

Dedication and Friendship in Two Livres D'Artistes: Parler Seul (Tzara-Miro, 1948-1950) and Vivantes Cendres, Innommees (Leiris-Giacometti, 1961)

Forcer, Stephen; Wagstaff, Emma

DOI:
[10.3366/nfs.2011-3.008](https://doi.org/10.3366/nfs.2011-3.008)

License:
None: All rights reserved

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Forcer, S & Wagstaff, E 2011, 'Dedication and Friendship in Two Livres D'Artistes: Parler Seul (Tzara-Miro, 1948-1950) and Vivantes Cendres, Innommees (Leiris-Giacometti, 1961)', *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 103-116. <https://doi.org/10.3366/nfs.2011-3.008>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Volume 50, Page 103-116 DOI 10.3366/nfs.2011-3.008, ISSN 0029-4586, Available Online 2011 at <http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/nfs.2011-3.008>. Copyright Edinburgh University Press

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

DEDICATION AND FRIENDSHIP IN TWO *LIVRES D'ARTISTES: PARLER SEUL* (TZARA-MIRÓ, 1948-1950) AND *VIVANTES CENDRES, INNOMMÉES* (LEIRIS-GIACOMETTI, 1961)

STEPHEN FORCER AND EMMA WAGSTAFF

Introduction

One could be forgiven for wondering if the avant-garde premium on playfulness, jokes and satire meant that avant-gardists themselves spent their lives in the state of liberated transcendence evoked by Louis Aragon and André Breton in their definition of humour.¹ Taking as its subject two little-known *livres d'artistes* produced by four canonical figures well after the heyday of the avant-garde movements in which they came to prominence, this article is motivated by questions to do with loss, mental illness, solitude and other issues that run counter to the youthful energy with which avant-garde activity is often associated.

We are particularly interested here in using textual analysis to understand material produced by avant-gardists in the later parts of their careers. Close reading of individual poems will allow us to move beyond biographical context and the notion of the *livre de dialogue* as ways of understanding work that arises from lived collaboration between writers and artists. Text-based readings may also produce instructive variations or contradictions in relation to work for which historical avant-garde authors are better known.

Following the preliminary analysis of a range of texts, we have elected to deal with Tristan Tzara's *Parler seul* (1948-50) and Michel Leiris's *Vivantes cendres, innommées* (1961) for their respective treatment of shared themes, particularly dedication and offering, friendship, mental health, and the use of the pronoun 'tu'. In the first section of the article, we will consider ways in which the textuality of a book may make gestures of friendship and offering in ways that are not accounted for by the overt biographical fact of friendship between those involved in its production. In turn, we will argue that *Parler seul*, about which there currently exists no research literature beyond short reviews, represents a distinct variation in the position usually taken up by avant-garde writers in relation to women and states of mind. Our second section, on Leiris and Giacometti, will be

1 'L'humour a non seulement quelque chose de libérateur, mais encore quelque chose de sublime' (attributed to Sigmund Freud), in André Breton and Paul Eluard (eds), *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* [1938] (Paris: Corti, 2005), p. 14.

used to reflect in detail on the specific friendship between a writer and an artist, and on the relationship between text and image. In particular, our analysis of *Vivantes cendres, innommées* will bring out word-image functions to do with the distinction between deixis and representation, conceptual debates around language and death, and the predication of friendship and life on the acceptance of silence and loss. Thus, our approach to the two books involves complementary, rather than self-replicating, approaches to Tzara's and Leiris's respective associations with specific individuals which, in both books, drive textuality and semantics in subtle, complex ways that cannot be predicted by the basic facts of friendship or collaboration.

Parler seul

Parler seul is a collection of 24 poems, divided into 6 sections, with lithographic illustrations produced by Joan Miró, who agreed to work with Tzara out of mutual respect and friendship.² Tzara wrote the text in the summer of 1945 during a stay at the Hôpital psychiatrique de Saint-Alban (Lozère),³ on the invitation of his friend Lucien Bonnafé, who was the director of the hospital and one of the founders of the journal *L'Évolution psychiatrique*.⁴ Paul Eluard had previously composed poems at the institution during a clandestine visit in the winter of 1943.⁵ While Tzara's time at Saint-Alban was not a period of formal or obligatory hospitalization, material both published and unpublished suggests that Tzara had been affected by a series of personal and professional difficulties since the 1930s, in particular the regretful acceptance of separation from his wife, Greta Knutson,⁶ the antagonisms and failures of avant-garde groups, and the long-term effects of his reluctance to visit his family in Romania.⁷ Tzara's mental health also suffered over the course of the Occupation. Denounced in *Je suis partout* and from 1942 pursued by the Gestapo as a Jew, as a foreigner and as a political and cultural radical, Tzara went into hiding in the south west of France.⁸ In a review of Tzara's dramatic poem *La Fuite* (1947), Michel Leiris sums up the context of unending personal and collective restlessness in which Tzara had also written *Parler seul*, and which applied to so many during the Occupation:

