

PRESENT ETERNITY: QUESTS OF TEMPORALITY  
 IN THE LITERARY PRODUCTION OF THE «EXTRÊME  
 CONTEMPORAIN» IN FRANCE  
 (THE WRITINGS OF DOMINIQUE FOURCADE  
 AND EMMANUEL HOCQUARD)

ABSTRACT

The term « extrême contemporain » is an expression currently used by scholars to indicate the French literary production of the last 20 years. This term was used in a work of literature for the first time by the French poet Dominique Fourcade in 1986 (*Élégie L apostrophe E.C.*) in reference to an epoch, but also to a new sense of experiencing time and space in the so-called « age of digital reproducibility ». The aim of this paper is to consider how the change in temporal protocols due to the triumph of *Big Optics* (Paul Virilio) affects the sense of teleology (destiny) and the quest for experience in French contemporary poetry (in particular, in the genre of the elegy). Including both memory and anticipation, the « extrême contemporain » production seems to prefer the “time of now”, *Jetzt-zeit* in Benjamin’s words, to past or testimony, and speaks to the present, whose responsibility is to give voice to a space where everything is simply allowed to happen.

*Destiny, temporality, doom*: these three words, that are put together in the title of this Issue apply to our sense of historical progression, as if the first and the last were linked, like “beads on a rosary,” through and by the middle one, invoking the notion of an *inner quest*.

This well-known image of the rosary is taken from “Theses on the Philosophy of History”,<sup>1</sup> an essay in which Walter Benjamin criticizes historians who content themselves “with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history,” instead of grasping “the constellation which [their] own era has formed with a definite earlier one”.<sup>2</sup>

In these pages I would like to share my thoughts about a supposed change concerning the notion of the teleological passing of time that has been taking place in the contemporary French “Literary era”; an “epoch”—I prefer this word to the previous one—which, following the suggestions advanced by Jean-Luc Nancy and Michel Chaillou in the mid-1980s, can be approximately called the “*extrême contemporain*” (the “contemporary extreme”).<sup>3</sup>

Since then, this label has seen myriads of formulations, and has come to identify a corpus of authors (mostly novelists, even if the term was primarily introduced for poetry) who interpret, each in their own specific way, their “avant-garde” work. One

could even say that this definition has become thoroughly debased by now, because of its broadness. Nevertheless, among all the possible interpretations of this expression, I will advance the one that describes a *contemporary age that includes its extremities*, where the word “extremity” is not to be taken merely in the sense of an extreme experience (somehow connected to the concept of necessity and, perhaps, *doom*), but rather in the meaning of outermost *and* farthest parts of it.

This allows me to preserve the idea of the “continuum of History” proposed by Walter Benjamin in his “Theses”, when he states that:

History is the object of a construction, whose site is not that of homogeneous and empty time, but one filled with now-time [*jetzt-zeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate.<sup>4</sup>

*Jetzt-zeit* and *extrême contemporain* poetry are, in my opinion, to be paralleled by this constructive principle (that Benjamin attributed to historical materialism) related to a sort of “cessation of historical time”. They both recognize

the sign of a *Messianic cessation of happening* [a sort of zero-hour, *Stillstellung*], or, put differently, a *revolutionary chance of events* [...] in order to *blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history* – blasting a specific *life* out of the era or a specific *work* out of the *lifework*. As a result of this method the *lifework* is *preserved* in this work and at the same time *anceled*; in the *lifework*, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains *time as a precious but tasteless seed*.<sup>5</sup>

The various aspects of time (past, present and future) are thus converging, so that they are all simultaneously autonomous *and* mutually constitutive, creating a sort of “temporal synaesthesia”<sup>6</sup> that gives things a chance to happen.

What I intend to do in this essay is, first, illustrate how and why time has to be seen as a “precious but tasteless seed” in the *extrême contemporain* literary epoch (in France).

To do this, I will begin by discussing the notion of the “suspension of experience” in contemporary literature, recently proposed by several critics. Secondly, I will turn to think about the relationship between destiny and experience, as it results in some pages of two poets belonging to this epoch of extremes: Emmanuel Hocquard and, more specifically, Dominique Fourcade. And I will conclude with some reflections on an elegy poem in which, in my opinion, “*extrême contemporain* epoch” poetry best shows its peculiar interpretation of the link between *destiny*, *temporality* and *doom* through its *inner quest*.

#### I. NOTES ON LITERATURE AND EXPERIENCE: PROSE AND POETRY

There are two ways to explore the connections between literature and experience. We can initially wonder about what the experience *of* literature is today; secondly, we can investigate the relationship *between* literature and experience today.

