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“IN THE FAR DISTANCE”:

Memories of the Medieval and Ghosts in Modern Poetry

(Jack Spicer, Cole Swensen)

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This essay proposes a comparative reading of medieval texts and the modern poetry of Jack Spicer and Cole Swensen. It explores the places of destabilization in these literary works, to grasp the stakes of the medieval resurgence that is taking place there. To summarize, we can say that the Middle Ages are used here to fight three tyrannies that are usually seen as constitutive of the subject in classic views inherited by modernity: that of time; that of the subject; and finally the primeval importance of meaning.

In the literary field, memories of the Middle Ages have been a recurrent feature, from the second third of the twentieth century up to our days, in works that have been called experimental – that is to say works that position themselves, both in their writing and the reading they compel, as places of acknowledged rupture with the past, sometimes going as far as refusing any notion of heritage or filiation and contributing to the invention of a new language. The works of Beckett, Céline, Jack Spicer or Valère Novarina are part of this group, in which inventing the work goes along with inventing a new literary language, a language that projects the reader’s horizon of expectations so much “in the far distance” (to quote a verse from Spicer’s *Holy Grail*¹) that the reader becomes a stranger. In each of these works, the omnipresent medieval reference enables the author to explore the potentialities of the language he is working with and which is used in the destabilizing goal of the work:² “to create a *tabula rasa*, let us dig deeper,” writes Valère Novarina in his latest creation, *Le vrai sang*.³

In spite of the diversity of the worlds created and their aesthetics, we can attempt an exploration of the places of destabilization in these literary works, to grasp the stakes of the medieval resurgence that is taking place there. To summarize, we can say that the Middle Ages are used here to fight three tyrannies that are usually seen as constitutive of the subject in classic views inherited by modernity: that of time, its chronological orientation and linear perception; that of the subject, a clear, distinct Cartesian unit and centre of perspective; and finally the primeval importance of meaning, that defines the relation between the work and language as one of compulsory submission. Temporal frameworks, subjective anchorage, a clear message: experimental writing aims at breaking these structures founding the use of language – to which I would add also the structure of the ideologies, including humanism, inherited from the Renaissance and the age of Enlightenment. This process of breaking away might indeed be characteristic of modern thinking: “I/ Can-/ not/ accord/ sympathy/ to/ those/ who/ do/ not recognize/ The human crisis” (Spicer 2008, 379), admitted Spicer in a 1964 poem in which the dislocation of syntax and rhyme expressed “the human crisis” that was to be even more radicalized by Valère Novarina.⁴

In this struggle, resorting to the memory of the Middle Ages, and to the Middle Ages themselves as a period of Western civilisation relating specifically to memory, is fundamental: the meeting point between the medieval and the contemporary within the works themselves enables a breaking of the frames to experience a heterogeneous temporality and a multiple and fleeing subject, creating works that value variation on form, polyphony and linguistic dynamism and produce sites of meaning that belong only to themselves.

Recurrences – resonances – ghosting

These general cues, which can be found through a detailed analysis of these works, give a specific place to the medieval reference through three common features:

1. In these works, returning to past works is firstly thought of as a movement of inversion rather than as a movement of affiliation: the Middle Ages are summoned as a reverse, “L’envers de l’esprit” as is titled Valère Novarina’s latest book. This confrontation enables the poets to work on the rupture through the strangeness that is inherent to medieval civilization, its “alterity” (*altérité*), as Paul Zumthor called it (1980).⁵ Indeed, the Middle Ages present us with a set of structures –

theological, aesthetic, social, mental, mythological – that we feel to be anthropologically different from our own conception of the world. Observing how these structures work through a process of rewriting, as Beckett did with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, or Roubaud and Delay with the prose Arthurian cycles, or Novarina with medieval theology – to name just a few examples – is a means to confront their power while expressing our contemporary singularity.

