

Mathilde Heu

UPSIDE-DOWN
From Indifference to Difference

Programme: CAP / Critical Practice
Tutor: Daniel Campbell Blight
Word count: 8665

RCA 2017

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Note for the attention of the reader

This dissertation is originally bound into a book, whose first part must be read on the right hand-side pages. Once at the 'end', one should turn the book upside-down, to read the rest of it. For practical reasons, I here made a version readable as a pdf, without the pages being 'upside-down'. Nonetheless, you will find at the end (p. 40 of this pdf), the intended edited version.

‘Principle of indifference’

noun

the principle that, in the absence of any reason to expect one event rather than another, all the possible events should be assigned the same probability.¹

1. ‘Principle of Indifference Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary’ <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/principle-of-indifference>> [accessed 11 June 2017].

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Overture

... yes, moving to London did not feel such an upheaval, not at first sight. But soon, I started to realise how things were going quickly: I had not started and yet it was already Christmas. Moreover, my programme, 'Critical Practice', had just been launched and was still to be defined. I have been asking myself what this means to me. What does it mean to have a *critical practice*? For a long time, I described my work as non-political: not especially reflecting cultural or societal changes. While writing this dissertation, I have become conscious that I was wrong: one's interest always reflects a surrounding, experiences that have been lived, body-filtered, before being re-transmitted to an audience. I believe this dissertation reflects the change of a surrounding, new to me, and perhaps also the echo of something else, belonging the virtual modernity of our time.

Facing the fearsome guest called Procrastination, I knew that I had to carry on, master the time before he would master me. I did not know exactly where to begin, however, I already knew that I had some interest in seeing how my English would evolve, how far I could get into writing, trying to reach an ease and a fluency close to the one I have got in French. The first book I read as

part of the programme, and far from being the easiest one, was *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* from Denise Riley. This book, advised by the tutor of 'Critical Practice' Jeremy Millar, marked the first steps I would make, 'lost in translation'. Today still, I am unable to read it without stumbling once every ten words. Though, one aphorism particularly caught me: "I am a walker in language."¹

And therefore I am, walking... or maybe *falling*, though the experience of writing.

But for now, it seems that I am slowly falling asleep, awaiting the 'fade to black': the many hours of computer light tiring my eyes. A last thought maybe, before entering into slumber: I remember Denise Riley speaking about how language can mark an individual, when she says: "Verbal attacks, in the moment they happen, resemble stoning."² I vaguely remember having seen a painting by Francis Alÿs, with a small note on the corner saying 'Painting and Punishment'. At first sight, I thought it was a rabbit. Never mind, I will come back to it later...

Dozing off.



Stutter

8th December 2016

How to initiate a new process of writing? Among the infinite variety of subjects, I need to settle my mind for a moment. Grab something which suddenly bursts to the surface of my gaze, an anomaly, that I could transform, develop into a field of research. Grab it, make it grow, slowly, regularly: as if blowing into a balloon. Pass from the indifference to the difference simply by extracting a thing which was part of an unseen world. However, I perceive something like a stutter in my ideas, in my hands. As if I can't move forward anymore. A stumbling block, a root on which I trip and that holds me back.

And the shift I am waiting for is simply not happening, not yet. I have the bizarre impression to repeat myself, but with less consistence than before. Maybe because I not only need to find translations for my own words, my

1. Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 28.

2. *ibid.*, p. 10.

'magic words'³, that look like thousands of empty shells that I have to fill with meaning, but also because I need to find a space of translation for my work.

Where to begin has always been a question that haunted my mind, a mistake that I can't help to repeat again and again, but little by little I notice that there is no real beginning, just a continuous flow in which I try to make a difference, a difference from what I have been doing so far, and a difference from what I used to be, yet I remain my 'Self' almost *same*, '*être autre dans le devenir autre*'. I have been waiting for a shift, which of course has not happened. It is illusory to believe that one can begin without referring to what constitutes this so believed *new* beginning. Things constantly overlap, yet many times I felt I was reaching the end of something. Hence, there is no real beginning and there is no real ending, or maybe "In the end, what we find is the beginning, and in the beginning, the end."⁴ And those two notions only determinate the limit of a crystallisation, an artwork, a piece of writing: a becoming '*à l'oeuvre*'. This stutter that I say I feel in my hands, is nothing but the fear of repeating what I have already done, nevertheless, I had forgotten that repetition was already creating a difference, an alteration.

The notion of 'infrathin', developed by Marcel Duchamp, may explain my thought: in one of his numerous notes about this concept, he says that the infrathin is the remaining warmth

of a chair that has just been left, or when the tobacco smoke smells also of the mouth which exhales it, the two odours marry by infrathin⁵. In a few words, it is an almost imperceptible separative amount between two phenomena. Hence, the infrathin seems to embody the passage of time, that modifies any thing, and lies in the very heart of the becoming. And the infrathin is at its peak when it differs the *same* from almost the *same*. Phenomenon also observable (or maybe only imaginable) between a mold and its substratum (fig. 1).

Without referencing it, Giuseppe Penone seized one of the possible manifestations of the infrathin when he writes: "Becoming increasingly important is the space that separates the hand from the thing touched, the slime, that the fine iridescent thickness with the colours of the rainbow, the colours of the light."⁶

It seems that I recognise, in the embryo of an artistic process, an impalpable mass, unknown, that moves ceaselessly, and whose the ephemeral incarnations crystallize the steps of a desired and undertaken becoming. No matter its numerous incarnations, it always grows from the same nucleus. Each crystallisation is a step aside, a new variation, to attempt once again, to discern the core of one's thinking. A process which reminds the short essay that Marcel Duchamp wrote about the creative act, saying that the work of art is nothing else but a

3. Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 90.

4. Sarah Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze*, Studies in Literary Criticism & Theory, v. 19 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 20.

5. 'Duchamp's Notes on the Infrathin' <<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jbass/talks/mla06/infranotes.htm>> [accessed 7 June 2017].

6. Giuseppe Penone, *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: Commune di Bologna, 2009), p. 294.



Fig. 1: Mathilde Heu, *Habit de sérendipité*, 2015.

coefficient.⁷ And curiously, in mathematics, a coefficient is also called a *difference*⁸. I have never been gifted on that branch. Anyway, I...

9th December 2016

... need some fresh air. My body and my mind are spread among the screens which flood me with their blue light, the ideas and all the stimuli bursting into my surroundings. I desperately try to focus my mind on something to grab my attention, but I merely can't. So, what do I do? Sitting on the paper, beforehand unwound onto the floor, I try to keep my hands active with great difficulty.

I am moving forward in a linear manner, covering the paper as experiencing the drawing, with all the joy and the boringness that it comprises. I keep a record of every thought that comes to my mind. But, staring at me, Procrastination has a half-smile on its lips. The gesture becomes mechanic; my wrist as memory.

7. "Therefore, when I refer to 'art coefficient', it will be understood that I refer not only to great art, but I am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state – à l'état brut – bad, good or indifferent. In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle towards the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plan. The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of." Marcel Duchamp, *Le Processus Créatif* (Caen: L'Echoppe, 1989).

8. In mathematics, also called a 'finite distance'.

I used to call this process ‘intervalle arrêté’, a term that could be translated as follows: suspended interval. “This poetic form would organise the temporality, giving it unity, beginning and ending, allowing the event to insert itself in a comprehensible totality.”⁹

I was drawing every day, trying to find a new motif each time I was on my way to the studio. A new motif as a new motivation that I could use until depletion. Thus, the drawing was expanding, from the left to the right...

Later, the beginning tends to disappear: there is not enough place on the floor, so words and paper wind on themselves and disappear. I am moving forward, blind, wandering on this blank surface where the end is not to be seen, not yet. Indeed, where am I? Is there a lot of distance to be covered? The space of possibilities seems to be infinite. I am slowing down. Words are floating, and my hands become numb. However, a feeling of urgency pushes me to get through it. On my way towards a desired end, I pay attention to each of the things I meet. Eventually, I burst into the drawing in order to better extract myself from it: I draw all around my body, until the charcoal reaches my tights, my feet, my hand. I stand up, the white space looks like a body seen from underneath glass: we would say a photograph of Patrick Tosani (fig. 2), a body defined by the contact points maintained with the ground. Suddenly

9. My translation, original quotation: “Cette forme poétique organiserait la temporalité en lui conférant une unité, un début, un milieu et une fin, permettant à l’événement de s’inscrire dans une totalité [...] compréhensible.” Raphaël Baroni, *L’œuvre du temps*, Paris, Seuil, (coll. “Poétique”), 2007, p.48.



Fig. 2: Patrick Tosani, *Corps du dessous*, 1996.



Fig. 3: Mathilde Heu, *Infrathin in translation*, 2016.

here I am, upside-down, under the surface. I continue to draw, hands and hands... And although I used to consider them as a tool capable of concrete volition, I notice that at the same time, they are “precisely what disobey.”¹⁰

So from motivation they become the motifs of demotivation. My hands are now empty ghosts which haunt the surface of my drawing, listless, almost lifeless (fig. 3). What do I do with them? Bad drawings of procrastination again. And again. Procrastination smiles wide now and reminds me of my blindness: keeping simultaneity between my thoughts and my drawing is creating immobility. Indeed, I can't move forward.



10. Darian Leader, *Hands* (London: Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2016) p. 4.

Inertia, resistance to movement

No setback possible. No time. I need to carry on after all.

Whereas '*être au pied du mur*' in French means to be forced to act when facing a delicate situation, to be '*up against the wall*' in English means to be in a crucial or critical position, especially one in which defeat or failure seems imminent.¹¹ It might be both, in my concern.

Perhaps writing requires another time, a past time. Indeed, simultaneity between what we live, experience and what is written is impossible, even though the present time that is created when reading gives this illusion. I understand that I have to get a head start in order to be able to step back. But I can't step back. The wall is just behind me, and therefore the only way is forward, into a void that I have not had the time to fill with new content to explore and to look at. As if being projected in a direction, so quickly that my body suddenly feels excessively heavy, trying to resist helplessly to this over-acceleration.

By trying to reach in my drawing a utopic synchronicity between the present and my actions, I have made the mistake to

11. '*Up against the Wall* | Define *Up against the Wall* at Dictionary.com' <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/up--against--the--wall>> [accessed 8 March 2017].

repeat a creative process that worked before but which doesn't anymore. I deeply knew that it was no-way-out: a bait, a lure, soon of strange disaffection. I now estrange this simulacrum of movements: Autumn's dying twitches. I thought it was the only way to avoid lethargy, torpor. But, my hands remain tied.



Loss of equilibrium

I have a quick look at my hands, these inert ghosts and their fingers that I can't stop to bite, trying to think of something else but their *morbid alliance* with my *mouth*¹². This mouth that twists itself, lips tightened, words jostling around inside. Once again, I insert my mouse cursor in-between what is going to be the end of this chapter and first few lines of the following one. A clumsy start. Every time I insert myself in the text, I change its internal balance. De facto, it is a constant readjustment between connections and points of reliance, but also a reflection on how a phrase generates an idea, a feeling leads to the next paragraph. By annotating the text and its construction, I cannot refrain myself to think about sincerity. And how, by rearranging the events, and sometimes altering them to be more precise, and thus, by 'lying', I can tell a merciless truth that couldn't exist if I had chosen to tell the things exactly in the way they happened. In fact, Fyodor Dostoyevsky even says that" (...) telling the truth or lying is absolutely the same"¹³ to him. Indeed, at that point,

12. " 'Morbid alliance with mouth' ." Sarah Freiberg quoted in Darian Leader, *op. cit.*, p.17.

13. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Notebooks of an Idiot*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 102-173, quoted in: Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p.17.

truth and lie cancel each other to form one single character: a witness, a sum of conscious decisions, choices that find a form, eventually. And so Hélène Cixous described that we constantly need to stand one foot in one world and one foot in the other: on the side of the text¹⁴. Writing is an act taking its roots in a rhizomatous universe, it is a specific plot, a site specific intrigue which grows from attentiveness and gives me the opportunity to organise the time as I wish it to be. The artwork somewhat less flexible: it's a response, more or less direct, to an event or an experience. But both share the same attribute: they need time to exist, to take roots. Initiate a new process of making is quite similar to moving into a new apartment: your voice and your steps resonate into the void created by the absence of any furniture.

Hélène Cixous wrote about reading that it was like “eating on the sly”¹⁵, a quote that perfectly describes my appetency for aphorisms. Ergo, the following one, borrowed from Jean-Luc Marion, looked at me as I read it, as an invitation to copy it here: “(…) I actually find myself located, a thing amongst the things, I organise – indeed, I open – the space between right and left.”¹⁶ I suddenly notice that my mouse cursor looks like an ‘I’ and ambles, between block letters, words and sentences, taking place between what has already been written and the white space shortly followed by a blinking cursor. Indeed, it organises a space between what precedes and what follows. It's a ‘needle’ whose eye / ‘I’, has been stabbed by the black thread

14. Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

of the text. Its pattern seems regular, without any defaults or jolts, but as the back of an embroidery constitutes it is in fact a fine mess, the back of a text is also an absolute thread tangle. Its author works toward a continuous piece of work, trying to hold everything together in a coherent whole, until the ineluctable ‘end’: the writer must extract himself out of the writing in order to allow space for the finite object.

