

“The Position of the Solitary Crime Novelist” An Interview with Jean-Patrick Manchette¹

Jean-Patrick Manchette was born in Marseille, France in 1942 and died in Paris in 1995. In the 1960s, he was active in far-left politics: he wrote articles and created illustrations for *La Voie communiste* and later became strongly influenced by the Situationist International. Over the course of his career as a writer, he wrote dozens of novels (some of them “crime novels”), screenplays, adaptations and translations (English to French). Conducted in 1991, this was his last interview.

Q: You demonstrate restraint, or perhaps some embarrassment, when you place the “artistic” trades and “industrial art” between quotation marks. Is there always a refuge to be taken in these disciplines?

A: I scorn contemporary art, which arrives after the historical death of Art and is reduced to presenting itself as if it were new, when it is actually a crude repetition of Dada or a few Surrealist treasures. This anti-Art position is neither original nor novel, not any longer, since radical artistic avant-gardes in the immediate aftermath of the post-War World 2 period developed it even before they fused into the SI on the program of the suppression-realization of art (the construction of situations). I discovered this radical current when I discovered the journal *Internationale situationniste* around 1965. I didn't understand everything in it right away; I'm still far from understanding everything today, almost 20 years after the self-dissolution of the SI, but I feel I agree with the little that I have understood, except perhaps the possible tendency to [Hegelian] panlogism among certain situs and especially some pro-situs.

As for “industrial art,” the phrase is obviously borrowed from Flaubert (*L'éducation Sentimentale* in particular, certainly) and, according to the context, I have used diverse means to highlight: 1) the vile entertainment industry in itself; 2) this industry insofar as it dissolved in the *melting pot*² of commodity-culture and disgustingly gets mixed together with the fine and popular arts of the past, the end

¹ “*La position du romancier noir solitaire*,” interview conducted by Yannick Bourg on 26 February 1991 and published in *Combo!* #8 (1991). Translated from the French by NOT BORED! 26 August 2019. Introduction and footnotes by the translator, except where noted.

² English in original.

result worthy of simply being called “culture” because someone like Malraux built houses for it and even more so because someone like Jack Lang (or some American or Moldavian sociologist, let’s not be chauvinist in our execration) chatters on about this “culture,” which he likes just as much as Homer, Sade and Madonna; and 3) this industry insofar as certain talented and fierce individuals have chosen to practice it in a contestatory and anti-social manner (examples: Dashiell Hammett, author of detective fiction; George Orwell, author of social novels and Science Fiction; Philip K. Dick, author of speculative fiction – their manner of outflanking the enemy is comparable to the superb cavalry movements by Condé at the Battle of Rocroi³ and merit as much if not more praise).

The choice that I made to practice industrial art, that is to say, to publish in the entertainment industry, normally derives from a conviction (the history of Art is finished) and a hope (can we repeat the bold maneuvers of Hammett, Orwell and Dick, and bring protest to the suburban housing projects [*les banlieues*] of the mind?). In addition to the fact that my own maneuver was shaky because my works were completely recuperable by the culture (in Jack Lang’s sense of the word), my too-passive hopes were tied to a “favorable prognosis” concerning the development of the social revolution after 1968. We know that the enemy’s counter-revolutionary measures, modestly begun by the discrete November 1975 putsch in Portugal, have continued with the “democratic transition” in Spain in 1976, the blitz against proletarian autonomy in Italy during the three years that followed and since then transferred to the East in December 1981 in Poland with Jaruzelski’s “state of war,” after which the Polish laboratory, carefully studied for 6 or 8 years by the Stalinist “camp,” led to the spectacular “democratization” of Central Europe and the reformation of the USSR, while the bureaucratization of the West triumphed, so that when the New (World) Order triumphed in the advanced countries spectacular democracy coupled with the despotism of the *lobbies*,⁴ while the Third World was left to burst, all the civilized territories with insoluble problems of politico-military management were given the Third World treatment, the Lebanon treatment, and while waiting for the Economy to progressively, but quickly and quite completely, finish off the human species and the other living creatures to which we have become accustomed for the last few millennia.

Forgive me for this *excursus*,⁵ but it will clarify what follows and helps clear the lungs.

