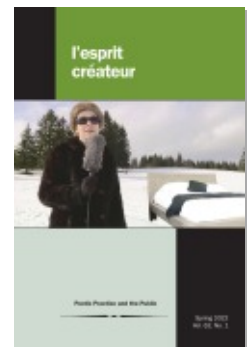# Defamiliarizing and Recycling: The Contemporary Poetic OVNIs and OFNIs of Jérôme Game and Sandra Moussempès

John C. Stout

→ For additional information about this article
  https://muse.jhu.edu/article/851758

Defamiliarizing and Recycling:
The Contemporary Poetic OVNIs and OFNIs of Jérôme Game and Sandra Moussempès

John C. Stout

A S THE RECENT CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY *Un nouveau monde: Poésies en France 1960–2010* vividly demonstrates, French poetry has undergone a major period of transformation and reinvention in recent decades.[1] Although traditional verse lyricism remains important today, several clusters of avant-garde poets—very often centered around a particular journal such as *Tel Quel, Change, Java* or *Action poétique*—have taken poetry in unexpected directions. A different understanding of poetry, foregrounding the role of poetic publics and of poetry as a form of action, has emerged. Christophe Hanna's 2017 essay "Comment se mobilisent les publics (L'écriture comme écosystème)" provides a representative statement of this changed emphasis evident among many poets today.[2] In that essay, Hanna vigorously rejects the notion of the literary text as a "bloc de langage, obscur et transcendant, à l'image du monolithe de Kubrick ou de Mallarmé" ("Comment se mobilisent" x). He denounces the practice of reducing writing to the status of a text—in other words, an object whose formal and stylistic properties are to be identified and analyzed. Instead, he argues for a pragmatic view that underscores a text's social position vis-à-vis its publics: "toutes les œuvres […] orientent, chez [leur public] des choix, contraignent des actes, suscitent des négociations" ("Comment se mobilisent" xiii). "L'art doit être l'occasion d'une exploration comme de la vie sociale," Hanna writes ("Comment se mobilisent" xiv). Viewed in this way, poetry can acquire the force of a public act: "L'action de l'œuvre résulte donc des *tensions* auxquelles celle-ci soumet les institutions qui la font exister et qu'elle transforme, nécessairement, par effet retour. L'action n'est donc pas une et instantanée, mais processuelle et évolutive" ("Comment se mobilisent" xviii).

The impact of public poetry events and performances has been significant, especially since the 1990s. As poet Jérôme Game wrote to me recently,

[l]a poésie actuelle est comme un genre suréquipé: elle conserve le texte mais le conjugue souvent à l'image, le son et la présence physique, pouvant ainsi travailler avec d'autres grammaires, comme celle de la performance, de l'installation ou de la conférence, avec trace ou support ou partition écrite. Cette sortie hors du livre offre des portes d'entrée dans tous les sens. Des gens viennent à ces textes par ce qui les précède ou les entoure, et qui attire leurs

goûts parfois non directement littéraires. Une horizontalisation, une brisure de la verticalité possiblement intimidante, absconse ou éthérée du texte poétique ont bien eu lieu. Cette latéralisation a sans doute rendu possible une extension, une démocratisation même, du geste poétique, tout en tenant bon sur un travail de langue(s) et résistant aux risques d'une spectacularisation industrielle.[3]

This heightened emphasis on performance has led to a different sense of audience, creating new publics for poetry. Game finds that "[c]ollectivement (c'est-à-dire politiquement), [la lecture et la performance] rendent ainsi possible (mais pas inéluctable) la constitution de communautés de sensations, d'entendement (aux sens phonétique et intellectuel), qui elles-mêmes peuvent être un élan pour l'action."[4] In this article, I will explore how poetry can function as a form of action by focusing on the relationships to publics and public space in recent texts by Game and by Sandra Moussempès.

