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<http://www.skenejournal.it>
info@skenejournal.it

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ALEXANDRE KOUTCHEVSKY*

Repetition as Zoom Effect. A Mechanism of Short Writing Played at the Level of Words¹

Abstract

The proliferation of short theatrical forms in France has never stopped growing, especially since the 1980s. This strong presence of short texts in French theatrical panorama is not simply due to the amelioration of writing, production, and circulation conditions, but is a symptom of a profound evolution of contemporary dramatic writings. For many of these authors, brevity offers a range of exhilarating tools which allow for the invention of new dramaturgical forms. If one admits that brevity is in the first place a question of style rather than of format, what is especially at stake for the authors of short forms is to achieve a maximum degree of signification with a minimum amount of words. It is therefore necessary to aim at economizing the means while, at the same time, attaining the highest efficacy (at the level of sense, of dramatic, poetic, narrative power, etc.). The zoom process, which aims at a slow-motion unfolding of sense to our consciousness, inscribes itself into a dimension of maximum profitability and parsimony. Accordingly, this article analyses the repetition of the word “fissures” [“cracks”] employed as zoom effect in Roland Fichet’s short piece *Fissures* (1998).

Un seul mot peut vous mettre sur la voie,
un deuxième vous trouble, le troisième vous met en panique.
À partir du quatrième, c’est la confusion absolue.
(Ionesco)

[One single word can start you off,
a second one troubles you, a third one gets you into a panic.
From the fourth one onwards, it’s utter confusion.]

In France, short drama has been sailing before the wind for some thirty

* Playwright and director – alexandrekoutchevsky@yahoo.fr

¹ This article is a revised version of a few passages taken from my PhD thesis in theatre studies, entitled *À l’échelle des mots, l’écriture théâtrale brève en France 1980-2007* [*At the Level of Words: Short Theatre Writing in France, 1980-2007*]. That analysis moved from the reading of more than three hundred texts written by over one hundred authors. These texts are available in print and have been represented at least once by professional companies.

years on both the page and the stage. The significant presence of short texts in the French theatrical panorama is not simply due to a generalized amelioration of writing, production, and circulation conditions, but is also the symptom of a profound evolution of contemporary dramatic writing. Since the 1980s, the multiplication of short forms has never stopped growing and this trend does not seem to be fading in any way. Therefore it is not a question of a passing fashion, of a flair of French theatre for short forms, but of a durable and profound drive.

Who are the authors of short dramatic pieces? A generation may be identified, namely the one we ascribe to the 'return of the authors' who started to be known from the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. They are Philippe Minyana, Noëlle Renaude, Didier-Georges Gabily, Roland Fichet, Christian Rullier, Catherine Anne, Michel Azama, and Enzo Cormann, among the others), although this group may include also younger authors such as Xavier Durringer, Sophie Lannefranque, and Fabrice Melquiot, to name just a few.

This article will investigate the stylistic result of repetition as zoom effect by focusing on the verbal texture of the script of a short piece by Roland Fichet which appears to be particularly suitable for exploring this specific mechanism. A larger and varied corpus of texts might have been selected with this aim, but I chose to concentrate on the detailed analysis of only one text in order to let the linguistic effects at the level of words emerge as more comprehensible and more perceptible.

In this article the word 'short' will be used for the form and 'brief' for the style. If we admit that briefness is above all a question of style rather than of size, the main challenge that the authors of short forms face is how to mean a lot by using very few words. They need to spare their means and, at the same time, to attain the highest degree of efficaciousness (at the level of meaning, of dramatic, poetic, and narrative power, etc.). Two main procedures, each in its own right, are bound to reach a maximum of effectiveness and economy: zoom and acceleration. These two effects – which constitute the authentic skeleton of short texts – are embedded into writing strategies based on the management of speed in both delivering information and making images, words, sentences, etc. appear. If this management of speed is apparent with regard to the acceleration of the fabula (see the *peripeteia* and other dramatic turns), what happens at the level of sentences is that the procedure that allows us to zoom out a word or an expression, suddenly focusing our attention on a specific area of the text, slows down our comprehension of its meaning. That is why the zoom belongs to a writing strategy based on speed modulations. However,

leaving aside a discussion of the effects of acceleration,² in this article I will rather concentrate on the zoom effect.

The zoom effect consists in making a word or an expression progressively appear throughout the text, somehow arresting its becoming, as it is proper of that state to “duck the present” (“esquiver le présent”, Deleuze 1969: 9). By looking at the scripts of these short plays, one realizes how the author ‘slows down’ the readers or even causes a short pause in the process of reception, or a stasis of sense, as it were. This type of effect relies especially on a maximized investment of the processes of connotation and evocation; the zoom is characteristic of a poetic use of language, and indeed authors have to introduce a rupture or a cleavage in the flux of the text in order to deploy a whole range of meanings. Creating the conditions in which the words may develop their entire signifying potential can set off the zoom effect.

The zoom process is characteristic of a poetic use of language on which we should briefly dwell before going into a more detailed analysis. Indeed, when approaching short dramatic texts, we are immediately faced with what Peter Handke would style as “la possibilité du poème” [“the poem’s possibility”]:

Tout s’est un peu brouillé, confie Handke à Gamper, les frontières entre le drame, le poème, le récit: dans mes derniers travaux, les frontières ne sont plus aussi nettement dessinées, je me crois capable, ou j’exige de moi-même, d’unir dans ce que j’écris la trame du poème ou la possibilité du poème, l’élan lyrique et aussi l’élément dramatique. (qtd in Sarrazac 1999: 200-1)

[Everything gets a little muddy, Handke confided to Gamper, the boundaries among drama, poem, and narration; in my latest works, the boundaries are not clearly outlined anymore, I believe I am able, or I expect from myself, to unify in my writings the poem’s plot or the poem’s possibility, the lyrical momentum and also the dramatic element.]

