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Speaking from the Ruins: Benjamin Fondane's Irresigned Poetics

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In memory of Fraser Goodall (1947–2020) and Des Rubens (1952–2016), beyond their private places

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Abstract

Benjamin Fondane (1898–1944) had many vocations, sometimes contradictory: he was a poet and a philosopher, a cineaste and an essayist, a disciplined polemicist and an unbounded absurdist. His varied activities overlap and yet remain distinct, greater than the sum of their parts. An existential horizon animated his life and work. He was a dedicated and original reader of philosophy, but resented its reductions and limitations. It was as a poet that he worked at the limits of what language could capture, playing with this boundary in a search to affirm existence itself. Confounded by the manifestations of modernity and swept up in the major historical events of his era, he brought his literary affinities and his Jewish heritage to bear on the revelatory aspects of catastrophe. Between the messianic potential of the extra-rational and the performance of human utterance he generated a reciprocity between poet and reader even through the inevitable failures of the text. In the ruins of Western culture at the end of the First World War he saw also the ruination of language itself. His poetic response, simultaneously anguished and celebratory, entailed a prophetic, apophatic resistance, a constant renewal which, when seen holistically with his work as a whole, represents what he called irresignation, a going-on without rational expectation of consolation.

The thesis develops from the critical foundation of Fondane studies in French (and Romanian, Italian and German) and advances the overdue reception of Fondane's work into English. The first part contextualizes his life, work and styles. The centre of the thesis is a sustained reading of his major poetic sequence *L'Exode: Super Flumina Babylonis*, informed by my work translating it (in collaboration with Henry King). The third part is a theoretical intervention in regards to Fondane's assertion of the capacities of poetry at the boundaries of rational thought. A profound concern for the stakes of language and ineffability is the filament which weaves these parts together.

Honouring Fondane's own reservations about definitions, several notions are ventured as conceptual handholds while remaining conditional. Disconsolation, for example, the ongoing desire for an answer to life in the face of the absurdity of such a quest, and the context that engenders irresignation as Fondane's response; together they are considered through a discussion of literary mood and tone. A certain idea of anamnesis – remembering that some things

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cannot be adequately remembered – is crucial to the apophatic considerations of the thesis. Crucially, a paradoxical notion of art as a kind of subversive celebration, valuable precisely for its capacity to sustain contradictions, is put forward as a way of following the paths towards which Fondane gestures.

These theoretical concerns are bolstered by comparisons with contemporary poets Laura (Riding) Jackson and Edmond Jabès. The rich and living poetry of *L'Exode*, with its plethora of voices, forms and experiments, its ancient myth and radical modernity, exemplifies Fondane's work of recuperation and restitution, his refusal either to resign himself to the status quo or to sweep the slate clean. The thesis explores the ways in which this poetic witness affirms human life and expression from the midst of irony, bitterness and defeat.

Note on the text

Translations

Translations of *L'Exode* are my own in collaboration with Henry King (occasionally adapted). Where I have translated other primary sources directly, the original is given in a footnote or in square brackets in the text. Where I have used existing translations of Fondane alongside the original, both the French reference and the translation reference are given, in that order.

Titles

The poetic sequence *L'Exode: Super Flumina Babylonis* is referred to by its shortened French title, *L'Exode* [Exodus], in order to keep it distinct from the Biblical Exodus. In the thesis, *Le Mal des fantômes* refers to the 2006 Verdier edition of Fondane's collected French poetry, while *Le Mal des fantômes 1942–1943* refers to the specific poetic sequence of the same name.

Abbreviations

AG – *Fondane/Fundoianu et l'avant-garde.* Edited by Petre Răileanu and Michel Carassou. Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 1991.

BEG – *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre.* Paris: Editions Complexe, 1994.

CM – *La Conscience malheureuse.* Paris: Verdier, 2013.

CO – *Cinepoems and Others.* Edited by Leonard Schwartz. Translated by Mitchell Abidor, Marianne Bailey, E. M. Cioran, Marilyn Hacker, Henry King, Andrew Rubens, Nathan Rudavsky-Brody and Leonard Schwartz. New York: New York Review Books, 2016.

EC – *Ecrits pour le cinéma.* Paris: Verdier, 2007.

EDR – *L'écrivain devant la révolution: discours non prononcé au congrès international des écrivains de Paris (1935).* Edited by Louis Janover. Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 1997.

EM – *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays.* Translated by Bruce Baugh and Andrew Rubens. New York: New York Review Books, 2016.

FT – *Faux traité d'esthétique: essai sur la crise de réalité.* Paris: Paris-Méditerranée.

HDH – 'L'Homme devant l'histoire ou le bruit et la fureur.' *Les Cahiers du Sud* 18, pp. 441 – 454, 1939.

LE – *Le lundi existentiel.* Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1990.

MF – *Le mal des fantômes*. Edited by Patrice Beray, Michel Carassou, and Monique Jutrin. Paris: Editions Verdier, 2006.

RV – *Rimbaud le voyou et l'expérience poétique*. Paris: Editions Non Lieu, 2010.

Overture: Exodus

Paris, mur des lamentations | réservé à plus tard

[Paris, wailing wall | reserved for a later date]

(from *L'Exode,* MF 179; CO 173)

On the 14th of June 1940, the Nazi army drove into Paris. The French capital had marked a decisive moment in its history as the 'capital of modernity' in 1871, when the tragedy of the Commune ended with Prussian troops staging a victory parade down Baron Haussmann's wide, uniform boulevards. In 1940, the farce of French military strategy had seen the 'most modern army of its time' (Bartov 1994), the Wehrmacht, sweep across the territory of its southern neighbour with relative ease. In the *années folles*, the city of light had literalized its Enlightenment nickname, as electricity set its streets artificially ablaze with shop fronts, billboards, cinema palaces and nightclubs. Now smoke filled the air from burning petrol reserves.

1940 also heralded the mass production of penicillin, the discovery of carbon-14, the sale of the first nylons, the development of the Z2 computer, the first artificial hip surgery, the invention of plastic contact lenses and the Frisch–Peierls memorandum on the viability of the atomic bomb. Yet as the historian Hanna Diamond recounts in her book *Fleeing Hitler,* nearly a quarter of the population of France (around 8 million people), 'more people […] on the move than at any time in previously recorded history' (Diamond 2007, 2) took part in a chaotic flight bereft of modern comforts. One eyewitness commented 'in the space of four days, France had jumped backwards six centuries, finding itself at the gates of a medieval famine' (Diamond 2007, 2). Diamond describes how 'railways could not cope […] Parisians continued their journey on foot […] as they took to the roads, they encountered exhausted and frightened evacuees from Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg along with fellow citizens from the north and east of the country […] no one had planned for this exodus and the result was total chaos with an enormous price to pay in terms of human misery and suffering' (Diamond 2007, 1–2).

Diamond narrates the proliferation of bicycles, horses and carts, and the vast numbers walking, most of whom had packed in haste or not at all. Their numbers quickly increased as petrol ran out for the privileged minority with motor transport. Hunger led to the pillaging of fields and townships, and German aircraft struck at random like lightning on the slow-moving lines of civilians. Confusion reigned, exacerbated by the refugees' shock at their abandonment by the French state and military, and generalized suspicion due to the fear of a fifth column. The writer Camille Bourniquel remarked 'only an experience in the Bible could represent this surge of humanity' (Diamond 2007, 2).

This catastrophic event seemed to disrupt time. It represented both a peak of modernity in the might of the German army and a throwing-open of time, so that its human effects seemed not so much bracketed by a historical present as part of a flow of disruption and displacement which was more easily approached through religious and literary lenses. The Parisian avant-gardes, accelerators of the future, were confronted with a vanguard of modern steel. While some of the right-wing minority, such as Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Céline, welcomed Hitler not so differently to the way Hegel welcomed Napoleon, most were cast into the same disarray as other civilians. A few, especially if they were Jewish or had already fled Germany (or both, such as Walter Benjamin), had particular prescience of the stakes involved, though in most cases it did not help prepare them for the German victory. Avant-gardes already had form in artistically responding to modernity's violence, such as Rimbaud at the Commune or Picasso with Guernica.[1] Such events defeated simple understanding for those who lived through them, and exposed the inadequacy of the means available to attempt to communicate their significance.

One such writer who nonetheless made the attempt was the idiosyncratic poet and philosopher Benjamin Fondane. Fondane was also a cineaste, visual artist, polemicist and translator who mingled extensively with the dadaists, surrealists and Grand Jeu group without formally attaching himself to any of them. In the early 1930s, he had been making a name for himself in Parisian literary circles with the publication of poem-sequences such as *Ulysse* and *Titanic*, lyric narratives of

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[1] See for example Rimbaud's 'Chant de guerre parisien' (Rimbaud 2009, 73) and Kristin Ross's book *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Ross 2008) or T.J. Clark's *Picasso and Truth* (Clark 2013).

wandering and of disaster. Their mostly free, disjointed verses mixed dissatisfaction and alienation at modern life with the desire for new horizons, and startling, personalised, surreal imagery with cityscapes, images lifted from cinema and descriptions of nameless masses – workers and emigrants – who had thus far received a miserly distribution of the future. This combination of individual and mass experience of alienation would eventually lead him to coin the untranslatable expression *le mal des fantômes,* which became the title of a later collection and ultimately his chosen title for his collected French poetry.[2] Around the same period, he had also been working on a different project without publishing it, one that employed his Jewish heritage much more explicitly. No significant part would be published until after his death, but it was finished in 1942 or 1943, when he wrote an afterword that, in an understated way, indicated he viewed the work as a kind of resistance to the triumph of fascism. In uncanny fashion, the work was called *L'Exode*, or to give its full title, *L'Exode: Super flumina babylonis* [*Exodus: By the Rivers of Babylon*].

Fondane, less complacent than some Europeans regarding the menace of Nazism, had already considered emigrating to the Americas in the 1930s, but had been hampered, like Benjamin, by his poverty (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 187). He thus directly experienced the invasion and latter-day exodus. In *L'Exode,* his deep and broad use of Biblical imagery to confront modernity – analogous to the way other modernist writers and he himself drew on classical sources – pre-empted the events which seemed to literally collapse the different worlds into one another. *L'Exode* was unlike any sequence he had written before. Though it contained elements of the same surreal, genre-subverting lyrics of his other poems, it brought together a host of different characters and poetic forms into an original and quasi-dramatic texture.

Many of the characters of *L'Exode* are lifted straight from the Bible, but their creation is also – and sometimes simultaneously – influenced by antecedents of modernity such as François Villon and Nietzsche, as well as by cultural fields as diverse as kabbalah and the music hall. This use of characters parallels the ideas

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[2] It is sometimes rendered as the pain, sorrow or sickness of ghosts; Vassiliki Kolocotroni ventures 'phantom trouble'. *Mal* has no direct equivalent and I also feel that no English translation captures the duality of this malaise or ache being both with and of ghosts, the hurting and the haunting of masses of people devalued in actuality and in history.

Fondane was concurrently developing around existential dimensions of aesthetics, in his burgeoning vocation as an existential philosopher. Drawing often on Shakespeare and Nietzsche – a focus encouraged by his philosophical guide Leon Shestov – he was coming to the view that the truest existential statements are brought out by a Wildean 'truth of masks'.In his afterword, he wrote that 'celui qui parle décline son identité tout de suite [the one who speaks immediately discloses their identity]'(MF 208) but this character-identity serves a particular literary purpose, and allows the author to sidestep philosophical responsibility for the utterance, as a kind of psychic protection which allows the speaking of thoughts too intemperate to state directly.[3]

The interplay of different voices also creates a relational emphasis in which new angles are revealed and poetry's palinodic capacity to sustain contradiction comes to the fore. Yet it may be that the distance Fondane was seeking also contributed to an early dissatisfaction with the work. We will probably never know for certain the 'obscure scruples' (MF 207) that held him back from publishing in the 1930s. But it may be that despite his juxtaposition of varied poetic forms, the realization of his vision was struggling to find the shape that best suited it. His philosophical development was also seeking new outlets, as he sought to balance his anarchic 'ransacking of the safeboxes of philosophy' (Lescure 1998, 23, my translation) with his poetic activity. Certain passages of the work, such as the verses he puts into the mouths of Hebrew alphabet letters or the soliloquies of three unnamed men, attest to this struggle.

The invasion of 1940 energized its victims even as it threw them into a panic. André Morize wrote of 'a deeply moving and pitiful mixture of bravery and panic, calm courage, distress, and (what a marvellous thing) good humour, the will to live and fear of death' (cited in Diamond 2007, 53). These contradictory qualities are reflected in Fondane's additions to his poem in the 1940s as surely as the streams of human lives, the horses and carts and the death and destruction. Fondane scholar Olivier Salazar-Ferrer argues that in *L'Exode* 'the ghostly reality of the narrative subject in *Ulysse* and *Titanic* was saved by his cry' (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 178, my translation). The dramatic dialogue is interrupted right in the middle by the return of the lyric *je*, only a *je* marked by radical self-interrogation and peri-utterative,

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[3] See also his discussion of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms (CM 234).

questioning expostulations. Fondane had come to place particular emphasis on performances at the limits of utterance, such as the cry, or wail [*le cri*], and the prayer, in his essays (CM 25; EM 39). Now these concerns irrupted into his poetic sequence in the form of an 'Intermède [Interlude]' subtitled *Colère de la vision* [Visionary anger], which ambiguously hovers between the poet's rage at what he is witnessing and frustrations with his own art.

Fondane had previously tried to reconcile his desire to make his poetry touch reality with his own position at a remove from the epicentre of tangible historical events. Now, instead of bearing witness from the edges, a position that characterizes *Ulysse*, he was caught in the maelstrom. His Shestovian understanding of the absurdity of history, akin to Walter Benjamin's, had already stripped him of any illusions of stability and security in the modern world. Despite his distrust of notions of progress, his contributions to anti-fascist debates had earlier (in 1935's *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution*) led him to proclaim the uselessness of literature in resistance to war and oppression, a position he honoured when he was called up to the French army prior to the German victory. Now, however, he came to understand his practice of poetry as its own kind of resistance. His most famous poem, the 1942 *Préface en prose* to *L'Exode*, circulated as an act of defiance during the Occupation and stands as an immaterial resistance to fascism and racism to this day.

Anne Mounic, another Fondane scholar, argues that

> from the point of view of a narrative conceived as a singular subject's existential perception of events shared, in one way or another, by the whole (whether or not they are 'historic'), the importance of myth reveals itself, not as a chimera leaping from a fanciful imagination, but as the common thread of our effort to live and our belonging in the world. (Mounic 2017, 88, my translation)

The importance of myth, alchemized through a dramatic dialogue, cannot be overstated in Fondane's poem. Yet the lyric voice, inserted into the work as a direct response to his lived experience of catastrophe, brings it to a new degree of artistic force, in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The lyric passages of the *Intermède* and the *Préface* cut through the more esoteric aspects of the sequence as it had previously existed. Yet rather than straightforwardly undermining them, the tension between the vivid immediacy of the

lyric voice and the mythic diversity of the rest of the work raised the latter to a new degree of relevance. Though the author 'était fort loin de penser qu'il prophétisait [hardly imagined he was prophesying]' (MF 208) in 1934, his images of exile and exodus beyond the bounds of history took on new sharpness as his bruised but impassioned lyric voice responded to the force of the present.

      The fourth poem of the *Intermède* exemplifies the immediacy and skill of Fondane's blending of various elements. It speaks, in a first person plural, the questions and the flotsam of hopes whirling round the refugees' minds, passed around to the point of becoming impersonal. This effect is heightened by the form, which is reminiscent of the style of a popular earworm.

Qu'allons-nous faire si les fleuves l'un après l'autre nous quittaient? Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, qu'allons- nous faire?	What are we going to do if the rivers one after another should leave us? Oh God, oh God, what will we do?
La Meuse nous a fuis, la gueuse, et la Somme s'est fait enlever… Si tous le fleuves nous quittaient qu'allons-nous faire?	The Meuse gave us the slip, the bitch, and the Somme's been carried off… If all of the rivers should leave us what will we do?

La Marne, ô rusée, ô jolie,
Pourquoi es-tu restée au lit?
Ô Seine, c'est de la folie!
    Mon Dieu!
	Sweet Marne, so canny, so pretty,
	why did you stay in your bed?
	Oh Seine, this is insanity,
	              Oh God!

Il reste la Loire, elle attend,
elle nous attend sûrement,
toute nue parmi ses joncs
    – n'est-ce pas, ô Loire?
	There's still the Loire, she's waiting,
	she's waiting for us for certain,
	naked between her banks
	    – isn't that so, dear Loire?

Mais si elle aussi nous quittait, à quoi bon le pain et le lait, s'il en demeure sur la terre?	But if she were to leave us too, what would bread and milk be worth, supposing there's any left on earth?
Si elle aussi, elle s'en allait… Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, qu'allons- nous faire?	If she, if she left too… Oh God, oh God, what will we do?

(MF 177–178; CO 169–171)

Bread and milk appear as quasi-Biblical images, the essential stuff of life symbolized in poetry – but they are also figuring as a very prosaic, very immediate concern. Diamond notes that 'crossing the Loire seemed to promise safety'. She reproduces the account of Léon Werth: 'they [the Germans] pass the Somme, the Oise. Even if they pass the Seine nothing is lost. We will fight them on the Loire. We will have no shortage of rivers and strategy is the science of rivers' (Diamond 2007, 64–65).

The commonplace ejaculation 'mon Dieu!' took on a new significance in a context where the complancency of everyday life had been turned upside down by an overwhelming event. Fondane, shaken from his artistic milieu and 'brusquement […] jeté dans la campagne de France [abruptly thrown into the countryside of France]' (MF 176) would have been as shaken as his fellow refugees, though perhaps less surprised. His prose writings of the 1930s betray an uncommon prescience of the imminent disasters. His poetry, fed, like the perceptions of those around him on the roads, by information and misinformation flowing on the radio and from mouth to mouth, also allowed him to make something more of this input by drawing on rich resources of form, image and existential reflection. In the seventh poem of the *Intermède*, the voice of the present and the voice of myth interchange and overlap like radio channels:

Nous laissions derrière nous Paris.
               Ah! si jamais
je t'oublie, Jérusalem… À présent
tu n'étais plus une ville, mais une
               vieille hostie
un pain de chair, de sang
qui est resté là-bas, mais que nous
               emportions
avec nous – dans la captivité,
               l'outrage
dans l'angoisse, l'offense et le
               vomissement.
Douce rivière, ô Siloé!
Ô Seine! et toi Paris, mur des
               lamentations
réservé à plus tard
quand Assyrie enflée comme une
               vessie immense
crèvera!

We were leaving Paris behind us. Ah!
               If ever
I forget you, Jerusalem... From that
               moment
you were a city no more, but an old
               piece of the Host
bread of flesh and blood
that stayed put, but which we were
               carrying
with us – through captivity, insult,
through anguish, offence and vomiting.
Sweet river, O Siloam!
O Seine! and you, Paris, wailing wall
reserved for a later date
when Assyria, swollen like a huge
               bladder
will burst!

How many Jews on this earth, Lord!

Que de Juifs sur cette terre,
        Seigneur! et qui sans doute
T'ont oublié, cous raides et têtes
                fortes. Oui,
et pourtant nous criions vers Toi.
                Te souviens-Tu
du bouc, jadis, que la forte main
                d'Aaron
imposait et chassait dans le désert,
                chargé
de nos impuretés? Me voici Aaron.
Je me mets à genoux et je sanglote
                et crie
en une langue que j'ai oubliée,
                mais dont
je me souviens aux soirs émus de
                Ta Colère:
'Adonaï Elochenu, Adonaï Echod!'

                who have doubtless
forgotten you, stiff-necked and
                headstrong. Yes,
and yet we were crying out to You. Do
                You remember
the goat, back then, that the strong
                hand of Aaron
fell upon and chased into the desert,
                laden
with our uncleaness? Now I am Aaron.
I go down on my knees and I sob and
                cry
in a language I have forgotten, but
                which
I remember in the impassioned
                evenings of Your Anger:
'Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Eḥad!'

(MF 179–180; CO 172–174)

The affective reality of the mythical history is reactivated by the very concrete present reality. The rivers of France map in association with the Siloam, river lost to the Jews in the first Jewish-Roman war.

The Siloam is where Jesus sent a blind man to recover his sight (John 9). The longing for knowledge tends to be juxtaposed in Fondane's work with reminders of humanity's suffering, mortal state. The Christian desire for salvation, carried in the poem's image of the wafer, is given a tragic pathos in the face of the material conditions of its setting. The identity of the exile, rent from the physical and social fabrics that normally allow it to help constitute itself, is dependent on memory alone, clung to and carried 'through anguish, offence and vomiting'. The fusion of the expression of alienation in modernity with a poetic reactivation of Jewish mythos create both a powerful assertion of and a resistance to the 'metaphysics of exile' (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 178–179). The Jewish experience becomes generalised: 'Que de Juifs sur cette terre, Seigneur! [How many Jews on this earth, Lord!]'

Significantly, the last stanza of this poem dramatizes an uncertainty of understanding and expression in the hour of failure and abandonment. The speaker's self-characterization as Aaron is ambiguous: is the poem doing the work of the scapegoat, charged with a confession of humanity's failings and weaknesses? If so, the poet recognizes its inability to fulfil the task of absolution. The poet speaks of the

limits of speaking, falling to sobbing and crying. He speaks in 'une langue que j'ai oubliée'. The prayer-words of the last line are at the absolute limits of signification; they are an irrational, fragmented, ritualized gesture as much as linguistic signs.

The thread of this thesis is bound up with Fondane's struggle with the limits of language, of how catastrophe exposes the inherent insufficiencies of human attempts at communication and reconciliation through words. He himself had previously abandoned poetry altogether for several years, bereft at the crumbling of the faith he had invested in Symbolist aesthetics. Yet he returned to it, and as his hard-won commitment to poetry shows, it also became the site of a vital and affirmative resistance, not only to ineffability but also to the elements he considered to be detrimental to the celebration and assertion of life in its plenitude, from overconfidence in idealist philosophy to the terrible destruction wrought by the Nazis. After the exodus and the surrender of France, he returned to Paris along with the bulk of its inhabitants. There, at great personal risk, he refused to obey Nazi and Vichy laws, living clandestinely in occupied Paris until the end of his life, working, against all the odds, on the poetry and philosophy that was his powerful and lasting rebuke to dehumanization.

Introduction

> Si, par contre, une *limite* est, pour vous, 'une torture et un aiguillon', si vous êtes de ceux qui, pas toujours, mais ne fût-ce qu'une fois, ont crié que la logique ne saurait résister à un homme qui veut vivre; si vous étouffez en un monde qui n'a ni portes ni fenêtres, et pensez que c'est le rôle de la métaphysique de les faire surgir, alors, seulement, votre passion sera existentielle.
>
> [If, however, a limit is a 'torture and a spur' for you, if you are one of those who has cried out – not all the time but even just once – that logic cannot resist a man who wants to live, if you are suffocating in a world that has neither doors nor windows and think it is metaphysics' job to conjure them up, only then will your passion be existential.]

<div align="right">

from *Le Lundi Existentiel* (LE 62; EM 28)

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Benjamin Fondane was an agonistic philosopher. On one hand he was a studious reader of major philosophical texts and a fierce and dedicated interlocutor with them. On the other, he resented the project of philosophy itself, chafing at the reductions and limitations inherent in any attempt to reason with the world. This tension is appropriate, for as a poet he valued the sustaining of contradictions very highly. Like the surrealist group, of which he was almost a de facto member, if – like his friend Antonin Artaud – an idiosyncratic one, he saw in poetry a route to going beyond quotidian, rationalized perceptions. However, he was deeply divided from the line of André Breton because he ultimately saw in surrealism the same hubristic confidence of masterful interpretation he condemned in idealistic philosophy. While the latter suppressed the irrational entirely, the former became guilty of rationalizing it in turn, what the Fondane scholar and publisher Michel Carassou refers to as a 'systemization of the irrational' (Carassou 1999, 15, my translation).

One way to understand Fondane's position is to consider that philosophers have always tried to guarantee the supremacy and absolute clarity of the logos, and poets have always subverted this by playing on the ambiguity of words, right from the starting point that one word – one signifier, even one letter – can have two diametrically opposed meanings. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed many projects in many domains that considered themselves modern in the project of attempting to to bring mundane reality into line with the perfection of

ideals. From grand projects such as 'scientific' Marxism to the *a priori* economics of the Austrian school which underpin neoliberalism, many trends in modernity, explicitly or implicitly, sought to make reality conform to theory. For others, Fondane among them, modernity exposed the ideal world as a fraud, leaving us only with reality as we live it and with the conflicting, contradictory medium of language as our only means for navigating a fundamental cultural disunity. The logos is no longer guaranteed by a divine or otherwise ideal super-reality, whether conceived in grandiose terms, such as the Supreme Being of the French revolution, or more covertly, as in Whig history and its latter-day mutations. However, language remains the nexus of communication for our existence. By using it to gesture to what it cannot capture, the poet can seek to affirm existence itself.

The tension between the processes of reason and the excess that always remains outside of any definition is crucial to Fondane's work. In his key essay *Faux Traité d'esthétique* [*Pseudo Treatise on Aesthetics*] he wrote:

On ne peut guère nier la duplicité de notre art. Mais il est très probable qu'elle tient principalement à la duplicité de l'artiste moderne. En tant qu'homme, il croit à une réalité naturelle et mécanique qu'en tant qu'artiste il ne peut que repousser de toutes ses forces; mais il ne parvient à croire, en tant qu'homme, à ce qu'artiste il tient pour vrai. Conflit déchirant et qui ne peut se résoudre par un compris – et fût-ce un compromis hégélien.

[We cannot deny the duality of our art. But it is very probable that it primarily originates in the duality of the modern artist. As a man, he believes in a natural and mechanistic reality that as an artist he must push against with all his strength. Yet as a man he cannot make himself believe what, as an artist, he holds as true. This is a terrible conflict and one that cannot be resolved by a compromise – even if it were a Hegelian one.] (FT 106)

The problem of life's irrational aspects is fundamentally bound up with the problem of the limits of language. As a vehicle for rational thinking, language constantly trips against the irrational impulses that fail to ever be fully categorized by it. For Fondane, the liminal space of this conflict is the terrain of the poet.

The philosopher Ann Van Sevenant argues that Fondane is 'undoubtedly a precursor of twentieth century philosophy of difference' (Van Sevenant 2007). She describes his work as pressing the reader to 'continue the many discontinuous meanings that haunt not only texts, but also each individual experience' (Van

Sevenant 2007). The failures of language are productive failures, and the poet bets on the space they open, on their capacity to make something happen beyond themselves. The critic Patrice Beray argues that

> in Fondane's work the time of invention in and through language is allied with the 'address of the witness', which achieves the convergence of a personal account and a factual or historical relation. But for the poem to exist, the narration and the linear story must ineluctably make way for the temporality and spatiality that the 'present' of writing creates in its own right […] Alone, the discourse of the poem, without a 'reason', steps forward into the unknown. (Beray 2006, 238–243, my translation)

A certain kind of reciprocity is hoped for by the poet, precisely in the generation of meaning in the anticipated encounter between text and reader.

As is made evident in interlinguistic translation, meaning is consistently being both lost and created. Each interpretation of language sends meaning transformed back to its origin, changing how that origin may be received in turn. My own engagement with Fondane has been shaped by my practice of translating his work from French into English. Jacques Derrida drew extensively on the practice of translation in his own thinking about language. In his work *Monolingualism of the Other,* he writes of the paradox that each poet creates their own idiolect that is nonetheless oriented towards a reader. He claims that

> language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other […] the fact that there is no necessarily determinable content in this promise of the other, and in the language of the other, does not make any less indisputable its opening up of speech by something that resembles messianism, soteriology, or eschatology […] what remains insurmountable […] whatever the necessity or legitimacy of all emancipations, is quite simply the 'there is a language' […] there is no metalanguage (Derrida 1998, 68–69)

This interminable dwelling between messianism and human utterance is a pertinent parallel to Fondane's deployment of Jewish scripture in his poetry.

Derrida continues:

> This is not to say that language is monological and tautological, but that it is always up to a language to summon the heterological opening that permits it

> to speak of something else and to address itself to the other […] It can also
> be given over, without betrayal, to other inventions of idioms, to other
> poetics, without end. (Derrida 1998, 69)

At a time when many of his avant-garde fellows were attempting to ground a definitive artistic praxis, Fondane performed this act of opening towards a poetics without end, a poetics that also resisted political attempts to 'end history', maintaining always the 'heterological' possibility of a connection with the other, in defiance of pre-determination of either form or content.

For Fondane, the poetic act has a profoundly existential dimension. Analysing the 'negative' philosophy of his philosophical mentor Shestov, Luca Governatori argues that, 'where the philosopher [Shestov] sought somehow to prove, in a battle lost in advance, the world's ultimately non-apprehensible nature, the artist simply wants us to experience it' (Governatori 2002, 14, my translation). This is the task Fondane sets himself as a poet. In his essay 'Silence in Debris', the writer China Miéville quotes Fondane's opposition of living and knowing (Miéville 2019, 5).[1] In his own apophatic approach to history, Miéville sets out the 'presence' of silence in the debris of modernity's catastrophes, arguing with Fondane that we ignore it at our peril. I came to Miéville's essay after having conceived the thesis title, but the parallel is felicitous. The ruins of modernity's ideals also entail a kind of confusion and ruination of language, as the sound poems of Dada showed. The whole question of Fondane's poetry became how to speak with and from these ruins.

L'Exode, as the poet Claude Vigée claims, is arguably Fondane's major poetic work (Vigée 2007). In collaboration with Henry King, I have been working on translating it for several years, with extracts published in magazines and in the first Fondane anthology to appear in English (*Cinepoems and Others*), and a full edition forthcoming. Accordingly, it is the focal point for my critical and theoretical discussion of Fondane's work as an artist, philosopher and critic. My readings of it form the axis around which the thesis turns. As I shall set out, these readings are not straightforward literary criticism (Patrice Beray has done the best and most extensive formal and metrical analysis of Fondane's work to date, in his 2006 book *Benjamin*

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[1] Fondane asks, subversively but honestly, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un philosophe pour lequel la liberté ne commence que là où la connaissance finit? [What kind of philosopher is he who does not accept that freedom begins where knowledge ends?]' (CM 30; EM 44)

Fondane, au temps du poème). Instead, they attempt, to some degree, to respond to the holistic and idiosyncratic tendencies of Fondane's own critical work.

The thesis comprises three main parts. The first is mainly expository, a survey of Fondane's life, work and reception history; his context in and responses to modernity and modernism; and a discussion of the methodological concerns around critically studying a contradictory field and a defiantly category-resistant author. The second part is where the main readings are developed. The third represents an argument for understanding Fondane's work in open-ended ethical and theoretical ways, following his own defence of associative over syllogistic modes of thought to posit functions of poetry that are powerful yet provisional in definition. All three are overlain and interwoven with a linguistic element: the importance of the limits of rational discourse and the effects of ineffability are held up in sustained apposition to the discussion of Fondane's work.

Fondane is under-known in the English-speaking world, although the situation is rapidly changing. In Part I, Chapter 1 balances introducing Fondane for the reader with the need to focus on what is essential for grounding the arguments of the thesis, rather than being comprehensive. A discussion of his biography highlights his relation to artistic and philosophical trends and some of the issues around defining his life and legacy. An overview of his reception follows, examining the history of his work after the Second World War, including the attention he has received from critics writing in English. A brief survey of his work, in its various domains, is included, again with a focus on what is most relevant for the current study. A literature review covers the existing field of Fondane scholarship, as well as the theoretical associations that have been most important for the thesis. Finally, the methodological difficulties of academically approaching an author whose stated desire was to 'dédorer la séduction [strip off the seductive glitter]' (CM 30; EM 45) of academic discourse are discussed, and Fondane is placed in a loose context of idiosyncratic modernist writing that blurs the boundaries between criticality and creativity.

Chapter 2 takes a broader approach to understanding Fondane's primary philosophical and artistic concerns and situating these with his contemporary contexts. For Fondane, the absurdity and suffering of life could be understood and confronted by way of catastrophic events; catastrophe, for all its terrors, also held a possibility of revelation and renewal. Thus this chapter looks at Fondane's

understanding of modernity *as* catastrophe, shorn of the cultural unity that has at times been consolatory for humanity in the face of disaster. His critique of Humanism and turn to the existential metaphysical angles he saw exposed by this view of history are set out. These are then related back to the notion of ineffability, and its resonances from negative theology, which help to frame both his extra-rational take on philosophy and his poetics, as they did for contemporary writers such as Kafka, Celan and Jabès. Chapter 2 concludes by tying this awareness of ineffability with the challenge of responding to historical events, their resistance to full rational comprehension and the possible value of extra-rational responses.

This is a thesis that constitutes a sustained engagement with the insufficiencies of terminology: with the contradiction acknowledged, Chapter 3 sets out its keywords. The notion of 'disconsolation', formulated partly in contrast to the role of philosophy as consolation, is put forward as one way of thinking about the paradox of Fondane's declaration of the essential suffering of existence and his determination to affirm existence's intrinsic value. This state, which, in his worldview, could only be surpassed messianically, is the terrain from which the attitude he called 'irresignation' can spring. In a theoretical move which is intended to be functional rather than conclusive, these two terms are linked to poetic notions of mood and tone, as a means to reading them as effects in his poetry when they cannot be considered as independent from his philosophical work, nor as didactically 'carried' by his poems. Several other key terms are also discussed proleptically for their development in the analysis, including the concept of poetic testimony, what Beray calls the 'discours du témoin' (Beray 2006, 238).

Instead of a purely linear unfolding, the thesis contains two chapters that diverge from the central focus on Fondane to enrich the argument and context through comparison. The first of these is chapter 4, which acts as an interlude between the introduction of disconsolation, irresignation and testimony and the deeper engagement with them in *L'Exode*. Chapter 4 uses a contrasting comparison between Fondane and his contemporary Laura (Riding) Jackson in order to expound and clarify his relationship to language and its insufficiencies, and the ways his struggle to respond to the resulting aporiae became a paradoxical but essential aspect of his poetic activity. The juxtaposition of this comparative chapter with those that

follow give another dimension for the reader's engagement with Fondane's poetic decisions.

Part II begins with chapter 5, which uses disconsolation to get to grips with *L'Exode* itself. Firstly, the prominent polyphonic and heteroglossic aspects of the text are reviewed. Secondly, the contradictory, yet mutually inclusive, enfolding of personal, historical and mythic temporalities in the work is connected to the 'time of the poem' (Beray 2006) and its (non) place of existential experience and affinity. Thirdly, the importance of characterisation and masks, key to the relationship between Fondane's poetry and his philosophy, is introduced, particularly in connection with the notion of the tragic.

Chapter 6 then moves on to irresignation and *L'Exode*. It looks at the way the poem dramatizes the struggle against ineffability and makes its own existence a performance of irresignation, even as it questions the authority of its own categorizations. The exilic relationship between the 'existent' and reality, apparent in the distance created by language between the object of perception and the interpreter, is shown to parallel the work's Jewish imagery. At the same time, by means of the poem's avowed extra-rationality, this distance is resisted in poetry itself. The work's affirmation of human life and human expression, even in the midst of irony, bitterness and degradation, is highlighted. These points are also related to the development of Fondane's own critical stance on poetics, especially his relation to Rimbaud. The final part of the chapter consolidates *L'Exode* as part of Fondane's extra-rational response to catastrophe.

Part III moves into a wider theoretical discussion. Chapter 7, *Towards Poetic Testimony*, returns to the problem of writing disaster. It argues that Fondane's work, and *L'Exode* in particular, complicates distinctions between the eyewitness and the artist, both directly in terms of addressing specific catastrophes and more philosophically in terms of the fight of the existent to affirm their reality against what Fondane saw as the alienation that reduced individuals to ghosts, without falling into the trap of reifying overdetermination. The Lyotardian concept of anamnesis is useful here as a way of understanding the poet's non-programmatic response to disaster. The elusive directions it gestures towards, without dictating, lead into a more direct assertion of three aspects of the subversiveness of Fondane's poetic approach. Although irresignation entails affirmation of the existent and of existence, it can only

take place in a context of subversion.[2] This context is at once linguistic, existential and ethical. Through eclectic readings of Fondane, poetry's operations of contradiction, apposition and association are shown to be crucial. This tension between subversion and affirmation takes us to the greatest paradox of the chapter, an Achebean notion of art as a kind of subversive celebration that draws all of these contradictions into its atmosphere.

Chapter 8 completes Part III. It turns this consideration of poetic testimony towards intersubjective and ethical concerns. These concerns are (once again) somewhat paradoxical in Fondane's work: in his philosophy he consistently attacks any science of ethics, yet crucial ethical aspects are to be found in between the lines, as is clear in most readings of his work. These aspects are necessarily resistant to straightforward definition, yet, building on the work of other Fondane scholars, as I do throughout the thesis, I argue that they become evident and active, if not categorically defined, in his poetry. Keeping his subversions and the ambiguity of subject positions in his work in play, I further examine the interpretive and interpellative elements of his poetry introduced in chapter 7, linking them to recent theoretical debates over ethics and intersubjectivity and arguing for his poetry's creation of a proto-political space for relation.

Part III is succeeded by the second comparative chapter, this time finding affinity between Fondane and another contemporary, Edmond Jabès. Together, (Riding) Jackson and Jabès, both of whom survived the Second World War, make useful points of reference for Fondane, who did not. Where (Riding) Jackson responded to the difficulties of meaning by eventually rejecting poetry, Jabès responded to surviving catastrophe by dedicating himself to it, confronting the voids of meaning in the same medium that highlighted them. As with Fondane, Jewish tradition and negative theology helped give form, if not solace, to his expression. These formal and thematic connections bring the thesis full circle, back to its linguistic problematic: the impossibility of speaking and the necessity of doing so, and the importance of poetry as a means of going forward with this contradiction.

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[2] *L'existant* is defined simply, in post-Sartrean existential philosophy, as a person or object existing concretely. I will examine the openness of Fondane's use of the term to refer to a person in their situated consciousness in the terminology discussion in chapter 3.

PART I

Chapter 1

Approaching Fondane

Biography

Benjamin Fondane's biographical and bibliographical contexts are extensively laid out in Olivier Salazar-Ferrer's two monographs (2004, 2007). These situate the writer and the man in the milieu which characterized his reception and social setting in his own lifetime – as an *homme de lettres*, part of a European literary and artistic culture of intellectual debate, political positioning and avant-garde aesthetic affinities interwoven across varied media and forums, from the *Nouvelle Revue Française* to the cafés of the European capitals, with Paris the most lively or at least the most famous (Ory and Sirinelli 2004; Winock 1997). Salazar-Ferrer maintains a holistic overview of Fondane's creative activities throughout. Drawing mainly on Salazar-Ferrer's work, here follows a review of aspects of his biography that relate to the concerns of the thesis.

Fondane was born in Iași, Romania in 1898. Part of the city's important Jewish community, he benefited from its rich Yiddish culture, not least in terms of theatre, music, literature and folklore. He also grew up in a period of strong anti-Semitism, including pogroms nearby. He wrote and published poetry from a young age, influenced by French symbolism. As a young man he moved to Bucharest, joining an avant-garde group, Insula, with which he created Romania's first avant-garde theatre. In 1923, he moved to Paris, actively participating in the city's avant-garde ferment. He reported on events in Paris for Romanian newspapers and journals, wrote literary criticism and film scripts, befriended Man Ray, Antonin Artaud, Constantin Brancusi, Arthur Adamov and many others (he knew Romanians such as Tristan Tzara already) and took part in the various ebbs and flows of movements such as Cubism, Dada, surrealism and Le Grand Jeu.

However, he never pinned his colours to the mast of any particular group, which is one factor in his relative neglect in modernist posterity. In 1924, he had another crucial encounter, meeting the Russian philosopher Leon (or Lev) Shestov, who encouraged him to study philosophy more deeply and to write himself. Thus, Fondane contributed to the existential debates of the 1920s and 1930s, later overshadowed, like others such as Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff, by the post-war celebrity of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Poetry was always central to his concerns. Fondane's move to Paris, ironically in part a rebuke to what he saw as Romania's slavish imitations of French culture, was also paralleled by what might be called a crisis of faith in poetry, outlined in his 1929 essay 'Mots Sauvages'. In that short essay, written to introduce a collection of his existing (Romanian) poems, he attests to an inability to write poetry lasting four years. This thesis pivots around that crisis, and Fondane's return to poetry in the medium of the French language, the reasons for which he never stopped exploring in both the poems themselves and in his existential and aesthetic prose writings. As this thesis will explore, Fondane's literary criticism and philosophical essays overlap with his poetry in their engagement with the endless problem of language as origin and experience of consciousness in the world.

Fondane was not only a literary participant in the artistic and intellectual ecosystem. He also worked as a disseminator: as well as reporting to Romania, he made trips to Argentina to introduce Dada and surrealist films to South America, meeting Jorge Luis Borges through his friend Victoria Ocampo. He also made his own film there, *Tararira*, now sadly lost. Of course, his move to France (he married a French woman, Geneviève, and eventually took French citizenship) also corresponded with the rise of fascism in Europe. Fondane took part in fierce debates over the role of writers and artists in fighting this new threat, and over the appropriate political response, including the role of Communism. At a time when many were drawn to political absolutes, Fondane — without claiming a sanctimonious neutrality — adopted a commitment to the ultimate autonomy of art and the elements of existence and culture which he saw as threatened by rationalizations of history, be they 'scientific' socialism, National Socialist pseudo-Darwinism or liberal-capitalist 'progress'.

Fondane experienced the German invasion of 1940 and the mass flight from the north of France, one of history's biggest immediate displacements. He was called up to fight and soon became a prisoner of war. He was released back into occupied Paris, soon having to live clandestinely as a subversive intellectual and identified as a Jew. He wrote poems for resistance journals, notably through Paul Eluard. He was betrayed to the Gestapo in 1944. Friends such as Emil Cioran (who credited him with turning him away from fascism), Stephane Lupasco and Eugene Ionesco pulled strings to obtain his release and passage to Argentina. However, he refused to abandon his sister, Line, and was sent to Auschwitz, where he was murdered.

Many strands of Fondane's work and life bear upon readings of his oeuvre, which therefore run a constant danger of reducing it. In particular, these are his Jewishness; narrow conceptions of existential thought, and doubt at his autodidact and interdisciplinary encounters with philosophy; and his death. Add to this the challenge he presents to understanding the history of Dada and surrealism and the temptation to treat him in isolation from them and it would be easy to fall into the trap of treating his writing 'as a kind of biographic key', as Chris Kraus cautions in relation to Fondane's contemporary Simone Weil (Kraus 2013, 18).

In the ongoing process of his reception, Fondane's perceived national and cultural identities are often foregrounded. This is understandable as part of an impulse to situate him in a canon, but it sometimes comes at the expense of wider ramifications. In a jacket quote on Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody's translation of his poem *Ulysse* (the first to appear in English in its entirety), Brooks Haxton describes the work as the 'meditative and rhapsodic travelogue of a Romanian Jew' (Fondane 2017). Fondane's Jewishness is undoubtedly present in the poem. Yet his response to all aspects of 'being Jewish' is ambiguous. For him, the 'essence' of Judaism is a metaphysical or philosphical or theological or existential position, rather than an essential identity:

> beaucoup de Juifs, nés Juifs: un Bergson, un Freud, un Einstein, ne le sont guère 'essentiellement'; ils le sont moins qu'un Pascal, ou un Kierkegaard, l'un exigeant le Dieu d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob, l'autre quittant Hegel avec éclat pour les 'penseurs privés', Job ou Abraham.

> [many Jews, born Jews — Bergson, Freud, or Einstein, for example — are not 'essentially' Jewish; less than Pascal, or than Kierkegaard, the first

insisting upon the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the second dramatically abandoning Hegel for the 'private thinkers' Job and Abraham.] (Fondane 1936)

His poetry draws deeply and richly from Judaic literary and theological sources. Haxton's description, though, is fairly typical, in that it risks mediating Fondane too narrowly through such an identity. In this thesis I aim to respect his biography without falling foul of that restriction. It is now possible to read the essays and poetry of Walter Benjamin and Paul Celan inclusive of their Jewish aspects without prefixing every mention of their name with 'German Jew'; Fondane deserves the same. Of course, we cannot suspend the terrible suffering he went through by way of his Jewish identity, but it is worth remembering that anti-Semitism forced constraints of identity upon him (Beray 2009, 18–19). His statuses as Romanian, as French and as Jewish were singular starting points, neither fixed nor denied, but moved through on a philosophical and artistic journey towards multiplicity and plenitude. In this sense, Fondane is eminently modernist. Like the surrealists, he reserved the right to descend from Rimbaud rather than his given genealogy.

In his foreword to *Ulysses,* David Rieff laudably attempts to walk the blurred lines. Introducing Fondane is no easy task, as my own efforts here no doubt highlight. This is in part due to his shifting identities: Jewish, Romanian, French; poet, playwright, filmmaker, philosopher; unbeliever, avant-gardiste without a group, non-combatant Résistant, underground man. It is also due to the variety of media and genres he worked across. Rieff seems to seek to prevent the reader pigeonholing him as a Sartrean existentialist. While this is quite correct, unfortunately he throws the baby out with the bathwater, writing 'as an existentialist, he is no Camus or Sartre' and 'his philosophical work… is finally of the second rank' (Rieff 2017, xiv). Such is Sartre's preponderance in conceptions of existential thought that it is difficult to read 'existential' without thinking 'existentialism'. However for many existential thinkers and certainly for Fondane the ambitions birthed by the '-ism' suffix are anathema. Sartre proclaimed that existentialism was a humanism, a move that later led Michel Foucault to refer to him as a 'man of the nineteenth century' (Foucault 1966), with a belief in historical progress centred on the human individual. For Fondane the contradictions of 'progress' were laid bare by the First World War and existential thought demands its rejection as a concept.

Fondane gravitates around what might be called an 'anti-Humanist humanism': a rejection of Humanism as a historical and philosophical ideal that encounters a desperate concern for the human subject.[1] This position, influenced by Shestov, maintains a deep skepticism towards the powers of human reason and knowledge and emphasizes the effect of forces beyond the individual's control or even knowledge, be they social or metaphysical. At the same time it emphasizes a kind of radical freedom, though it does not presume to offer much in the way of solutions. Despite the pull of Sartre, in this thesis I will continue to use the term 'existential', not least because it is used by Fondane himself, e.g. in *Le lundi existentiel et le dimanche de l'histoire* [The Existential Monday and the Sunday of History]. Further, I aim to argue across this thesis that Fondane's philosophical writings have more to offer when read in conjunction with his other work, rather than as an independent project.

In that sense, the use of the term 'existential' is not to be conflated with an ontological project. While to some extent in dialogue with phenomenology, Fondane's work is more concerned with the lived experience of existence than defining its parameters and indeed he sets himself against the possibility of a rational explanatory framework for 'le vécu', much as he sets himself against a possibility of defining history. There is a careful line to be walked here. The consciously subjective, self-implicating and anti-systematic qualities of Fondane's work are linked to his focus on existence, a focus which emphasizes personal lived experience, not least his own.

To be fair, Rieff's dismissal of Fondane's philosophy is in the service of emphasizing the expansive importance of poetry for Fondane, which, as Rieff cites, he himself opposes to philosophy as 'a permanent threat of new acts, and with them the looming possibility of something stronger' (translated by Rieff, from the essay 'L'Esprit et le temps: La conscience malheureuse', *Cahiers du Sud,* no. 171, April 1935). Here we are closer to the tensions in Fondane's work which are at risk of being overshadowed by categories of identity or genre. Above either of these still looms a greater danger of overshadowing, as Rieff is keenly aware: 'a horrific death at a … relatively young age is like a powerful acid dissolving the meaning of

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[1] Henceforth I will emphasize this distinction by capitalizing Humanism when it is intended in the common usage.

everything that had come before in a life' (Rieff 2017, ix). Rieff's opening sentence at once strenuously resists the problem of Fondane's death governing his reception and lays bare the difficulty of doing so. The very effort of employing the first page to warn against the 'biographer's nightmare', 'rewriting' the life so that the 'manner of his… death becomes the star of the show' to some extent undermines itself simply by continuing to use that death as the starting place.

In seeking other avenues into Fondane's work, there are two points to be made concerning his death. He was a victim of the Nazi Holocaust, an event which tends to overload any language which addresses it: there is no question of reading his death against the grain, as Chris Kraus does that of Simone Weil, who died just before Fondane (Kraus 2017). Yet the witness he bears to his time is first and foremost the witness of a life and is not bounded by that event. Fondane's responses to the horror bearing down on Europe and on himself can seem startlingly prophetic in retrospect and definitely drew upon his personal insight as an immigrant who was Jewish, or at least Jewish enough for the Nazis. But that clarity also comes from the unflinching regard he developed through his encounters with metaphysics and avant-garde movements. In essays like *L'Homme devant l'histoire* ['Man Before History'] he addressed the context of the period so unsparingly that his words were not only challenging for his contemporaries but remain so today, refusing simplistic definitions of evil and implicating Western culture. His testimony is of tragedy, but of a wider tragedy, of human beings devalued by the very progress supposed to uplift them in the abstract. In poems like *L'Exode*, Jewishness expands to include the whole of humanity in suffering and the search for consolation.

The second point follows on from the first. Rieff is not wrong to describe Fondane as a 'great poet and great soul who choked to death in a gas chamber' (Rieff 2017, xv). It is, however, important to state Fondane's own emphasis on the *ordinariness* of every human life. He continually subverts the heroic. His Ulysses is Jewish, but he remains in a sense Everyman, as Leopold Bloom does. The very first lines of his poem *Ulysse* dismantle the image of the heroic artist: 'J'étais un grand poète né pour chanter la joie/ — mais je sanglote dans ma cabine' ['I was a great poet, born to sing Joy/ — but I am sobbing in my berth'] (MF 17; Fondane 2017, 5, translated by Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody). Yet he also inverts tragedy: informed by Shestovian philosophy, he brings the tragic into the ambit of everyday human

experience, as condensed in the figure of Job.[2] Throughout Fondane's work vulnerability is foregrounded in a way that refuses the elevation of his own suffering as privileged either by his status as an artist and intellectual or by the specific circumstances of his persecution.

The question of Fondane's death is intimately tied up with his perspectives on history. In his philosophical writing history is constantly under question, as evident in titles such as *L'Homme devant l'histoire* and *Le Lundi existentiel et le dimanche de l'histoire.* Like Benjamin, he questions the hegemony of history as a narrative imposed upon the past, looking to the recuperation of the latter in its concreteness, while the former is always already contextualized by assumed concepts. Considering Benjamin's own catastophic death, Irving Wohlfarth writes:

> A life, as we remember it, is sealed by its end; but, according to Benjamin, remembrance is also the retroactive power to 'complete the incomplete [happiness] and undo the completed [suffering].' This statement was too theological for his interlocutor, Horkheimer, who was too convinced that 'the murdered really have been murdered' to be capable of being persuaded that past injustice can be undone. To this Benjamin replied that remembrance marks an 'experience which forbids us from conceiving history in fundamentally atheological terms, however little we may attempt to write it in directly theological one'. (Wohlfarth 1997, 85)

This theological horizon for the recuperation of the past is present in Shestov's work (see Clark 2008). If Benjamin introduced it into a political context, Fondane did so in poetry. Verse XXII of *Ulysse* expresses the alienation of modernity, of knowing the exception is in fact the rule and awaiting the contact of the event ('comme la crue houleuse d'une rivière en mars [like the furious rise of a river in March]') to confirm it, 'un digne événement de l'Histoire moderne [an event worthy of Modern History]' (MF 53; Fondane 2017 97). In *Le Mal des fantômes 1942–1943*, the reader finds a ghostly injunction from those disappeared and silenced in history to value life as it is being lived: 'inique Histoire! Eux – les conquérants! | Et nous – les égorgés! || on donnerait parfois l'éternité | pour une de ces heures de la terre [iniquitous history!

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[2] For more on the philosophical currents around what Christopher Hamilton calls the 'tragedy of modernity', see his 2016 book *A Philosophy of Tragedy,* especially chapter 5, 'Among the Ruins', which mentions Shestov. This philosophical context is certainly important for reading Fondane's work, as will be discussed in particular in the next two chapters, but my focus is primarily on Fondane's poetic response and its linguistic stakes.

They – the conquerors! | And us – the slaughtered! || sometimes we would give eternity | for one of earth's hours]' (MF 96–97).

Fondane's refusal of absolute objectivity and distance can lead to the broader and deeper resonances of his 'existential' thought and art being discarded or reduced to a sub-category of the heavy circumstances of their creation. Without in any way diminishing its horror and injustice, in particular I wish to resist reading his work through the lens of his terrible death. Fondane's voice says much that is prophetic, important and challenging in regards to the Nazi Holocaust and its value as testimony is difficult to overstate. But it is what might be called existential testimony, an uneasy confrontation with the metaphysical or the possibility of the metaphysical, as much as it is historical testimony. I can only agree with Rieff that 'to make the horror of his death the focus is to grant the Nazis their victory. Better to look at a life profoundly and passionately lived, and to work that mattered then and matters still' (Rieff 2017, xv).

Reception

The circumstances of Fondane's death contributed to a relatively low profile for his work in post-war France (see Beray 2006, 144), as did the ascendancy of Sartre and Camus as *porte-paroles* for existential thought (see for example Kuhnle 2010). His main champions were Emil Cioran and the English surrealist David Gascoyne, but publications were patchy. Some scholars have argued that the work of Jewish writers such as Fondane was more or less consciously elided due to the hegemonic post-war narrative in France that wanted to supress the uncomfortable truths around French complicity in the Holocaust (Mole 2008; Elsky 2020). Further analysis can be found in Salazar-Ferrer's monographs and across the *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane* and *Titanic*, the Bulletin of the Association Benjamin Fondane. A steady restitution of his importance to French letters has been progressing since the 1970s, thanks to the efforts of the Société d'études Benjamin Fondane, the Association Benjamin Fondane, critics such as Patrice Beray and Louis Janover, and in particular the work of publisher Michel Carassou. Eminent writers, including Cioran but also poets Yves Bonnefoy and Claude Vigée, have also acknowledged his influence (Vanhese 2017; Bikard 2005).

This growth is characterised by republications and new publications (especially a recent spate from Editions Non Lieu and Editions Verdier), critical acclaim (see for example the selection of press quotes on the Verdier website or various programmes on France Culture e.g. Farine 2018, Van Reeth 2017, Omélianenko 2014, Noudelmann 2013), cultural events (e.g. the Romanian Cultural Institute's International Benjamin Fondane Prize for Francophone literature, the unveiling of Place Benjamin Fondane in Paris and exhibitions including a major retrospective at the Mémorial de la Shoah) and scholarly commentary. There has also been a proliferation of translations, notably into Italian and German, as well as the translation of French texts into Romanian and early Romanian poems into French.

There has been a dearth of attention in the English-speaking world, not least due to a lack of translations, as John Taylor noted in 2012 (J. Taylor 2012, 383). In the past few years, this has finally begun to change. In 2016, New York Review Books published two translated selections, one of philosophical essays (*Existential Monday,* translated by Bruce Baugh and myself) and one of poetry (*Cinepoems and Others*, translated by Leonard Schwartz, Mitchell Abidor, Marianne Bailey, Marilyn Hacker, Henry King, Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody and myself). Syracuse Press published Rudavsky-Brody's translation of *Ulysse* in 2017. These three represent the first ever significant translations of any of Fondane's work into English.[3] In his review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of October 7 2016, Crispin Sartwell called the NYRB *Existential Monday* 'a sufficient spur to a revival of interest in this neglected and fascinating figure'. 2018 saw a dedicated Fondane conference at Yale University, the first of its kind.

Prior to recent developments, twentieth-century attempts to bring Fondane to the attention of Anglophone readers were limited to individual efforts which remained niche despite their often passionate advocacy. Foremost would be those of David Gascoyne, who knew Fondane personally (see Gascoyne 1980). Intellectual affinity with the philosophical currents in which Fondane travelled has perhaps played to the detriment of introducing readers to the vivacity of the poetry at times. John Kenneth Hyde's 1971 *Benjamin Fondane: A Presentation of his Life and Works* emphasizes his relation to Shestov and takes an approach driven by semantic field

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[3] A Canadian named Pierre L'Abbé self-published a garbled translation of *L'Exode* in 2008.

inquiry. Romanian Arta Lucescu Boutcher's self-translated 2003 book *Rediscovering Benjamin Fondane* was a noble effort but limited in reach. Both books were published before any of the primary sources were available in English translation, as with another work, published, like Boutcher's, by Peter Lang, physicist Michael Finkenthal's 2013 *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet-Philosopher Caught Between the Sunday of History and the Existential Monday.* Peter Lang also published William Kluback's 1996 *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet in Exile*, a short meditation on Fondane in relation to exile and to Shestov.

All of these works attempt to introduce English readers to Fondane and encourage their own reading of his work; now that a selection is available, this is at least possible to some extent. They are surveys which aim to offer a synthesised understanding of Fondane's multifarious oeuvre, which is a challenge, to say the least. Finkenthal's is the most sustained in this regard, synoptically restating what he sees as the gist of different works, and contains some useful interpretations (such as the application of the term 'metasophia', a form of knowledge that exceeds reason) but it is flawed (particularly in the translations) as well as simplifying at points (which is unavoidable given its scope).[4] Nevertheless, it is certainly the best introductory overview to Fondane currently available in English, breaking down various stages in his life in conjunction with a presentation of his work that can guide the reader into their own reading at any point they choose. The passages on Stéphane Lupasco and physics are especially valuable due to Finkenthal's professional expertise. As this thesis nears submission in November 2020, Stanford University Press is about to publish *Writing Occupation: Jewish Émigré Voices in Wartime France* by Julia Elsky, a professor of French at Loyola University in Chicago. A major section of her book centres on Fondane.

As opposed to survey or biography, this thesis represents the first full-length critical study in English of any part of Fondane's work. Written under the auspices of the French department, it is not an introduction to Fondane, or a counterpart to the

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[4] Some of Finkenthal's translations are simply awkward: 'Shestov read for the third time my paper' (Finkenthal 2013, 122, quoting *Rencontres avec Leon Chestov*). Others are grammatically incoherent: '*le Dieu existe-t-il, le Dieu d'Isaïe, qui essuiera toute larme des yeux et qui vaincra la mort*" (Does Isaiah's God, who dry tears and vanquish death, still exist?)' (Finkenthal 2013, 63, quoting *Ulysse*), while some are inexplicable: the line from *Ulysse* '*tu avais beau presser l'orange, l'univers*', a reference to Baudelaire's 'Au lecteur', is rendered 'quite a task to follow tempests and the world' (Finkenthal 2013, 64).

wide scope of Salazar-Ferrer's studies. Nonetheless, writing in English — dare I say philologically — I am conscious of contributing to Fondane's English reception. Indeed, while the past three decades have seen concerted efforts to bring his work into a proper French reception, there too there remains much critical work to be done. Therefore this thesis, while offering a sustained and developed critical and theoretical engagement with the development of Fondane's poetry, also negotiates an expository aspect, as it is written with the awareness of Fondane's underrepresentation in English.

Internationally Fondane's poetry has occasionally made its presence felt: for example, lines from *L'Exode* adorn the Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.[5] He has also been discernible in the margins of post-war philosophical discourse, mostly in connection with Shestov, who like Fondane has thus far been something of a writer's writer (despite being championed by D.H. Lawrence in his own lifetime). From Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* to Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and Ambivalence*, this marginal presence has often seemed to exert a haunting force on the roots of the discourse beyond its specific instances. For example, Bauman, although he mentions Shestov fairly extensively in one chapter, also devotes an endnote of almost an entire page to Shestov and Fondane (Bauman 1991, p. 196). Some recent French publications have sought to find a legacy for Shestov among various critical philosophers of the past few decades (e.g. Bernasconi 2015, Fotiade 2016). The 2015 publication of Joseph Acquisto's *The Fall Out of Redemption: Writing and Thinking Beyond Salvation in Baudelaire, Cioran, Fondane, Agamben, and Nancy*, is a promising development.

Works

Fondane's 'interdisciplinary' activities foreshadow the interpenetration of critical theory and philosophy with the humanities, offering promising horizons with his

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[5] While the appropriateness of the association is indisputable, it is unfortunate that the lack of wider contexts for Fondane contribute to his pigeonholing as a 'Holocaust poet'. Though his work is very different than that of Paul Celan's, it is analogous in its breadth and complexity. Holocaust poetry may, in fact, be a contradiction in terms, as I shall explore in chapter 3. Fondane wrote before his encounter with extermination, Celan after. Neither give meaning to the catastrophe, but unsettle our relationship to it. Jackie Metzger briefly sets out some of these contradictions in an article for Yad Vashem (Metzger n.d.).

creative work. This potential was evident to David Gascoyne, who considered for example 'that [Pierre Jean] Jouve and Fondane were among the first poets to recognize the crucial importance of Baudelaire as the creator of modern poetry' (cited in Jouve 2007, 54, note 59). The free-ranging quality of Fondane's writing is possibly a contributing factor to its periods of marginalisation, although this factor did not stop it being acclaimed during his lifetime (see Salazar-Ferrer 2004a). Sympathetic contemporaries from artistic and philosophical milieus recognised it as a formal strength of his subversive attitudes.[6]

Fondane's rich, varied output reflects his unbounded attempts to push at the interstices of rational thought. In this thesis I am treating principally of his (French) poetry, though with his multi-faceted work as an essayist in view. In particular, the essays which might be contextualized as having aesthetic concerns — 'Mots Sauvages' (1929); the book-length studies *Rimbaud le voyou* (1933), *Faux traité d'esthétique* (1938) and *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* (which was still being completed as Fondane was arrested, and was first edited and published in 1972); the essays and letters around his participation in avant-garde movements (collected in *Fundoianu/Fondane et l'avant-garde*); the speech he wrote (but never gave) at the 1934 Paris anti-fascist writers' congress (*L'Ecrivain devant la révolution*); his writing on cinema (collected in a 2007 Verdier edition which reflects Fondane's multi-modality, bringing together cinépoems, essays, photographs and letters); and review articles such as those published on Brancusi and Chagall (see Fondane 2013a) — form their own dialogue with his poetry. At the same time, his essays written for philosophical publications (such as his philosophy column in *Les Cahiers du Sud*) are also brought to bear, notably *La Conscience Malheureuse* (1936), *L'Homme devant l'histoire* (1939) and *Le Lundi existentiel et le dimanche de l'histoire* (1944). *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* exemplifies the interlocking nature of Fondane's thought, as Joseph Acquisto highlights, by way of Mircea Martin:

> Mircea Martin has described the difficulty a reader initially has in placing
> Fondane's Baudelaire book within an established genre: while the title might
> indicate a biography, there is also the exploration of literary history as well
> as its social context, both of which, along with certain biographical elements,

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[6] Walter Benjamin, his fellow contributor at *Les Cahiers du Sud,* was one, as he mentioned in letters to editor Jean Ballard (Benjamin 1934; 1935).

'are put in relation with the stages of its creation' […] Martin goes on to ask:
'Do we have here studies or essays? […] Is it the critique of a professional or
of a poet? Is it a critique of Baudelaire's poetry or his philosophy? […] Does
this critique come from a poet or a philosopher?' […] Martin's rhetorical
questions set the stage for Fondane's analysis, which does in fact situate
itself at the intersection of literary criticism, philosophy and poetry.
(Acquisto 2015, 74)

It is apt to read this intersection literally: Fondane's prose strains against rationality
and intermeshes with the absurdist, subversive and affective elements of his poems,
which themselves sometimes contain philsophical rhetorical questions.

From one angle, we could take Fondane as positioning poetry as a kind of
Derridean supplement to philosophy: in his *Faux Traité d'esthétique* [*Pseudo-
Treatise of Aesthetics*] he writes 'la poésie peut penser bien des choses qui ont été
refusées à la philosophie [poetry can think many things which have been denied to
philosophy]'(FT 16). Yet a few pages earlier he criticizes poets who 'pensent sauver
la poésie, en la faisant passer pour un document mental, une accoucheuse d'idéals et
de nobles sentiments [think to save poetry by passing it off as mental documentation,
as a midwife of ideas and noble opinions]'. For Fondane, poetry is not merely
information, even well-polished information, and cannot be bounded by thought, yet
it can think things which philosophy cannot. This seeming contradiction remains
unresolved, an example of the extra-rational effects of his prose. The tension remains
and a very un-syllogistic space for meaning is precariously opened. The effects of
Fondane's Shestovian subversions are greatest when the territories of his poetry, with
its metaphysical contours, and those of his undialectical prose are jointly explored.

In a sense, titles such as philosopher or poet are insufficient when interpreting
Fondane. Indeed, his work undermines the usual grounds for such activities, attacking
the primacy of reason in philosophy and aesthetics in poetry. If Nietzsche was a
philosopher who wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Fondane was a poet who wrote a
response to Hegel (*La Conscience Malheureuse*). His insistence on the rhetorical
aspects of philosophy foreshadows, to some extent, the work of Jacques Derrida and
the controversies around its status as philosophy. Yet he respected both terms,
following Shestov's instructions to be 'purement philosophique [purely
philosophical]' when appropriate (Fondane 1982, 5 January 1938). If I treat him
foremost as a poet, it is not for the beauty and creativity of his work — though these

elements are abundant — but because the mask of poetry is paradoxically that which allows him to be most truthful, and to push language into an act beyond knowledge. Topography is a common hermeneutic metaphor in literary criticism. In Fondane's case, oceanography may be better suited, not least as his poetry abounds in water images. His work is full of shifting currents and abyssal encounters. The long poem *L'Exode* is no exception, and with its treatment of mythical, topical, political and metaphysical themes, as well as its mixture of poetic tradition and innovation, it exemplifies the concerns of Fondane's oeuvre taken as a whole. It forms the primary territory of inquiry in this thesis.

Criticism

This thesis has been driven by a primary encounter with Fondane's texts, one deeper than usual as it is bound up with translating some of them, which is a privileged, though at times frustrating, experience. Given the lack of studies written in English, this is appropriate. Nonetheless, it is of course grounded in the compact but, by now, sustained body of French criticism. The extensive work of Olivier Salazar-Ferrer in contextualizing Fondane and analysing his work from a metaphysical standpoint is key. So too is the work of the *Société d'études Benjamin Fondane* and the *Association Benjamin Fondane*, both of which regularly publish their own journal with contributions from various Fondane scholars, of whom Monique Jutrin is (along with Salazar-Ferrer) the most prolific. These organizations have also organized conferences, and the proceedings of the 1999 conference on *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* are particularly important.

The promotion of Fondane's work in recent years owes much to *gens de lettres* such as Patrice Beray, who as well as aiding Michel Carassou in editing Fondane's manuscripts has advanced Fondane studies with essays like his 2006 book *Benjamin Fondane, au temps du poème*. Louis Janover, who with Beray wrote *Retrouver Fondane* (2010), is another example of a writer working to bring Fondane to a wider public. Established poets such as Henri Meschonnic, Claude Vigée, Yves Bonnefoy and Jacques Darras have also promoted Fondane's work; their reviews and essays have also been helpful for this thesis.

Articles by Nicolas Monseu, Dominique Guedj, Til Kuhnle and Gisèle Vanhese have been useful for contextualizing the philosophical stakes of Fondane's work and their relationship to his poetry. Ann van Sevenant's work on the *Faux traité d'esthétique* and Anne Mounic's study *Poésie et philosophie: ineffable rigueur* (2017) have also been important in this regard. Mounic and Vanhese's work in particular also fleshes out connection and comparison between Fondane and other poets who were his contemporaries. Margaret Teboul's article on Fondane and another contemporary, Walter Benjamin, was key for thinking Fondane as writer who traversed genre boundaries. The 1998 special Fondane edition of the review *Europe* also offered a useful entry point for French Fondane studies.

In terms of scholarship in English, three essays (one forthcoming) by the poet, translator and scholar Alexander Dickow represent the zenith thus far. These essays, 'Ethical Writing and Commemoration: Benjamin Fondane's "Preface in Prose" and the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas' (2018); 'Escaping History: Benjamin Fondane's "Mal des fantômes" and Interiority' (2017) and 'The Rhetoric of Reason: Fondane's Theory of Language' (forthcoming in the conference proceedings of the 2018 Yale conference), combine fresh insights into Fondane's poetry with theoretical rigour and open up new directions for Fondane studies across the board. In a more purely philosophical direction, the work of Joseph Acquisto and Bruce Baugh has lain the groundwork for further development and connection with trends in English-language theoretical fields. Michael Finkenthal's book *Benjamin Fondane,* while not without issues (some of which were noted above), provided some original analysis as well as an overview.

Romanian scholarship has been drawn on only when written in or translated into French. While this was an unavoidable linguistic limitation, it is also the case that my focus is purely on the French works, and that most, if not all, of the relevant scholarship is available in French (for example in the review *Euresis*). The exception is the recent developments by Italian writers such as translator Luca Orlandini. The most important of these — indeed one of the most important academic Fondane scholars working in any language — is Giovanni Rotiroti, who as a scholar of Romanian also bridges the French and Romanian worlds. I have drawn directly on his work, particularly in terms of thinking Fondane amongst the harmonies and

dissonances of poetry and philosophy, alongside considerations of the Holocaust, and by extension with regard to Paul Celan and Edmond Jabès.

Contemporaries of Fondane such as Celan and Jabès have provided important context for thinking and rethinking his work. I have devoted two chapters to a comparative approach in order to broaden these horizons, one on Fondane and Laura (Riding) Jackson and one on Jabès, which focuses on Jabès' own writing but also draws on the essays and scholarship of Rosemary Waldrop and Didier Cahen. I have drawn on Celan where useful for the argument, as well as on Celan scholars including Pierre Joris, Anne Carson, Marjorie Perloff and Gerard Richter, and on Fondane scholars who have studied them together, such as Gisèle Vanhese.[7]

The work of Shestov is of course important. At times Fondane has been considered a 'disciple' of Shestov (Bykova 2017, 306; Hyde 1970, 26). However, I consider his philosophical writings in their own right. Fondane, with his unique, polemical rhetorical style, took the relationship between thought and existence in another direction, triangulated by poetry and his practice as a poet, building on Shestov to affirm with a poet's peculiar bravery that, as Bruce Baugh puts it, 'the truths of the irrational, affective, imaginative and passionate self are not the timeless intellectual truths of the philosophers but the existential, tragic truths of the great poets' (Baugh 2016a, xix). Like Shestov, other philosophers active in the 1920s-1940s such as Heidegger and Sartre form part of the backdrop of understanding the debates Fondane was writing in and out of; as Baugh notes, 'the diversity of existential thought in the 1930s has been largely eclipsed by the phenomenal success of […] humanist phenomenological existentialism' (Baugh 2016a, xviii).

Other contemporaries, such as Simone Weil and Walter Benjamin, both of whom wrote alongside Fondane in the *Cahiers du Sud*, and Emil Cioran, his close friend, also slipped through the fence gaps between philosophy and creative (and spiritual) writing; their work has been drawn upon where appropriate to both situate Fondane in intellectual and artistic history and to provide contrast. The same applies to the Dadaists and surrealists, including Tzara, Artaud, Breton and Fondane's friend

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[7] For more on Fondane and Celan see Rotiroti 2019 and 2018; Vanhese 2015a, 2015b, 2012 2011, 2008 and 2006, Carannante 2013 and 2012; Manea 2012; Boitani 2007; and Roditi 1992. There remains much scope for further combined study of Fondane and Celan, though it was beyond the scope of this thesis.

and champion David Gascoyne. The histories of Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli (2004) and of Michel Winock (1997) have been useful in establishing the context of these milieus. As Baugh points out, in those highly political times Fondane may have been idiosyncratic, with his focus on a Nietzschean 'becoming' (which in some ways anticipates Deleuze — see Baugh 2015), but he was certainly not apolitical (Baugh 2016a, xvii). As well as his debates around Marxism with the avant-gardes (*AG*) and as part of anti-fascist organizing (*EDR*), he corresponded with Victor Serge. Testimony and scholarship of the Holocaust, including the work of Primo Levi, Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, John Roth, Robert Boyers, Timothy Snyder and William Brustein and Amy Ronnkvist has also necessarily provided context.

Fondane saw himself, in his own way, as one of Rimbaud's *horribles travailleurs* (from his famous *lettre du voyant* — see Rimbaud 2009). Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Nietzsche are the claimed predecessors whom I have drawn upon at points to map out Fondane's work, as well as, to some extent, Kierkegaard, Huysmans and Kafka. Kristin Ross's book *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (2008) was an excellent exemplar for considering how to consider a poet with such metaphysical and existential concerns in a holistic manner, not neglecting the social dimensions of their work, as well as providing fresh perspectives on the inception of modernity in relation to Fondane and his responses.

A wide variety of scholarship on modernism in general has influenced the directions of this thesis, too much to list exhaustively, especially as much of it has not been drawn upon specifically, though it has contributed to a general picture built up over years. Certain works have overtly formed part of the dialogue, notably articles by Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Emma Bell and the doctoral thesis of Fabio Vericat on T.S. Eliot, which provided more food for comparative thought both in terms of Eliot and Fondane's shared concerns and in terms of the meeting points and disagreements between philosophers and poets. Regarding the latter, the Bloodaxe collection *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* proved very useful for considering the continued relevance of Fondane's poetic testimony today, notably the essays by U.A. Fanthorpe and Sarah Maguire. Twenty-first century philosophical takes on the history of modernity, such as Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) and John Gray's *Straw Dogs* (2015) and Jonathan Glover's *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*

(2001) were useful for looking at Fondane's critiques of modernity as prescient (though not necessarily in harmony with these). Joyce Wexler's book *Violence Without God: The Rhetorical Despair of twentieth-Century Writers* draws on Taylor's book to bring the history of ideas and poetry into juxtaposition at the limits of expression; some of her conclusions are a helpful contrast to Fondane's radical approach.

As I shall discuss in the last section of this chapter, honouring Fondane's decades-long intellectual and artistic struggle against abstract categorization is a difficult thing to balance with the analytic duties of scholarship. Indeed it was difficult for Fondane himself, who strove to validate the rigour of his philosophy without undermining his commitment to the poetic, the affective and the irrational. In theoretical terms, this meant directing sources towards his argument — whether for the purposes of support or attack — rather than applying a framework. I have similarly attempted to prioritize theoretical dialogue over theoretical prescription. This is all the more apt as the argument draws upon the influence of negative theology in literary and political critical theory.

I have drawn fruitfully upon scholars of apophasis. Shira Wolosky's book *Language Mysticism: The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett and Celan* (1995) was an important text, both theoretically and to attach Fondane to certain modernist concerns around language from an angle which comprehended performative as well as philosophical aspects. Beth Hawkins's (now Benedix) book *Reluctant Theologians: Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Edmond Jabès* (2003) performed a similar function with more of a theological focus. China Miéville's erudite article 'Silence in Debris: Towards an Apophatic Marxism' (2019) was crucial, articulating the relevance of such linguistic and existential concerns with social and political ones. The work of William Franke, the pre-eminent scholar of the unsayable, goes without saying. James Gordon Finlayson's work on Adorno was also helpful in this regard. Adorno (and Horkheimer)'s own work was also highly relevant at points, and there is much scope for further comparison of Fondane and Adorno (indeed, and the Frankfurt School more broadly), despite their acute differences in certain regards. Although it does not mention Fondane, Fondane scholar Joseph Acquisto's book *Poetry's Knowing Ignorance* draws on similar sources to my own to survey French

poetry's 'knowledge that is first and foremost aware of poetic knowledge's own limits' (Acquisto 2019, cover). However, it was published too recently for use here.

The work of Judith Butler (2020 and 2015) and Amia Srinivasan (2020 and 2018) provided an important bridge between the apophatic and affective concerns of the thesis. Literary dimensions of Sianne Ngai (*Ugly Feelings,* 2005) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's (*Touching Feeling,* 2003) work was also drawn upon in order to link Fondane's affective concerns with affect theory. So too was recent scientific research (for example Lisa Feldman Barrett, 2017), which questions some of the research by Sylvan Tomkins that affect theory draws upon, in order to emphasize Fondane's refusal of any rationalization of the irrational. One work by Roland Barthes, *Sade, Loyola, Fourier*, was also helpful in this regard, linking together linguistic concerns with affective 'traces' in his notion of the 'biographeme'. Affective concerns also relate Fondane's work to that of Emmanuel Levinas, who has been brought up in the *Cahiers Fondane* by Nicolas Monseu (2005). Alexander Dickow (2018; 2018b and 2017) goes beyond Salazar-Ferrer's statement of Fondane's 'metaphysical anarchism' to develop the importance of the relation to the other in Fondane's 'commemorative writing'. Arguments by Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek around violence and the relationship to the other, which go back to the debates of the 1930s and 1940s that Fondane, Weil, Benjamin and Levinas were active in, provide updated context. Also with a political slant is Silvia Federici's recent book *Re-enchanting the world* (2019), which, with its nod to Max Weber, provides a political parallel to Fondane's articulation of an artistic desire for re-enchantment.

Two Derrida works on the capacity to speak and unsayability provide critical openings in the discussion: *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998) and *On the Name* (1995). This is appropriate, not only given Derrida's importance in the reception of Levinas, but also for the under-examined influence of Shestov in post-war philosophy (see Fotiade 2016). Derek Attridge's work *The Singularity of Literature* (2017) was also hermeneutically useful, in the same vein. Similarly, Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger and the Jews* (1990), *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1988) and *Discours, figure* (1971) turned out to be vital theoretical reference points, greatly assisted by the interpretations of the wonderfully nominatively-determined Bill Readings (1991) and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. It must be said,

however, that outside of Fondane's own critical writings, the most important theoretical tool in writing this thesis has been Chinua Achebe's expansive, meaning-opening notion of celebration (Achebe 1992 and 1990), forged in his own reflections on literature and theoretical debates around philosophy and poetry.

Negotiating Methodology: Fondane and 'Other' Criticism

Fondane's writing, taken as a whole, demonstrates a respect for the rigours of philosophical method in combination with a revolt against the primacy of reason, one that dovetailed with his artistic creation. In some ways this is the driving tension at the heart of his living and writing existence: in *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre,* he wrote 'le *rapport*, le *conflit* entre logique et affectivité quoique inexplicables, existent [The *relation* and the *conflict* between logic and affectivity exist, even if they are inexplicable]'(BEG 368; EM 79). In Fondane's writing, the desire to explain and the defence of the inexplicable are combined. As a reader, scholar and critic of Fondane, I feel it is essential to respect the unbounded nature of this relation and conflict.