I have chosen to highlight the work of Game and Moussempès for several reasons. Each poet began publishing in the 1990s, and each can be regarded as representing a certain generational sea change in French poetry. Both Game and Moussempès work in and beyond the written text, incorporating photography and sound performance into their practice. Their exploration of sound and image is presented very deliberately not as a parasitical or supplementary add-on to the text but as a separate and equally vital facet of their creativity. Moussempès performed with the techno-pop band Mimicry in England before beginning to write poetry; Game has had exhibitions of his visual work on display in galleries in recent years. Their involvement with different art forms and mixing of art forms arguably reflects the alternative view of poetry as an expansive, socially significant action that Christophe Hanna calls for.[5] After situating the work of these poets in the context of the proliferation of media images today, I will propose that Game and Moussempès are engaged in creating disconcerting, challenging verbal objects (or "ovnis") by mixing art forms and genres in order to produce an effect of estrangement. Using processes of defamiliarization and recycling, the poets invite the reader to reexamine contemporary culture with a heightened critical distance. In discussing Jérôme Game's *Salle d'embarquement*, I will highlight the movement from passivity to action and from accelerated time to stasis, which defines the personal and political trajectory of Game's protagonist, Benjamin C. A political critique is implicit in the protagonist's literal and metaphorical journey. In the second half of the article, I will focus on Sandra Moussempès's poetry from three angles: her recycling of images of women and girls from myth, literature and popular culture; her engagement with, and interrogation of, the image; and her exploration of sound and voice.

The influence of our current media-saturated environment, in which new technologies and the mass media play a determining role, has altered poetry's place within culture. As Yves Citton argues in his recent book *Médiarchie*, "notre imaginaire commun nous fait croire que nous vivons dans des 'démocraties,' alors qu'un regard plus distant sur la réalité de nos régimes de pouvoir suggère que nous vivons dans des 'médiarchies.'"[6] The effort to develop a critical resistance to these "médiarchies" will necessarily encounter significant difficulties, since the "médiarchies" surround us constantly, shaping how and what we perceive. "On ne saurait 'comprendre' (littéralement: circonscrire) cela même qui nous inclut. Comment donc surmonter le paradoxe inhérent à vouloir *approcher* les media *de l'intérieur*?" Citton wonders (Citton 64). One possible strategy for countering the "médiarchie" emerges in Game's and Moussempès's use of techniques of recycling and defamiliarization. Both poets reframe and thus alter media images and narratives, placing them at a distance in order to have the reader reexamine them. The deployment of quirky literary forms and performances becomes a powerfully productive tool for both poets.

The texts of Game and Moussempès can best be approached as "OVNIs" (that is, as examples of "objets verbaux non identifiés"), a term first proposed by Olivier Cadiot and Pierre Alféri.[7] (Moussempès further proposes the neologism "OFNI"—that is, "objet féminin non identifié"—to characterize her works.) In his 2010 book *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, Christophe Hanna provides useful remarks on the "ovni" as he explains how it operates. Contemporary French literature has become "un monde traversé par des ovnis," Hanna writes.[8] He describes the ovni as an odd, unclassifiable object that constitutes a defiant and subversive challenge to the institution of Literature. The term "ovni," he suggests, "fait office de catégorie 'par défaut' désignant des textes qu'on percevait ou voulait présenter comme inclassables" ("Nos dispositifs" 2). Hanna emphasizes the ovni's propensity to create "certains effets de perturbation de l'environnement" since "[l]a grammaire de l'ovni nous dépasse" ("Nos dispositifs" 4). Because the ovni is hybrid, unconventional and not easily graspable, it furnishes poets a means to generate potential new publics. As Hanna argues, "construire une littérarité autre implique alors de concevoir un mode de relation différent entre le sujet et sa production. Une conception non plus duelle et réflexive mais collective, pratique, dans laquelle la question de l'écriture n'est plus présentée comme une activité *privée* […] mais une action prenant en charge des *problèmes publics*" ("Nos dispositifs" 12). Hanna defines an ovni as "un ensemble d'éléments disparates *agencés* de manière à constituer une certaine unité expérientielle et logique irréductible à

une saisie esthétique" ("Nos dispositifs" 13). The ovni functions as a " dispositif poétique," which "effectue une 'action directe'" ("Nos dispositifs" 18). "La création d'un dispositif est une action politique," Hanna asserts, "dans la mesure où elle manifeste ce qui demeure couramment invisible dans 'l'ordre des choses' […], ce, donc, par quoi cet ordre tient" ("Nos dispositifs" 20). A close examination of Game's and Moussempès's texts will disclose the ovni's subversive potential.

