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THE NOUVEAU ROMAN
AND
THE AESTHETICS OF MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

by
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SUMMARY

This study considers the relationship between the nouveau roman and the aesthetics of modernity and postmodernity. By nouveau roman, it is meant the creative and critical practice of those writers - principally Michel Butor, Robert Pinget, Jean Ricardou, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Claude Simon - who have dominated the French literary scene for some forty years and whose influence in the modern novel generally has been incontestable. It is argued that since its inception, the nouveau roman has been characterized by a concern to justify and legitimize its endeavours by systematically positioning itself in a literary-historical sense in terms of a progressive modernity. At first, this was evident from the encounter with modernism, stressing the extent to which the formal procedures in their fiction were so designed as to convey the fragmentation of reality and consciousness. At a later stage, this mimetic impetus would be rejected in favour of a poetics of textual autonomy and reflexivity, in harmony with the evolution into a nouveau nouveau roman under the aegis of Jean Ricardou. Finally, the abandonment of this aesthetic programme would be signalled by the appearance during the 1980s of their autobiographical writings. The periodizing versions provided to account for such a supposed 'development' are analysed in some depth in order to demonstrate the extent to which such narratives should be considered as strategic constructs whose objective is both to position the nouveau roman in literary history as well as to direct the reader's response to the texts in question.

This study does not therefore offer a totalizing or homogenizing account of the nouveau roman; rather, the diversity of aesthetic practices and responses is stressed. Unlike previous studies which have been undertaken of the nouveau roman, the present has been informed by the controversies in postmodernism which it is suggested can lead to a fruitful reconsideration of a number of key issues including reading, representation, autobiography, the political and ideological dimension, and of course the question of literary history itself as a problematic critical discourse. It is argued that the nouveau roman has been central to the debates which have been set in train in contemporary culture surrounding many of these topics. Far from becoming ossified into a literary 'period' with a fixed set of precepts, it is maintained that these mobile and plural texts have continued to elicit fertile critical approaches.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to such a reassessment of the nouveau roman by its focus on how it has been deeply implicated in the aesthetics of modernity and postmodernity. Within this perspective, this study attempts to evaluate some forty years of creative and critical practice, culminating in the recent autobiographical texts which have so far received very little critical attention.

INTRODUCTION

The nouveau roman has now dominated the French literary scene for some four decades. It has also unquestionably influenced the development of contemporary fiction at an international level, reversing many of the assumptions and conventions in the novel generally. It would not be inaccurate to state that it has in many respects initiated the metafictional dimension of what has come to be regarded as postmodern writing. Indeed, the transgressive and self-reflexive formal procedures used in many nouveaux romans have been seen as in many ways axiomatically postmodernist. Arguably, the nouveau roman has been instrumental in setting the terms of the debate in contemporary culture surrounding the questions of representation, reflexivity, reading, and the status of writing and language. It is as both a creative and a critical practice that its force has rested, in the sense that since its inception it has been deeply implicated in the repercussions of these arguments which have been taking place. The nouveau roman has been at the centre of the discussion of the aesthetics of modernity and postmodernity, both in terms of the textual operations in their novels and in their public contributions in the form of essays, interventions at colloquia, and interviews.

Although the individual writers were hostile to the notion that they could in any sense be considered a 'group', 'movement' or 'school', it is important to consider, nevertheless, how the nouveau

roman initially constituted itself in literary-historical terms as part of the attempt to legitimize and justify its endeavours in literary experimentation. This legitimizing strategy was of course characterized by a systematic contestation of the techniques and precepts of the Balzacian 'classic realist' novel and the overt promotion of a modernist practice. In terms of the polemical tactics in which they have been engaged, periodization has been a feature of their 'aesthetic politics' since the essays by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute written in the 1950s and early 1960s, and has continued right up until the late 1980s, in texts such as the contributions to the New York colloquium in 1982, Claude Simon's Discours de Stockholm, and Robbe-Grillet's autobiographical writings. It is apparent that the nouveaux romanciers have considered themselves the 'successors' of a number of modernist writers, whose 'progressive' subversion of plot, character and linear and causal narrative they consider themselves to have incorporated and extended. In addition to this evaluation of their position in the history of the modern novel, it is also very much the case that these novelists have been preoccupied with narrativizing the evolution of their own practices over the decades. Versions of such a development have been adduced in order to valorize their writing, frequently with recourse to concepts imported into the nouveau roman from structuralism and poststructuralism - although it could of course be argued that contemporary literary theory has itself arisen partly as an attempt to articulate the radical experience of écriture presented by the nouveau roman itself. Therefore, in spite of the numerous disclaimers which have been issued concerning both their composition

as a group and the validity of their theoretical pronouncements of whatever kind, it remains true that the nouveau roman has been constantly prepared to enter the wider debates in aesthetics. Few literary 'movements' have been so closely concerned with the question of reading itself.

This is particularly apparent in the context of the encounter with modernism. It was repeatedly stated by the nouveaux romanciers that they were in fact seeking to provide a more accurate representation of reality than that which classic realism presented. Realism and reference were therefore key concepts in the strategies they invoked in defence of their writing practices, and indeed readings of many of their novels were specifically invited on that basis. Denying that they were motivated by an 'arid' formalism, they insisted that an attempt was being made to translate into the novel the fragmentation and discontinuity of reality, consciousness, perception, and memory. In this respect, they were of course relying on a set of arguments derived from modernism itself: the 'modernity' of the nouveau roman rested therefore on the manner in which the fiction they produced was more in harmony with the nature of reality and perception than that which was the case in the classic realist text. Indeed, the notion of a 'classic realist' text was one which was deliberately fostered in order to encapsulate the aesthetic which was claimed to have been superseded. This was therefore a construction of reading and an integral part of the literary-historical metanarrative they established. Their rejection of Sartrean engagement - in evidence from Robbe-Grillet's Pour un nouveau roman (1963) as well as Claude

Simon's more recent Discours de Stockholm (1986) - was also part of an aesthetic campaign to assuage their 'anxiety of influence'.

It is only with the advent of postmodernism that periodization has itself come under scrutiny as a natural or unproblematic critical discourse, relying as it does on the presentation of narratives of literary history as part of the legitimization of cultural practices. The discussion which has surrounded the criteria which are used to measure the suitability of a work being described as 'modernist' or 'postmodernist' explicitly invites a thorough reconsideration of the characteristics which are deemed to constitute a text's 'modernity' or 'postmodernity'. As a cultural practice which has never shirked from theorizing about its own activities, the nouveau roman provides a particularly illuminating illustration of the ramifications of this question. It has been claimed that an evolution towards a nouveau nouveau roman occurred (under the aegis of Jean Ricardou), apparently characterized by a self-referential, self-generating and non-mimetic écriture which had jettisoned the representation of subjective states of consciousness in favour of the materiality and productivity of the text. The focus on the text as the result of work in and on language would itself become consecrated as the next 'period' in nouveau roman aesthetics. This could be taken to suggest the defeat of modernism by a ludic and ideologically unrecuperable postmodernism. Thus, the nouveau roman could be equated with 'modernism'; the nouveau nouveau roman with 'postmodernism'. However, it can be seen that this narrative is unconvincing when an account of the 'early' (modernist) nouveau roman is given using precisely the terms of reference set out

by the advocates of a nouveau nouveau roman. Just as in S/Z Roland Barthes could show how an apparently straightforward classic realist text could be argued to contain evidence of the aporia, plurality and discontinuity which are supposed to characterize a work which is scriptible, so can the elements of the nouveau nouveau roman be seen in the nouveau roman. Certain nouveaux romanciers (most notably Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon) were of course complicit with the textual materialist programme which Ricardou was formulating in his critical works and at conferences devoted to the nouveau roman individually or collectively.

In the most recent manifestation of the aesthetics of the nouveau roman, the literary history of the nouveau roman has been even further contested by the appearance of the autobiographical texts in the 1980s, which conspicuously challenge both the 'progressivist' narratives which were once provided and the conceptual apparatus of formalist autonomy set in place by Ricardou, by the unequivocal 'reinsertion' of the author as a source of discourse. The assault on the parameters of writing which these autobiographical texts carry out would seem to place them, however, not as part of a 'regressive' poetics of self-expression, but as firmly illustrative of postmodernism's emphasis on the 'mixing' of writings which constitutes a radical écriture. More importantly, such texts yet again provoke a re-reading of previous works using a new set of evaluative criteria. In particular, this recent 'development' invites not only a reconsideration of the role of the author's subjectivity in the elaboration of a text (a taboo under Ricardou),

but indeed the question of representation itself. The autobiographical writings would seem to occupy a greater intertextual space than was previously the case: the interaction between levels of discourse within the text become more important than the demonstration of the text's numerous mises en abyme.

The possibilities opened by the debate within postmodernism concerning the political nature of postmodern writing invites a reassessment of the ideological position of the nouveau roman over the years as another self-legitimizing strategy. From initially upholding their 'formalism' (as a gesture of 'agonistic' defiance of Sartre), there would be an attempt on the part of some nouveaux romanciers to endorse the Tel Quel view of the text as implicitly subversive in ideological terms by contesting the dominant ideology. This was particularly apparent in Robbe-Grillet's promotion of the oppositional 'ludic novel', which affirmed the freedom of the creator to disrupt ideologies. This area of the nouveau roman was very much a topic of discussion at the various colloquia in the 1970s, but has so far received little critical attention. It is important to measure the extent to which they could be said to have produced 'interrogative texts', perforating the fabric of otherwise imprisoning ideologies. The encounter with history is a relevant aspect of this question.

As the discussion will demonstrate, the word 'postmodernism' is itself fraught with ambiguity as a result of the lack of any widely accepted definition. It has been used to refer to examples of

experimental/avant-garde writing in addition to describing the contemporary literary 'period' as a whole, whether individual works exhibit evidence of radical textuality or not. It is also used to designate, with either negative or positive connotations, the contemporary cultural condition as a whole in all its complexity. Such theoretical imprecision, however, does not invalidate its applicability. As a 'periodizing' instrument, it is no more or less valid than terms such as 'realism' or 'modernism'. It is vital to recognize such a period term then as a strategic construction of reading. It is more meaningful to speak of a wider condition of either 'modernity' or 'postmodernity' than a clearly identifiable modernism or postmodernism, which both tend to assume a recognizable corpus or canon of texts meeting with general approval. The contribution of the nouveau roman to the formation of that which is said to constitute 'postmodernity' will be examined.

In aiming to analyse the nouveau roman's relationship with the aesthetics of modernity and postmodernity, rather than providing exhaustive accounts of each of the novelists in turn, this study attempts to examine how the nouveau roman can be positioned within the wider context of their 'collective' response to certain recurrent issues, hence the organization of the discussion as a whole. Chapter 1 examines the encounter with modernism, focusing in particular on the question of representation. Chapter 2 provides an account of the influential contribution to the nouveau roman of Jean Ricardou whose advocacy of a practice of modernity met with great support, but

whose exclusive emphasis on reflexivity led to an ultimately reductive reading. In Chapter 3, Robbe-Grillet's Un Régicide is analysed as a texte-limite whose late publication deconstructs the narrativizing literary-historical constructions presented by or on behalf of the nouveau roman. Chapter 4 presents an assessment of the nouveau roman's insertion within the postmodernism debate. In Chapter 5, there is a reconsideration of the political and ideological discourse surrounding the nouveau roman, an aspect which postmodernism has invited. Finally, in Chapter 6, the autobiographical impetus in the nouveau roman is discussed, also as part of the debate about postmodern textuality and as a further disruption of literary history.

For the purposes of the argument set in train, it has therefore been a necessary hypothesis to assume the existence of such an entity as the nouveau roman itself. This is not in way to impose an unproblematic, totalizing and homogenizing description either of the 'group' itself let alone of any concerted aesthetic policy or programme. Rather, while emphasizing the specificity of their writing practices, it is nevertheless vital to determine the nature of their responses within the wider debate. It is not within the scope of this study either to provide a full account of every nouveau roman or an overview of the group's 'history'; instead, the focus is on the nouveau roman conceived as both a creative and a critical practice. It may be argued that it makes no sense to speak of a nouveau roman at all, if such 'period' constructs are recognized as at best strategic and at worst reductive and unreliable. While

continuing to stress the diversity of their fiction, it is however increasingly pressing to situate the nouveau roman within the continuing cultural debate.

With several notable exceptions, there have been surprisingly few attempts to locate the nouveau roman in this way. Jean Ricardou's body of work systematically strives to impose his own theoretical constructions on the nouveau roman; however, this has been somewhat overtaken both by the appearance of the autobiographical texts in the 1980s, and the overt disavowal of his position even by those nouveaux romanciers themselves who had once been enthusiastic in their support for textual materialism. Stephen Heath's seminal study (The Nouveau Roman: a study in the practice of writing (1972)) remains instrumental in focusing attention on the nouveau roman's promotion of a radical écriture liberated from the psychologizing endeavours of previous readings. However, the continuing creative and critical practice of the nouveau roman since the publication of his book has ensured that a new set of questions have been placed on the theoretical agenda. Ann Jefferson's The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction (1980) concentrates valuably on how the nouveau roman foregrounds the critical and reflexive aspects of all fiction, thereby providing a perspective which concentrates less on the 'novelty' of these works than on how the poetics of the novel generally come to be raised. If the nouveau roman as a collective entity has received little attention in recent years, this is not to say that the work of individual nouveaux romanciers has suffered the same fate. On the contrary, it is in the analysis of the work of

these writers that critical thinking has been considerably advanced - in particular, much of the discussion surrounding Claude Simon's oeuvre has delivered penetrating insights which have yet to be applied more widely.

The present study therefore proposes to offer a reading of the nouveau roman afforded both by the continuing practices of the nouveaux romanciers themselves as evidenced by their potent autobiographical explorations in more recent times, and by the theoretical questions which have been initiated by postmodernism.

Chapter One

Modernism and Representation

It has been a constant feature of the nouveau roman to have recourse to the narrative of literary history as part of an impetus in self-justification. Few literary movements have exhibited such an abiding preoccupation with establishing antecedents in order to defend and define their textual practices. This 'self-periodization' has been a dominant factor in the nouveau roman since the 1950s: literary-historical arguments are frequently deployed by these writers as a means of both affirming their radical modernist credentials and of validating and valorizing the transgressive techniques in their works.

It is important to consider how the formation - however tacit - of a 'group' or 'movement' became part of the general endeavour to promote the new literary aesthetic. Needless to say, there was an explicit denial of any sense of organization or common purpose: they attempted to assert the extent to which they were writing independently of each other. It would be frequently stated that if they were in any sense 'united', it was because they shared a rejection of the assumptions and techniques of what they chose to describe as 'Balzacian realism' - by which they tended to mean any novel which aimed to represent contemporary society through the portrayal of rounded and 'representative' social types and which was characterized formally by a linear narrative and a causal structure. However, it should be taken into account that this distorted construction of 'Balzacian realism' was itself a polemical strategy,

which was as much an attack on their contemporaries, as it was on nineteenth-century realism, for having failed to incorporate the advances of modernism. While it is generally recognized that their description of Balzacian 'classic' realism is a flawed and partial one - clearly owing more to strategic, polemical 'aesthetic politics' than anything else - it has not been sufficiently recognized the extent to which they drew on a modernist canon as part of the attempt to legitimize their objectives.

It is common to most narratives of the 'evolution' of the nouveau roman to begin with the proviso that the designation 'nouveau roman' is merely a convenient quasi-journalistic or even marketing label attached to an otherwise heterogeneous collection of writers, sharing little other than the same publishing house at one time or another (Editions de Minuit). It has usually been said to comprise a central group - Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, Michel Butor, then, later, Robert Pinget - with Marguerite Duras and even Samuel Beckett as 'co-opted' members. While it is certainly true that the central core never issued a single agreed 'programme', a considerable degree of cohesion does emerge from an examination of their critical writings; and an impression of shared writerly values is suggested by their willingness (to a greater or lesser extent) to appear on the same platform at conferences and to accept (however apparently reluctantly) the 'nouveau roman' appellation. Nevertheless, it is significant that Robbe-Grillet decided not to include his review of Nathalie Sarraute's L'ère du soupçon in Pour un nouveau roman because of the extent to which he was concerned that

it might have appeared critical. As he states in the Obliques volume in which it was republished:

les réserves qui apparaissent [...] n'avaient guère de place dans un ouvrage qui prétend au contraire mettre en lumière une certaine concordance de vues.¹

During the 1970s, the critic and novelist Jean Ricardou, in his self-appointed role as the nouveau roman's spiritual leader, attempted to foster a greater sense of group identity by bringing together Butor, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Simon and Claude Ollier at the famous Cerisy conference (1971), in addition to organizing separate colloques devoted to Claude Simon (1974) and Robbe-Grillet (1975). However, his endeavour to formulate a theoretical programme met with greater resistance. Michel Butor did not in fact attend the Cerisy conference in person; however his contribution was read by someone else.² Nor did Butor attend the conference devoted to the nouveau roman in New York in 1982 at which Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Simon and Pinget all gave papers, thereby confirming his increasingly marginal position.³

It is instructive to examine Ricardou's own account of the members of the group in his book Le Nouveau Roman. It is worth bearing in mind that this study was published as part of the 'Ecrivains de toujours' series of informed critical guides to 'great' authors. While recognizing the diversity of these texts, he nevertheless decides to focus attention on the narrative techniques used by the various nouveaux romanciers: it is Ricardou's contention that 'membership' is based on a certain attitude towards le récit:

le Nouveau roman met en cause [...] avec une virulence croissante un phénomène d'envergure, insidieusement

actif dans la plupart des institutions humaines et
peut-être, l'objet d'un tabou idéologique clandestin:
le RECIT.⁴

The 'mise en cause du récit' is 'un critère de parfaite pertinence pour définir un mouvement'.⁵ Towards the end of his commentary, he uses the term 'méta-récit' as another criterion which can be applied. Ricardou is of course led to include himself in the canon of the nouveau roman which he is establishing. He lists the 'members' of the group drafted by other commentators (in the journal Esprit in 1958⁶ ; and in Françoise Baqué's book Le Nouveau Roman in 1972⁷), criticizing the over-reliance on chronological factors concerning their 'appearance' as writers. Ricardou himself is led to provide an extensive list of authors and works published up until 1973 (the year of this volume's publication) which can be said to conform to certain criteria for inclusion in order to demonstrate the dangers of drawing up a definitive list. Instead, he proposes the notion of auto-détermination⁸, provided principally by the fact that a number of these writers attended his Cerisy colloque in 1971. It is this concern with certain collective preoccupations surrounding narrative which he claims has dictated the nature of the volume Le Nouveau Roman. It is for this reason that this volume is not divided into discrete sections devoted to individual nouveaux romanciers. It is inevitable that Ricardou claims these writers share with him a rejection of expression and representation in favour of an emphasis on the conception of the text as the product of work in and on language. In the final section of this critical work, however, each of the novelists chosen is given a short separate section containing comments made in interviews or essays: significantly, the statements

reproduced here are carefully selected in order to be consonant with Ricardou's own theoretical position. This may well suggest an element of truquage on his part as part of the strategy of establishing common criteria for inclusion into the canon he is formulating, despite his initial hesitations in this respect.

In addition to using the Balzacian model as that which characterizes a retrograde writing, the nouveau roman's 'map of misreading' is also apparent from the confrontation of these writers with their more immediate predecessors. In establishing their ancestry, little reference is ever made to the surrealists, who obviously contributed a great deal to the contestation of realism - this seems to arise mainly from a dislike of the practice of automatic writing and the over-emphasis on the value of the subconscious. Claude Simon has spoken disparagingly of:

l'aventure décevante et avortée de la fameuse tentative
d'écriture automatique des surréalistes qui [...] n'aboutit
qu'à une suite sans fin de paranthèses qui s'ouvrent les uns
après les autres sans jamais se refermer.

However much the nouveaux romanciers may have wished to disrupt conventional narrative structures, it remains the case that their work is characterized by a great deal of highly conscious control. Ricardou's detailed analysis of the procedures of linguistic and textual production and generation both in his own work and in that of the other novelists reveals a very conscious exploration and exploitation of the material provided by language. This represents a marked departure from le hasard objectif. While it is certainly true that the nouveaux romanciers have but rarely cited surrealist

writers, nevertheless there have occasionally been references to some surrealist painters. It may also be possible that they feared the 'group identity' of surrealism which was promoted through the various manifestos and internal disagreements on 'doctrinal' questions. On the other hand, a writer like Céline becomes an 'approved' precursor on account of the liberation of literary language which was effected in Voyage au bout de la nuit. Robbe-Grillet, for example, has described him as 'le grand écrivain révolutionnaire de l'entre-deux-guerres'.¹⁰ Ricardou devoted a chapter to Valéry in his second critical work Pour une théorie du nouveau roman¹¹ which also attempted to consecrate the 'ideologically correct' generative procedures in the writings of Raymond Roussel, whose work had been praised by both Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor.

The self-periodization of the nouveau roman is apparent from the attempts made by these various novelists to position themselves in 'progressivist' literary-historical terms. In Pour un nouveau roman, Robbe-Grillet had selected from a number of previously published essays on certain 'marginal' writers as part of his so-called 'anthologie moderne'¹², including Roussel, Svevo, Joë Bousquet, Samuel Beckett and Robert Pinget. Nathalie Sarraute in L'Ere du soupçon also draws upon certain 'precursors' in order to demonstrate the extent to which her own fiction has evolved out of a 'tradition' of experimentation.¹³ The essays grouped together by Michel Butor in Répertoire also contribute to this process.¹⁴ Claude Simon has of course repeatedly invoked his debt to Proust, Joyce and Faulkner in interviews over the years and more overtly during his Nobel Prize

acceptance speech as recently as 1986.¹⁵ He has also referred to Stendhal, Flaubert and Dostoevsky, and has underlined the impact of modern painting (especially Cézanne) in establishing modernity in the arts generally, by denouncing causality and stressing fragmentation:

If I had to sum up [...] the change which thus occurred, I would venture that over the principle of the establishment of relations justified by causality and necessitating a kind of totalizing (and illusory as well) inventory, the principle of the establishment of above all qualitative relations took precedence.¹⁶

Robbe-Grillet has also chosen to focus on the 'value' of fragmentation in literary discourse, paying tribute most noticeably (like Simon) to the fiction of William Faulkner: of As I Lay Dying, he praises the manner in which 'the fragmentation of the world and the fragmentation of consciousness [...] is enacted within the very text'; while Benjy in The Sound and the Fury is described as 'the typical incompetent narrator'.¹⁷ The principal function of numerous comments such as these is to convey that a kind of 'aesthetic revolution' has taken place to which they are contributing. It is thus a means of legitimizing their own practices.

In many such examples of literary self-positioning by the nouveaux romanciers, existentialist writing was considered to be insufficiently experimental: Sartre in particular was felt to be especially reprehensible as a consequence of his advocacy of 'la littérature engagée'. Such an overt delineation of a social and political function for the writer was at direct variance with the formalist prerequisites of the nouveau roman.¹⁸ Demonstrating in a tangible way the 'anxiety of influence' (to adopt Harold Bloom's

terminology), this criticism is maintained even in later texts such as Robbe-Grillet's Le Miroir qui revient and Claude Simon's Discours de Stockholm. Sartre is castigated for having failed to follow through the innovative La Nausée by writing Les Chemins de la liberté, which appeared unambiguously 'political' in conception and, as a consequence, axiomatically non-modernist. However, their arguments rest largely on Sartre's intentions rather than his actual practice in the latter novel: Sartre in fact adopts a whole range of modernist devices throughout the three volumes, deriving precisely from the narrative experiments of Joyce, Dos Passos, Faulkner and others.¹⁹ Arguably, Nathalie Sarraute's career benefited enormously from Sartre's famous preface to her first novel, Portrait d'un inconnu, which he claimed placed her in the alternative tradition of the 'anti-roman'. This endorsement had a crucial effect in terms of the development of the 'movement' of the nouveau roman as a new generation of novelists united in their rejection of realism. Sartre had initially been attracted to her work because it seemed to demonstrate his own concern with the inauthenticity of human relationships, yet he would later express his distaste for the fact that her novels are set in an upper-middle-class Parisian milieu.²⁰ Camus's L'Étranger is also marred (at least for Robbe-Grillet) by the unwelcome intrusion of a 'metaphorical' vocabulary in the second part of the novel: in his essay 'Nature, Humanisme, Tragédie'²¹ and in Le Miroir qui revient, Robbe-Grillet had condemned this unfortunate lapse from 'le degré zéro de l'écriture' almost as a kind of betrayal of modernism, in addition to being deficient in phenomenological terms by establishing a complicity between man and the world. If we

accept Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as the subversion of metanarratives, then the nouveau roman can be said to have rejected the totalizing metanarrative of existentialism, even if only to have replaced it with a literary-historical metanarrative of its own. It would also be possible to use the Jakobson/Tynjanov 'change of dominant' thesis to account for the nouveau roman's 'rebellion' against the prevailing 'cultural dominant' of existentialism.²²

Significantly, it is the metaphysical dimension of Samuel Beckett's writing which places him, strictly speaking, outside the confines of the nouveau roman, despite the similarities in formal experimentation. André Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs, a novel characterized by self-reflexivity and self-consciousness, in which the device of mise en abyme is especially active, has perhaps not received from them the kind of attention that could be expected, although Jean Ricardou does speak highly of Gide in a contribution to the Entretiens sur André Gide volume²³. Gide was perhaps perceived as having been too closely allied to the psychological novel in the French tradition of the roman d'analyse. Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, however, is recognized as an important technical achievement, especially by Claude Simon and Robbe-Grillet. Simon's syntactical and thematic discursiveness and preoccupation with memory and time are clearly reminiscent of Proust. For Nathalie Sarraute, however, Proust's psychologizing had to be refined and transformed in order better to convey the mobility and fragmentation

of consciousness. Proust's use of the anonymous first-person narrator was of course to be adopted in several nouveaux romans.

All of the nouveaux romanciers have paid tribute most conspicuously to Flaubert: Robbe-Grillet has repeatedly credited Flaubert with the departure from 'mimetic' realism in favour of a more self-consciously modernist writing; the title of Nathalie Sarraute's essay 'Flaubert le précurseur',²⁴ itself underlines the indebtedness of the nouveau roman towards Flaubert's work. In a series of overtly periodizing comments by these novelists, Flaubert's oeuvre is deemed to constitute a 'turning-point' in French literary history and the history of the novel more generally. As Robbe-Grillet comments in his literary-historical tour d'horizon in 'Sur quelques notions périmées': 'Dès Flaubert, tout commence à vaciller'.²⁵ Flaubert's use of style indirect libre in order to voice the consciousness of his protagonists is regarded as the forerunner of the stream of consciousness technique popularized by Joyce and other twentieth-century modernists. It is of course the Joyce of Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses who attracted the attention of the nouveaux romanciers rather than Finnegans Wake, whose verbal and linguistic inventiveness did not receive many enthusiasts, except during the 1970s when both Simon and Robbe-Grillet were influenced by the theories of Jean Ricardou, who stressed the productive nature of work on language in order to counter representation. In this context, Ricardou was particularly guilty of attempting to establish an officially-sanctioned list of approved modernist precursors: the criteria he used were based on a simplistic and over-schematic

distinction between writers who accepted a mimetic function and those for whom the materiality of language was paramount. However, this self-legitimizing and periodizing strategy has always characterised nouveau roman aesthetics.

In general terms, what the nouveaux romanciers would jettison from modernism was the privileging of interiority and the portrayal of the awakening of the artistic sensibility: although writer-figures occasionally appear in the fiction of Robert Pinget and Nathalie Sarraute, we find a rejection of the elitist preoccupation with the artist as a unique individual possessing a heightened awareness of reality. Nevertheless, the early nouveau roman was very much engaged in the characteristically modernist preoccupation with the representation of consciousness. It was the subsequent 'abandonment' of this attempt to render in formal terms subjective states of consciousness and perception which can be claimed to illustrate the nouveau roman's postmodernity.²⁶ The concern with anonymity and alienation, present in the metaphysical novel of the twentieth century, is absorbed most obviously by Robbe-Grillet - although devoid of an overtly philosophical content. It is clear from his critical writings that, to some extent, he considers himself to be the successor of Kafka and Camus: this 'influence' emerges in his novels, Dans le labyrinthe - whose very title evokes Kafka and Borges - and his first work, Un Régicide in which the atmosphere is very much that of the absurd-cum-behaviourist novel²⁷, even if in both cases the 'metaphysical' element is subjected to parody.

It is evident then from the comments made by the nouveaux romanciers that they considered themselves to be developing and integrating the formal experiments of writers drawn from a carefully selected modernist canon, suggesting that they judged modernism to have been incomplete in the French novel before their own arrival on the literary scene. The attack on the norms of classic realism was of course aided and abetted by the emerging school of structuralist critics, most notably Roland Barthes, who, in Le degre zero de l'écriture (1953) and in Essais Critiques (1964), espoused the efforts of the nouveau roman (or, more exactly, of Robbe-Grillet) in overturning the Balzacian bourgeois novel and its attendant retrograde ideology. The deconstruction of narrative as a natural or unproblematic activity was to be amplified by several other literary theorists. The decentring of the author as the source and guarantee of his/her discourse, and the increasing preoccupation with the operation of intertextuality in the novel, could be demonstrated to be reflected in the work of the nouveaux romanciers. Structuralism was also able to use the nouveau roman's denial of an autobiographical motivation, and its allocation of an apparently more active role to the reader, as an illustration of the 'death of the author' criterion; while the rather more difficult question of referentiality would be echoed by many of the novelists themselves in critical debate.

This collusion between writers and critics was not deliberate, let alone coordinated in any systematic way, yet, in cultural and intellectual terms, the principal outcome was to revolutionize the

literary landscape by initiating new, evaluative criteria to chart the movement from realism to modernism: Flaubert is of course also considered by Barthes to be the pivotal figure in this transformation towards an apparently less 'transparent' écriture. Both the nouveau roman and structuralism were able to find nourishment and encouragement in their parallel activities and in the polemical tactics both movements employed as a means of furthering their broadly similar aims. If it is in any way meaningful to speak in terms of a 'change of dominant', then arguably the nouveau roman could not have achieved this without the support of like-minded critics. Indeed, in the 1970s, the theoretical influence of Jean Ricardou, who was aligned to both movements via Tel Quel, can be said to have extended even to the actual fiction produced by Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon at that stage, and several of the concepts he formulated were regurgitated in critical interventions by these writers.

Modernity and Representation

There can be no doubt that the question of representation has been the key debate in nouveau roman aesthetics. Much of the theoretical and critical discussion surrounding the nouveau roman has been preoccupied with the implications of this. It has been a central feature in the evaluation of the nouveau roman's modernity. What is significant is the extent to which the novelists themselves have become involved in the ramifications of this complex issue, at various times either confirming or rejecting the existence of a

mimetic impulse to their writing. The defence or condemnation of representation has been in many respects characteristic of the polemics and 'aesthetic politics' of the nouveau roman. Initially, recourse to arguments concerning representation was grounded on a perceived need for a justification for the 'greater realism' of the early examples of nouveau roman writing felt to be otherwise illisible.

It is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated, however, the extent to which a great deal of nouveau roman polemics was engaged in valorizing representation as that which in fact constitutes the essential modernity of the fiction being produced. From a literary-historical point of view, it should not be overlooked that the nouveaux romanciers frequently resorted to the argument that they were importing or updating in the French novel the experiments and advances of European and American modernism. An analysis of these polemics reveals, at the very least, a concern with modernizing the novel because they felt it had progressed little, formally and technically, since Balzac, as a consequence of the failure to assimilate both the local experiments of Flaubert and Proust as well as the innovations of Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner and Kafka elsewhere. In Robbe-Grillet's Pour un nouveau roman and Nathalie Sarraute's L'Ere du soupçon, Michel Butor's essays, and Claude Simon's comments in conference papers and interviews - all of these writers have had recourse to a modernist canon and a particular narrative of literary history principally as part of an impetus of literary self-justification.

The explicitly polemical nature of the attack on what was depicted as the persistence of Balzacian realism was perceived as 'historically necessary' if French fiction was to progress. Implicit in these arguments produced by the nouveaux romanciers was the assumption that the presence of causality, plot, linearity and characterization in the novels of their 'reactionary' contemporaries made them redundant, both in literary-historical and in formal realist terms. The adoption of the 'superannuated' forms of nineteenth-century fiction did not adequately reflect or represent the epistemological and ontological uncertainty which characterised the contemporary experience of reality. Nathalie Sarraute's condemnation of plot and character in L'ère du soupçon was based firmly on the conviction that traditional narrative cannot convey the experience of incoherence and discontinuity, nor the dissolution of the personality in a psychological sense. Therefore the fixed categories of the character- and plot-based fiction of the nineteenth century had to be abandoned in favour of structures permitting fluidity and instability. According to Sarraute, the modern reader had also become distrustful of the authority of the act of narration and of the narrative voice - hence the disapproval of omniscience in particular. Michel Butor was adamant that classic realism was in fact unable to incorporate the complexity of reality: he advocated the creation of a narrative discourse which would possess a greater mimetic scope.²⁸ For Robbe-Grillet there was also a direct correlation between Balzacian realism as a literary form and the society which 'produced' it: the argument is presented in an unproblematic reflectionist way. In his lucid and highly combative

essay, 'Sur quelques notions périmées' (1957), he stressed that the formal components of the realist novel reflected the dominant ideology of bourgeois society:

Tous les éléments techniques du récit - emploi systématique du passé simple et de la troisième personne, adoption sans condition du déroulement chronologique, intrigues linéaires, courbe régulière des passions, tension de chaque épisode vers une fin, etc. - tout visait à imposer l'image d'un univers stable, cohérent, continu, univoque, entièrement déchiffrable. Comme l'intelligibilité du monde n'était pas mise en question, raconter ne posait pas de problème. L'écriture romanesque pouvait être innocente.²⁹

He insisted in a number of essays that the novel had to reflect the fact that our perception of reality had changed³⁰; and he concedes in an essay not included in Pour un nouveau roman that a new conception of realism was being used: 'Un nouveau réalisme doit donc s'imposer, maintenant'.³¹ It was therefore necessary to develop narrative forms which would in many ways more accurately mirror the unintelligibility of the world: the problematic nature of reality had to be more suitably translated. Claude Simon also repeatedly indicated that the causality and confidence of the traditional novel in fact perpetuated a misrepresentation of reality.

This reading of classic realism (and of Balzac in particular) was of course extremely distorted: the Balzacian novel was made to encapsulate in a convenient way everything which the nouveaux romanciers considered to be deficient in any modern representation of reality. It is significant that in the light of Roland Barthes's S/Z, critics would subject even Balzac to the kind of analysis reserved for the more allegedly oppositional works produced by the nouveau roman: poststructuralist and deconstructive readings could

transform the lisible into the scriptible.³² The so-called 'classic realists' could be shown to be just as transgressive and problematic as the 'modernists'. By default rather than by design, therefore, the nouveaux romanciers inadvertently encouraged this fruitful interpretative transformation.

The nouveaux romanciers have used not simply formalist, but more explicitly 'formal realist' arguments to explain their departure from traditional narrative structures: it was held that the form of the novel had to reflect the changing perception of reality as fragmentary and discontinuous. For Robbe-Grillet in particular, this was also a philosophical (in the phenomenological sense of translating the 'être-là des choses',³³) and quasi-sociological necessity, mirroring the dehumanization and alienation of man in modern society - a critique which would later be adapted by the Marxist theorist Lucien Goldmann (in Pour une sociologie du roman (1964)), who was able to use the concept of reification as a means of explaining the chosisme of Robbe-Grillet's early novels and the subversion of character in the nouveau roman generally. Even as recently as 1982, Robbe-Grillet would explain his transgressive narrative techniques by relying on the Sartrean concept of contingency³⁴: thus the disruptive narrative syntax can be said to convey the fragmentation of man in the world, and the proclaimed absence of meaning in his novels can thus be claimed to correspond to the gratuitousness of existence. This emphasis on chance and coincidence is vividly depicted in Djinn.³⁵

With the exception of the Ricardou-dominated 1970s, Claude Simon would adopt a similar set of epistemological and phenomenological pretexts for his textual practices. 'Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultané du monde' was the quotation used as a title of one of the interviews given to coincide with the publication of Histoire (1967)³⁶, in the course of which he described his narrative strategy in the novel as an attempt to convey, in formal terms, the incoherence of perception and instability of memory.

Nathalie Sarraute has consistently defended the narrative structures of her texts as the only possible means of representing, in fictional form, the psychological interactions between consciousnesses which she describes as 'tropisms': the portrayal of such subtle, intersubjective activity requires the creation of a more fluid narrative discourse. The linearity and chronology of the conventional novel had to be abandoned in order to achieve this: the minute movements of attraction and repulsion towards other consciousnesses, the hypersensitivity towards and provoked by language and objects of various kinds, could clearly not be accommodated within the character-centred novel of classic realism. It is clear from L'ère du soupçon that Sarraute is arguing from a position which considers psychological realism of the traditional kind as a falsification of mental experience.

Michel Butor's justifications for the devices used in his early novels are also grounded in the language of mimetic realism. His subsequent abandonment of the novel form following Degrés (1960) is

explained principally by his conviction of the impossibility of representation within even the 'transgressive' novel: in his later works, coherent and sequential narrative patterns are rejected as being inadequate from a mimetic point of view. In texts such as Mobile, Réseau aérien, and 6 810 000 litres d'eau par seconde, even the typographical arrangements of the texts themselves are designed to encompass a greater representational potential which include a greater 'quotation' of reality:

Nous sommes à l'intérieur d'un complexe de cultures en évolution, à l'intérieur duquel se produisent toutes sortes d'illusions et de gachis. Pour nous en délivrer il est indispensable de mettre au jour et à l'épreuve les références. Travailler sur les citations c'est mettre en évidence le fait qu'on n'est jamais seul auteur d'un texte, que la culture est un tissu.³⁷

Ann Jefferson has spoken of the 'powerful mimetic intention'³⁸ of Butor's last designated novel.

Although the concerted attack on the forms and conventions of classic nineteenth-century fiction was pursued very much in the interests of modernity, it is evident therefore from the defences provided by the nouveaux romanciers themselves that they were relying to a considerable extent on a revised concept of realism. It is certainly the case that the arguments they employed were partly designed in order to make their work appear more lisible, in response to the frequently voiced objections concerning the alleged 'difficulty' of their novels. In this respect, their rhetoric had the principal aim of facilitating the reader's response to these otherwise 'incomprehensible' texts whose erosion of conventional contours impeded the reader's access. Therefore the question of

retrievability of the nouveau roman depended to some degree on the reader being convinced of the necessity for modernity.

The issue of récupération itself has of course become a key factor in critical debate ever since the publication of Bruce Morrisette's Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet (1963). Roland Barthes's 'subversive' preface to this volume warns against the attempt made to 'naturalize' Robbe-Grillet's fiction by adopting such a markedly humanist approach. Before Morrisette, Robbe-Grillet had appeared to accept the chosiste label attached to him by Barthes on account of the supposedly flat and neutral representation of external reality and the minute descriptions of objects in his early novels, which seemed to be in accordance with the phenomenological position outlined in Pour un nouveau roman. Morrisette's interpretative strategy was derived of course from Robbe-Grillet's own departure from this standpoint in favour of a more 'subjectivist' view. Thus Morrisette was able to perform readings of his work which concentrated on the psychological realism of the texts in question. He argued that, in each of Robbe-Grillet's first three novels, the narrative discourse is focalized around the consciousness of the central protagonist, so the recurrent objects (the rubber in Les Gommes, the cord in Le Voyeur, the centipede in La Jalousie) connote some sexual or criminal obsession and the presence of an interiority. Far from being neutral, the objects and descriptions become in fact suffused with meaning when attached to a centre of consciousness. Robbe-Grillet showed himself willing to embrace this psychological/subjectivist mode of analysis as readily as he had previously accepted Roland

Barthes's imprimatur as the model chosiste.³⁹ It was not uncommon for critics at this time to be engaged in character study and supposed reconstructions of plot and chronology in the writer's work. Barthes's caveats against recuperation have been most convincingly demonstrated by Stephen Heath who is critical of the tendency towards naturalization: for Heath, the radical experience of the nouveau roman is undermined when the novels are subjected to reductive readings of the psychologizing variety enacted by Morrissette, however much these may be encouraged by the novelists themselves. For example, despite her attachment to an extra-textual and pre-linguistic domain of mental activity, Nathalie Sarraute's work, according to Heath, should not be limited by interpretative strategies which are fundamentally 'referentialist' in orientation.

In considering how the nouveau roman periodizes itself in relation to modernism, it can certainly be shown that the early productions of the nouveaux romanciers are susceptible to readings which to some extent meet the criteria of psychological realism and interiority so important in modernist aesthetics. The subsequent evolution towards an apparently less recuperable writing would seem to bear this out.

In Robbe-Grillet's fiction, this movement may seem most tangible. In Un Régicide (1949/1978)⁴⁰, the narrative oscillates between two apparently distinct, fictional universes: a 'prosaic' world (recounted in the third person), in which a character named Boris is socially, metaphysically and politically alienated in the manner befitting an existentialist hero, intersects with the 'poetic' world

of an anonymous first-person narrator who inhabits an isolated farming and fishing community. These competing discourses struggle to achieve hierarchy in diegetic terms. However, the text invites us, as a result of the parallels and correspondences between the two worlds, to consider the first-person sequences as occurring oneirically in Boris's mind: thus the disruptions in the narrative can be interpreted as the symptom of his distorted ordering of experience. In Les Gomme (1953), Robbe-Grillet adopts a mock-Oedipal detective story format: the detective Wallas, at the end of a period of 24 hours, kills the man whose 'murder' he had been sent to investigate. His investigations are accompanied by a search for an india-rubber, about which he remembers only that it contained the two letters 'di' in the middle of its trade name (hence 'Oedipe'). This novel becomes lisible if we accept the psychologizing interpretation that Wallas is a kind of victim of Oedipal obsessions which he projects onto the objects around him. In Le Voyeur (1955), the intense preoccupation with specific objects which the travelling watch-salesman displays - the figure-of-eight patterns, the girl's neck, the rope, the cinema poster - is contrived to function as an index of his guilt: Mathias is incriminated by the narrative, although his guilt is never proved conclusively. The sado-sexual crime is not described, yet everything in the text points to Mathias as the perpetrator. In La Jalousie (1957), the disjointed chronology, the use of the present tense, the repetition of scenes, the recurrence of certain details - features which initially perplex readers - become explicable if an identifiable narrator is postulated. If we accept that the narrative discourse represents the

consciousness of the unnamed 'mari jaloux' then the ambiguities and contradictions in the text can be related to this 'narrator''s obsessive fascination with the possibility of his wife's adultery. According to this reading, the repetition of episodes and the lack of a linear structure can be regarded as being in keeping with the formal realism of a narrative which is being conducted by someone whose overwrought state of mind colours his perception of the world around him, and who is no longer capable of distinguishing between imagination and reality. The central gap in the text is the narrative perspective; however, by accepting the proposition that this is indeed a first-person narration, with the first-person conspicuously omitted, then the novel becomes understood in psychological terms as a radical example of stream of consciousness writing. In all of these novels, the disorders and inconsistencies can be 'justified' as the attempt to convey the limited viewpoint of an incompetent or unreliable narrator, or the workings of a confused and obsessed consciousness.

Similarly, in what seemed a particularly unconventional technique at the time, Michel Butor, in La Modification (1957), employs a second-person narrative as a means, apparently, of voicing the monologue which Léon Delmont is conducting with himself as he travels from Paris to Rome to join his mistress, explaining to himself the history of his affair and anticipating how it will resolve itself. The abbé is the organizing focus in Passage de Milan (1954); while L'Emploi du temps (1956) is a first-person narrative concerned with the solution of an enigma. In Robert Pinget's Graal Flibuste (1956)

and Le Fiston (1959), the grief of the occasionally drunken narrator clouds his view of the world and consequently the narrative itself. In his later novels, such as Quelqu'un (1965) and Le Libera (1968), however fragmentary the discourse appears, readings can still be performed along psychological lines if such texts are seen as extensions of the 'modernist' monologue intérieur technique.

Claude Simon's fiction provides for the possibility of retrieval, if we accept the mimetic claim that the form of the novel must be dictated by the incoherence and instability of memory and perception. In Le Vent (1957), L'Herbe (1958), La Route des Flandres (1960), Le Palace (1962) and Histoire (1967), the fragmentation and discontinuity of reality is conveyed by the narrative syntax itself. The arguments adduced by Simon (see below) reveal a concern with representation: the partial and subjective nature of perception and the flux of experience necessitate an equally disruptive formal structure. These novels can be read as attempts to reconstruct the fragmentary apprehension of the past. As Simon himself has stated, there is a striking incompatibility between the discontinuity of perception and the continuity of writing: it is central to Simon's aesthetics to bring to the novel the non-linearity of painting.

Simon's fiction dramatizes the attempt to impose order and meaning on the chaos of reality, history and consciousness - hence the appearance in his novels of tumultuous events such as war and revolution. His work is intimately concerned with the epistemological questions which preoccupy modernist aesthetics. In

stylistic terms, the long and digressive sentences, the accumulation of parentheses, the sustained use of the present participle, the increasing lack of conventional paragraphing and punctuation are all deployed in order to convey simultaneity of perception, in a manner clearly reminiscent of both Proust and Faulkner. In Le Vent, there seems to be a reconstitution of the past in which perception, memory and imagination all play equally important roles: the central protagonist Montes provides the narrator with a disordered version of events. It is significant that the sub-title is 'Tentative de restitution d'un rétable baroque'. In L'Herbe, Louise is another unreliable narrator; indeed, the perspective changes from sharing Louise's point of view to a wider lens. The theme of disintegration in the novel (Louise's Tante Marie is lying comatose in an upstairs room on the verge of death) is suggested formally by the disjointed narration and chronology. Louise's fragmentary perception is mirrored in the discontinuity of the text. In La Route des Flandres, the fluctuations between first and third person mean that it is not possible to contend that the novel's discourse is organized entirely around the consciousness of the central character Georges, who otherwise seems to be recreating his experiences in the course of a night in bed with the widow of his commanding officer, some time after the wartime conflict. The principal theme of this novel is again decomposition in all its aspects, so the formal disintegration of the text itself can be said to convey the dispersal of Georges's subjectivity. Using the débâcle of the Flanders campaign as a basis, a reconstruction of the fragments of a chaotic experience occupies the narrative. Simon's decision to dispense with normal syntax

implies that stylistically the intention is to render the 'real' more satisfactorily than the conventional novel would allow. Le Palace presents a reconstruction of the events of a day, a night and the next morning during the Spanish Civil War, apparently in the mind of a student - into this narrative is imbricated the 'récit de l'homme-fusil' by an Italian who has committed an assassination. In Histoire, the narrator is engaged in the elaboration of descriptions which are suggested by a set of postcards: he attempts to evoke and organize these fragments of the past, aware that it is ultimately unknowable and that reconstructions are inevitably incomplete and distorted by the passage of time. The chaotic narration is therefore in harmony with such a fractured representation: conventional syntax and punctuation would only conceal the discontinuity of experience.

It is evident from these examples that Claude Simon wished to compose novels whose structure and language would reproduce the confusion of perception, the discontinuous and simultaneous aspect of memory, and the fragmentary nature of knowledge. Simon's own statements made at this time betray a strong representational intent: while rejecting the forms and assumptions of classic realism, the novel nevertheless could be said to have retained its mimetic role. As Stuart Sykes has argued, the emphasis on the simultaneity of spatio-temporal representation in Simon's fiction should be seen as the manner in which the linearity of writing is contested.⁴¹

In the context of the debates and polemics generated in the nouveau roman surrounding the question of representation, Claude Simon's

fiction has undoubtedly been central to the development of critical thinking. Simon's fiction has continued to remain the focus of much of the theoretical controversy provoked by the preoccupation with the role of mimesis in literary discourse. Indeed, the attention which has been paid to representation in his work can be said to parallel the evolution of nouveau roman aesthetics in general.

In common with the other nouveaux romanciers, Simon's defence of the textual strategies operating in his novels was initially characterised by the belief in the necessity for a 'greater' representation than that which is provided by the classic realist text. Simon has also frequently resorted to the narrative of literary history in order to justify and legitimize his writing practices. In particular, he has constantly invoked the influence upon his writing of the work of Marcel Proust and William Faulkner, thereby conveying the extent to which he considers himself to be their 'successor' in literary-historical terms.⁴² His debt to these novelists is evident from even the most cursory examination of his work. The disjointed and digressive syntax, the discontinuities, the problematic narrative viewpoint, the emphasis on the instability of memory and perception and the fragmentation of reality, the concern with epistemological uncertainty: the presence of these and other features can be immediately attributed to his reading of these 'precursors'. In any attempt to 'situate' Simon, the conclusion would inevitably be drawn that his writing can be located as part of 'late modernism'.

