THE LANGUAGE OF LITHOGRAPHY IN *MATIÈRE ET MÉMOIRE*:
JEAN DUBUFFET'S CRITIQUE OF HENRI BERGSON

A Thesis in
Art History
by
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ABSTRACT

Substantial research has been lacking on French artist Jean Dubuffet in the English language, especially on his printed works. In this thesis, I perform a close look at his earliest published printmaking effort, in collaboration with the French poet, Francis Ponge. Titled *Matière et mémoire*, it is often connected to the publication of the same title by French philosopher, Henri Bergson. I argue that it is not a positive association but a subtle mockery by Dubuffet and Ponge of Bergson’s theories. It is well known that both Ponge and Jean Paulhan (the project’s behind the scenes director), did not care for Bergson’s theories on language. Through the lithographs of Dubuffet, and the poetic text of Ponge, Bergson’s ideas are referenced, mocked, and put down, in favor of a different approach to art and language that glorifies the everyday, put forth by Ponge and Dubuffet. This lithographic series in particular, allow a closer look at the collaboration between artist and writer. Although most scholars agree the project references Bergson, little has been made about the circumstances surrounding the connection to Bergson, or the circumstances of the project itself. Even less has been said about the images. Although this thesis uses Bergson as a comparison to Dubuffet’s ideas, the work is mostly focused on the collaborative efforts between Ponge, Dubuffet, and Paulhan.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. vii

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1  The Collaboration ......................................................................................... 11
  Dubuffet’s style ............................................................................................................. 11
  Ponge and the Naming of the Project ......................................................................... 16
  The Prose .................................................................................................................... 20
  The Images ................................................................................................................... 24

Chapter 2  Paulhan and his Influence .......................................................................... 32
  Introducing Jean Paulhan ........................................................................................... 32
  Les Fleurs de Tarbes and Bergson ............................................................................ 33
  The Omnipresence of Bergson .................................................................................. 38
  Dubuffet’s Interest in Language ................................................................................ 40

Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 55

Appendix A: Francis Ponge’s *Matière et mémoire*, .................................................. 62
Appendix B: The Lithographs of *Matière et mémoire*, .............................................. 71
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Nutrition. From Matière et mémoire. N.D. 1944. Lithograph in black ink. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1 [Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1964]) above the table………….......4

Figure 2. Que J’aime pas les Femmes Saoules les Emmerdeuses. From the series Les Messages. June 19, 1944. China ink and gouache. 18 x 22.5 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, Jean Dubuffet [Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2001], 54) …………………………………..4

Figure 3. Lion dans la Jungle, May 1944. China ink drawing. 25 x 20 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, Jean Dubuffet, 48.) …………………………………………………………………..45

Figure 4. Corps de Dame. June-August 1950. China ink drawing. 27 x 21 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, Jean Dubuffet, 50.) ……………………………………………………………..……45

Figure 5. Le Vaisseau de Barbe. From Assemblages d’empreintes. May, 1959. China ink lithographic assemblage. 51 x 34 cm. Collection of Diane and Arthur Abbey. (Source: Abadie, Jean Dubuffet, 210.) …………………………………………………………………………46

Figure 6. Jardin nacre. June, 1955. Butterfly wing collage. 21 x 29 cm. Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris. (Source: Abadie, Jean Dubuffet, 166.) ……………………………………………………………………..……46

Figure 7. Cyclotourisme. From Matière et mémoire. October, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Originally for the cover of Pierre Seghers’ “L’Homme Du Commun” published in October, 1944. 20 x 27 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ……………………………………………………………………..……47

Figure 8. Mur et Homme. From Les Murs. 1945. Lithograph with ink additions. 33.3 x 27.9cm. (Source: MoMA website. Purchase. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.) ……………………………………………………………………..……47

Figure 9. Chapel of Saint-Accurse and arch of Saint-Cesaire at Les Alyscamps. Arles, France. (Source: www.fotobank.com, BRO1-7307 Bridgeman.) ……………………………………………………………………..……48

Figure 10. Dactylographe. From Matière et mémoire. October 25, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Georges Limbour. 26.5 x 16 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ……………………………………………………………………..……48

Figure 11. Le Supplice du Téléphone. From Matière et mémoire. N.D. 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 29 x 18 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ……………………………………………………………………..……49

Figure 12. Le Salut de la Fenêtre. From Matière et mémoire. September 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Also published in Paul Eluard’s Quelques mots rassembles pour Monsieur Dubuffet in 1944. 20 x 11 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ……………………………………………………………………..……49
Figure 13. Plumeuse. From Matière et mémoire. November 27, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Fernand Mourlot. 32.5 x 19 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................50

Figure 14. Mangeurs d’oiseaux. From Matière et mémoire. October 28, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 24 x 34 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..........................50

Figure 15. Déjeuner de Poisson. From Matière et mémoire. September 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 21 x 16 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..................51

Figure 16. Travaux d’aiguille. From Matière et mémoire. September 15, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 20 x 13 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ......................51

Figure 17. Mouleuse de Café. From Matière et mémoire. November 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Francis Ponge. 29 x 20 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................52

Figure 18. Gambade au Sofa. From Matière et mémoire. Gouache from 1942. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................52

Figure 19. Négresse. From Matière et mémoire. September 23, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 32 x 24 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................53

Figure 20. Ingénue. From Matière et mémoire. September 20, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 29 x 21 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................53

Figure 21. Valse. From Matière et mémoire. November 14, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 28 x 19 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1) ..............................................................54
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Introduction

…the impressive aspect of direct printing on the spot, acts very strongly on me. It is the aspect of an image produced by the elements themselves, inscribing themselves directly, without the intervention of any other medium; that of a primordially immediate, pure image, with no alteration…impeccably raw…[like] marks left on the sand by the bare feet of unknown men…

Jean Dubuffet

To those familiar with the process, lithography seems anything but raw; it is so very mechanized in its repetition.¹ Yet in Dubuffet’s printmaking, the natural materials he incorporated such as dust and leaves were rudimentary and crude. His writings on printmaking detail a plethora of materials he used in his printing process such as bits of thread left over from his wife’s sewing projects, dust, sugar, salt, leaves and sand, all found in his lived environment.² In other words, his prints incorporate pieces from his everyday life. So important was this medium that even in describing painting, he does so with vocabulary tailored to the methods of print: “The essential gesture of the painter is to smear a surface, to print [imprimer] the most immediate traces

¹ The epigraph above is taken from Jean Dubuffet “Empreintes” in Les Lettres Nouvelles (April 1957): 507-527. In this article, Dubuffet scientifically describes how he creates his lithographs. […]l’allure impressionnante d’estampages directs sur le fait, agit sur moi très fortement. C’est l’allure d’une image produite par les éléments eux-mêmes venant s’inscrire directement sans qu’intervienne aucun médium interposé, celle d’une image donc primordialement immédiate, pure d’aucune altération de transcription, d’aucun commencement d’interprétation, impeccablement brute…les marques laissées sur le sable par les pieds nus d’hommes inconnus ou de bêtes sauvages…] Excerpt translated to English by Lucy R. Lippard and reprinted in Herschell B. Chipp, ed. Theories of Modern Art. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968): 615.
² “Empreintes” Les Lettres Nouvelles, 508.
possible of one’s thoughts…” revealing the importance he places on the genre. Introduced to lithography by a neighbor in 1944, Dubuffet used it throughout his expansive career, until his death in 1985. Devoting so much time to the process of lithography, he became an apprentice for the master printer Fernand Mourlot in order to perfect the technique, and set up two printmaking studios of his own in France to continue the practice once he was proficient.

Extensive research on his large lithographic output, which spanned his entire career, has yet to be done, especially on his earliest series, *Matière et mémoire*, which was first shown in the April 1945 exhibition at Galerie André. In fact, many scholars are inclined to conflate Dubuffet’s *Matière et mémoire* (produced in collaboration with the poet Francis Ponge), with his later lithographic compositions in *Les Murs*—two completely different series, produced with two completely different authors. 4 *Matière et mémoire*, his first published foray into lithography, needs to be explored on its own, especially since Dubuffet continued to make lithography a preferred medium in his oeuvre.

Produced to accompany a yet-to-be-written article by the French poet Francis Ponge in 1944, the 34 plate series *Matière et mémoire* was Dubuffet’s first public attempt at the lithographic process. 5 Although Ponge’s accompanying prose makes no direct reference to it,

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3 Jean Dubuffet, *Notes Pour Les Fins-Lettres, “A Pleines Mains”* from *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, tome 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1967): 71(emphasis mine)(translations are mine unless otherwise noted). Originally published in *Prospectus aux Amateurs* in 1946, it was composed by Dubuffet in 1945, and, though not originally intended for wide publication, it was circulated among certain writers who were interested in writing about his art. [Le geste essentiel du peintre est d’enduire] […y imprimer les traces les plus immédiates qu’il se peut de sa pensée…].

4 In her article “Jean Dubuffet—Trace of an Adventure,” Caroline Messensee suggests “Les Murs could reflect the everyday life of wine merchants and their customers, café and bisto owners, the short man with his petit blanc or petit rouge glass of wine, and the drunkard relieving himself on the street.” This does not describe *Les Murs* at all because in that series, there are only depictions of walls, interspersed once in a while with images of men, usually engaged in relieving themselves against the structures. There are no other daily activities depicted, and certainly no one drinking wine, which is a prevalent theme in *Matière et Mémoire*. Not once is *Matière et mémoire* mentioned in the entire article, or the book in which it is found—a book which supposedly encompasses his entire career. See Agnes Husslein, ed. *Trace of an Adventure* (New York: Prestel), 2001, 33.

5 We learn in a note to a letter from Dubuffet to Jean Paulhan dated June 14th, 1944, that Mourlot was introduced to Dubuffet by Paulhan in September of 1944, which is presumably when Dubuffet started
most scholars believe that the book’s title repeats and perhaps consciously draws upon French philosopher Henri Bergson’s 1896 study of time and memory, *Matière et mémoire*. It is my goal to look carefully at *Matière et mémoire*, closely examining the collaboration between Ponge and Dubuffet, and the context and boundaries of their effort. Few critical studies in English have mentioned editor Jean Paulhan’s influence on Dubuffet or on Dubuffet’s literary connections. Fewer still have looked at his guidance of Dubuffet’s artistic output. Most important, while many scholars have pointed to the fact that *Matière et mémoire* references philosopher Henri Bergson, the relationship between Dubuffet’s series and the philosopher has remained vague. At best, the reference is often claimed to be positive, but I argue that it is, in fact, a mocking use of his title and legacy. Dubuffet’s images of the habitual and repetitious actions of daily life are to his mind, transcendental—a direct opposition to Bergson’s privileging of the spiritual over the commonplace.

The thickly permeated and dark prints of *Matière et mémoire* illustrate scenes from mundane events of human life such as the act of repairing socks, preparing and eating meals, blowing one’s nose and taking bicycle rides (Appendix B). They are filled with the everyday working on the lithographs for his first series, some of which would be published earlier, but most of which would be published as *Matière et mémoire*. While made in 1944, the lithographs weren’t shown until April 30, 1945 at Galerie André, in conjunction with the lithograph series *Les Murs*. From Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné. eds. *Correspondence: Jean Paulhan and Jean Dubuffet-1944-1968* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003): 11. Although no explicit connection can be found, many scholars believe there to be a direct reference. Marianne Jakobi in her book *Jean Dubuffet et la Fabrique du Titre* (Paris: CNRS, 2006), believes this to be the case, and scholar Sarah Wilson states in an article that the title was “making an explicit homage to the aged philosopher” (“Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute” in Morris, *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993): 33. While Wilson makes the reference positive, Jakobi treads on neutral ground when connecting Bergson to the work--neither talks about the connection in negative terms.

needs and actions of which life is composed. The images also include scenes of entertainment such as piano playing, and singing and dancing in clubs, oddly juxtaposed with cows resting in country fields. In their subject matter, they are similarly drawing attention to the aspects of life, or the little things that are, perhaps, under normal circumstances, neglected. Dubuffet plays with the various actions his subjects are performing; city life and country life, the everyday chores and the evening escapes are amalgamated, in scene after scene, depicted in chaotic, dramatic, swells.