Jérôme Game's *Salle d'embarquement* appeared in the "Ré/velles" collection published by Éditions de l'Attente.[9] The aims of the collection are described as follows at the end of the book: "Entre le récit et la nouvelle, cette collection tente de fusionner des genres préétablis en y infiltrant des onces de poésie." The first few texts published in the "Ré/velles" series—texts by Jérôme Game, Frank Smith, and Patrick Bouvet—vary widely in format, style, and their approach to using the short story and poetry; yet, an innovative engagement with hybridity links these disparate works. As we have seen, an unexpected and challenging literary hybridity is, precisely, a salient feature of the ovni. A close consideration of how Game's ovni *Salle d'embarquement* operates will help to further our understanding of this odd literary object and its relationship to its public.

In *Salle d'embarquement* Game explores physical displacement, the functioning of global capital, our contemporary *médiarchie*, and accelerated time. We see events unfold from the perspective of Benjamin C., a commercial traveller who criss-crosses the globe doing business for a large company: "C'est l'histoire d'un déroutage inopiné dans les interstices de la globalisation, smartphone en main" (back cover description). *Salle d'embarquement* begins as a (deceptively) banal narrative employing standard techniques of literary realism:

> À l'aube, le hall d'embarquement quasi désert s'étend à perte de vue. Son épaisse moquette est souple, est bordeaux. Les pieds s'enfoncent légèrement. La façade en verre-acier donnant sur les pistes n'en finit plus de rejoindre le plafond.
>
> Sur ce background à l'avant-plan, soit un type au léger embonpoint, la quarantaine, un peu blond, le visage neutre. Il marche avec entrain, de profil, plan moyen. Ses pas s'étouffent dans le silence feutré, le salon Classe Affaire commence ici. (Game 9)

One soon realizes, however, that Game's apparent choice of realism—of a copying of scenes from everyday life—is actually a trompe-l'œil effect.

After a few more pages, he begins interrupting the narrative of Benjamin C.'s business travels with pages of impersonal data such as names of destinations from airport arrivals and departures boards, or abbreviations of names of airlines, or segments from a visitors' guidebook to Tokyo. These pages of lists disrupt narrative continuity in order to introduce an effect of impersonality and alienation. The distancing effect that the lists create also, simultaneously, reflects the character's own experience of alienation. At no point does a narrator disclose to us what Benjamin's thoughts or feelings may be. All that we can know is what he sees. He functions as a perceiver, consuming visual information from the media much of the time:

> Il lit *Business Week*. Il lit *The Los Angeles Times*. Il lit *The Washington Post*. Il lit *The New York Times*. Il lit *The Wall Street Journal*. Il lit *The Boston Globe*. Il lit *The Toronto Star*. Il lit *Le Journal de Montréal*. Il lit *Reuters Daily*. Il lit *The Economist*. Il lit *The Montréal Gazette*. Il lit *L'Obs*. Il lit *Le Monde*. (Game 33)

Although newspapers and magazines from different countries and in different languages are named here, the monotony of the sentences ("Il lit…") quickly creates a sense of repetition and sameness. This long list of newspapers and magazines detaches these names—these signifiers—from their content, thus creating an opportunity for a more critical perspective on media culture. A passage listing the television channels that Benjamin watches in his hotel room has the same effect:

> Il regarde Discovery Channel. Il regarde National Geographic Channel. Il regarde CCTV 4. Il regarde Star Sports. Il regarde Starz Movies 1-Action. Il regarde Starz Movies 2-Children Programs. Il regarde Starz Movies 3-Adult Programs. Il regarde MTV China. Il regarde TCM. Il regarde Cartoon Network. Il regarde BBC World. Il regarde CNN International. Il regarde CNBC Hong Kong. (Game 41)