In her article 'The Trans-cultural Journey of Benjamin Fondane', Monique Jutrin states that

> Benjamin Fondane is an atypical writer, one who is difficult to categorize. Many critics have focused exclusively on the negativity so prevalent in his philosophy, but this focus fails to recognize an uncompromising demand that oriented his thinking — a fact that helps explain his distance from literary, philosophical, and political systems of all kinds. (Jutrin 2012, 137)

Tellingly, Jutrin does not concisely define what this demand is: the anguish of existence, the thirst for satisfaction in life (in the poetic 'preface' to *Ulysse*, he writes, from a meta-poetic vantage point, 'Il n'y a pas assez de réel pour ma soif! [There is not enough real for my thirst!]'.[8] Pirandello-like, the poetic voice revolts

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[8] The 'preface''s metafictive soliloquoy sets out the sensitive balance between social contingency and individual agency, and the author as both wielder of and wielded by language:

Il y avait longtemps
que le spectacle était commencé de l'Histoire
on en avait déjà oublié les débuts
les origines fabuleuses,

against authorship, as Fondane himself, perhaps, revolts against a divine or ideal plan. A modernist vertigo is induced by the recognition of the artificiality and baselessness of cultural structures at the same time as their power over the individual. The Homeric context of *Ulysse* makes this struggle an echo of classical struggles with fate, as well as nodding to the textual fluidity implied by the oral tradition. As suggested by certain sections of Fondane's poems, such as the Hebrew alphabet sequences of *L'Exode*, there is also a parallel with the traditions of the Midrash, where reflective commentary upon the narrative itself becomes an integral part of the text. Fondane too writes 'in the margins' as he writes the poem, but without rabbinic confidence in the ultimate destination of the textual plan.

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quand je suis né au monde
au milieu de l'Intrigue
comme un événement prévu depuis toujours
et cependant comme une surprise
un personnage inquiétant
qui pouvait tout laisser en place, tout changer,
le sens de l'action, la trame des mobiles
qui avait sur le texte établi de toujours l'ascendant prodigieux, étrange du vivant
le droit de bafouiller les meilleures répliques
d'improviser un monde en marge de l'Auteur
et tout à coup, malgré le Plan,
s'introduire soi-même au sein du personnage
en criant, excédé, vers le public des loges
' Il n'y a pas assez de réel pour ma soif! '

(MF 21)

The performance
of History had already begun
the beginning, the fabulous origins
were long forgotten
when I awoke to the world
in the thick of the Intrigue
like an event foretold since the begininng
and yet a surprise
a troubling character who could
leave everything untouched, who could change it all
the line of action, the weave of motives,
who had over the long established text
the strange prodigious force of the living
the right to stumble over the best lines
to improvise a world in the margins of the Author
and suddenly, despite the Plan,
to slip himself into the character
shouting furiously to the public in their boxes
'There is not enough *real* for my thirst!'
(Fondane 2017, 15)

'Il n'y a pas assez de réel pour ma soif! [There is not enough real for my thirst!]') loses much in attempts to put it plainly into words. What might be called proto-utterances, semi-speech acts at the borders of discourse, such as prayer and, especially, le cri (the cry, scream or wail) are crucial to Fondane's staging of the conflict between knowing and living, as many scholars have noted (e.g. Dickow 2018b; Vigée 1998; Beray 1994, vi) and his attempts to affirm the latter against the former's abstractions and exclusions. What is key in Jutrin's point is that Fondane's work as a whole is anti-systematic, without ignoring its own enmeshing in systems of thought. This thesis attempts to honour Fondane's approach by keeping that resistance to systemization active, without discarding academic rigour.

The political scholar John Holloway, whose anti-positivist takes on Marxism are reminiscent of Fondane's contributions to 1920s anti-fascist discourse, states that 'there is no room for the scream in academic discourse. More than that: academic study provides us with a language and a way of thinking that makes it very difficult for us to express our scream' (Holloway 2010, chapter 1, I). Patrice Beray speculates that this is one reason for the neglect of Fondane's final work, *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*: 'the themes of this essay can be read as inspired texts, as poems or philosophical fables […] does it keep too close to the cry of men [?]'(Beray 1994, v-vi, my translation). On this cry, standing at the boundary of irrational affect and rational discourse, Holloway stakes a critical position: 'We quite consciously start from the subject, or at least from an undefined subjectivity, aware of all the problems that this implies. We start there because to start anywhere else is simply an untruth' (Holloway 2010, chapter 1, V). This is very much Fondane's starting point, and a starting point for this thesis as it aims to follow his negotiation of the presence of reason's objective elements in the way of the attempt to affirm subjectivity.

Like his contemporary Simone Weil, Fondane argued against rationalist traditions by insisting on the centrality of extra-rational, affective experience to the barest questions of philosophy and theology. He gravitates to Christ's cry of helplessness: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* (HDH 450; EM 61).[9] This cry reveals an implication held in Fondane and Weil's questioning of reason's authority: that their

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[9] 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)

discourse introduces a different kind of address to the model of inquiry that turns its discourse towards the revealing and recording of ultimate truth. Instead, a living interpellation to all who share in actual existence, and its unanswerable questions, is opened up.

Fondane's work acknowledges a thirst for transcendence countered by an existential commitment to the *hic et nunc*. For Jutrin,

> Fondane's oeuvre is marked by a migration through cultures and languages and by a dialogue between different kinds of knowledge. It is a polymorphic body of work, expressed *equally* [my emphasis] in poetic, philosophical, and critical texts, as well as in the theatre and the cinema. Fondane was passionate about all the innovative aspects of the philosophy of his time, and he was not afraid to venture into anthropology, psychoanalysis, logic and physics. (Jutrin 2012, 137)

While this last claim may be stretching it somewhat (though Fondane certainly did keep abreast of scientific developments, not least through his friendships with Gaston Bachelard and Stéphane Lupasco) Jutrin's description encapsulates the fullness of his respect for knowledge, even as he subverted its authority in his creations. Zygmunt Bauman has emphasized Shestov's defiance of the unacknowledged and 'incurable parochiality of the very search for the absolute in general' (Bauman 1991, 81). Fondane embodied the double-sidedness of this summation: on the one hand, critiquing the affective and situational blindness and repressions undertaken by universalizing philosophy, on the other, affirming the singular against the supremacy of the absolute. Fondane is not a nihilist or an absolute relativist, but his work is a ceaseless renewal of the fight against the collateral damage of abstraction.

In this thesis I carry out a scholarly and critical engagement with Fondane's work while pointing up the limits of that engagement, walking the boundaries between Fondane's existential thought and an existential practice that is performative and gestures beyond thought, with poetry as the most important juncture between logos and the extra-rational (I want to write that it is a praxis, but that may be misconstrued – for Fondane, poetry is precisely the defiance of any theory, not the implementation of one, nor can it be recuperated into an a posteriori theoretical discovery). In his 2006 review of *Le Mal des fantômes* in *Aujourd'hui poème*, Jacques Darras writes: 'Fondane is a poet but also a philosopher… Fondane, on all

subjects, takes a personal position, dissonant each time, not through affectation but personal conviction' (my translation). His philosophical and poetic projects supplement each other, and it is my contention that a critical engagement with his work is best served by navigating the tension between rigorous thinking and creative freedom.

In order to honour Fondane's atypical writing with criticism that comes 'from sideways on', as James Gordon Finlayson puts it, (Finlayson 2012, 32), I have drawn on the work of poets as well as critics, and on writers who share thematic affinities as well as on secondary sources. As Fondane quite deliberately refrained from aligning with any school, I feel it is appropriate to mimic his eclecticism in terms of drawing on sources. I have also sought to bring paradoxes to the surface — for instance, his simultaneous modernism and anti-modernity (Martin 2007); his revolt against reason and his philosophical commitment (see *L'Homme devant l'histoire* in particular); and my efforts to subvert his pigeonholing as a 'Holocaust writer' while frequently discussing the Holocaust. Fondane wrote that 'existential philosophy does not amount to an abandonment of knowledge […] but is rather the search at long last for a genuine knowledge which will not turn its back on anything that is, whether it is a matter of "unhappiness" or of the "discontinous"' (EM 24). Fondane followed Nietzsche in thinking that the real philosopher must be a poet (Nietzsche 2013, chapter 6, section 211), or at least, that poetry could push beyond 'professional' philosophical thought (*EM* 24).

In many ways, Fondane's existential challenge to philosophy pre-empts theory's 'affective turn' (Clough & Halley eds., 2007), though again it must be stated that his philosophy is principally negative in its practice if not its aims, subverting and opening rather than refining theories. In this regard it also pre-empts auto-theory, that 'chimera of research and imagination' (Zwartjes 2019). While Fondane's essays do not foreground the autobiographical in the ways commonly associated with that hybrid genre, his work taken as a whole can be seen as sharing its holistic, testifying, affirmative concerns. Certainly, the work of Chris Kraus (2013) and Anne Carson (2002a; 2002b) on Celan and Weil respectively has been inspirational as examples of how serious intellectual research may be combined with extra-rational, affective and existential concerns.

This thesis could not be in imitation of Kraus or Carson even if its author were capable of reproducing their brilliance; its academic format restricts it. Nonetheless, it is written with a meta-methodological awareness kept in view. Pierre Joris argues that 'critics' problems are specific to their undertaking (i.e. the need to prove that the methodologies they are invested in are the right ones and will result in the 'true' interpretation of the poem)… Celan claimed a necessary opacity for poetry today' (Joris 2005, 5). Fondane's poetry may not be as linguistically disruptive as Celan's, but he claimed a similiar place for poetry's essential undecidedness. Rather than elaborating a frame to concretely define Fondane's poetry, this thesis seeks to place its theoretical apparatus in the service of his contention that 'les poètes ont vu que le singulier est plus important que le général, le contingent plus vrai que l'immuable et l'éternel, l'inintelligible plus profond que l'intelligible [poets have seen that the singular is more important than the general, the contingent truer than the immutable and eternal, and the unintelligible more profound than the intelligible]' (FT 78).

In his 2016 book *The Philosophy of Tragedy* Christopher Hamilton discusses the remnants of religion still wreathed through our attempts to confront our contexts of questioning, to be ignored to our detriment: 'with the loss of Christianity [as a monoculture] we have lost the overarching vision of the world that for so long people defined themselves in terms of, or against […] on the one hand, the decay of Christianity seems […] a cultural disaster' (Hamilton 2016, conclusion). On the other hand, he also identifies with the freedom Nietzsche found through this 'decay'. Hamilton concludes his existential survey of our 'disenchanted world […] in which meaning is at best elusive and often absent' (Hamilton 2016) by relating the separate spheres of the material and the immaterially personal, with reference to Weil and Beauvoir. The 'idiocies of how we organize our life', that let people die of hunger in a time of superabundance, are 'clearly tragic', but 'it is tragic too when people find their lives meaningless' (Hamilton 2016). Fondane seeks to confront the former tragedy without mutilating the realities of the latter to have them resolved into an ideal project.

For Fondane subverting *rational* knowledge is a step to affirming life, if space is given to the affective experience of not being satisfied by knowledge. In his introduction to *Fondane et l'avant-garde*, Petre Raileanu argues that when it came to the questions of human suffering and 'metaphysical despair', 'the 20th century started

systematizing everything: anxiety, neurosis, ecstasy, the unconscious, desire and even the irrational. A systematization of the irrational, what Fondane would call the 'rational exploitation of the irrational', which was what he reproached most in surrealism.' (Raileanu 1999, 15, my translation)

Scholars such as Amelia Jones (2004) demonstrate a recovery of a counter-trend of which Fondane may be considered a part. Gabriel Sessions argues that 'disconsolation legitimates the writing of dependency and vulnerability'(Sessions 2018):

> At [the] instances where the emergent discourses of twentieth-century post-Hegelian philosophy and modernism interfere, we see most clearly how bodily vulnerability is set against scientific over-determinism… disconsolate subjects… gain defining contour and shade in the narratives of literary modernism. (Sessions 2018)

Although Sessions proposes a Spinozan response that stands at odds with Fondane's 'metaphysical anarchism' (Salazar-Ferrer 2008, 86), his 'counter-rational praxis' is nicely aligned with Fondane's in that both imply a possibility of 'friendship [that] disconsolation's disillusioned experience of vulnerability makes possible, when it exists in proximity to it' (Sessions 2018).

This thesis draws on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century nondualistic approaches in critical theory at the same time as looking back on Fondane's subversive attempts to affirm untheorizable life. It finds something of a description both for an understanding of Fondane's work and for its own guiding lights in Lisa Samuels's analysis of Laura (Riding) Jackson's 'antisystematic mandates' (Samuels 2001, xiii). With examples running from Ezra Pound to Angela Carter, Samuels refers to 'unconventional modernist criticism, a criticism which insists on eclectic and subjective processess […] an unorganized 'tradition' by its very nature […] a body of work we might call the Other criticism.' (Samuels 2001, xiii) Though Samuels is writing for an anglophone context, Fondane's books on Rimbaud and Baudelaire fit this paradigm well. Further, as these works stand between his philosophy and poetry texts at the nexus of reason and 'absurd' expression, they exemplify the tension at the heart of Fondane's work, one made overt in this Other 'tradition' or anti-tradition. It makes sense to talk about Fondane in terms of Other criticism, both as a way of

understanding his approach holistically and of reflecting it, balancing scholarly rigour with Fondanian 'metasophic'(Finkenthal 2013, 121) concerns.

As will be discussed in chapter 4, there is in fact a strong antithesis between (Riding) Jackson and Fondane's poetic development, one accepting failure and turning to other lines of enquiry, the other absurdly responding to failure with what he termed *irrésignation,* cognized despair combined with poetic affirmation. Nonetheless, the earlier criticism of (Riding) Jackson analysed by Samuels (in contrast to some of her later work) is 'oriented to the unknown. Poetry and human beings are "true" for Riding insofar as they are permanently incommensurate with, always on the other side of, what we might say about them'(Samuels 2001, xvi-xvii). Such a view is also the fulcrum of Fondane's work, which also offers a model of 'generative indeterminacy' (Samuels 2001, xvii), one directing us towards a relational understanding of the future through a reactivation of the past in the present, rather than the extraction of atemporal knowledge.

While Fondane and Laura (Riding) Jackson could not be further opposed in their conception of poetry's relationship to the real (see chapter 4), this holistic, subversive conception of criticism is wedded to a valuation they share, of poetry as an 'asocial force' (Samuels 2001, xix). (Riding) Jackson wrote of her desire to place poetry in opposition to 'reliance upon definitions of things delivered from socially constructed or philosophically systematized frames of authority' ([Riding] Jackson, 2001, 262). Without reducing Fondane's work, as Jutrin cautions, to a negative project, I consider that he sees the poet as unmaker as well as maker.[10]

'For Fondane,' argues Salazar-Ferrer, 'catastrophe is paradoxical because it engenders' (Salazar-Ferrer 2017a, my translation). Through its subversions, Fondane's work aims to create a participatory commitment in the ruins of systematized thought.[11] This thesis, then, aims to emulate the spirit of this Other modernist tradition (or anti-tradition) that holds that 'criticism can be […] a discourse of thinking rather than a record of thoughts'(Samuels 2001, xvii).[12] The

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[10] He saw Dada as accelerating what he called 'les actes de suicide nécessaires [the necessary suicidal acts]' for European civilization to make way for the new (Fondane 2007, 73).

[11] The notion of participation has been key for some Fondane scholars. See for example Jutrin 2003.

[12] Despite their respective Anglo-American English and cosmpolitan French intellectual contexts, Fondane and (Riding) Jackson share cultural undercurrents that go deeper than their shared Eastern European Jewish origins. Samuels links Riding's intellectual formation to Emerson; Fondane's is

expansiveness of Fondane's own curiosity is reflected in its resistance to genrification and formal convention. Poetry, philosophy, literary and artistic criticism, film scripts and polemic interweave and intermesh in an anti-systematic praxis drawing on Shestovian thought and Dada practice. Such intermodal, consciously category-defying expression is essential to Fondane's ceaseless quest to push his readers beyond the 'consolations of philosophy'.[13] However, it presents a challenge to and demands care from them. The challenge is how to approach these texts, connecting to them without overdefining or isolating them from the broader procedure they collectively represent. The care is in the difficult task of attempting to avoid abstracting and reducing this engagement ourselves. The danger may be greatest in an academic context and the task is likely impossible to fulfil.

Unlike the surrealists, Fondane did not have confidence in the triumph of art as a synthesis of individual and social concerns. [14] His poetry was written (and, significantly, rewritten) in an active sense of ever starting again: 'le voyageur n'a pas fini de voyager' (MF 146). Like Weil (though without her religious faith), his hope is itself impossible and absurd, paradoxically disconsolate, a Beckettian 'going on' rather than a sighted prospect. Yet also like Weil, it does not give up on collectivity. Chris Kraus writes that

> fascism triumphed largely through its emotional appeal for unity and collectivity. Can we devise another form of collectivity, [Weil] wondered, which binds without annihilating the presence and power of the person? Evil, she believed, occurs more easily when the person is deindividualized. (Kraus 2013, 178)

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linked to Nietzsche and Whitman. Both wrote some of their keenest criticism in dialogue with Eliot ([Riding] Jackson 2001, 92–92; BEG, chapter 30).

[13] Fondane's turn to poetry is in part a revolt against the 'superiority'of the 'things of the mind' exemplified in Boethius but going back to Plato. His attempts to theorize what he calls irrésignation may come from a passage in Shestov discussing Kierkegaard and the struggle against necessity, against the 'metaphysical consolations' of 'theoretical philosophy': 'the master of the world of the "finite" turns out to be, not the knight of faith, but necessity, and the full realization of the human ideal is to be found in the knight of resignation […] it will be demanded of us that we recognize this state of affairs as natural and desirable, and even see in it the fulfillment of a wise design planned by some primordial principle.' (Shestov 1969aa, chapter XI). Fondane's subversive freedom reserves the right to revolt against such a design, whether or not it actually exists.

[14] Though he did hold out an absurd hope for a re-enchantment of modernity through a better mediation between the imaginary and the real, as will be discussed in chapter 8. This form of enchantment is not to be confused with his rejection of escapist aesthetic enchantment (see chapter 3).

Perhaps in order to contribute to a questioning of the universal, it is necessary to undo the categories forced upon the specific in order to reaffirm its agency within the possibilities of the multiple.

In Fondane's case, the public and personal crises of modernity are given charge by the apocalyptic association of catastrophe with 'the hope of a revelation and of a new era' (Salazar-Ferrer 2017a, 7, my translation). Yet for Fondane this hope is absurd, rather than truly millenarian or eschatological. There is nothing logical or knowable about it. This hope and the importance of art for it are encapsulated by his comments on cinema in his lecture introducing avant-garde films to South America. The crisis he refers to is the advent of the talkies and the splits within surrealism, yet the existential concerns are impossible to miss, as is, with hindsight, the looming political catastrophe:

> Nous sommes quelques-uns dans ce monde à avoir accordé au cinéma, comme moyen d'expression, une confiance d'autant plus considérable qu'elle fut accordée *in extremis*: je ne saurais vous dire avec précision ce que nous attendions de lui – rien de précis en tout cas… Quelle est la nature de la confiance? De quoi est fait un espoir et quelle est sa véritable dimension, qui le dira? Sais-je, savez vous, ne fût-ce qu'un tout petit peu, ce que vous espérez de la vie? et de vous-même? La promesse du cinéma n'est pas mesurable. […] Peut-être dans la grande crise qui le menace actuellement attendons-nous une rupture, une catastrophe, un grand schisme qui mettra toutes choses au point; je me trompe peut-être; si cela peut vous faire plaisir, je me trompe *certainement*; mais qu'importe que je m'y trompe? Il n'est de plaisir plus grand que de se tromper dans le sens juste.

> [A few of us have granted cinema, as a medium of expression, a trust which is all the greater for being granted *in extremis*: I cannot precisely tell you what we have been expecting from it – nothing precise in any case… What is the nature of this trust? What is a hope made of and what is its true form? Who can say? Do I know, do you know, even to a very small degree, what you hope for from life? And from yourself? The promise of cinema cannot be measured. […] Perhaps from within the great crisis which currently threatens it we are waiting for a rupture, a catastrophe, a great schism which will clear everything up; I am mistaken perhaps; if it would make you happy I am *definitely* mistaken, but what does it matter if I am mistaken? There is no greater pleasure than to be mistaken in the right direction.] (Fondane 2007, 67)

Fondane's work is saturated with a *logical* impossibility of believing that a messianic event will 'clear everything up.' Yet it is the irrational desire for such an event that drives each new question. It is my hope that this thesis shares in his great pleasure.

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Chapter 2

Naufrage infini: Modernity and Catastrophe

> Le tremblement de terre est en route.
> [The earthquake is on its way.]

> from *Titanic* (MF 110)

Fondane scholars have traced the ways in which his life and work are intimately marked by catastrophe (Acquisto 2015, 70; Jutrin 1998, 74; Salazar Ferrer 2017a; 2017b, and 2014). In this thesis, I will think of catastrophe as it affected and was interpreted by him in three forms: the material, the philosophical and the representational. These tend to flow into each other but also offer useful perspectives when examined separately. This chapter will look at each in turn in order to contextualize the readings of Fondane's poetic response to catastrophe as a whole.

The etymology of catastrophe resides in Greek tragic drama, as the turning point, the moment when chaos fruits and the centre of the narrative is revealed.[1] Therefore it carries a promise of revelation, for example in the apocalypse of the Book of Revelation. Catastrophe is totalizing, not only bearing calamity in its present but also subverting the future, implying that whether or not there is any degree of recovery, repair or restitution, life will no longer be what it was. Yet it also depends on a tension: that between the subjective personal experience of the protagonist and the wider causes and effects of the disaster. In other words, catastrophe is at once world-shattering and intensely intimate. Fondane saw modernity as in no small part shaped by catastrophe in its simplest and most brutal sense: the actual physical violence that rocked and defined his world, from the First World war to the genocide which claimed his life. For Fondane, in parallel with his Dada contemporaries and their refusal of sanity in a world seemingly gone mad (see Bell 2010), the mechanized slaughter of the early twentieth century was not just terrible in itself. It

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[1] 'A turning upside down. The termination of a drama is always a "turning upside down" of the beginning of the plot. (Greek, kata-strepho)' (Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable)

also exposed the fundamental absurdity of a world without God, where the reassurances of Humanist projects had been disgraced by historical events.

The second form, then, is the catastrophe of meaning which is a starting point for existential philosophy. For Fondane, *angoisse* is inseparable from crisis, with what Sartre might call an authentic confrontation with crisis. As with many aspects of thinking about Fondane, this raises a need to critically consider the status of modernity and its relationship to pre-modernity in his work. On one hand, the lived Kierkegaardian anguish which informs much of his writing is as old as St John of the Cross, as old as the Bible. On another, the mobilization of existential philosophy in the twentieth century – from the prominence of Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir and Heidegger to the marginalized contributions and disputations of Fondane, Shestov or Simone Weil – attests to a particularly modern context of unhappiness and the absurd, following in the wake of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. In Fondane's thought, *angoisse* is a point of intersection for individual consciousness and a catastophic notion of existence.

Together, these two forms of catastrophe initiate the third, which spurred a great deal of Fondane's critical thinking and occupied much of his artistic practice. The desire to find and express a conditional, immanent, intrinsic value to life beyond the demolished certitudes of theology and other imperatives to transcendence, combined with the overpowering task of reckoning with wanton violence, defined the catastrophe of representation which is the crucial context that spurred his modernism. I will begin by briefly surveying his direct relation to the violence – at once ageless, as part of an endless chain of human cruelty, and novel in its modern scale, scope and cultural context – of the historical period he lived through, before focusing on aspects of the crisis-informed existential thought which colours all of his work. Lastly in this chapter I will set out the considerations of ineffability which condition his responses to catastrophe.

History and Violence: The Context of Material Disaster

> Verrons-nous de nos yeux l'esprit des vieilles chutes
> sera-ce de nos mains que nous empêcherons
> les déperditions lamentables?
>
> [Will we see with our own eyes the spirits of old
> downfalls,
> will it be our hands that prevent
> grievous losses?]

<div align="right">

from *L'Exode* (MF 200)

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Modernity and modernism are typically thought through crisis (see Kolocotroni 2015, 344–345; Burwick and Douglass, eds., 2010; Black 2009; A. Wilde 1979, 23) and Benjamin Fondane's life was marked by catastrophe from the start. Born in 1898, he grew up in Iași, a prominent seat of Jewish culture in Europe, where he would have been aware of the calamitous reach of anti-Semitism from a young age. He was born in a period when many Romanian Jews were emigrating due to discriminatory laws (see Brustein and Ronnkvist 2002). The infamous Kishinev pogrom, just over the border from Iași in the Pale of Settlement, occurred when he was five years old. He came of age, moreover, as the First World War swept into Romania, and its formative cultural impact is as hard to overstate as the physical devastation which its armies wrought. Although Romania relaxed its anti-Semitic laws in 1923 under pressure from the Allied powers, anti-Semitism remained rife and tens of thousands of Jews were left stateless (Brustein and Ronkvist 2002, 213). This atmosphere was possibly a factor in Fondane's emigration to Paris (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 32–37). Here he was under no illusions as to the direction of European and world politics, being alert to the rise of the Nazis and Vichy and seeing them as modern phenomena rather than a 'return' to barbarism (EDR; HDH).[2]

After being taken as a prisoner of war following the invasion, Fondane was released to Paris on the grounds of ill-health as the occupation was consolidated. He soon had to go into hiding as a Jew and an intellectual (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 189).

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[2] This interpretation will be discussed further in chapter 7, 'The Artist and the Eyewitness'.

Eventually betrayed to the authorities, his literary connections could have secured him a release but his refusal to abandon his sister took him through Drancy and eventually to Auschwitz. As we will see, he stands out for his capacity to think and artistically respond to such cataclysmic circumstances from their very depths, maintaining a perspicacity that at times comes across as uncanny, even prophetic.

Fondane interpreted and responded to catastrophe while actually living it. His responses were conditioned by his situation. He could not help being acutely aware of the threat towards Jews, despite being non-practicing and naturalized French; he must have had direct news of the pogrom in his home town, Iași, in 1941. In other senses, however, it was the other way around: his apprehension of catastrophe owed much to his particular artistic and philosophical development, from his early fascination with the antisocial tendencies of Baudelaire to his encounter with and participation in avant-garde movements and friendship with Shestov. The urge to pigeonhole his oeuvre as *only* the temporal product of disaster must be resisted. Fondane's work clearly faces catastrophe in all its intersections, and with courage, but it does so in order also to think and gesture through and beyond it.

Fondane's perspective on modernity as catastrophe is tempered by a certain contradictory position of looking both forwards and back, and by French, Romanian and Jewish contexts. Whereas the World War, despite its colonial prototypes (Judd & Surridge 2013, 61 and 195) was almost universally felt as utterly modern, Fondane looked on late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century anti-Semitism bifocally. With one eye, it was evident that its violence was caught up with projects of modern state-building and its projections and manifestations were part of a new, secularizing, mechanized age ('outbreaks of violence […] now enter into history *set up as principles*, whitewashed as science' [HDH 447; EM 57]). With the other, he could not but incorporate it into the vision of a historical panorama (which extended to the metaphysical and mythical). One of the great, generous gifts of his poetry is the compassionate reworking of the age-old story of Jewish persecution as a testament against all human cruelty, and systematised violence in particular, without in any way denying the particularities of Jewish experience.

Fondane strove to engage with the historical period he was living through across his writing. The encounter of the twenty-first-century reader with Fondane's work is coloured by our perspective on twentieth-century history. Yet rather than

allowing us to claim a distance which would bracket it as simply the remainder of a tragic, curtailed life, his life's work consistently emphasizes the specificity of every 'existent' and their unique and contingent situation in history. He strives to balance an openness towards the possibilities of the future with a clear-sightedness in regards to the present. 'Nous sommes d'accord sur ce que nous voulons pas [we are agreed on what we do not want]', he wrote, addressing his fellow writers, in 1935:

> l'asservissement, les brimades, les censures, la perspective des camps de concentration; mais nous ne sommes pas plus avancés en ce qui concerne les moyens à employer pour éviter l'avènement de ces désastres [… les] problèmes angoissants de l'écrivain ont été escamotés.

> [subjugation, bullying, censorship and the prospect of concentration camps, but we are none the wiser as to the methods to use to avoid the arrival of these disasters […] the writer's unnerving problems have been evaded.]
> (EDR 60)

He emphasizes the common threads between social, individual and philosophical problems without projecting a simplistic unity.

Fondane's work is often contextualized through the 'entry point' of his death. His murder in Auschwitz incontrovertibly casts a shadow, and its pathos is amplified by its terribly prescient foreshadowing in both his philosophy and his poetry. Nonetheless, this entry point poses a dilemma for the critical or scholarly reader. It is evidently crucial to set out the historical circumstances of his writing and their resonances in his texts. Yet to give too much emphasis to Fondane's status as a 'Holocaust poet' is to flatten and circumscribe other aspects, and indeed the complexity of those resonances themselves as they connect and refract with other contexts. Fondane fought constantly for the rights of the singular, and yet his work also resists the elevation of any singular to an essential or primary status – even the horror of his own end.

Violence shaped Fondane's life and thought before the Nazi party had even come into being. He was among the avant-gardes who registered the force of the First World War upon culture, responding to its effects as an ethical and epistemological break. His artistic work and critical writing directly participate in and critique the projects of the Futurists and Dadaists, as will be discussed in the upcoming section on

ineffability and indeed throughout this thesis. Influenced by Shestov, too, he saw the war as the shipwreck of the Enlightenment, leaving 'le vieux monde écroulé [the old world in ruins]'.[3] Although Shestov's concerns were ultimately turned towards a religious horizon, Fondane's own philosophical essays share his anti-systematizing tendencies and prioritizing of the 'existent' over abstractions, bringing them to bear on historical and aesthetic questions.

Although he was not a Marxist,[4] Fondane's critical work shares affinities with the Frankfurt School, and indeed with post-war philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida in its critiques of rationality and systematization (Fotiade 2009). As for Marx, the question of the 'poverty of philosophy' (cited in EM 17) is always present for Fondane, though with a different focus: philosophy's inability to provide a true metanarrative of history and of its failure to overcome the Kierkegaardian separation of the 'writing self' and the 'living self'.[5] In *Existential Monday* he sets out the need to address this latter problem as a cornerstone of his negative philosophy: 'to live in one category and think in another: this is the critique aimed at speculative philosophy by which one recognizes the distinctive mark of existential thought!' (EM 17). Following Kierkegaard and Shestov, the starting point for much of this critique is Hegel. Shestov and Fondane read Hegel as sacrificing the individual experience of existence to the progress of history, to the authority of Hegel's 'hussars with sabres drawn' (EM 9). He was all too aware of the 'seriousness of history'[6] invoked by Hegel, which forced destruction and suffering to break into the contemplative life. However, he strenuously resisted

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[3] In Olivier Salazar-Ferrer's view, for Fondane Dadaism 'reacted to the First World War by smashing Western idealism with absurdity, insult and derision [...it] functioned as a violent agent of social and epistemological discontinuity, unveiling what Fondane would call "the catastrophic"' (Salazar-Ferrer 2004a, 40–41, my translation).

[4] As is clear in his writings which touch on politics, such as *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution* ['The Writer Before The Revolution'], Fondane saw the benefits of socialism as self-evident and was not an anti-Marxist in a simplistic sense. His critique of Marxism was philosophical in its attack on teleology and pragmatic in its warning against the effects of dogmatism. There is scope to align some of his positions with anarchist thought, as his correspondence with Victor Serge supports (Serge 2019).

[5] Fondane takes this reference to different selves from a 1927 Gallimard book of excerpts (*Fragments du journal*, translated by Knud Ferlov and Jean J. Gateau). I have been unable to trace the relevant entry in English translation in Kierkegaard's voluminous journals.

[6] Fondane uses the term intertextually, referring from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which he quotes in *Existential Monday* (EM 9). Bruce Baugh gives Nisbet's translation as a reference, but it is very different from the English version as published in the NYRB volume: presumably he has translated directly from the French. Where Nisbet has 'solemn recurrences of history' (Hegel 2003, 363), Fondane's *Morceaux Choisis* has 'le sérieux de l'histoire' (EM 25).

the idea that this destruction could ever be recuperated into any narrative of necessity, and argued that in any case such a recuperation could only ever be an insult to those who had suffered in the name of its transcendent victory. His understanding of modernity as an epistemological catastrophe connects directly to the experience of the existent who loses the reassurance provided by metanarrative, and risks being crushed by those who attempt to manifest their own.

Fondane's attempt to reckon with the widespread and unchecked violence of his time was informed by, and in turn informed, his 'negative', 'tragic' philosophy. This project primarily operated in antagonism, to resist the reductions and omissions considered inherent in 'positive' philosophy and to assert the experience of the 'existent' against philosophical narratives which would attempt to dismiss or justify actual suffering:

> La pensée existentielle […] doit […] rompre l'enchantement […] elle se situe dans le bref interstice qui sépare la logique du rêve de la liberté de l'état de veille; elle est la pensée de l'effort à fournir, le moment du malaise, du désespoir, de la tragédie, de la lutte; elle n'est pas encore le possible, elle est la lutte pour le possible.
>
> [Existential thought […] must […] break the enchantment […] it is situated in the small interstice that separates the logic of the dream of freedom from the state of wakefulness; it is the thought of the effort that must be given, the moment of unease, of despair, of tragedy, of struggle; it is not the possible either, it is the struggle for the possible.] (Fondane 1938, 37)

By definition, this negative, subversive philosophy could not operate by way of positive argument. It is this context which opens up a space for art, and in particular poetry, to carry such subversions into the territory of positive affirmation.

Poetry, then, became a means to go beyond interpreting catastrophe, to respond to it. For Fondane it had two important functions: to testify to the experience of the singular and to resist the closure of possibility implicit in philosophical claims of interpretative authority. With these functions in mind, the thesis readings will centre mainly on his long 'dramatic' poem (or poem sequence) *L'Exode* [Exodus], his most direct engagement with the violent upheavals that marked his life and bore upon his considerations of the role of disaster in human history, but will also be situated in the broader context of Fondane's work.

It is productive to think of *L'Exode* as participating in Maurice Blanchot's 'writing of disaster' (Blanchot 1995). Yet through all his attempts to speak the unspeakable, Fondane keeps in view the affinities of human suffering across history. This compassionate act of balancing and holding together the rights of the singular with a solidarity of suffering is seen in *L'Exode*'s *Préface en prose* [Prose preface], which blurs formal boundaries, being a poem and as such participating in the sequence, destabilizing its own status as an *hors-texte*, both part of and extra to the whole. It can be thought of as a tone-poem overture to the 'opera', the *oeuvre*, tying all that is to follow into a relation of feeling. It encapsulates catastrophe's evasion of positive definition and the creative strategies required to affirm a sensibility of compassion through the midst of it.

The tension between the knowledge and experience of catastrophe and the attempt to express it is key to Fondane's poetics. It is also worth mentioning his political responses. Fondane's readings of politics are often to the effect that the perfect is the enemy of the good, or to put it in a more Jewish idiom, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Fondane's warning of unintended consequences in political theory and action is mainly articulated negatively, with an emphasis on the dimensions of private and social life that are excluded by their operations. Art becomes of primary importance in part because as practice it can fill in gaps in political thought, at the limits of the effable. To use a Derridean framing, Fondane's political thinking resists the fallible determinacy of the *futur* and insists on the modalities of unknowability of the *à-venir*.[7] Catastrophic upheavals offer an opening to the indeterminacy of the future. He demanded a place – the place of poetry – be left open for the non-place of 'le Non-Savoir [Un-Knowing]' (EDR 95).

Like Walter Benjamin, his fellow contributor at *Les Cahiers du Sud*, Fondane's thought seems better able than that of many of his contemporaries to think beyond the circumstances of his time (whether or not we agree with him). In her comparison of their approaches to time and history, Margaret Teboul writes: 'Benjamin and Fondane strive to push the violence of history that exceeds the Idea into philosophy' and 'their deconstruction of historical time aims to integrate the 'state of exception', the catastrophe' (Teboul 2011, my translation). Twenty-first-century reappraisals of

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[7] With thanks to Fraser Goodall.

political teleology, as exemplified by Miéville (2019), have the potential to reactivate its relevance.[8]

Among the most controversial of Fondane's philosophical positions was the argument that Hitler was a 'twisted' product of Humanism rather than a 'barbaric' aberration from it (HDH 448; EM 59). This remains a very difficult position to countenance even today. Yet we must do so, remembering the etymology of 'barbarism' as nonsensical babbling outwith the logical signifying of language. However distasteful, the Nazis used comprehensible speech representative of a definite ideology, beyond bloodlust.[9] Timothy Snyder emphasizes the importance of this work of understanding in his 2015 book *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. Fondane's response to catastrophe in its material form is a resistance to its incorporation in *any* iteration of the Hegelian Spirit of History, however noble or horrible, and any project which claims to justify any death or suffering as service to a higher purpose. As the twentieth century showed only too clearly, the potential for the letter of ideology to overrule the spirit is great. Poetry, for Fondane, could play a key role in resisting the transformation of good intentions into oppression and in keeping open the doors of possibility.

Existential Despair as Crisis

> Nous sommes à la fois, en tant que citoyens du malheur social, des êtres politiques, et en tant que citoyens du malheur humain, des êtres métaphysiques.
>
> [We are both political beings, as citizens of social unhappiness, and metaphysical beings, as citizens of human unhappiness.]
>
> from 'Préface pour l'aujourd'hui [Preface for the Present Moment]'
> (CM 20; EM 34)

> Une philosophie pas valable pour tous, cela veut dire seulement, peut-être: – non valable pour tout homme pendant que plongé aux conditions ordinaires de la vie où, pour chaque question, il y a une réponse toute prête. Mais la peste, le tremblement de terre, peuvent surgir *soudain*, avec *leurs* problèmes,

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[8] Miéville's essay will be discussed further later in this chapter.
[9] See Žižek 2009b, 67: 'Nazism disclosed reality in a way which allowed its subjects to acquire a global 'cognitive mapping', which included a space for their meaningful engagement.'

dans l'homme le moins préparé, dans la vie la plus banale. Tout un chacun *peut* devenir une 'exception'.

[A philosophy that is not valid for everyone means only, perhaps: not valid for every man as long as he is immersed in the ordinary conditions of life, where there is a ready-made answer for every question. But a plague, an earthquake, can *suddenly* rise up with *its* problems in the least prepared man, in the most banal life. Each and every one *can* become an 'exception'.]

from *Le Lundi existentiel* [*Existential Monday*] (LE 66–67; EM 31)

The epistemological break of the First World War led Fondane to connect broad catastrophic experience with the intensely personal forms of anxiety and despair found in existential philosophy. The war literalized the shock waves of the 'transvaluation of all values' predicted by Nietzsche, horribly clarifying the ramifications of his messages of the death of God and the need to reckon with the immanence of ethics. For Shestov and Fondane, belief in an Idealist or deterministic conception of history could only ever lead to the devaluing of specific human experience and of the importance of the ineradicable presence of the unknown. If their existential thought can be said to be a philosophy, it is a philosophy of crisis, resisting synthesis, and aiming to incessantly trouble the experience of living rather than absorb absurdity into a new Humanism.

Unlike Sartre, Fondane is concerned with how to live with anguish rather than how to overcome it, and with the revelatory potential which he and Shestov see as inherent in the experience of doubt and despair. His thought marks a refusal of existential*ism*, preferring to emphasize existential thought as a wider phenomenon and resisting any attempt at systemization.[10] Material catastrophe such as war has immaterial as well as material effects, capable of collapsing worldviews and psychological and metaphysical buffers in the subjects who experience it, and spreading new and unforeseen affective modes. For Fondane it has the potential to shake any individual's confidence in history's meaning.

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[10] 'Existential philosophy is concerned with the thought of the existent *during*, involved in a Real as yet without form or structure.' (EM 17)

On the one hand, the 'exception' is an ahistorical category, as anguish and the 'dark night of the soul' is testified to across the written record.[11] On the other, it has a specific modern resonance for Fondane: the modern subject lives in a dis-unified culture, one in which no authority can convincingly claim to hold the key to transcendence and in which they are abstracted by the industrial organization of society and by secular attempts to rationalize history (see C. Taylor 2007). Fondane's writing thus manifests a temporal dislocation, or a tension between the specific existential context of modernity and the pre-modern context of worldviews – cosmologies, affective/philosophical relations to reality – which cradle thought in a state where metaphysical consolation is at least conceivable (beyond naivety or self-deception), if not guaranteed. At the same time, there remains a simultaneous attraction in pre-modern avowals of despair as testaments of experiential similarities which break through the isolation of existential crisis. Thus Fondane is less concerned with absolute truths about the 'human condition' as with a dual emphasis on the *situatedness* of experiences of despair and a kind of solidarity of suffering. He engages with what we might call *affinities* of anguish which open related possibilities and aporiae while retaining their specificity.

Fondane notably adds a contemporaneity in extending Shestov's approach to the uncertainty which resists all claims to truth and authority. He brings such subversions to bear on contemporary society and politics as well as examining philosophy and aesthetics. In a sense, he sees the mechanized massacres of the early 20th Century as extreme aspects of the alienation and dehumanization omnipresent in modern life.[12] He brings this perspective on the interconnectedness of individual angst and alienation and social contexts directly to political and philosophical debates, for example in the speech he wrote for the 1935 Anti-Fascist Writers'

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[11] 'Do you believe that misfortune is of these times only? […or is it] Dostoevsky who is right, and Shakespeare, or indeed their common Master, the Bible, which said, in its way, that life is a tale told by an idiot by its reminder, its insistence, that the same sun here below throws its light on the just and the unjust...' (HDH 444; EM 52)

[12] This analysis is particularly acute in an article he wrote for the Romanian avant-garde journal *Integral* in 1927, in which he argues that Futurist exaltation of speed and materialism over the contradictions of human existence is the most honest artistic ally of modern doctrines of progress. Without approbation, he states that Futurism 'écarte toute vie contemplative, ne conçoit que le mouvement; mais rien ne convient certainement mieux à son temps [brushes side all contemplative life, conceives only movement; but nothing suits its age better]' (AG 52). Martin Heidegger argued that the 'inner truth and greatness' of the Nazis' vision 'consisted in modern man's encounter with global technology' (cited in Staal 2008).

Congress (*L'Ecrivain devant la révolution*). Against a Soviet Realist conception of
culture as a utilitarian 'instrument of our liberation from the domination of paradox,
mystery, the indeterminate and the inconceivable' (EDR 92), he argues for the role of
art in revealing needs which exceed modernity's rational programmes, 'although that
necessity cannot always be *comprehended*. This vast world shaped by man in
darkness leads us to the Socratic, paradoxical discovery of the knowledge of our own
ignorance' (EDR 96). In the essays collected in *Fondane/Fundoianu et les avant-
gardes,* meanwhile, he defends the importance of the internal world against the
primacy of social theory, arguing for an interplay between the two, walking like
Chaplin's pilgrim, 'un pas dans un pays, un pas dans l'autre [one foot in one country,
one in another] (AG 52). Most forcefully, he argues in *les Cahiers du Sud* that

> quatre siècles d'humanisme et d'apothéose de la science n'ont abouti qu'au
> retour des pires horreurs que l'on croyait à jamais révolues […] Je ne dirai
> pas qu'un humanisme prévoyant, fondé sur la misère de l'homme, nous eût
> évité les guerres, les révolutions, les cataclysmes – qui n'ont manqué à
> aucune époque de l'histoire. Mais il nous eût évité certainement les guerres à
> l'échelle de la nation, les révolutions à l'échelle du monde, et la barbarie
> machiniste, et la guerre des gaz et des microbes – et le racisme.

> [four centuries of Humanism and apotheosis of science have only led to a
> return of the worst of the horrors which we believed were gone forever […]I
> will not say that a far-sighted Humanism, founded on the misery of man,
> would have spared us wars, revolutions and cataclysms, which have never
> been lacking in any period of history. But it would have certainly saved us
> wars on a national scale, revolutions on a world scale, and machinist
> barbarism, and the warfare of gas and germs – and racism.]
> (HDH 447; EM 57)[13]

For Fondane, alienation is a symptom of modernity's catastrophic failings, and
poetry offers a site of engagement and resistance. The ghosts of *Le Mal des fantômes*
are the mass of ordinary people whose atomised lives are given no collective purpose
and who are reduced by political philosophies of all stripes to mere cogs in the
machine of history. Fondane's poetry, often using images of water to emphasize the

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[13] Fondane's sense of modern history as catastrophic is echoed in the long view of Edward Said,
despite Said's self-identification as a humanist: 'We allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently
altered the consciousness of our time: why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in
what imperialism has done?' (Said 2003, xvii).

groundless nature of such an existence, is in many ways a confrontation with such abstraction and the subalternity it enforces.

As Walter Benjamin showed (2003a, 389), modernity can be conceived of as the generalization of the exception. Whereas individual crises had always exposed an existential uncertainty, modernity entails a universal crisis, manifested in its most 'ordinary' state as anomie and disaffection. We can also view the relationship from the opposite angle, if we consider worldwide destruction as dependent upon that 'ordinary' disaffection and abstraction, with resonances of Hannah Arendt's banality of evil. We may think today of the abstracting logic of capitalism, which, despite the claims of its theorists to the authority of reason, is unable to respond to the ecological crisis, its priorities in clear conflict even with the dire warnings of scientists. If Fondane's poetry speaks to us in the early twenty-first century, it is partly because it again affords a paradoxical space of speaking beyond his time while insisting on its singularity. Fondane refuses overarching solutions to catastrophe. Instead, his insistence on the singular and the situated in response to alienation leads him to what might be termed an anti-Humanist humanism.[14] The intrinsic value of life and of experience, in all their uncertainty, became a starting point for political and philosophical thought, against any conception which starts with an image of society, or even a cosmology, and then makes actual, existing people conform to it. This problem is exemplified in that emblem of modernity, the factory. Whereas Marx saw the factory as a deterministic driver of class consciousness, Fondane, like Simone Weil, saw it as a dehumanizing institution which in practice deformed and subdued consciousness and autonomy.[15]

The consciousness of catastrophe defined as the exception is not a political theorization, and certainly not a defeatist abandonment of politics. Fondane's meditations on catastrophe are resonant with Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, and the possibility of a better society remains very much alive in his thought. However, his focus is more on the value of existence as actually lived and on how to live in the midst of collapse. As such, his work may act as warning and corrective to

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[14] This is articulated extensively in *L'Homme devant l'histoire,* but also *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution,* where he states 'l'artiste est humain; il est impropre de l'appeler humaniste [the artist is human; it is incorrect to call him humanist]' (EDR 81).

[15] 'Serviteurs de la machine! – cet état est indigne de nous [Servants of the machine! – this state is beneath us]'(AG 88)

political projects. It is not against politics, but it does resist teleological systematizations of the political. This is in part why poetics are so important to Fondane in both criticism and practice:

> l'art nous apparaît comme un phénomène d'imagination affective [… il est] presque impossible *d'isoler les structures* de cette imagination, de les réduire à des unités simples et fut-ce [sic] à une activité singulière, *déterminée.*

> [Art appears to us to be a phenomenon of affective imagination… it is more or less impossible to *isolate the structures* of this imagination, to reduce them to simply units, even as part of a singular, *defined* activity.] (FT 51)

Poetry can perform a resistance to the delineations of systemic thought and in doing so reignite suppressed and devalued aspects of human consciousness. Thus Charlie Chaplin, whom he called 'le plus grand poète moderne' (AG 56), was his reference for a critique of and a resistance to the factory.[16] In *Modern Times*, the chaos sown by 'Charlot' causes a breakdown of the machine-system, and a blooming of the creativity and vitality that may be circumscribed even by egalitarian political projects.[17]

   Fondane's participation in modernism is conditioned by an existential perspective. As the subsequent chapter and the readings of *Exodus* in chapters 5 and 6 will explore, the commingling of material catastrophe and personal anguish can be understood through the idea of disconsolation. For Olivier Salazar-Ferrer in his reading of *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*,

> The abyss appears when the values of truth, beauty and goodness collapse, along with the reassurances of Stoic or Christian wisdom and the morality of the progressives of the 19th century. For Fondane this collapse occurs under the force of traumatic events that are unable to be integrated into logics of consolation or justification, indeed exposes them as brutally insufficient. (Salazar-ferrer 2003a, 51, my translation)

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[16] See EC; Benjamin 2003a, 251 and Buck-Morss 2002.

[17] I use the term vital in a simple or naive sense. While Fondane engaged extensively with the work of both Nietzsche and Bergson (see for example 'Bergson, Freud et les dieux' and 'Edmund Husserl et l'oeuf de Colombe du réel' in CM and Fondane 1982, as well as Jutrin 2012, Fotiade, ed. 2006 and Regier 2005, 76) his conceptions of life resolutely resisted theorization.

The *gouffre* or abyss is an important image for Fondane, not least as a conception of the lack inherent in many philosophical and political worldviews and attempts at their application. It also opens on to the undeniable metaphysical and spiritual dimensions. Fondane is not a religious thinker as such, nor a mystic. He is not an anti-rational thinker, but an *extra*-rational one. If God informs his work, it is arguably as a space of absence and possibility.

The Biblical Exodus is a narrative of God's absence and of the possibility of an antagonistic relation to God and an abandonment by God. It was an especially productive source myth for Fondane's poetry, especially in the overlap between metaphysical and worldly exile, and especially because Fondane came to see modernity itself as an exilic condition.[18] However, while lament and a search for conciliation have important metaphysical resonance in modernism – think of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, another modernist river journey – *revolt* is also a key response in Fondane's work. He also stages Job's 'howl in terror' (EM 53), the breakdown of any foundation and bulwark to existence in the consciousness of the 'exception', that is to say the cry for comfort of the absolutely desperate, and, simultaneously, a revolt against their conditions. Whether it be the Hegelian World-Spirit or the plan of the Christian God, Fondane's compassion for the suffering of the now rejects justifications. He stands against any attempt to integrate catastrophe into a greater plan.

For Fondane, the 'unhappiness' of consciousness, the dissatisfaction and anguish of consciousness in a world where suffering is meaningless and, further, where no meaning could compensate for that experience of catastrophe, acts as a thorn in the side of abstract thought. Yet a focus on the singularity of suffering and its affinities with other sufferings across different times, places and cultural frameworks speaks of a deep compassion. It is only through a valuing of one's own experience, extended outwards to a valuing of others, that such an impulse could come to be: 'it is possible that philosophy does not have to know a truth which *is* once and for all but can know a truth capable of changing […] loving, crying, praying, indeed revolting or

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[18] Edward Said's key text *Reflections on Exile* amplifies many of Fondane's themes in this regard. Fondane exemplifies Said's statement that 'exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism' (Said 2001, 174), as well as the paradox of using his alienation from place of origin and language as a starting-point for communicating across the abyss.

resigning oneself are acts that shape it to some extent' (LE 55; EM 25). Existential thought, then, is a crisis for rational thought. The rupture in thought caused by anguish and despair allows a gesture towards the existence occluded by thought's operations, if only by the delineation of its absence: 'Let the disaster happen! Will it still remain positive philosophy's prerogative to measure reality's extent by its own powers alone?' (LE 63; EM 29).

Fondane's existential engagement with philosophy insists upon on the primacy of the existent. Not only anguish but also joy and love of life are located in the philosophical absence of the *gouffre*. Philosophies which are constructed outside of it play an active role in shaping actual lives and societies. Against Marx, Fondane argues that philosophers have consistently contributed to great shifts in society, 'aussi profonds que délibérés [as willed as they are profound]' (EDR 97), often to the detriment of those caught up in the implementation of their ideals. Fondane's emphasis on the existent resists the totality of catastrophe. His poetic response makes a gesture to the unsayable, to the value of life that always slips through philosophy's fingers.

Fondane's take on the *conscience malheureuse,* the unhappy consciousness of the existent, combines a desire for consolation in the face of the suffering of existence with a refusal to negate or repress its own suffering. However, c*onscience* can be translated as either 'consciousness' or 'conscience', depending on context. When discussing the role of the poet in opening a view to the abyss, Fondane brings in the idea of *la conscience honteuse du poète*, the poet's 'shameful conscience', which Salazar-Ferrer glosses as 'the guilt of a subjective activity in a polarised culture that gets its validation from the triumphant objectivity of the sciences' (Salazar-Ferrer 2013, 86, my translation). It is born of a conflict between rational and irrational elements within the self: the poet finds themselves seeking in their art an amoral, 'frivolous' contact with that which is beyond the bounds of ethical systems and use values, leading to feelings of shame in the face of super-egoic criteria of usefulness and morality. As a thinking subject like any other (Fondane clearly states that he does not exclude himself from rational thought: 'tout comme vous, mon cher lecteur, je m'accroche désespérément à l'intelligibilité de l'histoire [just like you, dear reader, I cling hopelessly to the intelligibility of History]' HDH 450; EM61). As a thinking being, the poet cannot but aspire to the justifications promised by philosophical

systems and seek to align themselves with their precepts. Yet this same desire for conciliation finds rational explanations and metaphysical comforts lacking. Poetry, sometimes despite the poet themselves, as Fondane argues in *Rimbaud le voyou*, becomes a space to explore what is not present in rational analyses of existence or of history – indeed what tends to be dismissed altogether – and perhaps *cannot* be present.

At the very same time as reckoning with the anguish of catastrophic existence, the desire to go beyond systematic thought also contains the urge to affirm the affective joy which philosophy, in its turn towards the transcendent or the universal, cannot capture, as well as the very *expression* of the existential yearning inherent in the subject's relationship with this lacuna. Thus the existential abyss as indicated in Fondane's work represents a utopos – the *non-lieu* mentioned in his poetry – outwith rational thought, in which repressed affect, the singular value of the existent, the boundlessness of the catastrophe and the yearning for an impossible resolution all operate. This leads us to a context of ineffability refracted through the modernist crisis of representation, the unstable territory of Fondane's poetry.

Ineffability

> Men cannot unify in their human language all that they live through and feel in such a way that it can be expressed by a single word or single concept.

> Leon Shestov (Shestov 1975)

> Qui osera relever la tête afin que les mots se soulèvent? L'homme est un animal que la poésie pétrit dans l'argile, ou qu'elle fait sauter à coups de dynamite.

> [Who will dare stick out their neck in order to whip up the words? Man is an animal whom poetry hardens into clay, or else blows up with blasts of dynamite.]

> 'Mots Sauvages' (Fondane 1996a, 23)

The third aspect of catastrophe as it bears down on and informs Fondane's thought and art is a catastrophe of representation. Wanton material violence and an existential

crisis of meaning provided fertile ground for Fondane's participation in modernism.[19]
The coin of catastrophe can be thought of as having two sides, the horror of violence
being one and the groundlessness of meaning the other. The currency is ineffability.
Ineffability itself can be thought of as twofold, with a distinction between the
unspeakable and the unsayable. This is the definition used by China Miéville in his
article 'Silence in debris: Towards an Apophatic Marxism' (2019). Although on close
examination they are (appropriately) not neat categories, in Miéville's essay the
unspeakable and the unsayable become a useful shorthand for, respectively, the
ineffability of horror and the ineffability of what stands in opposition to horror, of joy
and fulfilment and their conditions. Complete fulfilment is the territory of the
utopian[20] and the divine, Shestov's religious horizon, and is at best aspirational. But
the unsayable is also the value of the existent that evades philosophical capture, just
as the unspeakable is not only the unseizable *meaning* of horror but also suffering's
dismissal and demeaning by philosophy (despite the frequent good intentions of
many who conceive of systems which carry out such dismissals or reductions).

Fondane arrived at a poetics open to contexts of ineffability through a highly
personal trajectory. As an aspiring writer in Romania, he idolised French poetry,
particularly Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine and Mallarmé. During this Symbolist
period, represented in the Romanian collection *Privelisti* (*Landscapes*), Fondane held
to a *l'art pour l'art* belief in the poem 'ressenti comme un univers autonome
[experienced as an autonomous universe]' (Fondane 1996, 20), wherein poetry
offered a pure escape from the complications of existence. His confrontations with
material and metaphysical catastrophe, through the catalysts of Dada and Shestov,
shattered this faith. He came to see the 'escape' into beauty not only as sterile, but as
a betrayal of existence.

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[19] Modernism was of course often driven by new theories of history, such as the Futurists' sweeping
veneration of the new. Fondane was concerned with thinking and living with the insufficiencies of
historical theories rather than overcoming them. His commitment to uncertainty has some parallels
with the tension between politics and representation discussed in David Weir's 1997 book *Anarchy &
Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism*.

[20] As already mentioned and as I will return to throughout the thesis, the notion of a 'non-place' has
many aspects in Fondane's work. In his engagement with political utopias, his critique aligns with
Miéville's, which calls for a 'proud humility' (2019, 4) in socialist politics and a recognition that the
achievement of a better society in communism will never eradicate *individual* suffering, and thus
resisting the conflation of post-revolutionary society with cataleptic Christian conceptions of heaven.

Fondane's concern for what poetry tends to leave out is part of the larger picture of modernism's post-Somme grappling with art as ideological apparatus, shaping thought and constraining ideas, so that genres such as realism 'came to seem immoral' (Bell 2010, 2). Language itself, the most fundamental social bond, seemed to have failed, to the point that straightforward attempts to employ it could be seen as betrayals of reality. Dada was the performance of a failure which the rest of the world seemed intent on ignoring, standing 'in opposition to society, as did heretics in the Middle Ages' (Hugo Ball, quoted in Bell 2010), burlesquing the proclamations of authority and, in its trauma, Emma Bell argues, 'signifying little', in positive terms, 'beyond a reluctance to signify' (Bell 2010). Fondane's direct engagement with 'le débat continental sur le renouvellement de l'art et de la façon de penser l'art [the continental debate on the renewing of art and ways of thinking about art]' (AG 17) eventually led to complete paralysis: from 1924 to 1928 he did not write a line of poetry.[21]

Dada pointed towards an aporia of expression, the defeat of meaning in a senseless world, where any remaining values could only be betrayed by language, its forms necessarily complicit with the destructive machinery of modernity. Fondane's unfinished essay *Signification de Dada* begins 'Nous avons été trahis par les mots auxquels nous avons le plus souvent ouvert notre cœur. Que cela nous serve d'exemple! [We have been betrayed by the very words to which we opened our hearts. Let that be an example to us!]' (AG 76). Shestov's critiques of positivist thinking reinforced the sense that there was always a remainder to any statement: 'It is a great art, a difficult art, to be able to keep oneself from the exclusivism toward which we are unconsciously drawn by our language and even by our thought, which is educated by language' (Shestov 1975). It was only at the end of his four-year abnegation, however, that Fondane's own critical apprehension of the effects and import of this catastrophe took shape. He found the means to move beyond it, not by victoriously overcoming it, but through a refusal to accept defeat, a permanent resistance to overwhelming despair, creating what he felt to be new ways of affirming the human voice despite, and beyond, the broken promises of aesthetic expression.

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[21] Olivier Salazar-Ferrer has pointed out that we only have Fondane's own word to go on for this. Whatever the truth of Fondane's activities during this period, the spirit of the crisis was very real.

Dada was an important starting point, and parts of this paradoxical stance had been learned through Shestov, but Fondane's performance of this resistance was his own.

'Mots Sauvages' ['Wild Words'] is an essay Fondane wrote in 1929 in which he takes stock of the rupture, disavowing his previous belief that poetry could 'apporter une réponse là où la métaphysique et la morale avaient depuis longtemps tiré les volets [provide an answer where metaphysics and morality had long ago shut up shop]' (1996, p. 21).[22] Yet it also marks a refusal to relax into Pessoan decadence, 'renunciation as a way of life', 'the aesthetic contemplation of life' as a 'justification for having a soul' (Pessoa 2002, 12). 'Mots Sauvages' instead opens onto a new, hesitant, intrinsically self-doubting use of language. The impossibility of speaking (or, speaking adequately) met in Fondane an urgent need to speak.[23]

Apophasis

> The more of which we can speak, the more of which we cannot […] Lack must be part of how we see the world, how we act in it, how we speak and change it. 'What kind of philosopher', we might demand, with Benjamin Fondane, 'is he who does not accept that freedom begins where knowledge ends?'
>
> […]
>
> Apophasis may not be sufficient, but it is necessary.
>
> (Miéville 2019, 5 & 13)

Although the term *apophasis* has a long history as the name for the project to consider the impossibility of knowing God with merely mundane resources, with certain qualifications it has viability as a critical term for considering various problems of meaning in modernism and modernity.[24] The theological tradition does

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[22] Sartre carries out a similar autopsy of the dead end of Symbolist poetry in his *Mallarmé,* though his championing of a dialectical materialist prose is the antithesis of Fondane's response.

[23] Though beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be possible to draw many parallels between Fondane's linguistic problematic and translation theory, not least because of his moving between languages and his own practice as a translator.

[24] I am not concerned here with the rhetorical sense of declaring that one will not speak of a subject, and thereby speaking of it.

provide a foundation for this struggle with meaning, 'a point of reference within philosophical explorations of language' (Vericat 2002, 172), but, for writers from Walter Benjamin to T.S. Eliot to Paul Celan to Fondane, this is not so much by way of the transcendence of metaphysics as by its absence. [25] I want to associate Fondane with an apophatic tendency in modern poetry which draws on the *via negativa* but is primarily concerned with language and with interpretations of history, where 'the territories of language and silence shift from metaphysics to more specifically historical questions' (Wolosky 1995, 4). Fondane's essay *Faux traité d'esthétique* sets out the commensurability of metaphysical absence and the poetic expression of existence, together with a defence of the extra-rational space where the affective life of the existent takes place.[26] Fondane's poetics seeks to acknowledge and assert ineffability *at the same time as resisting it*. In *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre,* Fondane considers Baudelaire as veiling the unbearability of the abyss. For Fondane, the apophatic challenge will be how to use art not to veil the void but to acknowledge or even confront it.

I propose that we may think of apophasis as having three valences when considering Fondane's work, three threads that can be productively examined separately but which also weave together. The first of these is the *apophasis of absence*: the ineffability of the hole left by God's disappearance, which in particular tears catastrophe from frames of meaning and lays bare its unspeakability. The second is the *apophasis of existence*, or the desire to gesture towards the unsayability of existence, to the lived remainder left behind by speculative philosophy or modern teleologies of politics. The third might be termed *linguistic apophasis*, what Shira Wolosky calls the 'negative way of language' (Wolosky 1995). This is the dominant 'colour' in this textile metaphor, enfolding the other two. The failures of language to overcome ineffability in regards to absence and disaster can be considered to expose a fundamental aspect of language itself.

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[25] Anne Carson argues that 'a negative theology may begin as just a way of thinking about the surface on which you are working, whether it is a zinc plate or a slab of stone or the facts of human language' (Carson 2002a, 114).

[26] See Wexler 2017, Finlayson 2012, Hawkins 2003, Carson 2002a and 2002b and Wolosky 1995. A key difference between modernist poetics and negative theology is the tendency for the former not to assume an object out of reach. Sabine Müller makes this comment on Rilke: 'there is no veil to be lifted from any concealed essence. Veiledness is understood as an integral and irreducible aspect of the mystery of being' (Müller 2017, 298).

In negotiating his path through ineffability, Fondane learns from Dada and Shestov and pre-empts the theoretical engagements with the limits of language by 'postmodern' philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard or Jacques Derrida.[27] His linguistic engagement, however, was not so much theoretical as poetic, an exploration of and resistance to these limits which nonetheless remained committed to the subjective and the singular. The combination of avant-garde subversions with Shestovian existential and metaphysical uncertainty invites parallels with Samuel Beckett, as the search for meaning becomes a going-on, a failing better.

This going-on– this refusal to resign oneself to the limits of knowledge and instead, with 'proud humility' (Miéville 2019, 4), endlessly negotiate how to live with them – informs the double sense of the title of this thesis. The ruins are both the actual wasteland of Europe in the World Wars and the remains of what Fondane called the 'le vieux monde écroulé' (AG 77), the shipwreck of Humanist and Enlightenment values. To address the felt presence of silence in the midst of this debris and the context of uttering from what is left over, I will now briefly expand on the notions of unspeakability and unsayability in relation to Fondane, on the writing of disaster and 'extra-rational' uses of language.

Writing Disaster

> Not until the revolts issuing from the depths, and then the dissidents and their clandestine writings, do perspectives open up — do ruined words become audible rising from the ruins, traversing the silence.
>
> (Blanchot 1995, 83)

Maurice Blanchot's text *The Writing of Disaster* (Blanchot 1980) is one of the most striking critical interventions in regards to the unspeakability of violence, and he has

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[27] In his 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', Derrida hints at the existential import of linguistic questions even as he emphasizes the provisionality of terminology: 'The word [deconstruction], at least on its own, has never appeared satisfactory to me (but what word is), and must always be girded by an entire discourse. It is difficult to effect it afterward because, in the work of deconstruction, I have had to, as I have to here, multiply the cautionary indicators and put aside all the traditional philosophical concepts, while reaffirming the necessity of returning to them, at least under erasure. Hence, this has been called, precipitately, a type of negative theology (this was neither true nor false but I shall not enter into the debate here).' (Derrida 1985)

certain affinities with Fondane (see Bikard 2005). Blanchot's text was groundbreaking in the performance of its apophatic qualities, proclaiming the impossibility of adequately representing the Nazi Holocaust by refusing to proclaim, acknowledging the limits of its medium through a fragmentary subversion of them. The very form of the text is a warning for attempts to speak the disaster. Despite many attempts to speak it, with all their complications, the Holocaust remains an unavoidable reference for the limits of representation, notably by way of Adorno's oft-cited and usually decontextualized statement on poetry after Auschwitz.[28] The shadow of the Shoah does indeed lean backwards across Fondane's poetry and at points he speaks towards it, almost uncannily.

However, it is important to keep in mind that all of the questions around representation which were so horribly amplified by Nazism were already raised by the First World War, as I have already touched upon in relation to Dada. 'What made writing about twentieth-century violence so difficult,' writes Joyce Wexler, 'was that it occurred in a secular age' (Wexler 2017, 2). The First World War was not simply an overwhelming event. It exposed the epistemological break, the lie that Western culture could be considered justified.[29] Adorno's critique of poetry is essentially the same as that of Dada and of Fondane: to create objects of aesthetic pleasure, uncritically reproducing pre-twentieth-century forms, is to deny this new perspective on reality, to participate in reproducing its cruelty by masking it.[30] As Rhys Tranter points out, 'for Blanchot, historical testimony is by its very nature flawed, troubled

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[28] 'The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter […] To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today […] Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.' (Adorno 1981, 34)

[29] This thought of Henry James is particularly succinct as evidence of break and as foreshadowing of avant-garde responses: 'The subject-matter of one's effort … has become *itself* utterly treacherous and false — its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of this — and how represent that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either — without putting into play mere fiddlesticks?' (Lubbock 1970, 398).

[30] Glossing Adorno's much-misused statement, Brian Oard writes: 'To persist, after Auschwitz, in the production of monuments of the very culture that produced Auschwitz […] is to participate by denial in the perpetuation of that barbaric culture and to participate in the process (reification) that renders fundamental criticism of that culture literally unthinkable' (Oard 2011). We may think too of Benjamin's famous statement that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin 2003aa, 392). Fondane addresses this problematic directly in *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution,* using the palace of Versailles as an example (EDR 66).

and incomplete' (Tranter 2009).[31] For Fondane, the First World War had already raised Adorno's problematic, and the limits of historical representation sent him towards a different way of making poetry, a way that made its insufficiencies part of its strength. Ironically, this new mode laid the ground for his response to the Second.[32]

The collapse of language precipitated by catastrophe is a theme I will return to throughout the thesis. Blanchot and Adorno's critiques of utterance,[33] however, also raise the question of *where do words begin again*? Despite their reservations around cataphasis, they speak and write, however hedged, fragmentary, and challenging their words may be. 'L'homme a besoin de désapprendre le langage [man needs to unlearn language]', wrote Fondane in 1927 (AG 55), attempting to take stock of French poetry in the wake of the war. Against the resumed urge to create masterpieces, he affirmed the need to learn *à balbutier*, to stammer (AG 55). Poetry had to be 'humiliated' (AG 54) so that it could open on to this new context of uncertainty. Writing amid the ferment of the avant-garde he concludes, without the confidence of a Marinetti but with a certain kind of liberatory hope, 'jamais autant de lassos n'auront été jetés aux crinières de l'inconnu [never will so many lassos have been thrown at the manes of the unknown]' (AG 57).

In the wake of the wars, Adorno emphasized the question raised by a character in Sartre's *Les Morts sans sépulture* of 'whether or why one should live in a world in which one is beaten until one's bones are smashed. Since it concerns the possibility of any affirmation of life, this question cannot be evaded' (Adorno 2001, 110). Fondane's work on the unhappy consciousness aligns with Adorno's point that 'any thought which is not measured by this standard […] cannot be called a thought at all' (Adorno 2001, 110). Yet despite his own participation in the interpretive work of

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[31] Compare Fabio Vericat's comment on T.S Eliot's contemporary analysis of the problem: 'The most important temporal myth is perhaps not that there is an ideal and final origin, but that there is such a thing as an intelligible present' (Vericat 2002, 258).

[32] The abyss of silence around the quantative and epistemological novelty of modern mechanized slaughter is apparent everywhere in narratives around the First World War. For instance, this testimony from 19-year-old burial officer Norman Collins after the Battle of the Somme: 'as an officer, the best way of comforting the living would be to give them a stroke on the head or a pat on the back or some gesture like that: without words, comfort them without words' (Collins 2018). It would also surely be fruitful to compare Fondane's poetry with that of Isaac Rosenberg.

[33] 'It is in the nature of philosophy', Adorno later wrote to clarify his position, 'that nothing is meant quite literally' (Adorno 2001, 110).

thought as evinced in his essays, ultimately his most lasting response to the ineffability of catastrophe was in the search for affirmation, a search which pushed language beyond the bounds of the conceptual. The responsibility of poetry in this context is thus no longer only aesthetic (if it ever truly was) but towards a crisis that conflates ethics and representation (a problematic most acutely developed by Fondane in his *Faux Traité d'esthétique*). He seeks to affirm certain indefinite values or aspects of life in the face of the irrational void of meaninglessness, while at the same time fighting against positive systems of thought in order to defend 'the liberatory, enriching unsayable' (Miéville 2019, 24). Unsaying, according to Catherine Keller, whom Miéville draws on, 'performs its negations for the sake of the most positive relations possible' (Keller 2014, 3).

Fondane's apophatic search for affirmation corresponds with the same literary 'projects' Beth Hawkins gleans from his contemporaries Franz Kafka, Paul Celan and Edmond Jabès: 'a radical subversion of the Enlightenment Humanism that allows for faith in humanity as a necessary corollary to faith in the unlimited power of reason. Here, human *capacity* is tempered by *incapacity* and the evidence, at every turn, of the *inhuman*' (Hawkins 2003, xxv). Like Jabès, Fondane implores us, 'in the throes of the crisis, to preserve the question' (Hawkins 2003, xxiii). That is to say, in their stance of challenging all systemization, Fondane's philosophical and poetic approaches are fundamentally subversive, seeking to provoke the reader's subjective engagement rather than offer theoretical grounding. As a Fondane scholar, the task is to critically open his work without overly defining it; as John K. Roth says of the role of the critic of the literature of catastrophe in his book *Holocaust Politics,* 'it is not for me to settle what should remain unsettling' (Roth 2001, 258).

Writing on Paul Celan, Pierre Joris says of the Holocaust that 'all poetry, after that date, will have to be, at some level, a poetry of witnessing' (Joris 2005, 6). A variegated notion of testimony will be crucial to my framing of Fondane's own poetic response and will be elaborated in the third part of the thesis. Suffice it to say for now that Fondane's own consciousness of what Blanchot calls the writing of disaster meant an end to what he called the 'perfect poem'. Fondane uses this term to refer to the aesthetic ideal of the language of poetry transcending the mundane, an ideal to

which he once ascribed.[34] It appears in the most famous of his poems, his response to the calamity he knew himself to be living through, the 'preface' to *L'Exode*: his poem is only a 'cry', he writes, 'qu'on ne peut pas mettre dans un poème | parfait, avais-je donc le temps de le finir? [It is no more | than a cry, which cannot be put into a perfect | poem – had I even the time to finish it?]' (MF 153). On one hand, he cannot escape the desire to transcend the world through beauty: the reference to time is both a poignant acknowledgement that his own time is running out and that there is not time in the world to make a poem perfect. On the other is the implication that aesthetic perfection denies and obfuscates the value of anguish. Fondane's poetic oeuvre is a paradox, a virtuosic appeal to attend to its imperfections. In the next section, I will extend the ways in which poetry had to be the means for his apophatic response to the crisis of representation.

Beyond Philosophy

> Qu'il [le désastre] se produise! Appartient-il encore à cette philosophie de mesurer à son seule pouvoir l'étendue du réel?
>
> [Let the disaster happen! Will it still remain positive philosophy's prerogative to measure reality's extent by its own powers alone?]
>
> from *Le Lundi existentiel* (LE 63; EM 29)

Poetry can harness the paradoxes intrinsic to apophatic discourse. Despite his famous quote, Adorno stated that writing poetry after Auschwitz was both impossible and imperative: 'philosophical reflection really consists precisely in the gap […] between these two otherwise so flatly opposed possibilities' (Adorno 2001, 110). The unspeakable and the unsayable are intertwined. If there is a response to life during and after the catastrophe which is not simply suicide, then it is unlikely, in Fondane's view, to be a purely rational response. Fondane's activity between philosophy and poetry exemplifies a tension between the rational and the irrational. He is not a philosophical poet by in Santayanan terms, one who has a 'scheme of the universe'

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[34] His volte-face is set out in 'Mots Sauvages', but anguish at the sterility of aestheticism also drives his major critical works *Rimbaud Le Voyou, Faux Traité d'esthétique* and *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*.

(T.S. Eliot cited in Vericat 2002, 166). 'If we want to be honest about the reality around us', writes Italian critic Olivia Salvadori in a résumé of Fondane's attitude to philosophy, 'we also need to try and avoid certain forms of Idealist cowardice, the sterility of the dialectical visions which most encourage us and reconcile the phenomena of the world with those of human life' (Salvadori 2017, my translation). For Fondane modernity is a catastrophe, and modernisms, whether philosophical, artistic or political, cannot find a reconciliation for it. His quest then becomes the absurd one – absurd, yet important – of how to live without reconciliation. In the words of Anne Mounic in *Poésie et philosophie: ineffable rigueur* [*Poetry and Philosophy: Rigorous ineffability*], he leads the reader towards 'an existential reflection provoking alarm, dejection and questioning' (Mounic 2017, 89, my translation).

Fondane's speaking from literal, philosophical and linguistic ruins necessarily resists its own repression or absorption into a stable framework. However, the drive to speak remains strong despite the impossibility of speaking *adequately*. For Fondane this drive is the desire of the Kierkegaardian living self to get beyond the writing self.[35] Paradoxically, he wishes to attempt this *in writing*. Fondane's thought attempts to be anti-discursive. He does not claim special status for his own philosophical incursions, admitting to the same old failures (HDH 450; EM61). His philosophy set itself the task of turning towards what Karl Jaspers called the 'incessant uneasiness of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche', of 'shedding light upon that which is unconditioned, historical and hence not valid for everyone' (cited in EM 7). Poetry, then, became a place where not only could this uneasy questioning be sustained, but the 'strangeness of the existent' (EM 19) could be acknowledged.

This move beyond philosophy is intimately bound up with catastrophe because disaster strips away all metaphysical answers. To Kierkegaard's question 'once all is completely lost… *is there really nothing left?'* (from Kierkegaard's Journal, cited in EM 19) Fondane replies 'a cry' (EM 19). Where philosophy suppresses this cry because it will not 'cause something to be where there is no longer anything' (EM 19), for Fondane it is crucial. Where 'this immense cry of human misery and

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[35] 'One lives in a different category than that in which one places oneself when writing.' (From Kierkegaard's Journal, cited in EM 17)

suffering throughout the ages, this lengthy waste of hope and of despair' is not given 'the faintest echo throughout the entire history of philosophy' (EM 20), where 'existential' philosophy can only cry out negatively against this omission, poetry represents the only possibility for a positive move beyond the limitations of the 'writing self'. Joseph Acquisto argues that for Fondane attempts at systematic certitude are 'an impossible and falsifying ideal' (Acqusito 2015, 70). Pre-empting affect theory's readings of the affective dimensions occluded in philosophical thought,[36] Fondane argues, in Acquisto's words, that 'this philosophical move is itself [...] based in these philosophers' own awareness of the impossibility of certitude and a reaction inspired by fear of anguish, absurdity and madness' (Acquisto 2015, 70).

Poetry sustains contradictions, stands outside of discursivity, and gestures towards what is unreifiable. Although Fondane did not regain his faith in language, still less in poetry as a specialized language which transcended language's failures, poetry could yet attempt to explore the cry in a way discursive thought could not. Mircea Martin argues that the *Faux traité d'esthétique*, Fondane's most direct treatment of this context, targets

> aesthetics itself […] as a philosophy of art with 'calm' problems, which is to say abstract and atemporal ones; with its conceptualizing approach, an impoverishing one from an artistic perspective; with its will to autonomy, interpreted as the symptom of an undeniable 'crisis of reality' […] the author attacks all speculative, logical and rational approaches to art and poetry [...] In his eyes, poetry is a vital experience which supposes participation in life and not separation from it. (Martin 2007, my translation)

Even if it could never fully articulate the cry, poetry could assert the cry as an affirmation of life (see Salazar-Ferrer 2007 141–142).[37]

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[36] See Redding 1999. It is possible to imagine Fondane's response to the affective turn in academia in the 1990s associated with theorists such as Brian Massumi as akin to that he gave to psychoanalysis in the 1930s: a useful recentring of suppressed experiences that nonetheless betrayed their broader human context by aspiring to scientism and introducing new dualities, such as severing the physiological and the intentional. Spinoza, a major precusor of that turn, is one of Shestov and Fondane's principal antagonists. Recently, scholars have challenged some of the interpretations in affect theory along similar lines (e.g. Leys 2011) as well as their scientific grounding (Young 2020).

[37] Martin argues that Fondane's critique of aesthetics raises problems as well as opportunities for poetry. For example, in his view Fondane's extra-rational approach fails to answer 'what distinguishes a poem and a poetic manifesto, or an artistic confession and a cry' (Martin 2007, my translation). I intend to leave these questions open, as Fondane and his Dada predecessors did.

Although Fondane, like Kafka, Celan and Jabès in Hawkins's study, 'choose[s] literary forms that reflect a pervasive anti-systematicity', often conveying 'silence rather than speech' (Hawkins 2003, xxix), poetry also strangely becomes a affirmation of the strangeness of the existent, a positive gesture though formed in failure. This affirmation is also a gesture towards the future, despite the resistance to teleology. As Hawkins puts it, 'The non-fulfillability of the messianic wish is also the inexhaustibility of the written word. The "not-yet" is the condition for the now' (Hawkins 2003, 161). This is reflected in Fondane's endless reworkings of his poetry, his view that a poem was never final and fixed, his description of his output as *edition sans fin*.[38] 'Le poème || ne demande | rien! || Ce n'est | qu'un cri, qu'on ne peut pas mettre dans un poème | parfait [this poem || asks nothing! || It is no more | than a cry, which cannot be put into a perfect poem]' (MF 153). It is a means of calling our living attention to the cry.

Following Miéville, we can read this cry, the cry of the living self trapped in language, in terms of the unsayable. Although doing it justice would require a detailed study, it is important to mention silent cinema, in which Fondane worked as a screenwriter, critic and director. He saw silent cinema as a kind of poetry, opening on to the absurdity of affectivity. Neither could surpass the 'not-yet', but they could – along with music and other non-verbal art forms – be attestations simultaneously of the cry of anguish and the value of the existent. Silent cinema was a major inspiration because it could unite a total audience: both the mass audience and the avant-garde were enraptured by Chaplin (EC 80).

