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LOVE

A text by  
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### MINUS ONE

We consumers have fragile stomachs. Every day we swallow masses of phrases and words, poems and novels and plays. On the same day, in our bedrooms or on the Underground, we can successively or simultaneously read or hear Diana Ross and John Donne, Lil' Jon and Jon Fosse, Robert Johnson and Johan Sebastian Bach, Benjamin Britten and Britney Spears, Marlowe and Bob Marley, Mallarmé and Beyonce, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Stock Aitken Waterman, Gil Scott-Heron and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Hölderlin and Boulderdash, Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Walser and Scott Walker, Smokey Robinson and Salvatore Sciarrino, Emily Dickinson and Dizze Rascal, Animal Collective and Anne Portugal, Petrarch and Patti Smith. How do we manage with these "dissonances", as we might call them? By what mysterious process does our brain process or mix these fluxes that pass through us from everywhere, that work on us and pull us lengthways? Where do they all go, these bits of thought cut in four, these bachelor utterances, these maudlin choruses, these naïve rhythms? How do we put up with these chaotic cut-ups, these composite textures, these mixtures in bad taste? Do we put up

with them? Sometimes we take pleasure in them. Sometimes not: we are suddenly overcome with nausea, we have the impression we are living in several impossible worlds, we feel ourselves to have been conceived in spite of ourselves, threatened by other people's speech, cut into little bits, pushed outside in directions that we cannot grasp. It is very tempting to make a nostalgic return to homogenous cultural universes that are perfectly segmented, just to get back to the lost pre-postmodern unity. We won't fall into that crude trap. For us it is too late and we know it. We love this cultural shuffle that is our de facto element, but on the condition that we really can live in it: if and only if we can invent techniques, wiles and tactics, tools of navigation and negotiation, tricks for converting and mediating; if ways can be found of not just consuming passage and disparity as such, like stupid or cynical tourists who in the end enjoy only the scintillations of change, the voluptuously guilty lapses into mass culture or the redemption of Great Art—but of articulating these materials in a serious, meticulous way. For all these works definitely do exist on separate levels; they coexist in the mode of the *incomparable*, and you can't decree their de jure equivalence just by sticking them together; you also need to be able to convert them so as to compare them in reality. There is not a great deal to be said for staging a big carnival where everything would literally cancel itself out. I am not claiming that Christina Aguilera = Dante Alighieri. We are not nihilists. We know very well that from many perspectives *there are* differences and hierarchies. But we also think that a certain point of view, or *level*, from which there are effectively no differences *must exist*, where all the canonical oppositions between popular and elitist, underground and mainstream, dirt-cheap and priceless, personal material and found material, meticulously written and totally improvised, original language and foreign language, past and present, imperishable and past its use-by date, are effectively undercut. Now, this level does not pre-exist: we each have to invent our own. Some find it by overlapping and mixing, by seeking out monstrous kinships, by grafting, by genetically

modifying genres and forms. For us, it is more a matter of *converting*: creating interfaces, intermediary representations, schemes, equivalences: it is more a matter of flattening. For a flattened literature, that is our manifesto. Literature with the creases ironed out. We want to flatten everything with our little hammer. We hammer by day and we hammer by night. We hammer on hard-heads and on corrugated metal. Mickey masks and mottled marble. But, well, we always hammer a bit too hard and it comes out the other side in a rounded bump, a concave mask, dented coachwork, an intaglio landscape, a negative relief: *level minus one*. Let's admit it, we never believed in irony—as haughty distance, satirical or parodic obsession, self-mockery, depressive or depreciative laughter—which we have always seen as a preventive and ultimately rather pusillanimous posture. We do not much like to mock. We do not particularly wish to denigrate. We are not even sure about being ironic. But for all that we still don't believe in "plain literalism", clear positions, critical distance, denunciation, sincerity, seriousness, evangelism, humanist confidence and civic-minded dialogue. We are too fond of play, camouflage, machinery, machinations, artifice, trickery and class betrayal. As for the "degree zero"—the fusion of souls, immediate communication, the negation of the system, trance, transparency, communion, neutrality and non-style, it's something we never think about, not even when shaving. In fact, we can live only below, in the subjacent, the underhanded, the underlying: *degree minus one*. But, precisely, *not* the atomic shelter or cavern, more the epidemic labyrinth, scabies, the Moebius strip, the hydraulic network (we live in tubes and pipes). Perhaps a backwards irony, the fish laughing at the fisherman? We do not know how the carp perceives the banks from the pond, but we can wager that everything appears on the same, slightly hazy level, the romantic walker and the muncher of crisps, the family in shorts and the windsurfing champion, the duck hunter in his gaiters and Virginia Woolf with stones in her pockets. Writing not *on* a subject but *under* it: "Three discourses under the dramatic poem". It should surely be possible nowadays to work from the

