Poetry, Performativity, and Ordinary Language Philosophy

Philip Mills

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"J.L. Austin ostentatiously excluded poetic language—a mode of language use he called parasitical, hollow, and void—from his theory of the performative speech act in *How to Do Things with Words*. Philip Mills' timely study charges the forms of language restored to intellectual credibility in ordinary language philosophy with 'forms of life' witnessed by contemporary poetry with 'poethical' force."

—Eric Lindstrom, University of Vermont; author of
Jane Austen and Other Minds

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Note on Translations

When no English translation was available for works in French, poetic or theoretical, I translated the text myself and provided the original French in a note.

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Abbreviations

Wittgenstein

BB   *The Blue and Brown Books*
PI   *Philosophical Investigations*
Z   *Zettel*

Nietzsche

TL   *On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense*
WS   *The Wanderer and His Shadow*
GS   *The Gay Science*
BGE   *Beyond Good and Evil*
GM   *The Genealogy of Morals*
TI   *Twilight of the Idols*
KSA   *Sämtliche Werke: kritische Studienausgabe*

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Introduction: Poetic Promises—Austin Meets Nietzsche

Nothing performed that is not promised.—Sharon Olds, 'Golden Shovel: Our Faithfulness'

What can poetry bring to the philosophy of language? Little, if we believe John L. Austin's exclusion of poetry and other so-called parasitic utterances from his consideration in *How to Do Things with Words*. And he is not the only one to operate such an exclusion as most contemporary (analytic) philosophers of language seem to leave poetic utterances aside (or reduce them to metaphors or fictional utterances). Contra Austin, I believe that Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP), represented by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell in addition to Austin and others, has the potential to become a poetic philosophy of language. Poets and literary theorists have been quick to receive and adapt Austin's speech-act theory to the study of literature and, through this adaptation, have contaminated his theory with the poetic and the literary. What can OLP bring to the study of poetry? And what does OLP look like through the lens of poetry? These questions will guide my reflections throughout this book.

Austin's speech-act theory is famous for revealing and theorising the performative dimension of language. However, Austin is not the first to discover this performativity of language. A century before him, Friedrich Nietzsche elaborates a conception of language that prefigures Austin's

view.[1] And this performative conception of language can be traced back to the Greek sophists and their rhetoric, as Barbara Cassin has shown (Cassin 1995, 2018). The association of the performative powers of language with the Sophists might explain in part why the constative or descriptive conception of language has prevailed throughout the history of philosophy. Siding with Plato against the Sophists, philosophers of language have tried to move away from 'subjective' persuasion to 'objective' description.

Even though they both argue for a performative conception of language, Nietzsche and Austin approach the question in opposite ways: while Austin conceptualises a philosophy of performative language, Nietzsche offers a performative philosophy of language. Even though Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man acknowledge this filiation, not much has been said about the connection between Nietzsche and Austin, probably because they operate in radically different realms of philosophy.[2] Indeed, the twentieth-century philosophical landscape has been marked by the so-called analytic–continental divide, in which Nietzsche is associated with the continental side and Austin with the analytic one. Without entering the details of this divide and the misconceptions and miscomprehensions on which it relies,[3] we could argue that Austin's rejection of poetic utterances reveals a certain disdain for poetry in analytic philosophy while Nietzsche and continental philosophers embrace poetry as fundamental to understanding the ways in which language works.

[1] Linda Simonis for instance considers Nietzsche to be an advocate of Austin's and Searle's 'performative *avant-la-lettre*' (Simonis 2002, 58) and Csongor Lőrincz explores the unintentional and forgetful dimension of promise (and performative language) to highlight its 'afformative' dimension that shifts from 'I will' to 'I shall do' (Lőrincz 2020, 86).

[2] Those who comment on Derrida's suggestion to connect Austin and Nietzsche (Derrida 1988, 13) focus especially on the relation between performative force and will to power (Navarro 2017, 89). Raoul Moati argues that such a connection is problematic because it naturalises the illocutionary force in the 'will to power' (Moati 2014, 57). According to him, the connection between force and will to power misses Austin's point and, conversely, does not help in understanding Nietzsche's views on language either. Derrida's reading would therefore misread both Austin's notion of force and Nietzsche's will to power. Joseph Hillis Miller on the contrary considers Derrida to be right 'of course, to say that Austin's notion that words have a force has a Nietzschean ring to it' (Miller 2001, 89–90), but does not explain for what reasons. As Paul de Man suggests in considering Nietzsche to anticipate Austin's performative, the connection between Austin and Nietzsche lies at a more basic level of understanding language as performative, without calling on the notion of will to power, nor naturalising Austin's notion of force (De Man 1979, 130).

[3] Andreas Vrahimis shows how the history of this divide in based on miscomprehensions from both sides (Vrahimis 2013).

Connecting Austin to Nietzsche brings him into a realm where the poetic is a central dimension of language and thus reveals the poetic dimension of the performative. To explore this dimension, I will focus on one specific idea that is central both to Austin's conception of language and to Nietzsche's philosophy: promises.

In discussing 'awe-inspiring performatives such as "I promise to…"', Austin considers that 'the words must be spoken "seriously" and so as to be taken "seriously"' (Austin 1975, 9). He considers this to be an 'important commonplace' and that in making a promise 'I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem' (Austin 1975, 9). Interestingly, Austin then quotes Euripides to illustrate the idea of a promise. He uses a literary example for his philosophical argument, even though such utterances are supposedly not serious. As Joseph Hillis Miller argues: 'The "literary" in the sense of etiolated utterances, utterances that are used not seriously to carry out the performative intentions they express but merely to illustrate, are absolutely necessary to Austin's argument. His own discourse is, necessarily and not contingently, infected with the literary' (Miller 2001, 48). The literary is central to Austin's claims and I will argue that the poetic is fundamental to the performative. Barbara Johnson furthermore considers that Austin's choice of words such as 'perform' and 'act' reveals what he attempts to exclude: 'Left to their own initiative, the very words with which Austin excludes jokes, theater and poetry from his field of vision inevitably take their revenge. But if, in the final analysis, the joke ends up being on Austin, it is, after all, only Poetic justice' (Johnson 1977, 158). Such parasitic utterances—as Austin calls them—come back to contaminate the concepts at the heart of his theory, despite his attempts to exclude them from his consideration. We will see in Chap. 2 that this exclusion of parasites often leads to their reintegration, albeit in a different form. The poetic would therefore have a special relation to the performative in which the former becomes revelatory of the latter. For this reason, Lisa Lai-Ming Wong compares lyric utterances to promises: 'Comparable to a promise, the performative aspects of the utterance produce an expectation that what is spoken necessitates its repetition by the reader. While the repetition is an essential constituent of the intelligibility of the poem, the speech act repeatedly performed in the unfolding present is heard over and over again, without being a repetition per se' (Wong 2006, 282). Repetition is at the heart of both speech-act theory and lyric reading: the lyric promise must be repeated by the readers to become effective as much as the performative must be repeated to function as a performative. We will see that

Derrida's reading of Austin insists on this repetition—this iterability as he calls it.

Performative utterances such as 'I promise' reveal an alternative philosophy of language that escapes what Austin calls the *descriptive fallacy*:

> To suppose that 'I know' is a descriptive phrase, is only one example of the *descriptive fallacy*, so common in philosophy. Even if some language is now purely descriptive, language was not in origin so, and much of it is still not so. Utterance of obvious ritual phrases, in the appropriate circumstances, is not describing the action we are doing, but doing it ('I do'): in other cases it functions, like tone and expression, or again like punctuation and mood, as an intimation that we are employing language in some special way ('I warn', 'I ask', 'I define'). (Austin 1979, 103)

Focusing here on 'I know'—which is related to other performatives such as warning, asking, promising—Austin argues that not all uses of language are descriptive, and even speculates that at its origin, language was not descriptive but performative. This rejection of the descriptive as the sole mode of functioning for language joins the broader concerns of an expressive line of thought in philosophy of language that rejects *representationalism*, that is, the primacy given to representation in traditional conceptions of language. To put it briefly, a representational philosophy of language considers language to mirror the world and, in this framework, meaning is thought in terms of reference and truth in terms of correspondence.

Nietzsche also argues against this representationalist framework by showing that it falls into the trap of metaphysics, that it becomes a 'philosophical mythology' according to which 'we originally think that through [words] we are grasping the *essence* of things' (Nietzsche 2013, WS 11). For Nietzsche, the problem of representationalism lies in its relation to metaphysics; for Austin, it lies in its rejection of performative utterances. However, while Austin's rejection of the descriptive fallacy could lead to a critique of the metaphysics of representationalism, we will see that he remains somewhat a prisoner of the representationalist framework. In this context, his exclusion of poetry and other so-called parasitic utterances can be seen as a consequence of this attachment to representationalism. While his notion of performative opens the door to a rejection of representationalism, he fails to see this possibility and remains committed to a certain idea of truth as correspondence, as Daniel Vanderveken argues:

'The theory of satisfaction of speech act theory is based on the traditional *correspondence theory of truth* for propositions' (Vanderveken 2001, 32).

This commitment to correspondence is a point where Austin and Nietzsche clearly dissent. Nietzsche is rather critical of the correspondence theory of truth and, in a famous passage from his early unpublished essay *On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense*, he considers that truth is 'A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding' (Nietzsche 1990, TL 1). Truth is no longer thought in terms of correspondence between language and the world but is poetically constituted through language. Much has been said about this passage, and Maudemarie Clark for instance attempts to retrieve a correspondence theory of truth in Nietzsche's work by dismissing *On Truth and Lie* as a work of youth (Clark 1990). However, as Cynthia Crawford has shown, Nietzsche's early theory of language is much more complex than what Clark suggests (Crawford 1988). Without entering the details of the debate, I would argue that Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysics is related to this rejection of truth as correspondence, insofar as the dualism language-world reflects the appearance-true world distinction. By rejecting correspondence, Nietzsche is thus going a step further than Austin, and this might explain in part why their conceptions of performativity differ.

A promise, like other performatives, is a speech-act that does not describe a situation in the world but does what it says. Such performatives involve a certain commitment, a certain responsibility that is not, at least at first glance, so important in descriptive uses of language: 'If someone has promised me to do A, then I am entitled to rely on it, and can myself make promises on the strength of it: and so, where someone has said to me 'I know', I am entitled to say I know too, at second hand. [...] Hence, if I say it lightly, I may be *responsible* for getting *you* into trouble' (Austin 1979, 100). A promise is not a speech-act like any other because it involves the utterer's responsibility in ways stronger than descriptive sentences. When someone promises me to do something, I can build on this promise and go on to make further promises to other people. Promises are just one kind of performative utterances and, in the passage quoted above, Austin relates promises to knowledge, thus suggesting that knowledge too is performative. The reason they both belong to the performative realm is that they involve the idea of responsibility. If performative utterances equate

saying and doing, there is a similar responsibility at play in both words and acts. The philosophy of language steps here on the grounds of the philosophy of action.

There is, however, more than responsibility to the definition of performative utterances: 'I know' and 'I promise'—like all performatives—involve authority and testimony, elements that are 'an essential part of the act of communicating, an act which we all constantly perform' (Austin 1979, 115). The belief in authority and testimony is essential to communication insofar as considering language as a social practice involves that users conform to some rules and commit themselves to the language they use. In this sense, the performative dimension of language operates a pragmatic shift towards the uses and practices of language rather than pursuing the representationalist investigation of the relation between word and world. We will however see that the relation between word and world comes back within the uses themselves. As a performative conception of language does not consider meaning in terms of reference or representation, it cannot consider truth in terms of correspondence. Or, as Austin argues, promises—and performatives in general—cannot 'strictly, *be* lies, though they can "imply" lies, as "I promise" implies that I fully intend, which may be untrue' (Austin 1979, 103). If I do not intend to do what I promise to do, then I am not really promising. I might not be in measure to fulfil my promise, but if I am really promising something then I must be fully intending to do it.[4] It is in this intention that the correspondence theory of truth comes back into Austin's theory: the performative is no longer a correspondence between a statement and a fact but between an intention and an action. However, this idea of correspondence only works within ritualised performatives, illocutions rather than perlocutions in Austin's vocabulary. As we will see in Chap. 3, he favours the illocutionary over the perlocutionary and therefore mainly focuses on ritualised performatives such as marriage or christening. Nietzsche, on the contrary, seems

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[4] The notion of intention raises other philosophical problems that I cannot discuss in length here, but these problems question the idea of the conventional or institutional dimension of promises. Indeed, if promises were an institution strictly speaking, there would be public criteria to determine the validity of the act of promising (as there is in Austin's example of unhappy performatives such as a *fake* christening). Elizabeth Anscombe considers that intention can be publicly assessed in most cases, that 'there can be a certain amount of control of the truthfulness of the answer' (Anscombe 2000, 43). However, this certain amount might not be sufficient when it comes to assess promises and the truthfulness of the intention in promising. In the next chapters, I will focus on the idea of intention in the literary realm.

to be more interested in the perlocutionary, in how a speech-act affects the world. For him, the question of promises is related to the nature of the human: 'To breed an animal that *is allowed to promise*—is this not precisely the paradoxical task that nature has set for itself with respect to human beings? is it not the genuine problem *of* human beings?' (Nietzsche 2014, GM II, 1). This opposition is one of the reasons why their views take radically different paths. These paths also concern their style of philosophising, as Eric Lindstrom argues that 'the "literary" intensity and instability of Nietzsche's style are embedded in his very conduct of philosophy' (Lindstrom 2016, 27). The differences in Nietzsche and Austin's views about the poetic affect their style of writing.

A promise is therefore a speech-act that involves the responsibility of the utterer. While Austin highlights what is being done by promising, Nietzsche emphasises the conditions in which promises are made, that is, the context of social interaction. As he argues in *The Genealogy of Morals*, 'that task of breeding an animal that is allowed to promise includes as a condition and preparation the closer task of first *making* the human being necessary, uniform, like among like, regular and consequently predictable to a certain degree' (Nietzsche 2014, GM II, 2). Nietzsche considers promises to be of central significance because they involve a certain idea of society, a certain idea of language as a tool for social interaction. What is required for promises to make sense is that all participants consider promises as doing the same thing. There is a necessary uniformity to promises.

This uniformity is a task that Nietzsche constantly assigns to language, from the early unpublished essay *On Truth and Lie*, where he considers language as the equating of unequal things through a metaphorical process that moves from nerve stimuli to concepts (from individuality to generality), to *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he considers that the task of language is to make common: 'It does not yet suffice for purposes of understanding one another to merely use the same words: we must also use the same words for the same species of inner experiences, we must ultimately have our experience *in common*' (Nietzsche 2014, BGE 268). In order to share our experiences, Nietzsche argues, we must have the same experiences in common. This commonality is both positive and negative: positive because it allows for communication, negative because it restricts the possibilities of expression to what is already common. Language therefore normalises our experiences to enable us to share them with others.

Because of their social dimension, promises can be viewed as a form of contractual relationship that Nietzsche models on the relation between creditor and debtor central to the first essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. It is only through this 'contract' that promises can be made:

> Of course calling to mind these contractual relationships arouses all kinds of suspicion and resistance against the older humankind that created or permitted them, as one would expect from the start given what was noted earlier. Precisely here *promising* takes place; precisely here what matters is *making* a memory for the one who promises; precisely here, we may suspect, there will be a trove of harsh, cruel, painful things. (Nietzsche 2014, GM II, 5)

What is central in Nietzsche's discussion of the contractual relation exemplified by promises is that it is a human invention; hence, the emphasis on the fact that 'a memory had to be *made*'. Making a promise, in the social context, amounts to signing a contract, which places, Nietzsche argues, the promisor in a position of debt towards the promisee: the promisor owes something to the promisee.

An animal with the right to make promises must therefore be, according to Nietzsche, a 'sovereign individual' who has the freedom and the will to do so. As we will see, this idea of freedom is central to understanding the creative dimension of language at play in poetry. Without such freedom and will, no one can make a promise, no one can place oneself in the situation of a debtor. Having the right to make a promise is a situation of strength, 'the strong and reliable' are 'those who are *allowed* to promise' (Nietzsche 2014, GM II, 2). For Nietzsche, the performative is thus intimately linked to social constructions: saying 'I promise' makes sense only in the context of a society in which promises can be made and kept. The debtor–creditor relationship is an institutional prerequisite to making promises. The sovereign individual with the right to make promises 'possesses his *measure of value*' in the sense that they can evaluate others from their position. They can evaluate as weak those who promise without the right to do so, and as liars those who do not keep their word. In this sense, sovereign individuals are masters of value as they both evaluate and possess their own norm of evaluation. It is this notion of value that is central to speech-acts, to a performative philosophy of language that moves, as Derrida argues, from truth-value to the value of force (Derrida 1988, 13).

This shift from truth-value to the value of force pursues the idea that language is not only describing the world but also playing an active role in shaping it:

> To demand of strength that it not express itself as strength, that it *not* be a will to overwhelm, a will to topple, a will to become master, a thirst for enemies and obstacles and triumphs, is just as absurd as demanding of weakness, that it express itself as strength. A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, of will, of effect—moreover it is nothing but this very driving, willing, effecting, and it can only appear otherwise under the seduction of language (and the basic errors of reason petrified in it), which understands and misunderstands all effecting as conditioned by something that effects, by a 'subject.' For instance, just as ordinary people separate lightning from its flashing and take the latter as its *doing*, as the effect of a subject that is called lightning, so too popular morality separates strength from the expressions of strength, as if behind the strong one there were an indifferent substratum *free to* express strength or not to. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind the doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely tacked on as a fiction to the doing—the doing is everything. (Nietzsche 2014, GM I, 13)

In this famous passage from *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche questions the notion of 'subject' in the idea of action and I will further explore this 'subject' in Chap. 4. Following this idea, recent scholarship has shown the importance of a theory of action in Nietzsche, that Robert Pippin and Aaron Ridley consider to be an expressivist theory (Pippin 2015; Ridley 2018). As I have argued in *A Poetic Philosophy of Language*, this notion of *expressivism* can be opposed to *representationalism* (P. Mills 2022). Although Ridley and Pippin do not connect such an expressivism to the philosophy of language, a relation can be found in the idea that there is an expressive dimension to both the acting subject and the grammatical subject. In contemporary philosophy of language, Huw Price and Robert Brandom among others defend expressivism against representationalism (Brandom 1994; Price 2013). Even though Brandom considers that there are some connections between his pragmatism and romanticism (Brandom 2011, 41), his pragmatic expressivism can be contrasted with Charles Taylor's more romantic expressivism that takes root in the eighteenth-century German philosophy of language, what he calls the 'HHH view' of

meaning, that follows the lineage from Herder to Humboldt and Heidegger. This expressivist framework does not consider language to mirror the world but, as Taylor argues, 'shows us language as the locus of different kinds of disclosure. It makes us aware of the expressive dimension and its importance. And it allows us to identify a constitutive dimension, a way in which language does not only represent, but enters into some of the realities it is "about"' (Taylor 1985, 273). The question of truth, in a Romantic line of thought, is no longer considered as correspondence between a statement and a fact but as disclosure: statements, especially literary and poetic ones, reveal something that is hidden behind the appearances. However, this notion of disclosure is problematic (and we will see that Judith Butler is suspicious of the idea of expression in Chap. 4) insofar as it retains a strong metaphysical dimension: it still suggests that there is an essence to be disclosed behind the appearances. On the contrary, Nietzsche is clear that the dismissal of the metaphysical true world also dismisses the apparent one in the famous chapter of *Twilight of the Idols* 'How the true world finally became a fable'. There is no world of appearances and there is no metaphysical essence to disclose. As we will see throughout the book, contemporary documentary poetry embraces this idea and distances itself from the Romantic idea of disclosure.

In commenting this passage from *The Genealogy of Morals*, Béatrice Han-Pile considers that the usual translation of 'Thun' as 'deed' is misleading and that it should be translated as 'doing', like in the new translation I quoted above. While the word 'deed' suggests a reification of the process, the word 'doing' highlights the processual dimension of action. As Han-Pile further argues, translating 'Thun' by 'doing' rather than 'deed' 'displace[s] the dominant opposition between deeds and events, agents and patients' (Han-Pile 2020, 62). We can thus consider Nietzsche to argue that the metaphysics of the subject is misleading as it considers the doer as distinct from the doing. To the contrary, a theory of action—and a theory of language as a form of action—must consider an expressive *qua* constitutive view of agency, which joins Taylor's expressive view of language. This expressivist view considers that doer and doing shape one another, without any metaphysical privilege given to one or the other. As we will see, this idea is related to Nietzsche's critique of morality, as the metaphysics of the subject presupposes that actions can be good or bad in themselves rather than matter for interpretation.

In this expressivist context, we can consider language to be shaping the world, to be an activity, to be a process of evaluation. If the doing shapes the doer, it means that the utterance shapes the utterer. But this does not mean that the utterance is autonomous, quite to the contrary. There is a co-shaping of utterance and utterer that is dependent on the context of the utterance. The evaluation of a speech-act is not limited to the mere words uttered, but to the context in which these words are uttered. As Austin argues, the meaning of the utterance is related to the 'total situation' in which it appears:

> In conclusion, we see that in order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) as has been done traditionally. We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act—if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. (Austin 1975, 52)

This move from the 'proposition involved' to the 'total situation' is a pragmatic move: the focus shifts from the semantics to the pragmatics of language. Furthermore, it brings to the fore the idea that there can be no semantics without pragmatics.[5] As Austin argues: 'The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating' (Austin 1975, 147). There is no phenomenon outside the total speech-act, which includes not only the words but also the performers and interpreters of these words.

Nietzsche and Austin both agree in considering language to have efficacy, but they do so in two different ways, each casting light on a specific

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[5] Robert Brandom interestingly considers that pragmatics is central to the programme of semantic analysis: 'If that is right, then supplementing the traditional philosophical analytical concern with relations between the meanings expressed by different kinds of vocabulary by worrying also about the relations between those meanings and the use of those vocabularies in virtue of which they express those meanings—as I recommended in my first lecture—is not so much extending the classical project of analysis as it is unpacking it, to reveal a pragmatic structure that turns out already to have been implicit in the semantic project all along. For the conclusion I have been arguing for is that it is because some vocabularies are universal pragmatically elaborated and explicitating vocabularies that semantic analysis in the twentieth-century logicist sense is a coherent enterprise at all' (Brandom 2008, 55).

aspect of language: the institution for Austin, and the rupture from the institution for Nietzsche. The expressive dimension of their philosophies of language reveals that language is not a place of correspondence to a pre-existing world but a place where the world is made and created. Promises are poetic in the sense that they are made and that they produce meaning and significance. This making constitutes the human activity of being in the world. How does this creation work? This book precisely investigates the ways in which poetry and philosophy contribute to understanding this linguistic making of the world.

The questions raised at the beginning of this introduction structure the argument of this book in two parts. First, how can poetry affect and transform OLP from within? Second, how does OLP affect the aims and scope of poetry and poetics? Each chapter explores central theoretical notions through contemporary poetic examples.

The first part, 'Parasites, Viruses, and *Baisetioles*', expands the metaphorical line opened by Austin's characterisation of poetry as parasitical to show how poetry operates as a viral action that disrupts and transforms language from within. It elaborates a poetic philosophy of language that reveals the virality of language at play in poetry and inverts Austin's initial exclusion. Chapter 2 explores the notion of parasitism and its creative potential by considering poetry as a performative *dispositif* that operates within ordinary language. This understanding of poetry breaks down the traditional distinction between the so-called poetic and ordinary language. Chapter 3 aims to overturn parasitism by revaluating Austin's theory and showing how poetry shifts the focus from illocution to perlocution in Manuel Joseph's *Baisetioles*. Placing the emphasis on perlocution rather than illocution highlights the disruptive dimension of poetry that functions as a virus contaminating our uses of language. Chapter 4 expands this virus metaphor and further connects viral poetics to queer theory to show the disruption of traditional categories of thought at play in the works of Paul Preciado, Maggie Nelson, and Kae Tempest.

The second part, 'Performative Poethics,' turns to the ways in which this performative philosophy of language affects the task of poetry and poetics. If the borders between ordinary and poetic are brought down, the poetic acts within the world and hence acquires an ethical dimension. Chapter 5 shifts from Austin's speech-acts to Wittgenstein's language-games to show how forms of language are embedded in forms of life. It

further explores the Wittgensteinian poetics at play in the works of the contemporary French poets and theorists Henri Meschonnic, Emmanuel Hocquard, Christophe Hanna, and Florent Coste. Chapter 6 investigates how this transformative force of poetry operates by focusing on poetic documents—understood here in the sense of poems made with documents—by Caroline Zekri, Frank Smith, and Franck Leibovici. Chapter 7 pursues the exploration of the imbrication of forms of language and forms of life to investigate the ethical force of poetry by focusing on the works of Muriel Pic, Claudia Rankine, and Rosa Alcalá. This interaction between forms of language and forms of life relate to the notion of poethics. The transformation of forms of language (poetics) is inseparable from the transformation of forms of life (ethics). A performative philosophy of language is thus a poethics that aim at the poetic transformation of the world.

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Parasites, Viruses, and *Baisetioles*

Austin's Parasites and the Resistance of Poetry

The performative dimension of language anticipated by Nietzsche and theorised by Austin reveals that our uses of language have effects in the world and that mastering a language is a way of controlling these effects to a certain extent. In Wittgenstein's words: 'To understand a language means to have mastered a technique' (PI 199). Mastering a language is not just a matter of grammar and vocabulary but a pragmatic understanding of how to do things with words. This is Austin's discovery: when we use language, we are not only describing the world but we are doing something to it. And when we do something, we usually do it with a certain intention that is either located in the action itself or a means to do something else (two of the aspects of Elizabeth Anscombe's analysis of intention[1]). I will come back to intentionality in Chap. 3 as it is crucial to understand Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. Both forces however show that our uses of language are doing, or failing to do, what we had intended, with varying degrees of intentionality and control.

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[1] Against a mentalist conception of intention as a mental state preceding the action, Anscombe considers intention to be in the action itself. And she considers the concept of intention to contain three intertwined dimensions: 'Very often, when a man says "I am going to do such-and-such", we should say that this was an expression of intention. We also sometimes speak of an action as intentional, and we may also ask with what intention the thing was done' (Anscombe 2000, 2).

By shifting from the traditional conception of language in terms of reference and correspondence to the notion of performance, Austin operates a philosophical move that seems favourable to poetic uses of language. While traditional philosophy of language struggles with poetry insofar as questions of reference and correspondence miss the point of poetic utterances (Does a poem refer to the world? Is it fictional?), Austin's (and OLP in general) move towards a conception of meaning as use avoids reducing language to a question of reference. And poetry precisely aims to avoid such a reduction, as Mutlu Konuk Blasing argues: 'Poetic forms and schemes maintain a tradition devoted precisely to blocking such referential reduction' (Blasing 2007, 65). According to Blasing, traditional conceptions of language reduce meaning to reference (this is the ostensive definition of language that Wittgenstein criticises in the opening paragraphs of the *Philosophical Investigations*). Poetic utterances, insofar as they do not (always) play the game of reference, show the limits of such a conception of language. Guillaume Artous-Bouvet further argues that in poetry 'language would not be defined as the mere effort of reference, but as the consciousness of this effort'[2] (Artous-Bouvet 2019, 57). The reflexivity at play in poetry undercuts the referential function of language. We could therefore argue that language in poetry—or literature in general—moves from the question of reference to the question of performance, following Johnathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric*: 'Literary discourse can take its place among performative linguistic practices that bring into being that to which they refer or accomplish that of which they speak—creative and world-changing modes of language. The theory of performative language acknowledges this linguistic mode, so central to literary value' (Culler 2015, 126). Literature—and poetry more specifically—is a 'world-changing' mode of language. It does not only aim at describing the world but at acting upon it.

Despite these points of convergence between performance and poetic utterances, the hope for a poetic philosophy of language in Austin quickly dries out as he famously excludes poetic (and other so-called parasitic) utterances from his consideration. Before following the idea that the performative is a model for creative uses of language, we need to understand this exclusion and reintegrate poetic utterances within the framework of OLP.

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[2] My translation: 'Le langage ne se définirait plus alors comme le simple effort de référer, mais comme la conscience de cet effort lui-même.'

Against Austin's rejection of poetic utterances, literary studies have been quick to adopt and adapt speech-act theory to show that there is a performativity of literature. Shoshana Felman for instance analyses Molière's *Dom Juan* to show how the play enacts an opposition between a performative and a constative view of language (Felman 1980, 33). Reintegrating literature within speech-act theory breaks down the distinction between ordinary and literary forms of language by showing the continuity between them. Marie-Louise Pratt suggests that 'a speech act approach to literature offers the important possibility of integrating literary discourse into the same basic model of language as all our other communicative activities' (Pratt 1977, 88). Sandy Petrey also argues in favour of a continuity between literary and ordinary discourse: 'celebrate literariness all you want, but never make the mistake of believing it's found only in literature' (Petrey 1990, 75). Joseph Hillis Miller even considers that Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* is a work of literature, thus reversing Austin's theory: 'Literature or "literariness" appears *in How to Do Things with Words* in at least three distinct ways: in the pervasive irony, in the constant introduction of imaginary examples, and in the frequent use of little fictional dialogues, often presented in indirect discourse, a basic resource of narrative fiction' (Miller 2001, 40). These different attempts all undermine the ground on which Austin's rejection of poetic utterances lies, namely the essential distinction between what would be called 'ordinary language' and what could be called 'poetic language'. On the contrary, they show that there is a continuity between ordinary and poetic uses of language insofar as the creative dimension of language, supposedly characteristic of poetry and literature, pervades our ordinary (and even theoretical) discourse.

Austin's performative philosophy of language builds a pragmatic framework to understand our uses of language. Even though he excludes them, literary and poetic utterances are an undeniable part of our everyday linguistic interactions (and even more so for other kinds of so-called parasitic utterances such as jokes). Following Austin's insight, Stanley Fish argues that ordinary language is extraordinary insofar as it includes elements crucial to literature and poetry: 'What philosophical semantics and the philosophy of speech acts are telling us is that ordinary language is extraordinary because at its heart is precisely the realm of values, intentions, and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature' (Fish 1982, 108). Inverting Austin's exclusion, Fish considers that what lies at the heart of literature is the prime concern of speech-act

theory. We could also invert Fish's consideration by saying that extraordinary language is ordinary insofar as it relies on the same mechanisms. Both reductions however show that the distinction between ordinary and poetic uses of language is not a matter of essence but a pragmatic matter of what we are doing with words. There is no ontological distinction between ordinary and poetic language, as Wittgenstein argues in *Zettel*: 'Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information' (Z 160). The words might be the same, but their use is different. The focus on use precisely highlights the specificities of poetry and shows how these specificities pervade our everyday use of language. In other words, as Richard Poirier argues: 'Literary language is indeed very different from ordinary language, but only as a matter of degree' (Poirier 1993, 141). I would go even further in saying that there is no literary language as such, nor any ordinary language as such, but various uses of language that work in specific contexts. Literary uses of language differ from our everyday uses only in degree and we use some literary devices in our everyday communications, albeit to a lesser extent than in literature.

In this chapter, I explore Austin's parasitism to overturn his initial exclusion. By including poetic uses back into his conception of language, I aim to broaden its scope. To do so, I focus on the ways in which poetry can have an effect in the world and create something new. In the first section of this chapter, I come back to Austin's exclusion of poetry and try to find where his initial exclusion can be overturned. In the second, I read Austin through Michel Serres's conception of the parasite in order to highlight the creative and disruptive powers of parasitism. In the third, I explore these powers in Natacha Guiller's work 'J'ai fait fermer U Express' as a form of creative parasitism. In the fourth and final section, I conceptualise this creative parasitism through Wittgenstein's notion of invention and bring it into relation to what Christophe Hanna calls a 'poetic *dispositif*'.

Austin on Parasitism

As we have seen in the Introduction, early in his investigation of performative utterances, Austin sets a limit to his theory. This limit is that of parasitic utterances:

I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. (Austin 1975, 22)[3]

Austin considers that under certain 'special circumstances', any utterance can become '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void' and he therefore excludes these utterances from his consideration. Examples of such utterances include theatre, poetry, and soliloquy. In these contexts, Austin argues, language is not used seriously. He furthermore describes these parasitic utterances as '*etiolations* of language', as uses of language that are somewhat less powerful than ordinary ones, that lack performative force. However, much remains underdetermined in this passage, and I will focus on two points.

First, what are these special circumstances? How do they differ from normal circumstances? If a performative utterance gains its force from repetition in normal circumstances (and is thus conventionalised, ritualised, or institutionalised), what or who establishes these normal circumstances? If any utterance is potentially subject to parasitism, if 'this applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance', how can we clearly distinguish parasitic (special) from ordinary (normal) circumstances? One of the special circumstances Austin might be pointing towards here is the question of fiction.[4] A fictive promise is just a pretence and does not involve the responsibility of the author or actor on a stage (although it involves the responsibility of the character in the fictional world). However, this question of fiction does not cover poetry as the lyric does not work along the lines of fiction, as Culler argues:

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[3] See also pages 9–10, 104, and 121.

[4] While Austin does not discuss the question of fiction, John Searle analyses it at length in 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse'. This analysis of fiction is however not an analysis of literary uses of language, and he does not believe it is possible to offer a similar analysis of literature: 'In what follows I shall attempt to analyze the concept of fiction but not the concept of literature. Actually, in the same sense in which I shall be analyzing fiction, I do not believe it is possible to give an analysis of literature' (Searle 1975, 320).

It would therefore be wrong to embrace for lyric a notion of performativity correlated with fictionality. The epideictic element of lyric, which certainly involves language as action but not of a fictionalizing kind, is central to the lyric tradition: it includes not just praise or blame but the many statements of value, statements about the world that suffuse lyric of the past and the present, from Sappho's claim that what is most important is what one loves, to Larkin's "They fuck you up, your mum and dad…" Lyrics do not in general performatively create a fictional universe, as novels are said to do, but make claims (quite possibly figurative ones) about our world. (Culler 2015, 128)

The main difference between a novel and lyric poetry is that a novel works according to the premise of fiction. It creates a world and rules that make this world cohere. This world is sometimes very close to ours, sometimes very different from it. Lyric poetry, to the contrary, does not begin with fiction but with performance, with language as action. And this action claims something of and about the world, claims *an* experience of the world, following John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (Dewey 2005). John Gibson and Hannah Kim argue that the lyric subject is precisely the subject of *an* experience: 'In fact, the I of lyric poetry is often nothing more than a center of perceptual, cognitive, and affective *attention*: the subject of *an* experience. It is a self effectively reduced to a perspective' (Gibson and Kim 2021). What matters in lyric poetry is the performative experience of a subject and of the world. As we will see in Chap. 4, the performative thus exceeds linguistic usage to shape the subject and the world. Judith Butler has taken up this idea of the performative and broadened it to cover seemingly extralinguistic factors such as gender and identity. According to her, the subject is performatively constituted through the iterations of language uses and these iterations open the possibility for disruption: 'If every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity, then every repetition requires an interval between the acts, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted' (Butler 1991, 28). The possibility of parasitism does therefore not only affect uses of language but also broader socio-cultural concerns.

Second, if such parasitic utterances are hollow in a peculiar way, what is the particularity of this hollowness? As Miller asks: 'Is there an unpeculiar way to be hollow or void?' (Miller 2001, 34). Can we really say with Austin that such uses of language are not serious? As Jacques Derrida comments in his paper 'Signature, Event, Context', can we really consider

parasitic utterances to be a 'ditch' surrounding ordinary uses? (Derrida 1988, 17). Austin sees parasitism as a danger ('an ill that can infect') from which he needs to protect his theory, transforming it into a kind of fortress excluding what is outside. However, the danger remains rather underdetermined as the particularity of this hollowness is undefined. Against this exclusion, I argue that Austin's theory has a lot to profit from so-called parasitic uses of language.[5] As Geoffrey Hill suggests in commenting on Austin's remarks on poetry: '"Infections" are "ordinary circumstances" and the dyer's hand, steeped in etymology if nothing else, is, by that commonplace craftsmanlike immersion, an infected hand' (Hill 2008, 163). If infections are ordinary, Austin's attempt to protect his theory from parasitic uses of language is bound for failure.

By giving force to parasitic utterances, we can avoid some of the problems raised by Austin's exclusion. The main problem is that by setting parasitic uses against normal uses, he is creating a divide in the uses of language. This divide has been subject to many interpretations, the most famous one being the Derrida-Searle debate in which Derrida criticises Austin for making a metaphysical move by distinguishing normal from parasitic uses while John Searle defends Austin by considering this distinction to be merely strategic (Searle 1977, 205).[6] Two book-length investigations of this divide have been published recently and much remains to be said (Moati 2014; Navarro 2017). Although Derrida misreads Austin on many points, I think that his insistence on the exclusion of parasitic

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[5] Matt Dill offers an insightful analysis of the relation between parasitism and overflow in Nietzsche: 'Accordingly, a host that punishes its parasites for their parasitism (or aims to destroy them) thereby evinces a lack of power on Nietzsche's account. For this intention to punish or destroy one's parasites evinces the recognition of one's relative lack of the power to squander. It shows that the host is not confident in his or her (or their) own surplus of power. The more highly ranking host, on the other hand, will be the host who can affirm those she empowers' (Dill 2017, 210). A host that rejects its parasites is showing its weakness. We can therefore understand Austin's exclusion of parasites as a sign of weakness of his theory. Reintegrating and affirming the parasites is a way of strengthening Austin's conception of language.

[6] The term 'divide' that I use here is also meant to suggest that the Derrida-Searle debate must be inscribed in the broader 'analytic-continental' divide that has shaped the twentieth-century philosophical landscape (and to some extent still does). While most agree that neither analytic nor continental philosophy can be adequately defined, the divide still remains effective in regard to professionalisation and although more and more work is being made at the intersection of these fields, dialogue is not always at work (Critchley 1997; Glendinning 2006; Glock 2008; Vrahimis 2013).

utterances is important. I am not saying that parasitic utterances should be considered more central than ordinary ones, as Searle believes Derrida to be doing, but that the whole ordinary/parasitic distinction needs to be left aside. Derrida and Searle misunderstand each other, and both misunderstand Austin: the former by attributing Austin a negative theory, the latter by attributing him a positive theory.[7]

One of the reasons for this mutual failure of understanding lies in the role Derrida and Searle attribute to language. While Derrida sees the notion of force as something like a naturalised Nietzschean will to power (and in this sense, Derrida fails to see the performative dimension of language in Nietzsche, as mentioned in the Introduction), Searle understands force in a much more technical way, as something like the intention behind the speech-act. In a sense, Derrida focuses on perlocutionary force while Searle follows Austin in his interest in illocutionary force. We will see in Chap. 3 that Austin's lack of interest in perlocution mirrors his exclusion of poetic utterances, but for now let us explore how we can follow Derrida to rehabilitate parasitic utterances. Indeed, if we are to consider poetic utterances seriously in the framework of OLP, we need to reconsider Austin's parasitism.[8]

In the Derrida-Searle debate, I believe that a specificity of French language adds a layer of misunderstanding and complexity: parasite in French also means 'static'. This supplementary meaning of parasite in French is central to Derrida's claim as he uses it to connect the notion of parasitism

[7] Nancy Bauer, for instance, argues that Austin 'is primarily interested not in producing a viable theory of linguistic competence or a description of the conventions and quasi-conventions that govern illocution in natural language but in drawing our attention to the human capacity to make various commitments to and in the presence of others' (Bauer 2015, 95). In this sense, we should not consider Austin's view of language as a theory but rather as a method that brings our attention to the ways in which we use language and the consequences of this use to a form of philosophical therapy, to borrow Wittgenstein's words (PI 133).

[8] Christopher Ricks discusses this matter of the seriousness of poetry in relation to Hill's criticism of Austin: 'But Austin was wrong—and Hill's stringency is the more telling because there can be no doubt of his brooding respect for so much in Austin—to speak as if the difference in question came down to a matter of the serious or (Austin's prophylactic quotation marks) of the "serious"' (Ricks 1992, 298). Maximilian de Gaynesford offers an insightful reading of Austin and the 'non-seriousness' of poetry, claiming that one of the benefits of 'non-seriousness' lies in the absence of commitment and responsibility. 'Non-seriousness' would therefore not be a criticism of poetry saying that it is just a joke but a condition of the possibility of speaking as a poet (de Gaynesford 2009). However, poetic license does not always (and often fails to) save poets from their claims.

to that of communication, a meaning that remains alien to Searle's reading. This focus on communication in turn brings Derrida to misread Austin's notion of force as similar to force in physics, thus naturalising the notion of force (Derrida 1988, 1). But there is also a positive dimension to Derrida's reading: the parasite *qua* noise that disrupts communication becomes an active (disruptive-creative) element that modifies what is communicated. In this activity, the parasite gains performative force: the parasite is doing something with and to language.