Soon, the result becomes so smooth, so polished, that “One need only rub the “book” (again) in order to see the trace of what lies beneath. Below the surface, one finds the multiple revisions that the book has undergone, the lack of certainty behind each word, the instability of its margins, its aborted beginnings and abandoned ends (...). What one discovers beneath the “book” is the “text”: the evidence of “writing.”¹⁷

How many paragraphs have I been moving around, adding some new phrases in-between ideas, like I am doing now? I couldn't count. The text grows from inside, seeking for unity and coherence. The text becomes the *evidence of writing*, yet at the same time erases the marks of its construction. I quite like the idea of commenting the writing, an act which reveals some moments where the text tends to slow down, panting, until a new breath is found. The only thing nevertheless obvious is that I am constantly walking, following this black thread that blinds me but at the same time guides me towards a desired end, still without knowing its outcome. Once again Hélène Cixous perfectly seized this idea when she wrote: “The book writes itself, and if by chance the person opposite to you should ask what you are writing, you have nothing to say since you

17. Sarah Gendron, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

don't know.”¹⁸ And Simon McBurney's following quote hence continues, saying: “The moment you decide what something means, it at once resists and seems to writhe its way out of your grasp, revealing itself as meaning something quite different.”¹⁹

Writing/Drawing is not given, and trying to seize its nucleus provoked my own immobility. A process needs gaps, duration. I have to dig a new plot. I have been rambling – trying to open a way out of a procrastination swamp, where words have been swallowed helplessly – trying to write down these empty shells that are not mine, and that I have had to fill with meanings. Although I already knew some of their definitions, they were continuously remaining strangers to me, empty jars in which I was, very clumsily, pouring my translations. Thus, they plunged in the charcoal, invisible to me, almost nonexistent for others. Throes of doubts breaking over my thoughts, flowing out from my hands.

According to Darian Leader, “Hands offer a first way out”²⁰, they are part of ourself yet at the same time are something else: a gateway, a contact point between the body and the world. Conversely, eyes offer a first way in. But they share one common characteristic, they are indeed the body parts that we see the least easily: once working, one pays attention to what is being made more than one's actions of the body to make it. And moreover, the eye has a blind spot, therefore invisible to us. Also, when looking at the night-sky, if you gaze at a comet or a distant star, light years away from you, too intensely by focusing only on its

18. Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

19. Simon McBurney, *Who Do You Hear It from* (London: Complicite, 2015), p. 119.

20. Darian Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

precise position, it will soon disappear from your vision. You consequently have to slightly move your focus point to be able to observe it. In the same way, hands also have their blind spot. Indeed, you can hardly feel your hand touching: as soon as you caress a surface, its sensation (rough, soft, cold, ...) permeates your senses. In addition, you certainly have once experienced the sensation of the disappearance of your skin's boundaries when holding your own hand or the hand of someone else for a prolonged time.

According to Jacques Derrida, our hands and our eyes are the sites of recognition, “signs through which one identifies the other”²¹. It is easy to have an almost accurate image of ourselves in mirrors, but it is “very difficult to have an image of our own act of looking or to have a true image of our hands as they are moving. It is the *Other* who knows.”²² And it is why having a reasonably accurate set back of your own practice is arduous, and sometimes burdensome. I do feel blind, and I do feel the need to draw my own hands, as a helpless interrogation, hoping they will offer this ‘first way out’.

In terms of blindness, it reminds me of an artwork of Giuseppe Penone, where his eyes were covered by reflective (and opaque) contact lenses (fig. 4). Obliging him to have to look inwards into his mind, the lenses constituted a limit²³

21. Gor Madoyan, *Jacques Derrida. Full Documentary Film* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ujk4vld9A> [accessed 19 March 2017].

22. *Ibid.*

23. “Mirrored contact lenses cover the iris and the pupil, wearing them makes me blind. (...) placed on the eye, they indicate a point of division, a separation from what surrounds me. (...) Blocking the extension of sight eliminating data necessary for my subsequent behavior.” Giuseppe Penone, *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: Commune di Bologna, 2009), p. 59.



Fig. 4: Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi*, 1970.

between him and the surrounding world, driving him back into himself and allowing him to have what I believe to be an accurate image of his own act of looking (as Derrida would say). But in addition to this, the artist's eyes thus reflected the environment that influenced his work and hence marked the boundaries of the world itself: the returned image seems like a projection from the artist onto the cornea, but in fact, it is nothing else but the reflection of the present environment. And thus, the reflected image changes according to the position of the artist. This work expresses both, and almost in contradiction, how an artwork is indeed the reflection of a context but also, the result of a desire to be extracted, to disappear of this world, in order to better discern, and better perceive what is going on, in an unseen part of thoughts; a wish to find the roots, whose seeds belong to the surroundings and sometimes overwhelming elements of our quotidian. It is a nice opposition to, at the same time, wish for blindness in order to find clarity. Moreover, this work emphasises the fact that there is no simultaneity between the experience and the work of art. Giuseppe Penone, was indeed blind to his own piece: he describes it as prophetic vision, and adds that lenses are a mask that "allows a vision of the world which is not present but past or future."²⁴ Likewise, this reminds me of an experience that I did quite genuinely: I covered my eyes with a black piece of fabric, and asked my sister to guide me for a walk (fig. 5). I had a camera which I used as if it was my spare eyes to record my trip. Hence blind, I strongly remember how sounds became increasingly important, and I recall having this thought

24. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

that my body is in fact an attentive boundary between my experiences and the way I would re-transcribe them. 'The surrounding' is a wrapping that stimulates and helps one to define its position. However, sometimes, I just feel like I am just floating... what if it was the wrapping that becomes less and less perceptible, loose? Just like Giuseppe Penone aspired to grasp and master his gaze, I am maybe trying to better understand the play of my hands, in order to identify the part of me that is trying to differ, every step forward, of what I used to be, of what I used to do; trying to make a difference in order to be seen, to have something interesting to say. It is always a slight shift, the sliding that makes you go out of depth, this moment when your foot, thinking there is another step to be climbed, loses itself in the void, and creates an instant of weightlessness, where your entire body seems to collapse.



Fig. 5: Mathilde Heu, *Blind Walk*, 2014.

On the edge of an abyss, towards an upside-down

And so I would like writing to be: standing on the edges, in equilibrium, or walking on a land, on which you suddenly lose your balance, when your foot slips on its surface: in a split second, here you are, flailing your arms in order to arrest your fall, yet you never touch the ground. You know, this precise second where your stomach seems to levitate. This uncanny moment that you have certainly experienced before, when on a roller coaster, you feel the space which surrounds your organs.

In equilibrium, yet still immobile, I feel like the stone of John Dewey²⁵: once I would have begun my fall, I would roll down a hill, paying attention to all the events I would meet on my way down, thus having an aesthetic experience, until reaching a state of rest, bewildered. Writing is keeping this state of amazement, in order to create and construct your own plot, a story-line:

25. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, G. B. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1934, quoted by: *Encyclopædia Universalis*, 'ESTHÉTIQUE - L'expérience Esthétique', *Encyclopædia Universalis* <<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/esthetique-l-experience-esthetique/>> [accessed 6 June 2017].

your own intrigue. *Wooden Boulder* (fig. 6)²⁶, is wood sculpture made out of oak by David Nash. Taking the shape of a stone, the artwork journeyed down the River Dwyryd in Wales, until vanishing into nature, presumably into the sea. This poetic work, embodies this idea of a subject having an aesthetic experience, rocked from one place to another. Hence, I wonder if I could talk of having an aesthetic experience in narrative, if the hazards of the text are sufficient to lead me through a form of narration.

When reading again the first paragraph of this chapter I just wrote, I cannot refrain from thinking of Lewis Carroll's character: Alice²⁷. A little girl, a bit bored, who follows her instinct. Standing on the edge of a burrow, she launches into it. And, instantly, she is falling, in this huge vertical tunnel, a very deep well, where objects, mysteriously floating in space, offer no grip where she can hang on. Her blue dress, swirling crazily.

But strangely, where we would expect speediness and scared screams, her fall finds itself to be a never-ending drowsiness: she is almost floating, in a state of anti-gravitation, as there is no time perception but plenty of time to observe the things she encounters on her way, down, down, down, at the same time she falls. In Kafka's novel entitled *The Burrow*²⁸, the semi-man, semi-animal who inhabits it, is constantly oscillating between the comfort of his habitat and the paranoia of its possible invasion,

26. 'David Nash and the Mystery of Wooden Boulder, His Missing Sculpture | Christie's' <<http://www.christies.com/features/David-Nash-on-his-free-range-sculpture-Wooden-Boulder-7525-1.aspx>> [accessed 6 June 2017].

27. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 150th anniversary edition (Princeton, New Jersey: New York, New York: Princeton University Press ; in association with the National Museum of Mathematics, 2015).

28. Franz Kafka and others, *Le terrier* (Paris: Éd. Mille et une nuits, 2002).

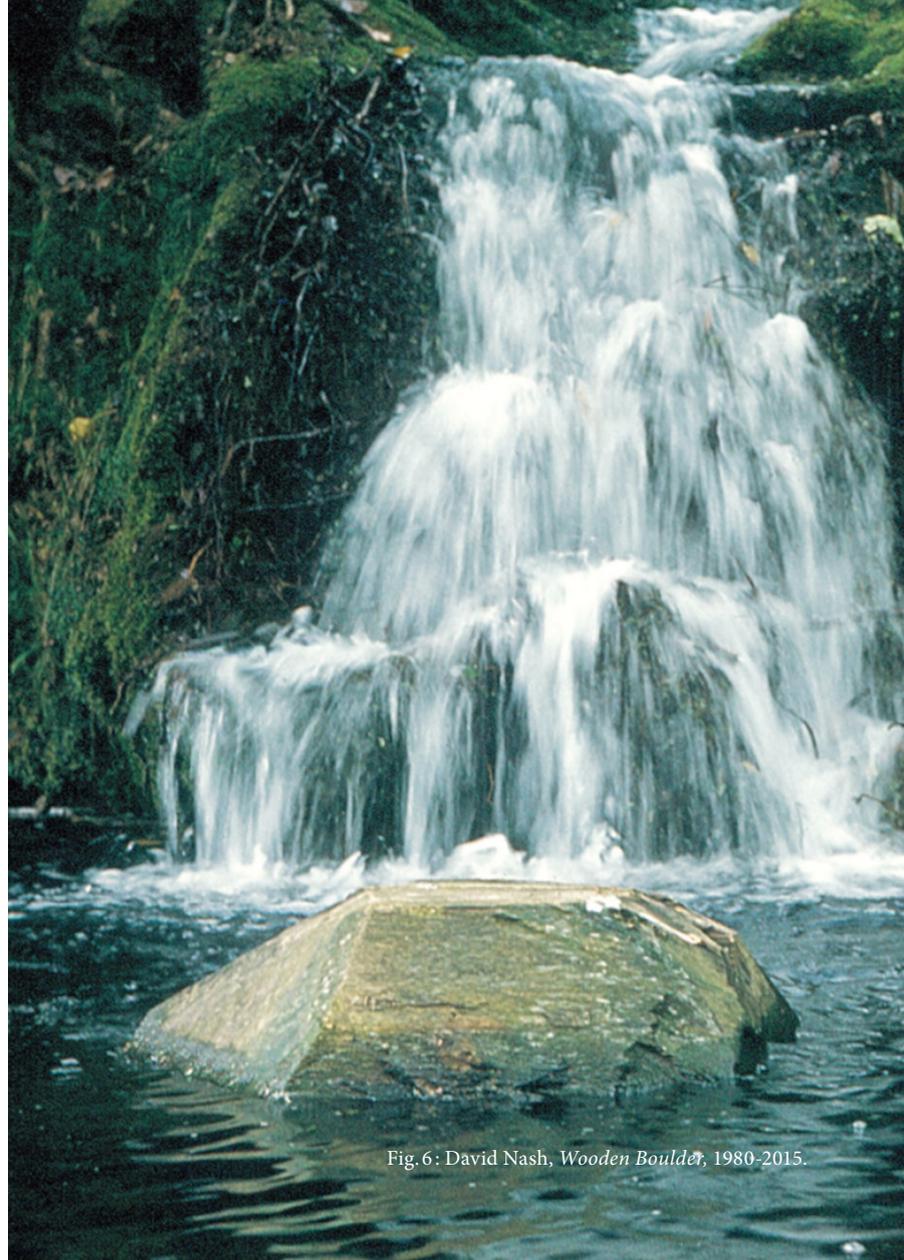


Fig. 6: David Nash, *Wooden Boulder*, 1980-2015.

to the point where the only relief to be found is to leave the place of relative security as a means to observe it from outside, and control its different entrances. And what I find interesting in this novel, is how one can make the experience of an alterity, and how this otherness finishes by constituting him, yet at the same time remains a stranger. There is within this in-between position something that constitutes the shifting point I need. Perhaps it is time to plunge, head first, and drive away Procrastination whose deep laziness has consumed “the joy of [my] hands.”²⁹ Escape from my own retreat, in order to analyse my process from outside: *that is the Other who knows*. So to let the objects of fascination seize me and face this otherness, become this *Other*, and let the text become the witness, a space of reflection.

