

# READING MOBY-DICK. THE QUESTION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN RESEARCH IN THE ARTS.

(Research and Continuity in Liquid Forms of Writing - III)

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'Now I would like to head out with you toward writing and reading as those narratives represent them, about which I will speak to you in order to hold you back. Heading, then, for a sailing without heading, lost at sea without compass, and yet still magnetised.'<sup>1</sup>

Peter Szendy, *Prophecies of Leviathan: Reading Past Melville*.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Szendy, *Prophecies of Leviathan: Reading Past Melville*, NY, Fordham UP, 2010, p.10. Translated by Gil Anidjar. First published as *Les Prophéties du Texte-Léviathan, Lire selon Melville*, Paris, Minuit, 2004.

## HYPOTHESES<sup>2</sup>

This paper, written first in French and subsequently translated into English and Portuguese, explores two main questions. First, that of carrying out research in the field of the arts, and more specifically in a French context. In other words, should we speak in terms of research *into*, *with* or *through* art? I willingly adopt the latter turn of phrase – *through* – as a means of investigating the terms on which the experience of creation is capable of producing research in a notable manner, thereby enabling us to move the cursor as to how we define the ‘artistic’ objects produced.<sup>3</sup> Second, what are the conditions underpinning the sustainability of research in the arts? What is it that means this research is not exempt from the ethical principles underlying all forms of research – *searching, speculating, finding (or not), observing, analysing, experimenting, testing, reporting back, modelling, conceptualising, using, preserving and tracing*. These few lines say it all – and then again, say nothing, except perhaps that we may already assert that the ‘artistic’ object<sup>4</sup> might gain from temporarily casting off its appellation, as a means of avoiding any form of hasty assimilation with the work of art. Its name and function should be *neutralised* and removed from common forms of usage (exhibitions and dissemination, commodification or production, the latter being the artist’s privilege). Rather, the artistic object considered here, on the abstract threshold of hypothesis, is the result of an integrated form of knowledge, of a knowledge born from experience, of an in-depth familiarity by far surpassing mere theory. Rather it is the expression of a theorised form of knowledge acquired through trial and error, and at times through serendipity.<sup>5</sup> This hypothesis explicitly views the artistic object as belonging to the field of experimental science, in which conclusions are validated only by repeated experimentation. Repetition is, then, one of the conditions underpinning the sustainability of research in the arts.<sup>6</sup>

The overlapping between research and the production of works of art may be represented in schematic form (see diagram below). Each area may be discussed individually, but also replies to a general schematic definition. The protocol adopted in this paper relates to two complex and somewhat porous zones – labelled here as A and D. The characteristics inherent to the researcher are based on the definition outlined in the Frascati Manual, published by the OECD.

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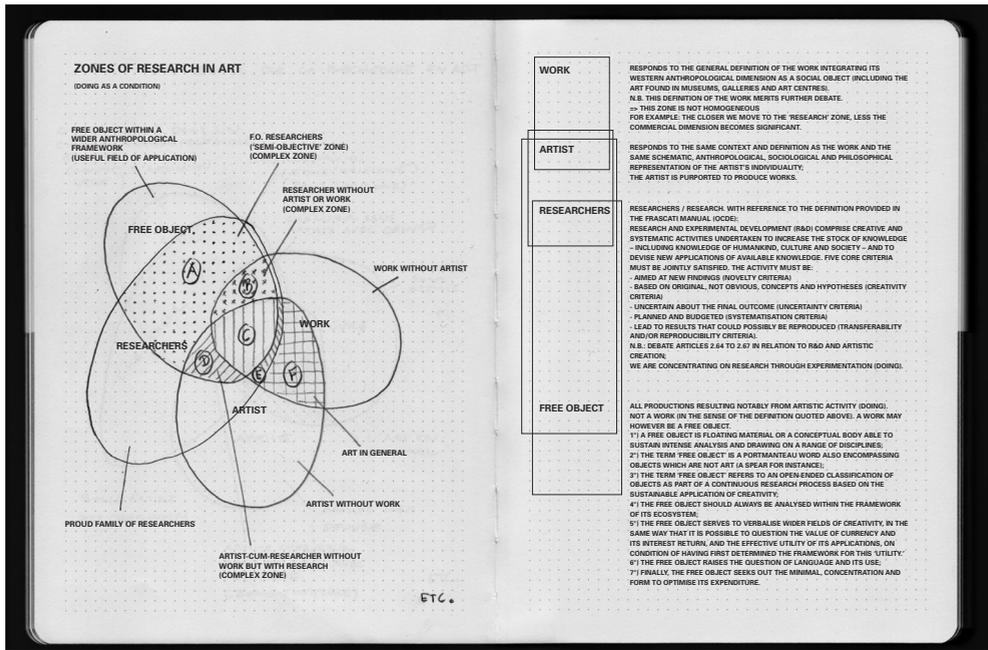
2 This research could not have been carried out without the benefit of Philippe Jaworski’s restrainedly attentive ear. May the words that follow be interpreted as a demonstration of the sincere interest of a small group of free-thinking readers, inspired by the flashes of brilliance in Melville’s text and a desire to discover fiction beyond fiction, thanks to the translator’s upright translation, right like the species of whale itself.

3 While this idea has now long held sway, forthright detractors to this at once progressive and clearly observable conception of research in the arts do still exist.

4 This object might take the form of material elements, actions, gestures, visual or mental images or abstract concepts.

5 These forms of knowledge are proper to the artist, of course, but here the moot point concerns the designation of the work, in that the connotations of the term are restrictive. Kaprow himself attacked the designation of the work and numerous young artists follow in his wake today, for example Jean-Baptiste Farkas.

6 We should remember that this unicity may be identified as an initial form of removal from the general principle of unicity underpinning the work, a notion which still gets good press today, even if it was widely reworked in the wake of Postmodernist analyses of the 1960s.



Modelling of research areas in the field of the arts, diagram of the author.

This provisory proposition heralds a further idea. The artistic object has no value unless it is used. And it is useful only if its sustainability is jeopardised by the very fact of its being used. Take for instance apparatus comprising a spear and a spear-thrower.<sup>7</sup> The spear is only useful, within the framework of its ascribed functions, if it is thrown at a target, and, simultaneously, its sustainability is jeopardised by the possibility that it might veer off course, rebound and end up twisted or broken. In the best circumstances, the spear may be retrieved, and repaired if damaged has been incurred. If, however, the spear is lost, it must be replaced. In other words, sustainability is a counter-economy of wear and tear,<sup>8</sup> in turn shedding light on two further perspectives - *maintenance* or *replacement*.<sup>9</sup> To complete this hypothesis on the benefits of sustainability, let us suppose that if the spear is useful in a specific discipline (hunting, for instance), then the object itself and/or mastery of its use may well be opportune in other activities and relevant disciplines. The reader will no doubt have a multitude of possibilities in mind (as a lever, for stone throw-

7 As in J. L. Deotte and P. D. Huyghe, the term 'apparatus' is used, in that the example presented here includes not only the projectile itself, but also the thrower and the throwing skills acquired.

8 I refer here to collective research carried out into the question of wear and tear/usury presented in Baumann P. and De Beaufort A., *L'Usure*, Bordeaux/Brussels, PUB/ARBA, 2016.

9 Le Clézio refers to this in *Haï* and Toni Grand also endeavours to implement this notion.

ing, athletics, games etc.). The same goes for the artistic object concerning the terms of its sustainability – or depletion – and even more so in light of its vocation to make itself useful outside the limits of art within a wider anthropological and social framework.<sup>10</sup>



Experimenting with Pierre Baumann how to throw a spear, Chloé Bappel, photographic documentation, Mai 2017, copyleft pierre baumann.

