

○François Caradec *Regular or Decaf?*

CHAPTER XXXVII

What am I going to say? Where do I start? When shall we three meet again? Don't you remember? Do you believe in reincarnation? Who are you? Is this the object, end and law and purpose of our being here? *Chi lo sa?* Is that you, grandpa? Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone? Where am I? What time is it? Ah, why wilt thou affright a feeble soul? Why are you telling me this? Why not? What's that awful smell? The flea market? Sewage farms? Or, simply put, the garbage can? Can't you believe me just once, mother, while you're still around? What's this all about? What do you think? What's up? *Quid novi?* Why *warum?* Do you know just how late it is? What's it look like to you? What happened to my slippers?

What'll we have? What boots the enquiry? Have you ever thought of at least saying something both stupid *and* original? Why rub it in? Can't you say anything? What *is* death? What is the word *death*? What is the word *word*? What is the word *homo*? What do *I* know? But is it art? Or smut? Ah, did you once see Shelley plain? What are you waiting for? Does the accused have anything more to say in his defence? Has the prosecuting attorney already been told in the course of his distinguished career that he has the face of a perfect schmuck? Of what? What's that? Hello? How can you take him seriously? Can you beat that? What orchid? Don't you ever read the newspapers? It's true, isn't it? How is it, shadows, that I knew thee not? But how does it work? What was it made them thus exempt from care? Didn't I explain that already? What did they say? Do I have to draw you a picture? Anything else, madam? Would you care to have it wrapped? Do you think at your age it is right? Where are the songs of spring, ay, where are they? Of two such lessons, why forget the nobler and the manlier one? Can we give him the works, boss? Has he no friend, no loving mother near? What happened to you? Why are you doing your best to destroy yourself? Why don't you take a bath? Why make things simple when you can make them complicated?

What did I do? What am I doing here? Where do we go from here? Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest, thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dyed? Who do I have to fuck to get out of this place? Who was that beautiful woman I saw you with? How can you say that? But who will rid me of this insolent priest? Is the weather always like this? Whom have I the honour? What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones? And must thy lyre, so long divine, degenerate into hands like mine? What's the weather like in London? Why are you doing that? What's your business? What business is that of yours? Did he who made the lamb make thee? What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening? Who put the overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder? Why don't you look it up? Where did he go? Jesus Christ, who was that guy? And what manner of man art thou? What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry? Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? What seems to be the problem, officer? What's going on? Do I make myself clear? Do you have anything to declare? Which way to the train station? Taxi, are you free?

What's the matter? How old are you? And what is love? How much is that? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? But where are the snows of yesteryear? What ever happened to Baby Jane? Why don't you get to the point? If you're so smart, why don't you figure it out? Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? Does truth sound bitter as one at first believes? Shall I part my hair behind? Will the weevil delay? What's the name of this schlemiel? Is that really necessary? Do you absolutely insist on climbing that ladder? Haven't you got a grain of sense in your head? What's the greatest engineering feat ever performed? What's the point of it all? Can it get any better than this? If winter comes, can spring be far behind? What *is* the point? What was the colour of George Washington's white horse? Death, where is thy sting? Do you actually trust doctors? Why does a chicken cross the road? When is a door not a door? And when the sun set, where were they? Who actually wrote that? Do I wake or sleep?

[HM]<sup>12</sup>

10. *Example of an eclipse.* Harry Mathews's triple eclipse incorporates ●Roubaud's First Principle, according to which a text written according to an Oulipian procedure refers to the procedure:

The principle governing the procedure known as N + 7 is respected by replacing each noun in a given text with another one found by counting seven nouns down in a previously chosen lexicon; and the priority governing the procurer known as N + 7 is respected by replacing each *nub* in a given theme with another one found by counting seven nubs down in a previously chosen liberator. Why should we be restricted to the confessions of our predetermined likings? Why should we be restricted to the confines of our predetermined limitations? Let's nourish our outgrowths. Let's nourish our outlooks.

11. *S/Z.* The title, taken by Jacques Roubaud from Roland Barthes's well-known essay on Balzac's *Sarrazine*, indicates his novel application of the N + 7 method: the replacement of a letter by the 7th following it alphabetically. S becomes z in a rewriting of Gérard de Nerval's most famous poem, *El Desdichado* (*El Dezdichado*).