These long lists (of which I have quoted only short excerpts here) introduce disruption, as well as a space for readerly reflection, into the narrative. These lists make Benjamin even less present as a character. The endless streams of information contained in the lists indicate how the *médiarchie* dominates what we think and know. The impersonal listing of dozens of cable television channels, like the listing of names of newspapers and magazines, defamiliarizes these names. By devoting full pages of his text to these lists, Game encourages us to a adopt a different, less trusting perspective on the media. The gesture that he is performing through the lists may be comparable

to Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's laying bare the political stakes of media culture.[10] Chomsky and Herman argue that the media are, essentially, huge corporations operating in the interests of a narrow group of financial élites. Alternative views that do not benefit the interests of those élites are marginalized or omitted from consideration. By critiquing the selective and biased coverage through which the media manufacture consent, Chomsky and Herman demonstrate how the media act to weaken democratic engagement.

The alienation effect and disruption produced by the many lists that cut into narrative continuity in *Salle d'embarquement* are intensified by Game's use of other devices of estrangement, such as passages of dialogue in English or fragmentary bits from magazine articles that Benjamin is reading. Given the emphasis on the circulation of global capital within a context of transit, media consumerism, and on spaces like airports and hotel chains in Game's text, the few moments when Benjamin is looking at a political news story on television in his hotel room assume particular relevance, introducing evidence of political conflict into the narrative. In the following scene, as he is channel-surfing, he happens to stop on a scene involving a political protest against the neoliberal disempowerment of workers:

> Il essaye une autre chaîne. Un sujet y tourne en
> boucle derrière la voix inquiète de l'envoyé spécial.
> On voit une tête de cortège entourée par les gen
> darmes mobiles. La situation se tend visiblement.
> Les manifestants refusent de se disperser et sont
> de plus en plus en colère, physiquement. […]
> "… et sous quels prétextes exactement se mo
> derniser rimerait-il fatalement avec accepter de
> perdre ses droits ? … Qui sera véritablement surpris
> qu'une telle appropriation de la marche du monde
> suscite rejet et indignation? …" (Game 24)

In such passages, Game highlights the importance of political action, even though the kind of world through which Benjamin travels seems to reflect and encourage passivity rather than political action. The contrast between the protestors' active resistance to neoliberal political oppression and Benjamin's passive acquiescence to it—or, at least, his failure to confront his involvement in it—is telling here. Game commented to me that "[l]a critique de la globalisation néolibérale que comporte mon livre sait qu'une résistance à celle-ci sera d'autant plus puissante qu'elle en passe par les corps sensibles, l'imaginaire, et, une fois de plus (c'est crucial pour moi), la capacité à opposer des contre-récits aux récits (capitalistes, scientifico-critiques) qui prétendent être les seuls sur Terre."[11]

A significant break occurs toward the end of *Salle d'embarquement*. Most of the narrative falls under Part I; a very brief Part II concludes it. In the end, Benjamin C. abruptly experiences an epiphany that moves him from passivity to action. His relationship to the image changes drastically as he is suddenly no longer merely a consumer of the images he sees, but, now, an actor reframing those images as he begins taking numerous photographs with his smartphone. Game offers us verbal equivalents of Benjamin's photographs in the final segments of *Salle d'embarquement*. The accelerated, subjectless time that had characterized the narrative thus far becomes arrested and changed into an act of attention. When Benjamin is fired from his job, he begins a career as a photographer, and so, he finally discovers a means to gain agency. Game writes that "[c]'est en effet comme une épiphanie pour Benjamin C., à la fois existentielle, plastique, et critique."[12]