Dubuffet extols the mundane actions of everyday life in his prints, and his printing process emphasizes their mechanical nature. Yet his style is at odds with lithography—his prints look more like etchings or woodcarvings, not the lightly penciled and extremely detailed drawings one typically associates with the lithograph. Dubuffet plays with the intaglio look of the images as well as inserting a stark contrast between outline and ground, as seen clearly in the lithograph Nutrition (Figure 1). Lithography is the printmaking medium where shading and gradations of color are possible, yet Dubuffet declines to produce these effects. Instead, his lines are raw and inky, smeared and saturated with ink impregnated with found material from Dubuffet’s own pockets. Although these are lithographs, the prints retain the choppy, linear rawness of his woodcuts; they display a reductive quality that is not normally present in lithography, which creates a startling effect similar to that of grave rubbings. Dubuffet’s

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8 In “Empreintes,” Dubuffet’s reflection on his printmaking processes, he goes into detail on the found material he has previously put in the ink. Although his reflections are on the later series of Assemblages D’empreintes and Les Phénomènes (starting in 1955), his text frequently alludes to previous usage of found materials in earlier print work: “I first used sweepings from my wife’s sewing room, rich in bits of thread and minute debris mixed with dust, then various kitchen ingredients also—such as fine salt, sugar, semolina, or tapioca. Sometimes I put to good use the leafy elements of certain vegetables, which I went to look for early in the morning on the refuse piles at Les Halles…the simplest and poorest means are the most fertile in surprise elements…” […] j’usais pour cela d’abord de balayures recueillies dans la chambre de couture de ma femme, riches en bouts de fil et menus débris mêlés de poussière, puis aussi d’ingrédients divers pris à la cuisine tels que sel fin ou sucre en poudre, semoule ou tapioca. Certaines éléments végétaux empruntés aux légumes, et que j’allais le matin chercher aux Halles dans les tas d’immondice…je pris conscience que le moyens le plus simples et le plus pauvres sont les plus féconds en surprises…]

strikingly unusual use of the medium shows his interest in breaking out of old ideas and finding new means of expression.

In his popular critique of art, *Culture Asphyxiante*, Dubuffet stressed the need to withdraw from old ideas of culture and seek new ones in non-normative sites in order to locate a fresh point of departure for art. For Dubuffet, the medium of lithography was just such a site. As Daniel Abadie notes, it was one of the least artistically respected arts because of its common and industrial character. Free of much cultural tradition, as Abadie points out: “Lithography offered an ideal banality of processes, which Dubuffet, nevertheless, would be quick to pervert.” In his printed repetitions, Dubuffet infused found material into the very ink he used, making each repetitive print, nonetheless, unique. Without the old connotations and associations of culture tied to painting, Dubuffet was free to experiment and express his ideas in a new vocabulary, and with lithography, played out in the repetitive and flat form of a lithograph, he did just that.

After introducing Dubuffet to the medium in July of 1944, his neighbor M. Pons lent him a lithographic press for study. The master printer Fernand Mourlot, seeing his introductory attempts, let him use a press in his workshop and took him on as an apprentice. Soon, he asked

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9 Jean Dubuffet, *Culture Asphyxiante*, first published in 1968. Translated to English by Carol Volk as *Asphyxiating Culture* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1988): 10. In this “manifesto” Dubuffet praises art that is untaught, or raw. Culture, like religion, holds hierarchies. Dubuffet believes creative thought would do better with a more horizontal arrangement meaning diversification and expansion, where individuality and eccentricities are praised instead of ridiculed. Dubuffet focuses on the art market as being a decider of value and that the art market business and culture reinforce each other in a negative manner. Ironically, Dubuffet profited greatly from the art market, whereas some of his contemporaries like Jean Fautrier did not.


11 Ibid. [la lithographie offrait une idéale banalité de moyens qu[e] [Dubuffet] n’allait pourtant pas tarder à pervertir]In this superb introduction to Dubuffet’s lithographic work, Abadie calls *Matière et Mémoire* “un théâtre du quotidien, d’une célébration de l’inaperçu…”[a theatre of the everyday, a celebration of the unperceived] where Dubuffet attacks his paper with “savagery.” Abadie moves through all of Dubuffet’s important lithographic work, including prints he created for his immense sculptural *L’Hourloupe* series.


13 Many artists, Matisse and Picasso among them, worked with Fernand Mourlot and his printers. Dubuffet, however, apprenticed under Mourlot only until he knew the craft so well that he opened up his own studio.
Dubuffet to create a series (what would become *Matière et mémoire*) to be published, and suggested Francis Ponge to collaborate on the series. With only sixty editions printed, it has become rare and hard to find.  

*Matière et mémoire* illustrated common everyday occurrences, with Dubuffet’s lithographs detailing a very flattened and two-dimensional world.

Ponge was not the only writer Dubuffet worked with—one of the most important aspects of Dubuffet’s lithographic work came from its ability to help him forge connections with the literary world. Through the medium of paper, Dubuffet started collaborative processes with some of the most prominent intellectual names in Paris at the time, such as Jean Paulhan, Paul Eluard, Eugène Guillevic as well as, of course, Francis Ponge. Because of his early collaboration with Ponge, other poets and writers, like Guillevic, asked Dubuffet to work with them as well. The collaboration with Guillevic created *Les Murs*, whose lithographs, perhaps because of their legibility, have far eclipsed those of *Matière et mémoire*.

It is remarkable that scholars have often overlooked the large body of his lithographic output to focus mainly on his sculptural work and paintings, especially since his first solo printmaking show was such a success. Critic Louis Parrot responded to Dubuffet’s printmaking debut in April, 1945, at the Galerie André, raving that, “the second exhibition happily complements [his first solo exhibition of painting]. It is not for nothing that the painter spent three

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14 One copy is kept at the Dubuffet archives in Paris. I was able to examine one book and its lithographs closely in 2008, and no reproduction does these images justice. These dramatically layered and textured prints are so finely printed on sumptuous paper that their details are lost in reproduction.

15 What was considered common and everyday at the time these prints were made is a problematic issue. Common life was disordered and disrupted because of the war and the Occupation. An example can be seen in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Critique of Everyday Life* (New York: Verso, 1991), a critique of consumerist society in which he argued that humans are oppressed by their organizational structures like government, an oppression which leads to alienation. Originally published in 1947, his views became more important to depict societies of the 50s and 60s, but his writing does allow us to see the conversation already taking place in France in the 40s.
months at the studio of Mourlot.” Judging from most critics’ remarks about his lithographs, they were well received. Yet, most frequently omitted from scholars’ research is this first series of lithographs. Perhaps the lack of scholarly response is due to the general obscurity of Dubuffet’s early pieces as well as the fact that he destroyed a large part of his earlier pre-1940’s work as well as any notes on it. In fact, Dubuffet was notorious for destroying much of his lithographic work, if it was not going in the direction he wanted. The lack of context might be frustrating, but one cannot ignore the importance of Dubuffet’s lithography from this period simply because there is little reference to it from the artist himself. While there are several copiously illustrated monographs on Dubuffet, rigorous scholarship on the French artist is scarce. A modicum of

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16 The critic, Louis Parrot from *L’Action*, on May 4th, 1945, writing about his exhibition at Galerie André from April 14th to the 30th. In French [l’un des plus ‘originaux’ des peintres d’aujourd’hui][La seconde exposition de Jean Dubuffet vient compléter très heureusement la première. Ce n’est pas pour rien que le peintre a fait entre temps un séjour de trois mois dans l’atelier de MM].

17 Parrot’s is not the only positive review for the show. Several authors have similar positive feelings: L. Degand wrote that his lithographs were “images of a poetry that understands not knowing limits…” «…des images d’une poésie qui entend ne pas connaître de limites… » L. Degand, *Les Lettres francaises*, 28 (avril, 1945). S. Arbois wrote that Dubuffet’s works had “a deliberate intention (on the part of) the artist to produce modest works, by means of a refined and “poetic” technique”—the background being particularly rich with work on the clawed or repainted material” « résultant, en fait, de la volonté délibérée de l’artiste de réaliser des tableaux modestes, au moyen d’une technique raffinée et « poétique »- le fond étant particulièrement riche d’un travail sur la matière griffe, écorchée ou repeinte. » Arbois, Simone. « La peinture Dubuffet » *Le Figaro*, (2 mai 1945). Henry McBride remarked at a New York showing of the prints: “The new collection of lithographs is so full of gaiety and charm and distinction that one is now tempted to conclude that lithography may eventually turn out to be his true medium. *New York Sun*, (October 17th, 1947).


19 One account states: “At one point during the project, when a total of five workshops were in use, he destroyed everything he had started in his Paris workshop (approximately fifty stones and plate) because the work was not progressing quickly enough.” Audrey Isselbacher, “Jean Dubuffet: A Hunter of Images” from *Dubuffet Prints from the Museum of Modern Art*, (NY: MoMA, 1989): 6.

20 The Foundation Dubuffet holds all of his *carnets d’atelier*, or journals, starting from when he moved to the small French town of Vence. These 20 volumes hold long descriptive techniques, but unfortunately go from 1946-1985, a year too late for *Matière et mémoire*. Dubuffet goes into great detail about his printmaking process for his *Assemblages d’empreintes* and *Phénomènes* series from the 1960’s. Although he never specifically writes about the experience and methods of his apprenticeship at the atelier Mourlot, he references it fondly, asserting that his time there had been a quick but positive experience.
recent articles about him in various periodicals hardly does justice to his prolific and complex career. His prints, especially, have received scant attention.\footnote{Four monographs document his printed work: \textit{Exhibition of Lithographs by Jean Dubuffet}, Pierre Matisse Gallery \textit{[October 10-Nov.1 1947]}, Gravures et Lithographies de Jean Dubuffet by Noel Arnaud, Silkeborg Museum, 1961, The Philadelphia Museum of Art’s exhibition, \textit{Lithographs of Jean Dubuffet November 18-January 10, 1964-1965}, and Sophie Webel, \textit{L’œuvre gravé et les livres illustrés par Jean Dubuffet: catalogue raisonné v. 1 and II}. Preface by Daniel Abadie \textit{(Paris : Baudoin-Lebon, 1991)} Max Loreau, a long time friend and collaborator with Dubuffet compiled a large catalogue raisonné of his works, writing a brief introduction for each, including a nice introduction to his printed works. Although visual documentation is included in the catalogue raisonnée, Loreau does not mention \textit{Matière et mémoire} in the introductory details. Daniel Abadie’s introductory article, in conjunction with Sophie Webel’s compilation in a 1992 catalogue raisonné of all Dubuffet’s published and exhibited prints, contribute to an overview of his printed works, and includes an illuminating description of \textit{Matière et mémoire}. This work, while an extensive look at all of his printed material, is reduced to thumbnail prints of all his works, without full-page reproductions. Webel significantly expands on the work of Françoise Woimant, who catalogued \textit{Jean Dubuffet: livres et estampes, récents enrichissements}, \textit{(Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1982)}. Although these are the most encompassing of his printmaking works, Dubuffet was featured in Pierre Bord’s \textit{Cinquante années de lithographie}, \textit{(Paris: Bordas, 1983)}. Dubuffet was also included in the \textit{Masterpieces of modern printmaking: exhibition, June 23-August 1, 1997}, at the Alan Cristea Gallery, London, 1997, as well as \textit{Dubuffet Prints from the Museum of Modern Art}, in a 1989 Museum of Modern Art, Fort Worth, exhibition catalogue.}

Dubuffet scholar Rachel Perry has made critical and informative arguments about the artist’s early and under-studied works on paper. However, she chooses to focus on his collage series \textit{Les Messages} and seems uninterested in his lithographic work. Indeed, Perry never mentions the early contribution of \textit{Matière et mémoire} when describing his earlier work, but says that the change in style of the 1944 collage series \textit{Les Messages}, created shortly before \textit{Matière et mémoire}, indicated where he would go with some of his more important work, most notably with the hautes pâtes of \textit{Mirobolus, macadam et cie.}\footnote{Rachel E. Perry, “\textit{Retour à l’Ordure: Defilements in the Postwar Work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier},” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000), originally quoted from a letter to Jean Paulhan from Dubuffet on May 14, 1944. \textit{(Correspondence, 48)} Perry’s main argument is that not only are Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier’s earlier works visceral and bodily, they are all about debasement, and a return in language to defilement.} By contrast, scholar Kent Minturn emphasizes Dubuffet’s literary leanings, and uses one print from \textit{Matière et mémoire}, that of \textit{Dactylograph}, as evidence of the artist’s literary explorations. Minturn’s insightful research explains how Dubuffet’s art was searching for a voice in the aftermath of World War II, but doesn’t mention \textit{Matière et mémoire} as being part of this attempt. Minturn’s very brief mention of the work is
used simply to highlight the connection between Ponge and Dubuffet before Dubuffet’s later infamous portrait of the writer.  

Perhaps one reason scholars ignore *Matière et mémoire* is due to its randomness. The fractured nature of the work makes it difficult to pinpoint a coherent motif. Dubuffet’s depictions of menial tasks and everyday life also assert the arbitrary nature of life—it’s lack of a systematic quality. This aspect of *Matière et mémoire* could well be frustrating to the viewer, especially when the images are compared to those of his other print and ink work, such as *Les Murs* and *Les Messages*—two series which have a message that is coherent and easy to grasp. Though *Matière et mémoire* may be hard to pin down, its complex interweaving of literary collaborations and odes give it particular interest, especially in post-war Paris, and invite a closer look.

Dubuffet’s intellectual circle was greatly expanded due to his friendship with the Parisian literary figure Jean Paulhan, an influential editor on the French literary scene in the 1930’s and 40’s. It was Paulhan who introduced Dubuffet to both Ponge and Mourlot, the two key figures and collaborators of *Matière et mémoire*. Paulhan even introduced Dubuffet to his first dealer, René Drouin. Indeed Paulhan’s ideas about language seem to have influenced Dubuffet’s own visual vocabulary in the making of *Matière et mémoire*. Looking closely at the relationship not only between Ponge and Dubuffet, but also between Paulhan and Dubuffet, one can see that Paulhan was the creative director behind the scenes of the project.