## CONTINUITY

Upon what, indeed, are these hypotheses based? They are rooted in conclusions gathered from research outlined in an article entitled ‘Hypothesis through Indifference vs. Legal Fiction (Research and Continuity in Liquid Forms of Writing)’,<sup>11</sup> encapsulated in three words: *continuity of discontinuity*. These conclusions are underpinned by five principles of relevance here, as follows:

<sup>10</sup> This process is converse to the concept of *artification* explored by Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro in *De l'Artification. Enquêtes sur le Passage à l'Art*, Paris, EHESS, coll. ‘Cas de Figure’, 2012. It is not a question of following in the unwavering and enduring footsteps of Duchamp and studying what ‘designates the transformation process of non-art into art, the result of a complex procedure engendering a shift in definition and the status of people, objects and activities’ (p.20), but rather, in the spirit of Filliou’s thinking on ‘permanent creation’, of discussing the benefits of extracting artistic processes from usage outside the field of art without any longer needing to name them as such, in our ways of behaving or organising the economy of objects, even over and above the field of design or architecture but within the context of our daily lives, in both their private and collective dimension. We might also note that N. Heinich is firmly opposed to the presence of bringing creative artists into universities, in that she does not believe that they can respond to the prerequisites of research as outlined in my diagram.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Baumann, ‘Hypothèse par Indifférence vs Fiction Juridique (Recherche et Continuité des Ecritures Liquides)’, in Quaresma José (dir.), *Research in Arts and Absurdity*, ESTC/U.Auckland/Creative Arts and Industries Dance Studies, Lisbon, 2016, p. 143-162.

1. Seeking out the continuity of discontinuity (in other words, identifying coherence in absurdity, solidity in fluidity, the relationship between consecutive phrases, even if Whitman reminds us that all writing is essentially fragmentary).<sup>12</sup>
2. Apprehending how hard 'doing' can be – the notion of hardness is an etymological cousin of sustainability, in that sustainability and durability are related, as something hard is both 'enduring' and 'lasting', since it 'resists our touch' – (literally revisiting reality for reality's sake).
3. Reinvesting indifference (repositioning positions, displacing finalities, relocating objects of research, questioning the meaning of montage).
4. Exploring the relations between uses of analogy and metaphor (from the vantage point of science, law or art).
5. Contradicting theory in light of the facts and vice versa (testing and 'fictioning').

A principle is only of any use if it is a subject of discussion and debate. Its role is to be investigated, rejected, displaced, analysed and thereby converted into a useful piece of knowledge through a process of verification and repeated testing. Such is the purpose of the analytical presentation which follows.

## RESAYING, SAYING, DOING

Before proceeding, I wish to linger for a moment on a book recently published by Pierre-Damien Huyghe, entitled *Contre-temps*,<sup>13</sup> in which the author returns to the question of research in the arts, architecture and design. It is not my intention to appraise the entire work here, but a number of arguments caught my attention in that they point to positions which, admittedly, may already have been formulated differently – the author makes no bones about this – but which show that the injunctions of 'artification' evoked above have been clearly digested. The book also reclassifies the directive sent from the French Ministry of Culture to fine arts schools instructing them to 'do research.' While this position rapidly re-establishes the classic differentiation between doing (*poiësis*) and enacting (*praxis*), Huyghe makes three main points. The first is that today's zeitgeist has

12 More precisely on the subject of Whitman, Deleuze explains that a differentiation exists between Europeans who have an 'innate sense of organic totality, or composition, but they have to acquire the sense of the fragment', while 'Americans, on the contrary, have a natural sense of the fragment, and what they have to conquer is the feel for the totality (...)' The words Whitman chooses are 'spontaneous, fragmentary' and Deleuze goes on to point out what Whitman is saying, 'What is proper to America is not then the fragmentary, but the spontaneity of the fragmentary.' (In Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, London and New York, Verso, 1998, translated by D.W. Smith and M.A. Greco, p.56. First published in *Critique et Clinique*, Paris, Minuit, 1993). Effectively speaking and to avoid simplification, we should assume the double politics of writing (and research) and, as good Europeans, ride our bicycles 'American style' as Jacques Tatie so aptly put it. It is also well and truly question here of the relation between pragmatic conceptions of research in the arts (like that carried out in Canada and at UQAM, in particular) and French organicism.

13 Pierre-Damien Huyghe, *Contre-temps, de la Recherche et de Ses Enjeux. Arts, Architecture, Design*, Paris, B42, April 2017.

‘somewhat abandoned the notion of doing and its inherent qualities.’<sup>14</sup> We talk rather than do, and the simple fact of saying has now become synonymous with the fact of action.<sup>15</sup> Huyghe goes on to explore this performative process. Secondly, he notes that performative utterances have something ‘speculative’ about them, thereby rather turning the tables. ‘Speculation does not infer that we first do things, but rather that we say them’.<sup>16</sup> It is a symptom, then, (and in this Huyghe is laying down the foundations of his theory), of a decrease in doing to the benefit of an increase in ‘telling’ or ‘having believe’. This in turn raises a further question which serves as a hypothesis to which I subscribe, to wit: ‘Can we unequivocally make a case from the simple fact of doing something, from a fact free of assertion, promise and connotation? And who, as it matters so much to us, would presume to call upon words – in a commentary rather than an explanation or interpretation – without being supported in advance?’<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, Huyghe reminds us of the ministerial directive sent out to art schools to ‘do research.’ According to Huyghe, the ‘do it yourself’ approach is a form of research - a hard task indeed in light of our epoch’s injunction to *say*. He counters this argument by reversing the directive and suggesting we might first ‘do’ and then question what has been done by testing ‘the distance between doing and saying.’ What seems particularly interesting is not so much the novelty of positing such ideas – for they are not new and academics, artists and teachers in art schools have been familiar with them for many years (think of the spirit of the Bauhaus and Foucault’s analysis of the gaps between forms of discourse) – but rather the necessity of saying over and over again what has not been sufficiently said,<sup>18</sup> because these words are seemingly addressed to the political sphere, and politics always advances in *delayed fashion*.<sup>19</sup> I agree with Huyghe when he assimilates the nature of research – ‘looking, seeking out’ – with an act of re-disposition, inherently modern, consistent with *cinematographic* montage in style, and comparable with what Didi-Huberman describes from his reading of Brecht’s poetics as a cruel undertaking of disposition and *dysposition*.<sup>20</sup>

14 Here Huyghe joins the debate on *deskilling*, i.e. the loss of technical skills decried as early as 1981 by Jan Burn in the light of analysis of Conceptual Art, and also by Hal Foster who, in 2017, became the object of a research project entitled ‘taking it as a progression’ at the HEAD in Geneva.

15 Huyghe takes care to remind us of John Langshaw Austin’s work, *How to Do Things with Words*, published in 1962 and based on a lecture cycle given in 1955. I would add that there is a more or less explicit borrowing of Austin’s ideas in the no less allusively entitled tome directed by Patricia Brignone, *Du Dire au Faire*, Vitry-sur-Seine, MacVal, 2012. The idea of the implementation of verbal expression as an artistic action is discussed.

16 *Contre-temps*, p. 24.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

18 This is what Delacroix says in substance in his *Journal*. The current state of French research in the arts clearly suffers from a lack of visibility and readability on the international stage, notably due to the bipartisan nature of the institutions (Universities vs. Fine Arts Schools) responsible for developing research in this field, and the fact that this research has difficulty 1° - situating itself, 2° - being accepted as such by research organisations (CNRS, ANR, ERC). Proof of this may be found in the sociologically detailed approach, albeit subject to the dialectics of theory/practice, formulated by Efva Lilja in *Art, Research, Empowerment, On the Artist as Researcher*, Stockholm, Elanders, Sweden AB, 2015, p. 43.

19 Said with genuine Duchampian staircase wit regarding the sadly problematic situation today, as expressed in the institutional texts which define research and the Frascati Manual, published by the OECD in particular.

20 Cf. P. Baumann, ‘Je ne sais pas ce que c’est, mouvement, détournement, montage’ in Quaresma J., Rosa Dias, F. (dir.) *Research in Arts, The Oscillation of the Methods*, FCT, Lisbon, 2015, p. 157-177.

