

THOUGHT AND PERCEPTION: BERNARD NOËL AND THE MIND'S EYE

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On n'invente pas, on ouvre les yeux, c'est tout.

—Bernard Noël¹

Because Bernard Noël has investigated the relationship between the conceptual and the visual in many of his prose and poetic texts, I take, as an entry into his difficult, often hermetic work, a curious passage from his text *Le 19 octobre 1977* that deals directly with these issues. The image described in this passage is also depicted, although combined with other details, in the drawing by Colette Deblé that appears on the front cover of Noël's *Poèmes 1*, published by Flammarion in 1983. Noël's description of the image is as follows:

Ce portail, je ne l'avais jamais franchi; l'ombre qu'il projetait sur le sol à cette heure avait un charme, et mon attente fut distraite par la contemplation de son dessin, dont les vides changeaient de luminosité selon ma position. Il me semblait y apercevoir l'envers de la présence, et bien que cela ne voulût rien dire, je me le répétais avec plaisir.²

Several aspects of this description deserve comment. First, this is the description of a visible image, although the image is no longer visible at the time of writing/narration, except in the mind's eye (the mind of the writer/narrator). Second, Noël focuses our attention on the narrator's attention, which is not really drawn to the pattern cast on the ground by the gate's shadow, but rather to what the dark lines of that shadow isolate: the blocks of luminosity. The dark lines function as the form that allows the luminous content to manifest itself—the skeletal structure, so to speak, that makes visible what would otherwise

escape attention and therefore remain invisible. Third, this luminous emptiness has the power to distract the narrator from his previous activity (waiting) and induces him to think he perceives “the other side of presence” which, in this visual example, is not mere absence but luminous, or voluminous, emptiness. In other words, the image his eyes see leads to the formation of a thought that manifests itself in precise words. Fourth, he repeats these words to himself although he feels they lack meaning: “I’m perceiving the other side of presence.” The narrator makes no claims about the ability of his words to correspond to reality; on the contrary, he calls attention to their arbitrariness and admits their meaninglessness despite the pleasure he takes in repeating them. To put this a different way: something about the “luminosity” of the empty phrase charmed him, much in the same way that the luminosity of the visual voids charmed him. This single passage introduces many of the major preoccupations in Noël’s work: the visual, the verbal, thought, perception, attention, the act of making visible, and the dialectics between form and content. The complex interplay of these issues as they manifest themselves in Noël’s work is the focal point of this essay. Since virtually all of his work can be called poetic, especially *Le 19 octobre 1977* (which he has probably labelled a novel for sheer provocation), the present essay crosses traditional generic boundaries to arrive at an understanding of some of the major issues driving Noël’s poetics.

About seventy pages further along in *Le 19 octobre 1977*, the narrator’s attention fixes on a similar image of light:

Entre les pavés, les feuilles et le pied règne une lumière, qui me charme. J’ai longuement hésité à employer ce dernier mot; il s’impose pourtant. L’hésitation se reporte sur “règne,” car “se dilate” serait plus juste, la lumière ayant cette particularité de se manifester, là, volumineusement.³

The stones, leaves, and foot “frame” the light, which is the subject of the narrator’s attention. In this example, like the other, he comments on what happens inside the frame instead of on the objects making up the frame. Once again, by his particular strategy of seeing, something that might ordinarily escape attention becomes foregrounded. And once again, what intrigues him in his “seeing” is the quality of the light which he now calls “voluminous” instead of simply “luminous.” Although these two passages occur several pages apart in the text,

they echo each other poetically not only by their similarity of content but also because of the linguistic similarity between “voluminous” and “luminous.”

But there is something else going on in this passage. Noël has focused our attention on the narrator's thought as he ostensibly searches for an adequate language to describe an image in his mind's eye. The narrator admits his hesitation in using the word *charme*, but as it turns out, the reason for the hesitation has to do not with the word *charme* but with a different word he had written previously (*règne*) that does not seem quite right. *Règne*, he thinks, does not correspond to his mental image as well as *se dilate* would. The real subject of this passage is neither the mental image nor the word used to describe it, but the process of thought that attempts to connect the two.

