

LITERARY CONCORDANCES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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(Translated by Áine Larkin)

ABSTRACT

In the context of the most recent experiments involving dance–literature relations, I would like to focus on *Concordan(s)e*, a fascinating literary and artistic adventure that has been ongoing since 2007. A collaborative encounter between a writer and a choreographer leads to the co-creation of a new, shared work, which is a sort of prolongation or extension of their individual artistic worlds. This ‘shared artistic act’ invites reflection on a possible transformation that affects not only the novel but also creativity itself. The novel is changed by the ‘mutation’ of the act of writing. This ‘mutation’ both nourishes the reader-spectator and serves as the foundation for thinking about the writer’s creative process; it also gives the literary text another form. Might not this change in the act of writing be the main issue to be considered if we are to understand one of the ways the contemporary novel is developing, and to broaden the scope of studies on the relationship between dance and literature?

Keywords: dance and literature; verbal dance; act of writing; act of dancing; moving reading; mutating/mutant literature; contemporary extreme; Concordan(s)e

TO BEGIN, I wish to thank Áine Larkin for organizing the ‘Meaning(s) in Motion’ symposium at the University of Aberdeen in May 2015, on the links between dance and contemporary French literature, and for using my monograph *Dans l’encre de la danse* as a starting point for thinking about this topic.¹ It has given me the opportunity to return to, and update, my research in this area. Such specific encounters in the academic world are rare, although recently more focused attention on this kind of interdisciplinary study has been seen.

My research activity as part of the Groupe de Recherche sur l’Extrême Contemporain (GREC) [Contemporary Extreme Research Group] explores the link between dance and contemporary French literature.² It began fifteen years ago, and like all research, is not yet complete. With *Dans l’encre de la danse* (published in 2006), I simply took a few initial steps, while at the same time research activity was ongoing in the field. It was wonderful then to see the quantity of new novels about dance, the numerous colloquia and seminars dealing with the question, and initiatives bringing the two arts together. Notable events included a colloquium at the University of Verona in December 2008; study days on Yannick Haenel’s *Cercle* in February 2009 at the

University of Pau and the Pays d'Adour; and the *Concordan(s)e* festival. In its twelfth year in 2019, this festival is dedicated to the intersections between dance and contemporary literature, and facilitates a network of varied, open-ended experiments located somewhere between fiction and written performance.

Dans l'encre de la danse [In the ink / anchor of the dance]: prose in movement

How does the universe of dance, of vertiginous 'tours' [turns] and arabesques, combine with that of words?³ This is the question underpinning my research on dance in literature published in the last fifty years. I have tried throughout to establish fixed points of reference with regard to the importance of, or the relationship between, dance and writing. From the dancer's material body, through its gradual disappearance, to the idealization of the written word, and the 'non-corps' [non-body] of writing, my research has led to a sort of *entre-deux* [in-between], a phenomenological space of 'situations' where writing dance oscillates between word and object, reality and imagination. 'Verbal dancing' is a form of narrative. My research explores this in-between space situated somewhere between communication and abstraction, meaning and sense or metaphor, freedom and constraint, the clarity of the word and the opacity of language. More work is needed to better explain how this discourse about 'riens' [nothings]⁴ works – this useless art that is literary writing about dance, and whose success is based less on the writer's themes or intentions than on the 'situations' and 'tensions' of the narrative. Writing these pages may very well encompass a movement that integrates, in a single gesture, the art of dance and the art of the sign, leading to a magical spectacle of the word, which opens up new spaces to writing through dance.

Prose about dance is a sort of prose poetry. 'Before', 'during' and 'after' dance, novels' words remain evocative. In twilight, only bodies and gestures speak. According to circumstance, words about dancing become a dancing body whose leaps, twirls and bends enlarge the surface of the world and the surface of the word. Speech itself is generated and regenerated with every step. The writer relives dance's primitive upsurge, which is an archetypal gesture, freeing her/himself from contemporary ideological and cultural structures based on a false image, and opposing to it the authenticity of the body and dancing. This authenticity is made manifest through a corporeality and a movement that enrich the text. 'Here' and 'now', dance is immediate participation that enables fusion between the 'self' and the world, a transgression of the verbal and cultural universe. Literary writing about dance generates a renewal of narrative language, centred around the repetition of words and phrases as well as the use of certain syntactical structures; no longer just a choice of words, it becomes a physical point of reference. The function of dance in literature is a narrative one. Dance prose is writing in three movements – 'bodily', 'vertiginous' and 'vocal' – that shifts between stillness and acceleration.