2. Thus, in spite of the diversity of works that are called upon, these creations that are “haunted by the Middle Ages” are defined by the precision and erudition of the medieval references called upon. It is no vague medieval fantasy that we see here, but a real dialogue resurrecting the medieval reference it uses, making it visible and audible in its archaeological existence. Jacques Roubaud, working with manuscripts of troubadour material or prose romance, reproduces their specificity down to their punctuation, both in his translations and in his own works.⁶ The American poetess Cole Swensen shows her creative observation of a fifteenth-century book of hours by noting the details of the lay-out:⁷ she comments on the ink that went through the paper and enables a reading from the other side, recreates the pigments as they were done in medieval workshops (Swensen, 59, 77). transforming the story of a manuscript into the very matter of the poem. In the original version of the collection, the list of critical and literary references she used is proposed at the end. As for Jack Spicer, he held a PhD in linguistics, had studied ancient languages at Berkeley – Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Old German – and attended lectures on medieval culture by Ernst Kantorowicz, and adapted several medieval plays (including a modern *Grail Quest*).⁸ On the French side, Valère Novarina reads Latin and Greek patristic texts as easily as vernacular medieval ones, feeding on philosophical readings that show in his essays and works, whether obviously or cryptically so.⁹
3. Thirdly, we have here a very particular phenomenon of resonance that is acutely felt by specialists of the Middle Ages. These characteristics come in contact with other characteristics that are constitutive of medieval aesthetics: the importance of voice, variation, repetition, all coming from the transcription and inventive tradition of medieval works, the primeval importance of the poetic network over the single figure of the author, and the importance of memory and past works in

the present of the work are remarkable meeting points that feed the contemporary works and contribute to their singularity.¹⁰

These paradoxical correspondences create *in fine* a new vision of the Middle Ages centred on its textual and visual representations. They call for a re-reading of medieval works by emphasizing their inventive fecundity and singularity. Around these contemporary resurgences new literary genealogies come to life, reactivating in our time the medieval idea of tradition.¹¹ This is a paradoxical tradition that places the contemporary author in a network based on a faraway proximity and brings together, through a bold time-jump, the now and the then, yesterday within today. "I have changed ancestors", claims Novarina; "the archaism of the *trobar* is my own", says Jacques Roubaud.¹² Contrary to the nineteenth-century concept of medieval studies,¹³ that is still active in some modern productions, this medievalism is less an attempt at revival than a resonance, a ghosting or *revenance*. It is through this concept of *revenance* that I will explore in detail these effects in two American poetic works that bear witness to the fecundity of the medieval reference within contemporary poetic creation.

The concept of the ghost is in itself an echo between medieval and present times for us literary theorists: it penetrates all medieval theology, it is central to the medieval conception of fiction inspired by the Augustinian *fantasticus*, and it is at the heart of the anthropological relation between medieval society and its dead, as was shown by Jean-Claude Schmitt. However, ghosting or "coming back" (*revenance*) is a very topical concept in the present-day humanities: philosophy and psychoanalysis place it at the core of the impossibility of bereavement that is typical of contemporary times,¹⁴ and the theory of aesthetics uses it to elaborate a dynamics of writing (Avital Ronell 1993), as well as of art (Didi-Huberman, Schefer).

From the point of view of poetic creation, ghosting seems to me to be particularly potent: the ghost (*revenant*) is defined in a relationship to time out of chronology, it participates in the destabilization of the subject through the splitting it supposes and it gives rise to a poetics that fosters a repetition, proliferation, superposition and hesitation that are very particular from one work to another. A poem by Cole Swensen on the medieval ghosts of the *Mesnie Hellequin*, associated with the night of May 1st in the medieval calendar, shows, visually and thorough its meaning, this poetics of ghosting, in which the imagination of the medieval is a support both in text and in image:

May 1, 1. A.M.: Les Revenants¹⁵

Old and on/ certain nights of the Walpurgis
I saw them
coming
back
that live
on bridges
suspended

While it enables readers to link the memory of the medieval in present-day poetry to the broader movement that accompanies the return of the Middle Ages in experimental creation, ghosting or *revenance*, when applied to poetic writing, is also an amplifier of this poetry's characteristics traits. The multiplication of voices, destabilization of space, time and meaning, the importance of confronting poetic writing to a visual medium: these are the elements that I will emphasize here to qualify those "suspended" returns in contemporary American poetry.

