Doing Things with Words: The Transformative Force of Poetry

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Against the apparent casting away of poetry from contemporary philosophy of language and aesthetics which has left poetry forceless, I argue that poetry has a linguistic, philosophical, and even political force. Against the idea that literature (as novel) can teach us facts about the world, I argue that the force of literature (as poetry) resides in its capacity to change our ways of seeing. First, I contest views which consider poetry forceless by discussing Austin's and Sartre's views. Second, I explore the concept of force in the realm of art—focusing on Nietzsche's philosophy and Menke's Kraft der Kunst—*and the relations between linguistic, artistic, and political forces. Third, I consider how the transformative force of poetry can be considered political by turning to Kristeva's* Revolution in Poetic Language *and Meschonnic's conception of poetry according to which the poem does something to language and the subject. To illustrate this transformative force of poetry, I analyse Caroline Zekri's poem 'Un pur rapport grammatical'. I therefore think of poetry not only as doing something with language, but also as doing something to language. To rephrase Austin's famous title, and thus reverse his evaluation of poetry, poetry might reveal us not only* How to Do Things with Words, *but how to do things to words and, through this doing, how to transform and affect the world.*

Keywords: Philosophy of poetry; ordinary language philosophy; force.

> *Je suis donc obligé de dire que le poème fait quelque chose. Il fait quelque chose au langage, et à la poésie. Il fait quelque chose au sujet. Au sujet qui le compose, au sujet qui le lit.*
> (Meschonnic 2001: 43)[1]

Despite its attempt to systematically analyse the specificities of each artform, contemporary aesthetics seems to have surprisingly left poetry aside. From being the paragon of the arts in 18th and 19th century philosophy—as in Baumgarten, Kant, or Hegel for instance—poetry in the contemporary world seems to have lost most, if not all, of its philosophical force. Even Plato, who is famous for being rather unkind to poetry, nevertheless admits that poetry has a specific force, one he is afraid of, and his unkindness reveals his fear of poetry rather than an indifference towards it. In contemporary aesthetics, as John Gibson argues, 'until very recently one could fairly say that poetry is the last great unexplored frontier in contemporary analytic aesthetics, an ancient and central art we have managed to overlook more or less entirely' (Gibson 2015: 1). Even though one might argue that the situation has changed since then and that Gibson overlooks some traditions in philosophy's dealing with poetry, it seems that poetry has lately received less attention than film or the novel for instance. How can one explain such a change of attitude towards poetry? One of the main reasons for this shift can be found in one of the grounds of analytic philosophy: the linguistic turn'. If, following this turn, philosophy is a matter of language and solving philosophical problems becomes a matter of solving linguistic ones, poetry seems to be of no help at all, quite to the contrary, to philosophy of language either as 'ideal language philosophy' or as 'ordinary language philosophy', the two types of philosophy of language Rorty considers in editing *The Linguistic Turn* (Rorty 1967: 15). If poetry is a problem for the former, as it presents a form of language which cannot be translated into formal logic and therefore not be given any truth-value, the latter also shows no interest in it, as Austin suggests that performative utterances in a poem, are '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void' (Austin 1975: 22). Failure for philosophy of language to give a substantial account of the language of poetry might have contaminated the realm of aesthetics and incited philosophers to look at artforms other than poetry, more easily approachable with these new philosophical tools.[2] The great interest in literature (here understood as the novel)

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[1] My translation: 'I am therefore forced to say that the poem does something. It does something to language and to poetry. It does something to the subject. To the subject that composes it, to the subject that reads it.'

[2] It must be said that most philosophies of language have attempted to give an account of poetic phenomena but have often considered poetic language from the sole perspective of metaphor. Metaphor has been of importance throughout the whole history of philosophy of language, but inasmuch as metaphor is only one poetic phenomenon among many others, these accounts of poetic language do not exhaust the possibilities used in poetry. It is worth noting that metaphors pervade our everyday speech (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) and can therefore not really be considered a definitory feature of poetic language. This idea that metaphor is central

and the problem of truth in fiction can be seen as a consequence of the 'linguistic turn': philosophers have started looking into aesthetic problems for which philosophy of language could be of use, rather than artforms which are problematic to philosophy of language.[3] Inasmuch as Austin deprives poetry from any performative force, contemporary aesthetics strips poetry from its philosophical force.

If this account gives a schematic picture of the place of poetry in analytic aesthetics, one might think poetry fares better on the other side of the so-called 'analytic-continental divide.' At first glance, continental philosophers seem to pursue the 19th century praise of poetry.[4] Heidegger for instance considers poetry almost on par with philosophy, and the most philosophical of all artforms. If one looks further, however, a shift in attitude similar to that of analytic aesthetics seems to occur in continental philosophy. Although it is not a mark of indifference towards poetry, Sartre's theory of literature seems to operate a similar shift from poetry to literature (and one can understand here, as with analytic philosophy, 'the novel'). Indeed, Sartre defines literature in terms of political commitment and denies any commitment to poetry.[5] Very schematically: if the force of literature is proportional to its political commitment, poetry has no force as it is denied such commitment. This does not mean that Sartre denies any greatness to poetry but ascribes it one which might be of another kind, one which is certainly not of help to any concern in the actual world. If poetry still has a force in continental aesthetics, it is not a political one, not a force of influence in

to poetry (and it is in some cases) shows a focus on 19th century poetry rather than on contemporary forms. If a philosophy of poetry is to give an account of current poetic practices as well, metaphor might not be of great help.

[3] Contemporary philosophy of literature indeed shows little interest in poetry, perhaps because the notion of fiction which is central to studies in literature does not apply to poetry, or not in a straightforward way. One could even say that poetry undermines the fiction/nonfiction divide. Contemporary autofictions also work towards this undermining, but as for poetry, philosophy of literature seems to be exclusively focused on the 19th century novel, as Peter Lamarque argues: 'Philosophy of Literature has virtually become Philosophy of the Novel' (Lamarque 2017: 109).

[4] It seems indeed that all continental philosophers bring their attention to poetry in some way or another. However, this (sometimes) central place they give to poetry further attempts to isolate it from the ordinary world, to leave it in its ivory tower.

