

From writing under production to the finished product

A processual threshold

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| ENS)

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Writing(s) at the Crossroads: The process-product interface

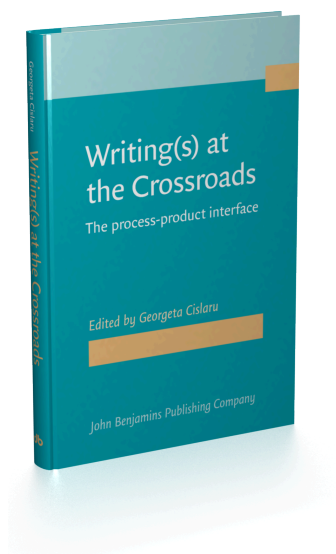
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From writing under production to the finished product

A processual threshold

Irène Fenoglio
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The study of manuscripts allows us to analyze the initial materialization of textuality, that is, the way in which text mass/material is built up, then the way in which an actual text is constructed that can then be turned into a book. This issue raises several questions: By what process are the enunciative forms constructed? Given the diachrony of the graphic delinearization brought about by successive additions and revisions, how does the author maintain enunciative linearity?

Through the analysis of the manuscripts of Pascal Quignard, Emile Benveniste and Ferdinand de Saussure, we show that while the product of the writing act is *always* linear, the writing process is *never* linear.

Keywords: manuscript; delinearization; enunciation; Benveniste; Quignard; de Saussure

1. Introduction

The preliminary notes and successive drafts of manuscripts contain all manner of traces of hesitations, resumptions and forgettings. We can assume that these traces emanate from the psychic (i.e. simultaneously cognitive, reflective and unconscious) gesture of writing. Scientific manuscripts, such as those produced by linguists, allow us to examine all the methodological constraints they face. Moreover, we can see where they hesitate over terminological considerations, requirements, and even injunctions arising from discourse production.

All these constructs become invisible in the published and consultable text, even if they continue to make their presence felt. In the case of scientific texts, these constructs reveal the inner workings of the theorizing process.

By studying manuscripts, we can analyze the initial materialization of textuality: how the text is gradually put together, from the first words to the actual book. In this investigation, I restrict myself to the pen movements across the surface of

the page, scrutinizing the writing gesture (cf. Fenoglio 2008, 2009b; Fenoglio & Boucheron 2002). The latter, while seemingly natural, is actually very complex. Both physical and psychic at the same time, this gesture produces a trace that can be used to track textuality. I only deal here with the writing gesture that is graphically materialized. We cannot say anything about what happens before or during this gesture in the mind, “behind the eyes”, as Pascal Quignard eloquently puts it. By scrutinizing the manuscripts of Quignard, Ferdinand de Saussure and Emile Benveniste (see also Fenoglio 2006, 2007a, 2009a, 2009c, 2009d, 2011, 2012a) I demonstrate how a sentence, a text and a book are put together.

This type of examination can provide definitive answers to a number of questions, and allows us to analyze certain linguistic issues (Fenoglio 2011, 2012a, b, c). By what process, for instance, are the enunciative forms constructed? Intriguingly, despite the diachrony of the graphic delinearization brought about by successive additions and revisions – as in this draft manuscript by Quignard –, the enunciative linearization is never *lost*: we can always recognize and follow its tracks.

The complexity of what happens when we write and when we attempt to produce a legible text can sometimes seem inextricable at first glance. The legible text provided for the Other and destined for the reader never willingly gives up its data.

Regardless of the identity of the author and regardless of the writing object, the delinearization process is absolutely necessary, and constitutes an integral part of writing production. By picking up all the *incidents* that occur during writing, which, in an ideal world, would be absolutely cursive and linear, we can understand the processes behind all forms of writing. This understanding does not entail finding out about the author’s psychology. For instance, the repetitive use of certain words that is subjectively specific to a given author can be regarded as part of his or her style. However, since no word is perfect, all writing is subject to alterations, and all the various reformulations, breaks, repetitions, word omissions and ellipses that inwardly leave their traces, inhabit and add new layers to the linearity of a text provided to the reader.

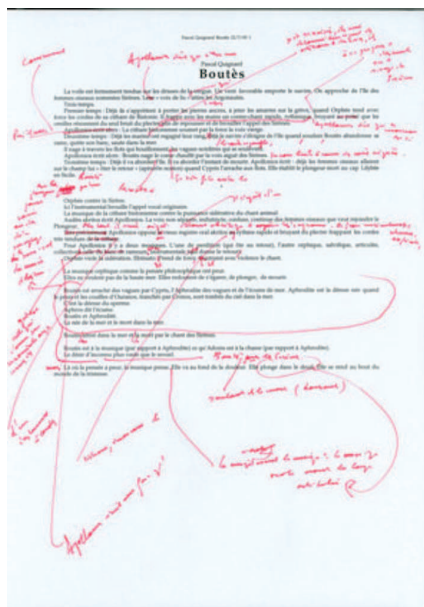
For example, in Benveniste manuscripts, how do we move from the tangle of alterations in the draft¹ stage to the printed² text which is directly legible?