- 2 Béhar, 'Notes', in Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, 6 vols, ed. by Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975-1991), IV, 582-83. Subsequent references to Tzara's *Œuvres complètes* are abbreviated to *OC*.
- 3 Béhar, 'Notes', pp. 37-66.
- 4 Henri Béhar, *Tristan Tzara* (Paris: Oxus, 2005), p. 170.
- 5 Henri Béhar, 'Notes', p. 583.
- 6 The couple separated in 1936 and divorced formally in 1942. Letters held at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (BLJD) indicate that the relationship had been in difficulty for some years before the separation (MS in TZR.C. 4007-4029).
- 7 Béhar, *Tristan Tzara*, pp. 167-70.
- 8 François Buot, *Tristan Tzara: L'homme qui inventa la révolution Dada* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), pp. 350-54.

Le thème directeur [de ce poème] est ce déchirement, ce divorce constant, cette séparation qui répond au mouvement même de la vie. Fuite de l'enfant qui pour vivre sa vie doit s'arracher à ses parents. Divorce des amants qui ne peuvent rester l'un à l'autre sans aliéner leur liberté et qui doivent nier leur amour s'ils ne veulent pas eux-mêmes se nier. Mort d'une génération dont se détache peu à peu, pour monter à son tour, une génération nouvelle. Fuite de chaque être vivant, qui se sépare des autres, souffre lui-même et fait souffrir, mais ne peut faire autrement parce que pour se réaliser il lui faut une certaine solitude [...]. Fuite historique enfin: exode, dérouté, dispersion de tous et de toutes à travers l'anonymat des routes et dans le brouhaha des gares où se coudoient civils et militaires. Faillite, effondrement, confusion, parce qu'il faut ce désarroi total pour que puisse naître une autre société impliquant d'autres relations entre les hommes, entre les femmes, entre les femmes et les hommes.⁹

Dedications are a common feature of avant-garde literature, reifying friends and affiliates within an emerging cultural history and reinforcing the idea of canonical avant-garde activity as having been undertaken by and for a group of self-referencing practitioners operating on the basis of a set of in-jokes and tenets.¹⁰ That *Parler seul* articulates affective bonds with specific individuals is indicated by the repeated appearance of dedications at the start of individual poems. In this collection, however, poems are offered not to Miró or other recognizable figures from the European avant-garde, or to Bonnafé, but to women who were patients with Tzara at Saint-Alban. Cécile, Jeanne, Tamara, Françoise: these women are designated only by first names (which might themselves be pseudonyms), and there is no indication of their full identity in the scant literature that exists on *Parler seul* and Tzara's time at the hospital.

The actual content of Dada poems dedicated by Tzara to other avant-gardists tends to display little or no connection of any sort to their dedicatees. So too Tzara's Dada and Surrealist work stubbornly resists offering clues about even the most basic details regarding the people and places that may have informed individual texts, and even in work written around the time of Tzara's split with Knutson references to second-person forms are rare and tend not to be qualified as feminine. In *Parler seul*, however, Tzara follows a policy of giving explicit feminine forms to subject and object pronouns, repeatedly using feminine agreements to qualify 'tu' and 'vous' forms and indicate specific women. In turn, the poems suggest that in *Parler seul* Tzara moves beyond the gesture of dedication and towards the affective plane of female addressees. For example, the titles and content of the first two sections, 'Étrangère' and 'Égarées', draw on feminine pronouns and agreements as part of Tzara's signature assembly of merged categories of object and impossible configurations of the physical world:

9 *Brisées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966), quoted without page number in Béhar, *Tristan Tzara*, 167-68.

10 See, for example, the playful hagiography – 'Noblesse galvanisée André Breton', 'Défilé fictif et familial Ribemont-Dessagines', 'Crylomine bémol François Picabia' and so forth – of *Maisons* (1920), *OC*, I, 131-40.