[5] Maximilian de Gaynesford offers an interesting reading of Austin in relation to the notion of commitment (although not necessarily political commitment), which opens a potential link between Austin and Sartre. According to him, either poetry is capable of commitment and is thus serious, or it is not and can therefore not claim to seriousness: 'For if we insist that poetry is "serious", Austin can still rescue his approach to speech acts; he must simply accept that commitment-apt utterances in poetry may make commitments. And it is surely possible to contemplate ways of integrating poetry and philosophy while acknowledging that poetry is, indeed, serious. (The surprise is that we might have been able to do so without acknowledging this.) We would, however, have to renounce the attempt to exempt poetry from forms of commitment' (de Gaynesford 2011: 49). We then must choose whether we would rather commit poetry to seriousness and hence abandon the idea of poetic license or abandon commitment in favour of poetic license.

the everyday world, but rather a force of distancing and isolating itself from the commonplace.

One of the possible reasons for this shift is an inversion of value between literature and poetry. Whereas poetry was literature (or the highest literary form) for 18th and 19th century philosophers (and in this sense Heidegger inherits from this background and pursues a romantic tradition), the 20th century marks the rise of the novel in philosophical concerns. When one thinks of literature nowadays, the first thing to come to mind is probably more often a novel than a poem. In that sense, philosophy of poetry would be considered a subcategory of philosophy of literature rather than the opposite.[6] However, even if there were such a shift, it would not explain the disdain towards poetry and why philosophers have stripped it from its force. In my paper, I therefore aim at reinstating the force of poetry by showing that it has a linguistic, philosophical, and even political force (and this as much as the novel) because poetry, I will argue, has a revolutionary dimension. Against the idea that literature (as novel) can teach us facts about the world, I argue that literature (as poetry) teaches us a different way of seeing the world and that its force resides precisely in its capacity to bring us (or force us, perhaps) to see things differently. As Wittgenstein puts it: 'The work of art compels us to see it in the right perspective' (Wittgenstein 1998: 7) More than seeing the work of art itself in the right perspective, it compels us to see the world in the right perspective, in a perspective which makes sense.

To explore the force(s) of poetry, my paper is divided in three parts. First, I contest views which consider poetry forceless, be it linguistically or politically, by discussing Austin's and Sartre's views. Second, I explore the concept of force in the realm of art—focusing on Nietzsche's philosophy and Menke's *Kraft der Kunst*—and the relations between linguistic, artistic, and political forces. Third, I explore how the transformative force of poetry can be considered political by turning to Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* and Meschonnic's conception of poetry according to which the poem does something to language and to the subject. To illustrate this transformative—and even political—force of poetry, I offer an analysis of Caroline Zekri's poem 'Un pur rapport grammatical'. Poetry is revolutionary in the sense that it brings to see language and the world anew. Poetry is not only doing something with

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[6] Peter Lamarque for instance considers philosophy of poetry to be a sub-branch of philosophy of literature: 'But just when aestheticians are getting used to another recent sub-division, The Philosophy of Literature, here comes a sub-branch of that, focused on poetry' (Lamarque 2017: 109). We could argue against Lamarque that philosophy of literature is not so recent (and perhaps one of the oldest forms of philosophy of art if we think of Aristotle) and that philosophy of poetry, historically speaking, comes first. However, I agree with Lamarque to a certain extent in considering philosophy of poetry distinct from philosophy of literature. My only contention is that philosophy of poetry must be understood as radically different from philosophy of literature rather than as a sub-branch of it.

language, but also doing something to language. To rephrase Austin's famous title, and thus reverse his evaluation of poetry, poetry might not reveal us *How to Do Things with Words*, but how to do things *to* words. The force of poetry is not primarily political, but it becomes political insofar as its force modifies language and, through this modification of language, our ways of being in the world.

1. *The forcelessness of poetry: Austin and Sartre*

This first section explores two ways in which poetry is considered forceless, respectively from a linguistic and a political perspective. As outlined in the introduction, Austin considers poetic statements to be without performative force and Sartre poems to lack political commitment. Although the authors are quite distant from one another, these two considerations are not unrelated as Sartre's argument against the political force of poetry relies on depriving poetry from any linguistic force.

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin distinguishes between constative utterances, statements of fact, and performative utterances 'in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something' (Austin 1975: 12). In other words, and following Austin's example, saying 'I promise' is not a statement of fact but a performance of the act of promising, as much as saying 'I do' in a marriage ceremony is a performance of the act of marrying. 'Here we should say that in saying these words we are *doing* something—namely, marrying, rather than *reporting* something, namely *that* we are marrying' (Austin 1975: 13). There is a distinction between speech acts that describe or report a fact and speech acts that perform an action, although both kinds of utterances might look alike. Performative utterances might grammatically look like statements, but they are different from them in that they cannot be said to be true or false; they have no truth-value, but they have a certain force.

At first glance, replacing the notion of truth-value by that of force might open the possibility to account for uses of language which escape the game of truth-value, such as poetic and literary uses. Indeed, in the framework of conceptions of language based on truth-value, poetic and literary uses are problematic, insofar as they must be said to be false.[7] Although they are false, they might not be forceless, and the notion of force could serve here to reinstate such uses within the theory and philosophy of language. Unfortunately, Austin does not make this move but follows the tradition in excluding such uses from his consideration.

To substitute to the notion of truth-value, Austin calls on the term

[7] Among other things, it is this incapacity for conception of language to account for literary statements that brought to the fore the notion of fiction, from Russell's bald king of France to Walton's focus on make-believe. The problem of fiction has gained crucial significance in the contemporary philosophical landscape, but poetry seems to place a limit to the notion of fiction as it blurs the fiction/nonfiction divide.

felicity. However, in describing felicitous and infelicitous performative utterances, he specifies that some utterances do not take part in this game of felicity. Those utterances are 'non-serious' uses of language:

> Secondly, as *utterances* our performatives are *also* heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect *all* utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (Austin 1975: 21–22)

From the outset, Austin considers poetic utterances 'hollow or void'. This view is not new to philosophy of language and reflects the traditional rejection of poetic uses as deviant uses. It is rather common in theorising language to distinguish between ordinary and poetic uses, the latter being deviances from the former. However, such a view fails to acknowledge the fact that 'deviant' uses might become ordinary. So-called 'dead' metaphors are an example of such bringing non-ordinary uses in ordinary language. More widely, everyday language is full of creative uses of language which outgrow so-called ordinary uses. By excluding poetic utterances from his conception of language, Austin limits its scope and makes a metaphysical move.[8]

Further in *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin makes a second distinction between 'the locutionary act (and within it the phonetic, the phatic, and the rhetic acts) which has *meaning*; the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; the perlocutionary act