In the 1960s, Claude Simon had appeared to be more than willing to sanction 'mimetic' readings of his work as a means of facilitating their reception by readers. It is important to bear in mind that unlike Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Michel Butor, Simon had not published 'theoretical' essays at this time as part of the polemical defence of his writing. His contribution to the Cerisy 1971 conference, 'La Fiction mot à mot', constituted his first major intervention in the theoretical domain⁴³; while Discours de Stockholm (1986) has remained his only (and somewhat 'belated') single-volume statement of aesthetic intent. It is very much the case that these collections of essays of the other nouveaux romanciers functioned very much as a kind of preface to the fiction itself, playing the dual role of contesting the preconceptions of classic realism and of setting out the agenda of a new poetics. In the 1950s and 1960s, as we have seen, much of this endeavour is centred upon the demand for new formal structures which more 'accurately' reflect the complexity of reality. Hence the confusion in nouveau roman criticism between 'realism' and 'representation'. Although Simon did not choose to indulge in the more or less public debate surrounding the nouveau roman by adding critical essays of his own at that stage, nevertheless comments made in interviews over this period rapidly came to play a similar role, as Simon in a sense 'caught up' with the nouveau roman polemics from which he had been largely excluded during the late 1950s because of the extent to which his first works published by Editions de Minuit only attracted attention somewhat later than the others.⁴⁴ It may even be possible to argue that during the 1960s, Simon would eventually come to 'replace' Michel Butor in

the central nouveau roman pantheon as a result of the fact that Butor's decision to abandon the novel following Degrés placed him in an increasingly marginal position in terms of the evolving 'canon' of nouveau roman writing.

When La Route des Flandres was published, Simon stated in a widely-quoted interview given to Le Monde that 'à partir de quelques éléments du souvenir, de ce qu'on peut savoir de la vie des autres, il est possible de reconstituer un ensemble de choses vécues, senties'.⁴⁵ As he went on to specify in what has since become a famous declaration of authorial aesthetic intent:

J'étais hanté par deux choses: la discontinuité, l'aspect fragmentaire des émotions que l'on éprouve et qui ne sont jamais reliées les unes aux autres, et en même temps leur contiguité dans la conscience. Ma phrase cherche à traduire cette contiguité.⁴⁶

The title of another important interview (again in Le Monde) devoted to Histoire has been repeatedly cited as evidence of Simon's belief in mimesis: 'Claude Simon. Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée du monde'.⁴⁷ Speaking at one point to L'Express, he referred again to his desire to remain faithful in formal terms to the simultaneity of memory and perception: 'Traduire dans la durée, dans le temps, des images qui dans la mémoire coexistent'.⁴⁸

Nathalie Sarraute has never deviated from her conviction that her novels must be considered as attempts to reproduce, in formal terms, the domain of the interpersonal, pre-verbal psychological 'reality' of tropism. It is to facilitate the translation of the dramas of sub-conversation and activity below the surface of consciousness that

she had abandoned the conventions of linear narrative, 'normal' chronology, plot, and characterization. The 24 texts which comprise her first work, Tropismes, are in fact closer to prose poems than traditional narrative. The representation of psychological states in formation demanded the expansiveness offered by the full-length novel to depict the psychological sub-surface in all its complexity: it was important that the experience of tropism should be created in the reader.⁴⁹ In Portrait d'un inconnu and Martereau, anonymous first-person narrators, hypersensitive to the power of tropism, provide the narrative focus. In Le Planétarium, however, although it is possible to attribute some of the sequences to the consciousnesses of the 'characters' involved, we are presented with conflicting narratives and interpretations of events emanating from insufficiently individuated figures. Her subsequent novels confirm this development towards a narrative discourse in which it is increasingly difficult to situate a perceiving consciousness or tangible focalization. Sarraute's aim is to stress that tropistic movements are interchangeable: movements of attraction and repulsion towards or away from other human beings, and the frequently clichéd and stereotyped language they employ, demand representation in a more flexible narrative form. She has repeatedly emphasized that her novels are linguistically self-conscious explicitly in order to translate the apprehension of the problematic arena of language as it struggles to combat preordained and clichéd 'ways of seeing'. The subject of Les Fruits d'or is a novel which is itself entitled 'Les Fruits d'or'; this novel acts as a catalyst for tropistic interactions amongst a set of predominantly anonymous figures who are

trapped within the fixed patterns of social discourse. Entre la vie et la mort depicts the 'drama' of a writer's struggle with language and the processes of creation, aware as he is of the potentially enslaving power of words. In Vous les entendez?, an art object is the topic of discussion: it becomes a kind of totem whose aesthetic value is upheld by a father and disputed by his children. In the short texts which make up L'Usage de la parole, the traumatic reactions to particular words and phrases are once again dramatized in all their intensity. Although eschewing the analysis prevalent in the traditional psychological novel, Sarraute's work has been seen as one which nevertheless combines, as Valerie Minogue has argued, 'a simultaneous commitment both to reflexivity and to her own definition of realism'.⁵⁰

On the subject of representation, Nathalie Sarraute has remained remarkably consistent in 'theoretical' terms. Unlike both Claude Simon and Robbe-Grillet, she never aligned herself with the Tel Quel-oriented perspective of Ricardou which explicitly sought to remove any consideration of extra-textual and extra-linguistic factors in the elaboration of fiction. She has resolutely defended her belief in formal experimentation not as an end in itself, but rather in order better to represent tropistic activity. In her essays, interviews and conference papers she has repeatedly focussed on her preoccupation with finding the correct form in which to express the sous-conversation which she considers the most significant feature of mental and intersubjective activity. She has repeatedly stressed

that her objective is the articulation by new formal/textual techniques of a domain of inarticulate experience and sensation.

Sarraute has given numerous definitions of 'tropism' as a means of conveying to readers what she had been striving to 'represent' - thus facilitating in some measure the reception of these novels in a more apparently lisible manner along the lines of a modernist mode of interpretation. The following definition from L'Ere du soupçon presents a characteristic statement of the area of mental life in which she is interested:

Ce sont des mouvements indéfinissables, qui glissent très rapidement aux limites de notre conscience; ils sont à l'origine de nos gestes, de nos paroles, des sentiments que nous manifestons que nous croyons éprouver et qu'il est possible de définir. Ils me paraissent et me paraissent encore constituer la source secrète de notre existence.⁵¹

It should not be overlooked the extent to which the existence of such repeated statements throughout essays, interviews, and public lectures have the purpose of 'enabling' her texts to be read. As is the case with the other nouveaux romanciers, she is willing to situate her arguments using certain recognizable literary concepts, however much she proposes revised definitions of 'realism' itself. Taken collectively, these statements can be said to function as a 'pre-text' in terms of the direction of the reader's response.

Another central feature of Sarraute's defensive tactics has been to use this revised concept of 'realism' to justify her novelistic researches. In an article entitled 'Les deux réalités' (1964), she comments:

Il me semble qu'il y a pour l'écrivain deux sortes de réalité. Il y a d'abord la réalité dans laquelle il vit, celle que tout le monde voit [...] une réalité qui a déjà été prospectée, étudiée, exprimée maintes et maintes fois dans des formes depuis longtemps utilisées et connues. Cette réalité est le domaine du journalisme, elle ressortit au document et au reportage. Elle n'est pas le domaine sur lequel porte l'effort créateur du romancier. La réalité, pour le romancier, c'est ce qui n'est pas encore connu, qui par conséquent ne peut être exprimé dans des formes déjà utilisées et connues, et qui exige la création de nouveaux modes d'expression, de nouvelles formes.⁵²

This is only one of many such statements which she has made over a period of some forty years which underlines her belief in a psychological 'reality' which she is attempting to 'represent' - hence the evolution of new forms and structures, and her rejection of the devices and assumptions of classic realism. Her essays in L'Ère du soupçon obviously convey this preoccupation, while simultaneously drawing on a selection of modernist precursors in order to legitimize both her 'psychological' interests and her development of narrative experimentation. She has stressed, of course, that she is not interested in psychology of the traditional analytical, static kind; but rather with 'dynamic' psychological states in movement ('certains mouvements, certaines actions intérieures sur lesquelles mon attention s'était fixée depuis longtemps'⁵³).

Sarraute has relied on a modernist canon of writers (in this case Flaubert, Henry James, Proust and Virginia Woolf) in order to defend her practices and critical interventions generally. In common with other nouveaux romanciers, she attempts to legitimize her activity as the literary-historical continuation in a 'great tradition' of modernity:

Je ne cherche, pour ma part, qu'à avancer si peu que ce soit dans la voie que ces écrivains [Joyce et Woolf] ont ouverte et qui ne

me semble pas conduire à une impasse. Je crois fermement à un progrès dans la recherche, et cela dans le domaine de la psychologie. et j'entends par là l'exploration et la création, au moyen d'une forme qui lui est propre, d'un nouvel aspect de l'univers mental.⁵⁴

Such a recourse to a modernist canon has been a constant feature of her critical interventions over the years. Her conviction that tropistic sensation had to be more adequately translated in formal terms has figured throughout her many 'theoretical' pronouncements. In L'Ere du soupçon, her readings of other writers/precursors is conducted according to the extent to which they investigated the 'endroits obscurs de la psychologie'.⁵⁵ As she reiterated at the New York conference in 1982:

There was an interaction between this initial sensation and the language: without the language, it did not come into being. But thanks to it, the language was alive. This interplay has always been indispensable to me.⁵⁶

Later in her contribution she states:

The substance and the forms of my books [...] have evolved, though they still reside in the same regions of psychic life, in those regions where I place myself, where I work.⁵⁷

Sarraute's literary-historical view of the development of the novel is apparent from this lecture as elsewhere. What is most interesting about her intervention is once again the extent to which it can be seen that she has been consistent in terms of her public pronouncements on her aesthetic practices.

Taking Sarraute's views as the basis of her sustained analysis of her writing, Valerie Minogue has argued that despite Sarraute's rejection of realism in the conventional sense, 'she has never deviated from the tradition of mimesis: her fundamental aim is to

uncover and represent human reality'.⁵⁸ Unlike Stephen Heath, Minogue's argument is in harmony with the Sarrautean emphasis itself on the coalescence of both 'form' and 'content' - in Sarraute's case, the drama of the psychological sub-surface and its 'mise en mots' in a structure which is itself linguistically complex.

In these various ways, therefore, while rejecting realism as a literary form, the nouveaux romanciers were still prepared to adopt a mimetic impetus, while clearly jettisoning the conventional devices of plot, character, and linear chronology. The obvious validity of 'recuperable' readings of many of these nouveaux romans by applying criteria derived from psychological realism and modernism generally cannot be denied. It is evident from such a perusal of the 'legitimizing' commentary provided by the novelists themselves that the reader is being encouraged to 'naturalize' the texts along the lines suggested. The subsequent evolution towards the production of fiction from which no coherent narrative perspective emerges would seem to demonstrate a measure of discontent with previous textual and theoretical practice. It is certainly not the case that this can be discerned in the work of all the nouveaux romanciers at the same time; however, that such a development did indeed take place suggests that a new poetics had been tacitly formulated.

The modernity or postmodernity of the nouveau roman resides not only in the degree to which the novels in question are transgressive in narrative terms, but also in the extent to which they call into question the legitimacy of the practices they install. An

examination of the development of the nouveau roman displays exactly those difficulties with periodization which have beset postmodern poetics, calling into question the legitimacy of literary history as a critical practice itself. As we have seen, it has been central to the nouveau roman's poetics to establish a literary-historical metanarrative as a legitimizing strategy. The nouveau roman - like postmodernism - has created a reading community with specific expectations and evaluative criteria of its own.⁵⁹ It is important to take into account how this readership has been constructed and to recognize the danger implicit in the formulation of a totalizing version of literary evolution, as the theoretical discourse of the nouveau roman vividly demonstrates.

Notes: Chapter One

1. Obliques, ed. François Jost, nos 16 - 17, 1978, p. 10.
2. Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 10/18, 1972), 243 - 54. Michel Butor's paper was in fact read by Georges Raillard. It is interesting to note that Robbe-Grillet commented, 'Les recherches de Butor [...] sont presque le négatif des nôtres' (p. 279). However, a colloque was dedicated to Butor in 1973 organized by Georges Raillard. See Butor: Colloque de Cerisy, (Paris, Union Générale d'Éditions, 10/18, 1974). As Raillard states in his opening remarks, referring to Butor's marginalization at the earlier Cerisy conference, 'on traitât Michel Butor à part' (p. 11). Significantly, Jean Ricardou did not attend.
3. Proceedings (in English) collected in L. Oppenheim (ed.) Three Decades of the French New Novel, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986.
4. J. Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman (Paris, 1973), p. 24.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
6. Esprit, nos. 7 - 8, 1958, 'Le Nouveau Roman'.
7. Françoise Baqué, Le Nouveau Roman (Paris, 1972).
8. Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman, p. 11.
9. Claude Simon, 'La fiction mot à mot', Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, p. 84.
10. Obliques, p. 41.
11. J. Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, 1971), pp. 59 - 90.
12. A. Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris, 1963), p. 69.
13. N. Sarraute, L'Ère du soupçon (Paris, 1956), especially 'De Dostoïevski à Kafka' (pp. 15 - 66) and 'Conversation et sous-conversation' (pp. 95 - 147).
14. M. Butor, Répertoire (Paris, 1960), Répertoire II (Paris, 1964), Répertoire III (Paris, 1968), and Essais sur le roman (Paris, 1969).
15. C. Simon, Discours de Stockholm (Paris, 1986). As he once commented in the course of an interview: 'It is quite obvious that without Proust, Joyce and Faulkner, I would never have been able to write as I have', in A.B. Duncan (ed.), Claude Simon New Directions (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 17. For analyses of

Simon's debt to Faulkner, see A.B. Duncan, 'Claude Simon and William Faulkner', Forum for Modern Language Studies, 9, 1973, 235 - 52; and S. Sykes, 'The novel as conjuration: Absalom Absalom! and La Route des Flandres, Revue de littérature comparée, 53,(1979), 348 - 57.

16. In Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 80.
17. Oppenheim, p. 23.
18. For a discussion of the political repercussions of the nouveau roman debate, see Chapter 5.
19. 'J'ai tenté de tirer profit des recherches techniques qu'ont faites certains romanciers de la simultanéité tels Dos Passos et Virginia Woolf. J'ai repris la question au point même où ils l'avaient laissée et j'ai essayé de retrouver du neuf dans cette voie', J.-P. Sartre, prière d'insérer (1945) to L'âge de raison and Le sursis, Oeuvres Romanesques (Paris, Pléiade, 1981), 1911 - 2.
20. Simone de Beauvoir has said: 'Sa vision des choses s'accordait spontanément avec les idées de Sartre: elle était hostile à tout essentialisme, elle ne croyait pas aux caractères tranches, ni aux sentiments définis, ni a aucune notion toute faite', La Force des choses (Paris, 1963), p. 30. However, in an interview in 1960, Sartre made the following criticism: 'elle ne fait que montrer les effets abstraits et infinitésimaux d'un milieu social très défini: aisé, bourgeois, un peu mondain, ou le travail et l'oisiveté ne se différencient jamais', M. Chapsal, Les Ecrivains en personne (Paris, 1960), p. 214.
21. Pour un nouveau roman, 45 - 67.
22. R. Jakobson, 'The dominant', in L. Matejka and K. Pomoroska (eds), Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1971) 105 - 10.
23. Entretiens sur André Gide, (eds.) M. Arland and J. Mouton (Paris, 1967). Jean Ricardou and Claude Ollier both contribute to the discussions.
24. N. Sarraute, 'Flaubert le précurseur', Preuves, 15, 168, 1965, 3 - 11. This essay was republished (along with with 'Paul Valéry et l'enfant d'éléphant') in 1986.
25. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 31.
26. For a discussion of the nouveau roman's relationship with postmodernism, see Chapter 4.
27. For a discussion of Un Régicide, see Chapter 3.
28. M. Butor, 'Le roman comme recherche', Répertoire (Paris, 1960).

29. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 31.
30. 'Du réalisme à la réalité' and 'Nouveau roman, homme nouveau'.
31. 'Réalisme et Révolution', L'Express, 3 janvier, 1956, p. 15.
For a complete list of Robbe-Grillet's uncollected articles, see Michel Rybalka's bibliography in Obliques, 263 -77, pp. 265 - 6.
32. For a discussion of the advantages of such approaches, see Ann Jefferson, 'Balzac and the nouveau roman: Problems of Reading', Romance Studies, 2, 1983, 166 - 80, in which she makes reference to P. Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (Yale, 1976) and C. Prendergast, Balzac, Fiction and Melodrama (London, 1978).
33. See 'Une voie pour le roman futur' (1956) and 'Nature, humanisme, tragédie' (1958) in Pour un nouveau roman, pp. 15 - 23 and pp. 45 - 67 respectively. Stephen Heath's account of this aspect is particularly valuable, see The Nouveau Roman (London, 1972), pp. 74 - 110 in particular.
34. In L. Oppenheim (ed.), Three Decades of the French New Novel, op. cit., pp. 21 - 30.
35. For a discussion of this aspect, see David H. Walker (ed.) A. Robbe-Grillet: 'Le Rendez-vous' (London, 1987), pp. 8 - 48.
36. J. Piatier, Le Monde des livres, 26 avril 1967, pp iv - v.
37. 'Dialogue avec Michel Butor' in André Helbo, Michel Butor: vers une littérature du signe (Paris, 1975), p. 12.
38. A. Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction, p. 185.
39. See his essay 'Nouveau roman, homme nouveau' (1961), Pour un nouveau roman, pp. 113 - 21. His comment that 'Le Nouveau Roman ne vise qu'à une subjectivité totale' (p. 117) prepared the ground for this approach.
40. For an analysis of Un Régicide, see Chapter 3.
41. S. Sykes, Les Romans de Claude Simon (Paris, 1979).
42. See A.B. Duncan, 'Claude Simon and William Faulkner', art.cit., and S. Sykes, 'The novel as conjuration', art. cit. J.A.E. Loubère also provides an account of Simon's encounter with modernism generally in The Novels of Claude Simon (Ithaca and London, 1975), pp. 18 - 32.
43. 'La fiction mot à mot', Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, 73 - 97. See also the introduction to Orion aveugle.

44. For a detailed discussion of Simon's theoretical progress, see Celia Britton, Claude Simon. Writing the Visible (Cambridge, 1987).
45. C. Sarraute, 'Avec La Route des Flandres, Claude Simon affirme sa manière', Le Monde, 8 octobre 1960, p. 9.
46. Ibid.
47. J. Piatier, 'Claude Simon. Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée du monde', Le Monde des livres, 26 avril 1967, pp. iv - v.
48. M. Chapsal, 'Entretien avec Claude Simon', L'Express, 10 novembre 1960, p. 39.
49. See Valerie Minogue, Nathalie Sarraute and the War of the Words (Edinburgh, 1981).
50. Ibid, p. 20.
51. L'Ere du soupçon, p. 8.
52. 'Les deux réalités', Esprit, juillet 1964, p. 72.
53. L'Ere du soupçon, (Gallimard 'Idées', 1964) p. 8.
54. Quoted in J.H. Matthews, 'Nathalie Sarraute: la présence des choses', Revue des lettres modernes, nos. 94 - 99, 1964, p.197.
55. L'Ere du soupçon, p. 82.
56. In Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 122.
57. Ibid., p. 129.
58. V. Minogue, Nathalie Sarraute and the War of the Words, p. 16.
59. See V. Mistacco, 'The theory and practice of reading Nouveaux Romans: Robbe-Grillet's Topologie d'une cité fantôme', in The Reader in the Text, (eds) S. Suleiman and I. Crosman (Princeton, 1980), 371 - 400.

Chapter Two

Jean Ricardou and the Practices of Modernity

It was central to the aesthetic programme being formulated by Jean Ricardou to distinguish between the 'reactionary' poetics of the literature of expression and representation and the progressive enterprise of the nouveau roman and Tel Quel, characterised by textual productivity rather than expression, representation and referentiality. This view has been reiterated on numerous occasions with remarkable consistency; but perhaps the most complete statement is provided in Nouveaux problèmes du roman:

L'idéologie qui actuellement domine [...] consiste en le credo suivant: toujours, à la base du texte, comme la condition de sa possibilité, doit, dans un premier temps, nécessairement gésir un quelque chose à dire. Ou, plus précisément, ce que nous nommons un sens institué. Ensuite, dans un second temps, peut s'accomplir l'acte d'écrire qui ne saurait se concevoir autrement que comme la manifestation du sens institué [...] si le sens institué concerne des aspects du Moi, la manifestation est habituellement nommée une expression; si le sens institué concerne des aspects du monde, la manifestation est communément nommée une représentation [...] Avec la notion de production telle que nous l'entendons, le dispositif est de toute autre sorte. D'emblée, il n'hésite pas à changer le point de départ. Ce qui rend possible la venue d'un texte, c'est plutôt le désir d'un quelque chose à faire.¹

It is evident from this statement that Ricardou is attempting to mobilise a particular reading of literary history to justify his claim that the nouveau roman is a truly radical literary 'movement'. He frequently claims that expression and representation is a 'dogma' which is propagated as 'natural': 'A l'expression du Moi correspond la représentation du monde [...] le texte n'est que le reflet d'un donnée préalable. Au stendhalien roman-miroir qu'on promène le long d'une route fait écho le romantique poème-miroir de l'âme'.²

Ricardou has continually insisted on the modern text as one which, by contrast, does not act as a vehicle for self-expression or representation, or any content which exists prior to the production of the text itself. According to Ricardou, realism disguises écriture: 'Le but de l'opération réaliste est [...] de restreindre l'écriture à une fonction purement expressive, celle d'une passivité exempte de toute créatrice vertu'.³ The aesthetic values of Romanticism and Realism (which are characterised respectively by expression and representation) are to be seen as outmoded in a contemporary poetics. The truly modern text is distinguished by self-referentiality:

Le roman, ce n'est plus un miroir qu'on promène le long d'une route; c'est l'effet de miroirs partout agissant en lui-même. Il n'est plus représentation; il est auto-représentation [...] loin d'être une stable image du quotidien, la fiction est en perpétuelle instance de dédoublement. C'est à partir de lui-même que le texte prolifère: il écrit en imitant ce qu'il lit⁴

In Nouveaux problèmes du roman, Ricardou goes so far as to distinguish between what he terms the 'Rétro-roman' (of expression and representation) and the 'Roman de modernité' (of production)⁵, thereby giving the impression of drawing up a new orthodoxy of, as it were, officially-approved writers 'worthy' of being read. It is clear that his analysis and promotion of Flaubert, Poe, Lautréamont, Proust, Roussel, Valéry, Mallarmé, Bataille and Artaud amongst others in his theoretical works is an attempt to co-opt these writers as part of the 'evolution' of the progressive literary-historical aesthetic he is elaborating on behalf of the nouveau roman as part of the impetus to validate and valorize their textual practices. In Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, Ricardou applies many of his

analytical categories to a reading of Proust: 'Le roman proustien [...] s'inscrit foncièrement dans ce rôle producteur des mots (le nom propre s'y révèle comme signe dégagé du signifié autoritaire qui occulte communément l'aptitude productrice du signifiant) par opposition à leur fonction strictement utilitaire'.⁶ Thus Proust's writing is polemically advanced as evidence of the progressive nature of the modernity of an écriture which is being continued by the nouveau roman. Proust and Flaubert become 'official' precursors, but not Balzac who remains 'contaminated' by bourgeois society and its ideological forms. In Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, Ricardou accuses Balzac and the realist novel of perpetuating 'illusionism': that is, masking the status of the text as writing ('réduire la présence du texte en fascinant le lecteur avec des événements'⁷) The progressive text is one which dispenses with these criteria. Ricardou goes so far as to distinguish between revolutionary and reactionary innovation in terms of narrative technique: the latter are tied to 'anciennes procédures d'expression et de représentation'.⁸ Ricardou unequivocally divides texts (and readings of texts) into two basic categories, the radical and the progressive:

Il y a deux types de textes: le texte moderne où la contradiction tend à être dominante; le texte d'autrefois où la contradiction tend à être dominée. De même, il y a deux sortes de lecture: la lecture moderne qui s'efforce de mettre en évidence [...] tout ce qui suscite le vif d'une contradiction, tout ce qui contrecarre, fût-ce insidieusement, l'appareil autoritaire; la lecture d'autrefois qui tâche de mettre ces contradictions sous l'éteignoir.

Ricardou does not share Barthes's interest in how the 'gaps' or aporia in classic realist texts reveal them to be as self-reflexive and problematic as 'modern' texts. This is the thesis conveyed most

notably in S/Z and Le Plaisir du texte. Indeed, the main impetus of deconstruction has been precisely the 'unmasking' of the apparently seamless structure of otherwise 'unproblematic' works, thereby demonstrating the extent to which they too can be said to contain transgressive or unrecuperable features. Ricardou has clearly been unmoved by this development in literary theory, preferring his schematic and specious narrative of literary history, founded as it is on a narrative discourse of literary movements. Ricardou's analyses are also devoid of the Barthesian focus on textual jouissance as exemplified in Le Plaisir du texte: there is little evidence of the concern with the ludic which would increasingly preoccupy Robbe-Grillet in his theoretical utterances of the 1970s and 1980s. A reading of Ricardou's theoretical works reveals curiously a concern for control of the text, despite the otherwise emphatic promotion of an aesthetic based on the free play of the signifier. Ricardou's commentary on his own fiction is characterised by a rigorous attention to the generative methodology of linguistic exploitation, while at the same time on the surface ceding the initiative to the productive nature of the écriture itself: his contribution to Cerisy in 1971, 'Naissance d'une fiction', is remarkable for its demonstration of the somewhat hermetic processes by which 'gratuitous' elements are in fact very consciously shaped into a text.¹⁰ The question of reading is conspicuously absent from these considerations.

Indeed, a rigid application of Ricardou's categories would exclude a great deal of contemporary fiction, including many metafictional

and postmodernist works in which an element of self-reflexivity is not incompatible with a 'content' of some kind, frequently of a politically and ideologically challenging nature. Linda Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' is an appropriate description of works which are both experimental from a formal point of view, but which also engage with history and politics by contesting and subverting discourses.¹¹ It is this dogmatic rejection of content of any kind which would increasingly alienate the nouveaux romanciers themselves. While Nathalie Sarraute never accepted the theoretical strictures being laid down by Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon would also themselves eventually rebel against the fundamentally totalizing and ultimately aesthetically imprisoning system being imposed by Ricardou.¹²

Ricardou has of course been credited as the instigator of this development, although his contribution to the nouveau roman was initially to articulate and systematize this new aesthetic. Coming from the Tel Quel camp, which under Philippe Sollers's leadership was pushing experimentation even further, Ricardou sought to contest the referentiality of the nouveau roman. The importance of Tel Quel in setting the new agenda should not be underestimated: from the point of view of periodization, the writers and critics associated with this journal (the most influential since Sartre's Les Temps Modernes), in addition to espousing the 'classic modernists', also resurrected from literary history non-canonical writing which they considered to have been unjustly neglected. Lautréamont, Raymond Roussel, Céline and Joyce's Finnegans Wake all benefitted from this

redrawing of the map of 'subversive' discourse. It is vital to emphasize Tel Quel's perception of the implicitly political nature of avant-garde writing: Ricardou shared the group's belief in the 'fonction critique' (in his words) of oppositional works¹³. He also attempted to import Tel Quel's conviction, derived from semiotics, that the hors-texte did not exist. This theoretical perspective favoured the free play of the signifier at the expense of the signified, hence the importance of word-play and the exploration of language in the elaboration of the text. According to this version, the materiality of the text should replace the evocation of the workings of consciousness. In this respect, the emergence of a nouveau nouveau roman was said to have evolved which was deemed to be characterised by this emphasis on textual productivity, instead of reference, representation and expression. Ricardou refused to countenance any vestigial mimetic input, such was his preoccupation with a view of the authentically radical text, as defined by work in and on language. If it had become axiomatic that the author (or 'scriptor' in Ricardou's preferred terminology) had become decentred and that the novel could not represent any psychological or social reality, then the origins of the text could only be found in the self-generating aspect of language itself. Ricardou contested the 'referential illusion' that the text could refer to anything other than itself: the 'myths' of expression and representation propounded by the (historically superannuated) literary movements of Romanticism and Realism respectively, had to be excised from self-reflexive modernist practice. He distinguished between 'l'aventure d'une

écriture' and 'l'écriture d'une aventure': this precluded the existence of a pre-verbal, pre-textual domain.

In keeping with the emphasis on the ideological impetus of radical textuality propagated by Tel Quel, Ricardou has sought to correlate the outmoded aesthetics of expression and representation with the society which produced Romanticism and Realism. In his paper to the colloque on Claude Simon he organized in 1974, he gives the following definition of what he understands by the term 'dominant ideology':

c'est l'ensemble des concepts, des notions, des schémas propagés dans une société de classe par l'intermédiaire d'un certain nombre d'institutions idéologiques précises avec le rôle d'assurer et de confirmer le pouvoir de la classe sociale qui domine¹⁴

It is clear from this comment that he is making a reflectionist equation between bourgeois society and the existence of certain literary forms which he claims support such a social structure. Thus, he is using the classical Marxist (some would argue 'vulgar' Marxist) notion of the ideological superstructure (which would include 'literature') being 'determined' by its socio-economic base. In this paper, Ricardou addresses himself to the question of the 'originality' of the author: his argument is that this conception of the writer as inspired genius is itself a product of a certain literary discourse. In this respect, his position is very close to that of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault who in two influential essays also claimed that the concept of the author is by and large the product of Romanticism.¹⁵ Although he neglects to mention Barthes in this essay, he would seem to have absorbed the principal thesis advanced. Addressing himself to the question of the validity

of scrutinizing the corpus of a writer's work (an ensemble of texts bearing the same signature), Ricardou sees 'authorship' and 'originality' as outmoded concepts tainted by bourgeois ideology. He attempts to contest the view that an author expresses himself in his works: 'tantôt, l'auteur provoque une expression: porteur d'un quelque chose à dire concernant le moi, il exprime le sens de son être. Tantôt, l'auteur provoque une représentation: dépositaire d'un quelque chose à dire concernant le monde, il représente le sens de sa vision'.¹⁶ Following Barthes's lead, Ricardou prefers the notion of 'scripteur' as a more ideologically sound term. The scriptor becomes a product of his productions: the differences between texts 'correspondent à des variations intrinsèques du scripteur, provoquées par les effets de l'écriture'.¹⁷ Ricardou contests the 'romantic' myth of the author expressing himself through writing and seeks to replace this conception with a view of the writer as a producer of language and text: 'l'écrivain est [...] celui qui, par l'écriture, se lie si étrangement au langage qu'il se trouve aussitôt immensément démuné et de soi et de soi [...] Quand il écrit, le langage n'est pas un instrument qui lui permet de communiquer plus ou moins bien tel sens antécédent, c'est une étrangeté qui le divise, l'évide, le transforme'.¹⁸ In keeping with the textual materialist aesthetic he is conveying, nothing exists prior to linguistic/textual elaboration. It is for this reason that the nouveau roman's increasing preoccupation with autobiography in the 1980s is such an interesting development as it in so many ways runs deliberately counter to the aesthetic being formulated by Ricardou at this stage of the 'literary history' of the nouveau roman.

It is central to Ricardou's whole critical/theoretical endeavour to consider the text as a product of work in and on language, and not as the vehicle of a pre-ordained representation. It is axiomatic that the text is generated by language itself: this is the matière signifiante which is used to elaborate a text:

Produire [...] c'est transformer une matière. S'agissant du texte, ces opérations consistent à transformer la matière signifiante jusqu'à l'organiser selon du texte.¹⁹

Language is not a means of expression, but the basis of a number of operations which will produce a text. Referring to Claude Simon's La Route des Flandres, for example, he states: 'les mots deviennent des centres d'irradiation sémantique qui, sous la croûte de leur sens immédiat, tendent à recomposer entre eux, de proche en proche, les relais d'un langage sous-jacent, libre et mobile, où jouent toute manière de sens seconds'.²⁰ By exploring the semantic and phonetic properties of words, texts can be formed. Thus Ricardou is able to maintain that the text does not 'originate' in reality or in a consciousness, but in the dynamics of language itself freed from 'la tyrannie d'un sens institué'.²¹ It is this stress which he places on the linguistically self-generating nature of the text which betrays Ricardou's debt to Tel Quel poetics. This emphasis on the materiality of language characterises Ricardou's whole theoretical programme.

For Ricardou, the abandonment of mimesis implied an endorsement of the formalist, or textual materialist, aesthetic which he had been elaborating upon in his theoretical works and in the conferences devoted to the nouveau roman. It would become an article of faith

that a truly progressive and liberated écriture was incompatible with mimetic writing - hence the acrimony which would be provoked as a result of the exclusive emphasis placed on self-reflexive practices. Such was the hegemony established by Ricardou that any argument adduced in support of representation was dismissively labelled 'reactionary'. The interest shown in autobiographical forms, however, in more recent years would further confuse this question as a consequence of the implicit challenge to the formalist orthodoxy by the reinsertion of apparently representational criteria.²² The reappraisal of the nouveau roman which this new 'development' (to use a literary-historical construction) invites has very fruitfully provoked a reconsideration of the question of reference now that its previously negative connotations have been removed.

In analyzing the terms of reference of this debate, it becomes evident that there has been a great deal of confusion between the use of the word 'representation', and other related concepts such as 'realism' and 'referentiality'. Indeed, it is apparent that these three terms are manipulated in such a way that they have become almost interchangeable. The alarming degree to which the words have become synonymous with one another can be attributed clearly to the general condemnation of realism as a superannuated novelistic form. A simplistic correlation was made between the overtly mimetic aspirations of classic realism and the linguistic referentiality of literary discourse. The growing influence in literary theory of (Saussurean) structuralism's focus on the relationship between signifiant and signifié would lead to a consequent distrust of the

'naturalness' of narrative discourse in terms of reference to extra-linguistic features. According to this view, language in the literary text is in an important sense axiomatically non-representational because of systems of differential relationships operating in language itself rather than as denotations of 'the real'. It is, however, the case that structuralist critics were not necessarily condemning this state of affairs, but were merely defining or describing it. While a critic such as Roland Barthes in some of his more polemical works (e.g. Le degré zéro de l'écriture) did indeed appear to be attacking the 'ideology' of the classic realist text through the deconstruction of its aesthetic assumptions and procedures, it was in fact the poetics of representation in general which was being addressed. Representation - like narrative - could not be considered an unproblematic, 'natural' process, but was rather an effect of the text itself: in his influential essay 'L'effet du réel', he demonstrated how 'reality' is itself constructed in narrative discourse.²³ Barthes himself in S/Z would of course go on to illustrate the complexities of mimetic strategies, and would in particular illustrate how the production of meaning is related to codes of signification. However, once again, the intellectual and cultural 'coincidence' of structuralism and the nouveau roman would blur the distinction between descriptive poetics and aesthetic programmes. The incorporation of this idea into the nouveau roman (via the early Roland Barthes, Jean Ricardou and Le Quel-orientated criticism) effectively encouraged the view that écriture (in the 'progressive' sense of a radical and innovative form) and representation (defined narrowly as the transcription of

'reality') were to be seen as both theoretically incompatible and, in a more important sense, ideologically undesirable. Asserting a mimetic impetus of any kind was tantamount to embracing the classic realism of a writer such as Balzac and its attendant retrograde literary ideology and was therefore seen as a betrayal of 'progressive' modernist aims.

Ricardou's insistence on a poetics of textual generation is apparent from his own theoretical works, and was later taken up by both Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon during the 1970s in their theoretical utterances and textual practices. Ricardou considers this new aesthetic to be in many ways characteristic of the nouveau nouveau roman. In a paper entitled 'Esquisse d'une théorie des générateurs', Ricardou again addresses himself to the question of the origins of the text. His argument is founded on his literary-historical distinction between the traditional novel and the modern novel: 'est traditionnel, tout ce qui tend à faire du roman le récit d'une aventure; est moderne, tout ce qui tend à faire du roman l'aventure d'un récit'.²⁴ The 'new' reader will be led to a deeper understanding of the text's productive reality: 'C'est accéder à une intelligibilité nouvelle: celle des principes de sa génération et de son organisation'.²⁵ The basis is language itself: the text is formed through an exploration of the signifiant and signifié. This constitutes the 'raw material' on which a number of operations take place. In Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, he provides what is in many ways the classic illustration of this approach in his analysis of Claude Simon's La Bataille de Pharsale to demonstrate how rhyme,

anagram and word-play are used to produce the text which results²⁶.

In Ricardou's scheme, the nouveau roman is characterised by 'auto-représentation' ('le récit, notamment en l'intense effet de la mise en abyme qui retourne la fonction représentative, se désigne mille fois lui-même'), whereas Tel Quel is deemed to embody 'anti-représentation' ('Le signifié n'est [...] nullement refusé [...] mais soumis mot à mot par le jeu de l'écriture à une permanente critique qui l'empêche de coaguler et de cacher le travail qui le forme').²⁷ This is of course a somewhat schematic taxonomy, but is central to Ricardou's elaboration of a literary history of contemporary 'progressive' French writing. Both the nouveau roman and Tel Quel work against 'le dogme représentatif', but whereas the former subverts the traditional devices in fiction, the latter abolishes them. Ricardou's analysis of Robbe-Grillet's La Maison de rendez-vous is designed to demonstrate how character is subverted, but not totally abolished as in the work of Philippe Sollers.²⁸ It is Ricardou's contention that the principally radical feature of the nouveau roman is that its self-reflexivity constituted a greater subversive threat to the dominant ideology.

Claude Simon's proximity to Ricardou is apparent from this comment made some nine years after the publication of Histoire when the Ricardolian influence on his critical discourse is most tangible:

Je disais autrefois: il est possible de reconstituer à partir de choses vécues, senties. Aujourd'hui, après avoir réfléchi, je ne pense plus qu'on puisse "reconstituer" quoi que ce soit. Ce que l'on constitue, c'est un texte et ce texte ne correspond qu'à une seule chose: à ce qui se passe dans l'écrivain au moment où il écrit. On ne décrit pas des choses qui pré-

existent à l'écriture mais ce qui se passe aux prises avec l'écriture.²⁹

Commenting on Simon's conflicting statements, Alastair Duncan has spoken of 'une crise de la représentation'³⁰ in Simonian aesthetics as his position 'evolves' from the 1960s to the 1970s. The rejection of the mimetic impetus came to be seen as an article of faith in the textual materialist programme being formulated by Ricardou over this period. Simon's enthusiastic 'embrace' of this aesthetic is such that it leads him to deny that he had previously been motivated by such considerations in the first place, advocating instead that his previous ('mimetic') novels be re-read in the light of the emphasis now being placed on the productive nature of language in textualization.

Simon's endorsement of Ricardolian aesthetics perhaps reached its apogee in the course of the two Cerisy colloques in which he played such a central role in espousing this theoretical approach. His contribution, 'La fiction mot à mot', emphatically demonstrates his commitment to the view of textual production as the result of work in and on language. Ricardou's methodology could not have received a better imprimatur than this statement by Simon of his textual practices.

Sarraute, however, was less impressed: it is this emphasis on representation (however nuanced) which caused Ricardou and others at the Cerisy colloque in 1971 to claim that her writing was 'marginal' to the evolving textual materialist trend at that time. Her

contribution to the colloque is prefaced by her comment that she had originally been reluctant to participate but for the 'aimable insistance' of Jean Ricardou:

Si j'ai tant hésité, c'est que je savais que je trouverais ici de nouveau, comme j'ai été si souvent au cours de ma vie, dans une situation assez singulière.³¹

At the end of the conference, Françoise van Rossum-Guyon underscored the extent of Sarraute's exclusion from the movement towards a nouveau nouveau roman:

A l'exception peut-être de Nathalie Sarraute dont les opinions sont légèrement différentes de celle des autres, en ce qu'elle maintient l'idée d'un monde préalable à l'écriture que celle-ci s'efforce de découvrir (mais ce monde est inconnu, seule l'écriture le révèle), et de Michel Butor qui maintient la représentation (mais par des moyens nouveaux), les écrivains ici présents rejettent la conception traditionnelle de la littérature comme représentation, expression et communication.³²

However, despite Sarraute's frequently stated attachment to mimesis and formal realism of a particular kind, Ricardou was anxious that she should still be considered part of the nouveau roman, such was the strength of his endeavour to galvanize theoretical thinking. It is interesting to note that Stephen Heath adopted a similar position in his book on the nouveau roman: like Ricardou, he chose to jettison the mimetic dimension (whether 'psychological' or 'formal') in order to incorporate her in the all-embracing notion of the 'practice of writing'. He does this by bringing to bear on an analysis of her work (especially Entre la vie et la mort) the theories of Benveniste and Jakobson on the use of personal pronouns. As Heath comments:

The reading of Nathalie Sarraute's texts proposed at the end of this present chapter is based on the recognition, readable in her texts, of the text as work in and on language.³³

This reading clearly involves a dismissal of Sarraute's own oft-stated views on certain mimetic prerequisites in her writing. However, this is felt to be justified on the basis of the thesis of a radical écriture which is being propounded. This blatantly ignores the statement in the prière d'insérer to Entre la vie et la mort, for example, which refers explicitly to 'les tropismes qui constituent la substance de ce livre'.

On the part of both critics, therefore, there was a clear desire to maintain that her works could also be considered as illustrative of a new poetics (Heath himself mentions 'the radical experience of language'³⁴). The readings which were proposed would consequently concentrate on those aspects (especially of her novels after Le Planétarium) which could be made to prove a high degree of linguistic and textual self-consciousness. It is significant that the principal source of evidence for this position are what may be termed the 'narrator-free' works: the removal of a clearly identifiable consciousness from the discourse is seen as evidence of the abandonment of 'psychological realism' with its outmoded concentration on perception and interiority, in modernist terms. Ricardou very selectively includes examples from a novel like Entre la vie et la mort which can conveniently be argued to be consonant with his own theoretical position. This novel is especially permeable to such a reading because of the vivid depiction of the writer's struggle with the materiality of language. Comments made by Sarraute at the Cerisy conference concerning her exploration of the properties of language are reproduced by Ricardou in the section

devoted to Sarraute in Le Nouveau Roman. However, this is to some extent to distort the broader implications of her stated position. While he would otherwise claim that it is 'unsound' to attribute too much significance to any author's pronouncements, Ricardou would appear to be only too willing to resort to such tactics if any advantage could be gained in favour of the theoretical position he was striving to impose.

Sarraute has rarely deviated from the position outlined in L'Ere du soupçon that the task of the writer is to uncover 'une parcelle de réalité encore inconnue'³⁵ by means of new formal and representational techniques:

Il ne me paraît pas possible de se passer de ce qui est à mes yeux la source vive de toute oeuvre: des sensations neuves, encore intactes, qui nous sont donnés par le monde qui nous entoure³⁶

However, this is not to claim that she considers there to be a divorce between form and content; rather, she insists on the parallel nature of writing and 'representation':

Sensation, recherche de la forme, écriture, les trois démarches sont en vérité absolument inséparable et simultanées; chaque livre se déroule dans une sorte de frottement continu: la sensation appelle la forme. Celle-ci provoque une autre sensation et ainsi de suite.³⁷

At the Cerisy conference, she had continued to argue that language is not a transparent vehicle of meaning, but a problematic and creative area:

Que le langage du roman ne soit pas, ne puisse pas être un simple instrument, une pure transparence qu'on traverse en toute hâte pour voir ce qu'il y a par derrière, ce à quoi il ramène - cela m'a toujours paru évident.³⁸

This may to some extent suggest that she is now adapting her stance under the pressure of the increasing emphasis on language as the textually generating material to be exploited. It is certainly the case that in interviews and critical/theoretical interventions at this time she will choose to concentrate on the linguistic rather than the exclusively psychological. There is therefore a discernible shift from the polemical defence of the 'realism' and 'psychological truth' of her textual strategies which was apparent in the 1950s and 1960s. However, responding directly to the challenge thrown down by Ricardou that the hors-texte does not exist, she still comments:

C'est pour ça que je suis, comme je le disais tout à l'heure à Jean Ricardou, obligée de croire qu'il y a un pré-langage. C'est une hypothèse de travail, sans laquelle il m'est possible de travailler. Même si c'est une erreur - ce que je ne crois pas - elle m'est nécessaire. J'en ai un besoin vital. Je ne peux pas y renoncer. Dire: il n'y a pas de pré-langage [...] cela m'est absolument impossible.³⁹

At the Cerisy conference the debate between Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute can be said to illustrate very tangibly the contrast in aesthetic approaches being developed. Sarraute is taken to task by Robbe-Grillet for precisely this insistence on an area of mental/psychological experience which exists prior to textual elaboration. She is 'accused' of upholding the existence of 'une sorte d'antériorité', to which she replies emphatically:

il y a un pré-langage... une sensation vague qui ne se laisse saisir dans sa complexité que par le langage. Sans lui, elle reste un magma confus.⁴⁰

Throughout this exchange she refutes the claims that she is concerned with expression and representation ('Je n'ai pas employé le mot "expression", que Dieu m'en préserve! Je sais parfaitement bien dans quel piège vous essayez de me faire tomber' (p. 50)). However,

Robbe-Grillet and others repeatedly choose to ignore her insistence on the indissoluble link between writing (she refers to 'une mise en mots') and this 'unnameable' mass of tropistic activity at the level of the sous-conversation:

C'est par le langage que j'arrivais à atteindre ces sensations. C'est parce que le langage me permettait de les faire passer à travers lui que les mots avaient pour moi tant d'importance: la forme même des mots sur la page, la sonorité des mots, la façon de les prononcer.⁴¹

This is of course not very far removed from her statement to Tel Quel some ten years previously:

Cet invisible que l'art rend visible, qui est à tout moment pour l'artiste ce qu'il appelle "la réalité", de quoi est-il fait? D'éléments inconnus, épars, confus, amorphes, de virtualités, de sensations fugaces, indéfinissables, écrasées sous la gangue du visible, du déjà connu, du déjà exprimé, du conventionnel. [...] En l'absence d'une forme qui les crée, ces éléments resteront invisibles, inexistantes. Sans la forme, ils ne sont rien. Mais la forme n'est rien sans eux.⁴²

It is evident that the degree of acrimony apparent at Cerisy can be largely attributed to the fact that Sarraute remained unwilling to recant from this long-standing interest in her 'parcelle de réalité'.⁴³ Unlike Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon at this conference, Nathalie Sarraute steadfastly declined to desist from continuing her commitment to the 'representation' (in the broadest terms) of tropism and sous-conversation. Sarraute was clearly unwilling to comply with the evolving aesthetic politics of the nouveau roman which demanded some kind of public repudiation of mimesis as the hallmark of the abandonment of an outmoded poetics. Nathalie Sarraute refuses to regard the novel as pure self-reflexive linguistic play. It is also important to signal Nathalie Sarraute's apparent lack of concern with the political and ideological nature of

écriture: this also put her at variance with the nouveau nouveau roman's emphasis on the implicitly political radicalism of experimental writing. Her disregard for psychoanalytic and feminist theory also removed her from any Tel Quel-inspired position, despite her willingness to accept the validity of critical approaches from these perspectives.

The fiction of Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon can be said to approximate most closely to these new literary values. Dans le labyrinthe (1959), described by him as a 'charnière'⁴⁴ was the first of Robbe-Grillet's novels not to have a tangible focalization, unless we accept Morrissette's interpretation that it dramatizes the attempts of a delirious narrator to construct a text from objects around him. Developing even further the gommage technique of his previous novels, this text presents permutations and combinations of a set of elements subject to revision, repetition, and repetition with variation. La Maison de rendez-vous (1965) and Projet pour une révolution à New York (1970) continue in this vein, except that the 'content' of these novels is provided by clichéd representations of Hong Kong and New York respectively in popular mythology. Robbe-Grillet has chosen these stereotypical exotic and erotic images precisely in order to prevent the reader from constructing a 'meaningful' world. In his work of this 'period', Robbe-Grillet increasingly abandoned the cohesion and narrative hierarchies of his earlier fiction: the ontological status of the text is thus problematized. The novelist has himself referred to the self-generating quality of these works: he seems to provide the reader

with a metaphor of the construction of narrative. Topologie d'une cité fantôme (1976) and Souvenirs du triangle d'or (1978) both contain explicit (and theoretically ironic) references to generating cells of various kinds from which the fictions are produced. His highly playful Djinn (1981) - originally written as a French teaching text - demonstrates the limitless power of narrative to combine and fragment in ever-changing patterns. Robbe-Grillet appeared to be illustrating the poetics of the jeu combinatoire: the novels reflect their own processes of composition, and the interpretative strategies which the reader brings (in some cases the awareness of nouveau roman theory itself) are encoded within the text. These novels are ostentatiously full of gaps, discontinuities and contradictions of various kinds.

Claude Simon's fiction at this time is particularly amenable to the criteria established by Ricardou. In La Bataille de Pharsale (1969), Les Corps Conducteurs (1971), Triptyque (1973) and Leçon de choses (1976), any trace of an interiority has been elided. The texts seem to have been composed as a result of work in and on language. Simon explores the properties, associations, and connotations of words in order to form the thematic basis of the novel. The opening of Leçon de choses, significantly entitled 'Generique', can almost be said to provide a poetics of the autonomous, self-referential text, such is the emphasis upon the creative power of words: a description is composed which will generate the text as a whole and which also acts as a self-reflexive commentary on this process. The following extract from the preface to Orion aveugle (1970) conveys the

importance he attaches to the exploitation of both signifier and signified:

Chaque mot en commande (ou en suscite) plusieurs autres, non seulement par la force des images qu'il attire à lui comme un aimant, mais parfois aussi par sa seule morphologie, de simples assonances qui, de même que les nécessités formelles de la syntaxe du rythme et de la composition, se révèlent aussi fécondes que ses multiples associations.⁴⁵

The descriptions can be generated almost endlessly by means of this productive view of the activity of writing. These texts lack a fixed centre: the narrative perspective is always shifting, and what remains of 'plot' is subject to continual fragmentation. The descriptions, far from gesturing to an external or subjective reality, merely affirm their own status as verbally constructed artefacts. There is a concerted attempt to destroy what remains of the referential illusion in the sense that what seems 'real' is immediately transformed into another representation in the form of a painting, a postcard, or a film. Robbe-Grillet's contemporaneous work exhibits similar characteristics: in La Maison de rendez-vous, for example, a 'real' person turns out to be a dummy, or a narrative sequence is revealed as a theatrical representation or a description of a magazine cover. The textual practices of these nouveaux romanciers reveal a much greater similarity than was previously the case: under Ricardou's stewardship, a new aesthetic programme seems to have been in operation. The linear and temporal progression of the narrative is disrupted by the non-stratified discourse of the text. The proliferating, non-hierarchized narratives impede 'recuperable' readings from occurring. They present the reader with the autotelic novel, apparently sufficient unto itself and the fruit

of the endless play of language. Many of these texts can be read as elaborate commentaries on the nature of writing and reading. It would be difficult to find more suitable candidates for postmodern metafictionality than the novels of Simon and Robbe-Grillet at this time. These plural, heterogeneous and non-totalized texts vividly proclaim their metafictional status, referring constantly to the processes of their own production. They would seem to demonstrate that a text can only ever designate its own activity, that textuality is inherently narcissistic.