“Paradise is down below”³⁰, said Kafka about writing. And as I am wandering, from an object to another, a key word to another, falling just like Alice, I am trying to make sense of my slow dive, gathering the pieces of knowledge: voiceless interrogations that spin continuously in my head.

As writing I notice that the flow of the text is most of the time very slow, as if my thoughts couldn't expand behind the vocabulary I possess. Also, on my way down, down, down, I wonder if there is an infrathin in translation, and if this infinitesimal space between a language and another, could offer me a gateway.



29. Original quotation “We have lost the taste of hands, of the touching of hands. We have lost all the small and great secret of joy.” Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

30. Franz Kafka, quoted in: Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Infrathin in translation

When writing in English, I feel like progressing underneath a thin membrane, which can be pierced at every moment, to reach my mother-tongue. Indeed, a word like *membrane* for example remains exactly the same in French. Thus, I feel an infrathin distance between the two. Furthermore, a membrane is a selective barrier, letting some elements pass through, and some not. A filter that I like to compare with the body, to sift the experiences which stimulate an interiority.

As I was reading, looking for aphorisms on the subject, I got caught by this delightful phrase of Roland Barthes: “The language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words.”³¹ Between drawing and writing, exists a strange similarity: as if writing was drawing sense out of words and ideas; and drawing, similar to the gesture of writing, a serpentine stroke on the paper.

Being in this in-between, is like observing a body from

31. My translation, original quotation: “Le langage est une peau: je frotte mon langage contre l'autre. C'est comme si j'avais des mots en guise de doigts, ou des doigts au bout de mes mots.” Roland Barthes, *Fragments D'un Discours Amoureux*, Collection Tel Quel (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), p. 43.

underneath glass, another point of view, as in Patrick Tosani's photograph, where the body offers itself in a way that you are not used to. Albeit, you know this body, but you discover its hitherto unseen parts. And thus, English constitutes for me this alien language that I am experiencing, and I wonder how this otherness, this exteriority, modifies an interiority. And by which means, after a relative period of time, this experience finds its output, and is crystallised to form an artwork and find its autonomy back in exteriority. To carry on with the idea of being under, or behind something, I would like to shortly talk about mirrors, as indeed, it also refers to a phenomenon happening *behind* a reflective surface. Anish Kapoor's *Sky Mirror* (fig. 7) suggests to our gaze the reflection of the sky, a break through the scenery, a reflection space³². Observing this, I find interesting to relate this work to what Giuseppe Penone wrote about his reflecting contact lenses: "The reflected image is the border between reality and a dream-world or apparition; it has no substance and is the instant which follows the changes in reality." Furthermore, a reflection is a reversed image, at least laterally inverted, which means that it reverses the forward/backward axis: "if you stand side-on to a mirror, the mirror reverses your left and right, because that is the direction perpendicular to the mirror"³³. In addition, a reflection is a light-issue. Indeed, light takes time to travel, however it is imperceptible to the naked eye. It is therefore accurate to say that a mirror reflection is the 'instant' that follows reality.

32. 'Sky Mirror' <<http://anishkapoor.com/230/sky-mirror>> [accessed 29 March 2017].

33. 'Mirror', *Wikipedia*, 2017 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mirror&oldid=775109129>>.



Fig. 7: Anish Kapoor, *Sky Mirror*, 2001

Once again there is an infrathin amount of time, sufficient enough to create a difference, that one can only imagine or understand theoretically.

Curiously, ‘reflection’ can both mean a process of thoughts and a reflected image whereas in French, two words exist, but they are differentiated by only one letter: one being *reflexion* with an ‘x’, that signifies the process of thinking and the other being *reflection* with a ‘c’ and means the reflected image.

I notice with amusement that a ‘c’ would be symmetrically inverted if seen as a reflection in a mirror. And by putting the two side-by-side, we would obtain the ‘x’ of the French word *reflexion*. Regarding Giuseppe Penone’s work, I find this anecdote interesting, according the fact that he uses both of the meanings of the word ‘reflection’.

Thus, the transition from a language to another can be seen as similar to a shift, a trip toward an antipode: from a word to its translation, resulting in imperceptible change. One ends up at the same place, or almost the same, but, on the other side. Like if a specific word and its translations were gathered on the surface of a sphere containing all their meanings: by entering the surface, and travelling to its antipode, one would meet on its way their definitions, to end up at the opposite coordination point. A fabulous trip as it tends to bring us closer to a nucleus, where the definitions collide and enrich words at their output.



Anti-gravitation

In Disney’s animation³⁴, still descending, Alice crosses her reflection in a mirror, but the reflection is upside-down and this event seems to be the mid point of her fall, this famous *border between reality and a dream-world*. Objects still floating around her, or with her, she fears to release a book held in her hands: it could fall on someone. This precise moment reminds me of my father’s explanation about anti-gravity.

In free fall, one could experience weightlessness, a phenomena close to what scientists call micro-gravity. In an orbital state, bodies and objects seem to be floating, but this is because they are falling at the same time, not falling down, but falling around a celestial body. This is not exactly anti-gravitation. It is micro-gravity. Perfect anti-gravitation doesn’t exist.

In space ships, astronauts, hence drifting without being constrained to gravity, constantly have to project themselves, using nearby elements in order to initiate movement. Indeed, theoretically, once placed immobile in the middle of an empty

34. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, *Alice in Wonderland* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1951).

space of perfect anti-gravity, with nothing to hang on, it is impossible to create an acceleration: agitating your limbs, wouldn't be of any help. As a beetle lying on his back, you would be condemned to immobility for the rest of your existence. However, by throwing an object at the level of your hips, you would slightly move backwards.³⁵ I have been throwing some phrases on my laptop keyboard, leaving them be, hoping for a chain reaction. Happening, eventually. Keyboard keys jingle under my finger tips, reassuring whilst the words appear.

I am now evolving³⁶, projecting myself from one subject to another, inside this text which becomes longer and longer, trying to put as much distance as I can between my previous state of immobility and writing, in motion. I am getting into the subject, ultimately falling, but the writing still tends to be quite irregular, it stops brutally from time to time, until a new idea engages the writing once again. It sometimes resembles this feeling one can experience whilst half asleep: abruptly falling until striking your mattress with violence.

In the ending of Disney's animation³⁷, Alice, running out from danger, arrives nearby the same door she passed through at the commencement of her fabulous trip. But she can't pass, she looks through the key-lock and sees herself, slumbering, on the other side. In the book, however, she suddenly recognises that she is also somewhat, dreaming. She shouts: "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"³⁸ And the dream vanishes. At this precise moment, she realises that something is wrong. And

35. Thank you to Bastien Confino and Wilfrid Heu for their explanation.

36. In French, *évoluer* means to move, as well as to change of status.

37. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, *op. cit.*

38. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

she certainly asks herself: "[Am I] in [my] dream or [am I] already outside?"³⁹ A curious question as it brings attention to the moment when you switch from a dreaming state, where you are overwhelmed with thoughts and images that you more or less control, to almost instantaneously plain consciousness where you try to reactivate your dream, make sense of it, and rebind its bits together. Here again there is a shifting point that this question tries to grasp, and asks if this realisation, acknowledgment, belongs or not to the dream.

In a half-sleep, I am used to letting my mind wander, madly, amongst desires, kooky ideas and even anger sometimes. But generally, it is moment of euphoria. And once I wake up, it is over. Truly over for most of the ideas I have had. Indeed, suddenly, the dawn breaks over the pillow. In one's mind, the idea is nothing more than the souvenir of the sensation that you have had an idea: it is nothing but crumpled paper. 'It's way out of your grasp', abandoned on the edge of the pillow, even though it seemed fascinating as it was still blooming in a half-sleep.

I remember having heard that "the process of modernity is a process of anti-gravitation"⁴⁰. This captivating aphorism made me think about my groundlessness impression. I now clearly see how it is linked to 'free-fall', which is relative, as it can be felt as simply floating, when there is no ending it, or at least, when the latter is not yet to be seen. A theory also valid from the point of view of an astronomer, since in an orbital space, objects fall at the same time, together, and thus seem to be floating instead of falling. But why this feeling of groundlessness?

39. Original quotation: "Are you in your dream or are you already outside?" Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

40. Unknown.

As I was walking through London, I realised that I was hardly experiencing the city in its horizontality. Indeed, when taking the tube, one almost disappears in the underground, to reappear somewhere else on the asphalt surface: tube stations are almost entry and exit points for each neighbourhood. In French we call them ‘*bouches de métro*’ (metro mouths). They swallow the rush hour crowd, citizens and folks. It is therefore difficult to keep track of the architectural changes, and in my case, of orientation.

I recently discovered the paintings of Francis Alÿs, an ongoing series started in 1995 and entitled *Le temps du sommeil* (fig. 8). The multitude (one hundred and eleven in 2016) of mini scenes, depicts tiny figures and actions, often represented in what seems to be a break through the painting, giving the impression that the characters come from behind the canvas or that they are travelling inside it.

Francis Alÿs constantly modifies his paintings by retouching, adding, or altering them, sometimes even overlapping completely the previous image. However, some of them remain untouched for years...“ The various stages in the work’s ongoing transformation – it may be said to evolve alongside the artist himself – survive only in photographic documentation, illustrating the constancy of Alÿs’s art and the foundation on which it rests, but also his changing interests and priorities.”⁴¹ Hence, his work grows from the inside, following his experiences and his interests. The title, here translated *The Time of Sleep*, resonates as an invitation to dream, and once again reminds

41. ‘David Zwirner Books · Francis Alÿs: Le Temps Du Sommeil’, David Zwirner Books <<https://davidzwirnerbooks.com/product/francis-aly-s-le-temps-du-sommeil-1>> [accessed 11 June 2017].



Fig. 8: Francis Alÿs, *Le temps du sommeil*, 1997.

me of Alice, and I notice with amusement that Alice and Alÿs are in fact perfect homophones.

Alÿs is indeed also a true ‘Wanderer’, a wanderer of the cities that he uses as a raw material, to then create performances that respond to it. But what really struck me is how frequently I could find mirrored scenes, looking like worm holes : passages or doors between two parts of the painting. In one of them one can see a snake passing from a green circle to another. In another one, it is a ladder (see cover), and, to my big surprise, I even found a painting portraying a body in free fall. Also I was wondering if the city, its life and its architecture, provoked feelings of free fall or anti-gravitation on their author.

According to Hito Steyerl, in the linear perspective established by early painters like Paolo Uccello (around 1450), the viewer becomes central to the perspective and is hence “ mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it.”⁴² This linear perspective as we know it, tends to disappear. Indeed, with new technologies like 3D view, Google maps view, satellites view we are getting use to what “ used to be called God’s-eye view”⁴³: The ground is simulated, non-tangible anymore and there gives an impression of floating. In fact, I recently tried a version of these famous 3D glasses. I downloaded several applications, and tried several virtual activities: scuba-diving, haunted house, dinosaurs and so on. The space one did not work as I of course cannot escape the weight of my body. But the most convincing experience of all of them, is without any doubt the roller coaster. The effect on me was so strong that I had to stop,

42. Hito Steyerl, ‘ In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’ (e-flux Journal, 2011), p. 5.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

feeling sick after three or four times. Indeed, apart from both the wind whistling in my ears and the engine twitches that were both lacking, the resemblance was almost perfect: I swear I felt my stomach contracting several times. Another sickening experience was the application that allowed me switch my point of view with someone else : the two smartphones, connected by Bluetooth, where swapping the live recorded video, made me see what my colleague was seeing, and the other way around. All my reference points were inverted, plus : I could see myself, almost as people usually see me. The uncanny sensation to be outside of my body, that I could not control, gave me a strange nausea.

So what if the vanishing point disappears? It certainly changes our way to experience the world. And the viewer is not central to this new perspective any-longer.