From a condition of 'seeming' fixity – 'seeming' because it is charged with tension – there is a switch to movement, which suddenly or progressively dies away, to the point where the action stagnates. Sometimes, this is followed by a voice talking about

dance, through the action of thought or by setting up an observation. The immobility of the outset, which is always false in that it contains potential movement, is communicated through several things: the body's relationship with music; the description of place, which is often linked with that of light; and bodily tension (through the expectation of movement, the senses, energy, the gaze and sensitivity). Desire and a feeling of lightness, and the different orchestrations of dancing movement trigger action to the point where language itself becomes unsteady. This ends only when the activity that preceded dancing, or the action of thought, returns or is taken up again – or when the writing itself stops. Sometimes, different uses of the voice that trigger dancing also bring the action to an end. The aim of writing dancing may well be to reconstruct writing's very own dance within this diversity of sameness and this distance that binds together.

Beyond any narrative or communicative intention, writing 'en arabesque' [with repetitive motifs] is a dynamic language and a set of words that introduce unexpected movement into the story, one which emphasizes parallel images and worlds for the reader. Dance in literature is a 'limit' experience of the body. Just as dance is a poetry of the body, so writing is a poetry of words, when words are freed from the obligation to communicate. Like art, writing dancing is a recognizable existence in itself, which gives access to a second, 'other' reality that is on the margins of the ordinary, and where the symbol is more important than meaning – 'Écrire, pour que l'indicible puisse se dire et ainsi, pour que soient repoussées les limites de la communication humaine' [Write so that the unsayable may be said, and thus so that the limits of human communication may be stretched].⁵

Writers use dance as an archetype because of a need to organize movement. Writing dance in literature shows motion that frees and enriches the page, while setting up the body and dance as models of action and richness in opposition to the stasis of a situation. It is a physical and mental act of the body, which sometimes combines with the act of writing. As an energetic, lively, image-rich kind of writing, conveying the emotion of the lived dance that can be minutely or elliptically described, narrative brings together not only the characters' questions or thoughts, but also the narrator's remarks on the action. When writing speaks of dance, it becomes a prose of transformation, representing and projecting movement, through the impression of strength and weightlessness, and the effect of defying gravity, that together create this 'flight', reinforced by the body's disappearance and the magic of intoxicating music.

Writing dance today: new harmonies

Given that this article is but the beginning of a project that is likely to grow over time, it is important to point up the links between dance and literature in recent years. An aesthetic is now emerging around dance in the novel and it is marked by a new kind of equipoise. Geneviève Vincent's *Trop de corps* (2007), Yannick Haenel's *Cercle* (2007) and Patrick Grainville's *Lumière du rat* (2008) are a far cry from the type of self-referential, minimalist writing that dominated, notably in the 1990s, in novels

about bodies, works that depict a body reduced to a memory-fragment of lost identity. I am thinking here of a whole series of works of literature on the broken, splintered, damaged body, from Lorette Nobécourt's *La Démangeaison* (1994) to Virginie Despentes' provocative texts (such as *Baise-moi* (1994) and *Mordre au travers* (1996)), and Christine Angot's *Inceste* (1999). Vincent, Haenel and Grainville, on the other hand, reclaim the body as a living, breathing entity which the 'act of writing', like that of 'dancing', reconstructs through a more lush, hard-hitting, even violent prose, but one modulated by a certain lyrical quality. Any suffering, fatigue and pain the body feels in such texts are not there to disfigure, deny or erase it, but rather to honour and elevate it, through writing that writes the present moment, in order to celebrate the body's creative efforts. The 'act of writing' has the task of reviving this body threatened with death:

Par où commence mon corps et comment dans ce paysage dévasté, l'acte d'écrire devient de manière claire un acte de résistance à la mort qui vient. Sache que le prix à payer est la fatigue.