While this blatant metafictionality is most evident in Robbe-Grillet's and Simon's novels of the period, it is less noticeable in the work of Sarraute and Butor. Degrés (1960) is in fact the last of Butor's works to be labelled a novel: the impossibility of sequential narrative being able to incorporate more of reality is vividly demonstrated; the remainder of his output is difficult to classify in generic terms, as his writings seem to avoid any narrational impulse.⁴⁶ It has already been indicated that Nathalie Sarraute has always remained committed to the depiction of psychological states, despite the apparently 'narratorless' trend of her fiction since Le Planétarium. As we have seen, the chasm between her and the other writers is most apparent at the 'Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui' conference at Cerisy in 1972, at which her conviction of the existence of a pre-verbal, extra-textual reality in mental life was obviously anathema to Ricardou, hence the arguments surrounding this crucial 'doctrinal' question of referentiality. It is clear that Ricardou had established a new doxa of reflexivity from which no

deviations could be permitted, such was the extent to which he saw himself as the custodian of a radical modernity. For a text to be described as a nouveau roman it had to display self-reflexive and metafictional features as well as foreground the exploration of the semantic and phonetic properties of language.

The increasing discontent of the nouveaux romanciers at being imprisoned in an interpretative mode of exclusive autonomy is witnessed in their attacks on Ricardou. As we have seen, Nathalie Sarraute had never been prepared to accept his insistence on pure textuality, and both Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon would seek to distance themselves from the increasingly over-rigid application of his theories. Robbe-Grillet would state that it was the tension between reference and reflexivity which characterized his works, and described as 'naive' the belief (which he admits to having encouraged) in the self-generating text devoid of a controlling subjectivity (in Le Miroir qui revient⁴⁷). As he comments in the Obliques volume:

Je vois bien aujourd'hui que le problème insoluble de la représentation - ou de l'expression - est au cœur même de mon travail, et que cette contradiction (dialectique?) vivante constitue un des systèmes de tension qui rendent mes textes perméables à la lecture.⁴⁸

Claude Simon would become vociferous in his condemnation of Ricardou's 'terrorism' in asserting that expression and representation were superannuated and ideologically unsound: at New York, he accuses Ricardou of suffering from 'pathological megalomania'.⁴⁹ In a recent interview with Lucien Dällenbach, Claude Simon emphatically distances himself from the kind of 'lecture

rousselienne' practised by Ricardou of a novel like La Bataille de Pharsale:

C'est tout à fait en dehors de ma conception de l'écriture.[...] Ce type d'approche d'un texte [...] peut aussi mener à des aberrations.⁵⁰

Throughout this interview, Simon is led to confront the question of the referentiality of language, concluding that: 'Le statut de la langue est fondamentalement ambigu: elle est toujours, à la fois qu'on le veuille ou non, véhicule et structure.[...] Cette dualité ne disparaît jamais'.⁵¹

It is central to Ricardou's critical enterprise to promote his contention that the nouveau roman's progressive character rests on its promotion of self-referentiality. It is for this reason that he devotes so much attention to a methodical analysis of those aspects of the texts which demonstrate this feature, principally mise en abyme, metaphor, and description. He insists that texts dramatize their own functioning: 'Loin de se servir de l'écriture pour présenter une vision du monde, la fiction utilise le concept de monde avec ses rouages afin d'obtenir un univers obéissant aux spécifiques lois de l'écriture'.⁵² He does not specify that he is referring here to metafiction, or avant-garde experimental writing: it is presented rather as the general condition of all writing. His general supposition is that the content of a work mimes the writing, and not vice-versa as is usually advanced by the proponents of a formal realist aesthetic: 'une fiction se développe notamment de manière à représenter la narration qui l'érige'.⁵³ Ricardou makes the somewhat extravagant claim that 'toute fiction [...] tend à produire une image

des principes narratifs qui l'établissent'⁵⁴, but this is evidently a polemical gesture to promote the aesthetic of textual productivity and reflexivity.

Mise en abyme and the Tyranny of Reflexivity

For Ricardou, mise en abyme is synonymous with self-reflexivity. It is the nouveau roman's promotion and valorization of this device which distinguishes it from the literature of expression and representation, and is therefore its most 'radical' feature (in both formal and political terms). In Problèmes du nouveau roman, he describes it as 'un facteur de contestation' (p. 172) which disrupts the 'ordonnance préalable du récit globale' (p. 176). Using examples from André Gide, Novalis and Edgar Allen Poe (before proceeding to Robbe-Grillet and Butor), he argues that mise en abyme operates to bring about 'une abolition du temps' (p. 181), thus depriving the novel of one of its 'realist' contours. The presence of 'micro-histoires' and internal duplications of various kinds thereby undermine the novel's coherence by forcing the reader to consider the parallelism and correspondences which exist within the text: 'la mise en abyme est avant tout la révolte structurelle d'un fragment du récit contre l'ensemble qui le contient' (p. 181). The thrust of Ricardou's analysis of the role and function of mise en abyme in the nouveau roman and elsewhere is that the operation of this paradigmatically self-reflexive device impedes the referential or mimetic expectations of the reader. Ricardou repeatedly cites mise

en abyme as the characteristic feature of a radical modernity. It becomes in many respects the central arm in his attack on the reactionary literary values of the literature of expression and representation.

In a conference devoted to André Gide, Ricardou recognizes the importance of the Gidean mise en abyme as part of the modernist project in reducing the referential dimension of the text:

Cette mise en abyme a [...] la singulière fonction de souligner que le roman n'a de rapport avant tout qu'avec lui-même. Au lieu d'attirer l'attention vis-à-vis du monde quotidien dans laquelle nous sommes, il semble qu'il y ait là comme une volonté extrêmement concertée d'attirer l'attention vers le centre secret du livre⁵⁵

In his discussion, he states that mise en abyme itself engenders a different kind of reading, one which is 'vertical' in distinction to the traditional 'horizontal' reading proposed by conventional narrative structure.

Ricardou insists that the existence of mise en abyme in a text effectively prevents the text referring to anything outside of itself. By representing itself, the text no longer can be said to represent any extra-textual reality:

le récit, notamment en l'intense effet de la mise en abyme qui retourne la fonction représentative, se désigne mille fois lui-même.⁵⁶

It is in Le Nouveau Roman that Ricardou conducts his most intensive analysis of mise en abyme. It can operate in an analogical way in relation to the text which contains it, reflecting the global functioning of the novel as a totality. In this respect, it

constitutes an internal duplication of some component of the general narrative or thematic material. Alternatively, he argues that it can be antithetical to the text: effectively disrupting the unity of the text, so stressing the discontinuity of the narrative: 'La mise en abyme conteste cette unité postulée, en la soumettant à la relance infinie de scissions toujours nouvelles' (p. 73).

It is mise en abyme which, according to Ricardou, provides the novel with its fundamental self-reflexivity. Read in this way, a text such as Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur emerges as characteristically narcissistic and introspective. By reading such a novel in this way, Ricardou would contend that it no longer becomes possible to view the text as in any sense mimetic: we would have to abandon any attempt to consider it as the representation of a disordered consciousness. In this novel, mise en abyme can therefore be claimed to be the major device deployed by Robbe-Grillet to subvert and undermine the referential illusion, and acts as the principal means whereby the reader's attention is directed inwards towards language and structure.

As Lucien Dällenbach has documented in his magisterial study of the history of this critical concept,⁵⁷ although André Gide holds the distinction of having formulated the notion, the term itself was coined by critics of Gide - namely Pierre Lafille and Claude-Edmonde Magny - to describe the Chinese Box-effect of the 'novel within a novel' which is found in Paludes and Les Faux-Monnayeurs. The nouveau roman has in various ways been particularly keen to exploit

the possibilities of this reflexive device: for example, Nathalie Sarraute's Portrait d'un inconnu refers to a painting in which the anonymous narrator has a special interest; and the title of Les Fruits d'or is also the title of a novel being discussed by the characters. Internal duplications proliferate throughout the work of Michel Butor (especially L'Emploi du temps) and Claude Simon. Unlike the case of Gide, however, mise en abyme in the nouveau roman does not usually take the form of a novel within a novel; rather, especially in the early nouveau roman, it emerges in the context of some form of artistic representation which mirrors the novel in which it appears. In the nouveau roman, it becomes in a text 'any sign having as its referent a pertinent continuous aspect of the narrative (fiction, text or narrative code, enunciation) which it represents on the diegetic level. The degree of analogy between sign and referent can give rise to various types of reduplication'.⁵⁸

In his full-length study of mise en abyme, Lucien Dällenbach charts the growth of this technique in literature over the centuries. Gide himself of course refers to the play-within-the-play in Hamlet; but equally well it can be seen to operate in Corneille (in L'illusion comique) or in the form of prophecies and oracles in Racine. The term has come to be used so often in critical discourse that it does of course risk becoming a cliché. Dällenbach's initial definition suggests that it can be used to refer to almost anything which appears in the infra-structure of the text: 'Est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une relation de similitude avec l'oeuvre qui la contient'.⁵⁹ As Ann Jefferson has commented, for an item to qualify

as mise en abyme it must provide some analogy or parallel with the global structure of the novel: as a microcosm or correlative of the text as a whole:

For an item to qualify as mise en abyme in a text, it must have points of analogy with the text as a whole, and, secondly, it must, ontologically speaking, be embedded (emboîté) in the spatio-temporal world of the text, existing both as an object within it and as a representation or mirror of it.⁶⁰

Indeed, Dällenbach's more precise revised definition is a particularly useful one in assessing the use of this device in the nouveau roman:

Deux mises en abymes distinctes: l'une, fictionnelle, dédoublant le récit dans sa dimension référentielle d'histoire racontée, l'autre textuelle, le réfléchissant sous son aspect littéral d'organisation signifiante.⁶¹

Thus, the 'fictional' type relates to those 'enclaves' in the text which parallel certain thematic elements in the novel as a whole; while the 'textual' kind establishes analogies with the global structure of the text in terms of its formal organisation. This is what distinguishes the nouveau roman's incorporation of the device. Dällenbach maintains that there are three uses of mise en abyme: of the énoncé, of the énonciation, and of the code. In the nouveau roman, the preoccupation is increasingly with the last of these: what becomes 'reflected' is 'le mode de fonctionnement du récit' itself.⁶²

If we examine a novel such as Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur we can find evidence to support this claim. Of the 'fictional' variety, the old man's legend of the island, the two cinema posters, the oval mirror and the painting in the room above the cafe, Mathias's fait divers newspaper cutting, the photograph of Violette, the calendar on

the wall in the farmhouse could all be cited as examples of this. The legend of the island (p. 221) resumes several of the elements which have already appeared in the novel, and contains crucial references to the sacrificial killing of a young virgin. The first cinema poster shows a man standing above a girl with a doll at his feet; the second bears the title 'Monsieur X ... sur le double circuit' (p. 167) immediately reminiscent of Mathias's journey around the island. The landscape is described in similar terms to the island itself. The third time he looks at the hoarding, there is only a piece of blank paper, on which someone has written a large zero: a reference to the gap in the novel as a whole. The calendar in the farmhouse depicts 'une jeune fille, les yeux bandés, qui jouait au colin-maillard (p. 197), suggesting the crime committed by Mathias. The oval mirror (p. 68) and the painting in the room above the cafe depict similar 'incriminating' scenes. Mathias's fait divers newspaper clipping (p. 75) tells of a particularly violent crime, analagous to that which we assume Mathias to have perpetrated. It could be argued that the recurring motifs in the novel gesture to the the central organising 'gap' in the text. Robbe-Grillet has referred to 'ce trou dans la diégèse [du Voyeur] est vraiment la force organisatrice du roman'.⁶³ The crime which we are led to believe Mathias commits, but which is never described, is suggested by the 'formes en huit', the cigarette packets, seagulls. The feminine diminutive ending of cordelette will linguistically and thematically 'generate' several nouns with the same ending which together form a thematic network: 'mouette', 'mallette', 'bicyclette', 'fillette', 'cigarette', and, of course, 'Violette'.⁶⁴

In Le Voyeur it is the second 'textual' kind of mise en abyme in Dällenbach's scheme which are particularly significant. The text contains numerous examples of references to narration and interpretation. The imaginary 'childhood' sequences are often prefaced by the words 'on lui avait souvent raconté cette histoire'. Thus no more credence should be given to these sequences than to any other part of the text in terms of their veracity or reliability. The drawing of the seagull is clearly a mise en abyme of the construction of the novel itself. Mathias had tried to 'reproduire avec fidélité'(p. 20) but 'quelque chose manquait au dessin, il était difficile de préciser quoi' (p. 22). This indicates the 'gap' in the narration itself. Mathias is concerned with the 'simplicité et vraisemblance' (p. 185) of his alibi, which he describes as 'le récit d'une fausse journée' (p. 228). Referring to the second cinema poster, the emphasis is placed on difficulties of interpretation: 'mais plus il le regardait, plus il le trouvait flou, changeant, incompréhensible' (p. 168). Mathias's fait divers is littered with the sensationalist sado-erotic stereotypes which constitute the received 'mythology' of the psycho-pathological killer. It is constructed very much in the manner of Le Voyeur itself: for the reader 'il fallait réinventer la scène à partir de deux ou trois détails élémentaires' (p. 76). Mathias is confronted with a similar problem to that of the reader of Le Voyeur itself in attempting to reconstruct the 'truth' of the narrative. Similarly, Robin tries to explain the functioning of the lighthouse in the following way: 'il appuyait la plupart de ses phrases par des gestes rapides, larges, compliqués, dont les rapports avec le texte paraissaient assez

lointains' (p. 139); but Mathias admires the 'allure technique' of the description. Robin's narration is like that of the novel itself:

Au lieu de la narration précise d'un quelconque fait, limité et précis il n'y eut - comme d'habitude - que des allusions très embrouillées à des éléments d'ordre psychologiques ou moral, noyés au milieu d'interminables chaînes de conséquences et de causes, où la responsabilité des protagonistes se perdait' (p. 147)

The lack of coherence in the fisherman's narrative could be said to mirror the contradictions in the text itself: 'l'ensemble du discours conservait - en apparence du moins - une architecture cohérente, si bien qu'il suffisait de l'écouter d'une oreille distraite pour ne pas s'apercevoir des anomalies qu'il présentait' (p. 152). A sailor in the café uses a mode of narration not unlike that of Le Voyeur: 'en se servant exactement de mêmes termes et construisant ses phrases de façon identique' (p. 175); similarly, the cafe-owner 'parle seulement pour parler, sans attacher la moindre importance aux histoires qu'il raconte' (p. 245). And, of course, the process of the construction of a narrative is clearly mimed by Mathias's repeated attempts to construct alibis in Parts 2 and 3 of the novel. The presence of mise en abyme of this kind (even in an early nouveau roman) would seem to confirm the proposition that the nouveau roman uses this device as a means of providing a commentary on the discursive nature of fiction itself. Mise en abyme moves from being a device deployed for specific textual ends to be the very constituent and characteristic of the reflexive text, 'cleansed' of referentiality.

By the proliferation of references to narrative in a novel such as Le Voyeur, and so many other nouveaux romans from all 'periods', the

reader's attention thus becomes focused on the problematics of the recit itself and therefore potentially away from any mimetic dimension the novel may have. It is in this respect that mise en abyme could be maintained to promote a foregrounding of narrative and its problematic status. The ability of narrative to 'refer' to a linear, extra-textual reality is thus systematically questioned. The reader is encouraged to deflect his attention from the search for any representation of the world and instead concentrate on such textually structuring and self-referring devices as a means of reading. Mieke Bal has argued that mise en abyme takes on an 'iconic' status because of the extent to which it can 'represent' the text as a whole: 'est mise en abyme' tout signe ayant pour réfèrent un aspect pertinent et continu du texte, du récit ou de l'histoire qu'il signifie, au moyen d'une ressemblance'.⁶⁵ As Lucien Dällenbach has stated: 'Plus le roman se réfléchira lui-même, moins il aura de chances de servir de miroir à autre chose que lui'.⁶⁶ Reflexivity - in its most conspicuous manifestation of mise en abyme - will thus become a means in itself of reading. The valorization of this increasingly all-embracing concept in critical discourse on the nouveau roman is above all a legitimizing strategy: the 'value' of the nouveau roman thus resides in its promotion of the inherent self-consciousness which is claimed to be the province of the novel generally.

It is Dällenbach's contention that the development of mise en abyme in the nouveau roman itself denotes the 'evolution' of the nouveau roman into the nouveau nouveau roman. He analyses the use of mise en

abyme in early examples, such as Portrait d'un inconnu, La Jalousie, L'Emploi du temps, and L'Herbe to show the extent to which there can still be detected examples of mise en abyme of the classic kind. He examines the widespread use of internal duplication in these novels, and concludes that mise en abyme does not as seriously threaten the hierarchy of the récits in which they are contained: they can still function in terms of parallelism and analogy. However, it is also the case that these texts provide a commentary on the processes of reading and interpretation:

dès lors qu'il proclamait qu'il n'est pas de récit naturel, le Nouveau Roman ne pouvait réfléchir une histoire sans refléter en même temps l'organisation narrative qui la supporte; dans la mesure où sa nouveauté indéniable transgressait l'"horizon d'attente" de ses premiers lecteurs, force lui était d'explicitier son encodage et de réduire ainsi la force de résistance qu'il pouvait représenter pour eux.⁶⁷

Thus it is possible to argue that the use of mise en abyme in the 'early' nouveau roman served in many respects to dramatize the problematics of representation in which they were increasingly engaged: what would occupy the attention of these writers was less mimesis than structuration and écriture. Dällenbach's study of the later nouveau roman, however, focusses on the expansion and

proliferation of the device so as to disrupt more radically narrative hierarchies. The mise en abyme textuelle has more or less replaced the mise en abyme fictionnelle in the light of the aesthetic of textual materialism and production which was being developed. The 'logic' of this aesthetic demanded a substantially revised function for mise en abyme. The nouveau nouveau roman will use mise en abyme as another generating device: it becomes a means of producing fiction rather than simply reflecting fiction. It becomes increasingly more difficult to locate the mise en abyme as a textual 'enclave' because of the extent to which in novels like Projet pour une révolution à New York and Triptyque the text's narrative discontinuities prevent relationships of mere parallelism or analogy: the global structure of the text is more fragmentary and less hierarchised. The contours of the narrative are much more difficult to locate: there is no identifiable 'histoire' to which a 'micro-histoire' can be said to refer. Ultimately any aspect of the écriture can be made to be a mise en abyme of the écriture generally. It no longer becomes possible to speak of 'micro-histoires' of narrative 'microcosms' because the 'surrounding' narrative discourse and diegesis is itself too diverse:

en multipliant les auto-inclusions et les inclusions-exclusions à l'intérieur d'une suite de dépendances emboîtées, le nouveau Nouveau Roman non seulement tourne en dérision l'idéologie réaliste et se coupe du monde en se bouleversant plusieurs fois sur lui-même, il s'affirme comme une réalité impensable, un défi au bon sens et un exemple de très vive modernité s'il est vrai que 'la modernité commence avec la recherche d'une littérature impossible.'⁶⁸

In her book Narcissistic Narrative, Linda Hutcheon incorporates many of Ricardou's and Dällenbach's categories of mise en abyme in

her description of contemporary postmodern metafiction in support of the proposition that such fiction is 'in some dominant and constitutive way, self-referring or autorepresentational: it provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception'.⁶⁹ However, a more critical perspective is presented by David Carroll, in The Subject in Question and in Paraesthetics, who argues convincingly that Ricardou's exclusively formalist focus and over-reliance on mise en abyme results itself in a form of closure: 'Fiction, as the mise en abyme of itself, becomes a totally self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and self-conscious "object".'⁷⁰; instead, Carroll prefers Foucault's view that 'literature reveals in its mirrors of itself that it has no solid foundation in itself or in any other origin'.⁷¹

The Production of Metaphor

It is evident that Jean Ricardou's principal contribution to the nouveau roman was to articulate and conceptualize the aesthetic which was being evolved tacitly by these writers. In his theoretical works, Ricardou turned his attention to specific writing practices which he was able to claim illustrated the self-referentiality which he insisted was the characteristic feature of the modernity of the nouveau roman. Metaphor and description, in particular, were to be seen as devices which foregrounded the non-mimetic impulse of the new 'scriptural' aesthetic which was being elaborated.

In The Pursuit of Signs, Jonathan Culler argues persuasively that a preoccupation with metaphor has become in many respects the dominant issue in contemporary poetics: 'Today metaphor is no longer one figure among others but the figure of figures, a figure for figurality'.⁷² Metaphor has been one of the major concerns of the nouveau roman ever since the famous 'querelle de la métaphore' erupted after the publication of Robbe-Grillet's polemical essay 'Nature, Humanisme, Tragédie' in 1958, when he had condemned metaphor not simply on the grounds of anthropomorphism, but, more fundamentally, because of the specifically ideological implications of such use of language: 'La métaphore [...] n'est jamais une figure innocente'.⁷³ It is important to bear in mind, moreover, that Robbe-Grillet's condemnation of metaphor was carried out in favour of a greater 'realism': by expunging metaphor from the language of fiction, the novel would be better able to represent phenomenological and epistemological 'reality': 'Le monde n'est ni signifiant ni absurde. Il est, tout simplement [...] Autour de nous, défiant la meute de nos adjectifs animistes ou ménagers, les choses sont là'.⁷⁴ Thus the argument was as much a literary-historical one as anything else. By advancing on Camus's practice in L'Étranger, the novel would progress to a 'degré zéro de l'écriture'. Robbe-Grillet would confirm this aim in Le Miroir qui revient.

Critics were of course quick to reveal the apparent contradiction arising from these views and his actual practice, pointing out to him examples from his work which disprove his intentions. For example, Christine Brooke-Rose claims in A Rhetoric of the Unreal that Robbe-

Grillet had admitted to her that he had occasionally been 'negligent' with metaphor.⁷⁵ However, it was largely as a result of Ricardou's theoretical precision on this matter which would lead Robbe-Grillet to clarify his attitude to metaphor; and indeed to recognize the not inconsiderable role it has played in his fiction. As he has admitted: 'A partir du moment où j'avais interdit la métaphore en général (c'est au moment de La Jalousie), ce qui m'intéressait, c'était justement de mettre en action des métaphores, ce qu'on a vu à partir du Labyrinthe et qui s'est développé [...] dans Projet pour une révolution à New York'.⁷⁶ Indeed, referring specifically to La Jalousie, he related the following episode: 'Pendant que j'écrivais cette condamnation définitive de la métaphore, La Jalousie ne cessait de traiter des métaphores. Le titre même (annonce de cette immense métaphore qui va se développer dans le cours des pages) était pour moi extrêmement conscient. A Royaumont où je me trouvais avec lui, André Dormont, sinologue et homme très cultivé, s'était montré choqué par le côté métaphorique du titre La Jalousie. Il voulait absolument que j'appelle ce livre Le Store, et j'ai dit "Ah, mais non!".⁷⁷ Robbe-Grillet's attempt to dismiss the contradictions in his position were very much in line with the increasing emphasis he would place on the 'ludic' aspect of theory: 'Quand on me reproche [...] telle ou telle formulation un peu sommaire concernant la métaphore, bien sûr je le savais moi-même, déjà, à l'époque: simplement, ça me faisait rire'.⁷⁸

It would be reasonable to suppose that Ricardou and Robbe-Grillet are using the accepted definition of metaphor, but this may not in

fact be the case. The word 'metaphor' is derived from the Greek metaphora: meta meaning 'over' and pherein meaning 'carry'. Accordingly, we have come to use the word 'metaphor' to refer to a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first. This is not to be confused with metonymy, which is the substitution of the name of an attribute for that of the thing meant: for example, 'crown' for 'king'. Metaphor therefore represents a turning of language away from literal meanings and towards figurative meanings. In the Classical view, Aristotle has said that literature draws on metaphor because of the process of imitation or mimesis: in other words, it can be used specifically in order to represent reality more faithfully. According to this fairly prevalent definition, it becomes a rhetorical device intended to seduce, convince and illustrate; a decorative addition to language which lends charm, distinction and clarity: 'There is one thing that cannot be learned from anyone else, and it is the mark of great natural ability, for the ability to use metaphor well implies a perception of resemblances' (Aristotle Poetics, ch.22). Its effectiveness resides in its analogical function, its capacity to express or represent some pre-existing 'reality', thereby instituting a descriptive relationship with the world. Metaphor has been considered a device of reference and expression, which establishes an analogy with the world.

Robbe-Grillet devoted a great deal of his early theoretical endeavours to undermine and subvert assumptions which are implicit

in certain conceptions of language. The clearest statement of his attitude to metaphor is contained in 'Nature, Humanisme, Tragédie' (1958), which should be seen as a response to criticisms arising from his essay 'Une voie pour le roman futur', written two years earlier. In this earlier essay, he had argued that there can be no rapprochement between man and the world: 'Le monde n'est ni signifiant, ni absurde. Il est, tout simplement [...] Autour de nous, défiant la meute de nos adjectifs animistes ou ménagers, les choses sont là'.⁷⁹ He criticizes the 'pathetic fallacy', the process described by Ruskin to refer to the Romantics' investing the world of external reality with subjective meanings. According to Robbe-Grillet's phenomenological perspective at this stage, objects exist in the world without our expressive adjectives. But in the later essay, we can see that Robbe-Grillet's attack on such linguistic descriptions of phenomenological reality is specifically ideological in character. It is clear that he regards the traditional use of metaphor as an ideological support for bourgeois humanism, by which he means the belief in man and his perfectibility as exemplified by a prestigious literary tradition stretching from the Renaissance to Gide and Camus in the 20th century. In this essay, Robbe-Grillet had overtly attacked the analogical function of metaphor because this establishes a solidarity between man and the world. It was crucial to the new aesthetic programme being elaborated by Robbe-Grillet that descriptive language had to be purged of anthropomorphist analogies.

There was a clear desire on Robbe-Grillet's part, therefore, to achieve what could almost be described as a kind of linguistic purity. If, however, we examine a novel like Le Voyeur, how is it possible to reconcile these theoretical objectives and the actual practice of writing which contains examples of language which by common usage would be considered 'metaphorical'. It was largely in order to 'defend' Robbe-Grillet that Ricardou attempted to formulate a more 'coherent' theory of metaphor than that which was undermined by the contradictory practice of Robbe-Grillet in his fiction.

Ricardou's discussion of metaphor hinges on what he understands by the term 'modernity'. Ever since the period when he was closely associated with Tel Quel, he has been continually at the forefront of the attack on traditional literary values. As we have seen, for Ricardou, modernity is defined in terms of the emphasis it places on production at the expense of expression and representation: the 'quelque chose à faire' rather than the 'quelque chose à dire' characteristic of what he saw as the dominant ideology permeating literary activity and criticism, which he described as 'le Dogme de l'expression et de la représentation'. According to Ricardou, the truly modern writer is one for whom language is a means of production and not of communication: 'L'établissement du texte moderne se reconnaît notamment à ce qu'il métamorphose les traditionnelles procédures expressives en moyens de production: agencements générateurs ou organisateurs'.⁸⁰ Language therefore constitutes a 'matière sur lequel peut porter un travail d'organisation et de transformation. Loin de véhiculer un sens déjà établi, il s'agit

alors de produire un sens'.⁸¹ The modern novel transforms the 'matière signifiante' of language into text. A concerted analysis of this process of textual generation is applied to Claude Simon's La Bataille de Pharsale in a chapter significantly entitled 'La bataille de la phrase'.⁸²

The immediate impact of such a position for stylistics is obviously considerable. As Ricardou indicates: 'par suite de la persistante hégémonie de l'idéologie expressive/représentative en matière de littérature, stylistique se trouve encore massivement synonyme d'expressif'.⁸³ Since Aristotle, it has become something of a critical orthodoxy to view metaphor firstly as a device which the writer uses to 'express' his perception of analogies in the world; and secondly as a rhetorical figure whose function it is to seduce, convince and illustrate by adding charm, distinction and clarity to style. As Ricardou has put it: 'qui agrément de ses prestiges chatoyants le cours d'une prose'.⁸⁴ Ricardou groups both the referential and the ornamental under the term métaphore expressive.

Ricardou breaks down the components of a metaphor as follows:

Seront [...] appelées métaphores toutes figures construites sur trois éléments: le comparé, le comparant, le point commun autorisant (ou issu) de la comparaison.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that these terms correspond approximately to what I.A. Richards writing in 1936 has called the 'tenor', 'vehicle' and 'ground' of a metaphor.⁸⁶ Ricardou has two other important things in common with Richards: they both proceed from an initial dissatisfaction with the notion in Rhetoric that metaphor is

an embellishment or refinement of 'normal' language (for Richards, metaphor had been treated as 'a sort of happy extra trick with words [...] a grace or ornament or added power of language, not its constitutive form'⁸⁷); and they both share a deep dislike for the surrealist metaphor as advocated by Andre Breton, which Richards described as 'the crude "clash-them-together-no matter what" view of metaphor'.⁸⁸

However, although there may well be certain convergencies in their respective positions (especially in their concern for a greater degree of theoretical accuracy), the fundamental differences between them - characteristic of the differences between the approach of the New Critics and the practitioners of the Nouvelle Critique more generally - should not be obscured.⁸⁹ Ricardou would be quick to highlight the humanistic basis of Richards' viewpoint, which is revealed by his reliance on such notions as 'experience' and 'the mind', centred, as it is, on a different conception of the author. Nevertheless, it must be added that Ricardou, unlike Richards, has consistently failed to deal adequately with the commonplace of much Formalist and Anglo-American criticism that metaphor is in fact intrinsic to language itself, and, by definition, could never be merely ornamental. As Jonathan Culler has indicated, language originates in metaphor:

A non-metaphorical language would consist logically of proper names only; but [...] logically proper names are something natural languages do not have. To call something by a name in a natural language is to ascribe to it some properties, to bring it under some loose heading. It would seem, then, that as soon as we speak we engage in metaphor.⁹⁰

For Ricardou, the essential feature of the metaphore expressive in a work of fiction is its distinctively local character, the fact that it is often created in isolation and has no relationship with the global structure of the text. Such metaphors are 'seulement dotées d'une locale valeur évocatrice', having no other function than the decorative one of displaying 'les brillants d'une écriture spectaculaire'.⁹¹ Ricardou detects a basic 'exoticism' in the way such a metaphor functions, bringing together 'un ici (le comparé) a un ailleurs (le comparant)':

Utiliser la métaphore comme figure d'expression, revient à subordonner étroitement l'ailleurs à l'ici; le comparant n'étant plus que cet ectoplasme provisoire qui s'estompe sitôt le comparé manifesté, sitôt accomplie la traduction rhétorique.⁹²

What Ricardou calls the métaphore structurelle comes into being when the ici is surpassed in order to allow greater freedom for the ailleurs to structure and generate the text as a whole: 'la métaphore expressive se transforme ainsi en métaphore structurelle par laquelle un texte se construit et, spécifiquement, fonctionne'.⁹³ He gives the following example of this process:

Supposons que dans un éloge, je dise: "c'est un lion" à la place de "c'est un homme courageux", j'ai proposé une métaphore expressive. Mais si, à partir de ce lion, je me laisse aller à parler des crocs et de la crinière, et de la savane, et de l'incendie des hautes graminées dont la fumée commence à couvrir l'horizon, alors la métaphore devient une chargère. Avec elle, le récit bifurque vers une autre chose.⁹⁴

Here, the comparé is heroic character, and the comparant is the lion. It is when attention is focused on the possibilities of the comparant that the métaphore structurelle comes into its own within a narrative: 'le principe métaphorique transforme sa fonction

expressive en rôle générateur de fiction'.⁹⁵ A metaphor is expressive when the ailleurs is localised and consequently disappears, but becomes structural 'si l'ailleurs s'installe et se prolonge, si la contiguïté est rompue par une similitude insérant une nouvelle séquence d'éléments contigus'.⁹⁶ Indeed, Ricardou suggests that contiguity is the characteristic of the structural metaphor ('la métaphore structurelle consiste à faire que deux éléments voisins, c'est - à - dire semblables, deviennent voisins, c'est-à-dire contigus')⁹⁷, departing from Jakobson's view that metonymy is more properly the province of contiguity.

Ricardou is keen to exploit the métaphore structurelle in his analyses of various nouveaux romans. The 'formes en huit' which proliferate in Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur acts as structural metaphors, providing the text with one of its principal means of organization: for example, Mathias' eight-shaped itinerary around the island mirrors the entire structure of the novel itself⁹⁸; and similarly, La Jalousie can be seen as being structured not around the supposed perspective of a jealous husband, but around a network of textual 'cells' composed of interacting structural metaphors, whose function it is to establish analogies with other parts of the text, thereby confirming the text's self-reflexive status. For Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet's novels contain examples of the possibilities to be gained from a productive and not expressive use of metaphor: 'Ce n'est pas [...] que la fonction métaphorique soit absente des romans de Robbe-Grillet; elle est tout-à-fait présente: mais son rôle expressif a cédé place au rôle producteur'.⁹⁹ Claude Simon's novels

are equally rich in examples of this process: in La Route des Flandres, the sword/war motif evokes the notion of 'woman' through the 'common ground' of virginity, thereby generating a new sequence of narrative, the transition from one textual cell to another is thus effected by means of metaphor¹⁰⁰; and Ricardou demonstrates, in the course of a particularly detailed analysis, that the narrative structure of La Bataille de Pharsale originates in the generative power of metaphor. The nouveau roman, then, in various ways, has promoted the analogical mode of metaphor, and has relegated the substitutional mode: 'Ce que le texte ecarte, ce n'est nullement l'analogie, c'est l'expression métaphorique. Bref, ce que le texte met en oeuvre, c'est la production métaphorique'.¹⁰¹

Ricardou's most vigorous analysis of the function of structural metaphor, however, is reserved for Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, a text which can be claimed to be founded on the principle of analogy. Ricardou was not of course the first to recognize the primordial role played by metaphor in Proust's novel; but his approach departs radically from the traditionally accepted view of commentators on Proust's style that metaphor is deployed as the means by which Proust referentially expresses his vision of analogies in the world. Critics have tended to regard metaphor as being used in the service of conveying the process of souvenir involontaire; indeed, the ici/ailleurs distinction which Ricardou has detected in the operation of metaphor, would seem to mirror exactly the way memory itself operates. Ricardou, however, is quick to deny the possibility of any such 'reality' existing prior to language. He

insists, instead, on the structuring role that metaphor plays in the novel, where its purpose is to 'ordonner et produire la substance même du texte'.¹⁰²

Ricardou identifies two main types of structural metaphors which organize the textual cells of the novel: the métaphore ordinale ('il s'agit de la rencontre de deux cellules [...] à partir de certains de leurs points communs: c'est un des éléments de chaque cellule qui se voit affecté de ressemblance') and the métaphore configurale ('il s'agit de la constitution d'une cellule à partir de certain schème de telle autre: c'est tout ou partie de l'organisation de chaque cellule qui se trouve soumise à similitude').¹⁰³ It is clear from this that Ricardou has not in any way denied the importance of analogy in Proust's novel; on the contrary, he allots it the role of providing the principal means by which the text is constructed. Ricardou points to the paving stones episode in Le Temps retrouvé where textual transitions are effected by the structural generation of metaphor, and not by the extra-textual psychological 'reality' of memory: 'Loin d'offrir une simple évocation par métaphore, c'est un véritable télescopage métaphorique qu'il accomplit'.¹⁰⁴

For Ricardou, in his relentless desire to uphold the modernity of the text's self-reflexive status, Proust's use of metaphor effectively subverts spatio-temporal representation ('dans la mesure où son exercice revient à dissoudre, conjointement ou séparément, les catégories du temps ou de l'espace, la métaphore ordinale joue le rôle d'une parfaite machine à subvertir la représentation'¹⁰⁵) -

especially in its destruction of linearity. Time, in Proust's novel, is short-circuited by means of metaphor, not memory. Ricardou, however, fails to take into account Gérard Genette's point that metaphor in Proust, although not explicitly referential, always takes place in some spatio-temporal context. Genette cites the example of the steeple which is described in different ways depending on its 'authenticité', or 'sa fidélité aux relations de voisinage spatio-temporel'.¹⁰⁶ David Lodge, paraphrasing Genette to some extent, posits the dependency of metaphor on the 'authenticity of the subjective consciousness'.¹⁰⁷ Genette, indeed, is at pains to emphasize the role of Proust's 'fétichisme du lieu' in this respect, and his marked preference for 'les métaphores ou comparaisons suivies' in the interests of spatial continuity. Genette stresses the primary importance of metonymy in the progression of narrative rather than metaphor, given the connection exalted in Proust between the memory process and contiguity.

In general terms, it could be reasonably objected that there is nothing particularly original in Ricardou's concept of the structural metaphor; there are, for example, several indications of a similar concept in the work of Stephen Ullmann, who also concentrated on Proust's use of metaphor. Like Ricardou, Ullmann frequently made the distinction between ornamental and what he terms functional metaphor ('which are part of the fabric of a literary work')¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, he drew a distinction between static and dynamic metaphors, which clearly evokes Ricardou's ici/ ailleurs categories. Ullman often attempted to show that metaphor could operate as a structuring

process in a work of fiction: for example, the imagery in André Gide's La Symphonie pastorale is 'very closely integrated into the story and plays a dynamic part in its progress'¹⁰⁹; in Alain-Fournier's Le Grand Meaulnes 'the most important aspect of the imagery is [...] its structural role, the notable part it plays in the total effect of the book [...] inextricably bound up with the basic texture of the novel'¹¹⁰; there is no room in Camus' L'Étranger and La Peste 'for idle, rhetorical or purely decorative similes and metaphors: the imagery is almost entirely functional, closely integrated into the narrative'.¹¹¹ Ullmann's functional metaphor is not all that far removed from Ricardou's structural metaphor. Indeed, even Ricardou's métaphore génératrice has been prefigured by Ullmann: 'the metaphor or simile may so engross the writer's attention that he will work it out in great detail'¹¹² as, for example, in Jean Giono's Regain where 'images may also be generated by chain-reaction, with one metaphor setting off another until the initial impetus is spent'.¹¹³

However, despite such similarities, Ricardou would be keen to reveal the 'expressive' purposes underlying Ullmann's functional metaphor. Ullmann praises Camus for 'his searching and courageous exploration of the spiritual and moral problems of our time'¹¹⁴; in Proust, 'Metaphor is [...] an indispensable instrument of expression and thought'¹¹⁵ which is used in the service of the souvenir involontaire because there exists 'a fundamental affinity between metaphor and the rediscovery of the past'.¹¹⁶ Proust's metaphors are remarkable because of 'their appropriateness, their aesthetic

qualities, and above all, [...] the uniqueness of the vision which dictated them'.¹¹⁷

That Ricardou has consistently failed to take any account of the fact that structural metaphors can work successfully with an expressive motivation behind them, is not perhaps surprising in view of the over-rigid dichotomy he imposes between the literature of expression and the literature of production. It could be argued that Ricardou overlooks the fact that the characteristic of early modernist writing was the attempt to find more adequate formal means of representing 'reality' more faithfully.

Despite the immense possibilities and insights of Ricardou's concept of the structural metaphor, the main failing of his theory is that it does not sufficiently deal with the question of context. Ricardou, in his endeavour to prove that language is a 'powerhouse' with an enormous capacity for generating fictions, has perhaps overlooked, as Umberto Eco has put it, that the axes of metaphor and metonymy are fundamentally culturally-determined and must, consequently, severely limit the choice of elements that can be used: 'The imagination would be incapable of inventing or recognizing a metaphor if culture [...] did not provide it with the subjacent network of arbitrarily stipulated contiguities'.¹¹⁸ Or as Jonathan Culler has stressed:

To maintain the primacy of metaphor is to treat language as a device for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, truth. To posit the dependency of metaphor on metonymy is to treat what language expresses as the effect of contingent, conventional relations and a system of mechanical processes. Metaphor and metonymy thus become

not only figures for fugurality but figures for language in general.¹¹⁹

It is legitimate to mobilise a reading of a text like Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur using Ricardou's concept of structural metaphor. The text can be said to be constructed around a network of interrelated elements. The various 'formes en huit' appear in combination with the recurrent motifs. The string is 'roulée en forme de huit' (p.10); it appears as the mark left by the two circles of iron rings (p. 17), and on several doors, especially the one in the corridor above the cafe (p. 66); then as pairs of eyes (e.g. 'deux cercles situés côte à côte (p. 214); as glasses (e.g. 'on croyait voir deux anneaux peints en trompe-l'oeil (p. 37)); and to refer to the circles described by the seagulls in the sky. More importantly, from a structural point of view, it denotes Mathias's route around the island (p. 150), and by extension to the circular structure of the novel itself. Another recurring motif is the cigarette packet: first mentioned as floating on the water (p. 20), then on the bedside table in the room where Mathias 'witnesses' a man standing above his young female victim, then towards the end of the novel it reappears in the form of the incriminating cigarette ends which Mathias tries desperately to retrieve and which he will use to make holes 'en forme de huit' in his notebook and the newspaper clipping. The poupée is another motif which functions metaphorically to incriminate Mathias : the design on his suitcase is that of 'minuscules poupées comme on pouvait en voir sur les rideaux pour chambres d'enfants' (p. 23); the first cinema poster has 'une poupée salie et désarticulé qui traînait sous le sol, aux pieds du héros'

(p. 46); the servant girl in the café has 'longs cils de poupée' and walks with 'son allure lente et fragile de poupée désarticulée (p. 64); the gap in the wall of the Marek farm could have held 'quelque poupée fétiche' (p. 192); the shop where Mathias buys sweets contains 'petites poupées de couleurs vives' (p. 72).

The linguistic repetition of certain key elements in the descriptive passages could also be claimed to illustrate this metaphorical function. This is particularly noticeable in the descriptions of the postures of the female characters: the little girl on the boat has 'l'air abandonné [...] elle avait les deux mains ramenées derrière le dos, au creux de la taille, les jambes raidies et légèrement écartées' (p. 22); later, sitting by the sea, Mathias remembers her 'les mains ramenées dans le dos. Elle avait l'air liée au pilier de fer' (p. 75); the servant-girl in the cafe 'mit ses mains derrière le dos' (p. 59), later with 'poignets ramenés dans le dos, au creux de la taille' (p. 171); Violette/Jacqueline is described as follows: 'les mains cachées derrière le dos - sous elle, au creux de la taille - les jambes allongées et ouvertes' (p. 246). A recurrent feature is the man in the room which Mathias passes, who is always depicted as standing above a young girl who is below him on her knees (pp 45, 78, 127). Similarly, Pierre Robin is seen standing above the woman in his house in an identical posture (p.135). These are just a few examples of the controlled analogical network which proliferates in the text. The language of the novel is implicitly metaphorical - the text is being linguistically conditioned and generated to condemn and incriminate Mathias. Even a description as

apparently 'neutral' as that of the movement of the sea takes on metaphorical significance if read in this way. A word like 'bercement' is not mere decoration, but becomes charged with meaning by structural analogy with the movement of a young girl. The expression 'bruit de gifle' is repeated on a number of occasions, conveying by implication the violent act which the reader is led to believe Mathias commits. Even the description of the sea-wall is metaphorically charged: 'la paroi sans garde-fou plongeant abrupte dans l'eau noire' (p. 43). This is implicitly telling us something about Mathias's crime, suggesting the manner in which he presumably throws her body off the cliff and into the sea. There is an implicitly sexual suggestion in this phrase describing the foam from the sea: 'de la gerbe d'écume qui jaillit, quelques gouttes entraînées par le vent retombaient près de Mathias' (p. 78). The description of his attempt to repair the chain on his bicycle also has metaphorical repercussions: 'il lui suffiront de forcer légèrement la tendeur, mais en le manipulant, il effleura la chaîne et se couvrit les doigts de taches de cambouis' (p.99). Far from being neutral and free from metaphorical cargo, therefore, the language becomes invested with meaning both if a certain 'psychologizing' reading is adopted or - as Ricardou would prefer to assert - we choose to consider details of this kind as indicative of an endlessly self-referring text.

The nouveau roman's contribution to the debate about metaphor has perhaps not been fully appreciated by literary theorists working in this area. Unlike Culler and Eco, Ricardou fails to confront the

fact that metaphor is in fact the constitutive form of language. Although Ricardou's work may be 'tainted' for some as a consequence of the exclusive focus on reflexivity, it is regrettable that his substantial contribution to theoretical thinking has not been more widely recognized as an extremely valuable attempt to confront the question of the operation of metaphor in narrative discourse. With some notable exceptions (particularly Paul Ricoeur and Gerard Genette¹²⁰), it is also the case that this question has not as yet received the level of attention accorded to other aspects of le récit.

Description as écriture

Ricardou has written widely on the subject of description: in several of his theoretical works there are extensive analyses of the function of description in narrative not only in the texts of the nouveaux romanciers but also in those of writers as diverse as Homer, Lessing, Flaubert and Proust. It is central to Ricardou's argument that it is the nouveau roman's preoccupation with description which again provides confirmation of the modernity of their textual practices. His work on this topic has taken place within the wider debate in narrative poetics generally concerning the role of description in narrative discourse. However, it is possible to distinguish Ricardou's position from that of other leading theorists in that he is less concerned with narrative poetics than with promoting the textual materialist aesthetic which is centred on the value of the productive nature of description as écriture. Whereas

other critics are operating within a specifically narratological domain, Ricardou is not seeking to evolve rules of general applicability but rather to demonstrate precisely how 'work on language' is tangible in such practices. In considering descriptive writing in the nouveau roman as constitutive of its radical textuality, Ricardou thereby betrays a polemical thrust underlying the meticulous scrutiny of the operation of description in certain texts.

For readers of the nouveau roman in the 1950s and 1960s, the most contentious aspect of this new literary movement was the preoccupation which some of these writers seemed to place on description at the expense of traditional psychological character analysis. It was in this respect that the nouveau roman was considered to be at variance with the psychologizing practices of 'acceptable' modernism in French fiction. It was very much the case that Robbe-Grillet in particular was considered to be illisible as a result of the preponderance of apparently 'unmotivated' (in the Genettian sense¹²¹) descriptive passages in his novels. The question of reading description therefore emerged almost from the very beginning as crucial to the debate which the nouveau roman was setting in train, and would quickly become the terrain of the aesthetic querelle which was beginning to be waged.

Hostility to the nouveau roman was voiced by critics such as J.-P. Barrere (in La cure d'amaigrissement du roman) and Pierre de Boisdeffre (in La cafetière est sur la table; contre le nouveau

roman): much of their time was in fact taken up with an overt condemnation of this particular feature of the writing with which they were confronted. It was seen to be in some sense symptomatic of the 'failure' of the nouveaux romanciers as novelists: their writing was said to be redolent of an arid 'formalism'. However, for Roland Barthes and the nouvelle critique generally, the defence of (in particular) Robbe-Grillet against such widespread attacks by the literary and academic establishment was necessary in order to promote the structuralist perspective which was also being evolved. Barthes's initial claim that Robbe-Grillet's work represented 'le degré zéro de l'écriture' was as important polemically as it was interpretatively. The history of the 'reception' of the nouveau roman has in many ways revolved around the question of the interpretation or justification of what is a tangibly 'transgressive' feature of narrative discourse. Each of the critical readings have attempted to make some assessment of this aspect of Robbe-Grillet's writing in particular. It is not of course true that such a preoccupation can be seen in the works of the other nouveaux romanciers, or at least not initially.

Robbe-Grillet's own insistence on what might be termed 'phenomenological realism' was the first 'justification' advanced for the notable presence of description in his early work: it could therefore be considered as a formal strategy to represent in writing the 'être-là des choses'. His 'defence' of this specific textual practice was, he claimed, in keeping with the desire to evolve a non-tragic, non-anthropomorphic, non-humanist writing. It was the

correct narrative means of evacuating 'man' from the world. His theoretical comments indicate that he considered the practice of description as a mimetic strategy: this should therefore be considered a more formally authentic means of representing existential 'reality' without recourse to the establishment of a complicity between man and the world from which he is otherwise alienated. In Robbe-Grillet's account, Camus had betrayed this aim in the second half of L'Étranger; while only in La Nausée had Sartre attempted to translate into narrative form the 'reality' of existential and ontological phenomenology. Robbe-Grillet reiterated this view at a much later date in Le Miroir qui revient and in interviews elsewhere. During the earlier 'period', however, it must be seen as part of Robbe-Grillet's polemical campaign for a 'new realism', which would be more in harmony, from a formal point of view, with the conceptual apparatus of existential phenomenology. Unlike Robbe-Grillet, however, Ricardou does not explicitly situate his argument within the context of existential phenomenology: clearly this is considered to be less important as a justification for the descriptive processes in nouveau roman texts.