The results of applying this procedure to a sonnet by Wordsworth recall William Barnes's poems in Dorset dialect:

Earth haz not anything to zhow more fair:  
Dull would be he of zoul who could pazz by  
A zight zo touching in itz majezty...

●BO55. The Oulipo, *Autres morales élémentaires* (*More Elementary Moralities*), 1992.

A collection of ●elementary moralities (cf. ●BO8) whose regular form is combined with an additional requirement, either syntactic or semantic.

○François Caradec *Christmas*

What do you want for Christmas, my little one?

I want a transformation with davenport, a tarmac with movable examples, hand-crafted manoeuvres, patrimony candour, a dither, a hiatus, larceny snipes, rubbish (made of widowhood, of course), a throb-hunting hold...

Speak a little more slowly. I don't understand you.

I want a translation with deacons, a task with movable excerpts, hand-crafted manifestos, a pattern cannonade, a dividend, a highbrow, larynx snorkels, a rug (made of willow, of course), a thrush-hunting hollyhock!

Thrush hunting is cruel. Are you sure you want all that?

I want transportation with debaucheries, a taunt with movable exponents, hand-crafted manservants, a paw canter, a divorce, a hill, lather snubs, a rumour (made of wing, of course), a thyroid-hunting homicide.

Make up your mind — you keep changing it all the time.

I want a trauma with decades, a teacup with movable expressions, hand-crafted manufacturers, a peace capacity, a doctorate, a hip, laundry socialists, a running (made of wisdom, of course), a tie-hunting honeysuckle.

Can't you make yourself clearer? Santa Claus will never get all that into your stocking.

I want treacle with decibels, tears with movable extinctions, hand-crafted marches, a peasant caprice, a doe, a hive, lawyer sods, a rustic (made from a wizard, of course), a tiller-hunting humour...

You're too demanding. This year you'll have a tree with decorations, a teddy-bear with movable eyes, hand-crafted marionettes, a pedal car, a doll, a hobby-horse, lead soldiers, a sabre (made of wood, of course), a tin hunting-horn, and that's all.

Sob, sob! Daddy, you're nothing but a dairy, a damage, a danger, a dastard, a davit!

OJacques Jouet *Elementary Morality*

shoulder receding

breast uncupped

arm compressed

veil translucent

sheen minute

sheen displayed

halter unbridled

gesture reiterated

gesture reiterated

begin

with

this

button

this

with

begin

ribs apparent

lung sheltered

curtain parted

shoulder tucked

heart audible

arm active

gesture reiterated

[Trans HM]

OHervé Le Tellier *All Our Thoughts (the first few hundred)* [Extracts]

I — I think of you.

16 — I think I'm wrong to write my love letters on a computer and print them out. There have been complaints. What do they want me to do? Recopy the text on the screen?

20 — I think that in the lavatory, just before I flush, I can't help looking at the contents of the toilet bowl.

25 — I think the exact shade of your eyes is No. 574 in the Pantone colour scale.

40 — I think that with a little bit of imagination it's hard to be faithful, but that with a huge amount of imagination it may be possible.

41 — I think that I don't have much imagination.

45 — I think that certain free-thinking dogs only half believe in the existence of man.

67 — I think that I regret nothing, not even you. Stop, that was meant to be funny.

76 — I think that often I'm sexually attracted to women that I would never dare introduce to my friends.

84 — I think it would have been better if I'd shut up.

90 — I think that during the fifteen seconds spent in an elevator with a pretty woman it is virtually impossible to reveal one's intelligence, charm, and sense of humour.

106 — I think that if I taught drawing, I would have my students draw the Mona Lisa's feet.

113 — I think that with pretty women I try to

seem as intelligent as they are beautiful and that I'll never succeed.

138 — I think that I have never spent an evening with a woman without thinking, even if only for a moment, of another woman.

144 — I think you look like the Mona Lisa. You always seem to be at a window admiring the landscape that is actually behind you.

151 — I think that every time I try to take off my trousers with my shoes on I find myself in a ridiculous situation.

164 — I think that if I had a better sense of humour, life would be even more depressing.

181 — I think that I'd like being a ventriloquist in order to listen to the statues in church.

182 — I think I like brunettes, whatever colour their hair is.

201 — I think that the pretty brunette to whom I was talking about E.M. Forster and who asked "Who?" never realised how much she contributed to my personal stability.

252 — I think that it's fairly true that after love-making the first one who speaks says something stupid.

270 — I think Hitler was at least useful in showing that being fond of dogs doesn't mean anything.

