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## In Memoriam: Holly Anne Gilbert

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*For Former, Current and Future Graduate Scholars of French and Francophone Studies and for Holly Gilbert's Friends and Family*

As someone who knew Holly Gilbert throughout her career as an undergraduate with honors in French and as a graduate student who completed her Ph.D. with us before going on to UCLA's Law School, I feel privileged to share with you an excerpt from her dissertation on the poet Paul Valéry. I selected this section in particular because it materially reflects a lifetime spent reading and writing, that is, Holly addresses here Valéry's critical relation to time, a process of reading which is spatialized on the page in the form of his marginal notes.

She examines specifically in this section Valéry's evolving thoughts on Leonardo da Vinci over a span of more than three decades. Modeled on both Da Vinci's notebooks and Edgar Allen Poe's *Marginalia*, these essays are the only texts in his oeuvre to include in their publication by design the poet's marginal notes. As though in dialogue with himself, these pieces may have his readers feeling that they are only eavesdropping on another's process of understanding and self-criticism. Their value for us here, however, is the way they speak to our own experience with literary works. The marginalia on the pages of the books that we read over and over again accumulate over time. Each rereading is as much testimony to a work's depth, its capacity to draw us into a haptic relation with it as it is a function of what we can and cannot bring to it then and now. And as Holly so capably demonstrates, events and

discoveries—artistic, cultural, political, philosophical and, especially for Valéry and Holly, scientific—compel us to return to the pieces that we have read or written to consider them in a new light.

Holly would not be able to take pleasure in this process for as long as most of us have or will be able to do. Yet, those who were closest to her know that she packed a great deal into her short lifetime. Her curiosity for and command of such topics as thermodynamics, atomic theory, relativity, quantum theory, mathematics, poetics, foreign languages, the law, and dazzle camouflage was, among her friends, fabled. The following excerpt is but one example of her intellectual vitality.

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*Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci, Note et digression, and Léonard et les Philosophes (Lettre à Leo Ferrero)*<sup>1</sup>

Paul Valéry's simultaneous discovery of Edgar Allen Poe's *Eureka*, coupled with his readings on architecture and ornament in the early 1890s, lent him a lifelong interest in natural and artificial systems.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere is this Poean influence, which would lead to an interest in nineteenth-century science and, later, to relativity theory, more evident than in the *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1894), *Note et digression* (1919), and *Léonard et les philosophes* (1929). Like his *Eupalinos* (1921) and *L'homme et la coquille* (1937), these essays address the idea of construction but the *esprit universel* that is da Vinci synthesizes both human and non-human compositional methodologies, combining Eupalinos's rational artistry while

approaching the complete fusion of act and existence that defines the mollusk. One of the *Introduction*'s principal objectives is the elucidation of a continuous relationship between the universal mind and the objects of its contemplation. Its supporting essays, *Note et digression* and *Léonard et les philosophes*, written twenty-five and thirty-five years later, respectively, represent necessary components of this project because they illuminate both inconsistencies in and new developments of Valéry's scientific and artistic theory that span most of his authorial life.<sup>3</sup>

The idea for an intellectual biography of Leonardo da Vinci occurred to Valéry after a conversation with Léon Daudet at the house of Marcel Schwob, originator of the *Vies imaginaires*, a collection of fictional vignettes based on the lives of celebrated artists and other important personages. Though dedicated to Schwob, the *Introduction* contains very little biographical or fictional information about da Vinci's daily existence, concentrating, instead, on unveiling the intellectual method that characterizes all great thinkers.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the *Introduction*'s tone is largely impersonal, *Note et digression* serves as an apologia for Valéry's previous approach to da Vinci and the universal mind and thus provides far more biographical information on Valéry himself. As is the case with *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*, Valéry takes a progressively jaundiced view of philosophy in the two later da Vinci texts, particularly in *Léonard et les philosophes*, which he dedicates primarily to unmasking the meaninglessness of such concepts as ethics and aesthetics. A response to Leo Ferrero, who had requested that Valéry write a preface to his soon-to-appear *Léonard de Vinci ou l'oeuvre d'art*, the piece rejects, as does *L'homme et la coquille*, knowledge in the classical sense in

favor of construction as an epistemological act: "Tout savoir ne vaut que pour être la description ou la recette d'un pouvoir vérifiable" (I: 1240). The da Vinci essays may at times treat their principal subject from differing standpoints, but their forms are essentially unvarying. They consist of three essays of between thirty-four and forty-six pages in length, including the marginal notes added in 1930 when Valéry would publish the 1919 *Note et digression* and the 1929 *Léonard et les philosophes* together with the *Introduction*.