This “poem’s possibility” influences the short form. Whatever epoch we are dealing with, looking at short texts at the level of words inevitably brings forth the poetic question. However, we need to point out in the first place that the short forms we are discussing here belong to the

² The effects of acceleration include all those processes that – as Benito Pélegrin would dub them – we may call “figures du silence” (1984: 66-7) [“figures of silence”]. All figures related to implied meanings are part of these processes of acceleration that rely on an exasperation of the functioning of the ‘outside-text’. These effects result into an acceleration of the action.

general context of the French contemporary dramatic writings in which the poetic use of language is extremely widespread, to the point that we could ask ourselves, with Geneviève Jolly and Alexandra Moreira Da Silva, whether we should be talking of “poème dramatique” [“poetic drama”] in order to define these texts that intimately mix dramatic and poetic aspects:

Il faut ... préciser que le poème dramatique ne se confond ni avec le théâtre versifié, ni avec le “poème dramatique” de Corneille, ni avec la “poésie dramatique” qu’analyse Diderot ... S’il ne constitue pas un genre propre, le poème dramatique renvoie à des formes spécifiques rompant avec le drame absolu ainsi qu’avec une conception illusionniste du théâtre ... On peut le considérer comme l’une des manifestations de la crise du drame: se voulant contestataire, et s’écrivant contre un certain théâtre, il est en recherche d’une autre théâtralité. (Jolly and Moreira Da Silva 2001: 90)

[We should ... specify that the dramatic poem neither overlaps with verse drama, nor with Corneille’s ‘poème dramatique’, nor with the ‘poésie dramatique’ analysed by Diderot ... If it does not constitute a genre on its own, the dramatic poem refers to specific forms that move away from absolute drama as well as from an illusionistic conception of theatre ... We could consider it as one of the manifestations of the crisis of drama: wishing to be dissenting, and being written against a certain theatre, it is after another theatricality.]

We could therefore interpret this “possibility of the poem” as the sign of the research for another theatricality. Yet, when applied to short forms, this expression, “possibilité du poème”, alludes at least a couple of different realities: to the (poetic) format and to the (poetic) style. Thus, browsing through collections such as Roland Fichet’s *Micropièces. Fenêtres et fantômes*³ [*Microdramas. Windows and Ghosts*] or Xavier Durringer’s *Histoires d’hommes*⁴ [*Stories about Men*], what strikes us are the blocks of words gathered in heaps, often laid out as free verse on the page without a specified locutor. At a first glance, what we see makes us think of a collection of poems. At a second glance, reading these texts – especially the shortest ones – arouses the feeling that we are dealing with poetry resurfaces. What characterizes these dramas in a poetic sense then is a certain writing style in which we observe a great number of features traditionally

³ See, for instance, *Loterie, Sac, and Yeux* [*Lottery, Bag, and Eyes*], four microdramas occupying the same page (see Fichet 2006: 26).

⁴ See, for instance, fragment 12 (Durringer 2003: 30), or 15 (*ibid.*: 34), or 17 (*ibid.*: 37), or even 18, 19, and 20 (*ibid.*: 38-9).

related to poetic language: the effectiveness of the words' musicality, the multiplication of connexions, connotations, images, only to name a few among the most noteworthy aspects. Philippe Minyana has remarked then that brevity has pushed him towards a practice belonging to poetic writing:

La brièveté oblige à une sélection serrée pour faire comme un répertoire de paroles emblématiques, comme des sentences, des titres, c'est presque un poème. Beckett l'a fait bien avant nous: sélectionner une phrase qui ressort plus de l'art du poème que de l'art dramatique. C'est, je pense, le même plaisir qu'aura le poète à remplir sa page puis à passer à un autre poème, même s'il a des thèmes récurrents. C'est une façon de conduire autrement l'imagerie théâtrale. (Koutchevsky 2006b)

[Brevity requires a strict selection in order to obtain a sort of repertoire of emblematic words, such as maxims, titles, it is almost a poem. Beckett did that well before us: selecting a sentence that is related to poetic rather than dramatic art. It is, I think, the same pleasure a poet would have in filling his page and carry on to the next poem, even though he works on recurrent themes. It is a different way of conducting theatrical imagery.]

Minyana's point of view can be valuably completed by Matéi Visniec's who further underlines the mutual permeability of these two kinds of short forms: poems and short dramas:

Avant de passer à l'écriture dramatique j'ai écrit des milliers de poèmes ... Je voulais accéder à l'essentiel, au mystère des mots. C'est ainsi que j'ai appris à apprivoiser la forme courte. Car mes poèmes devenaient des petites histoires, des scénarios ... Ce sont dans ces 'embryons' que j'ai puisé plus tard mon théâtre. Je me suis rendu compte que mes poèmes étaient des courtes pièces de théâtre en puissance, et cela me fascinait de les développer. (Visniec 2000: 14)

[Before moving on to dramatic writing I wrote thousands of poems ... I wanted to achieve the essential, the mystery of words. Thus I learned how to domesticate the short form. My poems became little histories, scripts ... It is from these 'embryos' that later on I drew my theatre. I realized that my poems were potential short dramas, and this fascinated me into developing them.]

For reasons of both format and writing style, short dramas and poems do have a lot in common and that is why we will rely here on tools which are normally employed in the analysis of poetry in order to investigate the zoom effect.

Choosing Words and Placing Them into a Contextual Dependency

In photography, cinema, and television, zoom indicates a “variable focus lens made of a fixed and a movable part whose shifting modifies the focal length” (*OED*, ‘zoom’, 2a). The word ‘zoom’ comes from English and is defined as a “shot in which the range is rapidly shortened to close-up without loss of focus” (*ibid.*). This second definition gives a rather precise idea of the processes we can observe in the texts we will investigate here. Zooming a word or an expression may be translated in terms of shortening the range of vision, of focusing on a specific object or of employing the necessary speed to perform such an operation. The cinematographic zoom aims at putting a certain portion of what is visible under the eyes of the spectator. Similarly textual zoom aims at isolating one word or one expression among the others in order to emphasize it, as it can amplify its connotations and expand its semantic field. Therefore, making the reader linger on one word is functional to the comprehension of the whole range of meanings of that same word. Clément Rosset has summarized the result of such an operation:

Cet art de faire parler un mot plusieurs fois à la fois, dans plusieurs sens différents au sein d’une même phrase, confère à celle-ci une sorte de richesse musicale, et d’épaisseur harmonique, en même temps qu’il rend possible un supplément de sens intellectuel. (1995: 56-7)

[This art of making one word speak many times at a time and with many different senses within one same sentence, endows it [the sentence] with a sort of musical richness and harmonious thickness and, at the same time, it enhances its intellectual meaning.]

Playwright Philippe Minyana has noted how “la brièveté l’oblige à une sélection serrée” [“brevity obliges him to carry out a strict selection”] – alluding to a selection of words – since, as quoted above, he has to produce something “comme un répertoire de paroles emblématiques, comme des sentences, des titres” (Koutchevsky 2006b) [“like a repertoire of emblematic words, such as sentences or titles”]. Many points in this quotation deserve to be highlighted and developed as they help throw light on both zooming and decelerating as the tools of brief style. To start with, the question of verbal selection is crucial; as Rosset points out, “le choix des mots est affaire sérieuse. Il signale toujours une certaine forme d’adoption – ou de refus – des choses, d’intelligence ou de mésintelligence de la réalité” (1995: back cover blurb) [“The choice of words is a serious

matter. It always gestures towards a certain form of adoption – or of refusal – of things, of understanding or misunderstanding of reality”].

