Author	Michel Serres
Title	*The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies I*
Publication	1985 (2008)

1. VEILS

1.1 Birth

Fire training

The book begins with fire on a ship. In general, water can be let into a hull and the ship will likely stay afloat. But fire must be kept out (17). This is the first mention of porous boundaries.

Seamen receive training and exercises to prepare their body to react appropriately in such a situation:

- The link is established between the management of the five senses and human life or survival: "I can still remember several torturous exercises which teach not only a certain relationship to the senses, but also how to live or survive" (17).
- This training brought a deeper sort of knowledge of the body: "these are things I know about the body. This is no fable" (17). Serres contrasts it with the location of the fire in the Platonic myth, which is now brought disturbingly close into view: "no-one sees dancing shadows on the wall of the cave when a first is burning inside" (17).
- Huddled down in the breathable strip of non-toxic air by the floor, smoke blinds, deafens, obscures; the only sense that is allowed is touch: "touch is the last remaining means of guiding yourself" (18).

Fire on a ship

The real event happens when a fire occurs on the ship when out to sea. There is panic as Serres finds himself trapped inside a cabin; he describes the desperate attempt to escape via a narrow port-hole, in which the body is forced through, then forced back by the terrible storm conditions outside, which are almost as bad as the heat of the fire itself. This becomes a kind of quasi-birth narrative (18), one that will be echoed in the final sentence of the book.

- In these moments, the body is half-in and half-out: singed, some parts of the body that remain on the inside are "black" (20), as if they are singed and do not belong to him. This is preparing the ground for Serres' later exploration of the non-symmetrical aspectualism of the body; the transaction of "touch" is usually disproportionately weighted on one side, for example the right-hand/ left hand dichotomy.
- The return to the whole will only come when all the parts of the body are brought to one side or the other of the porthole, to be re-united as one: "the I as a whole leaps towards this localized point and moves decisively from one half of the body to the other when the point slides, in contact with the separating wall, from its internal to its external surface" (20). The equilibrium is in the middle, but this is not sufficient, for safety is to be found by going either one way or another: "I go under or I exist" (20).
- The body can embrace (and even regulate) these deviations from the equilibrium, in the same way as Serres' body knew that it had to go further in or fully out in order to survive: "it judges deviations from normal balance, immediately regulates them and knows just how far to go, or not go" (19).

Bodily subjectivity

In spite of the apparent lack of options, this near-death experience is actually the birth-place of subjectivity: "I was inside, I was outside. Who was this I?" (19). In this apparently unconscious state, with the body apparently "acting" on its own, "thought" kicks in; personality, agency, identity.

> I remain there, motionless, vibrating, pinioned, gesticulating within the confines of the fixed neckpiece, long enough for me to think, no, for my body to learn once and for all to say 'I' in the truest sense of the word. (18)

Thus, the experience constitutes a "dark, slow, binding meditation" (19).

This is a universal experience: "you only have to pass through a small opening, a blocked corridor, to swing over a handrail or on a balcony high enough to provoke vertigo, for the body to become alert. The body knows by itself how to say I" (19).

Just like in that panic-strewn, agency-reduced situation on the ship, subjectivity kicks in when the individual is not in control, when there is an in/ out admixture (dangling through the porthole), when the individual is "howling like a wounded animal" (19), not in control; "the totality of the divided body shouts *ego* in a general toppling movement" (20). There is a kind of common sense, or even rationality, to this moment: "this common sense apportions the body better than anything else in the whole world" (19).

The soul

The point at which the body moved out of its perilous equilibrium, attaining to the outside, equates to:

- The saving of his life.
- The determination of the "soul".

> Since my near shipwreck I have become accustomed to calling this point the soul. The soul resides at the point where the I is decided. (20)

Thus, Serres agrees with Descartes that the soul is located at a point: but this is not a physical site, such as the "pineal gland" (20), but it is the "solar plexus" (20), the point at which all nerves radiate out, and the very point that was trapped in the porthole.

Risk

The soul comes into being, then, at the point at which the body "risks" (20) the move out of perilous equilibrium: "we are all endowed with a soul, from the first moment of passage when we risked and saved our existence" (20). Indeed, this is linked with the cry *SOS* ("save our souls").

Piloting

The pilot of the ship knows this intuitively when he refers to himself or his own body as being the radiating point of the whole ship, which he refers to as nothing less than "*I*": "the soul of his body descends into the soul of the boat, towards the central turbines, to the heart of the quick-works" (21). The pilot becomes joined with the ship as a quasi-subject; his soul radiates from a point of internal equilibrium to include the object of the whole ship within itself.

This is what the fire taught him.

1.2 Tattoos

Gymnastics

The discipline of gymnastics (and some types of athletic events) incorporates an object with which to interact (a fixed bar, a sand-pit, a high-jump pole, etc). This metaphorically illustrates the place where the soul appears, since it is a point outside the body around which the body orientates itself. This object thus becomes a "quasi-point" (21), offering the same experience of asymmetry that was provided by the port-hole. Thus, gymnasts "gently curl their bodies around the place where it projects itself forward" (21). They find their soul in this interaction with the object.

"Metaphysics beings with, and is conditioned by, gymnastics" (23).

Ball games

A similar object exists in certain ball games: "players have lost their souls because they entrusted them to a common object, the ball: they organize themselves, spread themselves out, wrap themselves around it, collectively" (21). Serres returns to this idea in the fifth chapter.

Nail-trimming

But can the soul appear in the more normal course of affairs?

Consider trimming one's nails as a left-hander (which Serres is):

- To cut the nails on the right-hand, the left-hand picks up the scissors and acts upon the right-hand. The "I", the "soul" is located in the left-hand: "the left-hand subject works on the right-hand object" (21).

- But to cut the nails on the left-hand, even if the scissors are changed to the other hand, the left-hand still dominates: the left-hand drives the process, offering up its index finger, moving it into place, and so on; the right-hand, holding the implement, is somewhat mechanical, just snipping when the left-hand is ready. The right-hand is like the "dark body" (22) that is acted-upon.

The soul (for a left-hander) is predominantly located on the left-side; it drives the physical (mechanical) action of the whole process, even if it is being-acted-upon (rather than acting).

> The presentation of the finger to the blade, its flexibility or rigidity at the moment of cutting, the precision of the process, are sufficient for the external observer to determine the state of the soul, the place where it is now in a state of equilibrium, as it were. (22)

Serres is arguing that the sensible world lists and orientates asymmetrically; it has a left-hand or right-hand: "there is no such thing as balanced indifference. There is no centre or axis; it cannot be found, or is absent" (*The Troubadour of Knowledge*, 15.)

Some parts of the body are so absent that they can essentially be dismissed as black of alien. Serres compares the awkward experience of cutting toenails, they are too far away to engage in this interplay, so that no toe can act as "soul" in the way the left-hand can: "so far away, the soul is absent" (22).

Asymmetry

But this asymmetry, this movement of the soul from one part of the body to another, and from the body to the outside world, is vital for existence.

Consider touching one's lip with a middle finger; in the minute creasing of the surface of the lip by the finger, it is as if "consciousness" is triggered by this unitary touch. The soul is accessed in this gesture of touch, where the body makes contact with the outside world.

More specifically, this contact is found in moments of "folds" in the body: lip creasing, teeth-clenching, a hand clenched as a fist, "contracted sphincters" (22)", "consciousness belongs to those singular moments when the body is tangential to itself" (22). Without these creases, we would live "slippery smooth and on the point of fading away" (22).

Tattoos

- The soul is revealed in these intra and extra-bodily movements.
- Whether these are intra (the "touch" of finger on lips) or extra (the pilot or gymnast wrapping around an object), they involve a point of contact, which can be taken for the skin.

The tattoo is the image Serres uses for these points of contact. As the soul is revealed, intra and extra bodily, a tattoo "map" is created: "the traces of the soul and those of the world" (25).

Skin

- We all have fixed markers of identity relating to our bodies, for example "the thumbprint or dental record" (23).

- But our skin is not a fixed marker in this way; it changes over time, in a way that is unique to us, with "wounds, callouses, wrinkles, blotches" (24). It is as if we have a series of shifting tattoos on us.

- These marks are the signatures of intra and extra bodily contacts. They are evidences of historical soul-encounters: "the soul, translucent as an evanescent angel, whitens the places where it alights; the skin, imprinted elsewhere with the varied colours of history, is brighter, lighter and correspondingly whiter at these points, because it has come alive" (25). "Memory is inscribed there, why look elsewhere for it?" (24).

Which painter could record the skin? To paint a portrait is to decide upon a particular colour and shade, thereby fixing the meaning of the skin. Here, "the skin becomes a standard-bearer, whereas it is in fact imprinted" (24).

White/ black

If the idea of "white" is for points of subjectivising encounter, *intra* or *extra*, those parts of the body that are untouched by this, or that have been untouched for a while, are "black": lived existence is really "a long, hazy mingling of the I and the black body, resulting from time to time in a peacock's tail of mingled colours" (25).

Bodily existence traces a path between two extremes:

- The beatific vision of an "alabaster-white, mystical body" (25), where the body is reduced to pure soul.

- The "cybernetic body, a black box, another total nothingness" (25), where the soul is lost, and the body is constituted only by predictability.

But the soul does not reside in either extreme (this would be a false dichotomy or dualism).

Mingled bodies

Instead, "the mingled body finds itself in the middle, between heaven and hell: in everyday space" (25). Real bodies are neither all soul, nor all material: "all real bodies shimmer like watered silk" (25). "They are hazy surfaces, mixtures of body and soul" (25). "Body and soul are not separate but blend inextricably, even on the skin" (26).

Serres aims for a philosophy of mingled bodies, with touch/ the tactile, and its corresponding organ the skin, as its distinctive locus:

> Many philosophers refer to sight; few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the tactile or olfactory. Abstraction divides up the sentient body, eliminates taste, smell and touch, retains only sight and hearing, intuition and understanding. To abstract means to tear the body into pieces rather than merely leave it behind: analysis. (26).

Thus, "the sense organs appear on the skin, where it is soft, fine and ultra-receptive" (70).

Analysis

By contrast, the senses of sight and hearing in particular have a tendency to privilege a fixed and dominant position. Later, Serres further qualifies this by the term "analysis", which is the "cut" of this complex mingling; he suggests this is part of educational pedagogy itself by reminding us that the study of Greek morphology begins with the verb "*luo*", to untie, "which means to chop up, break apart, take apart" (135).

Love

Two lovers do not form a "separate subject and object" (26). During a kiss, the soul passes between lips, just as described above. The lover's embrace is described in terms of "patience" and "exploration" (27). It is an admixture and blending of "black" and "white" (26).

This critiques the artificial concept of "simple entities" that we are led to believe are out there in the world (27). In fact, even nature tells us these do not exist: "simple entities are rarely seen in nature, one only ever encounters the indefinite spectrum of their compounds, one only knows simple entities as admixtures and through their reactions to one another" (28). Moments of purity are rare: "alabaster and jet are miracles" (28).

Change

The concept of complex entities and the love encounter provides a model for change: "no doubt, we have never said anything about change except in terms of mixtures; if we try to think about it in terms of simple entities, we merely arrive at miracles, leaps, mutations, resurrections and even transubstantiation" (28).

Love culmination

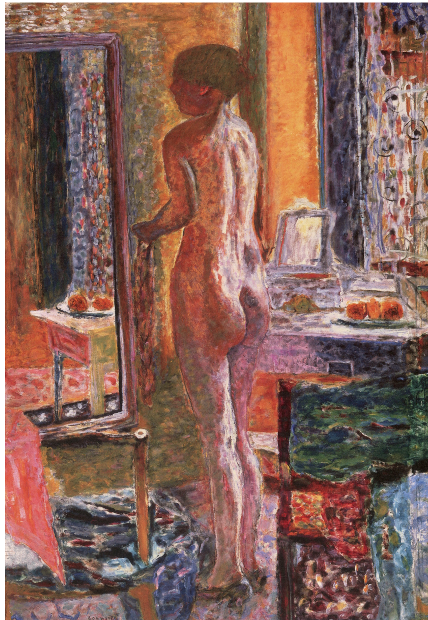
But finally, in the moment of culmination, there is a form of joining-together that overcomes the mixture. "In these lavish undulations, fluctuations and versatile caprices brought about by countless changes of skin and direction, there will sometimes be sudden simplifications, and saturation or plentitude: all colours of every tone will come together as white" (28). You experience "your radiant white soul, transfigured on the mountain and enveloped in immaculate dawn" (27). As Serres puts it, "carte blanche, smooth fabric, dawn light" (29).

1.3 Canvas, Veils, Skin

Pierre Bonnard

At first glance, Bonnard's pictures of women bathing look like they are encouraging or supporting a primitive view onto the subject, one that privileges the "analysis" of sight: "everything impels us to feel the prestige of the visual, to discourse yet again on eroticism and representation" (31).

But on the contrary, Bonnard's "immensely tactful and tactile art does not turn the skin into a vulgar object to be seen, but rather into the feeling subject, a subject always active beneath the surface" (30). For example, different towels and night-dresses seem to provide concealment, but their patterns and motifs are echoed elsewhere on the canvas, on mirrors, and even on the skin of the women. Thus, Bonnard's art "is underpinned by the equivalence or equation of canvas, veils and skin. Nudity is covered with tattoos, the skin is imprinted, impressed" (32).



Cosmetics

Bonnard's meta-references to the painter's art are reflected in the action of the women herself as she applies make-up to her face and body. This points to the importance of "decoration": what we see on the surface of the skin is what we take the world to be, thus: "adornment equals order, and embellishment is equivalent to law, the world appears ordered, at whatever level we consider phenomena" (32). The woman is here akin to the "physicist" (33) in the way she represents order on the very surface of her skin.

Serres marvels at the artistry of women he sees in the streets of Paris. Some women apply make-up in such a way as to show forth the tattoo of the skin, the adornments of pressure points that have accrued over the years. Make-up begins to mark out the complex interplay between senses: "cosmetics becomes an aesthetics of sensation because of a particular harmony: the naked woman in the mirror tattoos her skin, in a certain order and according to precise laws, she follows exact pathways; she emphasises the eye and the gaze, accentuates with colour the place to be kissed, crowning the zone of words and taste, underlines hearing with an earring, traces the bridges or links of colour between the wells or the mountains of the senses, draws the map of her own receptivity" (33-34).

Veils between skin and world

Painterly preoccupation with the nude body is not to do with voyeurism, but "to reveal what belongs to the sense" (36). These women represent what it means to live and to think, namely, to "throw yourself naked into the ocean of this world" (36).

To paint is to sense the "invisible veil" (36) around a body and then to "draw it back gently, tactfully and delicately, from this laminated corridor between the skin and things, stretch out, unfold, spread, exhibit and flatten it" (36), like a flayed epidermis. Bonnard's art is to extract this veil, with its imprint of object-encounters in the world, and to lay it on a canvas. Or to show how veils delicately interact, "the canvas seizes the momentary junction of the sloughed skins" (38).

Serres' own writing

In an important moment, Serres suggests that he has flayed his own skin and laid it out delicately in the pages of this book: "painters sell their skin, models hire out their skin, the world gives its skins. I have not saved mine, here it is. Flayed, printed, dripping with meaning, often a shroud, sometimes happy" (38).

Turin Shroud

This "veil", this printed topology of *intra* and *extra* bodily encounters, is like a "shroud" (36). In fact, it is just like the "Turin Shroud", which when spread out and displayed, "displays the traces of the body and face" (36). Serres even says: "this is the man" (36), *ecco homo*, as if to suggest that to view this shroud is to view the real man himself.

Veronica, the one who wiped Christ's face and body by tradition, has a name that means "true icon, faithful image" (37). This is apt, for the shroud is indeed "imprinted, impressionistic" (37). She becomes a type of painter herself, indeed "Veronica becomes the patron saint of painters; her eyes full of tears, blinded with grief and pity, she made with her hands the imprint of the skin, the mask of pain, a holy woman of contact and caress, her hands open and her eyes unseeing" (37).

Immersion in the world

Thus, a contrast is set up:

- First, "some look, contemplate and see" (37). This is the gaze of dissection and control; "the first, with their large eyes embedded in their smooth, flat skin, are unacquainted with the weight of things" (37).

- But others "caress the world or let themselves be caressed by it, throw themselves into it, roll, bathe or dive in it, and are sometimes flayed by it" (37). They "give in to the weight of things, their epidermis marked locally and in detail by the pressure, as if it had been bombarded" (37). Their skin is "tattooed, striped, striated, coloured, beaded, studded, layered chaotically with tones and shades, wounds and lumps" (37).

Painting can show us how the second prevails: "the eye loses its pre-eminence in the very area in which it is dominant, in painting" (37).

1.4 Hermes and the Peacock

Argus

In Greek mythology, many-eyed Argus was involved in "surveillance of relationships" (39); he is "the precursor of the private detective" (39).

Serres bemoans societies or communities where this model of surveillance prevails or is the norm: "the villages of my childhood were alive with lucid, talkative Arguses" (39).

Surveillance and observation

The maturing of a culture takes place when we move merely from human-to-human relationships, which are increasingly policed by jealous and mimetic surveillances, to "observation of things" (39). Indeed, when this takes place societal life improves: "a more relaxed collective life tends to improve our morals, such as when men turn their attention away from the anxious, uncomfortable loves of their neighbours, towards the trajectory of a comet" (39).

The human sciences and the exact sciences

Serres maps this model to the human and exact sciences: "the human sciences keep watch; the exact sciences observe" (39).

Human sciences, and the philosophies that primarily take their values from them, are like "sociologies"; they take their meaning from (mimetic) human relations, not from objects. It remains in primitive village life. They are characterised by "sleuthing" and "policing" (42). Their critical depth is likened to the experience of a queue, with every member seeking to be at the back, so as to gaze at another (without being gazed at in return): "objects are replaced by relationships, issues, fetishes and goods; these are all forms of regression" (41). Every critic seeks to be the last in the line, "the last link in the chain" (44).

Under the imprimatur of Argus, the human sciences seek to be the knower of all things, but from behind: "This is Argus. Here at last we have total theory, the unassailable method that can conquer everything. There is no getting around Argus. Here at last is the right position for those who desire to be first or last, critical yet never subject to criticism, an observing presence with no observable opacity, always a subject, never an object" (45).

By contrast, the exact sciences, dealing with objects in the world, generate the quality of "observation" rather than "surveillance": "things liberate one from surveillance and observation frees one from suspicion" (42).

God as observer, not sleuth

With the exact sciences, it is as if there is the guarantee of the presence of God, but only because in deist fashion he sets and abides by the rules: "God does not deceive, he establishes the rules of the game and remains within them" (43). In a sense, God does not seek to "cheat" or "win" the system: "the first attribute of God consists in being indifferent to winning" (44). And so "detach yourself from notions of winning or losing, be indifferent to victory or loss, you will enter into science, observation, discovery and thought" (44).

Serres likens this to the divine creative impulse: God creates not in order to initiate the world of deceitful surveillance of humans: rather "God is devoted to the object, and thus creates the world, the complete set of objects. Everything derives therefore from his refusal to be part of the game" (45).

Panoptes and Hermes

This contrast between the human sciences and the exact sciences is likened to the conflict between Panoptes and Hermes:

- Panoptes (Argus) is part of the shape-shifting and deceitful culture initiated by Hera in order to deceive Zeus in his pursuit of Io: "here everything becomes possible; a cow is a woman or a god a bull, even the identity principle is unstable" (43). This is the function of surveillance: "man deceives and cheats, so much so that he disappears sometimes, like Zeus beneath the skin of the bull, like Hera behind the sting of the gadfly" (44). In this "hellish world of relationship" even "stability itself fluctuates" (43).

