

**PATAPHYSICAL NETWORKING: VIRTUALITY, POTENTIALITY AND THE
EXPERIMENTAL WORKS OF THE COLLÈGE DE 'PATAPHYSIQUE, THE OULIPO,
AND THE MOUVEMENT PANIQUE**

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My dissertation investigates the Collège de Pataphysique, a little-known mid-20th century French artistic movement, and two related groups, the Oulipo (Workshop of Potential Literature) and the Mouvement Panique. The imaginary science of pataphysics was invented in 1893 by Alfred Jarry who argued that existing scientific laws only offered a limited number of possible explanations for worldly phenomena. The notion of pataphysics was picked up by the Collège in 1948, and its practitioners advocated the exploration of alternative approaches to reality through artistic and experimental means. Scholars have tended to ignore the Collège's influence on 20th century French art and culture, preferring instead to treat its most famous practitioners, such as Raymond Queneau and Boris Vian, in isolation rather than as members of the pataphysical network. My dissertation contests dismissals of the Collège's importance by reconstructing its long-occluded artistic genealogy and tracking its connections and ongoing cultural activities. Such an examination shows why pataphysical methods and modes of work might be relevant in contemporary intellectual and artistic contexts.

My first chapter traces the history of the Collège de Pataphysique. I examine the Collège's founding documents and literary texts by pataphysicians, Raymond Queneau, Boris Vian and René Clair, demonstrating how they implement pataphysical philosophy in the process of creation. The second chapter focuses on the Oulipo and three of its writers, Georges Perec, Italo Calvino and Marcel Bénabou, who use literature to experiment with potentiality and virtuality.

The third chapter describes the case of the Mouvement Panique, and through films of its founders, Fernando Arrabal and Alejandro Jodorowsky, demonstrates that the cultivation of pataphysics is not limited to literature and can be realized in cinema. In the final chapter I look at the Collège's contemporary publications and activities in order to draw conclusions about the growth of the pataphysical network and its importance for today's arts and sciences.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

At the close of the nineteenth century, the French writer Alfred Jarry created pataphysics, a science of imaginary solutions to real problems and, as such, one that focused on exceptions rather than rules and regularities.¹ Jarry shaped pataphysics through his two most prominent characters: King Ubu, doctor in pataphysics, and Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician. In *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (1898), Jarry offered bits and pieces of his knowledge and vision for pataphysics, describing it as a discipline that investigated the realm lying beyond the philosophical reach of metaphysics. In short, Jarry presented pataphysics as a tool that could be used to construe the universe not as it is, but as it could be, with all its inherent potentialities. It was this artistic vision of a semi-philosophical, semi-literary system of thought that half a century later inspired Emmanuel Peillet, a philosophy teacher, and Maurice Saillet, a writer and a publisher, to form the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. Founded in 1948, the Collège is a little-known intellectual circle with a significant, albeit concealed, impact on the landscape of contemporary artistic networks in France and around the world.

This dissertation focuses on the Collège de ‘Pataphysique and two related groups, the Oulipo (Workshop of Potential Literature) and the Mouvement Panique, in order to demonstrate the ways in which these separate entities are, in fact, intertwined. This interconnectedness has much to teach us about contemporary art, philosophy and interdisciplinarity that includes the

¹ Alfred Jarry, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll* (Lexington: FB Éditions, 2015), 15.

sciences. From the time of its founding up to 1975, the year that marks the beginning of its 25-year-long hiatus, the Collège focused predominantly on literary experimentation, despite its members' declaration of interest in a variety of media of artistic expression. It was only after the year 2000 when the Collège started fulfilling its interdisciplinary vision. The Oulipo, founded in 1960, from the start vowed its commitment to literature and its potential, and has remained faithful to its goals to this day. The Mouvement Panique, which was created in 1962, in turn, has had no interest in language-based media. Instead, the movement has taken on methods of artistic expression through the body, as its interest has shifted from theatrical performance to film. I contend that respective philosophies and approaches towards creative expression and methodologies of all three groups can be tied back to Jarry's imaginary science of pataphysics, as they incorporate its core assumptions, such as a pataphysical understanding of virtuality, potentiality, and temporal relationships. By establishing a widespread association of the three movements, I unveil an extensive and intricate network of artists, thinkers and scientists, one that promotes unique ways of pursuing ingenuity in all domains of life, explores a myriad of creative media, and crosses multiple nations.

1.1 WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GROUPS RELATED TO PATAPHYSICS AND WHY IT IS NOT ENOUGH

Even though the Collège de 'Pataphysique has been operating and expanding its ranks on the French intellectual scene for almost a century and now is thriving, scholars have shown little interest in writing about the group. Up to the beginning of the new millennium, there was virtually no serious study about the Collège other than publications released by the group itself.

The dossier on the Collège entitled “La Pataphysique: histoire d’une société très secrète,” presented in *Le Magazine littéraire* in 2000 on the occasion of the group’s revival after 25 years of suspension was the first informative publication targeting general literary and academic audiences.² The dossier offered a reader’s digest version of the origins of pataphysics and the Collège’s history. It discussed some aspects of its organization, such as the use of the pataphysical calendar, and it published profiles of some of its prominent figures, including Baron Jean Mollet, Raymond Queneau and Boris Vian. Furthermore, the publication even investigated the Collège’s connections to the literature and philosophy of some outsiders, such as Raymond Roussel and Gilles Deleuze. However, the dossier in *Le Magazine littéraire* barely scratched the surface of the rich knowledge and history of the Collège, and much work remains to be done to fill in our understanding of the Collège’s history and its role in the contemporary artistic scene.

While the Collège has not been a central focus of scholarly inquiry, the last two decades have yielded two significant publications about pataphysics. The first, entitled *‘Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science*, was authored by Christian Bök, a Canadian experimental poet, in 2002. In his study, Bök sketches a map of early- and mid-twentieth-century creative groups influenced by Jarry’s imaginary science. He identifies two artistic tendencies dominating that time period: irrationalism and surrealistism. Bök categorizes the Symbolists, the Dadaists and the Surrealists as the former, and the Futurists, the Oulipians, and the Jarryites as the latter.³ Given that the Collège de ‘Pataphysique is a group that decided to practice actively the principles of pataphysics via creative expression, it is striking that Bök does not even include the Collège in

² “La Pataphysique: histoire d’une société très secrète,” *Le Magazine littéraire* 388 (June 2000): 19–65.

³ For more information see Christian Bök, *‘Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

the list of groups influenced by pataphysics. The second publication revolving around pataphysics is Andrew Hugill's *'Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* (2012). Hugill is a professor at Bath Spa University in the UK, a composer and researcher interested in music and computing, and, most importantly, a member of the Collège. Even if he does not work on a regular basis with the core members who manage the day-to-day administration of the group in Paris under the direction of Thieri Foulc and Paul Gayot, he offers a unique and reliable insider's perspective. Indeed, Hugill provides us with a brief history of the group, the profile of its founder, Dr. Sandomir (one of Emmanuel Peillet's pseudonyms), and situates the Collège in the context of postwar artistic tendencies.⁴ He does not, however, talk about the Collège as it functions today – its organization, members, or interests – and thus he fails to highlight its relevance within the contemporary intellectual landscape in France and elsewhere.

I contend that the reluctance, if not outright refusal, to take the Collège as the subject of scholarly research stems from the fact that the group, and even pataphysics itself, does not always do the best job interfacing with a wider public and calling attention to its activities. The Collège functions like a secret society, and it has deliberately limited its relationships with outsiders, especially in its formative years. As a result, rather than following the Collège's active outreach, only those who find out about the group on their own and are determined enough to educate themselves and wade through a sea of misinformation about the Collège become new members. Moreover, the Collège's internal publications, including its quarterly journal *Viridis Candela* as well as numerous literary and informative volumes by its individual members, are not readily accessible for public consultation as they are first circulated among pataphysicians

⁴ For more information see Andrew Hugill, *'Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

and only later become available for purchase by the general public or make their way into libraries. The elitist character of the group and its reluctance to reach out or advertise its work certainly contributed to and perpetuated misconceptions about pataphysics and the Collège. At present, the adjective *pataphysique* appears rarely in print or in everyday parlance. When it does, pataphysicians rightly notice, it is usually used as synonymous with *ubuesque*, which denotes the absurd and is meant to diminish and ridicule things.⁵ Pataphysics is commonly identified with the satirical tone of Jarry's works and with the grotesqueness of his creation, King Ubu. Jarry's tone was picked up by the Collège's founder, Dr. Sandomir (Peillet), it was implemented in the composition of the group's *Statuts* and Sandomir's opening speech, and it is used in the group's everyday interactions that blur the boundary between solemnity and the absurd.⁶ I had an opportunity to experience the pataphysical tone firsthand, when in a brief exchange of electronic correspondence Thieri Foulc addressed me as "Estimée Paulina Tomkowicz," and concluded his message with a polite greeting, "En Faustroll." The name of the Collège does appear in several scholarly monographs in literary or even film studies, such as Julian Pefanis's *Heterology and the Postmodern* (1991) and Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993). In these cases, the name of the Collège is briefly glossed over or simply used in passing without further elaboration.⁷ Such mentions recycle clichés and received ideas rather than focus scholarly attention on the Collège and its activities.

⁵ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "De la Pataphysique parlementaire," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 4 (2015): 61.

⁶ For examples see Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013); Irénée-Louis Sandomir, "Harangue inaugurale," in *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013).

⁷ For more information see Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Unlike the Collège, the Oulipo and the Mouvement Panique are relatively well known and recognized in their respective fields, literary and theater/performance studies. The Oulipo, for example, benefited from American academic Warren Motte's iconic *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (1986) that brought attention to the group among English-speaking readers and scholars through its English translations and analyses of the first oulipian texts.⁸ The Oulipo is predominantly recognized for its writers creating literature under self-imposed literary constraints that introduce controlled chance into their works. Alison James, an Oulipo specialist, has extensively studied this aspect of oulipian practice in *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (2009).⁹ As for the Mouvement Panique, Frédéric Aranzueque-Arrieta, a Hispanic theater expert, published a comprehensive study, *Panique: Arrabal, Jodorowsky, Topor* (2008) that provides an account of the formation of panic philosophy and of the ways in which it informed its creators' works.¹⁰ While studies of the Oulipo and the Movement Panique are extensive, these movements' connections to the Collège and the mutual influences circulating between all three are sorely underappreciated.

The relationship between the Collège and the Workshop of Potential Literature is relatively obvious and therefore harder to ignore: the Oulipo was founded as a sub-committee of one of the Collège's sub-commissions and its founding members became coopted to the Collège by default. The link between the two groups is, indeed, acknowledged by scholars presenting historical overviews of the Oulipo. However, such studies underplay the Collège's role and the

⁸ For more information see Warren F. Motte, ed., *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

⁹ For more information see Alison James, *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ For more information see Frédéric Aranzueque-Arrieta, *Panique: Arrabal, Jodorowsky, Topor* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008).

ongoing influence of its philosophy on oulipian modes of work. Both James and Motte mention the initial administrative connection between the Collège and the Oulipo, yet, they promptly emphasize that the latter became an independent entity shortly thereafter. Scholars fail to discuss the ongoing involvement in collegial life and activities of the Oulipo's founding fathers, Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. They also ignore Latis's (another pseudonym of Peillet) participation in the Oulipo long after the workshop became emancipated from the Collège. Moreover, they neglect to elaborate on the intricate complexity of the oulipian understanding of the notion of potentiality that, I contend, originated in the philosophy of pataphysics and has remained at the core of the creative labor that oulipian writes perform while working on potential literature.

When it comes to studies of the Mouvement Panique, the group's philosophy has not been explicitly associated with pataphysics until 2006, and even then, the parallels were pinpointed not by literature or film scholars, but by Fernando Arrabal, one of the three founders of the movement. Arrabal, who became an active member of the Collège after the year 2000, declared his passion for pataphysics in his new millennium panic manifesto, *Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire* (2006), where the two philosophies are juxtaposed for the first time, but without elaboration.¹¹ Like in the case of the Oulipo, I offer in the pages that follow an in-depth analysis of panic philosophy, devised in the 1960s by the founders of the group, Arrabal along with Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor. I focus on its treatment of temporality, bodily sensation and intuition, aspects that are shared with the pataphysical worldview. By locating points of convergence between the Collège's practice of pataphysics, oulipian notions of

¹¹ See Fernando Arrabal, *Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire* (Paris: Punctum, 2006).

literary potentiality and panic philosophy's focus on cinema, I unearth a network of influences that extend out from Jarry's imaginary science, spanning not only a century of artistic and intellectual history, but crossing the borders between countries, disciplines, and artistic media.

The fact that the pataphysical connections between authors, filmmakers, other artists and intellectuals holding membership in at least one of the aforementioned groups remains unexplored does not mean that their individual works went unappreciated or unstudied. To the contrary, some of the pataphysicians, Oulipians and members of the panic circle are considered among the most influential and canonical authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and their works have generated extensive scholarship. However, their works have not been sufficiently understood in connection to pataphysics and the Collège.

To provide an example from each of my three chapters focusing on their respective groups, the famous individuals that form the foundation of what I call a network inspired by the pataphysical tradition are Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec and Alejandro Jodorowsky. Queneau, a member of Académie Goncourt, has been studied mostly as the founder of the Oulipo, the author of *Zazie dans le métro* (1959) and the inventor of *néo-français*, an alternative to standard French language that is distinguished by a vocabulary and syntax characteristic of spoken language and by the phonetic spelling of words and expressions. The Workshop of Potential Literature being his most important life project, scholars have tended to focus on the role of chance and formal constraints in the author's works. The novel that I study from the pataphysical point of view, *Le Chiendent* (1932), has generated interest as a book that is meticulously structured and exemplifies Queneau's war-on-chance attitude, one that he assumed

after he broke with André Breton and the Surrealists.¹² Claude Simonnet devoted an entire study, entitled *Queneau déchiffré: (notes sur “le Chiendent”)* (1981), to literally decipher all possible formal patterns and restrictions that Queneau imposed on himself in order to streamline his creative process after having experienced severe writer’s block.¹³ The focus on the formal structure of the author’s works overshadowed his experimentation with the element of chance and his determination to control it in his writing, which stands in direct opposition to the Surrealists’ creative methods that Queneau had violently rejected. Indeed, I aim to show how Queneau’s attempts to tame chance and to investigate its origins and effects on his characters are part of an exploration of a larger pataphysical tradition promoting intuitive perception rather than cognitive thinking and favoring exceptional occurrences rather than regularities. Queneau had, indeed, a more important role in the Collège, as his collaboration started with his contribution to the group’s inaugural volume of *Viridis Candela* and continued with a promotion to the rank of Satrap, a member of the creative body of artists of the Collège. While Queneau’s novels, stories, poems and other texts are studied as individual feats of literary ingenuity and taught in French schools as a part of the literary canon, I demonstrate that they are underpinned by the principles of pataphysics.

Georges Perec, whom I study in my second chapter, has been recognized as the most prolific and celebrated member of the Oulipo. His most famous works, which also happened to be the most studied ones, are *La Disparition* (1969), a novel written entirely without the letter “e,” and *La Vie mode d’emploi* (1987), a book constructed under not one but four formal

¹² Noël Arnaud, “Queneau, l’humour et la ‘pataphysique,” *Magazine littéraire*, no. 94 (1974): 24–26.

¹³ For more information see Claude Simonnet, *Queneau déchiffré: (notes sur “le Chiendent”)* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1981).

constraints regulating the order of its chapters, as well as themes evoked and even specific words used in each chapter. Perec's literary output has inspired countless studies using a range of scholarly approaches, from a concentration on formal constraints and his treatment of the infra-ordinary to studying his Jewish roots and his traumatic experience of the Second World War. Perec even inspired an encyclopedia-like biography by David Bellos entitled *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (1993) that extends over eight hundred pages. Bellos's opus, like other scholarship on Perec, emphasizes the writer's mastery of the French language and the role of memory in his works, and it identifies the potentiality of his creations in the elaborate constraints he employs.¹⁴ I propose a new angle on Perec's, and other Oulipians' works by presenting the notion of potentiality from a pataphysical perspective. Pataphysics approaches potentiality as a unique state of being that dissolves once actualized, and it studies ways to capture potentiality in circumstances that preserve its unique absent existence. Tracing the evolution of the term "potentiality" as it was adopted and developed by the Oulipo from its founding demonstrates how the potential of literature that is the Oulipo's quest originated with a strong influence of the Collège de 'Pataphysique.

As for Alejandro Jodorowsky, he is generally considered a filmmaker with a strong authorial voice, and he is rarely studied as a representative of specific artistic trends other than panic philosophy, which he devised with Arrabal and Topor. Indeed, in *Alexandro Jodorowsky: cinéaste panique* (1985), Michel Larouche looks at Jodorowsky's cinematic work from the perspective of the principles of "panic" that favor the dismantling of normative perception and promote confusion. Larouche sketches an exhaustive timeline of the founding and development

¹⁴ For more information see David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words: A Biography* (Boston, MA: D.R. Godine, 1993).

of the Mouvement Panique and its transition from theater to film, and he presents the ways in which the group's philosophy informs its adherents' creative work.¹⁵ Yet, he does so while keeping the analysis of the movement and its members' films isolated from the context of their relations with other artists and intellectuals except for a comparison of panic and surrealist aesthetics. My project enriches the significance and influence of the Mouvement Panique by inscribing it in the tradition of pataphysics and situating its place within the network of influences initiated by the Collège. Even though Jodorowsky himself never joined the Collège, he cultivated an aesthetic of “panic” through experimentation with temporal confusion, the ephemerality of the present, and the celebration of imperfect and intuitive bodies. All these elements of panic philosophy fulfill the requirements of a pataphysical research method focused on the search for solutions different from those that are deemed “universal truths.” When Arrabal explicitly likened panic to pataphysics in his 2006 manifesto, he made the case for the acknowledgement of a pataphysical character not only of his past works, but of all creations made under the aegis of the Mouvement Panique, including those by Jodorowsky.

1.2 THE PATAPHYSICAL NETWORK IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

By linking the Collège de ‘Pataphysique with the Oulipo and the Mouvement Panique, and by inscribing them within the tradition of pataphysics that originated with Alfred Jarry, I uncover a network of influential and highly-esteemed writers and directors, but also artists representing

¹⁵ For more information see Michel Larouche, *Alexandro Jodorowsky: cinéaste panique* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1985).

other media of expression, intellectuals, and even scientists working towards a shared goal: the creation of multiple visions of a universe that we could see in place of the existing one. This dissertation shows how pataphysical philosophy underpins the creative work of well-recognized artists, such as Raymond Queneau, Boris Vian, René Clair, Italo Calvino, Fernando Arrabal, and others, in most cases without their readers or viewers knowing it. In the process, I debunk a number of severe misconceptions about the Collège. I demonstrate that pataphysics does not equal “the absurd” and that the general misunderstanding of what the Collège is stems from its aura of secrecy and from the cognitive dissonance of the metalanguage that the group uses to present its organization and goals, which clashes with the actual gravity of what it can achieve. Moreover, I make a case for the interdisciplinarity of pataphysics cultivated by the Collège. By the inclusion of the Mouvement Panique in my analysis, I demonstrate that pataphysics can be a guiding principle not only for literature but also for film. Furthermore, my study of the most recent projects and activities carried out by the group after 2000 shows that the scope of pataphysics goes well beyond art. I contend that the influence of pataphysics is not limited to artistic endeavors performed within the Collège and circulated mainly among its members. The pataphysical model of investigation resonates with the ways in which scientific and technological advancements are made, which challenges the status of the Collège as an irrelevant oddity in the contemporary artistic and intellectual context.

In my project, I dedicate a chapter to each of the three artistic movements in the chronological order of their founding: the Collège de ‘Pataphysique (1948), the Oulipo (1960) and the Mouvement Panique (1962). In the final chapter I return to the Collège and look at its organization and activity from 2000 to the present, juxtaposing it with its past iteration to demonstrate the paths of expansion it has taken since its founding. In order to provide the fullest

possible picture of the whole pataphysical network of influence, I adopt a methodology that combines historical study of the groups' documents and manifestos with close analysis of literary and cinematic works. Such a methodology entails the use of two types of primary sources. On the one hand, I look at testimonials related to events surrounding the groups' founding and documents that chart the artistic and organizational paths of their budding philosophies. These sources include essays, statutes and speeches authored by the founding members of said groups, as well as interviews constituting first-hand accounts of the subjective significance of these communities, their organization, and their development. Moreover, in the case of the Collège de 'Pataphysique and the Oulipo I look at archival materials from Fonds Oulipo and Fonds Caradec housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, including meeting minutes, memoranda and private correspondence that reveal the most intimate discussion topics preoccupying the groups at various points in time. Finally, I evoke contemporary mentions of these communities, with a focus on the Collège, across modern communication channels: online sources, newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, blogs, and obituaries. All these sources allow me to create a reliable account of how the movements were established and what influences shaped them. These documents also help me trace the relationships between the groups' members and determine the position of the groups *vis-à-vis* other artistic circles of their times. A historical account of the movements' formation is crucial for understanding their artistic output. On the other hand, I look at selected works by authors and filmmakers adhering to the groups that seek to realize their respective philosophies. These sources include novels, short stories, journal articles and feature-length films. I present these texts as resulting directly from a practical application of pataphysical methodology, oulipian potentiality, and panic philosophy, respectively. This presentation allows

me to show how notions developed by individual groups intertwine with and inform one another, thus opening channels of communication and mutual feedback between the movements.

Importantly, across my project, I found it most productive to employ concepts and vocabulary from affect theories in the humanities as a theoretical framework in order to help clarify pataphysical notions, texts, and practices. As an experimental practice, pataphysics advocated the exploration of alternative relations of our immediate reality, thus expressing an interest in the virtual that aligns with how affect theorists such as Brian Massumi, Ben Anderson and Ruth Leys construe virtuality and potentiality. Moreover, pataphysics resonates with certain strands of thought by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Henri Bergson, who, directly or not, inspired and influenced these theorists. As I mentioned earlier, pataphysicians and their writings have often sought a cultivated obscurity that has hindered a broad appreciation of their works and their philosophy. There are striking similarities between key notions in contemporary affect theories and pataphysical philosophy from its founding to the present. Throughout my four chapters, I adopt some of the language and ideas from affect theories and bring them into dialogue with pataphysics as a means of making it intelligible for a contemporary audience. For example, the distinction between the actual and the virtual worked out by the aforementioned theorists provides a solid base on which I build my elaboration of potentiality, crucial for pataphysics and particularly for the Oulipo. Furthermore, affect theorists' search for alternative links between phenomena, which favors relationships of resonance and feedback rather than linear and causal progression, helps us understand the pataphysical take on temporality that insists on the expansion of the present moment at the expense of chronological sequencing. Finally, the idea of the affective becoming of individuals and collective becoming in a game-like setup, presented by Anderson and Massumi, will shed light on the dynamics of the pataphysical

community as a field of emergence and expression resulting from unusual modes of cooperation and methodology that relies on intuition and subjective experience.

1.3 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The first chapter provides a historical overview of the foundation of the Collège de 'Pataphysique and paints a general picture of what the Collège is, how it functions and what its preoccupations have been. It also provides a clear image of the distinction between the Collège and the field of pataphysics itself, a distinction that is frequently blurred or even overlooked in existing scholarship on both. To complete this overview, I first present the theorization of the science of pataphysics as it was devised and presented by Alfred Jarry in *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*. Subsequently, to show how the Collège adopts and implements Jarry's imaginary science, I draw from accounts and documents directly related to its founding, such as the group's *Statuts*, the "Harangue inaugurale," an inaugural speech by its founder, Dr. Sandomir (Peillet), and articles in the first volume of the *Viridis Candela* journal, *Cahier du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, which at the time was supposed to be a unique, non-cyclical publication. Once the historical circumstances of the group and its philosophy are established, I proceed to consider selected literary texts in order to identify themes that connect to pataphysical preoccupations and determine how they were implemented in the process of creative expression.

In René Clair's short story, "Mémoires d'un innocent" (1976), the protagonist deliberately relieves himself of responsibility for his actions by inviting and controlling an element of chance as a factor deciding about how his life unfolds. Such a move goes against logic and questions established social structures and expectations about how one ought to act.

The protagonist structures his life as a game but at the same time is flexible about his choice of rules, favoring ones that are counterintuitive as he experiments with outcomes stemming from chance, thus welcoming the newness of the unexpected in his life.¹⁶ Clair's exploration of such a game space serves me as a model for approaching the Collège in general. I present it as a group that plays its own game by seemingly counterproductive rules. Boris Vian's *L'Écume des jours* (1947) proposes a new worldview for approaching the postwar environment where the existing fact- and tradition-based perception proved insufficient to process the traumatic events of the World Wars. Vian's universe collapses the hierarchical distinction between human, animal and inanimate elements, connecting them as equal constitutive parts of one organic whole.¹⁷ His ecosystem neutralizes causal links between events and phenomena, instead favoring alternative relationships such as resonance and feedback (to use Massumi's nomenclature). Thus constructed, Vian's makeup of the world constitutes what I call, borrowing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the "flesh of the world."¹⁸ Only when we see the universe as one living flesh can we understand the disastrous scope and aftermath of wounds inflicted on one or several of its elements, as was done during wartime. As for Raymond Queneau's take on pataphysical exploration through literature, I look at his study of the process of becoming in *Le Chiendent* (1932). His protagonist's conscious questioning of his daily routine and generally assumed truths about what is socially acceptable leads to his physical transformation from a shadow of a man to

¹⁶ See René Clair, "Mémoires d'un innocent," in *Jeux du hasard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 106–58.

¹⁷ See Boris Vian, *L'Écume des jours* (Paris: Pauvert, 1997).

¹⁸ For more information see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

a self-aware, three-dimensional and fully formed human being.¹⁹ Witnessing the protagonist's intimate becoming teaches us about a fine equilibrium between established patterns of cognition and an intuitive perception of the surrounding world, and the distinction between actual events and virtual unrealized potentials. The actual/virtual dichotomy leads me to begin a discussion of potentiality, the topic of the second chapter.

I study potentiality based on the case of the artistic output of the Oulipo, a French literary group whose name translates as the Workshop of Potential Literature. In the second chapter, I begin by explaining how the Oulipo is historically connected to the Collège de 'Pataphysique, and how the kind of potentiality in which its members are interested stems from the pataphysical tradition. The close relationship and cooperation between both groups, especially in the first decade after the Oulipo was founded, can be inferred from first-hand accounts of its members preserved in the archival materials such as detailed meeting minutes from its regular gatherings. These materials are not typically referenced in existing scholarship about the group. In order to explain how the Oulipo understands potentiality, I will lean on the work of Giorgio Agamben and Espen Aarseth. In his essays on the subject, Agamben points out that potentialities assume a peculiar mode of existence: one of being and not being at the same time. Nevertheless, they are not simply absent. It is the stubborn presence of their absence that is key to their understanding.²⁰ Aarseth, in his book on ergodic literature, theorizes a category of texts that he calls cybertexts, which for him are characterized by their unique potentiality. To put it simply, a cybertext is not meant to be read from beginning to end, as such a linear reading will not exhaust or even acknowledge its full potentiality. A cybertext is multicursal – it has multiple possible paths of

¹⁹ See Raymond Queneau, *Le Chiendent* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

²⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14.

exploration. While only some of them are realized in the act of reading, all of them exist in the virtual picture of the work as a whole.²¹ Finally, I argue that such was the initial ideal of potentiality sought by the Oulipo in literature, and it was fulfilled by *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* by Queneau. *Cent mille milliards* is a poetry volume that, by exploring the principles of combinatorics, effectively contains one hundred thousand billion virtual sonnets.²² It is true that with time the Oulipo distanced itself from the objective of creating complete potential works that emulated Queneau's volume, and chose to focus on literary constraints instead. Yet, I still identify works by oulipian writers that strive to achieve the potentiality of absence made present and available for the reader's exploration, thus keeping the pataphysical notion alive.

In this chapter, I look at three oulipian texts that seek to extend their material *façades* with the potential contained within them. The condition to preserve their potentialities without actualizing them, however, is for the works to remain absent. In *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (1986), Marcel Bénabou takes on a challenge of creating a "livre unique," a book that cannot be written.²³ For his unique book, Bénabou adopts the model of games with a machine-like structure, one described by Roger Caillois. Such a creation, be it a game or a book, requires a precise mechanism, a material framework that, once set in motion, comes alive by generating its virtual dimension.²⁴ Following this idea, Bénabou provides a material scaffolding, the book that the reader holds in her hands, which has the capacity to generate its virtual double that remains physically absent. Italo Calvino's *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur* (1979) explores a

²¹ For more information see Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

²² See Raymond Queneau, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

²³ See Marcel Bénabou, *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

²⁴ For more information see Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 13.

similar pattern of building a material *façade* for a virtual extension of a text. Calvino's approach is to create multiple potential novels by including in the book he actually writes ten beginnings that are abruptly interrupted.²⁵ For Calvino, just as for Bénabou, the reader's engagement is crucial in activating the potentiality of the absent books. The author achieves this goal by addressing the reader directly with an adept use of personal pronouns, which invites the audience to assume a position that is simultaneously within and outside of the diegesis of his text. My last Oulipian, Georges Perec, constructs a potential, absent book by inscribing it in the intertextual network of the nineteenth-century French literary canon. In his short story, *Le Voyage d'hiver* (1979), the author creates a book by the same title that allegedly got lost after the war. If found, it would constitute a proof that French classics such as Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé were nothing but plagiarists. It is the book's absence that suspends Perec's story in a state with the powerful potential of overturning the French literary canon.²⁶ Perec establishes the presence of the book's absence by constructing a multi-level intertextual web of connections, exhaustively theorized by Julia Kristeva and Gérard Genette, between the text and actual literary works, but also real institutions, such as British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale de France.²⁷ Perec thus presents the possibility of literary history being multicursal and having unexplored potential iterations. All three authors evoked in this chapter, Bénabou, Calvino and Perec, show that literature can effectively explore the state of potentiality without

²⁵ See Italo Calvino, *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur*, trans. Martin Rueff (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

²⁶ See Georges Perec, *Le Voyage d'hiver & ses suites* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

²⁷ For more information see Julia Kristeva, *Sēmeiōtikē: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969); Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

succumbing to the risk of actualizing potential developments. Their works also demonstrate that the Oulipo did not entirely separate from its original roots in the pataphysical tradition.

Even though from the time of its foundation the Collège described itself as a *société savante* rather than a literary movement and declared interest in all artistic and scientific disciplines, its activity was largely limited to media based in written language. By tracing the connection between the Collège de ‘Pataphysique and the Mouvement Panique, principally via Fernando Arrabal, the third chapter shows that pataphysical influences are not limited to literature but can be also found in film. As the Mouvement Panique was not associated with the Collège from its founding, like the Oulipo, I mark the official crossing of the two groups after Arrabal was publicly coopted as a Satrap to the Collège upon its desoccultation in 2000. The chapter looks at the founding essays of the panic group from the 1960s, such as “L’Homme panique” (1963) by Fernando Arrabal and “Vers l’éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre” (1965) by Alejandro Jodorowsky, to isolate the principal assumptions of its philosophy and juxtapose them with pataphysics to show how these two currents of thought inform and complement each other.²⁸ Furthermore, this chapter relies on Gilles Deleuze’s theorization of time and affect in cinema and visual arts, presented in *Cinéma 2: l’image-temps* (1985) and *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), to establish a framework allowing me to show parallels between pataphysics and panic philosophy and to define a panic approach to filmmaking.²⁹ What predisposes Deleuze to be such a bridge between cinema and the imaginary

²⁸ See Fernando Arrabal, “L’Homme panique,” in *Le “Panique,”* ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1973), 73–54; Alejandro Jodorowsky, “Vers l’éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre,” in *Le “Panique,”* ed. Arrabal, 74–93.

²⁹ For more information see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: l’image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1985); Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

science is his little-known personal interest in pataphysics, expressed in his two essays: “En créant la pataphysique Jarry a ouvert la voie à la phénoménologie” (1964), and “Un précurseur méconnu de Heidegger, Alfred Jarry” (1993).³⁰

In this chapter I investigate the ways in which panic philosophy was implemented in the making of two films representative of the movement’s artistic output, Jodorowsky’s *Fando y Lis* (1968) and Arrabal’s *Viva la Muerte* (1971).³¹ First and foremost, I study the panic notion of time, where linear temporal progression is dismantled to make room for a new, simultaneous image of temporal stages, based on memory and confusion, two key concepts for the Mouvement Panique. With the help of Deleuze’s theorization of the time-image and the crystal-image, I single out cinematic techniques used in both films that allow their filmmakers to implement such an understanding of time in practice. Another aspect of panic thought I identify in the films in question is its insistence on bodily experiences of immediate sensation at the expense of cognitive and linguistic filtration of impulses. Artists affiliated with “panic” commit to staging and creating events of celebration, so-called *fêtes-spectacles*, during which all participants are invited to enter in a state of communion of sensation while being targeted by violent sensory stimuli. With the example of *Lis*, Jodorowsky’s protagonist, I point out panic artists’ commitment to celebrating the imperfect, monstrous body. Furthermore, in the case of a *fête-spectacle* scene of a ritual bull slaughter in *Viva la Muerte*, I demonstrate panic’s determination to push the audience’s morally and socially conditioned inhibitions in order to shake their

³⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, “En créant la pataphysique Jarry ouvert la voie à la phénoménologie,” in *L’île déserte et autres textes: Textes et entretiens 1953-1974* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 2002), 105–8; Gilles Deleuze, “Un Précurseur méconnu de Heidegger, Alfred Jarry,” in *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1993), 113–25.

³¹ See Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Fando y Lis* (Producciones Pánicas/Fantoma, 1968); Fernando Arrabal, *Viva la Muerte* (Cult Epics 2012, 1970).

sensorium through an affective response. By inscribing the analyzed elements of panic philosophy, such as an original take on temporality and celebration of the body and the sensorium, in the tradition of pataphysics, I argue that the Collège de 'Pataphysique has the potential, even though largely unexplored at least up to a certain time, for creative expression in media other than literature.

In the fourth and final chapter, I return to the Collège de 'Pataphysique proper to analyze the patterns of its growth and to trace its expanding network in the twenty-first century in order to draw conclusions about its evolution and to speculate about its future. The event of desoccultation in 2000 marked a new beginning for the group when, after a 25-year-long break, the Collège resumed its public activities. It was a time when its members could reinvent their community, define their relationship to the past and sketch directions for future growth. Several publications accompanying and documenting this event, including *Les Très riches heures du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (2000), *Documents Intimes* (2000), as well as the first post-occultation volume of the *Viridis Candela* journal, confirm that the Collège insisted on the need to respect tradition in order to move forward.³² I argue that the Collège's growth should be understood in terms of a spiral, noting that the symbol of a spiral is closely related to the group's history. I present the group's evolution as spiral expansion rather than linear progression to accommodate for pataphysicians' flexible approach to temporality and their drive towards newness.

In this chapter, I analyze contributions to the ongoing cycle of the *Viridis Candela* journal, entitled the *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, rather than larger works by

³² Collège de 'Pataphysique, ed., *Les Très Riches Heures Du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); Collège de 'Pataphysique, ed., *Documents intimes* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Ouverture," *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 1 (2000): 1; Ruy Launoir, "Du Régent de Cléidologie," *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 1 (2000): 34–35.

individual authors. I chose to focus on selected articles about imaginary archaeologies because they demonstrate creativity, flexibility, playfulness, and an all-pervasive skepticism *vis-à-vis* what is considered established truths and fields of investigation based on scientific knowledge. The collection also gathers examples of the ways in which the Collège's members approach the past and the future. The chapter further identifies the present trends of expansion that the Collège has chosen to pursue. It shows that the group, indeed, has found a way to grow beyond its initial focus on literature by sanctioning the creation of multiple Ou-x-pos, workshops of potential "x," sub-groups exploring multiple disciplines, such as painting, graphic novels or even cuisine, to name just a few, by emulating the Oulipo's treatment of literature. Finally, I conceptualize the patterns of development followed by the Collège as a move towards universality and as a cultivation of pataphysical networking. The move towards universality consists of constant adjustment to contemporary social and academic expectations, including international expansion and deliberate work to acknowledge and curtail existing gender inequalities within the group. What I term pataphysical networking refers to the promotion of various disciplines, from literature, the arts, and the humanities to sciences such as biology and information technology, in the work of the Collège. The results of such networking are visible, for example, in the group's journal, where specialists representing a variety of disciplines publish side by side. Finally, I compare the Collège's mode of networking and experimental practice with the research model at Google X, a tech company promoting innovative technological solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems, such as delivering internet access in remote areas or designing self-driving cars. The company claims to be uniquely innovative with its transdisciplinary approach to problem-solving and with the inclusion of the element of the absurd in its research processes. While the differences between the X and the Collège de 'Pataphysique are not to be ignored, the

similarities are striking. It is as if the Google-founded company arrived independently at a model of collaborative research and experimentation that aligns with what the Collège de 'Pataphysique has been doing since its founding.

2.0 COLLÈGE DE ‘PATAPHYSIQUE: FIRST APPLICATIONS OF THE IMAGINARY SCIENCE

Toutefois, il n’est pas moins vrai de dire que d’imaginaires solutions aient toute l’efficace des solutions prétendues réelles. Elles meuvent les choses; elles meuvent les hommes. Et parfois bien plus puissamment. Surtout, elles meuvent les idées mêmes de la Science dite objective, lesquelles, de cette motion, tirent leur pouvoir [...].³³

– Irénée-Louis Sandomir, “Testament de Sa Feue Magnificence le Docteur I. L. Sandomir”

The Collège de ‘Pataphysique is a self-described *société savante* gathering like-minded thinkers, writers and poets, but also editors, filmmakers, painters, philosophers and scientists, and has been present on the French intellectual scene, persistently but at a distance from mainstream literary and philosophical movements, since 1948. The concealment of its discreet presence throughout decades of the twentieth and twenty-first century resulted in relatively few serious academic studies related to this particular group. In part, this relative invisibility has to do with the Collège’s aversion to public promotion of its activities and a preference for difficult and obscure language to describe its organizational structure and philosophy. Despite the opacity of its mission, the Collège’s artistic methods and aims bear striking resemblances to key notions that have become important to affect theorists in the humanities. In order to make the Collège

³³ Irénée-Louis Sandomir, “Testament de Sa Feue Magnificence le Docteur I. L. Sandomir” (Open Access Patakosmos Press, 2014), <http://www.patakosmos.com/database-open-access/Testament-Sandomir-opus-pataphysicum-college-de-pataphysique.pdf>. The Press describes itself as “an online project that wants to give access in all languages to scientific texts, studies and research pataphysical in the world. The project aims to disseminate the publications of the great Science and currently without copyright.”

understandable for twenty-first century readers, I will use certain theorizations of affect to clarify difficult aspects of the philosophy of pataphysics or to make explicit the mechanisms through which pataphysical texts operate. Based on selected works of the Collège's members, this chapter will pinpoint the ways in which pataphysical writers approach and grapple with the issue that is a constant struggle for affect theorists, namely, how to isolate and talk about instances of circulating affects when they manifest themselves in actuality in the form of feelings, emotions and sensations, without reducing their whole potential that remains virtual. In order to carry out this project, I will analyze works by three prominent figures of the French literary and cinematic world, Raymond Queneau, Boris Vian, and René Clair whose pataphysical identities are not known to the majority of their readers and spectators. As pataphysical writers, they led secret artistic lives devoted to the practice of pataphysics and to the exploration of what we would today call affects and potentiality even if they themselves might not always use these terms.

Before turning to Collège de 'Pataphysique and these three French writers, it is crucial to define my understanding of the term "affect." Ben Anderson, one of the key figures for contemporary theories of affect, contends that nowadays discussions about affect are problematic because of how preconceptions and different uses of the term across social sciences and humanities have led to conceptual slippage that groups related terms such as mood, passion, emotion, intensity and feeling with affect into one indistinguishable notion.³⁴ Anderson takes on the task of differentiating between these concepts, and his differentiation will constitute the basis for my further readings. According to Anderson, people experience and make sense of affects when these undergo expression as feelings experienced through the body, or further cognitive

³⁴ Ben Anderson, "Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24, no. 5 (2006): 734.

qualification, in linguistic terms, as emotions. In their purest form, however, affects are understood as forces and energies in a state of circulation that precedes their expression and qualification, and they are generally physically inaccessible to people. Understood as such, affects are far more powerful than what becomes of them in their actualization through corporeal feeling or language:

The key distinction between the three modalities [affects, feelings and emotions] is [...] that emotions and feelings are produced through actualizations and can never coincide with *the totality of potential affective expression*. Movements of affect are always accompanied by *a real but virtual knot of tendencies and latencies* that generate differences and divergences in what becomes actual.³⁵

Generally, people can access affective forces when these are manifested in the actuality as feelings or emotions, when one experiences physiological symptoms corresponding to what can be qualified, for example, as happiness, sadness, anxiety, etc. But feelings and emotions are only the tip of the affective iceberg, and if the full potential of affects remains undiscovered, it is because it belongs to the plane of virtuality. The power of affects is potential exactly because they remain unexpressed in actuality. They are primarily virtual and therefore not immediately accessible to human cognition.

In “The Autonomy of Affect,” Brian Massumi, one of the most prominent affect theorists, argues that in the last two decades, “[t]here seems to be a growing feeling within media and literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information- and image-based late-capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have

³⁵ Ibid, 738, emphasis added.

founded.”³⁶ If now the paradigm shift from a linear logic of causality and narrative to a non-linear, multifaceted world of potentiality is being theorized as a crucial step on the way to understanding the mechanisms of our contemporary capitalist society, I want to argue that during the postwar period the Collège’s artistic and intellectual turn to pataphysics was a similar attempt to better understand their contemporary world. In the introduction to *The Affective Turn*, Patricia Ticineto Clough confirms that currently, “[t]he increasing significance of affect as a focus of analysis across a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourses is occurring at a time when critical theory is facing the analytical challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism.”³⁷ If the academic interest in affect related to war and violence is relatively new, the use of affective rather than cognitive perception as a coping mechanism can be identified in the works of the Collège’s members. Their day-to-day reality was the result of dramatic changes in all domains of life, changes ensuing from both World Wars caused by the capitalist practices that had led to the collapse of the world’s free markets and the outbreak of armed conflicts. The science of pataphysics, as practiced by the Collège through systematic and primarily literary experimentation, especially in its formative years, was responding to similar social changes as those Clough mentions, and developed a flexible system of thinking about causality and potentiality that anticipates some of the mechanisms through which contemporary scholars in the humanities theorize affect.

³⁶ Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 88.

³⁷ Patricia Ticineto Clough, “Introduction,” in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O’Malley Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

2.1 PATAPHYSICS: AN IMAGINARY SCIENCE

To sketch an image of the group, it is important to mark a distinction between the science of pataphysics and the Collège de ‘Pataphysique, one being a concept merging philosophy and general science, and the other an institution.³⁸ The former was officially explained for the first time when Alfred Jarry gave life to his fictional character Faustroll, a doctor of pataphysics and the protagonist of *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (1898). Via Faustroll, Jarry provides his readers with the following definition of the discipline: “La pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité.”³⁹ The definition itself is not conclusive and can be easily opened up for interpretation, but it is its openness and flexibility that constitutes one of the most important characteristics of pataphysics understood as a method of investigating the world and its phenomena and of framing knowledge about them. What is, however, conclusive about the definition, is the fact that the science of pataphysics does aim to find solutions to certain problems, and that this process involves the imaginary, the symbolic, and the virtual. Therefore, pataphysics steps in where fact-based, empirical studies of actual phenomena are insufficient or

³⁸ Many have speculated on the origin and the purpose of the mysterious apostrophe that sometimes precedes the word *pataphysique*. Alfred Jarry provided a simple explanation of this choice of punctuation in *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*: “[...] l’ortographe réelle, ‘pataphysique, précédé d’un apostrophe, afin d’éviter un facile calembour [...]” Alfred Jarry, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll* (Lexington: FB Editions, 2015), 15. The members of the Collège claim that the apostrophe should be used when we talk about pataphysics as a science practiced consciously (as opposed to unconscious, accidental pataphysics). However, the same members of the Collège, and even Jarry himself, did not continue to use the recommended punctuation consistently, and any discrepancies found in this dissertation are due to my decision to retain versions of punctuation and spelling as they appear in cited documents. As for my choice of punctuation, I decided to keep the apostrophe only when I evoke the Collège de ‘Pataphysique, and only by its French name.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

do not yield satisfactory answers. If scientific laws and theories are devised in order to systematize our knowledge and understanding of processes governing existing matter, physical, chemical, biological and otherwise, the mysterious *solutions imaginaires* that pataphysicians strive to establish, constantly seek to question the existing scientific models in order to push boundaries of cognition, even at the cost of undermining logic. Pataphysics does not attempt to reorganize the hierarchy of the established scientific disciplines in order to prove its superiority, but it does demonstrate that we can perceive imaginary solutions (explanations of phenomena, definitions detached from reality and alternative to universally accepted truths) as equally impactful as scientifically proven answers to specific problems. Jarry further develops his definition when he clarifies that pataphysics will focus on exceptions and not on establishing laws: “Elle étudiera les lois qui régissent les exceptions, et expliquera l’univers supplémentaire à celui-ci; ou moins ambitieusement décrira un univers que l’on peut voir et que peut-être l’on doit voir à la place du traditionnel [...].”⁴⁰ Thus, the imaginary science analyzes principles governing exceptions, not rules, and strives to discover not what the world is, but what it could be in its exceptional iterations. In such a non-traditional universe one can attempt the unthinkable, which some might call absurd, just like Jarry’s Faustroll did: with a non-orthodox use of algebra and geometry he provided a provisional algorithm allowing the calculation of the surface of God.⁴¹ Such an operation is exemplary of what pataphysics aims to achieve: a creative fusion of scientific disciplines and poetics that affects people by pulling them out of their comfort zone associated with the familiar and the known.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁴¹ The proposed equation was solved with the following conclusion: “Dieu est le point tangent de zéro et de l’infini.” Ibid, 65.

While pataphysics was for the first time named and classified as a scientific discipline in *Gestes et opinions*, the origins of this science, in fact, date back to Jarry's adolescence, a fact that was revealed in the first issue of the Collège's publication, *Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (1950). Pataphysical inspiration came from Jarry's teacher at the lycée de Rennes, Félix-Frédéric Hébert:

Génétiqnement, c'est l'enseignement de M. Hébert, professeur de physique, qui se trouve être à l'origine de ce mot. "Le père Ebé" (que Jarry devait transformer en P. Ubu) invoquait constamment "sa science en physique" et dans les invraisemblables aventures que lui attribuait l'imagination des élèves, cette science lui permettait d'agir sur les phénomènes de façon péremptoire et magique, antiphrase probable de tant d'expérimentations ratés.⁴²

It was, then, M. Hébert's grotesque demeanor and larger-than-life approach to physics that inspired and influenced Jarry's entire career as a writer, despite his personal dislike of the teacher. It is the spirit of operating on the verge of absurdity, and blurring its boundary with the serious, borrowed from M. Hébert, that Jarry brought to literary life not only in *Faustroll*, but also in père Ubu, now a quasi-mythical literary figure introduced to readers in *Ubu Roi* (1896), followed by *Ubu Cocu* (1897) and *Ubu Enchaîné* (1899). Being an important influence on Jarry's artistic output, we can see that the science of pataphysics was not only a literary concept relegated to pages of his books, but it also acquired independence as a concept describing a set of energies capable to direct one's way of thinking, a concept that took on a life of its own and was picked up by the institution of the Collège de 'Pataphysique.

⁴² Jean-Hugues Sainmont, "Jarry et la 'Pataphysique,'" *Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 1 (1950): 27.

2.2 COLLÈGE DE ‘PATAPHYSIQUE: A SOCIETY OF LEARNED AND ‘INUTILOUS’ RESEARCH

It was this peculiar and powerful way of thinking and perceiving the world, which Jarry set in motion in his writing, that was adopted by the founders of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. While Jarry, who died in 1907, had nothing to do with the establishment of the institution in 1948, he was an unquestionable inspiration for its members who took him on as their patron. The idea of founding a society inspired by Jarry’s science was born during one of the gatherings at Adrienne Monnier’s library, La Maison des Amis des Livres, between Maurice Saillet, a writer, publisher and Monnier’s assistant, and Irénée-Louis Sandomir (Emmanuel Peillet), a philosophy teacher.⁴³ Their interest in pursuing pataphysics as a mode of inquiry in everyday life was the result of multiple factors coming together in space and time. The intellectual milieu provided by Monnier was conducive to discussions about the participants’ current work in progress. At the time Saillet was collaborating with Éditions Mercure de France and the publishing house possessed Jarry’s unpublished manuscripts. Having shown his interest, Saillet was put in charge of editing the publication. His encounter with Peillet, a like-minded individual who shared his fascination with Jarry’s work, gave birth to the idea of pursuing their passion collectively.

The fortuitous encounter of minds was, however, only one of numerous seeds from which the idea of the Collège’s foundation germinated. Other factors that sparked the interest in pataphysics at the time were several tumultuous events including the two World Wars, as well as

⁴³ Irénée-Louis Sandomir was one of Peillet’s many pseudonyms that he used throughout his life. He functioned as Dr. Sandomir in the context of the founding of the Collège and when he acted as its Vice-Curator. Other pseudonyms he used in order to identify as other members of the Collège include: Jean-Hugues Sainmont, Mélanie Le Plumet, Latis and Octav Votka. Even though Peillet denied his multiple identities in his testament. From this point on I will be referring to Peillet by his pseudonyms preferred by him in given contexts.

other social and political developments over the forty years separating Jarry's death and the creation of the institution. Andrew Hugill, a member of the Collège and one of the very few researchers who gave the group considerable attention in their works, notices that in the postwar period, France saw a proliferation of movements focusing on a spiritual rediscovery of art, literature, and philosophy.⁴⁴ Hugill defines these attempts as desperate and serious, as people felt a strong need to find a way to respond to the atrocities of the Second World War. The trend of artists gathering together and uniting around a common aesthetic, intellectual or even political goal was not new at the time; yet, the already existing groups did not seem to provide a creative framework sufficient for the meaningful fulfillment of the self in that particular historical moment. As Hugill further explains, "[t]he reinvention of a Dada spirit of nihilism, which had so well captured the sense of futility of the First World War, seemed dangerously trivial at this time. Likewise, the seances and dream inspired doodlings of surrealism ran the risk of self-indulgence or irrelevancy."⁴⁵ The oneiric and abstract matter of interest of the Dadaists and the surrealists was too distant and detached from everyday life, and thus not relatable for the many artists who did not want to forego their immediate reality in their pursuit of meaningful creation. During the interwar period, some artists were also tired of the dictatorial tendencies of the surrealist movement's leader, André Breton whom Hugill compares to Jarry's Ubu. Their exasperation with the status quo led them to assemble a pamphlet entitled *Un Cadavre* (1930), declaring Breton dead. A number of contributors to the pamphlet, including Raymond Queneau, Jacques Prévert and Michel Leiris, were later drawn to the Collège de 'Pataphysique.

⁴⁴ Andrew Hugill, *Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 115.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 115.

After Jarry's death, quite a few artistic communities revealed their interest in pataphysics or declared themselves to be inspired by Faustroll's science, yet, the Collège was the only one that embraced it as its central focus. Christian Bök, a contemporary experimental Canadian poet, distinguishes two opposite artistic tendencies into which pataphysics was assimilated: irrationalism and surrationalism. The irrational current, Bök explains, embraces the Symbolists, the Dadaists, and the Surrealists, groups that advocate the separation of poetry from science.⁴⁶ The surrational groups such as the Futurists, the Oulipians, and the Jarryites, in turn, support the application of scientific methods to poetry.⁴⁷ As far as the current of irrationalism is concerned, *Ubu Roi* was read as a pre-Dada work,⁴⁸ and André Breton declared his admiration for Jarry in *The First Surrealist Manifesto*, proclaiming him "surréaliste dans l'absinthe."⁴⁹ What is more, the movements labeled as surrational, the Futurists and the Jarryites, certainly quote Jarry as their inspirational figure or even as a forerunner, but their endeavors are not described as the practice of pataphysics. Finally, when it comes to the Oulipo, the group on which I will focus in my second chapter, its connection to pataphysics is indeed strong, since it was initially established as a subcommittee of the Collège, and many of its original members were self-declared pataphysicians. Bök's breakdown elucidates the fact that Jarry's persona, pataphysics and the Collège are three different entities and should not be considered synonymous with one another.

However, it is surprising that Bök left out the Collège itself from the list of movements and groups influenced by Jarry's science. This may be due to the fact that pataphysics, in its

⁴⁶ Christian Bök, *Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁸ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams, 1988), 76.

⁴⁹ André Breton, *Les Manifestes de surréalisme* (Paris: Le Sagittaire, 1955), 25.

definition and scope of interest, surpasses the familiar categories for understanding the aesthetic, artistic and scientific systems within which meaning is created through models of binary oppositions. I contend that in existing literature the Collège of 'Pataphysique is often glossed over because it is misunderstood. When Daniel Levin Becker, an American poet and one of the youngest Oulipians, studies the origins of the Oulipo, which are inevitably rooted in the Collège, he surprisingly characterizes the latter as eccentric and absurd, and projects his own lack of understanding of the group as its intentional strategy. He describes the group as "[...] an intentionally inscrutable arts syndicate that counted some of Europe's most illustrious weirdos [...]." ⁵⁰ Bök commits a similar oversimplification, when instead of including the Collège on the list of artistic movements inspired by pataphysics, he only briefly mentions it as "[...] an absurd school, founded in 1948 in order to preserve the memory of Jarry by publishing *Cahiers* and *Dossiers* about his avant-garde pseudoscience." ⁵¹ The overrating of the devotion of the Collège to the preservation of Jarry's memory is a common mistake, repeated, for example, in *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* (1980) in the entry on Raymond Queneau, where the Collège is succinctly presented as "an organization devoted to continuing the stupefyingly complicated, serious humor of Alfred Jarry." ⁵² All these accounts are misleading because absurdity and satire are not the main objectives of the Collège, and preserving the memory of the father of pataphysics is only a minor preoccupation. In an annex to the Oulipo's meeting minutes from June 1965, Latis (Peillet) addressed this misunderstanding that was manifest already within

⁵⁰ Daniel Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 127.

⁵¹ Bök, 'Pataphysics', 65.

⁵² Mary Ann Caws, "Queneau, Raymond, 1903-76," *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1980).

the first twenty years of the existence of the Collège. Latis spoke of the Collège's mission as follows:

C'est de promouvoir une forme de pensée (qu'il ne faudrait pas prendre pour un "système", une Woltanschauung, un isme parmi les autres) plus originale que vous ne le croyez peut-être; exemple du cahier Rabelais. Ne parlons pas de tapirs lettrés qui prennent la 'Pataphysique pour un canular, ou des badauds qui la trouvent farce, - encore moins des inqualifiables qui parlent d'humour.⁵³

We can see that the Collège's founder demonstrated his awareness of the common misreading of his group's activities, and the group was ready to address it occasionally in its own circulars or publications. However, the Collège had no desire to combat actively such misinterpretations as it was not preoccupied with the proactive promotion of the group's activities or the recruitment of new members. When in 1996 a literary critic of *Cahier Livres de Libération*, Jean Didier Wagner, contacted François Caradec, a member of the Collège since 1950, in order to ask substantial questions about the group and thus demonstrating his will to learn about it, Caradec responded: "Voilà bien une excellente initiative! [...] je voue mes veilles à la Science depuis une cinquantaine de berges sans avoir jamais vu la grande presse s'en préoccuper sérieusement. Je vous en félicite."⁵⁴ Instead of fighting for attention, the group focused on the existing community and has accepted new members who were led to the Collège by their own curiosity and persistence. This, too, explains the Collège's near absence from French literary history.

⁵³ Latis, "Annexe 1 dactylographiée de Latis intitulé 'Évolution du Collège'" (Circulaire, Paris, 1965), DM-1 (57), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

⁵⁴ François Caradec, "Lettre à Jean Didier Wagner" 1996, Ms Caradec-2, Fonds Caradec, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

I would argue that scholars and writers, who attempted to narrow down the definition of the Collège's scope, fall into a trap of infantilizing the group or formulating a dismissive generalization about it at best. The extreme example of the infantilization of the Collège can be found in Julian Pefanis's *Heterology and the Postmodern* (1991), where the author speaks of the group using a tone of offensive condescension. Not only does Pefanis confuse the general concept of pataphysics with the Collège when he says: "As a minor and absurd movement of infinitesimal brevity, pataphysics (to drop the absurd apostrophe) represents an obverse and parodic mirror to the philosophically and scientifically serious", he also peppers his presentation of the institution with his own ironic commentaries (after enumerating a few notable members of the Collège, Pefanis adds: "quite a lineup").⁵⁵ Finally, the author tops off his condescending attitude with his persistent misspelling of the Collège's founder's name (Docteur Sandormir). The confusion, condescension and reluctance towards exploring and understanding the inner mechanisms of the Collège may be due to its complex structure and collective diversity. The group gathers artists and intellectuals from various fields without clear subdivisions into groups of writers, filmmakers, painters and so on. Instead, all of them work together. In fact, it is the prolific diversity of the group's members, where for example Raymond Queneau is appreciated not only as a writer but also as a mathematician, and René Clair's talents are not limited to filmmaking but extend into writing literature, that constitutes the richness of the group's activities but also causes confusion as to what exactly is the scope of artists identifying as pataphysicians. Another point that adds to the difficulty of talking about the Collège as a historically significant organization is the discrepancy between the form and the content in the

⁵⁵ Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 121n4.

discourse used by pataphysicians themselves in their definitions of the group. In other words, while they are dead serious about their mission, they describe it in deliberately convoluted and humorous ways.