But in this state of anti-gravitation, where everything I try to seize in order to harden it and give it a ground in practice, even if it continuously seems to escape and fade until disappearing from my clenched fist, there is at least one thing that is worth to be retained : even if it doesn’t make sense yet, every collected bit and record have something to do with ongoing concerns. It is only waiting to be connected, to be understood. And suddenly, it feels right, back on track. Attentiveness grows from desire to find, desire to gather, construct. It is waiting, already in action. Indeed, the hazard is possible only if one is ready to observe and embrace it, as it barely comes out of the blue, hence it is an active waiting, in a state of alert.



Autotelic writing

Like in perspective, is there a vanishing point in a text, in this text?

Auto meaning *yourself* and *telos* meaning *goal / purpose*, autotelism therefore means that the object has no goal but itself. Or again, having a purpose *in* and not *apart* from itself. Or else, (of an entity or event) having within itself the purpose of its existence or happening.

As I drift (to carry on with space lexical field), from one object of curiosity to another, trying to draw sense of them until the ineluctable end of the writing act (that grows by itself in a logic only nourished by additions relevant to it), can I qualify this text as autotelic writing? Indeed, "(...) we mean by literature a kind of self-referential language, a language which talks about itself."⁴⁴

The goal of this text is to create a convolution of thoughts, a loop where the 'ending' finds itself to be in the 'beginning', without knowing where to enter in the book. From the front cover? From the back cover? Which one is which? Its goal is

44. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.7.

therefore to achieve its cycle, in an never-ending spiral.

Another point of view would be to say that the purpose of the book is to be activated by the reader, indeed, “ (...) ‘literature’ may be at least as much a question of what people do to writing as of what writing does to them.”⁴⁵

But the present text goes back, more or less implicitly to its own construction, while not being a self reflection (*mise en abyme*). In fact, it witnesses the act of its fabrication, construction. This object that you hold in your hands, possesses its own purpose, and I share with it, its existence mode: to think its thinking (*se penser*).

The possible back and forth of the text would be one achievement in itself: its desired ‘ending’ being the crystallisation of writing, of this process of thoughts: a bound book that contains the movement of a fall, like the sand of an hourglass.

I ‘ended’ my previous dissertation speaking of aporia and how the artistic process is a never ending loop: indeed, one’s interests grow almost simultaneously to its author, and thus never cease to need concretion and to re-engage with the process of doing. And I can only but agree with this quotation from Michael Hamburger which says that “the point of an essay, like its justification and its style, always lies in the author’s personality and always leads back to it.”⁴⁶ As such, writing this essay is not only a formal exercise, but it is also to make the reflection of a ‘changing intimate’ world composed of experiences and curiosities previously belonging to the ‘outside’.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

46. Hamburger Michael, ‘An Essay on the Essay’, in *Art as Second Nature, Occasional Pieces* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press Ltd., 1975), p. 4.

This can also be associated with the notion of ‘graphiation’ which refers to the theory that through one’s drawing or writing, one can analyse the entire personality of the author⁴⁷. In fact, the narrative that the author undertakes through writing, about his own metamorphosis, is, according to Jean-Michel Tournier, an *extime* writing.

In order to understand the term *extime*, I shall first explain the word *intime*, which is a French word that means, that which belongs to the intimacy of an individual and is not, at first sight, intended to be shared: an *intime* diary for example. *Extime*, by opposition, means ‘outside’ the ‘Self’. However an *extime* diary doesn’t relate nor describe the “useless considerations of an ego that gives itself to be seen”⁴⁸, but how a surrounding, an outside world modifies or engages one’s thinking.

I am relating the encounters that I make to one another, drawing a thread of interests that I seek and strive to develop. I reread the previous paragraph, twice, three times. There is something that I have missed... There it is: I am wondering if it is possible to link *extime* and *autotelism*? Maybe if the text conception is linked to its result? A result that embodies a ‘covered way’ which by definition is a path that gives view on the horizon, but also inside the walls that it protects. The book would then have this double purpose of both achieving the goal of the text, but also embodying a passage outside itself. By this

47. ‘Graphic Novel’, *Wikipedia*, 2017 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Graphic_novel&oldid=781720570>.

48. My translation, original quotation: “des confidences inutiles d’un ego qui se donne à voir”. ‘Le Principe de L’extimité’, *BSC News* <<https://bscnews.fr/201402143530/Philo/le-principe-de-l-extimite.html>> [accessed 31 May 2017].

I mean that the book marks the ‘ending’ of the text in its state of becoming.

So I come back to my question: Is there a vanishing point in writing? A point of disappearance? If there is one I reckon it would precisely be where the beginning and the ending overlap and disturb the boundaries of the text. And if the text is falling, continuously and without any ‘proper ending’, the vanishing point would then disappear, and its author fade away slowly. The following sentence, that I owe to Joë Bousquet, mentions the liberation of the author: “Write the book which frees you from its contents.”⁴⁹ Therefore, as long as ‘I’ operate, ‘I’ inhabit the becoming of the text, until the exuviation (momentous finiteness, where the author extracts himself from the writing). To intentionally loose/lose the boundaries of the text in a loop, would then erase its vanishing point, blurring its perspective, giving a complete autonomy to the book, and freeing its author at the same occasion. Indeed, “Unlike the “book,” the “text” does not attempt to conceal the fits and starts involved in the writing process. Instead, it is the mark of the “text” to self-consciously fixate on the act of writing and in so doing to represent, with its “aphoristic energy,” the “disruption” of classical writing.”⁵⁰

As the viewer is normally central to the perspective: reflected and constructed by the vanishing point, its disappearance would coincide with the author’s disappearance. And like me before you, give you perhaps this sensation of tumbling, through writing.



49. Joë Bousquet, *Une passante bleue et blonde*, Paris, René Debresse, 1934, p. 173.

50. Sarah Gendron, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Convolution

The notion of ‘aporia’, is for me linked to each new creative process, where the artist must find a way to continue the ‘solidifications’ of his interests. For each artwork, one passes through a chain of different stages until an artwork physically bursts. This process possesses a quality of resilience, a form of involution which involves the capacity to return to a former size/state: it is an aporia, whose elasticity embodies not only the fear of procrastination, which led me to repetition (an other form of postponement), but also the differentiation. This aporia is thus an essential motor for creation. My biggest fear would be to lose this capacity of resilience.

So perhaps, procrastination is after all just the fear to become this other ‘Self’, of making the experience of otherness.

And repetition “(...) a force that simultaneously [reproduces] one thing and [produces] another thing anew. No longer privileging a past by honoring the return of the ‘same Self’ or the return to an origin or a beginning, [repetition looks]

forward to the future and to the production of difference.”⁵¹ The onward step is a bit easier as it ‘only’ consists in ordering the puzzlement that followed procrastination. Indeed, when one finds an object that suddenly unlocks a possible thread that could be followed, unwounded and exploited, one finds oneself in a state of bewilderment... the plot is there, puzzling. One just needs to find a path through the serendipitous aspect of one’s discoveries.



51. Original quotation: “And repetition,” (...) a force that simultaneously reproduced one thing and produced another thing anew. No longer privileging a past by honoring the return of the same Self or the return to an origin or a beginning, repetition looked forward to the future and to the production of difference.” Sarah Gendron, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Was it a cat I saw?

“Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?”⁵² And so goes Alice’s litany, when she tries to kill some time as she falls. She repeats this question in a loop, as to lose its meaning, or like the games you play, when after several repetitions, you end up by saying something quite different from the original phrase, an accident known under the name of ‘spoonerism’. Eventually, Alice winds up to say “Do bats eat cats?”⁵³ This reversal is not without making me think about another form of upside-down: the palindrome. Loops at a spoon⁵⁴: an exact symmetry... In words drown I? I did, did I? Damm it I’m mad.

Dozing off.

Oh no! *Spoonerism*. I was wondering why the root of this word was *spoon*, it is suddenly so obvious: have you ever tried to look at yourself in the curvaceous belly of a spoon? Of course you have... Encore, this is about reflection and upside-down! No... I am sad to write that in fact, it is just named after the Reverend William Archibald Spooner.

52. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

54. Spelling mistake to allow this and the following palindromes.

Anyway, it is a lovely coincidence: in the case of Alice, as her words are transmuted at the opposites of her interrogation. More and more, the writing slows down. It is about time.

Dozing off.



Loop

It is four o'clock in the morning. The distant noise of a siren reaches my ears through the skylight. Birds are whistling, tweeting. Soon the noise of the metropolis will invade the sound texture surrounding. As I rub the sleep from my eyes, the last chapter seems like a dream, a little bit bizarre, a little bit strange, a little bit confusing. I like it though.

With some distance, I can say that I have eventually found a place, in writing, to have a sufficient step back in order to better discern the concerns that keep shaping my practice : attentiveness, language, experiences, serendipity, process ; all contained into a single aporia, a loop that never ends and embodies each of my artworks. Here you are, almost where you began, because wherever you are, is the entry point (fig. 9).

On a last and more personal note, this time belonging maybe more to the intimacy of a diary, I think of the stoning words that Denise Riley described and that once hit me, making me feel as if I were wearing a 'dunce hat', but in the end, it was more like a white rabbit, leading me towards what I liked the most (fig. 10), through experiences and strangeness, experiences of otherness.

I am thinking of the day I arrived here, with the few

belongings I possess which gave me the feeling to be home, here in London. I am amazed to see the compression of time of eight months, ...



Fig. 9: Francis Alÿs, *Le temps du sommeil*, 1996-.



Fig. 10: Francis Alÿs, *Le temps du sommeil*, 2002.

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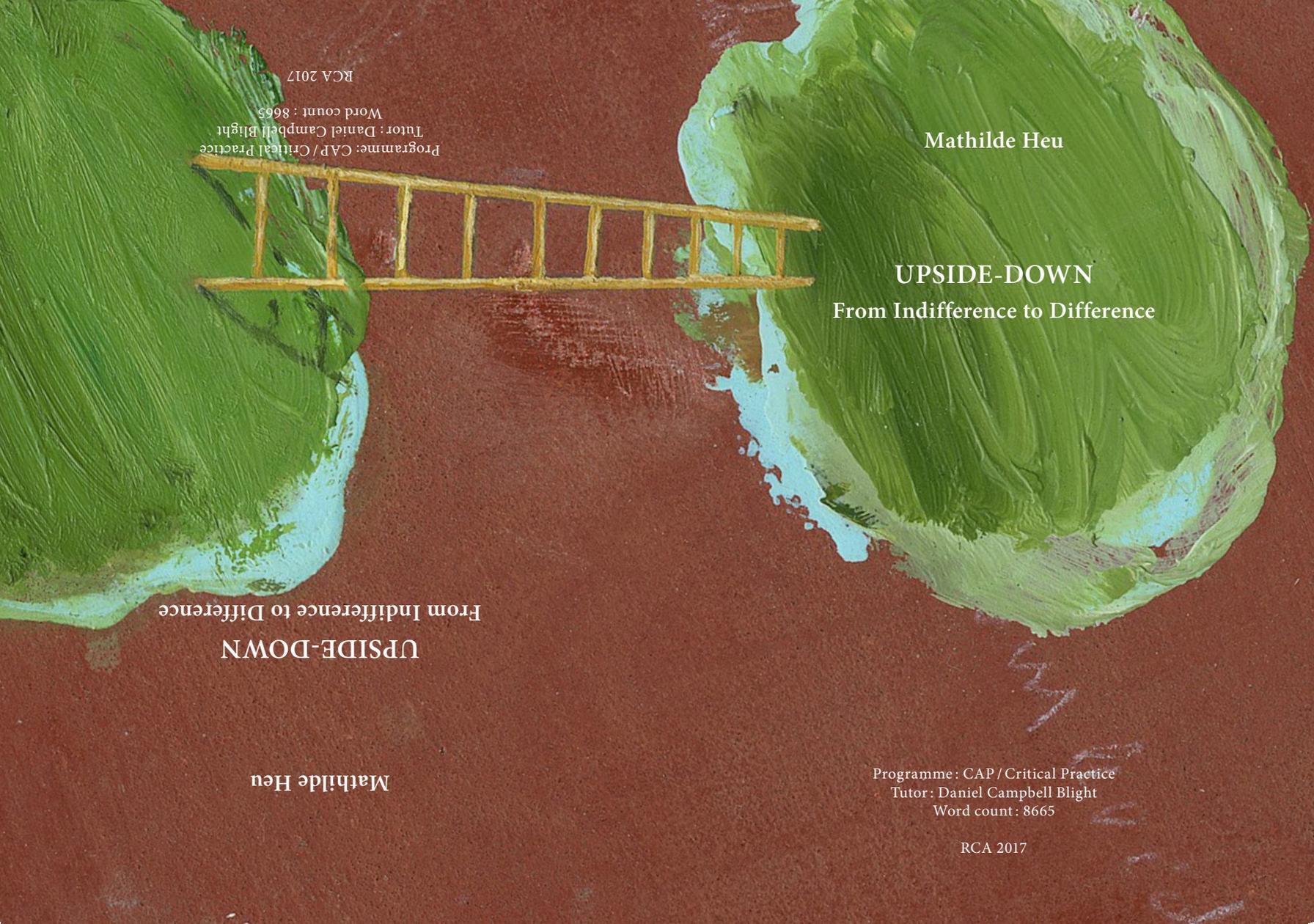
Cover: Francis Alÿs, *Le temps du sommeil*, 2008. Source: 'Francis Alÿs at Secession (Contemporary Art Daily)' <<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2017/01/francis-alys-at-secession/>> [accessed 6 June 2017].