- Hermes kills Panoptes (Argus), thus showing that "the bearers of messages will triumph over the watcher, surveillant or observer" (42). Panoptes was set the task of surveillance on behalf of Hera, but this task is redolent of the human all-too-human attributes of gossip and policing: "jealous panoptic theory sees all from the top of its tower" (42).

Panoptes as panoptic gaze

Panoptes is a model for all-seeing, but more importantly for a gaze that is singular and elevated, like a lighthouse whose light "controls a particular zone and fills the night" (45).

This panoptic gaze is one we all assume. Later on, Serres writes: "everyone seems to believe that our point of view, our point of vision, is up in the dress circle, eyes sitting at the top of the trunk on a swivelling, mobile head, like a lighthouse lantern. Our skin would be a stone base of the lighthouse, with no relation to the lights and signals, a simple raised structure ensuring that the gaze will travel. The lighthouse guardian would be the pupil of the eye, or at least ensure its movement" (75).

Panoptes' demarcation of the world is like a hyperbolic Leibnizian calculus:

- Leibniz "added together the different views of a thing in order to obtain its ichnographic or geometral dimensions" (47). The smaller the differential gaps, the more accurate the calculation of the curve. And so the better view you had, the more differentials you could make. "God alone, for Leibniz, reveals simultaneously all the profiles of a thing" (47).

- Panoptes represents the ultimate expression of the adding-up of eyes (the almost uncountable eyes on the peacock's tail), the "the almost divine power of universal reach" (47) of the gaze. Thus, it can be said that "Panoptes totalises the body's points of view, adds together the sites from which he sees" (47).

This panoptic derivation of meaning is inadequate, however. Because however many individual sums you add up, however many eyes possessed by Panoptes, it will never be a global vision. "However panoptic and lucid this bright sphere is, it remains differential and pointillist, analytic of micro-states or dwarf scenes" (48).

By contrast, a truly global intuition: (A) appreciates space as big enough to include all these fine cuts, all these individual sums, all these singular entities; (B) and yet, at the same time, is able to appreciate each not merely as an additional one, but as a wholly individual entity: "because the best of all watchers, the geometral subject, far from perceiving a geometral object, sees space as the sum of all places, whilst still seeing each thing according to its profile" (47).

Thus, the true contrast between Panoptes and Hermes:

> All sites are local for Argus for as far as he can see. As a subtle analyst, he totalizes the information about a place flawlessly and faultlessly. Hermes intercepts all information, in all places; sites of transport and translation, interference and distribution, he occupies passages. (49)

Sound

The panoptic myth is exploded most of all by sound. This is found within the classical myth itself, for Hermes plays the pipes (the "pan" pipes, indicating the totality of the sound immersion he produces):

> A new combat between extremal sites: Panoptes has total and complete vision. In the realm of sight he leaves his adversary no opening. Hermes therefore quits the terrain on which Argus is unassailable and moves into the realm of sounds by taking over the entire spectrum: hence the name of Pan's pipes. Pan against Panoptes […] a strange conflict of the faculties of sense. (46)

The triumph of Hermes over Panoptes is the triumph of sound over sight: "sound undoes sight, or charms it: the latter focuses itself at the endpoint of a narrow beam of light; but what else do eyes do except focus on that point? Sound puts sight in its place" (48). In the bombardment of sound, "Argus collapses with excitement" (47).

More precisely, the triumph of sound over sight is an expression of "the system of harmony enveloping the theory of representations" (46).

- *Sound is a revealer of the body*: for example, sound has the facility of breaking through "the black veil" that conceals the tattoo of impressions on the body (47). "Hermes, the god of passage, becomes a musician, for sound

knows no obstacle" (47).

- *Sound provides a global intuition*: The triumph of the sound of Hermes of the sight of Panoptes represents the triumph of "the global" over what Serres calls "the sum of sites" (47), namely, the Leibnizian stacking-up of tiny differences. "The sound wave has access to the totality, so fruitlessly sought by adding together places of points of view and juxtaposing eyes" (47-48). If we want to attain to the total, to the global, "we are never led there by partial or endless representations, we only ever get there through harmony, metaphysical Pan-piping" (48).

- *Sound travels at speed*: by contrast with sight (Panoptes), which "possesses light's clarity" (49), sound (Hermes) "seizes the arrow of its speed" (49). This speed is somehow more accurate than "the trust in illumination" (49) that has characterised sight-based classical philosophy, "for the speed of light is more important than its purity" (49). "Pan or Hermes kills Panoptes: the swiftness of the message is of more value than the lucidity of a thought" (49). This is a description of a "new state of knowledge" (49), one that is highly fitted to our world where "having no centre, the network of communication makes presence superfluous and surveillance obsolete" (49). Thus, "all Panoptes' avatars, all those figures who remain present to presence, in short, all the successive figures of phenomenology are put out to pasture. Present everywhere, Hermes, the spirit, suddenly descends into the spatial realm" (50).

Din

Via the Serresian dialectic, this celebration of sound is then upscaled and problematized as "din", a noise that covers the whole world and therefore obstructs the communication of information. It is caused by the technicity of modernity:

> Hermes has taken over our world, our technical world exists only through the all-encompassing confusion of hubbub, you will not find anything left on the earth – stone, furrow or small insect – that is not covered by the diluvial din. Great Pan has won, he has expelled silence from space. (48)

This threatens to return us to the situation of "Antiquity" (50), when human relationships were without the blessing of objects, and therefore subject to jealous and mimetic surveillances (see above, p.39). In the din of modernity, "relationships return, bringing with them the whole of mythology, the formidable and regressive burden of conflicts and fetishes" (50).

The return of the peacock

The din of modernity, the return of observation (sight) over the clarity and speed of light (sound), is foreshadowed in the revenge of Hera, who strips Argus and lays his skin over the plumage of the peacock, as a kind of grisly reminder of the past:

> The motionless fowl, squawking harshly and tunelessly when Hermes plays on the flute, limping low to the ground when Hermes flies past, has only dead theory to display when it spreads its tail. Sight gazes without seeing at a world from which information has already fled. (51)

We gaze awkwardly at this awkward bird in public parks and gardens.

Touch

And yet the dialectic turns again. For there is a promise: "touch sees a little. It has heard" (51).

- We are like the peacock's tail, a mere set of eyes observing.

- But that tail is also like skin: "it perceives confusedly on its whole surface area and sees clearly and distinctly by virtue of the hyper-acute singularity of its eyes" (52). The tail/ skin has "pockets and folds and, refining itself at a given site, creates an eye" (52). "The skin, a single tissue with localized concentrations, displays sensibility" (52).

Later on, Serres writes: "sight is pained the sight of mixture. It prefers to distinguish, separate, judge distances; the eye would feel pain if it were touched. It protects itself and shies away. Our flexible skin adapts by remaining stable. It must be thought of as variety, like the *vair* slipper. It apprehends and comprehends, implicates and explicates, it tends towards the liquid and the fluid, and approximates mixture" (67).

Thus, "touch involves stitching together, place by place. Pointillist, if you like, or impressionist, moving between sections and localities, it creates maps, varieties, veils" (138).

1.5 Subtle

Subtelty

“We no longer know why, when it is acute, or refined or delicate, we describe a sense or a thing as subtle. We have lost the memory or sense of it” (52).

The lady and the unicorn

Some features of the series of tapestries:

- Each scene is framed on an “island’ (53).
- Each tapestry places a specific object representing one of the senses: mirror for sight, organ for hearing, sweet dish of food for taste, basket of flowers for smell.
- Each sense is framed within a chaotic multitude of detail: foliage, animals, and so on. This means that each sense is “open and abandoned to the world, like a flat island to the sea” (56). There is an “instability” (56) to them because they are “plunged into the invariable and the mixed, tattooed, quivering with sense” (57).

Touch

The panel concerning touch, however, has no specific object or tool (53). Rather, the red, background tapestry wall is like a skin, on which the central objects (the senses) are “tattooed” (53).

Thus, “one notices in the scene that touch alone has no need of a special tool, its skin becoming at will both subject and object’ (53).

This in fact is why the hand seems to be represented as the point of contact for each of the first five panels: “the hand serves five times as a common factor and a common sense develops there” (54).

These tapestries seem to suppose that “touch will win the day” (54)

The sixth tapestry

Serres suggests the first tapestries all portray sense as external to the self in some way: “the woman does not see or hear herself, does not feel or touch herself” (54).

This sixth panel is different insofar as it portrays a connection to an interiority, rather than merely an external sense: "a sixth sense is necessary, in which the subject turns in on itself and the body on the body: a common or internal sense, indeed a sixth island was necessary, a doubly enclosed island for the body itself" (54).

Serres suggests that the boundary of the subject's interiority is represented by the tent. This is the skin; its carpeted walls represent the creases and folds of the skin, "veiled in drapery" (54).

Thus, each sense "is veiled in skin" (54). It has its point of contact with the outside world through this veil of fabric/ skin/ touch. This is represented by the way the figure of the woman stands at the entrance to the tent, as if her body "opens" or "closes" (55) the way-in to the tent; to get to her, you have to get through the skin:

> Touch has won the day through the equivalence of veil, fabric and skin. Its palette combines flowers, fruits, leaves, birds and animals. The world is printed on the wax garment that surrounds and clothes us, that now offers us an intimate habitat. A factor common to four external senses, an open and closed sense in itself, it protects the internal sense and begins to construct it. (55)

"Touch therefore has the virtue of closing and outlining an interior" (56). The skin (body/ touch) is that which opens out to the world whilst remaining in contact with the interior: "it closes in on the internal sense, remaining slightly open" (55).

Language

The line demarcated by the woman and pavilion is crowned by the verbal motto: "*à mon seul désir*". For Serres, this signifies that the woman is "acceding to language" (56), that is, she is entering into the risk posed by language. This moment is reinforced by the Pentecost "burning tongues" (57) that he sees as imprinted on the drapery.

Serres interprets the word "*désir*" from the motto as meaning "nostalgia" (rather than the modern meanings of lust or covetousness):

- The woman is putting jewels away in the casket (not accepting them); these are the senses in their categorial definition: "I leave behind my jewels, those that my body was wearing, those displayed by my partial bodies when they were a scent of roses, a shiver of sounds, a simulacrum in the mirror … I carry them and shut them in the casket" (57). The word "*désir*" thus indicates nostalgia for the loss of a world of pure or originary sensation, a "lost world, a lost paradise, an island between two seas, where the senses sparkle like a lake of gemstones" (57).

- This is the descent into language, a movement into/ out of "the prison of language" (57). To enter into language is to lose something of the bodily transmission of information that is given by the senses: "having withdrawn beneath the veils printed with tongues of fire and beneath the crown of the written cartouche, the body which has left the world mourns it, the woman who leaves behind her jewels misses them, the beauty of the five senses lies in the black box while we sleep under the blue hangings engraved with fire" (57). We become "devoted to what language gives us" (57), rather than to the rich sociology of objects described above.

The words "*à mon seul désir*" thus represent the originary or Ur-moment of descent into language (and away from sense perception): "these are the first words uttered by the body when it becomes an interiority endowed with a voice, and is enveloped in flames and imprinted with signs, when the skin-tapestry or the skin-pavilion no longer bears on itself lilacs or cheetahs but geometry and letters" (58). This is the sentence "that causes the world to flee" and that "chased us away from paradise" (58). It is the utterance that "causes the senses to withdraw into a black box" (58). It is the first sentence of a Cartesian philosophy, "the stable unity philosophy of identity" (58).

The woman turns and returns into the pavilion of language. Thus, she represents the nostalgia for that lost completeness: "I speak about myself, about my loneliness and the nostalgia of lost senses, I mourn the lost paradise, I regret the loss of that to which I was giving myself or of what was given to me. Since that phrase was written, I desire. And the world absents itself" (58).

Our desire, and the work of Serres, is "that it be re-opened" (58).

The writing project

To write of the senses is in one way to return to the pavilion: thus, "I cannot tell or write of touch, nor of any other sense. I live in the tent crowned with the cartouche and clothed in tongues" (58). Is there a language that can speak of the outside? Is there a language that can speak of the first five tapestries? No, because the writer already finds himself enclosed in the sixth, "the original language has come into being, we can do nothing about it" (58).

From within the tent, a flow of words can emerge that has little or no relation to the senses. Serres gives the example of being stung by a hornet whilst delivering a lecture; he did not betray the pain to his audience: he tells this to "indicate that the speaking body, flesh filled with language, has little difficulty in remaining focused on speech, whatever happens. Words fill our flesh and anaesthetize it" (59). "Nothing makes one more insensitive than words" (59). The gushing forth of speech, particularly about ourselves, serves as a kind of anaesthetic to other sensory perception.

An alternative interpretation of the sixth tapestry

The Serresian dialectic gives us another view on the scene. This time, the woman is exiting the pavilion, taking the jewels from the box, she thereby "frees herself from the veils and is reborn" (59). On this reading, she is now "visiting the island paradise amidst the oranges and cheetahs … she participates in the banquet of things, to our joy and hers" (59).

The idea of the banquet will become crucial in the third chapter, where Serres likens those who are satiated at the table to the newcomer (empiricism) who rejoices at the proliferation of things: "the crucial experience of philosophy is structured like a feast, which is the best expression of it" (218).

The entrance of the woman into the complex, embodied world of the senses is represented by the interweaving of the tapestry: "the thousand ties and knots on its other side, events on the underside of the canvas which, by hiding them, obscure the roots of the adjective 'subtle'. The secrets of the tapestry are knotted beneath it" (60). It is as if our five, external senses are located above and below the surface of the skin, touching the outside world but also the inside, operators between them, moving in and out, like the lady enters and exits the pavilion. The senses "inhabit the tapestry, enter the weaving, form the canvas as much as they are formed by it" (60)

1.6 Variation

Mixing

All the models described above (Bonnard's art, Argus' eyes, the peacock, the lady and the island) portray variation. Variation means "multiple: a thousand shades and tones, a thousand forms" (60).

There are distinct categories of variation (the pattern of the oranges in the tapestry is different from the pattern of acorns), but there is also "continuous variation" (60-61), where these discrete variations are mixed up (this is represented by the strange amalgamation of animals that constitute the unicorn figure). Serres calls this "mixing" (61). Mixing means "variation on the idea of variety" (61).

The skin as a site of mixing

Our skin is a site of such mixing, "in a precise topological sense" (61): it is a "thin sheet with folds and plains, dotted with events and singularities and sensitive to proximities" (61).

- Of course, the skin can be "discrete and panoptic when the eyes make regular holes in it" (61).
- But it can also be "continuous when tattooed, like that of the naked woman at her mirror, in reality a compound like the unicorn" (61). It has "mingled regions or states" (62).

The suit of the body

The mixed body is like a "suit, cobbled together with the seams visible" (61). The skin "varies, discrete, continuous, inexpertly sewed, horned" (62).

We might try to work towards "the definitive garment", but this "never eventuates" (61). Instead, we remain "a slapdash piece of work, subject to the vagaries of time and the blunders of brief opportunities" (61); "our time does not end in a system, but in a rough-cut and patchwork rag" (61).

The meaning of the senses

Thus, what our sense data tells us should not first of all be judged in terms of ethical norms. Rather, values inculcated in us by sense data should be evaluated in terms of "variation":

> The senses vary, the feeling and the felt vary. To measure their appearances according to the criteria of truth or falsehood is obviously inappropriate: one must first think in terms of the variable. (62).

Genetic modification

For example, what about genetic manipulation? For "any genesis is party to such manipulation, any individual, any organism can call itself a sphinx or unicorn" (62).

1.7 Vair

Cinderella

The prince seeks the woman he had fallen in love with at the ball. But he does not ask merely to "see" the women, but to have them try on a slipper made of "*vair*". This is an old French, heraldic term for fur of mixed colour, possibly squirrel.

"And here begins the mystery" (63):

- A slipper "gently sheathes the foot, like an invaginated pocket" (64).
- This is why in the fairy-story the slipper should be "*vair*", not glass: for fur is that which is "soft, not hard, loose, not tight, extremely pleasant to feel, and gentle, velvety and voluptuous to the eye" (63). It provides a layering effect (the slipper itself has layers of thicker outside fur and thinner inside fur). Its colour is not black or white, but a "mixed, ash-grey colour" like a squirrel (64). It is as if it is "made for touch" (64).
- The happy ending is secured when the prince handles this "*vair*" slipper: "the prince discovers his queen, sitting almost naked amongst the ashes, by encasing her foot in the slipper. Recognition works by touch, not by sight" (64). "The skin precedes the gaze in the act of knowing, "*vair*" wins a victory over glass" (65).

The slipper as an object

The "*vair*" slipper represents variation, "a varied colour, soft, double fur, a slipper that allows the foot enough freedom to dance, a variable shoe" (65).

Variation is a quality that is different from mere transformation. We all understand the duality of a rags-to-riches story, which is a transformation made possible by an act of fairy magic.

But the slipper is an object that exists in both worlds, as shown by the fact that: (A) it does not turn into a clog: (B) one remains in the palace, and one in the house. It thus stands out in an environment "where rats change into footmen, where things whirl around under a fairy godmother's magic wand, where unrecognisable horses are transubstantiated into lizards" (65). For "the slipper is the sole object amongst these changing appearances that resists the wave of instability" (66).

The slipper is a variable not because it changes in itself (it is the same object throughout, indeed, that is why it works as a plot device). Rather, it is variable because it crosses worlds or discourses, but not by means of a magical transformation that makes it unrecognisable as it moves. The slipper is a "place of seams, mixture and marriage" (66). "Variation requires one to think both the stable and the unstable simultaneously, not pure instability, which is strictly speaking incomprehensible, but the invariant in the variation" (67). Thus, the slipper "obliges one to think in the same place, at the same time and in the same relationship the stable and the changing, the one and the multiple, reference and variation. Quite precisely, *vair* designates the variable" (67).

The fairy story as the key to language

The plot seems neat and tidy, leading to a happy ending. But "for us, absorbed in the story, the word *vair* gives the meaning, the key to language: to what is a variant sense to be referred?" (67). In other words, language (its primordial function) should be that which allows us to move between worlds or discourses, finding a stable point of contact between them that allows a "variant sense" to be deciphered.

The fairy story as aspectual

"At the same time as Perrault was writing his stories, Leibniz was introducing into mathematics, and into the same French and Latin languages, the notion of the variable, and giving variety as a criterion for the reality of a phenomenon" (66).

1.8 Mists

Dark and shadow

Serres likes the twilight hours; things take on a material presence and proximity that bright light obscures in its dazzling intensity. "Shadows excite the closest possible attention and are even subtly revealing; our whole skin comes alive" (68). There are all sorts of paths one can navigate in the dark. Our bodies become alive to subtleties we had "lost through forgetfulness and habit" (68).

Later, he writes that although he is a "child of the South", he prefers "Flanders or the north of France, the mysteries of misty seas, places where light disappears beneath low-lying vapours and absent stars; a grey, hazy plain, the black texture of sparse tree-trunks, where a sudden ray of light, as though trapped, lights up an odd area, works its enchantment on some specific place" (250).

Writing in light

"One can do almost anything without light, except write. Writing requires a glimmer. Life is satisfied with the shadows, reading requires clarity" (68).

Mist

Mist, however, is more illustrative than twilight or darkness, for "even if darkness envelops us, it does not attack the skin as mist does" (68). With mist of fog, however, "the anguish into which fog plunges us comes not only from the blindness it provokes, but from the way in which it trails and crawls, in layers, over our arms, shoulders, thighs, stomach and back" (68). Where darkness prompts bodily sensation, mist "lulls the body to sleep, saturates it, anaesthetizes it" (68). In this environment, "impression fails under compression" (68). Fog "tears out our back-up eyes, it blindfolds or cocoons us" (68). It is an all-encompassing sort of veil.

