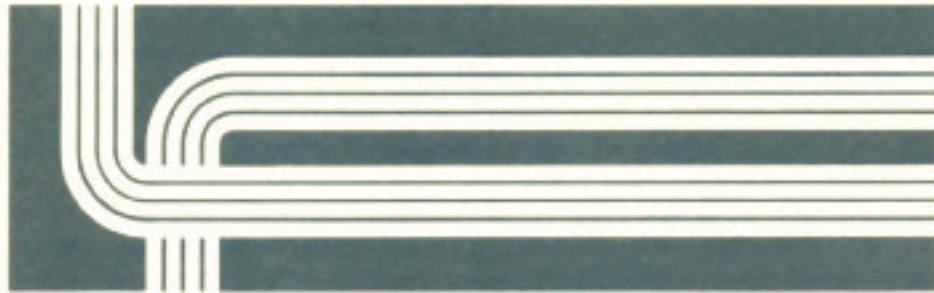


# Collage

JEANINE PARISIER PLOTTEL, General Editor

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# 3

## Collage/Space/Montage

JEAN-JACQUES THOMAS

*Qu'est-ce que lire? C'est parcourir du regard un ensemble graphique.*

*(What is it to read? It's to let your eyes roam over a graphical ensemble.)*

*Louis Marin, Etudes sémiologiques: écritures, peintures*

Through this remark, Louis Marin gives the notion of *reading* its broadest definition. As such, it corresponds perfectly to the idea of the poem as *montage*. First of all, it is a question of knowing how to look at things. The spatial architecture deployed on the page, which adds an objectal dimension to the text's verblity, has taken an ever increasing importance in contemporary French poetry. The fusion of the construction thus produced with the writing gives a tangible aspect to the figure but leaves the reader perplexed, forcing him to discover new rules of reading for himself; his eyes must learn to roam over a new graphic economy.

In order to identify certain types of texts for which a linear reading,



in which the eyes jump from one word to the next following the disposition prescribed by traditional typography, is impossible, the terms *collage*, *fragment*, and *montage* have been conventionally introduced in critical terminology. Collage, fragment, and montage subvert the graphic accumulation with cutups which, at the formal level, signal the importance of the deconcatenation of the verbal chain. Nevertheless, what is implied, beyond this empirical observation, is the establishment of new networks of significance.

In addition to the fact that these three terms, which label a practice of deconstruction of conventional external forms, have gone, such as they are, from the French language to the aesthetic Anglo-Saxon terminology, they also share the similarity of belonging to the realm of literary as well as plastic art. Without a doubt, this occurs because historically the intellectual movements that proposed them influenced the plastic arts as well as literature.

Accordingly, concerning the fragment, literary critics could mention Roland Barthes's *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*<sup>1</sup> and art's dilettanti, Robert Anderson's *Fragment of Western Civilization*<sup>2</sup> which, in the form of a visual pun, symbolizes this contemporary ateleological civilization of which the fragment (either literary or artistic), by its incompleteness and its obvious lack of will to conclude or to synthesize, is the product par excellence.

Contrary to the notion of fragment, which is of recent fashion and which is used primarily in dealing with prose (there are some exceptions, of course, especially with the so-called "poetic" prose, such as "Fragment du cadastre" by Michel Deguy<sup>3</sup>), collage and montage belong to a well-established aesthetic tradition, in art as well as in literature. The differentiation that one could make between the two notions are far from being academic and, on the contrary, serve to put into place the criteria of identification of a certain number of artistic and poetic practices. It is true that the majority of the time the two terms are used interchangeably and that the distinction between the two is somehow blurry. Thus, if we want to refer to the greatest common denominator, the dictionary—the Merriam-Webster publication, for instance—it only introduces a slight technical variation between the two (disputable, as we shall see):

Collage: . . . an artistic composition of fragments (as of printed matter) pasted on a picture surface.<sup>4</sup>

Montage: . . . an artistic composition made up of several different kinds of items (as strips of newspaper, pictures, bits of wood) arranged together.<sup>5</sup>

It is our contention that there is a decisive difference between collage and montage, but it is not to be found at that rather trivial technical level; instead it is much more fundamental in that it hinges on the value itself of

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the artistic composition, on the manner in which the work establishes its own strategy of significance, no matter whether it is a question of plastic or literary art.

Returning to the "canonical" definitions of *collage* and *montage* that are set forth in the dictionary, it must be remarked that, if art history were taken into consideration, those terms are particularly confusing since the production procedures of one are attributed to the other and vice versa.

Everybody knows that collage, introduced as a labeled technique by the cubists and soon after developed by the dadaists and surrealists, began as the pasting of *manufactured* materials such as newspapers, nails, bits of worked wood, twine, and so forth, on a surface. The artists using this technique were primarily concerned with proclaiming that their artistic aim was no longer the realization of a work of art that had the mimesis of reality under an idealized form as its goal. The notion of ready-made is of prime importance, since the fact that the work relies on elements taken from reality has to be made conspicuous; consequently, the border between art and reality becomes uncertain. As Marcel Duchamp stated, his collages were above all "a form of denying the possibility of defining art."<sup>6</sup> From ready-made, the choice went on to specifically machine-made objects. Once the manufactured objects lost their "natural" function, they were able to establish themselves according to a new symbolic ordering strictly limited by the choice of the artist. Because choosing has become the decisive creative act, André Breton correctly remarked: "Manufactured objects [are] promoted to the dignity of art through the choice of the artist."<sup>7</sup> Before long, however, it appears that within this practice of choosing objects at random the important concept had become the "at random"; the intervention of the artist stopped at the selection and placement of the retained components. What was of upmost importance for the realized product was the appearance of chance, which seemed to produce a singular encounter.<sup>8</sup> The artist postulates the defunction of the collected objects and offers a display of their manifest nonnecessity.