place where we stand (and not dream up a before, an after or an elsewhere), to work with the culture we have. To use all the available materials, not to lower them or point a finger at them, but as true potential of pure literature, naively merging in something that both erases them, inverts them, disfigures them and shows them in a different light: “*So, you teach him once again to dance backwards, like in the frenzy of the bal musette, and this backwards will be his real forwards.*” This calls for a bit of brutality and a lot of delicacy. We are “sensitive bastards”. We take lightly what we adore. We violate what we most love. Minus one does not mean going lower than low; it is the point of view from which there is no high or low, where the very notions of high and low cease to mean anything. At level minus one, a certain Schubert *lied* may have more in common with a Beatles song than with Schumann; a piece by Ligeti, for example the first movement of *Musica Ricercata* (the version for hurdy gurdy) is closer to Daft Punk than to Webern; a Yoruba chant sounds like a sound poem by Hugo Ball; and Nick Drake dialogues directly with William Blake. At level minus one, the syntax characteristic of instructions for tampons can be used to describe an exquisite feeling—not for fun, but simply because that syntax has changed our ways of thinking, feeling, talking and writing, as (in a different way) has the poetry of Rutebeuf and Francis Ponge. At level minus one there is no outside, no salutary overview, no outside unsullied by vitiated relations, *society-free*, there is no desert island or tree hut, no Radio London or flying saucer, no Place from which, in a firm voice, one could speak an “authentic” language to the few remaining “free” men: we are struggling in a world of the fictions, alienation and utterances that constitute us, a world of social determinations and preformed discourses: our only chance of getting just that little bit outside it is to start accepting that, like everyone else, we are immersed. So: instead of refounding a language that is pure, original and untouched, we must define systems of conversion: reprises, translations, transpositions, displacements. Create gaps, adjust, tweak and derail within the relations in which we are already engaged.

Displace texts to bring them to other people in other contexts, other languages, other cultural regimes and other fields of thought: reprises, covers and conversions are meaningful only insofar as they effect such displacements. On this level, on level minus one, the notion of author gets lost in the operation and with its dashing cortège of creative interiority and inspiration. Nobody speaks in their own name, there is no personal material, no fresh source, just processors or transformers, functions and operators placed at a certain point on the production line. All that remains are orphaned blocs of text and interpretations, versions: “*A dramaturge is someone who feels an irresistible urge to metamorphose himself, to live and act through other bodies and other souls.*” Well, more on that later.

## DRUGS

A lot has been said about feeling, when it comes to theatre, and not enough about drugs. Too much psychology, soul, incarnation, meaning and poetry, and not enough about psychotropes, effects, reactions, sensations and the nervous system. We materialists believe that, from the actor’s viewpoint, the theatrical text comprises only two dimensions: the software text and the drug text. About software, the text as a series of functions to perform, as algorithm or programme, we will say more next year. Allow us simply to point out here, to avert the suspicion that can already be sensed rising, that as far as we are concerned this software is always open source: the user (the actor) has to add his own lines of code, to programme or re-programme certain functions, invent commands or menus and put together patches—in other words, make a whole series of choices of *script* that ultimately make him the true guarantor of the representation. Today, though, I am more concerned to talk about the other side of the text, i.e. drugs. First of all, this notion needs to be placed in the context of a whole series of medico-scientific metaphors: writing as chemistry (but not with the certified labs under miles of neons, more like mixing pills in the bathroom), the stage as a work surface, the rehearsals as tests, the speech as a precipitate, the affect as a side-

effect. If the text is a drug, this is insofar as it gets the body moving, insofar as its ingestion, its injection brings on certain physical and psychic states in the actor, certain perceptual disorders; it flips the mind onto other levels of consciousness, distributes all kinds of exciting, anxiogenic, aphrodisiac, anti-depressant, introspective, hallucinogenic and sleep-inducing effects. We could learn a lot from studying theatrical writings in terms of their narcotic effects. We would need to work out a whole toxicology of texts, showing for example how the Claudelian period is by its very essence intoxicating when Péguy's is hypnotic, whereas the Beckettian blackout works more like cocaine. Racine might then be listed among the amphetamines and Koltès among the hallucinogens. Above all, special care would be taken to distinguish between good and bad drugs. Bad drugs: affections based on signifieds, sentimental, psychological drugs, provoking false, forced states, soft grimaces and mannerisms: "*I am sad, I cry, boo hoo!*"—bad trips. Good drugs: carefully measured affections and signifiers, brought on by the substance of language itself: sounds, rhythms, respiration. For what is at stake here, for us druggies, is always the text's physical penetration of the actor's body, the differences of incorporation and implication, the way the movements of acceleration, deceleration, repetition, suspension, exhaustion and elongation, or, on the contrary, compression and contraction of breath, can induce specific corporeal states: hyperventilation, apnoea and breathlessness, which modify the actor's very presence on stage: whether the actor transforms or deforms himself, if he is involved in a becoming that shifts him far from an imaginary centre, pushes him towards zones where he himself does not recognise himself, this is not because he is playing something or imitating someone: it is just that *he is drugged up*. If he is filled with affects, it is not because he is summoning up emotions with a view to expression or representation, it is because multiple forces are moving through his body—tickles or electrical currents that make him laugh or cry. "*I am electric by nature. Music is an electric soil in which the mind lives, thinks and invents.*" It is not the actor who express-