³ On 19 May 1643, in the Battle of Rocroi, the French Army, led by the Duc d’Enghien (aka the Great Condé), defeated the Spanish Army.

⁴ English in original.

⁵ English in original.

OK, speaking of industrial art, I'd like to maneuver like Hammett did. But I am a more maladroit cavalryman and the situation would be more propitious for recuperation. The overtures of the "neo-detective novel" have been progressively conquered by literary hacks (of Art) or by Gorbachev-loving Stalino-Trotskyist racketeers. As these measures have developed, I have slowed down. Since 1980, they have flourished. Since 1980, I have stopped publishing. (Almost six months.)

As for the "refuge" offered by the entertainment industry, it only interests me as a base for infiltration, not as a refuge. When I saw that I was no longer capable of operating behind enemy lines with my crime novels, I let them go.

I have continued to work as a film screenwriter (and once for TV) because it paid well and there was the ephemeral joy of [having] two or three jobs, against the constraints of money and ideology. But these constraints were painful from the beginning. Without exception, they became intolerable (I made a short TV film with Juan Bunuel that I'm happy with; the producer wanted us to change the entire scenario, but – a stroke of luck! – he suddenly remembered that we started shooting in two weeks and the scenario remained as Juan Bunuel and I had wanted it; it is redoubtable to depend on strokes of luck).

In sum, in the audiovisual realm, in detective fiction, there is no longer a formal refuge. There remains individual talent, isolated in open country, facing the enemy's artillery and airplanes. I am completely sure that my talent is second rate, but its utilization clashes with the firepower of the New Cultural Order.

Q: In *Polar* #27 (2d period), you declared, "The classic detective novel is the opposite of kitsch: it's a style and, in the industry of fictional styles, the last one." Is a "non-classical" detective novel conceivable and, if so, how?

A: The American detective novel before World War II is notably an object that has been stylistically cleaned up [*dégraissé*] to the maximum, thus, yes, "the opposite of kitsch," even if this form has now been adopted and on the condition that it is adopted in its purity. It is simple, like a sonnet, though more unpredictable formally and longer. If you want to critique the current world, and what else would you want when you are writing? even if this critique isn't everything that you do, or even if you only write essays, but already in an essay or even a slogan the question of the beautiful is posed. . . . "Is there life before death?" (Belfast)⁶ is a good example, celebrated, the unity between the content and the formal beauty – I am a partisan of cleaned-up behavioralist [*comportementaliste*] realism. A "non-classical" detective novel only seems conceivable to me in the example of writers

⁶ Various sources confirm that the phrase "Is there life before death?" did in fact appear in Belfast as graffiti, but the date of its inscription is unclear.

like Umberto Eco, Brautigan, Echenoz, author of *Cherokee*,⁷ etc. I find Echenoz funny, by the way, but in a general way the non-classical detective novel isn't formally "noir," thus it isn't "noir" fiction at all – it is a kitsch detective novel, *contradictio in adjecto*,⁸ a priori I have nothing at stake, they are novels, some authors inspire me through sympathy, others do not (the Democratic Christian semiotician Eco inspires me through hatred).

The only "non-classical detective fiction" that I like, in sum, is the genre in which I am working: the formal starvation of the "noir" novel must now be put at the service of a new reality and let the literary and Stalinist-Leftist detective-fiction writers sit on their asses. To live and write in the banlieues (Lyon, for example) unfortunately falls outside of my ordinary capacities. But it is the only interesting road open to the contemporary French "noir" novel. It is avoided, of course. Hammett, Orwell, Dick – someone must follow up, even timidly, and the people of good taste will forget about the current clowning around concerning the "subversion of the text." Of course I can appreciate the people who are labeled "beyond detective fiction," but I see that generally they are Hemingwayians, sometimes saddled with the label "minimalist." I quite like someone like James Crumley, but all this slop about labels is foolish.

Finally, some avant-gardists have tried their hands at detective fiction. One can only say "bravo" to them, except that in general they're always tripping over their own guts.

Q: In *Polar* # 26, you give a good definition of the writer of detective novels by evoking your work as translator for Westlake's *Kahawa*:⁹ "One doesn't have to invent intrigue or twists-and-turns, nor to weave the details of the action around a secret center that governs the pacing." Technically, how do you proceed? What precedes the elaboration of the novel and "justifies" the passage to action? What are the parts played by the intellectual game and by emotion?