The three da Vinci texts' marginal notes perform several indispensable functions. As they are the only such notes published alongside Valéry's numerous essays, they serve to unite these texts formally and separate them from the main body of his work. Manifestations of an interior dialogue from self to self, they also display Valéry's continued interest in Poe, whose marginal notes he had translated several years before including his own with the da Vinci essays. Furthermore, I propose that the marginalia hark back to Valéry's *Cahiers* through similarities of style and content, and thus indirectly to da Vinci's own notebooks, which most scholars believe to have directly inspired Valéry's own daily musings. In this sense, the marginalia unite both Poean and da Vincian literary techniques, lending support to Valéry's affirmation in the *Introduction* that universal minds such as these make use of essentially similar modes of self-expression. The marginalia also bond the three essays thematically, as points made in later essays come into play in earlier ones through the notes. As one of the *Introduction's* main points is the necessity of integrating ornamentation with the basic structure of architectural creations, the marginalia function as a sort of textual ornamentation for the da Vinci essays, upholding the body of

the text yet remaining on its exterior. The marginalia manifest Valéry's conflicting views of mathematical language that began to trouble him later in his career but had not yet arisen at the time of the *Introduction*'s writing. They both deny the existence of mathematical truths in the realm of quantum physics and laud them as the last remnant of rationality possible in this same realm. Furthermore, they lend a sense of temporality to the essays as they integrate references to the earlier Valéry's state of mind with the main text, providing the dates of their writing and referring to concurrent discoveries in physics. The da Vinci essays' temporalization through marginalia functions well within the context of the texts' main bodies, which attempt to create a microcosm of the universe within the mind of da Vinci himself. This symbolic space-time, which Valéry constructs by means of references to space, roads, lines within the da Vincian consciousness, is also a metaphor for the text of the *Introduction*. Drawing from *Eureka* and his later interpretations of field theory culled from his avid reading of contemporary scientific literature, Valéry construes the Leonardian mind as a universal field that the intellect at its center traverses by means of a continuous network of lines of force, the pathways of thought. Exemplifying da Vinci's method of reuniting disparate concepts first, mentally, then, on paper, Valéry himself uses the lines of the essay to reunite the superficially disparate thought of da Vinci and nineteenth-century scientist Michael Faraday. Fruitful mental activity, however, necessitates a fundamental energy, a continuous intellectual movement through the network of interconnected heterogeneous elements of the mind. The *esprit universel* that is da Vinci, points out Valéry, recognized the inherent dynamism contained within all objects, which was key to his success as an artist. Again,

later discoveries in physics would reinforce this, as Valéry demonstrates by examining the steadily increasing complexity of a man-made structure at the level of the atomic. No longer a solid, rectilinear block of stone at this level, the structure manifests its inherent dynamism when portrayed as a whizzing cloud of electrons.

### Poe, da Vinci and the Marginalia

As several scholars of Poe and Valéry have pointed out, the nineteenth-century author's influence upon the *Introduction* and its later offspring through *The Poetic Principle*, *The Philosophy of Composition*, and *Eureka* is undeniably obvious.<sup>5</sup> None, however, has chosen to elaborate upon the influence of Poe's *Marginalia*—which Valéry translated in 1927—upon these texts. Although the reason for their inclusion in lieu of prolegomena or other forms of explanatory material remains speculative, I propose that the marginalia bring the idea of Poean consistency to the forefront in the da Vinci essays because they endow them with both formal and thematic unity despite their categorization as “open” by contemporary critics. Since they appear in no other of Valéry's published work, these marginal notes are the most distinguishing formal feature of the collection of essays and serve as indicators of Valéry's ideological modulations in the thirty-five year span between the first of these essays and their group publication in 1930. Furthermore, the marginalia are linked with da Vinci's *Quaderni* in that stylistically, they resemble the aphoristic, haphazard form of expression that Valéry employed in the *Cahiers*, themselves directly inspired by da Vinci's notebooks. Several recurring themes of the marginalia serve to bring together the earlier and later essays by either introducing new material to all three or by making

intertextual references to the later essays in the margins of the previous ones. One recent thematic addition includes the idea of failed human systems of knowledge and communication, such as philosophy and language. Another corresponds to the conflicting portrayal of mathematics as both a last defense against the total subjectivity that recent discoveries in modern physics imply, and conversely, as a system that lacks meaning because of these same discoveries. Also of importance in the marginalia is the idea of an interdependent space-time, an idea adopted from Einstein that Valéry utilizes to imbue the da Vinci essays with a textual spatio-temporality.