Noël will continue to highlight the thought process throughout the course of this “novel,” with the result that thought itself seems to take on a volumetric density that is not unlike the light he describes in this passage. It is worth mentioning in passing that this special ability of something on a two-dimensional surface (here, the light) to appear voluminous, or three-dimensionally luminous, from the perspective of the mind's eye relates metaphorically to Noël's conception of writing as well: “[J]e rêve d'une écriture qui donnerait du volume à la page . . .,” he writes in *Le 19 octobre 1977*, where volume is expressed in terms of the image of air circulating between things (“l'air, qui constitue entre les choses la page volumineuse dans laquelle il n'y a jamais de blanc”).⁴

These two examples, then, hint at the importance of volume for Noël and point to his concern with seeing, both conceptually and perceptually. Because of his own interest in these issues, it is not surprising that he chose to investigate and write about the work of visual artists such as Magritte, Matisse, Moreau, Bellmer, Michaux, and others. He has been particularly drawn to the painting of René Magritte, an artist who confronts these issues on canvas. In his book on Magritte, he talks about Magritte's paintings not as paintings containing “meaning” (“There is no truth-country in which one could install oneself proclaiming, here is what this means”), but as manifestations of visible thought (“Writing is an invisible description of thought and painting is its visible description”).⁵ Taking, for example, Magritte's painting entitled *The False Mirror* (1928) depicting an eye reflecting a clouded sky, Noël comments that the eye reflects the image while also reflecting on it (thinking about it), so that

the thought which is depicted goes something like this: "I think inside myself, but I also think outside myself in a perpetual inversion of the outside and the inside, of the projected and the reflected whose crossing produces this mental object: the image" (p. 24). Much of Noël's work on Magritte is quite difficult to follow, but his insistence on the dialectical relationship between thought and the eye stands out as one of the major areas of focus.

Because this crucial dialectic between thought and the eye takes place so automatically and unconsciously, only special circumstances will awaken us to its presence, according to Noël. Indeed, it is the disconcerting malfunctioning of the thought-eye connection during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1979 that he chooses to foreground in the opening remarks of the book he wrote to chronicle his travels, *U.R.S.S., Aller-Retour*. While trips to foreign countries ordinarily caused him to feel foreign vis-à-vis language but not with respect to his eyes (i.e., he did not feel displaced visually), he found that in the Soviet Union the visual became just as incomprehensible as language. Because any perception of objects is already affected by what we mentally understand them to be, there is an unconscious tendency to adapt reality to the ready-made ideas we ordinarily carry around. When these ready-made ideas are called into question, as they were for Noël in the Soviet Union, familiar objects became visually foreign too:

Je croyais jusque-là qu'un verre est un verre partout, un arbre un arbre, une maison une maison, mais en U.R.S.S. j'ai soudain pris conscience que le contexte modifie le sens des choses quand bien même il ne semble pas en affecter l'apparence.⁶

Because objects in the Soviet Union are embedded in a radically different historical context, the mental referents Noël habitually relied on in his own Western culture (the mental referents that helped him see visually) actually distorted his "seeing" in Soviet culture: "Tout est faussé hors du contexte, non seulement la compréhension, mais le regard même."⁷ Perception, as Noël discovered, is ideological; as a mental construct, perception depends upon learned conventions (which themselves occur in, and depend upon, specific contexts) and not individual psychology or "natural" impulses. And because the mental always influences the visual, says Noël, what we actually see is meaning: "[L]e visible est notre lecture du monde, car nos yeux le

croissent toujours avec le mental. Nous voyons moins le monde que du sens."⁸

But just as the mental always influences the visual, according to Noël, so too does the visual determine the mental, since what we are capable of thinking depends, in turn, on what we have already seen and experienced (or its approximation). Clearly, Noël believes it is through our eyes that we come to know the world when he writes about "le corps produisant cette pensée au cours du regard que j'ai essayé de décrire et qui est la seule source des mots."⁹ As is the case in the two examples from *Le 19 octobre 1977* at the beginning of this essay, Noël proposes that all thought and all language begin with vision, and he has tried to discover the process by which thought and language are physically produced, thanks to vision, *in the body*.