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[8] The charge of making a metaphysical move is one Derrida raises against Austin in his article 'Signature, Event, Context' which gave rise to the famous debate with Searle. Searle's defence of Austin argues that the parasitic-ordinary distinction is not metaphysical but strategic. However, this defence misses Derrida's point which is precisely to say that if one posits a difference (be it only strategically), one commits to a system of metaphysical dualisms and its related hierarchies. Distinguishing from the outset ordinary from parasitic uses might be only strategic but it does not remain at this level. As soon as the distinction is posited, values are attributed to both terms of the dualism (traditionally, ordinary is good, parasitic bad). The whole idea of deconstruction is to undercut this system of metaphysical dualism by showing the fluidity of terms and values. Derrida's aim is therefore not to promote parasitic uses over ordinary ones, as this promotion would reaffirm the dualism, but to undercut it and consider the distinction impossible: for Derrida, one can never say whether a statement is ordinary or parasitic for those attributes can only be given within the game of metaphysical dualisms. Without entering in detail here, Derrida's view of Austin is in my opinion much more positive than what Searle's reply suggests: I believe Derrida considers Austin's theory as potentially germane but raises a reserve regarding the distinction he makes between ordinary and parasitic uses.

which is *the achieving of* certain *effects* by saying something' (Austin 1975: 121). As Austin mentions it, the distinction between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts 'seems the likeliest to give trouble' (Austin 1975: 110). In order to distinguish them, Austin shows that the illocutionary force is not a consequence of the locutionary act (in the sense of a physical consequence), but a convention. The illocutionary act might have an effect, but this effect is due to the conventions that regulate the use of language. The perlocutionary act is on the contrary not conventional as the use of language aims at certain effects without having those inscribed in a convention.

In this context, poetic utterances are considered 'hollow or void' from any illocutionary force, insofar as such utterances are not conventional. As Joe Friggieri argues, there is a 'suspension of illocutionary force' (Friggieri 2014: 58) in poetic utterances. However, two problems arise from such a conception: first, is this suspension always clearly stated and understandable? Most misunderstandings in ordinary speech might come from a misinterpretation of the status of the speech act. Second, is it possible to always distinguish an ordinary from an extraordinary use of language? Without entering into the details of Derrida's discussion of Austin, Austin's requirement for a 'total context' in order to distinguish ordinary from extraordinary uses is something Derrida considers impossible. Indeed, Austin considers that performative utterances, unlike statements, can be understood only by calling on 'the total situation in which the utterance is issued' (Austin 1975: 52). Is this situation fully determinable? Derrida argues against Austin by saying that the context is never completely determined, and that Austin's requirement is thus impossible to meet. If the context can never be determined as ordinary with complete certainty, it is impossible to distinguish ordinary from parasitic uses (Derrida 1988: 14).

In his various works, Stanley Cavell attempts to take poetry seriously in order, among other aims, to save Austin from Derrida's criticism. In *A Pitch of Philosophy*, he shows that the Derrida-Searle debate is the product of a mutual misunderstanding which has caused more trouble to philosophy than needed. Searle's criticism of Derrida indeed misses the point that Derrida sees something valuable in Austin, whereas Derrida puts too much focus on Austin's rejection of poetic language, which should not, according to Cavell, be interpreted as a rejection.[9] Cavell considers Austin's ordinary to be an opposition to both the metaphysical and the formal, not to the poetic or the literary. As he argues: 'That in literary studies Austin's ordinary language is instead thought to be contrasted with literary language means to me that Austin has not there been received' (Cavell 1994: 62). One way of receiving Austin in literary studies would therefore be to set aside the

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[9] Recent scholarship has given much attention to the Derrida-Searle debate, as it marks an important moment in the history of the analytic-continental divide, see for instance Raoul Moati's and Jesus Navarro's book-length explorations of the debate (Navarro 2017; Moati 2014).

ordinary/literary distinction. Stanley Fish suggests such a reading of ordinary language: 'What philosophical semantics and the philosophy of speech acts are telling us is that ordinary language is extraordinary because at its heart is precisely that realm of values, intentions, and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature' (Fish 1982: 108). Following Cavell's and Fish's leads, recent trends in ordinary language philosophy have made of literature an important aspect of their investigation of language.[10] To that extent, Austin's project might be closer to Derrida than one initially thinks. According to Cavell, Derrida is wrong to consider Austin to be rejecting poetic language, as he argues that in fact Austin's theory can be of use for literary studies. In some sense, Cavell's whole philosophy is an attempt to take literature seriously from within the framework of ordinary language philosophy.[11]

We have seen that by depriving poetry from any performative and illocutionary force, Austin strips poetic language from any impact on the ordinary world. By placing such uses on a stage, far away from ordinary uses, he isolates poetry from ordinary language. In such a view, the value of poetry would only lie in an abstract and vain play on and with language: abstract because unrelated to any social and practical reality, vain because unable to affect the socio-political world. The forcelessness of poetry in language entails a forcelessness in the everyday world. Austin is not the only philosopher to put poetry in such a remote place, Sartre suggests something similar, following the acknowledgment that poetic language is remote from the ordinary.

Sartre argues that if a poetic utterance has no force, illocutionary and performative, it cannot have any political impact. He asks: 'How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out?' (Sartre 1988: 34). To place poetic language apart from ordinary language is to place poetry in no position to influence the everyday politicised world. This separation might seem surprising as, in *What Is Writing?*, Sartre defines literature in terms of political commitment, in terms of the effects literature can have in a political framework. This definition however concerns

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[10] See Toril Moi's latest book, which questions the distinction between ordinary and literary language from within the framework of ordinary language philosophy: 'Ordinary language is certainly not the opposite of 'literary' language. (In my view, there is no such thing as 'literary language.') Nor is ordinary language the opposite of 'extraordinary language.' The extraordinary is at home in the ordinary. (We share perfectly ordinary criteria for when to apply the concept.) There is nothing extraordinary about the extraordinary' (Moi 2017: 162). See also Maximilian de Gaynesford's work on Austin and poetry (de Gaynesford 2011; 2009).

[11] On that topic, Cavell's concluding question in *The Claim of Reason* reveals the central role of literature for philosophy: 'Can philosophy become literature and still know itself?' (Cavell 1979: 496).

only literature (and here more specifically the novel) and not poetry. Indeed, Sartre uses this definition to distinguish literature from other artforms: 'No, we do not want to "commit" painting, sculpture, and music "too," or at least not in the same way' (Sartre 1988: 25). Poetry is an artform different from literature and therefore an artform whose main characteristic is not to be politically committed. The definition of poetry in terms of 'language that has been turned inside out' prevents poetry from having any political influence. For Sartre—as for Austin—poetry uses a language which steps outside the bounds of ordinary language, that is outside the bounds of a language that can influence the ordinary world.