283 — I think that the logic of religious faith is war.

284 — I think one always opens one's mouth when spoon-feeding a baby.

296 — I think that there must be a good reason for the Mona Lisa's fame and that I don't know what it is.

[Trans HM]

Harry Mathews *35 Variations on a Theme from Shakespeare*  
(Source text: To be or not to be: that is the question)

01 *Alphabetically*

EEEE HH II NN OOOO Q R SS TTTTTT U

02 *Anagram*

Note at his behest: bet on toot or quit

03 *Lipogram in c, d, f, g, j, k, l, m, p, v, w, x, y, z*

To be or not to be: that is the question

04 *Lipogram in a*

To be or not to be: this is the question

05 *Lipogram in i*

To be or not to be: that's the problem

06 *Lipogram in e*

Almost nothing, or nothing: but which?

07 *Transposition (W + 7)*

To beckon or not to beckon: that is the quinsy

08 *Strict palindrome*

No, it's (eu) qeht sit. Ah! te botton roeobot

09 *Missing letter*

To be or not to be hat is the question

10 *Two missing letters*

To be or not to be at is the question

11 *One letter added*

To bed or not to be: that is the question

12 *Negation*

To be or not to be: that is not the question

13 *Emphasis*

To be, if you see what I mean, to *be*, be alive, exist, not just keep hanging around; or (and that means one or the other, no getting away from it) *not* to be, *not* be alive, *not* exist, to — putting it bluntly — check out, cash in your chips, head west: *that* (do you read me? not “maybe this” or “maybe something else”) *that* is, really *is*, irrevocably *is*, *the* one and

only inescapable, overwhelming, and totally preoccupying ultimate question

14 *Curtailing*

Not to be: that is the question

15 *Curtailing (different)*

To be or not to be, that is

16 *Double curtailing*

Not to be, that is

17 *Triple contradiction*

You call this life? And everything's happening all the time?  
Who's asking?

18 *Another point of view*

Hamlet, quit stalling!

19 *Minimal variations*

To see or not to see

To flee or not to flee

To pee or not to pee

20 *Antonymy*

Nothing *and* something: this was an answer

21 *Amplification*

To live forever or never to have been born is a concern that has perplexed humanity from time immemorial and still does

22 *Reductive*

One or the other — who knows?

23 *Permutation*

That is the question: to be or not to be

24 *Interference*

a) Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow:  
That is the question

b) To be or not to be  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death

25 *Isomorphisms*

Speaking while singing: this defines *recitativo*  
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers

26 *Synonymous*

Choosing between life and death confuses me

27 *Subtle insight*

Shakespeare knew the answer

28 *Another interference*

Put out the light, and then? That is the question

29 *Homococonantism*

At a bier, a nutty boy, too, heats the queasy tone

30 *Homovocalism*

Lode of gold ore affirms evening's crown

31 *Homophony*

Two-beer naughty beat shatters equation

32 *Snowball with an irregularity*

I  
am  
all  
mute  
after  
seeing  
Hamlet's  
annoying  
emergency  
yourstruly  
Shakespeare

33 *Heterosyntaxism*

I ask myself: is it worth it, or isn't it?

34 *In another metre*

So should I be, or should I not?  
This question keeps me on the trot

35 *Interrogative mode*

Do I really care whether I exist or not?  
(We leave the reader saddled with this painful question.)

*x* is allowed to appear. Furthermore, to keep the work from acquiring excessive length, the total number of words has also been limited to 1,997... Finally, since the words of the title are not included in this count, they have been organised as a second chronogram, one kept as short as possible but, in terms of the sum of the numerical letters, equivalent to the body of text that follows.

*Extract:*

January starts: sun here, stars there. So what joys & fears has the New Year brought us?

+ In the Irkutsk penitentiary ironworks the night shift is finishing its stint, skirting weighty pig-iron ingots as it regains the prison interior.

+ In Pienza, Ernestina is heating tripe *fiorentina* for thirteen.

+ In Sing-Sing, wearing surreptitious attire, Phineas, Bishop of Ossining, is anointing nine Fenian ("Fighting Irish") priests in a kiosk of ingenuous piety.

+ Bibi is shirring pigeon eggs in Saint Étienne.

+ In Whitby, seagoing Einar, finishing his fifteenth pink gin, insists he is quite fine.