Noël's exploration of the thought-eye connection is already evident in his earlier "body" poetry, where the image of the eye turned inward makes its appearance. "Mais voici que mon oeil s'est inversé," he announces in *Extraits du corps*,¹⁰ probably his most widely read collection, and the inward-looking eye finds some unusual material to work with: nerves, bones, cells, ribs, spinal cord, corpuscles, marrow, and muscles, in addition to the more common stomach, chest, throat, and tongue. The inward-looking eye also finds a hollow void, which is not only the prerequisite empty space, as he says, that permits the organization of everything else, but which also relates poetically to, and seems to poke fun at, the metaphysical/metaphorical void that has preoccupied French poets for ages.

With its insistence on the physical, Noël's *Extraits du corps* constitutes an explicit rejection of lyrical or metaphysical poetry in favor of a more materialist poetics. Proclaiming that the mind has been caught up with itself and has turned us away from our materiality, certain prose essays like "La Matrice des signes" and "D. H." read like manifestoes that encourage a shift from mind to body and propose a strategy of thinking with the body:

Mon corps enferme le passé et le futur; chacune de ses cellules est plus profondément ancrée dans la réalité qu'aucune des pensées de mon esprit. Il y a dans l'avenir un moyen de connaissance qui fera paraître risibles toutes les oeuvres de l'esprit—un moyen que nous ne découvrirons qu'à force de penser avec notre corps.¹¹

Although it is impossible to know what this body-thought would be or

what Noël means when he suggests that we might think with the body, he nevertheless believes in its existence and cites D. H. Lawrence as the first to have developed body-thought (*la pensée du corps*). He also parodies Descartes' formula to reveal his own materialist bent: "Je suis, bien que je pense et que je m'écoute penser."¹² Proclaiming the preoccupation with mind to be one of the illnesses of our century, Noël equates the mind with a gangrene that destroys the flesh and with a parasite that physically consumes it. Poetry has ignored the material aspects of the body, he claims, so now it is time to look at nerves, muscles, and bones because "le reste" (that is, the soul, the spirit, the mind, and all the traditional manifestations of the transcendental or the sentimental) "a nourri les artifices de trop de poésie. . . ."¹³ Stated differently, Noël's materialist poetics would concern itself not with individual consciousness but with the material aspects of existence that give rise to it and determine its structure.

Noël proposes, then, to "look" at the body, and his emphasis is very much on perception and the eye, as a sampling of lines from *Extraits du corps* reveals:

- Des nerfs vibrent sur des arêtes d'os. Paupières closes, l'oeil branle son regard tout au long de la moelle, tandis que des élastiques cinglent le foie et l'estomac.
- Le coccyx est atteint avant l'habituelle déperdition du regard dans le ventre, mais les vertèbres, tout à coup, ne me fournissent plus ce canal parfaitement rond, où la perception voyageait instantanément.
- Au commencement, l'oeil visita la moelle, et je naquis.¹⁴

These early examples, like the ones cited above from *Le 19 octobre 1977*, all confirm the primary role accorded to perception in Noël's poetics, where perception itself brings things into existence (like the voluminous voids in the first example), and where the ability or desire to "see" controls what can or cannot be seen (as in *U.R.S.S., Aller-Retour*). Interestingly enough, by continually thematizing the functioning of perception, Noël succeeds in making it an object of study, as if perception itself had acquired volume and become material. In his essay "Trajet de l'oeil," Noël speaks explicitly of the way perception seems to have been made material: "Tout se passe alors comme si la perception se matérialisait: elle devient à la fois une présence inscrite

dans mon corps et un organe de ce corps. J'ai conscience de son trajet et conscience également de sa place, de son volume, de son pouvoir."¹⁵ Yet perception can only become material in a figurative sense, as Noël indicates by his use of the words "as if."