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23 Kent Mitchell Minturn. *Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007): 97. Shown in 1947 at galerie René Drouin in 1947, Dubuffet exhibited a number of portraits of French intellectuals, many of them his close friends, which Minturn examines in great detail. The portrait series “Les gens sont plus beaux qu’ils croient” or in English “People are More Beautiful Than they Think,” depicts collaborators and resistance figures intermixed. Minturn postulates that this was a deliberately ambiguous move in order to separate the writer from his writings and lessen the urge to condemn French intellectuals after the liberation.

24 Jean Paulhan (December 2 1884- October 9 1968). Paulhan was a prominent French writer and literary critic. Director of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1925-1940, and came to know Dubuffet in 1943 after being introduced by Dubuffet’s childhood friend, Georges Limbour. Through their correspondence, it is clear that both men had a profound effect on each other, especially in regard to their ideas on and interests in language. Michael Syrotinski is the most prominent English language scholar of Paulhan’s literary influence and has translated Paulhan’s *Les Fleurs de Tarbes* into English. Paulhan’s influence on Dubuffet and this project will be explored further in Chapter Two.
This thesis is primarily focused on Dubuffet, Ponge, and Paulhan. It is the study of a collaboration (*Matière et mémoire*) that reveals the importance of the common, of the mundane, of the everyday, as a new way of looking at culture. It does, though, direct attention to their project’s Bergsonian reference. Indeed, along with Dubuffet’s images of the everyday, Ponge’s accompanying text appears to be an attempt to ring out a final death knell for the dominant French philosopher, Henri Bergson, whose struggle to surpass the monotony of the everyday in language and life is an old idea to those like Dubuffet, who believed they could culturally transgress by embracing the habitual.
Chapter 1: The Collaboration

Dubuffet’s Style

In lithography, Dubuffet stressed an unconventional approach to vision by creating his images in a flattened two-dimensionality. He associated the horizontally skewed flatness that is ever-present in his work with counter-cultural ideas, believing that hierarchical powers like religion and government used forms of vertical arrangement to organize and compartmentalize in a constricting manner.25 By re-directing a normal picture plane, and opposing the verticality and conformity he sees in normative society, Dubuffet sought and stressed what he called “horizontal proliferation,”26 a freedom he found in the flatness of the two-dimensional. This opposition of the vertical and the horizontal was first expressed in the late 20’s by Georges Bataille (who greatly influenced Dubuffet), in his discussion of the formless: “Man is proud of being erect (and of having thus emerged from the animal state...).”27 With this, Bataille links horizontality to what is less structured and more animalistic and carnal. Rachel Perry also recognizes this reorientation of the picture plane as an important element in Dubuffet’s work, especially in Les Messages, a series of ink on newspaper imbued with ideas about language and communication.28 (Figure 2) This idea of horizontality became a widely shared interest of the avant-garde in the 20th century, especially when linked to ideas about primitive nature. In a footnote, Perry also explains that a renewed artistic interest in graffiti was spurred by the discovery of prehistoric paintings at

25 Jean Dubuffet, Asphyxiating Culture, 10 (see footnote 9).
26 Ibid, 10.
28 Rachel E. Perry, Retour à l’Ordure, 54.
Lascaux in 1940. The painted surfaces covered with primitive yet recognizable forms were often layered one upon the other without any direction. Dubuffet, inspired by the formations, created lithographs and ink drawings that critics viewed as reminiscent of cave surfaces (Figure 3). Dubuffet’s interest in these elemental forms of drawing and communication can be seen in much of his work, but it is a mistake to see the images in Matière et mémoire as replications of children’s drawings—these are cleverly crafted by Dubuffet, and layered with meaning. In looking at the elemental, in getting back to roots and beginnings, Dubuffet was hoping to renew what had become old and stagnant ideas in art.

At the same time he uses horizontality in art, Dubuffet creates a more chaotic and unordered look in two dimensions, generated by this horizontal flatness. He argues that the surface of a work needs to “speak its own surface-language and not a false three-dimensional language which is alien to it.” While his quote references painting, it applies to all works, and seems to give a reason for his focus on printmaking as a medium. The majority of his works throughout his career show an extremely flattened surface space, whether it be his images of steam-rolled women (Corps de Dames) (Figure 4), his flattened-out plant matter of Assemblages d’empreintes (Figure 5), or his butterfly wing collages (Figure 6). Dubuffet methodically compressed the pictorial space and eliminated a horizon line in almost all his work, even from the

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29 Bataille, who was an important influence on Dubuffet (and whose works Dubuffet was reading in 1944), wrote a book on the Lascaux cave drawings connecting these images not just to the earliest traces of humans in history, but of the earliest traces of human capability, as in a child’s first drawing. Around the same time, the photographer Brassai compiled a book of black and white photos consisting solely of Parisian wall graffiti, and Dubuffet collaborated with poet Eugène Guillavec on the series Les Murs, a book filled with lithographs of graffitied walls (Perry, Retour à l’Ordure, 77).

30 Perry notes that the critic Jean Grenier believed Dubuffet’s drawings were not only reminiscent of children’s scribbings, but of the graffiti on the street as well as the drawings of cavemen. (Perry, Retour à l’Ordure 77, footnote 52).


very beginning, as exemplified in *Matière et mémoire*. A good example of this is *Cyclotourisme* (Figure 7), where the space is compartmentalized so that perspective is almost non-existent. The two figures within have no perspectival relationship. The viewer is unable to gauge distance, and houses look as if they are sitting directly on top of the bicycle. While many artists were working with similar ideas, flatness linked with disorder and rawness seems to be unique to Dubuffet’s art.

Neither Dubuffet’s lithographs nor his paintings were primarily about the surface texture, however, but about the surface itself as a site to elevate the everyday and ordinary, like the images of *Matière et mémoire*. Rachel Perry gives critical attention to Dubuffet’s paper and ink series, *Les Messages*, an effort, as Dubuffet called it, to “vivify the paper, make it palpitate.”

Composed of small sections of newspaper with messages scribbled in ink on its surface, *Les Messages* are artfully connected by Perry to Dubuffet’s graffitied *Les Murs* lithographs. In *Les Murs* (Figure 8), Dubuffet’s preoccupation with wall marks and scratchings, and with the changes and the deteriorating nature of manufactured surfaces came into play, with his carefully rendered graffitied brick walls. The markings that people make over the years get cleaned up, and written on again, and the walls themselves start to disintegrate along with any man-made marks on the surface. Most important, walls and newspapers are a backdrop to normal, everyday life and remain such a part of our vision that we seldom take them in consciously; they are a form of communication. Walls soak up daily human existence, as the lithographer’s paper soaks up images, and each conveys a language to those who choose to read their surfaces. Dubuffet’s ink, as noted previously, even soaks up material from his own environment. These newspaper prints and their common everydayness echo the sentiment of lithography and its mundane and mechanical credentials. Lithographs themselves were primarily used for newspaper cartoons, located upon a surface that is thrown out quickly or saved only to wrap fish. Perry, echoing

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33 “animer le papier, le faire palpiter.” Rachel E. Perry, “*Retour à l’Ordure*: Defilements in the Postwar Work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier,” quoted from a letter to Jean Paulhan from Dubuffet on May 14, 1944.
Bataille, notes: “Man is characterized by his verticality, he veers away from horizontality of the earth, away from all of those raging bodily instincts, away from base materialism.” Perhaps this is why Dubuffet felt so attracted to the earth and its surfaces, using it as a symbol and a site of resistance to culture. Flatness is inherent in the printing process, with ink being rolled out and compressed upon whatever image is created, which is then flattened a second time by the printing press. By working in lithography, it seems Dubuffet was lowering himself, moving closer to contact with the ground, especially when using substances such as dust and leaves as his material. Simultaneous with this natural and elemental movement, the flatness of these lithographs exposes their mechanized creation. Lithography is anything but a natural process—it is a man-made scientific manufacturing of an image, so easy that anyone can use the technique. It does not take talent to scribble on a stone. Dubuffet seems to relish this very contradiction, emphasizing lithography’s mechanized attributes, while concurrently lauding its natural, earthy, and elemental qualities.

That he delights in the contradictory becomes a hurdle in researching Dubuffet and his careful scripting of anything published about himself or his work. He cultivated his own image, writing several memoirs and vigilantly guarding all personal and work information, now kept at the self-established Fondation Dubuffet in Paris. One needs to be wary, as Kent Minturn has pointed out, about such a controlled dissemination of information. It is even more important, then, that scholars look closely at what he wrote, for Dubuffet himself seemed to anticipate critical analysis of his own work in his acknowledgement of the falseness of word and image and by his interest in the deceit of language. According to Minturn, Dubuffet loved the idea of the

advent of the printing press because it “signaled fundamental epistemological rupture between the spoken and written word.” Minturn highlights Dubuffet’s early interest in stenography, which Dubuffet practiced throughout his life, showing his continual interest with language and writing. In 1939, Dubuffet was mobilized into the French army as the stenographer for the air force in Paris until he was demobilized a year later, which could account for Dubuffet’s attraction to hidden messages and codification as well his interest in typewriting.

Although Dubuffet was fascinated by the printing press, he distrusted mechanical technology. He was also an “accomplished typist but…detested the typewriter because it tended to standardize all forms of writing.” This annoyance and distrust of the mechanical tool interests Perry, who mentions numerous examples of Dubuffet’s fingerprints inserted into his lithographs, most notably in *Matière et mémoire*. These fingerprints, as Minturn also points out, “guarantee that this human aspect would not be lost in the process of mechanical reproduction.” This vacillation between human and mechanical tendencies is in the very nature of *Matière et mémoire*, and Dubuffet’s conflict with Bergsonian theory.

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38 Ibid, 15.
41 Rachel E. Perry, *Retour à l’Ordure*, p. 52. The four prints she mentions specifically are *Ingénue*, *Travaux D’Aiguille*, *Le Salut de la Fenêtre*, and *Maison Forestière*. It is almost impossible to tell in reproductions, but in the original prints, these four prints in particular do show fingerprints popping out of the ink, emerging to create an uncanny effect of texture on the surface of the paper. Fingerprints were something inserted in many artworks during this time, famously by Dubuffet’s friend and fellow artist, Jean Fautrier. According to Rachel Perry, Fautrier included fingerprints in his artwork not only to reference his physical presence in the works, but to “mock the consumer or connoisseur who fetishizes the artist’s autographic mark or stroke. They deride a public that clamors for visible signs of the artist’s inspired labor.” (Rachel Perry “The Originaux Multiples” in *Jean Fautrier: 1898-1964*, eds. Curtis L. Carter and Karen K. Butler, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2002, 74).
Ponge and the Naming of the Project

Francis Ponge, Dubuffet’s collaborator, wrote a book of prose poems, *Le Parti Pris des Choses* on which Paulhan was an advisor, pending its 1942 publication. This book of poems commends small, often unnoticed material objects. It praises and personifies rocks and oranges in beautiful detail, elevating these common everyday objects to an almost spiritual glorification. It is an ode to objects most people take for granted in their daily existence, and in their speech.

Although Ponge wrote the prose for *Matière et mémoire* after Dubuffet had created the images, their documented correspondence during its creation reveals a strong mutual admiration of each man for the other’s creative output. In a letter dated in 1944, Dubuffet wrote to Paulhan after their first meeting of his great admiration for Ponge. According to Marianne Jakobi, they struck up an immediate friendship, and she even went so far as to call it “coup de foudre” or in English, love at

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43 Jean Paulhan and Francis Ponge, *Correspondence: 1923-1968*. Vol.1, (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). One exchange from Paulhan to Ponge, November 3, 1941, says: “J’ai gardé l’essentiel: je vais faire composer le *Parti pris des choses* (c’est bien le titre, n’est-ce pas?). Je te ferai envoyer les épreuves…j’ai gardé le sentiment que notre brouille de q[uel]q[ues] années venait de toi, plus que de moi. Mais peu importe. Je désirais beaucoup que tu me parles des *Fleurs*…” (*Correspondence*, 259). “I’ve retained the essential. I will have the *Parti pris des choses* laid out (that is the title isn’t it?). I’ll have the proofs sent to you. . . I’ve always felt that our disagreement from a few years back came from you, more than from me. But it doesn’t matter. I very much wanted to you talk to me about the *Fleurs*. . .” It seems as if Paulhan was asking for advice on *Fleurs*, while concurrently helping Ponge with ideas for his most famous work. Ponge would continue to comment on *Fleurs*, and Paulhan would continue to critique *Parti Pris des Choses* in 1941.

44 In is poem titled “The Orange,” Ponge explains how “. . . one remains speechless to declare the well-deserved admiration of the covering of the tender, fragile, russet oval ball inside that thick moist blotter, whose extremely thin but highly pigmented skin, bitterly flavorful, is just uneven enough to catch the light worthily on its perfect fruit form.” From *Le Parti Pris des Choses*. Edited and translated by Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972): 37.