The first approach implies the introduction of a new model when considering literature in the “age of digital reproducibility”. It is culturally fashionable today

to speak of literary *device* rather than of literary *structure*, which implies a trans-semiotic approach to literature, including a strategic combination (*agencement*) of utterance (textuality) and visuality.<sup>7</sup>

It is undeniable that what Paul Virilio called the “Big Optics” (the switch from an anthropometrical vision based on geometrical perspective, which involves the distinction between near and far, to “the active optics of time passing at the speed of light”, typical of Information Technology)<sup>8</sup> has affected both temporality and the horizon of life and experience. We are beneath (or better, floating into) an *open sky* full of promises, or full of emptiness. The epoch of horizons has passed away and contemporary storytelling often explores the erosion of the line between Story and History.<sup>9</sup> Therefore the contemporary literary scene looks like a theater where the wings of the stage, and the stage as well, are placed in front of the spectators’ eyes.

After the advent of photography, that informs the Nineteenth century “imageries”—as Philippe Hamon calls them, after Arjun Appadurai’s considerations about social imaginary—,<sup>10</sup> montage and video composition techniques are now influencing our contemporary literary *perspectives* which have been left, as we have seen, without a horizon. We can dance “photographically”,<sup>11</sup> we can write “hypertextual” poetry, which is not necessarily the incorporation of images, sounds, touch or other interactive multimedia tools along with alphabetic writing,<sup>12</sup> but rather the necessity of reading poetry and novels as a “multilayered” devices, as a multitrack abridgement of possibility. This is the legacy, I dare say, the *destiny* of our visual culture era, and not only for writers, but for scholars too, who are more and more often asked to cross the boundaries between disciplines (in particular, those between literature and the arts), as I am doing in my paper.

Considering now the links between experience and literature, that is to say experience *in* literature, in *Infancy and History*, under to sub-heading “Modern poetry and experience”, Giorgio Agamben writes:

Modern poetry from Baudelaire onwards is seen to be founded not on new experience, but on an unprecedented *lack of experience*. Hence, the boldness with which Baudelaire can place shock at the centre of his artistic work. It is experience that best affords us protection from surprises, and the production of shock always implies a gap in experience. To experience something means divesting it of novelty, neutralizing its shock potential.<sup>13</sup>

Here Agamben is thinking about Baudelaire and Benjamin. In “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”,<sup>14</sup> the German philosopher asserts that “the replacement of the older relation [to storytelling] by information, and of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience”.<sup>15</sup>

As another scholar noticed,

it is not that experience disappears because of the exposure to ‘shock’. Rather, experience becomes devoid of meaning, empty, voiceless. It speaks no more, and with its silence comes the nakedness of the subject. But exactly what is it that we mean by nakedness (*nudità*) [. . .]? By nakedness we mean here the simple event of being devoid of experience, which in turn means that moment devoid of historiography [. . .], the present-now (*Jetzt-zeit*) to which Benjamin devoted so many pages and so much thought. In other words, by nakedness we mean here the suspension of historiographical existence by way of which existence manifests itself as pure existence; existence as-such.<sup>16</sup>

Not only does this nakedness of the subject take precedence over experience, but the contemporary writer doesn't believe in Humanism any more, that is to say s/he denies the possibility of having a posterity and a message for it.

If s/he refutes the judgment of posterity, what about retributive judgment of God, where the destiny is decided according to our merits or lack thereof? Let's stop for a second here and we'll come back later to this question.

Some contemporary fiction is looking for a factual grounding, by investigating the only experience that seems to be fit for those who are the "survivors" of Story and History: war, war as an absolute, and violence.<sup>17</sup> If destiny is, as I believe, a horizon, destiny is more and more in the horizon of death.

Paradoxically, the so called "homme imaginaire"<sup>18</sup> (Imaginary Man) of Mass Culture materializes the erosion between *fictional* and *factual* precisely in relation to the event of *death*: what is the sacrificial theme of "dying for me" in cinematographic truth? Always the others are dying "instead of me".