A: The most interesting part of the response is in the question. The rest is in the details.

Technically, I generally begin with a vague idea and then I search for a well-worn "noir" structure that can be used to write it. Terrorism? For or against or

⁷ Umberto Eco (1932-2016) was an Italian semiotician and novelist. Richard Brautigan (1935-1984) was an American novelist and poet. Jean Echenoz (born 1947) is a French novelist. His book *Cherokee* was published in 1983.

⁸ Latin for "a contradiction between parts of an argument."

⁹ Donald E. Westlake (1933-2008) was an American novelist. His book *Kahawa* was published in 1981.

don't know? OK, I will do that – it will be a *kidnapping*¹⁰ carried out by gangsters in a “Parker” novel by Richard Stark, and the cops attack a small farmhouse in Seine-et-Oise because it is the scene of the foulest action in the world. But everything, certainly, is reorganized “around a secret center that governs all the details.” As for the passage to action: if I knew how it was done, I would bring it about twice a year and I would be the author of twenty novels. For *Nada*¹¹ – since that's what I'm talking about – I was half-way through drafting it when Pierre Overney was shot.¹² I suppose that I was “up” on the news. The problem is to grasp the durable tendencies of the period. *Nada* certainly did that, but I hadn't seen what terrorism could become, was becoming, had begun to become. Concerning the manipulations, the “moles,” and the *repenti*,¹³ I have sketched out possibilities, but they aren't the “secret center” of the book.

In my books, I have hardly separated the “intellectual game” from “emotion.” Like a cabin maker who wants to make a beautiful piece of furniture, I must know as much technical knowledge as possible, but my goal is a beautiful piece of furniture. Distinguishing this goal and the means to attain it is an exercise in moral philosophy that risks being [too] long, only to end in the conclusion that it is good to have technique, but that it is useless if you are a vile rogue – you end up with a roguish work, the mixed [*gâchée*] technique will no longer be a style but a mannerism, the object will hideous, emotions absent.

Q: In *Polar* #27, you say, “The truth about the ‘hard-boiled’¹⁴ detective novel is that it must not only be a novel of modern poverty, but also must become the modern poverty of the novel. It wants nothing to do with the poetic, except ironically.” Why this modern poverty of the novel? – Here again, is a modern richness impossible?

A: The phrase that you quoted is opposed to the despisers of the *écriture blanche*¹⁵ who reclaim subversive poetry. I demand desperate realism faced with the total absence of richness in material reality and against any attempt to compensate the poverty of this world with an artistic beyond. I have nothing against subversive poetry as it is practiced by rioters, but I fear that, in the name of poetry, *La moisson*

¹⁰ English in original.

¹¹ Jean-Patrick Manchette, *Nada* (Gallimard, Série Noire, 1972). In 1974, this book was adapted for the screen by Manchette himself. The movie was directed by Claude Chabrol.

¹² Pierre Overney (1948-1972) was a French Maoist militant who was killed by a security guard during a demonstration at a factory in Billancourt.

¹³ Former terrorists who have “repented” and confessed to their crimes.

¹⁴ English in original

¹⁵ “White writing.” Cf. Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953).

rouge and Marguerite Duras¹⁶ would be placed in the same bag. The desperate realism of Hammett aims at “angering the people.” Duras? No. “Modern richness” is held, it survives in the interstices between certain individual existences (and this can be the excellence of a book and even perhaps of a novel), but, as a whole, it remains to be conquered by the overthrow of all laws.

Q: One of your obsessions is this: “the problem of the cliché is the most acute problem of genre literature.” Can’t we, can we no longer escape the cliché?

A: The problem of the linguistic cliché has been an “on-going question” in literature ever since Flaubert at least. It is aggravated in “genre” novels and in the entertainment industry in general, because this industry wants clichés, nothing but clichés, nothing more than clichés. Concerning what can no longer be escaped: it is the constant struggle against clichés, sometimes by force (violation of the rules), sometimes by ruse (irony, exaggerated submission to the rules, abrupt excesses of clichés, etc.). I have generally preferred ruses (conventional intrigues that have been tinkered with, “noble” phrases suddenly stained by a dirty word, or vice versa, excessive or very elliptical violence), because the manifest violation of this or that rule immediately uncovers you and taxes you with artistic literary originality. And yet people have quickly taxed me with that, too. Fatalitas!¹⁷ No, seriously, my share of literary success is almost completely mixed up with my failures.