Mist is particularly interesting because it has to do with topological space:

- "Darkness is concerned with optic space and retains Euclidean volume; shadow, like clarity, preserves the order of common geometry" (69).

- "Fog occupies a variety of topologies and is concerned with the continuous or ragged space of touch" (69). It transforms the recognisable distances, volumes and metrics of the world by means of "homeomorphism, causing distances, measurements and identities to be lost" (69).

Whereas shadow leaves things "invariable", mist "makes everything variable" (69). "Night unsettles phenomenology; mist disturbs ontology" (70). "Shadow reinforces the distinction between being and appearance, mist blurs it" (70).

Ancient Greece, "dry Greece" (69) with its occupants inhabiting either "blinding light or darkness", is the "kingdom of geometers" (69). It makes you believe that truth will arise merely by the lifting of a veil. There are no mists. And so "topology could never have originated in Sicily or Iona, where everything is known in terms of distance and measurement" (69). You have to move far beyond the pillars of Hercules, into northern seas, to find mists.

1.9 Common Sense

Skin as common site of the senses

The "sense organs appear on the skin, where it is soft, fine and ultra-receptive" (70). Sensory data, which might be received through sight, hearing, smell or taste:

> […] causes strange variations on the skin, which is itself a fundamental variable, a *sensorium commune*: a sense common to all the senses, forming a link, bridge and passage between them: an ordinary, interconnecting, collective, shared plain. (70)

Skin is thus "common sense" in the sense that it is the common site of all the senses: "the skin, multisensorial, can pass for our common sense" (81). It displays that which is given to it, "unfolds their density, opens out and exhibits things deposited by them in a central place, dilutes and thins them down" (70). The skin is like the plain shaped by "the sands that wash down from each mountain along the rivers" (70), just as the face is marked by the erosion caused by tears and laughter creases. "We are bathed in things from head to toe" (71).

Skin barriers

The over-consumption of alcohol "swells, burns and corrodes" the skin (71). The French word "*blaser*" (blottoed) conveys a sense of swollen excrescence, like the sword that is swaggeringly grasped by the drunk lord, or the belly that is proudly displayed by the drunk football supporter. To be drunk is to foreground one's "insensate body armour" (72).

How do we set up these thick skins, these skin barriers, in our own lives? "Skins without doors or windows, coats of mail, bullet proofing, what do you feel?" (73).

Language, too, can function as a kind of skin barrier: "and what do you feel, equipped with techniques and formulae, protected by exact, rigorous language? (73).

Dialectics and soft skin

Dialectics too is a kind of thick skin, because it refuses to wear kinship with the past on one's own skin, preferring instead to overturn it continually in "war" and "polemics" (73). "Show me a single thing produced in and by conflict, a single thing and I shall be converted; show my just one invention induced by polemics" (72). It is primitive, animal behaviour: "hominoids fight to remain primates" (74), but "man comes into being when he sees the falsity of this" (74). The "drug" of such combat produces a "monstrous skin" (74).

On the contrary, "nothing is constructed, made or invented, except in relative peace, in a small, rare pocket of local peace maintained in the middle of the universal devastation produced by perpetual war" (74).

The truly creative person is therefore one who has not thick, but thin skin: "endowed, supplied, afflicted with a quivering envelope, a tender onion-skin disturbed by wrinkles like a fragile lake, naked, nay flayed, these are the ones who are unsuited to the battles of crabs" (74). In fact, this is shown by the evolution of creatures "from animal forms whose soft parts were inside, covered by a hard external casing, into other forms, such as ours, in which everything hard is interiorised as bone, cartilage, skeleton, while the soft is expressed as flesh, mucous membranes and skin" (74-75). And so those who love to fight via dialectics are "unevolved leftovers from a very ancient past" (75). But the "newcomers among us become gentle, wrinkle-bearing: we bear imprints" (75).

Skin as the four-fold

The skin thus becomes a site of the fourfold: "the skin receives the deposit of our memories and stocks the experiences printed on it" (75).

Knowledge

Knowledge too arises in these impressions, from the soul that "has a kind of softness … a softness strong enough to resist circumstances or to seek them out boldly when the opportunity arises" (75). "We learn nothing, really, except what marks the wax, which is soft and warm but cold enough for the tracing to endure, adaptive to the point of death but stopping short of it" (75-76).

The brain, it seems, is "a local concentration of this place of knowledge. The thinking I quivers along the spine, I think everywhere" (76).

Bergson

Serres presents Bergson as the thinker of varieties: first, "discrete varieties", but more importantly, "continuous varieties" (76) like the paint on a palette or "shades of modesty or emotion on the skin" (76).

Bergson claimed that the former were a function of space, and only the latter of time and "intuition" (76), which is the domain of philosophy. But this shows "the limits of his intelligence" (76). For "topology has never stopped exploring spaces, trailing community in its wake" (76). It is not obvious why "the continuous should be alien to them" (77).

Leibnizian calculus

The Leibnizian idea of calculus suggests the insertion of increasingly granular slices between points, a "third point" or "third man" between two previous points (77). This needs to be repeated infinite times.

But Serres looks to topologize even the insertion of this middle point. Where exactly do we place it? And is the point itself a "thread or a plane" (77)? What "inclination will be given to the plane" (77)? It is not intuitive to answer any of these questions: "this situation also deploys a great multiplicity or variety of paths or ways crossing this thread or space" (77). "Indeed, at every level at which the question is again posed, the choice of the intermediary situation of the new seed can take place in a different dimension" (77).

<u>The topology of a weave</u>

The complexity of the placement of any middle point is intuited by "women" (77) who are dress-makers, spinners, knitters or weavers, returning to the image of the complex tangles on the underside of a tapestry. "Since many braids and curls are involved, an inextricable tangle presents itself. Metric measurement and its rigidity, so often confused with rigour, disappear" (78).

The topology of a tapestry or weave shows that "distinction is distinguished from distance, the number of ways from here to there increases inexorably, and the paths overlap" (78). When we appreciate the depth, the dimensionality, of a weave (by looking at the underside), we realise that the tapestry is not flat, straight or simple, but has a topology: "knots and weaving gave us a topological description of touch by supposing it to be made up of one-dimensional threads and intertwining them" (144).

We must relearn this topology for our own bodies: we must be taught "a rigour different from that of a wooden automaton" (78).

If we seek to make increasingly granular slices in order to ascertain a calculus, as described above, we might cut a line or a knot above the weave, but forget the complexity that lies underneath. "Separation ignores the knot or tangle that lies behind the tapestry" (78). "To be sure, the tapestry displays a sort of discrete mosaic, but to analyse it properly it would be necessary to undo by hand the tangled threads behind. What a job it would be to separate out this mixture!" (78). Thus, connection precedes the cut.

<u>Medium and mixture</u>

"Mixture is a more accurate term than medium. Medium, too geometrical, is minimally useful: a centre in a volume, when it is reduced to an intersection, or the volume itself, when its tendency is to surround. A point or totality, singular or almost universal. A contradictory and inflexible concept" (80).

The movement here parallels that of sugar dissolving in water (and image from Bergson). The idea of a "medium" suggests that of sugar particles being suspended in the water, and therefore extractable. But "a mixture is not easily analysed … the continuous is unanalysable at any given moment, and so are mixtures" (79):

> There are only varieties tied or bound by soft or hard, cobweb-thin or thick bonds, knots that analysis undoes with ease or difficulty. This situation is better described as a mixture than a medium. (79)

A "mixture is abstract, dense, homogenous, almost stable, concentrated; a mixture fluctuates" (80). The medium creates "classes", but the mixture results in "hybrids" (81).

Serres' idea of "mixture" is equivalent to that of the "veil" (rather than a solid perimeter), "skin" (rather than contact with the world through panoptic sight), and "body" (rather than tongue) (79). The purpose of his philosophy of mingled bodies is to foreground "mixture and the concept of variety, both immediate in the rich, complex, vibrant experience of the senses and, unparadoxically, more abstract than the simple, inverse operations of analysis" (167).

<u>The development of the body</u>

The human body develops as a mixture. "The organism forms a gigantic knot with as many dimensions as one could wish" (80). It begins in the form of an embryo, "with one or more sheets, folded, pleated, rolled, invaginated" (80). And as the body emerges and grows "it traces a variable path between the things of the world, changing like a piece of seaweed in the depths of the water, a thousand and one exchanges and signals" (80).

The body can never be revealed as having some inner core; it is mixture all the way down: "there is no thing under the veil, nor does the woman dance under her seven veils, the dancer herself is a complex of fabrics. Nudity reveals more pleats and wrinkles. Harlequin will never arrive at his last costume. He undresses infinitely. There are always more peacock marks, ocelli and tattoos" (82).

1.10 Mixture, Unveiling

Skin

Once again, skin is the site in which mixture with the world takes place: “in it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and felt, it defines their common edge” (80).

The skin does not trade in “measurement” (81); it is “more topological than geometrical” (81).

Knowledge by touch

Our model of knowledge must be based on the idea of topology, weaving and skin: “it can be said that fabrics, textiles and material provide excellent models of knowledge: the world is a heap of clothes” (83).

The blind man thus has excellent knowledge available to him: “pure touch gives access to information, a soft correlate of what was once called the intellect” (84).

2. BOXES

2.1 Healing at Epidaurus

The experience at Epidauris

Epidaurus was a small *polis* named for the Argolid Epidauris, the son of Argus. It was believed to be the birthplace of Apollo’s son Asclepius the healer. Epidaurus was known for its sanctuary situated about five miles from the town, as well as its theatre.

The theatre at Epidaurus is famed for its acoustics; from the air it looks like “a question mark on the sky’s axis, visible from passing planes, an immense ear bathed in the precisely tuned acoustic properties of the amphitheatre” (85). Note how one sense (hearing) is always framed in terms of another (here, sight from above).

Serres feels a sense of healing (for which the *polis* was famous in the ancient world) insofar as the peace and silence of the theatre “calms the turbulent noise of my body” (85). “My organs fall silent – health returns. Illness comes upon me when my organs can hear each other. Silence in the great theatre, in the capital of hearing” (85). Thus, health, as represented by the god Asclepius, comes when the “thousands of messages” bombarding the skin are “quietened” and then “slowly erased” (85).

This calming is a function of leaving behind noise, rather than perpetuating it through further words: “we are healed better by leaving noise behind, than by diving into language” (85).

Crowd

Horror! A crowd of tourists enter the scene, with their noisy presence. They are “encased in a shell of language, and then in a rumbling outer hull which precedes, flanks and follows them like the prow, sides and stern of a bulky ship” (86). The “sea” (the space around them) is displaced by their noise, just like the water is displaced around a vessel (86). They are “immersed in the social ship” (86).

In fact, as they move through the space, “the group moves on, trailing a long train of language behind it” (86). The image returns us to that of the plane view from above.

They introduce “din” (86).

Serres queries the nature of their experience and what they “learnt” from their visit. “What did they really see?” (86). They heard lots of noises, emitted from their own group, but “what did they really see?” (86). Or rather, what did they see “that they did not already know from their language-memory?” (86).

They are living in a world of “knowledge”, in “sects and libraries” (86). They partake of the idea that “the world is given to us at the outer hull of language” (86). But Serres bemoans that they do not have a real, embodied connection to the place.

Can we break free from this crowd to secure a true experience of the world? For “being enclosed in a group condemns us to language and language alone, since even social silence produces it” (88). “Being enclosed in language stops us from seeing that the noise it makes veils and overwhelms the things which compose our world, and causes them to vanish” (88). The real world is easily “frightened off” (88) by our noise.

True experience of the world

By contrast, in the silence once again, Serres understands that "the given comes upon you like a state of grace. Evanescent spirit, lightness scudding through the limpid air … the given approaches me quietly. I listen" (87).

The silence of the crowd and of the performer

It becomes clear that the silence that Serres himself experiences is not necessarily absence of noise. To have viewed a performance originally in this amphitheatre might have meant hearing a word from the stage or even music from an orchestra: the silence he is referring to is what overtakes the audience as they view, such that "the assembled throng heals itself by listening to its own harmony, observing it in silence, nestled inside the immense marble ear" (87). In fact, what the assembled crowd hears is "its own social contract" (87).

The actors and musicians are skilled at inculcating and curating, even "detonating" (87) this sense of peace. They facilitate the silence of the crowd, such that "the gathering hears and recognises itself through a word that emanates from its own silence" (87). This must be a different sort of speech or noise from the "language" of the tourists: "what is said is cancelled out between the two large, heavy blocks of stillness and peace, its cause and its consequence" (87).

The applause breaks the silence; "the gods are broken into tiny pieces in the palms of our hands" (87).

Attentiveness

What Serres' experience in the silence of the theatre produced, then, is a "distance" that produces "attentiveness" (88).

This distance "is needed for the flighty given to reveal itself in all its timidity" (88). Or, to put it another way, attentiveness to the world out-there comes as we remove ourselves from all that distracts us from sensing real objects in the world, which is especially the "din" of language: "I give a chance to the given, which the collective ruckus expels: I give a chance to those senses anaesthetized by language" (89). "This is the healing I seek from the god Asclepius on a winter morning: not just the silence of my organs, in harmony with the silence around me, but even more than that, the silencing of language within me" (89).

> Unspeaking, I go toward silence, towards health. I open myself up to the world. The sensitive, delicate, receptive, refined feeler detects another echo and withdraws hastily, waits, observes, unsteady, outweighed by the mass of language, like a rarely-extended antenna, waits for the unexpected, recognises the unrecognizable, expectant in the silence. (93)

The ear is the ideal organ for this "distance". By projecting one's range of hearing to near or far, to the distant world out-there or to the inner-thoughts of the mind, it is as if "I can put it out of the window or project it far away, hold it distant from the body" (94).

Being alone

Thus, "the given is only given to us beyond this first threshold: that of living alone" (88).

- This is practised by hermits and "reclusive scholars" (88), "those who are simply attentive" (88), who intentionally secure for themselves a "distance" (88) so as to be attentive.

- It is like the act of a hunter: we wait attentively in order for "the observed world to come to us" (88).

Being alone is the paradigm of scholarly work and research too. "If you should come together in the name of research, all research will flee" (88). If "the word descends in your midst, all focus will evaporate" (88). This is because scholarly and research groups surround themselves in "din" in exactly the same way as the group of tourists do in Epidauris: "groups surround themselves with a compact wall of language" (88).

Two steps of attentiveness

Thus, there are two steps by which the given can be given to the senses (89):

1. The threshold of "solitude and silence" (89).
2. Followed by a "stepping outside of language" (89), which Serres equates with this activity of distant attentiveness.

Socrates

Serres uses Socrates as an example of the "din":

- His language defined him, even at the very point of death: "he would not stop talking, right up to the moment of death" (91). "Already half cold under the effect of the pharmaceutic draught, the hero is prostrate in the centre of

the orchestra, humming with language" (92). This entices those around him: "Language dictates. We are addicted" (92). In a sense, his death validated all the words he spoke during his life: "the death of Socrates shuts down his language and at the same time validates it, endorses it" (101). And "death" validates all other discourses that are similarly built on analytic certainty today: "Hiroshima is the foundation of contemporary science, just as the death of Socrates is the foundation of modern philosophy, just as the death of the world is the foundation of the very language which makes us human" (101).

- In fact, language did not only spew from his mouth with great authority, but language condemned him; after all, the words "*Socrates addictus*" were his verdict (95). In a sense, he was condemned by the words of judge, but also by his own words (95).

- Since the poison worked from the feet upwards, Socrates' mouth was one of the last things to be silenced, but after that there were his eyes: sight is linked to this garrulousness: "what do you see, you who are drunk on words? I see your sight, still and empty" (91).

- This outward-facing "din" of words/ sight is like a drug on anyone who relies on it: "if we always talk, then we suffer: drugged, anaesthetized, addicted, under the edict of language. Drunk on words, as once one was said to be drunk on God" (93).

- This primacy of Socrates' language is linked to a commitment to analysis: Socrates was one who "eyes were always riveted on categories, heaven and hell" (93). And this categorization is linked to the confidence to make strong statements about the soul and its afterlife. They "promise each other a better future in Hades" (92). But in reality, "the prison of speech leads to hell, or to the ideal heaven" (92).

- This language then gets applied in various acts of religion, law and performance: "it is an act of faith, an act of law and an act upon a stage" (101).

<u>Looking outside of oneself</u>

Serres uses the image of language as a series of battlements guarded by watchmen (94). We must dare to peep over, "gripping the battlements and leaning out through the crenulations, unbalancing into vertigo, ecstatic … First stability, then existence" (94).

Serres' own activity, resting on the stone steps in the theatre in Epidaurus, is an example of this daring: "patient watchman, upright, searching for a peephole, crack, fissure, hole, window in the densely-packed wall of language, motionless watchman bent under the chaotic weight of night, waiting for dawn, occasionally ravished by the sight of this wordless dawn exploding out of nowhere along the breadth of the horizon, thirty-thousand feet above the ground" (93). Rather than spewing forth words, we are "the subject of language and memory" (94). This is an instability that contrasts with the (apparent) stability of the Socratic subject:

> By extending myself precariously I exist, outside of the stability where the other subject remains asleep or dead. (94)

The self must exit the self in order to exit the forms of language that are given to it, "the sum of the mother tongue, the collective, the undefined set of others" (94) (in this case, represented by the crowd at Epidaurus). "I only really live outside myself; outside of myself I think, meditate, know; outside of myself I receive what is given, enduringly; I invent outside of myself. Outside of myself, I exist, as does the world. Outside of my verbose self, I am on the side of the world" (94).

The French word for "addicted" perhaps gives a sense of this mode of giving oneself to the world: "*adonné*" (95).

Serres links this ecstatic experience to the revelation of the Gospel: "Ah! Good news! Our humiliated bones are exultant, our flesh has become sensitized" (95)

<u>Ancient paradigm for philosophy</u>

Socratic language, the words spewing from his mouth and the words the brought down his condemnation, become the paradigm for all subsequent philosophical analysis: "it is not the case that philosophy becomes involved in questions of law and justice, where speech is action, at the end of the eighteenth century. It does so from its Platonic beginnings. Since that time, it has enjoyed saying that to say is to do; it loves speaking about language" (95).

But with his death, we are left with the words of the "judge" (96), the one whose words have actual power to determine life and death. And then comes along the "praetor" (magistrate) with equally actualised powers of pronouncement, "*do, dico, addico*" (97). The third term here seems to sum up the first two: the cycle of giving and saying somehow degenerates into "addiction" (98), "the addiction and synthesis of language and the given" (98).

Philosophy really takes its cue from these legal figures, even more than from Socrates, insofar as it claims this absolute authority to have the last word, to dispose of truth in language: "since philosophy enters the tribunal, it has put itself into a position to act – to kill. It has in fact killed millions. By what right?" (96)

Thus, there is an ancient paradigm including dictator, general, praetor, philosopher, all of whom "remain idealistic, everything in the world seems to transpire according to their representations of it" (101). Others in this lineage include "the rigorous scientists, the scrupulous historian, even the priest" (101).

Serres' philosophy of the mingled seeks to get behind this identification of saying with power, of words with law, to get "before the foundation of knowledge, or of law and approbation, even before the foundation of speech" (99).

Soothsaying

There is another role behind even these: the "seer", the "haruspex" of birds in Roman times. "The dictator talks, the general commands, the praetor pronounces and endorses the law, the philosopher speaks, but the soothsayer listens and sees, before the king, dictator, preator or philosopher can speak. He comes before speech, in silence" (101).

The soothsayer watches the flight of birds. Thus, he is attentive to the movements of the world that take place before language. "Philosophers mock them, but I admire the rituals of augury, the close attention that haruspices pay to the meaning that traverses or resides in the world, prior to our intervention, whether physical or spoken; the very first observation, wherein perception proceeds the utterance or evaluation of languages" (100). Augury is a turning-to-the-world that takes place before the intrusion of language.