In order to define literature in political terms, Sartre considers it to be a means for action:

> Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition. (Sartre 1988: 37)

If the language of poetry is remote from the everyday world, if it is as Sartre says a God's eye's view, literature is on the contrary rooted in the everyday world. The prose-writer uses language to influence the course of the world, to disclose something of the world and hence to change it. Words are action, words perform. For poets, however, language is something else: 'Poets are men who refuse to *utilize* language.' (Sartre 1988, 29) Sartre's definitions of poet and prose-writer however seem to rely on a contradiction. Indeed, is the poet not someone who 'has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition' as well? For Sartre, the poet 'withdraw the reader from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out,' but does such a conception suggest that poetry has no effect, neither on the human condition, nor on language itself? If the poet is someone who changes language—who 'turns it inside out'—by using it (in opposition to maintaining language by utilising it), she might be someone who affects the human condition in greater ways than the prose-writer.

As long as we remain within the Austinian (and the philosopher of language) framework in which poetic statements are considered forceless, there is no way for the poet to affect the ordinary world. However, if we turn the Austinian distinction around and consider poetry forceful, the poet is then she who affects the human condition the most, insofar as she affects how language can be used. How can we turn this distinction around? The distinction Sartre suggests between prose-writers and poets as well as the distinction Austin establishes between ordinary and parasitic speech acts both rely on a conception of lan-

guage which postulate from the outset this distinction. It is by revaluating the conception of language without falling into the prejudice of the dualism between ordinary and extraordinary that we can give its force back to poetry.

2. *Nietzsche, Menke, and the notion of force*

If taking linguistic force away from poetry entails a political forcelessness, reinstating force in the language of poetry might make it relevant again for social and political concerns. The first step in giving poetry its force back is therefore to give it a linguistic force. Nietzsche's views on language offer useful insights in how force operates within language, and therefore how force can operate within poetic language (if there is even such a distinction between ordinary and poetic language). Claudia Crawford's reading of Nietzsche's theory of language provides an ideal starting point to explore the notion of force in Nietzsche's views on language:

> In the works of his last year another phase in Nietzsche's understanding of language is intensified and provides the material for a specific study. Language retains its effectiveness as force and play of forces, but now Nietzsche begins to lay more stress on the power which each individual instance of language production exerts as an instance of *value and action*. […] Language becomes a dynamic instance of interpretation and valuing, not in a critical sense of a subject who interprets values and then speaks or writes about those interpretations, but in a creative sense where the speaking or writing itself *is* the new value force embodied. (Crawford 1988: xiii)

This characterisation of Nietzsche's conception of language is Austinian in the sense that language is equated with action. If each instance of language is 'an instance of value and action', each instance could be read as a performative. Although Austin's initial limitation of performativity to a certain class of verbs seems to go against this idea, his later characterisation of utterances as all having a force goes in this direction. In this sense, Nietzsche shares Austin's idea that all speech acts are performative, i.e. have a force, but does not make the serious/non-serious distinction. For Nietzsche, all utterances are performative, including poetic and other non-serious ones.

This difference in their relation to poetry is the point of greatest dissent between Nietzsche's and Austin's conceptions of language. Indeed, while they share this common concern of language as power (a point of contact that Derrida already suggests[12]), the place attributed to poetry is radically different. Contrary to Austin's rejection of poetry, Nietzsche embraces poetic utterances by writing his philosophy in a

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[12] Austin was obliged to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the truth value, from the true/false opposition, at least in its classical form, and to substitute for it at times the value of force, of difference of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force). (In this line of thought, which is nothing less than Nietzschean, this in particular strikes me as moving in the direction of Nietzsche himself, who often acknowledged a certain affinity for a vein of English thought.) (Derrida 1988: 13).

poetic way and even writing poems proper. His views on language, such as exposed in his early text *On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense* in which he considers language to be primarily metaphorical, bring to the fore the creative aspect of language and is at odds with Austin's more descriptive stance. This creative aspect is important because creating language, in the sense of naming, is a mark of power for Nietzsche, as he suggests in *On the Genealogy of Morality*[13]: 'the origin of language itself [is] a manifestation of the power of the rulers.' (*GM* I, 2) The relation between language and power lies in the fact that giving names, naming, is an act of power, of taking possession. Language does not only mirror the world in a neutral way but crafts it according to the will of the powerful. In *GM*, Nietzsche considers that the keys to shaping the world has been given to the rulers but, in *The Gay Science*[14], Nietzsche suggests that those who give names are those with originality: 'Those with originality have for the most part also assigned names.' (*GS* 261) This notion of originality brings us back to the realm of art and poetry. Reading this aphorism with *GM* in mind suggests that those who have power are not the rulers but the artists, those with force are those with originality.

As a shaping of the world, originality is a poetic force in the etymological sense of *poiesis*. It is a making of the world, which is, at the same time, an unmaking, as '[w]e can destroy only as creators.' (*GS* 58) This process of destruction and creation is primarily linguistic, as Nietzsche further argues: 'But let us not forget this either: it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new "things."' (*GS* 58) The force of artists, and poets especially as they are primarily concerned with language, lies in their capacity to create new words and hence new things. The linguistic force of originality is both a destructive and creative force which modifies the world we live in.

Although the notion of force is hardly ever conceptualised as such in aesthetics, it is quite common to consider artworks to have a certain force, a certain effect. Nietzsche considers this force to be creative, and Christoph Menke offers a thorough exploration of the force of art in his book *Die Kraft der Kunst*. He constructs his notion of force in contrast to that of capacity, one being active and the other passive:

> Capacity makes us subjects who successfully take part in social practices, insofar as they reproduce their general form. In the play of *forces,* we are pre- and over-subjective agents who are no subjects; active, without self-consciousness; inventive, without aim.[15]

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[13] (Nietzsche 2006) Hereafter *GM*.

[14] (Nietzsche 1974) Hereafter GS.

[15] My translation: '*Vermögen* machen uns zu Subjekten, die erfolgreich an sozialen Praktiken teilnehmen können, indem sie deren allgemeine Form reproduzieren. Im Spiel der *Kräfte* sind wir vor- und übersubjektiv—Agenten, die keine Subjekte sind; aktiv, ohne Selbstbewusstsein; erfinderisch, ohne Zweck' (Menke 2013: 13).