We may say that the importance given to the choice of words is a prerogative of all authors who are truly committed to literature. Yet, it is rather obvious that the choice of ‘good words’, of the most ‘appropriate’ ones, keeping in mind the objective one wishes to achieve, becomes crucial in short forms. The shorter the text, that is, the lower the number of words that composes it, the higher the importance of each word; indeed the receiver will have to make the maximum use of what the author supplies. Minyana confirms that this effort is necessary and consubstantial to the writing of short forms:

C’est vers la densité que je me dirige dans mes formes brèves. Tu es obligé d’avoir une acuité supplémentaire, de cadrer davantage ton récit. C’est excitant et vertigineux de savoir qu’à une réplique près le fragment peut être en péril. (Koutchevsky 2006b)

[In short forms, I head for density. You must have some supplementary acuity and frame your account. It is exciting and dizzying to knowing that if one cue is missing the fragment may be in danger.]

If there is something dangerous in this exciting dizziness it is perhaps because short forms, when pushed to their extreme consequences, refer the author (and the attentive receiver, who is responsive to this brevity) to “la peur de crouler avec tous les mots” (Cioran 1980: 15) [“the fear of collapsing with all the words”]. As Emil Cioran has remarked: “Ne cultivent l’aphorisme que ceux qui ont connu la peur au milieu des mots, cette peur de crouler avec tous les mots”. (ibid.) [Only those who have known fear among words, this fear of collapsing with all the words, cultivate aphorisms.]

Therefore the chosen words become “emblematic”, as Minyana has it. They tend to assume the signifying form of a “sentence” or of a “title”, that is, the meaning that they convey shines, asserts, and establishes itself as a belief, and carries all its weight within the sentence. The authors of short forms create the conditions for an optimal setup of the meaning of the words they wish to foreground. Since their texts are composed of a small number of words, many of them will pursue this operation. One should recall how Michel Collot defined the objective of the majority of these procedures: it is a matter of “faire culminer la dépendance contextuelle du mot”:

L’un des traits principaux de l’organisation poétique du sens paraît être

... de faire culminer la dépendance contextuelle du mot. Les relations qui déterminent la signification du mot débordent en poésie le cadre logique et syntaxique de la phrase, et s'établissent au sein d'unités prosodiques et/ou typographiques comme le vers, la strophe, ou le poème, et jouent aussi bien sur les signifiants que les signifiés. Il en résulte à la fois une spatialisation et une multiplication des rapports intervenant dans la réévaluation sémantique de chaque mot. L'espace ici fait sens; les mots signifient par position. (Collot 1989: 225)

[One of the main features of the poetic organization of meaning seems to be ... climaxing the contextual dependency of words. The relationships that determine the meaning of a word overflow, in poetry, the logical and syntactical frame of the sentence and establish themselves within prosodic and/or typographic unities such as verses, stanzas, or the poem itself, and play on both the signifier and the signified. This brings forth both a spatialization and a multiplication of the relations occurring within the semantic re-evaluation of each word. Thus space makes sense; words signify through their position.]

In addition to a rigorous choice of words, an operation one should particularly rely on in short forms is this maximization of the contextual dependency of words. If Collot applied it to poetry, short dramas also profit from being thus investigated. As happens in poetry, in short theatrical pieces "les relations qui déterminent la signification du mot ... s'établissent au sein d'unités prosodiques et/ou typographiques ... et jouent aussi bien sur les signifiants que sur les signifiés." (ibid.) ["The relationships that determine the meaning of a word ... establish themselves within prosodic and/or typographic unities ... and play on both the signifier and signified."]

This way of writing, riveted to words, recalls what Michel Vinaver – who greatly influenced Philippe Minyana – once remarked:

Si l'on se passionne pour l'écriture, à un moment, n'est-ce pas, elle crée un plaisir. Eh bien, pour moi, ce plaisir gît uniquement dans la micro-description, pas du tout dans la construction d'un plan d'intrigue ou d'un plan symbolique, d'un plan rationnel entre plusieurs niveaux d'écriture. Le plaisir est au ras du langage. Cela se relie au fait que l'écriture est une démarche de connaissance à tâtons, non de révélation. L'écriture n'est pas un acte de dévoilement; elle est un acte de fouille. (Vinaver 1998: 287)

[If one develops a passion for writing, at a certain point it brings pleasure, doesn't it? Oh well, in my opinion, this pleasure lies exclusively in the micro-description and not in the least in the construction of a plot or of

a symbolical or rational outline among several levels of writing. Pleasure lies at the level of language. This is connected with the fact that writing is like groping one's way to knowledge, and not getting it through revelation. Writing is not a matter of unveiling, it is a matter of rummaging.]

Expressions such as writing and finding one's pleasure "*au ras du langage*", "*à tâtons*", "handling" (language, in particular) regularly emerge in the authors' discourse too. They refer to writing techniques that do not belong exclusively to short forms – Vinaver refers to drama in general – and yet, when employed in short forms, they assume a crucial importance because of the limitations they are forced to. Thus framed, the effects gain not only visibility but also efficaciousness.

The Repeated Word as "radiating nucleus": Roland Fichet's *Fissures*

Among the many 'word highlighting' effects, one in particular consists in repeating a term or an expression over and over again throughout a text, like a refrain. As Hans-Thies Lehmann has foregrounded, the receiver can be affected by this process since

[a]s duration, a crystallization of time occurs in repetition, a more or less subtle compression and negation of the course of time itself ... On closer inspection, however, even in theatre there is no such thing as repetition. The very position in time of the repeated is different from that the original. We always see something different in what we have seen before. Therefore, repetition is also capable of producing a new attention punctuated by the memory of the preceding events, *an attending to the little differences*. (2006: 156-7)

Conceived as allowing "*an attending to the little differences*", repetition invites to micro-reading. Indeed it is the easiest way to focalize the reader's attention on a particular syntagm, while producing a rhythmic dynamics capable of influencing one's reading. In order to better understand the effects of repetition, it is necessary to limit its examination to the most significant procedures. Thus, textual investigation built upon one word or one expression is a fit starting point for the analysis of the word as the "noyau irradiant" ["radiating nucleus"] within short forms. I have borrowed the expression "noyau irradiant" from a study Suzanne Bernard dedicated to prose poems. She employed it to qualify the modern authors'

tendency to isolate words within a poem and extract them from a sentence:

... on reliera à ce désir d'abolir le temps toute la tendance poétique moderne à donner au mot une importance primordiale — au nom surtout, qui n'est autre chose que le signe et l'évocation de l'objet considéré dans son essence intemporelle. Inséré dans le déroulement d'une phrase, le nom perd en partie cette valeur pour n'être plus qu'un élément d'un ensemble qui prend sa forme progressivement, à travers le cheminement des propositions; mais qu'on l'isole et, retrouvant son autonomie, son éclat propre, il devient un noyau irradiant; il émet librement toutes les suggestions sensorielles ou idéelles que le progrès de la phrase continue rejetait dans l'ombre. (Bernard 1994: 457)

[... we will relate desire to get rid of time to the modern poetic tendency to endow words with a primeval importance – and nouns, in particular, which are nothing but the sign and the evocation of the object in its timeless essence. Included in the development of a sentence, the noun partially loses this value and becomes a mere element in a composition which progressively takes form through the sequence of prepositions; but let us isolate it and, while it recovers its autonomy and proper brightness, it becomes a radiating nucleus; it freely releases all the sensory or ideal suggestions that the continuous progress of the sentence threw back in the shade.]

