

On *Poetry*¹
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“It would only take about fifty years for Lautréamont’s injunction – poetry must be made by all, not by one – to become obvious. The crisis of poetry, like the crisis in the entirety of the arts, is part of a more general crisis to which the poet can only respond by ceasing to be a specialist in culture, by renouncing the exercise of a language that has no effect on the transformation of the world. How did the obsession with poetry made by all in the context of a total upheaval in the conditions of life dominate the attempts and failures of the Surrealists? Why does this obsession also clarify the last currents of poetry considered as a zone of separate culture?” Thus does Raoul Vaneigem summarize and extend his preceding works on the necessity of surpassing this artistic form in the brief chapter that serves as an introduction to *Cahier de l’Encyclopédie du monde actuel* #71, dated September 1971 and titled *Poetry*. As the subtitle indicates, the text presents itself as a report on French poetry from 1945 to today.

In it, Raoul Vaneigem reviews more than a half-century of poetic creation, concisely presenting the different routes taken by the poets engaged in their respective attempts to renew the very idea of poetry. If he decides to be indulgent towards some, by choosing, for example, to “save Ponge from the night in which all poets are gray,” few others find grace in his eyes. A number of them are even copiously taunted before being sent off to the ranks of common writers. In this desolate landscape, a rather unexpected and promising result finally appears: “It is at this point that it is fitting to wonder if the last refuge of written and oral poetry is not in song. If it fails to enter everyday life through the front door, which was Lautréamont’s project, it won’t linger in the magic that is the closest to mankind, a potion made up of music and words.” Some of the composers and/or interpreters cited – Anne Sylvestre, Jacques Brel, Georges Brassens, Léo Ferré, and even Albert Vidalie – “haven’t hesitated to resolutely turn their backs on literary imposture,” thus having the merit (according to Vaneigem) of bringing poetry out from under the “ridicule that weighs upon it” by refusing to join the “official poets” in sharing “the incomprehension of the public at large.”

¹ *La Poésie française de 1945 à nos jours* (“French poetry from 1945 to today”).

² Published in Raoul Vaneigem and Gérard Berréby, *Rien n’est fini, tout commence* (Editions Allia, 2014). Translated by NOT BORED! 2 November 2014.