## ART WITHOUT WORK OR ARTIST

In a further chapter entitled ‘theory in artistic disciplines’, Huyghe posits the superb idea of ‘writing with art.’<sup>21</sup> I willingly concede that it would be impossible to fully discuss his thinking in the space of a few lines, worthy no doubt of a more complex discussion using the appropriate philosophical tools. It is a fact that a thesis in art goes hand in hand with high stakes pertaining to professionalization and should be questioned as such, in relation to what it engenders in terms of research in the arts. I also fully share the idea (as a change from the term ‘hypothesis’) that research is played out (a game of dice, perhaps?) in its capacity to put out to sea whatever the hypo-thesis and whatever the wind, as all sense of certitude is carried away on the tide. Huyghe puts these words into the researcher’s mouth, ‘I thought that...,’ he says, ‘but I can now see that things weren’t necessarily just as I had imagined them.’<sup>22</sup> Adopting a position of such humility requires prior questioning of the confidence that the artist supposedly places in his work. Huyghe issues a warning - artists beware, take care where you tread, for in seeking accreditation of your ‘research’ by means of a doctoral thesis, you run the risk of dislocating your vision of your own artistic practice.

The idea here is to investigate how the artist descends towards research and how, by the principle of communicating vessels, causes the research to *ascend*.

I would posit a further hypothesis of a less ambitious philosophical nature, for I am no philosopher. While we all accept (despite debate on the subject in art schools, among others), that a doctoral thesis provides the symbolic and institutional framework of the implementation of research, on the premise that research is played out through hypo-thesis, should we not reconsider what seemingly lies at the basis of the robust presupposition that research in the arts, and notably research rooted in practice, should be carried out by *artists*?

## FREE OBJECTS

The protocol underlying the research described here is therefore based on a hypothesis, dislocating the supremacy of the figure of the artist. For this to function, we must first dissociate the figure of the artist from the artistic activity he or she embodies. Put more bluntly still, it is a question of ridding the figure of the artist of the trappings of social and stereotypical prestige. The individual will be ‘whitened’ (as will language later), as a means of interesting ourselves only in what that individual is and does, freed from the political sphere. What does this imply? Well, it implies that this whitened figure meaningfully employs their skills for doing, thinking or saying, in relation to, for example, their sense of colour, acute awareness of composition, control of layout, their *way of seeing*, their expert understanding of gesture, their imagination, visionary power, etc. Consequently, the terms expressed in the notion ‘research in the arts is carried out by artists’ (my reformulation) are reversed, i.e. there are no artists in research in the arts,<sup>23</sup> only the full creative power and understanding of the individual carrying out that research.

<sup>21</sup> Huyghe, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> Removed from its context, this formulation obviously sounds as moronic as it does reactionary... I am cutting to the chase, but the diagram presented supra enables us to gain a more nuanced understanding of this hypothesis.

Secondly, my hypothesis also implies that the work of art no longer really exists, or in any case not as it is defined in western cultural thinking. Anthropological objects and *intermediary objects* (Vinck) exist which call upon artistic knowledge in terms of doing and saying and which *mark* hypotheses.<sup>24</sup> This saves time, in that we can ill-treat artistic objects through discussion and debate without having to endure the objection that the work was produced by the artist, in a way defying all explanation and that even if an explanation could be found, it would not be open to negotiation. On the contrary, these things can be debated and tested, analysed and taken to pieces, just like any other research hypothesis in any other field of study (I am thinking here of mathematics, biology or archaeology, for example). Some might object that the humility of the researcher's approach has much in common with the humility demonstrated by a number of artists, like Cage or Filliou. I would agree with this - the definition of the artist is in no way homogeneous. This hypothesis (here again) is doubtless one of the conditions defining the sustainability of research (in the arts) and which appends this research with a presupposition - there must be discussion and debate, in other words rigorous testing using collective tools.

Thirdly, Huyghe's hypothesis - presented as a possible exercise to be carried out with students - consisting in first saying 'shut up and show us' as a precondition for later discussion, works tolerably well as an exercise in acquiring basic research practice (relative to the arts), but does not work as a fundamental research principle. In other words, the relation between *saying* (B) and *doing* (A) only exists on the basis of a continuity principle enabling us to pass uninterruptedly from A to B, and then from B to A. But also from A to A' and from B to B'. And also, then, from A' to B and B' à A. Needless to say that from the perspective of this hypothesis, the equivalent ratio established between doing and saying (i.e. A=B) must also be tested. In short, this uninterrupted structure requires that we proceed in a more nuanced manner, by describing the function of the different operations this series unrolls (variably, of course, depending on the research context) with greater precision.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, it is not entirely certain that we will be able to employ the word 'practice,' so often called upon to avoid the use of other terms. This too is the painful legacy of stereotypes which dictate that spreading colour across a canvas is a form of practice, for example, while penning words on a sheet of paper is not. Practice may be defined as 'a means of applying a theory.' The posteriority implied here between doing and thought must surely be refuted. We might prefer the word *experience* (Huyghe's book contains a chapter on 'writing with art as an experience). Experience reinvests the artistic research

24 This opens up the question of the ethical and legal status of the objects produced, and does not rescind, just as for any piece of research, the value of intellectual property. From a sociological point of view, parallels should doubtless be drawn between this conception and the *intermediary objects* studied by Dominique Vinck, within the framework of academic cooperation networks. These objects might be texts, instruments, materials, ghosts, animals or vast instruments, technological platforms and instrumental tools. Vinck has observed that teams which devoted greater attention to these objects came up with far more conclusive results. According to Vinck, these objects play a key role in *representing and translating* research. Representing because the 'intermediary object is entrusted by its authors with the task of conveying fragments about which knowledge is still in the process of construction.' Notably, 'it is the promise or hypothesis of a potential scientific object.' In other words, 'it refers back to the idea that the passage from one register to another, for example, the passage from intention to realisation does not take place without a form of transformation', in D. Vinck, 'From Intermediary Objects towards Boundary-Object. Accounting for the work of Equipment.' Full article published in French, 'De l'Objet Intermédiaire à l'Objet-Frontière. Vers la Prise en Compte du Travail d'Équipement', *Revue d'Anthropologie des Connaissances* 2009/1 (Vol. 3, n° 1), p. 56. Grateful thanks to Anne Wambergue for introducing me to this research.

25 Cf. P. Baumann, 'Hypothèse par Indifférence vs Fiction Juridique (Recherche et Continuité des Ecritures Liquides)', *op. cit.* Taking as our starting point the Darwinian experience of gleaning, we outlined a series of research gestures which, at the end of the article, serve to reinforce a more precise definition of the use of continuous series such as these.

object with its full uncertainty, possible failure, serendipity and contextual perspectives: experience is a lived fact.<sup>26</sup> It is true that in whitening the word destined to redefine the artistic object, this *exercice* (another term with inferences to Beuys) is diminished by dint of its pragmatic connotations.<sup>27</sup> As part of this endeavour to *neutralise* vocabulary, I have indeed developed my own term which, out of context, no doubt comes across as a linguistic affectation – the ‘free object.’ The term figures in the diagram presented supra. The free object<sup>28</sup> corresponds to the outline definition of the *artistic research object* gradually emerging from these considerations. Let us, if you will, accept this ellipsis.

## A MONSTROUS TEXT, TOO MUCH METAPHOR

Let's get down to the facts (as if today facts were the only means of proof). How can the question of the sustainability of research be properly tested and what is the origin of this obsession with whitening language?

