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THE UNWRITING OF DISASTER

Dominique Hecq and Chantal Danjou

*This multi-generic bilingual piece is sourced from our Journal off-beat (forthcoming), begun in the aftermath of the 2019 Paris International Poetry Festival. It was brought to a conclusion on 22 March 2020 after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. The March entries convey how hope wrestles with despair and confusion. We sensed that the pandemic symbolised a warning of something worse to come. This is reflected in the liquefying of the text in journal entries and poetic responses from mid-March onwards. At that point Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of Disaster* became a backdrop for making sense of the global crisis which, like the idea of the apocalypse, seemed to arise from the unknown with an inkling towards endless deferral. Unlike Blanchot's book, however, 'The unwriting of disaster' proclaims the continuing relevance of art in our lives and confirms how writing deepens our connection as human beings.*

Keywords: journal; testimony; collaboration; genre; disaster

Preamble

'There is no reaching the disaster' — Maurice Blanchot

Off-beat: informal, unusual, off-centre, *ex-centric*, outside the beaten track. *Journal off-beat* written by two flâneuses, Dominique Hecq from Australia and Chantal Danjou from France. Each geographical territory increasingly out of reach as COVID-19 spread, yet reaching to each other in layered languages and the palimpsest of voices. Ours in English and French, and in the full version of the *Journal off-beat* (forthcoming), other women writers' encountered before the disaster. Voices. All accented ... *Voix mêlées de femmes qui s'étaient retrouvées au Marché de la Poésie, place Saint-Sulpice en juin 2019, venues des quatre coins du monde, voix de présentes et d'absentes*, and all travellers, explorers, creators. *Ces voix bourdonnent, chantonnent ou crient autour de notre journal*. Sound. Silence. Breathing. Sign language. Bird song. Chatter. Sigh. White noise. Pause. *Décalage*.

Back in Melbourne, D.H. lives among these voices. Rhythms. Cadences. Whispers. *Décalage temporel* — the time it takes for voices to settle, echo, respond — the seasons' *décalage*, so striking as we live in two different hemispheres; *décalage* of place that refers to a shared experience of travel constantly evoked in the journal which is offset against lived experiences in the now in France for C.D. and in Australia for D.H.; *décalage* of the poetic work imbued with its own generic bustle and

search for form documented in the Journal, excavation of languages, the fact of language as primary intrigue creating the 'Off-beat', beating to its own rhythm and ruptures of rhythm. The journal itself as *décalage*: a necessary step between life and fictional life. Journaling as a way towards writing true: a bringing forth of incipient texts. Katherine Mansfield in her *Journal and letters* (1978: 57, 60) testified to this dual positioning a few days apart on the same Jean-XXIII Square in Paris: between 'the real life' and 'the life of life'.

Most of all, our journal is a re-living and limning of a trajectory intimated in the below excerpt in two parts. Limn: from *lumine* via Old French *luminer* and Latin *luminare*: to make light; depict or describe in painting or words; suffuse or highlight something with a bright colour or light. So where did this idea of a shared Journal spring from? *D'une trajectoire, plus que d'un trajet, entre Camps la Source et Bormes-les-Mimosas via l'Argentière, Toulon, Lourmarin, Le Point sublime dans les Gorges du Verdon, découverte pour D.H., revisiting for C.D.*, which signifies shedding new light on intimate places. We set out to unpick the relationship between walking and writing and what it means to us as women writing outside the reified canon of masculine writer-walkers. A fun experience, as you can no doubt imagine. But also, the opportunity to redefine what we meant by 'flâneuses': the flâneuse is both an introvert and an extrovert; she is all alone and connected, perceptive and ferocious, reluctant and mutinous; she embodies *inbetweenness*^[i] while making space for the reader:

I am clearing a space to invite you into it. On equal terms, that is incorporating the voices of disparate discourses to create or recreate some form of cohesive aliveness. Walk with me.