This opposition between passive capacity and active force is not without reminding Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche according to which there are active forces and reactive forces in Nietzsche's philosophy. Deleuze argues that positive forces are active, i.e. creative, whereas reactive forces are negative in the sense that they are always subject to a previous active force.[16] Similarly, Menke considers the notion of capacity to make us subjects, i.e. to submit us to a social practice, whereas the play of forces aims at freeing us from this subjection. In the play of forces, we are 'inventive without aim' because we are creative without being submitted to a conventional practice. In this sense, poetry might indeed not work within the realm of illocutionary forces, as those are conventional, but within perlocutionary forces. However, as we have seen with Austin, the distinction between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts 'seems the likeliest to give trouble' (Austin 1975: 110). This trouble might mean, and this is a path Nietzsche and Menke open, that this distinction should be abandoned.

More specifically, it might be impossible to distinguish the illocutionary from the perlocutionary. Perhaps, the perlocutionary can even become illocutionary in time. Although Austin does not discuss the ways in which the illocutionary force comes to existence (it seems to the contrary that for Austin this illocutionary force is either there or not, without any consideration about how it might appear or disappear), we could imagine that an unintended perlocutionary effect might, in time, repeat itself so regularly that it becomes a convention and thus an illocutionary effect rather than a perlocutionary one. A comparison with the theory of metaphor might enlighten this point. Indeed, it is common to distinguish dead metaphors from creative ones. A dead metaphor however is originally a creative one that has been so used that it does not appear as a metaphor anymore. Max Black compares conventional metaphorical uses such as 'cherry lips' to catachresis: 'So viewed, metaphor is a species of *catachresis*, which I shall define as the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary. Catachresis is the putting of new senses into old words. But if a catachresis serves a genuine need, the new sense introduced will quickly become part of the *literal* sense' (Black 1955: 280). In this sense, a metaphorical sense can become literal. Once a metaphor becomes conventional, it loses its creative aspect. Similarly, once a perlocutionary

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[16] 'The power of transformation, the Dionysian power, is the primary definition of activity. But each time we point out the nobility of action and its superiority to reaction in this way we must not forget that reaction also designates a type of force. It is simply that reactions cannot be grasped or scientifically understood as forces if they are not related to superior forces—forces of *another type*. The reactive is a primordial quality of force but one which can only be interpreted as such in relation to and on the basis of the active' (Deleuze 1983: 42). Even though Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche in terms of active and reactive forces is somewhat problematic, the distinction between active and reactive forces provides an insightful framework to consider how active forces are transformative, how the 'Dionysian power,' as Deleuze puts it, or the power of art, can actively transform the world by transforming values.

effect becomes conventional, it could become an illocutionary effect.

However, as conventions are always contextual and as the 'total context' of a speech act is, as Derrida argues, never fully determinable, these conventions are never completely determined. There is a lack of determinacy that appears more or less clearly in our uses of language (hence the possibility of misunderstanding or, in Austin's vocabulary, of misfire). It therefore seems that without this determination, the illocutionary force of a speech act is difficultly distinguishable from its perlocutionary force. In this sense, poetry contests the idea that the context and convention on which the illocutionary force relies can always be determined. In other words, there are so few determined contexts (if there are any) that the illocutionary force would only apply to very few utterances. Rather than suspending the illocutionary force, poetry reveals that it might not be the most important force in language. The illocutionary force would in this sense be a subcategory of the perlocutionary, without there being such a sharp distinction between them. So following Nietzsche and Menke, we must reassess Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary, considering all utterances to have a force, relying to various degrees on conventions and contextual cues.

It remains however to be clarified what poetic speech acts do, what their effects are. Menke considers art to have a certain effect, to be a certain making which comes close to Nietzsche's views:

> What art makes is not an object of knowledge, because what art makes does not have its ground in knowledge. Hence philosophical aesthetics has called this making 'obscure' (Baumgarten): the aesthetic making is not a self-conscious activity, because there is no aesthetic making without the action of 'unconscious forces' (Herder). This action is play: the connection and disconnection and the new connection and again disconnection of images in the acts of imagination.[17]

There is a play of forces which connects and disconnects (in Nietzsche's terms: creates and destroys) images. In poetry, such images are words and the poets are those who connect and disconnect words, not only between one another, as in a sentence or spatially on the page, but also between language and the world, thus revealing how the world is made up with words. The effect of art, and more specifically of poetic speech acts, is to reveal the play of forces in which we are embedded. This play of forces is creative and hence also creates the agent. The poet is not subject to language, she is not in a reactive stance towards language, she exists even before this first determination. In poetics, the

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[17] My translation: 'Das Machen der Kunst ist nicht Gegenstand des Wissens, weil das Machen der Kunst nicht im Wissen seinen Grund hat. Deshalb nennt die philosophische Ästhetik dieses Machen "dunkel" (Baumgarten): Das ästhetische Machen ist nicht eine selbstbewußte Handlung, denn es gibt kein ästhetisches Machen ohne das Wirken "unbewußter Kräfte" (Herder). Dieses Wirken ist Spiel: das Verbinden und Lösen und Neuverbinden und Wiederauflösen von Bildern in Akten der Einbildung' (Menke 2013: 67).

unconscious always plays a role, not in the sense that the originality or the genius of the poet lies within the psychoanalytic unconscious, but because 'the world of which we can become conscious is only,' as Nietzsche argues, 'a surface- and sign-world, a world that is made common and meaner.' (*GS* 354) The poet's play with the unconscious is therefore a broadening of the scope of language and hence an expansion of the world; it is an active force of transformation and creation.

We have seen that in the play of creative and destructive forces, the poet is a pre- and over-subjective agent who does not operate on the world of consciousness, but on that of the preconscious. In terms of language, the poet reveals the limits of linguistic conventions (illocutionary force) because they can never be fully determined. In other words, the poet arises as subject insofar as she brings the linguistic, social, and even poetic conventions into question. The notion of 'subject' is at the heart of Meschonnic's and Kristeva's conceptions of poetry and both reveal the importance of the transformative force(s) of poetry: transformation of language, of the subject, of society. In this sense, the force of poetry is a revolutionary one.