Q: For *Fatale*¹⁸ – not published by Série Noire and atypical – you’ve said that the system of the interpretation of the world isn’t yours. Whose is it? (We don’t change them like socks.)

A: In *Fatale* – and I believe that I said this explicitly several years later – the socio-political description of the provincial town and a part of its population draws upon the degenerated Marxist notions produced by the Second International and later worsened by the Third (“the bourgeoisie and its lackeys,” the “downgraded” killer “in the pay of the capitalists,” the baron cleaned out like a “*lumpenized* squire from the Ancien Régime”). It is a social caricature, normally associated with a style that covets the Symbolists (Huysmans et. al) because this style was contemporaneous

¹⁶ *La moisson rouge* is the French title of Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, first published in 1929. Marguerite Duras (1914-1996) was a French novelist and screenwriter.

¹⁷ A phrase repeated at the end of every chapter by a character created by Gaston Leroux circa 1913.

¹⁸ Jean-Patrick Manchette, *Fatale* (Gallimard, 1977), translated into English by Donald Nicholson-Smith, *Fatale* (New York Review of Books Classics, 2011).

with the degeneration of orthodox Marxism. This is a fitting example of insubordination to the rules of the detective genre through an excess of deliberate submission to dusty ideological clichés and obsolete ways of writing.

My own system of interpreting the world can be described, in brief, as pro-situ or neo-pro-situ, if you want to judge it severely. I am generally very interested and rarely shocked by what Debord, the *Encyclopédie des nuisances*¹⁹ or others have published, but I have also tried to avoid automatic, blind and stupidly passive admiration.

Q: What were your connections with the situationists, pro-situs and post-situs? In the first volume of Editions Champ Libre's *Correspondence*, there is a lively exchange between you and Gérard Lebovici that questions your status as recuperator.²⁰

A: Apart from rare exchanges of insignificant letters, I didn't have any personal connections with the SI or any of the post-situ groups.²¹ I had several conversations with Champ Libre in [19]73. The exchanges you mention can be seen as commentaries if they are read attentively. In my exchange with Gérard Lebovici, you can see that he was right where I was concerned but I refused to recognize it at the time. From the point of view of subjective quibbles, perhaps I might add that, not having paid attention to the evolution of Champ Libre after my brief contacts with it in 1973, in 1977 I still believed Lebovici was a simple pro-situ, thus I thought that he wasn't right to insult me so energetically, which allowed me to ignore everything in his attack that was justified.

Q: In your behaviorist style in the third-person, I have noted two troubling intrusions of the word "I" (perhaps it appears elsewhere, too, but I haven't noticed it if it does): in the first chapter of *Le petit bleu de la côte ouest*²² and the last chapter of *Fatale*. What do these intrusions mean?

¹⁹ The *Encyclopédie des nuisances* was first a journal (1984 to 1992) and later a publishing house of situationist inspiration founded by Jaime Semprun. <http://www.notbored.org/EdN.html>.

²⁰ Editions Champ Libre, *Correspondence*, Vol. 1 (Editions Champ Libre, 1978), pp. 93-97.

²¹ But see the French version of Wikipedia, which claims that, "In 1974, he [Manchette] worked with Abel Paz, Raoul Vaneigem and Mustapha Khayati on a film about the Spanish Revolution of 1936 and the life of Buenaventura Durruti."

²² Jean-Patrick Manchette, *Le petit bleu de la côte ouest* (Gallimard, Série Noire, 1976), translated into English by Donald Nicholson-Smith as *Three to Kill* (City Lights Publishers, 2002).

A: The intrusions of the word “I” in behavioralist novels in the third person are little blows against the rules, in accordance with what I was saying before. Generally speaking, it is at first a banal reminder of reality: this isn’t a pipe, it is a novel written by a novelist, wake up for two seconds!