In the following passage, Valéry links da Vinci and Poe through the figure of Mona Lisa's mysterious smile, a symbol of technical skill and artistic flair that, I propose, presents the Poean conception of imaginative logic while drawing attention to the hidden connection or universal consistency<sup>6</sup> that unites men ordinarily separated temporally and culturally:

Edgar Poe qui fut, dans ce siècle littéraire troublé, l'éclair même de la confusion et de l'orage poétique de qui l'analyse s'achève parfois, comme celle de Léonard, en sourires mystérieux, a établi clairement sur la psychologie, sur la probabilité des effets, l'attaque de son lecteur. De ce point de vue, tout déplacement d'éléments fait pour être aperçu et jugé dépend de quelques lois générales et d'une appropriation particulière, définie d'avance pour une catégorie prévue d'esprits auxquels ils s'adressent spécialement; et l'oeuvre d'art devient une machine destinée à exciter et à combiner les formations



individuelles de ces esprits. (*Introduction* I: 1197-98)

While both da Vinci and Poe base their creations on abstract mechanical laws such as grammar or geometry, their ability to conjoin these principles with artistic imagination gives rise to precisely calculated effects that ceaselessly bewilder and enchant readers and observers of their work. Valéry's homage to Poe does not limit itself to the above passage but continues throughout the body of his work on da Vinci, whose motto "hostinato rigore," and its Gallicised brother "rigueur obstinée," appear throughout the *Introduction* and the other da Vinci essays, bringing to mind Poe's exhortations to lucidity and logic during the artistic process. Logic is not the only quality valued by the creative mind. In subtle reference to the Poean doctrine of imaginative leaps as keys to intellectual innovation, Valéry writes, "[m]ais, le meilleur argument est que, neuf fois sur dix, toute grande nouveauté dans un ordre est obtenue par l'intrusion de moyens et de notions qui n'y étaient pas prévus" (*Introduction* I: 1180). The great subject of the *Introduction* being the universal mind's ability to perceive and communicate continuity via analogy in a seemingly heterogeneous universe, it is no surprise that this text and its later offspring allude to Poean consistency with such statements as "[l]a connaissance et son objet sont, en quelque manière, réciproques" (I: 1222). Further references to lucidity, imaginative logic and the importance of controlled emotion during the artistic process appear in the *Introduction*, which Valéry wrote soon after his first readings of Poean poetic theory. These concepts, however, continued to make their mark even upon the later essays, as is the case

with *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*—written twenty-five and forty years after the *Introduction*, respectively.

The Valéryan critic Jürgen Schmidt-Radefeldt affirms that the marginalia constitute an integral part of the da Vinci essays' structure as these notes allow the reader to share in the process of Valéry's own self-critical metadiadialogue.<sup>7</sup> The marginalia indeed serve as indicators of ongoing mental functioning. Nevertheless, Schmidt-Radefeldt's reasoning is incomplete as it neglects the role Poe played in their addition to the soon-to-be published collection of the three da Vinci texts in 1930. Valéry's emphasis on the importance of marginalia, particularly with regard to these essays most probably arose from his earlier contact with Poe's *Marginalia*, a collection of the American author's marginal comments culled from his own papers and personal library. Besides the existence of an overt reference to Poe's *Marginalia* in the *Introduction* (I: 1170 fn), a further indication of the high degree of respect that Valéry held for Poe in general and this mode of expression in particular is his translation of selected fragments of the *Marginalia* in 1927. Indeed, this was to be the only other translation of Poe's works besides *Eureka* that Valéry carried out, despite the fact that at the time much of Poe's work remained unavailable in French. Valéry's regard for the forms appears even greater given that he included his own commentary on the translated material in the published addition, which appeared on the *verso* pages—a sort of marginalia of the *Marginalia*. The following remarks from *Quelques fragments des Marginalia, traduits et annotés par Paul Valéry* elucidate his marked interest in the genre:

Il ne manque pas d'ouvrages dont les notes qui les accompagnent font tout le prix.