In a sense, this is just as legitimate a power as that of the philosopher, judge or magistrate: the random flight of birds is just as good a foundation for a *logos* as any they claimed: "birds do not speak, entrails say nothing, the flight of vultures leaves no writing on the sky" (100).

In fact, by merely "observing" a world without seeking to intrude into it, soothsayers are acting in the lineage of the most rigorous scientific method: "they are already acting like scientists" (102). For the meaning discovered by scientists "also presupposes a world removed from men and independent of them" (102). In fact, Serres speculates that the ancient books of augury "contained the ancient algorithm of our physics" (102).

Realism

Serres suggests these soothsayers were ancient "realists", which is a "proposition worth betting on" (102).

> I believe, I know, I cannot demonstrate that this world exists without us. Who would not rather take dictation from its formidable silence, joyously and in good health, then write under the judgment of some tribunal? (103)

2.2 Three Kinds of Audible

Three types of noise

1. *Noise within the body*: the hum of the inner workings of our physiology, "the primary source of noise is within the body, whose subliminal murmur our proprioceptive ear sometimes strains to hear: billion of cells dedicated to biochemical reactions" (106). Usually, this is managed by our bodies, the noise dampened by a succession of "rectifiers" (106), and so it is integrated into our lives as a "healthy silence" (106). But "when we do hear it, we call that audibility illness" (106). At death, it is as though "the harmony gives way" (107) and "my eardrums are punctured by the screaming flood" (107).

2. *The noise of the world*: "thunder, wind, surf, birds, avalanches, the terrifying rumbling that precedes earthquakes, cosmic events" (107). Likewise, this noise is managed, "resolved into information" (107) through the mechanism of the inner and outer ear. But also by other immunological mechanisms we erect all around us: "walls, cities, houses, monastic cells" (107).

3. *The noise of the collective*: the noisy tourists at Epidauris, this noise "surpasses the others by far, often to the point of cancelling them both out: silencing the body, silencing the world" (107). As described above, this sound is a "din", but it has the power to fill our consciousness: "sound, through its very ubiquity, unites space in its entirety and makes of it a single phenomenon perceptible to all, whereas sight always remains multiple" (108).

Pinara

Pinara was a large city of ancient Lycia at the foot of Mount Cragus and not far from the western bank of the river Xanthos.

By contrast with Serres' experience at Epidauris, this theatre seems to open not to the open world, as Greek theatres were wont to do, but rather seems to be nestled in a hollow, faced by a craggy wall of stone tombs: "ten thousand dead eyes watch

the ruins of the old city built on a hill below, watch over it, small and crumbling” (108). This is a “bewildering and constant vigil, death keeping watch over life, the time of history carrying on, beyond the extinction of history, beneath the unseeing and multiple gaze of eternity” (109). Thus, “under the oppressive sun of Asia Minor, Pinara is astonishing for its pure and abstract geometry: the theatre orients its pavilion towards the detailed rumblings of the lively city, although for the most part it is directed at what is broadcast in the background from a thousand shadowy mouths, tombs that blacken the tall, sombre cliff-face, the lingering moan of the dead still audible in the circus two thousand years after the death of the city” (110).

Serres takes this as emblematic of “enclosure by the social circus … one has the same form as the other, its scale model” (109). It almost is akin to the square or palazzo of a city.

And so, rather than hearing, this theatre fixates on seeing: “so simple, so banal, the circle is closed. Yet everyone seems to be fixated on *seeing*” (109). It’s as if the tombs in the wall-face are a reminder of the social contract that leads to death. And so “the more we immerse ourselves in this space, the more we see and the less we hear. And the more we withdraw from it, the less we see and the better we listen” (109).

And so a play performed on this stage must have been akin to hearing “echoes” (110): “the only echoes that come back from the mountains at Pinara are of social acclamation; we will no longer hear the howling of wolves in this place” (110).

Pinara provides a case-study of the types of noise listed above:

1. The rock-tombs, like little bodies, represent the noise of the body, constantly humming in the background: “our myriad cells shout out: a proprioceptive ear, often deaf, listens” (110). Each tomb is specifically linked to the idea of a “box” or “a series of boxes” (111), just as the body/ ear is a box through which the flow of noise coming from the body is processed

2. But each rock-tomb is clamouring to speak out its own story, its own death, and thus also represents the din of the social crowd: “thus does the group constantly send out and receive information about itself, its noises, wars and stories, crises and tragedies, its languages and its conditions, all in multiple cycles” (110). Their noise seems to become a “social contract” (111), “the circulation of a thunderous flux, meaningful or meaningless, the social contract?” (111)

Knowledge would only be constituted when a moment of distant attentiveness is secured from or in spite of these noises. This moment or cycle, “which beings with a rare attentiveness and requires turning a deaf ear to oneself and to the group, interrupting the closed cycles of consciousness and the social contract, might simply be called knowledge” (111).

2.3 Soft and Hard

<u>Road</u>

Serres cites the example of a road: when a road is in a state of disrepair it can either be repaired using hard labour and materials (hard) or its danger can be averted by the simple erection of a warning sign (soft).

“The former is measured on the entropic scale, the latter on the informational scale. The former is manual, the latter digital. It is the latter that is preferred by philosophers, who love signs and words, icons and notices, language, writing” (112).

<u>Breaking through language via the body</u>

Our philosophies of language have reigned supreme in recent years, even over phenomenology. “The philosopher of language would like everything to stay soft. Let him build, let him navigate, let him break stones, let him abandon for a while his rigorous languor, his felt, his logic and his fleecy lining” (117).

Is there a way to circumvent it? “Hoping for a return to the things themselves, it was my naïve wish to hear, see, visit, taste, caress, smell; to open myself to the given. How can we do this without also saying it?” (112). Is there a way to access the things themselves apart from language?

The answer is: through our bodies. For whilst bodies are certainly the site of language (soft), they are also in contact with the world of hard things: “our bodies live in the world of hardware, whereas the gift of language is composed of software” (113). Our body, “warm, powerful, resistant and therefore hard, an object on the entropic scale, mingles its hardness with the softness of small-scale energies: information first, meaning and language last” (115).

For example, the eye will recoil from staring at the sun. But the body senses too that nothing will be burned by language: “tacitly, the body understands the softness of meaning, and that one’s retinas are never burned out by discourse, one’s back not broken, one’s skin not flayed” (113). “Our bodies are aware of this discrepancy, or more precisely, live as though they understand it, or even better still, *survive* because they understand it” (113).

In a sense, then, our senses understand and exploit this distinction between the hard and the soft: “it is through the sensible that the body recognises the interval between the two and the direction in which we are carried” (113).

The softness of modernity

There are so many soft signs in the world today that it can be hard for the average person to be exposed to the hard. In fact, Serres speculates that we are on the verge of permanently transitioning from hard to soft: “at what point on this path do we leave behind hardness for permanent softness? When? The time is not far off for us” (115).

This change will not come through screens alone, not through merely thinking about the world out-there: “empiricism is not enough to wake us from this new sleep, we need an eruption, a large-scale cosmic event, a major cyclone, a new Hiroshima” (114).

Here, Hiroshima is cited as the event which work Serres up to the hard world of things.

Thus, the real world can give a sharp jolt to the average moderner: “it would seem that there are two kinds of given: one is gentle, conveyed by language, a suave kingdom, satin-smooth, syrupy, soft, exquisite, logical and exacting; the other is unpredictably hard, a mixture of hard and soft, giving no warning before waking us with a slap in the face” (114).

The body as intermediary

The body is in contact with both worlds, the hard and the soft, “it mingles soft and hard and thereby produces and receives the same mixture. A state in the middle of this process or progression” (115). It is a kind of “filter” (115). And the issue of “knowledge” is located “somewhere in the range it encompasses between hardness and softness, this portioned, compartmentalised distance, strewn with obstacles, twists and turns, and clear pathways” (115).

Serres is most interested in this “mingling” (116) of soft and hard, as filtered by the body.

Hard language

Although language is an obstacle to the givenness of the world, it can itself also be a means of introducing the hard into the soft, for example when language “blows, thunders and shreds us with its screeching” (116). Soft though it may be, words can “sill over to the hard scale of entropy” (116).

2.4 Passages

The religious “voice” of the world

A walk to the deserted hamlet of Pratz-Balaguer in the western Pyrenees gives Serres the chance to listen to silence.

Or rather, to the periodic rustling of poplars in the wind, “the merest stirring of barely perceptible currents, background noise. Music – no, nor rhythm, nor noise; might this be the voice of God?” (118). By dint of being “far from the collective”, our “body perceives the divine” (118). Serres calls this the “religion of the world” (118), which is always and endlessly chased away by the “religion of the collective” (118).

“What did this divine voice say?” (119). It gave us the “palette” on which an infinite number of shades and colours combine and make themselves available, “the interplay from which tones are drawn to the surface, the inaccessible totality of meanings” (119).

The social “noise” of humanity

The religious “voice” of the world is crowded out by the noise of the social world. Or, to be more accurate, we have silenced the noise of the world through the din of human-orientated chat, and so have the freedom to listen only to ourselves: “ours is an age without trumpets. We can now receive the gift of language, because we have silenced the world” (119).

Serres contrasts this to his father and brother, both shy people, who nevertheless had to raise their voices to be heard above the din of the stone-crushing machinery with which they worked (119).

Music

Serres proposes a three-level typology:

1. At the basic level, there is chaotic “noise”, the world of “hard” noise.
2. The next level is that of “music”, which is a knitting together or rhythm of this chaos.
3. This provides the platform out of which language, sense and meaning, all that is “soft”, can emerge.

> The transcendental dimension of our communications is woven from music … Beneath language, this layer of music covers the chaos that precedes it with universality. Language needs music, its essential condition; music has no need of language. Music needs noise, its essential condition; noise has no need of music. The latter softens the jagged edges of the tumult; suddenly, music is so undifferentiated it can no longer carry any specific meaning, but carries all, and none. Thus do the Muses guard the corridor of universals, the mandatory universal passage between noise and meaning. (123)

This layer of music undergirds all language, or all language that has sense makes reference to it: “beneath language, all languages, universally so, music lives beneath meaning and before it, its pre-condition and its physical medium” (123).

Ulysees

Ulysees represents a character who bypasses and avoids the musical layer. He passes through the sirens’ “noise” lashed to the mast, with wax in the ears of his crew. “Here, directly ahead, is the Siren’s pass. Ulysees enters it, but cleverly avoids it too. Once again, he becomes no-one: he slips in, immobile, lashed to a mast, in the wake of his sailors who swim through the choppy waters, their ears sealed with balls of warm wax” (122).

He is heir to Leibniz’ monadology, “Homer has anticipated Leibniz” (125):

- He traverses the path without opening himself up to the “noise” of the world; he “cheats by suppressing all noise, danger or temptation” (122); he “suppresses all noise” (126), and in doing so opens up a means to deliver pure information to his crew.

- He himself becomes a sort of master of what others (those on his ship) can receive, the Leibnizian “god”, dictating what makes it through chaos and into the realm of understanding: “God-Ulysees has already dictated everything that will follow to his monad-sailors” (125). The sailors follow his pre-set instructions for navigation; “they receive nothing at all from the deafening world of the Sirens” (125).

In fact, “Leibniz presupposed a world without noise, his solution required no effort, for him the universal rested with God” (126). But, in fact, the movement of his monads through space and time requires some understanding of this other dimension, their “transcendental condition” (127).

Black box

This middle zone is a “black box”, for an input goes in (from the realm of chaos) and a stable output, “information, and even meaning” (129) comes out. “We do not know sensation, but we might as well say it occupies this black box” (129). For “a black box is ignorance, interrupting a chain of knowledge or creating a void in a transparent volume” (138).

Music and philosophy

The task of philosophy is to key-in to this middle zone: “music precedes philosophy; no one can give themselves over to the latter without passing through the former” (127). For “as there is in fact noise, philosophy is obliged to invent a solution bound to Orpheus, just as Leibniz is bound to Ulysees” (126).

Skin

Our skin is this middle zone; “sensation has the same status as music” (129):

> Our skin, hot and strong, defends us quite fiercely, but at the same time, warm and delicate, gives itself over gently to be tattooed with one thing and another, and with its own emotions. We listen to the whole, double-sided musical variety with our whole, similarly double-skin. (128)

Orpheus

By contrast with Ulysees, the "hero, composer Orpheus" (126) is a character who mediates this middle level though his music; he "precedes him [Ulysees] bravely, confronting the problem and resolving it with music" (122); "he rushes, defenceless, towards the beasts and the women, into the breakers, attempts the maximal, dangerous, spendthrift solution, the solution that produces music" (126). Orpheus represents "composition" that "confronts the noise of beasts and invents harmony in close proximity to their song; the music that issues forth always carries within it the trace of the screeching that preceded, heralded and inaugurated it" (126). Thus, he signals "the comprehensive integrality which music propagates across space, the once rare harmonization of non-integrable elements; a fragile summation" (138).

This is demonstrated by his moving to the realm of the Underworld, a realm of "risk" (131), to play his music and to bring Eurydice back to the world. He "takes risks, not wanting to leave as he came, but wanting more: energy, a body" (131).

By calling her and bringing her back, it is as if he is making hard what was soft. It is almost an act of **incarnation**: "voices make the name flesh, delivers words from death, lights dispels the darkness, music adds flesh, hardens what is soft: how far does incarnation go" (132).

To move from soft to hard is the "supreme achievement", to "give life to speech" (133):

- It is an act of "creation, trying to break through to the world itself" (133).
- It is akin to the labour of birth, being "ripped from the protective sheath of dreams, extracted from the blanket of sleep" (134).
- And this in turn is likened to the story of the ship that began the book, "emerging with a start from the warm, dark cabin, emerging from these holes by jolting painfully form one section to another" (134).

His failure is a sign of the difficulty of "climbing back in the opposite direction, the vertical path towards life, creation or incarnation" (133).

2.5 Cells

Failed receptivity

Human beings are good at transmitting, but not at receiving: "whether we are dealing with a black box or the very simple scenario linking a transmitter to a receiver, the pole which perceives or feels is encased in a series of black boxes" (139).

How, then, does the human body or skin receive the manifold of data coming to it from the world? In fact, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that "sensation is organized, or trapped by us, within, by and through a similar set of embodied models" (140). We are constantly creating "cells", boxes to try to control a particular output from a specific input:

> We create boxes in order to hear, we connect our ear to a conch to hear the sound of the sea, we build spaces with the express purpose of listening, or hearing each other: town squares, vaults, walls, churches, theatres, narrow passageways, alleys, ears of stone. We favour echoes and rhymes. (140)

We create nothing but "capture reception" (140) out of the data that comes to us. Serres calls this "reception structured as self-transmission", because its purpose is to "tame the unfamiliar, just as we repeat new words to ourselves in order to assimilate them" (140).

Writing

This is a risk to the very enterprise that Serres sets out to achieve: "the objection destroys my book and any hope of describing reception" (140).

Abstract receiver

But at the same time, it puts a first foot forward on the path to a new task, "constructing something we might call an abstract receiver" (140).

The abstract receiver is not that which formats data by means of one sole black-box, thus gaining control; rather, it is that which accepts the abstraction necessarily associated with sense perception and multiplies it. It stacks up black-boxes in black-boxes. For "reception occurs in a configuration in which input, which is mobile, is highly susceptible to feedback" (140). The data that comes in takes the form of "captive energies that are lobbed back and forth" (140).

The concept of the abstract receiver captures this:

- This has already been described in relation to touch, for “touch involves local patches activated or created by contact and brought together into an ocellated fragment” (141). This is what painters such as Bonnard help us to see: “the painter makes us see through touch” (140). “Our skin receives by constructing these black boxes within its supple and flat surface” (141).

- But sound, too, can function by means of an abstract receiver. The ear can be understood as a black box, itself having “boxes within boxes” (141). The shape of the ear itself makes this point: “folds and structures in space, exquisite chiselled contours” (141). Its various elements – “inner, outer and middle ear, fossa triangularis, auditory canal, cochlea, vestibule” (144) and so on – have “folds, edges, mountains and valleys, passes, chimneys, tubes and lobes; architecture, landscape” (144). It is as if the physical shape of the ear is projecting “multiple networks or labyrinths” (141) into space. Just as the skin modelled this labyrinth in two dimensions, the ear does in three: “we find the same delicate outline of interlacing, corridors, screens, bottlenecks that defines the two-dimensional labyrinth of tattoos, but in three dimensions now, another vestibule of sound” (142).

- In fact, it’s as if the whole body is an ear, and all our sense reception takes the form of this ear-like abstract receiver: “we hear through our skin and feet. We hear through our skull, abdomen and thorax. We hear through our muscles, nerves and tendons. Our body-box, strung tight, is covered head to toe with a tympanum” (141). In a way, “our whole posture is linked to our sense of hearing” (142).

<u>Labyrinths as a method</u>

This idea of the abstract receiver, of labyrinths, of the reception of data by black boxes within black boxes, represents an entirely different “discourse on method” (143).

For this method allows us to “optimize” (143) the journeys we take through the world.

- The labyrinth is associated in the tradition with the idea of “death, despair and madness” (143).

- By contrast, epistemological method is usually characterised by straightness: “the discourse on method finds ease in shortness, simplicity in speed, prefers the minimum. Metric theory and its method will thus always seek to escape from the labyrinth by optimal means, in the briefest time, via the shortest path” (143).

- However, “the maze is in fact the best model for allowing moving bodies to pass through while at the same time retracing their steps as much as possible; it gives the best odds for finite journeys with unstructured itineraries” (143). Mazes maximise feedback; they provide the longest possible route to achieve a short journey. This mode of repetition is “the best possible method for all kinds of reception” (143). “Excellent reception, here is the best possible resonator, the beginnings of consciousness” (143).

<u>Labyrinths and sensation</u>

It is not surprising then that labyrinths “are often to be found in sensation” (143), for example in the figure of the ear. “The summation of hearing, hard and soft, box of transmitter-receiver boxes, runs the course of the labyrinth thus described, quickly and over long, difficult passageways; a labyrinth which produces the maximum number of cycles” (150).

<u>The ear as mediating hard to soft</u>

Through the mediating work done by the ear, this labyrinth, “the hard becomes soft” (145).

- There is a necessarily protective element to this mediation: “without it, our bodies would explode from the screeching attacks of the Bacchantes, would disintegrate like Eurydice” (145). Serres likens this to the creation of new layers or coats; we can flee backwards into another layer if and when we need to, “rather as a thief who has been nabbed might shed his jacket into the hands of his captor and run” (150). This is Harlequin-like behaviour, “discarding his old costumes and skins” (150).

- But we have to realise this mediation, that we are living inside a house and not in the hard world: “the house functions as a space of transformation where forces are calmed, like a high energy filter or converter. Outside reigns harsh spring or unrelenting dawn, inside is the dream space of calm pictures which do not hinder conversation, inside the space of language is created” (146).

<u>Philosophizing in the soft world</u>

The philosopher must understand that he or she is philosophizing from within this house: “in such a house the philosopher writes and thinks and perceives” (146).

- *Philosophy can neglect the alterations made on reality by this apparatus*. Thus, like Merleau-Ponty, the philosopher sees an apple tree in flower in the garden. But "he forgets the window, the alcove, the curtains, the opaque or translucent glass and, depending on whether he lives in the north or south, the sash or casement window" (146). "The philosopher holds forth about sensation, yet he inhabits it already, dwelling in a kind of sensation, a part of his house as the pupil is part of his eye" (147).