In other words, what ways can be found of considering the relationship between the different research tools used for studying the arts, from the perspective of the continuity between the different stages of their implementation (experimentation, analysis, theorisation, review)? More precisely, I will support my argumentation here by means of a protocol recently devised to study a *prophetic* work of literature – Herman Melville's epic novel *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael sets sail on Captain Ahab's ship, the *Pequod*, to take part in an expedition to hunt whales, or at least so he believes. Ahab's real mission is to seek revenge on the great white sperm whale, Moby Dick, who bit off his leg at the knee in a previous whaling voyage. This is therefore, a priori, but only a priori, a tale of revenge gone wrong. It is a monstrous text. The analogy between the ‘monstrous fiction, a true Leviathan text’<sup>29</sup> and the monster in the novel, i.e. the white sperm whale, should not be overlooked. His colour is exceptional among his species, unlike other animals, and he has what can only be described as a formless form - rhomboidal (like a musical instrument) with a crescent shaped tail and flabby appearance, while in reality his body is as hard and heavy as the glowing, pliable metal shaped in the steel forges of Richard Serra. To all extents and purposes, his form is indistinguishable and cannot be seen (most of the time he lurks in the ocean depths, seemingly ‘ubiquitous’<sup>30</sup> and overawing sailors with the ‘rumors and portents concerning him’).<sup>31</sup> His form takes effect through impact. While difficult to see, his shape makes itself felt through the force of the collision it generates, crashing brutally into ships like a sledge-hammer or battering ram. By then it is too late; the ship goes down. This is sculptural in essence. The whale is a monster, however poorly we apprehend him, like the novel itself. The contours of the novel are equally difficult to define, composed of fragments, forming a seemingly interminable patchwork, incommensurably difficult to read, with lengthy phrases and digressions. To catch sight of the monster, to fully appre-

26 OED, ‘*The apprehension of an object, thought, or emotion through the senses or mind; Active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill.*’

27 cf. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York, Perigee Books, 1934. Written in 1934, Dewey's pragmatic text on research in the arts has much in common with what was described earlier on the European spirit.

28 A synthetic overview of this research is presented in my accreditation to direct research dossier, available at [https://www.academia.edu/19532471/Les\\_objets\\_libres](https://www.academia.edu/19532471/Les_objets_libres)

29 Peter Szendy, *op. cit.*, back cover.

30 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, New York, Harper & Brothers publishers, 1851, p. 200, (original edition).

31 *Idid.*, p. 199.

hend and define it, to retrace its contours, it has to be read. Our full attention must be given, as we proceed patiently, word after word, gradually transforming the monster into a precious animal whose skin bears the inscriptions of battles waged and whose anatomical attributes enable us to understand why it is hunted on an industrial scale.

Peter Szendy writes that *Moby-Dick* is 'above all, perhaps, a book about reading.' (...) 'But what the narrator of the novel constantly affirms and reaffirms is that the whale is a book. Or rather, as the book of *Moby-Dick* is written under the quill of Ishmael, its scribing narrator, so the whale *becomes* equally a book.'<sup>32</sup>

So what can be done with this book? The answer is doing and saying the whale (*Moby Dick*).

Nor can we ignore the striking metaphor of a narrative written like a sea-faring quest, in which navigation is always the upshot of a set of both intuitive and theoretical interactions (there is no clearly defined course because it is impossible to know where *Moby Dick* really is), involving both practical experience at sea, knowledge of how to sail and maintain a ship and the abundant skills set necessary (hierarchy on board ship, map reading, astronomy, carpentry etc.). This extended metaphor also clearly serves as a driving force for modelling research in the arts – the ship is the laboratory, the research team its quartermasters, and its roaming akin to the researcher's quest, etc. In either case, be it the metaphor of the narrative as Leviathan or the novel as a seafaring expedition and research experience, two questions must be asked.

1. What is it that enables the whale and the ship to endure? If this were not the case, then the narrative itself would peter out in light of its construction, until the final headlong collision between the two marine bodies.
2. What should be done with all these metaphors and analogies, aware as we are that metaphor all too often results in the reader getting carried away. There must be a usure of metaphor, Derrida explains in *Margins of Philosophy*.<sup>33</sup> Metaphor must be 'whitened' so that words, images, saying and doing, do not drift away from literal meaning.

## THE WHITENESS OF LANGUAGE

We have already evoked the question of neutralising language as a rule of thumb to our approach. In his *The Preparation of the Novel*, Roland Barthes attentively explores every step of the creative processes involved in novel writing, paying particular attention to the Japanese haiku (the 'whitest' possible form of writing)<sup>34</sup> and to Proust who might summarily be compared to Melville in his ability to pen a literary mountain range. Barthes's text is all the more powerful in that it is the transcription of speech in action, in the form

32 Peter Szendy, *op. cit.*, p. 39. When Szendy wrote his book, he did not have the benefit of Philippe Jaworski's superlative translation. This explains why Szendy sometimes offers his own translation of the original text.

33 Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', p. 207-273, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1982. Translated by Alan Bass. First published in *Marges de la Philosophie*, Paris, Minuit, 1972. The French term *usure* is retained in the English translation. The translator gives this definition in the footnote on page 209: 'Usure in French means both usury, the acquisition of too much interest, and using up, deterioration through usage.' Derrida uses the metaphor of *usure* to use up metaphor.

34 In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Barthes introduces the term of 'white writing', purged of the mannerisms of 'literature', to describe a minimalistic literary style.

of lectures addressed to students between 1978 and 1980. To *finish (rather than conclude)* his lectures, after two years spent trying to put his thoughts into words as best he could, Barthes says, 'I can try to give a sort of profile of the Work I would like to write'.<sup>35</sup> This corresponds perfectly to what happens in research – the hesitation of endeavour, the fundamental difficulty of pinning down what exactly is going on, but despite this, the inextinguishable desire to put things into words, to identify and designate. Barthes discusses three words: *simplicity*, *filiation* and *desire*.

I adhere (whole-heartedly) to what Barthes says.

Filiation: 'Writing needs lineage'.<sup>36</sup> Yes, it does.

Desire: 'The Desire that must be deposited in the Book = desire for language – a certain desire for Language'.<sup>37</sup> Yes, a desire for language deposited in the form being produced.

Simplicity: Barthes argues that simplicity is defined by three forms of writing behaviour: 1) 'Readability.' 2) 'That the work should cease to be, or be only discreetly, a discourse of the work about the work.' 3) 'To renounce what's insinuated by the autonymic code (Autonymy: the word taken as the word and not as a sign: the word put between scare quotes).' (...) 'What simplicity wants, will want, then, is for us to write as much as possible at face value.'<sup>38</sup>

We too will attempt to write things at face value and produce something readable, something not turned in towards self (the work), but out towards others. This is no easy task, because language has such a strong propensity for metaphor. *Moby-Dick* calls upon metaphor constantly. Still, we will try to stick to this approach to avoid any degradation (loss of sustainability) in the interpretation of our results and avoid the trap of putting interpretation before seeing.

That's all well and good, but to what end? For the second time, let's get down to the facts and return to the central question. What should be done with this novel? And why this novel in particular?

## THE OBJECTIVE

Our objective: Testing the sustainability of Melville's novel. Testing its sustainability means investigating the novel's capacity to sustain the novel as a genre, the reader's capacity to sustain their reading and the narrative's capacity to sustain its story telling. In other words, the novel's capacity to keep on generating narrative, over and over again. And therefore, also, the text's capacity to let itself be unceasingly rewritten, including in the form of translation (there is something indefinably reminiscent of the *Talmud* about this, I feel). This implies, then, a capacity to generate new texts, new literary organisms and also new forms. In other words, begging the question of the novel's sustainability implies a degree of experimentation as to the relationship between doing and saying and creativity's ability to endure. The sine qua non of this durable sustainability is, then, the transmission and reformulation of the novel (*maintenance, replacement*).

35 Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel 1 and 2*, European Perspectives Series, Columbia Press, New York, 2011, translated by Kate Briggs, p. 298. First published in *La Préparation du Roman 1 et 2*, Paris, Seuil/IMEC, 2003.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 300-301.

Let us return for a moment to the spear analogy – a novel (the object-book and its literary content) is produced so that its reading may be projected out towards the listener (let us not forget that the novel is a spear with a capacity to strike the heart even of the person who threw it). Once the reading (throwing) has been dispatched, the spear is unleashed. Should we understand, then, that this novel can be thrown again, repaired or replaced? Such is our hypothesis – people generally believe that a novel is a sluggish weapon, unchanging because its words are set in stone. Yet translation alone provides clear proof of the contrary. The simple fact of switching language transforms the novel, shaping it into forms which are not exactly the same (“Translation is a form. To comprehend it as a form, one must go back to the original’ writes Benjamin.)<sup>39</sup> The spear has been re-made on the basis of the original model. It still works perfectly, may hit new targets, but, truth to tell, it is not exactly identical. When it’s all said and done, does this really matter? (This is another question, and the reader should be allowed to make their own mind up). In any case, the Indian spear-thrower seems to agree that it does not – after all, his new spear is endowed with magical powers.