On pourrait observer à ce sujet que la lecture attentive d'un livre n'est qu'un commentaire continu, une succession de *notes* échappées à la voix intérieure. Les notes marginales sont une partie des notes purement *pensées*.

La valeur d'un ouvrage pour un lecteur donné est mesurée par l'importance de ces réactions parallèles à la lecture. L'ouvrage peut, en définitive, être jugé fort mauvais; si les notes en question ont été nombreuses et explicites, la valeur excitante du livre est démontrée. (I: 1801)

The previous statement both demonstrates Valéry's admiration of Poe's commentary and provides excellent evidence of his own marginalia's singular importance for the group of da Vinci texts. Given the great number of marginal notes in the da Vinci texts—most of the Pléiade edition's 115 pages include several of these, and the page with an empty margin is a rare exception—we can conclude that Valéry found this confrontation with an earlier self to be intellectually provocative. Beyond this aspect, the marginalia's addition, which unites the three essays both formally and ideologically, displays yet another facet of the trope of Poean consistency in evidence throughout the da Vinci essays.

As well as reflecting Valéry's continued interest in Poe, the marginalia indirectly recall da Vinci because of their stylistic similarity to the *Cahiers*, which Valéry began as a result of his readings of the Italian polymath's own notebooks. Opinion differs as to the degree of similarity between Valéry's *Cahiers* and da Vinci's *Quaderni*,<sup>8</sup> but most scholars concur that, as a result of reading da Vinci's notes, Valéry began his *Cahiers* two years later (the same

year he wrote the first version of the *Introduction*), an exercise he would continue for the remainder of his life.<sup>9</sup> If Valéry learned of Poe's ability to extract unity from a seemingly heterogeneous universe in *Eureka*, he learned of da Vinci's similar skill from his reading of Gabriel Séailles's *Léonard de Vinci, L'artiste et le savant, 1452-1519: Essai de biographie psychologique* (1892). Séailles's important contribution to Vincian scholarship, as critic Martin Kemp points out, was his ability to perceive continuity in the diversity of the Vincian subject matter, which manifested itself "above all through his constant use of analogy as an explanatory tool when studying different natural phenomena" ("Hostinato Rigore..." 30). Perhaps because of his encounter with Séailles, Valéry's reading of a translated version of da Vinci's *Quaderni* in 1892 permitted him to imagine a hidden system in the apparently random collection of drawings and written passages. "[L]a quantité de notes laissées par Léonard se présente comme un ensemble simultané devant lequel nous demeurons dans l'incertitude quant à l'ordre des questions dans son esprit," he remarks in *Note et digression* (I: 1251). Whatever the case may be, a strong enough impression remained from Valéry's research on da Vinci (both through first and second-hand sources) that he embarked upon two of the most important projects of his literary career, which, in my opinion, merged when Valéry added the marginalia to the da Vinci essays. In spite of Valéry's obvious intention to publish them, the marginalia resemble the diurnal exercise of the *Cahiers*, especially when we consider their role as markers of the intellectual process, as Schmidt-Radefeldt indicates. By dint of their aphoristic form and diversity of subject matter, which also characterize the *Cahiers*, the marginalia manage to incorporate a wealth of information—both semi-personal and objective—that

enhance the subject matter of the essay's main body. Furthermore, like the *Cahiers*, several recurring themes allow a loose categorization of their contents, recalling the unity-in-diversity aspect of da Vinci's own notebooks. The most important of these themes for my project are construction, the failure of philosophical systems as valid sources of truth, and the intellect-defying results of the most recent experiments in physics and spatio-temporality. While complementing many of the topoi of *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*, the ideas I have chosen to emphasize also serve to bolster the overarching trope of the da Vinci essays: the formulation of a system of thought that can perceive continuity in both self and universe.