While Derrida might be going too far in his criticism of Austin, I think he points out an important aspect. Separating normal from parasitic uses is never an innocent move or even a mere strategic one. This exclusion creates a picture of language that is divided and that fails to account for creative uses of language. Stanley Cavell attempts to save Austin from Derrida's criticism by showing that the distinction is not between ordinary and poetic language, but between ordinary language and a form of ideal or formalised language defended by the logical positivists for instance:

> Derrida's deconstructive objective is the metaphysical voice, I mean the voice of metaphysics, philosophy's hoard; whereas the voice Austin and Wittgenstein call on in asking their interlocutors to say what they say, to arrogate our voices if they dare, they call the voice of the everyday or the ordinary. They call it this—thus contextually defining what they mean by the ordinary—precisely to *contrast* their appeal with the appeal to metaphysics. The other running contextual definition they give of the ordinary contrasts, in a different spirit, ordinary language with formalized language (say, mathematical logic). (That in literary studies Austin's ordinary language is instead thought to be contrasted with literary language means to me that Austin has not there been received. This is not to be taken to mean that I believe he is sufficiently received in philosophical circles.) Derrida is every bit as opposed—of course in his way—to the metaphysical voice as Austin and Wittgenstein are. (Cavell 1994, 62)

According to Cavell, Derrida joins Austin and Wittgenstein in the idea that philosophy should avoid falling into the traps of the metaphysical voice. For Austin, this avoidance of metaphysics also goes with an avoidance of formalisation. The central opposition would therefore not be between ordinary and literary language but between ordinary and metaphysical or formalised language. This kind of ideal language is a form of idle language that Wittgenstein criticises as causing philosophical problems insofar as they 'arise when *language goes on holiday*' (PI 38). The

language of metaphysics is an example of such an idle language, a language that is not in use. What matters for Wittgenstein is whether language has a function in a language-game or whether it is running idle. He uses this image repeatedly, to criticise a descriptive conception of language for instance: 'Thinking of a description as a word-picture of the facts has something misleading about it: one tends to think only of such pictures as hang on our walls, which seem simply to depict how a thing looks, what it is like. (These pictures are, as it were, idle)' (PI 291). If we consider descriptions to be mere pictures hanging on walls, they do not have a function because they are not being used for something. They are like a wheel running in neutral: 'a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it is not part of the mechanism' (PI 271). Language uses are part of a mechanism, of an activity, and must therefore have a function in it. But we cannot understand Austin's exclusion along these lines as it seems that parasitic utterances such as jokes and poems have a rather important role to play in our uses of language.

We could nuance this exclusion by going back to Wittgenstein's consideration of poetry in *Zettel*. While the language used in poetry looks like the language of information, it is not playing the same language-game. However, that would mean that Austin is excluding some language-games and considering others as more central. While many attribute a central language-game to Wittgenstein (such as rule-following), he himself avoids attributing any hierarchy between language-games.[9] Considering all language-games as equal to one another is a way towards including parasitic utterances back in the remit of language. Against Austin's exclusion, I aim to include the parasite in a theory of language as it proves to be crucial to understanding the creative powers of language.

SERRES ON THE INVENTIVE PARASITE

While Austin's theory remains a conservative picture of language because of his exclusion of parasitic utterances, Serres's exploration of the concept of parasites helps bringing creativity back into Austin's theory of language. To do so we must abandon the conception of the parasite as passive. The

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[9] For instance, Robert Brandom and Huw Price, who both advocate for a conception of language as expressive rather than descriptive stop following Wittgenstein at some point to consider assertion as the central language-game, which is, as I argue elsewhere, a limit to their expressivism (P. Mills 2022, 61–65).

parasite is not merely feeding off its host—the parasite-host relationship is not one-sided—but the parasite and the host mutually shape one another. Another specificity of the French language can explain this two-sided relationship: in French, both host and guest are *hôte*, thus breaking down the distinction between the two. In this sense, the parasite is also the host, or at least there is no immediate way of knowing whether the *hôte* is a guest or a host. Combined with the abovementioned fact that parasite in French also means 'static', these specificities of the French language (and French thought) help reconceptualising the notion of the parasite in a more positive way.

To describe the structure of parasitism, Serres analyses Jean de Lafontaine's fable 'Le Rat de ville et le rat de champs' that is inspired by Aesop's and Horace's fables. In this fable, and in parasitism in general, each parasite is further parasited by another until the last parasite, noise or static (thus playing on the meaning of parasite in French), brings the whole structure to an end.

> The tax farmer produced neither oil nor ham nor cheese; in fact, he produced nothing. But using power or the law, he can profit from these products. Likewise for the city rat who takes the farmer's leftovers. And the last to profit is the country rat. But we know that the feast is cut short. The two companions scurry off when they hear a noise at the door. It was only a noise, but it was also a message, a bit of information producing panic: an interruption, a corruption, a rupture of information. Was the noise really a message? Wasn't it, rather, static, a parasite? A parasite who has the last word, who produces disorder and who generates a different order. (Serres 2007, 3)

The parasitical structure is a form of cascade in which each parasitical relation is further parasited by another parasite. In Serres's example: the tax farmer is a parasite for the producer and this parasitical relation is parasited by the city rat. This relation is further parasited by the country rat that joins the city rat without knowing the codes of city life. Finally, the parasitical relation between the rats is further parasited by the noise of the tax farmer. Two comments on this structure: first, the roles can be changed as the tax farmer is once parasited and twice parasite. Second, noise is the ultimate parasite: that which brings down communication. This reading comes from the meaning of static that is contained in the French *parasite*:

the parasite is the noise that disrupts communication and prevents the signal from being clearly transmitted and understood.

However, Serres's analysis adds a creative force to the concept of parasitism: the parasite does not only produce disorder (i.e., as a passive disruptive force) but also generates a different order:

> The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he builds a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal. He does not barter; he exchanges money. He wants to give his voice for matter, (hot) air for solid, superstructure for infrastructure. People laugh, the parasite is expelled, he is made fun of, he is beaten, he cheats us; but he invents anew. This novelty must be analyzed. This sound, this aroma, passing for money or roast. (Serres 2007, 35)

There are two sides to the parasite: a destructive one and a creative one. The destructive part represents the abovementioned disruption of communication, the impossibility of transmitting a signal, and the creative part represents this 'new voice' that the parasite adds to the signal, this modification of the transmission that can be meaningful. Serres argues that the creative dimension is perhaps even more fundamental than the destructive one. Parasites can indeed be harmful, but they can also be very beneficial to their hosts.

The parasite's ever-changing role—from parasite to host and back—suggests that the parasitical relation is always present. Michel Deguy relates poetry to the idea of hospitality: 'The principle of poetry is a principle of hospitality. Poetry is the host (of the poem) of the circumstance. What is the circumstance? Such is perhaps the essence of the host: we do not know *who* it is. The host is always unknown, without *identity*'[10] (Deguy 1998, 116). Because the host is always unknown, so is the parasite. But the parasite is always present in the sense that any utterance can become parasitical. The ever-evolving nature of language and literature can be further examined from this perspective of the parasite.[11] The parasitic

[10] My translation: 'Le principe de poésie est principe d'hospitalité. La poésie est l'hôte (du poème) de la circonstance. Quelle est la circonstance ? Telle est peut-être l'essence de l'hôte : on ne sait pas *qui* c'est. L'hôte est toujours inconnu; sans *identité*.'

[11] Anders Gullestad suggests an interesting relation between parasite and minor literature: 'The most interesting similarity, though, is the way in which Serres' definition allows us to more clearly perceive the effects of minor literature: standing in a parasitic relation to a major language, the minor forces it into a state of continual becoming' (Gullestad 2011, 314). The

structure can never be stopped because it is the structure of becoming. If any utterance can be parasitical and if the means to distinguish the parasitical from the ordinary is never completely certain, the parasite is always a possibility and is therefore always present.

Interestingly, this position of the parasite as being always already there is what grants it its power. The parasite is not attacking from the outside nor lying at the centre but occupying the whole environment: 'The parasite gets power less because he occupies the center than because he fills the environment. The grasshopper occupies space, the media, the environment, the milieu—his property because it is the owner who emits an extensive phenomenon in this place' (Serres 2007, 95). The notion of parasite presupposes a host, and this host–guest relationship suggests—if we come back to Derrida—a metaphysical dualism. We have seen that Serres's account of parasitism downplays this metaphysical dualism by showing that the positions are interchangeable (because there is no difference between host and guest in French): parasites are always there and they are not an external 'other'. As Sean Braune argues in his study of language parasites: 'The very idea of a parasite conveys an ontology and an embodiment that is paradoxical, liminal, and aporic. The concept of the parasite bridges the boundaries between self and other because for the parasite there is no inside or outside: a parasite is both in the host, in the self, and in the other; as well, the parasite contains a kind of self that interlinks with the host's self' (Braune 2017, 52). The parasite operates as a limit to the metaphysical dualism between inner and outer, between self and other, between host and guest. It creates a form of intertwining that reveals the interconnections that are always at play within our dualistic concepts. The parasite is therefore neither a ditch surrounding ordinary language, what Austin seems to think, nor the centre and most important aspect of language, as Derrida sometimes seems to think. Parasitism is a function of language that pervades all our uses of language and that is always present at least as a possibility. Richard Rorty connects the parasitism of literature to moral parasitism: 'literary interest will always be parasitic on moral interest. In particular, you cannot create a memorable

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parasitic relation forces the major language to evolve continuously due to the pressure brought by the minor literature. In this sense, the parasite brings the host to be in continuous change and thus adds something positive to the host (preventing it from becoming a dead language).

character without thereby making a suggestion about how your reader should act' (Rorty 1989, 167). The parasitism of literature operates within the moral world to make the readers act. The possibility of parasitism is therefore a creative and productive (poetic) one and not one that we must exclude. We must shift from the idea of the passive and negative parasite to a more active and positive one.

NATACHA GUILLER'S SUPERMARKET

The creative parasite represents a disruptive and transformative force. This force operates as the resistance of poetry against attempts to contain its powers or to reduce its capacities. There are two ways of understanding the resistance of poetry, following the two senses of the genitive. We can either understand it in the Romantic and Heideggerian sense of poetic language resisting against instrumental uses of language, thus searching for a language that will disclose something of the essence of the world, or in the sense of a resistance to poetry, to a certain idea of what poetry should be. A strand in contemporary poetry follows the second option by criticising the sacralisation of poetry that is at play in the first option. As Henri Meschonnic argues, one of the problems of poetics is to confuse poetry and the sacred, and to oppose instrumental ordinary language to a programmatic sacred language:

> The immediate effect is to confuse poetry and the sacred. Because the union of words and things is the definition of the sacred in the terms of the sign. The more poetry is poeticized and opposed to the instrumentalism of so-called ordinary language (typical proposition: language *is used* to communicate), the more it is sacralised and taken for a substitute of the sacred, and the more it inscribes itself in the sign and accomplishes and reinforces the scheme of the sign. […] And as soon as poetry is confused with the sacred, it is lost. It accomplishes a programme.[12]

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[12] My translation: 'L'effet immédiat est de confondre la poésie et le sacré. Car l'union des mots et des choses est la définition du sacré, dans les termes du signe. Plus la poésie est poétisée et opposée à l'instrumentalisme du langage dit ordinaire (proposition témoin: le langage *sert à* communiquer), plus elle est sacralisée et prise pour un substitut du sacré, et plus elle ne fait que s'inscrire dans le signe et accomplir, renforcer, le schéma du signe. […] Et dès que la poésie est confondue avec le sacré, elle est perdue. Elle accomplit un programme' (Meschonnic 1995, 126).

In this sacralisation of poetry, Meschonnic argues, poetry is transformed into an essence and loses its connection to the world. Poetry in this sacralised sense is a metaphysical enterprise that removes poets from the everyday world and weakens their power. Against this powerlessness, Meschonnic argues that 'the poem does something. It does something to language and to poetry. It does something to the subject. To the subject that composes it, to the subject that reads it' (Meschonnic 2001, 43).[13] Poetry becomes a transformative experience that affects language and the (writing and reading) subject. In this sense, Meschonnic operates within poetics a shift similar to Wittgenstein's in philosophy when he argues that: 'What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (PI 116).

Wittgenstein's opposition between metaphysics and the ordinary in philosophy mirrors the opposition between Romantic and language poetry. As Jeff Barda argues in his study on contemporary French poetry: 'For the poets studied in this book, the lyric is no longer governed by romantic norms: they reject symbolist and confessional modes of poetic expression in favor of the repurposing of pre-existing textual residues, placing greater emphasis on the workings of language and its effect' (Barda 2020, 308). Against the idea of poetic expression that lies at the heart of Romantic poetry, the contemporary French poets Barda analyses—and the French poets discussed in this book also belong to this tradition— focus on language and the effects of language. There is a performativity of language at play in poetry.

In *Comment une figue de parole et pourquoi*, Francis Ponge explores the shift from the first understanding of the resistance of poetry to the second one as a shift from resistance to non-resistance. He investigates this resistance and non-resistance through the image of the fig, that epitomises his poetics: 'Here is the poetic art of the fig: When the resistance, or rather the non-resistance of the sentence, the words, at last ceases and that the thickness of compacted speech, pushed to its limits is cut, incised, crossed'[14] (Ponge 1997, 65). Against a language (a poetry) that resists understanding and requires interpretation to find a hidden meaning, Ponge argues

[13] My translation: 'Je suis donc obligé de dire que le poème fait quelque chose. Il fait quelque chose au langage, et à la poésie. Il fait quelque chose au sujet. Au sujet qui le compose, au sujet qui le lit.'

[14] My translation: 'Voici l'art poétique de la figue : Quand la résistance, ou plutôt la non-résistance de la phrase, des mots, enfin cesse et que l'épaisseur de paroles tassée, poussée dans ses derniers retranchements est coupée, incisée, franchie.'

for a language that offers no resistance, like a fig under one's teeth. This does not mean that his poetry is easier to understand, but that the place of difficulty has shifted. Language in his poetry is not resisting by being too complex, but by seeming too simple. As Jean-Marie Gleize argues: 'Everything happens as if the maximal literality, i.e., "readability," caused or could cause a maximal unreadability, a maximal immediate inadmissibility'[15] (Gleize 2015, 448). Without resistance, there is no affordance on which to grasp, there is no salient feature to which the reader can hold on, there is no entry point to an endless hermeneutic process. The resistance of poetry therefore lies in the fact that it offers no resistance and that it refuses to be immediately grasped as a symbol for further interpretation.

Poetry challenges the traditional categories of thought, and hence also the category of poetry. This resistance to poetry becomes a way of creating and finding new poetic forms. A poem in this sense might not be immediately identifiable *as* a poem (in the sense of a Wittgensteinian 'seeing-as') because there is no model for comparison. Poetry resists the very category of poetry. However, some contextual elements can bring its poetic dimension to the fore, be it the inscription in a volume of poetry, a presentation in a poetic context, or even a poetic intention. Such a view follows Arthur Danto's analysis and conception of the artworld: like a ready-made in art in which an ordinary object becomes artistic because of its inscription in the artworld, a poem transforms ordinary language in poetry.[16] It is this transformative force that I consider central in poetics as a generation of significance. This significance does not only concern linguistic meaning but also involves existential and ethical dimensions that I will explore in the second part of this book.

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[15] My translation: 'Tout se passe comme si le maximum de littéralité, c'est-à-dire au fond de "lisibilité", entraînait, ou pouvait entraîner, un maximum d'illisibilité, d'irrecevabilité immédiate.'

[16] Danto's *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* suggests that ready-mades bring a certain attention to how the artworld functions: 'And in the end this transfiguration of a commonplace object transforms nothing in the artworld. It only brings to consciousness the structures of art which, to be sure, required a certain historical development before that metaphor [of the Brillo-box-as-work-of-art] was possible' (Danto 1981, 208). Gaëlle Théval elaborates a concept of 'ready-made poetry' in reference to ready-mades in art: 'Le point commun à la plupart des approches littéraires du ready-made, qui explique en partie son identification respective au collage et au plagiat, vient du fait que ces pratiques y sont envisagées comme des techniques d'écriture quasi similaires car fondées sur une opération de base commune, l'importation' (Théval 2015, 79).

Natacha Guiller is a French poet and artist who explores the language of the ordinary in 'U Express', a work initially published in the poetry journal *Nioques*. As Figs. 2.1 and 2.2 show, 'U Express' consists in interventions on Google reviews on a supermarket (Guiller 2019, 8–9). The poetic process is simple: she copied the Google reviews and commented on them. As we will see, these comments can take various forms that poetically play with the initial reviews. It is not only the publication in a poetry journal that gives a poetic dimension to her text, but also the idea of working on an ordinary text to make visible affordances, to make salient certain poetic features. These affordances can be narrative, rhetorical, or even poetic in the broad sense of imaginative. Her interventions on the Google reviews are a form of invention: poetry is as much a matter of inventing new uses of language as it is a way of intervening on actual uses of language. Poetry thus moves from the Romantic ideal of creation to the more pragmatic idea of intervention.[17] Rorty analyses this shift from romanticism to pragmatism as a move away from the Romantic ideal of disclosure: 'Instead of saying that the discovery of vocabularies could bring hidden secrets to light, [Nietzsche and William James] said that new ways of speaking could help get us what we want. Instead of hinting that literature might succeed philosophy as discoverer of ultimate reality, they gave up the notion of truth as a correspondence to reality' (Rorty 1981, 165). The romantic ideal of disclosure still relies on the idea that there is a hidden reality or essence to which literature, poetry, and the arts in general can give access—thus remaining within the framework of correspondence, albeit a slightly altered one. To the contrary, pragmatism suggests that there is nothing to be searched behind what is under our eyes, that, as Wittgenstein says, 'everything lies open to view' (PI 126).

Guiller's interventions take various forms, but they all aim to comment, specify, and evaluate some aspects of the Google reviews. Her work thus becomes a form of meta-review that disrupts the ordinary function of the reviews. Guiller's poetic act shifts the attention to the textuality of the reviews or, in Wittgenstein's words, uses the language of information

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[17] Linda A. Kinnahan uses the notion of lyric intervention to connect experimental poetic practices to feminism. The intervention in language becomes a social intervention: 'Fostering the power of poetry's intervention into social norms, practices, and ideas, many contemporary women poets have labored to make explicit the link between poetic expression and social change that carries forward the work of innumerable earlier poets, whose social motivations may or may not have overtly charged their poetry but whose work nonetheless unsettles the structures of gender marking their historical moments' (Kinnahan 2004, 3).

Avis consommateurs #2

Anne-Charlotte Cortin
2 avis
il y a 2 mois ← février 2019
Bien penser à vérifier les dates car beaucoup de produits sont périmés (blancs de poulets, conserves, etc etc).
Et quand on leur signale à la caisse, ils les remettent en rayons (loin de la qualité des Super U de province, c'est
bien dommage...). Sans compter les excrements de souris sur les étagères....
1

Des Al
3 avis · 2 photos   ≈ 2018
il y a un an   avril 2018
Fuyez !   ⚠ CAUSES ? incomplet
1

Elsa Bartolone   merci Elsa BARTOLONE
1 avis
il y a 3 semaines ← on s'est peut-être croisés
Des crottes de souris partout sur les produits et étagères , les emballages des produits grignotés, manque
d'hygiène total scandaleux pour les clients et les personnes travaillant la bas !
J'aime
   moi aussi

Emmanuel FRELON   Emmanuel FRELON AVAIT DÉJÀ REPÉRÉ LE SCANDALE
1 avis
il y a 10 mois   juin 2018
Ce magasin devrait fermer et être traité...crottes de souris et odeur très forte d'urine...dans le coin des
viennoiseries et des gâteaux apéritifs...boîtes grignotees par les rongeurs... horrible...
3

Gabriel Gorea   (→ complice ??
1 avis
il y a 2 ans
(Traduit par Google) Ambiance!   "quand le chat n'est pas là [...]"
(Original)
Atmosfera!

8

Fig. 2.1   Natacha Guiller, 'J'ai fait fermer U Express', p. 8

Lolo Jam
Local Guide · 23 avis · 93 photos
il y a un an
Qui est client et qui est employé car pas la place pour circuler
1
ↄ et qui grignote les emballages Lolo Jam ?

Loulou C
Local Guide · 84 avis · 20 photos
il y a un an
Salade perimee toujours dans les rayons et prix des fruits et legumes exhorbitant et qui en plus sont de piètre qualite photos prises le 28
3
— même réflexe que moi – Loulou C., qui avez-vous fait des clichs des salades ?

Nath
Local Guide · 160 avis · 432 photos
il y a un an   avril 2018 [poisson d'avril ?]
Un supermarché propre avec pas mal d'achalandage. Entre 18 et 20 h il y a pas mal de monde. Magasin propre et bien entretenu. Caissières plus ou moins agréables selon sur laquelle on tombe. Pas d'avis sur les fruits et légumes car je vais au primeur.
J'aime

Nemezis .
Local Guide · 93 avis · 3 photos
il y a 3 mois   janvier 2019
(Traduit par Google) RAS   ⌁ SOURIS
(Original)
R.A.S   ⟶ mouse
J'aime

Roberte Crozet
1 avis
il y a 3 mois   janvier 2019
qui est coupable ????
Les rayons sont tous quasiment vides ????
Je reviendrai demain
1   → procrastination quant à la réalité de ce qui se passe

Tiphanie THOMAS
Local Guide · 32 avis
il y a 7 mois   FAIT
septembre 2018 →
Tablettes de chocolats grignotées par des rongeurs   Hôtesse pas plus étonnée que ça. D'où l'avis plutôt négatif.
ji n'ai pas encore étudié ce rayon, Tiphanie J j'irai constater
CONSTAT   CONSEQUENCE
Outre ce désagrément, déjà rencontré auparavant les produits de base (farine, beurre, lait...) sont corrects en termes de qualité. Achetant mes légumes au marché je n'ai pas d'avis. Idem pas d'avis sur les plats préparés, salades et surgelés.
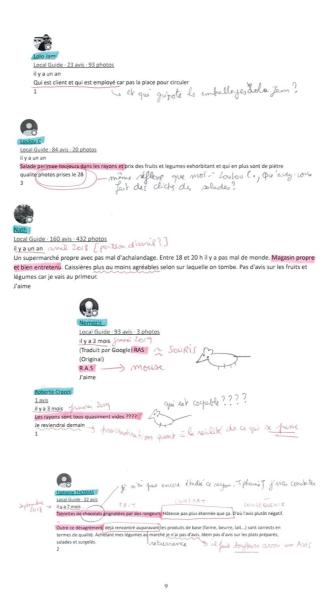2   récurrence   → il faut toujours avoir un AVIS

9

Fig. 2.2   Natacha Guiller, 'J'ai fait fermer U Express', p. 9

outside of the language-game of giving information.[18] I will focus on three aspects of Guiller's interventions:

1. The temporal dimension of the reviews only makes sense in relation to an act of reading. 'Two months ago', 'One year ago', and so on are deictics that have no referent once we move out of the act of reading. While it is crucial to know if a review is recent or old to make one's opinion on a place, these indications become completely blurred if extracted from their context of reading. To counter this imprecision, Guiller indicates that 'Two months ago' corresponds to 'February 2019'. However, the imprecision of the deictic, to the contrary of a fixed date, also allows for speculations that would be impossible with a specific date. 'Three weeks ago' allows Guiller to suppose 'we might have crossed each other's path', 'One year ago' corresponds to 'April 2018' and allows to speculate that it is an 'April's fool', whereas exact dates could have infirmed (or confirmed) these suppositions.

2. What brings the supposition of April's fool is the fact that the review praises the cleanliness of the supermarket, while all the other reviews point out the lack of hygiene and the presence of 'parasites', namely rats. Alongside the temporal indication suggesting that the situation has been lasting for quite some time, we realise that these reviews have only little impact on reality. They might reflect the people's impression, but they produce no action, effect no change. At most, these reviews will bring the readers to do their groceries elsewhere. The evaluation does not affect the reality of the supermarket. In this sense, these reviews remain a mere representation of reality, while poetic work precisely aims at transforming this reality.

3. This transformation takes place with a second evaluation. There are therefore two levels of evaluation: the original reviews that evaluate the reality of the supermarket (but become the mere reflection of it)

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[18] The notion of attention is crucial to understanding poetry. Lucy Alford, for instance, considers the notion of attention to be at the centre of poetic practices: 'But the poetic also moves beyond the collection of loosely related entities convention has called poems. In this second sense of poetic attention, I intend the first term to modify the latter, suggesting modes of attention that function poetically: attentional acts and modalities that are fundamentally noninstrumental, not subjugated to the conveyance or extraction of information, and not in the service of rhetorical persuasion' (Alford 2020, 8).

and Guiller's evaluation of these reviews that aims not only to reflect them but also to transform them. We can find explicit evaluations with respect to Tiphanie Thomas's review for which Guiller makes the logical structure explicit: 'FACT – CONSTATATION – CONSEQUENCE' or through the mention 'incomplete' next to Des Al's review.

This notion of evaluation opens a perspective on Guiller's broader project, 'J'ai fait fermer U Express', a poetic investigation of which her work on Google reviews is just one part.[19] This project was first published as a blog post on the website: 'Evaluation Générale. L'Agence de Notation comme dispositif artistique'[20] that is supported by ArTeC (Paris 8) and that presents itself as a 'Research notebook dedicated to the modalities of intervention of research-creation on the generalization of evaluation'.[21] Evaluation is a central component of poetry: poetry being the subject of evaluation (good or bad poetry) and the evaluating act itself (that is poetry!). As Charles Stevenson argues in 'On "What is a poem?"', the term 'poem' can be used in different ways. One of them is evaluative: saying that such a text is a poem involves the question of value. In such cases, Stevenson argues: '"What is a poem?" asks about the sources of poetic value, or more generally, about the standard by which poetry is to be judged. The word "poem" is then taken to have a sense restricted to "good" poems, and hence (as I see it) a sense that has an active, laudatory, emotive meaning' (Stevenson 1957, 360). Considering a text as a poem is therefore a way of evaluating it positively. However, contemporary practices shift the focus of attention and revaluate the notion of evaluation. The evaluative practice no longer aims at finding characteristics to evaluate a poem, but more pragmatically aims to assess the effects of poetry. In this context, Guiller's remarks on Google reviews are set in a broader narrative that shows not only a resistance to poetry, namely that poetry needs not to be limited to verse and rhymes, but also a resistance of poetry that acts in the world to transform it. These reviews become proofs or evidence to pursue the investigation.

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[19] https://archives-sng.blogspot.com/2019/05/jai-fait-fermer-u-express-extrait.html.
[20] https://evalge.hypotheses.org.
[21] My translation: 'Carnet de recherche dédié aux modalités d'interventions de la recherche-création sur la généralisation de l'évaluation.'

The broader work consists in an investigation of the supermarket reviewed by Google users. The title of the post 'J'ai fait fermer U Express', indicates the result of her investigation: namely the (temporary) closing of the supermarket for sanitary reasons. During Guiller's investigation, we discover some aspects of her life, regarding her nutrition issues notably. It is among other things because of these issues that the sanitary situation of the supermarket affects her. We have seen that Google reviews have no effect on the reality of the supermarket but were a simple reflection of it: rather than resisting, they reflect. Guiller's intervention in these reviews adds a poetic component. While these reviews are a mere representation of the supermarket, Guiller's poetic intervention transforms them. This transformation affects the reality of the supermarket, thus establishing a parallel in Guiller's work: the poetic intervention in the ordinary reality of the Google reviews becomes a poetic intervention in the ordinary reality of the supermarket. Following the idea that reviews have taken the place of reality, an intervention in the reviews becomes an intervention in reality. Guiller's work shows the resistance of poetry in action: through the crossing of the poetic (intervention in the reviews and in reality) and the investigation (autobiographical insofar as the author is the detective), her work becomes the support for a resisting poetic production.

The notion of resistance reveals the diverse modalities of poetic production. This resistance needs not only to be crossed, as Ponge suggests, because there is no hidden kernel to discover after the crossing. As we have seen, Ponge moves from a resistance of poetry (difficulty to read poems) to a resistance to poetry (opposition to a preconceived idea of poetry).[22] In this context, poetic uses of language do not resist by their obscurity or hermeticism, but by a certain literality in which banality renders the text unreadable or hard to understand. With this banality, there are no criteria to make the evaluation 'This is poetry!' Except perhaps, and

[22] The resistance of poetry I locate in Ponge's works is opposed to Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of the resistance of poetry in which 'Poetry makes the easiness of the difficult, of the absolutely difficult. In easiness, difficulty yields. But that does not mean that it is flattened. This means that it is laid down, presented for what it is and that we are engaged in it. Suddenly, easily, we are in the access, i.e., in the absolute difficulty, "heightened" and "moving"' (My translation: 'La poésie fait la facilité du difficile, de l'absolument difficile. Dans la facilité, la difficulté cède. Mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle est aplanie. Cela veut dire qu'elle est posée, présentée pour ce qu'elle est, et que nous sommes engagés en elle. Soudain, facilement, nous sommes dans l'accès, c'est-à-dire dans l'absolue difficulté, "élevée" et "touchante"') (Nancy 1997, 10).

that is what I take Guiller to be doing, that there is poetry when there is resistance: poetry is an act of resistance. Poetry is an act that resists reading, that resists poetry itself, that resists the order of things.

POETRY AS PERFORMATIVE *DISPOSITIF*

Guiller's poetic work moves away from the idea that poetry is watching the world from the top of its ivory tower. Poetry is concerned with reality and goes down into the supermarket. In this descent, poetry acquires another dimension, that of a *dispositif* that aims at having effects in the world. As we will see, a *dispositif* (device or apparatus in English) configures elements in view of producing a certain effect. In Pierre Vinclair's words, we must look at the 'effort' that poetic texts ask from readers, we must investigate what we can do with texts in the same way Austin reflects on what we can do with words (Vinclair 2019, 3). To consider poetry as a performative *dispositif*, one must move away from Austin's conservative picture of language and towards a more inventive, creative, or poetic one. As Hanna suggests, in such a pragmatic poetics poetry becomes:

> A mode of social action especially focused on information and the great figures of the ambient spectacle but ceasing to occupy a position of direct confrontation against the power of media. It would follow the hope of constituting special forms of epistemic competences that could be locally applicable in the interstices of the domains crisscrossed by the power *dispositifs* rather than exploit the idea of a struggle by aggressive misappropriations and the manipulation of presumed automatic behaviours of the public.[23] (Hanna 2010, 170)

Hanna thus relocates poetics within ordinary social life and considers poetry as a resistance to propaganda and ideology. Poetry does not function as a direct confrontation but as a way of constituting special forms of attention to transform the system from within.

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[23] My translation: 'Un mode d'action sociale, concentré en particulier sur l'information, sur les grandes figures du spectacle ambiant, mais cessant d'occuper une position d'affrontement direct contre les puissances médiatiques, et qui exploiterait moins l'idée d'une lutte par détournements agressifs, manipulation de présumés comportements automatiques du public, que l'espoir de constituer des formes spéciales de compétences épistémiques localement applicables dans les interstices des domaines quadrillés par les dispositifs de pouvoir.'

In opposition to Austin on that matter, Wittgenstein considers creative and inventive uses of language to be as crucial as existent ones: 'That is also why our method is not merely to enumerate actual usages of words, but rather deliberately to invent new ones, some of them because of their absurd appearance' (BB, p. 28). While Austin seems to correspond to the first part of the sentence, 'enumer[ating] actual usages of words', Wittgenstein focuses on 'invent[ing] new ones'. In this opposition resides a different approach to poetic and creative uses of language: excluded by Austin, included by Wittgenstein. Rather than considering these views as contradictory, I believe that they complement each other, and that Wittgenstein offers a way to reintroduce creativity within Austin's theory.

An interesting insight into this inventive potential of language can be found in remark 492 from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

> To invent a language could mean to invent a device for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game.
>
>   Here I am saying something about the grammar of the word 'language', by connecting it with the grammar of the word 'invent'. (PI 492)

This remark considers two meanings of 'to invent a language' that reveal the connection between language and invention.[24] The first meaning is akin to inventing a device serving a 'particular purpose' and consistent with the laws of nature. This device does not modify our understanding of language or the world as it complies with its pre-existing rules. Inventing a device for a specific purpose, say a sewing machine, does not modify the laws of sewing, but just makes it easier. In linguistic terms, when I invent a sentence, I am not modifying the laws of language but using them to say

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[24] José Medina relies on PI 492 to explore the necessity of inventing new language-games: 'These alternative contexts may not always be available; they may require inventing new language-games or radically transforming existing practices until they acquire a new face. Indeed Wittgenstein often talks about the invention of new language-games (e.g., PI §492) and of the possibility of replacing old games with new ones (e.g., PI §64). He emphasizes that language-games are constantly fluctuating and that this fluctuation allows for radical changes in which our practices can be twisted, bent, and rearranged beyond recognition. It is purely arbitrary to insist that these transformations always have to be understood as internal changes or reforms of the same practice. This insistence is just an arbitrary imposition of a priori constraints on our conceptualizations of the evolution of linguistic practices' (Medina 2004, 568–69).

something new (or at least something that I have not said before and that potentially no one has ever said before). Such a device does not radically modify our being in the world or our understanding of language. The purpose pre-exists the device and the device serves this purpose in the best possible way.

The second meaning is akin to the invention of a game. What happens in inventing a game is that we create new rules and new moves and therefore modify the scope of what is allowed (and hence possible). Oskari Kuusela discusses these two senses of inventing a language in terms of arbitrariness: 'The two senses of inventing a language, to which he refers, make manifest two different aspects of the concept of language: (i) language as analogous to games and defined by arbitrary rules and (ii) language as analogous to instruments that serve particular external purposes, i.e. not arbitrary but determined, for instance, by their effects' (Kuusela 2006, 329). While the device built for a specific purpose is not arbitrary (in the sense that it is determined by the purpose), the invention of language akin to a game is purely arbitrary. This arbitrariness is a mark of independence, and the creation of new games expands the scope of language. Such an invention of language can be considered an invention of parasitic uses of language in Austin's framework.

By reading Wittgenstein's use of the word 'device' (*Vorrichtung*) in an anachronical way, we can add another layer of interpretation and connect it to the French theory of the *dispositif*. The two meanings of inventing a language provide two understandings of the notion of *dispositif*: a normative and repressive one, which relates to Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon and Giorgio Agamben's force of subjectivation, and a creative or affective one, which relates to Jean-François Lyotard's *dispositif pulsionnel*. This opposition is only schematic as Foucault's understanding of *dispositif* is much more complex, but it provides a way of relating the *dispositif* to Wittgenstein's two manners of invention in language. I will not elaborate on Foucault's theory here but only use it in opposition to Lyotard's. For Foucault, a *dispositif* consists in 'strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge' (Foucault 1980, 196) and, according to Agamben, this process leads the *dispositif* to be a force that we need to recover (Agamben 2009, 24). One way of overcoming these repressive strategies and recovering a creative force can be found in Lyotard's *dispositif pulsionnel*.

The libidinal dimension of Lyotard's *dispositif* counters the power of control and becomes a transformer of energy, creating meanings or, in a

Wittgensteinian interpretation, creating a game, creating rules and uses: 'What we have here is a linguistic dispositif, i.e. an arrangement that allows for *libido to be connected to language* (support, surface of inscription)'[25] (Lyotard 1994, 121). With this connection between libido and language, Lyotard's *dispositif* transforms libidinal energy and produces 'effects of meaning'. In other words, there are two important aspects of the *dispositif* for Lyotard: first, as it is a linguistic *dispositif*, it connects libido and language against the idea that language is alien to libidinal energy (the tension between the 'rationality' of language and the 'irrationality' of emotion). This connection produces meaning in the naming of affects. Second, the *dispositif* circumscribes a linguistic modality that transforms libidinal energy into linguistic energy and, in turn, into affects, emotions, and so on. This transformation of libidinal energy into meanings produces what Lyotard calls 'intensities': 'The "intensities" are what imports, not the meaning' (Lyotard 2020, chap. 7). Indeed, this producing device is an affirmative power that however 'always disrupts [libidinal intensities] until dysfunction'[26] (Lyotard 1994, 160). The *dispositif* distributes libidinal intensities but, through this distribution, it also brings them to dysfunction, it operates as a parasitic disturbance. As Stuart Sim argues, Lyotard's focus on the libidinal aspects of *dispositif* opens the space for creative freedom against Foucault's repressive strategy.[27]

We can thus consider poetry as a linguistic *dispositif* that distributes libidinal intensities by bringing them to dysfunction, to the disruption of communication (parasite *qua* static), and that reveals the failure of meaning. Lyotard's *dispositif* is a meaning-producing game that follows Wittgenstein's second form of invention. It is primarily in this sense of *dispositif* that poetry can arise: a *dispositif qua* game opens a space of

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[25] My translation: 'On a là un dispositif langagier, c'est-à-dire un agencement qui permet de brancher la libido sur le langage (support, surface d'inscription).'

[26] My translation: 'formation toute positive, affirmative, de distribution des intensités libidinales, mais les détraquant toujours jusqu'au dysfonctionnement.'

[27] 'Foucault certainly emphasises this repressive aspect of the phenomenon, and Lyotard is very aware of it too, hence his concern to draw our attention to the limitations that all dispositifs share. Libidinal Economy is an exasperated response to how we have allowed certain dispositifs to control our thought, with Lyotard repeatedly making the point that libidinal energy makes a mockery of all such pretensions to regulation. Given that any power the dispositif has is illusory, we have far more freedom within it than we tend to believe; freedom to construct oppositional little narratives, for example' (Sim 2011, 56).

expression for creativity, a space for poetry to occupy. The two conceptions of *dispositif* mirror Austin's distinction between ordinary (normative) and parasitic (poetic) uses of language. The common term '*dispositif*' however shows that both ordinary and parasitic uses are doing something, that both are performative. Reading these two conceptions of *dispositif* through Wittgenstein's remark reveals that they are two sides of the same process. As we will see in Chap. 3, this duality reflects Austin's distinction between a controllable and institutionalised illocution and an unpredictable perlocution.

This idea of *dispositif* can be related to the notion of configuration that Antonio Rodriguez builds from Wolfgang Iser's reading theory. As Iser argues, configuration is a 'perceptual *noema* [that] therefore links up the signs, their implications, their reciprocal influences, and the reader's acts of identification, and through it the text begins to exist as a gestalt in the reader's consciousness' (Iser 1978, 121). A text would be a configuration of these various elements that produce a signification. Following traditional hermeneutics, Rodriguez argues that reading goes through a first layer of sense to reach an event of signification (Rodriguez 2003, 73). Similarly, Deguy considers poetry to be a matter of disposition and operation that is at play in all language-games (Deguy 1998, 27). But the theory of the *dispositif* departs from the notions of configuration or disposition insofar as it moves away from hermeneutics and towards pragmatics, insisting on the idea of functioning, as Hanna suggests in *Nos dispositifs poétiques*:

> A dispositif is an arrangement of patched-up pieces of different nature that are composed with the aim of producing an effect, of 'functioning.' […] In a dispositif, the notion of *functioning* becomes more important than those of 'signification,' 'representation,' and 'expression.' Although built *ad hoc*, a dispositif can, as Ponge suggests it, be compared to a 'tool.' The disposital effect above all a practice and aims at improving conditions, at facing a danger.[28] (Hanna 2010, 14–15)

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[28] My translation: 'Un dispositif est un agencement de pièces rapportées, de natures différentes, composées dans le but de produire un effet, de "fonctionner". […] Dans un dispositif, la notion de fonctionnement devient plus importante que celle de "signification", de "représentation" et d'"expression": bien que monté ad hoc, un dispositif peut, comme le suggère Ponge, être comparé à un "ustensile". L'effet disposital est avant tout pratique et vise à améliorer des conditions, faire face à un "danger"'.

By considering poetry as a *dispositif*, Hanna considers poetry as a process rather than an object. The aim of such a *poetic dispositif* is to reveal what is usually hidden in everyday life. This revelation is not the romantic disclosure of the essence of the world but a more pragmatic attention to features of the world we usually overlook. If the Romantic conception of poetry suggests that it is the genius of the poets that allows them to go beyond appearances to reach the essence of the world, a pragmatic understanding of poetry follows Wittgenstein's idea that: 'The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something a because it is always before one's eyes.)' (PI 129). The distinction between Romantic poetics and pragmatic poetics could thus be seen as the philosophical shift from metaphysics to the ordinary. What matters is no longer the essence of things and words—because this essence can never be determined and searching for it leads to philosophical confusion—but the effects of these things and words.