West coast – east coast: Haunted poetry

By its title, the present essay places itself under the influence of Jack Spicer, the avant-garde American poet who died at forty in 1965. Spicer was a precursor of the Beat Generation and in some ways of the "language poets" movement that took up an experimental position in the 1960s in the United States and still feeds the contemporary poetic scene, both in the United States and in Europe.¹⁶

Jack Spicer, who rejected the "big lie of the personal", used to hear voices. In his theoretical texts and his poetic experience, he assumed a daily practice of "dictation" and assimilated the poet to a radio whose frequency changed all the time, whose calling was to hear the rush of simultaneous waves and to translate the sonorous complexity of real life in the present moment:

The poet is a radio. The poet is a liar. The poet is a
counterpunching radio. (Spicer 2008, 374)

Linked to the depersonalization of the lyrical subject, that permeates the problematic of modern, contemporary Western poetry,¹⁷ this claim shows the importance of the voice and its polyphonic interference and enables the invention of a new lyricism, free of the individuality of the biographical subject and of the abstraction of the poetic subject, perceived as isolated and disincarnated. Thus, Spicer's writing is dictated by others, redirecting the poet

to a somewhere often free of any referential reality. The others include “Martians” for example, translating the poet’s experimental ambition, or dead people, who come back in his work and place it in a context of reciprocal haunting: Garcia Lorca firstly, whose work was posthumously increased by Spicer in his first published collection, a hybrid work plagiarizing the Spanish poet after his death while bringing him back to life through his own speech:

More often he takes one of my poems and adjoints to half of it another half of his own, giving rather the effect of an unwilling centaur [...] The reader is given no indication which of the poems belong to which category, and I have further complicated the problem (with malice aforethought I must admit) by sending Mr. Spicer several poems written after my death. (Spicer 2008, 107)

With Spicer, dictation, different from the automatic writing of the surrealists, is thus seen as a haunting of writing: it is inseparable from the figure of the ghost that explicitly links the present of the poetic voice to time and memory. In these texts, deeply anchored in American contemporary history, a model emerges of a past linked to a ghosting (*revenance*) that transforms poetry into writing from the grave, and contemporary time into a place in constant tension with the past: “I am sick of the invisible world and all its efforts to be visible,” Spicer makes Guinevere declare in his *Holy Grail*, one of his last published collections of poems, which transposed into modern poetry the structure of the great prose Arthurian cycles (Spicer 2008, 342).

If the ghosts are many in this work, often speaking to Orpheus, the main elements for a poetic of revenance in Spicer’s writing come from the Middle Ages. In *Holy Grail*, Merlin is clearly a medieval projection of the poet:

The tower he built himself
From some kind of shell that came from his hide
He pretended that he was a radio station and listened to
grail-music all day and all night every day and every night
The Book of Merlin, 3 (347)

The prophet from Arthurian fictions enables to link past and present talk by transforming the present into the incongruous realization of an anterior prophecy from the grave: the poet is doubled and superimposes the past of Arthurian England to the American present of the 1950s and 60s. He puts on the same level “Sacco & Vanzetti and Richard Lionheart”, “Willing to rise from their graves” (348). The temporal superimposition is not seen as a nostalgia that feeds poetry. On the contrary, the poetic voice, obscure because

it is prophetic, leaves the past to see the present as a future: “Hold to the future. With firm hands. The future of each afterlife, of each ghost, of each word that is about to be mentioned”, says Spicer in his *Textbook of poetry* (309).