As is the case with *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*, construction, whether of intellectual or architectural systems, comprises one of the prevalent leitmotifs of the da Vinci essays. Given these thematics, the marginalia serve as a form of ornamentation for the main body of the three texts, embellishing them through repetition of ideas in their main body or through the addition of new, relevant information to modernize the older essays. If we recall that Valéry insists upon the interdependence of ornamentation and structure, an idea first expressed in the *Introduction* ("la conception ornementale est aux arts particuliers ce que la mathématique est aux autres sciences" I: 1185) and continued throughout the later two da Vinci texts as well as in *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*, the marginalia's significance grows even more evident. The following self-referential marginal comment, taken from the *Introduction*, draws attention to its own status as ornament: "L'ornement, réponse au vide, compensation du possible, complète en quelque sorte, annule une liberté" (I: 1184). True to this description, Valéry's series of aphoristic comments completes underdeveloped

ideas within the text with a flourish but prevents further such expression from future readers since the margins are no longer empty.

Exemplifying the idea of ornament as a repetitive, thematic element, the marginalia exhibit a formal peculiarity that critics have thus far chosen to ignore: the occasional, almost verbatim duplication of material from the essays *in the margins* several pages earlier. The following marginal comment in *Léonard et les philosophes*, which appears on page 1240 at the mention of “esthétique” in the main body of the text, becomes an actual paragraph *within the essay* on page 1245: “Si l’Esthétique pouvait être, les arts s’évanouiraient nécessairement devant elle, c’est à dire, *devant leur essence.*” Since Valéry wrote *Léonard et les philosophes* only a year prior to making these marginal notes, we can assume that he was perfectly aware of the duplication and let it remain as a useful thematic embellishment. By emphasizing what he obviously believed to be a crucial idea in the essay’s margins several pages before its appearance in the main body, Valéry endows the reader with his own tactical advantage over the essay. This reduces to an advance understanding that the word “aesthetics” implies an absolutist ideology and is therefore devoid of meaning before this idea is discussed at length in the text. Far more common, however, are intertextual allusions that iterate themes addressed in later da Vinci texts in the margins of the earlier ones, endowing all three with thematic consistency.

The da Vinci essays and marginalia evince an epistemological progression similar to the diachronic loss of faith in traditional philosophy that characterizes *Eupalinos* and *L’homme et la coquille*. In the *Introduction*, the theme of philosophy is a mere undercurrent and the names of

Descartes, Kant, Leibniz, and Diderot appear only as exemples of consistently thought-provoking writers whereas in *Note et digression*, the failure of traditional philosophy becomes a prominent leitmotif, later subsuming the theme of the da Vincian continuity in *Léonard et les philosophes* and becoming the essay's principal idea. Exemplifying this in *Léonard et les philosophes*, Valéry remarks of philosophy, "chaque jour accuse un peu plus la ruine de cette noble architecture" (I: 1240) and later, "[s]eule, une interprétation esthétique peut soustraire à la ruine de leurs postulats plus ou moins cachés, aux effets destructeurs de l'analyse du langage et de l'esprit, les vénérables monuments de la métaphysique" (I: 1247). Bringing the theme of architecture once again to the foreground, the preceding remarks allude to philosophy's deficiency as a rational system of knowledge in a modern era (where general truths are a product of science) and its concurrent success as an art form. In the *Introduction's* marginalia, the derision toward philosophy as a method of discovering reality that characterizes *Léonard et les philosophes* is present to a far greater degree: "Voilà la vice essentielle de la philosophie. Elle est chose personnelle, et ne veut l'être. Elle veut constituer comme la science un capital transmissible et qui s'accroisse" (I: 1164). Philosophy's collapse is not only the product of increased faith in the exactitude of science but the fault of language itself whose inherent and inevitable polyvalencies render its verbal structures unstable. As Valéry remarks in *Léonard et les philosophes*, "que devient [la philosophie], quand pressée, traversée, surprise à chaque instant par la furieuse activité des sciences physiques, elle se trouve, d'autre part, inquiétée... par les travaux lents et minitieux des philologues et des linguistes?" (I: 1255). Besides relegating philosophy to the domain of art, the marginalia occupy considerable

amounts of space in discussion of the latest discoveries of physics. Though they do not conflict in a general sense with the idea of a universal field that Valéry adopted from Poe, Faraday, and Einstein, these discoveries undermine the concept of a 'lucid' Poean approach to understanding mind and world; for they often yield experimental results that defy human intelligence.