How do we go from Quignard’s preliminary handwritten notes to this *draft*, and thence to at least 11 other versions of his *initial content*?³

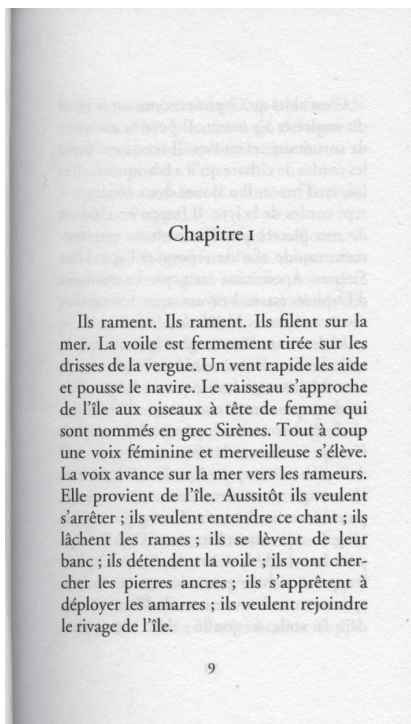
1. BnF, Pap Or, boîte 45, env. 117, f^o 3.

2. Benveniste, Émile. 1980. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 2. Paris: Gallimard (coll. Tel), p. 43.

3. *Sur le désir de se jeter à l'eau*, *op. cit.*, p. 45 and p. 48, respectively.



until we eventually reach this first edition that is materially featureless and constantly legible, no longer sending our gaze off in myriad directions?



Nevertheless, even when we are confronted with such apparent multilinear illegibility, we can still make out the presence of a text. The process we are interested in consists in switching from *a* text to *the* text. In other words, from textualization in progress – a potentially infinitely expanding process – to a constructed and discrete text, even though it can be revised and modified thereafter.

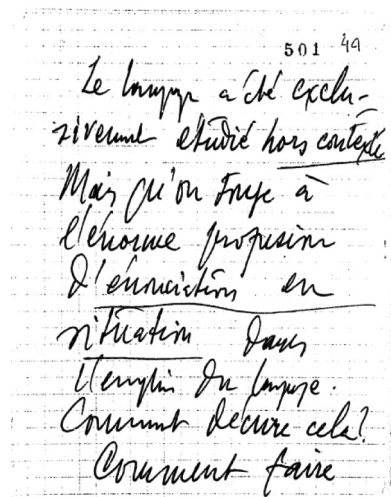
2. Constructing a text

2.1 Putting pen to paper

We first need to talk about writing materials. Nowadays, authors rarely make do with pen and paper. These have largely been supplanted by the computer, and this has had a significant impact on writing. Benveniste and Saussure wrote entirely by hand, while Quignard combines handwriting and word processing. All three punctuate(d) their preliminary writings with small drawings that were an integral part of the construction process.

Notes, be they scattered or jotted on a single sheet, are often the starting point. These notes express the writing project, the desire that underpins it and the questions it raises. They do not, however, constitute the start of the drafting process *per se*.

Thus, in Benveniste's preliminary⁴ notes for his article on the utterance as a *formal device*,⁵ the linguist lays the foundations for his thinking, expressing his anxieties about how and what to say:



Language has been exclusively studied out of
context

However, we need to think about the huge
profusion of utterances in situation in language use
How can we describe that?

How can we proceed?

4. BnF, Pap Or boîte 51, env. 198, f^o 501.

5. *Langages* 17: 1970, reprinted in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, *op. cit.*, p. 79–88.

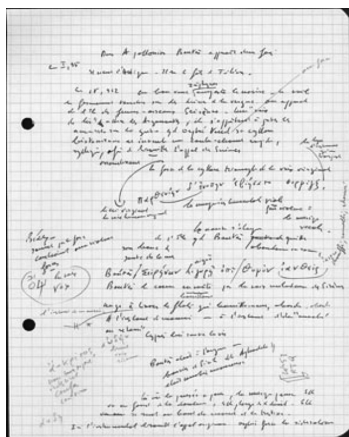
This additional note is more constructive:⁶

En réalité c'est un changement, un
pas, un changement dans la matière, même
de la langue. Un changement, le fait qu'elle
est mise en mouvement, que jusqu'un
rien est impossible et qu'elle se meut,
la met en action, que est apparu qui
gravid, potentiel, non inert, croissant
en dignité d'un côté (sign, lexicaux et
autres), en modèles lexicaux et syn-
taxiques, de l'autre ^{seulement pendant l'existence} ~~seulement pendant l'existence~~
existence, ~~le langage~~ ^{un monde} ~~un monde~~
naît au monde alors. Un homme
s'exprime (lat. *exprimere* = faire jaillir
en pressant, faire jaillir à l'extérieur), il
fait jaillir la langue dans l'énonciation.