At first glance, what strikes the observer is the gratuitous quality of the encounters and, simultaneously, the provoking character of their uncanny singularity. The prime result of this strangeness is to confuse the observer accustomed to a certain mimetism within the work of art but not to a fragmented restitution of his own daily reality brought back together in a new symbolic (dis)order. Next, it forces him to reevaluate his own practice of aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, the first effect of collage is a challenge to the observer and to his rational world. Collage is then perfectly tailored to the Dada line as it is presented by Udo Rukser:

Dadaism is a stratagem by which the artist can import to the citizen something of the inner unrest which prevents the artist himself from being lulled to sleep by custom and routine. By means of external stimuli he can compensate for the citizen's lack of inner urgency and vitality and take him into new life.<sup>9</sup>



The notion of montage emerges subsequently and, in many ways, can be seen as a spin-off of collage through the intermediate stage of *photomontage* (designated in its earliest aspect merely as "pasted photo-engraving," for example *Tatlin at Home* by Hausman, 1920), which simply alludes to a photocollage. The following definition given by Pontus Hult  n accurately illustrates their kinship and the entangled aspect of their relationship: "Photomontage, or rather the collage of photographic images from many sources, was especially elaborated by the Berlin Dadaists. . . . Photomontage incorporated illustrations, and often letters, from newspapers and magazines."<sup>10</sup> One cannot fail to note, once again, how interbred and intertwined collage and montage are, since this explanation of photomontage is similar to the one given for collage by the dictionary, but certainly remote from the definition of montage. Although, as it is apparent, people have a tendency to confuse one with the other, nevertheless, in our opinion, it is a gross mistake to substitute one term for the other. Quite the contrary, it seems to us much more theoretically productive to mark a difference between the two.

Montage was quickly separated from its exclusive association with the photograph and was expanded to describe a variety of composite works, of assemblages not necessarily realized by pasting. Such is the case of *Spirit of Our Time* by Hausman made through the assemblage of a hairdresser's wooden dummy and of different means of measurement or the *Merz* by Kurt Schwitters. All of these pieces, although they share the character of lampoon with the surrealist and dadaist collages, have another pretention and another intentionality. (We are not speaking here of the author's intentions, which we are unable to know, but of the rapport between the work and its project of significance such as it emerges from the generalized encoding system of its symbolism.) Relying fundamentally on another philosophy of art, these works remove themselves from the immediate non-sense and propose a global statement built up like a riddle. To that purpose, they utilize all of the possibilities of the artistic space, being an interplay of several dimensions; while in the collage space becomes reduced to a flat intangible surface because the surprise caused by the accumulation of bizarre elements by itself is sufficient. Collage does not require profundity, because it does not go beyond the visual pun; it does not need any background or depth, the game falls back upon itself; its quality adheres precisely to the fact that the medium is utilized in order to obtain an immediate result. With respect to the collage, space then does not necessarily appear as anything but the effect of *trompe l'oeil*; while for montage, the disposition and distribution become the constitutive elements of the formation of the signification.

With this *Dream House* (see Figure 12) by Marvin S. Coats<sup>11</sup> who unaffectedly defines his constructions as montages, the combination of elements, because of their strange yet familiar character, plays a dominant role in the generation of significance. The general frame is readily identifiable; the very title, "house," constitutes a tautology of the figurative



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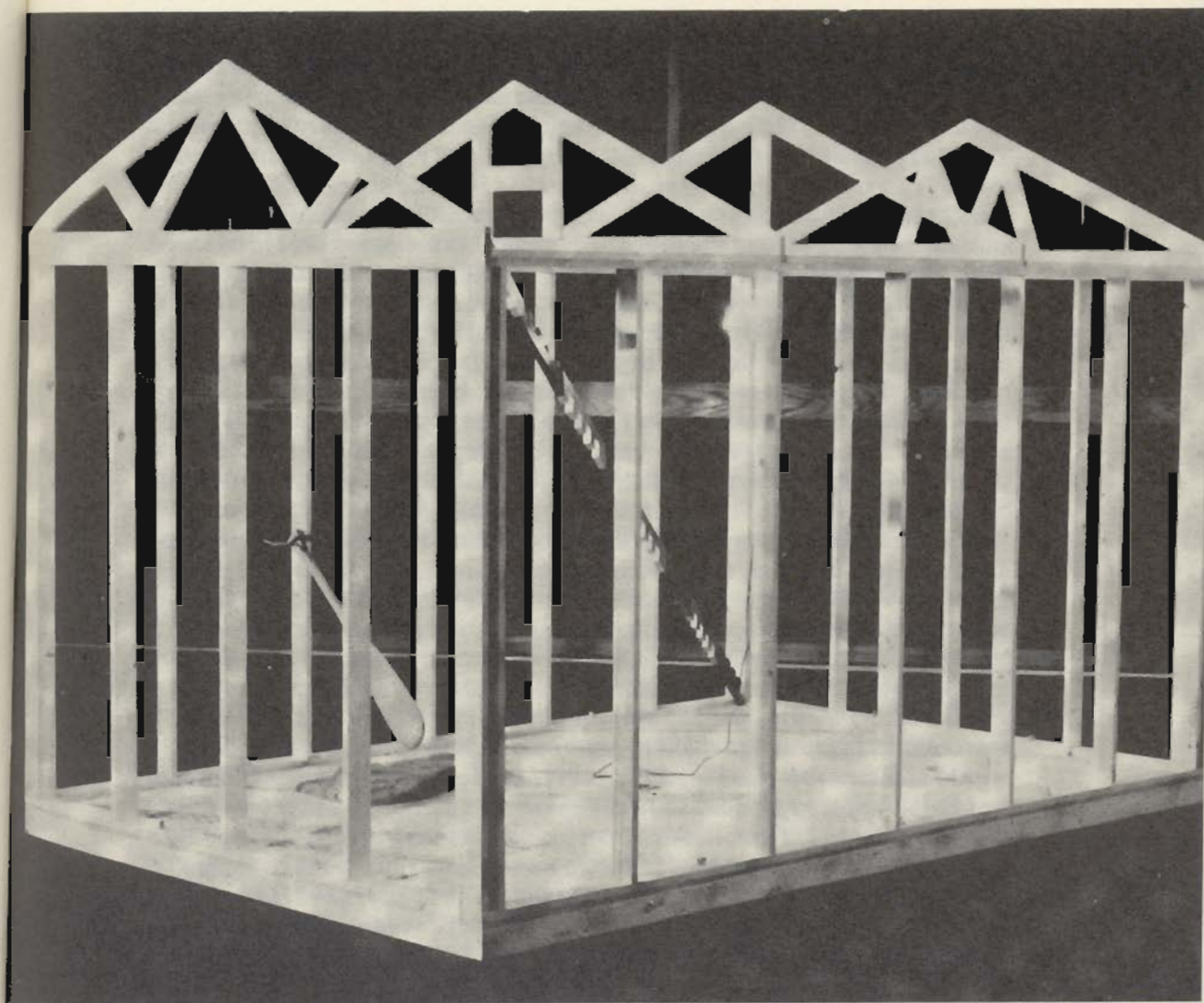


Figure 12. Marvin C. Coats, *Dream House*, 1978. Copyright Marvin C. Coats. Mixed media, 72" x 72" x 108". DW Gallery, Dallas, Texas.