Metaphor has caught up with us once again. On this occasion, the metaphor is interesting in that it enables us to clearly see that sometimes a spear, because it does not belong to our language, is present, but without our being able to use it. It is passed from hand to hand, seems hermetic and is not used because we do not know how to do so. As such it becomes magical and mysterious, because only the *original* knows from whence it came. It is an object of power.<sup>40</sup>

Allow me to reformulate our objective – identifying how the literary object is sustained through use, and how through use we create new forms, and how these new objects that we have created use new plastic languages. Defining the terms and conditions of the sustainability of such an object requires that we lay down the framework of an ecological conception of use in art, at the expense of its economic perspectives. Indeed, the question of the novel’s sustainability in this context is not a question of management and administration (even if there is always a form of economics in ecology, it is not our priority here), but rather a study of the relations created between its different components, a study of behaviours, the novel’s adaptability and its capacity for regeneration.

## THE MUSIC OF READING ON THE AFTERDECK

The hypothesis behind this protocol – experiencing reading. Saying the book through reading. Letting the novel be heard. Seeing how different individuals use the novel. Sharing the novel. Analysing the novel. Telling each other the story of the novel. Discussing the novel. Testing translations of the novel. Translating a verbal language into a ‘plastic’ one.

This is encapsulated in the following chain:

Reading – Saying – Doing through Saying – Reading what has been Said – Doing through Form (= Resaying) – Rereading.<sup>41</sup>

39 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume I*, 1913-1926, ed. M Bullock and M W Jennings, ‘The Task of the Translator’, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 254.

40 I am thinking here of research carried out into the work of Toni Grand and the question of New Guinea polished axe-heads that Anne-Marie and Pierre Pétrequin have been working on for a number of years - *Objet de Pouvoir en Nouvelle-Guinée*, Paris, RMN, 2006. Cf. P. Baumann, ‘Toni Grand et le Silence de Hai’ in P. Baumann and A. De Beaufort, *L’Usure*, op. cit., p. 20-35.

41 Each step is also accompanied by thinking, naturally.

(Or in other words: understanding how to hold the spear – throwing the spear – hitting the target – understanding throwing the spear and hitting the target – making a new spear and throwing it – understanding this new object-apparatus/throwing movement).

In this light, we<sup>42</sup> have not tested all the metaphors threaded through *Moby-Dick*, but we have tried out the reading chain for all chapters in the novel, i.e. 135 chapters together with an ‘etymology’, two ‘extracts’ and an ‘epilogue’.

To quote Beckett, ‘what is the word’?

« comment dire –

voir –

entrevoir –

croire entrevoir –

vouloir croire entrevoir –

folie que de vouloir croire entrevoir quoi –

quoi –

comment dire –

et où<sup>43</sup> –

(...) »

Yes, folly indeed. In order to resist the lure of metaphor, so as not to be dragged off course by it into the carelessness of ambiguity, we decided to keep things literal. We believed in the simplicity of this approach, just like one believes in the simplicity of a form or gesture, like a biting supposition which grasps you, like my belief in what Deleuze has to say, first of *Bartleby* and then of Melville as a whole:

‘*Bartleby*’ is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of anything whatsoever. It is a violently comical text, and the comical is always literal. It is like the novellas of Kleist, Dostoyevsky, Kafka or Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious lineage. It means only what it says, literally.<sup>44</sup>

We wished to read what Melville says, literally, in comedic mode - and in one sitting.

Our starting point was the idea of finding language in language itself, a point Deleuze also discusses in *Essays Critical and Clinical*:

‘Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. (...) It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment, which tends to constitute an original language within language; and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover the Outside, silence or music. A great book is always the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood.’<sup>45</sup>

42 A collective ‘we’ which includes Chloé Bappel, Etienne Beaudouin, Christine Bielle, Marlaine Bournel, Alice Camuzeaux, Simon Deniboire, Esther Pontoreau, Philippe Régnier, Camille Rousseau, Tomas Smith and myself.

43 Samuel Beckett, first published in *Poèmes et Autres Mirlitonades*, Paris, Minuit, 1992, p. 26-27. Beckett’s own translation, published in *Grand Street*, Vol. 9, No. 2, N.Y., Winter 1990, p. 17-18.

44 Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, London and New York, Verso, 1998, translated by D.W. Smith and M.A. Greco, p.68. First published in *Critique et Clinique*, Paris, Minuit, 1993.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

## READING MOBY-DICK

Without harping back to vain theory and by getting to grips with the novel, we too have endeavoured to send language into flight - *Outside*. We began by reading *Moby-Dick* in its entirety, out loud and in uninterrupted manner.<sup>46</sup> This enabled us to experience the text in the fullness of its duration. Patiently, obstinately. We did not do this for the sake of making a film or documentary. Nor did we read the text as actors would. We literally just read it – for the sake of reading. We read it to be heard, listened to and to better grasp Melville's gesture in writing this story. And in doing so, we began to amass *information* contained in the novel.<sup>47</sup>



Reading *Moby-Dick*, with Camille Rousseau reading here (2<sup>nd</sup> watch) on the afterdeck, May 2017, photo copyleft Pierre Baumann.

The whole process took quite some time: 32 hours and 16 minutes without stopping, all through the day and night, between Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> May at 06h21 and Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2017 at 14h37. It took some organisation too. The team was divided into three 'watches' (of three or four people), rotating every two hours, and entrusted with the task of reading and recording (literally) the novel in its entirety, chapter after chapter, page after page, line after line, word after word, letter after letter, silence after silence. We read night and day; at times we read well, at others badly; sometimes we were listened to well, and at others badly, but we never ceased to seek to hear (at times on stand-by mode, delegating the role of listening to the crewman steering the reading across the nocturnal waters of the narrative). We recorded the reading. Literally: to the letter.

46 It goes without saying that 'doing' and 'saying' are part and parcel of each other here. Further still, literally 'saying' the text is the first stage in charting it and the first way in which the locus of the novel is brought into existence. Keith Basso, in 'Water Lies with Mud in an Open Container', in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, UNMP, Mexico City, 1996, analyses the verbal designation of place in Apache territories. 'Instead of an image, a verbal description can be used', for example 'Water Flows Down on a Succession of Flat Rocks' (p.46). That makes sense for a novel, one might argue, and it does enable us to assimilate the fact that *Moby-Dick* can be envisaged as a form of oversized chart. This verbal description, which functions as a 'take', also supposes that we adopt the point of view of the individual doing the describing. (For the Cibecue Indians, this is done by the ancestors). From the point of view of our research methodology for *Moby-Dick*, this parallel suggests that charting of this type can only be carried out if we can identify the vantage point from which place is described.

47 Deleuze also points to this: 'Even *Moby-Dick* begins by amassing information at the beginning in order to give the whale a form and sketch out its image, right down to the dark painting hanging in the inn.', *op. cit.*, p. 77.

We read the novel first and foremost, of course, to be able to listen to the story. *Moby-Dick* is an incredible tale, brimming with captivating characters, presenting the reader with an inventory of a wide range of specialist subjects (mathematics, cetology, philosophy, navigation, etc.). Let us not dwell on this point, however essential, except to remember that the question of sustainability is deeply rooted here. It stems back to the intimate mythology created whenever a father, mother or attentive adult reads a child a story. True, this is a novel whose pages one must search carefully to find a representation of femininity, an absence that is amply troubling. Perhaps, in this light, the novel might find a form of *renewal* through the voice. The spirit of research itself is also no doubt rooted in elements of our childhood reading habits: the questing spirit, spurred on by a desire to discover what will happen next, imminence with the unknown, lying stretched out, our head in the stars. This is the stuff of experiences which only happen once. There is only one first time. After that, yes, of course, you can re-read the story, and relive the adventure of reading. In other words, we repeat the narrative and proceed to its *scientific verification*.

The protocol set out was therefore relatively simple and adhered strictly to the line of continuity between saying and doing.