The future of the ghost: Confusion and proliferation of the subject

With Spicer, medieval fiction is seen as a place to start in order to grasp the revelation of the present time. The poem becomes the privileged space of a reversal and the reader, the active double of the poet, is invited to take part in this renewed experiment. In the poetic prologue of Cole Swensen’s book, *Such Rich Hour*, published in 2001 (translated into French in 2007), the use of the slash symbol enables the reader to choose – or rather to always hesitate – between two tenses for the same verb that juxtapose the fifteenth-century past, creative observation, the present and the reading future:

it is said
“it is sown” though there is no
reason, particularly,
that it had to happen/will happen (circle one) this way (4)

In these works, the superimposition of temporalities goes together with the doubling of the poetic subject, who is then multiplied. Of the prose Arthurian cycle, whose division into books is repeated both by Jacques Roubaud and Jack Spicer, the latter retains the proliferating trend. Each poem of *Holy Grail* makes sense only when it is integrated within a volume whose dynamic can only be grasped when read as a whole: the collection is divided into seven books, each placed under the authority of one of the characters and containing seven poems – 49 poems in total. The “I” is in turn Gawain, Perceval, Lancelot, Gwenivere, Galahad, Merlin, Arthur, or an unknown subject, and they all speak to as many interlocutors coming out of the poet’s world and transposed into a legendary past: in the first poem, the text talks to a Tony who is superposed to Gawain, and in the *Book of Lancelot*, the first poem is yet again addressed to a Tony, but the poet adds between brackets that it is a different one from the first (“another Tony”); on the mythical boat that takes Arthur away in the legend “There is always one lone person on it sailing/ Widdershins”, writes Spicer (Spicer 2008, 107). But this isolating and floating character is at once multiplied and ambivalent: he / she is pierced by emotional experience, linked to the acknowledged homoeroticism of the poet:

His name is Kate or Bob or Mike or Dora and his sex is almost as obscure as his history. (333)

Of the Grail Quest in which every character is engaged, each will only have a partial and deceptive vision: not only does Spicer brings back as ghosts the characters from Arthurian myth to show and emphasize the difficult relation to the invisible that is at play in the medieval texts themselves,¹⁸ but the contemporary characters, defectors from the present, are in the end treated as ghosts *in* the present, grasping a reality whose sense is slipping away and multiplying. The relationship to the present that is described in the poem gives an account of the frailty of human relationships, viewed following the model of erotic experience: an “elusive embrace” to recall the title of a book by the American author Daniel Mendelsohn (1999), repeated to infinity in its impossible plenitude. Spicer likens himself to Perceval on the boat that carries the Grail, tormented by a multitude of spooks:

The boat [...]
Would have to support me
All the loves of my life
Each impossible choice I had been making. Wave
Upon wave.
“Fool”, I could hear them shouting for we were becalmed in some impossible harbor
The grail and me
And in impossible armor
The spooks that bent the ship
Forward and backward (Spicer 2008, 336)

The collection, which appears to evolve randomly, seems to me to be conceived around this void that symbolizes the Grail: like a chessboard deprived of its eighth square, through medieval fiction, the collection enables the reading of a reactivated lack into its very construction. The figure of the ghost becomes the clue to this absence.

In Cole Swensen’s book, following the calendar division of the *Très Riches Heures* of the duc de Berry, mingled with fragmentary notes borrowed from the tumultuous history of the French fifteenth century, the dynamic of the collection is also linked to the discontinuity and proliferation of subjects: alternately Jean de Berry, a painter, a Parisian woman from the fifteenth century, the poetic subject, either *I* or an undetermined *you*, but also an *eye*, reflecting the story discontinuously while creatively meditating on the illuminated manuscript. Above the Castle of Lusignan in Poitou, the flight of Mélusine set in the sky by the medieval painter comes to haunt the present of

the one observing it in later times, in order to be transformed into poetic words (Swensen, 39 – see the illustration below):