étrangère dans le soleil des cloches
je t'ai vue fugitive aux bras de feuilles mortes ('Étrangère', p. 39);

dans l'eau des pierres que voilà
comme sur les tessons du soleil à boire
je t'ai retrouvée

invincible à tout jamais chaude telle la fourmi
sur la route intraduisible
tu t'es découverte (Poem I, 'Égarées', p. 41)

Explicit feminine forms recur in subsequent poems, such as poems II and IV of the third section:

rêches belles à ne plus douter des nœuds
risibles le long des coutures termitières
brisées chevalines sur le tertre de chaux
ainsi je vous ai vues puis perdues
sur le champ diamanté d'un dimanche à longueur de rail (p. 48);

retrouvées toujours plus seules
incrédules à la file
elles s'en vont chercher de l'eau
les maudites les hardies (p. 50)

So while Tzara's opening depiction of women suggests positive mental states ('invincible', 'tu t'es découverte') and an association with beauty both real and unreal ('belles', 'sur le champ diamanté'), neither is it purely sentimental ('rêches', 'risibles', 'brisées', 'maudites') or based on omnipresence or ownership ('je vous ai vues puis perdues').

It is also important to note that female subjects and objects function as more than elements to be combined with the mineral, the natural world and other semantic fields that allow Tzara to construct his scenes of non-sequitous aporia. Rather, attention to the text shows that references to women are intimately bound up in utterances around the language and mechanics of mental damage and repair. In the final stanza of 'Étrangère', for instance, Tzara writes:

réveillez les dormeuses leur cause est entendue
éternelles étrangères sur la croix du sentier
à peine ressemblantes à peine lointaines
les jardins foudroyés aux lumières sauvages
les raisons de se taire et de haïr en secret (p. 39)

Tzara's imperative makes for a striking call in the opening poem of a collection composed in a psychiatric hospital: the time is now for women to wake from a state of alienation and be heard, and for unspoken resentments to be brought aggressively into the open. Stanza two of 'Étrangère' also evokes repression and, metonymically, anxiety around speaking:

tu tombes dans l'azur béant et crédule
encore un chant qui n'ose pas dire son nom de pauvre (p. 39)

Poem IV of 'Égarées' elegantly formulates a further trope that is common in representations of mental trauma: the giveaway sign of past damage in a person who may otherwise appear to have healed:

les mains seules sont tristes
elles pleurent la rosée des champs (p. 43)

The poetic mechanics of these lines are neatly dense, figuring both 'les mains' and 'la rosée' as semantic stand-ins: the former connote an intense affective state that is otherwise unidentifiable; and the latter works as a physical metonymy for tears that also pre-figures the proximity to weeping evoked just two lines later ('le passé de leur regard / tient l'aiguille sur le bord des larmes'). It is in this sense that Tzara's poetry is involuted, self-referential and aware of its own fine-level structures, well beyond the caricatured randomness that is often unhelpfully extrapolated as the main feature of his work.

In poem III of 'Égarées' Tzara combines the figure of the hand with an important variation in his relationship to women, this time writing from the position of a female speaking subject but indicating this only in the last of the poem's four stanzas:

je rirai la dernière
seule et sourde
prends-moi par la main
de laine molle (p. 42)

Tzara's voice here is doubly unreal, figuring himself as female and made of wool, and the hand – a functionally creative, active part of the human body – becomes the soft and transformed marker of a creature who aspires to triumphant solitude even while it suggests a childlike need for company and hand-holding.

Ironic laughter is also to be found at the end of poem X from the 'Mots de paille' section, within the evocation of two female patients and their response to therapy. In this instance Tzara combines an anaphoric pair of lines with playful phonology and the personification of laughter as an act and an abstract idea:

fais la branche fais la planche
je sauterai par-dessus
ou marcherai entre les jambes
d'un seul rire écartelé

l'une est noire l'autre aurore
qu'est-ce que c'est
celle qui rit de ne pas pleurer

celle qui pleure de ne pas aimer
coccinelle au bout du nez (p. 63)

Again Tzara refers to women and the dynamics of emotion, using simple language to describe the displacement of affect from states that are absent or impossible (crying and loving, respectively) to expressive acts (laughter and crying) that connote or symptomize the former.¹¹

While there is not space here to pursue an exhaustive analysis of *Parler seul*, the poems cited demonstrate clearly that the text draws repeatedly on the language and mechanics of mental health, including repression, undeclared hatred, the bodily traces of psychological damage, internal and external dialogue, patients' responses to treatment and, in a succinct piece of phonological play, the deck-clearing allowed by successful talking therapies ('table ronde table rase', p. 58). As a general principle, the idea that writing is likely to reflect the circumstances of its composition is of course a given. In the case of Tzara, however, a range of important points are brought into relief by *Parler seul*.