evidence. This work can either be viewed as unfinished (that is, limited to its minimal elements) or stripped bare (with a play on the reference to Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*, itself referring back to alchemy and to the symbolic representations of elementary matter). This characteristic of the construction renders the primordial value of the setup. This particular montage, by reason of its basic simplicity, allows for the manifest presence of items, contained within the exposed interior, and apparently problematical but warranted by the word *dream* in the title, because the dream is, above all, the meeting ground for seemingly inexplicable encounters (but justifiable) and, in some ways, made official under the protection of chance and/or "whim." That is exactly what is explicitly stated here, because anyone can see, under a verbal form, the notion of "whim" as protective cover for the objects of fantasy placed in this volume, which is reduced to its primal constituents. But the "whim," as such, is immediately annulled since it becomes the framing element, therefore fundamental to the construction ensemble, and not merely a haphazard presence. The connotations previously linked to the word "whim" are denied here by its present contextual system. Taken into the architectural structure, even serving as the reinforcing braces for the girders, "whim" becomes its own antonym. Contrary to its identification with mobility and versatility in the sociolect, "whim" begins to firm up, to stiffen, and supplies the elemental fixture to the "house," with everything that the latter, in turn, connotes as structure of social stability, as symbol of the family, and of ownership. However, at the same time that this solidification of the "whim" is accomplished through integration within architectural rigidity, this rigidity, at another level, defaults because "whim" is reintroduced into the design of each and every architrave and since the number of architraves is determined, not by criteria dictated by the rules of architecture, but, rather, by the number of letters contained in the word. Finally, then, this is truly the "whim" that gives its definitive form to the apparently elementary structure (the parallelepiped volume) of the "house."

As this montage shows, the composition is then constituted within its ensemble (here the space of disposition is fundamental) like a system of significance that refers, on more than one level, to the same basic semes. Since the austere solidity of the composition is the very location of the whim in installation and of the lack of purpose, this montage is a visual pun. It is also a play on words; the title *Dream House*, which refers to the most conforming desires for petty bourgeois comfort, to the closed-in universe of hidden egoistic gratifications, constitutes instead the "House of Dream," a frame reduced to its simplest expression, built on caprice and cruelly empty, filled merely by those relics of stranded desires. As such it manifests, a contrario, through a subtle game of binary oppositions, the vacuity of that which the *Dream House* covers or contains. As montage, then, this sculpture by Marvin S. Coats certainly formulates a statement; far from being an object of non-sense, offered simply for the sake

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of uncanny strangeness, it incites one to reconstitute the riddle of composition and, inevitably, one finds there the intentionality of a pronouncement. The montage transforms one kind of reality into another, but the message, instead of being direct, is indirect, relying mainly on the distribution and spatial order of the components involved, these articulating the grammar of the riddle.

The claim of significance is due to the fact that montage owes a great deal to constructivism, which, in conformity with Tatlin's teaching,<sup>12</sup> rejects the gratuitous character of non-sense that is assimilated to a form of art for art's sake. Montage postulates intersubjective communication and the transmission of meaning, but it refuses the literal character of representation and the direct accessibility of its meaning. Just like the collage, montage is a destruction of reality; but when collage, insisting on the heterogeneous superficial character of the summoned-up fragments, plays the hand of *provocation* (the rapture of rupture), montage is an inducement to rediscover the network of signification that organizes them, to recover underneath the deconstruction not a nihilistic chance, which only retains the absurd and the accidental, but the uncanny that economizes significance.

At the level of the principles, collage is characterized by the explicit and deliberate presentation of the heterogeneous nature of diverse components, while montage aims at the integration of the diverse combinatory constituents and, as such, provides unity. Since the different elements should jar with one another, the collage exhibits the fortuitous character of chance encounters even if, at the moment when one considers the functioning of the ensemble (that is to say, the conditions under which the choice of elements is made or when one tries to rationalize the reasons why the author retained these components), its "beauty" appears as the aftermath of a certain type of necessity. Then, if we want to pursue this to its furthest extent, for a very perseverant and dedicated observer, each and every collage may be considered as if it were a montage, once beyond the ostensibly provocative character of the composition. And yet there is a fundamental difference: montage is proposed purposefully as a kit designed to be assembled, while collage is nothing but a mixed bag full of obviously incongruous components. Within montage, the suspicion of systematization forms a part of the constitution of the signifying process, while collage asserts its gratuitous character, as Breton clearly enough proclaims: "Il est même permis d'intituler POEME ce qu'on obtient par l'assemblage aussi *gratuit* que possible . . . de titres, de fragments de titres découpés dans les journaux".<sup>13</sup> (It is even legitimate to give the title "Poem" to that which one obtains through the assemblage as *gratuitous* as possible of titles, fragments of titles cut out from the daily papers.)

So as to come back to literary territory, and more specifically to poetry, and in order to clarify distinctions that we have just proposed in a somewhat rapid and relatively limited manner, it seems useful to present an example of collage by one of montage, both having been taken from



works by Michel Leiris.

The first example (see Figure 13) is a literary "collage" (whether it is a real one or not does not matter) borrowing its form from the *Cadavre exquis* (exquisite cadaver) game (the term *cadavre*, which appears on the middle line, sufficiently indicates the appropriateness of the reference). On a superficial level, each sequence is presented through a graphic (typographical) form that accentuates the differences and valorizes the discrete quality of each one. Furthermore, the graphic structure of the text that privileges the horizontal plane—that is to say the normal reading from left to right—introduces no fantasy into the order of reading and each reader will tend to read as he habitually does, jumping from line to line, following the syntagmatic deployment.

The association is based first and foremost on elementary *accumulation*. Just like the model sequence "exquisite cadaver," this collage associates two verbal elements that usually exclude each other; "cadaver" vs "pink cheeks" and "soft skin" (an oxymoron of sorts). It is this basic opposition that produces the "scandal" enlarged by the fact that the term employed (*cadavre*) has a particularly taboo functioning within the French sociolect. The reading could stop here, the eyes caught the point, but, evidently enough, anyone could handle this text as a montage. Once the provocative character of the verbal ensemble has been defused, the exhibited deconstruction is of no great importance, and what counts is the reconstruction of the system of verbal relationships that constitutes this text as a discrete semiotic unit.

The second example (see Figure 14) is what we designate as montage. The singularity of the graphic elements is not emphasized, and they are "neutralized" by the same typography. Here, the new disposition of the linguistic material that builds up the text causes the strangeness of the piece. The horizontal quality is destroyed for the benefit of a spatial distribution limited to the surface of the page. Quite obviously, the title (besides its semantic-unifying function) serves as a model for the representation, and the size of the words is linked to the depicted form (in this case, *quadrature*—the helve—is the longest one). The main purpose of the reading is to refigure the semiotic bonds that explain the assemblage of these three words and their relation to the formal model. The reader's approach to such a text can be nothing but heuristic. The text does not solicit scandal, it calls forth an enduring exegetic study.