A poetic *dispositif* aims to bring our attention to these effects, and we could understand it as bringing us to operate a kind of reading-as modelled on Wittgenstein's seeing-as. According to Florent Coste, reading-as provides a middle ground between two pitfalls of literary theory: subjectivism and objectivism. There is a form of stability of the text that avoids placing everything in the reader's subjectivity (a duck-rabbit can be a duck or a rabbit but not something else; a poem can be read in various ways but there are limits) and there is a form of subjectivity that rejects the idea that there is one objective truth to the text (Coste 2017, 319). As we will see in further chapters, this idea of reading-as is an interplay of attention and intention, two notions that connect to more traditional forms of literary criticism. By finding a middle ground between subjectivism and objectivism, reading-as recovers the intention of the reader, but also the intention of the author insofar as a poem appears as an intentional object. Intention is revealed by the practice in which the reader is inscribed.

A poetic *dispositif* reconfigures traditional poetics by placing an emphasis on attention. We must be attentive to what we usually overlook, not because it is hidden behind a veil of appearances but because it lies right before our eyes. As Hanna argues, 'Through its power of re-exposition, any dispositif possesses a reflexive, projective, and critical dimension. […] The creation of a dispositif is a political action, in the sense that it manifests what remains usually invisible in the "order of things"—*unmarked*, in the police sense of the word—, that, therefore, by which this order

holds'[29] (Hanna 2010, 19–20). Against the 'order of the law', the *poetic dispositif* creates a space in which power relations can be revealed and overturned. This notion of *poetic* dispositif thus contrasts with a traditional conception of poetry. According to Laurent Jenny, while traditional poetry adopts a form in order to adapt a situation to it, a poetic *dispositif* is 'an attempt to transmute into a formal necessity the primary clash that motivates speech'[30] (Jenny 1990, 137–38). In this sense, poetic *dispositifs* do not focus on form as preceding poetic utterances but as a consequence of poetic utterances. Guiller's work can be seen as a poetic *dispositif* that aims at producing effects in the world—a parasite for parasites—and expanding the scope of poetry.

The notion of poetic *dispositif* thus shows how poetry can act within the ordinary. Rather than thinking of poetry as formatting the ordinary, a poetic *dispositif* shows that form is the result of poetic experience. In that sense, there is no distinction between ordinary and poetic language, if we understand poetic language as a set of characteristics. What is at play in poetic language is nothing else than what is at play in ordinary language, namely making sense of the world with words. By reintegrating poetic utterances within ordinary language through the notion of *dispositif*, we can now understand how poetic utterances transform the ordinary from within. We will explore this transformative and creative force in the next chapters.

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[29] My translation: 'Par sa puissance de réexposition, tout dispositif possède une dimension réflexive, projective, et critique. […] La création d'un dispositif est une action politique, dans la mesure où elle manifeste ce qui demeure couramment invisible dans "l'ordre des choses"—banalisé, au sens policier du terme—, ce, donc, par quoi cet ordre tient.'

[30] My translation: 'une tentative pour transmuer en nécessité formelle le heurt premier qui est au motif de la parole.'

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Intentional Misfire: From Parasitic Illocution to Viral Perlocutions

The revaluation of the parasite operated in Chap. 2 reveals its inventive and creative dimension as a generator of significance. I pursue this revaluation in this chapter by moving from the parasite to the virus metaphor. This shift might seem minimal if we understand viruses as kinds of parasites, as Michel Serres suggests: 'In the common vicinity of what is called inert and what is called living, a virus reproduces in a parasitic fashion' (Serres 2007, 188). However, there are some differences in the connotations of these words, and I will highlight two. First, a virus needs to operate from within its host and needs healthy cells to contaminate and replicate. A virus therefore has an internal action, whereas the parasite can also work externally. Not all parasites have an external action, but the very mode of replication of viruses points towards a more internal action (pervasive rather than invasive). Considering poetic utterances as parasitical suggests that they lie somewhere outside of language and feed onto it while considering them as viral shows that they operate from within. Relocating the poetic within Austin's framework through perlocution grants it the power to virally affect the performative.

Second, a parasite has a somewhat passive connotation—it is just feeding off its host—while a virus has the more active dimension of replication. We can read this opposition following Gilles Deleuze's notions of active and reactive forces that he elaborates on in his reading of Nietzsche:

> The power of transformation, the Dionysian power, is the primary definition of activity. But each time we point out the nobility of action and its superiority to reaction in this way we must not forget that reaction also designates a type of force. It is simply that reactions cannot be grasped or scientifically understood as forces if they are not related to superior forces—forces of *another type*. The reactive is a primordial quality of force but one which can only be interpreted as such in relation to and on the basis of the active. (Deleuze 1983, 42)

Deleuze opposes active to reactive forces showing that the power of transformation, the 'Dionysian power', is an active force. In this vocabulary, a parasite is reactive insofar as it responds to the host's action, while a virus is active and forces the host to react. Despite these differences, both parasites and viruses can be harmful (negative, destructive) but also beneficial (positive, creative) to their hosts. It is in this sense that Verena Andermatt Conley considers that 'Viruses are like a pharmakon, they can be benevolent or malevolent' (Conley 2022, 126). This notion of *pharmakon* can be related to Derrida's reading of Plato in 'Plato's Pharmacy' where he shows that *pharmakon* operates both as a poison and a cure (Derrida 1981, 61–171).

The *pharmakon* also relates to Derrida's understanding of autoimmunity. In discussing the distinction between constative and performative, Derrida shows that Austin's performative aims for total immunity. However, this total immunity prevents any event from happening:

> A performative produces an event only by securing for itself, in the first-person singular or plural, in the present, and with the guarantee offered by conventions or legitimated fictions, the power that an ipseity gives itself to produce the event of which it speaks the event that it neutralizes forthwith insofar as it appropriates for itself a calculable mastery over it. If an event worthy of this name is to arrive or happen, it must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity; it must touch this vulnerability in its finitude and in a nonhorizontal fashion, there where it is not yet or is already no longer possible to face or face up to the unforeseeability of the other. In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes—which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event. (Derrida 2005, 151–52)

Derrida's reading of autoimmunity relates to Austin's parasites. While Austin aims to secure his performative from parasites, Derrida shows that these parasites are precisely what makes something happen; they are the possibility of an event. And the performative itself is an event instituting meaning. By rejecting parasites, as we have seen in Chap. 2, Austin is making a move which prevents performativity to come into existence. We could rephrase Derrida by saying that parasitism 'is not an absolute ill or evil'. It is on the contrary the possibility of meaning.

In this chapter, I argue that one way to overturn Austin's parasitism and transform it into a viral force is to shift the focus from illocution to perlocution. I explore how Austin's focus on illocution makes him overlook perlocution and argue that his rejection of so-called parasitic speech-acts is a consequence of this lack of interest in perlocution. More specifically, I argue that 'parasitic' utterances are kinds of intentional misfires with strong perlocutionary force. By revaluating the hierarchy that Austin establishes between illocutionary and perlocutionary, I aim to reintegrate parasitic speech-acts in the realm of ordinary language. In the first section of this chapter, I focus on Austin's notion of misfire, to explain how illocution works (or fails to work) and to connect it to his remarks on poetry. In the second, I illustrate the failure of the performative in Manuel Joseph's *Baisetioles*, thus pursuing the parasite and virus metaphors. In the third, I explore in more detail the notion of perlocution, drawing on Cavell's conception of passionate utterances. In the fourth and final section, I conclude by showing how poetic perlocution functions.

Misfire and Illocution

Let us begin with an aphorism from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*:

> In a theater, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious. This is the way, I suppose, that the world will be destroyed—amid the universal hilarity of wits and wags who think it is all a joke. (Kierkegaard 1987, 30)

This aphorism perfectly illustrates the performativity of language and its dependence on the context of utterance. If it were not a clown announcing the fire, everyone would have taken the threat seriously and might have been saved. Kierkegaard shows the performative power of language

and the failure of a speech-act, what Austin calls a misfire. One might argue that this passage rather reveals the powerlessness of language as the clown fails to lead the audience away from the fire, but this view misses the unintentional powers of language. The clown's speech-act is not understood as a warning but as a joke. As a warning, language is indeed powerless as the illocution fails; as a joke, however, its perlocutionary effects are undeniable: it brings the world to its destruction. In this opposition between illocution and perlocution lies one of the challenges of Austin's theory.

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin specifies the performative by distinguishing three forces at play in speech-acts: locution, illocution, and perlocution. The locutionary act simply refers to the words uttered, while illocutionary and perlocutionary acts refer to the consequences or effects of that speech-act. As Austin summarises: 'Thus we distinguished the locutionary act (and within it the phonetic, the phatic, and the rhetic acts) which has a *meaning*; the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is *the achieving of* certain *effects* by saying something' (Austin 1975, 120). The illocutionary act therefore concerns the automatic effects of uttering the locution. For instance, the sentence 'There's a fire backstage', if not uttered by a clown in a Danish theatre, is an illocutionary act of warning. It is worth noting that illocution outgrows the limits of the explicit performative as this sentence looks like a descriptive one. The perlocutionary act to the contrary refers to the extra-linguistic and extra-conventional effects of speech, but I will come back to this distinction as Austin admits that it is 'likeliest to give trouble' (Austin 1975, 109). For the moment, I want to focus on illocution and the potential misfires, such as the one described by Kierkegaard.

Austin distinguishes various kinds of misfires and abuses, but I will take the notion of misfire in a general sense to describe speech-acts that fail to accomplish what they were intended to. He gives the following general description of misfires: 'When the utterance is a misfire, the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched: and our act (marrying, etc.) is void or without effects, etc.' (Austin 1975, 16). When a speech-act misfires, it fails to accomplish what it was supposed to and thus becomes void. As we have seen in Chap. 2, this notion of void is precisely the term Austin uses to characterise what he calls parasitic utterances such as poems or jokes: they are '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void' (Austin 1975, 22). In this sense, poems and jokes are forms of misfires, but while

an ordinary misfire is supposedly unintentional, poems and jokes are intentional (which does not mean that they cannot have unintentional effects, jokes can fail to generate laughter for instance). The notion of intention plays a crucial role here as the satisfaction or felicity of the speech-act can only be asserted by comparing an intention to a result. As we have seen, there is a form of correspondence between intention and action that shows that Austin remains within a *representationalist* framework. The only difference is that the correspondence is no longer between a statement and the world but between an intention and an action.

Another way to approach misfires with less insistence on the notion of intention is by considering the conventionality of speech-acts. In this case, the misfire marks a mismatch between the convention and the actual effect. The question then is: when does a speech-act become conventional? Could we not imagine a misfire to become in turn a new convention? As we have seen in Chap. 2, Derrida insists on the constant possibility of parasitism and Austin indeed argues that all utterances are subject to the ill of infelicity:

> Well, it seems clear in the first place that, although it has excited us (or failed to excite us) in connection with certain acts which are or are in part acts of *uttering words*, infelicity is an ill to which *all* acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all *conventional* acts: not indeed that *every* ritual is liable to every form of infelicity (but then nor is every performative utterance). This is clear if only from the mere fact that many conventional acts, such as betting or conveyance of property, can be performed in non-verbal ways. (Austin 1975, 18–19)

In Austin's conception of language, ritual plays a central role. It is the ritualistic dimension of speech-acts that grants them an illocutionary force. However, as speech-acts need to be repeated in order to becomes rituals, the possibility of misfire becomes always greater. The more often an utterance is uttered, the more chances it has to misfire. Illocution gains its force from the repetition of utterances and, while this repetition opens the door to the ill of infelicity, Austin focuses on the normativity that it establishes. It is interesting to note that the vocabulary of illness, 'infelicity is an ill', serves to describe both misfires and parasitic utterances. The difference between the two lies in the fact that a misfire is accidental while poems and jokes are usually intentional. Misfires are failures of normativity in Austin's conception of language, but this failure of normativity can be valued

positively when it is intentional. Poems and other creative uses of language challenge this normativity in order to reveal its artificial character and aim at transformation through intentional misfires.

Intention has been a controversial term in literary criticism. New Critics such as William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley have fought against the idea of intention in literary criticism, considering that the 'intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work or literary art' (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 468). This rejection of intention is mainly a result of the rejection of biographical criticism that considers that the meaning of a literary work can be explained through the life of its author. This rejection is further exemplified by Roland Barthes's 'death of the author' (Barthes 1977, 142–48). However, according to Kaye Mitchell, thinking of text in terms of act rather than object 'may help us account for the role of context and convention (in literary texts this encompasses issues of canonicity and genre, historical context, etc.) as they combine with intention in the production of meaning' (Mitchell 2008, 53). Following Austin and speech-act theory, Mitchell relates intention to illocution to show how context and convention play a crucial role in the production of meaning. If we stop thinking of the text as an object and think of it in terms of action, we can avoid the intentional fallacy. As Toril Moi argues following Cavell: 'If we think of a text as something someone has wanted to be precisely the way it is, Cavell argues, there is no difference between "what is intended" and "what is there." What is there is what is intended. […] To ask "Why this?" or, if you prefer, "What did the author want from this?" about a textual feature is to ask what *work* this feature does in the text' (Moi 2017, 203). If the text is action, then its intention is simply what there is, following Elizabeth Anscombe's idea that the intention is to be found in the action rather than in a mental state (Anscombe 2000). We must not think of intention in a causal sense but in the sense that any action can be explained by a reason. Asking about intention amounts to asking for a reason for such or such element in the text. This reason can be explained in literary terms without necessarily having recourse to biographical elements.

Illocution for Austin therefore functions on the model of an intentional act that aims at producing certain effects that are more controllable than those of perlocution. In a sense, illocution would be like Wittgenstein's symbolic machine from PI 193:

A machine as a symbol of its mode of operation. The machine, I might say for a start, seems already to contain its own mode of operation. What does that mean?—If we know the machine, everything else a that is the movements it will make a seem to be already completely determined. (PI 193)

Wittgenstein brings up this example of the machine in his explanation of rule-following. What does it mean to follow a rule and how can we assess it? Without getting into the details of what he says about this, the machine offers a model for the idea of rule-following. A machine is built with a certain purpose in mind, a certain task it has to accomplish. It is a *dispositif* in the sense explored in Chap. 2. A machine is thus completely finite: it does what it is instructed to do, it follows the rules it was made to follow. The movement of the machine is completely determined by the task and the way it is built.

However, Wittgenstein pursues, the machine can fail just as an utterance can misfire:

We talk as if these parts could only move in this way, as if they could not do anything else. Is this how it is? Do we forget the possibility of their bending, breaking off, melting, and so on? Yes; in many cases we don't think of that at all. We use a machine, or a picture of a machine, as a symbol of a particular mode of operation. For instance, we give someone such a picture and assume that he will derive the successive movements of the parts from it. (PI 193)

In thinking of the machine as a symbol, we are missing parts of what can happen. Namely, the machine might break down; parts might melt or bend and thus prevent it from accomplishing the intended movements. The machine is a kind of symbol, but the symbol does not contain all the possibilities of the machine. While the movements of the machine as symbol are completely determined, the movements of the machine as such outgrow this determination. Wittgenstein's example touches an important point here. If we think of the machine as a metaphor for language, we get a picture in which a certain idea of language is completely determined, a form of ideal language. It suggests that language is a finite and predetermined machine and considers all the possibilities to be mapped out. But if, as Wittgenstein argues, 'the movement of the machine *qua* symbol is predetermined in a different way from how the movement of any given actual machine is' (PI 193), what are the movements of actual language?

Wittgenstein criticises philosophy and its 'craving for generality' (BB, p. 17). As he further suggests: 'When does one have the thought that a machine already contains its possible movements in some mysterious way?—Well, when one is doing philosophy' (PI 194). In doing philosophy, we are considering the movements of the machine to be completely predetermined. But we are mistaken. The movements of the actual machine can never be completely determined in the same sense that the possibilities in language can never be completely mapped out. There is, however, a difference between the machine and language, as unthought-of possibilities in language are not necessarily due to a dysfunction but to the way we ordinarily use language. Against the ideal language philosophy model of the machine with its logical and predetermined movements and utterances, Wittgenstein and OLP consider language in use.

If we connect this picture of the machine to Austin's theory of language, we might say that illocution is a form of machine that performs what it was intended to do. The machine breaking down would be a form of misfire, an illocution that fails to achieve its goals. Austin's exclusion of parasitic utterances is therefore an exclusion of all forms of language that do not conform to the machine model, namely poems, jokes, and so on. However, language is not a machine with a clear map of possibilities: it is full of unmapped possibilities; it is, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, an 'open mesh of possibilities' (Sedgwick 1993, 8). These possibilities are not less intentional than others, they are just uses of language like any others, and we will see in the next chapter how these possibilities relate to queer theory in contemporary literary thought.

Wittgenstein's metaphor illustrates the fact that language cannot be reduced to a machine. While the movements of the machine are determined and might fail, most movements of language are undetermined. This indeterminacy is what makes language so powerful and what makes poems, jokes, puns, and all that Austin characterises as 'parasitic' possible. We should not model language on the machine, as Austin somewhat did, but be attentive to the possibilities that lie in language. These possibilities are what I would call intentional misfires: uses of language with an intention but without set expectations regarding the outcome. Against the normativity of illocution, intentional misfires bring up the possibilities of perlocution.

Manuel Joseph's *Baisetioles* and the Failure of the Performative

We have seen that Austin's notion of misfire concerns speech-acts that are void because of a failed illocution (convention). Poetry, in this sense, is a form of misfire because it refuses to play the game of illocution. Or, at least, it refuses to play Austin's game of illocution. It is however undeniable that poetry has a form of effectiveness and Manuel Joseph's *Baisetioles* illustrates this point by proposing a performative analysis of the language of media. Joseph's poetic work brings into relation forms of language that he finds in various contexts. The title *Les Baisetioles* plays on the word *bestioles* (bugs) and *baiser* (to screw, but also a kiss) to suggest that there are, on the one hand, bugs that come to disrupt (to screw with) the space of communication, thus following the parasite metaphor, and, on the other hand, that this space itself is screwing with us, bugging our minds.[1] In other words, the context in which we come to encounter language frames and restrains our possibilities of thinking. These two interpretations reflect the two conceptions of *dispositif* explored in Chap. 2: the normativity of language constrains our thoughts while its poetic capacities disrupt this normativity. Joseph's reference to *baiser* can further be related to Lyotard's notion of *dispositif pulsionnel* in which libido connects to language.

The full title of *Les Baistioles: Aubépine, Hiatus, Kremlin, Netflix & Aqmi ou les Baisetioles* shows the diversity of topics covered by Joseph in his book, and I will only highlight a few elements relevant to the discussion of perlocution. It is difficult to give an overview of the structure of the book, but we can distinguish a first part named 'Synaptic Chick' (even though the name comes back at the end of the book) and a second part named '+336XXXXXXXX_'.

The first part combines images (from art exhibitions, TV shows, advertising, etc.) and texts (some written by Joseph, some found in news articles, some transcriptions from TV shows, etc.). This combination of elements and documents aims to question our relation to the language of media, to the way media frames the question of terrorism around the Paris

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[1] The relation between *bestioles* and *baiser* could make us think of AIDS and open a connection to queer theory. As we will see in Chap. 4, disrupting the performative is central to such thought and although Joseph is not making an explicit connection to queer theory, we can see how his examples would fit within it.

attacks of Friday, 13th November 2015. This question of terrorism explains the reference to Aqmi in the full title of the book (AQIM in English for Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). Through his poetic practice, Joseph offers insights to rethink the philosophy of language, and especially the performative force of poetic utterances. By criticising the language of media, he shows that there is a virality of language at play in our uses of language and explores how this virality affects illocution.

The second part contrasts with the first one as it consists of text messages that Joseph exchanged with various people, hence the title referring to a phone number. This rendering of text messages connects to the first part by offering a kind of surveillance of Joseph's communications one year after the terrorist attacks, going back from 20th November to 24th September 2016. Reading those messages backwards gives a glimpse into the life of the author and we realise how complex and personal our uses of language can be. Some messages are incomprehensible because of the lack of the whole conversation and the codes that exist between two friends. There is an autobiographical component to the second part that does not aim at giving a clear narrative of the author's life but to extract a timeframe of communications that relate to his work, his love life, his friendships.

I will focus mainly on the first part as it shows how Joseph plays with the performativity of language, more specifically with the performativity of the language of media, which relates to Wittgenstein's reference to the language of information. As Hanna writes in his preface to Joseph's work: 'They are empty, impersonal, and tautological [ideological] statements, threadbare clichés, reasons without any logical force. However, when uttered in the press at the right moment, they seem to possess a strong performative power'[2] (Joseph 2020, 14). Like Austin's analysis of utterances that are performed only in specific contexts (such as 'I do' in a wedding ceremony), the language of media seems to be empty outside of media space. All these sentences are bugs that come back into this space, parasites that however possess a performative force when rightly uttered. It is not only poetic language but also the whole of language that is '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void'. And not only when it misfires according to Joseph and Hanna.

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[2] My translation: 'Il s'agit d'énoncés [idéologiques] creux, impersonnels, tautologiques, de poncifs usés jusqu'à la corde, de raisons sans aucune force logique. Pourtant, proférés dans la presse au bon moment, ils semblent posséder un fort pouvoir performatif.'

A further interesting connection: Austin considers parasitical uses of language as 'etiolations of language'. There is a phonic similarity between the verb 'étiole' and *baisetiole*, suggesting that the *Baisetioles* aim at etiolating the force of the language of media, at showing that this language itself is an etiolation of language. Against Austin's view that parasitic uses of language have no performative force, Joseph questions this hollowness of utterances because empty statements uttered on the media stage have such a force. To what extent would the media stage not be a stage like any other? *Les Baisetioles* therefore begins on a stage, more specifically at Sting's concert at Paris Bataclan one year after the 2015 terrorist attacks.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 are two pages at about the middle of the book that provide key elements to understand the virality of poetic language against the language of media (Joseph 2020, 54–55). We are at Sting's concert one year after the terrorist attacks, people are laughing, drinking, and so on. Joseph investigates the use of the word barbarism (*barbarie*) and the idiom 'art is a bulwark against barbarism' (*l'art est un rempart contre la barbarie*). This idiom is one of the abovementioned empty clichés that nevertheless has a performative force on the media stage. This cliché is recurrently used to show the supposed superiority of culture over barbarism or, in other words, of us over them. Joseph considers this cliché problematic in a least five ways.

1. Media uses the term barbarism without ever mentioning the barrel organ (*orgue de barbarie*) although it is one of the uses of the word in French. In this context, barbarism is part of culture rather than opposed to it. This musical instrument, at least through its name, weakens the opposition between barbarism and culture.
2. Following the first point, the language of media restrains the scope of barbarism: 'there is no other word in barbarism than arab' (*il n'y a pas d'autre mot dans barbare qu'arabe*). Playing with the letters, the language of media uses barbarian (*barbare*) as a quasi-anagram (and hence synonym) for arab (*arabe*). Such a language is performatively doing something that it cannot explicitly say. It excludes some uses of language (to avoid positive evaluations) and imposes specific meanings (to impose negative evaluations).
3. One of the ways in which the language of media operates is by imposing a specific format which Joseph calls '#élément formant#'. The formatting dimension of such an element is further reinforced by framing it with ##. By following such a format, the language of

Les baisetioles

Aujourd'hui c'est une salle qui rit, qui boit, qui gueule et s'apostrophe en atten-
dant le premier concert qui effacera la
barbarie

Il n'y a pas d'autre mot que «barbarie»
Il y a orgues
Un sens qu'on ne voyait pas
Il y a orgues
Sting est arrivé sur scène sans crier gare
n'a pas crié «Gare à la barbarie!»
n'a pas beuglé «Gare aux Arabes!»
par exemple il n'y a pas d'autre mot dans barbare qu'arabe
ni «guerre à l'arabe!»
car il respecte l'#élément formant# chanteur de POLICE
D'abord
honorer ceux qui ont perdu la vie dans l'attaque il y a un an
Ensuite
célébrer la vie et la musique que représente cette salle de spectacle
historique
Il n'y a pas d'autre mot car
L'art est le rempart contre la barbarie
De ceux qui parlant un français quasi parfait ne le sont pas barbares le chanteur
demande une minute de silence *Nous ne les oublierons pas*
un silence français en français parfait de silence
même ceux qui ne parlent pas un français parfait
seuls ceux qui parlent un français parfait
Le reporter écrit un français
parfait Il n'y a pas d'autre mot
Car l'art
L'#élément formant# leader chanteur du défunt
Police, cet homme, Sting
Il entonne
Fragile. Son tube de 1987, une chanson douce. *«How fragile we are… On and on
the rain will fall. Like tears from a star»*
Le reporter donne la traduction des paroles de
la chanson intitulée *"Fragile"*
il omet de traduire le titre de la chanson qui s'appelle Fragile car *Combien nous
sommes fragiles, la pluie va tomber et tomber encore, comme les larmes d'une étoile*
il écrit dans un journal de Français qui parlent aux Français
L'#élément formant# chanteur du défunt n'omet pas lui le tube
le hit *Message in a bottle*
Dans cette chanson il y a le message de l'art qui est le message que contient la
bouteille qui est jetée à l'eau depuis la jetée qui est aussi le titre d'un film très chiant
«I send an SOS to the world»
Le reporter donne la traduction des paroles de la chanson intitulée
"Message dans une bouteille"

54

Fig. 3.1   Manuel Joseph, Baisetioles, p. 54

Synaptic Chick

Je lance un SOS au monde parce qu'il y a des âmes sur cette terre
Le message de l'art qui est le rempart contre
la barbarie L'ultime rempart
La barrière infranchissable de l'art
puis un enchaînement de chansons de son nouvel album, 57th & 9th, dans
lequel pour la première fois depuis plus de dix ans il revient à un son pop
rock acidulé dans le même temps que très subversif car l'art est le rempart
ultime est le concert et la chanson est un art
Précédent 1/12 suivant un an après les attentats terroristes qui ont fait 90 morts
au Bataclan la salle de concert revenait à la vie samedi soir FRANCOIS
GUILLOT / AFP
                                                      › Accéder au portfolio
ultime rempart contre le barbare et les chansons de l'#élément formant# /
ex-chanteur /
                                              POLICE / un art
Étonnement de voir comment dans un cadre comme celui-là les paroles
peuvent se charger d'une
autre force revêtir un sens qu'on n'y voyait pas
tout de suite les paroles revêtent alors un sens qu'on n'y vît point de prime
abord immédiatement
Un sens qu'on ne voit pas immédiatement
Car le sens de l'art se voit

Parmi les morceaux du nouvel album, il y a Inshallah : «*Un très beau mot*, explique
doucement l'ancien bassiste et chanteur de Police le groupe qui s'appela POLICE
s'épelle P.OL.I.C.E. qui est un très beau mot Une marque d'humilité, de courage
et d'espoir La chanson raconte l'histoire d'une famille partie sur un petit bateau
Il n'y a pas d'autre mot   *Je n'ai malheureusement pas de solution politique
pour la crise des migrants mais, s'il y en a une, je pense qu'on peut la trouver en faisant
preuve d'empathie. En s'imaginant sur ce bateau avec vos enfants et ceux que vous
aimez.*»   tout amateur de rock parisien a une histoire avec le Bataclan une
histoire de fosse une histoire de sueur une histoire d'amour aujourd'hui ce drame
qu'on aimerait dissoudre dans l'oubli les propriétaires du lieu – Jules Frutos, Olivier
Poubelle mais aussi Jérôme Langlet, le président de Lagardère Live Entertainment
qui possède 70 % des parts –, ont gardé la configuration de la salle mais l'ont refaite
de façon à chasser les fantômes.
Rendre lumineux. Rassurer.

«si parfois dans l'obscurité on peut se surprendre à pleurer. «*Ce matin encore je me
demandais si on avait fait le bon choix de rouvrir la salle si vite on a toujours des
doutes*, confie Jérôme Langlet
même si

j'ai toujours pensé que c'était ce qu'il fallait faire.» car ce sont deux modèles de
civilisation qui s'affrontent ici encore aujourd'hui
J'ai toujours pensé que c'était ce qu'il fallait faire

55

Fig. 3.2   Manuel Joseph, Baisetioles, p. 55

media—and Sting on stage represents such a language—is not using the creative powers of language but submitting to a certain frame of thought that prevents invention.

4. One of these forming elements is the idiom 'art is a bulwark against barbarism'. However, if barbarism is part of culture (following point 1) and if art is submitted to a frame of thought (following point 3), how can art be a bulwark against barbarism? By blurring the frontiers between culture and barbarism, Joseph breaks down the performative force of this idiom. Culture as suggested by the language of media is less a bulwark against barbarism than a form of propaganda against the other (us against them), something that Michel de Montaigne already suggested in his essay 'On Cannibals': 'we all call barbarous anything that is contrary to our own habits' (Montaigne 1993, 108).

5. Pursuing the line of thought of propaganda, Joseph comes back to the fact that Sting is the ex-leader of The Police, which is 'a very beautiful word A mark of humility, of courage and hope' (Joseph 2020, 55). Against barbarism, The Police.

Sting's show one year after the events is represented as a media stage on which an empty statement, 'art is a bulwark against barbarism', gains performative force. Joseph shows how this performative force is based on conventions that hide prejudices that can be more than problematic. Sting on stage is therefore not a bulwark against barbarism but an empty statement of propaganda aiming at performative force in the media space, The Police on stage. This performative force of empty statements surprises Joseph: 'Surprise to see how in such a context the words [or lyrics]/ can acquire/ another force carry a meaning we didn't see' (Joseph 2020, 55). By bringing the reader's attention to the emptiness of the language of media, Joseph aims to generate a similar surprise in his readers. Poetry *qua* viral action is therefore active in deconstructing a political message.

Joseph's *Baisetioles* reveals that there is a performativity of poetic uses of language, and that this performativity lies elsewhere than in illocution. Illocutions as understood in the language of media are somehow hollow and void. And if we were to say that the language of media is parasitical, then all of language would be too. We need to abandon the parasitic/ ordinary distinction in order to focus on the effects of language. In poetry, the effects aim at disrupting the conventionality of illocution, of revealing how our ways of dealing with language are just one way among others. In so doing, we are shifting from illocution to perlocution.

Perlocution and Passionate Utterances

We have seen that the normativity of illocution lies in the repetition of the same utterance that, in time, institutionalises or ritualises it. On the contrary, perlocution seems to escape normativity, which is one of the reasons why it is much more complex to theorise than illocution. Austin suggests that the distinction between illocution and perlocution is problematic:

> It is the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions which seems likeliest to give trouble, and it is upon this that we shall now embark, taking in the distinction between illocutions and locutions by the way. It is certain that the perlocutionary sense of 'doing an action' must somehow be ruled out as irrelevant to the sense in which an utterance, if the issuing of it is the 'doing of an action', is a performative, at least if that is to be distinct from a constative. For clearly *any*, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever, and in particular by a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal). (Austin 1975, 109)

What is crucial in distinguishing illocution from perlocution, Austin argues, is that perlocution is not to be found in language itself. While illocution is the quasi-automatic performative consequence of locution, perlocution escapes the performative. As strange as it might sound, Austin argues here that illocution is the actual performative (or more specifically *his* performative) while perlocution is an effect that is independent from the performative dimension of the utterance. However, he undermines his claim in the last parenthesis by asking whether there is such an animal as a 'straightforward constative utterance'. Austin seems to be struggling as his way of distinguishing illocution from perlocution requires the presupposition of 'pure constatives' that are far from being proven.

Austin however pursues his attempt to distinguish illocution from perlocution by focusing on the idea of convention: 'Illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional. […] A judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved' (Austin 1975, 120). Austin clearly states what distinguishes illocution from perlocution is the conventional dimension of illocution and the non-conventional dimension of perlocution. His use of the example of a judge to distinguish them is quite striking: one can accuse someone of an

illocutionary act (the locution 'I do' in the right circumstances for instance automatically marries two people) but not a perlocutionary act (as convincing someone might not be proven). However, one difficulty remains, namely that of determining what convention means. Indeed, cases of christening and marriage are quite simple insofar as they are rituals and institutions, but not all conventions are institutions, and the distinction becomes much more complex to establish. As Layla Raïd argues, 'Austin's use of the term convention is problematic: illocution in general is not only conventional in the sense of conventions agreed upon at a specific time and space; this case is rather rare. It is also not conventional in the sense of being always guaranteed by an institution, unless we extend the meaning of "institution" to include excuses, blame, warning, etc.'[3] (Raïd 2011, 156). By underdetermining the notion of convention while using it as a determinative criterion, Austin fails to account for one of the weaknesses of his theory. If illocution is distinguished from perlocution by its conventional dimension, how can this distinction work if convention is not clearly defined? While the notion of convention works quite well with institutions such as marriage or christening, it is less convincing with other forms of illocution.

In rejecting poetic utterances from his consideration, Austin further blurs the notion of convention:

> For example, if I say 'Go and catch a falling star', it may be quite clear what both the meaning and the force of my utterance is, but still wholly unresolved which of these other kinds of things I may be doing. There are parasitic uses of language, which are 'not serious', not the 'full normal use'. The normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar. (Austin 1975, 104)

One element strikes me in the last sentence: Austin considers that poetry and parasitic uses of language make no attempt 'at a standard

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[3] My translation: 'On sait que le sens dans lequel Austin utilise le terme de convention est problématique: l'illocution en général n'est pas seulement conventionnelle en ce qu'elle invoquerait des conventions passées en un temps et un lieu donné; ce cas est plutôt rare. Elle n'est pas non plus conventionnelle au sens où elle serait toujours garantie par une institution, à moins qu'on étende le sens d' "institution" de telle sorte que l'excuse, le blâme, l'avertissement, etc., soient encore des institutions.'

perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything'. Austin's reference to a 'standard perlocutionary act' reinforces the normative dimension of his theory of language and is rather questionable, especially since the perlocutionary is so much underdetermined. What is a standard perlocutionary act? If perlocutions are not conventional, how can they be standard? Austin seems to be ascribing some characteristics to perlocution that he does not make explicit. If there is a standard to perlocutions, it means that there are criteria to assess the felicity or infelicity of the utterance. But Austin never makes these criteria explicit. To think of poetic utterances as intentional misfires thus brings them back into this conceptual framework.

Paul Campbell comments on this passage by raising two problems with Austin's characterisation of Whitman's metaphor as parasitic:

> I find this example unfortunate because it suggests that figurative language is not intended to produce effects, and I find the phrase 'parasitic uses of language' unfortunate as applied here because it distorts and degrades the nature and function of metaphor by implying that whatever meaning Whitman's exhortation may have derived from 'conditions of reference' having to do with an actual eagle and with actual flight. (Campbell 1973, 290)

Austin's casting away of parasitic uses of language from perlocution is unfortunate because it means that poetic utterances have no effect, that figurative language is a vain play with language with no consequence. A metaphor, in this sense, would be useless from a pragmatic perspective. Austin's problem is that he is reintroducing the notion of reference through the normativity of his theory. While his substitution of truth-condition by felicity and force seemed to go towards encompassing uses of language that do not rely on reference, Austin comes back to reference. His problem is not that he considers that there is a suspension of illocutionary force (or at least this is not a problem once we consider illocution a subset of perlocution) but that he considers that there is a suspension of perlocutionary force as well.[4]

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[4] Searle defends such a view that conventions (and hence illocutionary force) are suspended in fiction: 'Now what makes fiction possible, I suggest, is a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world established by the rules mentioned earlier. Think of the conventions of fictional discourse as a set of horizontal conventions that break the connections established by the vertical rules. They suspend the normal requirements established by these rules' (Searle 1979, 66). Joe Friggieri follows Searle's

David Kaufmann precisely rejects this suspension of perlocutionary force in literary works and considers them performative as well:

> If I am correct that literary conventions supervene (or suspend) conventional illocutionary force, then the literary, by Austin's lights, becomes precisely the realm of the perlocutionary. Let me stake my claim as clearly as possible: against the deconstructive reading of Austin, I am suggesting that the literary is not 'performative' in any scandalous way. I am suggesting that the performative in literature serves largely perlocutionary aims. I am thus dragging the literary back to pragmatics, aesthetics and everyday ethics. (Kaufmann 2016, 60)

Giving perlocutionary aims to literature therefore brings the literary back into the ordinary, like Wittgenstein's bringing philosophy back from metaphysics to the ordinary. Although I agree with Kaufmann's attempt to bring perlocution back into the poetic realm, and hence to bring the poetic back into the ordinary, I consider that poetic utterances do not suspend illocutionary force. Quite to the contrary, as the perlocutionary effect of poetic utterances is to undermine illocutionary force (not just suspending it).[5] This undermining of illocution opens the possibility for revolution and subversion. Raïd, for instance, suggests that the 'revolutionary illocutionary act' is 'a reminder that no one is the slave of any convention'[6] (Raïd 2021, 209). Mona Gerardin-Laverge further considers that 'subversion does not consist in denying the conventions that frame

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idea that fictions are pretended speech-acts that therefore suspend illocutionary force: 'The suspension of illocutionary force in stage utterances, coupled with the actors' pretence that they do have that force, together with the audience's attitude or predisposition (its willingness to play along with the pretence), combine to give rise to the game of pretending which is necessary for the success of the play' (Friggieri 2014, 58).

[5] This undermining of convention goes against Peter Lamarque's conception of poetry (which he builds from Wittgenstein among others) which relies heavily on the idea of convention (on the idea of practice as conventional): 'If we combine this point with the first, then we can derive the following: that participants in the rule-governed practice of literature are defined not by social or political criteria—class, gender, age, reader preferences, etc.—but by conformity to the roles in the practice' (Lamarque 2010, 377). However, the roles in the practice seem to be more and more subject to debate. Is the author still an author in the sense of conforming to the role in the practice of 'uncreative writing'? Against such reified roles, it seems that poetry rather constructs itself in opposition to actual practices and conventions.

[6] My translation: 'L'acte illocutoire révolutionnaire consiste à revendiquer et récupérer le statut de plein locuteur qui a été dénié: il est un rappel en acte que personne n'est l'esclave de quelque convention que ce soit.'

speech-acts, but to develop strategies of resistance to their effects'[7] (Gérardin-Laverge 2021, 247). In this sense, the conventionality of illocution becomes a space of resistance and subversion. I will argue that the force that animates this resistance is the perlocutionary act. Whereas the idea of a suspension of illocutionary force remains within the Austinian framework in which illocution comes first and perlocution second, considering the undermining of conventions as the perlocutionary force of poetry closes the conventional path to illocution and forces the subject to think the world anew.

To avoid the problems encountered with convention, Nancy Bauer argues that the notion of convention should not be taken too seriously:

> These sorts of problems about the notion of convention are virtually inevitable, I think, if you are out to evaluate *How to Do Things with Words* as a piece of theory. But they recede in importance if we resist the temptation to sublime Austin's use of the concept of convention, to take it as a technical theoretical term. Conventions of language for Austin are, roughly speaking (and Austin continually reminds us that he sees himself speaking "loosely" and "roughly"), what we are inclined to say (and do) in certain circumstances, not what is stipulated or set in stone. (Bauer 2015, 102)

The problems with convention are mainly due to the idea that we consider Austin's ideas to build a theory. If we do not, Bauer argues, these problems disappear. Convention is no longer an absolute concept but rather a pragmatic understanding of what we are doing when we are speaking. Conventions change and evolve, but the important point is that they provide a shared understanding of how the world functions. By minimising the strength of convention, Bauer provides a way of understanding Austin in a more Wittgensteinian fashion. Furthermore, she argues that one of the differences between illocution and perlocution is a matter of responsibility: 'Rather, he is pointing at the extent to which, when it comes to perlocutionary effects, there are no conventions about *how we assign responsibility* for what has happened' (Bauer 2015, 103). While the utterer is responsible for illocution (because the effect is already known), the assignment of responsibility is much more complicated when it comes to perlocution. Indeed, the perlocutionary effect of an utterance, while it can be to some extent controlled, often escapes the control of the utterer.

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[7] My translation: 'la subversion ne consiste pas à nier les conventions qui encadrent les actes de parole, mais à développer des stratégies de résistance à leurs effets.'

As Bruno Ambroise suggests, one way of distinguishing illocution from perlocution is to consider that a 'perlocutionary effect can be obtained in an unintentional manner (it can be unwanted, or even feared) while anyone realising an illocutionary act must have (at least) the intention that to realise the effect corresponding to the procedure'[8] (Ambroise 2021, 51). While illocution is necessarily intentional, perlocution can escape one's intention.