Firstly, the relationship to women and mental illness set out in *Parler seul* represents a departure from the conceptualization of femininity and psychosis produced and championed by Surrealism. Louis Aragon and André Breton, for example, see hysteria as a cherished altered state, stating that 'L'hystérie n'est pas un phénomène pathologique et peut, à tous égards, être considérée comme un moyen suprême d'expression'.¹² As demonstrated by the Surrealists' eulogisation of suicide, or their interest in the Papin sisters, orthodox Surrealism fetishizes and objectifies extreme states of mind, positing them as gateways to the radicalization of art and literature, and psychological freedom. So too for Aragon and Breton '[l'hystérie] est fondé[e] sur le besoin d'une séduction réciproque'.¹³ In other words, women suffering from mental illness are prime targets for pursuing the affective and erotic intensity of *amour fou*, the canonical example being the eponymous subject of Breton's *Nadja* (1928) who was let go by Breton and subsequently committed to an asylum.¹⁴ The fetishized and performed nature of

11 Tzara's lines also recall the end of Eluard's 'L'Amoureuse', in which the notion of wordless dialogue makes for a striking counterpart to the solitary speech suggested by the title *Parler seul*:

Ses rêves en pleine lumière
Font s'évaporer les soleils
Me font rire, pleurer et rire,
Parler sans avoir rien à dire.

Capitale de la douleur [1926] (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 56.

12 André Breton and Paul Eluard (eds), *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, p. 14.

13 *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, p. 14.

14 Raymond Spiteri and Donald Lacoss, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), p. 63.

Breton's relationship to mental illness is underlined by Julien Gracq, in a statement that makes for quite a contrast both with Aragon and Breton's enthusiastic definition of hysteria and with Surrealism's wider rhetoric around disorder and death: 'Sa vie [à Breton] était réglée comme une horloge. Il détestait les fous – et les malades. Il a dû se forcer pour aller voir Péret mourant à l'hôpital. C'était un rationaliste à sa manière, très puritain.'¹⁵

In *Parler seul*, however, Tzara writes about mentally damaged women not as an erotically motivated 'neuropsychiatric observer' – as Susan Suleiman describes Breton in *Nadja*¹⁶ – but as a glossolalic companion who comes and goes, with a marked absence of sexual interest; and while Tzara's dedications indicate respect and friendship, his poetics preclude sentiment that is declared too easily or overtly, allowing his affinity to emerge intermittently and obliquely. In turn, in poems that contain references to women, female figures complement and counterpoint – but do not drive – Tzara's trademark capacity for unlikely but memorable formulations and humoured wordplay, particularly around ageing, fate and deathbound bodies: 'un cadavre aux dents de pluie' (p. 48); 'la mort nous mord les fesses' (p. 45); 'alors je me suis dit / debout vieux corps' (p. 47); 'le temps est venu sur la pointe des pieds' (p. 55); 'tu es cousue à la courte paille' (p. 56).

More particularly to Tzara, *Parler seul* represents a significant moment in the evolution of his relationship to (theories of) the mind. In the 'Manifeste Dada 1918' Tzara denounces psychoanalysis as a stultifying prop to middle-class convention: 'La psychanalyse est une maladie dangereuse, endort [sic] les penchants anti-réels de l'homme et systématise la bourgeoisie.'¹⁷ Previous analysis has indicated that Tzara's poems contradict the anti-psychoanalytic protestations of their author, in that their textuality offers an extremely rich engagement with the compacted signifiers of sexual desire, *avant la lettre* of Aragon, Breton, Dalí, Magritte and Soupault as psycho-Surrealists better known than Tzara for their experiments with the relationship between art, literature, and conscious and unconscious affective charge.¹⁸ Over the 1920s and early 1930s Tzara's professed suspicion of psychoanalysis turned to interest and experimentation, leading to the

15 Julien Gracq, quoted in Régis Debray, *Par amour de l'art: une éducation intellectuelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 438. We are grateful to Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert for bringing this text to our attention.

16 Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Nadja, Dora, Lol V. Stein: Women, Madness and Narrative' in *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 124-51 (p. 139).

17 *Sept manifestes Dada*, OC I, 359-67 (p. 364). Henri Béhar suggests that Tzara's remarks bear the influence of Carl Jung; 'Notes', OC I, 701.