In *Fatale*, there are two intrusions of the word “I”: when it takes on the first name “Aimée,” after being called Mélanie, the novelist writes, “This is what I will call her from now on.” The novelist declares his love for this person, who had at first been called the Black (Mélanie). The novelist also demonstrates his omnipotence, which permits him, at the end, to cure Aimée by means of a miracle: dying or not, we don’t know, the Black Mélanie, being Aimée, covered in red blood, rises toward whiteness in a glorious light.

By the way, here the symbolism (the colors, in this instance), especially as this itinerary from the black to the white through the intermediary of red blood is an itinerary of combat against the green, which is the color of evil insofar as it is 1) torment, because it is a composed color and not a primary one, like red, nor totalizing like white, nor a non-color like black; 2) the lying color of the garbage pails, in the same way that in Paris there are green bins decorated with the inscription “Property of Paris,” while they in fact convey and signify the dirtiness of Paris and their content is anything but bucolic green; and 3) the color of money. Excuse me for this exposition, I simply want to indicate that I am a great artist full of subtlety. Open fire!

Q: You’ve mentioned the possible reprise of the character of Tarpon.²³ After the publication of *La position du tireur couché*,²⁴ 14 times you began the first chapter of the next book, which was intended to be a reflection on the cinema and the image and your “work as artist feeding the masses” ([quoted] in *Lire*). Why haven’t you reprised Tarpon and have abandoned the follow-up? Are there other aborted projects and what are they? Finally, where did the idea “*How the hell did we get here?*” come from?

A: *Tarpon* didn’t sell as well as the rest of my books. Nevertheless, one day I will take that character up again, but I have other preoccupations at the moment that surpass the narrow universe of a calamitous private detective, although I love him a lot.

²³ Described by the interviewer, Yannick Bourg, as a former riot cop who becomes a private detective and who, little by little, awakes to the tragic realities of society.

²⁴ Jean-Patrick Manchette, *La position du tireur couché* (Gallimard, Série Noire 1981), translated by James Brook as *The Prone Gunman* (City Lights Noir, 2002).

The book with “reflection on the cinema and the image” is a still-active project, but at the moment integrated into an envisioned series of volumes in which it would not be the first episode.

Several other projects have been or are “aborted” but are or have been resuscitated as future episodes of the saga in question. It is the question “How did we get here?” that has resuscitated them by federating them. It has “germinated” because I’m 48 years old and we are in a shitty global situation that wasn’t what we could hope for in 1968-74. Thus my response to your first question, the *excursus* on modern history from 1975 to the present.

Q: In other interviews, you’ve mentioned your agoraphobia several times. Can you draw a connection between it and your silence?

A: I do not see a direct connection. On the contrary, I have worked a lot and published during my bouts with agoraphobia – my most recent novel, several articles, film scripts. I was literally shut in with my typewriter – what else was there to do? But it is also true that I’ve had the time to ruminate lugubriously. But it was the progressive ending of the acute phobia (in 1985 and 86) that contributed to separating myself from writing a bit for banal reasons of regained mobility. I wandered around, I sorely missed it.

Q: Your work for the cinema, TV, and graphic novels (*Les gardiens*) is well known, but, unless I am mistaken – amateurism has its limits – you also have translated Westlake and, more recently, Ross Thomas (*Le faisan des îles*, Rivages/Thriller).²⁵ What have you “accomplished” these last few years to earn a living?

A: I had some money set aside. An agoraphobe hardly uses his shoes, doesn’t go to the cinema, etc. – he works and transfers the money to his bank (where he can’t go to get it; I’m hardly joking, I haven’t been to my bank in 7 years). On the other hand, even after the phobia passed, I kept relatively frugal tastes. The majority of the products disgust me and, on this point, I have good reason for this.

I loved true luxury when I encountered it, a long time ago, on an exotic island that today is ravaged by civil war. I am not interested in false luxury. In brief, accumulated author’s royalties and several small jobs have allowed me to “subsist” since 1985.

²⁵ Ross Thomas (1926-1995) was an American writer of detective novels. *Le faisan des îles* is Manchette’s translation of *Out On the Rim* (1987). Manchette also translated Thomas’ *The Fourth Durango* (1989), *Twilight at Mac’s Place* (1990) and *Voodoo, Ltd* (1992).