At a time of profound material, geopolitical, social, cultural and spiritual crisis, it seemed that COVID-19 symbolised something far worse to come. We did not know what shape the disaster would take, nor its extent. Its incipient presence and looming absence seemed to be imbued with a sense of endless deferral:

When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it is in the order of lived time, belongs in the disaster, the disaster has always already withdrawn or dissuaded it; there is no time or future for the disaster, just as there is no time or space for its accomplishment. (Blanchot 1995: 1)

We have lived at the edge of global obliteration for some time; it is imminent, yet it remains in abeyance. It so far exceeds our ability to imagine it. It might already be upon us, but we have no way of knowing. Despite the pandemic and global warming, we are unable to read the signs. To unwrite disaster seems the only way of containing it. Instinctively, we did so in March 2020 when writing liquefied as though the tears we could not shed in the face of a disaster we were trying to comprehend were being transmuted into words cascading into fragments and metaphors of dissolution and waste — the 'weeping grass', the 'compost'. Then vigilance liquified. We are left with nothing but the lucent liquidity of our screens.^[ii]

Journal off-beat — excerpt: toward the equinoxes 2020

Journal entries — Dominique Hecq

11 March

Sunny. Air, golden. I love March for its soothing light as much as I love October for its carefree glow.

Supermarkets out of toilet paper, sanitising soap and canned food. In Sydney two women fight over KLEENEX. Or was it QUILTON? The police get involved. It's farcical.

Necessities is the word that jumps at me when I read about essentials. It comes from a long training in a puritanical environment — some would have said repressive. Anything outside home was not a necessity. Bar friends, films, concerts, even certain books, unless smuggled in. Once asked if it was necessary to go out (without the necessity implied in the western philosophical tradition), I retorted that only water was a necessity. I took my shoes off, wiped the mask off my face, washed the anger, put on a nightgown that every day grew heavier with stones as my frame grew smaller. Forty-five years on I hang on to space, words, spectacles and extimate others: these are necessities. Essentials, on the other hand, extend to the cultivation of my garden, bird song and water. I hesitate about children: though never a necessity, they are now essential(s).

Meanwhile Italy is still in lockdown. A disaster.

Sending three poems to the Australian Poetry Anthology.

Blue Nib interested in an auto translation of *Pistes de rêve*. Plod on. Print. Amend.

12 March

WHO Director General officially declares COVID-19 a world pandemic and briefs the media. It took them a while.

Songlines. Confronted with a few translating problems: it's not easy to render the play on homophony and equivocation.

Petites trouvailles tout de même. On verra ce que demain en pensera.

Still, some creative solutions. Let's see what tomorrow makes of this.

Lassitude. I'd like to go for a swim, mais c'est pas raisonnable. I walk to the Post Office.

Puffed out.

Deal with the Lending Rights Directory. I hate their online system.

13 March

A Friday. We are flying to Launceston tomorrow morning. Coming back with Spirit of Tasmania on Sunday night. Anxious. At least we have a private cabin on the boat. Need to check in with Jetair. Pack. Whip up meals for the poor kids we are leaving behind. Lasagna. Curry.

Crepe myrtles flare in the street. A flyscreen screams shut. The heat hangs around like smoke. Thunder rolls. A hallucination? There are no clouds. Day of reckoning. I walk the darkness of my mood snatch a red rose from a smouldering bush, a bottle of straw-coloured wine we won't drink in the other hand. Jasmine veils. A passionfruit vine bursting with blooms. Clouds cover the sky. Sheets of rain. The word apocalypse derives from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις meaning revelation. While end of time millennialism promises an irrevocable accounting of good and evil, what is to come will not supersede the chaos of revelation. What is to come is a looming absence. A glowering fire hidden from view.

14 March

5 am. Moonlight asleep on my black clad body. I slept in my clothes. Isn't this what poets do?

Taxi. Fluid traffic. Am I dreaming? Wide awake and still can't tell. Hyperreality crumbles into the real. Everything seems darkly written until we reach the airport. Cars disgorge people and bags. International terminal, sleepy. Domestic terminal 4, the one we call the cattle pen, quiet, compared to what it usually is.

Think of Baudrillard. How he denied being a nihilist. Was it in *Passwords*?

Raphael chatty upon arrival. He makes toast for breakfast. First coffee in four weeks for me. The men drive out to rent a lawn mower. I walk the dog.

We tidy up the garden. They carter loads of rubbish to the tip. Drained. A beer. How nice.

Quixotic sunset over the Esk. We head to a new restaurant overlooking the river. Prosecco to celebrate Raphael's achievement — four aluminium sculptures we'll see tomorrow. They share a huge square of roast beef with vegetables and roast potatoes. I choose Moreton Bay bugs, crustaceans with a distinct red-brown shell. The bugs are like tiny lobsters. Delicious: sweet, soft, delicate, flesh. A subtle taste of sea wind. Mineral lift of Pinot Noir. Decadent.