Illocution, primarily because of its conventional character, does not require interpretation and occurs without special thought or talent. It is something that we have learned to use in our practice of language. Following a Wittgensteinian-like interpretation of 'convention' as rules, we could say that with illocution 'we follow the rule blindly' (PI 109). In contrast to this blind rule-following, perlocutionary acts create a space in which other capacities can express themselves. Baptising a child or christening a ship or enacting a marriage cannot be done well or badly; it is either done or not, in Austin's terms, happy or unhappy. On the contrary, conviction, persuasion, or humiliation cannot be achieved absolutely. Whereas the christening of a ship entails a permanent change of status for the ship, persuasion can be more or less effective, be it in duration or intensity. To that effect, Daniele Lorenzini recasts the natural–conventional distinction in terms of predictability and stability: 'Instead of employing the natural-conventional distinction, I therefore propose focusing on the degree of predictability and stability that differentiates illocutionary from perlocutionary effects' (Lorenzini 2020, 5). This idea avoids distinguishing illocution and perlocution in terms of their nature—and in the long run avoids us from defining clearly what perlocution is—and considers illocution a form of perlocution with higher predictability and stability. In this sense, Lorenzini's view can be seen as considering illocution a subgroup of perlocution.

We have seen that it is complicated (and counterintuitive) to define convention as it simply describes what we are doing. Any attempt at setting it as an absolute is bound to fail. Convention is of no help in distinguishing illocution from perlocution, and we should understand the difference in terms of predictability and stability. By so doing, we are

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[8] My translation: 'l'effet perlocutoire peut ne pas être obtenu de manière intentionnelle (il ne peut pas être voulu, voire même redouté), alors qu'il semble nécessaire que la personne qui réalise l'acte illocutoire ait (au moins) l'intention que l'effet correspondant à la procédure qu'elle utilise se produise.'

reconceptualising the difference between illocution and perlocution. While Austin provides a clear picture of illocution, we still need a better understanding of perlocution. Cavell's notion of 'passionate utterance'[9] provides a framework to describe such unconventional speech-acts:

> Perlocutionary acts make room for, and reward, imagination and virtuosity, unequally distributed capacities among the species. Illocutionary acts do not in general make such room—I do not, except in special circumstances, wonder how I might make a promise or a gift, or apologize, or render a verdict. But to persuade you may well take considerable thought, to insinuate as much as to console may require tact, to seduce or to confuse you may take talent. Further, that perlocutionary-like effects—for example, stopping you in your tracks, embarrassing or humiliating you—are readily, sometimes more effectively, achievable without saying anything, indicates that the urgency of passion is expressed before and after words. Passionate expression makes demands upon the singular body in a way illocutionary force (if all goes well) forgoes. (Cavell 2008, 173)

Cavell's appeal to a verbal/non-verbal distinction to elucidate the difference between illocution and perlocution is not a very happy or efficient one as what is problematic is precisely to distinguish between illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of verbal locutions. However, his suggestion that perlocution leaves space for interpretation, that it creates a space in which imagination can freely roam is much more convincing. As Cavell suggests: 'With illocutions, interpretations or decisions are sometimes to be made as to whether an instance is happy (Austin cites the case of a ship sliding into the water before the ceremony of christening is concluded); with perlocutions, interpretation is characteristically in order, part of the passionate exchange' (Cavell 2008, 185). While interpretation might be needed from time to time with illocution, interpretation is always at play with perlocution. If, following Lorenzini, illocution is predictable, it requires no interpretation. On the contrary, the unpredictability of perlocution requires interpretation. Cavell argues that perlocution is part of a 'passionate exchange'. In other words: 'A performative utterance is an

[9] There has been a renewed interest in perlocution after Cavell's paper on passionate utterances, and he offers an interesting way of conceptualising perlocutionary acts (and thus distinguishing them from illocutionary acts). See for instance volume 4 of *Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies* on Cavell and literature with two papers on perlocution: (Lindstrom 2016; Kaufmann 2016). See also a forthcoming issue of *Inquiry* on the notion of perlocution: (Bäckström 2020; Gustafsson 2020; Laugier 2020; Lorenzini 2020).

offer of participation in the order of law. And perhaps we can say: A passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire' (Cavell 2008, 185). Within the order of the law, there is no interpretation needed; within the disorder of desire, interpretation is constant. Jocelyn Benoît adds that the opposition between illocution and perlocution can be thought of in terms of convention and intention (Benoît 2021, 42). If illocution is conventional, then it logically requires no interpretation. Whereas perlocution, as an intentional act, can be subject to interpretation, one can ask: what did you intend by saying that?

Cavell pursues his reflection by showing what the consequences of his 'passionate utterances' are:

> If I were to continue here, I would try making explicit the kind of challenge which the idea of passionate utterance poses in my mind to the idea of performance as an image of what speech is (remembering Austin's seeking to 'rule out the perlocutionary act as an instance of a performative utterance'), the idea of speech (perhaps I should make explicit that this includes writing, while writing has formal conditions of its own) as designed to work on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of others coevally with its design in revealing our desires to others and to ourselves. (Cavell 2008, 185–86)

While illocution—and hence Austin's theory of the performative—seems to focus on the order of the law, on automatic effects of locutions, Cavell's passionate utterances bring 'feelings, thoughts, and actions of others' back in the picture. One of the problems of Austin's focus on illocution is that it somehow denies the human dimension of linguistic exchange by making it automatic. Perlocution brings the human back into the picture, but this human element brings some chaotic dimension with it.

POETIC PERLOCUTIONS

Austin's privilege of illocution over perlocution brings him to defend a rather conservative and normative view of language. His account of perlocution remains minimal and fails to provide a convincing distinction from illocution. Two options arise here: either find a way to characterise convention such as it can become a criterion to distinguish illocution from perlocution or consider that we need to change something to Austin's hierarchy, to rethink the roles of perlocution and illocution. We have already explored the first option, and it seems that determining convention within the conventionality of language only leads to a dead-end.

The second option is more radical, and three kinds of answers have been given: 1. Consider perlocution as a subset of illocution (Gaines 1979); 2. Reject the distinction altogether (Petrey 1990); 3. Consider illocution as a subset of perlocution (Campbell 1973). The first answer is the most common one and commentators then go on to define criteria to understand perlocution better. The second answer is attractive as the difficulties encountered in distinguishing illocution from perlocution might indicate that this distinction holds no value. However, I think this answer goes too far into rejecting Austin's analysis of illocution, which contains important elements. Indeed, Austin's theory of illocution is quite valuable for certain situations in which illocution is institutionalised, either through an actual institution (baptism or christening), a habit of talking (can you pass me the salt?), or even grammatical categories (question, order, etc.) and we should therefore keep the notion of illocution for such cases. The third answer is the one I will explore in more detail as it seems to be the most promising.

If, following Cavell's analysis of passionate utterances, perlocution is part of performance after all and if poetic utterances are primarily perlocutionary, we can say that poetic utterances are performative after all (against Austin's initial view).[10] Whereas Austin's initial view excludes poetic utterances from the realm of performance and from the realm of standard illocution or perlocution, we can recast perlocution to create space for the poetic. Creating this space, however, requires reconsidering the role of illocution and giving more importance to perlocution. Austin's move back to the performative after his locution/illocution/perlocution 'sea-change' thus provides us with a performative somewhat different from his initial characterisation: it is no longer primarily conventional (*qua* institutional) but focused on what language does in a broader way. Austin's failure to acknowledge poetic utterances has brought him to a limited view of

[10] Sandra Laugier argues that the opposition between performative and perlocution can be viewed as following the double sense of the Latin prefix 'per-': 'Austin, for all his sensitivity to language, never comments on the fact that there could be confusion between the per- of perlocution with the per- of perform. The per- of performative, like that of performance, or of perfection (another Cavellian theme, perfectionism) denotes achievement, fulfilment; while the per- of perlocution denotes the means, the medium, the "by" of "by saying". In the perlocutionary, the statement is a means of doing, of creating an effect – to go through you, to reach, touch you. But isn't Cavell's perlocutionary also a kind of performance?' (Laugier 2020, 19). Considering that Cavell equates perlocution and performative, we could argue that perlocution after Cavell is both a means and an end.

perlocution and performance. Both his incapacities to deal with perlocution and poetic utterances are therefore intimately related to one another. Giving its force back to perlocution creates a space for the poetic while considering the poetic seriously creates a space for exploring perlocution. Unless we want a theory of language that is limited to what Cavell calls 'the order of law'—that is, a theory of something that is certainly not ordinary language as we experience it every day—we need to acknowledge the force of the poetic and the importance of perlocution.

To think of illocution as a subset of perlocution brings Austin to the broader tradition of a performative philosophy of language mentioned in the Introduction and that I will explore in more detail in Chap. 4. This tradition shares important aspects with pragmatism and considers that there is a certain efficacy of language, that language does something in a very general sense. Uses of language have effects: they make things visible and thinkable, they establish certain identities, they constitute a world we can live in. All these effects are perlocutionary. Illocution would then be considered a specific set of actions that are institutionalised in some ways (laws, rituals, grammar, etc.) and that work somewhat automatically. We could then imagine other subsets of perlocution and distinguish illocution from them. My aim here is not to create new categories but rather to show that considering illocution as a subset of perlocution allows to evade the problem of distinguishing perlocution from illocution and keeps intact Austin's insights in the illocutionary.

In this sense, all language has an efficacy, language always does something. However, as Benoît suggests, we must be careful not to confuse perlocutionary effects with a general efficacy of language. By doing so, we would fall into the trap of what Wittgenstein calls the 'craving for generality' and reach nothing of the specificities of perlocution (Benoît 2021, 39). For perlocution to occur, we need to have the intention of producing certain effects, even though these effects can sometimes escape our intention (be misinterpreted or misunderstood). Steven Davis argues that the process of communication relies on such a perlocutionary act:

> When we talk to one another, one thing we normally seek is to be understood. That is, we want our hearer to understand what we mean in saying and by saying what we do and what our thoughts are which we intend to express by the words we utter. If these are achieved, then we can be said to have communicated to our hearer. But often, and in some cases standardly,

we want more than this. We ask questions to elicit answers; we tell others something to inform them; and we make requests to get others to do our bidding. It is not enough in these cases to be understood, but what we want to bring about are certain effects, on the thoughts, actions, or feeling of our hearers, for our purpose in bringing these about is the point or purpose of our communicating and the achieving of our purpose is the performance of a perlocutionary act. (Davis 1979, 242)

We do many things with language. Mostly, at least in the way we use language nowadays, we aim to transmit some information, to communicate something. This communication is already the performance of a perlocutionary act insofar as our words have an effect, namely that of having informed someone else. We can use language to achieve other aims, such as warning, questioning, doubting, ordering, intimidating, and so on. In all these cases, our language aims to have an effect. In this sense, I only partly agree with Kaufmann when he argues: 'So, while Austin is certainly right to deny that every speech act has a perlocutionary moment, it is a safe bet that most do. It might be harder to come up with a taxonomy of these moments, but that does not mean that we are free to ignore them' (Kaufmann 2016, 46). Although I agree on the fact that we must make perlocution central in our understanding of language, I would go further and argue that every speech-act has a perlocutionary moment. If we include illocutions as a subset of perlocutions, then all speech-acts have a perlocutionary effect: language is never idle. Kaufmann is right in saying that a taxonomy of perlocution is more difficult to reach (if it is even possible), but we could already say that one group of perlocutions is illocutions (and we could perhaps even distinguish in this subgroup illocutions that rely on institutions and those that do not).

Language always has effects, but some of these effects have become conventions, institutions, and habits. For Stina Bäckström, Austin's focus on illocution is a focus on the normativity of language:

What I urge going forward from my conclusion is that the role of affection and response in the hearer should be reconsidered. I am not suggesting that we look for some one way in which hearer-responsiveness might be involved. Austin himself took a special interest in highly formalized, even ritualized, forms of speech, such as christening, marrying, and pronouncing sentence. In such instances, there might be a point in thinking about the acts as primarily setting up a normative space with new entitlements and commit-

ments, and thus as relatively independent of the audience's responses. This is connected, it seems to me, to the fact that such forms of speech are not addressed to any one particular person, but are moves within a legal or (quasi-legal) system. (Bäckström 2020, 15)

Illocutions are part of a legal or quasi-legal system in which utterances turn out to be felicitous or infelicitous. Before this felicity stage, there is the normative one that decides whether an utterance is legal or not. In some of our practices, this legality of moves in the language-game is important, but not in all of them. Austin focuses on these utterances because the normative space they create can be clearly delimitated, but, in so doing, he rejects all other utterances to a category he does not define or describe convincingly. The legality of a perlocutionary act is not in question, it just exists, and its effects cannot be analysed in terms of legality (i.e. in respect to the rules of language). In interpersonal speech, illocution plays almost no role because there is no institution to validate or invalidate utterances. This is where Austin's focus on illocution cuts off his theory from many uses of language, perhaps even the most common ones, that is, communication. This focus is also why he must exclude what he calls *parasitic* utterances from his consideration. This exclusion, against Searle's argument that it is merely strategic, is in fact embedded in his focus on illocution and his quasi-rejection of perlocution.

One of the ways in which poetry affects our worldview is by casting special light on the concept of truth. Moving from illocution to perlocution brings to the fore an alternative conception of truth. Daniele Lorenzini argues that:

it is possible to place the problem of truth not only at the level of the locutionary act (truth and false being defined, in this case, by constative, logical, or epistemological rules) and of the illocutionary act (thanks to the Austinian move of the true/false couple in direction of the happy/unhappy), but also at the level of the perlocutionary act, in which truth is to be conceived as an ethico-political force that has nothing conventional and that should not be confused with the illocutionary force. (Lorenzini 2017, 117)

For Lorenzini—who discusses this idea in relation to Michel Foucault's *parrêsia*—the truth of the perlocutionary force is ethical and political in the sense that it institutes a value of truth that can contest the established order. While the truths of locutionary and illocutionary acts are established by rules and conventions, the truth of perlocutionary acts lies in

their capacity to affect the world and our ways of being in it. In this context, the perlocutionary relates to the poetic and the literary. According to Johan Faerber, there is a perlocutionary effect of literature:

> In this sense, Literature would move from a *reality effect* to *an effect in reality*. It would thus acquire a savagely *perlocutionary* power, namely that of transforming narrative, poem, and theatre into the sensible vector of an intentionality of which the world, as great addressee of all text, might have become the sensible and psychological trace.[11] (Faerber 2018, 225–26)

Barthes's idea of 'reality effect' (Barthes 1986, 141–48) that aims to make fiction more believable remains within a framework in which truth and representation are key concepts. On the contrary, Faerber suggests that literature has a perlocutionary effect, an 'effect in reality'. While the 'reality effect' remains focused on illocution as an attempt at make-believe, the 'effect in reality' shifts to perlocution, to the force of literary utterances. This force of poetic utterances affects language and the world, and we will explore in Part Two how this force relates to ethics.

Now that we can think of perlocution as a central notion to understand our uses of language, parasitic utterances (that fail to be illocutions, that are misfires or abuses) can be brought back into the picture. They might not have an illocutionary force, but they do have a perlocutionary one. Some uses of poetry aim at disrupting the order of illocution, as Joseph's *Baisetioles* shows. What is also interesting is the physicality of perlocution: language is considered a force almost in a physical manner.[12] There is a materiality of language that perlocution acts upon, and such materiality is central to poetic uses of language. Indeed, the focus on the sound or the shape of language in concrete poetry, for instance, reveals this physical and material dimension of language that perlocution in some ways shapes. Perlocution is therefore a poetic force in the etymological sense of making or shaping. It forms and informs language in such ways as to bring it to do something. It is in this sense that poetic perlocution is an intentional

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[11] My translation: 'En ce sens, la Littérature voudrait passer d'un *effet de réel* à *un effet dans le réel*. Elle désirerait ainsi se doter d'une puissance sauvagement *perlocutoire*, à savoir parvenir à faire du récit, du poème et du théâtre le vecteur sensible d'une intentionnalité dont, grand destinataire de tout texte, le monde sera peut-être devenu l'empreinte sensible et psychologique.'

[12] Derrida suggests something like this in his reading of Austin, but he misreads Austin's notion of force by making it precisely such a physical force.

misfire. It does not aim at bringing to effect other than the intended one but at undermining the game of intention. A poem cannot misfire in the sense a ship christening could, because a poem is not part of an institutionalised convention, it is not illocution but perlocution. By so doing, poems might aim at disrupting illocution, at disrupting linguistic conventions to bring to see the world anew. In the next chapter, I will explore how this disruption of linguistic conventions through the virality of perlocution is central to queer theory and social performativity.

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Viral Poetics as Performative Philosophy of Language

In Chap. 3, we operated a shift from the parasite to the virus metaphor that overturns Austin's evaluation of poetic utterances and gives them a space within OLP. This shift shows how poetry can provide insights towards a performative philosophy of language and exchange a conservative picture of language for a creative and inventive one. In one of her poems, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says: 'Always, I wanted marriage inside out' (Sedgwick 1993, 34). Insofar as marriage is exemplary of the performativity of language for Austin, I want the performative inside out. To want the performative inside out means to uncover an alternative that lies dormant behind the normative performative that excludes, silences, oppresses those who do not conform, to activate a virus to create an alternative space.[1] We have seen how connecting the poetic to perlocution offers an alternative to Austin's conception of language, and it remains to be seen how this alternative affects literary theory.

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[1] The way language performatively oppresses parts of the population has been explored in many ways, especially in relation to the question of free speech. Where is the limit between free speech and hate speech? We can think here of Butler's analysis of hate speech, but also of the way critical race theory and postcolonial thought tackle the question (Matsuda et al. 1993; Butler 1997a; Spivak 1999). Another problem that has arisen from this performativity of language is the question of pornography: is pornography a performative discourse that creates conditions for hate through its illocutionary acts? (Hornsby and Langton 1998; Weinstein 1999; Bauer 2015). I will focus more on the question of linguistic oppression in Chap. 6.

In contemporary literary theory, overcoming the normative performative has been a central objective of feminist and queer theory. Against the dominant performative, queer theory can be seen, following Sedgwick, as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (Sedgwick 1993, 8). While the dominant performative establishes an order that supposedly cannot be moved, queer theory aims to see the world as open possibilities. Meaning is no longer monolithic, it is no longer established once and for all, but is constituted through the exploration of these possibilities. Language moves from being a tool of oppression to being one of creation. Although queer theory seems to focus on that which refuses to be performative, on that which refuses to produce and reproduce, it does not necessarily mean that it must be opposed to the performativity of what I call viral poetics. Indeed, this opposition is only apparent, as we have seen that the performativity of viral poetics moves away from the Austinian focus on illocution (the conventional) and towards perlocution (the unconventional).

In this chapter, I explore the idea of a viral poetics that highlights the creative and inventive dimension of language against Austin's normative picture. This viral poetics relies on a performative philosophy of language that is at play in queer theory. By focusing on works characterised as 'autotheory', I aim to show how the specific uses of language in poetry provide a performative philosophy of language. In the first section of this chapter, I briefly explore the ways in which autotheory can be said to be poetry (and the opposite: that poetry is a kind of autotheory). In the second, I focus on Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie* to highlight the performative dimension of language. In the third, I show how this performative dimension reveals that language is not a mere representation of reality but that performative language constitutes reality (and more specifically identity and gender) in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. In the fourth, I elaborate on the idea of a creative performative that opposes the dominant performative. In the fifth and final section, I conclude with Kae Tempest's idea of 'creative connection' to understand how poetry comes to constituting the performative.

Undoing Genre: Poetry as Autotheory

The title of this section hints towards the idea that, like gender in Butler's theory, literary genres are construed performatively. As we have seen in Chap. 2, rather than considering poetry as a genre with clear and definite properties, because such properties can never be objectively determined as they are subject to geographical and historical changes, I consider poetry as a *dispositif* that aims at producing effects in the world. This *dispositif* moves away from an essentialist perspective on properties and towards a pragmatic perspective on effects. Pierre Vinclair follows such a pragmatic shift by focusing on the efforts required by various texts: 'This problem [of identifying formal traits of a genre] disappears if we accept to consider that a genre of texts is defined by an *effort*—similarly, novels can look not alike and share a same genre because they aim to do the same thing to their reader—, for instance an effort of which unreadability is a first symptom. I call energetics this method that, belonging both to pragmatics and speculative philosophy, aims to reconstruct the action of a text'[2] (Vinclair 2019, 5). Vinclair's focus on *effort* leads him to consider reading as a form of energetics that suggests moving from what a text supposedly is—its genre and its formal characteristics—to what a text does to its readers. This pragmatic move operates a desacralisation of poetry (and of genres in general) to suggest that what matters are the effects and their related efforts. Our analyses in the previous chapters revealed that Natacha Guiller's sanitary inquiry of a supermarket brought poetry down from its ivory tower and made it descend into the ordinary to transform it from within. Her investigation remains subjective and personal and does not aim at the supposed objectivity of traditional investigations, which reveals the autobiographical or autofictional dimension of her poetic *dispositif*. A similar claim can be made regarding Manuel Joseph's *Baisetioles*, which is an inquiry into the public media space that intertwines with the author's life.

Rather than focusing on the notion of genre, that reached its limits, focusing on poetic *dispositif* adopts a more pragmatic view close to Wittgenstein's family resemblance. We can consider genres as various

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[2] My translation: 'Ce problème disparaît si l'on veut bien considérer qu'un genre de textes de définit par un *effort*—de même, les romans peuvent se ressembler et partager le même genre, parce qu'ils essaient de faire la même chose à leur lecteur—, par exemple un effort dont l'illisibilité est un premier symptôme. J'appelle cette démarche qui, relevant à la fois de la pragmatique et de la philosophie spéculative, s'attache à reconstruire l'acte d'un texte, l'énergétique.'

language-games that share some characteristics with others. New language-games can come into existence and relate in some ways to other games, and I will come back to the relationship between genre and language-games in Chap. 5. Autotheory is interesting in this respect because it focuses on performativity and change. The notions of autobiography, autofiction, autotheory all revolve around the same idea that there is a saying of the self, but that this saying can be made under different 'constraints'. The most famous one is the idea of 'autobiographic pact' theorised by Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune 1989), but this pact does not prevent authors from fictionalising their lives. Can there be a saying of oneself without fictionalising it? I have already suggested that the notion of fiction might not be the most relevant category to understand what is at play in poetic works, and autotheory moves away from this idea of fiction. As Shannon Brennan argues, autotheory is 'a genre concerned with the performative presentation of a somatic self-in-becoming, whose subjectivity is formed in relation to community and to power, and as a genre that stages the process of transforming and being-transformed-by theory (and especially theories of gender, capital, affect, community), autotheory seemed—seems—a useful pedagogical tool for allowing students to process their process across this threshold' (Brennan 2021, 719). Autotheory becomes a tool for the transformation of the readers (or students in Brennan's case). What is important is the effects that the text can have, the 'transforming and being transformed by' rather than some formal properties, the pragmatic perspective rather than the essentialist one.

Contemporary literary theorists have coined the term 'autotheory' to describe works that combine a saying of the self and aspects of critical theory. In this sense, Guiller and Joseph's works could both be considered as kinds of autotheories, albeit in a way very different from what literary theorists currently consider autotheory. This term has been used by Maggie Nelson to describe *The Argonauts* and she acknowledges her debt to Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie* in using this term. Preciado himself describes his work as 'a somatopolitical fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory' (Preciado 2013, 11). In autotheory, the question of the self is mediated through theory and the idea of the politics of the body. As Lauren Fournier argues, 'In autotheory, one's embodied experiences become the material through which one theorizes and, in a similar way, theory becomes the discourse through which one's lived experience is refracted' (L. Fournier 2018, 658). There is an interaction between the

subjectivity of the narrator and a higher-order theory, or as Robyn Wiegman suggests 'an encounter between first person narration and theory as an established body of contemporary academic thought' (Wiegman 2020, 1). Émile Lévesque-Jalbert considers the influences of French feminism on autotheory to distinguish it from autofiction: 'By linking the feminist understanding of the self to the abandonment of the strictest definition of autofiction, this article has proposed a transversal account of self-writing and self-theorizing, i.e., a perspective that takes into account their connection and their mutual influence' (Lévesque-Jalbert 2020, 82). As Kris Pint and Maria Gil Ulldemolins argue following Roland Barthes, autotheory aims to overcome 'the separation of intellectual, rigorous reflection and the affects of embodied experience' (Pint and Ulldemolins 2020, 120). Autotheory mainly challenges the notion of genre, as if poetry were trying to escape the rules of poetry. As Ralph Clare argues: 'Genre, then, is a system of resemblances, not representations, composed of what we arrange and assemble, not what can be measured up and classified. In its in-between-ness, autotheory is a strange, hybrid thing' (Clare 2020, 104). Following Wittgenstein, genre is much more a family resemblance concept than one with clear boundaries. This 'strange, hybrid thing' can be grasped through the notion of poetic *dispositif*. As we will see in further chapters, this notion of poetic *dispositif* relates to a conception of poetry as a documentary in two related ways. First, this documentary describes works made out of documents, and most of the works that Franck Leibovici calls poetic documents are transcriptions and transformations of existent documentary material. Second, this documentary poetry describes the way in which poetry itself becomes a document. Following this line of thought, autotheory would be a form of document, a form of documentary poetry, and I will come back to this idea in Chap. 7.

While the category of autotheory is useful to classify some works that do not fit so well in previous categories (autofiction, novel, essay, etc.), the challenge that autotheory poses to traditional literary genres highlights the fact that thinking in genres is not always the best way to go. It is an indication that we should perhaps move away from genres as fixed categories because the point of many literary works is to challenge previous definitions of their genre. This is what Derrida also suggests by considering that the law of genre 'is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy' (Derrida 1980, 59). This defiance is especially visible in the history of modern poetry where poets

progressively abandon what seemed to be characteristic of their art (verse, rhymes, meter, etc.). While it might make sense to look for similar characteristics in some works for a specific historical period, any attempts at generalisation are doomed to fail. They are 'craving for generality' that, following Wittgenstein, can only lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations. If we resist this craving for generality, we can focus on the effects of these works, on how they affect readers, rather than formal characteristics. As Ryan Tracy argues, commenting on Derrida: 'When Derrida declares in "Circumfession" that "the virus will have been the only object of my work" (92), he invites a reading of his deconstructive (auto)theory as "a theory of the parasite virus, of the inside/outside, of the impeccable *pharmakos*, terrorizing the others through the instability [it] carries everywhere, one book open in another" (308)' (Tracy 2020, 31–32). The virus of autotheory thus contaminates the inside/outside dichotomy and with it the binary oppositions that structure traditional theory. The virus of poetry thus forces us to rethink our categories of thought, to rethink our ways of being in the world.[3]

We thus move from considering poetry as a clearly defined genre towards an understanding of poetry as performative, as a *dispositif* doing something to and with language in order to affect readers and the world. We can furthermore consider literary works to be heterogeneous, combining lyric sequences with narrative or critical ones. Antonio Rodriguez distinguishes three 'pacts' that characterise intentional frameworks for literature: lyric, fable-like ('*fabulant*'), and critical (Rodriguez 2003, 94–96). While these pacts indicate a general tendency of a work, there can be some overlaps. We understand autotheory as a form of critical lyric, which can also be found in what has been called the lyric essay. Autotheory would thus be one of the latest instantiations of poetry, in the sense that poetry is not a genre with well-defined limits (or these limits are purely historical and contextual) but rather an investigation of the powers of language through the expression of subjectivity. The lyric (be it autobiographical/fictional or not) presents itself as the support for a critical reflection on language and the world. The question of genre is therefore left

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[3] The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us in what ways a virus can be disruptive to our ways of being in the world, but also how creativity becomes the solution to make the world livable despite this disruption. The force of the virus is thus not only a destructive one (although this destructive dimension must not be underestimated) but also a creative invention of new ways of being in the world. The question of the duration of these effects is hard to settle, but the effects themselves are undeniable.

aside to focus on the effects of such poetic *dispositifs*. In a broad sense, autotheory is a form of poetry that enquires into the powers of language and explores the possibilities for the generation of significance.

Paul Preciado on the Performativity of Language

Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie* is a work that defies literary genres. In this investigation, Preciado follows how his use of testosterone affects him and refers to some aspects of critical theory to characterise his experience. Written in Spanish and described as an 'Autoteoría', it plays at the intersection of autobiography and critical theory. This centrality of theory might be one of the differences between Preciado and Nelson, as Tyler Bradway argues: 'Despite its narrative interludes, however, *Testo Junkie* is recognizable as a work of critical theory. By contrast, *The Argonauts* quite literally moves theory to the margins' (Bradway 2021, 717). Preciado's work looks much more like theory than poetry, while Nelson and Tempest are primarily poets. Focusing too much on these differences however misses the point of their similarity, namely that they explore the potential of language to generate significance by combining the experience of the subject with a theoretical reflection.

In the chapter 'The Attractive Force of a Break-Up' from *An Apartment on Uranus*, a collection of chronicles written for *Libération*, Preciado explores how the performativity of language establishes institutions and becomes a tool for oppression: 'Performative force is the result of the violent imposition of a norm that we prefer to call nature to avoid confronting the reorganization of the social relationships of power that any change in conventions would bring about' (Preciado 2019, 98). In order to acquire its dominant position, the performative must disguise itself. This disguise takes the name 'nature'. By passing as natural, the dominant performative becomes a universal truth, an objective matter of fact. Preciado challenges the traditional opposition between nature and culture by showing that nature is always already a cultural phenomenon.

It is through a disguise (*nature*) that dominant performatives (*culture*) act upon and regulate social norms. Following Butler, Preciado considers this disguise in linguistic terms:

> Butler would go even further in her thinking about utterances on identity (gender identity, but also sexual and racial identity, 'man', 'woman', 'homosexual', 'black', etc.) as performative utterances that pass as constative, per-

locutionary acts that pass as illocutionary acts, words that produce what they are supposed to describe, questions that take the form of scientific statements, or commands that are presented as ethnographic portrayals. (Preciado 2019, 99)

The disguise is elaborate: dominant performatives present themselves as constatives, as if they were matters of fact rather than interpretations. They are perlocutionary acts that present themselves as illocutionary acts. While illocutionary acts are conventional and as it were automatic (the illocutionary force is active as soon as the utterance is spoken), perlocutionary acts are extralinguistic effects of language that are not totally controllable. By disguising themselves as illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts become immediately effective. The dominant performative controls perlocutionary effects by making them pass as illocutionary. One way to undermine the dominant performative is therefore to reveal its perlocutionary—and hence purely cultural—nature.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler summarises her view on the performativity of gender:

> There [in *Gender Trouble*] I argued that gender is performative, by which I meant that no gender is 'expressed' by actions, gestures, or speech, but that the performance of gender produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core. That is, the performance of gender retroactively produces the effect of some true or abiding feminine essence or disposition, so that one cannot use an expressive model for thinking about gender. Moreover, I argued that gender is produced as a ritualized repetition of conventions, and that this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler 1997b, 144)

Butler argues against a notion of expression that would repeat the metaphysics of gender. If expression means—in the romantic sense discussed in Chap. 2—that there is a hidden essence to disclose, it only replays the metaphysics at play in representational conceptions of language. An 'expressive model for thinking about gender' is therefore inoperative for Butler. However, if we understand expression in Charles Taylor's constitutive sense, it becomes relevant to Butler's views. Gender is performatively produced for Butler, and hence requires a 'ritualized repetition of conventions' in the sense of Austin's performative. We must however remember that, following Nietzsche's critique of the subject, the idea of a doer is related to a dominant moral discourse: 'In this sense, there can be no

subject without a blameworthy act, and there can be no "act" apart from a discourse of accountability and, according to Nietzsche, without an institution of punishment' (Butler 1997a, 46). While for Austin the institutions are established and need not be questioned, Nietzsche brings to a theory of performativity such a questioning of the institutions. Butler makes this questioning explicit and translates it in terms of gender. What is at play is therefore not only how language works but also how language constitutes the very subject of speech.

The word 'break-up' in the title of Preciado's chapter translates the French *rupture*, which includes the broader meaning of rupture. In this idea of rupture lies the disruptive force of language and the attraction of break-up becomes the attraction for and of the disruptive. If the reiteration of performative utterances establishes social norms and if the possibility of parasitism lies within this reiteration, then it might be possible to modify, affect, and infect the dominant performative. This moment of parasitism is when the virality of language comes into play. The attraction of disruption brings to resist the normativity of ordinary language. It is in this resistance—a poetic resistance we have seen in Chap. 2—that lies the possibility of creating something different, as Preciado argues:

> For the subaltern, speaking implies not simply resisting the violence of the hegemonic performative, but above all imagining dissident theatres where the production of a different performative force can be possible. Inventing a new scene of enunciation, as Jacques Rancière would say. Disidentifying oneself in order to reconstruct the subjectivity damaged by the dominant performative language. (Preciado 2019, 99)

Preciado uses the term 'subaltern' to name the oppressed, silenced minority following Gayatri Spivak's famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak 1999). He argues that the only way for the subaltern to escape the domination of the performative is to invent a different stage, a stage in which the dominant performative will appear as it is and lose its performative force. Poetic and artistic works are ways of creating such alternative stages by bringing to the fore the disruptive force of language and using the virality of language to infect other uses of language.

This discussion about the performativity of language highlights an important point regarding a performative conception of language: language does not only work along the lines of representation and reference as philosophers usually think. As Preciado argues, following a Nietzschean

idea: 'A word is not the *representation* of a thing. It is a slice of history: an endless chain of uses and citations' (Preciado 2019, 167). The question of reference that is central to a representational conception of language becomes secondary in a performative conception of language. One of the reasons to move away from the representationalist framework lies in its difficulty in assessing fictional and poetic utterances. Cathy Caruth even argues that reference and fiction are interdependent: 'direct or phenomenal reference to the world means, paradoxically, the production of a fiction; or otherwise put, that reference is radically different from physical law' (Caruth 1990, 195). Once we move away from the question of reference (as it is not so relevant in poetry), the question of fiction loses its significance.

It is crucial to move against the dominant representationalist framework and towards the disruptive power of the poetic performative (in opposition to Austin's normative performative). To operate such a move, Preciado argues that we must focus on our uses of language:

> On the one hand, it is imperative to distinguish ourselves from the dominant scientific, technological, commercial, legal languages that comprise the cognitive skeleton of the epistemology of sexual difference and techno-patriarchal capitalism. On the other, it is urgent to invent a new grammar that allows us to imagine another social organization of forms of life. (Preciado 2019, 50)

As we have seen in Chap. 2, the idea of a poetic *dispositif* suggests that, following Wittgenstein, inventing a new grammar means inventing a new language-game that allows us to imagine new forms of life.

LINGUISTIC CONSTITUTION OF IDENTITY

With the performative, the position of the speaker (subject) becomes of central significance. As Sedgwick argues: '[Discussions of linguistic performativity] also deal with how powerfully language positions: does it change the way we understand meaning, for instance, if the semantic force of a word like "queer" is so different in a first-person from what it is in a second- or third-person sentence?' (Sedgwick 1993, 11). If meaning is no longer construed in terms of 'objective' reference but in terms of 'subjective' performance, it cannot be separated from the position of the speaker.

As Nietzsche puts it: 'An action is perfectly devoid of value: it all depends on *who* performs it' (Nietzsche 2009, KSA 12.10[47]). Language is not something neutral but is dependent on the speaking subject and the context of utterance. Translated in Austin's terms: a speech-act is devoid of value, it all depends on the 'total situation'.

Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* has brought autotheory to critical fame. In this work, she explores the experience of her pregnant changing body and relates it to her partner's transitioning. It builds on a literary form explored by Roland Barthes in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* that brings into relation literary references, critical concepts, and autobiographical experiences (Barthes 1977). In contrast to Barthes, Nelson's work insists much more on the autobiographical dimension, but she also inserts references to critical work in the margins. This combination of autobiographical experiences and critical references brings Nelson to question the notions of subject and identity in relation to language:

> Words change depending on who speaks them; there is no cure. The answer isn't just to introduce new words (boi, cisgendered, andro-fag) and then set out to reify their meanings (though obviously there is power and pragmatism here). One must also become alert to the multitude of possible uses, possible contexts, the wings with which each word can fly. Like when you whisper, You're just a hole, letting me fill you up. Like when I say husband. (Nelson 2016, 9)

Against the reification of meaning, Nelson suggests looking at the performativity of language. What are the uses and contexts for words? Saying a word like 'husband' might mean very different things depending on the context, but it also has a performative power of constituting the other. Creating new words is therefore not sufficient to overturn the social order; there is a need to change the performative force of the words we use. It does not mean that new words are useless, but rather that they are useless if not associated with a performative and constitutive power. For new words to be effective, they need a context in which they can make sense, a form of life and a language-game in which they can be implemented. To pursue the viral metaphor, new words must be able to operate as viruses infecting language-games and forms of life to transform them from within.

Combining Austin's performative and Nietzsche's expressive conceptions of language, Butler explores how language performatively creates

social identities. Her work on the performativity of language and gender seems to be reshaping Austin's performative through Nietzsche's philosophy, thus bringing more conceptual tools to Nietzsche and more creative powers to Austin:

> Hence, within the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that 'there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.' In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated, or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results. (Butler 1991, 34)

Butler reads Nietzsche's comment on the doer and the deed through the Austinian perspective of the performative. The specificity of Butler's reading of Nietzsche is that the deed becomes a performative that is separated from the performer. Inasmuch as the world does not pre-exist the discourses we hold, the subject does not pre-exist the deeds. To the contrary, the subject is performatively brought into existence by the deed, as the world is brought into being by language. However, the value of this performative can only be assessed by considering the whole context, the total speech situation. As we have seen, doer and deed shape one another, as utterer and utterance. What Nietzsche criticises in the traditional way of thinking about the relation between doer and deed is that it is modelled on the relation between cause and effect. While the cause is not affected by the effect, the doer is affected by the deed (and reciprocally). Nietzsche argues that the deed shapes the doer as much as the doer shapes the deed.

As we have seen in the Introduction, poetry asks that we move away from a representational model of language and towards an expressivist one. Although Butler is suspicious of the expressive model according to which gender is an essence that is expressed through different sociocultural aspects such as actions, gestures, and speech, expressivism as I understand it suggests that there is no essence, but that the world is precisely shaped by our uses of language, thus joining Butler's performative understanding of language. Even though Austin's performative seems to

move away from the notion of reference, we have seen that his rejection of parasitic uses of language shows that he remains attached to *representationalism*. Nancy Bauer argues that expression is for Austin 'inherently neutral and its (perlocutionary) effects are unpredictable, which means that neither the utterer nor the auditor is automatically responsible for any failure of uptake. When an utterance has perlocutionary effects on others, it will be absolutely necessary to make one-off judgments about who is responsible for them. For in the domain of the perlocutionary we cannot rely on "convention" to sort out the question of responsibility' (Bauer 2015, 83). Against illocutionary acts that are conventional and therefore predictable, Bauer argues that a focus on expression brings the perlocutionary (the unpredictable) to the fore. As we have seen in Chap. 3, focusing on perlocution creates a space for poetic utterances within Austin's theory. The opposition between illocution and perlocution thus reflects the two interpretations of *dispositif* suggested in Chap. 2: while illocution sides with the normative and repressive dimension of the *dispositif*, perlocution falls on the side of impulse and libido.

A queer theory of language therefore shows that the social norms and conventions embedded in language can be overturned, can be modified, and that language is not an obstacle to change but a place of endless possibilities. Nelson precisely questions this normativity of language and compares it to Argo:

> A day or two after my love pronouncement, now feral with vulnerability, I sent you the passage from Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes in which Barthes describes how the subject who utters the phrase 'I love you' is like 'the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name.' Just as the Argo's parts may be replaced over time but the boat is still called the Argo, whenever the lover utters the phrase 'I love you,' its meaning must be renewed by each use, as 'the very task of love and of language is to give to one and the same phrase inflections which will be forever new.' (Nelson 2016, 5)

Roland Barthes connects (or confuses) Jason's ship Argo (on which Theseus was a crew member) with Theseus' ship that gave its name to the famous thought experiment: if during its travels and battles all the original parts of the ship have progressively been replaced, can we say it is still the same ship? Nelson translates this question into the field of language: are utterances such as 'I love you' always the same or are they completely

different? While we are using the same words, the performative power of language shows that we are always renewing the meaning of our utterances.