45 Jakobi, *Paulhan-Dubuffet Correspondance*. [letter vendredi 6 octobre 1944] p.134 “Francis Ponge est venu hier; nous avons parlé ensemble pendant trois heures…Nous avons fait le meilleur ménage du monde.” [Francis Ponge came by yesterday; we talked together for three hours. . . . We hit it off beautifully.] Their mutual admiration is also documented in another letter dated “vendredi matin 17 novembre 1944” where Dubuffet writes: “J’ai vu hier Ponge, il est venu me voir à mon atelier, je lui en ai parlé. J’aime très fort ce qu’il écrit, et aussi une forte amitié mutuelle s’est allumée entre lui et moi. Il veut bien (et de bon Coeur meme je crois) faire ce texte [for Matière et Mémoire].” [Yesterday I say Ponge. He came to see me in my workshop, I spoke to him about it. I very much like what he is writing, and also a strong mutual friendship broke out [flared up] between him and me. He really wants, and (good-heartedly, I believe) to do this text [for Matière et mémoire].] *Correspondance*, 150.
first sight. Interestingly, it was Paulhan whose influence and mentorship seems to show so strongly in this project, as he even offered counsel to help with the choice of title.

The title chosen is shared with a work by the esteemed French philosopher, Henri Bergson, and it would be difficult for a title like this to be chosen without the Bergsonian aspects emerging. Dubuffet had first considered entitling the work “L’ÉCOLE DE LA LITHOGRAPHIE” or in English “Lithography School” and asked Paulhan for his advice in a letter. Paulhan responded that “yes, L’École des Lithographes, has a good feel, or, phonetically almost the same as L’Ecueil [stumbling block] des Lithographes, or well something else that Ponge might find better.” In this way, Paulhan shifts the stumbling block image from lithography to lithographers themselves. The correspondence between Ponge and Dubuffet shows no discussion about titling the work, and from the correspondence between Dubuffet and Paulhan, it seems that Dubuffet had little input regarding the title, giving most of the duty to Ponge. Considering Paulhan’s suggestion of the play on words with “école” and “écueil,” the title would have connotations of a stumbling block and school, which, had it been used, would have been quite fitting for Dubuffet’s first published foray into the process of lithography. Not only that, but it retains the idea of Dubuffet’s interest in returning to an elemental stage.

The project’s title, however, was later changed to Matière et mémoire ou la lithographie à l’école, which Marianne Jakobi points out, conserved the idea of a scholarly apprenticeship, but with a title that referenced Bergson, a philosopher of critical interest to both Paulhan and Ponge. Both Ponge and Paulhan also shared an aversion to the vogue of Bergsonism. Bergson’s ideas about language and writing were critiqued in Paulhan’s Fleurs de Tarbes, upon which I will expand later in Chapter 2. One biographer of Ponge quotes him as stating his university

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47 Matière et mémoire was first published in 1896. In it, Bergson writes of time and memory, existence and their relationship to both the spirit and the body.
49 Jakobi, Correspondence Paulhan-Dubuffet, (mercredi 29 1944): 153.
experience increased “his growing distaste for the feeble lyricism of the Symbolists and what he saw as the wordiness of Bergson and Renouvier, the philosophers of the moment.”50 Clearly both writers were frustrated with aspects of Bergson’s work, so it is highly unlikely the reference to Bergson is used in an adulatory way. We know that Dubuffet also had an interest in Bergson and had read Bergson’s *L’Évolution Créatrice*, so it was likely that he had also read *Matière et mémoire*.51 Bergson had a cult following and his theories were widely disseminated. Even if Dubuffet had not read any of his books, he would have known the main ideas of each work, as they were generally “in the air.” It is important to note that Dubuffet’s favorite books were disseminated to friends—he rarely kept them. This is perhaps why Bergson’s *Matière et mémoire* is not included in the list of his home library, even though it is likely Dubuffet had read it, since it was Bergson’s most famous work besides one of his last works, *Le Rire*.52 The earlier, soon to be disregarded, suggestion of the play on words by Paulhan highlights all three men’s interest in the nuances and complexities of language, and their appreciation for how confusing and jumbled it can be—all the more reason to return to a more simple form of discourse.

The reference to scholarly apprenticeship, suggested by lithography school in the definitive title, makes sense because this was Dubuffet’s beginning as a lithographer. Jakobi postulates that in the title’s reference to Bergson, there is a connection, “perhaps with the controversial intention that would consist of forcefully imposing materiality in opposition to the spiritualist approach of the philosopher—and also an implicit comparison between lithographic practice and a return to a state of childhood.”53 Jakobi herself is more interested in the second part

of this commentary, which immediately equates the series with a return to infancy, and she focuses on this aspect in the rest of her discussion. Although the first clause of her comment may simply be an aside for Jakobi, it is the essence of the Ponge/Dubuffet collaboration. Ponge and Dubuffet both focused on the very materiality of life, the earth, the inanimate objects, and stressed the banal rather than the spiritual. The evocation of Bergson in the title is especially ironic when one realizes that Ponge’s title selection came from the very work Bergson mentioned in his last breath.

An article written in Le Figaro in January of 1945 details Bergson’s last words to his wife on his death bed, and is a logical source for the title of Ponge’s and Dubuffet’s collaboration. In this brief article, Bergson’s wife recalls that “He did not completely lose consciousness until the last 12 hours…in his delirium…he spoke phrases that pertained, I believe, to Matière et mémoire ….” Ponge and Dubuffet had not yet changed the title to Matière et mémoire, and Ponge had not yet finished the text, as already noted, which he wrote some time between June, 1944, and February, 1945. This article, published just one month before the project was finished and before a title was picked (as correspondence indicates), seems too coincidental. Just as Ponge’s text describes the act of printmaking as exposing past histories, Bergson’s last thoughts did the same. In fact, much of Ponge’s text seems to quote, in a somewhat sarcastic manner, a number of Bergsonian ideas. It must be remembered that one of Bergson’s fundamental beliefs was that memory was what made us human, and differentiated us from machines, and inanimate objects. In addition, the job of poetry, in Bergson’s view, is to get beyond language. Anything given is easy, and cliché is to be avoided at all cost. Performed

55 While this was collaboration, it is important to note Ponge wrote the text well after Dubuffet had completed the images for the collaboration. In an accompanying footnote for a letter from Dubuffet to Paulhan dated November 17th, 1944, it states Ponge wrote a text between June 18, 1944, and February 6, 1945, which was published in Matière et mémoire.
language is lazy. Dubuffet, however, loves clichés, as does Ponge, something that can be easily seen in his prose. It is ironic that Ponge might have found the title of his prose about resurging memory from a work that the famous philosopher of memory quotes in his dying delusional moments. It seems that Ponge has picked these final last words of Bergson to show how irrelevant his theories have become.

The Prose

In his accompanying writing, Ponge details the printmaking process, showing how a lithographic stone retains memory, revealing layers of secret histories from past prints; he thus personifies the stone. Ponge begins his prose by equating the stones to grave markers and cemeteries, an allusion that is paired well with Dubuffet’s lithographs, reminiscent of gravestone rubbings. In his first paragraph, Ponge calls a lithographer’s studio something which “resembles a depot or library of miniature gravestones,” with tiny stones lying about as if ready to be engraved for the dead. He quickly negates this notion however by saying lithograph stones “are not at all like the stones of Alyscamps,” the famous Roman necropolis in southern France. Les Alyscamps is composed mostly of dignified mausoleums and interment for the great nobility of past ages (Figure 9). Ponge brings up Alyscamps only to negate it. He clarifies that the stones he is talking about here, while connected with death, to be sure, have nothing to do with a noble death. The death Ponge describes is of the more regular and mundane kind. What is interesting is

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56 For an excellent introduction to Bergson see: Henri Bergson: Key Writings. Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2002).
57 For an English translation please see Appendix A.
59 ibid, 93.
Ponge’s shockingly apolitical notion of death. These stones are not memorials, this will be no eulogy. Instead, they are like templates, a writing pad that the artist uses to express his ideas.

But Ponge goes even further. He personifies these inanimate objects, stating that the lithographic stone has its own memory. This immediately turns Bergson’s philosophy on its head, for one of Bergson’s fundamental theories on memory was that it was a distinctive trait that separated humans from inanimate objects. Ponge’s writing discusses lithography in general as a process to hide and expel secrets: the stone is treated as “depositary and interlocutor…your authentic trace is to be at once shown and buried.” To Ponge, the language capability of the stone reveals its humanity. More explicit is Ponge’s notion that the history of a lithographic stone never completely goes away, always leaving some type of trace or imprint: “When a stone has what is called a past (as a woman has had several lovers) well pumiced as it may be, it will repeat during love making the name of one of its old lovers…a memory involuntarily cropping up….”

This very passage recalls Bergson’s last words, his past, his brain, repeating and squeezing out last blips of information that it had hidden and yet retained all of these years.

In addition to his comments on forgetfulness or repression, Ponge’s reference to promiscuous women in comparison to the stone recall the French women persecuted as collaborators in the purge. Ponge’s descriptions progressively get more graphic in their personification, and go on to describe how the stone itself in the act of lithography is flayed by the printmaker: “Gently flayed. The finest grain of its skin has been bared. It has been sensitized. Made like a mucous membrane. In the most merciful way, by polishing.” Because he uses such a violent description for the act of smoothing stone, it seems that for Ponge, lithography is an act

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60 Ponge’s musings on death are surprisingly apolitical considering the mass slaughter that had just taken place on French soil in the post-World War Two moment.
61 This theme is also an interest for Sigmund Freud in his 1925 essay, “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad.” Found in General Psychological Theory. (NY: Collier Books, 1963).
62 Ponge, Matter and Memory, 95.
63 Ponge, Matter and Memory, 95.
64 Francis Ponge, Matter and Memory, 93.
associated with the death of the material in some way—material that is somehow human. Another way to look at his words is in their masturbatory allusion—the skin being bared and rubbed hard.

In addition to its physical humanity, the stone is described by Ponge as having a spiritual humanity in that it is capable of memory: “Here, then, is a page that manifests immediately what you entrust to it…As a price for this service…it shares in the making, the formulation of the expression.” The stone itself has traits only associated with a higher thought process of humans. This could be a two-way mockery of Bergson in which Ponge elevates a lithographic stone to a more spiritual and human level, and is quite possibly comparing Henri Bergson to a stone—for he simply repeated on his deathbed what had been lurking deep down inside his memory all these years, almost automatically. Perhaps human memory isn’t all that spiritual, as Ponge suggests, but something quite automatic, ingrained, and ready to be released once our brains are about to stop processing properly.

Lithography is a very mechanical and unthinking form of art, one that might seem at first to exclude the hand of the artist, or at least stifle it. It is this aspect that Dubuffet plays with, as does Ponge. One may try to discount the mechanics of the machine but it has a mind of its own—never fully giving in to what the artist might have intended, or tried to exclude. This unthinking repetition is exemplified in Ponge’s statements such as “It is always the same thing. Always the same thing that will be imprinted to a certain depth, beneath which nothing will be imprinted at all…a certain thickness for the affirmation of nothing at all.” The idea of depth versus surface here draws attention to Dubuffet’s flattened manner of drawing. Images can only go so far. It is just below the surface that the images are retained, and it is the surface where they crop back up again.

65 ibid, 93.
66 ibid, 93.
The close relationship between the artist and the stone, as well as the stone and the paper, is poetically articulated in Ponge’s prose. He compares the act of printing to a marriage:

“It is in love…a series of kisses that the stone is made to give up its memory. It is necessary to intimately solicit it, in a perfect coupling (under the press). The paper must marry it perfectly, lie on it, stay on it—in sacramental silence—for a certain time. And the stone, then, not only allows its surface to be copied but truly gives itself up to the paper, willing to give what is inscribed in the depth of itself.”

Not only do the stone and the paper play off each other, but also the printmaker has the unique ability and responsibility to make this happen. The relationships forged in this process unlock a type of power. The stone has the power to hold memories and deep secrets—and it is ready to expose them. In this relationship, Dubuffet uses the lithographic stone and paper to reveal a new way of seeing in the very mundane nature of the images in this series. This repetitive labor of printmaking was perhaps a distraction for Dubuffet from the heavy emotional reality of post-war Paris. Yet the process becomes compulsive, and it is this compulsion that Ponge writes about so fluidly. In *Matière et mémoire*, Ponge describes how each print becomes “an inscription in time as well as in matter.”

“We could say there is a memory in each of these lithographs where the stone’s ever-present residue of history comes back up with each successive print. Every subsequent run exposes the various layers transposing themselves, one upon the other, creating an image even more nuanced than what actually occurred with the ink on the plate. The past continues to haunt, to remain, to create a residue.”