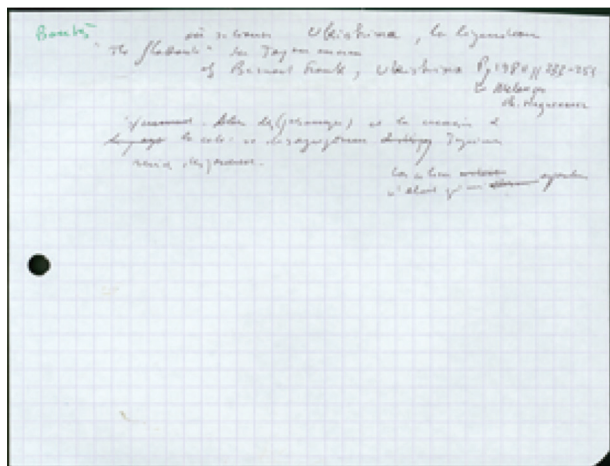
Actually it is a change, but it is not a change
in the substance of language itself. A change
<more subtle, more radical> owing to the fact
that it is set in motion, that somebody seized
it, and that someone takes hold of it, and
moves it, puts it into action, that this device
which is lying there, potential, but inert,
consistent in signs on the one hand (lexical
and different signs), and inflectional and
syntactic models on the other hand (suddenly
comes to life and becomes suddenly actual)
suddenly takes on existence (a speech is
constructed restoring around itself a living
movement); of language. Something is born
in the world then. A man expresses (lat.
exprimere "to press out, to bring forth"), it
brings language forth into the utterance

This important note shows just how moved the linguist-writer is by the discovery of the researcher, and how he explores his thoughts by setting them down on paper and secures their foundations ("lat. *exprimere* to press out, to bring forth"). This process is expressed in a rough, awkward, unconventional and astonished way. Although none of this emotion will be visible in the final text, it nonetheless contributes to the embedding of thought in textuality.

Quignard's preliminary notes for his work on Butes, a direct translation of Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, constitute one of the first visible foundations of the text that will eventually be published:



or these notes in Quignard:⁹



In the writing stage, the text is picked apart, revealing the dislocation/reconstruction that takes place at the different levels of text elaboration.

Here is an example from Benveniste:¹⁰

d'un système unique. On devra constituer
 plusieurs systèmes de signes et entre ces systèmes
 pour expliciter le rapport de différence et d'analogie.
 C'est ici que Saussure ~~présente~~ ^{présente}
 Saussure, dans la méthodologie comme dans
 la pratique, à l'exact opposé de l'avis.

We will **set out** have to explain a
 relationship
 Saussure **is characterized** appears
 Saussure **appears** is presented from
 the start
 Saussure presents **from the start**
 Saussure presents from the start

We can see that a choice had to be made between “set out” and “explain”. Furthermore, this lexical choice is joined by a modal one. We therefore switch from a simple assertion to an obligation (“have to”).

In addition to thinking about lexical semantics and modality, we can see that Benveniste hesitated over whether or not to add the information “from the start”: we can count three operations related to “from the start”, as it was first written down, then crossed out, then written down again.

9. V3, f^o 2 of the manuscript for Boutès, *Sur le désir de se jeter à l'eau*, op. cit., p. 50.

10. Draft of “Sémiologie de la langue”, BnF, Pap Or, boîte 45, env. 117, f^o 7.

These word choices in Saussure's preliminary manuscript are significant, as each change implies a total shift in point of view:

59. 36(5)
 Éternellement donc le grammairien
 ou le linguiste prend pour entité
 concrète nous donne pour entité
 concrète, et pour entité abstraite
 devant de base à ses opérations,
 l'entité abstraite et relative qu'il
 vient de définir dans un chapitre
 précédent.
 Mais ce cercle vicieux, qui
 ne peut être brisé qu'en basculant
 clairement ce concept une fois pour
 toutes du devant de toute distance
 tout linguistique hors de la détermination
 et se soustraire

the grammarian or the linguist
 takes as a concrete entity gives us
 as a concrete entity

[...]

The abstract and approximate
 entity he just highlighted in
 in a previous chapter.

Both substitutions correspond to the same change in direction. The linguist switches from a positivist position ("takes", "highlights" an entity assumed to reflect reality) to an epistemological point of view, where everything takes place in the linguist's scientific discourse: he "gives us" as an entity, the entity he "has just invented" in and through his reflexive speech.

