

Article

“Time is Production”: Process-Art, and Aesthetic Time in Paul Valéry’s *Cahiers*

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Abstract: This paper offers a contextually inflected discussion of the extensive investment Paul Valéry makes in going beyond formal understandings of time. To this end it takes the processual work *Cahiers* as both a repository of insights, and a practical motor of conceptual creation for new time concepts through its very writing and production. In a speculative engagement with Valérian concepts such as phase, prolongation as well as reconfigured relations between central categorical pairings such as quality-quantity and succession-simultaneity, the paper situates Valéry’s writings on time with regard to their ambiguously critical attitude to a given image of philosophy as a form of verbal exercise ungrounded in empirical observation of local systems.

Keywords: rhythm; phase; incompleteness; form; meontology; simultaneity

The French writer and poet Paul Valéry is a figure often associated with an antiphilosophical stance on many questions, mainly because of the way philosophy often seems to him to offer expedient understandings for a series of concepts such as time, space, and finality—to name a few among explicit objects of Valéry’s criticisms—without taking proper care to restrict the use of its terms. In response, his proclivities generally lead him to depart from carefully delineated local and experimental settings and contexts, bespeaking an insistence on submitting concepts to empirical verifiability. On the other hand, it is no accident that Valéry has become a vital point of reference for an impressive range of philosophers, representing among them a whole contemporary scene in its actuality and prehistory: Critical theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno both regarded the writer highly, devoting considerable attention to his views on craftsmanship and aesthetic production.¹ In a parallel way, the writer’s nuanced understanding of the somatic dimension of aesthetics offered extensive overlaps with phenomenological inquiries into art and corporeity, as in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Eye and Mind* (Merleau-Ponty 2007). Finally, Valéry’s formalist streak—exemplified in forays into morphogenesis and topology—continues to prove inspiring for contemporary thinkers invested in philosophies of formalization.²

The antithesis at work in Valéry’s attraction of serious philosophical interest despite his occasional self-styling as antiphilosophical may be no accident, especially if a tendency to generative antitheses can be taken as a philosophically significant characteristic in a thinker. That Valéry’s hesitations between rational control and chance, life and mechanical models, as well his general taste for paradox may not be philosophically indifferent quirks was duly noted by Adorno: “If there is anything at all that may still lay claim to the name of philosophy, it is such antitheses. By leaving them unreconciled, thought expresses its own limits” (Adorno 1992). A provisional solution, given this charged confusion caused by different understandings of what philosophy means, might be to accept a characterization

¹ See (Benjamin 2007; Adorno 1992).

² Cf. (Karatani 2001; Zalamea 2016).

that seems less contestable: Valéry is a thinker who sets himself problems and thought experiments,³ and these problems span philosophy, literature and numerous other discourses, often resulting in effective fictions that have relevance for many at once.

In this particular engagement with Valéry's work, the possible relations between literature and philosophy are to be taken up with a particular reference to the question of time. Valéry makes much of the wide range of relations between form and time, according to which "instant engenders form, form makes the instant visible" (Valéry 1989, p. 58). The consequences of this conjoining between time and form did not escape Isabelle Stengers and Ilya Prigogine, who, among so many others, enlisted Valéry in their bid to reintroduce emergence and radical historical irreversibility into the manner of working of the sciences at large, affirming with him that "time is construction" (Prigogine and Stengers 1988, p. 17). In the following, the equation "time is production" (Valéry 2001) is to be unpacked both in terms of its theoretical implications and the way it emerges out of a practice of writing, especially the writing of Valéry's *Cahiers*, which is one of the most singular cases in the 20th century art of a desistance from the autonomous finitude of a traditional work in favor of the potential richness of a processual mode of working.

Cahiers is a work that has an ambiguous status regarding any possible category of literariness, seeming to serve as a research diary, essay collection, and an encyclopedia at once. Perhaps, it finds its only real company alongside other equally unclassifiable works of world literature such as Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, and Novalis' *Allgemeine Brouillon*. The transformations in consciousness and subjectivity Valéry describes and enacts throughout the *Cahiers* find their medium in performative formalization and production, while his work of formalization is such that with its analytical fervor and recombinatory linkings provides a favorable site for rich interplays between discontinuity and continuity, ultimately tracing an arc that ties aesthetics or poetics with an adventurous metaphysics of time that does not speak its name. Against this background, this paper will pursue two interrelated concerns: First it will address the paradox that makes it possible that despite an open hostility to philosophy Valéry can still end up creating a number of time concepts that might have relevance for philosophy; next, it will inquire more extensively into the specific form of this contribution, which depends on an alignment of aesthetic production (*poesis*) with a characterization of time as such.

In a notebook entry Valéry mentioned his desire to eliminate "the entity of Time (as philosophers conceive it)" (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 262), making a tentative proposal to replace it with apparently more easily verifiable categories such as "transformation" and "conservation". Rather than referring to a project such as abolishing the reality of time along the lines of the Mallarméan attempt at an abolition of chance, he was referring to time as a concept, in this sense only affirming his long-established eliminationist tendencies with regard to philosophy.⁴ Nevertheless, even if Valéry's thought and style of discourse are positioned in ambivalent exteriority to philosophy, and by implication in exteriority to a philosophy of time, it is undeniable that his work offers serious engagements with a variety of questions that have occupied European philosophies of time since the Pre-Socratics, not to mention attempts at formulating fresh questions of his own, concerning notions such as rhythm, repetition as well as the perception of change. For this reason, in order to approach Valéry's direct derivations of a new description of the experience of time from his experience of making, characterizing his general approach to time and his related attitudes toward important interlocutors and precedents such as Bergson and Kant might be necessary. This is not to say, however, that what will occupy us here will be hunting his dialogic sources.

Cahiers emerge out of an already vibrant and polyvocal context. When Valéry starts to interrogate and recoup established philosophical categories and antitheses such as simultaneity and succession or quality and quantity, or when he sets out to determine the place of a functioning body not only in

³ On this question Jed Deppman's work on what he characterizes as the M. Teste thought experiment, and its possible relations to phenomenology is instructive.

⁴ Cf. Jacques Bouveresse's article "Philosophy from an Antiphilosopher: Paul Valéry".

the perception but also the constitution of time, he very much situates himself in the company of a host of other contemporary figures such as Bergson, Whitehead, Husserl, Einstein, and Minkowski. On the other hand, in a company such as this, what is singular in Valéry's work should not be missed either: Only at the juncture where his inquiries into time turn out to be inextricably linked to his poetic concern with the making of form and creation of effects, does Valéry's thought on temporality come into its own. The reverse claim has validity too: that form in *Cahiers* can only be fully appreciated with reference to its functions in modulating temporality. Thus, under the general heading of time, it is possible to follow at least two simultaneous pathways across this work: one that departs from an engagement with time to arrive at an enriched understanding of the nascency of form, and conversely, one that departs from form to arrive at an enriched concept of time in its own right. This paper will travel these paths successively. For now, let us note that what is at stake in the coexistence of these directions of thought in Valéry is nothing less than the complementary possibilities of a poetic time that is not merely subjective, and a time-as-such thought on the basis of its original openings to poetic scansion, rhythm and production. What is more, these pathways and their complementarity in the economy of Valéry's work, also point to a search for a new conception of the aesthetic in a bid to overcome its division between a discourse bearing on the conditions of possible experience, and a practice bearing on the conditions of real experience.⁵

1. From Kantian Time to Time as Local System

Although Valéry's engagements with Kant do not amount to an exhausting critical account or even lengthily elaborated explanations for disagreement, it is still possible to isolate certain objections he raises by way of an entry to his particular account of time at large. Valéry imputes generally to Kant's epistemology and particularly his account of time a certain deficiency in fulfilling criteria regarding observation, experience, and an awareness of language. For instance, he makes an objection to Kant's distinction between the form of judgements as synthetic and analytic a priori/a posteriori, arguing that the said distinction conceals "an even earlier problem, the very existence of JUDGEMENT as such" (Valéry 2001, vol. 5, p. 131). If the problem of the emergence of judgement is restored to its necessary connections with the possibility in a "gain in knowledge" that is essentially "expansive", Valéry's remark can be better appreciated as a gesture toward the relation between invention and knowing, with all the implications for a notation that discovers vis-a-vis a notation that merely transcribes/translates. Put otherwise, by questioning judgement Valéry may also be highlighting the contingent genealogy of the philosophical fixation on propositional identity, thus tracing a curve from a logic proper to an ontology of time.

