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Malcolm de Chazal's *Sens-plastique* as Aesthetic Remainder

ALEXANDER DICKOW

L'idiot bêle du regard.

*

Nuages bas servent de presse-papier au vent.

*

L'écorce est le crâne des plantes; et la sève en est la matière grise.

*

Seul

Le

Feu

Peut

Lécher

Sa

Propre

Langue.

*

L'huître

En

Souvrant

La bouche

Se

Parlait

Dans

L'oreille.

*

Les lèvres sont le potier des sons. Comme des doigts appuyés sur l'argile, les lèvres moulent les sons que leur transmettent les cordes vocales à vitesses variantes, autour du pivot flexible de la langue.¹

One is best introduced to the Mauritian Francophone writer Malcolm de Chazal by encountering his work, such as the aphorisms above, before his history. Neither the details of the writer's life as a telephone serviceman, nor his role as a self-styled visionary and eccentric provide much insight into the strangeness of Chazal's thousands of aphorisms and poems, a strangeness that in the 1940s prompted the immediate admiration and praise of the likes of André Breton, Jean Paulhan and Francis Ponge.² While this sudden fame has assured Chazal a relative place in literary history, that place remains on its periphery: like other writers far from Paris, far from the center, Chazal is made to play the at once prestigious and marginalizing role of literary Other. Such writers are caught in a machinery that cannot fully integrate them as a working part. Their foreignness makes them hypervisible as Other, yet institutionally invisible, relegating them to the uncomfortable space of the footnote and the passing allusion.³

Chazal's critical reception has reproduced this double bind in a peculiar way: criticism has privileged his most obscure work rather than the works for which he acquired notoriety. This notoriety arose when Jean Paulhan, his curiosity piqued by the Mauritian poet's strange work, arranged for Gallimard to publish Chazal's *Sens-plastique* in 1948. To the literary world (as opposed to the public at large), this collection of some two thousand aphorisms or mini-essays remains Chazal's signature work, and the only one to have been completely translated into English.⁴ Shortly after its release, André Breton would publically praise *Sens-plastique*; Jean Dubuffet and others noticed and extolled the book, while Ponge compared its importance to that of Lautréamont's work.⁵

This brief moment of fame helped establish *Sens-plastique* as an admired curiosity up to the present day. Some part of Chazal's readers also know the longer essays of *La Vie filtrée* (1949), the second and last of Chazal's books to be published by Gallimard. Yet in-depth critical discussions of Chazal's work do not generally focus on *Sens-plastique*, nor on later aphoristic volumes like *Sens magique* (1957). Instead, they involve charting Chazal's vast mysticism, developed from the 1950s to the 1970s in books such as *Petrusmok: roman mythique* (1951), *Pentateuque* (1953), or *L'Évangile de l'eau* (1952), among countless others. A relative invisibility, or minoration, of *Sens-plastique* and the aphoristic corpus results within Chazalian critical discourse.⁶ In short, Chazal's critical reception largely runs counter to his broader readership, for whom the aphoristic corpus remains Chazal's principal legacy.

Of what, then, does this legacy consist? Chazal's aphorisms and poems seem to push the logic of decoration to its furthest confines. His stunning

conceits display the superlative inanity of a fireworks show: all gratuitous spectacle, without consequence or implication beyond themselves. As I will argue in this essay, this aesthetic purity, this nearly subconceptual quality effectively remove Chazal's work from the realm of critical visibility, making his aphorisms almost philosophically and ethically irrecoverable. In other words, what makes Chazal hypervisible—his singular investigation into *aesthesis*—is also what renders him, in a sense, invisible. Chazal's mystical discourse represents an attempt to rationalize the aphorisms' purely aesthetic project by artificially grafting a metaphysical project onto it. But Chazal's mystical, metaphysical project, in the end, cannot effectively recuperate the aesthetic project. Along with works like *Sens magique*, *Sens-plastique* constitutes a critical remainder, unaccounted for, ultimately unexplained.

A blanket explanation for the aphoristic corpus does exist, of course. This inadequate explanation reduces Chazal's thousands of aphorisms and poems to a single, unifying principle, that of Swedenborgian or Baudelairean *correspondances*, the notion that all elements of the universe entertain analogic relationships to all other elements of the universe, forming an infinite web of analogy. It would be absurd to deny the relevance of this notion to Chazal's work (and to his life as well, since Chazal and his family maintained strong ties to the Swedenborgian Church). In the afterword to *Sens-plastique*, Chazal writes: "je m'aperçus bientôt que tout était lié ici-bas, que tout se touchait et formait *un*."⁷ Analogy indeed constitutes, at least on the surface of things, the basis of this cosmic unity. But no matter how obsessively Chazal returns to the same devices—namely metaphor and comparison—, the notion of cosmic correspondences does not exhaust the aphoristic corpus.