3. *The revolution of poetry*

We have seen that Nietzsche's views of language bring force back into poetic language, and that Menke's conception of art brings to the fore the idea that art is a creative and transformative force. It remains to be seen how this force operates in poetry, and I will focus on two theoretical works to do so, Meschonnic's *Celebration of Poetry* and Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and analyse one poem, Caroline Zekri's 'Un pur rapport grammatical'. Both Meschonnic and Kristeva consider poetry to be a transformative force: poetry does not leave the subject (as reader or writer) unchanged. She undergoes a transformative process due to a transformation of language. As Meschonnic clearly states: 'there is a poem only if a form of life transforms a form of language and if reciprocally a form of language transforms a form of life.'[18] This double transformation of a form of life and a form of language—both being intimately related to one another—is precisely where the force of poetry operates. Because of this transformation of her form of life, the reader or writer cannot maintain the same attitude within and towards her surrounding world. In taking poetry seriously (unlike Austin's rejection of poetic utterances in the realm of the 'non-serious'), she must accept this transformation of her form of life.

What is central to Meschonnic's views is the idea that poetry and life are intimately bound to one another. Against the views which argue that poetry is remote from the everyday politicised world—and hence remote from ordinary life—Meschonnic considers poetry and life to be

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[18] My translation: 'il y a un poème seulement si une forme de vie transforme une forme de langage et si réciproquement une forme de langage transforme une forme de vie' (Meschonnic 2001: 292).

closely related as the title of his book *La rime et la vie* makes it explicit. The poem must therefore not be understood in terms of work, i.e. in an essentialist way, but in terms of activity. The poem as a work of art is a working on changing the world and the subject through the transformation of language. Against the idea that poems have a truth, Meschonnic argues that they have an activity, an effect, a force. With Meschonnic, we move from Austin's notion of illocutionary force to something closer to Menke's notion of force: poems have a force that build a subject rather than subject users to linguistic conventions. It is in this sense that poems can be revolutionary. Against the idea that poetry, as a form of literature, can teach us facts about the world, poetry teaches us a different way of seeing the world and its revolutionary force resides precisely in its capacity to bring us to see things differently.

If we take seriously the idea that poems transform a form of language and a form of life, thinking about poetry is not something which concerns only small details of our lives. Quite to the contrary as, according to Meschonnic, 'to think the poem, one must rethink the whole of language, and the whole relation between language, art, ethics, and politics.'[19] Insofar as poetry transforms our form of language and our form of life, it has an ethical and political impact. For Meschonnic, thinking poetry requires rethinking language and, through this reconceptualisation of language, rethinking our being in the world. If our ways of being in the world are dependent on our language, i.e. if our form of life is dependent on our form of language, and if a conception of language must account for poetry—because one can hardly argue that poetry is not related to language—we must modify our conceptions of language which fail to account for poetry and by changing those, change our ways of being in the world. In this sense, poetry becomes a topic of central philosophical significance. Meschonnic brings to the fore the political, ethical, and foremost existential dimensions of poetry, insofar as language itself bears these political, ethical, and existential dimensions.

The ways in which poems can affect our ways of being in the world are multiple, but recent evolutions in poetry show that, against the romantic ideal of the poet in her ivory tower, the contemporary poet, following Baudelaire whose 'halo slipped from [his] head, down onto the muddy street' (Baudelaire 2008: 91), must be in the 'muddy' everyday world and act within it. Some poets operate this move from the tower to the ground by focusing on the quotidian and the everyday as poetic material. Kenneth Goldsmith's transcription trilogy in which he transcribes weather reports (*Weather*, 2005), traffic (*Traffic*, 2007) or sports broadcast (*Sports*, 2008) participate in this idea of an 'uncreative writing' which casts a new light on everyday texts and situations. Fol-

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[19] My translation: 'C'est pourquoi, pour penser la poésie, le poème, il y a à repenser tout le langage, et tout le rapport entre le langage, l'art, l'éthique et le politique' (Meschonnic 2001: 256).

lowing Moi's title, they operate a *Revolution of the Ordinary* in which the ordinary is both the subject and the object of the revolution: the ordinary is the material for the revolution and is what becomes changed through the poetic work (Moi 2017).

Franck Leibovici's work on poetic documents explores this transformative force of poetry through the way poetry modifies the use (and hence the meaning) of documents. Part of his analysis relies on Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* which, according to Leibovici, transforms court transcripts in such a way. In the process, the court transcripts lose their documentary quality and become what Franck Leibovici calls 'poetic documents' that overcome the categories of true and false. As he argues in discussing Reznikoff's *Testimony*, the court transcripts are modified insofar as they become fictional, not in the sense that they become false, but that revealing their linguistic nature 'automatically suspends the categories of truth and false.'[20] What is central is not that these documents become poetic, but the realization that any document has the potential to become poetic and hence that the categories of 'document' and of 'poetry' are to be reassessed.[21] This reassessment of categories entail, as Meschonnic suggests, a rethinking of politics and ethics through the reconceptualization of language and art. Kenneth Goldsmith even considers that the simple reproduction of a text has sometimes more impact than a 'creative' poetic production: 'Sometimes, by the noninterventionist reproduction of texts, we can shed light on political issues in a more profound and illuminating way than we can by conventional critique' (Goldsmith 2011: 84). Such 'poetic documents' reveal the fact that poetry has the force to modify a form of language and hence a form of life, but also, following Meschonnic, that a form of life transforms a form of language. Poetry does not come out unchanged from its encounter with documents, quite to the contrary. It is crucial to note that according to Leibovici 'poetic documents' are not static, are not to be considered fixed entities as works of art, but are processes that can always evolve: 'the output, through the successive redescriptions, has gained a strong analytic power: at the same time process and product, small machine to redscribe and output of a redescription, it can be applied to some situations, working as a transportable poetic document, as if dematerialized' (Leibovici 2007: 68). Against the essentialization of the work of art, poetic documents are workings of art, they act upon the world by acting upon language. The apparent oxymoron 'poetic documents' reveals that the quotidian world affect poetry and that, in turn, poetry affects the quotidian world.

By affecting the quotidian world, poetic documents are not only con-

[20] 'par fiction, nous n'entendons pas quelque chose relevant de l'imaginaire, du "forgé de toutes pièces," mais simplement quelque chose exhibant sa nature langagière, suspendant ainsi automatiquement les catégories de vrai ou de faux (critères de vérité)' (Leibovici 2007: 35).

