The Uses of a Mistranslated Manifesto: Baudelaire's "La Genèse d'un poème"

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IN HIS COURSE ON "LA POÉTIQUE" at the Collège de France in 1937, Paul Valéry proposed an examination of the aspects of literature that distinguish it from other uses of language. He would investigate the "effets *proprement littéraires* du langage," the expressive and suggestive inventions that increase "le pouvoir et la pénétration de la parole," along with the restrictions placed upon literature "en vue de bien distinguer la langue de la fiction de celle de l'usage."[1] It was a project of separation and purification. The goal was to "bien distinguer" between literary language and mere speech. Taking for granted the distinctiveness of literature, he sought to detail and to explain this difference; he claimed, for instance, that literature relied more heavily than other arts on convention and memory, and that it uniquely combined abstraction with emotion and the senses. At all times, however, literature for Valéry was something particularly mental and internal. In the "repentirs" and "ratures" of the successive drafts of a work, he saw a history of the working of the human mind.[2]

This paper presents one part of the story of how we arrived in the early twentieth century at a notion of literature as an exclusive medium—as an exemplary record of the creative processes of the mind, or better yet "l'esprit." If we are now sensitive to the rivalries between and within media, as well as the ways that literature can mimic and enter into dialog with the codes of meaning proper to film, sound recording or, more recently, the digital hypertext, it is only on the basis of a previously held conviction of the "uniqueness" of literature, one associated in French criticism with Valéry's poetics and with certain strands of phenomenological and semiotic analysis.[3] Crucial to this history, and not only for Valéry's particular conception of the "autonomy" of literature, were the critical writings and poetic practice of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe.[4] In his literaray criticism, Baudelaire presented Poe's works as a moral and metaphysical resource for an intellectual and ultimately spiritual view of poetry, as a sacred province to be protected from contamination by the mechanical materialities of the industrial age. The poetry and criticism of both Baudelaire and Poe were central influences upon Valéry's concept of the object and methods of "la poétique."

However, when we look at Poe's conception of literature in his original English texts, he appears, unlike his translator, to consider literature less as an

isolated mental process than as a material link between an author and a reader. This view, I suggest, brings him close to contemporary views of the dialogical interrelations entertained by literature and other media. Poe saw literary technique and the material assembly and diffusion of texts as *technologies* that were continuous with other devices of the industrial revolution: like steam trains, the telegraph, and daguerreotypes, an effective poem would restructure the relations among humans, and between humans and the natural world.

This article will first give a brief overview of the importance of technological themes and content in Poe's writing, focusing on the technical meaning of "composition" and its implications for his literary theory. It will then examine Baudelaire's early embrace of Poe's scientific and machine-friendly view of literature and his eventual drift, from the late 1840s to the mid-1850s, to a view of literature as a medium that must keep itself at a distance from the mechanical production of industrial capitalism. This eventual landing point will be anchored in a parallel reading of Poe's key critical essay, "The Philosophy of Composition," and Baudelaire's translation of it, "La Genèse d'un poème." While no translation can hope for perfect transparency with regard to the range of overtones and resonances of a text, the spiritual interpretation that Baudelaire put on the writings of his American precursor—in his introductions and critical studies of Poe as well as in the specific, word-by-word choices made in translation—block our view of Poe's profoundly "intermedial" conception of literature. My conclusion will suggest how Valéry was able to reclaim Poe's technical metaphors, thanks to the cultural shift in the relation between literature and mechanical industry that Baudelaire's *mistranslation* of these very terms helped to bring about.

Composition as machine technology

Many of Valéry's locutions in the passage quoted above resemble, in syntax and lexicon, the poetic principles expressed by Poe. In one early work, "On Literary Technique," even more direct appropriations of these principles can be found. Like Poe, the young Valéry sets the maximum length for a poem at one hundred lines; he writes, for example, that a sonnet "will be a true quintessence, a nutrient, a concentrated and distilled juice, reduced to fourteen lines, carefully *composed* with a view to a final and overwhelming effect" (author's italics).[5] Valéry himself stresses the two central concepts of Poe's "Philosophy of Composition," *effect* and *composition*.