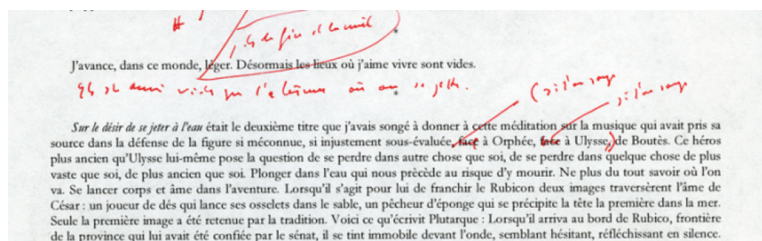
Substitution (suppression + insertion) simultaneously expresses a hesitation and a choice: it redirects the utterance. The written trace of this movement reveals two textual possibilities (or two possible texts). The first reflects a positivist discourse, the second a distanced awareness of the linguist's function. In manuscripts, we can observe the utterance of two words at the same time, just as we can in speech, with slips of the tongue, for example. The saying that "you cannot say two words at the same time" is often transgressed in manuscripts.

In literary texts, another element is played out, as we can see in this example taken from Quignard's manuscript for the first chapter of *Sur le désir de se jeter à l'eau* (*On the Desire to Take the Plunge*);¹¹

The author makes two related corrections. These parallel corrections follow the rhythm of the sentence. In literary manuscripts, substitutions generally involve stylistic modification and rhythm. The two successive substitutions clearly highlight the language constraint whereby the substituting phrase has to have the same

11. Manuscript, private collection.

construction. However, at the literary level, “if we think about” clearly opens up a wider field of possibilities for the reader than “compared with”.



“On the desire to take the plunge” was the second title I had thought of giving to this meditation on music that had emanated from the defense of the figure of Butes, so little known, so unfairly underestimated, compared with **regarding** (if we think about) Orpheus, compared with (if we think about) Ulysses.

2.2 Writing

Writing is about the emergence of textuality through the binding together of words. There may be inescapable language constraints, but there are also endless possible combinations.

Benveniste, who was the first to deal linguistically with the sentence, thus creating the enunciative perspective, noted in preparation for his article on “The Semiology of Language”¹² that a sentence (utterance) has to be put together, or “created”. On the basis of the Saussurean language system, he demonstrated the need for a “formal apparatus” for creating sentences. He called this the “formal apparatus of the enunciation”, underscoring the impossibility of shifting directly from sign to sentence without having an understanding of the act of discourse. To consider the latter, he exploited the paradox between the finite number of signs that emerge from the language system and the infinite number of possible sentences:

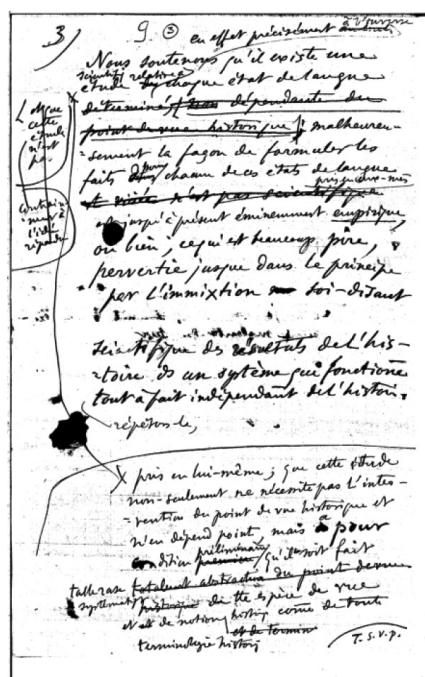
Sign
92 92
Faut-il que l'on
compréhension la théorie du
signe (sémiotique) et la
théorie de la phrase
et de la production de
phrases, qui sera une
science de la génération, une

Sign
Is it necessary to completely dissociate sign theory
(= semiotics) and the theory of enunciation and
sentence production, which will be a science of
generation, a

12. BnF, Pap Or, boîte 45, env. 117, f^o 92.

This is the composition paradox highlighted by Benveniste: the sentence is not just a collection of linguistic signs but a careful piecing together of words to form a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Quignard puts it rather differently: “What we find when writing, looking for words and crossing them out, is not what we experience when we are swamped by the sentence that we ignore.” (Quignard & Lapeyre-Desmaison 2001, 111).

In addition to rewriting operations, we sometimes come across within-sentence additions indicated by a variety of insertion signs. Thus, in Saussure’s manuscript:¹⁴



We also find devices that hold the construction process in abeyance. Saussure’s manuscripts, for example, are known for their blanks and empty spaces. Whatever the reason for their presence, these blanks implicitly leave their mark: the space left for a missing word will later be filled without touching the rest of the text.¹⁵

14. Manuscripts of “The Double Essence of Language,” *op. cit.* f. 9(3).

15. *Ibid.* f. 29 b (3).

The more I scrutinized this manuscript, with its almost indecipherable handwriting, the more this drawing came to resemble a beetle—an entirely subjective vision. Version Two did nothing to enlighten me, as the *beetle* simply turned into a question mark and thus into a missing word:

Mon âme est contenue dans un petit ? qui pèse deux grammes.
Les lieux où j'aime vivre sont vides.