18 Stephen Forcer, *Modernist Song* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006), pp. 10-28.

Marxist-socio-psychological commentary and prose poetry of *Grains et issues* (1936). *Parler seul* lyrically offers a further suggestion of the distance Tzara has travelled from his blustering against formalized psychology in the Dada period, the genesis of the book demonstrating an openness to the medical treatment of mental health, and the poems speaking of the qualified healing – the incremental progress and self-discovery, the continued signs of anxiety and damage, the risk of falling backwards – found in individual patients.

As noted previously, it is known that Tzara became friends with many of these patients, as well as with employees at the hospital, but reflecting on the text allows us to begin concluding on *Parler seul* by moving beyond the limited biographical facts of existing material on the book. In summary, we contend that *Parler seul* presents something highly unusual in the work of canonical Dadaists and Surrealists: an authentic avant-garde poetics that merges with an openness to the dynamics of mental health and in which women are mediated not as eroticized or hysterical objects of yearning and curiosity but as subjects who occupy the same space (the hospital and grounds) as the author, for the same basic reason (mental fatigue and damage), and to whom the work is directly and implicitly dedicated in friendship. By extension, the fact that Tzara offers gestures of friendship and affinity to women in *Parler seul* also connotes his great disappointment and sadness at the failure and breakdown of long-standing friendships with individual men, which had been damaged by the antagonisms and hostilities of wilfully homosocial avant-garde groups.

Among the small volume of published writing on *Parler seul* is a short text written by Michel Leiris in 1950, which takes as its title the last four words of Tzara's final poem in the collection: 'tu es sorti vivant'.¹⁹ There is no reason why this line should not relate to Tzara's having evaded capture by the Gestapo, and the context of post-Liberation France can certainly be read in other parts of *Parler seul*.²⁰ But the line picked up by Leiris is not one about triumphalism and overt victory on a national or collective scale. Rather, it is a quiet reminder to the self about survival, emergence from difficulty, and the private knowledge of lived experience. In turn, Leiris's use of Tzara's quotation is a moving suggestion of affinity between Tzara, seeking psychological peace and repair, and a man whose relationship with his own mind would lead him to attempt suicide seven years later, and who would eventually come through that experience.

19 'Tu es sorti vivant', *Derrière le miroir*, 29-30 (May-June 1950), 2.

20 In the preceding poem, for example, Tzara writes that 'la liberté se répand / comme du lait comme du sang' (p. 64).

Vivantes cendres, innommées

The association between Giacometti and Leiris, both significant figures in the Paris of the 'historical' avant-garde, was to last to the end of the artist's life.²¹ Giacometti subsequently repudiated his sculptures corresponding to the Surrealist period, although some critics argue for a continuity in approach despite the apparent difference between these objects and the later repeated attempts to sculpt, draw and paint real people and scenes for which he is best known.²² Leiris, on the other hand, considered that he himself remained a Surrealist.²³

Their collaborative work *Vivantes cendres, innommées* is a direct result of that friendship.²⁴ Leiris began composing the poems in hospital after his suicide attempt in May 1957 and continued to work on them once he returned home. During that convalescence, Giacometti was a frequent visitor to Leiris's apartment and etched the copper plates that would accompany the poems, although the book was not finally published until 1961.²⁵ Its format is traditional in that texts and images appear on facing pages; the etchings depict Leiris's immediate surroundings, including furniture, ornaments and even the ceiling above his bed, viewed as if from the patient's perspective. In addition, there are portraits of Leiris himself, full face, and in profile; in one, he resembles a corpse as he lies in bed. Leiris's poems take a denuded form and, although they do not engage in aphorism

- 21 They were introduced to one another by André Masson, but, contrary to Yves Bonnefoy's dating of their friendship to this first association in *Alberto Giacometti: Biographie d'une œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), Aliette Armel argues that they became close following Giacometti's return to Paris after the end of the Second World War: *Michel Leiris* (Fayard, 1997), p. 465.
- 22 Jacques Dupin proposes that Giacometti was always 'searching for reality', both during his Surrealist activity and later; it was simply that reality had temporarily deserted him: *Alberto Giacometti* (Tours: Farrago, 1999), p. 37. See also Bonnefoy's discussion in 'Giacometti: le problème des deux époques', in *Le Nuage rouge* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1995), pp. 475-89.
- 23 Seán Hand, *Michel Leiris: Writing the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 15.
- 24 Michel Leiris / Alberto Giacometti, *Vivantes cendres, innommées* (Paris: Jean Hugues, 1961), 32.5 x 25 cm, 72pp, incl. 13 etchings. 100 copies were produced. The text is reprinted in Michel Leiris, *Haut mal, suivi de Autres lanciers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 217-30. Subsequent references are given in the text. Giacometti's etchings, including 41 additional etchings not used for the original printing, are reproduced in *Giacometti, Leiris et Iliasz: Portraits gravés* (Paris: FAGE, 2008), n.p.
- 25 Véronique Wiesinger gives a detailed account of the book's genesis and production, in which she disagrees with previous hypotheses by Armel, op. cit., and Ursula Perruchi-Petri, in *Alberto Giacometti, Vivantes cendres, innommées: Eine unbekannte Graphikfolge* (Bern: Berteli Verlag, 1989), based on recollections by the publisher Jean Hugues regarding the time-span during which the etchings were made: Wiesinger, 'Giacometti, Leiris, Iliasz: "Qu'on vous regarde / ou qu'on vous pense / vous vivez, / vous existez"', in *Giacometti, Leiris et Iliasz: Portraits gravés*, pp. 6-13.