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

Mélusine, who was touched
beyond oath

and all ten sons

(dead) and the husband who

in jealousy
and fled
in
the form of

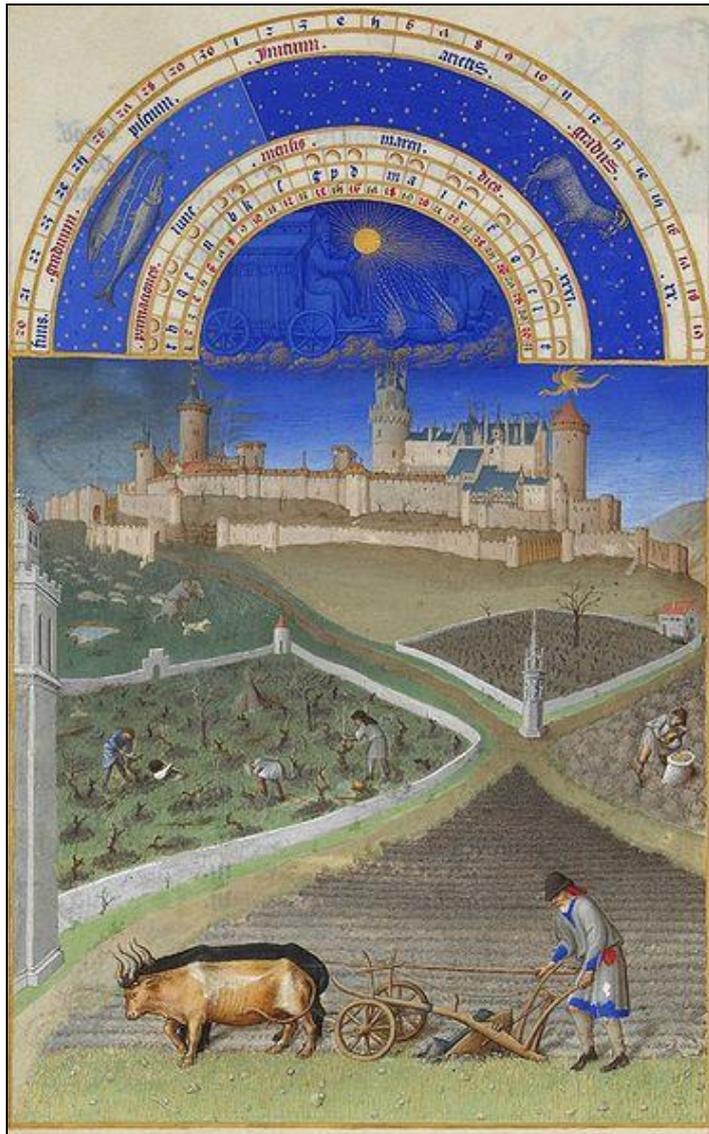
a dragon she turned
the sky red for a thousand years

“and the husband

who” blue
field, ten what

red? what

are you doing in my sky?



The medieval text and image are called upon to translate the interference springing from a legendary fixation, which is prolonged in our imaginations into the “long Middle Ages”, to use the words of Jacques Le Goff, and can still be felt through traces in our contemporary time. As feedback, pieces of discourse to an interlocutor who seems to share the present of the poem are taken away with him, the reader being submitted to a constant here-and-there in space and time that sets two books face to face and contributes to the superposition of worlds, making the poem the place of an always-fragmentary setting, constituted in equal part of memory and forgetfulness. As with Spicer the “moving water” enables the destabilization of “moving life”; in the book, the evocation of the great flood of January 1408, borrowed from *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*,¹⁹ is the way to go from the outer world to the inner world, from the medieval past to the present of the poetic

Unwillingly
Who saw through time (Spicer 2008, 333)

Recapturing a motive from Celtic and Christian mythology, the cup of plenty, Jack Spicer bends it to his own mythological thinking about ghosts: the Grail reversed, the poem is not the cup that fulfills us, but the one from which the dead drink. This resurgence shows the radical dissatisfaction that lies at the basis of poetic invention: “The poem. Opposite. Us. Unfulfilled” (332). The Grail legend opens itself to the awakening of the dead, and opens the reading to a neverending quest: “They are still looking for it”, adds Spicer; the Grail, meeting the world of Lewis Carroll, becomes a snark hunter: “A grail. A real grail. Snark hungry” (338).