Nevertheless, the Collège deserves to be acknowledged and recognized in the French literary and art history. The organization, I posit, played a vital role in the restoration of French intellectual and artistic life after 1945. If the existing secondary literature on the subject of the Collège is often misguided and inaccurate, one can attempt a proper definition of the group by going back to its original roots and sources. This is why I will analyze the documents drafted at the founding and in the first years of the existence of the Collège, such as the group's *Statuts*, the "Harangue inaugurale," allegedly given by Dr. Sandomir (Peillet) during the inauguration festivities, and the first issue of the *Cahiers de Collège de 'Pataphysique* that was prepared and published without the intention to turn it into a series, which makes it even more representative of what the group strove to achieve at the time.

The "Canons" opening the *Statuts* of the group succinctly identify pataphysics as science, "La 'Pataphysique est la science (Alfred Jarry)," and stipulate that pataphysics is so ubiquitous that everyone participates in its practice.⁵⁶ The only difference between the Collège members and the rest of the world is that the former commit to do it consciously and deliberately: "Le genre humain n'étant composé que de pataphysiciens, le Collège de 'Pataphysique sélige [*sic*] ceux qui ne s'ignorent pas de ceux qui s'ignorent."⁵⁷ The last line of the canons, however mysterious, is especially significant for the understanding of its mission, as it emphasizes the

⁵⁶ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013), titre I, article 2, paragraphe 1. The publication that I reference when I quote the *Statuts* is a booklet that I received after my first year of membership with the Collège.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, titre I, article 3, paragraphe 1.

expansion of limits that tend to define any scientific discipline: “Le Collège de ‘Pataphysique promeut la Pataphysique en ce monde et dans tous les autres.”⁵⁸ This particular stipulation makes it clear that what we consider today as laws, rules, and phenomena that have been observed, studied, and defined as regularities, in the eyes of a pataphysicians are nothing more than isolated attempts at explanations. Considered from the perspective of pataphysics, scientific theories are not universal. As Ruy Launoir, a member of the Collège since 1957 who is interested in documenting its history, explains: “[...] [la pataphysique] traite chacune d’elles [théories] non pas comme une généralité, mais comme une tentative, parfois héroïque et parfois pathétique, pour apposer l’étiquette ‘vrai’ sur l’une de ces interprétations.”⁵⁹ Thus, pataphysics is not a way of thinking and perception that considers itself superior to other scientific disciplines, but equally valid as a method of inquiry, which is why members of the Collège are open to freely include and play with various scientific concepts. Such an approach to methods and objects of investigation is addressed in more detail in Dr. Sandomir’s testament and described as the principle of equivalence.⁶⁰ According to this principle, all things and phenomena can be considered equally important, impactful and worth of pataphysicians’ attention. Further, Launoir cited the definition of the group adopted and readily used by the members of the Collège, who describe it as “une Société de Recherches Savantes et Inutiles.”⁶¹ The latter attribute, translated into English as “inutilous” rather than useless, conveys not that the group’s research has no value, but rather that pataphysicians who pursue it are not seeking to benefit from it or to change the world with their findings.

⁵⁸ Ibid, titre I, article 3, paragraphe 2.

⁵⁹ Ruy Launoir, *Clefs pour la ‘pataphysique* (Paris: Seghers, 1969), 7.

⁶⁰ Sandomir, “Testament.” 3.

⁶¹ Launoir, *Clefs*, 181.

Considering how the Collège's members insist on describing their research as *savante*, and their journal as scientific, it is curious how much the group has been dependent on the written word, how much work its members have been investing in the analysis of literature, and, finally, that almost all pataphysical experimentation has been done through creative writing, at least during the initial years of its existence. The Collège's predilection towards literature manifested itself in the first cycle of the group's journal, *Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique*. There are quite a few reasons that determined this course of development for the Collège. First of all, it was founded in the literary milieu of Monnier's bookstore whose most frequent guests were writers; therefore, it was instinctive for the founders to adopt literature as their first medium for investigation. Secondly, at the time, the Collège's most effective medium of distribution to reach other potentially interested intellectuals was its printed journal, unavoidably tied to written language. In the previously mentioned circular annexed to the Oulipo's meeting minutes on June 1965, Latis (Peillet) noticed that the Collège's attachment to literature was constricting, and he listed two tasks awaiting the group: "[...] redresser les erreurs de la méthode. Les *Dossiers* ont élargi le champ d'études du Collège: mais souvent inconsidérément. Par exemple en versant dans la littérature (qui ne nous concerne pas en tant que telle), [...] renouveler la Revue, la rendre plus maniable, mieux organisée, & plus strictement limitée à la 'Pataphysique.'"⁶² Here, Latis admitted and documented the slight progress that the Collège had made from the *Cahiers* to the *Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (*Dossier* being the second cycle of the group's journal), but he still called for more freedom from literature and more commitment to science. While the Collège has gradually distanced itself from a strictly literary milieu, it owes its *raison d'être* to literature, considering that pataphysics was initially a literary creation, which is why in this

⁶² Latis, "Annexe 1."

chapter I focus on literary narratives working through various elements of Jarry's imaginary science.

2.3 AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF PATAPHYSICS

Compared to other sciences, such as biology, chemistry, or physics, the originality of pataphysics is located in its relation to temporality and causality. Traditional scientific disciplines are concentrated around phenomena that can be observed and experienced empirically and classified based on their regularity and predictability, a precondition for formulating natural laws. Pataphysics, in turn, extends beyond the formulation of laws that apply within a system based on simple linearity and cause-effect reactions. Thus, pataphysics, defined by its creator as an “imaginary” discipline, shares a multitude of convergent points with what more recently was defined as the study of affect, which has been since established as a significant field of enquiry across disciplines from the sciences to the humanities. Massumi goes as far as announcing a shift of paradigm from a linear way of perceiving, understanding and explaining existing phenomena, to a potential one that valorizes the notion of hybridity and acknowledges that what occurs and can be empirically perceived is only the tip of an iceberg of energies and powerful forces that circulate between bodies and influence their interactions. We no longer talk of chains of reactions but of becoming, not a sequence of events but expression, keywords that will help me discuss in this chapter the ways in which pataphysical writers anticipate what has become known as “the affective turn” in the contemporary cultural theory.

“The affective turn” has been tackled directly by scholars such as Ruth Leys, Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley who adopted this very expression in the titles of their works in

which they emphasize the inevitable applicability of affect theories across a broad spectrum of disciplines. Leys proclaims that the turn to affect “[...] has been occurring in a broad range of fields, including history, political theory, human geography, urban and environmental studies, architecture, literary studies, art history and criticism, media theory, and cultural studies,” and Clough identifies the influence of the affective approach in the political, the economic and the cultural, three dimensions of what Massumi construes as “the social:” “The affective turn invites a transdisciplinary approach to theory and method that necessarily invites experimentation in capturing the changing cofunctioning of the political, the economic, and the cultural, rendering it affectively as change in the deployment of affective capacity.”⁶³ The inter- or even transdisciplinarity of “the affective turn” has an important analogue in the Collège and its openness to engage members representing a variety of intellectual and scientific disciplines. If the turn to affect opens up such fields and disciplines to the consideration of not only facts, but also invisible and intangible potentialities, in pataphysics, these potentialities become relegated to what the Collège defines as all the other, parallel worlds, which it investigates along with our familiar reality governed by scientific rules rooted in linearity and logic.

Moreover, another common denominator between the Collège’s activities and later affect theories is the claim that both pataphysics and affect are autonomous. In the “Harangue inaugurale,” Dr. Sandomir (Peillet) proclaims that, “la ‘Pataphysique précède l’Être.”⁶⁴ If pataphysics as a discipline precedes being, it is independent of all its manifestations. Granted, it can adopt being, understood as an expression or an actualization of energies as events that unfold

⁶³ Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (March 2011): 434; Clough, “The Affective Turn,” 3.

⁶⁴ Irénée-Louis Sandomir, “Harangue inaugurale,” in *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013).

in a linear way, as an object of its investigation. But these events do not dictate the rules or the laws by which the science of pataphysics approaches them. Being is only one of many modes of existence in which pataphysics is interested: “Dans l’infini miroitement de la lumière pataphysique, l’être n’est qu’un rayon, et pas le plus brillant, parmi tous ceux qui sortent de ce soleil inépuisable.”⁶⁵ If pataphysics precedes being and its causal and hierarchical nature, it also precedes the ideologies that stem from the knowledge rooted in such causality and hierarchy of power structures. In her critical take on the recent theoretical turn to affect, Ruth Leys, a historian interested in psychology and neuroscience, points out that most affect theorists univocally “[...] suggest that the affects must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology – that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs – because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning.”⁶⁶ Thus, in sync with the pataphysical approach, affects exist and circulate in a very particular space where they assume a state of being that precedes their actualization that, in turn, entail ideologies understood as artificial patterns of thought meant to streamline one’s comprehension of one’s situation within the world and its social structures. Indeed, I would argue that pataphysics, as the Collège defines it, can be understood as a discipline designed for the study of affects through literature and later on other means of artistic expression.

In addition to the documents and publications from the beginnings of the Collège, the different ways in which its members experiment with generating and working through affective forces in their literary works also provide us with knowledge about the nature of the group. In the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Leys, “The Turn to Affect,” 437.

following sections, I focus on two key works, “Mémoires d’un innocent” by René Clair (1976) and *L’Écume des jours* by Boris Vian (1947), because I find them particularly revealing in terms of the writers’ perception of the world that can represent the broader point of view of the Collège. Finally, I will turn to Raymond Queneau’s first novel, *Le Chiendent* (1932), which, even though written before the Collège was founded, provides us with a useful model for understanding Queneau’s evolution as a writer on his way to embracing pataphysics.

I chose these three figures because they constitute a cross section of the Collège’s members. In my approach, I decided to forego the chronological order in which my selected works were written and published, as they do not all belong to the time period after the foundation of the Collège, and because the group itself defies restrictions of temporality. One does not become a pataphysician at a certain point in time; it is only the realization of being one that can be marked temporally. All my selected writers belong to the largest of the Collège’s subgroups, namely to the body of *Satrapes*. *Satrapes* are members who actively cultivate the science of pataphysics according to their own judgment and preferences. Launoir speaks of the breadth of this subgroup’s scope as follows: “Quatre continents, plusieurs beaux-arts, trois académies, le clergé et tous les horizons politiques, littéraires et géographiques sont ainsi représentés au sein du Corps des Satrapes: symptôme parmi beaucoup d’autres de l’illuminations des préoccupations de la ‘Pataphysique.’”⁶⁷ Queneau, Vian and Clair were not only writers; they are known for their works in the domains of film, music and mathematics. Moreover, Queneau was a member of the Académie Goncourt, and Clair the Académie française, groups which, with their objectives of promoting a certain type of literature, and the preservation of the French linguistic and the literary traditions in their status quo, can be placed on the opposite end of the

⁶⁷ Launoir, *Clefs*, 102.

spectrum of creative interest in relation to the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. Under the auspices of the Collège, the Satraps have complete freedom in their pursuit of pataphysics, as stated in the statutes: “[...] Ce Synode vénérable n’est soumis à aucune règle et ne s’en donne aucune. Il ne se réunit qu’à son escient et nul n’y est tenu à une présence indispensable, ni à aucun enseignement ou activité. Tous et chacun y cultivent la ‘Pataphysique uniquement pour elle-même et pour soi.”⁶⁸ Such a formulation of the Satraps’ mission, where the only rule is that there are no definite rules, allows their status within the Collège, and that of the Collège itself, to remain pataphysical: anchored in the realm of potentialities with infinite possibilities of expression before they cross over to actualization in the realm of being. Each of the writers, whose works I chose to analyze in this chapter, approaches the issue of coming to discover and understand the space of the potential of affects in their own way resulting from their individual experiences and sensibilities.

2.4 RENÉ CLAIR AND “MÉMOIRES D’UN INNOCENT:” THE COLLÈGE AS A GAME SPACE

Seeing the Collège as a collective is crucial to understanding its work. It becomes evident if we take a look at the Collège’s Statutes, which explain that the position of the Collège’s leader, referred to as the *Vice-Curateur*, is elected and not inherited or self-appointed, and their role in no way resembles that of a dictator, like in the infamous case of Breton and the Surrealists. Moreover, the Statutes lay out the intricate hierarchy, not of individuals, but of the Collège’s

⁶⁸ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, *Statuts*, titre II, article 6, paragraphe 1.

organs and bodies (the terms used in the original French version are *corps* and *chaires*) on which depends the healthy functioning of the group.⁶⁹ The use of these specific terms in reference to subdivisions and sub-commissions of the group reveals its organic nature of a living structure that needs all its vital parts to communicate and work together to ensure that it operates smoothly. As a result, the Collège resembles a team that plays a collaborative game by the rules it defined for itself in order to achieve goals that can only be realized collectively. A member of this organic collective since 1955 who has become famous as an individual is René Clair. Even though he is best known for his films, especially those made before the Second World War, he also tried his hand at literary fiction, and it is one of his short stories entitled “Mémoires d’un innocent,” included in the collection *Jeux du hasard* (1976) that pushes the boundaries of the actual and explores the realm of potentialities. It also provides us with a model that presents an active engagement with affects as a game, which is particularly useful if we want to approach the Collège as a group of people playing on the same team and working towards one goal.

Affects may be hard to trace in the day-to-day course of events where people resort to reason in order to explain current phenomena, but we can also create artificial spaces that are particularly prolific when it comes to generating affects and pushing for their expression: the spaces of games. Logically, if a move in a game is supposed to trigger a specific response according to a given rule, the number and types of outcomes should be limited and predictable. Yet, the specificity of games, especially ones that invite and embrace the influence of chance, is that the course of their development can be unexpected and surprising, both for the participants

⁶⁹ Examples of these include *un Corps des Provéditeurs* and *un Corps des Satrapes*, as well as *les Chaires fondamentales du Collège de ‘Pataphysique*, a list of twenty-seven bodies uniting *Régents* around such categories as ‘*Pataphysique Générale & Dialectique des Sciences Inutiles*; ‘*Pataphysique Appliquée, Blablaba & Matéologie*; *Crocodilologie*.

and the spectators. Clair's protagonist, the titular "innocent," comes to the realization that reason is insufficient in approaching certain dilemmas arising in his life when he finds himself in Monte Carlo, in front of a casino, with money that does not belong to him in his pocket. At that moment the only alternative to reason is what he sees as its opposite, chance: "Et, cette fois-là aussi, la seule décision raisonnable semblait être de me fier au hasard plutôt qu'à ma raison."⁷⁰ His immersion in the space of the game of roulette at the casino is life-changing and even the loss of an exorbitant amount of money belonging to his boss does not bother him anymore: he consciously decides to change the rules that, from then on, would shape the development of his subjective self, which also leads to the shift in his perception of priorities.

The protagonist's decision leads to a revelation concerning the arbitrariness of the norms of conduct and the intentionality of his choices. The moment of his *prise de conscience* is described in the following passage:

Chaque pas que nous faisons nous achemine vers notre destinée. Si la ligne de ma réussite traverse la rue Fontaine, n'est-il pas déplorable que rien ne signale l'erreur que je commettrais en me fourvoyant dans la rue Pigalle? Les chiens possèdent le flair et la sensibilité du poil qui leur permet de sentir la présence du gibier, l'approche de l'orage. Mais leurs maîtres ne disposent que de la raison, cette superbe raison qui ne donne aucun avertissement à Napoléon quand il prend la route de Waterloo, à mon père quand il se prépare à une paisible partie de pêche! Pour moi, je ne veux plus me fier à cette aveugle. La pièce de monnaie

⁷⁰ René Clair, "Mémoires d'un innocent," in *Jeux du hasard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 114.

qu'on lance en l'air en sait tout autant sur l'avenir que les plus profonds penseurs, les calculateurs les plus habiles. Je ferai de ma vie un jeu de hasard!⁷¹

Thus, Clair's protagonist refuses to perceive his own life as a linear sequence of events simply occurring chronologically in time. He pinpoints the flaws of such a model: if we were able to reasonably predict what will happen based on calculations and estimation of causes and effects, all possible outcomes in our lives would be accounted for, and there would be no room for the new. According to Massumi, the element of newness, or change, is only possible if we look at realization of potentiality as expression or becoming, the keywords I had mentioned earlier: "The playing out of those potentials requires an *unfolding* in three-dimensional space and linear time – extension as actualization; actualization as *expression*. [...] *The limits of the field of emergence are in its actual expression.*"⁷² Clair's protagonist, indeed, decides to invite the unpredictability into his life in order to live it as an expression of the self. In order to illustrate what the shift in his attitude means, he compares humans, like Napoleon and his father, and their idolization of the reason leading them to failures, to animals and their instincts. Dogs, for example, are able to *sense* the presence of game or the approaching storm because they are receptive to the circulating energies accompanying the change. Thus, by turning his life into a game, understood as a setup with artificially defined rules, especially ones that include the element of chance as a constant, Clair's protagonist opens it up to the drive towards newness.

There are several qualities characterizing spaces specifically designed for play activities that makes them particularly productive when it comes to their drive towards change. When Massumi attempts to define spaces that are truly generative of newness, he voices the need for

⁷¹ Ibid, 122.

⁷² Massumi, "The Autonomy," 95-96, emphasis original.

them to be located outside of the systems of binary oppositions. These systems favor the linearity of cause-effect sequences based on reason while ignoring all the other possible relationships that can occur in the circulation of affects, which Massumi refers to as intensity: “Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future.”⁷³ Thus, spaces that invite and embrace processes that represent alternatives to linearity, such as resonance and feedback, emerge apart from the reality of binary oppositions. And it is indeed in these spaces, free from the limitations of linear logic, that games can flourish. In his crucial work regarding the historical and social role of games and play, Johan Huizinga, a historian and cultural theorist, defines play space as follows: “Play is not ‘ordinary’ or ‘real’ life. It is rather a stepping out of ‘real’ into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.”⁷⁴ The notion of the “real” in Huizinga needs to be narrowed down, since terms such as “real,” “reality,” and “realism” can be charged with different, often diverging meanings. I understand the “real,” in the context of Huizinga’s theorization of play, as actuality or a time-space that we experience and process from the perspective of laws that are established as scientific facts. If we forego these laws and step outside of this familiar and comfortable space, we can devise our own, alternative rules, also ones that defy the linearity of time and cause-effect relationships in space. As a result, one of the vital qualities of play spaces is their hermetic and autonomous nature, which turns them into incubators for the propagation of potentialities.

Furthermore, such play spaces do not only generate potentialities but also serve as interstitial zones in which affects cross over and become actualities. Such mechanisms, Massumi

⁷³ Ibid, 86.

⁷⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: The Beacon Press, 2009), 8.

explains, can be activated by the presence and participation of bodies, which, themselves, undergo the process of becoming. The bodies are the agents receiving and generating affects that circulate between them. This process of becoming of bodies as a result of navigating affective spaces is illustrated by Clair's protagonist who confirms his awareness that his seemingly homogenous body is a product of fragmented external influences: "Ce 'moi' qui me semble si homogène, si dense et si lourd à porter, aurait-il été divisé en deux parties et, mêlé à des éléments étrangers, se serait-il promené dans le monde au sein de deux corps différents?"⁷⁵ In this passage, he acknowledges that his sense of being a whole is nothing more than his own impression, as his "I" is shaped by events that happened or things that he physically encountered, but also by the potentialities that remained absent and never actualized. When he consciously identifies his life as a game, he opens himself up and becomes more receptive to affects, understood as shaping forces and energies that are not yet qualified. Thus, Clair's protagonist creates a game space, which he activates by his involvement and participation, as well as by his encounters and interactions with other people who enter it and bring in their own energies that add to the unpredictability of the outcomes.

Games of chance constitute a type of game particularly suited for unpredictable expressions of potentialities in the form of unexpected moves and swerves in the decision-making logic, as the element of random and uncontrollable interventions is systematically fed into the game. Clair's protagonist makes sure to impose the format of such a game on his life by devising a system of intricate rules that would determine his subsequent moves. What decides the course of his day is an alternative reading of the daily newspaper:

⁷⁵ Clair, "Mémoires," 106.

Au réveil, je me faisais apporter les journaux et sans prendre la peine de lire les nouvelles (les journaux ne parlent que de ce qui s'est passé alors que je ne m'intéressais qu'à ce qui va se produire), je regardais au bas d'une colonne choisie sans préméditation, la dernière lettre de la ligne. Si cette lettre était une consonne, la journée s'annonçait favorablement. Si c'était une voyelle, je savais qu'il me faudrait agir avec circonspection.⁷⁶

The first indicator that his new rules are outside of the realm of ordinary logic is his original way of approaching printed text, a way that literally defies linearity; instead of following the text from left to right in order to decode linear sequences of letters, words and sentences, Clair's protagonist chooses the vertical direction, which presents him with last letters of words that happen to be last in their lines for no reason other than the arbitrariness of the page layout. Moreover, he puts into question the temporal linearity by using an object that normally serves as a link with the past, as newspapers report events that had already happened, in order to determine the future. In doing this, he endows an everyday object with a potential that is impossible to access through its standard use. Thus, by introducing the format of a game of chance, Clair provides us with a model for approaching everyday objects and phenomena in ways that actively oppose reasonable motivations. Yet, these ways are counter-intuitively productive in terms of our openness to circulating affects, the invisible energies that are often classified as random because they resist fitting into the standards of reason and logic.

Such a heightened level of sensitivity to affects is not only a common denominator for the protagonists of novels whose authors identify as pataphysicians, which I will also demonstrate in the case of Queneau's character Étienne Marcel, but also a broader goal of all the

⁷⁶ Ibid, 124.

members of the Collège. The Statutes and the Manifestos of the group can be read as a rulebook that assists the members in their pursuit of said goal, thus framing the Collège's activity as a game of sorts. Considering that the pataphysicians' objective is to carry out their exploratory research without falling back onto the established scientific theories based on reason, the documents contain formulations, which, taken at their face value and viewed from the perspective of binary logic, seem contradictory and irrational. For example, in terms of the scope of responsibilities of the Collège's members, article 11 of the Statutes defines it as follows: "Le Collège de 'Pataphysique n'engage à rien, ni ses Optimates, ni ses Membres: il *dégage* au contraire dans tous les sens du mot *dégager* et du mot *sens*."⁷⁷ At the same time, the Second Manifesto of the Collège (1958) states that "Indeed, the initial GOAL was [...] to FOUND A SOCIETY COMMITTED TO LEARNED AND INUTILIOUS RESEARCH."⁷⁸ How do we reconcile the explicit stipulation about the lack of engagement of the members with the commitment to research (however peculiar)? Because pataphysics as a science does not adopt scientific laws as universal truths, the Collège allows its members to look at these laws as particular attempts to solve unique problems but does not oblige them to engage with the previously established body of knowledge. The collective character of the group, described in the Manifesto as a society, is crucial, because the members of the Collège, just like regular scientists, can present, share and discuss their works and texts via their internal publications (the pataphysical journal *Viridis Candela* has been regularly published in cycles including the previously mentioned *Cahiers* and *Dossiers*, and circulated among the members to this day) and

⁷⁷ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts*, titre V, article 11, emphasis original.

⁷⁸ Til Bullin, "The Second Manifesto of the College of Pataphysics," in *A True History of the College of 'Pataphysics*, ed. Alastair Brotchie, trans. Paul Edwards (London: Atlas Press, 1955), 77, emphasis original.

at their meetings. The Collège's rejection of the rules of reason as objective truths does not imply that the group's modus operandi is chaos and anarchy. To the contrary, the existence of the Collège proves a possibility of an alternative order and space, which generate spaces for the capture, exploration, and cultivation of affects and their potentialities.

Such an alternative order allowing for the systematic research on various manifestations of affects is made possible thanks to the collective effort and the inner support system of the group. As individuals, the Collège's members all bring in their personalities, knowledge and styles of work. While working as a team, their respective contributions circulate, and become generative of innovative thinking reaching outside of the realm of reason towards the realm of the imaginary. Massumi in his analysis of soccer games argues that such collaboration can double the amount of potentialities invested in one's being:

[The players] relate to each other in their collective becoming, as a distinct ontological level doubling their substantial being. It is this collective becoming that is the condition of a formation like a sport, common to the proto-game, the official game, unofficial versions coexisting with it, and subsequent variants of them all. [...] The phase-shift of the substantial to the potential is the opening through which empirical contingency – the intermixing of already-constituted bodies, things, and signs – expresses itself as coordinated becoming. The *expression* is the effective condition of collective change (open-ended belonging).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 76-77.

Thus, the heterogeneous nature of the Collège's composition guarantees that the group remains a space of encounter where ideas and their accompanying affects from various disciplines meet, merge and clash. It is thanks to its shared effort that the community of pataphysicians continues its collective becoming capable of change and gravitates towards a shift of paradigm from favoring the linear, causal logic, to the recognition of the ubiquitous influence of affects and potentiality.

2.5 BORIS VIAN AND *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS*: THE POST-WAR FLESH OF THE WORLD

The organization of the Collège is an example of an imaginary solution that favors proliferation of affects, worked out through the methodology of constant questioning and challenging of commonly adopted general truths. As I explained in the opening of this chapter, imaginary solutions range from alternative interpretations of existing processes and phenomena, devised by those who find general truths and laws insufficient or unconvincing, to imaginative models of perception of the world and its structures, for those who refuse to comply with traditionally established societal and economic norms governing peoples' lives in the postwar period. These imaginary solutions attempt to overthrow systems based on binary oppositions with an implied superiority/inferiority relationships and hierarchies between people and their material surroundings, and they propose alternative ways of perceiving and interacting with one's environment. *L'Écume des jours* by Boris Vian is a novel that paints a world in which the dichotomy between the animate and the inanimate elements is deflated, and where all bodies, understood as people, animals and things become organs situated in one living circuit. Vian uses

the novel as a space in which he can develop and propose an alternative way to approach the world, at the time shaken by the Second World War, and to view it as a deeply wounded organic whole. Exchanges and interactions between the elements of such a universe are often based on emphatic synchronization and the reverberation of energies that lack repetitive regularities, rather than on linear causality and a simple action/reaction chain, and as such they provide an alternative to understanding of the world based on laws inferred from repetitive occurrences.

Even though the publication of *L'Écume des jours* dates back to 1947 and precedes Vian's joining of the Collège by five years, it does not mean that its pataphysical character is underdeveloped. To the contrary, it shows the consistency of Vian's identity as a pataphysical writer. Personally, Vian traces his inherent curiosity to his childhood and reminisces about his first conscious pataphysical realization. In a radio interview given in 1959 he spoke of it as follows:

Pour vous donner un détail personnel, je suis venu à la Pataphysique vers l'âge de huit ou neuf et en lisant une pièce de Robert de Flers et de Caillavet qui s'appelle *La Belle Aventure*, c'est vraiment le dernier endroit où l'on peut s'attendre à en trouver quand on n'est pas pataphysicien; (...) je crois qu'elle peut initier tout le monde très aisément et très rapidement à la Pataphysique, c'est la suivante: "Je m'applique volontiers à penser aux choses auxquelles je pense que les autres ne penseront pas."⁸⁰

Vian thus confirms that pataphysics is not a phenomenon that started with the foundation of the Collège, but rather a particular and timeless mindset in approaching the world. The fact that bits and pieces of pataphysical thought can be identified in works by turn-of-the-century authors such

⁸⁰ Noël Arnaud, *Les Vies parallèles de Boris Vian* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1998), 342.

as Robert de Flers and Gaston Arman de Caillavet proves that the discipline precedes its institutionalization and that one can be a pataphysician without realizing it. Therefore, the only difference between Vian's work pre- and post-admission to the Collège is the degree of awareness with which he was exploring the potentiality of pataphysics in his works, and that includes *L'Écume des jours*.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the ways in which *L'Écume des jours* moves away from the established scientific and philosophical assumptions towards pataphysics is Vian's dismantling of the anthropocentrism reigning at the time of the Second Industrial Revolution with its capitalist power hierarchy, something that was only reinforced by both World Wars. Colin and Chloé, the two protagonists of *L'Écume*, for example, display a very unusual attitude towards the concept of labor and the necessity to work in order to sustain oneself in a capitalist world, one of disgust and utter unhappiness leading to Colin's demise when forced to join the capitalist machine as a member of its work force. Such an attitude comes off as arrogant, but Vian adopts it in order to provide the point of view of an outsider, of someone who is not yet caught up in the system of socio-economic hierarchies or capitalist structures that are taken for granted. Instead, the author proposes to view the world composed of people, animals and things as an organic whole. The circulation of energies triggered and tied to emotions, feelings and affects, takes place between animate and inanimate elements of a clearly defined ecosystem. This ecosystem is illustrated with the example of the house belonging to Colin and Chloé. Vian provides detailed descriptions of various rooms in the house in order to emphasize their slow but steady metamorphoses throughout the novel. An insistence on the parallelism of changes in inanimate objects and animate beings, without favoring ones as the cause of the others, constitutes an imaginary solution, an alternative to established models of perceiving and

interacting with one's immediate environment, especially in the specific historical and social context of the world affected by the World Wars and their economic and moral aftermath. Indeed, Maurice Nadeau calls Vian “[un] auteur qui incarne au mieux les préoccupations, les besoins, les soucis et les aspirations des jeunes gens qui ont subi les contrecoups de la guerre sans y participer et qui, en 1945, se trouvent orphelins des valeurs qu’on leur avait enseignées, obligés qu’ils sont de les confronter avec une réalité plus au moins sinistre [...]”.⁸¹ As one of the postwar orphans, as described by Nadeau, Vian creates a whole new world that bares the extent of the consequences once its balance is shaken.

In the novel, the changes in the architectural makeup of the house resonate and enter in a dialog with the moods and reactions of their inhabitants, rather than result from them. Since the beginning of the novel strongly resembles an idyllic fairytale whose characters are only concerned with the pursuit of happiness and love, the interiors in which the plot develops are presented as spacious and filled with light. One of them is the kitchen hallway:

Le couloir de la cuisine était clair, vitré des deux côtés, et un soleil brillait de chaque côté, car Colin aimait la lumière. Il y avait des robinets de laiton soigneusement astiqués, un peu partout. Les jeux des soleils sur les robinets produisaient des effets féériques. Les souris de la cuisine aimaient danser au son des chocs des rayons de soleil sur les robinets, et couraient après les petites boules que formaient les rayons en achevant de se pulvériser sur le sol, comme des jets de mercure jaune.⁸²

⁸¹ Maurice Nadeau, *Le Roman français depuis la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 130.

⁸² Boris Vian, *L'Écume des jours* (Paris: Pauvert, 1997), 24.

At first, the kitchen area of the house is depicted as filled with light, and throughout the novel light, and most precisely the degree of its brightness or dimness, becomes an indicator of the intensity of affects. The many windows in the kitchen hallway allow for the unobstructed influx of light, which then is refracted, dispersed and refocused on brass polished surfaces. The transparency of glass and air allows for a free circulation of light, which the narrator describes as *féerique*. Understood figuratively, the visual effect enhanced by the trembling light is aesthetically magical, but also otherworldly. The use of this particular term suggests that another world parallels the one that is visible, and that this other world constitutes a space for the circulation of affects, which always shadows the actions and reactions of people living and interacting in the realm of actuality.

I would like to emphasize, however, that the relationship between the visible and the invisible world, between the realms of the actual and the affective, is not simply linear or causal. To say that the house is luminous and shiny *because* its inhabitants are happy and carefree is an oversimplification. While it is true that at times the radiant ambience of the house takes a secondary role of only enhancing the general disposition of Colin and his friends, there are moments where shifts in the rooms' materiality take place without an evident cause at the time they occur. One such change becomes evident in the following description of the same kitchen hall:

En passant dans le couloir, Nicolas s'arrêta. Les soleils entraient décidément mal. Les carreaux de céramique jaune paraissaient ternis et voilés d'une légère brume et les rayons, au lieu de rebondir en gouttelettes métalliques, s'écrasaient sur le

sol pour s'étaler en flaques minces et paresseuses. Les murs, pommelés de soleil, ne brillaient plus uniformément, comme avant.⁸³

Colin's cook, Nicolas, who spends a lot of time in the kitchen, first senses a change rather than notices its specific physical manifestations, which causes him to stop and look around. We can see that the surfaces that were designed to let the light through and reflect it, became slightly opaque and foggy. Their functionality became disrupted; initially designed to facilitate the free circulation of light, now they seemed to assimilate it just like black holes quell energies coming into contact with them. This change, however, is not a reflection of a shift in the characters' state of mind, as the situation could not be happier at this time when Colin and Chloé were planning their honeymoon following their marriage ceremony. This disruption serves rather as a premonition of events that cannot be otherwise predicted, such as Cholé's imminent illness and the couple's poverty. As a result, the material world forms bonds with its inhabitants, bonds that are not rooted in causality, but rather in relationships such as resonance and feedback, the alternative affective connections proposed by Massumi. The structure of the house and Colin's and Chloé's disposition resonate with one another rather than constitute a causal chain of reactions. Similarly, the changes in the protagonists' situation and in the architecture of the house are situated in a constant feedback loop where causes become indistinguishable from effects.

Such co-dependence and co-existence of the animate and the inanimate elements of what I call the closed ecosystem of Vian's universe, call for a further investigation of the entity that they compose. Their mutual sensitivity and responsiveness suggest that we can discern a kind of connective tissue, which brings them together to make up a whole. The work of the French phenomenological philosopher and Vian's contemporary, Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a

⁸³ Ibid, 157.

concept that helps us understand how to approach the world as an interconnected organism rather than hierarchical space of binary power struggles. Merleau-Ponty uses the term “flesh of the world” in order to fill in a gap in philosophical thinking: “What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment.”⁸⁴ Like in the case of other newly minted terms introduced in scientific or philosophical disciplines, it is easier for the philosopher to define the new notion by stating what it is not. The flesh or mass of the world is therefore explained to be independent of spatial and temporal determinations and the subject/object dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty continues: “We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit – for then it would be the union of contradictories – but we must think of it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being.”⁸⁵ Thus, Merleau-Ponty invites us to change the way in which we are used to thinking about ourselves and about a general makeup of things, as entities composed of binary oppositions, such as body and spirit, and to start thinking of the general unity of the world as flesh, as a mode of existence. Vian’s universe, as it is presented in *L’Écume des jours*, in which human, animal, and inanimate bodies become an interconnected organic and living tissue, can therefore be understood as an illustration of Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh of the world.” Merleau-Ponty’s term shines light on Vian’s pataphysical practice in *L’Écume des jours*: creating through fiction an imaginary solution for how to make sense of the world.

The connective tissue that binds all the elements into one flesh is made up of sensory experiences and the affects that accompany them. All senses constitute possible channels of

⁸⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 147.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

communication between the elements of the flesh, and in his text Merleau-Ponty concentrates on vision and touch in order to explain how this communication is realized. The philosopher insists on the two-directionality of the sensory channels of communication and on the reciprocity of the act; one cannot really see, unless they simultaneously let themselves be seen: “It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it*, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them – he who is one of them.”⁸⁶ This example concerns seeing and being seen but can be extended onto other senses. It assumes that through our bodies, we can only truly experience other elements of our world if we open ourselves up to being experienced in the same way by them. The physical separation from other objects and bodies, that we bridge thanks to our senses, ceases to be an obstacle to be defeated, and starts to function as the connective tissue of the flesh of the world, a tissue that allows us to affect and to be affected. I consider this conception of interrelations between bodies pataphysical because attributing the two-directionality of sensory perception stands at odds with laws of biology and physics. The idea that energies can be exchanged between animate and inanimate bodies through sensory-like channels, that sensory perception does not have to be active and can be construed as passive, expands traditional scientific theories. Such plasticity in approaching the existing scientific disciplines is deeply pataphysical.

If the universe of *L'Écume des jours* is an autonomous organism, composed of things, animals and people, and lives on as an entity, it also dies as such. The energies that accompany misfortune, misery, illness and eventually death, once again connect people with their environment and lead to a slow but systematic degradation of the entire ecosystem. When

⁸⁶ Ibid, 134-35, ephasis original.

Chloé's battle with the cancerous flower in her lung, followed by a surgery to remove the plant, proves ineffective, the hopelessness and the approaching death, doubled by Colin's despair, once again resonates throughout the architecture of their house. I choose to read this ecosystem as literal rather than figurative because the house does not merely reflect the overwhelming negativity surrounding its inhabitants' lives. As a legitimate element of the living organism, it reacts and unleashes defensive mechanisms against the affects that are bringing it down. At that point:

On ne pouvait plus entrer dans la salle à manger. Le plafond rejoignait presque le plancher auquel il était réuni par des projections mi-végétales, mi-minérales, qui se développaient dans l'obscurité humide. La porte du couloir ne s'ouvrait plus. Seul subsistait un étroit passage menant de l'entrée à la chambre de Chloé.⁸⁷

In this transformation, not only is it more and more difficult for the light to enter and illuminate the rooms of the house, but the walls also close in on themselves, leaving less and less of free space in which bodies and affects can circulate. The reduction of space forces the inhabitants to contort their bodies in order to be able to move. Moreover, the shrinking universe strikingly resembles a living creature, with its vegetal and mineral, organic-like shapes that emerge where neat joints and blocks should be found in the house construction.

After Chloé's death and funeral, and Colin's spiritual demise caused by these events as well as his need to work, the ecosystem in which they struggled to survive tumbles down also:

La souris grise à moustaches noires fit un dernier effort et réussit à passer. Derrière elle, d'un coup, le plafond rejoignit le plancher et de longs vermicules de matière inerte jaillirent en se tordant lentement par les interstices de la suture. Elle

⁸⁷ Vian, *L'Écume*, 316.

déboula en toute hâte à travers le couloir obscur de l'entrée dont les murs se rapprochaient l'un de l'autre en flageolant, et parvint à filer sous la porte.⁸⁸

In this closing moment, the final modifications to the architecture of the house accelerate, as we can see the ceiling descend and seal the hallway as the pet mouse escapes the self-annihilation of the building. Where the ceiling reaches the floor, we can see, again, organic growths, resembling worm-like matter, sprout. Thus, at the moment of its demise, the house becomes an agonizing organic body, encompassing its material elements, but also devastating events that took place in it, and the energies that affected the lives of the inhabitants.

The passages I chose to analyze in this section constitute only one example of Vian's exploration of the ways in which affects and energies circulate and connect animate and inanimate elements of the world in which we live. At times, he puts his scrupulously constructed universe to use in order to express his critique of capitalism that led to both World Wars and to demonstrate that the effects of said wars are irreversible. In the novel, the destructive force of capitalism is hinted at in passages where Colin and Chloé cross a desolate field of copper mines where workers resemble monsters. Another example of Vian's criticism is the episode where Colin is forced to take up a job in which he miserably fails, as he is unable to keep up with the demand for warfare machinery and to produce the expected number of high quality cannons. In the cannon factory, just like the rest of the novel's world, the production process is organically connected with the people who participate in it. The machines are sewn from a seed and require human warmth in order to fully sprout, leaving men who provide the energy exhausted and drained. Even though there is no explicit mention of the war in the book, Vian demonstrates that the physical and psychological wounds left by violence and misery, and the economic

⁸⁸ Ibid, 332.

consequences are far more profound than people like to admit, and they cannot be quantified by the number of taken lives or the amount of destroyed property. Vian illustrates them as Colin's slow demise caused by the amount of heat and energy drawn from his body in the process of production of weapons. If the universe touched by war and capitalist economy is a living organism, its balance becomes permanently shaken because all events have an affective layer to them.

When placed in the broader context of pataphysics, Vian's vision of the universe of *L'Écume des jours* should not be considered superior to any other model of approaching reality. In the *avant-propos* of the novel, Vian admits the playful character of his approach: "[...] quelques pages de démonstration qui suivent tirent toute leur force du fait que l'histoire est entièrement vraie, puisque je l'ai imaginée d'un bout à l'autre."⁸⁹ Thus the author presents us with a pataphysical truth, according to which imaginary solutions are no less legitimate than the real life systems governing people's lives. By highlighting the multitude of possible ways to process and position oneself *vis-à-vis* contemporary developments, Vian and other Collège adherents promote the potential of mind rather than its devotion to actuality.

2.6 RAYMOND QUENEAU AND *LE CHIENDENT*: BECOMING

Through the negotiation of his own stance *vis-à-vis* potential affectivity of chance encounters and random events on one's body and subjectivity, Raymond Queneau launched his own quest in the field of pataphysics. Just like Vian struggled to make sense of his world with its own set of

⁸⁹ Ibid, 19-20.

problems conditioned by wars and the economic climate, Queneau was fighting his own demons. In his case, these demons sprang from the issues of his artistic affiliations and the contemporary landscape of literary movements heavily influenced by the turmoil caused by André Breton and the conflicts within his Surrealist group. For Queneau, the time period between his separation from the Surrealist movement in 1929, and his engagement in the publication of the first issue of the Collège's *Cahiers* in 1950, was one of negotiation of his own position regarding the questions of chance and arbitrary choices shaping literary works and especially novels, as well as of his own awareness of who he was as a writer. It was in the spirit of resignation and aversion to the surrealist technique of automatic writing, in which the writer relinquishes control over decisive impulses directing the creative process, but also to the general lack of rigorous rules for the novelistic genre, that Queneau started writing his first novel, *Le Chiendent*, in 1932.

Queneau's critics have unanimously emphasized his war-on-chance attitude. Speaking of the writer's first novel, Claude Simonnet, a Queneau scholar who provided us with an in-depth study on *Le Chiendent* in *Queneau déchiffré*, states that:

Rien n'est laissé au hasard, pages, chapitres, personnages sont strictement mesurés, le développement romanesque s'effectue avec une précision calculée et les correspondances entre thèmes, situations et personnages, qui se répondent subtilement, forment comme autant de rimes à l'intérieur du récit.⁹⁰

Queneau himself confirms his will to curb the chaos inherent in the free structure of novel when in "Technique du roman" (1965) he criticizes the genre saying that any assemblage of characters and events scattered over a number of pages and chapters can be called a novel. For *Le*

⁹⁰ Claude Simonnet, *Queneau déchiffré: (notes sur "le Chiendent")* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1981), 41.

Chiendent, Queneau says that he “[s’est] fixé des règles aussi strictes que celles du sonnet”⁹¹ in order to infuse his work and all its elements with internal motivation. Yet, the goals regarding strict structuring of novels that Queneau set for himself evolved, moving from a total eradication of chance towards a gradual exploration of its possible influences on literature and the creative process in general, as well as its broader implications of its conscious investigation in life. Years later, in 1975, Noël Arnaud, Queneau’s fellow pataphysician and Oulipian, summarized the author’s engagement with chance in the following terms: “le hasard est utilisé à une fin qui est tout juste son contraire et qui l’annule, il sert à structurer l’œuvre et donc à supprimer le hasard. Identité des contraires qui s’annulent et se fécondent: pataphysique”.⁹² Thus, Queneau’s resolution to eradicate chance from his writing grew into his interest in using controlled chance as a creative device, and the first signs of that interest manifest themselves already in his first novel.

Le Chiendent constitutes a particularly significant stage in Queneau’s evolution as a writer and in the crystallization of his approaches to literary creation. It is important not only as his first novel but also as an exercise, a process that brought him closer to pataphysics, even though at this point he was still exploring it in an unconscious manner. His subsequent adherence to the Collège and the discovery of deliberate practice of pataphysics would lead him to later set into motion his life’s project of the Ouvroir de la Littérature Potentielle (Oulipo). In “Technique du roman,” Queneau talks about his standing as a writer in the years after his separation from the surrealist movement as follows: “J’ai d’abord eu une réaction violente, une détestation passionnée, je n’ai commencé à m’en débarrasser qu’en écrivant un roman qui s’appelle *Odile* et

⁹¹ Raymond Queneau, *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 41.

⁹² Noël Arnaud, “Queneau, l’humour et la ‘pataphysique,” *Magazine littéraire*, no. 94 (1974): 25.

où d'ailleurs il n'est pas question que de ça."⁹³ Queneau admits that his struggle with the values of surrealism was not settled until the completion of *Odile* in 1937, which indicates that the years prior to this event constitute a period of negotiation and questioning of the role of inspiration that is out of the writer's control, and intentionality in the writing process. As a result, *Le Chiendent* was the first space after his separation from the Surrealists in which he could carry out a fully conscious and intentional experimentation in order to better understand how chance affects his characters. *Le Chiendent* also enabled him to rework his writing process in which he played with deliberate and directed chance instead of relying on automatism, which ideally required one's submission to random inspiration beyond one's control. In *Le Chiendent*, Queneau gives life to Étienne Marcel, a character that undergoes a systematic evolution of his own. From a mere outline of a man sketched with words, Étienne transforms into a solid material and spiritual thinking being. As his metamorphosis progresses, he discovers that the events and encounters that affect him are often driven by chance, and he embarks on a philosophical journey of capturing the elusive affects, in other words forces that make him act certain way, that shape him. I will argue that Étienne's transformation can be adopted as a model for understanding Queneau's own process of becoming a pataphysical writer.

From the beginning of the novel, the readers are set up to observe Étienne's evolution, as the protagonist is first introduced through the eyes of another character, Pierre Le Grand, who watches him. At this point, Étienne is nothing but one of many inconspicuous, barely present half-beings that move across the landscape of the city and its suburbs to keep the machinery of the middle-class life based on work and consumption moving. His existence is so minimal that he materializes only as a silhouette:

⁹³ Queneau, *Bâtons*, 37-38.

La silhouette d'un homme se profila; simultanément, des milliers. Il y en avait bien des milliers. [...] La silhouette indiquée se dégagea du mur d'une bâtisse immense et insupportable, un édifice qui paraissait un étouffement et qui était une banque. Détachée du mur, la silhouette oscilla bousculée par d'autres formes, sans comportement individuel visible, travaillée en sens divers, moins par ses inquiétudes propres que par l'ensemble des inquiétudes de ses milliers de voisins.⁹⁴

Étienne is still only on the verge of becoming a material being. Affective expression of Étienne's character, understood as the gradual development of his body, shares similarities with the becoming of Clair's protagonist. The process of becoming of both characters is conditioned by their navigation of affective spaces and their rising awareness that their bodies are products of fragmented external influences. Their *prise de conscience* can be also understood as an awakening of the pataphysical approach to the world. At first, caught in the interstitial space of almost-being (to which Queneau will return in the later stage of his novel, where another one of his characters, Saturnin Belhôtel conducts a theoretical divagation on various modes of non-being), Étienne's silhouette, deprived of its own substance, blends in with the surrounding material objects, such as walls and buildings. Without a material body, Étienne still only exists as an independent individual only thanks to someone else's, in this case Pierre's, perception. Pierre observes the silhouette oscillate and navigate space in a chaotic manner without any apparent agency. In this state, Étienne as a person does not seem to have the ability to affect others; he can only be passively influenced and directed by the totality of the affects generated by the movement of and interactions with other bodies.

⁹⁴ Raymond Queneau, *Le Chiendent* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 9.

The longer Pierre watches Étienne, the more regularity in his daily routine he notices. Through Pierre's observations, Queneau builds up the sense of comfort associated with the familiarity of repetitive sequences of events, where causes, effects, and motivations of actions were unequivocal and dictated by middle-class model of life, skillfully summarized decades after *Le Chiendent* was written, namely "métro, boulot, dodo."⁹⁵ It is the breaking of that pattern that causes unease:

À 6 heures, la silhouette se détacha. Il s'en amusa inconsidérément. Celle-là, il l'avait bien repérée. Un jour, il s'amuserait à la suivre. A ce moment, il constata avec angoisse que la silhouette, au lieu de se diriger droit vers le métro, faisait un crochet et s'attardait devant la vitrine d'un chapelier pour regarder deux petits canards flottant dans un chapeau imperméable rempli d'eau afin d'en démontrer la qualité principale.⁹⁶

The initial joy that Pierre experiences because of another instance of recognition, expressed by the verb "s'amuser," is dissipated and replaced by anxiety when the object of his observation makes a metaphoric unexpected swerve on his way home and lingers in front of a store display. The observer further confirms his irritation with the disruptions of Étienne's routine by referring to the latter store display with the pejorative term of distraction. When after a certain delay, caused by said distraction, Étienne finally boards the train to go home, the narrator suggests that the consequences of the disruption are far more permanent than the distress of its witness. The narrator mentions regular commuters who habitually took the train along with Étienne ("les gens qui avaient coutume de prendre le même train que lui") who, despite not having witnessed

⁹⁵ Pierre Béarn, *Couleurs d'usine* (Paris: Seghers, 1951).

⁹⁶ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 15.

Étienne's whim to look at the waterproof hat and the rubber ducks, can sense that "[l]'atmosphère s'alourdit lorsque, au coup de sifflet libérateur, la portière s'ouvrit et au dernier moment, la place à côté du coin de droite, face à la marche du train, fut occupée. Quelque chose avait changé."⁹⁷ Thus, Étienne's unexpected and unmotivated behavior that was at odds with the regularity and the repetitiveness of his seemingly unimportant daily routine, had a huge affective impact on himself, his observer, and on all the other bodies surrounding him.

The plot of *Le Chiendent* takes a turn towards the exploration of affects at this very moment, the moment of Étienne's examination of the waterproof hat and the floating rubber ducks. This event is an epitome of a pure chance occurrence as there is no motivation to it that is possible to pinpoint, and it does not fit in a regular cause-effect chain of events preceding it. Therefore, the relationship between the event and Étienne's anchoring onto it can be described as pertaining to affect. Moreover, being an exception to, rather than a fulfillment of an expected behavior pattern, such a coincidental occurrence constitutes a perfect object of study of pataphysics. Christian Bök explains pataphysics's involvement with exceptions by relating it back to the words of Jarry: "Pataphysics, 'the science of the particular,' does not, therefore, study the rules governing the general recurrence of a periodic incident (the *expected* case) so much as study the games governing the special occurrence of a sporadic accident (the *excepted* case)."⁹⁸ He further proposes a classification of types of exceptions in which pataphysicians are interested by dividing them into three categories: "Exceptions [...] can resort to an assortment of modalities: variance (*anomalos*), alliance (*syzygia*), or deviance (*clinamen*)."⁹⁹ While *anomalos* is defined as a deviation in a system that adopts equivalence as a norm, and *syzygia* stands for

⁹⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁹⁸ Bök, *Pataphysics*, 9, emphasis original.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 11.

equating things in a system where difference is norm, it is the third category, *clinamen*, that Queneau puts under scrutiny to examine its impact. The events that can be defined as a sudden deviance are usually difficult to explain in terms of rational causality, and at times they allow for the leakage between the actual and the spaces of the circulation of affect, which otherwise are relegated to the sphere of the potential and the unknown.

The event that acts as a *clinamen* in Étienne's life, and that causes a domino effect of cascading unexpected influences over other characters' trajectories, is not the staging of the display at the hatter store, where a waterproof hat is being filled with water with two rubber ducks floating on the surface, but the fact that Étienne stopped and looked at it. In his later conversation with his stepson, Théo, Étienne finds out that the display has been there for years, therefore the business owner's choice to put it together cannot be identified as the cause of his transformation. It was rather the arbitrariness of the moment when Étienne turned his head to look at the display, which made him linger, that pushed him subsequently to reflect upon what happened and to set off on a quest of doubt and inquiry about the motives of one's choices. The moment of capturing Étienne's attention throws his entire existence, depending on his daily routine, off balance, and has immediate consequences: "Cette distraction de la silhouette eut sur elle un effet immédiate qui n'échappa point à l'observateur; elle acquit une certaine épaisseur et devint un être plat."¹⁰⁰ Because of his inexplicable drive to slow down his pace and let his gaze hang on to the display, randomly conspicuous at the time, Étienne's body becomes endowed with materiality and texture, and ceases to be an entity that can be only sensed. He steps out of the zone of in-betweenness that he occupied as a silhouette and starts his journey of becoming a person.

¹⁰⁰ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 15.

I propose to read the event that triggered Étienne's transformation as one generating affective forces, as Ben Anderson theorizes them. Anderson's point of departure in his consideration of affect is the assumption that spaces conducive to encounters of bodies (animate and inanimate) have an inherent potential to be affective: "The emergence of affect from the relations between bodies, and from the encounters that those relations are entangled within, make the materialities of space-time always-already affective."¹⁰¹ While the potential to be affective is a latent constant in these spaces, it is the circulation of affects that brings about concrete reactions and changes in the affected bodies' status quo. Anderson enumerates three elements of such a circulation, namely, affect, feelings and emotions. They occur in no particular order and are not bound by cause-effect linearity. Feelings, "[...] proprioceptive and visceral shifts in the background habits, and postures, of a body [...]" can be translated and further analyzed as emotions, "[that] are formed through the *qualification* of affect into 'semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action [...]'."¹⁰² By applying Anderson's theorization of affect to Queneau's novel, I propose to read the moment of clinamen that changes Étienne's habitual path on his way home as a trigger that sets the always-already present affect in motion. Anderson's definition of feelings captures very well the effect that affective forces have on Étienne: his attention caught by the display and his reflection on the change of his habit cause a bodily reaction that can be vaguely described as unease and anxiety. Yet, by defining Étienne's reaction as unease, anxiety, or any of their derivatives, I inevitably qualify the affect-induced feelings as emotions. In his descriptions Queneau too performs such qualifications, yet, he does not reduce the manifestations of affect to language by simply naming his protagonist's emotions.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, "Becoming and Being Hopeful," 6.

¹⁰² Ibid, 736; Massumi, *Parables*, 28.

Rather, he also gives them another dimension expressed through Étienne's bodily transformation.

The transformation begins when Étienne emerges as a material being in the form of an *être plat*, as opposed to his existence as a mere *silhouette*. This emergence sets in motion a gradual process in which Étienne's increasing materiality seems to be helping him master his affective reactions and emotions, which, in turn, appear to be further feeding his becoming a fully formed three-dimensional person. When Étienne comes home for the first time after the incident that started his transformation, he feels the need to tell his wife and his son about the hat and the ducks that he saw earlier, as well as about the shift in his general disposition. This is when "L'être plat prend son courage à deux mains, ces deux mains là qu'il sent au bout de ses bras; il prend son courage, c'est-à-dire il le crée."¹⁰³ Étienne's newly acquired body allows him to experience and take ownership of his feelings, such as courage, that he can now generate at will. When, in the following days, Étienne thinks about his cat that was killed by an unknown perpetrator, he feels an overwhelming indignation, which prompts further development of his materiality:

Au lieu d'être découpé comme un soldat d'étain, ses contours s'adoucissent. Il se gonfle doucement. Il mûrit. L'observateur le distingue fort bien, mais n'en aperçoit aucune raison extérieure. Il a maintenant en face de lui un être doué de quelque consistance. Il constate avec intérêt que cet être doué de quelque réalité a les traits légèrement convulsés. Que peut-il se passer? Cette silhouette est un être de choix.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

The anger that Étienne experiences at the thought of the cat murderer causes his flat body to acquire volume and expand into the third dimension. The rounding up of his body is summarized as *mûrissement*, a word that designates ripening of a fruit as its shape becomes fuller and its color more intense, but also biological maturation. Étienne's metamorphosis again takes place in front of Pierre's eyes, and, like in the case of the initial change, Pierre fails to attribute it to any visible or tangible cause as it lies in the circulation of affects. Thus, by becoming a Sartrean *être de choix*, an autonomous being that makes independent choices concerning his existence, Étienne advances one step further on his way to gaining his own distinct subjectivity independent from the undistinguishable mass of people in which he was inscribed until now, and from the patterns of everyday life that he had never questioned until then.

From that moment on, Étienne's physical dimension continues its fulfillment, during which he is described in terms such as having acquired "le minimum d'épaisseur permis à un bimane," and "plein comme un œuf," thus reclaiming his own chunk of physical space as a body that becomes not only thick in volume but also more and more human.¹⁰⁵ His passage from a silhouette full of potentialities to actuality can be marked on page 51 when the readers for the first time discover his name, Étienne Marcel. Once named, Étienne resembles a thoroughly Cartesian being, composed of a body as well as a thinking soul, as he develops a habit of doubt that mirrors Descartes's philosophy laid out in *Discours de la méthode* (1637), initially the original text that inspired Queneau to embark on project of translating it into modern French.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 36, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Queneau stated that he started writing *Le Chiendent* while traveling in Greece, as an exercise of translation of Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* into modern French. Why Descartes? Because this was one of the books he brought with him on vacation. The initial project was short-lived, and Queneau confirmed that once the writing began, the creative process took his own direction: "[...] je voulais simplement faire un petit essai de traduction du *Discours de la*

French novelist and essayist Jean-Marie Cattoné also pinpoints that *Le Discours* is not the only Cartesian text reflected in the metamorphosis of Queneau's protagonist; Étienne's constant doubting of the existence of his body leads him to mimic Descartes' conclusion of *Méditations métaphysiques* (1641), that the only certainty in his life as an individual of his own subjectivity is his ability to think. Yet, Étienne's ability to doubt the existence of his body is paradoxically conditioned by its developing materiality and substance. As a result, in a pataphysical fashion in which universes and philosophies merge and overlap with one another, rather than being juxtaposed, his material body and thinking soul complement each other and become one, rather than remaining two separate elements of being as Descartes envisaged them.