In a similar vein, Valéry seems uncomfortable around Kant's binding of knowledge and "functioning" (in Valéry's account a term corresponding to a physio-neurologically based and expanded account of messily interrelated physical/mental faculties and responsive task capacities) in a predetermined "table" of categories. Finally, in a criticism that carries the real burden of Valéry's disagreement, he refers to Kant's "failure to consider language" (Valéry 2001, vol. 5, p. 341). In fact, the problem of language dominates Valéry's most references to Kant and extends especially to his view of time, amounting to a general reproach that Kant smuggles in an unquestioned—"fiduciary"—metaphysics by relying on his definitions of time and space as nonphenomenal forms of sensibility: "Kant says that space and time are 'forms of sensibility', which means something only as a negation of other theses—but to say form and to say sensibility isn't to

⁵ In a celebrated passage of his *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze brought a clarity of philosophical kind to the significance of the duality or splitting of the aesthetic between conditions of real and possible experience, thereby indirectly corroborating Valéry's preoccupations: "Aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience. For these two meanings to be tied together, the conditions of experience in general must become conditions of real experience; in this case, the work of art would really appear as experimentation" (Deleuze 1990, p. 260).

say anything positive at all—that is less clear even than just sticking to space and time and altogether less useful” (Valéry 2001, vol. 5, p. 350). Aside from a detailed excavation of the reasons for these reservations, it should rather be possible to read the outlines of Valéry’s main strategies about time in the negative here: a revalorization and redefinition of the role of sensation in experiences of time; the place of the physiological or organological as a naturalized and intraphenomenal form of time-keeping; an expanded and more differentiated armature of concepts borrowed from various sources such as thermodynamics, physiology and biology (thus an emphasis on exact language); and a correlated drive to locate modest observational loci and cases of experimentation (something “positive”) before any declaration on what constitutes time in a nonphenomenal sense. Consequently, more than an interlocutor or a dialogic source in his own right, Kant might have played a role of instructive contrast in the development of Valéry’s approach to time.

In a sense, Valéry’s search for observational and descriptive accuracy, as expressed in his criticism of Kant, is significant also because it allows us to witness a somewhat antiphilosophical impulse—“philosophers are concerned with time. They defend this territory. It seems easier to hold forth on time—without restriction” (Valéry 2001, vol. 5, p. 264)—in Valéry leading to supporting a more experimental and performative bent in his thinking. Instead of an anti-theoretical consequence however, the performative does lead to a theory. As it will be seen shortly, ironically, it is partly because Valéry insists on avoiding what he takes as vague definitions, and aims to supply his declarations with their observational counterparts in kind, that he may end up with what itself looks like a speculative stance on time, namely one that merges an interrogation of temporality with an inquiry into the events of a somatically based aesthetics, which is ultimately the domain of Valéry’s most significant observations on transformation and becoming generally. Apparently, the abandonment of mere expediency in communication, or undoing the reliance on current words has a productive valence for Valéry, opening the way for invention, which involves a proliferation in the expressions, notations and even “concepts” of time in this case. Moreover, parallel to the overlaps between experiment and exercise that typify his work, Valéry’s paradoxical exhortation to analytical rigor works equally in the service of the very thing whose potential disorder it is supposed to mitigate: sensibility.

A prominent feature of Valéry’s understanding of time is that, instead of assuming a universal and absolute time to find it applicable in individually localized set-ups later, it always starts from the closure of an observably local functional cycle that is capable of undergoing transformations and modulations. In this abstract sense the vision of time compatible with Valéry’s functionalism is also one that accommodates his perspectivism, a perspectivism that is not limited to human subjectivities, but in principle includes abiotic materials and living things at large. In illustration, take Valéry’s interpretation of biological time: “The dynamic structure of plants reminds us that our ideas of life and death go back to an era when we had no idea of functioning—something machines make us think about. Living beings are based on a cycle, or rather on a system of cycles and epicycles—of which they are only vaguely aware—Sometimes these cycles are easily linked to astronomical cycles—and the general idea of time is introduced—as ‘Order of the world’. However, time is particular to each system and each functioning, of which it is the vague name” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 146).⁶

As a corollary of this functional and operational conceptualization of time, Valéry is led to expanding the role of somato-sensory physiological systems in the human time perception too. In a passage that bears quoting at length, he writes:

To say that the moving object O moves according to time, is to say that perception of O is conserved by means of a modification of something independent of it, and yet that modification depends on perception of it; and finally since this modification excludes all

⁶ To his credit, Valéry’s abstract considerations also position him to conceive the possibility of a time beyond human consciousness, displaying a fascination shared by people like Jacob Von Uexküll, William James, Henri Michaux and Vilém Flusser: “How does an animal experience time?” (Valéry 2001, p. 324).

others . . . Then the time in question becomes a partial perception, or rather a sensible part of the perceived modification—as e.g., the sensation of breathing in, of taking into the nostrils, is a part of the sensation of a smell—and the change in sensation is a function of the change in breathing in. From which we must conclude: There is no such thing as time separate from other things—On the contrary!—There is no time except as there is difference,—contrast. (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 399)

It bears noting that although it may look like Valéry is making time dependent on movement in Aristotelian fashion, or even worse, seems to be reducing it to its subjective repercussions and perceptions, it is possible to maintain that he does neither. Here the importance of the generic lexicon used cannot be overstated. Just as Valéry did not require the plant to observe its own cycles to make its prefunctional growth a partial inductive basis for the human concept of time, here there are only modifications, framings and partial events without any assumptions about a constitutively subjective thematizing; the body, on the other hand, is only one of the events participating in the potentially obscure loops of functions reciprocally taking each other into account. It is against a generic level such as this that Valéry's conviction that "time is no such thing as separate from other things" gains intelligibility. In other words, instead of being a transcendental principle beyond experience and setting a parameter for it, time is not separate from the becoming of real things and their functions, but a variable coextensive with them. No wonder, the passage arrives at a thought of *difference* and *contrast* with a fertile and indeterminately broad area of relevance. Before discussing how this vision of system-bound time of local singularity may inform and in turn be informed by Valéry's investment in somatic conditions of sensibility, a comparison is necessary to drive home the main consequences involved.

Valéry's engagement with Kant as a contemporaneous element of his own attempts at a layered description of temporal experience may be no coincidence, since Kant's formal construal of time often prompts critiques from philosophical endeavors that resist the derivation of time from mere succession. Two examples are especially relevant here. For reasons that will be apparent later, both examples come from figures who prize rhythm as an irreducible aspect of the experience of time in its own right. By way of the first example, I take A. N. Whitehead, whose particular engagement with relativistic physics led him to a notion he called "epochal duration", which has a significant affinity with Valéry's notion of time as a coextensive variable, immanently built-in to the structure of events.

In affirming that "the epochal duration is not realized via its *successive* divisible parts, but is given with its parts" (Whitehead 1948, p. 128), Whitehead certainly wanted to establish temporality on the basis of the coherence and the internal patterns of the events of nature and radical experience without any separate transcendental timekeeping, ultimately ruling out any conception of time as another continuous process, metrically accompanying what is happening, be this conception a Newtonian absolute time, or a more indirect subordination of irreversibility and becoming to the geometry of space-time, as in Einstein: "temporalisation is realisation. Temporalisation is not another continuous process. It is an atomic succession. Thus, time is, atomic (i.e., epochal), though what is temporalised is divisible" (Whitehead 1948, pp. 128–29). Significantly, Whitehead's arrival at a notion of "time qua realisation" was already prepared by an earlier foray into the irreducible character of rhythmicity in the temporality of the living: "Life (as known to us) involves the completion of rhythmic parts within the life-bearing event that exhibits that object. We can diminish the time-parts, and, if the rhythms be unbroken, still discover the same object of life in the curtailed event. However, if the diminution of the duration be carried to the extent of breaking the rhythm, the life-bearing object is no longer to be found as a quality of the slice of the original event cut off within that duration" (Whitehead 1919, p. 196). In a parallel way, Valéry would write of rhythm that it is "divisible artificially physically; it is no longer so, functionally" (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 325): "The notion of division is misleading in the case of rhythm, which is the sense of a mode of action that constructs -and in that 'construction', THE SAID 'FEELING' ARISES, and there is a sort of reciprocity" (ibid., p. 390).