In the poem, language is treated so that it restitutes in its specificity the nature of the ghostly apparition, which “dictates” the choice of words, the dislocation of the syntax and even the versification pattern:

The cup that keeps the blood shed, bled into Is a hoax, a hole I see it dis- appear (<i>Livre de Guenièvre</i> , 3)	La coupe qui garde le sang versé, où coula le sang n'est qu'un tour, un trou je la vois dis- paraître (Spicer 2008, 343) ²¹
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Here one can see in the detail of the versification the dynamic of the ghost: as an apparition highlighting an absence, the ghost enables a poetry that allows us to hear a constant and ungraspable here-and-there motion. In Spicer's poetic and intimate landscape, it is a wave, evanescent, with its ebb and sonority, recurrently expressing the typical motion of ghostly arrival: the Grail, brought to the Californian shores where the poet lived, is given a marine existence, recalling the aquatic world it first showed in Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval*.²² The entire book deepens the invention – or reactivation – of this sea Grail and aims at imposing this sonorous image of the ocean: “The pulse and beat of it. The roar” (Spicer 2008, 340). Spicer's Grail-ocean is an always-moving boundary, revealing an infinity that demonstrates its existence by its very elusiveness.

Ghost-birds

Cole Swensen's book shows the same awareness of the motion of the image, the instability of the apparition, and aims at transcribing this experience in poetic terms, an experience arising from the visual confrontation with the illuminated manuscript. Here it is the bird that is a recurring image, retaining

the meanings linked with the ghost-image: birds, portrayed on paper by the medieval illuminator merely as an enriching detail in the depiction of the seasons, centred on human labour, are often what the poetess retains of the medieval image. The October poem, for example, acknowledges the very recent incorporation of characters' shadows in painting and describes "a world so active, governed by birds, and that a stone rends, and holds". From the August illumination in the manuscript, that shows the duc de Berry and his suite going out to hunt, the poem takes from the landscape and the scene the presence of aristocratic birds "who hunt birds" (Swensen, 68):

<p>August 1 : The Outing</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">("all this shall someday be</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">Birds :</p> <p style="padding-left: 120px;">Plane 1:</p> <p style="padding-left: 160px;">Count them: 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 200px;">choregraphed</p> <p>a private alphabet</p> <p>one falconer</p> <p>with his one red sock</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">(the fine</p> <p>lady and her one red sleeve</p> <p>sieve</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">one into a thousand days</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">It's raining birds</p> <p>who hunt birds, it's</p> <p>always morning here. (Swensen 2001, 68 – see illustration)</p>	
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Between here and now, imagined in its impossible flight, the bird becomes in the poem the airy and ungraspable transposition of a constant here-and-there movement in space and time. It is also, just like Spicer's Grail, the sign of an invisible world that the poem seeks to make tangible. In the poetess' book, a piece about the Italian painter Paolo Uccello reveals the dynamic functioning of these invisible birds (100):

Vasari swears

the birds were there, are

still

beware they are

the hand
rose to the face to brush
away what was there that was
difficult, was
still half-unmade

a truce implied by flight

A man walks out of a painting into a war
and all that should be there
is there
and what should not
ever, it's now all over
it's the animals that fly
it's that now
the hunted sail for a minute