[Wherever and however my body begins in this devastated landscape, the act of writing is clearly an act of resistance against approaching death. Know that the price to pay is fatigue.]⁶

For Geneviève Vincent, writing does not mean telling stories or one's own story in order to share one's existential experiences; it means rendering a fragment of inner lived experience, with the kind of inner motivating desire that characterizes dance. '[R]ien ne viendra plus de l'extérieur [. . .]; tout viendra de ma propre force. On ne peut pas écrire sans la force du corps.' [Nothing more will come from outside me [. . .]; everything will come from my own strength. Writing cannot happen without the body's strength.]⁷ Through dance, there is a conscious process of reconstructing the self and regenerating narrative.

In *Lumière du rat*, as in Vincent's novel, the body can be rediscovered through dance, via a refined, sensual, almost baroque prose – through the struggle between the body and the dance, animal instinct and the grace of a dancing body. Dance informs the very structure of Haenel's *Cercle*, where the writing emerges in circles, multiplying images based on unusual word choices that are concerned more with subjective, bodily feeling than with any objective meaning. The body in *Cercle* is not hurt; it is a surge of energy.⁸ If dance proposes a new life to the body, thanks to the quality of its gestural language, the act of writing *Cercle* is renewed constantly due to the writer's attention to the least obvious aspects of life – 'Je raconterai ce qui m'est arrivé en détail. Ce sont les détails qui m'ont permis de m'en sortir.' [I will recount in detail what happened to me. It was the details that helped me to escape from it.]⁹

In Hervé Gauville's *Pas de deux*,¹⁰ pas de deux technique with its moments of contact and distance constitutes a model for the work's prose. The whole novel is a recording made over the course of a week – one person speaks while another listens; there are pauses and digressions. The theme is the love story triggered by dancing;

but actually, dance may in fact be found also and especially within the quirky dialogue itself, where references to the body-text are explicit:

Avez-vous remarqué comment le corps se noue à la parole empêchée, comment ses articulations peuvent avoir la rigidité d'une syntaxe rouillée?

[Have you noticed how the body knots itself up with the unspoken word, how its joints can be as stiff as rusty syntax?]¹¹

puisqu'il s'agit de danse, puisque vous vous prévaluez de cette compétence, comment pourriez-vous ignorer certains écarts du langage qui ne sont, tout compte fait, que les faux pas de notre chorégraphie commune, de notre pas de deux, le *paso doble* de notre dialogue?

[since we're talking about dance, and you claim to be skilled at it, how could you ignore linguistic lapses which are, after all, only the missteps in our shared choreography, our *pas de deux*, our dialogue's *paso doble*?]¹²

Among recently published novels, Philippe Grimbert's *Rudik* deserves special mention.¹³ In spite of the evident research underpinning the narrative and the real-life moments that appear repeatedly, it is less a fictionalized biography of the famous dancer Rudolph Nureyev than a reimagination of his life that grants him a new existence as a character in a novel, thereby enabling the reader to get closer to him. Grimbert imagines the artist's confessions to a psychologist after he becomes depressed on returning to Russia, on his first visit to his birthplace in twenty-six years. Through *Rudik-as-Nureyev*, Grimbert can imagine the unusual process of analysis that might have happened between the star and a medical professional who resembles him quite a lot. The writing results in a fascinating confrontation, enthralling the reader beguiled by the dance which the novelist writes, inspired as he is by his model's energy.

'To write dance' is to write the body grappling with words, a body that writes not in order to tell a story or its own story, but to render a fragment of inner lived experience, starting from the same desire that leads to dancing. My research explores the possibility of these texts showing, through the space of authentic moments, fragments of life in the present moment which manifest the great difficulty of being in the world, but also our connectedness with it, where dance moves coincide with the 'adventure' of these writings. Such an adventure is an 'act' of creation, where the primacy of 'I write' over the 'writer' makes 'writing' a way of life, which becomes a need and a discipline, just as with dance – a way of living to '*return from the depths of Hell*' rather than a status that produces meaning. Contrary to the organic, splenetic novel of a few years ago, recent writing shows a move away from a written, narrated body and dancing, to a 'narrating' body and writing characterized by an active body affirming its identity through the prose.