On the other hand, the Imaginary Reader, nowadays, knows much about the wearing down of the line that distinguishes meta-narrative literature from narrative one, to the extent that "today, while the lack of experience in literature is exploding, every novel, even the most autobiographical, the most naïvely up-to-the-minute, is written like an historical novel".<sup>19</sup>

The beginning of this century is rather similar to the beginning of the last one, except for this indifference not only to "these fragments [we] have shored against [our] ruins",<sup>20</sup> but to posterity and future. We are now in Klee's *Angelus Novus* position, and the storm forces us irresistibly into the future to which *our* back is turned.<sup>21</sup>

Poetry could seem, at first sight, to be more protected from these shocks related to the end of teleology than narrative literature. But that is not the case; and how could it be different, given that poetry is the quintessence of the permanent oscillation of words and worlds? One could extend to poetry what Benjamin said about the thinking of historical materialism:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad.<sup>22</sup>

Each poem contains a blueprint of the world, each poem has a "constellatory essence". By dialectically canceling-out the specificity of an event or epoch, it elevates and preserves its specificity in relation to the entire structure of messianic time.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in a poem, the etymology for *destiny* shows all its properties: it actually implies the sense of *firmness*, of *arrest* ("that which has been firmly established", from Latin *destinatus*, pp. of *destinare* "make firm, establish").

In this sense, a poem is so established that it *includes its extremities*; it is *filled with now-time (jetzt-zeit)*; its parts are all autonomous *and* reciprocally constitutive; in it, "everything happens", despite *and* because of its firmness: in language there is always "too much play"—as you could say for a steering wheel. It is precisely in this "play" that we can look for its "inner quest".

## II. AND STILL EVERYTHING HAPPENS!

*Everything happens* is the title of one of the central poems of the Parisian poet Dominique Fourcade.<sup>24</sup> He wrote this composition in 1999 for Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe and their students at State University of New York in Buffalo. In *Everything happens*, the Edouard Manet's letterhead, "*Tout arrive*", stands for the principle (of life, of language or writing, which contains both life and language) that illuminates poetry: "Be ready but not prepared".

A "shimmering apprenticeship"<sup>25</sup> can then take place, leading to a "shockwave":

The effect that of a shockwave on a tightwire the wave travels the wire bounces off the mooring doubles back amplified to the starting point I don't dare follow; we walk a wire known to us alone sometimes we even walk a wire unknown to us this time I knew of the wire but nothing of the shock that awaited me – no tightrope artist's allure here – just plain old sleepwalking and the wire is buried – no ambiguity or metaphor<sup>26</sup>

In the "great openness" of the contemporary epoch, these two words (i.e. "everything happens") show all their complexity and become aspects<sup>27</sup> of the world:

everythinghappens objects sentinels like Marcel Proust's childhood Kaleidoscope lamp  
 everythinghappens moments Dominique Mercy's solo in *Nur du* it's the structure's suppleness that  
 authorizes the stunning man-moments  
 simplest regard magic lantern of discrete series  
 Dickinson Stein Oppen  
 no decrees  
*all the instant of time fit one in the other towards the outsides*  
*and the points on the surface want one another escape immobile*<sup>28</sup>

The categories of *time* and *space* are hence here reversed.

Time blasts to its extremities, being, simultaneously, *fit* (this image recalls here the "now-time", *jetzt-zeit*, "blasting a specific work out of the lifework, where the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled, containing *time as a precious but tasteless seed*"). In the same way, space condenses everything, being, simultaneously, *still*:

all the points of the page's surface, of its swerve to the frontiers all diagonals included, all this in a nearly madding simultaneity, is not a happy story, because it means breaking not only with what is established but also with your most advanced and cherished masters, and even giving up on your brothers, and because, of all the phases spoken in a line, not one is natural in the first place,  
 I'm lying a little  
 Because this gaping  
 I don't mention  
 That I engulf myself in today  
 And that the subject  
 contains dying<sup>29</sup>

The subject contains dying. "Dead subject" is included in "Everything happens".<sup>30</sup> And his/her death and nakedness are not necessarily due to a lack of experience, but surely to a suspension of historiographical existence, that reveals when existence manifests itself as pure existence.

Modernity, in Manet's words, "gave a larynx back to the art-maker, and changed the rate of indecision to quicksilver. Finally [it] *let happen* [. . .]. *Let, and not force to happen*. Discovery of disorientation. Work of elimination of defenses".<sup>31</sup>

There is no *fate* forcing to take place. Hence, there is no *doom*.

What is more, place is always displaced: "These two words so reliable [are] traveling by balloon [. . .], *going farther and farther towards their destination whose nature is to never arrive, never happen*, including the highest-quality *chance, young*".<sup>32</sup>

So poetry is *still* an experience, but an experience of sorts. As the poet states, it's "an experience over the page, into which you enter as the experience of each time-space unit of the word on the level of the letter, multitrack".<sup>33</sup>

In this way,

the truth and the possibility of this experience, a force at least equal to its necessity comes into play from the start to eject you. Eject you from what? From the immense point we were getting to, of the page language world and so of all experience. I'm certain that only a method can make everything happening plausible, otherwise it is unfounded: art today stands so little to reason. This method [. . .] is something I don't have [. . .]. Or shut up and schuss, I'm sure that what's at stake is the planning of death. At any rate everything is art. And I should pretend what, I'll do anything you ask, to be a writer?<sup>34</sup>

*Everything happens* is ending here, suggesting that death has *to be planned* (no more verdicts, just a choice). That is the "*en-jeu*" of art: that is its very serious play in action.