Version Three contains several alterations concerning the definitions of both the book and the text. Furthermore, the question mark is replaced by the name of the previously unidentified object: “My soul is contained in a small memory stick that weighs two grams”:

Mon âme est contenue dans une petite clé USB qui pèse deux grammes.
J'avance, dans ce monde, léger, et les lieux où j'aime vivre sont vides.

Version Five

~~Mon âme est contenue dans une petite clé USB qui pèse deux grammes.~~
J'avance, dans ce monde, léger. Désormais les lieux où j'aime vivre sont vides.

“I call My ‘soul’ that which is contained in a small memory stick that weighs two grams.”

Version Six

J'appelle texte achevé la sortie-papier découverte pour la première fois sans correction après la relecture qui l'a suivie.
J'appelle livre le texte imprimé et relié qui n'a plus d'expérience possible dans le temps que la lecture.
J'appelle âme ce qui est contenu dans une petite clé USB qui pèse deux grammes.

A closer look at these operations reveals the existence of writing blocks. These blocks remain stable and are reminiscent of *cut and paste*.

Here are the successive transformations this sentence undergoes:

My soul is contained in a small [drawing] that weighs two grams

My soul is contained in a small ? that weighs two grams

My soul is contained in a small memory stick that weighs two grams

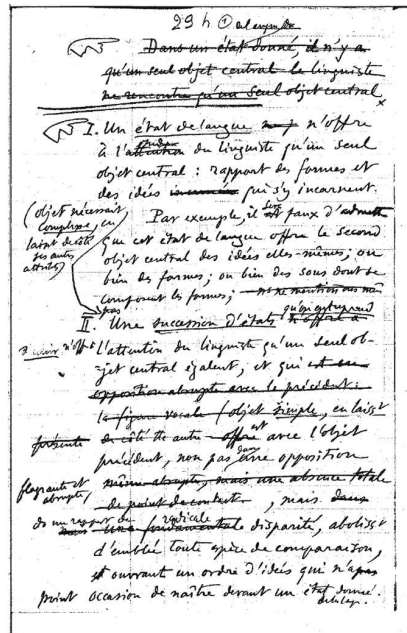
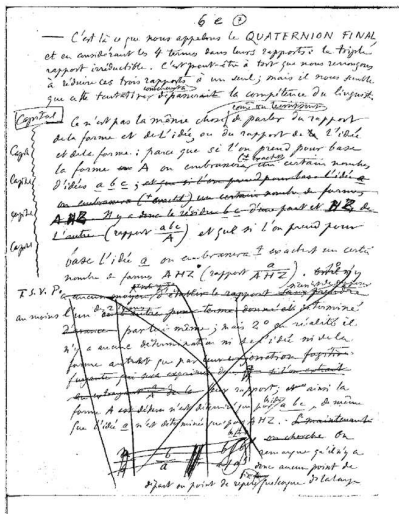
My I call 'soul' that which is contained in a small memory stick that weighs two grams

I call 'individual soul' that which is contained in a small memory stick that weighs two grams

Moreover, in a rerun of the Saussurean blanks, space is left for the appropriate term, which is not yet available. This term may change across the versions, but its place in the contextual construction does not.

2.3 Assembling the finished sentences

The nature of the *meta-inscription*, which highlights the target of the textual project, can vary from one manuscript to another. The author-critic may manifest interest in what the author-writer has just written, thereby drawing attention to him- or herself as a future reviewer, as in the Saussurean manuscripts,¹⁷ where the *meta-margin* contains the word “Capital” written several times, along with drawings of a pointed finger:



Then again, the author-reviewer may ensure that the passages are read in the right order (“TSVP”, Please turn the page) and marks the textual linearity with a guiding thread, as in these two consecutive preliminary pages by Saussure:¹⁸

17. Op. cit., f. 6 e (7) and f. 29 h (1).

18. Op. cit., f. 9 (5) and f. 9 (6).

521) la pensée qui crée le signe, mais
le signe qui guide la pensée,
(dis lors la cré. en réalité, et
la porte à son tour à créer des
signes peu différents de ce qu'elle
avait reçu).

Peut-on au contraire considérer
la langue comme une somme
de signes ~~transmis~~ de la propriété
de se transmettre à travers le
temps, d'individu en individu, de
génération en génération, il faut
nécessairement renouer avec le
but à poursuivre. Or se trouve avec
précipité dans une étale radicale-
ment différente de la sienne, pour
la langue à un moment donné. Para-
it alors on considère le langage
ou dans la succession de de tels
passés, on a alors en et matériellement
des signes, à
moins qu'on
ne puisse
considérer
leur du tout

