Form and Love in the Poetry of Jacques Roubaud

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I, Theano Petrou confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Thesis Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between form and the figuration of love in the poetry of Jacques Roubaud (born 5 December 1932). I begin with Roubaud's decision to institute form at the centre of his poetic practice. While rejecting the freer verse forms associated with Surrealist poetry, Roubaud maintains an ambiguous relationship with the work of Paul Éluard, placing the earlier poet at the heart of his theoretical understanding of an inextricable link between love and poetry, form and memory.

I analyse the particular place of Roubaud's muse within poetic form, and her relation to Roubaud's key concepts of literary constraint and memory. I read parts of Trente et un au cube (1973) through the lens of Lacan's theory of sexual difference and Irigaray's response, finding that the position of Roubaud's poetic beloved overlaps with that of the reader. Roubaud offers his reader spaces in which to invest her own associations and memory, and to contribute to the productivity of his practice of formal constraint.

I go on to consider the differing roles of the Lacanian and Irigarayan sexual disjunction in the relation between the poet and his beloved, particularly expressed through moments of sleep and silence. While it is an ambivalent space, this disjunction may also be a site in which the individuality of both terms in the love relation flourishes and produces mobility.

Finally, I reflect on that collaboration between poet and beloved by retracing the journey taken thus far through a selection of subsequent works written as the poet mourns the loss of his wife, Alix Cléo. A key text is Du noir tombe (1985), a poetry collection read here for the first time as relating to Roubaud's loss, and I consider the interaction of Alix Cléo's photography and Roubaud's notion of poetic form.
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Contents

Note to the Reader 8

1. Introduction 9
1.1 Preliminary Thoughts: Context for the Study 9
1.2 Research Aims 16
1.3 Thesis Outline 17
1.4 Musing on Psychoanalysis: A Lover's Discourse 18
1.5 Lacan, Irigaray and Roubaud 21

2. Chapter One – Towards a Definition of Love Poetry 23
2.1 Introduction 23
2.2 Beginnings: vers in the Enchanted Forest of Childhood 25
2.3 First Loves 28
2.4 Vers (non) libre 35
2.5 Roubaud: The Search for Poetic Autonomy 41
2.6 Éluard's Muse: Questioning the Specular Relation 45
2.7 Éluard's Muse: Associations and Transformations 53
2.8 Conclusions Thus Far: Roubaud, Éluard and Free Verse 59
2.9 Trente et un au cube: Moving Away from Specularity 61
2.10 Origins: Japanese Tanka and Troubadour Canso 64
2.11 Multi-Dimensional Rhythms 67
2.12 Transformations: 'Parler pour parler' or 'Upper Limit Music' 74
2.13 A Project of Maths and Poetry 82
2.14 Conclusion 89

3. Chapter Two – Constraint, Potential and the Reader: Roubaud's Love Poem 92
3.1 Introduction 92
3.2 Constraint: Drawing in the Reader 95
3.3 Trente et un au cube: A User's Guide 99
3.4 Constraint: Structuring Reading in Space and Time 108
3.5 Constraint and Containment at the Centre of the Cube:
The Beloved 116
3.6 The Blind Spot in Set Theory: Lacan, Irigaray and Roubaud 124
3.7 'comme un corps diaphane'... 135
3.8 The Disjunction: From the Impossible Relation to 'j'aime à toi' 142
3.9 Spaces of Silence in the Composition of Trente et un au cube 152
3.10 Conclusion 157

4. Chapter Three – Form, Loss and Love in Poetry 160
4.1 Introduction 160
4.2 When Darkness Falls: Love, Mourning and the Unravelling of Form 162
4.3 Reflections on the Place of Form in Poetry: Returns 181
4.4 The Two Dimensions of Quelque chose noir 182
4.5 Reading Obliquely: Positions in Trente et un au cube and Quelque chose noir 188
4.6 Dimension One: The Page 190
  4.6.1 Introduction 190
  4.6.2 Formal Constraint in Quelque chose noir 191
  4.6.3 Space, Time and the Reader in Quelque chose noir 197
4.7 Dimension Two: The Apartment 203
  4.7.1 Introduction 203
  4.7.2 Inadequate Spaces in Quelque chose noir: The Impossibility of Memory 204
  4.7.3 Memory Inferno: Refusing Feminine Form 209
4.8 Beyond the Text: Alix Cléo's Last Photo 213
4.9 Reflections on the Relation of Poet and Muse: Returns 222
4.10 Breathing, Form, Collaboration 224
4.11 Grief and Biipsisme: Different Forms of Silence 231
4.12 Conclusion 238

5. Conclusion 240
5.1 Windows on Form 240
5.2 (Re)presenting the Beloved 'in Theory': Chapters One and Two 242
5.3 When Silence is Grief: Chapter Three 244
5.4 Reader–Addressee 246

6.0 Bibliography 248
Note to the Reader

In citations, I have endeavoured to reproduce Roubaud’s poetry as it appears in
the original text. The wide landscape format of the poems in Trente et un au
cube and also in Roubaud’s ‘Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de
Trente et un au cube à Shakespeare et C°’ means this has not always been
possible. I have chosen to represent the particular layout of the poems in Trente
et un au cube using a single dash to represent a space between fragments (|), two
dashes to represent a line break (||), and three dashes to signal a new stanza (|||).
1. Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Thoughts: Context for the Study

This project is rooted in a love of poetry, and especially the poetry of Jacques Roubaud. A full-length study on any topic should be inspired by at least a sense of curiosity, but with poetry some might argue that the commitment is greater. Poetry's apparently waning readership has been put down to its difficulty by Roubaud himself. In his *Poésie, etcetera: ménage* the poet speaks of doing 'le ménage dans [sa] tête' with regard to a number of questions he feels poets are faced with today, including 'La poésie contemporaine, pourquoi si difficile?', to which he dedicates an entire section of this theoretical treatise.¹ He suggests several reasons for the perceived difficulty of poetry, including our lack of understanding as to why the genre should exist in the first place, the challenge of tackling a new metre, and the barrier that is our lack of patience when confronted with a text we cannot penetrate.²

The obstacle perhaps most likely to intervene in a reading of Jacques Roubaud's own poems is that of 'l'ignorance de la poésie qui se fait', or a non-familiarity which functions on two levels.³ Roubaud explains: 'la poésie est liée à la mémoire, elle l'est à la mémoire de chacun; si elle n'est pas, ou plus, dans votre mémoire, alors vous ne connaissez plus ce qu'est la poésie'.⁴ When we are not in the habit of reading poetry, we lose the very sense of how to read it: it is traditionally something which is memorised, or recited, gaining additional meaning through its gradual absorption into our mind, and also through its constant comparison there with other poems. Immersion will be more difficult for someone not already familiar with poetry and its techniques. The problem with contemporary poetry then, is one of change, or rather our reluctance to accept change. When poems no longer sound like those we used to know, the patterns we have memorised, whether the difference is one of 'vocabulaire,

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³ Roubaud, *Poésie, etcetera*, p. 266.
⁴ Roubaud, *Poésie, etcetera*, p. 266.
constructions, formes, présentation, idées,...', their language comes across as 'insolite', 'étrange' or 'difficile'.

Critic Alain Bosquet singles out Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube* for its lack of penetrability for the average reader: 'le malheur est que, pour le lecteur de bonne volonté moyenne, Jacques Roubaud se barricade dans ses livres et en interdit l'accès.' The volume Bosquet criticises, true to its title, is described by Roubaud as 'un livre composé d'un poème qui est trente et un poèmes, dont chacun est trente et une lignes (ou vers), chaque ligne comptée trente et un (suivant le décompte que voici: chaque voyelle non élidée est 1, chaque e muet (élidé ou non) est 1 ou 0 au choix).' The implications of this description for an analysis of the form of *Trente et un au cube* will be discussed in more detail elsewhere, but a superficial glance is enough to identify the difficulties of 'ignorance', or 'non-familiarity', which a reader might experience. The emphasis on the syllable count, in particular the reference to the *e caduc*, implies an assumed knowledge of traditional methods of counting French verse. An ear trained in conventional metres will also pick up on Roubaud's radical break here, since his lines of thirty-one syllables are divided into counts of 5-7-5-7-7 after the Japanese *tanka*, an unheard of sequence in French verse. A reader of *Trente et un au cube* might also be struck by the prominence of its intertextuality. This operates visually throughout the book, as the poems are interspersed with nearly blank pages dedicated to single quotations from other texts, sometimes poetic, but also mathematical and scientific ones. A final page of credits at the end of the volume also attributes some of the intertextual extracts to their respective authors.

A reader of the book should then be sufficiently familiar with the rhythms of traditional French metres, his or her memory should know the patterns of poetry, if only to be able to notice the contrast made with the deviating scansion employed here. Through both this play with the poems' metrical features and the proliferation of intertextual references, Roubaud places his poetry within a series of interconnecting relationships with the writings of

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others. Perhaps Jacques Roubaud's poems are 'difficult' then, but an intricate, concentrated, repeated reading yields greater rewards: an awareness of the links extending beyond his texts brings to light a network of allusions and associations that might otherwise have remained hidden.

Other readers of Roubaud have responded more sensitively than Bosquet to the dense quality of his poetry. Jean-François Puff writes of the demands made on a reader of Trente et un au cube as 'un investissement, intense, dans une complexité que le désir seul peut soutenir, le désir ou l'amour de la poésie'. Here the reader's love of poetry takes the form of perseverance through the sheer complexity of the poem itself. For Puff, the challenge lies in the layers of meaning that constitute the text:

Il faudrait notamment considérer quel usage conjointement formel et expressif Jacques Roubaud fait de la théorie du rythme qu'il a contribué à développer […]. Consubstantielle à la forme du poème, cette théorie en soutient aussi le sens. Cela exige une vraie lecture de la théorie et de la poésie.

To know the poem is also to know the theory of rhythm that it speaks of and through, the theory that is both subject matter and form of the poem. There are echoes of this approach in Jean-Jacques Poucel's reading of Trente et un au cube. Like Puff, Poucel recognises the overlap of content and form within the book as key to its understanding: 'Roubaud's poetic "cube" foregrounds how formal constraints engender textual meaning'. Poucel also explains that the theoretical value of the work is articulated through the poetry itself: 'Reading the work as a poetic treatise on the art of poetry is fundamental to understanding how Roubaud turns literary self-referentiality into a study of poetic rhythm and memory'. What is common to both arguments is not only the self-reflexivity of Trente et un au cube, but its particular way of engaging with the reader, inviting us to participate in our own relationship with the text. That idea has been central to the impetus behind the current study.

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9 Puff, 'Le Déploiement du nouveau chez Roubaud', p. 100.
11 Poucel, Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory, p. 118.
The self-reflexivity of his writing and a beckoning to the reader come together at a particular moment in Roubaud's poem of poems:

The markers of contemporaneity within the piece also play a role in captivating the reader. Roubaud's own situation watching his lover as she sleeps reminds him of a line of poetry from the past: ""tant es ma donna | endurmyda" (car ma dame | est si profondément en- || dormie)' . The scene activates the line in his memory, giving it new relevance in the present moment. The effect is that of

Perhaps I can say that this piece has found its way into my memory; I am drawn to it for a multiplicity of reasons. I am initially intrigued by its self-referential quality. Roubaud writes the details of the poem's composition into the poem itself: "'tant es ma donna | endurmyda' (car ma dame | est si profondément en- || dormie) j'écris silencieusement sur ma feuille' and 'le verre laiteux de la télévision; je le note aussi'. It is as though the reader is given a privileged position presiding over the very creation of the text as it comes into being. The time of composition, the poet's writing and noting, merges with the moment in which the reader's eyes scan the words on the printed page. The poet also explicitly states that the poem needs a listener, a reader, an addressee of some sort, in order to survive. Without someone to respond to it, to activate it, 'le chant [...] | rouille gèle se dissout ||| s'altère cède se | compliquée'. The sense of movement which derives from the enumeration and accumulation of verbs comes up against notions of decay, immobility and an entanglement in the semantic value of the words. While the 'chant' then still exists and remains dynamic in some monstrous form, it can only end in ruin when not directed towards someone in particular.

a mise en abyme, almost like viewing a window through a window. I cannot help but wonder at the surprising juxtaposition of a verse of troubadour love poetry with 'le déclic du radiateur' and 'le verre laiteux de la télévision'. The conspicuousness of the radiator's click and the unnatural light of the television come to life in the poem, functioning quite literally as distractions to the reader, perhaps to make us feel self-conscious, as readers. As I become aware of myself reading the lines of the verse, and of being drawn into this intimacy with the poet and his lover, I realise that in some ways I am replicating the scene within the poem, for Roubaud too is reading another poet, Bernart Marti. Somehow the windows multiply, extending out to the reader and creating a web of links to the past.

This study is rooted in a love of poetry in more ways than one. For Jacques Roubaud, there is necessarily love in reading poetry and the process of reading it is inextricably linked with the act of writing. As the poet composes these lines, he reads both to his lover and to the reader of Trente et un au cube who, addressed as 'toi', become one and the same at various points in the text: 'voilà ce que je lis pour toi sous ces quatre vers de Bernart | Marti "lo pintor"'.

If 'toi' encapsulates both the lover and reader as addressee, in 'je lis' the poet's announcement of reading becomes confused with the act of composing the text for our eyes; for he writes those words within his poetry, but the first-person present tense seems to simultaneously perform the action of the verb in 'je lis pour toi'. Writing poetry is in part formed of reading it and the words of the poem appear to emanate from this very act of reading, that is, from the four lines that Roubaud reads-writes for his lover and reader.

The four lines by Bernart Marti to which Roubaud refers are printed on the left-hand leaf of the book parallel to the poem itself which unfolds to the right on the facing page:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aisi vauc entrebescant} \\
\text{los motz e'l so afinant} \\
\text{lengu'entrebescada} \\
\text{es en la baizada}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ainsi je vais enlaçant} \\
\text{les mots et affinant la mélodie} \\
\text{comme la langue est enlacée}
\end{align*}
\]
The excerpt by Marti is both part of and separated from the book's fourth poem. The body of the poem unfolds (as do all the poems in the book) on an extended page that opens out to the right-hand side, in landscape format. The Marti extract, on the facing page, to the left of the poem, follows the title page printed with the number '4', thus enclosed within the fourth section, but simultaneously isolated in its own blank space opposite the poem itself. The liminal position of the troubadour verse gives it a certain prominence and it soon becomes clear that this is the seed from which Roubaud's own poem grows. Marti writes of the action *entrebecar*, translated as *enlacer* by Roubaud, to liken the intertwining of words in interwoven troubadour rhymes to that of tongues in a kiss. Roubaud's repetition of 'langue' in the translation, while 'lengu'entrebecada' appears only once in the original, emphasises that double meaning. Poetry composition and physical passion are inextricably linked in the verse, bestowing upon the act of writing poetry the same force of love found in a kiss. In the opening lines of the poem proper, Roubaud's own words are crafted according to this reading of Marti:

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LA BOUCHE EST DOUBLE et | la langue est double dans la | bouche et dans la double | bouche naît l'unique langue | langue des baisers et du chant, la langue du chant dans la bouche est double et dans la bouche la langue s'enlace à la langue | double langue d'une bouche, || un instant, unique; | bouche qui n'est rien sans autre | bouche; langue qui n'est langue vraiment que double | à la naissance du chant.
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The 'chant' is constructed through the repetitive doubling, the intertwining of 'bouche' and 'langue', the love that drives both the kiss and language towards the beloved. The enjambment that occurs line after line, or rather fragment after fragment, with 'bouche', 'langue' and 'chant' often falling in the prominent first position of each segment, creates the effect of an overflowing. All boundaries between the 'langue' of the 'baisers' and that of the 'chant' fade and the two lose any individual sense they might have had, finally merging. Through the coaxing interactions of the repeated rhyme words in the technique that is *entrebecar*, mouth and tongue, initially doubled in their actions of kissing and speaking to

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and of their lover, end in the 'fusion' of love and language that is 'un instant, unique [...] la naissance du chant'.

In *Trente et un au cube*, love of poetry also becomes a poetry of love. Coaxing the reader into the text, intriguing her with the possibility of interaction, Roubaud then merges the reading of poetry with writing. This crafted fusion suggests that the reader participates in the creation of the text, or at least fashions his or her own relationship with it. Jacques Roubaud himself further constructs the poem with his own readings in mind, situating his writing within a web of intertextual links, so much so that the reader is never certain where the poet's own words begin or end. In this poem, love in reading and writing poetry converge in the self-reflexivity of the poem, as the poet entices the reader into a sense of intimacy with the text, addressing us and giving us a privileged relationship with its words. He lets us into the quiet space he shares with his lover, trusting the reader with this private, sensual moment.

The reader, along with the poet, watches the beloved sleep. It is the perfect voyeur's gaze, unchallenged, taking in the naked female who is asleep and unaware. The power of the gaze appears to be further confirmed when the poet repeatedly addresses his lover in terms of her silence: 'ta tranquillité ensommeillée || m'engourdissent, surtout ta tranquillité engourdie et chaude, le sérieux, l'application de ton silence'. She does not respond, instead characterised as a blank space onto which the viewer can project his or her own image. She appears to be the perfect muse, present simply to inspire the poet—lover, only featuring in his lines as a reflection of his desires, her own unaccounted for. Yet something of the lover herself remains independent and elusive; as the poet writes silently on his sheet of paper so as not to wake her, there is the sense that as readers we cannot reach her. Her silence is not passive, described here in terms of its 'application', which connotes decision and concentration, and creates a certain tension with the atmosphere of quiet and tranquillity that prevails. The same term appears earlier in the description in adjective form: 'tu dors nue | tranquillement appliquée | tranquillement arrondie'. The adjectives 'appliquée' and 'arrondie' have an enigmatic quality here, not immediately comprehensible in their denotation of the lady sleeping,

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but they are subtly linked: they may both be used to describe handwriting, that is, the careful, rounded lettering of his poetry. The female is not only the purpose of Roubaud's poetry, the person to whom it is addressed, but like language, love and the passionate kiss, she herself is woven into the words on the page: 'j'écris en travers, de très longues lignes qui t'enlacent (ou le prétendent).’ At least, the poet is attempting to capture the female in his writing, even as his parenthetical aside to the reader expresses an element of doubt.

It is this moment of *Trente et un au cube* that has drawn me into Roubaud's poetry. I am intrigued by this privileging of the reader: we stand in the position of the poet himself, made aware of the intimacy of the moment by the jolt of those distractions that echo out from the lovers' bedroom into the space of the reader. Roubaud's use of *mise en abyme* invites me into the space shared by poet and lover, creating a series of parallels to be explored: between reader and poet, reader and beloved, reading and writing, love and poetic form. I am carried along by the wordplay that twists and turns around definitions of love and poetry, and love poetry. I take up the role of observer offered, and in doing so cannot help but think that there is something about this vision of the woman who sleeps that resists an understanding of the beloved muse as simply one who silently inspires.

### 1.2 Research Aims

Like the studies conducted by Puff and Poucel, my interest lies in the both the self-reflexivity of Roubaud's poetry and the privileged role he provides for the reader. My own focus is created in the points at which these aspects of his writing coincide with the poet's portrayals of the female lover, on the one hand, and his use of form on the other. With this introductory reading of *Trente et un au cube*, I hope to demonstrate that through his focus on the female, and the imagery used to convey the nature of the relationship that she forms with the male narrator, Roubaud comments on poetry both as a genre and as a mode of self-expression. Roubaud's accounts of love are often characterised by the absence of the female, and the poetic relationship between his male narrator and

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the female beloved come to be structured through separation or a struggle to assert female presence. This may suggest a sense of alienation, or even oppression for the narrator; my research will explore how it also functions as a source of creativity. The female is not simply a muse, but comes to stand for the ambition and purpose itself of poetry, always through a concern with form. Through the practice of poetry, Roubaud creates insights into the place of the female in love and art.

1.3 Thesis Outline

*Trente et un au cube* contextualises my enquiry and is central to it, taking up the largest part of my readings. Written shortly after a well-documented shift in Roubaud's approach to poetry composition, after which he endeavours to prioritise form and sustained metrical shaping over free verse structures, this volume of love poems is well placed to provide an insight into the poet's ideas on the expression of love through poetic form. I explore the ways in which poetic form and numerical constraint open out the poems to an interaction with the memory of the reader. The poet's beloved addressee is woven into this relation and her position in the poems creates the space through which the reader enters into a deeply personal engagement with them.

My exploration of *Trente et un au cube* is centrally positioned in the chronology of my study: I begin with a consideration of Roubaud's texts which relate to his earliest composition processes, including *Autobiographie, chapitre dix* (1977), *Poésie:* (2000) and *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre* (2000). These texts reveal something of the poet's engagement with the Surrealist movement, and provide commentary on his decision to move away from the influence of the writing practices associated with the movement. They also give an account of Roubaud's early conception of love poetry, rooted in his own memories of first love. Entangled in these accounts of love and poetic form is the poet's struggle with the particular influence of Paul Éluard; while expressing the need to distance himself from the composition practices of the Surrealist poet, Roubaud simultaneously uses an Éluardian formula (*L'amour la poésie*) to inscribe himself within the tradition of love poetry. What is the place of Éluard in Roubaud's own conception of poetic language? How does Roubaud respond to
the crisis in his creativity and what role does the female addressee have in his formal solutions?

After exploring the ways in which Roubaud finds his autonomy as a love poet in *Trente et un au cube* through the institution of form at the heart of his poetic practice, the final stage of my research focuses on texts written after the death of Roubaud's wife, Alix Cléo. Looking in particular at *Du noir tombe* (1985), which has not before now been considered in relation to the poet's bereavement, and *Quelque chose noir* (1986), I reflect on the shifts in form that occur from Roubaud's earlier texts as he now addresses his grief in poetry. While in Chapters One and Two I build an understanding of Roubaud's approach to form and the ways in which it is used in poetry to represent the lovers' relation, in my third chapter, I see an unravelling of the poet's methods. While memory has a central role in the network bringing together poet, reader and beloved in *Trente et un au cube*, it emerges as the source of formal expressions of inadequacy in the later texts, as the poet grapples with the reminders of his life shared with Alix Cléo. We have seen how love is woven into the metre itself of Roubaud's love poetry, in a gesture reaching out to the beloved. When love is lost, rhythm is unthinkable and the two-dimensional space of the page on which poetry is composed becomes irreconcilable with the poet's memory of love.

Alix Cléo was a photographer as well as a writer, and it is through a web of intertextual connections drawing together her photographs, the writings of her *Journal* and his own poetry that Roubaud seeks out a solution to the failure of poetic structure to hold onto the memory of his beloved. Directing the reader beyond his own texts to those of Alix Cléo, Roubaud seeks to extend her presence in collective memory, but does the poet's posthumous engagement with her work constitute an appropriation, or some form of collaboration? What does it mean for a poet to establish a 'dialogue' through poetry with a beloved after she is gone?

### 1.4 Musing on Psychoanalysis: A Lover's Discourse

In each of the three stages in my research, I focus on the position of the beloved addressee in relation to the formal construction of Roubaud's poetry. I trace the journey from Roubaud's ambivalent engagement with conceptions of the poetic muse in Surrealism, to his own reformulation of what it means to address the
beloved in poetry, especially in *Trente et un au cube*. Finally, I reflect on what it means for the poet to mourn his loss of love in poetry, from the impossible articulation of grief in poetic form, to the hope for some form of collaboration, or dialogue with the beloved.

In the opening of his *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Roland Barthes writes of the 'extrême solitude' of the lover's discourse:

> Ce discours est peut-être parlé par des milliers de sujets (qui le sait?), mais il n'est soutenu par personne; il est complètement abandonné des langages environnants: ou ignoré, ou déprécié, ou moqué par eux, coupé non seulement du pouvoir, mais aussi de ses mécanismes (sciences, savoirs, arts).\(^\text{18}\)

While love can touch anyone, Barthes points out the lack of serious critical or analytical attention that is paid to its discourse. Love does not feature on the current agenda preoccupying what Barthes calls 'les discours objectifs – scientifiques ou moralistes'.\(^\text{19}\) Barthes takes Freudian and Lacanian theory as his own point of departure in his study of a lover's discourse, pointing to psychoanalysis as the only framework available through which love and the love relation have been extensively explored: 'c'est le seul discours qui se tienne aujourd'hui sur le sentiment amoureux, toutes les autres épistème dédaignant d'en parler'.\(^\text{20}\)

The love relation, and its position at the core of the interaction between the poet and his muse in Surrealism, forms the starting point of my study, and psychoanalysis is certainly the dominant point of reference. Seminal studies of the role of the female in Surrealist literature and art, such as Xavière Gauthier's *Surréalisme et sexualité* (1971) and more recently, Katharine Conley's *Automatic Woman* (1996), frequently turn to Lacan to exemplify the relation between the male poet and his female muse. The structures representing the interaction of the male and female in Surrealism have been often aligned with the Lacanian teaching: 'il n'y a pas *la* femme, la femme n'est *pas toute*.\(^\text{21}\)

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Commentators on Lacan agree that the empty status he attributes to woman as a universal category designates her position as defined purely in relation to the male, existing as the 'not all' and thus the 'vanishing point' in a system of gender representation that is phallically orientated.\textsuperscript{22} As such, devoid of an identity specific to herself, she becomes that 'fantasmatic place' or receptacle for the projections of male fantasy, for which she, nonetheless, cannot fulfil the role of 'guarantor'.\textsuperscript{23}

Luce Irigaray reverses the analogy, describing what she perceives to be the stifling of the feminine in predominant psychoanalytic structural accounts of the masculine–feminine relation in terms that evoke woman's position as muse to the male writer:

Mais encore faut-il interroger [les mots] comme revêtements dont le 'sujet' habilile, pudiquement, le 'féminin'. Lequel, enfoui sous toutes ces métaphores, survolaisrantes ou dénigrantes, ne sait plus comment (s')en découdre de ces déguisements, y trouvant d'ailleurs un certain plaisir, en rajoutant même dans le genre plaqué or. Mais, de plus en plus investie de tropes, comment pourrait-elle articuler quelque son – quelque 'mon' – de sous ces chevaleresques oripeaux? Comment trouver une voie, une voix, assez forte ou assez fine, pour retraverser ces couches de style ornemental, cette sépulture décorative, où elle perd jusqu'à son souffle? Étouffée sous tous ces/ ses airs.\textsuperscript{24}

Irigaray's female is one that has been written into the story by men, stifled beneath eulogistic metaphors and chivalric finery and layers of ornamental style. Here patriarchal discourse, even (or particularly) when it appears in the form of adulatory descriptions of the feminine, is likened to artificial garb that conceals the true nature of femininity: she becomes the muse to male subjectivity. Irigaray's criticism of what she sees as dominant patriarchal psychoanalytic


\textsuperscript{23} Rose, \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision}, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{24} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, p. 177.
theories of the subject, elaborated by and for the male term which remains central, overlaps with the world and vocabulary of literature; it is the muse shackled into the story by her male author that needs to break free. Is Roubaud's female too hemmed in and cathected by tropes? Is her presence at once limited by and infused with the writer's pen? Irigaray alludes to disguises of decorative clothing, likening their artificial veiling to the ornamental flourish of the lyric poet. Roubaud's poetry speaks both of and to his female love; are we to see her as this muse adorned with his own lexical embroideries? Does the reader glimpse her own presence beneath the poet's elaborations? Is she silenced by his poetry, as Irigaray believes the feminine is stifled by her place in the structures of psychoanalytic theory? Where should the reader look for her in the lines of Roubaud's poetry?

1.5 Lacan, Irigaray and Roubaud
Although a number of studies have been written on the significance of love and its loss in the poetry of Jacques Roubaud, my project will be the first to approach the theme in a way that is nurtured by psychoanalytic theory. Although psychoanalysis has been said to dominate modern investigations into love, it has been suggested that Roubaud distances himself from psychoanalytic theory, rejecting the Freudian unconscious.\(^\text{25}\) By aligning elements of Roubaud's poetry with Lacanian, and in turn Freudian and Irigarayan representations of the sexual relation, I do not suggest that the poet may be classified as subscribing to any of their ideas. Neither do I claim, or wish to provide a psychoanalytic reading of the poet's life or his work. Just as Irigaray describes the sexual relation in Lacan's work with metaphors evoking the male poet, I read Roubaud's poetry and its presentation(s) of the love relation through the lens of selected texts by Lacan and Irigaray. I engage with these texts as a way of illuminating the structures of loving and reading in Roubaud's poetry, allowing me conversely to explore Irigaray's poet–theorist analogy in relation to the effects of Roubaud's poems and my close readings of them.

I find that the Lacanian articulation of the male–female love relation in terms of the numbers 'one' and 'two', and Irigaray's interpretation of it together

reveal ways in which Roubaud's poetry revolves around the absence and presence in love of the female. If Lacan proposes the impossibility of the sexual relation in *Encore*, as a deconstruction of the mythical two-become-one, what does this mean for the disparate 'two' which still remains? I will consider the ways in which Irigaray draws on Lacanian thought while forming her own interpretations of this notion of a disjunction at the heart of the sexual relation. Can the impossibility of the 'union' be the site of creative conceptions of love? What does the impossibility of the 'union' mean for the poet's creativity? Poetry has often posited the female muse as the mirror image of the poet: the 'other' through which he gains insight into his own soul.  

26 My dissertation explores how Roubaud moves away from this conception of the muse and towards a collaborative and interactive relationship in poetry, centred on the articulation of love in poetic form.

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2. Chapter One
Towards a Definition of Love Poetry

2.1 Introduction
A study of Jacques Roubaud's poetry necessarily begins with a consideration of form. Described as 'formalist' by some, others who look more favourably on his work have focused on a range of structures as eclectic as the Japanese tanka in *Trente et un au cube*; collage and pastiche in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*; innovative sonnet forms, including prose sonnets, long and short versions of the structure and even sonnets of sonnets, in *Signe d'appartenance* (1967); and more recently the spiralling, intertwining branches of his prose cycle.\(^{27}\) An exploration of form is at the beginning of things for several reasons. It is demonstrably at the heart of Jacques Roubaud's approach to poetry in general, but it also has a particular relationship with content when it comes to the love of the female in many of his works. This interface between form and the female presence will be considered in two stages here in this chapter. I begin with a comparative reading of selected poems from *Autobiographie, chapitre dix* and passages from Roubaud's autobiographical volume *Poésie*; drawing together some of the commentary on poetic form in these texts and the life experiences that shaped them. These readings are illuminated by the poet's theoretical reflections on the status of the vers in modern and contemporary French poetry in *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*.

The elements of this first stage are brought together by a definitive, contemporaneous decision made by the poet to establish the activity of form at the centre of his writing. This decision is to be made operative at the level of the poems themselves, which will in turn contribute to a structured volume, finally to be part of the greater architecture known as the *Projet*. Form becomes central to Roubaud's texts through the prioritisation of a certain 'rigueur' henceforth in his work routine.\(^{28}\) This establishment of a definitive writing process is simultaneously a rejection of another way of writing: a less structured,

\(^{27}\) Roubaud himself writes 'je suis un poète qu'on dit formaliste', in *Poésie, etcetera: ménage*, p. 58, while warning against 'une position formaliste qui consiste à avoir une idée simplificatrice du formel', in 'Le rythme, le formel et le formalisme', an interview with Pierre Lusson and Mitsou Ronat, *Action Poétique*, 62 (1975), 61–75 (p. 61). The significance of the formal and criticism of Roubaud's 'formalism' will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

supposedly 'freer' vers libre associated with the Surrealist movement, embodied, it would seem for Roubaud, by the work of Paul Éluard, whose influence is described by Roubaud as 'particulièrement débilitant'. Éluard will therefore be a key figure in this part of the analysis, featuring as he does centrally in Roubaud's autobiographical writing on the poetry project in Poésie:, as well as within poetry pastiche, Autobiographie, chapitre dix, and treatise on form, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre.

I will explore a selection of Éluard's poems which I find to be particularly pertinent to my understanding of Roubaud's decision to distance his own poetic output from the work of the Surrealist writer. The poems foreground the female beloved as muse to the poet's creativity: a binary relation that I will illuminate with readings of Freudian and subsequent Lacanian theories of the sexual relation. I turn to Irigaray's deconstruction of these perspectives, and her unpicking of the Freudian principles that underpin Lacan's work. A reading of some of Éluard's poems through the lens of these theories and a comparison with Roubaud's reaction to those poems will show the limits of such binary structures as a basis for our understanding of the relation between poet and beloved, or muse.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the implications of Roubaud's rejection of free verse forms in his own poetic output. This will involve consideration of the interaction between poetic form and the feminine which is foregrounded in Trente et un au cube. Published in 1973, this volume is one of the earlier texts listed as belonging to Roubaud's poetry project before the poet's notorious pronouncement of its failure and his renouncement of it. As such, the volume will serve as a pertinent point of reference from which to consider the various outcomes of Roubaud's 'decision'. How does he respond to

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29 Roubaud, Poésie:, p. 104.
30 Jean-Jacques Poucel lists the works belonging to the project in his preface to the recent republication of Roubaud's Description du projet, p. 8. Roubaud charts the failure of the project in his prose collection 'le grand incendie de londres'. Over six volumes, he describes the development of what was to be a project involving mathematics and poetry, from its conception following a dream in 1960, to his eventual realisation at the time of writing in the 1980s that it would never be completed. In his Description du projet, written in 1978, seventeen years after the project's inception, he hints at knowing then its impossibility and utopian proportions (p. 25). In the first volume of the 'grand incendie de londres' series, first published as Le Grand incendie de Londres (Paris: Seuil, 1989), Roubaud announces in the foreword that the project was destined to fail from the outset (p. 8). However, in the same volume, the author also explains the impact of his wife's death on his decision to give up the project (pp. 110–11 and 150–52).
the sense of crisis in his creativity and what role does the figure of the female play in his formal responses? How far can the female figure in this early Roubalidian poetry be aligned with or distanced from Surrealist visions of love and the muse?

2.2 Beginnings: vers in the Enchanted Forest of Childhood

To begin, I will look at the role that the Surrealist movement had in Roubaud's youth and beginnings as a poetry writer. The literary movement and its poetry form the setting of Roubaud's first love and the poet's autobiographical accounts of episodes from the time are inextricably linked with arguments for his decision on poetic form. Of Roubaud's six autobiographical prose volumes charting the failure of his Projet, collectively known as 'le grand incendie de londres', Poésie: is most closely concerned with his early poetic influences.\(^{31}\) In the chapter entitled 'Forêt racine et labyrinthe', the reader is transported to the magical forest which is the setting for Roubaud's earliest encounter with poetry. Indeed, the forest seemed to have a certain power over the young poet. In a curious passage, Roubaud describes the noises that would arise from the usually very quiet forest beyond his bedroom window: 'les après-midi ensoleillés, un bruissement continu se faisait entendre, un murmure de mastication appliqué, par des milliers de mandibules. Alors les feuilles étaient dévorées de vers minuscules'.\(^{32}\) The chomping worms working with a manic intensity reappear throughout the chapter, for example: 'Les petits vers du parc et de la forêt murmuraient des mandibules dans les hêtres'.\(^{33}\) Some pages later in the chapter, the poet writes of 'le murmure des petits vers dans les feuilles des hêtres', and finally he adds: 'Dans la forêt, le travail des petits vers dévoreurs me fascinait'.\(^{34}\)

The cumulative effect of this is a forest that appears to be calling out to him; Roubaud observes with fascination the murmuring worms and the accumulation of their noisy consumption through the pages of the chapter.

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\(^{31}\) Roubaud distinguishes between the title in lowercase letters and single quotation marks, which is representative of his six-volume prose cycle, and the same words capitalised and italicised without quotation marks, to designate the novel which would have accompanied his original conception of the project, as a 'telling' of that project: see Roubaud's Poésie:, p. 235 and p. 239.

\(^{32}\) Roubaud, Poésie:, p. 184.

\(^{33}\) Roubaud, Poésie:, p. 197.

\(^{34}\) Roubaud, Poésie:, p. 199 and p. 212.
Vers assumes its double meaning when we discover that his forest excursions coincided with a retreat into poetry: 'Alors je partais en forêt avec un livre de poésie, avec un cahier à poèmes'.\(^{35}\) The land of the rustling, murmuring creatures calling Roubaud away from his everyday studies becomes a new territory of poetry for him to explore: 'je venais de voir s'ouvrir devant moi tout un territoire entièrement nouveau, inimaginable auparavant, de poésie'.\(^{36}\) Roubaud is absorbed into this land of poetry. Just as the forest 'vers' chomps through the beech leaves, so too the young poet becomes an avid consumer of poetry: 'Je rongeais des pages–feuilles mentales de poèmes, en murmurant'.\(^{37}\) He is one of the murmuring worms of the forest, greedily consuming, absorbing and spewing out poetry. He writes of 'une orgie de lecture, [...] une mise en mémoire ou composition de poésies mollement inspirées', he also expresses the process in terms of 'l'incessante et boulimique lecture', absorbing poetry 'telle une éponge métrique'.\(^{38}\)

The adult narrator lists poets he had become familiar with during his earlier childhood, such as La Fontaine and Victor Hugo, progressing through Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and eventually coming to Mallarmé, describing the renewed effects of discovering each one anew in terms of shocks absorbed by his body:

Chaque fois, à chaque nouvelle irruption d'une voix nouvelle de poésie encore insoupçonnée, j'absorbais un nouveau choc sonore intérieur, mental, qui était composé à la fois d'émerveillement, de jalousie, de désir, d'émulation, de découverte de recettes versificatoires, d'efforts de nouvelles mises en mémoire.\(^{39}\)

The poet is changed by these experiences, they mould him into the poet he will become, forming elements of the work he will produce, without him always being conscious of it: 'J'absorbais et apprenais et me récitaïs et copiais explicitement sur des pages, involontairement dans les vers que j'écrivais'.\(^{40}\) His young memory, the memory of a poet, works much like that of poetry itself, soaking up poetic traditions and leaving traces of them in works to come. The

\(^{35}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 213.  
\(^{36}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 199.  
\(^{37}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 214.  
\(^{38}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 197, p. 199 and p. 214.  
\(^{39}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 214.  
\(^{40}\) Roubaud, Poésie, p. 215.
influence of poetic history and tradition is incorporated into his own progression, becoming part of his being and also his own poetic production.

The young Roubaud's emergence from this enchanted forest of poetry is marked by a rather sudden discovery, which he describes as 'ma dernière influence de ce genre'. It is a coming of age of sorts, the last youthful influence in the stages of his evolution as poet:

Mon professeur de première, Mr Espiand [...] me conseilla la lecture d'autres modernes que Rimbaud [...] : il énuméra ces poètes bien loin du 'programme du bac' – Lautréamont, Corbière, Germain Nouveau, Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars et 'quelque chose que vous devrez connaître aussi si vous voulez écrire de la poésie'. – 'Quoi?' ai-je dû dire. – 'Le surréalisme'.

His teacher mentions key figures Breton, Éluard and Aragon to clarify, explaining that their writing was less 'classique' than pre-war poetry. The simplicity of the teenager's unquestioning acceptance of his teacher's suggestion, expressed in 'Je l'écoutai. Je lus', only emphasises the violence of the reaction that ensues: 'Mettre certains textes de ce genre [...] entre les mains d'un élève de première nourri de Victor Hugo ne peut que provoquer en lui une conflagration intérieure.

For the young poet, embarking on this new reading represented an irreversible fissure between poetry and schooling:

À la suite de cette rencontre changea du tout au tout le rapport que j'établissais entre la poésie et le lycée [...]. Je peux dire que dès que j'ai lu Capitale de la douleur, Persécuté persécuteur et Nadja (dans la même journée), j'ai cessé de considérer qu'il pouvait y avoir le moindre rapport entre la poésie et les institutions d'enseignement.

The ardour provoked by these Surrealist texts stems in part from the allusions to an adulthood not yet within reach, their subject matter extending beyond the familiar framework of his secondary school reading experience. Equally, the formal arrangement of these poems was a significant departure from the poetic structure Roubaud had come across as a school pupil. While the undermining of regular rhythm and innovation in traditional metres had begun long before the Surrealist movement, for example in the work of Hugo and Baudelaire, in what

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Roubaud terms 'un geste de destruction–libération' with regards to tradition, the Surrealists largely did away with metric regularity and recognisable rhythms, opting instead for a *tabula rasa* in verse: *vers libre*.\(^{45}\)

Through his adolescence, Roubaud's ardour for this new discovery in poetry grows ever stronger, reaching a climax of sorts in the later chapter 'LamourLapoésieLamour'. This part of Roubaud's account in *Poésie*: is climactic in more ways than one, exploring memories of fragments of poetry, his own and that of other poets, which are tied in with reminiscences of increasingly passionate sexual encounters. The autobiographical episodes recounted are not without relevance for a reflection on Roubaud's poetic practice, since the writer himself explains that as its title suggests, this 'branche' of his prose series 'nécèssite un débordement de ma vie en prose sur ma vie en non-prose'.\(^{46}\) If life and poetry are intertwined for Roubaud, what do these love encounters mean for the particular role of form in his work? As I explore the interlinking of poetry and love proposed by the title of this key chapter in Roubaud's *Poésie*:, I will continue to examine the ways in which episodes recounted from the poet's youth illuminate his ideas on poetic form and the poetry writing process, bringing into the discussion poems from *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*.

### 2.3 First Loves

The chapter 'LamourLapoésieLamour' begins with all the optimism and energy of youth, looking back to the summer of 1950, at the 'Festival international de la jeunesse' in Nice: 'C'était l'été. J'avais dix-sept ans. Pas de parents, pas de connaissances. Tout changeait. Tout finissait. Tout commençait'.\(^{47}\) The repetition, throughout the segment, of very brief sentence structures listing single actions creates an accumulation of activities and, in turn, a sense of growing possibilities. A sense of nostalgia also pervades the opening of the chapter, as Roubaud captures the joy of early friendships forming in a newly experienced freedom away from home: 'On riait. On discutait. On parlait de la paix. On parlait d'amour. On racontait'.\(^{48}\) Here the cumulative use of collective

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pronoun 'on' and the imperfect tense sweep the reader along on a wave of joyful reminiscence. The scene is set for Roubaud's first love, a summer love, Michelle, who somehow merges into the surroundings and seems to be as much a part of the setting as the sea and the stars: 'C'était la plus jolie (je trouvais); petite, plutôt silencieuse, plutôt timide. On parlait tard le soir. C'était l'été. Sable, étoiles, mer.'

It is not long before Roubaud's attraction to Michelle is swept up in his other great passions of the time: politics and poetry. The two were not unrelated: Roubaud writes that he was a member of the 'Groupe des Jeunes Poètes' as well as the 'Parti communiste'. Through a volley of exclamatory phrases, Roubaud ecstatically connects Michelle's mixed Chinese and Spanish heritage with Communist revolutionary ideals: 'L'Espagne! la Chine! la guerre perdue par la République! Guernica! la Longue Marche! la guerre gagnée hier (en 1949) par la Révolution! mon amoureuse chinoise! mon amoureuse espagnole! comment aurais-je pu ne pas l'aimer?'. Poetry becomes life as the young Roubaud embraces Surrealist ideals of revolution and love, that is, revolution through love, as Xavière Gauthier puts it: 'la révolution sera sexuelle ou ne sera pas. La liberté sexuelle passe par la révolution sociale'. Sexual freedom was a step in social revolution.

For Surrealists such as Breton and Éluard, love was a positive and transformative force. Gauthier describes both the Bretonian and Eluardian conceptions of love as 'un amour heureux [...] partagé, vivant, formateur, conciliateur et conciliant'. While it must be conceded that there are moments when love fades, or conflict arises in its representation in the work of both writers, love remains at the root of the transformation of everyday experience for these Surrealists. Breton, for example, describes the restorative impact of the female on his existence: 'Avant de te connaître, j'avais rencontré le malheur, le désespoir. Avant de te connaître, allons donc, ces mots n'ont pas de sens'. For Éluard, the sexual revolution frequently takes the form of the female as a pathway between the individual and the community beyond. Of his lover, the

49 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 375.
50 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 374.
51 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 378.
poet writes: 'Cette main double la mienne | Pour tout lier pour tout délivrer'.

The couple is the site where difference and the bonds between individuals in love can flourish and extend towards wider society: 'La première femme étrangère | Et le premier homme inconnu' become at once 'Et la première différence | Entre des êtres fraternels' and 'Et la première ressemblance | Entre des êtres différents'. Nevertheless, while Roubaud's own revolutionary love for Michelle appears to reach similarly euphoric heights in this passage, the series of exclamations with which he describes her gradually takes on an unreal, perhaps unconvincing quality. Indeed, the links he establishes between his lover and his political agenda are rather tenuous, an admission Roubaud confirms through his humorous rhetorical question in the finale of the extract: 'comment aurais-je pu ne pas l'aimer?'. Rather than presenting his experience of love as a transformative force according to Surrealist ideals, Roubaud's attraction to Michelle seems itself to stem from his involvement in the cultural movement and a youthful desire to be swept up in the feeling of possibility it opened out.

These traces of doubt in the relationship grow in the account of the couple's return to ordinary life in Paris following the summer festival, where the writer nonetheless comes to establish the link between love and poetry that will become integral to his poetic practice. Roubaud takes Michelle to meet friends at the Saturday meetings for members of the 'Groupe des Jeunes Poètes'. Here, love comes together with both politics and poetry: 'Elle y rencontra mes amis de poésie. Nous étions ensemble. J'étais fier. J'étais deux. Tous mes amis d'alors étaient deux.' The narrator's description of being in a relationship is upbeat and proud, but it is almost as though Michelle herself fades into Roubaud's sense of self, here elided in the personal pronoun *je* that represents Roubaud in 'J'étais deux'. Their relation is, for Roubaud, a part of being caught up in the revolutionary movement that Surrealism represented, expressed resolutely as his own experience. After listing the names of couples they met regularly at these gatherings, to emphasise his coupledom as part of the trend surrounding him at the time, he goes on to elaborate on the inextricable ties linking love and poetry:

Être deux était une condition nécessaire et suffisante de la poésie. Être deux était une condition nécessaire de la révolution. L'amour la poésie était un titre d'Éluard (Éluard surréaliste); qu'on peut comprendre comme un génitif de la vieille langue: l'amour de la poésie. Alors il vaudrait mieux dire: l'amour la poésie l'amour. L'amour de la poésie de l'amour.

soudain je fus amoureux: l'amour la poésie l'amour
l'amour la poésie
l'amour la poésie l'amour l'amour
l'amour

The typographical erasure of the boundaries between poetry and love here goes even further than a 'génitif de la vieille langue': poetry is inspired by love, but as the sequence folds back on itself, it also grows out of a love of poetry, or language itself. The quotation embedded in the text here comes from Autobiographie, chapitre dix, where the links between love, poetry and Paul Éluard's writing are explored further through the medium of poetry. In a book subtitled 'poèmes avec des moments de repos en prose', the extract appears as the 'prose moment' that sets the scene for three Eluardian poems, 'L'AMOUR LA POÉSIE L'AMOUR UN', 'DEUX' and 'TROIS'. They are Eluardian as far as their content is concerned, made up as they are of words and phrases from the earlier poet's collection L'Amour la poésie. However, a look not much further beyond the titles reveals a number of significant departures from the original material in Roubaud's manipulations of the text.

Roubaud describes Autobiographie, chapitre dix as 'l'histoire du vers libre français, en sa période triomphante, classique', the autobiographical element alluded to in the title being the very words of those poets who have preceded him:

Les mots des poètes sont le matériau de la biographie d'un poète; ce sont les mots de sa langue et les mots de sa vie, mais les uns et les autres se réfractent à travers la poésie qui l'a précédé, celle qu'il a lue, aimée ou détestée. Ainsi, les poèmes qui m'ont servi pour Autobiographie, chapitre dix font partie de mon existence en tant que poète.


Jacques Roubaud, Autobiographie, chapitre dix (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 22–23. All references to Jacques Roubaud's re-writing of Éluard's L'Amour la poésie can be found on these pages. I will only reference the more variable page details from Éluard's original volume in this section.

Roubaud, Description du projet, pp. 82–83.
The passage recalls the forest of Roubaud's youth, where poetry is absorbed into the memory of the eager reader—poet, just as the *vers* devour the beech tree leaves that nourish their existence. In this particular volume of his poetry, the process of reading, digesting, and subsequently producing material that reflects traces of the traditions that have preceded it are overtly manifest. Roubaud points out his borrowings: 'Je n'ai pas inventé les poèmes d'*Autobiographie*. Je les ai pris dans ma mémoire de poésie, dans les livres que j'ai choisis pour en parler'. More specifically, these are poems chosen, copied, adapted and at times distorted from '84 livres de poésie par 35 poètes parus entre 1914 et 1932'.

For Natacha Michel, the effect of Roubaud's collage writing in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix* is a displacement of the voice of the poet. She uses a version of the famous Rimbaudian statement, 'Je est un autre, passé', to highlight the presence of past influences in Roubaud's writing here. A close study of Roubaud's adjustments reveals another side to the maxim: until the third poem, the personal pronoun 'je' and associated possessive adjectives 'mon' and 'ma', replace the presence of the female in Éluard's writing with that of the male poet himself. For example, Éluard's 'Et le soleil noue ses rayons cherche ton front | Pour te frapper sans cesse' becomes for Roubaud 'et le soleil pour | me frapper, invariable, est une serrure'. The emphasis on the poet himself is also reinforced when the original 'La tête prisonnière dans son corps lié' is rewritten by Roubaud as 'mon corps lié'. Later in the text, Éluard's 'dans le fleuve ignorant de ta tête' is slightly modified to read 'dans le fleuve ignorant de ma tête'. This is a distant departure from the Éluard who has been referred to as the poet who left his readers 'clefs d'or [...] qui ouvrent les chambres de la joie, du désir ou de l'amour', for whom 'love is [...] the center and the circumference of

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63 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 82.
his universe. Éluard is possibly most widely thought of as a 'love poet' and *L'Amour la poésie* is first and foremost an expression of the wonder of love as an inspiration for poetry, full of references to the beauty of the poet–narrator's lover, who is also his poetic muse. Anna Balakian has described the female role in his poetry as 'the intermediary between the creative sensibility of the poet and the sensations to be conjured from the earth. In her are reflected the beauties of the material world and impressions of the poet'. For Éluard, woman is often 'a force, a haven', associated with images of 'fecundity', she 'inspires [...] him', and it is through love that the poet achieves the most 'precise appreciation' of both 'the self' and 'the outside world'; it is a source of creativity for the poet. She is the mediating force between the poet and his experience of both himself and the world, facilitating the occasion for poetry. Roubaud's reshaping of Éluard's lines here thus represents a certain diminishment.

Although Roubaud eventually engages with an addressee, using 'toi' and 'te' several times in the third and final poem in the *L'AMOUR LA POÉSIE* trio, the female, even love itself, appear at first to be missing from the lines Roubaud has pieced together:

\[ \text{ma présence n'est pas ici} \\
\text{habillé, moitié du monde} \\
\text{tête prisonnière dans mon corps lié.} \]

\[ \text{dans une solitude d'encre} \\
\text{à proscrire. Sa visi} \\
\text{bilité parfaite me rendait aveugle} \]

\[ \text{voici que le déluge sort} \\
\text{sa tête et le soleil pour} \\
\text{me frapper, invariable, est une serrure.} \]

Images of solitude and confinement abound in the three stanzas, with the intensely physical references to 'tête prisonnière' and 'mon corps lié' in the opening verse, notions of prohibition and blindness in the second, and finally the

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74 Nugent, *Paul Éluard*, p. 64.
closing of the poem on 'serrure'. That this poetry is somehow representative of Roubaud's young relationship with Michelle may at first seem an incongruous suggestion. However, this constrictive and debilitating imagery becomes more relevant as their affair progresses, or rather deteriorates, following their return to Paris. Space once again plays a role in Roubaud's anecdotal depiction of their situation:

J'embrassais Michelle successivement dans les salons du CNE, en montant ou en descendant ses escaliers, sur tous les bancs des jardins près de l'avenue Gabriel, sous les arbres au bas des Champs-Élysées, sur la place de la Concorde, sur les plates-formes des autobus qui étaient des autobus adéquats aux amoureux, avec plates-formes à l'arrière, par lesquelles on montait dans l'autobus; [...] et l'autobus repartait, et nous nous serrions dans un coin de la plate-forme pour nous embrasser.\(^{75}\)

The passage describes displays of affection shared by Roubaud and Michelle, but the proliferation of prepositions of place and verbs of movement point to the fact that there was no single place for the couple, leaving them unable to consummate their relationship. Perhaps Roubaud represents this lack of intimacy with the missing caress in his poem, which states 'une | seule te fait briller' from Éluard's 'D'une seule caresse | Je te fais briller de tout ton éclat'\(^{76}\). Afraid of Michelle's strict father and with no place of his own the two resort to secret trysts in locations scattered around the city. It is this lack of their own space that eventually signals the somewhat anticlimactic end of their love: 'Je ne voulais pas attendre. Michelle ne voulait pas attendre'.\(^{77}\)

Despite the emphasis on the male poet within the lines of the poem, the stability of his presence there is called into question from the very beginning, suggesting a sense of ambivalence as the poet speaks through the words of his predecessor. Roubaud describes his own agency in the production of this book in terms of his selection and subsequent arrangement of the extracts of poetry used: 'et bien sûr dans le choix des moments restitués (comme dans toute autobiographie) comme dans la progression de la présentation, est mon intervention propre, en ce livre'.\(^{78}\) In the same way that a reader might take

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\(^{76}\) Éluard, *L'Amour la poésie*, p. 163.


\(^{78}\) Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 83.
Roubaud's advice and give weight to the fragments of poetry that feature in this collage, paying particular attention to the way they are presented, or to 'la progression de la présentation', consideration of what is omitted in these lines is critical in the understanding the poet's role in the creation of the text. Like Roubaud, Éluard opens a verse with 'Ma présence n'est pas ici', continuing with 'Je suis habillé de moi-même'.79 A comparison with Roubaud's 'habillé', isolated at the beginning of the line by a full stop, is haunted by the missing affirmations of the speaking 'je' in 'Je suis' and 'moi-même', deepening the sense of loss of self that has occurred in the transition from one poet to the other.

Proclaiming himself to be 'dans une solitude d'encre' – though once again the missing personal pronoun and verb 'suis' lead to a certain dislocation within the speaking voice – directly situates the feeling of solitude within the ink that writes the poem into being. Although there is the sense that Roubaud's writing extends, or deepens Éluard's expression, adding new layers of meaning through the manipulation of his words, it is clear that this poem speaks not only of Roubaud's problematic encounter with first love, but also of his experience as poet and the particular feeling of disjunction that occurs in speaking through the poetry of Éluard. Why does Éluard in particular feature in this representation of first love? What does the Surrealist poet contribute to Roubaud's analysis of his own poetic practice in Autobiographie, chapitre dix?

2.4 Vers (non) libre

While the adolescent Roubaud falls immediately in love with the novelty of Surrealist poetry and its vers libre, the retrospective author looking back on his life's work in Poésie: makes no secret of his eventual rejection of the form, represented in particular by the work of Éluard:

Mon exercice de la poésie jusqu'à ce jour (et Dieu sait que je m'y suis fortement 'exercisé') se caractérise par un manque total de rigueur. J'écris comme cela me vient et ce qui me vient me vient d'ailleurs, d'autres poètes, principalement de surréalistes et postsurréalistes, de Breton, Tzara, Aragon, Éluard; d'Éluard surtout (ce qui est particulièrement débilitant).80

79 Éluard, L'Amour la poésie, p. 219.
80 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 104. Emphasis in the original.
Once associated with the nourishment of the forest vers masticating and digesting beech tree leaves, reading other poets and allowing their influence to flow through the hand composing poetry anew is now anything but productive, described as 'débilitant' even, especially in the case of Éluard. The choice of Éluard here has much to do with him being the most accessible of these new, adventurous poets: 'C'est que nous lisions Éluard beaucoup. Il représentait la transition moins rude entre la poésie de nos études et celle des temps nouveaux.'

His style of composition will have been the most readily absorbed and regurgitated by the budding young poet.

Roubaud explains his later rejection of Surrealist modes of poetry, rooting his own motivation in his concern with form (or lack of it):

Plus les conditions formelles d'une poésie (et c'est le cas de celle de tous les poètes que je viens de citer) sont molles et floues (plus ceux qui les adoptent se sentent et s'affichent libres par rapport à leurs propres conditions d'exercice), plus la personnalité poétique émerge difficilement. Le sentiment de déjà-vu, déjà-entendu, d'air de famille vague domine leurs productions. [...] je sens qu'impérativement je dois rompre. Je romps.

Jacques Roubaud admits he does not find the freedom others proclaim to enjoy in the practice of free verse, instead aligning forms he describes as 'molles et floues' with lacking poetic originality. In his essay charting the rise and fall of the alexandrine through the history of French verse, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, Roubaud further elaborates on the restrictive elements inherent in so-called free verse. While the form was celebrated for its independence from metric measure and strict rhyme schemes increasingly thought to contort syntax into artificial arrangements for the benefit of sonority, Roubaud points out the dependence of free verse on typography: 'Le vers libre, pour lequel la fin du vers n'est pas définie de manière interne par une mesure rythmique répétable, a une existence écrite et, puisque destiné à être transmis par l'imprimé, une existence d'abord typographique.' Defined by its penned presence on the page, the restrictiveness of free verse form's visual existence becomes another dimension to the words of Autobiographie, chapitre dix: 'dans une solitude d'encre | à proscrire. Sa visi |

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81 Roubaud, Poésie: p. 348.
82 Roubaud, Poésie: p. 104.
bilité parfaite me rendait aveugle'. Only a reader of this poem, and not a listener to its oral performance, will be conscious of the enjambment ironically breaking up the reference to 'visibilité parfaite', since there is no regularity of rhythm or rhyme indicating line endings and beginnings.