However, we often fail to acknowledge the performative power of language:

> Afraid of assertion. Always trying to get out of 'totalizing' language, i.e., language that rides roughshod over specificity; realizing this is another form of paranoia. Barthes found the exit to this merry-go-round by reminding himself that 'it is language which is assertive, not he.' It is absurd, Barthes says, to try to flee from language's assertive nature by 'add[ing] to each sentence some little phrase of uncertainty, as if anything that came out of language could make language tremble.' (Nelson 2016, 122)

Nelson is afraid of totalising language. She is afraid of a language that asserts and imposes some kind of reality upon her. However, it is not sufficient to add 'some little phrase of uncertainty' to overcome this assertive nature. It is necessary to remain in the ever-creative dimension of language, to remain at the point where language cannot be reified, cannot be totalising. This is what Nelson finds in queer theory:

> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wanted to make way for 'queer' to hold all kinds of resistances and fracturings and mismatches that have little or nothing to do with sexual orientation. 'Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant' she wrote. 'Keenly, it is relational, and strange.' She wanted the term to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of placeholder—a nominative, like Argo, willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. That is what reclaimed terms do—they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive. (Nelson 2016, 35)

Queer theory, according to Nelson's reading of Sedgwick, aims at remaining in this fugitive moment of constitution of meaning without going towards reification. It remains performative without becoming conventional; it remains perlocutionary without becoming illocutionary.

Sedgwick further challenges this conventionality of the performative: 'The fascinating and powerful class of negative performatives—disavowal, demur, renunciation, deprecation, repudiation, "count me out," giving the lie—is marked, in almost every instance, by the asymmetrical property of being much less prone to becoming conventional than the positive performatives' (Sedgwick 2003, 70). This idea of negative performatives

moves away from the conventionality of illocution and towards the unconventionality and unpredictability of perlocution. It is important to note that a negative performative does not negate the existence of the performative but rather disrupts or displaces it. As Julie Rak argues, it is 'a refusal that does not negate the original statement' (Rak 2021). To avoid the confusion between refusal and negation, Sedgwick coins the term periperformative to describe utterances that are not explicit performatives but 'explicitly refer to explicit performative utterances' such as '"We get a kick out of dedicating this ground" or "We wish we had consecrated it"' (Sedgwick 2003, 68). She further defines the periperformative in contrast to the exemplary:

> By contrast to the performative, the periperformative is the mode in which people may invoke illocutionary acts in the explicit context of other illocutionary acts. Thus, it can also accomplish something toward undoing that fateful reliance of explicit performativity on *the exemplary*, on the single example—which so often has meant, for instance, in the contingency of philosophical and literary practice, the exemplarity of the marriage act itself. (Sedgwick 2003, 79)

The periperformative highlights how an illocutionary act can contaminate another illocutionary act and reveals the virality of language. More than that, it means that the illocutionary is not set once and for all, that it can be changed and, with this changeable nature, the illocutionary becomes closer to the perlocutionary. The periperformative moves in the vicinity of the performative but highlights a different point. While Austin's performative remains in the exemplary, the periperformative opens the possibility to escape this exemplarity and understand how contamination can occur between performatives, and how it is possible to turn the performative inside out.[4]

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[4] In her essay 'Periperformative Life Narrative Queer Collages', Anna Poletti argues that works of autotheory can be understood as periperformative life narratives: 'Periperformative life narrative, rather, *wants* to make truth claims about the author's life experiences, but critiques the terms under which those claims can be made and the consensus views about what makes a life meaningful that they assume, what Berlant refers to as "the presumed self-evident value of bionarrative" and the idea of "the good life"' (Poletti 2016, 373). In such works, there is a truth of the periperformative, the action of an illocutionary act on another one. We move away from the question of fiction and towards the question of effect. Autotheory does not aim at the factual truth of the 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune 1989)

As we have seen with Preciado and Butler, there is a process of denaturalisation, that is, of showing that what the dominant performative imposes as natural is in fact socio-culturally constituted. As Annemarie Jagose argues:

> While the concept of performativity includes these and other self-reflexive instances, equally—if less obviously—it explains those everyday productions of gender and sexual identity which seem most to evade explanation. For gender is performative, not because it is something that the subject deliberately and playfully assumes, but because, through reiteration, it consolidates the subject. In this respect, performativity is the precondition of the subject. (Jagose 1996, 86)

The subject is performatively constituted, and we can understand Henri Meschonnic's idea that 'There is no subject without the subject of a poem' (Meschonnic 2001, 292) as a claim that it is through poetic means that the subject reaches the understanding of its own performativity. The subject is performatively constituted and usually follows the norms of the dominant performative that reiterates itself constantly.

Towards a Creative Performative

We have seen that a performative philosophy of language reconfigures the traditional notion of the 'subject'. If the subject is no longer a given but performatively construed, the question remains: who or what builds the subject? Butler points out this question in relation to Nietzsche: 'For if the "subject" is first animated through accusation, conjured as the origin of an injurious action, then it would appear that the accusation has to come *from* an interpellating performative that precedes the subject, one that presupposes the prior operation of an efficacious speaking. Who delivers that formative judgment?' (Butler 1997a, 46). If the subject is formed by a performative and if a performative requires a subject to be enounced, this whole subject-formation seems to lead to infinite regress.

While we could probably avoid the problem by considering the formative performative a thought experiment, a conceptual fiction that needs no origin (in the same sense the question of the origin of language cannot be

but at a truth that highlights what is significant and meaningful, thus providing a reflection about the conditions of meaning and linguistic effects.

solved), Butler highlights an interesting point in Nietzsche's text: 'Nietzsche's own language elides this problem by claiming that the "der Täter ist zum Tun bloß hinzugedichtet." This passive verb formation, "hizugedichtet," poetically or fictively added on to, appended, or applied, leaves unclear who or what executes this fairly consequential formation' (Butler 1997a, 46). Nietzsche elides the problem by using a passive form. However, he also uses a literary vocabulary to describe the subject-formation: the subject is poetically or fictively added to make sense, to generate significance. The subject is therefore the poetic creation of an interpretation.

In this sense, Nietzsche brings to the fore the literary dimension of his worldview. Alexander Nehamas offers the most famous 'literary' reading of perspectivism by arguing that Nietzsche considers the world as text: 'Nietzsche looks at the world as if it were a vast collection of what can only, at least in retrospect, be construed as signs; and once again, it appears to be no accident that he likes to think of the world as text' (Nehamas 1985, 82). If the world is a text made of an interrelation of signs, then it is subject to interpretation. This interpretation is not only descriptive but produces the world, in an expressivist vein *à la* Taylor. One of the consequences of such a view is that the world is never given but always in the making: 'As in the literary case, so in the world, according to Nietzsche, to reinterpret events is to rearrange effects and therefore to generate new things. Our "text" is being composed as we read it, and our readings are new parts of it that will give rise to further ones in the future' (Nehamas 1985, 91). The notion of interpretation reveals the literary dimension of Nietzsche's perspectivism. At the heart of his philosophy lies the idea of the poetic *qua* generation of significance. The subject is a poetic creation necessary to make sense of the world.

We can now see two ways in which language can act: a conventional one and a creative one. While the conventional performative aims at instituting itself as dominant through the repetition of its iterations, the creative one aims at disrupting these repetitions. The creative force brings the poetic back into the Austinian picture of language. Errol Warwick Slinn suggests, against Austin, that poetry is 'homologous with performative insofar as generically it privileges self-reference, flaunts illocutionary effects, reiterates conventions and formulae, creates its own meaning, and above all does something with words' (Slinn 1999, 67). However, there is no 'straightforward equation between poetry and performatives' (Slinn

1999, 67). Slinn's suggestion opens new ways of thinking creativity in language. Poetry and performatives might not operate in similar ways, but they both attempt to do things with words.

Slinn further argues that we should not construe poetry as transformative because while 'performativity rests upon a constitutive theory of discourse, thus allowing for the introduction of new meaning, new metaphors which would shift cultural perception, it does not guarantee or even necessarily offer social change' (Slinn 1999, 70). However, we do not need to think of transformation in such a limited way. The disclosive dimension of poetry, while it might not always lead to concrete social change (and there can be some conservative poetry too), offers a standpoint from which critique and subversion can operate. Poetry can thus be considered to have a transformative viral force: it infects and affects language and, by affecting language, it affects our ways of being in the world. A performative philosophy of language must therefore necessarily include the poetic *qua* creative and transformative force, against Austin's initial exclusion of it. There is a poetic performative—an idea that sounds contradictory in an Austinian vocabulary—that reveals how language generates significance.

KAE TEMPEST AND THE CREATIVE CONNECTION OF POETRY

Kae Tempest's *On Connection* is a reflection (a personal meditation according to the publisher) on their poetic practice as a writer and performer. It departs from their previous work that explored more traditional forms of poetry (epic in *Brand New Ancients*, lyric in *Running Upon the Wires* for instance) or literature (the novel in *The Bricks That Built the Houses*). *On Connection* comes closer to autotheory (even though the frontiers are fuzzy) and combines personal thoughts and experiences with references to critical figures. It explores the relations between poetry and creativity through the notion of connection. Poetry, Tempest argues, is a form of creative connection: 'Creative connection is the use of creativity to access and feel connection and get yourself and those with you in the moment into a more connected space' (Tempest 2020, 5–6). Once again, the creativity of poetry brings us into the realm of the performative, in a space where connections can take place. This is because it moves away from the normative performative towards the creative performative: 'Naked language has a humanising effect; listening to someone tell their story, people noticeably opened up, became more vulnerable, and let their defences

down; the rooms got less frosty, less confrontational' (Tempest 2020, 22). Poetry is a matter of naked language, that is, a language that is not using its performative power to impose sociocultural norms but a language that helps people overcome judgment, and helps them move towards a more inclusive form of life.

However, this naked language is also putting oneself in danger: 'Each time I have walked into strange rooms with poems to tell, I have had to confront my own insecurities and judgements about who I was talking to and why, and each time I was taught something about what connects us being more powerful than what divides' (Tempest 2020, 23). Poetry is a way of confronting and overcoming insecurities, and there is always a risk in this confrontation. Revealing oneself is an act of courage that comes back to Nietzsche's idea of the sovereign individual who is able to make promises that we have explored in the Introduction. Making a promise amounts to signing a contract that places, Nietzsche argues, the promisor in a position of debt towards the promisee: the promisor owes something to the promisee. An animal with the right to make promises must therefore be, according to Nietzsche, a 'sovereign individual' who has the freedom and the will to do so. Without such freedom and will, no one can make a promise, no one can place oneself in the dangerous situation of debtor. Having the right to make a promise is therefore a situation of strength, 'the strong and reliable' are 'those who are *allowed* to promise' (Nietzsche 2014, GM II, 2).

Creativity, Tempest further argues, is not limited to poetry as a genre but is a way of life: 'creativity is any act of love. Any act of making. It is usually applied to art-making, but it can also be applied to anything you do that requires your focus, skill and ingenuity. It takes creativity to dress well, for example. To parent. To paint a windowsill. To give someone you love your full attention' (Tempest 2020, 5). Any creative act is a poetic act. Following Guillaume Apollinaire: 'It is that poetry and creation are one and the same; only that man can be called poet who invents, who creates insofar as man can create. The poet is who discovers new joys, even if they are hard to bear. One can be a poet in any field: it is enough that one be adventuresome and pursue new discovery' (Cook 2004, 80). Or Nietzsche: 'For with [artists] this subtle power usually comes to an end where art and life begins; but we want to be poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters' (Nietzsche 1974, GS 299).

In this sense, creativity offers guidance to navigate within the ordinary. As Tempest argues: 'Somehow, creativity reached through the fog when nothing else could. It gave me guidance, offered me purpose and connected me to all other creative people. It was transformative' (Tempest 2020, 32). Creativity offers guidance to escape the normativity of discourse and make sense of the world. Meaning is not found but created. We place meaning in things and people. To be creative is to become active in engaging with the world, and thus refusing passive submission to social codes. It is in this sense that 'telling poems levels the room':

> This is why poetry levels the room. Because it speaks to the psychic facts which are hidden.
>
> To be judged by others is part of social life. We may tell ourselves that we don't care what others think of us but we evolved the ability to enjoy a good gossip in order to encourage certain traits and discourage others: selfishness was dangerous in prehistoric society, because if someone ate all the food then the others would starve. So, gossiping became a way of keeping a check on any undesirable behaviour. The difficult feelings that arise from transgressing social codes, from being 'talked about' by those you don't want to upset have been knitted into the fabric of our moralities for many hundreds of generations. (Tempest 2020, 64)

Poetry and other poetic practices are ways of engaging with these hidden psychic facts, with what has 'been knitted into the fabric of our moralities for many hundreds of generations'. As they have been guiding us for so long, it is obviously difficult to digress and transgress these moralities. Creativity precisely helps in overcoming these moralities, revealing and making apparent what is usually hidden. Not in the sense that there is an essence to be revealed, but in the sense that these moralities are constructs that we can deconstruct. This deconstruction does not necessarily aim to dispose of them but to create a space in which we can deal with them without enduring them. A space in which we can act and mean.

Transgressing social codes, disrupting social norms, and overcoming these moralities that naturalise socio-cultural aspects of life are some of the effects of poetry. Poetry should not be considered an object or an essence but an activity that performatively transforms our forms of language and our forms of life. Poetry can thus be compared to a virus infecting the iterations of the performative in order to change it from within. A viral

poetics joins here the aims of queer theory: it refuses the dominant performative and opens new possibilities. Not to establish a different, alternative order but to undermine the idea of order: to move from oppression to creation, from illocution to perlocution, from exclusion to inclusion. Viral poetics reveals how the poetic generation of significance can turn the dominant performative inside out. By overturning the dominant performative, viral poetics opens ways for poetry to affect the social order and to become an existential and ethical enterprise. In Part Two, I will focus on the relation between poetics and ethics through the notion of poethics to understand how linguistic change can affect ethical life.

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Performative Poethics

Wittgenstein's Performative Poetics and Contemporary French Poetry: Henri Meschonnic, Emmanuel Hocquard, Christophe Hanna, Florent Coste

The first part of this book has shown the potential and the limits of Austin's speech-act theory to approach poetic uses of language. We have seen in Chap. 3 that perlocution is the best candidate to understand the poetic effects of language, but it remains difficult to conceptualise without falling back into what Wittgenstein calls a 'craving for generality'. Indeed, poetic effects of language seem hard to distinguish from the rather vague effects of language in general. How can we specify the effects—the performativity—of poetic utterances? To answer this question, we need to take a step back from the utterances themselves to the broader situation in which they are uttered. In other words, we need to move from Austin's speech-acts to Wittgenstein's language-games. In contrast to Austin's speech-act *qua* utterance, a language-game consists in an activity that might combine various kinds of speech-acts. In this chapter, I argue that contemporary French readings of Wittgenstein bring to the fore the performative dimension of poetic language-games and help specify the effects of poetry.

Wittgenstein is a central figure in contemporary poetry and poetics. His influence can be found among various poets, including Maggie Nelson as we have seen in Chap. 4. While this poetic reception of Wittgenstein has been thoroughly explored in respect to English-speaking poetry, notably in Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder* (Perloff 1996), there is no such overview regarding his influence on French poetry and poetics. While here

is not the place to present such an overview, let us just say that Wittgenstein permeates contemporary French poetry, be it through specific notions (language-games, forms of life, etc.), formal features (such as the numbering of the *Tractatus*), or a certain grammatical attitude. One of the reasons Wittgenstein is so influential on poets is his style of writing that has an undeniable poetic dimension, which is epitomised in his saying: 'I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one writes a poem' (CV, p. 28). There is a *Literary Wittgenstein*, to borrow the title of John Gibson and Michael Huemer's volume (Gibson and Huemer 2004), that reveals the poetic dimension of his philosophy and its influence on writers and poets.

To speak of Wittgenstein as a unified influence is however misleading as it is customary to distinguish between at least two Wittgensteins: the one from the *Tractatus* and the one from the *Philosophical Investigations* and other later works.[1] As we will see, the notions from the later works such as language-games and forms of life seem to have found a home in the thoughts of many poets and theorists. In this chapter, I will focus mainly on how contemporary French poetics builds on such notions, but it is worth noting that the form of the *Tractatus* has attracted a lot of interest. In ∈, Jacques Roubaud poeticises the logical structure of the *Tractatus* (Roubaud 1988); in *Le Commanditaire*, Emmanuel Hocquard numbers his verses as if they were Tractarian propositions and Juliette Valéry's photographs bring together showing and saying (Hocquard and Valéry 1993); Jean-Michel Espitallier intitles one of his book *Tractatus Logo-Mecanicus* (Espitallier 2006); in 'Astronomiques Assertions' Nathalie Quintane numbers the propositions *à la Tractatus* to offer a different order of reading (Bailly et al. 2011); more recently, Emmanuel Fournier has published a *Tractatus infinitivo-poeticus* (E. Fournier 2021). A similar trend can be found in contemporary literary theory with Jérôme David, who rethinks the *Tractatus* in terms of 'ontological engagement' (David 2015) and Laurent Dubreuil who writes a *Tractatus Logico-Poeticus* (Dubreuil 2018).

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[1] David Stern considers that there are even three Wittgensteins, with the middle period between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* as a third, middle Wittgenstein (Stern 1991). Danièle Moyal-Sharrock also considers that there are three Wittgensteins, but she argues that the third Wittgenstein is to be found in the post-*Philosophical Investigations* works around *On Certainty* (Moyal-Sharrock 2004). James Klagge suggests a different mapping of the two Wittgensteins, arguing that Wittgenstein oscillates between an esoteric and evangelical stance: esoteric until the middle of 1931 and then esoteric again from 1947 onward (Klagge 2021, 17).

My focus on the French poetic reception of Wittgenstein aims to build a performative poetics that highlights and specifies the effects of poetry, its perlocutionary force in Austin's vocabulary. I focus on four different theorists and poets who are all in some ways indebted to Wittgenstein: Henri Meschonnic, Emmanuel Hocquard, Christophe Hanna, and Florent Coste. Even though the scope and style of their investigations vary greatly, reading them together provides a coherent picture of the French poetic reception of Wittgenstein that shows ways to read Wittgenstein poetically. My argument is divided into five parts that each explore a specific notion. First, I focus on the notion of language-games and show how it can help us approach the question of poetry. Second, by considering poetry as language-games, I explore how Wittgenstein's view leads to reconsider the traditional distinction between ordinary and poetic language. By breaking down this distinction, a Wittgensteinian poetics distances itself from the Romantic view of language and poetry that has been prevalent in the nineteenth century and that still pervades some poetic production to this day. Third, the exploration of the pragmatics of poetry leads me to explore the question of interpretation: how does one understand a poem and what is its relation to intention? Fourth, I focus on the notion of forms of life to show how they interact with our forms of language, which brings me to explore the ways in which poetry can effect social change. Fifth, I conclude by exploring how the pragmatic force of poetry recasts the role of poetics by transforming it into a performative poetics.

FROM SPEECH-ACTS TO LANGUAGE-GAMES

Meschonnic holds an ambiguous relation to Wittgenstein's thought, that reflects the two Wittgensteins. He for instance criticises him for failing to taking into account poetic language: 'Wittgenstein's paradox lies in the fact that his whole oeuvre attempts to push back these limits without seeing that the only possible way of pushing them back is poetic language [...]'[2] (Meschonnic 1978, 51). However, this criticism only applies to the *Tractatus*, and Wittgenstein's later works provide a framework in which poetic language-games gain significance. Indeed, Meschonnic sees in Wittgenstein's later works the possibility of thinking about the relation

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[2] My translation: 'Le paradoxe de Wittgenstein sur ce point est que toute son œuvre tente de reculer ces limites, sans voir que le seul autre recul possible de ces limites est le langage poétique[...].'

between language and life, insofar as language-games are embedded in forms of life. I will come back to the question of forms of life later in this chapter, but it is important to note that Wittgenstein's later views on language bring to the fore the relation between language and life and that the potential for transformation lies within this relation, as Meschonnic argues: '*The criterion is the disappearance of criteria*. Which we can think from Wittgenstein and which I believe leads to a transformative relation between form of life and form of language'[3] (Meschonnic 2001, 52). The notion of criterion relates to Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games and rule-following. What are the criteria to evaluate whether someone is following the rules correctly or not? Cavell thoroughly discusses the question of criteria in relation to scepticism and Wittgenstein (and Austin) in *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell 1979a). For Meschonnic, a work of art escapes the question of criteria insofar as there are no criteria to define a work of art. If we rely on criteria, then a work of art is the mere repetition of previous definitions and loses its transformative dimension. Cavell suggests something similar in considering that 'we do not know *a priori* what painting has to do or remain faithful to in order to remain a painting' (Cavell 1979b, 106). Through the notion of criteria (and the disappearance thereof), Meschonnic considers that Wittgenstein's conception of language-games is much more germane in thinking poetry than his propositional conception of language from the *Tractatus*. The shift to language-games moves the focus from the propositions themselves to the activities in which we use language. Through language-games comes the possibility of thinking transformation. But what are language-games?

Wittgenstein defines them as follows:

> But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command?—There are *countless* kinds; countless different kinds of use of all the things we call "signs", "words", "sentences". And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)
>
> The word "language-*game*" is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (PI 23)

[3] My translation: '*Le critère est la disparition des critères*. Ce qu'on peut penser à partir de Wittgenstein, et je crois qu'on peut penser comme rapport transformateur entre forme de vie et forme de langage.'

Wittgenstein argues that there are many different uses of language, which can appear, evolve, and disappear. To that extent, Wittgenstein proves more useful to poetry than Austin does insofar as poetry is a form of invention of language-game. While Austin's speech-act theory provides clues to understand how utterances work, Wittgenstein's language-games provide a picture of the activities in which these utterances are uttered. In a sense, the question Wittgenstein raises is similar to Austin's question: how many forms of speech-acts are there? Where Austin comes up with five kinds of speech-acts (Searle and most speech-act theorists will follow him on this point), Wittgenstein points at something different. He is not aiming at a typology of speech-acts because language-games cover a broader scope encompassing the forms of life in which language-games are embedded. The list of language-games in PI 23 reveals the variety of these activities and that there is no discontinuity nor opposition between so-called ordinary language-games ('Giving order, and acting on them', 'Reporting an event', etc.) and poetic ones ('Making up a story; and reading one', 'Acting in a play', etc.). This continuity breaks down the traditional distinction between ordinary and poetic language. There is only a language that we use in certain activities, that is shaped by our activities.

As Meschonnic argues, we must therefore 'stop opposing poetry to ordinary language. For the same reason that we must stop opposing language to life'[4] (Meschonnic 2006, 251). The traditional framework incites us to think that there is an opposition between language and life. There would be reality on the one hand and linguistic representation on the other. As long as we remain within this framework, and insofar as poetry is an art of language, poetry is of no use for life. However, if we move away from this framework with Wittgenstein and consider the connection between language-games and forms of life, language and poetry become part of life. One must not fall into the trap of believing that poetry is the only language of life: all language-games are languages of life.

This shift from Austin's speech-acts to Wittgenstein's language-games attributes a different role to the philosophy of language. While Austin considers ordinary language to be the first word in philosophy, Emmanuel Hocquard argues that: 'For Wittgenstein, ordinary language *also* has the *last word* [...]'[5] (Hocquard 2018, 161). Hocquard considers that Austin

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[4] My translation: 'Comprendre la rime suppose qu'on cesse d'opposer la poésie au langage ordinaire. Pour la même raison qu'il y a à cesser d'opposer le langage à la vie.'

[5] My translation: 'Pour Wittgenstein, le langage ordinaire a *aussi* le *dernier mot* [...].'

focuses on improving language, thus engaging in a normative or prescriptive task, whereas Wittgenstein remains at a descriptive level. This consideration of Austin as being prescriptive is somewhat strange as his project is opposed to what has been called 'ideal language philosophy' and its attempt to reduce language to logical forms. However, we can understand Hocquard's consideration in the sense that Austin's very detailed descriptions of uses of language concern distinctions that generally evade the thoughts of language users: 'That is why the Oxford school launched a very detailed and meticulous study of ordinary language through which it hoped to discover hidden riches and make explicit distinctions which are very confused for us, by describing the various functions of all sorts of expressions'[6] (Hocquard 2018, 428). Furthermore, the development of Austin's theory in Searle and subsequent speech-act theory has become much more technical, going in the direction that Hocquard signals of describing functions of expressions. For Hocquard, Austin focuses too much on the details of linguistic expressions and not enough on the broader context in which these expressions occur, whereas Wittgenstein attributes a central significance to the context, to the language-game.

Hocquard pursues his exploration of Wittgenstein in relation to writing:

> Writing is playing. Playing with language. Avoiding the traps set by language. […] In his *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that the child learns to speak by mimicking (*mimesis*), by imitating, by playing. Catharsis (purge) is the result of this play with representation, in the sense that we speak of representation in theatre (the role of tragedy for Aristotle). **Playing** is the basic notion. Playing with representation is taking a step back.[7] (Hocquard 2018, 345–46)

Writing is playing with language, playing with words. Hocquard connects this idea of play to Aristotle's *mimesis* to show how fundamental this concept is for writing (especially for literary writing). What is central with this concept is that it reveals a more primordial play, that of the child:

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[6] My translation: 'C'est pourquoi l'école d'Oxford s'est vouée à des études très fouillées, très minutieuses du langage ordinaire, étude par lesquelles elle espère découvrir des richesses enfouies et rendre explicites des distinctions dont nous n'avons qu'une connaissance confuse, en décrivant les fonctions disparates de toutes sortes d'expressions.'

[7] My translation: 'Ecrire est un jeu. Jouer avec le langage. Déjouer les pièges du langage. […] Dans sa *Poétique*, Aristote explique que l'enfant apprend à parler en mimant (*mimesis*), en imitant, en jouant. La catharsis (purge) résulte de ce jeu de représentation, au sens où on parle de représentation au théâtre (le rôle de la tragédie, pour Aristote). **Jeu** est la notion de base. Le jeu de la représentation, c'est le recul.'

'Imitating is playing for children. The first play. Before even speaking, they play to imitate (facial expressions, gestures, sounds, intonations…)'[8] (Hocquard 2018, 536). Children imitate before they are even able to speak; language is a game before being a set of rules. There is a moment of rupture for children (which connects both to the disruption of the categories of thought we have explored in Chap. 3 and to the question of acknowledgement we will elaborate on in Chap. 6) when they 'become conscious of the rules that are imposed upon them from the outside. To find the joy of playing, they play to play. They invent (themselves) other games, they elaborate "fictive games" for which they set and change the rules as they like'[9] (Hocquard 2018, 536–37). As soon as the children realise the limits that are placed upon them in language, they move towards creative uses of language, they move towards poetry.[10] The child at play with the limits of language is therefore the first instantiation of the poetic: 'To move the rules of language—and therefore the meaning—is the stake of all literature for which the book has ceased to be the theatre of the world to become the theatre of language'[11] (Hocquard 2022, 45). In this play with the limits of language, the child and the poet are playing with the world, are making sense of the world, are generating significance.

The normativity of language, its rules, is at the heart of the will to play. In other words, the ordinary is at the heart of the poetic. Or, rather, this distinction between ordinary and poetic becomes irrelevant. Similarly, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction loses its importance. As Hocquard suggests in *Le Commanditaire*:

> 22. Is everything that begins a fiction?
> 23. I am inclined to expect so.
> 24. But there is no proof.

[8] My translation:"Imiter, chez l'enfant, est un jeu. Le premier jeu. Avant même de parler, il joue à imiter (les mimiques, les gestes, les sons, les intonations…).'
[9] My translation: 'Quand l'enfant prend conscience des règles qui lui sont imposées de l'extérieur, pour renouer avec la joie du jeu, il joue à jouer. Il (s')invente d'autres jeux, il élabore des "jeux fictifs", dont il fixe et change les règles à son gré.'
[10] This idea of play has a long critical history that outgrows the scope of my investigation. We can notably think of Friedrich Schiller for whom the concept of play is central to aesthetic education. He builds on Immanuel Kant's famous idea of beauty as the free play of imagination and understanding in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant 2008; Schiller 2016).
[11] My translation: 'Faire bouger les règles du langage–et donc le sens–, tel est l'enjeu de toute littérature pour qui le livre a cessé d'être le théâtre du monde pour devenir le théâtre du langage.'

25. *Fiction nonfiction*. How can one know, given that the same words are used to tell a completely fabricated story and to express oneself in everyday life.[12] (Hocquard and Valéry 1993, chap. L'histoire commence à Bondy-Nord)

The distinction between fiction and nonfiction cannot operate at the level of words. The same words are used in fiction and in reality. Hocquard considers this sameness to be luck: 'What if it were luck—and not a handicap—that words that are used to write poetry are the same as those we use to express ourselves in everyday life?'[13] (Hocquard 2018, 409). If anything said in poetry can be used in real life and reciprocally, what use is the distinction between ordinary and poetic, between fiction and nonfiction? Anything that takes the form of a story ('everything that begins') is a fiction, is a making with words, is a playing with words, thus connecting doing to poetry. We have already seen that poetry is not really concerned with fiction and Meschonnic further argues that 'poetry does not tell stories. It lies at a different level than fiction. It does not invent another world. It transforms our relation to the world'[14] (Meschonnic 2006, 127). What matters in poetry is how our relation to the world is changed and what we can do with this change. This change is not limited to poetry as it can occur in other literary genres and even in other forms of art, but the aim of poetry is the mutual transformation of language and life. Because language is inseparable from life. As Meschonnic argues: 'Poetic thought comes to being, in an unforeseeable manner, only when a form of life transforms a form of language and when a form of language transforms a form of life, both inseparably'[15] (Meschonnic 2001, 41–42).

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[12] My translation: '22. Est-ce que tout ce qui a un commencement est une fiction ? / 23. J'incline à penser que oui. / 24. Mais il n'existe aucune preuve. / 25. *Fiction non fiction*. Comment savoir, puisque ce sont les mêmes mots qui servent à raconter une histoire forgée de toutes pièces et qui servent à s'exprimer dans la vie de tous les jours.'

[13] My translation: 'Et si, justement, c'était une chance–et non un handicap–que les mots qui servent à écrire (de la poésie) soient les mêmes que ceux dont on se sert pour s'exprimer dans la vie de tous les jours ?'

[14] My translation: 'En ce sens, la poésie ne raconte pas d'histoires. Elle est d'un autre ordre que celui de la fiction. Elle n'invente pas un autre monde. Elle transforme le rapport qu'on a avec celui-ci.'

[15] My translation: 'la pensée poétique advient, imprévisiblement, quand et seulement quand une forme de vie transforme une forme de langage et quand une forme de langage transforme une forme de vie, les deux inséparablement.'

Overcoming Poetic Language

The notion of language-game provides a picture in which poetry is not a special activity but an activity among many others, connecting forms of language and forms of life. Wittgenstein's thought allows to escape the sacralisation of poetry that is at play in most philosophies of poetry (German Romantics, Heidegger, and even Nietzsche to some extent). The problem with sacralisation, Meschonnic argues, is that 'As soon as poetry is confused with the sacred it is lost. It accomplishes a programme'[16] (Meschonnic 1995, 126). Poetry should not be considered a programme or an ideology but a way of doing things with words. A way of making words mean something to us. In this sense, Meschonnic suggests that 'poetry, against this widespread *opinion*, is not a *celebration* of language. It is quotidian'[17] (Meschonnic 1973, 223). With these remarks, Meschonnic undermines the idea of a poetic language. Rather than thinking of language as divided into absolute categories (ordinary, poetic, metaphysical, etc.), language-games provide a way of thinking these categories as different practices that operate within language in general. By abandoning poetic language, we are also abandoning ordinary language, in the same sense that the rejection of the metaphysical true world in Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* leads to the rejection of the world of appearances: 'The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps? … But no! *we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!*' (Nietzsche 2008, TI, 'How the True World').

Poetic language can only exist in contrast to ordinary language, and once we reject the ordinary–poetic dualism, both poetic and ordinary language blend into our linguistic practices. As Christophe Hanna suggests, the distinction between ordinary and poetic uses of language is no longer determinable *a priori* because 'we do not presuppose the existence of a poetic language that causes a poetic experience, but we consider any experience declared as "poetic" to be an experience of particularly intense interactions, "integrating" (in the electric sense of the word) various

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[16] My translation: 'Et dès que la poésie est confondue avec le sacré, elle est perdue. Elle accomplit un programme.'

[17] My translation: 'Mais la poésie, contrairement à cette *opinion* répandue, n'est pas une *fête* du langage. Elle est quotidienne.'

language-games and social practices'[18] (Hanna 2010, 47). We must let go of the idea of a poetic language that would have specific properties because the poetic experience is not caused by poetic language. Hanna inverts the relation and considers any experience in which the subject operates in a certain way to be poetic. In this sense, there is a continuity between ordinary linguistic experiences and poetic experiences. Poetic experiences will intensify certain aspects and set aside others (and respectively for ordinary linguistic experiences). These experiences integrate (like integrated circuits) language-games and social practices at their heart. The properties of language matter less than the activities in which words are uttered. A poetic experience is the production of an 'attentional *dispositif*' in which traditional categories lose their importance, to borrow Olivier Quintyn's words (Quintyn 2017, 79). These theories shift from a model of intention in which a meaning must be uncovered or discovered to a model of attention in which there is a production of an experience.

This shift can also be considered, following Meschonnic, as a shift from words to values: 'Poetry is not to be found in the meaning (of words), where we usually look for it, but in the value (of a discourse)'[19] (Meschonnic 2009, 37). Focusing on the effects of poetry brings to the fore the pragmatic dimension of poetics. Florent Coste suggests that we need a pragmatic conception of language that allows us to include poetic and literary uses of language without marginalising them (Coste 2017, 77). We need to think of poetic uses of language as activities or practices that take place within our everyday dealings with language. This idea originates in Coste's Wittgensteinian conception of ordinary language: 'Ordinary language is nothing else than the strategic site where our forms of life organise themselves, where we establish the ways of thinking problems, of imagining futures, of qualifying what is happening and presenting itself to us, of elaborating collective actions and making common'[20] (Coste 2017, 6).

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[18] My translation: 'Ce qui revient à dire qu'on ne présuppose pas l'existence d'un langage poétique comme cause d'une expérience poétique, mais qu'on envisage toute expérience déclarée "poétique" comme une expérience d'interactions particulièrement intense, "intégrant" (au sens électrique du terme) divers jeux de langage ou de pratiques sociales.'

[19] My translation: 'C'est que la poésie n'est pas dans le sens (des mots), où on la cherche, mais dans la valeur (d'un discours).'

[20] My translation: 'Le langage ordinaire, qui n'est autre que le site stratégique où s'organisent les formes de vie, où se mettent en place les manières de penser les problèmes, d'imaginer des futurs, de qualifier ce qui nous arrive et qui se présente à nous, d'élaborer des actions collectives, et de faire commun.'

Ordinary language is a strategic site where we can share our experiences and imagine our futures. It is the place where we make common, in the sense Nietzsche suggests in *Beyond Good and Evil* (Nietzsche 2014, BGE 268). However, where Nietzsche is somehow suspicious of this making common, Coste argues that it allows us to act, to change things.

Such a conception of ordinary language is a pragmatic one that helps consider poetic uses of language as they can be analysed in terms of effects rather than in terms of essence or properties. It is in this respect that Austin's move to a performative philosophy of language is so powerful. A pragmatic conception of language leaves space for poetry and brings to the fore a performative poetics. Therefore, as Hanna suggests, a pragmatic conception of the 'dispositif is more performative than rhetoric: it engages *directly* on the conventional basic structures of its context'[21] (Hanna 2010, 16). Against a rhetorical conception of poetry with well-categorised effects of language, Hanna argues that poetic *dispositifs* are performative. What is important is not the language itself and its characteristics but the effects the language produces. Obviously, language matters because the effects are dependent on it, but a performative poetics must focus on the effects rather than the causes because the causes, the total situation as Austin calls it, can never be fully determined.

What these French theorists are fighting against is a reduction of language and a reduction of poetry. As Coste suggests, by following a pragmatic conception of language and a performative poetics, we avoid two problems: 'reducing language to a source that provides information on an external reality which exists independently from our interventions; believing that with effort and constructions we could clear a deeper path, more direct and more essential, towards this remote reality'[22] (Coste 2017, 60–61). These two problems map two pictures of language: a propositional one focused on reference in which language has no power on the world but is its mere representation and a romantic one in which language would be of use to reach a hidden essence. Against the propositional and romantic conceptions of language, Wittgenstein's pragmatism considers

[21] My translation: 'Le dispositif est plus performatif que rhétorique : il embraye *directement* sur les structures conventionnelles de base de son contexte.'

[22] My translation: 'réduire le langage à une source donnant sur une réalité qui lui serait extérieure et dont le cours serait indépendant de nos interventions ; croire qu'à condition d'efforts et d'élaborations, on pourrait se frayer une voie plus profonde, plus directe, plus essentielle vers cette réalité retirée ou reculée.'

that 'everything is lies open to view' (PI 126) and that our uses of language shape the world we live in. As Coste argues: 'Literature concretely configures our lives, not only through routine postures and gestures, but also and above all through the techniques of institution (or destitution) of sense and agreement (or disagreement)'[23] (Coste 2017, 155–56). This question of agreement connects to Wittgenstein's forms of life: 'What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in forms of life' (PI 241). Literature, following Coste, precisely works on this agreement, by disrupting and creating forms of life and language-games.

UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING

The shift from speech-acts to language-games and forms of life affects the notions of interpretation and intention. As we have seen in Chap. 3, we can recover a notion of intention that does not fall back in the form of biographical criticism but that focuses on the unpredictable effects of per-locution. This unpredictability however raises the following question: how does one react to the perlocutionary force of poetic utterances? And the corollary: how does one assess another's reaction? These questions touch at the heart of Wittgenstein's investigation of rule-following that begins at PI 143 with a pupil who learns the natural numbers. Wittgenstein connects the notions of knowing, doing, and understanding by considering understanding a rule as the capacity to go on: 'Let us imagine the following example: A writes down series of numbers; B watches him and tries to find a rule for the number series. If he succeeds, he exclaims: "Now I can go on!"' (PI 151). In an example that is interesting for poetic concerns, Wittgenstein connects rule-following to reading in PI 156–171. How can one know whether someone is reading or not? There must be some form of understanding implied in reading. Understanding is a first step towards interpreting.

What Wittgenstein brings up in his discussion of reading is the difficulty to characterise this phenomenon. What does it mean to be reading? Is there 'a distinctive conscious mental activity' (PI 156) that accompanies the act of reading? However, such a mental activity would have no way of

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[23] My translation: 'La littérature configure concrètement notre vie, certes par les postures et les gestes routiniers qu'elle convoque, mais encore et surtout par les techniques d'institution (ou de destitution) du sens et d'accord (ou de désaccord) qu'elle véhicule.'

being publicly confirmed and would be a useless criterion to assess reading. Wittgenstein then imagines the example of reading-machines that would be independent from 'a mental or other mechanism' (PI 157). These reading-machines are assessed only in terms of their reactions to written signs, but such a reductive view becomes a form of behaviourism that Wittgenstein also aims to avoid. The criterion of reading thus cannot be the 'conscious act of reading' (PI 159) as there would be no way of distinguishing someone who is reading from someone who is pretending to be reading. Wittgenstein oscillates between two pitfalls he aims to avoid: mental process on the one hand and behaviourism on the other.

What raises these problems is the fact that we want to consider reading as 'a quite particular process' (PI 165). We need to move away from this idea, Wittgenstein suggests:

> The grammar of the expression "a quite particular" (atmosphere).
>   One says "This face has a quite *particular* expression," and perhaps looks for words to characterize it. (PI 165)

The grammar of the expression 'a quite particular' brings us to believe that we need words to characterise the expression. As if there should be some essential properties that could explain the particularity of the expression. In this sense, it is the same idea that we reproached Austin in his lack of characterisation of the particular way in which poetic utterances are hollow or void in Chap. 2. To consider reading to be 'a quite particular process' is to go towards the question of properties of reading. Rather than focusing on properties (metaphysics), Wittgenstein argues that we need to focus on what we do and how we do it, on the ability to go on (pragmatics). For him, understanding—or finding the rule for—a series of number means being able to continue this series.

The problem of reading, however, is that the assessment of understanding is more complex than the case of continuing a series of numbers. While it is easy to spot an error in someone continuing a series of numbers, it is much less so in someone reading. However, reading comprehension in language learning is often assessed by asking questions about the text. At a further level, the understanding of the text required by reading can be assessed in terms of interpretation. While we focus on understanding in everyday reading, the notion of interpretation brings up the dimension of literary criticism, albeit in a way different from traditional poetics.