For example, correspondences alone fail to account for his aphorisms' frequent uncanny ring of truth. Chazal's readers have often noted this apparently inexplicable quality of *justesse*. Jean Paulhan writes, "Il y a dans le ton de Malcolm de Chazal je ne sais quelle véhémence, quel accent décisif, qui frappe à la longue; qui convainc. De quoi? C'est difficile à dire."⁸ Jean-Louis Joubert evokes Chazal's style, "parfois maladroite, abrupte, voire incorrecte, et pourtant imposant [son] évidence, comme commandé[e] par on ne sait quelle force décisive, convaincante."⁹ In both cases, the quality described is a *je-ne-sais-quoi* characterized by uncertainty; Joubert says that "*on ne sait*" what force is at work, while Paulhan does not quite know of what Chazal convinces us.

Unsatisfied by descriptions that rely on the "ineffable," one might well seek to explain how Chazal in fact produces this truth effect. One explana-

tion might be that Chazal often superimposes metaphorical and metonymic relationships. Resemblance is superimposed on elements that are already closely associated by proximity or by category. Here is a particularly ingenious example: “Du fait que la fleur a œil et bouche surimprimés, gencive et cerne des yeux ne font qu’un chez les fleurs.”¹⁰ This single sentence contains no fewer than five interconnected metaphors: the flower’s corolla is compared both to a mouth and to an eye, while its petals play the role of the gums of the mouth or the circles beneath the eyes. Finally, the mouth is compared to the eye. The net result is a superposition of three images, according to the following analogical schemata: *corolle:œil::pétales:cerne*; *corolle:bouche::pétales:gençives*; *œil:bouche::cerne:gençives*. But this final metaphor assumes a visual resemblance between elements that are already metonymically linked, since we associate facial features to one another by way of their proximity. The superimposed triple analogy produces an internal redundancy that suggests a relationship of resemblance between all elements interchangeably. In this kind of network, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the metonymic from the metaphorical.

In Chazal’s later poems from *Sens magique* in 1957 and the *Poèmes* in 1968, the poet repeatedly displays this superimposition of metonym and metaphor. Dozens of these pieces, all much more brief than the aphorisms of *Sens-plastique*, are involuted, folding back in on themselves by suggesting a resemblance between two closely associated objects or actions. In the poem “L’hostie / S’adora,” the host is compared by verbal metaphor (a personification, more precisely) to the worshipper. But worshipper and eucharist are already tightly associated elements, even before the personification imposes a fictive resemblance on them.¹¹ Evidently, one cannot reduce all of Chazal’s metaphors to the device of involuted metaphor either, but it does suggest that his devices may have more diversity than the idea of *correspondances* would at first suggest. To begin with, metonymy clearly plays a much greater role than commentators have assumed.

Devices like involuted metaphor also confirm what many have suspected, that Chazal’s work has only a superficial affinity to surrealism.¹² Adjusting or adapting a text by Pierre Reverdy, Breton states that an image should be composed of “deux réalités distantes,” so that the surrealist image “la plus forte est celle qui présente le degré d’arbitraire le plus élevé.”¹³ The less related the elements of the image, the better. In Breton’s judgment, “the mandibles of the legal brief” would constitute a “better” surrealist image than “nerves like trees,” since the visual relationship of branching nerves to trees makes intuitive sense, while mandibles have no immediate relation-

ship to legal briefs (although . . .). Now, the above examples have shown that Chazal often works within a tight circle of intimately related elements: the more closely related, the better. In short, Chazalian imagery very often works directly against the surrealist definition of the image, which is among surrealism's central tenets.