As is the case with *L'homme et la coquille*, the marginalia reaffirm the existence of a universal order but emphasize the impossibility of reaching an understanding of this order based on a specific human rationality. While *L'homme et la coquille* emphasizes spatio-temporal multiplicities and the arbitrariness of number systems as a means of imposing order upon the universe (by contrasting the growth and perceptions of a crustacean with human construction and intelligence), the marginalia approach this standpoint by bringing to light the incompatibility of the newest scientific discoveries with reason. In 1927, the discovery of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and other such material anomalies sabotaged the very notion of continuity as definable through reason. Valéry makes mention of the inherent inexplicability of quantum phenomena in the margins of the section of the *Introduction* that explores the notion of monuments as representative of the creative powers of the mind and the inherent structure of the physical universe: "Ce ne sont plus aujourd'hui des *édifices* que découvre la physique dans la matière. Elle finit par y trouver de *l'indescriptible par essence*—et de *l'imprévu!* 1930" (I: 1188-89). In contemporary science, as with the growth of an organic object, the act of producing replicable results in a given experiment took precedence over the understanding of these results:



La science au *sens moderne* du mot, consiste à faire dépendre le savoir du pouvoir; et va jusqu'à subordonner l'intelligible au vérifiable. La confiance repose entièrement sur la certitude de reproduire ou de revoir un certain phénomène moyennant certains *actes* bien définis. Quant à la manière de *décrire* ce phénomène, de *l'expliquer*, c'est là la partie muable, discutable, perfectible de l'accoissement ou de l'exposition de la science." (I: 1253, margin)

The above passage actualizes the *faire-savoir* dichotomy of *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille* by construing it as a scientific problem that is becoming steadily more apparent. While the body of the *Introduction* treats the topos of mathematics principally as an example of the da Vincian control over diverse elements of artistic production (Leonardo's artistic skill lies in the fact that he is able to perceive the underlying geometry of forms), the marginalia exhibit the same conflicting approach to the validity of mathematical systems that characterize *Eupalinos* and *L'homme et la coquille*. The following marginalium reveals Valéry's anti-Pythagorean tendencies<sup>10</sup> as seen through the lens of modern physics:

Il n'y a pas *d'infiniment petit* en chimie, et l'on peut aujourd'hui douter, en physique, de la divisibilité illimitée de la *longueur*. Ce qui signifie que l'idée de division et celle de la chose à diviser ne sont plus indépendantes. L'opération n'est plus concevable en deçà d'un certain point" (I: 1192).

The inclusion of this particular statement results directly from recent experiments with quanta or split atoms. Since

chemical reactions occur only with combinations of whole atoms, a portion of an atom has no bearing on the field of chemistry. At the level of the subatomic, moreover, notions of length and width cease to have meaning in the same way that they do at larger scopes, a fact that Valéry believed to demonstrate the arbitrariness of such systems of measurement. Despite the idea of division inherent to all mathematical systems, which makes them an impediment to envisioning total continuity, Valéry still finds them useful as tools for applying reason to irrational physical phenomena. Near a segment of the text noting that da Vinci's intellectual activity narrows the gap between two disparate ideas, Valéry employs a marginal note that confirms his knowledge of the Uncertainty Principle's implications but reveals his continued faith in mathematics as a source of objectivity—and thus as an aid to informational organization:

Ceci est curieusement confirmé, 36 ans après, aujourd'hui, 1930.

La physique théorique la plus hardie et la plus profonde,—contrainte de renoncer aux *images*, à la similitude visuelle et motrice—n'a plus, pour embrasser son immense domaine, unifier les lois et les rendre indépendantes du lieu, de l'époque et du mouvement de l'observateur, d'autre guide que la *symétrie* des formules. (I: 1175)