1. Reading the book in its entirety and recording each chapter.
2. Analysing our listening.
3. Proceeding to sound and plastic translations, some of which were intended for documentation purposes, others intended to be inlaid with the recorded voices.
4. Reflecting on an editorial form which would bring together the elements outlined above as a tool for promoting our research.

In other words: Reading (1) – Saying (1) – Doing through Saying (1) – Reading what has been said (2) - Doing through Form (= Resaying) (3) – Rereading (3 and 4).

Secondly, we read with *intentions*. The first intention took the form of an assumption.<sup>48</sup> Whosoever signs up for this quest must respect the method. In other words:

1. Keep it minimal (in the spirit of Barthes's simplicity).
2. Foster concentration (to ensure sustainability).
3. Produce a form (to make it enduring).

<sup>48</sup> I consider that it would be pointless to spend time justifying these assumptions, for they seem self-evident. The *minimal* targets what is 'necessary and sufficient', while *concentration* involves listening, attentiveness, keenness of mind, density and intensity. *The production of form*, the prerequisite lying at the very origin of the field of research studied here, involves how to use artistic creation.

The second intention behind the inaugural reading of the text was to seek out useful working models which would enable us to begin describing the varying nature of the *artistic objects* (or *free objects*) by systematically identifying three types of trace in each chapter:

1. Detecting the appearance of objects (for example the cover, the spear, Brit, the chart, etc.) encapsulating the essence of mobility and the question of their sustainability.
2. Identifying types of gesture (throwing the spear, beating the anvil, treading the deck, waiting, etc.) later to be tested through the experience of creation.
3. Cataloguing signs of sound and elements suggesting auditory information (writing on paper, Ahab's ivory leg, etc.). Why such focus on sound? Let us once again explain this 'in the words of another.' Indeed, Deleuze writes that, 'Even the words they utter surpass the general laws of language (presuppositions) as well as the simple particularities of speech, since they are like the vestiges or projections of a unique, original language [language], and bring all language [language] to the limit of silence and music.'<sup>49</sup>

In his essay *Hāi*, Le Clézio tells us that language is magical. 'Silence, on the contrary, is natural', he writes. 'Silence, on the contrary, allows everything.'<sup>50</sup> Within the framework of our evaluation grid, silence, of course, is not total silence – nor for that matter is it so in Le Clézio either. Rather, it is the absence of language between the lines of the narrative and the sound of silence of things which cannot speak – the wood of the deck, slumbering metal, Ahab looking into Starbuck's eye on a 'clear and steel-blue day.'<sup>51</sup> Reading the text also literally means listening to the sound of silence (in the *Cagian* sense of the term).

There is also a literal reason behind our acoustic attentiveness, serving as a driving force for analogical developments. Language is dangerous – it is responsible for the monstrous mythology built up around the whale through tales told about it by sailors. Yet literal attentiveness not to what language has to say, but to animal silence, the noise of the whale himself – an alternative form of language, one might argue, – explains the creature's aggressiveness towards ships.<sup>52</sup>

49 Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

50 Jean-Marie Le Clézio, *Hāi*, Geneva, Skira, 1971, p. 35.

51 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, CXXXII, 'The Symphony', *op. cit.*, p. 596.

52 The sperm whale has poor eyesight. It is short sighted. It does, however, possess a very keen echolocation system. It does not have ears - sound signals are received through its jaw. Sound is generated by phonic lips situated in the melon, amplified as it travels through the spermaceti and projecting outwards from the frontal sac. Male sperm whales have a very large sac, doubtless enabling them to produce very powerful sounds. The sounds resemble 'clicking' and when produced they can be as loud as a gunshot, resembling the noise of a hammer against an anvil from a distance. Modern day knowledge of how the sperm whale finds its way around confirms the erudite hypotheses posited by Thomas Beale in 1831. The noise of the hammer striking the anvil as the whaling ship's smith repaired spearheads could, in all reality, have resulted in the sinking of numerous vessels (the *Essex* in particular), as the sperm whales mistook them for aggressive rivals and therefore attacked them, targeting the very spot in the hull where the blacksmith would strike the iron, level with the foremast near the front deck on the ship's weaker side. It was the whale's acoustic organ, the spermaceti, filled with a white, waxy and odourless substance, which caused whalers to covet the largest, and most dangerous specimens of the species. Cf. *La Véritable Histoire de Moby-Dick*, Jürgen Stumpfhaus, documentary, Arte, 2015 and Beale, Thomas, *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale: To which is Added a Sketch of a South-Sea Whaling Voyage, in which the Author was Personally Engaged*, London, J. Van Voorst. London, 1839.

The analytical grid might lead us to think that the novel was successfully pared down and scientifically dissected in objective manner, exactly what is missing in research in the arts. Superficially speaking, this is half true and half false. Indeed, research in the arts should be logical and should not hide behind the ‘unexplainable.’ But there is no getting away from what one is confronted with when studying the work of a great novelist like Melville. All you can do is *try*. As Deleuze puts it, ‘What counts (...) is that things remain enigmatic yet non-arbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason, and seizes the intimacy of life and death.’<sup>53</sup>

The process was terribly complicated and we have not yet finished with the story. It has provided us with a diagram of the beast, not eviscerated, but observed by us as in the process of existing.

48	Première mise à la mer	Veste chinoise de coton noir	Murmurer souquer embarger clandestinement Première pêche	"Nagez mes petits gars" "Je veux entendre vos os se rompre"	Thème de MD que avec la guitare (à faire phi si) Craquement d'os? (e) X
49	L'Hyline	La ganule de la mort	Piquer droit	rafales	Ambiance cosmos E X.
50	La pirogue et l'équipage d'Achab: Fedallah	Piquets de bois Turban	envelopper de mystère renforcer la pirogue		Achab qui marche (à faire nous) X.
51	Le souffre spectral	disque lunaire	zigzaguer	souffle argenté Expiration fautive	souffle chiolé (fait) X
52	L'Albatros	vêtements cloués au mat	déchirer rapiécer		essu X
53	La game	porte voix lette journaux	frayer oriser raboter se remonter		idemjuarez 62
54	L'histoire du "Hola ho"	mallet	remuer le pest d'ogit	grogner comme un ours abominable hurlement	rire de lomas (à faire par l'équipe) X
55 Q1	De quelques représentations monstrueuses de baleines	Représentations populaires/ représentations scientifiques	Mélier de baleinier Description analytique de manœuvres description des baleines	Bouillonnements qui sortent du cerveau du dauphin	Grognement de baleine grave (fait st) X.
56 Q1	De quelques représentations moins inexactes de la baleine	dessin / peinture Garamery Granure Minature	dessiner / peindre, écaler, dépecer, peindre	paissible / pacifique / plie / souffle / puisant	Grognement de baleine algu (fait simon)X

57 Q1	Des baleines en peinture	Aspet juridique Figures de la baleine	l'action attention microscopique	fracas (représenté en peinture)	
58 Q1	Kill	Des baleines en peinture	Petits objets ingénieux sculptés. Petits outillage de dentiste Imagination d'un marin / état sauvage La sculpture	sculpter / se rebeller	Girovete Le bruit des outils qui fagonnent giroveteX
59 Q1	Le calm	Kill / plançon / l'océan comme 1% de notre planète / la mer / naufragé	engloutir un monde l'océan comme une course effrénée autour du globe	bruit faucheur des petits plançon épaves de nappes fracassés glissement sub aquatique	Multitude de petit sons petit monde(fait simon) X
59 Q1	Le calm	plançon masse de rocher sans vie bosse de terrain Spectre / forme blanche / ga ne ressemble pas à une baleine / ça ressemble à Moby Dick	Aliment de la baleine gigantesque poumpuse étrange! INFORME	s'élevait paresseusement glissait sous l'eau barboter dans le kill s'abatta s'aventurer se précipiter	bruit de succionX

A spontaneous analytical grid (detail above) drawn up after listening to each chapter.

## A TALE OF THREE WATCHES

As a means of grounding the story and compensating for the lack of listening, we carried out an activity situated in the ‘reading what has been said’ stage.

Here: Reading – Saying – Doing through Saying – **Reading what has been Said** - Doing through Form (= Resaying) – Rereading.