or word-play as might be found in better known earlier texts, many preoccupations are ongoing, including death, the mineral and processes of metamorphosis.²⁶

The poems of *Vivantes cendres, innommées* have not previously been considered in detail, and scholars have studied the book as a whole in one of two contexts: as an important stage in the development of the *livre de dialogue*, produced through close cooperation between writer and artist, or as another means of approaching Leiris's autobiographical project, given its status as the expression of his response to a pivotal event in his life.²⁷

In contrast, the present analysis will argue that the book exemplifies poetry as loss and as offering. Jean-Michel Maulpoix outlines the ways in which a poem can be an offering or gift, from the apparently straightforward practices of dedication and address to its opening out towards an unknown reader, in place of self-expression.²⁸ Intrinsic to this offering is loss: the poem presents an 'il y a' that designates all that is absent. Here Maulpoix is close to Blanchot's discussion of literature as loss: writing shows the absence of what it names and thereby makes death plain. All language can do is become a physical presence that accepts that loss, making a point of its own impossibility.²⁹

A focus on Leiris's different uses of the pronoun 'tu', whose function is shifting and indeterminate, will illuminate the ways in which this is in operation in *Vivantes cendres, innommées*. Poems and etchings will be shown to have a deictic

- 26 An example of a volume built on wordplay would be *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses* (1940) in *Mots sans mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). Joëlle de Sermet outlines the persistent themes in Leiris's poetry in *Michel Leiris: Poète surréaliste* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), p. 9.
- 27 Damien Bril discusses the place of the etchings in Giacometti's practice in 'Alberto Giacometti, illustrateur de livres', in *Giacometti, Leiris et Iliadz: Portraits gravés*, pp. 14-25. Yves Peyré proposes the expression *livre de dialogue* for those books that emerge from shared concerns and processes rather than commentary on images or illustration of text that would assume a time-lag between the two contributions: *Peinture et poésie: le dialogue par le livre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001). He considers *Vivantes cendres, innommées* to be crucial to the form's renewal owing to Leiris's and Giacometti's 'discretion', through which they ensured that neither text nor image was dominant (pp. 168-69). Wiesinger and Armel focus on the importance of the personal connection between writer and artist. De Sermet concentrates on Leiris's major poetic works, with a brief discussion of *Vivantes cendres, innommées* among other later collections, and argues that, far from being preparatory or ancillary to his autobiographical writing, poetry for Leiris is another means of finding the self (p. 265).
- 28 Maulpoix, 'Introduction à une poétique du texte offert (Apostilles)', in *Poétique du texte offert*, ed. by Jean-Michel Maulpoix (Fontenay/St. Cloud: ENS Editions, 1996), pp. 11-24.
- 29 This discussion is pursued principally in 'La Littérature et le droit à la mort', in *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 303-45. Richard Stamelman cites Blanchot in *Lost Beyond Telling: Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 35-46. Stamelman devotes a section to Giacometti and poets' responses to him, not including Leiris (pp. 180-93).

rather than representative function, and the relationship between texts and images, instead of simply reflecting the biographical connection between their creators, will be found to embody offering and loss. The 'tu' occurs as dedicatee, or as muse. In addition, it can be read as death itself (what is other to temporal or spatial human existence), or as the figure of the lost voice: this is not just the self who cannot return once the near-encounter with death has transformed the subject into a 'revenu',³⁰ but also the self that is the unattainable goal of the writing process rather than its expressive origin.