Perhaps poetry, however, was primary for Fondane because it could flag the unavoidable failures of language through its very use of the medium: 'nous sommes encore sous le règne des mots [we are still under the reign of words]', he wrote in 'Mots sauvages' (Fondane 1996a, 22). Dealing with a similar modernist problematic, one in which life's limitations are exposed rather than overcome (as opposed, say, to the contradiction-crushing assertions of Futurism), Fabio Vericat argues that T.S. Eliot's strategies 'both adopt and subvert the medium he inherits' (Vericat 2002, 186). M.A.R Habib interprets this problematic:

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[38] 'Fondane rejected the imprimatur of literary aesthetics over the idea of the finished work. This is consistently emphasized by the note 'endless editions' which he appended to the various manuscripts of *Ulysse*.' (Beray 2009, 18, my translation)

> The task of literature is precisely to achieve that unity between the subjective and the objective which has suffered dissolution in real life. And it must do this by an ironic process: by incorporating the romantic emphasis on subjectivity within a larger equivalence which reinstates a classical emphasis on the object. (cited in Vericat 2002, 187)

For Fondane, the tension between subject and object is only overcome at the horizon where art and life cease to be independent of one another, where art loses its status as a concept. This is the situation he reads into 'primitive' cultures, and the poet's activity is a step towards it (FT 32). However, for the modern mind the separation has already taken place. The awareness of language and logic's insufficiencies cannot be unlearnt. In Martin's words, 'the recuperation of the primitive mentality is never completed, its restoration constantly under threat from omnipresent, omnipotent reason' (Martin 2007, my translation). For Fondane the poet's role is an absurd one: to strive towards that synthesis of subjective and objective without hope of fully realizing it.

To paraphrase Ursula Le Guin, 'it is words that make the trouble and confusion […] The artist deals with what cannot be said in words. The artist whose medium is [poetry] does this *in words*' (Le Guin 2018, introduction). Fondane moves beyond philosophy and into poetry as a means of affirming the unsayable.[39] But the unspeakable and the unsayable are revealed as inseparable by the catastrophe, which undoes the consolations of philosophy and force us to recognize the 'trouble and confusion' of words. How can poetry be a means of going-on when language is 'severedness from an ultimate significance', as William Franke diagnoses in the 'apophatic poetics of Paul Celan and Edmond Jabès' (Franke 2005, 621)? Claude Vigée gives us one of the clearest glimpses of Fondane's holistic response. 'How, [in Auschwitz], to "unwall the place from where the poetic word stems?" Fondane dared to sketch the beginning of a real response: it is, in fact, the cry of a clump of nettles' (Vigée 2007, my translation).

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[39] Reductive rationalist attacks pose a constant threat of incomprehension for this move. Forestalling such attacks, China Miéville argues that 'there is more to rationality than rationalism versus *ir*rationalism, let alone than in the model whereby, beyond the limits of the former, that dangerous obverse thrives. If the unsayable is a rebuke to the reductive one, it does not follow that it is a function of the obscurantist other.' (Miéville 2019, 22–23)

In reading Fondane's work, it is crucial to recognize the resistance to ineffability that is simultaneous to its foregrounding. Silence can of course be deathly, as both Wexler (e.g. on war as its correlate, 2017, 46–47) and Miéville (on 'apophatic fascism', 2019, 14) point out (I will address some of the political tensions around poetry's capacities of subversion in the third part of the thesis). Nowhere is this tension in Fondane's writing between the inadequacy of speaking and the need to speak so urgently dramatized more than in the long poetic sequence *L'Exode*. Vigée's 'clump of nettles' are the famous words from the work's *Préface en prose*, where Fondane turns mourning into participation and intervention on behalf of the unsayable. *L'Exode* ties together the threads of catastrophe I have attempted to delineate here in exemplary fashion. It is the fulcrum of Fondane's resistance; it is a cinder smouldering beyond reason and beyond his own death. *L'Exode* stages the unspeakable catastrophe, resists the absorption of the catastrophe into reductive sense-making and resists the catastrophe itself through a gesture towards the unsayable. The second part of the thesis will read some of the ways in which this happens and some of the resonances of these catastrophic, apophatic, affirmative words. Before proceeding further, however, I will clarify some of the terms which act as handholds in this discourse.

Chapter 3

Introducing Disconsolation and Irresignation: Terminology and its Discontents

Disconsolation and irresignation are two interrelated concepts which I consider to be fundamental to Fondane's life and oeuvre and which I will use to anchor my readings of *L'Exode*. Irresignation appears as a term in his prose as he attempts to conceptualize his metaphysical and existential revolt. Disconsolation does not, but is a useful handle for both philosophical and literary contexts; I am using it to describe the relation of Fondane's 'unhappy consciousness' (CM, EM 33) to the world in its 'situatedness', and the literary expression of that relation. To attempt to honour Fondane's antagonism toward conceptual thinking, I must problematize these terms even as I introduce them: they are not ideas that can be held down as principles or defined through syllogistic examples. Instead, I am outlining them as provisional and incomplete concepts that gesture to a wider field of indefinable poetic activity. Through these terms, I will extend the sense of Fondane's work as poetic testimony. First, however, it is necessary to interrogate them.

As my concern is to polarize the light of Fondane's work through the prism of his poetry, I will consider disconsolation and irresignation as literary notions of mood and tone, themselves suitably ambiguous critical handles. Despair and anxiety are important concerns in Fondane studies, and *irrésignation* has also been picked up as a keyword in French-language scholarship. I will now set out my analysis of disconsolation and irresignation, before considering their integration in his poetry more closely. I will also trace some of the issues around applying aesthetic categories to Fondane. This mapping is directed in particular towards the idea of poetic testimony which I will develop from my readings of *L'Exode* at the core of the thesis. The context of conflict between poetry and philosophy will be kept in view. I will also contextualize the wider body of Fondane's work by examining some other important keywords, such as modernity and tragic philosophy, which are refracted in his thought.

The 'unhappy consciousness' is the state Fondane proposes as endemic to the fact of existing in modernity, that is to say, the inescapable experience of suffering

and the impossibility of compensating for this suffering. Fondane does not dismiss calls to remedy material suffering, but he proclaims the 'integrity and indivisibility' (EM 36) of such suffering from its metaphysical counterparts: 'the presence of unreality, of contradiction, of powerlessness, necessity, and death, and thereby from the *Fatum* [Fate] that inexplicably brings about the total alienation of man's powers' (EM 36). Disconsolation, therefore, is the state of existing within interconnected tensions: the intractable desire to escape suffering; knowledge of the impossibility of doing so; and consciousness's confrontation with the evidence of suffering's circumstances, which precludes accepting any proffered escape as a surety. The thematic and formal expressions of anguish in Fondane's poetry are inseparable from those of the subject's continued, vital drive to move on from that anguish, though unable to finally escape it.

My use of disconsolation is to be distinguished from despair. Where despair implies an acceptance of a dead end, a cessation of activity, disconsolation combines a refusal to accept one's situation with a rejection of all alternatives. Irresignation comes out of this position or condition; it is the expression of an extra-rational revolt which affirms life against the proof of a hopeless situation. Fondane's work manifests an absurd 'hope in despair', in which the subject experiences suffering as inescapable and yet does not lapse into cynicism or abnegation. It is this 'going on' which constitutes his response to this metaphysical catastrophe and to the material violence and deprivations which simultaneously coloured the circumstances of his writings. As a result, even the very expression of despair could represent a paradoxical affirmative gesture. This underpins what Fondane terms *irrésignation*, 'la mobilisation de l'individu contre un réel hostile [the mobilisation of the individual against a hostile real]' (SEBF 2020). In *La Conscience malheureuse,* he gives some examples of this mobilization: 'tant que la réalité sera telle qu'elle est, de manière ou d'autre, – par le poème, par le cri, par la foi ou par le suicide – l'homme témoignera de son irrésignation, dût cette irrésignation être – ou paraître – absurdité ou folie [As long as reality remains what it is, man will attest to his irresignation, in one manner or

another – through poetry, through the cry, through faith or through suicide – even if that irresignation must be – or seem – an absurdity or madness]' (CM xvii).[1]

The word *irrésignation* as used by Fondane in *La Conscience malheureuse* is not employed to do the work of a critical concept making a positive definition and delineating or manipulating elements of thought. It is closer to what affect theorists have termed an 'ideo-affective posture' (Ngai 2005, 74; Tomkins 1995, 111) and Fondane's avowal of its potential for 'absurdity or madness' speaks to his need to subvert the operations of philosophy as much as to carry forward its project of critical enquiry. Similarly, the necessity of reading Fondane's poetry in relation to the rest of his writing incurs a strong caveat, namely that there is no case for 'applying' his philosophical ideas to his poetry or straightforwardly reading them 'through' it. Instead, his prose and poetry must be considered different valences of his encounter with and response to existence, ideally to be treated holistically. Irresignation and disconsolation are useful primarily as means of writing about what cannot be written about, as umbrella terms for the senses that emerge from reading an aggregate of affects and intentions in Fondane's work.

There is subterranean affinity between Fondane's existential foci and more recent trends in affect theory. Books like Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* tie together the personal situation of the individual with their macro ideo-affective context in subversive and potentially productive ways. Unlike in the existentialism of Sartre, Fondane does not seek to resolve the tension between the individual and society (or rather, philosophical and political efforts to organize society).[2] Not that he considers social concerns trivial, but his foremost concern is always the affirmation of the singular, which he construes as constantly under threat from macroanalyses and logical frameworks which demote it in the name of the transhistorical. Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* is a particularly apt example, in that it is an attack not so much on bad faith as on cultures of misplaced hope which allow the individual to turn away

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[1] The cry is an important existential topos in Fondane's work, representing an individual's proto- or paralinguistic expression of anguish against the meaninglessness and loneliness of reality. See Vanhese 2017 and Bikard 2005.

[2] See HDH and EDR in particular. There are of course strong affinites between Fondane's philosophical essays and those of better-know contemporary thinkers associated with existential thought such as Simone Weil and Albert Camus (particularly later Camus), both of whom also distanced themselves from existential*ism,* as well as less well-known figures such as Rachel Bespaloff and Vladimir Jankélévitch. Fondane, Weil and the Camus of *The Rebel* share a mistrust of teleologies. See Fotiade 2017.

from catastrophe and its revelations (the American dream, which drew the immigrants of Fondane's poems *Ulysse* and *Titanic*, is Berlant's principal object). The courage to live in despair and to hope only absurdly is Fondane's principal context, whether we read this context as contingent to him or more fundamental, asking to what degree his existential anxiety was a product of his historical moment – a question he himself kept open (see Beray 2009 19–22).

Art becomes fundamental to him in large part because in art the rights of the singular, the situated, are paramount. Although much of Fondane's focus is on personal experience, it is important to clarify that this valuation of art is not so much the struggle of the individual against the mass as the affirmation of the affective and fleeting extra-rational elements of life against the tendency of rational thought to aspire to the transcendent or universal. It is possible, he wrote, 'that philosophy does not have to know a truth which *is* once and for all but can know a truth capable of changing, of being made and unmade, of becoming bored, perhaps; it is also possible that we have some effective influence on its procedures; that loving, crying, praying, indeed revolting or resigning oneself are acts that shape it to some extent' (EM 25). Ultimately his preoccupation with these possibilities pushed him to art as a domain beyond philosophy, in favour of what Patrice Beray calls '*l'affectivité créatrice*' (Beray 2009, 13). Ann Van Sevenant argues that for Fondane, any attempt by a poet to resolve their own contradictions 'in the name of some noble idea turns out to be destructive' (Van Sevenant 1998, 9, my translation). Art's capacity to sustain the contradictions inherent in affect (and especially in disconsolation) are part of its capacity to give space to and articulate irresignation.

There is also a parallel between the emergent apprehensibility of disconsolation and irresignation and critical discussions of mood and tone in poetry.[3] Mood in particular, but also tone, are also evident in the literature of psychology, though mostly resistant to full definition.[4] Their slipperiness as terms is evident even in this empirically-oriented discourse: statements such as '[some emotions form] our

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[3] Emergence itself is also a productively slippery notion, or as the Stanford Encylopedia of Philosophy puts it, 'emergence is a notorious philosophical term of art' (s.v. emergent properties).
[4] It is not the place of this thesis to enter further into psychological delineations, such as the distinction between mood and affect wherein the latter is an instance of the former, although it is worth remembering the emphasis in psychology of affect as bound up with an interpenetrating interaction between subject and environment (or 'stimuli').

background, as well as the tone, the colour, the affective taste, the feelings of activities, relations and experiences' (Stocker 2004, 137) are commonly made without specifying what tone is. Similarly, literary critics giving introductions or overviews to their field, from the popular, as in Stephen Fry's *The Ode Less Travelled* (2007), to the academic, such as Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2017), use the terms extensively without devoting space to pinning them down.[5]

It is partly the simplicity of mood and tone as terms that leads to their deployment without exposition, yet even authorities who offer simple definitions do not agree. Online educational materials, ultimately founded on the orthological efforts of New Critics such as I.A. Richards, will variously state that tone, for example, is the author's attitude towards the subject of the poem, towards the audience or towards the poem itself. Many academic critics don't find the mood/tone distinction itself (atmosphere of poem vs attitude of author or voice) useful, and tone is frequently preferred when discussing the effects irreducible to the 'discursive prose elements of a poem' (Voigt 1999, 77).[6] The entry in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* is suitably confident and vague:

> tone has denoted an intangible quality, frequently an affective one, which is metaphorically predicated of a literary work or of some part of it such as its style. It is said to pervade and 'colour' the whole, like a mood in a human being, and in various ways to contribute to the aesthetic excellence of the work (cited in Voigt 1999, 77).

It is the very simplicity and ambiguity of these categories, as well as their strong affective dimensions, that draw me to them in reading *L'Exode*. They permit a certain appropriate reticence, not in the form of a disavowal of criticality but in the sense of avoiding overdefinition.[7]

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[5] I must avow that Fry specifies that his poetic glossary is 'incomplete'.

[6] Without pursuing it, I would like to raise the question of whether this preference for tone over mood reveals a continuing preoccupation with intentionality.

[7] Such an approach is risky, of course. The malleability of tone renders it especially vulnerable to manipulation towards an agenda. For example, for want of actual evidence the FBI seized on tone in correspondence during the McCarthy era: 'the *tone* of the letters indicated that they had […] been […] Communists' (From a 1949 FBI report cited in Macdonald 2019, 185). I aim to navigate such risk by acknowledging the subjective elements of my critical approach up front, an approach which aims to reactivate the questions and subversions inherent in Fondane's work rather than fixing them to a concordant hermeneutics.

In proclaiming the independence of art, Fondane sometimes has recourse to the idea of the Socratic daemon, the divine inspiration that is one figure for the extra-rational elements of 'poetic activity' (Van Sevenant 1998, 14).[8] Derek Attridge echoes this thought: 'From somewhere – inspired by the Muse, Donne might have said – the right words, in the right rhythm, capturing the right tone of voice, emerge' (Attridge 2017, 43). In Fondane's view, for the modern poet this process is rendered tortuous by its subversion of their own rationality. In *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*, he picks up on Gérard de Nerval's qualification of the disobedient poetic muse mutating, through the poet's repression, into an anguished Pythia: 'le poète, lui, est incapable, malgré sa "bonne volonté", de les écarter [le Gouffre et la Pythie] de son drame [the poet is unable, despite his 'willingness', to banish the Abyss and the Pythia from his drama]' (BEG 35). Whether the extra-rational impulse acts benignly or disruptively, mood and tone as extra-rational, emergent, recognizable but finally unsayable affective effects of a poem are fruitfully aligned with the subversive and affirmative affective modalities of disconsolation and irresignation.

Whatever the applications and limits of mood and tone in literary theory, they are particularly useful for reading Fondane, for reasons beyond their mirroring of the ambiguities of disconsolation and irresignation. Another of Fondane's paradoxes is the way his writing shares avant-garde and existential disruptions of form and dismissals of style with an aptitude for and employment of fixed poetic forms.[9] His dadaistic sensibilities led him to poetic effects of subversion and lacunae as well as positive style, while his readings of Dostoevsky and Shestov contributed to a kind of anti-aesthetics,[10] wherein the ideal of Beauty was resisted as another devaluing of

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[8] Although Fondane, through the influence of Shestov, read Plato, I also suspect the influence of William Blake, whom he translated (MF 260), in this regard. Look at Blake's 'Principle 1st' from his *All Religions Are One* (subtitled 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness', a key Biblical reference for Fondane): 'That the Poetic Genius is the true Man… the forms of all things are derived from their Genius, which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel & Spirit & Demon' (Blake 1977, 77).

[9] We could read Fondane's modernist collage of lyric and fixed form with freer approaches as a continuation of Baudelaire, in the Benjaminian sense that 'Baudelaire's poetry was able to convey the intensity of the experience of modernity through the very tension between that experience and his chosen, lyrical means; not merely negatively (like Kafka), but via the way in which modernity transformed those means' (Osborne and Charles 2020).

[10] The idea of Dostoevsky as a writer who demonstrates the force of 'having something to say' by deliberately setting himself against aesthetic conventions was influential for Fondane, as is evident in his conversations with Shestov (Fondane 1982) and the *Faux Traité*. As Richard Pevear puts it, 'the oddities of [Dostoevsky's] prose are deliberate […] a willed imperfection of artistic means […] essential to his vision' (Pevear 2002, xv).

existence (Rimbaud's statement 'j'ai assis la beauté sur mes genoux et je l'ai trouvée amère [I sat beauty down on my knee and I found her sour]' became a lodestone for Fondane [RV 236]). [11] Fixed forms were crucial for him, particularly in *L'Exode*, as a means of avoiding solipsism, but they had to exist as ruins, recontextualised and undercut by strange juxtapositions and repurposings.

Discussion of form in Fondane's literary criticism is conspicuous by its absence, but then calling it literary criticism is unsatisfactory. In addressing aesthetics, without denying the power of poetic effects, Fondane seeks to turn art away from abstracted readings, proclaiming art's freedom and autonomy by wrenching it from the domain of aesthetic perfection (another paradox) and connecting it to life. This approach is most obvious in his book-length essay *Faux traité d'esthétique*, in which he grapples with art's autonomy and its social presence.[12] The title of this work is sometimes inadequately translated as *False Aesthetic Treatise*. In fact, Fondane is seeking to disrupt the boundaries of truth and falsity (as related to some longed-for objective aesthetic standard). *Faux* here is much better given as 'pseudo', akin to the way it is used when discussing early authors such as pseudo-Dionysus, who are not simply fakes but who metamorphose their subject material. His treatise is not 'false', but rather an approach which disjoints the very category of aesthetic enquiry.[13]

Given this background, mood and tone are especially good lenses (caveats aside) because they cover affective and literary aspects of Fondane's poetry together, allowing a holistic treatment without dismissing stylistic considerations. Fondane's priorities are perhaps summed up in the lying truth of a statement attributed to Cocteau: 'Un vrai poète se préoccupe peu de la poésie. Tout comme le jardinier ne parfume pas ses roses [A true poet fusses little over poetry. Just as a gardener does

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[11] The quote is from the prologue to *A Season in Hell* (Rimbaud 2009, 210).

[12] It is unclear whether Fondane read much Virginia Woolf, but I feel he would recognize her comments from *A Room of One's Own*: 'fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners.[…] one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings' (Woolf 2002, chapter three).

[13] Ann Van Sevenant gives another slant on this problematic: 'this treatise is only false [*faux*] from the point of view of traditional aesthetic […] The only possible aesthetics turns out to be one which stimulates the artist and poet to believe in artistic and poetic activity' (VanSevenant 1998, 9–14, my translation). Compare Derek Attridge: 'what if the most important reason for our high valuation of literary works […] is something we *can't* talk about, or at least that none of our readily available vocabulary and conceptual tools – whether those of informal discussion or those of the traditions of philosophy and aesthetic criticism – is able to handle?' (2017, xvii)

not perfume his roses]'. The point being, in Fondane's case, not that poets spontaneously bring forth beauty, but that a work can only be judged on its own terms.

One book which theorizes affect and literary mood and tone together is Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2007). In reading Fondane's poetry in this context of ineffability by way of disconsolation and irresignation, both terms fall into the orbit of Ngai's mapping of literary tone, a concept which by any definition, as I have suggested, seems to be inherently open-ended and eludes positive capture. 'Tone', writes Ngai, '*is* the dialectic of objective and subjective feeling that our aesthetic encounters inevitably produce... the concept's power resides precisely in its amorphousness' (2007, 30).[14] Like mood and tone, disconsolation and irresignation are at risk of collapsing into each other when deployed in a critical reading. This is why, for the purposes of this thesis, I have decided to use a 'New Criticism'-inspired model of mood and tone as a way of examining their effects and resonances.[15] *L'Exode* is considered as having a mood or atmosphere of disconsolation, which is the context from which a tone or stance of irresignation is made possible. This narrow (even naïve) framing is not intended to dispute theoretical work which complicates the use of these terms but, ironically, because doing so affords a useful critical distance from which it is possible to approach Fondane's poetry holistically, in context with his life and his other work (criticism, philosophy etc).

It is easier to approach irresignation when disconsolation is made a context for it, and thus distinguishing mood from tone is useful. However, I must emphasize that this is not intended as a strong claim for this differentiation as the 'correct' theoretical approach. Indeed I would like to further qualify my use of disconsolate mood as the poem's 'atmosphere' and irresigned 'tone' as its 'attitude' by flagging the New Critics' 'mut[ing of]... the affective dimensions of the problem' (Ngai 2007, 41). As an existential thinker, the relation of affect to thought and language was among

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[14] As I understand it, the expression 'objective feeling', which uncontextualised may seem paradoxical, is being used here to emphasize the porousness of 'objectness', that is to say the sense that affect crosses the seeming boundary between subject and object and is not a property that can be situated in one of these alone.

[15] Consideration of mood, or feeling, and tone occurs diffusely across texts associated with New Criticism, and most overtly in IA Richards' *Practical Criticism.* Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren's *Understanding Poetry* was instrumental to the genesis in the classroom of even vaguer notions of mood as atmosphere and tone as speaker's stance, a vagueness I now want to leverage.

Fondane's primary concerns. Fondane was one of the first Francophone commentators on Heidegger, and the mood and tone of his poetry in the New Criticism senses must be understood, in my usage, as interacting with Heideggerian mood and its 'situatedness'.[16]

While the New Criticism terms are useful for discussing disconsolation and irresignation in separation, I would like it to be understood that this separation is a critical device and not absolute, and that my uses of mood and tone in reading *L'Exode* are *both* aligned with what Ngai calls 'a global and hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation or "set toward" its audience and world' (Ngai 2007, 43). In all my critical endeavours towards Fondane's poetry I have this warning from him ringing in my ears:

> le poète lorsqu'il s'écrie que 'la vie est un songe', ou encore 'le rêve d'une ombre', le prouve-t-il? C'est là que cesse la vertu de l'art vivant et que débute l'activité seconde de la 'contemplation esthétique', trop souvent confondue avec l'art lui-même et dont un jour il faudra bien dire la pitié et l'extrême misère.

> [When the poet cries out 'life is a dream', or 'the shadow of a dream', does he prove it? With that question the virtue of living art ends and the secondary activity of 'aesthetic contemplation' begins, an activity too often confused with art itself and which sooner or later will have to be declared piteous and extremely impoverished.] (Fondane 1935)

With these considerations in mind I will now develop a fuller examination of disconsolation and irresignation.

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[16] An existential umbrella term, enfolding Heidegger's *Dasein,* used by the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, though by no means all Heidegger scholars. See s.v. existent, https://www.iep.utm.edu/existent/#SH1d, accessed 23 April 2020. By using this term I am not intending to tie Fondane to a Heidggerian framework, but merely to signpost broader contexts in existential philosophy.

Disconsolation

> At [the] instances where the emergent discourses of twentieth-century post-Hegelian philosophy and modernism interfere, we see most clearly how bodily vulnerability is set against scientific over-determinism [...] disconsolate subjects [...] gain defining contour and shade in the narratives of literary modernism.
>
> (Sessions 2018)

> A man whose family had died under torture, who had himself been tortured for a long time in a concentration camp, or a 16th century Indian, the sole survivor after the total extermination of his people, such men, if they had previously believed in the mercy of God would either believe it no longer, or else they would conceive of it quite differently. I have not been through such things, *I know, however, that they exist, so what is the difference?*
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> (Weil 2002, 115)

> Ce monde assis par le philosophe sur une Raison, un Esprit, un Logos immuable, déraille toutes les nuits sur un principe d'indétermination, sur un tremblement de terre, conçu et posé là par le poète [...]Il n'est pas l'Arbre de Vie: il est soif de l'Arbre de Vie.
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> [This world placed by the philosopher on a Reason, a Spirit, an immutable Logos, comes off the rails every night because of a principle of indetermination, an earthquake, conceived and put forth by the poet [...] It is not the Tree of Life: it is a thirst for the Tree of Life.]
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> from 'Léon Chestov à la recherche du judaïsme perdu' (Fondane 1936)

Disconsolation is a tricky term. 'A single moment of true sadness', writes Chris Kraus, 'connects you instantly to all the suffering in the world' (Kraus 2013, 119). Here is a paradoxical attention to the body: knowledge which is created through an affective state, a desire of the self to exceed the self, an intensely individual experience that nonetheless opens outwards. To take Simone Weil seriously means seriously considering that thought is inseparable from its conditioning by bodily experience. In our time, the Cartesian separation of mind and body has been fairly

comprehensively demolished by neuroscience (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 391–415). Although this science is beyond the scope of this thesis, its truths are also those of certain strains of existential philosophy, going back at least to Kierkegaard. Fondane's take on the unhappy consciousness is certainly informed by Kierkegaardian anxiety and its revelatory potential (by way of Shestov's discourse on anxiety and despair).[17] His concern, however, is not so much theology as an objective as the endless negotiation between subjectivity and thought.

Fondane's essay *La Conscience Malheureuse* responds to Hegel: 'il a vu que la conscience était un appareil d'angoisse [he saw that consciousness was an apparatus of anxiety]' (CM 47). The break he makes, through which existential philosophy works its subversions, is with the refusal of what Olivier Salazar-Ferrer calls 'a conciliatory universal [un universel conciliateur]'(Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 40). With the 'rational' Enlightenment cosmology inaugurated by Hegel comes 'the negation of the individual existent integrated into the great mechanism of Reason in History' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 40, my translation). In Salazar-Ferrer's reading, modernity destroys previous cosmologies which allotted a space for transcendence, but if the solution to immanence is not to be found in Hegel, then 'a new form of tragedy, metaphysical in essence' is created. 'Fondane would never be able to allow History's violence upon individuals to be integrated, as dialectical moments, into the process of Spirit's reconciliation with itself' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 40–41, my translation). This refusal leaves consciousness in a catastrophic state of disconsolation in which the unspeakability of immanent violence and affective suffering meets an inability to reckon a way beyond their inevitability.

The mere mention of metaphysical aspects can lend a grand tenor to the discussion, but the territory of disconsolation in Fondane's modernist context is as much what Sianne Ngai calls 'affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings... ambivalent situations of suspended agency' (2007, 1). In Fondane's work disconsolation occurs simultaneously in the consciousness of history and the intimacy

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[17] It is also in dialogue with Heidegger, whom Fondane was one of the first in France to recognize (Serban 2015 note 8, Jutrin 1998). 'La liberté, le néant, l'angoisse, le possible, la faute, toutes les catégories heideggériennes, se trouvent déjà amorcées et développées par le génie mobile de Kierkegaard [Freedom, nothingness, anxiety, the possible, error, in fact all Heideggerian categories, were already initiated and developed by Kierkegaard's free-ranging genius].' (CM 216)

of paralytic and disaffected emotions.[18] Art becomes primary, both in criticism and practice, because it goes beyond thought as we usually think it: 'Fondane's entire oeuvre is (...) haunted by the possibility of opening spaces closed by reason' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 41, my translation).[19] As disasters in life tear away received existential comforts, art can concentrate the ways that catastrophe can be a 'modality of liberation' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 42, my translation). In refusing both cataphatic attempts to explain suffering at a historical level and the tendency of philosophy to devalue affectivity, Fondane's writing throws forward 'a dissolution of history by the absurd in the name of an existential *reappropriation*' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 41, my translation).[20]

Although, like Kierkegaard, Fondane attempts to use philosophy against itself to make disconsolation evident, as 'une pensée qui cherche quelque chose qu'elle ne puisse penser [a form of thought that seeks something it cannot think]' (CM 200), it is this contradiction that leads him, apophatically, back to poetry.[21] Poetry is a space that can honour the endless dimensions of disconsolation: personal anguish, macrocosmic disaster, metaphysical fissuring, groundlessness and unspeakability itself. A rejection of reasonable consolations leaves the divine (in its absence) as a foil for such expression. Foreshadowing China Miéville's assertion that 'there is a beyond-words, a politics of the unsayable. This is not an admission, as of failure, but

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[18] A key example of this is his treatment of boredom through reading Baudelaire: in Bruce Baugh's words, 'Fondane attributes to Baudelaire the discovery that boredom is not simply a passing mood affecting individuals but can also be a state of mind affecting an entire culture, a "malaise of civilization" that gives rise to the most excessive and extravagant forms of cruelty: the manias of self-torture during the Middle Ages, for example, or the horrors of the Second World War' (Baugh 2016b, 63). See also Jutrin and Vanhese, eds. 2003.

[19] As Bruce Baugh argues, this haunting is also why Fondane 'takes general issue with the phenomenological appropriation of existential thought' (Baugh 2010, 298).

[20] This reappropriation is given some theoretical grounding for Fondane in Shestov's opposition of Job to Boethius's conviction in the consolations of philosophy. See Shestov 1966, III, 4. There is great pathos in the comparison between Boethius's consoled philosophical response to imprisonment and imminent death in the sixth century and Fondane's disconsolate one in the twentieth. It is also worth mentioning Dostoevsky's undergound man, whose refusal to be comforted by rationality was all the more relevant to Fondane when he was himself forced 'underground' in occupied Paris. With thanks to Olivier Salazar-Ferrer.

[21] By way, notably, of silent cinema, which for Fondane, Salazar-Ferrer argues, 'recèle en lui des 'tendances catastrophiques'' [contains 'catastrophic tendencies'], offering freedom from 'la parole et des aliénations de la syntaxe logique et linguistique [the word and the alienations of both linguistic and logical syntax]'. Salazar-Ferrer emphasizes the inseparability of Fondane's philosophical and artistic practices: 'les propriétés de l'arrière-plan philosophique sont les mêmes que celles de l'arrière-plan géopoétique [the properties of the philosophical background are the same as those of the geopoetic background]' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 42).

a declaration. A proud humility' (Miéville 2019, 4), in *Man Faced with History*, Fondane argues disconsolately in favour of humility, against the confidence of teleological, logocentric politics:

> celle qui consiste à reconnaître que l'on n'a aucun pouvoir, que l'on est bien peu de chose, si peu que l'on peut sans honte avoir peur, et trembler, et crier et appeler au secours. Il y a plus d'humilité vraie à prier Dieu pour sa propre chair, à lui demander par exemple de vous délivrer d'un affreux mal de dents (comme cela arriva à Saint Augustin, *Confessions*, IX, c. 4) que de lui demander de nous livrer son essence intelligible et de confondre sa volonté avec la nôtre, dans les délices de l'union.

> [the kind which consists of recognising that one has no power, that one does not amount to much, that one amounts to so little that one can, without shame, be afraid, and tremble, and cry out, and call for help. There is more true humility in praying to God for one's own flesh, in asking him, for example, for deliverance from a terrible toothache (as Saint Augustine did, *Confessions,* IX, c.4) than to ask him to reveal his intelligible essence or confuse his will with ours in the delights of [mystical] union.] (EM 60, HDH 450).

Fondane is arguing that it takes a certain kind of courage to admit to the limits of our reason and to express grief, despair and hopelessness, whether to give them metaphysical or political space. This near-unthinkable thought (which, I would argue, does not erase politics but only mechanistic or programmatic politics of the kind the Futurists and surrealists were leaning into) is only able to coalesce its mixing of the intimate, the material and the cosmic through absurd poetic expression. In writing the roads full of refugees harassed by the Luftwaffe, *L'Exode* offers an impossible *teshuva*, a hedged and self-subverting 'return to God' where the locus of return could only be 'shattered and torn apart' (Meher 1990, 108). The poetic voice cries out:

Nous laissions derrière nous Paris. Ah! si jamais je t'oublie, Jérusalem...	We were leaving Paris behind us. Ah! if ever I forget you, Jerusalem...
[...]	[...]
Je me mets à genoux et je sanglote et crie en une langue que j'ai oubliée, mais dont	I go down on my knees and I sob and cry in a language I have forgotten, but which

je me souviens aux soirs émus de Ta
Colère:
'*Adonaï Elochenu, Adonaï Echod!*'

[...]

Tu sais que lorsque tout se sera apaisé
sur la terre et dans les cieux
nous T'aurons oublié. Tu sais, dès à
présent,
que seul le souvenir secret de ma prière
me remplira de honte. Je T'en voudrai,
vois-Tu,
de l'avoir écoutée. Je m'en voudrai
aussi
de l'avoir dite. J'ai, Tu le sais, d'autres
dieux
que Toi, secrets, perfides!
Mais ici, sur la route, dans le désastre
et dans
le chaos, il n'est pas d'autre Dieu. Tu
es seul!
Terrible, Igné, Miséricordieux, Unique!

I remember in the impassioned
evenings of Your Anger:
'*Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Eḥad!*'

[...]

You know that when all is calm
on earth and in the heavens
we will have forgotten You. You know,
from now,
that merely the secret memory of my
prayer
will fill me with shame. I will be angry
with You, do You see,
for having listened. I will be angry with
myself, too
for having said it. I have, as You well
know, other gods
than You, secret, perfidious gods!
But here, on the road, in disaster and in
chaos, there is no other God. You
alone!
Terrible, Igneous, Merciful, Unique!

(MF 179–180)

Fondane's poetry creates a space where consolations, whether Hegelian or divine, may be rejected, yet where the extra-rational need to reach out persists over the reasons of defeat.[22] The irrefutable evidence of the absoluteness of *ananke,* that what has been cannot be changed, bereft of possible absolution derived from the *nous,* opens the way to a revolt which starts in an acknowledgement of the extra-rational, even against the poet's 'better judgement'.

Against Eliot's declaration of the 'eternal utility, in a world of change, of any achievement of perfection' (cited in Vericat 466), for Fondane the capacity of poetry's 'singular' energy to open up cracks is its intrinsic value. In a world of generalized catastrophe, the very imperfections of poetry are apposite to the 'kairotic'

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[22] See Eliphaz's rebuke to Job, which holds up orthodoxy against the disrupting affect of the individual: 'Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?' (Job 15:11). Compare also this recollection of Fondane's friend Emil Cioran: 'One day at dinner we were talking "theology". The maid, an illiterate peasant, stood by listening. "I only believe in God when I have toothache", she said. A whole life later, her intervention is the only one I remember' (Cioran 2012, 22, my translation).

time of modernity, the value of the suspended instant, its frustrated yet unfinished potentiality [23] (see Kolocotroni, forthcoming). These lines from Fondane's sequence *Titanic*, his poetic figuration of modernity itself as catastrophe, tie together the material and the metaphysical:

[il est] un temps pour demander quel est le sens de l'homme,	it is a time to ask what is the meaning of man
que cherche-t-il donc sur cette terre branlante	what is he seeking on this shuddering earth
pourquoi le fait-on descendre dans les égouts dans les mines	why is he made to go down in the sewers in the mines
[...]	(...)
pourquoi lui crache-t-on au visage, et lui arrache-t-on sa chanson?	why is his face spat upon, and from him his song torn?

(MF 147)

Fondane does not deny the urgency of seeking answers beyond suffering and despair. His primary concern in the dark times, however, is how to hold on to one's song.

His final philosophical essay, *Le Lundi Existentiel,* draws directly on Kafka. Neil Lazarus argues that disconsolation is the 'central aesthetic *effect*' of Kafka's writing. He calls for a reactivation of the modernist work that 'says "no"; refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticizes' (Lazarus 2011, 31). Though Fondane considers progress an impossibility, the restless mood of disconsolation, of an absurd living' in despair, must be opposed to the mere dedition of despondency. Fondane's poetic protest is primary, starting from the refusal of the singular existent to succumb to despair despite demonstrably living in its

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[23] Like Adorno's Beckett, For Fondane 'the need for progress is inextricable from its impossibility' (Adorno 2002, 30, with thanks to Vassiliki Kolocotroni: See Kolocotroni 2019). Disconsolation holds within it elements of the modernist paralysis Sianne Ngai explores through the figure of Melville's Bartleby, a characterization also used by of Slavoj Žižek when warning against precipitous or pseudo-action in *The Parallax View* (2006, from 342 onwards. This is a strange affinity which sits alongside radical divergence, highlighting the care required in positioning Fondane in nuanced discourses around modernity). Bartleby has been theorized extensively. A recent survey, however, warns against 'a redemptive reading on precisely that which exceeds such a reading' (Bojeson and Allen 2019, 64). Analagously, while disconsolation is ambiguous, it has potential as a site of disruption.

conditions.[24] His disconsolation aligns with that diagnosed by Lazarus in 'the wreckage of lives that have been lived wrongly, in the shadow or under the auspices of malign social, cultural, ideological, and familial dispensations [...] acts and thoughts that *cannot* be forgiven or apologized for or reconciled [must] be glimpsed in the light of a yearning for fellowship or collectivity' (Lazarus 2011, 31). If disconsolation consists of a combination of despair with a yearning for a utopia that cannot be construed, then Fondane's poetry too contains Benjaminian 'splinters of messianic time' (Benjamin 2003a, 397). I leave the last word here to Lazarus: 'it is this transcendental implication that engenders 'disconsolation' in us as readers' (2011, 32).

Irresignation

> The destructive character sees nothing permanent.
> But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere.

Walter Benjamin, from 'The Destructive Character' (Benjamin 2005, 542)[25]

> La poésie [...] vit et ne conclut guère.
>
> [Poetry [...] lives and never comes to a conclusion]
>
> from 'L'expérience poétique' (Fondane 1935)

While disconsolation is a mood engendered by modernity and the modernist texts which make it evident, irresignation is a term specifically thought in Fondane scholarship. If tone is taken to denote a stance or attitude, then irresignation fits nicely, being explicitly formulated in Fondane's prose. In his *Lundi Existentiel*, he exposes Louis Lavelle's firm refusal of disconsolation:

> if all the pain in the world, writes Lavelle, left us no alternative save
> choosing between revolt and resignation, *that would be to despair* of the

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[24] Olivier Salazar-Ferrer: 'The specificity of Fondane's approach is found in his affirmation of the singular existent, even when affected by the dislocation of the self occasioned by the deconstruction of the concepts of rationalism' (2007, 181, my translation).
[25] With thanks to Vassiliki Kolocotroni.

value of the world; but this pain can have meaning only if it nourishes the very ardour of spiritual life. (EM 21)[26]

As I stated in the previous chapter in relation to Adorno and the unspeakable, Fondane, against that body of philosophy which refuses to countenance it, takes seriously the question 'how could one live if all the pain of the world was *for nothing*?' (EM 21). Lavelle set out the options for him, and, as is evident from Olivier Salazar-Ferrer's title *Benjamin Fondane et la révolte existentielle*, there could only be one choice, 'dût cette irrésignation être – ou paraître – absurdité ou folie [even if that irresignation need be – or seem – absurdity or madness]' (CM xvii).

This thesis builds upon work done by Salazar-Ferrer and other Fondane scholars to bring together the variegated elements of Fondane's work – philosophy, poetry, cinema, visual art, translation – in a holistic manner that emphasizes the seriousness of his theoretical critique while centring the artistic work that reaches beyond it. The latter third of *Benjamin Fondane et la révolte existentielle* sets out the affirmatory power Fondane finds in this revolt, despite the context of what I am calling disconsolation. My readings of *L'Exode* develop from this direction and I will also use irresignation as a way of sparking Fondane off other contemporary (and indeed subsequent) writers, thereby enriching both their contexts and his own.

Just as we may read Fondane's poetry as a tentative, pre-emptive response to Adorno's problematizing of the catastrophe that killed him, we can also see it in the context of modernity more broadly, as not only an acknowledgment of the affective paralysis (and its valuable subversive qualities) framed by Ngai or Žižek but an absurd attempt to move beyond it. Absurd, because there is no obvious exit or destination in view – *pas d'issue, pas d'issue!*[27] – but not therefore, syllogistically, valueless: is poetry not mutilated if reduced to a rational purpose? Part of Fondane's resistance to totalizing logics is a Nietzsche-inspired assertion of humanity as an end in itself through art:

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[26] The Lavelle quote is from *L'Erreur de Narcisse,* published in 1939 by Grasset (Paris), pp. 102–103.
[27] 'No way out, no way out!'. From *Ulysse* (MF 18). Fondane draws this line on the inescapability of facticity and force from John Gay's *Polly* ('no retreat' in the original). There was a revival of interest in *The Beggar's Opera* in the 1920s; Fondane and Bertolt Brecht may have been reading it around the same time. Fondane probably saw the 1931 film *L'opéra de quat'sous*, directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst (with thanks to Olivier Salazar-Ferrer).

une frivolité par rapport au social, mais de beaucoup plus terriblement sérieuse que le sérieux le plus grave [...] cette frivolité […] contienne un instant de l'éternel ou la plus désespérée des croyances en l'homme[.]

[frivolity in social terms, but far more terribly serious than the gravest seriousness [...] this frivolity […] contains an instant of the eternal or the most desperate beliefs within man] (EDR 90–91)

Salazar-Ferrer raises the question of the limits of Fondane's discursive refusal of logics and sets out the frame of his (fragile) positive response:

Coming as it does out of the pure subversion of Dadaism, is Fondane's subversion purely refutatory? Does it lead to a threshold beyond history where subjectivity, in its catastrophic insurrection, would have no resort but the experience of an incommunicable religious ordeal? [...] this is not at all the case [...] it [Fondane's subversion] does not lead towards nihilism, but instead to what we might call an *existential testimony*. (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 139, my translation)

It is my contention that this paradigm of testimony is *necessarily* a poetic one for Fondane, as I shall develop further in the third part of the thesis.

Irresignation happens at the moment when disconsolation becomes apparent. I love this line from Ursula Le Guin, a writer whose entire oeuvre walks the line between subversion and affirmation: 'Her despair grew so great that it burst her breast open and like a bird of fire shattered the stone and broke out into the light of day' (from her novel *The Tombs of Atuan,* 2020, 139). Despair can be revelatory, opening the vista to other horizons, which hope had blinkered. Irresignation is a step towards them in the acceptance of all that is lost by it. Thus it is at once subversive and affirmatory, moving against what we might call the violence of hope: I am thinking of Berlant's cruel optimism, or the hope (and fear of loss) which may keep a person experiencing domestic abuse from leaving (Michaels 2016, 37). I believe that Fondane demonstrates that only art can really express irresignation, both by writing *towards* such an opinion in his prose and by the very fact of his poetry. The pre-Le Guinian move corresponds with the recurrence of the emigrant as a motif in the latter, imbued with loss and the step towards unknown horizons, for example in *Ulysse*:

Émigrants, diamants de la terre, sel sauvage,

Emigrants, diamonds of the earth, wild salt,

je suis de votre race,
j'emporte comme vous ma vie dans ma valise,
je mange comme vous le pain de mon angoisse,
je ne demande plus quel est le sens du monde,
je pose mon poing dur sur la table du monde,
je suis de ceux qui n'ont rien, qui veulent tout
– je ne saurai jamais me résigner.

I am of your race,
Like you I carry my life in my suitcase,
I eat like you the bread of my affliction,
I ask no more for the meaning of the world,
I pound my fist on the table of the world,
I am one of those who have nothing, who want everything
– I will never be resigned.

(MF 35; Fondane 2017, 51)

Poetry is particularly apt for irresignation because it also confronts the limits of language and logic in its very medium.[28]

If disconsolation is infused with the paralysis of the unspeakable, irresignation is the refusal to submit in the face of existential despair, a gesture towards the unsayable. From within the atmosphere or mood of disconsolation, Fondane strikes a tone of resistance, a paradoxical 'going on' in the face of failure. Fondane *acknowledges* despair without *accepting* it. He is thus a descendant of Dostoevsky's 'underground man' and of Shestov in his 'struggle against evidence' (see Martin 1975), refusing to accept the victories of reasonable truths as finally settling their questions, that is, refusing to accept philosophical, political or artistic systems as finally authoritative. Far from imagining him happy, Fondane must imagine Sisyphus

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[28] Acts of everyday existence may also be instances of irresignation, but by their transcience they are more shadowy. I believe this is the argument Fondane makes in (for example) 'La Conscience Malheureuse', an essay published in 1935 in the *Cahiers du Sud*, originally envisioned as a chapter for the full work *La Conscience malheureuse* but later expanded into the *Faux traité d'esthétique*: 'Cette pensée de l'existence a sans doute trouvé ses meilleures expressions dans la vie d'individus qui n'ont point laissé de traces dans l'histoire; elle est le principe anonyme qui donne à l'histoire, son sens et sa plénitude […]Qu'il nous soit donc permis de jeter un regard sur une expérience impure, mêlée, parfois grossière, mais hautement significative qui porte sur le singulier et le vivant et ne peut le trahir sans se trahir elle-même — je veux dire l'expérience poétique, dont le résidu lyrique se trouve former la base nouménale de toutes les activités qui se rangent sous la dénomination générique de l'Art' [This experience of existence has almost certainly found its best expressions in the life of individuals who have left no trace in history; it is the anonymous principle which gives history its meaning and its plenitude […] Let it be permitted me to cast my eye on an impure, mixed, sometimes coarse, but highly significant experience which concerns the singular, the living being, and cannot betray it without betraying itself – I mean the poetic experience, whose lyric residue in fact forms the noumenal base of all activities found under the generic name of Art] (Fondane 1935). An interesting correlate to the 'lyric residue' is found in Roland Barthes's notion of the *biographème*, the affective trace of life that may be read from even philosophical texts (Barthes 1971, 13). Art for Fondane represents an empowering of such traces, against the flattening effects of rationality, which seek to suppress or transcend them.

resisting at some level. Resistance is humanizing, as Priya Gopal, for example, has recently argued in an anti-colonial context (Gopal 2019). Fondane's irresignation exceeds the *huis clos* of rationality diagnosed by Shestov's 'negative philosophy' because it irrupts in the extra-rational activity of poetry. The poetics of irresignation is also a refusal to submit in the face of representational aporiae.

As I have already suggested, we might describe Fondane's position, oxymoronically, as an anti-Humanist humanism.[29] As such it is not a politics, but the irresignation that is its articulation speaks, in its unsayability, to the open-ended negotiations of apophatic politics. In this vein, China Miéville criticizes

> imaginations that are impoverished, blind [...] to [the] sheer otherness [of a better future]. [...] unsaying is not evasion but respect, taking seriously the scale of potential, of alterity necessary [...] escaping 'realistic', articulable, reformist visions truncated by the real, actually-existing hope. It is thus, to appropriate from the eschatology of the theologian Jurgen Moltmann, a hope against hope. Its horizon, like that he recalls from his youth, 'is a boundary which does not confine but rather invites one to go beyond'. It is in such unsaying, rather than in anxious left assurance that the world can be said, that true radical Prometheanism inheres. (Miéville 2019, 16)

While 'Promethean' would be an uncomfortable label to attach to Fondane in his commitment to disconsolation, as it still implies the possibility of salvation through knowledge, this radicality certainly applies. [30] As Olivia Salvadori argues, 'Shestov and Fondane's positions are radical but, paradoxically, their lucidity is invigorating, and they are not at all nihilistic' (Salvadori n.d., my translation). They are invigorating because they provoke us to seek beyond the limits of our knowledge, as Shestov calls upon us to do in his philosophy and Fondane enacts in the irresignation of his poetry. This is why he can write that 'L'homme a besoin de désapprendre le langage [...] la grande joie de ne pas savoir ce que c'est la poésie. Mais en échange

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[29] A seemingly paradoxical notion akin to the Benjaminian 'plumb line' of Simon Critchley's 'violent non-violence' (Critchey 2009).

[30] 'Prometheus was lucky,' wrote Shestov, 'He had a "cause" (Shestov 1969a, Chapter 15). Although Prometheus is not central to the thought of Shestov or Fondane, he is an interesting figure because he captures the double-edgedness of knowledge, its costs and its unforeseeable consequences. This ambiguity is also present in his role as origin of both human science and art.

nous avons arracher [sic] le loup à son ennemi le plus mortel: le poétique[31] [Man must unlearn language [...] what a great joy to not know what it is that poetry is. But in exchange we must tear off the mask of its most deadly enemy: the poetic] (AG 55–56).

Irresignation implies the defence of an absurdity that reaches its full expression in poetry. 'Un poète', wrote Fondane, 'ça ne sait pas ce que c'est la gravitation, le code de la route, le lien de cause à effet [a poet doesn't know what gravity is, or the highway code, or the link between cause and effect]' (AG 56). [32] Far from being a distraction, poetry's very 'frivolity' (EDR 90) keeps a space open for the unsayability of existence. This is why Fondane can countenance humour even within terrible seriousness, as long as that humour fights against what we could call dehumanization, or reduction to bare life, or reification (as opposed to the other pole, the cold joke; see Glover 2001, 36).[33] In the final words of 'Mots Sauvages', Fondane sets out the newly irresigned intent of his poetry with a use of absurdity that chaotically affords his very sincerity:[34]

> La poésie n'est pas une fonction sociale mais une force obscure qui précède l'homme et qui le suit [...] une seule fleur jetée d'une loge perfide et l'acrobate perd pied, l'équilibre casse l'air comme une bouteille [...] *La représentation continue* [...] Rien de ce qui a été ne sera plus jamais. Au jugement dernier, la poésie seule jugera l'être. Elle seule ne l'a jamais quitté du regard. Qui osera relever la tête afin que les mots se soulèvent? L'homme est un animal que la poésie pétrit dans l'argile, ou qu'elle fait sauter à coups de dynamite.

> [Poetry is not a social function but an obscure force that precedes man and follows him [...] a single flower thrown from a treacherous box and the

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[31] Presumably there is an omission in the original and it should read 'nous avons *à* arracher'. As Fondane continues, he resonates with Cocteau, though in a more modernist idiom: 'La poésie n'a pas besoin de devenir poétique, ni le fer ferrugineux [Poetry does not need to become poetic, nor iron ferruginous]'. It sounds better in French.

[32] The exemplification of this principle by Charlie Chaplin was why Fondane wrote 'le plus grand poète moderne écrit en cinéma [the greatest modern poet writes in film]' (AG 56), a statement that in itself is pleasingly absurd.

[33] The serious, troubling relationship between disaster and humour has surfaced in discourse around the Holocaust, as is apparent in the controversy over the film *La Vita è bella* [*Life is Beautiful*] (see Lerner 2018 and Dak 2005). I will return to humour when exploring poetic testimony more fully in the third part of the thesis.

[34] As I hope is clear from my employment of its terms, affordance as a critical concept is very useful for considering Fondane's critical and poetic moves in their apophatic and affective dimensions. See Chapter 4 of Terence Cave's *Thinking With Literature* (2016). With thanks to Graham Riach.

acrobate loses her footing, balance breaking the air like a bottle [...] *representation continues* [...] nothing that has been will ever be again [...] At the last judgement, poetry alone will judge (the) being. It [poetry] alone has never lost sight of it [(the) being]. Who will dare stick out their neck in order to whip up the words? Man is an animal whom poetry hardens into clay, or else blows up with blasts of dynamite.] (Fondane 1996a, 23, emphasis in the original)

The Nietzschean tone of Fondane's last sentence, strengthened by the Zarathustran image of the rope walker, emphasizes a negotiation between horror and comedy, the Dadaistic refusal, in a world gone mad, to be constrained by what is 'appropriate'. 'Un poète ça doit sentir le souffre, ça doit souffrir [a poet must smell of sulphur, she must suffer] Fondane had earlier asserted (AG 56). It is this mixture of suffering and subversive, devilish mischief that sets an (anti-)poetics of irresignation against the bounds of propriety, with the most sincere motivations. 'Mots Sauvages' declares an intention to attempt to move beyond Dada's 'reluctance to signify' (Bell 2010, 2) without compromising with cultural and linguistic hegemony.

Reading Fondane's reading of Rimbaud, Salazar-Ferrer writes that 'Rimbaud's metaphysical revolt against necessity, logic, death and morality, against the moral God of the bourgeoisie, took the shape of an existential struggle in poetry' (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 66, my translation). We can say much the same for Fondane himself. Even a statement of despair can be a gesture of irresignation when made poetically, a gesture towards the other, 'across the centuries', as Margaret Teboul puts it (Teboul 2011, my translation). An already-ruined speech is discernible, unable to attain the wholeness for which its existence proves a longing, yet holding the promise of a future ear or eye. In the 1942 *Préface en prose,* Fondane literally describes himself amongst ruins, a 'bouquet d'orties [clump of nettles]' in a wasteland, speaking towards an other for whom his historical era will be 'périmée [obsolete]' (MF 153). Is this a poetic accordance with Walter Benjamin's 'alternative theory of ruin value' in modernity? Fondane seems to pre-empt the possibility in us of what Vassiliki Kolocotroni calls Benjamin's 'conviction that amongst [...] ruins remain signs of a salutary witnessing' (Kolocotroni 2019, 239). When 'le poème lu | se trouvera devant vos yeux [this poem | will find itself before your eyes]' (MF 153, CO 143), readings

do not reconcile or reconstitute, but they can restitute and vitalize.[35] The nettle draws our attention to destruction and to growth; it is both an encouraging sign of life and a discomfiting, prickly presence.

The refusal of the principle of non-contradiction that is the poet's prerogative, in Fondane's eyes at least, is essential to such apophatic utterance. Amongst the forceful lines which conclude *Titanic* by proclaiming the generalized context of catastrophe ('Tout l'histoire me suit [...] j'avance sous l'oeil de tonnerre [All history follows me [...] Under the eye of thunder I proceed]', Fondane uses a discomfiting double-sided image:

> l'homme [...] changera-t-il jamais le monde avec son cri? | Il est un temps où l'eau est froide, mais un temps où elle bout, | le gaz irrésigné distend les parois et éclate, | il est un temps de mourir et un temps de ne pas mourir | de révolte perpétuelle

> [man [...] will he ever change the world with his cry? It is a time when the water is cold, but a time of its boiling | the irresigned gas stretches its confines and bursts out, | it is a time to die and a time not to die | of perpetual revolt] (MF 147)

As Margaret Teboul (2011) says, this is the moment when the poem makes a move 'from renunciation to irresignation'.[36] The use of gas as an image is uneasy, a metaphor for the spirit with a troubling material resonance, starkly reminiscent of the trenches and, prophetically, of the camps. In its disquiet this figure asserts the indeterminate but caustic natures of both catastrophe and Fondane's revolt.

The lines that close *Titanic* are characteristic in that they proclaim unceasing revolt even as they subvert its chances of 'success' ('changera-t-il jamais le monde avec son cri?'). To come back to Benjamin as a fellow traveller in this work of speaking with and from ruins, let us look at the way Teboul brings them together under the aegis of Benjamin's 'weak messianic force' (Benjamin 2003a, 390):

> It is just as if it were the subject itself that had to bring forth the messianic spark [...] A means of wresting messianic hope from the tradition in the shadow of the death of God. Interpreted by Benjamin as eternal return and

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[35] We can read Fondane's poem as a Celanian message-in-a-bottle thrown into a dark sea: it carries an absurd hope of reaching its destination despite the certain erasure of its locutor. Although the full intricacies of Fondane's debt to Levinas is beyond the scope of this thesis (see Monseu 2005), the importance of the other in Fondane's work will be treated in chapters 8 and 9.

[36] My translation. See also Jutrin, 1998b.

the absence of the new, it suffuses Fondane's poetry. (Teboul 2011, my translation) [37]

Amongst the 'insistant, haunting background noise that comes to us from the 20th Century, the century of avant-gardes, who give the *tone* of the era', Fondane's own tone of resistance, according to Louis Janover, entails 'a radical problematization of what the world presents to our eyes' (Janover 2009, 33 and 55, my translation). The tone of Fondane's irresignation is found not in technique but in affirming the necessity of speaking despite acknowledging its impossibility,[38] of having something to *attempt* to say, '*En tant qu'objet singulier*, non en tant qu'essence [*as a singular object,* not as an essence]' (FT 29, emphasis in the original). It does not entail a dismissal of technique but of the prescription of technique. He continues:

C'est peut-être grâce à cette misère, à cette intime blessure, qu'elle ouvre sur quelque chose. Sur quoi? C'est à la poésie elle-même de nous le dire […] La poésie peut penser bien des choses qui ont été refusées à la philosophie […] [le succès de la poésie] est dû à l'échec des buts poursuivis, à l'oblitération de la théorie, à la matière inespérée que la poésie profonde a su jaillir d'une position de conflit, qu'elle n'a cessé d'ailleurs de provoquer, afin de se défaire de tout but et de toute théorie.

[It is perhaps thanks to this misery, to this intimate wound, that it opens onto something. Onto what? It is for poetry itself to tell us […] Poetry may think many things that have been refused to philosophy […] [the success of poetry] is due to the failure of the goals pursued, to the obliteration of theory, to the unhoped-for material that subtle poetry has been able to elicit from a position of conflict, indeed a conflict that it has never stopped provoking, in order to break away from every goal and theory.] (FT 30–31)

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[37] Sometimes the parallels between Fondane and Benjamin's apprehensions of the potential inherent in catastrophe, though nurtured in similar quasi-mystical reading, border on the uncanny. Compare these words of Benjamin: 'just as the slopes of Vesuvius, thanks to the layers of lava that cover them, have been transformed into paradisal orchards, so the lava of revolutions provides uniquely fertile ground for the blossoming of art, festivity, fashion' (Benjamin 1999, 83, with thanks to Vassiliki Kolocotroni) with this line from *Titanic:* 'je chante: terribles volcans merci de mûrir les vendanges [I sing: thanks be to terrible volcanoes which ripen the grapes]' (MF 146).

[38] See Blanchot 1959, 89 for a similar notion.

If Fondane's position here, namely that poetry is the linguistic activity that happens beyond the bounds of the theorizable, lays him open to accusations of mysticism, then the least of his defences is that he works towards what Catherine Keller calls 'an emancipation of mystery from mystification' (Keller 2014, 288). Fondane's tone of irresignation is struck against the poet's 'shameful conscience'[39]. Just as he urges poets not to resign themselves to aesthetic contemplation or moral servitude, he dares to revolt against knowledge and enact poetry's traversing of the unsayable.

Modernity, Tragic Philosophy, Poetic Testimony

In writing on a poet who Dadaistically castigates language for its betrayals, exclusions and misprisions, the critical exigency to define terms feels somewhat Quixotic. I hope that the field of usage of some of the terms I have cast around thus far will have osmotically pushed their way into the understanding between my text and the reader. Nonetheless I shall devote a little more time here to further stabilize the topography of some of the conversation's particularly recalcitrant words (modernity, rationality, the existent) and better introduce others particularly germane to the thesis development for the readings of *L'Exode* (testimony, anamnesis, celebration, performance).

Modernity

This thesis participates in the work of mapping Fondane within modernism. Yet in doing so it immediately bumps into a lexical difficulty present for anyone writing in English on twentieth-century French culture. Whereas in the English-speaking world the word modernism primarily conjures up swathes of movements in art and thought at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries, 'a break with the past

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[39] The unease of the poet towards the frivolity of their own activity and the internalized superegoic pressure to serve a social objective comes up repeatedly in works like the *Faux Traité* and Fondane's works on Baudelaire and Rimbaud, as well as in *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution*. The idea took a more defined shape in reaction to the publication of Roger Caillois's 'neopositivist' (Salazar-Ferrer 2009) book *Procès intellectuel de l'art* (1935). 'Fondane reacted to defend the living, interior autonomy of poetry against alienations of all kinds that could surveil it, control it or force it back into line on the grounds of moral or social conformity' (Salazar-Ferrer 2009, my translation).

and the concurrent search for new forms of expression' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,*
s.v. 'Modernism'),[40] it does not have traction as a parallel umbrella term in
Francophone discourse. *Modernisme* is not so much associated with the artists and
thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century who *responded* to the
transformations in Western society as with these changes themselves. Whereas the
Encyclopaedia Britannica centres a British perspective with the statement
'Modernists felt a growing alienation incompatible with Victorian morality,
optimism, and convention', contemporary French commentators associated
modernism with the development of the idea of a rationally-ordered society, from the
Revolution through nineteenth-century positivism to the techno-dominance of the
twentieth. In such a framing, Fondane often cast himself as *anti*-modern, despite
sharing the alienation of the avant-gardes and their search for new modes of
expression, because of his commitment to critiquing the post-Enlightenment notion of
progress.[41]

Fondane figures, like Benjamin's apocalyptic visions of Paris (Benjamin 2012;
see Kolocotroni 2019 and Lee 2016), both modernity and its antitheses. He
personifies a tension in modernism: the extent to which avant-gardes were variously
confronting modernity or inaugurating it (Janover 2009, from 33). Like Eliot's, his
poetry is unquestionably modern yet written in the ruins of tradition rather than
building on a tabula rasa. He was an avant-gardist without hope of a rearguard or
even a victory plan. He endorsed Dada's attack on the limits of reason (notably in
'Signification de Dada', AG 76–82) while refusing the transcendent or material
confidence distinct in Suprematism or Constructivism. In his existential philosophy
he also responded to the very French context of 'modernism' in the sense of the
attempts of Catholic freethinkers to apply liberal and rational approaches to Biblical
studies in the late nineteenth Century, a context which heavily influenced debate
among French intellectuals in the interwar period.[42] Fondane was an avant-gardist

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[40] https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism, accessed 22 April, 2020.
[41] For more on the idea of Fondane as anti-modern, see Soare 2013.
[42] See Koloctroni and Taxidou 2018, 1, and Conner 2014, 54. Vatican I in large part represents the
surfacing of these concerns. It almost goes without saying that the conservative reaction was extreme,
as exemplified in the watershed moment of the Dreyfus injustice, and continues today (see the
pertinently-named *Crisis* magazine's article 'The Modernist Roots of our Current Crisis', Gregoris
2018). The Dreyfus controversy brought out the complex interpenetration of Catholicism and secular

who did not believe in progress or in grand narratives of history, and who, as we have seen, prefigures what is often called postmodern thought. When his Francophone critics discuss modernity, this is what they tend to mean: 'modernity anchored in the utopia of progress and of the autonomy of knowledge' (Guedj 2003a, 110, my translation). Fondane is not anti-modern in the sense of being conservative, but as we have seen, if he accepts any possibility of renewal, is not be to found in manifestoes, but rather is unconceivably messianic.

Dominique Guedj argues that for Fondane 'le malheur' contains a liberatory aspect because it 'ends up creating a radical calling into question' (2003, 110, my translation) of modernity thus conceived. There has been a tendency in Fondane criticism to emphasize a relationship with spirituality, yet doing so immediately threatens to pigeonhole and constrain his work, which must be looked at as a whole.[43] For Fondane the existence of the possibility of faith was more central than its presence. Once again, a parallel with Walter Benjamin is inescapable (see Staal 2008 and Feuer 2014). Rein Staal argues that

> Modernity itself brought man face to face with everything at stake in the opposition of the personal to the impersonal. What had been discredited was […] the hubris of the great impersonal systems, whether the naturalistic reductionism of modern scientism or the dialectical sleight of mind of modern ideologies. The central intuition of this theistic revival [of the interwar period]—this preemptive postmodernism—is the irreducibility of the person. (Staal 2008)

Despite much heat around theory's 'religious turn', the citation of Staal here is not intended as a claim for theoretical 'postmodernism' as inherently theological. When Fondane writes 'avec Pascal, Nietzsche et Dostoïevski, contre Hegel et Husserl, […] il [Shestov] est résolument *antimoderne* [with Pascal, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, and against Hegel and Husserl, […] he [Shestov] is resolutely *anti-modern*]' (Fondane

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domains of thought (Conner 2014, 37), but the influence of debates around Catholic modernism infuenced inter-war intellectuals in ways that complicated the social polarization of anti-rational conservatives versus programmatic progressives. As Ethan Kleinberg puts it, 'traditional French philosophy' of any stripe 'had been unable to explain the senseless killings and mass destruction that marked the French "victory" in World War I, or the precarious position of an industrializing France' (Kleinberg 2005, 280). See also 'Christian Philosophy: The 1930s French Debates' in the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* https://www.iep.utm.edu/chri1930/ (accessed 2 November 2020). Jacques Maritain was a key interlocutor for Fondane for this context; see Salazar-Ferrer 1999.

[43] This is in large part because Shestov has been defined as positively theist, although even his position is 'subtle', as Thomas Carroll points out (Carroll 2014, 103).

1936), perhaps it is helpful to consider this anti-modernity not as the antithesis of modernity, but rather as untimely. Suffering, including in its metaphysical aspects, is crucial for Fondane, not as a gateway to divinity but in its post-Nietzschean implications.

These shades of affect and theology also return us to the question of Fondane's Jewishness, another label which threatens to cordon off his work. It is in fact difficult to conceive of modernism without Jewishness (Mann 2006, 674; Meyer 1989, 151). William Franke (2005, 1) claims that in the twentieth-century 'rediscovery of the oftentimes-repressed resources in the Western tradition of apophatic discourse... Jewish writers have been particularly important'.[44] He relates this to 'the biblical interdictions on representations of the divine' which 'gave Jewish tradition a peculiar attunement to the limits of representation and an especially acute sensibility for the Unrepresentable'. Franke adds a general point that has often been connected to Celan specifically: 'the Holocaust experience has become recognized as a culture code for the unspeakable par excellence' (2005, 1). These contexts cannot be ignored in relation to Fondane, the first necessarily informing his poetic takes on Judaic tradition, the second foreshadowing itself in his writing and influencing his reception. To these it is possible to add the instances of abandonment or seeming abandonment of the community by the supreme deity in the Jewish mythos, notably in the breaking and reshaping of the covenant in the Torah and in the Book of Job, both touchstones for Shestov and Fondane.[45]

Beth Hawkins argues that '[t]he tropes of exile, wandering, absence, disappearance, the simultaneous power and insufficiency of language – these have entered into a shared vocabulary' (Hawkins 2003, xxi). As Jewishness itself straddles the categories of ancient and modern, Fondane, generously and paradoxically, energizes its traditions not to create an exceptionalism but to extend their frameworks of perception and response to all, using, in Hawkins' words, a 'specifically Jewish paradigm as the means for promoting a universal ethics' (2003, xx; see also Kronick 1991), if by ethics we do not mean a system and if universal means open to all

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[44] Gershom Scholem, who triangulates Benjamin and Shestov, is the most obvious link between Jewish traditions and the writing of modernity. See Hamburger 1982 and Sugarman 2012, as well as section 8 of the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entry on Scholem.
[45] 'With the Book of Job, the notion of the absurd is born.' (Hawkins 2003, xxii).

humans rather than transcendent or absolute. This negotiation of the secular, of God's absence, through spiritual conceptions, surely owing something to traditions of Talmudic commentaries and their contextual emphases, connects to the work of Levinas and Derrida (Stone 1998, 5; Arnett 2017, 98) as well as Jabès and Celan (see David 2007 for a link with Fondane specifically). Fondane, Celan, Jabès and (Riding) Jackson are all of Jewish extraction and have a complex relation to this, holding interesting liminal positions. They are unquestionably modern poets without belonging to a modernist school, though Celan and Jabès, like Fondane, were associated with surrealism without firmly attaching themselves to it. While (Riding) Jackson ultimately cleaves to the defence of what might now be called logocentrism, all four problematize language in their work. [46]

All of these contradictions – the impossibility of speaking and its necessity, modernity and anti-modernity, Jewishness and post-God universal community – vitalize Fondane's modernism. If some modernisms sought to use art to make the world anew, whether transcendentally or materially, and others to turn away from it,[47] Fondane's catastrophic aesthetics aligns instead with modern writing's apophatic tendencies. Hawkins' words on Jabès are pertinent:

> What binds the reader to the writer, and by extension, Jew to non-Jew [...] is the condition of exile – exile characterizes the postwar trauma, the divisive split between the idealistic humanism of the Enlightenment and the atrocities that humanity found itself committing. We have been exiled from our own source of humanity, that is [...] the voice of the margin is the *human* voice, the voice that we all share in a world so deeply betrayed by and cut off from its own sense of value. (Hawkins 2003, 162–163)

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[46] See also Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 41 on Fondane recuperating Hegel's unhappy consciousness for a restitution of Jewishness, a restitution I believe to be an imaginative opening towards all of humanity rather than a religious exceptionalism. Jewishness may also complicate the centring of modernism on the West, as does the fact that Fondane, like so many Parisian modernists, was Eastern European. For more on this subject see Mathur 2008 and David 2007.

[47] The tension in artistic modernism between aestheticist quietism and interventionist disquiet is perhaps best exemplified in the similarly multiplicitous, multivocal work of Fernando Pessoa, whose oscillations between the avant-garde and what Helena Buescu refers to as the 'arrière-garde' resonate with Fondane's nuanced modernity (Buescu 2013). Modernist fluctuation between art and politics is also usefully surveyed from another angle in David Weir's *Anarchy & Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism* (1997).

Although Fondane strove against the desire to intellectually conceive a total ethical restitution, in his 'malheur' the defence of this human voice was the context of his modernism.

The recent publication of Fondane's philosophical reflections on the anthropology of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Le métaphysicien malgré lui* (Fondane 2019), emphasizes another facet of his thinking on modernity. Lévy-Bruhl's use of the notion of a 'primitive' mentality is highly problematic in its framing of civilization and primitivity, both politically, for obvious reasons, and philosophically, in the assumptions and exclusions required to construct such a binary.[48] However, beyond the flawed societal analysis, his work did bring an attention to extra-rational – 'pre-logical'– aspects of thought, in a manner that attracted the attention of contemporaries such as the surrealists and Georges Bataille (Engel 2020).

Fondane grasped at the possibility that Lévy-Bruhl's surveys of non-Western modes of thought that were not harnessed to the epistemological values of positivism could point a way to a reconcilation between imagination and reality. Against the Weberian disenchantment of modernity, such modes could, in Pascal Engel's terms, 'offer an escape hatch out of the idea that the world was to be known and thought logically' (Engel 2020, my translation). On these grounds, poetry appeared as a means towards re-enchantment (this form of enchantment is to be distinguished from the enchantment of the 'aesthetic veil' critiqued by Fondane in texts like 'Mots Sauvages', *Faux Traité* and his *Baudelaire*).

Lévy-Bruhl was later to concede that 'the very idea of an 'other' thought system, obeying radically different laws to those that founded classical logic, doesn't make sense' (Engel 2020, my translation). Neither logic nor the extra-logical has primacy, they are in constant negotiation. Fondane's own writing betrays this, and as Til R. Kuhnle points out (Kuhnle 2007), this tension animates the very activity of poetry. Perhaps Fondane's insight into modernity is that whereas in pre-modernity there was the possibility of harmony between the two (a theme shared by some of his decadent predecessors, such as Huysmans), the extra-rational is now suppressed and cannot be incorporated into a rational framework (in the manner of, say, the

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[48] Recent scholarship has pointed out that Levy-Bruhl did not consciously intend to place 'civilized' mentality over his 'primitive' one but merely to illuminate human psychology as a whole. Obviously, this intention does not erase the epistemological and political violence of the binary.

Scholastics). The very desire for re-enchantment, though absurd, becomes a driver of revolt against the arrogance of positivism and idealism.

Tragic Philosophy

One of my guiding lights in reading Fondane is the commitment to approaching him as an artist, despite the manifold philosophical concerns that permeate his work. As I have already stated, it is crucial to read his poetry in the context of his life and his other work, yet without allowing any one facet of these to overdefine it. There is no question of reading his poetry as an application or practice of 'his philosophy'. However, given the intense, though informal, philosophical formation he underwent through his encounters with Shestov, as well as with Gaston Bachelard and other contemporaries,[49] the influence this had on his poetic practice and the unresolvable struggle he maintained between critique and creation,[50] in the interests of clarity I will briefly plot some of the philosophical territory he set his bearings by and against.

As should already be clear, the antagonism towards reason Fondane encountered through Dada found a philosophical direction in his readings of and relationship with Shestov. 'Antagonism towards reason' is a statement broad and vague enough to be almost paralyzing. Shestov and Fondane's 'opponents' represent a similarly broad grouping, from Plato to Husserlian phenomenology. Yet despite the polemical nature of much of their writing, they do not oppose in the sense of having a counter-theory to this or that proposed by another. Instead, they offer a critique and corrective of knowledge itself, which is not a dismissal of it but a reading of its limitations and of the existential ramifications of living with it, of the way in which knowledge tends to alienate through the very creation of a subject-object position.[51]

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[49] This development flourished when he began writing a philosophy column for *Les Cahiers du Sud,* alongside the likes of Benjamin and Simone Weil, and where he was one of the first French commentators of Heidegger (Jutrin 2006).

[50] A tension he refers to in the *Faux Traité* as 'la duplicité tragique de soi', 'the tragic double-dealing of self' (FT 25).

[51] Butcher 2013, 18: 'Shestov's epistemic irrationalis[m] does not, by that fact, make him a moral or prudential irrationalist as well.' Nicolas Monseu highlights the troubling presence of affect in their work, raising 'a central philosophical problem: that of the capacity of a philosophy – and therefore a phenomenology – to envisage the different modalities of existence and, in particular, the irreducible character of the affective dimension, or even of the auto-affective dimension, of existence'(Monseu

Fondane cannot be considered simply 'anti-knowledge' and has no project of returning to an Adamic state. What differentiates his version of existential philosophy from what we might call the philosophies of the *nous*, that is to say of any which aim to successfully mediate life with the tools of the intellect, is its commitment to living with – or in spite of – this alienation rather than rationally overcoming it.[52]

As I have argued in introducing disconsolation, this position is not one of despair, leaving as it does an extra-rational horizon of possibility. In ranging Shakespeare, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche on their side Shestov and Fondane are not anti-rational bogeymen of the kind hand-wringing critics of 'postmodern philosophy' love to hate.[53] Their negative philosophy is not an anti-philosophy in the sense of cancelling philosophy out, but of subverting it, opening up its gaps. They oppose idealism of any kind, which goes beyond the usual philosophical uses of the term to include any project which treats the intellect as capable of capturing absolute truths and offering a model for human organization.[54] However, this opposition is not proclaimed as a triumph. Their (anti-)philosophy is termed the philosophy of tragedy because they too hold the desire to think their way past this alienation.[55] The commitment to reasserting the impossibility of doing so divides them from existentialism as commonly understood; Fondane could never proclaim that his philosophy was a Humanism (see Beray 2009, 21).

2005, my translation). Although it remains problematic for its participation in imperializing discourse, Fondane's consideration of non-Western cultures was important for his attempts to think beyond this alienation. See Guedj 2003b.

[52] Fondane insists on the irreconciliability of the plenitude of existence with the operations of the logos, what he calls 'l'irréductibilité profonde […] entre ces deux genres de "connaissance" [the profound irreducibility between these two kinds of "knowing"]' (CM 198). See Christopher Hamilton's *The Philosophy of Tragedy* (2016) for a concise overview of the philosophical context from which Fondane's work begins.

[53] Monseu 2005 (my translation): 'It must be said that Shestov and Fondane's existential philosophy does not renounce all truth but rather prioritizes a struggle against the idealist interpretation of truth, which glorifies logical truth.'

[54] It must be noted that Fondane's Hegel comprises in large part the Hegels of Shestov, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Wahl, which goes some way to explaining his preoccupation with resisting the precipitation towards the 'end of history' (a very contemporary concern). See Baugh 2003 and Bernasconi 2004. The question of whether Fondane falls foul of Gustav Mueller's warning against 'transform[ing] the great critic of rationalism *and* irrationalism into a ridiculous champion of an absurd pan-logistic rationalism and scientism' (Mueller 1958, 411) is for another thesis and probably inconsequential for his appropriative readings in the name of the philosophy of tragedy .

[55] Note these words from the poignant closing pages of *Man Faced With History*: 'Tout comme vous, mon cher lecteur, je m'accroche désespérément à l'intelligibilité de l'histoire [Just like you, dear reader, I cling desperately to the iintelligibility of History]' (HDH 450, EM 61). Fondane in particular fought against the temptations of solipsism.

Fondane critiques existential philosophers of the 1930s for falling foul of the risk inherent of conceptualizing even those concerns, such as affect, which they seek to restore into discourse. In *Existential Monday* he writes:

> If one regards existence *as an object of knowledge*, then it is clear that philosophy has never neglected it [...] Philosophy has always taken itself to be the Positive, just as it has always taken the existent for the Negative. If existential philosophy gives itself the same task, in what way does it differ from the philosophy that preceded it? (EM 8–10, emphasis in the original)[56]

Hence my clarification that the use of 'vitality' as a term when discussing Fondane's work should be understood 'naively', prompting critical reflection rather than absorption on the part of the reader, in a manner analogous to Brecht's dialectics of alienation. The same goes for the crucial word *l'existant*, 'the existent', which rather than being shaped as a critical lever with highly contextualized applications in discourse is held open, resisting overdetermination. I hesitate to reduce it at all – Fondane defines it only negatively, maintaining the rights of the feeling and conscious being against reductive discursive deployments. He seeks to hold open a space for the spatially and chronologically singular against thought's drive to generalize. Despite this sense of singularity, I prefer the term 'existent' to 'individual', as Fondane's philosophy is quite capable of sustaining itself alongside critiques of the unified subject. This point underlines the paradoxical nature of Fondane's anti-Humanist humanism; it includes an attack on the centring of Humanist values combined with an extra-rational compassion for and affirmation of the experience of human life.[57]

My attempts to heed the warnings of Fondane's negative philosophy should be apparent in my own apophatic approach. My text is littered with 'not... but...' constructions, 'not... rather...' and 'however'. In this it attests to the limits of logic so strongly pushed against by Fondane. Yet his attack on reductionism and the principle

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[56] Heidegger later made a similar critique of Sartre: 'he stays with metaphysics, in oblivion of the truth of Being' (Heidegger 1978, 208).