In 2020 Game published *Album Photo*, a book-length presentation of short texts similar to the reproductions of Benjamin C.'s photographs at the end of *Salle d'embarquement*.[13] *Album Photo* features about one hundred small squares or rectangles, and each of these shapes replaces and evokes an absent photograph. In a recent article, Yves Citton vividly describes the effect of reading this work: "Une centaine de carrés ou de rectangles cadrés comme des photos, bien centrés au milieu de la page, contiennent des phrases qui décrivent ce qu'on voit sur une image manquante. Avec comme double effet simultané de nous faire imaginer ce que nous lisons, mais aussi de faire écran verbal à ce que nous ne voyons pas."[14] The written version of the photographs thus lays bare the bias and opacity so often concealed by conventional photographs. Game's textual photographs make us keenly aware of what is left out and of what remains unexpressed in many photographs. This interrogation of the political stakes in the act of photography gives *Album Photo* a precise critical force, as Citton explains in his article: "Jérôme Game conclut son livre en rappelant que chaque minute, un million huit cent mille images sont snapées, un million six cent mille sont partagées sur WhatsApp, deux cent trente-neuf mille sont likées sur Instagram. En copiant/ \éditant/transcrivant une centaine de ces images sous forme de carrés textuels, le poète fait acte politique par l'index qu'il pointe ainsi sur la matraque qui tape incessamment dans nos têtes aussi bien que sur elles" (Citton, *Dérouter la politique* 56).

By means of estranging devices such as lists, as we have seen, Game breaks and disrupts narrative continuity throughout *Salle d'embarquement*. He, thus, encourages his reader to adopt a critical stance toward the powerful effects of the *médiarchie* through which Benjamin C.'s experience is defined.

The play of presence and absence in Game's verbal evocations of photographic images fulfills a similar function. His verbal descriptions of photographs encourage the reader to question how photographic images operate culturally. Both form and content in Game's work acquire a notable political force.

Like Jérôme Game, Sandra Moussempès became active in the poetry scene in France in the 1990s. Since 2011, she has often integrated her poetry and her work as a vocal artist, after having kept these two areas of creativity separate for a number of years. From her first books of poetry—notably *Vestiges de fillette*[15]—her work is centered in a poetic reenvisioning of images of women and girls. The images through which this "poetics of the feminine" develops include three distinct spheres: popular culture (starlets, princesses, sirens, female pop stars); female literary ancestors such as Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath; and rebellious, transgressive women from classical mythology and the Bible like Cassandra, Lilith or Salome. Moussempès has continued to return to these figures in several books of poetry, most recently in *Cassandre à bout portant*.[16] Her stance toward these figures is complex. She avoids a conventional feminist reclaiming of them as strong and complex alter egos or doubles, as a certain ambivalence conditions her presentation of them. Although she rejects positioning figures like Cassandra or Sylvia Plath as victims, she also eschews figuring them as empowered, and empowering, heroines. No directly political statement emerges from her texts or from her performances of them.

When I asked Moussempès to comment on the political force of her work, she answered that "[m]on travail n'est pas un moyen d'agir dans le sens d'un engagement politique visible comme tel mais de ressentir, et de devenir mon propre laboratoire textuel et sensoriel, de transmettre aux autres, à l'audience, ces capacités sensorielles et sensitives, comme les états modifiés de conscience, de convoquer des sensations de 'déjà vu', mon travail n'agit pas sur le mental mais le sensitif. Il n'en est pas moins politique puisque je passe ma vie à vouloir dénoncer les faux semblant, détourner les stéréotypes autour du féminin, du couple, de la famille."[17]

Moussempès characteristically examines the cultural images of the feminine that she is recycling and reimagining from a distance, placing them in incongruous, unexpected contexts. Her poems combine whimsy with darker, sometimes violent content in order to create what she has termed "ofnis" ("objets féminins non identifiés"). In these dreamlike poems, stereotypes become juxtaposed with odd, transformative language. She achieves an atmosphere dominated by the uncanny, suspended between fantasy and reality. Unlike the Surrealists' cultivation of dream narrative and oneiric images as a

means to attain *le merveilleux,* her poems maintain an ambiguous stance toward their subject matter. The opening passage of *Cassandre à bout portant* features some of the central preoccupations of Moussempès's poetry:

> Des princesses filmiques échappées d'un couvent orienté à l'Est savent depuis longtemps jusqu'où elles peuvent aller
>
> Elles se sont réfugiées dans une maison hantée, abandonnée depuis 1972, fatiguées d'avoir marché des heures dans la forêt, elles savent à présent qu'à tout moment le récit peut s'arrêter
>
> Le film peut se dématérialiser, elles rentreront alors dans leur famille aisée de Beverly Hills ou dans un de ces lotissements luxueux de Santa Monica en bordure de mer
>
> Pour le moment elles mâchent du chewing-gum à la fraise sauvage, écoutent du Dubstep en se trémoussant dans un couloir mordoré, allongées sur de vieux matelas posés à même le sol poussiéreux (Moussempès 11)