15 March

Beware the Ides of March.

Catch up with my old friend Mary. Walk through the Lilydale falls. Chat in the sun. I shared a house with her for three years when I was doing my PhD. Realise how much I miss her company. Her no-

nonsense approach to living. The last time we went for a walk together, The Duke tagged along. Painful. Impossible to have a conversation. As someone once put it, The Duke knows everything about everything. He also knows how everyone should lead their own lives. Except for himself, of course. Anyway, I'd like to take you to Tasmania when you fly to this part of the world, Chantal, and drive up to the Bay of Fires. Stunning. No bikini, or you'll freeze. I'll find a full swimsuit. Next year.

Bread and Butter, a nice café owned by the butter lady on Cimitiere Street. The men have a baguette — one vegetarian, the other carnivore. I am content with a mineral water. Raphael moody. I wonder why. Annoyed with us and our lack of initiative. Well ... I'm trying to read the situation. I put the question to him and that seems to clear the air. I find it difficult to negotiate the line with adult children: I want to give them privacy and allow them autonomy and yet I want to help in a kind of self-effacing way. Perhaps this is what infuriates him — the self-effacing bit.

I want to scream. See Munch's painting in my mind's eye. It arrives with a scrambled quote from Fredric Jameson: 'a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation ... solitude ... and isolation' (1993: 69). I remember seeing this face of the scream in a Launceston junk shop window in the form of a three-foot plastic punching bag. I wonder who or what I want to punch the living daylight out of. Me, I presume.

OK. On our way to Raphael's workshop and home of his mentor. I am forgiven. I bought the right champagne and fancy chocolates. Pfew.

Staggered by the work. Four light-catching dramatic sculptures. Near three metre phallic objects cascading in folds reminiscent of geological formations. A parasitic thought: Duchamp's *Nude descending a staircase*. I don't know why. The massing of volumes, perhaps. Anyway, I keep this to myself. Afraid of saying the wrong thing.

Umberto Eco describes the welding of copy and original as 'the levelling of pasts' (1987: 9).

16 March

We dock in Melbourne. Drive home. Exhausted. The Duke blasts Frédéric for not buying bread. The poor kid is not well. Cold or lack of sleep? Hard to tell. I come to the rescue. There is a loaf of sourdough in the freezer. Defrost. Voilà!

Situation assez spéciale. Je reviens du petit magasin bio: une demi-heure pour passer le cap de la caisse avec un pain! Je passe par le magasin italien pour acheter deux paquets de gnocchi frais. Et je vois que non seulement c'est bourré, mais qu'aussi on ne peut acheter que deux paquets de pâtes par transaction. Plus de spaghetti ... épique.

Weird situation. I've just come back from the greengrocer: half an hour to go through the check out with one loaf of bread. I swing by the Italian pastellaria to buy two containers of fresh gnocchi. Not only is it packed, but there is a limit of two pasta items per transaction. No spaghetti left. Epic.

Found the passage I was looking for (from Baudrillard's *Passwords*):

This isn't a pessimistic conclusion, but you have to fight the enemy with its own weapons, in terms of its own logic. What we need... is a thinking that, in order to pose a challenge, is a match for a system that's paradoxical, elusive and random. There's a lot of self-delusion in trying to force problems back into traditional moulds: joining unions, protesting, demonstrating, as though we were still dealing with the same old world. (2003: 73)

Which we are not as the strikes in France and the antics of the Gilets Jaunes painfully attest to. I wonder what he would think of today's rhetoric about the pandemic.

17 March

Vais mieux, mais toujours dure d'oreille comme disait ma grand-mère.

Feeling better. But still hard of hearing as my grandmother used to say.

Doubt I will be able to leave in June. Borders close everywhere. Qantas and Jetstar will cut international capacity by about 90 per cent, and domestic capacity by around 60 per cent, until at least the end of May. There is even talk of closing the Tasmanian border. Which freaks me out. No longer a dilemma for me. Grounded.

I wish we had some guidelines from the Short Story in English Conference. If cancelled. Or postponed.

You worry too much, mum. Quite right, Frédé. Drives me up the wall.