Surrealist or not, the phenomenon of involuted metaphor explains at least in part how Chazal produces his truth effect. For there is something satisfying in the notion that all objects *next* to one another might also *resemble* one another.¹⁴ In the end, though, most readers have been perfectly happy to leave Chazal's truth effect unexplained and assign it to the category of the ineffable. Close readings of the aphorisms, let alone the utterly neglected poems, very nearly do not exist.¹⁵ Generalizations, especially the all-encompassing principle of *correspondances*, reign supreme over Chazalian critical discourse. Why? Because, in the relative absence of scrutiny, one is free to assign great ideological or philosophical stakes to Chazal's literary project. In other words, there is a strategy of rationalization at work. Critics, and indeed Chazal himself, constantly work to circumvent or explain away the most visible and indisputable feature of Chazal's work: its raw, irreducible aesthetic appeal.

This applies in two senses: on the one hand, they tend to involve the stuff of the senses as such; on the other, they overwhelmingly concern themselves with pleasurable sensation and harmonious form. An example can demonstrate these features of Chazal's aphoristic production. *Sens-plastique* contains the following voluptuous meditation:

La mémoire de l'eau et la mémoire de la lumière se croisent et se confondent dans la perle. L'œil ne sait plus, dans la perle, s'il est dans l'eau ou s'il nage en pleine lumière, l'océan de l'eau et les mers de clarté n'y formant plus qu'un: le soleil y fait son plein d'eau, et les mers de lumière s'y écrèment à pleins bords; la nacre s'y égoutte et l'éclat s'y solidifie. Perle. Stalactites et stalagmites d'une clarté d'eau qui monte et d'où il pleut du soleil, lumière en colonnade aux grains bleus, partant des fonds marins à la tête des nuées, grains-pis de Lumière que traie, au tréfonds des océans, la bouche d'une Huître, comme pour tout réunir en un: les tons chauds de l'eau au dos bleu; le ventre blanc du ciel éblouissant; les formes opalines des courants blonds; le sucre candi des récifs; la dent blanche de la voile qui passe; le regard irisé de l'écume; les bossellements moirés de la hanche ronde de la vague qui se soulève comme une mamelle tendue à la bouche d'enfant du

soleil, vache-lumière de toujours, qui boit des lèvres comme elle est bue, comme le sein aspire la bouche qui le boit, comme la bouche est baisée par la peau qu'elle aspire, comme nous sommes en Dieu et Dieu est en nous.¹⁶

This meditation concerns the pearl, an object traditionally viewed as a paragon of formal perfection, like the diamond. Indeed, Chazal naturally gravitates towards culturally saturated emblems of the beautiful, and to the flower-blossom first and foremost. The first movement of this meditation finds its rhythmic culmination in an act of pure nomination: “Perle.” It is as though merely naming such an ideal, self-enclosed object sufficed to impose its perfect effect upon the senses, much like a certain tirelessly glossed Mallarméan flower (“Je dis: une fleur! et [. . .] musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets”).¹⁷ Mere evocation liberates a cascade of impressions. The initial word of the meditation springs from a verbal association rather than an analogy; the “mémoire” of water and light evidently reflects the “moire” of the pearl’s surface. The pearl is said to contain the “remembrance” of water and light as though it had coalesced from these very elements, as though it bore the mark of an imagined physical origin. Born of light and water, the imagery of birth—mammary glands, teats, cream and hips—thus springs directly from the implications of the initial sentence.

The meditation repeatedly combines and exchanges properties of water and light. Metaphors like “mers de clarté” and “mers de lumière,” blending light and water, recur in various forms throughout: “clarté d’eau,” “il pleut du soleil,” etc. The intermingling of light and water “n’y formant plus qu’un” finds an echo in the impressions that coalesce in the Oyster’s mouth, suckling from the sun “comme pour tout réunir en un.” Both of these expressions of unity are followed by a colon introducing enumerations that suggest abundance and diversity, by extension suggesting the diversity of Creation.

Mirror-like effects and chiasmata mimic the interplay between water and light. In “la nacre s’y égoutte et l’éclat s’y solidifie,” opposite processes find expression in syntactically and phonetically parallel forms (“la nacre s’y égoutte et l’éclat s’y solidifie”). The final period surges upward in a cascade of nested comparisons, “comme . . . , comme . . . , comme . . . ,” weaving an alliterative series that expresses the “bossellements” of the waves (“bossellements . . . boit . . . bue . . . bouche . . . boit . . . bouche . . . baisée . . .”). Finally, the passage culminates in a supreme chiasmatic clausula, “comme nous sommes en Dieu et Dieu est en nous,” an ancient paradoxical formula

in which the contained contains the container. One might also interpret this clausula as a periphrase of the word “enthousiasme,” etymologically signifying divine inspiration or possession.