The starlet-princesses doing Dubstep moves and chewing bubble-gum incarnate clichés of contemporary mainstream culture. At the same time, they exist here in a fairy tale or fantasy world of haunted houses and phantom memories. The reader experiences curiosity, and even perplexity, on first encountering passages like this. By mingling dissimilar—or incompatible—literary-cinematic codes, the poet creates an effect of disruption. The reader is challenged to enter a textual space where the feminine is figured both through a re-presentation of familiar clichés and through the (linguistic) experience of an uncanny otherness and strangeness.

Moussempès has been fascinated by the image—in particular, by the self-portrait—from the beginning of her career as a poet. The work of American photographer Cindy Sherman has been a touchstone for her from *Vestiges de fillette* to *Cassandre à bout portant*, as Sherman's ambiguous and inventive self-portraits have provided Moussempès with a powerful model for her own self-mirrorings and mirrorings of mainstream culture. Sherman is best known for her series of photographs from the 1970s "Untitled Film Stills" in which she disguises herself as heroines from Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s. The photographer remains recognizable in these images despite the stock costumes and wigs she is wearing; at the same time, she disappears into a character who is not herself in each image. In these often disturbing pho-tographs, Hollywood fictions of the feminine are repeated while undergoing an ironic recontextualization. She makes her audience aware of the ways in

which mass media images of women shape and distort our sense of female identity. Sherman's predilection for exaggerated, even grotesque, self-portraiture enacts a political gesture of exposing the questionable and harmful after-effects of the continuous circulation of images in a media-saturated world. Moussempès's starlet-princesses in the opening poem of *Cassandre à bout portant* partake of a similar act of self-portraiture, one could argue.[18] Like Sherman, Moussempès engages in a humorous and parodic form of play as she recycles the stock images of woman and girls that have become a recurring feature of her poetry.

In order to elucidate Moussempès's art of the self-portrait, I would like to highlight the importance of the mirror in her poetry. The metaphor of the mirror recurs frequently (one could even argue, obsessively) in *Cassandre à bout* portant, as in many of her collections of poems. The potency of the mirror as a textual figure derives from its propensity to represent and to distort the image that it returns to the beholder's gaze. Moussempès's textual mirrors perform many different functions. They hark back to the world of the fairy tale ("Mirror, mirror on the wall…") while also referencing the dark and distorted tales of Charlie Brooker's anthology television series *Black Mirror.*[19] The figure of Cassandra, "*la bien nommée qui annonce la perte*" (Moussempès 57), acts as a double or mirror image of Moussempès herself. She explains that Cassandra was one of the nicknames her father used for her in childhood, along with Salomé and Messaline (Moussempès 57).

As the mirror keeps returning throughout this collection, its metaphorical significance becomes less certain, less stable: "Les miroirs crient en se collant aux corps qu'ils reflètent/ Boue synthétique, joues rebondies" (Moussempès 62); "Que peut-on voir d'un visage effacé dans le miroir?" (Moussempès 74). The poem "Miroir rouge" reveals some of the more troubling consequences of looking into these mirrors:

> Miroir rouge
>
> Divisée en deux
> Je me donne une chambre et je m'impose un rêve je suis
> Dans un corridor, je décris le papier-peint qui change
> Au fur et à mesure du rêve
>
> Une princesse tue un serpent puis écrit un livre
> Sur l'extinction des sorcières ambivalentes
>
> Le miroir pleure des larmes de sang qui seront confisquées
> pour être étudiées
> Par des scientifiques de renommée (Moussempès 85)

What stands out in this poem is the active role that the various female figures play. The speaker performs decisive actions: "je me donne une chambre et je m'impose un rêve… ". A princess kills a snake and explores the fate of witches by writing a book. Despite its humorous tone, this passage furnishes a kind of agency to its female characters. Moussempès avoids any sense of pathos and victimization as she notes that the tears of blood that the mirror produces will be studied "par des scientifiques de renommée."