The constrictive qualities of free verse go beyond the necessity of its typography; in fact, Roubaud establishes a set of formal characteristics linking vers libre to the most classic of French verse forms, the alexandrine. He outlines three negative statements on which free verse is based: unlike the alexandrine, 'Le vers libre standard est non compté', 'Le vers libre commun est non rimé' and finally, 'Il n'y a pas d'alexandrin dans le vers libre/L'alexandrin est soumis à un interdit', citing Notes sur la poésie by Éluard and Breton as evidence of the latter.84 The result of this negative determination of free verse renders its 'freedom' 'extrêmement limitée' and makes it nothing more than what Roubaud calls an 'anti-alexandrin'.85 The poet uses a double grammatical negation to explain the consequences of its anti-alexandrine status 'le vers libre commun n’est pas libre de n’être pas cela et la détermination négative qui le caractérise va peser sur son histoire d’un poids considérable', emphasising its subsistence in the shadow of the traditional verse it so strives to get away from.86 There are even clear similarities between regular metric verse and free verse in what Roubaud refers to as its 'classic phase'. He outlines two rules respected by both regular and free verse: '(L) La dernière position pleine du vers est plus marquée ou au moins aussi marquée que la précédente' and '(F) Si un groupement syntaxique commence à l'intérieur d'un vers, il ne peut s'achever qu'à la fin d'un autre vers'.87 Boundaries for metrical and syntactic units are then found to fall in the same place for both verse forms, contributing yet further evidence to the claim that free verse is not, in fact, as 'free' as its name might suggest.

The three 'L'AMOUR LA POÉSIE L'AMOUR' poems in Autobiographie, chapitre dix are immediately striking in this respect, for they display a flagrant violation of the rules that make of free verse a form according to Roubaud's own

84 Roubaud, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, p. 128.
85 Roubaud, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, p. 129.
86 Roubaud, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, p. 129.
87 Roubaud, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, p. 129.
critique. There are no capital letters to head lines or verses, yet a single capital
does appear in the middle of a line, right in the middle of a verse:

dans une solitude d'encre
à proscrire. Sa visi
bilité parfaite me rendait aveugle

Furthermore, neither the unity of syntactic groupings, nor the fuller final syllable
(in relation to that which precedes it), that is, rules ‘F’ and ‘L’, are respected in
Roubaud's rendering. The final line of the second poem reads 'avouer. dans le
fleuve ignorant de ma', completed only by the first line of the next poem, 'tête
je te l'ai dit pour l'arbre'. Single words are violently broken up through
enjambment over two lines, as in 'visi | bilité', or even over separate stanzas, 'ne
veux pas inventer de béquilles ad | mirables'. Punctuation more often than not
appears anywhere but at the end of a line, creating an obvious disparity between
syntax and what might be thought of as the respiratory unit of a line. For
example:

    phore     la perspective ne joue pas pour
    moi;     ma mémoire va les cartes,
    bat, d'un concret à un autre
    sans savoir où je devrais la reconnaître.

The sense of fragmentation here is intensified through a comparison with
Éluard's original lines, 'Ma mémoire bat les cartes' and later 'Et de félicités | Tu
vas d'un concret à un autre'. The former line is made grammatically impossible
by Roubaud, who replaces 'bat' with intransitive verb 'va', making the ensuing
direct object jarring to the ear. This also leaves the isolated 'bat' with little
communicable meaning in itself, the overall harshness of the syntactic
disharmony emulating the words 'd'un concret à un autre'. Once again, the
replacement of Éluard's female addressee 'Tu' with what seems here to be the
memory of the poet, locates this disjointed, painful experience within the poet
himself.

    A similar technique transforms one of Éluard's most renowned images,
    'La terre est bleue comme une orange | Jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent

pas', into 'la terre est une erreur les mots | j'en rêve que je dors'.

A reader of French poetry will almost certainly think of what is absent in this line, even more so because the rhythm of the Roubaudian version matches the eight syllables that compose the original. The sensuality and vitality of the bold Eluardian image becomes 'une erreur'. The words which never lie for Éluard are left free standing, lingering at the end of the line with no follow-up, no purpose. On the surface of it, Roubaud appears to undermine Éluard's imagery, remove his admired lover, his poetic inspiration, and leave behind a wreck of broken lines, which are capable only of expressing a sense of futility and suffering on the part of the poet. The sentiment epitomised in the poems' end, 'toutes les raisons disparaissent: souffrir', is a desperate negation of the original reference to the female lover in Éluard's 'Et toutes ses raisons de souffrir disparaissent'.

The disparity between the ordered typographic arrangement of the poems into stanzas (there are three poems, each made up of three stanzas of, in turn, three lines each) and the fragmentary lines within these greater structures creates a sense of tension, further exacerbating the impression of imprisonment and constriction. Roubaud adopts a stance reminiscent of Denis Roche in his take on Éluard's poems in Autobiographie, chapitre dix, outlined by Roubaud himself as: 'faire comme si le vers libre était libre et tirer, axiomatiquement, toutes les conséquences de la définition'.

If Roubaud's foray into the history of the alexandrine has shown that classic metre continues to be an organising factor behind freer verse forms associated with the Surrealist movement, the only solution for the further development of the alexandrin is: 'rendre entièrement arbitraire le découpage en vers par rapport au découpage linguistique'. The above reading has demonstrated that this involves a two-fold challenge to the status of common free verse: first, interrogating the harmony between metre and syntax; second, undermining the typographic identity of the verse, highlighting the impossibility of its existence beyond the writing on the page. This next stage in the history of the ageing alexandrine is represented, for Roubaud, by Roche's Éros énergumène (1968). Roubaud quotes examples from the latter of lines beginning and ending midway through a word, but the tone of Roche's challenge

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90 Éluard, L'Amour la poésie, p. 164.
91 Roubaud, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, p. 175.
to metric and syntactic integrity is succinctly demonstrated in Roubaud's selection of the line 'les portes où je dors qui sont deux et fertiles d'.\textsuperscript{93} The addition of 'd' to the alexandrine disturbs the reader's count of the twelve-syllable line, but also has a stalling effect: the end of the line is not only missing the final strong syllable stress associated with the alexandrine, but is practically unpronounceable.

Roubaud differs from Roche, however, when he presents his own challenge to the line of free verse within the space of seemingly ordered stanzas and overarching poem structures, an organising strategy not used by Roche. The paradox seems to represent what Roubaud refers to as the 'entre-deux' of free verse.\textsuperscript{94} Speaking of Éluard, among others, he describes the way in which 'tout en fuyant la rime, leurs poèmes étaient de plus en plus envahis de mesures traditionnelles, alexandrins et octosyllabes surtout, flottant comme des ions libres dans une soupe chimiquement encore d'apparence vers-libriste'.\textsuperscript{95} At the level of form, the avant-gardists' aim of revolutionising poetic practice through the clean slate of a \textit{tabula rasa} approach proves counterproductive. For any poets that have grown up like Roubaud in the forest of poetry, learning by heart, copying and reciting the traditional poems taught at school in France, giving up on any definition of one's own verse through metrical count or rhyme schemes can only result in the eventual resurgence of the old patterns learned and engrained in one's memory.\textsuperscript{96} This is how it is that classic verse comes back to haunt free verse: the efforts of Surrealist poets to distance themselves from the rhythmic traditions that have come before make of their hopes for innovation a simple negation of past patterns, gradually paving the way for their resurgence in the most contemporary writing.

In his own ironic twist, Roubaud recreates the tension of this 'entre-deux', demonstrating the effect of constriction that this mode of composition has on his own poetic practice. By then placing his destruction of the axioms sustaining \textit{vers libre} within a greater sense of order in \textit{Autobiographie, chapitre dix}, Roubaud challenges free verse for being neither entirely free, nor versified. There is the sense that the lines of free verse, actually made 'freer' through

\textsuperscript{93} Roubaud, 'Quatre états de poésie', p. 91.
\textsuperscript{94} Roubaud, \textit{Poésie'}, p. 353.
\textsuperscript{95} Roubaud, \textit{Poésie'}, p. 353.
\textsuperscript{96} Roubaud, \textit{La Vieillesse d'Alexandre}, p. 155.
Roubaud's violation of the customs upholding what he calls classic or standard free verse, are imprisoned within the greater, inescapable framework of conventional versification. The analogy of this type of poetry with 'soupe' scattered with 'ions libres' captures the sense of the writer's loss of agency when it comes to free verse, conveying it as anything but generative.

Roubaud's is a deliberate gesture in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*, activating the agency of the poet in a defiant reaction against notions of unconscious inspiration often associated with free verse. Marjorie Perloff, for example, writes of free verse that it 'tracks the actual movement of thought or feeling, refusing to interfere with its free flow, to inhibit its natural motion.' Roubaud appears to be going against precisely these ideas, in favour of what he calls a greater 'rigueur' in his poetic process. The term implies an elimination of the element of chance, or intuitive composition that Roubaud appears to associate with the styles of poetry he comments on: the very qualities he connects with constriction and a sense of imprisonment. Before going on to further explore these ideas linking free verse to the notion of unconscious inspiration, I would like to address the sense that there is something more to Roubaud's particular foregrounding of Éluard in these lines and his decision to make a rupture with the freer verse forms associated with the Surrealist poet. What is Roubaud's reader to make of the fact that he finds the influence of Éluard on his writing to be particularly debilitating, while simultaneously appearing to build his theory linking love and poetry on the earlier poet's title, *L'Amour la poésie*?

### 2.5 Roubaud: The Search for Poetic Autonomy

Roubaud's unusual remoulding of *L'Amour la poésie* is, at least on one level, an effort to unearth the constriction present in Éluard's chosen form, the vers libre. The reasons for the poet's suffering, however, must be sought out in his dissatisfaction with his own poetic process and mode of composition. Indeed, having pointed out that his creativity in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix* consists in the selection and rearrangement of the words of other poets, Roubaud explains that the collection is as much about re-evaluating his own relationship with free

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verse: 'j'ai réfléchi et tenu compte de ce qu'était le vers libre pour moi et j'en ai fait une critique, en modifiant, dans mes poèmes non inventés, le rapport du vers aux mots, aux phrases qui le composent'. In the words of Natacha Michel, it is a matter of 'prendre pour contenu une autre forme'. His decision to effect a 'rupture' is not a personal critique of any single poet writing during 'Le classicisme du vers libre'. Perhaps his decision is not even a complete rejection of the form he seems to critique so heavily in some of his writing on the period. Indeed, Clive Scott recognises the 'danger' in attributing the frequent 'parisyllabism' in Éluard's writing to 'traditionalism' or a 'strategy of facilitation'. Instead of a reductive interpretation that concludes 'easier' reading, Scott encourages Éluard's reader to appreciate 'patterns of measures' and 'echoes of measures across line-groups' rather than 'the metricity of the line as line'.

Jean-François Puff is another critic who comments on '[le] caractère "facile" qu'on prête à son œuvre', also mentioning Éluard's tendency towards 'limpidité' and 'lyrisme émerveillé'. He believes it is these aspects of Éluard's writing that Roubaud rejects. However, like Scott, Puff recognises the complex kernel at the heart of Éluard's poetry, explaining that there are no 'distinctions claires' in collections L'Amour la poésie, Mourir de ne pas mourir (whose antithetical title is a precursor to the complexity within) or Capitale de la

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98 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 83.
100 Roubaud, *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*, p. 117.
101 Although Roubaud seems to frequently stage his rejection of vers libre as a choice of poetic form, to argue that he rejects vers libre outright would be simplistic. Some of the most personal, poignant poems that feature in his book of sonnets, *Signe d'appartenance* (∈), are in fact written in free verse. In the heart of this collection, which claims to be the poet's first book following his own choice of a new direction of formal 'rigueur' (Roubaud discusses the planning and writing stages for *Signe d'appartenance* in detail in *Poésie*, pp. 447–485), are a number of free verse poems mourning the loss of his brother. See, for example, *Signe d'appartenance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 104–05.
douleur. Rather these volumes are characterised by 'les contradictions de l'amour vécu', which gives many of the poems a 'sens obscur, chiffré'. He further finds that Roubaud pays homage to the Surrealist poet in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix* through the arrangement of Éluard's words into visual groupings associated with the number nine (there are three poems, each consisting of three stanzas of three lines), alerting the reader to the mysticism the number nine held for Dante in his great expression of love for Beatrice. Meanwhile Puff draws the reader's attention to the missing element in Éluard's title, the ancient genitive form linking 'l'amour' and 'la poésie': 'le chant', or *entrebecar*, weaving together rhythm and rhyme, that is, 'la dimension métrico-rythmique que recouvre le chant'. Thus, while the themes and images in Éluard's work are often complex and carefully constructed, the implication in Puff's reading is that Éluard's forms do not echo this level of involvement or intricacy.

Perhaps there is something of Harold Bloom's seminal work, *The Anxiety of Influence*, at play in Roubaud's ambivalent re-writing of Éluard (which also constitutes a reading on the part of the later poet). Bloom links 'poetic influence' to 'poetic history' to the extent that they are 'indistinguishable', and he explains: 'poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves'. Whether or not Roubaud 'misreads' a certain simplicity into Éluard's poetry – for 'facile' is a word that seems to recur in discussions about the relationship Roubaud has with the earlier poet – he certainly seems to create the image of a poet from which he distances himself. It is unlikely that Roubaud does not recognise the layers of complexity Puff finds on the semantic level of Éluard's writing, or the echoes of metric play that Scott reads in his

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105 Puff, *Mémoire de la mémoire*, p. 220. Puff's argument centres on the distinction between the *trobador leu* and *trobador clus* styles of the troubadour poets. The *leu* is characterised by 'distinctions claires, péremptoires, tranchées', structured by 'ses couples d'antonymes inséparés: joï e dolors, folie et sens' (Roubaud, *La Fleur inverse: Essai sur l'art formel des troubadours* (Paris: Ramsay, 1986), p. 326). The lexis of the 'closed' or more hermetic *clus* style of poetry is not marked by the clarity of binary pairings, but is interwoven without clear opposition or resolution in an enlacing pattern of rhyme words whose process is known as *entrebecar*. The *leu* and *clus* styles will be considered in more detail in the following chapter.


forms. However, Roubaud appears to associate his love of Éluard and other Surrealist poets with a concern for the unit of the line, or 'vers' in poetry, which has proved unproductive in his own work of the time. In his reassessment of his relationship with freer verse forms and the writing of his contemporaries, it is possible that Roubaud is, as Bloom describes, clearing his own 'imaginative space'.

Bloom also writes of the reading process in the poet as distinct from that of ordinary reader, or critic. This involves the discovery, in the poet, that poetry is 'both external and internal to himself'. Poetic influence is 'the sense – amazing, agonizing, delighting – of other poets, as felt in the depths of the [...] solipsist, the potentially strong poet'. The experience of the poet is one of ambivalence, at once delighting in the poetry that resonates with his outlook, appreciating the readerly experience, and simultaneously feeling the pain of the threat to his own ego. In a passage that closely recalls the experience of Roubaud speaking through the words and broken forms of Éluard's *L'Amour la poésie*, Bloom also refers to a sense of dislocation resulting from this dichotomy within the poet:

> For the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of other selves. The poem is within him, yet he experiences the shame and splendor of being found by poems – great poems – outside him. To lose freedom in this center is never to forgive, and to learn the dread of threatened autonomy forever.

On one level Roubaud appears to be conveying the difficulty he encounters when trying create within the forms frequently used in the work of Éluard, at once critiquing these forms and exploring what he feels to be their limits. However, his re-manipulation of Éluard's words may also bear witness to his internal struggle to assert an autonomous identity as poet, as outlined by Bloom in this passage. Roubaud tells his reader that he loves to read poetry, absorbing it so deeply within his memory that he is able to recite it decades later. However, when writing within the processes of these same poets, he certainly seems to 'lose freedom in this center'. He is torn between his adolescent ardour with the poets he reads, that early adult identification with the writers who swept him

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away at the time, and the feeling that he cannot innovate from within the space of their influence. Even when composing his defiant *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*, the poet describes becoming entirely absorbed by a re-reading of their words:

> En ce moment je relis les surréalistes pour mon *Autobiographie*, mais je ne les ai pas lus pendant une quinzaine d'années parce que j'étais totalement incapable de les aborder d'une manière qui me permettrait de prendre une distance par rapport à eux [...]. J'étais totalmente désarmé.  

The experience, for Roubaud, is overwhelming. The impossibility of maintaining a sense of distance on reading these poets he had enjoyed in his youth might be explained through the words of Louis Zukofsky, cited in an article by Roubaud on poetic form: 'sometimes a meter's a voice'.  

For Roubaud, poetic form is constitutive of the poet's voice and identity in poetry, and his acute 'awareness of other selves' in his own composition process is manifested in the haunting return of structures and metres that resurge from the poet's unconscious memory during his attempts to write in free verse.

Bloom's focus is the self-reflecting Romantic poet, but what is the meaning of his hypothesis when applied to the poetic process of the Surrealist poet? What is the relevance of the framework of love in which Roubaud explores his poetic relationship with Éluard? My next step will be to consider these questions through a reading of some of Éluard's poems that I believe to be particularly relevant for an understanding of Roubaud's reaction to Éluard's love poetry. Having explored Roubaud's ideas on free verse form, I will now explore the link between *vers libre* and the automatic writing processes associated with Surrealist poetry with the aim of achieving a greater insight into Roubaud's thoughts on these links and furthering my understanding of their influence on his own composition process.

### 2.6 Éluard's Muse: Questioning the Specular Relation

A glance at Roubaud's anthology, *Cent vingt-huit poèmes composés en langue française de Guillaume Apollinaire à 1968*, sheds further light on Roubaud's

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reading of Éluard. Subtitled 'anthologie de poésie contemporaine', it groups together poems from the period featuring in Roubaud's formal study of the fall of the alexandrine, La Vieillesse d'Alexandre. It is described by the poet as 'Complément' to his theoretical text, 'une anthologie de poésie française des cents dernières années "du point de vue formel"'. The collection is a further commentary on the poetry explored in his theoretical work and his response in particular to the question of form in the poems concerned. In addition to its complementarity with Roubaud's other studies of the poetry of the period, the author insists on the significance of his selection:


Roubaud's choice of these poems over other possibilities is made in his capacity as both 'lecteur' and 'compositeur de poésie', reminding the reader of the duality of the reading and writing poet encountered in Bloom's theory, the equivocal nature of the relationship between the material he reads and his creativity, these anthologised pieces and his own poems.

Although Roubaud focuses on the poems' formal traits in his decision-making, the inclusion of Éluard's work is also significant from a thematic point of view. Other than three war poems, published under the chapter heading 'Poésie dans la guerre', the only poems by Paul Éluard in the anthology are 'L'Égalité des sexes' and 'L'Amoureuse'. While the poems betray some of the typical formal elements of the period commented upon by Roubaud (the former is a traditional sonnet composed entirely of alexandrines and conventional rimes croisées and rimes embrassées, and the second poem is written in octosyllabic lines, avoiding rhyme until it culminates in a final rhyming couplet), both pieces also foreground the female, each speaking of her as lover, or perhaps love object. The position of the female in relation to the poet is at stake from the outset, taking centre stage in each title.

115 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 137.
117 All further references to the two Éluard poems can be found in Roubaud's anthology, pp. 51–52. See also Paul Éluard, Capitale de la douleur suivi de L'Amour la poésie (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) p. 51 ('L'Égalité des sexes') and p. 56 ('L'Amoureuse').
Nevertheless, as Jean-Jacques Thomas and Steven Winspur point out in regard to 'L'Égalité des sexes', 'there does not appear to be any equality of the sexes in the text (contrary to what its title claims'). Thomas and Winspur identify Éluard's trademark reference to the beauty and illumination in the lover's eyes in the poem, 'la beauté des yeux, beauté des pierres', a frequent motif in his love poetry, tracing their journey from 'un pays arbitraire', through their transformation into tears, 'gouttes d'eau', to the petrification of their 'regard' when they become 'pierres nues et sans squelette'. Thomas and Winspur explain that the 'desired person has gradually become objectified into a lifeless image', as the poet addresses his beloved successively as 'ô ma statue', 'ô statue abattue' and finally 'ô mon image'. In fact, it would seem that the presence of the female is in question from the opening of the poem, since it begins with a reference to her disembodied eyes: 'Tes yeux sont revenus d'un pays arbitraire'. Her body never materialises but for its role as 'statue' and 'image', whose existence relies entirely upon the poet's love: 'ô statue abattue | Par mon amour' and 'Mon désir immobile est ton dernier soutien | Et je t'emporte sans bataille'.

The study by Thomas and Winspur details the typographic and prosodic symmetries in 'L'Égalité des sexes', demonstrating the ways in which they are structured around the central word 'miroir', creating a number of mirroring patterns that quite literally emanate from this central point to the outer reaches of the poem. They describe the poem's arrangement as 'a fictional equation established between the desirer and his desired image'. Indeed, the lack of vision accorded to the female, doubled by the deprivation of her own reflected image in 'Le soleil aveuglant te tient lieu de miroir', contributes to the sense that the poet sees in his lover a reflection of himself. He refers to her in possessive terms, 'ma statue', 'mon image' (emphasis my own), where the possessive adjectives also serve to denote his own image, or statue.

Éluard's artistic conjuring of the lover through the words of poetry and the notion of mirroring that ripples outwards from the poem's centre are suggestive of the critical evaluation of male subjectivity outlined by Luce

119 Thomas and Winspur, Poeticized Language, p. 162.
120 Thomas and Winspur, Poeticized Language, pp. 161–63.
121 Thomas and Winspur, Poeticized Language, p. 162.
Irigaray. In *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Irigaray goes back to the origins of psychoanalytic theories of the feminine.122 The title of Irigaray's chapter dedicated to Freud – 'La Tache aveugle d'un vieux rêve de symétrie' – alludes to the privileging of the visual in the setting of his theory of sexual difference. Beginning with the Freudian notion of female anatomical castration, the gaze is shown to function within a dichotomous structure. Firstly, it involves a paradoxical look at the female body, paradoxical because 'la fillette, la femme, n'aurait rien à donner à voir. Elle exposerait, exhiberait, la possibilité d'un rien à voir'.123 This absence of a sight to behold refers to Freud's well-known account of the discovery, amongst curious children, that the little girl is missing a penis:

La 'castration' pour la femme serait de n'avoir rien à donner à voir, de n'avoir rien. De n'avoir rien de pénis, de voir qu'elle (n') a rien. Rien de même que l'homme. Donc rien de sexe qui se montre dans une forme susceptible d'en fonder la réalité.124

Feminine castration, therefore, is only relative to the visibility of the male sex organ, whose obvious 'forme' privileges the male as the central term within definitions of gender; that is to say, woman is castrated, lacking, simply because she is visually unlike man. Thus, the first stage in the unveiling of the female predicament posits woman as object of the gaze, in which she 'exposes' and 'exhibits' her visual dissimilarity from the male, her castration.

As the Freudian description proceeds, the focus shifts from the image of the female to her reaction, her own gaze. On seeing the male sexual organ for the first time, girls 'at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too'.125 Freud attributes to this realisation feelings of 'envy' and being 'wronged' as, somehow, the very appearance of the male genitalia is enough to inform the female of its value.126 The notion of envy here presupposes two looks: the first observing the lacking female and the second emanating from her thereafter, capturing sight of what she misses. Hence, the ease with which

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122 Irigaray also responds to treatments of myth and to philosophical texts, such as Sophocles' *Antigone* and Plato's *Republic*. The wide-ranging essays of the volume each consider an aspect of Western philosophy and culture and its treatment of woman.
123 Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 53.
124 Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 54.
the female can be situated as 'other' to a male centre also relies, in part, on her own supposed acceptance of her position, which accompanies her act of looking. In turn, the sole standard of value is attributed to the male sex, reducing the female to a supporting role. Freud's 'tache aveugle' is his inability, in Irigaray's reading, to formulate a positive definition of femininity. Sexual difference is constituted in the feminine not being (like) the male term; it is in this that she is 'other', a reflection of the self-same in which her 'penis-envy' compensates for what is missing.

The feminist theorist uses the metaphor of the sun to criticise the prioritisation of male subjectivity in predominant accounts of psychoanalytic theory beginning with Freud. The male becomes the sun, 'si c'est autour de lui que les choses tournent', and the female is aligned with the earth, 'Toujours en voltes, plus ou moins proches du soleil dont elle capte les rayons, les faisant virer selon ses cycles'. Irigaray also refers to the female's 'possession par un "sujet", le désir de son appropriation par un "sujet" [...] il (se) projette un quelque chose à absorber, à prendre, à posséder . . . et encore un sol sur lequel se tenir debout, une glace où se mirer'. However, just as the specular image projected in Éluard's poem proves to be flawed, closing the poem as a broken reflection betraying the narrator's own weakness, 'Rompue à ma faiblesse et prise dans mes liens', Irigaray explains that the subject who relies on objectification of the other for his own support is necessarily 'multiple, pluriel, parfois di-forme'. The wordplay bringing out the notion of duality in the deformation of male subjectivity designates his projected image as 'Morcellement fantastique, fantasmatique', a 'duplicité' which must inevitably collapse. The female figure of the poem becomes not so much poetic muse as empty 'image' or 'statue'. Éluard appears to question the capacity of the poem, or perhaps poetry in general, to express the structures according to which it functions. The poetic here interacts with social structures, suggesting the failure of specular relations in love and creative partnerships.

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127 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 166.
128 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 166.
129 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 168.
130 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 168.
The representation of the male–female, or poet–muse relationship in this poem stands apart from a number of Éluard's other poems centering on love and the female lover. The use of metaphor in *L'Amour la poésie* is widely referred to for its transformative and sensually expressive qualities; the notorious line 'La terre est bleue comme une orange' has gained almost iconic status for its voluptuous imagery and radical juxtapositions.\(^{131}\) There is in the line the sense that in love and poetry everything can be turned upside down: the reader is free to take the world in the palm of their hand. The earth is linked to the sweet tasting orange through roundness of shape, while the incongruous pairing of the small fruit and the immense planet, together with the shocks of colour make the reader pause for breath.

In another example, *Poésie Ininterrompue*, the poet–narrator conveys the multiplicity of his female lover from the outset, opening with a series of feminine adjectives. The description flows for thirty octosyllabic lines, starting from what might be considered a blank canvas in 'Nue effacée ensommeillée'.\(^{132}\) While at first this appears to categorise the female space as one of passivity, as the passage develops, the impression on the reader becomes quite altered. Within the mass of adjectives, both phonic and lexical patterns are formed. For example, 'Nue', 'ensommeillée', 'matinale', 'Fraîche', 'ébouriffée' and 'Ravivée' together conjure up images of morning and waking. Meanwhile, the potentially sexual connotations of 'ébouriffée' in turn tie it to 'Coquette', 'passionnée', and 'Étreinte'. The shifting chains of connected adjectives create a sense of stirring, or unfurling, as the female not only awakens, but is almost brought into existence.

At times, the description allotted to the female is less than favourable. For example, the alliteration in 'Sourde secrète souterraine' combines definitions which suggest the idea of concealment or barrier, whether the latter are physical or a prevention of understanding. Thus, an increasing number of unpropitious traits seep into the portrayal, until it ends with the woman tarnished and broken: 'Surprise dénouée rompue | Noire humiliée éclaboussée'. Despite this progressive darkening of the tone, moments of brilliance persist, since even towards the end of the piece, the woman in question is 'Ensoleillée illuminée',

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\(^{132}\) Éluard, *Poésie ininterrompue*, pp. 9–10 for all further references to the poem in this section.
'Fidèle' and 'populaire'. As a whole, the passage does not simply rely on binary oppositions, but gradually offers additions, contradictions and developments, which both expand upon and annihilate previous definitions, with the result that the reader is, in fact, given no certain perspective in relation to the woman at all. There is the sense that she begins to take shape, visibly moulded into being before the eyes of the reader, but she is outlined by the very same adjectives that proceed to break her down, to the extent that any image captured of her can only ever be fleeting and thus open to renewal as much as destruction.

It could nonetheless be argued that seemingly more positive portrayals of love similar to these latter two Eluardian examples continue to inscribe the female as other, or object to the male poet–narrator, or subject. Gauthier, for example suggests that Éluard has presented the female as both mother and child, heaven and earth, hope and despair in his writing:

\[ \text{Si elle peut être tout, cela signifie clairement qu'elle n'est rien, hors de la cervelle de l'homme. Elle n'est rien qu'une invention de mâle, encore cette invention fait-elle rien moins que 'réinventer' l'amour, puisqu'elle participe de tous les mythes traditionnels du 'mystère féminin'.} \]

The implication is that, in her multiplicity, she is portrayed as everything the male wants her to be, and nothing to herself. Such a perspective would appeal to Lacanian discussions on the structure of the sexual relation. The term 'structure' is chosen here in place of 'interaction(s)' since, according to the psychoanalyst, the male–female relation is always mediated: 'ils sont trois, mais en réalité, ils sont deux plus a. Ce deux plus a, au point du a, se réduit, non pas aux deux autres, mais à un Un plus a'.\(^\text{134}\) The list of \textit{objets petits autres} includes such disparate things as the gaze, voice and breast. Clearly not all objects as such, they are named so to designate their place as separate from the subject, also referred to as lost objects. The loss is primordial, occurring through the separation of the child from imagined unity with its mother. Occurring prior to the institution of language, this primal castration leaves of itself 'neither images nor words', the \textit{objet a} remaining 'the unobjectified object, the non-represented

\(^{\text{133}}\) Gauthier, \textit{Surréalisme et sexualité}, p. 194. Emphasis in the original.
object, the pre-object'. While the separation is a stage in the establishment of the subject, who very gradually becomes aware of his own 'boundaries', it nonetheless constitutes a castration, a 'severance of the various objects [the subject] previously experienced as part of itself' and so the subject is condemned to remain incomplete, to yearn. If the female other is everything, perhaps she can fill this void. Yet in psychoanalytic terms, she is also nothing, erased, since 'la réciprocité entre le sujet et l'objet a est totale'.

This Lacanian exploration of Gauthier's suggestion, though relevant for a consideration of the sexual relation in Éluard's poetry, draws the reader away from matters of creativity and poetic composition. The use of metaphor and imagery in L'Amour la poésie is startlingly new through the poet's careful arrangement of syntax, creating unexpected associations through juxtaposition. In Poésie ininterrompue, the poet begins with the blank page: the woman is erased, naked, sleeping. She, the poem, stirs, awakens and the opening adjectives seem not so much to be a silencing or erasure as a space for growth and possibility. While the critic may read an objectification of the female into either of these two poems, their contrast with 'L'Égalité des sexes' is vast. In the latter poem, Éluard appears to deliberately play on this notion of female objectification: the reader faced with the bold, provocative title and the dominant use of mirroring techniques on numerous levels of the poem, cannot avoid this interpretation. That is exactly why we must look further. Is Éluard himself staging the inflexibility – the prison – of the sexual relation, also explored by Lacan and Irigaray? Does he attempt to determine its limits within a contemporary understanding of sexuality? The title would certainly suggest some sort of social comment. Yet it is also about art, the statue and images of the poem not simply props supporting the unconscious. Perhaps Éluard is therefore also playing with the conception of the muse, questioning what it is to unlock inspiration within his lover. This is a possibility that I will now look at in a close reading of 'L'Amoureuse', a poem which appears at first to suggest a

binary relation of poet and love object as muse, but which gives way to a multiplicity of semantic layers associated with the couple during reading.

2.7 Éluard's Muse: Associations and Transformations

Roubaud allots a second place in his anthology to Éluard's 'L'Amoureuse', which bears a number of similarities to 'L'Égalité des sexes', in particular against the backdrop of the very different extracts just considered from L'Amour la poésie and Poésie ininterrompue. The beloved appears at first to dominate the poem as well as its title:

Elle est debout sur mes paupières  
Et ses cheveux sont dans les miens,  
Elle a la forme de mes mains,  
Elle a la couleur de mes yeux,  
Elle s'engloutit dans mon ombre  
Comme une pierre sur le ciel.

The repetition of the feminine subject pronoun, 'Elle', in the primary position of most lines of the first verse seems to insist on the central and active role of the female lover in the poem. Nugent writes of the female in this poem that 'she is present not only physically, but also becomes one with the lover through their reciprocal awareness of each other's love'. However, a closer reading suggests that she is not 'present' at all, gradually disappearing into the image of the male poet himself. She stands tall, but no further than on his eyelids; she takes on the shape of his hands, is shaped by his hands; she adopts the colour of his eyes, exists only through the affirmation of his gaze. It is difficult to detect any evidence of Nugent's 'reciprocal awareness' in the couple's love: rather, in assuming his form through the progression of each line of the poem, Éluard's female beloved once again becomes the poet's mirror image, reflecting his qualities in the shape of her own body. Through simile at the close of the verse, she becomes as lifeless as stone, the only verb other than avoir or être (which refer more to her appearance rather than actions) attributed to her as subject expressing her disappearance into the 'ombre' of the poet in 's'engloutit'. She retreats from visibility into the all-encompassing presence of the male, himself

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138 Nugent, Paul Éluard, p. 50.
so imposing that she fits entirely within his shadow. The sole standard of value is attributed to the male sex, reducing the female to a supporting role.

If that role is of poetic muse in 'L'Amoureuse', the beloved's inspirational qualities seem to be somewhat questionable:

Elle a toujours les yeux ouverts
Et ne me laisse pas dormir.
Ses rêves en pleine lumière
Font s'évaporer les soleils,
Me font rire, pleurer et rire,
Parler sans avoir rien à dire.

The culmination of the poem in what Daniel Rivas terms 'a frequent criticism hurled at those who speak for the sake of doing so [...] a negativization of uncontrolled speech in everyday discourse', appears at first to devalue the content of the poet's output as inspired by the beloved. Nevertheless, Rivas interprets the relationship between the poet and the feminine figure as one of 'identification', confirming the female as 'poetic Muse': both Romantic and post-Romantic French poetry would describe the female in terms of the speaker himself, 'blurring the differences between the two'. Katharine Conley outlines the role of the muse more specifically for early Surrealist literature and art as representative of the male unconscious: 'she is the muse of the automatic writing process who inspires him and prompts his connection to his own inner life'. Breton defines Surrealism itself in terms of this automatic writing process: 'Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée'. The *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme*, compiled by Breton and Éluard, also refers to the centrality of automatic writing to the literary movement, in 'l'idée génératrice du surréalisme [...] le débit torrentiel de l'écriture automatique', where the latter part of the definition resonates with the garrulousness at the close of 'L'Amoureuse'. However, reflecting on a photo entitled 'L'Écriture automatique', in which a woman is poised ready with a pen to

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139 Rivas, 'Éluard's "L'Amoureuse"', p. 492.
140 Rivas, 'Éluard's "L'Amoureuse"', p. 491.
take down the automatic flow of words, Conley points out her 'lack of mental engagement in the process': looking away from both the page and the camera, her body 'inspires' and 'represents' automatic writing. If automatic writing is central to Surrealism, and the female muse is the symbol for this process, Conley suggests that she does not participate herself in this artistic production, only creating a pathway for the male poet in that direction.

For Rivas, the final line of Éluard's poem, 'a collective wisdom that prizes content at the expense of form', is transformed within the poetic context to express the way the literary text 'speaks', though not in order to 'prove anything', rather to 'state its own conditions of existence as a speaking text'. His reading of this shift is very much in line with the ideas of Chénieux-Gendron, who writes of the significance the notion of 'parler pour parler' held for Éluard. She explains Éluard's work in terms of an impulse seeking out both a transformed and transformative conception of language: 'un nouveau langage, un langage du plaisir, doit être recherché – qui soit délivré de l'obligation de signifier – un langage qui reste ouvert à toutes les virtualités du sens'. In the light of these readings, the conclusion to 'L'Amoureuse' takes on a quality of ecstasy; it points towards the possibility of a language freed from the constraints of its signifying role, no longer the domain of 'bavards' and tedious habit.

If the reader further questions Rivas's distinction between form and content, or his thought that content is privileged over form in 'L'Amoureuse', the impulse in the poet to both laugh and cry, to speak without any preformed intention, stemming from the dreams of the feminine figure, may also be evocative of definitions of free verse. Perloff writes of the notion that free verse 'tracks the actual movement of thought and feeling, refusing to interfere with its free flow, to inhibit its natural motion; or so, at least, the poem must appear to be doing, no matter how much "craft" has gone into it'. She also mentions the belief that free verse 'tracks the movement of the breath itself', which points to an inherent spontaneity in the form, a closeness to emotions and their

144 Conley, Automatic Woman, p. 1.
147 Chénieux-Gendron, Le Surréalisme, p. 94.
148 Perloff, Poetry On and Off the Page, p. 147.
fluctuations as reproduced at the close of 'L'Amoureuse'.\textsuperscript{149} The emotion of the Surrealist artist too is given prominence by Breton in \textit{Le Surréalisme et la peinture}, charging 'la plume' or 'le crayon' with which he creates his artwork.\textsuperscript{150} In the \textit{Manifeste du surréalisme}, Breton compares the aims of Surrealist creation to Freudian psychoanalysis in terms evocative of these definitions of free verse: 'je résolu d'obtenir de moi [...] un monologue de débit aussi rapide que possible, sur lequel l'esprit critique du sujet ne fasse porter aucun jugement, qui ne s'embarrasse, par suite, d'aucune réticence, et qui soit aussi exactement que possible la \textit{pensée parlée}.\textsuperscript{151} Definitions of free verse and outlines of the ambitions of Surrealism and its automatic writing processes overlap.

Éluard's poem seems to comment on these notions of automatic writing and free verse, placing at the centre of their practice the female figure that inspires the poet to write. The female muse of 'L'Amoureuse' never sleeps, keeping the poet himself wide-awake throughout her daylight dreams. Moreover, the mirrored reflection of the male poet in his female love object in 'L'Amoureuse' reveals its cracks when the binary structure is subverted by a mysterious third term in the poem. Rivas spots the phonetic 'pie [qui] erre sur le ciel' in the final line of Éluard's first verse going on to explore, among other elements, the metonymic appearance of the magpie in the feminine subject pronoun: 'elle' becomes 'aile'.\textsuperscript{152} Éluard's phonic play may also be evoking the letter \textit{l}, which Breton proposes as a solution to the silence that threatens to block the Surrealist writer (Breton himself possibly playing on the \textit{l–elle} relationship) – the letter \textit{l} will be the writer's trigger to continue with his flow.\textsuperscript{153} A gendered reading of the text, in line with that of the mirroring in 'L'Égalité des sexes', might see the further erasure of the female presence, not only in her assumption of the supporting role, in the shadow of the dominant poet–figure, but also in her metamorphosis into the image of the magpie, standing thus for the unconscious inspiration and unrestrained form(s) of Surrealist poetry. However, this example of poetic play simultaneously demonstrates the expansive possibilities, or

\textsuperscript{149} Perloff, \textit{Poetry On and Off the Page}, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{150} André Breton, \textit{Le surréalisme et la peinture} (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{151} Breton, \textit{Manifestes du Surréalisme}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{152} Rivas, 'Éluard's "L'Amoureuse"', p. 493.
'transformations' existing within a layered interpretation of the poem, placing the female at the centre of both.\footnote{Rivas, 'Éluard's "L'Amoureuse"', p. 496} Despite evidence of conflict and violence in the poem, Nugent describes the experience of love in 'L'Amoureuse' as 'a total one', explaining that for Éluard there are 'never two separate experiences', only 'a union of the beloved and the person in love'.\footnote{Nugent, \textit{Paul Éluard}, p. 50.} Similarly, for Conley, this poem is an example of the Surrealist idealisation of reciprocal love, which she sees as 'an effective metaphor for their theoretical goal in automatic writing': that is, a harmony between the poet's unconscious and conscious thoughts.\footnote{Conley, \textit{Automatic Woman}, p. 9.} It is a matter of 'liberating' a part hidden deep in the unconscious of the poet, rendering it conscious, the text on the page reflecting the poet's self functioning more as an 'insight' than an 'appropriation'.\footnote{Conley, \textit{Automatic Woman}, p. 9.} Even the more encompassing notion of 'insight', however, restricts the potential reach of the text. As Timothy Mathews finds, the power of the poem to transform lies in the potential for association that it poses. He accepts the invitation to connect the impossibility of the lover standing on the eyelids of the poet, and the stone 'lost on the sky, "sur le ciel", not in the sky', explaining that each is 'placed on a boundary that cannot be fixed'.\footnote{Timothy Mathews, \textit{Alberto Giacometti: The Art of Relation} (London: Tauris, 2014), p. 55.} For Mathews, the connection captures the simultaneous potential freedom of 'endless, frame-defying association' and also the potential 'alienation of no relation', since 'relation seems to emerge where it cannot and because it cannot'.\footnote{Mathews, \textit{The Art of Relation}, p. 55.} Rather than seeking out deeper self-understanding or union with the lover, Éluard explores the limits, or potential, of language and image. The poem also comments on his poetic process, placing the feminine at the centre of his inquiry. Despite the potential for transformation to be unlocked in the images and connections that abound in 'L'Amoureuse', both 'L'Égalité des sexes' and 'L'Amoureuse' encourage the reader to assume gendered interpretations from the outset. The form of each poem appears, on the surface, to corroborate such readings, structuring the male–female relation according to the binary mirroring that has been the focus of much work on gender and sexual theory. Irigaray, for
example, deconstructs Freudian theory in such a way. She expresses that in both the images and words that constitute a Freudian theory of femininity, it seems the female hardly features at all. Her sexual organ lacks the visibility which characterises that of the male, and even her sight is appropriated by male vision, placing her as object of the scene. In the language of the text, she is therefore unrepresented in her own specificity, residing between the words that only describe sexual difference in terms of divergences from the central male term. This leads Irigaray to sum up the female role as that which provides a 'redoublement spéculaire' of the male, fulfilling 'le désir du même, de l'identique à soi, du soi (comme) même, et encore du semblable, de l'alter ego, et pour tout dire de l'auto... et de l'homo... de l'homme'. The progression from notions of similarity to those of specifically male association in Irigaray's description confirms the dominance of the one term over the other within the theory of gender, stressing that the theory does not simply posit her as his mirrored equal.

Irigaray further ensures that her use of mirror symbolism is not misinterpreted as a sign of sexual equality by reminding her reader of what is lacking in this 'spécula(ris)tion'; namely, the penis that the female does not possess, which she nonetheless compensates for through her penis envy. However, one must also note the 'spécula(ris)tion' within 'spécula(ris)tion' and remember that the female as a male reflection is a 'projection' or even a 'projet'. Such lexis alludes to the presence of fiction within Freudian theory, identifying its objectifying depiction of the female as one established in order to bolster male subjectivity. In emphasising the role of form in his choice of these two poems to represent Éluard in an anthology composed, as we have seen, 'du point de vue formel', Roubaud seems to foreground the limits of this binary understanding of the sexual relation. Although image and metaphor are sources of extension and transformation in 'L'Amoureuse', form in both of Éluard's poems catalyses the failure of the relation between poet and beloved muse in a way that may be aligned with an Irigarayan reading of a Freudian and to some extent Lacanian theory of femininity.

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161 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 63.
162 Irigaray, Speculum, p. 27.
163 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 137.
Conclusions Thus Far: Roubaud, Éluard and Free Verse

In the dialogue between Autobiographie, chapitre dix and Poésie:, between Paul Éluard and Jacques Roubaud, poetry and love first come together for the poet's younger self. The texts represent a coming of age, in which Roubaud experiences the ardour of first love: his physical desire for Michelle, and unknown territories of poetry. The reader is taken on a journey of discovery, learning how love can be transformative of life and also poetry, arousing an all-encompassing passion for everyday experience. The two come to represent an amour fou, the passionate encounter with love of/and poetry that transforms Roubaud's existence, but is nonetheless fleeting. Roubaud's first love, Michelle, fades into the setting of the poet's youth, existing only as a distant memory to be recounted in his autobiographical prose. Their relation is allowed no space in which to thrive, played out only in moments snatched in various public places. The free verse forms in which Roubaud attempts to compose at the time are also portrayed by the poet as momentary: apparently breaking with the ties of tradition on the surface, it is never long before these forms are invaded by recognisable metres and phonic patterns from past works. The poet finds his free verse compositions empty of innovation, and stifling to his creativity.

In Autobiographie, chapitre dix, the reader is offered evidence within the poetry itself of Roubaud's rupture with free verse writing forms associated with Surrealism. The poet appears to challenge writers such as Éluard in Autobiographie, chapitre dix, but the volume must also be read as his reassessment of his own relationship with poetry: 'les pastiches [...] font partie du parcours obligé de l'écrivain, qui doit s'y livrer afin d'etre au moins sûr de ce qu'il ne fera plus ensuite'. What appears to be a rejection of certain poetic practices and indeed significant figures is also Roubaud's reflection on his own composition processes. Roubaud writes, for example, of the 'le vers-librisme torride des surréalistes et de leurs émules' on the one hand, adding 'je m'étais enthousiasmé' by it on the other. He describes 'cette gêne' and 'cette insatisfaction de plus en plus paralysante' with his attempts to write after the styles of the Surrealists; associating their enterprise with 'qualités intuitives' and 'l'absence de rigueur', rightly or wrongly so, he outlines his 'méfiance [...] née

165 Roubaud, Mathématique:, p. 57.
d'une incapacité plutôt que d'une réflexion justifiée'. The implication is that intuitive practices and lack of rigor are accusations levelled at his own processes, swept up, as he often seems to be, in the rapture of the new movement in poetry at the time.

While there is a sense of potential transformation in Éluard's particular use of image and metaphor, Roubaud seems to foreground a sense of frustration at the level of form and its capacity to represent the relation between the poet and his beloved as muse. Although the feminine presence in Éluard's poems is the site of inspiration, she does not herself participate in the poet's creative process from her position within the binary structures in which he places her. In a return to the origins of psychoanalytic theories of the female, the structures that posited the female as muse to the poet, for whom she provided specular identification and insight, also collapse. In those moments in which she appears to be everything to and for the male poet, she fades in a structure where the terms of subject and object are mediated by the petit a.

Alain Badiou writes of alternative perspectives on love, proposing that its power to revolutionise lies in 'questions de durée et de processus, et non pas seulement [...] questions de commencement'; although 'incertaine', 'mystérieuse' and even 'miraculeuse' at times, the 'rencontre' of an amour fou exists not at the level of what endures. How do these descriptions become significant in the next part of Roubaud's decision? The poet rejects free verse forms epitomised by Éluard's L'Amour la poésie and the automatic writing process, foregrounding the fleeting nature of first love, but how does he go on to establish both 'process' and 'duration' within his own poetic forms? How does the position of the female in Roubaud's poetry compare to that of the Surrealist muse in his anthological selections of Éluard's work?

These questions will be considered across the next part of this chapter in the light of close readings from poetry volume Trente et un au cube. Beginning with Roubaud's decision to make a break with the free verse forms he associated with Surrealism, I will suggest that the poet provides an alternative formal solution for the presence of his feminine beloved in verse to that of the binary model erected by Éluard in 'L'Égalité des sexes' and 'L'Amoureuse'. The choices

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166 Roubaud, Mathématique:, pp. 56–57.
that Roubaud makes in relation to form in *Trente et un au cube* respond to his experiences of disillusionment in his early composition processes, with the notion of *tabula rasa* countered with tradition, and freer forms exchanged for intricacy of metrical structure in poetry. While Éluard's poems were enriched with associations and connections that extended the possibilities of meaning through layers of imagery in the text, I will show the ways in which the structural architecture and intertextuality of Roubaud's poems are the source of transformations activated in form for the latter poet.

2.9 *Trente et un au cube*: Moving Away from Specularity

Jacques Roubaud's decision to break away from the methods of poetry composition of his contemporaries evokes the same sense of violence associated with the avant-gardist break with traditional metres, referring to notions of 'rompre' and 'rupture'. However, the poet is quick to deny any similarity between their revolutionary stance and his own new beginning: *D'une décision de rupture* [...] *commencer, c'est rompre; pas pour faire table rase de la poésie du passé (illusion avant-gardiste), mais pour un retour en arrière, jusqu'au nœud de l'erreur, pour prendre un autre chemin*.168 His 'rupture' does not aim to break free of tradition, rather it turns back towards it, instead distancing his own writing from more recent attempts to deny the patterns of poetry that have come before. Roubaud embarks on an exploration of the sonnet form, citing among other reasons its 'fil formel très ancien, très archaïque; quelque chose capable d'une longue durée poétique'.169 He seeks a form known for its 'longévité' in order to escape the sense of the momentary that had come to characterise contemporary forms of poetry:

[le sonnet] était capable, comme forme, d'adaptation à des langues, des siècles, des mètres d'une assez grande variabilité; qu'il atteignait donc, par cohésion et métamorphoses, des régions poétiques assez éloignées des conditions poétiques particulières et momentanées, comme celles que j'essayais, précisément, de fuir.170

This decision for radical change in his methods of composing poetry is famously associated with the compilation of a book of sonnets, *Signe d'appartenance*, so

169 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 31.
170 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 31–32.
Boasting long and short sonnets, prose sonnets, and even sonnets of sonnets, this first publication contributing to Roubaud's *Projet* makes no secret of its central concern with form. Nevertheless, the implications of Roubaud's 'décision de rupture' for his poetic works will here be explored through the slightly later volume, *Trente et un au cube*. Preoccupation with form continues to dominate this latter book, still one of the earliest contributions to the then fledgling *Projet*, and it is also an expression of love of and for the female, which makes it most relevant for this study. Moreover, *Trente et un au cube* engages directly with the poet's decision for change: in an echo of the words from his *Description du projet*, Roubaud states in one poem: ‘je cherche ce qui n'est || pas momentané | dans cette disposition’. That is, he seeks to escape the momentary through the poetic arrangement itself.

The very notion of arrangement, or 'disposition', points to the new dimensions in this poetry. Roubaud's attention is very much given over to the line in *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*, where poetic play challenges definitions of free verse both typographically and phonically. In his *anthologie de poésie contemporaine*, spaces dedicated to Éluard's poetry are dominated by two-dimensional patterns, with a mirroring effect often occurring within a single line. In stark contrast to these binary patterns, Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube* paraphrases its own 'disposition' as 'chaos mobile', thus informing the reader that this poetry is doubly chaotic through its refusal to be stilled. This poem 'qui n'est || pas momentané' is also described in terms of:

\[
\text{liens méticuleux} \quad \text{tissés de son vertical} \quad \begin{cases} \\
\text{la blessure blanche au long} \\ 
\text{segments de soleils violets}
\end{cases}
\]

The notions of linking and vertical sound that the poem speaks of are enacted within the typography itself: the reader's eye follows the vertical movement of the line as its segments shift on the page, then scanning the stacked alternatives offered together within the bracket on the right. A reader might also see the white wound and violet suns that the lines speak of in the overall spacing of the

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172 Roubaud, *Trente et un au cube*, p. 49. All further citations from the volume in the remainder of this section are from this poem.
poem as a whole, where the unconventional layout and syllable count result in both small gaps (suns rendered violet through their edges of penned ink lettering) and longer jagged lines of white space. Poetry is no longer thought of in terms of its line, counted or without metre, but in terms of structure with multiple entry-points, or 'architecture'.

The symmetry within the Éluardian poems Roubaud chose to anthologise was found to explore the relationship between the poet and his female lover, illustrating her role of potential support to the writer, his own image and poetic inspiration. Roubaud moves away from what he presents as Éluard's binary model in favour of a different approach:

\[
\begin{align*}
ta & | \text{ chromatographie sur buvards sonores est} | \text{ dissolution en aiguilles} | \\
& \text{ cristaux vibratiles gongs } | \text{ perpétués tu } | \text{ te déroules reproduite } | \text{ en quelque sodium } | \text{ de timbres d'une hauteur } | \text{ oboesque d'un sifflet } | \\
& \text{ pentatonique et } | \text{ ce qui demeure c'est toujours } | \text{ fortuit le chemin } | \text{ d'un sein à un sein de ta } | \text{ bouche à ta bouche laissé } | \text{ intact par la lessive d'images conduit } | \text{ de seuil en seuil de synapses comme inaltérée.}
\end{align*}
\]

The beloved takes on the form of the poem, here represented by an amalgam of colour, sound and chemical substance. In Éluard's 'L'Amoureuse', the merging of lover and poet gave way to an endless deferral, in the form of associations and layers of imagery. Here, the female inspires the generation of the poem's form(s). A number of techniques are employed to perpetuate an underlying sense of movement in the extract. Vision and the sense of sound overlap, in 'buvards sonores', 'cristaux vibratiles' and 'sodium | de timbres', suggesting the poem as an entity that may exist written on the page, or be given an aural existence when read aloud. It is as though the poem unfurls before our eyes: it is the unpredictable spreading of colours in a chromatography experiment on blotting paper, the multiplication of crystals, the crossing of the distance between one breast and another, one mouth and another, ending in the splitting of cells. The doubling of the female body parts in this way, together with the vibrations of shifting colour, makes the reader feel they are viewing her through a prism. She unfolds, progresses like the branching lines of the poem itself: 'tu | te déroules reproduite'. This is not the reflection of the same Roubaud might have read in Éluard's 'L'Égalité des sexes' and the surface structure of 'L'Amoureuse'. Instead, the female of Trente et un au cube seems here to stir and
come into being before our eyes, while somehow escaping both reader and poet in her ungraspable multiplicity.

2.10 Origins: Japanese Tanka and Troubadour Canso

As far as poetic form is concerned, the evocation of crystals will take a regular reader of Roubaud back to the sonnet and its origins in the canso of the troubadours. For the poet, the sonnet is the 'forme mémoire de la canso', the earliest sonnets referred to as 'miroir de la canso'; he explains 'le sonnet n'est pas une canso mais s'aproprie une partie de sa définition formelle'. Elsewhere, he clarifies 'le sonnet est initialement une cobla de canso troubadouresque qui, par répétition et prolifération, atteint à un statut d'autonomie formelle', that is, it is a single verse of the canso that evolves into the later form. In this way, he is able to speak of the sonnet as 'résumant (cobla) la forme; cristal de la forme'.

More recently, the publication of the title Quasi-Cristaux shared Roubaud's research of fifty years on the sonnet form. The sonnet is, for Roubaud, a crystal, not only due to its longevity, the gradual sedimentation of its composite qualities over hundreds of years; the poet also writes of the form's 'capacité de multiplication effervescente'.

The sonnet's potential for multiplicity is not unlike the success of the 'tanka japonais', which enjoys 'un gigantisme numérique beaucoup plus vertigineux'. It is this Japanese equivalent that forms the basis of the structure of Trente et un au cube, with the basic count of 5-7-5-7-7, the syllable count of the Japanese tanka, repeated through every level of the text from the metric count of its line unit, to the number of strophes in each poem, and even in the groupings of the poems within the overall architecture of the book (the latter is made particularly clear by the layout of the credits page according to that pattern at the end of the collection, p. 131). The reference to crystals thus brings together the two traditions within which Trente et un au cube is formally inscribed: that of the troubadour canso and the Japanese tanka.

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173 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 344.
174 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 108.
175 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 108.
176 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 31.
177 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 31.
The proliferation of both sonnets (growing from the *canso*) and *tankas* has at its root a certain amount of collaborative effort among poets. Roubaud's study of the formal art of the troubadours, *La Fleur inverse*, presents the troubadour as 'ouvrier': more specifically 'forgeron' or 'fabbro'. In order to reach 'le diamant', which is both 'la canso et l'amour de l'amant et de la dame', the poet must work through certain 'équations [...] chimiques'. That is, to prove his love is the greatest, to show his lady is the most worthy of all, his *canso* dedicated to her, singing of her, must be 'unique' and 'Le forgeron lui-même, le troubadour, sort "affiné du feu de la forge d'amour"'. The notions of uniqueness and refinement, known as the *pretz* of the troubadour, or 'l'éclat qui est en ses cansos', are achieved through this constant effort to rise above all other invention: 'Chaque troubadour tente de créer la canso la plus parfaite, celle qui sera plus excellente que toutes les autres cansos. D'où l'axiome: *La canso est la dona du trobar*'. When a *canso* is composed, it is measured in the mind of the troubadour against those which already exist, refined and perfected:

Quand une canso commence dans le jeu et joie de poésie, toutes les cansos lui sont coprésentes. Dans une canso, le trobar tout entier est implicite. [...] Le trobar entier apparaît comme tissé, lié, entrelacé de [...] fils; fils de l'amors et des rimes, formules décasyllabiques dans le registre du «grand chant». Les manières de l'allusion, du passage d'une canso à une autre, représentent un des traits essentiels du jeu formel qu'est le trobar.

Thus, there is an enhanced intertextuality among the *cansos*, not only through direct 'allusion', but also in the appropriation and renewal of their technical elements, such as syllabic and rhyme patterns. Their striving for unique and better forms, their search for the 'diamant' of poetic invention, the *trobar*, becomes in a sense a coherent field of research.

The Japanese counterparts of this European form were chained together in medieval imperial anthologies, creating a 'livre qui est poème de poèmes'. The poems are intricately linked in such a way that they may form an overall

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182 Roubaud, *La Fleur inverse*, p. 188.
184 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 69.
sense of progression, 'par construction de séquences dont les éléments sont des poèmes préalablement composés et soumis à des principes d'intégration et de progression qui donnent à l'ensemble une architecture propre'. The form of the anthology itself thus becomes a poem of poems, a construction rather than a simple gathering of a number of pieces. Like the canso, the tanka acquires a layer of meaning through association with other texts that together constitute an overarching structure. Maria Muresan explains that a third poem, not included in the anthology but known to a reader from Japanese court society, would provide the link between each poem in the book, extending the notion of collaborative poetic memory from the poets to their readers.