But "composition" had a wider—and more concrete—meaning than just the patient and reflective choice of a sequence of words and images that Valéry praised. One well-remarked point about "The Philosophy" is that by arguing

for the existence of step-by-step rules that can be followed to write a poem, the essay broke with Kant's view of the artwork as self-contained creation of genius and from Coleridge and Wordsworth's doctrine of spontaneous expression. Further, as Rachel Polonsky has recently shown, Poe's essay leaves behind the walk in nature and the solitary study, traditional settings for the poetic act; he both employs the metaphor of the theater and places poetic construction within the specific constraints and pressures imposed by the weekly magazine. "The aesthetic principles codified in Poe's essay can also be seen as arising, at least in part, from his working circumstances; poetic form responds to the exigencies of time and space in a world of work."[6] More importantly, the kind of work in question is not just that of coming up with a good lead for a story, or of finding buyers and advertisers. The essay also associates itself with the work of industrial production, of which the magazine trade, with the introduction of steam presses in the 1820s and 30s, was indisputably part. Poe's title deliberately recalls Andrew Ure's *Philosophy of Manufactures*; its argument that poetry can be created according to fixed rules and procedures parallels Ure's analysis of methods to replace traditional craftsmanship with industrial modes of manufacture.[7] Even more glaringly, the title immediately suggests a reduction of the writing of poetry to a technical process: "composition" was the technical term for *typesetting*. Poe did not craft his poems out of thought alone, merely by the application of the *mental* "combinatoire" that was for Valéry one mode of "le fonctionnement de l'esprit"; he also worked as a "compositor," *physically* selecting and positioning, one by one, the iron letters that filled a page of formatted print, building meaning out of discrete, standardized, material elements. In its original context and its original language, "The Philosophy of Composition" presents itself as a technical manual for the mechanical production of poetic texts.

Poe's conception of literature is underwritten by a theory of technology, of the "arts" in the largest sense. His education at West Point military academy, which provided the best science and engineering training available in North America, and his "Notes on Arts and Sciences" treating discoveries and inventions, elaborated throughout his career, are neglected proofs of his persistent interest and even expertise in the sciences of his day. Poe's age witnessed a revolution in "media," or extensions of human faculties, in the broad sense developed by Marshall McLuhan.[8] He saw a unity among all the technologies that were transforming the natural and cultural landscape of the early American republic, including electricity, steam, and railroads, as well as new forms of communication and representation. For Poe, the *techne rhetorike* was one technology among others, not because a text was the product of the

human intellect, but because it was a device that accomplished a certain goal—a material object skillfully crafted, a tool made by other material tools. A poem, like any new technology that gives us new powers, has the potential to reorganize relations between humans and nature, drawing us toward a more perfect arrangement of parts, a more divine understanding.[9]

Furthermore, just as a new device to perform some task must integrate itself into a pre-existing set of practices and routines of production, so would Poe's poetry *communicate*—today the verb of choice might be "interface"—with other existing media.[10] He sought ways of integrating new modes of image reproduction into his written productions; he imagined the new powers of steam and electricity as vessels for language, spoken as well as written. A literary text was a center of conversion—a site for exchange among different forms of the universal substance, a site for "intermedial" translation among various modes of communication. He laid out the ground rules for engineering such a machine, within the embrace of the pre-existing, pantheistic cosmic apparatus described in *Eureka*, in "The Philosophy of Composition," which Baudelaire would translate in 1859. It is this very aspect of Poe's work that Baudelaire seized upon in his first introductions of the American author to the French public.