Q: You came up with the title for the *Chute libre* collection and ran the Futurama Collection at the Presses de la Cité.²⁶ There's been *Mélanie White* (with Serge Clerc) and an adaptation of *Watchmen*.²⁷ What are your connections with *science-fiction*²⁸?

A: I was a huge fan of *science-fiction*²⁹ from my adolescence until about 1975 and more selectively since then. In vain I have tried to write several reprises, being always blocked by the necessity that I can only describe what I can see with my own eyes. I have only succeeded in writing two short stories that touch upon S.F., one of which – *Basse fosse* – is in the collection that you have published.³⁰ In recent years, in conversations with Paul Buck (notably the author of an interesting novelization of *The Honeymoon Killers*,³¹ an Englishman, an avant-garde poet, also the author of texts – translations and originals – for Marc Almond and for Melinda Miel, a young, still-obscure talent working in the drunk nightingale tango-rock genre, arranged by Carla Bley), we have elaborated a theme for a collaborative novel, then ascertained that we couldn't manage to write it with “four hands,” and finally we have decided to utilize this theme to “federate” several short stories and graphic novels presented in episodes that we will write separately starting from the setting and situation that we have built together. *Basse fosse* is, in a certain sense, a prologue to this hypothetical cycle of stories.

Q: Why did you declare in the pages of *Libération* that your next book will be “rather detective-oriented, but not for *Série Noire*”? What is the distinction?

A: My next book hopes to be the first volume in a series of *thrillers*³² beginning in 1956 but really covering modern history since 1975 such as I have tried to describe it somewhat hastily (?) in response to your first question. This series hopes to revive diverse projects that were aborted in the past.³³ It could be published by

²⁶ *Chute libre* means “free fall.” Manchette ran the Futurama Collection at the Presses de la Cité from 1976 to 1979.

²⁷ Jean-Patrick Manchette, with illustrator Serge Clerc, *Mélanie White* (Hachette, 1979). *Watchmen* was originally created by Alan Moore, circa 1986-1987. Manchette's French translation (*Les gardiens*) was published by Zenda and Delcourt.

²⁸ English in original.

²⁹ English in original.

³⁰ Publisher's note: “Homicides.”

³¹ *The Honeymoon Killers*, an American crime film written and directed by Leonard Kastle (1970).

³² English in original.

³³ Publisher's note: cf. discussion above.

Série Noire save for two reasons: 1) Série Noire no longer seems to me to have a well defined literary line. I would find it unsettling to be grouped together with Robert B. Parker, Marie & Joseph, Lawrence Sanders, Syreigeol, etc., and I wonder how far this incoherence will go in the coming years (I love the authors that I've mentioned but their existence in a single collection would be incoherent); and 2) though this incoherence would allow me to place my project in the Série noire, I want to note that my work would be separated from the *hard-boiled*³⁴ detective novel that has, essentially, constituted the myth of Série noire classic. (I remain an admirer and heterodox disciple of Hammett et. al, but I now write and, no doubt, I will continue to write about other things than conspicuous delinquency. And yet, for all that, I have no intention of imitating Jean d'Ormesson, John Le Carré or Souvestre & Allain.

Q: Do you have a particular affection, or an intellectual kindness, for Oriental thought, Japanese in particular, since one of your pseudonyms was Shuto ("Headline"³⁵ isn't very Japanese) and that your portrait in the *Almanach du crime 1984* confirms this?

A: I have no particular affinities for Chinese thought. I know nothing of the rest of Asian thought, and Michel Lebrun has forgotten to send me a copy of the *Almanach du crime 1984*. When I thought it was amusing to take a pseudonym that proclaims "Manchette Manchette," I went with "Headline" because I know English and I'd unearthed "Shuto" from a short manual titled *Trois jours avec les arts martiaux* (Solar, 1976).³⁶ It makes me happy to recall that Shuto is also the nickname of an Asian wrestler in Samuel Fuller's *Crimson Kimono*.³⁷

Q: On the back cover of *Mélanie White*, it says you love jazz, red meat, German thought and rats. Rats?

A: It's well known that the rat is the only intelligent urban animal.

Q: As a big fan of jazz, do you hate rock?