10

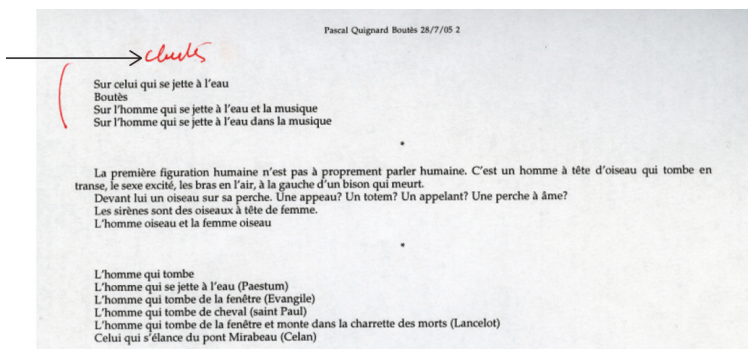
IX C

On se doit constater que cet
objet offre à peine quelque chose
de commun avec le précédent.
Cet opinion qui peut paraître
paradoxe trouve à chaque
instant sa justification; et ce sont
la même manière d'être susceptibles
de considérer la langue. Supposons
que nous ayons à parler de
l'origine du langage: il y aura
immédiatement ces deux manières
de concevoir la question: ou bien
la constitution d'une pensée
arrivé à se matérialiser en un signe
ou bien la constitution d'un
signe se arrive à se transmettre,
et aussitôt la pensée est supprimée,
parce que cette pensée peut être
d'un instant à l'autre. Or la
Méthode primordial du
langage est association d'une
pensée à un signe; et c'est justement
ce fait primordial qui est
supprimé dans la transmission
du signe.

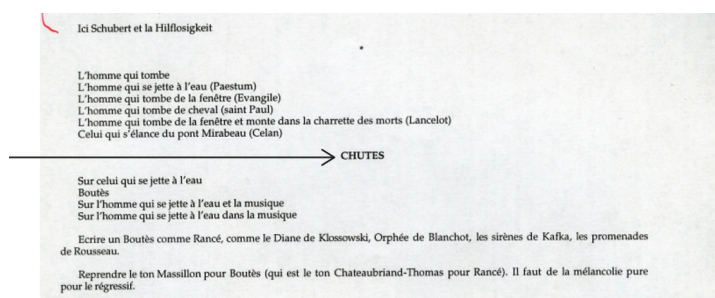
Similarly, Quignard uses this finished version of the *Butes* manuscript to sketch out the first version of the first chapter of *On the Desire*.¹⁹ By following what is literally a guiding scarlet thread linking together the various blocks of text, we can glimpse its future structure:



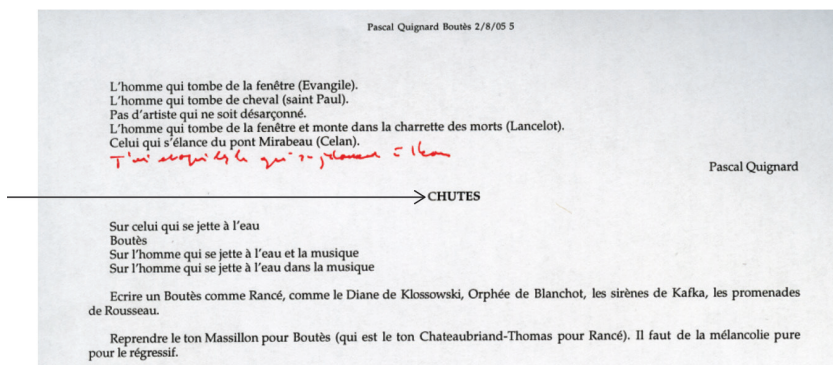
19. Op. cit., V32, P 2, p. 232.



"FALLS" is initially written on the lefthand side, but from the sixth version onwards, it is centered:



From the eighth version onwards, the author's name appears just above the title, thus marking a radical separation between the work in progress and the FALLS section, set aside for the time being. The author's name serves to confirm the text's construction:

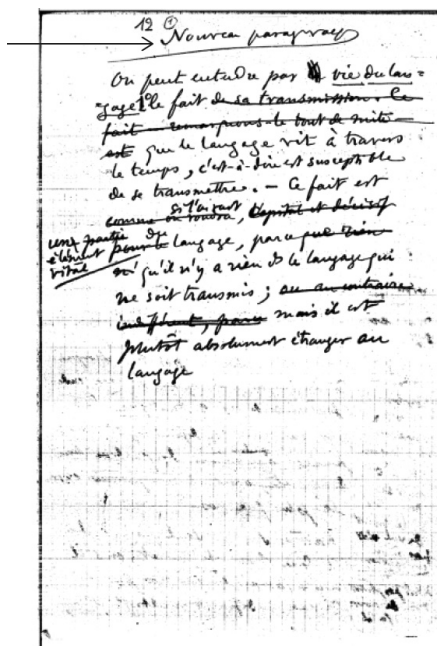


3. Constructing the text. Assembling the book

Once the texts are ready, they all have to be joined up. In other words, the book has to be put together.