As we will see, Valéry's nonmetric time will also find a necessary unfolding in a consideration of rhythm. To come to my second example, it is an insight from philosophy of music and, in terms of the manner of its derivation, provides a much closer affinity with Valéry's mode of thinking. Victor Zuckerkandl, whose own conceptualization of time also found a departure in a thinking of rhythm, made a critique of a formal time in very much the same terms as Valéry: "Anyone who thought that he could arrive at time by thinking away everything that is in time, the moving things, the sense perceptions that crowd upon us, our feelings, all the concrete content of our consciousness, and retaining 'only the form,' would be in for a rude awakening; with the things that are in time, time itself would have slipped through his fingers" (Zuckerkandl 1973, p. 204). Thus, looking back to Whitehead, a patterned order of sound events would not be accompanied and subject to counting by a metric time with uniform spaces, but hold in store a temporal variable coextensive with the *realization* of sounds in whatever irregular spacing: "We observe an oscillation, an accumulation—and this oscillation, this accumulation, is time . . . we see tree trunks moved, bridge piles subjected to pressure, soil carried away and deposited—but there is no water, the stream bed is empty" (ibid., p. 208). Or as Valéry puts it: "There is no such thing as time in general. There are only the times belonging to systems" (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 386).

Coming from very different antecedents and harboring different motives, the three thinkers nevertheless seem to reach an agreement around an originally heteroclitic and realization-coextensive temporality, the crucial experiment of which is unbreakable rhythmicity, or a vision of locally structured wholes given with their parts as well as intervals. Some important consequences and further questions follow from this first critical feature of Valéry's understanding of time. The first thing to note is the decisive contribution of this understanding—what I call "heteroclitic"—of time to the ultimate equation between time and production. Only a time that is immanent and co-belonging with realization can be equivalent to production. However, equally significant is the demand this feature places on Valéry in terms of conceiving time on the basis of a physiologically functioning, differentially equipped body among all the other possible cyclically functioning local systems—a chronosomatism. Emphatically, this body is not an anatomical but a "real body", suffusing the functions of consciousness and even the I (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 257). The system of functions at the disposal of Valéry's observations; the system also responsible for the same observations, radiates from his own body, if treated in a sufficiently impersonal regime. Thus, "the body is the clock of the present" (ibid., p. 252).

Furthermore, the composition of the body involves internal heterogeneities, ultimately raising the possibility that endogenous disparity⁷ or disjunction may be the condition of any unitary temporal experience, a disparity in deep complicity with the central role played by rhythm in Valéry's attitude to time: "The perception of duration is due to the difference between the state of a sensible part of the body and the state in which it ought to be (less or not at all sensible) in order to maintain its equilibrium with the sensibility of the whole" (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 377). Thus, everything happens as if at the base of bodily time there is a certain nexus of local disparities that get leveled more or less efficiently in their integration to the whole, and here as elsewhere difference, tension and what Valéry calls "intervals" are paramount: "The various constituents of the living being are not in the same 'epoch' or phase" (ibid., p. 393). In other words, the living being is composed of multiple phases in any given moment.

In these remarks Valéry builds on his earlier insights that found the experience of time on an ensemble of relations between the world, the mind and the body (a body with the contribution of all its relatively peripheral extensions instead of being identified with the dream of a neuronal island). According to Valéry's implicit scheme with energetic underpinnings, the overcharging of any psycho-physiological locus with excess stimuli is always bound up with changes in the perception

⁷ Valéry writes, "every action or modification is a form of disparity—(of distribution)—opposed to a general parity and freedom of the system of Being. Return to parity is a fundamental necessity—and is expressed, in sensibility, by a force opposed to that which by local stimulation created the disparity" (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 389).

of time, such that the perception of time in its own right becomes inextricable from the state of these localities, whether they be “in hesitation before urinating” or in a “pause before sneeze” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 71). Moreover, if Valéry’s attentiveness to the insensibilities of automatism and habit is remembered in this specific context, it is easy to imagine that he would not separate ordinary experience of time from the sedimented attunements and capacities of an individual body inasmuch as they would trail skewed insensibilities with them: the “less or not at all sensible”. Although extreme perhaps, the foregoing examples are totally consistent with Valéry’s main argument about the essential place of the peripheral body in the sense of time: “The muscular component of ourselves, in so far as we feel it, is the most important sense—the one whose properties are at the root of our ‘time, space, power’, etc. [. . .]” (ibid., p. 198).

What the process of the composition of a work of art can introduce to this sense of an intrinsically heterogeneous bodily time is not beyond speculation either. In the invocation to his body, Valéry’s architect Eupalinos enjoins it to furnish his intelligence “with thy presences, with thy demands, with thy local ties” (Valéry 1989, p. 91), presumably for enabling access to a sensible harmony that needs the body’s direct participation to be realized. As Eupalinos confesses, “how strange soever it may appear to you, it seems to me my body is playing its part in the game” (Valéry 1989, p. 89). Therefore, it can be argued that in the empirical setting of the process of poetic making, the emerging work is also involved with the system on the basis of which it makes sense to speak of time. This is why Valéry’s self-bestowed label “formism” (*Idée Fixe*) equally implies a “verbal materialism” (“*Calepin d’un poète*”), not leaving much room for a hylomorphic organization of materials from a center such as consciousness to which everything will be referred.⁸

2. The First Case of Reciprocity between the Successive and the Simultaneous: Rhythm

A second consequence of Valéry’s critique of a formal notion of time and succession with no reciprocal envelopment with the “realization” of systems and functions is his revaluation of simultaneity in the context of rhythm and what generally went by the name of “association” in the psychology with which he was contemporary. In fact, in a way that anticipates Gilbert Simondon’s theory of reflexive consciousness as a field of reciprocity between simultaneity and succession,⁹ Valéry seems to make much of states defined by a reciprocity or “correspondence” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 313) between the simultaneous and the successive. The avoidance of a metrically formal succession as a model of time finds an alignment with a countercharge of simultaneity in Valéry.

Rhythm is the most important of these states of reciprocity, but there are other avatars for it, such as form-gesture translations—“A pitted surface can be represented by mimicking the action of small hammer blows” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 324)—webs/groups of association, and what Valéry variously calls “chrono-topological agglutination” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 217), or “additivity”, since only a simultaneity can “add” up moments: “time is summation—additive process. In addition, we are an additive process” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 377). Calling for a revision of the philosophical categories of the successive and the simultaneous in the instance of rhythm, Valéry remarks, “Perhaps the usual division of time relations is inadequate. We limit it to the successive and the simultaneous. [. . .] In rhythm, the successive has some of the properties of the simultaneous. It is a succession of moments, although these moments are separate—nevertheless their sequence can occur in one manner only. [. . .] Between antecedent and subsequent events, there are links as if all the terms were simultaneous and present, but appeared only sequentially” (ibid., p. 324).

⁸ If this were not so it would be hard to account for the various places where Valéry talks about the experience of the work of making and receiving as the “fragments of an alien time”, intimating an almost inhuman drift only possible through the consistency of a process of making.

⁹ Simondon writes, “We do not want to affirm [. . .] that a radical distinction exists between the order of the biological and the order of the psychological; by hypothesis only, we say that pure biological reality is constituted by a nonreciprocity of relation between the domain of the simultaneous and that of the successive, whereas psychological reality is precisely the instauration of this reciprocity which one can give the name reflection” (Simondon 2005, p. 277).