In keeping with his proposed shift from mind to body, Noël suggests a radical reevaluation of our ideas of authorship along the lines formulated by Foucault in his well-known "What Is an Author?" or Barthes in "The Death of the Author." In the book he co-authored with Roger Laporte on Maurice Blanchot, Noël rejects the possibility that an author might express an interior, spiritual self and suggests that if one were to "open up" a writer, one would find not a soul, but a book (or rather, an ongoing and quite physical copulation of books): "Et certes pas une vie intérieure, mais une copulation de livres qu'anime l'imagination et qui produit ce croisement dénommé écriture."¹⁶ Although he proclaims, along with others, the death of the I who writes or speaks, Noël nevertheless takes steps to guard against speaking the self (assuming that this were even possible) when he claims he attempts to empty himself in order to be more available to language. This view of the self as an empty vessel across which and through which language is transmitted recalls the Surrealist fascination with mediums and the view of the medium as the transmitter, but not the origin, of language. Noël himself uses the word "medium" to describe himself: "Je n'écris pas, je suis le médium de cette chose qui se produit en moi, qui s'écrit en moi."¹⁷ Something happens inside him, he says, so that the physical body is only an instrument of language—the instrument through which language speaks and manifests itself in rhythms and images.

Bruits de langues, a collection of poetry published in 1980, would seem to be the result of this kind of experimentation with language. Even the title suggests a sort of noisy Tower of Babel, warning that the poems within contain fragments of rhythms and images that do not carry sense in traditional ways. We learn from the preface that Noël has constructed his poems from acrostics, building his horizontal lines from a framework of verticality: "La verticalité de ce qui refuse de rester simplement couché dans le livre est analogue à la verticalité du vivant."¹⁸ Sustaining the analogy between text and body, he compares his lines of poetry to horizontal ribs joined to an originary spinal column. The initial vertical "messages" contain words that more often than not relate to Noël's poetic enterprise itself and his philosophy of the way language works through the body. One poem

vertically proclaims "Il faut tuer le moi," indicating his rejection of subjectivism with its insistence on the I as origin, while another reads "Donne du cul à l'âme," a pun suggesting his preference for materialist rather than lyrical poetry. Distorted fragments from other poets appear every now and then in *Bruits de langues* and serve to reinforce Noël's view of language as something that enters us from the outside. One can recognize, for example, rhythms and distorted echoes from Nerval ("la treizième revient nous gommer le visage"), Baudelaire ("eh peaucrite lècheur, mon pareil bookmaker"), Rimbaud ("et je vois quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir"), and Mallarmé ("la chair nous quitte, hélas! voici venir le givre, / ah fuir, vers là-bas fuir! où va naître le Livre"). The appearance of recognizable fragments and even rhythms from other poets in Noël's work would seem to demonstrate his view (along with that of Barthes and other theorists of intertextuality) of the text as a crisscrossing and reworking of other, anterior texts. On another level, though, it also bears witness to his convictions that individual thought, perception, and language are constituted by the social.

In his hypothetical attempt to empty the self so that language can speak through him unimpeded, it is no wonder that Noël stated, in *Extraits du corps*, that the self was an organized void ("Je suis une organisation du vide," p. 59). Far from affirming his identity as being other, as did Rimbaud with his famous "Je est un autre," all Noël can affirm is the fact that he is a structure containing a void. The whole issue of identity is problematic in Noël's work, since he views the self as a locus of intertextuality, a permeable membrane that receives and emits the flows and energies already developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. He resists the notion of the self as a place of stable identity and prefers instead to see it as a place of organization. This view of the self as a container or structure, in which things take form by virtue of becoming organized, parallels his views about writing and art as well.