This final period, and indeed the entire meditation, is nothing short of spectacular, in the proper sense of the term: it puts on a show of light, color and movement. And its qualities do not fundamentally originate in metaphor; the analogy between mother-of-pearl, water and light lacks much originality. On the contrary, what makes this meditation so effective and so aesthetically satisfying is its deployment of very ancient rhetorical techniques: nested and parallel series, mirroring structures, internal symmetries; in short, syntax, rhythm and sound.

Such a reading gives the lie to the critical truism that metaphor constitutes Chazal’s principal poetic resource (and perhaps also to the notion of Chazal’s stylistic clumsiness). In fact, syntax, rhythm and phonetic effects probably constitute Chazal’s most operative tools (contrary to Chazal’s own claim, which critics have apparently taken at face-value, that his poetry “n’est pas une *poésie de la forme*, mais une *poésie du fond*, et uniquement cela”).¹⁸ It is by way of the material and rhythmic dimensions of language, by way of sound and syntax, that Chazal speaks most directly to the senses, in addition to thematic choices that privilege raw sense-data such as color, contour, gesture, sound, light, texture, etc. Chazal himself has been known to claim that there is nothing mediate about his writing, that it involves no ideation, but instead plunges the reader directly into a sea of undifferentiated sensation: “mon mode d’écrire *est* sensation pure, ma prose *est* corps-fleuve de sensations, et par conséquent n’a nullement besoin de *devenir* sensation, car elle l’est.”¹⁹ Since writing is by definition a form of mediation, this affirmation must be judged principally as a self-aggrandizing fiction (indeed, Chazal is guilty of many self-aggrandizing remarks).²⁰ The remark can only be taken as true insofar as it applies to the rich phonetic density and rhythmic structures of his texts—and if Chazal is indeed referring here to these material facets of language, then this statement contradicts his self-characterization as a poet of “fond” rather than “forme.” In any event, whether it is a fiction or a contradiction, the statement does drive home the essential importance that Chazal ascribes to immediate perception, to *aesthesis*.

Yet Chazal ascribes an even greater importance to what he refers to as “l’Invisible,” a realm beyond sense-perception.²¹ Accordingly, in *La Vie filtrée*, Chazal insists that his obsessive exploration of the senses is ultimately subordinate to the search for truth:

La science se nourrit du monde des apparences et soupèse tout dans les balances de la matière. La philosophie tend beaucoup trop à gravir dans l'abstrait. La poésie vise trop souvent, hélas, à ne nous faire goûter que l'esthétique aux dépens des vérités, à ne nous nourrir que du seul Beau-Plaisir sans étancher notre soif de connaissances—lorsqu'elle ne tombe pas plus bas encore pour n'être plus qu'un excitant des sens ou un dépotoir sentimental.²²

Here, Chazal claims that while philosophy abandons the senses and poetry too often limits itself to the senses, his own work, which he describes as a "science," "se nourrit du monde des apparences," that is, examines the world of the senses in order to extract something higher; namely, the truth. But why does Chazal reject aestheticism in poetry with such vehemence? He does so precisely because in his poetic works, it constantly threatens to overwhelm all other stakes.

Much has been made of Chazal's mysticism, which became increasingly overt after *Sens-plastique*, finally enveloping almost the entirety of his literary work.²³ Yet the above analyses, particularly of the impressively florid pearl-aphorism, suggest that the origin of Chazal's mysticism may in part lie in the need to compensate for the hypersensuality of works like *Sens-plastique*. Chazal, according to this perspective, needed to reinject moral and epistemological purpose into a project that had increasingly begun to veer toward pure aestheticism. *La Vie filtrée*, a series of brief essay-like expositions, bills itself as just this kind of post-facto justification:

Pour la composition de *La Vie filtrée*, je dégage du maquis d'idées qu'est *Sens-plastique* certaines liqueurs définitives. *Sens-plastique* est un long butinement. *La Vie filtrée* est le suc dernier que j'extrait sous forme de *grands principes philosophiques*.²⁴

La Vie filtrée does not really succeed in systematizing the chaotic and fragmentary profusion of *Sens-plastique*. Instead, it principally continues a tendency at work in *Sens-plastique* itself; namely, *La Vie filtrée* tends even more towards verbal amplification. Indeed, the aphorisms of *Sens-plastique* grow from one or two lines to more than a page by the end of the collection, while the essays of *La Vie filtrée* span from slightly more than two pages to slightly under ten. In this view, then, *La Vie filtrée* does not only explain and attempt to understand *Sens-plastique*, it also extends and continues the latter; the only difference between some of the essays of *La Vie filtrée* and the meditations of *Sens-plastique* is length.²⁵