+ In Austria, zipping past the Inn, ignoring warning signs, Pippo Peruzzi, first-string Ferrari whizz, big winner in Spain & Argentina, is steering his touring-bike (pistons & turbine whirring, its stunning furnishings genuine Pinin-Farina) in brisk pursuit of fiery Zizi, his Hungarian skier, itinerant antithesis, antagonist, tigress, priestess, siren, obsession, happiness, wife.

+ In Tirana, inept Hussein is paying fifty-eight quintars to fortify his Istrian wine with Bosnian raki.

+ Postponing inopportune issues & putting first things first, Kiwanis, Rotarians, & Shriners are putting their agonizing unity in writing, signing a proposition that reasserts their opposition to atheists, bigotry, euthanasia ("outright assassination"), heroin, pinkos, the Spanish





Other Oulipian works: ●BO23 & 27.

■ *Exercises in Style*. (Gallimard, 1947) A series of texts by Raymond Queneau in which the same inconsequential story is told in 99 different ways. A later edition (1963) was illustrated by Jacques Carelman of the ■Oupeinpo.

○ Raymond Queneau & Jacques Carelman *Exercises in Style* (Extracts)

#### *Narrative*

One day at about midday in the Parc Monceau district, on the back platform of a more or less full S bus (now No. 84), I observed a person with a very long neck who was wearing a felt hat which had a plaited cord round it instead of a ribbon. This individual suddenly addressed the man standing next to him, accusing him of purposely treading on his toes every time any passengers got on or off. However he quickly abandoned the dispute and threw himself on to a seat which had become vacant.

Two hours later I saw him in front of the Gare Saint-Lazare engaged in earnest conversation with a friend who was advising him to reduce the space between the lapels of his overcoat by getting a competent tailor to raise the top button.

#### *Antiphrasis*

Midnight. It's raining. The buses go by nearly empty. On the bonnet of an AI near the Bastille, an old man whose head is sunk in his shoulders and who isn't wearing a hat thanks a lady sitting a long way away from him because she is stroking his hands. Then he goes to stand on the knees of a man who is still sitting down.

Two hours earlier, behind the Gare de Lyon, this old man was stopping up his ears so as not to hear a tramp who was refusing to say that he should slightly lower the bottom button of his underpants.

#### *Blurb*<sup>21</sup>

In this new novel, executed with his accustomed *brio*, the famous novelist X, to whom we are already indebted for so many masterpieces, has decided to confine himself to very clear-cut characters who act in an atmosphere which everybody, both adults and children, can understand. The plot revolves, then, round the meeting in a bus of the hero of this story and of a rather enigmatic character who picks a quarrel with the first person he meets. In the final episode we see this mysterious individual listening with the greatest attention to the advice of a friend, a past master of Sartorial Art. The whole makes a charming impression which the novelist X has etched with rare felicity.

#### *Interjections*

Psst! h'm! ah! oh! hem! ah! ha! hey! well! oh! pooh! poof! ow! oo! ouch! hey! eh! h'm! pffff!

Well! hey! pooh! oh! h'm! right!

#### *Mathematical*

In a rectangular parallelepiped moving along a line representing an integral solution of the second-order differential equation:

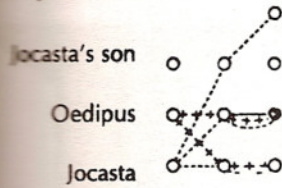
$$y'' + \text{PPTB}(x)y' + S = 84$$

two homoids (of which only one, the homoid A, manifests a cylindrical element of length  $L > N$  encircled by two sine waves of period  $\pi/2$  immediately below its crowning hemisphere) cannot suffer point contact at their lower extremities without proceeding upon divergent courses. The oscillation of two homoids tangentially to the above trajectory has as a consequence the small but significant displacement of all significantly small spheres tangential to a perpendicular of length  $I < L$  described on the supra-median line of the homoid A's shirt-front.