This is a real "revolution" (it was announced in the poem *Le ciel pas d'angle*, whose title announces *The Unangular Sky*—the Big Optic's open sky?).<sup>35</sup> This revolution contradicts, for the first time since the neo-platonic era poetry, the tradition of "negative theology" that has devoted literature to testify its own failures and impossibilities, according to Jacques Rancière words.<sup>36</sup>

And this is the meaning of the title that I chose for the final part of my essay. The sentence is actually a quotation of the epigraph opening the first version of an elegy by Dominique Fourcade published in 1986: "the elegiac experience that I have of the Contemporary" ("*Le sentiment élégiaque que j'ai du contemporain*").

### III. "LE SENTIMENT ÉLÉGIAQUE QUE J'AI DU CONTEMPORAIN"

In the text *Outrance utterance et autres élégies*, which has not been yet translated and that presents the final version of the poem *Élégie L apostrophe E.C.* (something like *Elegy L apostrophe E.C.*, where E.C. stands for *Extrême Contemporain*), this inscription is found just in a footnote, whereas in its first version, published in installments in several issues of Claude Royet-Journoud's journal *L'in-plano*, it was in the foreground.<sup>37</sup>

Starting from the early 1980s the poetic genre of elegy, used according to the classical tradition to digress about the conditions of the author's own time and fate, and not plot-driven, became crucial to some French poets referring to the American Objectivist Poets (we have already read the quotation of Oppen's *Discrete Series* in Fourcade's *Everything happens*). Among them, Emmanuel Hocquard,<sup>38</sup> who has

never abandoned the reflection on this genre, “listed under the heading *Lyric Poetry*” in the various entries of his “dictionaries”.<sup>39</sup> The last work in which the elegy is “at stake” is *Conditions de lumière* (*Conditions of Light* not yet published in English—the translation is expected in October 2009), where he writes without punctuation the poem “In a glass flute” (“*Dans une coupe en verre*”). Here a passage, in my translation:

The elegy is not in the words of mourning It is in the repetition of the utterance of language It is this repetition Language as a whole is elegy One never speaks of self Never a subject of enunciation has existed There is only the grammatical subject There is no beginning There is no primary utterance There is just to collect In a glass flute Even if one doesn't understand very well what's going on a disjunction has taken place A difference in pitch and velocity The pitch of utterance is neutral Its velocity steady An interval taken has place or an exit space Since never it was the case to enter in In speaking or writing or reading or translating one looks for the exit. Or to come out. Writing is this openness<sup>40</sup>

Emmanuel Hocquard, influenced by Wittgenstein, maps language to show the limits of thought and meaninglessness. A scholar defined Hocquard's poetic process a “negative modernity”, stressing the difference between his connotative “inverse elegiac” and the “classical” one. If in the latter the poet “ruminates” the representation of the past making a denotative use of it, in the “inverse elegiac”, writing in the openness, the poet “*redoes the past*, thus relating to it empirically”.<sup>41</sup>

In “*Dans une coupe en verre*” Emmanuel Hocquard is underlying one important thing that Dominique Fourcade would have said with another “image” (even if he never uses images): utterance is *always* elegiac because it is *the horizon of the voice*.<sup>42</sup> In other words, “elegy is always less *about* someone [. . .] and more in anticipation”<sup>43</sup> of something-someone (a “third person account”)<sup>44</sup> that makes its way through the multidimensional *space* of language, of utterance.

Is, then, our *étranger contemporain* a “negative modernity”? I'm not so sure that one can apply this label on the works of these French authors, especially if we associate the expression “negative” to a new declension of the “negative theology” in poetry. Surely, this is not the case for Dominique Fourcade, whose poetry calls for the *responsibility* of language.