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Word count: 8665

RCA 2017



Mathilde Heu

UPSIDE-DOWN
From Indifference to Difference

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‘Principle of indifference’

noun

the principle that, in the absence of any reason to expect one event rather than another, all the possible events should be assigned the same probability.¹

1. ‘Principle of Indifference Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary’ <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/principle-of-indifference>> [accessed 11 June 2017].

Mathilde Heu

UPSIDE-DOWN

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RCA 2017

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Overture

... yes, moving to London did not feel such an upheaval, not at first sight. But soon, I started to realise how things were going quickly: I had not started and yet it was already Christmas. Moreover, my programme, 'Critical Practice', had just been launched and was still to be defined. I have been asking myself what this means to me. What does it mean to have a *critical practice*? For a long time, I described my work as non-political: not especially reflecting cultural or societal changes. While writing this dissertation, I have become conscious that I was wrong: one's interest always reflects a surrounding, experiences that have been lived, body-filtered, before being re-transmitted to an audience. I believe this dissertation reflects the change of a surrounding, new to me, and perhaps also the echo of something else, belonging the virtual modernity of our time.

Facing the fearsome guest called Procrastination, I knew that I had to carry on, master the time before he would master me. I did not know exactly where to begin, however, I already knew that I had some interest in seeing how my English would evolve, how far I could get into writing, trying to reach an

ease and a fluency close to the one I have got in French. The first book I read as part of the programme, and far from being the easiest one, was *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* from Denise Riley. This book, advised by the tutor of ‘Critical Practice’ Jeremy Millar, marked the first steps I would make, ‘lost in translation’. Today still, I am unable to read it without stumbling once every ten words. Though, one aphorism particularly caught me: “I am a walker in language.”¹

And therefore I am, walking... or maybe *falling*, though the experience of writing.

But for now, it seems that I am slowly falling asleep, awaiting the ‘fade to black’: the many hours of computer light tiring my eyes. A last thought maybe, before entering into slumber: I remember Denise Riley speaking about how language can mark an individual, when she says: “Verbal attacks, in the moment they happen, resemble stoning.”² I vaguely remember having seen a painting by Francis Alÿs, with a small note on the corner saying ‘Painting and Punishment’. At first sight, I thought it was a rabbit. Never mind, I will come back to it later...

Dozing off.



1. Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 28.

2. *ibid.*, p. 10.

Fig. 10: Francis Alÿs, *Le temps du sommeil*, 2002.



Fig. 9: Francis Alys, *Le temps du sommeil*, 1996-



Stutter

8th December 2016

How to initiate a new process of writing? Among the infinite variety of subjects, I need to settle my mind for a moment. Grab something which suddenly bursts to the surface of my gaze, an anomaly, that I could transform, develop into a field of research. Grab it, make it grow, slowly, regularly: as if blowing into a balloon. Pass from the indifference to the difference simply by extracting a thing which was part of an unseen world. However, I perceive something like a stutter in my ideas, in my hands. As if I can't move forward anymore. A stumbling block, a root on which I trip and that holds me back.

And the shift I am waiting for is simply not happening, not yet. I have the bizarre impression to repeat myself, but with less consistence than before. Maybe because I not only need to find translations for my own words, my 'magic words'³, that look like thousands of empty shells

3. H el ene Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 90.

that I have to fill with meaning, but also because I need to find a space of translation for my work.

Where to begin has always been a question that haunted my mind, a mistake that I can't help to repeat again and again, but little by little I notice that there is no real beginning, just a continuous flow in which I try to make a difference, a difference from what I have been doing so far, and a difference from what I used to be, yet I remain my 'Self' almost *same*, '*être autre dans le devenir autre*'. I have been waiting for a shift, which of course has not happened. It is illusory to believe that one can begin without referring to what constitutes this so believed *new* beginning. Things constantly overlap, yet many times I felt I was reaching the end of something. Hence, there is no real beginning and there is no real ending, or maybe "In the end, what we find is the beginning, and in the beginning, the end."⁴ And those two notions only determinate the limit of a crystallisation, an artwork, a piece of writing: a becoming '*à l'oeuvre*'. This stutter that I say I feel in my hands, is nothing but the fear of repeating what I have already done, nevertheless, I had forgotten that repetition was already creating a difference, an alteration.

The notion of 'infrathin', developed by Marcel Duchamp, may explain my thought: in one of his numerous notes about this concept, he says that the infrathin is the remaining warmth of a chair that has just been left, or when the tobacco

4. Sarah Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze*, *Studies in Literary Criticism & Theory*, v. 19 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 20.



I am thinking of the day I arrived here, with the few belongings I possess which gave me the feeling to be home, here in London. I am amazed to see the compression of time of eight months, ...

It is four o'clock in the morning. The distant noise of a siren reaches my ears through the skylight. Birds are whistling, tweeting. Soon the noise of the metropolis will invade the sound texture surrounding. As I rub the sleep from my eyes, the last chapter seems like a dream, a little bit bizarre, a little bit strange, a little bit confusing. I like it though.

With some distance, I can say that I have eventually found a place, in writing, to have a sufficient step back in order to better discern the concerns that keep shaping my practice: attentiveness, language, experiences, serendipity, process; all contained into a single aporia, a loop that never ends and embodies each of my artworks. Here you are, almost where you began, because wherever you are, is the entry point (fig. 9). On a last and more personal note, this time belonging maybe more to the intimacy of a diary, I think of the stoning words that Denise Riley described and that once hit me, making me feel as if I were wearing a 'dunce hat', but in the end, it was more like a white rabbit, leading me towards what I liked the most (fig. 10), through experiences and strangeness, experiences of otherness.

Loop

smoke smells also of the mouth which exhales it, the two odours marry by infrathin⁵. In a few words, it is an almost imperceptible separative amount between two phenomena. Hence, the infrathin seems to embody the passage of time, that modifies any thing, and lies in the very heart of the becoming. And the infrathin is at its peak when it differs the *same* from almost the *same*. Phenomenon also observable (or maybe only imaginable) between a mold and its substratum (fig. 1).

Without referencing it, Giuseppe Penone seized one of the possible manifestations of the infrathin when he writes: “Becoming increasingly important is the space that separates the hand from the thing touched, the slime, that the fine iridescent thickness with the colours of the rainbow, the colours of the light.”⁶

It seems that I recognise, in the embryo of an artistic process, an impalpable mass, unknown, that moves ceaselessly, and whose the ephemeral incarnations crystallize the steps of a desired and undertaken becoming. No matter its numerous incarnations, it always grows from the same nucleus. Each crystallisation is a step aside, a new variation, to attempt once again, to discern the core of one's thinking. A process which reminds the short essay that Marcel Duchamp wrote about the creative act, saying that the work of art is nothing else

5. ‘Duchamp's Notes on the Infrathin’ <<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jbass/talks/mla06/infranotes.htm>> [accessed 7 June 2017].

6. Giuseppe Penone, *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: Commune di Bologna, 2009), p. 294.



Fig. 1 - Mathilde Heu, *Habit de sérendipité*, 2015.

but a coefficient.⁷ And curiously, in mathematics, a coefficient is also called a *difference*⁸. I have never been gifted on that branch. Anyway, I...

9th December 2016

... need some fresh air. My body and my mind are spread among the screens which flood me with their blue light, the ideas and all the stimuli bursting into my surroundings. I desperately try to focus my mind on something to grab my attention, but I merely can't. So, what do I do? Sitting on the paper, beforehand unwound onto the floor, I try to keep my hands active with great difficulty.

I am moving forward in a linear manner, covering the paper as experiencing the drawing, with all the joy and the boringness that it comprises. I keep a record of every thought that comes to my mind. But, staring at me, Procrastination has a half-smile on its lips. The gesture

7. “Therefore, when I refer to ‘art coefficient’, it will be understood that I refer not only to great art, but I am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state – à l'état brut – bad, good or indifferent. In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle towards the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plan. The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.” Marcel Duchamp, *Le Processus Créatif* (Caen: L'Echoppe, 1989).

8. In mathematics, also called a ‘finite distance’.



the Reverend William Archibald Spooner.
 Anyway, it is a lovely coincidence: in the case of Alice, as
 her words are transmuted at the opposites of her interrogation.
 More and more, the writing slows down. It is about time.
 Dozing off.

54. Spelling mistake to allow this and the following palindromes.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 52. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Oh no! Spoonerism. I was wondering why the root of this word was *spoon*, it is suddenly so obvious: have you ever tried to look at yourself in the curvaceous belly of a spoon? Of course you have... Encore, this is about reflection and upside-down! No... I am sad to write that in fact, it is just named after

Dozing off.

“Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?”⁵² And so goes Alice’s litany, when she tries to kill some time as she falls. She repeats this question in a loop, as to lose its meaning, or like the games you play, when after several repetitions, you end up by saying something quite different from the original phrase, an accident known under the name of ‘ Spoonerism’. Eventually, Alice winds up to say “Do bats eat cats?”⁵³ This reversal is not without making me think about another form of upside-down: the palindrome. Loops at a spool⁵⁴: an exact symmetry... In words drawn I? I did, did I? Damm it I’m mad.

Was it a cat I saw?

becomes mechanic; my wrist as memory.

I used to call this process ‘intervalle arrêté’, a term that could be translated as follows: suspended interval. “This poetic form would organise the temporality, giving it unity, beginning and ending, allowing the event to insert itself in a comprehensible totality.”⁹

I was drawing every day, trying to find a new motif each time I was on my way to the studio. A new motif as a new motivation that I could use until depletion. Thus, the drawing was expanding, from the left to the right...

Later, the beginning tends to disappear: there is not enough place on the floor, so words and paper wind on themselves and disappear. I am moving forward, blind, wandering on this blank surface where the end is not to be seen, not yet. Indeed, where am I? Is there a lot of distance to be covered? The space of possibilities seems to be infinite. I am slowing down. Words are floating, and my hands become numb. However, a feeling of urgency pushes me to get through it. On my way towards a desired end, I pay attention to each of the things I meet. Eventually, I burst into the drawing in order to better extract myself from it: I draw all around my body, until the charcoal reaches my tights, my feet, my

9. My translation, original quotation: “Cette forme poétique organiserait la temporalité en lui conférant une unité, un début, un milieu et une fin, permettant à l’événement de s’inscrire dans une totalité [...] compréhensible.” Raphaël Baroni, *L’œuvre du temps*, Paris, Seuil, (coll. “Poétique”), 2007, p. 48.

forward to the future and to the production of difference.”⁵¹ The onward step is a bit easier as it ‘only’ consists in ordering the puzzlement that followed procrastination. Indeed, when one finds an object that suddenly unlocks a possible thread that could be followed, unwounded and exploited, one finds oneself in a state of bewilderment... the plot is there, puzzling. One just needs to find a path through the serendipitous aspect of one’s discoveries.



51. Original quotation: “And repetition, (...) a force that simultaneously reproduced one thing and produced another thing anew. No longer privileging a past by honoring the return of the same Self or the return to an origin or a beginning, repetition looked forward to the future and to the production of difference.” Sarah Gendron, *op.cit.*, p.6.



Fig. 2: Patrick Tosani, *Corps du dessous*, 1996.

The notion of 'aporia', is for me linked to each new creative process, where the artist must find a way to continue the 'solidifications' of his interests. For each artwork, one passes through a chain of different stages until an artwork physically bursts. This process possesses a quality of resilience, a form of involution which involves the capacity to return to a former size/state: it is an aporia, whose elasticity embodies not only the fear of procrastination, which led me to repetition (an other form of postponement), but also the differentiation. This aporia is thus an essential motor for creation. My biggest fear would be to lose this capacity of resilience.

So perhaps, procrastination is after all just the fear to become this other 'Self', of making the experience of otherness. And repetition " (...) a force that simultaneously reproduces [one thing and [produces] another thing anew. No longer privileging a past by honoring the return of the 'same Self' or the return to an origin or a beginning, [repetition looks

Convolution

hand. I stand up, the white space looks like a body seen from underneath glass: we would say a photograph of Patrick Tosani (fig.2), a body defined by the contact points maintained with the ground. Suddenly here I am, upside-down, under the surface. I continue to draw, hands and hands... And although I used to consider them as a tool capable of concrete volition, I notice that at the same time, they are "precisely what disobey." ¹⁰

So from motivation they become the motifs of demotivation. My hands are now empty ghosts which haunt the surface of my drawing, listless, almost lifeless (fig.3). What do I do with them? Bad drawings of procrastination again. And again. Procrastination smiles wide now and reminds me of my blindness: keeping simultaneity between my thoughts and my drawing is creating immobility. Indeed, I can't move forward.