Baudelaire and the sciences on either side of 1851

Once Napoleon III had consolidated his coup d'état of 1851, Baudelaire's erratic enthusiasms for social reform and revolution began to yield to bitter resignation and reactionary invectives against the utopists' foolish dreams. The political and aesthetic aspects of this shift have been studied at great length, but often to the neglect of another important issue: Baudelaire's changing attitudes towards science and machine technology.[11] This aspect of his changing positions is crucial for a more complete understanding of what it meant to be, as Walter Benjamin termed it, a "lyric poet in the age of high capitalism." Yet, as we know, Baudelaire's critical writings of the 1850s and 60s were among the first and most anxious warnings about of the dangers posed by a new order of society whose pace was set by the machine; science and mechanics appear in his texts largely as a rejected "outside" of literature. Thus his stance on technology can only be identified in relief. In fact, the most visible markers of his changing views on this topic are found in the evolution of his presentation of Edgar Allan Poe.

Baudelaire experienced the "singular commotion" of discovering Poe in 1846, reading a translation of "The Black Cat" in a Fourierist journal, *La Démocratie pacifique*. His *Salon de 1846* gives an idea of the complex of ideas that formed the interpretive background for this discovery. The *Salon* entwines

romantic art criticism and natural history, seeking as well to incorporate the newly visible forces of economic and industrial power. It presents the work of art as the result of the constitution of the organs of the artist and his specific temperament, which in turn depend upon the "milieu" in which he developed; the artwork must literally incorporate all aspects of the present. Although at a few points the essay disparages "les ouvriers" and republicans, its dedication "Au bourgeois" recalls the Saint-Simonians' attempts to court the equally important figure of the industrialist, making a brazen appeal to those who are "les amis naturels des arts, parce que vous êtes, les uns riches, les autres savants."[12] The essay develops a theory of antitheses and contrasts akin to Chevreul's contemporary color theory, exemplified in painting by Delacroix and in literature by Victor Hugo.[13] It also recalls the theory of harmonies and correspondences found in the works of Charles Fourier, whose politics and metaphysics played an important role in Baudelaire's early thought. Fourier's system of united polarities—the four movements—aimed at an industrial-artistic-sensual utopia, a system of communal "phalanstères" in which love was freely shared and tasks distributed according to individuals' natural inclinations. Like Fourier's programs for a new world, Baudelaire's vision of the role of art in a utopian future openly embraced the reality of organized industrial production.[14]

The same mix of politics, aesthetics, metaphysics, science, and technology can be observed in his first translation of Poe, "La Révélation magnétique" (1848). His preface praises the combination of art and science in Diderot, whose feeling for "la grande Nature" he had praised in the Salon of 1846, and, above all, the example of Balzac. "La Révélation magnétique"—in which a mesmerized subject makes metaphysical proclamations from a magnetic or electric realm beyond ordinary existence—recalls Balzac's aspiration to "fondre en un système unitaire et définitif différentes idées tirées de Swedenborg, Mesmer, Marat, Goethe, et Geoffroy St-Hilaire" (*OC* 2, 248).[15] Poe's affinity with these theorists of electric and magnetic fluids and organic transformation put him at the vanguard of a newly scientific literature, one that incorporated the sciences and methods of practical experimentation of his day. As Baudelaire concluded in 1852 in "L'Ecole païenne," "Le temps n'est pas loin où l'on comprendra que toute littérature qui se refuse à marcher fraternellement entre la science et la philosophie est une littérature homicide et suicide" (*OC* 2, 49). In choosing to present "dans sa vérité la technique philosophique d'Edgar Poe" in his translation of Poe's "Mesmeric Revelation," he offered the public just such a united front of science, literature, and philosophy.