Robbe-Grillet's 1963 essay 'Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui' (which was included in Pour un nouveau roman ¹²²) constitutes the most extended formulation of his 'theory' of description. Published after Dans le labyrinthe (1959) and before La Maison de rendez-vous (1965), it could be said to have appeared at the time when his own writing had reached a critical 'turning-point', when he seemed to have abandoned the 'subjectivism' of his first

three published novels. Dans le labyrinthe was deemed to have initiated a less psychologically recuperable writing. In this essay, Robbe-Grillet addresses himself to some of the reasons why his practices of description had aroused such opprobrium: 'on les trouve inutiles et confuses; inutiles, parce que sans rapport réel avec l'action, confuses, parce que ne remplissant pas ce que devrait être, censément, leur rôle fondamental: faire voir' (p. 125). Robbe-Grillet is here conceding that description in his fiction transgresses the auxiliary role which is commonly assigned to the role and function of description in a narrative. This comment also suggests his awareness of the extent to which the traditionally mimetic function of description has been severely impeded. Characteristically, he again has recourse to literary history in support of the argument he presents: he refers to the manner in which 'le grand roman français du XIXe siècle' (p. 126) had used description as a means of incorporating and quoting reality. In these novels, objects functioned as a guarantee of authenticity: 'tout cela ne pouvait que convaincre de l'existence objective - hors de la littérature - d'un monde que le romancier paraissait seulement reproduire, copier, transmettre, comme si l'on avait affaire à une chronique, à une biographie, un quelconque document' (p. 126). He states that in these classic realist novels, description provided a correspondence between character and social environment. Instead, Robbe-Grillet wishes to emphasize the 'creative' nature of the practice of descriptive writing in the contemporary novel (or, rather, in his own writing): his remarks in many respects anticipate the emphasis on textual materialism and the self-generating text

which Ricardou will later display in his analysis of description. Contrasting the use of description in classic realism with the contemporary novel, he comments: 'Elle prétendait reproduire une réalité préexistante; elle affirme à présent sa fonction créatrice' (p. 127). His reference to 'un double mouvement de création et de gommage' (p. 127) could be said to apply to his textual practice of gommage throughout his oeuvre. He states that there need be no referential antecedent to a description:

Il n'est pas rare [...] dans ces romans modernes, de rencontrer une description qui ne part de rien [...] elle paraît naître d'un menu fragment sans importance [...] à partir duquel elle invente des lignes des plans, une architecture; et on a d'autant plus l'impression qu'elle les invente que soudain elle se contredit, se répète, se reprend, bifurque. (p. 127)

It is the écriture which is important rather than any mimetic impulse: 'L'intérêt des pages descriptives [...] n'est donc plus dans la chose décrite, mais dans le mouvement même de l'écriture' (pp 127 - 8). The reader, he states, is thus more actively engaged in the process of making sense of the text. Thus, the descriptions are not 'motivated' in conventional terms. Description is process, not representation. It is above all this emphasis on description as écriture, therefore, which Ricardou will develop in his own work on the subject.

Bruce Morrissette's book on Robbe-Grillet, however, was important in the context of this debate in the sense that it sought to establish 'psychologizing' interpretations in the assessment of description.¹²³ By positing a subjective consciousness, the descriptions in these texts could therefore become lisible if

'motivated' in the interests of psychological realism. Morrissette would attempt to argue that the descriptive sequences did possess a vraisemblance in terms of the modernist 'realism' of unreliable narration. It is of course the case that he was able to perform this reading by referring to comments made by Robbe-Grillet himself which invited such a récupération on the grounds of subjectivism.

Morrissette is prepared to use criteria which are normally more applicable to classic realism or psychological realism. In his analysis of descriptive passages in Robbe-Grillet's earlier novels, he is attempting to justify such examples of écriture by demonstrating how objects and landscapes represent the 'deforming vision' of the central protagonists. This in effect involves a return to the Romantic notion of the landscape or environment as a representation of the état d'âme of a perceiving consciousness. Far from being in any way arbitrary, the descriptions are explicable in terms of their narrative functions. Thus, for example, the transformations or obsession with the scutigère in La Jalousie denote the jealous frenzy of the husband-narrator; the descriptions of the landscapes in Le Voyeur and La Jalousie exist in order to act as a correlative to a state of mind. Descriptions are therefore motivated in terms of explicable psychological criteria: they therefore become lisible and more easily capable of being 'processed' by the reader. Relying on comments made by Robbe-Grillet himself supporting a psychologizing récupération (e.g. that descriptions 'sont toujours faites par quelqu'un'), he is able to provide an account of their use. Morrissette attempts to demonstrate the extent

to which description is always focalized in terms of the specific narrative discourse being performed. It is certainly true that the titles of some of these early novels invite this interpretation, but it would be increasingly argued that an examination of his écriture prevents this interpretation being generally applied. Ricardou would of course be especially critical of Morrissette's line of enquiry as it is based on what he would consider a reactionary poetics which privileges psychological realism, instead of stressing the materiality of writing.

The greatest part of the debate in literary theory - particularly in narratology - concerning description has been devoted specifically to this question of motivation. Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette have concentrated on this aspect as part of their attempt to establish a narrative poetics of general applicability. Ricardou is less concerned with narratology than with the promotion of modernity in narrative discourse. He is therefore unlikely to be preoccupied with motivation as such, as this would be to presuppose an extra-textual justification of some kind. In Roland Barthes's 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit'¹²⁴, the point is made that description is not superfluous and must be considered in relation to the global structure and functioning of the text: it can operate as an index or catalyst. In 'L'effet du réel', it is maintained that a descriptive detail ('quelque indice de caractère ou d'atmosphère') can be 'récupéré(s) par le structure'.¹²⁵ However, it is in this second essay that Barthes addresses himself to the question of apparently 'unmotivated' detail, of which he finds

some examples in Flaubert. Barthes's comments on the role of description in the context of the debate on narrative poetics is important because it examines the presence of aspects of a narrative discourse which appear not to 'signify': 's'il subsiste dans le syntagme narratif quelques pages insignifiantes [...] quelle est [...] la signification de cette insignifiance'.¹²⁶ Basing his discussion on 'impertinent description' in Flaubert, he concludes that a descriptive sequence may not be linked diegetically as a signifier of character, atmosphere or knowledge, but can be a means of signifying the real itself. A descriptive detail may not 'denote' the real, but is meant to 'signify' the real. For the realist writer, description is a 'copy' of a reality which is itself a copy: 'Décrire, C'est [...] placer le cadre vide que l'auteur réaliste remporte toujours avec lui [...] devant une collection ou un continu d'objets inaccessibles à la parole'.¹²⁷ He states that what is vraisemblable depends on the reader. Barthes maintains that in modernity this practice has been largely abandoned: 'il s'agit [...] de vider le signe et de reculer infiniment son objet jusqu'à mettre en cause, d'une façon radicale, l'esthétique séculaire de la "représentation"'.¹²⁸

It is evident that Ricardou engages directly with Gérard Genette on both metaphor and description, notably with regard to Proust. Genette's argument, however, takes place within an explicitly narratological context. Like Barthes, Genette has also attempted to define the operation of description in narrative: he also contrasts description in classic realism with that which is being practised in

the nouveau roman. Modern literature 's'est voulu et s'est faite [...] interrogation, ébranlement, contestation du propos narratif'.¹²⁹ In realism, description 'est tout naturellement ancilla narrationis [...] toujours soumise, jamais émancipée'.¹³⁰ His thesis is that in modern fiction, description takes on a diegetic function: 'l'oeuvre de Robbe-Grillet apparaît [...] comme un effort pour constituer un récit (une histoire) par le moyen presque exclusif de descriptions imperceptiblement modifiées de page en page qui peut passer pour une promotion spectaculaire de la fonction descriptive'.¹³¹

However, what is particularly interesting about Genette's contribution to this narratological debate, is the attention paid to this question of 'motivation' of elements in a narration. He contrasts the desire on the part of classic realism to mask 'l'arbitraire du récit',¹³² with the 'liberté vertigineuse'¹³³ of modern narrative. In Figures II and, most noticeably, in Figures III, Genette conducts a parallel exercise to that of Barthes in attempting to explain the presence of individual elements in a narrative structure. While this may be possible in realism, in modern fiction we find 'l'absence de motivation comme motivation',¹³⁴

In his book Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif, Philippe Hamon undertakes a concerted analysis of the poetics of description. Hamon refers to Ricardou on several occasions in the course of this study; however, again, it is Hamon's overriding aim to establish general

narratological principles governing the operation of description. In particular, he argues that in 'le texte lisible-classique', homogeneity and lisibilité are paramount to facilitate the way in which details are assimilated by the reader. He comments that a frequent feature of realist description is to have a spectator on the scene described in order to provide a superficial motivation for descriptive writing:

la description doit être sentie par le lecteur comme tributaire de l'oeil du personnage qui le prend en charge.¹³⁵

The protagonist exists as a kind of filter of description. As Hamon himself comments, the title of Le Voyeur itself provides just such a motivation: Mathias emerges as the pretext for the descriptions. As Ann Jefferson has also indicated, taking up Hamon's theory, this feature is crucial to the narrative organisation of the novel: 'does the text inventory items because they were objectively visible, or does it record only those elements which Mathias's psychological nature makes him notice'.¹³⁶ Morrissette's reading of description in La Jalousie, for example, is predicated on the assumption that the text is focalized around the perspective of the 'mari jaloux': this 'justifies' the descriptions in all their contradictions and complexities. Such a reading therefore neutralizes (as Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath have maintained) the 'radical' experience of a subversive textuality. It is important to bear in mind that the desire to 'process' and 'make intelligible' description as it occurs in narrative discourse is part of the 'literary competence' (as Jonathan Culler has called it¹³⁷) which the reader brings to the text: 'unmotivated' components of a narrative become scandalous if a

'realist' and naturalizing reading strategy is adopted. The nouveau roman therefore forces the reader to seek other means of understanding 'radical' description. As Hamon has stated, in the nouveau roman there is an infringement of description as 'un opérateur de lisibilité fondamentalement du texte'.¹³⁸ The reader already comes armed with the need to 'naturalize' description; as Hamon comments:

La description, avant même de commencer, doit donc se justifier, et, elle se caractérise alors par tout un remplissage vraisemblablement destiné à servir d'alibi.¹³⁹

Morrisette's psychologically totalizing account of the practice of description in the early novels collapses under closer scrutiny of the individual novels. The use of the word 'le regard' in Le Voyeur and La Jalousie may suggest motivation, but it becomes difficult to locate precisely the origin of the 'regard', despite the hints and signals contained in the texts. The very confusion and precision of the apparently 'geometrical' descriptions resist attempts to make the reader participate in the visualisation of any narrative referent. This is of course apparent in Un Régicide (admittedly not included in Morrisette's book as it had not yet been published) : the glissements between the two fictional universes prevent the 'recognition' of distinct descriptions emanating from distinct consciousnesses. However, as in the case of Les Gorges, Le Voyeur and La Jalousie, the reader is invited to attach description to character, but only ultimately to frustrate and subvert this 'recuperative grip'. Robbe-Grillet plays with our expectations of 'motivated' description, thus unsettling the reader who is attempting to recover the text as part of the psychological vraisemblable. It

is significant that with Robbe-Grillet's move to a more 'narratorless' fictional discourse, it is no longer possible to perform such readings: conventional hierarchies between textual levels of signification can no longer be identified. Description becomes foregrounded as part of the display of the écriture in keeping with the new aesthetic which was being elaborated.

In many respects, Ricardou's theory of the productive role of description was anticipated, as we have already seen, by Robbe-Grillet's commentary on the fundamentally creative nature of description as écriture in 'Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui'. Robbe-Grillet explicitly contrasts this new practice with the referential orientation of description in classic realism. The following passage is in this sense an uncanny foretaste of the Ricardolian aesthetic of textual materialism which will so characterise the Ricardolian nouveau nouveau roman, 'free' of the reactionary constraints of mimesis:

Elle [realist description] prétendait reproduire une réalité préexistante; elle affirme à présent sa fonction créatrice. [...] Il n'est pas rare [...] dans ces romans modernes, de rencontrer une description qui ne part de rien [...] elle paraît naître d'un menu fragment sans importance [...] à partir duquel elle invente des lignes, des plans, une architecture; et on a d'autant plus l'impression qu'elle les invente que soudain elle se contredit, se répète, se reprend, bifurque. (p.127)

Ricardou's critical polemic has been directed single-mindedly to assert that the practice of description in the nouveau roman is another feature - in the same category as mise en abyme and metaphor - of the text's fundamentally self-reflexive status. Ricardou has sought to demonstrate how description can itself become textually

generative. It is inevitable that Ricardou chooses to focus on this aspect in the light of the mimetically problematic nature of description in the nouveau roman. In view of Robbe-Grillet's own promotion of the creative nature of description, Ricardou has emphasized the dynamism of this practice. Countering Genette's notion that there can be no narrative without description, Ricardou insists on the fact that there can be no description without narrative: the mimetic and referential aspect of narrative discourse is obstructed by the accent on the diegetisation of description in the nouveau roman. Relying to a considerable extent on examples from Flaubert, Ricardou has attempted to underline that the linearity of writing is impeded by the narrativisation of the simultaneous. Narration is argued to be a process which erodes the boundaries between description and narrative. The references to the 'successive' (in examples from Robbe-Grillet, Simon, Proust, Flaubert and even Homer) emphasize that écriture is in action, rather than mimesis. He cites the example of the descriptions of Charles's cap and the pièce montée in Madame Bovary to demonstrate the extent to which such 'modernist' practices foreground the 'literal' rather than the 'referential' dimension of narrative discourse in the 'progressive' text. Throughout his theoretical works, it is Ricardou's intention to illustrate how such descriptions have the effect of forcing the reader to view the text as a self-reflexive artefact: 'C'est la force unitaire du récit qui s'oppose à la force disruptive de la description et en interrompt le procès de fragmentation infinie'.¹⁴⁰

Thus, a novel like La Jalousie:

tend à se construire selon des cellules éminemment
descriptives articulées les unes aux autres par des

charnières métaphoriques, et, donc, métaphore et description se trouvent associées en un rapport complémentaire.¹⁴¹

Ricardou in 'Le recit enlisé' section of Le Nouveau Roman concentrates on the 'digressive' nature of description in the context of a sequential narrative which is supposed to be linear. By interrupting a narrative, the referential potential of the text is severely restricted: the linearity of the narrative is disrupted. As he states in Nouveaux problèmes du roman: 'La description tend à détruire l'illusion réaliste qu'elle semble au premier chef entretenir'.¹⁴² In Une maladie chronique, Ricardou returns again to this question and attempts to construct a model of even greater theoretical accuracy than that found in Nouveaux problèmes du roman and before. Ricardou is relentless in his attempt to uphold the non-referentiality of description in narrative, and he again draws on a corpus of examples (from Homer to Claude Simon) specifically selected to prove how the representation of the simultaneous is achieved.

In terms of the nouveau roman, it is very much the case that Ricardou's methodology can only really be applied to the work of Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon, and even then only during a certain period of activity. The nouveau roman (at a certain point) can be used to provide examples of the diegetisation and verbalisation of description. For example, the Simonian emphasis on 'Générique' in textual elaboration - explicitly signalled in a novel like Leçon de choses¹⁴³ - is of course extremely consistent with Ricardou's promotion of the self-generating notion of description. The famous cafetière or tomato slice in Robbe-Grillet (as Stephen Heath as

notably commented 'a figure of the accomplishment of the text'¹⁴⁴); the 'animation' of the painting in Dans le labyrinthe or La Chambre secrète; or the groups of statues in La Maison de Rendez-vous, the dummies in Simon's Les Corps conducteurs: these are all particularly relevant illustrations of this theory. Far from being ancillary to the narrative, the description itself can have a diegetic function in the text. In the context of Ricardou's theoretical position generally, description in this sense can be said to show how a text is composed out of language, rather than as a representation outside itself.

His reassessment of techniques of description in works by other writers is extremely fruitful from a narratological point of view. It is of course debateable whether these insights can be extended more widely. Ricardou's blindness, if not outright contempt, towards classic realism means that the possible advantages or disadvantages of the system he elaborates remain untested as part of any deconstruction of realist discourses. It is Ricardou's steadfast refusal to countenance the 'value' of realism which ultimately defeats the analysis which he carries out. It is regrettable that the restricted range of examples chosen effectively prevents a consideration of the wider applicability of his theory. Unlike Ricardou, Phillipe Hamon chooses to examine how the notion of textual pleasure can be related to the practice of reading description.

It would be mistaken to dismiss in any way Ricardou's fruitful, meticulous and frequently persuasive thinking on description.

However, it must be recognized that Ricardou does tend to be selective in the corpus of examples used in support of his argument. As with mise en abyme and metaphor, his critical endeavour in this field has been undertaken primarily in the polemical promotion of an aesthetic whose modernity he is striving to valorize. As we have seen, it has not been his intention to establish narratological principles of general applicability; but rather to demonstrate the value of a productive textual materialist practice.

Notes: Chapter 2

1. Nouveaux problèmes du roman (Paris, 1978), pp. 15 - 16.
2. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, 1971), p. 261.
3. Problèmes du nouveau roman (Paris, 1967), p. 25.
4. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 262.
5. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p. 12.
6. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 11.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
8. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p. 44.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
10. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, pp. 379 - 417. In the discussion following this paper, Ricardou is taken to task on the question of 'détermination' by Robbe-Grillet, Jean Alter, Lucien Dällenbach and Karlheinz Stierle (who comments: 'Si le lecteur prend au sérieux vos suggestions [...] il se perd justement dans un travail immense que même un ordinateur ne pourrait réaliser' (p. 402)). For a detailed account of the generative processes in his own fiction, L'Observatoire de Cannes and La Prise de Constantinople, see Problèmes du nouveau roman, 156 - 7, and Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p.123. For an application of Ricardolian analyses by his own exegetes, see Hélène Prigogine, 'L'aventure ricardolienne du nombre', in Nouveau roman: hier; aujourd'hui, II, 353 - 77; and Lynn A. Higgins, Parables of Theory: Jean Ricardou's Metafiction (Birmingham, Alabama, 1984).
11. L. Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism (New York and London, 1988). See Chapter 4 of my thesis for a discussion of the nouveau roman's relationship with postmodernism.
12. This question is discussed later in this chapter.
13. See 'Une question nommée littérature' in Problèmes du nouveau roman (Paris, 1967), 16 - 20; and 'La littérature comme critique' in Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, 1971), 9 - 32. For a discussion of this aspect of the nouveau roman, see Chapter 5.
14. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 32.
15. See Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', Mantéia, 5, 1968; and Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur', Bulletin de la société française de philosophie, 63, 3, 1969, 73 - 104.

16. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 32.
17. Ibid., p. 12.
18. Le Nouveau Roman, p. 15.
19. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p.16.
20. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 52.
21. Ibid.,p. 54.
22. For an account of the ramifications of this question, see Chapter 6.
23. R. Barthes, 'L'effet du réel', Communications, 11, 1968 (also in Littérature et réalité (Paris, 1982), 81 - 90).
24. In Positions et oppositions sur le roman contemporain, ed. M. Mansuy (Paris, Klincksieck, 1971), p. 143.
25. Ibid., p.143.
26. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, pp. 118 - 58.
27. Ibid., p. 32.
28. Ibid., pp. 234 - 65.
29. B.L. Knapp. 'Interview avec Claude Simon', Kentucky Romance Quarterly 16, 1969, p.182.
30. A.B. Duncan, 'Claude Simon: la crise de la représentation', Critique, November 1981, 1181 - 1200, p. 1183.
31. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, p. 25.
32. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, pp. 404 - 5.
33. S. Heath, The Nouveau Roman, p. 44.
34. Ibid., p. 60.
35. L'Ere du soupçon, p. 154.
36. Gilbert Gadoffre, 'Avant-garde ou nouveau roman? Conclusions d'un colloque', La Quinzaine littéraire, 16 septembre 1970, p.11.
37. J.-L. de Rambure, 'Comment travaillent les écrivains', Le Monde 14 janvier, 1972, p. 16.
38. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, II, p. 27.

39. Ibid., p. 49.
40. Ibid., p. 50.
41. Ibid., p. 56.
42. 'La littérature, aujourd'hui II', Tel Quel, 9, 1962, 48 - 53, p. 49.
43. See G. Josipovici, 'The Novelist and the Critic', in Cross-References, eds. D. Kelly and I. Llasera (London, 1987), 86-94.
44. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 124.
45. Orion aveugle, (Paris and Geneva, 1970), manuscript introduction.
46. For an assessment of Butor's concern with representation in Degrés, see A. Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction, pp. 185 - 93.
47. 'J'ai moi-même beaucoup encouragé ces rassurantes niaiseries', in Le Miroir qui revient, p. 11. See Chapter 6 for an analysis of Robbe-Grillet's autobiographical texts.
48. Obliques, p. 10.
49. In Oppenheim (ed.), Three Decades of the French New Novel (Illinois and Chicago), p.188.
50. L. Dällenbach, Claude Simon (Paris, 'Les Contemporains', 1988) p. 174.
51. Ibid., p. 174.
52. Problèmes du nouveau roman, p. 25.
53. Ibid., p. 44.
54. Ibid., p. 56.
55. Entretiens sur André Gide, (eds) M.Arland and J. Mouton (Paris 1967), pp. 228 - 9.
56. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 32.
57. L. Dällenbach, Le Récit spéculaire (Paris, 1977).
58. L. Dällenbach, 'Reflexivity and Reading', New Literary History, 11, 3, 1980, p. 436.
59. Le Récit spéculaire, p. 18.

60. A. Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction, (Cambridge, 1980) p. 195.
61. Le Récit spéculaire, p. 123.
62. Ibid., p. 127.
63. Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, II, p. 195.
64. A.B. Duncan, 'Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur: A Reassessment', Symposium, 34, 2, 1980, 107 - 24. He states that there are some 30 nouns with the feminine diminutive ending.
65. M. Bal, 'Mise en abyme et iconicité', Littérature 29, 1978, 116-128, p. 123.
66. Le Récit spéculaire, p. 164.
67. Ibid., p. 175.
68. Ibid., p. 201.
69. L. Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox 2nd ed. (London and New York, 1984), p. xii.
70. D. Carroll, The Subject in Question (Chicago and London, 1982), p. 85.
71. D. Carroll, Paraesthetics (London and New York, 1987), p. 72.
72. J. Culler, The Pursuit of Signs (London, 1981), p. 189.
73. Pour un nouveau roman, pp 45 - 67, p. 48.
74. Ibid., p. 18. For a discussion of the phenomenological concerns in early Robbe-Grillet, see S. Heath, The Nouveau Roman, 74 - 110; J. Sturrock, The French New Novel, pp. 24 ff. 30 and passim; and R. Barilli, 'Aboutissement du roman phénoménologique ou nouvelle aventure romanesque' in Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, 107 - 30, and 'Neutralisation et différence', in Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, I, 391 - 443.
75. C. Brooke-Rose, A Rhetoric of the Unreal (Cambridge, 1981) pp 294 and 406, n.6.
76. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, 249 - 50.
77. Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, I, p. 35.
78. Ibid., p. 37. As he confirmed to François Jost: 'Depuis son titre jusqu'à ses moindres insectes, [La Jalousie] est un vaste piège à lecture métaphorique', Obliques, p. 2.
79. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 18.

80. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 119.
81. Ibid., p. 9.
82. Ibid., 118 - 58.
83. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p. 90.
84. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 16.
85. Problèmes du nouveau roman, p. 134.
86. I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (New York, 1936), 89 - 138. The tenor is 'the underlying idea or proposed subject which the vehicle or figure means' (p. 97).
87. Ibid., p. 90.
88. Ibid., p. 126. Cf. Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 129, pp. 155-6.
89. For an account of the 'ideological' background of the New Critics, see Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London, 1980) pp. 15 - 20.
90. The Pursuit of Signs, pp. 202 - 3.
91. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman p. 188.
92. Ibid., p. 134.
93. Ibid., p. 136.
94. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 280.
95. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 119.
96. Ibid., p. 138.
97. '"Miracles" de l'analogie', Cahiers Marcel Proust, 7, (Paris, 1975), p. 15.
98. Problèmes du nouveau roman, pp. 149 - 54.
99. Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 281.
100. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 120.
101. Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, I, p.25.
102. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 16.
103. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p. 98.

104. Ibid., p. 92.
105. Ibid., p. 93.
106. 'Métonymie chez Proust', Figures III, p. 45.
107. D. Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing, p. 116.
108. S. Ullmann, Language and Style, p. 175.
109. S. Ullmann, The Image in the Modern French Novel, p. 54.
110. Ibid., p.102.
111. Ibid., p. 273.
112. Ibid.,p. 226.
113. S. Ullmann, Style in the French Novel, p. 220.
114. The Image in the Modern French Novel, p. 54.
115. Ibid., p. 213.
116. Meaning and Style, p. 145.
117. The Image in the Modern French Novel, p. 225.
118. U. Eco, The Role of the Reader (Bloomington, 1979), p. 78.
119. The Pursuit of Signs, pp. 201 - 2.
120. See G. Genette, 'Métonymie chez Proust', loc. cit., and P. Ricoeur, La métaphore vive (Paris, 1975).
121. G. Genette, 'Vraisemblance et Motivation', Figures II, (Paris, 1969).
122. 'Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui', in Pour un nouveau roman, pp. 123 - 34. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
123. B. Morrissette, Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet (Paris, 1963).
124. R. Barthes, 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit', Communications 8, 1966, 1 - 27.
125. R. Barthes, 'L'effet de réel', Communications 11, 1968, also in Littérature et réalité (Paris, 1982), pp. 81 - 90.
126. Ibid, p.83.
127. R. Barthes, S/Z (Paris, 1970), p. 61.

128. 'L'effet de réel', p. 89.
129. G. Genette, 'Frontières du récit', Figures II, p. 49.
130. Ibid., p. 57.
131. Ibid., p. 60.
132. 'Vraisemblance et motivation', p. 85.
133. Ibid., p. 92.
134. 'Frontières du récit', p. 98.
135. P. Hamon, Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif (Paris, 1981), p. 470.
136. A. Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction, p.71.
137. J. Culler, Structuralist Poetics (London, 1975). Cf. Hamon on the 'competence' of readers of description, p. 40.
138. Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif, p. 114.
139. P. Hamon, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une description?', Poétique 12, 1972, 465 - 85, p. 47.
140. Le Nouveau Roman, p. 127.
141. Problèmes du nouveau roman, p. 142.
142. Nouveaux problèmes du roman, p. 27.
143. See A.B. Duncan, 'La description dans Leçon de choses de Claude Simon', Littérature, 38, 1980, 95 - 105..
144. S. Heath, The Nouveau Roman, p. 113.

Chapter Three

Robbe-Grillet's Un Régicide: Narrative Embedding and the Limits of Literary History

Un Régicide was Robbe-Grillet's first novel: it was written in 1949, although it only came to be published in 1978 at the same time as Souvenirs du triangle d'or.¹ It therefore appeared when the nouveau roman was alleged to have instigated a new set of writing and reading practices. If we are to believe the somewhat ironic preface to the novel (and, of course, extreme caution is urged in the light of the deliberately misleading prefaces to Dans le labyrinthe and La Maison de rendez-vous), this 1978 edition differs in only two important respects from the original manuscript²: the hero's name had been changed from Philippe to Boris; and pages four to ten had been rewritten - thus preserving the revisions Robbe-Grillet had made to the text after completing La Jalousie in 1957. The novel in its original form received scant critical attention. Ricardou, for example, once described it as a 'roman de jeunesse'³, but also wrote a short commentary on extracts which appeared in the journal Médiations in 1962.⁴ Other critics have only tampered with the content of the novel, insisting on seeing it as either a parody of both the existentialist novel and the roman engagé, or as an early example of linguistic play à la Raymond Roussel.⁵ The text should not be regarded merely as a literary archive, nor can it be used just as a point de repère with which to measure the recurrence of certain themes and motifs in 'subsequent' Robbe-Grillet novels. The publication of Le Miroir qui revient (1984) has been important in providing a reconsideration of this early work from different

perspectives. In terms of the evolving aesthetics of the nouveau roman, and the 'revised' conditions of reading which this proposes, the novel's most interesting feature is the diegetic status of the imaginary and the problematic of the hierarchy of representation which this involves. The narratological concept of enchâssement - a device deployed to great effect in the text - has to be investigated as a means of helping to resolve this.

For some time before its eventual publication, Robbe-Grillet had been at pains to stress the difficulty of his first novel, which had been rejected by Gallimard precisely because it was felt that no public would exist for it. Robbe-Grillet had described Un Régicide as a 'roman bizarre' because of its portrayal of an 'univers de fantasmes'⁶, and as 'plus déconcertant que Les Gommes et Le Voyeur'.⁷ And, in an interview given when it finally appeared, he again said it was 'plus avancé, plus ambitieux, plus bizarre'⁸ than his first three 'official' novels.

Un Régicide certainly lives up to these expectations. Whereas it has been argued that in his first three novels we are presented with a limited point of view, here the narrative oscillates between two apparently distinct fictional universes. One, that of the third-person or Boris sequences, registers a mock-behaviourist, mock-absurd Kafkaesque world, recording facts, chosiste descriptions, and political events and intrigue. This is a world peopled by all the stock clichés of the absurd-cum-behaviourist novel: Boris is a kind of inept existentialist hero, politically and metaphysically

alienated from the universe, and especially from his girlfriend Laura, a relationship calling to mind Meursault's estrangement from Marie in L'Etranger. Similarly, the first Boris sequence opens with his undergoing all the anguishes of a bourgeois Sunday, reminiscent of the experiences of both Meursault and Roquentin; the pain in Boris's mouth evokes Roquentin's nausée; the judgement scene towards the end of the novel echoes features from both L'Etranger and The Trial; even the novel's epigraph from Kierkegaard, on the insignificance of an individual's life, could be seen as an ironic cross-reference to that from Céline's L'Eglise which prefaces La Nausée. Stylistically, there is a parody of the behaviourists' formal rendition of prosaic reality. Robbe-Grillet admitted the importance of such influences in an interview given to Le Monde in 1978: 'Comme Meursault, Roquentin et d'autres personnages des années 30 ou 40, il se trouve à la fois dans la société et coupé de ses significations idéologiques'⁹; while, in the Obliques volume, he describes Boris as 'un désengagé absolu, affirmant son désintérêt total pour les problèmes de la société'.¹⁰ Boris sets out to kill the King, as a kind of pseudo-Sartrean acte, but by the end of the novel the reader remains unsure whether the King is alive or dead, or indeed if Boris was his assassin. Although Robbe-Grillet has paralleled certain political elements of the novel with the rise of fascism¹¹, he is keen to play down any overt political significance: 'La politique n'a pour rôle ici que de faire percevoir la coupure du personnage par rapport au monde social'.¹² In Le Miroir qui revient, Robbe-Grillet comments that 'Boris [...] s'inscrit dans la famille illustrée, lors de la décennie précédente, par le Meursault de Camus

et le Roquentin de Sartre'.¹³ Robbe-Grillet in his autobiography explicitly likens Boris's crisis to that undergone by the central consciousnesses in La Nausée and L'Étranger:

Avec ses deux célèbres parrains (Roquentin et Meursault) Boris partage aussi l'impression diffuse d'une coupure entre lui et le monde - choses et gens - qui l'empêcherait d'adhérer vraiment à ce qui l'entoure [...] d'où son sentiment d'être là pour rien en trop, comme par hasard.¹⁴

Interspersed with the Boris sequences throughout the novel is, by marked contrast, the 'poetic' world of the Je, which records seasonal changes, landscapes, seascapes and mermaids: all taking place in a Breton-like farming and fishing community, cut off from the outside world, similar in many respects to the island of Le Voyeur.¹⁵ Unlike the 'cleansed' world of Boris, these sections of the novel are couched in highly metaphorical, if not symbolist, language, such as can be found in Maeterlinck or Gide's Paludes¹⁶; and the powerful aquatic and marine imagery evokes humidity, fog, and the fear of drowning. There is, then, a striking difference in tone, vocabulary, style and thematic content between the fantastic world of the Je and the prosaic world of Boris. In Le Miroir qui revient, Robbe-Grillet's evocation of the Breton landscape of his childhood and the recurring phantasms and nightmares associated with it are proposed as an obsessional structure which was being mediated in Un Régicide. As Michael Holland has pointed out in a recent article, the description of the phantasmatic drowning scene is presented by the author as 'the source of his own psychological alienation and the matrix of all his fiction'.¹⁷ The repetition of the phrase 'une fois de plus' recurs both in Un Régicide and at the end of the first paragraph of Le Miroir qui revient. In this pseudo-autobiography, he states that the

first sentence is 'la répétition immémoriale d'une action toujours déjà faite, accomplie', akin in other words to the structure of a dream. He reveals that the opening of the novel was inspired by 'un cauchemar itératif personnel'.¹⁸ He makes it clear that the je/il dichotomy in the text, and the two distinct worlds to which they are located, should be perceptible to the reader: of the je sequences he comments that 'Le lecteur les perçoit comme de lentes rêveries, à la dérive [...] qui trouent et bientôt pervertissent une continuité "réaliste", rédigée, elle, à la troisième personne du passé historique'.¹⁹ Thus the unitary 'traditional' narrative is severely disrupted at the diegetic level. In Le Miroir qui revient, Robbe-Grillet insists on the deliberate stylistic oppositions which operated in this novel:

Le plus visible des conflits internes qui organisent la structure du récit est précisément l'opposition stylistique entre le constat et l'expression, c'est-à-dire entre L'écriture "neutre" et le recours systématique aux charmes pompeux de la métaphore.²⁰

Despite the emphasis he had placed on exactly those 'subversive' qualities of the novel, Robbe-Grillet nevertheless at the time of its publication seemed surprisingly to attempt to retrieve this difficult novel along the lines he had one used in the past. This may even be regarded as a somewhat reactionary strategy in view of his apparent withdrawal from subjectivist readings. He initially appeared to be seeking to reduce the radical import of the 'fantastic' aspect of the novel; and indeed to 'justify' it by endorsing the dichotomy between the real and the imaginary. In the interviews he gave on its publication, he said that the novel was 'construit sur un cauchemar récurrent' and insists on its 'structure onirique de base'.²¹ He

stated his intentions unequivocally: 'Le projet du livre était de travailler sur deux registres, de montrer quelqu'un qui vit deux réalités en même temps. Le héros d'Un Régicide mène une vie schizoïde'.²² Thus, he would seem to be equating Boris with Wallas, Mathias, and the 'mari jaloux' of La Jalousie : 'S'il y a une constante chez tous mes héros, c'est une espèce de déficience mentale'.²³ Are we then to interpret the il/Je dichotomy in the novel as a kind of formal symptom of Boris's schizophrenia? This is certainly the view which was accepted by Ben Stoltzfus, according to whom this aspect of the novel 'reflects man's sense of an inner and outer being and the ontological reality engendered by such an awareness'.²⁴ Similarly, Emma Kafalenos suggests that 'it would seem as if the protagonist were mentally ill, perhaps schizophrenic, responding to a name in the real world, but with an insufficient sense of self to give himself a name in his imaginary existence on the island which presumably is located in his mind'.²⁵

Plenty of examples from the text could certainly be produced to support a subjectivist reading; indeed, it could be argued that Un Régicide plays on the subjectivist grid of interpretation even if it is only ultimately to undermine this from within. Such a reading could highlight several thematic parallels between the world of Boris and the world of the Je; there may even be evidence for a psychological reading which would maintain that Boris has a kind of 'divided self'; or, even, we may well choose to see Boris as a creative writer en puissance : all such interpretations giving credence to the notion that the Je sections of the novel are merely

the effect of Boris's imagination and oneiric propensity. For example, the text opens with a Je/aquatic sequence where eventually the Je ends up in bed in his room; this is followed, in the second sequence of the novel, with Boris waking up in his room: by thematic juxtaposition, one is therefore invited to consider the parallel between these two sections and to draw the conclusion that the opening sequence had merely been a feature in Boris's dream. Similarly, the names of the figures who populate the island seem to be linguistic transpositions of those with whom Boris comes into contact: Vérant recalls Vincent, and Alban recalls Arnaud. One could also mention those elements in the seaman's ballad which recur in the song Boris tries to remember when he wakes up. Much could be made of the thematic counterpoint between Boris's obsession with the King, and the Je's obsession with Malus le Solitaire; and, indeed, Boris's decision to kill the King coincides with the Je's desire to find out more about Malus. In Chapter 6, the insects which proliferate in the marshlands evoke the fly which buzzes around Boris's bedroom. In Chapter 9, a sequence containing the Je's speculations about the existence of mermaids is followed by a sequence in which a young girl is looking at Boris: thereby suggesting that she is the 'origin' of the mermaid. One could even go on to contrast the approach of the rain in the Je narrative with the imminence of the killing of the King in the Boris narrative. And, of course, from a formal point of view, the cyclical structure of the Je sequences suggests a recurrent dream: the opening words ('Une fois de plus, c'est au bord de la mer') are repeated towards the end of the novel: as Robbe-Grillet has

said: 'la vie quotidienne et la vie onirique communiquaient constamment dans une continuité totale'.²⁶

For a psychologizing (rather than psychoanalytical) reading, we could unearth suggestions to account for his mental instability: at one point, in particular when Boris seems to be having difficulty making sense of reality, he forces himself to concentrate on the visible world around him ('il y avait, là, du moins, des images sûres où se reposer') (38); and one could go on to mention his headaches, his feverishness, and his deficient memory. This way of explaining the Je sections of the novel would imply that Boris is a schizophrenic: we could therefore interpret the disruptions and discontinuities in the narrative as the symptom of Boris's particular ordering of experience. The disorders and inconsistencies in the narrative thus mirror those of Boris: Didier Anzieu has used the term 'le discours de l'obsessionnel'²⁷ to refer to precisely this feature of Le Voyeur and La Jalousie, and it could be 'retrospectively' applied to Un Regicide. We would therefore be led to deduce that the distorted narrative can be explained in formal realist terms as the evocation of a disordered mind - very much a 'modernist' construction.

If the reader is to consider the Je sections as the construct of Boris's imagination, we may well decide to view him as a potential writer. Mention could be made of his apparently self-conscious attitude to language and word-play, citing the 'anagramme accusatrice' of the title 'Ci-gît Red'; we could also point to the

'feuilles' and the 'épaves' found in the drawer towards the end of the novel - could these be the sources for his imaginings, the 'générateurs' of certain thematic elements in the Je sections? And, of course, at the very end of the text we see Boris locked in a prison cell - have then the aquatic sequences been merely a story he has been telling himself to pass the time? There are also frequent references to narration which might suggest that Boris is a narrator.

But, of course, in his characteristically paradoxical fashion, Robbe-Grillet, while often appearing to welcome such readings, has on other occasions expressed dissatisfaction with them. The same novelist who once said that 'la subjectivité est la caractéristique du roman contemporain'²⁸, and that 'le nouveau roman ne vise qu'à une subjectivité totale'²⁹, has not always given his wholehearted stamp of approval to a Morrissette-like récupération. For example, referring to Mariénbad, he once commented: 'J'avais été gêné [...] par ce côté "onirique" que j'avais donné à Mariénbad'³⁰, thus arguing against modernistic oneiric realism. So, while admitting the validity of a subjectivist mode of interpretation, he has frequently stressed that this may be over-reductive: 'J'espère que mes romans sont défendables [...] de ce point de vue. Mais je sais bien que mon propos est ailleurs. Je ne transcris pas, je construis'.³¹ Robbe-Grillet therefore seems to play on the reader's expectations of subjectivity, but subverts and frustrates these in very devious ways.

Such invitations to recover the 'côté onirique' of Un Régicide in terms of the psychological vraisemblable characteristic of modernist

reading strategies would certainly satisfy the demands of what Ricardou calls 'le réaliste tapi au fond de chaque lecteur'.³² This form of recovery is akin to the process which the Russian Formalists have described as 'motivation' - a procedure which attempts to justify items in a text by showing that they are not arbitrary or incoherent, but comprehensible in terms of their functions.³³ The text's 'strangeness' is thus reduced by reading it as the utterance of a particular narrator: as Jonathan Culler points out. 'identifying narrators is one of the primary ways of naturalizing fiction'.³⁴ The identification of narrators may be an important interpretative strategy, but it cannot by itself take one very far with a text as 'unconventional' in this respect as Un Régicide.

The problem, then, of situating the text's discourse - of answering the question 'qui parle?' - stems largely from the Je/il division in the novel itself. In Un Régicide there is neither coherence nor consistency in its use of first- and third-person pronouns. In Problèmes de linguistique générale,³⁵ Benveniste states that the first-person pronoun can only be defined by the discourse of which it is a part; whereas the third-person, accompanied by the preterite tense, suggests that events speak for themselves. It is precisely this opposition in language itself which Un Régicide articulates: the Je sections of the novel are most often told in the present tense; while the Boris/il sequences often use the past historic. The Je/il oscillations in Un Régicide deconstruct this opposition; and the novel can hence be seen as a struggle to defer and suspend the location of a fixed point of view. Indeed, the novel provides a

foregrounding of this problematic, and by so doing reveals the 'il' and the 'je' for the artificial constructs they are. Much has been made of the presence in Robbe-Grillet's fiction of the 'voix narratrice mobile' and the 'narrateurs flottants', and it is just such an example of shifting viewpoint which Ricardou, referring to La Maison de rendez-vous, characterizes as fundamental to a text's self-reflexivity: 'l'une de ces fables intérieures par lesquelles les romans se plaisent [...] à désigner leur fonctionnement même'.³⁶ It is on our conventionally determined expectations of the subjectivity of a 'je' and the objectivity of an 'il' that Un Régicide plays.

The transitions between the Je and the Il sections are effected in various ways. From the first few chapters, the reader is able to acquire a 'grammar' which allows him to locate to which of the universes he is being referred. This focalization is brought about principally through the tonal properties, imagery and vocabulary of the different 'landscapes' evoked: on the one hand, there is the aquatic and marine vocabulary of the Je; and, on the other, the political and cosmopolitan vocabulary of the Il. However, our ability to recognize these different worlds is hampered. The transitions are often blurred - for example, sentences which more properly belong to one world are suddenly placed at the end of a paragraph which had been describing the other:

Boris regarda le journal qu'il avait gardé dans la main sans s'en rendre compte. 'Eclatante victoire...' La feuille, roulée en bouchon vint se poser sur l'eau verte; une brise légère la poussait vers le large. Longtemps, je suis des yeux cette boule de papier qui s'éloigne. (40)

Par la fenêtre on voyait la muraille grise, sans ouverture, du bâtiment qui occupait l'autre côté de l'allée; on l'appelait le Magasin Huit, il devait faire très sombre dans ce magasin. Le crépi en était ancien et d'assez vilaine apparence: fissure de haut en bas, décollé largement par plaques, arraché même en plusieurs endroits, laissant à découvert une sorte de mortier de couleur plus claire et d'aspect friable, à demi décomposé déjà par les pluies en boursouflures irrégulières que le vent désagrège. Sur les arêtes frangées des cratères, le sable s'accumule en sillons mobiles et crépite contre les herbes dures. (44)

Or, the transitions can occur mid-paragraph, or even mid-sentence, where there is an interpenetration of vocabulary:

Boris ne fut pas pris au dépourvu par ce changement soudain, auquel il était maintenant habitué. Il demeura une longue minute sans bouger attentif, à contempler le spectacle. Mais il fallait faire quelque chose: la frise des crêtes successives aux formes immobiles, qui poursuivait sa procession exaspérante, paraissait en même temps contenir une menace, comme si une rupture imminente, un enchevêtrement subit du dessin, allait déclencher quelque cataclysme. La parade d'ailleurs connue: Boris, méthodiquement, se passa la langue de gauche à droite sur le devant des incisives supérieures, à de multiples reprises, jusqu'à ce que les petites vagues fussent complètement chassées de sa bouche. (15)

The text thus dispenses with many of those 'conventional' links which one expects in a novel portraying two co-existing worlds; indeed, as Un Régicide progresses, there seems to be an ever-increasing disintegration of the referential categories which the reader had come to build up. For example, in Chapter 8, the Je and the il are interchanged - the third-person is suddenly used in an island sequence:

Il était de mauvaise humeur. Dans la matinée, il avait rencontré le Solitaire errant sur la falaise, mais n'en avait obtenu que des paroles vagues et réticentes. L'autre ne paraissait pas se souvenir très bien de ses déclarations enflammées de la veille [...]. Boris avait aussi voulu savoir pourquoi il n'habitait pas au village, comme tout le monde. (121)

And, vice-versa, as in Chapter 10, when Boris is in jail, but the Je form is used:

A nouveau, je rencontre des barreaux qui me ferment le passage et je m'arrête, découragé. Je ne réussis plus à penser à rien, ni seulement à me rappeler où je suis, mais l'instinct de conservation me fait changer de route une fois de plus.
(221)

The reader's ability to recognize a stable and consistent point of view is thus eroded.

A subjectivist reading might seek to explain this incoherence and disintegration of the two fictional universes of the novel as perhaps the ultimate proof that the Je /island sequences are merely the product of Boris's overwrought imagination or distorted perceiving consciousness. However, such an interpretation seems particularly reductive when one considers the relative independence which these sequences acquire. Despite the interpenetrations and barely signalled transitions, the reader is nevertheless left with the impression that two distinct fictional universes have been described.

How, then, are we to account for these sequences and transitions without being over-reductive? The problem of dealing with the structure of the relationship between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' when both appear to coexist in one level has received comparatively little critical attention. It should, of course, be remembered that the Boris sequences contain more obviously 'imaginary' elements of their own. In a way that is reminiscent of Mathias in Le Voyeur, Boris 're-enacts' the crime several times both before and after it was 'committed': this is largely effected through an elaborate confusion of tenses, undermining the very 'reality' of the Boris

sections themselves (as on pages 127, 146, 155, 166). And, again, it should be noted that we are given indications of the presence of dream-sequences within the Boris sequences: for example, at one point we are told that he had been dreaming that his colleague Thomas had turned into a centaur (p.114). A subjectivist analysis could account very well for sequences of this kind, but could hardly be adequately applied to the Je/island sequences, which constitute almost half of the novel.

Stephen Heath mentions Ricardou's short 1962 commentary on the opening sections of Un Régicide stating: 'the text offers [...] scenes at the same status of presence without any explanatory indications such as would conventionally be found in realist writing'.³⁷ And, in Problèmes du nouveau roman, Ricardou uses the term 'virtuel' to refer to such occurrences in narrative as dreams, hallucinations, imaginings, etc. : together they form the 'niveau illusoire' of a text ('en la fiction, le réel et le virtuel ont même statut parce qu'ils sont l'un comme l'autre entièrement gérés par les lois de l'écriture qui les instaure'³⁸). Similarly, in Le Nouveau Roman, he develops this argument: 'Ce qui dans un texte se prétend réel, n'est jamais qu'une fiction au même titre de ce qui s'y prétend fiction'.³⁹ In other words, both the real and the imaginary are 'fictional' because we are dealing with a work of fiction which, by its very nature, is non-representational. In 'Le récit avarié' section of this study, Ricardou states that the existence of variants of ambiguous status in a text effectively undermines the referential illusion: 'C'est que dans un récit, le niveau réel [...] et le niveau

illusoire [...] ont un seul et même statut. Dans la mesure où ils sont l'effet de mots ordonnés, ils sont tous identiquement de la fiction'.⁴⁰ Regrettably, however, Ricardou does not dwell on the vital problem of how a transition from the real to the imaginary, and vice-versa, is effected, or on precisely how such a transition is perceived by the reader: he merely comments that 'on ne passe jamais que d'une fiction à une autre'.⁴¹ In asserting that the real and the imaginary have the same status, Ricardou may be helping us deal with referential criteria on the level of the fiction, but not with the diegetic level of the narration. Ricardou fails to account for how we read a text like Un Regicide, each sequence of which, taken separately, asserts its autonomy and challenges the hierarchy of representation whereby it might be relegated to secondary status by the other sequence which lays claim in turn to representational priority. It is this concern with hierarchy, in dealing with coexisting narratives in the one text, which is the distinguishing feature of the narratological concept of enchâssement, or narrative embedding.

Working within the context of an attempt to establish a narrative syntax - specifically of how to describe 'subordinate' elements in a narration - Todorov uses this term, borrowed from linguistics, to analyse that aspect of The Thousand and One Nights and the Decameron, where there is 'l'inclusion d'une histoire à l'intérieur d'une autre'⁴², when 'l'histoire seconde est englobée dans la première'.⁴³ Todorov goes on to use the term to refer to all récits within a single récit, and seeks to explain the function of the embedded

narrative within the global structure of the text, indicating that it can have either a 'rapport d'explication causale' or a 'rapport de juxtaposition thématique'.⁴⁴ And Gérard Genette, in Figures III, takes up the concept to account for those 'récits au second degré' in the section 'le récit métadiégétique'.⁴⁵ He agrees with Todorov that embedded narratives often have a causal or thematic link with the 'first' (or primary) narrative, but adds that there can occasionally be no explicit relationship between the two levels of a story: 'c'est l'acte de narration lui-même qui remplit une fonction dans la diégèse, indépendamment du contenu métadiégétique: fonction de distraction [...] et/ou d'obstruction'.⁴⁶

However, Mieke Bal's development and refinement of the term is pertinent for our reading of Un Régicide.⁴⁷ In Narratologie, she seeks to define the relationship between the two récits in Le Vice-consul by Marguerite Duras, and discusses whether the sequences in question in that novel have a 'rapport de coordination ou de subordination'.⁴⁸ She has described the phenomenon of enchâssement thus: 'A sequence can [...] be said to be embedded when it is inserted in another sequence'; but she goes on to point out: 'an embedded unit is by definition subordinate to the unit which embeds it; but it can acquire relative independence'.⁴⁹

Indeed, in Un Régicide, it is precisely the 'relative independence' of both sequences which makes the novel so interesting in this respect. Bal's thematic analysis of the parallels between the two narratives in Duras's novel is very successful because the

transitions conform more recognizably to a consistent pattern. In Le Vice-consul, there is almost a chapter-by-chapter alternation; whereas, as we have seen, in Un Régicide, these transitions are effected in radically different and more subtle ways, causing a veritable disruption and subversion of the hierarchical relationship of one narrative over the other. In Un Régicide, one récit is almost visibly 'punctured' by the other; one is successively embedded in the other on the formal level of the narration.