In a performative poetics, the question of interpretation moves from that of a truth to be found by means of interpretation to that of understanding in pragmatic terms. As Hanna suggests, a performative poetics 'is characterised by the fact that it changes its central question: it abandons the question of truth (or that of a specifically poetic truth) and replaces it with that of understanding—how to understand?'[24] (Hanna 2010, 220). What matters in understanding, as in Wittgenstein's examples of rule-following, is to show that we can keep on playing the game. The problem that arises in the context of reading is that it is not always obvious how to keep on going. Some dangers and difficulties arise along the way because the multiplication of information interferes with basic understanding and tempts us into falling into a trap of overinterpreting, as Coste argues:

> Some words and signs must be understood period. We can therefore say that understanding is not always interpreting, it is understanding without digging deeper, without calling on a new interpretation. By generalizing interpretation, the hermeneut has never the means to understand anything because they are too occupied with interpreting their own interpretation, and so on and so forth. Hermeneutics introduces confusion, because it runs idle.[25] (Coste 2017, 33)

Some words and utterances can be understood without requiring a vast interpretative scheme. The idea of idling refers to Wittgenstein's opposition between a language that is at work and a language that is not (PI 38, PI 132). Metaphysics is the best example of a language that is idling and that is why Wittgenstein aims to move away from the language of metaphysics. For Coste, hermeneutics is to literary interpretation what metaphysics is to philosophy. The search for a hidden meaning is like the game of metaphysics searching for a hidden essence of things. A pragmatic

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[24] My translation: '[…] abandonne celle de la vérité (ou d'une vérité spécifiquement poétique) et la remplace par celle de la compréhension – comment comprendre ?

[25] My translation: 'Certains mots et signes doivent être compris sans plus. On peut alors dire que comprendre, ce n'est pas toujours interpréter, c'est comprendre sans creuser davantage, sans le recours à une nouvelle interprétation. À généraliser l'interprétation, un herméneute n'a, au fond, jamais les moyens de comprendre quoi que ce soit, occupé qu'il est à interpréter ses interprétations, et ainsi de suite. L'herméneutique introduit de la confusion, parce qu'elle tourne à vide.'

philosophy of language avoids this idle game by focusing on language in use, on language at work. Understanding thus becomes a matter of going on rather than finding a hidden sense.

To avoid the trap of overinterpretation, we must keep in mind that, as Coste argues, 'Reading is a work fixed on a socio-cultural background'[26] (Coste 2017, 319). As we have seen in Chap. 2, reading involves an interplay of attention and intention that can be understood in the sense of a reading-as modelled on Wittgenstein's seeing-as. Reading is a practice that follows certain rules and conventions, as Peter Lamarque argues (Lamarque 2010). However, this conventional conception of literature fails to acknowledge the fact that new poetic practices disrupt and challenge our old ways of reading and bring us to read differently—as Meschonnic suggests '*The criterion is the disappearance of criteria.*' Reading poetry as poetry is less a matter of rules and conventions than a matter of being attentive to the ways in which the text affects us and affects the language it uses. For Hocquard, it is in this attention that the value and power of poetry lies: 'To my eyes, "poetic fiction" has no other power on "the uniformization of the everyday" than that of changing our perspective on given (imposed) problems. A book cannot change a suburb, but if it brings us to see (it) in a way different from the usual clichés, it is already something, right?'[27] (Hocquard 2001, 288). Poetic fiction aims to change our ways of seeing the world. This change in our ways of seeing is a first step towards transformation. As we will see in the next chapter, poetic documents precisely aim at bringing the reader's attention to texts that would not have caught their attention. We need to be attentive to what we usually overlook, to what is under our eyes. We need to modify our ways of dealing with texts in order to see them anew. The work of investigation and intervention aims to transform us by transforming our ways of seeing.[28]

[26] My translation: 'La lecture est un travail rivé à un arrière-plan social et culturel […].'

[27] My translation: 'A mes yeux, la "fiction poétique" n'a aucun autre pouvoir sur "l'uniformisation du quotidien" que celui de changer notre regard sur les problèmes posés (imposés). Un livre ne peut pas changer une banlieue, mais s'il nous permet de (la) voir autrement que selon les clichés habituels, c'est déjà quelque chose, non ?'

[28] I have argued elsewhere that there is a form of 'perspectival poetics' at play in poetic works (P. Mills 2022, chaps 5–6). This notion of perspective is related to Wittgenstein's seeing-as and Nietzsche's perspectivism. This notion of perspective—although not in a Nietzschean sense—lies at the heart of Elisabeth Camp's and Karen Simecek's conceptions of literature and poetry (Camp 2017; Simecek 2015).

POETIC FORMS OF LIFE

Being attentive to what is under our eyes means taking into account the background in which our practices occur. This attention brings to the fore the question of forms of life insofar as they are the background in which our language-games are embedded (PI 23). Despite the critical fame of the notion, Wittgenstein only rarely uses it and barely defines it. One of the reasons for this lack of definition lies in the fact that the word *Lebensform* was rather common in Wittgenstein's time, as Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin argue: 'in the Vienna of the 1920s, this was just one of those cultural commonplaces that did not need explaining' (Janik and Toulmin 1996, 230). Anna Boncompagni clarifies Wittgenstein's use of this notion and suggests that it can point towards three areas of his philosophy: language-games, rule-following, the 'given' (Boncompagni 2022, 10). We have already seen how Wittgenstein's poetics touches on the question of language-game and rule-following in the previous section. The question of the 'given' seems more problematic as it might suggest a form of conservatism that would contradict my attempt to place transformation as a central concept for a Wittgensteinian performative poetics. If forms of life are 'given' and language-games dependent on these forms of life, the possibilities for transformation seem rather limited. However, Wittgenstein is quite clear that change is possible insofar as he highlights the inventive dimension of our uses of language. A form of life might be given for a specific language-game, but the choice of the language-game itself is not given. Inventing new language-games would thus be a way of inventing new forms of life and escape the 'given'.

In PI 19, Wittgenstein makes explicit the relation between language and forms of life by arguing that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' (PI 19). The reason we cannot imagine language without imagining a form of life is that language is not an abstract tool but is the material with which we deal with the world. As Wittgenstein further argues: 'The word "language-*game*" is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI 23). We cannot extract language from the fabric of our everyday life and our uses of language must be considered as language-games: when using language, we are doing something. As Coste argues, a form of life is not just a context, it is a field of possible actions: 'Far from being a constitutional enclosure of action, a form of life is rather a field equipped and

covered with the regularity of practices. This field nevertheless contains a wide spectrum of propositions of actions and of significance. Far from imposing, through a kind of implacable determinism coming from who knows where, what one must do, a form of life deploys a spectrum of significations, i.e., of potential actions'[29] (Coste 2017, 166). In this pragmatic conception of language and literature, a form of life appears as a field of practices that allow for different actions. It must not be considered too strictly as a given that can never change, but as a background on which our activities occur.

A form of life is thus the background of our linguistic practices, and this shared background is the requisite for people to understand one another. As Wittgenstein suggests, 'What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life' (PI 241). For our linguistic practices to work, we need an agreement in the form of life. Truth and falsity are not properties independent from our linguistic practices but are embedded in them. For them to be meaningful, we need an agreement in the form of life, we need to agree on the background and the rules of our game. Our agreement, Wittgenstein further suggests, 'is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language' (PI 242). It is an agreement in judgement because in our form of life lies a whole range of valuations that must be agreed upon to understand one another.

In the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein has not yet conceptualised the notion of form of life and uses the word culture instead, which gives a broader scope to this notion: 'We could also easily imagine a language (and that means again a culture) in which there existed no common expression for light blue and dark blue, in which the former, say, was called "Cambridge," the latter "Oxford." If you ask a man of this tribe what Cambridge and Oxford have in common, he'd be inclined to say "Nothing"' (BB, pp. 134–135). Uses of language are related to a culture and this culture is the background on which linguistic practices can make sense. Our words do not have an absolute truth or worth but are relative to a culture. The way

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[29] My translation: 'Loin d'être un enclos constitutionnel de l'action, la forme de vie est plutôt un champ aménagé et tapissé par la régularité des pratiques, mais ce champ n'en recèle pas moins un spectre large de propositions d'actions et de sens. Loin d'imposer, par une sorte de déterminisme implacable et venu d'on ne sait où, ce qu'il faut faire, une forme de vie déploie un spectre de significations, c'est-à-dire d'actions possibles.'

language builds categories of thought restricts what can be thought. It is in this sense that transforming language is needed to transform the world (culture, form of life).

We could thus reinterpret Wittgenstein's idea that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' in the transformative sense that 'to transform a language means to transform a form of life.' As we have seen, Meschonnic follows such an idea and relates it to poetry:

> Against poeticisation, I argue that a poem exists only if a form of life transforms a form of language and reciprocally if a form of language transforms a form of life. I argue that it is only thus that poetry, as the activity of poems, can live in society, can affect people in the way only a poem can. Without poetry, they would not even know that they are losing their subjectivity and their historicity to become mere products of the market of ideas, of the market of feelings and behaviours. Whereas the activity of poems helps them to constitute themselves as subjects. There is no subject without the subject of a poem.[30] (Meschonnic 2001, 292)

For Meschonnic, poetry is the place where a transformation of a form of life can occur through the transformation of a form of language. This interdependence between forms of language and forms of life is important as it explains how change can happen. Without poetry, Meschonnic argues, linguistic and social subjects would not even understand that they are losing their subjectivity and their historicity to the normativity of concepts (and ordinary language). It is only through poetry that the normative work of ordinary language is perceived. Without going as far, we could say that poetry provides a space in which this normativity is questioned, and perhaps a place where such a questioning occurs at a greater level than elsewhere. Or we can understand poetry here in a broader way, in the etymological sense of *poiesis*, creation, and fabrication, and argue that the normativity of ordinary language can be questioned only through creations and fabrications.

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[30] My translation: 'Contre toutes les poétisations, je dis qu'il y a poème seulement si une forme de vie transforme une forme de langage et si réciproquement une forme de langage transforme une forme de vie. / Je dis que c'est par là seulement que la poésie, comme activité des poèmes, peut vivre dans la société, faire à des gens ce que seul un poème peut faire et qui, sans cela, ne sauront même pas qu'ils se désubjectivent, qu'ils se déshistoricisent pour n'être plus eux-mêmes que des produits du marché des idées, du marché des sentiments, et des comportements. / Au lieu que l'activité de tout ce qui est poème contribue, comme elle seule peut le faire, à les constituer comme sujets. Pas de sujet sans sujet du poème.'

A form of life is thus neither conventional nor natural, but a kind of composite. Cavell shows that this notion combines a vertical (or biological) dimension and a horizontal (or socio-cultural) one (Cavell 2013). As Coste further argues, 'Language embedded in forms of life is not a pure natural phenomenon, nor a pure conventional phenomenon. On the one hand, I am not subjected to language in the same sense that I am subjected to gravity. On the other hand, because the grounds of uses resists me at least a little, I cannot arbitrarily decide of the foundations of sense (that would be as absurd as instituting alone a rule valid for all, or else to practice a private language'[31] (Coste 2017, 171). I must not endure the laws of physics and the laws of grammar in the same way. While I cannot change the laws of physics, I can act on language to modify it from within. However, this modification cannot be solely mine because language is a social practice. Wittgenstein famously rejects the idea of a private language because if language is a social practice, it necessarily needs to be shareable. This does not mean that one cannot talk to oneself, but that this talk could be shared at some point. As Wittgenstein suggests, if grammar is a matter of rule-following, there needs to be some kind of public criterion to evaluate whether the rule is being followed or not (PI 202).

This idea that language is public brings to the fore the social dimension of language, and Hocquard connects it to morality and ethics:

> **Morality**, like grammar, is a 'set of restrictive and obligatory rules of a special type, that consists in judging actions and intentions in respect to transcendental values (*it's good, it's bad*…). There are moral rules, like there are grammatical rules, that we learn (every morning, at school, the day began with *the morality lesson*), that we must follow and apply if we want to avoid punishment. […] **Ethics** is much more complex. It does not obey to rules fixed in advance, even optional ones. Ethics has to do with *private experience*, invisible connotations, the unsayable: 'To hit one's head against the limits of language, that is ethics.' (Wittgenstein.) It happens between oneself and oneself, not between oneself and the world: 'Ethics does not talk about the world.' (Wittgenstein.) If I say, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, that

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[31] My translation: 'Le langage adossé à des formes de vie n'est pas un pur phénomène naturel, ni un pur phénomène conventionnel. D'une part, je ne subis pas le langage comme je subis à chaque instant la gravité. D'autre part, parce que le sol des usages me résiste un tant soit peu, je ne peux pas décider arbitrairement des fondements du sens (ce serait aussi absurde que d'instituer seul, dans mon coin, une règle valable pour tous, ou encore de pratiquer un langage privé).'

"work in [writing]—like work in architecture in many ways—is above all a work on oneself. It is working towards one's own conception. Towards a way of seeing. (And what we expect from them)", I am talking about ethics. Another 'definition' given by Gilles Deleuze regarding what Michel Foucault called *styles of living*: 'Ethics evaluate what we do, what we say, according to the mode of existence that it implies. We say this, we do that: what mode of existence is implied?'[32] (Hocquard 2018, 187–88, his emphasis)

Grammar in the strict sense of rules of language is similar to morality understood as a set of rules. However, grammar in a more Wittgensteinian sense, in a more poetic sense as it were, could be similar to ethics. This ethics concerns our ways of being in the world, our styles of living. What does our way of living entail? Such is the fundamental question of ethics.[33] This style of living, this form of life, is related to our uses of language. Hocquard considers that even though we cannot define ethics, it is not something subjective either (Hocquard 2018, 383). Ethics is similar to language as it implies a shared form of life. That is where poetic grammar connects to ethics. Poetry as a form of language comes to act on our forms of life and our forms of life inform our forms of language. That is why, following what we have seen in Chap. 2, Hanna can consider the poetic *dispositif* as a language-game that must implement itself in a form of life: 'A dispositif cannot be thought of as a kind of proposition, but as a kind

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[32] My translation: 'La **morale**, comme la grammaire, c'est un "ensemble de règles contraignantes et obligatoires d'un type spécial, qui consiste à juger les actions et les intentions en les rapportant à des valeurs transcendantes (*c'est bien*, *c'est mal…*). Il y a des règles morales, comme il y a des règles grammaticales, qu'on apprend (chaque matin, à l'école, la journée commençait par *la leçon de morale*), qu'il faut suivre et appliquer, sous peine de sanctions. […] L'**éthique**, c'est beaucoup plus complexe. Ça n'obéit pas à des règles, même facultatives, fixées à l'avance. L'éthique, ça a directement à voir avec *l'expérience privée*, les connotations invisibles, l'indicible : "Donner du front contre les bornes du langage, c'est là l'éthique." (Wittgenstein.) Ça se passe entre soi et soi, pas entre le monde et soi: "L'éthique ne traite pas du monde." (Wittgenstein.) Si je dis, en paraphrasant Wittgenstein, que "le travail en [écriture] – comme, à beaucoup d'égards, le travail en architecture – est avant tout un travail sur soi-même. C'est travailler à une conception propre. A la façon dont on voit les choses. (Et à ce qu'on attend d'elles)", c'est d'éthique que je parle. Autre "définition", donnée par Gilles Deleuze, à propos de ce que Michel Foucault appelait les *styles de vie*: "L'éthique évalue ce que nous faisons, ce que nous disons, d'après le mode d'existence que cela implique. On dit ceci, on fait cela : quel mode d'existence implique-t-il ?"'

[33] Marielle Macé explores the connection between style of living and forms of life in *Styles: Critique de nos formes de vie* and suggests that contemporary engagement relates to defending a certain form of life (Macé 2016).

of interaction, a language-game that is implemented on a given form of life'[34] (Hanna 2010, 24). A poetic *dispositif* cannot work without a form of life in which it implements itself. In implementing itself on our forms of life, a poetic *dispositif* will modify it and poetry thus acquires a power of acting in the world and transforming it.

A Performative Poetics

A pragmatic philosophy of language leads to a performative poetics that contrasts with traditional poetics. While traditional poetics focuses on defining properties to evaluate texts as poems, that is, defining criteria to enter the category 'poem', performative poetics focuses on the effects of the text. The properties are less important than what the poem does. The 'major effect' of traditional poetics, Hanna argues, 'is to sacralise the works out of which they take their criteria and to overestimate everything that resembles them with more or less evidence'[35] (Hanna 2010, 36–37). Defining properties as essential brings to sacralise these properties (for instance rhymes, verses, or other stylistic devices), which leads, in turn, to a form of parody. As we have seen with Meschonnic, works that conform perfectly to the criteria that were valid when they were produced are not creating anything new but are rather mere pastiches of what had been done until then. Another problem of traditional poetics is that reducing poetics to mere categorisation prevents it from acting in the world.

By freeing ourselves from the traditional poetics inherited from Aristotle and its reception, we move from the idea of *mimesis* or fiction towards the idea of performance or action. In this context, the notion of revelation that is central to poetry acquires a different dimension. As Hanna argues: '"Revelatory" writing is therefore not representational in the sense that its signification is not related to the understanding or interpreting of a continuous symbol. It operates as a dispositif: it is generated by the specific exercise or gesture that consists in bringing together different constituting blocks in a context'[36] (Hanna 2010, 130). For Hanna, revelation is not a

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[34] My translation: 'Le dispositif ne peut pas être envisagé comme une forme d'énoncé mais comme une forme d'interaction, un jeu de langage qui vient s'implanter dans une forme de vie donnée.'

[35] My translation: 'leur effet majeur est de totémiser les œuvres desquelles elles tirent leurs critères, et de survaloriser tout ce qui leur ressemble avec plus ou moins d'évidence.'

[36] My translation: 'L'écriture "révélatrice" n'est donc pas représentationnelle dans le sens où sa signification ne relève pas de la saisie ou de l'interprétation d'un symbole continu. Elle

romantic disclosure: poetry does not uncover hidden meanings behind a symbol. It rather works as a *dispositif* that generates interactions. By placing ordinary language and ordinary experiences in a specific context, the revelatory writing of the poetic *dispositif* aims to bring our attention to what remains usually unnoticed in our everyday lives.

By moving away from traditional poetics, we also move away from the question of genre that has been central to readings of Aristotle's *Poetics*. As we have seen in Chap. 3, the whole theory of genres is undermined if we stop looking for essential properties. Poetic *dispositifs* expand the concept of poetry. We can therefore better think of genres as family resemblance rather than clear concepts, as Coste argues:

> Genre theory makes us believe that literature is constituted of entities (that we could grasp and place in a basket or that we could decompose in as many ingredients as long as we understand their subtle alchemy). Literature is actually just a family of language-games that we practice, for some, or do not practice, or not anymore, for others. The pragmatic activity that each genre has launched and maintained, continued, softened, is as placed in a generic jar, *in vitro*.[37] (Coste 2017, 85)

The question of literary genres poses a problem of definition and categorisation because they are related to a certain historical context and that works of art in general oppose former definitions. Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance provides an elegant solution to the problem of categorisation at the heart of genre theory. He argues that what ties the various language-games together is not some specific property but a kind of family resemblance. As we have seen with Pierre Vinclair, what unites poetic language-games is a kind of effort that defines an energetics (Vinclair 2019, 5). There can be some direct affinities between games that look alike (tennis and badminton for instance), and some indirect affinities between games that look very different (tennis and chess, for instance). As

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est dispositale: elle est générée par l'exercice ou le geste particulier qui consiste à rapprocher des constituants dans un contexte.'

[37] My translation: 'Les genres nous font croire que la littérature est composée d'entités (que l'on pourrait empoigner et mettre dans un panier, ou que l'on pourrait décomposer en autant d'ingrédients, pour peu qu'on en comprenne la subtile alchimie). Elle n'est en réalité qu'une famille de jeux de langage, que l'on pratique, pour certains, et que l'on ne pratique pas ou plus, pour d'autres. L'activité pragmatique que chaque genre a amorcée, entretenue, perpétuée, infléchie semble comme mise dans un bocal générique, *in vitro*.'

Wittgenstein suggests: 'Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all —but there are many different kinds of *affinity* between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all "languages"' (PI 66). What links the various language-games is not an essential property but a kind of affinity, like the one we can find among various games. Wittgenstein calls these affinities and similarities 'family resemblances' (PI 68). Alastair Fowler among others has built on this notion to conceptualise genre: 'Literary genre seems to be just the sort of concept with blurred edges that is suited to such an approach. Representatives of a genre may then be regarded as making up a possible class whose septs [clans or classes] and individual members are related ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all' (Fowler 1982, 41). By considering genre a concept with blurred edges, Fowler and other Wittgenstein-inspired scholars consider genre as based on family resemblance rather than on some essential feature or property. One of the strengths of this view is that it allows accounting for the new. If genre is a concept with blurred edges, it can easily adapt to include new works rather than create new categories for works that fall outside the definition.

Genres are not only concepts with blurred edges but they also have performative effects. As Hocquard argues: 'My way of seeing things is the following (I am only sweeping in front of my own door): *Poetry* is a stock-room for order-words and swear words. They swarm and proliferate openly. […] When you see, printed on a book cover, the word *Poetry*, *Poem*, or worse *Poems* or *Poetries*, you are confronted to an order-word'[38] (Hocquard 2018, 246). Describing a work as a poem is an action that will generate expectations in the reader. Stanley Fish famously describes this phenomenon by considering that 'Interpreters do not decode poems: they make them' (Fish 1982, 327). Hocquard adds to this analysis the idea that this making of the poem can be induced by order-words that performatively bring the reader to approach the text in a specific way. Hocquard takes this idea of order-word from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's

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[38] My translation: 'Ma façon de voir est aujourd'hui la suivante (je ne balaie que devant ma porte): la *Poésie* est une réserve d'élection pour les mots d'ordre et les gros mots. Ils y pullulent et y prolifèrent ouvertement. […] Quand vous voyez, imprimé sur une couverture de livre, le mot *Poésie*, *Poème*, ou, pire, *Poèmes* ou *Poésies*, vous êtes d'emblée confrontés à un mot d'ordre.' By translating 'mot d'ordre' by 'order-word,' I follow Brian Massumi, Deleuze and Guattari's translator.

reading of performativity in *Mille-Plateaux*: 'The elementary unit of language—the statement—is the order-word. Rather than common sense, a faculty for the centralization of information, we must define an abominable faculty consisting in emitting, receiving, and transmitting order-words. Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 76). Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of Austin leads them to consider the order-word, the performative, as the 'elementary unit of language'. The word poetry on a book cover (or on the bookshelf in a library or bookshop, or on a stage with poetry readings) is not describing what is in the book but commanding the reader to approach what is in the book with a certain mindset specific to what they have learned about poetry.

With this focus on order-words, Hocquard moves away from strict performative utterances to the idea of a performative *aim* that connects to my reading of perlocution:

> Strictly speaking, performative utterances are quite rare. But nothing forbids us to think of what we could call a *perfomative aim*. That is, to project performative properties onto non performative utterances. […] Let us suppose now that I begin a novel with the sentence: *The window is open*. By taking the decision to write this sentence, I become its author. In other words, I open the window in the story. In a writing situation, writing become action. The writer is not only the author, but also the *actor*.[39] (Hocquard 2022, 77)

The writer (or the poet) becomes an actor. By writing something, the author is acting. The order-word does not only affect the reader and the story but also the author. Hocquard highlights this idea in discussing a famous order-word that we encountered in Chap. 4, namely 'I love you'. Hocquard argues that 'Like all order-words, *I love you* marks a takeover: I have grasp on you (or you have grasp on me)'[40] (Hocquard 2018, 422–23).

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[39] My translation: '*Stricto sensu*, les énoncés performatifs sont assez rares. Mais rien n'interdit d'envisager ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *visée performative*. C'est-à-dire rapporter à des énoncés non performatifs les propriétés des énoncés performatifs. […] Supposons maintenant que je commence un roman par la phrase: *La fenêtre est ouverte*. En prenant la décision d'écrire cette phrase, j'en deviens *l'auteur*. Autrement dit, j'ouvre la fenêtre dans le récit. Dans une situation d'écriture, l'écrit fait acte. Celui qui écrit n'est pas seulement auteur, il est aussi *acteur*.'

[40] My translation: 'Comme tous les mots d'ordre, *je t'aime* marque une prise de pouvoir: j'ai prise sur toi (ou tu as prise sur moi).'

Like Maggie Nelson discussing Barthes and the idea of what it means to use a performative utterance such as 'I love you', Hocquard considers it to be an order-word, to be affecting both the 'I' and the 'you'. This discussion of order-words reveals that there is a performative *aim* in the work of poetry, thus connecting the performative to the etymology of poetry: 'Our little linguistic journey in performative utterances has shown us a connection with vast consequences between "what we *do* in saying it" and poetry (*poïein* = doing)'[41] (Hocquard 2018, 365).

Meschonnic also highlights this idea of doing in poetry; poetry is not to be found in what it says but in what it does: 'Because poetry is not a language that says. Any language says. Does not stop saying. It is not what it says that defines poetry, it is what it does. Poetry is a language that does, specifically'[42] (Meschonnic 2006, 177). This performative poetics brings to the fore a new role for poetry and literature and a new form of evaluation. It is no longer a matter of evaluating poetry in relation to aesthetic norms but to evaluate its effects. According to Coste, what matters with literature is not to be able to say whether this work is good or bad literature but to know what to do with it (Coste 2017, 304). There is no need for correspondence, there is no need for truth, but there is need for *an* experience. John Dewey contrasts ordinary experience that occurs continuously with *an* experience that demarcates itself: 'In contrast with such [ordinary] experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences' (Dewey 2005, 36–37). Aesthetic experiences are of this special kind: experiencing a work of art is *an* experience. This Deweyan understanding of aesthetics has opened the path to a pragmatic aesthetics, as developed by Richard Shusterman among others (Shusterman 2000). A pragmatic and performative poetics focuses on knowing how rather than knowing that. There is no use for any 'knowing that', for any criteria or essential characteristics to decide whether this or that work belongs to literature or not, as long as we can experience poetry in context.

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[41] My translation: 'Notre petite excursion linguistique du côté des énoncés performatifs nous a permis d'opérer une connexion, riche de conséquences, entre "ce qu'on *fait* en le disant" et la poésie (*poïein* = faire).'

[42] My translation: 'Car la poésie n'est pas un langage qui dit. Tout langage dit. N'arrête pas de dire. Ce n'est pas ce qu'elle dit qui définit la poésie, c'est ce qu'elle fait. La poésie est un langage qui fait, spécifiquement.'

In this sense, Coste suggests that we should consider 'literature as an set of open exercises' that can educate us in various ways (Coste 2017, 365). In *Réparer le monde*, Alexandre Gefen shows how the idea of therapy and repair is central to contemporary French literature (Gefen 2018). He focuses mainly on fiction, but a similar trend can be found in poetry. By considering literature a form of exercise, it comes closer to philosophy. There is a long tradition in philosophy that considers philosophy to be a form of spiritual exercise in search of living a better life (Hadot 1995). Alexander Nehamas draws on Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot to consider that 'Philosophy began not so much as an effort to present some general doctrines about the world or our knowledge of it: its purpose was, rather, to change people's lives on an individual level' (Nehamas 1998, 164). In a broader perspective, this view of philosophy is one that considers philosophy to be a kind of therapy, an activity rather than a doctrine. As Wittgenstein says: 'There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were'[43] (PI 133). A Wittgensteinian performative poetics combines the forces of poetry and philosophy to show us ways of being in the world and ways of changing the world. It is precisely these ideas of change and transformation that will be the focus of the next chapters.

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[43] Much has been said on Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as therapy (Peterman 1992; Fischer 2000; Gefwert 2000; Hagberg 2010).

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Poetic Documents: Transforming Forms of Language, Transforming Forms of Life

This chapter focuses on a special kind of poetic *dispositif* that transforms forms of language and forms of life, namely poetic documents. A poetic document follows the move that I have described from the poem as a fixed object (and of poetry as a genre with well-defined properties) to a performative conception of a poetic *dispositif* (operating between word and world, author and reader, etc.). It operates by rearranging pre-existing texts and thus breaks down the traditional distinction between the poetic and the ordinary. One of the reasons that might explain this turn to document in contemporary French poetry is the multiplication of information.[1] In *The Poetics of Information Overload*, Paul Stephens shows how poetry evolved with and adapted to new technologies throughout the twentieth century. He argues that 'the poetics of information overload show that there are many possible forms, as well as frames of reference, available to contemporary poetry' (Stephens 2015, 36). Poetic documents are one form of adaptation to technological changes and the transformative process at play in these poetic practices in turn affects the readers who can change their perception of the world, who can now see aspects that were hidden by the normativity of language and perception. Poetic

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[1] This turn to documents is not a French specific matter as Michael Leong argues that a similar turn occurs in North American poetry (Leong 2020). While my main focus is set on French poetry, I will look at some American documentary poetry in the next chapter.

documents reveal a transformative force of poetry that affects the uses of language and ways of being in the world, forms of language and forms of life. I will show in this chapter that even a minimal intervention in the original text can lead to radical change, understood more specifically through the philosophical notions of linguistic oppression and epistemic injustice.

This chapter is structured around three poetic works that each explore one aspect of how poetic documents can lead to linguistic and social change by making visible what is usually unnoticed. First, I define the poetic document with Franck Leibovich's theory and its application in *bogoro*, co-authored with Julien Seroussi. This work shows how poetic documents bring visibility to usually invisible texts. Second, I turn to Frank Smith's poetic document *Gaza d'ici-là* to highlight the political importance of giving a voice to the voiceless, building on theories from Stanley Cavell and Jacques Rancière. Third, I show how this transformative political force is related to a transformation of forms of language with Caroline Zekri's 'Un pur rapport grammatical'. Poetic documents fight against a form of linguistic oppression and epistemic injustice. This fight reveals how poetic documents aim to transform our forms of language and our forms of life and shows that the ordinary and the poetic always intertwine.

POETIC DOCUMENTS BETWEEN INTENTION AND ATTENTION: FRANCK LEIBOVICI AND JULIEN SEROUSSI'S *BOGORO*

Frank Leibovici and Julien Seroussi's *bogoro* is based on the report from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the Bogoro massacre in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 24 February 2003. The ICC investigation in the DRC is one of its first investigations and the poetic document aims to evaluate the process poetically. A poetic document such as *bogoro* inscribes itself in the line of conceptual (or uncreative) writing as practiced by Kenneth Goldsmith or Vanessa Place, for instance, with a strong insistence on the political intention at play.[2] Leibovici and Seroussi's

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[2] While Vanessa Place's work is highly political, Kenneth Goldsmith became political unintentionally. As Abigail Lang suggests, the controversy around Goldsmith's appropriation of Michael Brown's autopsy report has brought a new form of conceptual poetry that is politically committed to fighting against racial, social, and political injustices (Lang 2021, 318). In addition to the French poetic documents on which I am focusing in this chapter, we can for instance think of M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong* that is composed from words of a 1783 legal case (Philip 2008).

aim in using the reports to create a poetic work is to bring the readers' attention to a political situation. The same can be said for Frank Smith and Caroline Zekri, whose works I will analyse further in this chapter.

The political dimension of poetic documents aims to give visibility to discourses that are usually invisible in our everyday life. The information that *bogoro* reveals is not hidden in the sense that it is kept secret but is invisible because it is buried in pages and pages of text. It follows the Wittgensteinian idea that we have been exploring: 'One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes' (PI 129). As Leibovici argues, a poetic document is neither a comment on nor an objective analysis of the original document but a way of making visible some affordances in the text. The idea is not to represent the document, nor even the reality this document is supposedly referring to, but to produce new 'regimes of visibility' (Leibovici 2020, 139). By doing so, the original text loses its purely informational dimension to gain other effects (rhetorical or perlocutionary). I will come back to this idea of visibility in connection to Rancière in the next section.

However, how is poetry more efficient in this respect than the other forms of discourse that Leibovici considers, especially the one he calls 'critical posture'? One might think at first that poetry is of little help to navigate through mundane matters such as reports, but Leibovici and Seroussi give an element of an answer in the postface to *bogoro*: 'in the tradition of objectivist poetry, working on original documents is an irreplaceable task. only this documentary work can give access, *verbatim*, to the words of the implicated people and show in all their subtlety and plasticity the moments where worlds encounter one another or, to the contrary, diverge from one another'[3] (Leibovici and Seroussi 2016, 351). They therefore aim to render faithfully, '*verbatim*', words that have been pronounced in the ICC, while offering a redescription of events, a retranscription of the court's report by rearranging the order and the structure of the discourse. Poetry allows them to use the same words to say something different, without adding more words to the already existent layers of text.

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[3] My translation: 'dans une tradition de la poésie objectiviste, le travail sur les documents originaux est irremplaçable. seul ce travail documental permet de donner accès, *verbatim*, aux paroles des acteurs, et de montrer, dans toute leur finesse et leur plasticité, les moments où des mondes se rencontrent ou, au contraire divergent.'

icc-01/04-01/07-t-156-red2-fra
wt 15-06-2010 1/60 ea

prisons

25   les soldats qui
1   avaient commis des fautes creusaient des trous pour des prisons.

camp

4   q. en ce qui concerne ces prisons souterrains... sous la terre, il y en avait combien
5   approximativement dans le camp ?
6   r.   j'en ai vu deux.

4   r. elles étaient grandes, mais je ne peux... je peux dire... je ne peux pas compter
5   le nombre de mètres, mais je peux dire qu'elles étaient assez grandes.
6   q. êtes-vous en mesure de nous dire combien de personnes pouvaient se... se
7   trouver dans ces prisons un moment donné ?
8   r.   en ce moment-là, j'y étais parce que, moi aussi, j'y étais emprisonné à
9   cause de quelques fautes que j'avais commises. en ce qui me concerne, nous étions
10   un certain nombre de personnes. il y avait assez d'espace. nous étions au nombre de
11   six, mais il y avait suffisamment d'espace.

5   r. les prisons... pour nous, les prisons que nous connaissions, ce sont celles qui
6   étaient souterraines. mais les prisons, il y avait des maisons où on pouvait enfermer
7   ceux qui faisaient des fautes mineures, et ils n'y restaient pas longtemps ; ils y
8   restaient pendant quelques minutes. mais les prisons que nous connaissions étaient
9   celles qui étaient souterraines.

15   q. et quelles étaient « vous » instructions si quelqu'un essayait de s'échapper de
16   la prison ?
17   r. quand une personne veut sortir, quand une personne sort, et commence à
18   fuir, il faut tirer sur elle.

***

21

Fig. 6.1 Franck Leibovici and Julien Seroussi, bogoro, p. 21

Figure 6.1 is a page from *bogoro* and contains the various elements that Leibovici and Seroussi use to transform the original document into a poetic work. The indications in the top right corner of the page give the

source of the text, freely available on the website of the ICC, thus revealing the documentary dimension of the work and including it in the broader archive of the ICC. Even though they select and present only excerpts of this archive, the reader can access the full original document with this reference. The line numbers correspond to those indicated in the source document and we can see that the authors skip some lines. Leibovici and Seroussi select passages from the report and present them to the readers. The poetic document is therefore not an exact copy of the original report but directs the reader's attention to certain elements.

In this sense, the poetry of poetic documents is less the expression of the author's intention than a redirection of attention. As Leibovici argues, 'poetry makes possible a certain attentional *foregrounding*'[4] (Leibovici 2020, 153). By placing a text or an object in the foreground of attention, poetry makes visible that which is usually overlooked. A poetic document is a form of poetic *dispositif* that, as Olivier Quintyn argues, 'functions as a selective attentional focus that filters the seizure of objects in order to modify the way in which operative configurations can emerge in the situation where these objects act'[5] (Quintyn 2017, 79). A poetic *dispositif* or document operates as an attentional filter for the reader. Florent Coste further argues that 'we must work at being attentive, at transforming our margins of manoeuvre and at maintaining a willingness to investigate, elucidate, and intervene'[6] (Coste 2017, 224). This investigation, elucidation, and intervention that Coste calls for is precisely what is at play in Leibovici and Seroussi's *bogoro*: being attentive to a usually overlooked text (at least by those who are not working with it) reveals what is at play in these practices of justice. This attention to things is not so far from a broader conception of modern poetry, as Jean-Christophe Bailly argues: 'What is found by the ways of the most abrupt and simple modernity is the idea of an attention, of an attentive and worried listening; it is the necessity of a

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[4] My translation: 'un *foregroudning* attentionnel rendu possible par la poésie.'

[5] My translation: 'il fonctionne plutôt comme une focale attentionnelle sélective qui vient comme filtrer la saisie des objets, pour modifier la manière dont des configurations opératives peuvent saillir dans la situation où ces objets agissent.'

[6] My translation: 'C'est à être attentif qu'on doit travailler, à transformer nos marges de manœuvre et à entretenir une disposition à l'investigation, à l'élucidation et à l'intervention.'

relation to things that is not that of enjoyment or profit and rejection, but that of regard, consideration, and wonder'[7] (Bailly 2015, 201).

We could be tempted to say that the concept of attention replaces the concept of intention in poetic practices, but this idea would miss the fact that a poetic *dispositif* is not only an 'attentional focus' but also an intentional object. Attention and intention work together to some extent, as Lucy Alford argues that there are at least two kinds of attention: an active one in which we intentionally focus our attention on something rather than something else and a passive one in which 'the subject's attention is caught and held by changes or movement in the environment, or by the sheer arresting nature of the object itself' (Alford 2020, 34). While passive attention does not involve intention as it precisely distracts us from our intentional attention, active attention requires intention. Poetic documents aim to redirect the readers' active attention towards texts that would usually not catch their attention.

Leibovici and Seroussi use different poetic tools to redirect the readers' attention and they undertake three main operations to transform the report into a poetic work. First, they remove all the capital letters. This removal is not only a way to make the text correspond to Leibovici's aesthetics—he never uses capital letters in his texts—but also a way to create a distance between the original document and the poetic document. The nonconformity to the traditional rules of typography indicates that we must apprehend the text under our eyes with a specific kind of attention (an aesthetic or a poetic one). Second, they cut some sentences and replace them with blank spaces, for instance in line 6 between 'r.' and 'j'en ai vu deux'. These blank spaces play with the idea that some elements are always redacted from documents and do so by further referring to the poetic significance of the blank space. The blank space is an important dimension of poetry—especially since Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*—that highlights the materiality of language in poetry. Language is not only a matter of significations (and mental representations) but also a physical one of words on a page (or on a screen or in a space for forms of poetry outside the book format). The blank space thus becomes a space for poetic

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[7] My translation: 'Et ce qui est retrouvé par là, par les voies de la modernité la plus abrupte et la plus simple, c'est l'idée d'une attention, d'une écoute attentive, inquiète, c'est la nécessité d'un mouvement envers les choses qui ne soit plus celui de la jouissance ou du profit et du rejet, mais celui de l'égard, de la considération, de l'étonnement.'

invention and intervention. Third, they align the text to the left in contrast to the originally justified text, giving it the appearance of verses. This change in alignment produces poetic effects such as enjambments and further highlights the importance of the position of the words on the page in poetry.

The poetic redirection of the readers' attention also casts a new light on the wording of the text itself. The uncertainty of the witness becomes a repetition such as 'je ne peux … je peux dire … je ne peux pas' that shows the oscillation of uncertainty. It shows that the context of a trial, of asking questions and replying to them, is a *dispositif*—and not necessarily a poetic one here—that creates a discrepancy between the judges and the witnesses, especially in the case of the ICC because its conceptual framework is alien to the witness's way of thinking. In many passages, witnesses refer to magic and fetishes, which shows a cultural difference as such references would not be considered rational arguments in an occidental court of law. Similarly, the repetition of the word 'prison' in the fourth paragraph contrasts with the unique use of the word 'maison'. The witness is talking about the prisons 'that [they] know', a locution that is repeated twice. Prisons and houses might be close to one another because the words 'maison' and 'prison' rhyme, but their meanings are completely different. This difference is further reinforced by the fact that prisons are underground and houses over ground. However, this way of opposing two terms is already projecting a dualistic framework on an experience of the witness that escapes this dualism.

The word 'prison' also appears in red and in italics in the top right corner, under the archival references, like the word 'camp' three lines below. These words added by Leibovici and Seroussi function as themes that readers can look for in the mass of information. Rather than reading the text in a linear fashion, readers can decide to follow a thematic thread. This indication also activates the readers' attention by indicating that on which they should direct their attention in the following lines. It highlights specific themes on which the readers can focus. The authors' choice offers a way of navigating through the documents of the ICC, by selecting some passages and cutting others. The readers further operate this cutting and selecting in their freedom to navigate through the text in their preferred way, either following a theme or reading linearly.