Someone whispers my name here and there. No one around. No radio on. Either someone is singing me dead or I have gone mad. Geraniums grin in the sun. Everything is shutting down: patrolled beaches, swimming pools, art galleries, concert halls, theatres, cinemas, even cafés where gigs happen and universities. Some schools close tomorrow.

Ecrivons des cartes postales. Etablirons un contact avec Zoom.

Will write postcards. Establish contact through Zoom.

Phone call from Raphael. Grim. The opening of his exhibition in the Blue Mountains is cancelled. The likelihood of border crossing ban high. I can't imagine him not being able to return. Shit.

Everything is interrupted. I need to brace myself and be firm about my emploi du temps.

18 March

Distress at being separated from my children. How silly is that? They are supposedly grown up.

This will all end one day (or so I keep telling myself) and maybe we will be all the better for it. We

have to learn some life lessons.

Drastic reduction of planes leaving the country until 2021. Australians are urged to stay home or return home before it is in total lock-down. Travel plans are history. See you on the other side of uncertainty, Chantal.

In an apocalyptic COVID scenario the corruption of the *bodymind* and its alleged boundaries is a possibility. I don't think of this break down or erratic growth in terms of cancerous proliferation, but rather in terms of dissolution. An osmotic challenge. Mutable and porous membranes. A leakage of cells, memories, speech, thoughts, the universalisation of angst. The dawn of the band aid black goggle-eyed era. Tower flowing excess. Flux. Permeability. The return of *noli me tangere*.

19 March

The windows turn away from the sun. The air we breathe is dark and getting darker. I sit white and still like a *chicon* (a type of endive grown in the dark) waiting to be picked. I'm already frying, except not in butter and garlic. Fever and chills. I swear I'm not imagining this.

Un kookaburra s'esclaffe. Un chien aboie. Des fantômes passent.

A kookaburra chuckles. A dog barks. Ghosts go past.

Notre véritable mémorial n'est pas la tombe au cimetière, malgré les fleurs qu'on y apporte parfois, mais le rythme qui commande le souffle et la parole. L'écrit titubant dans le temps.

Our true memorial is not the tomb in the graveyard despite the flowers someone might send, but the rhythm that impels breath and speech. Writing staggering through time.

Between bouts of madness and despair, skin, muscle and bone hit the keys. Muck about. Make compost. Post it notes.

Because of the coronavirus leading to the effective shutdown of churches, churchyards and funeral parlours, I am trying to organise my cremation as a Zoom meeting. The idea is that anyone who wants to will simply be able to join the meeting from any virtual time onwards. However, I have struck a slight snag. I am told when I try to organise the service that since I have only pending membership, the memorial service is limited to 13 minutes, and then it only allows me to book 30 or 33 minutes. I have booked two consecutive self-deleting 33- and 30-minute meetings which seem to have identical IDs, so it might be possible to go straight through three minutes, or it might be necessary to log in again. I will email Coop@vida.com to upgrade this account when I have checked how long the actual cremation takes as no one will want to make a speech for an absent audience. I realise that this is a little absurd, too, as nobody will want to collect the ashes, but these will help dandelions push through next spring in the absence of roses. As you will remember, I loved Albert Camus with all my Sisyphean soul and want to do the right thing until the end. The meeting is titled 'Heck Zoom meeting invitation'. What is really important to note is your Person Meeting ID

13-33-30*q / k#. When you open Zoom you should be able to click on 'Join' and then this in where it is asked for. Click on the OTHER side of your screen / scream at or just before the appropriate time (or even a bit late), and you will be able to enter at your own risk(s).

20 March

We had agreed to end our *journal off-beat* and *flânerie* at the time of your spring equinox, which is my autumn equinox — fall, as they say so aptly in US English. Here we are. Shall I build an altar with harvest fruits and vegetables, meditate, gather and feast on apples, or offer them to the goddess and count my blessings?

The *flâneuse* in me has morphed into a *glaneuse*. My breathing slows and so does my step. I glean cherry tomatoes, zucchinis, pumpkins, thyme, sage, basil and rosemary. I glean words and silences. Turn them into long cadences. I write parodies to distract myself from myself.