Mise en abyme is probably the most typical form of enchâssement. Lucien Dällenbach, in Le Récit spéculaire, has defined two distinct kinds: 'l'une, fictionnelle, dédoublant le récit dans sa dimension référentielle d'histoire racontée; l'autre, textuelle, le réfléchissant dans son aspect littéral d'organisation signifiante'.⁵⁰ It is striking how many of the second kind can be found in Un Régicide. For example, there is a reference to a radio announcer speaking 'comme s'il lisait un livre sans intérêt pour lui ni pour personne' (14), and to a woman singing 'un air impossible à identifier' (14). Such mises en abyme of the problems of interpretation and perception, meaning and representation, abound in the text: the misty, foggy landscapes and the accompanying light and dark imagery throughout the text function as structural metaphor. We are told of the oil painting in Boris's room that 'ça ne représentait rien' (18): if it were hung the other way it would still be meaningless; the sea-ballad contains significant gaps: 'les vers d'une ancienne ballade lui revenaient sans cesse à la mémoire avec des trous qu'il n'arrivait pas à combler' (88). There are several

references to narration itself: all the men in the seaside village get together to tell stories (60); the narrative told to Boris by Thomas contains too many details ('avec toutes sortes de détails oiseux, de circonstances trop précises, qui paraissaient mal inventées tant elles étaient nombreuses et vaines') (112); and there are frequent allusions to the 'fictional' quality of the mermaid stories; indeed, à la limite, one could interpret the references to the 'grands travaux' as yet another mise en abyme of the construction of a narrative. Such mises en abyme emphasize the text's structural narcissism, as do the many examples of linguistic play. Elements of the 'anagramme accusatrice' of the title, 'Ci-gît Red', recur as multi-lingual word-play: the colour red appears in Boris's painting, the picture postcard he buys, and in the sailor's song. It is implicit in the reference to the fire which has been burning all night (in Chapter 7), even the expression 'feu roi' and the Cathedral (at Retz) seem to be puns on this. At one point, the transition between the two worlds is brought about by the two meanings of the word 'lame' (168). By suggesting the text's self-reflexivity, such linguistic narcissism calls attention to the novel as structure, rather than as merely a formal representation of a perceiving consciousness.

Through the text's foregrounding of the problematic nature of enchâssement, Un Régicide reveals its most significant feature to be the struggle between two narratives for superiority - a struggle to establish and maintain a hierarchy at the levels of both the fiction and the narration, at the macro-structure and the micro-structure,

even down to paragraphs, sentences and vocabulary. The central metaphor of Un Régicide is therefore essentially an Oedipal one: it is the locus for a killing, a killing of the 'father' narrative, in order to assert domination and to impose diegetic subordination. This is what accounts for much of the imagery and the 'content' of the novel (both the Je and Boris are seen to be struggling in various ways): a particularly relevant example of that process in which 'la fiction est une immense métaphore de sa narration'.⁵¹ Un Régicide would seem to illustrate Bakhtin's description of the novel generally as a 'battle-ground' of converging and colliding discourses or, to paraphrase Julia Kristeva, as a mobile intersection of a plurality of forces and codes. Un Régicide appears to present us with just such a clash of discourses in order to call into question the very strategies of vraisemblance which the reader deploys to account for the status of the 'real' and the 'imaginary' by proposing a hierarchy of representation. It is the manner in which the text subverts such an ideology of privilege which constitutes its deconstruction: Un Régicide read in this way becomes a paradigm of the plural text composed of contradictions and 'warring' forces of signification. In Le Miroir qui revient, Robbe-Grillet insists on the 'conflits internes'⁵² in the novel. As Robbe-Grillet has himself stated, in the Centre Georges-Pompidou video archive, his main interest has always been the construction of 'un récit en train de se faire et de se défaire', with its own internal 'structure de contestation'.⁵³ In Un Régicide, where there is no single, privileged discourse, enchâssement emerges as the principal device which the text deploys to foreground the problematic of narrative hierarchy. Rereading the

novel in the light of the autobiographical works, it is also apparent that Robbe-Grillet is engaged in a literary-historical conflict with the then ruling 'school' of existentialism: the fractured absurdist narrative, perforated by the nightmarish Je marine sequences, can at another level be considered a mise en cause of the existentialist novel. In Le Miroir qui revient, he repeatedly upbraids Sartre for abandoning narrative experimentation after La Nausée in favour of more conventional structures in line with the demands of littérature engagée. Robbe-Grillet provocatively and amusingly suggests that Roquentin's 'aesthetic solution', sketched out at the end of the novel, would result in a text like Un Régicide, whose narrative structure may be considered more in harmony with a perception of the contingency of existence: 'Tel Roquentin à la dernière page de La Nausée [...] une seule décision s'impose: écrire un roman, qui certes ne sera pas L'Age de raison, mais Un Régicide'.⁵⁴ It may even be possible to argue that Un Régicide in this respect can be considered as an 'agonistic' text, to adopt Harold Bloom's notion⁵⁵, in the sense that it almost tangibly is striving to detach itself from its existentialist precursors with which it enters into competition and rivalry - in addition to being a novel in competition with itself.

By presenting two colliding discourses in the text, Robbe-Grillet has effectively advanced beyond the consciousness-centred fictions of modernism, although clearly in not as radical way as can be found in his fiction from Dans le labyrinthe and La Maison de Rendez-vous onwards. The literary history of the nouveau roman therefore cannot be made to conform to the neat modernism to postmodernism

model which has been proposed elsewhere. We seem to be presented with a literary text which is almost tangibly seeking to release itself from its forebears and prevailing influences, hesitating between radically different modes of organization and readings. Further complicating and disrupting comfortable accounts of literary transitions is the retroactive impact on Un Régicide of Robbe-Grillet's pseudo-autobiographies which invite reconsiderations of the early work along more profitable lines than the exclusive focus on reflexivity.

Notes: Chapter Three

1. A. Robbe-Grillet, Un Régicide (Paris, 1978). Page numbers in brackets refer to this edition. 'Un Régicide' is also the subtitle of the last act of a play in Souvenirs du triangle d'or, p. 25.
2. 'Philippe c'est pour moi typiquement le nom bête [...] Ce prénom de Philippe est [...] ce qui m'a empêché d'éditer ensuite le roman' (Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, Paris, 1976, 2 vols, I, p. 313.), Robbe-Grillet has explained his preference for the name Boris, which frequently appears in his work, by relating it to his long-standing interest in the 'mad king' tradition: 'le roi est pour moi un personnage double, car il est à la fois le meilleur représentant de l'ordre et le meilleur représentant du désordre [...] J'ai toujours été fasciné, au théâtre, par les pièces qui mettent en scène un roi fou, l'Eric XIV de Strindberg l'Henri IV de Pirandello, Macbeth bien sûr, Lear bien entendu. Il y a surtout Boris Godounov de Pouchkine, le roi fou par excellence. le roi fou - assassin qui a supprimé le vrai roi pour se mettre à sa place [...] et qui est à l'origine du prénom Boris qu'on retrouve à de nombreuses reprises dans mes petits travaux' (ibid., p. 136).
3. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, 1971), p. 239.
4. J. Ricardou, 'Par delà le réel et l'irréel (Simple note sur un fragment d'Un Régicide)', Médiations, 5. 1962, 17 - 25. For a brief discussion of these early extracts, see Stephen Heath, The Nouveau Roman (London, 1972), p. 129; and John Sturrock, The French New Novel (Oxford, 1969), pp. 176, 177, 182, 223.
5. See, for example, Ben Stoltzfus, 'Un Régicide: a metaphorical intrigue'. French Forum, V, 1980, 269 - 82; and Emma Kafalenos, 'Robbe-Grillet's Un Régicide - an extraordinary first novel'. International Fiction Review, VI, 1979, 49 - 54.
6. 'Archives du XXe siècle: Alain Robbe-Grillet', Centre Georges-Pompidou (Paris, 1971), Tape 1.
7. 'Robbe-Grillet: mes romans, mes films, et mes ciné-romans', Le Magazine littéraire, April 1967, p. 11.
8. 'Robbe-Grillet commenté par lui-même', Le Monde 22 août, 1978, p. 17.
9. Ibid., p. 17.
10. Obliques: Robbe-Grillet, ed. F. Jost (Paris, 1978), p. 2.
11. Idem.

12. Le Monde, loc. cit. Although, elsewhere, he has suggested a possible connection with 'la dislocation politique des 3e et 4e Républiques en France', 'Entretien: Alain Poirson / Alain Robbe-Grillet', Digraphe, 20, 1979, 149 - 61, p. 154.
13. Le Miroir qui revient (Paris, 1984), p. 164.
14. Ibid., p. 165.
15. 'C'est la même île, c'est la même perte, c'est la même errance' ('Entretien Alain Poirson/Alain Robbe-Grillet', p.154).
16. Claude Ollier has suggested that Gide may have been a greater influence on Robbe-Grillet than has hitherto been thought, indicating that he had read Gide extensively between 1940 and 1945, before the growth of his interest in Sartre and Kafka: 'Il me semble évident que tant dans sa future attitude d'écrivain que dans sa façon d'envisager et d'utiliser la langue il a subi fortement l'influence de Gide' (Entretiens sur André Gide, eds. M. Arland and J. Mouton (Paris, 1967), p. 233. There is, however, no evidence that Robbe-Grillet had actually read Paludes itself; but one is nevertheless struck by the prevalent 'paludist' flavour of the Je sections of the narrative.
17. Michael Holland, 'Seachange: Figure in Robbe-Grillet's Autobiography', Paragraph, 13, 1, 1990. 65 - 88, p. 78.
18. Le Miroir qui revient, p. 43.
19. Ibid., p. 43.
20. Ibid., p.164.
21. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 15 décembre, 1978, p. 5.
22. Le Monde, loc. cit.
23. Le Monde, loc. cit. Cf. his much-quoted 1963 statement that his characters are 'des menteurs, des schizophrènes ou des hallucinés, in 'Du réalisme à la réalité', Pour un nouveau roman p. 140.
24. B. Stoltzfus, art. cit., p. 269.
25. E. Kafalenos, art. cit., p. 51.
26. Le Monde, loc. cit.
27. D. Anzieu, 'Le discours de l'obsessionnel dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet', Les Temps modernes, 233, 1965, 608 - 37.
28. 'Entretien Claude Sarrate/ Alain Robbe-Grillet', Le Monde 13 mai 1961. p. 9.

29. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 117.
30. Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme, 9/10, 1965/6, 97 - 125. p. 98.
31. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 139.
32. J. Ricardou, Problèmes du nouveau roman (Paris, 1967), p. 28.
33. For a discussion of this critical concept, see G. Genette, 'Vraisemblance et motivation', Figures II (Paris, 1969), pp. 71 - 99; and Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (London, 1975), pp. 131 - 60.
34. Culler, p. 200. For a discussion of the poetics of character, see Ann Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction (Cambridge, 1980), pp 58 - 107.
35. E. Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale (Paris, 1966), pp. 251 - 7.
36. Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 236.
37. S. Heath, The Nouveau Roman, p. 129.
38. J. Ricardou, Problèmes du nouveau roman, p. 28.
39. J. Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman, p. 121.
40. Ibid., p. 91.
41. Ibid., p. 123.
42. T. Todorov, 'Les catégories du récit littéraire', Communications, 8, 1966, p. 140.
43. T. Todorov, Poétique de la prose (Paris, 1971), p. 82.
44. T. Todorov, Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme? 2. Poétique, (Paris, 1968), p. 84.
45. G. Genette, Figures III, pp. 241 - 3.
46. Ibid., p. 243.
47. M. Bal, Narratologie (Paris, 1977); and 'Notes on Narrative Embedding', Poetics Today, 11, 1981, 41 - 59.
48. Narratologie, p. 61.
49. 'Notes on Narrative Embedding', p. 44.
50. L. Dallenbach, Le Récit spéculaire (Paris, 1977), 123.

51. J. Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p. 220. There is an apposite parallel to be drawn here between Un Régicide and Ricardou's own novel La Prise de Constantinople, which he has said takes as its principal image a conflict between a 'récit terrestre' and a 'récit venusien': see Le Nouveau Roman, pp 102-9.
52. Le Miroir qui revient, p. 164.
53. 'Archives du XXe siècle', op.cit., Tape 4.
54. le Miroir qui revient, p. 30.
55. H. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence (Oxford, 1973).

Chapter Four

The nouveau roman and Postmodernism

In considering the relationship between the nouveau roman and post-modernism, it is important to examine the versions which came to be provided of a supposed transformation of literary values and aspirations. As it has already been argued¹, it is clear from the original polemics of the nouveau roman in the 1950s and early 1960s that the novelists themselves felt that they were engaged in the 'modernising' of the French novel by advancing on the experiments of writers like Flaubert, Proust and Joyce, while drawing on the example of Faulkner, Kafka and Beckett in the evolution of narrative form and technique. It was an inattention to radical form which in their view marred much of the writing of the then-dominant 'existentialist' school. It is apparent that they considered themselves to have ushered in a new and progressive literary 'period'.

Within the literary history of the nouveau roman, a development towards a nouveau nouveau roman was alleged to have taken place. Plotting the trajectory of this, according to Ricardou (and relayed by Robbe-Grillet and Simon), this was said to have been characterised by an abandonment of almost all vestigial traces of psychological realism to be replaced by a Roussellian / Tel Quel-inspired poetics of textual and linguistic play. Thus the problematic question of representation and referentiality could be sidestepped by proposing the so-called 'self-generating' text composed as a result of the

exploration of the properties of language rather than the apparently now outmoded formal realist aesthetic which privileged the demand to translate in formal terms the workings of a fractured consciousness. While for Jean Ricardou it is this feature which demonstrates the 'modernity' of the nouveau roman, in the emerging American and English critical idiom this was what was deemed to constitute its 'postmodernity'. In The Modes of Modern Writing, for example, David Lodge unequivocally groups the nouveau roman as part of a postmodernism which is 'neither modernist nor antimodernist [...] it continues the modernist critique of traditional mimetic art, and shares the modernist commitment to innovation'.² Postmodernism is deemed by Lodge to be characterized by contradiction, permutation, discontinuity, randomness, and excess. It is not uncommon to see works from this period of the nouveau roman grouped along with the avant-garde experimental texts being produced by the American postmodernists (e.g. John Barth, John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon) and by other practitioners of the metafictional novel such as B. S. Johnson, John Fowles, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, and assorted Latin American writers. Critical works on postmodernist writing will frequently include the nouveau roman as part of this new literary 'period': the nouveaux romanciers were integrated within the emerging canon of postmodernism.³ The development of the nouveau roman into the nouveau nouveau roman has been claimed to illustrate the evolution of modernism into postmodernism. The idea of a nouveau nouveau roman was said to be based therefore on the abandonment of the 'modernist' nouveau roman's residual mimetic impetus (psychological or otherwise) existing in an ultimately retrievable coherent narrative, and the

replacement of this aesthetic with an increasing emphasis on dis coherence, plurality and textually generative and productive devices as a consequence of the fertile exploration of the potentialities of language. Thus the nouveau nouveau roman appears to be synonymous with the theoretical approach of Jean Ricardou.

Ricardou's own work Le Nouveau Roman refers to the change in poetics between the early nouveau roman and the later nouveau nouveau roman as being characterised by a much greater contestation of both narrative and reference. He himself prefers the term premier nouveau roman as a means of describing the extent to which the earlier practices could still be said to possess an 'unité diégétique'.⁴ Referring directly to the Cerisy conference in 1971 at which the term nouveau nouveau roman was being widely used, Ricardou comments that the later works are distinguished by diegetic plurality: it is no longer possible to reconstruct a 'récit unitaire'. Ricardou's valorization in his critical analyses of certain key theoretical criteria (the values of production and self-referentiality rather than expression and representation) has the effect of providing a narrative account of the 'history' of the nouveau roman. An examination of the Cerisy proceedings is extremely instructive as it suggests the extent to which Ricardou ultimately has recourse to a totalizing version of literary history. As Celia Britton has persuasively argued, this conference 'was in fact a turning-point in the evolution of the nouveau roman, not least because it consolidated the ascendancy of Jean Ricardou over the group'.⁵

At Cerisy, Robbe-Grillet had been extremely enthusiastic about the new aesthetic being articulated by Ricardou. He pays tribute to Ricardou's influence: 'Le Nouveau Roman a considérablement évolué depuis ses débuts et, en particulier, grâce à vous, Ricardou'.⁶ He credits this development specifically to Ricardou's efforts, particularly in his promotion of the self-generating text: 'le Nouveau Nouveau Roman, qui est en train de naître sous la houlette de Jean Ricardou, se définit précisément par ses structures génératrices'.⁷ Concurring with the Ricardolian line, he refers to the nouveau nouveau roman's 'liquidation de la littérature référentielle'⁸ and likewise underlines the decisive influence of Raymond Roussel.⁹ Robbe-Grillet indulges in the overt literary-historicizing of the nouveau roman at this stage. Surveying his own fiction, he states:

Dans le labyrinthe constitue la charnière, à tel point que j'irais jusqu'à présenter Les Gommages, Le Voyeur et La Jalousie comme une espèce de trilogie appartenant encore à cette première moitié du XXe siècle, alors que nous sommes maintenant avec vous, Ricardou, dans la deuxième.¹⁰

It is also the literary-historical map of the nouveau roman which is being drafted: from the exchanges following Nathalie Sarraute's paper, it is clear that Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou consider her not to have 'progressed' because of her attachment to a pre-verbal area of 'reality'¹¹; while Michel Butor is described by Robbe-Grillet of having been 'laissé en route'.¹² He will further comment: 'Les recherches de Butor [...] sont presque le négatif des nôtres'.¹³ By 1971 therefore Sarraute and Butor have become marginal to the evolving aesthetic of the nouveau roman as defined by Ricardou and supported by Robbe-Grillet and Simon. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon's

intervention consecrates these versions of evolutionary poetics. She talks about 'la prise de conscience d'une évolution et même d'une transformation du Nouveau Roman avec l'émergence de ce qu'on a désigné sous le vocable de "Nouveau Nouveau Roman"'.¹⁴ She groups La Jalousie, La Modification and La Route des Flandres as representative of the 'first period' of the nouveau roman; while La Maison de Rendez-vous, Mobile, La Bataille de Pharsale and Passacaille belong to the second phase:

le Nouveau Roman (première manière) a pu, et à juste titre, être considéré comme le dernier avatar du roman épistémologique et relève pour une grande part du réalisme phénoménologique, le second Nouveau Roman [5..] se présente comme un jeu ou, [...], un jeu de construction.¹⁵

In Jean Ricardou's critical works this sense of transition is most apparent. Ricardou seeks to propose a poetics of modernity which consists in the valorisation of certain textual strategies which come to be characterised as 'progressive'. It is clear from the literary history advanced by Ricardou that a number of scriptural practices are seen as having evolved in a certain way culminating in the arrival of the nouveau roman. Thus, the writings of Flaubert and Proust are considered as the most significant stages in this evolutionary process of literary history. In this respect, 'deviances' from the realist norm also come to be reappraised as having assisted in the contestation of the conventional novel: Raymond Roussel's work is especially privileged on account of the emphasis he placed on linguistic play in the elaboration of his fiction rather than a representational impetus. The opening sequence in Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres is referred to on several occasions as providing almost a model of the new textual

practices associated with the nouveau nouveau roman. Ricardou is able both to quote examples from works by Claude Simon and Robbe-Grillet in support of this aesthetic of the self-generating text and to co-opt the otherwise reluctant Nathalie Sarraute by selective illustration: in Le Nouveau Roman, for example, he reproduces comments made by Sarraute at the 1971 colloque concerning the child playing with words in her novel Entre la vie et la mort.¹⁶ Ricardou's totalizing version of the new poetics of the nouveau roman group thus glosses over the insistence by the author herself on the existence of a pre-verbal reality or 'tropistic' region of linguistic and psychological self-consciousness.

Ricardou's over-schematic, simplistic and fundamentally literary-historical version of the evolution of novelistic form inevitably leads to the formation of a canon of officially sanctioned writers characterised by the extent to which certain works display radical or subversive textual strategies. Thus writers as diverse as Sade, Lautréamont, Poe, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Roussel, Proust, Joyce, Artaud, Bataille, Borges and Beckett have to be seen as the approved precursors of the nouveau roman. Ricardou in this respect is in harmony with the critical endeavour of Tel Quel in the pages of which attention was increasingly being drawn to such 'marginal' figures whose work could not be recuperated by the dominant literary ideology of realism. Surrealism, which would seem to have an obvious claim for entry into this new pantheon, is in fact rarely discussed by Ricardou, presumably on account of the fact that the emphasis on automatic writing and exploration of the unconscious constitutes a

threat to the textual control which Ricardou saw as essential in the elaboration of writing. It is also very much the case that the use of the unconscious as a provider of 'text' was both dangerously close to the reinstatement of the personality of the author and possibly confirmed a pre-verbal area of experience. Ricardou, for example, seems to have been unimpressed by the fruitful attempts in literary theory to apply concepts derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is significant that Robbe-Grillet's provocative statement in Le Miroir qui revient ('Je n'ai jamais parlé d'autre chose que de moi'¹⁷) would be followed by a refutation of the axiomatic Ricardolian standpoint on 'the death of the author'. The more recent attempts to examine the influence of surrealism on Robbe-Grillet's work represents a defiant attitude towards Ricardou's critical agenda. In addition, David Carroll and Celia Britton have subjected Claude Simon's work to Derridean and Lacanian psychoanalytical criteria¹⁸; just as Anthony Pugh has disrupted the Ricardolian hegemony by examining the confrontation between the historical and the writerly in Simon's work.¹⁹

As Ann Jefferson has pointed out, 'a novelist like Balzac simply becomes uninteresting for a critic like Ricardou'²⁰. Ricardou too readily embraces the Barthesian opposition (originally a working hypothesis) between the lisible and the scriptible, but without the attention to the nuances and subtleties of this polarization which Barthes exhibits in S/Z. It is regrettable that Ricardou, ever-attentive to totalization - in particular that of Sartre, as evidenced by his intervention in the Que peut la littérature? debate

at the *Mutualité* - fails to appreciate the intellectual rigidity and totalizing nature of the schema which he himself has evolved. Perhaps the greatest contribution of *S/Z* in terms of literary theory and criticism is the extent to which it led to the discovery of discursive fracture and aporia in even the most apparently unproblematic of texts.²¹ Robbe-Grillet insisted on the fact that a writer like Balzac had written the 'nouveau roman' of 1830. However, it still remains true that the nouveaux romanciers have been prepared to see themselves in a literary-historical fashion.

In assessing the relationship between the nouveau roman and postmodernism, it is of course vital to stress that it has played a central role in the whole debate concerning the existence of 'postmodernism' as a literary period. The metafictional techniques associated with these writers have come to be regarded as in many ways synonymous with what constitutes postmodernist fiction. It would not be to overstate the case to comment that the nouveau roman has in many ways dictated the terms of the critical discourse and how it acts as the essential reference point in any definition of postmodern aesthetics. The sustained and systematic polemical assault upon the assumptions and procedures of classic realism vigorously pursued by them could almost be said to represent a manifesto of postmodern aims and aspirations; while the emphatic self-reflexivity of their novels is frequently cited as paradigmatic of radical textuality. However, the relationship between the nouveau roman and postmodernity is considerably more problematic than most accounts suggest. It has been claimed, for example, that it may be

more accurately described as 'modernist' or 'late modernist' when compared with the apparently more subversive avant-garde experimentalism of Tel Quel, whose status as the natural successors of the revolution inaugurated by Finnegans Wake would be difficult to refute. The work of writers conspicuously unaligned with the nouveau roman (or Tel Quel) as Georges Perec and Michel Tournier has been deemed to merit the attention of those seeking to map the postmodern: in an essay in Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas, A. Kibedi Vega considers Perec's La vie mode d'emploi (1978) and Tournier's Le Roi des Aulnes (1970) as 'postmodern masterpiece[s]',²². And it is not by any means the case that the nouveau roman is considered in France as 'representative' of postmodernism: the term is usually raised in discussion concerning the wider cultural condition. The novelists themselves have been reluctant to embrace the term, which has tended to occur on those occasions when parallels are being drawn in a comparative literature context with writers from other countries: this was particularly evident at the conference on the nouveau roman which was held in New York in 1982 which they attended and which also saw the participation of several leading American postmodernists.²³ Indeed, at this conference, Robbe-Grillet chooses to signal his distance from American postmodernism: referring to Pynchon, Barth Coover and Hawkes, he comments, 'There are American writers currently alive who are very interesting, but about whom I am less enthusiastic'.²⁴ Once again, Robbe-Grillet professes his admiration for Nabokov as an 'American' writer. Few literary movements have exhibited such an abiding preoccupation with establishing antecedents in order to defend and define their textual

practices: as we have seen, this 'self-periodisation' has been a constant feature of the nouveau roman since the 1950s. Literary-historical arguments are deployed as a means both of affirming their radical modernist credentials and of validating and valorizing their transgressive strategies: all of these writers have had recourse to a modernist canon as an integral part of the impetus of literary self-justification.

In attempting to disentangle the various ramifications of this debate, it is essential to consider the view that the nouveau roman is modernist or late modernist, the view that it is postmodernist, and the view that it is more radically subversive than postmodernism.

In support of the proposition that the nouveau roman is modernist or late modernist, evidence from early examples of nouveau roman writing would lead to the conclusion that these texts are ultimately recuperable along formal realist lines. In Chapter One, there was a discussion of the relationship between the nouveau roman and modernism in the specific context of the issue of representation. In common with other works of the modernist period, the early texts systematically questioned the techniques and assumptions of realism; they exhibited a preoccupation with narrative and linguistic experimentation; narrative unreliability was paramount in the sense that these novels present the fragmentation of consciousness; metafictionally, they provide commentaries on reading and writing. However, unlike other modernist works, there was not a privileging of interiority as a 'superior' form of consciousness, nor do we find a

concern with a specifically artistic awareness. Psychological realism may be present to some degree, but only in order to signal a fractured perception. The earlier nouveaux romans are therefore susceptible to many of the reading criteria evolved in response to modernism; however, the nouveau roman's appearance in the late 1950s and 1960s places it from a chronological point of view beyond modernism proper. It becomes 'late modernist' also in the sense that it seeks to extend the boundaries of fiction to a greater degree by promoting in particular self-reflexivity principally by means of mise en abyme.

In considering the proposition that the nouveau roman is postmodernist, it is essential to test out how it satisfies the criteria attached to this term. It has, of course, become fashionable to apply the word 'postmodernism' indiscriminately to a variety of cultural, intellectual and social practices. Several commentators have attempted to provide definitions, yet no single definition has gained widespread currency or acceptance. It is evident that no consensus exists regarding either the parameters of postmodernism or the precise meaning of the term.

However, it is possible to identify broadly two distinct ways in which 'postmodernism' has come to be used: first, to designate either negatively or positively the contemporary cultural condition as a whole in all its complexity; or, second, to describe a specific set of textual characteristics which can be gleaned from an analysis of selected literary, dramatic or cinematographic works. In this second

sense, it has been applied to a style or sensibility manifesting itself in cultural productions as varied as fiction (in the work of, for example, John Barth, Salman Rushdie, Alasdair Gray, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, Gabriel García Márquez, and, of course, the nouveau roman generally), film (e.g. Resnais's Providence, David Lynch's Blue Velvet, the work of Godard or Peter Greenaway), drama (Dennis Potter's series The Singing Detective and Blackeyes) - in short, in any creative endeavour which exhibits some element of self-consciousness and reflexivity. Fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, plurality, metafictionality, heterogeneity, intertextuality, decentring, dislocation, ludism: these are the common features such widely differing aesthetic practices are said to display. In distinguishing between what is or is not 'postmodernist', those works betraying such properties have been labelled as postmodern. However, from common usage it is clear that 'postmodernism' has been adopted by many commentators as synonymous with the contemporary literary 'period' as a whole, in addition to being used as a synonym for avant-garde experimental writing.

From a literary-historical perspective, it is as a periodizing description that the word has gained widespread acceptance. In literary terms, the majority of accounts of the 'development' of postmodernism are couched in historical language: postmodernism is seen both as a continuation of modernism and even, by some, as a rejection of modernism. Frank Kermode preferred the term 'Neo-Modernism'.²⁵ Several of postmodernism's literary historians have asserted that postmodernism differs from modernist aesthetics

principally in its abandonment of subjectivity. The representation of consciousness is alleged to have been forsaken with the emphasis which postmodernism has placed on the fragmentation of subjectivity. The proposition that the self can no longer be considered a unified and stable entity has become almost axiomatic in the light of poststructuralism. Also, in distinction to the allegedly 'elitist' dimension of the so-called 'high' modernism of the first half of the twentieth century, it has frequently been stated that such works have absorbed popular cultural forms to a greater extent. Parody, pastiche, quotation and self-quotation have been considered as characteristic features of postmodern textual practice. Brian McHale argues strongly in favour of the 'change of dominant' thesis and speaks in terms of a 'transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics'.²⁶ This is even applied to individual texts: William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! is claimed to contain evidence of just this transformation within its own boundaries. McHale has examined the relationship between postmodernism and modernism as a 'logical and historical consequence rather than sheer temporal posteriority'.²⁷ Postmodernism is considered to be ontological in the sense that it has abandoned the modernist assumption of the possibility of contact with a reality of some kind: thus postmodernist fiction foregrounds what can be considered 'post-cognitive' questions. McHale charts this 'change of dominant' in so-called transitional works by Samuel Beckett, Carlos Fuentes, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon - and, interestingly, Robbe-Grillet. For Hans Bertens, it is precisely this ontological uncertainty which is central to postmodernism: 'It is the awareness

of the absence of centres, of privileged languages that is [...] the most striking difference with Modernism'.²⁸ Every discussion of postmodernism involves above all the transformation of critic into literary historian. We have seen the extent to which Jean Ricardou has relied on just such a narrative to support his account of the 'modernity' of the nouveau roman in contrast to the 'rétro-roman' of expression and representation.²⁹ Postmodernist 'practitioners' have also relied on a narrative of literary history - as we have seen, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon and Nathalie Sarraute have all at various times attempted to situate themselves in terms of the 'evolution' of the progressive forms of twentieth-century fiction. A similar narrativising impulse can be detected on the part of both John Barth (in 'The Literature of Replenishment',³⁰) and Salman Rushdie (in 'Is Nothing Sacred?',³¹), both of whom are willing to a greater or lesser degree to endorse the term 'postmodernism' itself. All of these writers - in particular the nouveaux romanciers - have had recourse to a narrative of literary history on several occasions when seeking to chart the evolution of avant-garde narrative forms. All accounts of postmodernism, therefore, become narratives in their own right. This may seem paradoxical in view of Jean-François Lyotard's assertion that what principally characterizes postmodernism is in fact the subversion of totalizing metanarratives of any kind.³² It may from this point of view appear curious that commentators and 'practitioners' have not always been sufficiently conscious of the historicizing nature of their attempts to 'map' the postmodern.

The historicizing impulse of these critics and writers must be regarded with some suspicion. It would be in many ways false to the pluralizing nature of postmodernist writing to establish a homogenizing metanarrative of the 'development' of postmodernism as a movement: literary history is a far more problematic area of enquiry than many of these commentators suppose. It should be taken into account that literary history is itself a critical discourse fraught with dangers of various kinds, the principal of which must be the establishment of a canon. It is evident from a great deal of recent theory that a postmodernist pseudo-pantheon is in the process of being constructed, however reluctantly. Again, this too may seem contradictory in the light of the caution concerning the establishment of both the realist and modernist canons. As more than one commentator has observed, the evaluative criteria for deciding upon the admission of a work into this postmodernist canon can be applied 'retrospectively' to almost any literary work from any given 'period'. Thus, Don Quijote, Tristram Shandy, Gargantua - to give only three examples - can all be claimed to contain postmodern features if one decides to apply a grid of interpretation which privileges certain well-defined postmodern criteria. A concern with fictionality and self-consciousness has of course been a feature of the novel since its very inception. If these criteria can indeed be applied to such an array of literary works, it becomes necessary to question the nature of the discourse of literary history itself. Clearly, these qualities and characteristics are not exclusive to contemporary experimental fiction. The danger is that one can very quickly establish a homogenizing description of postmodernist fiction

which is discursively totalizing and totalitarian, as these narratives of the evolution of the nouveau roman so amply demonstrate. As Roland Barthes has warned, a new doxa is always in danger of being constructed. Critics are inevitably caught in a kind of double bind when the analysis of postmodernism takes place: in providing a version of postmodernism which rightly emphasizes plurality, multiplicity and mobility, one is of course valorizing certain critical concepts at the expense of others. As a critical discourse, writing about postmodernism is therefore extremely problematic. It is perhaps not sufficiently recognized the extent to which postmodernism is an effect of reading: there can be no adequate or absolute definition of what constitutes radical textuality. Any discussion of the cultural practice of postmodernism is tied up with the direction of reader response. This should be evident following Barthes's S/Z in which he demonstrates how even the apparently most lisible texts can be shown to contain those inconsistencies and aporia normally considered axiomatic of modern writerly textuality. Postmodernism must be recognized, therefore as a condition of reading.

In History and Value, Frank Kermode confronts this central question of how value is attributed to certain texts and addresses himself to the formation of a canon. His analysis of a passage from Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent shows a concern in this modernist work for the supposedly supreme postmodernist 'value' of fragmentation. Clearly, other characteristics of the postmodern can be demonstrated to exist in a variety of texts from different 'periods', as Umberto

Eco and others have pointed out.³³ Ihab Hassan's schematic 'eleven traits' of postmodernism³⁴ can be found in several texts not confined to the postmodern 'period'. Postmodernism is a construction of reading rather than a self-contained literary period: it is what the literary institution has chosen to call Postmodernism.

The work of Jean-François Lyotard has been crucial in the elaboration of postmodernism as a means of describing the wider cultural and intellectual condition: the contemporary experience is characterized by epistemological and ontological uncertainty. According to Lyotard, the master- and meta-narratives which have sustained Western society and discourse since the Enlightenment can no longer be considered legitimate and authoritative. What is being challenged are the the rationalist and humanist assumptions of our culture. It is of course very much the case that this contestation was initially carried out by the nouveau roman, both in theory and in practice. This has led several commentators to suggest that the plural nature of social discourse is, in a sense, reflected in the aleatory forms of postmodernist writing. It is interesting to note the extent to which several critics have come to rely on a formal realist argument as a means of explaining the connection between postmodern textual practice and what is supposed to characterize the wider cultural condition. Fredric Jameson, for example, proposes an homology between the cultural form of postmodernism and its economic base.³⁵ In these versions, the fragmentation and discontinuity of the contemporary experience of reality is deemed to be reflected in the plural and mobile structures of postmodern writing. Thus, for

Brian McHale and others, epistemological and ontological doubt is conveyed through disjointed formal structures in a work of postmodern fiction. However tempting this view may appear, it is still a totalizing perspective in that it remains in no small measure predicated on a reflectionist (not to say reductive) description of the complexity of the language of fiction and its relationship to 'reality'. In some ways, this position involves little more than an updating of Erich Auerbach's Mimesis, repackaged to encompass the postmodern episteme.

In the context of the intellectual history of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard's description of 'la condition postmoderne' is relevant in the assessment of the nouveau roman's position in the debate. Lyotard's preoccupation with the radical crisis of 'legitimation' as a consequence of the abandonment of the metanarratives which have supported society can place the nouveau roman in a wider cultural (or epistemic) context. Lyotard's description of how postmodern writing subverts totalizing thought could be argued to support the nouveau roman's account of the ideologically positive nature of its enterprise. A certain cultural critique might argue that the nouveau roman dramatizes this new 'postmodern' condition of knowledge. In his essay, 'Réponse à la question: Qu'est-ce que le postmoderne'³⁶, he claims that Proust is still attached to a conception of unity and identity, whereas Joyce is concerned with the 'imprésentable' in language itself. His writing is therefore 'postmodern' because it refuses to satisfy the demands of nostalgia. Is it then the case that the nouveau roman,

which he does not explicitly mention in this essay, continues in this vein? He provides the following description of the postmodern artist:

Un artiste, un écrivain postmoderne est dans la situation d'un philosophe: le texte qu'il écrit, l'oeuvre qu'il accomplit ne sont pas en principe gouvernés par des règles déjà établies et ils ne peuvent pas être jugés au moyen d'un jugement déterminant, par l'application à ce texte, à cette oeuvre de catégories connues. Ces règles et ces catégories sont ce que l'oeuvre ou le texte recherche. L'artiste et l'écrivain travaillent donc sans règles, et pour établir les règles de ce qui aura été fait. De là que l'oeuvre et le texte aient les propriétés de l'événement, de là aussi qu'ils arrivent toujours trop tard pour leur auteur, ou, ce qui revient au même, que leur mise en oeuvre commence toujours trop tôt.³⁷

Lyotard's valorization of 'événement' in this statement needs to be discussed in relation to the example of the nouveau roman.

It is evident from several accounts of 'postmodernist fiction' that it can be an all-embracing term which can include several types of writing, from 'minimalism' through to the exuberance of 'fabulism' and 'magic realism', and the self-consciousness of metafiction. It is evident that 'postmodernism' as a description of both the current literary period and the wider cultural and social condition is probably irreversible. In this respect, as a critical term it will remain ill-defined and all-pervasive, despite the numerous attempts which will continue to be made to theorize the concept in a more satisfactory way. 'Postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' will continue to be interchangeable concepts. As Ihab Hassan has indicated, 'the question of Postmodernism remains complex and moot'.³⁸ More 'precise' terms - such as Raymond Federman's 'Surfiction' or Jerome Klinkowitz's 'Post-Contemporary Fiction' - have not gained wide

currency. However, it is vital to recognize the role and the contribution of the nouveau roman to the evolving critical debate.

According to Brian McHale's description of postmodernism as that which 'follows from modernism [...] more than it follows after modernism'³⁹, the 'development' of the nouveau roman as part of this framework is integral. Using the Jakobson/ Tynjanov concept of the dominant, McHale attempts to evaluate the changes in the hierarchy of devices through which the postmodernist differs from the modernist. It is McHale's central contention that modernist writing is characterised by epistemological questions, whereas postmodern fiction is dominated by ontological issues. According to this analytical grid, a modernist work will dramatize the problematics of the reliability of knowledge, by such means as the multiplicity of narrative viewpoints or the focalization of the narrative within a fractured consciousness. As we have seen, the early examples of the nouveau roman could be said to correspond to this pattern to a greater or lesser extent. In McHale's words, a 'poetics of the epistemological dominant'⁴⁰ can be said to have been in operation. The postmodern work, however, will foreground 'post-cognitive' problems of being - both in terms of the unity and stability of the self and the ontology of the text itself. This is the 'dominant' of postmodern poetics.

Using Robbe-Grillet as a prop in his analysis of the 'change of dominant' thesis, McHale comments that 'the watershed between modernist and postmodernist poetics [...] coincides rather closely

with the one between the nouveau and the nouveau nouveau roman'.⁴¹ Discussing La Jalousie, he claims that the presence of mise en abyme in the text disrupts to some extent the epistemological hierarchy of this otherwise 'modernist' exploration of limited point of view. The absence of a fixed centre of consciousness represents a 'hemorrhage of modernist poetics'⁴²; but this is not ultimately a 'fatal' one because of the degree to which the text invites the reader to construct a narrative perspective and so recuperate the novel in modernist terms. McHale is then able to invoke Dans le labyrinthe and La Maison de rendez-vous which move on to the ontological dominant by dispensing more radically with the text as representation of consciousness. Regrettably, however, he does not move on to chart the evolution of the other nouveaux romanciers to test out the accuracy of his equation of the transition from modernist to postmodern aesthetics as corresponding to that of the nouveau roman into the nouveau nouveau roman. The 'progressivist' nature of McHale's (and indeed at some stages the nouveau roman's) analytical methodology is belied by the validity of the 'retrospective' application of 'new' criteria to older texts: we have seen the extent to which readings of texts like Un Régicide and Les Géorgiques contest the literary-historical narratives of 'evolution'.

An analysis of Ricardou's theoretical rhetoric, accompanied by readings of the later fiction of Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon, would amply support the proposition that a 'change of dominant' in favour of a postmodern aesthetic had occurred. Recuperative readings grounded in psychological realism could no longer be effected with

confidence. The removal of a centre of consciousness (however fractured) to which the narrative discourse could be attached and the self-conscious preoccupation with both the linguistic/verbal origins of the text and the status of reading and writing of fiction suggested that a new aesthetic had been evolved. At Cerisy, Robbe-Grillet even went so far as to reproach Simon for having 'un certain passé référentialiste'⁴³: 'La fiction mot à mot' may suggest that Simon has responded to such criticisms. As Simon has said of Triptyque:

J'avais le projet de faire un roman irréductible à tout schéma réaliste, c'est-à-dire un roman où les rapports entre les différentes "séries" [...] ne relèveraient pas d'un quelconque enchaînement ou déterminisme d'ordre psychologique.⁴⁴

However, as many of the novelists have themselves pointed out, the presence of transgressive and subversive features could be shown to exist in their earlier works.

While it is undeniable that Robbe-Grillet's early novels are indeed capable of being read as essentially modernist texts whose narrative strategies consist in the representation of a distorted perception of reality: nevertheless, 'retrospectively', they can also be considered to demonstrate reflexivity. The use of mise en abyme and the presence of an element of word-play would seem to align them with the apparently more transgressive works initiated - if the literary history of the nouveau roman is correct - by Dans le labyrinthe. Equally, the existence of alternative and proliferating versions of 'events' of dubious ontological status anticipates the more radical disruptions of narrative syntax carried out in the later novels.

Even La Jalousie, which had become assimilated into the 'great tradition' of the French psychological novel, could be described as an exercise in serial composition, as its author himself would claim: 'un des exemples les plus évidents de ce système de répétitions à variantes. La Jalousie [...] était un roman seriel'.⁴⁵ All of these can be read equally well as examples of the récit lacunaire paradigm in poststructuralist criticism, such is the extent to which they seem to be generated by a gap or an absence:

Quand je repense aux Gommes, au Voyeur, à La Jalousie, ce qui me frappe, c'est une approche croissante de ce qu'est ce vide central de l'oeuvre.⁴⁶

In these earlier works, there are numerous traces of the glissements in narrative structure which are so common in the later productions. Robbe-Grillet's insistence upon the essentially ludic dimension of all his fiction (and cinema) was also a means of escaping what might be termed the prison-house of reflexivity. It was not uncommon to find him distancing himself from Ricardou, even during this conference devoted to his work in 1975, at which he claimed that even his supposedly 'theoretical' utterances over the years should be construed as attempts to maintain plurality and mobility. Ricardou is accused (like Morrisette and others before him) of smoothing over the contradictions and tensions in his novels. It is only by stressing the element of play that the imposition of 'totalitarian' meaning of any kind can be avoided. This emphasis on an aesthetics of textual pleasure provides a convenient way of confronting the adventure of meaning present in Robbe-Grillet's oeuvre as a whole. Of course, it could be argued that ludism is, in its way, another interpretative strategy launched by the novelist: while conceding the

liberating effect of viewing the literary text as an open and democratic discourse, Robbe-Grillet is again allocating a new role to the reader. The novelist's justification of ludism is usually couched in pseudo-political language: all meaning is seen to be 'ideological', therefore playful and experimental writing becomes a means of subverting dominant ideologies. Just as the novelist considered the deconstruction and demythologization of carefully selected cultural stereotypes to be a politically liberating activity (as in Projet pour une révolution à New York), so in the same way he appears to be propagating an idealistic and positivistic view of the literary text which he had been quick to criticize in Sartre's aesthetics.⁴⁷

Claude Simon's Les Géorgiques was considered by several critics as a rejection of the extreme textual materialism of his more recent fiction, as if Simon had finally shaken off the pernicious influence of Jean Ricardou: Stuart Sykes describes it as 'une reconversion totale'.⁴⁸ However, although there does appear to be a return to 'history' (in Simonian terms) and an abandonment of the scriptural narcissism of the 'self-generating' novels he produced in the 1970s, this view also rests on a literary- historicizing version of the development of Simon's fiction. Again, it can be demonstrated that his apparently more mimetic works also exhibit the linguistically self-generating features typical of his later fiction. In La Route des Flandres, for example, there is ample evidence that many of the fictional sequences emerge as a result of an exploration of the properties of certain words: the inherently fertile nature of

language can be shown to have generated the subsequent text, and, through the use of metaphor and metonymy, the associations of both memory and language work together in the production of the narrative. The dispersal of the narrative voice in this and other novels can be claimed to illustrate poststructuralism's preoccupation with the disintegration of subjectivity. Histoire, whilst at one level a transposition of the discontinuity of experience, can at the same time be considered as providing an implicit commentary on the nature of fiction and writing: the text can be said to be formed from a meditation on a collection of postcards which the narrator is sifting through. The process of description triggers off the narrative sequences. Both of these novels contain in their opening pages a narrative sequence which acts as a kind of generating cell for the rest of the text - the process of textual production foregrounded in Leçon de choses. Disturbing further the literary-historicizing account of Simon's writing, Les Géorgiques commences in a similar vein. Thus, the existence of both mimetic and autonomous features in Simon's novels proves that the two are not incompatible, as Ricardou had claimed and which the novelist himself had been willing to endorse for a time.

It is evident that earlier nouveaux romans do contain, although less conspicuously, many of the radical features common to later works. This observation raises the crucial question of precisely what criteria are being used to chart the evolution from a modernist to a postmodernist aesthetic. The example provided by the nouveau roman directly contests any strict application of many of the

versions of this transformation. If it is claimed that a poetics of textual production and reflexivity replaces mimetic strategies, then the early nouveau roman can also be made to conform to this new postmodern aesthetic. Similarly, if subjectivity and interiority are deemed to be essentially 'modernist' characteristics, then it has to be stated that these are also challenged in a number of ways in novels such as Le Voyeur and L'Herbe.

The earliest interventions into the debate surrounding postmodernism emanated from American critics working within the context of the cultural and intellectual politics of the mid-1960s and 1970s. Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sontag begin to focus on the extent to which postmodern art departs from the 'elitism' of high modernism, and defend the positive rupture with traditional aesthetic which this new sensibility implies.⁴⁹ Malcolm Bradbury interprets their conception of postmodernism as a 'new post-humanist consciousness'.⁵⁰ This would certainly be in harmony with the anti-humanism which has characterized Robbe-Grillet's poetics ever since the polemical essays of the 1950s and early 1960s, and which would remain a constant throughout: Robbe-Grillet would continually insist upon the complicity of humanism with the dominant ideology as a consequence of the emphasis on the concept of the unity and uniqueness of man. Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation' defends the hostility towards an outmoded conception of 'meaning' and the eclectic cultural plurality which is particularly advertised by a writer like Robbe-Grillet. Gerald Graff (in Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society) considers self-reflexive, metafictional

postmodernism merely as a continuation of modernism's rejection of realism. In contrast to this view, Richard Wasson, in a seminal essay written in 1969, groups Robbe-Grillet along with John Barth and Thomas Pynchon as being united by a revolt against modernism - especially the modernist emphasis on the 'value' of subjective consciousness.⁵¹ For Wasson, the epistemological nature of modernism has been replaced in postmodernism by an emphasis on contingency. Writing in the influential journal of postmodern aesthetics boundary 2, William Spanos hesitates in including the nouveau roman as part of the evolving postmodern canon because of what he sees as the failure to engage with history.⁵² As Hans Bertens has commented: 'The self-referentiality of language espoused by Barthes and Robbe-Grillet must appear to him as a wilful withdrawal from the world of concrete existence'.⁵³ Ihab Hassan's inclusive literary history of postmodernism does, however, embrace the nouveau roman as meeting the requirements he sets out in his typologies of postmodern features: in particular, the criteria of 'radical indeterminacy' and the heightened awareness of the self-referentiality of language.⁵⁴ David Lodge in The Modes of Modern Writing also includes Robbe-Grillet in his postmodernist pantheon. Definitions of the 'performative' nature of postmodern writing corresponds very closely to Robbe-Grillet's notion of the ludic novel.

It is Hans Bertens's view that postmodern writing asserts the abandonment of subjectivity: 'The postmodern self is no longer a coherent entity that has the power to impose [...] order upon its environment.[...] The radical indeterminacy of Postmodernism has

entered the individual ego and has drastically affected its former (supposed) stability'.⁵⁵ Bertens would incorporate metafictional writing as part of postmodernism. Linda Hutcheon, however, initially hesitates in equating metafiction with 'postmodernism' in the Ricardolian Narcissistic Narrative; however, this uncertainty disappears with the publication of A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988), in which the nouveau roman is to some extent relegated in status as evidence of postmodern textuality because of its extremist emphasis on autoreferentiality: for her, the nouveau roman 'is much more radical in form than any postmodern fiction'.⁵⁶

This view that the nouveau roman is more radically subversive than postmodernism rests primarily on the apparently more autonomous nature of the texts, as a consequence of linguistic play and narrative heterogeneity and discontinuity. The later nouveau roman texts are therefore in many respects 'condemned' by certain theorists of the postmodern because of what is perceived as a failure to engage with history. Such works are represented as being over-preoccupied with narrative and formal experimentation as an end in itself, whereas the textual practices in the 'genuinely' postmodern work present a discursive challenge to the dominant ideology. This reinsertion of the political will be examined in the next chapter.