The novel was divided into thirteen reading periods (watches) carried out in turn by three teams who kept watch in succession.

Watch 1: Marlaime, Chloé, Pierre

Watch 2: Esther, Camille, Christine, Simon

Watch 3: Alice, Tomas, Etienne

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p.82.

Addition to the watch: Philippe, a visiting musician

Each watch was entrusted with reading, listening to and analysing the group of chapters allocated, representing a reading stretch of approximately two hours (in reality closer to two and a half hours). During this time, the others were on the ‘front deck.’<sup>54</sup>

Each watch therefore accomplished four stretches of reading, apart from Watch 1 which did five.

Illustrating how the watches were organised.

Each watch therefore read and heard a third of the novel (the equivalent of over ten hours spent reading and listening), and therefore a third of the story. Each watch therefore also ‘missed’ two thirds of the story. Much of the epic therefore *remained to be told*, and we did this on the evening of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2017, in a bar which was not so much ‘Tha’ She Blows’ but a rather ordinary local. For an hour and five minutes, watch and bell in hand, each watch told the rest of the crew what they had experienced in the story, in five minute watches. These short oral narratives, of ‘what remained to be told’, in turn become a further analytical guide, of an oral nature this time, word against word, as we discussed the novel’s meaning, diligently retranslating it in a superb shambles.<sup>55</sup>

54 On the front deck we did things through form, studied, acquired information, ate and slept a little.

55 We should remember that The Shambles was the city of York’s old butcher’s street, where meat was carved up and displayed. Now synonymous with a state of disorder, the term once designated an open-air slaughterhouse.



Telling the tale, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2017, *What Remained to be Told*, HD video documentary, 1h05min, copyleft Pierre Baumann.

## TRANSLATION

Translation plays a key role in this research, and designing a book to promote our work is part and parcel of the exercise.

As we read the text, our aim was to get a sense of what Melville's writing feels like on the reader's lips, and how the author's train of thought progresses. There is no lack of documentation on this subject, admittedly (as we will see below), but the very structure of the sometimes phenomenally long sentences obliges the reader to pick their own way through the grammatical complexity of the syntax. This presents three unlooked for advantages. The first is that it enables us to uncover Melville's thought patterns as they first crystallized in the text, at the very moment the narrative was taking shape. The novel was swiftly penned; it took Melville under two years to write all six hundred or so pages. Jaworski points to a revealing characteristic of Melville's idiom, saying that often 'the ideas or arguments were not conceived ahead of time.'<sup>56</sup> Secondly, the reader must be at the helm, in a position to switch tack as and when they deem necessary, and to set off again once they have got their second wind. In this light, yes, saying is much more than a mere utterance; it is an eminently plastic means of practising language per se. Thirdly, the text forces the reader into an interpretation. It is difficult to escape the metaphors and the narration is long-winded, taking us over high seas and through choppy waters. It is a spear of the most incommodious sort. Yet it is interesting to observe how the pseudo linearity of the narrative generates a succession of powerful peaks and swinging emotions, with both victories and memorably crushing defeats. Jaworski's translation perfectly renders the text's weight. At times, we were exhausted and lost for words – there is no going back in a reading exercise of this ilk, apart from on rare occasions, when the necessary conditions were not respected. The text had to be audible, at all times. The words had to

<sup>56</sup> Philippe Jaworski, 'Note sur la Traduction', in Herman Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 1165.

be heard. In this regard, the translator's honesty in leaving an indelible mark on the text is very different from the stance of the reader who must make a point of never sparing the text he or she is reading in return. It would be wrong to think that sustainable contact with a novel should be maintained with respect for the form it exhibits. This is not, in any case, what Melville leads us to believe. Bear with me for a moment in this hasty generalisation, but there is no single Melvillian style *Moby-Dick*, writes Jaworski, but rather *styles*. Never would we have felt the importance of the translator's role with such intensity if it had not been for the reading aloud. We might argue, then, that while Melville fosters different forms of practice of his text, and thereby different artistic practices, there is one transversal model – the precision with which Melville steers each strand of the narrative, strands born from a high level of familiarity with multiple fields of study, however archaic at times, together with first-hand knowledge of sea navigation. Melville *knows* both how to say it and do it. The novel itself provides us, then, with a model research method and functions as a tremendous *search engine*. Melville's novel could not have been, if it had not been for his personal experience of sailing.

Our own recklessness, the comic situation and the immoderation of the initial hypothesis fuel the intensification of doing. This is a 'writer's book'<sup>57</sup> says Jaworski, and this is why it has lasted. If it were merely 'objective' and 'scientific', you wouldn't get past the first chapter (even if at times Melville consciously plays on the insipid character of scientific language). I can already hear voices objecting that, yes, of course it's a fabulous writer's book, but that does not make it research! More likely, it means that it embodies a form of research which does not fit the box. Yet research in the arts must also commit itself to studying *writing*; writing *tells its own story*, emerging from archipelagos of work which the researcher endeavours to chart, diligently seeking out connections between each island. We have begun to chart *Moby-Dick*, as a means of situating not only its content, but also its artistic geography and geology.

## THE CHART AND THE ORIGINAL

'I know that there are islands in the South and grand cosmopolitan passions'<sup>58</sup> writes Fernando Pessoa, the poet of fragmentation. Our archipelago was put together on the basis of enumerating each chapter. We applied the analytical grids described above, identified the sound events gradually accumulating and, more importantly, the fledgling experimental developments we had undertaken.

In the chain: *Reading – Saying – Doing through Saying – Reading what has been said – Doing through Form (= Resaying) – Rereading*, this activity is situated at the centre of the analytical grid '*Doing through Form (= Resaying)*.' In other words, each research phase is individually structured around an internal chain defined by specific contents. How is the archipelago organised? Each chapter has its own independent ecosystem, each island its own outline, montage system and individual rhythms. Yet it is part of a single cartographic entity, organised to serve a single overall design.

57 Philippe Jaworski, 'Note sur la Traduction', in Herman Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 1165.

58 Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, London, Serpent's Tail, 1991, translated by Margaret Jull Costa, p. 3. First published as *Livro do Desassossego por Bernardo Soares*, 1982.

Chapter forty-four is entitled ‘The Chart’ and Ahab is on Moby Dick’s trail. Hunter and hunted – is that what the story is all about? Chapter forty-four plans the story’s meaning. Melville offers the reader this explanation. The *Pequod* sets off to Nantucket too late to reach the Southern hemisphere before winter.

‘Therefore, he must wait for the next ensuing season. Yet the premature hour of the *Pequod*’s sailing had, perhaps, been correctly selected by Ahab, with a view to this very complexion of things. Because, an interval of three hundred and sixty-five days and nights was before him; an interval which, instead of impatiently enduring ashore, he would spend in a miscellaneous hunt;’<sup>59</sup>

The word *miscellaneous* is crucial here. Ahab’s route offers no guarantee of crossing Moby Dick’s path:

‘So (...); any wind but the Levanter and Simoom, might blow Moby Dick into the devious zig-zag world-circle of the *Pequod*’s circumnavigating wake.’<sup>60</sup>

Free object par excellence, travelling on a spherical planet which turns lines into loops, the hunter is hunted. The whole process is very graphic – we imagine the squiggly line of the *Pequod*’s route as a logical means of intersecting the clean line of Moby Dick’s gravitational circling. The whale is a free electron, revolving around the earth’s core, a perpetually spinning, tiny white ball, destroying all that lies in its path. By using this sort of layout, Melville brings Ahab into a *hyperborean, arctic zone*. Deleuze speaks in terms of a *zone of indistinction, of indiscernibility or of ambiguity*.<sup>61</sup>

‘Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby Dick, he enters into the zone of proximity where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby Dick and strikes himself in striking the whale.’<sup>62</sup>

Until the point of intersection has been found, there is nothing, and Ahab is nothing because Moby Dick is not there, in front of him. There is no photograph to develop, nothing has been exposed. Ahab is a ‘ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself.’<sup>63</sup> Charting the novel also implies examining the meaning of these indistinctions. Melville prompts action. He prompts verification. The proposition makes no bones about this, and the experimentation is carried out in pragmatic fashion. In other words, our tools of thought are first and foremost those born from experiencing the creative gesture. Those put forward by Melville are highly *original* in that he began by taking them literally, before the novels *Moby-Dick*, *Bartleby*, *Redburn* and *Pierre: or the Ambiguities* were written. Anteriority of doing over saying. At the age of twenty-one, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1840, he set sail on a three-masted whaler, the *Acushnet*, heading