Within the context of the overall weakening of the French literary imaginary,¹⁴ writing about dance in the contemporary extreme is an unexpected flowering. The crisis in the perception of the body and the inability to 'recount' which a lack of imaginative powers causes are now expressed through a feeling of disorder, which

means that the body and dance (its moving form) are being considered as among humanity's last means of expression. In this writing, dance is a virtual space. It exists thanks to the representation the writer manages to make of it, however fragmentary it may be. These are a few considerations which ought to be pondered in an 'attempt' to legitimize this writerly 'dynamic', while also considering how dance is at one and the same time a delicate geometry of volumes and bodies in a changed 'space-time', and a way of life and of thinking about movement.

It is useful to note, alongside this writing about dance, the increasingly intense collaboration between writers and choreographers that has been happening in recent years. Pascal Quignard and Angelin Preljocaj's 1995 collaboration led to the work *L'Anouwe*, based on Quignard's *La Voix perdue*. It was followed by Christine Angot and Mathilde Monnier's 2005 *La Place du singe*.¹⁵ Another 2005 co-creation was *À quoi tu penses?* by Marie Nimier and Dominique Boivin, based on Nimier's text *Vous dansez?*. Within the context of this writing 'for' the stage, it is important to point up how very much more developed the most recent works are. In the Quignard/Preljocaj collaboration, for example, the voice of the text became a character in the *L'Anouwe* ballet, performed by Preljocaj himself, dressed in white. By contrast, Nimier's *Vous dansez?* concerns 'everything that happens inside the heads' of the dancers while they are dancing – and in the written monologues Nimier wrote for the dancers in Boivin's 'Beau Geste' company, there is a reciprocal absorption of the writing by the dancing and vice versa. This means that the voiceover does not tell a story; rather it incarnates thought and becomes 'flesh' – the dancers' thoughts take on bodily form. Incarnated thought is brought to life by the dancer's body, which gives life and a body to the textual voice. Words do not replace gestures; they become gesture, a 'parole incarnée' [language made flesh].¹⁶

Other collaborations have emerged, such as François Weyergans and Micha van Hoecke's work *Salomé*, which was on the Ravenna Festival programme in July 2008. In 2010, Éric Reinhardt and Angelin Preljocaj worked together on a new work, *Siddharta*, for the Paris Opera. For the Lyon Biennale in 2012, Laurent Mauvignier and Angelin Preljocaj brought *Ce que j'appelle oubli* to the stage, a work based on Mauvignier's eponymous text.¹⁷ Finally, the extraordinary adventure that is the *Concordan(s)e* Festival began in 2007, offering a new, concrete possibility to question dance and literature within the framework of an 'open' artistic space.¹⁸

Concordan(s)e

Every year since 2007, *Concordan(s)e* has proved to be a gripping literary, artistic adventure, born of a writer and a choreographer collaborating to make a new work. Strangers beforehand, the two artists live and work together for a month in order to get to know one other, tease out some shared points of interest, and formulate a work that brings their disciplines and interests together. In order to come up with an agreed project that will link language and the body in their own uniquely personal, contingent ways, they observe each other, talk, and ask one another about their creative motives. It is a case of two creative practices and two ways of seeing co-existing

on stage to exchange with and complement each other. Judith Mayer remarks with regard to this process that:

Le terme de ‘concordance’ revêt une dimension performative, puisque tout l’enjeu de la collaboration entre eux est bien de trouver un équilibre entre leurs pratiques sans fragiliser leurs compétences respectives.

[The term ‘concordance’ has a performative dimension, since the principal concern of the collaboration between them is to find a balance between their creative practices without weakening their respective skills.]¹⁹

The resulting show illustrates this mixed alliance; it lasts thirty minutes and the only constraint is that the dancer must remain within a small space (6m²) that includes the writer too. Hence the need for the dancer to attract the audience’s attention to the fusion of body and words using a minimal range of gestures. From the start, both writer and choreographer find themselves drawn into an interdisciplinary perspective.