Benedetta Zaccarello rightly located in this “co-belonging and impossibility [. . .] of the successive and the simultaneous” (Zaccarello 2013) a defining characteristic of the poetics of *Cahiers* in particular and Valéry’s work at large, thus drawing attention to this juncture as one of the most important in determining the Valérian nexus between time and form. To mention some of the reasons why Valéry is interested in the correspondence between simultaneity and successiveness as exemplified by rhythm and “addition”: first, it seems to offer a model to grasp the creative and dynamic incompleteness of thoughts in linking with, altering and charging each other; secondly, it represents a deployment of the resources of the organism that is at home with the prolongation—a keyword in Valéry—of attention against the greater odds of its dissipation; and in the final instance, it is more accommodating of the kind of order-emergent-from-disorder Valéry assumes to be a significant aspect of poetic acts of making: “Our sense of duration is linked to the difference in state between a part and a whole, and to the preservation of that difference, that inequality. Then addition occurs—or rather accumulation, increase, and no longer substitution through equal exchanges” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 157). Thus, the simultaneous or, rather, a rhythmic addition understood in the sense of a *simultaneity of the heterogeneous in the successive*, not only becomes a theoretical case of great interest bearing on time, but also emerges as something Valéry actively tries to bring about in his poetics: “Creation of the simultaneous = creation of the significant. Permanence-discontinuous addition” (ibid., p. 286).

Functioning as a mediating node between the two main dimensions of Valéry’s work that are the exercises and becomings vs. the experiments, models or methods, as well as between the two movements of time-to-form and form-to-time traversed in this paper, the simultaneous in this richer and almost dialectical sense is also associated with what holds salience or significance in sensory, affective as well as intellectual terms, acting as the currency of pregnant psychic ingressions—and in the long run the unequal exchanges of dehabituating. The consequence of a conception of time as realization and precarious consistency of an addition, it sheds an instructive light on essentially non-sclerotic attunements and modes of being sought by Valéry as an outcome of his exercises.

As to the expansively additive aspect Valéry highlights in association with rhythm, *Cahiers* are especially well poised to illuminate its mode of action. In the notebooks, the experiences of prolongation, forgetting and becoming that cling to the making of the individual entries surely correspond to an experience of addition, offering a model for Valéry’s reflection on rhythmicity. However, the entries do this not only in terms of their juxtaposed parts, but also by allowing and preparing an active role for the very intervals that individuate them and discriminate them as phases. Since what is added also involves determinate intervals and absences—the difference of addition being equally a subtraction—*Cahiers* provide a good example of what Barbara Stafford helpfully calls a “gapped configuration that undercuts automaticity” (Stafford 2009, p. 153).

3. Quality

The particular pairing and intertwining of succession and simultaneity in Valéry’s work raises the question of that other pairing relevant to experiences and descriptions of time: quality and quantity, as well as the associated notions of measure and energy. In a correlated way, from Whitehead’s reference to divisibility onward, a certain question has also been looming regarding whether what amounts to a plea for irreducibility of time to mere succession is equivalent to an endorsement of the Bergsonian experience of duration on Valéry’s part. Certain entries in *Cahiers* may create this impression in their emphases on the radical irreducibility of rhythm: “Experiment: It is impossible to think a rhythm. Keep quite still and try to imagine a rhythm. Impossible. I’ve seen someone think he could do it and beat out the rhythm with his eyelids. Or by twitches in the muscles around the mouth” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 379). Especially significant is the way experiences of quality such as color get associated with an ostensible independence from perception of time: “A sound and a temperature do not, of themselves, become classified as ‘before, after’” (ibid., p. 400). Here it seems Valéry conceives the relationship between certain sensory givens and time as an organization between different layers of

process, the senses being able to manifest in a relative independence from a temporality of succession. Consequently, he can write about “the indivisibility of an experience of color” (ibid., p. 394).

However, in a way that corrects this stratification that recognizes an *atemporal quality*, there is in Valéry an important notion that makes the experience of time itself a matter of quality: phase. Having its origin in Valéry’s “soft spot for analogies with physics and mechanics” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 295), most importantly Josiah Willard Gibbs’s statistical mechanics, phase describes a space-time section of a system or a group of functions: “My old theory of phases was good, productive” wrote Valéry in 1929, continuing to explain: “[. . .] Consisted of observing that an individual’s possibilities varied with the moment—that the outcomes of the same stimulation were not the same at T_a as at T_b , that the time taken to assemble them internally was limited; that as a result, in each of these phases a degree of freedom had to be taken into account—conditions of connectivity and conditions of energy . . . ” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 162). Thus, sleep (as a shutting down of the responsiveness to exterior stimuli), alertness, fatigue, and finally a seemingly more intellectual state of “unequal exchange” or receptivity open to new thought formations can all be determined in terms of the different phases that limit and make them possible: “it [phase] indicates in short a state of possibilities of all kinds (and the impossibilities that these possibilities can engender), some modifications being *immediately* feasible, others requiring a change of phase which is sometimes *abrupt* (i.e., perceptible), and sometimes modulated: an abrupt awakening, a gradual awakening” (ibid., p. 216). Although based on very simple principles—“Short times are not of the same nature as long times. They differ profoundly in quality” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 387)—phase nevertheless serves Valéry in making minute classifications between different states of possibility and affordance in the psychological domain.

Moreover, as a category of quality, phase is not at odds with quantity and energy, and the states it differentiates depart from a community of energetic/quantitative resources. According to Valéry, every structured ability/faculty can have various phases defining its readiness to response, level of cultivation or dormancy, the phase providing a temporal marker that brings specificity to Valéry’s longstanding interest in the categories of psycho-organic possibility. Here too the logic of Valéry’s thinking shows a certain level of spontaneously dialectical intricacy: just as he is capable of conceiving an embodied skill informing a competence for abstraction, and a simultaneity of the heterogeneous activated in the successive, here the quality that is a phase is bound up with quantity.

In its necessary links with Valéry’s adoption of a thermodynamic understanding of energy, phase significantly brings to his theories of time a certain quality of irreversibility not directly derivable from part-whole relations and other echoes or evocations of Gestalt so predominant in his writings on rhythm. Finally, in a pragmatic inflection, phase seems to find its own when it is used to describe an inadequacy or inability to assimilate/anticipate closely related to invention or a new and surprising connection: “The new fact finds no place within the frame of the given (energetic or specialized) phase. Finding no outlet, the energy dissipates through all kinds of disorder—or, on the contrary, is everywhere insufficient” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 191). Thus, perhaps one of the most instructive scenarios for the use of this concept is where a phase responsible for producing a form is in its turn transformed and “dephased” by its unanticipated product, indicating the generative capacity of the work of art itself.

These features of Valéry’s understanding of time instanced in the notion of the phase may also help open up the question of his relation to the philosophy of Henri Bergson. The public history of this relation is marked by hasty assimilations between the two, which in turn prompted critics like Judith Robinson to highlight unbridgeable divergences, following Valéry’s lead: “I never pronounced the word ‘becoming’, and all infinitism is my enemy” (Qtd. in Robinson 1965, p. 205). For the purposes of this study, which makes no claim to resolve this tension, proposing a specific rapprochement is in order. Bergson’s philosophy cannot but involve a decisive qualification to Valéry’s blanket statements about the philosophers’ time. While the way Valéry counters the encroachments of an abstractly divisible time may be different than Bergson’s, the very fact of difference indicates a common field of concerns involving measure, intensity, and quality. Particularly, Valéry’s penchant for cases where

quality—in the sense of relational irreplaceability for determinate tasks—itself would be informed by quantity—fatigue, attention, tension, dissipation of attention—certainly has something in common with Bergson’s preoccupations with intensity and gradation.¹⁰

To sum up the points made so far, notwithstanding Valéry’s more “nominalist” and experimental approach that aims to deny content to the philosophical concept of time in the service of providing a more far-reaching role to the unique elements of his research like a somaesthetic dimension and energy-Gestalt complementarity, the cumulative picture obtained from his understanding of time and *times* carries a great deal of resemblance to a formulation provided by a philosopher like Jean Wahl: “It is no more times, but the events that succeed or precede one another, and are contemporaries with each other. If time is quality, it is the quality of these events” (Wahl 1968, p. 308).