His first study of Poe, "Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages" (1852)—in the *Revue de Paris*, a progressive journal co-directed by Maxime du Camp—

remains consistent with this outlook. Balzac is again mentioned repeatedly, and it is as if Poe's life were that of the hero of *Les Illusions perdues*. He notes Poe's "grande préoccupation scientifique" and, according to this essay, "ce qui lui imprime un caractère essentiel et le distingue entre toutes [littératures], c'est, qu'on me pardonne ces mots singuliers, le conjecturisme et le probabilisme" (*OC* 2, 258; *OC* 275, respectively). Like Balzac, who had "des rages de science," "il a, comme les conquérants et les philosophes, une entraînante aspiration vers l'unité; il assimile les choses morales aux choses physiques. . . . Dans cette incessante ascension vers l'infini, on perd un peu l'haleine. L'air est raréfié dans cette littérature comme dans un laboratoire" (*OC* 2, 283). This study, published when the Second Empire was barely one year old, stays within the conceptual vicinity of the texts of 1846 and 1848 discussed above: Baudelaire continues to argue here that the sciences and their material techniques—as in the "laboratoire" of the quote—are continuous with literature, whose goal is the unification of the spiritual and the physical.

Four years later, in a thoroughly reworked version of this essay, "Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres" (1856), the elements of the myth of the accursed poet have been expanded and made into the central thrust of the study, which he refers to now as a "martyrologe" (297). Baudelaire has amplified the first essay's allusion to Vigny's *Chatterton*—with its doomed, excluded poet—with an extensive analysis of the "destinée . . . écrite dans toute [la] constitution" of this "âme sacrée" within the inhospitable climate of the United States, "une grande barbarie éclairée au gaz" (296-97. He rails against the "toute-puissance de l'industrie" and "l'activité matérielle, exagérée jusqu'aux proportions d'une manie nationale" in America, denouncing "la grande idée moderne, le Progrès" (299). Less obvious, but equally important, is the fact that all references to Balzac have been eliminated. In his place Delacroix emerges as the new model, as one who "a élevé son art à la hauteur de la grande poésie" (317), and not, as with Balzac, one who unified art and science. The air in Poe's literature remains "raréfié," but the allusion to the "laboratoire" has disappeared. His literature occupies the heights of "le Beau," now associated with his alleged aristocratic birth and manners. Further, while Poe's early talent in the sciences is mentioned again in the essay of 1856, the praise of this aspect of his works is now strongly qualified: Baudelaire returns to the notion of "des probabilités et des conjectures" (316), but, where these were previously identified as essential and distinctive to Poe's method, here they are dismissed with the term that is fast becoming one of Baudelaire's preferred epithets: "Ce n'est pas par ses miracles *matériels*, qui pourtant ont fait sa renommée, qu'il lui sera donné de conquérir l'admiration des gens qui

pensent" (italics mine); instead it is by his unique temperament, which allows him to perceive, and indeed to be, *"l'exception dans l'ordre moral"* (316). Baudelaire now attributes Poe's literary accomplishments to his spiritual constitution and to his rejection of the merely "material."

Baudelaire's final critical study of Poe, "Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe" (1857), takes this tendency yet further. Here he presents those texts that are concerned with science and technology as the works of a *farceur* who mocks the champions of progress: he "a le plus énergiquement posé la souveraineté humaine et le plus ingénieusement fabriqué les *canards* les plus flatteurs pour l'orgueil de *l'homme moderne*" (321, italics in original). The term "poésie pure" (330) now appears, along with clear definitions of that of which it must "purify" itself; a moral or instructive poetry—one that teaches virtue or the order of nature—is an abomination, a mixed species that does not deserve to live. His final verdict shows the extent to which the Baudelaire of 1857 has reframed Poe's life and works according to the new metaphysical and political position he was constructing for his own poetry: "Dans ce bouillonnement de médiocrités, dans ce monde épris de perfectionnements matériels . . . du sein d'un monde goulu, affamé de matérialités, Poe s'est élancé dans les rêves" (*OC* 2, 321). Dreams are now praised, to the detriment of material perfections; the image of the poet in spiritual flight from the corrupt, devouring material world has taken on weight and solidity. In order to preserve this one remaining refuge of spirit and originality, he argues for the need to purify poetry of the craven demands of materialism. As we shall see with his translation of "The Philosophy of Composition" two years later in 1859, this new stance also entails a defense against any encroachment by mechanics.