[21] Gaëlle Théval suggests that these poetic practices resemble readymades in art (Théval 2015).

ceptual devices (as the term conceptual poetry describing Goldsmith's work might suggest) but can also aspire to having a transformative and even political impact. An example of such a poetic document with political aspirations is Zekri's 'Un pur rapport grammatical' which combines excerpts from the 'Report of the Mapping Exercise'[22] from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), analysing violence in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 1993 and 2003, and excerpts from individual evaluation forms from the '*Permanence d'accueil et d'orientation des mineurs isolés étrangers à Paris* (PAOMIE)' (Zekri 2015: 16), showing how French authorities evaluate under 18 migrants in Paris. The confrontation and reconfiguration of these documents reveal a certain use of language that the poetic document aims to disrupt. Zekri distinguishes both sources by using short quotations organised as verses from the Report and longer sentences from the evaluation forms. This distinction generates a contrast between a form of emotional violence in shorter verses and a form of rejection of emotion in longer sentences. There is something of a distinction between a more poetic structure on the one hand and a more narrative or argumentative structure on the other.

Here are the first lines of Zekri's poem:

on the pretext of searching their genitals for minerals
including diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, cassiterite (tin ore) and coltan
are alleged to have mutilated and disembowelled a pregnant woman
stripped, manhandled and even severely beaten with nail-studded pieces of wood
for having worn trousers
and 17% of global production of rough diamonds

and two girls aged six and seven

> When asked about his older sisters' age, he begins counting out loud. It is difficult to believe that he doesn't know his older sisters' age. He says he can't explain.[23]

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[22] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CD/DRC_MAPPING_REPORT_FINAL_EN.pdf

[23] (Zekri 2015: 7) I used the translation from the report to translate the parts taken from there and translated myself the sentences taken from the evaluation cards:

sous prétexte de chercher des minerais dans leur parties génitales

dont les diamants, l'or, le cuivre, le cobalt, la cassitérite et le coltan

auraient mutilé et éventré une femme enceinte

dénudées, molestées et battues sévèrement avec des planches cloutées

pour avoir porté un pantalon

et 17% de la production mondiale de diamants bruts

ainsi que deux fillettes de 6 et 7 ans

> Lorsqu'on lui demande l'âge de ses sœurs aînées, il commence à calculer à voix haute. Il est difficilement crédible qu'il ne sache pas l'âge de ses sœurs aînées. Il dit qu'il ne peut expliquer.

To understand the first lines of the poem, it is necessary to explain the title 'Un pur rapport grammatical' as it plays on (at least) three possible meanings of *rapport* in French.

1.   The obvious meaning when we know the source of these sentences, *rapport* means report. That it is a grammatical report might mean that Zerki's poem focuses on the linguistic aspect of the report and plays with it. Indeed, except for the 'and' in verse 6, all these sentences can be found in the report from the OHCHR and the addition of 'and' is a grammatical one establishing a grammatical relation (this notion relation will be of importance in the third line of interpretation) between the two verses. We can understand that the reorganisation of the report operates on grammatical grounds. If we focus on the grammar of the sentence, two elements stand out.

      First, in verse 3, the subject of the verb 'are' must grammatically be 'diamonds, gold, copper, etc.' from verse 2, which suggests that the violence is operated by the minerals themselves and, by metonymy, by the mining industry, something which is epitomised in the last two verses of the poem: 'some had their anuses ripped with a knife/ by multinationals' (Zekri 2015: 15). In this last verse, Zekri adds 'by' to generate once again a grammatical relation in a way similar to verse 6. The same play with grammar can be seen in verse 4 as the feminine plural of the adjectives ('stripped,' 'manhandled,' 'beaten') can only refer to genitals in verse 1, thus bringing the attention to the womanhood of the victims.

      Second, in verses 5, 6, and 7, Zekri uses a zeugma to join three objects by using one verb, playing with three meanings of *porter*: 1. to wear trousers, 2. to carry diamonds (that relates to the first verse where minerals are hidden in genitals), 3. to carry a child (as in being pregnant). This zeugma therefore gives three reasons to explain the violence in verse 4 and places these reasons on a same level, considering them of equal importance.

2.   *Rapport* means ratio. Although the idea of a grammatical ratio might be somewhat strange, the use of percentages in the report and the poem brings this aspect to the fore. The poem brings the reader's attention to the use of percentages and the depersonalisation that they operate. People become numbers, *ratio*, rather than victims. Furthermore, there is a relation between the importance of statistics in economy, in the mining industry in this case, and in the evaluation of the damages of the industry. The word 'ratio' therefore becomes a grammatical connector between the industry and its damages.

3.   *Rapport* means relation. As already mentioned in point 1, the notion of relation is crucial. The poetic document establishes grammatical relations between aspects that are not necessar-

ily so connected. Furthermore, the poetic document establishes a relation between the report and the evaluation forms, which has at least two effects. First, these evaluation forms show how people in Paris are evaluating migrants from their perspective without considering the effects of the violence that they have been through, hence the repetition of 'difficult to believe' in many of the excerpts.[24] Second, it establishes a relation between what has happened in the DRC and what happens in Paris: multinationals can go to DRC and commit violence, but migrants cannot come to Paris and have a supposedly incoherent story.

Zekri's poem therefore shows how poetry transforms an ordinary form of language (report and evaluation forms) and reveals something through this transformation. There is, if not a direct political claim, an injunction to discover and uncover relations (*rapport*) that operate in language. In this sense, I believe we can extend the conception of document even to some forms of poetry that do not use ready-made texts. Insofar as poetry uses language, and if there is an attention to the language used, i.e. if there is a linguistic or metapoetic dimension to the poem, all poems can to some extent be documentary.[25] If we consider that the language of poetry is not ontologically distinct from ordinary language, ordinary language becomes the document that the poetic phenomenon disrupts and transforms. It is in this sense that there is a *Revolution of the Ordinary* following Moi or, following Kristeva, a *Revolution in Poetic Language.*

Kristeva's title can be understood in two different ways, depending on the interpretation of the 'in'. First, it can be interpreted as a revolution occurring within the realm of poetic language and a large part of her work indeed investigates the changes that occur within the language of French poetry at the end of the 19th century. But this interpretation remains within the framework according to which there is such a thing as 'poetic language', even though it is subject to changes and revolution. Second, from a broader perspective, it can be interpreted as a revolution operated by poetic language. The revolution is not occurring within poetic language but is caused by poetic language. According to this second interpretation, poetry becomes a revolutionary force.

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[24] 'difficile à croire' (p. 8), 'difficilement crédible' (p. 9), 'peu de crédibilité' (p. 11), 'peu crédible' (p. 12), 'peu crédible' (p. 14).

[25] This is especially true of a certain trend in contemporary French poetry, inspired by the American Objectivists among others, that takes the ordinary, the quotidian, the everyday as material for poetic explorations. In their anthology on Contemporary French poetry, *Writing the Real*, Nina Parish and Emma Wagstaff explore this 'refiguration of the everyday' among other trends (Parish and Wagstaff 2016). The quotidian has been of central importance in 20th century French poetry (Sheringham 2006), and this importance continues nowadays, especially in the journal *Nioques* and at the publisher 'Questions théoriques'.