During the 2015 Festival, there were five new pairings.²⁰ As a result of the artists being immersed in each other’s creative worlds, new collaborative works were presented to the public. These works bear witness to the understanding the artists have reached and the space each has offered the other. Whether it be between the artists themselves (writer and choreographer) or between them and the public, the aim is always to stimulate curiosity, a critical eye, and the discovery of new fields of exploration, without forgetting all the encounters and exchanges that follow on from this pooling of creative resources. What is fascinating in exploring ways of writing in this manner are the encounters they bring about – the time the two artists spend on research, and what they offer and share with each other, but also with the public, which becomes a catalyst opening up new perspectives while questioning the fundamental underpinnings of the work. Throughout the year, the *Concordan(s)* organizing committee sets up different kinds of encounter with the public during the period when new work is being made: dance- and literature-writing workshops, public rehearsals, dance/writing readings, all of which offer new opportunities for public engagement, giving the public the chance to see the creative process up close.²¹

The surprising aspect of this initiative is not so much the tendency for dance to affect language, as the requirement that the writer be onstage. ‘À l’origine, il s’agissait d’accompagner les danseurs dans l’élaboration d’une pièce’ [At first, we did this to accompany the dancers while a new work was being developed], said the artistic director, Jean-François Munnier, ‘un écrivain peut les aider à verbaliser, analyser leurs gestes’ [a writer can help them verbalize, analyse their gestures].²² Opening up practices starts there. The collaborating partners get together in the studio to define a joint strategy in approaching the stage set: text and show conceived of together. ‘L’écriture gagne en liberté car la danse permet à chacun de raconter ses histoires’ [Writing is freed up because dance allows everyone to tell their own stories], states Arnaud Cathrine, the writer who worked with Philippe Combes in 2009; ‘En revanche, faire quelque chose de son corps, le sortir de sa position d’écrivain, est une

autre affaire, et c'est ça qui me passionne' [On the other hand, it's quite another matter to make something with your body, to move it beyond its position as a writer – and that's what fascinates me].²³ Rosita Boisseau wrote in *Le Monde* that 'la question du corps et de la présence, centrale dans le spectacle vivant comme dans les arts plastiques, est le premier enjeu évoqué par les écrivains' [the question of the body and of presence, which is central to live performance and to the plastic arts, is the most important issue that writers mention].²⁴

It seems that contemporary writing no longer happens in complete solitude, but rather within the present moment of all art, which is notable for overstepping boundaries and exceeding modes of expression. Literature today is affected less by the question of its own definition than by that of its limitlessness. Pushing the boundaries of literary art is an experience that occurs through literature's relationship with the other arts and with the world, rather than through language itself. Modern writers get involved in artistic, social collaborations; they try out skills that are new to them; they enter naturally into different artistic and social milieus, where they can bring their own writerly art with them and see it in a new way by granting it new powers and potential.

Concordan(s)e is therefore the result of these exchanges, this immersion, these connections between gesture and word. At each festival, every writer/choreographer encounter gives the witnessing, colluding public unexpected forms and new artworks which make this experience so particularly rich and unusual. The shows offered are also one-of-a-kind and push both writer and choreographer to reflect on how to define the word 'creation'. Diverse and varied hybrid forms are thus born of these encounters between artists. Working in this way means that texts may be considered from another perspective. Interdisciplinary artistic activity allows everyone to reinvent themselves and avoid being enclosed; they can 'open out' towards, and tackle, different ways of making art, and in so doing complement each other.

During the sixth Festival, in 2012, the Fabrice Melquiot/Jean-Baptiste André duo²⁵ provided a good example of the values and issues at play in these concordan(c)es, especially their 'lectures mouvementées' [moving readings/reading in motion/lively, eventful readings].²⁶ What emerged from the two pieces of writing that preceded the text of the eponymous work, *L'Espace*, was a stream of thoughts and reflections on the new characteristics expected of these works, both textual and performative. This led the artists to consider the transformations happening in the creative arts at that moment, where artistic form was understood as follows: as a trying-out rather than a polished spectacle; as a shared act of creation to inhabit space 'together', rather than parallel performances; as an act of instantaneous enunciation, where the artists wonder about what to say, and how to say and do it, at the same time. Writing space proves therefore to be work 'on', 'in', 'for', 'under' and 'with' space. It may be taken to be a space of freedom and representation; as a space to be written in, after the writer encounters another body s/he must collaborate with; as needing an open form to be written for it, thereby bringing about the end of narration; as writing under this space that was created deliberately in order to be shared; or finally, as writing a single-voiced dialogue with space. All

of this leads to an artform that bears witness to the shared presence of the writer and the dancer, the bringing together of ideas and bodies. Thinking about the links between literature and the dancing body, Alice Godfroy observes that