In the final poem in the collection, "La vierge au miroir," Moussempès offers us an ironic double for the poet herself. This figure constitutes an odd composite of a sacrificial virgin and a fairy-tale princess. The "vierge au miroir" is associated with a replaying of childhood memories, as well as with self-protection and self-transformation:

> À chaque respiration tu recraches les tabous de ton enfance
> La vierge au miroir te sert de gilet pare-balle
> […]
> Je suis la vierge émulsionnée qu'on démonte avec un coeur/ en forme de pieu
> Poétesse en kit composant un poème sous vos yeux (164)

Moussempès presents the "vierge au miroir" with an irony echoing that of Sylvia Plath in her harsh and shocking poem "Lady Lazarus," in which the female speaker performs a mocking and accusatory act of suicide before the reader. Through her commitment to virginity, this figure of the "vierge au miroir" resists the marriage script that mainstream culture typically imposes on women. Like Plath's Lady Lazarus, she presents a deliberately frightening and provocative image to the reader's gaze. She challenges us not to look away as she drinks "le sang d'un miroir plein de trous."

A complex poetics of sound and voice plays as vital a role in her work as the exploration of the image. The sound component of Moussempès's texts and performances complements their visual aspects, as phantom, disembodied voices, and the technologies connected to recording these voices influence her poetics on multiple levels. The voice is fundamental to her work on both a thematic and a technical level.[20] "En inventant mon propre langage dans mes poèmes mais aussi dans mes pièces sonores et vocales," she wrote to me, "je tente d'interroger la notion de temporalité aussi bien que l'immersion dans diverses époques/atmosphères. Dans mes albums j'intègre ma voix chantée murmurée stratifiée éthérée à l'énonciation du poème, afin de provoquer une forme d'hypnose et de chamanisme, c'est d'une certaine façon au-delà d'une action publique une action cognitive et interactive avec des

notions paranormales qui m'intéressent et me questionnent (d'où mes livres sur la voix enregistrée et le spiritisme.")[21] Her fascination with ghostly, ethereal voices and with the technologies linked to them is long-standing: "J'ai toujours été fascinée par ces objets mécaniques qui nous restituent les voix longtemps après leur disparition dans la réalité, elles restent dans des boîtes vocales, des répondeurs téléphoniques, de vieux enregistreurs, des gramophones, des magnétophones d'époque que jamais nous n'écouterons, ou alors par hasard, par surprise."[22]

Interestingly, in *Médiarchie* Yves Citton discusses the strange and persistent fascination among inventors of new media since the nineteenth century with spiritualism and ghostly disembodied voices: "Pourquoi diable tant d'inventeurs de nouveaux medias ont-ils flirté avec l'occultisme? En même temps qu'il inventait le phonographe ou la lampe à incandescence, Thomas Edison cherchait à mettre au point un 'nécrophone': 'un appareil scientifique, permettant aux morts, si la chose est possible, d'entrer en relation avec nous'" (Citton, *Médiarchie* 237). Citton speaks of "[l]a prolifération de spectres, de revenants et d'ectoplasmes dans les nouveaux médias du XIXe siècle, et l'angoisse de voir nos vies aliénées par des images et des messages venus d'ailleurs" (*Médiarchie* 262). Hearing the recorded voice of someone long dead (as Moussempès did when she discovered a Youtube recording of her great-aunt Angelica Pandolfini singing),[23] "c'est bien une 'connexion énigmatique et ambivalente,' me reliant à un 'au-delà' incompréhensible, qui agit dans cette situation banale" (*Médiarchie* 263).