Inspired by the account of Uccello's life by Vasari, the poetess focuses on the significant interpretation of one name: "Paul l'oiseau", or "Paul les oiseaux" recalling a title from Artaud to emphasize a paradox that built up over time: if, just like Vasari "swears", Uccello particularly loved painting birds, not one bird is to be seen in the painted works we still have:²³ as if time had created a forgetting between the fifteenth and the twenty-first century, and this forgetting had transmitted the essential of what the painter thought to be the representation of birds, "a truce implied by flight", a suspension of representation, "still half-unmade", vanishing "brush/away". In the reality reproduced by painting, birds, preys of the painter, "the hunted", escape representation to show an invisible and ephemeral flight. As the end of the poem says, they "sail for a minute"; for the early-Renaissance painter haunted by perspective, they are the vanishing point of every representation.

The lay-out of the poem tries to render this essential limit of representation through the use of white and word wrap: just as with Spicer's "dis/appear", the "brush/away" lets us see and hear the disappearance within the appearance and shows that the memory of the medieval is built on fragments, based on forgetting – in the "dés-oubli" (Novarina 2009), to recall Valère Novarina's fine neologism. We are thus invited to engage in a reflection on memory by the reading of the poetry volume as it penetrates the manuscript tradition and medieval history.

The art of collection: “Serial poem” and memory arts

In the works of these two American poets, the reflection on memory creates a real poetics that draws inspiration from the medieval arts of memory to create the format of the collection and shape its use of images.²⁴ The collection of poems is built up as a “serial poem”. Jack Spicer’s reader is invited to go from one poem to another as one wanders from one room to another in an obscure house, where lights are turned on and off successively: wandering within this poetic architecture, she will retain one image from each poem, one image that springs out from the brief moment of light and visit, the time of reading. Similar to a room inside a coherent whole, each poem is the site of “apparitions”, but also implies a consciousness of the inhabited obscurity that is around it, as Guinevere tells Lancelot:

What you don’t understand are depths and shadows
They grow, Lance, though the sun covers them in a single day.
Grails here, grails there, grails tomorrow
A trick of light.
A trick of light streaming from the cup
You say, knowing only the unbent rock
The shells
That have somehow survived their maker.
The depths and shadows are beside all of this, somehow
Returning
Each man to what of him is not bone and skin and mortal
The moon
Which is beautiful and shell of the earth
Streaming. (Spicer 2008, 343)

With a vision of the world invaded by shadows, devoid of any transcendence, the poem still transmits what takes hold in the very heart of instability: images fixed on the retina, just like the intermittent effects of light, or the concretions of the moving sea, beautifully symbolized by the moon, this “earth-shell”. Just like the ghosts of the Middle Ages, these night-lights are also what escape other fixations – those of time, the carnal body, death:

a ghost is a hole in the sky a ghost is a suture in the mind a visible sigh
from cell to cell, a ghost turns in a small room taking a jar off a shelf and
opening the sun.²⁵

... insisting shadows that come to ask the living to occupy the moving and failing places of memory, thus giving matter and shape to today’s poetry...

Notes

¹ Jack Spicer, *The Holy Grail*, "The Book of Gawain", 5, in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. See also the recent reprinting of *My Vocabulary Did this to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*; for the French translation, see Jacques Roubaud's groundbreaking "Le saint Graal", and Eric Suchère in *Les Livres de Jack Spicer: c'est mon vocabulaire qui m'a fait ça*, 247.

² See my collective volume about the paradox of renovation serving innovation: *Passé présent*.

³ *Le Vrai sang*, first performed at Odéon Théâtre de l'Europe, January 5, 2011.

⁴ "Humaniste non. Je sors d'homme. Je cherche une déséquation, une désadhérence des acteurs au langage, à l'espace, au corps et à l'homme ; je fais trébucher . . . trébucher sur un mot pour parler. Toute l'action provient d'un déséquilibre." (2002, 173).

⁵ See also his *Essai de poésie médiévale*. The second edition from 2000, with a foreword by Michel Zink, includes an afterword by the author dating from 1985 that again addresses the specificity of medieval literature in scholarly studies.