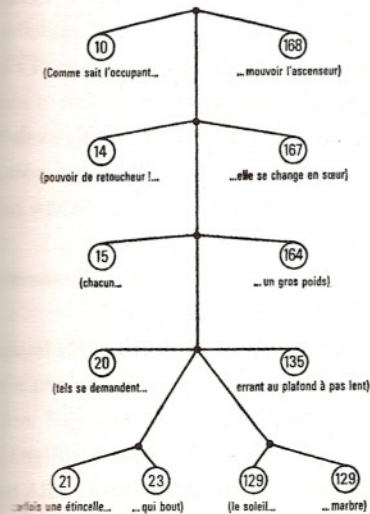
#### *Botanical*

After nearly taking root under a heliotrope, I managed to graft myself on to a vernal speedwell where hips and haws

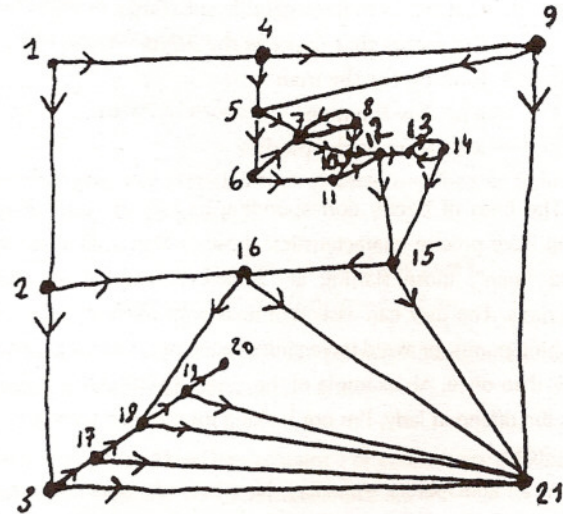
Oedipal situation



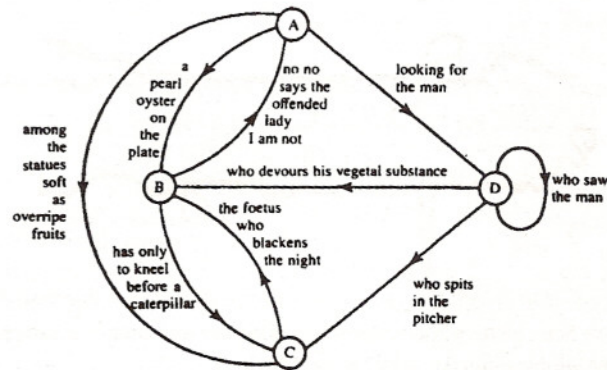
Other texts, in particular those using ●branching systems, are hard to grasp without being visualised graphically. Various attempts have been made to schematise the cantos of Roussel's *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique*: the entry for ●Roussel and his methods includes one; in *Lipo* (●CP3), Claude Berge and Raymond Queneau offered these diagrams of Canto I (numbers indicate the line at which parentheses are opened or closed):



Queneau also mapped his bifurcating story *A Tale of your*



In *Lipo*, Claude Berge proposed writing poems arranged according to a graph without co-circuits (never mind what they are), which allows a user starting from any point to finish at a predetermined point:

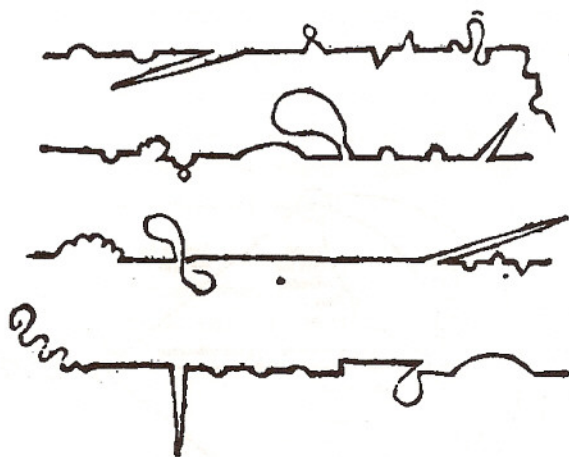


among the statues soft as over-ripe fruits  
 a pearl-oyster on the plate  
 must bow down to a caterpillar  
 no no says the offended lady I'm not

that devours its vegetable substance  
 the foetus that darkens the night  
 looking for the man  
 who saw the man  
 who spits in the pitcher

The lines of poetry corresponding to the segments of the graph have precise characteristics: those ending at D share the word "man", those starting at D have parallel grammatical structures. The user can assemble texts with fixed starting- and finishing-points, or avoid traversing a segment or crossing a point more than once. An example of the latter: BADC yields, "no no says the offended lady, I'm not looking for the man who spits in the pitcher".

As an anticipatory ●plagiar, here is the famous diagram of digressions from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (for another of its formal innovations see Going for the ■limit):



See also ●Eodermdrome, ●Multiple-choice narrative, ●Multiple-choice theatre, ▲*Jus d'Orange*.



