages*, for Roubaud's course on poetics—and no longer mimics Antin's irregularly spaced, jagged typography throughout these volumes. But the process is the same. Roubaud begins writing during the predawn hours, under the light of a solitary lamp, and as the sun slowly rises, its light slowly begins to wash out the light from his lamp. Once his lamplight has been completely drowned out by the sunlight, he stops writing. Although not measured by a clock, this creates a regular stretch of natural time, the duration of which is marked by the intensity of the light. During this stretch of natural time, Roubaud avows to never give in to "la tentation de dissimuler les variations, les faiblesses, les incohérences, les obscurités involontaires que la simple progression irréversible de ces lignes tracées au présent (au présent de leur trace) va nécessairement faire apparaître si je ne reviens pas en arrière, si je ne corrige pas, si je me refuse la distance protectrice d'une construction réfléchie, d'une organisation, d'une simulation, si je ne sors jamais du temps propre de ma tentative" (*Le grand incendie* 30). The result, as can be expected, is similar to that of *Dire*: a digressive, exploratory movement through a variety of topics and material. As Roubaud explains, given the constraint of the work, this is inevitable:

En avançant dans la prose je rencontre, presque à chaque pas, l'impossibilité de la maintenir sur une ligne unique, de la diriger dans un seul sens. A tout moment j'éprouve le besoin, comme quand on raconte (comme c'est mon cas ici) à quelqu'un d'éloigné, que beaucoup de noms ou de circonstances risquent de surprendre (et il est nécessaire alors de les rapprocher de lui par une explication, sous peine de n'être pas compris), j'ai besoin, donc, d'expliquer, de m'arrêter pour accrocher, au fil ténu de la narration, la lampe d'un éclaircissement indispensable.

(*Le grand incendie* 33)

Indeed, as Roubaud admits, "la nature même de l'opération de récit rende inévitables en fait de tels carrefours, de tels embranchements multiples sur la carte, ces endroits de l'hésitation, où il n'est peut-être aucune droite voie" (*Le grand incendie* 34).

As for the typographic appearance of this work, though, Roubaud takes a different approach from Antin and from *Dire*. Rather than eliminate punctuation, Roubaud deploys it excessively. The digressions and hesitations are signaled by a surplus of coded symbols, such as multiple-embedded parenthesis, numerically ordered sections with subcategories, appendices of "bifurcations" and "incises", and, in the last volume, complex color and font schemes. The pulse of talk, as Antin calls it, is thus masked under the sophisticated typographical structuring of his six-volume project. But it beats nonetheless, and, in light of Roubaud's theories of orality,

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[126] It is now well known the extent to which Antin modifies the textual version of his talk pieces. He has provided compelling justifications for this decision in *A Conversation with David Antin*.

there is an unmistakable continuity between his early experiments with oral poetry and this autobiographical project. In other words, the poetry reading continues to impact Roubaud's writing.

The rise of the American poetry reading is thus a central context for Roubaud's work. This is only natural. Like many of his contemporaries, Roubaud became familiar with the poetry reading circuit out of necessity, reading his work at bookstores, universities, churches and cultural centers, sharing the stage with his others at international festivals or reciting poems on radio stations such as *France Culture*. To be sure, Roubaud challenges the standard conventions and expectations of these readings, which he deems American. Instead of a dramatic and participatory performance, mentally he turns away from the audience, letting himself be distracted by dappled light and ambient noises as his voice carries on steadily, uninflected, emotionless. This distraction causes slight discrepancies in each reading. He stumbles over a word or extends the length of a syllable. His sequence *Dors*, as we've seen, is meant to recreate this process. The reader doesn't know—indeed, can't ever know—how to negotiate the line breaks, and this indecision incites the same variability and instability as is likely present in the oral version of the poems. With *Dire*, Roubaud performs an oral work directly on the page, so to speak. By working within a fixed amount of time while refusing to edit or correct the results, Roubaud is mimicking the conditions of a traditional oral performance. This isn't the rehearsed act of those expressive poets who read with great flair and panache a poem with end-stopped lines, a poem that differs very little on the page than in performance. Roubaud's is an unpredictable performance, with no small amount of hesitations, digressions and repetitions, all of which find expression through the typography and layout of the piece.