[57] For a survey of similar trends in post-war theory, see May 2013. This Lyotardian consideration by Peter Gratton is also resonant: '"Being prepared to receive what thought is not prepared to think", [Lyotard] writes, "is what deserves the name of thinking" [from *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, 73]. This form of the inhuman, against those who would think of Lyotard as a celebrant of the 1960s death of man and the end of humanism, stands as a testament to the inventiveness of the human and its irreducibility to the machinic' (Gratton 2018).

of non-contradiction also contains its own limits. Negative philosophy is just that, and the expression of his anti-Humanist humanism there hits a stumbling block. Fondane engages with this problem in his interventions in the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.[58] His (negative) philosophical writings on art do not proclaim an 'answer' in the form of a victory for poetry over philosophy, either. Rather, they indicate his path beyond philosophy, beyond prose argumentation itself. Onto what, he asks in the *Faux Traité,* does poetry open? 'C'est à la poésie elle-même de nous le dire', it is for poetry itself to tell us (FT 30). Only in the actual practice of poetry did an extra-rational expression of extra-rational concerns become possible.[59]

Poetic Testimony

I have already built up some notion of poetic testimony through the idea of irresignation and its place in Fondane scholarship. The existential revolt Salazar-Ferrer reads in Fondane is both negative and positive – a subversion of rationality's limitations in the name of the existent. Yet the positive *expression* of this is problematic when it subverts the powers of language and logic in advance. Fondane's correspondent Victor Serge wrote 'I am irritated by this hint of revolt that results neither in willing it or [in] an act' (Serge 2019). Fondane's poetry, however, is not only an outlet for disconsolation: if it were such it would surely be a space only of despair, and would then not exist at all. His philosophy of tragedy is not a gesture, still less a politics, yet it fights on behalf of the situated place of affect and intention where each of these begin. A space of suffering, but also of joy, love and compassion, and of the contradictions of consciousness's experience of them, in anguish,

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[58] 'On a le droit de dire que l'artiste est humain: il est impropre de l'appeler humaniste [We may say that the artist is human; it is incorrect to call him humanist]' (EDR 81). The 'deadly confusion between ethical values and artistic and cultural values [confusion meurtrière entre les valeurs éthiques et les valeurs artistiques et culturelles]' (EDR 83) is treated with particular urgency in *L'écrivain devant la révolution.*

[59] Fondane moves back and forth between using poetry in a broad, multimedia sense and the narrower, more common meaning. This thesis is primarily concerned with the latter, the poetry of words. Crucially, poetry in this sense resists logic from within its own medium, a point I believe was also very important to Fondane.

dissatisfaction and the desire to 'go on'. The poem, then, *is* a gesture – an opening of this space, a subversion of discourses which reduce, reject or sideline it.[60]

The literary framing of mood and tone helps to anchor poetry and testimony together without subordinating poetry to external criteria. But what are the features of this testimony? I propose four aspects to help consider it: anamnesis, subversion, celebration and performance or gesture.

Anamnesis: Poetic testimony differs from legal or reporting testimony because it does not claim ethical or intellectual authority, only affective and interlocutory energy. In doing so it offers powerful possibilities towards anamnesis in the sense used by Jean-François Lyotard, the struggle 'to keep events from sinking into the oblivion of either representation [...] or silence' (Readings 1991, glossary s.v. Immemorial). Lyotard's *détournement* of the psychoanalytic context of 'a complete knowledge concerning the things happened in the past' (J. Jones, n.d.) is particularly appropriate given Fondane's insistence, against Freud and the surrealists, that the unconscious cannot be fully captured or understood. Further, it breaks with its underlying origin in the sense used by Plato of remembering the ideal outwith the apparent real, which is fruitful when discussing Fondane's subversions of idealisms.[61] As I shall develop further in the third part of the thesis, Fondane's poetry, in its apophatic contexts, accords well with Lyotard's indication of an 'aesthetics of pathos'(Readings 1991, 23; Lyotard 1990, 45) in the service of this anamnesis, this remembering which is not a resolution.

Subversion: I have already discussed the subversions of thought in Fondane's philosophy. The poetic intervention is doubly subversive because it has the capacity to undermine oppressions while simultaneously complicating the very notion of judgement.

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[60] This gesturing, indicative aspect of poetry will be discussed further in chapters 7 and 8, along with the performative aspects that link writer and reader.

[61] For Plato, anamnesis is concerned with 'the transcendent Ideas that represent the real nature of things' (Samet 2019), one of the starting points for what Fondane sees as the devaluing of actual life in the name of philosophy.

Celebration: In going beyond critique, poetic testimony offers an affirmation of the human voice without objective or authority and pre-empts dialogue with another. [62] In thinking this fragile, paradoxical and absurd role for art, both autonomous and – in the words of Virginia Woolf cited earlier – 'attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners' (Woolf 2020), I have found Chinua Achebe's notion of celebration very helpful, as an extra-rational manifestation of suffering and joy. It decouples celebration from a purely joyous sense, expanding towards an affirmative plenitude that also comprehends sorrow (and many other affective states).

Performance/gesture: This dimension of celebration depends upon an understanding of the poem as performance or gesture of immanent affect, rather than aspiration to eternity or revelation of higher truth. Though this affect may *necessarily* be disconsolate – even when joyful and participating in plenitude (due to its transience) – its performance is *always* affirmative. Suffering – *le malheur* – may be revelatory (in an immanent sense), but in poetic testimony it may also be an affirmation. I will develop the idea of the *performance* of existential affirmation further in chapter 7, along with these other aspects of poetic testimony which help to afford my readings of *L'Exode*. I do not hope to capture poetic testimony as an objective tool of critique, but rather to encourage the reader into dialogue with it in its instances in Fondane's work and beyond.

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[62] Again it must be clarified that this move is not a *dismissal* of critique but a reclaiming of space for what is necessarily made unsayable in rational discourse. In her essay *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes 'it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to […] develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices' (Sedwick 2003, 150). Fondane's own critical approach is often astringent, yet he also insists upon the spaces across which reparative readings must operate, spaces which his poetry dives into.

Chapter 4 (Interlude)

Words Fail: Fondane and Laura (Riding) Jackson, Two Opposing Responses to the Imperfection of Language

> And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
>
> John 8:32

> Si même il n'y a lieu que pour une expression manquée, n'est-ce pas, là encore, une expression?
>
> [Even if there is only room for a failed expression, is that not, still, an expression?]
>
> from *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre,* 409

In this chapter, I will draw out the crucial importance of the very capacities of language as central to understanding Fondane's response to the philosophical and existential (in all senses of the word) crises in which he found himself embroiled. On his own account (as given in 'Mots Sauvages'), in 1924 he abandoned poetry as escapist and inadequate to the task of representing reality (represent in the senses of both mimesis and affirmation). In 1929 he began writing poems again. This renewal was not a 'return to the fold'. Fondane had not revised his disappointment in the inadequacies of language nor found a new light to compensate for them. Instead, his return heralded a recognition of the inescapability of language and the need to resist the despair engendered by these inadequacies, through a new engagement with the ruins of the dream of linguistic perfection, poetic or otherwise.

At the same time as Fondane was wrestling with these problems, Laura (Riding) Jackson,[1] who was born just three years after Fondane and moved to England a year after he moved to Paris, was engaged in her own unique confrontation

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[1] (Riding) Jackson scholar Carla Billiteri addresses the confusion around (Riding) Jackson's name: 'there is not yet a convention in place for referring to Riding/(Riding) Jackson by name when discussing all phases of her career […] I will use (Riding) Jackson throughout this study except when the anachronism of the name would introduce confusion. In the bibliography, all publications are collated under '(Riding) Jackson' so all are in close proximity' (Billiteri, 2009). I follow her example here.

with poetry and the 'ambiguity of language' (Wexler 1994, 193). (Riding) Jackson may seem an unexpected point of comparison, situated as she is on the edges of the canon of anglophone modernism, with an idiosyncratic poetic style that threw down a gauntlet to English-language poets who came in her wake (McGann 1992, 466–467). Yet there are striking parallels. As well as the dates I have just mentioned, (Riding) Jackson's biography mirrors Fondane's in other ways. Despite being born in America, she arrived into what was essentially Eastern European Jewish culture.[2] Like Fondane, her work has been 'under-canonized' despite its quality, range, influence and contemporary regard. As with Fondane, in the past few decades scholars have worked to recuperate and contextualize (Riding) Jackson's work (despite her own opposition at times), beginning with Joyce Wexler's 1974 study *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth*. This pursuit, it is fair to say, was the driving force in (Riding) Jackson's life. Her own abandonment of poetry was very similar to Fondane's in that it came through a disenchantment with aesthetic ideals (McGann 1992, 458).[3] Yet where he came to acknowledge the profane imperfections of language and returned to poetry as a nexus of the rational and irrational, (Riding) Jackson remained committed to a logocentric quest for 'rational meaning' (the title of the linguistic polemic co-written with her husband Schuyler Jackson and eventually published in 1997). Both she and Fondane stand at odds with modern positivist and structuralist theories of meaning, resisting what (Riding) Jackson scholar Claudia Billitteri calls 'reliance upon definitions of things from socially constructed or philosophically systematized frames of authority' (Billitteri 2009, 106).

However, where Fondane subverts language's entanglement in rationality to open up its inherent plenitude and possibility, and emphasizes its performative and relational contexts, (Riding) Jackson doubles down. Where Fondane's poetic subversions prefigure deconstruction (Fotiade 2006, 14), (Riding) Jackson insists upon a perfection of utterance grounded in an Adamic obsession with nouns: 'knowledge of the meaning of words is, basically, adequate knowledge of language: know the words (know what they mean), and all the grammatical and syntactical

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[2] 'When she met John Crowe Ransom in 1924, Miss Laura Riding Gottschalk spoke as if English were not her first language.' (Wexler 1994, 192)
[3] Without speculating, I will note here that Riding's abandonment of poetry coincided with the horrors of the 1940s, a fact that as far as I am aware has not been greatly investigated in Riding scholarship.

processes will be found deducible from the knowledge' ([Riding] Jackson and Jackson 1997, 13). Where Fondane deplores the exclusions wrought by the abstractions of conceptual thought, (Riding) Jackson ends up attacking the use of language in scientific discourse as insufficiently precise. She remains committed to the assumption that 'rationally coherent existence' is possible and necessary, and that all that is required is to determine the correct 'forms of understanding' ([Riding] Jackson and Jackson 1997, 14), looking for meaning to be 'complete, perfect and intrinsic' (Billitteri 2009, 106). Where Fondane seeks to live in the ruins of Babel with an exploration of the relational aspects of language, (Riding) Jackson triumphs an absolute referential achievement reminiscent of Adam's acts of naming.

Comparing (Riding) Jackson and Fondane is useful for several reasons, not least for the continuing work of situating Fondane within modernism: they are both complicated figures for the canon, meriting further acknowledgement yet also standing at a tangent to many of their contemporaries. They emerge from similar spheres of literary influence: not only Nietzsche (Samuels 2001, li) and Whitman (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 159), but also Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Significantly, as Fondane took on the mantle of what he saw as Rimbaud's existential work at the point where poetry failed as an ideal, (Riding) Jackson defined herself against her predecessor, her faith in rational coherence affirmed against his example ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 65). In terms of Fondane's English reception, what could be more useful than comparison with an Anglophone poet-writer – of the 'Other' tradition (Samuels 2001, xiii) – who struggled with such a similar linguistic problematic and was similarly committed in her response?[4]

The comparison of (Riding) Jackson's and Fondane's responses to the problems of poetry and language exposed in modernity is all the more useful for the fact that they were so antithetical. They can act as mirrors, each showing the opposite direction of the other. Where (Riding) Jackson's disgust at poetry's 'falseness' carried her into a project of overcoming all ambiguity in language (Wexler 1994, 193), Fondane came to understand the failure of aesthetics as an aspect of a more profound failure. (Riding) Jackson's insistence that 'anarchism is not enough' is

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[4] Alexander Dickow has studied (Riding) Jackson and her canonical status in relation to French poetry through an examination of her French-English bilingual poem *The Life of The Dead* (Dickow 2015).

opposed by Fondane's 'metaphysical anarchism': words are both insufficient and inescapable. Where (Riding) Jackson discarded poetry to plough on with the quest to make words sufficient, Fondane returned to it as a means of living with their insufficiencies.

The negative image is strengthened by the respective relationships between Fondane and (Riding) Jackson's life and their works. Where Fondane feeds the surrealistic and mythical aspects of his poetry with a committed subjectivity and lived testimony, (Riding) Jackson strives for a kind of rigour and objectivity. The Barthesian excess of writing mentioned in chapter 3 is present here too: her 'poems express the depth of her feelings by the intensity of the effort necessary to repress them' (Wexler 1994, 194). (Riding) Jackson longs for an escape from this excess where Fondane embraces it. I venture that this is evident in their relationship to their shared Jewish heritage. (Riding) Jackson effectively effaced it in her life and work, where Fondane expansively engaged with it not only as a context his poetry, but also – like Edmond Jabès – as a tradition of thought in regards to the word.

(Riding) Jackson and Fondane both rejected the primacy of form in a way that complicates their relationship, as poets, to modernity. Like Dostoevsky, they saw *le beau style* as a deception. Yet as Wexler points out in regards to her later prose attempts at perfect meaning, 'contrary to [(Riding) Jackson's] intention, her attempt to articulate what she could not express in poetry demonstrates that form is an essential part of meaning; ignoring form does not eliminate its rhetorical effects' (Wexler 1994, 193). Fondane, without regaining faith in form as a conduit to a higher truth, recognised this.

(Riding) Jackson was insistent that words should have intrinsic value. However, context, too, is an essential part of meaning, as twenty-first century linguists, in revision of some of the theories of the twentieth, are acknowledging (Everett 2017). Any utterance is always already part of discourse. Wexler argues that 'Riding's demand that we read her poems "literally, literally, literally" inevitably invites the opposite' (Wexler 1994, 194). We cannot escape words but there is always something beyond them. Where (Riding) Jackson, like Plato before her, ended up attacking poetry for not being fully committed and only playing at the truth, Fondane follows Nietzsche: it is the poet's very frivolity, their understanding that the play of

meaning is endless and depends upon the agency of all who engage in discourse, that is so valuable and deserving of commitment.

Poetry as Anti-Systematic

In her introduction to Laura (Riding) Jackson's early essays collected in *Anarchism Is Not Enough,* Lisa Samuels interprets her 'manifesto against systematic thinking' as valuing poetry as an 'asocial force' with 'saving inutility' (Samuels 2001, xviii-xix). Although the context of (Riding) Jackson's critical negotiation with the value of poetry in the 1920s was at a remove from the polemical and political territory-marking of the Parisian avant-gardes, essays such as 'Jocasta' reveal a dialogue between her underlying concerns and the philosophical politicization of poetry, most obviously with Wyndham Lewis. Just as Fondane stood against the practical and philosophical sublimation of the poetic into the social enacted by the surrealists, (Riding) Jackson insists that 'any philosophical position is irrelevant to the individual and relevant only to a symbolic mass of individuals' ([Riding] Jackson 2001, 69).[5] Samuels puts it that she sees poetry as 'a realm for engaging with unknowables, not an historical accumulation of improving points of view' (Samuels 2001, xix).

This assertion of poetry's asociality aligns (Riding) Jackson and Fondane by way of Nietzsche's territory, defending the importance of poetry's particular kind of 'frivolity' against the use of language as a means to an end.[6] 'La poésie n'est pas une fonction sociale [poetry is not a social function]', wrote Fondane in 'Mots Sauvages', 'mais une force obscure qui procède l'homme et qui le suit [but an obscure force which preceeds man and which follows him]' (Fondane 1996a, 23), while as Samuels highlights, 'in *Contemporaries and Snobs,* [(Riding) Jackson] challenges the subordination of poetry to the "social offices" of inspiriting message or compensatory pleasure' (xlvii). In other words, in their own ways they each define themselves

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[5] If the first principle of surrealism, asked Fondane in 1926, was 'l'automate psychique pur [pure psychic automation]', then '*comment la transformation s'opère-t-elle* en faveur d'une discipline, révolutionnaire il est vrai, mais de nature social, issue d'un malaise matériel [?] [*how could it be transformed* into a discipline, even a revolutionary discipline, of a social nature, stemming from a material disorder?]' (AG 47, emphasis in the original)

[6] In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche responds to Plato's characterization of poets as frivolous in the Ion dialogue by reclaiming that frivolity, against the dismissal of poetry as 'ancillary to philosophy rather than an art form in its own right' (Bett 2019).

against those 'qui pensent sauver la poésie, en la faisant passer pour un "document mental", une accoucheuse d'idéals et de nobles sentiments [who think to save poetry by making it out to be a "mental document", a midwife of ideals and noble sentiments]' (FT, 12).

Like Fondane, (Riding) Jackson also resists the intrusion of systematizing thinking in the other direction, that is to say the anchoring of individual experience to the ground of a defining framework, such as psychoanalysis. In 'Jocasta', she employs her own 'case' with the story of mispronunciations embedded in her speech due to teenage experiences of reading to a blind man with eccentric accents:

> Now, if I were a psycho-analytic individual-realist, I should symbolically refine this… it is merely an incident… I have never told it… to illustrate this or that… and in treating it in this way I am sure I am closer to the incident as it happened and as it affected me, although I am not closer to what is called the reality of the incident. (2001 60–61)

'Reality' in this instance symbolizes the conclusion posited in a predefined interpretative framework. Its ironic rejection here is not so much an absolute refusal of interpretation as a resistance to the foreclosure of meaning enacted by the application of (would-be) systematic methods. The humility of the limits of interpretation here has a resonance with Fondane's reading of the theological 'case' of Augustine and his toothache: 'Il y a plus d'humilité vraie à prier Dieu… de vous délivrer d'un affreux mal de dents… que de lui demander de nous livrer son essence intelligible [there is more true humility in praying… for deliverance from a terrible toothache… than to ask [God] to reveal his intelligible essence]' (HDH 450, EM 60). Sometimes a toothache is 'just' a toothache.

In *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (Riding) Jackson seems to value poetry for the 'absolute uncertainties' that it protects from 'pseudo-realities of achievement' (2001, l). These 'uncertainties' occur in the space that she calls the 'unreal', which is perhaps the imaginative or metaphysical, and which she would protect from thought-systems of the 'collective-real' such as Marxism or the 'individual-real' of psychoanalysis. Her definitions are somewhat slippery, and she would later abandon them along with a denunciation of the value of uncertainty. Yet a kernel of this protection of the subversive unknown would remain present in her explorations of

language through and beyond poetry. It is certainly possible to write of her approach in 1928 that she

> wants to forestall the increasing division of intellectual and artistic life into organizations based on historical and natural fact […] one way to stop such destructive analogies is to keep changing the language, to imagine it as 'unbecoming'. (Samuels 2001, xxvii)

Fondane makes a strong claim for poetry's capacity to act with epistemological violence to the same ends. In his view, the systematic divisions of 'organized' thought which became dominant in the nineteenth century, as Huysmans and others diagnosed with unease, *necessitated* the occasional Rimbaud come along and '*jeter le trouble dans l'idée que l'esprit se fait de lui-même* [throw the idea that the mind makes for itself into turmoil] (RV, 31). In order to break open the reification of thought, subversive poets such as Rimbaud wound language and piety, foregrounding the uncertainties of their own words even as they confidently assert their newness.

The (Riding) Jackson of *Anarchism Is Not Enough* and *Contemporaries and Snobs,* then, stands against 'this philosophy, this merchant-mindedness: how much have we here? what sum? and of what profit?' ([Riding] Jackson 2001, 15). Poetry seems to resist this quantification: 'the end of a poem is the poem' ([Riding] Jackson 2001, 34). The 'nothing' of poetry insisted upon by (Riding) Jackson would seem to correspond with the subversive project of Shestov, being the remainder left when the foundations of rational thought are radically questioned. Samuels glosses her 'poetic intelligence' as 'an inspired comprehension of the unknowable' (Samuels 2001, xlvii). Yet despite her defence of poetry from external ends, (Riding) Jackson's 'inspired comprehension' conflicts with Fondane's subversions of knowledge. It is closer to the claim of the poet as privileged interpreter of the irrational into the rational which Fondane attacks in the surrealists.

For Fondane, poetry performs affective subversions as well as intellectual ones. Poetry can participate in a 'sensation of the unknown' (Samuels 2001, xlvii), certainly. It can acknowledge the presence of the unknown, of '*la vie qui déborde les formes* [the life that overspills forms]'(*BEG*, 14). Poetry can enact an experience of the unknowable, can move into it, but is not for all that a comprehension or an accurate representation. (Riding) Jackson's 'poetic intelligence' seems to reject (or at

least expose the limits of) all ideals, and in this it accords with Fondane. Yet in doing so she institutes her own ideal of poetry as a space for truth, straining to surpass language's 'compromise between what it is possible to express and what it is not possible to express' (2001, 13). Eventually, she would conclude that poetry could not succeed.

Poetry's Failing

Like Rimbaud before them, (Riding) Jackson and Fondane both broke off into poetic silence at the point where they found the maxim *beauty = truth* to be unsustainable. In 1965, (Riding) Jackson made public the process of self-reflection on poetry's 'failure to be truth-speaking' ([(Riding) Jackson] Jackson 2007, 2) which she had already begun and which, along with its following concerns ('not anti-poetic but pro-linguistic' [235]), would occupy her, without conclusion, for the rest of her life. In 'The Failure of Poetry', she wrote that she 'renounced it' as 'disappointing the hopes it excites as seemingly the way of perfect human utterance, or articulate truth' (29). Like Fondane, she despaired of poetry when she saw its truth-seeking fail, when the art-for-art's-sake, Symbolist, aesthetic compensation for the world, the beauty of what (Riding) Jackson termed the 'individual-unreal', finally came to be seen as inadequate.

But inadequate in what sense? For Fondane, the ideal of truth itself became a kind of hinterland, '*l'esprit qui n'a soif que de soi* [the spirit thirsting only for itself]' (*Ulysse*, MF 71). The desire for it was not lessened, but it could never be guaranteed. The pursuit of such a guarantee is not easy to abandon. As Shestov put it, 'Plato was not content with the sources of truth… he knew that it is difficult to find 'the Father and Creator of all the universe' and that 'if one finds Him, one cannot show Him to everyone.' (Shestov 1966, 1:4)

Though (Riding) Jackson did not couch her experience in theological terms, she did not give up on the 'hope' poetry had 'excited', but transferred it, her straining, like that of Shestov's Plato, 'an attempt to overcome these difficulties as well as this impossibility' (Shestov 1966, 1:4). (Riding) Jackson's move towards a rationality of meaning abandoned poetry for 'the promise of language itself' ([Riding] Jackson and

Jackson 1997, 447). This is akin to the promise Sartre claimed for prose in his writing on Mallarmé, that it was the 'lieu naturel de l'engagement [natural site of engagement/commitment]' (Denis 2006). The hope of 'perfect utterance' is sustained in what (Riding) Jackson called 'the style of truth' (2007, 28). Carla Billitteri argues that

> In poetry's place (Riding) Jackson sought 'the open ground of general human speaking', which she came to see as a 'pure language' that could naturally and effortlessly speak the 'style' of 'truth'. As she affirmed in her first public appearance after two decades of silence, a BBC broadcast of 1962, '[F]or the practice of the style of truth to become a thing of the present, poetry must become a thing of the past' […] Poetry, she came to believe, was not only ill-suited to the unveiling of truth; its reliance on craft made poetry a greedy, material obstacle to this revelation as well. (Billitteri 2008, 332)

(Riding) Jackson clearly maintained that the possibility of language freed from material corruption, able to offer direct access to an object truth, was an achievable goal.

According to Robert Nye, (Riding) Jackson 'believed that poetry itself was exhausted… it stood revealed as never having truly possessed those possibilities for a complete propriety of word to thought which it seemed to have in the hopes of its adherents' (Nye 1994, 2). She continued to resist 'definitions of things delivered from socially constructed or philosophically systematized frames of authority' and Lisa Samuels situates this 'self-reliance' in a context of American idealism (Samuels 2001, xvii). However, this same idealism reveals itself in the expanded hope for this 'propriety'. She would come to abandon her position that 'nothing is enough' ([Riding] Jackson 2001, 132), that, as Samuels interprets, 'our knowledge of the state of emptiness – of positive 'nothing', of the poetic 'vacuum' – suffices, is enough' (Samuels 2001, lix). But though her response strived for the empirical, 'an experience of gradual learning of the full potential of language' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 179), it was underpinned by an idealistic assumption revealed in her own direct contrast of herself with Rimbaud's despair: 'I had hope, built in the terms of faith in the Good as ultimate necessity' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 65).[7]

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[7] This rationalist take on the Good and necessity, which parallels neo-platonist conceptions of cosmic order, would bear further comparison with the writings of Simone Weil. Though Weil explores the

Fondane would never have agreed with his contemporary's startling earlier conclusion that nothing could 'suffice', which could be interpreted as an injunction to imagine Sisyphus happy. He is closer to Samuels's interpretation of 'nothing is enough' as implying 'no satisfaction is possible in the ongoing, desiring self' (Samuels 2001, lix). The 'faith in the Good' as a response led (Riding) Jackson close to a condemnation of poetry aligned with Plato's *Republic*, warning against poetry's misleading distractions and cowardly 'beguilement of the soul': 'the final value of poetry is *play* – not purposively, but by organic deficiency of seriousness' ([(Riding) Jackson] Jackson 2007, 26).

Despite the Platonic overtones of such a statement and (Riding) Jackson's insistence on the promise of truth in language in general, her disillusionment with aesthetics represents a parallel to a similar stage in Fondane's movement. (Riding) Jackson's 'faith in the Good' offered her 'shelter' to the effect that 'nothing has changed for me but my judgement as to the field in which human utterance can best find its perfections' ((Riding) Jackson 2007, 65). Nonetheless, her assertion that 'the poetic shadows that veil [the truth] must be torn away' before 'the speech of truth' becomes 'a real and immediate possibility' resonates with Fondane's own disappointment in the power of artistic beauty. He arrived there by way of his own master in beauty, Baudelaire, who wrote 'the intoxication of Art is better than any other at veiling the terrors of the abyss'(Baudelaire 1869, 81, my translation). This view of art as a kind of painkiller, akin to Marx's view of religion as the opium of the people,[8] was ultimately insufficient for (Riding) Jackson and Fondane both. Neither could continue to live in 'a paradise which excludes any notion of the tomb and of destruction' (Baudelaire 1869, 81, my translation).

The image of the veil occurs in (Riding) Jackson's work as well as Baudelaire's: it is unclear whether this is a direct or unconscious inheritance. Where for Baudelaire the veil hides a terrifying sublimity, (Riding) Jackson posits an

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same desire for a justification of existence, her move is essentially mystical, abandoning the logical search in favour of one based on personal experience of divine revelation (see Basevich 2020). For Fondane, an ethical justification of necessity is also an impossibility, but, bereft of Weil's religious experience, one that leads him to his absurd revolt (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 85).

[8] That is, in (for example) Kurt Vonnegut's reading, which emphasizes Marx's famous comment on religion as opium as an empathetic statement on religion as a cultural buffer against the anguish of a miserable and otherwise meaningless existence, rather than a simplistic dismissal of religion as a mind-clouding intoxicant. This reading is similar to Lauren Berlant's idea of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011).

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objective truth waiting to be revealed. For her, ripping away the veil is a straightforward objective, opposing the 'mere human dreaming of truth' found in poetry with a will to overcome 'the embarrassment and pain of human reluctance to face in actuality the full potential of truth implicit in words' (2007, 98). She stakes everything on the idea that truth is immanently and imminently seizable. Her concerns for truth in language, which occupied the rest of her life and were never conclusive, seemed to defer questions of its content. She repeatedly asserts in her post-60s essays that her inquiries are not philosophical or critical but linguistic. And yet, from the revealing of the extra-rational impulse behind the creation of utterance inherent in the '*inspired* comprehension' of *Anarchism Is Not Enough* quoted above to the '*faith* in the promise of language' (my emphases) of *Rational Meaning* to the 'waiting for words' found in *The Telling*, her theories have an implicit messianic kernel, even if she would reject the notion and counter it with a belief in the attainability of what she calls 'the style of truth' and what is ultimately an Adamic pure language.

Although (Riding) Jackson does not confront the notion that poetry, like religion, could participate in the question of what Marx called 'the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering' (Marx 1970, introduction) her critique of it dovetails with the crisis experienced by Fondane in the moment of his loss of poetic voice: 'poetry is a sleep-maker for that which sits up late in us listening for the footfall of the future on today's doorstep' ((Riding) Jackson 1973, 11). Fondane too came to reject his experience of the art as the false promise of a dreamlike, childish happiness. In *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* he explores this idea through Baudelaire's image of poetry as a child's toy (BEG 133).   Yet for Fondane the collapse of poetry as consolation and the rejection of its purpose as a distraction led him in the opposite direction to (Riding) Jackson. The messianic import of her listening was contained for her by a kind of willed idealism which kept irrationality at bay with a faith in the perfection of language. While she discarded poetry in order to reassert the triumph of language as absolute, he saw the failure of poetry as evidence of the groundlessness of all thought, as well as its affective failure: 'la vie est impuissante à atteindre le concept; le concept est impuissant à soulager la vie [life is powerless to attain the concept; the concept is powerless to comfort life]' (BEG 163).

Pursuit of Truth

The Laura Riding of *Anarchism Is Not Enough* shares a project with the (Riding) Jackson of *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*, seeking 'the way… to full exercise by human beings of their truth-function' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 43). (Riding) Jackson the poet already held a latent dissatisfaction with poetry-as-dream. Samuels argues that '(Riding) Jackson's poems… are meant to prick the reader to self-consciousness rather than to function as dream events (for writer *or* reader)' (Samuels 2001, lii-liii). The apophatic contradiction of that 'compromise' of poetic expression was well within her awareness in 1928. Her rejection of poetry's soporific qualities was nothing less than a rejection of the compromise. 'At stake', she wrote in 1972, 'is the effort to do otherwise with words than can be done within the range of the respectable or the *accepted in imperfection*' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 101, my emphasis).

In (Riding) Jackson's view, poetry could only ever be an acceptance of imperfection. Its pathways to self-consciousness ultimately contained too many aesthetic distractions and dead-ends. Her stakes remained the same, but the faith in perfectibility had been transferred from poetics to linguistics. Her broaded search represented a refusal to deal with the materiality of words themselves. It is fascinating that her move towards a kind of science of language takes her in this Platonic direction, when compared to Fondane's warning that the notion of unsullied truth tends towards a valuing of ideas over existence.

Despite (Riding) Jackson's insistence on a strict difference between her writing and philosophy – 'I dealt with [my subjects] personally and not philosophically' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 78) – the idealism which grounds her expression contextualizes her valuing of what is most 'human', and for (Riding) Jackson what is most valuable in humanity is abstraction. Her pursuit of truth leads into a problematic similar to Sartre's pursuit of the authentic, and similarly never reaches a conclusion. Her prickings at 'self-consciousness' can be revealingly juxtaposed with Fondane's own philosophical and poetic attempts to provoke self-reflection in his audience. When Fondane's dramatic poetry, with its contradictory voices and interpellations,

sometimes produces effects close to Brechtian alienation, or uses apostrophe with hints of Baudelaire to implicate the reader, it does so in order to startle consciousness into awareness of its contexts and, at least momentarily, strip away the buttresses of rational thought which allow being to rest in complacency. (Riding) Jackson may share a similar project of tearing open received ideas, but with, instead, a confident faith that in doing so she is moving closer to the revelation of hidden truth.

Through their experiences of poetry failing and 'the deceit that [its] commitments to beauty always entail', as (Riding) Jackson scholar Jerome McGann puts it, (McGann 1992, 465) (Riding) Jackson and Fondane share many of the same premises. The difference in their responses is succinctly opened up in a paragraph (Riding) Jackson wrote in 1967 as part of an introduction to her work *Epilogue*, which was written in the latter part of the 1930s as she moved towards abandoning poetry. At that stage she still considered poetry a rational means to immediate truth. In 1967 she condemned its mediation, but articulated the ideal of a rational linguistic immediacy she would never let go:

> Only by the government of the Word can human existence become consistent with itself, break through the barrier of inconsistency of efforts dividing it ever from itself as the Good in the form of articulate life. Where to find this government? The search for it has been philosophy's most serious object, and religions' most serious passion; and when, as now, human beings decide to attempt nothing more of *that* sort, fearing to come face to face with ultimate failure, they are all inconsistency – and use their human talent to piece themselves together from moment to moment. ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 166).

Here she parts categorically with Fondane's confrontation with catastrophe.

To her 'government' must be opposed Fondane's *'anarchisme métaphysique* [metaphysical anarchism]' (Salazar-Ferrer 2008, 86). It is exactly the challenge and the pathos of 'piec[ing] themselves together from moment to moment' that Fondane attempts to accept, despite the constant desire to go beyond that 'inconsistency'. The concordance of their premises is worth re-emphasizing. Unlike his surrealist or Catholic contemporaries who appropriated poetry in their claims to the status of gatekeepers of the unconscious or mystical revelation, (Riding) Jackson saw the same exposed fault lines of meaning as Fondane. Like Simone Weil, her own work of decreation – unbecoming – left only a panic for the good. Unlike Weil, she smothered

this panic with an overarching – though not systematic – project of rationality. In the most mischievous of interpretations, she could be cast as a kind of poetic Robespierre, sweeping away befuddling ideas to usher in a new age of rationality that nonetheless rests on faith in a Supreme Being (or supreme Good) whose rational existence is proclaimed all the more fervently for its intangibility.

Although she originally defended poetry from the pressure of social utility, (Riding) Jackson eventually took that pressure to another extreme, pushing what Fondane called '*la conscience honteuse du poète* [the poet's shamed conscience]' to what amounts to a metaphysical accusation of truth-failure: 'it stops short of literal truth-achievement in a rhetoric of truth-love: its history is more a record of propaganda for the effort of "truth", in loving word-detail, than a testament of accumulative human realization of the truth-objective' ([(Riding) Jackson] Jackson 2007, 239–240). The earlier Benjaminian engagement with the unknown was rejected for 'an accumulation of points of view' – not subjective viewpoints, but gradual uncoverings of 'the truth'. The nobility of such a purpose is not in question, and Samuels argues that (Riding) Jackson presages writers like Kathy Acker with the goal to '*speak up*, to make human *attention* the central event of the literary act' ((Riding) Jackson 2001, xxxiii), a goal she carried past her use of poetry.

Her use of 'truth' as a concept conflicts with Fondane's ultimate belief in the need for poetry, but she aligns with him in her resistance to the abuse of language by systematic agendas. Her desire for autonomous language is haunted by longing:

       Were this not a poem
I would speak on speaking
[…]
That saved itself for the other, others
[…]
Needed no grace of time to rescue it
From total loss.

Or so I would speak, so write,
Endeavour to construct, I mean,
Something binding in our understandings
In a reality of words, selves, others,
More utterable, enterable, occupiable, open.

([Riding] Jackson 2007, 243)

(Riding) Jackson refuses to give up on the pursuit of a saving Truth. Her meta-poetic mode here is strikingly similar to ways in which Fondane explores his dissatisfaction with poetry while writing it: a foreword (written with ironic reverential capitalization, a style Fondane often employs), modal verbs, conjectures and negations. He also shares a desire for the 'reality of words' she envisions. But he does not share her faith in its actualization.

Against Despair

It is tempting to read (Riding) Jackson's assertion that 'the total import of what I have to say is a happy one… the speech of truth… is a real and immediate possibility' (2007, 54) as a nonchalant but resolute denial of doubt and tragedy. From *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (which Samuels identifies with the anti-tradition of modernist 'Other' criticism) to *The Telling,* she maintains a searching and fastidious pursuit of the relationship between the individual and truth. Despite acknowledgement of the difficulties of consummating that relationship, her prose maintained an exclusion of failure or anguish by its consistent commitment to the apparently imminent expression of 'the fundamentals of being' and 'an exact self' (1973, 59). Although she sought to bring the problems of expression back to the experience of the individual, her firm belief in an abstract 'Subject' of truth to be apprehended left the individual in an abstracted position while that apprehension was yet to occur.

Despite her rejection of the fragmentations of science and materialism, her own search for truth, like Rimbaud's (in Fondane's view at least), ultimately steered close to a kind of positivism in seeking to rationally capture knowledge. Like most positivisms, it depended upon a foundation of assumption. Her linguistics, with its 'faith in the Good as ultimate necessity' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 65) veils its own faith-based guarantee by hiding it in plain sight as a rational imperative. The intensity of the exclusion of existential affect from (Riding) Jackson's rigorous grapples with meaning is given pathos by her suicide attempt, as well as the coincidence of her abandonment of poetry and the coming of war. If read in these terms, her post-poetic project may be understood as a determined rejection of despair.

For Fondane, following Shestov, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, the denial of the possibility of despair necessitates a denial of the infinite excess, not to

mention messiness, of reality. Poetry indeed contained the danger of becoming a distracting illusion, yet in its capacity to consciously express something of the experience of this gap it nonetheless retained a subversive potential for affirmation. In the midst of despair, paradoxically,

> il consiste, pour le poète, à ne pas désespérer, à persévérer, à croire en la mystérieuse vertu de la poésie, à la vertu existentielle qu'elle supporte, et cela dans la mesure même, précisément, où il ne la comprend pas [it consists, for the poet, of not despairing, persevering, believing in the mysterious virtue of poetry, the existential virtue that it bears, and in the very measure, in fact, that he or she does not understand it] (FT, 18)

Where (Riding) Jackson hoped for the realization of an ultimate truth that would compensate for false truths which seem to offer objective frameworks, Fondane saw such a hope as messianic and beyond human scope. It was precisely poetry's capacity to escape linguistic and conceptual rationalism which allowed it to confront this situation.

Though (Riding) Jackson despaired of poetry and could not accept persevering in despair, could not accept the trace of the real among the abstractions of poetry nor admit the operations of abstraction into the positivism of linguistics, her poetry as Riding haunts her life's projects. In *Ode to the Triumph of Bodily Intelligence* she wrote

> Be blessed, passionate intelligence,
> In this prime, that has uncovered
> The fond geography of ghosts.
> You are enchanted against ruin
> By that you are but ruin
> And nothing but ruin can love or know. (quoted in Samuels 2001, lvii)

These wistful lines attest to the escape of the mind from the corruption of existence, an escape finally rejected as sterile. Yet the 'ruins' of the imagination can be read another way. To read 'ruin' in the final line as the subject of the phrase would be to affirm the resurgence of the existent, imperfect in utterance. In fact this imperfection is an inescapable condition of experience. If, as Samuels puts it, 'the languaged self walks through the privilege of historical ruin' (lviii), the eternal waiting for a soteriological linguistics offers no consolation to those without faith in

it. (Riding) Jackson's 'geography of ghosts' may refer to the shadow-play of the mind, but the lives reduced to shadow by modernity's abstractions remain as underserved by scientific language as they are by poetry-as-nothingness. The constant deferral of the quenching of metaphysical thirst entails the need for some means of existential attestation in the meanwhile.

The tension between the limitations of existence and the transcendent possibilities of poetry was unsustainable for (Riding) Jackson.

> I had accepted poetry at the hands of history as the Somehow that would rescue words and their speakers from the ever-insufficient speaking of impermanent time-cramped life – as all poets who take the name not from self-concerned ambition must in their dedicatory spirit accept it; in pressing upon the poetic possibilities of utterance for evidence of the actual feasibility of saying poetically what appears to be otherwise not entirely sayable, I was doing no more than what poetry – as a pursuit of genuine high human purpose – has always called poets to do. (2007, 66–67)

For her it seems that in terms of 'genuine high human purpose' there was no alternative to the pursuit of perfect utterance and that living with 'ever-insufficient speaking' was intolerable. Whatever Nietzschean subversions had stimulated her poetry, she insisted upon the rationality of seeking a moral guarantee. The paring knife of her prose left no room for the consideration that not only was beauty insufficient as a means to reach truth, but truth itself could be deficient as a goal. That transcendent truth could be not only untranslatable, but absent.

If other values, other possibilities, for poetry exist, for Fondane they cannot be absorbed into a project of enlightenment, or, in fact, ever adequately rationally expounded. He was not satisfied with poetry as a 'Nothing' either, but while the failure of its 'high' purpose initially seemed aporetic, the undefined impulse to write imposed upon him the consideration that perhaps it was not the means that was to be abandoned but rather the goal. He saw that poetry could perhaps offer something other than the exposition of a hidden truth, or a sterile escape. In the absurd confrontation with the 'laws' of necessity or non-contradiction, art allowed a release

from objectivity and a potential space for the *'liberté de mon triste moi'* (BEG 294).[9] Along with the rejection of poetics as an aesthetic means of revelation of an otherwise unsayable truth came an understanding that a generalized theory of poetry was impossible.

The Self that Sings

Instead of a theory, a kind of anti-aesthetics predicated on the communication of affective experience hove into view for Fondane. What if art's expressive power was not merely vehicular, but

> …une activité créatrice qui alors même qu'elle semble emprunter une idée, s'en empare et la bouleverse au point d'en rendre la signification méconnaissable? Une idée vécue par une douleur, est-ce toujours la même idée? Une idée portée par la joie, ne nous dit-elle rien de plus que son contenu logique? [a creative activity that while it seems to carry across an idea, in fact seizes it and convulses it until its meaning is barely recognisable? Is an idea lived through pain still the same idea? Does an idea carried through joy tell us nothing more than its logical content?] (BEG 298)

What if poetry were not an aesthetic move towards the communication of objective truth but a need to 'montrer le moi qui chante [show the self that sings]' (BEG 253)? This statement would need to be distinguished from 'self-concerned ambition'. That is, not an argument for poetry as the vaunting of biography for fame, but an exposure of the affective experience of life left wanting by the failure of idealisms to provide metaphysical security. An attempt to honour immanence despite the anguish caused by the failure of the quest for transcendence, whether theological or linguistic.

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[9] Fondane's use of the term *triste moi* is complex. It originates in Schopenhauer as the 'miserable self' (Schopenhauer 2011, 264) which the idealist seeks to escape, which Fondane reads as a tension in Baudelaire's work. Without denying the reality of suffering, Fondane inverts the value-judgement of the self as miserable in the sense of worthless. It is the only self we have. As Baldine Saint Girons notes, 'when Fondane evokes the "miserable self" […] he does so with great irony […] "there are no others" [FT 253] […] this complex self that wonders and panics, that suspends itself and finds itself again, is the only representative of our body: our life is bound to it. This self is my face, my sadness and my joy, one day to be a pile of ashes from which a clump of nettles will grow. All life quivers in it'. (Girons 2017, 109, my translation). This is the existential starting point from which Fondane works towards poetry as a kind of '"strange truth" which opposes rational truth' (Girons 2017, 109).

Where (Riding) Jackson retained her anti-systematic position through insistence on the possibility of immediate truth in language, Fondane's 'post-silence' statements on the uses of poetry are necessarily guarded and consciously apophatic. His wish was not so much to 'établir une doctrine nouvelle [establish a new doctrine]' as to 'affaiblir celle qui a cours [weaken the one currently in place]' (BEG 296). In *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* he affirms the existential grounding of this resistance to the categorization of poetics:

> La poésie est toujours *autre chose* que ce à quoi on tente de la réduire, elle n'est, finalement, réductible qu'à l'acte de son créateur (sans qu'on sache exactement ce qu'il est) et débordant toujours sa définition. Quand on parle de la poésie, on évite toujours sa définition. Quand on parle de la poésie, on évite toujours de se souvenir qu'elle est faite par *quelqu'un*. Comment alors n'aurait-il pas *quelque chose* à dire?

> [Poetry is always *something else* than what one tries to reduce it to. In the end it is reducible only to the act of its creator (without our knowing exactly what it is) and always exceeds its definition. When one speaks of poetry, one always avoids defining it. When one speaks of poetry, one always avoids remembering that it is made by *someone*. How then could it not have *something* to say?] (BEG 298, emphasis in the original)

Such a perspective is not to be confused with a partition of form and content. Rather, it is saying something about the communicative impulse and poetry's place as a response to the insufficiency of other forms of speaking – not as a sufficient answer in itself such as (Riding) Jackson searched for, but as a possibility of saying *something,* even though that saying be incomplete.

For Fondane, poetry had to participate in an interrogation of its own *why* of speaking, even though, without external guarantee or goal, this meant an exploration of the impossibility of defining that *why*. The truths of poetry are inseparable from its masks and lies, and resist the circumscription of an attempted science of Truth. The (Socratic) daemonic aspect of the decision to speak is always supplementary to the process and objectives of speaking. Beyond (Riding) Jackson's disenchantment with the techniques of poetry, amidst the restless anxiety of truth, the trace of her impulse remains: 'the destruction of poetry as a tradition would not destroy poetry itself', she wrote in *Contemporaries and Snobs* ([Riding] Jackson 2001, xix). Nor, apparently, would the diktat of her own intellectual Platonic Republic. Surely her own returns to

poetry betray an impulse of speaking which exceeds the capacity of *rational* truth-seeking. As Tom Fisher puts it, 'For (Riding) Jackson […] it is *as philosophy* that poetry is abandoned' (2017, 58).

The suspicion of poetry's obfuscatory potential places Fondane and (Riding) Jackson on shared ground. A concern for the stakes of human speaking, against the inadequate compensations of art for art's sake, seemingly draws them closer. Ultimately however this closeness sharpens the contrast between (Riding) Jackson's idealised quest for immediate truth and Fondane's anti-idealistic position. Where (Riding) Jackson cedes the ground of poetry to philosophy and linguistics, Fondane moves in the opposite direction. For him (idealist) philosophy also acts as a false comfort in the same way as poetry in its escapist or consolotary guises: if a 'metaphysical proposition… gives your mind satisfaction', then

> vous êtes certes un philosophe ; mais vous n'êtes pas, ou n'êtes plus, ou pas encore, un existant – au sens existentiel du mot […] 'Il ne faut pas, écrivait Kierkegaard dans son *Journal*, que mon histoire avec elle s'évapore en poésie' ; et il entendait par là: en philosophie hégélienne. (LE 61)

> you are certainly a philosopher, but you are not, or are no longer, or not yet, an existent – in the existential sense of this term […] Kierkegaard writes in his *Journal*: 'My history with her must not *evaporate into poetry*', by which he means: into Hegelian philosophy (EM 28)

While (Riding) Jackson is far from being a Hegelian philosopher, her turn to linguistics would surely be understood by Fondane as a turn away from the questions of being an 'existent'.

Yet although their approaches cannot be reconciled, (Riding) Jackson's commitment to 'life-fulfilling speaking' (2007, 60) parallels Fondane's own efforts. His endeavour to keep Kierkegaardian or Shestovian questioning alive in poetry is precisely a means of resisting their 'evaporation': every rational effort to finalize such speaking in fact betrays it. (Riding) Jackson wrote that she 'moved; and I think I am much closer, for having chosen my own movement, to keeping the ultimate appointment I have with others – we all have with one another…' (2007, 166). She situates her quest in the same existential context of waiting as Fondane. The difference is that he, along with Kafka, has accepted that 'Sunday will never end' (EM, 2). In confronting the poet's 'shameful conscience/shamed consciousness', he

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turned away from rationally establishing the conduits of truth and towards existential testimony: an affirmation of life, the worthwhileness of listening. Facing the impossibility of ultimate definition he sought to reckon with the implications of suffering and joy for meaning.

Both writers attempted to join meaning and expression while avoiding getting caught up with the 'mechanics of magic-making' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 26) for their own sake. Though she rejected poetry, (Riding) Jackson also rejected despair and held firmly that the 'margin of speaking-achievement to be crossed' ([Riding] Jackson 2007, 66) was almost within reach. Perhaps she considered herself a worker of a linguistic form of Benjaminian weak messianic force, on the point of redeeming the almost-truths of poetry with the exposition of the linguistics of Truth. She sought to 'treat of main things of being, in thought & expression from a position of self-reliance as against reliance upon definitions of things from socially constructed or philosophically systematized frames of authority' ([Riding] Jackson 2001, xvii). These words could equally apply to Fondane, but where (Riding) Jackson considered that such an independence would lead to the appearing-through of *true* Truth, Fondane saw endless worldly groundlessness. (Riding) Jackson was led through the individual consciousness to a rejection of the particular for the universal, where Fondane sought to negotiate identity and contingency.

The imperfectibility of the poem was unacceptable for (Riding) Jackson and countered by a striving for a higher perfection. For Fondane, such striving was stricken with impossibility, and the poem's very imperfectibility made it appropriate for exploring the pathos of this impasse. He would surely have viewed (Riding) Jackson's linguism as another form of idealist abstraction. The bifurcation of their paths is evinced in their own attitudes to their oeuvres as they developed. (Riding) Jackson insisted upon the totality of her work, its movement towards the truth requiring an encyclopedic illumination: 'her poems are one poem', writes Robert Nye (Nye 1994, 7) and her prose is similarly totalizing (though still unsystematic), by her benchmark. Fondane, on the other hand, viewed his poems as traces, fragments, to be abandoned (and revisited) but never completed. Speaking can be on the side of life, but never completely fulfil it. The final truth is never arrived at, never immediate, and the creation of poetry is the creation of an *édition sans fin.*

Jerome McGann writes that (Riding) Jackson 'brought the practice of poetry to a crisis' and claims that 'later writers who have not at least attempted to meet its challenge risk being seen…as trivial' (McGann 1992, 466). McGann offers an alternate view to her personal responses to the challenges of beauty and truth, arguing for 'eradicating the idea that the postpoetical (Riding) Jackson has been seeking a transcendental ground of truth' (McGann 1992, 466). Other eminent (Riding) Jackson critics would seem to disagree, as Carla Billitteri arguably does, citing, for example, (Riding) Jackson's statement in *The Telling*: 'What I have aimed at [i.e. 'normal diction'] is an ideal. It is not my invention, but a linguistically ordained ideal […] outside of it there is only place for saying what is mad or wicked to say' (quoted in Billitteri 2009, 96).

Perhaps the judgement of whether or not (Riding) Jackson's search is transcendental rests upon an interpretation of the concept of hidden truth and whether such an absolute reality could ever be immanent. Even if we accept McGann's interpretation, many of her contemporaries (such as Fondane or the Dadaists) were already responding to the contradictions of poetry from within, breaking and reforming their poetics as they did so.[10] In doing so they certainly made a linguistic turn of the kind McGann identifies, yet in refusing (or finding themselves unable) to abandon poetry despite its failures they were doing something *else* from (Riding) Jackson's post-poetic linguistic project. They were not clinging on to the illusory comforts of beauty either, but groping in the dark of inspiration, testimony and performance – not only acknowledging the imprisoning aspects of language, but gesturing towards the horizons beyond it. Perhaps this is the territory (Riding) Jackson herself arrived upon in *The Telling*.

In chapter 9 I will return to these horizons to better explore their non-secular resonances (Rodger 2015), leaving behind the measures of (Riding) Jackson (and the question of to what extent they are ultimately empirical or poetical), and comparing Fondane with a writer who shares his desires of linguistic expansion at the threshold

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[10] McGann's argument against a transcendental reading of (Riding) Jackson's project is also complicated by the ethical dimension, the 'faith in the Good' which she uses to distinguish herself so sharply from Rimbaud, that ur-predecessor of dilemmas in modernist poetics. The question of who defines what is 'mad or wicked' is once again the question of Plato's Republic, and the refusal to assume a transcendental ethics informs both existential philosophy and the concurrent proliferation of subversive modernist poetics in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, from Baudelaire and Lautréamont to Fondane and many of his contemporaries.

of existence and divinity: Edmond Jabès. For now (Riding) Jackson has provided a foil to elucidate the linguistic failure and poetic revolt of Fondane's break with and return to poetry. It is to his poetry that I will now fully turn.

PART II

Chapter 5

Pas chez lui sur cette terre: Disconsolation in *L'Exode*

L'Exode is an exemplary text for reading the 'mood' of disconsolation discussed in the thesis introduction, because it unites worldly and metaphysical anguish in a context of exile. Its poetic expression alchemizes Fondane's broader existential concerns into a sustained engagement with the limits of language and the desire to communicate. The use of different 'characters' across the poem mediates the destructive impact of catastrophe while simultaneously registering its fragmentizing force. In the midst of this mediated chaos, past, present and future collide with imagined times as the poem confronts a breakdown in meaningful narratives of history. *L'Exode* also contributes reflexively to Fondane's interrogation of the role of imaginative art in exposing and exploring disconsolation.

Voices

> Le jour de Colère est venu et chaque pierre est une bouche
> [The day of Anger is here and each stone is a mouth]

> (MF 182)

L'Exode develops through a plethora of voices. Polyvocality and heteroglossia allow Fondane to emphasize the specificity of separate instances of disconsolation while simultaneously extending them into a plurality. This multiplicity both connects, creating identifications across time and space, and fragments, performing the effects of catastrophe. In his 'Afterword', Fondane refers to it as a 'poème dramatique *à plusieurs voix* [dramatic poem in *several voices*]' (MF 207). Unlike famous polyvocal modernist texts such as *The Waste Land*, the poem gives the impression of having some traditional formal structure, with the titled characters (titled, but not named – e.g. the chorus, the narrator, a priest, a man) sometimes recurring. Yet it is not a play or a dramatic poem in the sense of a story with a narrator. Instead it is as if the text were written in the ruins of some older dramatic form: a Greek tragedy perhaps – yet

the irony is that the catastrophe of the work's circumstances has arrived before its *dramatic* catastrophe and precluded it. It is written in the ruins of civilization and of language.

There are dramatic titles, including for a chorus which appears intermittently, but there is no clear dramatic shape – instead, a fusion of pastiched Hebraic poetry (which itself contains dramatic elements such as titles and was often written to be chanted), Greek choruses and narrators and a grab-bag of other elements are juxtaposed. There is also a wide-ranging heteroglossia, with a switch in registers from religious incantation to barrack-room slang to medieval ballad to Biblical song. It is also longer than Eliot's poem, at around 60 small-poetry-book pages, adding to the play-like feel. However, there are many parts where the division of voices is disturbed and becomes ambiguous, at points even cacophonous. An 'I' sometimes intercedes in and among the dramatic forms, very much more in the style of lyric than soliloquy (we will come back to the status of this lyric voice in the next chapter). Moreover, in the middle of the work is an 'Intermède' with 18 individually numbered poems which slip between an 'I', a 'we' and passive narration. This section dislocates the structure, multifarious as it is, of the rest of the work and its Biblical themes, with a direct treatment of the experience of the 1940 German invasion of France.

The voices of *L'Exode* make assertions that are then subverted by other voices which cut across them. Despite the instability of the demarcation and status of different voices in the poem, the unusual, 'ruined' dramatic structure distinguishes it from the ebb and flow of voices in Eliot, Joyce or Woolf, for example, or from the splintered voices which make up the self in the work of Mina Loy or Dorothy Richardson. In its author's own words,

> C'est un poème dramatique *à plusieurs voix*. Cela explique l'emploi, ici et là, de formes et d'intentions tenues pour périmées en poétique – sonnets, ballades, odes, pastiches, voire de formes remontant à certains psaumes davidiens (alphabet sacré). La poésie dramatique exige des caractères, elle se doit de revêtir chaque personnage de l'expression où, le mieux, éclate sa manière d'être. Les formes fixes, par opposition aux formes libres, instituent un dialogue où celui qui parle décline son identité tout de suite.

> [It is a dramatic poem in *several voices*. This explains the use, here and there, of forms and intentions considered outdated within poetics – sonnets, ballades, odes, pastiches, even forms going back to certain Davidic psalms

(the sacred alphabet). Dramatic poetry requires characters, its duty is to dress
up each one in the form of expression which best causes its essence to shine
forth. Fixed forms, as opposed to free forms, establish a dialogue wherein
the one who speaks immediately discloses their identity.] (MF 207)

The voices speak of connected narratives (or at least connected themes), but the fact
they mostly do not actually interpellate each other means the narrative does not fully
cohere. There is irony in his assertion that forms establish a speaker's identity. In
L'Exode the forms vary even within the speech of a particular speaker, as though
identity were unstable. Many of these identities are vague: 'a man' (MF 171) , 'the
voice in the desert' (MF 202), or simply without name (e.g. the sonnet at MF 165).
The bureaucratic formulation of 'décliner son identité' recalls the too-present regime
of document checks Fondane was living under. The poem's discernible but marred,
incomplete identities indicate an indeterminability both ruined and containing a
vitality beyond bureaucratic categories. The Babylonian guards can name their
captives ('Chante. Juif!', MF 190), but they cannot define them.

For Fondane the ruins of civilization (both figurative, in terms of cultural
breakdown, and literal, in terms of the chaos of war) expose an essential existential
disorientation and 'adriftness'. The lyric voice, the voices of the chorus and those of
the Hebrew letters, which speak in two sections which bookend the work, all ask
anguished questions in search of meaning and purpose. The context and expression of
these questions vary from immediate personal concerns to mystical interrogations of
abstract spirituality. Thus the spread of voices manifests a kind of universality (or at
least plurality) of disconsolation, underlining the lack of refuge anywhere (see
Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 55). 'Qui veut monter dans les ténèbres? [Who wants to climb
among the shadows?]' the Aleph asks itself at the beginning of the poem, before the
Beth utters 'Je cherche en un moi qui coule… le dieu qui ne coule pas [I seek within
an I that flows… the god that flows not]' (MF 154, CO 145). The letters, talking
across one another, attest to a fluidity that allows no rest, even in language, the literal
Alpha of thought. In giving them voice, Fondane both centres and destabilizes the
very foundations of language.

This crosstalk of the literal characters of the alphabet is paralleled by the
clashing of more embodied voices, which manifest in the Biblical exiles who
compose the Chorus and their guards, as well as Fondane-the author-the narrator in

the *Interlude* section. The *sotto voce* musings of the speakers by the fire (if they even speak aloud) are juxtaposed with the drunken singing of the guards; which is followed by a four-line 'Envoi';[1] then a miniature version of the Song of Songs, beautiful in its simplicity, which trembles around the campfire (sung by a nameless exile, a dead ancestor, a spirit?); this is interrupted by the half-hearing guards who demand a song of their captives, which turns *its* address to the guards towards God in his absence ('Rompez nos chaînes… Celles qui nous lient | à cette terre' [Break our chains… These, that tie us | to this earth]'); which is interrupted once more: 'C'est alors que les gardes crachèrent sur notre voix [At this the guards spat at our voices]' (MF 192), and so on. The voices subvert and redirect each other, speaking around the same subject of God's abandonment of humanity without agreeing or even establishing truly reciprocal dialogue.

The heteroglossic deployment of different forms reinforces the semiotic instability. The voice lamenting the lack of peace (MF 186–187) is written in the first-person plural prose-poetry of the Choruses, though it is given no such title, pulling us back into Babylon *in medias res*. The drinking song is overtly Villonesque verse, a sonnet if we take each line for a hemistych, though its syllables drunkenly overstep the alexandrine, and manages to combine pathos and bathos in pastiche lines like 'sous quelles neiges sont les ans? [what snows have covered up the years?]' (MF 187), which reminds us that loneliness and angst may be found even in the tavern and yet seems maudlin given the plight of their captives.

The guards overlay lewd archaicisms with the slang of 20th-century soldiers (another reconfiguring of voice which adds to the palimpsestic effect for the reader): 'Où sont les bistrots, les casse-croûte | où les vieux boxons d'antan [Where are the pubs, the fish and chips, | the knocking-shops of yesteryear]' (MF 187). The guards of Babylon use not only modern French – 'bistrots' – but the earlier 'boxon' ('fish and chips' is an attempt to render 'casse-croûte' into an appropriate English register). Bathos is added to the irony already present in Villon's *Ballade des dames du temps jadis*. Two expressions of disconsolation are thus expressed side by side, and the contrast is increased by the differences in register.

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[1] This 'Envoi' is another instance of formal indeterminability – does it round off the Interlude, which seemed to already be over? It seems addressed to the 'audience', though it is not given the title of Chorus, standing outside of the rest of the text. Its subject and bodily statuses are uncertain.

Around the middle of *L'Exode*, the eighteenth section of the *Interlude* is followed by one of the typographic black diamonds which have been used as section breaks earlier in the work. The new line falls with exquisite ambiguity: 'La nuit descend comme autrefois [night falls as it used to do]' (MF 186). Who speaks? The description of the scene suggests an omniscient third-person narration. Is this night the night of France falling upon refugees on the road? Or are we back with the Babylonian exiles, or somewhere else entirely? Time telescopes – *whose* 'autrefois' (which means 'once', or 'in days gone by,'or 'once upon a time')? Six lines later, we meet a first person plural pronoun. Who is being addressed? The reader? The unnamed community of the '*nous*'? Then a 'Gardes!' breaks out of an ellipsis and collapses us back into the Hebrew exile. The guards are addressed, yet the address is ambiguous, the speaker(s)' attention wandering as if in a dream. This is the wish of what the Jews do not dare to demand, that the guards cease their drunken carousing to give reign to the contemplative space of night:

Cessez vos clameurs insolentes	Stop your insolent clamouring
qui éloignent la mort comme le feu	that keeps death at bay as the fire
les loups,	does the wolves,
les chansons où le désir	those songs where desire grinds
grince des dents	its teeth
où la soif se réveille plus grande	where thirst wakes up greater
que la faim	than hunger
où l'homme se retourne contre lui-	where man turns against himself
même et crie	and cries out
… où la nuit s'émiette comme ces	… where night crumbles like the
pains rassis	stale bread
que l'on donne à manger aux	that's fed to sacred doves.
colombes sacrées.	(MF 187)

The speaker's resistance to the songs of their persecutors actually makes evident the vitality of those songs, and by way of that vitality maps all human songs ('il n'est de chanson que l'humaine'; MF 188), despite their differences in tone, aesthetic, sincerity and dignity, upon the place of anguished thirst the drinking songs betray. Night fragments through the fragmentation of voices.

The boundaries between each narrating voice and knowledge of who is speaking are not completely clear. The peace, even salvation, the Jews long for is not

to be found in their songs either, despite the beauty and pathos of the version of the Song of Solomon which the reader is privileged to encounter among the sleepless prisoners, on the following page. Thirst, desire and 'crying out' – that is to say, making a sound against silence with no assurance of being heard or understood – are conditions of speaking, whether the speaker focuses on mundane or on spiritual concerns. These lines speak, directly in their words and indirectly by way of their placement in the work, to its shifting voices and the shifting status of its voices. They are even a dramatization of silence: these lines, ostensibly addressed to the guards, must be read as *sotto voce*. They are heard only by their own speaker, the reader and the night.

Single and Multiple voices

While Fondane's other poems also engage with myth and Jewish culture ('Juif, naturellement, tu étais juif, Ulysse [a Jew, naturally you were a Jew, Ulysses]' MF 20; Fondane 2017, 11), it is the use of characters in *L'Exode* that allows him to fully deploy that potential, even when the 'character' is a voice in the night. The variation of both form and register makes the entrance of the Song of Songs especially powerful. His version of the Biblical song is made fresh in the simple, everyday language of its 'translation' ('je suis ici, je suis partout', calls the voice of the Beloved, 'comme duvet de pissenlit [I am here, I am everywhere | like dandelion seeds]' MF 189) yet carries a timelessness in its music, which Fondane accentuates formally with varied end rhymes and with refrains ('ouvre-moi | (que mon coeur, que mon coeur a de joie) [open to me | (my heart, my heart sings joyfully)]' [MF 189]).

In some interpretations, the Song of Songs is an emblematic poem of disconsolation, articulating the 'agonies of separation' (Kehoe 1952, 339) experienced not only by a woman for a man she loves but by the people of Israel for God, whose renewed covenant is looked to in the song's nuptial consummation – an ending which fails to appear in *L'Exode*.[2] Through its admixture of beauty and tragedy, the sacred and the despoiled and absence and presence, which extend beyond

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[2] Scriptual status aside, the Song of Songs, like *L'Exode*, also occupies a liminal formal status between poetry and drama, as Keith Bosley points out in a succinct survey of its interpretative history, from Jewish and Christian allegory for the relationship between the people and God or between Christ and the church to Romantic folkloric interpretations and modern reaffirmations of eroticism (Bosley 1975).

the narrator as lover or seeker of God to a condition of loss and searching which parallels the experience of living through any catastrophe. The search for metaphysical solace is fused with worldly affect through the motif of the heart ('que mon coeur, que mon coeur a de peine [my heart, my heart is in pain]' MF 189). Here, too, contrasting voices interweave and miss each other, and the Beloved's disembodied call adds all the more anguish to the material condition of the searcher. Her lines 'Les gardes de nuit m'ont trouvée | (que ma chair, que ma chair est blessée) [The city watchmen found me |(my flesh, how my flesh is wounded)]' MF (189) once more entangle different dimensions of disconsolation, not only touching back to the mythologised Jewish captives in Babylon but also to those bodies who were similarly suffering in the 1940s.

Despite the weight of his own persecution pressing on the poem, Fondane's use of 'characters' spreads the load, preventing his own voice from being crushed by the story it must attempt to tell. These lines 'spoken' by the Qoph may be read as the address of an individual 'soul' to an absent God, but also as a meditation on the work itself:

COPH	QOPH
Écoute mon cri dans la nuit	Hear my cry in the night
et ouvre ton oreille avare.	and open your miserly ear.
Ce cri redresse et multiplie,	This cry makes straight and spreads,
il sollicite et prophétise,	it appeals and prophesies,
il crée d'énormes figures,	it creates enormous forms,
il sème une neuve Justice,	it sows a new Justice,
un monde plein qui tournera	a full world that will turn
autour du cri d'un homme seul!	on the cry of a solitary man!

(MF 162; CO 163)

The cry that expresses a desire for consolation with little hope of an answer '*multiplie*' despite being that of 'a solitary man'. A multiplication that refers to the anguish of every human being as well as the different mouths Fondane shapes in *L'Exode*. Here he describes the power and ambition of this work, both aesthetic – 'enormous forms' – and ethical – 'a new Justice' – but all is undercut by irony: singing the fullness of a world does not overcome solitude. Despite the superficial

swagger of these lines, in the context of the poem's other voices this solitude becomes not the triumph of the *übermensch*, but rather that of an author marshalling their imaginative powers with tragic irony.

From such a position, there is a contradiction: the poem enacts a virtuosity and plenitude of voice and expression, yet mastery over the magic of words must be felt an illusion.[3] Despite his use of fixed forms and characters, line patterns (such as the quatrains of the alphabet sequences) break their bounds, rhyme schemes break down, voices blur and confuse their identities. Multiplicity of voice reproduces the shattering effects of catastrophe and individual voices lose their integrity and confidence ('ai-je une voix dans la gorge? [Have I a voice in my throat?]', the desolate Chorus asks itself [MF 190]). The plethora of 'vocal' forms suggests an exploration of possible satisfactory means of expression and the result that none of them are. No part can effectively assert an authority or impression of correct direction.

L'Exode confronts the problem that speaking may also be a form of silencing, and resists the masking of absence. Perhaps the most important voices in the poem are the ones that cannot be heard at all. In mobilising dramatic voices, Fondane 'refuses his identity', but in the disunity of the text he also refuses to fill the space left by the silence of those who cannot speak, the excluded and the dead. From the silence of God made manifest by the ruin of the temple (MF 192–197), to the compassionate address to the horse that 'cannot speak' but dances around its thirst (MF 185), to the empty homes of the shtetls mourned by the Chorus ('comment voulez-vous que chante une maison sans lampe? [how can you expect a house to sing without a lamp?]' MF 191) speechlessness is everywhere honoured and lamented.

Through the text's many voices, unspeakability and unsayability are intermingled, as the mood of disconsolation unfolds through both the impossibility of truly turning away from suffering and of metaphysically transcending it. The voice of

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[3] In the *Faux traité d'esthétique* Fondane addresses a predicted critique of his irrational poetics: 'Le mieux que vous obtiendriez ce serait un état de conflit, de tension, qui romprait l'harmonie, l'unité si laborieusement conquises par la connaissance. – Eh bien! Ce ne serait déjà pas mal que ça, pour commencer… Le conflit, la tension, voilà qui serait *plus vrai* que la *fausse unité*, que la fausse paix, de la connaissance!'
[The best you would achieve would be a state of conflict, of tension, that would break apart the harmony and unity so painstakingly won by knowledge. – Well! That wouldn't be such a bad start… Conflict and tension would be *truer* than the *false unity*, the false peace, of knowledge!] (FT 142)

the Sadhe condenses many of the traditions and concerns that animate the text's disconsolate mood: *via negativa* mysticism; a spiritual horizon of absence; the finitude of language; and the urge to listen for, and impossibility of speaking on behalf of, the voiceless: 'Je vois une chose sans vue | dans la ténèbre où je remue | ma langue ne peut pas la parler | mon oreille ne peut la taire [I see something without sight | in the shadows where I flit | my tongue cannot speak it | my ear cannot make it quiet]' (MF 157) *L'Exode*'s polyvocality suggests disconsolation through a subversion of consensus. However, at the same time, it prevents the reduction of existential anguish to solipsism: the desire to hear and to speak is everywhere.

Times

The dimensions of disconsolation are extended throughout the planes of the poem, as Fondane assembles voices which push back against the limitations of their circumstances. They form a plurality, sharing this mood despite their differences and contradictions, saturating the text with interrelated meaning yet resisting a synthesis which would make such meaning final and complete. Whether in the quiet song of Solomon's lover or railing (in what may be the authorial voice, or a 'stage' version of it) at the ruins of France, injustice and suffering are figured as senseless, as the ears of the speakers listen out for the answer which would explain them, and which never comes. Section XIII of the *Interlude* declaims the totality of the catastrophe of the German invasion with 'burning actuality'(Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 58, my translation). Biblical catastrophe is invoked, but is immediately (and characteristically) subverted by another voice:

La trompette du Jugement,
    dans cette vaste journée
 de juin. — Oui, j'y étais,
    mais je ne l'ai pas entendue
 — Sourd!
	The trumpet of Judgement, on that
	                            vast day
	 in June. – Yes, I was there, but I
	                      didn't hear it
	 – Unhearing!

(MF 183)

In this section, the beauty of a June day is contrasted with the devastation of war. The accusing response to 'je ne l'ai pas entendue' offers two readings. In one sense, it

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interrogates all who were not caught up in events and how much attention they chose to pay (and also the reader who comes after, as the reality of the events is flattened into history). In another, its portent is more metaphysical – 'j'y étais', but 'I' heard no divine message.

The allusions to divine time reinforce the sense that the experiences of catastrophe exceed attempts to contain them (see Salazar-Ferrer 2017a, 64). The disaster is apocalyptic, but no revelation is forthcoming, and focusing on the search for it risks neglecting

le torrent de faim, de soif et de désordre — pendant que la Stupeur nue, écarlate et chauve mangeait les excréments des morts	the torrent of hunger, thirst and disorder – while naked Stupor, scarlet and bald, feasted on the ordure of the dead

(MF 184)

Telling the reader of the 'gros nuages rouges [fat red clouds]' which run across the 'oeil épouvanté des routes [the horrified eye of the roads]' (MF 184, an image which recalls the intimate, creepy shock of the eyesplitting in *Un Chien Andalou*) the narration implies that, as for Milton's Satan or Dostoevsky's underground man, the revelation of such waste is so horrific that it would demand rebellion were it part of God's very plan. As for human teleologies, despite their implicit claims of 'ending history', the implication is that neither the 'defence of democracy' nor the establishment of the Third Reich could rescue the dead.

L'Exode pulls together human times to a pitch and degree that is near-cosmic, activating the deep time of the dead, the transversality of mythic time, the porousness of the present and the latency of the future. The marking of time is an inescapable aspect of exile: from the originary exile which so occupied Shestov, the fall from a timeless Eden into the knowledge of death and hence of aging to the qualification of the present by the time spent far from home, to the dead time of being without a place, of hiding and of bureaucracy, of restless stasis. After the first 'alphabet' section, Fondane/the Hebrews address the rivers they come to, and describe the seas as being, like themselves, 'immobiles, à force de toujours être en marche [still, because they were always moving]' (MF 165). This untitled section contains all of

these aspects. The rivers were still watering the 'paradis terrestre' on the evening that 'nous avons mangé du fruit amer de l'arbre | de mort [we ate the bitter fruit of the tree | of death]' (MF 164). Time seems to have stopped in the endless wandering and waiting of exile, yet the 'before' time is ever present in the mind:

Avant d'être damnés	Before you were damned
d'être à jamais la route	to be always on the road,
cassiez-vous votre croûte	did you break stale bread
au bord des années?	where years lapped the sand?

(MF 164)

The rivers are reminders of the constant passage of time, though their presence is also dependable: 'que de fois nous nous sommes jetés dans votre nasse | pour éviter la route [How many times did we throw ourselves into your creels | to avoid the road]' (MF 165). Though the road is a means of escape, it is also relentless and offers no refuge; its time is 'infinie [infinite]' (MF 165).

The combination of different dramatic voices with a crossing and melding of narrative boundaries allows for a transparency of perspectives which associates different temporal conditions to a commonality, while allowing them to retain their specific character and pathos. The flow of the rivers parallels the fluidity of voice. The section where the Chorus is speaking to them exemplifies the palimpsestic effects in the text. Ostensibly addressing the rivers, the voice also seems to speak back to the ancestors whose experience, despite their physical absence, is folded in time alongside that of 1940s refugees: 'Chantiez-vous de la harpe | en sanglotant – Abba! [Did you sing with the harp | sobbing 'Abba!']' (MF 164). It speaks, moreover, more broadly, including all of humanity, not only in the condition of the Fall, but by identifying the rivers with their mortal plight: 'vous étiez comme nous prisonniers de la terre [like us you were prisoners of earth]' (MF 165). This epithet defines the stories of the Biblical Jews and of people scattered by the Second World War, but also extends out to the universal imprisonment of worldly contingency.

Thus, in the same section, the expansive, overarching time of metaphysical exile merges with the mythical time of Biblical exile, which in turn flows into and colours the continuing upheaval and burden of displacement in the present. The

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generosity of this poetic overlayering and co-identification of oppressions and loss is further developed by the appearance of the time of African-American slavery. The emphasis on powerful actual examples of exile and enslavement prevents the symbolism from being compartmentalized to a singular cultural reading. How far it is, declaims the voice 'jusqu'au Mississipi | qui nous a vus gagner le pain | à la sueur de notre front! [to the Mississippi | which saw us earn our bread | by the sweat of our brow!]' (MF 164).

The appearance of the Mississippi links the rivers of Babylon to the American South, foreshadowing the *Interlude'*s description of the French rivers passed by those fleeing the German advance.[4] The sudden shift from 'je' to 'nous' makes this more than a simple juxtaposition. Once again, there is merging of voices which confuses identity and ties together experience. The time of memory is re-folded like a puzzle box. The black slaves remember the myth as if they lived it:

Et ces chansons de nègres!	And those Negro spirituals!
le soir, avec des paniers de coton	In the evening, with baskets of
sur la tête	cotton
les ai-je assez entendues	on their heads
sur tes eaux vastes, boueuses	I heard them often enough
qui nous faisaient souvenir	across your wide, muddy waters
bêtement	which reminded us – fools that
du Nil, où des ibis	we were –
sacrés nous regardaient pleurer au	of the Nile, where sacred
crépuscule!	ibises watched us weep at dusk!

(MF 164)

The poet hears all these voices and reorchestrates them in a modernist composition whose shifts, gaps and dissonances formally perform the themes of lament.

The Nile is also where God once was, 'errant comme une vieille chanson | de nègres, sur les routes [wandering like an old song | the Negroes sang, on the roads]' (MF 164). God too has gone wandering, and without a theologically-prescribed framework of time to rely on, people move to other rhythms, be they those of the eruptions of disaster or their own attempts to find a common movement, exemplified

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[4] There would be ample scope for comparison between Fondane's poetic engagement with rivers and that of Eliot in *Four Quartets*, especially *The Dry Salvages*.

in song. Music can be considered a manifestation of time, and as such had a fundamental importance to Fondane. His lost film *Tararira* took music as its central concern, influenced in part by Ravel, notably the *Bolero* (EM, introduction xv), as well as Jewish song. *Bolero* parallels *L'Exode* in using older forms in a modern idiom, and in its repetitions prefigures minimalism (Iliescu 1998, 192), music which is more inhabited as a condition than followed as a narrative. Such repetition also speaks to the time of mechanization and the standardized clock in its rhythms, as Fondane's Dada contemporaries were exploring in films and performances in Paris.[5] As in *Modern Times*, the masterpiece of Chaplin, whom Fondane regarded as a great artist (Fondane 2007, 88), individual human experience reacts to each repetition with its own subjectivity, whether that of the musician or the mourner. Life may be trammelled by circumstances beyond the individual or community's control, but their reaction is their own.

The rhythms of *L'Exode* play with different experiences of time. The polymorphous quatrains of the first alphabet section speak from the void, declaiming with anaphore (e.g. Nun, Pe, Shin) or condensing into Cabbalistic riddle of a mere ten words (Qoph). Together, they create a feeling of abstraction, a context of Beckettian sparseness, exposing disconsolation at the very root of thought; that is to say, the need for language being intrinsically catastrophic: 'Faudra-t-il la chute des mondes | pour que jaillisse une parole? ['Do worlds need to fall | for a word to spring forth?] (MF Samech 156, CO Samekh 148). Like the shadows they address, these voices only hint obliquely at the passage of time, speaking in generalisations (*pierre, figures, Esprit, Justice…*).[6]

If the Hebrew alphabet is intimately bound up with a relationship to God, Fondane's version of it is fragmented and crying out in His absence. The irresistible force of disaster resonates in these shadows, its wave constantly about to break upon the future. Fondane's vision complements Walter Benjamin's angel of history, who

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[5] Such as *Entr'acte* with Satie's repetitive score, or George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* (both 1924).

[6] Louis-Thomas Leguerrier, reading Adorno reading Beckett, explores a similar nexus of the existential and the linguistic: 'According to Adorno, the catastrophe operating in Beckett in terms of language is a response to the historical catastrophe of the Second World War and the way in which it broke the continuity between human suffering and the possibility to articulate it with language […] while Sartre responds to the catastrophe of the Second World War with committed literature, Adorno, from his reading of Beckett, responds with what will be called the catastrophe of language.'(Leguerrier 2020, 213)

sees 'one single catastrophe' instead of a 'chain of events', 'piling wreckage upon wreckage'. He too sees, under the narrative of mechanized progress – Benjamin's 'storm' pushing 'irresistibly into the future' (Benjamin 2003a, 392) – a piling-up of foresaken human lives:

TSADE	SADHE
Marché aux puces du Futur!	Flea market of the Future!
Les mêmes usines de viande	The same meat factories
pour le séisme et les massacres –	for earthquake and massacres –
encore un transport de mannequins	another cargo of mannequins
pour l'accident perfectionné!	perfected for calamity!

(MF 162, CO 161)

The temporality of this verse gathers horror into repetition, at once banal and terrible. The lack of narrative coherence among the voices of the letters contributes to the unease created by the collage of images, leading to a sense of paralysis and nervous expectation. Towards the end of the section, the unbearable weight of suffering promises to break through:

RESCH	RESH
Les temps sont venus, je l'annonce,	The times are at hand, I proclaim,
des fusillades, des émeutes,	of shootings, of riots;
nous organiserons	we will organize
le gaz, la pierre et le métal	gas, stone and metal

(MF 162, CO 163)

As the war machine bore down on Europe, pogroms and the First World War were in Fondane's living memory.

The 'disembodied' alphabet section is succeeded by the coalescence of mythic and metaphysical exile upon the rivers of Babylon, introduced by the rhythm of the psalm's refrain. The poem's first embodied voices (other than that of the *Préface*) speak together to the surface of the water:

fleuves qui charriaient nos âges, nos	rivers that carried our ages, our faces
visages	they went laden with dirges and

il s'en allaient comblés de chants et
              de chalands
avec leurs marins périssables
à travers les chimies du monde.
	barges
	with their perishable sailors
	through the chemistries of the world.
	               (MF 163)

Lifetime and identity float into the water, to be heard only as snatches of song by those downstream. This mythic quality is carried over the next twelve pages, as the named voices of the Chorus, 'the Narrator', a 'man,' a 'second' and a 'third' speak of their exile, intermixed with the 'Voice of the Spirit' and untitled verses which seem to be metaphysical asides. In fact, this entire section has a certain dreamlike quality, full of introspective questioning and metaphysical incertitude. Only the Chorus and, in particular, the guards, speak more directly and concretely. The most metaphysical passages are written in sonnet form, whereas the Chorus recalls song and the guards harangue repetitively.