Coop-Vida admin were unable to upgrade my Zoom account, sending the following message: 'Unfortunately we have exhausted all of our upgraded licenses, I could recommend using Microsoft Teams for your video conferencing as MS Teams has all the same functionality and no restrictions on time'. I looked at Microsoft Teams. Downloaded the program and 'played' with it. I also looked at comparative reviews of both. It is clear that Microsoft Teams is much more complex to use and not really suitable for our meeting. I also looked at UberConference because its motto resonates: 'Belief in the sickness as sickness'. The words are actually from Nietzsche's *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, the second supplement to *Human, All too Human*. So, I will continue to attempt to use Zoom, and see whether there is any problem with the arrangement I have made. Since we are effectively restricted to 3 minutes, it is possible that the session will stop working before some of you log in. In which case we might have to reconvene on the other side of uncertainty. *Arrivederci!*

Poetic responses—Chantal Danjou (trans D.H.)

Derrière moi, des toiles du Point Sublime. Le fleuve de l'air. Les aigles taquinant l'homme sur la paroi rocheuse. Nous, pirouettant dans des rapides de rires. La voix virevoltant. La route en lacets. Champs de ciels étoilés sur un monde croulant. Plus tard nous redécouvrons ce journal off-beat et ses flâneries avec intervalles, intravals, intercryptions et interruptions. Lier, délier, relier.

At my back, paintings of Point Sublime. The air's river. The eagles teasing the man on the rock face. Us, pirouetting in rapids of giggles. Our voices twirling. The winding road. Fields of starry skies above a crumbling world. Later we'll discover this journal off-beat with its flâneries, intervals, intravals, intercryptions and interruptions. *To tie, untie, tie back together.*

Les brèves

Nous avons convenu de cesser d'écrire notre Journal off-beat aux équinoxes, d'automne pour toi, de printemps pour moi.

Flânerie interrompue. Prise de court en quelque sorte. Comme une pluie drue qui enverrait ses gifles épineuses. À vous renverser sur le chemin. Hachures de silhouettes qui ont titubé. Mis gris sur vert des champs. Short grass and long grey leaves. Plantago lanceolata.

Pourtant pas de pluie mais du soleil et de la lumière. Rayons obliques à travers ruelles, branches. Clarté insistante. Nous aveugle. Aurions-nous été enfermés si longtemps?

Sombres, penchés, courbés, las, affamés ... Aurions-nous été enfermés si longtemps?

Violents, assoiffés, soumis — subject to a chain of circumstances. Thoughts crushed by fucking circumstances.

Rotting thoughts ... Compost? C'est plus subtile que ça, un compost! Pas une simple affaire de décomposition.

Laisser aller les choses? Pire, mettre sa confiance en ...? Jour qui plane. Prédation et soir rouge.

Poussière des chemins. Touffes de plantago major, plantain aux oiseaux. Pépiements sur fil électrique.

La liberté. N'est plus la même depuis longtemps. Trame ses hachures sur nos vêtements. Nouveaux pépiements sur fil électrique.

Remarks

We had agreed to stop writing our Journal off-beat at the equinoxes, the autumn one for you, spring for me.

Interrupted flânerie. Cut short in a way. Like heavy rain that would deal out its stinging slaps. And bowl you over on the footpath. Staggering of hatched silhouettes. A touch of grey upon field green. Herbe rase et longues feuilles grises. *Plantago lanceolata*.

No rain though but sun and light. Slanting rays of sunshine through laneways, branches. Insisting brightness. Us blind. Had we really been locked down for so long?

Sad, bent, stooped, weary, famished ... *Had we really been locked down for so long?*

Violent, thirsty, submissive — assujettis à une chaîne de circonstances. La pensée écrasée sous le poids de putains de circonstances.

Pensées en decomposition ... Compost? A compost is more subtle than that. No simple

decomposition affair.

Let things go? Worse, entrust what ...? Hovering day. Predation and red dusk.

Road dust. Clumps of *plantago major*, bird plantain. Twittering on electric wires.

Freedom. Hasn't been the same for a long while. Weaves its hatchings on our clothes. *Renewed twittering on electric wires.*

Les flâneuses

L'automne et le printemps entrelaçaient leurs branches, du rose au rouge, du blanc au brun. Bref moment de fusion. Immobilité comme un feu qui prend et brille. Les branches sentaient la fleur et la moisissure.

Ton voyage se préparait, tous les avions annulés pour au moins six mois, m'écris-tu; le mien s'espérait au secret, murmure du mûrissement ruling. Je me voyais comme un lâcher de ballons. J'oublie les soucis et les travaux à faire à la maison et je pars, je viens, je vole!