Les arts littéraire et chorégraphique vont s'aventurer, parallèlement, vers l'horizon d'une même réponse: c'est par le corps, par la voie du sens, qu'il sera possible de régénérer le sens. La 'révolution' du langage littéraire passe par une méfiance envers le référent verbal et, corollairement, une confiance nouvelle accordée au corps.

[The literary and choreographic arts are going to venture, in parallel, towards the prospect of one and the same answer: it is through the body, by means of feeling, that meaning may be renewed. The 'revolution' in literary language is taking place through a mistrust of the verbal referent and, consequently, a new faith in the body.]²⁷

The final work was an expansion of the text and its source material, which is concerned less with 'showing' than with making a presence visible, warts and all. The text of *L'Espace* looks very airy, with the writing spread over the page in such a way that every sentence occupies its own space, and it points up the 'silences', which are pauses underlining the different parts of this text-play, written to be spoken during the performance. On stage, every word and sentence spoken stimulated a corresponding movement, using all the available space, not as a consequential but as an immediate link. This gave a different weight sometimes to speech and sometimes to the dance. What was notable was the increasingly frequent, almost obsessive, repetitions – first, of the word 'muscle'; then of the phrase 'muscle tenseur' [tensor], which emerges from the body to suggest all kinds of mundane images; and finally, in the last sentence, the phrase 'espace entre toi et moi' [space between you and me]. This phrase represented the issue the piece was concerned with – the pivot around which the two artists were working. The space of these co-creations is not designed to circumscribe. On the contrary, the artist/writer interaction should open up that space and provide a means to reflect and better fix their discoveries, disrupt their habits, and thus together consider the processes and concerns of the different artforms involved.

Concordan(s)e extends the individual creative realm of each participating artist. It is 'un acte artistique commun' [a shared artistic act] that, on the one hand, 'permet d'explorer des modes inhabituels d'expression et la découverte d'univers artistiques méconnus' [allows the exploration of unfamiliar modes of expression and discovery of unknown artistic worlds].²⁸ On the other hand, it brings about reflection on a potential transformation affecting not just the novel but creativity itself. The novel changes when the act of writing mutates. The reader-spectator thrives on this 'mutation', which also stimulates writers' thinking about the creative process, and engenders a new form of literary text. This 'mutating' literature, as David Ruffel defines it in the issue of *Littérature* devoted to *La littérature exposée*, seeks to create new aesthetic experiences through its changes of stage-set and medium, and its previously unseen mixing with other creative modes of expression.²⁹ Within this framework, what we are witnessing, Ruffel remarks, are '[des] pratiques littéraires qui débordent le cadre du livre et le geste d'écriture, en démultipliant les possibilités d'intervention

et de création des écrivains' [literary practices which exceed the limits of the book and the gesture of writing, by increasing exponentially writers' potential avenues for acting and creating artworks]. Ruffel emphasizes the idea of a 'littérature qui se fait "contexte" et non dans la seule communication *in absentia* de l'écriture, du cabinet de travail ou de la lecture muette et solitaire des textes' [literature which becomes 'situational' [contextual], a context that is not restricted to the mere *potential* for communication that writing holds, in the author's study, or in the silent, solitary reading of texts].³⁰ What is being created are 'collective' artworks. Distinct artistic realms are not speaking *to* each other; each sets the other going, in a space-time where practices and perceptual worlds blend. The resulting 'polymorphous' works struggle against the prevailing fixation with genre and formal constraints. Written word and movement thus give life to a heterogeneous, extreme body, and to a space of exchange where no artistic expression can be imposed. Instead, there is an explosion of meaning. When literature leaves the book to ally itself with other artforms, what we find are attempts to articulate diverse syntactical systems, which show their porousness and change our very sense of what a literary work is. The intrinsic power of these texts is their defining characteristic. The issue is to create concordances at the frontiers of different modes of expression, which give life to art. If our goal is to understand one noticeable trend in contemporary novels, and to broaden out the parameters for the study of the relationship between dance and literature, then could it be that the real issue we must consider is this change in the very act of writing itself?