The collective effect of meandering uncertainty fits the endlessness of the rivers and of wandering. It also means that the interruption of the *Interlude*, with its *Colère de la vision* [Visionary Anger] (MF 176, CO 166) bursts through with startling immediacy: 'Et brusquement je fus jeté dans la campagne de France' [And I was abruptly thrown into the countryside of France]. It is as though, however fitting Fondane found his theological and mythic figures of disconsolation for the attempt to get under the skin of ennui and anomie, it took the arrival of catastrophe in its most immediate form to truly animate the destabilizing and decentering effects of modernity. As the First World War had shattered the dreams of Humanist progress and aesthetic solace, the breaking wave of the Second invaded the poet's reflective distance:

si les cris des humains tombent comme châtaignes à terre, au gré du vent, sans altérer la paix des anges qu'est-ce que donc que l'Exode?	if human cries fall to the ground like chestnuts, as the wind wills without disturbing the peace of Angels, what then is Exodus?

                                             (MF 176, CO 166)

The *Interlude* moves us into real time, as it were. The language is pacy and direct, spoken with a lyric I/eye which roves over the flashes of landscape seen on the run,

finding that even geography can no longer be relied upon ('La Meuse nous a fuis, la gueuse, | et la Somme s'est fait enlever [The Meuse gave us the slip, the bitch | and the Somme's been carried off]' MF 177, CO 169); over the fellow refugees, united in their persecution and perilous future ('Je vous ai tous comptés[...] devenus français, selon la mort [I have counted you all[...] become French, by right of death]' MF 178, CO 171); over the night sky which countless exiles have looked up to in the past without answer ('encore un siècle sans sommeil [another century without sleep] (MF 179, CO 173). The Biblical images are given new resonance as the experience of dispossession is literally relived ('ô Siloé! | O Seine! [O Siloam! O Seine!]' MF 179,CO 173).

The time of catastrophe thus draws in other times, both experienced and imagined, into its chaos. This flood of temporality, full of the flotsam of broken stories, overwhelms attempts to restitute an intellectual tranquillity which could reckon with it. The closest *L'Exode* comes to a net which can draw together its disparate elements of disconsolation, of past, present and future denied sight of refuge or resolution, is in the extension of Jewish exile to embrace all humanity. Fondane had already used the figure of the Wandering Jew as an emblem of the individual adrift in the alienation of modernity, their voice lost in the crowd. In *Titanic* he writes:

La mort saisit le vif	Death caught life
en marche, juif errant, changeant de pose,	on the hop, wandering Jew, changing pose
tournant autour de quelque chose qui tourne à son tour autour de quelque chose…	turning around something that turns in its turn around something…

(MF 92)

This sense of movement is reprised in *Ulysse*, where, as in Joyce's work, the everyman of modernity is *'naturellement'* Jewish and everywhere out of place (MF 20; Fondane 2017, 11). The Wandering Jew's origins are essentially anti-Semitic; the mythical figure is cursed by Christ to wander the 'infinite' road (MF 165). The story was also employed for racist purposes throughout history and into the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, when it informed the coalescing of the 'Jewish Question', including the Nazi framing of it. Fondane consciously appropriates the trope, inverting its anti-Semitic significations to stand as an image of literal and metaphysical exile accessible to all. [7] At the same time, the particularities of Jewish persecution are kept resonant in the trope.

Fondane's use of Jewish tropes is not what could be called a religious programme, but neither is it incidental. The Biblical Exodus is surely one of the world's most sustained scriptural engagements with exile, not ony physical, but also from God, in its treatment of the breaking of the covenant.[8] Fondane's work mobilizes this relationality to associate the time of modernity with a deeper catastrophic time in which a fundamental breakdown between human experience and mortality, on the one hand, and the possibility of future consolation, on the other, is revealed. God's absence becomes an absence of meaning. The only response is an absurd cry to the space left behind ('aie pitié, aie pitié de la terre de France! [Have pity, have pity on the land of France!]' MF 180). Here is the desperate relevance of the Jews who turn back to seek God only when all their plans have collapsed around them: 'ici, sur la route, dans le désastre et dans | le chaos, il n'est pas d'autre Dieu [here, on the road, in disaster and in |chaos, there is no other God]' (MF 180). The subjunctive mood of 'aie pitié' typifies its use throughout the text, particularly in prayer and implication. The uncertainty of the grammatical mood matches the uneasy poetic mood of disconsolation.

The Jewish 'model' of exile is grafted into the French experience of 1940. The French identity granted to all fleeing the Nazis, whether 'du Congo, du bled algérien, d'Annam […] des Tchèques, et des Polonais, des Slovaques [from Congo, from deepest Algeria, from Annam (…) Czechs, and Poles, and Slovaks]' (MF 178) is raised to aspirations of universality by dint of the historical struggle to transcend human divisions ('fils de la barricade et de la guillotine [sons of the barricade and of the guillotine]' MF 178), but the true anguish of the catastrophic subject is reached

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[7] There are other precedents: the painter Samuel Hirszenberg, for example, had exhibited a painting of the Wandering (or 'Eternal') Jew as a victim of the pogroms at the 1900 Paris Salon. When signing the poems published by Resistance magazines, Fondane used the pseudonym Isaac Laquedem (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 127), a French name for the Wandering Jew which had previously featured in literary works by, for example, Alexandre Dumas (*Isaac Laquedem*) and Guillaume Apollinaire (*Le Passant de Prague*).

[8] Chapter 9 will pick up this theme in relation to Jabès.

only through an engagement with Jewish tradition which both reveals the Jews as the wretched of the wretched and generously offers the Jewish experience as a means to confront the time of catastrophe: 'Que de Juifs sur cette terre, Seigneur! [how many Jews there are on this earth, Lord!]' (MF 180).

Fondane's engagement with historical events critically deploys the tropes of a Jewish messianism in which hope exists only beyond human comprehension. His work has some close affinities with the philosophical projects of Walter Benjamin, as Margaret Teboul has shown (2011). It is crucial to state that for both writers it was a case of 'free appropriation' (Teboul 2011) rather than 'applying' a theology. Such a framework afforded new perspectives for thinking catastrophe. As Teboul puts it,

> Benjamin came to think progress as a catastrophe, while Fondane, following Leon Shestov, restored full intensity to the struggle against the evidence of reason by introducing a confrontation with history. Their deconstruction of historical time sought to integrate the 'state of exception', which is to say the catastrophe. (Teboul 2011, my translation)

L'Exode resists an Enlightenment teleology of progress, much like Benjamin's 'historico-poetic' (Hayes, 2018) *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. In its conflation of mythic and actual time, it performs this resistance affectively, as an alternative to the projects of Fondane's critical prose, which bow to the imperative to attempt to stand outside of history in order to assess it.[9] Through the very particularities of its voices, interwoven across time, it offers to the future the latency of exceptional catastrophic time, not simply as aesthetic object but as active questions to the reader, subverting the distance between audience and speaker, between the ennui and paralysis of living in a catastrophic world and the terror of actually being caught under the breaking wave. *L'Exode* saw Fondane not simply argue against the dominance of 'reason', but intervene to force the time of anguish into the present.

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[9] In his dark and challenging essay, *L'Homme devant l'histoire* [Man Faced with History], written in the depths of 1939 and still discomfiting today, Fondane wrote 'Sans doute, tout comme vous, mon cher lecteur, je m'accroche déespérément à l'intellgibilité de l'histoire; tout comme vous, j'espère, alors même que je doute; tout comme vous, je songe aux réformes utiles, aux grands moyens à employer [Admittedly, just like you, dear reader, I cling hopelessly to the intelligibility of History; just like you, I hope, even though I have my doubts; just like you, I dream of useful reforms, of great methods to put into action]'. (HDH 450; EM 61, adapted)

Masks

car l'homme n'est pas chez lui sur
                                 cette terre
 étranger où qu'il aille
	for man is not at home on this earth
	 a stranger wherever he goes
	
	             (MF 170)

The role of myth and imagination, though broken open and reconfigured in Fondane's modernist deployments, is key to approaching *L'Exode* and its disconsolations. Though he had abandoned Symbolist confidence in the power of artistic symbols to convey immaterial truths, Fondane still sought ways to approach the unspeakable. The time of catastrophe is perforated with absences. The Alpha of upheaval and violence is concurrent with the Omega of stillness and muteness. In the last numbered section (XVIII) of the *Interlude*, we are met with the image of the alarm clock. Yet the call to awaken finds no ear: 'Les réveille-matin ont sonné | dans des milliers de maisons vides [The alarm clocks have rung | in thousands of empty houses]' (MF 186).[10] For Fondane and for millions of displaced people in France, the alarm is unheard, or unheeded. Like Benjamin, Fondane in part regarded his philosophical writings as a wake-up call. Yet for all its prophetic force in revitalizing the Biblical Exodus for the 20th Century, *L'Exode* shows that Fondane's concern is not so much preventing the catastrophe as living (and indeed dying) with it.[11] No

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[10] This instance of an alarm clock mechanically sounding in the place where human life has vanished is strangely reminiscent of Benjamin's discussion of surrealism, where he describes the exchange of 'the play of human features' for 'the face of an alarm clock' which rings incessantly (Benjamin 2005, 218). Michael Löwy argues that 'we cannot reduce the position of the *Passagenwerk* to a static dichotomy between dreaming and wakefulness: Benjamin's ambition – like that of Baudelaire and Andre Breton – is to create a new world in which action will finally become dreaming's sister' (Löwy 1996, 22). Although Fondane is contrasting progress with loss where Benjamin is lauding surrealism's annoucing of revolutionary possibility, he is also concerned with the relation between dream and action, between imagination and rationality.

[11] Much of *L'Exode* was composed, according to its author, in 1934, when he was clearly aware of the threat of Fascism but could not have known how prescient he was in his visions of catastrophe, though his interpretation of the First World War and of modernity by way of Shestov's subversive philosophy made him more clear-sighted in that regard than many. It is hard to 'date' Fondane's poetry as he never stopped editing and rewriting it, but the *Prose Preface (*date 1942) and *Interlude* were obviously written after the war started.

rescue, no break from the nightmare of history, would repair the loss that has already occurred. The poem continues:

les blés ont mûri, sauvages	the wheat has ripened, wild
loin du regard du paysan.	far from the peasant's eye.
Personne n'est allé aux champs	No one has gone to the fields
personne n'est allé à l'école	no one has gone to school
personne n'est allé à l'église	no one has gone to church
et la nuit est tombée brusquement.	and suddenly night has fallen.

(MF 186)

These lines recall those sung with rich imagery by the Chorus, which also give the sense of lands forcibly abandoned and gone to waste, despite their bounty ('sources sur les genoux [springs pouring from their knees]', holding out harvests 'paumes ouvertes [with open hands]' MF 167). The style is much simpler here, however. The simplicity of this section helps it to act as a moment of breath after the rushing diction and chaotic images that pervade the *Interlude*. There is a sense of being in the eye of the storm, an unexpected instant of stillness that allows the dispossessed to briefly and inadequately take stock of the new situation through their shock. The second quatrain recalls a child's rhyme, and the 'night' of history that has fallen plunges all back into a naked fear akin to a child's fear of the dark.

Yet a mood of disconsolation, despite its definite notes of despair, would merely be dull and deadening without the notes of absurd sweetness it requires. The third and final quatrain of the section runs:

Mais les rossignols ont chanté	But the nightingales have sung
tout de même!	all the same!
C'était une vieille romance	It was an old ballad
du temps où le monde existait.	from a time when the world existed.

(MF 186)

Section XVIII of the *Intermède* condenses the blunt sense of pain, shock and dispossession intrinsic to disconsolation, but also the equally intrinsic pulsion of life that ties them together. The mood *L'Exode* creates is not simply tragedy in the classical sense, which would imply a finality. Disconsolation entails living after the

ending, in a new time in which the consolations which used to work upon everyday fears and sufferings are revealed as insufficient, yet the experience of life remains acute and filled with longing. The admixture of longing, suffering and continued seeking exemplified in the Song of Songs section discussed earlier is found throughout *L'Exode* and its tracing ofthe faultlines of disaster by way of Jewish theology and of mythology.

There is an emphasis on the role of art in articulating the experience of disaster in much of Fondane's critical prose. For Shestov, Shakespeare and Dostoevsky were as important for existential thought as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Fondane, unsurprisingly, was interested in the role of art to an even greater extent – a much greater extent, for where Shestov drew upon literature as fuel for his philosophy, his influence on Fondane led the latter to pursue philosophical engagements with art that not only extended Shestov's approach within aesthetics (if that is the appropriate term to use, given Shestov's existential priorities) but also to engage creatively and subversively as a literary essayist, in works like *Faux Traité d'esthétique* [*Pseudo-Treatise on Aesthetics*]*, Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* [*Baudelaire and the Experience of the Abyss*] and *Rimbaud le voyou* [*Rimbaud the Reprobate*]*. Insofar as the emphasis on art's 'tragic' capacities can be made into an argument, it is perhaps put most directly in the 1939 essay *L'Homme devant l'histoire:*

> les pensées les plus audacieuses et les plus honnêtes ne se sont pas fait jour dans les ouvrages *sérieux*, mais dans les ouvrages *frivoles,* qui ont pour caractère distinctif celui de dispenser leurs auteurs d'assumer la *responsabilité* de leurs dires: 'pourquoi vous refuserais-je la vérité, puisque je ne risque rien?', semblent insinuer, de temps à autre, le romancier, le poète. (HDH, 442)

> [the most audacious and honest of thoughts do not come to light in *serious* works, but in *frivolous* ones, which hold the distinctive characteristic of dispensing with the author's *responsibility* for what they are saying. "Why should I refuse you the truth, since I risk nothing?", the poet or novelist seems to insinuate from time to time.] (Fondane 2011, 75)

'Serious' and 'frivolous' can be thought of here as terms for, correspondingly, 'philosophical' and 'artistic' works. The contradictory tensions of artistic responsibility will be developed in a later chapter, but for now note the similarity

with *L'Exode*'s Afterword as discussed earlier: 'a dialogue wherein the one who speaks immediately refuses his identity' (MF 207).

Fondane's position on the possibilities of art point to a subversion of the consolations of philosophy. His work repeatedly engages with what is sometimes termed the 'ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (Griswold 2020).[12] He has no intention of resolving the quarrel, and does not choose poetry 'over' philosophy; however subversive and anti-systemic his Shestovian approach, he finds himself a 'prisoner of the earth' as much as anyone, and driven to grasp at truth with the same tools of language and thought. What he contends is that the refusal of identity made possible in what might be called 'imaginative' writing allows the author to say what otherwise might be passed over as discomfiting. This does go right to the heart of the quarrel, or at least the parts where thinkers such as Plato or Plotinus argue that the representation of evil sympathetically reproduces it in reality. But the stakes are not simply those of art as a moral or amoral force. For Shestov and Fondane, art has the capacity to undermine the very processes of reasoned argument that bulwark confidence in human progress:

> Shakespeare peut bien oser, en cothurnes et sous masque, nous confesser ce qu'un Plotin, un Nietzsche ou un Kierkegaard, ayant eu la même pensée, n'eussent jamais pu avouer, le visage découvert… que 'la vie est une histoire contée par un idiot, pleine de bruit et de fureur' (HDH 442)

> [Shakespeare certainly dared, in buskins and through a mask, to confess to us what Plotinus, Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, having had the same thought, could never admit with their face uncovered… that 'life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury'] (Fondane 2011, 75)[13]

L'Exode, with its unanswerable questions and laments, certainly expresses the tragedy Fondane found himself plunged into: 'L'Espoir est tombé en miettes, qui le rassasiera? [Hope has crumbled to bits; who will sate it?]'(MF 183).

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[12] The inadequacy of this terminology is flagrant when we consider, say, Plato's *Symposium*, which argues against rhetoric with wonderful rhetoric and even a dramatic structure (Griswold 2020). Fondane's poetry and critical writing arguably direct us to the gaps in philosophy where it attempts to separate thought from lived experience and affect, and he makes a case for and a practice of art as occupying these gaps.

[13] In the full text Fondane also references William Faulkner, evidence of his engagement with developments in anglophone literature.

In *L'Exode*, however, Fondane articulates a broad interpenetration of existential philosophy and the special conditions of modernity. In her book *Violence Without God: The Rhetorical Despair of twentieth-Century Writers*, Joyce Wexler argues that with the 'demise of axiomatic belief in transcendence… [t]he meaning of violence could no longer be grounded in a transcendent order' (2017, 3). It must be noted that even before the secular age that Wexler, following Charles Taylor, identifies with modernity, violence and suffering had made existential doubt part of the work of Shakespeare or Villon, as well as of that of religious writers such as St John of the Cross and indeed of the Bible itself, both Old and New Testament. However, if modernity moves beyond these glimpses to a world where the centre no longer holds, where there is no 'unifying force' (Wexler 2017, 3), then *L'Exode* performs this existential uncertainty writ large in the chaos of modern war. Rather than soliloquized by a Macbeth or Lear who peel back the veil of worldly ideals and spiritual confidence at a moment of intensely personal crisis, *L'Exode* assails us with a plethora of voices and contexts which decentre Fondane himself from the narrative. There is a strange compassion in this work of association, an attempt to unite individual anguish through comparable experiences of suffering. For the destructive effect of catastrophe to be properly attested to, these cannot cohere into an answer, and yet in their poetic juxtaposition a kind of solidarity emerges.

This solidarity is, of course, disconsolate, a sharing but not a repairing. Fondane's poetry also serves as a riposte to those who would seek to repair the hole exposed by 'violence without God', through Idealist philosophy or political utopias.[14] In its most hermetic, metaphysical utterances, *L'Exode* stages the tensions inherent in the encounter with the self and this void:

    AIN   AIN

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[14] As Joseph Acquisto puts it, Fondane's framing of catastrophe 'has much in common with Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment' (Acquisto 2015, 70). While there will be insurmountable differences in their approaches, there is much scope for further research between Fondane and the Frankfurt school. Note the affinity in this statement from *Negative Dialectics:* 'The need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1966, 17–18). Fondane carried out his own critique of the Enlightenment directly across his philosophical prose, while the speech he wrote for the 1935 Antifascist writers's congress (*L'ecrivain devant la révolution*) is his most direct address to utopianists, including the pithy line 'Marx […] n'était pas le pape [Marx was not the pope]' (EDR 112).

Ne puis-je obtenir une Joie	Can I not obtain a Joy
où ne s'égoutte une rancoeur,	where rancour does not drip,
et pas une seule Raison	and not a single Reason
qui n'ait un viscère malade?	whose guts have not gone bad?
Et ne puis-je toucher un marbre	And can I not touch a marble block
où ne dort une vierge défaite	where an unrealized virgin sleeps
sans que la vie ne se hérisse	without life bristling with
de mille désordres mortels?	a thousand mortal disorders?

(MF161–162; CO 161)

The trio of Joy, Reason and art in this verse lay out the anguish of being a 'prisoner of the earth'. There is no joy which is everlasting and transcends mortal context, no intellectual argument or framework which can legitimately distance itself from the fundamental chaos of existence, no aesthetic creation which truly represents an escape from its circumstances.[15] As poetry, these lines allow Fondane to perform this very relation, a voice appearing out of nothing to pose the questions of its dissatisfaction before disappearing unanswered. Despite their abstraction, these are the words proffered by an engaged subjectivity rather than those of a detached philosophical argument.

It is important to emphasize that the lines spoken by the Ain, and many others in *L'Exode*, are also a cry against this irresolvable condition of mortality and its lack of answers.[16] Fondane's poetry does not condemn humanity for seeking answers. In the very fact and means of its expression, it resists the self-isolation of a Dostoevskian 'underground man'. *L'Exode*'s multiple voices allow Fondane to dramatize anguish in its extremity while resisting an atmosphere of absolute bitterness. Its cries to the void (l'homme doit grimper | lentement, enfonçant ses

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[15] The problem of the impossibility of the escape through art and the difficulties of living with this impossibility animates much of Fondane's critical prose, especially his books on Rimbaud and Baudelaire and the *Pseudo-treatise on Aesthetics*. Across his essays Fondane ties together artists from various epochs, from medieval art's claims to access to the divine to the surrealist's privileged claims to interpreting the unconscious, as united in the denial of this problem.

[16] For example, in the questions of the Chorus as it keeps going determinedly ('Il me faut avancer, marcher […] est-il encore de pays | où ne s'étale pas, moulé dans le sable | la plante de mes pieds? [I have to go on, to walk […]are there still countries | where there's no trace, moulded in sand, | of my footprints?]' MF 168; 'Que me demeure-t-il à présent, si ce n'est | l'espérance? [What is left for me now, if not hope?] MF 170), in the musings of 'a man' ('Angoisse, ô maman vénérable, | donne-nous de pouvoir brise cette vieille lumière [O Anguish, venerable mother | give us the power to break this old light]' (MF 173) or in the *Intermède* ('Assez crié! Assez vu! Assez de paroles mortelles! ['Enough crying! Enough visions! Enough deadly words!]' MF 182).

chaussures cloutées, | mordant les éboulis du vide [man must climb | slowly, pushing with hobnailed boots, | biting the scree of the void] MF 197) and to God ('ce sont tes premiers-nés dont il t'a plu briser | contre le roc la tête tendre' | — Jusques à quand, Seigneur? [these are the first-born whose tender heads it pleased you to dash | against the rock. | – For how long, O Lord?]' MF 170), both in their metaphysical and mythopoeic masks, are juxtaposed, at certain points in the poem, with direct address to the other who is the reader.

This aspect of poetry as interpellation makes the contrast with the Underground Man's isolation more poignant, not least because Dostoevsky's protagonist can also only define himself in relation to the other, from the 'six-foot officer' to his 'old schoolfellow', Simonov. When working on *L'Exode* in the 1940s, Fondane was genuinely underground, in hiding from the Nazis and their Vichy collaborators, yet continued to write and to publish his poetry in Resistance journals. Even in Auschwitz he is reported to have engaged his campmates by quoting Baudelaire from memory (Jutrin 2012).

Imaginative work thus had a twofold importance for Fondane. It was certainly a means to gesture towards the other. However, this means could not be separated from the disconsolation which was the condition of the need to perform that gesture. Thus in expressing this 'reaching out' the imaginative work could contain the shared anguish which, according to Fondane, philosophical or political projects could not admit to. In *Man Faced with History,* Fondane refers to the words of Plotinus, who posited a universal order using the metaphor of human beings as tortoises who must align themselves to the gigantic steps of divine dancers in order to avoid being crushed by a dance whose logic they had ignored. One who, firmly holding to a philosophy or indeed a 'science' of history, whether secular or theological, finds themselves caught up in a disaster, is like

> ce stoïcien dont parle Sénèque qui, surpris par l'orage en pleine mer, se met à trembler de tous ses membres. Croit-il encore qu'il suffise de se régler sur la cadence de l'ordre universel? Ou bien, en ce moment-là, s'aperçoit-il qu'il n'y a pas de sort privilégié pour la tortue 'instruite' et que c'est Dostoïevski qui avait raison, et Shakespeare, ou encore leur Maître commun: la Bible, qui avait dit, à sa façon, que la vie est une histoire contée par un idiot lorsqu'elle rappelle, et insiste, que le même soleil ici-bas luit sur le juste et l'injuste… Il semble au philosophe qu'affirmer cela, c'est porter atteinte à

Dieu et pourtant c'est Jérémie, après Job, qui s'écrie: 'Maudit soit le jour où je suis né' (20–14) (HDH 444)

[that Stoic mentioned by Seneca, surprised by a storm in the middle of the sea, whose limbs begin to tremble. Does he still believe that it is enough to align himself with the cadence of universal order? Or really, in that moment, does he make out that there is no privileged fate for the 'educated' tortoise and that it is Dostoevsky who is right, and Shakespeare, or indeed their common Master, the Bible, which said, in its way, that life is a tale told by an idiot by its reminder, its insistence, that the same sun here below throws its light on the just and the unjust... It seems to the philosopher that to affirm that is to undermine God and yet it is Jeremiah, after Job, who cries 'Cursed be the day of my birth!'] (Fondane 2011, 77)

The poem's imaginative features consolidate a sense of uncompassable tragedy, pre-empting and resisting any logical attempts to fit the experiences it addresses into a framework of meaning.[17]

L'Exode uses imaginative tropes in order to break through the shock of self exposed by desolation and afford a confrontation of catastrophe that is not flattening, reductive or closing. 'Man is not at home on this earth | a stranger wherever he goes' (MF 170): these lines spoken by 'the narrator' participate in the extension of the condition of Jewish exile to all humanity. But as well as refusing the essential identity of people with place, they speak to a more personal relation – in Rimbaud's words, *je est un autre*. Perhaps there are parallels with a child's imaginative engagement with a stuffed toy to communicate distress or a patient's therapeutic use of meditation or psychedelic drugs to confront trauma, in that Fondane's mythic-artistic approach to the writing of disaster is mediating but not distancing.[18]

The mood of disconsolation that pervades the poem constitutes a paradox: a defeat that is not an ending. Proclaiming the insufficiency of knowledge and

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[17] Plotinus's tortoises may have been in Fondane's mind when writing the Chorus lines in *L'Exode* mentioned earlier, as the captives address God in response to the hectoring of the guards, asking for their chains to be broken. 'Que pose son pied déchaussé | sur nous, le Maitre de la vie […] et nous vous chanterons la chanson de Sion [Let him place his unshod foot | on us, the Master of life […] and we will sing you the song of Zion]' (MF 192), they continue, the implication presumably being that even being crushed by God's presence would at least be proof of a divine plan redeeming the chaos.
[18] See for example pyschology discussion of the 'transitional object' as bridge from 'the psychic inner reality of wishes, desires, feelings, and ideas to the external world of intersubjectively verifiable things' (Roig, Roig and Soth, 1987, 46; Nieuwenhuys 2011, passim) or 'MDMA as a therapeutic catalyst for participants as they integrate the trauma they experienced' (Doblin et al., 2019, 94).

language, *L'Exode* writes into the gaps to cry out what is absurd and unanswerable. This staging of anguish is part of a subversion of purported *answers* to catastrophe, but this subversion also depends upon the sense that a search remains open. Fondane's unhappy consciousness is as fundamental to readings of his poetry as to all the rest of his work.[19] Yet the mood of disconsolation created in *L'Exode* also depends upon a sense of courage – the courage of dissatisfaction. It is the refusal to bow to overwhelming circumstances – be they metaphysical or tangible – that differentiates disconsolation from mere cynicism, abnegation or simple despair. The next chapter will examine the ways *L'Exode* manifests this refusal.

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[19]Not least because of the imperative to replace philosophy's' 'problème du Savoir [problem of Knowledge]' with a situation 'où le Savoir devenait un problème [where Knowledge became a problem]', as the Société Fondane website puts it (SEBF, n.d.), a situation where all claims to answers were to be resisted and despair openly acknowledged as a starting point.

Chapter 6

Colère de la vision: Irresignation in *L'Exode*

> D'autres […] ont confessé naïvement, comme ce fut le cas de Freud, que la science n'est que plus grande pour avoir eu le courage de nous enseigner la résignation à 'l'univers hostile' […] Quel besoin a-t-elle donc, l'existence, d'être justifiée et légitimée?
>
> [Freud naively confessed that science is all the greater for having the courage to teach us resignation in the face of 'the hostile universe' […] What need does existence have of being justified and legitimated?]
>
> from 'Preface for the Present Moment' (EM 43)

Fondane struck an 'irresigned' attitude to his disconsolate situation. Like the very notion of poetic tone, irresignation is both necessarily expressed in words and implies a resonance beyond their individual instances. If, against aestheticism, *L'Exode* confirms the presence of what is 'terribly human' (Salazar-Ferrer 2009) in poetry, it offers neither the rapturous efforts towards transcendence Fondane ascribed to Rimbaud nor the confidence of his avant-garde fellows such as Breton. Nonetheless, Fondane's poetry does not make statements of misanthropy, aporetic nihilism or defeatism. *L'Exode* offers a revolt from *within* tragedy: as Meschonnic puts it in his introduction, 'in his revolt […] he is closer to Dada and Artaud than to the surrealists, in living the poem [dans un vivre le poème]' (Meschonnic 2006, 8, my translation). It is this unquantifiable 'living-the-poem' that I will survey in this chapter, with four short sections that draw together aspects of the linguistic and semantic difficulties of Fondane's attempts to express irresignation, followed by a longer section that reaffirms the paradoxical necessity of poetry in the proclamation of this unsayable revolt.

'*La chute des mondes*' : The Struggle to Speak

One way in which *L'Exode* strikes a tone of irresignation is by setting up representational aporiae and then refusing them. Let us begin again *au pied de la lettre,* with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet which, in their multiple voices, appear at the beginning of what might be called the poem proper (though the 'supplementary' preface is in fact essential to its reading) and immediately create an expectation of order. Instead, however, of acting as a kabbalistic worldly manifestation of the transcendent, these letters seem to float free in the abyss. What would be the essence of divine order figures only an empty chaos. Chaos, of course, is what theologically precedes creation.[1]

Qui veut monter dans les
    ténèbres?
Qui veut descendre en la
    lumière?
Nulle figure n'est ici –
L'Esprit ne flotte encore.

Who wants to climb among the
    shadows?
Who wants to drop into the light?
There is no figure here –
The Spirit is not moving yet.

(MF 154; CO 145)

This is the voice of the ALEPH that begins the sequence. It is as if the shapes of reality – *figure* – await a transcendent driver (whether divine, Platonic or Hegelian) to direct their appearance.

Instead of a justification, the demiurgic urges of the poet come through in splinters, revealing themselves as the irrational thirsts and hungers of existence. There is a potentiality in these shards. KAPH warns that catastrophe is yet to come:

Le temps n'est pas encor venu
des cris, des signes, des mystères,
l'homme n'est pas encor tout nu...
Que ses villes se couvrent d'ortie et
    de terre aride,
qu'il craigne jusqu'à l'ombre qui au
    soleil le ceint

The time is not yet here
for cries, signs and mysteries,
man is not yet laid bare…
Let his towns be covered by nettles and
    dry earth,
let him fear even the shadow that haloes
    him in the sunlight,

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[1] These voices from the darkness, subverting the uncertainty of their waiting with humour as well as anguish, foreshadow Beckett. I will come back to touch on this humour in chapters 7 and 8.

et si, dans son esprit, il sent mûrir le vide, qu'il en appelle au Saint!	and if, in his spirit, he feels the void ripen, let him appeal to the Most High!

<div align="center">(MF 155–156; CO 149)</div>

The warning prefigures the catastrophes attested to in the succeeding sequences, but it is also ambiguous. It not only prefatorily proclaims of what is to come in the poem, but also introduces a metaphysical anxiety: how bad do things have to get before we are really at the day of judgement? Immediately after the ALEPH, the BETH already undercuts the nothingness, introducing a 'je':

Je cherche en un moi qui coule pendant le siècle qui coule avec un désir qui coule le dieu qui ne coule pas.	I seek within a self that flows while the century flows with a desire that flows the god that flows not.

<div align="center">(MF 145; CO 145)</div>

With the 'je' comes temporality, desire and the absence of God. Already, we have the suggestion of the existent and their dissatisfaction. With or without the guarantee of reason, being already is, even if only according to the phantom voice of an abstraction, even only as a trace. Thus, the concluding word of the 'voice in the wilderness' that comes right before the alphabet sequence at the end of the work is prefigured – 'C'EST!' (MF 203).

Desire is always temporal, always historical. The voices of the letters shimmer between the abstract and the concrete, as if the purity of the void were impossible, because to attempt to conceive of it presupposes existence. The holy letters cannot sing as David made them; they are themselves paradoxically profane. When HETH declares 'Nous avons erré dans les rues | et sangloté dans les vitrines [We've wandered in the streets | and sobbed in the windows]' (MF 155; CO 147), the groundlessness of the letters is tied to that of the emigrant, and to the Jew. Untethered from their rightful places – in Romanian synagogues, for example[2] – the words go out into the world in the mouths of the persecuted and displaced. Their restoration would

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[2] See Vanhese 2012 on Fondane's formative experience of pogroms.

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require a miracle, because what is shattered cannot be put back together. 'Faudra-t-il la chute des mondes', asks SAMEKH, 'pour que jaillisse une parole? [Do worlds need to fall | for a word to spring forth?]' (MF 156; CO 149).[3] The form of the question underlines the scattering of letters. Already, we are in ruins. Fondane does not seek to erase poetic form in order to replace it with a newer, truer version. Instead, the very letters of creation (divine and artistic) continue to speak but contradict each other and pull apart in form. The quatrain set up by the ALEPH and BETH, already shaken by BETH's hammering end 'rhyme' of a repeated 'coule' (which also undoes itself with that final 'pas'), is troubled by GHIMEL's six lines (although we could see eight if we count the blanks which frame the last '– mais où est-elle l'épaisseur? [but where is the density?]' [MF 154, CO 145]). Not only between the letters but within them, there are silences, lacunae.

Words occupy a troubling space between nothingness and density. 'Le vide peu à peu se peuple | d'étrange poissons transparents [The void peoples itself piecemeal | with strange transparent fish]', begins GHIMEL, recollecting the 'poissons irréels' which the fragile self of the *Préface* mentions fishing for in the attempt to assert its own reality (MF 154, CO 145). Their 'irreality' is important. The *Préface* does not simply offer the pathos of details of the everyday life of a victim. It weaves together the absurdity and nobility, the transience and potentiality, of the affective and the imaginative.

Le dimanche j'allais à la
                    campagne
pêcher, sous l'oeil de Dieu, des
                    poissons irréels,
je me baignais dans la rivière
qui chantait dans les joncs et je
                    mangeais des frites
le soir. [...]

On Sundays I went to the country
to fish, under the eye of God, for
                    unreal fish,
I bathed in the river
that sang in the rushes and I ate chips
in the evening. […]

(MF 152; CO 141)

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[3] The emigrant and the exile are major presences in Fondane's poetry in part because, torn from their cultural and material apparatus of identity, they betray the reality that identity is in fact always being constituted by consciousness. As the dispossession of catastrophe exposes, memory and language are constitutive rather than conservative: in Julia Creet's words, 'memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left' (Creet 2010, 3).

There is a constant interplay here between figures of the mundane and the magic of the poetic, a simultaneous repulsion and attraction. Fondane cannot but love the beauty of art and artifice, yet strives against its complete enchantment.

'Play' is the right word. An acknowledgement of the gravity of his context and the mood of disconsolation that pervades his work should never be allowed to efface the playfulness, both bright and sardonic by turns (though more often the former), that diverts its anguish. The way that words are more than one thing at once, that this is what poetry depends on, is essential to his use of it as a means to affirm even as he subverts meaning and form. Fishing (pêcher) on a Sunday is also sinning, a classic French homonym (and the juxtaposition of day and activity also reminds us of the Fisher of Men); *l'oeil de Dieu* is the sun as well as the watchful Lord (displeased or beneficent?); the singing flow of *baignais*/*chantait* is slowed by *mangeais*; the 'frites le soir' letting go of the melody and also, in their humble everydayness, counterpointing the 'poissons irréels': daydream fish, real fish whose own transience and beauty mark the bridge between reality and imagination, insubstantial ideas. When GHIMEL speaks of 'poissons transparents', the fish are words: what use are the insubstantial words of poetry, that claim to call a flower into being? [4] Where is density?

These inchoate voices, in their fragmentation and seeming crypticism and unanswerable questions (HE: 'qu'est-ce que la soif | qu'est-ce que la faim – | le feu qui embrase, | les anges de glace? [What is thirst | what is hunger – | the fire that ignites, | the angels of ice?]') sound dissonantly; they are dangerously close to an impossibility of utterance (MF 154, CO 147). Yet SAMEKH's question is double-edged. 'Faudra-t-il la chute des mondes | pour que jaillisse une parole?' Creation is predicated on instability; in the midst of catastrophe comes not ultimate silence, but a word. Amidst the ruination of *langue* comes a *parole*. Among the irreality of poetics and the cries of anguish, a word comes forth. Not the 'true' word, perhaps, the divine word of 'in the beginning', though we sense a longing for and accusation of this word

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[4] Mallarmé, famously: 'I say: a flower! and, out of the oblivion into which my voice consigns any real shape, as something other than petals known to man, there rises, harmoniously and gently, the ideal flower itself, the one that is absent from all earthly bouquets' (poetryfoundation.org/poets/stephane-mallarme). For more on the intricacies of Fondane's self-extrication from Symbolism, see Salazar-Ferrer 2004b. See Suleiman 1996, 651 for a connection between this Mallarméen naming and catastrophic absence and exile.

(must creation come from nothing, are mundane things meaningless except as pieces in a divine plan, to be discarded as necessary in the service of revelation?). But maybe, perhaps, a word that can be heard, a hesitant, unconcluding word that is not only an escape into beauty or abstract truth. Against the betrayals inherent in these options, irresignation is the struggle to speak.

SADHE, COPH and RESH speak across each other:

TSADÉ
Je vois une chose sans vue
dans la ténèbre où je remue
ma langue ne peut pas la parler
mon oreille ne peut la taire.

SADHE
I see something without sight
in the shadows where I flit
my tongue cannot speak it
my ear cannot make it quiet.

COPH
Qu'elle sourde
belle Sourde
hors des gonds
des visions!

QOPH
To your appearing,
lovely Unhearing,
beyond the limits
of visions!

RESCH
Ténèbre! Voici ta victoire
Je veux parler à ces oiseaux
dans un langage d'innocent
plus blanc que neige boréale.

RESH
Shadow! Here is your victory
I would speak to these birds
in an innocent language
whiter than boreal snow.

(MF 157; CO 151–153)

The impossibility of the tongue's speaking is matched by the unquenchable desire to speak, to translate what is unsilenceably 'heard' yet unsayable. The desire for a pure language, which Fondane had previously felt promised in poetry, a promise distorted in the too-assonant, too-perfect rhymes of COPH, where abstraction and form create absurdity, is dashed by its own paradox: as Benjamin intimated, a pure language would be no language at all, the black bridges of words disappearing into omnipresent whiteness.[5]

[5] 'In this pure language – which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished' (Benjamin 2003ab, 22)

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Language cannot be innocent, and against the Adamic dream of aestheticism, poetry must blow man up with blasts of dynamite, must be an 'axe on the frozen sea inside'.[6] RESH is followed by SHIN: 'Le cri que l'on pourrait crier | il n'est pas ici, pas encore | il rôde autour de quelque bouche | il sollicite une salive [The cry we could cry | is not here, not yet, | it roams around a mouth | it asks for saliva]' (MF 157, CO 153). The cry, as we have seen in the *Préface,* cannot be put into a poem. It is always waiting to be said. This avowal of SHIN foreshadows the attempts of the rest of *L'Exode* to say it, and this double move of repeatedly asserting the cry's unsayability and attempting to say it is an irresigned one. The poet Joë Bousquet wrote of Fondane's wartime poetry: 'this spectacular poetry is so far from song it seems outside the human voice' (Beray 2006, 206). Patrice Beray argues that Bousquet is right to consider it 'spectacular' (and note that the French is semiotically close to the noun *spectacle,* performance) and gesturing beyond itself (its 'prophetic' aspect; Beray 2006, 207). However, Fondane's break beyond aesthetic tradition exposes the limits of human utterance not to leave it behind but to affirm it with humility. 'Fondane's poem [*Le Mal des fantômes 1942–1943*]', claims Beray, 'is animated by this prosodic, rhythmic orality, and not by an efficiency, a dramatic organization [*un spectaculaire*], drawn from a formulaic art refined by a poetic tradition' (Beray 2006, 207). The question of form is never abandoned by Fondane, but the human voice missed by Bousquet in fact cannot be fully expressed in it. In *L'Exode* this tension, between aesthetic convention and the 'roughness' of the attempt to express what it cannot hold, is taken to its highest point.[7]

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[6] Kafka, who had such a philosophical influence on Fondane, wrote these famous words in 1904 (in a letter to Oskar Pollok dated January 27), though they were not published until after Fondane's death (Kafka 2013).

[7] Beray cites editor Jean Ballard's description of Fondane's poetry as *âpre*, arguing that his assessment and Bousquet's label *spectaculaire* both apply.

An Anti-Aesthetic Gesture

The irresolvable contradictions of the Alphabet sequence are formed from a kind of 'mysticism-without-a-beyond' repeatedly broken by the attempt to figure the real. The cry is crucial to this counterpoint, and disrupts the integrity of the poem itself. The letters speak, like a fragmented chorus, from beyond the action of the drama and yet as part of it: the drama of the work and the drama of history. TSADÉ's description of being unable to stop witnessing and unable to respond are reminiscent of Benjamin's angel of history, with a focus on hearing and language instead of seeing and action. Gisèle Vanhese (2012, 181) draws attention to the parallels between Fondane's poetic vision and the *angelus novus*, using Michel de Certeau and Carlo Ginzburg's work on history to argue that his poetry has a 'heterological' perspective, seeking to speak the unsayability of the lives that sweep through history only as statistics or absent voices. Poetry as a kind of salvage.

In the last chapter we saw how QOPH, speaking for a second time, stages both the creation of the poem and the search for rational answers to the absurdity of suffering, placing the unhappy consciousness behind the unending drive to create. The poem is 'un monde plein [a full world]' that nonetheless turns 'autour du cri d'un homme seul! [on the cry of a solitary man!]' (MF 162, CO163). QOPH hovers on the line between metaphysical and worldly relationships: 'Écoute mon cri dans la nuit | et ouvre ton oreille avare [Hear my cry in the night | and open your miserly ear]' (MF 162, CO 163). *Avare,* cognate of avaricious, could be translated by *greedy* as well as *miserly*. If *miserly* implicates a God who never gives any sign of hearing, in the first instance (although the secondary implication is also of humanity's inattention to its own cries), *greedy* would be a posing of the possible reader as sharing the same thirst for interlocution. If this voice knows anything of a potential listener, it is that their ear too must have a desperation, an unending search for answers. RESH brings us into history: 'Les temps sont venus, je l'annonce | des fusillades, des émeutes [The times are at hand, I proclaim | of shootings, of riots]' (MF 162, CO 163). The horrors of pogroms and war are also an attempt to block this ear, 'immense échafaudages [massive scaffolds]' built 'contre la mort [against death]' (MF 162, CO 163), seeking through the reification and instrumentalization of the other a rejection of vulnerability

and fundamental powerlessness in front of the meaninglessness of death. Against this process, *L'Exode,* as Fondane explicitly writes in the afterword, 'cherche des amis [is looking for friends]', both among the underground of its time of composition, where 'le lecteur, qui est un confident [the reader, who is a confidant]' (MF 208) is exhorted to circulate their own clandestine versions, and in the 'ears' of all who come to it in the future.

If Fondane saw aesthetics as another form of the denial of vulnerability, the cry operates as its antagonist, 'une attestation existentielle dans l'impuissance de la parole [an existential attestation in the powerlessness of the word]' in Salazar-Ferrer's words (2007, 84). *L'Exode* takes up Fondane's critique of aesthetics and performs a kind of anti-aesthetic gesture between the *cri* and the *chante*: not an obliteration of aesthetics, but a poetic writing that foregrounds its own insufficiencies, subverting itself even as it affirms. Indeed, this subversion is critical for the affirmation – a beauty which is precious for the pathos of its insufficiency, a going-on given force by the difficulty of its conditions. Thus the tone of irresignation contains contradictory overtones, combining defiance with uncertainty. There is ambiguity not only in the poem's polyvocality, but clearly within its voices, in moments of hesitancy, polysemy and self-contradiction.

The status of the lyric 'je' is constantly under pressure. Fondane fully mobilizes the awareness that 'je est un autre' in its manifold and contradictory aspects – the desire for a true self which transcends earthly existence, the a priori unified self as an illusion, the correspondences between self and other. Many of the different voices speak from a 'je' position, including the Chorus. The confusion of identities is exemplified in an unusual sequence of tercets near the end of the work, which, with its eight stanzas followed by a lone end line coda, could also carry the trace of a double sonnet: the idea of the lyric underlies much of *L'Exode,* as if the poetic 'I' has lost its confidence but retained its appeal.[8]

It is unclear who is speaking in the tercets. They begin with a subjectless description: 'Disséminés parmi les hommes [Broadcast among men]', 'baignés de

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[8] Patrice Beray carries out a sustained reading of Fondane's subversive use of traditional forms in his book *Au temps du poème* (Beray 2006, 193–224), the way he 'does something new with the old-fashioned' (200) so that internal conflict in the rhythmic structure becomes 'le foyer d'incandescence du verbe poétique [the hearthstone for the blaze of the poetic word]' (208, my translations).

solitude [bathed in solitude]', 'oubliés sur la carte immense du vivant [marooned on life's huge mappemonde]'; we are unclear who is being referred to. The grammatical absence of a subject turns the referents into phantoms, who are then addressed in the second person 'quelle langue parlerez-vous, quelles paroles primitives [what language will you speak, what primitive words]' (MF 201). There is no adequate language for disconsolation, and the irresigned response entails constantly seeking new words. In the third tercet, a dash introduces the voice of 'the Lord', whereafter second person plural and singular injunctions intermingle, until the penultimate tercet. Here, the *aba* rhyme scheme is broken, and the rhythm disrupted with an ellipsis ending the first line of the stanza:

Il y a trop longtemps que vous aimez
                la paix...
– La Paix vous abêtit, dit le Seigneur.
Je préfère l'erreur qui chante à la
                vérité dévorante.

You have been in love with peace
                for too long…
– Peace is debasing you, sayeth the
                Lord.
I'd choose a mistake that sings over
                truth's ravenings.
                (MF 202)

These lines are deeply ambiguous and refuse to settle. Particularly the last. Is the 'Je' a continuation of the Lord's voice? We could construe it as a privileging of beauty over reality. Alternatively, we could read the voice of the poet, asserting the value of their song in defiance of the exigency of 'ideal' truths.

Poetry is thereby aligned not with the co-expression of truth and beauty, but with the irrational and its right to exist, to disrupt the peace of the mind. This reading is supported by the two sections before the tercets. On page 198, the Narrator rages against man's inhumanity to man, and against the lies of 'false prophets'. Significantly, the insult he casts against those who have 'assez tué pour des fantômes [...] vautrés au lit des idéals, | assez joué les saints, les héros, les martyrs [killed enough, you ghosts […] sprawled on the bed of ideals, | played enough at being saints, heroes, martyrs],' is '*Porcs!* [*Swine!*]' This Circean epithet is highly charged in its use in *Rimbaud le voyou*, separating the base, credulous part of the self from the *esprit critique*: Fondane essentially reads Rimbaud as seeking a means of

transcending the baseness of life while still satisfying his rational mind's demands for proof. [9]

According to Fondane (influenced by Kierkegaard), it is fear of being thought a *porc* that prevents Rimbaud from truly experiencing faith, whether the Catholic faith contemporaries[10] aspired to claim for him or faith in poetry. In the tercets, the response to the question of language is 'Il est temps de confondre la Beauté assise! [It's time to confound settled Beauty!]' (MF 201). This draws upon the exclamation of Rimbaud's that Fondane considers a key expression of his break with the ideal of poetry: 'Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. Et je l'ai trouvée amère. Et je l'ai injuriée [One evening I sat Beauty on my knees. And I found her bitter. And I cursed her]' (from *A Season in Hell,* translation Louise Varèse, 1961, p.3 [adapted]). For Fondane, this break that eventually led Rimbaud to abandon poetry for its illusions and insufficiencies is the same as the one he himself experienced, as set out in 'Mots Sauvages'. Rimbaud's accusation of poetry's denial of reality demands a confusion of beauty: 'sous l'impulsion première donnée par Rimbaud […] le poète en arrive à se mépriser et à mépriser l'opération qui rend son travail spécifique et lui confère un sens [by that first kick given by Rimbaud […] poets ends up holding in contempt both themselves and the operation that makes their work specific and confers meaning upon it]' (RV 237).

However, unlike those who abandon poetry or seek to find a place for it by other logics, in Fondane's words 'une sorte d'expérience, une sorte de connaissance […] quelque chose de valable, de rigoureux, de scientifique et qui n'a de la poésie que le nom [a sort of experience, a sort of knowledge […] something valid, rigorous, and scientific and which is poetry in name only]' (RV 237), Fondane sees in poetry alone a means of staying with this representational trouble. As Kristin Ross puts it, Rimbaud's 'decanonization of beauty […] is a transformation in the relation of the narrator to the object […] a relation to beauty that is no longer timeless or immortal, but transitory, acknowledging change and death' (Ross 2008, 40). Against the

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[9] For more on the problem of not being a naive believer and Fondane's irresignation, see his discussion of Nietzsche in *Preface for the Present Moment* (EM 42–43). It would be interesting to see further research in this regard comparing Fondane and his *Cahiers du Sud* collaborator Simone Weil, who did claim faith, in its Kierkegaardian absurdity.

[10] In this regard Fondane was writing against Roland de Renéville and Paul Claudel in particular. See for example RV 190.

imperatives on poetry to be either transcendentally beautiful or useful, Fondane, writing his last revisions to *Rimbaud le Voyou* around the same time as *L'Exode*, asserted

> Que l'on ne sache pas pourquoi on écrive, n'épuise pas la question […] il y aura toujours des poètes de par le monde, même si on leur coupait la tête pour de bon […] je consens que ceci ne soit pas […] une réponse sensée; mais peut-être que cette question ne comporte pas une réponse sensée; il n'est pas question de réponse sensée.

> [That we don't know why we write does not exhaust the question […] there will always be poets somewhere in the world, even if they really are getting their heads cut off […] I accept that this is not […] a reasonable answer; but perhaps this question does not entail a reasonable answer; it is not a question of reasonable answers] (RV 238)

The act of poetry is therefore a revolt against the very pressure on poetry to be reasonable, and is given extra weight in Fondane's case as a simultaneous revolt against persecution. Where suffering seems to demand an escape but the faculties of reason cannot accept aesthetics as sufficient, *L'Exode* contains the injunction to refuse the lure of beauty's enchantment even while actively putting poetry forward as an indication of and necessary means for the continuing need to speak, indeed *as a performance meeting that need*, though it cannot be fully satisfied.

Strange Singing in a Strange Land

Between the rant of the narrator and the semantically whirling tercets, the Chorus speaks. Picking up from where SAMEKH started, the final stanza it utters in the entire poem condenses the doubt of the poet:

Mais laisserai-je choir le monde
et pourrai-je jouer au cerceau dans un
                       monde
qui me demandera comme un
                      aveugle-né
de l'aider un instant à traverser la rue
– la grande rue du Jugement?
	But shall I let the world fall
	and shall I play at push-pin in a
	                      world
	which will ask of me, like one born
	                      blind,
	for a moment's help to cross the
	                      road
	– the great road of Judgement?

(MF 201)

Here the poet is not claiming a special status, but rather poetry is exposing the dilemma of all disconsolate subjects. We are in the territory of Simone Weil, discussed in chapter 1 ('"Other" Criticism'): faced with the knowledge of suffering, how can we do anything other than maximize our efforts to eliminate it? What use is 'playing at push-pin', the child's game of poetry?[11] Yet the poet's shameful conscience has already been unpacked; there has already been a refusal to put faith in answers. The world is not just *aveugle* but *aveugle-né*: there has *never* been a convincing vision of a final resolution. The drama of history is stuck in catastrophe and cannot reach culmination. The Chorus shows an awareness of there being risk not only in action ('oserons-nous baigner au sang de la justice [Dare we bathe in the blood of justice]') but in words: 'sur notre langue [s'appuieront] les serpents [from our tongue snakes will rise]?' (MF 200). Unspeakability shadows the catastrophe.[12]

    Is the only alternative to 'let the world fall'? The line captures Fondane's skilful simultaneous use of pathos and burlesque, the uselessness of the poet holding the whole world in their imagination. But refusing to 'let the world fall' could be a gesture not so much of holding it up as of refusing to abandon it. The tercets conclude 'Je serai avec vous, dans la boue et la poisse – | mais je serai en vous *Celui qu'on ne voit point* [I will be with you, in the mud and bad luck – | but I will be in you *the One who is unseen*].' (MF 202). While there is a theological edge to this proclamation (see Nicorescu 2006, 180–181), we can read its 'je' as the voice of a poet. Not simply of Fondane, but of the trace of the singular which remains, going along with the people of the future who must keep walking with 'reins d'angoisse [anguish in the gut]' (MF

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[11] *Le cerceau* is literally *hoop-and-stick*, but *push-pin* is used for prosodic effect.
[12] In this regard Fondane's quasi-drama foreshadows Beckett's 'dramaticule' titled *Catastrophe,* which succinctly stages the exploitation of suffering fraught in any attempt to represent it (Beckett 2005).

202). Irresignation does not represent an overcoming of the problems of representation, but a resistance to them. Avoiding the desire to elevate life out of itself and into a transcendent ideal, the poet can offer a trace of their experience which connects to the lonely suffering of others.[13]

The Chorus has been asking the ageless question of how to sing in exile from the beginning of the poem, the impossibility of doing so in plenitude and satisfaction. Yet on page 195 it reminds its persecutors of 'cette secrète angoisse | qui nous lie à la Joie créée aux jours anciens [this secret anguish | that links us to Joy created in ancient times]'. The cry of anguish and the joy of singing are intimately linked. Neither is sufficient to establish permanence or truth, yet together, in irresignation, they unite a refusal to dismiss suffering with a refusal to be overwhelmed by it. Against their own shameful conscience, the poet finds the bravery to cry out with a hope against hope, to use poetry's sustaining of contradictions to affirm existence without imposing a judgement upon it:

– C'est dans ce point
que j'ai douté enfin de ma lucidité
en me voyant moi-même, mais
                              détaché de moi.
Ce n'était pas la peur mais une autre
                                      joie,
ce n'était pas le bonheur mais une
                        autre amertume,
et je criais, honteux de m'entendre
                                crier:
C'est dense!

– It's at this point
that I finally came to doubt my reason,
seeing myself, yet detached from myself.
It was not fear but a different joy,
it was not happiness but a different gall,
and I cried, ashamed to hear myself cry:
it's solid!
                              (MF 203)

The voice that speaks these lines is the 'voice in the wilderness', the barest expression of affective life. In them we see that the end of the poem is only the beginning, as underlined by the reappearance after it of the Alphabet whose letters speak once more, bookending the work. In full awareness of the impossibility of speaking sufficiently, poetry becomes the means of an assertion of the need to speak.

L'Exode's irresignation involves repeated attempts to push words beyond rationality, to use language to gesture towards what is beyond it. The notion of tone here becomes somewhat paradoxical – like the silences between chimes of a bell,

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[13] This point will be developed further in chapter 8.

intentional absence contributes to the tone as much as what is positively perceived. Fondane uses a variety of paralinguistic strategies: punctuation such as ellipses, dashes and exclamation marks that disrupt syntactic flow; spaces, breaks and discontinuities within and between poems; contradictions that imply a missing presence as well as a lack of semantic stability; and various mentions of and paradoxical efforts to express extra-verbal vocalizations, such as vocative hailings (Ô), sobs and cries. Alexander Dickow gives an excellent reading of these strategies in Fondane's poetry, arguing for their capacity to create the effect of an 'emotional outburst' and 'disillusioned tonality' (Dickow 2017, 206).

Out of the inchoate cacophony of the initial Alphabet sequence, the next speaking voice coalesces around an age-old formula: 'Sur les fleuves de Babylone nous nous sommes assis et pleurâmes [by the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept]'. Yet the poem's disillusion precludes the notion of the comforting of present sorrow by recuperation into tradition. Immediately breaking with form, the next lines link with the past and future only to emphasize the way present sorrow is increased by the temporal perspective of the unhappy consciousness, one in which there is no diegetic justification: 'que de fleuves déjà coulaient dans notre chair | que de fleuves futurs où nous allions pleurer [so many rivers have already flowed through our flesh | so many future rivers where we were going to weep]' (MF 163). It is not clear who is speaking here. It seems similar to the Chorus, which continually mixes fragments of the Biblical refrain with mentions of other temporalities throughout the work, yet it is not titled as such. It is indeed a ghostly voice, one whose suffering is haunting.

Ghosts too are associated with crying or wailing. Fondane's ghosts, denied even the attachment of a haunting ground, address the waterways that mirror their shifting reflections, asking: 'Chantiez-vous de la harpe | en sanglotant – Abba! [Did you sing with the harp, | sobbing – Abba!]' (MF 164). This is an exemplary instance of the paralinguistic bridge between the word and the unfigurable. The dash and exclamation mark parenthesize 'Abba', underlining its status as a sob. Instead of a ritualistic invocation of God[14] that reassures past and present, the letters come close to losing their status as a linguistic sign, expressing anguish and desperation. As with other paralinguistic instances in the text, the juxtaposition of poetic and incantatory

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[14] Abba (Aramaic for father) is one of the names of God, e.g. in the Kaddish.

forms of language with non-verbal gestures highlights the signifying absence of what cannot be put into words.

The Human Song

A disconsolate mood entwines anguish at unspeakable suffering with a thirst to find and express unsayable joy. I will return to the cry later in this chapter, when I will discuss the *Intermède* that is the clearest expression of revolt in the work and the clearest statement of its actuality. For now I want to look at the way irresignation can also be brought out with softness and tenderness. In the last chapter, I discussed the retelling of the Song of Songs. This section of *L'Exode* is subtly startling. In its form, in its message and in its quiet appearance in the clamour of the work, it presents an unexpected will to live (or will to life), just as it does in the Bible: with a spontaneity, fertility and irrationality that confounds the narratives of suffering and searching for moral guidance that surround it. The return to Babylon, after the *Intermède* has pushed the France of 1940 directly into our imagination, finds the quiet of the night, in which the Jews had each been soliloquizing their metaphysical lassitude, broken by the drunken songs of the guards. Without falling into what Adorno calls 'the abstract conception of universal wrong' in which 'all concrete responsibility vanishes' (Adorno 2020, 27), the text remains committed to the humanity of the guards, themselves caught in the horrible logic of force. The bleak, Villonesque humour of their song, in its litany of corruption, is their attempt to reconcile themselves with horror:

Où sont les mariniers des soutes?	Where are the sailors from amidships?
Sont balayés par l'océan.	All swept away into the mere.
Les vieux copains? Ils ont la goutte.	Old mates? Their feet now give them gyp.
Les amoureuses plus de dents.	Their teeth are black, who were so fair.

(MF 188)

Its refrain seems to oppose the Jews' search for 'la chanson de Sion' (MF 169): 'il n'y a de chanson que l'humaine [there is no song but the human one]' (MF 188).

However, in the strange 'ENVOI' which follows – is it simply the conclusion to the guards' song, or are other voices joining or responding, sending their message out beyond the bounds of the longer poem? – the refrain is picked up:

Que l'on nous brûle ou qu'on nous cloute et que ce soit chance ou déveine, que voulez-vous que ça nous foute? Il n'est de chanson que l'humaine.	Whether they burn us or they whip, whether we had good luck or none, what makes you think we give a shit? There is no song but the human one.

<div align="right">(MF 188)</div>

This would seem to be a statement of pure resignation: abandonment of the search for salvation, the human song as one of bitterness only. Yet singing in the dark times, about the dark times, can be a gesture of revolt as well as despair.

The Song of Songs is also, in Fondane's emphasis, a song of abandonment and lack. However, the 'mais' that introduces it on the heels of the 'ENVOI' immediately distinguishes it from the numbing humour that preceded. If the messianic resolution is absent, the longing for it can still be sung, and as a different key of the human song: one that absurdly sings the value of what lives in the ruins, of the presence of love in the sensible despite the absence of the beloved, of a faint (weak?) promise beyond reason. Everywhere and nowhere, like the fragile 'duvet de pissenlit [dandelion seeds]' which could be scattered by a breath.

– Mais comment donc lui ouvrirais-je, pas encore lavée du songe, mêlée à moitié de nuit?	– But how could I open to him, not yet washed of the dream equally mixed with night?

<div align="right">(MF 189)</div>

Caught between dream and the night, Fondane's poetry utters, and in the Song of Songs finds a distillation of its own absurd gesture. Through bitterness and irony, sincerity irrupts, not overcoming the confrontation with horror but active nonetheless.

Here is a combination of the unspeakability of absence and violence with the unsayability of longing and absurd hope.

In the same years that Adorno was reaching the conclusion that 'even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror', Fondane was 'withstanding horror' (Adorno 2020, 28) by nonetheless singing 'un panier de rosée [a basket of dew]', in a voice 'plus tremblante qu'un cil [trembling more than an eyelash]'(MF 189). This brings us to a paradox at the heart of irresignation that defines it as an activity. Where negative philosophy diagnoses and warns, Fondane's poetry remains a *gesture* even when it expresses despair. This is a 'hope against hope', a gesture towards a reader that by the fact of its occurrence is a resistance to silence or suicide. The imagery of nakedness and fruit that characterizes the Song of Songs does not only signify a celebration of sensuality and sensual hunger, but the dignity of subjective life even when dispossessed, and a hunger that refuses to be resigned, a hunger that propels the search for restitution even against all evidence of failure.

After being rendered desolate ('– Les gardes de nuit m'ont trouvée | (que ma chair, que ma chair est blessée) [– The city watchmen found me | (how my flesh, how my flesh is wounded)]'; MF 189), the speaker concludes with these lines:

Si vous voyez Celui que j'aime
ne lui dites pas
– ou dites-lui à peine –
que l'on a vu saigner une fraise des
bois…

Should you see Him I love,
do not tell him
– or barely tell him –
you have seen a wild strawberry
bleed…

Fondane's reprisal of the Song of Songs is filled with quotation, and the novelty of the last line is startling.The poem, for all its sorrow and beauty, concludes with the passing on of a message, if 'barely'. It is absurd: 'He' is not to be found, and the effort to keep active the life that exceeds the recognition and acceptance of the law – indeed of logic, as emphasised by the concluding metaphor, that lapses into wordlessness – occurs in the face of violence. Yet it is not ridiculous: it is the renewed attempt to keep what is beyond the sayable *live*. Although it is addressed to the 'filles de Jérusalem!', we cannot help feeling implicated by its 'vous'.

The affecting sincerity of the Song of Songs section, which is paradoxically created through its status as a placeless whisper, layered in metaphor and mythos, is underlined by the irony of the next voice following it. Another 'mais' throws us back to the guards: 'Mais les gardes ont dit: "Assez de bavardages! | Chante-nous une chanson de Sion! | Chante. Juif!" [But the guards said: "Enough chatter! | Sing us a song of Zion! | Sing. Jew!"]' (MF 190). The guards have just missed the song they demand like a trophy, one which could offer a 'human song' better than their bitter one. Between the hardness of accepting the logic of force and the vulnerability of resisting it is an unintelligibility, a myopia of the powerful, what we could call, in Lyotardian terms, a differend. 'Comment voulez-vous que je chante sur une terre étrangère? [How shall I sing in a strange land?]', responds the Chorus. Once again, the words of tradition are not simply repeated as a lament, but given new significance in the singular context of the poem. 'Le malheur n'a-t-il plus de visage? [does suffering no longer have a face?]' (MF 190), the Chorus asks, against the abstraction of suffering inherent in the reification of victimhood.

In singing a 'human song' despite the resounding silence that answers the Chorus's question 'Est-elle donc venue la Justice [?] [Has Justice come, then?]' (MF 190), *L'Exode* resists the logic of revenge demanded by the Weilian logic of force, and indeed expressed in Psalm 137 ('blessed is he who repays you as you have done to us'). In this sense Fondane's irresignation, though far from speaking in optimism or anticipation, preempts the liberation theology of Paulo Freire, who wrote that 'the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well' (Freire 1996, 26). The understated register of Fondane's version of the Song of Songs offers itself, simple as a strawberry, to any who will hear it. It contains a different expression of the hunger and thirst that burns throughout *L'Exode*, as in WAW's lines: 'Si la faim vous brûle | qu'allez-vous prier? | Si la soif vous brûle – dites-moi, dites-moi qu'allez-vous devenir? [If hunger burns you | what will you pray? | If thirst burns you – | tell me, tell me what will become of you?]' (MF 155; CO 147). The 'torrent de faim, de soif et de désordre [torrent of hunger, thirst and disorder]' (MF 184), that lead to a refusal to stop looking for respite in the face of impossibility, is becalmed here, in a manner foreshadowed earlier by a nameless speaker: 'la soif elle-même fond comme un fruit très mûr | et mouille notre lèvre… [thirst itself melts like overripe fruit | and wets our lips…]'(MF

175). Like these lines, the Song of Songs trails off into wordlessness through an ellipsis. But the hunger that connects to the unsayable ('dites-lui à peine') therein concludes with the passing of a message: not so much the relaying of information as an injunction to keep the unsayable alive, apophatically, between those who continue to seek the words for it.

Mentions of hunger and thirst in *L'Exode* are never far away from mentions of *le cri*, an extra-rational, para-linguistic, interpellating expression of anguish which Fondane tries, absurdly, to force into words (the *Préface,* remember, states, full of contradictions, that the poem 'n'est qu'un cri, qu'on ne peut pas mettre dans un poème parfait [only a cry, which cannot be put into a perfect poem]', MF 153; CO143). This brings us to an important clarification: that the hunger is not only metaphysical, but also related to Rimbaldian motifs of affective independence: 'Faim, soif, cris, danse, danse, danse, danse!' (*A Season in Hell*). In her reading of Rimbaud, Kristin Ross points out how this line is counterpointed by the pacified, subjugated voice in the next scene of *A Season in Hell*: 'La raison m'est né [I am reborn in reason]' (Ross 2008, 68). While Rimbaud's positive appropriation of 'the primitive' to oppose Western 'civilization' is still problematic,[15] this juxtaposition perfectly highlights the radical dissection of affect in post-Enlightenment projects claiming to be guided by reason. Language itself is made complicit: *plus de mots*, Rimbaud's speaker ejaculates. The body's affirmations of its own existence – thirst, hunger, shouts, dances – are in every instance a revolt against the discourse which excludes them. Fondane's poetry becomes an irruption of this revolt in language itself, and the cry, the hole of the open mouth, as gestured to by absences, italics, ellipses and exclamation marks, the insistence on the reality of what exceeds discourse.

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[15] As is Fondane's, although his discussion of 'primitive' thought is far from creating a 'noble savage' Other. Dominique Guedj (2003b, my translation): 'For Fondane the dividing line between prelogical and logical thought does not separate so-called 'primitive thought'– Fondane would almost certainly have said affective thought, or mythical, or analogue thought – from our own […] If there is a 'rift' between different modes of thought, it is internal to the human psyche, regardless of its ethnic, cultural or intellectual attachments. It is not so much a separation of the 'civilized' from the 'primitive' as it is the centre of the 'tragic duality of the self' [FT 25] discussed by Pascal.' While any conception of the primitive is compromised by assumptions, Fondane's use of the term does not function as a simple opposition to 'civilized' values but as a means to consider the inevitable failure of speculative thought's attempt to resolve the problem of affect.

From the Disconsolation of Philosophy to the Irresignation of Poetry

> The disaster is unknown; it is the unknown name for that in thought itself which dissuades us from thinking of it […] Alone, and thus exposed to the thought of disaster which disrupts solitude and overflows every variety of thought, as the intense, silent and disastrous affirmation of the outside.
>
> (Blanchot 1995)

Fondane's frustrations with language are a frustration with the limits of thought. The cry reminds us that these frustrations are not only epistemological but affective. Kierkegaard wrote that 'All existential problems are passionate problems, for when existence is interpenetrated with reflection it generates passion'(Kierkegaard 1941, 313). The inevitability of passionate thought, which seems a paradox from a Cartesian perspective, is attested to in Fondane's gloss on Kierkegaard: 'Voici un homme vivant dont la pensée n'est pas une reflexion sur l'existence, mais le mouvement même de cette existence vers le VIVRE [Here is a living man whose thought is not a reflection on existence, but the very movement of that existence towards LIVING]' (CM 203). And if the highest passion of thought, as he put it, is to discover something it cannot think, Fondane's poetry represents a step beyond this movement, being an actual engagement with '*le vivre*' itself. A revolt against the limits of the thinkable, tied to the actual experience of being.

The *Intermède* [*Interlude*] in *L'Exode* is as clear an articulation of revolt as anything in Fondane's poetry. His return to poetry after his loss of faith in language marked an attempt to use words extra-rationally as a means to make a positive affirmation where philosophy could only be used negatively if it were not to continue

perpetuating exclusions and reductions.[16] The voices and tropes wrought in the first part of the work, from the first Alphabet sequence to the Chorus and the 'Voice of the Spirit' by way of an intermingling of nameless '*je*s', evidence the philsophical and theological complications of this step, with free-floating abstractions and sollipsistic preoccupations: 'Le chair a beau crier: l'Angoisse est lourde. | Et l'Ange a beau gémir: il est lié [In vain the flesh cries: Anguish is heavy. | And the Angel moans in vain: he lies bounden]' (MF 165); 'A quoi te sert de fuir? L'Angoisse est prête. | – Je veux dormir. Qui crie? Est-ce moi? [What good will fleeing do you? Anguish is waiting. | – I want to sleep. Who's crying? Is it me?]' (MF 167); 'quelquefois le gouffre prenait la voix d'un homme | il criait au secours: | " PLUS HAUT, PLUS HAUT QUE L'HOMME!" | et cette solitude me donnait la nausée [but sometimes the abyss took the voice of a man | crying for help: | 'HIGHER, HIGHER THAN MAN!' | and this solitude made me sick]' (MF 174). Such utterances are not as esoteric as they seem, when considered in light of the traditions engaged throughout the poem and their status, not as individual voices but as speakings that are juxtaposed and contrasted with many others across the work, with tropes that are both intertextual and semantically expansive. Nonetheless, the historicity that the *Intermède* injects into the work helps to mark the necessity for irresignation to be expressed through singularity and specificity, beyond the universalizing tendencies of philosophy, affectively tying together the linguistic and the social:

[']si les cris des humains tombent
comme châtaignes
à terre, au gré du vent,
sans altérer la paix des Anges,
qu'est-ce que donc l'Exode?
Si ce n'est pas vraiment une chose
éternelle
– qu'est-ce donc?'
Et brusquement je fus jeté dans la
campagne de France.

[']if human cries fall to the ground
like chestnuts, as the wind wills,
without disturbing the peace of Angels,
what then is Exodus?
If there is really no eternal thing
– what is it then?'
And I was abruptly thrown into the
countryside of France.

(MF 176; CO 167)

[16] For more on the broader intellectual context of Fondane's negative philosophy and the background of this move to poetry as 'a way of knowledge and a modality of expression that confronts – and constantly maintains the conflict with the rational and conscientious […] that] escapes definition and cannot reach the status of a concept', see Finkenthal 2006, 86.

The *Intermède* is subtitled '*Colère de la vision*': not *just* an angry vision that speaks in fury, but the poet's anger at their own vision, at the limits of what can be seen and depicted, at the limits of the value of poetic vision. The interruption of the 'drama' is not simply the poet wearing the mask of themselves and speaking across the fourth wall: here too the text is broken into disparate sections, numbered this time, switching between singular and plural first person, mixed with third-person narration and second-person addresses to God. Again the status of the lyric voice is confused, gesturing towards an attempted 'collective agency of enunciation'(Ross 2008 129). Following in the footsteps of Rimbaud, Fondane's 'ambivalence to figuration' is also 'culturally and historically determined'(Ross 2008 130). The redployment of Jewish tropes and forms, already brave in the anti-Semitic climate of the 1930s, took on renewed significance during the Nazi invasion of France in 1940. Under the occupation, Fondane wrote, 'la poésie cherche des amis, non du public [Poetry is looking for friends, not an audience]' (MF 208): just by existing, his work is a resistance to authoritarian mass culture.

The variegated poetic forms of *L'Exode* give an impression of voices fighting to articulate a different kind of collectivity, trying out the flotsam of tradition among the interruptions of war's dadaistic cries and lamentations, which prevent the realization of that collectivity. There is, appropriately, a kind of *mise en abyme* effect from the use of Jewish tropes, concerned as they are with the absence of and desire for covenant. Unlike philosophy in its conceptual constructions, poetry has the capacity to lay its own uncertainties bare. Even as *l'Exode* seeks the best 'éclate[ment] [eruption]' of the 'manière d'être [manner of being]' (MF 208) of each of its voices through the masks of different times, places, myths and forms, the poem draws them together to unite the singular with the expansive: 'Nous laissons derrière nous Paris. Ah! Si jamais | je t'oublie, Jérusalem... [We were leaving Paris behind us. Ah! If ever | I forget you, Jerusalem...]' (MF 179). The interplay of the unutterable between its utterances and the words themselves creates an affective tone. The potential for Fondane's revolt to find resonance is inseparable from its singularity. In the *Intermède*, the pressing actuality of 1940 bursts through the entwinement of the melancholy of the captive Hebrews in their abandonment with the melancholy and

groundlessness of modernity without subsuming them. Instead of analogy, all three aspects are expressed through and next to each other, reactivating their affective connection by way of the reader's own engagement.

In reading, the reader has an opportunity to participate in the performance of a resistance to the obliteration of the existent through the poem's assertion of the value of what is transient and intrinsically affective.[17] Fondane synchronically connects Judaeo-Christian tropes to all those fleeing the invasion, opening up space to implicate all colonized peoples with this experience of colonization, offering solidarity with Jewish experiences of dispossession. At the same time as this, he diachronically reactivates French history, energizing the still-latent universality of revolutionary and communard ideals *through the fact of their articulation*, prioritizing the real over the ideal, and casting this situation forward to the living reader. Consider *Intermède V*:

Je vous ai tous comptés	I have counted you all
civils d'hier, comptables,	yesterday's civilians, accountants,
boutiquiers, paysans	shopkeepers, peasants
et ouvriers d'usine et clochards	and factory workers and tramps whose
dont le nid	nests
est sous les ponts de Notre-Dame	are under the bridges of Notre-Dame
et bedeaux de sacristie et fils	and sacristy beadles and dependents
de l'Assistance	of the State, all Frenchmen from
publique, tous Français de France,	France, with clear eyes,
aux yeux limpides,	or from Congo, from deepest
ou du Congo, du bled algérien,	Algeria, from Annam
d'Annam	with palm-trees floating in their
avec des palmiers flottant dans le	gaze
regard	and Frenchmen come from
et des Français venus des îles	Caribbean islands,
Caraïbes,	French according to the rights of
Français selon les droits de	man,
l'homme,	sons of the barricade and of the
fils de la barricade et de la	guillotine,
guillotine,	sans-culottes, incorruptible
sans-culottes, le front	foreheads, free,
incorruptible, libres,	and Czechs, and Poles, and
et des Tchèques, et des Polonais,	Slovaks
des Slovaques	and Jews from all the ghettos of
et des Juifs de tous les ghettos de	

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[17] For more on the philosophical background to notions of participation in Fondane's thought and his troubling of genres of writing, see Jutrin 2003.

<table>
<tr><td>ce monde,</td><td>the world,</td></tr>
</table>

ce monde,

qui aimaient cette terre et ses
        ombres et ses fleuves,
qui ont ensemencé de leur mort
        cette terre
et qui sont devenus français, selon
        la mort.

the world,

who loved this earth and its
        shadows and its rivers,
who have sown this earth with
        their death
and who have become French, by
        right of death.

(MF 178; CO 171)

Elsewhere, the poem uses shadows to stand in for those who are allowed no reality in the history books, and rivers to express their homelessness: still the poem can affirm love for them and their situation.

The poem contains a weak messianic hope held in the expression of the specific. Poetry is where one is most likely to, in Anne Carson's words, 'encounter a fragment of unexhausted time. Who can name its transactions, the sense that fell through us of untouchable wind, unknown effort – one black mane?' (Carson 2002a, viii). Having described the refugees on the road 'dormant sur les chevaux [sleeping on horses]' (MF 177) in *Intermède II*, in *XVII* Fondane poignantly addresses an abandoned horse: 'Cheval, ayant perdu ton cavalier, quel long | regard amer, le tien. Tes croupes sont usés | comme une vielle chaise [Horse, now you've lost your rider, what a long | bitter look you have. Your haunches are worn | like an old chair.'(MF 185). One has the sense that this is a real horse. If, like Rimbaud, Fondane uses language that 'threatens to move beyond language'(Ross 2008, 133), it is primarily in relationship with the real, *le vivant.* This urge acts as a sort of anti-tradition to Symbolism and the pure linguistic creation of which Mallarmé is the paragon.[18]

The irresigned tone of *L'Exode*, then, is something to do with the tension between three modes of time: a transtemporal vision that seeks affective affinity, historical specificity and an affirmation of the intrinsic value of the present moment, latent with 'unexhausted time', a trace which is reactivated in reading.[19] In *Intermède*

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[18] The paradox of this anti-Symbolist interpenetration of the poetic and the historic is nicely captured by Kristin Ross's assertion that in Rimbaud 'the lyric – that unique, evanescent, exception moment – tells a story'(Ross 2008, 76). We may think also of the contrast amongst the Romantics, notably the distinction between John Keats's idealized use of nature and its foreshadowing of Symbolism, and John Clare's 'transactions', with the sense 'falling through' actual, specific birds and trees. See for example Erchinger 2018, Parshley 2013 and McAlpine 2011.

[19] This picks up from Fondane's interest in a paradoxically non-universal philosophy, which runs throughout his philosophical writing, his fascination for 'la fulguration d'un moment *unique* [the lightning-flash of a *unique* moment]'. (CM 271)

XVII the thirsty, restless horse wanders round the well in the deserted farm. A wounded, brutalized soldier wanders into the yard, takes water and closes the well without attending to the horse, before collapsing from his wounds. Sandwiched between *XVI* and *XVIII*, which are written in verse (although *XVIII* ends the *Intermède* by emphasizing the paradoxical co-existence of unspeakable horror and singing in the dark times by reproducing sing-song quatrains that subvert themselves by not rhyming: 'et la nuit est tombée brusquement. | Mais les rossignols ont chanté | tout de même! [and suddenly night has fallen. | But the nightingales have sung | all the same!]'; MF 186), the prose poetry of *XVII* is elegiacally modern. While firmly contextualized by the *Intermède*'s opening sections which speak unequivocally of the 1940 invasion, the scene – horse, soldier, farm, well, desecration, thirst – ties in previous catastrophes: the First World War, pogroms, countless aftermaths of massacres in rural Europe going back to Homer.[20] A subversion of linear time is operative: the historicity of the moment is confronted without being subsumed into either a progressive narrative or broken into untouchable atomization.

The presence of the horse also reiterates the apophatic actions of the poem. *Intermède XVII* (MF 185-185) stages the leap involved between affect and communication, and also the act of intersubjective recognition that is fundamental to a shared experience of unsayability, as well as the pain of its absence.

Il va au puits, boit au seau et recouvre le puits d'un mouvement mécanique. Cheval, je te vois approcher et regarder cette eau. Tu as été aussi de la bataille, du massacre.	He goes to the well, drinks from the bucket and shuts the well with a mechanical movement. Horse, I see you approach and stare at that water. You too were at the battle, the massacre.