For Noël, writing and visual art are activities by which content comes into being by being given form, regardless of whether one believes content precedes form or not. He insists, nevertheless, that a certain mentality (this is not the same as content) precedes expression, which is why he talks about Magritte's paintings as "visible thought" or art as "externalized mentality," as he does in the preface he wrote to the catalogue of an exhibition of the art work of Louise

Nevelson, Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva, and Magdalena Abakanowicz:

Abakanowicz, Nevelson, Vieira da Silva, leur oeuvre n'est-elle pas d'abord de la mentalité extériorisée?
 Un dedans mis dehors grâce au support extérieur de la forme?
 Un support qui est le lieu d'un mouvement contradictoire:
 il précise et ne limite pas; il assure et n'affirme pas; il présente et dérobe.¹⁹

Although it seems that Noël does believe in the existence of what he calls "the inside" and the temporal priority of "the inside" in relation to its placement on "the outside" through some exterior form, it is impossible for him to know the content of this hypothetical inside apart from its manifestation on the outside, in form. It is also impossible for him to know to what extent the form itself dictates which content comes into being. It is for this reason that he can talk only about the form, and not the content, of the inside: "Je suis une organisation du vide."

The text that best thematizes Noël's conception of the self as a place of organization is *Le 19 octobre 1977*. The "novel" reads like a *nouveau roman* with its fragmented scenes, abrupt juxtapositions of realistic detail and inner musings, collage of past and present time, unidentified voices, and discontinuities and displacements. "Ce qui est fictif dans la fiction," he proclaims, "c'est la continuité."²⁰ By calling continuity fictitious, he implies that discontinuity is more "real"; his writing, therefore, will be a truer (because more real) representation of how the mind works, how organization takes place, and how events seem to congeal when given form (the form of his "novel"). *Le 19 octobre 1977* is set up as a story about a writer (the protagonist/narrator) who speaks in the first person; he creates the illusion that he is writing the book that we are in the act of reading. Just as the mind progresses not linearly but in bursts, according to Noël ("La pensée progresse par éclats, par saccades," p. 35), so this text moves rapidly between disjointed scenes, where bursts of thought appear suddenly according to a logic of association. Beginning to write his book on October 19, the narrator remembers October 19 of the previous year when, browsing through a bookstore, he bought a book from which a photograph slipped; that event produces further

associations in an almost surrealist fashion. As the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Noël's primary interest lies less in the events narrated than in the whole problematic of the self as locus of organization. During the process of organization, what is the relationship between seeing and thought? Language and thought? Seeing and writing?

In one of the most fascinating episodes of the text to deal directly with these questions, the narrator reveals to his readers his difficulty in writing when he finds his thoughts and language blocked. He telephones a professor of philosophy to ask if he will help him "speak" by becoming a character in the book he is writing. The professor agrees to help and meets the narrator in a restaurant; the ensuing scene is written in dialogue form. Literally, then, the appearance of this character in Noël's text actually pushes the writing forward (i.e. helps the narrator, who is also the writer, to "speak"). Instead of speaking in first-person indirect discourse, the narrator can now speak through the words of the professor (this is, ostensibly, the reason why the professor was invited to appear as a character in the book). The professor and the narrator have a discussion about the relationship between seeing and writing. Writing can only occur, says the professor, when he first has an image. Although the image calls forth words, the words, in turn, transform the image so that what emerges in writing is what he calls "*ce visible en transformation*," the visible in the process of being transformed. The more he writes, he explains, the more that visible disappears. Writing, then, is the process by which an author tries to make a reader see what he, the author, can no longer see.