- *Philosophy can forget the necessity of mediation through this apparatus*. Thus, "the empiricist" is astonished by the number of veils or skins that separate us from the outside world, "boxes within boxes" (148). Is this not to some degree protective? "The house transforms the given, which can assault us, softening it into icons: it is a box for generating images, a cavern or eye or camera obscura, a barn which sunlight only illuminates with a slim shaft piercing through the dust – an ear" (148). Thus, the house in which the philosopher sits is another black box, scrambling but also enhancing the signal, "second skin, enlarging our sensorium. Still a box, but now an eye also" (147).

<u>The soul</u>

At the bottom of the boxes we construct, and the layers we hide behind, something is down there, "the dancing flame or instance we might easily call the soul" (150). The soul is the box-constructer, the ever-fleeing-one.

The soul is thus "the white doll at the end of a sequence of black boxes, final instance" (151). It escapes our desire to know it, because it is always behind a veil, "singing joyfully, protected, immortal" (151).

But at death, it faces its own reality: "when the final assault comes, it slips away, true to its usual strategy, once more triumphant, but has failed naively to see or feel that there was only one garment left, that the final barrier has fallen, shed at the moment of departure; at the instant of death the body surrenders the living, still thinking soul" (151).

3. TABLES

3.1 Animal Spirits

<u>The Bottle of 1947 Chateau d'Yquem</u>

The Château d'Yquem vineyard is located in the Sauternes region of Gironde. Appropriately for Serres' project of mingled bodies, its success stems largely from the site's susceptibility to attack by "noble rot".

Serres and his friend sit with this bottle in front of them. Later, he says: "friends attempt, passing from one to another, to plunge from word to body, from spiritual scents to the grey, stable, tranquil substance of things, and climb back up, through memory, from one feast to another, to the beginning: not, in search of sense, to the beginning of knowledge, but to the birth of our culture" (184).

The deep golden colour of the wine has the appearance of "straw in a barn" (152), thus linking to the description of sensory perception reaching through the barn given at the end of the chapter above (148, itself a reference to Verlaine's poem):

> *L'espoir luit comme un brin de paille dans l'étable.*
> *Que crains-tu de la guêpe ivre de son vol fou?*
> *Vois, le soleil toujours poudroie à quelque trou.*
> *Que ne t'endormais-tu, le coude sur la table?*

<u>Taste as "sapience"</u>

Taste is itself a form of knowledge. The wine as Serres looks at it standing there on the table has the "colour of intelligence and wisdom" (152).

This knowledge comes when the wine passes your lips: "before drinking good wine, we have never tasted wine, or smelled it, or known it, and have no chance of ever knowing it" (153). In fact, "knowledge cannot come to those who have neither tasted or smelled. Speaking is not sapience, the first tongue needs the second" (153).

Serres therefore refers to "sapience" and "sapidity" (153). This is a pre-reflexive phenomenon, something that occurs before rational (language-bound) thought. It is as if human beings, *homo sapiens*, are those who "react to sapidity, appreciate it and seek it out […] before referring to judgment, intelligence or wisdom, before referring to talking man" (153).

Serres contrasts "sapience" with "sensation". We usually suppose that knowledge comes through sensory intuition. But actually, rather than "sensation inaugurating intelligence", we find "more locally, taste institutes sapience" (154).

Animal taste

Sapience is a unique quality of *homo sapiens*. It differentiates us from the animals. Think of how "animals wolf down their food; but humans taste it" (154).

Second communion

The sensation of taste is like a "second communion" (152). The wine "awakens the second mouth, the second tongue, reveals it through this second communion" (153). It is as if the taster is born again or given a new identity, just as takes place in the reception of communion.

The relationship of taste with language

Words are to do with our mouths of course. Thus, language might appear to have a certain proximity to taste. But "soft words, dull and insipid" (153) are actually the opposite to the experience of taste: "they anaesthetize the mouth, which finds the zestiest conversation tasteless" (153). However sonorous, poetic or eloquent our words might happen to be, they "refrain from awakening the tongue to anything but themselves" (153).

In relation to the tasting of wine, we might even say that this first mouth would be more interested in the "information" transmitted by the label on the bottle (the "*etiquette*"): "the given is reduced to written language, painted on a panel" (157). Later, Serres refers again to this "small label" that is found on a cheap bottle of wine or even a fizzy drink: "everything printed on the external surface can be found within"; "drinking as analysis" (222).

Of course, containing the sensory depth of wine on a label like that is impossible: "if we had to set out what wine contains, […] the label would cover the bottle, the cellar, the vines and the surface of the countryside, mapping them all faithfully, point by point. Excellence opens up a descriptive sequence which we can imagine running on to infinity" (222).

This is because language is not in touch with the real world-out there like taste is: "fragrant flowers, the scent of the earth, the powerful fragrance of musk and skin" (153).

Taste has to be described. But, as we always find, words are inexact vehicle for describing taste. Taste actually overwhelms words (it is no coincidence that Serres describes the time in which he consumed the wine with his friend as taking place "in silence", 152).

And yet, because it inevitably has a proximity to words, taste is often undersold by language: "oppressed, too close to language, too much its twin or competitor, taste is rarely conveyed well" (153). It is often expressed in language "that provokes mirth" (153). And so "one mouth chases the other mouth, the mouth of discourse excludes the mouth of taste, expels it from discourse" (153).

Serres refers to this as "golden mouth" (cf. Chrysostom) overwhelming and taking over "the tasting mouth" (154):

> Take this wine: drink, taste – you must choose. If you merely drink it, you will keep only speech, language. If you taste it, it will give you your taste by giving you its taste, it opens a new mouth in you, this is the day of your second communion, prevented by the first. (155)

What makes taste different from sight/ language?

Try to describe a taste; "try to trace the geographic map of the tongue" (155).

It is not easy! "From where might we describe it? From near or far or middle distance, it always seems to shimmer like watered silk" (156).

This is no doubt because "smell and taste differentiate, whereas language, like sight and hearing, integrates" (156).

- The first mouth, the mouth of words, seeks to subsume difference under unity; it "stockpiles" things in the world in such a way as to use them to its convenience. Think of how "words pile up in dictionaries, food accumulates, frozen, in cold-rooms, like bank accounts" (156).

- But the second mouth, the mouth of taste, "integrates" (156); it spends or "expends" (156); it prevents subsuming things under a unity and reminds us of the dispersed reality that actually exists out there, like "delicate silk or a spider's web […] with neither stock nor total" (156).

Smell

In some ways, taste is "simple and rudimentary" (156); it can only make out four or five qualities such as "sweet, sour, acidic" and so on.

The sense of smell complements or even completes this: "[taste] depends on smell to achieve its festive richness" (156). And "so our sense of smell, champion among our sensations, and our taste, excellence in culture and refinement, bestow their rare treasure together, within a shared cycle" (156).

With these two together, the fan effect of the peacock's tail is once again observed: "a cornucopia emerges from nose and palate, odours and tastes spilling forth, the peacock's tail is displayed" (156).

A tour of the landscape

Serres waxes on the region of the lower Garonne, near the vineyard of Yquem. If the wine itself, its taste and smell, has the sensory effect of the peacock's tail, then the "ocellated fan" (156) can be seen also in the landscape itself, "a map of the area and an expanse of taste" (156).

Serres embarks on a tour of smells of the region, as if moving across this fan on foot, led by the nose. It is ambulatory and dispersed, so different from cutting through the landscape in a motorcar by road (157).

And then he enters the vineyard itself and examines its landscape. "If you pass through a vineyard as a blabbermouth might cross the sea, then you will see only green or red foliage, just as the other would see only water" (157). But the true connoisseur would "bed down and examine the furrows: earth or body, streaked, blended" (157). Even the apparently uniform rows are in fact "streaked, striped, composite" (157).

In fact, if you wanted to understand this landscape, you would have to "superimpose several maps: geological, pedological, viticultural" (158) and so on. Another image for this would be "an interleaved stack of atlases" (158). The earth itself is "a mingled body" (158).

Time and weather

The landscape, in all its fanned and ocellated glory, actually reveals different timescales. For at the moment you take and taste a wine, you are taking and tasting a whole history, a *temps*, each and every season the vineyard has experienced: "take this great wine, taste it, the map of its temperament will be traced on your tongue, the inimitable and singular facets of a particular season" (159). Wine is a hybrid function of many different times.

This idea is further reinforced by the apparently random order of good years: 45, 61 and 75: "the stochastic mixture of years by which we might read the different vintages of the Chateau d'Yquem over the last hundred years gives us a very different idea of that same history, once again drawing us a blended map" (159).

Mixture

To the eyes of reason and language, this mixture would appear to be random and confusing. But to the wine connoisseur, mixture is the whole point.

Wine itself is a mixture: "where is the Semillon in the Sauvignon? Identities are destabilised, their precise locations lost in ill-defined surroundings, contradiction itself hesitates in the face of confusion" (218).

Sagacity

If this first mouth is a supposed product of sensation, and the second mouth (taste) is sapience, then the "third mouth" (161), which is smell, is crowned by "sagacity" (163). Every banquet should be characterised by "sapience and sagacity; around the table, only sage tongues" (163).

Cooking

We are attracted by the smell of meat and other foods as they cook from raw. To stand in a kitchen or hearthside and observe the cooking process is almost to be "connected to knowledge" (165). "Empiricism takes refuge in the kitchen alongside the kitchen boys smeared with sauce, and the maids, saucy brunettes in white aprons" (230). But this "kitchen" life seems to lead to a sort of sacred or correct knowledge, as if the smell of cooking is pointing out a trajectory from untouchable to palatable and consumable. Palatable and consumable because it is mingled and not reduced: "in the kitchen it learns not to abhor impurity, puts its finger in the soup. It learns about mixtures" (230).

Serres links this to the sacred modus of religion: it is no coincidence that “the Last Supper did not consecrate grapes or wheat” (165); rather, it had to do with things that could be consumed, and thus enter our bodies.

Wine too “belongs to the order of the cooked: the peacock’s tail, in which each ocellus exalts an island that is simple by nature, raw in its elementary composition, comes together through cooking, is organised into a whole” (165-166).

It’s as if cooking brings out the mingledness that is implicit in the raw, but too tough or uncultured to savour: “cooking compacts, concentrates, reduces the given, makes it converge, the raw is made more abundant by cooking, the given goes from random chance, from flighty, improbable, inconstant circumstance to habit and compactness. Goes from diffuse, chaotic mixture to dense, ordered blend” (166). It is as if fire cements and solidifies the mixtures that Serres has been describing. This is especially the case when one knows how to cook well, as the French do: “our savoir-faire magnifies the given, which belongs to a suborder when raw” (166).

Analysis

Serres likens the difference between the raw and the cooked to the difference between analysis and synthesis (his own method): “analysis slices and dices raw; synthesis requires flame. As a result, the latter tends towards knowledge and culture; the former remains unrefined” (167).

When we understand the role and function of the senses, we understand that the input that comes from the world functions by means of “a more difficult and complex kind of abstraction than our traditional understanding of it” (167).

3.2 Memory

Air

Is there a neutral base from which we can discern the complex processes that the senses engage in?

Air might be a candidate; colourless, transparent, odourless, etc; “it is the medium for every signal that reaches our senses” (169).

Smell

Perhaps this is why smell is a unique sense.

- Sight, hearing, even taste more or less point out “singularities” (169).
- But smell is the sense that helps us identify singularity in and through variation. Think of how you can still detect a smell many years later in a very different times and contexts to when you first discerned it: “forms reappear, a harmonic line is reproduced, this is already a kind of knowledge, at least a frequent, recurring recognition” (170). Smell itself is blended, and so when that blend is repeated the sense of the original circumstances returns quickly: “suppose that a rare blend should appear a second time in the random turbulence of air, that this unique confusion should recur, improbably: the knot gathers in its threads, the apex pulls up its base, the tributary subsets burst forth as they intersect, a whole world rushes in” (170).

Smell as memory

The way that smell captures generalities in which singularities are embedded reminds us of memory: “our sense of smell slides from knowledge to memory and from space to time” (170).

Bouquet

The exhalation of a fragrance is called a “bouquet” (171): both a bunch of flowers and a perfumed fragrance. The idea of a bunch of flowers is apt to express this idea of smell as singularity in and through variation:

- The various stems are held together by twine or the neck of the vase: “bouquet expresses their intersection” (171). Thus, multiplicity is located at a specific, singular site.
- When this site is pressed, for example when the twine is gripped and the stems are pulled together, then there will be an output of sensory fragrance (171). This fragrance is not a function of one single stem, but of the bundle; thus, multiplicity.

Thus, “a bouquet forms a fragment of memory because of the impossibility of analysing mingled bodies” (171) (it is not reducible), but it nevertheless does have a local point of a sort (“a singularity reappears around the intricate intersection”, 171).

Love

Odour is vital in a love relationship: "we do not love unless our senses of smell find themselves in improbable accord, a miracle of recognition" (171).

For Serres, the love moment is precisely a bouquet: the multiplicity of two is gripped at a point of singularity with a sensory exhalation.

Soul

Serres identifies the soul with *ame*/ *anima*/ *anemos*, meaning "wind": "the wandering soul comes from where the wind comes from" (172). The sense of smell is thus a crucial indicator of the state of the soul, as it operates in the medium of the air/ wind. The soul is "the base line of the senses, carrier to all of them" (172).

So, to fall in love is to fall in love with another "soul":

> I love your light, subtle, vaporous, turbulent, chaotic soul, I love that it penetrates your skin, your ears, that it reigns over your skin. Tell me the difference between the soul and wind. (172)

The Eucharist

The Last Supper is an event we repeat and commemorate.

At the heart of the story is a "crater of blended liquids" (177). Serres uses this idea as a basis to re-envisage it:

- He imagines the process of passing the chalice around the table. Each recipient becomes both "a station" and "an engine of circulation" (176). The chalice is a quasi-object, tracing the relationships between the apostles, "carrying, weaving, objectivising what unites the group, the twelve" (176). And it creates quasi-subjects of all the disciples, their individual identities now being less important than the blend of the group (their identities are as it were lost in the chalice by means of the backwash). "The subjects become relationship, the relationship becomes subject through the intermediary of the object, of this, the wine" (176). It is no wonder they have a name ("disciple") that means "sent forth, gone elsewhere, dispatched, banished" (178).

- The repetition of the ceremony is therefore a re-enactment of "this unstable, never quite substantial collective, always in its death throes on Friday, in all its glory on Sunday" (177).

- Peter, the rock, is perhaps a different case; because he is to become the "institution", one who signifies something in the future, "the only one who represents" (176). He is the one who insists on becoming a "subject", a "statue": Peter, commander, leader, always rises from the grave to kill John, who submits out of love" (178). This is a metaphor for the hegemony of analysis over flow. "Peter, the stable rock, kills John, time" (178).

- At its heart, the event is about fraction and division. This reminds us of the cut of analysis: "the bread is broken or analysed into as many individuals" (177). Perhaps this is what we commemorate: "no-one has ever forgotten an act of partition, separation, rupture" (177). But the fraction of the bread is complemented by the flow of blood (and the flow of other liquids throughout the Gospel accounts). With these flows, we remember time itself: "time: flowing currents of water, wine, blood flowing and blending. Memory is ensured by this multiple passage and because of this confusion" (178).

The Eucharist is a memorial, and memories remind us of flow, and flow reminds us of time: "time itself carries memories. It flows like currents, those rivers which pass by, stop, return upstream, or divide time, or flow into one another" (178).

The flow of time

Time, like rivers, can be stopped, obstructed or slowed. When this occurs, human beings have the opportunity to "stockpile" (179):

> Power, before using it; dry-cell and storage batteries; dams. Money: bank accounts, insurance, capital. Codes: libraries, computer memory, data banks. Food: cold rooms for meat or fruit, grain silos, cool, dark cellars. Sperm, oocytes, embryos. (179)

These are little accumulations of power: "they allow us to access power and not waste our time in continual action" (179).

But this would be a little like taking from a bottle of wine just one flavour. This is not how a banquet works! "Like our body, the table is a constellation of small accumulations, amphora and craters, bottles, glasses, plates" (180). In fact, "the body resembles the table, and the banquet love" (180).

Bodies thus are subject to this flow of time:

- Our bodies are studded with "small memory pockets, where time hardly flows or stops altogether, unconscious; intermediary stockpiles likes glasses and bottles, and larger banks, where it can remain frozen forever" (180). The human testicles are one example: hanging down, in a cool place, like a bottle of wine kept in a cellar (not at the banqueting table): "banks of potential beings" (180). For these to become actualised, there must be a love encounter, like the bottle being brought up from the cellar and consumed, "to dive back into the current of time" (181).

- The same is true of philosophy, which is also studded with memory pockets in the form of books and encyclopedias, and all the apparatus of preserved memory.

Banquet

All this is figured as a banquet. The "speaking, feeling and loving tongues" seated there are offered a bottle of wine. This bottle represents the multiplicity of time and space that Serres has been describing above: "they approach the vessel in which the liquid rests, where confusion sleeps, where time accrues and from which memory comes" (181).

Although this bottle has been "imprisoned for an age", as soon as it touches their lips "a genie escapes" (181). The bottle is like Pandora: "the given in its entirety gushes forth from the horn of plenty" (181).

- This "Pandora's box" is reminiscent of the black boxes that have figured so prominently in the preceding chapter.

- But, in a contrast with black boxes, this is a box "without sides"; moreover, "it is the world", that is, "it contains the given in its entirety" (181). It is a box therefore that we must seek to open.

Myth

Myth, not reason, is the best method to think about the senses: "the attention given to the senses, respectfully, in their own right and not as embryonic, inchoative knowledge differentials, is best expressed through myth" (183). "The logos cannot express the attention we pay to the senses" (183).

Serres lists: "Hermes, Pandora or fairy tales; Cinderella, the unicorn; or the arts: Orpheus, the muses; or religion" (183). Note the place for religion in this list.

> There is nothing in the senses which does not lead to culture.
> Not towards knowledge, but culture.
> Not towards discourse, but towards what? (184)

What is a bottle of wine? "This transubstantiation of material energy into signifying scents, into spirit", a "concentrating or summing up of the gifts of the world, all that it has given", which when consumed "invades each person's body and circulates through the collective body, like blood that burns, flows and pulses" (184).

This is precisely the mechanism of myth. Myth captures something of the very first moment, but (because its own narrative is patchy and approximate) without then mediating it through precise language. It is afterwards that language intrudes: "we move from ancient religions to our religion, from creeds of the senses to that of the word, from the body to speech, from philosophies of experience to those of language" (185).

Collectives

Many collectives in the world function without diving into the senses. And in doing so they seek to establish their reason for being without really having roots in the real: "a military group attacks or defends itself, that is its reason for being; churches or sects pray, withdraw from the world, condemn heretics, worship their reason for being; an association of common economic interests either makes a profit or goes bankrupt, the company's efforts are directed towards its reason for being" (187). "Everyone lives together for no other reason than the fact that they say so, and write it incessantly; inflationary paperwork" (187). The basis of unity here is nothing much more than the "contract" (187) or "administration" (187).

In doing so, collectives are stifling the flow of time and therefore disconnecting themselves from reality.

- First of all, they do this by translating things into language.
- Second, they translate words that do have resonance (such as myth or the incantations of the Eucharist) into "codes and numbers" (188).

Empire

The Roman Empire functioned in this way: "it owed its singular longevity to the reduction of all such reasons, the genial discovery of administration, the application of null reason. To the suppression of all objects in favour of language" (187). In

fact, it is in the interest of every Empire to withdraw from reality into the world of administration, “to leave behind reality for language” (188) and “to eliminate culture with currency” (188).