A: A fan of jazz, although it has almost stopped innovating since Archie Shepp, I love classic black American rock 'n' roll (rhythm and blues,³⁸ music from

³⁴ English in original.

³⁵ English in original.

³⁶ Written by Frank Morvan-Denegre.

³⁷ American film noir released in 1959.

³⁸ Slightly misspelled English in original ("rythm'n'blues")

Louisiana, hairy tenors³⁹ like Plas Johnson). The word “rock” sometimes seems to include an incoherent multitude of pop musics, from Elvis Presley to the Pogues, by way of the Beatles and Vanessa Paradis (I’m hardly exaggerating). I quite like several things heard by chance on the radio (the Pogues, for example), but I know nothing about it and it doesn’t interest me enormously. I don’t hate what I suppose to be “rock,” but *show biz*⁴⁰ horrifies me, especially when it claims to channel popular/working class discontent through songs.

My direct connections with “rock” came through a theater piece that I created for the Comédie de Saint Etienne and that integrates a group called Factory into the action and critiques the cultural *bizness*⁴¹ (not “rock” especially). I told the guys in Factory, who come from the Saint Etienne suburb, about the dangers of fame. Onstage, they triumphed over the text. Shortly after the success of the piece, they broke up.

Q: What are the historic moments of the past (crummy) decade and why?

A: The tendencies of the decade will be more quickly cited [by me here] and are perhaps more important than the particular events. The “New World Order,” with its attempt at synthesis between spectacular democracy and universal bureaucratic management in order to continue to develop the Economy until everyone is dead, is the central tendency. History will soon show if the quasi-permanent riots [of today] will announce the improbable revolutionary upheaval and are not simply self-destructive in the face of this frightful tendency. All the important events of the last decade, *and this one, too*, are episodes in this confrontation.

Q: What are the five crime novels of the 1980s that you would recommend and five works that are necessary for a better comprehension of our world?

A: Crime novels: *Mortelle randonnée* by Marc Behm; *Le clou de la saison* by John Crosby; *On tue aussi les anges* by Kenneth Jupp; *Le soleil qui s’éteint* by Robin Cook; and *Huit millions de morts en sursis* by Lawrence Block.⁴² Of course there

³⁹ The French here is *ténors velus*.

⁴⁰ English in original.

⁴¹ English in original.

⁴² Marc Behm (1925-2007) was an American crime novelist; *Mortelle randonnée* is the French title of *Eye of the Beholder* (1980). John Crosby (1912-1991) was an American author of detective fiction; *Le clou de la saison* is the French translation of *Party of the Year* (1979). Kenneth Jupp (1929-2009) was an English playwright; *On tue aussi les anges* is the French translation of *Echo* (1980). Robin Cook (born 1940) is an American author of medical thrillers; *Le soleil qui s’éteint* is the French translation of *Sick Transit* (1983). Lawrence Block (born

must be a supplementary place for James Elroy and his *Dahlia noir*.⁴³ Others: *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* by Guy Debord; *Tchernobyl, anatomie d'un nuage* (anonymous); *Coming Up for Air* by George Orwell; *On Terrorism and the State* by Gianfranco Sanguinetti (with the postface by the translator of the Dutch edition); and *Minima moralia* by Theodor W. Adorno.⁴⁴ Here I am limited to works published in French [or French translation] between 1980 and 1990. Perhaps there was a French edition of Orwell published earlier than that.

1938) is an American detective writer; *Huit millions de morts en sursis* is the French translation of *Eight Million Ways to Die* (1982).

⁴³ James Elroy (born 1948) is an American detective writer; *Dahlia noir* is the French translation of *The Black Dahlia* (1987).

⁴⁴ Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1988), translated by NOT BORED! as *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (www.notbored.org/commentaires.html). Anonymous, *Tchernobyl, anatomie d'un nuage: inventaire provisoire des dégâts physiques et moraux consécutifs* (éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1986). George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (1939). Gianfranco Sanguinetti, *Del Terrorismo e dello Stato*, Italian original (1979); translated into French and published with the postface by the translator of the Dutch edition (1982); translated into English by NOT BORED! as *On Terrorism and the State* (www.notbored.org/on-terrorism.html). Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima moralia*, first published in German in 1951.