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67 ibid, 95 [C’est dans l’amour…dans une série de baisers que la pierre est amenée à délivrer sa mémoire. Il lui faut une sollicitation de tout près, un accolement parfait (sous la presse). Il faut que le papier l’épouse parfaitement, s’allonge sur elle, y demeure- dans un silence sacramentel- un certain temps. Et la pierre alors non seulement laisse copier sa surface, mais véritablement elle se rend au papier, veut lui donner ce qui est inscrit au fond d’elle-même. (French from Francis Ponge and Jean Dubuffet. *Matière et mémoire, ou, la lithographie à l’école*. Paris: Fernand Mourlot, 1945)].

The image on the stone cannot be covered over, Ponge implies. It seeps through the layers—an unsettling idea. The suggestion of stains is a reminder of the intellectual/political purge or purification of French collaborators going on after the liberation. His words read like notions of historical memory as constructed through the lens of postwar society. It is just as likely, however, that these stains recall the influence and hold Bergson had on the outpouring of literature from French intellectuals in the first half of the century. Ponge suggests a very specific action for stones such as this, whose memory keeps cropping up: “There is nothing to be done with such a stone. It is fit only to be killed. To be killed with its memories.”

It is hard not to be reminded here of Bergson, who, at the end of his life, unconsciously repeated ideas from his theories on memory. The interest in the mechanical is shown in Ponge’s writing where he suggests that no matter how much the artist wants control, the stone still has the power. The distrust of the mechanical is articulated in *Matière et mémoire* by Ponge, who describes how the stone has power over the human hand to reveal what is supposed to be kept hidden. In addition, Ponge’s repeated mention of the surface of the stone draws on Dubuffet’s interest in flatness and the surface, and how these could be deployed artistically in the fight against established cultural norms.

**The Images**

As previously stated, Dubuffet scorned the typewriter, and similarly, he “would declare his comic disdain for the mindless uniformity of the typewritten, utilitarian language found in

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newspapers.”70 Nothing shows this contempt better than the print _Dactylographe_ (Figure 10) in _Matière et mémoire_, where the typewritten words become disorganized and, instead of uniform type, look handwritten. Perry states that with the typewriter as an instrument of language, “Dubuffet finds that its machine-made typography is an accurate reflection of all of society’s homogenizing forces.”71 In the juxtaposition of the processed and typewritten words with the organically-scribbled letters, Dubuffet calls attention to how mechanized communication has become, and he allows the two forms of writing to reveal different possibilities of expression. But perhaps this view is not all negative. The mechanized process and habitual nature of language is something Paulhan also wrote about in _Les Fleurs de Tarbes_, especially in regard to Henri Bergson; this will be developed in Chapter Two. One can make out what is written on the typewriter: “La réalisation au mieux des stocks placés sous sequestre permettra de verser aux créanciers chira-graphaires un divi…” Loosely translated, it appears to be an incomplete secretarial note on the stock market. The written words scribbled on the paper remain illegible. The woman is methodically typing up what is most likely a boring report from a boring job, and yet Dubuffet seems to revere her in making her actions important enough to warrant a lithograph. This reverence is, moreover indistinguishable from that lavished upon other figures Dubuffet

70 Perry, _Retour à l’Ordure_, 58 (translation mine). Perry also cites a letter to Jacques Berne in which Dubuffet states that “Je ne sais pas si l’existence d’une langue éteinte pour les lettres commerciales et les journaux et les actes notariés et trait de médecine est nécessaire. Peut-être que ou pour les même raisons que dans ces domaines on préfère les caractères d’imprimerie ou de machine à écrire à l’écriture manuscrite, et parce que ce devient très facile quiconque, après courte initiation, de rédiger tout message, et cela uniformise tous écrits, cela répond au même but que le conditionnement du paquetage du soldat et aboutit au même résultat. Ce qui est comique c’est l’inavraisemblable satisfaction d’orgueil que ceux qui ont appris la grammaire et l’orthographe dans nos pays en retirent.” In English, [I don’t know if the existence of an extinct language for commercial letters and newspapers and legal acts and medical treatises is necessary. Maybe it is for the same reasons that in these fields they prefer printed characters or typewriters to the hand-written, and because it becomes very easy to anyone, after a short initiation to write up any message, and that standardizes all writing, that corresponds exactly to the packaging of the soldier’s kit and ends up with the same result. What is amusing is the unbelievably prideful satisfaction that those who have learned grammar and spelling in our country get out of it.] (Originally found in a letter from Dubuffet to Berne, Monday, February 7, 1947, _Lettres a J.B._, pp.45-46.)

71 Rachel E. Perry, _Retour a l’Ordure_, 58
draws, like the singers, mothers nursing, and the men blowing their noses, and like Ponge’s adulation of the lithographic stone.

The *dactylographe* image also exemplifies the idea of communication, a theme which is prevalent throughout many of the lithographs in *Matière et mémoire*. Dubuffet’s print *Le Supplice du Téléphone* (Figure 11), like the *dactylographe*, illustrates aspects of the technological advancement of communication. Unlike the *dactylographe*, the lithograph *Le Supplice du Téléphone* is unsettling in both the title as well as the image. *Supplice* (anguish or torture) could allude to many different possibilities, whether corporeal or emotional in nature. In his image, the telephone actually becomes part of the body. This effect is caused by the complete lack of perspective Dubuffet uses, flattening and compressing his images, which appear rolled out like the ink they were printed with. With one hand, the man holds the headset up to one side of his head—both listening and speaking. With the other, he holds a piece up to his ear. This might detail a confusing mixture of sensory overload—while trying to listen and speak at the same time, sometimes signals can be easily crossed. Perhaps the news on the other end of the line is painful, or maybe the person on the other end is far away, and being unable to see his/her face only makes the distance harder to bear. While making it easier to reach another, this form of communication can create more difficult problems for those who use it, and might even be seen to generate more of a distance. It appears that the telephone itself is physically shocking the speaker, who is seemingly electrically jolted by whatever is being said. This bungled/upsetting form of communication is also shown in *Le Salut de la fenêtre* (Figure 12) where someone appears to be waving, but to whom? The person waving looks out the window at a distance, appearing to flag or to communicate with the figure outside on the street, whose back is turned. There seems to be a

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72 This image was first produced in Pierre Seghers, *L’homme du commun* (Paris: Éditions Poésie, 1944). It shows Dubuffet’s early interest in normal, everyday activities, his homage to the normal activities, ironically now printed and reproduced on luxurious expensive paper. The text is fitting, as this homage glorified Dubuffet’s embrace of the ordinary and boring, forcing us to see what the world really looks like.
disconnect in communication between the two figures in that the figure in the background is trying to get the foreground figure’s attention to no avail because his back is turned. In addition, there could be a three-way relationship/communication failure if one takes into account that the viewer of the image is implicated in the conversation. Again, like Le Supplice du Téléphone, signals are being crossed and miscommunication occurs.

In addition to depicting efforts at various forms of communication, many of these images are simply of people going about their everyday business of the most basic kind. One can see this in Plumeuse (Figure 13), where the figure is engaged in plucking a bird to make a meal. Hunched over, her hair and neck actually mimic the dead bird she is de-feathering. (This 20th century representation of an activity associated with genre painting, takes on an ironic tone when one notes that the image is elevated and placed in an expensive, limited-edition book). This focus on the preparation of food is also repeated in Mangeurs d’oiseaux (Figure 14). This image is striking because at the same time the figures are engaged in eating birds (oiseaux), birds completely cover them, and perch on top of their heads. Both figures’ mouths are wide and open, hungrily ready with fork in each hand as well as birds already stuffed in their mouths. It is a crude depiction, but perhaps describes the desperation in postwar Paris, where food was rationed and starvation was present. At the same time, restraint is depicted with the elegant place setting. Like the previous images, Déjeuner de Poisson (Figure 15) not only emphasizes the daily chores, but the daily rituals of eating. In it, a woman brings a fish to her mouth, her breasts prominently displayed, her mouth open—a very raw and carnal image. Unlike Mangeurs d’oiseaux, the woman does not use her silverware, but takes the fish to her mouth with her bare hands. This is puzzling because she has taken the time to place her glasses by the side so as not to interfere with eating. She even has a glass of wine to accompany the meal. It is an image of ravenous hunger, again countered by a polite restraint. This repetition not only of similar chores, but of the actual repetition humans go about in preparing their meals each day, seems to turn human life into a machine-like existence,
where hunger takes over. Dubuffet praises this mechanical repetition in contrast to Bergson’s more lofty ideas on language and life, which stress the avoidance of the repetitious and the common.

Women figure prominently in these images, whether in the *Travaux d’aiguille* (mending socks) (Figure 16), or the *Mouleuse de café* (preparing/grinding coffee) (Figure 17). This image especially draws parallels between the human body and a machine, with the grinder placed directly in her lap; the position of the machine suggests not only a mechanical juxtaposition, but a possible allusion to masturbation.\(^73\) Many of the women in these images appear with bald heads, perhaps a reference to women known as *les tondues*, in English “the shaved/shorn,” who were accused of “horizontal collaboration” or sleeping with the German occupiers and punished by having their hair shaved off. As previous scholars have pointed out, women tended to bear the brunt of the blame.\(^74\) Shaved heads are an anomaly in Dubuffet’s earlier work. He has depicted men as bald, but in a few gouaches from 1942, he specifically paints women with no hair (Figure 18). After this, bald women do not appear in any of his works until 1944’s *Matière et mémoire*.

Even Ponge’s text seems to allude to a horizontal coupling when he says: “It is necessary to intimately solicit [the stone’s memory], in a perfect coupling (under the press).”\(^75\) Indeed he makes the suggestion quite explicit on the same page when, in a striking allusion he says that the paper must lie on it [the stone] stay on it. Just like the past of a well-pumiced stone as Ponge poetically observes, history—although one can try to bury it, as the French often did after the war—never goes away. Ponge has compared the lithographic stone to a woman who sleeps with many lovers. The stone itself is like a collaborative woman. In fact, Dubuffet, as a black marketer

\(^73\) Marcel Duchamp, champion of the “ready-made” first characterized this with his *Chocolate Grinder* series, starting in 1913.
\(^74\) Rachel Perry states: “ The signs of the purge were most visibly etched on the bodies of women collaborators… undressed, shorn heads paraded through the streets of Paris. Her betrayal was seen as a national betrayal…charged with “collaboration horizontale.” Perry, *Retour à l’Ordure*, p. 130.
\(^75\) Ponge, *Matter and Memory*, 95 [Il lui faut une sollicitation de tout près, un accolement parfait (sous la presse)].
during the Second World War, could also be seen as a collaborator in a sense: one who was not likely to be not be quick to judge others harshly. Moreover, Dubuffet’s images tend to focus on people eating, at a time when food was scarce. Both Dubuffet and Ponge play with ideas of collaboration and complicity in the prose and illustrations of *Matière et mémoire*.

Other women are seen not just making or preparing meals and nurturing, but are part of entertainment and performance such as the figures of *Négresse* (Figure 19) or *Ingénue* (Figure 20). Women are both fashionable stars and working mothers. These images are a mixture of women as house workers and breadwinners. Many of the faces seem impersonal and lacking detail. Their appearance is formulaic—not just in their chores, but in the stereotypical differentiation by which Dubuffet depicts the distinguishing characteristics of each sex. Most women are very clearly delineated with large, sculpted hair, a contrast to those depicted with shaved heads. They also have round breasts, and pointed-heeled shoes, which emphasize their feminine traits. They are depicted working on gender-specific chores like mending socks, or feeding and taking care of children. Men are shown engaging in dog-walking, bike-riding, more leisurely activities, as if the war has somehow let them off the hook, able to avoid the minor annoyances of life in general. And it is not just the women who have special characteristics. Dubuffet’s illustrations characterize the men wearing a tie and often an accompanying vest. The mouths of both sexes are set in an uncomfortable grimace, emphasized by pointy teeth. Depicted in dress and manner as if everything is normal, as if the war never happened, their grimaces suggest otherwise.

All in all, there is such a variety of actions and subjects that is hard to attach any overarching theme to the series, but it is clear that many of these images display scenes of physical gratification such as itching, sneezing, eating—all unintentional actions and basic needs of the body, in a flattened horizontal manner that mimics the repetitive process of the act of lithography. Exemplary, of course, is the *Mouleuse de café* (Figure 17) with its suggestion of
masturbatory urges. Here Dubuffet stresses the connectedness of the physical or the concrete, as opposed to the isolating nature of the visual. “If seeing maintains purity,” Perry reminds us, “touching contaminates, it unleashes the processes of decay and entropy.” The nose blower, blowing out his germs, also embodies the idea of purging—purging the body of its toxins while contaminating his handkerchief and anyone else unfortunate enough to be in his way. These images teem with processes of touch, and contagion, of miscommunication, and the inadvertent mechanical actions of the body. Mechanization, the very subject of Henri Bergson’s *Le Rire*, will be expanded upon in Chapter Two, but Bergson’s main idea is that laughter is what keeps us from becoming too machine-like. This mechanization, and these movements are apparent in two of Dubuffet’s lithographs, *Valse* (Figure 21) and *Mouleuse* (Figure 17) where the body is depicted literally and figuratively as a machine. The bodies are blocky, dancing the night away, or methodically churning coffee. The dancers do not look very enthusiastic in their movements; what they do looks almost like a chore. Whereas Bergson sees literary and visual clichés as the downfall of language and humanity as a whole, Dubuffet embraces them.