Language is in its impulse and floating,<sup>45</sup> in the horizon, in the blank of the voice: “The voice is the horizon; the voice is every horizon; every horizon. The poem, the impulse, the voice are one”.<sup>46</sup> And being a voice, language implies a moral obligation, which is all but a burden: it is more like a call for a attention, like when someone pours out his/her anxieties to you and you do the same to him/her.<sup>47</sup>

In the final part of *Oustrance Utterance* an angel comes (the lyrical subject says that he “raids” the poem), not only to provide consolation (like in the classical elegy), but to redo the past in a very concrete way. This angel is a woman (we can read that he is “sister in virginity” with the poet, since the poet himself is, according to the poem, a woman)<sup>48</sup> and he/she gives substance (“*donne corps*”)<sup>49</sup> to the contemporary. Contemporary age is nothing but clamor. The angel has thus come to pronounce this clamor “with the weight of he who spreads some big wings to dry”.<sup>50</sup> He/she has also come to put his/her wings round us (Fourcade uses the verb “*ceinturer*”, that gives the idea, simultaneously, of a grip and an embrace): to

hold us, to talk to us with sharp notes, but without saying anything we didn't know before. The angel just testifies his/her commitment in the poem.<sup>51</sup>

*Outrance, utterance. Utterance* rhymes with *outrance*. It is necessary to avoid any drift that the image of the angel can recall. The angels here have both feet planted on the ground, just where the things of the poem do happen.

The language of poetry cannot but be excessive (it exceeds a proper limit: its own limits), language is exorbitant (it exceeds a horizon: that of a world *pas d'angle*). In short, language is extreme when it frees from the grip space-time: "Space is the unique place for a poem which refuses to be yesterday's".<sup>52</sup> So, elegy is not in the mourning over a (tragic) destiny, but in the promise of a (happy) happening. Its *inner quest* is for space and this space is that of the surface of the page, it is that of a line regardless of time, the tasteless fruit.

The next to last phrase of *Outrance utterance*, originally written in English, affirms:

We are aiming at a line without trauma. Aiming at space within language regardless of time within language. We have in mind a novel that would loose information, and deprocess words – a metric novel. Temperature? But depth has none, nor fever. Voices are bodies more real than bodies and so is rose, loaded with blue. It all comes as an inundation on the page. The sea is flesh-colored, and we are being paged on the beach, it's disconcerting. A poem demands light, not clarity. Light ever more, we shall not understand. Aiming at not aiming. The light which is within the light and the well which is within the well within the light and the air within the word are the poem's subject and we shall be anxious.<sup>53</sup>

Who is this "we"? It is all the contemporaries of the poet who have wings: E.E. Cummings writing the verse "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" (a line that becomes, in Fourcade's version, "no one had smaller hands, even the rain")<sup>54</sup>; Simon Hantai, who teaches us that utterance is singing, with its breathing, modulation and scansion<sup>55</sup> and that nowadays painting is "with hands behind the back and with eyes scratched out"<sup>56</sup>; John Barrow, with his *Dictionarium poly-graphicum* about the *Body of Arts*, poetically describing the colors in the Eighteenth century<sup>57</sup>; Cézanne, Rembrandt, Manet, Fra Angelico, their angels, their wings.

And last, the most contemporary embodiment of this elegy is the side mirror of a famous race car<sup>58</sup>: in that mirror, in the way it reflects the world, in the way we look at it disappearing at our back, there is the emblem of the cancellation of our deformed perception of time. Time here becomes space, surface and it is up to the writer to hold it back like space, or to redo it in time. Very, very slowly.<sup>59</sup>

#### BIOGRAPHY

Silvia Riva earned her BA from the Istituto Universitario di Lingue Moderne (Milan) with a dissertation entitled "The Sky and the Abyss. Cosmology and Poetry between the Renaissance Hermetic Tradition and the Baroque", and she gained a PhD in Francophone Literatures from the University of Bologna. Since 2001 she has been working as Tenured Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Milan, where she teaches courses in Francophone Cultures and

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *Theses on the philosophy of history* [Gesammelten Schriften I:2. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1974]. In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn, 263. London: Pimlico.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> In 1986, Dominique Fourcade, Michel Deguy and Jacques Roubaud went to a conference organized by Michel Chaillou, in which Chaillou coined the expression "extrême contemporain". In 1987, the French magazine *po&sie*, edited by Michel Deguy, started a new collection by the same name. Today the term is used mostly to indicate prose production (cf. Blanckeman, Bruno, Aline Mura-Brunel, and Marc Dambre. eds. 2004. *Le Roman français au tournant du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 8. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle).

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, cit., pp. 252–253.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 262–263. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>6</sup> Modern, John Lardas. 2006. Walter Benjamin's 115th dream, In *Epoché: The University of California Journal for the Study of Religion* 24, 127–128: "When reading Benjamin one becomes privy to a temporal synaesthesia – not a convergence of past, present, and future into a kind of cosmic consciousness but a sensitivity to the ways in which the past, present, and future are *both* independent *and* mutually constitutive".

<sup>7</sup> Vouilloux, Bernard. 2008. *Du dispositif*. In *Discours, image, dispositif. Penser la représentation III*, ed. Philippe Ortel, 15–31. Paris: L'Harmattan.