The short writing form always tries to produce meaning through the smallest linguistic unities and one of its essential tendencies is that of creating both the conditions that would make a word emerge and the possibilities for the optimal deployment of the universe it contains. The dream of short forms (or better their authors' dream) has perhaps been revealed by Francis Ponge:

Chaque mot a beaucoup d'habitudes et de puissances; il faudrait chaque fois les ménager, les employer toutes. Ce serait le comble de la "propriété dans les termes" ... Il faudrait dans la phrase les mots composés à de telles places que la phrase ait un sens pour chacun des sens de chacun de ses termes. (qtd in Collot 1991: 181)

[Each word possesses many habits and potentials; it is matter of managing and employing them all, time after time. This would be the height of "the propriety of terms" ... One would need words to be placed in such positions so that the sentence made sense in every sense of each of its terms.]

It is a fruitful utopia in which all the words of a sentence would exploit the totality of their signifying potential, and yet it is a utopia on which

literary shortness rests. French playwright Roland Fichet would not deny it. Indeed, he is dedicated to this kind of procedure which consists in repeating a word or an expression over and over in order to make it ‘cough up’ its meaning in the same way we make someone ‘cough up’ [‘rendre gorge’] what he or she has taken. Each word contains a world, a plurality of senses and landscapes, and therefore one of the author’s tasks is to extract what it conceals and to illuminate its meaning. In four of his fourteen *Petites comédies rurales* [*Little Rural Comedies*] (1998),⁵ Fichet constantly repeats the same word slightly varying the immediate context in which it appears. Among his *Petites comédies*, *Fissures* [*Cracks*]⁶ is by far the most intriguing piece from the point of view of repetition, which becomes an authentic questioning of words.⁷

Fissures is nine pages long. It is a short traditional drama in that it includes dialogues, actions, a progressing plot, and a *dénouement*. The play is composed of three sequences (or scenes) of equal length (three pages each), indicated only by numbers. As the title of the collection reveals, the action takes place in the countryside; *Fissures* is set in a resort in Bretagne, near the legendary forest of Brocéliande. The first two sequences are set at the city hall (the place is indicated by a stage direction), the second starting after an interval of one year. The last one is set on the lakeshore three hours after the events dramatized in the second sequence. The characters are Milig Le Floch (the city hall secretary), Pierre Pidou, and Aline Kieffer (the environment councillor). As typically happens in short forms, in order to spare time to the full the first sequence starts *in medias res*:

[*Dans la mairie.*]

MILIG LE FLOCH. Répète ce que tu dis.
 PIERRE PIDOU. Des fissures dans les arbres.
 ALINE KIEFFER. Quoi des fissures dans les arbres?
 Quel idiot!
 Des fissures dans les arbres c’est pas d’aujourd’hui.
 (Fichet 1998: 31)

[*At the city hall. // MILIG LE FLOCH. Repeat what you’re saying. // PIERRE*

⁵ *Plus personne* [*No one, no more*] (Fichet 1998: 27-30); *Fissures* [*Cracks*] (ibid.: 31-9); *Mon combat* [*My battle*] (ibid.: 41-3); *Antipodes* (ibid.: 45-9).

⁶ *Fissures* was premiered at La Passerelle, Scène Nationale de Saint-Brieuc Theatre on 17 January 1997 and directed by Roland Fichet; since then it has been staged for over one hundred times.

⁷ The violence suggested by the term ‘questioning’ is not casual here since the author constantly strives to make the words speak.

PIDOU. Cracks in the trees. // ALINE KIEFFER. What cracks in the trees? /
What an idiot! / Cracks in the trees is no news.]

Later on, we find out that Pierre Pidou “met l’œil” [“peers”] into these cracks and “y voit des choses graves” (ibid.: 31) [“sees some serious things in them”], while his behaviour first amuses, then troubles and later annoys Aline Kieffer. What Pierre Pidou sees in the cracks are “des femmes nues blessées au ventre” [“naked women with wounded bellies”] who walk into the Pond of Comper “en aboyant” (ibid.: 32) [“barking”]. Hearing this, Aline Kieffer lectures Pierre Pidou warning him that this would “affoler les estivants” [“throw the holiday-makers into a panic”] and “sans les estivants nous sommes sur la paille” (ibid.: 33) [“without the holiday-maker we’re penniless”]; then, in order to hush him she promises he will win a bicycle at the August fair. Yet, a year later, in the second scene, Pierre Pidou still has not won his bicycle and comes back to the city hall announcing that he now sees “fissures dans les animaux” [“cracks in the animals”] and, once again, this gets on the councillor’s nerves. The year before, because of the rumours about the cracks, she had all the trees cut down in order to calm down the holiday-makers. Since there is no question of killing all the animals, she decides to follow Pierre Pidou and let him show her these famous cracks. The last scene is a dialogue between Milig Le Floch and Pierre Pidou, while Aline Kieffer lies unconscious on the lakeshore in front of them:

PIERRE PIDOU. M’a poussé
l’ai poussée
m’a claqué
l’ai mise à poil et hop dans le lac!

(Ibid.: 37)

[PIERRE PIDOU. She pushed me / I pushed her / She slapped me / I stripped her and there, I threw her in the lake!]

We then learn that Pierre Pidou wanted to “attendre la chienne du lac” [“wait for the bitch of the lake”] but Aline refused, at which he slapped her and thenceforth he “a tout fouillé / tout fouillé les creux / tout zieuté – meme la fourche! –” (ibid.: 38) [“searched everything / searched all the cavities / peeped everywhere – even into the fork! –”], but saw nothing in her: “y’a rien dedans / elle est vide” (ibid.) [“there’s nothing inside / she’s empty”]. The play closes with Pierre Pidou’s questioning Milig Le Floch about his bicycle:

MILIG LE FLOCH. Demain.
 PIERRE PIDOU. Elle aboie.
 MILIG LE FLOCH. T'as de la malice quoique t'en dis
 t'as de la malice, Pierre Pidou.