Two poems in the collection appear to be dedicated to a beloved other: 'À qui l'on aime', the opening poem (p. 217), though this is the one occasion on which that other is addressed as 'vous' rather than 'tu', and by an impersonal 'on', and 'Toi' (pp. 225-26), which lists comparisons for the other, showing his or her redemptive power; twelve of the first thirteen nouns employed for comparison are masculine, and the remaining seven are feminine. There are various more oblique addresses to a 'tu', such as the use of questions ('Dilemme', p. 220) and the repeated invocation of the 'tu' in 'Missives' (p. 226), a poem that could be seen to consist of missives to that figure. The title of the final poem makes explicit the refusal to name or designate the other that has been present throughout: 'Innommée' (p. 230). By removing the agreement attached to this adjective in the volume's title, Leiris transforms it into a noun. The unnamed is said to have been an illusory promise of transformation; a biographical reading would suggest that it is the near-encounter with death that has failed to produce the desired change.

It is possible to see the poems as expressing Leiris's feelings as he recovers, and the 'tu' appears to stand for the lost self. But rather than a biographical past self, the 'tu' might be all that it is futile to attempt to capture in writing. In 'Missives', he writes:

Rien à surgir
 sinon des pleins et des déliés
 de la feuille sans nuances ni aspérités
 où je cherche à sculpter tes ombres,
 tes lumières
 et tes dénivellations de créature vivante (pp. 226-27)

The quest to convey three-dimensionality, whether of the self, another person, the world or an experience, is thwarted by the necessity of employing a two-dimensional form: the upstrokes of writing on paper. Nevertheless, Leiris goes on to write, the 'tu' will take shape, 'comme je m'incarne en mes mots décharnés' (p. 227). This is not the 'real' self, but it will be a new written form that cannot be equated with representation.

30 Perruchi-Petri, *Alberto Giacometti, Vivantes cendres, innommées: Eine unbekanntes Graphikfolge*, p. 10.

Giacometti's etchings might appear representational, illustrating Leiris and the feelings expressed in his writing; it has been suggested that the balcony and open window, in contrast to the bourgeois furnishings, correlate with the sense of imprisonment conveyed in some of the poems.³¹ Nevertheless, such scenes are typical of his drawings and lithographs irrespective of the particular circumstances of the people who inhabit the spaces.³² Giacometti is pursuing his project of designating ephemerality, or showing what things look like at a particular moment in order to demonstrate that time cannot be arrested. Despite their figurative status, the etchings are not representational because they do not fix, and thereby replace, a person or place. They are deictic in the same way as the poems, embodying loss instead of suggesting completion through an act of illustration.

Giacometti's etching of an open window is reproduced opposite the poem 'Au vif' (p. 219). Its title reconfigures the usual expression 'À vif', implying that the poem is addressed to openness, speed, and a sense of being alive. No 'tu' figure is introduced in this instance, but each line opens with 'à'. The first stanza consists of a series of idiomatic phrases that all imply energy: 'À cors et à cris / À toutes brides / À ras bord / À tire d'ailes': rapid movement is therefore designated by the semantic meaning of the expressions and by sense of projection 'towards' emphasized by the repeated 'à'; this projection can be seen both as physical movement and as the act of offering the poem. The second stanza follows the same pattern, but moves from idiomatic expressions to concrete ones that take on the status of idioms owing to the repetition in structure. It ends: 'À pierre fendre / À chaudes larmes / À pleines voiles'. In a manner typical of Leiris's poetry and of his writing on Giacometti's art, he combines matter and emotion, with particular emphasis on the mineral.³³ By moving from the abstract to the concrete, Leiris designates the attempt to come to terms with physical existence, and time-limited human life, more effectively than if the poem were seen as the vehicle for expressing feelings and thoughts. Giacometti's evocation of the open window similarly suggests movement towards the outside world through a focus on the physical here and now.

If Leiris's and Giacometti's projects can be considered analogous, then dialogue might seem to be a helpful model for their collaboration: the etchings respond to the poems, and the conversations known to have taken place could have

- 31 See, for instance, 'La Vie bleue' (p. 220), 'En proie' (pp. 220-21), 'De quel lointain' (p. 221), or 'Je mime Lazare' (p. 222).
- 32 Important examples of portraits and street and interior scenes to which these can be compared appear in Giacometti's posthumously published book *Paris sans fin* (Paris: Tériade, 1969).
- 33 In a 1929 article on Giacometti written for *Documents*, Leiris develops an extended series of images based on disintegration, including snow, dust and salt, which is related to tears: 'Alberto Giacometti', *Documents*, 1.4 (1929; repr. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1991), 209-214 (p. 210).