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NOTES

¹ V. Gramigna, *Dans l'encre de la danse. Roman et danse entre XX^{ème} et XXI^{ème} siècles* (Bari: B. A. Graphis, 2006).

² GREC is a team of researchers who work on contemporary French literature at the University of Bari, Italy. Directed by Matteo Majorano, the group has been working on the contemporary extreme for almost twenty years, with the aim of building a bridge between French and Italian literature, while taking into consideration current trends in the contemporary extreme in European, US and Japanese literature. One goal is to develop our knowledge of French writers and their literary questions/problems/issues from a scientific perspective; another is to encourage a more concrete mingling of these two cultures. Every two years, a French writer received the Murat Prize (A French Novel for Italy). From 2001 to 2015, this prize was awarded on the opening day of the Contemporary Extreme conference, which took place every two years during that time. The conference allows us to give an account of the state of contemporary French literature and its reception to an audience of young students and researchers.

³ Gramigna, *Dans l'encre*, pp. 142–45. All translations from the French are by the editor, Áine Larkin.

- ⁴ C. Wajsbrot, *Pour la littérature* (Paris: Zulma, 1999), p. 40, p. 52.
- ⁵ C. Chawaf, 'Donner aux émotions leur écriture', *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 532 (16–31 May 1989), p. 10.
- ⁶ G. Vincent, *Trop de corps* (Montpellier: Indigène, 2007), p. 9.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ⁸ See V. Gramigna, 'Libri di carne. Dalla "pelle-testo" al "corpo di frasi": Nobécourt, Moreau, Vuillard, Haenel', in *im romanzo francese contemporaneo*, ed. by E. Bricco (= *Nuova Corrente*, 56 (2009)), pp. 331–44.
- ⁹ Y. Haenel, *Cercle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 304.
- ¹⁰ H. Gauville, *Pas de deux* (Paris: Verticales, 2007).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–05.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ¹³ Ph. Grimbert, *Rudik* (Paris: Plon, coll. Miroir, 2015).
- ¹⁴ Cf. M. Weitzmann, *28 raisons de se faire détester* (Paris: Stock, 2002): 'Il n'y a plus de système fiable, plus d'institution crédible, plus de critères, et, pour nous aider à définir notre goût, nous n'avons guère, outre l'éventuelle culture, que l'intuition [...] pour aller à la rencontre d'éventuels lecteurs' [There is no trustworthy system anymore, no credible institution; no criteria. To help us define our tastes, we have hardly anything except our intuition to lead us to engage with potential readers – besides the culture that might exist] (p. 14); M. Waldberg, *La Parole putanisée* (Paris: La Différence, 2002): 'Tout se passe comme si la littérature était en état de régression. Comme si, après les fulgurances de la première moitié du XX^{ème} siècle, les expérimentations, hasardeuses ou non, réussies ou pas, de l'après-guerre, elle s'était assagie, lénifiée, ne se proposant plus que de prévisibles motifs' [It looks as though literature were in a state of regression. As though, after the dazzling developments of the first half of the twentieth century and post-war experiments, whether risky or otherwise, successful or not, literature had become sensible, becalmed, and concerned only with predictable motifs] (p. 14); P. Jourde, *La Littérature sans estomac* (Paris: L'Esprit des Péninsules, 2002): 'Le paysage littéraire est devenu incertain' [the literary landscape has become uncertain] (p. 12), and contemporary literary production suffers from mediocrity (p. 39).
- ¹⁵ *La Place du singe* is a work denouncing the bourgeoisie, in which dance is a subtext before language emerges, displacing and freeing opposing gesture and characters, and producing derision, leading to anti-social characters: the witch, the madwoman, the child, or the monkey who transforms the way the text and the show can be viewed.
- ¹⁶ Cf. V. Gramigna, *La Parole incarnée. Autour de Marie Nimier et Dominique Boivin*, in *Pas de mots. De la littérature à la danse*, ed. by L. Colombo and S. Genetti (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2010), pp. 289–304.
- ¹⁷ L. Mauvignier, *Ce que j'appelle oubli* (Paris: Minuit, 2011).
- ¹⁸ Another noteworthy example of this kind of event is 'ActOral'. Established in Marseille in 2001 by Hubert Colas, this is an international art and contemporary writing festival, with a programme that features readings, performances, installations, and shows about emerging artistic forms linked with literature. 'ActOral' takes place every year, over a period of three or four weeks in September/October, at the heart of the literary and artistic return from summer holidays. Since 2009 there has been a collaboration between 'ActOral' and the 'Sonorités' festival which focuses on the links between literature and music.
- ¹⁹ J. Mayer, 'Le Festival Concordan(s): jeux d'influences entre texte et danse', in *Danse contemporaine et littérature, entre fiction et performances écrites*, ed. by M. Nachtergaele and L. Toth (Paris: Éditions du CND, coll. Recherches, 2015), p. 87.
- ²⁰ New dance and literature artworks were made by Fabrice Lambert & Gaëlle Obiegly; Julie Desprairies & Thomas Clerc; Jonah Bokaer & Antoine Dufeu; Yann Lheureux & François Beaune; Anne-Mareike Hess & Nathalie Ronvaux.
- ²¹ Initially held in Paris, the festival has since expanded to several regions of France. Two ways of speaking are brought together and put on show in unexpected places: bookshops, libraries, media centres or art galleries.