This freedom is further reflected by the fact that this work has been presented as an art installation, *muzungu*, in which it was possible to freely roam and choose which documents to observe. In addition to the text of

the reports, there was more documentation such as pictures, drawings, and so on. The text of the report helps navigate through all these documents and hence the art installation. In this context, the text becomes a guide through the documents, in the same way that the themes in red guide the readers through the pages. It is important to note that, as Rahma Kazan argues: 'Even though installations and visual displays do not fall within the ICC's area of expertise, the latter nonetheless acknowledged the project's usefulness as a means of offering a new and more comprehensive perspective on the case' (Khazam 2018, 19). Leibovici and Seroussi's work provides a new perspective on the work of the ICC by taking distance from the case to look at the process at play in the trial. The distancing from the original report is necessary for the work to function as a poetic document.

Bogoro and *muzungu* are two of the 'work-tools' (*oeuvres-outils*) made by Leibovici and Seroussi during their experiences at the ICC between 2016 and 2022. Their various experiences have been compiled in a book that intertwines their artistic practices with critical discourses (Leibovici and Seroussi 2023). What is important in their work with documents is not the purely poetic or artistic dimension (although we have seen that they use poetic tools) but the production of public discourse:

> to integrate the question of the circulation of a document in the activity of writing itself leads to the following conclusion: a publication in the poetic space does not transform the material into something poetic. but the material is transformed into something else, *by means* of poetic tools. in this perspective, poetry is no longer an end in itself, but a transformative instrument, and this 'something else' remains open. it is the uses that will be made of it that will produce a definition.[8] (Leibovici 2020, 130)

In poetic documents, poetry is no longer an end in itself but a transformative process that brings attention to what is in front of us and that we

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[8] My translation: 'intégrer la question de la circulation d'un document dans l'activité d'écriture même permet de dire la chose suivante: une publication dans l'espace poétique ne produit pas tant une transformation du matériau en quelque chose de poétique. mais le matériau est transformé en quelque chose d'autre, *au moyen* des outils de la poésie. dans cette perspective, la poésie n'est plus une fin en soi, elle est un instrument de transformation, et ce « quelque chose d'autre » est laissé ouvert. ce sont les usages qui en seront faits dans le futur qui viendront alors en produire une définition.'

fail to notice. We have seen that the whole distinction between ordinary and poetic language is brought down by such poetic practices: there are no ontologically distinct languages, but only various activities in which we use language. One of these activities is that of the ICC reports which use the specialised vocabulary of international law; another is that of an international trial where witnesses and judges have to confront their forms of life to understand one another.

VOICES OF THE VOICELESS: FRANK SMITH'S GAZA D'ICI-LÀ

In making visible discourses that are usually invisible, poetic documents reveal a voice that is kept silenced in the reports. This voice is a voice of the minority, a voice of the margins. In literary and cultural studies, this question of voicelessness has been brought to the fore by Gayatri Spivak's famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' According to Spivak, in the capitalist world of 'imperialist law', the subalterns are placed in such a position that they cannot speak. Their voice cannot be heard because it does not have a place in the capitalist system. In contrast, in a context of solidarity and resistance to capital logic, the margins or, as Spivak puts it the 'silent, silenced center', can speak and know their condition (Spivak 1999, 269). The silenced are therefore voiceless only in the dominant social structure of the report and they might be able to gain their voice back in poetic documents.

In a world dominated by normalised and neutralised speech, what does it mean to have a voice, to be heard? The problem of linguistic oppression arises as soon as a minority must express itself in the language of the majority.[9] This minority/majority relation is not a matter of numbers, but of

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[9] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari consider this relation between literature and linguistic domination as the question of 'minor literature': 'A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 1997, 16). Without entering the details of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical vocabulary, minor literature is the product of a minority within a major language. The translation from the minor language of the voiceless to the major language of order and normativity affects language itself (not only the minor language that must adapt but also the major language that is deterritorialized, moved away from its original grounds). Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that 'minor literature' 'does not merely refer to a type of literature, the marginal production of second-rate authors. It refers to the revolutionary conditions of all literature, to the instability and violence of all language' (Lecercle 1990, 243).

power, of domination, of controlling speech and knowledge. Furthermore, it is not just a matter of natural language, in the sense that domination can be exerted even in one own's mother tongue. Linguistic oppression silences and makes invisible discourses held by the oppressed minority. What does it mean to have a voice? How can one find their own voice? Cavell relates these questions to the child who must learn to find their voice:

> When I earlier invoked the figure of the mad child I cloaked him as perhaps invisible and, as lacking language, lacking the means of making himself intelligible or, as Augustine remembers it, expressing his desires (beyond his needs). These predicates—or absence of predicates—I associate with my further sense of the child as in the position of having to steal language from his or her elders. The concept of stealing was prompted, I think, both by wanting to mark the absence of linearity in the order of words acquired, and by wanting to emphasize the asymmetry of work to be done on each side of the inheritance, the elders exaggerating their individual contributions of sounds, as if to relieve the anxiety in the fact that they mostly repeat themselves and wait, and talk to the air. This condition is the basis and parable of the possibility and necessity in the education of humans, of making language mine, of finding my voice (my consent, my right to speak, to promise, to break my promise), hence the standing threat of not finding it, or not recognizing it, or of its not being acknowledged. (Cavell 1994, 36–37)

In this passage, Cavell insists on the concept of stealing as the child does not only learn but also steals language. Education is a way for the child to find their own voice but, in this search, there is always a risk that they cannot find their voice or cannot recognise it. If so, how can they be acknowledged? The discrepancy between the child's own voice and the normative voice of the elders creates oppression and injustice. In this sense, the oppressed minority is like a child who could not find their voice and therefore cannot be heard, seen, or even acknowledged.

This question of voice is of central significance to the study of poetry, and the voice at play in poetic documents is not only the voice of the poet but also includes the voices of the voiceless. While Mikhail Bakhtin defines poetic style as being 'by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse' (Bakhtin 1981, 285) in contrast to the dialogical novel, the multiplication of voices in poetic documents contest this definition. Many contemporary forms of poetry play on the multiplication of voices, and Jahan Ramazani argues that 'poetry dialogizes literary and extraliterary languages, intensifying and hybridizing them, making them collide and rub up against one

another' (Ramazani 2013, 8). By including other voices, poetry opens itself to fight against linguistic oppression that silences voices, and the value of poetry as resistance against forms of oppression is a rather well-documented topic. Bringing Cavell and OLP to the question of linguistic oppression highlights the importance of acknowledgement. Poetry brings to the fore the question of recognition and acknowledgement of the silenced voices.

This question of acknowledgement arises in Cavell's discussion of scepticism about other minds. Following Wittgenstein's discussion of pain and the expression of pain in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Cavell addresses the sceptic's question: how can one know the other's pain? This is the point where acknowledgement comes into play. The sceptic's call for total certainty can never be met because the question misses the point. The other's saying 'I know I am in pain' is, Cavell argues, 'not an expression of certainty but an expression of pain, that is, an exhibiting of the object of knowledge' (Cavell 1976, 258–59). To think of the expression of pain in the mode of a certainty that can satisfy a specific set of criteria is to mistake the way the language-game of pain works. Cavell therefore moves from the question of knowledge to that of acknowledgement. We cannot know the other's pain, but we can acknowledge it. Through this acknowledgement, we know that the other is in pain. As Cavell says: 'Acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge. (Goes beyond not, so to speak, in the order of knowledge, but in its requirement that I do something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge)' (Cavell 1976, 257). Moving from knowledge to acknowledgement is a way of exploring a different region of knowledge, one in which our dealing with others precedes our dealing with so-called objective facts.

The threat of not being acknowledged is therefore the threat of the failure of one's expression.[10] Not the failure in the sense that one fails to express oneself, but the failure of being heard. This is where the question of voice becomes significant: one needs a voice to express oneself. Having a voice means mastering a language, means having a visible speech. The failure to find one's own voice with respect to the voice of the elders is a failure to be acknowledged as a human being. This normative voice of the elders, this

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[10] Maximilian de Gaynesford offers an insightful analysis of the question of silencing in respect to Austin's speech-act theory, adapting Rae Langton's view. What is interesting in his analysis is that he connects it to Austin's exclusion of poetry and considers that 'there is a category of cases where (for the best of reasons perhaps) Austin's remarks nevertheless threaten to silence poets – some poets, and on some occasions' (de Gaynesford 2018, 94).

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distribution of speech, of what can and what cannot be said is what Rancière calls the police. Not in the sense of the 'petty police' *qua* state apparatus but as a force that distributes places and roles: '[The police] is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise' (Rancière 2008, 29). The police *qua* normative force distinguishes between discourse and noise, between visible and invisible. This police becomes a law that attributes roles and tasks in society. The oppressed are those without a role in the political system, those whose voice is considered noise, considered a parasite. These distinctions bring Rancière to consider politics as a distribution of the sensible, that is, 'a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière 2004, 8). If politics as a form of experience is determined by this distribution of the sensible, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, it is a process of inclusion and exclusion, of determining who can speak and who cannot. The exclusion of the voiceless reveals, as Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen argue, a form of soul-blindness in our 'failure to see their suffering as suffering of the same kind as our own' (Havercroft and Owen 2016, 744). They build on Rancière's distribution of the sensible to show that this soul-blindness is inscribed in our socio-linguistic power structures (Havercroft and Owen 2016, 746). The normativity of language operates a distribution of the sensible that decides what can be seen and heard and silences the rest. This distribution of the sensible is a continuous aspect of perception in the sense that we cannot move away from it. It is, in this sense, a form of ideology to which we automatically adhere.[11]

[11] This is idea that ideology is always already there is its fundamental dimension according to Slavoj Žižek: 'This is probably the fundamental dimension of "ideology": ideology is not simply a "false consciousness", an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as "ideological"—"ideological" is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence—that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals "do not know what they are doing"' (Žižek 2008, 15–16). Against the idea that ideology would be something that modifies our perception of reality, Žižek argues that reality is always already ideological, that we perceive things ideologically and that we need to work on this perception if we want to modify ideology.

A minority, following this Cavellian interpretation, has no voice in the sense that it cannot find its own voice within the normativity of language. To be heard, to be seen, to be acknowledged, such a minority must create a space of visibility in which it can express its voice. According to Rancière, such a minority must draft its own map of the visible and there are two options to do so: 'Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making' (Rancière 2004, 35). Throughout this chapter, I focus on literary locutions, and more specifically on poetic documents, to explore how, as we have seen with Leibovici, they 'produce new regimes of visibility' (Leibovici 2020, 139). Jeff Barda argues that such poetic documents 'seek not only to invent new regimes of visibility of the political but also to provide people with the tools, methods, and materials to carry out their own investigations' (Barda 2021, 51). Poetic documents are thus tools to think problems anew, to cast a new light on political and social problems.

Like Leibovici and Seroussi's work on ICC reports, Frank Smith's *Gaza d'ici-là* is written out of a report, namely the 'United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict', also known as the Goldstone Report.[12] Smith's work creates a space of visibility for words that are usually read only by those working with the UN. In other words, the voices of the victims compiled in reports are not given a space of visibility: they are excluded from the realm of the visible by being assigned to reports that will quickly move from being work documents to becoming archives. There is no reason for most people to read such reports written in a neutral language of little literary interest. However, there are good reasons for poets to dig into this material. As Morgane Kieffer argues in discussing the works of Valeria Luiselli: 'only placing the archive in plot will allow it to escape the administrative division (here, case files) and meet an audience'[13]

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[12] Other interesting uses of reports in contemporary French poetry include, for instance, Franck Leibovici's and Julien Seroussi's *bogoro* and Caroline Zekri 'Un pur rapport grammatical' (Leibovici and Seroussi 2016; Zekri 2015).

[13] My translation: 'seule la mise en intrigue de l'archive permettra que celle-ci échappe aux cloisonnements administratifs (ici, les dossiers juridiques) et rencontre un public.'

(Kieffer 2021, 32). Although Kieffer is talking about narrative plot, her claims can be extended to a broader conception of poetry, and especially to Smith's use of UN reports. Smith makes public the language of these reports and, with minor modifications, transforms them into literary works. Against the idea that the language of the report is nothing poetic, Smith's rearrangement of the report shows its poetic potential to provide ways of dealing with it, of navigating in it, of using it to other ends.

Smith's *Gaza d'ici-là* produces at least three effects that aim at modifying the reader's attention to the text of the report. A first effect is that of depersonalisation. For instance, in the opening lines of the first poem:

> Quand les hostilités ont éclaté, le 27 décembre 2008,
> l'homme, de 59 ans, a demandé à sa femme et ses enfants de quitter leur domicile,
> où il est resté seul.[14] (Smith 2013, 9)
> When hostilities started on 27 December 2008, Abbas Ahmad Ibrahim Halawa, aged 59, asked his family to leave the home and stayed behind alone. (Human Rights Council 2009, 223)

By breaking the text in these lines, Smith uses a poetic device in order to place emphasis on certain words. The last part of the sentence, 'stayed behind alone' is isolated, thus reinforcing the feeling of loneliness. This attention to the feeling that can be hidden in the language of the report is however balanced by the emphasis on 'the man' at the beginning of the second line. While the feeling of loneliness brings more effect to the text, the replacement of the man's name with the generic 'the man' depersonalises it. This depersonalisation plays on the fact that such reports, although they contain names of people, never really consider them as individual subjects. The language of these reports has a neutralising effect that goes against the subjectivity of the people. By further depersonalising the text, Smith brings our attention to the negation of subjectivity at play in the report.

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[14] Rather than translating Smith's work, I quote the original text from the report and its page number below the French. It is worth noting that the question of translation is of central significance in the writing of such reports as they are usually available in various language and the discourse of the victims is usually a translation from their original language. These various processes of translation neutralise the language in the same way ordinary language normalises our experiences.

It might be objected that Smith's depersonalisation does not give a voice back to the voiceless but steals their voice once more. Does such a poetic work bring back the voices of the voiceless or does it silence them in a different way? It would be wrong to say that people who lost their voice in the report gain it back in the poem. The process of depersonalisation cannot bring back their individual voices, but the poem creates a space in which their voice as a group can be heard and brings readers to realise how the report renders these voices voiceless. By making readers change their perspective, such a poetic document allows us to be attentive to the process of silencing that is at the heart of linguistic oppression and prompts us to listen to these silenced voices.

A second effect involves the reader's implication. Smith does not only break the text in lines, he also sometimes changes the mode of the sentences from affirmation to interrogation:

> Les soldats n'y ont-ils pas pénétré en force
> en lançant un engin explosif—une grenade peut-être? (Smith 2013, 22)
> The soldiers entered Ateya al-Samouni's house by force, throwing some explosive device, possibly a grenade. (Human Rights Council 2009, 160)

Shifting from affirmation to interrogation creates a strange double effect of rhetorical questioning and emphasising uncertainty. While the affirmative mode only states what happened, the interrogative mode places readers in the position to answer the question: 'isn't it true that …?' As a rhetorical question, readers can only approve and confirm what has been said. Changing the sentence from the affirmative to the interrogative mode therefore makes readers take part in the report rather than contemplating it passively. It also emphasises the uncertainties in the report: the line 'possibly a grenade' becomes a real question. What remains a hypothesis in the report becomes a question that the reader must answer. This question is however more of a rhetorical kind: 'what else could it have been but a grenade?' The reader's implication is greater as the text is no longer considered a work document (as it is for the UN) but a poetic work with which readers must engage.

A third effect is that of making explicit the epistemic gain of the text. Smith also modifies the text by introducing some sentences with 'we learn that' or 'we say that':

On apprend que les factions armées palestiniennes opérant dans la bande de Gaza
qui on revendiqué la responsabilité de la majeure partie des tirs de roquettes et d'obus de mortier sont:
les Brigades d'Izz al-Din Al-Quassam,
les Brigades des Martyrs d'Al-Asqa
et le Jihad islamique. (Smith 2013, 148)
The Palestinian armed factions operating in the Gaza Strip and claiming responsibility for the majority of the rocket and mortar launchings are the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Islamic Jihad. (Human Rights Council 2009, 349)

This way of using an impersonal subject ('On') to introduce the text creates a distancing effect that reinforces the neutralisation of language at play in the report. This emphasis on learning reveals the performative power of the report. The language of the report makes us learn things, but, at the same time, this very language is what prevents us from reading and thus learning. What we can learn is hidden in pages of text that we fail to read. By revealing some information, Smith shows the reader things he deems important in the report, thus making them readable, visible, effective.

One might object that Smith's work does not make anything more visible than the report in the sense that the audience for his works might concern even fewer people than readers of the original report. To what extent is the audience of such a work of poetry greater than that of the original report? While the audience for contemporary French poetry is certainly not that important, what matters is not the number of people who read such a work but the making explicit of the transformative process at play. This transformative process aims not only at revealing something about the report being used to write these poems but also about a certain way of being in the world. If the work of the poetic document stopped at the transformation of a report into a poem, its effect would be rather insignificant. However, it involves something broader, that is a characteristic of literature and art in general, that is to change our ways of seeing the world, to make us adopt a different perspective. In this sense, the effect is greater as it outgrows the limits of this specific poem to concern a broader worldview. As we will see in the next chapter, this point is where poetics merge with ethics to become poethics.

These different elements of analysis all reveal that, in the report, language is neutralised in such ways that the experience of the oppressed can never be heard. Even though people can express themselves in such reports, there is a form of silencing that makes their voices voiceless. The transcription makes them lose their individuality, and hence prevents any empathy from the reader, producing a form of soul-blindness. The neutralisation of language places these voices at such a distance that they become silent. In his work, Smith creates a new space in which their voices can be heard, a space that reveals the linguistic oppression and aims to overturn it. It is interesting that Smith reaches such an effect by reinforcing the neutral character of language, thus bringing the reader's attention to the process of neutralisation and silencing. By creating a space of visibility, he aims to give a voice to the voiceless, to those whose voices have been silenced by linguistic oppression and to bring them to the reader's attention.

Transforming Forms of Language: Caroline Zekri's 'Un pur rapport grammatical'

What is linguistic oppression? Linguistic oppression arises when a minority must express itself in the language of the majority that precisely discriminates against it and renders it voiceless. Contemporary theories of epistemic injustice are precisely concerned with this form of silencing at play in linguistic practices. Miranda Fricker distinguishes two kinds of injustices: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007, 1). The main difference between these forms of injustices is that, according to Kristie Dotson, testimonial injustice is inflicted by an agent while hermeneutical injustices 'an agent is only a tool within some socioepistemic structure' (Dotson 2012, 29). Both kinds of injustice produce a form of silencing: in cases of testimonial injustice, the speaker has a voice that is turned down by the hearers; in cases of hermeneutical injustice, the speaker cannot even express her own experience because the language she uses lacks the concepts for such a speech. There is a third way in which voices are made voiceless, which we have seen with Smith: when voices are assigned to a space that makes them invisible.

The voices in the report do not have a stage of their own as they are assigned to archives and Smith's poetic intervention aims at giving them such a space of visibility. While these reports might seem to be giving a

voice to minorities, they rather silence them once more by bringing them to the neutral language of reports. The majority, understood as the normalisation of the privileged perspective, produces linguistic oppression and epistemic injustice. José Medina argues that epistemic injustice arises within 'the phenomenon of the normalizing and homogenizing tendencies of a privileged perspective that protects itself by blocking our recognition of differences' (Medina 2013, 39). The majority often fails to recognise its own privileged position and is incapable of seeing the difference, is blind to the problems encountered by the oppressed minority. Following Cavell, linguistic oppression does not acknowledge the other; there is a form of soul-blindness that reflects the blindness to epistemic injustice.

To fight this blindness, Medina argues that we must move away from the consensus and the agonistic interpretations of democratic interactions and move towards a model of resistance that connects to the resistance of poetry explored in Chap. 2. For Medina, this model of resistance 'teaches us that democratic interaction is broader and goes deeper than reaching or breaking consensus' (Medina 2013, 11). Democratic interaction is a continuous process: there is no reaching nor breaking consensus as a final stage but only resistance *qua* communicative engagement. As we have seen with Rancière, we must be able to move through consensus and dissensus in this process of democratic interaction, as they are stages of experiences of the other's perspective. Rancière considers that the notion of dissensus is where art and politics join: 'If there exists a connection between art and politics, it should be cast in terms of dissensus, the very kernel of the aesthetic regime: artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination' (Rancière 2010, 140). To understand this relation between dissensus and art, it is necessary to come back to Rancière's definition of politics in terms of dissensus:

> The essence of politics is *dissensus*. Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another—for instance, the world where the factory is a public space in that where it is considered private, the world where workers speak, and speak about the community, in that where their voices are mere cries expressing pain. (Rancière 2010, 38)

The notion of voice comes up in this definition of dissensus. In politics, two worlds meet and produce a separation between the worker's voice and the worker's cries, thus failing to acknowledge, in Cavell's terms, the expression of the pain of the other.

These voices remain unheard because they are dependent on a form of language that is silenced. The transformative force of poetry at play in poetic documents reveals how these forms of language can be transformed. Caroline Zekri's 'Un pur rapport grammatical' explores this transformative force by using a document with more intervention than Leibovici and Smith. It combines excerpts from the 'Report of the Mapping Exercise'[15] from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), analysing violence in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 1993 and 2003, and excerpts from individual evaluation forms from the '*Permanence d'accueil et d'orientation des mineurs isolés étrangers à Paris* (PAOMIE)' (Zekri 2015, 16), showing how French authorities evaluate young under-18 migrants in Paris. The confrontation and reconfiguration of these documents reveal a certain use of language in official documents that the poetic document aims to disrupt and transform. Zekri distinguishes both sources by using short quotations organised as verses from the report and longer sentences from the evaluation forms. This distinction generates a contrast between a form of emotional violence in shorter verses and a form of rejection of emotion in longer sentences. We thus find two voices combined in Zekri's poetic document: a voice representing the oppressed minority and a voice that oppresses the minority. Its structure marks the distinction by making the voice representing the minority more poetic and the other more narrative or argumentative. There is a confrontation between the voices of the OHCHR and the PAOMIE. Zekri's poetic document aims to show the linguistic oppression at play in the voice of the PAOMIE and uses the voice of the OHCHR to reveal it. Here are the opening lines of Zekri's poem:

> sous prétexte de chercher des minerais dans leur parties génitales
> dont les diamants, l'or, le cuivre, le cobalt, la cassitérite et le coltan
> auraient mutilé et éventré une femme enceinte
> dénudées, molestées et battues sévèrement avec des planches cloutées

[15] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CD/DRC_MAPPING_REPORT_FINAL_EN.pdf.

pour avoir porté un pantalon
et 17% de la production mondiale de diamants bruts
ainsi que deux fillettes de 6 et 7 ans

Lorsqu'on lui demande l'âge de ses sœurs aînées, il commence à cal-culer à voix haute. Il est difficilement crédible qu'il ne sache pas l'âge de ses sœurs aînées. Il dit qu'il ne peut expliquer. (Zekri 2015, 7)

on the pretext of searching their genitals for minerals
including diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, cassiterite (tin ore) and coltan
are alleged to have mutilated and disembowelled a pregnant woman
stripped, manhandled and even severely beaten with nail-studded pieces of wood
for having worn trousers
and 17% of global production of rough diamonds
and two girls aged six and seven

When asked about his older sisters' age, he begins counting out loud. It is difficult to believe that he doesn't know his older sisters' age. He says he can't explain.[16]

A lot is happening in these lines, and their analysis will show the mul-tiple meanings of the title of Zekri's poem 'Un pur rapport grammatical' that builds on various meanings of the word *rapport* in French.

A first meaning of *rapport*, and the most obvious, is report and refers to the material used to create her poem. Her poem is written out of two reports (from the OHCHR and the PAOMIE). Zekri's poem plays with the linguistic and grammatical dimensions of the report. Except for the 'and' in verse 6, all these sentences can be found in the report from the OHCHR. The addition of 'and' establishes a grammatical relation between the two verses. We can understand that the reorganisation of the report

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[16] I used the translation from the report to translate the parts taken from there and trans-lated myself the sentences taken from the evaluation cards.

operates on grammatical grounds. If we focus on the grammar of the sentence, two elements stand out: first, in verse 3, the subject of the verb 'are' must grammatically be 'diamonds, gold, copper, etc.' from verse 2, which suggests that the violence is operated by the minerals themselves and, by metonymy, by the mining industry, something which is epitomised in the last two verses of the poem: 'some had their anuses ripped with a knife/ by multinationals' (Zekri 2015, 15). In this last verse, Zekri adds 'by' to generate once again a grammatical relation in a way similar to verse 6. The same play with grammar can be seen in verse 4 as the feminine plural of the adjectives ('stripped', 'manhandled', 'beaten') can only refer to genitals in verse 1, thus bringing attention to the womanhood of the victims. Second, in verses 5, 6, and 7, Zekri uses a zeugma to join three objects by using one verb, playing with three meanings of *porter*: 1. to wear trousers, 2. to carry diamonds (that relates to the first verse where minerals are hidden in genitals), 3. to carry a child (as in being pregnant). This zeugma therefore gives three reasons to explain the violence in verse 4 and places these reasons on the same level, considering them of equal importance. The poetry arises from grammatical changes and adaptations in the text of the reports. It is a poem that uses grammar to explore reports.

These grammatical relations bring to the fore a second meaning of *rapport*, namely that of relation or analogy. The notion of relation is crucial as the poetic document relates the report to the evaluation forms which show how people in Paris are evaluating migrants from their perspective without considering the effects of the violence that they have been through, hence the repetition of 'difficult to believe' in many of the excerpts.[17] This difficulty to believe marks a form of epistemic injustice in which the minor's testimony is considered untrustworthy. The grammatical report does not only relate sentences together through linguistic and poetic devices but also highlights the relation between what has happened in the DRC and what happens in Paris. This relation is not one of analogy as multinationals can go to DRC and commit violence, but migrants cannot come to Paris and tell a story that is considered incoherent because it does not fit the norm of the PAOMIE.

[17] 'difficile à croire' (p. 8), 'difficilement crédible' (p. 9), 'peu de crédibilité' (p. 11), 'peu crédible' (p. 12), 'peu crédible' (p. 14).

The violence of the multinationals is highlighted by a third meaning of *rapport*, namely that of *rapport sexuel*, sexual intercourse. The grammatical relation highlights that the abuses of the mining industry are, as we have seen, also of sexual nature. We can also understand this abuse metaphorically in the sense that a dominant form of language abuses minor forms of language. This grammatical intercourse is not one of mutual consent but one of abuse and imposition of an order of speech. The dominating language of multinationals is in a position of power to abuse the people of the countries in which they operate, in the same sense that the PAOMIE uses its position to doubt the language used by the migrants.

A fourth meaning of rapport further enacts this violence and abuse: ratio. It brings the reader's attention to the use of percentages and the depersonalisation that they operate. In the language of the report, people become numbers, *ratio*, rather than victims. The grammatical ratio highlights a relation between the importance of statistics in economy, in the mining industry, and in the evaluation of the damages of the industry. The word 'ratio' therefore becomes a grammatical connector between the industry and its damages. The poetic transformations that Zekri makes in the report aim to bring this depersonalisation to the readers' attention. The poetic document transforms ordinary forms of language (report and evaluation forms) and reveals something through this transformation. There is an injunction to discover and uncover relations (*rapports*) that operate in language.

Poetic documents are ways of making speech visible. Even though they might not reach the greatest audience in terms of numbers, they move discourse from a space of invisibility to a space of visibility. They operate the transformation of a form of language that Meschonnic calls for (even though Meschonnic is probably thinking of radically different forms of poetry) by showing that displacing a form of language transforms it, even when the words themselves remain untouched. The transformation of a form of language is never a merely linguistic operation but involves the whole context in which the form of language appears, the form of life in which it is embedded. This notion of form of life is central to understanding the work of poetic documents. The discrepancy between the victims' voices and the institution—between the witnesses and the judges of the ICC, between the experience of the victims and the UN report, between the minor migrants and the officials of the PAOMIE—is a discrepancy

between two forms of life. The transformation of forms of language aims to make this discrepancy visible in order to overcome it, to build bridges across different forms of life. This transformation also aims to transform the reader, to change their way of seeing and being in the world. It shows that things that we usually overlook can be worthy of our attention and that we must change our perspective on them. That is why Meschonnic argues that the poem does not only affect language and poetry but also the reading subject. The transformative force of poetry can transform forms of life to give a voice to silenced subjects. Not only in the sense that the voices represented in the poem find a space in which they can be heard but also in the sense that readers can find their own voice, their own experience as subjects. The force of poetry aims to give a force back to the voices that have been silenced. This process reveals the ethical dimension at play in poetry, and I will explore in the next chapter the notion of poethics that combines the poetic and the ethical.

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Poethical Force: Muriel Pic, Claudia Rankine, Rosa Alcalá

It might seem like the focus on poetic documents in Chap. 6 neglects an important part of poetic production, and possibly the part that Henri Meschonnic is thinking of when he argues that any poem is the mutual transformation of forms of language and forms of life, namely the lyrical. How does the 'objective' dimension of documents relate to the 'subjective' lyric experience? As I will argue in this chapter, the opposition between documentary and lyric poetry is an artificial one that has been reinforced, in France, by the so-called war between the literalist and the lyric poets that Olivier Cadiot describes.[1] Poetic documents reveal a documentary nature of poetry in which the account of a personal, subjective experience becomes intersubjective—shared and sharable. This documentary poetry therefore becomes a space for the lyrical and I will explore how it combines the ethical (as transformation of a form of life) and the poetic (as transformation of a form of language) in a common task.

While poetic documents such as those studied in Chap. 6 left little space for the lyric, documentary poetry brings the lyric voice back to the fore. As we have seen in Chap. 4, this is a point where poetry meets autotheory, or where we can consider autotheory to be an instantiation of documentary poetry, where the lyrical meets the critical, to use Antonio Rodriguez's typology of pacts. Documentary poetry is not opposed to poetic documents but is a broader category: poetic documents are a form

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[1] 'C'était la guerre entre littéralité et lyrisme' (Quoted in Barda 2020, 1).

of documentary poetry, as is autotheory. As Adalaide Morris suggests in the entry 'Documentary Poetics' of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 'documentary poetics is less a systematic theory or doctrine of a kind of poetry than an array of strategies and techniques that position a poem to participate in discourses of reportage for political and ethical purposes' (Morris 2012, 372). Documentary poetry is not a subgenre with a clear definition but, following Pierre Vinclair, a particular 'effort' aiming at documenting the world to participate in political and ethical discourses.

While poetic documents show the power of the use of documents in poetry, documentary poetry reveals how poetry itself can become a document. Anthony Reed even argues that 'most poetry has come to be read as the documentary expression, fictional or autobiographical, of personal experience and feeling, presented in compact, harmoniously arranged form, and indirectly addressing a private reader' (Reed 2017, 25). The relation between the documentary and the lyric thus becomes blurred or, rather, the lyric becomes a document. I will explore this interaction between lyric and document in this chapter as it connects the poetic to a certain form of ethics—or *ethos*—of the subject. In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the notion of poethics to retrace its recent history. This notion brings to the fore the ethical and political force of poetry that I explore in the three following sections by analysing the works of three poets: Muriel Pic, Claudia Rankine, and Rosa Alcalá. The second section focuses on Pic's *Elégies documentaires* to show how the poetic merges with the documentary. The third one focuses on Rankine's works to show the imbrication between the conceptual and the lyrical, between the poetic and the ethical, between poetry and document. The fourth and final section pursues this exploration of documentary poetry and its poethical force in the works of Rosa Alcalá, especially her volume *Undocumentaries*, which explores the limits of the documentary and the power of poetry to overcome these limits.

DEFINING POETHICS

As we have seen, for Meschonnic, poetic thought is the mutual transformation of forms of language and forms of life. Poetics, as the transformation of a form of language, acquires an ethical dimension insofar as it transforms a form of life. Reciprocally, ethical thought (as the transformation of the form of life) acquires a poetic dimension. While the first

interaction seems quite usual in the sense that transformative forms of language often aim at ethical changes, the converse seems less intuitive. To what extent does the transformation of a form of life require a transformation of a form of language? Such is the guiding question of poethics.

We can distinguish two kinds of poethics. A more traditional (or Romantic) one represented by Heidegger that focuses on the *ethos* through the idea of being in the world and a more pragmatic one inspired by Wittgenstein and the interactions between forms of language and forms of life. The Heideggerian view builds on his famous reading of Hölderlin in 'poetically man dwells' and suggests that poetics is concerned with the *ethos* involved in the search for a poetic inhabitation of the earth. For Heidegger, the relation between dwelling and poetry resides in the idea of building: 'Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building' (Heidegger 2013, 213). As a form of making, poetry becomes a form of building a world in which one can live. Without poetry, there is no way of being in the world because there is no way of building a place to dwell: 'Authentic building occurs so far as there are poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling' (Heidegger 2013, 225). According to Heidegger, poetry is a prerequisite for life insofar as it creates the conditions in which human beings can live and dwell. In this sense, the poetic becomes a prerequisite for the ethical.

One of the problems with the Heideggerian view is that it leads to a sacralisation of poetry that separates it from the ordinary. Such a sacralisation leads to the powerlessness of poetry with respect to everyday life (the separation between art and life). Following Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, denies any political force of poetry because he considers poetic language to be remote from ordinary language. He asks: 'How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out?' (Sartre 1988, 34). To place poetic language apart from ordinary language is to place poetry in no position to influence the everyday politicised world. This separation might seem surprising as Sartre defines literature in *What Is Writing?* in terms of political commitment. This definition however concerns only literature (and more specifically the novel) and not poetry. Indeed, Sartre uses this definition to distinguish literature from other forms of art: 'No, we do not want to

"commit" painting, sculpture, and music "too," or at least not in the same way' (Sartre 1988, 25). Poetry is a form of art different from literature and therefore one whose main characteristic is not to be politically committed. The definition of poetry in terms of 'language that has been turned inside out' prevents poetry from having any political influence. For Sartre, poetry uses a language that steps outside the bounds of ordinary language, namely outside the bounds of a language that can influence the ordinary world.

If we aim to consider the ethical, social, and political force of poetry, we must move to a different view of poethics, one that is more pragmatic. In France, Jean-Claude Pinson is the most prominent proponent of such a poethics. To some extent, he follows the basic Heideggerian understanding of poethics: 'In this perspective, I brought to the fore the word "poethics" to underline that poetry is not only an art of language (of interest for poetics). At the level of existence, of *ethos* (the customary way of being in the world), poetry carries the greater ambition of being the search for another light, another language to make sense to our stay, to our inhabiting the earth'[2] (Pinson 2013, 11). Pinson pursues the idea that poetry is a way of inhabiting the earth. Poetry is not only concerned with language and poetics must therefore not be reduced to tools for transforming language as it involves our ways of being in the world. As Aurélie Foglia comments on Pinson's poethics: 'Poetry proposes a mode, or even a model, of existence'[3] (Foglia 2019, 822). Poetry is a mode of existence in the sense that it provides suggestions on how to live, but it is also a model of existence in the sense that we must strive to live according to the standards of poetic living. When one fails to live poetically, one resides in mere surviving rather than living; one fails to dwell but only passes through.

In that sense, Pinson aims to maintain a form of sacredness to poetry and to connect it to a form of ethics:

> [T]he modern poetic ethos would not only be one of phenomenological openness to the sacredness of the world in the perspective of preserving its trace and meaning. It would also be, as it is the case in the works of Yves Bonnefoy, an *ethical* engagement of the poetic word in order to build a

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[2] My translation: 'Dans cette optique, j'ai été conduit à mettre en avant le mot de "poéthique", pour souligner que la poésie n'est pas seulement un art du langage (celui qui intéresse la poétique). Elle me semble porteuse d'une plus grande ambition, se voulant, au plan de l'existence, de l'*ethos* (de la façon coutumière d'être au monde), recherche d'une autre lumière, d'un autre langage pour donner sens à notre séjour, à notre habitation de la terre.'

[3] My translation: '[La poésie] propose un mode, voire un modèle d'existence.'

place where the sacred can be 'reformed' and the earth be kept liveable by preserving another relation to the world than the one imposed by the domination of a purely instrumental rationality. Safekeeping and instating the sacred would be the aim of poetry, its supreme task as 'poethics.'[4] (Pinson 1995, 124–25)

Even though Pinson aims to undermine the distinction between poetic and ordinary language, the notion of sacredness that lies at the heart of his poethics remain somewhat within the line of Heidegger and the Romantics. However, the sacredness he is advocating for has nothing to do with the sacralisation of poetry that Meschonnic criticises, for instance; it is on the contrary as he talks about the sacredness of the earth, of life, rather than that of poetry itself. Pinson's investigation of the idea of 'poétariat' further suggests that the poet is no longer modelled on the Romantic genius but on the worker (Pinson 2015).

In a way similar to Pinson but in the English-speaking world, Joan Retallack offers a definition of poethics that insists on being in the world: 'A poetics can take you only so far without an *h*. If you're to embrace complex life on earth, if you can no longer pretend that all things are fundamentally simple or elegant, a poetics thickened by an *h* launches an exploration of art's significance *as*, not just *about*, a form of living in the real world' (Retallack 2003, 26). Retallack argues that a poetics must be thickened with an *h* in order to reveal the significance of art. Without this *h*, poetics remains at a superficial and artificial level of simplicity and elegance. With an *h*, it gains significance as a way of life. Art is no longer understood in the mimetic/representational conception but becomes an ethical/existential enterprise. It is a form of spiritual exercise as we have seen at the end of Chap. 5. Rather than being about the world, art is a way of being in the world. Following this idea, Retallack's notion of poethics comes closer to Wittgenstein. She avoids the sacralisation of poetry that is present in Heidegger to focus on the more pragmatic level of understanding how poetry gains significance in our everyday practices.

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[4] My translation: '*l'éthos* poétique moderne serait non seulement ouverture phénoménologique à la sacralité du monde, en vue d'en préserver la trace et le sens, mais aussi, comme c'est le cas chez Yves Bonnefoy, engagement *éthique* de la parole poétique en vue de bâtir un lieu où puisse se "reformer" le sacré et demeurer habitable une terre préservant un autre rapport au monde que celui qu'impose la domination de la rationalité purement instrumentale. Sauvegarder et instaurer le sacré serait alors le but de la poésie, sa tâche suprême en tant que "poéthique."'

This view is shared by Paul Audi, who coins the notion of *aesth/ethics* in a more phenomenological and Nietzschean way. He considers that ethics and aesthetics are one, not in the sense Wittgenstein suggests in the *Tractatus* but in the sense that living ethically necessarily involves an aesthetic dimension: 'Because if ethics essentially consists in a work on oneself in the aim of living the best or most efficient possible way, this work on oneself must be characterised as aesthetic, in the sense that it aims to produce a *form*—i.e. a *style of living* that opens itself as such, that presents itself as a pure disposition to the jouissance of living'[5] (Audi 2010, 128–29). This understanding of ethics brings to the fore its aesthetic dimension. In contrast to Pinson and Retallack, Audi does not only discuss the ethical dimension of aesthetics but also the aesthetic dimension of ethics that is epitomised in the locution *style of living*.[6] Although he uses the term aesthetics, Audi's theory is also concerned with creation (and hence with poetics): 'Creating, let us say it once again, is this aesth/ethic event that consists in giving back power to life by opening the field of possibilities. Although this opening depends on a certain production, it cannot be reduced to it. Because producing means producing an object from the world and in the visible horizon of the world; whereas creating means creating a possible from life and in the invisible level of life'[7] (Audi 2010, 163). Creation is an aesth/ethic event that opens a field of possibilities. The reason why Audi rejects the notion of poetics (and especially of *poiesis*) lies in the fact that he does not want to reduce creation to a mere making of an object. He attributes a higher status to creation that is not only concerned with the making of an object but with the making of a perspective (in a Nietzschean sense). The creation of possibilities outgrows the mere making of an object.

[5] My translation: 'Car si l'éthique consiste essentiellement en un travail sur soi dont le but est de se tirer d'affaire dans la vie le mieux possible, ou le plus efficacement possible, ce travail sur soi doit lui-même être qualifié d'esthétique, dans la mesure où il vise à produire une *forme*—c'est-à-dire en l'occurrence un *style de vie* qui s'ouvre comme tel, qui se dispose, qui est lui-même une pure disposition à la jouissance du fait de vivre.'

[6] This idea is central to Nietzsche's ethics of self-creation and self-stylisation. What matters for him is 'To "give style" to one's character' (Nietzsche 1974, GS 290).

[7] My translation: 'Créer, répétons-le encore une fois, est cet événement d'ordre esth/éthique qui consiste à redonner de la puissance à la vie, en lui ouvrant le champ des possibles. Certes, cette ouverture passe par une certaine production, mais elle ne s'y réduit guère. Car produire, c'est produire un objet, à partir du monde et dans l'horizon visible du monde; alors que créer, c'est créer du possible à partir de la vie et sur le plan invisible de la vie.'