[ALINE KIEFFER jappe légèrement.]

(Ibid.: 39)

[MILIG LE FLOCH. Tomorrow. // PIERRE PIDOU. She barks. // MILIG LE FLOCH. You've got malice, no matter what you say, / you've got malice, Pierre Pidou. // (ALINE KIEFFER yelps slightly.)]

As should be evident by now, the “radiating nucleus” here is the word “fissures” [“cracks”]. It appears thirteen times in the first scene, nine times in the second, and once in the last scene, which makes a total of twenty-three occurrences in nine pages. Not only does this omnipresence testify to Pierre Pidou’s obsession with it, but also to its being contagious to the other characters, especially to Aline Kieffer. The word runs across the drama text, and even though it appears only once in the last scene, it is still there, weighing heavily in the background, actually bringing the plot to its conclusion. Indeed, Pierre Pidou eventually managed to look through Aline Kieffer’s cracks. How does the word “fissures” move from its first appearance, in the second line of the text, to its virtual graphic disappearance in the last scene? In what sense can we say that it is a “radiating nucleus”?

A “nucleus” is something hard, something difficult to break. The atomic nucleus is the region at the centre of the atom, consisting in protons and neutrons, and the mass of the atom is concentrated almost entirely in it. Comparing a word to the nucleus is making of it the smallest possible significant linguistic unity. We can break a word, cut it up in sounds, still it would “radiates”, which means it would produce radiations, radiate, diffuse... but what? Sense and imagery that contaminate and radiate (here in its transitive meaning) the rest of the text. That word – its meaning, the connotations it suggests – powerfully diffuses in the text as a whole, and in this case, the radiations of a word such as “cracks” can be hardly resisted. It belongs to a family of powerful words, whose signifying and connotative perspectives are varied by the author simply modifying their field of application. Michel Collot thus specified the definition of the word “connotation”:

[Le] sémantisme occasionnel produit par le contexte poétique est de l'ordre de la connotation. Celle-ci peut en effet être définie précisément comme un “trait fluctuant” de signification qui vient au mot de son association

avec d'autres. Cette association connotative peut être ... paradigmatique, mais aussi syntagmatique. ... Du fait de toutes ces relations paradigmatiques ou syntagmatiques, le mot ne cesse de s'absenter de lui-même pour rendre présent un sens qui ne lui appartient pas en propre, mais résulte des rapports complexes de différence et de ressemblance qu'il entretient avec les autres. (1989: 226-7)

[The] occasional semantism produced by the poetic context belongs to the category of connotation. This may indeed be specifically defined as a 'fluctuating feature' of signification which a word derives from its association with other words. This connotative association can be ... paradigmatic, but also syntagmatic ... Due to these same paradigmatic or syntagmatic relations, the word does not stop being itself to convey some other meaning that does not properly belong to it, but results from the complex relationships of difference and similarity that it maintains with the other words.]

In order to vary the meaning of the word, Fichet establishes three associations between the cracks and the objects they affect: cracks in the trees, cracks in the animals, cracks in human beings (in a woman, in this case). The text revolves around this three-stroke range of cracks, and in parallel with this tripartition, the word itself works in turn as a dramatic, poetic, and comic engine. Among these three power fields of expression, the comic is to be intended as a consequence of the other two. Michel Vinaver's assertion with regard to his own dramas may be adapted to the conception and usage of the comic by other authors, especially Roland Fichet, Philippe Minyana, and Noëlle Renaude:

La dimension comique de la pièce, mais aussi sa dimension tragique, et la façon dont l'une s'articule à l'autre, résident dans le rythme, plus que dans telle situation, telle action, telle réplique. Les émotions dont la pièce est porteuse surgissent de correspondances entre tel et tel élément, plutôt que de tel élément particulier. Les émotions surgissent de l'"entre-deux", donc du rythme. C'est par le rythme que la banalité se transcende. C'est par un travail sur le rythme que tout danger de trivialité se dissout. (Vinaver 1998: 20)

[The comic dimension of a play, but also its tragic dimension, and the way in which they relate to each other rest on the rhythm rather than on a specific situation, action or line. The emotions the play conveys arise from the correspondences among the various elements, rather than from a particular one. Emotions arise from the 'in-between', therefore from the rhythm. It is through rhythm that banality is transcended. It is by working on the rhythm that all danger of triviality gets dissolved.]

In *Fissures*, the comic also has a lightening function. Although the dramatized events are rather grim (Aline Kieffer is eventually stripped, beaten, and thrown into the water), the comic shade allows to avoid the pathos. As Fichet has it, “dans la brièveté je sentais mieux quelque chose du côté de la comédie. Les *Petites comédies rurales* sont des petites tragédies, mais dans l’écriture la comédie est en jeu énormément” (Koutchevsky 2006a) [“In shortness I felt it more appropriate to have something on the comic side. The *Little Rural Comedies* are little tragedies, but in writing them comedy plays a huge role.”]

One of the main features of Roland Fichet’s writing relies exactly on this argumentation which we may summarize with the formula: think tragic, write comic. The expression “some cracks [in the trees, in the animals]” stands between comedy and poetry: it is not downright funny and it troubles you before it makes you laugh. It is the engine of the play, in that it multiplies its connotations by varying its fields of applications. The term “cracks” refers to a breach, an opening, a cleft. However, a crack may also signify that the end is near, it is a disturbing omen of destruction. Throughout the text, the author makes this word function (and work as fiction) both in a proper and figurative sense, therefore calling into cause the evidence – or at least a significant echo – of the fact that the announcer of the cracks, Pierre Pidou, is himself cracked, as Aline Kieffer points out to him twice, at the beginning of scenes one and two:

ALINE KIEFFER. Fais pas le zèbre, Pierre Pidou,
 il n’y a pas de fissures dans les arbres,
 dans ta tête oui mais pas dans les arbres
 ...
 tous les êtres vivants sont fissurés, Pierre Pidou,
 même toi.
 Surtout toi.

(Fichet 1998: 32-4)

[ALINE KIEFFER. Don’t play the fool, Pierre Pidou, / there are no cracks in the trees, / in your head maybe, but not in the trees. / . . . / all living beings are cracked, Pierre Pidou, / you too. / Especially you.]