10. Darian Leader, *Hands* (London: Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2016) p.4.

and constructed by the vanishing point, its disappearance would coincide with the author's disappearance. And like me before you, give you perhaps this sensation of tumbling, through writing.



Fig. 3: Mathilde Heu, *Infrathin in translation*, 2016.

'covered way' which by definition is a path that gives view on the horizon, but also inside the walls that it protects. The book would then have this double purpose of both achieving the goal of the text, but also embodying a passage outside itself. By this I mean that the book marks the 'ending' of the text in its state of becoming.⁴⁹

So I come back to my question: Is there a vanishing point in writing? A point of disappearance? If there is one I reckon it would precisely be where the beginning and the ending overlap and disturb the boundaries of the text. And if the text is falling, continuously and without any 'proper ending', the vanishing point would then disappear, and its author fade away slowly. The following sentence, that I owe to Joë Bousquet, mentions the liberation of the author: "Write the book which frees you from its contents."⁴⁹

Therefore, as long as 'I' operate, 'I' inhabit the becoming of the text, until the exuviation (momentous finiteness, where the author extricates himself from the writing).

To intentionally lose the boundaries of the text in a loop, would then erase its vanishing point, blurring its perspective, giving a complete autonomy to the book, and freeing its author at the same occasion. Indeed, "Unlike the "book," the "text" does not attempt to conceal the fits and starts involved in the writing process. Instead, it is the mark of the "text" to self-consciously fixate on the act of writing and in so doing to represent, with its "aphoristic energy," the "disruption" of classical writing."⁵⁰

As the viewer is normally central to the perspective: reflected

49. Joë Bousquet, *Une passante bleue et blonde*, Paris, René Debresse, 1934, p. 173.

50. Sarah Gendron, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Inertia, resistance to movement

No setback possible. No time. I need to carry on after all.

Whereas '*être au pied du mur*' in French means to be forced to act when facing a delicate situation, to be '*up against the wall*' in English means to be in a crucial or critical position, especially one in which defeat or failure seems imminent.¹¹ It might be both, in my concern.

Perhaps writing requires another time, a past time. Indeed, simultaneity between what we live, experience and what is written is impossible, even though the present time that is created when reading gives this illusion. I understand that I have to get a head start in order to be able to step back. But I can't step back. The wall is just behind me, and therefore the only way is forward, into a void that I have not had the time to fill with new content to explore and to look at. As if being projected in a direction, so quickly that my body suddenly feels excessively heavy, trying to resist helplessly to this over-acceleration.

11. 'Up against the Wall | Define Up against the Wall at Dictionary.com' <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/up--against--the--wall>> [accessed 8 March 2017].

By trying to reach in my drawing a utopic synchronicity between the present and my actions, I have made the mistake to repeat a creative process that worked before but which doesn't anymore. I deeply knew that it was no-way-out: a bait, a lure, soon of strange disaffection. I now estrange this simulacrum of movements: Autumn's dying twitches. I thought it was the only way to avoid lethargy, torpor. But, my hands remain tied.



such, writing this essay is not only a formal exercise, but it is also to make the reflection of a 'changing intimate' world composed of experiences and curiosities previously belonging to the 'outside'. This can also be associated with the notion of 'graphiation' which refers to the theory that through one's drawing or writing, one can analyse the entire personality of the author⁴⁷. In fact, the narrative that the author undertakes through writing, about his own metamorphosis, is, according to Jean-Michel Tournier, an *extime* writing.

In order to understand the term *extime*, I shall first explain the word *intime*, which is a French word that means, that which belongs to the intimacy of an individual and is not, at first sight, intended to be shared: an *intime* diary for example. *Extime*, by opposition, means 'outside' the 'Self'. However an *extime* diary doesn't relate nor describe the "useless considerations of an ego that gives itself to be seen"⁴⁸, but how a surrounding, an outside world modifies or engages one's thinking.

I am relating the encounters that I make to one another, drawing a thread of interests that I seek and strive to develop. I reread the previous paragraph, twice, three times. There is something that I have missed... There it is: I am wondering if it is possible to link *extime* and *autotelism*? Maybe if the text conception is linked to its result? A result that embodies a

47. 'Graphic Novel', *Wikipedia*, 2017 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Graphic_novel&oldid=781720570>.

48. My translation, original quotation: "des confidences inutiles d'un ego qui se donne à voir". 'Le Principe de Leximité', *BSC News* <<https://bscnews.fr/201402143530/Philo/le-principe-de-leximite>> [accessed 31 May 2017].

cover? From the back cover? Which one is which? Its goal is therefore to achieve its cycle, in an never-ending spiral.

Another point of view would be to say that the purpose of the book is to be activated by the reader, indeed, "(...)" literature' may be at least as much a question of what people do to writing as of what writing does to them."⁴⁵

But the present text goes back, more or less implicitly to its own construction, while not being a self reflection (*mise en abyme*). In fact, it witnesses the act of its fabrication, construction. This object that you hold in your hands, possesses its own purpose, and I share with it, its existence mode: to think its thinking (*se penser*).

The possible back and forth of the text would be one achievement in itself: its desired 'ending' being the crystallisation of writing, of this process of thoughts: a bound book that contains the movement of a fall, like the sand of an hourglass.

I 'ended' my previous dissertation speaking of aporia and how the artistic process is a never ending loop: indeed, one's interests grow almost simultaneously to its author, and thus never cease to need concretion and to re-engage with the process of doing. And I can only but agree with this quotation from Michael Hamburger which says that "the point of an essay, like its justification and its style, always lies in the author's personality and always leads back to it."⁴⁶ As

45. *Ibid.*, p.6.

46. Hamburger Michael, 'An Essay on the Essay', in *Art as Second Nature, Occasional Pieces* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press Ltd., 1975), p. 4.

Loss of equilibrium

I have a quick look at my hands, these inert ghosts and their fingers that I can't stop to bite, trying to think of something else but their *morbid alliance* with my *mouth*¹². This mouth that twists itself, lips tightened, words jostling around inside. Once again, I insert my mouse cursor in-between what is going to be the end of this chapter and first few lines of the following one. A clumsy start. Every time I insert myself in the text, I change its internal balance. De facto, it is a constant readjustment between connections and points of reliance, but also a reflection on how a phrase generates an idea, a feeling leads to the next paragraph. By annotating the text and its construction, I cannot refrain myself to think about sincerity. And how, by rearranging the events, and sometimes altering them to be more precise, and thus, by 'lying', I can tell a merciless truth that couldn't exist if I had chosen to tell the things exactly in the way they happened. In fact, Fyodor Dostoyevsky even says that "(...)" telling the truth or

12. " 'Morbid alliance with mouth'." Sarah Freiberg quoted in Darian Leader, *op. cit.*, p.17.

lying is absolutely the same”¹³ to him. Indeed, at that point, truth and lie cancel each other to form one single character: a witness, a sum of conscious decisions, choices that find a form, eventually. And so Hélène Cixous described that we constantly need to stand one foot in one world and one foot in the other: on the side of the text¹⁴. Writing is an act taking its roots in a rhizomatous universe, it is a specific plot, a site specific intrigue which grows from attentiveness and gives me the opportunity to organise the time as I wish it to be. The artwork somewhat less flexible: it’s a response, more or less direct, to an event or an experience. But both share the same attribute: they need time to exist, to take roots. Initiate a new process of making is quite similar to moving into a new apartment: your voice and your steps resonate into the void created by the absence of any furniture.

Hélène Cixous wrote about reading that it was like “eating on the sly”¹⁵, a quote that perfectly describes my appetency for aphorisms. Ergo, the following one, borrowed from Jean-Luc Marion, looked at me as I read it, as an invitation to copy it here: “ (...) I actually find myself located, a thing amongst the things, I organise – indeed, I open – the space between right and left.”¹⁶ I suddenly notice that my mouse cursor looks like

13. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Notebooks of an Idiot*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 102-173, quoted in: Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

14. Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

44. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 7.

Like in perspective, is there a vanishing point in a text, in this text?

Auto meaning *yourself* and *telos* meaning *goal / purpose*, autotelism therefore means that the object has no goal but itself. Or again, having a purpose *in and not apart* from itself. Or else, (of an entity or event) having within itself the purpose of its existence or happening.

As I drift (to carry on with space lexical field), from one object of curiosity to another, trying to draw sense of them until the ineluctable end of the writing act (that grows by itself in a logic only nourished by additions relevant to it), can I qualify this text as autotelic writing? Indeed, “ (...) we mean by literature a kind of self-referential language, a language which talks about itself”⁴⁴

The goal of this text is to create a convolution of thoughts, a loop where the ‘ending’ finds itself to be in the ‘beginning’, without knowing where to enter in the book. From the front

Autotelic writing

an ‘I’ and ambles, between block letters, words and sentences, taking place between what has already been written and the white space shortly followed by a blinking cursor. Indeed, it organises a space between what precedes and what follows. It’s a ‘needle’ whose eye / ‘I’, has been stabbed by the black thread of the text. Its pattern seems regular, without any defaults or jolts, but as the back of an embroidery constitutes it is in fact a fine mess, the back of a text is also an absolute thread tangle. Its author works toward a continuous piece of work, trying to hold everything together in a coherent whole, until the ineluctable ‘end’: the writer must extract himself out of the writing in order to allow space for the finite object.

Soon, the result becomes so smooth, so polished, that “One need only rub the “book” (again) in order to see the trace of what lies beneath. Below the surface, one finds the multiple revisions that the book has undergone, the lack of certainty behind each word, the instability of its margins, its aborted beginnings and abandoned ends (...). What one discovers beneath the “book” is the “text”: the evidence of “writing.”¹⁷

How many paragraphs have I been moving around, adding some new phrases in-between ideas, like I am doing now? I couldn’t count. The text grows from inside, seeking for unity and coherence. The text becomes the *evidence of writing*, yet at the same time erases the marks of its construction. I quite like the idea of commenting the writing, an act which reveals some moments where the text tends to slow down, panting, until a new breath is found. The only thing nevertheless obvious is that I am constantly walking, following this black thread that

17. Sarah Gendron, *op. cit.*, p.67.



Attentiveness grows from desire to find, desire to gather, construct. It is waiting, already in action. Indeed, the hazard is possible only if one is ready to observe and embrace it, as it barely comes out of the blue, hence it is an active waiting, in a state of alert.

to be understood. And suddenly, it feels right, back on track. I try to seize in order to harden it and give it a ground in practice, even if it continuously seems to escape and fade until disappearing from my clenched fist, there is at least one thing that is worth to be retained: even if it doesn't make sense yet, every collected bit and record have something to do with ongoing concerns. It is only waiting to be connected, blinds me but at the same time guides me towards a desired end, still without knowing its outcome. Once again Hélène Cixous perfectly seized this idea when she wrote: "The book writes itself, and if by chance the person opposite to you should ask what you are writing, you have nothing to say since you don't know."¹⁸ And Simon McBurney's following quote hence continues, saying: "The moment you decide what something means, it at once resists and seems to writhe its way out of your grasp, revealing itself as meaning something quite different."¹⁹

Writing/Drawing is not given, and trying to seize its nucleus provoked my own immobility. A process needs gaps, duration. I have to dig a new plot. I have been rambling – trying to open a way out of a procrastination swamp, where words have been swallowed helplessly – trying to write down these empty shells that are not mine, and that I have had to fill with meanings. Although I already knew some of their definitions, they were continuously remaining strangers to me, empty jars in which I was, very clumsily, pouring my translations. Thus, they plunged in the charcoal, invisible to me, almost nonexistent for others. Throes of doubts breaking over my thoughts, flowing out from my hands.

According to Darian Leader, "Hands offer a first way out"²⁰, they are part of ourself yet at the same time are something else: a gateway, a contact point between the body and the world. Conversely, eyes offer a first way in. But they

18. Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

19. Simon McBurney, *Who Do You Hear It from* (London: Complicite, 2015), p. 119.

20. Darian Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

share one common characteristic, they are indeed the body parts that we see the least easily: once working, one pays attention to what is being made more than one's actions of the body to make it. And moreover, the eye has a blind spot, therefore invisible to us. Also, when looking at the night-sky, if you gaze at a comet or a distant star, light years away from you, too intensely by focusing only on its precise position, it will soon disappear from your vision. You consequently have to slightly move your focus point to be able to observe it. In the same way, hands also have their blind spot. Indeed, you can hardly feel your hand touching: as soon as you caress a surface, its sensation (rough, soft, cold, ...) permeates your senses. In addition, you certainly have once experienced the sensation of the disappearance of your skin's boundaries when holding your own hand or the hand of someone else for a prolonged time.

