



Working on the dictionary

While I was working on Gustave Flaubert in 1978 I knew that, after completing the project, I would do something with the dictionary. Ever since I was a teenager, the dictionary has fascinated me. In elementary school there were contests where the teacher would say: "The first person to find a word gets bonus points." I was always lost, but it still fascinated me. In 1979, I came up with the idea of making a permanent outdoor French language park in which words and their definitions would be printed on small signs. Words are divided into groups. For example, all the "A"s are together like a section in a botanical garden. To learn words, people have to tour the park. That was my idea, to explore space and fill it with writing so that every human being could be inside a text, surrounded with words. To learn new words, you need to walk about. When you open a dictionary, there are two pages, whereas in the open space of the park, you will see words spread out like flowers. So, in 1979 I said to myself that I would make a model of such a park. I bought two dictionaries, one for each side of the page, and then I cut out each word, stuck it on a label and put each one on a base. The work is entitled *Le terrain du dictionnaire A-Z*.

It took me a year to cut each word out of the dictionary. There were about 55 000 of them. I kept

every page of the two dictionaries that I used, and I decided that I would create a work with the remaining pages, just using definitions. At that time, I was fascinated by the Middle Ages and the illuminators. I added small signs, coloured squares, just to add light to the page, and I filled in all the closed letters and numbers with gold, such as a, b, d, e, g, 4, 6, 8. I did this systematically, from the first page to the last, on all 2 130 pages. It was like creating basic harmony in music. Gradually I made other additions as well. This is my way of reading the dictionary and of understanding and focussing on what I read. Sometimes I would put signs or underline certain words and sentences. I will also add a musical element to the pages. In most French words one can find the name of notes on the scale: re, mi, fa, so, la, ti. For example, the word *famille* (family) contains fa and mi. If I do this systematically for certain definitions and then play them, it will make music. This is a way of saying that there is music in most words in the French language. In contemporary art, there are many sculptors who create works with objects they happen to find. This is a bit in the same vein: there is music that happens to be found in a text. The mirror was an idea I found by happenstance. I used *le Petit Robert* because that was the dictionary I had at hand when I wanted to do my project.