Whether the nouveau roman is or is not 'postmodernist' is less important than the attention which must be paid to the construction of the reading criteria which have been adduced at various times to enable the reader to gain access to the novels themselves. The

validity of 'period' terms of whatever nature should be recognized as unstable strategic constructs which are themselves subject to constant revision. It can be illustrated how the texts resist the periodizing constructions which are placed upon them. It is in this respect that the nouveau roman has been central to the problematization of literary history as a narrativizing critical discourse.

Notes: Chapter 4

1. In Chapter 1.
2. D. Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing (London, 1977), p.221. For a discussion of postmodernism, see pp. 229 - 39.
3. See, in particular, L. Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative, 2nd ed. (London, 1984); Patricia Waugh, Metafiction (London, 1984), Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction (London, 1987).
4. J. Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman, (Paris, 1973) p. 139.
5. Celia Britton, 'The Nouveau Roman and Tel Quel Marxism', Paragraph, 12, 1, 1989, 65 - 96, p. 65.
6. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui (Paris, 1972), I, p. 122.
7. Ibid., I. p. 206.
8. Ibid., I, p. 123.
9. Ibid., I, p. 122 - 3.
10. Ibid, I, p. 124.
11. See my discussion of this aspect in Chapter 2.
12. Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 416.
13. Ibid., II, p. 288.
14. Ibid., I, p. 402.
15. Ibid, I, p. 404.
16. J. Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman, p. 179.
17. Le Miroir qui revient (Paris, 1984), p. 10.
18. See D. Carroll, The Subject in Question (Chicago, 1982); and C. Britton, Claude Simon. Writing the Visible (Cambridge, 1987).
19. For example, A.C. Pugh, 'Defeat, May 1940: Claude Simon, Marc Bloch and the Writing of Disaster', in I. Higgins (ed.), The Second World War in Literature (Edinburgh, 1986), 59 - 70; and, 'Claude Simon et la route de la référence', Revue des sciences humaines, 220, 1990 - 1, 23 - 45.
20. A. Jefferson, The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction (Cambridge, 1980), p. 165.

21. A. Jefferson, 'Balzac and the nouveau roman: problems of reading', Romance Studies, 2, 1983, 166 - 80.
22. A. Kibedi Varga, 'Narrative and Postmodernity in France', in Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas, (eds) T. D'Haen and H. Bertens (Amsterdam, 1988), 27 - 44, p. 38.
23. L. Oppenheim (ed.), Three Decades of the French New Novel (Urbana and Chicago, 1986).
24. Ibid., p. 64.
25. F. Kermode, Modern Essays (London, 1971), p. 60.
26. B. McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, p. 12.
27. Ibid., p. 5.
28. H. Bertens, 'The Postmodern Weltanschauung and its Relations with Modernism: an introductory survey', in D. Fokkema and H. Bertens, (eds), Approaching Postmodernism (Amsterdam, 1986), 9 - 51, p. 46.
29. J. Ricardou, Nouveaux problemes du roman (Paris, 1978).
30. John Barth, 'The Literature of Replenishment', The Atlantic January 1980, 65 - 71.
31. Salman Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?' (London, 1990).
32. J.-F. Lyotard, La condition postmoderne (Paris, 1979).
33. As Umberto Eco has remarked: 'I have the impression that [the term 'postmodernism'] is applied today to anything the user of the term happens to like', in Postscript to The Name of the Rose (London, 1984), p. 65.
34. Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn (Ohio, 1987).
35. Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', New Left Review, 146, 1984, 53 - 92.
36. J.-F. Lyotard, 'Réponse à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?', Critique, 419, 1982, 357 - 67.
37. Ibid., p. 367.
38. Hassan, I. and Hassan, S. (eds) Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on Modernism (Madison, 1983), p. 25.
39. McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, p. 5.
40. Ibid., p. 10.

41. Ibid., p. 13.
42. Ibid., p. 14.
43. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 31. As Robbe-Grillet went on to say, 'il faut bien croire que Simon accorde aux référents une importance supérieure à celle que font les autres romanciers de cette réunion' (p. 32).
44. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 424.
45. Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, I, p. 410
46. Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie, II, p. 194.
47. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see Chapter 5.
48. S. Sykes, 'Les Géorgiques: une reconversion totale?', Romance Studies, no. 2, 1983, 80 - 9.
49. Leslie Fiedler, 'The New Mutants', Partisan Review, 32, 1965, 505 - 25; Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York, 1966).
50. In Hassan and Hassan, op. cit., p. 323.
51. R. Wasson, 'Notes on a New Sensibility', Partisan Review 36, 1969, 460 - 77; and, 'From Priest to Prometheus: Culture and Criticism in the Postmodern period', Journal of Modern Literature, 3, 1974, 1188 - 1202.
52. W.V. Spanos, 'The Detective and the Boundary: some notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination', boundary 2, 5, 1972, 421 - 57.
53. H. Bertens, in Fokkema and Bertens, op. cit., pp. 21 - 2.
54. Hassan, op.cit.
55. H. Bertens, op. cit., p. 47.
56. L. Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, p. 202.

Chapter Five

**The Subversive Text: Ideology, Postmodernity and
the nouveau roman**

At the earliest stage of the development of the nouveau roman, there was no discernible political impetus to the work produced by these writers. On the contrary, most of the declarations of these novelists were couched in an overtly formalist discourse. The self-periodizing characteristic of the nouveau roman as a central plank in the broader strategy of legitimizing and justifying their endeavours foregrounded the primacy of narrative experimentation as in many respects the sole criterion on which they should be 'judged'. It is clear that they were explicitly attempting to distance themselves as a 'movement' from the emphasis on engagement which had so characterised Sartrean existentialism. The repudiation of the aesthetics of engagement was therefore seen by them as a necessary strategy in affirming their independence as a distinct literary 'movement', despite the oft-repeated claim that they were in no sense setting themselves up as a 'school' of any kind. They were thus able to challenge the hegemony of Sartrean existentialism. They were very keen not to present themselves as in any sense socially, politically and ideologically 'committed'; instead, it was repeatedly insisted upon that their only commitment was to the pursuit of formal experimentation. It was stressed that their writing was not to be considered as the vehicle or cargo of an ideology: there was to be no rhetorical message to be conveyed to the reader. They were preoccupied by questions of form, whereas Sartrean engagement privileged content. This basic position would be maintained;

however, the impact of Ricardou and Tel Quel can be traced in the pronouncements of Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon (especially the former) in the 1970s concerning the implicitly political nature of their writing. During this period, they seemed to accept the concept of a 'radical form' which Jean Ricardou had imported into the nouveau roman debate. The question of the nouveau roman's relationship with to postmodernism invites a reconsideration of the politics of the nouveau roman.

The valorisation of an apparently formalist aesthetic and the overt denial of a political motivation would seem to confirm the nouveau roman's alignment with modernism. Definitions of modernism frequently stress the distrust of the political. It would be fair to argue that the writers who constituted the nominated 'predecessors' and approved ancestry of the nouveau roman were conspicuous for their repudiation of a political aesthetic. It was asserted that they were attempting to revolutionize form at the expense of content. This strategy is particularly noticeable in Robbe-Grillet's polemical essays. The privileging of form over content is essential to the 'modernizing' of the French novel which they felt in literary-historical terms had to occur. Formalism was therefore a necessary arm in the contestation of 'reactionary' aesthetic programmes, particularly that of Sartrean existentialism.

It is significant that engagement is specifically identified as one of the 'notions perimées' in Robbe-Grillet's essay 'Sur quelques notions perimées' to be jettisoned along with the other outmoded

baggage of the traditional novel, such as plot and character. The writer had to be committed to form: 'Au lieu d'être de nature politique, l'engagement c'est, pour l'écrivain, la pleine conscience des problèmes actuels de son propre langage'.¹ Robbe-Grillet tends of course to conflate Sartrean commitment with socialist realism. In the course of this essay, Robbe-Grillet defends the nouveau roman against the charge of formalism. He argues that the form / content distinction cannot in fact be maintained, that the two are in fact indissolubly linked. He attempts to dismiss the negative connotations accruing to the word 'formalism'. At this stage the nouveau roman was 'relatively depoliticized and quiescent', as Celia Britton has argued in a recent article.² As Robbe-Grillet pointed out at the 'Nouveau Roman; hier, aujourd'hui' conference, 'C'est cette conception de l'engagement qui nous a toujours opposés à Sartre'.³ Claude Simon will echo this attack on 'ces "utilitaires" (car c'était déjà le nom qui se donnaient, au XIXe, en Russie, les précurseurs des théories jdanoviennes ou de la "littérature engagée"'.⁴ As Celia Britton has convincingly demonstrated, 'the tendency among nouveaux romanciers to use [socialist realism] interchangeably with the Sartrean concept of "engagement" appears somewhat disingenuous: Sartre becomes identified with a Stalinist view of literature'.⁵ The nouveau roman refused the reductiveness of any suggestion of the instrumentality of language, which the writers deemed to be common to both socialist realism and Sartrean engagement.

However, it is also true that the argument presented in Pour un nouveau roman considers the realist devices of plot, character and

causal and linear narrative as being complicit with the bourgeois ideology of the nineteenth century. Using a (for him) surprisingly 'vulgar Marxist' base / superstructure analysis, Robbe-Grillet regards these forms as an expression and a reflection of that society and ideology. Such forms have become institutionalized and naturalized, therefore the contestation and rejection of these can be considered ultimately a political - or rather, ideological - move. By implication, the superannuated nature of the classic realist novel corresponded to an ideological framework which was itself in disrepute. By subverting these features, the ideological structure of bourgeois society could be impaired. The version which Robbe-Grillet presents of the hegemonic discourses of bourgeois society rests heavily on the role of humanism, hence his distaste for anthropomorphic metaphor.

The suggestion of a 'radical form' was initially demonstrated by Roland Barthes in Le degré zéro de l'écriture (1953), in which he sought to show that realism was the cultural practice of an outmoded ideology. This position was embraced and developed by Tel Quel as a central preoccupation in their mix of radical semiotics, structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis. According to this conception, a formally disruptive écriture is ideologically radicalizing because it challenges conventionalized and naturalizing ways of reading and writing. It problematizes the 'natural' in bourgeois society by subverting the forms through which the dominant ideology is conveyed. Marginal and experimental texts were privileged because of the extent to which their forms resisted the

recuperation of a totalizing social or literary ideology. Hence a radical écriture could be deemed to constitute a politically radicalizing and liberating force. Philippe Sollers has described this aesthetic practice as one in which we find 'l'accent mis sur la pratique immanente du texte, sur la rupture avec les justifications extra-littéraires de la littérature'.⁶ The 'policy' of Tel Quel will involve the 'ressuscitation' of eclectic and esoteric writers, such as Artaud, Bataille, Ponge, Mallarmé and Joyce. This differs from the nouveau roman in the sense that they were considered by Tel Quel to be too closely situated within the tradition of the novel, that their objective was merely narrative experiment within the terms of fiction rather than a more radically disruptive writing. Sollers was hostile to the 'idéologie positiviste du "nouveau roman" qui oscille entre une survivance psychologue ("courant de conscience") et un "descriptionnisme" décorativement structural'.⁷ On the contrary, the Tel Quel group were interested in texts which were more 'oppositional': texts whose very form was said to subvert the dominant ideology. The aim was to valorize the modern text at the expense of traditional literary discourses. The pages of Théorie d'Ensemble - in many respects the manifesto of Tel Quel - echo to the names of Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Marx and Freud. It is common to this volume to claim that the promotion of such an écriture (and theoretical methodology) will undermine the ideological basis of capitalist society. The contestation of a mimetic literature by an anti-representational and textually self-conscious écriture would disrupt the ideological matrices of capitalist society: 'l'écriture est la continuation de la politique par d'autres moyens'.⁸ The

contemporary political climate dominated by the events of May 1968 assisted in the legitimisation of this claim. An equation was made between the dominant ideology and 'literature'. This aesthetic foregrounded the materiality of the signifiant and the practice of writing involved the textual exploitation of this signifiant. Michel Condé, in his account of the history of Tel Quel has spoken of a 'sacralisation du texte'.⁹ A concise statement of this position is offered by Jean-Louis Baudry:

Pour briser la clôture du sens et de la représentation, pour se faire texte, la fiction doit être produite à l'intérieur d'un espace formel qui ait pour fonction de détruire, au fur et à mesure qu'il apparaît, le sens ou chacun voudrait se ressaisir.¹⁰

Jean Ricardou, a member of the Comité de Rédaction of Tel Quel from 1967 until 1971, attempted to import this ideological perspective into the nouveau roman, claiming for it too this ideologically oppositional role which Tel Quel allotted to a marginal écriture.

As Celia Britton has argued, Tel Quel had adapted from Althusser not only the proposition that ideology, instead of being merely the reflection of the economic base, is in fact a relatively autonomous domain; but also the view that a productive literary practice may potentially transform ideology. Althusserian Marxism as applied to literary criticism and theory involves specifically the rejection of reflectionism, i.e. the idea that literature 'reflects' society in some mechanistic fashion. In the Althusserian view, literature generally (as distinct from exclusively 'marginal' works) is defined by its capacity to reveal or rupture from within the 'ways of seeing' proposed by the dominant ideologies. Literature has a relationship

to ideology in the sense that it is able to distance itself from it, permitting us to perceive the nature of that ideology. Ideology is not a reflection of society's material base, but an activity or practice which has its own equally material means and relations of production: it is not reducible to mere economic relationships. By concentrating on a writing practice, Tel Quel were positing that ideology can be distanced from within in their 'marginal' texts. Britton comments that the nouveau roman will distort this position as imported into their debates by Ricardou:

Despite having based their whole theory of "revolutionary" texts on a conception of production which is ultimately founded in Althusser's conception of practice, the Nouveau Roman also make it dependent on a notion of ideology which he rejects in the strongest terms.¹¹

In fact, the nouveau roman will so simplify the initial Althusserian-inspired Tel Quel stance as to 'reinststate an idealist conception of literature as an autonomous domain'.¹² This has remained a central feature in their politically legitimizing strategies and is apparent particularly in Robbe-Grillet's Romanesques.

In promoting this perspective, Jean Ricardou took part in an important debate at the Mutualité in 1964 with Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre and others entitled 'Que peut la littérature?'. The productive activity of creating a text itself, he insisted, served to question ideologies: 'La littérature, c'est ce qui se trouve questionner le monde en le soumettant à l'épreuve du langage'.¹³ According to Ricardou, this had little to do with 'art for art's

sake': 'deux théories me paraissent inacceptables: l'art pour l'art et l'art pour l'homme'.¹⁴ Ricardou seems to be distancing himself here (and the aesthetic position he defends of Tel Quel and the nouveau roman) from the narrowness of a purely formalist approach. In his paper, Ricardou attacks Sartre's emphasis on the utility value of prose in his essay 'Qu'est-ce qu'écrire' which is contained in Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, his widely influential statement of the aesthetic principles of 'la littérature engagée.' Ricardou schematically distinguishes between those writers for whom language is an instrument to convey a pre-established meaning ('le langage est considéré comme le pur véhicule d'une information') and those for whom 'l'essentiel n'est pas hors du langage; l'essentiel, c'est le langage même. Ecrire, pour eux, est non telle volonté de communiquer une information préalable, mais ce projet d'explorer le langage entendu comme espace particulier'.¹⁵ This encounter between the two dominant 'movements' in post-war French writing is extremely instructive in that it so tangibly documents the polemical battle being waged by the advocates of radical textuality and the existentialists from a broadly similar political perspective. It presents a fascinating account of the political bases of differing aesthetic positions. For Ricardou, the 'subject' of the book is its own composition. Ricardou confidently claims that 'la littérature, c'est ce qui se trouve questionner le monde en le soumettant à l'épreuve du langage'.¹⁶

The prologue to Problèmes du nouveau roman is entitled 'Une question nommée littérature' and explores precisely the controversial

question of the value of literature. As he specifies, the nature of the ideologically interrogative text can be described in terms of its removal from conventionalized constructions: 'C'est par son écart essentiel que la littérature interroge le monde, et comme nous le révèle'.¹⁷ In Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (1971), the first chapter is significantly entitled 'La littérature comme critique'. The position of these two chapters in each of these works suggests a need on Ricardou's part for a 'political' justification for the highly formalist analyses which he will go on to perform of various nouveaux romans and 'related' works. The emphasis on the productive role of writing will lead to a defamiliarisation of bourgeois ideology:

Si [...] la littérature nous fait mieux voir le monde, nous le révèle et, d'un mot, en accomplit la critique, c'est dans l'exacte mesure où, loin d'en offrir un substitut, une image, une représentation, elle est capable, en sa textualité, de lui opposer la différence d'un tout autre système d'éléments et rapports.¹⁸

Ricardou endeavours here, and conspicuously at the various Cerisy colloques, to stress that the textual materialist aesthetic was implicitly political in character. At the 'Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui' conference, he gives what is perhaps the most explicit formulation of this perspective:

C'est parce qu'elle n'obéit ni aux directives jdanoviennes du réalisme socialiste, ni aux injonctions sartriennes de la littérature engagée, toutes deux liées au vieux dogme représentatif, que la littérature moderne peut avoir, dans sa spécificité, un rapport actif de critique et non plus d'illustration avec politique et l'idéologie.¹⁹

Ricardou considered it to be axiomatic that representation of any kind was reactionary: it is by work in and on language that literary discourses are subversive of the dominant ideology: 'un travail

textuel qui met en cause les opérations majeures de l'idéologie dominante'.²⁰ By the productive nature of work on language, it was possible for the 'texte moderne' to 'relancer la transformation idéologique'.²¹ Ricardou consistently targeted representation as being synonymous (and in a sense constitutive of) ideology. A poetics of textual production, focused as it is on the demonstration of the transformation of language and the consequent avoidance of representation, will therefore 'unmask' the illusions supporting bourgeois society. Questioned during the Colloque Claude Simon about the extent to which one is condemned to submit to the dominant ideology, Ricardou confidently states that 'il y a, par certains pratiques et celle du texte moderne en est une, une possibilité de travailler à l'intérieur, de manière à la mettre en cause selon une espèce de 'altérité intérieure'.²² Ricardou repeatedly has insisted on the politically liberating quality of the self-reflexive text: 'si le nouveau roman permet de mieux comprendre les mécanismes du texte, ses lecteurs seront mieux à même de comprendre les mécanismes de fabrication des divers discours idéologiques dont ils sont bombardés'.²³

Raymond Jean was a particular enthusiast for this position, developing further a conception of a literary praxis (he talks about a 'praxis transformatrice'²⁴). Thus, Robbe-Grillet's Projet pour une révolution à New York constitutes a 'dévoilement, vraiment subversif [...] des phantasmes, des stéréotypes et des mythes qu'une société produit'.²⁵ Conducting an analysis of Claude Simon's Triptyque, he asserts that:

Il est pourtant possible qu'un tel travail remploie une fonction de ce qu'on pourrait appeler dévoilement des idéologies adverses plus radicales que n'importe quelle intervention d'un autre type dans la mesure où la priorité du faire y relève d'une conscience que je n'hésiterais pas à appeler matérialiste de la littérature et dont le pouvoir de renversement idéologique est justement décisif.²⁶

At the Cerisy colloque in 1971, he had spoken of the 'fonction politique' of the nouveau roman: 'Elle réside à la fois dans le pouvoir qu'ont certains livres de rendre lisibles le contexte idéologique où ils s'inscrivent, la société qui les produit, et dans la force de subversion [...] de leur écriture'.²⁷ A great deal of the discussion at all these Cerisy conferences surrounded precisely this question of ideology and the 'effectiveness' of the nouveau roman in contesting what was repeatedly described as 'une idéologie dominante'. Françoise van Rossum-Guyon also shared the Ricardou/Raymond Jean perspective:

Non seulement le Nouveau Roman ne peut être isolé du contexte culturel dans lequel il s'insère, mais qu'il est, lui-même, l'enjeu d'un conflit. Il s'agit, pour les nouveaux romanciers, non seulement de ne pas être "récupérés" par l'idéologie régnante mais, bel et bien, de la renverser.²⁸

Ricardou gives the following extended description of how such a process of ideological contestation by means of textual materialism will come about:

il y a, par certaines pratiques et celle du texte moderne en est une, une possibilité de travailler à l'intérieur, de manière à la mettre en cause selon une espèce d'altérité intérieure. Ce travail est double: d'une part pratique du texte non conforme aux injonctions de l'idéologie dominante en ce domaine, d'autre part effort théorique de telle sorte que se produise aussi une nouveauté dans la théorie, opposée aux injonctions de l'idéologie en ce domaine.²⁹

Jacques Leenhardt, however, was critical of this formulation, emphasizing the capacity of the dominant ideology to absorb

oppositional viewpoints: 'Je ne pense pas du tout [...] que les conditions de possibilité d'écriture des textes dans notre société aient radicalement changées'³⁰; similarly, Jean-Claude Raillon accuses Ricardou of offering a highly mechanistic view of such a process.³¹

The basic question being addressed here is whether textually generated, self-reflexive texts can indeed be seen to be ideologically subversive. It is important to consider whether Ricardou's formalist analyses of certain nouveaux romans support this contention. It is central to Ricardou's materialist aesthetic that such metafictional texts can be claimed to be politically oppositional. By stressing the 'fonction critique' of these novels, Ricardou is of course attempting to establish the political legitimacy of the nouveau roman in the light of the critical agenda increasingly dictated by Tel Quel. While the opening chapters of Problèmes du nouveau roman, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman and Nouveaux problèmes du roman all contain statements affirming the ideologically 'transforming' power of textual production, Ricardou rarely addresses specifically how such linguistically self-conscious fictions lead to a political critique. By uncovering their linguistic status and by demonstrating how such works resist mimesis, Ricardou takes it as axiomatic that texts of this kind are inherently oppositional if such an approach is adopted. It is very much the case that the political oppositionality of metafictional texts is stated rather than demonstrated in the course of Ricardou's analyses. This in part stems from Ricardou's failure to focus on reading itself

and the ability of the reader to distinguish between different levels of discourse. The accusation, therefore, that his theoretical framework is 'idealist' has a certain justification: 'work on language' is not necessarily going to lead to ideological contestation. Ricardou refuses to countenance the possibility that realist texts may be capable of fracturing bourgeois ideology because he does not consider them to be sufficiently self-conscious.

However, it is certainly the case that throughout the 1970s both Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon appeared to accept the Ricardolian view. This is apparent from the comments they themselves made about their fiction, using the vocabulary of textual production derived in large measure from Ricardou via Tel Quel. Hence Robbe-Grillet is able to claim that his promotion of the 'ludic novel' was a means of subverting meaning, and by extension, the dominant ideology:

Notre parole ludique n'est pas faite pour nous protéger, pour nous mettre à l'abri du monde, mais au contraire pour nous mettre en question nous-mêmes et ce monde, et par conséquent, le transformer.³²

By focusing on the play of the text, a unitary and totalizing reading was unable to be constructed. Claude Simon comments that 'un écrivain n'est véritablement "engagé" que si son travail participe à et de l'incessante transformation de la société dans laquelle il vit, c'est-à-dire si par sa façon d'écrire il s'inscrit dans la modernité'.³³ Simon clearly views writing as being implicitly subversive:

Il est normal que l'écrivain ou l'artiste dont la fonction est de trans-former, se heurte aux forces de l'ordre établi qu'il dérange et qui se défendent partout par les mêmes interdits ou les mêmes censures plus ou moins avouées.³⁴

Thus both Simon and Robbe-Grillet seemed to have endorsed (during the 1970s at least) the Ricardolian/Tel Quel proposition that the transformation of language and text can perforate the ruling ideology in a politically disruptive way. There is little evidence, however, that this view was shared by Nathalie Sarraute or Michel Butor.

It is clear, however, from comments made at the colloque devoted to his work, that Robbe-Grillet had become increasingly dissatisfied with the textual materialist aesthetic adumbrated by Ricardou, claiming that the imposition of any theoretical framework represented a form of ideological terrorism in itself. At one point he accuses Ricardou of 'impérialisme'.³⁵ Unlike Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet has insisted upon the fact that he is not 'outside' or 'above' ideology (as he claims Ricardou and Sollers have placed themselves); but rather deeply implicated in it:

Je me considère comme un fragment de cette masse idéologique de la société à laquelle j'appartiens [...] Vous pensiez travailler à l'extérieur de l'idéologie, alors que, personnellement, j'espère seulement être dans les marges.³⁶

He criticizes Ricardou and Sollers for exhibiting 'une espèce d'angélisme, comme si la révolution était déjà faite, comme s'il était possible de se placer tout à coup à l'extérieur de l'idéologie'.³⁷ Robbe-Grillet had criticized Ricardou for having used the adjective 'dominant' to qualify ideology.³⁸ In fact, he agrees with Frederic Grover about the difficulties inherent in the notion of being able to 'escape' ideology:

Je précise [...] que, personnellement, je suis à l'intérieur de l'idéologie "dominante" et que c'est à l'intérieur de cette idéologie que je travaille. Il me semble plus intéressant de la pervertir de l'intérieur.³⁹

Robbe-Grillet's (and Simon's) departure is further underlined by comments made at the New York conference in 1982. It is also clear from comments he makes in Le Miroir qui revient that he was attempting to distance himself from Ricardolian poetics and domination. It is interesting to note that both Claude Simon's and Robbe-Grillet's rejection of the Ricardolian position is couched precisely in ideological terms: theory itself could represent a form of intellectual imprisonment. It is significant that Ricardolian textual materialism will be considered by them as a hostile form of ideology in itself. Robbe-Grillet regards 'ideology' as an ever-present danger whenever a 'fixed' system of any kind (political, theoretical, aesthetic) is consecrated: 'je sente le poids de cette idéologie à New York et à Moscou'.⁴⁰ Robbe-Grillet in particular reveals that theory (including his own) forms part of this ideological terrorism: 'les textes théoriques sont plus ancrés dans l'idéologie, à partir du moment où ils reprennent toutes les formes de discours'.⁴¹ They wished to reassert the liberating feature of their writing. Claude Simon's Discours de Stockholm, delivered on receipt of the Nobel Prize, while continuing to underline his distaste for socialist realism and Sartrean engagement (another illustration of his equation of the two in terms of the 'instrumentality' implicit in their view of prose - utilitarian, in Simon's terms) reiterates to some extent the revolutionary potential of the textual materialist aesthetic:

on pourrait peut-être concevoir un engagement de l'écriture qui, chaque fois qu'elle change un tant soit peu le rapport que par son langage l'homme entretient avec le monde, contribue dans sa modeste mesure à changer celui-ci.⁴²

In this speech, Simon has at various times recourse to the work of the Russian Formalists.⁴³ What is interesting is to note the extent to which Simon's reading of the theoretical formulations of the Russian Formalists joins in many respects the ideologically positive (in the Brechtian/Bakhtinian senses) perspective adduced by Tony Bennett in Formalism and Marxism. According to this view, formalism can take on a 'subversive' role by laying bare the textual and ideological 'natural'.⁴⁴ The defamiliarizing of the world through the language of writing can be seen as an ideologically disruptive manoeuvre. In explicitly Simonian terms (in view of his reliance on art to provide metaphors of the aesthetic experience), our perception of the world is 'defamiliarised' when we encounter an adventurous piece of writing. This perceptual disruption can therefore be seen as ideologically disruptive. Admittedly, this position is only modestly sketched out in Discours de Stockholm; however, the theoretical and political implications remain apparent.

A similar manoeuvre can be seen in Robbe-Grillet's account of the 'justifications' of the plethora of sado-erotic imagery and motifs, significantly in the article in Le Nouvel Observateur which is included with copies of Projet pour une révolution à New York, which may suggest a certain sensitivity to the inclusion of such material. In this essay/prière d'insérer/pseudo-preface, he offers the view that by using such stereotypical imagery he is in fact contesting and demythologizing the 'profondeur' of such images, unmasking, as it were, their ideological potential and so liberating the reader. He

again has recourse to the reflectionist correlation between bourgeois society and the form of the novel:

Les sociologues ont identifié [...] cet ordre narratif à l'ordre politique et moral de la société qui l'a mené à son apogée, c'est à dire cette bourgeoisie sûre de ses pouvoirs, qui croyait de bonne foi naturels, éternels et justes.[...] Et cependant la narration traditionnelle semble, elle, avoir conservé intacte sa bonne conscience, feignant d'oublier que Flaubert déjà mettait en doute sa légitimité.

As he goes on to say, his 'thèmes générateurs' have been taken from 'le matériau mythologique qui m'environne'. He insists that it is by playing with 'une multitude de signes' that alienation can best be resisted. As he concludes in political terms:

Après la faillite de l'ordre divin (de la société bourgeoise) et, à sa suite, de l'ordre rationaliste (du socialisme bureaucratique), il faut pourtant comprendre que seules des organisations ludiques demeurent désormais possibles.

However, Robbe-Grillet's stress on his individual implication in such imagery in his two works of autobiography may retrospectively cast doubt on the legitimizing strategy adumbrated in the original article, and so undermining to some extent his claims to ideological defamiliarisation and the potential for liberation from imprisoning ideologies. His insistence that he is merely uncovering the langue of contemporary society needs to be examined. Robbe-Grillet insists on the fact that his 'generators' are profoundly contaminated by ideology:

Pour reprendre la célèbre opposition de Saussure, je ne travaille pas sur la langue [...] mais sur la parole d'une société (ce discours qui me tient le monde où je vis).⁴⁵

He goes on to refer to 'ce travail de déconstruction sur des éléments découpés dans le code, désignés comme mythologiques, datés, situés, non-naturels'.⁴⁶ It is by making them speak that he is exercising

his freedom ('les parler c'est-à-dire d'exercer sur eux le pouvoir de ma liberté'⁴⁷). In the introduction to his film Glissements progressifs du plaisir, using once again the Saussurean langue/parole distinction, he comments: 'C'est la parole d'une société qui a été découpée en morceaux afin de la faire rétrograder à l'état de langue. Et c'est cette langue seconde qui va servir de réservoir à matériaux pour produire une parole nouvelle, une structure non réconciliée, ma propre parole'.⁴⁸

Robbe-Grillet has insisted that his incorporation of the imagery of contemporary eroticism was in order to reveal the very 'flatness' and clichéd nature of such images.

Désignées en pleine lumière comme stéréotypes, ces images ne fonctionneront plus comme des pièges du moment qu'elles seront reprises par un discours vivant, qui reste le seul espace de ma liberté.⁴⁹

More importantly, he also claimed to have selected this 'langue' because of the very lack of 'profondeur' inherent in such a discourse, just as at an earlier stage in his career he had condemned the humanistic connotations of anthropomorphic metaphor. The text could therefore be 'generated' by the ludic play of repetition and combination of a defined set of 'elements' drawn from this area of discourse. The incorporation and parodic quotation of 'mass media' texts - such as detective stories, cinema posters, pornographic representations in advertising etc - could be said to be typical postmodern practice. The version provided by Robbe-Grillet is that by foregrounding such images he was liberating the reader from their otherwise negative connotations: 'Notre parole ludique n'est pas

faite pour nous protéger [...] mais au contraire pour mettre en question nous-mêmes et ce monde, et par conséquent le transformer'.

⁵⁰ This position constitutes a departure from the emphasis on formalism which had previously characterised his justificatory arguments.

Robbe-Grillet's ideologically-motivated argument is clearly a legitimizing attempt to justify his obsession with a content which could be criticized on account of its politically unsound repercussions. His work was frequently the object of attacks from feminist critics, many of whom argued that his work merely perpetuated male-oriented stereotypes despite the ideological disclaimers to the contrary. As Susan Suleiman has argued with specific reference to Projet pour une révolution a New York:

Far from deconstructing male fantasies of omnipotence and total control over passive female bodies, Projet repeats them with astonishing fidelity.[...] Whatever else Projet may be, it is definitely a man's book.⁵¹

In Le Miroir qui revient, he refers to feminists as 'nos amazones à oeillières' (p. 209), and condemns the extent to which feminism has become, in his view, ideologically institutionalized. The ultimate crime in Robbe-Grillet's scheme of things is the doxification of theory into 'ideology'.

The fruitful debate in postmodernism concerning the relationship between politics and metafictional textual practice allows a more informed contextualisation of this recurring feature in nouveau roman aesthetics. According to Linda Hutcheon, 'postmodernism is a

phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political'.⁵² When she comments that postmodernism sets out to 'de-naturalize the dominant features of our way of life',⁵³ this definition would seem to confirm and indeed to coincide with the position of what might be termed 'cultural defamiliarisation' as theorised in the above manner by Robbe-Grillet. Robbe-Grillet would probably concur with the proposition that the ironic and parodic appropriation of certain images undertaken in postmodern writing can be construed as a 'de-naturalizing critique'.⁵⁴ Indeed, postmodernism's preoccupation with the 'politics of parody' - as attested by several commentators of postmodernism (negatively and positively) including Hutcheon, Bertens, Eagleton and Jameson - fits very neatly with the legitimizing ludic recuperation enacted by Robbe-Grillet.

Robbe-Grillet would presumably wish to argue that parody (as part of the wider context of 'ludic' writing practices) has the effect of contesting and subverting ideologies by foregrounding the constructed nature of representations. It is also a means of demythologizing both 'content' (or le sens in Robbe-Grillet's vocabulary) and the position of the writer as a unique consciousness. This could be said to provide evidence of the nouveau roman's (or at least Robbe-Grillet's) alignment with the aesthetics of postmodernism rather than modernism or late modernism. The devaluation of content by the repetition of stereotypical or cliched representations from contemporary 'reality' is an affront to the notion of the writer as a privileged consciousness delivering a unique insight. The focus on

parody has the effect of challenging the 'value' of the content of a work of art by inscribing it within a broader intertextual context. It is central to the aesthetic being elaborated by Robbe-Grillet at this time that this aspect of parody, far from being narrowly 'formalist', is in fact profoundly political and oppositional because of the extent to which it unmasks otherwise 'natural' representations. As Victor Burgin has commented in another cultural historical context, the emphasis on the 'intertextual' nature of the production of meaning suggests that 'we can no longer unproblematically assume that "art" is somehow "outside" of the complex of other representational practices and institutions with which it is contemporary'.⁵⁵ Such an aesthetic runs counter to the emphasis in modernism of artistic autonomy and the apolitical nature of representation.

Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodernism is grounded in the opinion that parody as pastiche is a kind of nostalgic and narcissistic escapism: it is 'a terrible indictment of consumer capitalism itself [...] an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history'.⁵⁶ In his seminal work, Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, his aim is to define a postmodern Zeitgeist (when postmodernism is supposed to be predicated on the lack of a unifying, totalizing identity) and to 'historicize' it in terms of its economic context. The 'degeneration' (as he would see it) of certain postmodern artistic practices into pastiche is politically imprisoning and does not lead to a heightened ideological

consciousness. It could well be argued that the politically negative reaction to postmodernism may be in no small part due to the pre-eminence of the erstwhile formalist nouveau roman on the critical agenda of postmodern, metafictional writing practices. In an earlier article, a review of Jacques Leenhardt's Lecture Politique du roman (a study of Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie), Jameson emphasizes the failure of experimental fiction to contest the dominant ideology:

To insist upon the effortlessness with which the consumer society is able to absorb and co-opt even the negativity of formalistic works like those of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet is not necessarily to suggest that a different type of aesthetic would have some easier situation to face. On the contrary, I would myself tend to go even further and to claim that all forms of art, when taken as objects in themselves, are co-optable.⁵⁷

The political hostility of the Left to postmodernism may in some measure stem from a dislike of the ahistorical, trivializing and narcissistic (in its 'pejorative' meaning) quality of the metafiction produced by the nouveau roman. Jameson, however, has been prepared to argue that it is necessary 'to reject moralizing condemnations of the postmodern and of its essential triviality when juxtaposed against the Utopian "high seriousness" of the great modernisms'.⁵⁸ Certain critics have occasionally been hostile to the metafiction produced by the nouveau roman because of the formalist/aestheticist removal from politics and history. Jameson has praised Claude Simon's novels precisely because the reading processes invited are resistant to commodified mass-culture passivity: 'We have to read these sentences word by word, and that is something already fairly unusual (and painfully unfamiliar) in an information society in which a premium is placed on briefing and instant recognition, so that

sentences are either skimmed or preprepared for rapid assimilation as so many signs.'⁵⁹ Linda Hutcheon has strenuously endeavoured to defend the political potential of postmodern writing against its detractors, according to whom, western capitalist culture is able to absorb , 'naturalize', and indeed neutralize otherwise apparently 'subversive' or politically destabilizing threats to the dominant ideology. Postmodernism is considered to have been 'tainted' by commodification. Thus the allegedly 'radical import' of postmodern writing can have little effect in contesting political and cultural hegemonies. Eagleton seems to praise modernism for at least having escaped and resisted commodification: in his view, 'Post Modernist culture will dissolve its own boundaries and become co-extensive with ordinary commodified life itself'.⁶⁰ This is of course only achieved by avoiding the 'realist' codes of lisibilité in favour of an arguably more 'exclusive' - or even elitist - aesthetic.

However, Jean-François Lyotard considers the hostility towards postmodernism as as reactionary and conservative as a consequence of the implicit subtext of order and unity:

il y a dans les invitations multiformes à suspendre l'expérimentation artistique un même rappel à l'ordre, un désir d'unité, d'identité de sécurité, de popularité [...] Il existe un signe irrécusable de cette commune disposition: c'est que [...] rien n'est plus pressé que de liquider l'héritage des avant-gardes.⁶¹

In defence of the political repercussions of postmodern writing, Hutcheon has insisted on the extent to which such writing deconstructs and demythologizes (in the Barthesian sense), by contesting from within, the cultural representations which otherwise

imprison us in their 'naturalness'. Postmodern writing performs a critique of the commodification of art in western capitalist culture: it incorporates and challenges from within. By challenging internally the dominant ideology, it resists recuperation.

[The postmodern] does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique.⁶²

However, Terry Eagleton has argued that postmodernism's valorization of what may be described as the 'self-ironizing' position is a form of bad faith and is a politically suspect manoeuvre in terms of its alleged 'effectiveness': 'Irony is no escape from the ideological game: on the contrary, as an implicit disrecommendation of large-scale political activity, it plays right into the hands of Whitehall or the White House'.⁶³

It is worth noting, however, that the nouveau roman is not in any way more central to Hutcheon's argument in this respect than the work of other practitioners of what she has termed 'historiographic metafiction'. Hutcheon considers the nouveau roman and indeed Le] Que] as 'late modernist' or as a 'formalist extreme',⁶⁴ because of the preoccupation with a poetics of textual production and auto-referentiality. Indeed, in A Poetics of Postmodernism and The Politics of Postmodernism, the nouveau roman is rarely mentioned in support of the position she maintains, preferring Salman Rushdie, John Fowles, Maxine Hong Kingston and the Latin American 'fabulists' and 'magic realists' amongst others. In Hutcheon's view, the nouveau roman is in fact 'much more radical in form than any postmodern fiction'.⁶⁵ She argues that the nouveau roman is 'idealist' in the

sense that it has marginalized itself because of its 'ultra-formalist' and 'hermetic' nature: 'It assumes that its readers know the conventions of the realist novel, and so goes about subverting them - without the postmodern inscribing of them'.⁶⁶ This is to be seen as distinct from her category of 'historiographic metafiction' which both installs and undermines. However, this is to privilege one area of postmodern writing at the expense of another. Hutcheon analyses the problematic nature of the ideological critique which postmodern writing allegedly invites: she states that postmodernism is self-consciously complicit with power and domination, but it 'acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine'.⁶⁷ According to Hutcheon, such texts are characterized by reflexivity and historicity; but whether and indeed how they both 'inscribe and subvert the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world'⁶⁸ is a claim which needs to be examined.

In fact, Hutcheon and others too readily conflate the nouveau roman and Tel Quel. As Robbe-Grillet has repeatedly stated, although his novels may be 'oppositional', they are not 'ultra-formalist' on account of the presence of some shadow of conventional realist modes which are then systematically subject to contestation. Representation is present in order to be unmasked as complicit. Indeed, Robbe-Grillet would seem to be arguing that in this respect the nouveau roman is more effective in subverting ideology in the sense that the reader's expectations of coherence and stability are

systematically undermined. In specific terms of the debate being conducted about the relationship between postmodernism and ideology, Robbe-Grillet would presumably not subscribe to the 'end of ideology' theory which Eagleton in particular has allotted to postmodernism. On the contrary, his interventions frequently have recourse to a concept of ideology. Of course, it is also very much the case that his version of how his texts can 'puncture' ideology is itself very much a legitimating and rhetorical strategy deployed to defend and validate his writing practices and their aesthetic and political value. His sensitivity to the question of how writing and politics relate to each other indicates his involvement in the debate. He is also responding to the 'charge' that his work is 'ultra-formalist'.

Robbe-Grillet has himself notoriously claimed that writing is never innocent. Therefore the ideologically complicit nature of his enterprise has to be interrogated. Robbe-Grillet would presumably argue that far from promoting fixed representations of women, for example, he is in fact subverting the male-oriented construction of sexuality and eroticism. Objections of this nature have also attached themselves to Claude Simon's fiction in which fetishism is sometimes involved; Celia Britton has conducted a defence of this feature of the Simonian text by stressing that 'what is being represented is not a woman but [...] the construction of male sexuality'.⁶⁹

It is Claude Simon's writing which perhaps more closely approximates to the allegedly typical postmodernist 'mixing' of the

historical and the fictive. Linda Hutcheon has commented that it is this 'mixing' in postmodern writing generally which has provoked a negative reaction from critics: 'The problem seems to reside in its manner, in the self-consciousness of the fictionality, the lack of the familiar pretence of transparency, and the calling into question of the factual grounding of history-writing'.⁷⁰ To this must be added the additional 'mix' of the autobiographical intertexts, which problematizes the otherwise 'natural' representation of self and subjectivity. 'History' becomes a self-consciously narrativizing discourse, which dramatizes and de-naturalizes the representational processes themselves. In a recent article on Simon's relationship to this wider argument on the connection between postmodernism and history, David Carroll has argued that:

Simon's return to history and to the formal experiments that cannot be separated from it [...] highlights certain aspects of a profound crisis of culture which touches the very foundations of literature, history, and politics.⁷¹

Arguments against postmodernism are frequently based on the fact that it is said not to possess an ordered and coherent sense of truth. Robbe-Grillet's ludic novels do not contain a serious 'centre'; his autobiographical works prevent the reader attaining a consistent and univocal 'meaning' because of the slippage from 'fiction' to 'theory' and to 'autobiography'. Claude Simon's works do not disclose historical 'truths' or a consistent ideological position about the fragmentation of the experience of war and revolution. Nathalie Sarraute's Enfance does not engage with the 'truth' of childhood, nor even the stereotypical psychologizing 'versions' of the childhood trauma. In such ways, can the nouveau

roman be said to demonstrate the epistemological uncertainty characteristic of la condition postmoderne.

The contestation of the relationship between writing and history encourages the reader to 'question the processes by which we represent our selves, and our world to ourselves, and to become aware of the means by which we make sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture'.⁷² The example provided by Simon's texts demonstrate the resistance to totalization that is claimed to characterise postmodernism. Such works overtly dispense with teleology and closure, thus laying bare the 'naturalness' of narrative as an ordering process. Such texts foreground epistemological questions by uncovering the discursive situation from which they originate. By fragmenting the causal sequence of narrative, history is revealed as unstable and incapable of epistemological appropriation. Multiple and unreliable perspectives resist any final closure. The past can only be 'known' through its textual traces - paintings, documents, archives - which are themselves unreliable. Thus these representations of the past are shown to be discursive and not 'natural' or unproblematically 'authentic'.

According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern writing is 'resolutely historical, and inescapably political'.⁷³ It becomes a means by which the dominant ideology can be resisted. Larry McCaffrey sees textual self-consciousness as an attempt to 'provoke readers to critically examine all cultural codes and established patterns of

thought'.⁷⁴ This is very much the defence of metafiction carried out by Patricia Waugh in Metafiction. Arguing in a similar vein to that of Terry Eagleton, however, Toril Moi criticizes Julia Kristeva's (Tel Quelian) confidence in the political importance of avant-garde movements⁷⁵: while advocating a radical mode of signification, Tel Quel's politics should ultimately be considered utopian as little attempt was made to describe how avant-garde writing would have an 'enlightening' effect on the surrounding culture and ideology which had so successfully marginalized such texts. As Celia Britton has usefully commented, in her account of the relationship between the nouveau roman and Tel Quel Marxism: 'The specificity of the central question [...] how, concretely, does textual production subvert the dominant ideology? - is dissolved into a series of general statements about the attack on representation'.⁷⁶

According to Ann Jefferson, the publication of Robbe-Grillet's two volumes of autobiography invite a thorough-going reconsideration of the political nature of his enterprise. It is her conviction that 'in all Robbe-Grillet's thinking is the belief that there are positions outside of ideology and outside of politics which the individual and the work of art [...] could ultimately hope to occupy, or, more precisely, to recover.'⁷⁷ Robbe-Grillet's politics are adjudged to be in many instances anarchist in character. She argues that Robbe-Grillet's valorization of the ludic novel by incorporating ideological material is part of a generally 'disengaging, de-politicizing, de-ideologizing strategy'.⁷⁸ Her basic contention is that Robbe-Grillet throughout his career has in fact remained wedded

to a concept of the freedom of the individual, and above all, to a notion of the artist as someone who is free of ideological contamination and complicity. Jefferson suggests that Robbe-Grillet's language in criticizing all ideology is in many ways reminiscent of the discourse of the political right, with whose ideology it thus enters into a relationship of complicity. What perhaps makes this analysis deficient (at least in so far as its tentative conclusion is concerned) is that it presupposes a greater degree of consistency surrounding how the word 'ideology' is being used by Robbe-Grillet than may in fact be reasonably demanded. As Celia Britton concludes: 'the nouveaux romanciers are, after all, novelists rather than theorists - or, better, novelists whose theoretical work is most productive when it remains implicit in their fictional practice.'⁷⁹ In view of the fact that a critic like Terry Eagleton has identified broadly sixteen definitions in circulation⁸⁰, this should lead to some caution. However, it is important to clarify what Robbe-Grillet himself means by the term when we attempt to assess the manner in which his work has political overtones or repercussions.

It is nevertheless extremely valuable to re-examine the question of ideological content. It is very much the case that nouveau roman criticism has far too often been made to follow an agenda laid down by the nouveaux romanciers themselves. There has possibly been too much emphasis on textual practices, as this was the 'favoured' approach for so long. Perhaps what is now invited is a reconsideration of the reception aesthetics of the nouveau roman: the

political readings which have been proposed were themselves part of a wider cultural debate about the relationship between writing and politics. We are once again invited to examine the position of the nouveau roman within a perceived cultural 'crisis' arising from an epistemological fracture.

Notes: Chapter 5

1. Pour un nouveau roman, p. 39.
2. Celia Britton, 'The Nouveau Roman and Tel Quel Marxism', Paragraph, 12, 1, 1989, 65 - 96, p. 66.
3. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui (Paris, 1972), II, p. 345.
4. Nouveau roman: hier, auourd'hui, II, p. 83.
5. C. Britton, art. cit., p. 68.
6. Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble (Paris, 1968), p. 392.
7. Ibid., p. 392.
8. Ibid., p. 78.
9. Michel Condé, ' Tel Quel et la littérature', Littérature, 44, 1981, 21 - 32, p. 28.
10. Théorie d'Ensemble, p. 142.
11. C. Britton, art. cit., p. 84.
12. C. Britton, art. cit., p. 92
13. Que peut la littérature?, ouvrage collectif (Paris, 1964), p. 58.
14. Ibid., p. 57.
15. Ibid., p. 52.
16. Ibid., p. 58.
17. J. Ricardou, Problèmes du nouveau roman (Paris, 1967), pp. 12-13.
18. J. Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, 1971).
19. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 381.
20. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie (Paris, 1975), p. 431.
21. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 147.
22. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p.61.
23. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 381.
24. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 248.

25. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 364.
26. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 248.
27. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 367.
28. Ibid., p. 405.
29. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. p. 61.
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32. Nouveau roman: hier, aujourd'hui, I, p. 97.
33. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 413.
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Chapter Six

Autobiography and Postmodern Textuality

The departure of the nouveau roman from the strictures of the Ricardolian textual materialist aesthetic can be said to be signalled most conspicuously by the autobiographical texts produced principally during the 1980s. Nathalie Sarraute's Enfance was published in 1983, and Robbe-Grillet's Le Miroir qui revient in 1984. Claude Simon's Les Géorgiques, published in 1981, included sections of a personally referential nature which the author seemed less inclined to disguise as 'fiction', thus forcing commentators to reassess the existence of 'subjective' elements in his previous works and so placing on the theoretical agenda of the nouveau roman questions of the relationship between author and text which would have been unthinkable ten years before under Ricardou's hegemony. Nathalie Sarraute's development was not considered quite so surprising in view of her continued reluctance to align herself with Ricardou since the Cerisy conference in 1971: she may already have been considered 'reactionary' in comparison to Robbe-Grillet's and Simon's enthusiastic endorsement of the Ricardolian programme. However, this factor did not lessen the impact which the work's appearance would provoke. The enormous critical and popular success of Marguerite Duras's L'Amant (1984) must also be considered in this context, despite of course Duras's 'excentric', or non-canonical, status in the nouveau roman. Although Philippe Sollers belonged unequivocally to the Tel Quel group, the success of his autobiographical works in the late 1980s (such as Femmes, Portrait du joueur and Le Coeur absolu) - admittedly at the

point at which Tel Quel's influence and cohesion had all but evaporated (the review was dissolved in 1983) - also confirmed what seemed to have emerged as a new and exciting trend amongst avant-garde writers. However, it was the publication of Robbe-Grillet's text which suggested the degree to which the nouveaux romanciers had shifted their ground and were still willing to embrace new forms of literary experimentation. Postmodern textuality could be said to involve a more radical, liberating departure from 'fiction' to a wider incorporation and mixing of other forms of écriture.