Pierre Pidou is what we would call the village idiot, the simpleton, the half-wit, as his name also suggests.⁸ Yet, he is apparently not as stupid as

⁸ The sound quality of ‘pierre pidou’ endows this name with a slightly ridiculous aspect which is specially conveyed by the close repetition of the ‘p’. “Pidou” makes one

he looks. In a series of lectures on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze analysed the figure of the “idiot” who – he said – embodies:

La puissance de la raison naturelle réduite à soi. Tellement réduite à soi qu'elle est malade. Et pourtant elle a gardé des éclairs. Le prince, l'idiot il ne sait rien. Mais c'est l'homme des présupposés implicites. Il comprend tout. (Deleuze 1980)

[The power of natural reason reduced to itself. So much reduced to itself that it is sick. And yet, it maintains some sparks. The prince, the idiot knows nothing. But he is the man of implicit presuppositions. He understands everything.]

The idiot knows nothing yet understands everything. Thus, at a dramatic level, we may analyse the plot from a twofold perspective with regard to the motivations and actions of this character. At a first reading, he seems to achieve his goals by “messing around”⁹ with the councillor, and making her promise he will get a bicycle, which triggers Milig Le Floch’s comment, repeated three times in the last scene: “T’as de la malice, quoique t’en dis, t’as de la malice, Pierre Pidou” (Fichet 1998: 37, 39) [“You’ve got malice, no matter what you say, you’ve got malice, Pierre Pidou”]. We may therefore suppose that Pierre Pidou has successfully carried out a strategy in order to obtain what he wanted. Talking about cracks in the trees and in the animals, he messes around with Aline Kieffer and earns a bicycle. This is a first possible reading, based on the conflict between the two protagonists (in this perspective, Milig Le Floch is a helper), of whom one succeeds by playing the fool. Yet, there is a second level of interpretation that disturbs and undermines the first one as it rests on the very nature of Pierre Pidou’s announcements. Apparently simple and naive, his declarations about the cracks are fundamentally poetic, and therefore they unsettle and destabilize the action. Rather than a village idiot’s, Pierre Pidou’s words are reminiscent of the Pythia’s: they sound like an oracle’s, mysterious and perfectly clear at the same time, as is his first line: “Des fissures dans les arbres” (ibid.: 31) [“Cracks in the trees”]. The power of this sentence derives from the absence of the verb,

think of a contracted form of ‘petit doux’ (p’tit doux, ‘little sweet one’), which reminds of a nickname and connotes the character as ridiculous and yet good-natured. It is also homophonous of ‘pis doux’, literally ‘sweet tit’, that is, cow pee which adds a country connotation to its double meaning.

⁹ “Did you mess around with her?”, Milig Le Floch asks him on the lakeshore (Fichet 1998: 37).

from the conciseness of its formulation, and from its being at the same time visual, affirmative, and final. As Philippe Minyana had it, brevity pushes towards the “sentence”. Besides, the beginning *in medias res* within which this sentence emerges, definitely reinforces its fascinating capacity:

MILIG LE FLOCH. Répète ce que tu dis.
PIERRE PIDOU. Des fissures dans les arbres

(Ibid.)

[MILIG LE FLOCH. Repeat what you are saying. / PIERRE PIDOU. Cracks in the trees.]

The sentence has already been pronounced; it has already had its effect. Just like the Pythia,¹⁰ exclusively alert to her interior vision, Pierre Pidou seems to ignore his interlocutors. No matter how much Milig Le Floch and Aline Kieffer interrogate him, mock him or show their surprise, Pierre Pidou (deliberately maybe) gives out a little bit at a time and no one can modify the course of his revelation. Every time he speaks, a little detail comes out to complete his account at a hallucinatory pace: “Des fissures dans les arbres” [“Cracks in the trees”], “Des fissures dans les arbres / j’y mets l’œil” [“Cracks in the trees / I peer into them”], and “Des fissures dans les arbres / j’y mets l’œil / je vois des choses graves” (ibid.) [“Cracks in the trees / I peer into them / I see some serious things”]. This technique of progressively adding details that gradually enhance the vision is a fine illustration of the word “fissures” as radiating nucleus. Clearly enough, the word “fissures” behaves here as the booster of the sentences, it is their living source and meaning-maker. As Julien Graq had it:

... le sens, on l’oublie trop, est à la fois signification et direction irréversible: le sens est un vecteur; la machinerie du langage, dès qu’elle est en mouvement, crée immédiatement dans l’esprit un courant induit qui tout de suite s’affranchit de son inducteur. Ce courant est déjà projet: l’esprit est “lancé” (tout écrivain de bonne foi, je pense, avouera ce mouvement qui est la dynamique même de l’écriture) la force vive ainsi éveillée se heurte au langage, l’utilise, biaise, compose avec lui, mais ne lui appartient plus toute. (1980: 157)

[... the sense, as we too often forget, is at the same time meaning and irreversible direction: sense is a vector; the machinery of language, once start-

¹⁰ Differently from the Pythia, it is Pierre Pidou who moves around to announce his tidings. This encourages our first interpretation that has Pierre Pidou following a preordained strategy throughout.

ed, immediately creates in the mind a flow of induced current that soon breaks away from its inductor. This current is already a project: the mind is “off” (every writer acting in good faith, I think, would avow this movement, which is the very dynamics of writing); thus awakened, the living force knocks into language, uses it, hems and haws, composes with it, but does not belong to it completely.]

The word “fissures” electrifies the group of words that follows but also imparts a ‘direction’, frames the sentence, and circulates a “living force” within Pierre Pidou’s words. Both the dramatic and the poetic levels are boosted by the “cracks”. Every time Pierre Pidou supplements his vision with a new detail, he mounts both a poetic and a dramatic step. The imagery keeps growing while the account of the visions pushes Milig Le Floch and Aline Kieffer to the limit, until the last scene which constitutes an actual *dénouement*.

The cracks allow one to see, both concretely and figuratively. It is through them that Pierre Pidou manages to see, and the verb ‘to see’ here is endowed with a sense of ‘supernatural vision’. Besides, this supernatural dimension is augmented in the second scene, as we move from the cracks in the trees to the cracks in the animals. The expression “cracks in the trees” may still sound acceptable to common sense and immediate perception, thanks to its being obvious rather than irrational. Everybody knows there are cracks in the trees, although few people actually say it, and even fewer pronounce it as an oracle. It is this variance that makes it weird. Yet, the fact that there are cracks in the animals heightens the originality of this point of view, which is now focused on the animals – perceived as ‘more alive’ than plants – and, in spite of its unusualness, it is absolutely unquestionable. In fact, it is a matter of point of view and designation. Through what do we look at the animals? From which perspective? And what kind of formulation do we rely on to describe our observations? Preferably, we define those areas in the body that allow an exchange between inside and outside as orifices, and we would probably speak of cracks when referring to claws, nails, or skin. Announcing this (partially acceptable) reality by means of a formula as concise, categorical, and generalizing as “cracks in the animals” is undoubtedly surprising. This perspective, this zoom – to resume the term we pointed out above –, this cornerstone of reality causes a slight destabilization of sense, a faltering of perception. It is exactly the fact that Pierre Pidou ‘voices’ this obviousness that makes his words enter the realm of folly – as minor ravings prompted by his status of village idiot – but also the one of poetry.