A conversation between Dubuffet’s portraits of women and Ponge’s text soon emerges in *Matière et mémoire*. The images of women with shaved heads, juxtaposed with scenes from everyday chores and cows grazing in the pasture, materialize from the ink. The images are tainted with the undeniable depression of the moment. One cannot hide from the mechanics of a lithographer. Along with the stone, the partnership will reveal it all. Everything appears to be going well, but look more closely. Though not explicitly, these images speak to the strangeness of a liberated and demoralized Paris. On closer look, one wonders if the purging referred to could

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76 Perry, *Retour à l’Ordure*, 265.
77 A sign of the occupation can also be seen in Dubuffet’s choice of titles. The titles as well as the content of the images highlight his interest in the English language and in American culture, both of which had a large influence on France after the war. The influence of jazz and swing can be seen in the title of two pieces, *Mademoiselle swing* and *Negresse*, which was perhaps a reference to the great American-born entertainer Josephine Baker, popular in France especially after she became a French citizen in 1937. On
also include a need to purge Bergson, and his grasp on French literary theory and philosophy, a hold he has held and not yet relinquished.

Eschewing all perspective, Dubuffet creates flat depictions obscuring the subject and blending foreground and background, fashioning an unsettling space for the viewer. The images reflect a tomb-like quality that has much to do with their close resemblance to grave rubbings with their deep, dark images cut with crisp, white lines. (And we should remember that Ponge begins his essay with a discussion of gravestones and a necropolis.) Perhaps, the resemblance to grave rubbings is a tribute to the immense loss of life during the war. More poignantly, they could well be an ironic tribute to the series’ namesake, Henri Bergson, who died in 1941. Even more generally, in conjunction with Ponge’s text, the images might be a simple reflection on the idea of history, of memory and of memorialization, perhaps in hope of the death of influence. These images reminiscent of grave rubbings highlight the pervasive importance of stone as a grave marker, or a remembrance marker. This seems to echo perfectly Ponge’s sentiments as he discusses lithographic technology all the while describing between the lines, the inescapable history that lies dormant within the stone.

Chapter 2- Oh What a Literary War

Jean Paulhan and His Influence

Jean Paulhan was arguably the most influential and active figure in French literary circles in the 1940’s. First appointed as secretary to the *La Nouvelle Revue Française* by Jacques Rivière in 1921, he became its director after Rivière’s death in 1925. Paulhan continued as director until the German occupation of Paris in 1940, which included the usurping of the *NRF* under Nazi rule. After leaving the *NRF*, he became one of the founders of the Resistance journal, *Les Lettres françaises*, as well as a supporter of editors of the underground journal *Résistance* by letting the staff use his apartment to mimeograph the journal. Michael Syrotinski is one of the few English-language scholars to pay close attention to Paulhan’s important literary contributions and connections with other French artists and writers in the 1940s. While Syrotinski mentions Dubuffet’s connection to Paulhan only in passing, it is important to highlight the fact that both shared an interest—and reveled—in the ambiguity of language. Syrotinski translated into English Paulhan’s most famous work *Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la Terreur dans les Lettres*, published in

78 The title for this Chapter is taken from a Chapter heading in Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). The book is “dedicated to the Memory of Technical Sergeant Edward Keith Hudson in the 410th Infantry who was killed beside Fussell in France on March 15th, 1945.” Fussell wrote this book in reference to many of his experiences during the Second World War. Although not explicit, Ponge, Dubuffet and Paulhan, whether conscious or not, draw upon their experiences in wartime upheaval.


80 Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity*, 110.
1941.\(^{81}\) It is in this work that Paulhan discusses Bergson’s theories of language in a thinly veiled, critical manner.

Paulhan’s interest in the complexities of language was shared not only by Dubuffet, but by Dubuffet’s co-author, Francis Ponge. In turn, Paulhan was influenced by Ponge’s understanding of language, often soliciting advice from the latter while writing *Les Fleurs*. As stated previously, both Ponge and Paulhan also shared an aversion to the vogue of Bergsonism. It was Paulhan who convinced Ponge to collaborate on a project with Dubuffet in the first place, obviously sensing a similarity in their work—both tend to emphasize the everyday and elevate the ordinary and the overlooked. The images of *Matière et mémoire* seem childlike, but the action is more than a suggestion of childish innocence.

**Les Fleurs de Tarbes and Bergson**

Paulhan devotes a whole chapter to Bergson in *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*, entitling it: “Terror Finds Its Own Philosopher.”\(^{82}\) According to Michael Syrotinski, Paulhan sees Bergson as the most powerful “anti-verbalist” critic of the first half of the twentieth century, and sees Bergson’s philosophy as the most hostile to literature.\(^{83}\) By anti-verbalist, Syrotinski simply means anti-cliché and anti-rhetoric. Bergson believes that language gets in the way of higher thinking. Paulhan concentrates on and specifically quotes passages from Bergson’s *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, known in English as *Time and Free Will*. For Paulhan, “Terror is literature that rejects literary commonplaces and conventions in an attempt to accede to pure,

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\(^{83}\) Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity*, 84.
authentic expression.” Terrorist writers detest the banal and the formulaic, and are constantly demanding a renewal of literature and language. According to Paulhan, Bergson believes that our mind is oppressed by language, and to get to authentic thought, one has to break through these language “barriers.” Paulhan claims that Bergson believes language “leads us further away from ourselves.”

Paulhan continues, “Bergson points out in this regard that language and thought are contrary in nature: the latter is fugitive, personal, unique; the former is fixed, shared, abstract.” Because of this, language becomes impersonal and bland, according to Bergson. Paulhan points out that such a reduction is unwise because thoughts can be hidden and concealed by language. They also can be unknowingly revealed. That words express this very hidden nature more than we think, is clearly expressed by Ponge’s prose. Language, for Ponge, mimics the way images on the lithographic stone can be concealed, and then revealed after successive prints. What you say and what you mean can be two very separate things. Paulhan also argues that creativity can be found in the commonplace. Clichés can be mysterious and interesting, and they can be reinvented, and reinvigorated, much like the repetitious behavior of everyday life, that we have become too blind to appreciate.

Paulhan’s discussion of Bergson focuses on a specific illustration Bergson uses to draw a parallel between the inadequacies of language and the act of tasting a bird. Bergson believes that words can somehow change the taste of a meal, simply by means of their sound upon the senses, because the word has been previously accepted and conditioned to express a good taste. Paulhan responds that “I find it hard to see anything more here than a play on words. If I say that an ortolan tastes good, my approval is directed at the bird itself, which I called an ortolan. If, on the other hand, I approve of the word ortolan, I may find it graceful or sweet-sounding, but I have no

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84 Paulhan, Flowers, 38.
85 Paulhan, Flowers, 38.
86 Paulhan, Flowers, pp. 37-38.
desire to eat it." Paulhan disagrees with Bergson that a word could have any influence *itself*, on any other senses such as taste. Is it merely coincidence that the vast majority of Dubuffet’s *Matière et mémoire* images involve birds, or are often centered on the act of eating? It should be noted that Dubuffet depicts human and bird interaction frequently in this series; in fact, there are three specific inclusions of birds in his images, and one of these where birds are being eaten as a meal.

The first half of Paulhan’s *Fleurs*, appears to confirm the validity of a language terrorist’s arguments, but Paulhan spends the second half of his book un-masking these arguments by showing that terrorists become victims of language themselves—in their preoccupation with trying to purify language of clichés, they end up making language more convoluted. An interesting example appears when Paulhan starts to describe Bergson’s idea of man’s oppression by language. Paulhan uses the most clichéd terms available, stating that writers “must eventually break through a crust of words that very quickly hardens…” when talking about meaningless expressions and conventions of language. By becoming obsessed with an attempt to purify language (or to use a loaded word in the context of the times, to purge it), one does nothing to resolve linguistic problems. Paulhan seems to be saying we cannot escape cliché. Instead we should embrace it. Similarly, it is the relishing of the cliché, of the banal and the ordinary, which is explicitly shown in Dubuffet’s prints, and in his introductory remarks to his first lithograph show. Instead of searching for the original, both men suggest looking to the commonplace. Paulhan’s comments on purification seem to foreshadow the physical purges that the French intellectuals will undergo after the liberation, and suggest the dangers of seeking purity. One will

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87 Paulhan, *Flowers*, 43.
90 In his introductory remarks to the 1945 Lithograph show at Galerie André, Dubuffet lauds the everyday: “Moi vous savez c’est du petit divertissement, ce n’est pas prétentieux, vous le voyez bien, ce n’est pas du grand tragique, de la haute cérébralité.” [For me you know, it is the small diversions, it is not pretentious you can see very well, it is not a great tragedy.] (Translation mine).
never find purity in language, and trying to do so can be perilous. Purification suggests a need for control, and what could not be controlled had to be expelled—in language as in post-war life. The purging of intellectuals (the removal of the different) does nothing but stifle intellectual output—something Paulhan experienced first hand, as did Dubuffet. Both were persecuted in the purge of intellectuals after the liberation. Similarly, any purging of human language is more likely to impoverish it, to render it sterile, than to purify it.

One of Bergson’s key ideas highlighted by Paulhan, is that mind is different from matter because it is capable of memory. This notion is, in fact, refuted by Ponge’s beautiful description of the very material of the stone as having a memory in itself, countering Bergson and his lofty theories of human capability. Humans are very much like a lithographic stone, or like an orange as far as Ponge (and for that matter, Dubuffet) is concerned. They are not special, and they are just as much a part of the earth as is everything else. Even in death, Bergson seems to have supported Ponge’s point by unwittingly mimicking the capabilities of a lithographic stone, simply repeating what had been hidden in the memory stone of his mind.

It is of interest that during the purges of collaborators or those thought to have collaborated with the German occupiers, Paulhan makes reference in his writing to previous political upheavals, such as La Terreur of the French Revolution, in mechanical terms that recall the mechanization seen repeatedly in Dubuffet’s images. One wonders if the chaotic nature of the time leads to a kind of mechanization of life: daily life goes on in a routine way, as if to deny the confusion surrounding it, as both the Terror and the post World War Two purges went far beyond

91 Syrotinski points out: “At the same time as he was apparently continuing to work with Nazi occupying forces, and with outright collaborators, he was also, in 1941, founding the first Resistance journal, Les Lettres Françaises. (110). “Paulhan left the group [that he founded, Comité National des Écrivains] in 1946 when it adopted a policy of purging writers who had collaborated during the Occupation, and he took the side of the collaborators, a move which outraged many of his Resistance friends. For several years he obstinately stuck to his position in the face of quite ferocious public criticism”(Syrotinski, Defying Gravity, 7). Laurent Danchin is one of many Dubuffet scholars who have pointed out Dubuffet’s wine business with the Germans. L.D. among other Dubuffet scholars, cites Dubuffet’s wine business with the Germans as evidence of collaboration that may well have left him open to this purging (Danchin, Jean Dubuffet, 33).
their original intentions. What is striking is that Paulhan’s description ends with humans taking on characteristics of machines, something we have clearly seen in Dubuffet’s *Matière et mémoire* images, such as *Mouleuse de Café* and *Valse*. Paulhan states:

We call periods of Terror those moments in the history of nations, when it suddenly seems that the State requires …an extreme purity of the soul, and the freshness of a communal innocence. Consequently citizens themselves are taken into consideration, rather than the things they do or make: The chair is forgotten in favor of the carpenter…Skill, knowledge and technique, however, become suspect, as if they were covering up some lack of conviction…As if a mediocre author—taking advantage of the effect *already* obtained by a certain arrangement of words, or certain literary device—were happy to construct, out of bits and pieces, a beauty machine, in which the beauty is no less displeasing than the machine.  

It is important to note a seeming inconsistency in the thinking of both Dubuffet and Paulhan. Pulled in two directions at once, they both evince a reluctance to give in to the mechanical qualities human beings possess, but at the same time, they put forward the contradictory notion that these repetitious actions can be somewhat cathartic and freeing. Dubuffet and Paulhan’s writings exhibit revelry in the mechanical, as Ponge does in his emphasis on the repetitious nature of the stone and its mechanical actions which Ponge’s descriptions make human. Paulhan’s mention of the Terror seems to refer, however, not only to the mechanical, but also to the notion that it is at times of political upheaval that it is most necessary to overthrow old and outdated modes of thinking. Paulhan’s writing makes it clear that in his opinion, Bergson needed to go. World War II had ended his reign.