3.1 Constructing the text

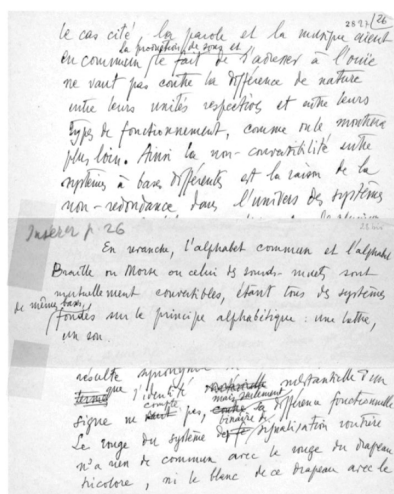
A set of meta-scriptorial or meta-discursive features attest to this transphrastic construction process. For example, Saussure writes “New paragraph”:²²



Putting the paragraphs together mostly involves cutting and pasting. Benveniste did this by hand, and by meta-textually noting all the necessary operations (“Insertion here”, “Insert p. 26”):²³

22. *Op. cit.* f. 9 (3).

23. Draft of “The Semiology of Language,” BnF, cote Pap Or, boîte 45, env. 117, f^o 28.



None of these movements, displacements and additions are, of course, visible in the final text provided to the reader. Only the manuscripts *betray* the alterations needed to achieve textual unity and cohesion.

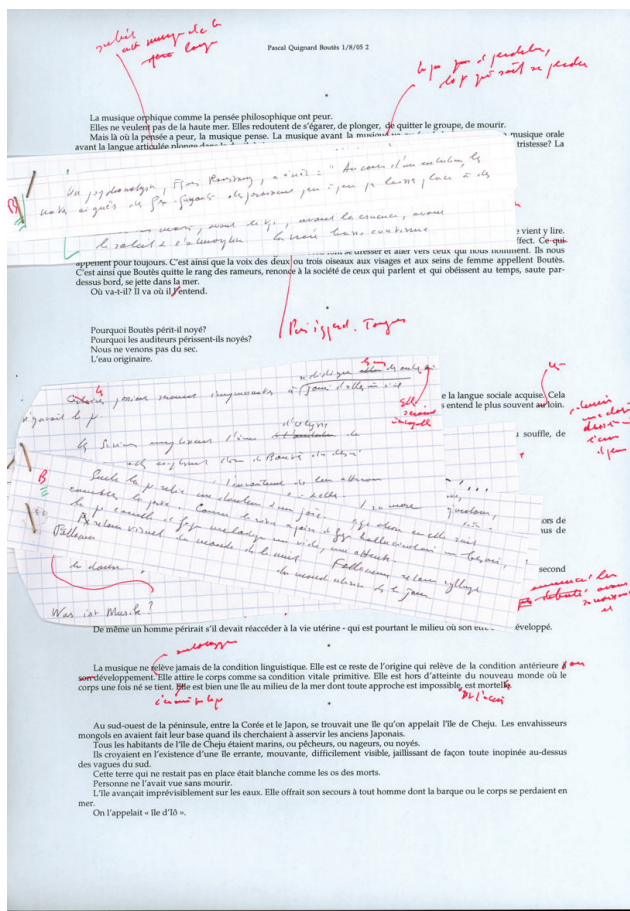
Cutting and pasting has always existed, but the computer has obviated the need for actual glue and scissors. Now that it can be done (and undone) virtually automatically, the possibilities for putting text together, both within the sentence and within its container (the paragraph), have expanded enormously. Whole paragraphs can now be cut and pasted.

In Quignard's manuscripts, we find evidence of both tools (i.e. word processor and pen and paper), with digital cutting and pasting but also its manual version in the form of Proustian paperolles (see figure page 147).

Umberto Eco, slightly tongue-in-cheek, highlights the need to allow for future cutting and pasting by leaving out links and connectives until the last step of the second reading-writing phase:

... with a computer [...]: you write, then you decide to insert the paragraphs using cut and paste. Suddenly, you find “nevertheless” and “however”, which should not be there. Then you start to delete them. But the next time you come to write, you leave these syntactic links out, so that you are free to move the paragraphs around. Thus, you eliminate “as a consequence”, “but”, “since”, etc. In a certain sense, you therefore produce paragraphs that are ready to be shifted [...] These electronic writing incidents will gradually lead us to cut adverbs and prepositions to the bare minimum, in order to maintain our freedom to move components around [...] We will have to wait a century before we are able to judge whether this practice has had an impact on the way we think. (Eco 2007, 175)

(Eco 2007, 175)