On the other hand, he calls writing a "different way of seeing." Instead of trying to appropriate the object of his writing with language, he lets the object envelop him: "*Écrire désagrége l'espace auquel la culture m'a habitué; c'est une autre façon de voir, en allant, non pas vers la chose, mais en laissant la chose m'envahir et contaminer tout le corps.*"²¹ The seeing he describes here is no longer a seeing that occurs before language, but thanks to language. Without writing he cannot see, so that he always feels more comfortable, he says, while writing. In the process of writing he finds a kind of fullness that disappears when he stops: "*Quand je n'écris pas, c'est l'écart, la division. Écrire, c'est rapprocher ma représentation du monde et mon dire du monde. . . .*"²²

This fullness, then, is a combination of a visual representation of

the world (that occurs thanks to, and as a result of, language) and the speaking of that representation through language. Noël's thought here comes quite close to issues analyzed by Jean-François Lyotard in *Discours, figure*, in particular, Lyotard's ideas about how the visual is embedded in language. Using phenomenological description to make his point, Lyotard cites intentionality and reminds us that speech is always speech about something, and that this space opened up by referentiality is the space of the visual: "Cette dimension de la référence . . . n'est rien d'autre que la présence de la distanciation du voir dans l'expérience du discours."²³ Language is already thick with volume, writes Lyotard, and because it expresses as well as signifies, it calls for the eye as well as for understanding. Both Lyotard and Noël insist on the presence of the visual inside, as well as outside, language.²⁴

Noël's strategy in *Le 19 octobre 1977* of introducing the professor as a character in his "novel" for the purpose of helping the narrator "speak" while trying to write a book is ingenious because it performs at a textual level what is narrated thematically: the complex overlapping network of seeing, thinking, speaking, and writing, where the language of the text functions both verbally and visually and where, as in Noël's own comments about Magritte's paintings, we witness the drama of thought itself. As Noël writes on the back cover of his text, the narrator, like the self, serves as a simple focal point for the events that bombard him from the outside and give him material for thought. And since this is a book about the way thought assembles everything coming in from the outside, Noël calls *Le 19 octobre 1977* the first *monologue extérieur*. Over ten years earlier, Noël had already proposed that writing should be the experience of experience, and *Le 19 octobre 1977* comes closer to this vision than any other text he has published to date: "Tout récit discursif est une trahison. L'écriture devrait être l'expérience de l'expérience. Il ne s'agit pas de raconter, mais d'éveiller."²⁵ The experience that Noël experiences as he writes this text is none other than the progression of thought from one place to another, and the text we read tells the story not only of the progression, but also of the production of thought, made material.

NOTES

1. "Lettre à Renate et à Jean de S.," *Le Lieu des signes* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1971), p. 13. "One doesn't invent, one opens one's eyes, that's all." All translations from the French are my own, with the exception of the quotations from *Magritte*. All citations are from works written by Noël, unless stated otherwise. For two critical studies that explore other aspects of Noël's work that I have not developed here, see Hervé Carn, *Bernard Noël, "Poètes d'aujourd'hui"* (Paris: Seghers, 1986), and Michael Bishop, *The Contemporary Poetry of France. Eight Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985), pp. 101–16. Both studies include more extensive bibliographical information.
2. *Le 19 octobre 1977* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 13. "I had never passed through this portal; the shadow it projected on the ground at this hour had a certain charm, and while I waited I amused myself by contemplating its pattern, whose empty spaces changed luminosity depending on where I stood. It seemed that I was perceiving the other side of presence, and although that did not mean anything, I repeated it to myself with pleasure."
3. *Le 19 octobre 1977*, pp. 82–83. "In the midst of the paved stones, the leaves, and the foot, there reigns a light that charms me. I hesitated for a long time before using the word "charms"; it asserts itself nevertheless. My hesitation has to do with "reigns" because "swells" would be more correct, since light has this particular quality of manifesting itself there, voluminously."
4. *Le 19 octobre 1977*, p. 50. "I dream of a writing that would give the page volume . . ." "Air, which forms between things the voluminous page in which there is never any whiteness."
5. *Magritte* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1977), pp. 24 and 79.
6. *U.R.S.S., Aller-Retour* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), pp. 5–6. "Until then, I thought that a glass was just a glass everywhere, a tree just a tree, a house just a house; but in the USSR I suddenly became aware that context changes the meaning of things, even though their appearance does not seem different."
7. *U.R.S.S., Aller-Retour*, p. 62. "Everything is altered outside of its own context—not only understanding, but sight itself."
8. "Le Dehors mental," *Poèmes I* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 283. "Because our eyes always cause the visible to be intersected with the mental, what we are seeing is our reading of the world. / It is not so much the world we see, but meaning."
9. "L'Oeil et les mots," *Le Lieu des signes*, p. 73. "The body that produces this thought during the process of looking, which I've tried to describe and which is the unique source of words."