Homogeneity

All this refers to fights to secure one’s own singular interpretation of the world. “We have long waged war to determine whether all feasts are but a single feast, whether all communions are but a single one, whether substance is just a noun” (188). In fact, “they who claim that the given comes to us through one tongue have the clearly identifiable profile of the venerable, old, reformed theology” (188).

But “do we really have just one tongue, or two, or three?” (188).

3.3 Statue

Condillac’s statue

Serres imagines the banquet being interrupted by a statue or “automaton” (189).

This is the sensory-deprived shell devised by the philosophy of Condillac. It waits to receive sensory data from “the guests whose spirit has come from the floral or earthy bouquets making up the peacock’s tail surrounding the glass of Yquem” (189).

But the statue is a rude interloper who will not be able to engage in the banquet presented: “arriving at the banquet, the statue interrupts it, neither sitting down nor drinking, neither smelling nor tasting” (193).

Feeding inputs to the statue

Condillac, the master scientists, begins by inputting scents: rose and violet.

- But which type of flower?
- Which colour and fragrance?

These are on a spectrum: “the peacock’s tail of fragrance displays a similar spectrum or fan” (190). “How long will the statue have to spend exploring the scent of roses across the length and breadth of such a differentiated terrain” (190).

Actually, if you wanted to input this smell, you would have to decide, categorise or cut (analyse) which violet you were inputting; language would have already intruded: “the automaton fills up on words. The name of the rose has no fragrance” (191). “What enters through the window, a unity of sensation, equals a unit of sense or digital information” (191).

In fact, whichever violet is chosen to input to the machine, there will be a memory that is greater than a binary digit I. How could the statue “keep up” (190) with the varieties, now enhanced by genetic modifications? “The experiment stops at the first line, in the first garden, for all eternity” (190).

Condillac’s automaton is really not at the beginning of a journey of sensory intuition, but at its end: it is “death” or a “corpse” (190). And by performing this thought-experiment, Condillac is “in fact dissecting a corpse. He has killed the living, in order to turn it into a tool: to attempt to resuscitate it” (190).

The early years of Victor Hugo

Serres contrasts the education of this statue with the education of a young Victor Hugo, who was allowed to frolic in the abandoned garden of the old convent of the Feuillantes (191-192).

> If you form [children’s] words through the senses, amidst the hawthorn and primrose, if rose, in all its declensions, can be related to the exploding, fragrant bouquet of shapes and hues, if you build their language through the given, then anything can happen. Even a poet. Even a happy adult; even a wise one. (192)

In fact, the whole work takes on the form of adventurous and unruly child’s play. “This meditation on chaos and mingling, this attention paid to the sensible, does tend to resemble a philosophy of unruliness. The crowning achievement of a long career as a restless kid, the inauguration of wisdom” (193).

This is made hard by the scientific educational systems we inhabit: “as children, we are plunged into language before we have any contact with the harder world. More and more we inhabit the soft” (197).

Empiricism

Empiricism, here understood as the interruption of the real, emerges from underneath or behind the statue like a "phantom" or "ghost" (197).

It has fled the world: we are left with "frigid organs, empiricism in ruins, lost impressions, phantoms" (198).

But there is still hope" "we imitate machines, we turn our children into automata, we bury ourselves beneath a skin of marble, and still the spectre reappears in a faint odour; in a taste we rarely encounter but which triggers an emotional response, in an unexpected posturer adopted while farming or sailing, through an environment which is rent asunder or undone, but which occasionally lets through to us the strange lightness of things themselves" (199).

Protagoras among the pre-Socratics was perhaps the only forbear of this empiricism (199).

3.4 Death

Tombeau de Couperin

Serres describes his book as "a memorial to empiricism, in the same way that Ravel evoked François Couperin in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*" (200).

Le Tombeau de Couperin is a suite for solo piano by Ravel, composed between 1914 and 1917. A *tombeau* is a musical composition (earlier, in the early 16th century, a poem) commemorating the death of a notable individual; the term derives from the French word for "tomb" or "tombstone". This piece is in six movements, each one dedicated to the memory of a friend of the composer (or in one case, two brothers) who had died fighting in WWI. It is thought that Ravel intended to evoke François Couperin, "the Great" (1668–1733); but stated that his intention was to pay homage more generally to the sensibilities of the French Baroque, not necessarily to imitate or pay tribute to Couperin in particular.

Written after the death of Ravel's mother in 1917 and of friends in the First World War, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is a light-hearted, and sometimes reflective work rather than a sombre one which Ravel explained in response to criticism saying: "the dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence".

Serres goes on to say: "celebration and tears. Commemoration, respect" (200). The idea of the "tomb" or "tombstone" links to the discourse on statues and stones just described.

Empiricism

For Serres, "empiricism, a wonder-struck philosophy of the inexhaustible, presupposes that the world is beautiful and its treasures infinite" (215).

What is the empiricism that he seeks to commemorate? "Ancestor of philosophy and men, pre-dating all language, a ruin of the time preceding writing and leaving no or almost no remains, hail; hail, enemy of philosophy, outlawed by it and hidden beneath language and steles since the dawn of our histories" (200).

This empiricism celebrates a wisdom that comes from the world but invades the body with grace:

> Your body radiates wisdom; the world gives us sapience and our senses receive it; respect the gracious given, embrace the gift. (200)

Ethics

This empiricism merges with an ethics too, for the good life consists in receiving what the world gives us and radiating it back out: "Ethics. The timeless morality of gratuity. We receive sense data as a gift, without reciprocating" (200).

Health

Indeed, this empirical ethics produces "good health" (201) too: "undergo the quiet treatment of the five senses. It is enough to accept what is gratuitously given" (201).

The Virgin Mary

Serres offers a complex account of the fall "into" and "out of" grace represented by the annunciation:

- *The immaculate conception*: the angel comes to Mary and blesses her before giving her the message. This implies that she existed in a state of empirical grace: "before blessing her, before giving her benediction, the envoy finds her occupied, saturated with grace. Only after that does the Lord approach her, and dwell within her" (202). Thus, though she is celebrated for her whiteness and virginity, she was of all people "full": "with grace: gratuity,

gratuitous things, the given" (202). "I hail thee, body, filled with the gratuitous given, received as gifts from the world" (205).

- *The virginal birth*: but the delivery of the message and the new task she is given to bear the Christ in some way brings her into the world of language; she gives birth to the word. This represents a fall. "As soon as the word arrives, gratuity vanishes" (205). For Serres, then, it is sad to think that "the woman has no response to the words of the announcement, except that she knows nothing and has known no man" (203); her new status as virgin is a fall away from that state. For "before the reign of language, the flesh was filled with grace requiring no compensation: unitary, beautiful, gratuitous" (205).

These two moments, the immaculate conception and the virginal conception, thus represent two opposing nodes. And to move from one to the other is to move in the direction that ultimately takes us to "logical empiricism" (203). "The angel makes us remember that the body was filled with grace before the word effaced it and rendered the body immaculate, as though in compensation" (203).

Thus, Serres opines: "hail, empiricism, lost to us the day the word was made flesh, the morning the angel appeared; already forgotten when the mother was born, white virgin flesh" (203).

In some ways, then, Serres celebrates the pre-annunciation, pre-biblical Mary: "this marks the return of woman, and of the virgin mother abandoned by the venerable reformed theology of which I have already sketched the profile. The return of the foreign woman from Nazareth" (204).

<u>Ruth</u>

The figure of Mary merges with that of her great-grandmother, Ruth, who is characterised in terms of "gleaning" (205); this is interpreted as welcoming things of the world that do not fit into the rigid categorization provided by language or science. In this sense, Ruth is grace-filled. Her act speaks of the "death" of the saturated control of the world exercised by language or science. "The time of the gleaners begins anew" (207).

<u>The death of Good Friday</u>

Thus, inspired by Ruth, we understand the nature of the death of Good Friday. It is as if the word has gone into the tomb. "The word will no longer be made flesh; the flesh of the world has suffered; dies, disappears" (209).

<u>Sabbath</u>

But after Good Friday, there is resurrection, "a time of repose" (207):

- The women go to the tomb on the Sabbath with spices (smell, taste).
- The heavy stone is rolled away: "the hard was made soft" (208).
- Inside the tomb, there is no language (nothing is spoken), all you find is a winding sheet portending a "resplendent body" (208); "what remains of language is a blinding white robe, a sound resonating in the tomb-box" (209).

"At the back of the tomb, scattered linens: canvases, veils, tissues and the shroud, rolled up separately a little further away. The black box of the empty sepulchre, flooded with light when the stone rolled aside" (214).

The resurrection is somehow indicative of the rise to life after the death of language. And the book of the senses then remains, as encoded in this book: "when language dies and enters into its full glory elsewhere, this book remains" (214).

<u>Philosophy</u>

The act of philosophy should be written under the sign of the archangel Gabriel ("another of Hermes' names", 208). We are to give birth to words and thoughts that pass through "language" and find their way out to the resplendence of Easter Sunday, a body without words again.

<u>The fragrance of Christ: life, suffering, death</u>

Various odours are associated with Christ during his life.

The mingled nature of fragrance points to his nature: "touched, pierced, marked, signed, coated, painted, perfumed: this, ultimately is what Christ means" (212).

This is also a suffering body. The coating of his body with perfume is likened to the wounds inflicted on his body, "coated in wine, blood, spittle, bile and vinegar" (211).

His death is the apotheosis of this mixing: “a smeared, pierced death” (213). His death, the dissipation and transcendence of the body, is somehow the ultimate sign of this mixing: “Christ will die because of the unction that transforms him into what his name designates. Anointed: marked, visible, tangible, scented. He will die because of his senses” (213).

(The spread of fragrance around him is contrasted with the tightly-controlled boundaries that are offered by words. For example, Peter the rock “draws his name from the unction, the balm poured by the woman, the perfume she wipes away with her hair” (211). No wonder that Judas wanted to swap the nard for thirty coins (for the poor); he was seeking to change the meaning of this body (212).)

The body of Christ

To be a Christian, to be part of the body of Christ, is to be “tattooed, drawn, coated, rainbow-coloured, studded, tangible, touched, sensible body, painted in various colours like a map, covered in sweat, in a shroud, in scents and odours, anointed” (213).

Perfume verses cement

Christians are composed and held together by this sort of perfumed multiplicity. “Unction is made through mixture and produces a mixture, there is no mixture that does not bind” (213). After all, “the Greek word for binding is preserved in the Latin word religion” (213).

What a contrast with a wall, rock, Petrus, which is bound by cement: “to build with rocks you need, also and at the very least, a binding element, a cement to unify and mix” (213).

Gift exchange

Serres has already defined grace as “beauty received graciously, our receptors astonished” (214).

Actually, grace is not a gift because it is not part of gift exchange. “Grace escapes the logic of the gift, it is an exception to the time of performance” (214). It is “forgiveness” (214). It is outside “the logic of gift-giving, purchase and redemption, exchange beating out a rhythm, calculating deviances and equivalences” (214). “Grace points us to a world or space outside of that time” (214).

This grace is contained in the world. “The world gives graciously, disinterestedly, asking for nothing back, expecting nothing in return; it has no scales, no balance sheet” (215). “The laws of the universe do not conform to the double-entry system” (215). The objects of the world “give to pure sensation, without concept” (215). Take, for example, the sun: “you would have to say that it gives without charge. Our bodies turn towards it, animals and plants too, stalks bend under its influence, an inexhaustible spring flowing irreversibly in one direction only. Without debt or reimbursement” (221).

This search for grace, in the spirit of Simone Weil, is the essence of Serres’ work:

> For a long time I have been searching for grace. Or for some object that could not be called a prize or a fetish or merchandise. Searching not for a gift, but for grace. Not for nature, but for grace. (221)

Philemon’s pitcher

This grace is inexhaustible. It is like drinking without the volume ever decreasing (216). As well as the miracle at Cana, this brings to mind “Philemon’s pitcher” (217).

Baucis and Philemon were an old married couple in the region of Phrygia, who welcomed the disguised gods Zeus and Hermes, thus embodying the pious exercise of hospitality, the ritualized guest-friendship termed “*xenia*” or “*theoxenia*” (when a god was involved). After serving the two guests some food and wine (which Ovid depicts in great detail), Baucis noticed that, although she had refilled her guests’ beech-wood cups many times, the pitcher was still full (from which derives the phrase “Hermes’s Pitcher”). Zeus blessed the goose that they went to slay and advised them to leave the town to avoid the coming destruction. After climbing to the summit, Baucis and Philemon looked back on their town and saw that it had been destroyed by a flood and that Zeus had turned their cottage into an ornate temple; the couple became guardians of it.

They are afterwards turned into two trees. Serres uses this to further elaborate their mixture and inter-relatedness: “Hermes, passing angel with winged feet, stands there in front of elderly lovers who will soon intertwine their limbs, Baucis’ boughs embracing Philemon’s branches” (218).

Economics

The economical world functions according to measurement, “the calculation of equilibrium in exchange” (216). “Economics abhors free gifts, thought to be wasteful in ceremony. It attacks the sensible. It destroys the beauty of grace, then reinvests gratitudes. Everything has a price, it tells us” (220).

But “empiricism marvels at profusion, a philosophy of well-springs” (216). “The gracious banquet of empiricism takes place before gifts, exchange and reciprocity; before economics and the scarcity that it constructs; before science, by virtue of the eternally flowing spring; before logic and language. I rest my case” (217).

These systems are all “parasites at the banquet” (221), functioning by means of gift exchange and tit-for-tat; “they pay in words and would have us believe that the given comes through language” (221).

3.4 Birth

Books

“Boring books” (222) have the form of analysis, “transcriptive, composite, analytical” (222). Serres imagines rows and rows of books in libraries, stretching interminably, referring endlessly to themselves in a cycle of referentiality, producing a labyrinth that can hardly be exited.

But “good books come from elsewhere” (222).

Bad wine

A cheap bottle is just like this library labyrinth: “everything printed on the external surface can be found within” (222). When we drink an “industrial concoction” like this, “it leaves us cold: pure, identical, analytical, reproducible” (223). Our mouths water in the way a dog salivates in reaction to the opening of a can of food (223).

The structure of sensation

What sense does, the depth of good wine or food, is trigger the over-wash of the self into the world, so that I come into being through sense:

> Taste is a kiss that our mouth gives itself through the intermediary of tasty foods. Suddenly it recognises itself, becomes conscious of itself, exists for itself.
>
> […] I taste therefore I exist locally. (224)
>
> I taste: existence for my mouth. I feel; and a piece of me thus comes to exist. There was a blank void in the place which was just born of the sensible. (231)

The “object of taste” (224), that is, the wine, “exists, concrete and singular outside of any short, finite sequence of technical terms” (224):

> It carries and gives up the virtually infinite detail which causes us to suspect and guess the presence of the real, the object in the world. (224)

The sense of smell is not a window or gate between these two, but is over-washed somehow by the forward and back of (quasi) subject and (quasi) object: “once tasted the Yquem brings the palate and sense of smell into existence, as well as the stitching that tacks mouth to nose” (224). It is almost as if the senses, those supposed gates to the intellect, are brought into being as “patches” by the interaction of mind and world. Patches, masks, faces, heads, small parts of the body. We look at the banquet, at those consuming wine there, and we see “along the length of the table, stretching into the distance, the masks are moving, drinking, evanescent. Faces without necks, heads without pectoral girdles, napkins floating in front of vacant chests” (225). As the sensation of taste is triggered, it is as if “a fragment of my body exists: mouth, head, mask. An ENT model. I sense, therefore patches are formed. Empiricism gives us a localised cogito” (225).

In fact, we have difficulty judging where these sensory patches begin and end, in the same way as we can’t say the precise point at which a taste changes (“where does meat end and stew begin?”, 228).

The body

The body therefore comes into being, bit by bit, by this overwash. This reminds us of the model enacted by Condillac’s statue. But it is a different sort of progressive construction. “The senses construct our body, bit by bit, as we use them” (225).

- The sewing together of a garment: “the rag comes together piece by piece, site by site, a tattered body well-sewn here, cobbled together there, scraps more or less attached, fluttering, tacked on hastily” (225).

- The writing of a book: “the body is constructed as books ae composed, its pages come together likes pieces and patches” (227).

In addition, this means we are not seamlessly composed of one garment. "clumsily tied together, loosely knotted, tattered, if you like: bandaged together. Each time you hear someone talking about a living being as a system, you should understanding: Harlequin's cape" (227). "The body is not an instantaneous construction, it folds over and unfurls – puffs and gathers – it stretches out like a landscape" (228).

Van Eyck

It is thought that fifteen layers of paint glaze were applied to Eve's thigh in the Ghent altarpiece:

- It is through the building-up of these layers that her life-likeness, her being, is conveyed.
- And yet, this does not really ensure some stability of being or essence. On the contrary, it's as if "there are fiftenn monsters contradicting each other on Eve's pink thigh". Indeed, Serres imagines that at the last application of glaze the painter saw her move (and perhaps stopped applying new glazes at that moment of life): "and Van Eyck created woman" (229).
- Our bodies are not synthetic wholes, a function of the "one", but are also composed of such layers: "the continuous, differential, imperceptible spectrum that tattooes places invisibly and binds them with knotted, fleeting, transitional ribbons can be said to paste our body together, to mix its parts together, more than it can be said to construct it, or produce a synthesis of it" (229).

The invitation to the banquet

Serres retells the parable of the banquet with the ungrateful guests, focussing on those who come in from the outside, who were originally outcast (230).

Fairy tales

What is fairy tales have a true representation of the mingled bodies that come in from the outside: "seven-league boots, beast become beauty, donkey skin, vair slipper, little mermaid wither lower body numb from cold and sheathed in blue-green scales, ogres smelling live flesh" (232)? Is the meaning of this obscured by "our culture of language and religion of the word" (233)?

St Anthony

Anthony is the patron saint of this "religion of the word": "priest of the word, a hermit in the smooth, homogenous desert under the immutable sun, a space where nothing new can appear beneath the metallic midday brightness, living amidst an infinity of stones, feeding himself on bread and water all day long, drunk on fasting, always chanting his text, his eyes worn out on the Book, his tongue numb from words and hard crusts" (233).

At least with him there was the chance of interruption by the "multiple traces of the shimmering pattern of the desert" (233). And there were his temptations, all of which were "the product of strange couplings" (233).

So pity the poor saints of today, eating controlled diets, surrounded by smooth concrete, whose lightbulbs ensure that "not even the night can add something new to the day" (233). These saints exists absolutely "in word alone" (233). "Cites are

populated by hermits, who have only one tongue" (233). For "no culture ever achieved the degree of asceticism that our so-called consumer society, our banquet, imposes on us today" (234).

The threefold domination of language

Serres speculates on three types of language-based asceticism today:

Language is threefold dominant: administrations rule through the performative dimension of the word; the media dominate through its seductive dimension; the sciences enjoy mastery through its truth dimension. Trismegistic language produces an abstract dominant class, drunk on codes: legislative, computerized, rigorous, thrice efficient, an din this manner producing a whole world. (234).

We need to be open to new temptations of Saint Anthony, in such a way as to create a new culture. "It takes a body and senses to create a culture" (234).

4. VISIT

4.1 (Local) Landscape

Paganism

"And supposing paganism and polytheism assembled a ragged world in the same way the body is constructed, a bit at a time?" (236).

- Paganism, linked to the *pagus*, relates to the land, and thus to the topological landscape Serres has described as analogous to sensory perception, "Mother Earth's harlequin costume" (236).

- This is further associated with worship "pagan gods", dwelling "in the hollow of the hedge, in the shadow of the elm" (236). It was not so much that these were objectively real, but that they represented a topography, "the demigods of the pagan pantheon pinning jewels here and there for her [Mother Earth's] adornment" (237).

Empiricism therefore "respects and nourishes a hundred local divinities, and will even allow the adoration of the word" (236).