Dérapiage sur les chemins. Grosses empreintes. Semelles rainurées des chaussures de randonnée. Traces de pieds d'enfant jusqu'à la mer. Sable au-dessus comme un oiseau de proie. Temps arrêté.

Appel du vide par petits fossés aux lupins et aux dernières violettes. Sentir combien nous serons à l'étroit couchés dans les fossés. Infinité de choses qui piquent, grattent. Grossissent, racornissent. Yeux «plus gros que le ventre» roulent de côté. N'ont plus de paupières. Ni orbites. Ni perspectives. Ferment au-dessus d'eux le couvercle léger des plantes et des nuages.

L'air est déjà différent. Les sons eux aussi. Pris dans le vide. Le bruit même, inhérent au silence, et que l'on n'entend pas d'habitude.

Gwen peint au doigt. Dit à Marley que c'est une «cascade». D'un rouge qui plairait à Davis. Bouillonne. Bourgeonne. Je regarde la photographie de «mon» petit bout de chou penché sur sa feuille. La seconde photo représente l'œuvre, l'enfant ôté, qui, pourtant, bat, sang vif sur la page.

Céleste fêtera ses vingt ans en juin. Je pleure en silence. J'avais commencé à préparer en secret l'événement. Que la «surprise surprenne»! Comme une «cascade» scintillante! Te souviens-tu, Céleste, de celle en pleine Jungle à Palawan?

Petits points de couleur à la fourche des ramures et des feuilles. Images tombent de nos têtes comme des feuilles mortes. Vent qui prend l'ensemble, hésite entre être un peu plus chaud ou un peu plus frais.

Pots brident les fleurs. Je crois percevoir leur énervement. Dans une fissure, échappée de mauvaises herbes. Crochètent vainement le dallage.

Flâneuses

Autumn and spring intertwined their branches, pink to red, white to brown. Brief moment of fusion. Stillness like a fire that starts and glows. The branches smelled of flower and rot.

You were planning your trip, all planes cancelled for at least six months, you write; I was imagining mine in secret, *règne* of ripening whisper. I saw myself like a letting go of balloons. I forget my worries and the repairs to be done on the house and I'm leaving, I'm coming, I'm flying!

Skidding on walking tracks. Huge foot marks. Grooved soles of bush walking shoes. A child's footprints right up to the seashore. Sand hovering above like a bird of prey. Time without clocks.

Call of the void through hollows filled with lupins and the last violets. To feel how cramped we'll be stretched out in the hollows. Infinity of things that sting, itch. Swell, harden. Eyes 'bigger than one's tummy' roll sideways. Are now lidless. Socketless. Depthless. Close the light lid of plants and clouds above their lashes.

The air is already different. Sounds are too. Caught in the void. Noise itself, inherent in silence, which is usually inaudible.

Gwen fingerpaints. Tells Marley that it's a 'cascade'. A red that would delight Davis. Boiling. Budding. I look at the photograph of 'my' little darling bent over the page. The second photo represents the work, the child removed, who, nonetheless, hits, bright blood on the page.

Céleste will be twenty in June. I cry silently. I'd started to prepare this event in secret. Let the 'surprise surprise'! Like a glistening 'cascade'. Do you remember, Céleste, the cascade in the heart of the jungle at Palawan?

Tiny dots of colour where boughs and leaves fork. Images fall from our heads like dead leaves. Wind taking it all in, unsure whether it's warmer or fresher.

Pots hem in the flowers. I think I feel their annoyance. Weeds escape through cracks. Pick the flagstones in vain.

Les choses

Sommes en pot. Si encore nous sentions des mains vertes courir sur nous! Confinés. Autorisations de sortie avec l'impression d'imiter sa propre signature.

Les mêmes qui en temps ordinaire ne respectent rien, se regroupent. Le garde municipal les voit, rentre vite dans sa voiture et démarre. Je l'ai observé de ma fenêtre.

Le Maire trouve deux autres spécimens sur la Place. Ricanent, provoquent. Leur fait la remarque. Parle d'amende. Explique que les soignants risquent leur vie. Est-ce en culpabilisant que l'on va brusquement éduquer? La Place de la Démagogie, plantée de quatre micocouliers.