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[20] The entirety of *L'Exode* is contextualized by its epigraph from Homer: 'Les dieux ont ordonné la mort de ces hommes afin d'être sujets de chants pour les générations à venir', which is given by Samuel Butler as 'The gods arranged all this, and sent them their misfortunes in order that future generations might have something to sing about'. With these words, King Alcinous enjoins Odysseus to tell his story (in book VIII of the Odyssey). Fondane follows the epigraph with an ironic 'ET VOILÀ!', undermining the implication that human lives could simpy be grist to the mill of art. The irony is tempered, though, by the notion that suffering is worth telling. *L'Exode* displays an anguish at all human suffering, for all the nuances of oppression and persecution. This far-seeing, compassionate perspective is mirrored and emphasized in Simone Weil's response to the invasion of France and occupation of Paris, published alongside Fondane's contributions in *Les Cahiers du Sud*. In *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* (1940/1941) she highlights Homer's lamenting loss of life irrespective of affiliation: 'The entire Iliad is overclouded by the worst of human calamities, the destruction of a city. This calamity could not seem more heartrending if the poet had been born at Troy' (Weil 2006, 65).

Tu ne sais pas parler, tu danse autour
                                    du puits,
tu danses autour de l'homme,
mais le soldat fourbu s'est allongé
                                    par terre,
les yeux ouverts. Tu danses de plus
                                    en plus. Le jour
monte son ombre autour du puits.
                                    Silence. L'eau.

You are speechless, you dance
                                    round the well,
you dance round the man,
but the knackered soldier is
stretched out on the ground,
eyes open. You dance on and on.
                                    The day
raises its shadow around the well.
                                    Silence. Water.

The discourse of war has dehumanized, left in the ruins it has engendered a soldier who is 'mécanique', and the dance and thirst of a horse represent an unquenchable affectivity, written tenderly where Rimbaud's 'primitive' is written in anger and sarcasm (although both, importantly, are present elsewhere in *L'Exode,* offering an energy beyond mourning without refusing it).[21] Fondane uses cinematic thinking, already proffered by the description in *XVII,* which recalls his film scripts and cinépoems, to weave together the pathos of the scene with a wider philosophical resonance:

Dans tes grands yeux ouverts de
                                    l'homme, ton image
s'est écroulée, immense. Elle est
                                    sortie du champ.
Pardon, cheval!

In the man's wide-open eyes, your
                                    image
has collapsed, that loomed so large.
                                    It has left the field.
Forgive him, horse!
                                    (MF 186)

War's field of vision has no place for the bucolic field. The *tes* in the Verdier edition may well be a misprint for *les*. Yet the strange syntax helps to reinforce the sense that

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[21] Anger is woven with sorrow in the *Intermède, e.g.* XI: 'Colère, je t'ai appelée aux heures de soufre et de feu | quand toute terre tremble! [Anger, I called on you in the hour of brimstone and fire when the whole world shakes!]' (MF 182). Sarcasm is apparent in the speech of the Babylonians, but also in the voice of the narrator who grows weary of his catastrophic perspective of the follies of mankind (MF 198):

J'ai vu les faux prophètes au travail:
ils étaient à cheval sur l'homme
ils tranchaient de la vie, de la mort
et la vie coulait entre leurs dents
la mort passait entre leurs jambes.

I've seen false prophets at work:
they were sat astride mankind
they were carving up life and death
life flowed between their teeth
death went between their legs.

'man's' eyes, the gaze of human priorities, the hegemonic visions that order society, wreak havoc by their certainties and exclusions.

The terminal gaze is in contrast to the soldier's eyes when he first appears:

<table>
<tr><td>les yeux hagards, emplis de visions, en vain cherche dans les armoires fiévreusement des choses secrètes.</td><td>his wild eyes filled with visions, searches in vain through the cupboards, furiously, for secret things.</td></tr>
</table>

(MF 185)

The desperation of the soldier, seeking some image in his memory to take him away from his present suffering, is, not allegorically but analogically, akin to the desperation of the poet, who seeks fantastical visions to save himself from the knowledge of suffering. On the face of it, *Intermède XVII,* especially read in isolation, seems to leave a taste of helplessness, if not outright despair. It is the work of a poet who has despaired indeed of being rescued by visions. Yet one who nonetheless writes poetry. Despair in the transcendent potential of poetry has been met with the courage to engage with reality, despite the fact that this can never be done *adequately*, never be done *completely*. The water that all through *L'Exode* communicates groundlessness and instability is also a sign that life is all around, though, as for the thirsty horse, in many ways denied to many.

Irresignation sounds as a refusal to abandon reality, even by the expression of its insufficiencies and the desire to soothe them. The pathos of *XVII*, in context with the rest of the *Intermède,* contains an injunction to the present, a resistance to the exclusion of lived reality. It is also an injunction both to be careful with language and to take risks with it. For Fondane, poetry is an attempt at language as pure means, in a Benjaminian sense, free of external criteria of ends, or from being 'reduced to impulses from beyond the sphere of mediacy' (Hamacher 1994, 116). It cannot succeed, because the presence of the word is always also an exclusion: it always relates to an instance, and always fails to resolve it. But, in Levinasian terms, it can trouble the notion of 'pure ethical saying' (Critchley 2009), disrupting the comfort of

the 'Said of politics and law' by sustaining contradictions, affirming affectivity and foregrounding its own inadequacy.[22]

I want to argue, as Kristin Ross does of Rimbaud and *A Season in Hell*, that *L'Exode* 'bears a distinctly different relation to the event than one of cataloguing or understanding; it materializes as a thought taken up with, vitally engaged with exterior forces, a problem-thought rather than a narrated, completed thought' (Ross 2008, 49). The tensions, subversions and contradictions sustained across the work prevent it from being closed into a reading, as either merely the trace of an individual consciousness or as a descriptive record of an event. *L'Exode's* irresignation in the face of disaster keeps its meaning open and propels interpretation into the future. Where Benjamin reads the source of weak messianic power back into history implicitly, it is as if Rimbaud or Fondane's poetry actively resists the definition of an event's significance in order to *consciously* implicate those who are yet to come. In Fondane's case at least, with the *Préface*'s address to the 'men of the antipodes', this opening is made explicit.

The vitality of irresignation is set aflame by the circumstances of catastrophe – as Salazar-Ferrer puts it, 'an exposing of the poet to extreme mental states, when they have broken past logic, cognitive rationality and the mental barriers of ethics' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 61, my translation). The very unspeakability of catastrophe leads Fondane to a sense of artistic duty, of art as resistance. This resistance is not *necessarily* ethical and is independent of political projects. As singing in the dark times it is proto-political: an affirmation of human life when its value can no longer be taken for granted. It is primarily a resistance to the domination of a particular relationship to the real, what Louis Janover calls 'the affirmation […] of the unassailable rights of the poetic experience' to 'explore every domain supposed to be unproductive, the domain of thought, of psychological analysis, of solitude' (Janover 1997, 11, my translation). If, in Blanchotian terms, 'desiring the ruin of language ends up making it live' (Vanborre 2005, 211, my translation), *L'Exode* is written by a poet who is fully cognizant – *connaissant* – of this, who, in fact, has gone beyond the

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[22] The primacy of the actual and the subversion of the Law as ideal are constant drivers of Fondane's philosophical writing. They are most succinctly addressed in *Le Lundi Existenitel*'s appropriation of Christ's reminder that 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2: 27). See Salazar-Ferrer 2009.

desire to transcend the real through the medium of language and has committed to living with it in that medium, while at the same time being aware of the medium's insufficiencies. Fondane insists upon the poet's duty to subvert thought and open up new linguistic possibilities while knowing there is no achievable final knowledge or 'correct' representation.

L'Exode is Fondane's poetry in action as 'courage for anguish in the face of death,' (CM 192) a rejection of false hinterlands in a living for what is. It is an act of irresignation in the face of the irredeemability of human subjectivity, which desires mastery and eternity but is faced with the evidence of failure and mortality. These affective dimensions betray the fact that there is in fact no objective certainty in rational thought, no absolute delineating standard of truth that separates knowledge and folly. The limitations and fallibility of knowledge collide with a fundamental condition of ineffability: 'le réel en sa totalité[...] ne se laisse pas penser [the real in its totality [...] does not let itself be thought]' (CM 193).

If Mallarméan poetics represented a desire to overcome this impasse by substituting a perfect imaginary for an imperfect reality, *L'Exode* is not just a critical refusal of this sterile escape but a commitment to reality along with all its suppressed affective dimensions. As maker, the poet does not simply frame reality, but intervenes in our relationship to it. Lamenting the world's horror while refusing to run from it into a brittle palace of truth or beauty, *L'Exode* demonstrates poetry's extra-rational power to affirm, revolting against the limits of language and its dangerous potential to reify by turning it into an intersubjective artistic performance of affective power. The present seems irredeemable, yet here it is:

Non, ce n'est pas fini!
Le cœur est haletant, ce viscère de paix,
l'estomac ne digère que mollement l'angoisse
l'œil ne repose plus sur lui-même et le sang
éprouve que c'est lui l'élément angulaire,
le fleuve originel, le cri premier, la voix,

No, it is not finished!
The heart, that organ of peace, is panting,
the stomach struggles to digest anguish,
the eye no longer settles itself and the blood
finds it is the foundational element
the originary river, the primordial cry, the voice,
the paradise whence man, having emerged at dawn
wet from his trespass

le paradis d'où l'homme étant sorti à
l'aube

went forth into the heavy stench of horses.

humide de l'offense
s'avança dans la lourde puanteur des
chevaux.

(MF 184)

As Acquisto puts it, 'he affirms the need [...] to generate a full picture of human subjectivity in a way that resists reason's potential for reductionism' (Acquisto 2015, 70). That task is endless, and requires the irrationality of poetry in order to move beyond the confines of philosophy's exclusions and negativity.

The Unending Road

Fondane refuses to turn away from reality to any kind of certainty, be it theological, meta-historical or aesthetic. Indeed, we might say, analogously, that he rejects the certainty of truth, goodness or beauty. *L'Exode* exemplifies Fondane's holistic, anti-systematic approach, taking his assertion that 'nous sommes à la fois, en tant que citoyens du malheur social, des êtres politiques, et en tant que citoyens du malheur humain, des êtres métaphysiques [We are, as citizens of social discontent, political beings, and as citizens of human unhappiness, metaphysical beings]' (CM x, translation Acquisto) and offering a combined, irresigned response, 'dût cette irrésignation être–ou paraître–absurdité et folie [even if that irresignation must be – or seem – an absurdity or madness]' (CM xvii).[23] Salazar-Ferrer shows how *L'Exode* ties all of these aspects together:

> As with the poem titled 'Refusal of the Poem', in which the poet expresses the impossibility of lyricism in war, the poem's formal beauty gives way to a historical real which violently irrupts into its field of meaning. Exile becomes a metaphysical theme: man is exiled from his original plenitude, and all the suffering of the outsider in historical exile [i.e. in an actual

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[23] Fondane's holistic view bolsters his consideration of himself a 'petit frère' of Rimbaud (Orlandini 2014) in the light of Ross's argument that the latter's poetry 'gives the lie to readings that would construct the poetic and the sociolect as contradictory or warring terms' (Ross 129), always a temptation when the singular and existential aspects of their work are in focus.

material instance of exile] reactivates this existential sense of exile. (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 57)

Salazar-Ferrer thus argues that *L'Exode* is an attempt to deal with the unhappy consciousness, the loss of the childlike unity of mind and reality.[24] But as a poem it goes, absurdly, beyond a mere rational attempt at understanding: it is a *response* to suffering and death, staging their ineffable reality while affirming life in the incomplete presence of its words.

Fondane's poetry speaks a pessimism that in its speaking signifies an absurd hope, acknowledging the presence and power of the ineffable but refusing to surrender to silence. Anne Carson argues that such speaking in despair is a 'contrafactual condition':

> a poet's despair is not just personal; he despairs of the word and that implicates all our hopes. Every time a poet writes a poem he is asking the question, Do the words hold good? And the answer *has to be yes*: it is the contrafactual condition upon which a poet's life depends. (Carson 2002a, 121)

L'Exode stages gestures of hopeless hope, performing a going-on against the impossible, a starting-again in the face of the inconceivability of happy endings. Here are linguistic affirmations in the midst of the fallibility of language, affirmations that do not save the poet in and of themselves but which do call the reader into question.

In this chapter I have built up a sense of the tone of irresignation in *L'Exode* through means themselves somewhat apophatic. I have written through the absences and contradictions of the work, which as poetry makes something extra-rational happen in writing, in what Blanchot calls 'the disastrous ruin of thought' (Blanchot 1995, 41). I am doubly aware, then, of 'the difficulty of a commentary' and have

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[24] It is irrelevant whether Fondane held this post-lapsarian conception literally, the point is that the *longing* for an accord between existent and universe was real. Fondane's concern was not so much how to overcome the unhappy consciousness as to live with it. Acquisto: 'It is important to specify that, like Baudelaire's Fondane's reference to the religious or theological has nothing of an orthodox affirmation of faith in a God and certainly not of the redemptive God […] Fondane adopts the vocabulary and structures of religious thought in ways that bracket questions of belief or practice but retain the full force of theology as a mode of thought […] in a conceptul framework that has much in common with Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment, the catastrophe of the mid-twentieth century that Fondane lived and which he attempted to theorize in its full metaphysical force' (Acquisto 2015, 70).

aimed to make apparent the inevitability of producing supplementary signification, 'unable to sustain an absent meaning' (Blanchot 1995, 41). Fondane's tone of irresignation is to be found in the collectivity of the work, akin to what Ross calls a swarm effect (Ross 2008, 103). The tension between the lyric and other poetic forms allow the singular and the collective to provisionally, incompletely co-exist, amounting to a pluralistic affirmation that, in sustaining contradiction and incompleteness, proclaims its revolt against exclusion and finitude without instituting a new exclusionary unity. Patrice Beray's summary of the operations of these formal tensions in *Le Mal des fantômes* is worth quoting at length here:

> in those years of the Occupation where his very existence was constantly threatened by his Jewish status, it is remarkable that the poet upturns and exceeds metricality's logics of identity and ideology […] our collective History in full is framed by the poem through an excessive, personal practice of versification, a style of writing both historical and collective. Overflowing the old mould, the metre's speaking becomes the moving, unending subject of the poem: the speech of a witness sung at the top of his lungs, full of the voice that resounds under the feet of the emigrant: 'The road walks and never ends' [*Ulysse*; MF 38]. (Beray 2006, 224, my translation)

Temporally, *L'Exode* is elegiac without permitting itself to be read as a monument, which would reify as it remembered. Instead it implicates the reader in its experience of exile, asserting its own singularity and historicity while confronting us with an affective affinity that cannot be denied without existential and epistemological self-harm or dismembering. Let us return to a most naïve sense of poetic tone as representing an attitude. Taken together, the contrasting voices and forms of *L'Exode* form 'the embracing of a posture in the world' (Ross 2008, 152), one that encompasses the refusal of both final solutions and silence. A tone of irresignation.

In the next chapter, I will expand this discussion of *L'Exode* into an analysis of Fondane's 'living-the-poem' as an intervention, suggesting a framework of poetic testimony as a means of understanding the specificities of his work and of connecting it with other responses to the (ongoing) catastrophes of modernity.

PART III

Chapter 7

Towards Poetic Testimony

The Artist and The Eyewitness

In her book *Violence Without God: The Rhetorical Despair of Twentieth-Century Writers*, Joyce Wexler frames an opposition between eyewitness testimony and artistic responses to the catastrophic effects of violence in the modern era, including its effects within the domains of signification and discourse themselves. Focusing on literature, she writes that

> common strategies in twentieth-century texts reflect the continuing need to represent unimaginable violence in the absence of communal belief – religious or secular [...] Explanations, justifications and condemnations were inadequate. The challenge of representing these events was to convey their gravity without presuming to define their significance.' (Wexler 2017, 149)

The language-defying scope of this challenge is communicated even in the attempt to state it: how can violence be represented if it is 'unimaginable'? And the choice of how to begin immediately throws the writer upon the twin horns of a dilemma: 'realist narratives imply that the unfathomable horror of events is knowable and describable, and antirealist accounts bury the specificity of events in a "discourse of unrepresentability and unknowability"' (Wexler 2017, 151–152).

In keeping with the interpretations of modernist attitudes towards representation I set out in the earlier chapters of this thesis, Wexler covers the turn away from the perceived insufficiencies and obfuscations of realism to the 'extremity, excess and irony [that] push readers beyond the empirical referent towards multiple symbolic meanings' (Wexler 2017, 19). The binary she sets up is essentially between the eyewitness's singular (usually legal or reportive) statement that fails to stand in for the whole and in using 'realist' language betrays the 'unimaginability' of the event, and the artist's 'radical narrative irony that does not depend on a speaker's

intentions [...] the range of scenes and social discourses [...] prevents readers from discerning any consistent narrative tone or point of view' (Wexler 2017, 99).

L'Exode certainly employs strategies of extremity, excess and irony, as well as 'parallels between similar events [that] preserve their specificity' (Wexler 2017, 19). Yet Wexler argues that with their proliferation of irony modernist writers ultimately failed in their duty to address violence, signifying little, to recall Emma Bell's phrase, beyond a 'reluctance to signify' (Bell 2010, 5). Her contention is that an assertion of the essential incommunicability of individual experience is sterile, with 'no basis for a wider consensus' (Wexler 2017, 187). This is a defensible view, if a pessimistic and limited one. However, she then leaps to an astonishing, and in my view deeply problematic, claim: that for a brief period after 11 September 2001, sincerity became possible, as evidenced in the poem *When the Towers Fell* by Galway Kinell, because it is an 'elegy [that] mourns a communal loss and speaks for all victims' (Wexler 2017, 186).

Although *When The Towers Fell* is a prose poem, it has significant formal and thematic parallels to *L'Exode*. Like *L'Exode*'s *Intermède*, it was written in response to the author's direct experience of a catastrophic event. It too employs multiple characters and voices, and incorporates fragments from other works (with even more overt direct quotation). It is heavily influenced by Eliot's *The Waste Land,* as the title indicates, which means that it shares *L'Exode*'s mythical Biblical resonances of disaster and lack of earthly succour.[1] Quotations from Aleksander Wat's story 'Songs of a Wanderer' and Paul Celan's 'Death Fugue' bring it degrees closer to Fondane. Like Fondane, Kinnell questions the relationship between imagination and reality: 'At the high window, where I've often stood to escape a nightmare, I meet the single, unblinking eye lighting the all-night' (Kinnell 2002).

Both poems act commemoratively. Kinnell's final lines are particularly poignant:

> As each tower goes down, it concentrates into itself, transforms itself
> infinitely slowly into a black hole

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[1] While the tower of Babel is not central in Fondane's work, its joining of physical and linguistic catastrophe is a context so ubiquitous it barely needs stated: 'Babylone, que ta langue est mauvaise! [Babylon, how rotten your tongue is!]' (MF 195)

> infinitesimally small: mass without space, where each light, each life, put out, lies down within us. (Kinell 2002)

This equation of the (inverted) infinity of immanent space with the imaginative remembering that links people to one another mirrors the performance of this intersubjectivity in *L'Exode*. However, while both poems deal with absence, Kinnell's poem is about the absence of the dead, whereas Fondane's is everywhere concerned with the living. *L'Exode* deals with the conundrum of affirming the lives still being lived as it pre-empts the absence of the present context of voices once they reach the reader, 'étonnés de si peu comprendre – | avez-vous mieux compris que moi? [astonished to understand so little – | have you understood better than I?]' (MF 152; CO 141).

Kinnell's poem shares the compassion of *L'Exode*, and I agree with Wexler that it is not an admission of failure in the task of representation. There are some elements which are perhaps contentious. *L'Exode* gives human voice to perpetrators (for example, in the characters of the Babylonian guards and priest) and engages with the reasons, however preposterous, that motivate them: Jews are 'accusés d'un délit que vous n'avez pas fait | d'un meurtre dont il manque encore le cadavre [accused of a crime you did not commit | of murder where there isn't a body]' (MF 153; CO 143). These lines succinctly tie together Nazi political scapegoating and ancient traditions of blood libel and the murder of Christ. On the other hand, *When The Towers Fell* risks reducing Islamist terrorism to an abstract evil. Even the pairing of 'New York and Kabul' is more likely to connote the global nature of a threat of senseless violence by Muslim 'barbarians' than it is drone strikes.

Significantly, as Wexler notes, Kinnell's poem stresses a certain sense of unreality which it shares with *The Waste Land* (which was arguably signalling the devaluing of worldy things to point towards a higher Christian reality [Freer 2015, 77]). *When The Towers Fell* and Fondane's *Intermède* both communicate a sense of shock through a collage of allusion, questioning and fragmentation. However, where for Kinnell a 'sheet of mock reality' is 'cast over our world' and the fatal plane is reminiscent of a 'cartoon plane' (Kinnell 2002), for Fondane the catastrophe actualizes an existential maelstrom already present in his poetics. For Fondane, myth is the carrier of an existential real which dovetails with the catastrophic present. Such

an existential signification is, however, also implicit in Kinnell's quotations of individual poets, which layer into the encounter with the terrible event.

My quarrel is not with Kinnell's poem, but with Wexler's conclusion. In Wexler's view 'Kinnell's beautiful images of a terrible event condemn the terrorists and commemorate the victims. This is not a hopeful message, but it is a meaning' (Wexler 2017, 186). Elegy may indeed be an important and valid part of responding to catastrophe. We may even allow that 'beautiful images of a terrible event' could be appropriate, if handled carefully, though we are on dangerous ground: aesthetically ennobling victims can also be dehumanizing, and aestheticizing the physical particulars of violent events is risky (as Weil points out in her treatment of the Illiad).[2] But Wexler's claim that the representational impasse can be overcome by defeating irony with a new sincerity that 'speaks for a new community' (Wexler 2017, 186) bypasses many of the stakes she has set out elsewhere in her book. It flattens not just the imperative to mourn without claiming to have fully realized that mourning because the loss is too great, but also the fact that catastrophe does not simply create a disruption of meaning but exposes a *fundamental* instability. Wexler's implication that the disruption can be repaired with 'a new global fusion' is not merely glib, it also perpetrates the epistemological violence modernist writers strove to avoid.

'Condemning the terrorists and commemorating the victims' is inadequate, and it severely limits the context of the commemoration. Wexler argues that for the period of commemoration, the 'Age of Irony' came to an end: 'suddenly, feelings seemed real' (Wexler 2017, 184). She quotes journalist Roger Rosenblatt: the anger is 'real', the pain is 'too real'. But one item on Rosenblatt's list is revealing: 'the greatness of the country: real' (Wexler 2017, 184). Wexler talks about a post-9/11 'sense of community' as if it were a universal. Let us be blunt: in her schema, the unstated implication is that these feelings only become real when experienced by Americans

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[2] Weil's argument that the *Iliad* word-paints its moments of value, such as the depiction of dreams, desires and love, while rendering its violence in the starkest of terms, is key to her assertion that 'the misery of all is revealed without dissimulation or condescension; no man is set above or below the common human condition; all that is destroyed is regretted. Victors and victims are equally close to us, and thereby akin to both poet and listener' (Weil 2006, 64).

(although Kinnell's poem gestures beyond them, with multi-lingual quotations and references to other terrible events).[3]

Her reading of Kinnell's poem also seems to make a virtue out of ahistoricity: despite the poet's use of parallel, alluding to twentieth-century violence and referencing, as Fondane does, Villon and Whitman, which would seem to give us a similar perspective to the Benjaminian Angel of History, Wexler seems to see some kind of restitution, 'a new consensus' (Wexler 2017, 186).[4] The terrorists are reduced to an abstract evil without context, akin to the attitude Fondane criticized in all who saw Hitler as a monstrous, barbaric, essentialized evil rather than a historical and all-too-human phenomenon (EM 56–59). The modernist crisis of representation is not only one of how to represent unspeakable horror, it is also inherently an engagement with the intractable problems of the history and politics in which a given event in enmeshed, with the contexts the writer already finds themselves in. In *The Waste Land* Eliot poeticized the chaos and barrenness of modernity in order to point the way to the necessity of Christian faith. Wexler's humanist version does not even have a supernatural guarantor for its claim of unity renewed.

I want to use *L'Exode* to argue that there is another trend in twentieth-century writing: one that, while not claiming to overcome the impasse, seeks to find ways of living with it and gesturing beyond it, through a juxtaposition of irony *and* sincerity. It is significant that the fragile return to unity Wexler envisages in Kinnell's poem is grounded in his use of the first person 'unifying the different elements of the poem' (Wexler 2017, 184). For Wexler, polyvocality means bitter irony only (Eliot is her prototype) and its cure seems to be a return to the 'je' problematized by Rimbaud

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[3] Kinnell's poem also gestures to New York multiculturalism with a mention of 'Humberto' who is 'delivering breakfast sandwiches'. This gesture, however, is more uneasy, suggesting that difference is subordinate to the aegis of Americanization. Further, Humberto is the only personage in the poem given a proper name, which instead of humanizing in this instance risks being othering: it is easy enough to imagine the office where the 'sandwich boy' is known by his first name while the 'banker' and 'trader' are addressed more formally (and implicitly associated with whiteness).

[4] Kinnell's excerption of verse XXXIX of Villon's *Grant Testament* is highly Fondanian, its '*povres et riches* . . . poor and rich *Sages et folz, prestres et laiz* Wise and foolish, priests and laymen *Nobles, villains, larges et chiches* Noblemen, serfs, generous and mean *Petiz et grans et beaulx et laiz* Short and tall and handsome and homely' emphasizing a shared humanity much as Fondane's pastiche does (MF 187), though less humorously. Anguish and perhaps irresignation are latent in his citations of Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Along with Villon, Whitman was a major influence for Fondane (Salazar-Ferrer 2007, 142), including during the occupation (see Dumas 2005). *When Lilacs* contains the lines 'Song of the bleeding throat, | Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know, | If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die' (Whitman 1865), which marries the cry of anguish with the poem as Fondane would later strive to do.

decades *before* the twentieth century. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Fondane counterposes a moving sincerity of lyric (as in the *Préface* and the Song of Songs passage) with other voices, lyric and otherwise, that do not erase the value of the former but which prevent 'beautiful images' from leading to a settled comfort. His 'anti-modern' modernism is of a different sort. Instead of attempting to impose a new unity of meaning or merely lamenting the unity that has been lost, his is an attempt to go on without it.

Fondane is both eyewitness and artist, 'a very dear ghost, whose powerful irony is invigorating' (Darras 2006, my translation). *L'Exode* combines glints of sincere statement with an explicit subversion of language's powers of representation, affirming without claiming authority. Although they do not map perfectly, it may be worth associating irony in his work with disconsolation, polyvocality and mood, while thinking sincerity by way of irresignation, the lyric voice and tone. While the tone, in Wexler's sense, may not be consistent, this does not mean the different voices simply cancel each other out. *L'Exode* is an 'indeterminate text' and yet it 'bears witness to specific acts' (Wexler 2017, 19).

Part of the problematic is the question that haunts Wexler's book: *why* is there a responsibility to attempt to represent catastrophic acts (or events, or processes) of violence? Is it simply to gain a knowledge of them, which could inspire a Weilian empathetic response? Catastrophe is unspeakable, but also exposes a more fundamental inadequacy in language. Meaning-making in response to it could be an attempt to live with this inadequacy rather than overcome it, and poetry can make affirmations at the same time as demanding we attend to the provisionality of meaning. Irresignation becomes an injunction to participate, rather than simply to know. The poem becomes an act of resistance to reification for poet and reader. For literal and for what, for a lack of a better word, I am going to side with Fondane and call *metaphysical* survival, resistance to dehumanization may not be sufficient, but is is necessary.

Anamnesis

A major reason that Fondane succeeds in marrying irony and sincerity is that he does not reduce his task to one of encoding knowledge of the catastrophe. It is at the very

moment that the unspeakable becomes overwhelming that he reaffirms the importance of the unsayable. To live with the catastrophe is not to comprehend it. Art has the potential to wrest back some of the space victorious or systematizing narratives attempt to dominate in an effort to justify power and consolidate it. This is true even when – perhaps especially when – the testimony is one of defeat and disconsolation. The struggle between irony and sincerity is also the struggle Fondane sets out in his works on Baudelaire and Rimbaud: between the inner 'monster' or 'saint' (iterations of the same thing) that sincerely wants to affirm life and the *esprit critique* that despairs of the attempt to do so *reasonably*. There is no replacement for the pre-modern cultural unity symbolised by God.[5] 'Je danserais comme une flamme', sings the Chorus:

– Mais puis-je danser sur Son corps?	I would dance like a flame
	– but can I dance upon His body?
L'Homme dont Dieu est l'ennemi peut-il chanter? Est-ce qu'on chante	Can the man with God for his enemy sing? Who can sing
dans la tempête, dans le sable dans la gorge du desert?	in the storm, in the sand inside the desert's gorge?

(MF 191)

L'Exode manages to stage the disconsolation of meaning's groundlessness while simultaneously affirming the value of the singular.

So *L'Exode* is an inspiring response to catastrophe because it shows that catastrophe is not just 'about' itself as an event, that it is not only negation, that it touches life and life touches it. Where, however, does this poetic resistance take us? The attestations of poets, their defiance of the cruelty of the world, their refusal to allow suffering to be subsumed by a narrative of victory or necessity, to accept the crushing of 'human tortoises... under the feet of the Laws' (HDH 443) placidly, must not be mistaken for compensation or restitution. Otherwise we are back with an aesthetic justification for the world, a retreat into poetic idealism. And we are still left with the unspeakability of violence and the why and how of addressing it. This is

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[5]The theological resonance of Fondane's work lies precisely in the refusal to turn away from this problem, though I would contend that Fondane is no more or less religious than Rimbaud, though he mobilizes Jewish myth, on the side of the oppressed, towards solidarity where Rimbaud attacks bourgeois christianity for the same ends.

where I want to link Fondane's poetic testimony to Jean-Francois Lyotard, who has a different take on modernist irony and fragmentary form than Wexler: 'Lyotard still has praise for the modernist avant-garde's work of anamnesis, the failure to forget that does not allow itself the solace of representation' (Readings 1991, xxviii).

Fondane seeks a kind of anamnesis, a way of not forgetting, 'même au milieu de la victoire, les morts, les blessés et les gosses mourant de faim [even in the middle of victory, the dead, the injured and the children dying of hunger]'. He continues: 'encore moins les puis-je oublier au milieu de l'échec, et me contenter de plastronner sur la 'valeur de l'exemple', sur les 'revanches' de l'avenir [still less can I forget them in the middle of defeat, and be contented with flattering myself with the 'value of example', with the 'revenges' of the future]' (HDH 136–137; EM 79). The question of remembering, of refusing to forget the unspeakable, is tied by Weil's question – I know, so what is the difference? – to the existential question of why and how to go on living ('since it concerns the possibility of any affirmation of life, this question cannot be evaded' [Adorno 2001, 110]). Adorno stands in Fondane's shadow. His meditations on survivor guilt recasts the Dadaist problematic of rejecting the bourgeois culture that made mechanized slaughter possible in existential terms:

> Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living. (Adorno 2007, 362)

In his own poetry and in his relationship to poetry, Fondane had already responded to this question, not after the fact but in it. Poetry could be a means of going on, a gesture towards the unsayable, *at the same time* as being the means of refusing to turn away from the unspeakable.

This irresigned resistance of Fondane's poetry is actually very close to Adorno's own ethics of resistance. Fondane argues:

> Un humanisme qui n'aurait pas *sur-estimé* la raison […] nous [n'] eût [pas] évité les guerres, les révolutions, les cataclysmes […] mais il nous eût évité certainement les guerres à l'échelle de la nation, les révolutions à l'échelle du monde, et la barbarie machiniste, et la guerre des gaz et des microbes – et le racisme. (HDH 447)

> A humanism that had not *overestimated* reason […] would [not] have saved
> us from war, revolutions, and cataclysms […] but it would certainly have
> saved us from wars on a national scale, revolutions on a world scale, from
> mechanized barbarism, from gas and germ warfare – and from racism. (EM
> 57)

Adorno says simply: 'there ought to be no concentration camps' (Adorno 2007, 281).
If the barest wishes of an anti-Humanist humanism flow, in James Finlayson's words,
'from a kind of pre-theoretical involuntary protest at the actuality of human suffering'
(Finlayson 2012 29), art can function as its extra-theoretical articulation. Finlayson's
wording is important: not only as a record, but as a protest. He continues:

> Adorno is no mystic: He holds that discursive thought can be abandoned in
> favour of non-discursive modes of thinking: faith, feeling, visionary
> experience, poetry, aesthetic intuition or mimesis [...] it is not incoherent to
> attempt to show what cannot be said by whatever means possible, even by
> means of self-subverting rhetorical utterances. Nor is it incoherent to attempt
> to articulate, from sideways on, the experience of being shown something
> that cannot be known or put into words [...] the ethics of resistance is the
> counterpart to his critique of representational thinking in *Negative
> Dialectics*, and the ethics of resistance is nothing less than a way of being
> and a way of living. (Finlayson 2012, 31–32)

This apophatic injunction to live and resist ties the work of anamnesis to the
affirmation of the singular. The words of one victim do not metonymically 'speak
for' all who have been silenced, but they are a resistance to the entwined
epistemological violences of catastrophe and realist representation, an affirmation
that 'there is something else, something that history does not record: namely,
the life as such, as subjectively lived, of the existant; that which Levinas calls
the interior life' (Dickow 2017).

Anamnesis sustains several paradoxes. It is a failure to forget that refuses
representation. Poetry can work 'sideways on', yet it can only fulfil its role as
testimony to the unspeakable by refusing to be defined by it. Fondane's defence of
the autonomy of art is a resistance to the enclosure in meaning of any one human life,
a resistance to the reification of thought itself. Lyotard's anamnesis reverberates
unexpectedly with Fondane's interest in Socratic daemonic inspiration as a means of
considering the artist's activity, the 'nécessité profonde, irrationnelle, qui fait que
l'art ne peut être autre qu'il n'est, comme s'il était porteur d'une mission dont le sens

doit nécessairement nous échapper et, en premier lieu, à l'artiste lui-même [deep, irrational necessity which means that art cannot be anything other than what it is, as if it were the bearer of a mission whose meaning must necessarily escape us, and escape the artist in the first instance]' (EDR 81).[6]

Bill Readings succinctly frames the doors opened by these considerations:

> As Lyotard remarks in *Heidegger et 'les Juifs'*, Adorno's greatness is to have recognized that, after Auschwitz, art can only be historically responsible as event, rather than representation (*HJ*: 79). Art must not exchange the affect of the Holocaust, the emotion which moves us out of representation, for a representation that claims to give a cognitive signification to the Holocaust. (Readings 1991, 17)

Readings continues with a gloss on deconstruction: 'in its displacement of representation, deconstruction does not return us to a pure being or truth that might precede representation: deconstruction is the aesthetics, ethics and politics of the incommensurable' (Readings 1991, 17). The catastrophe exposes incommensurability, but the great value of *L'Exode* is that Fondane responds not only by gesturing towards the horror but also the incommensurability of all that is cherished by the existent. This awareness and the brave attempt at expressing it dovetails with Lyotard's argument that 'an aesthetics of pathos is required, an aesthetics responsive to the limits of representation, to the sense that something is trying to be said which cannot be said' (Readings 1991, 17).

In the work of anamnesis, the cry may be a starting point. In his Levinasian reading of Fondane, Alexander Dickow comments, in a move that parallels Adorno's 'pre-theoretical impulse', that 'any attempt to establish an ethical relation discursively is ensnared: an ethical relation has or has not been established already as the Saying occurs, and before anything at all has been Said intervenes' (Dickow 2018a, 161). For art to be an event, however, something more than horror in a cry must be present. The aesthetics of pathos aligns closely with what Fondane scholars have called an aesthetics of participation (Jutrin 2003). For all the insufficiencies of language, when it is 'responsive to the limits of representation', as it is surely the

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[6] Fondane's use of Socrates's daemon to describe artistic inspiration disrupts the function of the figure of speech. Although he does not literally believe in the daemon according to the terms of ancient Greek cosmology, neither is he simply using it as metaphor or analogy to say artistic inspiration is 'like' it. Instead, it is naming an underlying truth beyond the powers of rational description.

duty of poetry to be, it has the capacity to act as an event in the particular interpellation of the reader. As Dickow puts it, 'in writing [...] the Saying does not become a Said until a reader actualizes the written discourse through the act of reading' (Dickow 2018a, 162). The poetry of testimony is different from other forms of testimony because of the way it addresses the reader *specifically*, as Fondane demonstrates to know in the afterword to *L'Exode* and throughout. The possibility of affectively extending the singularly valued humanity held by the work to the audience is mediated by the work's imaginative devices, which forestall the crystallisation of an authority which could overwhelm the ultimately ungraspable historical reality (Tranter 2009)[7] and allow the reader to approach the event 'sideways on'.

I will return to this interpellation in the next chapter. First, however, I want to probe certain aspects of this tentative notion of poetic testimony a little further, including its caveats and pitfalls. For all its positive, though anti-positivist, resonances, the context of anamnesis makes it crucial to foreground the necessarily subversive qualities enmeshed in it, the centrality of 'self-subverting rhetorical utterances'. I am worried that in seeing Kinnell's poem as successfully meaning-making Wexler is risking bypassing Adorno's (and Fondane's – 'no! I was not like you') warnings of complicity and allowing that meaning to settle.[8] As I stated in chapter 2, I would like to follow the example of John Roth in his book *Holocaust Politics*: 'I think there is no closure, at least none that I can or should attempt to provide [...] full expression requires not only a giving of testimony but a receiving of it as well [...] it is not for me to settle what should remain unsettling' (Roth 2001, 258).

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[7] Aestheticisation creates, or relies on, distance, and it is exactly this distance which Fondane is anxiously aware of in poems such as *Tristan et Yseut VII*, as he undermines the poetic act in the moment of its performance, throwing his voice away from himself even as he brings it into existence: 'je suis trop acteur au ballet qu'on joue de sang et d'horreur, pour chanter, ce thème! [I am stepped so far in this ballet, staged in blood and horror, to sing this theme!]'(MF 235)

8 Reading Wexler's example another way, we could instead see Kinnell's work as participating in the opening towards the reader I develop in this chapter. I would like to emphasize, however, my contention that Fondane's poetry demonstrates that the interpenetration of ethical and representational concerns cannot be resolved.

The gesture towards the reader in Fondane's poetry takes place in the expectation of a living response – an expectation that is *imperatively* fragile: the words both do and do not speak for themselves, and they make this vibration evident.

Subversion: I. Language

Poetic testimony, as I am arguing for it as a handle for reading Fondane's poetry, is subversive in three principal ways. It is extra-rational, at the very least gesturing towards what cannot be thought logically. It makes space for tragedy: it cannot be separated from actual existence, forcing the undeniable, irreducible affective condition of living into acknowledgement, through and beyond other discourses which seek, for better or worse, to suppress or instrumentalize it. Finally, it foregrounds its own paradox of ineffability, apophatically insisting on its own inadequacy, enjoining the reader to participate in the work of thinking towards the unthinkable.[9]

It is in its own powers of self-subversion that poetic testimony has the capacity to radically differ from other kinds. By drawing attention, in various ways ranging from irony to palinodes (Dickow 2018b, 16) extra-lingual gestures such as ellipses, contradictory questions and other discontinuities, to its representational insufficiencies, it can make its existence a performance of the 'attestation' laid out by Salazar-Ferrer even as – indeed *because* –it calls its own status as a statement of knowledge into question. Maurice Blanchot argues:

> If, in order to deny, it is necessary to speak, and speaking, to affirm; if, consequently, language seems not to be able to free itself from a first affirmation, so that, once you speak, you are already the prisoner, always belatedly struggling against it, of an enunciation that affirms itself in speech, one would still have to know what this affirmation, enunciation, means. (Blanchot 1992, 48)

L'Exode, written in the same epochal crisis of representation that contextualizes Blanchot's approach to ineffability, works by bringing this tension in language to the

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[9] Given that Fondane's poetic practice evolved in antagonism to the traditions of philosophy, we could see this triad as a subversion of the transcendentals. Extra-rationality confounds the notion of transcendental truth. The acceptance of tragedy complicates the estimation of the good. Finally, ineffability undermines the representative yardstick of beauty.

surface. It foregrounds its status as *parole*: as a specific utterance linked to an actual existant, and by extension to their circumstances, which are shared by others.

Unlike even negative philosophy, poetry is able to explicitly suspend the principle of non-contradiction. For Patrice Beray, Fondane seeks to be a kind of troubled conscience to history, reinserting the suppressed affect that discomfits the neatness of historical narrative: 'si on n'échappe pas à la logique du "signe", on peut entrer en conflit avec elle [if we cannot escape the logic of the 'sign', we can engage in conflict with it]' (Beray 2009, 23). This conflict becomes open in Fondane's poetry, which as an irresigned act can be considered, borrowing from Lyotard, first and foremost a 'disruption of conceptual reduction' (Readings 1991, xxix). Fondane pre-empts postmodern philosophy in the ways that 'his works attempt to testify to that which escapes language, though we never stop attempting to articulate this excess', as Peter Gratton says of Lyotard (Gratton 2018). For Fondane, however, this unending attempt – *édition sans fin* – can only have a positive aspect in poetry, where the extra-rational and singular can be granted some kind of fragile presence.

In his reflections on discourse in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola,* Roland Barthes draws together the historical concerns shared also by Fondane (and by his *Cahiers du Sud* collaborator Walter Benjamin) with a consideration of writing as excess in a way which accords nicely with Fondane's warning of logic's limits and his poetic resistance to it:

> A text's social intervention (which is not necessarily effected in the period when the text appears) cannot be measured with regard to the readership it reaches. Nor can it be measured with regard to the faithfulness of the socio-economic reflection it inscribes, or projects towards some sociologist eager to extract it. A text's social intervention is rather in the violence which allows it to exceed the laws that a society, an ideology or a philosophy create to harmonize themselves as a noble movement of historical intelligibility. This excess has a name: writing. (Barthes 1971, 14, my translation)

This is the excess Fondane clings to and defends against the urge to harness writing to a programme, a practical use-value. His poetic texts foreground this epistemological violence. They demand recognition of their ambiguity, their games and contorsions of language force attention to the silence beyond them, necessitating readings of their excesses. They ask us to take the frivolity of poetry seriously.

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The urge to exceed comes from a place of disconsolation. Lyotard writes that 'To question requires that something happen that reason has not yet known. In thinking, one accepts the occurrence for what it is: "not yet" determined' (Lyotard 2006, 278). Poetry has the capacity to make this process evident and vital. *L'Exode* does so, but it does not stop there: if the gap between reality and knowledge is exposed, the existant's 'thirst' for reality is also affirmed. In his paper on Fondane's poetic response to the problems of reason, Dickow addresses the problematic thus: 'if words cannot capture the world, they leave us without knowledge of the world [...] this places existence as such beyond the ken of language as a tool of knowledge (but not of language as expression beyond knowledge, such as poetic language in particular)' (Dickow 2018b, 2). This strange relationship of poetic testimony to reality that uses words to attest to what is failed by words, can be thought of as asserting 'power to figure and not merely to signify' (Lyotard 1971, 62). To do so, it must relinquish rationalist discursive postures of objectivity. Irresignation requires specific, personal gestures, which are necessarily repressed in the logical argumentation of philosophy. Fondane's poems are performances rather than arguments. Through simply being, they call for engagement, rather than imposing a logic.

Poetry has the great capacity to be 'breathable', as Barthes or Berardi might say. Its linguistic operations necessarily heed the silence from which it irrupts and which it carries within it, its inspirations, the blank spaces which surround its traces. Poetry is writing which refuses objectification, which insists that language cannot be total. Barthes argues that 'There is nothing more depressing than imagining the Text as an intellectual object (of meditation, analysis, comparison, reflection, etc.). The Text is an object of pleasure (Barthes 1971, 11, my translation).' This statement of pleasure may seem out of place in a discussion of testifying to the unspeakable. Yet this is precisely where irresignation irrupts, where the poetic testimony resists being merely a catalogue of horror. The poetic trace is a sign of life. Its pleasure may be absurd: an affirmation of life in language in the midst of catastrophe, of suffering, of anguish. This *jouissance*, this *éclat* admist darkness and silence, this affirmation in

the poem despite itself, despite the anguish of the author, is part of the poem's excess.[10]

Subversion: II. Presence

Where presence has been denied or marginalized, it may resurface in poetry. Olivier Salazar-Ferrer writes that 'the Fondanian poem is born from the fracture of the good, the true and the beautiful at the contact of suffering' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 60, my translation). Poetic testimony starts from an extra-rational impulse; a desire to affirm existence – even in its terrible or terrified aspects – which is 'pre-theoretical'. Catastrophe is not *necessary* to inflame this impulse, but it can dramatically release it (the energy of the *Intermède* in *L'Exode* demonstrates the effect of direct contact with catastrophe in Fondane's own work, acting as a counterpoint to more contemplative sections).

Fondane discusses the extra-rational impulse to creation in essays like the *Faux Traité* and *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*, as well as more broadly in his work (he does so with particular humour in his essay on Brancusi). More recently, Chinua Achebe, in a lecture at the South Bank centre, paralleled that impulse with the Igbo practice of Mbari, where the goddess Ana calls upon an individual to commemorate an event or experience with sculpture (Achebe 1990). Poets may have their own Ana calling them to attest to what has been passed over. In her essay 'War, Poetry and the Child', the poet U.A. Fanthorpe states that 'the distress I encountered [...] seemed to liberate my vocation' (Fanthorpe 2000, 210). The impulse to create and its relation to testimony are very close together in an anecdote she relates of one of Fondane's contemporaries:

> you will be summoned, as the great Russian poet Anna Akhmatova was. During the Stalinist terror, she was waiting in line outside the Leningrad prison where her son was detained.
>
> A woman with blue lips standing behind me... suddenly woke out of the benumbed condition in which we all found ourselves at that time and whispered in my ear (in those days we all spoke in a whisper):

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[10] It is important to re-emphasize the difference between Fondane's affirmation and an aesthetic escape from suffering. Salazar-Ferrer argues that '*Titanic* (1938)'s aesthetic of disaster radically opposes the contemplative aesthetic of *Cimitière marin*' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, my translation).

– Can you put this into words?
And I said:
– I can.
(Fanthorpe 2000, 210)

In Akhmatova's case, the call was incarnated. Often it is internal. The figure of the muse-taught poet, of course, with divine, unstoppable inspiration, Valéry's *force chantante*, has been romanticized beyond cliché, though the poet's subversive extra-rationality troubles the totality of the state as surely as it did in Stalin or Plato's time. For Fondane the impulse to poetry is more ambiguous. Like the Rimbaud of *Rimbaud le voyou,* he struggles with his *esprit critique:* his defences of the frivolity of poetry, its lack of teleology, are addressed as much to his own reason as to André Breton, Roland de Renéville or Paul Nizan. He writes poetry despite himself, tells us at the start of *L'Exode* to forget his poem and retains only a 'cri humain'. And yet this cry has to attempt to express itself through poetry. Poetic testimony seeks not simply to record but to be dynamite, a Kafkan axe to the frozen sea, an explosion to wake us out of any benumbed condition.

Fondane's poetry defends against the triumph of one particular set of interests as hegemonic, or in other words as self-authorized to define what is 'universal'. Beyond the negations of existential philosophy, though, it makes a statement of the singular. Poetic testimony affords ways of moving forwards, releasing the bonds of traumatic and oppressive silences, if not filling them or compensating for them. 'The artist', says Achebe, 'is always ready – he welcomes that aspect of our humanity – that man (including woman) will surprise [...] an artist makes room for [...] things that make the story untidy' (Achebe 1990). Against the 'grand programmes' that seek to tidy the world, in their nightmare forms such as fascism but also in their brightest clothing, such as socialism or liberal humanitarian discourses, poetry unshutters the untidy corners where, as Auden puts it, tragedy takes place, where 'things don't take place according to the manifestos' (Achebe 1990). Poetic testimony such as Fondane's or Akhmatova's is not only a revolt against the effacing of actual lives but also the affirmation of life as a whole against forces of neutralization and obliteration. Irresignation is a move beyond silence that paradoxically begins from the acknowledgement of silence. In Fanthorpe's words, 'we all have to be ready for the moment when that woman with the blue lips turns to us [...] since this has been a

century of war and dispossession, many people in the future may find their mouths blocked as mine was. I'd like them to know that they can retrieve and use their silence' (Fanthorpe 2000, 210).

In its affirmations, *L'Exode* is at the antithesis of the Nazi project, which valued triumph through and after death over life's transience (see Kolocotroni 2019, 231–233). Where the Nazis fetishized the triumph of ruination, *L'Exode* speaks from within it, gesturing beyond it. Fondane's return to poetry is very much in the existential paradigm critic Yann Frémy sees for Rimbaud – 'vivre sa vie, et pas la sauver [living his life instead of redeeming it]' (Frémy 2018). To speak from the ruins, to salvage, is to give consideration to the value of the evanescent rather than to give it 'an inferior status' as only worthy when driven towards 'the construction of the whole'. These are Adorno's words from a commentary on Hegel. Poetic testimony acts in defence of the singular. It is a resistance to the 'serene indifference [with which Hegel] opts [...] for [the] liquidation of the particular'(Adorno 2020, 17).[11]

In *La Conscience Malheureuse*, Fondane defines existence negatively, in opposition to philosophical thought with its liquidations of the particular:

> C'est définir l'Existence […] que de la considérer dans son opposition au mécanique: lois, necessité, logique, ressouvenir, esprit, et de la situer dans un CONFLIT IMMANENT qui ne peut avoir d'autre issue, ici-bas, que dans un ECHEC PERPETUEL.C'est définir la pensée que de dire qu'elle est OBLIGEE à l'échec, et non pensée DE l'échec.

> [We can define Existence […] by considering it in opposition to the mechanistic: laws, necessity, logic, remembering[12] and spirit, and by situating it in an IMMANENT CONFLICT which cannot have any other result, in the material world, than PERPETUAL FAILURE. We can define thought by saying that it is COMPELLED to failure, and not the thought OF failure.] (CM 212, emphasis in the original)

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[11] Adorno arrives at similar conclusions to Fondane, adding 'social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience than Hegel conceded, while conversely the large historical categories, after all that has been perpetrated with their help, are no longer above suspicion of fraud' (Adorno 2020, 18).

[12] I believe Fondane is referring here to the idealist Platonic conception of anamnesis, quite different from the Lyotardian sense.

This failure of thought is an opening for life. The poem, still having to live with language but resisting it, becomes the site of an extra-rational affirmation of the singular.

A going-on despite not being a victory, this paradoxical extra-rational affirmation in a struggle with the negativity of thought aligns Fondane's modernism with that of Samuel Beckett in ways that would bear much further exploration. I will merely bring Shira Wolosky's apophaticism-focussed Beckett analysis to bear on this discussion of the active, searching function of Fondane's poetic testimony:

> Beckett I think does not reject the world, although he does reject explanations that try to justify its suffering [...] he rejects transcendent solutions to immanent problems, rejects a totality of Being removed from the transient world and above it as a source of value and compensation. For Beckett, as far as I can see, suffering defies justification. And while there may be, nonetheless, ways for living in a world where so much suffering remains inexplicable, these will not point beyond the world to some other world as redemptive [...] figured [...] by silence. Language, conversely, may provide no final answer, but represents ongoing life – in protest, in hope, in despair, in tenacity. (Wolosky 1995, 122–123)

This passage from Wolosky brings together a non-transcendent apophatic understanding of representation in modernity; a certain poetic way of using language irresignedly; and affirmation of and compassion for the singularity of existence in a way that encapsulates much of the energies of Fondane's move to poetry.

In the expression of defeat that is a performance of resistance, irony can play an important role. It is not hard to find artistic and intellectual comparisons for this element of Fondane's work. Beckett also manifests a paradoxical use of irony to sincerely express this revolt, staging the humour of despair and hopelessness to send a meta-message of defiance and love, as critics have variously argued over (see Tereszewski 2013, 1 and 79–81).[13] Through the poetic act comes a performance of going-on that actualizes itself. This notion of performance, of what Salazar-Ferrer calls the 'illocutionary' form of this 'existential attestation' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005), has parallels with other existential responses to catastrophe, notably Victor Frankl's

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[13] Alain Badiou, who in a quasi-existential reading of Beckett offers a strong case for the importance of love, also makes the less contentious claim that in his work the approach to the Other 'oscillates between realisations of failure and flashes of victory' (Badiou 2003, 17), underscoring this tension between impasse and intersubjectivity.

logotherapy or Primo Levi's analogous discussion of resisting dehumanization in *If This Is A Man*. Humour and irony can actually be ways of resisting the disaster, not merely proclaiming its ineffability. This is evident, for example, in the astonishing life and work of Sachsenhausen survivor Aleksander Kulisiewicz, whose resistance to concentration camp life involved not only songs, poetry and memory but also clowning. This powerful, though still uneasy, mobilization of clowning as a defence against becoming what Primo Levi (2014) called a *muselmann* is well explored in the 2019 BBC Radio documentary *Songs from the Depths of Hell,* in a treatment that respects these practices without glossing over their troubling aspects. The clowning of Fondane's poetic inspiration Charlie Chaplin was informed by his experiences of the Great Depression. 'It is paradoxical that tragedy stimulates the spirit of ridicule', he commented. 'Ridicule, I suppose, is an attitude of defiance; we must laugh in the face of our helplessness against the forces of nature – or go insane' (Robinson 1992, 335).

Defiance of absurdity is an unending process, and must acknowledge absurdity in its testimony. In *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution,* Fondane argued

> Alors que l'éthique parle le langage de la raison discursive, l'artiste travaille sur un plan d'irrationalité lyrique qui fait qu'alors même qu'il tend à mettre en valeur le bien, la santé, la joie, le courage, la liberté, l'amour des hommes, il le fait sous la forme apparente du mal, de la maladie, du désespoir, de la lâcheté ou – ce qui accroît le malentendu – sous la forme de l'humour qui brouille ce qui reste encore de valeurs claires dans notre sentiment éthique de l'art. Qu'humour, ironie, lyrisme sont des catégories de l'art et que l'art est impuissant à parler le langage de tout le monde: celui de l'éthique, il importe que l'artiste le fasse valoir au plus tôt.

> [While ethics uses the language of discursive reason, the artist works in the domain of lyrical irrationality, which means that even though he tends to prize goodness, health, joy, courage, freedom and loving others, he does so in the seeming form of evil, illness, despair, cowardice or – in a way which further increases the misunderstanding – in the form of humour which blurs what there still is left of clear values in our ethical feeling for art. The artist must point out as quickly as possible that humour, irony and lyricism are categories of art and art is incapable of speaking everyone's common language, that of ethics.] (EDR 84)

The singing of the dark times can be not only lament but irresignation.

The statement that 'positive affirmation must inevitably establish an exclusivity against that not included in its definition' (Vericat 2002, 188) is subverted in poetic testimony, which, rather than only affirming in the cataphatic, positivist sense, also gestures through language, making an affirmation of existence out of the very failure to positively confirm its definition. Faced with the suspicions of rationality towards language, the poet's 'conscience honteuse' can easily lead to a work of 'purifying' language against ambiguity, a fruitless quest, in Fondane's eyes, that turns them away from 'the existent and from the *savoir-faire* they invent with their art' (Beray 2006, 148, my translation), qualities which poetry in fact has a unique capacity to defend. In order to do so, it must accept and even embrace language's insufficiencies in order to subvert misleading claims to certainty and universality. Poetic testimony includes the affirmation that any language act 'is made by someone' (BEG 298) and has something specific and singular to say. If poetry can affirm that existence is more than 'an object of knowledge' (EM 8), it does so performatively.

Here is an extensive comment on *L'Exode* by Alexander Dickow that emphasizes the performativity inherent in this poetic presence:

> one might claim Fondane's poem resembles ethical speech because of its performativity, as Jill Robbins hypothesizes when she writes that ethical speech might resemble 'what J. L. Austin described as the performative dimension of language'. Fondane's poems in general are eminently performative, which is precisely what gives them their flavour of oratory or theatre. Fondane ceaselessly warns, cajoles, accuses, forgives, promises, greets, invites, dismisses, begs, demands. The 'Preface in Prose' is no exception, as the poet's accusations demonstrate. And the poet's self-affirmation, his pretension to existence and his insistence that his humanity be recognized, does become a speech act (or the written equivalent) in the 'Preface in Prose.' The aporetic oscillation between identification and difference [...] can be viewed as performative in its own right, a performance of self-contradiction that encourages the reader's interpretive engagement. (Dickow 2018a)

L'Exode, with its explicitly dramatic structure, exemplifies the performative aspect of Fondane's poetic subversions.

There is no doubt that the revolt Salazar-Ferrer and others have read in Fondane's philosophical stance is performed in Fondane's poetry. But that is not to say that it is merely *expressed,* that the poetry is a vessel for a philosophical content.

The existential affirmation only comes to be as this performance. The revolt against the negation of existence can only have a positive dimension when understood as inextricable from a revolt against the limits of representation, through a simultaneously subversive and affirmative poetic practice. Elsewhere, Dickow writes that 'like the inarticulate cry, poetry constantly shifts and eludes the reader with regard to all three of these categories, speaker, topic, and addressee' (Dickow 2018b, 12). Even as it employs the masks which would seem to offer some orientation, *L'Exode* qualifies their solidity. Only through the poet's 'declining his identity' with the othered *je* of the poem can the existential revolt make a gesture of affirmation, a gesture towards the real presence of the singular. Similarly, this affirmation must be understood as a proto-ethical revolt against the isolation of the individual. Perhaps the most important of Fondane's poetic subversions is the paradoxical subversion of solipsism that makes *L'Exode* a performance towards the other and introduces a move towards justice.

Subversion: III. Justice

'The Igbo insist', says Achebe, 'that any presence which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgment and celebration, can become a focus for anxiety and disruption' (Achebe 1990). Poetry irrupts through the places where language denies and omits. Honouring a presence does not necessarily mean normalizing it, but it does mean trying to do justice to it. At the places where justice is impossible to realize, art can nonetheless gesture towards it. Subalternity involves both the repression of a voice and the implicit rationalization of that repression. Poetry can similarly make a double move, at once bringing our attention to a wider silence and refusing its domestication. The testimony of *L' Exode* is not simply the record of an event, it is a subversion of silence and the activation of a relation. It is a political or proto-political act, not just an intangible object of heritage. As Beray puts it, 'the present is in the time of the poem, of this poem to which the poet finds himself returning. And this historicity of the poem, which is valuable as specific testimony, is more important than the reading of historical events.' (Beray 2009, 21, my

translation) As a reader we do not simply receive a mimetic reproduction of events, but are implicated in 'the tragic nature of his poetic universe' (Beray 2009, 22, my translation).

Poetry lives with silence by challenging our relationship with it. Poetic testimony is a disruption of discourse: not only a counter-discourse but a challenge to the limits of discourse itself. A Lyotardian framing brings out certain ethical implications of this intervention, as Peter Gratton explains:

> in postmodernity, there is no metanarrative, no onto-theology, as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) would call it, that can ground prescriptive statements. Yet, leaving behind any foundation for prescriptive statements does not leave us unable to speak to what is just and unjust. […] What is unjust is the violent silencing of those raising claims to justice and disallowing them from making prescriptive claims, such as those colonized and left unheard by hegemonic powers […] If it were just a matter of having a sure knowledge or absolute set of laws to follow, then politics would be pre-programmed and there would be no judgment worthy of the name. (Gratton 2018)

Poetic testimony operates like samizdat (literally in Akhmatova's case; see Puchner 2017). Yet its value is not only in opposing a counter-narrative to the hegemonic one: it is also the process and actuality of its doing so, the attestation that there is something else to say. There is a greater silence that exceeds oppressive attempts to control speaking but also, often, liberatory projects which oppose them. Poetry is able to embrace that silence, to honour it and make it part of its reading even as it speaks. The dictator does not only seek to eradicate dissent, but also 'toute contradiction logique [any contradiction of his logic]', a dynamic typified for Fondane by the case of Mayakovsky (RV 102).

Fondane himself, writing to the 'hommes des antipodes', recognized the processes of silencing at work even as he felt the urgency of pushing back. His attention to the 'muffling' (Fanthorpe 2000, 210) effects of the various crises he lived through, spurred him to stay with the difficulty of writing through them. Poetry allows a balancing of the impossibility of doing justice to the traumatic event – the impossibility which imposes a wounded or shamed silence – with the necessity of trying. Where a rational explanation cannot be afforded, poetry can create a space of testimony. It must be subversive because it must refuse its own instrumentalization.

Fondane's poetics work in tandem with his insistence on subverting any kind of law in texts like *L'Homme devant l'histoire,* and thereby align with Simon Critchley's reflections on violence. Critchley, following Benjamin and Agamben, seeks 'to open a space between law and life. The name of this space is politics' (Critchley 2009). Fondane's concern as an artist is not to articulate the actual negotiation of politics but hold open this space and affirm 'a praxis of life's sanctity' (Critchley 2009).

It is crucial to distinguish this subversive work of poetry from the idea of art as a moral force. Fondane was only too aware of what Slavoj Žižek has called the 'poetic-military complex' (Žižek 2009a), the harnessing of poetry in the service of a nationalistic project, and he was similarly critical of *any* instrumentalization of poetry, including socialist realism. Fondane's relation to the political importance of poetic testimony is contradictory. With typical provocation, he placed himself at the antithesis of the majority opinion at the 1935 anti-fascist writers' congress, absolutely opposing the sublimation of art to political oversight. He went so far as to practically declare the writer's work irrelevant, that it was time to stop writing and act only 'as men', stating that there was really only a place for writing in a peaceful society:

> Éthiquement, à moins d'être un laquais ou un fou, il [l'écrivain] ne saurait que combattre le fascisme et souhaiter l'avènement d'une société socialiste, d'une société qui, résorbant les contradictions de l'économique, promet à la fois un peu plus de justice et un peu plus de durée. (Fondane 1997, 82)

> [Ethically, unless he is a lackey or is crazy, he [the writer] can only fight fascism and desire the arrival of a socialist society, a society which, negating economic contradictions, promises at once a bit more justice and a bit more duration. (Fondane 2011, 61)]

However, during the occupation, it was with poetry that he resisted, his poems appearing in *Europe, Fontaine* and later Eluard's collection *L'Honneur des Poètes* (SEBF 2003). Not as a call to arms or even as satire, but as testimony, as an affirmation of the value of everything fascism threatened not only to defeat, but to unmake, to reduce to an absolute non-presence.[14]

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[14]Vassiliki Kolocotroni points out that among ruins may 'remain signs of a salutary witnessing, fragments of the past that may be defunct, but also ripe for strategic reconstitution […] mythical thinking […] may be recuperated' (Kolocotroni 2019, 239–242). She argues that Benjamin and

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Poetic testimony refuses objectification, insists that language cannot be total, and is written with an implicit awareness of this statement by Barthes: 'Acting as though an innocent discourse can be opposed to ideology means continuing to believe that language can be simply the neutral instrument of a triumphant content' (Barthes 1971, 14, my translation). Let us not forget that the same autonomy that allows art to be the site of resistance to authoritarian oppression also allows it to be framed into an aestheticist detachment which can render it useless or even complicit in the face of atrocity (Auschwitz guards instructing inmates to play Mozart for them is only the most flagrant counter-example to the idea of art as a moralizing force; there are countless instances running at least from Nero's tears to Saddam Hussein's poetry). Art's ambiguities are often latent and always under contextual pressure, liable to enforced sentimentalization, distraction and even attempted weaponization.

In his philosophical and literary critiques, Fondane subverts Humanist assumptions about the virtues of art, assumptions which occur across political spectra. It is sometimes forgotten that it was not street thug brownshirts who carried out most of the *Bücherverbrennung* but university students, or that Savonarola himself was not simply an opportunistic rabble-rouser but highly educated. The capacity of poetry to perform an anti-Humanist humanism depends, in part, on a recognition of its failures: its failure to *comprehend*, to 'grasp all', even as it reveals, in its own writing 'between the lines' of rational thought, in its blank spaces and ambiguities, a thirst for plenitude. Poetry can say something new while foregrounding its own insufficiency in speaking. It is a gesture, but not a strategy. Poetry can be written in service to a cause (as a means to an end), but if it is not, it is difficult to instrumentalize it the way video evidence or juridical testimony can be instrumentalized, because it addresses itself to us, it speaks insufficiently and affectively, it calls upon us to interpret its story and not simply accept it. Any coming-to-terms it offers must not be taken as a just reconciliation with the traumatic event. It is a gesture towards a way of living, despite it.

Brecht's writings on the past point towards a resistance of hegemony with 'an incomplete, ongoing process of radical awakening. To the phantasmagoria of the fascist dream and its beautiful ruins-to-be [i.e., the Nazi obsession with monument-building], they issue a warning and a memory flash from the immediate past for present and future edification' (Kolocotroni 2019, 245–246).

Fondane offers a refusal of the poet's shameful conscience, a commitment to poetry that resists external logics of function. Daring to be 'frivolous' and subversive when the stakes of witnessing are so high is imbued with its own bravery, an assertion of what existentially has value but cannot be codified. Few poets have simultaneously theorized this struggle at the same time as fighting to bear witness to the extent that Fondane found himself doing, but the value of poetic testimony he prototypes is echoed in the words of many post-war poets. The 2000 essay 'Poetry makes nothing happen' by Sarah Maguire is so pertinent it is worth citing at length. She couples poetry's subversive autonomy with its unique testifying qualities ('poetry occupies the real places we inhabit' [Maguire 2000, 249] much as I am trying to do in reference to Fondane. I have already discussed how Adorno's famous quote about poetry has been taken out of context and de-nuanced. Maguire offers a similar analysis to Auden's: 'having told us that 'poetry *makes* nothing happen', Auden says that poetry, instead, survives as *a way of happening,* a mouth [...] we're fundamentally wrong if we expect poetry to have a *function*' (Maguire 2000, 250). If poetry is *subordinate* to politics, Maguire argues, it is reduced to propaganda, but arguing for 'a hermetically-sealed aesthetic world of its own', art for art's sake, 'stems from the same philosophical misapprehension, the same paradigm' (Maguire 2000, 250). Historical and symbolic oppression and exclusion are inseparable from linguistic failure. In one sentence, Maguire grazes an apprehension of all the contradictions I am trying to bring together in reading *L'Exode*: demonstrating the inseparability of an affirmation of the value of the existent from resistance to semiotic breakdown, poetry is 'a way of being in the world, of speaking in silence' (Maguire 2000, 250).

Against Joyce Wexler's dream of a simply sincere poetic statement, the poetry of witnessing that can overcome the eyewitness/artist binary must take into account the complexity and aporiae of representation even as it fights against them. Combining irony and sincerity, and singular affirmation qualified by multiplicity, is the only way to do justice to the fact that, as Jacqueline Rose puts it, 'there is no history outside its subjective realisation... just as there is no subjectivity uncoloured by the history to which it belongs' (Rose 1991, 8). Poetic testimony's overt subjectivity, qualified by the awareness that *je* 'est un autre', gives it a unique strength in this regard. Like Rimbaud, Fondane castigates the individual, rational

Enlightenment subject even as he defends subjectivity from modernity's historical philosophies of sublimation to the 'objective' whole.

Maguire turns her focus to Wilfred Owen. I discussed earlier in the thesis the fact that for Fondane the symbolic damage of the Second World War was not *essentially* different from that of the First, that the vacuity of Humanism had already been revealed, and registered by Dada. An anti-Humanist humanist poetics cannot fill that vacuum. At best it can operate akin to a Benjaminian 'plumb line', in the manner Simon Critchley frames a philosophy of non-violence, that is to say as a never-settled means of going on rather than as a draft of an ethical blueprint. Here is what Maguire writes of Owen:

> It's precisely because the poem can render the most intimate and elusive of subjective experiences in language that it's able to bear witness to what's excluded in dominant discourses [...] it's the sheer stubborn memorability of Owen's language, the way he draws on so many disparate discourses (from polemical anger to 'unspeakable' pain) in such a small space, which allows him to articulate experience which is at once profoundly subjective and politically resonant in all its gravid, lived reality. (Maguire 2000, 250–251)

In trying to set out *L'Exode's* poetic witnessing, its anamnesis and the 'gravid' potential of its affirmations, I could not put it more appositely than this.

L'Exode is not simply about an event, even though the catastrophe which is its context is so overwhelming. It sketches all kinds of modern voices and aspects, from the minutiae of everyday life to the anguish of God's absence, not defined by the catastrophe but made sharper by it. Even as it makes an existential affirmation in the midst of the disaster, one which – as I am about to discuss further – offers a tentative beginning of existential solidarity, it subverts any potential comfort this could offer. In order to make its witnessing count, poetry must unsettle.

Maguire argues that

> although Owen's war poems are responding to a major historical event, thus embuing his work with a particular urgency [...] the smallest and most seemingly 'personal' lyrics can also be capable of unsettling the given order of the world through speaking of speechless desire or loss. (Maguire 2000, 251)

It is the same uncontrollable, subversive, extra-rationality of poetry (when not reduced to function), that Fondane defends against Plato, that is fundamental for Maguire, who writes that the poet ignores 'the logic of separation', the separation that occurs through logic. 'Poetry's labour', she writes, is 'to bring together, carry, transfer, pieces of language that have been torn apart, decontextualized and placed in different categories (subjective/objective; personal/political). And it does this through the figure of the intimate self' (Maguire 2000, 251). This work is unending. In an essay in which he expands on Mbari, Achebe points out that Ana is also the goddess of justice (Achebe 1992). Her image in the Mbari house holds a sword. The testimony of the people sits before her, but there is no pronouncement, no judgement, only the possibility of justice given presence in the attestations of art.

Celebration

> As a vessel formed by the creative forces which it preserves,
> the work of art keeps alive and enhances every urge to come to
> terms with the world.

Max Raphael, from *The Demands of Art* (cited in Berger 2018, 52)

I want to use Achebe's notion of artistic testimony's worthiness of being presented before the demands of justice, without claiming that this validity, this 'metasophic' (Finkenthal 2013, 121) affirmation, comprises a satisfaction of those demands. Achebe's conception of celebration is key here. His use of celebration differs sharply from the common, joyous sense. It does not exclude joy, but entails an unveiling of all the states and experiences of existence that are inadequately served by reason. Although this unveiling is never complete (even if its representation *could* be adequate, the continous flux of existence means that it would always require renewal), it is crucial. Celebration in this sense is a reclaiming of art from the *conscience honteuse* that would render it secondary or even inconsequential, by giving it an unending, not-fully-definable purpose that exceeds rational ends.

I have had it put to me that Achebe is an unusual thinker to bring to bear upon a discussion of Fondane. This seems to me problematic in terms of Fondane's untimely, history-resistant engagement with the extra-rational, as well as Eurocentric. But even if we acknowledge the importance of historical contexts, as Fondane

himself simultaneously did, we find unexpected affinities. Achebe himself, antagonised by supposedly universal and actually racist characterization in the Western canon, developed his own literary response in part through his connection with Ulli Beier, co-founder of the Mbari Artists and Writers club and a Jewish survivor of the Nazi regime. A drawing of parallels facilitates an experience of solidarity.

Poetry is exemplary in juxtaposing different figures whose presences overlap while retaining the forms of their specificities. Fondane's valuing of its existential communication through and beyond its own time is close in spirit to the importance of 'non-contemporaenity' and resistance to classification that Kolocotroni (2019) emphasizes in Benjamin's philosophy in her essay on modernity and ruin. *L'Exode*'s Jewish tropes mobilize to make new, concrete experiences of exile and desire for community meaningful. The response of the Chorus to the Babylonian priest takes a context of Jewish cultural and theological tradition and within it raises the question of the valuing of the concrete, and the shared predicament of modernity:

Quel insensé qui n'ait voulu sauver
                  fût-ce
qu'un peu de crépuscule, une
               poignée d'odeur,
quelque absurde soulier d'une
                  ombre
et qui peut rire, rire de ce que
                l'Éternel
lui-même meure?

Which madman has not wished
                to save
even a little of this twilight, a
             handful of scent,
or merely the absurd boot-sole
             of a shadow
and can laugh, laugh at the fact
           that the Eternal
Himself dies?

(MF 197)

Poetic recognition across time and culture is exemplified in recent connections between Africa and Fondane, such as the award in 2016 of the Prix Benjamin Fondane to the Congolese poet Gabriel Okundji, or the special Fondane edition of the journal *La Plume Vivante* in 2017, edited by Fiston Loombe Iwoku.

Through the analogy of Mbari, Achebe redefines the meaning of celebration, tying it to art's unique value. As celebration, Mbari

extends the view, opens it out to meanings beyond the mere remembering of blessings or happy events. It deliberately sets out to include other experiences, indeed all significant encounters which man makes on his journey through life, especially new, unaccustomed and thus potentially threatening encounters. (Achebe 1990)

He tunes the word beyond its customary uses and into much wider resonance, not simply a confirmation of joy but 'an acknowledgement of presence, the courtesy of giving to everybody his due [...] art as celebration of my reality' (Achebe 1990). Thus celebration comes to mean a testifying to reality which can encompass suffering as well as success, an affirmation of life even if that life is experiencing sorrow.

In the sense of experience given witness by art, celebration is reminded of its Latin root meaning a large assembly, a coming together. If nothing else, in its attention to language poetry has the capacity to decry and resist experiences of the world defined by what Franco 'Bifo' Berardi calls 'a fundamental lack of friendship, where solidarity has been replaced by verbal negotiation and convention' (Berardi 2018, 83). Anne Carson refers to the myth of Eve and the apple as a 'gesture of rage' against Adam's imposition of the order of naming, 'our answer to chaos', the tendency which implies that 'something without a name is commonly thought not to exist' (2008). Poetic celebration means a coming-together in language which does not merely fill in the places discourse had hitherto excluded, but honours and holds open space for that beyond its limits.

The parallel Achebe draws between Mbari and the practice of art is, in my opinion, the same as that drawn by Fondane between the 'pensée primitive' and the aims of art. It is a 'non-Aristotelean' approach, as Serge Nicolas and Dominique Guedj put it in their edition of Fondane's *Lévy-Bruhl, ou le métaphysicien malgré lui* (Fondane 2019). 'Primitive' in Fondane's sense is not intended as meaning undeveloped, nor, conversely, noble and innocent. It is simply taken from the study of peoples termed primitive in the jargon of the 1920s to argue for a heterogenity of human thought against the domination of the Western ideal of reason as a good in and of itself. It refers to an experience of life in which creative acts are understood to directly intervene in the world, just as in Mbari.

This use of primitive would include medieval culture, as evidenced by the way Fondane references Villon and Shakespeare in his work. Indeed, the likes of

Baudelaire, Lautréamont and Huysmans, key influences for Fondane as for the surrealists, parsed the modern, positivist cultural changes which ended the unity of such a worldview by reflecting on the medieval in their work. Art only came to exist as a concept when the primacy of rational thought, free even of the pagan faith of the Greeks, severed it from its holistic functions. For Fondane as for Achebe, the artist must seek to restore to art its status as event instead of merely being object, despite the artist's own rationality – their *conscience honteuse* – working against them. In freeing and honouring – celebrating – the extra-rational in art, they must defy even their own mind.

Celebration through art may be understood as resistance to the subjugation to bare life. Fondane's poetry resists a total Nazi victory, resists its hegemonic drive to make itself not only victorious but acceptable. This is akin to Achebe's vision of African writing subverting the *a posteriori* justification of colonial appropriation by force through an idealized narrative of race and history. He received a letter from a group of Korean students who wanted to know why he let such failure fall upon Okonkwo, protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*. 'The fact that we are talking about that man', says Achebe, 'is in fact his success' (1990). These Koreans stand at the antipodes of Achebe's geography as we stand at the antipodes of Fondane's time. Such messages across the waters affirm a strange hope exactly in the moment of their own despair. They cannot promise a victory or justice in full, but their reading is some kind of success nonetheless.

The poetic urge to testify is a celebration of presence. Poetic acts of attention afford value to everyday experiences. This is true even at the simplest, smallest junctures and even when the presence is an absence, a space. This urge may also arise in the poet who is unwilling, crushed by the pain of their experience and the limits of its comprehensibility, yet who finds the pain of silence greater still, and finds themselves, in the words of Paul Celan, attempting to 'give your saying also meaning: | give it its shadow' (Celan 2005, 54). Through poetry, it is even possible to affirm that disaster can be part of the everyday. This does not mean normalizing or approving disaster and trauma. But poetry can help reclaim a way of speaking them from grand narratives which would situate them as exceptionally distant and either unworthy of attention in their specificities or devalued by the focus on a better future.

In his *Faux Traité*, Fondane unpacks Plato's prescriptions for poets in the Republic. 'Qu'importe', he glosses with irony, 's'ils ont *empiriquement* raison? Il n'en reste pas moins vrai qu'ils ont, *philosophiquement et moralement*, tort [what does it matter if they are *empirically* correct? It remains no less true that they are *philosophically and morally* wrong]'(FT 77). He notes that Plato reserves the moral authority to lie for the administrators of the city for the 'good' of the state, commenting with more understated irony that 'on a largement usé, depuis le temps, de cette tolérance-là [since Plato's time that allowance has been amply indulged]' (FT 77). Against the claims of states and ideology to dictate truth according to their interpretation of idealized ethics, for Fondane the poet provides evidence that 'la vie, la mort, et la souffrance, et la misère, l'amour, la colère, l'ennui, la lâcheté, le sacrifice, la solitude, l'inconnu, le mystère, la fatalité, la chance, la liberté – *existent* [life, death, and suffering, and misery, love, anger, boredom, cowardice, sacrifice, solitude, the unknown, mystery, fate, luck and freedom – *exist*]' (FT 78). Poets 'ont dit l'homme enchaîné par la nécessité inexorable, mais aussi éveillé à l'absurde, à la joie, à la liberté [have spoken man bound by inexorable necessity, but also awoken to the absurd, to joy, to freedom]' (FT 78).

By giving presence, poetic testimony opens up the possibility of coming to terms with an experience for all who read it. It cannot confidently be said that the experience is shared, but something of its presence can be heard. Poetry is a gesture towards community, community gathered by listening, by reading. Perhaps this is what Fondane means when he talks of an 'aristocratic poetry', when he claims in the midst of war that 'la poésie cherche des amis et non un public [poetry is looking for friends, not an audience]' (MF 208). Against the instrumentalization of poetry as propaganda, or its enforced popularization as a public good, he contends that it is only valuable as its own presence. The process of listening to testimony is active, the reader's participation in the celebration must be granted willingly. This door to a fuller human presence is potentially open even to the perpetrator of oppressive violence and the enforcer of silence who mutilate their own humanity in

dehumanizing others. At the least, poetry can stand against the 'total peace of mind' (Fanon 2004, 199) the perpetrator may have to consciously work to maintain.[15]

Celebrating the specific affirms the value of the multiple. The counterpoint of 'like you' / 'not like you' in the *Préface* attests to a specificity of experience while extending that experience – in this case a certain experience of Jewishness – into a public presence. In the agora of artistic culture tellings of private affective experiences become knowable without being subsumed into an organised whole. Thus Fondane is able to use Jewishness as a generous metaphor for human experience in the face of loss and exile even at the same time as he actually attests to the literal Jewish experience of persecution. Here is potential grounds for an anti-Humanist universality, based not upon the supposedly inevitable progress of a narrative of rights and freedoms extended to all but a celebration of the experience of life in joy and suffering.