es the text, but the text that expresses the actor—that pushes him outside himself. It is only insofar as he is drugged that the actor can sever the stereotyped connections, recompose his relations and get the becoming machine working again. It is only when he gets his dose that the actor can stop playing at having an "identity" and enter into a process for the production of subjectivity: "*I love your toxicity, I slide over it, I slip, losing my head; a spinning top, I slide over it and I am smooth, I am adulterated, do what you want, I love your toxicity, I adulterate it, I take a sip and it's in the air, oh, it's in the air and it's all around...*"

### TRANSLATION

"Every translation is, so to speak, a provisional way of confronting what it is that makes languages foreign to each other." As a child, I spent whole afternoons in my bedroom listening to loads of English groups, preferably with short, sharp names like The Cure, The Clash or New Order. I listened to them seriously. Most of the lyrics remained impenetrable (I'd taken German as my main language), but it was precisely this impenetrability that made them precious to me. I thought that "close to me" meant "close me", which had an unsettling sound to my ears. I thus developed a whole empirical system for converting sung English into my adolescent French, in which "Let's Dance" translated (no doubt because of the German *letzt*) as "last dance" (looking back, I prefer this fiction to what I can now understand of this indigent song). For the same Germanophone reasons, I took "Hey Jude" to be a song of consolation for the Jewish community. "Beat It" was literally about hitting something. A little later, and for long time, I believed (or wanted to believe) that Morrissey was singing about "the real around the fountain", which metaphysically displaced a proposition that maybe I found too sentimental. I thus had a passion, not for meaning but for significance, and a horror, not of nonsense but of insignificance. This passion and this horror are intact in me even today, in spite of my slightly improved knowledge of the English language. Misunderstanding is a practice that one uses to produce utterances. What

is going on deep down in our language when we are listening to a foreign language? What do we do with this English language that we are constantly consuming, how does it enter into our French mother tongue? What do we understand from what is said in *Happiness Is A Warm Gun* or *Upside Down*? What vague stories do we tell ourselves, what little fictions? How does our intelligence reorder the words we pick up, what is it that fills the gap between the points of significance, what images are projected onto the idiomatic opacity of the foreign language? What we call in French *translation* is in fact a bad translation, a wicked translation, a false translation, a wild, lo-fi effort, a translation that abandons the pattern. A translators' heresy: it is ill-learned, badly brought up, brutal like first love. It respects nothing: it cuts and throws away whole swathes of text, makes insignificant details into the main motif, reverses the order of propositions, overturns meaning without a precaution. In fact, it has almost nothing in common with what we generally call translation. It is more an art of approximation. Nor is it appropriation, more an artisanal practice of recycling. It is particularly interested in struggle, in literalism, in loss, in drift, in loss of control, in coagulation, in malapropisms. "*Beautiful books are written in a kind of foreign language. Under each word we all put our own meaning or at least our own image, which is often a wrong meaning. But in great books, all misunderstandings are beautiful.*" Translating a language that one does not know, or know well, or that one pretends not to know. Like translating a Portuguese text into French using a Russian dictionary. Loss as production, loss of control as the creation of something else, adultery as a proof of love. "*Translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important to it only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed.*" In effect, this *translation* does not seek either fidelity or betrayal. It does not show much respect, but nor does it point up the difference as in parody. That part of the original that it seeks to *render* is neither the form nor the content: a form of energy, per-