Défaut d'anticipation. Coupes budgétaires. Hôpital public sapé dans ses fondations. Orgueil démesuré de se croire hors d'atteinte. Hors finitude. Hors champ. Hors cycle. Hors chemin. Hors destin.

Fuite des capitaux. Fossés jaune sale. Herbes tristes.

Rejet de la pensée. Pins de plus en plus nombreux à être roux en bord de mer.

Angoisse. Asphodèles lèchent l'air de leurs flammes.

Épreuve. Homme seul dans ses vignes. Rang après rang.

Humain sur humain. Chant rauque du charnier.

Amont — aval se chevauchant. Peuvent toujours essayer aucune fécondation ne sera possible!

Rungis. Un bâtiment transformé en morgue. Recueillement des familles par ... Je ne sais plus quel nombre est autorisé. Madrid. Si belle ville. Patinoire funèbre.

Culbutos aux habits rayés au bord des chemins. Ces jouets m'ont toujours mise mal à l'aise. On leur a coupé les jambes. Oscillent, reviennent toujours à la verticale ?

Il y a une différence entre être à la verticale et se tenir debout. La même entre la sentinelle et la flâneuse. La même encore entre une route balisée et la route choisie.

Things

Are potted. If only we could feel the run of green fingers upon us. Confined. Authorised to go out feeling as though we are imitating our own signature.

The same people who normally respect nothing gather together. Security watches them, hurries into his car and drives off. I saw it from my window.

The Mayor spots two more dickheads on the village square. Sneer, hassle. He chides them. Mentions a fine. Explains that the paramedics risk their lives. Would this culpabilising all of a sudden educate? Demagogy Square planted with four hackberry trees.

Lack of anticipation. Budgetary cuts. Public health system under pressure. Hubris to think of oneself as bullet-proof. Beyond finitude. Out of bounds. Out of cycle. Outside tracks. Outside destiny.

Flight of capital. Dirty yellow ditch. Weeping grass.

Thoughtlessness. More and more rusty-looking pine trees along the seashore.

Anguish. Asphodels lick the oxygen off their lit-up petals.

Challenge. Lone man in his vineyard. Row after row.

Human upon human being. Hoarse song of the mass grave.

Upstream — downstream riding each other. May as well try no fertilisation will occur.

Rungis. A makeshift morgue. Family prayers by ... I forget how many are allowed at one time. Madrid. Such a beautiful city. Funeral skating rink.

Culbutos in stripes by the roadside. These toys always give me the creeps. They've had their legs chopped off. They swing, inevitably come back vertically.

There is a difference between being vertical and standing up. Same thing between sentinel and flâneuse. Same thing again between a marked-up path and a chosen path.

Mois de mars

Pendant ce temps ... On fiche un peu la paix à la nature. Such peace! All is still alive. For how long? Without us. Without the living and the dead.

As you said: See you on the other side of uncertainty!

J'ai suivi longuement du regard le petit ruisseau qui court le long du Chemin du Plan. Branches basses, mousses, reflets, les uns dans les autres. Imagine qu'une barque minuscule descende le courant. Œil à l'intérieur comme dans un panier de Moïse. Regard interrompu.

Tiges des lys d'eau comme une herse coupant le passage. Instabilité de la berge et du crépuscule.

Tuteurs vierges dans les champs. Leur ligne rejointe par celle des pneus du tracteur. Rien derrière.

Tourterelle sur le toit. Son bec traverse. C'est froid. Ravale comme on ravale ses larmes. S'envole. Tuile d'un rouge de forge garde l'empreinte. Ravale elle aussi. Se creuse.

Month of March

Meanwhile ... We leave nature in peace. *Quelle paix! Tout est encore en vie. Pour combien de temps? Sans nous. Sans les vivants et les morts.*

Comme tu as dit: *A bientôt de l'autre côté de l'incertitude!*

I have long gazed at the brook that runs along the Chemin du Plan. Low branches, mosses, reflections, all intermingling. Imagine a tiny rowing boat coursing down the current. Eye inside like in a Moses basket. Interrupted gaze.

Water lily stems like a hearse blocking the way. Instable banks, instable dusks.

Bare stakes in the fields. Their lines meeting the tractor's tracks. Nothing at the back.

Dove on the roof. Its beak pokes through. It's cold. Swallows as one swallows one's tears. Takes flight. Russet red tile keeps the footmark. Swallows, too. Hollows out.