The poetic outlook may reveal obviousness but above all it formulates it with all the power of self-evidence, and consequently makes us feel all its oddity. In this regard, we may refer to Clément Rosset's commentary on reality, referring to Parmenides:

Il faut dire et penser que ce qui est est, car ce qui existe existe, et ce qui n'existe pas n'existe pas: je t'invite à méditer cela ... à y regarder de plus près, ces sentences se révèlent bientôt à la fois paradoxales et terrifiantes: ... Paradoxales en ceci que, loin de flatter l'habituelle "raison", elle se heurtent à un sens commun, ou à une sensibilité commune, qui, chez les hommes, sont beaucoup plus volontiers disposés à admettre que ce qui existe n'existe pas tout à fait et que ce qui n'existe pas possède quelque vague crédit à l'existence, si minime et désespéré soit-il ... (Rosset 1991: 9-10)

[We must say and think that what is is, because what exists exists, and what does not exist does not exist: I invite you to meditate on this. ... on a closer look, these sentences soon sound both paradoxical and terrifying; ... Paradoxical in that they, rather than flattering regular 'reason', clash with common sense or common sensibility which, in human beings, are much more inclined to admit that what exists does not exist and that what does not exist does show some signs of credibility, be they small and despairing...]

If, in the first scene, Aline Kieffer and Milig Le Floch totally deny the possibility of cracks in the trees, a year afterwards they adopt a different strategy to get rid of Pierre Pidou by admitting that there are in fact some cracks in the animals and that he is "le messager d'aucune nouvelle extraordinaire, tous les êtres vivants sont fissurés" (Fichet 1998: 34) ["the messenger of no extraordinary news, all living beings are cracked"]. Yet this strategy aimed at doing away with Pierre Pidou by agreeing with him does not work. They need to go further, and Aline Kieffer decides to verify the existence of the cracks in the animals: "Je suis comme Saint Thomas faut que touche du doigt" (ibid.: 36) ["I am like St Thomas, need to touch for myself"].

In the last scene, as we noted above, the word "fissures" appears only once:

PIERRE PIDOU. Hi hi une fille lisse come une assiette je croyais
mais non
des fissures dans son corps.
Elle exagère elle saigne.

(Ibid.: 39)

[PIERRE PIDOU. Ha ha a girl as smooth as porcelain, I thought / but no / cracks in her body. / She exaggerates, she bleeds.]

Yet, this word keeps on illuminating the whole scene. First of all, the lexical field of ‘cracks’ is still present: “Pierre Pidou t’es fêlé”; “j’y mets l’œil dans le creux”; “Elle est blessée au ventre”, etc. [“Pierre Pidou you’re creviced”; “I peer into the cavities”; “she’s wounded in the belly”]. Yet it is its absence that makes this expression still act resonantly, as it were. We have read it so many times that it cannot easily exit our imagination. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the play is very short: the repetition of the same word within a short text is certainly very evident. Although they are graphically absent from the stage, the cracks persist and seal the play’s *dénouement* by strictly associating the poetic mode with the dramatic one. We learn that Pierre Pidou wanted to “wait for the lake’s bitch” (“attendre la chienne du lac”) but Aline Kieffer did not, so he “slapped” her, “stripped” her and “threw her in the lake” (“giflée”, “mise à poil”, “et hop dans le lac!”). However, we also discover another motive. This is Pierre Pidou speaking:

Aline Kieffer – mademoiselle Kieffer – a coupé les arbres.
Aline Kieffer – mademoiselle Kieffer – voulait abattre les animaux se
plaint de quoi?

(Ibid.: 38)

[Aline Kieffer – Miss Kieffer – cut down the trees. / Aline Kieffer – Miss
Kieffer – wanted to put down the animals complains about what?]

The brutality of the action is not the most relevant detail here. What leads the plot to its symbolic but also, we could say, imaginary and poetical conclusion is the fact that Pierre Pidou keeps explaining all along to Milig Le Floch that he looked ‘inside’ Aline Kieffer and saw nothing. Here are the different occurrences of this sad remark:

...
j’ai rien vu.
je l’ai regardée j’ai rien vu.
...
Toute fermée toute fermée
même les oreilles... Trop fermée, beaucoup trop.
...
J’y mets l’œil
dans le creux.
...

J'ai regardé tout
 tout fouillé
 tout fouillé les creux
 tout zieuté – même la fourche! –
 rien vu
 y'a rien dedans
 elle est vide.
 ...
 Y'a rien dedans ...
 t'es vide te plains de ça.

(Ibid.: 37-9)

[... / I saw nothing. / I looked at her, I saw nothing. / ... / All closed, all closed / even her ears... Too closed, too much. / ... / I peered / into the cavity. / ... / I looked at everything / searched everything / searched all the cavities / peeped everywhere – even into the fork! – / saw nothing / there's nothing inside / she's empty. / ... / there's nothing inside ... you're empty, complain about that.]

Once we have gone from fantasy to reality, we stand on the other side of the cracks and what looked as nothing but a vision of one who is a bit funny in the head (“I see naked women wounded in the belly who enter the water barking”, scenes 1 and 2) becomes indeed a premonition. And we go back to the Pythia. Aline Kieffer is wounded in the belly, she bleeds, “jappe” [“yelps”], and “aboye” [“barks”]. Pierre Pidou has swung into action; he was no longer happy to talk anymore, and put his claims into practice. What he saw through the cracks in the trees and in animals was but the anticipation of the last scene, and while he was no actor of those visions he was their producer. Once he acts, he is restored to his role of acting subject and leads the action to its end. It was a matter of seeing through Aline Kieffer then. Undoubtedly this is a case of what psychoanalysis calls scopophilia in which the eye is not perceived only as a source of vision but also as a source of libido. I will not pursue here a psychoanalytical line of investigation, yet this perspective is interesting as it may envisage how Roland Fichet foregrounds the existence of a relation between being unconscious and the short form. What he argued with reference to a short text entitled *Sur les dos des morts* [*On the Back of the Dead*] can be adapted to *Fissures* as well:

Sur le dos des morts c'est une image qui précipite du sens. Un impact spécifique différent de celui d'un texte long. La forme brève introduit du subliminal, de l'implicite. Pour moi la forme brève est un dispositif d'ouverture à l'inconscient. (Koutchevsky 2006a)

[*Sur les dos des morts* [*On the Back of the Dead*] is an image that precipitates out of sense. It produces a different impact from that of a longer text. Short forms introduce subliminal and implicit elements. In my opinion, the short form is instrumental in opening up the unconscious.]