Yet this type of montage per se is not of recent origination. Long before calligrams (or "lyrical ideograms," as Apollinaire first wanted to call them), figurative verse (*figurata*), also called "rhopalic verse" (from the Greek word *rhopalon*—club—the most common shape given to this kind of poem, with the wing, the egg, and Pan's flute), has always been an important part of poetry. In the works of Samosate, Fortunat, Alcuin,<sup>14</sup> and later on, as Paul Zumthor<sup>15</sup> points out, in the works of *Grands Rhétoriciens*, the reader had to discern the enigmatic image embedded and concealed in the text. Every poem realized with figurative verse may

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Figure 13

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*Vous en trouverez partout*

Figure 13. Michel Leiris, *Mots sans mémoire*. Copyright Gallimard 1969, p. 62.

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Figure 14. Michel Leiris, "La Hache," from *Mots sans mémoire*. Copyright Gallimard 1969, p. 92.



then be seen, above all, as a cryptogram.

With Apollinaire, the visual poem compels the reader to a meticulous operation of reconstruction. The reading must combine the effects of sound, meaning, and arrangement. Furthermore, the deciphering does not stop at the discovery of a dissimulated *icon*, whether it is an image, a word, a name, or a sentence. Several paths and relationships are arranged in the text for the reader, and it is more the slow restitution of this system of dependency, the artful montage of the fitting components, that constitutes the primordial interest of the reading process rather than the discovery of a specific hidden element.

It is important to consider, however, that the reading principles involved in this system of verbal organization differ according to the type of montage-poem considered.

Keeping in mind what Apollinaire defines as *simultanéisme* (the fact that for the reader all of the components present themselves simultaneously), which is the very basis for the reading process of all poems of this type, since the linear "tyranny" of the verbal chain is broken down by blank spaces, lateralizations, quincuncial ordering, etc., we would like to suggest, provisionally, these four types of montage in contemporary French poetry: the form-onomatopoeia, the cipher, the refraction, and the scrap-poem. We would also like to demonstrate how each calls forth a different reading strategy, while all entail the same principles for poetry.

#### Form-onomatopoeia

In his polemical and proselyte book, *Spatialisme et poésie concrète*,<sup>16</sup> Pierre Garnier asserts: "Le poème visuel ne se 'lit' pas. On se laisse 'impressionner' par la figure générale du poème." (One does not "read" a visual poem. One has to be "impressed" by the general figure of the poem.) This type of poem, which follows to the letter the literary tradition of the *carmina figurata*, imposes on the reader a representation of its thematic content that is perceived through its most immediate effects. There is an echo game played between the text as image-sign and the verbal material as symbolic emblem (be it a gloss or a definition). The surface of the page is taken as the unit of the image's disposition, and the reading, necessarily, implies the "visualization" of the poem. It is poetry that cannot be read out loud or declaimed, because, in compliance with the main teaching of the futurist and constructivist movements, words are reduced to the state of graphic material used to build the "object" poem.

Pondering the specific nature of this type of poem, which breaks away from the expected forms of poetry, Garnier forecasts the arrival of a new species of reader:

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Celui-ci jusqu'alors était passif. Le poème se fermait sur lui. La poésie nouvelle exige sa collaboration. . . . La poésie visuelle est un excitant pour son psychisme: à partir des mots proposés et de leur architecture, il doit faire travailler son corps et son esprit; il doit se poser lui-même comme contenu. Tous les hommes reprennent ainsi une place qu'on leur avait contestée. Ils se lavent de leur moi. Peu à peu apparaît, en chacun d'entre eux, le JE principe actif de création. (Visual poetry . . . changes the "reader's" destination. Up to now he was a passive element. The poem was closing in on him. The new poetry requires his collaboration. . . . Visual poetry stimulates his psychism: starting with the proposed words and their architecture he has to exercise his body and his mind; he has to take the posture as content. In so doing every man retakes a position for which he has been previously challenged. He washes away his "self." Gradually arises, in everyone, the *I*, the active principle of creation.)<sup>17</sup>

As a matter of illustration and analysis, we propose two "visual" poems: "La Porte du Soleil" (sungate) by Pierre Garnier and "La Fronde" (the sling) by Michel Leiris. Both are based on the same principle of montage, but they do not exploit in the same way.

The montage-poem (see Figure 15) displays an obvious effort to destroy the linguistic material as part of a linear concatenation of constituents. The letter is "reified"; it becomes, isolated or aggregated, the necessary material for the montage. The only disposition is vertical, contrary to language where it is the horizontal direction that prevails. Furthermore, this poem does not have any syntax; it is built around the isolated lexical unit *soleil*, which appears in its integrity or is impaired by several mutilations inflicted on its components. Such is the case of the repetition-expansion of the same letter (*ssssssooooooollllllleeeeeeeiiiiiiiilllll*) or the truncation of the word as a unit of meaning with the aim of generating a new meaning as in *sol* (*ground*) or *soleils* (*suns*) or none as in *eil*. The title "*La porte du soleil*" plays the role of definition of the poem-as-object and, at the same time, justifies the rapport between the shape (in French: "*une porte à claire-voie*"—a Dutch door that lets the sunshine in even if the lower half stays closed) and the verbal material (the word *soleil*) used to establish it.

The montage in Figure 16, very similar to the one proposed in the introduction, manifests the same interaction between its shape and its above-mentioned title. The title gives us the key to what is (re)presented. And, again, the words are used as the material of the montage. Nevertheless, the difference between this example and the preceding one is that these three words *vent* (wind), *aiguillon* (goad), *conjecture* (conjecture) gloss the word *fronde*. At one semantic level or another, they all share some common motifs or semes with the notion of "sling." For instance,





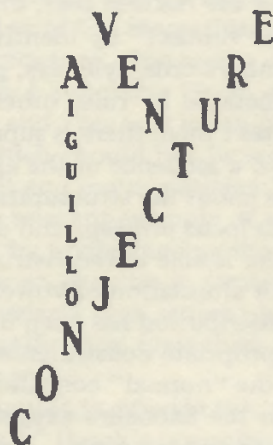


Figure 16. Michel Leiris, "La Fronde," from *Mots sans mémoire*. Copyright Gallimard 1969, p. 89.

in French, the semantic connection between *fronde* and *conjecture* is of an etymological nature: *fronde* is first of all "arme de jet" (missile weapon) and *conjecture* has as its first meaning "*jeter une idée*" (to toss out an idea). In this type of montage, the task of the reader consists of reweaving out the network of conjunctions that support the privileged relationship between the verbal material and the given figure. In the present instance, the shape takes its origin from the meaning of the title, and it is this meaning that motivates and justifies the selective apparition of these words proposed as montage material.