²² Quoted by Rosita Boisseau in 'Au festival Concordan(s)e de Bagnolet, six écrivains s'acoquent avec six chorégraphes', *Le Monde*, 30 March 2009, available at: <https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2009/03/30/au-festival-concordan-s-e-de-bagnolet-six-ecrivains-s-acoquent-avec-six-choregraphes_1174300_3246.html> [last accessed 29 April 2019].

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <<http://www.concordanse.com/Edition-2009>>.

²⁵ Fabrice Melquiot has been director of the Am Stram Theatre in Geneva since January 2012. He is the author of a number of texts, which have been performed widely in France and translated into a dozen languages. He worked with stage director Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota at the Centre Dramatique National in Reims, before both Melquiot and Demarcy-Mota moved to the Théâtre de la Ville. The recipient of numerous illustrious prizes, in 2008 he won the Académie Française theatre prize for his oeuvre as a whole. Jean-Baptiste André has a degree from the Cirque National des Arts du Cirque [Circus Arts National Circus]; he specializes in handstands. Along with his company, W, he has focused on the contemporary circus, creating two one-man shows: *intérieur nuit* (2004) and *comme en plein jour* (2006); a repertoire of small acts called 'modules', and *Qu'après en être revenue* in 2010, a show with three other tightrope walkers and a musician. In 2005, he became the first circus artist to win the Villa Médicis Hors Les Murs programme, and spent time in Japan where he staged a new work with two Japanese artists. André has danced for a number of choreographers. Recently, with François Verret et Rachid Ouramdane, he worked with director Arnaud Meunier on the choreography and staging of Michel Vinaver's play *11 septembre 2001*, which was put on at the Théâtre de la Ville in September 2011. For more information on both Melquiot and André, see <www.concordanse.com>.

²⁶ J.-F. Munnier (ed.), *Concordan(s)e*, p. 24.

²⁷ A. Godfroy, 'Pourquoi la littérature mobilise-t-elle le corps dansant?', in *Danse contemporaine et littérature*, ed. Nachtergaele and Toth, p. 27.

²⁸ J.-F. Munnier (ed.), *Concordan(s)e 3* (Paris: L'Œil d'or, 'Mémoires et miroirs', 2014), p. 5.

²⁹ D. Ruffel, 'Une littérature contextuelle', in *La Littérature exposée: Les Écritures contemporaines hors du livre*, ed. by O. Rosenthal and L. Ruffel (= *Littérature*, 160 (December 2010)), 61–73 (p. 67).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 62.