With his turn towards conscious thought, Étienne finds rational causality restrictive and inadequate in his attempt to understand what is happening to him. The habit of the constant doubt and reflection, in turn, serves not as a means to the end of pinning down the events' meanings, but as an ongoing process that activates a feedback loop between his bodily transformation and thinking. Such distortion of the body and mind dichotomy lends itself to interpretation with the application of theories of affect. Despite the proliferation of diverging affect theories, scholars tend to agree on one thing, namely, that affective forces resist assimilation into a linear system of signification and meaning. Instead, affect is theorized as the expression of its potentiality through a constant process of becoming. In the introduction to their *Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seighworth and Melissa Gregg link affect's expression as becoming to the body: "[...] affect is integral to a body's perceptual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-

Méthode en français moderne. Bientôt je me suis aperçu que j'étais tombé dans le bain romanesque." Queneau, *Bâtons*, 42.

boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, I would like to propose to read Étienne’s metamorphosis not as a linear progression of changes caught in a cause-effect sequence of events, but as his affective becoming, both in terms of his body and mind, which leads him to the discovery of the limitations of actual, material manifestations of this process.

His realization of the limitations of actuality, however, was not a sudden inspiration, but a gradual process of loosening the tight grip onto the familiar idea of a chain of signification. Initially, Étienne desperately yearns for a hidden meaning of his transformation, and he starts his habit of reflection by attempting to anchor the stages of his bodily metamorphosis to external factors by pinpointing possible causes of the systematic substantialization of his body. At first, as described above, he identifies the hatter’s display as a trigger that sets the process in motion and continues invoking the hat and the rubber ducks, like a mantra, as the factor to blame for the anxiety and the unease his change in form and habits causes him, his family and even people who randomly meet him on his daily route. The association of the transformation’s onset with the store display was inevitable as it was Étienne’s rational and natural reflex. A similar mechanism of the automatic association of an affective expression with the most immediate external stimulus present, was cited by Ruth Leys. Leys quotes Itzhak Fried’s study during which parts of the brain of a sixteen-year-old girl were stimulated by intracranial electrodes. When the electrodes stimulated a certain motor area of the girl’s brain, she laughed. Asked about the cause of her laughter, the girl attributed it, “[...] to the particular object seen during naming (‘the horse is funny’), to the particular content of the paragraph during reading, or to persons present in the

¹⁰⁷ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

room while the patient performed a finger apposition task ('you guys are so funny... standing around')."¹⁰⁸ This experiment demonstrates that when we experience emotional or affective reactions, we tend to subconsciously attribute them to the most readily available possible stimulating factors thus binding these reactions as their immediate effects. Yet, in this particular case the affective reaction of laughter was, in fact, subversive of the cause-effect linearity, as it came first and was independent of its perceived cause.

In his search for a motivation of his bodily transformation, Étienne displayed a similar automatism of detecting causal relationships between events where they do not exist. Such automatisms may function as a subconscious habit that helps us deal with processing and coming to terms with the surrounding world. As Étienne keeps dwelling on the coincidence of the hat and the ducks, and the onset of his becoming, he starts to detect other random coincidences in his daily surroundings, for example the fact that the stairs he took while wandering in the area of les baraques du Quatorze Juillet had 47 steps, exactly as many as the stairs at the train station in Obonne, his hometown. The fact that Étienne became overly eager to look for connections between facts and events proves that he became suspicious of what he had initially identified as the cause of his metamorphosis. His continuous doubt leads him to reject the hypothesis according to which the fortuitous works of external forces made him watch the store display. Instead, Étienne starts to consider a possibility that the impulse to look at the display came from within:

Ce n'est pas de sa faute [de l'univers], mais de la mienne. Il m'a suffi de tourner la tête à droite au lieu de la tourner à gauche, de faire un pas de plus et j'ai

¹⁰⁸ Itzhak Fried et al., "Electric Current Stimulates Laughter," *Nature* 391, no. 6668 (February 12, 1998): 650–650. In Leys, "The Turn to Affect," 459-60.

découvert des choses à côté desquelles je passais chaque jour, sans les voir. Je ne tournais pas la tête, je l'ai tournée. Mais pourquoi l'ai-je tournée ? Ça a commencé avec les petits canards, ces petits canards que Théo connaissait, lui.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, Étienne's perception of his metamorphosis started to shift from seeing it as a pre-determined chain of events originating in his encounter with the store display that he believed to carry hidden meaning. Instead he started to believe that the process of the gradual materialization of his body was one of many possible expressions of his potential as a human being, where his transformation was conditioned by his "oscillations" (the word Queneau uses frequently to talk about Étienne's movements in space and time) and affective interactions with other bodies understood as people and things, a model of reality closely resembling Vian's presented in *L'Écume des jours*.

The above reflection leads Étienne to believe that his impulse to turn his head to watch the hat and the rubber ducks' performance was only one of the infinite array of possibilities when it comes to his minute movements and reflexes, which suggests that all the other directions in which his actions could have been guided remain present but have no place in the actuality of events. Anderson makes the argument that this never-actualized excess of affective forces is the locus of affect's potential. The excess of affect is never qualified and does not lend itself to be easily accessed through its qualification as emotions or feelings, yet, its persistent presence pushes us to attempt a conceptualization of a dimension parallel to or even encompassing the actual. It is that very dimension, I argue, that the field of pataphysics had taken as its primary field of investigation long before affect theorists did. Anderson states that "[m]ovements of affect are always accompanied by a real but virtual knot of tendencies and latencies that generate

¹⁰⁹ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 78.

differences and divergences in what becomes actual.”¹¹⁰ The acknowledgement of the existence of virtual planes always paralleling and affecting that of the actual, invites us to conceive of reality as expanding beyond our sensory perception. Such a shift in conception of reality is significant because it assumes a hopeful drive towards the possibility of newness as a constant element of everyday life.

2.7 “LE NONNÊTE:” POTENTIALITY OF NON-BEING

Étienne’s process of affective becoming demonstrates that he is not merely a sum of his actions and decisions about how he navigates his material presence in the world; the potentialities of who and what he could have been, and who and what he could be although never will, are contributing forces in the constitution of his being. Étienne’s persona is an interstitial, potential being constantly on the cusp of actualization. Therefore, in order to define various aspects of his being, material and otherwise, one needs to acknowledge and take into account Étienne’s non-being, or what Queneau calls *nonnête*. In his study of Aristotle’s definition of potentiality, Giorgio Agamben argues that non-being is its essential element.¹¹¹ In order to illustrate this claim, Agamben cites Aristotle’s example concerning the nature of light: light exists in its actuality, but the true potentiality of light lies in darkness. By analogy, everything potential *can be* exactly because its inherent mode of existence is also its non-being.

¹¹⁰ Anderson, “Becoming and Being Hopeful,” 738.

¹¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

The Aristotelian concept of potentiality is problematic if we understand it as readiness to come or not come into being in actuality. When a potential development becomes actuality, its fulfillment erases the possibility of its absence (non-being). Thus, such a transition into actuality – the realization of potentiality – is at odds with the potential itself. Agamben addresses this seeming inconsistency in Aristotle by shifting the focus from realization of something that is potential to its suspension in non-being: “[c]ontrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality, here we are confronted with a potentiality that conserves itself and saves itself in actuality.”¹¹² Thus, the transition to actuality is not the only way for the potential to fulfill itself; it is its parallel coming into non-being, realizing self in absence, that is important. If actuality is a space in which only a fraction of affects become expressed as feelings or emotions, potentiality is the eternally parallel plane on which powerful unrealized affects circulate freely suspended in the realm of non-being. For example, Étienne’s decision to stop and look at the hatter’s display should not be seen as a cancellation of all the other encounters and experiences that he could have had if he had continued walking. Instead, all these potential events and unrealized affects tied to them became conserved in their non-realization and accompanied Étienne as circulating energies. Therefore, if we look at Queneau’s protagonist we can conclude that his evolution as a potential being is directed by the actions he performed, the things and people he encountered, and the events in which he participated. However, what is also inscribed in his actuality is every turn he could have taken and every path he could have followed, but in the end, did not.

Even though in *Le Chiendent* Queneau does not address the notion of potentiality explicitly, he provides readers with philosophical musings concerning the richness and multitude

¹¹² Ibid, 184.

of modes of non-being, which echo Agamben's appreciation of the potential as always present in its absence. Queneau broaches the subject through the character of Saturnin Belhôtel who is an aspiring writer and can be read as yet another of the author's alter egos. It is with the help of Saturnin that Queneau mints the term of *nonnête* or *nonnêt'* (alternative spelling versions of *non-être*). Saturnin feels that it is his responsibility to fill what he considers serious knowledge gaps in philosophy: "Vous comprenez, la philosophie, elle a fait deux grandes fautes; deux grands oublis; d'abord elle a oublié d'étudier les différents modes d'être, primo; et c'est pas un mince oubli. Mais ça encore c'est rien; elle a oublié c' qu'est le plus important, les différents modes de ne pas être."¹¹³ Saturnin further explains what he understands by different modes of non-being by enumerating them with an example of a slab of butter:

La motte de beurre n'est pas tout c' qu'elle est pas, elle n'est pas partout où elle n'est pas, elle interdit à toute chose d'être là où elle est, elle a pas toujours été et n'sera pas toujours, ekcétéra, ekcétéra. Ainsi une infinité pas mal infinie de ne pas être. De telle sorte qu'on peut dire que cette motte de beurre est plongée jusque par-dessus la tête dans l'infinité du nonnête, et finalement ce qui paraît le plus important, ce n'est pas l'être, mais le nonnête.¹¹⁴

Therefore, non-being as a mode of existence is not limited to an absence of a person or an object, but also to their state of not-being-anymore, or not-yet-being something or somewhere. Queneau's labeling all these modes of existence as *nonnête*, the non-standard or even incorrect spelling of *non-être*, can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the writer achieves a humorous effect of portraying Saturnin as a caricature of a philosopher whose language is clumsy. On the

¹¹³ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 374-75.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 375.

other hand, Queneau fills in the abovementioned gap in philosophical knowledge with a brand new term. We can see that the concept of *nonnête* overlaps with, or more accurately compliments and expands Agamben's understanding of potentiality, a state to which unrealized affects are relegated, always anchored and preserved in absence that does not disappear when confronted with actuality, but shadows and supports it.

Queneau takes this argument even further and have Saturnin boldly suggest that potentiality, or the *nonnête*, as a mode of existence is a category far more relevant in an attempt to understand one's place in the world, than that of being. The latter, in fact, is conditioned by the former: "[...] l'être est déterminé par le nonnête, il a pas d'existence propre, il sort du nonnête pour y retourner."¹¹⁵ This claim echoes the basic assumption of affect theories, which states that actuality of things is always paralleled by a virtual plane of potentiality where affects circulate. Thus, the *nonnête* encompasses everything that is and exists, thus dismantling the opposition of being versus non-being; being is only one version of a multitude of possible modes of non-being, a version that is crystallized in actuality. Saturnin further concludes: "Au fond, y a pas le nonnête d'un côté et l'être de l'autre. Y a le nonnête et puis c'est tout puisque l'être n'est pas."¹¹⁶ Following Saturnin's thought, the incontestability of actuality, which can be probed through scientific methods, is assumed to be an illusion. The actuality of things is insufficient to fully understand the surrounding world and the phenomena that take place in it because this particular mode of existence is only a fraction of a larger whole. Finally, *nonnête*, which determines the actual, is a notion that is profoundly pataphysical. As per the Statutes, members of the Collège are committed to investigate not only the actual world, but also all the other,

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 376.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 376.

alternative ones.¹¹⁷ Thus, through Saturnin's notion of the *nonnête*, Queneau again nods towards pataphysical thought.

However, ruminations on the nature of the *nonnête*, understood as non-being, which is closely related to the notions of potentiality and affect, are not purely theoretical in *Le Chiendent*. Queneau weaves into the plot of the novel an object, a blue door hanging on the wall of père Taupe's cabin, whose *raison d'être* is exactly the non-being aspect of its existence. The door becomes a catalyst of affects when it catches the attention of père Taupe's visitors as an object that does not fulfill its habitual functions. Étienne and Pierre pay a visit to Taupe's shack after he brags about his lost fortune and current modest lifestyle as a second-hand goods dealer. The readers discover the contents of the cabin through one of Étienne's stream-of-consciousness internal monologs, delivered in writing without separate sentences or any punctuation at all, in which the door is mentioned for the first time, in a smooth and inconspicuous manner:

[...] et le vieux bonhomme qui rigole en dedans assis sur son lit c'est ça qu'on dit appeler un grabat assis sur son grabat je crois qu'il se fiche de nous pourquoi cette porte est-elle là elle ne doit donner nulle part il n'a pas creusé une cave dans le remblai elle a un drôle d'air cette porte peinte en bleu elle est ajoutée elle doit être à vendre cette porte Le Grand lui demande si elle est à vendre non elle n'est pas à vendre ça c'est intéressant Le Grand est intéressé pourquoi ne veut-il pas la vendre sa porte le voilà qui se met en colère n'insistons pas [...].¹¹⁸

Étienne arbitrarily notices the door, and his attention lingers on it when Pierre asks to purchase it. The first questions about the door that occur to Étienne are conditioned by logic: why is the door

¹¹⁷ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts*, titre I, article 3, paragraphe 2.

¹¹⁸ Queneau, *Le Chiendent*, 138.

hanging on the wall like a painting? Is there possibly a secret cave hidden behind it? The consternation over an object separated from its practical function causes anxiety over its potential in people who discover it, and provokes their affective reactions, which accumulate and, in turn, start to affect others.

With the fast multiplication of affects around the object of interest, the readers observe how the blue door becomes a mythical treasure, referred to in the book as “trésor taupique.” Based on bits and pieces of conversations overheard by her nephew, Mme Cloche expresses her interest in the presumed treasure that lies hidden behind the symbolic door, and uses her hired help, Ernestine, to discover it. The next couple of characters that find out and develop a desire for the peculiar object are Saturnin and Narcense. Each of them speculates about the value of the door. Without making any specific assumptions, Pierre shares his curiosity about the nature of the door’s worth: “Je lui soupçonne une valeur singulière, je la suppose inestimable [...],” while more down-to-earth Mme Cloche counts on its monetary value: “[...] son argent, elle est cachée derrière la porte, c’est pour ça qui veut pas vendre sa porte.”¹¹⁹ Whatever the assumption about the value of the door, the characters’ desire to discover and possess or participate in this unidentified value sets in motion a circulation of affects, energies that are partially expressed in actuality as curiosity, jealousy, greed or ambition and that push the involved characters to make decisions otherwise unjustified. The “trésor taupique” inspires deception, conspiracy, theft and marriage, and becomes powerful enough to determine matters of life and death.

The *nonnête* of the door, in other words what the door is not but others imagine it to be, has consequences as serious as deaths of two of the novel’s characters. The cause of their deaths does not lie in actuality, but in the parallel plane of affects. Ernestine who, pushed by Mme

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 217, 163.

Cloche, marries père Taupe in order to claim her right to his presumed fortune, suddenly falls ill during her wedding reception. Confronted later on by Mme Cloche, père Taupe reveals the true reason why he kept the door:

Cette porte c'est un souvenir. C'est tout. Quarante ans après, j'ai retrouvé cette porte. Il y avait nos noms dessus. J' l'ai achetée. C'est tout. Pas d'fortune, pas d'trésor, pas d'mystère. Rien. Et si ça vous embête, tant pis. Ou tant mieux. Oui, quarante ans après, j'ai retrouvé cette porte où nous avons écrit nos noms. Et *grâce à cette porte*, Ernestine, que j'aimais, est morte.¹²⁰

Taupe traces the cause of Ernestine's sudden death to the object whose affective meaning spun out of control, or more precisely to the unrest it caused to the people who engaged in the guessing game of its value. The actual worth of the door was nothing more than sentimental and only to père Taupe, who kept it because back in the day he and his sweetheart engraved their initials on it. This worth became utterly irrelevant in the face of the power of all the things the door was not, but potentially could have been. The non-being of the door became so overpowering that its physical disappearance leads to another tragic event. Announcing their impending theft of the door, Saturnin and Narcense state in a letter: "L'aventure du trésor taupique touche donc à sa fin et c'est nous-mêmes qui la lui ferons toucher, cette fin, de la manière qui nous semblera convenable, autrement dit en faisant disparaître, à notre bénéfice, l'immense fortune de ce personnage, ainsi qu'il est écrit plus haut."¹²¹ The completed theft and the perpetrators' discovery that the door has hardly any actual value for anyone but père Taupe, are followed by the news of the old man's passing. Once again, the passage of the object into

¹²⁰ Ibid, 361, emphasis original.

¹²¹ Ibid, 366.

non-being, this time meaning its literal disappearance, has serious consequences affecting the physical wellbeing of its owner.

Père Taupe's door, as an object that has the power to affect such a multitude of Queneau's characters is essentially pataphysical. Paul Gayot noted the importance of this particular imaginary object for Queneau as a member of the Collège, as well as for his future interest in establishing potential literature as a literary field, in the issue of the *Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* dedicated to the author after his death: "La porte du Père Taupe est le lieu où viennent converger la plupart des personnages du *Chiendent*. Telle est la pataphysique définie par Torma, 'elle est une façade qui n'est que façade sans rien derrière'."¹²² In the subsequent course of his literary career, Queneau moved forward from creating an imaginary object of infinite potentialities, the door, to a real one, when in 1961 he published a collection of ten sonnets, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, poems with interchangeable lines that make for more possible combinations than one can read in one's lifetime.¹²³ The book containing the poems, in which pages are precisely superimposed and lines are separated, making it possible for the reader to browse the content not page by page, but line by line, is an artifact of potentiality, since it is impossible for one person to solidify all the combinations of the sonnets in actuality by reading them in their entirety. Thus, the potential fullness of the volume is there, but becomes suspended in non-being. The collection became one of the texts crucial to the foundation of Queneau's Oulipo. Another link between *Le Chiendent* and *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* traced by Gayot is the cyclical nature of consumption that both works inspire. The novel starts and ends with the exact same sentence, which invites the reader to recommence the reading,

¹²² Paul Gayot, "Disparitions, escamotages et prestidigitations dans *Le Chiendent*," *Dossiers Acenonetes du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 20 (1962): 21.

¹²³ Raymond Queneau, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

which, in turn, becomes a different experience once we are familiar with the content of the book: “‘Le contenu du Livre n’est pleinement révélé qu’à la fin du Livre... Arrivé à la fin il faut relire (ou repenser) le Livre et ce cycle se répète éternellement.’ À cet égard, *Le Chiendent* préfigure, en mieux, *Les Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes* dont la lecture peut demander un temps très long [...].”¹²⁴ Exploration of the possibilities that a pataphysical approach of experimentation and questioning of the existing assumptions about the surrounding world, allowed Queneau to forge a path for himself as a writer focused on literature’s potentiality, which became the Oulipo’s main preoccupation.

Even though being a pataphysician depends more on one’s specific mindset and inner curiosity, rather than one’s affiliation with the Collège, the Collège has provided a solid platform for creative encounters of intellectuals who were not satisfied with the existing knowledge of the world based on reason. The Collège has fostered individual and collective expression of its members and their becoming in terms of awareness of the limitations of actuality, and the possible expansion of our knowledge onto the realm of the potential, the non-being and the virtual. Authors taking part in the pataphysical exploration demonstrated that such becoming is a process, rather than sudden inspiration, and that it takes exercise to successfully capture, cultivate and generate affective forces in writing. Pataphysical writers have also demonstrated that systematic exercise makes it possible to seize the unseizable, even though affects are considered to be condemned to the virtual plane of potentiality parallel to actuality. *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* is an example of a text that is purely potential, and even though it materially exists, it can never fully actualize itself in the eyes of an individual human being. If the Oulipo’s mission was to investigate such potentialities in written texts, most of its members’ literary

¹²⁴ Gayot, “Disparitions,” 24.

output consists of exercises that capture only one version of an infinite number of potential solutions to a given problem.¹²⁵ There are, however, a few exceptional oulipian productions that, like *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, manage to capture potential without canceling it out through the actuality of the text. These texts, thus, resemble the “trésor taupique” in their engagement with non-being, and it is to these texts that I will turn in the next chapter.

¹²⁵ A notable example here would be *La Disparition* by Georges Perec, a novel that is also a lipogram on the letter “e.” The text of the novel is not potential in itself, the factor that generates the potential is the lipogrammatic constraint.

3.0 THE VIRTUALITY OF POTENTIAL LITERATURE

On peut admettre, sans tenter pour l'instant d'approfondir, qu'une œuvre potentielle est une œuvre qui ne se limite pas à ses apparences, qui contient des richesses secrètes, qui se prête volontiers à l'exploration.¹²⁶

– Jacques Bens, “Queneau Oulipien”

Queneau's pataphysical interest in bringing together literature and science, more specifically his mathematical knowledge, led him to the creation of the Oulipo, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, known in the Anglophone world as the Workshop of Potential Literature. Since its beginnings in 1960, the Oulipo has made considerable efforts to determine its guiding mission, and in this chapter, I will provide an overview of the way the group's objectives have changed over time. Specifically, I will look at the notion of potentiality as a node of exchange between the Oulipo and pataphysics, and I will define what potential literature is, what it is designed to do, and how it is inscribed in the tradition of the *Collège de 'Pataphysique*. To this end, I will situate potentiality *vis-à-vis* the relationship between the actual and the virtual, as it is understood and explained by contemporary affect theorists. Bringing oulipian texts into dialogue with the ways in which affect theorists understand virtuality will allow me to delineate potentiality not as a lack, or a possibility pertaining to the future, but as the presence of an absence. In order to theorize how virtuality operates in literary texts, I will also turn to Espen Aarseth's notion of the cybertext in which a text's actual, material dimensions are extended by a virtual plane. The

¹²⁶ Jacques Bens, “Queneau Oulipien,” in *Atlas de littérature potentielle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 23.

Oulipo, I contend, is a group that promotes the creation of literary works that capture potentiality by preserving it in an absence, and this artistic orientation is a direct inheritance from the Collège de 'Pataphysique.

What does it mean that circulating affects are always inherently potential and how can we conceive of their virtuality if they become lost once concretely manifested? In order to understand the connection between the potential and the virtual, I will return to the arguments made by Giorgio Agamben about the relationship between being and non-being with regard to potentiality that I discussed in the previous chapter. Potentiality is a mode of existence that is distinctive from separated notions of being and non-being:

Unlike mere possibilities, which can be considered from a purely logical standpoint, potentialities or capacities present themselves above all as things that exist but that, at the same time, do not exist as actual things; they are present, yet they do not appear in the form of present things. What is at issue in the concept of potentiality is nothing less than a mode of existence that is irreducible to actuality.¹²⁷

If potentialities do exist and yet they do not belong to actuality, I would like to suggest that it is the plane of virtuality, as it is conceptualized by contemporary affect theorists, that best serves as space that can accommodate this peculiar mode of existence. This is why I propose to say that affects are potential: as the editors to Agamben's collection of essays state, potentialities do not exist as actual things, but they exist nonetheless, and their mode existence is determined by a unique relationship of what is known as being and non-being. If potentialities cannot exist in

¹²⁷ Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, "Editor's Introduction," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, by Giorgio Agamben (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14.

actuality, it does not mean that they are simply absent: “What is essential is that potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence.”¹²⁸ Agamben’s understanding of potentiality as something that does not yet exist, but is not simply a lack, can be of great help with the conceptualization of affects. Even though affects are always potential and remain inaccessible in actuality, it does not mean that they are absent. It is this peculiar state of being present through their absence that can be used to experience the virtuality of affects.

I contend that the original interest of the Oulipo was to explore the ways in which potentialities can be accessed through attempts to create spaces of virtuality through the use of written language. During the first year of the Oulipo’s existence, its members discussed the delimitations of the group’s field of interest and methods of inquiry. One of the first definitions of the workshop proposed collectively by its members figures in the minutes from the group’s meeting in April 1961: “Organisme qui se propose d’examiner en quoi et par quel moyen, étant donné une théorie scientifique concernant éventuellement le langage (donc: l’anthropologie), on peut y introduire au plaisir esthétique (affectivité et fantaisie).”¹²⁹ This succinct description brings up several key preoccupations that will remain crucial for the development of the project of potential literature. First and foremost, the Oulipo will focus on language, and by extension on texts and literature, a declaration that distinguishes the group from the Collège. The matter of investigation established, the group makes a commitment to applying methods derived from science, more specifically mathematics, also in its pure, most abstract form. Finally, the goal of

¹²⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 179, emphasis original.

¹²⁹ “Compte rendu dactylographié de Raymond Queneau et Jean Lescure de la réunion n°6 du 17 avril 1961, avec erratum” (Paris, 1961), DM-1 (8), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

such experimental application is to give the readers access to a certain aesthetic pleasure stemming from the fact that works of potential literature open up a way to approach affects and fantasies that are otherwise inaccessible in actuality.

As Queneau's collection of sonnets, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* is the first acknowledged example of a conscious potential literary work, in this chapter I will identify oulipian texts that continue the tradition of the volume. The three works I selected, Marcel Bénabou's *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (1986), Georges Perec's *Le Voyage d'hiver* (1979), and Italo Calvino's *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur* (1979), each in their own way, build virtual planes and bring the potentialities of these planes closer to the readers. They all have a common denominator: they are larger on the inside, in terms of their *potential* content, than their physical limitations indicate. What makes the creation of such works possible is the fact that their authors go beyond the actuality of their books, do not stop at defining what their books are but also explore what their texts are not, and find ways to incorporate these explorations in their works. Such operations are tricky and have to be carefully designed, since capturing potentialities in actuality bears the risk of annihilating them.

Furthermore, I argue that due to their unique potentialities, my selected texts bear the qualities of cybertexts, as Espen Aarseth presents them in *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997). Adopting elements of Aarseth's theorization of cybertexts will help me shed light on specific ways in which the works I selected for this chapter engage the readers and invite them into the virtual planes they generate. A cybertext is a text whose linear reading does not exhaust its potentiality. In other words, it is physically impossible to take all of such a text in by approaching it as a traditional book, meant to be read from the beginning to end. Not surprisingly, Aarseth cites Queneau's potential poems as an exemplary cybertext. Aarseth

emphasizes that reading a cybertext unavoidably involves a sense of inaccessibility and absence: “[...] when you read a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed.”¹³⁰ Understood as such, a cybertext is inherently potential. Reading of such a text constitutes tracing textual paths in actuality, but also foregoing the alternative possibilities for reading, and thus suspending them in virtuality. Such alternative textual possibilities remain present and affective even though they remain unrealized, thus infinitely expanding the content capacity of a potential literary work. By demonstrating the Oulipo’s investment in devising strategies to construct and penetrate the virtual plane of potentialities and make its elements accessible to the reader, I will inscribe the group in the tradition of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. While the oulipian authors are commonly known for their playful attitude towards form and linguistic games, my study will show that their works are informed by rich pataphysical heritage, a fact that has not been properly appreciated in previous scholarship, and are not just art created for art’s sake.

3.1 *CENT MILLE MILLIARDS DE POÈMES: THE EPITOME OF POTENTIAL LITERATURE*

How is it possible that the content of a poetry booklet exceeds by far what is written on its ten pages, each containing one sonnet? The capacity of the thin volume expands thanks to its

¹³⁰ Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3.

painstaking design: not only do all ten sonnets follow the same rhyme pattern, but all the corresponding lines of each sonnet are built upon the same rhythmical and sonorous structure. As a result, the readers are not presented with ten delimited poems, but they are invited to intervene in the materiality of the book by separating the lines on each page and combining them at will. Queneau's volume is called *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* because what appears to be a collection of ten sonnets, really contains 10^{14} (100,000,000,000,000) of them, and if the first ten are the most readily accessible, as Jacques Bens explains, "[...] ce sont les quatre-vingt-dix-neuf mille neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf millions neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf mille neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix sonnets qui se trouvent, inexprimés mais *en puissance*, dans les dix autres."¹³¹ One may then ask why Oulipians call Queneau's collection infinitely potential if the number of possible combinations, however vast, is limited. While the number of poems is mathematically and logically foreseeable, the collection transcends a different kind of limitations, namely the fact that one would not be able to read or otherwise write all of the possible sonnets in one's lifetime. Queneau's pataphysical background sparked his drive to adopt a creative approach to science in order to open up a literary work's potential and led him to use mathematics, more precisely the principles of combinatorics, while composing this milestone collection. This event marked the crystallization of what the writer envisaged as potential literature, which became the focal point of the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle. In "Queneau Oulipien" (1981), Bens states that upon the completion of the volume, Oulipians immediately lauded it as the first official work of potential literature.¹³² Thus, Queneau's volume is a model for texts that can generate potential content that surpasses their physical limitations.

¹³¹ Bens, "Queneau Oulipien," 23, emphasis original.

¹³² Ibid, 22.

I propose to read the creative process of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* as emblematic of the birth of the Oulipo. The initiation of both projects coincided in September 1960, during the “Décade Queneau” colloquium organized by Centre culturel international de Cerisy-la-Salle, an institution that, since 1952, has been organizing annual themed conferences allowing for fruitful intellectual encounters. One of those encounters brought together Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, a French chemical engineer, mathematician and aspiring writer. According to Daniel Levin Becker, it was Le Lionnais who inspired Queneau to fuse combinatorics and poetry, which resulted in the publication of the collection of potential sonnets in 1961.¹³³ But the encounter had more immediate ramifications, namely, the decision to gather writers and mathematicians interested in more permanent and regular collective work aiming at bringing these two disciplines together. The group first met in November 1960 under the name of Sélitex: Séminaire de Littérature Expérimentale. The name was quickly changed to the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, proposed by one of its first members, Albert-Marie Schmidt who, “[a]ssuredly [...] was aware of the successive or parallel definitions of the word ouvroir; he saw in it above all a secluded place where people work together on a difficult task, where people strive to elaborate new techniques [...]”¹³⁴ The new name emphasized the group’s commitment to the quest for potentiality in literature, and if initially the idea of such potentiality was not clearly defined, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* constituted an anchor and a primary illustration of what the workshop’s aspirations were.

¹³³ Daniel Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 123.

¹³⁴ Warren F. Motte, ed., *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), x.

3.2 THE PATAPHYSICAL ROOTS OF THE OULIPO

The existing publications on the Oulipo or its prominent members, indeed map the birth of the group onto Cerisy-la-Salle of 1960, but at the same time they downplay or ignore altogether its ties to the Collège de 'Pataphysique. Warren Motte, a French literature scholar who in 1986 introduced American readers to the Oulipo with his book, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (1986), narrates its foundation as follows:¹³⁵

In September of 1960, an exceptionally diverse group met at Cerisy-la-Salle on the occasion of a colloquium devoted to the work of Raymond Queneau. The title of the proceedings, “Une nouvelle défense et illustration de la langue française,” was in many ways exemplary: if it recalled the Pléiade and its poetic manifesto, it also announced another group, the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle. For it was at Cerisy, on the initiative of Queneau and François Le Lionnais, that the Oulipo was conceived.¹³⁶

Such a version of the group's beginnings, which is commonly evoked by scholars writing about the history of the Oulipo, emphasizes the brilliance of men who met at Cerisy to ponder Queneau's literary heritage, but fails to mention that his work at the time was pervaded with a pataphysical spirit of innovation and openness to experimentation. Moreover, Motte's narrative ties the origins of the Oulipo to the traditional historical grandeur of the Pléiade, but neglects to pinpoint its founder's direct connection with the infinitely more diverse Collège de 'Pataphysique. While in his further description Motte does mention the fact that the Oulipo

¹³⁵ Levin Becker names Motte “the most accomplished of a handful of American Oulipo scholars,” and asserts that “Motte's *Primer* in 1986 stirred interest among English-speaking writers and academics [...]” Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels*, 79, 221.

¹³⁶ Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer*, 1.

started off as a sub-committee of one of the Collège’s sub-commissions, he promptly dismisses this aspect of the group’s genealogy by stating that “[...] early on, the *official* affiliation with that group would be dropped.”¹³⁷ The fact that at the moment of its founding the Oulipo was one of the units within the Collège’s structure is also briefly mentioned by Alison James, in *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (2009). Like Motte, James promptly transitions to talking about the Oulipo’s emancipation: “The Oulipo began its days as a subcommission of the Alfred Jarry-inspired Collège de ‘Pataphysique before becoming an increasingly independent entity and gradually adopting a more public profile.”¹³⁸ It is understandable that Motte And James only acknowledge the brevity of the administrative connection between the Collège and the Oulipo, considering that they focus on the latter’s innovative attitude to literary structure, not the group’s history. Yet, I contend that unearthing more details about the Oulipo’s genealogy will allow for the reaffirmation of the parallels between the field of pataphysics and the group’s interest in the potentiality of literature, which, in turn, will allow for a more complete understanding of the oulipian project of investigating the state of potentiality through writing, which I discuss in more details in subsequent sections of this chapter.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 1, emphasis original. It is important to note that this is not the only mention of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique in Motte’s volume. His *Primer* constitutes a collection of texts translated from French into English, originally published in volumes assembled by the Oulipians, such as *La Littérature potentielle* (1973) and *Atlas de littérature potentielle* (1981), as well as an article entitled “Le Collège de ‘Pataphysique et l’Oulipo,” originally published in volume 17 of the *Dossiers du Collège de ‘Pataphysique*. What I am emphasizing, however, is the fact that as the editor of *Primer*, Motte does not comment further of the Oulipo’s affiliation with its host society.

¹³⁸ Alison James, *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 14. In fact, James acknowledges that the Oulipo was at first a gearwheel within the hierarchy of the Collège, but she fails to mention that before becoming a sub-commission of its own, it was established as a sub-committee, a unit that is even less autonomous.

The degree to which scholars and authors pay attention to the Oulipo's association with the Collège depends on the scope of their subject of investigation. For example, Gérard Genette, who in his chapter on the oulipian games concentrates on the group's use of already existing literary works, skips the subject of the Collège altogether and summarises the Oulipo's origins in one sentence: "[...] Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, or Oulipo, created in November 1960 by Raymond Queneau, François le Lionnais, and a few others."¹³⁹ David Gascoigne, in turn, who analyzes the ludic aspect of Perec's fiction, describes the Oulipo (the group played an enormous role in shaping Perec's sensitivity) as "[...] the group of writers, mathematicians and others which formed around Raymond Queneau and called itself the Ouvroir de littérature potentielle [...]."¹⁴⁰ In contrast with these two authors, who do not go beyond one-sentence mentions of the centrality of Queneau in the oulipian movement while covering the subject of the group's historical background, Daniel Levin Becker devotes an entire section to the Oulipo's past in *Many Subtle Channels*. Before Levin Becker became an Oulipian himself, he had first established contact with the group as a Fulbright scholar in Paris where he had helped with the cataloguing of the Oulipo's archives before they were deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. As one of the first outsiders who had access to the group's archival materials, Levin Becker draws a more complete outline of the Oulipo's pataphysical prehistory, yet, his attitude towards the Collège's contributions to the French intellectual and literary milieu of its times, the attitude to which I already referred in the previous chapter, is dismissive. The author presents the Collège as a convenient springboard for the propagation of oulipian works: "As far as the Oulipo

¹³⁹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 39.

¹⁴⁰ David Gascoigne, *The Games of Fiction: Georges Perec and Modern French Ludic Narrative* (Oxford, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 29n19.

was concerned in its first few years, the partnership was a marriage of no small convenience, providing a readymade outlet for eventual publication and easy access to a network of people who would quite conceivably be interested by the workshop's erudite manipulations."¹⁴¹ Thus, Levin Becker suggests that the Oulipo only took advantage of the Collège's administrative and publishing infrastructure, without drawing much artistic inspiration from it or without reciprocally benefiting the Collège. While I do not think that it is crucial that all scholarship on the Oulipo should mandatorily acknowledge a stronger tie between both groups, I do believe that the absence of such argument in existing scholarship constitute a vital gap in the studies of the workshop. While most scholars focus on the playfulness and the ingenuity of the oulipian constraints, glossing over the group's pataphysical background and tradition results in an impoverished understanding of the term "potentiality," as linking it with the science of pataphysics and the circulation of affects can bring out its more nuanced facets.

In the early 2000s, the Oulipo committed to an archivization project consisting of sorting and cataloguing decades of documents, such as records of meetings and events, letters and press clippings, which until then had sat in the Parisian apartment of Marcel Bénabou, the Oulipo's secretary. These efforts culminated in the deposit of the group's extensive collection of documents related to its organization and activities at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris in 2006. The availability of this archive allows me to reconstruct the Oulipo's strong ties to the Collège de 'Pataphysique. Since most of the monthly gatherings of the workshop's members have been documented in writing, it is hard to overlook the fact that the first meetings were fully devoted to defining the Oulipo's position within the structures of the Collège, and that in the first few years of the group's existence, hardly any meeting went by without a mention of the Collège

¹⁴¹ Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels*, 144.

or without an intervention of the two main Collège liaisons turned Oulipians, Latis (Emmanuel Peillet) and Noël Arnaud. Some of the first *circulaires* summarizing the meetings of the workshop's members consistently featured a section entitled "relations avec le Collège de Pataphysique," which indicates that in the beginning Oulipians were constantly negotiating their identity *vis-à-vis* the Collège.

The *Circulaire* from December 1960, for example, praises Arnaud for his input allowing the Oulipo to regulate its status:

L'Oulipo est intégré à la Sous-Commission des Epiphanies et Ityphanies, elle-même incluse dans la Commission des Imprévisibles, dont l'un des trois Présidents est le Trt S. [Transcendent Satrape] Raymond Queneau. Au titre de la Sous-Commission, l'Oulipo pourra posséder des dataires chargés des relations administratives, (les deux dataires provisoirement proposés sont Claude Berge et Jacques Bens); elle pourra également créer des chaires, auxquelles des régents seront attachés.¹⁴²

The Collège's internal structure includes seven main commissions, each composed of ten to twelve sub-commissions. Thus, initially the Oulipo was fully assimilated into Collège's body as a sub-committee, a unit that is even lesser, of the Sub-Commission of Epiphanies and Ityphanies.¹⁴³ It is unclear whether the Oulipo was integrated in this particular sub-commission

¹⁴² Jacques Bens, "Compte rendu dactylographié de Jacques Bens de la réunion n° 2 du 22 décembre 1960" (Paris, 1960), DM-1 (3), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

¹⁴³ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Tableau récapitulatif des Commissions, Cocommissions, Sous-Commissions & Intermissions du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013). This publication that specifies the roles and the missions of all 142 of the Collège's organs, defines the mission of the Sub-Commission of Epiphanies and Ityphanies as follows: "[La Sous-Commission des Épiphanies & Ityphanies] collecte et classe les manifestations de l'Absolu (qui se font partout et non pas seulement dans la grande et petite

because of the overlap between the Oulipians' ambitions and the organ's stated mission of tracking the manifestations of the pataphysical absolute beyond the activities of the Collège, or because Queneau was one of the leaders of this particular organ of the Collège. It is, however, true that this configuration of allegiance does prefigure a trait that would later on distinguish the Oulipo from its host: with time, the Oulipo became much more open to the public and ready to entertain its audience by staging various activities, such as workshops and readings, while the Collège has remained virtually secluded to this day.¹⁴⁴ By May 1961 the Oulipo demonstrated sufficient individualism and initiative to be recognized as an entity in and of itself, and became emancipated as a separate sub-commission of the Collège.¹⁴⁵ Generally, in 1961 the Oulipo's increased autonomy coincided with tightening of the connection between the Oulipo and the Collège on multiple levels. The Oulipo was drawing profoundly from Dr. Sandomir's (Peillet's) heritage, from the playfulness of the language in which pataphysicians indulged to using the Collège's journal as a platform to reach an outside audience for the first time. The 17th volume of the *Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, published in December of 1961 and entitled "Exercices de littérature potentielle," constitutes the first printed trace of the Oulipo's presence within the French literary and intellectual milieu.

presse); établit les projets de 'manifestations' du Collège; traitement de l'exhibitionnisme; questions d'éclairage, de diffusion des lumières, de civilisations et de leur histoire."

¹⁴⁴ The *Circulaire* from January 1961 makes a brief mention that a preference of certain Collège members (not specified) was expressed that the Oulipo be moved and assigned to the *Sous-Commission de l'Acrote* rather than the *Sous-Commission des Epiphanies et Ityphanies*. On Le Lionnais's demand, l'Acrote was explained as: "[l]e but idéal vers quoi doivent tendre les efforts des hommes." Jacques Bens, "Compte rendu dactylographié de Jacques Bens de la réunion n° 3 du 13 janvier 1961" (Paris, 1961), DM-1 (5), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The motion was passed without further discussion.

¹⁴⁵ Ythier Marchant, "Compte rendu dactylographié signé Ythier Marchant de la réunion n°8 du 20 mai 1961" (Paris, 1961), DM-1 (9), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

3.3 THE OULIPO'S POSITION *VIS-À-VIS* POTENTIALITY

Regardless of the ongoing discussion on the Oulipo's ties to the Collège as well as on the degree of its autonomy, my archival research confirms that the workshop's members who were not initially affiliated with the Collège (only Queneau, Latis and Arnaud were), became members in the capacity of *Dataires*.¹⁴⁶ As such, the new Oulipians who had little to no previous knowledge about pataphysics, became indoctrinated in the intricacies of the imaginary science, and transitioned from practicing it unconsciously to investigating it consciously, as evoked in the Collège's *Statuts* discussed in the previous chapter. What is most pataphysical in the Oulipo's collective work is the pursuit and experimentation with potentiality, a mission that the group also strove to define in its initial years of operation.

From the workshop's very first days its members spent considerable time negotiating their own attitude *vis-à-vis* the notion of potentiality and how it should apply to literature. I will argue that initially the group's members did not have a clear and focused vision of what potential literary works were, and while working through that question, they moved away from the idea of creating complete works endowed with potentiality and veered towards the formulation of constraints. It is important to trace stages of this evolution in order to better understand what relation there is between a formal constraint and potentiality, and why in the end the generation of constraints became a more convenient objective for the workshop than the creation of literary works that are inherently potential in their completeness, like *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*. The collection of Queneau's sonnets was the exemplary artifact of potential literature, as it constituted a material object containing potential text that cannot be realized in a linear way in

¹⁴⁶ Officers named after the officials of the Apostolic Chancery, a former dicastery of the Roman Curia.

actuality (by reading or writing out all the possible combinations). Furthermore, it set the bar for what a potential work should be fairly high, thus raising the question of the method needed to achieve such level of potentiality in a single work. Latis (Peillet) brought up this question a year after the foundation of the Oulipo:

Il me semble qu'une œuvre peut nous satisfaire, au point de vue de la potentialité, si, comme dans les CENT MILLE MILLIARDS DE POÈMES, l'auteur y inclut volontairement, sciemment, techniquement, une potentialité. [...] Comment écrire de pareilles choses, voilà un problème qui, me semble-t-il, est au premier rang des préoccupations de l'Oulipo.¹⁴⁷

Initially, it seems, the Oulipians attempted to solve this quandary by the application of mathematics during the creative process, just like Queneau used the principles of combinatorics in his volume of potential poems, and this approach was documented in the group's First Manifesto authored by Le Lionnais in 1962.

The First Manifesto of the Oulipo, entitled "La LiPo," brings up an interest in construing formal constraints and structural rules as sources of creative inspiration in literature, but does not yet posit the generation of such constraints as the workshop's main objective. Instead, it defines its mission as two directions of investigation: analysis and synthesis. The analytical work, as Le Lionnais defines it, "[...] travaille sur les œuvres du passé pour y rechercher des possibilités qui dépassent souvent ce que les auteurs avaient soupçonné."¹⁴⁸ In practice, this means identifying formal structures that have been unconsciously applied by writers in the past, in order to put

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Bens, "Compte rendu dactylographié de Jacques Bens de la réunion n° 16 du 19 décembre 1961" (Paris, 1961), DM-1 (15), Fonds Oulipo, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

¹⁴⁸ François Le Lionnais, "La LiPo. Le Premier Manifeste," in *La Littérature Potentielle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 21.

them to conscious use in the future. Le Lionnais mentions elements of the Markov chain theory as an example, without, however, any further elaboration of the concept. If identification of possible formal patterns in existing literary works constituted the Oulipo's analytical concern reaching out towards the past, one could logically assume that the synthetic approach directed to the future should mean generating new patterns, yet, at the time of the composition of the First Manifesto, this was not the case. Le Lionnais formulates the synthetic preoccupation of the group as follows: "La tendance synthétique est plus ambitieuse; elle constitue la vocation essentielle de l'OuLiPo. Il s'agit d'ouvrir de nouvelles voies inconnues de nos prédécesseurs. C'est, par exemple, le cas des *Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes* ou des haï-kaï booléens."¹⁴⁹ This formulation again confirms that Queneau's sonnets were adopted as an ideal for which to strive in the creation of potential literature. The second example given by Le Lionnais, the haï-kaï booléens, constituted a set of haiku poems that can be written with the use of sets of words defined thanks to a juxtaposition of two existing texts.¹⁵⁰ Even though the First Manifesto does propose the application of mathematical structures and abstractions in the creative process as a method of facilitation the completion of potential literary works, I want to once again emphasize that at this point the group was not focusing on the formulation of such constraints. This initial flexibility in the group's approach towards the concept of constraint underpins the fact that at

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁵⁰ In his explanatory text entitled "Poèmes booléens," included in the volume *La Littérature potentielle*, Le Lionnais explains his idea with an example that makes use of two *Épithaphe* sonnets, one by Corneille, one by Brébeuf. Both sonnets use a very similar pool of vocabulary, therefore, if one considers words used in a poem as a set, the subset of vocabulary items appearing in both sonnets is substantial. Le Lionnais then proceeds to composing short haiku poems that only use words belonging to a specified subset: vocabulary that belongs to the intersection of both ensembles (original sonnets), or words that only appear in one or the other sonnet. Such a setup for the creative process constitutes a potentially immensely large number of haikus that can be generated, just like in the case of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*.

first the application of mathematical structures was only a means to an end of devising literary works that were inherently potential in and of themselves, and were not mere examples of texts that a constraint can generate.

Such a drive to test the limits of what can be accomplished creatively combining literature with scientific methods illustrated here by mathematical concepts inscribes the Oulipo even more in the tradition of pataphysics as promoted by the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. Considering that retaining the quality of potentiality in a work that exists in actuality, i.e. in the form of a book that can be held, touched and perused, and that contains lines of printed text inviting us to a linear reading, is an extremely difficult task. At times the Oulipians raised and discussed their concerns that the realization of such a task is a process much more complicated and delicate than its theorization, if indeed it is possible at all. In May 1961, Albert-Marie Schmidt brings up the conflict that takes place when one attempts to actualize potentiality: “Cependant un phénomène me semble mériter un soupçon d’attention: tout texte étudié possède des potentialités que nous faisons passer à l’actualité, c’est-à-dire que nous transformons en réalités.”¹⁵¹ This argument is reminiscent of the dilemma pertaining to the Aristotelian concept of potentiality, asking whether or not the latter vanishes once the potential becomes the actual. The assumption that, indeed, actualization equals the end of the potential is simplistic, but it appears that some Oulipians, like Schmidt, were susceptible to this fallacious logic. Jacques Bens raised a similar concern in December 1961: “Je me suis demandé si, dans nos activités personnelles [...], il nous est possible de réaliser une œuvre potentielle. Personnellement, je réponds non. Parce que je crois que le propre d’une œuvre achevée est précisément de n’être pas

¹⁵¹ Marchant, “Compte rendu mai 1961.”

(ou plus) potentielle.”¹⁵² Interestingly, these discussions of the feasibility of completion of a truly potential literary work were taking place in the year of publication of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*. Indeed, by the time Bens voiced his concerns, the volume had been already published. On the one hand, Queneau proved that despite the difficulty of capturing potentiality in actual works, it was not impossible. On the other hand, however, the doubts of the group members pushed them to modify their initial ambitious objective illustrated by Queneau’s sonnets and focus instead on the potentiality of constraints rather than accomplished works.

The ideal of potential literature, exemplified by Queneau’s volume of sonnets, proved impossible to capture in a formula at the time when the Oulipo had an implicit need to put the scope of their activities into words, therefore the group’s members started to redefine their initial goals. While the first oulipian manifesto, written in 1962, does not yet focus on the creation of formal constraints as the group’s *raison d’être*, the Oulipians had been discussing this direction already in the summer of 1961. Bens reports this discussion in his “Petite histoire de l’Oulipo” (1973), and cites Le Lionnais:

Le but de la Littérature Potentielle est de fournir aux écrivains futurs des techniques nouvelles qui puissent réserver l’inspiration de leur affectivité. D’où la nécessité d’une certaine liberté. Il y a 9 ou 10 siècles, quand un littérateur potentiel a proposé la forme du sonnet, il a laissé, à travers certains procédés mécaniques, la possibilité d’un choix.¹⁵³

While in this statement Le Lionnais does not directly advocate the idea of the formal constraint, he does turn towards coming up with techniques facilitating affective engagement in one’s

¹⁵² Bens, “Compte rendu décembre 1961.”

¹⁵³ Jean Lescure, “Petite histoire de l’Oulipo,” in *La Littérature potentielle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 37.

creative process, rather than focusing on completing literary works that encompass potentiality in themselves. He does, however, quote the example of the sonnet form, and this example tips us off as to his predilection towards formal constraints in general.

Le Lionnais suggests that an imposition of a rigidly defined formal structure, for example a sonnet, at the beginning of the creative process presents writers with a range of potential realizations of such a pattern, and this endows them with the freedom of choice. Later on, in his interview with Georges Charbonnier (1962), Queneau picks up on the formal patterns' relevance in the Oulipo's mission and nuances Le Lionnais statement as follows:

Le mot "potentiel" porte sur la nature même de la littérature, c'est-à-dire qu'au fond, il s'agit peut-être moins de littérature proprement dite que de fournir des formes au bon usage qu'on peut faire de la littérature. Nous appelons littérature potentielle la recherche des formes, de structures nouvelles et qui pourront être utilisées par les écrivains de la façon qui leur plaira.¹⁵⁴

Thus, Queneau suggests that potential literature is an umbrella term, which encompasses not only literature in the traditional sense of the word, understood as completed books, poems, and novels, but relates to streamlining the creative process by providing ready-made forms. Following Queneau's reasoning, the Oulipo's goals would no longer consist in composing works imitating the inherent potentiality of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, but in providing structural scaffolding, like the form of a sonnet, for future literary works.

Such an understanding of potential literature in which one is charged with identifying existing literary forms and devising new ingenious structures unavoidably raises the following question: what is the place of completed literary works, for example the volume of Queneau's

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 38.

potential sonnets, in this project? Le Lionnais did eventually address the rift between formulating constraints and creating literary works and officially inscribed the importance of constraints as points of departure for writing in the Oulipo's mission: "L'Oulipo a pour but de découvrir des structures nouvelles et de donner pour chaque structure des exemples en petite quantité."¹⁵⁵ This statement finally proposes a compromise between the laboratory-like mission to discover useful structural patterns for future literary creation and the actual creative process to produce texts that is unavoidably a part of any writer's ambition, including the writers identifying as members of the Oulipo. The inability to put into words what exactly took place at the creation of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* and the impossibility to define the creative process that led to the enclosure of immense potentiality in such a small volume pushed the Oulipians to settle on shifting the focus on potentiality from completed works to the constraints used in their creation. The group agreed to focus on formulating structural constraints, and to provide works that *illustrated* them. Such illustrations, however, constitute only one possible realization of a constraint and thus do not exhaust or embody its full potential. For example, Perec's famous *La Disparition* (1969), a novel that in its entirety is a lipogram in "e," demonstrates a significant portion of what can be written without that particular letter. Yet, it only contains the lines that are written on its pages. Considerably larger amount of text can be generated without the use of the letter "e," but this potential, unrealized text has no place in Perec's novel. This potential is, instead, located in the constraint of the lipogram itself.

I would argue that the Oulipo's gradual shift of focus from literary works that become artifacts of potentiality that elude a simple explanation to the generation of formal constraints and the illustration of them in writing is emblematic of the group's distancing from the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 38.

philosophy and lifestyle of the Collège de 'Pataphysique and its devotion to the imaginary science of pataphysics. The year 1973 was particularly significant for the official validation of the Oulipo's newly defined path of the pursuit of formal constraint for a number of reasons. First, in 1973, François Le Lionnais composed the workshop's second manifesto. "Le Second Manifeste," unlike the first one, openly admits the group's predilection for so-called syntactic constraints and advocates for the expansion of the scope of applicable pre-defined patterns from pure structure to the field of semantics. Le Lionnais asserts that "[e]ntre ces deux pôles toute une gamme de structures plus ou moins contraignantes a fait depuis l'invention du langage l'objet de nombreuses expériences. L'OuLiPo a la conviction, très forte, qu'on pourrait en envisager un bien plus grand nombre."¹⁵⁶ Thus, the group no longer declared its mission as "[...] ouvrir de nouvelles voies inconnus," in the way *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* did, but to specifically generate constraining patterns that can be used by writers as a springboards for their works and that could replace artistic inspiration.¹⁵⁷ In other words, a writer who is experiencing a creative block could, instead of awaiting inspiration from an undefined source, adopt a formal constraint in order to start generating texts.

Secondly, 1973 saw the publication of the first comprehensive volume, containing both oulipian manifestos and other informative texts, as well as the classification of constraints through which the Oulipo had been working, entitled *La Littérature potentielle*. It was the first book published independently from the Collège and the bulk of its content consists of lists and explanations of existing and new constraints identified and devised by the group. The list includes, but is not limited to, forms such as the lipogram, the palindrome, homophonic

¹⁵⁶ François Le Lionnais, "Le second Manifeste," in *La Littérature potentielle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 25.

¹⁵⁷ Le Lionnais, "La LiPo," 21.

translation, the snowball technique, the S+7 method, and many more, which clearly demonstrates that the Oulipo's interest crystallized around formal patterns at that time.¹⁵⁸ Finally, 1973 marked the death of Latis, the Collège's main delegate to the Oulipo, also known as Dr. Sandomir, the founder of the Collège, or simply as Emmanuel Peillet, which was his real name. Latis's death had significant consequences for the Collège itself and two years later resulted in the group's suspension of all activity and its occultation until the year 2000.¹⁵⁹ These years were symbolic of the Oulipo's emancipation, since its members found themselves all of a sudden without the guidance of their host organization, which went underground, and were free to take charge of the outreach and the promotion of their activities.

Thus, I would argue that we must understand the Oulipo's path to independence as a gradual process imbued with the influences of its pataphysical heritage, which was assimilated into the group's own formulation of their goals rather than rejected through its emancipation.¹⁶⁰ I

¹⁵⁸ A lipogram consists in deliberately not using a selected letter of the alphabet. A palindrome is a word or a phrase that can be read from left to right but also from right to left. A homophonic translation is a transposition of a text from one language to another, but not in terms of its meaning, but in terms of its sonorous structure. A snowball, a technique devised by the Oulipians, is a poem whose first line is a one-letter word, the second one consists of two letters, the third of three, and so on. Finally, the goal of the S+7 method is to replace each noun (*substantif*) in a text with the seventh noun that comes after it in a chosen dictionary.

¹⁵⁹ I will discuss the Collège's hiatus in more details in chapter 4.

¹⁶⁰ In an interview given to the journal *Histoires littéraires* in 2012, Marcel Bénabou, the Oulipo's provisional secretary, thus speaks about the evolution of the changing but prevailing bond between the Collège and the Oulipo: "Ces liens ont beaucoup évolué avec le temps. Au commencement, ils sont particulièrement étroits. À peine créé, l'Oulipo est rattaché au Collège, dont il devient d'abord une sous-commission, puis une co-commission. Les oulipiens deviennent automatiquement membres du Collège à différents niveaux de la hiérarchie. [...] Mais ces liens vont peu à peu de distendre, surtout après l'occultation du Collège en 1975 et le décès des principaux membres fondateurs, qui avaient été à l'origine du rattachement. Plus, récemment, en particulier depuis la Désoccultation de 2000, de nouveaux liens se sont créés, moins institutionnels, plus personnels, entre certains oulipiens et certains pataphysiciens." "Entretien avec Marcel Bénabou," *Histoires littéraires. Revue trimestrielle consacrée à la littérature française des XIX^e et XX^e siècles* XIV, April, May, June (2013): 120.

see the oulipian understanding of potentiality, even if its locus shifted from completed works to individual formal constraints, as significantly shaped by the imaginary science of pataphysics. Jarry's science, as the Collège cultivated it, advocated experimentation and the flexible merging of artistic practices and established scientific disciplines in order to expand existing horizons of knowledge. The Oulipo did just that through their marriage of literature and mathematics: they devised works, such as *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, or even just formal constraints, which contain a much larger pool of unrealized, potential and imaginary solutions than their physical realization in texts. For example, the abstract concept of the aforementioned lipogram in "e" incorporates all the potential words, as well as syntactic and semantic structures, that could be generated without the use of that particular letter. If *La Disparition* demonstrates a portion of these solutions, one would not be able to write out all of them in one's lifetime, just like in the case of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*. Such powerful constraints and texts, I argue, constitute a particular kind of pataphysical potentiality that bends and expands the limitations drawn by rigid scientific categories of knowledge. Such texts and notions of constraints are specific instances of material, textual objects that can expand exponentially beyond their physical limitation when processed by readers and writers.