The rapprochement of the canso and the tanka in Trente et un au cube does not serve simply to highlight their technical similarities, however: both Japanese and troubadour verse provide a challenge to what the poet has called 'le momentané'. Roubaud notes the extension of poetic duration through the insertion of the tanka into a collective work: 'L'effort du poète collectif, dont l'œuvre est l'anthologie, est de dépasser le temps fragmentaire du tanka et le temps erratique du monde physique en les insérant dans un mouvement qui les prolonge'. When inserted within the sequence of the anthology, the circumstances in which the individual poems are composed (for example, the author's name, time and reasons for writing) are erased, thus making them timeless, 'durables'. He also outlines the importance for him of a sense of otherness emanating from Japanese literature: 'Le Japon a joué pour moi un jour le rôle d'un 'ailleurs' poétique, d'une contrée où la poésie fut autre [...], où elle entretint avec la nature (une nature elle-même lointaine, étrange) un rapport privilégié.'

Japanese medieval verse opens up another time and place for the poet, far away from what he saw as the stagnancy in his work influenced by contemporary French forms. The curious paradox is that this 'ailleurs', this

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185 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 69.
189 Roubaud, Poésie, p. 494.
environment so 'lointaine' and 'étrange', is really much closer to home than it may seem:

découvrant la tradition japonaise du 'waka', je me suis senti brusquement en pays familier: c'est un sentiment qui ne trompe guère (ou qui nous trompe de manière convaincante). J'avais su, je savais déjà cette émotion mais je ne savais plus que je savais, je le redécouvrais; et je me souvenais alors du moment où je l'avais su.  

Feeling at home in the Japanese poetic tradition brings about a pang of nostalgia in the poet, who uses the pluperfect and imperfect tenses to refer respectively to an emotion forgotten and rediscovered. His description of this recaptured emotion is reminiscent of the way he speaks of Provençal – 'La langue provençale, que je n'ai pas parlée enfant (qu'aujourd'hui je lis mais je ne parle pas) joue un rôle particulier dans ma mémoire familiale. [...] À la fois proche et absente, elle est pour moi la langue d'origine, la langue perdue de l'âge d'or des langues' – which suggests his grammatical past of the past can only be looking back to the poet's Provençal origins, the 'pays familier' of his pre-war childhood.  

Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck also sees in Trente et un au cube a return to the Carcassonne of the poet's youth, where nature abounds to create a utopic garden. In Trente et un au cube, the return to the forest of his childhood is simultaneously a resituating of himself as poet among all those others he had read, absorbed and copied in his adolescence. Roubaud returns to his childhood origins in Provence, but also to where for him poetry begins its formal journey, with the troubadours.  

2.11 Multi-Dimensional Rhythms

Having outlined the broader principles of form and poetic influence underpinning Roubaud's composition of Trente et un au cube, those elements of the volume that distance it from the ambitions of Surrealism, I will now consider

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190 Roubaud, Poésie: 494.
191 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 16.
193 The reader may see in this overwhelming sense of origin a deviation from the pursuit of process, and even creativity. However, a key premise in much Roubaldian and Oulipian work is that there is much to be found and 'invented' in old forms. There is a strong sense that futurity can exist in the past, for example, the Oulipians frequently refer to the notion of 'plagiat par anticipation' to describe the invention, or discovery, of a form that has already been discovered.
their particular interaction on the space of the page through selected readings of the text. The imprint of the troubadour influence manifests itself at moments throughout *Trente et un au cube*, but its prominence at the open and close of the book is undeniable. Just as the troubadour *canso* begins with 'je', brought into existence by the impetus of love which moves the troubadour to speak of his desire, so too this poem of poems takes the lover as its audience:

JE DÉTIENS MILLION de | syllabes comptées pour toi | pas et tours des roues | hélices selon l'œil mailles | du bruit croisé recroisé || comptées dansées sont | syllabes que je te donne | vibrations s'allongent | couleurs se poussent et battent | suites de mains dyadiques.196

The accumulation of circular shapes and winding actions, like 'tours', 'roues', 'hélices', and 'croisé recroisé' recalls the troubadour ethic of *entrebescar*, the interlacing of rhyme words into an intricate pattern that forms the beauty of the *canso*. Moreover, the 'mains dyadiques' are suggestive of the work of the artisan, shaping and moulding his words into a form worthy of expressing his love. The axiom '*La canso est la dona du trobar*' is played out literally in the text when the motif of the artisan's craft recurs: 'mon matériel mes jeux d'orgues || cela qui pénètre | décisivement en toi | cela te façonne | ou t'imprègne de mes traces | résonne de ma métrique'.198 He crafts his verses around the wonder of his *dona*, so that their *pretz* may equal her own, and he is motivated by his desire for her, alluded to in the sexual image of the traces he leaves inside her.

At times, his efforts come across as an attempt to contain, even constrain her physically within the words of his poem: 'toi énumérante | chantante toi sous mes sibilantes syllabes | accumulées longtemps pour | mieux te réduire pour mieux || t'entraver'.199 The rhythm of the poem strives to capture her essence, to shackle her body within its few lines. If the poet is craftsman, the language of his poetry too becomes malleable material: the alliteration in 'sibilantes syllabes' gives the words another dimension, with phonic play echoing the adjective's meaning and somehow making objects of the syllables themselves. Roubaud also writes of 'les nombres | de syllabes que j'entasse || pour toi l'une sur | l'autre',

where the syllabic units become physical entities that are not only counted, but piled up.\textsuperscript{200} This description in poetry is reminiscent of what Roubaud describes elsewhere as '[la] physique du rythme'.\textsuperscript{201} The various semantic possibilities of the word 'physique' at once evoke the sense of form, attributing to rhythm a physical or material shape, and it also suggests material or chemical constitution, if an English reader translates 'physique' as 'physics'. The syllabic rhythm of his verse here takes shape as a physical entity.

The poet's attention turns to the particular syllable count of \textit{Trente et un au cube}: 'je prends | cet appui sur la parole | ce lent découpage | de l'impair et du premier | de l'impair dans l'impair pour || te parler'.\textsuperscript{202} The alternation of odd and primary numbers, of odd numbers within odd numbers, recalls Roubaud's description of the numerical organisation of the book. He breaks down 'sa division additive $5+7+5+7+7$' into its various levels, 'cinq subdivisions du livre; [...] cinq "strophes" en chaque poème; [...] cinq "segments" (hémistiches) en chaque "ligne" (vers)', each bearing the pattern inspired by the syllable count of the \textit{tanka}. Furthermore, he points out the property of 31 as a prime number, in turn divisible into prime numbers in the above way: 'sa "décomposition" à la japonaise en fait la somme d'un nombre premier de nombres premiers'.\textsuperscript{203} The segmentation of the poem in this extract emulates the multiple layering of the sequence, first outlining its basic division into odd and prime numbers in one fragment – 'ce lent découpage | de l'impair et du premier' – then after a pause, indicating what Roubaud calls its 'macroscopie' in 'de l'impair dans l'impair'.\textsuperscript{204}

His carving into segments of the poem is described as 'lent', perhaps another signalling of the intricacy of his craft. Alternatively, the adjective may reflect the reader's pace, unaccustomed as they will be to the pairing of French syntax with Japanese syllabic rhythms. The author himself recognises the potential obstacle for the reader in the clashing syntactic and metric units: 'Cela peut poser quelque problème de restitution auditive ou, pour l'œil–oreille d'un lecteur, d'adaptation au mètre du poème'.\textsuperscript{205} However, he is understandably less than sympathetic with the critic who proposes to 'supprimer les frontières de

\textsuperscript{200} Roubaud, \textit{Trente et un au cube}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{202} Roubaud, \textit{Trente et un au cube}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{203} Roubaud, \textit{Description du projet}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{204} Roubaud, \textit{Description du projet}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{205} All references in paragraph are in Roubaud, \textit{Description du projet}, p. 79.
vers et de segments, de «lire en prose»', referencing his 'surdité'. Indeed, Roubaud insists on the significance in *Trente et un au cube* of its rhythm, 'à la fois formellement et dans ce qui est dit dans le poème': rhythm is key to an understanding of the text's form and content.

Rhythm, then, is there to be considered, contemplated by both the eye and ear of the reader. Yet through his use of the hyphen in 'œil–oreille', Roubaud does not appear to separate the senses of vision and hearing. The first reader of *Trente et un au cube* is the poet's lover, his addressee, who he invites to receive the poem with all her senses. She mouths the words of the poem with her lips as she follows their sequence with her fingers, 'quand tu les reçois || syllabes remuants, tes lèvres et tes doigts'; she reads the syllables of the poem aloud and hears it recited to her in a present that ever slips away, 'en la bouche seule | qui les porte (la | tienne) l'oreille seule où | leur point présent se divise || (la tienne la tienne | où elles s'habituent); her hands are blackened with traces of ink from the pages of writing, 'en tes mains (seules | mains à noircir de leur encre)'.

The reader's 'œil–oreille' is thus multiplied for the lover 'en bouche mains yeux oreilles', rendering it an all-encompassing, sensual experience.

The four dimensions of the reading experience is a theme which comes up in Roubaud's theoretical writing. He mentions 'un quatuor de formes':

Il faut distinguer, par exemple, la page superficielle de la forme–poésie écrite de la page interne de la forme–poésie dans la mémoire. La poésie a une forme écrite et une forme écrite, qui est l'image visuelle intérieure, mémorielle, de la page de poésie.

De la même manière la forme–poésie a une composante orale, externe et une composante audale, interne. Elle entre par l'œil et par l'oreille, mais surtout, elle entre.

Elle est faite de ces deux couples formels, l'un externe, l'autre interne.

A poem written on the page, read with the eyes, is simultaneously perceived aurally within the internal workings of memory. A poem recited and heard is simultaneously seen on 'la page interne' of our inner eye. The poet's words are taken in by his audience, absorbed by his reader, who makes the poetry their own: 'C'est la mémoire qui ira chercher ce qu'il y a dessous, derrière, au-delà de

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la notation, au-delà de l'exécution. [...] Ce n'est qu'en entrant dans la mémoire intérieure de qui le reçoit et fait sien qu'il accède à un nombre de dimensions respectable, qu'il devient vraiment un poème, et plus une partition. Poetry then 'enters' the reader, as in Trente et un au cube the lover--reader 'receives' its syllables, impregnated with the traces of the poet, penetrated by his material. The description of what appears to be the same process in sexual terms highlights that the reading of poetry is a particularly personal experience. The poem achieves its full potential of being, its four dimensions, through the reader's activation of its words and rhythms, the insinuating of the poem into memory. The interaction with memory is always a singular process, never the same for any two people. This is why Roubaud insists 'Un poème est toujours fabriqué pour deux: celui qui le compose et celui qui le lit et entend. Et peut-être le retient'. The poem exists fully only through both its composer and reader. A poem must also be memorable, or at least 'revisité intérieurement', in order to be committed to memory and it is partly its rhythm that gives it its hold there.

The 'quatuor' in Trente et un au cube of 'bouche mains yeux oreilles', does not appear to entirely correspond to Roubaud's theoretical account of the act of reading poetry. Rather the mouth carrying the syllables and the hand blackened by their ink serve to convey the poem as more material, more 'object-like'. They accord it further dimensions of existence, weight and substance. The reader, in fact, learns of the precise physical dimensions of the manuscript when the poet writes in the fourth poem 'j'écris silencieusement sur ma feuille / 21 × 27 / dans la jaune lumière'. The measurement stands out in the poem, not only for its unusual precision in the context of a love poem, but also for its numerical-symbolic notation whose syllabic count is not spelled out in words for the reader. The figures also appear geometrically near the centre of the page of the published edition of Trente et un au cube, drawing the eye to itself immediately. In an anecdotal passage in Poésie:, Roubaud muses on 'le format 21 × 27', each quarter the perfect space for a sonnet to exist 'seul, compact, serré, événement de

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209 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 128.
210 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, pp. 103–104.
211 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 130.
212 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 129.
213 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 21.
poésie singulier'.\textsuperscript{214} He even describes the way in which non-sonnets composed on these sheets of paper would acquire 'une caractéristique minimale de la sonnetticité' simply through their arrangement in the same format as the other poems.\textsuperscript{215} It is the poet's aside, in the smaller font that indicates a later addition to his daily routine of prose writing, which is most revelatory. Years after the American A4 page format eventually became the norm in France, overtaking the once standard '21 × 27' quite literally with its ostensibly longer rectangle shape (a development Roubaud found 'infiniment disgracieux'), it is the original poem arrangement that appears strange to the poet: 'aujourd'hui cependant, sortant les vieux morceaux de papier couverts d'un sonnet de leur refuge de trente ans, ce sont eux que je trouve de forme étrange, trop serrée, comme rabotée'.\textsuperscript{216} The implication is that it is not the particular dimensions of any page that are suited to sonnet composition, but the familiarity of the spatial arrangement to the eye that facilitates the poem's hold in memory, the layout committed to the writer's inner page, 'page interne', of poetry.

A reader might think of 'Still life / Style leaf' by Georges Perec, fellow-Oulipian writer and close friend of Jacques Roubaud. In this enigmatic piece, Perec provides a detailed account of the desk on which he writes, including the very page of the text's manuscript, 'de format 21 × 29.7'.\textsuperscript{217} The description loops in on itself at the point where the A4 page features, as we learn it is 'presque entièrement couverte d'une écriture éxagérément serrée, et sur laquelle on peut lire: le bureau sur lequel j'écris est une ancienne table de joaillier', taking up the words the essay begins with and recounting once again the writer's surroundings.\textsuperscript{218} A careful reader will pick up on the tiny alterations that indicate the passing of time, such as the shift of the electronic clock face from 'AM 10:18' to 'PM 12.50'.\textsuperscript{219} Though there is an impossibility about Perec's piece – which he says almost fills the page even before it doubles up on itself and begins all over again – it is relevant for a reading of Roubaud both for its spatial play and its sense of déjà vu. The words of the text imply it fits onto a sole A4 sheet

\textsuperscript{214} Roubaud, \textit{Poésie}; p. 480.
\textsuperscript{215} Roubaud, \textit{Poésie}; p. 481.
\textsuperscript{216} Roubaud, \textit{Poésie}; p. 480.
\textsuperscript{218} Perec, 'Still Life / Style Leaf', p. 113.
\textsuperscript{219} Perec, 'Still Life / Style Leaf', p. 112 and 118.
of paper: as the writing progresses, the author knows his description is coming
to a close towards the bottom of the page since the entire process has always
already been carried out. When we reach the halfway point cited above, we
know the essence or shape of the text before it 'begins' (again), having already
gone through the account of the desk and what sits upon it. At the very start of
the published text, opening with the words 'Le bureau sur lequel j'écris est une
ancienne table de joaillier', the assumption is that the writer knows what the text
contains, what it looks like, as it is placed on the very desk he embarks on
describing; this very description somehow already exists on a sheet of paper
placed on his desk.220

In an echo of this sense of the 'already seen', Roubaud tells us that 'toute
lecture d'un poème est déjà une relecture'.221 His explanation lies in the visual
form of the poem: 'Mis en présence d'un poème, en tenant compte de ses
dimensions et de sa présentation spatiale, on possède déjà immédiatement
beaucoup de lui'.222 An integral part of its committal to memory, the visual
appearance of the poem gives away its overall structures and patterns, the shape
of what we are about to read or hear. Roubaud details how the play of black
lines composing a sonnet positioned on a white page were more easily
transposed onto 'une page mentale' through the familiarity of the poem's
shape.223 In fact, Roubaud speaks of the page of poetry, whether 'la page
existante de | livre     ou papier     un manuscrit     un tapuscrit', as 'une mémoire
oblique     pour éviter le trou de | l'infiniment privé'.224 While the poem may
exist in a person's memory, that of the poet or reader, its material existence on
paper may be thought of as an external support; the poem does not depend solely
on its written or printed form, like the typographic line units and enjambments
of free verse. However, the singularity of a person's memory, 'l'infiniment privé',
means that every poem memorised is transformed by and for that person, but
also that it faces oblivion, 'le trou', when that memory fades.

221 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 130.
222 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 130.
223 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 42.
Spacing reproduced from the original.
2.12 Transformations: 'Parler pour parler' or 'Upper Limit Music'

In *Trente et un au cube*, Roubaud prioritises structure over free verse forms, a conception of poetic form that goes beyond the typographic line of free verse, tradition and renewal over the break of a *tabula rasa*, but what becomes of the automatic writing process that was alluded to in his readings of Éluard's love poems? The act of writing is foregrounded a number of times in *Trente et un au cube*. As he considers the dimensions of the page before him, Roubaud writes silently under the lamplight at his desk, 'la lampe || éclaire ma feuille'\(^{225}\). He speaks through the poetry of Bernart Marti when he tells his reader he is also watching his lover sleep, 'tant es ma donna | endurmyda'.\(^{226}\) In another poem, Roubaud interweaves a series of parallel scenes of poets writing in solitude. He translates a description of Japanese poet Shunzei in the act of composition: "tard dans la nuit il restait | assis près du lit, | devant la lampe faible, | gémissant doucement des || poèmes, tard dans | la nuit, courbé sur le froid" | en ce temps-là'.\(^{227}\) In the same poem, the words of Reverdy's *La Lucarne ovale* are scattered throughout, intertwined with fragments of a Cavalcanti sonnet, in which the snow falls in stilled wind '(bianca neve), en tombant || (senza venti) devenue bleue'. Reverdy sits in his attic, 'dans un grenier où la neige || devenait bleue', far removed from the bustle of the everyday, where his meditation goes undisturbed. It is a place of powerful transformations through poetry, where the blank page is turned blue by the poetry's ink and 'le charbon | était devenu aussi précieux | et rare que des pépites d'or'.

The multiplication of the image in which the reader observes the poet writing at his desk, his lamp relieving some of the darkness of night, creates a parallel between Roubaud and these earlier poets, situating *Trente et un au cube* again within the troubadour and medieval Japanese traditions, themselves entwined here with Italian and French writers spanning the centuries to Roubaud's present day. Roubaud goes as far as to suggest his own writing here is the stirred memory of these old poems, writing of a music which is:

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\(^{227}\) All following references to *Trente et un au cube* in this section are to the same poem and can be found on p. 97. Roubaud translates this extract from a passage by Japanese poet Shinkei, who describes Shunzei composing poetry on a winter's night. For an English rendering of the original passage, see Earl Miner, *An Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 34.
For Puff, this closing line represents the pain of love lost.\textsuperscript{228} In this poem strewn with repeated sighs of 'en ce temps-là', this ending seems certainly to express a sense of nostalgia for what is buried under the snow of winters past, now conjured up in memory. It also evokes the image of the writer piecing together the poem like a puzzle, composing a new picture from old fragments by other poets. He awakens, in and through the poem, the rhythms buried under layers of snow, placing himself closer to these poets of various traditions through his own transposition into the past tense, 'ce temps-là où | dans le froid j’étais | seul'. In a curious line from \textit{Dire la poésie}, Roubaud expresses his love for the poetry of others: 'J'aime lire les poèmes des autres plus que les miens | j'aime aussi les écrire mais ceci est une autre histoire'.\textsuperscript{229} His passion extends from reading to \textit{writing} the poems of others – not simply copying or memorising them as he did in the forest near his home as a teenager. This unexpected statement places him among these poets of days gone by, erasing any barrier time might have erected between them, their lines and verses constituting his very being as a poet.

Roubaud thus challenges the Surrealist claims for innovation and invention through \textit{tabula rasa}: 'rien jamais | ne commence sans qu'un temps ne \textbar{} devienne "ce", "-là"'. There can be no beginning without a past. Yet in this company of poets, the common thread is solitude. They each write alone, in the dead of night. Earl Miner describes the 'love of solitude' that was intrinsic to Shunzei's attitude towards poetry.\textsuperscript{230} Much has also been written about Roubaud's own self-confessed hermitism, but the image portrayed in \textit{Trente et un au cube} is less concerned with isolation as a life choice, and more with the particular moment of composition.\textsuperscript{231} The ephemerality of this creative meditation is conveyed in the translated extracts from Japanese \textit{tanka}s by Arie and Teika woven into the continuing description of Shunzei:

\textsuperscript{228} Puff, \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, pp. 188–89.
\textsuperscript{229} Roubaud, \textit{Dors}, p. 179. Spacing reproduced from the original.
\textsuperscript{230} Miner, \textit{An Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{231} See 'Bifurcation I' in Roubaud's \textit{Grand incendie de Londres}, pp. 363–78.
(les bambous de Fushimi | craquent sous la neige dit || Ariie et | Teika: 'rêve-pont brisé | les nuages s'éloignent') | dans un vieux vêtement, sous | le froid de la nuit, la lampe || très faible, il restait, | parlant des poèmes dans | la nuit ('la couleur | de la fleur des mots est oubliée').

The segments by Ariie and Teika each introduce an interruption into the text, whether the sound of bamboo twigs snapping in the snow, or the broken dream-bridge, where Roubaud's beautifully compact translation in 'rêve-pont' phonically enacts the sense of disjunction being conveyed. In this intertextual tapestry of solitary moments composing poetry, the instances of distraction reinforce the sense of quiet concentration that they break.

Roubaud thus reverses the Surrealist conception of poetic composition associated with automatism; for automatic writing is associated with the very notion of distraction itself. Breton describes the required 'conditions de détachement par rapport aux sollicitations du monde extérieur aussi bien que par rapport aux préoccupations individuelles d'ordre utilitaire, sentimental'. 232 Poetry for the Surrealists becomes an experiment in seeking out a creativity that does not rely on what is immediately available to the poet through notions of perception or conscious aesthetic choice. 233 Rather the aim is to invent through the resurgences of the unconscious in a refusal of accepted, everyday meaning in language, or alternatively: 'créer les conditions de l'épiphanie d'un sens nouveau'. 234 Roubaud insists instead on the poet's conscious engagement of memory in the writing process: he slowly pieces together the syllables of this poem from his own memory of poetic fragments. As with Éluard and Breton, the female lover is at the centre of the poetic process, but rather than standing for the exceptional state that removes the poet from the sphere of the habitual, placing him within the sudden passion of the amour fou, she is here awoken and carefully reconstructed from the time–space of the poet's memory.

In his *anthologie de poésie contemporaine*, which the poet reminds his reader is assembled 'du point de vue formel', Roubaud represents Éluard's writing through poems which are constructed around binary patterns. 235 'L'Égalité des sexes' and 'L'Amoureuse' – and this becomes particularly clear

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232 Chénieux-Gendron re-quotes Breton in *Le Surréalisme*, p. 70.
235 Roubaud, *Description du projet*, p. 137.
when they are placed together in the way Roubaud chooses in his anthology – seem to explore a sense of limit, even frustration associated with the conception of the female as muse, or mirror-image to the poet. The mirror cracks at the end of 'L'Égalité des sexes' and in 'L'Amoureuse' the reflection of the beloved in the poet gives way to a multitude of layers of meaning and possibility through imagery that seems to constantly evolve within the syntax of the poem. If for Éluard this sense of poetic unfurling and renewal occurs through the associations created by image and metaphor in the text, for Roubaud transformation in poetry takes place at the level of form and its interaction with memory.

Roubaud explains that in Éluard's conception of the relation between poetry and love, the missing term is language: 'dans l'équation Poésie = Amour il manque un troisième terme qui s'introduit, c'est la langue'. That is not to say that Éluard is not a poet who works very carefully with language in his work, rather Roubaud's conception of 'langue' possesses particular qualities and effects in the context of poetry and its relation to memory:

La poésie parle, et nous parlons. Elle dit; mais en même temps qu'elle dit pour nous, qu'elle suscite en nous, non par la pensée réfléchie mais par la mise en mouvement de notre mémoire, par les choix de langue qui se font à mesure en nous tels que notre mémoire nous les propose en images, en émotions, en d'autres appels et souvenirs de langue, sous l'efficace de sa pénétration, elle transporte en nous quelque chose d'autre: elle parle pour chacun de l'être de sa langue, de la langue à travers laquelle elle parle; elle dit quelque chose de l'histoire de la langue, de sa construction, de son vocabulaire, de sa syntaxe, de ses changements etc. [...] elle emploie la langue à sa manière, unique (et elle est la seule aussi parmi les arts de la langue à le faire de manière essentielle, inséparable d'elle-même). Je nommerai cette manière d'être de la poésie, de son action de mémoire, le nombre et le rythme.

A love of poetry for Roubaud is necessarily a love of language, and it is in poetry that language finds the sedimentation of its very own history. For Roubaud, poetry captures so much of language itself through its insinuation into our personal and collective memories: we recite poetry, learn it by heart and repeat it. Through its particular rhythms and patterns, 'le nombre et le rythme', it sticks in our mind, becomes associated with lived moments, and interacts with

\footnote{236 Roubaud and others, 'Entretien presque imaginaire', p. 10.} \footnote{237 Roubaud, L’Invention du fils de Leoprepes, p. 142.}
our most personal thoughts and feelings. Language fragments become images, emotions and even morph into other recollections of pieces of language, the links and developments it creates here emphasised through the repeated phrases beginning with 'elle', which flow on each from the one before.

Roubaud's poem on the solitary writers composing under lamplight echoes the multiplicity of movement and interaction in memory described in the passage here: the intertextual fragments borrowed from several poets are interspersed and become almost indistinguishable at times. They brush against one another like the 'vagues de ce temps-là' that the poem speaks of, enacting the processes that occur in memory. As in Éluard's writing, language – its vocabulary and syntax – creates resonances and new associations, but rather than arising from the immediacy of resurgences from the unconscious, they are renewed through an engagement with the traditions of poetry. A reader of poetry will have a wealth of rhythms and lines stored in his memory, which are reactivated, renewed through every new poem they read. The power of language to multiply associations and interactions lies in memory and the memorability of a poem for Roubaud, as we have seen, is intricately tied in with its rhythm and formal composition.

Roubaud reflects on the relation between poetry and language elsewhere through a definition penned by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

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poetry is speech framed for the contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning (la poésie est parole construite, organisée formée façonnée disposée et la contemplation de l'esprit selon le chemin (li sentiers) de l'ouïe ou parole organisée pour être entendue pour elle-même pour sa valeur et intérêt même au-dessus et au-delà de l'intérêt du sens). 238
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Hopkins goes on to specify this idea of meaning as 'at least the grammatical, historical and logical meaning'. It is clear from the translation Roubaud offers here of Hopkins's definition that he sees his own work very much through these same words. Hopkins's 'framed' becomes for Roubaud 'construite, organisée formée façonnée disposée', an extension that encompasses the nature of his writing in Trente et un au cube, in which his poetry is crafted, arranged, shaped.

238 Roubaud, 'Le silence de la mathématique', p. 117.
The definition is also reminiscent of Éluard's ideas on the transformation of language: his motif of 'parler pour parler', or as in 'L'Amoureuse', 'parler sans avoir rien à dire', also aimed for a use of language over and above accepted everyday meaning, a use freed of the constraints of directed meaning, which is perhaps the 'grammatical, historical and logical meaning' adopted by Roubaud here.

Roubaud develops his conception of poetry as 'speech framed to be heard for its own sake' when he describes it as being close to the 'upper limit music' of language:

...my poetics

\[
\int \text{speech} \quad \text{music}
\]

An integral
lower limit speech
upper limit music

(une intégrale/limite inférieure la parole/limite supérieure musique/)
et Zukofsky, en conséquence se désigne ainsi:
'...the simplest fact of his life, specifically, a writer of music...'.

On this occasion, Roubaud borrows the term from Louis Zukofsky, citing and translating the extract in which it appears from the American poet's A-12. Like Roubaud, Zukofsky places form at the centre of his poetic practice. The two poets also share a love of mathematics, evidenced, perhaps, by the presence of the integral symbol in Roubaud's citation of Zukofsky. The integral here defines Zukofsky's 'poetics'. It has as its lower limit 'la parole' – speech in its everyday communicative function – and 'musique' as its upper limit – a syntax composed of the rhythm of its words. In mathematics, the limits of the integral are approached, but never reached, which means that Zukofsky's conception of his poetry can never entirely be one or the other. Nevertheless, placing their poetic traditions closer to the upper limit of the integral, Zukofsky and Roubaud classify themselves as 'writer[s] of music'.

There is a sense that the closer the poet is to '[la] limite supérieure', the further the words of poetry are from their usual signification, performing instead as acoustic instruments. Words no longer exist as representative of what is beyond their letters – the signified – rather they become objects, taking on a sense of materiality that means they are there for their own sake. Once again, there is something of Éluard's 'parler pour parler' in this formula. The Surrealist poet proposed a radicalisation of language that would lift it above the plane of the everyday: 'Et le langage déplaisant qui suffit aux bavards, langage aussi mort que les couronnes à nos fronts semblables, réduisons-le, transformons-le en un langage charmant, véritable'.\textsuperscript{240} He hoped for the possibility of a language that would no longer belong to the space of the 'bavards' whose use of language as a means to an end had deadened its effects and taken away any pleasure it might bestow.

In his collage piece drawing together fragments of works by various other writers and artists, his contemporaries, Éluard provides the solution for this transformation by way of a citation of Novalis: 'Parler pour parler est la formule de délivrance'.\textsuperscript{241} The fragment that follows, a comment by Fritz Wittels on Freud's talking cure, goes some way towards explaining the way in which the notion of 'parler pour parler' works towards such 'délivrance':

Les analystes patients laissent parler le malade, sûrs que l'important et le vrai remonteront à la surface même sans qu'ils s'en mêlent. Je présume que c'est par ce chemin que Freud est arrivé à sa découverte fondamentale. Il lui fallait écouter et il a donc écouté. Et à la fin vint la chose cachée, que le flot de paroles était destiné à recouvrir.\textsuperscript{242}

It is in speaking for speaking's sake that that which is 'important' and 'true' resurfaces in language. The difference between the 'flot de paroles' that conceals the 'truth' within it, and the chattering of the 'bavards' that Éluard wishes to leave behind, is that language is freed from constraint in the former, released from its signifying properties that make of it a tool, a means to an end, in Éluard's words, 'mort'. A third fragment on the same page of Éluard's 'Premières vues anciennes', attributed to Gisèle Prassinos, suggests that the route to achieving this potential

\textsuperscript{241} Paul Éluard, 'Premières vues anciennes', \textit{Minotaure}, 10 (1937), 49–56 (p. 55).
\textsuperscript{242} Éluard, 'Premières vues anciennes', p. 55.
in language was through the automatic writing practices that had a role in Éluard's poetry and his thought on creativity. In the cited fragment, Prassinos compares the 'trésor' uncovered in language through the practice of automatic writing to the supposed innocence perceived in the writing of a young girl of fourteen:

> on y voit apparaître une morale qu'un humour lugubre tient en laisse. Morale de dissociation, de suppression, de négation, de révolte, morale des enfants, des poètes qui se refusent à acquérir et qui resteront des phénomènes tant qu'ils n'auront pas redonné à tous les hommes l'envie de regarder en face ce qui les sépare d'eux-mêmes.243

The implication is that automatic writing can access something that has been buried under adulthood. The citation suggests that over years of use and familiarity, language is no longer questioned, challenged or observed as an entity in itself. A further constraint on language is the 'humour lugubre' that is not present in the child, perhaps because she has not yet lived sadness, mourning, or those everyday preoccupations that weigh heavily on daily routines. Perhaps we can infer that Éluard's 'parler pour parler' aspires to 'dissociate' from such an everyday, 'negate', even 'abolish' it; his poetics is one of 'revolt' against the mainstream, a search for a prior innocence, a lost self.

In Roubaud's work, it can be said that there is, once again, both a response and a resistance to Éluard's poetic practice. Roubaud's 'poetics' – spoken through the words of his fellow poet, Zukofsky – suggests a distance, if not a full 'dissociation' from language as 'speech', or 'parole'. Perhaps this separation from the 'lower limit speech' may be compared, on some level, to Éluard's desire for a language that breaks free of its referent. Yet Roubaud's self-confessed tendency towards 'upper limit music' must be contrasted with Éluard's 'parler pour parler'. Roubaud's self-alignment with poet Zukofsky in his identification as 'a writer of music' foregrounds the two poets' shared interest in mathematics. Their 'poetics' is at once defined in the form of an integral and presented by Roubaud in an article whose title places mathematics at the very heart of poetry: 'Le silence de la mathématique jusqu'au fond de la langue, poésie'. What is the role of mathematics in setting Roubaud's poetry apart from Éluard's conception of 'parler pour parler'? What does Roubaud mean when he

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243 Éluard, 'Premières vues anciennes', p. 55.
writes of 'le nombre et le rythme' as poetry's 'manière d'être'? To shape the answers to these questions, I will first look at the role of mathematics more generally in Roubaud's approach to poetry composition, going back to the decision he made to leave behind free verse forms of poetry at the height of the Surrealist movement in his youth, before moving on to the particular presence of mathematics in the construction of Trente et un au cube.

2.13 A Project of Maths and Poetry

It is impossible to know something of Roubaud and his work and not be aware of the prevalence of mathematics in his writing and life. He frequently goes by the self-introduction of: 'Jacques Roubaud, compositeur de mathématique et de poésie'. The introduction makes reference to Roubaud's professional career as a university professor of mathematics and his life as a poet, which existed alongside his job. The signature somehow merges the disciplines of maths and poetry; Roubaud speaks of composing mathematics like one might do a poem, alluding to the overlap of the two fields in his work. Indeed, a young Roubaud took up a profession in mathematics with the aim of serving his wish to be a poet. The first of a list of deductions and arguments in his decision to make a 'rupture' with his youthful approach to poetry is based on mathematics: 'Je vais me servir de la mathématique, disons comme garantie technique et mentor moral'.

Roubaud describes initially embarking on a university career in literature, pinpointing the moment he decided to change paths during a short period in the 'hypokhâgne', the preparatory class for literary studies at the École normale supérieure. He compares the exercise in textual analysis, or 'explication de texte', to the dissection of a frog, in which the object of study (a Nerval sonnet in this particular case) was 'torturé' and 'aiguillonné' by the teacher. Roubaud describes feeling that such treatment of poetry would be harmful to his own appreciation of poetry and his composition process. He wanted to be a poet and the only way to do that was to pursue a completely

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244 See, for one of many examples, Poésie, etcetera, p. 33, in which Roubaud attaches the signature to a speech he delivered at Osnabrück in 1993.
245 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 104. Emphasis in the original.
246 For Roubaud's account of his early change in career path, see Poésie., pp. 298–303.
247 Roubaud, Poésie., p. 302.
different field for his livelihood. The comparison of the dissected poem to a frog being maimed and prodded points to the importance of keeping a poem 'whole' and intact, so to speak. As I have shown, for Roubaud, for a poem to be appreciated, it needs to be read and heard in its own original form. For Roubaud, literary analysis as it was taught at university in his youth took away from the openness to poetry, cutting poems up into sections, smaller parts of themselves. The place of maths in defending the autonomy of poetry was thus in part in creating an alternative professional pathway for Roubaud, an escape from teaching, and 'dissecting' poetry.

It is specifically Roubaud's discovery of the Bourbaki approach to set theory that marks a decisive change in his approach to writing poetry. Nicolas Bourbaki – 'ce "mathématicien collectif"' – was the pseudonym for a group of young mathematicians in France in the early 1930s. Roubaud describes the group as the inventors of 'une entreprise générale assez exaltante': that of reconstructing the edifice of mathematics drawing entirely on the axioms of set theory. While this study cannot (and need not) enter into the particulars of the implications of such a project, certain aspects of Roubaud's engagement with their work are relevant for a consideration of his approach to poetry composition. Indeed, Bourbaki seems to serve more generally as the 'mentor moral' Roubaud was seeking in his poetic process.

In his prose volume *Mathématique*, Roubaud extensively describes his experience of getting to grips with the vast and dense *Traité* composed by the Bourbakists. It is his disciplined approach to understanding this mathematical text that he hopes to apply to his poetry composition: 'une chose m'a été certaine dès le début: que le mode de compréhension et de raisonnement dont je m'étais pénétré en des années de bourbakisme, la discipline sévère que je m'étais imposée pour parvenir à le maîtriser, allaient me servir aussi en poésie'. In his reflection on this rigorous approach to studying Bourbakism, Roubaud uses lexis not often associated with poetry. He writes of *penetrating* the topic and its mode

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250 Roubaud states that the 'provocation' of the title *Mathématique*: cannot be justified by the book that follows. His writing in *Mathématique*: is not a monument to the discipline, but continues the series of his prose volumes dedicated to providing an account of the failure of his project of maths and poetry. See *Mathématique*, pp. 17–20.
of reasoning, his harsh discipline in the pursuit of mastering Bourbaki writing. The enterprise itself (both that of the collective pseudonym, Bourbaki, and that of the young Roubaud, undergoing a conversion to their approach to mathematics) is described retrospectively by the poet as making mathematics (la mathématique) 'neuve, porteuse d'une vision et d'une mission'\(^{252}\). This understanding of mathematics as a mission to be taken on and completed, a vision to work towards mastering, was, for Roubaud, the perfect way to combat what he called the 'molle' and 'floue' poetry of free verse.\(^{253}\) The poet was seeking something that would insulate his mind from what he was experiencing as a sense of vagueness in literature.\(^{254}\)

At the time, Roubaud had a very clear idea of what he thought mathematics was, based on the presentation in school education of mathematics as a static, rather than evolving, discipline:

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\begin{split}
\text{il y avait } & \text{ cela, (telle construction, tel objet, tel calcul) qui se faisait } \text{ comme cela, qui s'était toujours fait comme cela } \ldots \text{ Résoudre un problème mathématique, c'était aller d'un point, l'énoncé, à un autre, la conclusion, préalablement donnés tous les deux, et toujours dans le même sens: il n'y avait à découvrir (et à découvrir vite) que le chemin pour y parvenir.}\^{255}
\end{split}
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There was in Roubaud's early conception of mathematics a sense of comfort in its fixity and order. Mathematical questions tackled at school presented a problem that could usually be approached in a limited number of ways. In contrast to the lack of structure Roubaud felt keenly in the forms of Surrealist poetry, maths was about finding a route to a predetermined solution, questions always already answered. Perhaps Roubaud found in Bourbakism a comforting familiarity with this conception of mathematics, for he describes the components of their \textit{Traité} in similar terms. He writes of:

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\begin{quote}
\text{les déductions léchées du Traité, avec la minutie de leur présentation, l'effort constant d'un découpage des chaînes déductives en pas à peu près triviaux } \ldots \text{, la précision pédante et suraffichée des définitions, propositions, lemmes, théorèmes et corollaires, les renvois incessants, chiffrés, typographiquement marqués, aux résultats et notions}
\end{quote}
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\(^{252}\) Roubaud, \textit{Mathématique.}, p. 68.
\(^{253}\) Roubaud, \textit{Poésie.}, p. 104.
\(^{254}\) Roubaud, \textit{Mathématique.}, 56.
This passage from Roubaud's description of Bourbaki's *Traité* is quoted extensively to display the detail involved in its composition. It is an already long extract from an even longer single sentence, which has the effect of a building accumulation of mathematical terms, increasing in detail and precision. Almost every noun and adjective is at least doubled or twice qualified in the piece: the 'renvois' are both 'chiffrés' and 'typographiquement marqués', the Bourbakists' 'précision' is both 'pédante' and 'suraffichée', all with the aim of reaching the peaks of 'netteté', 'clarté' and 'conviction pédagogiques'. Roubaud's constantly clarified and corrected sentence reflects the thorough nature of the Bourbakist project, the wish to leave no ground uncovered, no aspect of their study uncertain. His cumulative syntax emulates the Bourbakist project of breaking down the deductive chains he speaks of into increasingly smaller chunks, until even the tiniest element of unpredictability is removed so that the steps to follow in a deductive operation become 'triviaux'. The building sentence without the reprieve of a full-stop to break up the pace of the syntax also emulates the rising to a peak discussed in the semantic content of the sentence: the great heights of the Bourbaki aim were unrivalled clarity and conviction. However, what is also encapsulated in Roubaud's sprawling sentence is the impossible level of complication and, eventually, obscurity in the mathematic approach. The Bourbaki quest for 'rigueur' and 'perfection' could not be sustained and was doomed to end in failure.  

Years later in his account of his mathematic adventure, Roubaud notes 'la distance' separating the reality – 'le "réel"' – of mathematics and the Bourbaki approach: 'la présentation idéale d'une axiomatisation, même solidement bâtie comme la leur.' He nonetheless basked in the illusion of their intricate formal constructions for a while, enjoying the appeal of this 'espèce nouvelle et

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irrésistiblement séduisante de calcul.\textsuperscript{259} The architecture of the Bourbaki method provided certainty and process. Poetry, on the other hand was about composition and invention – 'composer, inventer' –, which had nothing to do with the way in which Roubaud conceived of mathematics at the time.\textsuperscript{260} As both the narrative and his studies progress, however, the definitions separating mathematics and poetry become less rigid. Roubaud describes maths as a writing process:

La mathématique n'était pas une concaténation de paroles, n'était pas un univers d'idées. La mathématique s'écrivait, s'inscrivait dans le monde en s'écrivant et s'inscrivant sur le papier, s'y enfonçant, de mine de crayon puis d'encre, en l'assombrissant peu à peu, séquentiellement, dans son ordre, sans ambiguïtés, sans hésitations. Elle se construisait suivant des règles, en échafaudages, en assemblages de signes.\textsuperscript{261}

The description of maths as a progression, constructed with scaffoldings, order and assemblages might be compared to metrically composed verse. In this meditation on the written process of mathematics, Roubaud could be describing the inverse of a Surrealist conception of poetry; or poetry written under constraint, in the manner of Trente et un au cube. The numerical pattern of constraint in Trente et un au cube is a vertical as well as horizontal feature of the poem; it can be counted in syllables across the page as it is followed by the reader's eye, and it visually shapes the number of lines and their organisation down the length of the page. The poetic construction thus resembles the scaffoldings and assemblages that Roubaud describes as being a foundational element of mathematics.

The poet's description of the two fields of maths and poetry, the resort to mathematics as a way of coming to terms with the lack of rigour that characterised Roubaud's early writings and the literature of the same time, resonate with the construction of Trente et un au cube. In this volume, which closely follows Roubaud's decision to pursue a certain rigour in his poetry, the cubic premise of the book appears to be an attempt to create an ordered, structured space in poetry. The structure of the book resembles Roubaud's early conception of mathematics as a progression to a predetermined solution, rather

\textsuperscript{259} Roubaud, Mathématique\textemdash, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{260} Roubaud, Mathématique\textemdash, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{261} Roubaud, Mathématique\textemdash, p. 77.
than 'concatenations of words': patterns of multiplication and syllabic counting define the book's completion from the outset. Bourbakian mathematics appears thus as both 'mentor moral' and 'garantie technique' in the volume, offering Roubaud structure, process and discipline to counter the intuitive practices associated with Surrealism and automatic writing.

Mathematics, as Roubaud conceives of it in his autobiographical prose, has a clear presence in Trente et un au cube: geometrical shape, counting and multiplication feature as themes and structuring devices within the form of the volume. Number is at the heart of the architecture that shapes the book, running through every layer of the text. Yet the lines between mathematics and poetry are increasingly blurred in the descriptions of his early experience of the two disciplines. In Roubaud's accounts of poetic language and its interactions with memory, 'nombre' is tied in with 'rythme'; the scale of Zukofsky's 'poetics' adopted by Roubaud, which has 'music' as its upper limit, is expressed in mathematical terms. Rhythm in his poetry is created in the intricate formation of syntactical and syllabic patterns, shaped by the carefully counted silences that determine each poem – indeed the book as a whole – through constitution of its stanzas, lines and fragments. The mathematics of the volume's structure is implemented through the patterns that create the constituent parts of the book, from the divisions distinguishing between the thirty-one poems, through to the count of thirty-one syllables that composes each individual line.

Roubaud embraces recognisable poetic structures, such as the tanka and the sonnet, bestowing upon them a certain complexity derived from their translation into the contemporary. In Trente et un au cube, the syllabic count of the Japanese tanka constantly comes up against the French syntax of the poem. Semantic and rhythmic units frequently clash, creating an overall sense of tension in the piece's sonority. At times, the syllabic units, composed of either five or seven counts, come together to evoke the French alexandrine: twelve counts. This can only occur as an echo of the line's classic form, since the shift of the hemistich from the sixth count to either the fifth or seventh means it is always an alexandrine at one remove from what the reader might be accustomed to. The result is a rhythm derived, in Roubaud's own words, from 'les retours du
mème et du différent'. The metrical patterns of Trente et un au cube both flirt with and resist a sense of familiarity in memory, thus luring the listener into an engagement with the text, and stimulating a sense of curiosity.

The rhythms created in the formal qualities of the poem are at the heart of the distinction between Roubaud's concept of 'poetic language' and Éluard's aspirations for a sense of 'parler pour parler' in poetry. For the poet who desired a renewal of language through the notion of speaking for speaking's sake, the unexpected images and connections that would arise from unfamiliar juxtapositions in syntax were a signal of the workings of the unconscious and its presence in conscious creativity. If the origins of 'parler pour parler' are inextricably linked to the principle of the talking cure, privileging content in speech over form, its ambitions are necessarily tied in with the possibilities of (self-)discovery that exist in the poet's unconscious memory. To recall Éluard's muse as she is read through Roubaud's selections for his anthologie de poésie contemporaine in 'L'Amoureuse' and 'L'Égalité des sexes', the female beloved as aligned with automatic writing processes in poetry appears as a reflection of the poet. Defined as what he is not, the feminine represents that point through which attempts to explore the unknown within himself.

In Roubaud's conception of poetic language, the poem is created as an offering of music to his beloved–reader. Carefully constructed and constantly refined rhythms entice and draw in the reader; phonic patterns wind their way into memory, triggering recollections of metres heard and recited before. The visual layout of the poem provides another dimension of its 'music': blank spaces frame the text and its components – verses, lines, fragments. The white spaces around the lettering of the text shape it on the page and make it more susceptible to absorption in memory. The reader is offered the position of the beloved in the text – 'toi' – and her position is vital for the activation of the poem's multiple dimensions on reading. Yet there are moments in which the poet appears to constrain the beloved in the words of the text, moments evocative of the scene of imprisonment staged in Éluard's 'L'Égalité des sexes'. What does this mean for the role of the muse and her relation with the poet?

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262 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 41.
What does it mean for the poet's female love to be both the formal substance of the poem and its addressee?

2.14 Conclusion

In *Trente et un au cube*, Roubaud goes back to his poetic origins to explore a conception of poetry as constructed object: the text is the poet's expression of love for his female addressee, closely moulded around the qualities of the beloved. She is in the physical body of the text, its words heavy with the *pretz* attributed to her by her troubadour poet. She also adds to the multi-dimensionality of the poems as addressee, activating its rhythms, associations and meanings through a reading of the text – with her *œil–oreille* – and its insinuation into the singularity of her memory. This is a reaction against what Roubaud felt to be the 'debilitating' influence that Surrealism had exerted on his poetic creativity during his youth, as he makes a decision to move away from the automatic writing processes and free verse forms associated with the movement.

In *Trente et un au cube*, the poet privileges constructed form and metric definition over a freer *vers libre*; the work of love is a gesture, crafted with his hands.

Through his exploration of form, from the notion of 'aller à la ligne' embodied by a Surrealist conception of the *vers libre*, to the intricate crafting of multi-dimensional structures, Roubaud is also considering his own relationship with poetry. His words spoken against Surrealism and his insistence upon a 'rupture' with their practices highlight a concern with his abilities to compose innovatively within free verse. Roubaud chooses Éluard in particular as representative of the oppressive influence of Surrealist poetry on his own composition processes, while incorporating the earlier poet's equation of love and poetry, *lamourlapoésie*, into his own conception of poetic practice. For Roubaud, as for Éluard, the place of the female love in poetry is one that activates a multiplicity of associations, transforming the language on the page. Éluard's use of image challenges the reader's expectations: the juxtapositions created within the syntax of his poems give way to further images, deepening the layers of meaning within the text. However, Roubaud translates this sense of multiplicity through image into a concern with form.
Roubaud speaks of moving on from 'le problème du vers' – notably the sense of the momentary he felt had come to characterise contemporary French poetry – to the sonnet as a stage in his poetic growth: ‘j’ai combattu mon insatisfaction poétique, mon incapacité à la poésie. [...] Je me suis tourné vers une forme fixe, une "grande forme"’. Closely linked to the sonnet, the canso and tanka forms represent both 'process' and 'duration' in a number of ways in Trente et un au cube: the constant honing of the form through intertextual comparison; the anthologising of the poems that makes them part of a sequence, broadening their relevance for the poetic memory of the reader; the careful, thoughtful construction of the text itself. In Trente et un au cube, Roubaud reacts not only against a certain poetic form, but the implication it has for the place of memory in poetry. For Roubaud, poetry necessarily engages the conscious memory of the reader and poet, and invokes the traces of poems that have existed before the moment of reading. Moreover, poetry's relation to memory occurs primarily through its form: its visual and aural dimensions, its spatial and rhythmic arrangement, for which the vagueness of 'aller à la ligne' proves insufficient for Roubaud. The female addressee is present in all of these elements: she is the poem's first reader, allowing its words to stir and interact with her memory; she is the intricate composition of rhythms, since they sing both of and for her.

Both poets seem to explore the limits of the specularity that has often formed the basis of psychoanalytic interpretations of the place of the female muse to the male poet: Éluard's narrator articulates the failure of the female to provide him with specular support in 'L'Égalité des sexes'. In 'L'Amoureuse', the multiple images and layers of interpretation challenge the binary forms that structure the poem, breaking the mirror reflecting the image of the male poet in the face and body of the female lover. Roubaud distances his poetry from such binary formal models altogether: his poem is a multi-dimensional construction that weaves the presence of the female into its framework and simultaneously addresses her. At the heart of Éluard's poems and forms foregrounding the female beloved is a reflection on the notion of inspiration that triggers automatic writing processes. It is this notion of poetic inspiration that Roubaud rejects,

stating 'je n'ai pas besoin d'inspiration en poésie', even blaming it for his own writer's block: 'la doctrine de la fureur inspirée, dans sa variante moderne (le surréalisme), fait des ravages, et m'a conduit à l'impasse dont je cherche à me dégager'. Instead, Roubaud's approach to composition manages both the impulses and effects in the creation of poetry: 'la poésie est conçue comme un métier et le poète comme un praticien disposant d'un assortiment de techniques, dont il maîtrise aussi bien les ressorts que les effets'. Roubaud's definition of his own poetry as approaching 'upper limit music' encompasses these principles: mathematics acts as a guarantee against the 'molle' and 'floue' of free verse forms, forming rhythms and metres that prioritise the poem's reception.

How far is it possible to truly master the impulses and effects of a poetic text? Is there a paradox in Roubaud's rejection of free verse forms in favour of a stronger sense of framework, structure and even constraint alluded to in the 'rigueur' he seeks out in poetry? Roubaud continues to associate his lover with poetry and the act of composition, but what is her position in relation to these notions of constraint in its language? If she is woven into the material of the poetry itself, and is also its addressee, what are the implications for her presence on the page and in the sound of the poem?

3. Chapter Two  
Constraint, Potential and the Reader: Roubaud's Love Poem

3.1 Introduction

Roubaud's insistence that he rejects the enslavement of free verse, instead finding freedom in formal 'constraint' might seem paradoxical, but it is nonetheless a founding principle of much of his writing. The aim of the Oulipo group, of which Roubaud is now one of the longest-standing members, is innovation in the field of literature by means of constraint. Some constraints applied to the writing process are not necessarily deducible from the texts they produce, such as Jacques Jouet's Poèmes de métro (2000), whose texts are composed in his mind while the métro train runs between stations, and jotted down in a notebook at each stop. Other constraints may be either visible or hidden in the body of a published text. For instance, Perec's celebrated novel, La Disparition (1969), is a lipogrammatic work written without the letter 'e'. In addition to such constraints in language, there are instances of mathematical or numerical constraints, such as the tanka patterns operating within Trente et un au cube.

The aims of constraints in literature are innovation and discovery: applying constraint to the production of a text alters the creative process and sometimes produces unexpected results. However, in doing so, the Oulipians do not make the break with tradition associated with the tabula rasa approach of avant-garde groups, such as the Surrealists. Indeed, for those literary constraints invented before the establishment of the Oulipo, the group has coined the title of 'Plagiat par anticipation'. It is a matter of viewing past literature in a new light and discovering texts written in the vein of those under Oulipian inspired constraint. Peter Consenstein highlights that this notion of 'anticipated plagiarism' makes of literature a "space–time" continuum: the Oulipo 'rewires' literature, 'referring back to [its] underlying processes of writing'. It is therefore not a case of eschewing tradition in the name of revolutionising

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266 See Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, pp. 205–06.
267 Peter Consenstein, Literary Memory, Consciousness and the Group Oulipo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 197.
literature, but rather capitalising on those forms that have already been
produced.

A further implication, and one which is central to this project, is that the
application of constraint to composition establishes intention at the heart of the
writing process. While the invention or discovery of a constraint might not
always succeed in producing a literary text, when it does, it forms the basis of its
creation. Thus, rather than acting as a text's limit or boundaries, constraint is the
trigger for creativity. In Roubaud's poetry, the 'freedom' of constraint makes of
writing a carefully planned craft, eliminating intangible notions of divine
inspiration historically associated with poetry. For Roubaud in particular,
there is freedom in his eschewing of the freer verse writing associated with the
Surrealists. Finding in his own attempts at Surrealist forms of writing a
resurgence of the rhythms and patterns memorised in his youth, constraint is a
form of release that allows for renewal and innovation.

In this approach to the poetic process, the presence of the female beloved
is no longer the illuminating glow of inspiration, the light of love and hope that,
often inexplicably, stimulates a creative impulse in the poet. While the Surrealist
muse is often the trigger of spontaneous creativity, Roubaud associates his lover
with the reading process: he aligns her with the form of the poem and its
interaction with memory in the reading process. In the previous chapter, I began
to explore the interaction between female beloved, form and memory in the
composition and reading of Roubaud's poetry. In the current chapter, I will
further investigate the place of constraint in this network of elements to
formulate what might be referred to as a Roubaldian conception of the poetic
muse.

To open this chapter, I will begin with an extended discussion on the
notions of literary constraint and potential in Roubaud's poetry, focusing on
_Trente et un au cube_ and a single poem written especially to introduce a reading
of the book at a Paris bookshop in the year it was published. I will question the
nature of potential in literature written under constraint and explore what it
means in particular for a reader of Roubaud's poetry, building on the link

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268 For a consideration of the opposing notions of the poet as prophet and the poet as craftsman,
relating to the work of Roubaud and the Surrealists, see Scepi, 'Éloge de la contrainte', pp. 31–
43.
between poetry and memory established in Chapter One. In which ways does the potential unlocked in a reading of constraint-based poetry differ from that which might exist in freer forms of verse, for example? What are the ambitions and effects of mathematical constraint in Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube*?

I will then consider the role of constraint in the relation between the poet and his beloved. At moments in *Trente et un au cube*, the beloved addressee appears to be imprisoned within the poetic structures erected by the poet–narrator: the cube of the volume's title comes to stand as a metaphor not only for the lovers' bedroom, but also for a cubic space in which the poet attempts to detain his love object. I will look at this particular aspect of their relation in the book's central poem, where the struggle between poet and beloved comes to a climax. Alongside close readings of this central poem, I will continue to explore Lacan's ideas on the impossible sexual relation, which I touched on in Chapter One. Lacan attempts a formalisation of Freud's ideas on sexual difference through the concepts of set theory, which I will compare with attempts to provide an account of the poet–beloved relation through notions of form and structure in *Trente et un au cube*.

In Irigaray's reading of Lacanian theory, she draws out its biological roots in Freud's original text, 'Femininity', to demonstrate the lack of objectivity in Lacan's attempts at formalisation. I will show, nonetheless, the pockets of resistance in her reading of Lacan: the spaces of possibility that persist for the position of the feminine in the theory. This exploration of Lacanian set theory and Irigaray's pitting of the theory against its Freudian origins will lead to a deeper insight into the relation between poet and muse and, in turn, poet and reader in *Trente et un au cube*. Can the points of resistance in Irigaray's reading be compared with the notion of potential explored in relation to Roubaud's poetry?

In the final part of this chapter, I will build on my enquiry so far into the sexual disjunction. I find in Irigaray's *J'aime à toi* (1992) and *Être deux* (1997) an alternative understanding of the disjunction as a space in which the subjectivity of each term in the couple may flourish. When aligned with certain moments in *Trente et un au cube* which feature the beloved who sleeps, Irigaray's positive understanding of the disjunction may be used to illuminate the
ways in which the dividing space between poet and lover, or poet and reader is also a source of meaning and creativity in poetry.