<sup>8</sup> Virilio, Paul. 1993. Big optics. In *On justifying the hypothetical nature of art and the non-identity with the object world*, ed. P. Weibel. Köln: Walther König.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ricoeur, Paul. 1983. *Temps et récit. Tome I: L'intrigue et le récit historique*. Paris: Seuil; Ricoeur, Paul. 1984. *Temps et récit. Tome II: La configuration dans le récit de fiction*. Paris: Seuil; Ricoeur, Paul. 1985. *Temps et récit. Tome III: Le temps raconté*. Paris: Seuil.

<sup>10</sup> Hamon, Philippe. 2006. *Imageries. Littérature et image au XIXe siècle*. Paris: José Corti; Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>11</sup> Waternaux, Isabelle, Mathilde Monnier, and Dominique Fourcade. 2001. *MW*, 57. Paris: P.O.L. “C’est plutôt la danse moderne qui danse photographiquement, produisant, à tout instant de sa propre durée, de l’immobilité et de l’espace, en un déploiement muet”.

<sup>12</sup> Narayanan Vivek. *Hypertextual Poetry: A Study of MSN Poetry Communities* (April 26th, 2005) <http://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/2005-April/005496.html>. In this post you can read: “hypertext renders obsolete, not ‘literacy’, but ‘post-literacy’”. It foresees a ‘revival of typographic culture’ (. . . in a truly dynamic, truly paperless environment”).

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. 1993. *Infancy and history: The destruction of experience*, trans. Liz Heron, 41. London: Verso. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, Walter. 2003. *Selected writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 313–355. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, cit., p. 316.

<sup>16</sup> Bartoloni, Paolo. *The suspension of experience and modern literature*. In *Le simplegadi. rivista internazionale on-line di lingue e letteratura moderne* 3, III (November 2005), <http://all.uniud.it/all/simplegadi/>

<sup>17</sup> As far as “war” is concerned see Bruno Bosteels (with Peter Hallward), Hallward, Peter. ed. 2003. “Beyond formalisation: An interview with Alain Badiou, In *The one or the other: French philosophy today*, *Angelaki* 8, 2, 111–137. As for “violence”, cf. Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. *Fear of small numbers*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Morin, Edgar. 2005. *The cinema, or the imaginary man (1956)*, trans. Lorraine Mortimer. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>19</sup> Scurati, Antonio. 2006. *La letteratura dell’inesperienza. Scrivere romanzi al tempo della televisione*, 78. Milan: Bompiani Tascabili. The English translation is mine.

<sup>20</sup> I’m clearly paraphrasing from T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

<sup>21</sup> I’m paraphrasing Walter Benjamin’s considerations on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus (Illuminations)*, cit., p. 249).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262–263.

<sup>23</sup> I’m paraphrasing the assumptions about the term “monad” in Benjamin’s understanding of messianic time contained in Owen Ware, “Dialectic of the Past / Disjuncture of the Future: Derrida and Benjamin on the Concept of Messianism”, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 5, 2 (April 2004), p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> Dominique Fourcade was born in 1938. He lives in Paris. His first book of poetry dates back to 1961. He is also an art historian and a curator (he has worked on Henri Matisse, Simon Hantai and David Smith, to name but a few). His books of poetry include *Le ciel pas d’angle* (Paris: P.O.L., 1983), *Rose-déclit* (P.O.L., 1984), *Son blanc du un* (P.O.L., 1986), *Xbo* (P.O.L., 1988), *Outrance utterance et autres élégies* (P.O.L., 1990), *IL* (P.O.L., 1994), *Le sujet monotype* (P.O.L., 1997), *Est-ce que j’peux placer un mot* (P.O.L., 2001), *en laisse* (P.O.L., 2005), *sans lasso et sans flash* (P.O.L., 2005), *éponges modèle 2003* (P.O.L., 2005), *Citizen Do* (2008). *Rose-déclit (Click-Rose)* and *Xbo* have been translated into English by Keith Waldrop and Robert Kocik respectively, and have been published by Sun and Moon Press. *Tout arrive (Everything happens)* has been translated by Stacey Doris for the Post Apollo Press. Other translations into English are: from *Three Things on the Commode* and from *The Unangular Sky*, trans. Cid Corman and Dominique Fourcade, in *Origin V*, 5 (Spring 1985), respectively pp. 74–76 and pp. 67–74; *Rose the Click for 23*, trans. Charles Bernstein, in *Série d’écriture* 3 (1989), p. 19; *Rose-Click-Click*, trans. Keith Waldrop, in *Série d’écriture* 3 (1989), pp. 15–18; *Mural*, trans. Douglas Oliver, in *Scarlet* 4 (Spring, 1991), p. 21; *Click-Rose 2 (X-XIII & XV-XIX)*, trans. Keith Waldrop, in *Sulfur* 27 (Fall, 1990), pp. 74–78; *On a leash*, trans. Peter Consenstein, in “French Poetry and Poetics”, *Verse* 24, 1–3 (2007), pp. 52–59.