The idea of a formal constraint as the starting point of a literary work, taking the place of inspiration at the onset of the creative process, became a trademark of the Oulipo and overshadowed the group's unique take on pataphysical potentiality and its application in literature. If Perec is indeed the best-known Oulipian of the twentieth century, it is because he wrote *La Disparition* (1969) without the letter "e," *Les Revenentes* (1972) without all the other vowels, and composed *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1987) by imposing not one, but four formal constraints involving a grid imitating the façade of an apartment building, lists of vocabulary

items to be used in each chapter, and a chapter structure organized according to the pattern of the knight's moves in chess, with the chess board superimposed on the aforementioned grid. While all of these constraints are extremely generative of potential outcomes, readers tend to focus on the ingenuity of Perec's novels *despite* the constraints rather than *thanks to* them. Such an approach to literature written under constraints lessens the initial mission of the Oulipo, according to which the group demonstrates how potent the literary medium could be in terms of the exploration of the virtual plane of potentiality, which always parallels our actuality. This does not mean, however, that the shift of focus away from pure potentiality to formulating constraints phased out the Oulipo's preoccupation with completed potential literary works altogether, as I will show in my readings of Bénabou's *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres*, Perec's *Le Voyage d'hiver*, and Calvino's *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur*. These are oulipian texts that, each in their own way, demonstrate how to engage readers in generating and accessing virtual planes parallel to the text that foster the circulation of affects.

3.4 THE POTENTIALITY OF CYBERTEXTS

The notion of the cybertext, as theorized by Aarseth, will be particularly useful in my study of the potentiality of oulipian works because it denotes texts that have a virtual dimension to them, a dimension that is not always accessible to the readers. It is true that we tend to pair the word "cybertext" with information technology, which is, to some extent, misleading. Aarseth explains that "cybertext," was a neologism proposed in 1948 by Norbert Wiener and used to describe the

newly formulated discipline of cybernetics.¹⁶¹ Aarseth emphasizes that the scope of Wiener's cybernetics reached far beyond the limits of technology, with which it was commonly associated. In Aarseth's view, "[...] the concept of cybertext does not limit itself to the study of computer-driven (or 'electronic') textuality."¹⁶² Does that mean that literary cybertexts have nothing to do with information technology? Not necessarily. Cybertexts are organized according to principles that exploit internal connections and channels of feedback within the text, the same principles used by computers in processing and generating data. Once again, Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* serves as an example: the author of the sonnets created a work that has the power to generate an amount of linear text that only a computer would be able to generate and process within a reasonable timeframe. Therefore, one can contend that literary cybertexts have the potentiality to generate and explore virtuality, an effect that otherwise can be achieved through automation and computing.

The capability of literary texts to do what only computers can do constituted a particular interest of the Oulipo. Cécile de Bary, an Oulipo scholar at the Université Paris-Diderot, goes so far as to proclaim that "[l]'Oulipo est le premier mouvement littéraire français à s'intéresser aux relations entre informatique et littérature."¹⁶³ Marcel Bénabou was the Oulipian who directed the group's attention towards technology. Bénabou, a Moroccan Jew who came to France in 1956 to obtain his education and who eventually earned a doctorate in Roman history, became acquainted with the Oulipo through his long-time friend Georges Perec, and his cooptation to the group took place in 1970. The night Bénabou was invited to meet the members of the group for

¹⁶¹ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 1.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶³ Cécile de Bary, "Marcel Bénabou et l'automatisation littéraire," in *Marcel Bénabou: Archiviste de l'infini* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015), 27.

the first time, he elicited the Oulipians' curiosity with his presentation of the project on which he and Perec had been working in the 1960s, described as PALF: Production Automatique de Littérature Française.¹⁶⁴ Bénabou's adoption of strategies for generating and constructing texts according to technology-based automatism unearthed unprecedented potentiality for creativity and discovery of unexpected textual outcomes with unique artistic value. This, in turn, inspired the group to explore the domain of information technology more seriously and involve computers in literary creation, a step that came into fruition with Paul Brafford's and Jacques Roubaud's ALAMO project (Atelier de Littérature Assistée par la Mathématique et les Ordinateurs), initiated in 1980, of which Bénabou was also a member.¹⁶⁵ Bénabou's particular investment in experimenting with virtuality, which we usually associate with information technology, led him to develop an interest in accessing virtuality via traditional literature. This tendency manifests itself in his works through a recurring theme of the impossibility of writing and the paradoxical presence of texts that are absent, and *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres* is a good case in point that I will analyze in detail in a moment.

Cybertexts are not the only ones that emulate the automated channels used in cybernetic technology to ensure the flow of information. A crucial quality that characterizes cybertexts is a divergence between the full content of such texts and what their recipients are able to read in

¹⁶⁴ PALF method of text production emulated technological automatism that could be used by computers generating text according to pre-programmed algorithms. Thus, generated literature Bénabou baptized as *littérature sémo-définitionnelle* or LSD. The LSD method required replacing every grammatically important word in a text (for example nouns, verbs, etc.) by one of its definitions found in a given dictionary, and this operation could be performed ad infinitum.

¹⁶⁵ The group's vast interests included creation of computer programs capable of generating potentially excessively large if not infinite amounts of texts. An excellent example of such programs are ones regrouped under the inclusive term of TALC (Traitement Automatique du Language Cuit), proposed by no other than Bénabou, and based on his technique of substitution used in the LSD method.

them. Since cybertexts can contain very large quantities of information and possible readings, readers are endowed with a certain agency as to what kind of text they assemble out of it, all the while aware of the impossibility of performing a holistic reading of the complete cybertext.

Aarseth clarifies this as follows:

[...] when you read a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed. This is very different from the ambiguities of a linear text. And inaccessibility, it must be noted, does not imply ambiguity, but, rather, an absence of possibility – an *aporia*.¹⁶⁶

Such a way of defining a cybertext implies that the materiality of a text and its active reception is always accompanied by absence and the impossibility (or at least difficulty) of fully accessing its entire content. This, in turn, closely resembles the terms used by affect theorists to conceptualize virtuality, the plane from which affects may or may not manifest themselves. Affects that manifest themselves do so in the form of feelings and sensations, which have the power to move and compel their recipients to act or change. These are the affects pertaining to the lines of a text that are read, received, or otherwise constructed by the readers out of the multicursal labyrinth of a cybertext. The affects that remain virtual and absent from actuality are, however, always present in their absence, which constitutes a particular *aporia*. They exist nonetheless, like the paths of the textual labyrinth that were not taken and thus remain potential.

¹⁶⁶ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 3.

There is no one formula, a perfect set of instructions as to how to design a cybertext. While *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit aucun de mes livres*, the first complete narrative work by Bénabou, is not designed as a multicursal textual labyrinth in the way that Queneau's volume is, it takes on as its subject the absence of possibility, an aporia related to writing potential literature that is similar to the aporia inherent in the inaccessibility of a cybertext's totality. In his work, the author discusses a book that he strives to write, a book that is uniquely potential. The condition of its potentiality, however, is that this book cannot be written: it has to remain absent. Therefore, Bénabou writes in order to make present the absence of the book, which itself is impossible to write. Laura Brignoli identifies this quandary of impossibility as a recurrent concern of Bénabou's: "[...] toutes ses œuvres sont construites autour de l'impossibilité d'écrire, moins par faute d'un thème à développer, que par l'excès de sujets et de souvenirs qui s'y enchaînent. C'est justement de cette impossibilité que naît le texte, centré autour d'une impasse."¹⁶⁷ Potential literature that qualifies as a cybertext has to fulfill an impossible requirement: to be present and absent, to exist and not exist at the same time. By adopting this impasse as the point of departure for his book, Bénabou devises his own literary strategies to create literature that is potential and that can only be accomplished through the engagement of the virtual.

While a linear text can exist in its entirety independently from its readers, a cybertext heavily depends on them. If reading a cybertext resembles choosing a particular way of exploring it while being aware of what Aarseth refers to as "paths not taken," the participation of readers is crucial to demonstrate the potentiality of such a text by bringing it to life. Bénabou

¹⁶⁷ Laura Brignoli, "Un pacte avec le livre: l'écriture compacte de Marcel Bénabou," in *Marcel Bénabou: Archiviste de l'infini* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015), 51.

shows his awareness of the need for readers when on page 11 he welcomes them into an adventure: “C’est ce cap dangereux que vous venez à l’instant de franchir, lecteur. Puisque je ne pourrai désormais feindre d’ignorer votre présence, qu’il me soit permis de saluer votre courage, votre esprit d’aventure. [...] Il y a une forme d’audace que l’on pouvait croire tombée en désuétude.”¹⁶⁸ This passage demonstrates that from the very beginning the composition of the book defied linear assumptions about the consumption of literature, where a book is first written and then read, already at its beginning. The narrator admits that from that moment on he is writing his narrative with readers’ engagement in mind, the engagement that is indispensable to endow literature with potentiality. The narrator recognizes his readers as adventurous and audacious, since entering the field of potentiality, one cannot really anticipate or predict where one will end up.

Aarseth compares such engagement of readers in the construction of a text, not just its passive reception, to playing a game: “The cybertext reader *is* a player, a gambler; the cybertext *is* a game-world or world-game; it *is* possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery.”¹⁶⁹ Such classification of a reader as a gambler reveals a number of things about cybertexts and their relationship with virtuality and actuality. First, if readers engage with the game-world of such a text through play, it means that their role in creation of said text is comparable to that of the writer. A more pertinent question is, however, what “creation” or “realization” of a cybertext really means. If all the potential possibilities contained in a cybertext belong to the realm of the virtual, the reception of such a text allows for the leakage of selected

¹⁶⁸ Marcel Bénabou, *Pourquoi je n’ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 11.

¹⁶⁹ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 4, emphasis original.

possible readings into actuality, without losing sight of other readings that remain virtual. In other words, when readers explore a cybertext, some of its potentialities become visible and tangible to them, without contradicting the virtuality of the text's total potential. Secondly, Aarseth's classification describes such exploration of the potential as making one's way through "textual machinery," and the textuality of a book that is also a cybertext constitutes its dimension that is tangible and material, thus anchored in actuality. The definition of a cybertext as an entity that is inherently layered, on the one hand capable of inspiring spontaneity due to its potential nature, on the other, however, meticulously planned and constructed, is reminiscent Roger Caillois' comparison of games to machines:

Une machine, en effet, est un puzzle de pièces conçues pour s'adapter les unes aux autres et pour fonctionner de concert. Mais à l'intérieur de ce jeu, tout d'exactitude, intervient, qui lui donne vie, un jeu d'une autre espèce. Le premier est strict assemblage et parfaite horlogerie, le second élasticité et marge de mouvement.¹⁷⁰

The comparison of an activity that is supposed to be spontaneous, fun and can develop in unexpected ways to a structure designed to perform automated tasks may seem paradoxical. Yet it does correspond to the oulipian concept of inspiration, which comes from structure defined by constraint, rather than uncontrollable otherworldly intervention. It is indeed a well-defined structure along with rules of a game that allow for some affects, which are generated while playing, to cross over from virtuality to actuality, while the rest of them remain potential. If a game, literary or otherwise, is Caillois's clockwork mechanism, it is capable of generating its virtual double, and there are as many possible doubles as there are players ready to engage in this

¹⁷⁰ Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 13.

game. I want to argue, then, that on page 11 of *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit*, Bénabou invites his readers to enter such a literary game. Their participation is necessary in order for the author to expand the actual, material *façade* of his work and to engender its potential double that otherwise belongs to the non-being of virtuality. As a result, there are as many possible outcomes of this literary game as there are readers ready to enter the text.

3.5 MARCEL BÉNABOU'S POTENTIAL "LIVRE UNIQUE"

To complete a work of literature that is infinitely flexible in its potential, Bénabou adopts the above dual model of the book's mechanism described by Caillois extended by its virtual dimension. The materiality of the book and its virtual component are not, however, presented as two opposite aspects of the work, but as planes that overlap and create a feedback loop with one another. Bénabou's narrator talks about creating a "livre unique," which would be miraculously complete in a pataphysical way, encompassing all the books he could have and will have written, yet, in order to achieve such a masterpiece, it is crucial that it remain unwritten. The narrator concedes that faced with such a challenge, "[l]'auteur donc pourrait rétorquer que la littérature est par excellence le lieu du paradoxe."¹⁷¹ Literature is, then, a medium particularly suited to deal with irresolvable internal contradictions that correspond to the aporia characterizing cybertexts, according to Aarseth. But Bénabou's "livre unique," whose potential nature entirely depends on the fact that it has not been written, cannot be simply classified as non-existent, and the narrator emphasizes this very point: "Les livres que je n'ai pas écrits, n'allez surtout pas croire, lecteur,

¹⁷¹ Bénabou, *Pourquoi*, 18.

qu'ils soient pur néant."¹⁷² What, then, should we make of a potential book that does not exist, if we cannot think of it as non-being? Here, again, I propose to lean on Agamben's understanding of a potential mode of existence as the presence of an absence. Potentiality cannot be reduced to an absence of a certain quality or development that could realize itself, but it is the fact that this absence is obstinately there, preserved in actuality. Furthermore, potentiality juxtaposes the virtual and the actual in a unique configuration of mutual dependence. This model of potentiality helps us read and understand the literary strategy that Bénabou adopted in constructing his "livre unique." His strategy assumes that non-being, the easiest and most obvious way to think of potentiality, has to be made present, and therefore fused with being, thus forming a new, seemingly contradictory, counterintuitive and logically impossible mode of existence.

If making the virtual accessible requires an intricate, clockwork-like existing structure, Bénabou provides it through the design of *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit* according to oulipian constraints. Bénabou reveals his choice of a ternary structure of his work in an interview with Alain Schaffner:

Pour commencer, le choix de la disposition systématiquement ternaire. Elle apparaît avec évidence dans la structure du livre, qui est composé de 3 parties, elles-mêmes composées de trois chapitres, eux-mêmes composés (à une exception près, volontaire, bien sûr, car c'est un clinamen) de trois sous-chapitres. Mais elle se trouve aussi présente dans la juxtaposition, l'enchevêtrement apparent, de trois formes d'écriture: la confession à la première personne, le dialogue avec le lecteur

¹⁷² Ibid, 51.

dans les “moments de pause”, et ce que j’appelle “l’écriture empruntée”, représentée par l’abondance inhabituelle des exergues et des citations.¹⁷³

The formal distribution of the elements of the book’s composition, even if arbitrary, serves no other purpose than maintaining the rigor of the literary craft. Such rigor is necessary for writers to master their craft first in order to eventually be able to create a masterpiece endowed with potentiality, just like rigor and self-discipline are indispensable for a musician to master their instrument in a way that allows them to stage a seemingly effortless and inspired performance. Bénabou’s adoption of formal constraints guiding the creation process indeed resembles the kind of writing advocated by Le Lionnais: writing that demonstrates that formal rules are full of potential, and this potentiality can lead to generating developed narratives. But there is more to Bénabou’s book, as his text is not a mere illustration of what his adopted constraints can generate; it is endowed with potential on its own. Bénabou speaks of formal rigor he adopted as follows: “L’absence de toute contrainte, de toute forme, de toute règle, m’aurait mené exactement là où je ne voulais pas aller: dans le tiède désert du narcissisme et de la complaisance.”¹⁷⁴ Through this statement, the narrator proclaims that authors can achieve more than just writing lines of text: they can make their works impactful and affective only through exercising rigor and working according to rules. Therefore, in order to create a “livre unique” that is potential and affective Bénabou composes the material, formal façade of *Pourquoi je n’ai écrit* with the utmost precision.

The carefully designed and constraint-based structure of Bénabou’s book plays a far more important function than a mere demonstration of literary mastery of language and form. If,

¹⁷³ Alain Schaffner, “Marcel Bénabou, archiviste de l’infini, entretien avec Alain Schaffner,” in *Marcel Bénabou: Archiviste de l’infini* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015), 185.

¹⁷⁴ Bénabou, *Pourquoi*, 103.

following Agamben's lines, potentiality is not simply relegated to non-being, but it is an absence made present, the *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit* serves as a tangible scaffolding in which the author anchors his potential "livre unique," thus situating it in actuality, without losing sight of its non-being. In his actual book, Bénabou deploys multiple points of convergence between the physical text and his potential unique novel. For example, the author hints at the point where his potential work should start, which coincides with the physical beginning of the book's section entitled "Première page:"

Au commencement, une phrase très courte. Une demi-douzaine de mots seulement; des mots simples, les premiers venus, ou presque. Chargés avant tout de signifier qu'ici s'achève un silence. Mais aussitôt après, sans même un alinéa, débiterait une longue phrase au conditionnel, une de ces périodes à l'ancienne où tout serait avec soin combiné – le choix des verbes, la charpente logique, le nombre des segments, la longueur et la durée de chacun – pour capter d'abord puis tenir en éveil la curiosité du lecteur, pour lui faire parcourir pas à pas [...] le cercle entier des propositions successives, distribuées – dans leur diversité très composée – autour d'un axe unique, et pour enfin le faire trébucher, à travers un dédale d'incises et de parenthèses, sur un ultime obstacle [...], une clause qui ne conclut rien.¹⁷⁵

The "Première page" section constitutes the official beginning of the book that the readers hold in their hands – preceded by prefatory units entitled "Au lecteur" and "Titre" – and is self-reflexive to the breaking point. In this passage, the author explains what the first page of the ideal potential book should be, and his instructions correspond word for word to what is being

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 25.

written. For example, the recommendation to start the “livre unique” with a short sentence composed of no more than half a dozen simple words is conveyed in a sentence that is exactly that: a concise, six-word sentence that breaks the silence before the writing process starts and marks the beginning of this break with the words “au commencement.” Subsequently, the author recommends a sentence in the conditional verbal mode, and, at his point not surprisingly, that very suggestion is made with the use of the verb “débuter,” conjugated in the *présent du conditionnel*. The sentence containing this suggestion is developed into a long, convoluted statement that is supposed to capture and retain the readers’ curiosity, and have them move across a complex text, with its tangential detours, which eventually does not lead to any conclusion – these words being a paraphrase of what we can actually read in the continuation of this first paragraph of the section. Considering that these recommendations for the beginning of such a potential literary work are at the same time carried out to the letter in this opening of the section, the author achieves a peculiar effect of what I will call “cleaving” of both the actual and the virtual narrative. Drawing on the double meaning of the word “cleave,” on the one hand, in this passage both the actual text and the narrative of the “livre unique” are distinctly split apart, as the former explains how to approach the writing of the latter.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, however, both narratives stick, adhere to and reflect one another to the point that we have to ask ourselves which one of them we are reading. Such moments of self-reflexivity and blurring of the line separating the actual text from its subject matter – the potential book – are strategically deployed throughout Bénabou’s novel. These moments, I argue, are the points of convergence between the

¹⁷⁶ I borrow this particular application of the verb “to cleave” from Zadie Smith who in her first novel, *White Teeth* (2001), employed it to talk about a unique relationship between identical twins: on the one hand, they are one and gravitate towards one another in their similarities, on the other hand, however, there is an insurmountable split dividing them, as they are separate human beings.

potential and the actual, and they constitute nodes that render the non-being of potentialities present.

Another way in which Bénabou anchors the absence of his “livre unique” in the materiality of the book he writes, is through linking its title with Raymond Roussel’s posthumously published metatextual work entitled *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935). In his work, Roussel does exactly what he announces in the title; he explains linguistic techniques he had applied while composing some of his books: “Je me suis toujours proposé d’expliquer de quelle façon j’avais écrit certains de mes livres (*Impressions d’Afrique, Locust Solus, l’Étoile au Front et la Poussière de Soleils*).”¹⁷⁷ The link between the two works, Roussel’s and Bénabou’s, is not one of simple emulation or adaptation. The narrator of Bénabou’s book does give the readers a *clin d’œil* regarding the reference to Roussel’s narrative without, however, explaining the work’s exact relationship to it: “*Pourquoi je n’ai écrit aucun de mes livres*. Pour bien des oreilles la formule sonnera comme une provocation: n’y aurait-il pas, derrière la reprise et le détournement d’un titre aussi fameux, le désir présomptueux d’affirmer une parenté, voire (ô sacrilège) une identification (au moins dans la démarche) avec Raymond Roussel?”¹⁷⁸ The narrator, thus, admits the resonance of Roussel’s title, but refuses to draw the causal connection between the two works. Such a statement is reminiscent of Massumi’s proposition to expand our understanding of relationships between phenomena from mere cause-effect links towards “[...] nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future.”¹⁷⁹ If Bénabou’s narrator

¹⁷⁷ Raymond Roussel, *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1977), 11.

¹⁷⁸ Bénabou, *Pourquoi*, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 95-96.

discourages readers from juxtaposing both works in a relationship of linear kinship by calling an inclination to do so presumptuous, he does not deny a connection altogether.

Roussel's narrative resonates within Bénabou's book in a different, practical way. Bénabou's narrator claims that "[...] la seule substitution du *pourquoi* au *comment* suffirait à dénoncer, aux yeux des gens sérieux (qui dans le monde des lettres sont légion, comme chacun sait), l'inanité de toute tentative de rapprochement."¹⁸⁰ The substitution of the initial interrogative adverb indeed can be seen as disruptive regarding the direct, linear relationship between the two, but it allows the writing technique that Roussel explains in his narrative to resonate throughout Bénabou's book. Roussel composed some of his books based on the technique of substitution of words or letters in otherwise identical sentences and on the multiplicity of meanings of certain words. As an example, Roussel cites his *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910), in which the first and last sentence are formally identical, apart from one letter in one of its words (*billard* – *pillard*).¹⁸¹ This slight modification results in sentences that carry completely different meanings, and his using them as an opening and a closing of his books constitutes an inspiration to "fill in" the rest, the body of the book.¹⁸²

Bénabou, then, draws directly from Roussel's technique of semantic and grammatical substitution and develops it in a new unexpected direction. Already in the title the author signals that this approach to generating literature via structural play is at work in his book, and he

¹⁸⁰ Bénabou, *Pourquoi*, 17, emphasis original.

¹⁸¹ Raymond Roussel, *Impressions d'Afrique* (Paris: Pauvert, 1963).

¹⁸² The phrases opening and closing *Impressions d'Afrique* are: "Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard," and "Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard." The author also plays on the homonymy of the words "lettres," "blanc" and "bandes." Such operation, applied in 1910, prefigures many of the Oulipo's interests, which is why Roussel has been noted as a figure of inspiration for the group. For more details see David Gascoigne, "From Roussel to Oulipo: Influences and Exemplars," in *The Games of Fiction: Georges Perec and Modern French Ludic Narrative* (Oxford, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 47–80.

suggests that a manipulation of the textuality of a book can bring about its expansion onto the plane of potentiality. At the end of Bénabou's book, his narrator implicitly gives a particular homage to Roussel by praising the potentiality of his technique: "Je découvrais ainsi que, pour peu que l'on se montre accueillant à son égard, un mot n'arrive jamais seul. *Il entraîne avec lui tous ceux de sa tribu* – ses parents par le sens ou par le son – qui de toute évidence n'attendaient pour faire irruption que cette brèche creusée par l'un des leurs."¹⁸³ Through this statement, the narrator admits to having spontaneously discovered what Roussel had already explained in his posthumously published narrative: potentialities come from the fact that words carry a multitude of meanings, as homophones or homographs, and this is an important discovery for literary creation. I want to argue that this statement also has an implication for my broader argument in which I contend that Bénabou's text is accompanied by its potential double, his "livre unique." Bénabou's narrator realizes that each word he chooses to use inevitably comes with its tribe, the potential meanings that are inherently comprised in it, even if they are not applied in the text. Thus, the potentiality of all the words and their combinations used in Bénabou's narrative expands exponentially and surpasses the physical limitations of his book. The potential meanings of words, sentences, and paragraphs in Bénabou's work are latent in the text and consciously made present in their absence.

Nevertheless, *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit* is a narrative that is self-reflexive in more than just one way. On top of it being a potential "livre unique," parasitically anchored in the materiality and textuality of an actual book, it is also a tale of his maturation as a writer and his realization of literature being uniquely predisposed to explore virtuality. Bénabou's narrator reveals that the potential of literature eluded him when he was young: "Je n'avais pas encore compris ce qui sans

¹⁸³ Bénabou, *Pourquoi* 119, emphasis added.

doute s'enseigne aux enfants des écoles aujourd'hui, à savoir qu'un livre n'a pas besoin d'être le reflet ou la transcription de quelque chose qui lui préexiste."¹⁸⁴ If the French school system instilled in its students the sense that literature, especially novels, are to be a reflection of reality, or at least a possibility of reality, writers who ventured into the imaginary and the potential had to work out their own ways to carry out such works. The narrator speaks of his own experience in this regard: "J'acceptais donc désormais qu'un livre eût pour fonction non de redoubler inutilement le réel, mais de le continuer par d'autres moyens. Il me fallait seulement, et de toute urgence, trouver lesdits moyens."¹⁸⁵ Subsequently, for the narrator, and by extension for Bénabou, finding ways to expand actuality, instead of copying it in literature, was a process. In this process, he devised ways to make his non-book present, of which he speaks as follows: "[...] son œil [de l'auteur] ne voit dans les choses que l'absence de ce qu'il cherche. Le mieux n'est-il pas pour lui d'accepter cette situation? Il a donc pris le parti de décrire patiemment les contours de cette absence, d'en tracer les formes avec le plus de précision possible."¹⁸⁶ Thus the narrator suggests that instead of fighting the stubborn immateriality and physical absence of potentialities, a writer should embrace these qualities. Instead of attempting to actualize virtual potentialities and affects, their absence and non-being should be emphasized, traced and crystallized in the process of writing. The narrator compares the result of such an operation to the famous painting by René Magritte "La Trahison des images" (1928-29) that depicts a pipe with a subtitle proclaiming: "*ceci n'est pas une pipe*," resulting in a cognitive dissonance between the image and the text. Inspired by Magritte, Bénabou's narrator summarizes the absent "livre unique," the contours of which he traced in *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit*, in the following phrase: "ceci

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 107.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 118.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 96.

n'est pas un livre." Even though such a statement is contradictory and logically impossible, the reader is invited to accept the fact that the creative process leading to the completion of *Pourquoi je n'ai écrit* was just that: bringing the apparent impossibility into existence. The potential non-text that results from methodically practiced writing assumes its existence in its peculiar potential form when confronted with readers who, like in case of Aarseth's cybertexts, are invited to engage in it.

3.6 READERS' ENGAGEMENT IN ITALO CALVINO'S *SI UNE NUIT D'HIVER UN VOYAGEUR*

The idea of writing a "livre unique," a text whose actual, material limitations are pushed and open up onto the plane of the virtual, which, in turn, gives the readers access to proliferating potentialities, is not exclusive to Marcel Bénabou. Italo Calvino pursues it in his own way in *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur* (1979), and his strategy to construct such a text consists in the direct confrontation of the readers with the absence and the incompleteness of a collection of narratives contained within his novel. In *Si une nuit*, Calvino addresses the concept of the "livre unique" head-on, via his narrator: "Pour l'écrivain qui veut s'annuler pour donner voix à ce qui se trouve à l'extérieur de lui deux chemins s'ouvrent: ou bien écrire un livre qui soit le livre unique, un livre capable de tout épuiser dans ses pages; ou bien écrire tous les livres, de manière à poursuivre le tout à travers ses images partielles."¹⁸⁷ Calvino envisages two possible paths in order to create a unique work of potential literature. The former is a text endowed with a singular

¹⁸⁷ Italo Calvino, *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur*, trans. Martin Rueff (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), 254.

and paradoxical property of generating in an exhaustive manner all its potentialities. I propose to cite Bénabou's book as an example of this first creative strategy, as his "livre unique" cleaves off of the material layer of his actual text and exponentially expands its capacity. The latter path resembles more the Borgesian Library of Babel, a library, described in a short story by the same title, that contains "all the books" of a certain format.¹⁸⁸ While the number of combinations within that format is possibly limited, the concept remains beyond human capability of containment. Calvino's narrator proclaims that he chooses to pursue the latter: "Je n'ai donc pas d'autre solution que d'écrire tous les livres, d'écrire les livres de tous les auteurs possibles."¹⁸⁹ This decision reflects to some degree Calvino's choices made in regard to the structure of *Si une nuit*, which is a book that contains ten beginnings of ten different novels and which could have been written by ten different authors. While ten examples of different texts are hardly "tous les livres [...] de tous les auteurs possibles," Calvino's novel gives the reader a glance at what could be accomplished if such a project were completed and handed to the reader.

The readers' engagement in constructing Calvino's story in *Si une nuit* is a subject that has engendered profuse scholarship arguing both for and against the readers' agency while reading the book. Inge Fink, for example, remarks upon the malleability of Calvino's novel, which lends itself to a myriad of interpretations, often contradictory, yet allowed by the text. She states that, while "[...] marveling at the differences between some of the interpretations critics propose, one cannot help wondering what it is about the book that sparks such a variety of

¹⁸⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, ed. Andrew Hurley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998).

¹⁸⁹ Calvino, *Si une nuit d'hiver* 255.

reactions.”¹⁹⁰ The novel starts with the narrator directly addressing the reader, informing him (the initially addressed reader is male, later referred to as *lecteur*, as he gradually becomes the protagonist of the novel) that he is about to read Calvino’s most recent novel. Having read a few pages of what appears to be that novel, the narrative is abruptly interrupted: due to a binder’s mistake, the opening few paragraphs of the book are printed repeatedly, thus preventing the reader from discovering how the story ends. As Calvino’s novel unfolds, the reader is repeatedly put in a similar situation: he finds himself reading new stories, all of which are unexpectedly interrupted. Thus, not surprisingly, the aspect of the book that raises the most divergent arguments is the readers’ agency and its close co-dependence on the writer’s authority.¹⁹¹ Rather than adjudicate which critical opinions are right and which are wrong, I want to examine instead the textual strategies that Calvino implements to interpellate and involve the readers in the unfolding of his novel. I will, furthermore, turn my attention to the effect that such an interpellation has on the multiple texts, the unfinished novels, comprised in Calvino’s book.

Calvino performs his interpellation of the reader through carefully constructed “cleaving,” simultaneous identification and separation between the person actually handling his book and reading it, and the virtual protagonist who is also a reader. Calvino’s anchoring of the

¹⁹⁰ Inge Fink, “The Power behind the Pronoun: Narrative Games in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 37, no. 1 (1991): 93.

¹⁹¹ To provide several examples, Anne-Marie Monluçon negotiates Calvino’s position *vis-à-vis* Barthe’s criticism of authorial authority and Foucault’s death of the author; see Anne-Marie Monluçon, “Entre théorie et fiction: quelques figures paradoxales de l’Auteur dans *Si par une nuit d’hiver un voyageur* d’Italo Calvino,” *Recherches & Travaux* 64, no. June (2004): 141–56. Moreover, while Madeleine Sorapure argues that the engagement of the reader helps the neutralization of the authorial power, Mariolina Salvatori posits that the readers’ agency is an illusion and that the text constitutes their entrapment; see Madeleine Sorapure, “Being in the Midst: Italo Calvino’s ‘If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler,’” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 31, no. 4 (1985): 702–10, and Mariolina Salvatori and Italo Calvino, “Italo Calvino’s ‘If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler’: Writer’s Authority, Reader’s Autonomy,” *Contemporary Literature* 27, no. 2 (1986): 182–212.

actual reader onto the virtual one is reminiscent of the way Bénabou connected his actual text with the virtual “livre unique.” The strategic points in Calvino’s novel where the actual and the virtual readers cleave towards one another are the opening and the ending of the text as well as moments of interruption of each of the ten narratives presented within the book. The first paragraph of the novel comes across as a direct address to the person reading it because it describes the exact circumstances of that very event:

Tu es sur le point de commencer le nouveau roman d’Italo Calvino, *Si une nuit d’hiver un voyageur*. Détends-toi. Recueille-toi. Chasse toute autre pensée de ton esprit. Laisse le monde qui t’entoure s’estomper dans la vague. Il vaut mieux fermer la porte; là-bas la télévision est toujours allumée [...].¹⁹²

At this starting point, the narrator, without revealing himself explicitly, describes what the actual reader is doing: while reading the first sentences of Calvino’s book, we are indeed starting a novel of his that is new to us. Such an interpellation allows us to identify instantly with the addressee of the narrator. The identification bond is only reinforced in the paragraphs that follow as the narrator offers advice as to how to make this reading experience more pleasant and comfortable; he suggests that the reader relax and eliminate any source of noise that could interfere with the experience, such as television in the background. Over the next couple of pages, the narrator goes into painstaking details about the most comfortable positions for reading, depending on preferences: “[...] assis, allongé, lové, couché. Couché sur le dos, sur un côté, sur le ventre. Dans un fauteuil, sur le divan, dans le fauteuil à bascule, sur la chaise longue, sur un pouf. Dans le hamac, si tu as un hamac. Sur le lit, bien sûr, ou dans le lit.” He offers suggestions concerning the positioning of one’s feet: “Allonge les jambes, allonge même les

¹⁹² Calvino, *Si une nuit d’hiver*, 9.

pieds sur un coussin, sur deux coussins, sur les bras du divan, sur les oreilles du fauteuil, sur la table à thé, sur le bureau, sur le piano, sur la mappemonde.” He even gives recommendations about the lighting appropriate for an optimal reading experience: “Règle la lumière de façon à ne pas t’abîmer la vue. [...] Arrange-toi pour que la page ne reste pas dans l’ombre, une concentration de lettres grises sur fond noir, uniforme comme bande de souris; mais prend garde aussi qu’elle ne soit pas exposée à une lumière trop forte [...].”¹⁹³ The exaggerated length and exhaustiveness of the lists of options regarding the narrator’s recommendations for comfortable reading maximize the odds of readers finding and identifying the configuration that is most appealing to them and that corresponds with their immediate environment, thus reinforcing their bond with the narrator’s addressee.

Such incorporation of elements that readers will find familiar and comforting tightens the bond between them and the protagonist/reader whose presence is not yet evident throughout the opening pages of the novel. The first sign of “cleaving away” between the actual and the virtual reader appears when the narrator names his addressee *lecteur*: “Toi, lecteur, tu croyais que là sous la véranda, mon regard s’était fixé sur les aiguilles plantées [...].”¹⁹⁴ From this point on, the narrator refers to the reader not only with the use of the intimate pronoun “tu,” focusing on the bond with him, but also establishes him as an individual. The “cleaving” is complete when, in the second chapter of the novel, the narrator names the reader *Lecteur*, with a capital “L,” and it thus becomes clear that we can no longer identify with him because that person belongs to the diegesis of the story. Over the course of the novel the protagonist/reader constantly gravitates

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 9-10.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 23.

back towards and away from the actual reader until the very end, where both become one again in the concluding words:

Et toi [tu dis]:

- Encore un instant. Je suis sur le point de finir *Si une nuit d'hiver un voyageur* d'Italo Calvino.¹⁹⁵

What allows the author to establish such a unique relationship of simultaneous identification and distance between the actual reader and the protagonist/reader is his skillful use of pronouns, which Fink describes as “the magic of the second-person pronoun.”¹⁹⁶ This relationship is determined not only by the deliberate application of the pronoun “tu,” but it is also laid out through its connection with the “je” of the narrator himself who controls the distancing and the coming together of the two facets of his reader. Fink states that the control exerted by the narrator, whom we can read as the implied author, is a game on his part: “There is the (implied) author, the ‘I’ parading as the real Italo Calvino, talking to an imaginary ‘you,’ whom the reader takes to be himself/herself. The game is thus set up, with the ‘I’ at an early advantage: he is already playing, whereas the reader, who still expects a traditional novel, is being played with.”¹⁹⁷ The game between the authorial “je” and the “tu,” the narrator’s actual and/or virtual addressee, consists not only in controlling the cleaving of the “tu,” but also in providing the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 362.

¹⁹⁶ Fink, “The Power behind the Pronoun,” 98. Calvino’s use of second person pronoun is reminiscent of Michel Butor’s *La Modification* (1957), a novel in which the author addresses his main character with the pronoun “vous,” thus also establishing a bond with the reader. *La Modification* is also a novel exemplary of the Nouveau Roman literary movement of the 1950s. In spite of such similarities in literary experimentation, writers affiliated with the Nouveau Roman and those belonging to the Oulipo group never manifested any mutual interest.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 95.

reader with new stories and taking away their availability at the point when readers have become invested in them.

The regularly recurring moments of interruption, when the *Lecteur* realizes he cannot continue reading the narratives once they capture his curiosity and interest, are also ones where the actual reader gravitates back toward and overlaps with the fictional one. Both readers are brought together by their response to the interruptions, a response that is an emotional expression of affects. When the first narrative proposed within Calvino's novel comes to a halt, it is because of a binder's mistake, which allegedly resulted in the binding of its first 16 pages over and over again. As a result, both the diegetic reader and actual readers are equally prevented from discovering the rest of the story. Thus, the the reader/protagonist's frustrated and irritated reaction can be said to correspond with ours, even if only figuratively: "Tu jettes le livre par terre, tu le lancerais volontiers par la fenêtre fermée, à travers les lames des stores vénitiens, et qu'elles triturent ses in-folios incohérents, que les phrases les mots les morphèmes les phonèmes jaillissent sans plus pouvoir se recomposer en discours."¹⁹⁸ The impulse to destroy the defective volume is an expression of the reader/protagonist's frustration, and this frustration binds him with the actual reader through the sensations it triggers.

The following iteration of this situation takes place when the reader/protagonist starts reading the next narrative, which he erroneously received instead of a corrected copy of the first book. The second narrative turns out to be interrupted due to a printer's mistake; the reader notices that some pages are followed by two blank ones, and that it is impossible to continue reading and enjoying the book without knowing what happened on those pages. Here again the response to this disruption is what brings us to identify with the fictional reader: "Tu es

¹⁹⁸ Calvino, *Si une nuit d'hiver*, 40.

abasourdi, tu contemples ce blanc cruel comme une blessure, espérant presque qu'un trouble de ta vision t'ait porté à projeter une tache de lumière sur le livre, de laquelle peu à peu tu ne tarderas pas à effleurer à nouveau le rectangle zébré de caractères d'encre."¹⁹⁹ The reader's response to the second interruption seems to be even stronger than the first one, as he feels stunned and compared this sudden disruption to a wound. This evokes a physical sensation, which, again, echoes that of actual readers. As the beginnings of new narratives keep reappearing in Calvino's novel, along with interruptions that become more and more expected, responses to these interruptions are what bring the reader/protagonist and the actual readers together in terms of sensations they experience in the face of sudden absence.

Designing a text that focuses on triggering readers' reactions is what Carl D. Malmgren calls "affective stylistics." In 1986, Malmgren wrote that at that time, literary criticism favored stylistics centered on the readers.²⁰⁰ In the case of Calvino's *Si une nuit*, the readers are interpellated as a part of his narrative when the text elicits their affective responses to strategically deployed interruptions of several texts. The presence of the absence of these narratives is what stirs and generates affects, which in turn, trigger emotional responses and sensations. Malmgren states that "[...] the novel establishes a new relationship with the reader based on desire," and Mariolina Salvatori goes even further when she proclaims that the readers' desire for fulfillment and completion becomes the novel's *raison d'être*.²⁰¹ It is true that the narrator, whose voice can be also considered authorial, sets up a desire-driven relationship with the reader, and this relationship is revealed in the playful connection between the narrator's "je"

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 63.

²⁰⁰ Carl Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader: Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 6, no. 2 (1986): 106.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 107; Salvatori and Calvino, "Italo Calvino's 'If on a Winter's Night a Traveler'," 188.

and the reader's "tu" in the text. It is important, however, to remark upon the subtle differences in the way the fictional reader/protagonist and the actual reader can access and position themselves *vis-à-vis* the unfinished narratives; the former can nurture the hope of eventually achieving the delayed gratification within the diegesis of Calvino's novel while the latter knows that the beginnings of these ten narratives is all Calvino ever wrote.

To define the relationship of the actual readers with the ten unfinished narratives comprised in *Si une nuit s'hiver*, I will borrow Wolfgang Iser's concept of the split signifier, which he described in *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (1993).²⁰² Iser proposes the notion of a split signifier by deconstructing the conventional Saussurean correlation between the signifier and the signified. Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the founders of contemporary linguistics, theorized the influential concept of a linguistic sign composed of two distinctive elements, the signifier and the signified, where the former *denotes* the latter. Iser proposes to split the signifier and separate it from its meaning, the signified:

[...] splitting the signifier [...] allows [it] to be used in other ways. If it no longer means what it denotes, then no longer meaning what it denotes becomes itself a denotation, bringing into existence something that does not yet exist. The suspended denotative function adumbrates the conditions under which the not-yet-existing may be conceived, and here the imaginary begins to develop in dual countering.²⁰³

Thus, separating the signifier from the signified can be seen as an operation aimed at bringing about forces generative of potentialities, "something that does not yet exist." Here, again, one

²⁰² Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 248.

arrives at the possibility of conceptualizing what eludes conceptualization, namely, preserving the potential within the actual, through making its absence present. I would like to posit Calvino's unfinished narratives as an example of texts whose mode of existence is perpetually potential, as it is the absence of their completeness that constitutes their *raison d'être*.

Borrowing Iser's distinction between the Saussurean relationship of the signifier and the signified, and the removal of the latter in his theorization of the split signifier, I will apply it to Calvino's case. Within the diegesis of *Si une nuit d'hiver*, the ten unfinished texts can be considered as signifiers of their lost complete versions (signifieds) that exist somewhere in diegetic space and time, and therefore resemble the Saussurean notion of a sign. For the actual reader, however, the narratives' beginnings are Iser's split signifiers, because they only realistically exist in the incomplete physical form present on the pages of Calvino's book. In order to illustrate the notion of a split signifier in less abstract terms, Iser borrows Gregory Bateson's (inspired by Alfred Korzybski) term of "map-territory relation." The relation of the elements of a linguistic sign resembles one between a map and the territory it depicts. In the conventional configuration, the map (signifier) depicts only a limited portion of the territory (signified) it charts. Yet, if we consider this relationship in the context of the "split signifier," "[t]he territory will exactly coincide with the map because it has no existence outside this designation. At the same time, however, it remains distinct from the map, because it is a product of the split signifier and not the signifier itself."²⁰⁴ Thus, the actual readers of Calvino's novel are confronted with split signifiers of the ten unfinished narratives, which do not have existence beyond their written-down beginnings, and yet, the readers enter into a game with the author, and within this game they assume the role of the diegetic reader who desires completion. This leads

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 248.

to what Iser calls “an activation of faculties,” which “[...] makes the reader into a player allowed to watch himself or herself playing a role. To be caught up in a role and yet at the same time to be outside it is a form of doubling, through which the transformations of the text game translate themselves into the reader’s reaction as shaped by the exercise of the faculties.”²⁰⁵ Thus, Iser alludes to what I proposed earlier to construe as “cleaving” of the readers, who find themselves, paradoxically, simultaneously inside and outside of Calvino’s narrative. The readers gain a double-faceted access to the ten unfinished texts in the story: on the one hand from within, through identification with the diegetic reader, but on the other hand from without, where actual readers watch themselves engage with the texts from a distance. What brings together these two simultaneous ways of approaching the absent narratives is the readers’ reaction, which can be translated as sensations, feelings and emotions shaped by the faculties, or affects, circulating in the virtuality of the absent texts.

Calvino’s take on what constitutes potential literature, literature that unleashes imaginative resources that are impossible to exhaust or deplete, is thus presented in *Si une nuit* in which the readers play the key role in the activation of dormant and potential affects. The author hints at his strategy of having the readers read only the openings of novels in order to set their affects and potentialities in motion through several characters in his novel. For example, Silas Flannery, a fictitious writer and Calvino’s alter ego, makes the following statement:

La fascination romanesque qui se donne à l’état pur dans les premières phrases du premier chapitre de très nombreux romans ne tarde pas à se perdre dans la suite du récit: c’est la promesse d’un temps de lecture qui s’étend devant nous et qui peut accueillir tous les développements possibles. Je voudrais pouvoir écrire un livre

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 278.

qui ne soit pas qu'un incipit qui puisse garder tout au long de sa durée la potentialité du début, l'attente encore sans objet.²⁰⁶

Silas Flannery expresses his desire to devise a literary creation that, in its completedness, will not shut off all the potential paths and directions in which a novel can develop. Preserving the promise of a myriad of possibilities comprised in a literary universe is thus contingent on not continuing a narrative once begun. The role of the readers is crucial in the process of rendering literature potential, because it is the readers' coming to contact with the book, in Iser's terms, the readers' entering into play with the text, that activates its faculties. While the desire for completion and frustration caused by the impossibility thereof is a natural reaction, throughout *Si une nuit* Calvino builds a case for a conscious reflection on reactions the readers deem natural and for the embrace, against one's own instincts, of seemingly impossible virtual realities where the lack of completion is not an obstacle but the principal creative force.

Another one of Calvino's characters, a random literature aficionado that the reader/protagonist encountered in a library, emphasizes again the importance of the openings of books:

La stimulation d'une lecture, et d'une lecture substantielle, m'est indispensable, même si de chaque livre je n'arrive à lire que quelques pages. Mais pour moi, ces quelques pages renferment déjà des univers tout entiers que je ne parviens pas à épuiser.²⁰⁷

The act of reading, which inevitably involves the readers' participation in the unfolding of the text, is therefore indispensable for bringing to life the potential that is latent in the type of

²⁰⁶ Calvino, *Si une nuit d'hiver*, 249.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 355.

literature that Calvino envisages. Once the potential is accessed, the open-endedness of the unfinished narratives and the conspicuous absence of their continuations ensure its preservation as absence or as non-being, a mode of existence that is its constitutive quality. To achieve this goal, Calvino chooses the strategy to invite his readers to engage and respond to the ten unfinished narratives within his story. Calvino's strategy results in bridging the virtual dimension of the unfinished texts with not only the actuality of the material book, but also with the actual readers' immediate reality with which they learn to interact in unexpected and counterintuitive ways. Such bridging allows for the stories' potential to thrive not only as fiction, but it translates and includes the potentialities of Calvino's novel in the way readers understand and connect with the world.

3.7 GEORGES PEREC AND INTERTEXTUALITY BEYOND TEMPORAL BOUNDS

Calvino's take on potential literature in *Si une nuit d'hiver* consists in the engagement of readers with the potentialities of texts that are physically absent. Such an engagement elicits reactions and strong emotions, but it can also compel readers to revise their beliefs and preconceptions as well as the ways in which they understand and construe the world. An example of such a work of potential literature that targets the readers' perception of generally accepted truths is Georges Perec's short story, *Le Voyage d'hiver*. Perec's story reminds us that works of potential literature are not closed circuits, solitary objects floating in a vacuum. Despite their idiosyncratic mode of existence that refuses to be reduced to actuality, they are a part the existing literary canon inscribed in literary history. In his short story, Perec explores the outskirts of mainstream

knowledge about the history of literature and ventures to unearth potential alternatives. In *Le Voyage*, the author demonstrates that literary history is like a multicursal labyrinth and therefore how we approach it is based on the works we read as well as on the way we read them. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the narrative regarding the literary canon and its history was comprised of an immutable collection of esteemed works that everyone should know and admire.²⁰⁸ Bénabou, when talking about his first youthful experiences with French literature, presented the possibility of a different vision of it: “Et je voyais la littérature française, dont je ne savais encore presque rien, comme un être vivant, un organisme dont il ne fallait négliger aucun élément, ou bien plutôt comme une personne jamais en repos et qui n’existait qu’à travers ses métamorphoses.”²⁰⁹ Following this statement, the division between canonical, exemplary works and minor, neglected ones is irrelevant, as every part of the system is crucial to its collective shape and life. Only by considering connections and channels of communication between all texts of a literary corpus can we sketch an informed image of what it is and what it can do. Seen as such, it becomes a living and constantly morphing organism rather than an ossified, lifeless entity. This is why, in this section, I will investigate the question of intertextuality in the context of potential works present only through their absence. My analysis is based on *Le Voyage* because I contend that Perec in this short story, by proposing a path that detours from the mainstream literary knowledge, demonstrates that literary history is multicursal and includes a virtual image of it in his writing.

²⁰⁸ Jean-Louis Jeannelle emphasizes that at the end of the nineteenth century, “l’autonomisation du champ littéraire [...] s’est doublée d’une autonomisation du canon littéraire lui-même [...].” Jean-Louis Jeannelle, “Perec et le divers de l’histoire littéraire sur *Le Voyage d’hiver*,” in *Fictions d’histoire littéraire* (Rennes: Presses Univ. de Rennes, 2009), 193.

²⁰⁹ Bénabou, *Pourquoi*, 84.

Georges Perec, born in 1936 in Paris, is one of the most prolific as well as the most studied oulipian writers. His early interest in formal experimentation and linguistic invention earned him an invitation to join the Oulipo in 1967. Perec is best known and studied for the way in which he perfected the art of writing under formal constraints (*La Disparition*, 1969; *La Vie mode d'emploi*, 1978). He is also well regarded for his literary study of memory in relation to the Second World War (*W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, 1975; *Je me souviens*, 1978) and his preoccupation with the infra-ordinary aspect of everyday life (*Les Choses*, 1965). While Perec is one of the oulipian authors who generated the most literary output and who triggered the most interest as reflected in the amount of scholarship on his works, *Le Voyage d'hiver* is one of his less-studied texts. This first becomes apparent when one browses through the catalog of the Association Georges Perec, an archive deposited at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris. If the Association claims to house the largest collection of scholarship on Perec, it has only two scholarly articles on *Le Voyage d'hiver*.²¹⁰ Moreover, comprehensive works on Perec's life and work in its entirety tend to gloss over *Le Voyage* or skip it altogether. The most notable examples are David Bellos's grand opus of eight hundred pages, entitled *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (1993), a Perec encyclopedia of sorts, in which the author mentions *Le Voyage* in one short paragraph, and Warren Motte's *The Poetics of Experiment: A Study of the Work of Georges Perec* (1984) in which *Le Voyage* does not figure at all on the list of the forty two primary

²¹⁰ Jean-Louis Jeannelle's "Perec et le divers de l'histoire littéraire sur *Le Voyage d'hiver*," and Claudette Oriol-Boyer's "Le Voyage d'hiver (lire/écrire avec Perec)." This does not mean that there are no more studies on the subject of *Le Voyage*, but it does demonstrate that their number is limited.

sources used in his study.²¹¹ *Le Voyage* is a compact text at seven pages, yet it is a powerful one that, through its clever connections to the existing French literary canon of the late nineteenth century, reveals the arbitrariness of literary histories and hierarchies.

From the outset of *Le Voyage* it becomes clear that Perec's narrative has multiple layers. On the surface, it is a short story about the personal journey of Vincent Degraël, a professor of French literature, who lays his hand on a book found in his friend's library, and about his utter fascination with the find that develops over time. The book, which disappeared after the Second World War, becomes his obsession materialized in the form of a notebook in which he gathers the results of his research and which is also labels "Le Voyage d'hiver." His research project constitutes another threshold in this gradual *mise en abyme* as its title doubles the title of the object of his fixation: the book that he pursues is *Le Voyage d'hiver* by Hugo Vernier. The fact that the book is absent is key for what Perec's story can achieve in terms of influencing the readers' perception, an argument that I will discuss in details later.²¹² Claudette Oriol-Boyer remarks that the proliferation of motives in Perec's story is omnipresent as it includes narrative layers (the three aforementioned narrative levels), narrators (Perec, Degraël, Vernier), and various parallels (for example one of ambiguity, where we cannot be sure if initials V.H. refer to Victor Hugo, of Vernier, Hugo).²¹³ At all narrative levels, the story centers on one peculiar feature of Vernier's book: its lines seem uncannily familiar:

²¹¹ David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words: A Biography* (Boston, MA: D.R. Godine, 1993); Warren F. Motte, *The Poetics of Experiment: A Study of the Work of Georges Perec* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1984).

²¹² In order to avoid confusion, from now on I will refer to Perec's *Le Voyage* as "the short story/the story," and Vernier's (the protagonist's) *Le Voyage* as "the book."

²¹³ Claudette Oriol-Boyer, "Le Voyage d'hiver (lire/écrire avec Perec)," in *Cahiers Georges Perec: Colloque de Cerisy: juillet 1984* (Paris: P.O.L., 1985), 158-59.

À peine eut-il commencé à la lire que Vincent Degraël éprouva une sensation de malaise qu’il lui fut impossible de définir précisément, mais qui ne fit que s’accroître au fur et à mesure qu’il tournait les pages du volume d’une main de plus en plus tremblante: c’était comme si les phrases qu’il avait devant les yeux lui devenaient soudain familières, se mettaient irrésistiblement à lui rappeler quelque chose, comme si à la lecture de chacune venait s’imposer, ou plutôt se superposer, le souvenir à la fois précis et flou d’une phrase qui aurait été presque identique et qu’il aurait déjà lue ailleurs;²¹⁴

Reading Vernier’s book for the first time, Degraël experienced a sensation of the Freudian *unheimlich*; he identified the lines he was reading as familiar, yet, out of place. The act of reading the text triggered in him the feeling of simultaneous attraction and curiosity mixed with anxiety, and it was this affective power of the book that pushed him to continue reading to finally realize that these lines indeed belong in other existing and canonical literary works.

Oscillating between “une violence hallucinée et une sérénité fabuleuse,” Degraël succeeded in identifying passages that, at the moment of reading Vernier, he considered borrowed, copied, or even plagiarized from works by well-known late nineteenth-century French authors and poets.²¹⁵ These included Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Rimbaud or Verlaine, and their lines were copied “[...] mot pour mot [...] ou à peine modifié.”²¹⁶ Importantly, Perec’s narrator makes it known that the list of the detected names cited throughout the pages of the story is not

²¹⁴ Georges Perec, *Le Voyage d’hiver & ses suites* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 12.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

²¹⁶ Throughout the pages of the story Perec specifically mentions many more prominent names and his list of plagiarized (or as we find out later on, plagiarizing) authors include: Germain Nouveau, Tristan Corbière, Villiers et Banville, Verhaeren, Charles Cros, Léon Bloy, Gustave Kahn, Banville, Richepin, Huysmans, Léon Valade, Charles de Pomairols, Hippolyte Vaillant, Maurice Rollinat, Leprade, Albert Mérat, Charles Morice ou Antony Valabrègue. *Ibid*, 14.

exhaustive, and that Degraël was able to single out approximately 350 references credited to almost 30 authors, and that excludes others that he could have missed. This proliferation of various citations and references in Vernier's book reported by Perec's narrator corresponds to what Julia Kristeva defined as the crossing of textual surfaces when she first introduced her concept of intertextuality in "Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman" in 1966. Inspired by a Bakhtinian approach to linguistics, one that emphasized the significance of communication in the analyses of spoken language, Kristeva advocates a similar approach to texts: "[...] le 'mot littéraire' n'est pas un point (un sens fixe), mais *un croisement de surfaces textuelles*, un dialogue de plusieurs écritures: de l'écrivain, du destinataire (ou du personnage), du contexte culturel actuel ou antérieur."²¹⁷ According to Kristeva, texts, just like words for Bakhtin, are not separate closed circuits and in order to fully comprehend their functionality and potential, we should consider them within their context, the network of connections they form with other existing texts, past and present. I contend that the intertextuality of Perec's story is its *raison d'être*. The short story is not, however, a mere illustration of what Kristeva had in mind when she proposed the term; as I will demonstrate, Perec adopts a similar concept of intertextuality and pushes it in a completely new and unexpected direction as he plays with the temporal order by which texts are assumed to be bound.

The Kristevan concept of intertextuality, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of literary works, is subordinated to a linear understanding of time. In her work on the origins and the development of intertextuality, María Jesús Martínez Alfaro summarizes the concept as follows: "Each text is trapped in a network of relations, between the different parts that constitute

²¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, "Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman," in *Sēmeiōtikē: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 144, emphasis original.

it, between that text and those which precede it, or those that come after it [...].”²¹⁸ By placing an exemplary text between ones that “precede” it and ones that come “after,” Martínez Alfaro implicitly defines an important limitation of intertextuality: temporality. Moreover, she defines an exemplary text as “trapped” between the past and the present, and even if her choice of this term was unconscious, it reinforces the impossibility of a text caught in an intertextual net to free itself from the bounds of linearity. And thus, following Kristeva’s notion of intertextual relationships, old texts can inform, shape and be reflected by new ones, and this order is impossible to reverse. This forward-oriented temporal vector of intertextual relations is further echoed in Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsests* (1982) in which the author offers a more practical classification of possible intertextual connections.

While Genette distinguishes five categories of intertextual relations (he calls them transtextual relations), he emphasizes that all of them overlap and oftentimes cannot be distinguished from one another.²¹⁹ And thus, it is in his definition of the category of hypertextuality, a category that will be of a particular interest to me in analyzing *Le Voyage*, that Genette perpetuates the temporal dependence of intertextuality: “By hypertextuality I mean any relationship using a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary. [...] a

²¹⁸ María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, “Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept,” *Atlantis*, 18, no. 1/2 (1996): 281. Martínez Alfaro also mentions that there is another contributor to said literary network, other than texts past and future, namely, those that never were. She cites Borges’s pseudo-textuality as an example, referring more specifically to his short story, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (1941) where the narrator cites a number of non-existent works. The category of works that “never were” will be relevant in the development of my argument.

²¹⁹ These relations are: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality.

text derived from another preexistent text.”²²⁰ Genette understands a hypertext as a derivative of a hypotext, and, importantly, a hypotext always comes first and preexists its reworking. Such an order of things in which an existing text constitutes an inspiration for a different text and thus the former has inevitably to preexist the latter, appears natural, and a disruption of such temporal bind seems inconceivable. I will argue, however, that in his short story, Perec accomplishes the impossible and manages to reverse the order of intertextual dependency, which results in the actualization of the possibility that a preexisting French literary canon might prove to be supple and could be imaginatively reconfigured. I propose to view Perec’s operation as a pataphysical imaginary solution because it once again, gives the readers a preview of what could happen if certain latent potentialities became expressed.