The Omnipresence of Bergson

Bergsonism as a phenomenon was quite in vogue and peaked in the last years before World War One. Much of its appeal stems from the fact that his theories “affirmed, in a milieu saturated with scientism and the myth of the machine, the artist’s capacity, via intuition, to explore reality itself.” At the optimistic start of a new century, Bergson’s inward focus on intuition and dreams seemed a positive attribute, but in the 1940’s, after years of war and economic depression, these ideas of intuition, duration, and creative evolution seemed suspect. Bergson tried to restore a place for “the spiritual” amongst a generation that was trying, reluctantly, to embrace science. Paulhan’s distaste for Bergson’s spiritual philosophy was no doubt enhanced by Bergson’s guru status and cult-like following. R.C. Grogin has noted that, during Bergson’s peak it is, “not an exaggeration to say that Bergson’s lecture hall was a shrine to many, and attending his lectures an almost obligatory pilgrimage.” Grogin goes on to say: “Between 1901 and 1914 he became the most widely discussed and published living philosopher in the world, and the first in the 20th century to become an international celebrity.” But some intellectuals felt that French literary thought was in a rut, and many, Ponge and Paulhan included, were tired of the old ideas. Dubuffet’s interest in a new manner of seeing echoes Paulhan’s frustration. Bergson’s attacks on the mechanizations of modern life, and his prescriptions for change were simply too spiritual—he left no room for the common, everyday pleasures.

95 In his book, The Bergsonian Controversy in France: 1900-1914 (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1988), R.C. Grogin pays special attention to this controversy, and specifically connects Bergson’s interest, downfall and the shaping of his work, to the occult revival in pre-World War I France.
97 R.C. Grogin, The Bergsonian Controversy, 176.
Henri Bergson would not vanish from the writings of cultural figures other than Paulhan during the years after the liberation. After his death in 1941, there was a resurgence of interest in Bergson’s thought that was inescapable. Albert Skira, a renowned art publisher, reissued Bergson’s famous *Le Rire* in 1945, and subsequently re-published all of Bergson’s major writings, including *Matière et mémoire* in 1946, the year after Dubuffet and Ponge’s collaboration with the same title. Bergson’s *Le Rire* is a commentary on the comic, and was one of his most famous and most widely read works.98

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson emphasizes how “the free act arises when the self, reflecting the whole personality and all of its past experiences, forces its way to the surface of consciousness piercing the outer self of habit and ready-made ideas, and takes a decisive action.”99 For Bergson, the real is seen only through introspection and intuition. It is Dubuffet, in his images, who really embraces these ready-made actions—a term which so beautifully recalls another noted 20th century artist, Marcel Duchamp and his ready-mades. Duchamp offers an interesting parallel to Dubuffet’s images because it was Duchamp’s common and ready-made “found” objects such as a toilet and a bicycle wheel that shook up the dusty Académie Française. People were forced to take a hard look at what French art was saying. Dubuffet, in a similar manner, was trying to enliven art by bringing humans back to their roots, to horizontal and earthly pleasures. His images are a repetition of the habitual actions of daily life, with the intention of helping us better understand ourselves and our modes of communication.

Dubuffet’s Interest in Language

Dubuffet plays with the language of images. He seems to be pointing out that the mechanics (form, structure, content, connotation) of language, both visual and written, can be deceptive. Lofty ideals will not fix the problems of language or humanity; to understand or grasp both, one must, rather than seek purity, go back to the elemental. This is why Dubuffet is so fixated on the mundane mechanics of everyday life—the instinctual urges that are shown without embarrassment. Instead of focusing on the lofty, Dubuffet focuses on the low, and this is what is so apparent in his images. Engaging the banality of everyday life becomes a way to start from scratch. These are the ideas espoused in Pierre Seghers’ *L’Homme du commun*, a tribute to the Dubuffet that reflects the ideas displayed in the *Matière et mémoire* lithographs.\(^{100}\) Seghers describes Dubuffet’s work and the everyday as follows: “A painting that swims in the rue Mouffetard, that takes its bicycle with bags and rides in the puzzle of prairies, a cow jar! Funny, roaring, giggling, idiotic, here is the quotidian, the poetry of everyday….” Seghers then draws attention to Dubuffet’s interest in language: “Do you see an artist who would not fight with his language, who would fornicate with a dead language? Words, colors, the dull and the brilliant, so many truths which did not wait for us to have, as their very own, their independence. That, Dubuffet respects and challenges, naturally.”\(^{101}\)

While continuing to write about Dubuffet, Seghers even links terror to writing, as did Paulhan, saying: “Terror acts ruthlessly. In writing, as in the street, in painting as in literature.


\(^{101}\) Seghers, *L’homme du commun ou Jean Dubuffet*. [Une peinture qui nage dans la rue Mouffetard, qui prend sa bicyclette aux bagages et roule dans le puzzle des prés, bocal à vaches! Cocasse, hurler, ricanant, imbécile, voici le quotidien, la poésie de tous les jours][Voyez-vous un artiste qui ne se battrait avec son langage, qui forniquerait un langage mort? Les mots, les couleurs, les mats et les brillants, autant de vérités qui ne nous ont pas attendus pour avoir, en propre, leur indépendance. Que Dubuffet respect et défie, naturellement.].
Ready-made expression reigns everywhere, under the tongue or paintbrush….”

This comment on Dubuffet’s work is an interesting choice at a time when, much like the moment of the historical Terror, people were being accused of collaboration when it was unclear what they had actually done. For both Dubuffet and Ponge, language is deceptive and, much like innocence and guilt, can be manipulated and so has no absolute, pure meaning. Things are not always as they appear, or as we understand them to be. One need not look too hard at the shorn woman nursing her baby in 1945 (Figure 1) to see that something more than motherly tenderness is depicted here.

Bergson’s idea is that laughter, while mechanical itself, is a social interaction designed to get away from the mechanical. It is our one instinctual saving grace. He believes this is the preservation of our humanity in the midst of such a mechanical society. We are lulled too easily by our automatic habits, which is why we fumble or have slips of the tongue, inducing laughter. It is the automatic habit of the stone that Ponge makes human in Matière et mémoire. It was the automatic response in Bergson that allowed him to repeat ideas from an old lecture. One cannot get away from the mechanical aspects of humanity. Laughter serves, in a way, to bring us back to reality. Bergson opens his famous essay by stating that laughter is a very human emotion, and is, more often than not, a social behavior. It is also often a complicit behavior, gauged by how others react. In his own words, “However spontaneous it seems, laughter always implies a kind of…complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary.”

102 Seghers: [La Terreur sévit. Dans les Lettres, comme dans la rue, en peinture comme ailleurs. L’expression toute fait règne partout, sous la langue ou sous le pinceau…]. Seghers goes on, even talking about Dubuffet’s usage of paper very much in the manner of Ponge. He states, “[Dubuffet] exploits the situation to find a new, profound material, velvety but aggressive, and rebellious, flaky. He skins the paper and extracts with a pen of vaccination.” [Il en profite pour trouver une matière nouvelle, profonde, veloutée, mais hargneuse et comme rebelle; un support lépreux. Il l’obtient en écorchant le papier, en l’arrachant avec une plume à vaccines.] While not always following absolute logic, these words mimic those Ponge writes of Dubuffet’s use of the lithograph and stone as well.

The most striking aspect of Bergson’s thoughts on laughter is how mechanical laughter is—for him it is usually present in the absence of emotion.104 Dubuffet’s very images seem to suggest the exact opposite—that humanity is found in the very mechanical aspects of life abhorred by Bergson. It is our simple daily repetitions that make us human. The human machine is depicted over and over again in his images, reduced to its elemental nature. When everything is said and done, we are simply mechanical drones, endlessly repeating ourselves like lithographs. For Dubuffet, however, this is something to embrace. Dubuffet believes that by welcoming the mechanical repetitions in our lives, we will be enlightened to a new way of seeing and experiencing—to a new language.

Bergson points out how “We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing.”105 In addition, the very act which causes one to laugh is often due to what Bergson calls “mechanical inelasticity,” whether it is your body giving out so you trip, or something breaking unexpectedly, creating the comic element.106 Bergson believes that laughter is the only thing that saves humans from the monotony of daily life, but Dubuffet and Ponge, and perhaps even Paulhan, see the mechanical aspects of humans as a normal element of life. Laughter cannot be an escape. We are simply stones, repeating information and memories. As Paulhan, Ponge and Dubuffet show, we are mechanical. Although they express some discomfort with this idea, it is there. Dubuffet’s figures are elastic machines playing out an existence which show little emotion except an awkward, almost mocking half-smile.

Perhaps more pertinent to Dubuffet’s images is Bergson’s notion that “Any image, then, suggestive of the notion of a society disguising itself, or of a social masquerade, so to speak, will be laughable” adding that “such a notion is formed when we perceive anything inert or

105 Bergson, *Laughter*, 34.
stereotyped…on the surface of living society.” As noted earlier in Dubuffet’s images, the blitheness of each action depicted masks the pervading despair in which Paris was left after the occupation. Ponge’s description of the stone reminds us that the images are concealing. In the words of Bergson, the comic appears in the “the stupidly monotonous body, perpetually obstructing everything with its machine-like obstinacy.” Like humans, language also contains the mechanical. Problems cannot be resolved by means of purging or clarifying—in language or in life. Dubuffet’s lithographs in Matière et mémoire turn this into a positive notion.

One can also see in the prose of Ponge, an opposition to Bergson in the way Ponge describes the memory of the stone. Bergson’s philosophy seems to be about profundity and spirituality, whereas Ponge claims that the surface, the superficial can also divulge much about what lies below. In this respect, superficial, clichéd words can also reveal depth. They do not have to be cleaned up or penetrating. They can be everyday, repeated, and mechanical. Indeed it is often these mechanical processes that are the most revealing. As Pierre Seghers describes Dubuffet’s images in L’homme du commun, the figures in these images are people everyone has seen on the streets and whose actions are familiar. In this collaboration that is Matière et mémoire, Ponge and Dubuffet embrace the mechanical, the repetitious, the everyday. What they extol is the commonplace opposed by Bergson.

The idea that matter does not have consciousness because it cannot perceive of duration is Bergson’s notion of memory. Bergson believed material could not have any sort of spiritual aspect such as memory retention. For him, the ability to have memory is what separates humans from the object world. Ponge’s text professes the opposite, countering Bergson’s philosophy in a subtle poem disguised as a reflection on an artistic craft. Bergson criticizes an automatic, unthinking culture. Dubuffet simply draws attention to the mechanics of being human.

107 Bergson, Laughter, 28.

Figure 2. *Que J’aime pas les Femmes Saoules les Emmerdeuses*. From the series *Les Messages*. June 19, 1944. China ink and gouache. 18 x 22.5 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, *Jean Dubuffet* [Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2001], 54)
Figure 3. *Lion dans la Jungle*, May 1944. China ink drawing. 25 x 20 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, *Jean Dubuffet*, 48.)

Figure 4. *Corps de Dame*. June-August 1950. China ink drawing. 27 x 21 cm. Private Collection. (Source: Abadie, *Jean Dubuffet*, 50.)
Figure 5. *Le Vaisseau de Barbe*. From *Assemblages d’empreintes*. May, 1959. China ink lithographic assemblage. 51 x 34 cm. Collection of Diane and Arthur Abbey. (Source: Abadie, *Jean Dubuffet*, 210.)

Figure 7. *Cyclotourisme*. From *Matière et mémoire*. October, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Originally for the cover of Pierre Seghers’s “L’Homme Du Commun” published in October, 1944. 20 x 27 cm. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)

Figure 8. *Mur et Homme*. From *Les Murs*. 1945. Lithograph with ink additions. 33.3 x 27.9cm. (Source: MoMA website. Purchase. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.)
Figure 9. Chapel of Saint-Accurce and arch of Saint-Cesaire at Les Alyscamps. Arles, France. (Source: www.fotobank.com, BRO1-7307 Bridgeman.)

Figure 10. Dactylographe. From Matière et mémoire. October 25, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Georges Limbour. 26.5 x 16 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)
Figure 11. Le Supplice du Téléphone. From Matière et mémoire. N.D. 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 29 x 18 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)

Figure 12. Le Salut de la Fenêtre. From Matière et mémoire. September 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Also published in Paul Eluard’s Quelques mots rassembles pour Monsieur Dubuffet in 1944. 20 x 11 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)
Figure 13. *Plumeuse*. From *Matière et mémoire*. November 27, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Fernand Mourlot. 32.5 x 19 cm. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)

Figure 14. *Mangeurs d’oiseaux*. From *Matière et mémoire*. October 28, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 24 x 34 cm. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)
Figure 15. Déjeuner de Poisson. From Matière et mémoire. September 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 21 x 16 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)

Figure 16. Travaux d’aiguille. From Matière et mémoire. September 15, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 20 x 13 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)
Figure 17. *Mouleuse de Café*. From *Matière et mémoire*. November 18, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. Dedicated to Francis Ponge. 29 x 20 cm. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)

Figure 18. *Gambade au Sofa*. From *Matière et mémoire*. Gouache from 1942. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)
Figure 19. Négresse. From Matière et mémoire. September 23, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 32 x 24 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)

Figure 20. Ingénue. From Matière et mémoire. September 20, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 29 x 21 cm. (Source: Loreau, Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet, vol.1)
Figure 21. *Valse*. From *Matière et mémoire*. November 14, 1944. Lithograph in black ink. 28 x 19 cm. (Source: Loreau, *Catalogue de travail de Jean Dubuffet*, vol.1)


Museum of Modern Art, Online website: www.moma.org


Matter and Memory by Francis Ponge

Unless you are ready for it, your first sight of a lithographic stone will astonish you. Thus Lily, at first, complained politely that this room has been turned into a cemetery for small dogs. And it is true that the studio of a printer-lithographer, that of Messrs Mourlot frères, rue de Chabrol, Paris, for example (the best example) much more even than a branch of the British Museum, Department of Ancient Architecture, resembles a depot or library of miniature gravestones. Several workmen or artists are employed there in a leisurely way. Nevertheless, you hear neither hammer, nor cold chisel. A music more discreet—like bedside music. Soft millstones, tender drills, big winches, little fans; and long looks, sprinklings, careful pressures; these stones are treated gently. A conservatory rather or the basement-shop of a seller of musical instruments.