From a how-to manual to a "Genèse"

In the very title we can observe an alteration. With "La Genèse d'un poème," Baudelaire transposes the analysis into a theological register, spiritualizing the typesetter, or textual engineer, into an inspired demiurge, a divine creator breathing life into a new living being. In both of its versions, the article leads the reader behind the scenes of the poetic theater; drawn along by the narrator, the reader discovers the "tricks" and the ordinarily hidden labor that go into the production of literary effects. Poe states that the poem is produced "with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem," and that he will explain what gives a plot "its indispensable air of consequence, of causation." In Baudelaire's version we have "avec la précision et la rigoureuse logique d'un problème mathématique" ("rigidity" becomes "rigour," and a term describing an object becomes a term appropriate for an

abstract thought), and "son indispensable physiognomie de logique et de causalité" (a symmetrical and rigid appearance becomes an organized physiognomy, and a machine begins to look like an organism).

The essay's reflection on *effect* implicates poetry in a form of technical production; art is given a goal beyond itself. Poe's sentence, "When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect," which places aesthetics within a theory of reception (displacing the qualities of a work of art from the text in itself to its reader), is translated faithfully overall. However, Baudelaire concludes it with "non pas précisément une qualité, comme on suppose, mais une impression," making vague what for Poe is quite precise: the poem is an instrument that accomplishes a task, the *cause* for an *effect*. Later, the claim that "effects should be made to spring from direct causes" is translated into "les effets doivent nécessairement naître des causes directes." The general sense remains the same, and it is possible that no exact translation exists in French to capture all of the resonances of "spring." What is important is to note the transformation, here again, from one register to another. As Poe has already stated that he will demonstrate the "wheels, the pulleys, the whole stage-set and apparatus of the poet" (rendered by Baudelaire as "l'apanage et le naturel de l'histrion littéraire," "le naturel" being an unjustified addition), the use of the term "spring" can be seen as another in this list of machine parts.

In the same way, Poe says he offers us a "peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought," while Baudelaire invites us "à jeter un coup d'œil derrière la scène, et à contempler les laborieux et indécis embryons de la pensée." The change from "crudities" to "embryons," from "to spring" to "naître," like the passage from "Philosophy of Composition" to "Genèse d'un poème," is in each case the same: from Poe's material, technical lexicon, the language of engineers and compositors, Baudelaire moves to a naturalizing, theological register, in which the production of a work of art is analogous to the birth of a living being.

His alteration of "The Philosophy" thus consolidates a hostility toward technology which grew in force over the 1850s and 60s. At a very minute level, Poe's view of a poem as a technological interchange—the fusion between the traditional literary culture and the new age of the machine—was neutralized by Baudelaire's translation. This antagonism towards the machine, as may also be witnessed in his acrimonious comments on the daguerreotype in the *Salon de 1859*, has shaped interpretations of Baudelaire. Benjamin thus presents him as the poet uniquely attuned to the changes brought by mechanization but who experiences them as an alien force that he must single-handedly combat, as a fencer parries the blows of an onrushing

opponent.[16] The moral chessboard upon which Baudelaire compulsively and ironically changed positions was one in which the squares were clearly separated; they took on an even starker contrast after 1848, as the category of "le mal," one of the two eternal "postulations simultanées," was increasingly concentrated around the image of mechanical technology.[17]

Yet it must be noted that Baudelaire rejected the argument of "The Philosophy" *even after* his step-by-step deformation of the text into what one would expect to be a more acceptable set of images. It is as though he found his own revision to be even more troubling than the original. More was at stake here than merely the analogy between a poem and a machine. His introduction to "La Genèse" reduces Poe's account to a satirical affectation:

S'est-il fait, par une vanité étrange et amusante, beaucoup moins inspiré qu'il ne l'était naturellement? A-t-il diminué la faculté gratuite qui était en lui pour faire la part plus belle à la volonté? Je serais assez porté à le croire. . . . Après tout, un peu de charlatanerie est toujours permis au génie, et même ne lui messied pas. C'est, comme le fard sur les pommettes d'une femme naturellement belle, un assaisonnement nouveau pour l'esprit. (*OC* 2, 343-42)

The allusion to 'the blush on the cheekbones' transforms Poe's position from that of a Laplacian demon possessed of a complete knowledge of poetic cause and effect to one that Baudelaire appears to tolerate more easily, that of a jester or a "histrion." "The Philosophy" becomes a bit of "charlatanism," which may bring out the *labor* (a crucial term in Baudelaire's later morality and poetics) that the poet expends, yet nonetheless can ultimately be reduced to a transparent artifice—to *maquillage*.

Even these interpretive contortions failed to satisfy Baudelaire. He returned compulsively to the "immutable axioms" of "The Philosophy," even attempting to reforge them into an introduction to his own *Fleurs du mal*. The third of his *projets de préface* begins in a style faithful to Poe's, presenting with a straight face quasi-geometrical axioms of poetry. Baudelaire suggests "Comment, par une série d'efforts déterminée, l'artiste peut s'élever à une originalité proportionnelle," adding "que la phrase poétique peut imiter (et par là elle touche à l'art musical et à la science mathématique) la ligne droite ascendante, la ligne droite descendante." Yet after these anticipations of a rational science of poetry, sincere discomfort with Poe's argument erupts as irony: "Comment, appuyé sur mes principes et disposant de la science que je me charge de lui enseigner en vingt leçons, tout homme devient capable . . . d'aligner un poème de la longueur nécessaire pour être aussi ennuyeux que tout poème connu" (*OC* 1, 183). The fourth *projet de préface* adopts the central conceit of "The Philosophy" and employs nearly identical phrases, but

Baudelaire refuses to answer an inquiry about his method, asking instead, "Mène-t-on la foule dans les ateliers de l'habilleuse et du décorateur, dans la loge de la comédienne? Montre-t-on au public . . . le mécanisme des trucs? . . . Lui révèle-t-on toutes les loques, les fards, les poulies, les chaînes, les repentirs, les épreuves barbouillées, bref, toutes les horreurs qui composent le sanctuaire de l'art?" His response is, "D'ailleurs, telle n'est pas aujourd'hui mon humeur" (*OC* 1, 185). The paradoxical workshop exposed by Poe becomes the jealously protected sanctuary of the splenetic creator.

Even after removing much of the language of industrial mechanics present in "The Philosophy," Baudelaire was unwilling to second Poe's rules of poetry. The source of his continued irritation with Poe's essay seems, therefore, to be its implied claim of omniscience. Over the course of the 1850s and 60s, it is precisely the hubris of the philosophers of progress that earned them some of his sharpest barbs. In place of the short-cuts that labor-saving devices or mechanical tricks might provide, Baudelaire's later writings, especially his *Journaux intimes*, testified to the purifying power of *travail*, labor. Poetic creation was a spiritual process, one made all the more holy by the labor that it cost.

Conclusion: beyond the productive misunderstanding

In the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, literature was established as a world apart, a world of pure, spiritual objects that were the product of individual and virtuous labor. Likewise, as Roland Barthes observed, Baudelaire's works reveal "une sorte de fétiche de la forme *travaillée,* située sans doute hors du pragmatisme de l'activité bourgeoise, et pourtant insérée dans un ordre de travaux familiers, contrôlée par une société qui reconnaissait en elle, non ses rêves, mais ses méthodes."[18] The thematics of disengagement found in the absolute poetry and aesthetic asceticism of Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam relied upon the break that Baudelaire's self-conscious labor helped bring about between literature and the dominant practices of his age.