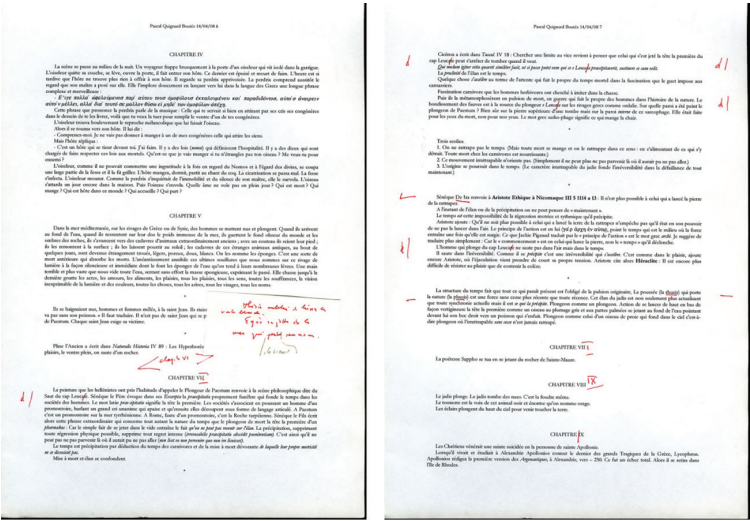


3.2 Assembling the book

In Jean-Claude Milner's *Clartés de tout*, we can read:

In *Clartés de tout* two psychoanalysts, Fabian Fajnwaks and Juan Pablo Lucchelli, question the author about his research experience and the role that Jacques Lacan played in it [...]. The book's project gradually emerges through these questions (and answers), which had to be carefully *honed* and *adjusted* in order to achieve this project. "Clearnesses of all" (the book's literal title) is the result of this work (my underlining).
(Milner 2009, cover)

Quignard constructed *Butes* by dividing his text into chapters, then assembling and numbering them. The insertion of a new chapter meant that he then had to renumber the ensuing chapters. It therefore altered the book's structure:



In a very eloquent article entitled “Montaigne, cannibals and grottoes”,²⁴ Carlo Ginzburg explores the way in which Montaigne, despite seeming very close to us on account of his peculiarities, actually *escapes* us:

Rejection of symmetry, inflation of details, violation of classical norms: Serlio²⁵ would have approved the loose structure as well as the uneven stylistic texture of Montaigne's essays. The abrupt juxtapositions may be compared to the alternate use of polished and rough stone in Giulio Romano's Palazzo del Te [in Mantua], representing respectively, as Serlio remarked, “works of art” and “works of nature” [...]

Readers of the first edition of the *Essais* (Bordeaux, 1580) were confronted with a text in which each essay was printed as a single, unbroken typographical unit. By splitting the sequence into two different paragraphs, modern publishers have attenuated the original harsh tone, but without making it disappear entirely.

“Une marquerie mal jointe”, an inlay badly joined: this definition which Montaigne gave to his own writings [...] reveals, in addition to his customary teasing tone, a remarkable literary self-awareness. Montaigne was referring to the uneven stylistic texture of the *Essais*, an unevenness exacerbated by his compulsive habit of inserting additional (*allonges*) of various lengths in subsequent editions. (Ginzburg 2010)

24. First printed in 1993, *History and Anthropology* 6(2-3): 125-155.
25. Sebastiano Serlio, the Renaissance architect and architectural theorist (1475-1554) summoned by Francis I to oversee the construction of Fontainebleau castle.

4. Conclusion

What is textualization? It is the process whereby elements of language are mobilized, tested, and distributed after numerous hesitations, in order to achieve textual linearity. This textual linearity is sufficiently broken up into manageable chunks, and has sufficient coherence and cohesion, to be read, transmitted, quoted, and so forth.

Beginning with a finite number of letters and vowels, language and writing are both structured in the same way. Similarly, discourse is constructed from a finite number of normalized linguistic signs. At this basic level, without which no text can exist, the number of combinations and recombinations is virtually infinite. In other words, all texts are the result of a construction process that takes place on several scales and at several levels. Manuscripts bearing irrevocable and irreversible traces of a text's *gestation* represent a rich seam for understanding not so much how a text is made but how it is gradually developed, put together and consolidated. Until it is stabilized by the author's imprimatur, a text remains a work in progress. By the same token, stability is organized and indeed embodied in the finished text.

Beyond the imprimatur, the text's stability makes it reproducible, but it still needs to be inhabited by the reader, just as a house built on firm foundations is given a different meaning by each successive occupant.

A book is like a house, in that we cannot see either its vital foundations or its structure, with its complex textuality. It is this multilayered textuality that will be inhabited by the reader.

Above and beyond the text's stated ambition, it is in the semiotic functioning of the writing (even scientific writing) and its iterative, but progressive, construction processes that the author leaves his or her imprint. Writing offers both legibility and opacity, accessibility and resistance. Writing simultaneously reveals and produces a direct linearity, a kind of teleology that is immediately materialized in the content and, at the same time, an absolute, or rather inescapable, *wandering*. The four operations—addition, deletion, substitution, and displacement—manifest themselves in this process as breathing spaces, breaks, pauses and moments of apnea. They also flag up the ever-present tensions between the essential and the nonessential, freedom and constraint: there is a gap between the rigid, minimally required linearity, and the experiments, wanderings, additions and crossroads encountered in the course of the writing activity.

Although the *product* of that writing activity has a single voice and is necessarily linear, the *process* of writing is never linear.

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