led to a shared vision. However, this closeness can be understood as different from easy communication. Blanchot's discussion of the loss inherent in writing makes silence central to it: writing is based on the emptiness of death because naming replaces the thing that is designated with words; he acknowledges Hölderlin's and Mallarmé's awareness of this. Language attempts to reach the moment of silence before naming brought about death: rather than a wish for presence, this is the unmasking of the fact that naming offers the illusion of presence.³⁴ In *Vivantes cendres, innommées*, the 'tu' includes the meaning 'silenced' in addition to its other connotations. Leiris engages with the paradox of naming and silence in his awareness not only that his writing will fail to capture his experience, but also that the lost self or other is banished by the very act of evocation: the final poem ends 'dans cette brume opalescente où l'anecdote se dérobe / seul subsiste un cliquettement de paroles' (p. 230). However, there is a tension between the sense of language as enacting abolition and an assertion of what it can achieve, which mirrors Blanchot's argument that language can be part of the world if it insists on its own materiality. In this final poem of the sequence, language can be construed not as emptiness, but rather as what is left if the attempt to represent has been eschewed: the 'Innommé' of its title. Blanchot writes of literature:

Elle dit: Je ne représente plus, je suis; je ne signifie pas, je présente. [...] Quand elle refuse de nommer, quand du nom elle fait une chose obscure, insignifiante, témoin de l'obscurité primordiale, ce qui, ici, a disparu – le sens du nom – est bel et bien détruit, mais à la place a surgi la signification en général.³⁵

The book's material form exemplifies all the senses of the pronoun 'tu': in addition to the person, people or things to whom poems are addressed, death, and all that is other and cannot be captured in language without also being irretrievably lost, the 'tu' can be the reader, and the form of the *livre d'artiste* means that a reader – Giacometti – and his response, are visible on the pages of the book itself via his etchings. Blanchot predicates friendship on silence, arguing that exchange requires interruptions and gaps.³⁶ Maulpoix argues that the writing and reading of poetry, rather than consisting of an exchange, involves the encounter and the distance between two solitudes: 'Le don serait finalement cette ouverture même, cette ouverture ou cette clairière, sentie comme sortie de soi, accueil de l'autre'.³⁷ In this way, the encounter between Leiris's words and Giacometti's images demonstrates both friendship and loss, an enactment of offering and reception without illusory plenitude or illustrative function. The etchings' designation of the ephemeral present signifies the patient's return from death to human time in which

34 Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 325-27.

35 Ibid., p. 331.

36 Blanchot, *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 328.

37 Maulpoix, 'Introduction à une poétique du texte offert (Apostilles)', p. 21.

he is once again mortal. But the etchings also make manifest the preference for deixis over representation that can be discerned in the poems as well, and rather than attempting to achieve closeness by illustrating the words, they operate in an analogous, but separate way, in order to enact the reception of the poems. *Vivantes cendres, innommées* embodies the action of poetry that takes on a new existence as loss in the process of offering itself.

Although they are both *livres d'artistes* by writers and artists formerly associated with the classical avant-garde, *Parler seul* and *Vivantes cendres, innommés* can be read as demonstrating and enacting different forms of friendship, dedication, the ambiguous 'tu' figure, and mental illness or distress. In this paper, we have argued that friendship and dedication can operate in ways that go beyond the biographical, and that lead to more productive understandings of how a book might function, as written text or in relation to accompanying images.

Poetry, construed as dedication in our analysis of *Vivantes cendres, innommés*, reveals not intimacy and exchange between writer and reader, but rather distance and loss, and these features produce its importance as offering. The texts and etchings show that the act of designating the real, instead of simply revealing the failure or rejection of avant-garde experimentation and shock, can be a valid and urgent task. Meanwhile, reading *Parler seul* close to and in context – in relation to women, friendship and psychiatry – helps to answer the basic question of what these poems are about. This may sound like an unambitious objective for literary criticism, but the fundamental opaqueness of Tzara's poems remains a factor in the marked disparity between his status in cultural history and the relative lack of serious critical interest in his writing. As is the case with *Vivantes cendres, innommées*, however, *Parler seul* allows for important refinements in the cultural memory and persona of its author. Indeed, to return to an issue with which this discussion opened, both books represent case studies in support of the commonsense supposition that behind the exuberance and glee with which the avant-garde is often associated were damageable human minds and individuals who, for decades after the fervour of classical avant-garde activity, continued to grapple with a fundamental human problem: how to live well.³⁸

38 Cf. 'Ce qui intéresse un dadaïste est sa propre façon de vivre'; Tzara, 'Conférence sur Dada', *OC I*, 419-24 (p. 424).