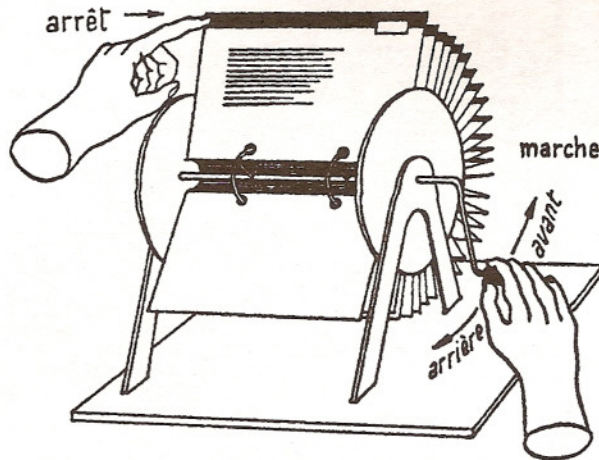
**Machines for reading.** The invention of the first reading machine is credited to Agostino Ramelli in the sixteenth century; it was intended to facilitate the reading of several books at once.<sup>30</sup> Although this invention might not appear particularly useful, there are certain works whose complexity seems to require just such mechanical assistance. Machines have been constructed to read two specific works, both of particular interest to the Oulipo, and whose structures make them difficult to read, namely Queneau's *1001,000,000,000,000 Poems* and Raymond ●Roussel's *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afri-*

que. Jacques Brunius seems to have been the first to design a machine for reading *Nouvelles Impressions* (exhibited at the 1967 Surrealist exhibition). Unfortunately neither the machine nor a photograph of it survives. Juan Esteban Fassio actually constructed a simple reading machine in 1964. His drawings of it in the Roussel issue of *Bizarre* (34/35, 1964) give an adequate account of its *modus operandi* (see above).

In some respects *Nouvelles Impressions* anticipates hypertext, and computer technology may well have provided the definitive means: a hypertext English translation is noted in the entry on Roussel and his methods.

The machines constructed in the 1980s by the architect Daniel Libeskind are exemplary. Libeskind constructed three machines, intended to function symbolically as well as mechanically. The first (left, overleaf) was modelled on that of Ramelli and was constructed using entirely medieval methods. The last, a machine "for writing architecture", which Libeskind at one point describes as "a contribution to Roussel scholarship",<sup>31</sup> was a complex mechanism of 2,662 parts (bottom; the remaining one, a memory machine, is not illustrated); it has provided the elements for the E.T.A. Hoffmann garden outside Libeskind's biggest completed project to date, the Jewish Museum in Berlin. All three machines were destroyed in a gallery fire.