⁶ In his troubadour poetry anthologies, medieval pieces are presented in blocks, without typographically separating the lines, which are instead separated by dots, without any capital letters within a block. This punctuation is the same as the one used by most medieval *chansonniers*. The translation proposed on the opposite page reproduces the lay-out in blocks of long lines, with a blank space to separate rhymes: *Les Troubadours, anthologie bilingue*. The same lay-out is used by the poet in some of his own books, among them *Trente et un au cube*, and in some poems in *Quelque chose noir*.

⁷ Cole Swensen, *Such Rich Hour; Si riche heure*, translated by Maitreyi and Nicolas Pesquès. A printed facsimile of the manuscript was made by Cazelles and Rathofer, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* along with an electronic facsimile, *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*. The monthly calendar is reproduced and commented by Dufournet, *Les Très Riches heures du Duc de Berry*. On the manuscript, see also Stirnemann and Villela-Petit.

⁸ Jack Spicer also translated *Beowulf*, a version that has recently been reprinted. Biographical elements are borrowed from Ellingham and Killian.

⁹ See, among others, Novarina, *Pendant la matière* and *Lumières du corps*.

¹⁰ On those echo effects, see our introduction "Rénover pour innover", in Koble and Séguy, 5-24.

¹¹ On tradition as a writing mode and the place of literary filiations see Zumthor 2000, 96-103.

¹² Novarina 2009, 83 and Roubaud 2008. See also Puff.

¹³ On the word "médiévalisme", as borrowed from English, and its uses in France and overseas, see the first article in the present issue .

¹⁴ In psychoanalysis, ghosting (*revenance*), when linked to loss, is defined as the symbol of a lack; see "L'irreprésentable", *Revue française de psychanalyse* 56.1 (1992). See also the work of Jean-François Hamel, at the crossroads of philosophical, historical and literary thought. The spectral concept used today in historical, philosophical and literary discourse expresses an experimentation with time born of the rejection of history, an attempt to address a poetry of repetition that is typical of modern writing. Contemporary time is then seen as the intertwining of heterogeneous presents, as also discussed by Agamben and Schefer.

¹⁵ Swensen, *Such rich hour*. The title is in French in the original book as there is no real equivalent to "revenant" in English to convey the double meaning both of ghost and coming back that is present in French.

¹⁶ On poetic dictation in Spicer's poetry, see *The House that Jack Built*.

¹⁷ Since Hugo Friedrich and his pioneering work on modern Western poetry. There have been many critical works on the deconstruction and resistance of the lyrical subject. For the most recent examples, see Perloff 1989 and Perelman, for the United States. In Europe, the definition of the lyrical subject is constantly debated in critical essays and poetic manifestos, such as Prigent; Alféri and Cadiot: “digest” (especially n°49); Rabaté, especially Combes, Jenny ; Vadé 1996 and 2008 ; Rodriguez.

¹⁸ On the link between the Grail and medieval thinking on the sign, see Méla, Dubost, Baumgartner, and Valette.

¹⁹ The flood is mentioned at the beginning of the *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Beaune.

²⁰ Swensen, *Such Rich hour*, Introduction. Concerning the historical and cultural richness of this period, the author drew inspiration from Johan Huizinga's major essay *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*.

²¹ French translation by Roubaud 1976.

²² When it first appeared in the castle of the Fisher King, the Grail, presented as a dish, was associated with table rituals. A hermit then explained to Perceval that the object was different from its usual use in that it did not contain “pikes, lampreys or salmons”, but “a single host”. Chrétien de Troyes, 764-6 and 843.

²³ On Uccello, see Pope-Hennessy and Jean-Philippe Antoine's fiction.

²⁴ On the arts of memory in the Middle Ages, see Yates' pioneering book, and Carruthers,.

²⁵ Cole Swensen, *Gravesend*, forthcoming.

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