By the 1930s, the personae of the dandy and the *poète maudit*, both of whose exclusion from ordinary society echoed the uniqueness and other-worldliness of poetic activity, could be professionalized and integrated into a quasi-autonomous sphere within the established system of cultural production.[19] Once Baudelaire had rendered poetry rare, esoteric, and spiritual, Valéry, from his chair at the Collège de France, could reclaim the features of Poe's account that had been excluded or circumscribed by "La Genèse." First, he accepted the implied conceit of "The Philosophy of Composition": "Le littérateur est un ingénieur—par rapport auquel je voudrais être le physicien" in

his function of critic.[20] As T. S. Eliot put it, in this image of the poet's work "the tower of ivory has been fitted up as a laboratory"—the very image that Baudelaire suggested in his first study of Poe but erased from subsequent versions. Valéry thus applies Poe's language of science and engineering, but without conceding ground to materialist, utilitarian philosophies. In addition, where Baudelaire had discounted Poe's claims for literary omniscience, Valéry put conscious control front and center in his account of the writing of poetry. He took "The Philosophy of Composition" to heart and based his own hyper-conscious self-examinations upon its dicta. For Eliot, the harmony between the theory Valéry expressed and his actual poems lent a credibility to his claims to describe the creative process, one that Poe's arguments lacked: "What for Poe was an ingenious exercise, was deadly earnest for Valéry."[21]

While critical writings concerned with Poe's essay and its posterity have concentrated on the issue of self-consciousness and intention—contributing to the formation of genetic literary studies as a legitimate discipline, one that reflects upon the embryonic development of the products of "l'esprit créateur"—I suggest that the more important aspect of Poe's essay lies in its identification between poetry and engineering, even if we must take some aspects of his views about both poetry *and* engineering with a grain of salt. Recent empirical studies of technological innovation have shown how powerful and persuasive is the image of rule-based invention and experiment in creating a rigid boundary between scientific disciplines and their "soft" counterparts in the humanities. Yet such ethnographies have repeatedly demonstrated that the part played by contingency, happenstance, and compromise is far greater than the public face of science and technology would suggest. A technical construction—say a bridge—must adjust itself to the specific circumstances of its deployment; a purely abstract science cannot reckon with the multiplicity of contingent variables present in a concrete setting.[22] Thus it is possible that Poe's description of the method of the poet is as inadequate for the engineer as many have said it is for the poet. In that case, the basis for the identification between the two would no longer be that both use a set of ready-made rules that allow for a standardized and logical process of invention, but, more simply, that both create *instruments* that accomplish a task. One indisputable claim of "The Philosophy" is that even the most "spiritual" or "ideal" poem relies on a material substratum: the object of the text and the experience of the reader or hearer. To be successful it must make use of and engage with elements of a pre-existing intersubjective, physical world. It must be aware of the specific circumstances of its deployment, which demands that the poet know the audience, understand what pleases it, and arrive at an "originality" that will

make the utterance a unique occasion. Just as a bridge will be judged on its ability to perform a function outside of itself, the poem will be judged on the basis of its *effect*, which requires us to think of it as part of a larger system— as the technical interface between different actors and entities, whose relation will be changed once the text has done its work.

This conception of literature as a technical extension of human agency and faculties is in many ways closer to our current sense of the nature of literature and its relation to other media and human practices. The notions of "pure literature" and "properly literary effects" lose much of their traction when we consider how digital media reduce all sense data to a single mode of storage and retrieval, a single code that can then be translated into separate sense registers and formats.[23] What I have anachronistically referred to here as Poe's "intermedial" theory of literature was an earlier version of this technological monism, one allied with a different technical and scientific configuration. Poe held that all aspects of reality were variable modes of a single convertible substance; he proclaimed the creative and spiritual power of matter, and was fascinated by the functioning of the material channels, including printed pages of text, that shaped these exchanges. These aspects of Poe's work may be visible only now, as we see the gradual eclipse of the model that Baudelaire and his other inheritors promoted with his own texts: the concept of literature as a pure, autonomous, and exclusive medium.