One might suggest that Chazal's work as a whole displays a movement

of expansion and contraction, as Philippe Met has suggested.²⁶ One of *Sens-plastique*'s most pithy aphorisms declares, (interestingly, in the space of twelve syllables), that "Le mot Dieu est le plus parfait des abrégés."²⁷ For Met, this particular aphorism stands in for a kind of "Fragment Absolu" or "Fragment Somme," that represents the pole of contraction.²⁸ And while *Sens-plastique* and *La Vie filtrée* unfold into a greater and greater dilation of the senses, Chazal would eventually return to the aphoristic form by way of the poems of *Sens magique* in 1957 and the *Poèmes* of 1968. These exceedingly terse poems sometimes span only two or three words, as in the aforementioned poem, "L'hostie / S'adora."

This dual movement of expansion and contraction is in fact intrinsic to the fragment as a form. As in Friedrich Schlegel's comparison of the fragment to a rolled-up hedgehog, each aphorism aspires to self-contained Totality, the same Totality that Chazal ascribes to the name of God. But the directionless and limitless proliferation of fragments constantly belies each individual fragment's apparent closure. In this sense, the fragment constitutes a closed and an open form at one and the same time.²⁹ In Chazal's case, the fragments' expansion reflects the tendency of the form to exceed and overflow itself; infinite extension is already present dialectically within the individual fragment.

Considering *Sens magique* and *Sens-plastique* together implies, then, that the poems and the aphoristic fragments represent a continuum, rather than two distinct genres. Even within *Sens-plastique* alone, one might contest the unity of the Chazalian corpus: as Philippe Moret has noted, the aphorism increasingly tends toward what I refer to above as the meditation, a longer, essay-like form which, while ostensibly fragmentary, no longer produces the pithy, condensed effect of the aphorism.³⁰ Moret nonetheless maintains *Sens-plastique* as his primary *aphoristic* corpus, rejecting the poems on the grounds that they tend toward the miniature fable or the micro-narrative.³¹ Yet not all of the poems bear the fable-like qualities Moret evokes; many of them are indeed indistinguishable from the shorter aphorisms of *Sens-plastique* or Chazal's earlier *Pensées*. The only feature that absolutely distinguishes the "poems" from the "aphorisms" is the former's arrangement into "verses" usually no more than one or two words in length:

Quand
Le feu
Se balance
L'ombre
Fleurit³²

In fact, this disposition hardly resembles the verse-lines of a typical poem; rather, it resembles the vertical arrangement of certain stone inscriptions. Such an analogy, however, suggests a special affinity with the aphorism, a genre that in principle aspires to the permanence of an eternal truth. In short, what at first seems to distinguish these “poems” from the aphoristic corpus is actually a signal that they belong to that corpus. The safest route is indeed to treat the poems, aphorisms and mini-essays as points on a single continuum (however, further inquiry concerning the specificity of the poems seems evidently in order).

In the case of *Sens-plastique*, then, the aphoristic form progressively approaches the miniature essay, as though in a constant attempt to justify its own project. This self-justification consists of the claim that the descent into pure *aesthesis* ultimately yields insight into an Invisible transcendent realm of truth. As Chazal writes in his afterword to *Sens-plastique*, his limitless “cosmogonie de l’Invisible” is explicitly defined as a “univers basé sur la sensation pure.”³³ Somehow the exploration of perception eventually yields access to transcendence, but this passage from immediacy to the Beyond remains mysterious and paradoxical at best. The meditation on the pearl illustrates the same aporia: the fragment’s veritable feast of impressions and sensations supposedly exposes the relationship of man to the divine (“comme nous sommes en Dieu et Dieu est en nous”). But it remains unclear precisely how the meditation illustrates this paradoxical “truth.”