10. *Poèmes I*, p. 45. "And now my eye has turned inward."

11. "D. H.," *Le Lieu des signes*, pp. 64–65. "My body encompasses past and future; each one of its cells is more firmly anchored in reality than any of the thoughts in my mind. In the future there will be a method of knowing that will make all the work of the mind seem laughable—a method that we shall discover only by thinking with our body."

12. "D. H." p. 63. "I am, even though I think and hear myself thinking."

13. "La Matrice des signes," *Le Lieu des signes*, p. 61. "The rest has nourished the artifices of too much poetry. . . ."

14. pp. 43, 44, 45. "Nerves vibrate on the edges of bones. With eyelids closed, the eye swings its gaze along the marrow while elastic bands lash the liver and the stomach." "The coccyx is reached before the usual loss of the gaze in the stomach, but all of a sudden the vertebrae no longer provide me this perfectly round canal where perception would travel instantaneously." "In the beginning, the eye visited the marrow, and I was born."

15. *Le Lieu des signes*, p. 70. "Then everything happens as if perception itself had become material: it becomes a presence inscribed in my body and, at the same time, an organ of that body. I am aware of its movement and equally aware of its place, its volume, its power."

16. *Deux Lectures de Maurice Blanchot* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1973), p. 14. "And certainly not an inner life, but a copulation of books that is animated by the imagination and that produces this intersection we call writing."

17. "Le Chemin de ronde," *Le Lieu des signes*, p. 118. "It is not I who write; I am the medium for this thing that is produced in me, that writes itself in me."

18. *Bruits de langues* (Le Roeulx, Belgium: Talus d'approche, 1980). "The verticality of whatever refuses to remain simply lying down in the book is analogous to the verticality of a living being."

19. "Le Dehors mental," p. 284. "Abakanowicz, Nevelson, Vieira da Silva—isn't their work first and foremost externalized mentality? / An inside placed outside thanks to the external support of form? / A support that is the locus of a contradictory movement: / it specifies and does not restrict; it makes firm and does not assert; it presents and conceals."

20. p. 35. "What's fictitious in fiction is continuity."

21. p. 127. "Writing breaks up the space that culture has made familiar; it's a different way of seeing because instead of going toward the thing, it allows the thing to invade me and infect my whole body."

22. p. 129. "When I'm not writing there's a separation, a division. Writing means bringing together my representation of the world and my statement about the world. . . ."

23. *Discours, figure* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1971), p. 31. "This dimension of

referentiality . . . is nothing other than the presence of distancing that belongs to the visual in the experience of discourse."

24. In the words of Noël, "L'image est dans la phrase, et elle est aussi au-dehors, si bien que la phrase n'est qu'un chemin ouvert dans sa direction" (*Le 19 octobre 1977*, p. 125; "An image is inside a sentence and also on the outside, so that the sentence is only a path opened in that direction.") Lyotard's words are strikingly similar: "Et on peut passer dans la figure sans quitter le langage parce qu'elle y est logée. . . . La figure est dehors et dedans . . ." (p. 13; "And we can pass into the figure without leaving language because it is lodged there. . . . The figure is outside and inside.")

25. "Poésie et expérience," *Le Lieu des signes*, p. 171. "Every discursive narrative is a betrayal. Writing should be the experience of experience. It's not a question of recounting, but of awakening."