4. A Principle of Virtuality

At this juncture that connects the two movements of time to form and form to time, the decisive shift of perspective has a bearing on language and notation, and their position with regard to time.

An early version of a time-form relation in Valéry depends on straightforward objectification and thematization of the temporal, even raising the possibility of an “elimination” of time from the notations that would serve as its representation. The temptation may make sense on the basis of the specific difficulties time poses for representation. Ernst Cassirer once observed that “the precise distinction and designation of time relations present language with a far more difficult and complex problem than the development of its spatial conceptions and terms”, especially since basic temporal determinations like antecedence or succession “are never, like things of objective intuition, given to the consciousness simultaneously” (Cassirer 1975, p. 215). Cassirer thinks this aspect of the relation between time and representation puts operations of differentiation and combination in a particularly privileged position in signifying time. Valéry’s early interests take a largely similar direction regarding the relation between time and its possible semiotic inscriptions.

In a *Cahiers* entry dated 1906, Valéry wrote, “The knowledge and power relating to a particular person may be considered either as instantaneous or over time, whether the period is definite or indefinite . . . According to whether the particular form of representation which can be effected through language or any other means (limitation) either does or does not eliminate the aspect of time. The whole set of possible systems of notation can be viewed as either taking account of the properties of time or not” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 42). In this entry combining a sense of time detachable from the events and realizations that would fulfill it, with a concomitant promise of time-free representation, Valéry provides a model of notation that would precisely not lend itself to a “labor of dehabituating”¹¹ as he came to designate it later. In this sense, he also invites an inquiry concerning what other modes of connection between time and notation can be obtained from his writings to do justice to this “labor”, especially considering how his reflections on time found a culmination in the affirmation that “time is production”. It becomes especially worthwhile to establish how Valéry moved from a notation that ideally objectifies time to a notation that itself becomes a temporal object, or better, an event and “edification”. In other words, it is necessary to understand how a consideration of “work” may become

¹⁰ Another important axis for comparison would involve the different attitudes to language at play in their respective works, which would make for a juxtaposition in terms of the status of the word and other preferred forms of representation: image, fragment, metrology, and poem. Here perhaps the divergences are more pronounced, and can be summed up as a conflict over the status of formal abstractions. In fact, figures as diverse as Maurice Blanchot and François Dagognet—cf. (Dagognet 1993)—pointed out in different contexts a specific tension between Valéry and Bergson along these lines: “We might observe that Paul Valéry conceives of the relationships of language with thought in a way that distances it [sic] infinitely from Bergson. [. . .] there is, for Paul Valéry, a trust in language that is not trust in a system of expression, able to correspond faithfully to thought, but a trust in the particular qualities of form, in its original effects of induction, in its power that makes it able to organize the poem and construct wonder from it. This ambition is quite opposite to Bergson’s” (Blanchot 2001, pp. 114–15).

¹¹ See (Guerlac 2015).

a necessary element for a reflection on the possible concepts of temporality in their own right, with potential implications for “the duality” of the aesthetic.

Here it is possible to pursue a tack based on a characteristic strategy on Valéry’s part. The strategy in question involves looking for a key to the experience(s) of time in variously eccentric aspects of making, most notably the incompleteness and the combinatory discontinuities of the “gapped configuration”, with the attendant place they assign to the experience of surprise/the improbable in its unique energetic determinations. In a way that echoes his claims for the muscular sense, Valéry indeed attempts to found time on a pivotal sense of incompleteness that characterizes his notion of the mind: “Whether it is a matter of dream, of attention, of poetry, of reasoning—everything always requires an analysis of the acts—for these different psycho-physical products stem from combinations directed by incomplete impulses or suggestions of acts—which tend to complete themselves as best they can so that it is possible to return to zero. In other words: NOTHING OF THE MIND IS COMPLETE. And that is the root of time. *Nothing resembles a ‘perfect shape’, circle, or square in conscious life*” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 206). As he proposes elsewhere, “the unfinished, the incomplete is the basis of time” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 365). In fidelity to the insight that there are only times specific to systems, moreover, the way incompleteness of the acts holds the key to time finds an echo in the specificity of the combinatory: “Above all, thought is mixing, mixture, and with a sophistication in the mixing which is inexpressible . . . The combinations are closely linked to the notion of time. The divisibility of thoughts by the independence of the constituents of thought, or their indivisibility—this is a problem of time” (Valéry 2001, p. 85).

As there is no real logical obstacle to subsuming the combinatory under the broader problem of incompleteness—on the plane of genesis it is always a combination coming to be—the incomplete thus emerges as one of the most important lessons of the praxis of writing for a thinking of time in general. It is in fact possible to speak of a “meontological” configuration in Valéry, in the sense of a poetic revalorization of nothingness and absence as productive principles.¹² Rather than taking absence in an absolute sense, this configuration revolves around the creation of forms that seem to surpass their origin in a given subjective agency, by making their own demands on that agency during the process of production. The “creative demand” works like a generative absence and a productive nothing. Starting from Valéry’s longstanding fascination with the unfinished, all the different ways in which he indicates a positive role for absence, interval and inequality are a part of this configuration, instanced in remarks on how in sensibility “an absence of excitation acts positively on us”, or similarly how the mind is a “creative absence” (Valéry 1993, p. 1409; Valéry 1989, p. 91; also see (Vercruyssen 2014)). Philosophers like Jean Wahl noticed the way this formally inspired experience of incompleteness informed Valéry’s understanding of time, writing that “time is imminence for him, we are always on the point of coming

¹² This category which comes from the Greek “me on” (nonbeing) has had a certain resurgence, even making appearances where it does not find explicit acknowledgment. To offer a brief overview of relevant topoi, Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical rehabilitation deserves mention (Levinas and Kearney 1986). Next, there is Deleuze with his early claim that Hegelian dialectics hijacked a sense of negative originally broader than the one that came to assimilate negative to Hegelian negation, a sense of negative actually equivalent to the primacy of his preferred concepts virtuality and “difference”: “Limitation and opposition are first- and second-dimension surface effects, whereas the living depths, the diagonal, is populated by differences without negation” (Deleuze 1995, p. 267). In this understanding, “me on” is a negative of virtuality as a “problematic being” (Ibid., p. 191) anterior to extrinsic differences and oppositions. Then there is the earlier and yet concordant challenge of Simondon with the idea of “transduction” as a negative that is not a sublatant intervention in what already exists: “in this research it [transduction] is called on to play a role that dialectics cannot play because the study of the operation of individuation does not seem to correspond to the appearance of the negative as a second stage, but to an immanence of the negative inside the primary condition, in the ambivalent form of tension and incompatibility . . . ” (Simondon 2005, p. 34). It is safe to assume that, readers of Hegel like Catherine Malabou would not necessarily agree with these evaluations of the narrowness of the Hegelian negative, as apparent in her *The Future of Hegel*, where she takes up the question of the “me-on”. In the contemporary scene otherwise Leo Bersani has made an interesting exploration of meontological negativity, or negativity we are in the position of seeing as a *problematic incipience*. See “Far Out” and *Forms of Being*.

into existence, time is lack; it is distance" (Wahl 1968, p. 306).¹³ Mirroring Valéry's attitude to the simultaneous in the successive, the interest in the incomplete provides another important juncture where Valéry's theoretical and poetic interests seem to converge, detached observations about a state of affairs equally serving as tasks bordering on the (self)prescriptive.¹⁴

In this sense it is possible to speak of a value of the nascent in Valéry, or in even stronger terms, to speak of the nascent and the incomplete as the very source of value and importance: "Importance is something created by non-compensation, by nervous incompleteness" (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 335). It is no coincidence that Valéry spoke of "the divinity of nascent states" (ibid., p. 173). The priority of the equation which makes "importance" a matter of incompleteness, means Valéry's preferred forms such as the notebooks will serve as delegate loci of a fertile instability, diverging from the vision of a subjectively fulfillable end for making. A dynamically generative and initiatory nothingness thus simultaneously accounts for the abandonment of an autonomously integrated work. This mechanism can work through the entries of the notebooks as well as in the interface between graphic figures and the instaurating gestures to which Thomas Vercruyse drew attention. It can be argued that Valéry made a practice of creating the "demanding remnant" with its own imperatives, being driven by this practice to downgrading the voluntary in poetics.