According to Jacques Derrida, our hands and our eyes are the sites of recognition, "signs through which one identifies the other"²¹. It is easy to have an almost accurate image of ourselves in mirrors, but it is "very difficult to have an image of our own act of looking or to have a true image of our hands as they are moving. It is the *Other* who knows."²² And it is why having a reasonably accurate set back of your own practice is arduous, and sometimes burdensome. I do feel blind, and I do feel the need to draw my own hands, as a helpless interrogation,

21. Gor Madoyan, *Jacques Derrida. Full Documentary Film* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ujk4vld9A> [accessed 19 March 2017].

22. *Ibid.*



Fig. 8 : Francis Alys, *Le temps du sommeil*, 1997.

hoping they will offer this ‘first way out’.

In terms of blindness, it reminds me of an artwork of Giuseppe Penone, where his eyes were covered by reflective (and opaque) contact lenses (fig.4). Obliging him to have to look inwards into his mind, the lenses constituted a limit²³ between him and the surrounding world, driving him back into himself and allowing him to have what I believe to be an accurate image of his own act of looking (as Derrida would say). But in addition to this, the artist’s eyes thus reflected the environment that influenced his work and hence marked the boundaries of the world itself: the returned image seems like a projection from the artist onto the cornea, but in fact, it is nothing else but the reflection of the present environment. And thus, the reflected image changes according to the position of the artist. This work expresses both, and almost in contradiction, how an artwork is indeed the reflection of a context but also, the result of a desire to be extracted, to disappear of this world, in order to better discern, and better perceive what is going on, in an unseen part of thoughts; a wish to find the roots, whose seeds belong to the surroundings and sometimes overwhelming elements of our quotidian. It is a nice opposition to, at the same time, wish for blindness in order to find clarity. Moreover, this work emphasises the fact that there is no simultaneity between the experience

23. “Mirrored contact lenses cover the iris and the pupil, wearing them makes me blind. (...) placed on the eye, they indicate a point of division, a separation from what surrounds me. (...) Blocking the extension of sight eliminating data necessary for my subsequent behavior.” Giuseppe Penone, *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: Commune di Bologna, 2009), p. 59.

“⁴¹ Hence, his work grows from the inside, following priorities.”⁴¹ Alice and Aly’s are in fact perfect homophones. Aly’s is indeed also a true ‘Wanderer’, a wanderer of the cities that he uses as a raw material, to then create performances that respond to it. But what really struck me is how frequently I could find mirrored scenes, looking like worm holes: passages or doors between two parts of the painting. In one of them one can see a snake passing from a green circle to another. In another one, it is a ladder (see cover), and, to my big surprise, I even found a painting portraying a body in free fall. Also I was wondering if the city, its life and its architecture, provoked feelings of free fall or anti-gravitation on their author. According to Hito Steyerl, in the linear perspective established by early painters like Paolo Uccello (around 1450), the viewer becomes central to the perspective and is hence “mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it.”⁴² This linear perspective as we know it, tends to disappear. Indeed, with new technologies like 3D view, Google maps view, satellites view we are getting use to what “used to be called God’s-eye view”⁴³: The ground is simulated, non-

41. David Zwirner Books · Francis Alys: Le Temps Du Sommeil; David Zwirner Books <<https://davidzwirnerbooks.com/product/francis-aly-s-le-temps-du-sommeil-1>> [accessed 11 June 2017].
42. Hito Steyerl, ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’ (e-flux Journal, 2011), p. 5.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

it can be felt as simply floating, when there is no ending it, or at least, when the latter is not yet to be seen. A theory also valid from the point of view of an astronomer, since in an orbital space, objects fall at the same time, together, and thus seem to be floating instead of falling. But why this feeling of groundlessness ?

As I was walking through London, I realised that I was hardly experiencing the city in its horizontality. Indeed, when taking the tube, one almost disappears in the underground, to reappear somewhere else on the asphalt surface: tube stations are almost entry and exit points for each neighbourhood. In French we call them 'bouches de métro' (metro mouths). They swallow the rush hour crowd, citizens and folks. It is therefore difficult to keep track of the architectural changes, and in my case, of orientation.

I recently discovered the paintings of Francis Alys, an ongoing series started in 1995 and entitled *Le temps du sommeil* (fig. 8). The multitude (one hundred and eleven in 2016) of mini scenes, depicts tiny figures and actions, often represented in what seems to be a break through the painting, giving the impression that the characters come from behind the canvas or that they are travelling inside it.

Francis Alys constantly modifies his paintings by retouching, adding, or altering them, sometimes even overlapping completely the previous image. However, some of them remain untouched for years... "The various stages in the work's ongoing transformation – it may be said to evolve alongside the artist himself – survive only in photographic documentation, illustrating the constancy of Alys's art and the foundation on which it rests, but also his changing interests and

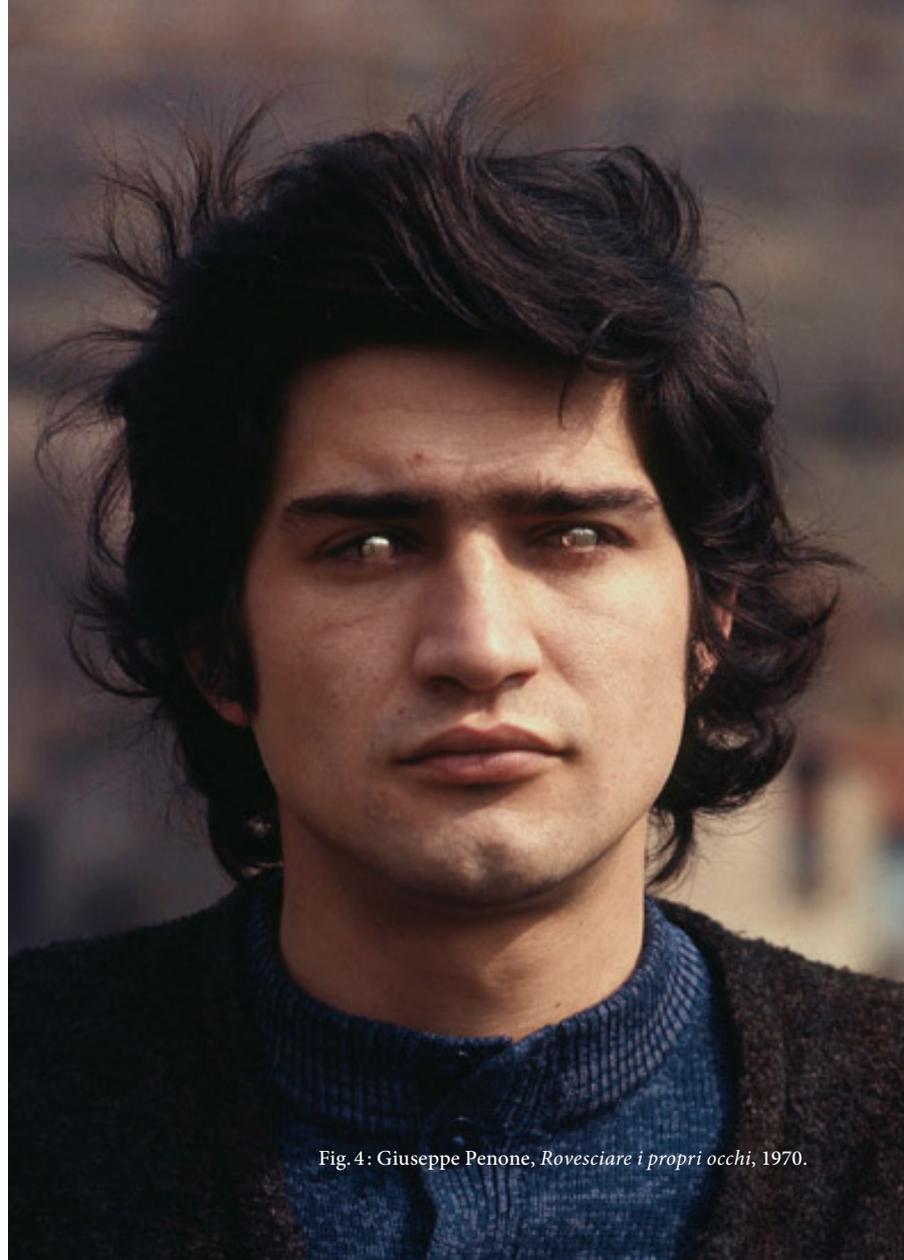


Fig. 4: Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi*, 1970.

and the work of art. Giuseppe Penone, was indeed blind to his own piece: he describes it as prophetic vision, and adds that lenses are a mask that “allows a vision of the world which is not present but past or future.”²⁴ Likewise, this reminds me of an experience that I did quite genuinely: I covered my eyes with a black piece of fabric, and asked my sister to guide me for a walk (fig. 5). I had a camera which I used as if it was my spare eyes to record my trip. Hence blind, I strongly remember how sounds became increasingly important, and I recall having this thought that my body is in fact an attentive boundary between my experiences and the way I would re-transcribe them. ‘The surrounding’ is a wrapping that stimulates and helps one to define its position. However, sometimes, I just feel like I am just floating... what if it was the wrapping that becomes less and less perceptible, loose? Just like Giuseppe Penone aspired to grasp and master his gaze, I am maybe trying to better understand the play of my hands, in order to identify the part of me that is trying to differ, every step forward, of what I used to be, of what I used to do; trying to make a difference in order to be seen, to have something interesting to say. It is always a slight shift, the sliding that makes you go out of depth, this moment when your foot, thinking there is another step to be climbed, loses itself in the void, and creates an instant of weightlessness, where your entire body seems to collapse.



24. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

nothing but a pack of cards!³⁸ And the dream vanishes. At this precise moment, she realizes that something is wrong. And she certainly asks herself: “Am I in [my] dream or [am I] already outside?”³⁹ A curious question as it brings attention to the moment when you switch from a dreaming state, where you are overwhelmed with thoughts and images that you more or less control, to almost instantaneously plain consciousness where you try to reactivate your dream, make sense of it, and rebind its bits together. Here again there is a shifting point that this question tries to grasp, and asks if this realisation, acknowledgment, belongs or not to the dream.

In a half-sleep, I am used to letting my mind wander, madly, amongst desires, kooky ideas and even anger sometimes. But generally, it is moment of euphoria. And once I wake up, it is over. Truly over for most of the ideas I have had. Indeed, suddenly, the dawn breaks over the pillow. In one’s mind, the idea is nothing more than the souvenir of the sensation that you have had an idea: it is nothing but crumpled paper. It’s way out of your grasp, abandoned on the edge of the pillow, even though it seemed fascinating as it was still blooming in a half-sleep.

I remember having heard that “the process of modernity is a process of anti-gravitation”⁴⁰. This captivating aphorism made me think about my groundlessness impression. I now clearly see how it is linked to ‘tree-fall’, which is relative, as

38. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

39. Original quotation: “Are you in your dream or are you already outside?” Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

40. Unknown.

space of perfect anti-gravity, with nothing to hang on, it is impossible to create an acceleration: agitating your limbs, wouldn't be of any help. As a beetle lying on his back, you would be condemned to immobility for the rest of your existence. However, by throwing an object at the level of your hips, you would slightly move backwards.³⁵ I have been throwing some phrases on my laptop keyboard, leaving them be, hoping for a chain reaction. Happening, eventually. Keyboard keys jingle under my finger tips, reassuring whilst the words appear.

I am now evolving³⁶, projecting myself from one subject to another, inside this text which becomes longer and longer, trying to put as much distance as I can between my previous state of immobility and writing, in motion. I am getting into the subject, ultimately falling, but the writing still tends to be quite irregular, it stops brutally from time to time, until a new idea engages the writing once again. It sometimes resembles this feeling one can experience whilst half asleep: abruptly falling until striking your mattress with violence.

In the ending of Disney's animation³⁷, Alice, running out from danger, arrives nearby the same door she passed through at the commencement of her fabulous trip. But she can't pass, she looks through the key-lock and sees herself, slumbering, on the other side. In the book, however, she suddenly recognises that she is also somewhat, dreaming. She shouts: "You're

35. Thank you to Bastien Confino and Wilfrid Heu for their

explanation.

36. In French, *évoluer* means to move, as well as to change of status.
37. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfrid Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, *op. cit.*



Fig. 5: Mathilde Heu, *Blind Walk*, 2014.

34. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, *Alice in Wonderland* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1951).