#### Cipher

*Et s'il n'y avait pas de chiffre? Resterait cet interminable appel du secret, cette attente de la découverte, ces pas égarés dans le labyrinthe de l'exégèse.*

*(And what if there were no cipher? We would be left with this endless call of the secret, this expectation of the discovery, these errant steps in the labyrinth of exegesis.)*

Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 160.

Everyone knows about Saussure's so-called "madness"; studying Latin classical poetic texts in order to recover what he labeled *anagrams*—and later on *hypograms*.<sup>18</sup> According to him, words, phrases, or names were



hidden below the surface of the realized text, though it was possible to reconstruct this concealed "subtext" by identifying, within the surface text itself, some components (words, syllables, phonemes) whose presence and distribution seemed dictated by rules other than the grammatical ones. Inside every poetic text then, there is supposedly a palimpsest text marked by a *locus princeps*, a sequence of the apparent text that provides the reader with some clues about the structuration of the secondary system. After recognizing this *locus princeps* and understanding its underlying functioning, the reader is able to reconstruct a set of numerical rules based upon scansion and/or alternation of vowels and consonants. When the numerical pattern of distribution has been unfolded, the reader may pinpoint the scattered appropriate constituents and reassemble them in such a way as to produce the "normal" concatenation of the hypogram.

However, contrary to the kabbala's exegetes, Saussure does not ascribe a mystagogic value to the hypogram. Its discovery is void of any sacred implication. As Jean Starobinski remarks:

L'hypogramme n'est, pour Saussure, rien de plus qu'une donnée matérielle dont la fonction, peut-être primitivement sacrée, se réduit très tôt à une valeur d'appui mnémotechnique pour le poète improvisateur, puis à un procédé régulateur inhérent à l'écriture elle-même, tout au moins dans la langue latine. Saussure n'a jamais affirmé que le texte développé préexiste *dans* le mot-thème: le texte se construit *sur* le mot-thème et c'est là quelque chose de bien différent.

(The hypogram is for Saussure nothing more than a material given whose function, maybe initially sacred, has been reduced, very early, to a value of mnemotechnic-aid for the improvising poet and then to a regulating process intrinsic to the *écriture* itself—at least in Latin. Saussure never stated that the realized text preexists *in* the theme-word; the text builds itself *around* the theme-word, and this is quite different.)<sup>19</sup>

It is probably just such a "technical" conception of hypogram that led Saussure to see in it the prototype of every poetic system based upon rhythmic rules. The phonic repetition of the hypogram's constituents foreshadows rhyme and the rule-governed distribution of the components, metrical prosody.

This theory has the merit of strongly accrediting the idea that every classical fixed form of poem is simply a "genetic" mutation of the cipher-type montage. However, we reserve the label "cipher" to those poems that do not conform themselves to traditional "fixed forms" but generate a specific organization based upon a numerical ordering. In this case, the numerical definitions are not given, they are part of the hidden network that the reader has to uncover. At the same time, the numerical cryptogram organizes the text and is the text.

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Quite obviously, in contemporary French poetry, the works of Jacques Roubaud, a member of the theoretical group Change, exemplify perfectly the cipher-type montage. The books of poetry of this author:  $\in$  (the mathematical symbol indicating "is an element of" in the set theory), *Mono No Aware*, and *Trente et un au cube*<sup>20</sup> are all based upon a mathematical ordering, which should not be surprising since Roubaud introduces himself as "poet and mathematician."

The book,  $\in$ , offers a relevant example of reading guided by a set of numerical rules. It is only by understanding the strict distributional rules of the Japanese GO game—an exercise in strategical skills in which the pieces are deployed progressively on a square plane—that the reader can gain access to the text's significance, since these rules are the ones that govern its overall arrangement.

Roubaud takes the trouble to provide the "uninitiated" reader with a "Mode d'emploi de ce livre" (book's operating manual). This foreword is nothing less than an exhaustive code of the reading procedures, a firm indication that the possible strategies involved are limited to those inscribed in the abstract system laid out as formal model:

Ce livre se compose, en principe, de 361 textes, qui sont les 180 pions blancs et les 181 pions noirs d'un jeu de GO. . . . Les textes ou pions appartiennent aux variétés suivantes: sonnets, sonnets courts, sonnets interrompus. . . . Les pions entretiennent entre eux différents rapports de signification, de succession ou de position. Ce sont certains de ces rapports (ou absence de rapports) que nous proposons au lecteur selon quatre modes de lecture explicités aux numéros suivants:

1. Selon le premier mode de lecture, des groupements de pions, d'importance inégale peuvent être isolés. . . .
2. La deuxième 'lecture' est celle qui détermine la répartition en paragraphes du présent livre. Les groupements . . . s'insèrent dans un développement qu'explicite la table I de la page 132 [il n'y a pas de table à cette page]. . . .
3. Le troisième mode de lecture suit le déroulement d'une partie de GO, reproduite à l'Appendice. . . .
4. On peut enfin, sans tenir compte de ce qui précède, se contenter de lire ou d'observer isolément chaque texte. . . .<sup>21</sup>

(This book is composed, in principle, of 361 texts which are the 180 white pieces and the 181 black pieces of a GO game . . . . The texts or pieces belong to the following categories: sonnets, short sonnets, interrupted sonnets. . . . The pieces are interconnected through different relations (or absence of relation) that we are offering to the reader under these four modes of reading explained below.

1. According to the first mode of reading, one can isolate



- groupings of pieces of disparate size . . .
2. The second "reading" determines the distribution of the present book into paragraphs. These groupings . . . take place in an expansion made explicit by the chart I on page 132 [there is no chart on this page]. . . .
  3. The third mode of reading follows an actual GO game presented in the Appendix. . . .
  4. One may also follow none of the above and be satisfied to read or look at each text taken separately. . . .

A squared surface as shown in Figure 17 corresponds to the third type of reading and is a representation of the actual GO game. It is also the numerical abstract diagram of the organization/distribution of the text.