In her readings and performances, Moussempès often shifts from a spoken recitation of her poetry to long passages of singing in a high, ethereal voice and, at times, the production of series of onomatopoetic sounds. A complex layering results from the mingling of these three kinds of sounds. The listener feels lulled into a sort of trance state. Moussempès's vocal artistry recalls the singing of a number of contemporary pop divas: Beth Gibbons of the group Portishead, Hope Sandoval of Mazzy Star or Kate Bush, among others. Through her vocal performances, she creates a new text, not merely a reproduction of the print version. Such an extension of her audience beyond the page gives her work a bolder political force.[24]

A salient feature of *Salle d'embarquement* and *Cassandre à bout portant* is a non-standard use of narrative and the questioning of narrative, which underlies both writers' projects. (I would disagree with Erica Durante's characterization of *Salle d'embarquement* as a "novel.")[25] In his 2021 article "Dérouter la politique par la poésie?" Yves Citton addresses the issue of the strategies employed by postmodern poets to contest the dominance of the

novel and the somewhat limited modes of narrativity upon which it relies: "La première réponse que proposent ces postpoètes est de briser l'inertie des grands récits. Leur écriture sans écriture se construit non seulement contre la forme-roman qui domine le commerce littéraire. Elle rechigne plus fondamentalement au mode d'intelligibilité assez rassurant que propose la narrativité commune, avec ses programmes standards et ses schémas essentiels, son suspens et ses dénouements, ses fables et leur morale" ("Dérouter" 55). The inclusion of narrative elements in *Salle d'embarquement* and *Cassandre à bout portant* can be understood as another strategy of recycling and defamiliarizing mainstream culture. The clichés of air travel, of conventional femininity, *and* of the (too) well-known aesthetics of the realistic novel are all challenged and made strange by the ovnis and ofnis of Game and Moussempès. Their provocative uses of recycling and defamiliarizing afford their work a distinct political force.

McMaster University

Notes

1. Yves di Manno and Isabelle Garron, eds., *Un nouveau monde: Poésies en France 1960–2010* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017).
2. Christophe Hanna, "Comment se mobilisent les publics (L'écriture comme écosystème)" in Florent Coste, *Explore: Investigations littéraires* (Paris: Questions Théoriques, 2017), vii–xxii.
3. Jérôme Game, e-mail to John Stout, September 4, 2021.
4. Jérôme Game, e-mail to John Stout, August 15, 2021.
5. Jérôme Game, e-mail to John Stout, November 28, 2021.
6. Yves Citton, *Médiarchies* (Paris: Seuil, 2017).
7. See Di Manno's and Garron's discussion "La 'Revue de littérature générale' (1995–1996)" in *Un nouveau monde*, 1091–95.
8. Christophe Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques* (Paris: Questions Théoriques, 2010), 1.
9. Jérôme Game, *Salle d'embarquement* (Bordeaux: L'Attente, 2017).
10. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).
11. Jérôme Game, e-mail to John Stout, August 15, 2021.
12. Jérôme Game, e-mail to John Stout, August 15, 2021.
13. Jérôme Game, *Album Photo* (Bordeaux: L'Attente, 2020).
14. Yves Citton, "Dérouter la politique par la poésie?," *La Découverte*, n. 18, 55 (2021).
15. Sandra Moussempès, *Vestiges de fillette* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).
16. Sandra Moussempès, *Cassandre à bout portant* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021).
17. Sandra Moussempès, e-mail to John Stout, July 26, 2021.
18. See Cindy Sherman and David Frankel, *Cindy Sherman: The Complete Untitled Film Stills* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003).
19. Moussempès has mentioned to me several times that the episode "Nosedive" from Season 3 of *Black Mirror* has influenced her recent work, including *Cassandre à bout portant*.
20. See her performance and interview recorded at the Maison de la Poésie in Paris on February 22, 2021.

21. Sandra Moussempès, e-mail to John Stout, July 26, 2021.
22. Sandra Moussempès, e-mail to John Stout, July 26, 2021.
23. See Sandra Moussempès, *Cinéma de l'affect* (Bordeaux: L'Attente, 2019).
24. Sandra Moussempès's CD *Beauty Sitcom*, which accompanies her *Acrobaties dessinées* (Bordeaux: L'Attente, 2012), provides an excellent example of her art of performance and its trance-like effects.
25. Erica Durante, *Air Travel Fiction and Film: Cloud People* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 104.