Once again, Fondane shades close to Benjamin, for whom, in Irving Wohlfarth's reading, 'the universal could only be reached […] in and through the particular, not by abstracting from it' (Wohlfarth 1997, 25). Susan Buck-Morss argues that for Benjamin 'the best thing about his Jewishness is that it is not limited to Judaism' (Buck-Morss 2014, 47:00).[16] Roland Boer (2007, 5–6) has cautioned

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[15] My idea of poetic testimony tends to be at odds with the poetic perpetrator testimony (already a much more marginal phenomenon). The sense in which I am using the term 'poetic' implies the assertion of contradiction and resistance of straightforward conclusions, whereas perpetrator testimony as such tends to be characterized by 'mendacity and attempts at self-exculpation' (Rowland 2011, 368), or at least simplified narratives which glorify one's own side. There are also many instances which blur moral boundaries, as Antony Rowland points out in his work on the British Oasis war poets, who were contemporaneous with Fondane: 'The "myth" of the "just war" […] a simplified narrative in which soldiers cleanly dispose of Germans and then return unaffected to civilian life – gives way in the context of the archive to a series of texts engaging with victim and perpetrator behavior, and sometimes (as in "Ubique") within the confines of a single text' (Rowland 2011, 380). Poetic testimony in the sense I am using it must relate in some way to what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub call the 'human condition of exposure and vulnerability' (Felman and Laub 1992, 5), whether that is in the weak sense of attending to '*l'inessentiel et à l'inimportant* [the *unessential and unimportant*]', as Fondane puts it in the *Faux Traité* – 'le jaunissement d'une feuille, l'écoulement d'une durée, la première ride entrevue dans la glace [the yellowing of a leaf, the emptying of a span, the first wrinkle seen in the mirror]' (FT 79) – or in the radical context of brutality and violence.

[16] Wohlfarth invokes the ghostly aspects of Freud's malaise in modernity which resonate so strongly with Fondane's 'mal des fantômes': 'In Freudian terms, a ghostly "return of the repressed" – an intrusion from "the other scene" – prevents the ego from ever really being the "master in its own house", thereby provoking a "malaise" endemic to "civilization" itself. The inalienable alien thus emerges from Simmel's and Freud's respective analyses as a key figure within both the psychic and the social economy. In this sense, we are all "strangers to ourselves" (in Julia Kristeva's phrase), all foreign bodies, all (as Daniel Cohn-Bendit had it) "German Jews". And the Jew is, conversely, easily made the scapegoat for the alien workings of the socio-psychic apparatus. He can be blamed for a

against overly strong readings of Benjamin's Jewishness. However if anything this reinforces the point, made by Hannah Arendt, that the best Jewish thinkers of modernity 'transcend the bounds of nationality and […] weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of European life' (Arendt 1978, 67). This is an achievement I am claiming for Fondane, even beyond a European context, and it is significant that for Benjamin the ability to maintain these contradictions of identity is the preserve of the artist (Wohlfarth 1997, 3).

Unlike other forms of testimony, whose primary function is to fix the present and turn it into a record of the past, poetic testimony necessarily looks forward. Art is a living alternative to history. This is how Ursula Le Guin voices it in her novella *Paradises Lost*:

> History tells us who we are, how we have behaved, therefore how we will behave.
> Does it? [...] that appalling record of injustice, cruelty, enslavement, hatred, murder – that record, justified and glorified by every government and institution, of waste and misuse of human life, animal life, plant life, the air, the water, the planet? If that is who we are, what hope for us? History must be what we have escaped from[...]
> To learn who we are, look not at history but the arts, the record of our best, our genius. The elderly, sorrowful, Dutch faces gaze out of the darkness of a lost century. The mother's beautiful grave head is bowed above the dead son who lies across her lap [...] 'Sleep, sleep', say the cradle songs, and 'set me free' cry the yearning slave-songs [...] and the poets, the crazy poets cry out, 'A terrible beauty is born.' But they're all crazy [...] all their beauty is terrible. (Le Guin 2016, 706–707).

The greatest of all the contradictions that Fondane sustains in his poetry is simultaneously singing and crying out, communicating both loving attention and disconsolate, excessive, irresigned yearning.

Poetic testimony must embrace poetic madness, as Fondane does: it cannot be only record-keeping and interpreting, it must give presence to the extra-rational and expose the limitations of discourse. This is also what turns it to the future, what lets it

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disturbing otherness that we prefer, all-too-humanly, to project onto others, but which belongs to the very definition of the human.' (Wohlfarth 1997, 22)
Ronald Boer (2007) also emphasizes the centrality of questions around language in this nexus of myth, religion and modernity.

hold a promise of life across time. In his introduction to a selection of Paul Celan's work, Pierre Joris writes, in the context of the Holocaust, that

> all poetry, after that date, will have to be, at some level, a poetry of witnessing. But it cannot stop there if it wants to be of essential use [...] it cannot simply bear witness to the past but must at the same time be resolutely turned towards the future: it has to be open, it has to be imaginatively engaged in the construction of a new world, it has to look forward. (Joris 2005, 6)

Untimely possibilities vitalize Fondane's poetry. Its urgency is to the present of its reading. Again, this corresponds with the thought of Benjamin, who 'wanted the art of the past to realize itself in the choices men [sic] made today in deciding their own historical role' (Berger 2018, 58).

Celebration, as a figuring, stands in opposition to resignation. The combination of an affirmation of the extra-rational with an untimely awareness means Fondane's subversive testimony is a refusal to be resigned, to be consigned to history's dustbin. In performing its own radical signing in full view of the limits of language, the artistic act as an event, as celebration, functions as a return of the repressed, haunting history. In *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution* he argued:

> le rôle de l'éthique se borne […] à interdire […] les instincts antisociaux, l'homme dût-il souffrir cruellement de cette interdiction […] L'art, par contre […] *libère.*

> [ethics limits its role to prohibiting antisocial instincts, even if man suffers cruelly from this. Art, on the other hand, *liberates*.]

> (EDR 87)

Addressing a crowd of writers whom he viewed as mostly complicit in subordinating art to ethical guidelines, Fondane harnessed this point to a social argument, claiming that the release of sadistic impulses through the creation and consumption of works of art guarded against their realization in reality. Whether or not we agree with this likely unmeasurable contention, akin to notions of catharsis in Aristotle or Freud, the notion of art as a place of expression for what has been repressed elsewhere remains a strong one.

Fondane's simultaneous critique of subject positions and defence of the existent's subjectivity is fundamental to the subversive, celebratory testimony performed by his poetry. His desire to break through the sterility of aesthetics as a pure condition for a pure art and connect the poem to reality relies on a different kind of aesthetics: of pathos, of participation. Salazar-Ferrer argues that 'The imperfect poem is not an end in itself, but the means of reaching another face which, by reading the poem, restitutes or saves the humanity of its vanished author' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 62–63, my translation).

The perfect correspondence between poem and reality can only ever be a dream, but the poem's very imperfection becomes part of its attestation, part of its value. In re-membering the humanity in its authors words through being read, it instantiates a subject relationship, between existent and existent. Shira Wolosky puts it that '*pure selfhood*' (emphasis added) is 'a fantasy of the unreal […] without linguistic expression, there is no self at all […] the self is not […] unitary, unmediated self-identity' (Wolosky 1995, 84). Fondane's poetry evinces a relational understanding of the self, in a tension where the boundaries are blurred but selfhood is not erased. 'If language moves the self outside itself', Wolosky argues, 'this is not finally a loss of self. If it moves the self towards the other, this is neither intrusive nor dissipating'(Wolosky 1995, 87). It is to the 'illocutionary', interpellative processes of Fondane's poetry that I now return.

Chapter 8

Towards the Other

> The poem needs the Other, needs an interlocutor for whom it searches and to whom it is dedicated.

> (Rotiroti 2013, 103)

> Take this unique face that each person may offer to alterity: all of its dreamed representations come back into play in language. They are realized in the poem, as in life, only if others share not only the same desire, but also the ethical foundation.

> (Beray 2006, 175–176, my translation)

Poetic Exile

In *L'Exode* Fondane shows an awareness of the poetic possibility of tying a historically-situated specificity to an ahistorical field of affect. This awareness comes despite the impossibility of comprehensively defining this field, an impossibility that marks the limits of existential philosophy. The poem operates as an instance of an ineffable totality. Poetic testimony stands in contraposition to the premises of the post-war 'Era of Witnessing' based on the objectivity of facts.[1] Fondane and Celan scholar Giovanni Rotiroti argues that poetry can attend to 'the convergence of all things that constitute us and not necessarily [...] what our eyes perceive in competition with (or concomitantly with) high-fidelity equipment' (Rotiroti 2013, 103). Poetry that does not accede to a subordinate function refuses the

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[1] The complexities around the historical value of eyewitness testimony are explored in depth in Anna Wieviorka's field-defining book *The Era of the Witness* (2006). The emergence of forensic approaches to documenting and analysing atrocities, born in part out of an unachievable desire for 'a stable and fixed alternative to human uncertainties, ambiguities, and anxieties' is superbly unpacked in Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman's 2012 book *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics.*

essentialization of any authority over the narration of an event at the same time as it liberates what has been suppressed.[2]

In his book *The Singularity of Literature* Derek Attridge claims that

> a literary work can speak powerfully and immediately to us from across centuries or across cultures. This [...] awaits a full theoretical explanation, but one outcome of taking it seriously as a basis for thinking about the specificity of the literary is a conception of singularity not as a matter of closure but as one of openness [...] it changes every time it is read; singularity means staying the same through being open to any possible new context. (Attridge 2017, xxii)

L'Exode asks the very question of the openness of the singular: 'chanterais-je ici la chanson de Sion | parmi des hommes étrangers? | Car nous sommes étrangers les uns parmi les autres | notre langue n'est pas pareille [And should I sing the song of Zion | among a strange race of men? | Because we are strangers amongst each other | our language is not the same]' (MF 169). Space, historical time and mythic time are drawn into the search for interlocution. In the words of Paul Celan in his Bremen speech, 'the poem does not stand outside time. True, it claims the infinite and tries to reach across time – but across, not above.' (Celan 2003, 34).

This reaching activates a renewed and renewable contemporary relevance because it 'calls upon the reader's sense of ethical responsibility' (Dickow 2018a, 149). Along with his 1960 'Meridian' speech (Celan 2003, 37–55), Celan's 1958 speech is one of the most important post-war statements by a poet on poetry. According to Rotiroti, they were written at a time when Celan was preoccupied by Fondane's life and by 'Mots Sauvages' (Rotiroti 2018, 169). Thus it seems appropriate to repeat Celan's argument that 'a poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea' (Celan 2003, 34–35) as a way of understanding *L'Exode*. In Alexander Dickow's Levinasian terms, this dialogue 'founded on a constitutive absence' calls upon us 'to respond through

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[2] Drawing on Blanchot, Kristin Ross argues that *Une Saison en enfer* 'bears a distinctly different relation to the event than one of cataloguing or understanding; it materializes as a thought taken up with, vitally engaged with exterior forces, a problem-thought rather than a narrated, completed thought' (Ross 2008, 49). Rimbaud's problematizing was crucial for Fondane's own practice of poetry as extrospective and participatory.

commemoration to a perpetual, signifying absence' in the act of reading (Dickow 2018a, 149–150).

I believe that for its singular openness this particular dialogue depends upon poetry's extra-rational, non-transcendentally apophatic, liminal status. Its ghostly promise of reanimation carries with it Fondane's 'aristocratic' (MF 208) defence of poetry against instrumentalization. In resisting instrumentalization of all kinds, poetry's subversion offers the space for life's affirmation. This inherent subversion holds even as the poem seeks the 'end' of the other: this 'end' is purely 'subjectifying'. Fondane's 'témoignage spécifique [specific testimony]' (Beray 2009, 21) differs from 'simply' recording. Rather than simply mapping the present, material time is 'transmuted' into 'the time of the poem', 'a *non lieu* that is the place of utopia' (Beray 2006, 176, my translation).[3] The poem cannot be reduced to its circumstances. There is a conscious irony and a productive tension in the relationship between the poet's experience and what Baudelaire called 'poetic force' (Baudelaire 1868, 23). Together, poet and reader 'voyageons ensemble | dans un poème [travel together | in a poem]' (MF 247, from an untitled poem cited by Beray).

When Fondane writes that 'notre langue n'est pas pareille' he continues 'quand même il n'y aurait qu'une seule langue au monde, | qu'un seul mot dans le monde [our language is not the same | even if there were only one language in the world, | only a single word in the world]' (MF 169). Fondane abandoned Romanian as his poetic tongue (in protest, in Rotiroti's view, against rising anti-Semitism and military-poetic nationalism [Rotiroti 2018, 167]). Yet his 'crossing' into French was set by the compasses of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and the linguistic instability signaled in *L'Exode* is always more fundamental than the specialized play of poetry. Fondane's configurations of the remnants found in the 'marché aux puces [flea market]' (MF 34 and 42; see Vanhese 2012) of words prefigures the relationship to language explored by Derrida in *The Monolingualism of the Other*.[4] Like Derrida, 'it

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[3] This productively tautological statement contains the *non lieu* that appears several times in Fondane's work. Like utopia, the words literally mean *no place*. In French they also have judicial signification, 'case dropped' or 'case dismissed'. There is therefore an implication of justice missed or unfulfilled: 'accusés d'un délit que vous n'avez pas fait [accused of a crime you did not commit]' (MF 153; CO 143). It also carries a reminder of the no man's lands of the First World War and of the Biblical wastes.

[4] Fondane's image of the flea market, the importance of which is explored by Vanhese (2012), may be a deliberate riposte to Marinetti's Futurist manifesto: 'Italy has been a market for junk dealers for too long' (Marinetti 1909, my translation).

is *on the shores* of the French language [...] on the unplaceable line of its coast' that Fondane 'wonder[s] if one can love, enjoy oneself [jouir], pray, die from pain, or just die, plain and simple, in another language or without telling anyone about it, without even speaking at all' (Derrida 1998, 2). The poet works consistently at the places where language shifts and where its contradictions open gaps in logic. Fondane wrote that the poet must be a seismologist (AG 56). The shifting shores of language are also what Paul Celan called the 'shoreline of the heart' (Celan 2003, 35).

Fondane's enacting of an 'ethical writing' (Dickow 2018a, 152) navigates an awareness of the poet's fragile and liminal position. This position is figured in the rest of the poem I have been quoting across the past few paragraphs, which is 'spoken' by the Chorus (MF 169–170), with its characteristic use of 'je' and Rimbaldian direct-speech dashes implying different individual voices. The final stanza draws together the chaos and darkness of abandonment with the crying out of one's condition in the figure of the leper from Leviticus 13:45–46:

Voici, mes vêtements ont été
                    décousus,
la ténèbre a noyé mon visage,
ma tête est découverte, et je crie:
Impur! Impur!
Impur serai-je autant qu'il te fera
                   plaisir
qu'on se moque de ton visage!
Impur! Je suis impur! J'habite seul.

Ma demeure est hors du camp.

Look, my clothes are torn,
shadow has overwhelmed my face,
my head is uncovered, and I cry:
Unclean! Unclean!
I will be unclean as long as it pleases
                   you
for your face to be mocked!
Unclean! I am unclean! I live alone.

My dwelling is outside the camp.

(MF 170)

Just as the poet stands 'neither inside nor outside' (Derrida 1998, 2) language, his extra-rationality is a kind of sickness, his figuring of thought as failure and the anguish of desolate mortality a contamination of the hope of progress. One who dwells outside the camp is both part of and outside the community.

The special testimony of poetry depends upon its subversive contradictions. Fondane's emphatic defense of the unqualifiable extra-rational element of poetry, 'ces ténèbres, ce silence, et ce mystère [these shadows, this silence and this mystery]'

(FT 104) resonates with Michel Foucault's approach to art through madness. Foucault argues:

> By the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. (Foucault 1988, 246)

We can triangulate this destabilizing status of the poet with leprosy and with madness. Their interwoven social history is Foucault's subject. The poet stands at the scission between figure and speech (Foucault 1988, 27), ceaselessly negotiating their contact. Fondane conflates the poet's post-Rimbaud, post-Dada exile from, yet in, language, with exile that places humanity outside the boundary of the divine, Jews outside the polity, refugees outside the state and the existent outside of the meaning of history. Like the man in Kafka's parable (Kafka 2015, 232–242) hesitating at the gates of the law, the poet troubles the threshold of the 'castle of our conscience' (Foucault 1988, 21).

In his book *The Drowned and the Saved* Primo Levi also troubles our collective conscience by arguing that eyewitness testimony of the catastrophe of genocide is literally impossible. Those who 'touched the bottom' were either dead or in a kind of living death, 'muselmanner' unable to communicate (Levi 2013, 89–90).[5] Where Levi writes of speaking, inadequately, as a 'delegate' on their behalf (Levi 2013, 89–90), Fondane further complicates the notion of the eyewitness and the possibilities of the artist, writing in a kind of visionary pre-meditation of his own death. It is the same madness of frivolity in the poem, which gives space to joy, that grants it its vision beyond time (and Fondane's vision is explicitly 'mad' with anger, too: 'colère de la vision' [MF 176]).

Fondane's negotiation between the rationality and the irrationality in the word fundamentally occurs in what Rotiroti, following Agamben and Derrida, calls the 'power of the poem, which is ready to reignite the subject's desire between the necessity of telling and the impossibility of speech' (Rotiroti 2018, 162, my

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[5] The living dead of the camps are also foreshadowed in the image of the ghost that runs through Fondane's poetry. Gisèle Vanhese points out that the first of these ghosts is the young woman murdered in a pogrom he witnessed as a young boy. He invokes her memory with the figure of Shulamite ('Sulamite, si jamais je t'oublie [Shulamite, if ever I forget you]'; MF 34), whom Celan would later famously employ to the same ends in relation to camp victims (Vanhese 2012).

translation). The apophatic elements of Fondane's poetry, like those of Celan's, trouble the notion of testimony at the same time as they strenuously work to testify. Derrida wrote of the 'poetry of cinders' (Derrida 1991, 31). In the ruins of the dream of a perfectly, mutually intelligible language, Fondane's words become embers to be stoked by fresh reading.

The Chorus poem on pages 169 and 170 of the *Mal des fantômes* layers together the relationship between Fondane's present and the 'poetic force' with which he transmutes and exceeds it. The mythic mask is evident; the section starts with the repetition of the psalm fragment. Yet the questions it asks of us build to an anguish which is both that of the essential isolation of the existent and a terrible acuity of the 1930s: 'qui est là pour m'entendre? || qui a pitié? [who is there to hear me? || who takes pity?]' (MF 169). Then two troubling lines: 'Bête qu'on mène à l'abattoir | ne fait pas l'innocente! [Animal led to the slaughterhouse, | don't play innocent!]' (MF 169). Perhaps Fondane was not quite cognizant of the industrial mode of slaughter to follow, but he certainly had the pogroms of his lifetime in mind. Yet it is the victims who are warned not to play innocent: the guilt can only be the guilt of knowledge, implicating the reader in the same knowledge that struck Simone Weil (2002, 115; see chapter 1, 'Fondane and 'Other' Criticism'), the knowledge that makes innocent poetry impossible. Even as Fondane displays a prescience of the coming catastrophe from which neither his contemporary reader nor today's could claim distance, we are still with timeless imagery: 'la fourmi avance jusqu'au bord de l'orage [the ant creeps up to the edge of the storm]' (MF 169).

Suddenly, we are turned for a moment into a French context: 'Ô Midi' begins the lines on page 170. Sacred and profane, metaphysical and poetic, mythic and modern, the joys of life and the destruction of disaster are mixed:

Ô Midi, recueilli dans la paume,
        si frais
la mort a fait des trous dans mes
        filets de pêche
et les poissons se sont répandus
        à terre
éclatants comme une poignée de
        monnaie de nickel...

O Midi, gathered in the palm, so fresh,
death has made holes in my fishing
        nets
and the fish are spread on the ground
flashing like a handful of nickel
        coins...

(MF 170)

The silver of betrayal, unmistakeable in that 'handful', is also everyday coins (nickel money had come into circulation in France relatively recently). The fish, that central Christian image, are also, reflexively, the Rimbaldian fish of poetry, the golden fish sought by the drunken boat, already conflated with the dreamworld of childhood in *Ulysse* at the moment when death, in the form of a murdered Jewish woman, first cut the nets (MF 34).[6] As the worldly goods of the French would soon be scattered by the Nazi invasion, Fondane's poetic goods are betrayed, are the stuff of betrayal, and he goes on wounded.

What follows, then, is the cry pushing again through the imperfect poem. The Old Testament here functions as the Law; Leviticus 13 is a prescription for hygiene. Fondane's leper gives imperfect voice to the experience silent between the lines of the commands. In destitution and darkness, he cries out his own inconvenient and disruptive condition ('Impur!') across the absence of justice, figured in God's silence. The shadows swallow his face, paralleling the impotence of God's image. Yet at the moment of catastrophe, when the speaker would be lost to the community, to history, without God to 'offer another form of communion' (Foucault 1998, 17), poetry allows us, the reader, to paradoxically witness his solitude. Who hears the cry if not us? As well as being naked (*découverte*), his head is discovered.

Performing Interpellation

L'Exode is performative in more than one sense. It is illocutionary (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 53) in its interpellation. Its cries, calls and questions function not simply rhetorically in and across the text but directly and indirectly addressing the reader and adjuring them to respond, or at least to complete this language act by reading and by carrying its questions on and into themselves. The performance of its existential affirmation depends upon the 'immediacy' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 55) of this address. Furthermore, this interpellation is necessarily effected in a poetic medium which also

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[6] 'Il a un monde en lui-même et rarement quitte le fond | pour respirer à la surface comme font les poissons | il ne comprend rien à ce meeting de fantômes || – Sulamite, je t'ai vue. Tu gisais sur la terre russe | ouverte comme un jeune melon [he has a world inside him whose depths he rarely leaves | to breathe at the surface as fishes do | he cannot understand this meeting of ghosts || – Shulamite, I saw you. You lay on the Russian ground | split open like a fresh melon] (MF 34; Fondane 2017 47–49)

performs an apophatic gesture, beyond its own sense limits and towards the ineffable which conditions its utterances.

Alexander Dickow has worked to examine the 'structures of address, [the] linguistic configurations that in some way implicate the audience' (Dickow 2018b, 3) that characterize lyric poetry in general and Fondane's work in particular (even if, as I argued in the last chapter, Fondane simultaneously follows Rimbaud's problematization of the lyric, for example in his *Refus du poème*).[7] Salazar-Ferrer (2005) and Dickow both examine the productive tension between solipsism and 'yearning for collectivity' (Lazarus 2011, 31; see chapter 3, 'Disconsolation') in Fondane's work. For Dickow, this tension inherent in Fondane's poetic act, the act that I am considering by way of Achebean celebration, is most usefully explored through the writing of Emmanuel Levinas: 'where Levinas is concerned, the most convincing resonances begin, not between the philosophies of the two thinkers, but between Levinas's philosophy and Fondane's poetry' (Dickow 2017, 202).[8]

Dickow argues that Fondane's poetry is perfect for considering a Levinas-inspired reading of the fragile paradox of relation between self and Other that extends into writing, able to reckon with the 'constitutive absence' of the author (Dickow 2018a, 149). He argues:

> the past of commemorative writing is the past of the dead and the missing [...] a *trou*, or hole: an absence already inscribed in the present [...] the *trou* can and must be 'recuperated by reminiscence', since the act of commemoration lies at the heart of its ethical call. (Dickow 2018a, 163)

Dickow rightly argues that this call occurs throughout Fondane's poetry, though *L'Exode*'s *Préface* makes it most explicit. This 'commemorative' writing, in which 'while the poem cannot itself preserve the singularity of an individual existence, it nonetheless bears witness to that existence, provoking an

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[7] The image of poetry's 'fish', as in the Drunken Boat, appears here most pointedly, as a sleazy distraction from reality: 'Les molles putains de mon songe | me crient: – "Lâche pied et plonge, | que les poissons sont frais et muets!" | – Je songe aux forçats d'Allemagne | ils sont maigres sous le fouet... [The slack whores of my dream | cry to me: – "Let go and dive | the fish are fresh and quiet!"| – I dream of German convicts | they are thin beneath the whip...'(MF 237).
[8] Dickow's analysis depends upon Levinas's distinction between 'the so-called thematic content that Levinas calls the 'Said' (le dit)' and 'the enactment of discourse prior to all content (the 'Saying', le dire)' (Dickow 2018a, 150).

awareness of the reader's own fragile and transient inner life' (Dickow 2017, 202) aligns nicely with the broader notion of Achebean celebration.

The idea of writing as celebration is surely strongest when it comprehends the direct interpellative aspect upon which Dickow makes commemorative writing depend. Celebration carries an active, participative sense that bolsters the argument that 'The commemorative text demands to be made present once more' (Dickow 2018a, 164). Fondane's address to the reader in the *Préface* – '[Un jour viendra, sans doute, quand le poème lu | se trouvera devant vos yeux [A day will come, no doubt, when this poem | will find itself before your eyes]' (MF 153; CO 143) – makes explicit the agency and actuality of remembering. There is no finality, but a ghostly interlocution reactivated at each reading. The many voices in *L'Exode* testify, admonish and question, but it is the *Préface* that directly ties them together in an interpellative rubric.

The *Préface* finishes with a call to remember that its author had 'un visage d'homme, tout simplement [quite simply, a man's face]' (MF 153; CO 143, adapted). In engaging the reader's participation, celebration not only commemorates the past but confronts the reader with the consitution of their *own* subjectivity through the intersubjective act of the poem. In this sense, Fondane's poetry is not only an admonishment to the future, but also an ethical gift, as is fitting for a celebration. Though it may be through an experience of mourning and lament, an opportunity is created for the fruition of subjective value. Dickow argues that:

> the face of writing can only be the face of reminiscence and the face of the reader, the Same and the Self. In this sense, the ethical call of writing originates with the reading Self, not with the Other: the *trou* is not of the same order as the Other, even though its summons, paradoxical because it arises through an absence that still signifies, still might be said to be pre-conceptual and therefore to precede the Said. (Dickow 2018a, 163)

Across the ineffability of absence, across the absence which language yearns to fill, the poem depends upon the other in the expectation of the reader. However, the other – which is also the self – also depends, in a sense, upon the poem. The intersubjectivity instantiated by the poem paradoxically depends upon the apparent individuation of both poet and reader.

Dickow examines various modes of address in Fondane's poetry. He distinguishes it from Celan's, in which the Said, according to Levinas, is abolished (although Marjorie Perloff [2006] questions this interpretation). While Fondane and Celan's poetics differ significantly, the subversions I have argued for in Fondane's poetry do constitute important qualifications of the Said, though without entirely abolishing it, for example by undermining the authority of any one voice. As Dickow points out, Fondane's poetry directly states its call and directly stages the problem of interpellation.[9] Nonetheless, the performance of this interpellation exceeds its Said. In Dickow's words, 'while the poem's Said, its content and its precise mode of being, asks nothing of us, the reader is enjoined to respond to the summons of writing to remember' (Dickow 2018a, 164).[10]

The interpellative aspects of Fondane resonate not only with Levinas, but also other authors he engaged with such as Shestov, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. Rein Staal points out that

> Like Shestov's friend, the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, Marcel came to believe that personal reality receives its clearest expression when one being addresses another in the vocative case, in the second person […] The condition of mutual presence, the second person, the *Thou* or the *You*, is the presupposition of every distinctively personal relation: love, friendship, brotherhood, citizenship, and worship. (Staal 2008)

Even this use of the second person, however, is subversively nuanced in Fondane's poetry. Dickow argues that 'the accusatory posture also short-circuits the potential pathos and passivity of victimhood. While Fondane often evokes the Jew's status as a victim, his representations always exceed and challenge this role' (Dickow 2018a, 158). Similarity is affirmed, but as a degree of difference.

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[9] Celan's 'Conversation in the Mountains' may be read as his most overt treatment of the same problematic: 'Even now, when their tongues stumble dumbly against their teeth and their lips won't round themselves, they have something to say to each other' (Celan 2003, 19).

[10] Dickow's Levinasian framing lends weight to similarities between Fondane and Kafka, Celan and Jabès. Beth Hawkins argues that in their work 'poetic moments'which 'capture the retreat of the divine' also capture 'the retreat of the confident, unified, autonomous subject […] as the subject or "self" loses autonomy, the text becomes the instance of, the arena for, the dissolution of the self in the other. At the same time, Kafka, Celan and Jabès remain conscious of the need between self and other […] their projects reflect something of the paradoxical positioning that Levinas promotes […] we are ourselves only *because* of the other […] the difference that cannot be reduced to the same upholds the ethical relationship between self and other'(Hawkins 2003, xxv-xxvi).

The going-on of Fondane's poetry post-'Mots Sauvages' represents an act of interpellation in order to affirm existence. However, this act also necessarily includes a gesture to what exceeds the literalness of communication, to what is beyond the Said and beyond the Saying itself. Fondane's reflexivity in this regard is crucial. I have already mentioned its palanodic moves (see chapter 7 and Dickow 2018a and 2018b) and its various articulations of the thirst for reality figured and unresolved in language. Fondane's unending desire to affirm the singularity of the existent indicates that a gesture beyond the limits of Saying actually occurs through some kind of Said.[11] Dickow argues that Fondane's poetry, especially understood alongside his philosophy's concern with the confrontation with reality, is exemplary for its demonstration that the inadequacies of words place 'existence as such beyond the ken of language as a tool of knowledge (but not of language as expression beyond knowledge, such as poetic language in particular)' (Dickow 2018b, 2).[12]

Despite the desperation of the cry that continually points in Fondane's work to what lies beyond words, its status as interpellative performance reminds us that unsaying 'performs its negations for the sake of the most positive relations possible' (Keller 2014, 3; see chapter 2, 'Writing Disaster). The apophatic gesture of Fondane's poetry, which is inseparable from its affirmation of existence and its interpellative act, means that it is not only useful for re-reading contemporary philosophers such as Levinas, but is relevant for current debates on language and ethics. Amia Srinivasan, for example, in her article 'The Ineffable and The Ethical', has succinctly addressed the continuing tension between the desire to capture meaning and the impossibility of fully doing so, as well as examining the same performative potentiality of language that led Fondane to return to the extra-rational medium of poetry. As the title implies, she argues that the use of language 'not only to represent, but also to gesture, enact, provoke' is intimately bound up with the fact that 'the ethical, properly understood, is grounded in the ineffable' (Srinivasan 2018, 216).

'Quand même il n'y aurait qu'une seule langue au monde, | qu'un seul mot dans le monde [even if there were only one language in the world, | only a single

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[11] 'One might put the rhetorical nature of discourse for Fondane in a different way, and say that for Fondane, all discourse, all linguistic signification, is driven by desire.' (Dickow n..d, 8)

[12] See also Beray on Fondane's readings of linguistic theory (Beray 2006, 145–148).

word in the world]' (MF 169): Fondane fully confronts what Judith Butler calls the 'paradoxical task of trying to write about what cannot be delivered in language'(Butler 2015). Butler shows that apophasis has always been central to existential philosophy: 'Kierkegaard insists upon the necessity of indirect communication, a kind of communication that knows its own limitations and by enacting those limits indirectly points the way to what cannot be communicated' (Butler 2015). If the negations of Fondane's existential philosophy act in the service of 'positive operations' by resisting the previous negation of life by an overweening deployment of logic (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 54) then it is in the singular address of poetry that the indirect gesture can fully realize its function of serving an affirmation that flourishes through an intersubjective relation. In Butler's words, 'self-affirmation means affirming the world without which the self would not be' (Butler 2015) and *L'Exode*, in all its forms of exile, resists the absence of any true home in modernity through the performance – in the sense of both staging and actualization – of this dependent relation.

I will return to the ethical implications of *L'Exode*'s apophatic interpellation shortly. It is crucial to restate, however, that this performance depends upon art's essential autonomy, the liberty from the demands of other ends that Fondane sets out in the *Faux Traité*. When Dickow writes that 'Fondane's poem allows us to extend Levinasian concepts into the domain of writing' (2018, 150), he allows us to contend that it does this *as poetry*. This tautology helps place poetry as the furthest step, the one that takes language beyond itself. Simon Critchley writes that

> Levinas affirms that the very experience of welcoming the other is a
> violence for a mind committed to the ideal of autonomy [...] With the
> infinity of the ethical relation to the other, Levinas is suggesting that we are
> not and indeed should not be masters in our own house. To welcome the
> other is to unseat the *archic* assurance of our place in the world, our
> sovereignty[...] It is [...] an *act* [...] a shattering of my capacities, as what
> [Levinas] calls 'a descent into the real' beyond the realm of thought and
> knowledge. (Critchley 2009)

It is poetry that can set the 'coups de dynamite' in writing, the ones that actually offer an affirmation of existence in the 'welcoming of the other'. If Levinas is the philosopher of ethical speech, Dickow's work confirms that poetry can extend

beyond the logical limits of language into ethical writing, adding another mode of response to the philosophical question of how 'an exchange [can] take place or a debate unfold if we accept as a necessary risk the failure to address or respond to the other?' (Voorsmit 2019, 6).

Like nothing else, poetry has a capacity to tackle what Derrida names the 'monolingualism of the other' (Derrida 1998), language's paradoxical double nature of being both more and less than owned by the self. Fondane wrote of poets performing 'l'acte déloyal *par excellence* envers le langage, qui est de l'incliner à n'être plus que le langage d'un seul [the disloyal act *par excellence* towards language, which is to push it to into being the language of one alone]' (FT 26, original emphasis). A language of one that we can nonetheless read. Beckett said that 'to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail' (Beckett 1949, 103). The exploration of the singular in poetry takes place in the most shared of media.

On the one hand, Fondane's poetry starts from a desire to strike out, and affirm the unsayable: as with Rimbaud, 'there is always that parting cry' (Gros 2015, 47). Yet this move away from what flattens the self in a wider meaning takes place in language, though it subverts, opens, renews and refashions it. Thus the articulation of the singular experience moves toward the other. In the absence of a transcendent justice which would absorb self and other, this process always fails, and so must be renewed afresh. However, in the words of Claude Sernet, 'through poetry's power of transmutation,' using 'the shape of one alone' Fondane finds 'the power to embody the convulsions of a collective conscience and to pass from the single to the general' (cited in Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 66, my translation). Thus, in Salazar-Ferrer's reading of *L'Exode,* 'The emergence of an intersubjective space [...] enriches, little by little, the meaning of the existential journey' (OSF 2005, 66, my translation). The poem 'gestures towards the other' even as it awaits the reader to bring its performance into being (Rebellato 2014, 4).

L'Exode certainly contains a Rimbaldian 'furious joy' (Gros 2015, 46) in its affirmation of existence, but the cry also reminds us of the haunting presence/absence of the unspeakable. The duality of joy and horror are part of poetry's contradictions. To honour Fondane's resistance to horror is to not let his death overwhelm our reading, without relegating it. Marjorie Perloff warns against the dangers of limiting Paul Celan's reception to a metaphysical encounter with the Holocaust which could

place him 'in a kind of solitary confinement, a private cell' (Perloff 2006, 1) of almost scholiastic hermeneutics. While interpretations of Fondane's poetry have not been steered to a philosophical-linguistic focus to the degree Perloff sees in Celan studies, the unspeakability of the Holocaust, a temptation to reduce Fondane to its prophet and emblematic victim, and a tendency to critique his work on theological and philosophical grounds, do risk creating a kind of 'exceptionalism' (Perloff 2006, 2).

Fondane is perhaps less at risk than Celan, despite the temptation towards purely philosophical readings of his work,[13] because it is more obvious that he writes 'out of a tradition, a culture, a history' (Perloff 2006, 2). Or out of several. Or out of the ruins of several. Perloff usefully reminds scholars of the specificity of every poem, a status which is as necessary to Fondane's irresignation as its simultaneous respect for the ineffable. The poem's matter is always 'quite specific' (Perloff 2006, 13). As is evident in Fondane's multitudinous use of poetic forms, although 'the difficulty of all speaking (to one another)' counts, the 'structure of that speaking' counts just as much for the poet (Celan cited in Perloff 2006, 13).

Although Perloff does not mention it in her article, Celan too explicitly and intertextually references tradition, most famously in *Todesfugue's* mention of Shulamite (Celan 2005, 46). Shulamite is an important reference for Fondane too, not only in the Song Of Songs passages of *L'Exode* but in *Ulysse*, where, as in *Todesfugue*, her name is given to a victim of a pogrom in a device that blurs the boundary between metaphor and repetition.[14] As this connection to Celan through Shulamite shows, the forms and images of Fondane's poetry connect in vital ways to other traditions, other moments of witnessing, of affirming the singular. The past is not restored to the present fully, but with difference, becoming a catalyst for the present's communion in affirmation. 'J'ai lu comme vous tous les journaux tous les bouquins [I read, as you do, all the newspapers, all the books]' (MF 152; CO 142)

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[13] Luca Orlandini warns 'in general, I find that critics of Fondane are too philosophers [*sic*], philosophy prevails over everything else' (Orlandini 2013). I am not sure I have avoided this trap.
[14] Shulamite is, understandably, a point of departure for much comparative scholarship on Fondane and Celan (see Rotiroti 2018 and Vanhese 2012). She is also an important third presence in the dialogue between Derrida and Levinas, paralleling Dickow's emphasis on triangulation of address in Fondane's poetry, which I will now draw upon. There is still ample scope for much more comparative work on Fondane and Celan. Perloff (2006)'s reading of *Sprachgitter* flags Celan's relation to his French Catholic wife – Geneviève Fondane's place in her husband's poetry perhaps merits similar attention.

writes Fondane in the *Préface,* certainly bringing knowledge into question (Dickow 2018a, 156) but also simultaneously affirming a community of reading. Writing is shown to be an opportunity for connection and also insufficient, demanding our living participation, though not prescribing its form.

Poetic testimony calls upon us to participate in the work of testimony. We cannot answer but we can 'respond', in the sense given by Pierre Joris: 'this necessity of witnessing imposes itself upon us as a *responsibility*, a word that Robert Duncan has usefully explained as meaning "the ability to respond," i.e. not only to respond to, but also, and perhaps above all, to answer for' (Joris 1995). To answer for Fondane and Celan is not to replace their words with ours, but to face their poetry and swear to it. We do not do this to grant them the legitimacy of truth – as if it were ours to grant – but to create an opening for them. 'To reopen', as Joris puts it, 'these commissures stitched up by the SPRACHE's word' (Joris 1995, emphasis in the original). We grant their texts community and the texts grant community to us. We celebrate them, and in doing so defend the rights of existence. Fondane's irresignation calls our own questions into being.

Art in general and poetry in particular, then, has a special role in what Foucault calls 'the sovereign entreprise of unreason' (Foucault 1998, 236). Fondane's view of the role of the artist in works like the *Faux Traité* very much foreshadows Foucault's argument that it is only in the 'lightning-flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud' that the 'gigantic moral imprisonment' (Foucault 1998, 236) of reason sure of itself can be resisted, that is only through art's autonomy can reason's autonomy be undermined. It is here that Fondane finds the promise of re-enchantment, although Til R. Kunhle points out that poetry may in fact depend on the poet's own rational separation from the world (Kuhnle 2007), an argument that aligns with Foucault's own nuance that true madness is the 'annihilation of the work of art' (Foucault 1998, 244). The poet's unhappy consciousness is, in this understanding, a necessary correlative of poetry's stretch across language and time. Nonetheless, the utopian promise of connection between the real and the word held in poetry's repeated failures is the occasion for its invitations between self and other, in celebration.

Triangulated Address

Alexander Dickow has shown how enunciative theories of poetry are especially pertinent to Fondane's work, and vice-versa (Dickow 2018b). He draws on Jonathan Culler's notion of 'triangulated address' – the propensity for lyric poetry to indirectly interpellate the reader by addressing a third – together with Fondane's direct interpellations to examine the ambiguity of address variously put to use by Fondane. While I agree with Dickow that *L'Exode* is not unique within Fondane's poetry in enacting such techniques, I do think that it is exemplary, especially because of the way it not only deploys and subverts lyric but intersperses it with other modes.

In *L'Exode* Fondane invokes various well-worn poetic 'thirds' – death (Resch, MF 157), rivers (MF 164, Interlude IV 177), Spirit (MF 175), poetry itself (Interlude I, MF 176), humanity (in a very Whitmanian way; see Interlude V, MF 178), a horse (MF 185), the list goes on. However, as the work's intertextual title implies, the primary point of triangulation between author and reader echoes the Old Testament. It is not so much God as the absence of God that is addressed. This absence torments the Israelites in their exile, and Fondane's reason ultimately denies him full acquiescence to the 'madness' of faith that is a prerequisite for the restitution of the covenant: 'lorsque tout se sera apaisé ‖ nous T'aurons oublié [You know that when all is calm ‖ we will have forgotten You]' (MF 180). When the voice of God speaks in the poem, it is to declare that 'Il vous faudra marcher avec des reins d'angoisse | jusqu'aux terres de la fatigue – et il se peut plus loin [You must go on, with anguish in your gut | to the lands of weariness – and further, it may be]' (MF 202). God will be 'Celui qu'on ne voit point [the One who is unseen]' and it is at 'ce point précis d'absence' [this exact point of absence] (MF 202) that reality, 'rugueuse à étreindre [rough to grasp]' in Rimbaud's words (Rimbaud 2009, 252, translation adapted), is admitted, despite the poet's conscience somewhere in the background exhorting him to work towards transcendence: the next voice, named 'La voix dans le désert' is 'ashamed' 'de m'étendre crier ‖ C'EST! [to hear myself cry ‖ IT IS!]' (MF 203).[15]

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[15] This absence through which reality is encountered also fundamentally exposes the relationality and precarity of the self: 'C'est dans ce point | que j'ai douté enfin de ma lucidité | en me voyant moi-même, mais détaché de moi [– It's at this point | that I finally came to doubt my reason, | seeing myself, yet detached from myself]' (MF 203).

'Pourquoi appelais-je au secours? [Why did I call out for aid?]' THAV (MF 207) asks in the very last stanza of the poem, and this reflexivity resounds with absurdity, in one sense: there is no response from God. Yet this constitutive absence is echoed by that absence that prefigures the relationship between writer and reader. It is the failure of communion between God and self that figures the fragile possibility of communion between selves through writing, the articulation of self through a shared experience of 'la boue et la poisse [the mud and bad luck]' (MF 202) of existence. The demolition of human community by the Nazis in the service of a totalizing historical project is resisted not by a pure language that would itself transcend difference, but by writing within and across the Babel of mundane life. Rotiroti argues that poetry offers the 'possibility of reintegration of that which has been broken' (Rotiroti 2019, 63). The breaking of absolute community cannot be undone, but it can be re-membered, recombined. Not fully restored, but salvaged.

The poem's mediation of a participative relationship depends upon its affordance of indirect communication. The uniqueness of this affordance is well summarised by Dickow:

> Solipsistic isolation as a universal condition, subjective uniqueness channelled through a collective and conventional medium: these paradoxes share a self-contradictory quality that might be said to resist or contest the principle of non-contradiction. (Dickow 2018b, 16)

Poetry is the linguistic medium that allows for contradiction, and *L'Exode's* many dictions emphasize this. The indirectness of *L'Exode*'s address, whether in direct written interpellation from an absent author to an absent reader or through triangulation, is performed to establish a human relationship over and above imparting knowledge.

The indirect means of Fondane's poetry can be seen as the antithesis of the utilitarian communications which Adorno, in *Minima Moralia,* sees as ubiquitous in capitalist modernity and attacks to an absolute degree: 'Matter-of-factness between people, doing away with all ideological ornamentation between them, has already itself become an ideology for treating people as things'(Adorno 2020, 45). Statistics, for example, objectifiy, as is only too clear in the wave of numbers that washes over us each day during the Covid-19 pandemic, abstracting deaths to a rate which must be

brought below an 'acceptable' level in order to 'restart' GDP. The Nazis' historicizing project sought not only to exile their victims from the human community, but also from the community of signifiers. Against this terrible eschatological project, we can put Adorno's statement that 'tenderness between people is nothing other than awareness of the possibility of relations without purpose' (Adorno 2020, 44). In *L'Exode* Fondane resisted reification even as it bore down upon him in absoluteness, in impending death.

L'Exode could only act as resistance to reification by gesturing to the unspeakable horror whose very existence is denied by other forms of discourse. This is the mediation I discussed in the 'masks' section of chapter 5. Poetic testimony uses triangulated address to mediate the reader's engagement with its premises with a degree of psychic protection: 'les pensées les plus audacieuses et les plus honnêtes […] se sont […] fait jour […] dans les ouvrages *frivoles* [the most audacious and honest of thoughts come to light in frivolous works]' (HDH 442; EM 49, adapted). The author's responsibility is at once great, pointing out what is otherwise too terrible a subject, and 'refused', passed on to the mouth of the mask.

Fondane argues in *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre* that 'l'expression artistique n'est ni l'objet de l'expérience affective, ni le langage, mais uniquement la *relation* entre les deux [artistic expression is not the object of affective experience, nor is it language, but only the *relation* between the two]' (BEG 409). Poetry, evading the principle of non-contradiction through the thrown voice, responds to the rational knowledge of inexpressibility with an absurd attempt to express. The poem acts to make possible the relationship between selves, between author and reader, across the placeless place, the *non-lieu* of the unspeakable and the unsayable: 'le besoin de poésie est un besoin de tout autre chose que de poésie [the need for poetry is the need for something quite different from poetry]'(BEG 517).

The 'Song of Songs' section of *L'Exode* is a drama-within-a-drama staging of the ways poetry's indirectness leads it to being more than the sum of its parts. The Levinasian 'trace of the feminine', the affective remainder of philosophy highlighted, in their different ways by Shestov, Fondane or Barthes (see chapter 3), is given voice in the mask of the woman from the Song, Shulamite – the very same that Derrida uses in his 'conversation' with Levinas (Voorsmit 2019, 47–48). Through this mask an address from self to other happens through layers of triangulation. Fondane's

poem in its boldness and humility is connected with the boldness and humility of the speaker and with uncountable, unnamed people whose existence is testified to by the poetic 'remains' that make up a written tradition.

The speaker addresses the people of Jerusalem (or specifically, the girls), but at the same time the words are being spoken by another mask, i.e. by a captive whispering to their comrades by a fire, and at another level still, its questions are addressed to a void, which could be the place of God or of Fondane's reader: to whom exactly are lines like 'Qui donc a frappé à mon coeur [Who was it knocked upon my heart]?' (MF 188) addressed? The character triangulates her yearning for the other through the reader even as the relation between author and reader is triangulated through her; at the same time, the human yearning for God shared by author and reader is triangulated through her search and its narration at the campfire.

Fondane's poetic forms may not be as wrenching to the Said as Celan's. Nonetheless, by looking at a work as a whole we see the relevance of Wolosky's contextualization of his compatriot's work:

> Linguistic failure is the failure to realize meaningful experience. On the one hand, the ineffable makes possible positive utterance; on the other, it may engulf it. Language trauma is historical trauma. (Wolosky 1995, 7)

Paradoxically once again, *L'Exode* affords a connection to the historical actuality of Fondane's experience through an indirect and mythical mediation. This is his way of reckoning with linguistic failure, to fight to affirm existence despite its lack of rational meaning. In his work, too, 'positive utterance is ever-threatened and vulnerable' (Wolosky 1995, 7). This is how the Singer tails off: 'Si vous voyez Celui que j'aime | ne lui dites pas | – ou dites-lui à peine – | que l'on a vu saigner une fraise de bois... [Should you see Him I love, | do not tell him – or barely tell him – | you have seen a wild strawberry bleed…]' (MF 190).

Wolosky defends Celan against charges of creating 'closed aesthetic worlds' (Wolosky 1995, 7) and we have seen that 'Mots Sauvages' is a manifesto against such worlds (see chapter 2). *L'Exode's* reckoning with reality's traumas is also a refusal to 'compromise' with life (FT 35). Fondane refuses to recognize the triumph of reason and defined ends, and against Jaspers's dismissal of myth (FT 36), he reactivates mythic fragments in an attempt to 'rendre à la vie ce qui appartient à la vie

[render unto life what belongs to life]' (FT 37). *L'Exode's* many masks, which would seem to take us away from reality, analogous to the seeming hermeticism of Celan's poetry, in actual fact are also invested with what Wolosky calls 'all the risk of temporal process and historical engagement' (Wolosky 1995, 7). Fondane's philosophical negations are important, but his project of re-establishing 'les fonctions abolies par le climat critique [the functions abolished by the critical climate]' (FT 37) cannot be carried by his own critical work. It is in poetry that he can go 'ever in the face of inexpressibility; but beyond inexpressibility there is a commitment to language as the articulation of meaning within our immediate historical condition' (Wolosky 1995, 7).

Fondane's use of myth and of masks, then, is another example of poetry's indirectness performing functions unavailable (or at least obfuscated and downplayed) in other forms of writing. Poetry's testimony subverts differences in status between locutor and interlocutor. It is predicated on affectively extending the condition of humanity to its audience, and seeking the humanity of its author in doing so. Claims to transcendent identities are subverted, and therefore the hierarchies which are based upon them. The othered '*je*s' of *L'Exode* (what Salazar-Ferrer calls Fondane's '*je errant*'; Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 54) undo transcendent authority in order to open to the contingent constitution of self and other in the fragile possibility of communication.[16] Between philosophy's constructions beyond reality and an aesthetic dream of escape, the participation invited by poetic testimony performs the endless negotiation between imagination and reality.

The operations of *L'Exode* belong to what Oscar Wilde referred to as 'the truth of masks' (O. Wilde 1913). Like his decadent predecessor, Fondane was highly aware of the importance of irony in this process, and as I have argued, against Wexler (see chapter 7), this irony does not nullify his truths but enhances them.[17] There is humour in Fondane's work, and the *Interlude's* translation of disaster into comic chanson, personifying the rivers (MF 177):

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[16] Fondane's precarious yet tenacious subject positions pre-empt Beckett in this regard. Wolosky writes that Beckett 'criticizes a unitary, self-identical self beyond time, and questions the Proustian ideal of one. For it is an ideal that imprisons the self in itself, making both love and communication impossible in any real sense' (Wolosky 1995, 73).
[17] Robert Boyers counters a similar reading of the fiction of another reader of Shestov, George Steiner (Boyers 1985, 28–30).

'La Meuse nous a fuis,la gueuse,
et la Somme s'est fait enlever...
Si tous les fleuves nous quittaient
    qu'allons-nous faire?

La Marne, ô rusée, ô jolie,
pourquoi es-tu restée au lit?
Ô Seine, c'est de la folie!
    Mon Dieu!'

The Meuse gave us the slip, the
         bitch,
and the Somme's been carried
         off...
If all of the rivers should leave us
    what will we do?

Sweet Marne, so canny, so pretty,
why did you stay in your bed?
Oh Seine, this is insanity,
    Oh God!

The lightness of the lines emphasize the absurd, unreal sense of suddenly being a refugee, while the 'Mon Dieu!' which interjects could be a stock refrain, but its seriousness is amplified by the uneasy sense that such an expostulation is only too appropriate.[18] Fondane's humour foreshadows the extreme example of Aleksander Kulisiewicz, mentioned in the last chapter, whose clowning in the concentration camp was not a means of escaping a terrible reality but of surviving with some semblance of humanity.[19] At a moment when other forms of resistance appear futile, poetry's frivolity disrupts absolute defeat with a hinging of self and other.

Fondane's engagement of irony towards making poetry an event participating in reality fits with Koloctroni's analysis of modernist historicity. While Wexler is right that there is a danger in modernist irony refusing the attempt at signification, Fondane constantly strives 'towards the contradictions which are crying out to be put into words' (Lefebvre 1995, 47–48, cited in Kolocotroni, forthcoming). In the words of Monique Jutrin, '[Fondane argues that] the poetic act can grasp the real only insofar as it refuses to conceive of itself as knowledge' (Jutrin 2015, 6). Through irony, Fondane contextualizes various forms of discourse to tear open access to that cry, revealing the Sophist (and Nietzschean) position that 'no dialectic can sidestep the affective dimension of language and its appeal to the passions' (Dickow 2018b, 17). As certain passages of *L'Exode* actually stage the conflict between the rational

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[18] The Meuse was the trajectory of another famous flight, that of Rimbaud, here turned on its head as the river flees the poet.
[19] See Jude Polsky's thesis *Laughing Matters: The Holocaust Humour of Art Spiegelman, Tadeusz Borowski, and Aleksander Kulisiewicz* (2002).

imperative to eradicate contradiction and the inconvenient 'thirst' (MF 174) of the existent, a kind of meta-address comes in to play, such as in the 'second man's' monologue (MF 173–174), where the exhortations of the ideal are related in a past-tense narrative. Dickow writes that 'as opposed to philosophy's pretension to rhetorical mastery, poetry submits to the uncontrollable drift of affective life' (Dickow 2018b, 19) and the staging of the rhetorical impulses of philosophy is followed, after the interlude, by the song of the Song of Songs (MF 188).

Fondane's poetry cannot overcome the paradox of testimony set out by Primo Levi. Nonetheless, in its engagement with catastrophe *L'Exode* is a kind of artistic correlative to Blanchot's philosophical attempt to confront the writing of disaster. Thierry Durand, commenting on Blanchot's *The Step Beyond,* frames the context thus:

> at the moment where all is lost, where it is already too late, the face of the other – the deported other – calls for remorse, 'as if it were necessary to respond' writes Blanchot, 'to a demand all the sharper for the fact that it demands nothing but this infinite response'. (Durand 1998, 51, my translation).

The 'moment when all is lost' is also the moment of writing, when the author lets go of their authority and allows the text to stand for itself, indeed to travel for itself. Poetic testimony's circumlocution, its circumnavigation – a message in a bottle cast upon the waves (Celan 2003, 35) – makes this demand possible in writing, across time, space and difference.

Salazar-Ferrer argues that *L'Exode* is primarily addressed to a 'shared community' (Salaza-Ferrer 2005, 63, my translation) implied in the 'aristocratic' view of poetry's audience in the postface, but the irony is that membership of this community is open to all who choose it. With the message in the bottle, the unknown reader is intended more intimately for reception and connection than they ever could be by a straightforward address. Durand opposes Blanchot's rhetorical conception of language to Hegel's idea of philosophy as the flower which grows from the ruins of history, something pure and perfect distilled from the mash of human lives (Durand 1998, note 2, 52). For Blanchot, against Hegel's image, the flowers of rhetoric symbolize 'the endless beginning again which ruins all dialectics'' (cited in Durand

1998, note 2, 52, my translation). Durand argues that Blanchot thereby undermines the dominance of a conception of literature as subordinate to ideas. In using his own image of growth, Fondane humbly chooses nettles that survive in ruin (MF 153).[20] What survives in his poetry is not a glorious idea or a frozen beauty but a trace of life amidst ruins, presenting an ethical injunction.[21] Neither simply a presentation of facts nor a command, its reading participates in that 'beginning again'. The message is thrown into the ocean yet its address is the most precise possible. It subverts scrutiny that would treat it as knowledge and enjoins participation in its celebratory process upon reception.

Proto-Political Space

> In all discourse, at its heart and in its essence, someone is crying out.
>
> (Dickow 2018b, 19)

Some of Fondane's commentators have argued that he attacks or withdraws from politics. Michael Finkenthal describes him as 'antipolitical' (Finkenthal 2013, 83). I think this is a mischaracterisation. Just as Fondane's philosophical work is best thought of not as anti-rational but as extra-rational, so his writing's relationship to the social may be considered extra-political, not denying the reality of politics but subverting its certitudes and affirming the importance of what exceeds it (without being totally independent of it). In fact, his relationships to politics and to reason are intimately linked. Against contemporary Marxist attempts to triage literature in terms of revolutionary 'purity', Fondane defended writers such as Baudelaire and Lautréamont as 'spiritually' revolutionary while being socially conservative (EDR77). Ironically, this aligns him more closely than his opponents to Marx himself, who 'always held that great writers have insights into social reality that transcend their personal prejudices' (Wheen 2006, 5). Fondane's position,

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[20] The image is a Biblical one, too: the nettles in the temple (MF 192) is particularly reminiscent of Isaiah 34:13.

[21] Although the modern sense of *injunction* implies command, the etymological meaning of *enjoin*, 'to fasten to, to bring upon', is appropriate for the sense of an ethical presence in Fondane's poetry as encounter and connection.

summarized by Finkenthal, that 'Marxism itself should be liberated from the constraints of a narrow determinism and be presented with the challenge of confronting the irrational aspects of life and society'(Finkenthal 2013, 83) pre-empts later revisions.

Although Marx's 'insights' could also be construed as a mandate for a hermeneutics of politically-correct knowledge extraction that Fondane would abhor, he never denied that the extra-rational activities of the artist were linked to the social. He only insisted that they not be made subordinate to it, at a time when various political idealists were demanding just that. While Fondane subverts the notion of an autonomous aesthetic realm à la Mallarmé, his defence of poetry's power beyond political definition can be seen as having a political edge, in the sense that it resists projects which would banish it and the social consequences of this banishment. In 1935 he wrote:

> Le rôle de la culture n'est pas de sanctionner une somme d'interdictions, ni de canoniser des moyens de contrainte; ce n'est pas à elle de faire le silence sur le suicide de Maïakovski; c'est à elle, au contraire, de délimiter dans un événement pareil la frontière du social de la frontière de l'individuel; c'est à elle de tirer les enseignements nécessaires et d'amener l'événement à sa plus haute expression éthique, métaphysique ou religieuse.

> [The role of culture is not to give official recognition to a collection of prohibitions, nor to canonise the methods of coercion; it is not its place to keep silent about Mayakovsky's suicide; on the contrary, in such an event it is up to it to mark out the boundary between the social and the personal; it is up to it to take the necessary lessons from the event and to bring it to its highest ethical, metaphysical or religious expression.] (EDR 101–102)

This is why I find the Achebean notion of celebration helpful: it ties together psychic liberation and the independence and ambiguity of art with a notion of community. There is an affinity between Adorno's 'ethics of resistance' and Fondane's poetics, in that a 'pre-theoretical ethical impulse' that demands a 'way of being and living' without 'rational justifications' (Finlayson 2012, 29) is surely expressed in Fondane's poetry, beyond the limits of theorization.

Poetry's affirmation of the existence of the singular takes place through the performance of contradictions. In Rotiroti's words, poetry's testimony 'brings a multiplicity into itself, a constellation of light and shadow, a secret configuration of

places for memory' (Rotiroti 2018, 152, my translation). Through its overt act of making the affirmation of the singular depend upon the expectation of the other in language, poetry holds together the singular and the multiple in a way which subverts the logical principle of identity. It does this even at the level of the word: a metaphoric word can be two things at once, as well as something else, subverting the principle of the excluded third, and that of non-contradiction. In the *Préface* Fondane subverts these principles in even simpler fashion: 'je parle d'homme à homme ‖ Et pourtant, non! | je n'étais pas un homme comme vous [I speak man to man ‖ But no! | I was not a man like you.]' (MF 151–152; CO 139–141). A difference that exceeds rationality is gestured towards in a comparison that puts forward similarity and then counters it without cancelling it.

Judith Butler makes a theoretical intervention that points up the importance of the limits of language in contextualizing the relation that is instigated by poetic testimony:

> None of us are captured by the categories by which we gain recognition. I am that name you give me, but I am also something else that cannot quite be named. The relation to the unnameable is perhaps a way of maintaining a relation to the other that exceeds any and all capture. That means that something about the other can be indexed by language, but not controlled or possessed, and that freedom, conceived as infinity, is crucial to any ethical relation. (Butler 2020)

Through its contradictions, poetry draws attention to the fact of this unnameability. At the same time it draws attention to its specificity, 'indexed by language, but not controlled or possessed'; poems are, in William Harmon's words, 'palpably physical objects inviting attention to their own visible and audible reality' (Harmon 1992, 926). Unlike the universalizing aims of philosophy, poetic testimony invites a plural relationship through the affirmation of singularity, connecting existents in an affirmation of existence that can never be captured as a transcendent object of knowledge.

Poetic testimony holds open a space for a non-absolute negotiation of values. Against programmatic politics that seek to comprehensively map social reality with logic, Fondane's work is useful for an apophatic understanding of politics, which would acknowledge that 'in many cases things happen without any possibility to

prevent them from happening and one has to cope with their consequences whether one finds meaning or not in their unfolding' (Finkenthal 2013, 85). Catastrophe exposes the fundamentally uncontrollable nature of contingency. Celan, inspired by Shestov, argued that the indirectness of poetry is created 'for the sake of an encounter' (Celan 2003, 46). By phantomatically inviting a 'shared humanity that demands recognition just as the face of the Other demands recognition according to Levinas' (Dickow 2018a, 157) poetic testimony offers a starting-point that may help self and other to live with this uncontrollability. I would call this starting-point *proto-political*: one to which politics can always return, 'a word for living creatures' (Celan 2003, 48).

The beginning of a relation invited by poetic testimony is centred around the notion of address. Poetic testimony depends upon always implicitly addressing the reader in the second person, even when this address is in fact triangulated. 'The condition of mutual presence, the second person, the Thou or the You, is the presupposition of every distinctively personal relation' (Staal 2008). *L'Exode* presupposes this relation, though most of its passages are not *directly* addressed to the reader. The *Préface* emphasizes this by acting as a kind of overture, its direct address colouring and uniting all that follows.

Butler, of course, reckons the importance of pronouns in mediating the ethical relation. Paul Celan had already understood this. His *Conversation in the Mountains* indicates that the second person is the insufficient and necessary beginning of all social being. His 'language of the earth' consists of 'nothing but He, nothing but It, you understand, and She, nothing but that' (Celan 2003, 20). The language of the third person – the language of philosophy and 'cataphatic' politics – unspeakably objectifies the existent, but the unsayable language of nature is also impersonal. In Fondanian terms, we are banished from unity with it by our taste from the tree of knowledge – our *esprit critique*. Therefore we can only respond to and through the insufficiency of our human language with the necessity of using it, which always begins with a second-person address: 'I had to talk, maybe, to myself or to you' (Celan 2003, 20). The self itself is affirmed by making this address, which Fondane's poetry performs.

Poetic testimony is ethically fragile. Its resistance to reification depends upon a refusal of instrumentalization: it should not be confused with an actual political act.

Nonetheless, the proto-ethical space which it holds open is that which must condition the ethical event. This is not to imply that poetry is necessary for the ethical event, only that it can perform such a pre-conditioning and make it evident. This fragility is clear in the tension maintained in *L'Exode* between the specificity of Jewish experience and its metonymic employment as exposing something essential in general human experience. As Dickow argues of the *Préface,* 'although the poem's conclusion at first seems to betray a preference for the notion of a shared humanity, the earlier section's accusation persists as a troubling palinode, a wrench thrown into the poem's otherwise smoothly working machine' (Dickow 2018a, 158).

L'Exode's fragile, absurd hope of shared humanity lies not in a political statement but in the relation it strives to engender, a relation which is necessarily provisional. It is in this sense that *L'Exode* can most importantly be 'considered the great poem of Jewish poetic resistance under the Occupation' (Salaza-Ferrer 2005, 59, my translation). It does not simply dare make the riches of Jewish culture relevant to the present and attempt to safeguard them for the future. It actually uses the anguish of the Jewish experience of exile from God as a means for resisting the anguish of the exile of self from other and therefore of the objectification that 'justifies' extermination. Fondane refuses revenge (MF 151; CO 139) not by accepting his fate but by looking to and attempting to instigate the subjectivity to come (see Buck-Morss 2014).

The guards' song discussed in Chapter 5 ('Voices') is exemplary for examining the breadth of Fondane' s vision as he articulates the meeting points of the existential and the social (as, with famous skill, did Villon, his formal model for this passage). Fondane imagines the brutalized humanity of the perpetrators of catastrophe singing a collective song with a lonely refrain. With Biblical force, the soldiers are stunned by looking on those stunned by violence: 'Les statues de sel des routes, | avec leur regard étonnant [The statues by the road we traipse | astonish with their saline stares]' (MF 187). Their own individual anguishes and confusions are channelled into their unison: 'Êtes-vous morts, tous et toutes? | Sous quelles neiges sont les ans? [Are you dead, each and all | What snows have covered up the years?]' (MF 187). Fondane subverts the border of individual and group, of victim and perpetrator: 'Il n'est de chanson que l'humaine [there is no song but the human one]' (MF 187). Henri Meschonnic argues that 'against the dualities of philosophy, Fondane is in the continuity of life [le

continu de la vie] by way of the poem and in that of the poem by way of life. In this way he is present' (Meschonnic 2006, 13, my translation). This presence is only possible through an unflinching attempt to gesture to the totality of affective reality, and so Fondane refuses to objectify his persecutors in turn.

Fondane's resistance of reification through his poetry is pre-political. His poetry makes apophasis evident, expressing the repressed and excluding and gesturing to the ineffable. Simply by existing it defends the independence of the imagination, and the political ramification of this is a reminder that politics is for people, not the other way around (Fondane made Mark 2:27 a *mot d'ordre* in this regard: 'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath'. See LE 12–13 and HDH). This kind of apophasis is a Celanian living-with the need to speak despite the abyss, as opposed to what might be called the apophasis of Fascism (Miéville 2019, 14): the obscurantism of a doctrine that demands acceptance of the authority of an ineffable truth held in blood and soil, the silence in the service of a cause that induced Fondane to abandon Romania and eventually killed him.

Fondane's dream of 'primitive' re-enchantment through poetry, as he himself sometimes admitted, would never be realized, 'its restoration', in Mircea Martin's words, 'always under threat from omnipresent and omnipotent reason' (Martin 2007, my translation), including in the poet's own mind. Poetry was nonetheless crucial in this endless attempt because it brought reality and imagination together in a resistance of what Fondane saw as philosophy's intrinsic hatred of reality. If this resistance to alienation has a political parallel, perhaps it is in the Marxian social project of re-enchantment of Silvia Federici, if only in its agreement that 'the root of oppression is loss of memory' (Paula Gunn Allen cited in Federici 2019, introduction), or in 'anti-blueprint' social anarchism, found in twenty-first-century primers such as Cindy Milstein's *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* but probably best (and somewhat apophatically) gestured towards in the fiction of Ursula Le Guin. Both share Fondane's critique of any politics that would impose 'a unitary model of social and cultural life' (Federici 2019, introduction).

Fondane's resistance to alienation operates at an existential level, not a political one, even though the act of affirmation in his poetry depends upon the possibility of a relationship. His notion of the poet's shameful conscience is like an inversion of the common understanding of existential 'bad faith', 'the human being's anxiety in front

of the responsibility entailed by the realization of its radical freedom' (Burnham and Papandreopoulos 2020). Fondane may have seen an 'escape' into aesthetics as a denial of that responsibility, but, in opposition to existential philosophies which depend upon a rational confrontation with the absurd, his own poetry represents the pushback of the irrational against the proclamation of other ethical responsibilities. Poetry can break all the rules, demanding even the freedom to be absurd, to escape the shackles of ethical thought without actually negating ethics. What Dickow has shown in his Levinasian reading of Fondane is that the act of assuming one's subjectivity, an act performed by Fondane in his poetry, depends upon the attempt to instigate a relationship with the other, even if only through writing. Thus the reader is the most distant and the most intimate, the most general and the most specific of interlocutors.

Fondane's poetry functions as a resistance to reification to the furthest degree, including the reification of death. In contrast to ruins which proclaim greatness past – the necrophilic Nazi conception – it speaks from the ruins with the promise of a living relation. It is impossible to consider his work without taking into account the specific catastrophe that surrounds it, and in thinking his writing as resistance his context is comparable to that of contemporary writers such as Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, and Etty Hillesum, the subjects of Rachel Feldhay Brenner's book *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust* (1998). There is something specific, though, about *poetic* resistance, poetic testimony: its embrace of irrational elements, the absurdity of its revolt as part of its revolt against absurdity.

Fondane is one of the 'drowned' discussed by Primo Levi (2017) and by Giorgio Agamben (2008). He cannot testify from death – yet he comes close. In his desire to give testimony to existence, through his own existence but, by the alchemy of poetry, not *reduced* to mere autobiographical witnessing, he defeats the significance of his death in advance. In his absurd choice to stay by his sister Line, in the aburd revolt of his poetry, his life gives itself meaning, rather than being given meaning by his death. That is to say, its meaning is opened by the participation of the reader. In his essays he argued for the revolt of art against domination in the philosophical sphere, and his poetry revolts against all domination.

In opening his book on the negotiation of identity and community with language, Derrida takes an extract from Edouard Glissant for an epigraph. If

Humanism is understood as a rationalizing, normative and exclusionary project, Glissant's characterization of the work of undoing hegemony as 'anti-humanism' (Derrida 1998) neatly shows that Fondane's desire to affirm existence and subvert all definitions in the endless desire for relation is inseparable from the confrontation with language. It is poetry that can undertake this without fear or favour. As a poet, Fondane precedes Celan, but he anticipates him. In 'Mots Sauvages' he argued for poetry as dynamite. Rotiroti sees the 'cinders' of the poetry of catastrophe in terms of 'the power of the poem ready to reignite the subject's desire, between the necessity of speech and the impossibility of the word' (Rotiroti 2018, 163, my translation). In Fondane's poetry, the fuse is always lit.

The necessity of saying something, against the impossibility of the word, brings us back once again to the importance of the cry in Fondane's poetry, which expresses that necessity in a way which is proto-linguistic as well as proto-ethical. The cry communicates a longing for understanding that stands at the edges of language's imperfections. To draw on William Franke, Fondane's cry is also 'the cry or scream (cri) that wells up from writing, "é-cri-ture" ' because writing entails the 'splitting apart of the whole into unbound, boundless fragments' (Franke 2014, 109–110). The cry that responds to the impossibility of adequately speaking occurs in the utterance itself.

Although he may not seem to rend language at the level of the word to the degree seen in Celan (or, as I shall examine in the next chapter, Edmond Jabès), in his poetry Fondane does stand at the boundaries of sense, aware that 'The significance of the whole–significance as a whole–is at stake in writing' (Franke 2014, 110).[22] This liminality, this awareness of language as fragmentary – as essentially ruined – goes hand in hand in Fondane's poetry with a social liminality. All too aware of the fragmentary status of identity, Fondane negotiates his complicated relationship with Judaism into an existential crying out that is nuanced by social contexts.

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[22]Furthermore, I agree with Perloff (2006, 9) that there is always a referential content and context to Celan's poetry (Rotiroti also argues that Celan's poetry owes much to the 'tradition of Romanian folklore as a mythical, historical and creative [creaturale] background'; Rotiroti 2018, 157, my translation). We could say that the singularity of poetic testimony, its affirmation of existence, depends upon the presence of the Said, even though it necessarily displays the incompleteness of that Said. This is a major part of what places Fondane's poetry in opposition to aestheticism.

In the *Interlude,* which is like a cry, acting as an affective outburst that disrupts the flow of the 'dramatic' poem, a cry erupts in the form of a Hebrew imprecation to God: '*Adonaï Elochenu, Adonaï Echod!*'[23] Fondane/the speaker cries out in a language which is not his own, whose function strains the division between signification and performance (of an act). The cry bursts through reason's defences, as France lies 'le ventre ouvert au centre immaculé de l'ode [stomach open in the immaculate centre of the ode]' (MF 180):

– Adonaï Elochenu, Adonaï Echod!
Tu sais que lorsque tout se sera apaisé
sur la terre et dans les cieux
nous T'aurons oublié. Tu sais, dès à présent,
que seul le souvenir secret de ma prière
me remplira de honte.
	– Adonaï Elochenu, Adonaï Echod!
	You know that when all is calm
	on earth and in the heavens
	we will have forgotten You. Now
	              You know,
	that merely the secret memory of
	              my prayer
	will fill me with shame.

It is at the moment of catastrophe that the *esprit critique* can no longer keep the irrational at bay, though the plunge into full faith is not possible either.

The boundaries straddled by the poet, between signification and silence, irrationality and logic, are made intensely relevant by his uncertain social status and identitarian persecution. As he has already made clear in *L'Exode* with his assumption of the status of the leper from Leviticus, Fondane writes from the boundary between member of the human community and *homo sacer*. The context of the Holocaust, of course, is integral to Agamben's development of *homo sacer* as a way of theorizing exile from human relation and significance into bare life. Fondane's poetry, however, resonates directly with its classical sense of one who relies only on the gods for protection. This is the exilic state of Odysseus, whose name he took for his first poetic sequence in French. It is also amplified here, as he cries out by the road, angry at himself for doing so, but without other recourse:

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[23] The end of the sentence quoted from Franke in the previous paragraph emphasizes the way writing and God act together as a wrangling of the desire for totality: 'The significance of the whole–significance as a whole–is at stake in writing, and just this is what God is and always was about' (Franke 2014, 110).

J'ai, Tu le sais, d'autres dieux	I have, as You well know, other
que Toi, secrets, perfides!	gods
Mais ici, sur la route, dans le désastre	than You, secret, perfidious gods!
et dans	But here, on the road, in disaster
le chaos, il n'est pas d'autre Dieu. Tu	and in
es seul!	chaos, there is no other God. You
	alone!

(MF 180)

Fondane's cry is a sign of intent; it is a refusal to give up though rejected by society, literally on its boundary, in desolation on the road. Even in the most abject cry of distress which terribly subverts the 'perfection' of poetry, the status of homo sacer – the looming threat of being reified into a 'muselmann' – is resisted.

Shakespeare's characterization of life as a 'tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' (*Macbeth*, act V, scene V) was a touchstone for Fondane's existential philosophizing (HDH 444). It is significant that Macbeth's speech is in fact prompted by hearing a terrible cry (the 'cry of women'; the keening of his wife's attendants and, possibly, her own suicidal shriek). Macbeth's lack of compassion turns him towards an existential soliloquoy, but it is also the completion of brutalization: 'bear-like I must fight the course' (act V, scene VII). Macbeth wearies of his own ambition, wishing 'th' estate o' th' world were now undone' (act V, scene V), yet 'will try the last' (act V, scene VIII). Fondane's own revolt turns on the enactment of the cry itself. In his poetry, it is not Macbeth but Lear that he echoes, and to some extent he also anticipates later poets such as Ginsberg:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! – O, you are men of stones
Had I your tongues and eyes I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack... (*King Lear,* act V, scene III)[24]

The anguished, absurd desire to 'crack heaven's vault' moves Fondane in the *Interlude*. The cry is the zero point of his poetry's 'pure resistance which survives his own extermination' (Rotiroti 2018, 157, my translation). Crying out on the road is

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[24] The expression 'men of stones' is worth noting, indicating a reification inherent in the assumption of pitilessness, as well as muteness. In *L'Exode* Fondane plays extensively on stones to explore boundaries between subjective and objective, human and divine and speech and silence: 'Le jour de Colère est venu et chaque pierre est une bouche' [The day of Anger is here and each stone is a mouth] (MF 182). So too does Celan, and there would be ample scope for further comparison: 'the stones – to whom do they talk?' (Celan 2003, 20).

also continuing down the road; the poem is '*en route*', in Celan's terms (Celan 2003, 49). It is by going towards the reader that the poem can 'signify in the *après-coup* of the catastrophic event' (Rotiroti 2018, 157, my translation).

The resistance to reification which begins with the cry shows that the cry in *L'Exode* is, always, not only a symbol, but an *act* of revolt. In the first place, it is a revolt against the 'philosophizing' of history, against the pressure to give meaning to human suffering by explaining it, or worse, justifying it. If the twentieth century is the 'shipwreck' of the Enlightenment, it is fitting that the significance of this revolt is betrayed in Robespierre, paladin of reason, who, in a debate on military strategy, asked: 'who will guarantee that your attack, for no plausible reason, will not irritate the people to whom you are bringing the war, however philosophical the motivations of this action?' (Robespierre 1954, 137, my translation). The cry is an endlessly renewed starting point for resisting philosophy's tendency to seek (and to seek to impose) laws. Blanchot points out that 'there has always been an ambiguity in what goes by the name of law' (Blanchot 1995, 143) and the proto-political effect of Fondane's work is the attention it draws to the endless work of negotiating this ambiguity. He has a Blanchotian understanding of the importance of literature's refusal 'to be dependent upon, or symbolized by, any other order at all (such as pure intelligibility)' (Blanchot 1995, 145).

Again and again, this extra-rational stance must be differentiated from the complete abandonment of reason: through poetry Fondane seeks to negotiate the boundary between the two. Like Rimbaud he cannot convince himself into faith; the cry which is repressed by the ideal cannot be constantly lived with (at the edge of reason, 'Il nous faut défendre de Rimbaud, plus qu'il ne nous faut défendre Rimbaud lui-même [I must defend myself from Rimbaud more than I must defend him]', he wrote in *Rimbaud le voyou*; RV 141). But his work also resists the capture of the irrational by reason, whether by Breton's psychoanalytic domination of the unconscious by the social or by apophatic Fascism. *L'Exode* contributes to the difficult but essential task of defending space for the extra-rational against the logics of the Holocaust. In its pre-emptive poetic testimony, Fondane's 'drowned' voice aligns with Levi's 'saved' witnessing: 'Perpetrators were "rationally" mean, putting unjust law and violence to use for social control' (Polgar 2018, 2).

The cry staged in *L'Exode* is that implied with the question 'Do you hear me?' in Celan's *Conversation in the Mountains*:

> who speaks does not talk to anyone, cousin, he speaks because nobody
> hears him, nobody and Nobody, and then he says himself, not his mouth
> or his tongue, he, and only he, says: Do you hear me? (Celan 2003, 20)

In *L'Exode* the triangulation of this address between poet and reader, the place of the capital-n Nobody, is taken by God. Given gestured presence in the salvage-work of the poem, cry is the affective start of the effort 'against collapsing into nothingness in the throes of the crisis to preserve the question' (Hawkins xxiii; see chapter 2, 'Writing Disaster'). In reading this problematic in Celan, Kafka and Jabès, Beth Hawkins sees an upholding of the bond between man and God. But 'preserving the question' could simply be holding open the space of the ethical, figuring a pre-political relationship through the poem. The affirmation of existence through the poem's question exceeds the ghost of the author that haunts it. At a time when many of his milieu were still defending Stalin, Fondane considered Mayakovsky emblematic of this power of poetry (FT 83), and its primary, unqualifiable need, stated by Celan in his translations of Mandelstam, for 'the chance simply to exist' (Celan 2003, 64).