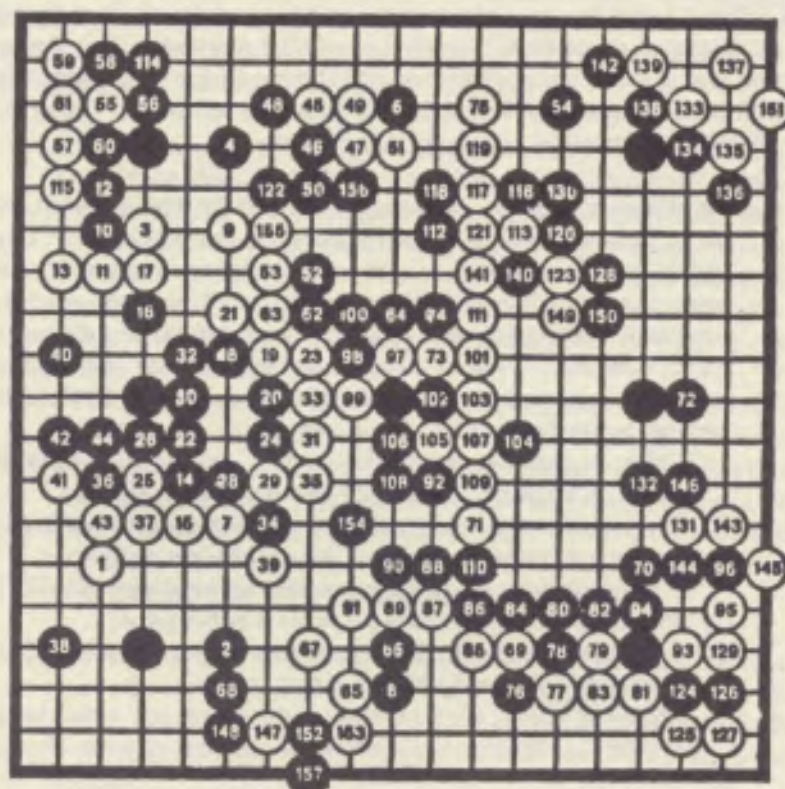


Figure 17.

This very abstract setting must be filled out by the multiple components of text-as-set. In the "Appendix," this mapping is reinforced by the unfolding, play by play, of the distributional strategy. As the following excerpt shows, for each move and within the framework of an ordered

reading, one finds the corresponding page number of the poem to "play."

numéro du coup dans la partie	page	numéro du coup dans la partie	page
1	116	29	85
2	109	30	66
3	133	31	61
4	110	32	77
5	58	33	61
6	116	34	43
7	58	35	52
8	76	36	53
9	46	37	53

Our reading is then constantly accompanied by an underlying numerical order that not only rules over the succession of the poems but dictates their regrouping as "constellations" on the squared board.

The montage of  $\in$  thus makes it necessary for the reader to manipulate the book as if it were a mere object. How could it be otherwise, since every time we want to follow the numerical order we must move forward or backwards, always skipping pages? Very quickly, the materiality of the book becomes overwhelming. Yet, it is only one of the effects of the numerical hypogram. Because the components are given as merely fortuitous juxtapositions, this text cannot be read in the usual manner. If we simply follow the "natural" pagination, we may be able to elaborate our own deciphering of the text, but we shall surely miss the quality of the book as a system. The underlying numerical order is part of the general significance of the text; its role is to program the necessary supplementary encounter of verbal constituents within the finite-state of language. Beyond the linear ordering of the book appear new constellations of verbal correlations and collocations solely generated by the underlying rule-ordering numerical system.<sup>22</sup>

## Refraction

*Débris*

*Fragments*

*Hasards*

*Horribles.*

*F. Nietzsche, Debris/ Fragments/ Chances/ Horrendous*

Under this denomination, it is at one and the same time "fraction/ fracture" and "refraction"—as such—that are retained; "fraction" in the sense that this type of poetry breaks into pieces the historical framework



of the classical poem organized according to a body of strict formal rules; "refraction" since what is produced may be considered as a reflection, a bended, altered, and, in a certain way, a parodic return of this classical poem.

The category regroups these texts that reject the graphic massiveness of the full page—tantamount to prose—and take advantage of a more imaginative open disposition in order to introduce a supplement of meaning.

Without being figurative—in the pictorial sense—like the type "form-onomatopoeia," and without being numerically arranged, like the type "cipher," the poem belonging to the "refraction" category plays mainly with spatial distribution in order to generate and consolidate the value of its significance. But, contrary to the classical poem, where disposition is the underproduct of the formal encoding, in this category, it is the disposition that impresses its formalism upon the text. Since the organizational code is no longer linked to an overdetermining universal formalism, it appears as the variable and immanent core of a combinatory piece.

Motion, space, and sign prevail over the concatenation of the verbal constituents. The syntactic line is fragmented at the discretion of the reading and ends up as a succession of inconsequential groupings endowed with temporary autonomy. The continuity introduced in the text by the reader does not require the "organic" quality of the common verbal set-up. Here the whole significance originates in a potential geometry made up of abrupt ruptures, broken lines, and seeming continuity or contiguity.

Numerous poems by Michel Deguy, Denis Roche, and Jean-Pierre Faye (among others) belong to this category. As an illustration and subject for analysis, we propose "Le Change-21" by Jean-Pierre Faye as seen in Figure 18.

As an *icon*, this text obviously takes the form of the letter X; or, in a more abstract manner, following de Brès's theory on letters, it is two vertical, obtuse, symmetrical triangles reunited by their apex. Here, the common top is the sequence *chassant la mer*. This sequence is the meeting point of these two texts vertically and, as we shall see, horizontally separated. The verticality of the textual triangle on the left is determined by the presence of a blank on the syntagmatic line. This space left empty on the horizontal plane—the usual orientation of the reading process—suggests and reinforces the impossibility to read "as usual." When the eye encounters this blank, the other reading motion (the vertical succession of the lines) forces it to jump to the beginning of the next line. Therefore one reads: *or, vin et feu ou/ tout autre rouge/ vivace, renversé*, etc.

Progressively, the void of the fissure is reduced to order to prepare the quasi-reunion on the fourth line. On this one, the illusion of spatial linkage is reinforced, at the syntactical level by the proximity of *n'importe où*, which lets us try to pull together in our reading: *n'importe où par quelle fissure ou*; this being overdetermined by the work of a chiasmus involving *n'importe* and *quelle*, since this lexeme is already present in its

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Figure 18.  
p. 143.