Chants and spells, minimalist poems with irregular line breaks and improvised performances are all phenomena inextricably linked to the poetry reading. Indeed, the public occasion of the reading enabled these practices. Whatever Roubaud's personal opinion of the American reading—whether while at the reading he writes his own poems while ignoring the performer or while reading his own poems in public he neglects the audience—his need to neglect some aspects of the reading, and to find forms for this neglect, brings the poetry reading into even sharper focus.

Coda

   Although Roubaud's *Dire la poésie* and *Dors* both depend on an American poetry reading context, never does he explicitly or directly address this public. Rather, he evokes it through explicit forms of neglect and self-imposed solitude. This confusion of address characterizes most of the works taken up in this dissertation. Luoma's "The Annotated My Trip to NYC" offers the starkest example of this. Originally written as a series of comments for his French translators before being reframed and published in English for an ostensible American public, at least two conflicting publics are put on vivid display. On the surface, Luoma's work is addressed to his French translators, but its implied public, as a poem, is unmistakably an American one.

   This play of competing publics is due to the way these poems circulate. As American and French poetry travels back and forth across the Atlantic, it is mediated by a variety of institutions and practices, including most notably those I've examined here: translation, periodicals, and the poetry reading. Even Charles Bernstein's "Vers Introjectif", which was written for, and first published in, Alferi's and Cadiot's *Revue de littérature générale*, was initially composed in English before being translated into French. This poem's French public was constructed more through editorial intervention than through any choices Bernstein made in his original "Introjective Verse." It is thus most often the mediating institutions and practices that give rise to these conflicting publics. This last point is thrown into sharp relief by the editorial practices of *Chain*. As a counter-example to the periodicals central to this Franco-American exchange, it called attention not only to the limitations of the transatlantic journal, but also to the role mediating institutions play in shaping poetic practices.

   But not all the works involved in this exchange entail so many levels of mediation. Stacy Doris's *La Vie de Chester Steven Wiener écrite par sa femme* is a telling example. This work represents an extreme case that has resulted from these new patterns of exchange. Like Bernstein's "Vers Introjectif", it was initially written on Alferi's and Cadiot's request for *RLG*'s second issue. As her title suggests, Doris's book is about the early life of her husband, *Chester Steven Wiener*.[127] But rather than write her piece in English, Doris chose to compose the work directly in French. Written and published in French—with the publisher P.O.L, no less—Doris specifically addresses this work to her French friends and readers: "J'écris en français parce que […] je veux que mon livre soit une marque d'appréciation et d'affection pour les amis français" (23). As a non-native speaker, this is particularly challenging for Doris. But the challenge isn't without its minor thrills and pleasures. As Doris explains, "commencer à écrire un livre dans une très belle langue que vous adulez mais que vous n'avez jamais complètement apprise au sens strict, comme il l'aurait fallu d'abord, cela donne une drôle de sensation assez frustrante mais remplie d'une liberté vertigineuse, comme si vous découvriez une langue inconnue, mais dans

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[127] After publishing this work in 1998, she published a follow-up work. It is interesting to note that Doris's name doesn't appear anywhere in the first work—the author is simply referred to as "sa femme"—and in the second work the author is referred to as Mme. Weiner.

laquelle sont déjà écrits vous livres préférés. C'est une ivresse presque science-fictionesque que je vous recommande à tous" (23).

This is all the more surprising considering the gratuitousness of her decision. To be sure, there are some advantages to writing in French. As Doris concedes, "cette entreprise, même si elle échoue en soi, peut m'aider à apprendre le français écrit, chose pas du tout évidente" (23). But there is no inherent reason for Doris to write in French. It is not, for example, a matter of gaining a wider public. Presumably, few of her American friends read French; and many of her French friends would most likely have read the same work had it been written in English. Moreover, the peculiarities of her style impose further constraints on her reading public. I can think of no analogous comparison with other writers who have chosen French over their mother tongue for practical purposes, as Doris lacks the education and experience of most of these writers. As peculiar as Beckett's French may appear, there is no question about his mastery of the language.