But the writer or draughtsman: ‘What notepads:’ Expecting a stone, he is slightly disappointed to find a page. Such a square one. So smooth. Yet he should look at it or feel it more closely. Beneath the page, he will soon find the stone again. A strange stone, it’s true, pumiced with the utmost care. Gently flayed. The finest grain of its skin has been bared. It has been sensitized. Made like a mucous membrane. In the most merciful way, by polishing. And here again maybe seen in it something resembling a lute.

Asked about the provenance of these stones, M. Mourlot states that they have been here for a very long time (as far back as his father…). When he wants to add to his

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collection, he has stones sent from central Europe: the banks of the Danube, near Pappenheim, the quarry at Solhofen….Thus, these are German stones. Philosophic, with a taste for the arts. Hard, yet soft. Compact, heavy, slightly servile. Good: this will be useful later.

These are not stones to sculpt, nor even to engrave. They are not meant to have their form modified by the artist. He must not turn them over, or look at them from behind. Nor must he lacerate them. These are not stones for the light, the sun. They are not at all like the stones of Alyscamps.

No. Each must be treated like a page. But here, a warning! It concerns a very peculiar page. As I’ve said, each resembles a thick note-pad, impossible to thumb through. A pad of which one will always alienate only the first page. Nearly white. Sometimes almost gray or mastic. And all the other leaves are intimately soldered to it, adherent. Made to uphold the first, to take it upon themselves, to come to its support. But not without other affirmations. It is always the same thing. Always the same thing that will be imprinted to a certain depth, beneath which nothing will be imprinted at all. A certain thickness is needed for the affirmation of the unchanging reasons and, beneath, a certain thickness for the affirmation of nothing at all. This is necessary….This thick album, then, shows a certain persistence in receiving that which is imposed on it. It receives it for several pages. It is deeply convinced of it. All this, besides, with no outward sign, rather secretively, in the dark, with a rather hermetic air. What occurs is like a surreptitious hoarding.

If then the artist must treat this instrument as a page, it will be as the first page (ultra-sensitive) of a stone. And he may do well to reflect upon it (or under it)….
When one inscribes on lithographic stone, it is as if one was inscribing on a memory; as if what was said to a person’s face was inscribed, not only on his thought in the depth of his head but appeared in its own right on the surface, the epidermis, the skin of his face. Here, then, is a page that manifests immediately what you entrust to it, if it is equally capable of repeating it a great many times afterward. As a price for this service, or a compensation, it shares in the making, the formulation of the expression. It reacts upon the expression; the expression is modified by it. And this reaction must be taken into account. For it is the modified expression that will be repeated. Luckily, however, it is this already modified expression that is shown to you from the start….But then, I think….Perhaps it is just this reaction that makes it capable of memory?

Certainly, I’m aware that it could also reproduce what had been inscribed on it carelessly, without feeling for its susceptibility. But it would have modified this also. Even if such reaction took place without the artist’s consciousness, consent or doing. And wouldn’t it be better, henceforward, to know this, to take it into account? Shouldn’t one grant it, from the beginning, its role? You know by experience that when a person (besides, you can read it immediately in his face) reacts to your formulations, you take this into account in what you say to him afterward. And won’t you then speak to him a little as he wants you to? Won’t what you tell him, if not what he wants to hear, at least be said in such a way that he will accept it, will welcome it as it should be?

And if I am told that one does not, in fact, speak to the stone or that one speaks to the stone as a witness rather than an interlocutor or, further, as an intermediary and depositary, and that it is not at all a question of persuasion, I will answer at once that it would be well, perhaps, nonetheless, to persuade it. At any rate, to interest. To interest it
in the expression. That’s right! Generally speaking, it can only be good to interest the instrument in the work, the material in the execution. Because, after all, if one looks down on it, treats it as a simple album….Well then, it will make one see that it is not a simple album. If on the other hand, one comes to terms with it, taking into account its eager, interested nature, what pleasure on its part! What response! What recompense! How it pays off---with interest—not the trust but the distrust (in fact) that one has shown toward it!

Let us study, then, these reactions of stone, beginning with that moment which is, strictly speaking, poetic (before any preparation save the initial pumicing): when the artist strives or plays with it to finally put his seal on it.

If it obliges the pencil in nothing, except a more or less skipping progress, a cross or steeple,\footnote{Translator’s note: Ponge uses these words in their English forms, which may be short for cross (country race) and steeple (chase)} varying according to the obstacles of its grain—it allows thick ink (more so when moist—when completely wet, even more) to evenly spread over its surface, disperses it, attracts it (slightly) towards its edges. AS if it were trying, perhaps, to saturate itself with each line, to become one with it, as if it wished to efface each line (first causing it to look like a caterpillar) but could not succeed or could hardly succeed, thus allowing other lines to be traced alongside the first. And it is very willing to abuse these subsequent lines as it did the first, never seeming fatigued or discouraged by its previous failure—but finally it is well flogged, striped like a zebra, with slashes every which-way, completely bound, snared, enamelled with welts….Its only victory is in
depth. Ineffaceable sir! Ineffaceable to a certain depth in me, sir, your victory. And you may count on me to repeat it (perhaps more often than you would have liked).

But let an artist who neither expects too much from it nor is blind to its desires, an artist who cares for it and loves it appear, who gives its reactions their proper role and it will seem happy to have taken part, to have been expressed itself and this happiness will show in the plates, the work itself.

For all that, it will have been necessary to give blemishes their place, to let it have its own way with certain lines, certain blemishes (or not quite its own way), without too much opposing other lines. Give up putting such blemishes or blurs to use; if they lead you to change the nature of the whole, why not? What matters is the happiness of expression: you cannot find happiness all by yourself, if your instrument (your wife) does not find it. At least, a child isn’t likely without this condition. It will have been necessary to let it completely display each trace, each blemish as much as it desires, until the end of the movement that it provokes, until stillness. Or, at least, to have given a sufficient indication of this desire.

Yet one must (to be just) make this observation also: at times the artist, even the most loving of the stone, has to bully it slightly to make it admit its desires/ to make it give its all. He is sometimes annoyed by the lack of reactions, or by their slowness or their exaggerated discretion/ withdrawn, limited in extent, vigor or intensity. Then, he stamps it, wipes it, thumps it, draws new lines in ink, scratches it with bottleglass, sandpapers it, makes teeth-clenching erasures with a razor or file, fingerprints it, brushes water off imperfectly dried dark areas, spreads newspaper pages on it, etc. (the artist also
plays with his instruments. He prefers those tools that are slightly independent, slightly capricious, whose behaviour cannot be exactly foreseen.)

It must be stressed, in fact, that the stone’s reaction to the different processes to which it is subjected is a discreet one; at times a microscope or strong lens might be needed to see it. To the naked eye, not a song. That the line drawn in ink on its surface makes streaky soap of lime, could not be guessed by the naked eye. And when the acidulous ‘preparation’ since we’re on the subject, is applied to it, only a microscopic seething occurs; no bubbling of chalk under vinegar. There are only imperceptible Brownian movements: like an ‘inquiry’ if not hesitant—yet it isn’t hesitant, on the contrary, very resolved and tragically hasty—very silent, at least, as if wanting to take place without drawing attention. Exactly as a maniac surreptitiously performs his rites, for himself alone (gestures only for oneself: curious, this exteriorisation without exterior end…). And yet, of course, he needs these rites so badly, they are so necessary to him, that he would also perform them in public, in the sunlight, under the camera focused for a close up….And perhaps, after all, it is only a question here of scale, of optics, of proportions.

It seems open to question, or at least it may have for a certain time, whether the acidulous application lowers the stone’s level, creating a relief. And, of course, it probably does create one, but infinitesimal. I do not like to overlook anything: yet it really would seem that here, given besides the thickness of the paper to be placed against it, which is given in marriage to the stone, a relief, even not infinitesimal, even relatively important, would be done away with by these rights. So that, to this question, the answer must be and has in fact been, negative.
No, the interest, the mystery, the gravity come from just this: that there is no engraving, no relief, that everything happens statically (may I say, without molecular destruction?). It concerns an immobile transformation. As a face turns pale all at once. As the litmus suddenly turns blue….It seems to come from further within, to be the surface effect of a profound emotion or decision; like a vascular phenomenon; as if of a heart in the stone, of some hidden muscle.

Such emotion is best observed in the process called ‘raising’, a cleansing with spirits of turpentine. For with this stone, at once treated as page and as face, as depositary and interlocutor, that is to say, by which your authentic trace is to be at once shown and buried, a moment arrives when one will (my God! The fist worker to come) deliberately efface it in its surface, deprive it of too much visibility, take away the immediacy of the deposit. And it does not resist, it does not ask for better, doubtless, knowing well that it has immediately drunken, swallowed up what it wanted to keep.

Yet it is during and after this process, it is in the resultant state, pale, reserved, the design rendered almost invisible, that the stones features move one most deeply.

Truly, it concerns here a depth of memory, a deep inward repetition of the theme inscribed on the surface and no other depth. Here it is the memory, the mind (and the confidence that these imply in personal identity) that constitute the third dimension. And so, here is an inscription in time as well as in matter. And it may not be said of the inscription, in the usual sense of the proverb: scripta manent. It remains, so to speak, only in the possible. In the immanent.

It may be seen that I search for my words and, through my words, for my ideas; or rather, for the qualities of this stone, the characteristic (and the laws) of this art. What is
well conceived will be stated clearly: doubtless….Yet only that which is badly conceived deserves to be expressed, desires it; and its expression is its conception. Literature, after all, would seem to be made for this….To be justly considered, henceforth, as a means of knowledge.

It is in love, moreover, in a kiss, in a series of kisses that the stone is made to give up its memory. It is necessary to intimately solicit it, in a perfect coupling (under the press). The paper must marry it perfectly, lie on it, stay on it—in sacramental silence—for a certain time. And the stone, then, not only allows its surface to be copied, but truly gives itself up to the paper, willing to give what is inscribed in the depth of itself. Perhaps this profound giving up is made easier by the creation of a void (which nature has a horror of), perhaps there is capillary action (yet isn’t this the same thing); it always happens that the design, under the press, rises to the paper from the stone’s interior. And this is the only proof that I want. When a stone has what is called a past (as a woman has had several lovers), well pumiced as it may be, it will repeat during lovemaking the name of one of its old lovers; on the proof of a poster (for example) the startled printer will see appear, like a memory involuntarily cropping up, the line of a very old Daumier which the stone, at a certain depth and in utterly incalculable way, has kept the imprint of. There is nothing to be done with such a stone. It is fit only to be killed. To be killed with its memories. If one tries to efface them in it, to extirpate them, one will only exhaust it, so that at the next pressing-process it will be unable to resist—and will break.

Yet what is the condition without which the paper would obtain nothing at all and all would remain merely possible? It is that prior to the kiss the patient’s whole body be covered with another ink than the one previously used to beautify it. As if with lipstick.
That it be completely made up. But the make-up takes only as it repeats what has been told before, in the very words that it was seduced with. And again, only as these have been understood and absorbed by the stone’s peculiar little mind.

In this kiss, the stone gives nothing from the depth of itself: it limits itself to giving back what has been imposed on it and as it has been able to modify this. For the rest, it seems to say, I am much too polished, you have made me too smooth; you will only draw a blank from me, none of my tastes,¹¹¹ none of my silent nature. He’s yet to come, the one who will make me speak.

Yet it is here that the marvelous artist intervenes, is able to intervene: he who has led the stone into as many temptations as possible, has won its consent, and thus caused it to have a sort of orgasm….And what could be more moving than these bewilderments, these favors,—these pardons on the part of a stone? It is this that many lovers will prefer in the finished work, this for which they will be grateful to the marvelous artist.

¹¹¹ Translator’s note: There is an untranslatable pun here on gré(s) and grès: taste and sandstone
APPENDIX B

IMAGES OF MATIERE ET MEMOIRE

Cyclotourisme. Lithograph in black ink. Originally for the cover of Pierre Seghers’s *L’Homme Du Commun*, published in October, 1944. 20 x 27 cm.


**Femme et Son Petit.** Lithograph in black ink. October 14, 1944. 31 x 22.5 cm. (Source: Loureau, *Catalogue des Travaux de Jean Dubuffet*. Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1964.)