Le Voyage d’hiver is a kind of thought experiment in which Perec destabilizes the widely-accepted version of the literary history of late nineteenth-century France with a short story written a century later by framing it as the documentation of Vernier’s absent book. As such, Perec’s story constitutes an actual trace of the absence of Vernier’s book acting as a hypotext for a considerable number of romantic French poets and writers. Perec reverses the temporal relationship between the hypotext and its hypertexts by narrating the insertion of a fictional text into the intertextual network of the canonical literary works, a text that allegedly predates the involved classics. The doubt that immediately comes to mind in this case is the question of how an obviously fictional fantasy can have an impact on an actual corpus of literary works. My answer is that Perec’s story forces readers to confront the artificiality of cultural constructs such as canons of art and unchallenged historical accounts. Gaps exist in all historical accounts, and these gaps open on to a plane of virtuality where unknown texts and sources have

²²⁰ Genette, *Palimpsests*, 5, emphasis original.

the potential to reconfigure our knowledge. Perec's story performs an operation similar to the one in Bénabou's book, namely, that of making an absent text (in this case it's Hugo Vernier's *Le Voyage d'hiver*) "cleave." On the one hand, Vernier's narrative is clearly separated from the actual status quo of French literature, as it is a subject of a fictional short story, on the other hand, however, it reclaims its inclusion in the body of actual texts, and this is made possible via multiple obvious intertextual references paired with the absent fictional narrative, as its absence is made acutely present. While the readers are aware that they are reading literary fiction, thanks to its inclusion in the intertextual web of the canon, they are pushed to second-guess what they know.

Like Bénabou, Perec anchors the imaginary text by Hugo Vernier in actuality, in this case, however, not through the textuality of his short story, but by deploying multiple points of convergence between the diegesis of the narrative and real events, facts and even institutions. Once again, the mode of existence of Vernier's book, its non-being, is key in making all these references possible. First, Perec anchors Vernier's text temporally, which allows him to establish its intertextual connections with the canonical literary corpus of the late nineteenth century. This operation takes place when Vincent Degraël, who comes into brief contact with Vernier's book before its postwar disappearance, discovers its date of publication: "Peut-être s'était-il trompé, mais il avait bien cru lire: 1864. Il vérifia, le cœur battant. Il avait bien lu: cela voudrait dire que Vernier avait 'cité' un vers de Mallarmé avec deux ans d'avance, plagié Verlaine dix ans avant ses 'Ariettes oubliées', écrit du Gustave Kahn près d'un quart de siècle avant lui!"²²¹ The simple confirmation of the publication date of Vernier's book triggers a mental operation required to process the undermining of what Degraël, and by extension the readers, considered common

²²¹ Perec, *Le Voyage*, 14.

knowledge about the state of French literature. But the discovery of the date of publication of the book does not cause Degraël to simply replace one truth with a new one since 1864 figuring in *Le Voyage* could be a deliberate misinformation or a typo. In fact, he *chooses* to do so:

Mais Degraël refusait d'envisager cette hypothèse [que la date de publication soit fautive]: sa découverte était trop belle, trop évidente, trop nécessaire pour n'être pas vraie, et déjà il imaginait les conséquences vertigineuses qu'elle allait provoquer: le scandale prodigieux qu'allait constituer la révélation publique de cette "anthologie prémonitoire", l'ampleur de ses retombées, l'énorme remise en question de tout ce que les critiques et les historiens de la littérature avaient imperturbablement professé depuis des années et des années.²²²

Degraël made a conscious choice to adopt the 1864 date of publication as a fact because he was attracted to the potential that such an assumption, in the state of its uncertainty, would unleash, a potential to release energies that he calls "vertigineuses," affects that could bring about a revolution and influence the actuality of the current state of knowledge, make it evolve and morph. Importantly, Degraël justifies his choice by proclaiming such shift in the literary canon "belle," "évidente," and "nécessaire," thus suggesting that he, as one of Perec's narrators, and by extension Perec himself, was looking for creative ways to give new life and purpose to famous French literary classics whose position within literary history is assumed to be set in stone.

The multiple literary passages borrowed from (or, according to the narrative, by) famous French writers and the date of publication of Vernier's text, are not the only moments with which Perec traces and anchors it in actuality. To legitimize the impact of an absent text, he reinforces its trace by linking it with archival institutions that have had significant authority in establishing

²²² Ibid, 15.

and solidifying the aforementioned literary canon. Perec's narrator thus describes Degraël's research on Vernier's book after its disappearance:

[...] au British Museum, il avait pu consulter le *Catalogue général de la librairie française* et la *Bibliographie de la France* et avait pu confirmer sa formidable hypothèse: *Le voyage d'hiver*, de Vernier (Hugo), avait bien été édité en 1864, à Valenciennes, chez Hervé Frères, Imprimeurs-Librairies, et, soumis au dépôt légal comme tous les ouvrages publiés en France, avait été déposé à la Bibliothèque nationale où la cote Z 87912 lui avait été attribué.²²³

While the alleged publisher of Vernier's text, Hervé Frères, Imprimeurs-Librairies, is a fictional institution, the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France are not, as they hold highly esteemed collections of archival documents and books. Associating alleged traces of an absent work with them endows it with unique validity. Even though when looking up the library reference number "Z 87912" one discovers that such document does not figure in the catalog of the National Library, Perec's name dropping of the archives compels the reader to try on the possibility that Vernier's *Le Voyage* could be an authentic, albeit absent, text.²²⁴ What is important is not whether or not the text is fictional, but that the readers are put in a position

²²³ Ibid, 16.

²²⁴ There are two accounts of the inexistence of the text paired with this reference number at the BnF. The first one is given by Perec's narrator who claims that when he turned to the National Library to retrieve it, he was told that the book disappeared on its way to a bookbinder's who was supposed to perform its maintenance in 1926. The second account was volunteered by Oriol-Boyer, who checked the actual reference number at the BnF and reported the following: "Plus encore, le texte programme en lui la capture d'un livre potentiel: en effet, si, comme moi, le lecteur attentif cherche quel ouvrage figure, à la Bibliothèque Nationale sous la cote Z 87912, il n'en trouvera aucun, cette cote ayant été fermée au numéro 63921. On a ouvert depuis 'octavo Z' qui n'en est pas encore, en 1984, au numéro 52000. Capture donc d'un livre inexistant ou, qui peut le savoir, future?" Oriol-Boyer, "Le Voyage," 159. Her suggestion of the possibility that Perec consciously referred to a book of the future opens up a whole new door for potential analysis.

where they become open to the idea that their preconceptions about literature are not necessarily universal truths.

At first sight situating Vernier's book in 1864, which allows for the claim that numerous canonical French writers of the end of the nineteenth century copied and even plagiarized its passages, goes with and confirms the temporal assumptions of intertextuality (the hypotext comes before the hypertext). Nevertheless, triangulating Vernier as a source with the classics of the Romanticism and with the actual text by Perec, the one with which the readers come into contact, and which, lest we forget, was published an entire century later, results in rendering the temporality of intertextual relations increasingly ambiguous and irrelevant. This triangulation fuses several categories of transtextual relations distinguished by Genette. First, Genette presents his definition of intertextuality as direct citations and even plagiarism, in other words, as appropriations of passages of texts word for word, acknowledged or not. Perec's *Le Voyage* performs such an appropriation by citing passages from late nineteenth century classics but complicates this operation by claiming that this very act of copying had happened before these passages were even written. Such a reconfiguration of connections between texts renders the very meaning of the word "copy" invalid and questions the alleged value attributed to the originality and the authenticity of famous works such as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. Secondly, Perec's story functions as a metatext to Vernier's book, a metatext being one that "[...] unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it."²²⁵ Perec does name Vernier's original by title and provides a commentary to it, without, however citing it directly, as the only access he claims to have to Vernier's book is through Degraël's testimony. The specificity of this

²²⁵ Genette, *Palimpsests*, 4.

connection between both texts becomes clear when, once again, we realize that Vernier's book is imaginary. This realization turns Vernier's *Le Voyage* into a true palimpsest, a text whose absence is its only trace in the actuality, a fact that is made apparent and confirmed by its metatext. Finally, both Perec's and Vernier's narratives are caught up in a hypertextual net with nineteenth century French poets. As I mentioned earlier, in his narrative Perec manages to neutralize the assumed temporal hypotext-hypertext order, and he is able to do so thanks to strategically doubling of his text with Vernier's. If the French nineteenth century poets copied Vernier, then the latter functions as their hypotext and the temporal order of the relationship remains intact. However, once we realize that it is Perec's book that copies the classics in 1980 and retroactively destabilizes them as hypertexts, the linearity of hypertextuality becomes irrelevant. In other words, if we consider Vernier's narrative as a virtual hypotext of the nineteenth century poets, Perec's short story is an actual one, and both constitute two sides that "cleave" around what adds up to be the full potential of the short story.

Whether Genette was familiar with Perec's *Le Voyage* at the time of writing *Palimpsests* (*Le Voyage* predates it by two years) is unclear; however, the fact that Genette does not mention it in the section of the book devoted to the oulipian play with language compels me to assume that he was not. The closest he gets to describing the unique transtextual situation pertinent to Perec's narrative occurs in the section entitled "A baffling hypertext." In this section, Genette looks at the case of "[...] works that we know or suspect to be hypertextual whose hypotext is missing, temporarily or not."²²⁶ The author elaborates on this statement with an anecdote according to which Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen* (1894) is presumed to have been inspired by a manuscript by Mme Jules Gauthier entitled *Le Lieutenant*. Stendhal is said to have read the

²²⁶ Ibid, 381.

manuscript, which later disappeared, in 1833, and the only mentions of this event are preserved in his correspondence. Genette attributes the power of “baffling” affectivity of such a transtextual configuration to the uncertainty that comes with absence made stubbornly present. Had Mme Gauthier’s text been published, it would have lost its potential to affect: “The hypertextual relation would be *fixed*, and thus neutralized [...]”²²⁷ An attempt to translate this assumption into Perec’s case only reinforces my claim to attribute its potentiality to the fact that his story is carefully constructed around the objective of the actualization of a “baffling” (hypo)text in its absence.

Perec’s ability to question the relevance of the temporal aspect ordering nineteenth century French literary history, thus making it malleable and open to new valuation, has ramifications far more significant than the simple idea of playing and toying with conventions. Jeannelle reminds us that the establishment of the literary canon in the final thirty years of the nineteenth century in France followed the general autonomization of the literary field, and under these circumstances, “[...] le dernier tiers du XIX^e siècle a *construit, exemplifié et exacerbé un imaginaire de l’histoire littéraire qui a structuré notre rapport au passé des lettres durant plus d’un siècle.*”²²⁸ Thus, the establishment of a collection of literary works considered canonical at the end of the nineteenth century defined a measure against which the value of literary works, contemporary and past, was to be determined. Jeannelle claims that such a development in the world of literature, which was further institutionalized by the system of education, still has grips on us as readers, even in the twenty-first century: “Ainsi le dernier tiers du XIX^e siècle a-t-il fixé le cadre d’un rapport à l’histoire littéraire dont nous sommes encore héritiers (ou prisonniers) et à

²²⁷ Genette, *Palimpsests*, 383, emphasis original.

²²⁸ Jeannelle, “Perec et le divers,” 193, emphasis original.

l'intérieur duquel l'histoire est à la fois refusée et célébrée, incriminée et consacrée.”²²⁹ The realization that contemporary readers are prisoners of imposed and institutionalized preconceptions about the worth and the history of the books they read is the first step in countering it. Through his absent narrative, Perec creates a virtual literary space that has the potential to defuse retroactively the crystallization of narratives regarding hierarchization of literary works.²³⁰ Having demonstrated such an operation by exploiting the potentialities of skillfully guiding readers, Perec addresses their preconception that is often taken for granted: the assumption of temporal understanding and an approach to literary studies based on the linearity of historical trends and developments. In other words, Perec reiterates Bénabou's vision of French literature, cited in the beginning of this section, as a living and morphing organism free of temporal limitations.

As my three selected texts demonstrate, certain oulipian writers made conscious efforts to take on the initial mission of the Oulipo and go beyond just writing under formal constraints, to create rigorous texts that are endowed with potential much larger than their material presence.

²²⁹ Ibid, 193-94.

²³⁰ Perec's short story is potential in more than one way. For the purpose of my argument I chose to focus on the potentiality of its intertextual relationships, but another aspect of its potential that is worth mentioning and worthy of further elaboration is its capacity to grow exponentially and infinitely beyond its author intentions and imagination. Perec ends *Le Voyage* by paralleling his narrative with Degraël's notebook, to which he refers as follows: “[...] un épais registre relié de toile noire et dont l'étiquette portrait, soigneusement calligraphié, *Le Voyage d'hiver*: les huit premières pages retraçaient l'histoire de ces vaines recherches; les trois cent quatre-vingt-douze autres étaient blanches.” Perec, *Le Voyage*, 17. The volume of Degraël's notes corresponds roughly to the number of pages of Perec's story, and the fact that they are followed by hundreds of blank pages constitutes a suggestion that the narrative remains unfinished. Indeed, to date Perec's *Le Voyage* inspired twenty *suites*, short stories by various oulipian and non-oulipian authors who decided to pick up bits and pieces of the original text and push them in unexpected directions.

Interviewed by *Histoires littéraires*, Bénabou confirms that his ambitions surpass a simple play with literary form:

Voilà, j'ai l'impression qu'il y a parfois comme un malentendu à propos des oulipiens et de leurs rapports à la contrainte. Bien entendu, en tant qu'oulipiens, ils se sont donnés pour tâche d'inventer sans cesse de nouvelles formes, de nouvelles contraintes, d'explorer par ce biais, de la façon la plus systématique possible, les virtualités, les potentialités, de la langue. [...] Mais pour ce qui me concerne, cette exploration, si plaisante qu'elle soit, et si divertissants qu'en soient parfois les résultats, n'est pas le but ultime. J'ai essayé de la mettre au service d'un projet d'écriture qui va, ou qui au moins prétend aller, bien au-delà du ludique.²³¹

The oulipian project that goes beyond the ludic aspect of experimentation with language consists in creation of texts that have the capacity to become something else, more than just their printed pages. The authors of the three texts that I selected for this chapter experiment, each in his own way, with a unique mode of existence combining being and non-being, characteristic of potentiality. Such a mode of existence pertains to phenomena that are latent and pending in the present rather than in an undefined future. The fact that they remain potential, however, does not mean they are not nonexistent; it is their absence that is inscribed in actuality. This mode of existence is inherently contradictory and its exploration, through literature or otherwise, constitutes a project that is pataphysical in nature. The Collège de 'Pataphysique advocated experimentation and exploration of notions that defy logic and reason. Thus, the exploration of virtuality, potentiality and affects, understood as forces and energies that are physically

²³¹ "Entretien avec Marcel Bénabou," 117.

detectable only when expressed as feelings, emotions, or material and textual inscriptions, constitutes an endeavor that fits well within the tradition of Jarry's science. I contend that certain oulipian authors, as demonstrated in the examples of Perec, Calvino and Bénabou, go beyond cultivation of entertaining linguistic and poetic games, and are invested in continuation of the pataphysical heritage, despite the workshop's emancipation from the Collège. As I noted in the previous chapter, the Collège's *Statuts* proclaim that "[l]e Collège de 'Pataphysique promeut la Pataphysique en ce monde et dans tous les autres," which is what my three selected texts are doing when they make their virtual dimensions accessible to readers.²³²

²³² Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013) titre I, article 3, paragraphe 2.

4.0 PANIC CINEMA: PATAPHYSICS AND FILM

La vie est la mémoire, et l'homme est le hasard.²³³

– Fernando Arrabal, “L’Homme panique”

Even though the Oulipo and the early Collège de ‘Pataphysique are both bound up with artistic expression based in written language, pataphysics does make room for expression via other media.²³⁴ Film has a particularly strong standing within the imaginary science. Indeed, although the Collège made claims to pursue pataphysics through a variety of modes of expression, it still remained heavily dependent on the written word. Despite the group’s predilection or even deliberate choice of literature as its preferred medium, the potential of pataphysics to influence other art forms is not just hypothetical. This chapter will demonstrate that the influence of the imaginary science of pataphysics extends beyond literature and to this end I will discuss another artistic group that also became tied to the Collège, namely, the Mouvement Panique. Its members used performance and film as their media of choice, and the design and execution of their work align with pataphysical philosophy. At the moment of its founding in 1962, the movement was not associated with the Collège de ‘Pataphysique like the Oulipo was. Furthermore, its founding members, Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor, were at the time unfamiliar with the Collège. Nevertheless, the group’s developing philosophy paralleled and

²³³ Fernando Arrabal, “L’Homme panique,” in *Le “Panique,”* ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1973), 47.

²³⁴ By early Collège de ‘Pataphysique I mean the group as it functioned until its occultation in 1975.

overlapped with the pataphysical assumptions of the Collège in many aspects, the main one being the proclamation of reason and logical thinking as insufficient in one's interactions with the surrounding world. Even though only one founder of the Mouvement Panique, Arrabal, later became personally involved in the life of the Collège, as he was officially coopted into it as a Satrap upon its desoccultation in 2000, he subsequently acknowledged the mutual interest of both philosophies and declared his fascination with pataphysics.²³⁵ This retrospective affirmation demonstrates that Jarry's imaginary science has indirectly impacted artistic production in non-literary media, in this case film, despite the Collège's seeming reluctance or failure to explore other modes of expression.

The word "panic" is most readily associated with its denotation of a sudden sensation of losing control over one's body and experiencing irrational reactions and impulsive behaviors stemming from anxiety and fear. Indeed, the founders of the Mouvement Panique chose this term because of their interest in the materiality and potential of human bodies. They further expanded the term by adding symbolic layers to its meaning, reaching out to mythology as well as the morphology of the word. In Greek mythology, the god Pan resembles a faun or a satyr and embodies the wilderness of nature. The grotesqueness of his monstrous appearance and his animalistic sexuality are elements that are, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, readily assimilated into the works of the founders. Moreover, the Greek root of the word, "pan," means "all" and suggests the plurality and a totality of the concept of *le panique*.²³⁶ The deliberate

²³⁵ Arrabal was the first founder of the Mouvement Panique to join the Collège, but not the first *panique* to do so. Olivier O. Olivier (Pierre Marie Olivier), a painter who joined the Mouvement Panique a year after it was founded, had been a member of the Collège since 1953.

²³⁶ In order to talk about their artistic preoccupations, the group members use the French word *panique* in the masculine form (as opposed to *la panique* – the sensation of fear). The deliberate change of the word's gender was dictated by the fact that in Spanish, Arrabal's and

inclusion of multiple layers of meaning in the name of the group, whose members devoted their time to artistic creation focused on communication with their audience through direct sensation, points to the nuanced ways they understood the group's mission: "Le panique trouve son expression la plus complète dans la fête panique, dans la cérémonie théâtrale, dans le jeu, dans l'art et dans la solitude indifférente."²³⁷ An artistic work that can be considered a panic creation is, thus, in itself an all-encompassing celebration of sensation and the corporeality of being human. While the group originally favored theater as its medium of expression, its scope quickly grew to include any medium that has an immediate impact on the senses and that generates intense sensations.

The three founders of the Mouvement Panique are best-known as individualistic and eccentric personas in the world of theater and cinema. In his recent volume, *Panique: Arrabal, Jodorowsky, Topor* (2008), Frédéric Aranzueque-Arrieta takes on the task of elucidating their collective efforts to advance their panic philosophy, which informed their artistic identities throughout most of their lives. This much-needed historical account maps the Mouvement Panique onto the landscape of contemporary arts and inscribes it into a tradition of other artistic movements such as Surrealism and Dadaism. I will use Aranzueque-Arrieta's volume, along with essays and texts written by the founders on the origins and purposes of the movement, as a springboard to demonstrate a broader affiliation of the group with the Collège de 'Pataphysique and Jarry's imaginary science in general.²³⁸ The association of the Mouvement Panique with the

Jodorowsky's native language, the word *pánico* is masculine, and such an interlingual transplantation of a grammatical rule results in making it a new term of its own.

²³⁷ Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," 52.

²³⁸ A collection of these texts includes, but is not limited to, "L'Homme panique" (1973) by Fernando Arrabal, "Panique et poulet rôti" (1973) by Alejandro Jodorowsky, "Petit memento

Collège is not as straightforward as the Oulipo's, nevertheless, the ties between both groups become visible through the explicit and implicit commitment of the group's founders to both causes. The Mouvement Panique demonstrates how the pataphysical tendency to favor the pursuit of creative ways to connect and interact with the world has branched out and freed itself from the limitations of literature into media based on corporeality and vision. I see this expansion into the media diversity as a step that was much needed to complete the pluralistic vision of pataphysics preached by the Collège, but which the Collège itself failed to attain at its beginnings.

In this chapter, I focus on cinematic works by two of the three founders of the Mouvement Panique: *Fando y Lis* (1986) by Alejandro Jodorowsky and *Viva la Muerte* (1971) by Fernando Arrabal.²³⁹ By relating them to the concepts of confusion, revised notions of memory and temporality, the monstrous and the celebratory ritual, I demonstrate how panic films fulfill the philosophy of pataphysics. As these films are their creators' first hands-on experiences with cinema, I believe them to be the most comprehensive and the most representative of the panic thought born out of fascination with performance of the human body. While Arrabal and Jodorowsky from the start emphasized their commitment to inclusion of elements of diverse media in their works, at first their efforts were focused on theater and more specifically performance and happenings, forms of art that are bound to a very specific timeframe and depend on their works' non-durability.²⁴⁰ Theater seemed to be the environment that the three

panique" (1973) by Ronald Topor, and "Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire" (2006) by Arrabal again.

²³⁹ Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Fando y Lis* (Producciones Pánicas/Fantoma, 1968); Fernando Arrabal, *Viva la Muerte* (Cult Epics 2012, 1970).

²⁴⁰ In the "Entretien panique," for example, Jodorowsky described himself and his colleagues as *artistes polyvalents*, continuing the tradition of Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Cocteau, Pier Paolo

founders at first considered the most fertile ground for the realization of their panic philosophy. Yet, as Aranzueque-Arrieta rightly notices, “[...] si l’on associe le plus souvent Fernando Arrabal au théâtre, car c’est dans cet art qu’il s’est le plus exprimé, ou Alejandro Jodorowsky à la mise en scène, au scénario de bande dessinées [...], les créations qui les ont rendus le plus populaire auprès du grand public, sont associées indéniablement au septième art.”²⁴¹ The inability to reach broader audience with their panic performances indeed pushed Arrabal and Jodorowsky towards exploring other media that engage with spectators in comparable ways, but which also last. Michel Larouche states that it was the inevitable pressure of the consumer-centered society, which the three artists could not deny, that steered them towards film:

Les paniques ont donc orienté leurs efforts vers des manifestations autres, susceptibles de s’intégrer plus aisément dans les normes actuelles, en vue toutefois de les faire éclater. Ils ont donc cultivé les autres manifestations paniques, qui tendent vers la “fête-spectacle”, considérée comme manifestation idéale. Et le cinéma semble avoir été le lieu privilégié de ces manifestations.²⁴²

Cinema as a medium allowed the three artists to pursue their commitment to impact their audiences through as many sensory channels as possible, to involve corporeality and movement and to create circumstances for celebration spectacles, and at the same time to leave permanent traces of their works, something that is precluded by the idea of live performance. Martine

Pasolini and Salvador Dali, artists who tried their hand at various means of expression and experimentation. For more details see Philippe Krebs, “Entretien panique avec Alejandro Jodorowsky.” *Les Éditions Hermaphrodite*, 2007, http://sitehermaphrodite.free.fr/article.php3?id_article=25.

²⁴¹ Frédéric Aranzueque-Arrieta, *Panique: Arrabal, Jodorowsky, Topor* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), 108.

²⁴² Michel Larouche, *Alexandro Jodorowsky: cinéaste panique* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1985), 25-26.

Beugnet, a theorist and scholar of French cinema, affirms that the cinematic medium is uniquely suited to achieving these goals and even pushing the viewers to uncover new sensations and experiences that are not accessible through individual stimulation of the senses:

Through very simple as well as elaborate operations, cinema can thus reawaken or make the viewer conscious of sensual correspondences. Through framing, camera movement, light and contrast, the grain of the image and the mix of different film stocks, as well as the variations in sound and visual intensities, the effect of the audiovisual footage extends to touch, smell and taste, and, in turn, operates as a relay between the sensual and the emotional – the diffuse but pervasive multi-sensory evocation of pleasure, desire, longing, fear and terror.²⁴³

The multi-sensory power of cinema allows the filmmaker to address multiple senses at the same time and generate unexpected affects manifested as sensations in their audiences, which I would argue was part of what attracted the founders of the *Mouvement Panique* to the medium.

A focused interest in the materiality and the physicality of the human body, especially in film, invites a phenomenological angle in approaching such cinematic works. The filmmakers of the *Mouvement Panique* exploit and experiment with the bodies of their characters but also directly with the bodies of their actors, by testing their possibilities and limitations. They also explore different ways in which people can perceive the spatial and temporal dimensions of their environment and interact through their bodies with their surroundings. Furthermore, these *panique* filmmakers indeed invite their audiences to connect with their films through sensation rather than cognition by addressing and engaging their sensorium as a whole. Even though

²⁴³ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74.

sensory engagement cannot be equated with affective engagement, sensory reception and sensations in general can be understood as manifestations of a larger pool of affects involved in such stimulation. By dismantling the familiar patterns of cognition based on causal and hierarchical structures, established to facilitate one's ability to understand and process phenomena, the members of the Mouvement Panique lean toward the exploration of affects rather than knowledge and logic.

In order to bring out how this process works, I will draw on the theorization of phenomenology and affect by Gilles Deleuze for several reasons. First, Deleuze's interest in the cinematic medium makes his work particularly suited for the purpose of this chapter. Second, Deleuze accorded a special role to pataphysics in the formulation of his take on phenomenology, and he even went so far as to name Jarry a precursor to Heidegger.²⁴⁴ Finally, Arrabal mentioned both pataphysics and Deleuze as significant sources of inspiration in an interview given in 2006.²⁴⁵ Thus, a Deleuzian philosophical framework will enable me to connect these two panic films and Jarry's imaginary science.

4.1 ORIGINS OF THE MOUVEMENT PANIQUE

A look at the emergence of the Groupe Panique in French artistic circles demonstrates that its philosophy is profoundly diverse; it is not devoted to a rigid, predetermined set of ideas. The

²⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "En créant la pataphysique Jarry ouvert la voie à la phénoménologie," in *L'île déserte et autres textes: Textes et entretiens 1953-1974* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 2002) 105-108; Gilles Deleuze, "Un Précurseur méconnu de Heidegger, Alfred Jarry," in *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1993), 113-25.

²⁴⁵ Jean-Marc Debenedetti, "Interview d'Arrabal par Jean-Marc Debenedetti," in *Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire* (Paris: Punctum, 2006), 211-32.

cement that keeps the three founders of the movement together is their overlapping vision of what aesthetic and artistic experience ought to be. More importantly, they agree to disagree and embrace the irreconcilable differences in their individual ways of pursuing their shared goal. What drew the three *paniques* to one another was their shared curiosity about their works. In an interview with Jean-Marc Debenedetti, Arrabal reveals that his first direct encounter with Jodorowsky's work occurred when the latter decided to stage Arrabal's play, *Fando y Lis* (1958). Jodorowsky's fascination with the play was so profound that it inspired him to give up his successful career as a mime to devote his time to theater and directing for the stage.²⁴⁶ Subsequently, Arrabal discovered intriguing drawings published around the time in a satirical and controversial journal *Hara-Kiri*, and he contacted their creator, Topor, by sending his newly published first novel, *L'Enterrement de la sardine*, in 1960. Topor reminisced about this unorthodox introduction with fondness:

Je travaille à Hara-Kiri, je reçois un livre d'Arrabal, *L'Enterrement de la sardine* qu'il m'envoie avec admiration et sympathie. Je ne sais pas comment il est ni son âge, et je lui envoie un dessin. Ensuite, un type me téléphone, soi-disant son secrétaire, [...] et on se donne rendez-vous au Saint-Claude, boulevard Saint-Germain. On découvre qu'on a des goûts communs: Hara-Kiri, la science-fiction, les romans noirs, Lewis Carroll... On se dit que fonder un mouvement serait intéressant.²⁴⁷

While the rapport between Arrabal and Topor began and continued as cordial, Arrabal's relationship with Jodorowsky was purely intellectual rather than affectionate. It was indeed

²⁴⁶ Debenedetti, "Interview d'Arrabal par Jean-Marc Debenedetti," 223.

²⁴⁷ Philippe Krebs, "Dossier sur panique," *Les Éditions Hermaphrodite*, 1999, http://sitehermaphrodite.free.fr/article.php3?id_article=125.

Arrabal who decided to introduce the other two in 1960 because he saw, despite their differences, the potential for a fruitful encounter of minds.

Arrabal, Jodorowsky and Topor met for the first time as a trio in 1960 at the Café de la Paix in Paris. It was evident from the start that they did not see eye to eye on all matters. Topor, for example, was instantly taken aback by Jodorowsky's spirituality that was grounded in Eastern philosophies such as Zen and Buddhism.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, despite a profound sense of friendship, the relationship between Arrabal and Topor was marred by their polarized attitude toward the Surrealist group, which all of the *paniques* were invited to join.²⁴⁹ The fundamental differences of opinions regarding their personal convictions aside, the three founders of the Mouvement Panique did not let these divergences overshadow their yearning to create an artistic space that would allow for contradictions to coexist and interact. Aranzueque-Arrieta calls the original *paniques* “[une] trinité subversive et polymorphe” in which each individual retains his views, values and experiences.²⁵⁰ Such diversity assumes that sharp differences are unavoidable, a premise that constitutes the basis of *philosophie panique* that turns them into an asset. If I insist on introducing the Groupe Panique by laying out the differences and diverging opinions of its members, it is because their acknowledgment and respect for them was a crucial factor in devising the group's philosophy regarding their artistic pursuits. The *paniques* took on as their first collective goal to make a statement of their mission without curbing their creativity the way

²⁴⁸ Aranzueque-Arrieta, *Panique*, 36.

²⁴⁹ Philippe Krebs, “Roland Topor et l'art,” *Les Éditions Hermaphrodite*, 2007, http://sitehermaphrodite.free.fr/article.php?id_article=629. Arrabal considered the invitation to the meetings of the Surrealist group as an honor, and even though he did not agree with Breton's dogmatism, he maintained a lifelong relationship with the group. Topor, in turn, could not stand the atmosphere of the group and, as an anecdote goes, he excused himself to go to the bathroom during the first meeting he attended and never came back.

²⁵⁰ Aranzueque-Arrieta, *Panique*, 37.

other movements did at the time, for example the infamous Surrealists. Topor talks about their endeavor as follows:

Avec Panique, nous essayons de mettre sur pied un programme, suffisamment flou pour ne pas être acculé à le suivre, mais pas trop tarte, pour qu'il se maintienne harmonieusement tout en favorisant nos épanouissements respectifs. Ensuite, comme de juste, nous cherchons quelques compagnons de route, des types marrants sans nous laisser piéger, c'est-à-dire sans oublier qu'il s'agit d'un faux-mouvement...²⁵¹

Here, Topor explains that even though the intention of founding a movement was not entirely serious, together with the other *paniques* they wanted to define goals for their group that would allow them to assume a direction but at the same time protect their artistic individualism; their goals reflect their strong identity in opposition to the mainstream art but at the same time allow for their artistic creativity to thrive freely.

This conundrum resulting from the will to articulate *philosophie panique* but at the same time to leave it as open-ended as possible starts already with the question of the best way to communicate it to the world, as the *paniques* consider written language a medium that is seriously flawed, which will be reflected in the group's preference for body/vision-based media, such as performance and film. This opinion was later explicitly expressed by Jodorowsky in his essay – in the end the *paniques* did not succeed in foregoing written language altogether – on *l'éphémère panique* in 1965: “La langue écrite ne peut pas être panique; pour l'être, elle doit

²⁵¹ Krebs, “Dossier sur panique.”

s'intégrer dans un ensemble corporel, vocal, spectaculaire; être un élément de la fête panique."²⁵²

I contend that the reluctance towards written language as an abstract and artificial system separated from human body was the reason that the Groupe Panique at first did not produce an official manifesto regarding their deliberations on *philosophie panique*, and that the first essay outlining their agenda, which appeared under the title "L'Homme panique," was a transcription of Arrabal's speech presented at the University of Sydney in 1963. Moreover, the only traces of the principles that the *paniques* worked out together are texts that they published throughout the 1960s as individuals, not as a collective. These texts, starting with "L'Homme panique," published independently and only later collected in a volume edited by Arrabal entitled *Le Panique* (1973) include Jodorowsky's "Panique et poulet rôti" and "Vers l'éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre," and Topor's "Petit Memento panique."²⁵³ It was not until 2006 that Arrabal officially used the word "manifesto" in reference to a collection of theoretical texts about the *panique* when he published a volume entitled *Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire*. The collection of these texts, which were relatively scattered in the beginning of the *panique*'s existence, along with numerous interviews given by the group's members, allow for a detailed picture of what the *philosophie panique* is and an understanding of how it relates to Jarry's pataphysics.

²⁵² Alejandro Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre," in *Le Panique*, ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 79.

²⁵³ Arrabal, "L'Homme panique"; Alejandro Jodorowsky, "Panique et poulet rôti," in *Le Panique*, ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 55–64; Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère"; Roland Topor, "Petit memento panique," in *Le Panique*, ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 66–73.

4.2 PHILOSOPHIE PANIQUE

Before tracing the connection between panic philosophy and pataphysics, I would like to outline the key concepts and assumptions shaping *le panique*. The keystone texts of the Mouvement Panique only confirm Topor's statement that the group members wanted to define their goals in a manner flexible enough to never let themselves be cornered by their own proclamations. Indeed, explicit definitions of what constitutes *philosophie panique* are not frequent in these texts. At the group's founding, Arrabal attempted such a definition in "L'Homme panique," stating that *le panique* is "[...] une 'manière d'être' régie par la confusion, l'humour, la terreur, le hasard et l'euphorie. Du point de vue éthique le panique a pour base la pratique de la morale au pluriel, et du point de vue philosophique, l'axiome 'la vie est la mémoire et l'homme, le hasard'."²⁵⁴ Taking all precaution against being limited by definitions, Arrabal calls this statement an "anti-définition." According to this anti-definition, *le panique* is not only a philosophy of artistic creation but also a way of living. In other words, if someone wants to create in the spirit of *le panique*, they must live it all the time in order to acquire a certain way of perceiving and experiencing the surrounding world. This way is informed by one's openness to confusion, humor, terror, chance and euphoria stemming from bodily reactions, all of which are constitutive elements of *philosophie panique*. By bringing all those elements in the mix of perception of the world, *le panique*, just like pataphysics, advocates reluctance towards preconceived truths. *Le panique* specifically insists on renouncing commonly accepted ethical and moral codes, as they are unnecessary inhibitors in terms of the ways in which we can live and commune with the world. The final statement of the definition, "la vie est la mémoire et l'homme est le hasard," is a

²⁵⁴ Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," 52.

result of Arrabal's semi-philosophical divagation on the direction of *le panique* at its founding in 1962 and is tightly related to the philosophy's mythological origins. As it warrants further explanation, I will return to it following my discussion of the definition of the movement's mission.

Now that half a century has passed since the founding of the movement, those involved in the group's life from the beginning are more willing to talk about it in more mundane and down-to-earth terms. Arrabal, for example, no longer firmly insists on the prefix "anti-" to be added to the name of the group or to its definition. 2007 saw the publication of *Diccionario Pánico*, a dictionary of terms and expressions related to *philosophie panique* as given by Arrabal.²⁵⁵ We can see that in the entry on "Pánico" the artist defines the group in somewhat more conventional terms than in 1960s and admits that his definitions change over time:²⁵⁶

Indefinible movimiento artístico literario y científico que defino con diferencias notables por lo menos una vez por año. Muda y transmuta día y noche, ayer y mañana, física y espiritualmente. [...] El anti-cientista grupo surrealista fue para Topor, Jodorowsky y para mí un anacronismo anacoreta, encapotadísimo por crónicas políticas. En el "Memento pánico" de Topor y en mi primer manifiesto (*El hombre pánico*) dejamos constancia de nuestro interés por la Ciencia y nuestro desinterés por el surrealismo. [An undefined artistic, literary and scientific movement, which I redefine with notable differences at least once a year. The

²⁵⁵ Fernando Arrabal and Raúl Herrero, *Diccionario pánico* (Zaragoza: Libros del Innombrable, 2007). The 2007 volume is an extended edition of a collection of Arrabal's definitions and aphorisms first assembled by Pollux Hernández in 1998.

²⁵⁶ At this point in time we can already observe between the lines Arrabal's fascination with pataphysics and that the artist aligns both currents of thought. I will analyze further the intersection of *le panique* and pataphysics in the following section.

movement changes and transforms day and night, from day to day, physically and spiritually. [...] For me and Topor, the anti-scientific Surrealist movement constituted an anachronism reserved for political chronicles. In Topor's "Petit memento panique" and in my first manifesto (*L'Homme panique*) we declare our interest in Science and our disinterest in the Surrealism.]²⁵⁷

In this recent definition of *philosophie panique*, Arrabal allows himself to call the group a "movement," however constraining such label may be, and names two theoretical texts composed at the founding of the group as its "manifestos." He also admits that the group is a living structure and it evolves along with its founders' interests, for example with his interest in pataphysics, which echoes throughout this entry. Furthermore, Arrabal identifies the key contributors to *le panique* (even though by this point the three founders welcomed more contributors, such as Olivier O. Olivier, Sam Szafran and Christian Zeimert), and positions the group against the Surrealists, even though at the time of founding the Mouvement Panique he was attracted to Breton and his group.

As much as the definition of the Groupe Panique may fluctuate, the philosophy managed to survive despite Topor's death in 1997, and it has reverberated to this day in Arrabal's and Jodorowsky's creative work. This philosophy is anchored in several key elements named earlier in this chapter, such as memory, confusion and chance, the significance of which is laid out in the aforementioned theoretical texts. Going back to his lecture at the University of Sydney, we can see that Arrabal had always intended to embed *philosophie panique* in a broader literary and philosophical tradition. Perhaps in order to give the genealogy of *le panique* a hint of mystery

²⁵⁷ Fernando Arrabal, "Pánico," *Diccionario pánico* (Zaragoza: Libros del Innombrable, 2007), 301-302.

and dignified mysticism, he chose to root it in Greek mythology. Arrabal not only proposes to personify *le panique* through the Greek god Pan, but also notes the mythological genealogy of artistic expression that results from the application of *philosophie panique* by pointing out its personification in the nine muses. Arrabal explains that the muses were children of Memory (Mnémosyne) and Zeus, himself a son of Memory's brother Time (Chronos). Arrabal grants a great significance to the fact that the muses representing respective arts were fruit of such an unusual, incestuous union of Memory and Time, and adopts them as two pillars of his group's philosophy and artistic agenda.

Further, Arrabal proposes to debunk the claim that memory, understood as the things that we remember, belongs temporally in the past. Arrabal states that the future is determined also by memory, as the latter serves to make predictions but also assist us with our encounters of unpredictable. Arrabal refers to the memory of the future as chance: "Je vins à penser que l'avenir était déterminé par le hasard et je supposai même que la confusion (que je ne distinguais pas du hasard) régissait notre avenir et par conséquent notre présent et notre [...] passé (ex-avenir)."²⁵⁸ With his proposition to view memory, chance and confusion as three distinctive manifestation of one phenomenon, one that determines the ways in which people relate to the world, Arrabal collapses the notion of time and renders linear temporality irrelevant. The categories of past (ex-future), present and future become obsolete as their artificiality is exposed.

With the adoption of memory, chance and confusion, as well as the non-chronological conception of time, Arrabal comes up with two semi-arbitrary statements that will also serve as mottos of *philosophie panique*, namely, "L'avenir agit en coups de théâtre," and "La vie est la mémoire et l'homme est le hasard." I contend that these mottos will determine the group's initial

²⁵⁸ Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," 41.

predilection for theater and reinforce the ways in which the *paniques* choose the human and the visceral, rather than the artificial and the logical, in their creative explorations. Arrabal admits to having come up with the first phrase by picking up a book and playing a linguistic game, which I view as purely oulipian: “Je choisis un mot ou un membre de phrase d’une page prise au hasard, dans un livre; puis j’ouvre ce même livre en un autre endroit et je recommence l’opération. Il ne s’agit pas d’un jeu automatique, puisque la seconde partie doit être choisie de telle sorte que l’ensemble forme une phrase cohérente du point de vue grammatical (exclusivement).”²⁵⁹ By relying on controlled chance, Arrabal assembled a phrase that surprised him by the profoundness of the meaning comprised in it, as he put together “l’avenir agit,” and “en coups de théâtre.” Rather than ascribing sense to it, he let himself be guided by the potential power of arbitrarily juxtaposed words. The adoption of this sentence as a motto of the group resulted in an emphasis on theater with an element of chance and confusion (associated by Arrabal with the future, “l’avenir”), which evolved more as spontaneous performance rather than staging a pre-planned play. The second motto, also revealed in the “L’Homme panique” lecture, was born out of a similarly spontaneous and arbitrary reasoning process, as oulipian as the aforementioned linguistic game. Arrabal admits that the process started with a *plaisanterie mathématique* that led him to sketch a sequence of equations resulting in the postulate that chance is equal to the square root of negative one, and therefore does not have a logical solution.²⁶⁰ Arrabal further combines this conclusion with a digression on the chemical nature of human memory, and this stream of personal reasoning leads him to proclaim that “La vie est la mémoire et l’homme est le hasard,” thus declaring his commitment to memory and chance over intelligence and reason.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 41. There is no indication, however, that Arrabal engaged in an oulipian linguistic game consciously and deliberately.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 44.

4.3 PANIC AND PATAPHYSICS

The core assumptions of *philosophie panique* are rooted in confusion and distrust towards reason, such as the refusal to perceive the world based on dichotomous systems of generally accepted knowledge and a defiance of linear conceptions of temporal and spatial cognition. As such, they are in many aspects convergent with the interests of the Collège de 'Pataphysique. Whereas the Oulipo and its potential literature can be considered a direct offshoot of the Collège, the Panic Group was embraced by pataphysicians only retroactively. Of the three founders of *le panique*, it was Arrabal who became fascinated with pataphysics and pulled the Mouvement Panique onto the path initially forged by the Collège. This did not occur, however, until the 2000s, when he became actively involved in the life of the Collège. It is indeed in the 2000s when Arrabal starts making explicit references to pataphysics. For example, when asked in 2006 about his attitude towards philosophy, Arrabal responds: "La philosophie pataphysique des exceptions me passionne."²⁶¹ In his *Manifeste pour le troisième millénaire* of 2006 accompanied by the interview, he elaborates further that pataphysics is an inspiration for the development of certain aspects of his own panic philosophy: "[Le panique] aspire à l'exception pataphysique et à la fête sans vaches sacrées."²⁶² Thus Arrabal states that *philosophie panique*, just like Jarry's imaginary science, strives to push the boundaries of what is familiar by focusing on exceptions rather than blindly following generally accepted rules.

Even though Arrabal does not start to express publicly his predilection for pataphysics until the 2000s, his first encounter with the Collège and its philosophy and lifestyle, one that

²⁶¹ Debenedetti, "Interview d'Arrabal par Jean-Marc Debenedetti," 213.

²⁶² Fernando Arrabal, *Panique: manifeste pour le troisième millénaire* (Paris: Punctum, 2006), 194.

pushed him to make a leap into the imaginary science, occurred in 1970. In a concise but informative article entitled “Que fait Arrabal au Collège de ‘Pataphysique?’” Thieri Foulc, an important figure within the Collège currently assuming responsibilities in diverse administrative and organizational matters, and Arrabal’s dear friend, fills in the details of the artist’s discovery of the group. Foulc boasts the fact that Arrabal’s first encounter with a pataphysician took place by chance, which only reinforces the significance of chance both within pataphysics and *le panique*: “[...] en 1970 dans un aéroport new-yorkais Arrabal [a] croisé la route d’un Optimate du Collège, le Régent Indicifique Marcel Troulay, [...] à la suite de leur conversation Arrabal [a] fait ce que nous appelons le ‘bon bond’ et [...] le 1 janvier 1971] il [est] né à la ‘Pataphysique.”²⁶³ Being born to pataphysics, as Foulc elaborates, means being officially registered as a member of the Collège and becoming a conscious pataphysician. Arrabal was thus registered as a *Correspondant Réel* of the group.²⁶⁴

At the time, as other members of the Collège were familiar and approving of Arrabal’s exploits and commitments, the Collège was happy to embrace Arrabal’s eccentricity to the point that the most prominent figures of the group, including Latis (Emmanuel Peillet), Raymond Queneau, and Thieri Foulc himself, immediately advocated for the new member’s promotion to the rank of a *Satrape*. Nevertheless, because of the somewhat unexpected occultation of the Collège in 1975 combined with Arrabal’s modesty, his promotion was indefinitely deferred.²⁶⁵ During the occultation, the Collège suspended all activity and decision-making with the exception of the journal’s publication, which at the time of occultation was officially published

²⁶³ Thieri Foulc, “Que fait Arrabal au Collège de ‘Pataphysique,’” *L’Atelier du roman* 74 (2003): 25–26.

²⁶⁴ *Correspondants Réels* are those who actively participate in the Collège’s life and activities.

²⁶⁵ I will discuss the occultation of the Collège in more details in chapter 4.

not by the Collège but by an organ called Cymbalum Pataphysicum, an institution established to maintain the dormant but otherwise existing pataphysical community. It was therefore a secret not revealed until the end of the occultation that in 1990 the acting Vice-Curator of the Collège, Opach, made some decisions *in petto*, and these included the long-awaited promotion of Arrabal, of which he was not aware until the year 2000. Upon the desoccultation of the Collège and learning of his award of the title *Satrape*, Arrabal assumed a much more active role within the ranks of the pataphysical community.

As a member of the Collège, Arrabal's privileges have included, but were not limited to, regular reception of the group's journal and internal publications, participation in manifestations and private events organized by the members, cooperation and assistance by other *Optimates* of the Collège, as well as the right to have the Collège's official delegation present at his funeral in case of death. As a *Satrape*, he joined the body of such prominent figures as Raymond Queneau, Boris Vian and René Clair, whose role, as defined by the *Statuts* of the Collège, was to work as freely as they wish, without any limitations or impositions. Arrabal took this freedom seriously and became very active within the Collège, as, when asked about what exactly Arrabal's contribution is, Foule responds:

Je pourrais, pour répondre, énumérer les cérémonies collégiales, manifestations publiques, réunions optimatiques, banquets de grand et de petit appareil, outre l'innombrable correspondance écrite, calligraphiée, dessinée, électronisée, et les distributions de livres, de photographies, d'objets inutiles, de jambon *PATA negra*,

de crocodiles empaillés, mais sous cette activité je perçois aussi une action moins visible, un art de faire exister l'imaginaire.²⁶⁶

This partly humorous list of Arrabal's contributions speaks also a deeper truth about his interest in the group. For Arrabal, the Collège provided not only a stimulating intellectual ground that was already aligned with his devotion to *le panique*, but also community and friendship. If his and Jodorowsky's relationship was mostly intellectual, Arrabal regretted that Topor, who was his close friend, did not live long enough to be coopted to the Collège after its desoccultation. This is why in 2001 he arranged for Topor to be posthumously nominated a *Satrape*, during a Collège get-together that Arrabal organized at his home in Paris. In 2003, Arrabal was selected to become a *Promoteur Insigne* of the Ordre de la Grande Gidouille, an exclusive club within the Collège gathering its particularly devoted participants (such as Vian and Queneau in the past).²⁶⁷ Arrabal kept making his way up the hierarchy ladder in the Collège and in 2014 he had the honor of acting as the *Unique Électeur*, the person in charge of nominating the new *Vice-Curateur*. At the time, he chose Tanya Peixoto, a representative of the London Institute of 'Pataphysics for the position.²⁶⁸ The activities of the Collège in the post-desoccultation era, which has seen Arrabal's involvement, will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

²⁶⁶ Foulc, "Que fait Arrabal au Collège de 'Pataphysique," 30.

²⁶⁷ The Ordre de la Grande Gidouille was invented, again, by Alfred Jarry, and first described in 1899 in *Almanach du Père Ubu illustré*. The Order was named after Père Ubu's grotesque stomach, the *gidouille*. Père Ubu was the first *Maître* of the Order. The *Statuts* of the Order define the function of a *Promoteur Insigne* as follows: "Un *Promoteur Insigne*, assisté de *Copromoteurs*, en nombre variable, est chargé, en liaison avec les Offices du Conférent Majeur, de préparer et d'élaborer les initiatives préalables propres à susciter les initiatives de la Chambre. L'initiative de ces initiatives préalables n'est l'objet d'aucune institution et est laissé à l'Arbitraire du Promoteur Insigne et de ses Copromoteurs." Ordre de la Grande Gidouille, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013), titre IV.

²⁶⁸ Traditionally, one member of the Collège nominated as the *Unique Électeur* is responsible for nominating the new *Vice-Curateur* after the death of the previous one. Raymond Queneau, for

The connection between the Collège de ‘Pataphysique and the Mouvement Panique is not, however, limited to Arrabal’s engagement in the life of the pataphysical community; there are also intriguing overlaps between the philosophies associated with both groups, and they are discernible even in Jodorowsky’s work, even though, unlike Arrabal, he never sought to be involved with the Collège. Jodorowsky’s commitment to dismantling and neutralizing linear notions of time and space in his works, which I will investigate later in this chapter, his insistence on freezing his plays and the action of his films in the “here and now,” seems to be a remarkable quest for pataphysical “imaginary solutions” that are infinite and escape hierarchization. In *Le Cercle des Pataphysiciens* (2008), a publication by the Collège, in the entry on Arrabal, André Stas, a poet and a fellow pataphysician, thus reconnects the two philosophies:

[Arrabal] avait déjà opté, au sein de ce mouvement [panique] éminemment ravageur, pour ce qui ressemblait comme au frère au ‘principe d’équivalence’ des pataphysiciens: la confusion panique, qui accepte tous les postulats, toutes les philosophies, toutes les morales (en en revendiquant la part qui convient), et qui critique la connaissance tout en cherchant les mécanismes, le conduisit à considérer que ‘la ‘Pataphysique est une machine à explorer le monde’ [...].²⁶⁹

The principle of equivalence evoked here by Stas is addressed in more detail in Dr. Sandomir’s testament: “Il n’y a donc aucune différence, ni de nature, ni de degré entre les esprits, non plus qu’entre leurs produits, non plus qu’entre les choses. Pour le Pataphysicien Total le graffiti le

example, was the *Unique Électeur* after the death of Dr. Sandomir (it was an imaginary death as Emmanuel Peillet, who at the time was impersonating Sandomir, was still alive) and nominated Baron Mollet as the successor of the deceased.

²⁶⁹ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, ed., “Fernando Arrabal, Satrape,” in *Le Cercle des pataphysiciens* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2008), 102.

plus banal équivaldrait au livre le plus achevé, voire aux Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll eux-mêmes [...].”²⁷⁰ Thus, according to the pataphysical principle of equivalence, all things and phenomena can be considered equally important, impactful and worth of pataphysicians’ attention. Pataphysical ways of thinking abolish hierarchies and dichotomies, and so does confusion embraced within *philosophie panique*. Such confusion is the preferred mindset for the fullest connection with the surrounding world. In a state of confusion, one detaches from learned inhibitions conditioned by the existing systems of knowledge and notions of appropriateness. Yet, if one, for example, rejects being politically correct, it does not automatically mean that he or she chooses political incorrectness. Panic philosophers embrace all contradictory elements of being human. As Larouche explains, in panic confusion, “[c]es contradictions apparentes ne sont, en réalité, que le refus de l’homme panique de se faire intégrer dans une pensée normative, ce qui entraînerait une limitation, un jugement par rapport à des normes sociales.”²⁷¹ Thus, a quest for a way out of normative systems of knowledge can be considered both pataphysical and panic. It is not, therefore, surprising that upon discovering pataphysics, Arrabal found this worldview particularly compelling.

Furthermore, what brings pataphysics and *le panique* together is the deliberate absence of a broader political agenda. If pataphysicians and *paniques* work to explore potentiality and push the apparent limitations of artistic creation, be it in literature, film, or any other medium, and by extension of the human mind, they emphasize that they do so without any political goal in mind. After all, the Collège specifically proclaims its research “inutiles,” which means that it is not

²⁷⁰ Irénée-Louis Sandomir, “Testament de Sa Feue Magnificence le Docteur I. L. Sandomir” (Open Access Patakosmos Press, 2014), 3, <http://www.patakosmos.com/database-open-access/Testament-Sandomir-opus-pataphysicum-college-de-pataphysique.pdf>.

²⁷¹ Larouche, *Alexandro Jodorowsky*, 21.

being developed in order to attain premeditated goals. This attitude of pataphysicians is best summarized by a famous statement that according to Noël Arnaud is often attributed to Boris Vian: “seul le Collège de ‘Pataphysique n’entreprend pas de sauver le monde.”²⁷² When pataphysicians say that they do not want to save the world, it means that they do not work in order to convert their readers to follow their own philosophy, or to prove their worldview’s superiority over other systems of thought; they merely want to show, to themselves more than anyone else, that alternative ways of connecting to the world are possible, and that, in this regard, possibilities can be endless. In his panic manifesto of 2006, Arrabal, possibly echoing some proclamations of the Collège, speaks of *le panique* as follows: “Le panique n’essaie pas d’améliorer le monde avec des légions de soumis, ni d’inspirer une seule ligne aux panicophiles.”²⁷³ This statement shows that the *paniques*, much like the Collège, did not adopt an idealistic mission to convince anyone to their philosophy or to recruit more and more followers. If the Mouvement Panique gained several new members beside the three founders, it was because of mutual respectful curiosity regarding their creative work and not the group’s active propaganda.²⁷⁴

The final connection between *philosophie panique* and pataphysics that I want to establish goes by way of “legitimate” philosophy broadly recognized within academic circles. In the interview with Debenedetti, Arrabal links *le panique* with the work of Deleuze: “Gilles Deleuze, peu avant de mourir, a cherché à comprendre ce qu’il appelait ‘l’épiphénomène

²⁷² Noël Arnaud, *Les Vies parallèles de Boris Vian* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1998), 336.

²⁷³ Arrabal, *Panique: manifeste*, 194.

²⁷⁴ Artists who joined the Mouvement Panique later on were Diego Baron, Olivier O. Olivier, Sam Szafran, Christian Zeimert and Abel Ogier.

panique””.²⁷⁵ While Arrabal does not elaborate on this statement and it remains unclear to which part of Deleuze’s work he refers, it indicates a common ground between panic philosophy and the philosopher’s take on phenomenology. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent sections of my analysis, Deleuze’s theorization of time as a phenomenon that can be perceived not in a linear manner but as a concept that collapses the past, the present and the future onto one plane, can deepen our understanding of the panic conception of time. Moreover, Deleuze’s idea that immediate bodily sensations can constitute a way of communication with the surrounding world that is grounded in affect rather than reason and cognition, is particularly fitting to elucidate the focus of *le panique* on the human body and its possibilities.

Finally, Deleuze’s theoretical framework will help me inscribe panic philosophy within the tradition of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique because of the philosopher’s personal interest in pataphysics. In an essay from 1964, published under the title “En créant la pataphysique Jarry a ouvert la voie à la phénoménologie,” then heavily edited and reprinted as “Un précurseur méconnu de Heidegger, Alfred Jarry” in the volume *Critique et clinique* in 1993, Deleuze traces the attempts to overcome the limitations of metaphysics with phenomenology back to Alfred Jarry’s imaginary science. In the essay, Deleuze refers to a modern prophecy according to which metaphysics must be exceeded by something else. This something else, he says, “[...] est conçu comme une force agissant déjà dans la subjectivité humaine, mais se cachant en elle, et aussi bien la détruisant.”²⁷⁶ Deleuze identifies the presence of this thus-far undefined force, which he decides to include under the umbrella of pataphysics, within the thought of Nietzsche, Marx, as well as Heidegger’s phenomenology. In the *Critique et clinique* reprint, Deleuze brings

²⁷⁵ Debenedetti, “Interview d’Arrabal par Jean-Marc Debenedetti,” 222.

²⁷⁶ Deleuze, “En créant la pataphysique,” 106.

pataphysics and phenomenology even closer: “En premier lieu, la pataphysique comme dépassement de la métaphysique est inséparable d’une phénoménologie, c’est-à-dire d’un nouveau sens et d’une nouvelle compréhension du phénomène.”²⁷⁷ I propose to read the search for a new understanding of a phenomenon, advocated here by Deleuze, as an investigation of what Arrabal refers to as a panic epiphenomenon in the Debenedetti interview. Linking pataphysics and *philosophie panique* by way of Deleuze’s philosophical writings will demonstrate the ways in which Jarry’s imaginary science can be freed from its initial location in literature and allowed to seep into cinema.

4.4 PANIC FILMS: FROM LINEAR TEMPORAL PROGRESSION TO MEMORY AND CONFUSION

To explain practical implications of *philosophie panique* and its constitutive elements for cinema, I will focus on two key performance-related theoretical concepts devised during the Mouvement Panique’s formative years: the *éphémère panique*, or the panic ephemeral performance, and the *fête-spectacle*, a notion of panic celebration. Both informed not only theatrical plays of the members of the Mouvement Panique, but also their later cinematic works. The *éphémère panique* is a type of performance first described by Jodorowsky in “Vers l’éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre” in 1965. Already the descriptive title of the essay explains what Jodorowsky has in mind while proposing an innovative performance: he wants to free the theater from its limitations related to years of tradition shaping this particular

²⁷⁷ Deleuze, “Un Précurseur,” 113.

art. Such limitations result from the layout of theater buildings, a relative lack of real interaction between actors and the audience, but most importantly from the adopted linear temporal structure of theatrical plays. It is a new attitude towards time, I argue, that the *éphémère panique* exemplifies.