<sup>25</sup> Fourcade, Dominique. 2000. *Everything happens*, trans. Stacy Doris, 11. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> I take this word in the sense of a category of the verb designating primarily the relation of the action to the passage of time, especially in reference to completion, duration, or repetition.

<sup>28</sup> Fourcade Dominique. *Everything happens*, cit., p. 16. My emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26. My emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28. My emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>35</sup> Fourcade, Dominique. 1983. *Le ciel pas d'angle*. Paris: P.O.L.

<sup>36</sup> Rancière, Jacques. 1998. *La parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature*, 12. Paris: Hachette: “[la] tradition de la théologie négative, vou[e] la littérature au témoignage de sa propre impossibilité, comme celle-là se vouait à dire l’indicibilité des attributs divins”.

<sup>37</sup> Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance* (Paris: P.O.L., 1990), p. 91: “L’édition originale de *Élégie L apostrophe E.C.* a paru en 1986 aux éditions Michel Chandeigne, avec les indications suivantes: ‘La première partie de cette élégie a été écrite pour répondre à une invitation de l’ADILC, qui organisait à l’université de Paris VII, les 19 et 20 février 1986, une réunion sur le thème de *L’extrême contemporain* où ces pages ont été lues; simultanément elles étaient publiées dans le quotidien *L’in-plano*, fait par Claude Royet-Journoud. L’existence même de ce journal, son rythme très prenant, l’impulsion infiniment imaginative de son créateur m’ont incité à poursuivre. La deuxième partie du texte porte sur l’expérience qu’a été pour moi la lecture de *Son blanc du un* au Théâtre National de Chaillot, le 3 mars. *L’in-plano* a donc publié ces notes dans ses numéros 4, 18, 20, 21, 33, 44, 48, 56, 63, 71 et 77; après l’arrêt du journal, une suite est encore venue (sur la vitesse acquise?). Mais le titre ‘Ozone’, donné parce qu’il fallait en toute hâte trouver un nom au feuillet mis en route, traduisait mal *le sentiment élégiaque que j’ai du contemporain*; il ne traduisait pas non plus l’émotion très mêlée qu’il me procure. Je dédie *Élégie L apostrophe E. C.* à ceux qui, lors des lectures du 19 février et du 3 mars (et d’une autre à l’A.R.C. le 11 juin), m’ont donné le privilège d’être leur contemporain.’” The emphasis is mine.

<sup>38</sup> Emmanuel Hocquard was born in 1940. Several of his books have been translated into English. Among them, Scott, John A. trans. 1989. *Elegies & other poems*, Plymouth: Shearsman Books; *Theory of Tables*, trans. Michael Palmer (Stockbridge: o-blek editions, 1994); *This Story is Mine: Little Autobiographical Dictionary of Elegy*, trans. Norma Cole (Instress Press, 1999). He has published many American poets in his publications *Orange Export*, *Un bureau sur l’Atlantique*, and the anthologies *21+1 Poètes américains d’aujourd’hui* (Delta, 1986), and *49+1* (Royaumont, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Hocquard Emmanuel. “Cette histoire qui est la mienne”, in *Petit dictionnaire autobiographique de l’élégie*, (rpt. in *Ma Haie*, Paris: P.O.L., 2001, pp. 461–490); “Comment en suis-je arrivé là? Conversation avec Henri Deluy du 20 mars 1998” (rpt. in *Ma Haie*, cit., pp. 443–459); *Tout le monde se ressemble: une anthologie de poésie contemporaine* (Paris: P.O.L., 1995). See also *Les Élégies* (Paris: P.O.L., 1990) containing « Une élégie », « Élégies 2 » and « Élégies 3 » published in *Les Dernières Nouvelles de l’expédition sont datées du 15 février 17...* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).