Because they are a product of reason, believed Valéry, the mathematical formulae that represent physical phenomena serve as a last barrier against the subjectivity that permeates all attempts at observation on the quantum level. As mention of Gödel, who proved that all mathematical systems are inherently fallible, is absent from the *Cahiers*, it is possible

to conclude from this note that Valéry's continued belief in the possibility of systematizing mind and world at the time of the marginalia's addition stemmed from an as yet unbroken faith in the validity of arithmetical operations. This belief prevailed despite his Zenonian stance on numbers as discontinuous human systems applied to a continuous universe. The marginalia incessantly reiterate this paradoxical position—at a mention of infinitesimal calculus in the text, Valéry notes, “mon opinion est que le secret de ce raisonnement ou induction mathématique réside dans une sorte de conscience de l'indépendance d'un acte par rapport à sa matière” (I: 1163). Here Valéry acknowledges that the act of applying mathematical reason to a particular set of objects or events is inherently discontinuous because this form of examination bears no relation to the objects or events considered. Of course, the reason-defying results of these experiments pose no difficulty for one such as da Vinci. In *L'homme et la coquille*, only the mollusk, a non-thinking life form is capable of producing a truly continuous structure that perfectly unites form and function. These essays, however, posit the existence of hybrid minds such as Leonardo's which can interact with the world using both human and non-human forms of perception. Of da Vinci, Valéry remarks, “[a]u regard de nos habitudes, Léonard paraît une sorte de monstre, un centaure ou une chimère...” (I: 1261), implying that this thinker is composed of both human and animal faculties, which allow him to circumvent the human mind's limitations. Irrationality at the subatomic level, then, does not preclude the existence of universal order, even if this order is only evident to hybrid thinkers like da Vinci or creatable by the likes of *L'homme et la coquille*'s erstwhile mollusk. Even though the marginalia acknowledge the dominant position of the illogical in

quantum theory, they do not refute the original text of *Introduction*'s assertion—that the illogical has no place in the arts.

Since one of the principle leitmotifs of the *Introduction* is the creation of a textual and mental spatio-temporality, the marginalia, whose subject matter frequently centers on the topic of reciprocal and relative space-time, fulfill a doubly important symbolic function in this regard. First, by referring to events or discoveries that took place after a given text's first writing, they highlight the passage of time between this event and their later addition, as with this marginal comment in the *Introduction*: "J'écrirais ce paragraphe premier tout différemment aujourd'hui; mais j'en conserverais l'essence et la fonction" (I: 1153). With the use of the deictic "aujourd'hui" in the margin, Valéry draws attention to the temporal difference between the original text's writing and its later addition. The following marginalium, located near a passage on objects in motion that leave a succession of passing traces, proposes the observation of a space through time: "A la *spatialisation* de la succession correspond ce que je nommais jadis la *chronolyse* de l'espace" (I:1169). Besides evoking Einsteinian spatio-temporal reciprocity, the "chronolyse" indicates observation of a particular space (in this case the text of the *Introduction*) through time, a function that the marginalia, indicators of ideological shifts, permit.<sup>11</sup> Valéry's obsession with the idea of spatio-temporal reciprocity as a metaphor of mental functioning is evident in the number of marginal allusions to the subject throughout the three da Vinci essays and in the body of the post-Einsteinian texts. Attempting to elucidate the continuousness, or reciprocity, of Leonardo's method of creation using the recently popularized Einsteinian

conception of space-time, Valéry notes in the margin of the *Introduction*: “Le travail de sa pensée appartient, par tout ceci, à cette lente transformation de la notion de l’espace—qui d’une *chambre vide*, d’un volume isotrope, est devenu peu à peu un système inséparable de la matière qu’il *contient* et du temps” (I: 1177). Here Valéry brings across the idea of Leonardo’s mind-as-space by opposing his intellect, which functions identically to the modern conception of reciprocal space-time and matter, to nineteenth-century spatio-temporal and mental disparity. The conception of spatio-temporal subjectivity that, after Einstein’s discovery, left the domain of pure science and permeated the common *Weltanschauung*, also colors the *Introduction*’s margins: “L’espace de la pratique ordinaire n’est pas tout à fait celui du physicien qui n’est pas tout à fait celui du géomètre. Car ce ne sont pas *toutes* les mêmes expériences ou opérations qui les définissent” (I: 1191). In the preceding statement, Valéry extrapolates a disciplinary subjectivity from the differing experiences of space-time that result from alterations in the position and speed of the observer. Thus do the marginalia, by lending formal and thematic continuity to the group of essays, serve to emphasize the foremost leitmotif of the da Vinci essays: the Pöean conception of a continuous system of mind and the world that Valéry adopted from *Eureka* and bolstered with contemporary scientific theory.

Holly Gilbert

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This excerpt comes from Chapter 1, Section B (91-110) of the Ph.D. dissertation of Holly Gilbert, *System and Intellect: Science and Imagination in the Valéryan Oeuvre* (2004).