It is crucial that the fight for this chance to exist that Fondane ardently enacts in his poetry (and attempts to contextualize in his philosophy) be set against a political co-option. Nonetheless, I contend that considering it in terms of the proto-political is worthwhile. While Fondane diverged from his contemporary Camus – with whom he was friendly (Salazar-Ferrer 2004, 217–218) – on the issue of political commitment as elsewhere, there is still something of a grounds of affinity to be found with Camus's analyses in *The Rebel* [*L'Homme révolté*], even if Fondane would reject his political conclusions. Douglas Burnham and George Papandreopoulos make the point that

> Camus suggests that it is the making-absolute of the values of the revolution
> that necessarily lead to their negation. On the contrary a *relative* conception
> of these values will be able to sustain a community of free individuals who
> have not forgotten that every historical rebellion has begun by affirming a

proto-value (that of human solidarity) upon which every other value can be based. (Burnham and Papandreopoulos 2020)

While Fondane would reject the rational political moves of Camus, or, on the other hand, the faith-directed politics of Simone Weil, this notion of the revolt against alienation as proto-political animates their shared problematic.[25]

For Fondane poetry is not a solution, but a going-on. The undirected apophasis of his irresigned revolt is also untimely, pre-empting current philosophical approaches to the logic of history, the critique of which is 'bound up with the experience of language and the realm of the subjective' (Critchley 2009). Fondane's 'metaphysical anarchism' (Salazar-Ferrer 2008, 86) finds resonance with Levnisas's 'anarchic' 'unbinding [of] the subject by binding me to another' (Critchley 2009). The negative political theology of Benjamin's 'On Violence' (Benjamin 2002, 236) continues to animate ethical debate. Critchley argues that '"God" is not the super-juridical source of the moral law [...] [but is] calling us into a struggle with the mythic violence of law, the state and politics by allowing us to glimpse the possibility of something that stands apart, an infinite demand that cannot be fulfilled' (Critchley 2009). There is a strong parallel here with Fondane's discussion of Christ's despair and his reminder that the Sabbath was made for men, and not the other way round, in *L'Homme devant l'histoire*. In Critchley's view, ethics is an endless process of responding to such a demand, which exposes 'our imperfection and failure and we wrestle with the demand and the facts of the situation' (Critchley 2009). He argues that 'ethics is all about the experience of failure, but in failing we learn something. As Beckett writes, "Fail again, fail better" ' (Critchley 2009).

Fondane is not so much concerned with learning from failure in order to build an ethically-improved society (though neither is he dismissive of this work, as texts like *L'Ecrivain devant la révolution* and *L'Homme devant l'histoire* make clear) but more, in his poetry, with the actual experience of failure and the going-on from it. Rather than mapping the lines of the ethical, his poetry may be seen in strongly Blanchotian terms, 'a disastrous passion, a perpetual exile' (Durand 1998, 36, my translation). Its ethical aspect, its proto-political aspect, inheres in an assumption of

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[25] For Salazar-Ferrer, Fondane's 'metaphysical revolt thirsting for the infinite' and Camus's 'phronetic' ethical revolt continue to offer an active dialectic (Salazar-ferrer 2003b, my translation).

the writer's responsibility: 'an ethic turned towards the other which comprehends (without being comprehensive) a practice of expiation' (Durand 1998, 37, my translation).[26] The poet's attempt to 'do justice' to experience is inseparable from the movement towards justice through the interpellation of the other. 'Y a-t-il donc encore | un être libre dans le monde | – et qui chante? Comment s'y est-il pris? [Then is there still | a free being in the world | – one who sings? How did he manage it?]' (MF 183) *L'Exode'*s mood of disconsolation is underlain by an unflinching clarity towards the impossible task of writing, and its irresignation by its necessity as a step towards the absurd possibility of justice.

Let us return once more to the notion of celebration. For Fondane, in my view, the failures of Humanism, exposed by multifarious catastrophes, revealed a woundedness in existing that was paralleled in language. Franke puts it that 'the unsayable is found within language, a language that wounds and bloodies itself by fragmenting into letters' (Franke 2014, 109), a thought that is mirrored in the *mise en abyme* of the alphabet sections of *L'Exode*. I have already argued, in Chapter 7, that Achebe's concept of celebration is wider than the everyday use, that mourning, for example, is a form of celebration (see also Dickow 2017). But even joyous celebrations may paradoxically contain an element of wounding. This is particularly true of ceremonies that mark the passage into a new stage of awareness and responsibility in life (circumcision is perhaps the last one widely practiced in the minority world) (Eliade 1998), that is to say which are explicitly existential. The double, wounded nature of poetic testimony is eloquently described by Rotiroti, who argues that the poem

> is not only the unsayable, ineffable, unavowable secret of the unheard-of, catastrophic event of extermination, but also the other order of the secret, that of the search for love, of the call towards the other, in the gift of the poem. (Rotiroti 2018, 165, my translation)

The celebration of existence in *L'Exode'*s utterances amid the ruins, 'even a little of this twilight' (MF 197), remains a provisional and unquenchable thirst, ever open for partaking by the reader.

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[26] 'Une éthique tournée vers l'autre qui consiste (sans pouvoir "consister") en une pratique de l'expiation.'

Fondane scholars have for the most part touched on his relationship to politics only in terms of the negative critique of his philosophy, which pre-empts later thinkers as various as Zygmunt Bauman (for whom the Holocaust, in Sheila Fitzpatrick's words, was 'an outcome of modernity, with its technological and bureaucratic capacities and processes of rationalisation'; Fitzpatrick 2020), John Gray ('We have been reared on religions and philosophies that deny the experience of tragedy'; 2015, chapter 6) and Benjamin Labatut (2020). Although Fondane's work resists political readings not at all in the sense of political contexts, it does so quite strongly in the sense of political directions. However, without denying the personal and spiritual foci which have been centred in Fondane studies (see the *Cahiers Fondane*), I believe it is worth examining how the ethical demands of his 'commemorative writing' (Dickow 2018a, 163) graze the political. Fondane's philosophy defends the non-determinability of existence outwith the realm of ideas. Yet unlike the work of Gray, say, which at points runs dangerously close to misanthropy,[27] Fondane exceeds the aporiae behind the failures of reason by finding an affirmative approach in his poetry.

In untimely fashion, against the apotheosis of action of grand modern projects, from state communism to fascism, and the seduction of politics as the highest end for artistic avant-gardes, his 'celebrations' do not necessarily *negate* projects for a better society so much as acting as a corrective by, in effect, reminding that dancing is as important as revolution.[28] In *L'Homme devant l'histoire,* Fondane centres his anti-Humanist anti-fascism around that statement of Jesus' that 'the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath'. *L'Exode*'s performance of human solidarity is both a pre-political ethical demand upon the reader and a caution for politics that the better society is made for man, and not man for the better society.

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[27] E.g. in chapter 1, section 3 of *Straw Dogs:* '*Homo rapiens* [sic] has become too numerous' (Gray 2015).

[28] It is worth cautioning here that Fondane's work does not only resist 'authoritarian' regimes. It cannot be co-opted in favour of a simplistic project of liberal-democratic 'neutrality'. His critique of modern rationalizing ideologies very much includes those of Western democracies. Again, this inconvenient view on the relationship between individual and society pre-empts more recent critiques of Western progress, and not only by post-modernist *bête noires*. To cite just one with an especially apt title, Enda Delaney's 2012 study of British government policy and the 1845–1852 Irish Famine is called *The Curse of Reason*: 'Universal systems of thought derived from Enlightenment concern with reason were translated in Ireland into rigid adherence to the ideologies of free trade and the protection of the rights of property over and above that of human life [...] Reason exacted an apocalyptic toll' (Delaney 2012, 235).

The legal scholar Luke Herrin argues that 'constant renegotiation [is] an inherent feature of social relationships: any given arrangement can only exist because of a background of social solidarity that can never be captured by any rigorous logic' (Herrin 2020). For Fondane, poetry's subversion of the 'three laws of thought'[29] is key to affirming this proto-political relation that can neither be completed nor destroyed by reason. Its paradoxical testimony moves through what Salazar-Ferrer calls 'factors of uncertainty [facteurs d'incertitudes]', the 'fragmentary appearances, ignorance, dissimulation, uncertainties and distortions' (Salazar-Ferrer 2005, 53, my translation), which prevent the singular from becoming universal, yet render its affirmation 'pertinent'.

If Fondane extends the possibility of community to all, there is nothing to demand the acceptance of his offer. Poetic testimony may act as a political gesture (as well as an extrapolitical one) primarily as subversion, in the opening of spaces – untidy corners – that political projects often occlude through the reductive modes of thinking they tend to employ in formulating their goals (as well as actively through prejudice and domination). Fondane's poetic practice and statements about poetry point to the value of testimony being not so much the vehicle of a counter-narrative as an affirmation of presence that subverts the consolidation of hegemony, the capacity of propaganda or law to dictate what presences may be acknowledged. Such a reading offers very little comfort. In fact, it is discomfiting. Yet surely poetry's greatest capacity is in discomfiting our relationship to reality, correcting our instinct to mistake language for the world it moves us through, simultaneously resisting both the occlusion of experience and the instrumentalization of language which abets the performance of such occlusion, whether consciously directed or through its own evolutive processes.

The irresignation performed in Fondane's poetic testimony is a kind of revolt which constitutes itself through an expectation towards the other. To consider this revolt as proto-political is not to direct Fondane's poetry towards politics, for the performance of this irresignation depends upon an understanding of art as ethically autonomous. The apophasis of Fondane's poetry in his modernist and existential confrontation with language is fundamental to the performance of its affirmations and

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[29] I.e., identity, non-contradiction and the excluded third or excluded middle.

its expectation towards the other, because it enjoins the reader to work across language's insufficiencies themselves, in an existential engagement rather than a consumption of knowledge. The suspicions engendered by the logic of Plato's Republic are that poetry neither touches the truth of things, nor provides a model for goodness, but only distracts with beauty. In Fondane's lifetime, even many poets attempted to address this problem by harnessing poetry to the yoke of morality, for instance in the guise of socialist realism. In defiance of his own 'shameful conscience', Fondane rejects the whole schema, including the gilded cage of beauty as poetry's domain. *L'Exode* is part of the expression of his conviction that poetry can stand up for its own truths, with images that, as the poet Philippe Jaccottet wrote a decade after Fondane's death, 'try to tell the truth, not about the world or about myself, but perhaps about our relations' (Jaccottet 2009, 57, my translation).

Poetic testimony is subversive and singular. Poetry rejoices in the paradoxes which are ordinarily occluded in language. These paradoxes allow it to affirm extra-rational aspects of life. This affirmation enjoins the reader to look through the gaps in the words: it gestures towards what is ineffable in a way that invokes the reader's participation. Thus its special testimony of the singular inherently connects it to the multiple, by way of its manipulation of a medium which is at once individual and shared: language. Its logical subversions make the space of relation it creates across time, ineffability and the very boundaries of the self into a space which is not over-determined, and therefore one in which the reader is called to engage and interpret themselves. Henri Meschonnic argues that Fondane wrote 'on philosophy, and its conflicts with poetry, but it is above all because he is the poet that he is, in his revolt, that he is closer to Dada and to Artaud than to the surrealists, in a living-of-the-poem' (Meschonnic 2006, 8, my translation). His poetry's resistance of instrumentalization is crucial to the creation of this space across which an ethical relation is possible. Poetic testimony is not political of itself, but it performs a fragile, apophatic, ethical act which can be considered an expression of that which precedes politics.

In chapters 7 and 8 I have articulated a notion of poetic testimony in relation to Fondane, and through the fulcrum of his irresigned revolt I have hinged this notion on a context of relationality. In a sense this brings us full circle to the interconnection between social, existential and linguistic concerns in the initial discussion of catastrophe. Fondane's confrontation with the limits of language cannot be reduced to

a struggle in any one domain, be it political, religious, or otherwise, but must be considered holistically. Shira Wolosky takes such a holistic view in her treatment of the stakes of modern poetry, and is worth quoting at length here (note her use of the word *celebration*):

> The inexpressibility topos [...] has broad cultural implications. The same impulse that demotes language as unequal to unitary truth finds expression in other systems that demote materiality, difference, and mutability [...] Conversely, an orientation towards history as the scene of language points towards a series of translocations of value to the immanent world of human experience [...] at issue is the whole philosophy of the One that has reigned more or less uncontested from the inception of Western culture [...] A commitment to language would assert, in place of this ideal of unity, the positive value of multiplicity, mundane conditions, and history as the authentic realm of experience. Transcendence would in turn act as an Other at the absolute border of language, an irreducible limitation that also marks respect, relationship and ultimately celebration of the multiplicity it makes possible and regulates [...] a positive valuation of language would join with a negative sense of the limits of language [...] it takes shape as the acceptance of a negative boundary that leaves open and respects the world beyond ourselves as one we never fully possess. The negative boundaries of language then remind us of our own limitations, while its positive embrace calls us toward full responsibility within the realms of our action and of our utterance. (Wolosky 1995, 269–271).

I believe the context set out by Wolosky is the same which Fondane navigated, through the subversions of existential philosophy and towards the 'positive embrace' of a new poetic practice. Patrice Beray argues that from the tension between Fondane's use of poetic form and his 'contestation' of it 'a living word springs' (Beray 2006, 208, my translation). Meschonnic puts it that it is as a poet, with his 'caprices and fantasies of language', against philosophy's binaries, that 'he is present' (Meschonnic 2006, 13, my translation). *L'Exode* figures God as a means to relate to the 'absolute border of language', and thereby triangulates its address to the reader. As a coda to chapters 7 and 8, the next chapter will examine the paradox of negative theology's influence as a way of dealing with immanence through language, by comparing Fondane's poetry with the work of another poet better known for exploring such a paradigm: Edmond Jabès.

Chapter 9 (Coda)

Fondane and Edmond Jabès: Absence and Possibility

> What can a writer do whose subject matter is the impossible,
> the emptiness of transcendence, the unsayable?
>
> (Waldrop 2002, 142)

> Entretenir une angoisse en nous, un état de discontinu et de
> provisoire, où force nous est de penser hors des catégories,
> sentir dans l'absurde, juger dans l'arbitraire – n'est-ce pas là
> la volonté qui perce dans les livres de Chestov?
>
> [to hold open an anxiety in us, a state of discontinuity and
> provisionality, where we are obliged to think outside of
> categories, to perceive from within absurdity, to discern
> from within arbitrariness – is that not Shestov's resolve,
> throughout his books?]
>
> from 'Léon Chestov, témoin à charge' (CM 281)

> There is no place for questions which is not also a question
> of place. Answers mean sleep, death. Waking means
> questioning […] I have, not without effort, preserved
> openness.
>
> from *The Book of Margins* by Edmond Jabès (1993)

In this chapter, I will relate Fondane's poetry more broadly to that of Edmond Jabès. Both are known for their treatment of God's absence, and therefore that absence is a useful point of triangulation between them. This work of relation is not intended to bring the preceding chapters into the conclusion of a religious Fondane or a religious Jabès. Instead, since at the start of the thesis I set out apophasis as a useful tool for understanding the linguistic stakes implied in Fondane's confrontation with catastrophe, I wish to bring Fondane's irresignation and poetic testimony back to these stakes, by way of a reflection.

I have argued that poetic testimony depends upon poetry's subversions of logic. However, the linguistic stakes are that the *logos* remains. Fondane's desire for 're-

enchantment', for the complete overcoming of thought through poetry, is never satisfied. As Mircea Martin points out, 'his own way of interpreting poems is itself conceptualizing' (Martin 2007, my translation). It is, in fact, this tension that makes poetry possible. Martin asks 'How could the poetic experience, as he himself understands and defines it, be possible without the anguish of separation, the anguish which his aspiration towards cosmic unity cannot soften, still less cancel out?' (Martin 2007, my translation). Fondane is, in actuality, aware of this tension; the 'savoureuse angoisse [delectable anguish]' (MF 157; CO 151) is the provocation to dare begin the poem: 'Oser, veut dire entreprendre une tâche dangereuse […] trébucher, se relever et lutter sans arrêt *contre soi-même* [To dare means to undertake a dangerous tasks […] to stumble, to pick oneself up and to relentlessly struggle *against oneself*]' (BEG 214). In both Fondane and Jabès's work, this division in the poet, the difficulty of reasserting what Fondane would call a 'primitive' experience, combined with the extra-rationality of their attempt, can be considerd in parallel with the modern absence of God across which interpellation is sounded. For both, the absence is framed through the extensive resources of Jewish myth.

In his stated desire for poetry to attain enchantment, Fondane parallels a desire for faith, which, as Fabio Vericat argues, 'is incompatible with self-consciousness, given that the critical awareness of faith already involves a distancing from the object of contemplation' (Vericat 2002, 173). In effect, the poet cannot overcome their 'conscience honteuse', only revolt against it. The struggle to succeed in this revolt is more or less the entire theme of *Rimbaud le voyou*. Unlike Rimbaud (at least his version of Rimbaud), Fondane does not rationally consider this success to be attainable. Nonetheless, the desire for it is crucial. Where philosophy left Fondane in a place of pure negation, a Kierkegaardian 'crisis in thought', poetry could affirmatively perform that absurd desire, 'the advent of passion' (Butler 2015). In the *Faux Traité* he asks 'pour quelles raisons le poète essaie-t-il de *spatialiser*, de rendre solide et historique son expérience spirituelle, immatérielle et intemporelle? [for what reasons does the poet try to *spatialise* his spiritual, immaterial and intemporal experience, to make it solid and historical?]', answering, provocatively but sincerely, 'nous l'ignorons, fort heureusement [we have no idea, thank goodness]' (FT 27).

The lack in language was thought and performed by Jabès, too. Jabès wrote that after Auschwitz it was only possible to write with 'wounded words' (Jabès 1990a, 9).

Giovanni Rotiroti sets out the way that poetry, despite its failure to heal the wounds of language, still performs a valuable extra-rational function in its attempt: 'even if the wounded word does not conquer death, it nonetheless seeks to survive it, revealing in the here and now of the *poema* the secret link that inextricably (and messianically) links the past to the future, hope to memory, the cry to the word (Rotiroti 2018, 176, my translation). Fondane came to an early understanding of language's wounding (see Vanhese 2012), as he sets out – and defies – in 'Mots Sauvages' ('nous sommes encore sous le règne des mots [we are still under the reign of words]'; Fondane 1996a, 22). Jabès's poetic response to the Holocaust helps us to understand Fondane's continuing relevance.

In *Madness and Civilization,* Foucault writes that 'the language of delirium can be answered only by an absence of language, for delirium is not a fragment of dialogue with reason, it is not language at all; it refers, in an ultimately silent awareness, only to transgression' (Foucault 1988, 224). For Fondane, poetry is a kind of reckoning with this absence *in language*. Perhaps ultimately for Fondane poetry is 'a fragment of dialogue with reason': the poet is a kind of intermediary between the irrational and the rational. This is supported by a holistic approach to Fondane's work, to what Patrice Beray calls 'the essence of the questions freely distributed for twenty years by this writer across poetry, philosophy, cinema and literary criticism' (Beray 1994, v, my translation).

The embracing of poetry's fragmentary, subversive possibilities, against an overarching theory of aesthetics, is part of what Beray calls Fondane's play at 'the passionate seizing of expression on a bonfire of forms'(Beray 1994, v, my translation). Of course, Fondane's piling up and enflaming of forms is not an erasure of them. As we have seen, his response to the ruining of form was not, in general to abandon it (even his cinépoems play with the form of the film script; Fondane 2007 27–49 and CO 2–33). *L'Exode* is unusual both in relation to Fondane's other poetry and to the poetry of his time and avant-garde milieu. Where Dada and surrealist texts often take fragmentation to extremes, enacting total breakdown or a chaos of novelty, in *L'Exode* fragments are married to forms that contextualize them without properly constraining them. As with the Song of Songs, at times they come close to allegory while subverting its possibility, recycling tropes and forms that are frayed at the edges.

The recognition of characters and modes by the reader simultaneously obliges a refashioning of their meaning. It is as if, interpreting Pound's injunction to 'make it new', Fondane were insisting on the persistence of the 'it'. This salvage-work cannot but take on a political dimension at a time when Jewish culture and literary culture in general were under grave threat, yet as an avant-gardiste Fondane recognized that their possible – if partial – integration, their translation, into the future required continuing renewal. This reworking of the fragments of the figures of the past might paradoxically be called a prefigurative poetics, endlessly creating the new poetry in the shell of the old.

Jabès is more commonly thought to drastically break open form (Franke 2005, 629–630), but he too writes 'out of a tradition, a culture, a history', as Perloff says of Celan (Perloff 2006, 2), not least that of Rabbinic commentary and mystical or quasi-mystical Jewish writing. And, whether with fractal expansiveness, as in the voices given to the letters in *L'Exode*, or with intense condensation, as in Jabès's *NUL/L'UN,* both are deeply concerned with form in the strictest sense, with the form of language at the barest level. Patrice Beray reads Fondane as turned towards 'a "something else" that seems to pull him outside of language' (Beray 1994, vii-viii, my translation). Through reading Baudelaire, Beray argues, Fondane articulated the question of the meeting point between art and life: 'If there were something in Baudelaire's poetry other than the most beautiful verses, what could that be other than existence itself?' (Beray 1994, viii, my translation). The question is not one of knowledge, but of relation.

The contradiction between Fondane's desire for enchantment and the persistence of the *esprit critique,* astutely observed by Mircea Martin ('the recuperation of the primitive mentality is never completed'; Martin 2007, my translation), strikes at the heart of Fondane's endeavour to continue with poetry despite not having faith in it. I mean this in the sense that he did not believe it would provide a resolution to the problems of existence, but only a means of properly engaging with them. At another order, he did not believe that poetry could be the means for repairing language, for attaining a pure language. This approach to poetry is paralleled by, and mediated through, his approach to God. *L'Exode* reactivates the energies of theology, in its alternate sense as a 'discourse to God' (Finlayson 2012, 12), as the Israelites seek their divine interlocutor, even though He may be absent. In

L'Expérience poétique, Fondane wrote 'Que Dieu soit cru existant et parfois le poète le hait; mais le hait davantage de ne pas être [if God is believed to exist then the poet will sometimes hate him; but he hates him more for not existing] (Fondane 1935). The persistence of desire, for God, for linguistic satisfaction, is anguished.

Derrida's famous text on negative theology, *Sauf le nom*, links the desire for God – the desire to understand the world through God – to the inevitability of poetry:

> inclining [to Godlessness], but not going beyond incline or inclination […] does not seem separable from a certain boldness of language [*langue*], from a poetic or metaphoric tongue […] apophatic boldness always consists in going further than is reasonably permitted' (Derrida 1995, 36–37)

Fondane's irresignation is manifested precisely in this boldness of the poet. This is how it is able to simultaneously establish a relationship with the reader and undermine and challenge us.

Regarding Kafka, another key influence on Fondane (see BEG 348), as well as on Celan and Jabès, into whose orbit I have brought Fondane, Beth Hawkins puts it that

> He did inhabit a world of foreboding. Living in that world, Kafka developed a theology – rigorous and complex – that Celan and Jabès find sustainable, in many regards, after the Holocaust. His theology revolves around a God who has either retreated or who does not exist; at the same time, it encourages faith and demands individual responsibility despite and because of this absence.
> (Hawkins 2003, 3)

Hawkins does much to illuminate the complex theological context of these writers. However, in Fondane's case at least, I do not believe that Hawkins's conclusions are sustainable. The encounter with an absent God certainly articulates a longing for faith, but it cannot encourage it: faith is irrational and therefore beyond the bounds of persuasion.

Faith in God acts as a kind of symbol for all the irrational aspects of life that are repressed by reason. Across the abyss of time, across the abyss of God's absence, poetry's 'thirst for the real' comprehends an impossible, unending desire to

comprehend eveything.[30] It can only attest to its experience in desiring and in being. *L'Exode* represents and performs a struggle for human liberation: liberation from hegemonic historical definitions, liberation from reification, liberation from suffering in the name of progress. If it also bears upon individual responsibility, it does so not by proclaiming the power of the individual subject, but by placing all moral questions within a 'pre-existing' relationality. Derrida puts it that 'To testify to the desire *of* God […] we do not determine *ourselves before* this desire, as no relation to self can be sure of preceding it, to wit, of preceding a relation to the other' (Derrida 1995, 37). Testifying requires speaking, or writing, and poetry – at least Fondane's poetry – makes manifest this relationality in its very articulation of the desire of God.

While Fondane's poetry very much speaks in its own right, the existential commitment of his philosophical writings is always an available context. In order to properly understand this relationship of Fondane's poetry to negative theology, it is also necessary to consider the major influence of that negator of theology, Nietzsche.[31] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in particular, is a key intertext with *L'Exode*. Fondane's irresignation is a rejection of the comfort of hinterlands or 'worlds behind' (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 3) even through the anguish of the continuing desire for such an escape. Nietzsche is a clear inspiration for much of Fondane's overall struggle against the 'teachings of weariness and renunciation' (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 9), and the Babylonian priest glorying in the desolation of the temple (MF 192–195) embodies both the philosophical 'preacher of death' and the literal, genocidal one.

L'Exode cannot be reduced to a Nietzschean reading any more than it can be reduced to a religious reading: its voices are in active dialogue with these influences. Understanding *Zarathustra* as an intertext helps to clarify the speech of the 'second man' in the section that precedes the *Intermède:* 'J'ai grimpé le plus haut que j'ai pu et je n'ai pas trouvé la hauteur | – Où est-elle donc l'altitude? [I climbed as high as I could and wasn't up to it | – so where is the altitude?]' (MF 173; see Nietzsche 2005,

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[30] ' "Il n'y a pas assez de réel pour ma soif!" ["There is not enough *real* for my thirst!"]' (MF 21; Fondane 2017, 15).

[31] 'C'est en un monde sans Dieu, un monde où on a *tué* Dieu et où, selon la remarque de Nietzsche, *on ne s'en est même pas aperçu,* que la philosophie existentielle est née [It is into a world without God, a world where we have *killed* God and where, as Nietzsche remarks, *we have not even noticed*, that existential philosophy is born]' (LE 59–60; EM 27).

book 1, chapter 8). The speech is laced with Zarathustran references, with its references to the cold of the void and the injunctions that come forth from it: ' "PLUS HAUT QUE L'HOMME!" ["Higher, higher than man!"]' (MF 174). Yet it is full of ambiguity, sharing Zarathustra's elevation of freedom with a deep ambivalence towards the overman: 'Le doute commença à ronger ma chair | qui donc avait voulu nous tromper de la sorte? || quelle était donc la chose | que l'on voulait nous voir quitter? [Doubt began to gnaw my flesh | so who had wished to trick us like this? || what was it | someone had wanted us to leave behind?]' (MF 174). Like Zarathustra, for Fondane the poetic act is what helps us 'bear to be human' (Nietzsche 2005, book 2, chapter 20), but he has no faith that this bearing is directed toward something higher, be it God or overman. This doubt is given immense poignancy by the time of its writing, as the Nazis exulted in their bastardizations of Nietzsche.

Zarathustra also illuminates the somewhat hermetic sonnets that appear earlier in *L'Exode*, which mention 'solitudes grasses [fat solitudes]' (MF 167) and 'des tas de SEULS! [heaps of alones]' (MF 165).[32] The solitude that comes from seeking the heights is ironically, and with great pathos, paralleled in the scattering and crushing of ordinary people beneath the feet of history's movers and shakers: 'Pas même seul. Des tas! Des tas de SEULS! | Ont-elles droit, si maigres, aux linceuls, | ces pures ombres que l'histoire traque? [Not even alone: whole crowds! | Alones, in crowds! | Thin as they are, have they the right to shrouds, | these pure shadows with History on their tracks?]' (MF 165). Extra-human solitude is acquired not by willing the overcoming of the human, but as a consequence of being treated as less than human. The poem testifies to the attachment to 'base' aspects of humanity – 'la maison, la mère et […] la femme | dont la ventre était chaud [the house, my mother and my wife | whose belly was warm]' (MF 173) – holding open a chink of space for their affirmation: philosophically, against the promise of edifying lightning that never arrives, and materially, against the persecution that is literally destroying them.

The tension between Nietzschean and theological impulses in Fondane's work is productive. If his reason, like that of his Rimbaud, rejects hinterlands and hears the

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[32] 'One day you will see what is lofty in you no longer and what is base all-too-closely; even what is sublime in you will frighten you like a spectre. One day you will cry: 'Everything is false!' There are feelings that want to kill the solitary; if they do not succeed, well, then they themselves must die! But are you capable of being a murderer?' (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 17).

imperative to 'create beyond himself', if it leads him to the 'desolate space […] the icy breath of being alone' (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 17), his poetry responds, in all its anguish and desire, with an extra-rational affirmation of life that uses God as a placeholder for what stands outside of thought. It is in poetry that Fondane can keep asking the question: 'free *for* what'? (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 17). Zarathustra itself is, of course, a poetic text that embraces contradiction. Chapter 14 of the first book avows something of the key of relationality that sustains poetic testimony: 'I and Me are always too zealous in conversation: how could it be endured if there were no friend?' (Nietzsche 2005). For Zarathustra, this relationship is a means to reciprocate the 'glance of eternity'. *L'Exode* does not deny a longing to the future: '… ô terres de futur! Puissants orteils! … [Lands of futurity! O powerful toes!]' (MF 165),[33] the first sonnet concludes, in fragmentary fashion. Yet the face of the *Préface*, in acting as a 'rough and imperfect mirror' (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 14), seeks not to provoke us to overcome its human image, but to accept it.

The terrible freedom birthed by the loss of God – whether dead or merely absent – is the obverse of the catastrophe of language and civilization, made manifest in world war, in which Fondane lived and died. Fondane's irresigned poetry, its absurd affirmations sprouting in a collage of poetic forms, seem to place him at a tangent to the poets whose minimalizing styles are commonly associated with this relationship between poetry and negative theology (both in the sense of the ineffability behind God the signifier and in the sense of God as an absence) – Celan, Jabès, Beckett, Yves Bonnefoy. Yet despite their parings of words, they too share his embracing of the fragmentary, ruined material of existence that is all they have to work with, and he shares their subverting of language (Dickow 2018a; Riach 2011).[34] With the context of apophasis once again in mind, I now wish to compare Fondane and Jabès as another angle for examining the ruins of language as a necessary locus for the possibility of the constituting encounter between self and Other.

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[33] The ambiguous toes here are a somewhat surreal eruption. They could figure a grasping of the earth, a rooting of the future in the past and present (this is supported if we read *orteils* as a pun on *orties*, the nettles of the preface). They could also figure the toes of the feet of Plotinus's dancers, stamping on the victims of progress who haunt history from the outside.

[34] As I have argued across this thesis, and as Dickow also shows in his work on Fondane and elegy. Bonnefoy explicitly acknowledges Fondane as a predecessor. Graham Riach has argued that Bonnefoy's figuring of the desire for material affirmation made present in the word's very lack of it also takes the elegiac as exemplary.

'Nous leur enseignerons à *balbutier*'[35]: Fragments of speech

In Chapter 4, as a counter-point to Fondane's dissatisfaction with language, I looked at (Riding) Jackson's search for perfect utterance. It is not clear how such utterance would deal with paradox. For Fondane, and for his near-contemporary Edmond Jabès, however, poetry is a territory of expression which affords space to paradox and thrives upon it. Poetry is written out of a paradox: it both comes out of nothing and manifests in a preexisting medium. In *Lavish Absence,* her passionate engagement with reading, knowing and translating Edmond Jabès, Rosmarie Waldrop writes

> Jabès is no mystic. He is not even a religious writer in the narrow sense. In Jabès, the transcendence is empty. His "God" is a metaphor and does not exist… on the other hand, Jabès shares the mystics' view that linear logic has its limits, and that beyond these, paradox becomes an epistemological tool. It takes an ambiguity in perception to make us conscious of perception. (Waldrop 2002, 127–128)

It is just such ambiguities of perception that lead both Jabès and Fondane to non-linear, questioning, reflexive modes of writing. This section will explore parallels between their poetry in order to illuminate, if only obliquely, something of the need for Fondane to turn to poetry in his wrestling with the contradictions he encountered in language, thought and ethics.

Despite magnetic similarities in their lives and works, and milieus (both connected, for example, to the surrealists, and both influencing later poets such as Yves Bonnefoy), Fondane and Jabès have been little studied together. The only article I have encountered which centres on them takes a very broad scope across a short text and does not offer much in the way of comparative reading (Chitrit 1998; Rotiroti 2018 also mentions them both). Like Fondane, Jabès was frustrated and intrigued by the aesthetic and semiotic limits of language, like Fondane, this process was given dizzying and terrifying new contexts by the war, though he was at a remove from it, and like Fondane, his personal experience of exile (forced out with

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[35] 'We will teach them to *stammer*.' From Fondane's essay 'Le grand ballet de la poésie française' (AG 55).

the rest of Egypt's Jews during the Suez Crisis) brought certain introspective and abstract concerns into collision with acute actuality. Like Fondane, he used the cultures of thought and mythic specificities of Judaism to address questions of existence and expression more broadly. It is impossible to state how mutually close their 'understanding' of unsayability may be and to what degree Jabès's 'empty' transcendence complements or conflicts with Fondane's own conceptions of the abyss or a religious horizon beyond it. What can be tentatively sketched out is an urge to communicate, a need to speak and a valuing of speaking despite the lack of an external guarantee for the value of that speech.

This hesitant speaking naturally forms itself by way of questions, and I will focus primarily here on Jabès's *Book of Questions*. Waldrop's own fragmented critical readings, grounded, like mine, in an experience of translation, provide particular inspiration. She quotes Derrida:

> The fragment is not a style or failure… without the interruption – between the letters, words, sentences, books – no meaning could awaken…Writing… proceeds only by leaps. (Derrida 1967, 108) [36]

Fondane and Jabès seek to lay bare such leaps, in their respective fashions. Although, like Apollinaire, Fondane offers something of a modernist take on the long Romantic poem, including or especially in the lyric sequences *Ulysse* and *Titanic* as well as *L'Exode's* special dramatic structure, which is similar in some regards to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, sitting as it does between the written word and the theatre, his (meta)logics are still associative and appositional, operating through not only the spark of images colliding but also a willed tracing of the gaps between them.

In constructing argument around Fondane's poetry I cannot but *détourne* him, and a structurally ambivalent approach opens itself to criticisms of evasiveness, bet-hedging or even cowardice. Yet in treating Fondane, alongside Jabès, as an artist working in language, I aim to avoid Italian Fondane translator Luca Orlandini's warning that 'in general… critics of Fondane are too [much] philosophers… "*généralisation*" prevailing [over] the single… philosophy is undermining the

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[36] Translated by Waldrop.

richness of [Fondane's] complexity' (Orlandini 2013, 1). A somewhat fragmentary and associative reading is at least a gesture to this end.

Speech Conditioned by Absence

For Fondane and Jabès both, the mark made upon the void of the page is at once an absolute point of origin, *ex nihilo*, and already inadequate. An inherent ontology and epistemology of writing. Rosmarie Waldrop, following Blanchot, writes of this haunting knowledge 'there is no "original word", no unbroken relation with the divine' (Waldrop 2002, 19), quoting 'Man come out of Nothing, unable even to claim a portion of this | Nothing.' (from Jabès's *Adam, or the Birth of Anxiety* cited in Waldrop 2002, 20). Yet despite the inadequacy of writing, of speech, they are nonetheless a gift, a necessity: 'it is the absence of a divine word that allows *us* to speak', Waldrop continues, introducing a quote from the *Book of Questions*:

> Eloquence is created by the absence of a divine word. It is at the beginning
> of speech. We are crushed by the deity. The echo dies as the voice weakens.
> The murmur is truly human. (Jabès 1991b, 85)

Fondane, writing in the imminence of catastrophe, also approaches this point from the other side, so to speak: 'Faudra-t-il la chute des mondes | pour que jaillisse une parole? [Do worlds need to fall | for a word to spring forth?]' (MF 156, CO 148). It is perhaps unsurprising that the 'truly human' in his poetry is most often found in a cry or shout. Yet, cry or murmur, it is the beginning of speech that is nonetheless valued, though it begin in the midst of human anguish, though its author knows it to be inadequate. In *Le mal des fantômes (1942–1943)*, the uncertain hopes of migrants setting out for America are a palimpsest upon all hopes of freedom and security in the absence of god. In their '*tas de rêves* [heap of dreams]',

> quelqu'un remue, si pareil à moi –   someone stirs, so akin to me –
> et néanmoins… Il rêve? Non; il parle   and yet… Dreaming? No; he
>   speaks…

(MF 88)

Like Jabès, Fondane proceeds with fragmented questioning, the humility of the breaks and spaces honouring '*l'innocence du cri*' (Jabès 1963, 13).

The very first lines of Fondane's return to poetry (at least as published) are contradictory, fragmentary, and culminate in a question on the transience of all life's arrivals: '*est-ce arriver vraiment que d'arriver au port*? [is it truly arriving, arriving in port?] (MF 17). They are also marked by death, in the form of the 'ashes' of his dear friend Armand Pascal which '*pèse si lourd dans ma valise* [weigh heavy in my case]'. Despite the weight of the abstractions which occupy them, Jabès and Fondane never fail to bridge these universal concerns with particular experience. As *Ulysse* is heavy with his brother-in-law Armand's ashes, the *Book of Questions* is pregnant with the death of Jabès's sister. Among the shadows of war and genocide which enfold their writings, the deep consideration for the value of one human life manages to assist in the mourning of those beyond named remembrance, rather than diminishing them. Ulysses's narrative of wandering is also a narrative of encounters. Some Fondane scholars have focused on his *Ulysse* to sketch an 'aesthetics of participation' (e.g. Monique Jutrin or Michael Finkenthal in Jutrin and Vanhese, eds., 2003, 25 and passim). In situating their meditations on death within or alongside specific experiences of grief, Fondane and Jabès alike make affect participate in enquiry, and open the poem to the participation of their interlocutors (from the mourned to the reader) according to categories which exceed the purely intellectual.

However noble her quest, perhaps this gesture towards the Other as specific other, rather than as part of a universal, is missing in (Riding) Jackson (see chapter 4). Yet she is surely spurred by the same question Jabès raises through 'Reb Midrasch':

> If we have been created to endure the same suffering, to be doomed to the same prearranged death, why give us lips, why eyes and voices, why souls and languages all different? (Jabès 1991b, 31)

Is this a lament, or a gentle challenge? Each experience of *les mêmes souffrances* is unique, for all it is the same (another paradox). Despite and because of the individuality that divides us, each poem is an opportunity to celebrate the humanity of speaking, as well as lamenting its insufficiencies. We might say with Beth Hawkins, as she juxtaposes Jabès with Kafka and Celan, 'the balance between particular and

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universal is precarious and constantly shifting' (2003, xi). The actual realization of participation is predicated upon originary difference.

In her book on Kafka, Celan and Jabès, Hawkins interprets Celan's statement 'I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem' (Hawkins 2003, xiv) as an imperative: 'art *should be* directed towards the other'. She cites Martin Buber, a formative thinker for Fondane (see Salazar-Ferrer 2017b and 2004, 18), who wrote: 'the basic movement of the life of dialogue is the turning towards the other' (Hawkins 2003, xiv, translation Ronald Gregor Smith) and foregrounds poetry as grounds for such turning, the Fondanian liminal *non lieu* where the border between internal and external space becomes open, or the two overlay each other. Whether or not we accept Hawkins's emphasis on the Judaic covenant as framework for Jabès's exploration of dialogue, her exposition is forceful:

> At the core of Jabès's world, the question resides, a pulsing, dynamic entity that vehemently rejects conclusions, yet promises to foster a relation between the one who asks and the one of whom the question is asked. (2003, 156)

Le Mal des fantômes and the *Book of Questions* are both intensely dialogic. Various voices ask a multitude of questions – to each other, to themselves, to their authors, to their readers, to 'God'. Speech is conditioned by absence: as Hawkins has it, 'Jabès reaches out to the reader in the space of loss' (2003, 162). Further, 'reproach and misunderstanding are expected from the beginning' (ibid). 'Oubliez-le! [Forget it!]', affords Fondane in the *Préface en Prose* (MF 153)*,* carrying no certitude for the poem into its lines; 'in order to punish me, you will deny the validity of these pages', foresees Jabès (1991b, 63). What remains is a relationship. A recognition, though it be the recognition of suffering, though we see with different eyes and speak with different tongues. A presence: a faint promise of presence in the possibility of being read. Reading implies a reader, who becomes the medium for the resurgence of existence, the medium for the ghost of the existent.

A presence which affirms. Though it perhaps only affirms its thirst, the affirmation is dependent upon the other. Jean-Luc Nancy states that Jabès's writing enacts a 'pure pleasure of scrawling impatience across the impassive face of being. A childish pleasure of being there' (cited in Cahen 2007, 13, my translation). I read

childish as something close to *simple*, and certainly not as pejorative. Even in the impatience of being, of being in loss and absence, writing becomes being's affirmation. Impatience connects this writing-into-silence into time, time which might be considered by way of the hermeneutic foothold of Benjaminian messianic time. If we extend Hawkins's claim that her authors 'reflect something of the paradoxical positioning between self and other that Levinas promotes' (Hawkins 2003, xxv) to include Fondane, we can regard the gesture towards the future in Jabès's and Fondane's interpellations to their readers-to-come as a specific paradox. If 'the perpetual alterity of the other, the difference that cannot be reduced to the same, upholds the ethical relationship between self and other' (Hawkins 2003, xxvi) the address to the future reader is a special instance of the paradox of alterity from which 'we gain our humanity' (Hawkins 2003, xxv).

If catastrophe is experienced as a confirmation of being's situation in loss and absence, then Fondane and Jabès's writing in anticpation of, during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust is generous and responsible in its human gesturing, *because of* the interpellating, questioning, fragmentation and respect for silence it performs in the holding up of a 'man's face' – Fondane's face, the face of Jabès's character Yukel – to the future, though such modes have lead some, in Jabès's case at least, to 'deny [their] validity'.[37] As we saw in chapter 7, Pierre Joris argues that post-Holocaust poetry:

> cannot simply bear witness to the past but must at the same time be resolutely turned towards the future: it has to be open, it has to be imaginatively engaged in the construction of a new world, it has to look forward. (Celan 2006, 6)

Jabès and Fondane's poetic writings, for all their lacunae, for all their kaleidoscopic variety and shifting, hold their contradictions within an existential resonance of self dependent upon other.

At the threshold where the word begins, Jabès asserts the positive gesture of writing against logonormative criticisms:

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[37] See for example Hawkins's contextualization of Berel Lang's ethical/formal criticisms, Hawkins 2003, 160.

"Writing for the sake of writing does nothing but show contempt."

"Man is a written bond and place."

(Jabès 1991b, 19)[38]

Thus connection and place [*lien et lieu*] affirm being and create relation in and across absence. The very medium that negates existence, the logos that is desired as the vehicle of the ideal, can affirm it when it is shaped and understood as such a performance. 'L'écriture' here is sometimes translated as 'Scripture'. The turn to the divine can be carried out as a turn away from wordly concerns, or it can be a fertile topos for the poet to explore the 'spatialization' (FT 27) of their experience, staging their extra-rational desire for affirmation and connection while recognizing the infinite horizon of absence.

For Fondane, poetry holds open a space – both abyss of terror and void of possibility – for the irrational to live, for a life to be allowed its irrationality. It is a space that is also a space of encounter. The relation that it instigates is both absurdly hopeful and predicated on strangeness. 'L'homme n'est pas chez lui sur cette terre | étranger où qu'il aille [man is not at home on this earth | a stranger wherever he goes]' (MF 170). Yet this strangeness is also the precondition for an act of expectant solidarity with other strangers.

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[38] '– L'écriture qui aboutit à elle-même n'est qu'une manifestation du mépris
– L'homme est lien et lieu écrits.' (Jabès 1963, 17)

Exile

Je hais le vide et voilà qu'il sonne en mon poème.

[I hate the void and there it is resounding in my poem.]

(*Titanic* XVII, MF 47)

Absence and loss also inform and shape Fondane and Jabès's texts in more concrete ways. According to Waldrop, 'there are themes that a writer is not free to choose, themes that impose themselves in the manner of an illness of a wound' (2002, 149). The theme she is specifically referencing is exile, one that imposed itself upon Fondane again and again – by force of the 'arbitrary' anti-semitism that intervened in his Romanian identity, by dint of the original and metaphysical exiles of Judaism, by (like Jabès, like Kafka, like Celan, like Benjamin) a displaced relationship to Jewish culture, by the artistic path which displaced him from groups and movements, by the German invasion of France which produced a shock akin to Jabès's experience of being forced out of Egypt, by his final exile from France, another transient home (see Salazar-Ferrer 2004 & 2007).

One could not talk of Jabès and Fondane without talking of exile; it imposes itself. Waldrop says of Jabès that he is 'the poet of the non-place' (2002, 153). It is tempting to read this choice of words as a linguistic inevitablity. Fondane is *literally* the poet of the 'non-place', *non lieu* being the title of the fragment which precedes *Le Mal des fantômes 1942–1943* (MF 77, CO 50). The French expression in fact has idiomatic resonance, shaded by the English *no man's land* (and such martial desolation is apt as a context for Fondane's poetry) but also used in a court of law to signify the dropping of a trial (hence the somewhat unsatisfactory translation of *case dismissed*).

The 'authorial' *je* as a voice is perhaps starker in Fondane's poetry, with its oneiric lyrics and prefatory or apostrophic interpellations (the 'prefaces' to *Ulysse* and *L'Exode* as well as *Non lieu*) than in Jabès's books. Yet both oeuvres, against a backdrop of exile, 'translate [*or* let slip] that vocation of the poet, to voyage across the world' (Cahen 2007, 19, my translation). In *Non lieu* Fondane apologizes for no longer being what might be called 'at home' in poetry. In order to be true to poetry,

he has to leave it behind: leave its limits and break through its conventions, not so as to renew them in a banal sense but to admit and afford a new condition of poet-as-exile.

> Quelque chose de plus puissant que moi monte en moi… me *force* à exprimer à travers le bric-à-brac des structures lyriques les moins apparentes, les plus dépareillées, les plus décriées, la confusion d'un esprit que hantent, pêle-mêle, des vœux, des présages, des superstitions, des calembours, des ténèbres et des essences.

> [Something more powerful than me rises within me… *compels* me to use a medley of the most unrelated, and leftover, and disparaged lyric forms to express the confusion of a mind haunted by such a commotion of vows, superstitions, puns, shadows and pure essences.]

> (MF 77; CO 51)

This haunting is surely of a kind with the phantomatic aspects of *The Book of Questions*. Like Jabès Fondane pre-empts criticisms addressed to his formal 'choices', criticisms which are ethical as well as aesthetic: the duty to communicate clearly and directly, the primary duty of the poet to 'reflect' the spirit of reality, 'de chair avec l'histoire [flesh joined with history]' (MF 77). 'Le ridicule m'apparaît d'une telle expédition', he admits of his poetic projects, 'I see the absurdity of such an expedition' (MF77, CO 51 [adapted]). When reality is so clearly incommensurate with words, with poetry, Fondane and Jabès cannot in good faith *assume* their homeliness. They cannot remain silent, but voices of exile impose themselves as their means of expression. Voices which resist straightforward narrative, interrupted by absences and hauntings.

Perhaps we are close to the impulse behind Fondane's resumed gravitation towards poetry despite his philosophical concerns: a necessity to linguistically *perform* the subversions of social and intellectual authority he drew from Shestov. Philosophical or 'conventional' prose could not in fact carry out these gestures even when directed towards them – a peculiar version of modernist insistences on the indivisibility of form and content. Waldrop writes that Jabès's texts subvert 'authority of statement, of closure and linearity, the confidence in a narrative thread, continuity of temporal and causal sequence' (2002, 143). Such subversions are often understood

as a form of quietism, equivalent to a refusal to speak (for example in Victor Serge's rebuttal to Fondane; Serge 1933). Yet for Fondane or Jabès, putting an utterance under interrogation is an act quite different from refusing or cancelling it. Jabès wrote:

> I don't presume to have any answers; I ask questions… [A]nswers embody a certain form of power. Whereas the question is a form of non-power. But a subversive kind of non-power, one that will be upsetting to power. (Jabès 1979, 51)

The exile is one who takes nothing for granted. Beth Hawkins wrote the following words on Jabès, and his name could seamlessly be exchanged for Fondane's:

> exile characterizes the postwar trauma, the divisive split between the idealistic humanism of the Enlightenment and the atrocities that humanity found itself capable of committing. We have been exiled from our own source of humanity, that is. In positing this equation, Jabès relies on the historical situation of the Jew in exile and the mythical resonance of the wandering Jew… the voice of the margin is the *human* voice, the voice that we all share in a world so deeply betrayed by and cut off from its own sense of value. (Hawkins 2003, 163)

Images

> Questioning the image still acknowledges its power.
>
> (Waldrop 2003, 143)

Although their works represent two different poetic universes, is there something uncanny in Jabès's mature poems first appearing in France at the very end of Fondane's life? The Yukel who haunts the *Book of Questions* is also a ghost of Fondane, as well as a ghost of another Jabès who 'could have been that man': '*J'aurais pu être cet homme*' (Jabès 1963, 73). An astonishing aspect of both writers' texts is the way in which the exilic experiences of Judaism comes to be extended to all of humanity. The metaphysical – and so often literal – experience of rootlessness, the anxiety of *patrie*, is a key facet of the phantasmatic effects of modernity. 'Je n'ai

pas de pays. Je suis Yukel Serafi dont la vie est l'histoire'(Jabès 1963, 72).[39] When individual lives are reduced to history, history is terribly inadequate in its representations. Fondane's poetry not only saves something of him from history but also testifies to the absences, outlines them, refuses the narrative smoothness which would reduce or background them.

Such honouring of absence is practiced by Jabès, too, in *The Book of Questions*. But also in his earlier poetry. The lyric *Chanson de l'étranger* could be addressed to Fondane, as well as to the *je* which is *un autre* to the writer himself. I give it here with two translations, because I want to highlight a difference between them.

Je suis à la recherche
d'un homme que je ne connais
pas,
qui jamais ne fut tant moi-même
que depuis que je le cherche.
A-t-il mes yeux, mes mains
et toutes ces pensées pareilles
aux épaves de ce temps?
Saison de mille naufrages,
la mer cesse d'être la mer
devenue l'eau glacée des tombes.
Mais, plus loin, qui sait plus loin?
Une fillette chante à reculons
et règne la nuit sur les arbres,
bergère au milieu des moutons.
Arrachez la soif au grain de sel
qu'aucune boisson ne désaltère.
Avec les pierres, un monde se
                ronge
d'être, comme moi, de nulle part.

(Jabès 1990b, 46)

I'm looking for
a man I don't know
who's never been more myself
than since I started to look for him.
Does he have my eyes, my hands
and all those thoughts like
flotsam of time?
Season of a thousand wrecks,
the sea no longer a sea,
but an icy watery grave.
Yet farther on, who knows how it
goes on?
A little girl sings backward
and nightly reigns over trees
a shepherdess among her sheep.
Let us wrench thirst from the grain
of salt no drink can quench.
Along with the stones, a whole world
                eats
its heart out, being
        from nowhere, like me.

(translated by Rosmarie
Waldrop, Jabès 1991a, 71)

I am seeking
a man I do not know,
who was never so much myself
as now I look for him.

---

[39] Waldrop translates this statement as 'I have no country. I am Yukel Serafi and my life is the story' (Jabès 1991b, 68) but 'whose life is history' is also possible. Fondane's philosophical understanding of the 'non-place' was also influenced by Shestov. See Geneviève Piron's *Léon Chestov, philosophe du déracinement* (2010).

Has he my eyes, my hands
and all these thoughts that are
like the wreckage of our time?
Season of a thousand shipwrecks,
the sea is no longer the sea,
becomes the icy water of the graves.
But, further, who knows further?
A little girl sings
and night reigns over the trees,
shepherdess among the sheep.
Tear thirst from the grain of salt
no drink quenches. With the stones,
a world eats its heart out
from being, like myself, nowhere.

(translated by Anthony Rudolf, Jabès 2013, 13)

Not only could it have been addressed to Fondane, it is so similar in style and imagery to some of his lyrics that it could have been written by him. The *je* under exploration and interrogation, the juxtaposition of the simplest physical connections to the world – *yeux, mains* – with thought, the shipwrecks and icy waters, the irruption at once surreal and archaic of the bucolic, the thirst, the stones and the contradiction, primary among many, of being from *nulle part* (the *non lieu), all of these are found at close quarters to each other throughout *Le Mal des fantômes.*

Both poets' works are prickly, mixing the abstract and the everyday so as to draw the reader deeper while simultaneously evading them. With Jabès the simplicity of 'my eyes, my hands' unfolds into a sea 'that is no longer a sea'; real seas and the seas of time and of the poem are confused. *L'Exode* contains similar juxtapositions of the intimacy of the body with the overwhelming vastness of seas. The 'entrailles lâches [cowardly innards]' of one of its nameless speakers is opposed by 'le vent du large [the wind from the open]' while 'la soif elle-même fond [thirst itself melts]' (MF 175). Fondane's own *Chanson de l'émigrant* (MF 36–38) shares with *Chanson de l'étranger* a metre that teeters and bobs around the octosyllablic – *tanguer*, the French might say, pitching a little, like a boat, unable to have solid ground under its feet. The surreal images and rug-pulling abstractions in Fondane's poetry prickled sharply in my experiences of translating it (see CO 137–175), and with Jabès, too, translation works as a kind of hermeneutics. Anthony Rudolf highlights the slightly

uncanny aspects (*unheimlich,* the home disturbed) – caught between traditional and modern – of both the metre and imagery in his decision to explicitly avoid translating the thorny *à reculons* in the twelfth line of *Chanson de l'étranger*, leaving a hemistich-sized gap which resonates with the poem's images of absence.[40]

As well as paralleling each other in ocean imagery, Jabès and Fondane also draw extensively, of course, on their own Jewish heritage for their imagery of exile. *Race, frère, pain, sel*, the 'vertigo' of seeking God and self-knowledge (Waldrop 2002, 129–130, MF e.g. 131, 174), the *cri* and the *soif* appear repeatedly, vibrate with such overtones that the two poets' works seem almost to interpenetrate when read together. It is simply remarkable that Fondane should be writing so reflexively on the wave of catastrophe he was caught up in even as it broke, seeming to respond to Jabès despite preceding him. Jabès, writing in the aftermath of that wave and during his own literal exile, turned like Fondane to that most Jewish of motifs, the desert, the categorical *non lieu*, extended, as in his lost contemporary's poetry, to encompass the exile of all humanity from God.[41] 'We walk along the fringe of the desert', writes Jabès in the *Book of Yukel*, 'along a solitude with the profile of a river where our thirst finds the strength to face the thirst to come'. (Jabès 1991b, 181). And Fondane, in *Ulysse*:

seul le désert avait de quoi calmer
                ma soif
j'avais besoin d'un monde sans
              horizon ni fin
	only the desert could calm
	            my thirst
	I needed a world without
	           horizon or end

(MF 56)

The desert appears again and again throughout *Le Mal des fantômes.* These lines, walking together with those of Jabès, encapsulate the paradoxes which the two writers were able to sustain: the desert which 'calms' thirst though it does not quench it; the tension between the anguish of exile and the desire for boundless freedom.

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[40] Waldrop's *backward* is justifiable but utterly different to the strong possibility of the idiomatic *reluctantly*. I do not have margin to further develop a comparative analysis of the two translations here but include both for the reader's attention.

[41] Olivier Salazar-Ferrer points out that there may a resonance between this use of the desert and Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic 'smooth space'. See also Beray 2006, 173.

By Way of the Word

For Fondane and Jabès, exile also takes place in and is conditioned by writing, which refers to that which is not present. Whereas (Riding) Jackson's universalism contains an implicit rejection of Jewishness and seems to target a finality of utterance, incompleteness and particularity are honoured in their work to subversive effect. Hawkins reads Kafka, Celan and Jabès with reference to the Jewish Midrash, 'a method that… privileges absence over presence… [it is] potentially subversive' (2003, xiv-xv). The Midrash 'encourages and promotes interpretation and digression from the written text' and yet paradoxically affirms the value of the text in doing so: in 'illuminat[ing] the gaps or spaces in the biblical text' it 'grants a certain primacy and legitimacy….this "enunciation", in other words, has inspired further commentary' (ibid.). A subversion that is also affirmatory in and of its own utterances. In the absence (Riding) Jackson seeks to fill with maximal meaning, Fondane and Jabès use God as a placeholder for the uncircumscribed possibilities of both human freedom and human responsibility. While Fondane strains against moral codification, there is a kind of responsibility entailed by the Levinasian, pre-theoretical ethical relation proffered in the act of his poetry.

Between preexisting meaning and idiolectic indecipherability, Fondane and Jabès's utterances take place in the 'space of negation' (Hawkins 2003, xv) where original creation negotiates with the sense beyond the self. Waldrop describes the paradox of the writer who is conscious of both the preexisting semiotic currency of their utterances and their (always insufficient) creative attempt to extend and renew it: 'the "book"… is both read by the writer *and* is unavailable, absent, unknown' (Waldrop 2002, 142). In this negotiation with reality through the useful and inadequate medium of language, the poem contains not so much revelations as hopes. Waldrop cites from *Elya*:

Jamais le livre, dans son actualité, ne se livre.[42]

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[42] Waldrop's translation: 'The book never actually surrenders.'

> What, then is this initial word? Maybe an unbearable absence of the word
> which the word will, unbeknownst to us, come to fill by exposing itself.
> (Waldrop 2002, 142)

Jabès's 'book' of life which never gives itself up, never confides what it has to confide in its full actuality, is paralleled by Fondane's *édition sans fin* [endless editions (or versions)]. Fondane came to the position that the text is never finalized, never complete: 'he never stopped reworking his texts, endlessly rewriting them', Monique Jutrin reminds us (Jutrin 2014, my translation).[43] Poetry seems to gain traction from its ability to actualize the lack of 'actuality', to subvert the apparent end of the text. 'Only the poet', argues Didier Cahen,

> knows how to approach the void by way of the word, only they know how to
> compromise with the *impossibility of saying anything* [*or* nothing]. In the
> game of questions, the writer does not interrogate in order to seize the
> incomprehensible and render it comprehensible, but to inscribe its
> impossible story between the lines of the book, to make it heard in the
> silences of creation. (Cahen 2007, 65, my translation)

In continuing to write poetry without holding faith in it, at least as 'un univers autonome [an autonomous universe]', Fondane aligns with what Waldrop refers to as Jabès's 'passionate questioning': 'dans quelle mesure un poète ment-il, dans quelle mesure dit-il la vérité; dans quelle mesure imite-t-il, ou modifie-t-il la réalité [in what measure does the poet lie, in what measure does he tell the truth; in what measure does he imitate or modify reality]'(Fondane 1996a, 22). Anne Van Sevenant argues that 'Fondane's aesthetics is one of finitude and failure; it makes us sensitive to artistic creation as being an irremediable shortcoming'; this is not nihilistic but 'underlines the fact that man [sic] finds himself each time again before new challenges' (Van Sevenant 2007).

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[43] She cites an unpublished 1944 letter Fondane wrote to the translator of Shestov, Boris de Shloezer: 'Mais le moyen d'avoir une pensée FINIE sur quoi que ce soit! J'ai écrit sur mon manuscrit d'*Ulysse: Edition sans Fin*, et cela est vrai de tous mes bouquins. J'ai envie de tout recommencer à l'infini; heureusement qu'il y a les revues, l'édition et la mort, en fin de compte, pour mettre un terme provisoire à ces travaux de Sisyphe.'
[But the way to have a FINISHED thought on anything at all! I wrote, on my manuscript of *Ulysse, Endless edition,* and that is true of all my books. I have an infinite wish to begin everything again; it's lucky there are journals, publishing and death, in the end, to put a provisional stop to these Sisyphean labours.]

Fondane wrote in the ruins of language, without faith in the perfectibility of utterance, between the word and the cry. In 'looking forward', Jabès also carried out 'a passionate crying out […] against not communicating. A passionate questioning of language […] staking his whole life on the word, on his call for a little light out of the overwhelming darkness. Out of our great need. Out of our wounds' (Waldrop 2002, 155). This existential resonance cannot be reduced to a response to the Holocaust, though it is informed by it. Jabès's struggle with language, combined with the bravery of the continued attempt at speaking, provides an excellent parallel with Fondane, and thereby an aid to situating Fondane in a broader modernist context of apophasis.

Conclusion

As a writer, Benjamin Fondane was concerned with truths beyond the grasp of syllogism. In his philosophical essays, as even some of his advocates have pointed out (Dickow 2017, 203 and Baugh 2003, 13) he was happy to read his sources in a very partial manner to suit the cut of his argument. Yet this does not undermine the intellectual depth of his work, for he was working according to his own criteria, which, in the case of his philosophy, sought to subvert the very criteria of the discipline and open gaps in it to attend to what necessarily escapes it, 'begin[ning] with disjointedness', in Ann Van Sevenant's words, with 'the idea that thinking is equal to starting anew, leaving behind the illusion that one has found a philosophy without error for all times to come' (Van Sevenant 2007). This creates a tension for the researcher: the very form of a doctoral thesis must, at least to some degree, enforce the limits which the totality of Fondane's work fights against. It is not even a case of the academic standing outside a radical artistic work and analysing it in their own domain. The holistic aspect of Fondane's oeuvre challenges any scholar, for Fondane has already preceded them in their own grounds and questioned their authority, that is, the authority of rational analysis.

To be true to Fondane, then, is to betray him: one can either contextualize and advocate his work using the very tools of reason whose constraints he consistently seeks to defy, or explicitly, committedly misrepresent him for one's own purposes. It is likely that across this thesis I have done a bit of both. But I hope I have done so without sacrificing the analytical and intellectual depth he himself practiced. Against surrealists who claimed to have mastered contradictions by colonizing the irrational, Fondane's 'conscience honteuse' epitomizes the unending condition of existing with reason despite its insufficiencies. Fondane's 'going on' in these circumstances is absurd. On the one hand, it rejects messianism: no future salvation could ever justify the sufferings of the past and present. On the other, it depends on it: the limits of our reason mean that the impossible could always be possible.

Critical discourse is vital to the ongoing engagement with Fondane's work. He himself continued to write philosophy as the Nazis came to their ascendancy. Yet his prose always points to what lies beyond it. This apophatic combination of a subversion of logos with a commitment to the necessity of discourse pre-empts

deconstruction, which, as cited earlier, Bill Readings calls 'the aesthetics, ethics and politics of the incommensurable' (Readings 1991, 23). Without claiming any deconstructive 'method', in the arguments of this thesis I have aimed to work at the boundaries, or at least to acknowledge, such limitations and liminality. For Fondane discourse is ultimately better served by acknowledging its always already rhetorical purpose, against the idea of a transcendent realm of ideas superior to human existence, with language as its orderly intermediary. Ideas were made for man, and not man for ideas.

As I stated in Chapter 3, the tone of Fondane's irresignation is found not in technique but in affirming the necessity of speaking despite acknowledging its impossibility, of having something to attempt to say, *'as a singular object*, not as an essence'* (FT 29, emphasis in the original). Fondane came to perform his linguistic and existential irresignation in his poetry precisely because he could not conceptualize it in his philosophy. This is not to say that his poetry 'transcends' his philosophy — its subversions remain important, and contextualize his poetry. But it is in poetry that his affirmation can take place, in the address to the other that the self-affirmation depends upon. His Rimbaldian subversion of the self is nonetheless a defence of subjectivity against modernity's idealisms, constituted in the relation to the other. This is at the heart of the subversive testimony performed by his poetry.

For Fondane, poetry can apophatically testify to existence and the experience of existing in ways philosophy cannot. This is fundamentally what led him to return to poetry after having lost hope in its aesthetic consolations. This testimony depends upon the fragile possibility of reception by a reader, who in the constitutive act of reading actively restitutes its origins, not comprehensively, but affirmatively. This address, triangulated through the irrational space — or *non lieu* — of the poem, can be thought of as a form of Achebean celebration: an apophatic, extra-rational affirmation of the whole of existence.[1] This celebration does not imply a condoning of horrific aspects of existence, but does include a liberation of these from their suppression or instrumentalization by philosophies of history which claim totalizing authority.

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[1] 'As in Levinas's paradoxical formulation, 'the distance of proximity', the relation of Self to Other occupies an undecidable space that is neither properly shared nor purely separate.' (Dickow 2018a, 159)

The affirmation of existence in poetic celebration includes an act of absurd hope and commitment towards the unsayable possibility of justice, precisely in the act of the poem constituting itself in relation to the other. Beth Hawkins argues that

> in the vast turbulence of the first half of the twentieth century, all the values of Enlightenment humanism — faith in the dignity and nobility of the human subject, in the power of reason and rationality, in the progress of technology to improve the world — were shattered. Like Nietzsche's madman, all three writers [Kafka, Celan and Jabès] place the burden of responsibility and accountability on *us* for the failure of these values, and sense that a God who *can* speak, who *does* act in history, who *is* personal, is a dangerous illusion that we have concocted in order to deflect such responsibility. (Hawkins 2003, xiii – xiv)

L'Exode's religious horizon may not contain any true faith in the covenant between God and humanity being renewed. Yet beyond the inadequacy of philosophy or religion when confronted with this shipwreck of values, its many voices stage and restage this disconsolate context with the tools of poetry: 'si le Juif, seul dans l'antiquité, a témoigné de la présence effective de Dieu, du moins pourrait-il, dans le monde moderne, et contre le monde moderne, être seul à témoigner, avec la même angoisse, de l'absence de Dieu! [if the Jew, alone in antiquity, testified to the effective presence of God, he could at least, in the modern world, and against the modern world, be the one who, alone, and with the same anguish, testifies to the absence of God]' (Fondane 1936). Hawkins's statement lays out the essentially *collective* ramifications of this context, which Fondane's anti-Humanist humanism implies and which his poetry enacts.

Fondane's celebration of existence, necessarily performative and subversive and therefore enacted in poetry, is a kind of resistance to dehumanization, by way of an affirmation of what is singular through its very interconnection to what is plural – to the other. It acts as a kind of corrective to the inevitable, idealistic dream of universality, one that cannot but be dreamed, yet always contains the danger of imposing itself as the 'final truth' in one form or another. Fondane's resistance is adjacent to politics: its 're-realization' of existents turned into phantoms is not sufficient for solidarity or justice, but it is necessary. Fondane like everyone else can dream of a final justice, but he performs the proto-ethical demand that must be the starting point for the endless worldly negotiation of

justice. The poet does not speak *for* the silent, but his saying says their unsaying, to defend the worth of ordinary lives irrespective of the directions of history.

Reading Fondane Today

> The continuity of the singular is born of the intersubjectivity that gives its substance to the future.
>
> (Mounic 2017, 105, note 16, my translation)

This thesis offers a direct and evident contribution to Fondane studies, which are still in their infancy in terms of English-language publications. It traces and develops key areas of Fondane scholarship previously established by francophone and international researchers, particularly at the interstices of existential thought and poetry. More broadly, the research presented here intersects with a variety of ongoing concerns across various fields in and beyond French studies. The question of 'the status of the work of art in desperate times' (Allen 2020, 1) is one with traction, as William S. Allen's recent work on Blanchot makes clear. My engagement with Fondane emphasizes the continuing relevance of the problematics he raises, promoting the status of his work in both its French context and its internationalism. Thus it offers fresh insights in regards to the nature of modernity and catastrophe, connecting to studies such as Carlos Fonseca's *The Literature of Catastrophe* (2020) and Seth Moglen's *Mourning Modernity* (2007). In the haunting of modernity, the question of the relationship between art and horror remains vital, and I have argued that Fondane's work remains a live challenge to our attempts to answer it. As Holocaust studies continues to grow, the arguments of this thesis around the problems of expression offer relevance to everything from music in the camps (see Elise Pétit's *Des usages destructeurs de la musique dans le système concentrationnaire nazi*, 2019) to cinema (see Alex J. Kay, 2019, on 'speaking the unspeakable' on film) to translation (Harris 2020; Munyard 2020; Harding and Nash, eds, 2019) to resistance to dehumanization (Cabral 2020) to the legacy of the Holocaust itself (Soulsby 2020). My treatment of groundlessness and exile in Fondane's work also offers useful material for consideration of these eminently modern problems and their linguistic expression, going some way to restituting his importance alongside contemporaries such as Benjamin (Källgren) Beckett and Steiner (Rosell 2019) and of course Jabès and

other Jewish and/or Romanian émigrés (Kerr 2021; Gelber and Sjöberg, eds, 2017; Taïeb 2012).

Last year's timely launch of the *Journal of Avant-Garde Studies* gathers many of the threads which run through such writing, and this thesis shows that Fondane's oeuvre has much to offer considerations of both the history and future of the avant-garde. Gelber and Sjöberg's centring of Jewishness in avant-garde studies has recently explicitly been picked up by way of Fondane in Iulia Dondorici's chapter 'Redefining and Integrating Jewish Writers into the Study of Historical Avant-Garde(s)' in the new book *Disseminating Jewish Literatures* (Zepp et al, eds, 2020) and this thesis offers groundwork for anyone siting Fondane in terms of 'how Jewish studies and avantgarde studies may benefit reciprocally from each other' (Gelber and Sjöberg, eds, 2017, 12). This thesis has also underlined Fondane's role as interpreter and developer of an understanding of modernity as catastrophe generated by nineteenth-century French poets such as Baudelaire, Lautréamont and Rimbaud, an understanding which continues to be absorbed, in relation to everything from philosophy (Acquisto 2013) to the pandemic (Elhariry 2021). It also contributes to the work of coordinating the poetics of modernist avant-gardes, including in their French and transnational contexts (Gumbrecht 2012), in their trans-genre and multimedia aspects (see Ksenofontova 2020, who discusses Fondane's filmic writing) and in terms of the interpenetration of art and politics (Nohendon 2020; Spiteri and Lacoss, eds, 2003).

In 2013 Joseph Acquisto argued that 'French poetry studies are at an important crossroads [...] Recent years [...] have seen a renewed interest in lyric poetry among literary critics whose work intersects with philosophy' (Acquisto 2013, 1). Acquisto's own subsequent research highlights the significance of Fondane for this move (as well as for the boundary between modernism and theology: see Domestico 2017), and this thesis represents the first prolonged engagement of this kind with his work to appear in English. In its exploration of uses of form in modernism, it can bolster current work such as Jeff Barda's *Experimentation and the Lyric in Contemporary French Poetry* (2019), as well as (to name a few) Benhaïm et al, eds, 2020; Thain 2019, Probstein 2017 and Hermans 2014.

Who are we readers today, who may participate in the performance of poetic testimony in our reading? Fondane's absurd hope has an ethical content in

its address to the *hommes des antipodes*. At one level, the men of the antipodes may be his friends in Argentina, receiving a message across space from one being swallowed by the wave of catastrophe, to the effect that there is still something to salvage, that it is never too late. At another level, they are people of a different time, figuring the hope of a better world to come: 'en tant qu'homme […] il ne saurait que combattre le fascisme et souhaiter l'événement d'une société socialiste' [as a man […] he can only fight fascism and desire the arrival of a socialist society'] (EDR 82; Rubens 2011, 61). We can hardly say that we live in the world with 'un peu plus de justice [a bit more justice]' (EDR 82; Rubens 2011, 61). We too live in a time of catastrophe, not only because the undermining of Humanism remains unrepaired but due to the climate crisis, a catastrophe that leaves no space untouched.

Today, as in Fondane's time, but probably with even less excuse than for his contemporaries, champions of faith in progress have disproportionately loud voices in both the political and spiritual (or imaginative) realms: discourse is dominated by 'green capitalist' technocratic solutions and a refusal to countenance the possibility of imminent catastrophe actually arriving. Against this tendency, there are theorists who attempt to think our current predicament while keeping in view the critiques of Enlightenment and modern values continued by many thinkers after Fondane. Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens have initiated the field of 'collapsology', a transdisciplinary approach to acknowledging and preparing for societal collapse (Servigne and Stevens 2015). Amitav Ghosh, in his 2016 book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable,* addresses the limits of rational thinking in reckoning with the climate catastrophe and centres on our collective failures of imagination. Donna Haraway (2016) enjoins us to *'s*tay with the trouble'. Her conception of the 'cthulucene', with its emphasis on interconnectedness, makes it evident that epistemological and existential crises – I here intend the latter in the broadest and most literal sense – must be confronted together. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and her colleagues look at the possibilities for life amongst ruin (Tsing 2017).

These thinkers share Fondane's territory: where are we in the midst of catastrophe? This territory is, in fact, the *non lieu:* how do we respond when the ground has been pulled from underneath our feet? Even if the shockwaves have not yet hit our personal patch, we can feel the trembling. In *L'Homme devant l'histoire* Fondane called for the humility to own our disconsolation: *Eli, Eli, lema*

sabachthani? (HDH 450). Even as we continue to seek reasoned responses to the calamity, an intellectual humility could temper our idealistic tendencies and bolster our courage in facing failure. What else could help us to go on when all our schemes come to naught, other than, as Jabès so neatly put it, 'in the throes of the crisis, to preserve the question?' (Hawkins 2003, xxiii). According to Haraway, inspired by Hannah Arendt, part of our task is to learn 'how to practice curiosity without sadism' (Haraway 2015), to engage with meaning without reducing that engagement to a domineering appropriation of knowledge.

Despite desperate searches for ways to undo our current environmental predicaments, it is not at all clear that updating Humanist values would be any kind of genuine solution. Significantly, many current theorists such as Haraway and Tsing lean towards an imaginative, rather than purely philosophical or scientific, practice of theory, which implicitly reaffirms the critique of Humanist modes of thought. In this thesis I have tied Fondane's relationship to such critique to linguistic concerns. Poetry becomes crucial because it can live with the challenges: the unreliability of language, the tensions inherent in memory (such as forgetting, distorting, erasing), our subjective relationship with reality, the tendency of language to mask its own erasures and to devalue by omission. Poetry can do this because it can foreground its own ambiguities and omissions, unmasking them. In its novel uses of language it exposes the insufficiencies of language as we have been using it.

Against the idea of a 'pure' poetry that could overcome these insufficiencies once and for all, for Fondane these new directions 'expand the shore of our ignorance' (John Wheeler cited in Miéville 2019, 4). Poetry can say 'look what I cannot say', and in doing so in strange ways, becomes an attestation of the life that is beyond it, of the singular, the affective, the fleeting, everything in existence that cannot be captured by rational thought in the guise of language. Even the expression of deep sorrow which gestures towards a catastrophe, where the breakdown of meaning overwhelms even those directly caught up in it, paradoxically affirms the life of the one who performs it, and may hold the grain of compassion that connects that life to all others. Richter argues that 'To write a pessimistic text is a thoroughly optimistic act' (Richter 2016, 1206).

The role of the poet, for Fondane, is not to provide solutions. Although he ranges himself on the other side of the argument, he essentially agrees with Plato that the poet is a subversive. Yet for Fondane poetry's function does not end

there; it can also affirm. Interconnectedness may be a problem here. For all that Fondane, as a philosopher, was influenced by Nietzsche, it would seem impossible for him, as a poet, to be 'the eternal Yes' (Nietzsche 2011): eternal recurrence, even as a philosophical motivation, is hard to sustain in the wake of World War and genocide. Yet poetic testimony can affirm the lives that lived catastrophe. If Fondane could not take on the 'lightness' of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, through irresignation he could simultaneously object to the suffering of existence and face and live through it. Jabès wrote that 'philosophy is incapable of taking on the wound' of Auschwitz, and that 'Jewish thought is turned towards the poetic, which does not mean seeking to circumscribe it — that would be futile — but seeking to open it' (Jabès 1990a, 17).

Fondane's philosophical writings may be guilty of Victor Serge's charge that they do not prescribe a 'gesture' (Serge 2019). Yet his work taken as a whole, philosophical and artistic, is an existential reckoning with the unspoken remainder of philosophy (and, in many instances, of politics): the extra-rational, affective factors without which no act would have a motivation. Fondane's irresignation is the poetic practice of carrying an absurd hope forward despite conditions of despair. The present of the poem is reactivated in the present of reading. For Fondane, poetry's simultaneous performance of negation and affirmation resists abstraction. His poetics is involved in a remediation – poetry subverts our relationship to reality and causes us to cognitively work to rearrange it. *L'Exode* is an unsettling gift, one that 'reaches us from outside ourselves and requires an acknowledgement of the other […] we are confronted with our own dependence on, and fundamental interrelatedness with, the other' (Richter 2016, 1202). Derrida framed a meditation on the dialogic nature of language in the form of an imaginative dialogue:

> since you want to narrate your story, give testimony in your name, speak of what is 'yours' and what is not, it remains for me, one more time, to take your word for it.
>
> — Is that not what we always do when someone is speaking, and hence attesting? (Derrida 1998, 9)

What is crucial about *L'Exode*, with its interpellations, its subversions, its polyphony and masks, is that it makes this context apparent.

The catastrophic context of modernity, and in particular the contradictions which became harder to ignore post-Auschwitz, leads us to a position where, as Richter says in his reflections on Celan and Adorno, 'the question of the right life would then have to be renegotiated and rearticulated with every new historical and personal situation and with every new way of feeling' (Richter 2016, 1216). Fondane, following Nietzsche and Shestov, already confronted this difficult task in his philosophy, with its 'metasophic' aspirations (Finkenthal 2013, 121). But to do the work of that Richter calls 'recognizing and affirming the survival of life itself, of life as life, of living as living on, precisely in the kind of restless and vigilant negotiation that living itself occasions' (Richter 2016, 1216), Fondane returned to poetry. Where philosophy comments upon and critiques our relationship to the world, poetry hopes to mediate it: to undo ideas we may have come to rely upon, to open up gaps in our understanding through which we are called to shift our perspective.

Damaged life, to use Adorno's term, is life in the ruins. Fondane defended a particular role for poetry in regards to this life, a role both unique and difficult to define. In her novella *Paradises Lost,* Le Guin mobilizes the ecological argument that 'there is no away' (Le Guin 2016, 707).[2] This serves as an existential reminder as well as an ecological one: there are no worlds behind (Nietzsche 2005, book 1, chapter 3). The importance of the immanent is doubly signified. The awkwardness of Fondane as something of an anti-modern modernist is reflected in the awkward relation between artistic modernism and ecology. This problem is excellently surveyed in Anne Raine's essay 'Modernism, Eco-anxiety, and the Climate Crisis', which demonstrates that critically examining meaning and progress remains as urgent a task now as it was for Fondane (Raine 2019).

Fondane himself showed a kind of awareness which might be called ecological with his image of the nettle in the *Préface* of *L'Exode*. The interconnection of all existence is latent in this generally devalued weed, which also stands as a riposte to Hegel's flower of philosophy, living only for itself and without justification or control. If modern poetry is often criticised for being without rhyme or reason, for Fondane these are the wrong criteria. For Fondane, irresignation only exists as poetic testimony: the act of affirming life, the interpellation of the other and the gesture towards the ineffable are inseparable.

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[2] I.e. to where waste can disappear.

His writing for an afterlife turns such a project away from its usual anxiety for personal fame and towards an existential and cultural ecology that is attached, 'ever so lightly', to material existence.[3]

As Fondane himself acknowledged in *L'Homme devant l'histoire*, catastrophe has us grasping for solid reasons to which we could cling. In his poetry, he instead enacts a different kind of affirmation. Poetry can affirm without undoing negation: because it takes the problems of representation into account in its saying, its making is also an unmaking, seeking to provoke us to re-mediate our own relation to reality, and through that process our relation to the subject of the poem. Fondane's poetic testimony is analogous to Chinua Achebe's artistic celebration: a celebration that is not exclusively joyful, that includes mourning, but that, in the absence of universal certitudes, refuses to turn away from the complexity of the plural plenitude of existence. Against thought's refusal of contradiction, across past and future in the re-activation of the present, through an exploration of the back and forth between singular and multiple, self and other, Fondane's speaking of ruin is a speaking from the ruins: a salvaging that reminds us that the unexpected may always grow anew.

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[3] This function for poetry was greatly sharpened for Fondane by his awareness of Nazi book burnings and the persecution of artists in the USSR, and to my mind foreshadows the use of memory as resistance in Ray Bradbury's McCarthy-era novel *Fahrenheit 451.*

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