59 Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

for the Galapagos Islands. He jumped ship in July 1842 on the island of Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands. This was literally the first Melvillian archipelago. And it looked the part – luxuriant vegetation and, as if by chance, the very spot in the Pacific, in all the wide ocean, with the largest gathering of sperm whales. Melville took refuge with the Typees, a cannibal tribe, incidentally finding inspiration for the character Queequeg along the way, and wrote three novels telling the tale of his absconding, as he shifted from island to island, whaler to whaler: *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Mardi* (1849). He did it, yes, built his literary archipelago, slipping inch by inch from autobiography – *Typee, Omoo* – to fiction – *Mardi*. Then, eleven years after setting sail for the first time on a whaler, *Moby-Dick* appears. He had created his own *white mythology* on the very brink of a bygone economy.<sup>64</sup>

Deleuze considers that ‘Pragmatism is misunderstood when it is seen as a summary philosophical theory fabricated by the Americans. On the other hand, we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as they create themselves.’<sup>65</sup> According to Deleuze, Melville (together with Thoreau and Emerson) figures among these trail-blazers.

Thanks to the originality of his creative gestures, Melville constructs highly original characters in each novel. Ahab,<sup>66</sup> Bartleby, Billy Budd... Melville (Ishmael) says of Ahab that his purpose, ‘forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own. Nay, could grimly live and burn, while the common vitality to which it was conjoined, fled horror-stricken from the unbidden and unfathered birth.’<sup>67</sup>

Deleuze points out that these figures also come together to form an archipelago, also explored by Jaworski in *Melville, le Désert et l’Empire*. Each fragment of the archipelago is endowed with cinematographic qualities, Deleuze argues – *panoramic shots* and *tracking shots*, ‘stationary process and infinite speed.’<sup>68</sup> In the charting of the montage of his gestures, Ahab represents infinite speed, the ‘ray of living light’, the spear. In losing his ordinary vitality, Ahab does not even use that thing which would most reconcile him with his fellows – language – but rather, is reduced to nothing more than a ray of light on a collision course. He is nothing more than the ‘vestige[s] or projection[s] of a unique, original [langue], and bring[s] all of language [language] to the limit of silence and music.’<sup>69</sup>

The chart enables us to identify this *archipelagian perspectivism* – it defines not only its layout, but also its cinematographic-acoustic framework. *The panoramic and tracking shots are part of sonic space.*

Let us think back to Keith Basso’s ‘takes’ of the Cibecue Indians (cf. note 46). The chart traced by the novel is like a lance hurtling towards the final ‘take’ – the very spot where Ahab and Moby Dick’s paths cross, the very moment when all points of view become one, when only one type of sound remains. This is the ephemeral moment when the fragmentary is made whole and language is whitened – the moment when the sea closes in around

64 *Moby-Dick* serves a sort of whistle-blower on the question of the ecologically devastating whale hunting industry, and this just before oil drilling began on a major scale in North America in 1855, leading to a decline in the use of whale oil for lighting in favour of kerosene.

65 Deleuze, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

66 Clearly inspired by the figure of Edmund Gardner, captain of the *Essex*, attacked by Mocha Dick.

67 Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 224. Ahab is the original example of what Deleuze is analysing here.

68 Deleuze, *ibid.*, p. 83.

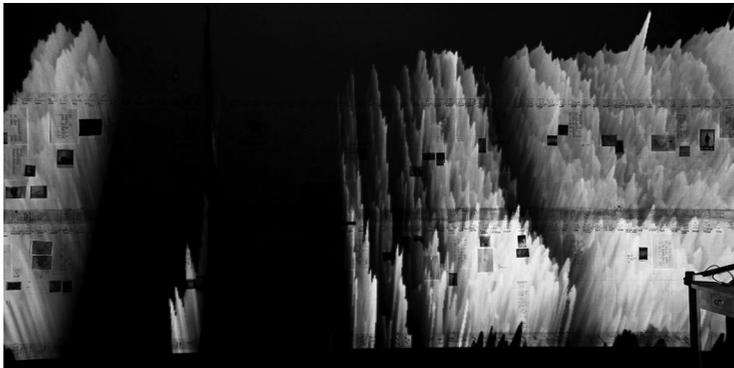
69 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the clicking of the white whale<sup>70</sup> and a body with an ivory leg abandons itself to the silence and solitude of the deeps for evermore. No more concepts, no more saying, just doing, and so the work may begin.

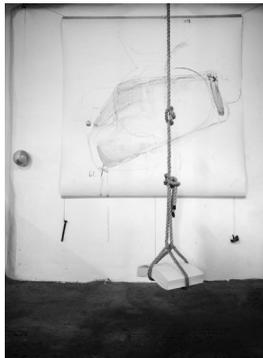


Charting/unfinished montage of 139 chapters, photo copyleft Pierre Baumann.

PIERRE BAUMANN



Simultaneous projected sound charting of the first 40 chapters recorded out of the unfinished charting of 139 chapters, by Simon Deniboire, photo copyleft Simon Deniboire.



Free object – doing through form (=resaying), by Chloé Bappel – Chapter 44 *The Chart*, May 2017, photo copyleft Chloé Bappel.

<sup>70</sup> Why is Moby Dick white? Either because he was an albino whale or because of his age – the skin of sperm whales becomes paler as they grow older.



Doing through form (=resaying), Philippe Regnier recording, May 2017, photo copyleft Pierre Baumann.

## ON THE FRONT DECK



On the front deck we did things through form, May 2017, photo copyleft Pierre Baumann.

## ENDING WITH THE HUNT

Before putting down the pen, two things need to be said. Firstly, the continuous chain described above, leading us unceasingly from saying to doing, was a perfect tool for studying *Moby-Dick*, and the charting system implemented greatly facilitated our work. Similarly, other continuous chains also exist, as discussed here, some of which are internal to a link in a general chain, which, in order to get to the bottom of one's analysis, must be reworked. In earlier research,<sup>71</sup> I worked on the process guiding creative thought based on the relationship between collecting gestures and thinking gestures in Darwin.

<sup>71</sup> These conclusions result from analysis of Darwin's presentation of *Amphiroa orbignyana* in P. Baumann, 'Hypothèse par Indifférence vs Fiction Juridique (Recherche et Continuité des Écritures Liquides)', *op. cit.*

Collecting gestures – seeing, taking, arranging, assembling, transporting, conserving and categorising – go with thinking gestures ('I think' is a Darwinian hypothesis), such as – choosing, experimenting, classifying, analysing, speculating, projecting and conceptualising. The organisation and application of this continuous chain play a role in the effectiveness of the fundamental logic of *spontaneous montage of the fragmentary*. The chart assumes multiple functions and it alone translates almost all the operations in the Darwinian chain.

This *Darwinian* chain, almost an algorithm, is applicable at each stage of doing and saying. It helps increase the level of precision of the analyses. It is a simple model, but what matters is not the credulity pertaining to its usage but that it serves our purpose. Its sustainability, as for the spear, is fostered by its use and our capacity to regenerate it, thanks to whatever we have at hand and the changeable course of our navigations

Finally, the second point is that the process described is unfinished – we have not yet fathomed all its results and are still at work collecting and collating them. Yet, and thereby confirming the operability of the method, it has shed light on a certain number of meaningful elements concerning the capacity of Melville's novel to produce research objects connected to our current reflections on the volatility and mobility of artistic objects, and the potential of these artistic tools to be used in ethical discussions on the sustainability of generalised resources.



Before impact, Chapter 134, *The Hunt, Day Two*, polaroid image by Tomas Smith, May 2017.

'Moby Dick is a free electron, revolving around the earth's core, a perpetually spinning, tiny white ball, destroying all that lies in its path,' photo copyright Tomas Smith.