The *éphémère panique* is a type of performance designed to combat temporal durability. As its name indicates, such a performance is ephemeral, its existence is fleeting and short-lived but particularly impactful and especially difficult to reproduce in the same form, and it stands in opposition to things that are permanent and repetitive. Jodorowsky broaches the subject of the problematic nature of durability in what is considered another one of the founding essays of the Mouvement Panique, “Panique et poulet rôti” (1964): “Le désir de DURER tourmenta l’humanité avant la [*sic*] panique [...]”²⁷⁸ There, Jodorowsky presents the human yearning to survive in time and to leave a permanent imprint that will last into the future, as a curse of humanity. He strives to raise awareness regarding the artificiality of the notion of time as measurement of linear progression and concludes that performance is the medium best adapted to realize his agenda. In “Vers l’éphémère panique,” Jodorowsky pins down theater’s limitations to the fact that this particular medium of artistic expression borrows inspiration and language from other artistic media, such as literature, visual arts, sculpture, music and architecture.²⁷⁹ One of the aspects that theater erroneously borrows from these media is a pretense of durability: “Cette confusion naît du fait que l’on considère le théâtre comme un ‘Art’ en prétendant lui donner le ‘caractère durable’ des autres arts. Les hommes de théâtre ont senti avec angoisse le

²⁷⁸ Jodorowsky, “Panique et poulet rôti,” 57, emphasis original.

²⁷⁹ Jodorowsky, “Vers l’éphémère,” 74.

caractère non durable de leurs œuvres et l'impossibilité d'une représentation parfaite."²⁸⁰ The non-durability of the theatrical medium, Jodorowsky claims, was always sensed but often suppressed by the influences of other arts. The artist and other *paniques* call for a conscious insistence on the ephemerality of the medium, which is why they prefer to speak of performance rather than use the broad term of theater. The ephemerality of performance is the key element of *le panique*. It prevents artists from achieving perfection, which, in a counterintuitive way, is a good thing, as according to *philosophie panique*, perfection is inhuman and confusion is desired over perfection.

If theater is the convenient medium of choice to accommodate the ephemeral type of performance that the *paniques* seek to create, their insistence on non-durability becomes more complicated when they turn to cinema. By virtue of the cinematic medium's recording, reproducibility, and defined time constraints, films are designed to last in more than one way. Films can be screened multiple times, which flies in the face of the idea of a unique, ephemeral performance. Moreover, a recorded film is meant to be watched in a linear fashion, from beginning to end, and has a defined duration. Arrabal, however, saw films, and especially the process of filmmaking, as uniquely ephemeral in its own way. In the interview with André Cornand, Arrabal states that despite the reproducibility of films, they can be considered even more prone to accidents and open to chance, as theater plays are rehearsed for weeks before they are performed, whereas the filming of a scene, especially in the case of low-budget cinema, is preceded by minimal rehearsing.²⁸¹ I will argue that indeed it is the production process, the inclusion of spontaneous performance during the making of the film, and the use of specific

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 74.

²⁸¹ André Cornand, "Entretien avec Arrabal," *Image et son* 280 (1974): 93.

cinematographic techniques, that informs the ephemeral nature of the panic films in regard to time.

In addition to the notion of the *éphémère panique*, Deleuze's concepts of the time-image and the crystal-image presented in *Cinéma 2* (1985) also contribute to a helpful theoretical framework to show how the *paniques* approach and construct the temporality of their films. In that book, Deleuze questions the relevance of the rational structuring of cinematic temporal progression based on movement and instead promotes the exploration of alternative possibilities that cinema has to offer. In what he calls the time-image, "[t]ime ceases to be derived from the movement, it appears in itself and itself gives rise to false movements. Hence the importance of false continuity in modern cinema: the images are no longer linked by rational cuts and continuity, but are relinked by means of false continuity and irrational cuts."²⁸² In my analysis of panic films, I will argue that false movements and false continuity are central tools used by the panic filmmakers to sabotage the continuity of time in their own productions and to dismantle its progression. Moreover, the *paniques* turn to the exploitation of memory (instead of past), and confusion and chance (instead of progression towards the future), to paint their own types of time-images in their films. In his presentation of the time-image, Deleuze uses terms that later on inspired and informed discourses by affect theorists, including the distinction between the actual and the virtual. Deleuze contends that time-images are virtual, as opposed to the actuality of linear movement-based sequences, because they are free from constraints of the traditional assumptions regarding the socially and scientifically constructed notion of time. The virtuality of

²⁸² Gilles Deleuze, "Preface to English Edition," in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlison and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1986), xi.

time-image-based cinema is one of the key characteristics shared with the structure of the cinematic productions inspired by *philosophie panique*.

It was the end of the 1960s that saw Alejandro Jodorowsky and Fernando Arrabal respectively carry out their first experiments with film: Jodorowsky's *Fando y Lis* (1968), and Arrabal's *Viva la Muerte* (1971). I chose to look at these works to demonstrate the practical implications of panic philosophy, because as their first films, they are still very much connected to their creators' tradition and background in stage-related arts, such as theater, happenings and spontaneous performance. At the same time, they mark the beginning of the directors' individual journeys during which, in the years to come, they both guided their artistic sensitivities in their own directions. Both films have a common foundation in the way that they solidified personal bonds of the members of the Panic Group, that they inspired fascination with one another's work, and that they gave their authors a taste of social and artistic ostracism.²⁸³ More importantly, the two films' common denominator is the core approach to the world and its perception by their directors, *le panique*, which shaped Jodorowsky's and Arrabal's respective takes on temporality.

While the two directors approach temporality each in their own way, they both seek to defuse or dismantle the regime of temporal progression and the idea of a linear passage from the past, through the present, and toward the future. The neutralization of temporal linearity in their

²⁸³ Indeed Jodorowsky made *Fando y Lis* based on Arrabal's theatrical play by the same title, Arrabal, in turn, included Topor's drawings in the opening sequence of *Viva la Muerte*. These are only examples of how fascination with one another's work brought the artists together. As for their ostracism, Jodorowsky's film caused a scandal at the Acapulco festival in 1968 at which it premiered, which led to closing down of the festival. Similarly, Arrabal's creation encountered severe criticism of its provocative visuals at the Cannes festival of 1971 and was subsequently banned in France for a year. It was, nevertheless, the French intellectual scene that provided the artists from different parts of the world and similar experience of being rejected by mainstream criticism, with exile where they could cultivate freely their own take on art and aesthetics.

works starts for both of them already at the conceptual stage. Jodorowsky prides himself in having shot *Fando y Lis* as a highly-improvised performance, without a script, based only on his subjective memories from the time of staging Arrabal's play in Mexico.²⁸⁴ Such an approach to filmmaking singles out the present as the only relevant temporal plane, and imagines the past not as the time that precedes and leads to the present, but as a panic conception of memory, virtual in its atemporality, that folds onto and becomes superimposed on the present. Arrabal, for his part, proposes his own vision of time as memory in the state of confusion, thus practically experimenting with the panic theorization of time. Whereas in his autobiographical novel, *Baal Babylone* (1959), on which *Viva la Muerte* is based, Arrabal focused on describing the past of his childhood, in the film he renders the storyline's ties to the past fluid and vague. The images in *Viva la Muerte* become less a representation of memories based on past events and more an expression of sensations and affective reactions triggered by the author's fantasies built around his childhood experiences. Both Jodorowsky's and Arrabal's approaches to the construction of temporality in film bring about results that are close to the elements of what Deleuze theorized as the time-image and the crystal-image. Interestingly, later in his life, Deleuze tied his conception of time to pataphysics when in the *Critique et Clinique* essay on Jarry and phenomenology he wrote: "La science sous ce caractère technique rend d'abord possible un renversement pataphysique du temps: la succession des trois stases, passé, présent, futur, fait place à la *co-présence ou simultanéité* des trois extases, être du passé, être du présent, être du futur."²⁸⁵ Fascinated with the science of pataphysics, Deleuze praises it as a domain that allows for the conceptualization of and experimentation with the simultaneity of the traditionally sequential

²⁸⁴ In his commentary to the 2003 DVD release of *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky admits to having a one-page script for the film, which still leaves plenty of room for improvisation and spontaneity.

²⁸⁵ Deleuze, "Un Précurseur," 119.

elements of time: the past, the present, and the future. As *philosophie panique* advocates the confusion and unification of these three facets of time, the members of the Mouvement Panique, Deleuze, and pataphysicians find common ground in the way they imagine time.

4.5 ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY'S TIME-IMAGE

I contend that in *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky strives to create an image of virtual temporality that aligns with his inner convictions about time: “Je ne crois pas qu’il ait un passé et un futur, mais un présent en constant changement.”²⁸⁶ One of the strategies he employs to this end is the elimination of indicators of the passage of time, such as the distinction between day and night. Jodorowsky first implemented this strategy in *Fando y Lis* and then perfected it in his subsequent movies: “The art of pictures is the art of shadows and light. For example, in my pictures there is never night. I have made three films and there is never night and never any shadows because for me, a shadow is a subjective opinion and I am searching for objectivity.”²⁸⁷ *Fando y Lis*, which is a story of a young couple on their quest of the imaginary city of Tar, indeed does not contain any night, or even any dusk or dawn scenes suggesting a specific time of the day. While the silhouettes that are on the move are accompanied occasionally by their shadows, these are not generated by artificial lighting, they vary in length but are usually on the shorter side, and their changes do not follow any consistent pattern. Rather than deliberately planned, the shadows naturally depend on the time of the recording of specific scenes. As Jodorowsky’s budget for his

²⁸⁶ Michel Ciment and Philippe Rouyer, “Entretien avec Alejandro Jodorowsky,” *Positif - Revue mensuelle de cinéma* 668 (2016): 18.

²⁸⁷ Daria Sternac, “Daria Sternac Interviewe Alexandro Jodorowsky,” *Cinema Canada* 13 (1974): 62.

first film was limited, he admits to having worked during the week and filmed on weekends. The economic necessity of following such a work pattern, rather than premeditated planning, most likely determined the natural lighting under which the film was shot.

Indeed, the temporal cycle of day and night is eliminated in *Fando y Lis*, as is the process of passage of time in general. It is true that the framing of the story of the couple in the form of an expedition in the search of the city of Tar, carries connotations of a linear journey, of sequential movement from a place of origin to a destination. Both Fando and Lis occasionally mention that they are looking forward to arriving in Tar. One of the sparse intertitles accompanying the unfolding story, however, reads: “Tar estaba dentro de su cabeza [Tar was inside his [Fando’s] head].” This statement prompts the spectators to think of Tar not as a place located in space and time, but as a state of mind after which Fando longs. The displacement and timelessness of Tar is emphasized by the way of depicting the protagonists’ journey, which is ruled by the confusion of space and time. As I have already mentioned, Arrabal emphasizes the key role of the temporal confusion for the panic perception of the world already in “L’Homme panique” by drawing the following conclusions: “Le passé fut un jour l’avenir. Le futur agit en coups de théâtre; en respectant la confusion ou le hasard.”²⁸⁸ The Second Panic Manifesto, published forty years later, shows that the panic attitude toward time, along with space, has not changed: “*Temps, Espace*: Notion sujette à la confusion panique, qui peut avoir l’apparence de réalité fondamentale ou d’idée utile.”²⁸⁹ Following these statements, for panic artists, space and time are tools for the development of the state of confusion, a goal that can be achieved by deconstructing the general assumptions of linearity and sequential nature of these notions.

²⁸⁸ Arrabal, “L’Homme panique,” 42.

²⁸⁹ Arrabal, *Panique: manifeste*, 194.

In *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky scrupulously works to bring about the panic idea of confused space and time and transpose it onto the screen. In their seemingly linear quest for Tar, the two protagonists spend most of the time moving across a desolate, mountainous landscape. The scenes in which Fando and Lis are situated in other, identifiable locations, such as a cemetery or ruins of a destroyed town, are sporadic and not connected by way of continuity to the main location of the rocky wasteland. In the mountains, the couple moves in space, where most of the time Fando pulls a wagon with Lis sitting on top of it as she cannot walk because of her paralysis, but they do not progress in their journey. In other words, they do not seem to get anywhere in space and time. The protagonists' relationship to the confused space and time in which they are situated, can be better understood with the application of the Deleuzian concept of the time-image and its principle of false continuity. In *Cinéma 2*, Deleuze traces a transition in the history of cinema, from the focus on movement and continuity as the most important factors dictating the structure of cinematic images, toward a growing interest in favoring time and its multiple dimensions as an organizing principle of the moving pictures. According to Deleuze, action and sensory-motor patterns give way to the pure optical as well as sound and tactile cinematic situations that allow for the creation of what he calls the direct image of time. He further explains that a time-image does not entail a total elimination of movement:

L'image-temps n'implique pas l'absence de mouvement (bien qu'elle en comporte souvent la raréfaction), mais elle implique le renversement de la subordination; ce n'est plus le temps qui est subordonné au mouvement, c'est le mouvement qui se subordonne au temps. Ce n'est plus le temps qui découle du mouvement, de sa

norme et de ses aberrations corrigées, c'est le mouvement comme *faux mouvement*, comme mouvement aberrant, qui dépend maintenant du temps.²⁹⁰

In a time-image, time stops being a measure, a mere counterpoint to movement and action. As a result, it is no longer represented as a linear progression, and all stages of a temporal sequence – past, present and future – fold onto the present. Jodorowsky's representation of Fando's and Lis's quest for the city of Tar thus constitutes a Deleuzian time-image. The movement of the protagonists through the mountainous paths is aberrant and does not lead them to any specific destination. Moreover, there is no timeframe to their expedition as all their actions are frozen in the present moment.

Deleuze links the notion of time-images to a specific kind of space in which they can take place: "Mais une situation purement optique ou sonore s'établit dans ce que nous appelions '*espace quelconque*', soit déconnecté, soit vidé..."²⁹¹ The *espace quelconque* is a space whose dimensions and directions are ordered by the notion of confusion and therefore become significantly less relevant in the process of its perception and exploration. Fando's and Lis's search for Tar takes place in such an *espace quelconque*, a virtual wasteland that is empty and disconnected from reality and other secondary locations in the film. Jodorowsky tackles the representation of this deserted *espace quelconque* with a special technique of his own invention; given the limited resources, and the fact that even though he did not handle the camera by himself, in the commentary to the 2003 DVD release of the film, Jodorowsky reveals that he literally tied himself to the photographers in order to control their movements.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: l'image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1985), 355-56, emphasis original.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 13, emphasis added.

²⁹² The camera operators for *Fando y Lis* were Rafael Corkidi and Antonio Reynoso.

The sequence of scenes following the intertitle proclaiming Tar to be an imaginary place is only one example of the way in which Jodorowsky constructs his time-images. The sequence starts with a high-angle shot of a grassy meadow on top of a cliff in which Fando stops the cart and picks Lis up, as she is unable to walk. Initially caught in a long shot perspective, Fando walks up towards the edge of the cliff slightly approaching the camera at the same time and ending up in a medium shot frame. As Fando walks to the left of the frame, the camera follows him but at the same time drags behind his movement, which result in the actors half exiting the frame. The couple seems confused about their whereabouts, as Fando asks if this is the right way, and Lis responds: “Para avanzar un kilómetro hay que dar un paso [To advance a mile one only has to take a step].” This indicates that the characters’ perception of the represented space and time is highly subjective, as these can expand or shrink at will: Lis claims that with only one step they can cross over to a very distant point and defy the temporal imitations imposed on such a move in a regular space. After this exchange, Fando turns around and exits the frame through its upper right corner. The aberrant movement toward the undefined location of Tar continues with the cut to the next shot. This time we can see Fando pushing the wagon with Lis sitting on it again in a long shot. Both advance in a jerky manner to the right of the frame and slightly approach the camera. The camera movement is fluid enough to keep them in the frame but uneven enough not to match their progression exactly. The movements of the characters and the camera are off, which results in interrupted continuity. Eventually Fando turns the cart toward the camera, and the protagonists pass it while it turns after them to linger on their backs. These two shots show the indecisiveness of the couple in terms of the direction they should follow to reach Tar, their arbitrary choices of paths as well as their highly subjective perception of space and time.

As the characters' movements are errant and seemingly unmotivated, camera movements only magnify this effect. Following the protagonists' journey, the camera always seems to be slightly off their course. It is also visible in more independent panning shots that only add to the confusion of the directions and dimensions of the *espace quelconque*. The following cut shows us a craggy vertical surface of the side of the mountain, as the camera pans to the right until it slows down and stops at a grassy shelf on which Fando stands with Lis seated next to him. After a short conversation during which Lis admits that she does not always have solutions to their problems, the camera pans out to the right leaving the actors behind. Following the cut to another panoramic view of the barren mountain landscape, the camera continues its uneven pan to the right until it settles at another place in which Fando and Lis seem to rest, which this time is a rocky enclave surrounded by steep walls. Fando stands up, touches the wall, as if in an attempt to climb it, and states that there is no way out. These pans demonstrate that the camera in *Fando y Lis* is given significant independence, and that its movements can be as deliberately aberrant as those of the characters. Here, it seems to only be catching glimpses of the protagonists in passing, seizing the views of them resting and waiting in random places, without any further explanation of how they got from one location to the next one. This false continuity and absence of direction in Fando's and Lis's journey are the building blocks of a Deleuzian time-image, which Jodorowsky is constructing, where movements only compliment a fuller image whose governing principle is time in the state of panic confusion.

4.6 FERNANDO ARRABAL'S CRYSTAL-IMAGE

Along with the idea of confusion assumed as a governing principle in organizing time, memory is another notion crucial to understanding the panic conception of temporality. In “L’Homme panique,” Arrabal proposes to adopt the notion of memory to ease ourselves into embracing the confused simultaneity of the past and the future within the present. Arrabal urges us to think of the past as memory, which is easy to digest as we are used to associating memories with events that have already happened. Significantly more intellectual flexibility is asked of us when Arrabal proposes to construe the future also as a type of memory: “Quant au futur: [...] [c’est] la mémoire, c’est-à-dire ce que nous supposons devoir arriver, grâce surtout aux statistiques... et qui arrive réellement.”²⁹³ Arrabal elaborates that the memory of the future, which we base on predictions and anticipations rooted in our previous experience, i.e. the memory of the past, has also an unavoidable element of chance and the unexpected. Perceiving time, with its past, present and future dimensions not as a linear sequence, but as a non-hierarchical memory, prepares Arrabal to create images, heavily rooted in his own memories, which align all three dimensions of time as simultaneous. The director presents his spectators with such images in *Viva la Muerte*.

Viva la Muerte is heavily inspired by Arrabal’s childhood, a period filled with the all-pervasive sentiment of hostility towards his absent father, sado-masochistic Catholic discipline, and the repression of his own sexuality. When Arrabal was four, his mother denounced his father as an individual with dangerously progressive ideas, which resulted in his arrest under the Franco regime and in an erasure of his memory, as the mother pronounced him dead in front of the children. Arrabal grew up forgetting his father and worshiping his extremely Catholic mother

²⁹³ Arrabal, “L’Homme panique,” 44.

until he found documents confirming her denunciation and proving that his father may have been still alive. From that point on, Arrabal was growing apart from his family and detaching himself from the conservative beliefs imposed on him. As *Viva la Muerte* is a deeply autobiographical film, it serves Arrabal as a visual space where he strives to recreate his memories, but not as records of the past, but as images combining the past with the present and further with the future. Arrabal seeks to express his sensations and reactions to the events and memories of the past from the perspective of a grown man with a baggage of experience of his own, anticipating his future life with significantly more freedom of expression in France rather than in Francoist Spain. *Viva la Muerte* does not constitute a simple representation of the past, as the film juxtaposes narrative passages about his childhood with fantasy scenes that are atemporal. In her reflections on the adaptation of Arrabal's autobiographical novel to the screen, Ardelle Striker talks about the structure of the film as a collection of vignettes that alternate representations of the past with fantasy scenes that express affective responses of a child to what has happened to him at the time.²⁹⁴ Making a visual representation of what Striker defines "[...] an unconscious response of the child to his experiences" indeed required a significant mental and creative effort on Arrabal's part. He needed to devise his own personal techniques in order to convey the unsayable aspects of his personal trauma only amplified by the rise of the Franco regime in Spain as it coincided with his formative years and was inextricably intertwined with the tragic story of his family. In an interview with Cornand, Arrabal states that "[...] il fallait 'dire en images' la période de l'arrivée du fascisme en Espagne. Ça ne pouvait être dit qu'en images."²⁹⁵ Thus, *Viva la Muerte* constitutes for Arrabal a visual space where he can tell the story of his childhood. However, to

²⁹⁴ Ardelle Striker, "From *Baal Babylone* to *Viva La Muerte*: Reflections on the Visions of Fernando Arrabal," *West Virginia University Philological Papers (WVUPP)* 26 (1980): 56-57.

²⁹⁵ Cornand, "Entretien avec Arrabal," 92-93.

preserve the multi-layered character of his experiences that, according to his interview accounts, were frequently simultaneously traumatic and ecstatic, Arrabal adopts the panic idea of time as holistic memory.

As Striker notices, the scenes of Arrabal's carefully constructed memories/fantasies stylistically relate to the aesthetic of surrealism and contain vivid colors. The memory/fantasy vignettes indeed express Arrabal's subjective perception of the recollections of sensations from his childhood, rather than a representation of the actual events. *Viva la Muerte* contains several scenes referring to Arrabal's specific fantasies about various elements of his childhood, which he mentions in the interviews with Alain Schifres. Arrabal reminisces, for example, about how his gradual discovery and exploration of his own sexuality, mainly through masturbation, was an experience that was exhilarating and at the same time inextricably linked with an overwhelming feeling of guilt and desire of self-punishment, which, in turn was exciting in itself. The director evokes a specific fantasy that haunted him in situations like this:

Toute autosatisfaction se transformait en un combat entre le supplice du "péché" et l'exaltation des sens. J'avais l'impression d'être à demi enterré sous un soleil de plomb et que bientôt les chevaux viendraient piétiner ma tête de leurs sabots ferrés. Ce phantasme revenait très souvent avec milles variantes.²⁹⁶

One of the variants of this fantasy is visualized in *Viva la Muerte* when Fando, the protagonist of the film and Arrabal's childhood alter ego, imagines a similar fantasy scene after having witnessed the arrest of his father. In this scene, the handheld camera is slightly shaky but otherwise the frame remains static, and in the foreground center of the frame we can see Fando's father's head, as he seems to be buried up to his neck in the sand. He remains immobile except

²⁹⁶ Alain Schifres, *Entretiens avec Arrabal* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1969), 25.

for occasional blinking, as four riders on horseback appear on the horizon and approach him and the camera. The riders get closer to the father and the camera zooms in on his head as one of the horses, which happens to be ridden by the mother, tramples over him. At this point the hue of the image, which so far was orange corresponding to the heat evoked in Arrabal's account of the fantasy in the interview, changes to blood-red, a color complimenting the father's head injury. Just like in the case of Arrabal's first sexual experiences, the scene evokes the contradictory mixture of guilt over his father's revolutionary convictions that drove Fando's mother to denounce him, as well as over the mother's act of denunciation itself, with perverse ecstatic pleasure related to punishment and repentance of one's own sins.

This scene shows that a panic perception of holistic time is not a representation of pure memories.²⁹⁷ The situation depicted never actually took place, but it came into existence as a virtual fantasy inspired and fueled by intimate experiences of Arrabal's childhood. Such imaginary situations correspond to the sensations and the ways in which the real event affected him as a child. Furthermore, he brought them to the screen when he was 39, and between the moments where the original fantasies were triggered and the time of making of the film, Arrabal experienced several important realizations that further affected and changed him and his outlook on his past. By the time the film was made, for example, Arrabal was fully aware that his mother denounced his father, and he no longer worshipped her as a quasi-saint figure. He was aware that his father did not die in prison as his mother had convinced him, and he had experienced

²⁹⁷ The described scene is only one example of such a memory/fantasy and several more are included in the film. They usually involve Arrabal's mother, aunt, or the missing father, and serve as a way to work through his childhood trauma.

imprisonment himself.²⁹⁸ As a result, the visualizations of the fantasies incorporated in *Viva la Muerte* have been significantly influenced not only by Arrabal's childhood sensations and reactions, but also by his knowledge and experience he acquired while becoming a filmmaker. Thus, the memory/fantasy scenes in the film constitute unique cinematic spaces that allow for the simultaneity of the past and the present occurring and overlapping in these very moments.

The nature of these visions can be explained in terms of the Deleuzian notion of the crystal-image. First of all, Deleuze states that “[l]’image-cristal, ou la description cristalline, a bien deux faces qui ne se confondent pas. C’est que la confusion du réel et de l’imaginaire est une simple erreur de fait, et n’affecte pas leur discernabilité: la confusion se fait seulement ‘dans la tête’ de quelqu’un.”²⁹⁹ A crystal-image combines the real and the imaginary, two elements that are not contradictory in such a context but complimentary. This is the case of Arrabal's memory/fantasy scenes that intertwine imagined shocking situations representing sensations and affects triggered by real events. Moreover, just like the structure of a crystal breaks down the light passing through it, and allows one to see the same image from multiple perspectives at once, the crystalline vision of time assumes the possibility of simultaneous perception of multiple moments that occur at different times: “Il faut donc que l’image soit présente et passée, encore présente et déjà passée, à la fois, en même temps. [...] Le passé ne succède pas au présent qu’il n’est plus, il coexiste avec le présent qu’il a été.”³⁰⁰ The memory/fantasy scenes in question are thus Deleuzian crystal-images of sorts. They do not represent actual events, or even distorted

²⁹⁸ When Arrabal visited Madrid in 1967, he was arrested and incarcerated because he had fallen victim to a political provocation. He was tricked into writing an inscription in a book he authored, belonging to the local library, that was deemed blasphemous. He then spent twenty five days in solitary confinement.

²⁹⁹ Deleuze, *Cinéma 2*, 94.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

recollections thereof, but they reunite the past and the present through the visualization of sensations provoked by Arrabal's interactions with his family members, as well as by the conservative and repressive values instilled in him during his childhood. Such scenes bridge temporal distances and render them irrelevant. Arrabal made the choice to narrate the past through virtual memory/fantasy scenes because a representation of actual events was a mode of expression insufficient to convey the depth of the impact his childhood had on him and his art.

4.7 PANIC FILMS: BODY AND CELEBRATION

Such a peculiar perception of space and time, where both notions are stripped of their linearity and sequentiality, provides a unique setup for the placement of human bodies. While performance falling under the category of *éphémère panique* focuses on the "here and now" and blurs the delineations separating the past, the present and the future, it also has at its core bodily engagement in ritualistic patterns of behavior. In "Vers l'éphémère panique," Jodorowsky claims that the invention of *le panique* with all its assumptions about how we should connect and interact with the world marks a shift in our affective disposition *vis-à-vis* our surroundings: "Avant le panique, la pensée produisait l'ANGOISSE et conduisait à la SOLITUDE. En échange, le panique produit l'EUPHORIE et conduit à la FÊTE COLLECTIVE."³⁰¹ Following Jodorowsky's statement, *le panique* replaced "thought" in a broad sense of the word. In other words, *le panique* is a disposition that one can adopt to communicate with other people as well as objects and general materiality constituting one's universe, when logic and cognition bring

³⁰¹ Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère," 79, emphasis original.

nothing but sorrow and lead to unsatisfactory existence. This unique disposition offered by *philosophie panique* is based on instinct and the immediacy of sensations that one's own body offers in interactions with the world and leads to a euphoric collective celebration of what it means to be human. Jodorowsky further emphasizes the importance of the celebratory angle of panic activities: "Toutes les activités artistiques sont en somme des fragments de la seule manifestation panique véritable: LA FÊTE-SPECTACLE."³⁰² Thus, the form of a collective ritual celebration is the most appropriate in an attempt to create an artistic expression of *le panique*.

The form of performance that can be labeled *éphémère panique*, then, is one that allows all its participants, its designers and actors, but also the spectators, to experience the elation of a celebratory communion. In the case of films containing elements of an *éphémère*, such celebration starts at the moment of filming, in which the only relevant temporal plane is an all-encompassing present. The spectators join the festivities when they experience the film with their senses but also through sensations it evokes. Achieving such a state of timeless communion is made possible by the careful design of an ephemeral happening, which is set up in a way that involves not only all senses but goes so deep as to elicit various bodily reactions through carefully planned corporeal engagement. Jodorowsky was not the only member of the Mouvement Panique openly advocating the form of the *fête-spectacle*, as Arrabal admits that it is one of the three principal activities to which an *homme panique* should devote his existence.³⁰³ In order to isolate and identify the constitutive parts of the panic *fête-spectacle* I will turn to the influential theories of Antonin Artaud about theater. Artaud and his "Theater of Cruelty"

³⁰² Ibid, 79, emphasis original.

³⁰³ Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," 49. The three principal activities being art, play and celebration.

presented in *Théâtre et son double* (1938) did not inspire *le panique* in its formative stage as much as it influenced the Surrealists and the Absurdist, and Arrabal states that at the time he did not read or appreciate this particular author.³⁰⁴ He does, however, admit, that in retrospect Artaud can be said to have anticipated numerous assumptions of *le panique*: “Pourtant Artaud a tout prévu. Il a parlé de *L’Empereur d’Assyrie*. Il a parlé de panique. Il a décrit à l’avance la mise en scène du *Cimetière des voitures* avec fauteuils tournants et environnement du spectateur.”³⁰⁵ Indeed, Artaud promoted the notion of a “total spectacle,” a type of theatrical performance that favors diversity and simultaneity of communication channels between the actors and the audience, in other words a state of communion between all participants of such a show.

The idea of a total spectacle, as Artaud envisioned it, comes directly from the tradition of Richard Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of total artwork. Wagner first theorized total artwork in 1849 and the concept outlived him as it was reincarnated under various avant-garde iterations in the twentieth century, one of them being Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty. Kimberly Jannarone, a Theater Arts scholar, explains that the original objective of *Gesamtkunstwerk* was to strip the audience members of their individuality and immerse them in a multi-sensory and multimedia experience: “Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total artwork, conceptualizes the audience as a recipient or inductee: it requires the spectator to abandon individual subjectivity and choice in order to follow the mythical event on stage.”³⁰⁶ In order to subsume his audience into the spectacle, Wagner introduced changes in the theater building and on stage, including but not limited to innovative lighting, rearranged seating and sensory overload. In their study of the

³⁰⁴ Schifres, *Entretiens*, 72.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 72.

³⁰⁶ Kimberly Jannarone, *Artaud and His Doubles* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 80.

Gesamtkunstwerk, Danielle Follett and Anke Finger specify that the Wagnerian approach to art inspired artists following his footsteps to conduct “[a] search for the ‘precise’ correspondences between colors, sounds, scents, and vowels [that] was accompanied by pseudoscientific research seeking an exact relation between light and sound waves.”³⁰⁷ Indeed, addressing multiple sensory systems simultaneously to reunite the spectators in sensations through their experience, was what Artaud transposed from Wagnerian total artwork into his total spectacle. His version of the totality of art, however, is an iteration of the Wagnerian concept and not its literal application. Follett best summarizes the most fundamental difference, which makes the Artaudian Theater of Cruelty stand out as an important concept of its own:

While Wagner could be said to combine the two paths – the one that aspires to a unified harmony between subject and object and the one that embraces the true dissonance, irrationality, and conflict within the objective or natural side of the equation – surrealism and Artaud renounce the hope for harmony entirely in favor of a disunified, but no less redemptive, totality.³⁰⁸

Whereas Wagner explored dissonance and conflict in his sound, but also visual stimuli directed to the audience, these were incorporated to culminate in harmony or at least to express the yearning for such harmonious resolution and experience for the spectators. Artaud, on the other hand, was utterly disinterested in harmony and strove to engage all participants of a piece, actors and spectators alike, in a non-hierarchical experience by shocking their sensoria and provoking

³⁰⁷ Danielle Follett and Anke K. Finger, “Dynamiting the Gesamtkunstwerk: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of the Total Artwork,” in *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 11.

³⁰⁸ Danielle Follett, “Tout et N’importe Quoi: The Total Artwork and the Aesthetics of Chance,” in *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 102.

unwitting physiological reactions in them. More importantly, Artaud insisted on cultivation of the *athlétisme affectif*, an active engagement through uses of bodies, sensations and affectivity.³⁰⁹

As I look further into the parallels between Artaud's conception of theater, more specifically theatrical performance, and the panic notion of *fête-spectacle*, I have to consider the practical implications of staging an Artaudian total spectacle. First of all, Artaud defines the nature of such spectacle by juxtaposing it with a multiplicity of media, all targeting different senses and entailing various forms of affective engagement: "Pratiquement, nous voulons ressusciter une idée du spectacle total, où le théâtre saura reprendre au cinéma, au music-hall, au cirque, et à la vie même, ce qui de tout temps lui a appartenu."³¹⁰ Thus, according to Artaud, a total spectacle should invite the audience to engage through their vision and hearing as they would while watching films and attending a music show. But the engagement of the spectators is not limited to their individual senses. Evoking the circus implies a multisensory experience as well as bodily engagement. The audience of various circus shows observes a corporeal performance that goes beyond the ways in which we customarily use our own bodies. As a result, the audience participates in what Artaud labels the *athlétisme affectif*, where movements of bodies can extend beyond their materiality and touch the soul. The key to creating such an engaging *spectacle total* is to be aware of the affective possibilities of materiality of bodies and to guide them accordingly: "Prendre conscience de l'obsession physique, des muscles frôlés par l'affectivité, équivaut comme pour le jeu des souffles à déchaîner cette affectivité en puissance, à

³⁰⁹ Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 199-211.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, 134.

lui donner une ampleur sourde mais profonde, et d'une violence inaccoutumée.”³¹¹ Mastering the physique and the materiality of one's own body allows actors and directors to learn to use it in a way that can reach their audience in unprecedented ways. While elaborating on this unique way of communication with the spectators through the affective athleticism, Artaud speaks of reducing the soul to a knot of vibrations.³¹² Similarly, the panic *fête-spectacle* aims to pull the audience, or at least their affective sensitivity, into the spectacle, to let them experience the sensations of the celebration as a first-hand shock to the body and the senses, rather than reduce the spectators to passive onlookers like the Wagnerian spectacle tended to do. In sum, Artaud emphasizes the need for “[...] un théâtre qui nous réveille: nerfs et cœur.”³¹³ Several decades later the members of the Mouvement Panique devoted their artistic careers to realizing this goal of shocking the spectators intellectually but also viscerally by foregoing the familiar formal and socially acceptable patterns not only in theater but also in their ephemeral happenings and cinematic works.

4.8 CELEBRATION OF THE MONSTROUS BODY

The panic idea of a *fête-spectacle* is deeply rooted in the potential of the human body, and in the exploration of ways and channels through which our bodies can not only communicate but also commune with their environment. It is then no surprise that both Arrabal and Jodorowsky express a vivid interest in bodily deviations and deformities and investigate them not as shameful

³¹¹ Ibid, 208.

³¹² Ibid, 202.

³¹³ Ibid, 131.

differences but as something to cherish and celebrate. Arrabal, for example, reveals that he considered himself to be a monster when he was a child: “À l’époque, je me figurais être un monstre, tandis qu’aujourd’hui, je pense que je suis... un monstre raté.”³¹⁴ As a scrawny child with a disproportionately large head, he was frequently picked on and bullied by other children. Even though Arrabal’s physique normalized as he grew up, the experience of being different to the point of being construed as a monster left a permanent imprint on his artistic activity: “Je me refuse à imaginer la réalité sans les phantasmes, les monstruosités, les distorsions du baroque.”³¹⁵ As Arrabal’s fellow *panique*, Jodorowsky has shared his obsessive fascination with the monstrous. In his personal commentary to the 2003 DVD release of *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky states directly that he loves the monstrous. He makes this statement to tell the story of the dedication of the film, which was made in the memory of Samuel Rosemberg. Rosemberg was a 26-year-old mentally disabled man whom Jodorowsky had met before he started working on the film. Jodorowsky reveals that he instantly fell in love with the man’s differences in terms of his physique and intellect and engaged him in the making of the film as his personal assistant. The director was enchanted with what Rosemberg’s presence brought into the professional environment. For example, when Rosemberg acted as his driver, Jodorowsky enjoyed the sense of endangerment of his own life. When Rosemberg assisted him in shooting certain scenes, including the ones in which he was engaged as an actor, Jodorowsky delighted in the way the man’s presence interfered and even hampered the usual communication between him and other actors.³¹⁶ Rosemberg committed suicide before the film was finished, and his father decided to finance the remainder of the process to recognize the respect and the help that Jodorowsky

³¹⁴ Schifres, *Entretiens*, 26.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 127-28.

³¹⁶ Rosemberg played the role of one of the three elegant men whom Fando invites to assault Lis.

provided for his son. These examples show that if the term “monstrous” seem pejorative, Arrabal and Jodorowsky use it with utmost appreciation and have the highest regard for all sorts of bodily, as well as mental anomalies.

Bodily and intellectual features that can be considered “monstrous” come in all shapes and sizes. The most obvious ones are physical disabilities that cause one’s bodies perform or function in a way that becomes conspicuous because they disrupt the flow of familiar movements and patterns. In *Fando y Lis* it is the character of Lis who functions as a monster. As a paraplegic, Lis needs continuous assistance since the protagonists’ journey to Tar requires constant movement from place to place. While most of the time Fando does not mind pushing Lis’s wagon because of his love for her, occasionally the burden becomes too much to bear. On several occasions Fando picks Lis up from the cart and carries her around in a unique position: Lis is wrapped around Fando’s back in a horizontal position, while he supports her body with both arms behind his back. Such configuration of bodies has religious connotations as it resembles a crucifix. When Fando carries Lis’s limp body, it is as if he had to carry his own cross, which in Catholic tradition means a sacrifice one must make for one’s sins. Esthetically, Fando assisting Lis to overcome her disability results in a double cross-like monstrous but also grotesque body, which flies in the face of religion, as both protagonists take pleasure in sacrilegious acts and profanities.³¹⁷

However, Lis’s physical impairment is not limited solely to her inability to walk. Her paralysis also impacts her womanhood. The paralysis makes it impossible for her and Fando to consummate their relationship, to Fando’s frustration. Moreover, the disability prevents her from

³¹⁷ One example of such an act would be when Fando carries Lis to a local cemetery where they desecrate and profane the tombs by laying on them in grotesque poses.

bearing children, which at the culminating moment of frustration is illustrated in the film with Lis giving birth to pigs. Thus, Lis's physical handicap is exacerbated by the fact that she is a woman. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, a disability studies theorist, argues that in Western cultures the discourses used to talk about women and femininity in general alarmingly resemble ones used to elaborate on disabilities. Garland Thomson traces this trend as far back as Aristotle, who described femininity as monstrous deformity apparent from the moment of one's birth. The theorist refers to philosopher's fourth book of *Generation of Animals*, in which he describes the male as the generic type and the female as a deviation that first manifests itself when a baby is born: "Aristotle's choreography of bodies thus conjoins the 'monstrosity' – whom we would today term 'congenitally disabled' – and the female on a course leading away from the definitive norm."³¹⁸ Thus Lis, whose concealed monstrosity of being a woman becomes exposed and blatant because of her physical disability, enters in an unusual dynamics with Fando. At first glance, Lis can be easily inscribed in the stereotype of a beautiful damsel in distress who needs to be rescued by a man, but as the plot of the film unfolds, her physical handicap turns her helpless femininity into monstrosity that slowly undermines Fando's virility.

In *Fando y Lis*, Jodorowsky demonstrates the impasse of the impossibility of living a fulfilling life defined by normative standards when a bodily monstrosity is involved, but at the same time seeks a way out of this impasse by way of a panic celebration. Fando's growing dissatisfaction with his inability to perform the socially expected role of a man, protective but also possessive of his woman, results in abusive behavior toward Lis, which, in turn, leads to her death. Lis's beauty and passive obedience are not enough to satisfy Fando's expectations, as they

³¹⁸ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Feminist Theory, the Body, and the Disabled Figure," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 280.

are always tainted by her deformity. In their study on nurturance and sexuality of women with disabilities, Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine contend that habitually, in heterosexual relationships, a woman's role is "[...] to accommodate a man emotionally while not exposing his vulnerabilities."³¹⁹ Disabled women are not a good fit to perform this role because "[i]f men desired only the passive, doll-like female of the stereotype, disabled women might do, but the doll must be functional as well as decorative."³²⁰ A comparison of a stereotypical woman to a doll is all the more relevant to the figure of Lis, considering that she is styled and dressed in a very doll-like fashion. A petite blonde with fair skin and luminous face, with her thin eyebrows and eyes accented with artificial eyelashes on her symmetrical face, dressed in white, Lis is first introduced in the opening scene, in which she devours a white rose, a symbol of purity, and is surrounded by dolls. In this scene, Lis is one of those dolls, only alive. While her appearance is aesthetically pleasing, it is her lack of functionality that leads to the final tragedy.

Jodorowsky explores the comparison of Lis to a doll in a crucial scene designed and carried out in the fashion of *éphémère panique*, with which he proposes the idea of panic festivity as a way to embrace and normalize Lis's monstrosity instead of condemning it. After Fando's and Lis's encounter with a group of drag queens, during which the couple also cross-dresses, the camera cuts to an isolated room. During the cross-dressing episode, both protagonists are laughing, kissing and having fun, and the following scene can be understood as an expression of their cheery disposition triggered by playful behavior and the blurring of gender norms. In the room, Fando at first puts Lis's naked and seemingly lifeless body on a bed strewn with dolls. The bed corresponds to the setup from the opening scene, only this time the room is

³¹⁹ Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine, "Nurturance, Sexuality, and Women with Disabilities," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 244.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 244.

messier and in more disarray. Fando proceeds to write his name all over Lis's body in black ink. After this act, which can be construed as Fando's possessing Lis, the camera cuts to the same situation with reversed roles: this time it is Lis who straddles Fando and writes her name on his body. The couple goes even further and starts covering the walls of the room with each other's names, with the help of a ladder and a scaffolding. As the situation escalates and the protagonists clearly enjoy their play with painting, they start splashing bucketfuls of ink on the walls and on each other. Soon everything in the room, the walls, the bed, the ubiquitous dolls and the protagonist's bodies, is covered in black ink, as Fando and Lis chase each other across the room amid joyful gasps. The scene was largely improvised, and Jodorowsky admits that he did not plan, nor did he have any idea, that it would end up in total destruction of the room and the dolls.³²¹ It is the improvisation, the insistence on a happening that takes place here and now, and the exploration of movements and textures of bodies, that make this scene exemplary of the ephemeral panic celebration.

The destruction of dolls is secondary to the couple's euphoric play with the ink. As an unintentional outcome of the happening, it parallels Lis's act of reclaiming freedom from her crippling, passive and doll-like femininity, as well as her physical handicap. In my description of the scene, I left out a significant detail that is only subtly apparent as it unfolds, but becomes evident when pointed out by Jodorowsky in his audio commentary: "Do you see? She can walk." The cathartic experience of panic celebration neutralizes the monstrosity of Lis's womanhood and allows her to explore and use her body in ways that are usually beyond her reach. In his

³²¹ Both the room and the dolls were rented and Jodorowsky had to spend days cleaning them, as they were too expensive to replace. This only proves that the scene could not have been reasonably planned the way it was carried out.

theoretical text on the panic ephemeral, Jodorowsky explains that pushing one's own body to explore its potentiality is crucial for followers of *le panique*:

L'homme panique cherche des postures corporelles nouvelles dans la gamme infinie d'attitudes que peut adopter le corps humain. Ce corps est un tout. Chaque pensée ou chaque sentiment entraîne une position nouvelle. Et à l'inverse, chaque position provoque un sentiment nouveau. De nouvelles positions lui permettront de découvrir de nouvelles possibilités spirituelles.³²²

In this improvised scene where both protagonists destroy the room with ink and not let the thought of potential consequences and aftermath inhibit their actions, Lis becomes an exemplary *femme panique*. By standing up, walking, running, and climbing ladders, at that very moment of celebration she explores bodily postures that are unthinkable in her everyday life.³²³ Following Jodorowsky's thought, the new configurations of her body entail new spiritual possibilities for her to communicate with the world. At that moment, for example, in her relationship to Fando, she ceases to be a monstrous other standing in the way of Fando's fulfilment and becomes his equal. It is only in such an environment rid of hierarchies and relationships of mutual dependence, where both protagonists can achieve the state of collective euphoria, which, according to Jodorowsky, thanks to *le panique* can substitute the sorrow of solitude.³²⁴

³²² Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère," 89.

³²³ It is clear that Lis is not cured. After the scene of *fête-spectacle* is over, we can see Lis again as a paralyzed woman, dependent of Fando.

³²⁴ Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère," 79.

4.9 PANIC RITUAL AS *FÊTE-SPECTACLE*

The improvised scene in *Fando y Lis* involving the destruction of the set and the props with ink can be seen as a panic rite that created conditions for Lis's freedom from negative implications of her inherent monstrosity. The motive of a ritual is frequently explored by the panic artists who include ritualistic scenes in their performances and films. In his study of panic philosophy and Arrabalian theater, Thomas Donahue investigates the importance of ritual. Donahue states that "[r]itual is commonly used by groups, religious and national, to recall in some way important acts of the past, so that they may have strength in the present and be ready for the future."³²⁵ Rituals are, thus, panic in their nature, as they serve to bring the past, the present, and the future together in a timeless moment. Moreover, Donahue notices that rituals can be incorporated in theater to fulfill its Artaudian vision: "Artaud wrote of a theatre which would touch man's innermost fibers and would resemble the ancient drama that was sensed and experienced directly by the mind without the deformation of language and the barrier of speech."³²⁶ The ancient drama that the theorist references is a term that includes ancient rituals, which consisted primarily of acts, movements and performance rather than articulated language. Such rituals have the power to affect their participants' bodies, through their senses and their nervous system, directly and without language as an intermediary stage that leads to cognitive processing and understanding.

Arrabal, in his turn, also explores and incorporates elements ritual in *Viva la Muerte*. He creates ritualistic images to establish a direct visceral connection between the image and the spectators, rather than encoding a message that would have to be subsequently decoded by the

³²⁵ Thomas John Donahue, "Fernando Arrabal: His Panic Theory and Theatre and the Avant-Garde," *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century* 3, no. 2 (1975): 106.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 107.

audience. In other words, Arrabal seeks to communicate with his audience by directly impacting their bodies and their sensorium, and to forego the use of abstract channels of communication such as linguistic systems. According to Jodorowsky, this is, indeed, one of the goals of the panic ephemeral performance: “[...] l'éphémère panique a pour tâche d'abandonner la figuration et l'abstraction pour arriver à une manifestation concrète.”³²⁷ Therefore, the images, or other stimuli that are constitutive parts of an *éphémère panique* are not primarily abstract representations or mysterious symbols of veiled ideas but are concrete objects and acts. Jodorowsky elaborates further that the distinction between the abstract and the concrete can be explained as follows: “[...] l'un exprime l'acte, l'autre le comment.”³²⁸ An example of a concrete act that is committed and not merely represented during a panic performance is the often-cited shocking decapitation of geese. According to Arrabal's account, one of the *éphémères paniques* staged in Paris in 1965 opened with Jodorowsky (who was an active participant of the show) releasing fifty living pigeons from a box and proceeding to decapitate a goose and to present its agony as “[...] une oie vivante [...] se vide peu à peu de son sang en battant des ailes.”³²⁹ What the spectators witness is not a representation of a shocking killing of a living bird but the violent act itself. In *Viva la Muerte*, Arrabal devises a scene that is similarly aesthetically and ethically shocking, the ritual killing of a bull.

Because Arrabal's film exploits violence, especially animal cruelty, in such explicit manner but at the same time it refuses to provide any type of cathartic resolution like horror

³²⁷ Jodorowsky, “Vers l'éphémère,” 76.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

³²⁹ Fernando Arrabal, “Le théâtre comme cérémonie panique,” in *Le “Panique,”* ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 97.

movies do, it falls under the category of “feel-bad films” devised by Nikolaj Lübecker.³³⁰ Feel-bad movies, Lübecker explains, do not easily provoke clear didactic conclusions or promote a free exchange between the spectator and the director, instead they lock the audience in a state of unease and displeasure. In order to derive any value from such films or scenes, the scholar emphasizes several times throughout his analysis that it is crucial to “[...] allow for an asymmetrical relation between the ethical standards inside the cinema and those outside” in order to approach them constructively.³³¹ Such flexibility in moral judgment is crucial in witnessing and experiencing panic rituals involving animal flesh, in real life or on film, which is why I will follow Lübecker’s recommendation. Importantly, both Jodorowsky and Arrabal renounce the idea that their work is overly violent. In an interview included in *La Constellation Jodorowsky* (1995), a documentary about the director, Jodorowsky proclaims his work to be no more violent than any other everyday act or the reality of death.³³² Commenting on the decapitation of the geese, Arrabal acknowledges that the easy and relevant argument in support of this type of performance could be that deeds significantly more cruel are committed in slaughterhouses on a daily basis. Personally, however, he rejects such an easy argument and states that at that particular time he desperately needed to participate in such an act: “Je refuse absolument l’idée de tuer une bête. Et en même temps, il fallait que ce soit fait. C’était plus fort que moi.”³³³ Arrabal further explains his longing for such an act: “Je voulais simplement ce geste qui allait me survolter, me bouleverser. J’accepte l’idée que c’est moralement injustifiable, condamnable.”³³⁴

³³⁰ For more on this category of films see Nikolaj d’Origny Lübecker, *The Feel-Bad Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

³³¹ *Ibid*, 169.

³³² Louis Mouchet, *La Constellation Jodorowsky*, documentary (Fantoma, 1995).

³³³ Schifres, *Entretiens*, 81.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 81.

Arrabal thus explains that inclusion of scenes and images of this sort in panic works is aimed at connecting with the audience at the level of their most basic instincts. The director states that the spectators need to work on stripping themselves from reserve caused by imposed societal ethical and even aesthetic norms, just like he worked to overcome his personal opposition to animal cruelty. Once such a state of detachment from one's cognitive inhibitions is achieved, the spectators can tune their bodies in and become more receptive to sensations that panic rituals offer.

Opening oneself up to sensations related to one's most basic instincts rather than emotions resulting from filtering stimuli through acquired understanding of what is morally acceptable, can be also understood with the help of the Deleuzian conception of phenomenology that aligns with pataphysics. In the face of Jodorowsky's and Arrabal's refusal to call such deeds of animal killing violent, I will classify them as acts of "violence of sensation," a term that Deleuze uses in his study of paintings by Francis Bacon: "What directly interests him is a violence that is involved only with color and line: the violence of a sensation (and not of a representation), a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression."³³⁵ Deleuze adopts Bacon's paintings as his object of investigation because he sees them not as representations of violent acts but as acts themselves. The theorist argues that these images create circumstances that enable their audience to forego cognitive processing of what they see and connect with them on a primordial level through sensation. Just like *philosophie panique* differentiates between an abstract representation of an act and its concrete manifestation, Deleuze distinguishes figuration from Figure: "[...] the form related to the sensation (Figure) is

³³⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), x.

the opposite of the form related to an object that it is supposed to represent (figuration).”³³⁶ Figuration, which is representation of actions or objects that can cause emotional reactions, is therefore an image that requires cognitive processing and qualification of reactions it evokes. Figure, in turn, is what *le panique* calls art committing an act triggering immediate violent sensations. Deleuze argues that such is Francis Bacon’s artwork, and I contend that panic celebratory ritualistic scenes are designed to work in a similar way, and their common denominator is the particular category of sensations they strive to elicit. Deleuze elaborates on what these sensations are as follows:

But there are no feelings in Bacon: there are nothing but affects; that is, “sensations” and “instincts,” according to the formula of naturalism. Sensation is what determines instinct at a particular moment, just as instinct is the passage from one sensation to another, the search for the “best” sensation (not the most agreeable sensation, but the one that fills the flesh at a particular moment of its descent, contraction, or dilation).³³⁷

Primordial sensations are therefore visceral symptoms of affects that touch the body on a physical level and manifest themselves in the flesh. They are juxtaposed with emotions, which are only secondary to affects and are a result of their cognitive qualification. Deleuze argues that Bacon finds a way to bypass the intermediary stages of connection between artwork and the audience and directly *touches* the flesh of his spectators, which is exactly what panic *fête-spectacle* strives to achieve.

³³⁶ Ibid, 36.

³³⁷ Ibid, 39-40.

The emblematic scene of the slaughtering of the bull in *Viva la Muerte* that I classify as a *fête-spectacle* is an exemplary image evoking the “violence of sensation.” Arguably, Arrabal’s scene differs from Bacon’s painting in the sense that the act of killing an animal was actually committed for the film, and no living creature was harmed in the making of the painting. Beugnet, who advocates the application of the Deleuzian approach from *Francis Bacon* to the analysis of moving pictures, addresses this concern from the beginning by explaining that one ought to focus on the film and its materiality as an object of art rather than its figurative facet:

[...] Deleuze’s analysis seems equally, if not more, applicable to the medium of moving images because film is, first and foremost, a medium of time and change, where image and sound are in constant mutation. Deleuze’s description of the ways by which an art form can escape the figurative, illustrative and narrative rule thus offers indubitable resonance in the context of a cinema of sensation.³³⁸

Beugnet further explains that cinema transitions from figuration to Figure when image, color and sound become manipulated in a way that make the human form lose its role as the main point of reference.³³⁹ The scene showing the slaughter of a bull, another one of Fando’s memory/fantasy visions, is an example of such an image. It starts with his mother, dressed in a colorful and shiny liturgical garment of the Catholic tradition, lifting a knife and dropping it on the throat of a bull that is tied up and held immobile on the floor. As its throat is slit in a close-up, the camera fixates on the head of the seizing bull while its blood pulsates out of its neck. As we observe the bull fade and become more and more immobile, still in a close-up, the camera cuts to the mother who sits on the floor next to it, smiles, and smears its blood over her face. The animal, the woman and

³³⁸ Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 64.

³³⁹ *Ibid*, 65.

the floor covered in blood, the mother then ecstatically wallows and rolls in the red puddle. At this point, an off-screen female voice, that we can assume is hers, coaxes her son to cut off his father's testicles. The camera cuts to a sight of a young man performing the command, again, closing up on the knife cutting through the bull's tissue. With a shot of the mother's bloody face, we see her observe the deed in delight when her son hands her the severed testicles. After an intermittent close-up of the mother screaming, we go back to a medium shot showing her silhouette as she holds the testicles up above the puddle of blood like a sacred object. The mother then proceeds to sew her son up inside the bull's carcass, his head sticking out where the animal's testicles used to be. We observe this through alternating medium shots of the carcass and close-ups on the needle piercing the bull's skin. When the act is accomplished, the mother smears her son's face with the bull's blood and kisses him violently. Both grin at the end. The whole scene unfolds rhythmically, following the pulsations of the accompanying cheerful tune performed by what looks like a military band standing on the sidelines.

While the scene has an unmistakable figurative meaning, as it represents the mother symbolically emasculating and destroying her husband by slitting the bull's throat and having her son castrate it, it also constitutes a concrete act committed right in front of the audience. The deed is performed, however, not to tell a story of a cruel slaughter, but to create a Figure assaulting the spectators' sensorium. Because the slaughtering of the bull was not pretend and the actors involved in the scene really wounded, killed and castrated the animal, the resulting images, often in close-ups, bring forward authentic textures, movements and views of biological matter in general. In this scene, the actors became one with their fictional characters as they no longer performed the roles but instead truly committed the deed. Even at the time of recording, the scene elicited sensations so violent, that the camera operator appointed to record it, refused to

perform his duties.³⁴⁰ In this scene, it is not only the actors who reach a state of communion with the characters they play; it is also the spectators who connect with the images and actions in a state of collective sensation, even if it takes place against their will. The concrete act of the ritual killing of the animal, and its celebratory character, affects the spectators not only emotionally, but also touches upon their nervous system. Deleuze argues that art as Figure, and not figuration, “[...] acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh, whereas abstract form is addressed to the head, and acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone.”³⁴¹ With the spectators’ flesh and nervous system being directly affected by images of agonizing and convulsing animal flesh and nerves as a result of an actual murder, they can achieve the state of unity of sensation, “[...] the unity of the sensing and the sensed,” with the spectacle they are witnessing.³⁴² In other words, they become at the same time the subject and the object of sensation, as the violence of sensation is so overwhelming that it blurs the line between the perpetrators, the victim and the onlookers. The communion of bodily sensation is exactly what a panic *fête-spectacle* is designed to bring about. The scene of the celebratory ritual of killing the bull lifts the customary barrier between the film and the spectator as the latter’s flesh and nerves become one with the violent sensations triggered by the act committed on-screen.

It becomes clear that being a part in such a panic *fête-spectacle* is a unique experience that allows its participants to open themselves up to sensations that cannot be reduced to single feelings or emotions. In order to understand better what these sensations are, I propose to lean on Vivian Sobchack’s notion of “carnal thoughts” that she developed in her theorization of the place

³⁴⁰ Cornand, “Entretien avec Arrabal,” 93.

³⁴¹ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 34.