Despite its irreducible place in Valérian poetics, the involuntary is thus actually subordinate to the larger set-up where a dynamism of the initial negative, the incomplete or the unequal finds activation, and this set-up is governed by what Valéry called a "principle of virtuality", the flip side of which is that locution of overdetermination, the "I can" or what he often calls the "implex": "The most valuable thing [. . .] in what mathematics teaches are the possibilities of transformation—and the habit or tendency—when faced with a given relation, (from experience, or *chance*, or *need*) to operate on it *without regard* to its meaning *outside* of its *form*, quite freely in that respect—but exploiting only its formal properties of expression" (Valéry 2001, pp. 220–21, 23; also see Krauthausen 2010). Incompletion and the nascency of forms, their openness to further handling and prolongation, become the motors or precursors of transformative reprises and connections, offering the possibility that a capacity (habit or tendency) or "implex" can develop in response to these transformations. There are numerous avatars of this set-up in *Cahiers*, whether bearing on the experience of drawing, geometry¹⁵ or other "acts" such as dance. Suffice to say that by whatever name it is called, the principle of virtuality, incompleteness, or nascency, this experience of notation as an experience of time also stamps the exercise or self-transformation topos in Valéry: "The world in Valéry's eyes is never more strange than at the moment of its inception, of that radical recreation of an all-encompassing Genesis which is dawn. Numerous analyses and prose poems testify to the extraordinary power, the intimate fascination, of these moments, whose significance lies far less in the banal fact that they accompanied a lifetime's writing in the notebooks than in their capacity for self-discovery, a self-recreation which is at the same time a rediscovery of self-expression and the world" (Pickering 2012, p. 160).

Since a dimension of value underlying the relay from the theoretical to the poetic has been discovered in the temporal experiences offered to Valéry by his forms, it is appropriate to address another aspect of this dimension, which is attention. In his work, attention is one of the most important

¹³ Cf. Valéry's Dialogue about dance: "_She filches from nature impossible attitudes, even under the very eye of Time! . . . She is divine in the Unstable, offers it as a gift to our regard! . . . _We never see her but about to fall" (Valéry 1989, p. 58).

¹⁴ It is possible to argue that the meontological tendencies in Valéry are in exactly inverse proportion to the possibility of achieving an end to construction, thus meontology simultaneously implicating a non-teleological impulse. Karin Krauthausen, who noted Valéry's interest in "construction and cognition in an eternal status nascendi", also discusses the experience of "non-finality" offered to Valéry by *Cahiers*. Therefore, a rigorous complementarity seems to exist between a shortcircuit in the relation between the artwork—or the research in the case of *Cahiers*—and its ends, and the operation driven by an initial and propulsive "nothingness". (See Krauthausen 2013, "A Writer Looking for His Writing Scene . . .").

¹⁵ In an entry on geometry, Valéry writes: "Lucid mysticism, the intuition of geometers, which consists in regarding the images in their natal milieu, in their unstable *composition*, accompanied by sensations of their formation, their transcendental maintenance, or the variations, either conforming to their figure, or their human nature, their support . . ." (Valéry 1999, p. 163).

functions whose intelligibility is constructed through the employment of a consistently energetic model: “mental phenomena do not have their own energy but they make use of a general-special energy-cf. attention” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 45).¹⁶ Moreover, in extension of the problem of nascency, attention has a major significance in the mediation between the axiological and the theoretical in Valéry’s reflections, since it is a condition for the “creation of the significant” and is accompanied by limits to power that make a provocation for Valéry’s sense of possibility: “Artistic minds” Valéry thinks, are “distracted-attentive” ones too, always trying to wrench their insights from the impossibility defined by confusion, distraction, inconsistency, and forgetting: “The mind at work, struggling against its own mobility, against its own constitutional restlessness and diversity, against the dissipation or natural decay of any specialized attitude . . . finds incomparable resources in this very condition itself” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 157; Valéry 1961, p. 101).¹⁷

On the basis of the notes collected under the rubric “Attention” in *Cahiers* and various other places like public lectures, it can easily be argued that the continuous revisions and the intercalary organization that characterize Valéry’s work in general and *Cahiers* in particular, serve as a technology of attention. The technology in question is effective in the prolongation of attention, and conversely, the question of prolongation central for the Valérian understanding of time, finds one of its sources in attention: “Attention is the effort to prolong, to continue the realm of clarity”; “Attention = analytic prolonging” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, pp. 293–94).

5. The Second Case of Reciprocity between the Successive and the Simultaneous: Prolongation

What is prolongation, and what can it hope to prolong other than attention? Can a labor of dehabitation be conceived on a model of prolongation (to bring together two different aspects of Valéry’s self-understanding from the perspective of time)? “Prolongation” is a recurrent expression in Valéry that accrues a fertile complexity across its movement across the oeuvre. Arguably, it is an indispensable node in the web of relations that tie time, making, and form together in Valéry’s work. A point of convergence for Valéry’s various interests, it already implies a notion of time coextensive with realization. More concretely, it evokes something of the additivity associated with the rhythmical, bringing into play a transaction characterized by the reciprocity between the simultaneous and the successive. However, since it is deeply connected with mental effort, it is more similar to succession despite the simultaneity of a constellation in precarious maintenance, in contrast with rhythm, which is “organization despite being succession” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 349).

“Prolonged hesitation between sound and sense” is a quintessential example, already aligning prolongation with the labor of keeping open a certain interval, but there are others, much less obvious

¹⁶ A few words are due to address the broadly energetic models that underpin Valéry’s attempts to bring intelligibility to organic and mental functions: “All science looks for what is conserved, or what is reproduced” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 378). Time is not exempt from the energetic models Valéry imports from thermodynamics and electromagnetism; in fact, with his central proposal to replace the concept of time as such with thermodynamic operators like transformation and conservation, it plays the most prominent role in Valéry’s experiments with this type of modelization: “time is the sensation of the uncompensated depletion of usable energy” (*ibid.*, p. 349). To speak to the merely symptomatic in Valéry’s work, he surely shares with a range of figures from Freud to Bataille a hope that psychic structures, needs and drives can be symbolized and reconstructed on the basis of an energetic system which offers a basis of exchange between the organism and its environment. In the specific economy of Valéry’s work however, energy comes to fulfill certain unique functions. First, it brings to Valéry’s view of temporality which is prone to an identification with extratemporal part-whole relations and the cancellation of succession an incontestable irreversibility. Even on a psychosomatic level, Valéry always acknowledged this irreversibility in a range of figures that indicate finitude: effort, fatigue, and distraction. Secondly, under the sign of the difference equal vs. unequal exchange, energetic models of physiology and excitation allow Valéry to conceptualize what goes beyond the maintenance of stability and homeostasis—of functional cycles—he attributes to the organism. Thus energy plays the role of an effective fiction for Valéry to help him describe what goes beyond utility or “equal exchange” in artistic activity; it is rallied to make sense of what Valéry experiences as a productive *inequality* in his creative process. Since energy is an effective fiction, theoretical reconstruction of functions like reflex or protracted mental effort on the basis of energy is not sundered from the possibilities of an enrichment of subjectivity for Valéry. However, it would perhaps be an overstatement to assimilate Valéry’s artistic energetics to Bataille’s “unproductive expenditure”.

¹⁷ For somebody who is often culturally identified with his projections of mastery and virtuosity this is perhaps the closest Valéry came to the problem of an inability to think as the condition of thought.

and equally important. It can be argued that, in a certain capacity, Valérian “prolongation” itself prolongs the Kleistian strategy of employing “tricks which will prolong my speech in order to gain sufficient time for the fabrication of my idea in the workshop of reason” (Kleist 1951, p. 42), imbuing the time of forms in the making with an affordance for thought. In this sense the centrality of prolongation confirms Krauthausen’s observation on how Valéry derives his slowly determined procedures of writing from a “concrete writing and drawing practice”, since he needs the prolongation of this practice to attain the said procedures perceived to be productive of insight (Krauthausen 2013, p. 310).