<sup>40</sup> Emmanuel Hocquard & Claude Royet-Journoud, “Le Cahier du Refuge” 164 (Marseille: cipM, December 2007), p. 13. Published in Emmanuel Hocquard, *Conditions de lumière* (Paris: P.O.L., 2007); english translation, *Conditions of Light*, is not yet published (expected for October 2009, Fence Books). The English translation of this text is mine: “L’élégie n’est pas dans les mots de la plainte Elle est dans la répétition des mots de la langue Elle est cette répétition La langue tout entière est élégie On ne parle jamais de soi Il n’y a jamais eu de sujet d’annonciation Il n’y a de sujet que grammatical Il n’y a pas de commencement Il n’y a pas de formulation première Il n’y a que recueillir Dans une coupe en verre Même si on ne comprend pas très bien ce qui s’est produit un décrochage a eu lieu Une différence d’intonation et de vitesse L’intonation de la récitation est neutre Sa vitesse constante S’est mis en place un intervalle ou une espace de sortie Car il ne s’est jamais agi d’entrer En parlant ou écrivant ou lisant ou traduisant on cherche la sortie À s’en sortir / Écrire est cette ouverture”.

<sup>41</sup> Fetzer, Glenn Williams. 2004. *Emmanuel hocquard and the poetics of negative modernity*, 126. Birmingham: Summa Publications.

<sup>42</sup> Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Fetzer Glenn Williams. *op.cit.*, p. 13. Cf. also Fetzer, Glenn. 2005. *L'élégie en jeu chez Emmanuel Hocquard*, In "Élégies", *Babel* 12, 287–297.

<sup>44</sup> Hocquard Emmanuel. *Ma Haie*, cit., p. 465.

<sup>45</sup> Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 26, "La contrebasse. La pulsation blanche. La pulsation derrière le poème? Devant le poème? La pulsation-horizon."; p. 19: "Je vois une île flottante"; p. 35: "[Language] est l'immobile vibrant du poème".

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25: "La voix qui est l'horizon; la voix qui est tout horizon; tout horizon. Le poème, l'impulsion, la voix sont un". The translation into English is mine.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18: "De tout ceci il ressort que nous avons, vis-à-vis du contemporain, une responsabilité. Une responsabilité totale et incompréhensible, une responsabilité irréversible mais somme toute légère, du genre de celle que l'on éprouve envers quelqu'un qui libère en confiance son angoisse en nous, et vice-versa. C'est la langue qui crée ce rapport. C'est la langue qui ne clarifie pas ce rapport."

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32: "(nous sommes sœurs en virginité)"; p. 9: "Nous les poètes, les meilleurs d'entre nous tout au moins, nous sommes des femmes."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33: "L'ange est venu dire une élégie. Faire son raid. Une élégie, un raid. En fa dièse. Dire des choses diésées. Nous ceinturer ne rien nous annoncer que nous ne sachions (nous sommes sœurs en virginité), seulement nous signifier son engagement, dans le poème. Une élégie convaincante. S'engageant dans ce raid donner corps au contemporain qui n'est que des rumeurs, prononcer les rumeurs avec le poids de celui qui a ces grandes ailes qui sèchent à l'air, ôter la ponctuation, ne pas lever le bras dans la commune noyade qui s'ensuit. // Bien rester au sol, là où le poème (les choses de l'ange) a lieu. Avec les ailes la seule chose à faire est de les ouvrir, immobile au sol, pour les sécher."

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35: "L'espace est le seul lieu pour un poème qui se refuse à être d'hier."

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. Originally in English.

<sup>54</sup> Cummings, Edward Estlin. 1970. Somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond. In *W ViVa* [1931], LVII, ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York, NY: Liveright Publishers.

<sup>55</sup> Dominique Fourcade. 2008. *Pour simon hantaï. Thème, motif, motet*, 9. Paris, Chandeigne: "Les *Tabulas* de Hantaï disent: parler c'est chanter. Fréquence modulation scansion".

<sup>56</sup> Fourcade, Dominique. 1976. Un coup de pinceau, c'est la pensée. In *Hantaï. Exhibition catalogue*. Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou, n.p.: "Le problème est de ne plus rien avoir dans les mains, de se mettre dans les conditions de peindre les mains attachées derrière le dos. La question serait de peindre les yeux crevés. C'est pourquoi Hantaï fait des pliures."

<sup>57</sup> Barrow, John. 1735. *Dictionarium polygraphicum: or, The whole body of arts regularly digested . . . adorned with proper sculptures, curiously engraven on more than fifty copper plates . . .*, 2 vols., vol. 1, M 2. London: C. Hitch and C. Davis.

<sup>58</sup> Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 34: "Les rétroviseurs de la Ferrari Testa Rossa – de quoi ne pas mourir".

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34: "Il incombe à l'écrivain de maintenir l'espace comme espace – ou de refaire de l'espace avec du temps"; p. 37: "Je voudrais parler très lentement, avec ceux de mes contemporains qui ont une connaissance de la profondeur. Je voudrais leur écrire, très lenetement. Être emmené".