### 3.2 Constraint: Drawing in the Reader

Contrary to what might be expected of the notion of constraint, Oulipian discussions frequently refer its generative quality: its potential. Indeed, the group's title, *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, points out that to open out the potential of literature is the purpose of its craft. Readers embarking on Oulipian literature for the first time might ask themselves, as does Jacques Bens in his essay 'Queneau Oulipien': 'Comment peut-on concilier une telle rigueur avec le vague, l'incertain, l'approximatif qui accompagnent nécessairement la potentialité?'. Bens plays devil's advocate here, questioning the compatibility of the 'rigueur laborieuse et obstinée' with which Queneau constructs his novels and the sense of uncertainty that might usually be associated with the idea of potential. Bens goes some way towards providing an answer through his exploration of what is meant by 'potential' in this case. He explores the meaning of the 'Po' in 'Oulipo', outlining two elements that broadly constitute the term. He writes on the one hand of 'une œuvre qui ne se limite pas à ses apparennces, qui contient des richesses secrètes, qui se prête volontiers à l'exploration'. These hidden layers in the work constitute a treasure hunt of secrets to be discovered by the reader, since 'la littérature potentielle serait [...] celle qui attend un lecteur, qui l'espère, qui a besoin de lui pour se réaliser pleinement'.

Thus, an Oulipian conception of literature's potential seems to be centred on a sense of interactivity between the work and the reader, a delving into the features of the text that cannot be immediately obvious to a reader. As Bens confirms, while fleeing the sense of 'hasard' which characterised notions of automatic writing and free verse forms popular with the Surrealist movement dominating the French literary scene in the period leading up to the founding of

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271 Bens, 'Queneau Oulipien', p. 29.
272 Bens, 'Queneau Oulipien', p. 23.
the Oulipo group in 1960, the Oulipian project is not averse to the uncertainty which often partners the concept of potentiality. Rather in consciously constructing intricate networks of pathways for their reader to follow, crossroads at which they expect readers to pause and consider the appeal of different possibilities, the Oulipian writer incorporates potentiality in the body of their work, to be fulfilled by the curious reader making his or her way through it.

Bens writes largely of Queneau's novels and their hidden plots, but Roubaud's poetry may also be read through the lens of his essay. The opening of *Trente et un au cube* draws in the reader with the words: 'JE DÉTIENS MILLION de | syllabes comptées pour toi'. This beginning serves as an invitation to the reader: we are invited to read the words that have been arranged, for each reader individually, in rhythms counted in syllables. The chiasmic positioning of pronouns 'je' and 'tu' respectively at the start of the opening fragment and the close of the fragment that follows seems also to suggest that the reader is invited into a relation with the poet: the counted syllables that make up this book are what bring *you* and *I* together.

In his 'Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de *Trente et un au cube* à Shakespeare et C°', Roubaud plays on the use of the second person pronoun 'toi' as his addressee: 'Cela signifiait | ce que chacun voulait vous | l'entendre et moi | l'entendre aussi mais parmi | vous c'est cela voyez vous || cela et pour vous | entendre était cela que je | disais d'elle de | toi mais pour vous elle elle | toi mais qui est ce? c'est toi'. As the sequences of words in the poem progress, Roubaud appears to demonstrate the meaning of his simple opening: 'Cela signifiait | ce que chacun voulait'. The poem 'means', or performs meaning for its addressee. Personal pronouns 'vous', 'toi' and 'elle' rush around one another in the poem's syntax, colliding and overlapping. The poet appears to attempt to clarify the difference between these pronouns and their role in his poem: 'entendre était cela que je | disais d'elle de | toi mais pour vous'. He suggests that the person he addresses as 'toi' is in fact 'elle', the love that is the impetus for the poetry. Perhaps then 'vous' is a polite reference to his reader, who has been accorded the privilege of insight into this expression of passion.

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275 Jacques Roubaud, 'Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de *Trente et un au cube* à Shakespeare et C°', in *Almanach de Shakespeare and Company*, 1 (1974), 167–71 (pp. 168–69). All references to the poem are from these two pages, until stated otherwise.
No sooner does the poet separate the roles, than he draws them all back together again, as he continues: 'pour vous elle elle | toi mais qui est ce? c'est toi'. She is at the centre of the address, appearing to mediate between a chiasmic 'vous' and 'toi', the reader and the personal address made by the poet. In the end, all of these ideas are contained within 'toi' – 'c'est toi': this serves at once as the most personal of addresses, and as the space which each reader occupies in reading *Trente et un au cube*.

The verb 'entendre' recurs throughout the piece and its doubling in the first line of the poem immediately draws out its ambiguity: the poet plays with the difference between his *meaning*, that is his agency as poet, and what his reader *hears* in the lines that are composed by the poet. Roubaud keeps the verb in the infinitive, 'vous | l'entendre et moi | l'entendre aussi', which has the effect of distancing the verb from any subject. It is as though meaning cannot be shackled exclusively to either poet or reader, denied the commitment of conjugation in line with either pronoun. The poet further probes the ambiguity of the verb 'entendre': 'devais je entendre ce | que j'entendais de toi contre ce | que vous entendiez de toi [...]?'. Must the meaning of 'toi' be the same for both poet and reader? Perhaps some aspect of the work's 'potential' lies in its possibility to expand differently for each reader, precisely in not being restricted to a particular pathway of understanding constructed by the poet.

In this sense, 'potential' is not a literary concept limited to the interpretation of Oulipian, or constraint-based writing alone. The term could in fact be used to describe the work of a number of Surrealist poets, in particular that of Éluard. His poems unfold in a multitude of directions, incorporating layers of meaning that become accessible through a plethora of associations. An illustrative example is Éluard's opening to *Poésie ininterrompue*, which foregrounds the place of the female love in the act of poetic composition. In Chapter One, I considered the significance of the poem's opening lines, composed entirely of adjectives in the feminine, with the position of the beloved muse in mind. The first section of the long poem is also important for a consideration of the notion of potential at work in relation to the role of the reader. Just as the poet begins writing on the blank page, so too the reader begins with a blank canvas on which to formulate his or her vision of the woman: 'Nue
Amongst the apparently arbitrary sets of words that follow, readers are left to create their own image of the woman through patterns of meaning that emerge:

Coquette vive passionnée  
Orangée rose bleuissante  
Jolie mignonne délurée  
Naturelle couchée debout  
Étreinte ouverte rassemblée  
Rayonnante désaccordée  
Gueuse rieuse ensorceleuse  
Étincelante ressemblante.

In this extract, threads of adjectives come together to emphasise a number of features that characterise the narrator's love. She is youthful: 'vive', 'passionnée' 'Rayonnante', and she is innocent: 'mignonne', 'délurée', 'Naturelle'. Yet the poet's attraction to her is a bewitchment, and hints at pain: 'Gueuse rieuse ensorceleuse'. She is both familiar, 'ressemblante', and impossible to pin down – 'couchée debout', 'désaccordée' – in an overabundance of patterns and contradictions that refuse to provide the reader with any guided interpretation. The line composed of colours evokes summer hues, and vitality, though a second look at 'bleuissante' introduces tinges of death in its description of a person. The combination of 'Orangée' and 'bleuissante' might, for some readers, be enough to evoke Éluard's earlier line in *L'Amour la poésie*: 'La terre est bleue comme une orange'. In the drawing together of the female love and the boundless sensuality of the world of poetry, Éluard here suggests that the possibilities of a poem's meaning are open.

Jacques Bens's definition of potential as an invitation to the reader to delve into the text could be applied to any reading of poetry that invites an addressee: *tu*, or *vous*. In his defence of poetry, Ben Lerner opens up the possibilities of poetry when he writes that 'to be hailed as a "you" [...] is to be endowed with poetic capacity', since it is also 'to be part of a linguistic community'. It is not uncommon to find in Éluard's poetry the same readerly address, 'tu', serving simultaneously as an appeal to the lover; the same 'tu' that

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is at the heart of Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube*. For example, Éluard's repetition of the call: 'Sommes-nous deux ou suis-je solitaire' through the early pages of *Poésie ininterrompue* is as much an invocation to the reader to continue to engage with the words of his poem as it is a questioning of his lover's commitment. Like Roubaud in the 'Poème de présentation', Éluard appears to place the alignment of lover and reader at the centre of the poem's meaning and functioning when he writes: 'C'est par toi que je parle et tu restes au centre | De tout comme un soleil consentant au bonheur'. If the poem is inspired by the poet's beloved, meaning is thereafter accorded by the reader who revisits it. Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation' thus points towards aspects of reading relevant to many poems, including those from which he apparently distances his own practice.

How does Roubaud's presentational poem more specifically introduce a reading of *Trente et un au cube*? Further, what is the nature of the 'potential' in poetry written under constraint? How does this 'potential' differ from that which appears to exist in Surrealist poems declared to be free of any form of literary constraint? These questions will be explored through continued close readings of Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation', which I treat as a user's guide of sorts to reading *Trente et un au cube*.

### 3.3  *Trente et un au cube*: A User's Guide

The full title of Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation' alerts us that it was written to present a reading of *Trente et un au cube* at the *Shakespeare and Co.* bookshop in Paris. Reading the published poem decades later, we can only imagine the poet addressing his audience, the singular identities attributed to the pronouns 'je', 'tu' and 'vous'. The poetry reading event at the bookshop may be considered in the light of Benveniste's 'instances de discours'. He explains: 'les indicateurs *je* et *tu* ne peuvent exister comme signes virtuels, ils n'existent qu'en tant qu'ils sont actualisés dans l'instance de discours, où ils marquent par chacune de leurs propres instances le procès d'appropriation par le locuteur'. The play on the ambiguous relationship between 'tu' and 'vous' remains, but in

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279 See, for example, Éluard, *Poésie ininterrompue*, p. 10.
the instance of the poetry reading there is more a sense that each listener is addressed personally by the poet with 'tu', and that 'vous' refers to the collective audience. The use of 'vous' certainly draws attention to what exists beyond the individual reader, bringing together the group of listeners in their shared experience of the poetry. The reading of verb 'entendre' as hearing in the poem also gains weight in the instance of this event celebrating the poetry's aural dimension.

The poem is also a response to a particular review by critic Alain Bosquet, which appeared in Le Monde des livres under the title 'Jacques Roubaud, ou la technique ennemie du poème'. Jean-Jacques Poucel points out that the 'vous' of the supplemental poem is therefore also used to address the critic, Bosquet. The context of the live poetry reading imposed by the poem's title and the dimension of listening to the poem that it involves is particularly relevant here; 'voulait vous | l'entendre' may be heard as an invitation to listen closely to the poem's rhythm – 'voulez-vous l'entendre' – through the assonant sounds of the two verbs. Poucel suggests this may be a response to Bosquet's claim that the reader of Trente et un au cube should disregard the line breaks in the text, instead approaching the text as a piece of prose. At an analogous level, Roubaud's poetic response establishes a dialogue with Bosquet which has a third and focal element: the reader.

The critic himself appears to take the side of the reader in his piece: 'Le malheur est que, pour le lecteur de bonne volonté moyenne, Jacques Roubaud se barricade dans ses livres et en interdit l'accès'. Bosquet initially suggests two obstacles to meaning, or understanding, with regard to Trente et un au cube:

Le premier obstacle, pour qui veut lire Trente et un au cube est dans l'absence de tout mode d'emploi: le livre–objet ne porte pas de texte au dos, ni sur les revers de la couverture; on cherchera en vain un avant-propos ou une post-face. Le lecteur est obligé de découvrir lui-même son fil d'Ariane. Le deuxième obstacle est physique: chaque texte est imprimé sur une double page repliée sur elle-même; on est donc obligé de la déplier. Pourquoi le format du livre n'est-il pas en largeur pour permettre une lecture normale?

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283 Poucel, Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory, pp. 135–36. For the original review, see Bosquet, 'Jacques Roubaud, ou la technique ennemie du poème', p. 16.
284 Poucel, Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory, p. 136.
286 Bosquet, 'Jacques Roubaud, ou la technique ennemie du poème', p. 16.
Although Bosquet's allusion to the myth of Ariadne suggests that the 'ordinary reader' is likely to be disorientated or even lost when encountering *Trente et un au cube*, in some sense, his critique captures perfectly the element of potential that is brought to the text by the reader, obliged to find his or her own route through the poem, like the mythological Theseus stumbling blindly through the obscure labyrinth. In the same vein, Bosquet's reference to Roubaud barricading himself in his books, though tongue in cheek, implies a comparison between the poet and the fearsome Minotaur hidden within the centre of the maze. Perhaps Roubaud does ask more of his reader than Ben Lerner when he dismisses 'difficulty' as a reason for avoiding poetry: 'Cette poésie est difficile. Et alors? Est-il indispensable de ne se heurter à aucune difficulté? est-il indispensable de ne faire aucun effort de pénétration, de compréhension?' As Lerner suggests, poetry, or 'poetic capacity' is indeed available to any person willing to respond to a poem's appeal: 'you'. Roubaud asks his reader to invest in his poems and engage with the difficulty he or she encounters. If disorientation is part of the reading process, the reader must necessarily grapple with the work and find his or her own path through the text.

In his concern for the reader, Bosquet disagrees. He suggests a need for further clarification – 'un avant-propos ou une post-face' – an explanatory meta-text addressed to the reader, a user's guide to aid understanding of the poem, from beyond the limits of the poem itself. Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation' playfully thwarts this request. The poet's dizzying play on personal pronouns and his ambiguity over the status of meaning and hearing in his repetition of 'entendre' do anything but guide the reader towards a set interpretation of the volume. Instead, the poem emphasises the place of the reader in directing the meaning of the text, if only he or she is willing to engage with the poem and remain open to its possibilities: 'ça signifiait | ce que moi je voulais di | sant cela de toi | que chacun entendait qui | l'entendait s'il voulait s'il || avait les oreilles | ouvertes cela que toi | tu entendais di | rigé vers toi dans le bruit de ces voyelles dislo || quées'. The poet's intentions coincide with the reader's understanding and, indeed, his or her own creation of meaning, as 'ce que moi je voulais' becomes 'cela que toi | tu entendais'.

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The 'Poème de présentation' hints at fulfilling the meta-textual function suggested by its title, referring to the noise of its own dislocated vowels. However, it simultaneously undermines Bosquet's hopes for guidance by constantly echoing in its form the themes of disjointedness referred to in its content. For example, the dislocation of its syllables is manifested in the breaking up of the word 'dislo || quées' itself over the boundaries of a line. The presentational poem stubbornly reiterates the form that Bosquet so firmly critiques. Moreover, the theme of meaning-making seems almost to be tossed around in the poem like a ball, alternately passed between poet, 'tu', 'vous' and 'elle'.

Roubaud certainly disorientates his reader throughout the 'Poème de présentation', but perhaps he also provides some form of 'Mode d'emploi' for an approach to Trente et un au cube along the way. His stirring of confusion through the play on personal pronouns, itself intensified by the unfamiliar metre that forces the pronouns to dance around unexpected breaks in syntax, requires a deeper sense of engagement from the reader: I find myself reading and re-reading the lines of the poem in an attempt to follow the intertwined pathways of the multiple addresses. For Stéphane Baquey, the form of a text only exists when something in it resists a reading, implying a hesitation or slowing down: 'Pour que je perçoive une forme, il faut qu'un aspect d'une œuvre résiste à l'automatisme de ma lecture'.289 Perhaps the poem is a playful attempt on the part of the poet to draw the reader in, to demand the 'effort de pénétration, de compréhension' Roubaud suggests have a place in poetry reading.290

While the pronouns of address constantly slip into one another, what remains is the prominence of 'toi' as the space shared by both lover and reader: 'et c'était tout ce | la que c'était toi partout | ici toi le tout | de toi et c'était cela que cela signifiait'.291 For Puff, the alignment of lover and reader in Trente et un au cube relates to the poem's difficulty. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Puff explains that both the form and meaning of the book are an expression of Roubaud's theory of rhythm: 'Consubstantielle à la forme du poème, cette théorie en soutient aussi le sens. Cela exige une vraie lecture de la théorie et de

290 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 264.
la poésie, un investissement, intense, dans une complexité que le désir seul peut soutenir, le désir ou l'amour de la poésie'. The level of commitment required of a reader of Trente et un au cube means he or she will necessarily be a lover of poetry; the difficulty of the text, Puff implies, is due to its technical make-up and the fact that its expression is composed formally of its theoretical foundation.

Puff’s argument that the theoretical foundation of the poem coincides with its content does not stray far from the Oulipian axiom: 'un texte écrit suivant une contrainte parle de cette contrainte'. Roubaud explains that constraint is not simply a work's starting point, rather it runs through every fibre of the text's being: 'Loin de rester externe au texte, de se situer seulement à son début, à ses fondations, la contrainte [...] telle "l'image dans le tapis" de Henry James, le pénètre entièrement'. The description recalls the structure of Trente et un au cube, which reflects the tanka pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 through each of its layers, from a line's syllable count to the division of the book into thirty-one chapters, or poems. There is also, in Trente et un au cube, the paralleling of the volume's focus, 'le problème du rythme', as Roubaud puts it, 'à la fois formellement et dans ce qui est dit dans le poème'. In his discussion of the characteristics of constraint, Roubaud evokes Henry James's tale, The Figure in the Carpet, for its self-referential narrative structure. The narrator of James's short story is a literary critic on a search to discover the self-declared 'secret' hidden within a novelist's work, but attempts to uncover 'the trick' are continually thwarted. Since the secret is never revealed in the tale, the reader's plight comes to echo that of the frustrated, curious narrator. The story's form mirrors our own experience of reading it: critics have been left puzzled over its interpretation, just as the protagonist–narrator is still left yearning for 'the particular thing' at the tale's end.

The significance of Roubaud's reference to the story extends beyond the example of a literary form which serves as a model of its own reading experience. The piece is renowned for its mystery, questions never answered, sustained in all the oblique looking suggested by its title: the secret is well-

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292 Puff, 'Le déploiement du nouveau chez Roubaud', p.100.
293 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 212.
294 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 212.
295 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 79.
297 James, The Figure in the Carpet, p. 11.
hidden 'like a complex figure in a Persian carpet'. There is a resonance with Bens's definition of a text written under constraint as 'une œuvre qui ne se limite pas à ses apparences, qui contient des richesses secrètes, qui se prête volontiers à l'exploration', which I referred to at the start of this chapter. Both Bens and Roubaud foreground a sense of mystery in literature under constraint: the literary work is a puzzle to be solved by an active reader. As Poucel puts it, there is in constraint-based writing 'the sense of a "question" or of a series of questions to be resolved by the reader': 'Which constraints are present? How have these constraints been used?'.

Is the systematic application of constraint throughout a text simply another layer of complexity added to the intricacies of 'conventional' poetry reading? It has been suggested that the difference between constraint-led writing and the looser forms of Surrealist poetry, and particularly between the writings of Roubaud and Éluard, is the increased sense of difficulty and complexity in the former of each pairing. In Chapter One, formal construction and rhythms created in the numerical arrangement of metrical patterns were at the heart of the 'rupture' distancing Roubaud's poetry from that of Éluard.

Puff highlights the value of difficulty in the formal architecture of Roubaud's poetry, identifying the self-alignment of the poet with the trobar clus practice. The clus style of writing is a branch of the troubadour tradition known for its hermeticism – 'Clus signifie clos, fermé'. The poetic style is recognisable from its intricate intertwining of rhythms and sounds, 'entrebesclar'. This troubadour interlacement is a prominent feature in Trente et un au cube. At the level of the individual poem, entrebesclar appears as the intertwining of different semantic possibilities. For example: 'LA BOUCHE EST DOUBLE et | la langue est double dans la | bouche et dans la double | bouche naît l'unique langue | langue des baisers et du chant. Here instances of repetition create the effect of a chase between 'language' and 'tongues' until the meanings within 'langue' eventually overlap one another as an expression of love through

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298 James, The Figure in the Carpet, p. 22.
299 Bens, 'Queneau Oulipien', p. 23.
301 Puff, Mémoire de la mémoire, p. 189.
302 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 316.
304 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 21.
poetry and a kiss. At the level of the book's form, *entrebescar* manifests itself as a merging of differing literary traditions: the book's French syntax is structured by the numerical constraint based on the formation of the Japanese *tanka*, and throughout the book there is an abundance of intertextual influences and references woven into Roubaud's poetry.\(^{305}\)

However, although these elements reminiscent of the *clus* style of poetry are recognisable in a reading of *Trente et un au cube*, the classification of a poet's style as *clus*, or its opposite *leu* is by no means a simple distinction to make. Roubaud rejects the validity of a 'banale' opposition between difficult and comprehensible poetry, 'entre poésie pour tous et poésie pour quelques-uns'.\(^{306}\) He writes instead of 'une ligne de partage' between the two styles *clus* and *leu*, but rather than clearly dividing the poets, 'elle passe apparemment à l'intérieur de chaque troubadour'.\(^{307}\) He posits the styles of *leu* and *clus* as two poles. Style tending towards the *leu* is described as:

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\text{un mouvement de désignation, de nomination, de multiplication des distinctions claires, péremptoires, tranchées: affirmer. Affirmer dans les termes les plus lumineux, les plus doux, les plus harmonieux possibles, tous les possibles de la théorie de l'amour telle qu'elle se découvre avec ses couples d'antonymes inséparés: joi et dolors, folie et sens...}\(^{308}\)
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A *leu* style of poetry conveys the oppositions of which love is composed, the contradictions that make up its experience. The use of adjectives 'lumineux', 'doux' and 'harmonieux' to describe the terms in which this love is expressed do suggest a certain readability, the clarity with which these binary possibilities of love are presented in troubadour song. The contrary movement towards *clus* writing does not consist in the removal of these distinctions, but rather their co-dependence: 'en même temps tout le joi est douleur, [...] le printemps hiver, le chant des oiseaux silence, [...] les mots les plus hirsutes peuvent donner la douceur au cœur; [...] tout tient ensemble en opposant tout, intérieurement aux vers, aux rimes'.\(^{309}\) At this opposite pole, the intricate intertwining of the terms expressing love introduces a greater density to the poetry; love's possibilities

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\(^{305}\) On the latter point, Roubaud provides a (by no means comprehensive) list of credits 'dans l'ordre de leur première intervention', see *Trente et un au cube*, p. 131.

\(^{306}\) Roubaud, *La Fleur inverse*, p. 316.


acquire an increased sense of nuance, or shading. To put it in binary terms, things are not always black or white, just as in love, that which brings joy is very often also the cause of suffering.

The lines between the *trobar clus* and *leu* are not always clearly drawn. Although it seems that constraint may add a layer of complexity to a literary work, providing further scope for a questioning of the workings of the text, clearly a poem can be both difficult and complex with no constraint present. Moreover, the suggestion that difficulty is solely what encourages a more intense readerly participation implies a somewhat diminished view of the experience of 'ordinary' poetry reading. There is a sense that there is more to be discovered about the nature of potential as Jacques Bens describes it in relation to constraint-based literature.

Roubaud goes a step further than the issues raised so far, when he declares that all poetry is, in fact, difficult: 'La difficulté principale de la poésie aujourd'hui est qu'elle est poésie'.

For Roubaud, the difficulty lies in the particular relation of meaning to form in poetry:

S'il y a sens, c'est sens formel et effet intérieur de sens. Dans toute forme—poésie du présent, d'un type nouveau, il y a difficulté à saisir ce sens, à l'admettre, à le reconnaître parce qu'on est habitué (scolairement et idéologiquement habitué) à chercher autre chose, une des formes habituelles du sens.

A poem's meaning is inseparable from its form, expressible only in that form; it cannot be paraphrased or explained, made simpler. Roubaud makes frequent mention of habits and familiarity in the passage: 'habitué' appears twice in the short extract to describe what readers are used to, 'habituelles' refers to our usual forms of meaning, or understanding, and 'nouveau' here does not signal innovation and the creativity of invention, but that which is strange, unfamiliar, foreign. Poetry is in many cases a departure from our every day encounters with meaning: it differs from what a conversation might communicate, from what may be read in a newspaper, even from the poetry that readers will have become accustomed to during their schooldays, and therein lies its difficulty.

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310 Roubaud, *Poésie, etcetera*, p. 269
At the heart of this sense of 'difficulté' is Roubaud's theory of poetry as memory:

L'accusation d'incompréhensibilité est associée de manière implicite à l'exigence de compréhension immédiate. Si la poésie est mémoire, agit sur la mémoire, il n'y a aucune raison que sa pénétration (donc sa compréhension) soit immédiate. Bien au contraire.

Dans la mémoire naît une compréhension irréfléchie, non traductible, non transmissible, de la poésie.\(^{312}\)

Poetry is not characterised by the immediate transparency associated with other forms of writing readers engage with regularly. For example, the clear message communicated by journalistic prose, or the suspense-filled syntax of a detective story. Time is the element which differentiates the meaning of poetry from other 'formes habituelles du sens'. Roubaud's reference to our ideological programming relates to our growing dislike of poetry in a world in which immediacy and convenience are increasingly prioritised – 'on est [...] idéologiquement habitué à chercher autre chose'. To appreciate or understand a poem's meaning, we must eschew our often cursory reading habits in favour of a reading which is perhaps slow, repeated, constantly re-thought.

This emphasis on a shift in reading patterns may be at the heart of Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de Trente et un au cube à Shakespeare et Cö'. The presentational poem's grammatical mobility confuses, slows down, even halts its readers, at times forcing them to go back and retrace their steps. The poem is, in a sense, demanding of the reader, requiring the time it takes for the poem, even parts of the poem, to become insinuated in memory. In this sense, there are 'richesses secrètes' to be uncovered and mysteries to be solved. However, the reader is perpetually alone in his or her search, for its outcome is an understanding 'non traductible, non transmissible'. Roubaud's conception of the comprehension of poetry through memory is not an understanding that comes through explanation or simplification. A poem grows for its reader over time through the resonances it creates and acquires; these are not 'secrets' that can be passed on intact.

\(^{312}\) Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, pp. 270–71.
Roubaud uses constraint to *invite* the reader to delve into the text and it is through a commitment of time that a poem's full potential can be activated. If Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation' is in fact read as the 'Mode d'emploi' that Bosquet desires, the reader can certainly glean an approach to a reading of *Trente et un au cube*. The first step is to embrace the position in the text offered to the reader and respond to the 'toi' that recurs in the 'Poème de présentation'. Through his play on pronouns intermingled with the presence of constraint echoed in the form and content of the piece, Roubaud offers the opportunity for closer readings, constructing intricate, intertwining pathways and placing stumbling blocks that slow down the reader and entice his or her concentration. If constraint implies a sense of mystery, 'the sense of a "question"', its role is to lure the reader into the text. Roubaud urges the reader to invest time in poetry, here in the individual text, but more generally in regular poetry reading. A poem's potential is expanded with each reader's absorption of its lines in memory, where it becomes part of a network of rhythms and poetic intertextuality.

3.4 **Constraint: Structuring Reading in Space and Time**

Having explored the ways in which constraint is used to draw in the reader of Roubaud's poetry, I will now focus on the processes of reading that it entails. Continuing to address Bosquet's criticisms directed towards *Trente et un au cube*, which seem somehow to point to the very workings of constraint that he seems to be so critical of, I will show that the reader's experience of *Trente et un au cube* is one which is structured by markings of space and time that shape the text. Then I will discuss the ways in which time and space, listening and reading come together through constraint to facilitate the interaction between the poem and memory.

The emphasis of Roubaud's intentions regarding constraint has seemed thus far to be concerned with time, yet Bosquet presents his critique of Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube* as a difficult space to be navigated by the ill-equipped reader. Bosquet's double criticism of what he sees as 'la technique ennemie du poème' draws attention to the spatial features and object-like nature of *Trente et un au cube*: on the one hand, the missing 'mode d'emploi' from any cover of the volume, and on the other, the pages that unfold into a landscape
format to reveal the extended width of the poems. The pages that fold out to reveal poems hidden within are described quite literally as physical obstacles for the reader: 'Le deuxième obstacle est physique'. It is a complaint that may seem almost comically disproportionate to some: unfolding the pages for a landscape reading of the book's poems is hardly a laborious task and may even be enjoyed by some for its novelty. It can feel a bit like being let in on a secret, opening out the sheet of a page where an angle remaining in the crease of its fold line creates the sense of an enclosure: the cube of the poem that makes a space of itself to draw in the reader.

When Bosquet asks: 'Pourquoi le format du livre n'est-il pas en largeur pour permettre une lecture normale?', an immediate reaction might also be to question what constitutes 'une lecture normale'. The implication is that reading should be physically comfortable, even passive. Instead, an experience of reading Trente et un au cube is characterised by movement: the reader is active and the book itself is interactive. Each poem is more marked in its beginning and ending, as the reader opens out the page to experience it, and closes it away when it is finished. It makes of each poem a space and of reading a gesture; by unfolding the page, the reader enters into that space and in a sense activates the poem.

In his 'Poème de présentation', Roubaud posits the book's physical format as the basis of a dialogue between himself and his reader: 'Ainsi cela ren venait de vous à moi de ces feuilles multiples de leurs rectangles pliés ou de quelques oreilles rétine enfoui cela revenait jusqu'à moi: toi'.

313 Though it is not a matter of a dialogue or conversation in any usual sense of communication, taking place 'en l'absence du machin communicatoire', the poet points out that the 'cela' of the poem that begins 'Cela signifiait' also moves in his direction from the place of the reader. He encourages the reader to be active not only in facing the poem printed on the page, but also in listening to an oral presentation of it: 'vous pouviez ouvrir les oreilles suivre du doigt ce que cela disait de toi l'entendre ou le réfléchir mais toi? et c'était tout ce que c'était toi partout ici toi le tout de toi et c'était cela que cela signifiait'.In Roubaud's 'Poème
de présentation', everything comes down to 'toi': the pronoun of address that is ubiquitous in *Trente et un au cube*, addressing the reader who adds so much to the volume simply by bringing to it his or her singular experience and understanding in memory, that which can be matched by no other reader. The poet's repetitions of 'toi' are compounded by examples of assonance in 'doigt' and 'cela'. His phonic play draws together the reader's concentration – he or she follows the words of the poem closely with his or her finger – and the piece itself – 'cela'. The reference to 'toi' becomes a space, a grammatical offering to the reader: an appeal for him or her to engage with the text. Beyond the notions of focus and concentration, we are reminded of Roubaud's reference to the 'œil–oreille' of poetry and the multiple dimensions of reading: a sense of the text's aural features and rhythm is present in a reading of the writing across the page, just as we might imagine the words and shape of a poem in our mind's eye as it is read aloud, for example, at a poetry performance.316

The description of the reader actively opening his or her ears, or following the words of the text with a finger across the page, a combination of hearing, seeing, reflecting and gesture, resembles the memorable tribute to reading in Michel de Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien: l'activité liseuse présente [...] tous les traits d'une production silencieuse: dérive à travers la page, métamorphose du texte par l'œil voyageur, [...] enjambements d'espaces écrits, danse éphémère*.317 Reading takes on the physicality of a dance, the engagement of the body in leaps across the written page. Of the reader, Certeau writes:

> Il insinue les ruses du plaisir et d'une réappropriation dans le texte de l'autre: il y braconne, il y est transporté, il s'y fait pluriel [...]. Ruse, métaphore, combinatoire, cette production est aussi une 'invention' de mémoire. Elle fait des mots les issues d'histoires muettes. Le lisible se change en mémorable.318

The reader participates in the text by bringing to it his or her own life experiences. Memory creates pockets of recognition and understanding: spaces to be activated by the formation of connections, associations and recollections. In fact, reading is as much an appropriation of space as writing is: 'La mince pellicule de l'écrit devient un remuement de strates, un jeu d'espaces. Un monde

318 Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, p. XLIX.
différent (celui du lecteur) s'introduit dans la place de l'auteur. Certeau draws an analogy between the space of the text and that of an apartment: 'Cette mutation rend le texte habitable à la manière d'un appartement loué. Elle transforme la propriété de l'autre en lieu emprunté, un moment, par un passant. Les locataires opèrent une mutation semblable dans l'appartement qu'ils meublent de leurs gestes et de leurs souvenirs. The act of reading, for Certeau, is peppered with moments that the reader can make his or her own, by bringing to a text their own particular understanding shaped by their experiences of memory. His metaphor of the text as habitable, like a rented apartment, encourages an understanding of writing as a space with flexible borders: a malleable shape that expands to allow the reader's recollections, additions, and elaborations to build on the text. The text before the reader ignites memories, which are used to cultivate a familiarity, or understanding of that text. The act of reading draws out the memories of the reader and the text invites him or her into its space.

The reader of Trente et un au cube is invited into the literal spaces of the text. Roubaud writes, for example: '(car ma dame | est si profondément en- || dormie) j'écris silencieusement sur ma feuille | 21 × 27 | dans la jaune lumière'. The self-reflexive comment brings together the dimensions of the page and the intimacy of the moment in which the poet writes. In the same poem, Roubaud signals his specific place in the composition process: 'le papier [...] se remplit || presque entièrement'. This sense of an approaching end is fulfilled in the final poem, where Roubaud observes (in the same central position on the page in which the earlier reference to the dimensions '21 × 27' appears) the shrinking space of the page before him: 'j'ai vu raccourcir devant moi l'espace de blanc étale entre | le front avancé des lettres || dans la transcription | de ce poème et le butoir de sa dernière | feuille tout s'est recouvert | de la terre de la nuit'. It is not only the page before him that gradually fills with the lettering of the poem, but the allocation of sheets set out for the manuscript of the entire book that comes to its 'butoir'.

319 Certeau, L’Invention du quotidien, p. XLIX.
320 Certeau, L’Invention du quotidien, p. XLIX.
322 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 21.
323 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 129.
The close of the book's final poem announces its own overlapping with the book's start in 'tout s'est recouvert', before leading into two final verses which are largely a repetition of the very first two in the book, starting once again at the beginning with: 'je détiens million | de syllabes comptées pour | toi'.\textsuperscript{324} This circular structure of \textit{Trente et un au cube} thus introduces a sense of \textit{déjà vu} into the text, its close echoing its beginning. It is true, as Thomas and Winspur write, that 'the repetition reinforces the finite nature of the text, as if the book were framed by parentheses'.\textsuperscript{325} There is the sense that the book's structure has been conceived in its entirety before the poet begins to set ink to paper. The writer knows where his writing will end, feels the approaching 'butoir' of its final page, as though it has already been seen.

Each time that the poet signals his place in the construction of the volume, whether he is approaching the end of the page, or the 'butoir' of the whole book, he creates a common space for himself and his reader. The reader's eyes reach the end of a poem's page at the same time as the poet's pen; the reader's fingers feel the sparseness of the pages remaining as they reach the end of the book. It is as though each reading is a reactivation of the memory of composition. Thus, constraint structures the reading process just as it does the writing process, mapping out the reader's route through the volume. The space of the book is underpinned by the compositional features arising from its constraint, which act as milestones that situate the reader. The \textit{tanka} pattern that permeates every layer of the book creates a sense of familiarity for the reader, who can navigate his or her way through the book accordingly: the poem numbers signal the reader's position in relation to the whole volume, and also in relation to the smaller groupings of five and seven poems within the overall sequence.

In \textit{Trente et un au cube}, the conception of constraint as the structural foundation of the text is also at the heart of the spatio-temporal metaphor on which the volume is constructed. The book's finite structure replicates the totality of a year, signalled in the final poem: 'UNE ANNÉE FINIT [...] une année comparse de la mémoire'.\textsuperscript{326} Roubaud's notes on the composition of \textit{Trente et un

\textsuperscript{324} Roubaud, \textit{Trente et un au cube}, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{325} Thomas and Winspur, \textit{Poeticized Language}, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{326} Roubaud, \textit{Trente et un au cube}, p. 129.
"au cube" also give a year for the period of composition: 'Composé de juillet 1971 à juin 1972'.

Whether or not this is accepted as fact, a reader of the volume can trace the shifting seasons through the piece. The book opens in summer sun and birdsong, 'dans le soleil orange un | oiseau acéré'.

The reader journeys through the autumn months, 'dans ce | jardin d'automne', with their fiery shading, 'le feu est cyprès | est saule rouge', and gusty showers 'c'était un jardin | que le vent affamé a- || percevait de loin | le trempant d'eau'.

He or she survives the winter frost, 'dans cette ville | glaciale' and the melting away of the leaves, 'où des | feuilles tombaient || sur moi dans le noir'.

Finally, the reader comes out again in summer, among 'belles | nappes de coquelicots'.

On a spatial level, the book is posited as cube: the cube of the book's title is reflected visually within the squaring of its unfolding pages and semantically in the repeated references to the poem itself as 'ce cube'.

This space alternately figures in the poems as garden, or bedroom, spaces equated in troubadour poetry, in which new love and desire are equated with the sweet blossoming of spring.

The book thus lends itself to interaction with memory, offering spaces and temporal markings in which to invest our own associations, recollections and evocations, but also providing markers for the reader to commit elements of the text to memory. After a reading of Trente et un au cube, features of its structure inevitably remain in memory: its numbering, its circularity, its rolling seasons. There will certainly be something of Certeau's "invention" de mémoire' in a reader's experience of Trente et un au cube: a process in which the act of reading elicits meaning from the stores of individual memory, 'acts and memories' which then 'furnish' or inhabit the space of the text. However, it seems also that Roubaud intentionally constructs poetic spaces that can themselves be committed to memory. Perhaps the temporal and spatial structures underpinning Trente et un au cube may be compared to the memory palaces and theatres explored in Frances Yates' influential study, The Art of Memory. In the

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327 Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 77.
329 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 37.
330 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 77.
331 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 129.
332 For example, Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 69.
periods she discusses, from the classical period through to the Renaissance, the memory palace, or memory theatre, is a mnemonic system in which memory recall is associated with an often imagined locus, or location. As Simon Critchley writes in his recent reflection on the art of the memory theatre: 'The time of speech could be mastered by the spatial recollections of loci, of topoi. One would walk around in one's memory as if in a building or, better, storehouse, inspecting the objects therein'.  

The text is at once a space to be invested with the associations and evocations that are conjured up in a reader's memory, and conversely the text conceived of as a spatial system facilitates its assimilation in memory.

The temporal and spatial markings of *Trente et un au cube* are what allows the particular relation between memory and its poetry. In Chapter One, we saw that an individual poem is memorable, memorisable, largely because of its form: the visual patterning of the black lines against the white page, typographic lines on the page shaped by the aural rhythms of the poem's sound. Listening to a reading of a poem evokes the image of its outline, for example, in the way that rhyme patterning frames the quatrains and tercets of a sonnet. Similarly, reading a poem from the page of a book is not without its phonic effects, an internalised trace of its beat(s). Instances of repetition, whether in metrical patterns, rich rhyme-words, assonance or alliteration, build up a framework of a poem that makes it open to being memorised. The relation of constraint to memory in the reading process does not demand that the reader memorise the entire volume. Rather the patterns in form function to create rhythms as well as recognisable shapes on the page that at once draw the reader into the text and become intertwined in memory. Engagement with a poem's rhythm reflects the reader's investment of time in the text, while an interaction with the poem's layout on the page reflects that the reader has entered the space of the poem. Through his use of constraint in *Trente et un au cube*, Roubaud demonstrates the way in which this interplay of spaces and patterns can be

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336 Roubaud describes the process of remembering a sonnet after many years of first reading and memorising it. The words at the end of each line are the first parts of the poem to return, their place in the syntax of the poem deduced from the end-rhyme that at once makes them more memorable and clarifies their place in the structure of the sonnet. See Roubaud, *Poésie*, pp. 48–50.
enacted beyond the limits of the poem, throughout the architecture of the book. Time is thus also reflected in the year over which the poet composes the volume, and references to the dimensions of the page and the book create a space in common between the reader and the poet.

Constraint in *Trente et un au cube* offers the reader a route into the text and, to some extent, directs the reading process. It is not a matter of simplifying the reading process, although constraint does not necessarily add difficulty either. Rather constraint poses questions, offers the sense of a secret to be unlocked, another layer of the text to investigate. Constraint in *Trente et un au cube* creates patterns in space as well as time; patterns which will draw memories and associations out from within the reader, patterns that will themselves become entangled in the memory of the reader. Within these patterns in *Trente et un au cube*, there are points at which the space of the book overlaps with the time of composition, bringing together the reader and poet. It is as though the book's composition is re-enacted on every reading, giving the reader the sense that he or she is present in the writing process, given a privileged position in relation to meaning-making in the poems. The book becomes the space of the cube that envelops the reader and his or her senses.

Thus far, I have explored the relation of poetic constraint in *Trente et un au cube* to the reader, particularly considering the way in which constraint-based writing encourages a deeper readerly participation in the creation of a text's meaning. I have considered the ways in which the spaces and temporal markings in the book structure reading and facilitate each poem's interaction with the reader's memory. I now turn to the place of the female beloved in this network. What is the relation of constraint to the poet's lover in *Trente et un au cube*? What can we learn about the position of the reader from the relation between the beloved and poetic constraint? Close readings of the book's central poem will be the first step towards answering these questions, since it is at the heart of the volume – the volume as the book in the hands of the reader and as the metaphorical cube that the book stands for – that the struggle between the poet and his beloved, between constraint and love takes place.
3.5 Constraint and Containment at the Centre of the Cube: The Beloved

The poet's lover and the constraint that structures the composition of *Trente et un au cube* come together in a climactic encounter in the volume's central poem. The opening incipit posits the female as the structural centre of the cube: 'TE VOICI LE CENTRE : tu es la seizième lame | de ce cube'.

Accorded this central position in terms of the geometry of the cube, her presence is structurally pivotal to the book's constraint. At the centre of the material volume in the reader's hands, poem 16 is the halfway point in the book's thirty-one poems. Visually and formally, poem 16 is itself set apart from the rest of the volume, consisting of two large strophes, although the division of the poem into seventeen and fourteen lines respectively means that the tanka pattern of 5-7-5 (-) 7-7 still underlies this piece. Each of these strophes is divided by a large white space across the centre of the page. A paradox in the poem's form becomes apparent: while the female is addressed in the poem's opening as the sixteenth edge of the book's cubic space, the layout of the page positions her at its centre, in the space of silence which divides the page.

The poet places his female love in a structural relation to constraint and poetic form, citing her position simultaneously as the cube's centremost edge and within the space of its centre, but there is also a thematic dimension to the portrayal of constraint in poem 16. Puff has drawn links between the cubic patterns structuring *Trente et un au cube* and the bedroom the poet shares with his lover: the etymology of *stanza* intersects the poem both with *chambre* (a material space) and with *strophe* (a prosodic one).

In poem 16 more than any other, the presence of constraint is predominant not only in the form of the poem, but also in its themes. Constraint appears to play out its most literal meaning in the poem, as its two verses recount a physical, almost violent

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337 All further references to Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube* in this section are to its central poem, p. 69.
338 The reference to the book's 'cubic space' refers at once to the pseudo-mathematical cubic pattern underlying *Trente et un au cube*, and to the metaphoric space of the cube Roubaud constructs by reference to it.
340 The echoes of a constraint within the thematic content of a literary work have been explored until now in this chapter in particular relation to notions of self-reflexivity. A reader may also refer more generally to the often-repeated Oulipian axiom: 'un texte écrit suivant une contrainte parle de cette contrainte'. See, for example, Roubaud, *Poésie, etcetera*, p. 212. To some extent, a constraint has been seen to be reflected through the thematic level of a text because it is also the generative impulse of that text.
struggle between the poet and his lover. How does this attempt to constrain – or contain – his love compare to the relation of freedom and potential that literary constraint fosters in collaboration with the reader? A further overlap in the poem's thematic and formal layers occurs in the coincidence of lover and poem in the address, 'tu'. The statement 'tu es la seizième lame | de ce cube' addresses the sixteenth poem itself, in addition to the female who is always somewhere behind that intimate second-person address. Although Roubaud's enthusiasm for the troubadour *canso* has shown that the alignment of poem and lover was in one sense a metaphorical reference to the praise and admiration – the *pretz* – that inspired the expression of love for the lady, in this particular poem, Roubaud emphasises the singular correspondence between the love-object and the poem's formal structure. Once again, what is the nature of the relation between the poet's beloved and the form of the poem?

This central poem of *Trente et un au cube* opens with the poet endeavouring to imprison his lover: 'TE VOICI LE CENTRE : | tu es la seizième lame | de ce cube tu | ne bougeras pas pendant | que je te fixe ailes bleues || vertes rouges ma | sauterelle très courtoise | tu ne froisseras | pas cette feuille pendant | que je te cloue'. The spaces of the poem, the material book, and the lovers' bedroom come together in the unrealisable image of the poet attempting to contain the lover within the page. She is transformed into a grasshopper pinned to the sheet of the poem, calling to mind display cases of captured, lifeless butterflies: she is both courteous and courtly lady, not threatening to disturb the sheet of paper on which the poem is written. Yet from within the stillness of her entrapped wings emanates a defiant and dazzling array of colours. Despite the sense of vulnerability in the beloved's metamorphosis into a small insect, and structurally trapped as she also is within this cubic space constructed by the poet, there is a sense that her creaturely transformation also allows her to elude his wish to possess her.

The more the poet persists in his efforts to constrain the winged creature, the more her form continues to be foregrounded: 'tu | seras le centre fixée | comme d'une grande aiguille || entre jaunes bleues | vertes et rouges tes ailes | bien définie par | tes paramètres'. In the background, her wings continue to issue an illuminating multitude of bright colours, eluding the poet's grasp through their constant transformation. Yet the emphasis on the poet's force has shifted
from the earlier line: 'je te fixe' and 'je te cloue' become 'tu | seras le centre fixée', removing the poet–subject from the image. Her prison is no longer 'cette feuille', the page of the poem. Instead, her own physical contours are described in terms of limit, or restraint, through use of the word 'paramètres', and it is she who incorporates them.

At the same time, her clear definition and outlines do make her more accessible to the touch of the poet: 'mes doigts détiennent | l'arc de ton | contour | mes doigts silencieusement | révisent la ligne douce || de tes genoux quelque | muscle a bougé pendant la | nuit quelque fumée | s'est engourdie dans tes bras | et je déplace un très peu || ton axe nocturne'. The image is characterised by a stillness so intense that even the slightest movements are notable: the displacement of a muscle overnight, the position of her knees. A sense of intimacy grows within the stillness and quiet, the female's susceptibility to his touch so great that the poet's fingers nudge her body from its centre. There is sensuality in the movement in her very form under his touch, but it seems that for the poet–lover to touch her body is simultaneously to possess it, to alter it with his fingers.

In some way, this image of the poet re-shaping the female form resembles the form of touch Irigaray criticises for making of the beloved a direct object – 'appropriation, capture, séduction – à moi, vers moi, en moi' – so much so that the object becomes alienated from his or her own being: 'arracher l'autre à son intimité ou intérriorité à soi, à sa temporalité [...] le/la faire retomber dans l'immédiataté naturelle d'un toucher simple.' Like Irigaray's alienating subject, the poet alters feminine being, ever so slightly shifting her place within the night. For both writers, the violence of the lover's touch is described in metaphors evoking time: Irigaray refers to touch as stealing the other from their 'temporalité', while Roubaud's 'axe nocturne' also evokes the rotation of the earth on its centre, the passing of time, the fading of night into day. The effect is one of displacement of the beloved; a touch that objectifies the other in seeking pleasure for the self violates the body of the beloved, stealing it away from its very centre.

Perhaps the poet's words are an impossible attempt to still the night and hold the moment of intimacy and desire forever. He captures the moment in his poem of those nights that too easily slip away into day, but at every re-reading something shifts, the present of the moment cannot be held still. Whether a reference to the elusiveness of time, or the impossible possession of the female herself, the object of the poet's touch – 'ton axe nocturne' – remains at a remove, separated from his fingers by the large blank space dividing the two stanzas that compose this central piece. There is a discrepancy between the poet's possessive touch of the beloved in the semantic expression of the poem and the structural layout of the words on the page, which divides him from her. There is the sense that in her position in the structural layout of the page, there is resistance to the words of the poem.

In *Trente et un au cube*, Roubaud attempts to demarcate the spaces in and of his poem, whose definition overlaps with that of his female addressee, but in this climactic centrepiece, she eludes his attempt at categorisation. The poet predicts that his lover will rise up and break free of the poem's hold: 'sans doute dans un moment || tu te lèveras | sans effort tu briseras | le temps coagulé | autour de toi dans ces mots [...] annihilant tout effort | de définition sans doute || t'échapperas-tu | très vite de cette feuille | cependant tu restes | en même temps séparée | en même temps retenue'. The series of verbs in the future tense, 'tu te lèveras', 'tu briseras', and 't'échapperas-tu' drills in a sense of determination and resolve, denoting the inevitable future escape of the female. She will break through the rhythms that surround her, flee the sheet of paper to which she is attached like the winged grasshopper, evading the poet's definition of her. Perhaps her position in his poetic cube may be aligned with the paradox of the smoke she holds in her arms, at once within grasp and slipping away into the air around her: 'quelque fumée [...] engourdie dans [ses] bras'. The poet pins her into the sixteenth edge of the cube, but her bodily transformation means she eludes the poet's capture through her difference. In the imagery of the poem, the poet expresses control over the centre of her being, but the blank space across the page of the poem structurally distances his touch from her.

Oscillating between imprisonment within the cube and existing *as* the structure itself, at once captured and elusive in imagery that is both beautiful and troubling, the reader is never sure what to make of her presence. For Elisabeth
Cardonne-Arlyck, the female’s metamorphosis into a grasshopper and the ensuing struggle is a metaphoric sign of the instability of the triad love–language–poetry that Roubaud places at the heart of his theory of poetry. She explains that the indefinability of the female means that neither love nor poetry can be pinned down definitively, thus creating a sense of fragility in both the relationship with the beloved and the poetry addressed to her. The central poem of *Trente et un au cube* therefore betrays the discrepancy between the fictional attempt of the poet to secure his love within the words of his poem, and the real impossibility of holding onto his love beyond that poem.

Jean-François Puff sees in *Trente et un au cube* the poet's impulse to establish a dialogue: the opening 'je' posits the existence of an addressee, or 'tu'. For Puff, the risk faced by the poem is in the failure of this dialogue; if address subjectivises language, both the poem and poet face oblivion if nobody is there to hear, or read its lines. Puff explains this dialogue in terms of 'une postulation en attente de réalisation pleine', rather than a matter of transparency on the modern model of communication: 'non pas transparence sur le modèle de la communication moderne'. He writes: 'dans l'entrelacement du même et du différent, la différence se manifeste fortement comme telle, au risque de rompre le lien, et de renvoyer la voix-guide au soliloque qui toujours la guette'. Even if Roubaud's cube is constructed to the most precise of syllabic dimensions, the other to whom the poem is addressed ultimately has the freedom not to engage with the poem or the symbolic significance of its constraint.

Puff also explores Roubaud's references to catastrophe theory in this central poem, comparing the cube evoked to the space of 'une boîte noire'. Puff describes catastrophe theory as the analysis of a sudden change, or leap—*le 'saut'*—in the behaviour of a system, due to continuous changes in one or more

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342 Cardonne-Arlyck, *Vérités*, p. 236.
343 Cardonne-Arlyck, *Vérités*, p. 236.
350 Puff, *Mémoire de la mémoire*, p. 464. Roubaud cites René Thom as one of the influences for poem 16 in his list of 'Remerciements', *Trente et un au cube*, p. 131. Thom was a mathematician well known for his work modelling sudden behavioural changes.
of the variables that control it.\textsuperscript{351} Operating via a series of inputs and outputs, the 'black box' too records abrupt change, or 'catastrophe'. For Puff, in Roubaud's poem the box becomes a sign of the poet's desire to possess the female: 'l'espace dans lequel le poète engage tout un effort de détermination, qui vise à la possession par le calcul des paramètres de la substance et du changement de la dona'.\textsuperscript{352} However, just as Cardonne-Arlyck finds that the poem speaks of its own fiction, Puff too distinguishes the space of the poem from the reality in which the reader is situated:

Le poème manifeste […] un exercice singulier de la mezura: où la forme prend modèle sur une théorie qui vise à la détermination de ce qui auparavant échappait au calcul. Il s'agit de faire en sorte que la dona soit prise dans le poème, abstraite en images et en valeurs rythmiques, et s'offre ainsi à l'organisation d'ensemble qui vise à reconfigurer le temps. La tentative se sait vouée à l'échec: on ne vit pas dans le temps du poème. Pourtant quelque chose y subsiste, quelque chose mis en mémoire.\textsuperscript{353}

Roubaud's use of form, in particular rhythm, in \textit{Trente et un au cube} is likened to the quantifying of that which was previously deemed incalculable. Roubaud applies René Thom's model for measuring abrupt behavioural changes to his expression of love: form appears as an impossible attempt to capture the beloved in time. However, the black box also refers to a recording instrument and its rendering of events, no matter how far they stray from continuity, can only be a recording of that event – 'quelque chose mis en mémoire'.

The uncertainty of the addressee's involvement and the distance separating the reader from the fictional space of the poem is at the heart of the readings of both Cardonne-Arlyck and Puff. The readings by Cardonne-Arlyck and Puff draw on Roubaud's elaboration of the particular néant threatening troubadour poetry. For Roubaud, the risk of the néant underlies all troubadour love poetry, implicating the reader–beloved to whom the poem is addressed. The néant threatens both the poet's verse in its structural life and his love. The reader may not engage with the lines offered by the poet, leaving his poetry redundant.

\textsuperscript{351} For Puff's summary of catastrophe theory, see his \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, pp. 463–64. In his outline of the theory, Puff refers to a passage from René Thom's \textit{Paraboles et catastrophes} (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 60.

\textsuperscript{352} Puff, \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, p. 463.

\textsuperscript{353} Puff, \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, p. 464.
and empty of meaning. At the level of the expression of love held within the poetic address, if the beloved turns out not to return the love of the poet, the result may send him into a fatal state of melancholia. An excess of desire or an overwhelming sense of jealousy then threatens to send his love into madness and, in turn, his verses into collapse.354

The troubadour concept of mezura, within which Puff inscribes the central poem of Trente et un au cube, is the safeguard against this threat. The poet describes its dual powers of resistance in love and troubadour poetry: 'le même mot, mezura, désigne à la fois le concept clef de la résistance de l'amour à la force de destruction du "néant" et l'enfermement des mots et des rimes dans les unités proprement indestructibles du vers, de la cobla et de la canso'.355 It is a stance in love; a defence against its excesses and the obscure forces that lurk behind its joy. Roubaud places his mezura in the space between two threats to love: 'l'insignifiance', perhaps in love that is unrequited, or love that never quite gets off the ground, and its opposite excess, 'l'insupportable'.

The troubadour mezura is also, for Roubaud, a linguistic concept. For the troubadours, Roubaud explains that the canso was a necessary way of maintaining unity and intactness of language against what he calls 'la dissolution dans l'étranger ou le dialecte'.356 The poet uses lexis of defence and security when describing the function of mezura in verse, writing of 'enfermement', and 'unités proprement indestructibles'. Language is tightly secured respectively within the metrical units of the line ('vers'), stanza ('cobla'), and poem as a whole (the troubadour 'canso'). The layering of form within the respective units of the poem's structure emphasises the sense that language is protected within multiple interlocking barriers. This description of mezura also resonates with the architecture of Trente et un au cube, whose tanka pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 makes a unit of each line, stanza, poem and even the volume as a whole. Mezura as the central structuring mechanism of a canso then is not unlike the function of literary constraint in Trente et un au cube; the patterns of counting and multiplication that govern every layer of the volume.

354 Roubaud summarises the link between 'jalousie, effort de possession absolue de la dame' and 'la folie et la mort' represented by 'eros mélancolique' in the introduction to his anthology Les Troubadours, p. 18. For a more detailed investigation of Roubaud's interpretation of eros mélancolique in troubadour literature see Roubaud's Fleur inverse, pp. 86–91 and pp. 94–95.
355 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 287.
356 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 286.
Yet at the very centre of *Trente et un au cube*, rather than the stronghold of *mezura* described in Roubaud's writings, poem 16 reveals its own fragility and uncertainty. Roubaud's central poem reflects on its own future impossibility, its failure: his lover's escape. While trying desperately to hold onto her, the threat of her disappearance keeps her forever at a remove. Yet there is a sense that the resistance of the female addressee arises from within the very constraint that structures the poem. The echoes of ambiguity that ripple out from the centre of the poem's structure to the words at the poem's edges have the effect of creating whispers: for every attempt to define, pin down, capture, and re-form the female beloved, there is a reference to the possibility of her escape, her elusiveness, her invisibility, her enigmatic place within the structure that seeks to define her. *Trente et un au cube* holds a contradiction at its centre which it is impossible to resolve. The female love's central place within the construction of the poem, and indeed in the volume as a whole, is asserted at repeated instances throughout the two large verses that make up poem 16. She is not simply the image of a love object trapped in the space of a prison created by her poet, rather she exists as part of the structure itself.

From the outset, the poet places her within the edge of the cube: its walls, not its enclosed space. Her central position in the cube is projected into the future in poem 16: 'tu | seras le centre fixée | comme d'une grande aiguille'. The poet even insists on her pivotal position in the book's structure against all odds: '(dans cette boîte un | champ de possibles, je dois | t'en séparer pour | que tu sois le centre pur | de ce cube) tu es centre || mobile'. In his final reiteration of her structural centrality, the poet states: 'tu es le centre | de ce cube construit pour | toi'. In this last reference to her central place in the cube, the poet eliminates any traces of entrapment, regarding the poem's cubic walls as an offering to his love. There is a contradiction in making her the form of the poem, ascribing to its boundaries the curves of her body, and simultaneously attempting to contain her within its cubic dimensions. The female beloved's struggle to escape the grasp of the poet takes place at the nexus of the volume in poem 16, yet the very possibility of her freedom seems to lie in her position in its opening words: 'TE VOICI LE CENTRE : | tu es la seizième lame | de ce cube'. She cannot remain captured within a structure whose edges coincide with the lines of her own contours.