³⁴² *Ibid*, 35.

and role of our bodies in the reception of films. Sobchack writes that “[o]ur entire body is our instrument of reception of films, not only one or a few senses, not only cognitive interpretation of what our senses perceive and experience,” and the most immediate sensations that we receive through the flesh and the tissue of our bodies as a whole are what she calls carnal thoughts.³⁴³ By overcoming aesthetic and ethical inhibitions and opening up to the possibility of experiencing such carnal thoughts, the spectators of a celebratory panic spectacle, be it on stage or on screen, give up their bodies to the affective forces of the show and become “[...] only one side of an *irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity* that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen.”³⁴⁴ Entering such a dynamic with the images on the screen, images that constitute a concrete manifestation of people and acts that are not abstract, is what makes such an experience unavoidably collective, as advocated by Jodorowsky (*fête collective*). Such an experience allows their participants to reach the state of communion in flesh, in other words in the unifying materiality of all bodies involved.

While the panic mission to construe one’s body as a sensitive entity that is uninhibited by reason and open to affects is an original endeavor, it was prefigured by no other than Alfred Jarry in his fictional story of Faustroll, a doctor of pataphysics. As the story recounts exploits and adventures of Faustroll in his pursuit of pataphysics, it is no coincidence that he reaches the cathartic state of illumination only after his death. In a telepathic account of what happened to him and his body after he dies, Faustroll claims to have entered eternity: “Mais étais-je ailleurs selon la date ou selon la place, avant ou à côté, après ou plus près? J’étais dans cet endroit où

³⁴³ Vivian Carol Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 60.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 79, emphasis original. Sobchack classifies the spectators who achieve such a state as cinesthetic subjects.

l'on est qu'on a quitté le temps et l'espace, l'éternel infini [...]."³⁴⁵ Faustroll, thus, finds himself in a dimensionless and timeless space. Attempts to defuse and neutralize notions of time and space, and to replace their sequentiality and order with confusion and simultaneity, deeply informed the works of Arrabal, Jodorowsky, as well as other *paniques*. In one of the founding texts of the Mouvement Panique, "Panique et poulet rôti," Jodorowsky indeed talks about a mistake humanity makes that prevents them from achieving the state of ecstatic eternity, which is a state of mind more than anything else, namely, the consuming desire to last and to preserve material things in space and time.³⁴⁶ As demonstrated through the analysis of the excerpts of *Fando y Lis* and *Viva la Muerte*, panic directors design their films to deconstruct the familiar notions of spatiality and temporality. Whereas Faustroll's pataphysical journey to free his body from the bounds of space and time is fictional, the founders of *le panique* implement cinematic strategies and techniques that allow them and their audiences to experience the sensations and the exhilaration of such freedom. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and especially his theorization of space, time and cinematic visualization thereof, as well as his elaboration on phenomenology and bodily sensations elicited upon encounters with art, help us identify and understand the particular artistic and aesthetic mechanisms used by panic filmmakers. It becomes evident that Deleuze devoted significant space in his philosophical works to issues that substantially overlap with questions pertaining to pataphysics and panic philosophy understood as methods of shaping artistic expression. Moreover, given the philosopher's explicit appreciation for pataphysics expressed in his essays, his conceptual tools can be applied directly

³⁴⁵ Alfred Jarry, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll* (Lexington: FB Éditions, 2015), 59.

³⁴⁶ Jodorowsky, "Panique et poulet rôti," 57.

to help us understand the ways in which Arrabal and Jodorowsky construct their panic films, as well as how Jarry's imaginary science informs *philosophie panique*, consciously or not.

5.0 SPIRAL GROWTH AND PATAPHYSICAL NETWORKING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Eadem mutata resurgo.³⁴⁷
– Jacques Bernoulli

Le XXI^e siècle sera pataphysique ou ne sera pas.³⁴⁸
– Ruy Launoir, “Du Régent de Cléidologie”

The Collège de ‘Pataphysique of the twenty-first century has grown significantly since its founding in 1948 and assumed new directions for its expansion. It has expanded its geographical and linguistic reach, as well as the variety of disciplines and media with which it experiments. The community has also matured in its approaches and sensitivity towards social realities, which is manifested through higher awareness of gender inequality within its ranks and the need to establish a dialog with academic circles. The goal of this chapter is to investigate the patterns of growth assumed by the Collège in order to demonstrate how the focus on the process of becoming in the present moment and a spiral, rather than linear, development path led to designing deliberately uncertain and plural futures for the group. Ultimately, I will examine the relevance of the Collège on the contemporary intellectual scene, despite pataphysicians’ insistence that their research and activity remain “inutilous.”

After over two decades of hiatus, a group of the remaining members of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique faithful to the imaginary science of Alfred Jarry came together in one place at the same time. The reason for their evening reunion at Saint-Germain-des-Près in 2000 was the

³⁴⁷ Bernoulli’s tombstone epitaph.

³⁴⁸ Ruy Launoir, “Du Régent de Cléidologie,” *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 1 (2000): 34.

anticipatory celebration of the group's desoccultation, planned for the following day. And thus, on April 20th of the new millennium, the *optimates* gathered at the Terrace des Trois Satrapes, a deck once shared by Boris Vian, Jacques Prévert and his dog Érgé – the three Satraps – to officially resurrect the Collège and put it back on the map of active intellectual networks. The ceremony of desoccultation included announcements of inevitable changes in the ranks of the Collège, which had taken place or had been decided *in petto* during the occultation; the year 2000 saw the official appointment of the new Vice-Curator, the crocodile Lutembi, whose name is listed in the catalog of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in more down-to-earth terms, as a fictitious character created by the Collège and used as a collective pseudonym. Other nominations made during the occultation included the appointment of new Satraps, among others Fernando Arrabal who became a vital formal link between the Collège and the philosophy devised by his Mouvement Panique.

Moreover, those who attended the desoccultation ceremony were presented with an exquisite publication, a collection of over five hundred texts, images, photographs and other documents constituting a chronicle of the pre-occultation Collège. The volume, entitled *Les Très riches heures du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (2000), destined for pataphysicians and outsiders alike, was accompanied by an addendum for members only, namely *Documents intimes* (2000). The preface to the latter collection speaks of both volumes as follows: “Les nouveau-nés à la Pataphysique y trouveront, sur l'organisation du Collège, ses fastes et ses activités, une vue perspective qui leur fait souvent défaut. Les anciens s'y rafraîchiront la mémoire et y découvriront suffisamment de documents rarissimes pour ne pas regretter leur acquisition.”³⁴⁹ Indeed, both collections are an invaluable fount of knowledge regarding the history of the

³⁴⁹ Collège de 'Pataphysique, ed., *Documents intimes* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 4.

Collège, but also the circumstances of its hiatus and the subsequent return to public life. Along with the first post-occultation issue of the Collège's journal *Viridis Candela*, then resurrected in the form of the *Carnets trimestriels* series, the volumes shed significant light on the return of the group. The abovementioned issue of the *Carnets* opens with the following words:

Voilà donc le Collège de 'Pataphysique restitué pour la seconde fois. La première était la fondation elle-même, que le Fondateur, Sa feue Magnificence le Docteur Sandomir, posait ainsi comme le rétablissement de quelque Collège antérieur et idéal. La réouverture des portes, après vingt-cinq ans d'Occultation, rétablit le Collège, non dans son idéalité, qui n'a jamais été entamée, ni dans sa réalité, qui n'a jamais cessée, mais dans tout le lustre de son Apparat.³⁵⁰

Following these lines, in 2000 the organization reemerged as yet another iteration of what the Collège de 'Pataphysique could be in the search for imaginary solutions. It is far from ideal, echoing panic philosophy, according to which perfection is inhuman, and remains in constant flux. This chapter will examine what has become of the Collège post-occultation and trace its multidimensional expansion by referring back to such key concepts as potentiality and temporality and investigate the relevance of the group in the contemporary world.

5.1 OCCULTATION

The occultation period, which started in 1975, was crucial for the reemergence of the Collège in a more global and inclusive form. Importantly, Ruy Launoir explains in the introduction to *Les*

³⁵⁰ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Ouverture," *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 1 (2000): 1.

Très riches heures that the decision of the members to go underground for twenty-five years should not be interpreted as the Collège's death.³⁵¹ In order to better understand this hiatus period, we have to back up ten years before the occultation and look at the events of 1965. That year saw the appointment of a new, third, Vice-Curator Opach.³⁵² His appointment coincided with the closing of the second cycle of the *Viridis Candela* journal, the *Dossiers* series, which gave him an opportunity to redefine the publication relaunched several months later as *Subsidia Pataphysica*. One of the editors of *Les Très riches heures*, Thieri Foulc, reminisces that “[l]a formule des *Dossiers*, qui a permis de mémorables publications, a aussi favorisé ce que le Collège, depuis le début, a voulu éviter: l’entrée dans le jeu littéraire et artistique parisien. Après vingt-huit numéros des *Dossiers* [...], un vent de remise en cause se lève.”³⁵³ Indeed, Foulc acknowledges once again that in the past the Collège had naturally stepped onto the easiest path available to an intellectual movement born out of a milieu of bookstores, publishing houses and printed journal: literature. With the beginning of a new series of its journal, Opach was explicit about his intentions to change the direction and focus of pataphysics's objectives. Along with the launch of *Subsidia*, the Vice-Curator drafted a manifesto announcing changes: “Ce titre latin (‘aides pataphysiques’) se veut à la fois scientifique et international. La tendance est pataphysiquement intégriste et novatrice. La revue évacue toute rubrique de littérature ou de

³⁵¹ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, ed., *Les Très riches heures du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 9.

³⁵² From Emmanuel Peillet’s biography by Launoir we learn that Opach was a nickname of André Chapellier, where Opach is *verlain* for Chapo, Peillet’s friend and colleague from the lycée de Charleville. See Ruy Launoir, *Gestes et opinions de quelques pataphysiciens illustres: Emmanuel Peillet, Jean-Hugues Sainmont, Latis, etc.: roman pseudo-scientifique* (Paris: Hexaèdre, 2007).

³⁵³ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, *Les Très riches heures*, 106.

critique. Le format est plus maniable, l'organisation intérieure plus claire.”³⁵⁴ This global and practical approach to pataphysics undertaken in the new journal series was reiterated in 1970 in Opach's message to the Collège community, published under the title of *Grand largue* (1970). In this communiqué, Opach once again dissociated pataphysics from literature as its focal medium: “Disons, pour la dernière fois, que la pataphysique n'est pas un matériau littéraire ou philosophique ni une housse qui empêcherait la réalité de se faner sous nos regards. LA PATAPHYSIQUE EST À VIVRE.”³⁵⁵ The joyous momentum of change culminated two years later, during the celebration of a hundred years of the pataphysical era.³⁵⁶ Unexpectedly, shortly after the festivities, dark clouds started to gather over the group's future, pushing the Vice-Curator to consider a temporary hold on its activities.

The Collège's momentum stalled after the passing of its two vital members, Latis (Emmanuel Peillet) in 1973 and Jean Ferry in 1974. Let us not forget, that the former, Peillet, who at the time was using the name Latis, was in fact the very founder of the Collège de 'Pataphysique.³⁵⁷ Jean Ferry, for his part, was also one of the few remaining members of the group present from its beginning, and his devotion to the Collège had been an important source of energy driving it forward.³⁵⁸ According to the jargon developed by pataphysicians since the beginnings of the Collège, the two members did not simply die, but made *un geste de mourir*, a gesture of dying, understood as a voluntary act of withdrawal and occultation of the self. The

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 106.

³⁵⁵ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Les 101 mots de la pataphysique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2016), 116, emphasis original.

³⁵⁶ The pataphysical era started in 1873, the year of Alfred Jarry's birth.

³⁵⁷ At the founding of the group, Peillet was acting as Dr. Sandomir.

³⁵⁸ The death of these two crucial members was a final straw, as they marked a series of deaths of several Satraps who had been with the group since its founding, such as Max Ernst, Jacques Prévert, Joan Miró, Raymond Queneau, Pascal Pia, René Clair and Man Ray. See Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Les 101*, 61.

impending occultation of the Collège was defined similarly as a gesture of withdrawal as it was announced in April 1975 and described as “[...] Occultation jusqu’à l’an 2000 de toutes manifestations du Collège de ‘Pataphysique qui était moins que jamais ‘un lieu public’; occultation des nominations, insignes, décorations, vêtements, et du Calendrier.”³⁵⁹ If before the occultation the Collège had already been a hermetic community, not looking to gain the attention of outsiders unless they were drawn to pataphysics on their own, in 1975 it became isolated from the outside world completely. Frank Ténor, a press agent, jazz critic and committed pataphysician, describes the occultation as Opach’s will to see if the group could withstand the test of time, or more poetically, as a controlled parenthesis in the continuity of the community, necessary for it to reemerge stronger than ever.³⁶⁰

While the occultation meant suspension of all of the group’s manifestations that could seep out to the public, the Collège maintained the minimum activity necessary to keep the community alive, albeit dormant. The organ established to officially stand in for the Collège in order to keep printing and circulating the *Viridis Candela* journal was Cymbalum Pataphysicum. Over the twenty-five years of the occultation period, Cymbalum released three series of the journal, respectively entitled *Organographes*, *Monitoires* and *Expectateur*, which were distributed among the occulted members only. Moreover, all the foreign institutes that started under the aegis of the Collège, as well as its sub- and co-commissions that had gained independence like the Oulipo, were excluded from the occultation.³⁶¹ Thus, the center of the

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 61.

³⁶⁰ Frank Ténor, “Préface,” in *Les Très riches heures du Collège de ‘Pataphysique*, ed. Collège de ‘Pataphysique (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 7–8.

³⁶¹ Before the period of occultation started, the list of foreign institutes included: Institut de Hautes Études Pataphysiques de Buenos Aires, Institutum Pataphysicum Mediolanense with its branches in Naples, Tuscany and Ticino, Institut Limbourgeois de Hautes Études Pataphysiques

pursuit of pataphysics seemingly dissipated and moved further away from France. In reality, however, the occulted members of the Collège were not as adamant about halting all their habits and traditions as it may seem. François Naudin, the author of “Histoire de France sous l’Occultation,” a series of episodes published in the *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* recounting the events and the meaning of the Collège’s withdrawal for France, reveals that “[e]n vérité, pendant toute période occultée, il était possible de s’inscrire au Collège. Celui-ci fonctionnait, les Provéditeurs pourvoyaient, les Auditeurs auditaient, du moins les assidus, des nominations étaient promulguées, des non-publications étaient offertes au petit nombre, mais nulle information ne filtrait vers le vulgaire.”³⁶² Following Naudin’s report, during the occultation the Collège was not a completely hermetic entity, and if someone from the outside discovered it and was determined enough, they could find their way in. Therefore, the Collège slowly but surely expanded its ranks. Furthermore, the existing members actively involved in the Collège’s pre-occultation life maintained their functions according to the position for which they were appointed. Further still, decisions regarding cooptation of new members and promotions of the existing ones were effectively made. For example, Opach promoted Fernando Arrabal and four other Auditors to the rank of Satraps in 1990.³⁶³ After Opach made the gesture of dying three years later, his successor, Lutembi, was nominated for Vice-Curator, also *in petto*, in 1997. As demonstrated, the occultation period did not mean a complete cessation of the Collège’s activities. It provided the existing members of the group with a space in which they could devote

joined by Vlaams Institut voor Hoger Patafysisch Onderzoek. During the occultation, Institut Vestrogothique was added to the list.

³⁶² François Naudin, “Histoire de France sous l’Occultation,” *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 5 (2015): 60. The *Publicateur* is the current series of the *Viridis Candela* journal, being published quarterly at the time of writing this dissertation.

³⁶³ The other four Satraps nominated under occultation were Noël Arnaud, Jean-Christophe Averty, Enrico Baj and André Blavier.

their time to literary and non-literary pataphysical exercise without the pressure of determining its future.

Nevertheless, the occultation, even if needed, also had conceivably negative effect on the generational gap between the existing members and potential new recruits. Naudin brings to our attention the fact that pre-occultation Collège did not include any members born after the Second World War:

Tous les dignitaires et membres occultés de l'occulté Collège avaient vécu le Décervelage mondial, au moins le deuxième épisode, quelques-uns aussi le premier. Certains avaient survécus, c'est-à-dire qu'ils avaient été en danger de mort du fait de ces événements. [...] Quant à nous, filles et fils du Bison, nous ne connaissions rien de tout ça, ni défense passive, ni chefs d'îlots, ni cartes d'alimentation, ni *Ausweiß*, ni évacuation, ni bombardement, pour ne parler que des tracasseries les plus bénignes inhérentes aux décervelages.³⁶⁴

Naudin, a representative of the postwar generation himself, points out that in 1975 all pataphysicians were survivors of at least one world war. He refers to wars as *décervelage*, a word borrowed from Jarry's lexicon, literally denoting an act of ripping out someone's brains.³⁶⁵ This observation tightly links the pre-occultation Collège and pataphysics to the trauma of war. It seems that, at the time, the group's participants were not sure how to open up to the youth who did not share the experience of mind-numbing atrocities that overturn all known hierarchies of

³⁶⁴ François Naudin, "Histoire de France sous l'Occultation," *Publicateur du Collège de Pataphysique* 8 (2016): 61.

³⁶⁵ *Décervelage* was a game invented by Jarry and his friends at the lycée de Rennes. It consisted in startling younger classmen by pushing them to the ground, covering their faces, hitting their heads, and after having uncovered their faces showing them a handful of potato purée claiming it is their brain matter. For more details see Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, "Décervelage au lycée de Rennes," *Publicateur du Collège de Pataphysique* 4 (2015): 59–60.

knowledge and values. Naudin refers to the postwar youth as “filles et fils du Bison,” children of Boris Vian (Bison Ravi being an anagram of the writer’s name), a generation of young people enchanted with Vian’s work. Because of Opach’s decision to cease all public exercise of pataphysics, this new demographic, fascinated with an author who had been a pillar of the Collège and potentially curious about the imaginary science of pataphysics, was deprived of the chance to discover the Collège that was in desperate need of new blood.

While the new generation of pataphysicians had their access to the Collège significantly reduced until the year 2000, their patience was rewarded and the new millennium saw an exponential increase in new membership. It was on April 20th of 2000, on the occasion of the desoccultation, that the Collège unlocked its gates for new members openly and publicly. The process of the Collège’s rebirth started with a mission thus defined by Ténor in the preface to *Les Très riches heures*:

Délivré de la période (nécessaire) de l’Occultation, le Collège va redevenir ce pour quoi il a été créé. Car ses tâches à venir deviendront de plus en plus passionnantes et indispensables, même et surtout si le Vice-Curateur veille à ce que le Collège n’ait aucune utilité. Le développement des nouveaux moyens de communication (Internet entre autres) ouvre à la Science des solutions imaginaires des champs d’observation illimités.³⁶⁶

In this statement of purpose for the group, Ténor demonstrates an important fusion of tradition and innovation. He emphasizes the significance of respecting the original mission of the Collège, which is the pursuit of imaginary solutions that is “inutilous” and serves no political agenda, but at the same time the inevitability of change. Considering that the world and France itself have

³⁶⁶ Ténor, “Préface,” 8.

evolved between 1948, the year of the Collège's foundation, and the year 2000, the group's shape and its goals undergo unavoidable adjustment. Ténot noticed that new means of communications and the Internet would have a particular impact on the Collège's functionality and expansion in the new millennium.

5.2 SPIRAL GROWTH

The expectations regarding the relationship between the old and the new in the reborn group are reiterated on the closing page of *Les Très riches heures* with a picture of a spiral and the Latin motto, *eadem mutata resurgo*. The motto can be translated as “changed and yet the same, I rise again,” and was borrowed from a prominent seventeenth-century Swiss mathematician Jacques Bernoulli known mainly for his immense contribution to the field of probability. Bernoulli selected the motto to figure on his gravestone as an epitaph and to be accompanied by a logarithmic spiral. The Collège's choice to adopt the spiral as its emblem was predetermined by the fact that Jarry had depicted Ubu's stomach as adorned with a coiling line. More importantly, however, it is the shape's symbolism, enriched and expressed by its pairing with Bernoulli's motto, that propelled the Collège's philosophy to develop in its current direction. Contemporarily, the spiral is used on the Collège's insignia, garments, seals and stamps, and helps members distinguish their fellow pataphysicians from the crowd. But the spiral is more than just a strange symbol stamped on equally unconventional artifacts. Both the *eadem mutata resurgo* motto and the symbol are deeply emblematic of the Collège's organization and growth. I contend that the group's development path should not be construed as a linear progression, but rather a spiral expansion. The desocultation of the year 2000 is a moment when the timeline of

the Collège's evolution coils back to the starting point but does not meet it. Thus, after the period of occultation, the community reemerged the same, yet in its new iteration.

The Collège de 'Pataphysique refers to the symbol of the spiral on their insignia and documents as *gidouille*. *Gidouille* is a neologism devised by the inventor of pataphysics, Alfred Jarry, that denotes Ubu's enormous stomach. One of the first representations of the curious silhouette of Ubu by Jarry, an iconic woodcut portrait that was printed with the first edition of *Ubu Roi* (1896) entitled "Véritable portrait de Monsieur Ubu," depicts his spherical stomach adorned with a spiral originating in his navel.³⁶⁷ Thus, by adopting the spiral *gidouille* as their emblem, and pairing it with Bernoulli's Latin motto, *eadem mutata resurgo*, the Collège de 'Pataphysique becomes inscribed, consciously or not, into a rich tradition and history of the spiral symbol. Indeed, Gayot and Foulc confirm that while borrowing the ubuesque *gidouille*, they are more interested in its spiral shape and its connotations rather than its history as Ubu's body part: "Par synecdoque, le Collège appelle gidouille la spirale intestinale qui transparait en ce ventre et, de là, toute spirale."³⁶⁸ The pataphysicians of the Collège have found the spiral symbol to be a particularly prolific metaphoric model for approaching and interpreting phenomena from unorthodox angles. Paul Schneebeli, a contributor to the 4th volume of the *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, for example, speaks of the spiral *gidouille* as follows: "La Grande Gidouille est l'ombre portée de la vibration omnidimensionnelle du cercle, cette perfection immatérielle extra-spatio-temporelle régie par le nombre Pi, quintessence d'une réalité irrationnelle transcendante à l'ultime précision toujours incertaine après des milliards de

³⁶⁷ Alfred Jarry, *Tout Ubu*, ed. Maurice Saillet (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1962), 3.

³⁶⁸ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Les 101 mots*, 46.

décimales.”³⁶⁹ To define the pataphysical spiral, Schneebeli describes it as omnidimensional and resulting from vibrations. He also references the impossibility of the exact definition of the Pi figure, the basis for spirals’ circularity, and the infinity of the string of digits after its decimal point. All these characteristics lie at the foundation of Jarry’s imaginary science. They are also revelatory when it comes to the structure and the evolution of the Collège as a group.

The symbolism of the spiral, so important for the Collège, becomes clearer when paired with the Latin motto, *eadem mutata resurgo*. The story starts at Bernoulli’s gravestone: the bottom of the mathematician’s gravestone plaque is adorned with the Latin motto written around a simple spiral. As it has turned out, a mistake was made in the making of the stone in 1705, because Bernoulli had specifically requested a logarithmic spiral but instead an Archimedean one was carved. To understand why this is significant, one must know the difference between these two geometric shapes. The Archimedean spiral, also called an arithmetic spiral, was first described by Archimedes in his treatise *On Spirals* around 225 BC. The Archimedean spiral is one whose windings remain at a constant distance from one another. To give an example, Philip Ball, a science writer and the former editor of the journal *Nature*, compares an Archimedean spiral to the shape of a coiled garden hose: even curled in the spiral shape, the width of the hose remains the same in all its windings.³⁷⁰ The logarithmic spiral, however, has more depth to it. Also known as a growth spiral, the logarithmic spiral was first described by Descartes in 1638, then extensively studied by Bernoulli. Unlike the Archimedean spiral, the coils of the logarithmic one are not of equal width; the distance between its windings increases with the

³⁶⁹ Paul Schneebeli, “Ostréiculture dayrosienne,” *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 4 (2015): 51.

³⁷⁰ Philip Ball, *Patterns in Nature: Why the Natural World Looks the Way It Does* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 80.

distance from the center of the spiral. In more illustrative terms, logarithmic spirals can be found in nature, for example in shells and vortices. Bernoulli specifically chose this type of spiral for his gravestone, because it complements his epitaph, “changed and yet the same, I rise again.” The special property of the logarithmic spiral is that it looks the same at different scales: no matter how much one zooms into the center of the spiral, the proportional distance between its coils will remain the same. As a result, one can look at different parts of the spiral, closer to or further from its center, and see an image that looks the same, but is different.

Logarithmic spirals occurring in nature are patterns that are inherently contradictory. Ball states that scientists are pattern-seekers, and that identifying patterns in nature is not only aesthetically pleasing but also reassuring: “[...] as if they help us believe that, no matter what fate brings, there is a logic and order behind it all.”³⁷¹ Looking for patterns occurring in nature may seem like the opposite of a pataphysical activity: after all, pataphysics is a science of exceptions and not regularities. Logarithmic spirals, however, are different from static and immutable repetitions of the same pattern because they are associated with growth. The vital characteristic of spiral shapes in nature, such as an arrangement of bracts in a pine cone or one of seeds in a sunflower head, is that they are in a constant state of becoming as they grow. As such natural spiral formations become larger, again, they appear the same because of the regular proportions between their windings. Yet they remain in the state of constant change and expansion, which makes them an exemplary subject of interest for pataphysics. Such a state of becoming, in which the past and the future image of a spiral object remain the same, fixes the object in question in the present moment. The simultaneity of the three stages of linear temporality, the past, the present and the future, unavoidably resonates with the premise of

³⁷¹ Ibid, 6.

philosophie panique evoked in the previous chapter. It was Fernando Arrabal who argued that the distinction between these three stages is irrelevant, as the past and the future fold onto the present in one image of what he calls memory.³⁷² The Collège, as I will demonstrate, assumes a similar approach to temporality, one that promotes the confusion of sequential chronology and, instead, advocates experimentation with growth and becoming.

Last but not least, the contemporary relevance of the spiral symbol in the context of art and literature extends beyond the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. In his 2015 book, *Spirals: The Whirled Image in Twentieth-Century Literature and Art*, Nico Israel, a Modernist Studies specialist, demonstrates the ways in which the spiral symbol is at the heart of numerous literary and artistic endeavors of the twentieth century, and he explains what such observations can reveal about changes in approaches to contemporary temporality, spatiality, aesthetics and politics.³⁷³ Israel names the spiral as crucial for contemporary writers and visual artists:

Embodying tensions between teleology and cyclicity, repetition and difference, locality and globality, spirals challenge familiar modes of organizing disciplines of study. Spirals not only complicate literary and art history’s familiar spatiotemporal coordinates (including those based on nation and period), but also offer a way of reconceiving the “distribution of the sensible” across that century.³⁷⁴

According to Israel, the spiral is a unique shape that reconciles conflicting concepts and releases the potential resulting from tensions between them. He indeed reiterates that twentieth-century

³⁷² Fernando Arrabal, “L’Homme panique,” in *Le “Panique,”* ed. Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1973), 42-43.

³⁷³ Nico Israel, *Spirals: The Whirled Image in Twentieth-Century Literature and Art* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 12.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 12-13.

art demonstrated that linear or circular spatio-temporal models of perception are insufficient and that spirals provide a more accurate exemplar for these phenomena. Moreover, Israel proposes to adopt the spiral as a way to inscribe Ranicière's "distribution of the sensible" in the contemporary context. The spiral shape, as one inclusive of opposites, provides means to understand the current redistribution of the sensible within the social order, where certain notions are inclusive and exclusive, sayable and unsayable at the same time. Furthermore, Israel pinpoints the potentiality of spirals in contemporary art: "[...] a potentiality that has appealed with astonishing durability to writers and visual artists across the twentieth century. For [...] the curved and recursive contours of the spiral do not simply express a relation to the past, but create an opening for potential newness."³⁷⁵ The rethought relationship of the present with the past but also with the future, dictated by the coiling of a spiral, where linear time is replaced by constant present growth, lies at the heart of works by numerous French artists and writers. It is not widely-known, though, that many prominent ones, several of which I have studied in the previous chapters, collectively adopted the symbol of the spiral to guide them in their pataphysical endeavors. I argue that unique properties of a logarithmic spiral, such as growth, simultaneous change and sameness, as well as opening up for future potentialities, can help us frame our knowledge about the contemporary Collège de 'Pataphysique. The model of spiral expansion, rather than linear progression, is preferable to demonstrate the way in which pataphysicians approach temporality in general and the way in which the Collège has evolved and changed over time. Therefore, I draw on the spiral's properties and symbolism to investigate what has become of the Collège in the late twentieth and the twenty-first century.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 25.

5.3 IMAGINARY ARCHAEOLOGIES: BRIDGING THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

After the desoccultation, the Collège acknowledged the importance it attributes to knowing its own past. The origins of the Collège constitute the center of its temporal image from which its community spirals out in growth. As a consequence, in the twenty-first century we look at a group whose shape, organization and principles seem unchanged, yet its coils have shifted and expanded. Upon the election of the current Vice-Curator in 2014, in the first issue of the new edition of the *Viridis Candela* journal, Christophe Henrion, a researcher at the Université de Reims and a pataphysician, reported on behalf of the Council of Proveditors on the state of the group's population. Considering that by 2014 the Collège has attracted a considerable crowd, including more and more young members who did not remember the group's founding or had not even been born yet at the time, Henrion concluded that "[p]our maintenir innovation, il faut connaître le passé."³⁷⁶ Indeed, the members of the Collège who took part in its desoccultation in 2000 were mindful of the importance of keeping in touch with the group's traditions and origins, even if the Collège has reemerged changed in comparison to what it was half a century earlier. The group's peculiar approach to its past and its simultaneous drive towards its future evolution and progress is a combination reflected upon by Israel in his study of the spiral symbol in the twentieth century. Whereas Israel does not focus specifically on Jarry's imaginary science, he provides his observation on an alternative approach to temporality in the twentieth century art in general: "[...] I proceed from the premise that spirals in twentieth-century literature and art express in their very forms a relationship both to history (which is to say, political-economic

³⁷⁶ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Vie du Collège," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 1 (2014): 88.

history) and to novelty and conceptions of the new.”³⁷⁷ As discussed beforehand, Israel identifies the spiral as not exclusive to the Collège, but as an allegory of temporal and historical connections exploited in contemporary art. The Collège, I argue, is the one group that has chosen the symbol as its explicit emblem and metaphor because of its unique approach to conceptualizing time and history.

This section will provide an overview of the ways in which the contemporary Collège members approach history and its relationship to the present and the future, in several texts that have been published across the pages of the most recent series of their journal, the *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (2014–). More precisely, I focus on contributions published in the volume entitled *Archéologies imaginaires* (2015), as they assemble texts related to dismantling linear progression of time and to experimenting with relationships between the past, the present and the future. I chose to investigate texts concentrating around the question of time for several reasons. The Collège’s treatment of time is exemplary of its more general approach to widely accepted “universal truths,” from everyday assumptions to scientific generalizations. Moreover, the *Viridis Candela* articles taking on and questioning such “universal truths,” although often poetic to a certain degree, demonstrate the group’s distancing from pure literature and its embracing of the long-sought goal of disciplinary heterogeneity.

Finally, in my analysis, I gravitate towards the stance of theorists who reveal interest in affect when approaching the question of temporality, such as Lauren Berlant and Nadine Boljkovac, as they provide a theoretical framework that helps me read the pataphysical publications. It is telling and particularly relevant for this project to note that these theorists return to Henri Bergson and his revolutionary vision of time. Indeed, Suzanne Guerlac, a

³⁷⁷ Israel, *Spirals*, 26.

contemporary French literature specialist, notes the recent resurgence of scholarly interest in Bergson's philosophy, which became undeniably significant in the 1990s. Guerlac credits Gilles Deleuze and his engagement in a dialog with Bergson displayed in his works on philosophy and film, with bringing the philosopher back to the spotlight. Furthermore, the scholar pinpoints that the reemergence of the Bergsonian thought coincided with and helped define the contemporary theories of affect, and notably influenced the work of Brian Massumi:

Massumi sets out to explore the implication for cultural studies of reintroducing movement and sensation back into one's thinking about the body. He wants to redirect the focus of qualitative differences that occur as change. He frames his project in relation to Bergson, the philosophical precursor, he affirms, for the discussion of "paradoxes of passage and position." He orients a new field of cultural studies in relation to what he calls the "Bergsonian revolution."³⁷⁸

Guerlac further emphasizes that for Massumi it is specifically the notion of affect that goes back to the Bergsonian conception of emergence and change as development. Indeed, the philosopher's focus on time brought him international fame, during his lifetime as well as a century later thanks to Deleuze and affect theorists. It is less known, however, that before becoming widely recognized, Bergson happened to be Alfred Jarry's teacher at the lycée Henri IV in Paris. As I will elaborate, even though Jarry's pataphysics is not a direct reflection of Bergson's teaching, it belongs to a network of ideas tying together the imaginary science, the Collège de 'Pataphysique, and the philosopher's thought with its aftermaths.

³⁷⁸ Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 195.

Broadly understood, archaeology is heavily dependent on a linear construction of time and a firm distinction, even distancing, of the past from the present. If pataphysicians want to present their own creative vision of how the field can be expanded, it is vital for them to define its current limitations. In his contribution to the 5th volume of the *Publicateur*, focusing on the archeological aspect of a literary work by Daniel Spoerri, Alastair Brotchie summarizes traditional archaeology as follows: “Les méthodes et les buts de l’archéologie vulgaire nous sont familiers. Dans un site donné, des constructions ou des objets d’une certaine ancienneté sont découverts. Le site a été oublié par inadvertance ou le trésor délibérément enfoui, et, avec le temps, les objets se sont retrouvés peu à peu pris et dissimulés dans des couches de sédiments.”³⁷⁹ Brotchie points out regularities and expectations surrounding processes that take place at archeological sites. One always counts on the fixity of sediments’ stratification in proportion to the amount of time that has passed since their deposition. The process of discovery and investigation serves to identify specific periods in the past to which the unearthed objects belong, and to link them in a linear manner with the present. Michel Foucault has already offered his criticism of such a conception of archaeology in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* (1972). According to Foucault’s vision, “[t]he horizon of archaeology, therefore, is not a science, a rationality, a mentality, a culture; it is a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation.”³⁸⁰ He affirms that archaeology should not be governed by the assumed linearity of time, but at the same time he rejects the idea that the field univocally overturns it: “Archaeology does not set out to treat as

³⁷⁹ Alastair Brotchie, “En fouillant la Topographie anécdotée du hasard,” *Publicateur du Collège de Pataphysique* 5 (2015): 39.

³⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1982), 159-60.

simultaneous what is given as successive; it does not try to freeze time and to substitute for its flux of events correlations that outline a motionless figure. What it suspends is the theme that succession is an absolute [...].”³⁸¹ Such willingness to go beyond what is assumed to be norms governing the archaeological field is echoed by the Collège and its flexible treatments of time.

Archaeology’s dependence on the linear progression of time is anchored in the way temporality is thought. In her study of the Bergsonian critique of so-called homogenous time, Bliss Cua Lim, a film and media studies researcher, points out that Henri Bergson associated the misconception of time as sequential and linear with the impossibility to think it otherwise in scientific terms. In other words, Bergson argued that as the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, science alone, without the contribution of philosophy, could not provide sufficient tools to construe time as heterogeneous, especially with the influence of the Newtonian legacy of absolute space and time. Even though the Newtonian approach was challenged also from a purely scientific standpoint by Albert Einstein through his theory of relativity, Einstein and Bergson eventually assumed positions on the opposite sides of the debate. As a representative of logical positivism, Einstein worked to diminish or even eliminate the relevance of philosophy for science, a position to which Bergson could not accede.³⁸² Despite the Bergson/Einstein debate that directed numerous philosophical and scientific developments of the twentieth century, the idea of standardized, linear and measurable time has prevailed to this day in numerous scientific fields.³⁸³ I will position Bergson’s critique as precursory and informative when it comes to the

³⁸¹ Ibid, 169.

³⁸² See the chapter on Bergson and positivism in Jimena Canales, *The Physicist & the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate That Changed Our Understanding of Time* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 475-95.

³⁸³ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 47-49.

pataphysical conception of time. Because of the student/teacher encounter between Jarry and Bergson in 1891-1893, Brotchie even makes a claim that, “[b]iographically speaking, Pataphysics may be considered as the epiphenomenon of Jarry’s attending the class of Henri Bergson.”³⁸⁴ According to Brotchie’s account, Jarry was captivated by Bergson’s lectures and transcribed them almost word for word. The publisher goes as far as to state that “[t]he most immediate effect of Bergson’s teaching, thought was to provide the philosophical underpinning for the young Jarry’s initial formulation of Pataphysics.”³⁸⁵ Pataphysics directs its followers to reject the rational, cognitive approach to time and adopt its intuitive exploration so strongly advocated by Bergson. Lim summarizes that for Bergson, “[t]ime cannot easily be thought, but it is always lived, felt, intuited. Here he explicitly moves away from the ground of intellect, which often ends by objectifying time, to the realms of feeling and intuition, the register of his methodology.”³⁸⁶ It is the intuitive approach to temporality that I will seek out and pinpoint in pataphysicians’ writing and investigation of time, starting with their studies of imaginary archaeologies.

Rejecting the preconceived assumptions of given disciplines, pataphysicians renounce knowledge-based approach to problems and, instead, turn to intuition and subjective perception. Brotchie sees the predefined processes and goals of archaeology as a limitation and states that they do not apply to the pataphysical take on the field:

Ainsi l’archéologie propose un certain nombre de relations inébranlables: entre fixation et sédimentation, entre découverte, investigation et analyse, entre passé et

³⁸⁴ Alastair Brotchie, “Our Science of Pataphysics,” *Interrelevant* (blog), 2013, <https://interrelevant.wordpress.com/tag/bergson/>.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Lim, *Translating Time*, 47.

présent. Mais une archéologie pataphysique n'a nul besoin d'observer de telles restrictions. Pourquoi pas une archéologie du futur ou du présent? Dans ce dernier cas, les objets ont-ils besoin d'avoir été enterrés?³⁸⁷

Thus, Brotchie proposes to imagine what history would become if the study of temporal relationships between various objects and artefacts was freed from the constraints of homogenous time. In the parlance of pataphysics, devising creative ways of practicing archaeology, as well as other disciplines rooted in scientific approaches, constitutes formulating “imaginary solutions to existing problems.” For Bergson, Lim states, the stakes of adjusting one’s mindset to go beyond universally accepted truths were even higher, as it was a question of personal freedom: “If we liberated our conception of time from its objectification by language, science, and mathematics [...], then we would recognize the truth of our own duration – our ceaseless transformation, our ever-new invention and becoming – as well as that of the universe.”³⁸⁸ In a similar manner, I would argue, the work by the members of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique consisting in creative and intuitive exploration of fields of knowledge in order to explore their potentiality, is not a question of mere playful brainstorming, but a systematic process of reclaiming one’s independence of thought and of one’s self-awareness.

Pataphysical archaeology, thus, is conceived independently from the restrictions of the vertical sedimentation being correlated with horizontal passage of time. Brotchie proposes to assume alternative archeological perspectives: instead of looking back on the past from the perspective of the present, one could investigate the present from the future point of view or

³⁸⁷ Brotchie, “En fouillant la Topographie anécdotée du hasard,” 39.

³⁸⁸ Lim, *Translating Time*, 48.

build an archaeology of the future.³⁸⁹ Such shift in the perception of temporal conditions necessarily roots the archeologist in the present moment, the moment of one's subjectivity. Lauren Berlant, who makes a case for an untimely perception of the present that does not depend on its relationship with the past and the future, also refers to Bergsonian philosophy of time to substantiate her argument. For her, "[f]ocus on the present isn't invariably shallow presentism, or 'the narcissism of the now,' therefore – but even when it is, it involves anxiety about how to assess various knowledges and intuitions about what's happening and how to eke out a sense of what follows from those assessments."³⁹⁰ Berlant looks at the present not as a moment in time ensuing from the past and progressing into the future: "[...] the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else [...]," before it becomes a mark on a chronological axis representing linear history.³⁹¹ She further proposes the notion of "animated suspension" to think of the present as immanence, emanation, atmosphere, or emergence.³⁹² In order to arrive at such conceptualization of the present, however, one cannot detach it from its historical past, which is where the alternative, non-linear impressions of temporal relationships intervene. This is where Berlant draws on Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896): "[...] Henri Bergson writes that intuition is the work of history translated through personal memory. [...] Intuition is where affect meets history, in all of its chaos, normative ideology, and embodied practices of discipline

³⁸⁹ The term "archaeology of the future" has been used in scholarship pertaining to the field, however, the context of its use diverges from the one envisaged by pataphysicians. In the work entitled *Archaeology at the Millennium* (2001), Gary M. Feinman and T. Douglas Price use the phrase while they talk about where the discipline would go from its current state, taking into account new methods and technological advances. They reiterate, however, that at its core, archaeology boils down to uncovering the past and learning about our ancestors. See Gary M. Feinman and T. Douglas Price, eds., *Archaeology at the Millennium: A Sourcebook* (New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001).

³⁹⁰ Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

³⁹¹ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁹² *Ibid*, 6.

and invention.”³⁹³ The sifting of the subjective perception of history into the present, and pairing it with intuition related to the future, allows us to construe an affective, atemporal present moment.³⁹⁴ It is this mindset, I argue, that allows for the pataphysical exploration of potential, imaginary archaeologies.

The focus on the present as a point of departure for a historical, but at the same time poetic and pataphysical investigation, allows us to approach the present moment from creative perspectives. In a contribution to the “imaginary archaeologies” volume of the *Publicateur*, Stéphane Mahieu, a writer and a *Régent* of the Collège, for example, invites us to consider an alternative archaeological vision of the present moment, one where, as Brotchie stated, the objects of investigation are not buried: “Nombre d’objets contemporains pourraient certes laisser le champ à d’étranges interprétations dans le futur. Comment sera considérée une salle de *fitness* en ruine? Comme une chambre de torture témoignant de la rudesse des mœurs du passé?”³⁹⁵ By suggesting that contemporary gyms can be perceived as torture chambers, Mahieu indeed advocates intuitive interpretations of the purpose of ordinary objects. Instead of taking for granted their functions based on generally accepted knowledge and logical explanations concerning their use, Mahieu proposes to define these objects through the lens of one’s subjectivity, personal experience and memory.

³⁹³ Ibid, 52.

³⁹⁴ In her reading of the Bergsonian conception of time, Nadine Boljkovac of the School of Film and Television at Falmouth University introduces the notion of the untimely, “[...] a time of difference in-itself, an untimely time that brings only the new, the eternal repetition of the different.” For more information see Nadine Boljkovac, *Untimely Affects: Gilles Deleuze and an Ethics of Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 15.

³⁹⁵ Stéphane Mahieu, “Les découvertes préparées,” *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique 5* (2015): 5.

In a text originally printed in *Le Monde* in 1983, and subsequently reprinted in the *Publicateur*, Michel Wiedemann offers an equally inventive take on a different everyday object. Wiedemann's article constitutes a research essay supposedly presenting the process and the outcome of an investigation into the shape and use of an architectural curiosity based only on its vestigial, physical remnants. In the introduction to his essay, Wiedemann explains that the traces of this type of construction are most frequent in the Mediterranean regions, and that "[c]es petits édicules de pierre ou de brique [...] voisinent toujours avec une maison de taille modeste [...]. Ils sont le plus souvent isolés au milieu d'un jardin entouré d'une clôture, et placés du côté opposé à la rue."³⁹⁶ As the research report continues and Wiedemann adds more and more details and facts pertaining to the physical properties of the *édicules*, he presents various hypotheses proposed for their use, such as a dog kennel or a bread oven. It is not, however, until the closing pages of the article that we, the readers, realize that the essay presents a future perspective on a contemporary object and guess its purpose: a barbeque pit. Wiedemann's research concludes with the following statement: "[...] les édicules crémateurs caractéristiques de cette civilisation sont bien les autels d'un culte rural pratiqué par une population allogène qui apporta d'Angleterre dans les régions méridionales de l'Europe le culte haïtien de l'esprit Barbacoa, amateur de viande."³⁹⁷ Interpreting the remnants of barbeque pits as cult sites of Haitian provenance practiced by meat amateurs has a clearly humorous ring to it, but I read it as a comment on the pataphysical ability to define objects outside of the constraints of generally assumed truths and through one's own affective perception rooted in intuition. It is important to note that Wiedemann's conclusion was made based on facts: an imagined reconstruction of the

³⁹⁶ Michel Wiedemann, "Recherches sur la civilisation des édicules," *Publicateur du Collège de Pataphysique* 5 (2015): 74.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

pits that can be done in the future should these objects turn into obsolete ruins and be forgotten. The reconstruction considers the pits' measurements, building materials, their positioning in space *vis-à-vis* other buildings and other factual clues. Therefore, it is indeed the subjective affectivity that comes into play and decides whether one interprets the *édicule* as a barbeque pit or a site of worship.

The pataphysical archaeology of Mahieu and Wiedemann does not constrict them to an excavation of the objects' past conceived in a linear manner. Instead, by rendering linear temporal progression governing the field of archaeology irrelevant, their approach allows them to reconstruct the objects' possible futures/presents instead of pasts. Furthermore, such reconstruction of future possibilities informs our understanding of contemporary objects. In other words, the visionary look at the possible future interpretations of gyms or barbeque pits may destabilize our assumptions of what these and other everyday objects are and alter the way in which we approach them. It is also reminiscent of Victor Shklovsky's notion of estrangement as a technique of combatting the automatism of perception in confrontation with art.³⁹⁸ It appears, however, that such treatment of objects of investigation is no longer relegated only to the domain of artistic creativity and playful poetics, should one view pataphysics as such. Jussi Parikka, a new media theorist, assumes a similar mindset when he speaks of media archaeology. Parikka, indeed, emphasizes the present as the point of departure for his line of research:

In the midst of the emphasis on the audiovisual and the [...] cinematic, and the methodological emphasis on alternative paths and transdisciplinary regimes of knowledge, media-archaeological research adopted the idea [...] that archaeology

³⁹⁸ Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David Richter (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1994), 778.

is always, implicitly or explicitly, about the present: what is our present moment in its objects, discourses and practices, and how did it come to be perceived as reality?”³⁹⁹

In this 2012 publication, Parikka proposes to approach the study of media history in a way that prioritizes its present state, rather than with the focus on excavating and establishing one acceptable past of the new media. The scholar emphasizes that “[w]hat should have become clear by now is that, while media archaeology writes histories of the present, it is also looking for alternative presents and pasts – and futures.”⁴⁰⁰ Parikka proposes a flexible understanding of what is commonly defined as history and treats it as a tool to talk not only of the present and the future, but also of their potentialities. His notion of history and archaeology resonates with Mahieu’s and Wiedemann’s pataphysical methods of dismantling temporal sequentiality in order to enrich our perception of the present world. These methods demonstrate that the pataphysical flexibility of thought can indeed find important analogues outside the realms of poetry and art in fields of investigation that are rooted in what is considered legitimate sciences.

5.4 EXPANSION: OU-X-PO

Possible iterations of the present and the future are not just a subject of exploration of pataphysical research and artistic activity. The notion of the future understood as the drive towards newness and investigation of actual and potential paths of development also informs the Collège’s expansion. Since its foundation in 1948, the Collège de ‘Pataphysique has been

³⁹⁹ Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 10.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 12-13.

struggling with a self-imposed impasse. The founders of the group had intended for it to be multidisciplinary and to explore various media creatively, yet its ties to the literary community, its affiliations with famous writers and its dependence on a printed journal have significantly hampered the fulfilment of this ambitious goal. Moreover, the Collège has boasted that it seeks to promote the science of pataphysics in this world and in all parallel universes, as proclaimed in the group's Statutes, whereas its ranks and teachings have remained virtually inaccessible to the general public, with the exception of very few individuals who sought to become pataphysicians themselves.⁴⁰¹ I would contend that the emergence of the first Ou-x-pos, workshops of potential "x," in the years following the Oulipo's founding, and their exponential proliferation during the Collège's occultation, constitutes a way out of that impasse without changing the core values of the group's organization. Individual Ou-x-pos are specialized branches that spiral out of the central collegial community. Each of them exemplifies a different facet of potential focus of pataphysical activity and a possible direction of growth for the Collège.

The rise of the potential workshops is an important evolutionary stage of the development of the Collège de 'Pataphysique; an explicit move to go public and to expand their focus, from literature to other media, happened exactly through the workshops. In the *Oulipo Compendium* (2005), Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie present a concise definition of what an Ou-x-po is: "During the years after the formation of the Oulipo, other groups were created to explore similar concerns in fields other than literature. François Le Lionnais invented the acronym Ou-x-po to

⁴⁰¹ The provision from the Collège's *Statuts* that I already cited several times in this dissertation indeed states that "Le Collège de 'Pataphysique promeut la Pataphysique en ce monde et dans tous les autres." Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013), titre I, article 3, paragraphe 2.

designate the generality of existing and possible groups, where x = the field in question.”⁴⁰² Thus, the Oulipo, as the first workshop exploring the potentiality of an artistic domain, was only an example taken from a seemingly unlimited pool of workshops investigating the potentiality of particular arts, sciences, media and disciplines. Considering that the new Ou-x-pos retained their affiliation with the Collège, even if by the time of their creation the Oulipo, on which they have been modeled, grew independent from its host organization, they represent an extension of activities by the pataphysical group that would be otherwise unimaginable. To this day, I posit, they remain in a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship with the Collège.

François Le Lionnais, who co-founded the Oulipo with Raymond Queneau in 1960, is indeed considered the father of the ou-x-pian initiative. The Oulipo was allegedly only the first manifestation of a larger project in the back of his mind. The editors of a 2005 volume of the *Viridis Candela* journal devoted to the Ou-X-po project explained that⁴⁰³

Le Régent François Le Lionnais laissait entendre qu'il avait “commencé par l'Oulipo” pour des raisons tactiques et purement circonstanciées, mais que, dans l'éternité [sic] abstraite de son esprit, tout était déjà conçu, inscrit et prévu, au moins à l'état d'intuition, depuis sa jeunesse. Autrement dit, dans l'intelligence lionnaise, le cas particulier de la littérature impliquait *ipso facto* (au plutôt *ipso conceptu*) un cas général, c'est-à-dire l'Ou-X-po.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, eds., *Oulipo Compendium* (London: Atlas Press, 2005), 318.

⁴⁰³ Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the project gathering all the workshops of potential “x” as the Ou-X-po, with the capital “X.” The use of the lower case in the word Ou-x-po will indicate that I am referring to only one exemplary workshop belonging to the project. This differentiation was also proposed by Le Lionnais who considered himself the father of the Ou-X-po, but not necessarily of all the individual Ou-x-pos.

⁴⁰⁴ Ou-X-po, “La Réunion,” *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 19 (2005): 31.

According to this account of Le Lionnais's explanation, the process of the Ou-X-po's manifestation can be considered retroactive, as the articulation of the whole project became crystallized only after the Oulipo and several other workshops were tentatively established. In an interview conducted by Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond and Jean-Baptiste Grasset in 1976, shortly after the Collège saw its occultation, Le Lionnais speaks already of three other existing workshops set up after the Oulipo: the Oumatpo (mathematics), the Oumupo (music) and the Oupeinpo (painting). In the same interview, the mathematician also fantasized about what the Oucinepo, a workshop of potential cinema, could do if one day founded.⁴⁰⁵ While Le Lionnais admits that, at that moment, the additional workshops were not particularly active, and he even refers to the existence of the Oumupo as “fantômale,” they provided a base for imagining the larger project of the generalized Ou-X-po.

Up to that point, Le Lionnais was involved in founding all the new Ou-x-pos, a situation that changed later as new branches of the imaginary workshop project started popping up without his participation. The Oumatpo was later reactivated as Oumathpo in 1980, the Oupeinpo was revived the same year, and the Oumupo became more active in 1992. While there is no centralized directory of the Ou-x-pos, studying several post-occultation publications by the members of the Collège, including the *Oulipo Compendium* (2005) cited above, *Les 101 mots de*

⁴⁰⁵ Le Lionnais had his heart set on the Oucinepo tackling the film adaptation of the work of Proust: “J’imagine très bien que viendra un jour un écrivain qui fera ce que n’a pas fait Proust – Proust a fait ce que d’autres n’avaient pas fait avant lui, ce petit passage est assez original dans toute la littérature, mais on pourrait faire beaucoup mieux. Mais je pense que ce qui n’a pas été fait sur le plan littéraire, que je ne pourrais pas faire non plus parce que ça dépasse mes capacités littéraires, pourrait être fait dans un autre domaine, le domaine cinématographique. C’est le domaine de l’OUCINEPO. Je voudrais trouver un cinéaste à qui je puisse suggérer cette recherche.” Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond and Jean-Baptiste Grasset, “Un Certain disparate, entretiens avec François Le Lionnais,” *Les blogs de l’Oulipo* (blog), 2010, <http://blogs.ouliponet.fr/>.

la pataphysique and the *Viridis Candela* journal, allows for the assembly of a convincingly comprehensive list of the existing workshops.⁴⁰⁶ The directory of the known Ou-x-pos reconstituted based on the cited publications took the following shape by 2005: 1973, the Oulipopo (*littérature policière*); 1980, the Oupeinpo (*peinture*) and the Oumathpo (*mathématiques*); 1990, the Oucupo (*cuisine*); 1991, the Outrapo (*tragicomédie*); 1992, the Oumupo (*musique*) and the Oubapo (*bande dessinée*); 1993, the Ouhispo (*histoire*); 1995, the Ouphopo (*photographie*); 2001, the Ouarchpo (*architecture*) and the Oupolpo (*politique*).⁴⁰⁷ Notably, this list is not exhaustive as additional Ou-x-pos were created since 2005, and there are several potential workshops borrowing the Ou-x-po name and following Le Lionnais's organizational pattern, but not associated with the Collège.⁴⁰⁸ The inherent potentiality of the Ou-X-po project stems from the possibility of applying a defined set of investigational approaches to an unlimited number of artistic and scientific disciplines, which contributed to the proliferation of individual workshops beyond Le Lionnais's initial intention.

⁴⁰⁶ Volumes 18 and 19 of the *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* are especially informative when it comes to knowledge about the proliferation of the Ou-x-pos.

⁴⁰⁷ The assembled list positions the aforementioned workshops, namely, ones of potential mathematics, painting and music, according to the date on which they became more active, not when they were first founded. The two last workshops, while mentioned respectively in *Oulipo Compendium* and *Les 101 mots*, their founding dates are not specified. I assumed it to be 2001 for both, as the *Compendium* lists it at the year of the first public manifestation of the Ouarchpo, and the same year is attributed to the beginning of the Oupolpo by the Fatrazie.com, a website devoted to the Collège and the Oulipo related matters. For more information see "Autres Ou-X-Po," Fatrazie, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.fatrazie.com/jeux-de-mots/ouypo/226-autres>.

⁴⁰⁸ *Oulipo Compendium*, for example, mentions that as the Oumupo members were taking their time to establish structure for their activities, "Meanwhile other Oumupos have emerged." Mathews and Brotchie, *Oulipo Compendium*, 327. Another example would be traces of activities of an Oucupo, a workshop of potential cinema about which fantasized Le Lionnais, that can be also found on the web and are limited to the time period between 2000-2005. The group has not earned the merit of being included in the *Compendium*.

The first workshops founded by Le Lionnais were, indeed, automatically attached to the Collège: “François Le Lionnais fut nommé Régent dès 88 E.P. (vulg. 1961) et, tout naturellement, les Ouvroirs qu’il fonda devinrent des Sous-Commissions du Collège.”⁴⁰⁹ Moreover, the founders of the workshops established without the help of Le Lionnais sought the same affiliation with the group: “Nombre d’autres Ouvroirs se reconnaissent des affinités avec le Collège et revendiquent même un statut de Sous-Commission.”⁴¹⁰ Even though the Ou-x-pos have remained largely autonomous and inducted members who have no connection with the Collège de ‘Pataphysique, their institutional attachment has been particularly advantageous. The most tangible benefit is that the fledgling workshops, just like the Oulipo during the first years of its activity, can take advantage of the established network to reach audiences predisposed to be interested in their work, via the *Viridis Candela* journal, but also by attending meetings for the Collège members at the atelier of Thieri Foulc that in the recent years have taken place on a regular basis.⁴¹¹ The less obvious, but possibly more impactful advantage of being affiliated with the Collège is that the workshops map their interests, objectives and goals onto the creative tradition stemming from a particular, pataphysical understanding of potentiality, first devised and pursued by the Oulipo.

In a nutshell, Jarry’s imaginary science inspires successive generations to create structures, artistic or otherwise, that have the ability to seize potential states, events or

⁴⁰⁹ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, “Les Ouvroirs et le Collège,” *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 18 (2004): 62.

⁴¹⁰ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, “Potentialité de l’Ou-X-po,” *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 19 (2005): 3.

⁴¹¹ Thieri Foulc’s atelier at 51A, Rue de Volga in Paris serves not only as the meeting place for the Collège, but also as the headquarters of the Oupeinpo, which he founded and reactivated together with Le Lionnais.

developments before they become actuality.⁴¹² If, as I argue in the second chapter, the Oulipo initially aimed at creating complete literary works that would be exemplary of capturing such a potential state of being, later the crux of their works' potentiality was relegated to constraints they would formulate. As a result, today the primary mission of the Oulipo is no longer writing books, poems or other types of literature, even though the groups' members are often prolific writers. Instead, the Oulipians' focus is to create constraints, or in other words instructions or patterns that could potentially result in infinite but structured narratives fulfilling them. Therefore, now the constraint is the locus of potentiality, and works that are written under it are only possible manifestations of potential solutions stemming from this constraint. The subsequent workshops of potential "x" did not follow the same path of negotiating what potentiality means for them, but indeed adopted the solution that the Oulipo worked out and focused on constraints from the beginning. A historical overview entitled "Les Ouvroirs et le Collège," published in the 18th issue of the *Carnets trimestriels* states that "[e]n effet, l'objectif d'un ouvroir est de fournir des contraintes (vulg. des formes, charpentes, structures) permettant aux artistes ou aux scientifiques de n'importe quelle discipline (car François Le Lionnais n'était pas loin de considérer la science comme un art) de travailler et de s'exprimer."⁴¹³ Therefore, the primary goal of the Ou-x-pos is not to create art or completed works, but to provide artists and scientists with tools that can assist them with their exploration of their field in a way that can surpass the assumed boundaries of the disciplines they navigate.