Robbe-Grillet's Romanesques: Hierarchies of Reading

Robbe-Grillet's Le Miroir qui revient in fact provocatively displays his departure from textual materialism, explicitly inviting and anticipating Ricardou's theoretical disapproval for such an enterprise. His comment at the beginning of the second section of the book: 'Je n'ai jamais parlé d'autre chose que de moi' (p. 10)¹, represents a deliberate attempt to shift the critical ground, disrupting and subverting what had become in his eyes a dangerously all-pervasive theoretical orthodoxy. The axiomatic post-structuralist emphasis on the 'death of the author' had become ossified into an 'ideology' - in the Robbe-Grilletian sense, a fixed and totalitarian structure of signification, which prevented the plural and mobile text (and indeed writer) from operating freely. Whether of course the reader is allowed the same privilege is another question, such is the extent to which 'sanctioned' readings have always played a crucial part in what might be termed the internal

reception aesthetics of his fiction. Robbe-Grillet goes on to say:

Chacun sait désormais que la notion d'auteur appartient au discours réactionnaire - celui de l'individu, de la propriété privée, du profit - et que le travail du scripteur est au contraire anonyme: simple jeu combinatoire qui pourrait à la limite être confié à une machine, tant il semble programmable, l'intention humaine qui en constitue le projet se trouvant à son tour dépersonnalisée

(pp. 10 - 11)

Robbe-Grillet is here reiterating precisely the basic tenets and articles of faith of the textual materialist aesthetic as set out by Ricardou: the references to 'le travail du scripteur' and the 'jeu combinatoire' make this apparent. He admits that he has himself in the past 'beaucoup encouragé ces rassurantes niaiseries' (p. 11), but now wishes to distance himself from what he has come to consider their pernicious ideologically imprisoning grip. Such a theoretical framework of 'naiveties' have lost 'ce qu'elles pouvaient avoir de scandeleux, de corrosif, donc de révolutionnaire, pour se ranger dorénavant parmi les idées reçues' (p. 11). His argument is that the formalist aesthetic has become bureaucratic and dogmatic, thus serving to support 'l'édifice de l'ordre établi' (p. 12). He makes it clear that he now wishes to jettison the Ricardolian programme as an outmoded theoretical phase, just as he had accepted then rejected chosisme and subjectivism. He dismisses his so-called theoretical statements as 'diverses banalités oiseuses' (p. 12). In his self-appointed role as an 'ideological terrorist' (a role which was already being sketched out at the Cerisy conference devoted to his work in 1975), he states at the end of this section that his aim in publishing this work is to 'tout remettre en cause':

s'interroger à nouveau sur le rôle ambigu que jouent, dans le récit moderne, la représentation du monde et

l'expression d'une personne, qui est à la fois un corps,
une projection intentionnelle et un inconscient. (p.12)

This unequivocal reinsertion of questions of representation and expression ostentatiously confronts the very foundations of the Ricardolian programme. Robbe-Grillet makes it clear, however, that he is not going to be engaged on the traditional autobiographical paths of revelation, confession and explanation - as he insists: 'c'est encore dans une fiction que je me hasarde ici' (p. 13). By stressing the fictional dimension of the text, moreover, Robbe-Grillet is clearly seeking to dissuade the reader from using the textual 'evidence' of an autobiography to perform authorially sanctioned biographical readings of his previous works: this would of course be an equally recuperative strategy. As he states: 'La vérité [...] n'a jamais servi qu'à l'oppression' (p. 65). Thus the autobiographical nature of the enterprise is problematized from the outset.

Le Miroir qui revient does indeed defy the expectations which the reader brings to autobiography. Heterogeneous autobiographical fragments and 'theoretical' comments on his novels and films are interspersed with a number of sequences which seem overtly 'fictional' concerning a character called Henri de Corinthe. There are constant references to the 'present' of writing: the time and location of the text's composition frequently interrupt the narration in conjunction with textual revision and rereading of previous passages. For example, following one particularly evocative passage concerning his enjoyment of winter and autumn twilight, he interjects:

Pourquoi raconter ainsi longuement ces petites anecdotes plus ou moins vaines? Si elles m'apparaissent un tant soit peu significatives, je me reproche aussitôt de les avoir choisies (arrangées, confectionnées peut-être précisément pour signifier. Si au contraire ce ne sont que des fragments perdus, à la dérive pour lesquels je serais moi-même à la recherche d'un sens possible, quelle raison a pu me faire isoler seulement ceux-là, parmi les centaines, les milliers qui se présentent en désordre? (p. 56)

Robbe-Grillet is thus self-consciously wrestling with the contradiction in autobiography between the flux of experience and memory and the formal organization of these into a 'signifying' text. He refers to the inevitability of the presence in the structure of a text of 'l'idée de hiérarchie et de classement'(p. 57), thus signalling his awareness of the distortion and falsification of existence which an autobiography involves. His own text is self-consciously fragmentary. As he comments towards the end: 'Je renoue inlassablement des fils interrompus sur une tapisserie qui en même temps se défait, si bien qu'on n'en voit plus guère le dessin' (p. 219).

By structuring the work in this way, the reader is prevented from pursuing conventional readings of the text along the lines to which we are conditioned by autobiographical writing. More importantly, perhaps, the status of the text remains unstable: theoretical comments are thus prevented from ossifying into 'ideology'; 'fiction' and 'truth' are deliberately confused; the representation of the 'self' is fragmentary.

The role of the reader is in fact delineated by Robbe-Grillet from the beginning: the opening pages of the work, while not a générique

in the classic Ricardolian fashion, nevertheless constitute the ground rules permitting the text to be read. The explicit warning to the reader is contained in the words: 'Il ne faudrait [...] attendre de ces pages quelque explication définitive que ce soit, ni seulement véridique [...] concernant mes travaux écrits ou filmés' (p. 13). While such a comment may be considered unconventional in terms of traditional autobiography (although even this may be debateable in twentieth-century autobiographical writing), it is unlikely that the average Robbe-Grillet/nouveau roman reader would approach the text with such expectations in any case. Indeed, from the remarks made in this opening section concerning the intended reversal of the Ricardolian hegemony (although Ricardou is not mentioned by name until p. 33 when Robbe-Grillet comments on the existence of a 'real' referent for a door in Projet pour une révolution à New York) and the insertion of the previously forbidden question of expression, it is clear that Robbe-Grillet is addressing his own reading community, anticipating their likely prejudices against a literature of personal expression. While the reading of the text cannot meet the criteria outlined by Philippe Lejeune in Le Pacte autobiographique and elsewhere, nevertheless Robbe-Grillet seems to be encouraging the reader to utilize an 'alternative' method of approaching the work. In so far as this 'method' can in any way be systematized, then it must involve the sense of the foregrounding of the text as discourse.

After some initial information about the background to the text, the work in fact begins by raising the question of the identity, not of the author himself (as one would expect from an autobiography), but

of the mysterious Henri de Corinthe - throughout the book a Swann-like family friend. The frailty of memory is also intimated in these opening paragraphs which has the function of underscoring the uncertainties and ambiguities of the text as a whole. It is evident that the narrative of the pursuit of Henri de Corinthe is intended to be seen as a metaphor for the impossibility of the reconstruction of truth in general, so reasserting the discontinuity of existence and the fragility of attempts to impose coherence on existence, and the consequences which this has on narrative. The reference to the 'récits décousus' (p. 8) surrounding Henri in his family will be immediately recognized as a self-conscious statement on the narrative structure of the text as a whole: the specularity denoted explicitly in the title of the work is thus maintained. Hence, from the outset, the Henri de Corinthe narrative has all the trappings of a mise en abyme. For example, his activities at the end of the Second World War are said to be open to 'multiples interprétations' (p. 70). Robbe-Grillet's attempt to mix 'fiction' with 'autobiographical fact' can be seen in his statement that Corinthe (a 'fictional' character despite the vraisemblance of the presentation of his narrative) was the 'basis' for the Edouard Manneret figure in his novel La Maison de rendez-vous. The account of a customs officer discovering Corinthe, his horse and a mirror leads to speculations about the links between these three elements:

Restait enfin, toutefois, une possibilité encore plus troublante que ces trois éléments - le cheval, le miroir et le chevalier - se soient trouvés rassemblés [...] par un pur hasard, c'est-à-dire sans qu'il existe le moindre lien entre eux, ni de causalité ni de possession. (p. 97)

Such a comment, although appearing during a 'fictional' sequence, invites the reader to establish parallels with the text as a whole. It functions self-reflexively as a commentary on the likely attempts made to link the different layers of the work. In fact this episode is described as the 'miroir qui revient' episode itself (p. 99), further establishing it in the reader's mind as a crucial mise en abyme. Many of the details given are reminiscent of the sado-sexual crimes committed in his novels and films - Le Voyeur in particular also shares the same Breton landscape. The description of Corinthe's delirious narration is evocative of the narrative structures in Robbe-Grillet's own novels:

Une des particularités de son récit, qui en rendait le déroulement quasiment impossible à suivre, était, en outre, sa fragmentation excessive, ses contradictions, ses manques et ses redites, le fait qu'il y mélangeait constamment les temps du passé avec de brusques passages au présent.
(p. 98)

It would be difficult to find a more accurate statement of the devices employed by Robbe-Grillet in his own novels. The recurrence throughout the text of the Corinthe narrative is compared intertextually by Robbe-Grillet himself to the passages concerning the Marquis de Rollebon as drafted by Roquentin in Sartre's La Nausée. Indeed, the sequence from pages 172 to 176 evoke stylistically this feature of Sartre's novel. The reader is invited to make a parallel between Henri de Corinthe and the Marquis de Rollebon, whose activities Roquentin was of course attempting (unsuccessfully) to reconstruct.

The first 'personal' sequence concerns a childhood memory of the sea as a source of nightmare. Robbe-Grillet's readers will immediately recognize the landscapes of Un Régicide and Le Voyeur, although these novels are not mentioned at this stage. Nevertheless, the following section opens with the words: 'J'ai l'impression d'avoir raconté tout cela, depuis longtemps dans mes livres comme dans mes films' (p. 16), while he claims that the representation of these scenes had not been 'le but de l'écriture' (p. 16). Citing Stendhal's Souvenirs d'égotisme, he admits to enjoying 'la forme traditionnelle de l'autobiographie' (p. 16), 'confirming' that his novels were written 'pour exorciser ces fantômes'. He explicitly states that writing is to a great extent a form of psychoanalytical catharsis: 'j'écris pour détruire, en les décrivant avec précision, des monstres nocturnes qui menacent d'envahir ma vie éveillée' (p. 17). However, he is quick to underline his belief that literature is 'la poursuite d'une représentation impossible' (p. 18). Reverting to a Ricardolian vocabulary, such 'fables' are 'opérateurs' and 'matériau' (p. 18) to be transformed. He insists that this is not appropriate in the autobiographical enterprise on which he is presently engaged: this involves him 'feignant de croire que le langage est compétent (ce qui reviendrait à dire qu'il est libre)' (p. 18) - a position which he knows to be highly problematic and the very reverse of his practice in his fiction. Thus, the text will proceed as a self-conscious autobiography: the evocation of childhood and adolescent memories will be deconstructed by reflections on the problematic nature of the autobiographical mode as a 'natural' process in the construction of selfhood. By interrupting the

autobiographical fragments with such commentary, the text thus asserts its status as a discourse.

Despite the admonitions given to the reader wishing to establish intertextual parallels between the autobiographical sequences and his books, Robbe-Grillet in fact cannot resist indulging in this activity - however self-conscious and ironically ideologically unsound it is made to appear. For example, describing his first sight of German soldiers, he comments 'On peut les retrouver dans le Labyrinthe' (p. 35). He suggests that the Boris character may have been based on his grand-father. He describes in detail how the origins of the content of his first novel Un Régicide resides in his obsession with the sea and with the experience of fear associated with it. The factory in which Boris works is based on an actual German factory where the author himself was deported to work during the Second World War, and which gave him a very tangible sense of alienation: 'l'étrangeté fondamentale de ma propre relation au monde, plus grave sans doute que le simple constat d'une expatriation' (p. 148). The interest in the concept of regicide stemmed, he indicates, from a sense of the importance of affirming one's individuality. He also relates the beginnings of his novel-writing to the reappearance of his sexual interest in young girls. He even claims that a Rudyard Kipling short story may have influenced his first novel. The 'traits grossiers' of Franck in La Jalousie are inspired by a former work-colleague. The description provided of the prisoner-of-war camps dwells largely on the extent to which their features were identical, thus immediately summoning the anonymous streets and houses in the Kafkaesque world of

Dans le labyrinthe. If part of the 'pacte autobiographique' which Robbe-Grillet wishes to contest is the facile and naive enterprise of seeking the sources and origins of literary works in personal experience, he himself fails to remain consistent to this aim. This may indeed be a deliberate ploy on his part to unsettle the reader in a whole number of ways. Of course, Robbe-Grillet would probably wish to argue that this is itself a ludic strategy designed to enhance the mobile and plural nature of the text, thus preventing ideological terrorism or recuperation from occurring.

Robbe-Grillet's decision to group his autobiographies under the label Romanesques conspicuously discourages these works being read as conventional autobiographies. It is important to take into account the lack of an unequivocal generic classification. These works do not carry the subtitles of either 'roman' or 'autobiographie'. The classification romanesque does suggest a text which may have more in common with fiction, but may contain other elements. The term may even carry certain baroque connotations: a work whose boundaries spiral out in shifting patterns. The work's contours are left deliberately fluid.

While contravening many of the conventions of autobiography, in Le Miroir qui revient Robbe-Grillet nevertheless in other respects is not averse to the traditional autobiographer's reliance on establishing his sincerity as a kind of guarantee of the discourse he sets in train. As Lejeune and others have pointed out, this strategy usually has the function of authenticating and legitimizing the

enterprise which is being undertaken.² Robbe-Grillet's account of his family's extreme right-wing political sympathies constitutes one of the major autobiographical 'revelations' of the work. It is certainly the case that this dimension of the text would be provocative from the point of view of the reading community of a generally leftist orientation who 'receive' the work. Thus Robbe-Grillet is able again to unsettle the likely prejudices of his readership, so undermining what he would see as the 'ideological' status of a left-wing perspective. His repetition of phrases such as 'nos sympathies' (p. 138) - used to refer to his family regarding the Occupation, Nazism, Pétain etc. - are deliberately calculated to incur the wrath of this readership, implying that he shared their views on these and other highly contentious issues. But this 'revelation' also allows him - paradoxically in view of the otherwise unconventional nature of this autobiographical text - to establish a contract with the reader as a 'sincere' autobiographical narrator. While these details may be considered scandalous, they also enhance Robbe-Grillet's 'credentials' as an autobiographer willing to uncover himself. It is a frequent rhetorical device in autobiographical discourse for the narrator to appear on occasions 'blameworthy' - this only serves to increase the validity of the enterprise in general and guarantees greater collusion between narrator and reader. Referring to his parents' antisemitism, for example, he states: 'Je ne voudrais pas glisser avec pudeur sur un point aussi gênant' (p. 118) - a statement which conforms to the confessional mode implicit in the genre of autobiography. Conversely, the comments he makes about his relationship with his wife enhance the 'confessional'

dimension of the autobiography, and establishes sympathy between narrator and reader.

This uncertainty surrounding the kind of work we are being asked to confront is of course an important strategy on Robbe-Grillet's part to challenge our expectations about the content and status of the text in our hands. In both volumes, the reader does however quickly learn to distinguish between the overtly fictional (the Henri de Corinthe narrative), the autobiographical fragments, and the 'theoretical' reflections on fiction, his own and that of others. Confronted with the Henri de Corinthe sequences, the reader will inevitably attempt to relate these to the author's psyche or the presence of similar episodes in his work. Although claiming not to be revealing 'truths' about himself or his works, the autobiographical fragments have not been arbitrarily chosen: we have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the information which is provided about his family, his childhood and adolescence, his war-time experiences, or uncontentious details about his life or literary activities and opinions. It is also the case that his comments and opinions about fiction and film are not in any sense presented as being particularly problematic. The reader has no reason to distrust him when he makes an observation about novels which have influenced him or techniques which he uses in his own fiction. After a section purporting to describe the visits of Corinthe to the house in which the author passed his childhood, we are then told 'Le passage qui précède doit être entièrement inventé' (p. 24). Such a comment suggests that 'truth' and 'falsehood' can be distinguished. Thus the

reader will continue to 'process' the details given about Corinthe as belonging to 'fiction' or the writer's imagination than to an 'authentic' experience. Indeed, the existence in both of these volumes of a highly detailed appendix allows the reader to find the textual 'level' (autobiography, the Henri de Corinthe fiction, theoretical reflection) which he finds most interesting. Thus the three distinct layers of the text quickly become apparent: we find in fact little of the glissements between these layers which we may otherwise have been led to expect, or at least at the very mention of Corinthe and the repertoire of themes with which he comes to be associated (in Angélique especially that of the erotically-charged pursuit of beautiful young girls) the tendency is to compartmentalize these (sometimes lengthy) sequences as fictional and imaginary. In this way, the reader can safely untangle a 'truth' (unproblematic autobiographical fragments; theoretical and literary speculations) from a tangible 'fiction'. Our reading of the works proceeds on that basis. It may therefore appear to be rather less conventional as a Robbe-Grillet text, despite being undoubtedly subversive as an 'autobiography'.

Le Miroir qui revient contains numerous 'theoretical' statements whose purpose is to legitimize the literary and narrative experimentation in which the author has been engaged. At one point he says: 'ne voit-on pas [...] que je tente moi-même sans cesse de me justifier? (p. 42). While these various comments grouped together cannot be said to form a systematic theory, nevertheless they do represent a coherent account of Robbe-Grillet's aesthetics, once

again providing the reader with another means of approaching his fiction retrospectively. Following an 'autobiographical' passage concerning his grandfather which concludes with an assertion of the fragments which remain from an individual's existence, he is led to a critique of the classic realist novel and its procedures:

Tout le système romanesque du siècle dernier, avec son pesant appareil de continuité, de chronologie linéaire, de causalité de non-contradiction, c'était en effet comme une ultime tentative pour oublier l'état désintégré où nous a laissés Dieu en se retirant de notre âme. (p. 27)

Robbe-Grillet demonstrates his regret that Sartre abandoned the experimental form of La Nausée for a more traditional narrative in Les Chemins de la liberté and accuses him of resorting to precisely those omniscient narrative devices (especially the use of the past historic) which he had criticized in François Mauriac's writing. His criticism of Sartre is tempered, however, by his admiration for the failure of Sartre's otherwise totalizing theoretical system, praising the fact that all his works were 'inachevées, ouvertes à tous les vents' (p. 67) - the quintessential 'value', according to Robbe-Grillet, of any work of artistic and intellectual endeavour. He defends explicitly the techniques of the nouveau roman for their fidelity to the fragmentation of experience:

ces systèmes compliqués de séries, de bifurcations, de coupures et de reprises, d'apories, de changements à vue, de combinatoires diverses, de déboîtements ou d'invaginations. (p. 30)

Several comments are made which are of great relevance to readers and critics of novels such as Le Voyeur and La Jalousie, especially concerning narrative voice and the technique of the 'centre vide' in his early novels. He states that the modern novel is characterised

by contradiction. The reading which he pursues of his own film L'homme qui ment valorizes precisely those aspects of the work which convey contradiction and mobility: 'Chaque élément du récit [...] s'y trouve comme miné par une déchirure interne' (p. 77). Ultimately, such a comment could be applied to all of Robbe-Grillet's novels and films, and indeed, crucially, to the 'present' autobiography. In the context of this autobiographical and theoretical discourse, however, the effect of such a comment is both to correct other 'erroneous' approaches and to foster a particular kind of reading. This self-legitimizing strategy may, however, appear itself to be a means of conditioning and controlling the reader's response; in other words despite the strong emphasis Robbe-Grillet himself places on freedom (especially his own).³ Robbe-Grillet insists on the conflict between order and disorder as both a political/ideological experience and as the principal aesthetic component of his work which he wishes to valorize in his autobiography:

Ce sont en nous deux forces antagonistes, qui entrent sans cesse en jeu l'une et l'autre, à la fois dans notre conscience et au plus profond de notre inconscient. Si les êtres humains diffèrent entre eux [...] c'est seulement à cause du dosage particulier que chaque individu représente, c'est-à-dire de la structure particulière que prend chez lui ce couple de torsion. (p. 132)

He states that it was specifically in order to explore this opposition that he turned to fiction. The readings he performs of L'Etranger and La Nausée occur as part of a literary-historical attempt to 'situate' his first novel, Un Régicide. His comments on these novels are selective: they do not emerge from the flux of fragmentary consciousness. These particular novels have been chosen for a purpose: as part of a literary-historical legitimizing

strategy. While paying tribute to what their authors accomplished (in terms of the literary history of the development of narrative technique which he sees himself as continuing), he nevertheless criticizes Camus for the 'fall' into what he describes as 'adjectivité' (or, metaphorical and anthropological writing). Following an autobiographical fragment, he makes the following (somewhat aphoristic) comment, which relates both to Le Miroir qui revient and to his aesthetic in general:

Tout cela c'est du réel, c'est-à-dire du fragmentaire, du fuyant, de l'inutile, si accidentel même et si particulier que tout événement y apparaît à chaque instant comme gratuit, et toute existence en fin de compte comme privée de la moindre signification unificatrice. L'avènement du roman moderne est précisément lié à cette découverte: le réel est discontinu, formé d'éléments juxtaposés sans raison dont chacun est unique d'autant plus difficiles à saisir qu'ils surgissent de façon sans cesse imprévue, hors de propos, aléatoire. (p. 208)

In this literary-historizing mode, Robbe-Grillet goes on to praise the self-consciousness of 18th-century fiction (he cites both Sterne and Diderot) for the liberation of narrative voice and the problematization of the real. He states that this interrogation was in many respects characteristic of the sceptical intellectual climate in which it appeared; Balzac, on the other hand, was in harmony with the values of the bourgeois age: 'Avec Balzac, la cohérence du monde et la compétence du narrateur se voient conjointement portées à leur point extrême, encore jamais atteint' (p. 210). He criticizes the 'realist ideology' in familiar terms:

une fermeté définitive, pesante, univoque [...] entièrement perméable au sens, où les éléments romanesques sont classés et hiérarchisés, où l'intrigue - linéaire - se développe selon les lois rassurantes du rationalisme, où les caractères deviennent des types. (p. 210)

Robbe-Grillet condemns Balzac for having 'reassured' the class who consumed his fiction - he is described as 'le dernier écrivain heureux [...] celui dont l'oeuvre coïncide avec les valeurs de la société qui le nourrit' (p. 220). He again praises Flaubert for having revolutionized narrative form (valorizing 'les étranges trous dans le récit' (p. 211) of which he provides a number of examples). He establishes a dichotomy between 'experimenters' like Flaubert, and those who have not escaped 'l'idéologie réaliste sous-balzacienne' (p. 212). Discontinuity and fragmentation are the narrative values which are to be foregrounded because this is how we experience the world - Robbe-Grillet therefore remains true to the formal realist position. It is Robbe-Grillet's conviction that the presence of these aporia maximise the reader's freedom - in both the ideological and aesthetic senses of the word. It is these gaps in the structure of works of fiction such as Madame Bovary which constitute the modernity of the text and permit the reader's access: 'Des trous se déplaçant dans sa texture, c'est grâce à cela que le texte vit' (p. 214). Robbe-Grillet is thus directing and inviting a certain kind of response through this delineation of a 'radical' work of fiction as defined by these properties. He also reiterates the observation made on numerous occasions concerning the use of stereotypes to provide the thematic material on which the process of textual transformation is based:

Il n'y a de significations que fondées à l'avance, par le corps social. Mais ces "idées reçues" (que nous appelons à présent idéologie) vont constituer cependant le seul matériau possible pour élaborer l'oeuvre d'art [...] architecture vide qui ne tient debout que par sa forme. La solidité du texte comme son originalité proviendrait uniquement du travail dans l'organisation de ses éléments, qui n'ont aucun intérêt par eux-mêmes. La liberté de l'écrivain (c'est-à-dire celle de

l'homme) ne réside que dans l'infinie complexité des combinaisons possibles. (p. 220)

This constitutes in fact precisely the theoretical position which he repeatedly outlined in the 1970s as the principle of textual, generative construction on which his works are based. So in this respect, despite the provocative adoption of an autobiographical textual framework, the underlying aesthetic seems to have remained unchanged - despite, in other words, the public repudiation of Ricardou and textual materialism and formalism which he carries out at an earlier point in Le Miroir qui revient. Thus Robbe-Grillet uses the work to propagate once again an authorially-sanctioned reading, which can be applied retrospectively to his entire corpus.

Although attempting to convey the impression of fragmentation, the selection of specific details suggests a more structured enterprise than may otherwise be thought. In particular, Robbe-Grillet's comments about Roland Barthes (while remaining critical of Barthes's neglect of the psychological dimension of his earlier novels) conveys his admiration for the critic's theoretical 'glissements' (p. 67). At another level this can also function as an example of self-justification on the part of Robbe-Grillet himself. It again permits him to make otherwise contradictory statements about his work and is intended implicitly to gain the reader's approval for such an aesthetic. While being 'subversive' as an autobiography in many respects, nevertheless the principle of selection remains apparent. An important part of this process of selection is the attempt to identify and valorize 'key' tuning-points in his existence: 1945 is

cited by Robbe-Grillet as just such a transitional stage in his life. He refers to 'mes rapports personnels avec l'ordre' (p. 122), identified as that which was incarnated by the Nazi (ideological) régime. By extension, this comment also takes on an aesthetic colouring, in the sense that he has repeatedly stated that his fiction is characterised by the opposition between order and disorder. This is of course apparent in his first work: Un Régicide, written shortly after the War, is tangibly characterised by a struggle between these two elements. However, it is apparent that Robbe-Grillet is still narrativizing his existence and its translation into text through such retrospective (and in some cases causal) 'signifying' explanation.

Angélique ou l'enchantement continues the Romanesques autobiographical trilogy. Indeed, it was with the publication of Angélique that Robbe-Grillet announced this title to the series: a third volume entitled La mort de Corinthe is mentioned as being under way. We find in this volume a similar mixture of autobiographical fragments, theoretical and critical commentary, and to a somewhat greater extent the continuation of the Henri de Corinthe narrative. In an interview given to Le Nouvel observateur at the time of its publication, Robbe-Grillet alludes explicitly to the work of Philippe Lejeune on the poetics of autobiography, and states that as in the previous volume 'on échappe totalement au contrat de cohérence [...] Une autobiographie doit retrouver la mobilité et la fragmentation de l'être vivant'.⁴ As we have seen, however, Le Miroir qui revient while certainly preserving fragmentation and mobility in its

structure and so minimizing coherence of a traditional kind, is not by any means 'totalement' devoid of the devices used in autobiography in establishing a contract (however unstable) between narrator and reader. As he comments in this interview, the structure of the work is itself designed to convey formally the incoherence and fragility of memory: 'Mes souvenirs sont fragmentaires, ils flottent, ils bougent, cherchent à recomposer un passé, n'y arrivent pas .' (p. 42).

It is interesting to note that Lejeune's theories are in fact alluded to in the text itself: Robbe-Grillet explicitly refutes the contention that it is the attempt to discover signification which is the characteristic feature of autobiographical writing: 'ne saurais-je partager l'avis de Philippe Lejeune concernant la mise en texte des souvenirs. "L'exigence de signification est le principe positif et premier, dit-il, de la quête autobiographique." Non, non! Certainement pas!' (p. 67). It is Robbe-Grillet's central premise that he is not attempting to impose coherence on a moi which is characterised by fragmentation and contradiction. He does not wish to impose a signifying structure on his life, hence his recourse in formal, narrative and stylistic terms to:

l'indéfini et [...] l'instantané. En même temps que la cohérence du monde, s'est effondré la compétence du narrateur. La patiente écriture des fragments qui demeurent [...] ne peut en aucun cas considérer mon passé comme producteur de signification (un sens à ma vie), mais au contraire comme producteur de récit'. (p. 68)

From such self-conscious comments made in the text, it is clear that Robbe-Grillet is attempting to translate in formal terms the discontinuity, mobility, instability and fluidity of memory:

Instants fragiles, aussi soudainement apparus que vite effacés, nous ne pouvons ni les tenir immobiles, ni en fixer la trace de façon définitive, ni les réunir en une durée continue au sein d'organisations causales à sens unique et sans faille. (p. 67)

He is therefore able to claim 'theoretically' that the aesthetic governing his autobiography is similar to that of his fiction;

Quant aux organisations des récits, dans un cas (les prétendues fictions) comme dans l'autre (les pseudo-recherches auto-biographiques), je reconnais sans mal qu'elles représentent le même espoir, sous des formes diverses, de mettre en jeu les deux mêmes questions impossibles - qu'est-ce que c'est, moi? Et qu'est-ce que je fais là? - qui ne sont pas des problèmes de signification, mais bel et bien des problèmes de structure. (p. 69)

He insists that he wishes to retain 'le mouvement, les manques, et la contingence inexplicable du vivant' (p. 69). It is this objective which has dictated the formal arrangement of the texts themselves.

However, as in the case of Le Miroir qui revient, this 'formal realism' of the textualisation of the autobiographising consciousness is in fact very consciously contrived: it is a textual effect rather than a random sequence of disjointed memories. There is again in Angélique no discernible 'logical' unfolding of events in the author's life and their telling: every attempt is made to foreground the 'present' of the composition of the text. This is clearly in order to convey the impression of a text which has itself been composed intermittently and frequently in transit between different locations - Paris, Normandy, the United States etc. An attempt is therefore made to destabilise the 'continuum' of any narrative text which is by nature linear simply on a typographical basis if on no other. This is, however, once again the result of as much a process

of selection on the part of the author as anything we would find in a more apparently conventional autobiography. It is vital to consider the extent to which this impression of 'naturalness' of random memory is undermined both explicitly by self-conscious autobiographising commentary in the text and, more importantly, by the 'interruptions' throughout the text provided by the highly stylised Corinthe narrative. As in Le Miroir qui revient, the Corinthe narrative (and here the Corinthe/Angélique sections) function as an attempt to perforate and deconstruct the autobiographical enterprise which otherwise 'contains' it. Designated more or less explicitly as 'fiction', the purpose is to subvert and undermine the autobiographical narrative, thus to de-legitimize the 'authority' of such a discourse. Thus the status of the autobiographical sequences is to be seen as the same as that of the Corinthe narrative.

However, as in Le Miroir qui revient, the reader is able to disengage what is frequently unproblematic autobiographical anecdote from 'fiction'. While it may have been Robbe-Grillet's intention to have organized the structure of these texts in order to contest the validity of the autobiographical endeavour by placing at the same discursive level fragmentary memory, fiction and theoretical commentary, nevertheless a hierarchy of reading will take place as a consequence of the recognizability of the textual layer in question. Once again, an appendix provides a useful tool in this respect, helpfully pointing the reader in the direction he wishes to take. While on the one hand textual recognition of this kind may enhance the reader's freedom to gain access to the text, on the other hand it

perhaps regrettably (at least in view of Robbe-Grillet's apparent objectives) allows a hierarchised reading to take place. Following the same practice he adopted in Le Miroir qui revient, recognition is assisted frequently by a number of stylistic signals: this to a considerable extent serves paradoxically to reduce the otherwise radical feature of the mixture of writings installed.

We find in this second volume the presence again of textual self-referentiality, such as the reader is accustomed to in Robbe-Grillet's fiction. Comments describing one particular element are invested with significance at a metatextual level - for example, this description of facial expressions: 'bien que marquée de façon si peu discrète, reste en général ambiguë et susceptible d'interprétations diverses, contradictoires' (p. 8). Or the following comment which comes at the end of the first section of the novel:

pantins véhéments que les sautes d'air désarticulent, tordent
comme oriflammes au combat, disloquant en lambeaux de fumées,
pour les recomposer un peu plus loin sous de nouveaux
harnachements

(p. 9)

These can be seen as providing a mise en abyme of the organisation of the text itself, also functioning as a kind of signal to the reader concerning the text he is reading. We are not in the presence of an 'unproblematic' autobiography, but of a self-conscious discourse. On another occasion, the attempt to 'reconstruct' a Corinthe sequence, remembered only vaguely via a story told by the writer's father, provokes the following ironic comment:

Mon père est mort depuis plus de dix ans et je ne puis hélas
désormais, confronter avec ses souvenirs personnels, qui

déjà s'effaçaient, les fragments auxquels, par une réflexion méthodique et à force de recherches, je tente ainsi de donner quelque cohérence, probablement artificielle, peut-être frauduleuse. (p. 104)

It is central to Robbe-Grillet's aesthetic that such coherence - whether narrative or psychological - can never be achieved: this would be a falsification of the discontinuity of experience and writing. Of course, it is also the case that descriptions or comments such as those cited above would be immediately 'received' and recognized by the typical Robbe-Grillet/nouveau roman reader as precisely the kind of textual sign (of metatextuality) with which he has become familiar over the years. It is in many respects a 'reading cue', operating to valorize a certain aesthetic which can be broadly identified as self-referentiality. Although frustrating many of the conventions of traditional autobiography then, readers of a text such as Angélique would be alert to just such features.

References to certain images as 'fragiles, passagères, aléatoires', to 'miroirs discontinus' (p. 11), 'feuilles en désordre' (p. 13), and a lost manuscript written by Henri de Corinthe which had to be reconstructed 'à partir de fragments disparates ou contradictoires, tous inachevés, dont l'abondance n'empêche nullement qu'il y manque peut-être maint détail précieux, sinon même des éléments capitaux' (p. 12) - can all be applied to the aesthetic which governs Angélique itself - and indeed Robbe-Grillet's work generally. This last suggestion concerning the omission of 'éléments capitaux' indicates that we cannot expect from this autobiography the revelations or confessions to be found in more conventional examples

of the genre. Like his fiction, we are going to be presented with a narrative structure characterised by discontinuities and aporia of various kinds. The allusion to the Hegelian idea (as taken up by Sartre and others) of 'le manque fondamental qui troue le centre de l'homme [...] comme le lieu original de son projet d'existence, c'est-à-dire de sa liberté' (p. 22) is presented by Robbe-Grillet, by way of an excursus into Wagner via a lecture attended by Henri de Corinthe, in such a way that this information is 'processed' by the reader as a crucial feature of the author's philosophical stance, despite the 'fictional' element of the Corinthe involvement. This mixture of perspectives is characteristic of the technique adopted in the text - as he comments at the end of this section:

Il y a quelque chose de troublant dans les souvenirs: ils constituent un tissu mouvant dont les fils innombrables se déplaçant sans cesse pour se nouer, puis se dénouer, disparaître, resurgir et se renouer ensuite ailleurs, de mille et mille manières presque identiques ou soudain tout à fait neuves, combinaisons imprévues ou ressassantes et former ainsi à chaque instant de nouvelles figures plus ou moins semblables, plus ou moins différentes. (p. 24)

This again provides a very appropriate description of the techniques which he adopts throughout his work, including Angélique itself. The problem, however, with this view may be that it in some ways presupposes a 'natural' means of representing in formal terms the disjunctions of memory which is more 'authentic' than that provided in conventional autobiography. As with Le Miroir qui revient, the Corinthe fiction as a mise en abyme 'doubles' the narrative as a whole: we are told that Corinthe's work was also a 'mélange' (p. 25) - like Robbe-Grillet's autobiographical texts - of theory, novel, politics and autobiography. In an interview, Robbe-Grillet had

likened Le Miroir qui revient to Proust's Contre Sainte-Beuve: 'Contre Sainte-Beuve, mélange, comme Le Miroir qui revient, la théorie de la littérature, l'autobiographie et la fiction'.⁵

The continuity of the text is undermined by his frequent references to where he had been writing the passages just read. Thus there are shifts between his present location (the present of writing) and the evocation of his childhood, whether 'real' (however problematic this is made to appear) or 'fictional' (as signalled in general by the presence of Corinthe). Apparently autobiographical passages about Robbe-Grillet's film-making are placed after a sequence depicting Corinthe writing at his desk: thus seeming to stem from his pen rather than the writer's own. The adoption of a present tense may denote this shift to the present, but equally well it can be used to convey the child's perspective of events uncontaminated by the totalizing and narrativizing past historic. The use of the present tense to convey the child's perspective, however, may paradoxically accord such passages a greater authenticity than may be intended. These glissements between the different textual layers certainly confer discursive mobility and plurality on the text (in formal harmony with the fragmentary nature of consciousness and subjectivity), but nevertheless this does not actively prevent a more hierarchised reading from occurring. Where the text may retain its instability, this does not seriously threaten the reader's attempts to impose order and coherence of a kind upon it by identifying levels of signification which are discursively signalled throughout. It could be argued that these autobiographical works may even to some

extent lend themselves to a kind of S/Z - inspired narratological analysis, such is the extent to which the different 'textual cells' or discursive layers can be analysed in terms of the operation of a number of 'codes', cues, or trigger-mechanisms. However, whilst not detracting from the mobility of the texts, these are still structured works in which the principle of selection still applies however self-consciously.

Unlike the previous volume, this mixture of writings now also includes sections taken from Henri de Corinthe's memoirs: again, this enhances the 'doubling' function of the Corinthe narrative and would be interpreted as mise en abyme. The emphasis on the difficulties involved in the reconstruction of Corinthe's life and activities function as a commentary on the impossibility of the (auto)biographical project of establishing coherence and significance of an individual subjectivity. The discovery of new details will always undermine critically the validity of the whole project and the veracity of any version or narrative; 'des éléments nouveaux, impossibles à insérer dans la trame si péniblement tissé, venant soudain remettre l'ensemble en question' (p. 131). Such attempts are therefore always doomed to failure because they inevitably involve a falsification of a reality too complex to be captured by the narrativisation which is implicit in any such biographical or autobiographical enterprise. Versions of a self are always unreliable because the self is itself subject to constant fragmentation.

Certain sections are 'attributed' to Corinthe - by this method the author attempts to create the illusion of relinquishing responsibility for their content. Thus Corinthe becomes a kind of 'relay-narrator' such as can be found in Robbe-Grillet's novels commencing with Dans le labyrinthe. This enhances the impression of a text not emanating from a single identifiable source (i.e. a central unified self or consciousness), but rather a mobile narrative viewpoint - in harmony, then, with the formal logic of an aesthetic of fragmentation. The Je can also become the voice of Henri de Corinthe (see pages 140 -45), and then revert back to the author himself (p. 145). The grammatical relationship between subject and discourse is thus disturbed. The narrative voice is thus very tangibly decentred, conveying the instability of the self and the proposition that subjectivity can only be partially reconstructed from the 'variants' of both writing and the self which these texts purport to dramatise. We also find in Angélique the 'classic' Robbe-Grilletian device of a painting used as a textual 'generator' of a narrative sequence, which in turn incorporates many elements used elsewhere (p. 106). During one 'interruption' of the Corinthe story, a reference is made to a statue of a young girl in the writer's garden (p. 123): this use of a statue as a narrative focus or point de départ is again a recognizable technique in his works.

Many of the comments contained in the Corinthe sections are inevitably reminiscent of Robbe-Grillet's own opinions on certain subjects which have been expressed elsewhere. For example, Corinthe's observations on the necessarily ideologically oppositional

role fulfilled by the creative artist are reminiscent of the author's own:

le projet socialiste [...] est aussi incompatible avec les les motivations profondes de l'artiste véritable que n'importe quelle autre idéologie communautaire. [...] L'artiste en effet, au sein même du travail créateur qui le constitue comme tel, prend sans cesse conscience de son moi propre (singulier, monstrueux, solitaire) comme constituant l'unique origine possible du sens, mais à la limite comme unique source pensante.

(p. 35)

In another passage, the emphasis is placed on political oppositionality to the 'ordre établi' of whatever ideological system is in force. Although comments of this kind are 'embedded' in the Corinthe narrative, the stratification of the various textual levels in this text ensure that it is not relegated in terms of its importance discursively. In other words, whereas the Corinthe narrative is given the same status in the text diegetically, this does not prevent the reader establishing hierarchies between these different layers of discourse. Robbe-Grillet's objective in these two works seems to have been to place the different 'levels' on an equal footing; however, despite the occasional 'interpenetration' (this particular comment can be seen as an example of this), hierarchised readings cannot be prevented from taking place. This statement would be read as a 'signalled' authorial aesthetic /theoretical comment.

Robbe-Grillet's comments on his films - in the form of autobiographical and theoretical utterance - are specifically enacted in order to criticise the realist ideology which also predominates in that art form. Although he sets out the formal

differences between cinema and fiction, he again uses the opportunity of his autobiography polemically to articulate his opposition to traditional cinematic aesthetics. Once again, he focuses on the necessity for film to enhance its 'metatextuality' as a discourse: 'désigner sans honte son propre matériau, ainsi que le travail createur effectué sur lui' (p. 182). It is clear that by extension these comments are also to be read at another level as a critique of realism in any artistic endeavour. For example, he comments: 'nous devons [...] profiter de chaque invention technique nouvelle, non pas pour nous soumettre davantage à l'idéologie réaliste, mais, à l'opposé, pour accroître encore les possibilités d'affrontements dialectiques à l'intérieur d'un tissu cinématographique devenu de plus en plus complexe' (p. 179).

To an even greater extent than Le Miroir qui revient, the Corinthe narrative is so dominant that it threatens to overtake the autobiographical sequences proper. Robbe-Grillet presents therefore a clash of competing discourses: a text from which a hierarchy of levels seems to have been removed. Indeed, in Angélique generally we find a greater attempt to disturb the contours between these different levels, which may have been lacking to some extent in Le Miroir qui revient. Thus the sections which contain the appearance of the 'jeune fille blonde de la charette' (another incarnation of Angélique) are placed within a narrative purporting to relate his father's activities in 1914. Although we can see in this respect an entanglement between different textual levels - in this case, a 'memory' of a story told by his father (a real figure) with an

obviously imagined and fictionalised narrative produced by the author - nevertheless this account would inevitably be read as 'fictional' because of the insistence on certain details belonging to Robbe-Grillet's repertoire of personal obsessions. The incorporation of such details function as reading cues or interpretative 'triggers'. The Robbe-Grilletian reader would be only too well attuned to references to, for example, 'la troublante fiancée [...] les mains liées derrière le dos . Et ses frêles pieds nus, déjà tachés de sang' (p. 53). This would immediately be categorized along those lines. Thus while this text is more preoccupied with such glissements between layers of discourse than the previous volume, this evident fluidity at a diegetic level may not in practice be matched by a reading strategy which is quickly involved in disengaging 'fiction' from 'fact' according to the codes which the reader brings to the text, one of which must be described as a 'code Robbe-Grillet'. The Robbe-Grilletian reader is the least 'neutral' or 'innocent' kind of reader confronted by writing of this kind, and would be expected to bring his 'textual memory' to bear on these works. It would seem to be obvious that Robbe-Grillet is explicitly playing with the expectations of just such a 'community' which he has created over the years. As Ann Jefferson has argued: 'The careful intertextual positioning of Robbe-Grillet's autobiography seems [...] to be ultimately connected to his anxieties about the reception of his texts'.⁶

'Justifying' his sado-erotic obsessions is also more of a feature of Angélique (with its 'roman de chevalerie' (p. 158)) than Le Miroir

qui revient , or at the very least an attempt to specify the origin and inspiration of this highly contentious feature of his writing. His comment at the end of 'ce long chapitre obsessionnel, où je sens déjà pointer l'agacement de mon lecteur' (p. 61) indicates his perception precisely of the role of the reader in the text, in this case of the Robbe-Grilletian reader accustomed to such recurrent features. Robbe-Grillet uses the opportunity of this autobiography to explain his position on this question. He reveals in these pages a certain contempt for the 'bataillons punitifs' of 'puritanical' feminist critics ever ready to accuse him of sexism at best and at worst promoting images of women in a degrading and demoralising fashion. Robbe-Grillet is therefore prepared to use the text again as a vehicle for polemics - in this case directed against censorship and what he sees as the restrictions imposed on the all-important freedom of a writer by an increasingly 'bureaucratised' and 'ideological' feminism. He again reiterates the argument that he uses such stereotypical features of sado-erotic imagery in order precisely to designate their artificiality, although not in a moral sense:

la morale n'est pas mon affaire et je ne voudrais pas que le mot "dénoncer" me fasse endosser justement la robe du procureur. Ces images récurrentes sado-érotiques, je les désigne et c'est tout.

(p. 191)

He also states that the representation of such imagery may have a cathartic function.

Robbe-Grillet attempts to minimise the risk of his own 'theoretical' commentary in these text ossifying into 'ideology' by

stating on a number of occasions that his polemical/theoretical statements are not to be read as being characterised by the same mobility as his fictions. Thus the metatextual commentary within these works is undermined by the recurrent warnings about the ideologically recuperative prison represented precisely by metatextual commentary itself. As at the Cerisy conferences devoted to his work and that of the other nouveaux romanciers, he repeats his position that the 'theory' he has enunciated over the years had a strategic objective, rather than a direct relationship to the 'truth' of his novels:

mes écrits "théoriques" [...] n'avaient aucunement pour moi valeur de vérité, encore moins de dogme, mais plutôt de lance et d'armure, ou d'aventureux échafaudage, destiné un jour ou l'autre à disparaître, ce qui m'a tout de suite séparé de mon ami Ricardou. (p. 166)

In the context of the two autobiographical works, this position is intended to have the paradoxical (and ludic) effect of undermining the content of the aesthetic commentary provided, thus ensuring a mobility which would be in harmony with the other levels of discourse in the texts. It functions as a kind of warning against providing these sections with a greater status than is held by the fictional and autobiographically anecdotal elements: the author clearly wishes to create a non-hierarchised text. For example, following a lengthy account of his views on the promotion of the self-reflexivity in cinema, he comments: 'J'y prêché pour les effets de rupture, les heurts irrationnels, les oppositions internes; or mon texte lui-même reste constamment conforme à la logique traditionnelle et à la raison' (p. 182). Related to the text of Angélique this observation is important because it demonstrates Robbe-Grillet's own sense of the

different (and sometimes antagonistic) discourses which he sets in motion in this work. This will then guarantee the plurality of the text. However, the recognition of textual levels is an inevitable feature of any reading which takes place. Whereas Robbe-Grillet desires an 'ideal reader' who will perform such an ideologically pure reading unconcerned with textual levels and discursive hierarchies, the 'actual reader' (if such an entity can ever be identified) brings to these works a number of prejudices and conventions, ranging from the generic expectations of autobiography (which he can almost certainly expect to see infringed) to the 'textual memory' associated with Robbe-Grillet's fiction or even theory itself.

Nathalie Sarraute's Enfance and the rhetoric of the ressenti

It has been central to Nathalie Sarraute's entire literary enterprise to contest the traditional novel's reliance on plot, character and 'analytical' psychology. Her attack on conventional forms was of course carried out in the essays which make up L'ère du soupçon, and can be more than amply demonstrated with reference to her fictional works. In her fiction, a fluid narrative structure is achieved which allows for the exploration and mise en scène of tropistic activity, below the surface of language and action. Sarraute has repeatedly insisted on the catalytic nature of language itself as that which can provoke tropism on account of the ever-present threat of cliché and stereotype. The appearance, then, of what seems to be an 'autobiographical' account of childhood, with all the attendant risks of the falsification of 'reality', form and language inherent in the

genre of autobiography itself, would seem immediately surprising and contradictory in the light of such an aesthetic. However, in Enfance such dangers will in fact be self-consciously inscribed within the text, to the extent of providing much of the momentum and dynamic force of the work.

An autobiography is conventionally expected to provide a retrospective narrative account of a life, usually in a linear fashion. This narrativisation is itself assumed to present a signifying structure on the flux of memory, experience and perception on account of the analytical nature of the presentation of events by the 'interpreting' and 'selecting' autobiographising narrator. However, in her 'theoretical' essays and statements, Nathalie Sarraute has explicitly attacked the predominance of linearity and narrativisation in the traditional novel precisely because the establishment of such 'artificial' patterning in fact falsifies the fragmentation and discontinuity of the experience of reality itself, in particular the intersubjective world of sous-conversation and tropism to which she has remained attached. She has also demonstrated a suspicion of the power of words to ossify experience into clichified representations: language is frequently depicted as a source of treachery and mystification. Therefore a representation of childhood is in many ways an especially problematic enterprise from her point of view as a consequence of the 'intangibility' of memories associated with a distant past and the ever-present dangers of turning such an account into stereotype because of the clichified nature of the discourses surrounding childhood itself.

Characterization is also to be mistrusted because it too involves the imposition of stable essences to personalities which are in Sarraute's eyes unknowable and constantly mobile. Hence in her autobiography *Nathalie Sarraute* will attempt to remain consistent with the aesthetic which lies behind her fictional works: she will avoid linearity and will remain attentive throughout the work to the potential fixity of the images of childhood which are presented.