Inasmuch as attention is its native context, prolongation brings into play the quantitative, but for the same reason that it is linked to attention, it is not identifiable with the bad infinite/indefinite. Because it is largely a proxy for the maintenance of attention, it is never characterized by a bare repetition of the past. As per a remark Valéry makes in *Cahiers*, if prolongation bears on the attention devoted to an isolated function, this is only to “obtain a fresh response” which equals to a “creation of the significant” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 289)¹⁸; in this sense the *raison d’être* of prolongation is a qualitative threshold, and a certain apposition. The implicit injunction that attends prolongation is that the formal relations already established should be prolonged in modes that keep their productive dynamism or their status as inductors of a fertile negativity or demand. In this sense prolongation is deeply linked with that elusive necessity from chance, and order from disorder that makes such an important aspect of Valéry’s view of the aesthetic work. Formal prolongation brings to succession and irreversibility a stringent modality.

Like the privileged domain of the function of attention itself, prolongation gains a certain edge over mere givenness in the way it measures a power against its own impossibility, amounting to a thought of the limit in the form of what cannot be prolonged. In illustration, Valéry’s famous essay on Degas describes the energetic economy of the dancer’s body as the prolongation of “a state which cannot prolong itself”, (“Degas Danse Dessin” Valéry 1993) seeing as this body makes a resource of imbalance and instability. Therefore, prolongation is an emblem of precarious consistency for a whole range of actions and attempts at production not limited to dance; owing its axiological weight partly to this precarious consistency. Prolongation finds intelligibility against the background of the ever present possibility of interruption or worse, an exhaustion of productivity in the product.

Finally, prolongation is the secret sharer of every major conceptualization of sensation Valéry makes, indexing an extension of sensation in the service of attention, and vice versa. If “sensation excites expectation”, and sensibility is the domain of a meontological dynamism where “satisfaction gives birth to desire; the response regenerates the demand; the possession engenders a growing appetite of the thing possessed”, then what Valéry calls prolongation becomes an abstract expansion of this logic in terms of other functions and events such as attention, consciousness and the emergence of a work (Valéry 1993, p. 1343, also see Vercruyse, “L’acte pur . . .”).¹⁹ For Valéry, any state of the whole organism “tending to annul the event(s)” that happens to it, “gives rise to questions of the prolongation, the anticipation, the revitalizing, the transformation, the *measure*—of events,—and of their development” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 316), a series in which the production of a work can be inscribed without any incompatibility. Here, what could be called an imperative seems to be attached to the possibility of prolongation; against the acknowledged fact of exhaustion and interruption of prolongation, this imperative would demand one to work against an always imminent neutralization, and to keep unequal exchange from reverting to an equal one. In the words of Valéry’s essay on Degas again, the work at stake is one of a “reprise and regeneration” brought to bear on an initial sensation.

¹⁸ The context of this phrase makes direct reference to prolonging: “Each observation is a unique value—to which one responds in general,—by an average value. Stage 1—you isolate one act of observation from the subsequent ones and the responses that are provoked. Stage 2—you prolong it. Stage 3 ‘You obtain a fresh response. (Creation of the significant)’” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 289).

¹⁹ We are not out of a rhythmic constellation of interests yet: “To establish a rhythm you have to see how to set up a closed D R [demand response] system—i.e., a system such that the response recreates the stimulus. Rhythmic state = state in which the response to stimulation restores it to a point at which the stimulation is renewed” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 379).

Before passing to the main instance of the inscription of production in prolongation however, let us note that there is no coincidence when Valéry endows prolongation with not only a diachronic sense following the fault lines of a realization or event, but—as we will see—also a sense of mediation between faculties, functions and tasks such as sensation and intellection. This aspect follows to some extent from the reciprocity and correspondence between the simultaneous and the successive to which Valéry is partial. However, what is not illuminated by this reciprocity is the way the mediation between functions or tasks that apply to prolongation takes the form of a transmission of intensity, and significantly, pleasure.

In one of his most comprehensive statements on aesthetics, Valéry situates aesthetic pleasure and its prolongation with regard to their special status between sensation and making: “This sort of pleasure is indivisible from developments which exceed the domain of sensibility, and always associates it with the production of affective modifications, those which prolong and enrich themselves in the paths of the intellect, and which perhaps lead to the enterprise of exterior actions on matter, on the sense and mind of the other, requiring the combined exercise of all the human forces” (Valéry 1993, p. 1298).²⁰ Thus, the incompleteness of sensation translates to an aesthetic pleasure directly active in the production of works, answering with pleasure our earlier question, “what can prolongation hope to prolong?”—a pleasure that is as much a pleasure in formal necessity as a simple sensation.²¹ In summary, prolongation accrues a polyvalence that signifies both the temporal status of the unfolding which derives a work from an initial sensation, and a variable mode of linking among the faculties and functions of the psychoorganism at stake in this unfolding. In this sense, prolongation is both the descriptive tool for a time coextensively variable with the necessities of making, and the descriptive tool for the labile mental architecture hinging on the relations between the functions/faculties of the psychoorganism. In these capacities it provides a cornerstone for any possible interpretation of the time = production equation in Valéry.

6. Questions of Surprise

After a charting of the various relations that the Valérian interest in temporal form entertains to rhythm, the body, the simultaneous, the qualitative, energy, and finally modality, it is necessary to round out this account with a final inquiry into the function of surprise in creating new dispositions, a claim generally present in Valéry but accentuated here in a speculative vein. Although it has its relatively obvious and intuitive aspects, Valéry’s treatment of this subject is so extensive that it would require a book of its own. In fact, Valéry seems to have considered generalizing surprise to model “any unstable duality, any paired couplet” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 146), thus some guideposts are in order. If one thing stands out in this context, it is the way surprise functions as one of the most critical among all the experiences Valéry examines in a circuit of instructive reciprocity with the question of time: “However, every present can be surprised. One cannot foresee everything. That is the point at which a reflection on Time should find its place” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 378).

To begin with, surprise has as consistent an energetic underpinning as attention in Valéry’s work. It is one of the best examples of what he classifies as an “unequal exchange”, having to do with a transformation that suspends the tendency to return to relative indifference, interrupting the cyclic functions of a psychoorganic system that work in conformity with a range of normalized expectancy. In this sense surprise is always associated with a perturbation that puts unusual strains on the capacity to efficiently dissipate external stimuli; although it would be hasty to attribute a directly dehabituating function to it, at least a contrast with insensibility is an inherent aspect for it. Following from the fact that its perturbations take longer to dissipate than average stimuli, it is identified with

²⁰ See also (Desideri 2012; Barbaras 2011).

²¹ Therefore, it becomes hard not to remember Valéry when Jean-Luc Nancy describes pleasure as “the relation that leads to its prolongation” in a similar linking between production and sensation (Nancy 2013, p. 66).

a specific and determinate temporal duration: “That caesura! which is of measurable duration” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 315). In Valéry’s treatment, one of the obvious assumptions concerning surprise that nevertheless requires a prior acknowledgment is thus that it occurs as a shock and rupture: “Surprise is a halt, a suspense caused by sudden external change” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, pp. 315, 72). As a form of “unequal exchange” that refuses to return to immediate equilibrium or cancellation, it also shows the features Valéry attributes to this form of organic and mental relation, namely an expenditure of effort usually unwarranted by mere utility: “huge call on immediate energy. Deficit” (ibid., p. 354).

In terms of modal categories and possibility, the unequal exchange of surprise implies a relation to the improbable, and the “secret of the power of surprise” is very much tied up with its lived contradiction of “my total possibility” (ibid., p. 336). Thus, what can be expressed in terms of excess, expenditure of effort or “waste”, also finds expression in another familiar Valérian register, this time hewing closer to the problem of what is possible to experience and even possible to think in a given stretch of time: “If the unusual produces an effect like that of violence or abruptness—it is because for each of us, our possible ideas form at every stage of our lives a territory whose frontier we cannot see—or else we confuse that frontier with the frontier of our absolute power to think” (ibid., p. 335). This also explains why Valéry associates surprise with a certain window of opportunity to transform a given “psycho-organic domain of possibility”, and potentially even bring into existence new capacities (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 190).