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What if poem 16 were not read as evidence of the poet's failure, but as the climax of his poetic project in *Trente et un au cube*? The poet speaks of his wish to detain the beloved within the space of his poem, but the numerical constraint with which he structures the volume and shapes the arrangement of its central poem on the page is the source of her elusiveness. Can this sense of resistance emerging from his use of constraint shed light on the notion of potential discussed earlier in the chapter? To illuminate my readings thus far of the relation between constraint and the beloved addressee in *Trente et un au cube*, I will explore Lacan's theorisation of the masculine and feminine positions in psychoanalysis. Not only are there resonances between the poet and theorist who each write the feminine position into their texts, but Irigaray's subsequent reading of a Lacanian definition of the feminine seems to suggest a sense of resistance within the structure of the theory itself; a resistance that may be aligned with the sense of possibility inherent in Roubaldian poetic constraint.

3.6 The Blind Spot in Set Theory: Lacan, Irigaray and Roubaud

Poem 16 brings into play the dynamics between the poet and his beloved: the message of the poem raises the questions of the nature of the poetic muse and whether she necessarily exists only as object in the writing of the male poet. The familiar structure of the relation that sees the muse imprisoned within the rhetoric of the male poet is one that we have seen is criticised by Irigaray. She writes of the 'métaphores, survalorisantes ou dénigrantes', 'tropes' and 'chevaleresques oripeaux' that the male poet uses to portray the female in poetry; whether he flatters or chastises the female that is the object of his writings, his words place her at a remove from herself, 'revêtements', and 'déguisements'.

Irigaray's criticism is a metaphor for the male psychoanalyst, who writes the female into his theory. In *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Irigaray in turn places Freud and Lacan at the heart of their own theories, deconstructing what she understands to be their patriarchal descriptions of the feminine and turning the texts in psychoanalytic theory against their writers. When Irigaray writes of the male poet–psychoanalyst that he captures the female within 'couches de style ornamental', a 'sépulture décorative, où elle perd jusqu'à son souffle', Roubaud's

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357 Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 177.
reader might think of the female figure and her dazzling array of colour pinned into the centre of *Trente et un au cube*. Roubaud's creation of a cube in poetry, his layers of constraint, are presented by the poet himself as an attempt to capture the female therein, an ill-fated wish to possess his beloved and hold her indefinitely in the present moment.

The project of *Speculum de l'autre femme* is encapsulated within the multiple resonances of its title. Through a series of essays presented as readings of texts from Western philosophy, culture and psychoanalysis, Irigaray explores the representation of woman as the 'other' to a central male term. She clarifies the possibilities of her title years later, explaining that it might be less ambiguously understood if it were punctuated thus: 'Speculum, De l'autre: femme'. Her book is an exploration of the 'other', insofar as that 'other' is 'woman'. The title does not, as has often been misconstrued, refer to the second of two women, or the mirror reflection of the author herself, for as Irigaray probes: 'Qui serait l'autre femme puisque le générique féminin n'existe pas encore comme représentation ou contenu d'idéalité pour la femme?'. Her writing in *Speculum* deals with the idea that there is no specific conception of 'woman', no 'représentation ou contenu d'idéalité pour la femme'. Feminine presence in psychoanalysis is instead drawn into the theory simply as the other of the male term, what Irigaray calls 'ce redoublement spéculaire'. Irigaray's title insists that this alterity be positively constructed and that the 'other' be considered for what it specifically represents.

Irigaray's explanation encompasses a consideration of what is possibly the key term in her title, 'Speculum':

> ce terme est utilisé, à une époque plus ancienne de notre culture, pour désigner l'expression la plus fidèle possible de la réalité. *Speculum mundi*, par exemple, est un titre qui a été fréquent et auquel j'ai pensé. Il signifie miroir du monde non tant comme reflet du monde grâce à un miroir mais plutôt comme pensée de la réalité ou de l'objectivité du monde à travers un discours.

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358 Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 177.
359 Irigaray, *J'aime à toi*, p. 102.
360 Irigaray, *J'aime à toi*, p. 103.
The definition inserts a layer of remove between the various texts that Irigaray responds to and 'la réalité' or 'l'objectivité du monde'. Treating the theories that she deals with as speculative, rather than objective, is what allows Irigaray first to deconstruct them as discourses, second, to explore the scope within them for the possibility of an alternative, or even opposing view. The speculative root of *Speculum* is therefore offered by Irigaray as the most important meaning of the word for the purpose of her writing in the book. However, its alternative denotation of a gynaecological instrument is perhaps the most recognisable, or obvious meaning of the word, particularly in the context of *Speculum de l'autre femme*’s opening section: an extended rereading of Freud's essay 'Femininity' and his other writings on women. In Chapter One of this study, I looked in particular at the ways in which Irigaray's criticisms of Freud's scene of feminine castration could be woven into a reading of some of Paul Éluard's depictions of the female muse as his mirrored self-image. Within this particular context, the 'Speculum' of Irigaray's title is an effort to achieve a vision that takes into account the 'forme' of femininity. The suggestion is that the problematic 'blind spot' in Freud's theory of castration – the 'rien à voir' that characterises the feminine sex in relation to the masculine in his essay – may be bypassed with an approach that considers the specificity of femininity, rather than its difference from (which is ironically also a reflection of) the central male term.

In his rereading of Freud's theory of femininity, Lacan shifts the emphasis away from such biologically orientated definitions. Bruce Fink writes of 'formalization without mathematization' in Lacan's approach to psychoanalytic teaching.364 The psychoanalyst’s provision of symbols – which he refers to as mathemes – plays an important role in summarising psychoanalytic theory, but Lacan himself explains: 'Le truc analytique ne sera pas mathématique'.365 Fink explains that formalisation in the work of Lacan is a move towards 'scientificity', rather than 'measurement'.366 Fink gives the example of physics to outline the benefits of this approach:

366 Fink, 'Knowledge and Jouissance', p. 32.
formalization allowed theorists an independent field of speculation: one could play with the formulas themselves and work out all of their interrelations, without having the slightest idea what the new configurations meant or implied. One could make certain assumptions not because they made any sort of intuitive sense but simply because they simplified equations; those assumptions could then be tested through experimentation.367

Fink's explanation implies that formalisation provided a certain level of abstraction, which meant that possibilities in scientific discovery could reach beyond a logic structured by intuition.

Fink concedes that formalisation in psychoanalysis is still far from providing an independent basis for theorisation in the field, pointing out the prevalence of reading and writing in Lacanian psychoanalysis:

we see a kind of "fetishization" of the text, so to speak: [...] an approach to reading Freud's and other texts (e.g., Poe's "The Purloined Letter") that has spurred great interest in the humanities and in literary criticism in particular and [...] an attention to writing that seeks to have effects on the reader that imply anything but the direct transmission of formulas and mathematically precise equations.368

This is clear, for example, in Lacan's presentation of his psychoanalysis as a return to Freud. It is rather as Elizabeth Grosz puts it, Lacan's work 'produces a certain Freud'; Lacan rereads Freud's texts, even rewrites them on some level.369 It is necessary to know Freud's texts in some detail before approaching a Lacanian reading, since the French psychoanalyst has a singular approach in his work, offering 'allusions, phrases, and metaphors' instead of direct references or classic footnotes.370 It is not only Lacan's intriguing approach to the texts he reads that requires a depth of engagement from his reader, but his own multilayering of language that inserts puns, double entendres and ambiguities into his teaching, replicating the process required by analysis itself, 'sifting

367 Fink, 'Knowledge and Jouissance', pp. 32–33.
368 Fink, 'Knowledge and Jouissance', p. 33.
369 Grosz, Jacques Lacan, p. 9. Grosz writes that Lacan produces 'a Freud perhaps more bold and threatening'; one who did not shy away from 'reinvigorating [...] the scandalous quality of psychoanalysis that so thwarted Freud's earliest ambitions for respectability and intellectual acceptance'.
370 Grosz, Jacques Lacan, p. 3.
through layers of meaning, deciphering the text as though it were a long series of slips of the tongue'.

Targeting Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexual difference, Irigaray places the writers of psychoanalysis at the centre of their own discourse. She too uses wordplay and lexical ambiguity, but she does so in order to draw out the presence of the Freudian text in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the speculation in the discourse. Irigaray writes of 'ses plans', 'ses contours nets', 'sa forme univoquement cadrée', 'ses calculs de proportions établis une fois pour toutes', 'son unité immuablement réfléchie'. The references to his univocally framed shape and reflected unit(y) point unmistakeably to the notions of visibility and specularity at play in Freud's observation of sexual difference in the little girl and boy. However, her commentary extends to the Lacanian definition of the feminine, which moves away from biological difference between the sexes to the topological lexis of set theory. Irigaray's choice of lexis in this extract aligns the prominence of male sexual form in Freud's theory of castration with the geometric outline of a closed mathematical set. Her reference to 'ses contours nets', 'sa forme univoquement cadrée' and 'ses calculs de proportions établis une fois pour toutes' might be compared to the 'espace borné, fermé, supposé institué' posited for masculine sexuality in Lacanian theory. On the contrary, 'la femme se définit d'une position [...] pointée du *pas-tout à l'endroit de la jouissance phallique*, residing in an open, or non-finite set. Lacan's distinction between the sexes is not based on biology or genetic makeup. Rather masculinity and femininity are defined as such in his psychoanalysis as relations of the subject to language, or the symbolic order. Fink summarises the masculine position as 'a whole': 'because there is something that delimits him [...] there is a definable boundary to his set'. The notion of a delimited set, a space enclosed within a defining boundary, arises from Lacan's use of formulae to distinguish between the categories of masculine and feminine. The masculine position is represented by the constructions: $\exists x \Phi(x)$ and

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371 Fink, 'Knowledge and Jouissance', p. 33.
Vx Φx. The latter formula denotes that 'c'est par la fonction phallique que l'homme comme tout prend son inscription'. The phallic function (Φ) as applicable to every subject (x) – or Φx – governs the whole of a man – Vx. Fink paraphrases this formula: 'man is altogether determined by symbolic castration [...] every bit of him falls under the sway of the signifier'. The 'phallic function' has been called the 'alienating function of language'; the phallus represents the moment the subject takes up their place as a speaking being in language. Castration is effected through a 'split' in the speaking subject: language becomes necessary because of the absence of the object.

Lacan defines the schism that occurs on the institution of the subject in language during a reinterpretation of the fort-da game that originally featured in Freudian analysis. In the game, the child would repeatedly throw a cotton reel out of his line of sight whenever his mother was absent, simultaneously making a sound that was equated with the meaning of fort. Lacan explains that the reel is 'un petit quelque-chose du sujet qui se détache tout en étant encore bien à lui', the petit a that comes into play when 'sur la frontière de son domaine, sur le bord de son berceau' his mother's absence creates 'un fossé'. Lacan summarises the process as 'l'automutilation à partir de quoi l'ordre de la signification va se mettre en perspective'. It is only when this division in the unity of the mother and the child is effected that symbolisation occurs: 'words stand for objects, because they only have to be spoken at the moment when the first object is lost'. Thereafter, the subject can only function within language by continually repeating this original rupture; one is 'constituted in language as this division'.

The other formula defining men in a Lacanian perspective – \( \exists x \overline{\Phi x} \) – offers 'cette fonction [phallique] trouve sa limite dans l'existence d'un x par quoi
la fonction $\Phi x$ est niée [...]. C'est là ce qu'on appelle la fonction du père.\textsuperscript{384} It can be said that there is some subject – $\exists x$ – for which the phallic function is foreclosed (as represented by the upper bar). This limit that acts as a boundary to the male set is provided by the existence – or the 'ex-sistence' of the primal father.\textsuperscript{385} The use of wordplay in reference to the position of the primal father indicates his problematic status. While he can be said to 'exist' in the symbolic order, written as he is $\exists x \Phi x$, he is simultaneously impervious to symbolic castration. The implication is that the primal father knows no limits: he can enjoy all women, including his mother and sisters, who would normally be excluded from accessibility through the incest taboo. The primal father is also the only man who can fully enjoy woman; for after succumbing to castration, a man can only relate to the objet $a$ in another person: 'the lost object which underpins symbolisation, cause of and "stand in" for desire'.\textsuperscript{386} The subject's yearning for the lost object as that which promises fantasised primordial wholeness is perhaps why Lacan says that 'La femme n'entre en fonction dans le rapport sexuel qu'en tant que la mère'.\textsuperscript{387}

Lacan's portrayal of the relation between the man and the objet $a$ emphasises the exclusion of the feminine in the formulation. If there is reciprocity, it is between the subject (insofar as the subject is a man) and the objet $a$, which leads Lacan to say of the man that 'tout sa réalisation au rapport sexuel aboutit au fantasme'.\textsuperscript{388} Jacqueline Rose explains the twofold process that makes of woman a 'symptom' for the man: she is 'the place onto which lack is projected' and the site through which that lack is simultaneously 'disavowed'.\textsuperscript{389} Defined in this way, she is 'reduced to being nothing other than this fantasmatic place'. Her status as an 'absolute category' and a 'guarantor of fantasy', however, is 'false', since symbolic castration brings about a desire that can never be satisfied; this is why it can be said that 'woman does not exist'.\textsuperscript{390}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{384} Lacan, \textit{Encore}, p. 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{385} Fink, \textit{The Lacanian Subject}, p. 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{386} Rose, \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision}, p. 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{387} Lacan, \textit{Encore}, p. 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{388} Lacan, \textit{Encore}, p. 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{389} Rose, \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision}, p. 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{390} Rose, \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision}, p. 72.
\end{itemize}
Lacanian theorisation of the feminine is epitomised by the statement 'il n’y a pas la femme, la femme n’est pas toute'. While not denying the existence of 'real women', this approach places the female within a space of instability. Her position is defined purely against that of the male, existing as the 'not all' and thus the 'vanishing point' of the system of gender representation. Woman may therefore only ever be 'other' to man, 'his other' or 'opposite'. The feminine position as negatively defined against the masculine in Lacanian psychoanalysis is reflected in Lacan's formulas of sexuation. The feminine portion of his schema differentiating between men and women is represented by the two formulations: $\exists x \Phi x$ and $\forall x \Phi x$. The latter formula states that, unlike the masculine position, not all of a woman – as shown by the bar negating $\forall x$ – comes under the law of the signifier. Fink confirms that this does not mean that 'some part of every woman escapes the reign of the phallus', describing the indication as a 'possibility' rather than a 'necessity'. The written formula implies the possibility of another jouissance to phallic jouissance, one which goes 'right off the scale, right off the map of representation'. The 'radical alterity' to the symbolic order of this possibility in feminine structure is important, for the first formula defining femininity states that there is not even one subject – $\exists x$ – (where the subject, x, is a woman) for whom the phallic function is foreclosed – $\forall x \Phi x$. Perhaps this instance in the feminine can then be said to 'ex-sist' in the same way as the primal father.

The woman comes to represent both difference and loss for the man in Lacanian theory: 'On the one hand, the woman becomes, or is produced, precisely as what he is not, that is, sexual difference, and on the other, as what he has to renounce, that is, jouissance'. Irigaray builds on precisely this presentation of the feminine 'as what he is not', contrasting the absence of

393 Bronfen, 'Fatal Conjunctions', p. 250.
395 Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 112.
396 Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 113.
397 Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 194.
398 Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 73.
positive definition on the side of the feminine with the bounded space erected by the male theorist for the masculine subject: 'sa forme univoquement cadrée'.

She adopts the lexical field of set theory that founds a Lacanian outline of sexuation in her summary of the position of '(la) femme':

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\text{Ne se peut rapporter à un être, à un sujet, à un tout, simplement désignable. Et pas plus l'ensemble (des) femmes. Une femme + une femme + une femme...n'aura jamais atteint à quelque générique: la femme. (La / une) femme fait signe vers l'indéfinissable, l'inénumérable, l'informulable, l'informalisable. Nom commun indéterminable quant à une identité. (La / une) femme n'obéit pas au principe d'identité à soi, ni à un \( x \) quelconque. Elle s'identifie à tout \( x \), sans s'y identifier de manière particulière. Ce qui suppose un excès à toute identification à / de soi. Mais cet excès n'est rien: la vacance de la forme, la faille de la forme, le renvoi à un autre bord où elle se re-touche sans / grâce à rien.}
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The mathematical lexis of set theory coincides with concepts of definition in language to elaborate on the impossibility of the feminine position in psychoanalytic structures. The impossibility of gathering woman into the space of a finite set – her innumerability – is equated with the lack of a designation that identifies her as 'woman'. For Irigaray, feminine identity is never established, or considered in its own formal specificity. This is why Irigaray can say on the one hand that the feminine 's'identifie à tout \( x \)', adding paradoxically that this identification takes place in no 'manière particulière'. Irigaray is referring in particular to the formula \( \overline{\forall} \, \phi(x) \) on the feminine side of Lacan's schema of sexuation. The bar in \( \overline{\forall} \) indicates that 'not all' of woman is governed by the phallic function, leaving the set defining woman as an open category.

Irigaray's repeated references to form and formalisation, or more precisely 'vacance de la forme', simultaneously encompass the absence of a boundary defining the feminine sex in Lacanian theory and the privileging of biological form, or anatomical difference, in Freud's outline of sexual difference. However, Irigaray's words also refer to the function of the feminine as what Elisabeth Bronfen calls the 'vanishing point' in a Lacanian topology of sexuality; the feminine exists as the measure against which the masculine standard is

\[399\] Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 295.
defined.\(^{401}\) In Lacanian terms, she stands at once for 'what he is not' and 'what he has to renounce'. Rose takes up the same term used by Bronfen, pointing out that 'there is no such system of representation, however elaborated or elevated it may be, in which there is not some point of impossibility, its other face which it endlessly seeks to refuse – what could be called the vanishing-point of its attempt to construct itself as a system'.\(^{402}\) The feminine is thus placed as an enigmatic, but central point in Lacan's system of sexual difference. The system refuses to classify her within a distinct, closed set, but cannot exist without her presence.

Despite her critical approach, there is a sense that Irigaray recognises in this 'vacance de la forme, the 'rien' that characterises feminine sexuality, a sense of potential. For Irigaray, the indefinability of woman means that she both exceeds and escapes male concepts:

\[\text{Indéfinie, in-finie, la forme ne s’y achève pas. Elle n'est pas infinie, mais pas plus une unité: lettre, chiffre, nombre d'une série, nom propre, objet unique (d'un) monde sensible [...]. Cette incomplétude de sa forme, de sa morphologie, lui permet à chaque instant de devenir autre chose, ce qui n'est pas dire qu'elle soit jamais univoquement rien. Ne s'accomplissant dans aucune métaphore.}\(^{403}\)

The centrality of the male term as 'all' in definitions of sexual difference means the female as 'not-all' is not (de)limited by any 'number' or 'proper noun'. The implication of this is that: 'La / une femme ne peut se recueillir en un volume'.\(^{404}\) The lack of a defining boundary around the feminine set means she exists perpetually as a space onto which the masculine may project his fantasy, it is that which 'lui permet à chaque instant de devenir autre chose'. Irigaray finds that the feminine in Lacan's definition is dependent on masculinity, whether it is that of the masculine set against which woman is defined simply as what he is not, or more generally because definitions of the feminine are written from what Irigaray perceives to be the deeply entrenched patriarchal viewpoint of male theorists. However, there is a sense of possibility in Irigaray's words. In the capacity of the feminine to continually become something else, there is a sense

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\(^{401}\) Bronfen, 'Fatal Conjunctions', p. 250.


\(^{403}\) Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, p. 284.

\(^{404}\) Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, p. 297.
that she is elusive. While her image is continually substituted for the projections of masculine desire, it seems that her indefinability opens up a field of potential: no metaphor completes her. Her position is characterised, through the words of Irigaray, by a sense of movement and elusiveness, positing her structure as the site of change and possibility.

Irigaray recycles the terms of set theory used to delineate the terms of sexual difference at this level in Lacan's theory, both in order to highlight its flaws and seek out the spaces for feminine resistance within that very theory. Without attempting to assimilate the poetic text to Irigaray's theory, there is a sense of potential in Irigaray's deconstruction of Lacanian sexuation that may be used to unlock Roubaud's cube. Like the feminine subject in Freudian and Lacanian theory, Roubaud's female love is written into the story. In each case, her 'form' is set out by the pen of the male theorist, or mathematician–poet. The feminine position in psychoanalysis is defined in relation to the masculine, whether it is in relation to the visibility of the male sex, or the neat finitude of the masculine in set theory. Roubaud attempts to detain his female love within his cube of poetry. In Irigaray's reading of Lacan, and Roubaud's portrayal of his female in poetry, there is the sense that the feminine position cannot be pinned down, in words or figures. The spaces of set theory and the volume of the cube fail to encapsulate the feminine presence, and in both texts an attempt at formalisation produces the portrayal of her elusiveness. She exists in their carefully constructed structures as a 'point of impossibility', or 'vanishing-point'.

What becomes of Freud's theory of castration without the presence of the little girl, whose anatomy and gaze affirm the dominance of the male sex? Without that which does not belong to the set – the existence of the 'not-all' – what binds the 'whole' in a Lacanian definition of masculinity? Without the female love, Roubaud's cube would have no intention. There is no explicit dialogue between Roubaud and the position of the feminine in psychoanalysis, but the alignment of the central poem in *Trente et un au cube* and Irigaray's reading of Lacanian sexuation illuminates correlative elements in the two structures. The feminine presence is at once that which is locked into a structure erected by the male writer, and also that which simultaneously supports and eludes that structure. Irigaray's deconstruction of Lacanian set theory will be instrumental in my further reading of the position of Roubaud's beloved in
Trente et un au cube, uncovering the implications of her enigmatic position as prisoner of his poem, elusive love object and metaphor for the volume's structure itself. I want to approach Irigaray's Speculum to interrogate the relations between poet, lover and reader in Trente et un au cube not in an attempt to define femininity, but to open out the dynamics interweaving the psychoanalytic and poetic structures.

3.7 'comme un corps diaphane...'
The poet's beloved and poetic form are inextricably intertwined in Trente et un au cube. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the poet attributes this practice to the troubadour tradition; like the troubadour canso, the intention of his poem is to address his love interest with an expression of that love. The form of the poem is said to bear the shape of the beloved as it sings of her qualities and the poet's adoration of her. It seems then that the link between poetic form and the love object is metaphorical: the form of a poem is reflective of its content.

However, when Roubaud addresses his beloved as the centre of his poetic cube in Trente et un au cube, he makes a clear reference to her as the very edge of the cube: 'la seizième lame'. She is at the structural heart of the volume, identified within its formal substance. Roubaud's insistence on the situation of his beloved's presence within the pages of his writing presents itself as an enigma in poem 16. The central poem stages a struggle between the poet and his muse: the poet attempts to imprison her within his cube, but he simultaneously aligns her with its structure, creating a paradox. Can the poet be compared to the targets of Irigaray's deconstructive criticism in Speculum de l'autre femme? Roubaud writes the lover into his poem, but what can an analogy with the concept of set theory in Lacan reveal about her interaction with the poet and her place for a reader of Trente et un au cube?

The ambiguous relationship between a poem's form and the female lover it addresses is explored in depth in Roubaud's meditation on poetry, 'Le silence de la mathématique jusqu'au fond de la langue, poésie'. In the article, Roubaud explores the relationship between poetry, love and language, and considers the

406 Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 251.
407 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 69.
place and nature of mathematics in this triad. His approach in the piece is to develop an argument through the construction of a list largely composed of intertextual references and quotations from other poets' writings, accompanied by his own commentary, translations, and poetic extracts. Each point builds on the last and the reader is left to infer the relationship between each and, indeed, the overall argument.

A reflection on the enigma of form and its relation to the beloved female comes in the words of Cavalcanti's poetic treatise on love: 'Dona me prega'. Cavalcanti's poem appears frequently as an intertextual reference in Roubaud's work, both in his poetry and his prose. In this essay by Roubaud, Cavalcanti's verse is followed by Roubaud's own translation from the Italian into French. The extract from Cavalcanti's poem is also accompanied by some words from the troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel (also translated into modern French by Roubaud) and an extract from "'Mantis", an Interpretation' by Louis Zukofsky. The three names are poets that appear periodically in Roubaud's œuvre and they form a small network of poets linked through their intertextual borrowings. Cavalcanti's 'Dona me prega' is influenced by lines from Daniel's earlier poem. Zukofsky too draws on Cavalcanti's sonnet in his A-9. The poets are also drawn together more precisely by poetic form, each of them writing in either the sestina or sonnet tradition. Roubaud has described the sestina as the culmination of the canso, bearing the traces of intricacies and developments in the form over time. In Chapter One, I also described the ways in which Roubaud links the sonnet to the canso, explaining that the newer form evolved from one verse – or cobla – of the troubadour song. Roubaud shares the poets' interest not only in the relation of poetic form and love, but more particularly the relation of the canso and sonnet forms to memory.

The extracts from the three poets in Roubaud's essay show the impact of their intertextuality 'par transmission d'ondes': Roubaud's use of the list form particularly draws out the similarities that ripple through the extracts. The

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408 Arnaut Daniel's full poem, 'Doutz brais e critz' ('Doux bruits et cris'), along with a modern French translation, is included in Roubaud's anthology of troubadour poetry Les Troubadours, pp. 232-35.
409 Roubaud highlights the connection, saying of the two lines quoted from Arnaut Daniel's poem: 'ils préfigurent les développements de Guido Cavalcanti dans sa canzone doctrinale sur la nature de l'amour'. See Roubaud's anthology Les Troubadours, p. 235.
410 Roubaud, 'Le silence de la mathématique', p. 115.
selections from poems ranging from the troubadour tradition to contemporary American poet, Zukofsky, bring together the female body, form, light and the diaphanous:

in quella parte
dove sta memora
prendo stato
di formato come
di affan da lome
d'un una scuritate

In the last version of the lines cited, a reinterpretation of Cavalcanti attributed to Zukofsky, 'the simultaneous' captures the duality of Roubaud's use of form in *Trente et un au cube*: it is suggestive of the cube that at once contains the female and whose parameters coincide with her own silhouette. The image which draws the multiple poetic extracts and translations together here, however, is that of the diaphanous body, resplendent against the light of the lamp it encounters. In Cavalcanti's lines, rippling echoes of internal rhyme bring together the place of love in the intellect, 'quella parte'; the state or essence, the formation of love, 'suo stato' and 'si formato'; finally the darkness, or obscurity of which the body of love (or poetry, as Roubaud adds in brackets in his translation, just beneath the Italian text) is composed, 'scuritate'. While the thematic focus of Cavalcanti's piece is love and its effects, Roubaud's exegetic translation highlights the reflection on poetry itself, which is equally present in the poem. The phonic patterns here draw out terms which contribute to the sense of materiality and shaping of the object described, 'l'amour (la poésie)'; the emphasis is on its place, its formation, its body. To break into this object, or space would be impossible, for it is characterised by its obscure blackness.

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411 Roubaud, 'Le silence de la mathématique', p. 115. Typographic layout and line indentation reproduced from the original.
412 In Chapter One, we saw that Roubaud adopts Éluard's title *L'Amour la poésie* as a tribute to the troubadour genitive in which juxtaposition of the nouns designates 'l'amour de la poésie'. The
The notion of poetry as secure, impenetrable object is reminiscent of Roubaud’s description of *mezura* as creating layers of protection in a *canso* through its rhythms and interlocking rhyme patterns, seen earlier in the chapter. Roubaud’s reader might also make a link between the conception of poetry described in these intertextual fragments and Roubaud’s own aphorism: ‘*La poésie dit ce qu'elle dit en le disant*’. Roubaud frequently invokes it in his criticism of methods of university literary studies and its methods: as I mentioned earlier, he notoriously dropped out of a pathway in literature, disillusioned with the dissection of poetry that was deemed a necessary feature of textual analysis. Perhaps the suggestion is that poetry should remain, in some sense, ‘obscure’. This ‘obscurité’ is not so much a matter of intellectual difficulty or impenetrability, rather the poet is insisting on a comprehension which does not rely upon explanation, paraphrase or simplification of a poem's content at the expense of its form. Instead form is privileged as that which allows a poem to express meaning: poetry says what it says ‘*en le disant*’. The choice of verb in ‘dire’ also evokes the phonic dimension of a poem. In Roubaud's reading of Cavalcanti’s poem, the dark object that takes its place in the mind of the reader, or observer, as he or she reads or looks is the poem as it is, intact, shaped and formed by its sounds and rhythms. The visual layout of a poem is developed in relation to its phonic patterning, forming dimensions that interact with one another.

In Cavalcanti’s verse, the poem is apprehended *where memory resides*: ‘*dove sta memora*’. The use of the verb in ‘prende suo stato’ and the past participle ‘*si formato*’ imply that the poem, in fact, can only acquire its final shape within memory. Roubaud has expressed the view that a poem is never the same for two different readers, only taking on its full potential when it is absorbed into an individual's memory and allowed to interact there with the past, with personal reminiscences and with fragments of other poems. Roubaud conveys this effect in his translation of Cavalcanti's 'memora' as 'lumière'. The freer translation creates a dual movement of light. A person's memory is a space

placing of ‘*la poésie*’ in parentheses in this case suggests that love and poetry are interchangeable concepts, at least in Roubaud's reading of 'Dona me prega'.

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that illuminates any poem he or she appreciates, bringing meaning to it through an engagement of memory. In turn, the words of poetry are a diaphanous material that shines brightly upon its immersion in the stores of the reader's personal and poetic memories, there triggering associations and connections. Imagined as diaphanous material, the poem is an invitation to the reader: a point of self-reflexivity and interactivity. Roubaud emulates the movement of this network of light in the form, or arrangement of his argument in 'Le silence de la mathématique jusqu'au fond de la langue, poésie'. Fragments of poetry from different times and languages are juxtaposed, bringing out the intertextual links and imagery which connect them. His choice of form enacts the way in which 'the diaphanous / historical' resides 'in one head', one line stimulating the recollection of another, like the successive collision of waves.

In the same way that the language of poetry is illuminated in the light bestowed on it in memory – *illuminé resplendit* – the body of the beloved lady glows against the lamplight. If love, poetry and the female body are placed in ever closer proximity by Roubaud in this intertextual discussion, what does this notion of 'the diaphanous' body of the female mean for the form of poetry, in particular, for the form of *Trente et un au cube*?

The diaphanous quality attributed to her body by the observer–poet might be compared to the lexis of Irigaray's criticism in regard to Lacanian theory on the not-all of the feminine: 'Cette incomplétude de sa forme, de sa morphologie, lui permet à chaque instant de devenir autre chose, ce qui n'est pas dire qu'elle soit jamais univoquement rien. Ne s'accomplissant dans aucune métaphore'. Just as Irigaray writes of the feminine who perpetually becomes 'something else', or 'something other' to herself through the incompleteness of her definition in psychoanalysis, the diaphanous form of the poet's lady appears to have no substance unique to her, her form instead activated by the lamplight and reflecting the vision of her observer. The diaphanous in Irigaray's later writings is that which protects and envelops male sexuality, making of the female a lifeless statue: 'Et si, pour surmonter la douleur de ta première nuit, tu veux que je devienne cristalline, diaphane, milieu te permettant de transparaître délivré de l'obscur de ta naissance et de ta conception, tu me prives de ma

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retouche. Du lieu où j'ai lieu.\textsuperscript{417} If feminine presence in Lacan's theory confirms the 'all' of male sexuality through her exclusion from the set, we might compare her diaphanous material in Roubaud's writing to the very lines with which Lacan delineates the masculine, those 'neat' lines that Irigaray mocks. If her exclusion from the set confirms the set's completeness, its wholeness, we might seek her out in the form itself that secures its space. Like that which is diaphanous, she reflects what the male writer requires her to be: what Irigaray called her 'son unité immuablement réfléchie'.\textsuperscript{418}

When Roubaud constructs his cube in \textit{Trente et un au cube}, it is not an attempt to comment on the classification of sexuation that Lacan establishes through set theory, but perhaps we can say that the female comes to be associated with form in the same way in the work of the poet and the psychoanalyst. She is the central axis on which \textit{Trente et un au cube} is built, the lines which form the edges of his poetic cube. Whether in Roubaud's poem or Lacan's use of set theory, the diaphanous quality associated with the feminine means her presence is determined by the male term in the relation. She exists in both theory and poem as a reflection of his vision. In Irigarayan interpretations of Lacanian theory, the feminine lacks her own specificity, serving as the 'vanishing point' of gender representation. However, there is a paradox in the effects of form: the implications of this mean that within the forms constructed by both Roubaud and Lacan, there is space for feminine resistance. Her diaphanous status means she perpetually evades Lacanian classification. In addition, despite her position of incompleteness in set theory terms, her place in the structure remains essential for the existence of the central male term:

De repérage, en fin de comptes, plus ultime que le sujet, qui ne se soutient que par un effet en retour de quelque objectivité, de quelque objectif. S'il n'est plus de 'terre' à (re)fouler, à travailler, à (se) représenter, mais aussi encore et toujours à désirer (s')approprier, matière opaque qui ne se saurait pas, quel socle subsiste-t-il pour l'ex-sistence du 'sujet'?\textsuperscript{419}

Irigaray emphasises the objectification of the feminine, not only in 'objectif' and 'objectivité', but also in her references to the feminine as 'repérage', 'socle', 'terre'

\textsuperscript{418} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, p. 295.
\textsuperscript{419} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, p. 165.
and 'matière' that the masculine subject bounces back off. The multiple layers in meaning that characterise Irigaray's lexical choices shine forth in her use of 'représenter', for it refers to the illusory place of the feminine as guarantor of a fantasy that cannot be, both for the subject and the male theorist who projects that subject. Irigaray's Speculum reveals that the position of the feminine in Lacanian theory is part of a discourse that needs to be reconsidered, and is not in fact 'objective' at all. Nevertheless, the presence of the feminine in Lacanian theory is the necessary platform for the very existence of the masculine subject in the system. Irigaray's use of the term 'ex-sistence' recalls at once the ambiguous status of the primal father, the boundary that limits the masculine set and the unenclosed position of the feminine in relation to that jouissance which escapes the reign of the phallus, going 'right off the scale'.  

Irigaray thus alludes to the place of the feminine as instrumental in the confirmation of masculine subjectivity through her place as support to this exceptional status. The feminine is then aligned with the boundary itself that confirms the set of man in Irigaray's rewriting of Lacan; without the impossibility of 'woman', the finitude of man's status cannot be.

Just as the feminine presence is necessary to prevent the collapse of Lacan's structure of sexual difference, so too Roubaud's poem cannot exist in its fullest being without the beloved addressee. She may not be 'all', so to speak, but she is nonetheless a guarantor of the structure into which she has been written. Roubaud's female also escapes classification. She is at once the reflection of the poet's vision, his creation, and she is also the material of the poem illuminated by each eye that runs over it, created in the unpredictability of the reader as other, who gives the text life and simultaneously threatens its failure. Her diaphanous nature represents the 'potential' that exists in any single reading of the text; the potential offered to the reader who is invited to participate in the creation of the poem. As in Irigaray's deconstruction of Lacanian theory, feminine otherness is at once a threat to the male term and the site of potential. Equally, when the poet offers constraint as an invitation to readerly engagement, there can be no guarantee of what experiences of his work will ensue.

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420 Fink, The Lacanian Subject, p. 113.
Roubaud's female beloved can thus be read through the model of Lacanian set theory and in Irigaray's reading of it. As in Irigaray's analogy of the psychoanalyst as male poet, Roubaud writes the female into his poem. The female is there aligned with the form of the poem: a diaphanous substance. As such, her presence in the poem necessarily reflects the poet's vision of her, just as the structure of the feminine in Lacan's system of sexuation is defined against the complete set delineating masculinity. As diaphanous substance, the form of the poem is also reflective of the presence of the reader. The reader contributes to the creation of meaning in a poem through its interaction with the spaces of memory. In this conception of poetic form, the poet allows the creation of meaning in the text to escape him. Similarly, the feminine is that which eludes definition and its Lacanian theorist: as the 'not-all' of Lacan's system of representation, she exceeds, surrounds, escapes and dwarfs male concepts. The poet attempts to capture her in words and figures, but she resides within the boundaries he constructs, and precisely because of that she eludes his cubic prison, indistinguishable from within the very structures he creates.

3.8 The Disjunction: From the Impossible Relation to 'j'aime à toi'

A conundrum remains for the reader faced with the central poem of Trente et un au cube. Reminded repeatedly throughout poem 16 that the female addressee is the centre itself of the cube, or volume of poetry – 'tu es le centre | de ce cube construit pour | toi' – the reader is left contemplating the blank space that occupies the middle of the page. This silent interval at the halfway point in the poem is made more noticeable by the fact it is the largest to intervene in any poem of Trente et un au cube: each poem is composed of five strophes, with a double line space between each, while this central piece is made up of only two verses, separated by a gap of approximately five line spaces. What is the reader to make of the alignment of the poet's lover with the space of silence at the centre of the volume? Could it be read as a symbol of the poet's silencing of the muse, a scenario that featured in the response of Irigaray to Lacanian accounts of the feminine? Contrary to these assumptions, Roubaud's use of the blank space has been the source of her resistance against the poet's pen. The poet's fingers are prevented from adjusting, or recreating the axis on which she turns, the core of her very being, when the poet's statement 'je déplace un très peu' is
separated from 'ton axe nocturne' by the page's silent interval. The moment suggests that the female presence eludes the poet: he cannot detain her, or define her in poetry.

Roubaud does offer a mathematical definition of the dividing space that separates the lovers in Trente et un au cube in the form of a mathematical, or more precisely, topological citation: 'dans un espace accessible, tout point est fermé, ou (ce qui revient au même) si deux points sont distincts, il existe un voisinage de chacun d'eux qui ne contient pas l'autre'. The citation is attributed to Nicolas Bourbaki, the collective pseudonym for the group of mathematicians whose ambition to reformulate mathematics has been so present in the beginnings of Roubaud's path as a composer of maths and poetry and it appears isolated on the page preceding the twelfth poem in the book. It is not referenced in any detail, referred to only in the list of 'Remerciements' at the close of the volume, where 'Nicolas Bourbaki' is typed in alongside the twelfth bullet point down the page. It is one of the direct citations in the volume whose origin and precise mathematical meaning are unlikely to be instantly recognisable by most poetry readers; many of the quotes and intertextual references that abound in Trente et un au cube are fragments of poetry that will be familiar to the regular French poetry reader, or even one who has grown up learning well-known poems as a school pupil in France.

The Bourbaki citation does not offer any clues as to its signification within Trente et un au cube. It is quoted elsewhere in Roubaud's œuvre, appearing a number of years later in prose volume Mathématique:, where Roubaud tells his reader that it is: 'l'axiome de Fréchet', or more precisely 'L'axiome dit (par Bourbaki) de Fréchet'. In Mathématique:, Roubaud recollects the earliest period of his studies in mathematics, particularly his embarking on Bourbaki's Topologie générale, the third in a series of vast and complicated volumes. Roubaud does not explain the meaning of the axiom in precise mathematical terms, only mentioning in passing that it applied, within the field of mathematical topology, to 'une séparation plus faible, celle des espaces accessibles'. Nevertheless, his narrative does implicitly suggest the

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421 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 52.
422 Roubaud, Mathématique:, p. 167.
way in which the reader of *Trente et un au cube* may approach the axiom.

Roubaud reassuringly describes the intense difficulty that even he encountered on his first attempts to read Bourbaki's *Topologie générale*:

J'ai lu et relu d'innombrables fois ces définitions, toute cette première page et les pages suivantes, sans rien comprendre [...]. Mais je n'ai pris que peu à peu conscience du fait que la difficulté essentielle venait non d'une extrême impénétrabilité du sujet [...] ni d'une incapacité congénitale de ma part à le comprendre (heureusement), mais de ce que je ne savais pas lire'.

Roubaud's own struggle to grapple with the Bourbakian Treatise justifies the hesitation of the reader to seek out the mathematical origins of his mysterious quote on accessible space. Roubaud's battle, as he reminiscences, is a question of reading approach. He describes switching from a mode of reading suited to prose, in which he would speed through the narrative driven by its suspense, to one which he applied to poetry: reading slowly, until much of the text was learnt entirely by heart. Only then was he able to read the text in a manner particularly befitting mathematics: 'C'est avec une extrême méfiance que j'en vins à me hasarder à redire ces enchaînements raisonnables autrement, à les résumer, à les paraphraser, à en venir à l'idée que la mathématique est paraphrasable'. In this, Roubaud found the insurmountable difference separating maths and poetry: while mathematics can, indeed must, involve paraphrasis, poetry cannot be paraphrased, or explained.

In *Trente et un au cube*, subtitled 'poésie', the same lines of Fréchet's axiom are read as poetry rather than mathematical theory. Taken out of their mathematical context, the lines acquire new possibilities of meaning. Roubaud himself seems to encourage this sense of freedom in their interpretation, when he muses on what the words evoke for him:

Le charme de cet axiome venait du fait qu'il se pouvait, dans un tel espace que, pour certains de ses couples de points, chacun des voisinages de l'un des points de tels couples rencontre nécessairement l'un des voisinages de l'autre et qu'ils se trouvent ainsi enchevêtrés l'un à l'autre

par la topologie de leur espace, leur monde. C'est, je crois, ce qui se passe dans la mémoire, dans la difficile séparation des souvenirs.  

Set against the backdrop of Roubaud's reminiscences of his youthful encounters with the world of mathematics, the axiom becomes a metaphor for the author's memory processes. Through his transposition of the topological definition into the domain of memory, Roubaud manifests its semantic flexibility and multiple possibilities. The lines describe a structural relationship, or interaction, that may be applied to concepts and objects outside of mathematics. Furthermore, his acknowledgment of the axiom's 'charm' somehow adds a personal perception, or sentimental value to the words, subtracting from their mathematical quality. This understanding permits a reading of the citation in *Trente et un au cube* that departs from its mathematical source, moving towards a lexical analysis of the shapes and structures it refers to. Perhaps it could be interpreted as a 'formalisation' of the poet–lover relation in *Trente et un au cube* reminiscent of Lacan's evolving approach to the sexual relation through the formulae and diagrams that were seen to avoid the intervention of intuition.

There are some resonances between the Bourbaki quote included in Roubaud's volume of love poetry and Lacan's outlining of the structure of the disjunctive sexual relation. Read as a description of love in structural terms, the Bourbaki quote insists on a distance between the couple: there is a part of oneself, a section of one's surrounding space, or 'voisinage', which remains inaccessible to the lover. The poet refers to two distinct points, each surrounded by an area that cannot be penetrated by the other. The mathematical phenomenon can be represented visually by the convergence of two circles, neighbourhoods of the points at their centres. Much like a Venn diagram, one circle, or neighbourhood, slightly overlaps the other, leaving its remaining space – the majority of its space – out of reach.  

This structural understanding of the distinction of the two points, isolated from one another by the boundaries of the neighbourhoods within which they reside, resembles the problematic relationship of the 'deux' in Lacan's work: the psychoanalyst refers to

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Lacan reformulates the notion more specifically as an impasse in the sexual relation: l'impossibilité d'établir [...] l'Un de la relation rapport sexuel.\(^{430}\)

Lacan evokes Aristophanes' myth of love in his account of the impossible sexual relation. In Plato's Symposium, the character explains that we are sundered beings, left to seek out our other half once physically separated from us by Zeus. Love, then, is the attempt 'to combine two in one' and 'heal the human sore'.\(^{431}\) To a certain extent, Lacan appears to echo this when he states 'L'amour [...] n'est que le désir d'être Un', and he also refers directly to Aristophanes' account in his theory of the subject.\(^{432}\) However, he does not endorse the ancient Greek representation of love, calling it 'pathétique' but 'leurrante'.\(^{433}\) He substitutes it with the evidence of analytic experience, which reveals that the search of the subject is not for his 'complément sexuel', but for 'la part à jamais perdue de lui-même'.\(^{434}\) For Lacan, the 'représentants' or 'figures' of this lost part of ourselves are the objets a, those reminders of primordial wholeness.\(^{435}\) Instead, while love may constitute our wish for oneness, it does not grant that wish. Instead, it is 'ce qui nous conduit à l'impossible d'établir la relation d'eux'.\(^{436}\) The use of 'd'eux' here specifies the love relationship as that which necessarily involves two, alluded to in the homophony that suggests deux. Thus, rather than fulfilling our search for that missing part of ourselves, making the subject whole, the unity of 'Un' is always supplanted by the disparity of 'd'eux/deux', and the only relationship characterised by oneness is that narcissistic 'mirage' of specularity.\(^{437}\)

Lacan's reference to 'la relation rapport sexuel' refers at once to the defining structures that differentiate the sexes, summarised in the formulae of sexuation that played such a key role earlier in this chapter, and to the (im)possibility of a sexual relationship between those defined as masculine and

\(^{429}\) Lacan, Encore, p. 12.


\(^{432}\) Lacan, Encore, p. 12.


\(^{436}\) Lacan, Encore, p. 12.

\(^{437}\) Lacan, Encore, p. 46.
feminine in psychoanalysis. Badiou transposes the implications of the formulae defining sexual difference into everyday terms, explaining that pleasure is the source of a separation between lovers:

Jacques Lacan nous rappelle que dans la sexualité, en réalité, chacun est en grande partie dans sa propre affaire [...]. Il y a la médiation du corps de l'autre, bien entendu, mais en fin de compte, la jouissance sera toujours votre jouissance. Le sexuel ne conjoint pas, il sépare. Que vous soyez nu(e), collé(e) à l'autre, est une image, une représentation imaginaire. Le réel, c'est que la jouissance vous emporte loin, très loin de l'autre.  

Badiou's reading of Lacan emphasises the sense of a physical distance between the lovers: pleasure divides, pursued and enjoyed by the individual through the mediation of the other's body. For Badiou, perceived notions of intimacy and proximity in the sexual encounter are illusory. In an experience that is summed up as 'pressing against the other', bodily contact is a means to individual pleasure.

While the homophony in the 'd'eux' of Lacan's 'relation d'eux' points to the discrepancy of the 'two' in the sexual relation, in Lacan's formulation it is the 'Others' – 'eux' – who come between the two lovers. Fink describes the 'Other' in Lacan's work as having many 'faces' or 'avatars', whose nuances shift over from one period of the psychoanalyst's thought to the next. There is the 'Other' of jouissance written into the formulae of sexuation, whose divisive powers in the sexual relation are manifested in the 'ex-sistence' of the feminine position, placing her out of the reach of the masculine. Fink also writes of the 'Other' as 'language', 'demand' and 'desire'. These three 'faces' of the Lacanian Other find themselves inextricably linked and as such, they form the barrier – 'eux' – which denies the possibility of the sexual relation.

Lacan makes the poignant observation that 'Ce qui parle n'a à faire qu'avec la solitude', suggesting that the subject in speech is destined to isolation and loneliness. Soler takes up the notion, pinpointing an 'impossibility' in speech, 'you speak with your lover, and the person who listens to you understands your words and sentences, and you can repeat them. You can even

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439 Fink, The Lacanian Subject, p. 13.
explain them. When you speak, you can develop meaning [...]. You can communicate that meaning and you can explain meaning, but the constant question for the listener is, what is he getting at? What is he after?". Soler's repeated use of the conjunction 'and', in addition to the insistent rhetorical anaphora in which 'you can' frequently recurs, both have the effect of delaying the critical questions. In a sense, it is as though the twists and turns in her explanation replicate what has been called the 'sliding', 'metonymy' or 'desire' in language. It is that which cannot be grasped, that lack, that absence of the referent which recalls the profound loss implicated in 'that first moment of symbolisation'. However, the void instils itself between speaker and other, or speaker and 'lover', for what the subject says is far removed, in both syntax and meaning, from what the listener hears. Thus, the 'impossibility' in speech is simply the 'impossibility to say what you want'; once our demands are put into words, something is lost and our interlocutor can never respond to us with what we truly demand.

While it is not the assumption of this study that Roubaud intends to draw together a mathematisation of space and Lacanian psychoanalysis, there are affinities between the two structures explored here. The distance between the two points in Bourbaki's theory of topology might be used to illustrate the sexual disjunction and the insulation of the subject in language according to Lacan's theory. The comparative reading of texts based on Lacanian theory and Roubaud's poems also allow for an extension into subsequent theory on the structure of the love relation that draws on the Lacanian notion of the disjunction. Irigaray in particular builds on Lacan's foundational statement of the impossibility of the sexual relation, seeking out the flourishing of love within the very space that divides the lovers. However, before this development in the understanding of the sexual disjunction can be considered in relation to Roubaud's Trente et un au cube, I want to question the nature of the disjunction in Roubaud's poems.

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442 Soler, 'The Subject and the Other (I)', p. 50.
443 Rose, Sexuality in the Field of Vision, p. 55.
444 Soler, 'The Subject and the Other (I)', p. 50.
The disjunction between poet and beloved is most prominent in the book's central poem, where the division between them is effected in the silent interval that separates the poem's two strophes. More than a structural division between the two terms of the couple, however, the space of silence on the page of the poem is aligned with the female beloved herself. Even if the alignment is one that prevents the controlling touch of the poet, the reader may feel a sense of ambivalence towards her position in the silent heart of the poem. Silence is explicitly referenced as a tool of restraint against the female in *Trente et un au cube*. At times in the volume, the poet's voice dominates the female, even muzzles her: 'que || ma voix te joigne | ma voix te place sur le plan de la page que [...] ma voix te | muselle'. The female beloved is silenced in the poet's representation of her across the pages of his poem: 'ma voix te plie. te silence'. In the reference to the folding of the lover, the reader might think of the foldout pages of the book in his or her hands, another reminder of the metaphoric relation between the poet's beloved and the material of the poem. Roubaud's terms evoking the muzzling and manipulation of his female love seem to resonate with the terms dividing poet and muse, psychoanalyst and feminine object in the early writings of Irigaray; the theorist finds in the poet–muse relationship a silencing, or stifling of the beloved.