Monotheism

This pagan world is disappearing or has disappeared, transformed into "a white, virginal coat, open fields where monotonous corn, disturbingly, occupies the space as far as the horizon, ugly and greenish" (236).

Serres links this with "language and monotheism", which "homogenize the pagan tatter, technology tramples over the altars: the old gods of the byways destroyed, tenure and boundaries abolished" (236). Monotheism creates "an isotropic space, it was first of all necessary to kill the idols" (236).

Writing

Serres likens this pagan localization, with its patient adornment of the multiplicity of the landscape, to writing and the writer's craft:

- A book can be closed, indicating completion and system, or it can be open, "a landscape page of pages, always open, displayed, free, readable, stretched out, unfolded, uncovered, manifest and obvious" (244).

- The writer "composes *pagus* by *pagus*" (237); he "ploughs" the page "in rectangular furrows"; a "small plot where the writer's existence settles, puts down its roots and becomes established, where he sings of it" (237). It's as if each page "needs the existence of a god" (237).

Thus, even though the writer is "a creature of language" (242), he "does not easily free himself from paganism, subjugated as he is by the same local page and by the infinitesimal miniature of fragile intuition borne by mute sonority, an immense breath that inhabits him" (242).

Landscape

The landscape of the countryside:

- It is a reminder of the play of time, of the varieties of agents that have acted upon it over the years: "all manner of populations, armies, industry, tourism and invasions" (248).

- In its patchwork form as viewed from above, it is a reminder of multiplicities, the "fractal face of the Earth" (248) as previously described in *Detachment*, that connects, divides, parcels out space in random and complex ways. "Like the body, the skin, the senses of empiricism, the landscape is clothed in a patchwork of tatters" (248).

- It is a reminder of a pre-modern epistemology: "nature and culture are displayed there in the same structure" (266).

The rural landscape has a certain reserve or humility, then, insofar as it does not reveal itself simply or straightforwardly to the gaze. Serres revisits the French word *vergogne*, "humility" or "modesty" (250).

Local sites

That said, a rural landscape is composed of points or units, that is, "localities" (240). "A locality is drawn as a singular point surrounded by a neighbourhood" (240). "Cultivated land displays high or secret places, immediately visible as stations. Equilibrium reigns here" (246).

We all have a sense of desire to create a point like this in the landscape, "a habitat or niche, a place for the bed or tent" (241). Passers-by would stop and note our presence in this place, "bow their heads and visit the god of the place" (241). They would be marked by a headstone or cairn.

Even on a ship, constantly journeying, sailors make a nest or a habitat: "they return every evening to the same bolthole and the same hammock" (278). In fact, those on long sea-voyages are more localised even than those who spend a different night at a different port, inhabiting different places each time. Thus, "a boat: a small hamlet with several hearths in a fragile shell" (278).

Gardens

For Serres, this is represented by the idea of the construction of a garden: "the outline of a garden miniaturises the countryside" (241). And the headstones or cairns that mark the route of local sites would be represented in this case by the presence of statutory. The "gardener lets the multiple eyes of the countryside control his world; the multiplicity of what is seen itself has eyes" (243).

This is linked with the variegation and multiplicity of the garden of Eden, where God is envisaged as roaming: "empiricism carries the unforgettable memory of gardens. Where God himself moves freely among the species" (243).

Two types of road

A landscape is also dotted by paths or byways, "separating or linking, stitching together or mingling these neighbouring circumstances" (237).

A. *Highways*

These can take the form of highways, "pushing through the countryside, striding over obstacles, catastrophes or limits" and "pushing the gods of place aside" (241). This is the world of:

- *Monoculture*: "nothing new under the solitary sun. Never-ending, homogenous rows prevent or efface the watered-silk effect […] a small number of laws replace tiny, incremental, pointillist permutations" (254).

- *Regulation*: highways are marked by stones indicating distance and measurement (see reference to Thales as mathematician "in the shadow of the Egyptian pyramidal tomb", 242). They are therefore associated with "architecture" rather than "landscape gardening" (242).

- *Monotheism:* by contrast with the evocation of paganism or polytheism, these are of "the one God" who is associated as "the architect of the universe" (242); the one who "creates a totality" (242): "the global design and conception is his alone, he plans and divides" (242). For "in many cases peace is only achieved by the one God, in just as many cases angels are better" (255).

- *Bible:* Serres links this with the construction of the Bible, as the writers sought to "bind their pages into monotheism, struggling against an idolatrous people who would scatter them in all directions, making them into a landscape, lost garden or paradise" (243). The biblical writers are here described as "passing for all eternity through the empty white plain between two landscapes" (243), almost like Moses passing between the waters.

- *Science*: or think of the attempt by science to "found a unitary system across the chaos of its pages, as numerous as grains of sand" (243). When modern scientists (or philosophers) use language of system, they are showing an ignorance of "time" (244), which is a shame because "they have before them a countryside to re-member, pieces stuck together with crossed strips of sticking plaster, knots in a shawl" (244). "They should seek, as we do here, subtotals, dynamic confluences" (244).

- *Philosophy*: or think of the "impossible work done by the philosopher – caught in architectural, logical, desert systems – in resuscitating the body of the countryside and the countryside of the body vitrified beneath language, so as to create a world from the explosion of fragments" (243).

These "highways" allow a vision of the global as merely that which is a scale model of the local: "the global appears to us as an inflated local: thus Euclidean space, or mechanical time, or time taking its rhythm from numerical series; the sun shines nothing new happening beneath it, a yellow dwarf in a little canton where the Copernican revolution has stirred up the neighbourhood" (308).

B. *Pathways*

But we would do well to note "busts of Hermes" (242) that litter the way of these highways, which function as reminders of something else.

Pathways can be fluid links between local sites. If the cultivated plot is a "circumstance" or a "local equilibrium", then these paths and byways can be understood as constituting "an irregular or capricious zone of influence" (238). They connect local sites tangentially, variably and contingently. Thus, "we shall call these circumstances, and the connecting points exchanges or interchanges" (281).

The beauty of a landscape is found in these pathway connections, and not just in a local site. "This is what the countryside is, the moving totality of its real fragments, paved with hybrid pages" (240).

Serres prefers the patchwork of the countryside, a "work of art and history partially integrating contingent circumstances", to "a straight road going through the forest", which would remind him instead of "method or science" (238).

These pathways are likened to the five senses: they "compete at the contours of the habitat" (247), that is, at the edge of these little units of circumstance and locality that we set up.

Pathways are represented by:

- The Ulyssean method (see below).
- Space travel, for "even space-ships do not follow a simple, straight, monotonous, Cartesian path" (272), rather they zigzag.
- Jules Verne, with his rambling journeys (272).

<u>Stacked images</u>

Another way of thinking about the role of pathways is the stacking of images, for example a miniature portrait, with greater and lesser depth in each stacked image, resulting in a wide cone or pyramid. Pathways between each layer link features (eyebrow, lip, breast) with the scaled up or scaled image above or below. Now, beauty lies both in one of the flat portraits, but also in a new dimension, the link between differently scaled versions of a single feature. Beauty therefore lies "in the midst of her elemental composition and her possible reproductions' (240).

If you want to "see" the beauty of the women represented in the miniature, then "draw one or more paths *across* its possible representations" (240).

<u>Synthesis</u>

And yet, in relation to a cultivation (a garden) or a composition (a book), we need more than just locality. For "levelling the local event produces boredom and ugliness, a world without landscapes, books without pages, deserts" (239). So "avoid the symmetrical error of being satisfied with progress" (239).

We need a synthesis of the two: "those who love the countryside sometimes need expressways" (271).

> Composition requires a tension between the local and the global, the nearby and the far-off, the story and the rule, the uniqueness of the word and the unanalysable pluralism of the senses, monotheism and paganism, the international expressway and the remote villages, science and literature. (239)

We can thus say that "philosophy sometimes requires syntheses" (239).

"Are we now reaching a third era when we will dine at the marriage of the global and the local, without ejecting from the nuptial feast those who were once despised, according to the norms of the day, as being empirical or abstract?" (255).

Pange lingua

Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium is a medieval Latin hymn written by Aquinas for the Feast of Corpus Christi. It is also sung on Maundy Thursday during the procession from the church to the place where the sacrament is kept until Good Friday. The last two stanzas (called, separately, *Tantum ero*) are sung at Benediction.

Pange, lingua, gloriósi	Tell, tongue, the mystery
Córporis mystérium,	of the glorious Body
Sanguinísque pretiósi,	and of the precious Blood,
Quem in mundi prétium	which, for the price of the world,
Fructus ventris generósi	the fruit of a noble Womb,
Rex effúdit géntium.	the King of the Nations poured forth.

For Serres, this is a "pagan confession" (244). This is indicated by the first word, "thus putting paganism before language, before the word, its sovereign" (244).

The hymn conveys the idea of that which is "given to us" (see second verse, *nobis datus, nobis natus*, "given to us, born to us"). It's as if all the processes that "dismember the ground, world and body" are here "redeemed" (244).

Novelty

Language trades in novel ruptures, the "announcement of news: Advent, coming, baptism, Epiphany, parables, Passion and Resurrection" (245).

In every case, by trading in novel ruptures, language makes the claim to be "the fulfilment", the final announcement, the definitive map; "it announces the logos, like a mathematician or metaphysician, voice, law and relationship dictated accordingly in a space drawn, ruled, calculated, measured, known and embellished by the world" (245). This is as true for modern society, which "reiterates this fact, is shaped by it, entering into resonance or harmonics with it alone, and dwelling in it" (246).

But in face of this constant novelty, "Antiquity shows its face", "that of the body and countryside, pages composed of dead ocelli and seen by blinded eyes" (246).

Sea chests

Imagine a naval company that pays to draw up a set of sea charts, "unmarked, new, white charts" (250), to comply with some new inspection law. But they are arranged in a sea chest that looks very professional, but which is hard or impossible to open because it is freshly-painted. They are therefore pointless because they are unused: "the whole company had gotten ready for the fray and responded to the caprices of the law, rather as one runs a standard up the masthead, so that it will be seen. That is the flag's only purpose" (250).

The captain is crestfallen. But the inspector is understanding. They sit down with a glass of wine (see reference to the beginning of chapter 3). They discuss how the captain actually navigates to his destination. There is a sensibility for the landscape of the sea that is greater than any map. "He described everything in precise detail – the colours, fish, wind, sky, the constant urge of the sea – exactly recreating this ancient document, an encyclopaedia, sunken like the great cathedral" (251).

The true dialogue is the one between reason (the inspector with his maps) and sensibility (the captain with his personal knowledge of the sea). Why is it that reason seeks to dominate and overrule the other? Why not a synthesis of them both? "We only ever judge empiricism scientifically; now, suppose we began to judge rationalism empirically?" (252).

Montaigne

The patchwork countryside represents a culture "amazingly like that of the *Essais*" (254): "the random, felicitous juxtaposition of large or small fields, like the chapters where Montaigne speaks of Hesiod or quince trees, Virgil or hazel trees" (254). Inspired by him, "let us cultivate the varied so that the intellect remains alive and active" (254).

4.2 (Global) Displacement

Descartes

"Motionless, seeking a fixed point […] locating himself in space and time, the centre-point of these co-ordinates" (256), Descartes is the epitome of the one who "brings into being the word" (256).

Placeless humanity

Humanity is losing its attachment to place: "it is losing its place and its self, like me, detached from its countries and the whole earth […] its new global emigration from space to signs, from the countryside to the image, from languages to codes and from cultures to science" (257). This is "a new humanity without earth, blind now to what we called the real" (257).

Group belonging

This lack of place leads to a tendency to another form of belonging, more pernicious by far, namely, belonging to a "pressure group" (258) that can simply confirm you in your global intuition.

Philosophy

Philosophy is not immune to this and finds itself unable to think about the patchwork of a landscape: "corporal mixture and mixture in general are foreign to philosophy which is a discourse promoting separation and purity, enveloped by a hideous and mortal passion for belonging" (258). "The philosophy that will come from mixture connects the global and the local irenically, and presupposes a different ontology" (259).

4.3 Method and Rambling (The Global and the Local)

Ramble

It is easy to cross the desert without facing obstacles, via a highway. But "a walk through the countryside is called a ramble" (259).

The etymology of "*randon*" began with the idea of the chase of an unpredictable, lunging, direction-altering prey (259). This found its way into the idea of the "*randonnée*" as a long walk, with a sense of the English "random" thrown in (259).

Cartesian navigation

The Cartesian method is about straight lines, maximal efficiency and the dismissal of anything that would cause "disturbance and fluctuation" (260) to a route undertaken. "Method clearly traces a journey, a pathway through space; it knows where it comes from and where it is going" (261).

- This is reflected in navigation at sea, wherever a sailor seeks to plough through a large expanse of water to get from A to B.

- This was also what happened in the great era of discovery: "the age of the great voyages implies monotheism, the dissolution of the countryside, the drawing of immense maps, stubborn disregard for circumstances, and the supremacy of the will over intelligence" (266-267).

Ulyssean navigation

"But we have also inherited non-economic paths that are not concerned with this equilibrium between extremes" (260-261).

Ulysees, who initially sought to find the quickest way home, found himself in many byways, "braids or loops to his route" (269). This was a function of him sailing in small waters as opposed to an ocean, where passage in a straight line is conceivable (265).

And yet, ironically, this was the path he needed to take in order to achieve his end, "a path enabling the discovery of unknown lands, inventing when cunning fails" (261). Even where he found backwaters, these can be understood as "an order outside order, original or singular equilibria outside the well-balanced middle road" (262). These can therefore be understood as "**strange attractors**" (262). They lie outside "the global equilibria of the episteme" (262) that had been assumed or reckoned on at the beginning.

The fact that he was able to navigate these constitutes the essence of his "cunning" (266); by contrast, "Bacon, Descartes, Columbus leave the bag of tricks: no cleverness or cunning" (270).

Ulysees thus "navigating without a care in the world leaves behind closed knowledge and histories constrained by structures, he invents inventive knowledge and open history, a new time" (264).

The Ulyssean method was the cultural milieu of the world of the Greeks: "they read in it the inventive dynamism of the anabasis" (263).

Can we reclaim it on our own journeys today? Can we take the Ulyssean ramble ourselves? It will "bring us close to what the body is capable of" (271).

Exodus

The idea of method is even more complicated in the figure of the Exodus, since there was no "end" achieved for Moses; it is even further away from "equilibrium" (261).

Smooth space

"Who in Antiquity would have believed in the existence of a universal law when no olive tree twisted in the same way as another and not gust of wind resembled that of the previous day?" (267).

In fact, to believe in this would have required the (impossible) experience of non-space:

- Plato had to imagine "a smooth, colourless, invisible, insensible space' (267).
- The Hebrew people had to travel through "the invariant, isotrophic and homogenous space of the desert" (267).
- Mathematics was born in the shadow of the smooth walls of a pyramid (267).

In fact, the choice is between seeing "countryside or space" (267).

Right/ left

This division between Cartesian method and Odyssean method, privileging the former over the latter, is as senseless as privileging the right hand over the left: "in the name of what outlandish underlying values does one condemn the variable, and what is related to it as being a deviation or gauche, belonging to the left hand, and a constant direction as right, or adroit" (270).

Optimism about the global/ local synthesis

We must get to the point where "local, singular vision is revealed not to be an accidental detail to dismiss – global vision is not alone in imposing law" (268).

Serres is optimistic about this, because the expanding sense of the global that modern societies enjoy actually serves to remind us that the local matters:

> Now that we can go around the world in a few hours and travel to certain heavenly bodies more rapidly that we could to distant islands a few hundred years ago, we tend to think that a detailed journey around a vegetable garden can offer us information that is just as surprising. When the universe widens, the countryside returns. We maintain a better balance between world and place now, where Antiquity or what I call thus, stifled by the local, could not aspire to be local. (268)

As a result, we are "re-establishing an equilibrium between the empirical and the abstract, the sensible and the intellectual, data and synthesis" (268).

Geography

Geography, "a hard science of hard things" (276), is a suitable name for this method of Odyssean rambling: "it transports us, in fact, from one major body of knowledge to the opposite one through the North-West passage" (274).

Our bodies are "geographic" in the sense that they reveal the operations of hard objects of the world upon us: "what we reveal to others is a consequence of the erosion that others and things leave on our faces and skin, or from the shrinking of the harder skeleton, a worn-out frame on the edge of ruin" (275).

Indeed, Serres "own elastic [writing] style makes use of this general property [of the geographic]" (275).

Sacramental rites

The analogy of countryside/ geography with dessert/ language can be traced in certain religious rites: (A) rites like "baptismal water, the chrism of anointing" (276) are "soft" activities; (B) whereas "circumcision" mimics the "harsh bite" of geography and erosion. "The latter is on the side of things, the former on the side of the word, one definitive like a feature in the antique countryside, the others labile and temporary like contracts" (275).

Visit

The only solution is to "go visiting" (239). This means being secure in one's locality, but also being prepared to go out on a ramble or wandering. "There is nothing in the intellect that you cannot see in the world: disciplinary places which often result from atypical wandering and from which those who wish to resume the methodic or exotic road are excluded" (279).

Catholicism

Serres attempts to redeem the sense of this word not for a "figurative monotheism in a sea of angels" (279, meaning Roman Catholicism), but for true "universality", "a rare and delicate synthesis between absent unity […] and the pagan countryside, resurfacing and dotted with localities, statues, stopping places, altars and localities" (280). Thus, Roman Catholicism finds itself "constantly torn between the exclusive monotheism of the desert, the universe of empty space whose name it bears – nothing new under the sun – and the proliferation of pagan odds and ends" (280). For Serres, it must work "ceaselessly, heroically, in a climate of general incomprehension, at the paradoxical – and suddenly highly contemporary – knot of the infinitely far and near: the love of God and of one's neighbour" (280).

Indeed, the bringing-together of God and neighbour, near and far, is likened to the optimistic synthesis he postulated above:

> Topology, fluctuations, small deviations and circumstances, mixtures, singularities again crowd into the empty, monotonous space of law. Yet we cannot, indeed must not, dismiss pure reason, rigour, nor exactitude. We must welcome this overpopulated place. This is reason reconciled: God and one's neighbour, pure and perfect reason as well as local singularities. The world is made of systems and mixtures. (280-281).

4.4 Circumstances

Existence

We might try to pinpoint the concept of existence using "logic" (282); this thing exists because it is located there (*Dasein*). "Rigorous or precise knowledge fashions the scales of existence" (282).

But in fact, existence by definition expresses "a deviation from a state of equilibrium" (282). It is a function of flux and pathways, a "state outside states" (282). Existence is "a deviation from equilibrium, yes, destabilization followed by ecstasy" (*Variations on the Body*, 27).

When it is applied to existence, then, rigorous or precise knowledge enacts the abolition of existence, "its reduction to equilibrium, it's abolition" (282). For "existence functions in a different mode to that of science" (282).

Leibnizian space and time

Aristotle posits the identity principle.

But Leibniz is the one who "reverses Aristotle's contention and defines the simultaneous as the state of things in which contradiction is neither present nor included" (284). He posits multiplicity. And this "allows space and time to be defined, not as conditions for these principles, but on the contrary as things produced by them" (284).

- Space is the order of non-contradictories, since two identical things cannot exist at the same time (284).
- But time becomes "the order of non-simultaneous things, which can therefore be contradictory" (284). For "those that were produced last year contain or imply opposite states of the same thing, in relation to those that are produced this year" (284).

Existence, which is spread out in time, therefore refers to "a deviation from equilibrium" (285) and relates to "circumstances" (285).

Grammar

In grammar teaching, we usually say that "less is more" (286) and therefore adjectives and adverbs are viewed with suspicion. "Always God, never the angels" (286). Adverbs cause settled action to "deviate" and adjectives "throw us sideways" (286).