Minor changes to this section were made for the purpose of clarity. These include corrections in punctuation, minimal editing where appropriate on a few sentences, the inclusion of some dates of publication of cited texts by Valéry and of full names where only the last name was initially used, and for the purpose of publication, adjustments to the text's method of documentation. I would like to thank Anne Gilbert for her kind permission to publish this portion of her daughter's dissertation and Julie Masi whose help and support have been invaluable. *Editor's note.*

<sup>2</sup> See Valéry, "Au sujet d'*Eureka*" (I: 854-67). All quotations from Valéry are from *Oeuvres*, volumes I and II of the Pléiade edition. *Editor's note.*

<sup>3</sup> Valéry wrote two additional texts on da Vinci, *L'oeuvre écrite de Léonard de Vinci* (in *Oeuvres* I; 1939) and a forward to a new French translation of da Vinci's *Quaderni* (in *Oeuvres* I; 1942), which are generally considered less important than those mentioned above and will thus not be analyzed here.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the similarities of Valéry's and Schwob's projects, see Dominique Jullien's "Vie imaginaire de Léonard de Vinci" (1996).

<sup>5</sup> For further information on Poean elements in the *Introduction*, see Henri Peyre's "Edgar Allan Poe and Twentieth-Century French Poetry: Paul Valéry" (1980), Lois-David Vines's *Valéry and Poe: A Literary Legacy* (1992), and Reino Virtanen's "Poe's *Eureka* in France from Baudelaire to Valéry" (1982); see also, Jeanine Jallat's *Introduction aux figures valéryennes (imaginaire et théorie)* (74-9; 1982) and Tsunejiro Tanji's "La marge de l'intellect: essai sur la logique imaginative de Paul Valéry" (78-81; 1968).

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<sup>6</sup> For a more complete description of *logique imaginative* and Poean consistency, refer to pages 15-16 of my dissertation.

<sup>7</sup> While Schmidt-Radefeldt is certainly correct in insisting upon their importance, the marginalia's self-reflexive function duplicates aspects of the main body of texts, written earlier, that serve an identical purpose; in *Note et digression*, Valéry admits to using the idea of da Vinci to conceal his own deficiencies: "je ne trouvai pas mieux que d'attribuer à l'infortuné Léonard mes propres agitations, transportant le désordre de mon esprit à la complexité du sien. Je lui infligeai tous mes désirs à titre de choses possédées" (I: 1232), he writes. For further information on Schmidt-Radefeldt's interpretation of the marginalia's role, refer to his article "Randnotizen in Valéry's Epoche des Leonardo" (1991).

<sup>8</sup> While Karl-Alfred Blüher points out that there exists a similar impersonal style of writing in both Valéry's *Cahiers* and da Vinci's *Quaderni* ("Leonardo da Vincis *Quaderni* und Paul Valéry's *Cahiers*" 91), Jacques Duchesne-Guillemain disagrees as to their ultimate likeness: in Valéry's case the drawings in his *Cahiers* have little to do with their text, which is untrue for da Vinci ("Léonard de Vinci dans les *Cahiers* de Paul Valéry" 712).

<sup>9</sup> For further scholarship on Vincian-Valéryan scholarship, consult Daniel Moutote's "Einführung in die Methode des Leonardo da Vinci: Einführung in die Methode Paul Valéry's" (1991), René Huyge's "Leonardo da Vinci und Paul Valéry" (1991), and Bernad J. Gonsior's "Nachdenken von Valéry über des Denken in seiner Leonardo-Welt" (1999).

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of Valéry's Zenonian and Pythagorean tendencies, refer to pages 62-8 of my dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> Valéry defines this chronolyse as “analyse en très petites unités de temps” (II: 1457). For an analysis of the concept of chronolyse from a differing perspective, see Suzanne Guerlac, “Valéry—chronolyse” (17).

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# Violence, Disaster and the Crisis of Representation

*Paroles Gelées*  
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Selected Proceedings from  
the Twelfth Annual UCLA Department of  
French and Francophone Studies  
Graduate Student Conference  
October 25 and 26, 2007



# ***Paroles Gelées***

**UCLA French Studies**

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici  
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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Holly Anne Gilbert

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