There are silences in *Trente et un au cube* which are indeed intertwined with the sleep of the female:

```plaintext
ainsi vont les suites | de silences jusqu'au point | de la nuit où tu t'endors, || séparent (j'explore | le filtre des voisinages | du point de ton sommeil j'adhère au germe proche | de ton inconscience | tourne || au-dessus de ton engourdissement) approchent | d'avant (dans le chaud | de tes paroles s'engourdir | dissant le chaud de tes jambes || se repliant se | fermant dans les draps) les suites | de silences convergent vers le point unique | de ton sommeil l'approchent le || plus infiniment | possible d'avant et d'après (accompagnant ta respiration, graduées | par tes poumons plongeant de || plus en plus profond | dans ton sommeil).447
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In the first line of this extract, the blank spaces separating the segments become 'les suites | de silences' that the poem speaks of: both 'suites' and 'point' are followed by a space and preposition 'de', punctuating the noun phrases with little

446 Roubaud, *Trente et un au cube*, p. 117.
moments of silence. The poet continues in the language of topology encountered earlier in the Bourbaki citation, writing of 'le filtre des voisinages' which he explores, following the sequence of silences until he reaches the central 'point unique | de ton sommeil'. Recalling the distinct points in topology between which 'il existe un voisinage de chacun d'eux qui ne contient pas l'autre', here the lady's sleep can only be approached up to a certain limit both before and after it. In sleep, she necessarily leaves the poet alone; the topological limit is also representative of the poet's sexual frustration, for he notes the legs of his lover 'se repliant se | fermant dans les draps'. The silences are aligned with her breathing, becoming gradually heavier as the extract progresses. As the poet nears the sleeping female at the centre, falling deeper into her sleep, the passage ends in a sequence of alliterative play on the letter 'p' in 'par tes poumons plongeant de ||| plus en plus profond', in which the reader hears the deepening of her breathing as it occurs in the words of the poem.

The poet too listens to her breathing as she sleeps: 'et dans ta nuit | depuis le point de ta nuit ||| je ne suis rien (j'écoute ta respiration | engourdie je longe | le chaud de tes jambes serrées longues) je cherche encore || un coin dans ton sommeil que déjà le jour me | sépare biffant | les étoiles'. The reader is taken deeper into the night as the first two segments culminate in a repetition of 'nuit'. The poet himself then falls silent, 'je ne suis rien', only listening intently to the breathing of his lover, following the heat emanating from her legs that exclude him. The piece resembles an inquiry by Irigaray into the productive function of silence and separation in a relationship between two individuals:

Ce silence est un espace–temps qui t'est offert, sans rite ni vérité préétablie, a priori. Il est constitution d'une ouverture à toi, à l'autre qui n'est et ne sera jamais mien. Ce silence est possible grâce au fait que ni je ni toi ne sont tout, que nous sommes l'un et l'autre limités, marqués par le négatif, différents sans hiérarchie. Ce silence est le premier geste du j'aime à toi. Sans lui, le 'à' est impossible tel que je l'entends. Ce silence est condition d'un possible respect de moi et de l'autre dans leur limites.

The definition of silence as a space–time echoes the limited proximity of Roubaud's topological points, each defined by an area of space that remains

448 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 81.
449 Irigaray, J'aime à toi, p. 182.
inaccessible to any other point. Irigaray too writes of the limits of each term in the relationship not as constraint, but as a space in which the individuality of I or you may flourish without the encroachment of the other upon their being. The philosopher posits silence as the first stage in the process of ‘j’aime à toi’, a way of loving that is based on an irreducible distance between the lovers, in which the preposition ‘à’, or 'to', is a mediating space between two people: ‘Le "à" est le lieu de non-réduction de la personne à l'objet. Je t'aime, je te désire, je te prends, je te séduis, je t'ordonne, je t'instruis, etc. risquent toujours d'anéantir l'altérité de l'autre, de le/la transformer en mon bien, mon objet, de le/la réduire au/en mien’.450 The beloved is no longer object. According to the feminist philosopher, true lovers are ‘Eloignés par [leur] différence, mais présents l'un à l'autre’.451 To clarify, the presence involves trust, love and respect for the other, but the distance means allowing the alterity of the other to survive.452 This involves being faithful to oneself, avoiding the temptation to become (like) the other, but also requires the acceptance that the other can never be completely revealed to us, appropriated by us, remaining, in part, a 'mystery'.453 The aim is to protect the subjectivity of each term in the relationship, avoiding the collapse of intimacy into sameness.

Although Irigaray's ideas here build constructively on the notion of the Lacanian disjunction, finding in the separating spaces within the relation a positivity that allows the flourishing of individual subjectivity, to accept that there will remain an element of 'mystery' in a lover may be a difficult reality to grapple with. We have seen that sleep and silence seem at times to represent the suppression and manipulation of the beloved in Trente et un au cube, signaling the dominant position of the poet who pens his love object into the text. There are also allusions in these moments to a sense of anxiety felt by the poet. Sleep is a separating space that isolates him from the beloved, and he is left yearning in her absence: ‘(ton sommeil | dans la chaleur de | tes jambes fermées) qui m'exclut sans espoir’.454 Puff too points out that the beloved's sleep is often a source of anxiety for the poet, who is subsequently excluded from her

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450 Irigaray, *J’aime à toi*, p. 172.
452 Irigaray, *Être Deux*, p. 16 and p. 94.
embrace. Roubaud does not attempt in *Trente et un au cube* to portray an impossible ideal, the mythical unity of the love relation that sees two become one. Instead, he interweaves moments of anxiety and insecurity in separation with silences that allow the presence of his beloved to grow, her breathing emanating through the words of the poem in sleep. The poet himself is overwhelmed with a silence so absolute that he hears the rhythm of his lover's breathing: 'les || suites de silences | m'enveloppent me recouvrent'. As Irigaray states, the space between is a 'geste', an act of giving, or offering oneself: 'T'écouter demande donc que je me rende disponible'.

### 3.9 Spaces of Silence in the Composition of *Trente et un au cube*

In Irigaray's reading and at moments of Roubaud's *Trente et un au cube*, the space between lovers is a gesture that allows the subjectivity of each term in the relation to thrive. To remain silent and listen completely to the other, to relinquish possession, in a sense, and allow the 'mystery' of an other is an act of giving, because it exposes the self to risk: what if she leaves? What if I am left alone? When the poet reveals this fear in poem 16 of *Trente et un au cube*, the alterity of his beloved is expressed in terms that see her flee the page on which he pens the rhythms of his poem, while he simultaneously addresses her as his (first) reader. What do the silent spaces in the volume therefore mean for the poet and his relation with (the beloved as) his reader?

The poet's gesture is described as a weaving of pockets of protective silences around his lover: 'déjà le jour | a vieilli les silences que | je cousais autour | de toi (séquences brodées | de silences ordonnant || ta surface endormie disposant caches chemins repères sur | ton corps en sommeil) je repars de rien, séparé'. Roubaud's reference to stitching, or sewing, is a reminder of his troubadour intentions, part of his process of *entrebescar* intricately weaving patterns of rhyme words into systems that are able to activate the memory of the person who reads, hears, or recites the poem. He entwines silences into the poem, the blanks between segments that create the jagged rhythm of *Trente et un au cube*. The silences here are inextricably linked to the body of his lover, but

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457 Irigaray, *J'aime à toi*, pp. 183-84.
rather than erasing her presence or silencing her, they create secret pockets of resistance, routes of possibility and monuments to her being: 'caches chemins repères'. The reference to 'repères' in particular is suggestive of Roubaud's theory of poetry as memory. The role of silence in rhythm is to create 'repères'; memorable patterns and divisions in language.

The poet reverses the process of writing in black ink on a white page, when he states: 'J’ARRANGE LE BLANC | dans le noir je prends pied dans | ta substance'. The composition of the poem consists in blank spaces being built into the black architecture of writing rather than the flowing of black ink along the page. The spaces of silence, associated with the female lover, her respiration and the web of rhythm the poet weaves around her take on a substantial quality that distances them from notions of emptiness or void usually associated with blank spaces. Instead, spaces of silence in *Trente et un au cube* are a tangible and enduring material entity: 'les pierres || blanches de l'espace'. If the reader follows these stepping-stones to the centre of the labyrinth, he or she finds the female lover is the breathing heart of the poem itself:

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musique de toi transmise | entre blanc et noir | par les fusées elliptiques |
et les carreaux d'étendue || patchwork buissonant | où progressent les |
silences | car tu es le lieu | de leur migration tu fixes | les silences dans |
ton pouls [...] musique de toi | détournée du blanc dans | le noir |
(l'étendue | cantatrice de ta peau | identiquement traverse || le vide |
nuitte').
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The contrast of the black inked words against the blank spaces of the page become the squares of a patchwork quilt, the singing skin of the female spread across the void of night. This 'musique de toi' is at once the poem that sings of her in black and white, and the silences that emanate from her own body, her breathing: 'ton pouls'. She is the diversion of white spaces within black writing, 'détournée du blanc dans | le noir', and the blanks spaces are constitutive of the text, acquiring an importance greater than that of the black writing.

In *Trente et un au cube*, the poet writes that the spaces in his text retain the presence of his addressee: 'pour | t'entraîner je dispose au | blanc de mes

The spaces are bordered, or limited; windows that look out beyond the text, before taking on the beauty of stars. A similar transition takes place in *Dire la poésie*, in which Roubaud compares the windows to sheets of paper:

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les ouvertures dans le mur
pas vraiment des fenêtres de grandes feuilles de papier
semi transparent translucide.
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These openings in the walls undergo a transformation of light and sound:

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la lumière
brouillant les arbres à travers les feuilles de papier
translucide au silence créant cette marge violette et
verte et mélangée de bruit à ma voix disant ces poèmes.
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The silent, almost transparent sheets of paper come alive with the noise of green and purple hues. Some of their colour comes from the interaction of light with the trees beyond the windows: the poet's distraction during the poetry reading is incorporated into the poem, the memories of the moments of composition absorbed into the spaces dividing the word units of the poem. The distraction of colours and sounds becomes a margin to Roubaud's voice, incorporated into his written text. Yet there is a sense that these margins, the 'feuilles de papier', or windows that stand for the silences structuring a poem, represent spaces that exceed the poet. However planned and crafted these sections of his poetry might be in reality, they appear to the reader as moments in which the poet is distracted, his mind wondering.

The 'feuilles de papier' of which Roubaud's windows are constructed calls to mind the body of the poem as diaphanous in the memory of the reader. In Cavalcanti's 'Dona me prega', the body of the beloved lady is resplendent against the lamplight. In Roubaud's reading of the Italian poem, its self-reflexivity also speaks of the body of the poem itself: like the lady glows more brightly before the gaze of her lover, so too a poem is illuminated by its interaction with a person's memory. For Roubaud, it is a poem's rhythm that

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463 Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 10.
464 Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 16.
particularly insinuates itself into memory: clashing and coinciding with the patterns memorised throughout a lifetime of poetry reading and recitation. It is then the blank spaces in a poem – 'marge [...] à ma voix' – that shape it for its reader. These blank spaces become imbued with the memories of the reader - senses of both familiarity and contrast conjured up by a poem's metre – and so, like diaphanous windows they let the reader into the text, allowing him or her to contribute to its creation through reading.

In *Trente et un au cube*, the tree leaves outside brush against the bedroom window of the lovers, inviting the reader into the intimate space within:

le || feuillage pressant | la fenêtre voulant dire | entrer octobre un | matin
ton ventre sous mes | mains toi séjournant dans la || compagnie du so |
leil bougeant de mes mains som | brement et lumi | neusement
sourcement à | la fois grimpant dans mes mains || qui t'ouvrent te
rferment comme des feuillages | si toi dans mes mains | et de la main du
soleil | t'ouvrant t'élevant bougeant.465

In the extract, the female figure is the page of the poem, which the poet folds and opens in his hands. Nevertheless, she herself stirs, 'grimpant' and 'bougeant' in his hands, until she seems somehow to overflow them, blossoming like the tree under the light of the sun 't'ouvrant t'élevant'. The image recalls the central poem of the book, in which the poet struggles to retain his love object in the cube. Here the sun shining into the room hints at the possibility of escape offered by the window in the text; it is at once a space through which the poet symbolically invites the reader into his text and a reminder that the poem opens out onto the unknown in doing so.

In another passage towards the end of the volume, the poem itself is referred to again in terms evoking its movement:

—permutations circulaires de groupes | traçants courant elles-mêmes || sur un fond fixe de | gouttes de crayons ou d'encre ||—glissements de sons | en presque durées égales | en presque constantes é- || lévations et chutes | et moments de retour —cœur | changeant des images | rouvertes, la reprise de | leur effondrement. ce po- || ême entre dans ta | vue. qu'il y bouge, qu'il force | ton angoisse. ce || la suffira. je ne de | mande pas d'autre utili || tê. qu'il soit cela | seulement. qu'il t'y enferme. || ensuite vienne le | sens que tu lui donneras | le demain de ta lecture || ton

The extract seems to stir before the reader's eyes, shot through with the same sense of flux that characterises much of *Trente et un au cube*. Circular permutations and sliding sounds effect rises, falls and returns, tracing their itinerary in droplets of pencil and ink. The poem's reference to itself may be gleaned from these sounds played out 'en presque durées égales' and the 'permutations circulaires de groupes', evoking the multiplication of *tanka* patterns that run through the book at various levels. The poet expresses his intention for the poem to move before the gaze of his lover, to enclose her, also his reader, within it. However, it is during her subsequent readings of the poem, 'le demain de ta lecture', that she will bestow (her) meaning onto the poem. In the 'paraphe de ton œil', her eye writes the text as it reads its lines; her finger imposes the signature of her presence along its lines, fleshing out its bones with the fulfilment of its potential that her reading brings. The poem is an offering to the lover–reader, an invitation for her in turn to bestow meaning upon the text: 'le | sens que tu lui donneras | le demain de ta lecture'. It is a meaning as individual as each signature – 'paraphe' – and perhaps it is possible to say that the poem changes in some way on each reading and in relation to each of its readers.

Spaces of silence in the love relation and in the poetic structure of *Trente et un au cube* are like windows: they provide a view beyond that of the poet, inviting the other into the creation of meaning in his text. Just as feminine subjectivity is given space to breathe in the love relation, so too the reader is encouraged to fill the spaces of potential in Roubaud's poetry. My conclusions to this section cannot, however, exclude those spaces that stifle and threaten the feminine presence in the volume. There is what might be called a vacillation in Roubaud's text between different understandings of the disjunction in the relation. Although it is a source of anxiety, yearning and a wish to possess the other, the space between lovers may be interpreted as a positive one that allows for the co-existence of both terms in the relation. Through the spaces that constitute the rhythms of the poems in *Trente et un au cube*, there is an opening

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up of the text to the creation of meaning within it, independent of the written lines of the poet. Perhaps it can be said that meaning in Trente et un au cube is the result of a collaborative effort between the poet and his reader, just as the male lover accepts that a space—between, with the anxiety and mystery that that sustains, is the way in which his beloved's existence may have space to breathe.

3.10 Conclusion
The analogy between Irigaray's reading of the feminine position in Lacanian theory and the female as aligned with poetic form in Roubaud's poetry has a singular power to illuminate the role of 'potential' in Roubaud's poetry. Potential in literary constraint is an invitation to the reader to engage with the text: it poses questions and stimulates an investigative approach to reading. In Roubaud's conception of poetry, the presence of constraint carves out spaces in the text, markers of place and time, which activate an interaction with memory. The reader invests these spaces in the text with his or her own memories and associations, and in turn, the form of the poem takes root in the memory of the reader. Numerical constraint combines with the multiple dimensions of a poem's form in the insinuation of a poem in memory: the shape of the poem on the page is reflected in the sounds that frame its outline when it is read aloud, just as a poem's sounds are present in a reader's encounter with its printed form. While a poem's sounds, shapes and structural formation are carefully composed by the poet, the concept of 'potential' offers the fullest construction of meaning in a text to the reader.

The otherness of the reader can be considered in the light of Lacan's theorisation of the feminine, particularly in the way in which Irigaray deconstructs the system. She reads Freud in Lacan's schema of sexuation, comparing the geometrical spaces envisaged in set theory to the visual prominence of male anatomy in the earlier psychoanalyst's theory of castration. While Lacan moves away from biological concepts in Freud, Irigaray finds in both a patriarchal writing of woman into the story. The psychoanalyst is likened to the male poet, who gains support in his creativity from the muse: she is an empty figure, a blank canvas onto which the writer projects his fantasy. However, Irigaray draws out the pockets of resistance in Lacan's theory: the feminine not only eludes the masculine term, but as that which cannot be
contained, her potential exceeds him. The very system that constructs the
defeminine in the negative image of masculinity, the 'not-all' that confirms that
which is 'whole', necessarily fails without her presence. When Roubaud aligns
poetic form with the diaphanous body of the loved female, he suggests that a
poem's form reflects the careful construction of the poet. As diaphanous
material, a poem's form also reflects the presence of the reader who contributes
to the construction of meaning in the text through an interaction between form
and memory. In the same way that Lacan's feminine eludes classification
through the theorist's very definition of her as 'what he is not', so too the fullest
potential of the poet's work exceeds him. The feminine resists from within the
structures that attempt to enclose her.

It would seem that Roubaud revolts against conceptions of the lover as
muse, which he finds in the poetry of Éluard. In Trente et un au cube, the co-
existence of the poet and his lover is not modelled on the game of mirrors that
the Surrealist poet explores and appears to criticise in his challenge to the
inflexibility of binary forms and patterns. In her bodily difference, the lover in
Roubaud's text resists the trap of specularity set up in some of Éluard's work:
she is not the poetic muse who reflects back an image of the poet himself; she is
not the projection of the self-same that Irigaray deplores in Freudian
constructions of the feminine. Her otherness to Roubaud's male poet – the
dazzling of her wings, her creaturely transformation – seems rather to distance
her from him, providing her with a sense of autonomy within his writing.
Moreover, through the many references to the female's position at, or as, the
central axis of the poem, she also comes to be aligned with the unusually large
space of silence that separates the two verses of the sixteenth poem: the true
centre of the book and the space that divides the poet's touch from the form of
the female.

I have read this distance separating the lovers in Trente et un au cube
through the structure of the sexual disjunction, or the impossibility of the sexual
relation in Lacanian psychoanalysis. The sexual relation in Lacan's work is a
layered concept: it is at once the relation between the masculine and feminine
terms in the psychoanalyst's formulae of sexuation and the coming together of
the two in sexual terms. Just as Lacan's conception of the sexual relation may be
understood on multiple levels – which are nonetheless interrelated – so too does
the disjunction function in different ways between the poet and his beloved. The distance gives rise to anxiety – the knowledge that the beloved cannot be possessed and the loss on the part of the poet who relinquishes some of his control, allowing for the interactions between the text and the singular investment of each reader's memory in the poem. However, the separation between the lovers is also a space in which each individual subject is allowed to flourish, comparable to the space-between that characterises the Irigarayan love relation both in Étre Deux and J'aime à toi – titles which exemplify the respected subjectivity of both terms that constitute the love relation. The respected space means the beloved thrives within the couple, just as the spaces dispersed throughout Trente et un au cube welcome the participation of the reader in creating meaning in the poem, sites which invite interactions with memory.

I offer no resolution of these contrasting interpretations of the disjunction, since Roubaud includes them all in his trobar clus treatise on love. There is violence and manipulation in his treatment of the female – a reminder that she exists in Trente et un au cube as the poet represents her on the page – and yet he distributes spaces throughout the text in which her presence may grow, acknowledging her breathing as the beating heart of the poem.
4. Chapter Three

Form, Loss and Love in Poetry

4.1 Introduction

Roubaud's later poetic texts reach beyond their boundaries towards the poet's life experiences, even more so than his early poetry volumes. The poet has written in particular of his work as existing in the interstice between two periods of mourning in his life: 'pris entre deux "bords" de mort'.\(^{467}\) The impetus for Roubaud's first major poetry collection, *Signe d'appartenance* (1967), came when the poet was mourning the loss of his brother. He writes of *beginning to speak*, 'selon ma manière de dire qui est la poésie', binding together the existence of poetry and the most intensely personal of periods encountered.\(^{468}\) Yet life alters the creative path of the poet; the unexpected overwhelms and just as it once was the trigger for the beginning of poetry, it also has the power to silence it.\(^{469}\) Following the unexpected death of his wife, the second of his "bords" de mort', Roubaud tells his reader: 'j'étais comme silencieux'.\(^{470}\)

The later works of Roubaud's oeuvre inevitably bear the weight of his loss of Alix Cléo, they are shaped by it and this study takes the form of a trajectory reflecting the poet's evolving relationship with poetic structure. My project began with Roubaud's construction of an approach to love in poetry. In *Trente et un au cube* (1973), it is a matter of moving away from the *tabula rasa* of Surrealist verse, building on tradition, innovating and intricately weaving an expression of love in form. There are attempts in the volume to formalise love through the language of poetry, numerical constraint, and mathematical structure. In later volumes *Du noir tombe* (1985) and *Quelque chose noir* (1986), there is what might be described as an undoing of form, what Roubaud has called his 'aphasie' in poetry.\(^{471}\) The collection titles themselves signal formlessness and a lack of measure, or definition; their indeterminate references


\(^{468}\) Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 131.

\(^{469}\) In a radio interview, Roubaud explains that he had planned the trajectory of his poetry publications from the outset, aiming for nine works that would culminate in the recently published *Octogone* in 2014. *Quelque chose noir* cannot have been part of that plan, since it was written in response to the unexpected passing of Alix Cléo. See Roubaud's radio interview 'Page 124 – Oubli', *Le Carnet d'or*, France Culture, 19 April 2014.

\(^{470}\) Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 132.

\(^{471}\) Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 131.
to the colour black and 'some thing' a far cry from the numerical precision and cubic shaping evoked by the title of *Trente et un au cube*.

What has thus far been a theoretical account of the relation between the poet and his muse will become a close reading of the particular creative partnership between Jacques Roubaud and his late wife, Alix Cléo, within the parameters of Jacques Roubaud's writing. The disjunction that I found to be at the heart of the lovers’ collaboration in *Trente et un au cube* becomes concretised, and the texts I will be reading were all produced after the death of Alix Cléo and in response to it. They include *Du noir tombe*, *Quelque chose noir* and *Octogone*. Although some parts of the texts will be characterised by moments lived by the poet, this study does not slip into the realms of life writing and autobiographical analysis. I continue to focus on the links between love and poetic form, through close readings of Roubaud's writings. Roubaud's later works draw on and expand the conceptions of love and poetic form that constitute *Trente et un au cube* and my readings reflect this development.

I will explore some of the ways in which the absolute disjunction created in the wake of Alix Cléo's passing is manifested in Jacques Roubaud's writing by re-tracing the journey thus far in this selection of works written after her death. I began this project with the particular intertwining of form and love that characterised Roubaud's outlook on poetry composition as he embarked on life as a poet. In the current chapter, I will reconsider the place of form in Roubaud's poetry through my readings of a book that scarcely features in commentaries on Roubaud's writing, *Du noir tombe*. What becomes of poetic form when love is lost and silence threatens to engulf language completely?

I will then consider the particular relationship between form and the female beloved in Roubaud's elegiac *Quelque chose noir*. How does the place of Alix Cléo in this volume relate to that of the female beloved trapped in the poetic cube of the earlier *Trente et un au cube*? In Chapter Two, I explored the network of relations linking the respective positions of the beloved in Roubaud's poem, the Lacanian feminine, and the reader who engages with constraint in the space of *Trente et un au cube*. I found the interaction between these relations to be at the root of memory play in Roubaud's text, and the position of the beloved to coincide with that of the reader. In the second part of the current chapter, I will explore the role of form and constraint in a volume written in the wake of
the loss of the poet's first reader. I will show something of the struggle between
two-dimensional and cubic spaces in Quelque chose noir, and the inadequacy of
either in retaining the memory of Roubaud's deceased wife. What is the position
of the reader in relation to the text?

The final part of this chapter corresponds to the end of Chapter Two, in
that it considers the place of the beloved's breathing in poetic language: it will
focus on the nature of the creative collaboration that goes on between Alix Cléo
and Jacques Roubaud as the poet mourns his loss. Alix Cléo was a
photographer, writer and translator, who shared her creative ideas with her
husband and frequently worked with him.\textsuperscript{472} Having suffered since her
childhood with asthma, a pulmonary embolism took her life suddenly in January
1983. Can we speak of collaboration in poetic form even after the poet's beloved
has passed away? Does the creative partnership necessarily fade with the death
of the beloved, or is it somehow appropriated by the person left behind? What is
the nature of that appropriation? I will provide close readings of selected poems
from Quelque chose noir and consider the place of one of Alix Cléo's photos –
Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration – in Jacques Roubaud's
writing.\textsuperscript{473} Although the particular focus of my project is Roubaud's poetry, I
will look at the place of the photo in a passage from the author's prose volume
Le Grand incendie de Londres. Not only does the passage in question bear traits
of Roubaud's adoption of the troubadour poetry aesthetic, entrebescar, but it
also anticipates – and retrospectively interacts with – a poem featured in
Roubaud's most recent collection to be published, Octogone. In Trente et un au
cube, the beloved's breathing is the beating heart of the poet's writing. How does
Alix Cléo's breath infiltrate Roubaud's later writing through her photo?

4.2 When Darkness Falls: Love, Mourning and the Unravelling of Form

Quelque chose noir is very often the point of departure for commentators
working on Roubaud's poetry of love in mourning. The volume contains some of

\textsuperscript{472} See, for example, their joint translation of Gertrude Stein's Lifting Belly, published in Action

\textsuperscript{473} This particular photo taken by Alix Cléo is reprinted in Hélène Gianneccchini, Une image
peut-être vraie: Alix Cléo Roubaud (Paris: Seuil, 2014), p. 115. See also the catalogue to the
posthumous exhibition of Alix Cléo's work at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Alix Cléo:
Photographies, ed. by Anne Birolete-Lemagny, Hélène Gianneccchini and Dominique Versavel
the first poems written after Alix Cléo died: its final poem, 'Rien', is dated 1983, the year of Alix Cléo's death, and the title of its first poem signals its composition date of May 1985, 'Méditation du 12/5/85'. The discrepancy in the dates is accounted for in the book's opening:

Je me trouvai devant ce silence inarticulé un peu comme le bois certains en de semblables moments ont pensé déchiffrer l'esprit dans quelque rémanence cela fut pour eux une consolation ou du redoublement de l'horreur pas moi.

A world apart from the opening lines of Trente et un au cube, in which the addressee, the poet's beloved, was the impetus for the production of the words on the page – 'JE DÉTIENS MILLION de | syllabes comptées pour toi' – the poet in Quelque chose noir is faced with emptiness. The silence here is not one that structures the poetry, the tangible component of the poem's form that we encountered in the last chapter. Instead, it engulfs the poet, leaving him inarticulate, motionless, stuck in his grief. There is no 'toi', only the impersonal 'certains' from whom the poet distances himself; it is a reference that doubles his isolation. The opening to the volume begins – 'Je' – and ends – 'moi' – with the poet alone. The passé simple tense takes the reader back to a past distanced by the poet from the present, however, and the beginning of Quelque chose noir marks the end of his silence. The book is thus testimony to a hiatus in Roubaud's life as a poet.

The interruption in Roubaud's poetry writing is made explicit to the reader in a poem called '1983: janvier. 1985: juin'. The space within the poem's title represents the void in Roubaud's poetry production and the full stop after 'janvier' marks a definitive ending in the poet's life, the point after which nothing will ever be the same. There is no full stop after 'juin', however, suggesting that the pathway towards poetry remains open onwards from the point of Quelque chose noir. In the first line of the poem, Roubaud explains: 'Le registre rythmique de la parole me fait horreur'. He cannot bring himself even

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475 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 11.
476 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 9.
477 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 33.
478 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 33.
to read poetry any longer: 'Je ne parviens pas à ouvrir un seul livre contenant de la poésie', preferring instead to read 'de la prose inoffensive'. With love wrenched from the formula that defined Roubaud's existence as poet, poetry as he knows it becomes impossible. The intertwining of love and language – 'lamourlapoésielamour' – that was the principal concern of Trente et un au cube, is now inconceivable. In another poem, 'Aphasie', Roubaud presents the particular stages of the undoing of his poetic theory:

Jakobson dit que l'aphasie mange la langue à l'envers de son acquisition. Les articulations les plus récentes partent les premières.

Une bouche qui se défait commence par les lèvres.

J'ai pensé la même chose du vers. les règles du vers disparaissent une à une dans sa destruction, selon un ordre, aussi, aphasique. Comme si les poètes défaisaient leur bâtiment étage par étage. Sans le faire exploser d'un coup.

Devant ta mort je suis resté silencieux.

Je n'ai pas pu parler pendant presque trente mois.

Je ne pouvais plus parler selon ma manière de dire qui est la poésie.

The mouth is the site of the fusion of poetry and love in Trente et un au cube, bringing together the 'langue' of poetry and the kiss: 'LA BOUCHE EST DOUBLE et | la langue est double dans la | bouche et dans la double | bouche naît l'unique langue | langue des baisers et du || chant'. In 'Aphasie', the 'chant' constructed in Trente et un au cube is unravelled from the very lips on which it began. The passage in the later volume also alludes to the principles behind the construction of Trente et un au cube in its reference to the notion of order and rules forming a 'bâtiment' in poetry. The cubic construction that holds the poet's beloved within its centre in the earlier book is here undone floor by floor, destroyed before the eyes of the reader following the prosaic lines on the page. Nevertheless, insofar as Quelque chose noir is the point at which Roubaud's silence is broken, its poems dated May 1985 marking 'presque trente mois' after the death of Alix Cléo, it necessarily presents itself as a volume of poetry.

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479 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 33.
480 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 131. Punctuation reproduced from the original.
481 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 21.
The form of the poems in *Quelque chose noir* has drawn much critical attention, often centred on the question of genre. Christelle Reggiani writes of the volume that 'la poésie précaire paraît constamment à la limite de verser dans la prose'.\(^{482}\) Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck finds in *Quelque chose noir* a 'poétique ablatif' and a 'raréfaction [...] des moyens'; she contrasts its poems to those of *Trente et un au cube*, pointing to a 'poétique austère de la phrase, qui [...] n’use quasiment jamais du divorce de la mesure et de la syntaxe'.\(^{483}\) While the clashing boundaries of syntactical and metrical measure are the source of texture in *Trente et un au cube*, *Quelque chose noir* is described in terms of its sparse idiom: 'Peu d’enjambements mais des phrases qui se prolongent au-delà de la ligne, comme des versets ou des paragraphes de prose, ou s’arrêtent avant, comme des vers. [...] Des poèmes, donc, de privation'.\(^{484}\)

The concern in both analyses is with the line of poetry, or 'vers', and Roubaud's decisive break with the free verse of Surrealist poetry that characterised his early composition processes. Reggiani's wordplay in her reference to a poetry constantly about to 'verser dans la prose' highlights the 'vers' as the point at which the distinction between poetry and prose is blurred. Cardonne-Arlyck points out the missing play between the syllabic and syntactic lines that was such a prominent feature of *Trente et un au cube*. In *Quelque chose noir*, there are lines, sometimes paragraphs, of prose. Poems characterised by shorter lines bear little trace of tangible syllabic patterning, placed at a remove from the poetic line by the simile in Cardonne-Arlyck's evaluation: 'comme des vers'. In Puff's words, *Quelque chose noir* is a 'négation stricte de la poésie', haunted at every step by what is missing from it:

> on se souvient du modèle de l'entrebesar rythmique – l'entrelacement des langues dans le baiser – et des conceptions des troubadours, qui lient indissolublement amour et poésie. De cela il saurait plus être question. Pas plus d'ailleurs que l'un des effets du rythme comme jeu de langage, qui est la reconfiguration du temps'.\(^{485}\)


\(^{483}\) Cardonne-Arlyck, *Véracités*, p. 247.

\(^{484}\) Cardonne-Arlyck, *Véracités*, p. 247.

The aesthetic of entrebescar present in so much of Roubaud's poetry is now but a memory, the intertwining of rhythms, rhymes and lexical fields unravelling in the wake of Roubaud's bereavement. What Puff had seen as an attempt to reconfigure time through the contours of rhythm in Trente et un au cube becomes impossible in a life full of the before and after of death.

Comparisons with Roubaud's earlier poetic works are inevitable, as the lines between Roubaud's poetic theory, composition processes and the poetry itself are rarely clear-cut. It is therefore understandable that many readings of Quelque chose noir allude to that which came before, present now only as a shadow, or an echo of a possibility. Ben Lerner writes of the experience of loss in the work of another writer, identifying the very phenomenon that seems to bring together commentators on Roubaud's poetry of mourning: 'the felt unavailability of traditional lyric categories; the instruction to read [the] writing as poetry – and especially as lyric poetry – catalyzes an experience of their loss, like a sensation in a phantom limb'. Indeed, Roubaud's volume, published within Gallimard's poetry collection, is subtitled as 'Poésie'. Nevertheless, its reader cannot help but feel that the dynamics have changed and that the poetry alluded to, both on the cover of the volume and within, is somehow a distant memory. What was 'catalyzes' what is now unavailable in poetic form.

Before embarking on my own reading of the relationship between form and the lost beloved in Quelque chose noir, I would like to explore the nature of the poetic silence that defined Roubaud's existence in the wake of Alix Cléo's death. Although silence, in many forms, is central to Quelque chose noir, and despite the ambiguity in the genre of the poems, I will be working from the premise that the book does nevertheless mark the end of a definitive silence in poetic output, and a new beginning in poetry composition. With these assumptions in mind, I turn now to Du noir tombe. The volume is made up of nineteen poems by Jacques Roubaud, accompanied by artwork – 'dessins' – by Jean Gaudaire-Thor. The book has received very little critical attention, as I mentioned, but I believe it to be an important point of reference for my consideration of Roubaud's poetry written after Alix Cléo's death. Roubaud breaks his silence with the first poems of Quelque chose noir in May 1985, but

the publication date of *Du noir tombe* is also 1985, and a note at the end of the book indicates a composition period of slightly earlier that same year: 'Du Noir Tombe, de JR est une suite de 19 variations écrites spécialement pour ce projet, en mars–avril'.

If *Du noir tombe* did not break the poet's silence, its 'suite de 19 variations' were part of that very silence and somehow characterised by it. What does it mean for poems to be written from within silence on poetry?

As with *Quelque chose noir*, there are allusions within the work to Roubaud's previous poetic concerns. The book's nineteen poems are divided into six groups of three; each of the three poems within a group contains almost exactly the same words, in the same order, the first line of each appearing thus:

1. nuit
2. nuit
3. nuit
4. un silence
5. un silence
6. un silence
7. la nuit
8. la nuit
9. la nuit
10. le noir
11. le noir
12. le noir
13. un silence
14. un silence
15. un silence
16. une couleur
17. une couleur
18. une couleur
19. fenêtre

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The view as a list of the first words of each poem shows the pattern of the sestina underlying the overall structure of the series. Invented by troubadour Arnaut Daniel, the sestina comprised six stanzas and an envoi. Roubaud pinpoints the 'le secret de la sextine' in the complex permutation of rhyme words – 'mots-rimes' – that create echoes throughout the form. The poet describes the innovative pattern as 'une imbrication' of 'assonances–consonances sur les mots-rimes', but also one which draws out 'une dissonance dans les assonances'. The 'rhyme words' do not necessarily rhyme, but rather are assonant and consonant sounds. The phonic effect produced is not random; rather the shifting pattern is generated through the mathematically structured movement of the same set of words appearing in each of the poem's six stanzas.

Roubaud uses the figure of the snail to represent the 'imbrication' of the 'mots-rimes' in a sestina. The rhyme words are listed vertically according to their order within the first stanza and the spiral is drawn working inwards from the sixth position at the bottom of the list, through the first at the top, ending at the third position. The trajectory of the spiral from this sixth position inwards gives the order of the rhyme words within the next stanza and the same steps can be followed in each new sequence until the series of six stanzas is complete. The order produced in the sequences can be represented thus, where each number represents a rhyme word and each letter a new stanza:

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a.  1 2 3 4 5 6
b.  6 1 5 2 4 3
c.  3 6 4 1 2 5
d.  5 3 2 6 1 4
e.  4 5 1 3 6 2
f.  2 4 6 5 3 1
```

Following this permutation, the pattern of rhyme words is never repeated within the six stanzas, ensuring a constantly original and stimulating formal structure.

Perhaps the particular permutation of rhyme words in the sestina is what leads Roubaud to write of the sestina's 'séduction poétique musicale et
The composition of the troubadour canso was inextricably linked with this notion of seduction, or an appeal to the beloved lady, and its structural ingenuity is therefore tied up in desire. For Roubaud, the shape of the 'escargot' used to calculate the sequences of rhyme words in the sestina is a symbol of the interconnectedness of the poem's formal and amorous ambitions: 'elle lie la permutation au poème plus fermement, l'escargot étant un animal pour qui chair et ongle sont particulièrement proches.'\(^{492}\) In addition to the entangling of flesh and skeleton, content and form, the image is suggestive of a sense of security in the architecture of the rhyme words, which holds together the poem 'fermement'. It is not the only reference Roubaud makes to the notions of protection and durability in a poem's structure, and the sestina's arrangement of rhyme words is an example of the entrebescar that Roubaud placed at the heart of his love poetry in Trente et un au cube.

This aside into the intricacies of the sestina form indicates the ways in which it is not similar to the structure of the poems that make up Du noir tombe. While the overarching architecture of six sections and an envoi in the book does invite a comparison with the form, the distinctive intertwining of the sestina's six stanzas through the engineered movement of assonant or consonant words is not present in the collection. Instead, the wording of each of the three poems belonging to a group is almost identical and each threefold repetition of a poem is followed by three repetitions of the next. There are no organised patterns or sequences connecting the six groups either, apart from the aleatory recurrence of references to night – 'nuit', 'la nuit', or 'le noir' – and silence – 'un silence' – which dominate the short collection. Roubaud appears to hint at the sestina form from within the arrangement of Du noir tombe, but delving beyond the surface reveals that the differences are greater than the similarities. In fact, the comparison itself between the sestina and Du noir tombe highlights the starker nature of these poems which are imbued with the sombre tones of the poet's grief and we are reminded of Puff's analysis: mourning his love has meant the impossibility of entrebescar for the poet.

Further comparisons – or contrasts – between Du noir tombe and Roubaud's other poetic concerns and works are invited in the note that closes the

\(^{491}\) Roubaud, Description du projet, p. 107.
\(^{492}\) Roubaud, La Fleur inverse, p. 296.
book. Referring to the nineteen 'variations' presented in the book, Roubaud insists that they are particularly unlike those that make up a previous work:

‘Elles sont toutes différentes de celles constituant le livre Dors, publié chez Gallimard en 1981.’ The statement naturally arouses the curiosity of the reader, particularly one who is accustomed to the intertextualities and multiple connections that both form a network within Roubaud's oeuvre and reach beyond it. Why – or how – are the 'variations' of Du noir tombe so completely different from those that make up the poet's earlier Dors? What might a comparison with Dors add to a reading of Du noir tombe?

The first difference in the approaches of the two books is manifested in their respective titles. The poetic voice of Dors addresses its listener in the second-person singular form; the title is the mark of a volume that is explicitly oral. In a section preceding Dors entitled 'Indication', Roubaud defines the book as 'un programme de lecture' whose poems 'ont été conçus pour être dits, pour être transportés réellement par la voix'. Not only are the poems to be read aloud, but also when the end of the section is reached, the poet instructs that the entire sequence is to be read again 'dans l'ordre inverse'. However, Roubaud states that the written page is not to be understood as 'une notation, une partition de la voix' and the silences in the vocalisation of the poems are not to be equated with the blanks on the page. Instead, the two modes of reading are described as 'presque autonomes':

l'une et l'autre lecture construisent, imaginaire, un double, qui est cette poésie, absente de chaque poème, s'il est entendu ou lu, mais plutôt se situe derrière chacun, un peu derrière chacun, à l'écart oblique et qui derrière chacun vous regarde.

These instructions on the reading process echo Roubaud's writings on the place of memory in poetry reading and writing. The poet encourages the insinuation of the poems in memory through the double reading of the sequence, first in the order in which they are printed on the page, then in reverse order.

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493 Roubaud, Du noir tombe, not paginated.  
494 Roubaud, Dors, p. 33.  
495 Roubaud, Dors, p. 33.  
496 Roubaud, Dors, p. 33. Spacing reproduced from the original here and in later citations from the volume.
Another double in the reading experience of *Dors* is that of the voice and the visual page; two dimensions which interact to encourage a link with the reader's memory. This twofold notion of a reading that watches on from behind the reader reiterates the significance of the multidimensionality – the interconnection of the phonic and spatial features – of a poem and its interaction with memory. The qualifiers 'à l'écart oblique' and the reference to the 'double' watching the reader from this distance add to the sense of multidimensionality that drives the reading process. The idea that a reading can be separate enough from the reader to be able to watch on over the process, almost like a presence lingering uncannily in the background, emphasises the elements of potential and 'otherness' in reading, the unknown that the poet invites into his text when he demands the reader's participation in it – a notion that I explored in Chapter Two.

The multidimensionality that characterises a reading of *Dors* collapses in *Du noir tombe*. Its title at once signals the onset of a darker time: rather than sleep, night now brings with it death – 'tombe'. There is no second-person address to connect with the reader of the poems, only the 'Je' of the poet's voice and the loneliness of night:

```
la nuit

je m'éveille

et je vois

dans la nuit

je vois

la nuit et

rien.\textsuperscript{497}
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\textsuperscript{497} *Du noir tombe*, poem no. 7. As the volume is not paginated, I will refer to the poems by number according to the sequence in which they appear in the book. I also replicate the original spacing of the poems as it appears in *Du noir tombe*.
The consecutive repetitions, which occur within poems as well as across groups, do not necessarily tease or stimulate the workings of memory in the way we have seen elsewhere in the poet's oeuvre and can be contrasted with Roubaud's own description of the poems in *Dors*:

les poèmes se répondent dans leur succession, de séquence à séquence, en des figures d'intrication, où interviennent non seulement le lexique mais les longueurs des vers, les intervalles qui les séparent dans la page, multiples impairs et rythmés d'une même unité, les glissements de temps et de nombre, les couleurs.\(^{498}\)

The 'succession' of poems in *Dors* is evocative of the constraint structuring *Trente et un au cube*; the collection is divided into three sections, each with thirty-one poems. Those thirty-one poems are in turn divided into smaller groups of poems counted according to the *tanka* pattern: 5-7-5-7-7. This Japanese influence on the structure of *Dors* is made evident through lists – almost like contents lists – that precede each of the five subsections in a sequence and indicate the key words, or titles, from which the poems grow. For example, opening section one is the list:

1. dormir
2. nuit
3. un silence
4. fenêtre
5. la nuit.\(^{499}\)

While the longer section two is outlined thus:

1. dors
2. nuit
3. lumières
4. un silence
5.
6.
7. la nuit.\(^{500}\)

Often the titles outlining each sequence of 5-7-5-7-7 are the same across the three streams of thirty-one poems, but slight changes and shifts mean that none of the three sections are identical. Despite the structural nod to *Trente et un au cube*:

\(^{498}\) Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 34.  
\(^{499}\) Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 43.  
\(^{500}\) Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 46.
cube, the poems themselves of Dors are characterised more by a sense of variation and modification open to chance and circumstance than by the intricate intertwining of the entrebescar aesthetic. As Roubaud states in his 'Indication', the poems respond or react to one another, they are made up of slips – 'glissements' – that are often no more than interruptions which 'interviennent'.

In the piece that precedes Dors, Dire la poésie, the poet accounts for the sense of shifting that characterises the work:

Je veux dire que pendant les six ou sept années où ces poèmes ont existé avant d'être posés en ce livre à chaque lecture à chaque copie manuscrite de leur ensemble quelque chose changeait je leur faisais subir des variations minimales l'ensemble de ces poèmes était accumulation de variations minimales.501

The published work comprises a set of poems that had evolved over time; it incorporates tiny changes that occurred within the sequences in their alternating states of being performed and written down. Roubaud's use of the imperfect tense here to describe the alterations in the sequences emphasises the sense that these were changes over time: multiple and accumulating. Another passage in Dire la poésie describes the way in which the sound of a dripping tap infiltrated the sequences:

une goutte ponctuation à ma voix toujours la même se préparait à tomber du robinet qui ne fermait pas je l'attendais elle absorbait mon attention retirant de ma voix basse lisant les poèmes toute intention toute persuation toute certitude afin encore que la voix continue d'elle-même au-delà de ce qui était déjà écrit peut-être pour le répéter pour le bouger d'un mot déplacer d'un intervalle d'une ligne pour aller un peu plus loin avant que la goutte d'eau à nouveau tombe.502

Roubaud thus foregrounds the way in which the sequences bear the traces of the circumstances in which they were composed, read and reread, assimilating the rhythms punctuating the poet's thoughts at the time. The dripping tap featured in

501 Roubaud, Dors, p. 18.
502 Roubaud, Dors, pp. 17–18.
this explanatory extract does indeed figure in Dors, appearing simply as 'une goutte' across six of the poems. The droplet signals the quiet of night and the poet's distraction:

\[
\text{une goutte}
\]

\[
\text{une goutte}
\]

\[
\text{va}
\]

\[
\text{tomber.}
\]

\[
\text{tu attends}
\]

\[
\text{qu'elle}
\]

\[
\text{tombe.}
\]

\[
\text{quelque chose}
\]

\[
\text{à}
\]

\[
\text{attendre.}
\]

As the sequence builds, there is a sense of accumulation and time passing, regulated by the intervals anticipating the droplets falling and the moments in which they fall:

\[
\text{une goutte}
\]

\[
\text{une goutte}
\]

\[
\text{tombe.}
\]

\[
\text{tu}
\]

\[
\text{l'entends.}
\]

\[
\text{rien d'autre}
\]

---

503 The poems entitled 'une goutte' appear in the sixteenth and twenty-seventh positions of each of the three sequences of thirty-one poems that make up Dors.

504 Roubaud, Dors, p. 52.
ne change.\textsuperscript{505}

It is not only the waiting and the falling of the water droplet that marks the passing of time, but also the lexical and typographical shifts. The next poem under the title of 'une goutte' repeats the structure of the first in the series cited above, but the verb 'attendre' (and 'attends') is replaced by 'croire' (and 'crois').\textsuperscript{506}

The fourth poem corresponds in a similar manner to the second:

\textit{une goutte}

\begin{verbatim}
une goutte
tombe
tu peux l'en tendre
rien d'autre n'a rrive.\textsuperscript{507}
\end{verbatim}

Lexical shifts see the move from 'change' to 'arrive' at the end of the poem, and the addition of the modal verb, 'peux', in the centre of the poem alters the syntax ever so slightly. The effect of these shifting repetitions, scattered among other poems that do not mention the 'goutte' at all, is to create echoes that resonate through the sequences in the poems. One of the final in the series of six evokes the role of memory in poetry:

\textit{une goutte}

\begin{verbatim}
une goutte
tom
bait.
revenait
en arrière.
quelque chose
en mémoire.\textsuperscript{508}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{505} Roubaud, \textit{Dors}, p. 59.  
\textsuperscript{506} Roubaud, \textit{Dors}, p. 75.  
\textsuperscript{507} Roubaud, \textit{Dors}, p. 81.
No longer waited for, the falling 'goutte' becomes a memory embedded in the preceding sequences that make up the text. The poem's reference to the drop as memory also recalls the episode in which the poet describes the dripping tap regulating the rhythms of his poetry composition. This network of resonances is one of many that ripple throughout the collection, connecting the reader to the poet and drawing us further into an engagement with the text. The series on the falling droplet is an example of the 'figures d'intrication' and the 'glissements de temps et de nombre' with which Roubaud defines *Dors* in his 'Indication'.

In addition to these sequences based on shifts in number and time, Roubaud mentions the place of 'les couleurs'. Although the blackness of night is the most frequent shade to recur, colours such as blue, white, black, yellow, red, and grey are interspersed throughout the sequences that make up the collection.\(^{509}\) The mood of the poems in *Du noir tombe* appears sparse and sombre in comparison to those of *Dors*, with the themes of darkness, night and silence prevailing. Any references to sound are overshadowed by a sense of its struggle, or failure, to penetrate the darkness. For example, in the first poem:

```
nuit

nuit et
le bruit
se scinde

du noir
tombe
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\(^{510}\) There are also references to the failure of sound in the fourth poem:

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un silence

un silence:

la nuit
```

\(^{508}\) Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 97.

\(^{509}\) See Roubaud, *Dors*, p. 43, p. 44, p. 46, p. 51, and p. 55 for the first mention of each of the colours listed, respectively.

\(^{510}\) Roubaud, *Du noir tombe*, poem no. 1 (the words of poems 2 and 3 are identical to those of this first poem).
où les bruits
sèchent.⁵¹¹

Sounds are described as split or drying up, suffocated in the poems by repetitions of 'nuit', 'noir' and 'silence'. Instead of the 'figures d'intrication', the 'glissements de temps et de nombre' and 'les couleurs' characteristic of the shifting sequences comprising Dors, movement in Du noir tombe takes another form.

A comparison of the first three poems in the volume highlights their typographical differences and slight changes in punctuation:

1.

nuit

nuit et
le bruit
se scinde

du noir
tombe
.

2.

nuit
nuit
et
le bruit
se scinde du

noir

⁵¹¹ Roubaud, Du noir tombe, poem no. 4 (poems no. 5 and no. 6 have the same wording, but differ slightly from no. 4: 'où' becomes 'dont').
tombe.
3.
nuit
nuit
et le bruit
se
scinde du noir

tombe

.

The shifts that occur from one poem to the next are visual: lines are rearranged, the full stop changes position, at times vertically distanced from the end of the poem, and the spacing of the lettering is not always the same. In poem 15, the inadequacy of the written format of the poem is foregrounded:

unsilence

un

silence.

fu

yant

dan

slan

nuits
The condensed font signals a shift to the eye of the reader, but is impossible for a voice to reproduce. Similarly, the enjambments of unpronounced letters cannot be transposed through voice to a listener, which means that the poem is, aurally, exactly the same as the preceding poem, number 14:

un silence
un silence.
fuyant
dans
la
nuit sans

point.

The variations occurring from one poem to the next are such that they would not be transmissible in an oral rendering of the page; they are silent. Perhaps this is one way in which the poems can exist within Roubaud's period of silence: there is a stifling of rhythm and an unravelling of the craft of entrebescar in the pure repetitions that characterise an aural representation of Du noir tombe. The 'variations' are notably visual in form and can be contrasted in this way to the 'programme de lecture' of which Dors is a part. According to Roubaud's conception of poetry, this means a diminishment of the multidimensionality of the poems and thus a broken link between the poems and memory. The two-dimensionality of the visual arrangements that constitute Du noir tombe may also be a response to the loss of his first reader: 'La poésie, parce que j'avais pris l'habitude de la dire à haute voix, de lire en public, et pour elle, avec qui je
vivais, s'est arrêtée pour moi. No longer able to read aloud to Alix Cléo, the purpose of poetry, particularly its 'upper limit music', for Roubaud is called into question. From January 1983, Roubaud describes preferring the 'neutralité' of prose: 'besoin ni des yeux d'un lecteur ni des oreilles d'un auditoire'. For the potential in poetry to be activated, Roubaud asks his reader to approach it with eyes and ears, yet the reader of Du noir tombe is cut off from any profound engagement with the latter and the variations in form that usually establish rhythm in a text here remain silent.

The 'intrications' of colour that Roubaud explains are characteristic of Dors are also notably absent in Du noir tombe. The only colour to be mentioned in the poems of Du noir tombe – and indeed it is mentioned again and again – is black. The single variation on this comes in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth poems, in which the expected 'noir' is replaced by a generic reference to colour: 'une couleur tombe'. The 'dessins' by Jean-Gaudaire Thor also bring blocks, lines and splashes of black paint to the pages of Roubaud's arrangements. These are only interspersed with interjections of pale grey, until the final poem welcomes a rough-hewn triangular patch of yellow, topped with a swirl. Alongside the yellow, across the centre of the double-page spread of the page of the final poem, is an imposing black rectangle, with two white spaces looking out from it, almost like eyes. A black swirl downwards across the page from the bottom of the rectangle, appearing almost like a tail, gives the shape an animal-like feel. Elements of the drawing find their echoes in the words of Roubaud's arrangement:

fenêtre

du noir tombe

et je vois

au milieu


The rectangle that looks back at the reader is suggestive of the window and the sense of vision, and perhaps it may be said that the yellow form to its right is a manifestation of light. Yet the image presents a paradox, as it is not light that the poet sees flowing in through the window, but 'le bruit | de la fenêtre | qui avance'. The senses of sound and vision also overlap in poem 16:

une couleur
tombe.

je l'entends.

Perhaps the vision of noise approaching through the window and the sound of colour falling compound the notion of a poetry and rhythm that are expressed visually, or typographically on the page *Du noir tombe*. Or does this development in which colour is heard and sounds morph into visions look beyond the fallen darkness of *Du noir tombe* towards the possibility of the poet breaking his silence? The ending of the collection with the sense of progression in the lexical choice 'avance', in conjunction with the singular appearance of the window and the brightening patch of yellow paint, seem to offer such a possibility. This final poem suggests the light at the end of the tunnel of silence.

4.3 Reflections on the Place of Form in Poetry: Returns

In Chapter One, my findings shaped a reading of *Trente et un au cube* as Roubaud's treatise on love (and) poetry. I found that Roubaud's decision to make a rupture with the free verse forms of Surrealist poetry runs parallel with a movement towards a particular relationship with form. *Trente et un au cube* places the female beloved at the centre of that form: as the addressee she

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encompasses the qualities and desire that are the subject of the poet's song. Also the first reader of the poem, she represents the activation of the poem's different dimensions; the visual and the aural readings of the poem come together to insinuate the poem in memory, there stimulating connections and associations.

A consideration of form in *Du noir tombe* in the light of certain aspects of earlier collection, *Dors*, brings into focus a number of key differences between those texts, and between Roubaud's works written before and after the death of Alix Cléo. From *Dors* to *Du noir tombe*, the multiplicity of colours is subdued, the lexical variations turn towards monotonous repetition and the poet's preoccupation with voice turns into a concern with the visual. The poems that compose *Du noir tombe* are characterised by silence: it is a *canso* whose *chant* is missing and the poet draws attention to this loss through his rapprochement of the two works. The poems of the later work may be described as two-dimensional in relation to those of *Dors*; they are missing the phonic dimension that makes of rhythm an enticement of memory into the reading process.

To insist that *Du noir tombe* is very different from *Dors* is to evoke the phantom limb. The loss of the poet's addressee equates to the impoverishment of the reading process in its relation to Roubaud's theory on poetry and memory. Rhythm is at the heart of the interaction between memory and poetry, but when it fails, when it is silenced, the place of memory in poetry is necessarily changed. In the next section of this chapter, I will further explore the nature of this new relationship between memory, poetry and love as it is cast in the poet's grief. I will approach this altered network through readings of poetic form in *Quelque chose noir*, considering my findings in the light of the potential of literary constraint that I discussed in Chapter Two.

### 4.4 The Two Dimensions of *Quelque chose noir*

The dates of composition offered by publisher's notes and Roubaud's poems themselves suggest that *Du noir tombe* was written just before the first pieces that were to be a part of *Quelque chose noir*.\(^{515}\) I find that *Du noir tombe* is therefore characterised by Roubaud's silence as a poet, written within the thirty

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\(^{515}\) With the exception of the volume's final poem, 'Rien', which is dated 1983, the year of Alix Cléo's death. See *Quelque chose noir*, pp. 145–48.
months following Alix Cléo's death, in which the poet was overcome with a poetic aphasia. Its poems bear elements of structure that are suggestive of the troubadour canso, but the analogy figures only as a stark reminder of what is absent from these variations: namely the rhythm or music that is central both to Roubaud's conception of the canso and more particularly to what he describes as the culmination of its form, the sestina. Nevertheless, I see in the collection a movement that reaches towards poetry, as Roubaud understands it. While the collection's title signals the poet's encounter with death and bereavement, its poems end with a window that points beyond the darkness that has fallen; through this window into the poet's chambre, sound enters through light and colour into the space of the poem.

Situated somewhere between Roubaud's silence and his formal return to poetry, I believe that Du noir tombe itself acts as a window into Quelque chose noir.\(^{516}\) The title of Du noir tombe appears in the later volume's sixth poem:

\[
\text{Où es-tu?}
\]

Où es tu :

qui?

Sous la lampe, entourée de noir, je te dispose:

En deux dimensions

Du noir tombe

Sous les angles. comme une poussière:

Image sans épaisseur voix sans épaisseur

La terre qui te frotte

Le monde dont plus rien ne te sépare

Sous la lampe. dans la nuit. entouré de noir. contre la porte.\(^{517}\)

\(^{516}\) I choose the adjective 'formal' to refer to the breaking of the poet's silence with Quelque chose noir for two reasons: it is the collection that Roubaud himself names as his first since Alix Cléo's death and it bears a number of the formal traits and 'constraints' that are characteristic of Roubaud's poetry before Alix Cléo's death. I will further explore the role of form and constraint in Quelque chose noir over the course of this next section.

\(^{517}\) Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 19.
Roubaud links the two collections through his reference to nightfall in the fourth line of this poem. The connection between the two volumes is compounded by the mention of the notion of two-dimensionality, which was evoked in my reading of *Du noir tombe*. However, in this case, the addressee encompassed in the 'tu' form that runs through the poem is at once the material of the poem itself arranged in a two-dimensional fashion on the page, and the poet's lost love, who was absent from *Du noir tombe*.

When the form of the poem coincides with the body of the female beloved in *Trente et un au cube*, the interaction is a rich site of associations and connections. Intricate formal crafting represents the desire of the poet and the song that is produced is a multidimensional structure that welcomes a multifaceted connection with the memory of the reader. I will explore what it means for the poet to now arrange his material 'en deux dimensions', using this poem from *Quelque chose noir* as my point of departure for analysis. I believe it is not only a matter of two-dimensionality of poetic material, in the sense that I have explored in my readings of *Du noir tombe*. Rather the poet appears in 'Où es-tu?' to suggest that Alix Cléo's existence now can be represented across two dimensions, or in two forms. The poet begins his poem questioning the position of his beloved in this world without her – 'Où es-tu? ' – but his use of the colon alters the nature of the question, hesitating over the very identity of Alix Cléo after death – 'qui?'. The rest of the poem is an attempt to answer this question: 'En deux dimensions'.

On the one hand, the poet mentions her image without depth, and her voice without substance. These flat representations of the poet's lost love correspond to mentions throughout *Quelque chose noir* of the reminders left behind by Alix Cléo of her life. He writes, for example, of being 'Entouré d'images de toi, choisies par ton regard. choisies et par ta pensée éclairées'.

The poet is surrounded by Alix Cléo's presence in the form of her work, which still fills the apartment she left behind. The photographer featured as object in many of her own pieces, so it is her particular photographic image that abounds. However, this sense of her presence is ambiguous:

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518 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 78. Punctuation reproduced from the original.
Chaque image de toi – je parle de celles qui sont dans mes mains, devant mes yeux, sur les papiers – chaque image touche la trace d'une reconnaissance, l'illumine,

Mais elle est pourtant révolue, elles sont révolues, chacune et toutes, ne constituent en leurs configurations aucune vie, aucun sens, aucune leçon, aucun but.\(^{519}\)

While Alix Cléo's photographs evoke memories of her presence, each holding a sense of her, a familiar trace that resonates with the observing poet, the form he recognises in them is irrevocably past: 'révolue'. It is this sense of ambiguity that Roland Barthes captured in his mantra: 'Ça-a-été'.\(^{520}\) The essence of a photograph lay, for Barthes, in what he calls the photographic referent: 'la chose nécessairement réelle qui a été placée devant l'objectif, faute de quoi il n'y aurait pas de photographie'.\(^{521}\) While in painting, reality may be feigned and referents need not be rooted within any real existence, the photograph bears witness to what has been: 'dans la Photographie, je ne puis jamais nier que la chose a été là'.\(^{522}\) An ambiguity results: 'Il y a double position conjointe: de réalité et de passé'.\(^{523}\) Representative of what has been, the real of the photo is also necessarily past. It is this distance that is compounded in Roubaud's poem by his use of the adjective 'révolue': belonging to the moment in which the image was captured, the photographic referent is not simply changed by time in relation to the poet's present, but is itself no longer.

Roubaud experiences the images of Alix Cléo that he beholds as two-dimensional objects. Prepositions signalling the positions of the photos – 'dans mes mains, devant mes yeux, sur les papiers' – place them tangibly within the poet's reach. The list of prepositional phrases also suggests an accumulation, an abundance of photographs. Yet these objects are without substance: 'elles [...] ne constituent aucune vie, aucun sens, aucune leçon, aucun but'. The presence they create points more to death than life; signifiers without their referent, they are empty signs. As such, they can hold no future for the poet, who sees in them

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\(^{519}\) Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 112.


\(^{521}\) Barthes, La Chambre claire, p. 120.

\(^{522}\) Barthes, La Chambre claire, p. 120.

\(^{523}\) Barthes, La Chambre claire, p. 120.
only what he has lost: 'aucun but'. Recordings of Alix Cléo's voice have the same effect on the poet:

Ta voix se déplaçant en bruisant dans le magnétophone, j'entends les efforts de ton souffle, dans la nuit, devant le magnétophone à ton lit.

Je l'entends après des centaines de nuits inchangée et pourtant il n'y a rien en elle d'un présent, rien que la magie mécanique ait pu, par la mimésis en limailles, translater d'aucun de tes moments, pleins, séparés, difficiles de souffle, révolus, pour être là en ton nom, comme un recours.

Et c'est pourquoi peut-être, tu es en elles, vue, et voix, le plus irrémédiablement, morte.  

Prepositions situate the reality of the moment in which Alix Cléo made the voice recording: 'dans la nuit, devant le magnétophone à ton lit'. The recording bears the qualities of her voice, the difficult breath of someone who suffered with asthma. Yet the sound is tinny and mechanic, removed from its original moment. Again, the reminder of Alix Cléo's presence is precisely what recalls her absence and the description connecting the souvenir object with the poet's present reality is constructed with negatives 'rien de', 'rien que' and 'aucun'.

These flat portrayals of Alix Cléo's image and voice are two-dimensional, empty reminders of what once was and is no longer. However, they are but one 'dimension' of her in death. The second dimension of Alix Cléo's existence presented in poem 'Où es-tu?' is that of her corpse. In the lines following the references to her image and voice 'sans épaisseur', Roubaud outlines the real of her current existence:

La terre
qui te frotte

Le monde
dont plus rien ne te sèpare.  

While the photos and voice recordings remind the poet of the temporal distance separating him from the Alix Cléo of these souvenirs, the references to the present of her body assert its proximity to the earth in which she is buried. The typographical play on the poetic line, with the line dropping downwards after

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524 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 112.
each subject, seems to reinforce the position of the corpse buried underground. The contrast between the 'deux dimensions' in 'Où es-tu?' is stark, the physicality of the objects indefinitely retaining images of Alix Cléo irreconcilable with the thought of her decaying body.

The double existence of Alix Cléo, both within sound and visual recordings of her life, and as the body that occupies her grave, intensifies rather than answers the poet's question: 'Où es tu : qui?'. The question acts as a premise for the poem, which goes on to assert the impossibility of pinpointing Alix Cléo's identity in death. Photographs, recordings, her proximity to the earth that touches her skin all signify her distance from the poet. The actual reply to the question provided in the title takes place across a re-writing of one line from the poem: 'Sous la lampe, entourée de noir, je te dispose : | en deux dimensions'. Qualified by a feminine adjective, this opening line refers to the poet's addressee, and the poet arranges the material of her presence within the page of the poem. At the close of the poem, it is the poet who sits under the light of the lamp, surrounded in darkness: 'Sous la lampe. dans la nuit. entouré de noir. contre la porte'. Full stops replace the commas of the first line, and the spatial and temporal position of the poet in his bedroom under nightfall is clearly demarcated with the additions 'dans la nuit' and 'contre la porte'; his position in the room thus appears to be more sharply defined than that of Alix Cléo. Yet he brings himself and his wife together through the repetition. They are distanced, they can exist only separately, but somehow Alix Cléo is aligned with Roubaud as he pens her existence into the poem.

The dynamic between the poet and his beloved-addressee bears similarities to that expressed in my initial readings of Trente et un au cube. In the earlier volume, the poet writes his beloved into the text, attempting to detain her within the symbolic cube of the volume's structure. The cube is at once the poem's form structured through numerical constraint, the bedroom of the lovers and the spatio-temporal construction which encourages the engagement of memory in the reading process; the position of the poet's female addressee

526 In her translation of Quelque chose noir, Rosmarie Waldrop writes 'I spread you out' for 'je te dispose'. Waldrop's translation here emphasises the lack of definition that characterises the existence of Alix Cléo in Roubaud's writing, her multiplicity in death. See Jacques Roubaud, Some Thing Black, trans. by Rosmarie Waldrop (Elmwood Park: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 17.
overlaps with that of the reader. What has changed, though, in *Quelque chose noir*? I will argue that the two dimensions in which Alix Cléo's existence is presented in 'Où es-tu?' extend to the rest of the volume, structuring the poet's approach to his beloved and the overarching form of *Quelque chose noir*. The flat representations of Alix Cléo, souvenirs of a life lived, are opposed to the three-dimensional reality of her decaying body. It is also a question of how the writing on the page corresponds to the three-dimensional structure that harbour(ed) the couple's relationship: the two lines of 'Où es-tu?' beginning 'Sous la lampe' contrast and connect what the poet does with the page before him and his physical place in the apartment that the lovers shared. Poetic form, or numerical constraint, space and time once again interact to shed light on the workings of memory in poetry reading. However, the relationship between these elements and the place of the reader approaching them is necessarily changed in the later work. In the absence of the poem's first addressee, the position of the reader too comes into question.

4.5 Reading Obliquely: Positions in *Trente et un au cube* and *Quelque chose noir*

In my study of the network relating form, constraint and memory in *Trente et un au cube*, the place of the reader is central. I began Chapter Two of this project by considering Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de *Trente et un au cube* à Shakespeare et C°', in which I found that the poet's wordplay draws the reader into an increasingly deep engagement with the text. The pronoun 'tu' is at the centre of the overlapping positions of beloved addressee and reader, making of the poem not only an offering of love, but also a space into which the reader is invited. Before embarking on a study of the links between formal constraint and memory in *Quelque chose noir*, I will again begin with the relationship proposed between the poet and his addressee, considering the implications of a reader taking up the position of the poet's lost love. In 'Dialogue', Roubaud posits the notion of the poem as dialogue:

> Je n'ai jamais pensé à un poème comme étant un monologue
> parti quelque part de l'arrière de ma bouche ou de ma main

> Un poème se place toujours dans les conditions d'un
The focus of the poem is the addressee, who constitutes the basis of its existence. Perhaps it would even be possible to speak of an interlocutor, rather than simply an addressee, since Roubaud places dialogue, encounter and reply – 'dialogue', 'rencontre', 'réponse' – at the centre of the poetry reading (and writing) process. The poem alludes to the multidimensionality that is such a prominent part of Roubaud's poetry theory: the poem is both oral and written entity, issued from the poet's 'bouche' or 'main'. The form of the poem, the line, the spacing and the typography are all part of the poem's interaction with memory in *Trente et un au cube*; here, although the poetic vers becomes 'ligne', the poet writes of form again as eliciting a response from the reader.

In the second half of the poem, Roubaud goes further, equating the reader's participation in the text with authorship:

> Quelqu'un de vivant, de nommé: un poème d'amour

> Même quand l'omission, l'indirection, l'adresse pronominale rendent possible cette translation: qu'un lecteur soit devant la page, devant la voix du poème comme au moment de sa naissance

> Ou de sa réception: lecteur lecteur ou lecteur auteur

> Ce poème t'est adressé et ne rencontrera rien.\(^5^{28}\)

The closing line encapsulates the uncertainty that the poet is faced with: addressed to the poet's wife, the poem will encounter only nothing(ness). A love poem, for Roubaud, is addressed to the beloved, exists for and because of the beloved: 'Quelqu'un de vivant, de nommé'. However, the reader's position as contributor to the creation of meaning in the poem – 'lecteur auteur' – remains

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\(^{527}\) Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 124.

even in the absence of the poet's primary addressee here. The poet refers to 'omission' and 'indirection', which he says are both a form of transfer – 'translation' – made possible through the umbrella of the pronominal address, 'tu'. While lexical and phonic play centre on the coincidence of the reader's and lover's position in Roubaud's 'Poème de présentation composé pour une lecture de Trente et un au cube', 'Dialogue' here proposes that the reader has an oblique relationship to Quelque chose noir. If the reader approaches Roubaud's poetry through 'omission', 'indirection' and 'translation', there is the sense that he or she is at one remove from the poem, rather than invited into its most intimate space – the stanza, or chambre that constitutes the premise of Trente et un au cube.

I will proceed to explore the nature of this oblique relation offered to the reader of Quelque chose noir. Retracing the journey I took in Chapter Two, I will first contemplate the place of constraint in the poetic form of Quelque chose noir, and the relationship that the reader has with the text through that constraint. I consider this to be the first of the 'deux dimensions', presented in 'Où es-tu?': that of the two-dimensional page on which Roubaud forms his poem. The second dimension, or space, that I will consider is that of the poet, the apartment in which he sits and writes 'Sous la lampe. dans la nuit. entouré de noir'. I will determine the ways in which these spaces – the poem on the page and the space of the apartment that the poet shared with his wife – influence the workings of memory in poetry reading, and I will analyse the changed relation between constraint and memory in the reading process. In Trente et un au cube, constraint generates the spaces connecting the positions of the reader and the poet's beloved and I found that this network activated in the reading process was the source of potential in the text. What shape does potential take in Quelque chose noir?

4.6 Dimension One: The Page

4.6.1 Introduction
In this part of my study, I will consider the relationship between the reader and the text of Quelque chose noir, reflecting on changes in form that occur from Trente et un au cube. This section thus incorporates a return to Chapter Two. I will explore the nature of the reader's engagement with form in the poetic text
across three approaches: formal constraint, manifestations of time in the text, and references to and uses of space. Markings of time and space are not always distinct themes to consider in the poetry collections, since moments in time are frequently given spatial markings within the texts and spaces too are often associated with particular times of year. My aim in these explorations is to ascertain the role of memory in the reader's relation with the text.

4.6.2 Formal Constraint in Quelque chose noir

Intricate formal crafting is at the centre of Trente et un au cube. Numerical constraint was found not only to structure but to generate the volume of poems, which bears out the Oulipian maxim confirming that a literary work written under constraint also talks about that constraint: 'un texte écrit suivant une contrainte parle de cette contrainte'. §29 I found constraint to be so ingrained in the volume, permeating every layer of its form, that its place in structuring the composition process is visible to the reader. The reader's journey through the temporal and spatial markings that constitute the book are mapped out in number and just as the approaching end of the volume is tangible, with the remaining pages decreasing in thickness in the hands of the reader, the composing poet foresees its end from the outset. Roubaud's comments on the composition process tell his reader that a work is conceived of in its entirety from the start of writing. This notion gives the text the air of a self-sufficient entity: the volume of Trente et un au cube fulfils the calculation indicated by its title.

Constraint appears to be less tightly wound into Quelque chose noir. The title itself indicates a sense of uncertainty, vagueness, its indefinable 'some thing' a world apart from the precision and finitude that characterises Trente et un au cube. Jean-François Puff pinpoints the unplanned nature of the volume: 'ce livre, Quelque chose noir, apparaît au lieu d'autre chose', the thing for which it is 'substitut' being the 'Projet' that had occupied Roubaud's plans since his decision to write poetry within a consciously formal schema. §30 The book's existence therefore signals loss on two levels: that of Roubaud's love, and that of the dual

§29 Roubaud, Poésie, etcetera, p. 212.
project in mathematics and poetry he had planned for many years, a great architecture built of interlocking, interrelated component parts. *Quelque chose noir* could not have figured in Roubaud's plans for a poetry project, and the period of silence to which it attests can only emphasise that fact. The book bears the weight of Roubaud's grief and, as Jean-Jacques Poucel concludes, it is 'the absence of a loved one' which is 'the work's generating principle'.

The first poem of *Quelque chose noir* to be written, 'Rien', is dated 1983, the year of Alix Cléo's death. Despite being the earliest of its poems, 'Rien' is the last to appear in the order of the book, separated from the rest of the collection by a page giving its title and date of composition. The typographical format of this final poem distinguishes it from the others of *Quelque chose noir*; it is aligned, unusually, to the right-hand side of the page, a position which Benoît Conort refers to in Roubaud's own terms as being up against the edge, or boundary of death: 'il bute sur la marge comme sur "un bord" de mort'. The layout of the poem on the page has a particular effect: set apart from the rest of the book both by the space of blank page that dominates the left-hand side of the pages on which it is printed as well as by its title page, there is a sense that the poem attempts to escape the volume. This is compounded by the typographical narrowing down of the poem on the final page to its final reference to nothingness:

\[
\text{tant d'absence}\\
\text{que tes yeux}\\
\text{s'approchent}\\
\text{de rien.}
\]

Figuring in the top right-hand corner of the page and surrounded by the vast whiteness that remains of the page's space, the poem's end disappears into the nothingness that it evokes. The poem has an ambiguous status; it is both the 'chronological' beginning of *Quelque chose noir*, written shortly after Alix Cléo died, and it marks the volume's physical end; it speaks of the loss of Roubaud's

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532 Benoît Conort, 'Tramer le deuil (Table de lecture de *Quelque chose noir*), *La Licorne*, 40 (1997), 47–58 (p. 56).
533 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 128.
love, and it represents the chronological beginning of the creation of *Quelque chose noir*. It is, as Poucel writes, Alix Cléo's absence that provides the impetus for this poetry volume and as the point where her loss intersects with Roubaud's poetry composition, 'Rien' brings a certain circularity to *Quelque chose noir*.

The term – 'bute[r]' – used by Conort to describe the position of 'Rien' on the page also evokes the ending of *Trente et un au cube*, whose 'butoir' the poet refers to as the end of his composition process comes into sight. Roubaud's earlier work too is characterised by a circular quality: its time span covers a single year with its evolving seasons, its overlapping verses brought together its ending and beginning, guiding the reader towards a re-reading of the book. This circularity and the possibility of perpetual repetition and transformation are in line with the poet's theory of poetry as memory. Multiple readings of the poetic work draw out new associations each time and embed parts of the poetic text more deeply in the memory of the reader. The circular quality of *Quelque chose noir* does not appear to have the same purpose. Instead, the reader is brought back, on each reading, to the death of the poet's beloved. The return to 1983 that closes a reading of the volume seems to point to an impasse: the poet of *Quelque chose noir* is enclosed within his grief. There can be no resolution, or consolation; there is no cathartic end to this piece of elegiac writing.

The positioning of the final poem along the right-hand page edge seems to point the reader somewhere beyond the text, rather than back to its first page. There is not the obvious push from the poet for a re-reading that there is in *Trente et un au cube* and the temporal scale of *Quelque chose noir* is not modelled on any cycle, or coherent period, in the manner of the earlier volume. While the numerical constraint structuring *Trente et un au cube* is finite and precise in its guidance of the reader towards the end of the book, 'Rien' separates itself from the patterning that runs through *Quelque chose noir*. For there is, in the later volume, what might be called a 'cubic' pattern running through many layers of the text: there are nine sections, or chapters, in the book, each comprising nine poems, and every poem is made up of nine lines. The lines differ in shape and form; rarely constructed with any distinguishable metric.

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count, they vary from being short, spaced out and quite sparse to approaching
the length of a short paragraph of prose. The cubic measure of nine stops short
of the level of the poetic line, while in *Trente et un au cube*, it begins with the
syllable – the smallest unit that goes into composing the poem. The last poem in
*Quelque chose noir*, 'Rien', is set apart from the sequences of nine that make up
the rest of the book: it appears alone, in or as its own section, following the
ninth line, of the ninth poem, of the ninth section. It is something of a number
ten in a book of nines, and challenges the numerical constraint that appears to
structure the volume.

The sequences of nine that run through the form of *Quelque chose noir*
themselves are not held together as tightly as the reader of Roubaud's earlier
works might expect; they cannot be compared to the intricately bound chains of
protection and security evoked in descriptions of troubadour *mezura*. There is a
sense of undoing, or unravelling at the very root of the number nine that appears,
on the surface, to uphold the volume. Three does not, for Roubaud, represent a
holy trinity, but is rather the multiplicity that death induces:

Tes photographies reproduites       les phrases reproduites de ton
Journal       avec sa ponctuation particulière: un.

Tes lambeaux de cadavre se défaisant       se délitant à l'anéantissement
sobrement et rigidement fleurir d'aucune façon imaginable       sinon par
la désuétude la résurrection de certains mots       les bibliques
n'appartenant       pas à ma tradition: deux.

Le rectangle de la pièce tapissée de papiers bruns japonais       et son
agencement d'objets       le tien       à peu près intact depuis presque trente
mois       où je reçois la lumière plein les mains: trois.

Ce sont       trois fois       toi       trois des irréductiblement séparés
déplacés réels de toi       perdus en une diaspora qu'unit seule ce pronom:
toi.536

For the poet, there is no question of an afterlife, and there are no words to
console him with the possibility of Alix Cléo's resurrection. The figure three
does not symbolise the hope of a holy alliance, but the cold fact that Alix Cléo's
identity is multiple in death. The plural nouns that abound in this extract from 'Je
vais me détourner' add to the sense of fragmentation. Individual words and

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syntactical clauses seem to float formlessly on the page in the irregular spacing that shapes the poem, despite being reined in by the count of three and the pattern of colons that equates these numbers with a mode of address directed to Alix Cléo: 'toi'. The dominance of nouns and present participles over active verbs compounds the feeling of stasis that has characterised the poet's existence for the thirty months since his wife's death.

She is in the writings and photos she left behind, her presence in these works particularly poignant as her body was more often than not the subject of her photographic creations, and her journal held some of her most intimate thoughts. Together they constitute what Roubaud has referred to as 'un multiple autoportrait', and Alix Cléo's principal activities.\(^{537}\) Already fragmented in this first of three points listed by the poet, Alix Cléo's body is the subject of the second. Echoes of alliteration and assonance draw together terms denoting decomposition, undoing and destruction: 'se défaisant', 'se délitant', 'anéantissement' and 'désuétude'. While the other two of Alix Cléo's identities are presented as having a particular form – her distinctive use of punctuation that shapes her journal entries, the rectangle-shaped room whose layout has remained untouched for thirty months – her body, 'lambeaux de cadavre', is described only in terms connoting formlessness.

In 'Je vais me détourner', number and references to shape only intensify the absence of metrical shaping in the poem. The count of 'un', 'deux', 'trois' that appears to offer a semblance of order and a set of limit points actually forms the gateway to further multiplication: 'trois fois toi trois des irréductiblement séparés déplacés réels de toi'. Three is the square root of the nine that runs through Quelque chose noir, but the root itself stands for the unravelling of the poem, the dissolution of the poet's love, rather than a solid structural foundation. The three repetitions of 'toi' in the final 'stanza' of this extract are echoes of their homophone, 'trois', and the effect of the whole is to lose the poet's addressee in a chorus of phonic repetitions. The reader too enters into an uneasy relationship with the text here; while an abundance of addresses in 'tu' and 'toi' have

previously functioned to draw the reader into a deeper engagement with the text, here they successively exclude the reader and place him or her in an unstable position in relation to the poem. Unlike the 'Poème de présentation pour une lecture de Trente et un au cube', the play on the second-person singular pronoun in this poem does not tempt the reader to follow the thread and find his or her way among the maze of addresses. It is no longer a matter of determining the respective positions of the reader and the beloved in the text. Instead, the beloved's position is already multiple.

Form is structured by numerical constraint in Quelque chose noir: numbers and patterns carve out spaces in the text. There is evidence, too, of the self-reflexivity that characterises literary constraint in Oulipian writing. The numbers nine and three recur throughout the poems like a leitmotif. Roubaud refers, for example, to 'ces phrases de neuf que je nomme poèmes', his text thus speaking of that constraint which it follows, as is the manner of Oulipian constraint. Roubaud's play on words here equates his poems based on the number nine with a quality of newness: 'de neuf'. Perhaps he is referring to the breaking of his silence as a necessarily new beginning, or maybe it is the form of his poetry in Quelque chose noir which is unfamiliar. Either way, the text's numerical constraint does not extend in any systematic way to the level of the line or syllabic count, and multiplication is no longer the source of strength and duration in poetic form that it was in Trente et un au cube. If the female beloved is still to be found within the form of this love poem, it is because multiplication in Quelque chose noir is a reflection of death. As Elisabeth Bronfen writes: 'death is a decomposition of forms, the breaking of aesthetic unity'. The undoing of the beloved's body – 'se défaisant se délitant' – is also the unravelling of form in this book of poems dedicated to her. The practice of constraint and its ambition are continually threatened at the edges, whether it is the final tenth poem, 'Rien', that defies its pattern, or the fraying root of three that leads to the shift in the relationship between the poet and his love, the poem and its reader.

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538 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 85.
In *Trente et un au cube*, the spaces of the poem coincide with the space and time in which the poet composes it. Roubaud draws on the traditions of the medieval Japanese anthology and the troubadour *canso* to create a tight interlocking of the volume's parts: his writings show an interest in the intertextuality, collective memory and interconnectivity that is central to both traditions. A series of associations and analogies runs through the text, creating connections between space and time, poet and reader. The volume is likened to a solid, three-dimensional structure through the cubic constraint that runs through every layer of its poems. The structures of poetry that Roubaud forges in *Trente et un au cube* represent the intimate space he shares with his lover: the bedroom, the garden of his childhood in Provence, the troubadour springtime of love.

Moments of self-reference draw the reader into those spaces and create an overlap between the manuscript in the process of being composed and the printed text in the hands of the reader. The year it took Roubaud to write *Trente et un au cube* coincides with the time span of the book covering the changing seasons from one winter to the next, and together with the constraint of 5-7-5-7-7 – thirty-one poems of thirty-one lines of thirty-one syllables – maps out a route that guides the reader through the text.

By contrast, the reader's pathway through *Quelque chose noir* is not marked out by the familiar signs of seasonal changes. Instead, references to time figure in relation to Alix Cléo's life and death: the thirty months of silence broken by composition of the book, the dates of the first poems written in 1985 after that interlude, the earliest dated poem 'Rien', 1983, and the 'jour de juin' which was the couple's wedding day. One poem in particular traces the events occurring in the year before Alix Cléo's death:

*Roman, III*

Cette année-là, les nouvelles ne furent pas bonnes. L'un mourut avant le printemps, d'un cancer du poumon. Son dernier livre resta inachevé. Il y travailla jusqu'au dernier moment.

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540 See Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 47 for 'Un jour de juin'. The poem is based on an epithalamium written by Georges Perec as a gift to the couple on their wedding day. The original epithalamium can be found in Georges Perec, *Beaux présents belles absentes* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 61–65.

À la fin d'août, l'homme dont nous parlons se rendit à La Bourboule chercher sa femme, pour rentrer avec elle à Paris. Il changea trois fois de train, sur de petites lignes. Il l'attendit à la sortie de l'établissement de bains et ils marchèrent en remontant la Dordogne, jusqu'en dehors de la ville, où ils s'embrassèrent. Il était onze heures du matin et trop tôt pour aller dans la chambre, à l'hôtel. Son dos s'était doré, elle respirait mieux.

En décembre, en somme, tout était encore possible. Le premier janvier de l'année suivante (l'année dont nous parlons), elle colla leurs deux noms sur la porte, avec la date en dessous, suivie d'un point d'exclamation:

19..!541

The first half of the poem has been cited here at length to highlight its framing within 'that year'. The poet traces events from before and during spring, through the end of August, to December, and finally January of the following year. Time references head each section and sometimes lead sentences within sections, such as 'Il était onze heures du matin' and 'Le premier janvier de l'année suivante', with the effect that the piece and the events it recounts are structured chronologically. The timescale of the poem might be compared to the temporal framework structuring Trente et un au cube. In this poem, as in the earlier volume, there are references to the times of year and the signs of the changing seasons: the sun shining over the park, Alix Cléo's tanned skin, the actions marking a new beginning on 1 January. However, its reader would be forgiven for thinking it was not part of a poetry collection at all.

The title – 'Roman, III' – anticipates the narrative tone of the piece: the sentences build up into paragraphs of prose and the use of the passé simple prepares the reader for a story. Yet there is a sense that the narrator is doing all he can to keep the reader at a distance. The title alludes to form, but gives no indication of subject, or theme. The main characters are given as 'Il' and 'elle', 'L'un' and 'un autre', designations that become confused in the third sentence of the second paragraph: 'Il lui rendit visite après l'opération'. The reiteration later in the poem – 'l'homme dont nous parlons' – does not clarify much, 'l'homme'

541 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, pp. 55–56.
never having been identified in the piece. Logic tells the reader that a new character – 'Il' – has entered the story, visiting the second person to be touched by lung cancer – 'lui' –, but the use of the subject pronoun is disorientating, suggesting that the subject in question is already known. Perhaps the reader is to assume that the protagonist here is '[l']homme abandonné, à cause d'une mort' who has a role in the previous poem, 'Roman, II'. In both cases, Jacques Roubaud is the main character. Nevertheless, the reader of 'Roman, III' seems to come in at a point after which the tale has begun. The anonymity of the two men – Georges Perec, who died of lung cancer in 1982, and Claude Roy, who was diagnosed with the same disease in that same year, having a lung removed because of it – who are close friends of our protagonist, excludes the reader from their circle of intimacy. This is the poet's story; these are his memories, and not those of the reader.

The same strategy of omission is used in reference to the year, the new year with which the story ends: 'l'année dont nous parlons'. The year we are speaking about, however, is not given: '19...!'. In the end, the new year does not materialise within the poem and the duration of the year is not a cycle that repeats, or renews. Time, instead, becomes the before and after of Alix Cléo's death:

Vue d'après, cette année-là lui semble presque paradisiaque : les dernières photographies, comme allégées de l'angoisse [...].

Il peut interpréter cela comme une prescience, des adieux. Les images ne s'en trouvent pas alourdies.

Il se souvient de bonheurs légers, clairs, précaires. Les heures bavardes dans la cuisine, Christmas shopping in Manchester.

Les nuages tournant dans les carreaux de miroir disposés, collés contre le mur à gauche des oreillers. Les nuages, ainsi, entrant dans le golfe de toits à gauche de l'église les regardaient, ensemble, l'après-midi. Puis ils s'embrassaient.

Mais, c'est vrai, cette année-là les nouvelles ne furent pas bonnes.

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542 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 53.
543 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 56.
Moments of happiness are remembered with greater intensity in the light of what was to follow. Lightness is a theme that pervades this second part of the poem, whether it is Alix Cléo's last photos that are 'allégées de l'angoisse', 'pas alourdies', or the poet's memories of times that were 'légers, clairs', but the memories are also 'précaires', teetering on the edge of tragedy. The lighter moments in the descriptions of the poem's second half can be contrasted with the very fixed narrative of the poem's opening four paragraphs. There are no longer time references structuring each section, the poem instead following Roubaud's thoughts and memories of that year. The use of the passé simple that dominates the earlier part of the narrative is swapped for the imperfect and present tenses of the primary character looking back on his past. At least until the final line of the piece, which brings these lighter thoughts back down to earth with a thud.

Perhaps the sections that compose the second half of 'Roman, III' may be likened to the clouds that enter the couple's apartment in the penultimate section of the poem. Conceived of as light, free-moving entities, the clouds enter the squared structure of the 'carreaux de miroir disposés, collés contre le mur', just as the poet's memories of 'bonheurs légers' exist within the framework of a poem whose beginning and end represent the unavoidable events unfolding over the space of 'cette année-là'. Such a comparison invites an understanding of happy memories as indeed 'précaires': ever-shifting and somehow only passing through this poetic structure. The framework of the squared mirrors itself unmoving – 'disposés, collés' – is like the square of three that structures the poem on the page, imperfectly reflecting the poet's memories in its two-dimensionality, and the immovable boundaries of before and after that mark both the time of the poem and the remainder of the poet's existence.

Time in Quelque chose noir is not a space in common between the reader and the poem; the dates that figure in the volume are personal to the poet, leaving the reader in a position that I have already described as oblique in relation to the text. The before and after of Alix Cléo's death brought to the fore through the narrative structure of 'Roman, III' distances the reader and there are constant reminders in the poem that this is the telling of somebody else's story. The presence of the clouds in the poem, however, represents a different possibility for the reader and his or her engagement with memory in, or through the text. The manner in which the clouds are reflected in the mirrors within the
interior of the couple's room foregrounds the distinction between the inside and outside spaces of the poem: the interior of the apartment and the outside sky, the ordinary everyday, but also the intimate life of husband and wife – hours spent chatting at the kitchen table – and the reader's place as not much more than observer. Yet there is something about the clouds' reflection in the squared mirrors of the poem that seems to invite the reader deeper into the text; perhaps it is the outside presence of the clouds in the room that parallels the position of the reader, or maybe it is that the clouds are the subject of the verb: 'les regardaient'. The reader too watches on from outside, at one remove through the mirrored reflection. It takes some thought and delving beyond the space of the text for the reader to place the key characters in the tale, and the numbers within the date.

As with time, space is conducive to an interactive relationship between the poetic text and the memory of the reader in Trente et un au cube. The poems in Quelque chose noir are not interlinked in the manner of Trente et un au cube, which follows the course of a year and where the principles structuring the Medieval Japanese Anthologies mean consecutive poems are also linked through themes and key pivot-words. There is no such discernible pattern in the poem titles of Quelque chose noir and where there are series of titles – 'Méditation du 12/5/85', 'Méditation du 21/7/85', 'Méditation du 8/5/85' and 'Nonvie', 'Nonvie, I', 'II' and 'III', for example – the individual titles involved may be interspersed between other poems, across more than one section, or appear consecutively. Despite the overarching architecture based on the number nine, there is little in the way of visible linking or ordering between one poem and the next. This sense of formal spontaneity is reflected at the level of the poem, or the poetic line, both of which I have shown have no consistent underlying formal matrix other than the number nine. Instead many of the poems have a prosaic feel and even the organising figure of nine itself is founded on unravelling and disarray.

The spacing and the typographical arrangement of the poems on the page invite some form of interaction with the reader, though it is one that seems to fall short at times. Cardonne-Arlyck asserts writes of a 'variation constante [...] de la densité respective des lignes noires et des blancs' creating 'espacements mobiles' and, in turn, 'un rythme qui n'est pas celui sonore de la parole, mais
Silencieux de l'espace graphique'.\textsuperscript{544} She also finds that the varying degrees of aphasia manifested in each of the poems itself contributes to their poetic value: 'La comparaison de l'évolution de la poésie au progrès de l'aphasie invite d'ailleurs à lire les poèmes comme manifestant divers degrés de l'affection, les plus proches de la prose étant les plus atteints.\textsuperscript{545} Poetry as a way of writing and feeling, or even as a presence in \textit{Quelque chose noir} is thus located in the comparison between poems, their differences and variations.

Comparison is also at the heart of Jean-François Puff's evaluation of genre and form in \textit{Quelque chose noir}. Puff asserts that 'l'entrelacement des mots dans le poème, par le vers, par la rime' which characterises Roubaud's subscription to the troubadour aesthetic in \textit{Trente et un au cube} is replaced in \textit{Quelque chose noir} 'par "la ligne, les déplacements, les formats", par "blancs", "ponctuation", "silence".\textsuperscript{546} Puff cites Roubaud's 'Dialogue' to qualify his analysis of rhythm in \textit{Quelque chose noir}, describing the shift from rhyme and metric shaping to blank space, punctuation and typographical features that occurs from \textit{Trente et un au cube} to the later book of love poetry. While Puff concedes that there are rhythmic elements in \textit{Quelque chose noir}, he defines these as 'non non rythme' and 'surface', which replace the concepts of 'rythme' and 'volume' that are central to \textit{Trente et un au cube}.\textsuperscript{547} Puff interprets the notion of two-dimensionality in \textit{Quelque chose noir} as the manifestation of a failure. Alix Cléo is described as a prisoner of the two-dimensional surface: whether it is a question of the poems in which she is memorialised by her husband, or her own photographic works which feature her image.\textsuperscript{548} As Roubaud himself writes repeatedly in \textit{Quelque chose noir}, these can only be flat representations from which the person that Alix Cléo once was continually fades.

The reader is not invited to engage with the temporal and spatial markings of \textit{Quelque chose noir} in the same way as in \textit{Trente et un au cube}. In the latter volume, time and space welcome the reader into a familiar relation with the text, an intimate link that promotes the stimulation of memory. In \textit{Quelque chose noir}, references to time and space disorientate the reader,

\textsuperscript{544} Cardonne-Arlyck, \textit{Véracités}, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{546} Puff, \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, p. 416.
\textsuperscript{547} Puff, \textit{Mémoire de la mémoire}, p. 504.
\textsuperscript{548} Puff, 'L’Écriture photographique', p. 322.
refusing the formation of patterns or distinguishable sequences that might more readily elicit the investment of a reader's memory. Instead, memory is singularly that of the poet and of his fading souvenirs of Alix Cléo's life. The poet's second-person singular address is troubled and the reader's relationship with the text exists at a remove.

I found that the position of the reader in *Trente et un au cube* was aligned with that of the female beloved. Representing the intervention of otherness in the text, she is a symbol of the reader's contribution to the creation of meaning in the poems. Just as Irigaray's reading of the Lacanian feminine finds resistance to the structures that place her as other within the theory she deconstructs, so too Roubaud's invitation to his reader to fulfil the potential of his written text suggests the possibility that meaning does not end with the writing process. Spaces of potential within the poems may be activated by the reader, expanding possibilities with the engagement of memory in the reading process. Attempts to constrain the feminine presence within the cube only betray the impossibility of that desire. In the next part of this chapter, I will draw together the role of memory in the reading process and the symbolic spaces that make up *Quelque chose noir*. In the absence of the poet's love, what becomes of the reader's position? What is the new role of memory in the reading process?

### 4.7 Dimension Two: The Apartment

#### 4.7.1 Introduction

Explaining that the square, or 'carré' refers to the space of each poem in *Quelque chose noir*, Puff sees in the cubic nine-by-nine-by-nine of the entire volume a projection of the real space of the apartment that Jacques Roubaud now inhabits alone.\(^5\) It is a space described as 'réduit' in relation to that of *Trente et un au cube*, in which Puff sees a privileged space–time for the beloved constructed in rhythm, and the reduced space is evidence of the failure of a joint project in photography and poetry that the poet had hoped to pursue with his spouse: 'la chute du projet comme lieu de mémoire extériorisé dans une œuvre conjointe de

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\(^5\) Puff, 'L'Écriture photographique', p. 323.
photographie et de poésie'. I will return to Puff's notion of an exteriorised memory–space, but first I want to explore the relationship between the two-dimensional space of the page and the real space of the poet's apartment in *Quelque chose noir*. I begin with the relations between these different dimensions, because I too see a 'failure' of some sort in the connections that Roubaud weaves between poetry and memory in *Quelque chose noir* and I believe that this failure is manifested in the parallels the poet draws between his text and the space of the apartment in which he composes it.

In the next section, I will explore the ways in which the space of form and the spaces of the apartment demonstrate failures in memory. I begin by considering the place of the poet, who at times seems himself to have replaced the female who was imprisoned in the space evoked in *Trente et un au cube*. While in *Trente et un au cube* the cubic form of the poem and the evolving spaces of the bedroom and garden are integral to the poem's interaction with the reader's memory, tapping into the potential he or she brings to the reading process, I find in *Quelque chose noir* that the reader's contribution to the 'potential' of the text lies elsewhere.

### 4.7.2 Inadequate Spaces in *Quelque chose noir*: The Impossibility of Memory

Readings of the poems in *Quelque chose noir* as somehow diminished in form are supported by Roubaud's own references in the volume to this inadequacy. He writes, for example, of his 'mécontentement formel [...] au regard de la poésie'. His formal dissatisfaction stems from a now limited resource that afflicts language and the experience of the poet as he composes:

*Tu m'échappes*

De débris de poèmes je fais ces phrases. de couleurs devenues négligeables. de jours troubles.

Dans tout souvenir se perdent les couleurs. là tu es claire ou sombre, c'est tout ce dont mon langage peut jouer.

Intérieurement tu me confines à tes photographies.

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Tes couleurs m'échappent l'une par l'autre. comme tes phrases.  

Sentences, or 'phrases' of prose, replace the poetic line – 'vers' – and even then, they belong to 'débris de poèmes'. Roubaud draws on the language of photography to add to the notion of fragmentation in his poetry a loss of colour and a blurring of visual definition – 'couleurs devenues négligeables', 'jour troubles'. Behind the metaphor invoking both forms, poetry and photography, is the failure of memory to retain the presence of the lost loved one. Despite Roubaud's efforts to write (of) Alix Cléo, to remember her as she was, as she spoke, her colours fade and she becomes only the memory of her memory held in static images. The black and white – 'claire ou sombre' – in which Alix Cléo is depicted, are at once representative of the colours of her photographs (produced, for the most part, in black and white) and of what has been repeatedly referred to as the two-dimensionality of the poems themselves.

Without the intertwining rhyme words and rhythms underpinned by sequences of numerical constraint that are characteristic of Trente et un au cube, the poems of Quelque chose noir seem sparse to the ear, depleted of the phonic qualities that would place the poems nearer to the 'upper limit music' end of Zukofsky's scale of poetic language than 'lower limit speech'.

Diminished form in Quelque chose noir is a sign that the singular qualities possessed by the beloved are fading from memory with every day. While the careful crafting of Trente et un au cube is an attempt to detain the beloved for evermore, Quelque chose noir can only bear witness to her disappearance. Alix Cléo's memory evades the poet, leaving him prisoner to the photos that remain of her. In the English translation of this poem, Rosmarie Waldrop translates 'tu me confines à tes photographies' as 'you hedge me with photos'. The roles of poet and beloved have been turned upside down: it is now Roubaud who is prisoner to – or in – the structure of the poems in Quelque chose noir. Indeed, when the poet evokes the space around him, it is invariably that of his apartment.

In 'Dès que je me lève', the continuity of the poet's morning routine in his apartment space evokes a sense of stasis and aimlessness:

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552 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 127.
Dès que je me lève (quatre heures et demie, cinq heures), je prends mon bol sur la table de la cuisine. Je l'ai posé la veille, pour ne pas trop bouger dans la cuisine, pour minimiser le bruit de mes déplacements.

Je continue de le faire, jour après jour, moins par habitude, que par refus de la mort d'une habitude. Être silencieux n'a plus la moindre importance.  

The actions the poet carries out upon waking are defined in the second section of the poem by a sense of passivity. The double negative in 'refus de la mort d'une habitude' demonstrates the poet's reluctance to change, rather than a reason, or impulse for his decisions. He goes on in the poem to describe the coffee he makes: 'Je verse un fond de café en poudre, de la marque ZAMA filtre, que j'achète en grands verres de 200 grammes au supermarché FRANPRIX, en face du métro Saint-Paul.'  

The presence of brand names, measurements of coffee and directions for the local supermarket arranged within the prosaic syntax here challenge once again the poetry genre ascribed to the book. The repetition and monotony in the poet's routine seem to echo through the details he offers and their grammatical arrangement. Form is called into question when Roubaud cites a line from Rimbaud's 'Les Amis' in the poem: 'Je pense: "Et l'affreuse crème/Près des bois flottants."'  

Through the citation, the prose poem points beyond itself to the lyric form, which is evoked in the forward slashes marking out the line breaks in the original poem. The contrast between lyric poetry and prose (poetry) is compounded by the translation of Rimbaud's richly symbolic description of a landscape to the purpose of depicting the sight of a badly stirred coffee.

The Rimbaud citation also points beyond the volume to *Trente et un au cube*. There, the same quotation, laid out in verse form, acts as an epigraph to Poem 15. This earlier poem also evokes the poet's morning: 'ainsi dans la pause | qui précède les jours aux | premiers roulements | de pigeons amoureux quand | je
m'éveille contre ta || chaleur repliée'. The cooing pigeons and the warmth of his lover can be contrasted, however, with the emptiness and silence that characterise the mornings of 'Dès que je me lève': 'je m'assieds sur la chaise de cuisine, [...] face au fauteuil, laïd et vide'. The spaces of Roubaud's apartment are described in terms evoking Alix Cléo's absence rather than the warmth of the waking beloved.

If poetic form is somehow diminished in Quelque chose noir, its 'débris' and prosaic 'phrases' a substitute for the precisely constructed vers that constitute Roubaud's treatise on love poetry, it is because the real spaces it represents are also lacking. Unlike the cube that is the lovers' haven in Trente et un au cube – the intimate bedroom and the fertile spring garden – the apartment becomes a place that Alix Cléo used to dwell in: 'Je m'éloigne peu souvent de cet endroit comme si l'enfermement dans un espace minime te restituit de la réalité, puisque tu y vivais avec moi'. The hypothetical structure points to the impossibility of restoring Alix Cléo's presence, but does not stop the poet from closing himself off from the world within the space he shared with his wife. There are echoes of the cubic prison of Trente et un au cube in the rest of the poem whose beginning I have just cited here. Its title – 'Dans l'espace minime' – designates the hermetic space of the apartment, but also the failure of that space to hold on to the poet's beloved:

Cela qui m'occupe, entièrement, et me détourne du dehors, de m'éloigner, de quitter les chambres, les mouvements de soleil, c'est l'espace, l'espace seul, tel que tu l'avais empli d'images, de tes images, de tes étoffes, de ton odeur, de ta sombre chaleur, de ton corps.

Disparaissant, tu n'as pas été mise ailleurs, tu t'es diluée dans ce minime espace, tu t'es enfuie dans ce minime espace, il t'a absorbée.

The space evoked by poetic form in Trente et un au cube is one that is securely constructed and tightly sealed within the interwoven strands of the entrebescar tradition. Underpinned by number, words and the interactions of their sounds acquire a multidimensionality that functions to engage memory in the reading process. The poet thus lures his reader–lover into the cubic space of the poem. In

558 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 65.
559 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, pp. 27–28.
560 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 36.
561 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, pp. 36–37.
this extract from 'Dans l'espace minime', the poet is losing his love. Space is no longer a tool used by the poet to navigate memory processes, but only reveals his failure to retain the traces of Alix Cléo's presence. In the first section or sentence cited above, space overwhelms the poet, always the subject of verbs which divide him from the outside world. In the second section, the use of reflexive verbs – 'tu t'es diluée', 'tu t'es enfuie' – suggests that the beloved has eluded the poet's grasp. There is a tension between the sense that she has actively escaped into 'ce minime espace' and the closing notion that it has absorbed her. The effect of the poet's play on subject and object verbs leaves him standing alone: the space of the poem no longer draws in the lover. The link between memory and space in this poem demonstrates the failure of memory to retain Alix Cléo.

There are efforts in this poem and the next in the collection to stop up the space that absorbs Alix Cléo's memory. Roubaud describes staying indoors, dominated by the apartment space that surrounds him. However, the shifting light of the sun entering the apartment windows compounds the sense that the structure is not intact: 'À sa descente, comme à sa montée, le soleil pénètre, s'il y a du soleil, et suit son chemin reconnaissable, sur les murs, les planchers, les chaises, courbant, couchant les portes'. The sun penetrates the apartment space, altering its lines: 'courbant, couchant les portes'. The poet is passive before its movement: 'Je laisse le soleil s'approcher, me recouvrir, s'éteindre'. In 'Fins', the poet describes closing up the apartment at daybreak: 'la nuit avertie de sa fin, je me lèverai, je fermerai les portes, les lampes, le lit'. Despite these attempts to secure the apartment, the sun's movement again creates the sense of a leaking space: 'la flaque de soleil couché devant la porte, [...] déjà se remue, se retire'.

The leaking space of the apartment into which the traces of Alix Cléo's memory are diluted might be compared to the notions of poetic form as a whole which inform Quelque chose noir. The prosaic lines, described by the poet as 'débris de poèmes', lack the embrace of structure that characterises Trente et un au cube. Cubic patterns of three that become nine are conveyed as an undoing in

562 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 36.
563 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 37.
564 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 38.
565 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 38.
the domain of form, the impossibility of unifying Alix Cléo's now multiple identity. If poetic form is an approach to space and thus memory in Roubaud's work, *Quelque chose noir* enacts the failure of space and poetry to hold on to the memory of his love. The title of poem 'Fins' that sees a resistance to the poet's attempts to close off the memorial space of his shared apartment brings together these notions of space and poetic form. The plural of the noun in the title refers at once to the ending of night that appears in the citation above and to the position of the poem at the close of the book's second section. At the end of the poem, Roubaud writes: 'Maintenant, vient une fin, je renonce'. However, throughout 'Fins', the poet questions the nature of another ending. He asks: 'quelque chose s'achève mais comment savoir quoi?' and later wonders 'Quelque chose qui est à sa fin, toute proche [...] je ne parviendrai pas à savoir quoi'. The French noun 'fin' may refer to an aim, or purpose, but the questioning, the vague references to 'some thing' that evoke the book's title, and the sense of resignation in the poet as he closes the poem suggest the meaning designates only endings. The plural too takes away from the possibility of a decisive aim, or target. The poem distances this collection from the conscious gesture that built *Trente et un au cube*, a volume conceived of in its entirety from the outset of its composition. Instead, the reader here encounters a sense of loose endings and the withdrawal of the poet faced with the impossibility of defining the space that surrounds him and the poems that he writes across the page.

4.7.3 Memory Inferno: Refusing Feminine Form

There remains the question of the number nine as structuring element within *Quelque chose noir* and its relation to the poet's three-dimensional space. In *Autobiographie, chapitre dix*, the number nine was seen to pay homage to the love poetry of Paul Éluard, through an allusion to Dante's love for Beatrice. Dante is said to have met Beatrice for the first time when he was nine and their second meeting took place nine years later; the number nine also became a symbol in the poet's dreams and visions, or the times at which they occurred.

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568 See Andrew Frisardi's introduction to his translation of Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nova* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), in particular his exploration of the significance of the number nine in the work, pp. liii–lvi.
However, the number is also a mark of death in Dante's writing. The number nine represents the number of circles in Dante's *Inferno* and the number of the canto in which the characters of Virgil and Dante enter the most significant part of hell: the City of Dis. It is under this latter guise that the reader of *Quelque chose noir* encounters the number nine in Roubaud's work. In 'Méditation des sens', the poet's memory of Alix Cléo through the various senses is experienced as a descent into hell:

On y descend par une spirale, une damnation.

De la vue, à la voix. de la voix, au souffle, parfum, odeurs.

De l'odeur au goût: mordre, enfoncer, salives.

Fond du puits, intérieur ultime est le toucher.

Le toucher absolu du corps. la jouissance et la décomposition.

Le toucher des mains, de la chair, la coexistence en un même lieu mental, en un même corps des corps, le dire dans la bouche, le goût, le souffle, l'entrelacement qui respire pénètre.

Pour la méditation des cinq sens, là était la recollection de mortalité

Si la distance évanouissante des deux corps, brûlant de leur infiniment présente brûlure: paradis veillant sur son envers.

Toutes stations que maintenant je descends en enfer, par le souvenir.\(^569\)

The intensity of memory is expressed as stifling the poet. To remember the bodily presence of the beloved is to yearn, but the thought of her physicality brings with it the reminder of her mortality. The effects of memory described in this poem differ from those of the previous two pieces explored. Space no longer represents the dilution of memory, but the intensification of its depth. The movement downwards is emphasised by the notion of 'stations' accessed through memory and the successive linking of the senses in the poem's opening with prepositions 'de' and 'à'. The downward spiral and the well are symbols of the poet's suffering, his desire not only thwarted, but an eternal reminder of the decay and decomposition of the mortal body. The number nine that runs through

\(^{569}\) Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, pp. 82–3.
the poem is suggestive not only of the hellish anguish of the mourning lover, his inability to escape the pain of memory, but also the status of the body that lies buried deep underground.

In 'Méditation des sens' from *Quelque chose noir*, the poet confronts the memory of Alix Cléo that is not contained within the two-dimensional photos that fill the apartment, or the tinny voice recordings she left behind. Smell, taste and touch are senses that cannot be traced within the physical objects that Alix Cléo owned or created: 'Les autres traces, venues des autres sens ne sont qu'en moi. Quand je trébuche dessus, j'étouffe'. 570 The poet describes the effect of these sensorial memories on him as physical obstacles that he stumbles against, so overwhelming that they cut short his breath and suffocate him. With the shrinking of space comes the withdrawal of air and the sense that Roubaud cannot go on without Alix Cléo. Yet there is a paradox in the poet's expression of his suffering: the traces of Alix Cléo that stem from the senses of smell, taste and touch are now to be found only in Roubaud. The memories he holds of Alix Cléo and her physicality are singular to him and can exist only for him. The poet repeats this notion elsewhere in *Quelque chose noir*:

Et c'est pourquoi aussi la vie qui te reste, s'il te reste, est imprimée en moi, suaire, entremêlée en moi, refusant de se défaire.

Et de céder comme ta chair à la complaisante décomposition non imaginable, et de s'immobiliser comme l'image et la parole dans les parenthèses documentaires. Cette vie qui est cela:

Ton odeur, ton goût, le toucher de toi. 571

On this occasion, the poet goes further than an allusion to the singularity of memory. He suggests that Alix Cléo's existence, whatever form that may take beyond the 'parenthèses documentaires' of the photos and recordings that capture her for a fleeting moment, is henceforth inextricably intertwined with his own. The reference to the immobilising effect of these documentary memories also points beyond the notions of spatial imprisonment within the poem and the apartment to the temporal hell that they represent. Florence Marsal points out the repetitions that occur both in the poem titles and the references to Alix Cléo's

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570 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 34.
571 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 113.
photographs that surround the poet, describing the effect in *Quelque chose noir* as one which 'imprisons the reader and the poet in a time that repeats itself identically, with no possible escape'.

No longer the site of transformations and associations created in rhythm, memory is characterised by stasis and endless circularity.

There is, however, a hint of the troubadour *entrebecar* in the poet's description of Alix Cléo's life as woven into his own existence, refusing to come undone. The idea that her life is henceforth '(im)printed' within Roubaud also echoes the relationship between the poet and the beloved in *Trente et un au cube*, where there are references to the poet writing his love into the text.

Roubaud's use of imagery drawing together the writing and weaving processes of the troubadour *canso* also recall the position of the poet in *Trente et un au cube* as he who writes his muse into the text. The intricately designed structure of *Trente et un au cube* is aligned with the beloved herself in the volume; the poet writes of her being at the very centre of form in the book and in the central poem he seems to adjust her body parts around the words and spaces on the page. There is an element of resistance to the poet's crafting, however, which I found to be a space allocated to the reader and his or her involvement in the text's meaning through the interactions of memory.

Memory continues to be at the forefront of Roubaud's poetry in *Quelque chose noir*, but its relationship with space and poetic form points repeatedly to a sense of failure or dysfunction. Spatial representations of memory and their links to poetic form suggest leaking structures that can only lead to the dissolution of the beloved. As opposed to the intricate weaving that lure her into the bedroom of *Trente et un au cube*, here there is a loosening of form and a loss of definition in the space that the poet shared with her. Attempting to preserve her memory, the poet shuts himself away in the silence of his apartment, but the space becomes suffocating and punishing when vivid memories evoke his yearning for Alix Cléo: the number nine is a constraint that evokes the infernal rings of Dante's hell and the death of the poet's beloved. While in *Trente et un au cube* poetic form is linked to feminine form, in *Quelque chose noir* the patterns of nine and three are symbols of Alix Cléo's dissolution. To spare himself the pain

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of her memory, Roubaud now refuses the possibility of feminine form: 'je
pourrais te donner forme, parler, te refaire, un dos, un ventre, une nudité humide
noire, je ne m'y abandonne pas'.

Memory in Quelque chose noir is that of the poet. He remembers Alix
Cléo and whether those memories fade, or haunt, they are singular to the poet
and his experience. Markings of space and time in the volume are points he
shared with Alix Cléo, points that the reader can only observe from outside. The
poems of Quelque chose noir relate the poet's own struggle with memory in the
wake of his wife's death. He also renounces the rhythm and lyric that had
characterised his poetic composition before this time. Although he evokes the
processes that went into his crafting of Trente et un au cube and his position of
poet to beloved muse, the poet renounces the possibility of reconstructing Alix
Cléo in the imaginative work of memory. In refusing the position of the other
through the feminine in his writing, in which ways does Roubaud continue to
invite the reader to engage with his poetry, whether through memory or other
means? How has the reader's relationship changed with poetic form and the
spaces it fashions in Roubaud's writing?

4.8 Beyond the Text: Alix Cléo's Last Photo
Although I find that the relationship between memory and poetic form has
changed in Quelque chose noir, with the reader pushed into an oblique position,
that is not to say that Roubaud's notion of a literary potential to be fulfilled by
the reader is now absent in these poems. I will show the ways in which the poet
draws the reader into the apartment space he inhabits and thus, to a certain
extent, into the story he shares with Alix Cléo. My analysis takes place through
a comparison of two poems in Quelque chose noir, both entitled 'Cette
photographie, ta dernière'. The poems appear respectively at the opening and the
close of the book's sixth section and they each describe the poet's view of a
photograph taken by Alix Cléo. The photo hangs on the apartment wall in the
position in which Alix Cléo had placed it, between the very two windows that

573 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 37.
are pictured within it: 'Posée, au cœur, de ce qu'elle montre'. The poems present a spatial, literal mise en abyme as well as a textual one.

A number of repetitions resonate through the poems, echoing the picture within a picture that they depict. Their openings, for example, describe the room in the evening light. The first of the two poems begins:

Cette photographie, ta dernière, je l'ai laissée sur le mur, où tu l'avais mise, entre les deux fenêtres,