As devising formal constraints and structures is the focus of the workshops' members, they are not under pressure to apply them to their own work. In the interview with Le Lionnais,

⁴¹² For more information see chapter 2.

⁴¹³ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Les Ouvroirs et le Collège," 58.

Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond asks the Ou-x-po's founder to confirm that the workshops' goal is not to create exceptional pieces of art, to which he responds: "Non, je le souhaite, mais à d'autres à le faire."⁴¹⁴ After all, it is the formal structure that contains the potential, and when applied it only yields an example of the way it can be realized. A case in point is the Workshop of Potential Cuisine, a two-man endeavor exploring the horizons of taste. Started by two members of the Oulipo, Noël Arnaud and Harry Mathews, the Oucuiipo's methods remained close to the linguistic ones due to the founders' personal experience. While studying the artistic output of the group, Bénédict Beaugé, a renown French food author, concludes that:

Le but, avoué ou non, de l'Oucuiipo a bien été une sorte d'hybridation de la cuisine avec la littérature et même, souvent, la plus exigeante, la poésie. Tentative couronnée de succès pour une raison dont les fondateurs de l'Oucuiipo semblent ne pas avoir tenu compte, du moins consciemment, ces similitudes qui existent entre cuisine et langage.⁴¹⁵

Examples of the imaginary solutions the Arnaud-Mathews duo proposes in approaching cuisine, cited by Beaugé, indeed involve linguistic metalanguage. Thus, Beaugé evokes a *lipogramme en cuisine*, where a certain ingredient is consistently eliminated from the recipe in the cooking process, just like a letter is eliminated from a lipogrammatic text.⁴¹⁶ Another example is Georges Perec's "81 fiches cuisine à l'usage des débutants" (1985), where the writer borrows the general structure from Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, and proposes three recipes, each with

⁴¹⁴ Levy-Leblond and Grasset, "Un Certain disparate, entretiens avec François Le Lionnais."

⁴¹⁵ Bénédict Beaugé, "Cuisine potentielle en puissance: l'Oucuiipo," *Sociétés & Représentations*, no. 34 (2012): 134.

⁴¹⁶ Beaugé classifies it as a culinary lipogram and contrasts it with a strictly literary one, where a recipe is formulated in a way that avoids a selected letter.

three interchangeable elements.⁴¹⁷ The result is $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 3^3$ (81) potential dishes. The proposed constraints constitute imaginary solutions for chefs looking for inspiration, but, as stated above, it is not the Oucupo's objective to realize the recipes: as the reader can work on actualizing all of Queneau's one hundred thousand billion of poems, chefs are free to create all or any of Perec's potential dishes.

As some constraints may seem impossible to apply during the creative process of laboring under them, at times pushing the boundaries of the difficulty of their realization can indeed lead to finding a solution otherwise unthinkable. The author of "Les Ouvroirs et le Collège" article states that "[o]n connaît même des cas où des solutions tenues pour imaginaires *in se* se sont révélées réalisables une fois envisagées sous un nouveau jour, par un nouvel Oucupien."⁴¹⁸ The Oulipopo, the Workshop of Potential Detective Fiction, provides an illustration of such an extraordinary situation. The Oulipopo's birth was foretold by the publication of its iconic text authored by Le Lionnais, "Qui est coupable?" (1971), in *Subsidia Pataphysica* two years earlier. "Qui est coupable?" is a combinatorial study of allegedly all the potential possibilities of who or what can kill/be the murderer in a detective story. Le Lionnais systematized his list into four categories where "x" is the murderer: A – x is known from the outset by the reader, B – x is known only towards the end, C – we will never know who x is, D – x is the reader.⁴¹⁹ In this case, writers of detective stories looking for inspiration can use the extensive list of structures included in each category, which they are free to impose on their work in progress. The

⁴¹⁷ While Georges Perec was not officially associated with the Oucupo, he offered some of his creativity to his Oulipian friends who founded it.

⁴¹⁸ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Les Ouvroirs et le Collège," 59.

⁴¹⁹ François Le Lionnais, "Who Is Guilty?," in *Oulipo Compendium*, ed. Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie (London: Atlas Press, 2005), 271–72. Le Lionnais emphasizes that the solution described in option D has never been realized to his knowledge.

imaginary solution that Le Lionnais proposes as never realized is a story where the reader would be the murderer. Seemingly impossible, Mathews and Brotchie report that this solution was successfully applied in 1990 by Jean-Louis Bailly, a writer and a pataphysician, in his novel entitled *La Dispersion des cendres*.⁴²⁰ In this case, it is the initial capturing of the potentiality within the proposed structure that guides a writer to creatively fulfill it in a work of literature.

Creating constraints and passing them on to other pataphysicians as well as artists who are not affiliated with the Collège is only one way of reaching out through Ou-x-pos and establishing communication with audiences beyond the circle of the followers of the imaginary science. Whereas the Collège de 'Pataphysique currently runs a basic website, it serves primarily as a point of access to enroll or renew one's membership. After all, the main page greets the visitors with Janvier J. Mauvoisin's quote proclaiming that "[l]e Collège de 'Pataphysique n'est pas un lieu public."⁴²¹ Furthermore, if the Collège's publications can be purchased via third party sellers, the new releases are first circulated only among the group's members. Likewise, only members of the Collège receive regular invitations to celebratory gatherings, for example the festivities of the Pataphysical New Year's Eve on September 7th every year. Selected Ou-x-pos, however, have a significantly more pronounced online presence and they regularly organize events open to general public. For example, the Oupeinpo and the Oumupo chose more user-friendly and accessible formats, such as blogs and wiki pages, to promote their activities on the

⁴²⁰ The novel recounts the story of an author who fails to publish valuable poetry but succeeds in publishing a badly written detective story instead. As Mathews and Brotchie summarize in the *Oulipo Compendium*, "After the royalties reach a certain level, they automatically (to skip the details) send into action a killer hired to shoot the writer. Thus, the book's buyers, who, as an incurious audience interested only in the facile, had 'killed' the author of the poems and stories, now kill him in fact." Mathews and Brotchie, *Oulipo Compendium*, 272.

⁴²¹ Collège de 'Pataphysique (website), accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.college-de-pataphysique.fr>. The website is available both in French and English.

internet.⁴²² Their visitors are invited to learn about the groups, their history, members and projects, and find out about current affairs and events in which they can participate.

The events offered by the workshops include, but are not limited to, expositions of their members' art, presentations of publications, workshops and interactive games. To provide an example, the most recent event listed on the Oupeinpo's blog, that took place on June 13, 2017, provided an opportunity for "Expositions, Disputations, Libations."⁴²³ The event included a promotion of a new publication by the Workshop of Potential Painting, *Transgression* (2017), and an exhibition of a painting entitled "Le Morpion pictural d'Argentat," a work made as a game of tic-tac-toe between two artists, one mimicking the style of Piet Mondrian, the other that of Jackson Pollock.⁴²⁴ The Workshop of Potential Music, in turn, lists two happenings organized by its two contributors, Tom Johnson and Moreno Andreatta, that took place in November 2017. The first was Johnson's music performance at Les Instants Chavirés, a venue described as "[...]

⁴²² *OuPeinPo* (blog), accessed February 9, 2018, <https://oupeinpoblog.blogspot.fr>; "Bienvenue à l'Oumupo!" Pour un Ouvroir de création Musicale Potentielle, accessed February 9, 2018, http://oumupo.org/wiki/Bienvenue_à_l'Oumupo_!. There are several other pages consecrated to the Oupeinpo, but the cited blog contains the most regular updates regarding current events.

⁴²³ From this point onward, when I cite examples of the most recent events organized by the workshop, it is relative to the moment of the writing of this section, December 2017.

⁴²⁴ It is significant to note that *Transgression* was released by a small publisher, Au Crayon qui tue, established mainly by pataphysicians and managed by Thierry Foulc. In the catalog of the 2017 edition of the "Salon Page(s)," a biannual book fair promoting contemporary artists' books, Au Crayon qui tue is presented as follows: "Le crayon qui tue publie des travaux, des projets, des points de vue 'hors norme' dans le domaine de la peinture, des arts visuels et désormais de l'écriture. Ces petits livres gardent eux-mêmes un caractère artiste par leur présentation et leur tirage limité. Ce que 'tue' le Crayon, c'est le bon sens, votre confiance en la pensée, votre passion pour le sensé et le sensible, votre nostalgie du 'beau'. Le Crayon n'interroge pas ces limites, il les surine. Auteurs : Oupeinpo, Oulipo, Panique, etc." In Anick Butré, "Catalogue Page(s): Bibliophilie contemporaine et livres d'artiste," 2017, 37, <http://christinepaulve.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/catalogue-salon-pages.pdf>. As for the making of "Le Morpion pictural d'Argentat," a year earlier, it was a performance of sorts when two Oupeinpians played the game of tic-tac-toe in front of the audience during the "Histoires de Passages" festival in Argentat.

un lieu de diffusion pensé comme un laboratoire des musiques improvisées, expérimentales, bruitistes;”⁴²⁵ and the second was a presentation of some of Andreatta’s publications at the Mamuphi (Math, Music, Philosophy) Seminar.⁴²⁶ Finally, respective workshops frequently collaborate and join their forces in confronting the public. Examples of such a move are some of the Oulipo’s famous monthly encounters with their readers at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the so-called “jeudis de l’Oulipo.” Recently, the Oulipians invited members of other workshops to join them in the auditorium: the Oumupo (*musique*) and the Oubapo (*bande dessinée*) in November 2017, and the Outrapo (*tragicomédie*) in December 2017. As various workshops collaborate with one another, but also become involved with specific venues, festivals, and communities surrounding them, they seize opportunities to reach those who would otherwise be unlikely to discover the pataphysical creativity. Considering the workshops’ affiliation with the Collège, I see the groups not only as creative spaces for playful artistic experimentation, but also a clever way for the Collège to reach out to non-pataphysicians and open up to the public without losing its aura of a secret and exclusive club. Creating such relationships with other artistic networks, indeed, allows the workshop members to promote pataphysics, within respective artistic fields and among non-pataphysicians, as dictated by the Collège’s Statutes.

⁴²⁵ For more information visit “Présentation,” Les Instants Chavirés (website), accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.instantschavires.com/presentation/>.

⁴²⁶ For more information visit “MaMuPhi,” MaMuPhi: Mathématiques – Musique – Philosophie (website), accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/maths/>.

5.5 COLLÈGE TODAY: UNIVERSALITY AND PATAPHYSICAL NETWORKING

The expansion of the Collège de 'Pataphysique via Ou-x-pos was not, however, the only way the group has grown and imagined its future(s). Following the festivities of the desoccultation of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, the group thus reemerged as a part of the French artistic and cultural scene, albeit withdrawn from the mainstream, the same but different at the same time, living its motto, *eadem mutata resurgo*. The return of the Collège after the hiatus can be viewed as its history coming full circle, providing an opportunity for the group to start fresh following the crises that had prompted Vice-Curator Opach to suspend it in the first place. Nevertheless, the Collège's post-2000 publications reveal that pataphysicians saw the desoccultation not as a chance to start over, but to build and expand on the artistic and philosophical foundation prepared by Emmanuel Peillet and his entourage. In the 9th volume of *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* dedicated to the subject of pedagogies, Florence Boudinot, a pataphysician and a National Education Inspector, proposes an overview of contemporary pedagogies in response to negative reactions regarding new guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education in 2015.⁴²⁷ Boudinot describes, among others, the spiral pedagogy model, which she states is particularly suited for pataphysical instruction: "Son fondement est simple: la maîtrise des notions essentielles nécessite des approches successives permettant de franchir chaque fois des obstacles cognitifs."⁴²⁸ The spiral learning method advocates successive reapproaching of similar problems in order to gain new perspectives on solving them and to ultimately be able to devise

⁴²⁷ In France, Instituteur de l'Éducation Nationale is a state appointment designating an official who supervises the implementation of curricula across the French primary education institutions and makes recommendations for the development of education programs.

⁴²⁸ Florence Boudinot, "Pédagogie contemporaine," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 9 (2016): 11.

problem-solving patterns independently. The Collège applies a similar method in reinventing its own organization and goals. Rather than an opportunity for a do-over, the desoccultion of the group provided an opportunity to adjust its members' views on how it should function and what it should do while applying its previously and systematically acquired experience. Boudinot states that the spiral approach is at times confused with the circular one as she adds, “[s]ouhaitons que le Collège sache ne pas tourner en rond.”⁴²⁹ The spiral drive towards the future positions the group in a constant state of becoming in the present. Thus, what the Collège de ‘Pataphysique has become today is a result of its spiral expansion rather than linear development.

Just like the image of a logarithmic spiral remains the same at different scales, the core preoccupations of the Collège have not changed. Rather, they are presented from an enriched perspective that is inscribed in the circumstantial social and political conditions of the contemporary world, even if the Collège strives to remain neutral in terms of politics. While the promotion of pataphysics remains the Collège’s *raison d’être*, I argue that its spiral approach to learning from its previous experiences allowed for the crystallization of specific driving forces systematizing its modes of work. These forces are what I will call the strive for universality, borrowing from the term *ubuniversalité* used by the Collège’s optimates, and pataphysical networking.⁴³⁰ Despite the Collège’s insistence on maintaining its aura of a secret society, its members have been aware of the need for change in order to remain relevant within the contemporary intellectual scene, as demonstrated by their preoccupations visible in their publications. The pataphysicians, thus, have made efforts to keep up with the general

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 11.

⁴³⁰ The term *ubuniversalité* is used in the 3rd volume of the *Carnets du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* on the occasion of the presentation of the London Pataphysical Institute and the international expansion of the imaginary science.

globalization of knowledge and modes of work, including a strong push for gender equality within all domains of public life. They also seek to entertain the possibility of cooperation with academic circles and to warm up to the public, as I have established with the instances of respective workshops of potential “x.” The incorporation of these goals in collegial life can be seen as a voluntary submission to constraints of sorts. These constraints are dictated by social circumstances and expectations, and it is necessary to address them in order to remain relevant in the artistic and intellectual context. By setting the aforementioned goals in their vision of growth, the group has worked towards the universality of pataphysics in order to render Jarry’s imaginary science more relatable.

Achieving pataphysical universality, *ubuniversalité*, depends on the international expansion of the Collège’s influences. In the Collège’s journal, *ubuniversalité* has been presented as follows: “[...] un pas vers l’ubuniversalité; la Science à la portée des peuples les plus divers.”⁴³¹ Despite the Collège’s close-knit, Parisian, inner circle, the strive for universality is, thus, a push for increasing the availability and the relevance of the imaginary science (spelled with a capital “s”) within other communities. Alluding to the opening of the first foreign institute devoted to the promotion of pataphysics, the Institut de Hautes Études Pataphysiques de Buenos Aires, in 1957, a *Provéditeur* Tchang Tso Min stated that the globalization of the imaginary science has been implied since the birth of the Collège:

Dès le principe, le Collège de ‘Pataphysique a été présenté comme une société scientifique et internationale, ignorant non seulement les frontières des nations mais même celles de l’esprit. Ses fondations n’ont considéré son origine française

⁴³¹ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, “London Pataphysical Institute,” *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 3 (2001): 17.

que comme un accident historique et ils ont appelé tous les peuples à l'édification indéfinie de la "Science."⁴³²

The potential for the international universalism, however, remained latent at the beginning of the Collège's existence. With the gradual opening of new foreign institutes shortly before and during the occultation, and the continuation of this trend post-occultation, in the new millennium Min's words ring particularly true.⁴³³ The mention of *ubuniversalité* was pronounced in the context of the newly established London Pataphysical Institute, and more precisely while speaking of the first projected cyclical publication on the subject of pataphysics in a language other than French. Indeed, according to the information provided in the *Viridis Candela* journal, until the Collège's desoccultation Jarry's imaginary science has been consciously practiced solely in French, not counting translations of the existing works. The London Institute was the first one to include publishing a journal in English in its projected goals, thus marking a new frontier for international universality and inclusion.⁴³⁴

Another milestone in the Collège's international expansion was the election of Tanya Peixoto as the new and current Vice-Curator in 2014. First and foremost, based in London, Peixoto is the first non-French head of the Collège.⁴³⁵ Paul Gayot and Thieri Foulc go as far as presenting her as an embodiment of the global, multicultural character that the Collège seeks to

⁴³² Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Les 101 mots*, 51.

⁴³³ According to *101 mots* and records from various issues of the *Publicateur*, after the year 2000 the following foreign institutes have been added to the list: London Institute of Pataphysics; Altísimo Instituto de Estudios Patafísicos de la Candelaria in Bolivia and in Aragon; Collage de 'Pataphysique, Autoclave de Estrazioni Patafísiche and Instituto di Patafísica Romanese in Italy; Académie Néerlandaise pour la 'Pataphysique; Berliner Institut für Pataphysik; Institut Pataphysique Arménien.

⁴³⁴ *The Journal of the London Institute of Pataphysics* has been released on a regular basis since 2010.

⁴³⁵ Not counting the imaginary crocodile Lutembi that held the office before Peixoto.

represent: “Sa Magnificence, d’ascendance galicienne, de naissance genevoise et de domicile londonien, parfaitement polyglotte et élue fort jeune par rapport aux précédents Vice-Curateurs, incarne l’avenir du Collège et son extension mondiale.”⁴³⁶ Gayot and Foulc reveal that they imagine the Collège of the twenty-first century to be multilingual and to operate transnationally, a future that begins with Peixoto’s term. Currently, even though the Vice-Curator is based in the United Kingdom, she has appointed Gayot and Foulc as her representatives in Paris where most of the Collège’s meetings still take place to date. Peixoto remains based in London where she has extended the networking of the London Institute of Pataphysics and by extension the Collège de ‘Pataphysique to work with Atlas Press, a publishing house managed by Alastair Brotchie, and the Bookartshop, a book store run by the Vice-Curator herself.⁴³⁷

Peixoto’s persona represents more than the Collège’s increasing awareness for the need of transnational and trans-lingual cooperation. As the first woman to hold the office of the Vice-Curator, her high position within the ranks of the Collège contrasts with the pressing question of the place of women within this apparently all-male club. While no scholarly analysis of the problem has been carried out, the question of the obvious gender gap became too important to ignore even for pataphysicians themselves at the time of the Collège’s desoccultation. In 2001, the Collège published an in-house study entitled “De l’antiféminisme supposé chez les Oncles du Collège de ‘Pataphysique,” which opens with the following statement:

⁴³⁶ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, *Les 101 mots*, 76-77.

⁴³⁷ Atlas Press is presented as a publishing house “[...] [focusing] on the representation of an alternative canon, an “anti-tradition” of dissenting art and literature, that stretches back to the German Romantics at the turn of the 19th century and which has informed the more belligerent avant-gardes of the last 200 years.” “About Atlas Press,” Atlas Press Limited, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.atlaspress.co.uk/index.cgi?action=about>. The Bookartshop indeed promotes the publications of Atlas Press.

Au moment de la Désoccultation, il a semblé idoine à la Sous-Commission des Bascules & Trébuchets de faire un point réellement scientifique sur la question et d'exposer la répartition des sexes dans le Collège. C'est aussi l'occasion de faire justice de lieux communs sur l'insuffisante mixité en son sein, ainsi que sur les liens entre l'inégale répartition homme/femme et un prétendu antiféminisme de l'Institution.⁴³⁸

By addressing the issue of the quantitative disproportion between male and female members, the Collège indeed acknowledges that it is in a position where it should defend itself against allegations of discrimination. Even if the article is composed in a satirical tone, the sub-commission who authored the analysis provided hard data to emphasize that the Collège is aware of the issue and that the situation is gradually improving:

Le taux de naissances féminines augmente lentement mais sûrement depuis l'origine du Collège. Parti de 7 à 8% lors des premières années, il avoisine des 30% à la fin de la période cymbaliste [the occultation period]. Un premier seuil, celui des 10% avait été franchi à la fin des années 80 [1950s], celui des 20% vers 110 [1980s], celui des 30% vers 120 [1990s]. À cet égard, on ne distingue aucune discontinuité notable entre la période collégiale et celle de l'Occultation.⁴³⁹

The sub-commission sees the steady growth of female membership as emblematic of changing times and as a natural drive leading to an eventual disappearance of the disproportion.

I would suggest that the striking original disparity between the number of male and female members of the Collège stemmed from the nature of the intellectual communities of its

⁴³⁸ Sous-Commission des Bascules et Trébuchets, "De l'antiféminisme supposé chez les oncles du Collège de 'Pataphysique,'" *Carnets trimestriels du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 5 (2001): 71.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*, 74.

founder, Emmanuel Peillet. Having graduated from the all-male lycée de Reims, Peillet returned to the same school as a philosophy teacher. Prior to his time as a teacher in Reims he had taught at the lycée de Charleville, and after the founding of the Collège he spent time teaching at the lycée de Vanves. It was his former classmates and students from these exclusively male schools who became the first recruits for the Collège de 'Pataphysique.⁴⁴⁰ The male base of the Collège was created out of Peillet's most immediate professional networks, which did not habitually include women. While the authors of the post-occultation gender gap analysis fail or refuse to make such an observation, or to provide any other convincing cause of the initial disparity, they do focus on the potential future consequences of the steady growth rate when it comes to women's participation. Should the number of women continue to grow, the authors humorously anticipate organizational issues:

Sans aller jusqu'à envisager l'émergence d'un matriarcat, on peut imaginer que la fin du II^{ème} siècle de l'Ère Pataphysique [2073] verra se poser le problème de la représentation des femmes dans l'Administration du Collège. Faudra-t-il instaurer des quotas pour les Chaires et les fonctions administratives? Peut-on envisager à moyen terme [...] l'avènement d'une femme au poste de Vice-Curateur du Collège?⁴⁴¹

Whereas the imagined future of the Collège becoming a matriarchy is not even close to being fulfilled, the anticipation of women being included in the administrative ranks of the group came true much earlier than the authors expected and culminated with the election of Tanya Peixoto for the office of the Vice-Curator only thirteen years after the predictions had appeared in print.

⁴⁴⁰ Launoir, *Gestes et opinions de quelques pataphysiciens illustres*, 164.

⁴⁴¹ Sous-Commission des Bascules et Trébuchets, "De l'antiféminisme supposé," 76.

The election of Peixoto triggered the first conscious reflection regarding gendered titles attributed to the officials of the Collège de 'Pataphysique. The question was whether the title of the Vice-Curator should accompany Peixoto's name in a feminine form, despite the lack of an official version thereof. This reflection led the pataphysicians to conclude that the situation was not, in fact, unprecedented: "[Le] Collège, lui, a toujours su désigner, avec la convenance et le souci des mots bien formés qui s'imposent, outre la Provéditrice déjà nommée, la Satrape Barbara Wright, les Régentes Marie-Louise Aulard ou Françoise Gilot, la Dataire Odile Claudon, autres maintes Auditrices ou Commanderesses."⁴⁴² Thus, the new millennium saw the assimilation of female members into the group's administration, which led to the emergence of increasingly flexible nomenclature. It was, then, an easy decision to start addressing Peixoto as *Vice-Curatrice*. The step was further reaffirmed by printing altered membership cards for the incoming members of the Collège, from 2015 on signed by Tanya Peixoto, *La Vice-Curatrice du Collège de 'Pataphysique* (and not *Le Vice-Curator*, which has been the case since the group's founding). The election of a female leader did not divert the Collège from its main goal of promoting pataphysics, yet, it is emblematic of the increasing awareness of the importance of gender disparity issues contemporarily and of a willingness to improve.

The Collège's involvement and collaboration with academic circles constitutes another way in which the group spiraled out of its initial model after the desoccultation, and it shows a gradual opening up to the idea of disseminating knowledge about the group outside of its own clique. In the first post-occultation volume of the *Carnets du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, Ruy Launoir cites academic interest as another symptom of the globalization of knowledge in which

⁴⁴² Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Vie du Collège," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 3 (2015): 73–74.

the Collège inexorably participates: “Mondialisation [de Pataphysique] dont témoigne grand presse [...] ainsi que les non moins grands Presses Ubuniversitaires de France. Ces dernières témoignent que la Pataphysique est désormais sortie du Collège pour accéder aux amphithéâtres de l’enseignement dit supérieur.”⁴⁴³ By *Presses Ubuniversitaires* Launoir unequivocally refers to publishers affiliated with universities and other higher education institutions. These institutions’ interest in pataphysics, indeed, becomes visible shortly after the desoccultation and is met with the Collège’s readiness to cooperate. The 2000 event coincided with the release of a special edition of the *Magazine littéraire* in June of the same year. Volume 388 of the journal, entitled “La Pataphysique, histoire d’une société secrète,” contained a large dossier devoted to the Collège, its history and its aspirations. The issue contains first-hand accounts regarding the life of the Collège as most of its contributors were members of the group, including Ruy Launoir, Michel Arrivé, François Caradec, Paul Braffort and others. The issue addresses a variety of questions that readers intrigued by the Collège may have, from its origins going back to Alfred Jarry, through the mysterious apostrophe preceding the name of the imaginary science, to the membership of famous writers, such as Queneau and Vian.

Another instance of disseminating pataphysical knowledge through scholarly channels was the publication of *Les 101 mots de la pataphysique*, edited by Paul Gayot and Thieri Foulc, with Presses universitaires de France (PUF), an academic publishing house specializing in scientific and literary journals, and higher-education textbooks. *Les 101 mots*, a dictionary of terms significant to understand the Collège and pataphysics itself, was published within the “Que sais-je?” collection, described by the PUF as follows: “Que sais-je? met à la portée de tous le savoir des meilleurs spécialistes, les analyses des penseurs qui comptent, le regard avisé des

⁴⁴³ Launoir, “Du Régent de Cléidologie,” 34.

experts.” The description further elaborates that with the selection of the questions that the collection investigates, “[elle] constitue un outil irremplaçable pour comprendre le monde.”⁴⁴⁴ The inclusion of a book explaining basics of the Collège, its history, and pataphysics in general, edited by two of currently most prominent and involved members of the group, in such a collection is telling. This gesture suggests that knowledge about pataphysics is deemed relevant if not important for the understanding of the intellectual scene today and that pataphysicians are considered unique experts when it comes to methods of investigation and approaches to scientific and cultural issues worked out by the Collège over decades. Even if at the beginning of its existence the Collège was determined to not actively reach out and recruit its new disciples to save them from the mundane universe of assumptions and preconceived truths, after the occultation we can observe an evolved approach towards communication with the outside world. The openness to collaborate with academics and the delegation of the more active outreach and interaction with the public through creative, artistic encounters and happenings to the Ou-x-pos are indeed illustrative of the message conveyed by Tanya Peixoto in her inaugural address: “Si le Collège ne se soucie pas de sauver le monde, il n’a jamais empêché personne d’apprendre à nager.”⁴⁴⁵ This proclamation upholds the Collège’s original goal to keep its research “inutiles,” which means to carry out its investigations without an end in mind, without the intention to prove a point and without the goal of saving the world with its findings. Peixoto indicates, however, that there is a generally understood need to raise awareness about pataphysical thought and to communicate and promote ways to navigate the world in the spirit of pataphysics.

⁴⁴⁴ “Que sais-je? Une question à toutes les réponses,” Presses Universitaires de France, accessed February 9, 2018, https://www.puf.com/collections/Que_sais-je_-.

⁴⁴⁵ Tanya Peixoto, “Adresse inaugurale de Sa Magnificence Tanya Peixoto,” *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 1 (2000): 5.

Such a need to send a clear message of what pataphysics and the Collège are, stems partly from a pattern of misuse of these terms by the public personas and in the media, which did not escape the pataphysicians' attention. Politics and political institutions are a particularly fertile breeding ground for misinformation about pataphysics, should the term be introduced amid talks and debates. The 4th volume of the *Publicateur* contains a report, entitled "De la pataphysique parlementaire," providing examples of abuses of the terms pertaining to pataphysics in the National Assembly and the Senate. The report opens with an explanation of how the terms are frequently misused:

L'adjectif *pataphysique* suit à quelques décennies d'intervalle le destin qui fut celui d'*ubuesque*. Outre la presse, il hante depuis quelque temps les couloirs de l'Assemblée et du Sénat comme en témoigne ce florilège puisé aux sources officielles par Nicolas Sniecinski. Il est réconfortant de considérer qu'il sert d'argument définitif pour clore ce que le langage de là-bas appelle un débat. Mieux, quelques parlementaires n'hésitent pas à mentionner un 'collège de pataphysique', mais leurs lumières sur le sujet demeurent faibles.⁴⁴⁶

The authors of the report identify the simple confusion of the term pataphysics with the characteristics describing the essence of Jarry's Ubu: the grotesque and the absurd. They find it extraordinary and hilarious, however, that such a simple misinterpretation is powerful enough to put an end to a debate. To substantiate their point, the authors cite French politicians referring to pataphysics and the Collège and provide links to the transcripts from the sessions of the Assembly and the Senate during which these words were uttered.

⁴⁴⁶ Collège de 'Pataphysique, "De la Pataphysique parlementaire," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 4 (2015): 61.

Thus, the reports document Pascal Cherki, a member of the National Assembly and the mayor of the 14th *arrondissement* of Paris to have talked of the “pataphysique législative” in the context of adding amendments and corrections that exist already to legislative texts.⁴⁴⁷ Another member of the Assembly, Michel Piron, attempted to shut down Jean-Pierre Brard’s argument about a lack of correlation between lowering the corporate tax and decreasing unemployment with the words: “Pataphysique et prêchi-prêcha!”⁴⁴⁸ Finally, while addressing a project to redraw administrative borders of the French regional map, Senator Élisabeth Doineau concluded: “À mon sens, cette carte des régions subit des vicissitudes rocambolesques dignes du père Ubu [...]. À vrai dire, nous sommes tous en train de faire de la pataphysique, discipline répondant au principe suivant: ‘Je m’applique volontiers à penser aux choses auxquelles je pense que les autres ne penseront pas.’”⁴⁴⁹ While Doineau, by quoting Boris Vian and his understanding of the essence of the imaginary science, displays a more extensive knowledge of pataphysics than Cherki and Piron, who use the adjective to simply convey an absurdity, she still misuses the term by rendering it pejorative and reduces its meaning to a waste of time.

The *Publicateur* report mentions that some officials refer not only to pataphysics, but also bring up the Collège, without much success. During a roundtable on the reform regarding regulations of tobacco products, Yves Martinet, the president of the National Committee Against Tobacco (Comité national contre le tabagisme), thus addresses the idea of smoking rooms: “À

⁴⁴⁷ “Compte rendu intégral, deuxième séance du vendredi 13 septembre 2013,” Travaux en séance, Assemblée Nationale, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cri/2012-2013-extra3/20133009.asp>.

⁴⁴⁸ “Compte rendu analytique officiel, 2^{ème} séance du lundi 19 juillet 2004,” Archives de la XII^e législature, Assemblée Nationale, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2003-2004-extra/037.asp>.

⁴⁴⁹ “Séance du 30 octobre 2014 (compte rendu intégral des débats),” Travaux parlementaires, Sénat, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.senat.fr/seances/s201410/s20141030/s20141030012.html>.

mon avis, les fumoirs relèvent du collège de pataphysique: comment faire simple alors que nous pouvons faire compliqué? Il serait tellement plus facile en effet de demander à un fumeur d’avoir la courtoisie de fumer à l’extérieur du bâtiment...”⁴⁵⁰ Another reference to the Collège itself in the context of politics, also cited in the *Publicateur* (2nd volume), was not pronounced by a politician but made on the radio, France Culture, in regard to the then-Minister of Justice, Christiane Taubira: “une femme qui croit en la tolérance mais qui, même au Collège de pataphysique, ne prétendrait pas ‘qu’on puisse faire disparaître ni l’imbécillité ni la vanité ni le racisme qui se nourrit de tout cela’.”⁴⁵¹ These two insertions of the name of the Collège in the given contexts also prove that the group’s existence is known, its jarryesque origins ring a bell, but the lack of a deeper understanding of its structure and activities is disheartening. Martinet, for example, lets himself be confused by the humorous tone and discourse for which the Collège is known, and mistakes the group’s “inutilous” research for being convoluted and useless. The radio station France Culture, in turn, identifies the Collège as a space where one pretends that the impossible is possible, while the pataphysicians see their work as far from pretending.

I see the appropriation of the term “pataphysics,” and even of the name of the Collège in media and political discourses, where their uses paint a false image of the organization and its members, as a motivation for Peixoto and the contemporary Collège to set the record straight and find ways to slowly but surely increase their public visibility without betraying their founding ideals. Thanks to assuming the drive towards universality (*ubuniversalité*) as its goal in the twenty-first century, the contemporary Collège de ‘Pataphysique has an established international

⁴⁵⁰ “Table ronde n° 4: ‘Quels doivent être les contours de la réforme?’ Extrait du procès-verbal de la séance du 5 juillet 2006,” Travaux des commissions, Assemblée Nationale, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/mita/05-06/c0506005.asp>.

⁴⁵¹ Collège de ‘Pataphysique, “Nouvelles de Nulle Part,” *Publicateur du Collège de ‘Pataphysique* 2 (2014): 86.

network of artists, intellectuals and scientists who engage in the pataphysical exploration of their respective disciplines. The cultivation of pataphysics in their respective scientific or artistic domains consists of a distrust in assumed laws and patterns and of a focus on irregularities, anomaly and exception, which drives their creativity. Thus, the renowned authors and filmmakers whose works I discussed in the previous chapters, such as Raymond Queneau, René Clair, Boris Vian and others, known principally as great individual talents, have worked within the intellectual and creative network of the Collège, and the principles of pataphysics informed their artistic output, a fact of which their audiences are usually unaware. But if the network of the pataphysical thought informed great French artists, it became even stronger and more widespread thanks to its international expansion. In my previous chapters I spoke of Italo Calvino (Italian) and Fernando Arrabal (Spanish) as pataphysicians. It is not common knowledge that in addition to these two names, for example, Umberto Eco, an Italian novelist and philosopher best known for *The Name of the Rose* (1980) was also a pataphysician. When we watch the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* (1933) we are not usually aware that they also joined the Collège. While admiring M. C. Escher's woodcuts and lithographs, his audiences do not realize he was a member of the Collège too. The Collège de 'Pataphysique has been extending its international influences since its beginnings, but it was the turn of the century that saw the group formalize and solidify its transnational networks with its foreign institutes.

Transnational cooperation is not the only way the Collège has worked to diversify the pataphysical network; its diversity consists also of transdisciplinary projects. The reason why I indicated professions and affiliation of most of the contributors to the *Viridis Candela* journal that I had cited was to demonstrate the multitude of backgrounds and fields that their representatives bring into the collective experience of cultivating pataphysics today. Thus, we

saw contributions from writers and publishers but also from a researcher and a specialist in the field of sports history, a press agent, a jazz critic, a National Education Inspector, all of them printed side by side in thematically focused volumes. This constitutes only a very limited sample of specialists, and the global range of disciplines represented by all members of the Collège is significantly wider. Moreover, inspiration and general enrichment when individual artistic and scientific disciplines collide with pataphysical methodology is not a one-way channel. The Collège certainly thrives thanks to the diversity of fields of investigation and backgrounds, but individual disciplines can also benefit from an infusion of pataphysical thinking. For instance, in 2014 Gérard Berry, a computer scientist and a member of French Academy of Sciences (Académie des sciences), French Academy of Technologies (Académie des technologies), and Academia Europaea, but also a pataphysician, was awarded a Gold Medal by the French National Center for Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS), France's most prestigious scientific award, for his contributions to computer science. As reported by the *Publicateur*, at the award ceremony, Berry mentioned the Collège and pataphysics in general as an indispensable part of what made his inventions possible:

Si un de ses langages de programmation en temps réel permet de faire voler des avions, l'idée, confessa-t-il, lui en vint en supposant un ordinateur surpuissant dont l'existence n'est qu'imaginaire. [...] L'invention du langage Esterel, qui vaut au Régent Gérard Berry ses dorures du CNRS serait doncques une application utilitaire de la Science des exceptions.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² Collège de 'Pataphysique, "Sécularités," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 3 (2015): 84.

Thus, Berry's work constitutes a concrete and palpable example of an imaginary pataphysical solution brought to life. Even though the Collège's members are adamant about not speaking of their group in utilitarian terms, insisting that their research and activity is "inutilous" and does not serve any higher purpose, its practice does have concrete impacts. When the materialization of pataphysical thinking occurs and an imaginary solution becomes an actual invention, like in Berry's case, Jarry's science ceases to be "inutilous." Paradoxically, it is the Collège's refusal to focus on specific utilitarian goals that creates an environment allowing for creativity leading to such inventions.

While examples of the practical application of pataphysics resulting in ingenious inventions within the Collège, such as in the case of Berry, are not an everyday occurrence, many pataphysicians openly and publicly express their attachment to their affiliation with the Collège, often ranking it significantly higher than their other affiliations. Eugène Ionesco, for example, spoke of his affiliations as follows:

Je suis couvert de galons. Non seulement je suis membre de l'Académie française, mais aussi de l'Académie du Maine, de celle du Monde latin, de celle des Arts et Lettres de Boston, de celle du Vaucluse, et je suis, surtout, c'est mon titre le plus important, Satrape du Collège de 'Pataphysique; le Collège de 'Pataphysique couronne, d'ailleurs, toutes les académies passées, présentes et futures.⁴⁵³

Ionesco was not the only pataphysician insisting on being identified with the Collège. Interestingly, in the recent years, the affiliation of various members with the Collège has been systematically pinpointed posthumously, in the obituaries or short memorial articles released in the press outside of pataphysical circles. A quick search across the archives of mainstream

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 83-84.

newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* reveals that at least three artists deceased in the last two years (2016-2017) have been recognized by their editorial staff as *Régents* of the Collège of pataphysics: Roger Grenier, a writer and journalist, Michel Arrivé, a writer and linguist, and Siné, a cartoonist, known for his publications in *Charlie Hebdo*.⁴⁵⁴ Perhaps the traces of the pataphysical network are not as immediately recognizable as those of such renown institutions as the Académie française or the CNRS; nevertheless, they are increasingly visible in public media, ready to be recognized by those who look for them.

If despite the above described expansion in the new millennium, the Collège still remains relatively unknown, in the recent years echoes of its modes of work and methods of investigation have sparked general interest. The following questions sound like they could be hypotheses for articles from the *Viridis Candela* journal: “What if a sculptor and a kite surfer worked together to rethink how we harness the power of the wind? Or if an aerospace engineer and a fashion designer teamed up to bring internet to everyone with balloons?” Yet, these are examples given by Google X, a company founded in 2010 by Google to carry out radically creative research in order to come up with technologies of which no one has ever dreamed.⁴⁵⁵ In November 2017, Derek Thompson, a senior editor at *The Atlantic* published an in-depth essay presenting X’s

⁴⁵⁴ “L’écritain et résistant Roger Grenier est mort,” *Disparitions*, *Le Monde*, updated August 11, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2017/11/08/l-ecrivain-roger-grenier-est-mort_5212234_3382.html; “L’écritain Roger Grenier est décédé à 98 ans,” *Actualité*, *Le Figaro*, updated August 11, 2017, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2017/11/08/97001-20171108FILWWW00318-l-ecrivain-roger-grenier-est-decede-a-98-ans.php>; “Mort de l’écritain et linguiste Michel Arrivé,” *Disparitions*, *Le Monde*, updated April 5, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2017/04/05/mort-de-l-ecrivain-et-linguiste-michel-arrive_5106553_3382.html; “Siné, du gamin de Belleville au dessinateur incorrigible,” *Disparitions*, *Le Monde*, updated May 6, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2016/05/06/sine-du-gamin-de-belleville-au-dessinateur-incorrigible_4914678_3382.html.

⁴⁵⁵ “About: What We Do? Who We Are? How We Do It?” X Development LLC, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://x.company/about/>.

history and day-to-day operations following his exclusive tour of the premises and interviews with employees. After becoming familiar with the company's ecosystem, Thompson states that "X is perhaps the only company on the planet where regular investigation into the absurd is encouraged, and even required."⁴⁵⁶ If X is, indeed, the only business entity incorporating the absurd in its model of work, it certainly is not the only or even the first institution that have combined the absurd with science – the Collège de 'Pataphysique has been doing it for over half a century.

Google X is a self-described "moonshot factory."⁴⁵⁷ Moonshots are ideas proposed to solve important and pressing problems in the world, ideas that often seem unthinkable or impossible, just like the pataphysical "imaginary solutions." Exemplary moonshot projects by Google X are Project Loon, the building a network of balloons populating the higher parts of the stratosphere designed to deliver internet connection to remote areas; Project Wing, designing a drone delivery system; or Waymo, a project started in 2009 that in 2017 does not seem so unthinkable anymore – designing self-driving cars.⁴⁵⁸ The main difference between the imaginary solutions of Google X and those of the Collège is that the former commits to the utilitarianism of their work and ultimately operates for profit, and the latter insists on its research being "inutilous." Unlike X's, it is not the Collège's principal mission to bring their imaginary solutions to life, but the group does not preclude such outcomes. A case in point here is Gérard Berry and his computer science solutions inspired by pataphysics. Thompson suggests that

⁴⁵⁶ Derek Thompson, "Google X and the Science of Radical Creativity," *The Atlantic*, November 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/x-google-moonshot-factory/540648/>.

⁴⁵⁷ "About: What We Do? Who We Are? How We Do It?" X Development LLC, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://x.company/about/>.

⁴⁵⁸ "Projects," X Development LLC, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://x.company/projects/>.

coming up with moonshots constitutes a science of radical creativity, and I contend that such an approach to science is not X's original invention.

A diverse network of specialists representing various disciplines and backgrounds is at the core of work methodology of both the Collège and Google X. To emphasize the apparent element of absurdity of X's methods of work, Thompson opens his essay in a joking manner: "A snake-robot designer, a balloon scientist, a liquid-crystals technologist, an extradimensional physicist, a psychology geek, an electronic-materials wrangler, and a journalist walk into a room."⁴⁵⁹ The brainstorming meeting that all those specialists attended, however, was not a joke. What Thompson witnessed was a gathering of the Rapid Evaluation Team, a team that investigates proposed projects and uses the expertise of its members to assess their feasibility from as many creative angles as they can. The collection of the represented scientific fields and the way in which their representatives enrich each other's perspective and learn from one another resembles pataphysical networking, where experts representing the humanities, the arts, but also sciences work and publish side by side. Another analogy that brings both groups together is their aura of secrecy. Thompson describes X as "extremely secretive," as "[t]he company won't share its budget or staff numbers with investors, and it's typically off-limits to journalists as well."⁴⁶⁰ Just like the core Collège does not go out of its way to convince new recruits to join the group, Google X is not trying to promote itself by overly advertising its projects or their effectiveness. In both cases, I argue, the institutions choose for their work to speak for itself.

Finally, an unexpected point that, in my mind, brings the Collège and X together is their creative construction and implementation of temporality in their work process. I have

⁴⁵⁹ Thompson, "Google X and the Science of Radical Creativity."

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

demonstrated the ways in which the Collège approaches time and imagines it not as a linear progression from the past, through the present and towards the present, but frequently projects alternative temporalities by collapsing and folding various parts of the temporal axis onto each other. Google X displays a similar flexibility in terms of imagining various temporal perspectives of their project. X’s employees are encouraged to think the present and the future concurrently: “Rapid Eval’s job to apply a kind of future-perfect analysis to every potential project: If this idea succeeds, what *will have been* the challenges? If it fails, what *will have been* the reasons?”⁴⁶¹ Thus, the evaluation team does not provide a linear analysis of how the project should be carried out from the present towards the future, but they assume the future perspective in place of the present one. Moreover, Thompson describes the X’s headquarters as a space providing a look not into the future, but into several alternative futures:

Inside X’s Palo Alto headquarters, artifacts of projects and prototypes hang on the walls, as they might in a museum—an exhibition of alternative futures. A self-driving car is parked in the lobby. Drones shaped like Jedi Starfighters are suspended from the rafters. Inside a three-story atrium, a large screen renders visitors as autonomous vehicles would see them—pointillist ghosts moving through a rainbow-colored grid.⁴⁶²

The company’s headquarters provide a space in which the imaginary solutions that are not yet realized, are boldly displayed in a “what-if” image showing several ways in which the reality could unfold if they were to be a part of it.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

Such a display of alternative future resembles an imaginary museum of uchronias, described by Stéphane Mahieu in the 20th volume of the *Correspondancier du Collège de 'Pataphysique*. The fictional *Musée des uchronies* is an archive of texts, maps and other artifacts presenting alternative histories proving that the version of past events assumed as the only truth can be flexible. The narrator of the story speaks of the official version of history as follows: “Le réel communément admis, me disais-je alors, n'est qu'une convention, une simple formule de politesse qui n'engage à rien. Il suffirait qu'un nombre suffisant de personnes modifient les conditions du consentement - les convenances en somme - pour qu'il bascule ou se métamorphose.”⁴⁶³ If alternative histories can be devised when a group of people joins forces to defy conventions and assumptions, so can alternative futures. As I have demonstrated, Google X works towards showing not what the world is, but what it could be, which echoes Jarry's definition of pataphysics: “Elle [...] expliquera l'univers supplémentaire à celui-ci; ou moins ambitieusement décrira un univers que l'on peut voir et que peut-être l'on doit voir à la place du traditionnel [...]”⁴⁶⁴ The differences between Google X and the Collège de 'Pataphysique are obvious and cannot go unnoticed. While the former focuses on profit-generating, marketable, utilitarian scientific solutions, the latter gravitates towards the cultivation of art in the intellectual spirit of human sciences. Nevertheless, the parallels in the ways both groups organize their work, the manners of networking, and the principles guiding their creativity are striking. Both X and the Collège seem to have strong philosophies at their core and these philosophies overlap. Whereas Google X presents not only their inventions but also its work methods as groundbreaking innovation, the Collège has promoted similar investigation tools for years, which

⁴⁶³ Stéphane Mahieu, “Le Musée des uchronies,” *Le Correspondancier du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 20 (2012): 47.

⁴⁶⁴ Alfred Jarry, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll* (Lexington: FB Editions, 2015), 15.

proves that the latter group does not constitute an irrelevant oddity, but that it has the potential to significantly affect and enrich highly influential science-based entities. If the future of the Collège de 'Pataphysique is uncertain, it is so by design, as thus devised expansion model requiring the group's research to remain "inutilous" promotes growth in the present moment and openness to the potentialities of the future.

6.0 CONCLUSION

January 15, 2015 was the day of the Bernard Verlhac's funeral, a French cartoonist better known by his pseudonym Tignous. Verlhac was killed in the terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, where he had been a long-term staff contributor. Press photos show that his funeral service became a public event. Many of the attendees were public figures, and we can see that Verlhac's otherwise plain coffin was abundantly decorated with drawings by his friends, which included surviving fellow cartoonists and other artists. A closer look reveals a familiar detail: a spiral drawn on the side of his coffin. The spiral is accompanied by the date of the event according to the Pataphysical Calendar and by Fernando Arrabal's signature. A beautiful token of friendship on the part of Arrabal, the Collège de 'Pataphysique also framed this gesture as a pataphysical reflection on the tragedy and on the spirit of solidarity that followed.⁴⁶⁵ A year later, at the beginning of 2016, an attentive moviegoer could spot the presence of a spiral that was etched on the canteen belonging to Hugh Glass, a fictional character played by Leonardo DiCaprio in the then-newly-released *The Revenant* (2015). Numerous fans and critics of the movie took to their blogs to analyze and explain the symbolism of the spiral, connecting it to the World Pantheist

⁴⁶⁵ In the third volume of the *Publicateur*, Bolivar Tiremine explains that the spirit of solidarity with the victims of the attack, embodied in the "je suis Charlie" movement, was pataphysical in nature. By declaring "je suis Charlie," the crowds wanted to convey their support for the victims, but instead they identified with Charles de Gaulle, even though unconsciously, as it is the diminutive form of the French general's first name that was adopted as the name of the satirical magazine. See Bolivar Tiremine, "Sous-commission des attentats," *Publicateur du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 3 (2015): 90.

Movement, God, spirituality, the concept of evolution and growth, and so forth.⁴⁶⁶ While all these hypotheses have merit, the first-hand account of what the spiral means in *The Revenant* reveals that the source of inspiration came from none other than the Collège de ‘Pataphysique. In interviews, Arrabal explained that Alejandro G. Iñárritu, the film’s director, co-producer and co-writer, had told him the spiral on the canteen is an homage to the pataphysical *gidouille*. Iñárritu became familiar with the symbol via the Ordre de la Grande Gidouille, a club within the Collège that gathers the most faithful and devoted pataphysicians and to which the director has desired to belong.⁴⁶⁷ Both stories provide examples of the ways in which the Collège or its followers materially mark the group’s presence in the contemporary world, in France, but also internationally. The symbol of a spiral, while used by the group internally to accompany its seals and signatures, is also used in the outside world as a tag expressing allegiance or a way to claim pataphysical interest in events, phenomena and ideas. Seemingly unimportant, it is recognizable to those who are in the know.

My dissertation presented a detailed historical account of the circumstances of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique’s founding, as well as its expansion and connections to other groups,

⁴⁶⁶ For examples of such analyses see Rosette Delacroix, “*The Revenant* Decoded,” *Rosette Delacroix: The Truth is in the Code* (blog), April 15, 2016, <http://rosettedelacroix.com/?p=1795>; Brian Jasper, “‘God is a Squirrel’: The Symbolism of *The Revenant* Explained,” *Movies* (blog), *Arch City Studio*, January 14, 2016, <http://www.archcitystudio.com/movies/god-is-a-squirrel-the-symbolism-of-the-revenant-explained/>; Loren Coleman, “Revenant’s Spiral, Amazing Angel, and Other Mazes,” *Twilight Language* (blog), February 7, 2016, <https://copycateffect.blogspot.com/2016/02/Kotze-Maze.html>.

⁴⁶⁷ The confession was reported by Sergejs Polanskis, researcher at the Daugavpils University in Latvia, who has conducted several interviews with Arrabal. See Sergejs Polanskis, “Concept of Pataphysics: Fom Jarry to Arrabal” (3rd International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts, SGEM 2016, Albena, Bulgaria, 2016), <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/308168628>. The name and organization of the Ordre de la Grande Gidouille adopted and developed by the Collège, were inspired, again, by Alfred Jarry, who had described such a circle in “*Almanach du Père Ubu illustré*” (1899).

such as the Oulipo and the Mouvement Panique. It also provided examples of how pataphysical philosophy informs and guides artistic creation and scientific ingenuity. In short, my project laid out constitutive elements of the meanings hidden behind the spiral symbol chosen to represent the group. A thorough examination of pataphysics's origins as Jarry's imaginary science allowed me to track how various groups have adopted the philosophy and cultivated its principles each in their own manner. In the process it became evident that there are numerous misconceptions deeply ingrained in existing academic and popular discourses about the Collège and pataphysics in general. These include reducing pataphysics to absurdity and grotesqueness or taking a dismissive and infantilizing attitude when the group is mentioned. I hope above all else that this dissertation has helped to correct some of these misperceptions. Some of the theoretical concepts borrowed from contemporary affect theorists, such as Massumi, Anderson and Leys, helped me demonstrate how elements of pataphysical philosophy have been practically implemented in the creative processes of authors such as Queneau, Vian, Perec, Calvino, Jodorowsky and others. Furthermore, I explained the nature of the strong bonds between the three artistic groups, thus charting an extensive system of connections between artists who circulated across the groups and performed collaborative work for the Collège. Finally, I provided examples of the philosophy's fulfilment in film via the Mouvement Panique, as well as other media taken on by the workshops of potential "x." My analysis has demonstrated that, against all odds, pataphysics of the Collège is not condemned to be associated only with literature, despite the community's strong ties with literary milieus.

A detailed historical study of the three groups, the circumstances of their establishment and the directions in which they developed revealed that they drew inspiration, consciously or not, from the pataphysical tradition. This history also allowed me to paint an informed picture of

the Collège de ‘Pataphysique and to present the group’s activities today with an eye towards showing why it might be relevant in the contemporary intellectual and artistic context. Currently, the Collège constitutes a transnational intellectual network. While still centered in France, it branches out through numerous foreign institutes to promote pataphysics and its potential internationally. While most of these institutes are strewn across Europe, with strong representation in the UK through the London Institute of ‘Pataphysics, the home affiliation of the current Vice-Curator Tanya Peixoto, Jarry’s imaginary science through the Collège has sowed pataphysical seeds also across the Americas and even Asia.⁴⁶⁸ Further still, the pataphysical network of influences goes well beyond institutions officially affiliated with the Collège and trickles down to independent endeavors. In the United States alone, there are instances of fascination with pataphysics yielding concrete projects, including the League of Imaginary Scientists and the Musée Patamécanique. The former is a Los Angeles-based collective that brings together the creativity of artists and scientists and performs experiments with everyday objects.⁴⁶⁹ The Museum of Patamechanics is located in Bristol, Rhode Island, and it is described as a cabinet of curiosities, an automaton theater and a venue of immersive performance.⁴⁷⁰ The extensiveness of the web of pataphysical influences, which now includes not only foreign counterparts of the organization model of the French Collège, but also a multitude of private and independent projects, shows that indeed the pataphysical tradition has gained international visibility.

⁴⁶⁸ The most remote branches of the international network of institutes associated with the Collège are ones of Argentina and China.

⁴⁶⁹ For more information see “Who is The League of Imaginary Scientists?” the League of Imaginary Scientists, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://imaginaryscience.org/about/>.

⁴⁷⁰ For more information see “Pay No Attention to That Man behind the Curtain,” Musée Patamécanique, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://www.museepata.org/about1>.

Moreover, the initial organization and assumptions regarding the Collège's modes of work allowed the group to evolve into a community across a great variety of disciplines. Such diversity fosters the belief that dialogue between these fields of inquiry is a condition for freedom of thought. While it is true that the Collège started off as a literary circle, despite its declarations to the contrary, it has systematically displayed its frustration with the prevalence of literature and literary analysis in its discussions. Methodical work that grew out of that dissatisfaction, led the group to inch towards real interdisciplinarity in the new millennium. The contemporary interdisciplinarity of the Collège spans the arts, but also the humanities and the sciences. When it comes to artistic endeavors, it becomes apparent when one looks at the variety of public projects by workshops of potential "x," groups that for the Collège represent spaces of interaction and play with outside audiences. The Collège's journal *Viridis Candela*, and more precisely its post-occultation cycles, *Carnets trimestriels*, *Correspondancier* and *Publicateur*, is where pataphysical representatives of the humanities, sciences and social sciences meet. The journal serves as a shared space for contributors and readers interested in applying pataphysical modes of inquiry to established sources of knowledge based on universal laws. The Collège still remains a relatively hermetic circle, without a proactive agenda for reaching out and collaborating with other institutions, artists or scientists. Furthermore, it continues to insist on its research being "inutilous," i.e. carried out without a utilitarian or economic goal in mind. However, my analysis shows that pataphysicians have the potential to contribute productively to developments entailing concrete and measurable advancement of science and technology. With the example of Gérard Berry, an expert in information technology and the leader of a team that devised an ingenious programming language called Esterel, I showed that the pataphysical approach to research can be crucial in finding solutions that require creative flexibility *vis-à-vis*

existing knowledge. Finally, I juxtaposed the exploits of the Collège with the uncannily comparable methods and modes of work adopted by Google X, a secretive research and development facility specializing in technological solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems experienced around the world. Through this comparison, I demonstrated the relevance and the significance of pataphysical philosophy, albeit unacknowledged, in the contemporary world.

As for the Collège's future, it is uncertain by design. In the twenty-first century the group has one primary goal that has not changed since its founding: to promote pataphysics in this universe and in all other parallel ones, as stipulated by the Statutes.⁴⁷¹ The Collège's internal organization is based on maximum freedom and openness, a design that seeks to avoid stunting creativity, but that also prevents pataphysicians from formulating specialized goals. Pataphysicians believe in the principle of equivalence, according to which hypotheses cannot be ranked or hierarchized. In their view, all hypotheses should be considered as equally valid and important. Because of this belief, they refuse to dismiss certain solutions as not sufficiently useful, beneficial or lucrative. This approach effectively prevents the Collège from becoming a utilitarian, or even for-profit institution in the future. At the same time, such a mindset guarantees that the group will remain a space of freedom of thought and an incubator of creativity that could inspire someone else to translate it into research that brings tangible, useful and profitable outcomes. It is true that today the Collège is becoming more and more noticeable to outsiders as compared to its early years. Due to this increasing visibility, I would speculate that pataphysical methods of inquiry, based in a mistrust towards "established" knowledge and embrace of imaginativeness and the irrational, will gradually become more and more

⁴⁷¹ Collège de 'Pataphysique, *Statuts* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet Numérique, 2013), titre I, article 3, paragraphe 2.

recognizable and useful to artists but also researchers and scientists who will no longer dismiss them as absurd.

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