haps? Something like an original drive? The idea of a current running through its skeleton, shaking its bones? What it seeks above all are new effects. Not an expression but an explosion—just as one blows up a car engine with a homemade mixture of sugar and sodium chlorate, in order to liberate captive virtualities from within, to use the remaining parts to make another machine for other functions and other purposes. The techniques of nuclear fission: by destroying a nucleus you create energy that is greater than the sum of the energies of each of its components, you "*liberate the pure language imprisoned in the work by transposing it*". Translation therefore does not signify either a systematic or random procedure, but more a complex of simple, known and tested techniques that are accessible to all, applied in successive treatments, with a huge margin for error, manoeuvrable by sweeping turns of the rudder (writing as a navigational error?). Most of these techniques we owe to other eminent *translators*: Paul Claudel, Antonin Artaud, Louis Wolfson, Jack Spicer, David Cameron, Stacy Doris, Cecilia Bengolea. Here are some of them, succinctly illustrated: *Word for word*: "I say boy you turn me inside out" → "je dis garçon tu me tournes à l'intérieur au dehors"; "no woman no cry" → "pas de femme, pas de cri"; "don't go breaking my heart" → "ne va pas casser mon cœur". The *false friend*: "a racing horse" → "un cheval de race"; "a love affair" → "une affaire d'amour"; "God bless you" → "Dieu te blesse". *Phonetic transliteration*: "come on baby" → "comme un bébé"; "get up" → "galope"; "I don't tend to them" → "Je ne leur tends pas la main". *Wolfsonism*, an elaborate and multilingual version of the previous form (see Louis Wolfson, *Le Schizo et les langues*, 1970). *Rousselisme*, or the monolingual version of the same (see Raymond Roussel, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, 1933). *Babelfish* (<http://babelfish.altavista.com>): "I know wrong from right" → "je sais le mal de la droite"; "I want you back" → "je te veux en arrière". *Homonymy*: "there is light" → "c'est léger"; "a guy like you" → "un gars qui t'aime bien". *Literal anglicisms*: "don't come back" → "pas de come-back"; "go shooting" → "va te shooter"; "a guy like you should wear a warning" → "un gars qui t'aime

bien, il faut mettre les warnings". The *Microsoft Word spell checker*: "feel" → "fiel"; "voices" → "vices"; "someone" → "sommeil". *Lexical serialism*: "imagine me and you" → "pense et imagine et figure et envisage et conçois je et me et moi et toi et tu et vous". The *turnaround*: "I knew that I would" → "je savais que j'aurais, que je voudrais, je savais que je serais, je l'ai su, je serais, je savais que j'aurais eu, que je l'aurais, je n'ai pas su, je n'aurais pas voulu, su que je l'aurais que je voudrais que je serais"... and others that I cannot go into here. After several sessions of intensive practice, and having obtained the required grades, the most intrepid applicants can throw themselves into "blind translation", which consists in translating a text of which we know only the title, perhaps the author and, vaguely, the context. This technique, when applied for example to the songs of AC/DC, produces remarkably satisfying results. I could give some examples, but I've still got to talk about love.

## AMOUR

**AMOUR** is just a four-letter word. Everything you deny about love is love. **AMOU**: Here comes the clubfoot of love. Love changes everything. Eight days of love a week. The word love three hundred times a minute. Love changes all the time. A black doggish love. As the only love lyric. Love immigrated from song. Dangerously in love. Subsistence of the gift giving me your love. **AMOR**: Your best love does not suit you. Your average love, don't throw it away (the whole memory has sunk). "*I fell into love's evil alley.*" Love at the halfway stage. Love with its neck cut. Just an outflowing love. The heart of my quilted love. The way I deal with love. The way I relieve myself from love. Cool me down in a love of ice. Take me in militant love. The first taste of love lyrics. Everything you need (to say) is an ill-fitting love lyric. **AMUR**: I think that I am in love. All out of love except my love. Beauty in your eyes my loving eyes cast. Just love lyric, kiss far from love. Pet my love. "*When you want, where you want love.*" I saw your love of position there. Draped in the love of rain. Frozen love for an agitated madam. "*And at the time of love, I love*

*him.*" Pay me the love lyric. Excuse the word. Everyone needs you my love. Love of the gentlest gift: something rare. **AOUR**: Everything to be said in the world of love. Nothing at all to say in the whole world of love. A virgin subject the world of love. Someone has already smashed my amorous lyric. A material world of love. Material girl of love lifted into the rays. Magic, the millimetric material of love. Magic, millimetric love. Clarity of love militant in the rays. Worlds of love in ringed phrases. Words of love in timed language. Lyrical love in bachelor syllables. Minibus of love off into the mist. Wave of love carried all before it. **MOUR**: Thank you for love. Thank you for militant love. Long live the law of love. Long live the law of militant love. The law of love redoubles words. Mass of words of love every eighteen months. A thousand words of love redoubled every eighteen months. A thousand bachelor words of love. Bachelor words of love will make recycled love lyrics. Love lyrics will never end. Lyrics of words of love recycled will eat. The double words of love will not end up being eaten. Death will not eat our words.

Quotations: Pierre Corneille, Antonin Artaud, TTC, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig van Beethoven, Britney Spears, Walter Benjamin, Marcel Proust.

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