[i]The sentence 'the flâneuse is both an introvert and an extrovert; she is all alone and connected, perceptive and ferocious, reluctant and mutinous; she embodies *inbetweenness*' reflects our joint opinion. It is compounded by research undertaken by D.H. during the writing of the *Journal off-beat*. Of particular relevance are books and articles by women discussing the dual type of flâneur immortalised in Walter Benjamin's famous essays 'The *Flâneur*' (1973) and 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1999). Janet Wolff's 1990 review article 'The Invisible Flâneuse' is a foundational piece. However, we disagreed with her reinforcing of Benjaminian clichés, not least that of the invisibility of flâneuses. This nineteenth-century cliché is brilliantly refuted by Lauren Elkin in *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo* (2017), particularly in the chapter on George Sand, the nineteenth-century French writer. Elkin's book not only crosses geographical borders as the title of her book suggests: she also crosses time barriers.

In her 'Walter Benjamin's Myth of the Flâneur (2007)', Martina Lauster shows that Benjamin's vision of the flâneur is dual and contradictory. The impulse to demystify Baudelaire's vision refracts then diverges into a vision of his own, which essentially adds to a more complex version. The early version and the later one diverge spatially and temporally. The first, in his essay 'The Flâneur', is a man of the crowd immersed in the movement of it and attuned to it. He is also subversive, even marginal. In the later version of 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire, the flâneur is 'the man at the window': an observer, detached both spatially and temporally from the crowd — a bourgeois. Lauster argues that Benjamin's flâneur is more a construct of his own imagination than of an actual nineteenth-century type.

Lauster's article was the impulse for a paper D.H. wrote for a symposium on the state of Australian poetry held on 20 September 2019 at the University of Melbourne ('Fantasmagoria: indeterminacy, plurivocality, movement'). The ways in which we scrutinise the city, its people, and postmodern life, she argued, continue to offer valuable approaches to the anxiety of *homo sapiens* without privileging the idealised lens through which flânerie is usually construed, summoning an expanded type of flâneurs with a more diverse range of characteristics that are relevant today.

The foundations of this talk built on an amalgamation of early and late characteristics of the Benjaminian flâneur, as well as additional attributes and behaviors gleaned from profiles of contemporary Australian poets. The talk also held the following assumptions: that the ambiguities of the flâneur concept is a site for the contestation of (white male) authority rather than the epitome of it; that outsiders can also be expert observers — or flâneurs — of urban postmodernity and its postcolonial avatars; and that one must focus on multiple poetics to better understand the so-called Australian poetry renaissance — that is its impulse and direction. Answers to these questions, it was suggested, might act as responses or provocations: the variety of flâneurs as well as the varied

modes in which they convey *flânerie* displays just how rich an expanded modern concept can become through the involvement of plurivocality. D.H. concluded that the distinctive forms of Australian *flânerie* undertaken in post-romantic and modernist works by established poets vie with the multivocal, multifaceted, and increasingly transnational inflections that acknowledges *flânerie* as an experiential approach to poetics that broaden our comprehension of (post)modernity in general and postcolonialism in particular close to what Guy Debord's concept of *dérive* (1956).

In an interesting, albeit short article in a recent issue of *New Writing* by Annette M Rodriguez on Benjamin's *Arcades Project* which, in her view, gestures towards what she calls a 'fugitive phenomenology', she states that his 'fascination with and practice of *flâneurism* [sic] demands our attention to movement as both chosen and forced displacements' (2019: 423). Beyond the strictly biographical context of the discussion, she has some interesting things to say about Benjamin's conception of 'dwelling' as both 'structural exterior' and 'manifestation of exposure anxiety' (2019: 423). She dwells on binary oppositions to argue for a 'dialectical relationship' which she links to Benjamin's incipient 'theory of the trace' as 'threshold betwixt permanence and disappearance' within the context of the insularity of the interior and the alterity of the exterior. Rodriguez also notes that aside from the concept of 'dwelling', Benjamin also develops the notion of 'unbelonging' (2019: 424).

[ii] This is a bilingual text. You have a choice, reader: either read through both languages, with the French in italics and English in plain script, or skip the italics. We thought that separating the two languages by using footnotes would have been too cumbersome, and would also have defeated the impulse of our *Journal off-beat*.

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