This aporia—the unbridgeable gap between the Visible and the Invisible that Chazal claims to cross—lies at the heart of Chazal’s mysticism, and defines the problematic relationship between the aphoristic corpus and the mystical project. It would be foolish to dismiss this aporia too lightly, for Chazal indeed explores the extreme limits of perception:

Vert agité s’irrite dans le bleu: secouée par le vent, la feuille bleuit. Jaune qui nous fonce droit dessus prend teinte verdâtre. Bleu qu’on secoue, foncit dans le gros-bleu; et rouge qu’on “malmène” passe au grenat. Tandis que l’homme voit rouge dans la colère, les couleurs, elles, ont des colères bleues.³⁴

That the agitation of a color produces a blue tinge has a certain degree of plausibility, but such an alteration would occur at the outer edge of sight and consciousness. Many of Chazal’s observation concern just this liminal space where perception borders on the imperceptible, where consciousness allows for doubts about the precision of perception. According to one of Chazal’s neologisms, one might refer to this liminal space as the “*invue*”: “Ce qui fait

l'idée géniale, c'est qu'elle présente l'*invue* aux yeux du lecteur, le dos de l'idée en même temps que la face."³⁵ The *invue* might therefore consist of the sub-consciously sensed, the fleeting, unregistered minutiae of perception, where the perceptual parasite or mental artifact becomes difficult to distinguish from an actual phenomenon.

In this sense, Chazal's aphorisms indeed concern the invisible as well as the (hyper)visible. But once again, these perceptual traces resist any ideological investment. What social, political, or even literary value can such aesthetic minutiae possibly maintain? They are doomed to remain at the edges of experience, lending themselves only to an empty admiration for the uncanny observational powers of the man Chazal. Nor do these perceptual traces provide any evident insight into the divine; the insuperable wall between the sensible and the transcendent remains entirely intact.

Jean Paulhan describes the reader's reaction to *Sens-plastique* in the following revealing terms:

Mais quoi? Le lecteur se dit d'abord (assez bêtement): "Voilà qui ferait un curieux répertoire d'images; voilà ce qu'il faudrait faire lire aux poètes, pour les renouveler un peu."

Puis il s'aperçoit qu'il s'agit de quelque chose de plus sérieux.³⁶

Evidently, "quelque chose de plus sérieux" must justify the imaginative fire-works of *Sens-plastique*. Something must substantiate the aesthetic play of surface and color. And so Paulhan goes to some lengths to elucidate Chazal's complex mysticism. This mystical belief system obviously has a role to play in *Sens-plastique* and *Sens magique*. But these works cannot be identified with the mystical project either; some dimensions of *Sens-plastique* simply do not fit into Chazal's totalizing scheme. The descent into sense perception is ultimately incommensurable with "l'Invisible" as such. This is why discussions of Chazal's mysticism so often neglect *Sens-plastique* and *Sens magique*, because the project of these aphoristic and poetic works cannot be integrated adequately into Chazal's system. The grand, general ideas constantly exalted by Chazal the mystic are little suited to explain the infinitesimal detail of perception as such. *Aesthesis* as *Sens-plastique* presents it does not belong to the general, but to the irreducibly particular. A sensation in the raw, especially of the almost imperceptible kind that often concerns Chazal, says nothing beyond that sensation. Sensations may resonate together, as in Chazal's spectacular cascades of paronomasia or alliteration, yet they remain a series of material singularities that do not in themselves constitute a conceptual whole.

Hence, *Sens-plastique* and *Sens magique* are perpetually missing, left out of discussion and forgotten by analysis. They are remains in this sense, strange ciphers, valueless, or beyond value. But this elusiveness does not make Chazal's work a sterile enterprise. Analyzing Chazal's aphorisms requires that Chazal's mysticism, and indeed all his statements about his own work, be bracketed and regarded at an appropriate critical distance. Ideas like *l'invue* and involuted metaphor suggest that Chazal's work contains insights into the structure of human perception; insights into the ways language may produce "truth effects," or into the distorting effects of liminal or subconscious sense-perception. But these insights are phenomenological, not mystical; they do not relate to the Beyond, but to our immediate presence in the world. Works like *Sens-plastique*, *Sens magique* and *La Vie filtrée* demand inquiry on their own terms.

Virginia Tech

Notes

1. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 5, 71, 26; *Poèmes, Apparadoxes* (sl: Editions Léo Scheer, 2005), 39.

2. For Chazal's biography, see especially Laurent Beaufiles, *Malcolm de Chazal: quelques aspects de l'homme et de son œuvre* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1995).

3. On Chazal's reception and his problematic relationship to the Parisian literary establishment, see Adelaide Russo, "Malcolm de Chazal: de la réception à la déception, ou comment devenir émetteur mauricien." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 13.3-4 (2010): 551-571. Russo particularly notes that Paulhan's understanding of Chazal's project was quite inadequate (561-562).

4. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, trans. Irving Weiss (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2007). This translation includes a foreword by W. H. Auden.

5. Voir Jean-Louis Joubert, "Découverte d'un primitif: l'invention de Malcolm de Chazal." *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 227 (july-september 1992): 187-189.

6. While no monograph solely devoted to *Sens-plastique* exists, Chazal's "novel" *Petrusmok* has benefited from exclusive attention in *Petrusmok de Malcolm de Chazal: radioscopie d'un "roman mythique"* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001). Chabbert's *Malcolm de Chazal, L'Homme des genèses: de la recherche des origines à la découverte de l'avenir perdu?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), while an interesting look at Chazal's mysticism, hardly mentions *Sens-plastique* except to establish it as Chazal's breakthrough work. No analysis is brought to bear on the aphoristic corpus. *Sur Malcolm de Chazal* (Toulouse: L'Éther Vague, 1996), a collective volume with some eight contributors, abounds in commentary on Chazal's mysticism, with mere generalities concerning Chazal's aphorisms. These are only a few examples of the critical emphasis on Chazal's mysticism at the expense of the aphoristic corpus.

7. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 314.
8. Jean Paulhan, "Malcolm de Chazal, l'homme des passages." préface, *Sens-plastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), x.
9. Jean-Louis Joubert, 189–190.
10. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 13.
11. Malcolm de Chazal, *Poèmes, Apparadoxes*, 49.
12. James Geary notes that "there is nothing even remotely surreal about de Chazal's aphorisms. If anything, they are hyper-realistic [. . .]" *The World in a Phrase: A Brief History of the Aphorism* (New York: Bloomsbury Books, 2005), 187. For a more detailed account of Chazal's ambivalent relationship to surrealism, see Herbert S. Gershman, "On Malcolm de Chazal." *Symposium* 24.4 (Winter 1970): 311, 314 and *passim*.
13. See André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 48–52.
14. Metaphor and metonymy have a complex and sometimes vexed relationship. The Groupe μ has theorized, for instance, that disguised metonymic relationships are structurally implicated in metaphoric relationships, especially in the case of extended metaphors. See Groupe μ , *Rhétorique de la poésie: lecture linéaire, lecture tabulaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).
15. Symptomatically, one of the only in-depth commentaries of the aphoristic corpus quotes several aphorisms, only to conclude immediately that "Il ne s'agit pas bien entendu de commenter des textes si foisonnants [. . .]" Philippe Moret, *Tradition et modernité de l'aphorisme: Cioran, Reverdy, Scutenaire, Jourdan, Chazal* (Genève: Droz, 1997), 369.
16. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 269–270.
17. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crise de vers." *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Bertrand Marchal, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 213.
18. Malcolm de Chazal, *La Vie filtrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 64.
19. Malcolm de Chazal, *La Vie filtrée*, 63.
20. For instance, this passage from a letter to Jean Paulhan: "Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse rattacher ma littérature à quelque forme littéraire connue, pour la simple raison que mes méthodes de travail sont à tel point révolutionnaires que je fais de la philosophie sans parler de philosophie [. . .]" Quoted by Adelaide Russo, 561–562. Russo likewise notes Chazal's reputation for "orgueil démesuré" and his "narcissisme" (558).
21. See for instance Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 315; *La Vie filtrée*, 11 and *passim*.
22. Malcolm de Chazal, *La Vie filtrée*, 15.
23. On Chazal's mystical belief system, see especially Christophe Chabbert, *Malcolm de Chazal, L'Homme des genèses*.
24. Malcolm de Chazal, *La Vie filtrée*, 14.
25. See Philippe Moret, 373.
26. Philippe Met, "Malcolm de Chazal au miroir du fragment, réflexions." *L'Océan Indien dans les littératures francophones: pays réels, pays rêvés, pays révélés* (Paris: Karthala; Réduit; Presses de l'Université de Maurice, 2001), 617.
27. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 59.
28. Philippe Met, 618.
29. On Schlegel's fragment and German Romanticism in general, see Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

30. Philippe Moret, 370.
31. Philippe Moret, 361–362, note 3.
32. Malcolm de Chazal, *Poèmes, Apparadoxes*, 67.
33. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 315.
34. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 114.
35. Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-plastique*, 79–80.
36. Jean Paulhan, x.

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