But both adjectives and adverbs "denote circumstances, limit and bring the act, person or thing into existence" (286). Therefore these describe the movement of nature (clinamen) and the movement of Hermes, who "leaps sideways, to the places where the senses murmur and tremble, the neighbouring turbulence of bodies – sensation" (287).

Balance and stability

The law-like nature of the world is secured not just on the basis of sight (the birds-eye view from above), but on the basis of the assumption of stability. Even where things are moving around us, there is a fixed axis or point of balance that is stable. We assume the presence of equilibrium around a fixed point, even where things are spinning around it: "the word system is generally used when a complex moving set is ordered around an invariant" (288).

The assumption is made that both subject and object must be partaking of this stability in order for thought to take place: "the affirmation of the *I think* and its requirement of constancy in the subject is translated into the reality of things by the principle of equilibrium" (288).

This is true in all disciplines of thought, including science: "identity remains the explicit or implicit condition of science: we must be able to repeat what is said, find the statue again in the same place, recognise the thesis, solid, affirmed, unchanged, repeat the experiment – determined, determinist, as stable as a terminus" (288).

Thinking ought to "direct towards obviously restless things, the equilibrium of which seems unthinkable. Chance often lies in wait for us there" (289). We must make an effort to take account of "phenomena not included in the strict definition of the system, not deducible from the general equilibrium" (291). "Lucid, with our voluble crown of circumstances, we understand or know better, our daily happiness increases – that is the adventure" (299).

After all, that might lead thought to the most real thing: "who can guess, without believing oneself to be God, that the real is the rational and vice versa?" (289).

Rivers

Rivers might seem to be a metaphor for this branching. In *Variations on the Body*, Serres even says that "Lot and Gers, Tarn and Baise … should have furnished the titles of my books" (59).

But actually, many rivers display equilibrium in the form of the stable path they take to the sea (even secured by a river "bed").

Some rivers, such as the Yukon or Mackenzie, by contrast "flow with a hundred arms, sometimes not at all, frozen, blocked, barred by obstacles and gravel" (289). In these cases, "it could be said that they write on the earth or countryside the whole programme of their circumstances: constancy, instability, consistencies, inconsistencies, circumstances" (289).

Zoology

Vertebrates have eyes, but some are essentially unseeing (moles). Vertebrates have teeth, but not the whale or the anteater (294). In each case, the animal in question has a sort of vestige of an eye or tooth, showing how its evolutionary progress has had to work around an obstacle (295).

Evolution

"The plan of life unfolds in order and generality, like a global law" (294).

But when we look at the local organs and adaptations of animals, "we do not always find development of increasing complexity" (294). This is because "circumstances have thrown up obstacles and introduced accidents, variations, deviations, irregularities in its unfolding, which then display disorder and contingency" (294).

It is a principle of life, then, that forward evolutionary motion bumps up against and negotiates "circumstances": "life in turn negotiates circumstances and adapts to them for it cannot nullify them, or consider them unworthy of note, or assume that they will always, everywhere be the same, or group them into classes. It is immersed in their mixture and changes. It visits a technicolour world" (295).

Serres celebrates Darwin's solution as that which internalizes the issue of circumstances: "mixture pervades genetics and genetic material" (296).

Knotted sensation

Serres said earlier that "circumstance" must return in the realm of thought and in the realm of science. But what about "in the realm of the senses: does it define that too?" (293).

It must return, because sensation is the thin point through which the global and the local touch:

> The global (matter, energy, information … law) comes to a locality (cell, body, town … an element of the countryside) through its surroundings (membrane, skin, peripheral walls, borders … circumstances) where it negotiates its transit or passage through an exchanger. (300)

Serres likens sensation to a path that winds around in a loop but then touches again; this point of exchange can be skipped over so that the traveller avoids the circuitous loop. But the point of exchange is itself a thickening or a knotting, and thus it adds depth, complexity and proliferation to any journey: "no-one can analyse without untying; no-one can unite without bringing deviations into play, nor loosen without causing an increase in volume" (301). The local is the local-in-the-global and the global is the global-in-the-local, then, because these local points of knotting replicate the dense knotting that so

obviously characterises the world itself: "it is clear from this that global motion by its force creates pockets and that local implications by their richness look further afield: like a landscape of the world" (301).

This is "just like a bodily organ" (301). For "when it looks at atlases of anatomy or embryology, the eye is reluctant to recognise the proliferation of exchangers or tight knots, in every size, filling a local volume with their branching or folds, braids and loops, envelopes or tears, windows" (302).

This is a description of touch, for when our bodies touch the world a knot is created: "sign disappears into touch, where touch, sensitive and delicate, sees contours, the smooth and the separate: origins preceding the arrival of speech by an entire era" (303). In this sense, touch becomes a "circumstance" (303), a neighbourhood and thus even a "place" (303). "The world can be seen as localities surrounded by their neighbourhoods: circumstances, connected with each other by exchangers that themselves become places, linked to each other by pathways that radiate into the global, the more or less local status of which is difficult to determine" (303).

> The sensible is in general both the constant presence and fluctuation of changing circumstances in the crown or halo bordering our bodies, around its limits or edges, inside and outside our skin, an active cloud, an aura in which take place mixtures, sorting, bifurcations, exchanges, changes in dimension, transitions from energy to information, attachments and untying – in short, it is everything that connects a local and particular individual to the global laws of the world and to the manifold shifting of the mobile niche. (303).

Since our lives are determined by this interaction of the local to the global through these knots or "circumstances", they must from now on be called "circumstable" (304).

Visit

The verb "*visiter*" means "to visit or inspect" (304).

- This first of all implies a sense of "sight or seeing" (304), which in turn implies a fixed or seated position: "generally, in traditional philosophy, the bearer of the gaze does not move, but seated by the window, sees a tree in flower" (304). This is a "statue set upon affirmations and theses" (304). Wordsworth called "the bodily eye" "the most despotic of our senses": *What wonder, then, if, to a mind so far/ Perverted, even the visible Universe Fell under the dominion of a taste/ Less spiritual, with microscopic view/ Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world?* [*The Prelude* 12, 88-92]

- But to visit always implies movement, turning around an object to get a better look, and so on. "In order to see, movements takes paths, crossroads, interchanges, so that the examination goes into detail or moves on to a global synopsis: changes in dimension, sense and direction" (305). "The mind sees, language sees, the body visits" (306).

- The self, the I, is precisely formed by visiting: "the sensible I splinters and changes direction, wavering and various, losing its self, unlocatable rather than hateful" (307).

Visiting the senses

- The senses are that which take a visit, "the different terrains through which the visit passes" (305).

- And "how could we see the compact capacity of the senses if we separated them?" (305). For in this book, "we have visited without dissociating the senses from the word visit" (305).

In order to address the senses, then, Serres has deliberately chosen not to describe them one-by-one, which would itself be an exercise in analysis, "we would have had to assign proper names to all the participants in the journey and a character and identity to each one" (305). It would have been like Plato's symposium, each participant discoursing on one area of speciality. "A colloquium. Its subject: the Sensible" (306). This is what our contemporary division of the disciplines achieves: "insert a cassette pre-recorded in the discipline box. The organizers of the conference press play on the control panel and everything is underway in the best possible way in the best of all possible conferences – the different disciplines express themselves" (306).

4.5 Mingled Place

History

In surveying the history of the Roman Empire in his book *Rome*, Serres claims to have revealed that even within as apparently homogenous a history as the Empire, there are local histories that have very little to do within one another. The law of one history is quickly replaced by the law of another (see the story of the rape of the Sabine women, 308).

Serres states that it is the express purpose of his writing to describe this global landscape:

- “This blended, striped, mixed place reappears in this book, which speaks of it alone, describes it, attempts to see it and make it more clearly visible” (308).

- “It is here marked on the pages of this book, written with the express aim of redesigning it; moults of skin, the quivers of hearing, fans of taste, landscapes of sight, the quivers of hearing, this is the sensorial – in other words, the common sense” (309).

5. JOY

The final chapter offers us yet another candidate for the sixth or common sense: this is the sense of bodily joy, or ecstasy. Here, Serres evokes astonishingly the seraphic pleasures of self-exceeding, to be found, for example, in the pleasures of swimming, of running, in the human fascination with the trampoline, or in the playing of rugby. Here, the body becomes itself in playing with, or transforming itself.

5.1 Stained Glass

Hot and cold

Serres speaks of situations of extreme hot and cold that wash deep into the body and disable action, even, in Serres’ case, the writing of a book on Plato being abandoned due to the cold in his hut in the Auvergne (312).

Swimming

Serres recalls a plunge into icy water that caused his conscious self to retreat into its own body: the skin becomes “objectivized” (313) as if detached from his body and floating elsewhere in the water; the “subject curls up within, anxious yet calm, dense like a small black diamond in the centre of the plexus, leaving all the rest to become, independently of it, an object there in the world – stable, motionless, relaxed, pliant, blissful in the liquid” (313).

Jumping

Serres celebrates the athleticism of retired French pole-vaulter François Tracanelli, “an archangel” (315), “a spiritual being, he flew, with no apparent effort, over the fine, slender, flexible bar, and his arms, which had just let go of the pole, sprouted wings” (315). His “wings” come from the force he exerts through his legs on the ground below.

Serres remembers his own fun jumping with his brother on their beds and refers to his “trampolinian upbringing” (316). To speak to his brother whilst hovering in mid air, whilst forgetful of the bodily movements that make this possible, is for him “where speech comes from” (317).

Merry-go rounds

On a merry-go round or flying scotsman ride you are thrust forward by centrifugal forces; but imagine you shuffle in your seat so as to make your particular location move slightly on the loop. You are counteracting a very real force “with another force, so as to do what you wish at last by means of a weak third force” (318). This is what “spirit” is (318).

Running

Serres imagines running being more like jumping than walking: one’s feet begin to glide over the ground. Once again, it is as if one’s supporting pillars – legs – lose their sense of the function they are supposed to have: “they work without drawing attention to themselves, they carry but are absent” (319).

Carrying

Serres celebrates the dignity of carrying a burden: “you do not know your body if your pectoral girdle has never been subjected to weight and been under pressure” (319). Serres celebrates the soft professions, but also “the builder and the removalist” (319). He thinks about an experience of carrying an injured walker down a mountain on a stretcher. The body becomes “*subjectus*, subject. I carry therefore I am” (320).

Swimming

When we swim we experience the lift of jump of the feet all over our body: “the body in its entirety becomes a foot” (321). He imagines this experience as a normal bodily experience, in contrast with walking or running on dry land: “should we, conversely, rethink the feet as scale models of the whole body, providing it with floats when fluid becomes hard?” (321). If we were to float for many hundreds of years, “would we become a little less rational – emotive and tender” (322).

Ball games

- A clumsy, soulless person plays sport by moving the ball around himself, thus "receiving its law from the subject sun" (322). "He does not know how to bring things into being" (322).

- But in a true team game, by contrast, the ball "plays with clever players as they pass by, wandering planets around the small new sun" (322). The players have allowed themselves to become subjects of a new system of law, one that "subjects them to the law of what is fleeting, and already far away, and in which they recognise their former soul" (322). It is as if "these players have given birth to the relationship and the object" (322).

Ball games are a good illustration of the function of the bodily senses. We have to allow the soul to go out sometimes from the body such that the subject can become "relationship and object" (323) when it returns, just like the ball goes out from and around player to player. The senses facilitate this: "the space of the five senses constructs the distances around it into a set, close to taste and touch, far from hearing, perfumes and sight, within which this place moves and gets its bearings" (323).

> The knowing subject dilates and extends itself over the whole body; the previous subject was condensed into a simple abstraction, existing somewhere, but in the background, unknown, in a transparent place, leaving the rest of the body in shadow; the body, now knowing, becomes a hyper complex spirit […] I know or understand through my skin. (325).

Dancing

The *pas de deux* is another example of this bodily connection between two team players: "music has taken over both bodies, has invaded them and the dancers, seraphic, have become music-made-flesh" (324).

Non-conscious experiences

These various experiences listed above all throw the participant into a mode of non-conscious experience: "swimming supposes that we ignore that we can swim; likewise for walking, jumping, making love, thinking" (338).

"This is what I have sought passionately: that knowledge and science be forgotten in my books, written so that their very loss might elaborate new objects, so that their loss might bring into being a new subject" (338).

Joy

Serres likens these experiences of intense immersion and of non-conscious thought to "joy" (314). He contrasts them with softer forms of motion: "to fall asleep is to acquiesce, waking tends towards refusal. To dive is to consent; to drag oneself up on to the rock coast. To be born each morning with the day. Joy" (314). "The body loves movement, goes looking for it, rejoices on becoming active, jumps, runs or dances, only knows itself, immediately and without language, in and through its passionate energy. It discovers its energy when its muscles are on fire, when it is out of breath – at the limits of exhaustion" (314).

- They are the utterance of a deep, guttural roar, one that comes before language, such as the "*ruach*" of God hovering over the waters (320).

- They are a dance, contrasted with "the weight of knowledge and self-awareness" (320) of the linguistic body: "a body is not born until it has danced" (321).

The soul

Once again, the soul is located in this movement out of oneself and into the world:

> The point of spherical symmetry, around which swimming, diving or dance unfold their flight, and the existence or soul which is revealed by birth, or by passing through the crack opened up in the side of the burning boat, moves outside the body as a result of positions, movements, exercise. (322).

5.2 Healing in France

French dinner parties

Serres celebrates his native country as committed to "taste" and "smell" (326), even if this is hard for others to understand: "neighbouring cultures are more hesitant: amazed or disgusted. When you condemn those who live to eat, you who speak of eating to live, have you worked out why you are living?" (326).

French conversation around the table is nimble and ephemeral in accordance with this commitment to taste and smell; "there is nothing in conversation which has not first been in this bouquet" (327).

French style of dialogue

French culture in general celebrates this kind of dialogue:

- Many cultures design sites for declamatory talk: "sites organized around public speaking, built to serve speech, and surrounded by places for listening, usually favour monologues: the pulpit raised for sacred eloquence I the middle of the nave, the rostrum of the specialist scientists at the front of the amphitheatre, now a stage with microphones and cameras. Silence, he is speaking. He speaks, and in order to be understood obeys rules of logic and rhetoric" (330). This "emits without receiving" (331).

- The French culture is instead modelled on the salon: "no announcements, no thundering prophecies, no teaching, much less discipline" (331). Here, many different disciplinary specialists were able to converse with one another: "swift movement or multiplication, not the discipline becomes the object of thought" (331).

For Serres, "the epistemology of conversation died, I believe, when the great universities took the place of the myriad churches. Academies presuppose disciplinary territories, sectarian conflict, in which the exclusion of heretics begins anew, through either words or ideas" (332).

Monetization

There is something about taste and perfume that drifts away, that can't be monetized or captured. True conversation has something of this form: "the supreme human art, conversation, which derives from them, drifting over lovers in clouds of signs, is lost in the air" (327).

- It is like this with the reception of things in the world: "the given can arrive in fits and starts, the art that derives from it is fleeting; language remains, like money" (327). "There is in the sensual a delicacy that does not remain, a bouquet, a conversation" (328).

- And of course it is like this with sensory reception: "the bouquet, perfume, shade, conversation which are lost in the air subtly marry themselves to the disappearing differentials of time: they flow, pass, fade away, return, blink and percolate" (329).

French culture is well-placed to capture this sense of the drifting that resists monetization: "our culture is made up of what our graceful senses do not leave behind: the capricious, like money, the venal theory of knowledge accumulates and calculates" (328). "I do not know of any culture lighter, more attractive, less abstract than mine, less calculating" (328).

Love

This fleeting sensory experience is also captured in the art of love. This has been compromised by modern culture, "in the attack from clichéd language" (329).

Books

Serres has "learned more" (332) outside, at the Garonne, Epidauris, in a storm, etc.

He "does not despise books, I love them so much that I have devoted my life to them" (333). "But we cannot bring a culture, a philosophy, to life without feeding it with what it is not" (333).

Thus, he finds a synthesis of the two: "I have learned more with you than in all the books of philosophy, you who gave me my body, to whom I offer the last words this book, humbly, in return" (333).

5.3 Signature

History of science

Serres thought that he was working in this defined disciplinary field, "a single discipline, criticism in general, the objects of which vary" (334). "Yet I was also sure that I was not in it. The unanimous judgement of my peers, also, led me to think that my practice lay elsewhere. Where? I did not know" (334).

This was problematic, for the discipline has to know its own boundaries: "this belongs to science and that does not, this inside, that outside. Inclusion, exclusion, the strategies of schools of thought, but originally a religious gesture: just as the haruspex carefully divided up the holy ground, marking out its plinths. This is the profane; that is the sacred" (334).

And yet those boundaries do shift. “It is a simple fact that things foreign to science will be embraced by it tomorrow and that things that are part of it today will be expelled” (334).

The space of science

This disciplinary jurisdiction is tied to a space: “where? In what place does a certain discourse attract a certain consensus? Orthodox, heretical, anathema – choose. Where do you live?” (334). The “space of science fascinates us” and “a whole group yields to this fascination, agrees to this objectivity” (334).

To really understand the history of science, we must be able to take a “distance” from it, that is, “we must be secularised in relation to it” (334). This is hard because the discourse of science has become nearly ubiquitous in our culture: “we are becoming subjects of science as we have been subjects of language ever since we became human” (337).

Do not seek to defend or justify the space of science against aggressors. Instead, merely “suppose it” (335). This puts science in the role of “subject” (335), being defined by that which washes into and out of it from the outside.

> We know science in quite a different way. First of all, we encountered it. Then we found ourselves immersed in it. Now it is immersed in us. It thought outside us, it thinks in us. We had made our dwelling in it, it now has its dwelling in us. (335)

The language of science

Science imposes on the world a uniform “language” that squashes the various languages through which cultures previously encountered the real. Take, for example, the difference in naming stars: “Sirius”, “Vega”, “head of Medusa” have been replaced by the scientific nomenclature of “NGC 1036” and so on (341); these “are no longer part of any language and are detached from language as are the formulae that are discussed in connection with them” (341). For “those who use the word star abandon exactitude or focus on the thing in itself” (341). Science has “derealized the things designated by language” (342).

In fact, science takes its place in a larger matrix: “the three powers of today, unopposed, have robbed language of its constituent parts. Science has seized its true relationship with reality; the media have taken hold of its seductive relationship with the other; and administration has taken on its performative power: (343).

The purpose of this book

“Why have I written about the five senses in a language long disqualified by so many true algorithms: without biophysics, biochemistry, physiology, psycho-physiology, acoustics, optics or logic?” (343):

- Serres’ book has celebrated and announced the death of language: “crushed and sandwiched between the Babel of scholarship and networks of information, humming with noise, language is dying, my book celebrates the death of the word” (339).

- And yet, it has done so in and through languages. He uses a language instead of “language”, in order to recalibrate the senses and restore a certain relationship to the real world. For “in this age of science language, even more than languages, is collapsing; our relationship to the world and others, and to ourselves, no longer passes preferentially through language” (341).

There is hope that “memory and language are set free […] we are going to think, directly, light-heartedly, freed from references stored in the bank – out of the text, out of the body, out of the subject” (344). It is free, “released from its obligations at last” (344).

In evolution, when an organ or function is liberated from a former duty, it becomes the white canvas for new “invention” (344). Hands become tools; mouths learn to speak, etc. Released from language, perhaps we will be able to invent anew, “to relaunch the adventure of philosophy” (344). This might especially be the case now we have repositories of information to store what we need to know; we now have “the first object at hand: the given” (344).

And so “the subject, forgetful, detached, immerses himself in the unforgettable world” (344).

This is “a resurrection – or rebirth” (345).