“Une image qui précipite du sens”¹¹ is the exact definition of a process that, in *Fissures*, mixes the poetic and the dramatic. Baldine Saint-Girons may help us understand this notion of ‘sense precipitate’ by inscribing it in the field of the unconscious and relying on the concept of condensation (in its psychoanalytical meaning):

Formation caractéristique de l’inconscient, la condensation ... est la simple expression de la tendance à l’épargne qui domine tous les processus psychiques ... la condensation est certes le résultat d’une omission ou plutôt d’une ellipse ou d’une élision, pour emprunter le langage de la grammaire et celui de la poésie. Mais elle est en même temps le fruit d’une surdétermination qui aboutit à la création de termes-carrefours, d’images génériques et de compromis: ‘Le processus de condensation’, écrit Freud, ‘est particulièrement sensible quand il atteint les mots et les noms’. Traitées comme des choses, les expressions verbales deviennent aussi opaques que celles-ci. (Saint-Girons 1999)

[as a typical formation of the unconscious, condensation ... is the sheer expression of a tendency to economy that dominates all psychological processes ... condensation is certainly the result of an omission or rather, borrowing the language of poetry and grammar, of an ellipsis or of an elision. Yet, at the same time, it is an overdetermination which leads to the creation of crossroad words, of generic and compromised images: ‘The process of condensation’, Freud writes, ‘is especially perceptible when it affects words and names’. When treated like things, verbal expressions become as opaque as them.]

In the last scene, the missing word, caused by an elision or an (in)voluntary omission of the author, is “fissures” which quite clearly responds to the above mentioned definition of “termes-carrefours”. The psychoanalytical concept of condensation is rather useful in order to qualify both the graphic absence and the simultaneous activism of the word “fissures”. Besides, while the word has disappeared from the page as a written formula, its absence ‘translates’ its presence into cavities; indeed, the term “cracks” does not allude to an object *per se*, but to a ‘rift’

¹¹ The expression “précipite du sens” [“precipitates out of sense”] is used with reference to chemistry and is to be intended as alluding to a process of crystallization.

in that object, that is, what allows us to see through or in it. Removing the signifier “fissures”, while keeping on exploiting its poetic resources and dramatic consequences, somehow is equal to make it function as a hidden metaphor at the level of the last scene. The strength of the word “fissures” in this short drama is in fact its continuing signification even in its absence. In his *La poésie moderne et la structure d’horizon*, Michel Collot illustrates a fundamental mechanism of textual signification:

La valeur signifiante d’une unité linguistique manifestée se définit par rapport à une série d’autres unités non manifestées qui auraient pu être employées à sa place au même point de l’énoncé et qui ont été exclues, mais restent d’une certaine manière présentes à l’arrière-plan ... lorsque je prononce ‘bas’, par exemple, le sens de mon énoncé repose sur l’existence non-manifestée de ‘haut’. Toute chose n’est vue qu’en relation à un horizon de choses invisibles ... ‘Le signe ne veut dire quelque chose qu’en tant qu’il se profile sur les autres signes’ comme un objet ne se donne à voir qu’en dissimulant les autres objets du champ. (1989: 221)

[The signifying value of a manifest linguistic unit is defined in connection with a series of hidden units that could have been used in its place within the enunciated but have been excluded, although they are somehow still present in the background ... if I pronounce the word low, for example, the meaning of the enunciated rests on the hidden existence of the word high. Everything is seen in connection with a horizon of invisible things ... ‘The sign means something only in its projection onto the other signs’ as an object that shows itself by concealing the other objects included in the field.]

The process described by Michel Collot is exactly what happens here with these ‘graphically absent’ and metaphorical cracks; yet, this is a negative image (in a photographic sense), an inversion, an engraving. As Collot would have it, the “unité linguistique” (here “fissures”) is not “manifestée”, it is “non manifestée” even though it is “présente à l’arrière-plan” as if all the other linguistic units which compose the scene never stopped referring to it or rather never stopped exposing the structure of the crack both poetically and dramatically. The word “fissures” keep on working at a metaphorical level, transposed to the horizon, “appresenté” (ibid.) [“appresented”]:

À la différence de la préoccupation quotidienne, qui nous oblige à concentrer notre attention sur tel objet à l’exclusion des autres, la contemplation esthétique est fondamentalement compréhensive: elle tend à restituer la

chose dans son environnement proche et lointain, dans cet horizon extérieur qui est comme son territoire. (ibid.: 20)

[Unlike everyday worries, which make us focus our attention on a certain object by excluding the others, the aesthetic contemplation is fundamentally comprehensive. It tends to restore things to their proximate and far-away context, to this external horizon that somehow forms its territory.]

We could say that the “territoire” of the word “fissures” gets illustrated in two phases. First, in a ‘presence mode’ through its association with the trees and animals, then in an ‘absence mode’ through this principle of metaphorical functioning.

As a conclusion, we can pair Baldine Saint-Girons’s comment – “traitées comme des choses, les expressions verbales deviennent aussi opaques que celles-ci” [“treated like things, verbal expressions become as opaque as them”] – with Viktor Chlovski’s definition of art as a process:

Et voilà que pour rendre la sensation de la vie, pour sentir les objets, pour éprouver que la pierre est de pierre, il existe ce que l’on appelle l’art. Le but de l’art, c’est de donner une sensation de l’objet comme vision et non pas comme reconnaissance: le procédé de l’art est le procédé de singularisation des objets et le procédé qui consiste à obscurcir la forme, à augmenter la difficulté et la durée de la perception. (2001: 82)

[And to convey you the sensation of life, to feel the objects, to prove that a stone is a stone, there exists what we call art. The aim of art is to give a sensation of the object as vision and not as recognition: the art process is a process of identification of objects, a process that consists in obscuring the form, augmenting the difficulty and duration of the perception.]

“Obscurcir la forme”, “augmenter la difficulté et la durée de la perception”, giving “une sensation de l’objet comme vision et non pas comme reconnaissance”: many other similar definitions could be used to qualify the processes carried out by Roland Fichet in order to fully exploit the word “fissures”. I should notice that the ‘radiating word’ process works particularly well with respect to a nine-page text such as *Fissures*. Its very short format produces an internal dynamics and a horizon¹² of expectations which do not last enough to deteriorate. In fact, it is not certain that in a longer piece, half an hour long for instance, the absence of the word

¹² I refer here to its etymological sense, from the Greek ‘horizein’, i.e. ‘to define, to mark the boundary’.

“fissures” – as happens in the last scene of Fichet’s piece – would have possessed the force of a presence. All in all, duration would probably damage this kind of process.

English translation by Lisanna Calvi

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