Et le soir, recevant la lumière, je m'assieds, sur cette chaise, toujours la même, la regarder, où tu l'as posée, entre les deux fenêtres,

Et ce que l'on voit, là, recevant la lumière, qui décline, dans le golfe de toits, à gauche de l'église, ce qu'on voit, les soirs, assis sur cette chaise, est, précisément,

Ce que montre l'image laissée sur le mur, sur le papier brun sombre du mur, entre les deux fenêtres.

The second of the poems opens:

Cette photographie, ta dernière, je l'ai laissée sur le mur, entre les deux fenêtres, au-dessus,

De la télévision désaffectée, et le soir, dans le golfe de toits à gauche de l'église, quand la lumière,

Se concentre, qui en même temps, s'écoule, en deux estuaires obliques, et inchangeables, dans l'image,

Je m'assieds, sur cette chaise, d'où l'on voit, à la fois, l'image intérieure la photographie, et autour d'elle, ce qu'elle montre,

Qui seulement, le soir, coïncide, par la direction de la lumière, avec elle.

The time of evening is the same in each poem, reflecting the same light conditions that went into the composition of the photograph itself. The position of the photo between the windows remains unchanged, even since Alix Cléo placed it there months before the time in which these poems were written. Roubaud too sits in the same chair – 'sur cette chaise' – taking up his familiar

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574 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 91. Spacing reproduced from the original in all citations of poems from the collection to follow in this chapter.
575 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 91.
576 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 103.
position before the picture and the windows looking out of the apartment. The phrase evoking the poet's point of view and the source of light through the window 'dans le golfe de toits, à gauche de l'église' is repeated not only within each poem, but throughout the volume, arising as a sort of leitmotif that the reader comes to memorise.

The repetitions that occur between the homonymous poems are interspersed, however, with differences. These extracts alone show the more condensed nature of the second of the two poems. There is also a shift in tone, when the poet refers to the 'télévision désaffectée' under the picture in the second poem. The disused TV set replaces Alix Cléo in the description of where the photo is placed and seems to infuse the two poems with a distinct sense of before and after. It cannot really be said that Alix Cléo is present in either of the poems, since both stage her disappearance from the room as a contrast to her presence within the photograph. However, the personal pronouns that address Alix Cléo seem to be more visible in the first of the poems. Referring to what he sees in the image, the poet writes:

parce qu'en ce cœur, le cœur de ce qu'elle montre, que je vois, il y a aussi, encore l'image elle-même, contenue en lui, et la lumière, entre, depuis toujours, depuis le golfe de toits à gauche de l'église, mais surtout il y a, ce qui maintenant manque

Toi. parce que tes yeux dans l'image, qui me regardent, en ce point, cette chaise, où je me place, pour te voir, tes yeux,

Voient déjà, le moment, où tu serais absente, le prévoient, et c'est pourquoi, je n'ai pas pu bouger de ce lieu-là.577

In the play of pronouns staging the difference between photograph and reality, absence and presence, the isolation through punctuation of the 'Toi' in the penultimate section seems to give greater impact to the image of Alix Cléo. The pronoun is followed by the only full-stop that appears within the body of either poem. The poet writes of a time before, when his wife could foresee the moment she would no longer be there. This sense of a change to come is compounded by the use of the conditional tense: 'le moment, où tu serais absente'. The close of the second poem can be contrasted with this:

577 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, pp. 91–92.
tu regardes,

Vers le point où je m'assieds, te voir, invisible maintenant, dans la lumière,

Du soir, qui pèse, sur le golfe de toits entre les deux fenêtres, et moi,

Absent de ton regard, qui dans l'image, fixe, la pensée de cette image, dédiée à cela, les soirs de maintenant, sans toi, au point,

Vacillant du doute de tout. 578

The conditional tense is replaced by the factual present and the pronouns representing Alix Cléo fade from prominence. The sparser lines of the second poem also reflect a sense of emptiness; the void that characterises Roubaud's existence since Alix Cléo's death is more prevalent. The poet himself seems to disappear before the two-dimensional gaze of the beloved, like the diminishing of poetic form that occurs in the absence of Roubaud's first reader.

In these readings, what becomes clear is that the play of similarities and differences that compose the pair of poems draws the reader in. The matching titles and opening words of the poems, the identical positions, oppositions and the network of gazes that are part of the layout of the room pose an almost ludic challenge for the reader, arousing a desire to find out what is the same, what shifts and what secrets might be hidden in the detailed echoing patterns of the two texts and their portrayals of the space of the apartment. They act as a palindrome that opens and closes section six of Quelque chose noir; their doubling reflects a sense of a before and after. In these instances, the two poems also emulate the form of the photograph in question: '51 rue des Francs-Bourgeois'. 579 In the photo, Alix Cléo and Roubaud both face the camera, Alix Cléo seated at the table on the left, and Jacques Roubaud reclining on the sofa, reading a newspaper, along the right-hand side. Their opposition is doubled by two windows between them that look out onto the street, and over the gulf in the rooftops to the left of the church. If the poems reflect the doubling that is present in the photographic image itself, perhaps we can say that they are also like photographs in their combined form. In their repetitions and the tiny shifts in

578 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, pp. 103–04.
579 The photograph is the last image to appear in Alix Cléo's Journal, p. 221. The photographs printed in the Journal appear chronologically in the text, sometimes to accompany events or moments recorded in the book's writing, sometimes not.
detail that create a sense of something the same but different, the poems are like two photos of Roubaud's view.

For Michel Monte, the poems express a 'vacillement': the refusal to fix 'un sens clair et unique', which is in tension with 'l'attitude obsessionnelle du scripteur', and thus 'le signe de la douleur'.\footnote{Michèle Monte, 'Quelque chose noir: de la critique de l'élegie à la réinvention du rythme', Babel, 12 (2005) <http://babel.revues.org/1093> [accessed 15 December 2013] (para. 49 of 58)} Indeed, in the shift from the first to the second of the poems, the tone becomes visibly starker and more pained. However, the poems are also a tribute to Alix Cléo, reflecting through the medium of poetry the form that was her craft and passion. They have a particular effect on the reader: the poems pull the reader into the sameness and difference of their detail and into the space that Roubaud inhabits. The textual mise en abyme functions as a formal analogy with its visual counterpart: when faced with a picture within a picture, the viewer cannot help but look more closely at the smallest image, identifying the features that make it a version of itself. However, while the repeated reference to the 'point' at which Roubaud sits seems to compound the effect of the mise en abyme, situating the onlooker within the space of the apartment, the poet's view through the windows sends us beyond. Because of its repetition, the phrase – 'le golfe de toits à gauche de l'église' – is one of the most memorable in Quelque chose noir; it remains almost like a refrain in the mind of the reader. The line directs our attention outside the apartment and beyond the space of the text. In my readings of Dire la poésie and Trente et un au cube, the windows represented spaces of potential within the text. Offering a view beyond the room of the poetry reading, and beyond the bedroom shared by the poet with his lover, the windows were openings that welcomed the participation of the reader in the text. In Quelque chose noir, it feels as though this line persistently directs the reader outwards. What is the nature of literary potential in a text that appears to send the reader beyond the spaces it creates?

Alix Cléo herself is identified with this space beyond the windows, the gulf formed by the rooftops to the left of the church: 'le golfe de toits' is also 'le golfe de toi'. Therefore, just as the beloved is aligned with the blank space in the centre of Trente et un au cube, so too the addressee of Quelque chose noir is
identified with the bay formed by the rooftops and the inlet of sky that it produces beyond the poet's window. In *Trente et un au cube*, the blank space contributes to the poeticity of the text and is constitutive of the poems' form: its rhythm, or music instilled through the breathing of the beloved and the reader. Like the space-between built into the relation proposed by Irigaray, the deep silence that means the lover listens to his partner and hears her breathing. I found that there was a form of collaboration through the medium of these spaces between the poet and his lover, and the poet and the reader. In *Quelque chose noir*, the elegiac nature of the writing and the emphasis in the text on the void left behind in the wake of Alix Cléo's passing make it tempting to interpret 'le golfe de toits à gauche de l'église' as an expression of the beloved's irrevocable absence. The gulf is bottomless in *Quelque chose noir*, representing the dissipation of Alix Cléo's memory, or it is engulfing, the suffocating intensity of grief.

Yet there are spaces in *Quelque chose noir* set out for Alix Cléo. Citations from her *Journal*, its particular use of punctuation and references to her photographic work abound in *Quelque chose noir*. In his 'Postface' written for Hélène Giannecchini's book on Alix Cléo's photography, Roubaud writes of *Quelque chose noir* as a sort of posthumous collaboration with the prose of the *Journal*. He describes the *Journal* as 'comme œuvre de prose [...] et généralement mis en rapport avec le livre de poésie que j'ai publié en 1986, *Quelque chose noir* qui, de manière très apparente, répond et dialogue avec lui.'

How far it is possible to speak of collaboration in the given situation is difficult, however. If Alix Cléo's *Journal* is to be described as a work of prose, intended to be read as a published volume, Roubaud's position as its editor cannot be ignored. The question of Alix Cléo's independence from Jacques Roubaud and the possibility that she may be accepted as a writer in her own right arises in Giannecchini's study. Writing of Jacques Roubaud's decision to publish only the parts of the journal that were recorded during the years he and Alix Cléo spent together as a couple, Giannecchini discusses the limits of Alix Cléo's position as Roubaud's wife:

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581 Giannecchini, *Une image peut-être vraie*, pp. 188–89. For Roubaud's 'Postface', see pp. 185–95.
Rien n'existe alors, avant 1979, le début de leur amour? La vie d'Alix est associée à celle de Jacques Roubaud au point que les événements antérieurs sont abolis; tout est réduit à leur histoire. En voulant permettre à son travail d'être vu, Jacques Roubaud s'y est lié. Si bien qu'Alix n'est souvent que la femme morte du grand écrivain, son état civil occultant alors sa production. Au mieux, elle est la muse pour laquelle il a érigé un tombeau dans son recueil de poèmes Quelque chose noir. Ce n'est pas ce qu'il voulait, il aurait aimé parfois être, lui, le mari de la grande photographe, réduit à sa simple fonction conjuguale.582

Roubaud had wanted to bring Alix Cléo's work the success and acclaim she did not have the chance to enjoy while she was alive. Giannecchini also suggests that Roubaud would have preferred to live in Alix Cléo's shadow, in matters of art and creativity, rather than the opposite. Readers of Quelque chose noir and the Journal will know that Roubaud's fame fuelled some of Alix Cléo's anxiety as a writer. In her Journal, she writes of the struggle to become a writer: 'J'ai voulu, à tort, être écrivain. Épouser un poète était le moyen de ne pas l'être'.583 Writing becomes an impossibility directly correlated with the status of her husband: 'impossibilité d'écrire, mariée à un poète'.584 Roubaud responds to Alix Cléo's expression of anxiety in his poetry volume: 'Impossible d'écrire, marié(e) à une morte'.585 The poet attributes the words to a feminine subject through his bracketed addition of the 'e' to the adjective form. In a sense, it is as though the poet does realise his wish to reduce his role to that of Alix Cléo's spouse.

The visible grammatical adjustment is just one of the ways in which the poet sends the reader beyond the text, in search of the source of his wordplay: Alix Cléo's writing. Roubaud uses similar strategies to direct the reader of Quelque chose noir to Alix Cléo's photography. While her photographs are not published in the French edition of Quelque chose noir, selected images figure in the English translation of the volume and in the second edition of Alix Cléo's Journal.586 Poucel describes the absence of photographs in Quelque chose noir as a gesture that 'concretizes the experience of loss by divorcing the text from its occasion'.587 He goes on to write that the decision not to publish the photographs

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582 Giannecchini, Une image peut-être vraie, p. 74.
584 Alix Cléo, Journal, p. 143. Typography reproduced from the original.
585 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 63.
586 Images from Alix Cléo's series Si quelque chose noir are included at the end of Some Thing Black.
587 Poucel, Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory, p. 178.
within the poetry volume is part of a 'poetics of absence and restraint found elsewhere in the poems'. The omission of the photographs from a volume that speaks of them repeatedly does indeed epitomise the experience of loss that is the poems' subject, but the tension created by the references to Alix Cléo's creations, combined with their notable absence from the poetry volume, pushes the reader to seek out the sources that Roubaud is alluding to. For example, 'Cette photographie, ta dernière' is identifiable as the photo entitled '51 rue des Francs Bourgeois', the last of the images to appear in the Journal, printed just above Alix Cléo's last diary entry. Roubaud's poem title – that photo, your last – leaves space for the reader to explore, to seek out the answers to the writer's clues by following his trail of intertextual links. As a reader faced with the title, 'Cette photo', I wish to know which photo. I wish also to compare the image to the dimensions of the room and the network of gazes described in Roubaud's poems. The duo of poems relies on the visual, emulating the effect of photographs through their comparative form. The reader who is missing this picture cannot help experiencing a sense of curiosity as to the subject of the poems and like the mise en abyme, Roubaud's texts draw us into a deeper engagement with their detail.

As Giannechini shows, Roubaud has a desire to have Alix Cléo's work seen. The view beyond the window and his emphasis on what lies beyond the text in the reader's hands make of Quelque chose noir a point within a network. After drawing the reader into the intimacy of the apartment space he shared with Alix Cléo, leaving clues and details for the reader to muse over, he leads us beyond the volume to the writings and photographs of his late wife. Memory in Quelque chose noir is not only that which fails to resurrect Alix Cléo, or that which haunts the poet; it is also tied up with the notion of potential and the role of the reader. As the poet of Trente et un au cube constructs spaces for the reader's memory to engage with, to stimulate his or her involvement in the creation of meaning in the text, so too the poet of Quelque chose noir creates spaces of potential mobility and collaboration. The feeling that there is a mystery to be solved, which I found to be present in some of the examples of literary potential I considered in Chapter Two, here leads to an external memory.

588 Poucel, Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory, p. 178.
589 Alix Cléo, Journal, p. 221.
space of sorts with which the reader engages through its intertextuality. Perhaps Roubaud has created something of what Puff described as a 'lieu de mémoire extériorisé dans une œuvre conjointe de photographie et de poésie'. The poet directs his reader to Alix Cléo's *Journal* and photography collection, without which a reading of *Quelque chose noir* feels somehow incomplete. The memory of the reader is solicited in order to perpetuate the appreciation of the art Alix Cléo composed.

Despite his wish not to dominate the posthumous reception of Alix Cléo's work, however, it is true that the poet's existence remains associated with it, as Giannecchini writes: 'En voulant permettre à son travail d'être vu, Jacques Roubaud s'y est lié'. His own popularity as a writer and the textual 'tombeau' he himself has created in Alix Cléo's memory have indeed contributed to the interest in Alix Cléo's work that she had wished for. Does this necessarily reduce the role of Alix Cléo to that of 'femme morte du grand écrivain', or muse? The question raised by Giannecchini returns me to the theoretical writings of Luce Irigaray, who questioned the position of the feminine as other, or muse within psychoanalytic structures they found to be ingrained with patriarchal tropes.

Perhaps it is impossible not to view Roubaud's uses of Alix Cléo's writings and photographs as examples of appropriation. However, some readers have interpreted both the direct and adjusted citations from her *Journal* within *Quelque chose noir* as a form of dialogue. For example, Marie Fabre draws out the dialogue in the *Journal*, describing 'les adresses à l'être aimé, seul interlocuteur direct du journal'. Thus, Roubaud's role in editing and publishing the journal might almost be considered to be a fulfilment of the dialogue begun in the text. Véronique Montémont writes of Roubaud's appropriation as 'un acte d'amour ultime', 'la seule manière de rester en contact avec la disparue, de se glisser dans ses mots, dans son regard, de continuer à être avec elle'. His absorption of Alix Cléo's language in *Quelque chose noir* is thus a way of being with her, of maintaining some form of contact with her after she is gone, through the voice of her writing. Moreover, Montémont emphasises Roubaud's own

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silence following his wife's death. The critic attributes Roubaud's renewed possibility for expression to his wife, 'par le truchement de la voix de la jeune morte'. It is Alix Cléo's voice that speaks through the published Journal, for Roubaud remains silent as editor: 'ne fournit aucune note, aucune explication, aucun commentaire de texte, prouve que sa démarche est pure de tout égoïsme et entièrement tournée vers la mise en lumière de l'autre'. Montémont and Giannecchini agree that Roubaud's intentions to increase awareness of Alix Cléo's work are noble, but the latter critic shows more concern regarding the impact of the poet on perceptions of Alix Cléo and her work. Giannecchini contributes to the discussion as author of the first full-length study on the work of Alix Cléo: one of very few works to consider the period of the photographer's life before she met Roubaud.

In what light are we to view the spaces carved out for Alix Cléo in Quelque chose noir? Roubaud uses them to direct his reader through a window out of the text, creating connections beyond the volume for the reader to pursue. The role of memory and potential in a reading of the poetry book lies in tracing the links in the intertextual network established by the poet through Quelque chose noir. While the poet's aims appear to be to broaden collective memory of his late wife's creative projects through formation of an external memory structure highlighting her photographs and journal writings, the question addressed in Chapter Two regarding the positioning of the beloved with the space of silence in the text arises here once again. Is Alix Cléo muse, appropriated, overshadowed by the work of Roubaud? Or does the poet step aside, as Montémont suggests, to foreground the work of his late wife?

4.9 Reflections on the Relation of Poet and Muse: Returns

The beloved addressed in Trente et un au cube represents the position of the reader: the 'other' invited into the text, she stands for the element of potential in poetry, the meaning created through the interaction of memory with the text. In the last chapter, however, I found her alignment with the silent centre of the volume to be the source of a paradox. Rather than an effacement at the hand of

592 Montémond, "Je t'aime jusque là", p. 208.
593 Montémond, "Je t'aime jusque là", p. 211.
594 Montémond, "Je t'aime jusque là", p. 209.
the writer, the blank space becomes one in which her presence is allowed to
flourish: the breath associated with the beloved is constitutive of poetic language
itself, instilling the rhythm that made of the poetry 'upper limit music', and also
providing a positive space-between in the lovers' union. What of the 'golfê de
toits' that the poet identifies with Alix Cléo in *Quelque chose noir*? Does the
emphasis on the poet's view of the patch of sky beyond his window speak of an
irreparable distance, rather than a productive space?

While the breath of the beloved captured as the rhythmic beat of the
poem in *Trente et un au cube* represents the space created for the reader's
involvement with the text, in *Quelque chose noir*, rhythm and the breathing of
Alix Cléo take a very different shape. Alix Cléo's respiratory difficulties are well
documented in her *Journal* and in Roubaud's writings and the spacing of the
words that compose some of the poems in *Quelque chose noir* has been linked
with the breathlessness of the poet's asthmatic wife. Geneviève Guétemme sees
the traces of Alix Cléo's jagged breathing in the punctuation used by Roubaud in
his poetry: 'Jacques Roubaud reprend notamment, dans *Quelque chose noir*, la
pontuation, sans espace entre certains mots et pleine de blancs, du *Journal*.
Cette ponctuation qui accélère et distend les phrases, présente une image de
l'asthme d'Alix, de son manque de souffle et ses appels d'air'.

Beyond this
homage to Alix Cléo and its
monument to her suffering, Guétemme finds that
the spaces in common in the two works represent not only Roubaud's own grief,
but also his continuation of Alix Cléo's work: 'Dans les texte de Jacques
Roubaud, les points intempestifs, les retours à la ligne et les espacements
d'interlignes visualisent son souffle à lui: coupé par la mort d'Alix. Ils montrent
aussi qu'il s'est approprié le travail d'Alix sur le vide et la coupure et qu'il le
continue'. Guétemme's description brings together the poet and his beloved,
and suggests a common aim in their writing, but her idea of Roubaud's project as
extending Alix Cléo's work comes back to the question of appropriation.

My exploration of the links between breathing and Roubaud's beloved
extends beyond *Quelque chose noir*. While some readers have recognised a
movement towards dialogue in the poetry volume, and while it is clear in the

595 Geneviève Guétemme, 'Le *Journal* d'Alix Cléo Roubaud: étude d'un paratexte
photographique, poétique et amoureux', *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, 49 (2012), 59–
78 (p. 68).
596 Guétemme, 'Le *Journal* d'Alix Cléo Roubaud', p. 68.
book that Roubaud intends the reader to go beyond his poetry to the photography and prose of Alix Cléo, the role the poet has in appropriating and editing his wife's writings gives them a context that lies within his own œuvre. While my exploration of the possibility of collaboration between Jacques Roubaud and Alix Cléo begins with *Quelque chose noir*, it will venture beyond the volume to look at one of Alix Cléo's most known photos: *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*. Although my focus remains the poetry of Jacques Roubaud and the relationship between the female beloved and form in his poetry, I will first consider the poet's response to *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration* in prose volume *Le grand incendie de Londres*, moving on to look at resonances of this initial response within Roubaud's recent poetry volume, *Octogone*. My aim is to show collaboration between the poet and his wife, even after death creates a gulf between them. I will show that the beloved's breathing is still at the heart of the collaboration in poetic form, and that the reader and the role of memory in reading Roubaud's poetry are intrinsic to the functioning of that form.

4.10 Breathing, Form, Collaboration

The distinctive spaces that shape the poems of *Trente et un au cube* are aligned with the breathing of the beloved addressee, and her beating heart is the rhythmic centre that generates the volume. These spaces that constitute the rhythm of the text are the basis of its music, the aural dimension that is integral to the poet's enticement of the reader and the engagement of memory. Alix Cléo's respiration is also referred to as rhythm in *Quelque chose noir*, but rather than figuring in an emphasis on music and sound in poetry, breathing appears in a poem entitled 'Art de la vue':

La netteté, la décision extrême de l'intention visuelle

Sans aucun doute cette absence d'hésitation est liée à l'ubiquité photographique, qui fragmente chaque mouvement en une séquence de gels

Mais du froid de l'immobilité acquise dans le sel la chaleur du corps solarisé s'évapore comme la sueur brumeuse au dessus des chevaux dans l'hiver new-yorkais de Stieglitz
D'un côté le littéral, l'absolutisme maniériste, les rayons lumineux conduits, forcés comme, à l'écrire

De l'autre, sur fond minimal géométrique (donné) le geste de tenir l'appareil sur la poitrine (contre le cœur, les seins) la pose nocturne interminable, aux seules étoiles, 'quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration'

Image avalée par le souffle.597

The visual is at the forefront as Roubaud describes Alix Cléo's Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration. The photo itself is a memory of the moment it was taken: in the black of night, Alix Cléo lies naked on the ground before a row of cypress trees in Roubaud's childhood home of Saint-Félix. With the camera resting on her chest, the long exposure of the photo over fifteen minutes produces an image marked by Alix's jagged breathing, an image which bears little resemblance to its visual referent.598 Roubaud captures the contrast between the decisiveness behind the composition of the image and the hazy result in his poem. He evokes Stieglitz's Terminal to highlight a series of oppositions and contrasts within Alix Cléo's photo. The Terminal contrasts definition and blurry edges, immobility and movement, cold and heat; in the foreground, hot steam rises from horses in the cold winter snow, while a set of powerful verticals in the building and colonnades behind them make up the background of the photo. The oppositions in Stieglitz's work may be compared to those that make up Alix Cléo's photo: the movement of her breathing, the heat of her tanned body in Roubaud's memory and the exposure of the photo taken over fifteen minutes may be contrasted with the immobility of the resulting image and its inflexible freezing of time within a sequence. The differences distinguish the 'littéral', the lines of darkness and light that make up the image, from the memory of the night on which it was composed and Alix Cléo's 'geste' of holding the camera against her chest.

The dichotomy between what the viewer sees in the photograph and the memory it represents characterises Roubaud's response to the photograph elsewhere in his writing. At first glance, the photograph looks something like an x-ray; jagged lines separate what appear to be black hills along the lower half of

597 Roubaud, Quelque chose noir, p. 99.
598 Gianneckchini, Une image peut-être vraie, p. 119.
the image from a white sky across the top of the image. Grey smudges blur the lines between black and white, and also the lower sections of the black slopes. Roubaud describes the photograph as he sees it positioned on his writing desk five years after it was taken:

montagnes très abruptes, plusieurs plans de montagnes s'enfonçant vers un arrière de l'image, relief imaginé par le devenir gris des noirs; montagnes regardées du plancher d'une vallée sombre, sombre de la muraille de noirs qui se dresse verticalement devant elle; vallée sombre et sans détails, à peine touchée, minimalement, de quelques photons tombés du ciel sans couleur; montagnes s'enfonçant dans d'autres montagnes, grises, éclairées de très loin.\textsuperscript{599}

The source of this extract is not without significance. The passage describing the photo appears for the first time in Roubaud's \textit{Grand incendie de Londres}, written in 1985, but is taken up again in 2014, in the poet's 'Postface' to Hélène Giannecchini's \textit{Une image peut-être vraie}. The reappearance of the extract in the first book-length dedication to the work of Alix Cléo places Jacques Roubaud in the position of critic, or reader, albeit one close or privileged enough to provide a 'Postface'. Despite its context respectively in a self-declared volume of prose and a critical study of Alix Cléo's photography, Roubaud's reading of Alix Cléo's photo seems to take on the qualities of a poem. Repetitions abound in the passage, so that one phrase describing the 'montagnes' seems to successively sink into another, much like the slopes of the image themselves. Words create shifting shapes: 'image' flows into 'imaginé', the 'sombre' of 'vallée sombre' is repeated after the quick breath of a comma, and greys and blacks merge into one another in the darkness. Alliterations and assonances drive the writing on: 'p', 'v' and 'to' sounds recur in 'plusieurs plans', 'verticalement devant elle; vallée sombre' and 'photons tombés'; 'verticalement' echoes in 'minimalement' and 's'enfonçant'. The effect, compounded by the repeated use of semi-colons and the lack of full stops, is one of breathlessness, perhaps in homage to the photographer and her subject. The repetitions and modulations create a sense of speed and unstoppable flow.

As the poet moves on in his description, the perceived image of the mountains in the photo before him morphs into one of smoke and then flames:

\textsuperscript{599} Roubaud, \textit{Le Grand incendie de Londres}, pp. 396–97. See also Roubaud's 'Postface' in Giannecchini's \textit{Une image peut-être vraie}, p. 191.
Ce seraient montagnes sauf que les airs, au-dessus, sont envahis aussi de noir: du noir cette fois comme une fumée; les montagnes ne sont pas solides, profondes, mais de fumée épaisse, noires de fumée dont on ne voit pas les flammes, ou plutôt dont les flammes sont noires elles-mêmes, sont la fumée même; un feu noir; un feu–fumée d'une seule noire couleur; un feu sombre qui renvoie la lumière qui l'exhibe, qui le dessine, qui le pénètre de gris en arrière et le dissipe en fumées.

Ce ne sont pas des montagnes, ce sont des flammes inclinées vers la gauche, des flammes obscures qui ne poussent pas toutes droites vers le ciel, mais s'inclinent sous la lumière visible à droite, la lumière lointaine qui les enveloppe de sa clarté, les définit comme flammes; les flammes s'inclinent sous la lumière, et sous le vent invisible aussi, venu du coin lumineux, à droite, où le golfe de lumière est le plus profond; le vent et la lumière viennent de là, comme la photographie le révèle.600

The description accumulates in the building of subordinate clauses that connect either through repetition of the nouns or adjectives that close the previous clause, or through prepositional phrases and relative clauses that create a branching out in the passage. The interweaving of nouns such as 'fumée', 'flammes' and 'lumière' is evocative of the entrebescar technique that has been so important in Roubaud's writing, hinting at the presence of poetry in these descriptions of Alix Cléo's photo. The entrebescar-like woven strands in this text also establish a particular relationship with the photograph in question. The sense that the elements of syntax in the text blend and merge through repetition and adjustment emulates the forms that make up the photograph: the spaces of colour – white, grey, black – separated by blurred lines and the peaks that seem at times to run into one another. Roubaud thus incorporates the rhythm of Alix Cléo's irregular breathing into his writing, through his account of the photograph that he takes as his subject. In the spaces joining the visual and the textual is the jagged breathing of Alix Cléo.

In this extract from Roubaud's reading of Alix Cléo's photo, the sense of flow driving the description forward is only punctuated by the paragraph changes, headed on each occasion by the gradual revelation that the peaks in the photograph are not, in fact, mountains. They are first manifestations of thick smoke, and then they are flames bending in the wind. The true subject of the photograph is revealed in instalments, it seems. Later in the passage, Roubaud writes: 'La photographie n'est pas de flammes, même noires, pas de montagnes

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600 Roubaud, Le Grand incendie de Londres, p. 397. Also in Gian necchini, Une image peut-être vraie, p. 191.
avalées par l'obscurité de nuit, mais de cyprès; les cyprès dans la nuit bougies noires bougées de vent, flammes–fumées'. Following the image through the eyes of the poet, the reader might at first imagine the trees bending in the wind, but the indication of the photograph's subject shifts once again when the poet remembers that on the night the photograph was taken, the air was still:

Mais les cyprès, alors, ne bougeaient pas: au moment dont je me souviens, le moment que j'écris, octobre, il y a du cers tiède qui s'enveloppe autour de mes jambes, qui vient battre obstinément la colline en haut de la restanque, et les cyprès s'inclinent, non vers la gauche dans un souffle venu de l'autre direction mais vers l'avant; ils s'inclinent de la tête comme ils le font toujours, comme des flammes, comme des bougies nocturnes dans une chambre fenêtre ouverte, comme des montagnes chargées de nuit quand on les contemple fixement. En octobre de cette année antérieure, dans le cers tiède de deux heures du matin, je me souviens, comme je me souviens maintenant, de la photographie intitulée Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration (les deux souvenirs se superposent, deviennent indistincts; je me souviens maintenant, devant l'image, et je me souviens m'être souvenu), du moment d'aôut, nocturne aussi; à ce moment les cyprès ne bougeaient pas. Et, Alix se levant, regardant l'allée des cyprès, l'air était chaud, immobile, en repos dans la nuit, il n'y avait pas de vent'.

There are two memories intertwined with the image shown in the photo: the original moment in which the photo was taken by Alix Cléo, on a hot August night in 1980, and the moment in October 1985 which Roubaud records in his prose writing. Just as the original memory, and the memory of that memory become confused in the mind of the poet, so too it becomes unclear for Roubaud's reader whether the metaphors that made of the photographic forms mountains, smoke and flames are inspired in the poet by the view of the cypress trees he encounters in October 1985, or whether the photo itself made him think of the trees 'comme des flammes, comme des bougies [...] , comme des montagnes chargées de nuit'. The similes used to describe the trees that the poet sees leaning in the October wind resonate with the shapes that he attributed to the forms in Alix Cléo's photograph. The memories overlap and the poet's vision of the photograph is included in that intertwining of moments remembered and views.

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An echo of Roubaud's description of *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration* sounds in the poet's most recent collection to be published to date by Gallimard: *Octogone*. The volume's opening poem, 'Entrecimamen', is a return to Roubaud's childhood home and troubadour heritage.\(^{603}\) In the prose poem, Roubaud pays tribute to his origins in the form of a wind that weaves its way through the peaks and lows of southern French terrain:

Dans les branches les plus hautes de grands arbres, des pins, des sapins, cèdres, mélèzes, sous le vent fort mais régulier, qui n'est pas le vent de tempête qui choque, entrechoque, embarrasse, punit, arrache, déracine, mais le beau grand vent constant, pressant, pressé des provinces méditerranéennes, le 'cers' du Minervois, des Corbières.\(^{604}\)

The text's rhythm is produced in layers of assonance, alliteration and lexical repetitions. The way in which successive clauses pick up phonic and lexical elements of what has come before not only drives the poem forward in a way that reflects the force of the incessant wind, but also evokes the form of Roubaud's description years earlier of Alix Cléo's *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*. Towards the end of the poem, there are further resonances between the two texts, when the poet becomes breathless in the face of the driving wind:

sur la colline, [...] le visage heurté, giflé de draps d'air, la bouche emplie d'un bâillon d'air froissé, presque m'étouffant, presque asphyxiant, presque étranglé, garrotté, suffocant, l'oscillation de flamme de bougie des cyprès aux plumeaux vert–noir, leurs affrontements, leurs confrontations aux gestes–paraphes des pins, et des amandiers en dessous, jusqu'à ce qu'enfin, et toujours, en chacun des lieux envahis par le vent en vient à s'établir, s'imposer, créant comme une oasis de tranquillité au cœur d'un tourbillon, un 'entrecimamen'.\(^{605}\)

Silenced, suffocated by the palpable slaps of air, the poet sees a row of cypress trees dancing in the wind, their movement like the candle flame he saw in Alix Cléo's photograph. Absorbed into this dedication to the troubadour craft are the echoes of a memory rooted in *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*. The 'entrecimamen' that is the subject of the poem is the

\(^{603}\) The troubadour term 'entrecimamen' signifies 'entrelacement', and is a reference to the 'entreescar' technique in noun form.


intertwining of lexical items and phonic assonances, but also of reading and memory. In Chapter One, I found that the young Roubaud would absorb fragments of poetry, his reading thus nourishing his own poetic output. Here, and by a visual analogy, his poem bears traces of his reading of Alix Cléo's photograph from decades before.

The poet's account of what he sees in Alix Cléo's photograph has a special place in this study, whether the reader chooses to classify it as prose or accept it as poetry. I believe that the piece of writing gives a reading of Alix Cléo's Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration as a poem. That is, Alix Cléo's photo is read in the same way that Roubaud invites the reader to interact with his poetry. The poet invests the spaces of the photo with his memories, and in turn, he allows its lines and shapes to stimulate his memory, and to create associations and new directions. His memory interacts with the form of the photo in the ways that he set out for poetry.

I have already described the ways in which Roubaud's writing in the extract reflects the characteristics that are singular to the image: the blurred lines, the running into one another of its various elements. Perhaps it is also possible to see in Roubaud's lexical repetitions and limited variation on nouns and adjectives the few colours that make up the image: shades of black, white and grey. Beyond this emulation of the photograph in his writing, the shapes that Roubaud sees as he observes the photograph positioned on his desk may be aligned with the notion of poetic language that I discussed in Chapter One. According to Roubaud's conception, formulated in vocabulary used by Zukofsky, poetic language is described as being nearer to 'upper limit music', rather than 'lower limit speech'; the referent fades from the fore as rhythm and sound are privileged in his definition of poetry. In Roubaud's reading of Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration, as we have seen, the forms of the photo are mountains, smoke and flames blown by the wind. For the reader following the poet's account, particularly in the absence of the image itself, the lines and forms in the photograph successively become the objects that Roubaud describes them as: mountains, flames, smoke, windblown trees. The forms seen in the image become material objects that exist in their own right, constantly shifting and existing as independent of their referent. In the same way, words in Roubaud's poetic language at times acquire an object-like materiality, becoming
self-referential in the foregrounding of their phonic qualities. Finally, rhythm is at the heart of the image. As the beloved's breathing punctuates the lines of *Trente et un au cube*, providing the spaces that are vital for the text's interaction with memory, so too Alix Cléo's respiration shapes the photograph. Rhythm draws in the reader, eliciting his engagement with the form of the text.

In his alignment of *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration* with poetic form, Roubaud places himself in the position of reader. He is Alix Cléo's reader and engages with her photograph in the same ways that he elicits a response from the reader of his poetry. As editor of Alix Cléo's *Journal* and writer of *Quelque chose noir*, the poet appropriates the work of Alix Cléo; her words and photographs acquire new resonances and increased readership, but within the context of Roubaud's own *œuvre*. In this extract from his prose volume *Le Grand incendie de Londres*, but more importantly as part of his 'Postface' in Hélène Giannecchini's study of Alix Cléo's photography, this text is a reading that places the poet in a different position in relation to his wife from that of poet to beloved addressee. He is her reader; he engages with the piece's form, allowing a network of associations and connections to grow from his vision of the photo, fulfilling his continuing notion of potential by which the reader is required to participate in the meaning generated in a text.

4.11 Grief and *Biipsisme*: Different Forms of Silence

Reflected in Roubaud's texts published after Alix Cléo's passing is a sense of conflict between the poet's silence in grief and the need to speak. Against the backdrop of many months during which the poet feels an impossibility to express his experience in poetry, in *Quelque chose noir*, the poet writes: 'On ne peut pas me dire: “il faut le taire”'.

This struggle is summed up by Sandra Gilbert as a reaction to an untimely death: 'anyone who has suffered the shock of a death that is unexpected or experienced as wrongful has had to engage with what is impossible to tell yet somehow essential to speak, if only stammeringly'.

Gilbert's summary captures, on the one hand, a sense of shock, or disbelief in mourning. There is often associated with bereavement an inability

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606 Roubaud, *Quelque chose noir*, p. 22.
to articulate the sense of loss that is felt – it is the unthinkable, the unspeakable – but Gilbert additionally suggests a sense that the survivor feels they have been wronged. Perhaps it is this feeling of injustice that is the source of the impulse to speak: a will to explain, justify, and in that way understand the unfathomable.

Elisabeth Bronfen points out what is frequently referred to as an impossibility in language when it comes to death:

Placed beyond the register of images that the living body can know, 'Death' can only be read as a trope, as a signifier with an incessantly receding, ungraspable signified, invariably always pointing back self-reflexively to other signifiers. Death remains outside clear categories. It is nowhere, because it is only a gap, a cut, a transition between the living body and the corpse, a before (the painful fear, the serene joy of the dying person) and an after (the mourning of the survivor), an ungraspable point lacking any empiric object.608

Death is beyond the line of what can be experienced by the survivor, which perhaps goes some of the way towards accounting for the silence that grief instils in the 'survivor'. Bronfen's description resonates with aspects of Quelque chose noir: the sense of a before and after that characterises the experience of the mourner, the identification of death as a 'gap', or 'cut', the 'ungraspable point'. Roubaud's references to his everyday life following the death of Alix Cléo point to a life divided into the before and after of his wife's loss, a before and after to poetry and the ability to write it. As poet he also grapples with finding a way not only to address Alix Cléo but identify her. As a result, she is associated with that which is missing in form.

The vacillation between silence and the impulse to speak experienced by the mourner is articulated rather differently by Jacques Derrida in his dedication to his late friend, Roland Barthes:

Deux infidélités, un choix impossible: d'un côté ne rien dire qui revienne à soi seul, à sa propre voix, se taire ou au moins se faire accompagner ou précéder, en contrepoint, par la voix de l'ami. Dès lors par ferveur amicale ou reconnaissante, par approbation aussi, se contenter de citer, d'accompagner ce qui revient à l'autre, plus ou moins directement, lui laisser la parole, s'effacer devant elle, la suivre, et devant lui. Mais ce trop de fidélité finirait par ne rien dire, et ne rien échanger. Il retourne à la mort. Il y renvoie, il renvoie la mort à la mort.609

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608 Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body, p. 54.
Derrida opposes silence to speaking in honour of the friend who has passed away, nonetheless describing both as 'infidélités'. In speaking on behalf of a friend who is no longer living, there is the risk of imposing only one's own presence, or 'voix'. The poignancy of Derrida's dilemma is derived from the situation of both figures in the sphere of philosophy and critical thought: to speak for the deceased equates to an erasure of sorts, an overshadowing. Derrida proposes 'quoting' the friend as an alternative, describing this particular form of silence as *accompanying* that which comes back to the other, *letting* him speak, and *effacing oneself* before his speech. However, his conclusion that citation in this case amounts to 'saying and exchanging nothing' tells us that there is no act of giving in silence, no homage, no dedication.

There are many differences between the context of Derrida's eulogy and the relationship between Jacques and Alix Cléo Roubaud as it figures in the written and photographic publications of the couple. The context of friendship is now one of marriage, and while Roland Barthes enjoyed great success in the literary domain, Alix Cléo's writings betray her sense of anguish as an aspiring writer. Nonetheless, I would like to consider the relevance of the impasse in this extract from Derrida's writing in the different forms of silence that characterise Roubaud's writing following Alix Cléo's death. Perhaps the differences between the two partnerships themselves raise important questions: between the notably unequal literary statuses of Alix Cléo and Jacques Roubaud, does it always come back to the voice of the poet? In the relationship between lovers, is there a greater likelihood of overlapping voices and what is the precise danger in ascribing the loudest voice to the male writer who addresses his beloved in poetry? Can we speak of 'infidelity', after Derrida, in the opposition of the poet's silence, or his use of citation, to a 'saying and exchanging'?

In this chapter, I have touched on this opposition between silence, or citation, and 'saying' as it is produced in some of the literary criticism surrounding Alix Cléo's *Journal* published by Roubaud in the wake of her death. On the one hand, I have found in Véronique Montémont's reading a tendency to see self-effacement in the silences that accompanied his role of editor to the volume – the lack of footnotes or interventions on the part of the poet, the absence of his name from the cover of the published journal. Others such as
Geneviève Guetemème and Marie Fabre write of citation in Roubaud's *Quelque chose noir* as a form of dialogue established between the poet and Alix Cléo. On the other hand, there remains a sense of questioning underlying Hélène Gianneccini's account of Roubaud's involvement in the text. Gianneccini's suggestion that Roubaud is inseparable from a perception of Alix Cléo's work, reducing her to the position of 'femme morte du grand écrivain', and 'muse pour laquelle il a érigé un tombeau dans son recueil de poèmes *Quelque chose noir*', even while he may wish to disappear into the background, resonates with the questions raised here in relation to silence and speaking.

A third possibility, somewhere between (citation as) silence and speaking that risks coming back 'to one's own voice', may exist in the form of Roubaud's own notion of *biipsisme*. The term encapsulates the writer's theory of love tied in with a conception of poetry that follows a line back into the troubadour tradition. For the two linked in love, *biipsisme* means unity without erasing difference: 'Chacun, une y est l'autre de l'un, une. L'inséparabilité y est absolue, mais sans indistinction: parce que l'amour est de ce monde et du corps'.

There are resonances with Irigaray's conception of love as protecting the distance that maintains difference in the two subjects that enter into a relation, but Roubaud's idea seems to place more emphasis on the ideal, perhaps utopian aspects of the fusion: 'Dans ce monde, s'il avait pu être pensé, la pensée de l'autre, toujours, aurait été la pensée de l"autre de deux"'.

Opposed to the notion of solipsism, Roubaud's definition relies on the extension of thought beyond the self. The poet's reference to the 'world' of *biipsisme* as other and his use of the past conditional in the description point to its impossibility, perhaps since in the latter citation the poet speaks from within the world of one left behind: 'Le monde d'un seul, mais qui aurait été deux'.

The fullest definition of *biipsisme* comes into being in poetry. Roubaud writes of a poem composed in two voices, the 'voix-guide' and 'voix-écho'. Rather than dominating the sequence, in a twist created by a constraint elaborated by the poet, the 'voix-guide' finds itself submitting to the same constraint as the 'voix-écho':

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La deuxième voix écoute et pèse et rumine et se remémore ce que dit la voix première, qui parle pour elle et qui ne parle qu'afin d'assurer que ce qu'elle aura dit ne rendra pas la seconde voix muette mais au contraire à la sienne parfaitement accordée. Aucune des deux voix, en fait, ne commande l'autre; elles se soumettent toutes les deux à la règle, qui est la Règle d'Amour.613

The constraint involves a series of repetitions of 'nos jours' and 'nos nuits'. Every time the guiding voice says either 'nos jours' or 'nos nuits', the reply from the echoing voice must be 'nos jours'. When the guiding voice doubles his or her utterance – 'nos jours, nos jours', or 'nos nuits, nos nuits' – the reply from the echoing voice is 'nos nuits'.614 The constraint limiting the 'voix-guide' is that he or she must make sure the 'voix-écho' never falls silent, for the echoing voice must repeat exactly what the guiding voice says, even if there is a delay and the echo becomes interspersed with further utterances from the guide. For example:

Nos jours
nos nuits, nos nuits
nos jours, nos jours

Nos jours  nos jours
nos nuits  nos nuits
nos nuits

The echoing voice must be given the opportunity to say both of the 'nos nuits' that make up the guiding voice's first utterance, before then taking up the echoes of 'nos jours nos jours':

nos nuits
nos jours
nos nuits, nos nuits

nos nuits  nos jours
nos jours  nos jours
nos nuits

In this way, the guiding voice is subjected just as much as the echoing voice to the constraint structuring the poem. Roubaud sets out his explanation as a dialogue, in which his interlocutor asks just what the reader might be thinking:

613 Roubaud, 'L'Amour, la poésie', pp. 84–85.
614 For a detailed description of the constraint that structures the poem and its effects, see Roubaud, 'L'Amour, la poésie', pp. 81–86.
– La seconde voix n'est-elle pas le souvenir de la première? la première l'anticipation, l'imagination de la seconde?
– En effet, en amour, deux voix se revoient et se prévoient l'une l'autre.  

If the 'voix-guide' does not stay in tune with the sequence of echoes, he or she will either silence the second voice, or the poem will end in a cacophonous repetition of endless 'nos jours', or 'nos nuits'.

The poet gives an extended example of the two voices at work, ending in a numerical palindrome: 'Cela fait 53 paroles pour la voix-guide, 35 pour la voix-écho'. The numerical play gives rise to a close of the discussion on love and a definition of love poetry:

La première voix du poème, la voix-guide, avance en assurant la préservation exacte de son passé. Il me semble dans ces conditions que ton poème n'est pas un poème de l'amour mais seulement du souvenir de l'amour. Et même pas du souvenir réel de l'amour réel, mais du souvenir imaginé d'un amour rêvé.

– Sans doute. Mais tout amour ne vit que de préparer la pérennité de son souvenir.

In a movement echoing the palindrome that brings together the 53 words spoken by the guiding voice, and the 35 uttered by the echo, the poem as a whole enacts the expression of love and its memory.

Jean-François Puff draws the notion of the 'voix-guide' and the 'voix-écho' into his analysis of Quelque chose noir, seeing in Roubaud's adoption of fragments from Alix Cléo's Journal 'la tentative de renversement de la voix-guide en voix-écho' and the hope of restoring what he describes as 'un impossible dialogue, par l'entrelacement de voix à jamais séparées'.

Véronique Montémont too writes of an experience of 'biipsisme' between the poet's Quelque chose noir and Alix Cléo's Journal, though pointing out the irrevocable distance across time that it highlights: 'Ce qui est absolument tragique, c'est que l'échange se fait à contretemps'. The disjunction effected by time is described by Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck as 'une sorte de dialogue

615 Roubaud, 'L'Amour, la poésie', p. 85.
616 Roubaud, 'L'Amour, la poésie', p. 86.
617 Roubaud, 'L'Amour, la poésie', p. 86.
618 Puff, Mémoire de la mémoire, p. 442.
Perhaps the notion of dialogue, particularly in line with Roubaud's elaboration of the intertwining 'voix-guide' and 'voix-écho', may be proposed as a third possibility to break the dichotomy between speaking and silence in Derrida's dedication to Barthes. It would not simply be a matter of 'accompanying' the other through the act of quotation, as Derrida puts it, but also of responding to her.

Yet the very descriptions of 'dialogue' given in these readings of Roubaud's texts are problematic and ambiguous. Puff describes the dialogue posited between the poet and his beloved as 'impossible', Montémont writes that it takes place 'à contretemps' and Cardonne-Arlyck places it beyond the grave. Each of the three writers classifies the dialogue that occurs through Roubaud's Quelque chose noir and Alix Cléo's Journal as somehow impossible. Although the voices of the two volumes address one another, perhaps Roubaud's interweaving of his responses to Alix Cléo's journal entries in poetry can only ever be citation. Nonetheless, I find Roubaud's conception of poetry as created between the 'voix-guide' and the 'voix-écho' to be present in my own hypothesis of the poet as reader of Alix Cléo.

The harmonious sequence of the guiding and echoing voices unfolds only in the presence of respective silences that allow the other's utterance to take place. However, this example of silence is not to be aligned with 'quoting', as Derrida evokes it. Rather each voice both anticipates and bounces off the other, the act of listening as vital in the sequence as that of speaking – 'deux voix se revoient et se prévoient l'une l'autre'. Finding an alignment between the manifestation of form in Alix Cléo's photo, Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration, and Roubaud's definition of poetic language as 'upper limit music', I see in his readings of the image the same play of guiding and echoing voices that makes up his evocation of biipsisme in poetry.

As Roubaud says of love poetry through this particular poetic constraint pulling together the 'voix-guide' and the 'voix-écho', there is an effort to preserve love past – 'la voix-guide [...] avance en assurant la préservation exacte de son passé'. As the echoes of his reading ripple out from Le Grand incendie de Londres and from his 'Postface' in Giannecchini's Une image peut-être vraie to

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recent poetry collection *Octogone*, we look back to the poet's memory of the moments spent with Alix Cléo, moments manifested in the rhythm of her breathing that shapes the irregular forms in *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*. The interaction of the guiding and echoing voices in Roubaud's constraint demonstrating *biipsisme* also seeks to ensure the permanence of love's future, or 'la pérennité de son souvenir'. The writing that resonates with the rhythm of Alix Cléo's breath is also the extension of love's memory into the future. The image at the heart of Roubaud's readings is renewed, stimulating fresh associations and connections on every re-reading. It is not in the silence equated with the act of quoting, but in reading her that the poet finds the space for Alix Cléo's voice to guide.

### 4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reflected on the relationship between poetic form, love and memory that characterises Roubaud's early poetry through the lens of his later writings. Comparisons of Roubaud's earlier and later works have enabled me to explore his changing relationship with poetic form and his expressions of love lost. At times, this has meant searching for aspects of his writing that are no longer present and some of my comparisons are inevitably concerned with negation.

To begin with, I reconsidered the centrality of form and its particular definitions within Roubaud's love poetry through a reading of *Du noir tombe*. I read this collection as belonging to Roubaud's poetic aphasia in the period following Alix Cléo's death. The multidimensionality of Roubaud's poetic structures – the way the poem's written shape interacts with and evokes the phonic, and vice versa – is replaced in *Du noir tombe* by a poetry that functions visually, in silence. Without the beloved addressee, the poet's first reader, the poem is no longer *chant*. Without the beloved that Roubaud had placed at the centre of poetic form, that form is somehow diminished, no longer structured from the level of the syllable. This loss of multidimensionality is foregrounded in *Du noir tombe* through a direct comparison with *Dors*, signalled by the poet himself. His statement that *Du noir tombe* is not like *Dors* is also an invitation to the reader to consider the changes that occur from the first to the second volume and thus to reflect on the definition of poetic form in the absence of the beloved.
Roubaud links *Du noir tombe* to *Quelque chose noir*. In the latter volume, poetic form and the rhythm that that entails in Roubaud's work continue to be defined as diminished, particularly in comparison with *Trente et un au cube*. The place of constraint as a marker of the text for the interactions of memory fails; memories are those of the poet and the reader is somehow excluded from many of the spaces that make up the volume. Poetic spaces seem, in Roubaud's grief, not to stimulate memory, but rather to dilute what the poet knows of Alix Cléo, or to engulf his senses in infernal yearning. But potential takes a different guise in *Quelque chose noir*. It is precisely in directing the reader away from the text that Roubaud creates a network of spaces for the engagement of the reader's memory. In encouraging his reader to seek out Alix Cléo's photographs, to search for references that he both borrows and adapts from her personal journal, the poet not only widens collective memory of his wife's creations, but also elicits deeper responses from the reader to those parts of his writing that speak through his wife's words and images. In this way, Roubaud dedicates an external memory space to Alix Cléo, but remains necessarily a central figure within the network he constructs. The place of the beloved in contributing to meaning in his poetry is therefore questioned and uncertain.

The beloved is present in Roubaud's writing as the centre of his poetic form through the rhythm of her breathing. Her uneasy respiration infuses Roubaud's description of *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*, filtering through to recent publication *Octogone*. Through his writing on Alix Cléo's photo in prose volume *Le Grand incendie de Londres* and the passage's renewed context in a volume dedicated to the work of his wife, Roubaud moves from the role of poet to that of reader. He engages with the form of *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration* as a reader of his poetry would: he invests the spaces of the photo with his memories and allows the forms within the image to elicit associations and discoveries in his mind as he observes it. Layers of reading and memory become intertwined until it becomes unclear where precisely the divisions between them lie, and the structure of the relationship between poet and reader is recreated, this time between wife and poet.
5. Conclusion

5.1 Windows on Form

Throughout this study, the poet is connected to the reader, or to the activity itself of reading, through a series of windows that appear in the texts. In Chapter One, the young poet looks out of his bedroom window into the forest beyond. He listens to the chomping beech tree worms – *vers* – that come to represent the absorption and production of poetry, a reading and writing process so engrained in the young Roubaud that it is likened to the nourishment of the tiny creatures. The window in this chapter opens out onto poetic influence: the forest situated in Roubaud's childhood region not only evokes his troubadour roots, but is also a land of escape where the young poet would spend his days discovering and reading poets. When Roubaud turns away from the free verse forms that characterised the *tabula rasa* approach of the Surrealist movement, it is not in order to escape traditions in poetic form that have come before him, but to actively engage with them, to adopt them into his own practice and to renew them.

Roubaud's commitment to an exploration of the richness of established poetic forms is manifested in *Trente et un au cube* through a return to the Japanese *tanka*. The poet's intertwining of a metre inspired by this exotic form with French syntax gives rise to a singular rhythm in the volume that flirts with, but never quite matches up with the classic alexandrine in its counts of five and seven syllables. Structure in *Trente et un au cube* is both visual and aural, leaving behind the dependence on typography that characterised free verse for the poet: the shape of the poetry on the page doubles the beat of its rhythm, just as listening to a poem might conjure up an image of its text as it appears on the page in the mind's eye of the listener. It is through the interaction of these dimensions in reading that the poem enters into a relation with memory: the echoes between the visual and phonic shaping of the poem better insinuates its form into memory. There, fragments of the poem interact with the stores of poetic traces and trigger associations and connections.

In Chapter Two, the window into the lovers' bedroom is an invitation to the reader to delve into the poems of *Trente et un au cube*. The dimensions of the poetry collection and entry points into its architecture are multiplied through
the poet's use of constraint: the numerical patterning of the book facilitates the creation of pathways for the reader who navigates its pages. Markings in space and time – the year over which it unfolds, the bedroom, the spring garden, the edges of the cube – insinuate their way into the reader's memory, providing points of familiarity in the book and inviting the reader to invest in its spaces. Constraint draws the reader into the text and structures the reading process, but ultimately offers the reader the space in which to construct his or her own meaning within the parameters of the book.

While windows draw the reader into the spaces of *Trente et un au cube*, those encountered in Chapter Three look out beyond their texts. At the close of *Du noir tombe*, the window lets a glimpse of light and a hope of sound into the poem collection. For its 'variations' exist only silently, on the page. These arrangements do not signal a return to the practice of 'aller à la ligne' that Roubaud describes in Surrealist free verse, rather their forms speak through what is missing: the *chant* that characterises Roubaud's self-inscription within the troubadour tradition. The shift in form represents a sense of loss and an impossibility in poetic expression tied to the poet's bereavement. Characterised by a silence in Roubaud's poetic output – or 'aphasie', in the words of the poet – *Du noir tombe* is a window into *Quelque chose noir*, the collection of poems that breaks the silence imposed by grief.

Windows again guide the reader beyond the text in *Quelque chose noir* itself. The poet's view of the inlet of sky produced in the gap between the roofs opposite his apartment develops into a leitmotif in the volume. Identified with the poet's late wife, Alix Cléo, the view beyond the space of the apartment signals the failure of poetic form to hold onto the memory of the beloved, instead directing the reader away from *Quelque chose noir* towards a network of texts and photographs by Alix Cléo. Through the multiple intertextualities in the volume, the poet constructs an external memory space of sorts, building the collective memory of Alix Cléo's *œuvre*. The movement from a personal to a collective engagement with memory is for the poet a way of continuing Alix Cléo's creative project in her absence.

In the development of my research, form has become less concerned with definitions of the poetic line and the prosodic elements of metre and structure that characterise my readings in the early stages. In Roubaud's poetry,
form catalyses a particular interaction with the memory of the poetry reader and creates an invitation to participate in the creation of meaning in the poems, to take an interactive role in relation to the texts.

5.2 (Re)presenting the Beloved 'in Theory': Chapters One and Two

Intrinsic to Roubaud's journey in poetic form is his engagement with the beloved addressee in his love poetry. I began this study referring to the poetic 'muse'. A traditional conception of the muse figures in models criticising the structures of the sexual relation in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, representing what Irigaray perceives to be the objectification of the feminine for the advantage of the masculine in male-dominated theories. In the same way that these feminist theorists use the structure of the poet–muse relation to illuminate their psychoanalytically inspired vision of the sexual relation, I have used Freudian, Lacanian and Irigarayan readings of the feminine and masculine positions as a lens through which to read Roubaud's poetic address.

I found some of the elements in Irigaray's criticism increasingly active in my readings of poems by Paul Éluard. The Surrealist poet seems to foreground a mirroring between the poet–narrator and muse that might be compared to the reflection of the self-same that Irigaray criticises in Freud's essay on feminine castration. I also explored the connection between free verse forms and the automatic writing processes that were prominent in the Surrealist movement, with the female muse acting as a source of inspiration to the poet's creativity. At first glance, she appears to be central to both of the poems by Éluard that I focused on in Chapter One, and which Roubaud selected to represent his engagement with Surrealism: her femininity dominates Éluard's titles, 'L'Amoureuse' and 'L'Égalité des sexes', and she is foregrounded in the texts. However, a closer reading of the poems sees her fade into the reflected image of the poet, leaving her with no substance unique to her. It is a shift that takes place in the poems' form; the poetic line that stages the dynamics of the relation between poet and beloved comes up against a limit in the binary opposition of the two terms, anticipating Irigaray's critique of the analogy of masculine subjectivity with the mirror image.

An exclusive focus on the formal structure of these two of Éluard's love poems would overlook the associations and transformations that occur on the
syntactical plane and its interaction with the lexical. Existing in multiple layers of semantic possibility, Éluard's muse inspires a renewal of language through its removal from the domain of the everyday: the exceptional state produced in love is conceived as an initial step towards new discoveries hidden within the deepest recesses of the poet's unconscious. Éluard's ambitions for a 'parler pour parler' in poetry link automatic writing processes explicitly to the principles of the Freudian talking cure, privileging unexpected juxtaposition over form and conventional structural arrangement.

While Roubaud's conception of poetic language appears to echo Éluard's wish to distance language from the ties of the referent, his 'upper limit music' incorporates the numerical constraints and mathematical patterning evident in the traditions of poetic form to produce a poetry that is built on that very premise, revealing a multiplicity of spatial and temporal dimensions that interact with reading and shape it. The female love in *Trente et un au cube* does not bring divine inspiration to the writing process, instead she is located within the forms conceived and crafted by the poet; like crystals that form over a number of years, she and the poem together unfurl through a myriad of associations and connections that extend over time, creating an inextricable link between form and memory. Her alignment with the form itself of poetry leads me to develop my foray into psychoanalytic representations of the sexual relation: just as the Lacanian feminine is accounted for in structures conceived by the male theorist, the female lover in *Trente et un au cube* is written into the story by the poet. Just as the feminine in Lacanian theory exists as the 'vanishing point' of the system of sexuation, as Irigaray emphasises, so too Roubaud's beloved addressee is identified within the very outlines that attempt to contain her.

The comparison between the position of Roubaud's beloved in *Trente et un au cube* and the Lacanian feminine illuminates the structures of reading into which readers themselves are invited. Although the spatial metaphor of the volume witnesses a violent attempt to imprison the beloved within its walls, it is in her alignment with the form itself of the book, the constraint from which the book itself is generated, that the female addressee is given the possibility of resisting the poet's hold. The beloved addressee as the feminine other who eludes the poet produces the potential offered in a reading of the text – spaces to be activated by the interaction with the reader's memory. The disjunction in the
relation of poet to beloved addressee continues to represent a creative space in *Trente et un au cube*, both for the female position and the poet's, when read through Irigaray's notion of 'j'aime á toi'. The acceptance that an element of mystery will always remain between lovers allows the subjectivity of both terms in the relation to survive. The poet's silence a further leitmotif, is read as an offering to his beloved, an invitation to enter the spaces of the poetic text through the rhythm of her own breathing.

My comparison of *Trente et un au cube* with texts that show something of Roubaud's engagement with Éluard's poetry explores the development in the poet's approach to the formal representations of love in poetry. The distancing of his poetic practice from certain structures and writing processes associated with Surrealist literature is simultaneously a formulation of love in poetry. While at times, Roubaud's poetic representations of love are rooted in his lived experiences – for example, his encounter with first love, Michelle, is inseparable from his reminiscences of his first loves in poetry – *Trente et un au cube* sets out a theoretical account of what it means for the poet to address his beloved in poetry.

In the Introduction to this study, and following Irigaray's poet-theorist analogy, I asked whether the male love poet necessarily silences his beloved when he pens her into his lyric and addresses her as his other. I have found moments in which the wish to possess the beloved overwhelms the poet–narrator, moments of violent struggle, yearning and anxiety. Through comparative readings of Roubaud's presentation of love in *Trente et un au cube* and varying but interconnected models of the masculine–feminine relation in psychoanalytic terms, however, I have also been able to show that there are spaces in Roubaud's poetry offered to his beloved and, in turn, his reader. When the feminine enters his text through its silences and blank spaces, rather than an erasure of her presence, she exists as the very heart of the text's form: the source of its singular rhythm, the impetus for its creation.

5.3 When Silence Is Grief: Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, it was not a matter of applying to the plane of reality what I had put together in the theoretical account of the ties between form and love in Roubaud's poetry. The conclusions that I had reached in the previous two
chapters were rather a springboard for the exploration of texts written by the poet in the wake of Alix Cléo's death. An understanding of Roubaud's approach to love and form in poetry composition enabled me to uncover the differences and developments in his later writings: differences that evoke loss not just of love but the possibility to articulate it through poetic form. These shifts are particularly evident in *Du noir tombe*, a collection that has not before now been considered in criticism in relation to Roubaud's poetic aphasia following the death of his wife. The ideas that I developed in Chapters One and Two in relation to the shared position of addressee and reader enabled me to explore the changed notion of potential in *Quelque chose noir* as pushing the reader somewhere beyond the text, rather than drawing him or her into it.

The understanding of poetic form as an engagement of memory is at the heart of findings in Chapter Three. The interrelatedness of form and memory led me to read *Quelque chose noir* as a failure in poetic form as Roubaud conceives it: the volume ceaselessly plays out its inability to hold onto the memory of the beloved, its spaces alternately diluting what remains of Alix Cléo and suffocating the poet who yearns for her. The unlocking of potential through the reader's singular engagement with poetic form was also central in my analysis of the intertextual network created through *Quelque chose noir*, which I read as an external memory space for the work of Alix Cléo. The constraints structuring the book appear to send the reader beyond the text, directing him or her to Alix Cléo's *Journal* and photographs. Finally, my consideration of Alix Cléo's photo, *Quinze minutes la nuit au rythme de la respiration*, in terms of Roubaud's conception of poetic language – one that encompasses a link between form and memory through the prioritisation of rhythm over the referent, or 'upper limit music' as Roubaud refers to it – led me to place Roubaud himself as Alix Cléo's reader. In this final shift within my study, Roubaud makes the gesture referred to in Irigaray's 'j'aime à toi'. Much like the poet–narrator in *Trente et un au cube* who listens intently to his lover's breathing as she sleeps, and the 'voix-guide' that prepares a space for the 'voix-écho' in biipsisme, Roubaud reads Alix Cléo's photograph, allowing the rhythm of her breath to penetrate the text.
5.4 Reader–Addressee

That I set out to explore my reasons for being drawn to a particular text by a certain writer is more than a platitude, or pleasing cliché. My research has explored the ways in which Roubaud invites the reader into a deep engagement with his texts through the questions posed by constraint, the shaping of the poems on the page and for the ear of his addressee, the intricacy of his crafted rhythms and the spatio-temporal metaphors on which his poetry is built – the volume of the cube, the lovers' bedroom, the apartment he shared with Alix Cléo, her last photo. My findings have thus illuminated my personal relation to Roubaud's love poetry, my close readings of his poetic and theoretical texts forming the basis of my enquiry into those aspects of the poems that have pulled me in.

Perhaps I can also admit to being intrigued by the poet's address: the pronouns 'tu' and 'toi' are omnipresent in his poems and, as his reader, those pronouns offer me the privileged position of his beloved, to whom he speaks through the poetry. Can I say that I have wanted, above all, to be addressed in poetry? Roubaud offers his poetry as a gift in Trente et un au cube; to reach his addressee is the purpose and ambition of his rhythmic formation, which is composed and intricately crafted in words and number: 'JE DÉTIENS MILLION de syllabes comptées pour toi'. In this opening to Trente et un au cube, it feels as though this poem has been written for me.

Poetic address, particularly that of the male poet who writes to his female beloved, has often been the context of an objectification, the female other serving as a pretext for the poet's (self-)reflection and creativity. When I embarked on this investigation, Irigaray's consideration of the structures of address in traditional lyric poetry as a central element in her critique of psychoanalytical approaches to the feminine resonated with my early experiences of Roubaud's poems. In Trente et un au cube, a struggle at the heart of the volume betrays the poet's will to control and manipulate the female addressee. In Quelque chose noir the use of direct and adjusted citation that is interpreted as 'dialogue' with Alix Cléo by some critics is read by others as necessarily an appropriation of her and her writing. I offer no happy resolution.

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621 Roubaud, Trente et un au cube, p. 9.
of these problematic moments, except to say that they often betray the yearnings and anxieties of the poet–narrator, and his difficulty in allowing the 'mystery', as Irigaray puts it, of the beloved to exist.

In a reversal of Irigaray's account of the psychoanalytic theory in terms that evoke the male poet, I turned to the Lacanian positioning of the masculine and feminine to shed light on the depictions of love in Roubaud's poetry. By bringing Lacan into proximity with Roubaud in this way, I found that the desire to hold the other closer, to possess her, to submit her to constraint gives rise in Roubaud's poetry to the very elusiveness and resistance of the feminine addressee. This equates to an inclusive, immersive experience for the reader of love poetry: the otherness of the feminine represents the power of the reader to contribute to meaning-making in the text. I see in the poet's attempts to constrain her the very knowledge that his beloved both eludes and exceeds him. Just as Irigaray proposes an acceptance of the disjunction between two lovers and a fostering of the space between them, Roubaud's poetry incorporates within its lines penned by the male poet a gesture that opens out his text to the other. The subject who listens intently to the breathing of the lover opens out a space for her own subjectivity; the poet who is now reader of his beloved lets her into the collaborative space of his composition.
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