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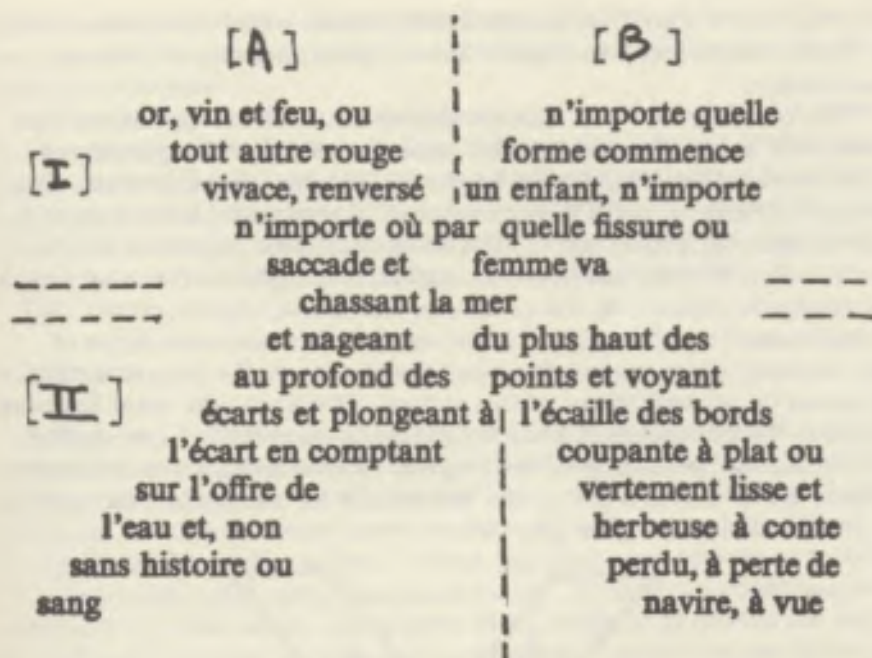


Figure 18. Jean-Pierre Faye, "Change," from *Change* 1, 1968. (Copyright Seuil), p. 143.

unified form (*n'importe quelle*) on the first line of the right triangle. This trace of conjunction between the two vertical triangles is strengthened by the repetition *ou/où*.

By the same token, the X figure establishes two horizontal triangles that, just as the two vertical ones, are reunited through the line *chassant la mer*. On any careful close reading, one cannot fail to note that this montage, which parts the text into vertical triangles (A, B) and horizontal ones (I, II) indeed triggers a system of opposition that activates the poetical qualities of the entanglement of the codes.

A thematic analysis would recognize in I an ensemble based on elements marked by a semic Abstract/Matter core manifested at the morphological level (the determiners that give their concrete value to the nouns are missing) and the semantic one (all the elements mentioned have a very high archetypal value). This ensemble is different from II based upon a semic Concrete/Form core, also morphologically (presence of determiners) and semantically exhibited. Yet, there are knitting points that link IA to IB and IIA to IIB. In IA nouns are *indeterminate*; in IB they are *indefinite*, the lexeme *n'importe* belonging to both systems. In contrast IIA and IIB display a mixture of definite and indefinite determination (IIA: *des écarts*, à l'écart; IIB: *des points*, l'écaille). Regarding the organization of determination, which does or does not actualize a



noun, it is noteworthy that an axis *IA/IIB* creates a new distribution in the figure, since these two parts show, quantitatively, a lack of determination.

The montage lays out another similar network of oppositions and correlations in the phonic material, since the echos of the phonemes sounds are distributed across the two levels, horizontal and vertical. The sounds /ɔ R/ and /u/ mark the character of *IA*, but /ɔ R/ belongs as well to *IB* (*n'importe, forme*) and to *IIB* (*bords*). *IB* is distinguished by the sounds /ɔ R/, /ɛ /, /ũ/, but they also appear, although less frequently—in a nonsystematic manner—in *IIB* (*coupante, vertement, voyant, point*). *IIB* is characterized by /ɛ / and /e R/, but one can find one occurrence of /eka/ (*écaille*), which echoes the repetitive system of *IIA* (*écarts, écart*). The sound /ũ/ is constitutive of this section. If we consider what has been excluded, the phonological code determines a structure of correlations that is organized according to the diagonal rows of the *X*. The sequence *chassant la mer* brings together the two sounds /ũ/ and /e R/ that motivate the polarization (see Figure 19).

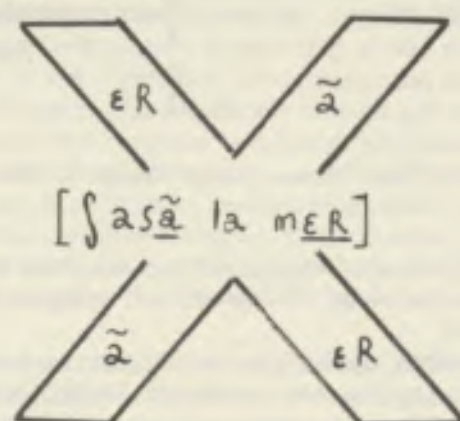


Figure 19.

Likewise syntax plays an important role, being at the same time the separator and the integrator. On the tenth line, for example, it is impossible to read the two parts together; *coupante* is in the feminine form and *écart* in the masculine; thus, *écaille* on the ninth line (*IIB*) necessarily appears as the noun to which *coupante* refers. Part *A* is marked by the structure centered around the coordinate *et* (*vin et feu, et chassant, et nageant, l'eau et*); on the opposite side, *B* presents a repetition of the preposition *à* (*à plat, à conte perdu, à perte, à vue*). Since the two parts are trying to counter the shifting apart, it is necessary to note that one occurrence of the fundamental element of each part appears in the other.

It is difficult to dismiss these systems uncovered through a close reading as the mere product of chance. In fact, under the apparent at-

tempt to disintegrate the fixed poetic forms, this type of text realizes the very process of constituting itself; an immanent formalism gives the text its poetic sharpness.

The generation of this poem's significance in which alternate union and breaking apart, substance and its accidents, is integrally determined by the *spatial geometry* that interferes with the normal use of language and, by so doing, originates new codes of significance running through specific networks of relationships. Far from shattering the text into pieces, the montage secures its compactness and compression.

### Scrap-poem

This post-Mallarmé poetic practice of asyntactical verticality, which is certainly the most prevalent characteristic of contemporary French poetry, was manifest in the "refraction" type. The only purpose of this last type, the "scrap-poem" is to accommodate Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*,<sup>23</sup> which rightfully can be seen as a "curio."

This book, a parceled, fragmented body, is made out of thousands of cutouts, tongue-like strips of paper on which single lines of text are printed. By manipulating these simultaneous cutouts, the reader can associate one with several others and construct the text that pleases him most. Using ready-made sequences, the reader "writes" his own poem, the only limitation being his inability to free himself from the horizontal fragmentation, since the latter is an integral part of the book's materiality.

On the level of the principles, this text can be viewed as an extension of the *cadavre exquis* game mentioned in the introduction of the present article. Nevertheless, we consider it to belong to the realm of montage because every line looks alike (there is no intentionality of overexposing the heterogeneous nature of each sequence). And, in a very technical sense, the reader has to "build" the text; it is not given as an immutable product.