We have seen with Meschonnic that poetry investigates the relation between forms of language and forms of life. It is precisely through this investigation that Kristeva considers poetry to be a revolutionary force: 'But mimesis and poetic language do more than engage in an intra-ideological debate; they question the very principle of the ideological because they unfold the *unicity* of the thetic (the precondition for meaning and signification) and prevent its theologization.' (Kristeva 1984: 61). Insofar as poetic truth is a way into the understanding of the relation between language and the world, and the constitution of this relation, it is not external to ideological, social, and political debates, but at their very heart. Poetic language is a space for transgression in which the foundations of the ordinary norm are fundamentally brought into question. Kristeva uses the term 'theology' to describe this relation to a given that is never put into question, which relates to Nietzsche's claim in *Twilight of the Idols*[26]: 'I'm afraid we are not rid of God because we still believe in grammar…' (*TI* 'Reason' 5).

Against the traditional view that posits poetic language as distinct from the ordinary, Kristeva considers it to lie at its very heart and to question the prejudices embedded in our uses of language. As an enemy within, poetic language becomes a revolutionary force. Indeed, whereas positing poetic language as outside only weakens its force, making it an external other which can easily be rejected, considering poetic language as lying at the heart of the ordinary gives it a force of changing things from within. For Kristeva, poetry affects language in such ways that our conceptions of the world cannot remain unchanged.

In order to conceptualise how poetry operates such a change, Kristeva elaborates the notion of practice and, as we have seen with Meschonnic, a poem is not a work but a working, an activity, a practice:

> The text thereby attains its essential dimension: it is a *practice* calling into question (symbolic and social) *finitudes* by proposing *new signifying devices*. In calling the text a practice we must not forget that it is a new practice, radically different from the mechanistic practice of a null and void, atomistic subject who refuses to acknowledge that he is a subject of language. Against such a 'practice,' the text as signifying practice points toward the possibility—which is a jouissance—of a *subject who speaks his being put in process/on trial through action*. In other words and conversely, the text restores to 'mute' practice the jouissance that constitutes it but which can only become jouissance through language. (Kristeva 1984: 210)

Kristeva's substitution of 'poem' by 'text' broadens the scope of what poetry is and can do. Shifting from poem to text undercuts all formal definitions of poetry and moves towards the notion of practice. Whereas the notion of poem remain within the framework of mechanistic practice—there are rules defining what a poem is and, in this sense, a poetics is a set of rules for literary creation[27]—Kristeva considers the prac-

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[26] (Nietzsche 2008) Hereafter *TI*.

[27] Such a conception of poetics is at the heart of Aristotle's *Poetics* in which he famously gives the rules to evaluate a good tragedy. In this context, poetics is a way

tice of the text to be a revolutionary one 'calling into question (symbolic and social) *finitudes*.' There is a social aspect to textual practice insofar as the text operates a critical force attempting to overcome established social rules. However, like Nietzsche and Menke, Kristeva considers this critical aspect to be only one side of practice. Indeed, following Nietzsche's idea that we can destroy only as creators, the criticism of finitudes occurs only through the 'proposing [of] *new signifying devices*.' The text is therefore not only a place of criticism against established social values, but also a place of creation of new means of signification. The text therefore becomes a signifying practice in which the subject comes to jouissance, to living language in a positive way. The focus on the notions of text and practice leads Kristeva to consider poetry as combining two forces in language: a destructive and a creative one. It is only in combining these two forces that poetry can be revolutionary. If it focused only on the critical side, it would remain forceless because criticising language by using language is a self-contradiction. However, focusing on the creative side of language allows to propose new signifying practices which replace the old ways of thinking, hence destroying as creators.

Both Meschonnic and Kristeva bring our attention on the fact that poetry is revolutionary insofar as it is a practice aiming at modifying our ways of being in the world through the modification of language. Against the essentialisation of poems as works of art, their views consider necessary to approach poems as workings of art, as doing something to language and to the subject (as reader and writer), thus relating to Leibovici's idea that poetic documents are processes rather than fixed and stable entities. The force of poetry lies in this doing. Poetry therefore teaches us about the creative potential that lies within all forms of language. Whereas considering poetic language as essentially distinct from ordinary language makes poetic language forceless, bringing the poetic back within the ordinary reveals the creatives capacities of language, the transformative and revolutionary forces that animate our uses of

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of classifying and evaluating artworks in respect to their relation to representation or *mimesis*: 'Now epic poetry and the making of tragedy, and also comedy and dithyrambic poetry, as well as most flue-playing and lyre-playing, are all as a whole just exactly imitations, but they are different from one another in three ways, for they differ either by making their imitations in different things, by imitating different things, or by imitating differently and not in the same way' (Aristotle 2006: 19). Jacques Rancière describes such a poetics as the poetic regime of art: 'I call this regime *poetic* in the sense that it identifies the arts—what the Classical Age would later call the 'fine arts'—within a classification of ways of doing and making, and it consequently defines proper ways of doing and making as well as means of assessing imitations' (Rancière 2004: 17). Against this poetic regime, Rancière consider the aesthetic regime which moves away from the Aristotelian classification in terms of representation towards an identification of art in its singularity. Kristeva's shift from poem to text is an attempt to move from the poetic regime (where the poem is classified as a poem) to the aesthetic regime (where the text exists in its singularity without any presupposed classification).

language. A philosophy of language that overlooks this creative force cannot account for the enormous potential that lies at the heart of language. Such a philosophy of language would be, as Kristeva argues at the very beginning of *Revolution in Poetic language*, 'nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs' (Kristeva 1984: 13). If the force of poetry is a revolutionary one, then, in respect to philosophy of language, poetry forces philosophy to operate such a revolution in order to account for the creative uses of language that are present in our everyday life. If, as Meschonnic argues, poetry does something to language, it also does something to philosophy of language: it reveals the shortcomings of conceptions of language and the necessity for any serious philosophy of language to account for poetic phenomena. The force of poetry therefore brings philosophy to rethink its categories (language, truth, fiction, ordinary) while modifying our ways of being in and of affecting the world. By doing things to words, poetry affects our conceptual scheme and our forms of life. If, following Austin, poetry cannot teach us how to do things *with* words because it cannot be taken seriously, it reveals us how to do things *to* words and, through this doing, how to transform and affect the world.

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