Doris does not try to hide her "connaissance moins que rudimentaire du français écrit" (15). Indeed, there is no mistaking that her text is written by an American. In addition to the countless allusions to American culture and expressions, which Doris always remarks or reframes for the benefit of her French readers—"il battait presque toujours des *home runs*, pour ainsi dire, si vous m'excusez ce barrage d'américanismes" (118)—her language betrays its American origin most notably through her syntactical choices. Adverbs, for instance, are both awkwardly placed—"il vite ôte sa veste"—and used much more frequently than is often the case in French writing: "Roberta, *authentiquement* étonnée par cette réception du cadeau au point que son amour-propre quasi *automatiquement* offensé par de tels événements en était *momentanément* éclipsé, répondit que les jeans n'étant ni plus ni moins que des jeans, un jeans *Sears* valait bien un *Levi's*" (114-115, my emphasis). This disrupts the conventional rhythm of the French sentence, which is strained throughout in a variety of ways. At times, adverbial clauses intervene in unlikely places—"Le fait important est que Roberta a, d'une manière ou d'une autre grâce à sa sœur, eu le jeune petit chien blanc avec quelques taches brunes et à poils longs nommé Fluffy" (39); at others, the sentence is thrown off balance by a final conjunction, which seems as though it were added hastily as a mere afterthought: "La presque foule de femmes vedettes qui jouent dans ce film représentent toutes, à part les domestiques, des bourgeoises bien soignées qui passent leurs journées à faire les magasins à Manhattan, et divorcent" (127). Set off by a comma and lacking a relative pronoun, these last two words, "et divorcent", strike an even more discordant note than the sentence's strange opening: "la presque foule de femmes vedettes."

Hocquard's sentiment regarding American poetry in French translation, which I cited at the very beginning of this dissertation, would seem an apt description of what is happening here. Certainly we could agree that, regarding this text, "*jamais un poète français ne l'aurait écrit.*" The decision to use non-standard French by a French writer is almost always a deliberate one. This is not the case here. Doris's slow-moving prose, filled with small blunders and awkward turns-of-phrase, appears nonetheless unaffected. In contrast, a French writer could only imitate Doris's style with a great deal of affectation, as when a native speaker imitates the accent of a non-native speaker. But the second part of Hocquard's statement—*ça, jamais un Américain ne l'aurait écrit*—isn't borne out by Doris's prose. In this case, only an American could have written it.

Perhaps even more significant for the purpose of my larger argument is the fact that this text would be impossible to conceive of in any context other than this Franco-American one.

That an American poet, whose handle on French, by her own admission, is less than rudimentary, can write and publish a work directly in French illustrates the extent to which new patterns of circulation have changed the way poetry is produced. It is also interesting to note that, properly speaking, this work entails very little circulation. Published in French in 1998, the work has yet to be translated into English. It has remained on that side of the Atlantic. Unlike Luoma, or Bernstein, or Roubaud, Doris doesn't address two competing or overlapping publics. Hers is decidedly French, though a very particular one. It is written for those few who can appreciate, like Hocquard, a work distinct from American poetry, in that it is composed in French, all while dramatically distinguishing itself from French poetry through its inimitable style.

Doris's work also serves as an important reminder about the nature of this exchange. For no matter the intensity or frequency of these cross-cultural encounters, rather than two poetries becoming one, as Bennett and Mousli suggest (89-90), each work that engages in this Franco-American context poses a distinct set of questions. This is because this poetry not only reflects current patterns of exchange but actively and repeatedly works to create new ones. Doris's work hasn't followed the same pattern of circulation as those that I've examined here, and, consequently, its public may appear much more circumscribed in comparison. But her willingness to serve as her own translator, so to speak, could give rise to a different kind of public, one that may be harder to define than those I've identified up till now. For as we've seen, no sooner does a poem imagine a particular public than another competing one often emerges at its margins. I have tried to make a case for this in the specific context of French and American poetry since the 1970s. But as these patterns of circulation are not unique to this particular exchange, this play of completing publics may prove to be a defining feature not only of contemporary French and American poetry, but of contemporary poetry *tout court*.

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