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Notes

1. *Introduction à la poétique* (Paris: NRF, 1938), 13 (italics mine).
2. See Jane Blevins-Le Bigot, "Valéry, Poe, and the Question of Genetic Criticism in America," *L'Esprit Créateur*, 41:2 (2001): 68-78, for a helpful overview of French and American responses to Poe's literary theory.
3. Henri Lefebvre offers a polemical reading of the psychological and idealist tendencies of the metaphor of "space" in his introduction to *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
4. See Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture, suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972); Pierre Bourdieu, "Extraordinaire Baudelaire," in Jean Delabroy and Yves Charnet, eds., *Baudelaire: Nouveaux chantiers* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1995). Henri Justin sketches some suggestive traits of the lineage in *Poe dans le champ de la vertige: des contes à Eurêka, l'élaboration des figures de l'espace* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991).
5. Quoted by Eliot in Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, tr. Denise Folliot (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), xviii.
6. Rachel Polonsky, "Poe's Aesthetic Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Poe*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 49.

7. Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures; or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral, and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (London: C. Knight, 1835).

8. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

9. I have made a more extensive case for the importance of technology for Poe's view of literature and the arts in "The Potent Magic of Verisimilitude: Edgar Allan Poe Within the Mechanical Age," *British Journal for the History of Science*, 30 (1997):275-90; and in "Extra! Extra! Poe Invents Science Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Poe*, 113-32.

10. See Armand Mattelart, *L'Invention de la communication* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1994); and Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker and Co., 1998).

11. See T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), and Richard D. E. Burton, *Baudelaire and the Second Republic: Writing and Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

12. Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 417. Hereafter cited as *OC* 2.

13. See David Kelly, ed., *Salon de 1848 de Charles Baudelaire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Bernard Howells, *Baudelaire: Individualism, Dandyism, and the Philosophy of History* (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre, 1996); and F.W. Leakey, *Baudelaire and Nature* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1969).

14. See Michel Butor, *Histoire extraordinaire: essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); and Walter Benjamin, "Fourier, or the Arcades," in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1976).

15. A helpful comparison of the metaphysics of Balzac and Poe can be found in Teresa Chevrolet, "Inscription de la science et système unitaire: une lecture de Balzac et de Poe," *Romantisme*, 58 (1987): 81-100.

16. See Benjamin, 118.

17. For his "deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan", see Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 682. Hereafter cited as *OC* 1.

18. Barthes, 48. Jacques Rancière has likewise argued for an intimate connection between the new conditions of industrial production and the seeming otherworldliness of "poésie pure" that Baudelaire helped inaugurate: "Il faut sortir du schéma paresseux et absurde opposant le culte esthétique de l'art pour l'art à la puissance montant du travail ouvrier. C'est comme travail que l'art peut prendre le caractère d'activité exclusive." *Le Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000), 72.

19. See Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study of the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*, intro. by Hugh Kenner (New York: Modern Library, 1996); Pierre Bourdieu, "Extraordinaire Baudelaire"; and Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984), which argues that the avant-garde movements of the early part of the twentieth century were direct challenges to the institutionalized autonomization of art.

20. *Cahiers*, vol. 2, 650, quoted in Blevins-Le Bigot, 78.

21. T. S. Eliot, "Introduction," in Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, xx.

22. Cf. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). See also Eda Kranakis, *Constructing a Bridge: An Exploration of Engineering Culture, Design, and Research in Nineteenth-Century France and America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), for a comparative study of bridge building and the different meanings a technology can take when 'translated' from one practical and linguistic setting to another.

23. Friedrich Kittler, *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, ed. John Johnston (Amsterdam: OPA, 1997), 31.