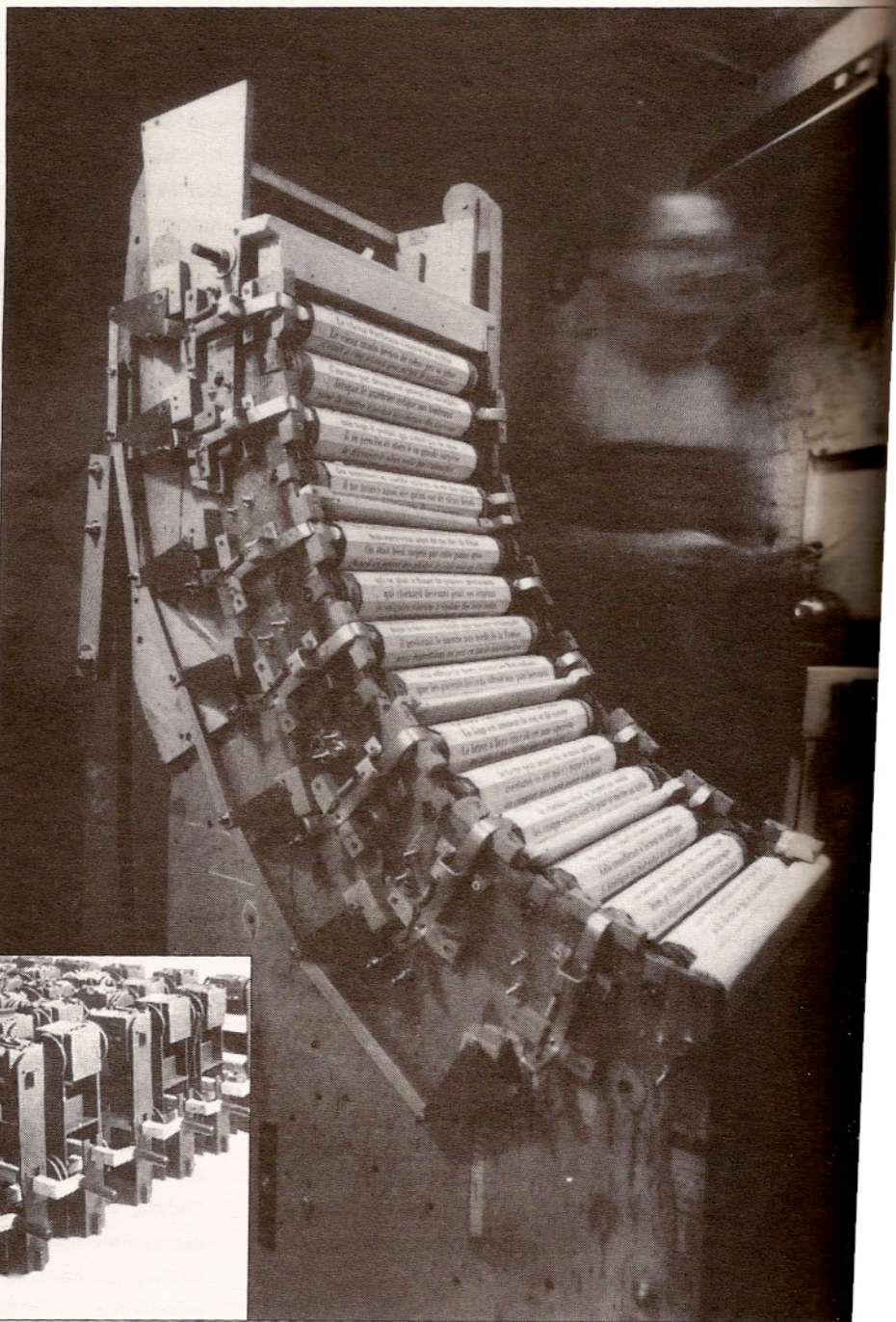
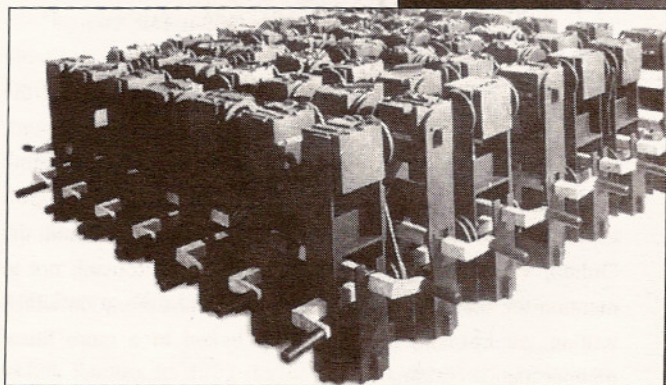
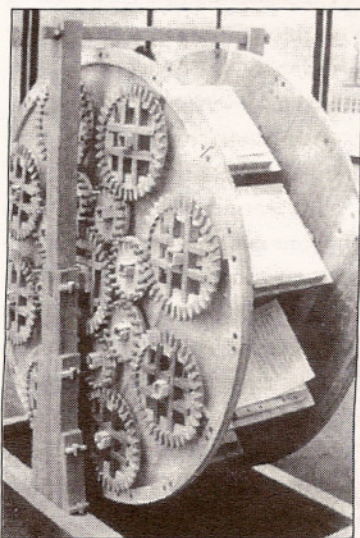
Although early attempts to facilitate the reading of Queneau's sonnet sequence (the book version is difficult to manipulate) centred on computers, a more recent attempt returns to mechanical means. The machine constructed by Jean-Michel Bragard and Robert Kayser (who is fleetingly visible in the main picture overleaf) featured in a plaquette published by *Temps Mêlés* (1994). [AB]



**●Machines for writing.** In the broadest sense of the word,

every Oulipian technique can be thought of as a writing machine. Several actual devices have attracted the Oulipo's attention, however. See ●ALAMO, the ●Computer and the Oulipo, ●Llull, ●Minutes of the Oulipo (1), ●Roussel; not to mention the machine in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, in which writing, punishment, and death are linked in a more literal manner than is customary. [AB]

MACHINES FOR READING



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