Retallack, Pinson, and Audi all combine aspects of aesthetic and poetic theory with the ethical but have different perspectives on this relation. While Pinson and Retallack focus on finding the ethical in the poetic, Audi's more Nietzschean reading also envisages the opposite, namely the aesthetic that lies in the ethical.[8] This connection between the poetic and the ethical brings to the fore the political dimension of poetry. Against philosophers such as Sartre, who consider that poetic utterances have no linguistic force and hence no ethical, social, or political impact, poethics reveals the ethical force of poetry.

If we abandon the distinction between ordinary and poetic language, Sartre's definition of literature in political terms can provide interesting insights to consider the ethical and political action of poetry. Sartre indeed considers literature to be a means for action:

> Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition. (Sartre 1988, 37)

The prose-writer uses language to influence the course of the world, to disclose something of the world and hence to change it. Words are action; words perform. While Sartre refuses this use of language to poets, is the poet not precisely someone who 'has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition' as well? For Sartre, the poets 'withdraw the reader from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out' (Sartre 1988, 34), but does such a conception suggest that poetry has no effect, neither on the human condition, nor on language itself? If the poet is someone who changes language—who 'turns it inside out'—by using it and if words are action, she might be someone who affects the human condition in greater ways than the prose-writer.

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[8] As I have argued elsewhere, this exploration of the aesthetic and poetic dimension of ethics is one of the powerful insights of Nietzsche's philosophy. Especially in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche offers a model of ethics that is eminently poetic (P. Mills 2024).

By abandoning Sartre's initial distinction between poetic and ordinary language, we see that poetry can have an ethical and political dimension. As we have seen in Chap. 6, this proximity between the poetic and the political has been explored by Jacques Rancière who considers art and politics to be two kinds of distributions of the sensible (Rancière 2004, 8). This notion of distribution of the sensible gives another reason why poetry is usually separated from politics. If politics is a distribution of the sensible, it is something public. Poetry is by contrast often considered a private matter of personal expression of subjectivity (among other things). There is a discrepancy between the publicity of politics and the privacy of the lyric. However, if poetry is concerned with language and as language is, following Wittgenstein, never private, then poetry and politics can be reconciled. As Michael Dowdy notes in his introduction to *Poetics of Social Engagement*, 'critical studies in poetry and poetics have demonstrated the myriad ways in which poets have combined innovation with investigations and assertions of ethnic, racial, and gender subjectivities' (Dowdy 2018, 6). Poets of social engagement combine poetic and lyric work on subjectivity with a broader social and political concern. There is no private language; there is no private poetry. In its linguistic innovations, poetry becomes a way of raising socio-political concerns. Dowdy continues: 'Broadly conceived, this volume's poets do not consider poetry a thing apart. Instead, they create sites, forms, modes, vehicles, and inquiries for entering the public sphere, contesting injustices, and reimagining dominant norms, values, and exclusions' (Dowdy 2018, 6–7). As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, contemporary poetry contains forms of investigation that combine the private and the public, the personal and the social, the lyrical and the documentary to aim at political change.

MURIEL PIC'S *ÉLÉGIES DOCUMENTAIRES*

Muriel Pic's *Elégies documentaires* is 'a lyrical, atmospheric, and elementary experience of documents' (Pic 2016, 81) that provides a different reading of archives. It builds on archives to produce a lyrical expression and experience of history. What is surprising in this description of her work is the combination of lyric and document. Traditionally, lyric and document belong to two radically different conceptions of poetry (one that focuses on subjective experiences and one that focuses on objective facts). However, Pic's work reveals that even documentary work involves a subjective dimension, that the exploration of archives is always

undertaken from one specific perspective. The three archives on which Pic's *Elégies documentaires* are built are all set around World War II and inscribe Pic's work in the literary tradition following the works of W. G. Sebald. The first part ('Rügen') of Pic's *Elégies documentaires* is built around the Prora archives, a sea-resort built between 1936 and 1939 on the island of Rügen in northern Germany. The second part ('Miel') focuses on kibbutzim archives and the third part ('Orientation') on an amateur archive on the Orion constellation from shortly before World War II.

Each part intertwines pictures from the archive and poems that relate to the pictures in various ways. Pictures and poems are numbered continuously, thus placing the archive and the lyric at the same level. The title of each poem or picture is composed of three elements that give information on the relation to the archive. For instance, the first image represents a map of Rügen and situates the archive geographically. The title of the image is 'I. Geographical postcard of Rügen—Prora or *Kdf Seebad* in the bay of the island—Corrected print after 1939'[9] (Pic 2016, 7). These three elements give three kinds of information on the archive. The first element describes what the picture is, namely a geographical postcard. Most of the titles of the pictures begin with such a description. The second element reveals the cultural and historical significance of the place. The island of Rügen and this specific bay are important because they were the place where the Nazi regime decided to build a sea-resort. The third element relates the image to a historical moment, 1939, the beginning of World War II. This last element plays on two meanings of the word *impression* in French. It means print, as I have decided to translate it here, and a corrected print indicates that the geographical map has been updated after the beginning of the war, as the borderlines shift. But it also means impression, which introduces subjectivity. The impression of what this postcard signifies changes after 1939. Before, it was just the postcard of an island. After, it becomes a place of historical significance. While it might not have attracted our attention before 1939, it does now because of historical events. We can already see in this 'impression' the way in which the archive relates to the lyric. The archive is not just an ensemble of photographs; it involves a viewer who organises this ensemble to highlight its historical

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[9] My translation: 'I. Carte postale géographique de Rügen – Prora or *Kdf Seebad* dans la baie de l'île – Impression corrigée après 1939'.

significance. Pic takes this archive to reveal something of a histori-
cal moment.

In *Élégies documentaires*, Pic thus aims to make sense of a historical
archive through a lyrical experience by showing how poetry can cast a new
light on what history traditionally shows. I will focus on the first poem
from the first part to show what Pic does with the archive and provide a
reflection on the relation between the ordinary archive and the poetic
experience. The title of the first poem is 'II. Tour operator—*All inclu-
sive*—Fossil Prora'.[10] The first element of the title indicates the way in
which the map presented on the previous page can be understood: the
map of Rügen is here to sell holidays. It thus gives the theme of the poem,
namely tourism, and the poem is built around this idea.

> Tourism is always the same thing
> always the same island
> the same salt, the same sun
> the same gestures.
> […]
> Tourism is the industry of the same.[11] (Pic 2016, 8)

The idea of a sea-resort is to provide the same experience to all the visi-
tors, to provide an experience of the same in order to foster a community
(that will also be the topic of Pic's second part on the kibbutzim). The
sameness that fosters this community is however an artificial one, a same-
ness of propaganda. The repetition of the word 'même' insists on the fact
that this sameness is constructed; it is an industry of the regime. The sec-
ond element also connects to the idea of tourism with the locution 'all
inclusive'. The holidays are all inclusive, Pic suggests, because also the
'farce of the welfare state [is] included'[12] (Pic 2016, 8). The sea-resort in
Rügen is much more than a mere sea-resort, it is a tool of propaganda for
the Nazi regime. The '*all inclusive* holidays' also include the aims and
goals of the regime and 'In Rügen in 1936/ tourism is dictatorship itself'[13]
(Pic 2016, 8). Tourism is the dictatorship of the same. The third element
builds on the longer history of the place by connecting it to the fossils that

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[10] My translation: 'II. Tour-opérateur – *All inclusive* – Fossile Prora'.

[11] My translation: 'Le tourisme, c'est toujours la même chose/ toujours la même île/ le
même sel, le même soleil/ les mêmes gestes./ […]/ Le tourisme, c'est l'industrie du même.'

[12] My translation : 'mascarade de l'état providence comprise.'

[13] My translation: 'À Rügen en 1936/ le tourisme, c'est la dictature elle-même.'

make up the island. Pic considers these fossils to resist the regime insofar as the sea-resort will not be completed: 'The fossils speak the fossils cry'.[14] They speak of what has happened, of the history of the place. They cry for what they witnessed, a cry that becomes a 'chalk witnesses' elegy'[15] (Pic 2016, 8).

In this becoming poem of the archive, the (objective) document becomes a lyrical and elegiac (subjective) experience. The poem creates a situation for the reader to experience the archive in a certain way. As we have seen, this idea of a process is at the heart of Christophe Hanna's poetic *dispositif*: 'The poetics of "poetic documents," as we can see it now, cannot be the description of static or essential forms, but that of a becoming or a process, of a chain of properties progressively acquired, in relation with other discursive forms and under the effect of various transformations: it therefore requires the analysis of the mutations of an enunciation in its contexts of use'[16] (Hanna 2010, 183–84). There is a shift from the object (the poem) to the process (the experience). What makes this documentary experience lyrical is not the formal (static) properties of the text but the process that is at play in the intertwining of archives and elegy. Through this notion of process, we find an agency (an intention and attention as we have seen in Chap. 3) that selects and composes with the archive. Pic's archival exploration connects the language of lyrical expression to a documentary and ethical concern. This exploration of history through poetry is a way towards an ethics of the archive, towards making sense of the archive.

We have seen that poetic documents in the French tradition involve a strong political dimension. A similar importance given to the political can be found in the forms of documentary poetry in North America, albeit within a completely different context. In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on two America poets, Claudia Rankine and Rosa Alcalá, to show how documentary work displays a poethical force. Even though the contexts and practices between French and American poetry significantly differ, there are some important points of contact. First, the French

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[14] My translation: 'Les fossiles parlent les fossiles pleurent.'

[15] My translation : 'élégie de témoins de craie.'

[16] My translation: 'La poétique des "documents poétiques", on le voit maintenant, ne saurait être la description de formes statiques ou essentielles, mais celle d'un devenir ou d'un processus, d'un enchaînement de propriétés acquises progressivement, en relation avec d'autres formes discursives et sous l'effet de diverses transformations : elle nécessite donc l'analyse des mutations d'une énonciation dans ses contextes d'usage.'

tradition of poetic documents is inscribed, as Leibovici mentions it, in the tradition of objectivist poetry that arises in the beginning of twentieth-century American poetry. Second, Emmanuel Hocquard, a prominent figure in theorising the documentary nature of poetry as we have seen in Chap. 5, operated as a *passeur* of American poetry for French audiences with his association 'Un Bureau sur l'Atlantique'. From 1993 to 2006, Hocquard's association distributed the series 'Format Américain' edited by Juliette Valéry that presented French translations of American poets.[17] Third, Vanessa Place, a major figure in conceptual uncreative writing, has translated Frank Smith's *Guantanamo*. These few points suggest that there are some connections between contemporary French and American poetry, and Abigil Lang offers a thorough exploration of these connections in *La conversation transatlantique* in which she shows the influence of American poetry on French poetry in the second half of the twentieth century (Lang 2021). There is a similar concern with documents that animate both French and American poetry and that can be related to a shared interest in Wittgensteinian poetics. Despite these points of contact, there are no explicit relations between the poets on which I focus in this chapter, and moving from Pic to Rankine and Alaclá moves from an investigation of history to contemporary political concerns with racism and immigration.

Claudia Rankine's Lyric Conversations

Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and her later works combine poetry with images and reflections about the question of racism in everyday life. Her works function like poetic documents not only in the sense that they include documents but also in the sense that they are a form of documentary poetry. While Pic's documentary poetry aims to explore history in a lyrical way, Rankine's work aims to show the imbrication of the personal and the social, to show how, as Angela Hume suggests, 'even personal experiences like grief are mediated by the ideologies of capitalism and the state' (Hume 2016, 85). What is central in Rankine's documentary poetry is the place given to the lyric, despite the idea that lyric and documentary are opposed to one another. However, while traditional lyric poetry insists on the lyric 'I', Rankine focuses on the 'you' and the 'we'. Bella Adams argues that in the context of racism, there can be no 'I' since the 'I' is always involved in a socio-political situation (Adams 2017, 55).

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[17] This series has now been collected in a volume (Valéry 2021).

In reaction to this impossibility of the 'I', Rankine creates a collective lyric, a common lyric, a voice for the voiceless. Rankine creates an 'American Lyric'—the subtitle of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen*—that, Katherine Leveling argues, 'intimates a poem that speaks for a mass of individual people who are, at the same time, joined to a collective national unit. That the subtitle names the lyric form makes the expansion of lyric capacities and their intentional extension beyond a singular "I" explicit' (Leveling 2019, 47). The lyric is no longer the expression of a solitary 'I' but the expression of a collective national unit. The poem is no longer monovocal but involves a multiplicity of voices.

This centrality of the lyric brings to the fore the idea of time and timelessness. Indeed, in contrast to narrative in which temporality can be considered as structural (be it in a linear or non-linear fashion), temporality in the lyric is always a present, the present of the event. Even though the elements of the poem might belong to the past, the experience of the lyric is always an experience at the present. The lyric is 'always punctual', as Grant Farred argues, and this punctuality corresponds to Nietzsche's 'untimely present' for Abram Foley (Farred 2017, 102; Foley 2018, 234). The lyric would thus correspond to something like the contemporary or the untimely in Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*.[18]

One of the recurring images—that even appears on the book cover—in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is that of a television with static. This idea of static brings us back to the question of parasitism explored in Chap. 2. The parasite in this case represents the failure and disruption of communication. The parasite causes interferences that render the message unintelligible, as if the lyric voice(s) failed to communicate. However, this failure of communication is also the point for a creative invention: the lyric voice is a static that lives as a parasite on television, that is, the language of media in general. As Emma Kimberly and Tana Jean Welch have noted, this voice becomes a critique of mass media (Kimberly 2011, 780; Welch 2015, 124). The lyric voice aims at undermining the ways media use language, at examining them to show the prejudices on which they are built. The lyric voice works as a *baisetiole* in the sense explored in Chap. 3, as a

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[18] Giorgio Agamben follows Roland Barthes to answer the Nietzschean question of what is the contemporary: 'Roland Barthes summarizes this answer in a note from his lectures at the College de France: "The contemporary is the untimely"' (Agamben 2009, 40). As David Scott argues, the untimely is not a matter of chronology but 'Rather, it is a *quality* of temporal experience, or a mode of being in time' (Scott 2020, viii).

disruptive and creative force. There are two aspects to the static on television: first, a criticism of the language of media that reinforces the (op) positions in society; second, a search for an alternative, disruptive, creative voice, that of *An American Lyric*.

In *Citizen* and *Just Us*, Rankine continues the exploration of the relationship between documents and personal experience. For instance, in the section 'notes on the state of whiteness' from *Just Us*, she erases some sentences from the *Notes of the State of Virginia* to highlight the point that the misery of the blacks 'could not produce a poet' (Rankine 2020, 117). The erasure reinforces the opposition between the black being visible on the page and the white being invisible, pursuing her exploration of the invisibility of whiteness. As Mary-Jean Chan argues, the blank spaces confront the reader with the violence of silence and turn this silence into a power, a force that affects the reader (Chan 2018, 156). Rankine describes *Just Us* as an *American Conversation*, thus shifting from the lyric to conversation. This shift is made explicit by the substitution of 'I' with 'we' in *Just Us*, which moves from the question of the voice (being silenced, finding a voice, etc.) to the question of communication and community.

What does it mean to communicate in a divided society? How can communication exist when voices are silenced? This question of communication relates to our exploration of acknowledgement and silencing in Chap. 6. In order to communicate, one must see the other and acknowledge them. As Rankine describes in one scene from *Citizen*: 'You must be in a hurry, you offer. / No, no, no, I really didn't see you' (Rankine 2014). Seeing the other requires acknowledging them as other. She describes a similar scene with a child, to show that even children fail to be acknowledged and seen: 'Yes, and you want it to stop, you want the child pushed to the ground to be seen, to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself' (Rankine 2014). There is a problem of seeing, a problem of acknowledging the other in their differences. As Rankine argues: 'Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen' (Rankine 2014). Before knowing (and before acknowledging to follow Cavell), there is a necessity of seeing and experiencing.

This lack of acknowledgement generates invisibility. Rankine points towards the apparatus of invisibility (a *dispositif* in the words of French theory) that operates in racism. But the picture is more complex, as

Cynthia Dobbs notes that there is a tension between hypervisibility and invisibility in Rankine's works (Dobbs 2020, 180). Hypervisibility produces an invisibility similar to Wittgenstein's consideration that what is already under our eyes becomes invisible: 'One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes' (PI 129). The task of Rankine's poetry, and of poetic documents or *dispositifs* in general, as we have seen with Hanna, 'is a political action, in the sense that it manifests what remains usually invisible in the 'order of things'—*unmarked*, in the police sense of the word—, that, therefore, by which this order holds'[19] (Hanna 2010, 19–20).

Invisibility and silencing are part of a *dispositif* of diversion of attention. In a situation where Rankine points out that 'Whiteness wants the kind of progress that reflects what it values, a reflection of itself', she experiences a form of silencing:

> A white woman effectively ends the conversation on 45's campaign tactics by turning our gaze toward the dessert tray. How beautiful, she says. Homemade brownies on a silver tray? Hers is the fey gesture I have seen exhibited so often by white women in old movies—women who are overcome by shiny objects. It's so blatant a redirect I can't help but ask aloud the most obvious question: Am I being silenced? (Rankine 2020, 151)

The white hand shifts the gaze from the discourse to the dessert silver tray. It diverts attention in order to avoid feeling ashamed. White people and shiny objects stand against the discourse of a black woman. This form of silencing is part of the 'social contract' as the title of the section in Rankine's volume suggests. Charles Mills has thoroughly explored how racism and slavery were built into the very fabric of the social contract, what he names the racial contract. As he succinctly puts it: 'The *Racial* Contract is thus the truth of the *social* contract' (C. W. Mills 1997, 64). According to Mills, the racial contract is a condition of possibility for the existence of the social contract. The social contract therefore includes forms of oppression such as silencing.

One way to escape these limits of speech is to enter into a conversation. As Rankine suggests: 'To converse is to risk the unraveling of the said and the unsaid. / To converse is to risk the performance of what's held by the

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[19] My translation: 'La création d'un dispositif est une action politique, dans la mesure où elle manifeste ce qui demeure couramment invisible dans "l'ordre des choses"—banalisé, au sens policier du terme—, ce, donc, par quoi cet ordre tient.'

silence' (Rankine 2020, 219). There is a risk to conversation because it reveals what is usually silenced and requires both parties to be seen and acknowledged. Through conversation can come acknowledgement, at the risk of revealing what is hidden by silence. In this process, conversation leads to the question of conversion or change. The aim of the conversation is to change the perspective of the other, but how can this change occur? As Rankine suggests: 'what if in a lifetime of conversations, what if / in the clarity of consciousness, what if nothing changes?' (Rankine 2020). Another risk of conversation is that nothing changes. After all, conversation might not lead to change, but conversation is all we have.

Change is conditional, but it is necessary. The call for change is however dependent on the conditional:

> What if—the repetitive call of what if—is only considered repetitive
> when what if leaves my lips, when what if is uttered
> by the unheard, and what if
> what if is the cement of insistence
> when you insist what if
> this is. (Rankine 2020)

The repetition of 'what if' becomes performative. It is only because it is uttered by the unheard that 'what if' needs to be repetitive. We can see at play the performativity of language that is always dependent on the 'total situation', as Austin names it. Words are powerful and, in the section 'tiki torches', in *Just Us*, Rankine discusses the question of a burning cross. This question has been central to some investigations on the power of hate speech, showing how words can be weapons (Matsuda et al. 1993; Butler 1997). As Rankine further argues, 'words work as release' (Rankine 2014). Words are not just a matter of language; they involve the whole body. The bodies are affected by words, in the sense of the performative constitution of identity in Butler.

In this reflection about the powers of language and identity, Rankine's works remind us of autotheoretical works explored in Chap. 4. Kyle Frisina relates Rankine's works to the genre of autotheory, insisting on the difference between the 'subjective' nature of most autotheoretical works and the central 'intersubjective' dimension of Rankine's works (Frisina 2020, 158). Frisina connects this autotheoretical dimension in Rankine's works to the question of the performative, and Rankine also brings up Butler's theorising of the performative:

For so long you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler's remarks, you begin to understand yourself as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present. Your alertness, your openness, and your desire to engage actually demand your presence, your looking up, your talking back, and, as insane as it is, saying please. (Rankine 2014)

Language does not aim to erase anything, but to make it so visible that it becomes natural. Through its performative language, racism becomes naturalised in the sense that it transforms a cultural matter into a matter of fact, like the dominant cultural performative that pretends to be natural as we have seen with Paul Preciado. Language constitutes the subject and constitutes the black subject as an 'other' that is considered in its difference. The force of Rankine's works does not solely lie in its verisimilitude but also in the way it reveals the performative force of language.

What is at play in this question of performative language is the difference between fact and value. Performative language leads us to take values for facts. Once these values are transformed into facts, changing them back proves to be very difficult. A description in this sense is never a mere description; it is never a mere matter of 'objective' facts but a matter of 'subjective' interpretation or value. As Rankine suggests: 'And still you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description' (Rankine 2014). There is a reduction of the description to the sole characteristic of skin colour. In this sense, there is always someone fitting the description. What matters to the description are not matters of fact but matters of value, which are always dependent on the system in which they are inscribed. As Rankine suggests in *Just Us*: 'That I was among them in airport lounges and in first-class cabins spoke in part to my own relative economic privilege, but the price of my ticket, of course, does not translate into social capital. I was always aware that my value in our culture's eyes is determined by my skin color first and foremost' (Rankine 2020, 21). The skin colour matters more than social class when it comes to value. Social capital cannot be so easily bought.

The problem is that values are taken as facts, whereas facts are a matter of fiction: 'The fiction of the facts assumes innocence, ignorance, lack of intention, misdirection; the necessary conditions of a certain time and place' (Rankine 2014). As Rankine pursues, this fiction of facts leads to an aestheticized distancing:

> Then this aestheticized distancing from Oh my God, from unbelievable,
> from dehydration, from overheating, from no electricity, no power, no way
> to communicate
> we are drowning here
> still in the difficulty
> as if the faces in the images hold all the consequences
> and the fiction of the facts assumes randomness and indeterminacy.
> (Rankine 2014)

This fiction of facts blurs the distinction between the two terms, showing that facts are also fiction in the sense that they are assembled in such a way as to become fiction. As we have seen in Chap. 5, Emmanuel Hocquard shows the difficulty in distinguishing fact from fiction and that everything is fiction from a certain perspective. The question then becomes one of evaluating these fictions and the meanings they generate. This might remind us of Nietzsche's perspectivism according to which, as Arthur Danto succinctly puts it, 'there are no facts but only interpretations' (Danto 2005, 59).

To say that facts are fiction is to say that the facts always appear to us in a certain fiction or, as Rankine's earlier volume of poetry suggests, in a certain plot. In *Plot*, she plays with the different meanings of the word 'plot': 'I see there is meant to be plot, a burial, but the beginning of reflection should have fewer maybes and tension should exist between the bank (our solidity) and the river (our dissolution)' (Rankine 2001, 58). There needs to be a plot to have a reflection, there needs to be facts to create such a plot. Too much indeterminacy leads to the impossibility of the plot. There needs to be a balance between bank and river, between solidity and dissolution, between facts and plot. The plot thus becomes central to the existence of the 'I': 'What is the world without I in it? I who am nothing without plots propping me up—/ Oh, action of narrative Oh secret plan To chart To chart A small piece of land' (Rankine 2001, 100). The various meanings of plot are placed next to one another with the repetition of 'To chart'. As if charting was a way of articulating the various meanings of plot, of understanding that there is no world without an 'I' and that there is no 'I' without a plot, without a way of making sense of things. In this sense, the idea of an 'American lyric' plays on the combination between the public world and the private 'I' as Joel Alden Schlosser argues, is 'a particular wording of the world, both public facing ("American") and personal ("lyric")' (Schlosser 2020, 449). This wording of the world, this plotting the world, is a way of showing that the world we live in is built through our words and what we do with them.

ROSA ALCALÁ'S *UNDOCUMENTARIES*

Rankine elaborates on a documentary form of poetry that accounts for the wording of the world. But is the documentary enough to give an account of the world? What becomes of all the facts that are kept hidden? Rebecca MacMillan suggests that Rankine's work 'emphasize how such [documentary] poetry makes visible its management of the tensions inherent to documentary work' (MacMillan 2017, 174). There is a tension in documentary work insofar as it operates a selection of what is shown; what is shown hides what the author decides not to show. Rosa Alcalá's work follows a similar reflection on the limits of the documentary as the title of her volume *Undocumentaries* suggests. As Dowdy argues: 'Her title also alludes to undocumented persons, who are paradoxically invisible, anonymous, and rightless, even as their marked bodies function as media and political spectacles. Undocumentary poetics thus calls into question the clarity and lucidity typically valued in lyric and documentary forms, while also troubling the narrow epistemological foundations of nation-state citizenship' (Dowdy 2018, 9). Moving away from the 'objectivity' of documentary practices, undocumentary poetry offers a different space that makes visible what is usually invisible. This does not mean that Alcalá rejects documentary poetry, but rather that she investigates the ways in which this form of poetry can be expanded, and how it can document the undocumented.

The title of Alcalá's *Undocumentaries* seems to indicate an opposition between documentary and poetry. In what sense are these two opposed? Is she replaying the opposition between literal and lyrical poets mentioned in the opening of this chapter? What does poetry bring that documentary does not? The opening poem titled 'Undocumentary' further blurs the lines:

> Documentary: The lyric of unrehearsed chemicals
> acts out the tensions of progress
> into a brighter but stiller image
> called fact or archive
>
> Undocumentary: the man who joined
> old world industries of textile
> to dirt trucked in from the Ramapos
> is not a video
> to behold. (Alcalá 2010, 13)

P. MILLS

These lines seem to oppose documentary to undocumentary by defining one and the other. However, the definition of documentary surprisingly begins with the lyric, thus connecting it back to poetry, while the definition of undocumentary seems to be more factual. The documentary is further defined as a fact or archive, while the undocumentary 'is not a video/ to behold'. Here lies the opposition: a poem is not a fact or an archive, even though it can be made of facts or archives. There is something more to poetry than mere reporting. One might object here that most documentary films can be said to be poetic in the way they approach the facts that they investigate, but I believe that Alcalá is not talking about documentary films *per se* here. She is concerned with archives and, as John Alba Cutler argues: '"Undocumentary" is a poem about class and labor in the neoliberal era, but these are not concerns that are merely examined from a distance. Rather, Alcalá sets up a dialectic between the expansive vision of the documentary film and the radical interiority of the lyric poem' (Cutler 2018, 44). The notion of undocumentary therefore pursues the imbrication of document and lyric, of public and private, of 'objective' and 'subjective' experience. The opposition between documentary and undocumentary further reflects the opposition between documented and undocumented. While the documentary is documented, is presenting facts, the undocumentary is undocumented and supposedly cannot bring any truth. This refers to the socio-political situation of undocumented people, as if they were worth less than documented people. Furthermore, a documentary will only focus on what can be of interest to an audience, while many things that happen every day do not reach this status, and are not considered to be valuable enough to be filmed. In associating poetry with the undocumented, Alcalá aims to invert the hierarchy and show that the undocumented have value, thus pursuing a similar work of giving voice to the voiceless explored in Chap. 6.

By contrasting the documented with the undocumented, Alcalá brings to the fore the question of language and reality. What is the relation between language and reality if poetry is a form of undocumentary? In the poem 'Mimicry' that thus refers to the tradition of *mimesis*, Alcalá suggests: 'What mirror reflects as whole/ a slip of truth. And the business/ of breaking it into lines,/ this privileged/ art' (Alcalá 2010, 48). The idea of *mimesis*, that the poem reflects the world is only partial. This partial reflection is further found in poetry that breaks down the whole into lines. The poem would therefore be a way of reminding us that the mirror is only one perspective and that any whole must be broken down into lines, as if

the lines were mirrors that were each reflecting part of the world and thus reconstituting a worldly experience. As Cutler argues: 'But most importantly, the poem never allows us to forget that alienation begins and ends with *language*' (Cutler 2018, 48). Alienation is the product of language, as the dominant performative imposes its perspective on subjects, but it can only be fought with language, by using language against its domination.

The question of the relation between language and the world brings to the fore the question of the relation between truth and lie. This question challenges the very idea of a confessional poem: 'But I am far from modest/ in my telling of lies. There are three references/ I put forward: each a past lover/ who liked a different kind of underling/ to his genius' (Alcalá 2010, 21). These lines from 'Confessional Poem' bring up the notion of lies. What does it mean for a poet to be lying? Can a poem lie? In these lies, what are the values of references? If we bring this in relation to the question of language, what does reference mean? In telling lies, we might be making up references and making up the relation between language and the world. But can a confession lie? To confess that one is lying brings up a paradox. Can one believe the confession if the person admits lying? This is the liar's paradox saying 'I lie all the time' that troubled so many logicians and philosophers of language. But this trouble is not a problem in a poem because the main function goes beyond questions of truth and lie.

Indeed, can we even say that an autobiography such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* is true? Does the 'autobiographical pact' rely on truth or rather on truthfulness? In her poem 'Autobiography', Alcalá relates autobiography to the word 'Factory': 'The office for agents/ is the etymology of Factory, what we now call/ the conference. It reads properties/ for poetries. Factory is both fact/ and act, and mere letters away from face/ and story' (Alcalá 2010, 50). The autobiography is no longer a matter of telling oneself but of looking at language and etymology to understand where the words come from and how they act. The word 'factory' includes the notion of 'fact' and suggests a relation between autobiography and facts. As Cutler argues: 'Think, for example, of the way a poem like "Autobiography" resists the generic meaning its title announces. Rather than narrate a life, the poem explores a single word, *factory*, defining it as "something not heard / but written in degrees / as breath"' (Rankine and Dowdy 2018, 41). Autobiography becomes a factory of facts, a making up of reality through language.

As poetry focuses on language in action, the question of description is left aside: 'I would have to leave this poem/ and enter the world to render/ a better description' (Alcalá 2010, 67). In 'Everybody's Authenticity', Alcalá opposes the poem to the world. In so doing, she distinguishes two conceptions of language: a performative one and a descriptive one. The title of the poem is a paradox: how can authenticity be everybody's? If the world is made of everybody's authenticity, then it has no authenticity at all, because authenticity goes against the idea that everybody has the same. As we have questioned throughout this book, is description the main role of language? Following OLP, I have argued that action is the primary dimension of language. In this context, poetry can help: 'This poem acts/ as if the world exists // so I ignore it // and it becomes/ a terror // to converse with' (Alcalá 2012, 23). These lines from 'Safe Distance' show how poetry becomes a form of action to place oneself at a 'safe distance' from the terrors of the world. In her second and third volumes of poetry, Alcalá moves further towards the question of language and makes her references to Wittgenstein explicit. For instance, in her third volume, *MyOther Tongue*, she quotes Wittgenstein in 'Voice Activation' (Alcalá 2017, 21–22). In her second volume, *The Lust of Unsentimental Waters*, she considers poetry to be: 'a better game than Wittgenstein's in learning how/we might know which husband/car/house will do in what context' (Alcalá 2012, 24). Poetry goes further than Wittgenstein and becomes an alternative philosophy of language that experiments with what can or cannot be done, with what words can mean in what contexts.

The opening poem of her second volume of poetry, 'The Thing' (Alcalá 2012, 9), offers a reflection on the powers of language where 'The thing becomes the thing/ because of some speaking habit'. In a Nietzschean vocabulary, 'what things are called is more important than what they are' (Nietzsche 1974, GS 58). The poem pursues this reflection on the speaking habit by suggesting that language is the product of evolution and rituals. The naming thus becomes an invention: 'We name/ the body of designations:/ we arrive at each other/ and claim discovery'. The claim of discovery is a claim of originality. In a Wittgensteinian fashion, she acknowledges the social dimension of language, 'we are social', and that our imagination is what makes us human. 'Monkeys cannot lie because they can't/ imagine the not-occurred,/ or more so, the not-witnessed'. As much as Wittgenstein's dog cannot be hopeful, Alcalá's monkeys cannot lie. The not-occurred and the not-witnessed is the basis of fiction. The capacity for fictionality is considered one of the characteristics that make

us human. However, with this capacity for fictionality comes the incapacity to distinguish fact from fiction as 'The root of my language is said/ a forgery'. We have the capacity to invent the not-occurred and the not-witnessed because we have the capacity of naming and inventing. In this naming and inventing, however, comes a moment where 'The problem with chasing invention/ is the wheel is its own perfect critic.'

Pic, Rankine, and Alcalá's poetic practices all reveal that the poethical force of poetry lies in the wording of the world. By looking at the language we use, and the way we use it, we can understand the worldviews that such uses of language build. If these worldviews are made by the language we use, it means that we can change them by changing our language. This is Meschonnic's idea that a poem is a reciprocal transformation of a form of language by the transformation of a form of life. Therein lies the poethical force of poetry. It changes our ways of seeing the world, our ways of being in the world by changing our ways of wording the world.

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Conclusion: Poetic Stitching, or Recovering the World

I wish to conclude my investigation with four quotes from various kinds of discourse that all in their own ways aim to reconnect language and the world. They will help me outline what I consider to be the task of a general poetics—a poetic philosophy of language or a philosophy of poetry—after my readings of OLP and contemporary poetry:

> For some while I have been urging the view that philosophy is concerned au fond with what I metaphorically speak of as 'the space between language and the world'. (Danto 1981, 79)
>
> Song begins/ between sight and reality / night falls syllable after syllable / and the world was given an enema[1] (Noël 1993, 44)
>
> the spirit (or rather: still the eye, but not only the eye, and not yet the spirit: this part of our brain where lies the sort of stitching, the hasty and coarse basting that connects the unnameable to the named) not saying but sensing.[2] (Simon 2013, 290)
>
> We must know whether we want to change the world to experience it with the same sensorial system as the one we already possess, or whether we'd rather modify our body, the somatic filter through which it passes.

[1] My translation: 'le chant commence/ entre la vue et la réalité/ la nuit tombe syllabe après syllabe/ et c'est le lavement du monde.'

[2] My translation: 'l'esprit (ou plutôt: encore l'œil, mais plus seulement l'œil, et pas encore l'esprit: cette partie de notre cerveau où passe l'espèce de couture, le hâtif et grossier faufilage qui relie l'innommable au nommé) non pas disant mais sentant.'

> Which is preferable: changing my personality and keeping my body, or changing my body and keeping my current manner of experiencing reality? A fake dilemma. Our personalities arise from this very gap between body and reality. (Preciado 2013, 237)

What is the task of a general poetics? Is it to give a descriptive account of literary production? Is it to give a set of normative rules to follow? Or is it concerned with a deeper level of understanding of how language comes to meaning and significance? With understanding the space between mind and eye, between sight and reality, between language and the world? The four opening quotes all raise a similar question. All belong to what are considered different literary genres: philosophical essay, poem, novel, autotheory. Do these differences matter? Or is their shared concern rather showing that these differences are merely contextual and circumstantial? Perhaps the importance lies in the investigation of this insight, namely that there is a space—be it metaphorical or not—that needs to be explored between what has been called reality and our perception, between language and the world.

Traditionally, this space has been the domain of reference. However, as I hope to have shown throughout this book, reading OLP through poetry and poetry through OLP reveals that, in Nietzsche's words, 'what things are called is much more important than what they are' (Nietzsche 1974, GS 58). The question of reference that is so central to traditional (representationalist) philosophies of language becomes secondary once we move towards the realm of the performative. Rather than considering the world as being mirrored by language, a performative philosophy of language argues that the world is shaped through our linguistic practices. Through this shaping process, the space between language and the world becomes a space for creation. Against the traditional view that explores this space in terms of *mimesis*, a performative philosophy of language thinks of it in terms of *poiesis*.

The incapacity of *mimesis* to account for the relation between word and world explains in part why the model of poetics proposed by Plato, Aristotle, and the tradition that follows fails to account for poetic innovation or rather must restrain it to a set of rules and effects. Philosophy of language seems to be facing a wall when encountering poetic utterances. Too often is poetry considered an abnormal use of language that one can set aside; too often is poetry considered a mere matter of metaphors; too

often philosophy of language fails to live up to the challenge posed by poetry. And by poetry here I also mean these creative uses of language that are pervasive in our everyday life. Poetry as a genre is a socio-historical matter and we have seen that this question originates in what Wittgenstein calls a 'craving for generality'. Poetry understood as poetics becomes a matter of investigating and making sense of the space between language and the world. As Arthur Danto argues in one of the opening quotes, this means that the task of philosophy is not so much different from that of poetry after all. However, the question raised by Stanley Cavell at the end of *The Claim of Reason* remains: 'Can philosophy becomes literature and still know itself?' (Cavell 1979, 496). This proximity might explain why Plato already was afraid of poetry, and why he chose to ban poets from his ideal city. While Aristotle's *Poetics* looks like it is giving a space back to poetry, it might rather be trying to confine poetic creativity to a set of rules and prescriptions. As long as we consider poetry to be a matter of imitation, we remain trapped in the metaphysics of language.

As Nietzsche argues, we must move away from the metaphysics of language that makes us disdain these 'nearby things' to privilege 'important things' (Nietzsche 2013, WS 5). The rejection of the ordinary has led philosophers to neglect the world as we experience it, to build great metaphysical edifices, and to privilege an ideal world whose existence still requires proof. In setting up a 'true world', philosophy somehow lost access to the experience of the world of appearances and we must gain it back. We need to reject this metaphysical 'true world', but as Nietzsche rightly points out 'by eliminating the true world we got rid of the world of appearances as well' (Nietzsche 2008, TI, 'How the True World'). The space between the 'true world' and the 'world of appearances' is the space between eye and mind, between language and world, between sight and reality. This is the space that poetry occupies. It is a space where language can begin to mean something to us, a space where, as Bernard Noël suggests in one of the opening quotes, 'song begins'.

We are now at the moment when 'song begins', when we can investigate the task of poetics. For Noël, song—yes another form of poetic use of language—resides in this space between eye and mind. This space is not thought of in terms of representation or imitation but in terms of effects. As he continues: 'night falls syllable after syllable / and the world was given an enema'. Through this rather crude image, Noël suggests that

song and poetry are ways of cleansing the world, but also of healing it, of treating it to make it different. Poetry is not working on the mode of *mimesis* as it acts upon the world. The etymology *poiesis* suggests that poetry is a form of making. More than that, and following the vocabulary coined by Austin, we can consider poetry as a form of performative use of language. When we understand language through poetry, we need to move from a conception of language modelled on *mimesis qua* imitation or representation to one modelled on *poiesis qua* performance.

What happens in this performative acting upon the world that is at play in poetry? What happens in this space between eye and mind if it is not a matter of representation? As Claude Simon suggests, this space between eye and mind is a space 'where lies the sort of stitching, the hasty and coarse basting that connects the unnameable to the named'. Poetics becomes an exploration of that stitching between eye and mind, between reality and sight, between the world and word. Through poetic performative acts, language shapes the world. These performative acts are attempts at reconnecting word and world, eye and mind; attempts at making sense of the world through linguistic creation and invention. This poetic stitching is a generation of significance. Not just a creation of words and meaning but an attempt at making the words mean something for us and, through the words, making the world mean something for us.

As Noël suggests elsewhere: 'infinity is the relation of the stitching / of the world with our own stitching'[3] (Noël 1993, 24). What is at play is how we can relate our stitching to the stitching of the world. While we might seem to be falling back into a model of representation with the world on one side and us on the other, the vocabulary of stitching rather suggests that we can act upon, that we can stitch ourselves to the world, that we can stitch the world to us, that words 'are the thread / that stitch the wound'[4] (Noël 1993, 64). Poetry becomes a form of performative stitching that requires us to act upon the world and upon ourselves; that requires us to create ourselves, following Nietzsche, 'to be poets of our lives—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters' (Nietzsche 1974, GS 299). This poetic stitching is a way to overcome the gap that Preciado perceives between body and reality, between eye and mind, between the external

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[3] My translation: 'l'infini est le rapport de la couture / du monde avec notre propre couture.'

[4] My translation: 'sont le fil / qui raccommode la blessure.'

world and our internal selves: 'Our personalities arise from this very gap between body and reality'. This opposition between inner and outer is overcome in the poetics of ordinary language. Insofar as, following Wittgenstein and OLP, language is public, the expression of any inner life is a making public, is a connection between my body and reality.

If the task of the philosophy of language is to understand the relation between language and the world, poetry becomes as an experimental philosophy of language. By focusing on OLP and the pragmatics of language, I hope to have shown how our uses of language are concerned with our ways of being in the world. Poetics thus becomes a form of philosophy of language concerned with the new, with invention, with the generation of significance. It is in this sense that poetics is performative: it aims at producing effects in the world. As we have seen, these effects cannot be totally controlled as they function on the mode of perlocution rather than illocution, but this does not certainly mean that poetry is ineffective. It is effective in an alternative way, in changing our ways of seeing and being in the world.

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