In this text, the importance of the vertical succession of the sequences points to an aggression towards language—as product of a community—since what it affirms is precisely the irrelevant character of syntax (and of semantics as a mere result of the concatenation of lexical elements). As montage, *Cente mille milliards de poèmes* is situated in the borderline zone of poetic reading, at that limit-point where reading becomes writing, for the usual framework of the literary discourse has been suppressed. The text-as-montage is the reader's private space, and its organization does not consist in an intrinsic interplay of codes. It is but a frolicsome expedient that propels the reader into the role of author. For the apparent disorder of signification, he substitutes, in practice, his own order and his own encoding of significance.

In "Figurations"<sup>24</sup> Michel Deguy states that language is much too important a matter to be left to the care of linguists. Linguists could return



the compliment and say that poetry is much too important a matter to be left to the care of poets.

The point can be made, of course, since we could not fail but note that all four of our types of montage are connected, one way or another, to language. The verbal component is always present, be it in the form of an isolated, truncated, fragmented, indeed, barely recognizable word, or as a seemingly ever-expanding phrase. Deguy himself, also in "Figurations," cannot avoid defining poetry as the "pushing of language to its limits." Poetry is language experimenting with itself, it is an illusion of words-in-freedom liberated from the constraints placed upon them by everyday usage. Consequently, montage must be seen as an artifact through which language transcends its instrumental communication role, its information-transmission function. Montage's special architecture expels language from the realm of concatenated meaning and places it in a world of seemingly odd, accidental, fortuitous encounters and juxtapositions.

But, in fact, montage displays guidemarks that signal the formal relationships and give access to its intelligibility. The spatial distribution literally forces the reader to travel on prearranged paths leading to the montage's significance.

These intrinsic formal constraints take the place of the external ones found in traditional poetry. A contemporary poem is first and foremost an exercise in rhythmical immanence. It is possible to recognize a traditional poem because it is organized according to a fixed form (external); today, one can recognize the intentionality of poetry in a text when that text generates its own form (figurative, numerical, geometrical). We are not saying that poetry is limited to external features; quite the contrary, it is our contention that the most important element under consideration is the significance process, and that the external form is part of it, not just a separate entity.

What motivates these spatial artifices is the necessity to restore language to its primal semic quality by pulling it out of the syntagmatic concatenation. The new distribution then generates its own pattern of encoding and provides the reader with indications necessary to understanding.

Traditional French poetry was loaded with conventional formal devices: verse, rhyme, types of poems, etc. The verse was the keystone of this formal architecture. When it disappeared, the task of identifying poetry was rendered more difficult; some critics even rejected the distinction between prose and poetry.<sup>25</sup>

In our presentation we described four types of montage that can be viewed as types of contemporary poetic "dialects," though, in fact, our aim was more ambitious in scope. We wanted to show that despite their difference, these types share some constant features that could be regarded as closely associated with this evasive notion of poetry.

In conclusion, we would like to suggest that the taxic grid of traditional French poetry was no more than an historically marked aspect of formalized poetic language; it was simply a temporary, conventional

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embodiment of two basic principles: number and rhythm. And it is the combination of these two that gives poetry its specific qualities of systematization, compression, and unity.

The image of a universally accepted pattern for poem has faded away. No longer does poetry exist in the external form; rather, it is entrenched in principles that take a topical pattern especially tailored to the nature of the specific text they govern.

Thus, Louis Marin's quote at the beginning of this study reveals its own limits. Because it covers such a broad spectrum, montages that otherwise would have been relegated to the realm of plastic arts find a place in the framework of reading. Yet the definition fails to recognize that the sole function of the graphic ensemble is to catch the eye. While collage allows it to continue wandering, montage forces it to come to a halt.

Indeed, there is no such thing as a poetry reduced merely to its "visual" quality. When there is poetry, the reader has to pass through the incongruity and apparent disorder of the constituents in order to enter the labyrinth of exegesis and, as in the case of montage, uncover the hidden regulating system that generates the text significance.

## Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
2. Robert Anderson, *Fragment of Western Civilization*, glazed earthenware, Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1976.
3. Michel Deguy, "Fragment du cadastre," in *Poèmes 1960-1970* (Paris: Gallimard, ["Poésie"], 1973), pp. 9-13.
4. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), p. 149.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 456.
6. Quoted by Man Ray, in William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 46.
7. "Phare de la Mariée," *Minotaure* (Paris) 6, Winter 1935.
8. On chance and literature, see my article "Michel Leiris and the 'Bazar Bizarre,'" in *Dada/Surrealism* 7, 1977, 50-58.
9. *Dada Almanach*, 1920.
10. K. G. Pontus Hultén, *The Machine* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 111.
11. Marvin S. Coats, *Dream House*, 1978, mixed media; 72"h, 72"w, 108"L. DW Gallery, Dallas, Texas.
12. On Tatlin and Constructivism, see: "The Constructivism Ethos: Russia 1913-1932. Part I," *Artforum*, VI, September 1967, 22-29.
13. André Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962), p. 57.
14. See André Massin, *La lettre et l'image* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) and Roselyne Dupont-Roc, Jean Lablot, "La Syrinx," in *Poétique* 18, 1974, 176.
15. Paul Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) and *Le masque et la lumière: la poétique des Grands Rhétoriciens* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).
16. Pierre Garnier, *Spatialisme et poésie concrète* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 202.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
18. On Saussure and hypograms, see Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). The term *hypogram* appears in the study "Homère" (Ms. f.



3963) and the study "Lucrèce" (Ms. f. 3964).

19. Ibid., p. 64.

20. *En* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967); *Mono No Aware* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); and *Trente et un au cube* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

21. *En*, pp. 7-9.

22. For further analysis of Roubaud's works, see my article "Chances aren't: Roubaud's numerical poe-tricks," *Sub-Stance* 23/24, 1979, 187-201.

23. Raymond Queneau, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (*One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

24. Michel Deguy, "Figurations," in *Poèmes, 1960-1970* (Paris: Gallimard ["Poésie"], 1973), pp. 105-134.

25. See, for example, the following statement made by Michel Butor (*Obliques* 2, 1971): "Aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus de genre; nous faisons à présent de la littérature ou de l'écriture et il n'est plus utile ni légitime de distinguer tel mode ou tel autre à l'intérieur de cette activité qui englobe tous les anciens genres." (Today there is no genre anymore; nowadays we are dealing with literature or *écriture* and it is neither necessary nor legitimate to separate one mode or another within the activity which includes all the old genres.)