In space ships, astronauts, hence drifting without being constrained to gravity, constantly have to project themselves, using nearby elements in order to initiate movement. Indeed, theoretically, once placed immobile in the middle of an empty

doesn't exist. anti-gravitation. It is micro-gravity. Perfect anti-gravitation down, but falling around a celestial body. This is not exactly this is because they are falling at the same time, not falling an orbital state, bodies and objects seem to be floating, but phenomena close to what scientists call micro-gravity. In free fall, one could experience weightlessness, a

In my father's explanation about anti-gravity. hands: it could fall on someone. This precise moment reminds around her, or with her, she fears to release a book held in her *border between reality and a dream-world*. Objects still floating this event seems to be the mid point of her fall, this famous reflection in a mirror, but the reflection is upside-down and In Disney's animation³⁴, still descending, Alice crosses her

Anti-gravitation

On the edge of an abyss, towards an upside-down

And so I would like writing to be: standing on the edges, in equilibrium, or walking on a land, on which you suddenly lose your balance, when your foot slips on its surface: in a split second, here you are, flailing your arms in order to arrest your fall, yet you never touch the ground. You know, this precise second where your stomach seems to levitate. This uncanny moment that you have certainly experienced before, when on a roller coaster, you feel the space which surrounds your organs.

In equilibrium, yet still immobile, I feel like the stone of John Dewey²⁵: once I would have begun my fall, I would roll down a hill, paying attention to all the events I would meet on my way down, thus having an aesthetic experience, until reaching a state of rest, bewildered. Writing is keeping this state of amazement, in order to create and construct your own plot, a story-line: your own intrigue. *Wooden Boulder*

25. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, G. B. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1934, quoted by: Encyclopædia Universalis, 'ESTHÉTIQUE - L'expérience Esthétique', *Encyclopædia Universalis* <<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/esthetique-l-experience-esthetique/>> [accessed 6 June 2017].



Thus, the transition from a language to another can be seen as similar to a shift, a trip forward an antipode: from a word to its translation, resulting in imperceptible change. One ends up at the same place, or almost the same, but, on the other side. Like if a specific word and its translations were gathered on the surface of a sphere containing all their meanings: by entering the surface, and travelling to its antipode, one would meet on its way their definitions, to end up at the opposite coordination point. A fabulous trip as it tends to bring us closer to a nucleus, where the definitions collide and enrich words at their output.

I notice with amusement that a 'c' would be symmetrically inverted if seen as a reflection in a mirror. And by putting the two side-by-side, we would obtain the 'x' of the French word *reflexion*. Regarding Giuseppe Penone's work, I find this anecdote interesting, according to the fact that he uses both of the meanings of the word 'reflection':

Curiously, 'reflection' can both mean a process of thoughts and a reflected image whereas in French, two words exist, but they are differentiated by only one letter: one being *reflexion* with an 'x', that signifies the process of thinking and the other being *reflexion* with a 'c' and means the reflected image.

a reflection is a light-issu. Indeed, light takes time to travel, however it is imperceptible to the naked eye. It is therefore accurate to say that a mirror reflection is the 'instant' that follows reality. Once again there is an infinitesimal amount of time, sufficient enough to create a difference, that one can only imagine or understand theoretically.

(fig. 6)²⁶, is wood sculpture made out of oak by David Nash. Taking the shape of a stone, the artwork journeyed down the River Dwyryd in Wales, until vanishing into nature, presumably into the sea. This poetic work, embodies this idea of a subject having an aesthetic experience, rocked from one place to another. Hence, I wonder if I could talk of having an aesthetic experience in narrative, if the hazards of the text are sufficient to lead me through a form of narration.

When reading again the first paragraph of this chapter I just wrote, I cannot refrain from thinking of Lewis Carroll's character: Alice²⁷. A little girl, a bit bored, who follows her instinct. Standing on the edge of a burrow, she launches into it. And, instantly, she is falling, in this huge vertical tunnel, a very deep well, where objects, mysteriously floating in space, offer no grip where she can hang on. Her blue dress, swirling crazily.

But strangely, where we would expect speediness and scared screams, her fall finds itself to be a never-ending drowsiness: she is almost floating, in a state of anti-gravitation, as there is no time perception but plenty of time to observe the things she encounters on her way, down, down, down, at the same time

26. 'David Nash and the Mystery of Wooden Boulder, His Missing Sculpture | Christie's' <<http://www.christies.com/features/David-Nash-on-his-free-range-sculpture-Wooden-Boulder-7525-1.aspx>> [accessed 6 June 2017].

27. Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dalí, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 150th anniversary edition (Princeton, New Jersey: New York, New York: Princeton University Press ; in association with the National Museum of Mathematics, 2015).



Fig. 7: Anish Kapoor, *Sky Mirror*, 2001.

Fig. 6: David Nash, *Wooden Boulder*, 1980-2015.

she falls. In Kafka's novel entitled *The Burrow*²⁸, the semi-man, semi-animal who inhabits it, is constantly oscillating between the comfort of his habitat and the paranoia of its possible invasion, to the point where the only relief to be found is to leave the place of relative security as a means to observe it from outside, and control its different entrances. And what I find interesting in this novel, is how one can make the experience of an alterity, and how this otherness finishes by constituting him, yet at the same time remains a stranger. There is within this in-between position something that constitutes the shifting point I need. Perhaps it is time to plunge, head first, and drive away Procrastination whose deep laziness has consumed "the joy of [my] hands."²⁹ Escape from my own retreat, in order to analyse my process from outside: *that is the Other who knows*. So to let the objects of fascination seize me and face this otherness, become this *Other*, and let the text become the witness, a space of reflection.

"Paradise is down below"³⁰, said Kafka about writing. And as I am wandering, from an object to another, a key word to another, falling just like Alice, I am trying to make sense of my slow dive, gathering the pieces of knowledge: voiceless interrogations that spin continuously in my head.

As writing I notice that the flow of the text is most of the

28. Franz Kafka and others, *Le terrier* (Paris : Éd. Mille et une nuits, 2002).

29. Original quotation "We have lost the taste of hands, of the touching of hands. We have lost all the small and great secret of joy." Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

30. Franz Kafka, quoted in : Hélène Cixous, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Being in this in-between, is like observing a body from underneath glass, another point of view, as in Patrick Tosani's photograph, where the body offers itself in a way that you are not used to. Albeit, you know this body, but you discover its hitherto unseen parts. And thus, English constitutes for me this alien language that I am experiencing, and I wonder how this otherness, this exteriority, modifies an interiority. And by which means, after a relative period of time, this experience finds its output, and is crystallised to form an artwork and find its autonomy back in exteriority. To carry on with the idea of being under, or behind something, I would like to shortly talk about mirrors, as indeed, it also refers to a phenomenon happening *behind* a reflective surface. Anish Kapoor's *Sky Mirror* (fig. 7) suggests to our gaze the reflection of the sky, a break through the scenery, a reflection space³². Observing this, I find interesting to relate this work to what Giuseppe Penone wrote about his reflecting contact lenses: "The reflected image is the border between reality and a dream-world or apparition; it has no substance and is the instant which follows the changes in reality." Furthermore, a reflection is a reversed image, at least laterally inverted, which means that it reverses the forward/backward axis: "if you stand side-on to a mirror, the mirror reverses your left and right, because that is the direction perpendicular to the mirror"³³. In addition,

32. 'Sky Mirror' <http://anishkapoor.com/230/sky-mirror> [accessed 29 March 2017].

33. 'Mirror; Wikipedia, 2017 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mirror&oldid=775109129>.

time very slow, as if my thoughts couldn't expand behind the vocabulary I possess. Also, on my way down, down, down, I wonder if there is an infrathin in translation, and if this infinitesimal space between a language and another, could offer me a gateway.



Infrathin in translation

When writing in English, I feel like progressing underneath a thin membrane, which can be pierced at every moment, to reach my mother-tongue. Indeed, a word like *membrane* for example remains exactly the same in French. Thus, I feel an infrathin distance between the two. Furthermore, a membrane is a selective barrier, letting some elements pass through, and some not. A filter that I like to compare with the body, to sift the experiences which stimulate an interiority.

As I was reading, looking for aphorisms on the subject, I got caught by this delightful phrase of Roland Barthes: "The language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words."³¹ Between drawing and writing, exists a strange similarity: as if writing was drawing sense out of words and ideas; and drawing, similar to the gesture of writing, a

31. My translation, original quotation: "Le langage est une peau: je frotte mon langage contre l'autre. C'est comme si j'avais des mots en guise de doigts, ou des doigts au bout de mes mots." Roland Barthes, *Fragments D'un Discours Amoureux*, Collection Tel Quel (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977), p. 43.

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On the edge of an abyss, towards an upside-down *p. 53*

Mathilde Heu

UPSIDE-DOWN

From Indifference to Difference

Programme: CAP / Critical Practice
Tutor: Daniel Campbell Blight
Word count: 8665

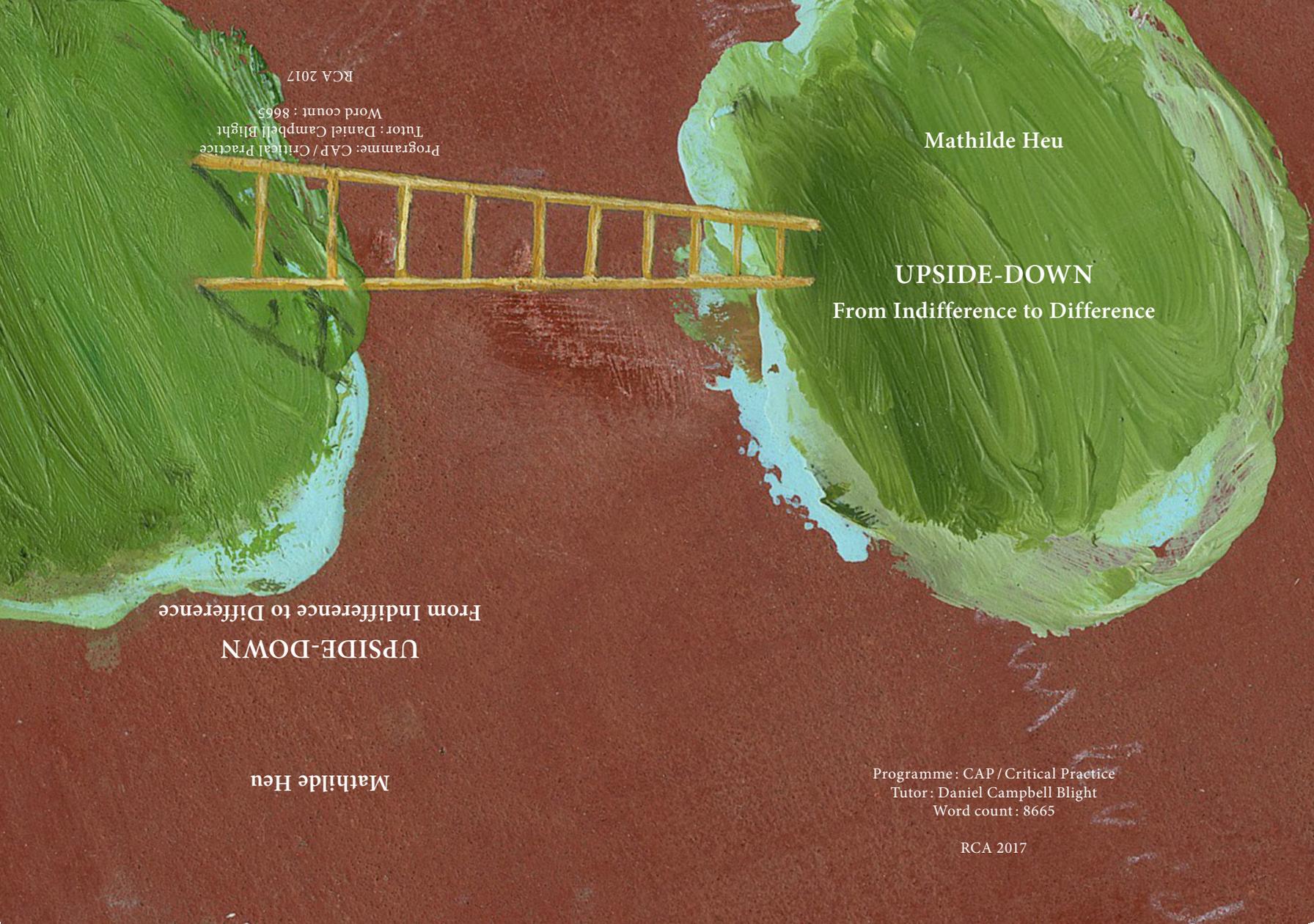
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'Principle of indifference'

noun

the principle that, in the absence of any reason to expect one event rather than another, all the possible events should be assigned the same probability;

1. 'Principle of Indifference Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary' <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/principle-of-indifference>> [accessed 11 June 2017].



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