To pass from what is relatively intuitive to the less intuitive, the question becomes how these ideas are embedded in the dimension of practice and production central to this discussion. Instead of assuming that experiences of chance and surprise are artistic goals in their own right for Valéry, perhaps it would be better to situate them in the intimate nexus of two respective relations: a zone of indistinction between long-term temporalities (habituation foremost) and real-time acts, and a zone of indistinction between the voluntary and the involuntary; in other words, two zones of indistinction in a contact zone of their own. Of these two, the second is perhaps the more familiar: in question is the paradox of working *toward* a state which will sunder the relation to any previous preparation, meeting the voluntary labor with involuntary insight. Embracing this paradox, Valéry presents it as a natural aspect of his mode of working, as a recipe for creating the significant: “In the same way, I can be surprised by my own action if that action was long Prepared: I have forgotten it,—by preparing and then forgetting it, I had set up a surprise!” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 335). The domain in which Valéry most extensively practiced his ability to set up a surprise is simply ideas, essentially imbued with the hidden element of a “charge of signs on which the immediate affective power depends” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 191). The notion of setting up a surprise does not sound as paradoxical in the semiotic and topological formalizations which Valéry elsewhere attaches to it, which bring a more refreshingly defamiliarizing imaginary to bear on the subject. According to this imaginary, the interruption of continuity achieved by surprise can be likened to an awakening that creates a new dimension, or a richer continuity: “This awakening taught me to see a new dimension. In the previous phase, all events of whatever kind interrupted my trajectory. However, surprise or awakening introduced this idea: that a group, a sequence of events, a ‘life’ could interrupt another trajectory which is my own enlarged, raised to a higher power. This new domain thus has more dimensions than the first” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 334). Fulfilling his own high expectations from a precise notation of experience—namely that it help invention—this attempt to conceive a geometry of surprise/chance, qualifies the more commonplace image of surprise as a mere interruption of a unilinear temporal progress, and provides it with a stronger connection with continuity, since here surprise does not only suspend but also evokes a life, making the change no longer an external insertion or rupture, but a power of becoming akin to the discovery of new directions and dimensions. In fact, surprise’s retroactive action is such that the previous phase is itself proved to be an inferior continuity, arbitrarily “interrupted by all events”, thus experimentally refuted in its lived claim to exhaust total possibility. At the same time, surprise becomes the herald of a “new domain” described in the implicitly value-laden terminology of a dimensional enlargement. Consequently, Valéry’s assertion

that “a reflection on Time should find its place” adjacent to a consideration of surprise, also gains a new meaning here. Time takes condensations, dilations and dimensional expansions; and the most radical severance can be contained in the possibility of making the most extensive overview, enabling the reorientation of mental topology.²²

Although one can analytically separate the axis of voluntary-involuntary from that of the axis of temporal scales, in practice they always accompany each other; and their connection largely depends on the value-laden and rewarding insight concerning a higher continuity made available by surprise. There is a way in which surprise not only serves as a rupture to a given trajectory and its norms but in fact actively instaurates new continuities that enfold as well as refunction the past. Symmetrically to the way prolongation is measured against the possibility of interruption and exhaustion, surprise does not interrupt without opening a previously unrealized path or potentiality of becoming and structuration. This feature is also immanent to the important relation that links it to repetition, which Valéry considers to be of “capital importance” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 333).

A possible clarification of this relation goes through the model of physical energy that informs Valéry’s conceptualizations of surprise; in this case surprise instigates a specific form of repetition because it creates an excess or undissipated build-up finding outlet in an “oscillation”: “surprise is at once a special sensation—a delay in the physiological response modification—as well as production of oscillatory sensory phenomena, like the oscillations of a slow-moving pendulum—and of repeats (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, p. 190; see Figure 1). Again Valéry notes, “a man who is stupefied repeats what has struck him, unable to re-constitute it or transform it into an appropriate action . . . He finds it impossible to produce what he receives, he can only reproduce it—which is very different. To be surprised is to reproduce without having produced;—to see again without having seen; to end up seeing after you have seen again. Reproduction precedes production” (Valéry 2001, vol. 4, p. 333).

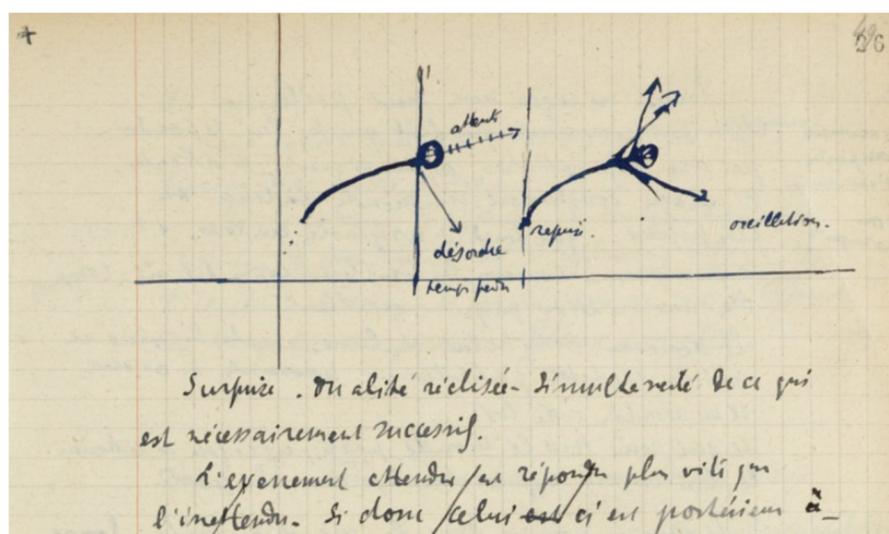


Figure 1. An example of the temporal notation of surprise from *Cahiers*.

²² Insofar as Valéry’s valorization of this specific mediation or indistinction between voluntary-involuntary can be separated from the first (temporal scales) it amounts to a conception of work—as well as thinking—that incorporates play, which he calls “another form of seriousness”: “The whole power of the mind is based on the innumerable chances of thought. The mind plays for high stakes, gambling a thousand to one that the result will stand. Without chance, no reflection” (Valéry 2001, vol. 3, pp. 106, 81). Thus it becomes necessary to insist that the common identification between Valéry and an interest in the conditions of the production of a work, should assume an inclusive disjunction between play and work if one wants to be comprehensive enough.

In characteristic fashion, Valéry's statements that have the ring of most extensive generality can be convincingly restored to the matrix of his daily writing practice. If surprise and ostensibly chance events often occur with an in-built bid for repetition (insofar as they leave oscillatory after-effects) that assumes the task of working through them, this also means, they must occur with a bid for *long-term potentiation*. Valéry confirms this in no uncertain terms: "Our unfolding life is to a large extent made up of renewed beginnings, our functions describe closed cycles. The events that change us in the long term must therefore establish cycles in us" (Valéry 2001, p. 124). The new connections and recombinant inferences made day by day in *Cahiers*, and the feedback loops to which they seem to give rise are there to see, but becoming can hardly admit proof. The most one can do is meet the multiple rhythms of this "work" with the ones that can be obtained from working through them in reading.

In terms of a general conclusion, this study has tried to show that Valéry's "antiphilosophical" repurposing of philosophical concepts of time in the light of an experience of form and notation is inadvertently rewarding from a philosophical perspective. A new way of talking about time, and the formal practices and experiments that evolve partly out of this way of talking, create productive derailments and generate new and eccentric foci of interest that do not often find evaluation in most standard philosophies of time. Among all the insights generated in this endeavor, the artistic dimension of work, important in its own right, emerges perhaps as a most fruitful source of insights concerning lived time as well. In this context, the emphasis placed on the shift between a discourse that takes time as its object, and a systemic perspective on time-as-realization that treats the set-up of work and formal genesis as an original inflection of the experience of time might be offered as the single most crucial contribution of this study. The themes and figures generated or taken up in this trajectory, such as prolongation, attention, and the diverse modalities involved in making, reestablish and bring to a culmination the connections and contradictions of Valéry's work as a project invested at once in formalization or method and self-transformation.

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