Enfance continues then Sarraute's exploration of le ressenti: that area of pre-linguistic, infra-psychological activity characterized by subtle and barely perceptible inter-subjective movement which has remained her fundamental literary and psychological concern since *Tropismes* (1939). However, following *L'Usage de la parole* (1980), this text is not located in any specific generic mould: *Enfance* remains deliberately neither roman nor autobiographie - nor does the text contain an explanatory subtitle - and indeed much of the import of this work resides in the extent to which it both avoids such a generic classification while at the same time inviting the reader to establish a 'pacte autobiographique' which the text ultimately frustrates. *Enfance* in fact oscillates between the two textual practices of 'fiction' on the one hand and 'autobiography' on the other, thus calling into question the validity of such categories and thereby reasserting the primacy of writing and textualization over genre - it is of course in this respect that it can be compared with Robbe-Grillet's Le Miroir qui revient.

The very form of the work itself suggests that Sarraute is striving to convey the fragmentary quality of memory itself. On the last page she indicates that she had been attempting to 'faire surgir quelques moments, quelques mouvements qui me semblent encore intacts ' hidden in the 'couche protectrice'(p. 277).⁷ Clearly her objective is to avoid the temptation in autobiography to totalize experience by resorting to conventional devices whose purpose is to endow coherence and continuity. In an interview with Viviane Forestier, she stated that 'Il ne s'agit pas d'un rapport sur toute ma vie. Pas même sur toute mon enfance'.⁸ And as Valerie Minogue has argued: 'The narrative is fragmentary both by nature and by design'.⁹ Any other formalization or textualization would clearly be inappropriate and inconsistent in the context of the objectives Sarraute has set out repeatedly over the years. The temporal shifts, the references to the 'present' of composition, the discontinuity of the narrative, the lack of chapter headings and numbers, and, most notably, the use of the dialogue format - all of these factors serve to heighten this impression of fragmentation.

The interruptions and comments of the interrogative voice in the work successfully impede the progress and the processes of autobiographical reconstruction. In this way, not only is the authenticity and reliability of memory contested (of course this is a not uncommon feature in certain autobiographical texts); but, more importantly, the composition and status of the writing itself is immediately challenged. By effectively underscoring the precariousness and validity of the whole enterprise of autobiography

in which Enfance seems to be engaged, the text self-consciously deconstructs the fragile foundations on which it rests. At the level of textual poetics, this can of course be seen as an uncovering of the naturalizing strategies in autobiography generally. In this sense, Enfance can be read as a 'subversive' example of autobiography because of the extent to which memory itself and the textualization of memory are revealed to be problematic. Enfance therefore can be said to foreground and dramatize the discursive nature of autobiography: as a mode of writing it is revealed as a process of construction rather than a 'natural' representation. Selfhood is discovered (if at all) not so much by narrativizing psychological analysis, but rather through textual composition. Read in this fashion alone, Enfance can be used to illustrate some important considerations in the construction of selfhood and subjectivity in the genre of autobiography.

But from the point of view of Nathalie Sarraute's own preoccupations, the memories and images of childhood which are evoked are never allowed to congeal into the unproblematic fixed patterns and categories of representation she condemns in her other works. The interrogative voice will undercut any attempt made by the autobiographising 'narrator' to indulge in such conventionalized evocations because of the risk of turning these fragments into frozen 'images d'Epinal'. The fear is explicitly voiced that the result of such an enterprise may be the creation of something 'fixé une fois pour toutes, du "tout cuit", donné d'avance' (p.9). It is not the case that the two voices can be rigorously disentangled; rather, they

are two halves of the same discursive activity. It is not that the text could be subject to a systematic découpage in the form of a theatrical dialogue¹⁰ - in any case, it is not a strict dialogue as the narrating autobiographer is allowed to continue uninterrupted over several sections and paragraphs. The interrogative voice may well be critical and sceptical of the narration which is set in train, but it also collaborates and sympathizes as well from time to time.

However, it is Philippe Lejeune's contention that Enfance nevertheless constitutes 'un retour à la tradition, c'est un livre très classique'.¹¹ Although Sarraute comes to the enterprise with the 'armes et bagages',¹² of the nouveau romancier, it is his contention that it shares with other literary exercises in childhood recollection the fact that it remains 'un montage a posteriori, qui organise chronologiquement et thématiquement un matériau donné par la mémoire'.¹³ He argues very persuasively that the narrative does in fact develop chronologically and that a close examination to certain points de repère in the text even reveals a discernible temporal and spatial structure which can be 'reconstructed' from the information provided, even if the reader does not immediately perceive this. Lejeune is able to date with apparent precision the time and location of individual scenes, and to reassemble an identifiable thematic structure which gives the work unity:

autour du fil chronologique, les grandes scènes ponctuent la double évolution des rapports sur la mère (détachement progressif) et avec le père (attachement progressif), et, dans la seconde moitié du livre, les fluctuations des rapports avec Vera et la grande découverte du salut par l'école.¹⁴

Thus the otherwise 'fragmentary' narrative is revealed to be characterised by a high degree of coherence despite initial appearances: while every attempt is made to create an impression of the chaos of memory, 'quand on regarde de plus près, on voit bien au contraire qu'on est devant un ordre'.¹⁵ He maintains that the elliptical presentation in the text (he prefers to use the term 'montage') is a narrative strategy designed to represent the chaos of memory.

The use of the present tense in the text does of course heighten the impression of an activity of reconstruction being carried out. In this way, the 'present' of, on the one hand, the fluid and unreliable processes of memory retrieval, and, on the other hand, the movement of textual composition, is foregrounded in a very self-conscious way. The lack of a strict and explicitly signalled linear chronology (despite the possibility of spatio-temporal reorganisation à la Lejeune) does indeed convey the fragmentary nature of memory and its textualization. So too the manner in which information is revealed about the child and her relationship with her parents and others, and generally her perception of the world. For example, crucial details about the deteriorating relationship between the two parents are allowed to enter the narration only in an oblique fashion. When such information is given, it is usually in the context of how external factors are impinging on the child's consciousness. The relationship between her father and Véra is only revealed gradually. Every attempt is made to suggest the 'present' of memories suddenly appearing to the autobiographizing narrator as

the text advances. In all of these respects, the text therefore is characterised by a high degree of psychological realism consistent with Nathalie Sarraute's preoccupation with the representation in formal terms of psychological states and intersubjective reactions. In Enfance, therefore, Nathalie Sarraute is able to convey the epistemological repercussions of the description of childhood. At one level, the text is designed so as to mime the 'logical development' (however chaotic) of the memory process. The text can in this way be said to have been composed in order to conform to a formal realist aesthetic. The problematic epistemology of memory and its textualization is thus translated in the very organisation of the text. In typographical terms, this is also apparent from the layout: the dialogue format, short sentences and paragraph, the visible gaps and blanks on the page, the very Sarrautean device of hesitant points de suspension, all contrive to enhance this impression.

Lejeune can thereby rightly claim with some authority that Enfance as an autobiography is still characterised by selection and ordering of material, however fragmentary and chaotic this is made to appear. It is therefore as 'contrived' as any other example he may select. While it may well be true that a discernible progression can be detected and even charted in some detail, what is more important is that this 'retrieval' (or even neutralization) of the text along the lines of the vraisemblance of the fragmentary memory process is in fact tangibly subverted by the use of the dialogue format. For it is precisely the role of the interrogative voice to query the validity of the selection and the textualization of the memories evoked. This

voice will frequently contest the retrospective version of events and perceptions being presented and will deliberately 'expose' and undercut the narrator's potentially distorting and naturalizing reconstruction. However, while the effect of this may appear to make the text more realistic - that is to say, because it now seems to obey the 'logic' of the narrativising, adult perspective - in fact Sarraute is thus able to deconstruct the very epistemological foundations of the whole enterprise. The 'representation' of the child's emotions and perceptions is not therefore allowed to be presented as 'natural' because of the interjections and objections of the critical, interrogative voice which serves to reveal the discursive situation as a problematic narrative perspective constructed by the autobiographizing 'adult' narrator. The versions of episodes and scenes are therefore uncovered as very conspicuously mediated by the narrator.

The opening section of the text alerts the reader to the perilous nature of the task which is being undertaken. The sceptical hostility and mock-ironic attitude struck by the interrogative voice immediately problematizes the validity of the whole enterprise. Labelled by the writing narrator as 'mises en gardes' (p. 10), these admonitions will serve to destabilize the legitimacy of the text itself in the mind of the reader. The critical voice will correct errors or query or pass comment upon the versions of episodes provided by the narrator. At one stage, the narrator is condemned for presenting a contrived account: 'tu n'as pas pu t'empêcher de placer un petit morceau de préfabriqué' (p. 20). As a consequence,

the autobiographizing narrator's discourse will tend to be treated with a great deal of suspicion as the text progresses. The version of events provided, as well as the narration which is used in the relation of these fragments, of childhood memories are both therefore being signalled as unreliable and untrustworthy: this is of course in many respects a corollary of Nathalie Sarraute's belief in the 'ere du soupçon' pertaining to both narrator and narrative discourse. We cannot regard the 'narrator' of this autobiography as an unproblematic witness to events, nor can the process of composition itself ever be considered an authentic activity.

It is important to bear in mind that the narration in the text is formed from both 'voices': they should not be seen as totally distinct entities. The dialogue does not take place in a mechanical way; rather, 'les voix passent leur temps à changer de rôle, à faire bouger leur identité'.¹⁶ And as Valerie Minogue has argued, 'The two voices keep in the foreground the flaws of memory and the processes of composition'.¹⁷ It is Minogue's argument that the text makes the reader aware of the 'partial, selective, and interpretative'¹⁸ nature of the whole autobiographical process set in train.

However, it is also true that the use of the interrogative voice raises questions about the 'hierarchy' of the voices which are articulated. One of the most interesting features of Enfance is the whole question of the positioning of the reader, specifically how the reader is made to be engaged in the process of composition itself. An example of this collaboration can be seen in the scene where the

child and her mother are heading towards her uncle's house to spend the summer. The narrator comments: 'Ce vers quoi nous allons, ce qui m'attend là-bas, possède toutes les qualités qui font de "beaux souvenirs d'enfance" [...] J'avoue que j'hésite un peu' (p. 31). The critical voice confirms that this description could easily lapse into 'une beauté si conforme aux modèles' (p. 31) of established stereotype if not checked. After this evocation nevertheless takes place, the voice reiterates 'Là se terminent les "beaux souvenirs" qui te donnaient tant de scrupules... ils étaient trop conformes aux modèles' (p. 39) - a criticism which the narrator is ready to concede.

We find throughout the text the Sarrautean hostility to the fixity of established and conventional patterns of explanation. We are indeed given a representation of an 'enfance malheureuse', but the narration is very reluctant to allow this simple explanation (however true) to appear satisfactory. There is a similar distrust of the glib Freudian construction of 'childhood trauma' to provide an acceptable version of the situation described. Psychological or psychoanalytical analysis of any kind is studiously avoided. Even when the narrator seems on the verge of slipping into stereotype, the critical voice will warn her off. For example, the phrase 'un enfant maniaque' (p. 14) is used only to be countered with 'Tu connaissais déjà ces mots...' (p. 21). The narrator at another point states that she had allowed the episode in which her spelling had been criticized to congeal into 'un de ces magnifiques "traumatismes de l'enfance"' (p. 85) to explain why it took her so long to begin writing

seriously. A similar hostility is exhibited to the repercussions of the description 'elle est nerveuse' (p.160). This conveys a recognition of the dangers of ready-made explanations. Every effort is made not to allow the totalizing application of such facile categories to an experience which is far too complex to be summarized in these all too neat and convenient ways. The 'longue maison de bois' (p. 41) is dangerously close to being a fixed 'image immuable' (p. 42) which she does not want to allow to coalesce into a clichified 'happy childhood' scene. The narrator (and the interrogative voice) are only too aware of, for example, imprisoning Véra into the stereotypical Cinderella-like 'wicked step-mother' figure of convention. As the narrator confesses: 'Il faut dire que Véra [...] quand on s'efforce de l'évoquer, donne le sentiment de décoller du réel, de s'envoler dans la fiction' (p. 130). Clearly this awareness built into the narration also dramatizes the reader's own possible constructions of individuals and episodes as a result of the conventionally-determined set of cultural and literary expectations brought to an autobiographical text.

What is of great significance is that, in the manner of L'Usage de la parole, Enfance reactivates a narrative strategy which consists in the inscription within the text of the 'reader'. As both Valerie Minogue and Sheila Bell demonstrated of the earlier work, a 'reader-figure' or narrataire is allotted a crucial role in motivating the textual material and whose 'presence' is indeed dramatized to this end.¹⁹ The most salient feature of Enfance is the degree to which the interrogative mode is now made more explicit through the diegetic

use of the dialogue which exists between the narrating/'autobiographising' je and the interrogative voice which weaves in and out of the text: it is this dialogue format which emerges as the basic component of the narrative structure of the text. Whereas in L'Usage de la parole the narrataire's existence is only suggested through apostrophe, in Enfance reservations, objections and comments are in fact textually voiced. Enfance uses an 'autobiographising' narrator persona engaged in open dialogue with this narrataire. The opening sequence is particularly revealing in this respect: reservations are expressed by the interrogative voice concerning the validity of such an apparent autobiographical project: 'Tu vas vraiment faire ça? "Evoquer tes souvenirs d'enfance"' (p. 7). The whole enterprise is thus placed under quotation marks from the outset. In the manner of a tropism itself, the text will attempt to 'repel' such a limiting and cliched classification.

Such interjections are clearly ironic, but largely because they are likely to be precisely the recognizable gestures of the 'trained' nouveau roman reader: in short, the reader who has come to regard the decentring of the author as paradigmatic of contemporary experimental fiction and who may be hostile to such a 'reactionary' activity. The use of the interrogative voice by Sarraute itself serves to problematize such an undertaking. More specifically, many of the interjections of the interrogative voice are likely to be those of the Sarrautean reader who has come to share a sense of the ressenti. In another sequence, the je exhibits acute sensitivity to such a phrase as 'tu m'aimes', thus provoking the sceptical comment: 'Tu le

sentais vraiment à cet âge?' (p. 58). The reference made by the interrogative voice in the opening section concerning the profoundly tropistic region where 'tout fluctue, se transforme, s'échappe' (p. 8) reveals the extent to which 'it' is aware of the characteristic Sarrautean mise en scene of sous-conversation. It is also true that the concentration on the effects which certain words or phrases provoke will be a recognizable Sarrautean feature. Such recurrent phrases include 'non, tu ne feras pas ça' (p. 10), 'ce n'est pas ta maison' (p. 130); or the use of the word 'beauté' (p. 92) or 'bonheur' (p. 122). Certain words and phrases such as these set off a tropistic chain-reaction of attraction and repulsion in the 'classic' Sarrautean fashion. It is also very much the case that the Sarrautean reader will be especially alert to the potentially 'embalming' nature of the images and memories evoked and the extent to which this may contradict the theoretical position the author has outlined several times elsewhere. In this way, the response is both anticipated and voiced in the text (a departure in practice from L'Usage de la parole), but a response which is again that of the Sarrautean reader. Elsewhere, the characteristic features of Sarrautean imagery are questioned by the narrataire: 'des images, des mots qui évidemment ne pouvaient pas se former à cet âge-là dans ta tête' (pp. 17-18), suggesting certainly that we are being presented with writing and not the genre of autobiography, but also that the version is being recounted in a way which would be recognizable to the reader attentive to all the subtleties and traps of sous-conversation. Clearly in such examples the reliability and validity of an 'adult' reconstruction of the child's perceptions or emotions

are also being queried in the conduct of the discourse itself. The reader is therefore encouraged to be suspicious of the versions of episodes and scenes which are presented. From this point of view, Enfance enacts in the text itself many of the concerns of the reader of autobiography. Such ironies, however, can also be said to testify to an awareness on Sarraute's part of how she has constructed a particular 'reading community', in her case with a commitment to the ressenti and tropism - it is not by accident that the intimate 'tu' form is used.²⁰

Such a figuration of a particular reading community had become a distinctive feature of the latest development of the nouveau roman. As Vicky Mistacco has pointed out, the nouveau roman has educated its own brand of reader based on the assumption of shared expectations and conventions (however transgressive).²¹ By adopting in Enfance a narrative strategy where such a figuration in the text is made more explicit, the reader's 'freedom' may be considered to be severely jeopardized: the dialogue, it may be felt, between the two voices in the text may have the negative outcome of 'excluding' the reader from any other form of participation than that of taking up the role of the interrogative voice. Such an impression of restriction arises from a certain blurring of contours between the narrataire (or 'reader in the text') and the actual reader: in both L'Usage de la parole and Enfance the two seem to have merged.

Such a critical problem may be directly attributed to Sarraute's emphasis on the ressenti itself. The intelligibility of the text

would be severely impeded if the reader did not share such a linguistic and psychological hyper-sensitivity - the ressenti becomes a necessary assumption or working hypothesis. It is necessary to examine some of the rhetorical processes working within Sarraute's texts in order to create this shared sense of the ressenti and the centrality of tropism - it makes sense to regard it as a rhetorical, narrative construct rather than as a psychological truth. Tropism itself thus becomes a trope in the rhetorical strategy of the text. The ressenti can be interpreted as one of the 'enabling conventions' allowing the text to come into being. Sarraute in Enfance is not only playing with her own fictional universe, but is delineating more sharply the reader's activity in the rhetorical processes of the text.

If it is true that Enfance enters into an informed relationship with the Sarrautean reader above all, it may be objected that the highly original and productive use of the dialogue format excludes the reader not acquainted with the Sarrautean code. It is Valerie Minogue's contention that the second voice (a term which she prefers to interrogative voice) is not in fact any more 'authoritative' or 'natural' than the narrator. In her view both voices are endowed with broadly the same *staus*.²² However, it is surely also true that the process of identification can work both ways: the reader may be more likely to want to occupy the position of the more 'superior' and 'informed' position of this second voice. The interrogative voice therefore provides a 'superior' level of signification to the 'trap' of the perhaps facile evocation of childhood memories. Of course, it

should be pointed out that this 'readerly familiarity' can occur commonly in respect of any author's works. This is not a problem exclusive to Sarraute's texts. In Enfance, however, critical participation is essential to the movement of the text: far from being allowed to be 'passive', the reader (whether of the Sarrautean variety or otherwise) cannot fail to become engaged in the problematics of memory and textualization (in autobiographical writing and in writing generally) which this work conspicuously raises. Readers are invited to become actively involved in the dynamics of the composition of a text of this kind. However, it would be equally mistaken to take no account at all of the existence of a level of reading which can be broadly identified as being based around such a Sarrautean code of signification.

Examining Enfance in the context of the nouveau roman's engagement with autobiographical forms in the 1980s, it can be concluded that like Robbe-Grillet's work it is clearly an unconventional work in terms of the genre within which it may be located. The content and the form of the texts produced by both nouveaux romanciers serve to question many of the assumptions governing the textual organization of autobiography generally. Traditional expectations of revelation and confession are systematically undermined. Both writers eschew the causality implicit in the narrativized accounts of conventional retrospective 'justificatory' reconstructions. From a reading of these texts, we do not find a 'reestablishment' of selfhood and subjectivity (let alone a valorization of the uniqueness of the artistic consciousness), nor is the establishment of such in any

sense the 'project' of the works in question. Instead, both writers foreground fragmentation at the level both of the subject's autobiographising consciousness and at the level of the textualization of this process. Fundamental questions concerning the epistemological and ontological validity of the genre are raised, either implicitly or in some cases explicitly. The relationship in autobiography generally between art and truth is vividly dramatized. From this point of view it may well be the case that the composition of these works does bear out the formal realist demand for a structure itself characterised by the discontinuity of the personality and the flux of reality. Both writers contest the legitimacy and authority of autobiography as a 'natural' or unproblematic activity and so reveal the discursive nature of such an écriture. Both writers have produced works which are highly self-conscious to say the least.

However, unlike the volumes of Robbe-Grillet's Romanesques, Nathalie Sarraute's text does not in any sense contain levels of signification which belong to 'discrete' layers. We do not find explicit theoretical reflections or literary commentary of any kind; nor are there any 'revelations' (however unreliable) pertaining to the life of the adult writer and his/her works; nor is there a distinction (however mobile) between 'fiction' and 'autobiography'. It could therefore be argued that it may be more 'subversive' as an autobiography in the sense that it is not possible for the reader to gain access to a recognizable textual level of information which may 'unlock', however tentatively or ironically, the writer's other

works. It is true that in Enfance we see the characteristic Sarrautean emphasis on the sensitivity towards language; however, it could equally well be argued in psychological terms that this is in fact a very typical feature of the child's consciousness. Nevertheless we do find an emphasis on the value of books and writing which may be 'processed' by the reader as the 'evidence' for the evolution of literary artist. The comments made concerning the reaction to her essay 'mon premier chagrin' could be said to document the birth of her interest in the fluid and mobile world of tropism. In the essay, she had liked 'ce qui était fixe, cernable, immuable [...] aucun risque de voir quoi que ce soit se mettre à fluctuer, devenir instable, incertain ... j'ai perdu pied dès que j'ai dû quitter ces régions où je me sentais en parfaite sécurité et aborder celles mouvantes, inquiétantes de la géométrie dans l'espace' (pp. 214-5). This 'dangerous' area would be likened by the Sarrautean reader to precisely that of sous-conversation.

Claude Simon and the Autobiographical Impulse

The publication of Les Géorgiques in 1981 marked in many ways the turning-point in both Simonian aesthetics and criticism. The presence in this text of material of a demonstrably 'personal' nature would eventually force commentators to revise the previously widespread view of Simon as the nouveau romancier who had most enthusiastically embraced the Ricardolian formalist emphasis on the poetics of textual production. Claude Simon repeatedly emphasized throughout the 1970s in particular the extent to which his texts were composed as a result of work in and on language. It was asserted by

him (and his exegetes) that representation and expression had been expunged and that instead his writing could be characterised as a self-referential exploration of language. The stress which was continually placed on linguistic and thematic transformation appeared to exclude any consideration of an extra-textual 'reality' of any kind, let alone a 'subject' existing independently of writing. A great deal of resistance was exhibited (sometimes in a very vocal and aggressive manner) whenever any attempt was made to test out the relationship between the texts themselves and the discovery of referents which may have formed the basis of such a process of (re)writing. In view of Simon's own acknowledged involvement (however reluctantly) in some of the most turbulent and violent encounters in twentieth-century history - many of which would find their way into his fiction in some form or another - this standpoint would become increasingly fragile to uphold. Indeed, as a consequence of the 'evidence' presented by Les Géorgiques, a necessity was beginning to impose itself for a thorough re-evaluation of the autobiographical dimension (in the widest sense of the term) apparent in so many of his previous works.

Throughout the 1980s, the publication of a number of very different texts by Claude Simon - Les Géorgiques (1981), L'Invitation (1987), L'Album d'un amateur (1988), L'Acacia (1989) - would encourage such a reassessment to take place. It would be broadly true to say that critics (aided and abetted to a very considerable degree by Simon's own stated 'theoretical' position and on a personal level by his characteristic reticence and modesty) had become extremely reluctant

to raise questions in any way 'tainted' with 'le dogme de l'expression et de la représentation', such was the extent to which a hatred of this had become the prevailing orthodoxy in the debates generated by the nouveau roman. For example, although the Spanish Civil War is featured to a greater or lesser degree in Le Sacre du printemps, Le Palace and Histoire, it would be intellectually unthinkable to dare to establish any historical 'truth' concerning the role of the author as a subject implicated in events. Of course, it is very much the case that in Simon's work if anything is learnt from history at all it is that it is fundamentally 'unrepresentable', in the very tangible sense that a 'truth' cannot be meaningfully re-assembled from the chaos of history and experience. Such questions had therefore become forbidden as a consequence of the denial of referentiality - including the author himself - as part of the emphasis on the aesthetics of production and self-reflexivity.

This theoretical doxa had effectively papered over the presence of 'inconvenient' material of a personally referential nature which was visible in a number of Simon's works. It had become an article of faith in this aesthetic programme that the recourse to extra-textual 'evidence' of any kind had no validity whatsoever as a reading strategy. This state of affairs was very graphically demonstrated by the intervention at the Ricardou-dominated Cerisy nouveau roman conference in 1971 at which it was revealed that a former cavalry colonel had written to the novelist concerning an incident in La Route des Flandres. The issue was treated in a very summary fashion and was almost literally ridiculed as a blatant example of the

naivety implicit in conventional realist interpretative approaches. In a recent article, however, by Anthony Cheal Pugh this text is reproduced in conjunction with a number of letters written to Pugh by Simon concerning the extract in question and the 'historical' episodes to which it relates.²³

It is instructive to examine the argument propounded by Jean Ricardou at the Claude Simon Cerisy conference to see the extent to which 'formalist' criticism experienced enormous difficulties in confronting the presence of personal, 'expressive' writing. It is significant that Ricardou's contribution is itself the opening paper. Entitled "'Claude Simon" textuellement', the purpose would appear to be one of deflecting attention from the Ricardolian twin horrors of expression and representation. In many respects setting the agenda for the colloque as a whole, it is inevitable that Ricardou stridently denies notions of originality and genius pertaining to an 'author' as being corollaries of what he considers the reactionary literary ideology of Romanticism. Ricardou again suggests that the term 'scripteur' is a less ideologically-contaminated description of the 'subject' which produces the text. Moreover, it is Ricardou's view that 'Le scripteur est le produit de son produit: il est une mobilité intra-scripturale'.²⁴ Although Simon himself does not refer to this specific point, he nevertheless intervenes in the ensuing discussion to contest any notion of 'genius', thus lending some credence to Ricardou's theoretical position. It has to be conceded that Ricardou largely succeeds in removing 'autobiographical' considerations from the discussions and communications which are

presented. It is clear that at this stage at least Ricardou's textual materialist aesthetic was triumphant. At the colloque devoted to Robbe-Grillet one year later he gives the following extended description of the status of scripteur:

L'écrivain n'est pas un auteur, cette unicité originale soumise, hors du texte, aux variations extrinsèques de son existence. L'écrivain est un scripteur, cet opérateur changeant soumis, par le texte, aux variations intrinsèques que provoque son travail. L'auteur n'est pas affecté par ce qu'il écrit: il est une stabilité extrascripturale.²⁵

Simon's novels of this period - La Bataille de Pharsale (1969), Les Corps conducteurs (1971), Triptyque (1973) and Leçon de choses (1975) - certainly seem less concerned with the encounter with 'history' than do his novels up to and including Histoire (1967) in the sense that these texts very much bear the mark of the poetics of textual production, such is the extent to which the process of writing is foregrounded and the referent is relegated on theoretical grounds. We find less of the personal and familial explorations which so characterised the novels of the 60s. When Les Géorgiques was published in 1981, therefore, critical discourse on Simon was obliged to confront the 'personal' precisely because there seemed to be a return to the familial and historically-engaged (in the broadest sense) works which seemed to have ended (in literary historical terms) with Histoire.

The title itself evoked in Simon's readers possibly the Georges figure who appears in Simon's earlier work. In Les Géorgiques, the eighteenth and twentieth centuries become related by means of the investigation of the death of an ancestor, who happens to have been

an actual member of the author's family. In the course of a number of articles written shortly after its publication, the beginnings of a re-assessment of Simon's autobiographical concerns can be seen. For example, for Stuart Sykes the novel moves 'from biography to autobiography'²⁶; while Alastair Duncan claims that it offers 'historical biography on a grand scale'.²⁷ In this novel, an apparently 'biographical' process of reconstruction seems to be taking place: 'authentic' documents in the form of letters and papers are used by the narrator as part of this endeavour. At one level, the novel is then a 'biography' of this ancestor, and also an account of Orwell's activities in the Spanish Civil War, and yet another visit to the Simonian 'site' of the Front in 1939 to 1940, familiar to readers of La Route des Flandres. What is known about these 'characters' is therefore mediated through their writings: so we are presented with an avowedly unreliable and 'impossible' reconstruction based on texts which are themselves partial and biased. The Simonian emphasis on the fragmentation of experience and the implications which this has for narrative form is apparent. Alastair Duncan and Michael Evans have mentioned the parallels engendered by the references throughout the text to Gluck's Orpheus and Eurydice: this is a legend which has been constantly re-written as a narrative, poem, opera and novel.²⁸ This fertile image suggests that we can only ever textualize experience, not totalize it - thus Simon is recognizing the 'impossibility' of writing history in representational terms. Nevertheless, by using a personal referent as a 'source' - however unreliable this textual origin is made to appear and however much the process of reconstruction is self-

consciously revealed as problematic in the extreme - Claude Simon effectively disrupts the Ricardolian orthodoxy which was founded on the conviction that the 'hors-texte' did not exist. The rigidity of the formalist aesthetic cannot easily be reconciled with the appearance of real referents in a work of supposedly progressive écriture.

The shift in critical thinking by and on Claude Simon can be documented by the interest which the publication of the text would provoke in the autobiographical dimension of his work generally. In the interview which is conducted with Simon in the book Claude Simon: New Directions, when asked directly about the extract 'Fragment' which was based on what he knew of his father's death, Simon comments: 'From L'Herbe on, all my novels verge on the autobiographical'.²⁹ Later in this interview, he repeats the same point:

From L'Herbe on, all my novels are next to autobiographical. Which does not mean that they make up an autobiography. I do not 'tell all' about myself.³⁰

In his contribution to the New York nouveau roman conference in 1982, Simon reveals the 'origins' of Les Géorgiques. It is interesting to note that he feels compelled to comment specifically on the highly problematic question of the existence of a 'referent'. He states that he wished to find some means of organizing the fragments left to him by this ancestor who had been a member of the Convention, a general in the Revolution and during the Napoleonic period, precisely because he was struck by parallels with his own experience of war and revolution 'which I was preserving from my personal experience'.³¹

While it is admitted that once again the 'information' was characterised by discontinuity and uncertainty, there was nevertheless according to Claude Simon a continuity in the thematic sense:

I found a disturbing relationship [...] between events which had taken place some hundred years earlier and those which I had witnessed in Barcelona in 1936 or in Belgium in 1940, or even the account which George Orwell rendered of his experience in Spain, an account which is in itself a perfect model [...] of an account by more or less voluntary omissions, and thus itself an account full of holes.³²

A thematic continuity could therefore be achieved by organizing 'these discontinuous fragments of history'.³³ The project inevitably is not in any sense to re-establish 'truth' - this would indeed have seemed paradoxical in the light of the instability of memory and history displayed in La Route des Flandres. Simon does, however, concern himself once again with the cyclical nature of history. In this respect at least the novel can be considered a 'reconversion totale'. Nevertheless, the extent to which he has not yet discarded his Ricardolian baggage can be seen by the fact that he still chooses to emphasize the processes of writing in the elaboration of this 'fiction', underlining that the 'characters' in the text, for example, did not exist in any referential sense, despite their 'origins' in 'real' individuals:

made of words and of the images which these words provoke [...] L.S.M. is not, nor can be, a portrait of General Lacombe Saint-Michel, just as 'O' is not George Orwell [...]. That the old lady is not my grandmother and that the General's great-grandson, a character of the novel as the others are, also bears but a distant and limited connection with me.³⁴

Thus Claude Simon is proposing that family and personal history of the kind with which the Simonian reader will be familiar from novels

such as Histoire and La Route des Flandres (and of course L'Herbe) should be considered as a kind of 'material' to be subjected to 'generation' by the practice of writing. Simon does not therefore exclude the existence of a 'referent'; merely regards these as the basis of an operation of textual transformation. In this respect, Simon resorts to the vocabulary of the Ricardolian programme, while jettisoning from it the contempt for extra-textual reference of any kind.

Both in his intervention at the New York colloquium and in the Discours de Stockholm, Simon mentions the extent to which he has 'witnessed' the turbulence of the twentieth century. In New York, he comments that 'I have in my life been involved in some rather tumultuous events'³⁵; while in Stockholm there is a rather more lengthy statement of his encounter with contemporary 'history'. On both occasions, he is of course quick to emphasize that he does not propose to use such experience in a didactic or moralizing sense: it is the confusion of experience and the impossibility of truth which has preoccupied him. However, the fact that Simon can now mention this with impunity suggests itself the distance he has travelled from Ricardolian formalism. Commenting on this passage from Discours de Stockholm, Alastair Duncan can claim that it 'invite à une relecture des romans dans un nouveau contexte, celui d'un espace autobiographique'.³⁶ It is Duncan's contention that this autobiographical continuity stretches from La Corde raide (1947) - his only truly autobiographical text in the generic sense per se - throughout all his work. Thus the reevaluation can take place.

This genuinely 'new direction' in Simon criticism can be seen in particular in the work of Anthony Cheal Pugh, Celia Britton and Lucien Dällenbach. In a number of landmark articles, Pugh scrutinizes Simon's work with reference to recent work on narrative history and historiography.³⁷ Pugh even goes so far as to publish letters and documents communicated to him by Claude Simon concerning his 'actual' involvement in certain events, thus opening up the previously unthinkable possibility of comparing and contrasting these accounts with the 'fictionalized' versions. Pugh provides a geographical and historical gloss on the material. Such an endeavour on the part of a Simon critic would have been considered profoundly ideologically unsound and deeply misleading as a critical strategy during the Ricardolian period. Every effort is of course made to underline the fact Simon presents us with a textualization of history: it would seem to be Pugh's contention that Simon's novels dramatize the problematic status of history as a discourse itself. Such 'documents' are important because of the extent to which they relate to the context of the work in the full, linguistic sense: 'Aucun acte de langage, y compris l'écriture et la lecture des romans modernes n'accède à la signification qu'à travers des contextes: celui de l'énonciateur, celui du destinataire - et celui du langage en tant que système de relais en rapport à l'intertexte'.³⁸ Pugh does of course recognize that the existence of such documentary material does not constitute a guarantee of authentic or verifiable evidence. It is his view that by rejecting formalist closure and by re-inserting the question of the referent, the text is in fact enhanced rather than diminished: 'il faut se laisser égarer, parfois,

sur "la route de la référence", car elle nous ramène à un texte enrichi, plein d'échos d'un passé dont l'étrange absence/présence ne cesse de fasciner le scripteur'.³⁹

Pugh is right to conclude from his analysis of the document in question that more questions are raised rather than solved by so doing: 'Que Simon ait bien voulu reconstituer "l'original" de cet épisode semble donc poser un problème'.⁴⁰ Are we to use it as confirmation of precisely the whole aesthetic process of scriptural/textual transformation; or should we use it as part of an attempt to reconstitute some kind of verifiable truth? There is a certain danger in reverting to a 'sources and influences' criticism which would immediately remove the concentration on the operation of the text. It is not entirely clear from Pugh's analysis what specific conclusions are to be drawn from the examination of secondary material of this kind. Inevitably the first critical endeavour would be to test out the different 'versions' of events which are given: this would probably result in stating that Simon provides a deliberately distorted 'reworking' of events presented by means of the mise en scène of a transforming consciousness and demonstrably faulty memory. It may then be possible to state that Simon is involved in an aesthetic representation of this process. Pugh is right to emphasize that it is increasingly necessary to re-examine 'the apparently conflicting claims of a concept of writing based upon the notion of fictional "production" [...] and one that remains in contact with "experience" and its historical contexts'.⁴¹ This is of course in a sense to locate Simon as a writer divided

between mimesis and poiesis, which is precisely the view of Lucien Dallenbach in a major recent book:

Récit en train de s'inventer au présent d'une écriture qui tâtonne pour trouver sa voie; mimesis doublée d'une poiesis ou, plutôt, inspirée et dominée par elle.⁴²

This is certainly an advance on the 'formal realist' argument which was previously adduced to describe Simon's textual practices in the pre-Ricardou period. Testing out 'real' referents against textualized versions is valid if the focus of the analysis remains squarely on the writing practices. For Pugh, the examination of documentary evidence also allows for a more interesting evaluation of the encounter between the writing subject and history. The advantage of this approach is that it now becomes possible to answer better the question of the choice of elements and themes as thematic générateurs: this has been a particularly contentious area in nouveau roman aesthetics. In view of the preoccupation with history in Simon's work, this exploration is a potentially fertile one. In terms of autobiography, the emphasis on the construction of selfhood and subjectivity in writing can thus be seen to be exemplified in Simon's novels. Alastair Duncan concludes his article on the 'projet autobiographique' by stating that: 'on peut penser que l'oeuvre de Simon pose des questions qui ne trouveront finalement de réponses que dans les études psychocritiques'.⁴³ It is the extremely complex relationship which exists between the self and language which arguably needs to be examined much more closely. It is indeed such a relationship which Simon's novels appear to dramatize when reconsidered in the light of his autobiographical concerns. The undeniable presence of 'personal' and 'familial' elements make such a

study all the more urgent. Simon has nevertheless attempted to deflect attention from an exclusive preoccupation with autobiography: 'Je n'ai pas le projet d'écrire ma vie. Ceci dit, qu'est-ce que je peux écrire en dehors de ce que j'ai senti, subi, imaginé?'.⁴⁴

It would not of course be possible to 're-construct' a self from Simon's work - the narrative procedures in themselves seem to dramatize the discontinuity of the subject. Any serious analysis of a work such as La Route des Flandres will conclude that subjecthood is characterized by deferral and fragmentation. Claude Simon's works very tangibly demonstrate that the 'self' can never be anything other than unstable and uncertain from an epistemological or ontological point of view. From the perspective of the poetics of autobiography, a 'pacte autobiographique' cannot be entered into with any expectation that an 'author' will be revealed. In any case, despite their grounding in personal, familial and historical 'reality', these are not of course autobiographies à proprement parler for generic reasons - although some, especially Les Géorgiques and L'Acacia, are textes-limites as literary discourses. Nevertheless, it is correct to maintain that a kind of contract is established thanks to the réseau thématique or repertoire which can be gleaned from an analysis of his work: Anthony Pugh, for example, has spoken of a 'textual memory' operating in Simon's oeuvre which plays a crucial role in the reception process.⁴⁵ Successive novels return to some recognizable Simonian 'sites' which become familiar to his readers. Alastair Duncan has provided a detailed description of the family relationships which can be reconstructed from his novels: family-

trees of both Simon's family and the fictional 'famille Thomas' are even reproduced; and the obvious parallels are explored. It is inevitable that this knowledge will inform the reading of his works: L'Acacia, for example, can be seen as a further excursion into this personal and familial fonds. By clarifying such a network of relationships, however, there is the constant risk of récupération along the lines which were once condemned. Duncan argues that we are invited by Simon to re-read his works autobiographically: 'Simon récupère son oeuvre; rétrospectivement, il la transforme en autobiographie'.⁴⁶ However, the fact that these networks of family relationships (both 'real' and 'imaginary') are not apparent from the texts themselves should not be overlooked. The value of this critical enterprise is to support the claims of an intratextual reading. It may be objected that although Simon seems to have invited this approach, attention may well be dangerously deflected from the functioning of individual texts. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that a Simonian 'code de lecture' does operate. There can be no more 'natural' or 'uncontaminated' reading of a Simon text than of any other; hence the justification of examining the aspects of this 'memory' which is brought to bear.

To this should be added what may be described as an 'iconographical' dimension arising from the reproduction in critical works of actual referents or generators of his fiction - as in Ricardou's Le Nouveau Roman (paradoxically in view of his hostility to extra-textual 'supports') which reproduces the portrait of the ancestor used in La Route des Flandres and the collage of postcards

in Histoire; or even more noticeably in Lucien Dällenbach's Claude Simon which contains a veritable wealth of Simonian 'memorabilia' and what may be described as 'archive material'. Dällenbach has revealed that Simon was very involved in the iconography in the book.⁴⁷ This state of affairs would therefore support the proposition that Claude Simon is indeed inviting autobiographical readings.

Such an approach seems to come with the imprimatur of the author; however, any consideration of the development of the nouveau roman should provoke a measure of suspicion regarding authorially-sanctioned readings of various kinds: they cannot in themselves be used to 'guarantee' the text. It would be a great injustice to reduce the narrative, linguistic, thematic and stylistic richness of Simon's work to a primitive or vulgar autobiographical récupération along conventional lines. The analysis of archive material, the study of variants, the identification of 'real' referents or sources, the establishing of personal and familial parallels - these directions in Simon criticism may indeed be permissible now that 'Ricardolianism' has been jettisoned. It is certainly extremely refreshing to observe the fruits of this research. However, while conceding the validity of these critical endeavours which move beyond purely formalist criteria, it is equally necessary to avoid the temptation to reduce the import of Simon's work merely to a reworking of certain personal preoccupations. In order best to resist what may inevitably be labelled 'revisionism', it is vital that this debate remains attentive to the problematics of the construction of selfhood

and subjectivity in writing and, in Simon's case in particular, the representation of the historical subject.

As we have argued, the nouveau roman's fertile engagement with autobiographical forms of various kinds raises a number of important questions. It is of course evident that these writers would wish to reject the notion that their oeuvre can in any sense be 'explained' by exclusive reference to the account of experiences which are given in their autobiographical texts. We do not find in Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute and Simon any valorization of the 'life of the author' as an interpretative strategy which can be fruitfully pursued. It has been demonstrated how the texts themselves consciously subvert such a totalizing reading by means of a range of narrative and formal devices; while more explicit 'disclaimers' are inserted into the fabric of some of the works involved. It is not possible to 'reconstruct' a figure of the author from the autobiographical mises en scène portrayed. Thus it can be maintained that these writers have not embarked on a 'reactionary' textual practice at odds with their previous concern with formal experimentation and the rejection of outmoded aesthetic criteria.

However, the presence of this autobiographical dimension presents considerable problems for nouveau roman criticism regarding the validity and the usefulness of the autobiographical material provided, if the pitfalls of narrow biographical criticism are to be avoided. While seeking to distance themselves from reductionist

approaches, the nouveaux romanciers cannot prevent their works being reassessed retrospectively in the light of the 'subsequent' appearance of works which may be 'misread' in this way. It has always been the case that the nouveau roman collectively has been attentive to the question of lisibilité. The fact that this increasing preoccupation with 'authorship' and 'subjectivity' has now been placed back on the critical agenda is of course at an important level a reaction precisely to the formalist/productivist approach which seemed to have itself become 'reductionist' in its own way. There is, however, a sense in which the autobiographical 'phase' of the nouveau roman (if we can revert to such a literary-historicizing notion) raises precisely the issue of reading itself. It can certainly be said to constitute an attempt to escape from previous readings which had themselves become limiting: thus a means of escape has been provided from the 'prison-house' of reflexivity. Whether, of course, autobiography presents another case of misreading is rather more difficult to predict at this stage.

In so far as it is possible to gauge the 'value' of the nouveau roman's explorations in this domain, it would be fair to say that these texts also have the merit of focusing attention more widely on the poetics of autobiography. We have seen in this chapter the extent to which the textual practices which are adopted serve to query many of the assumptions and conventions in autobiographical writing more generally, thus foregrounding the processes of writing and reading. The legitimacy of autobiographical writing as an unproblematic discourse is systematically challenged. It can be seen

that there is a concerted assault on the notion both that an 'author' can be successfully reconstructed and that a 'subject' can be reassembled. Instead, we are presented with dramatizations of the fragmentation of the writing subject confronted with a 'deferred' selfhood. It is this écriture which the nouveau roman can be said to be putting into practice. By concentrating on the relationship between écriture and the problematics of subjectivity, criticism will be less likely to be seduced into 'biographism'.

It can be argued that the generic glissements between novel and autobiography in these examples locate the nouveau roman firmly within the 'postmodernist' mode. It is this removal of clearly defined boundaries between different kinds of writings which constitutes the most radical feature of these works. By liberating such writing from its 'generic' position, there seems to be a greater textual mobility and plurality. It would seem to illustrate precisely what is meant therefore by postmodern textuality. It is evident that the fragmented subjectivity of the writer is itself being used as a textually-generating discourse. This is also very much in evidence in the works of 'adjacent' or non-canonical nouveaux romanciers such as Marguerite Duras and Philippe Sollers. In Duras's L'Amant, for example, the text originated in a commentary on an album of family photographs. In Sollers's recent works (such as Le Coeur absolu and Les Folies françaises) the playful exploration of the 'site' of the thinly-disguised male sexual psyche of the 'real' author is the central theme: like Robbe-Grillet's Romanesques volumes, these 'unstable' texts hover between the categories of

fiction, literary essay and autobiography. Such works dramatize the fragility of identity and the problematics of the textualization of selfhood. This does not suggest that a return to psychological realism or the reinstated romanticization of the author is taking place; rather, the autobiographical trend in recent 'experimental' writing demonstrates an attempt to maintain plurality. Far from privileging authorial discourse as a 'natural' mode, these texts submit the figure of the author and his/her subjectivity to intense scrutiny. Once again, the nouveau roman seems to be anticipating and articulating in its practice a question which is emerging in literary theory.

Notes: Chapter 6

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10. There has in fact been an adaptation and mise en scène by Simone Benmussa at the Théâtre au Petit Rond-Point in 1984. For an account of Nathalie Sarraute's theatre, see Arnaud Rykner, Théâtres du nouveau roman (Paris, 1988). See also the extended interview with Nathalie Sarraute, in S. Benmussa, Nathalie Sarraute: qui êtes-vous? (Paris, 1987), pp. 27 - 159.
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15. Ibid., p. 26.
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24. Claude Simon: analyse, théorie (Paris, 1975), p. 12.
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31. In L. Oppenheim, Three Decades of the French New Novel (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), p. 84.
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39. Ibid., p. 40.
40. Ibid., p. 43.
41. 'Claude Simon: Fiction and the Question of Autobiography', art. cit., p. 82.
42. L. Dällenbach, Claude Simon (Paris, 1988), p. 43.
43. A.B. Duncan, 'Claude Simon: le projet autobiographique', art. cit., p. 62.
44. 'Je n'ai pas le projet d'écrire ma vie. Ceci dit, qu'est-ce que je peux écrire en dehors de ce que j'ai senti, subi, imaginé. Même l'imaginaire est autobiographique'. Quoted by A.C. Pugh, 'Claude Simon: Fiction and the Question of Autobiography', art. cit., p.95, note 1.
45. See A.C. Pugh, Simon: 'Histoire' (London, 1982).
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CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to analyse how the nouveau roman has been deeply implicated in the aesthetics of modernity and postmodernity. It is evident that contemporary literature has been enriched by the contribution of the nouveau roman, whose fertile creative and critical practice has had a great influence in the wider cultural debates. This study has asserted the extent to which the nouveau roman has had recourse to aesthetically legitimizing strategies as part of its impetus of literary self-justification. By means of its literary-historical confrontation with modernism and the valorization in particular of the question of representation, it inscribed itself indelibly on the literary landscape. Later, its willingness to accept and then reject a poetics of textual autonomy itself illustrated a preoccupation with refining and theorizing its endeavours. Subsequently, free from the 'determinism' of this position of pure self-reflexivity, the recent autobiographical explorations - although certainly the last 'period' in the nouveau roman in view of the respective ages of the individual novelists - has demonstrated the potency of the écriture which these writers have produced. By placing the nouveau roman within the context of the controversies in postmodernism, moreover, it is possible to consider a number of questions which were previously excluded from the agenda which had been set. Far from becoming ossified into a set of fixed precepts concerning the nature of the aesthetic enterprise in which these novelists have been engaged in their diverse ways, the nouveau

roman has continued to remain flexible and receptive to new approaches.

Above all, it should be clear that the nouveau roman has been uniquely preoccupied with the question of reading - hence the plurality of critical strategies which it has initiated. The 'history' of the nouveau roman is also the history of the readings which it has both engendered and then resisted. Although it has been essential to use a construct of a nouveau roman as a 'group' of writers in terms of the argument which has been presented, this is not to imply any kind of group cohesion or collective literary programme. Indeed, it has been insisted upon that it is the diversity of aesthetic responses which has in so many respects characterised the endeavours of these novelists. It is only by close attention to how individual texts are subject to a variety of readings that the plurality and heterogeneity of the nouveau roman can best be maintained. If anything at all is to be learned from the nouveau roman, it is the deficiency of totalizing theoretical and literary-historical constructions. The experience of reading the nouveau roman highlights the inadequacies of any over-rigid critical apparatus, such is the extent to which the nouveau roman always seems to escape from the clutches of homogenizing endeavours of any kind which have been placed upon it.

To conclude, if it makes any sense to speak of a postmodern 'legitimation' crisis, then the nouveau roman can be said to have both predicted and contributed to this 'condition', by means of

reflecting the epistemological and ontological uncertainty which characterizes our apprehension of contemporary reality and how we set about constructing it. It is as active readers that the nouveau roman addresses us, forcing us to examine the assumptions which we bring to the text by undermining our attempts to impose patterns of coherence derived from whatever source of 'knowledge'. It is very much the case that while the nouveau roman may indeed have created its own 'community' with certain identifiable expectations of transgression and reflexivity, it is also important to bear in mind how the radical experience of reading the nouveau roman has enabled us to read other texts along these lines. Indeed, it could be asserted that the 'value' of the nouveau roman has resided principally in this re-drafting of the criteria by which we approach literary works in addition to our assessment of many other cultural manifestations. If a 'revolution of reading' has occurred, then this can in no small measure be attributed to the efforts of the nouveaux romanciers. If it is correct to state that in numerous areas increasing attention is being paid to narrativity, then this is also due to the nouveau roman's contestation of narrative and representation as unproblematic constructs. If contemporary culture is preoccupied with the nature of discourse as the means by which we shape our understanding of the world, then again the nouveau roman's discursive self-consciousness has been instrumental in ensuring that this has remained a vital question. Now that some forty years of sustained creative and critical endeavour have passed, perhaps the time has come to recognize the nouveau roman's essential contribution to the wider cultural condition.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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There has been no attempt to provide an exhaustive list of works by the nouveaux romanciers: only those works which have been used directly or indirectly in the course of the preceding chapters are mentioned. For the purposes of the argument presented in this thesis, by the term nouveau roman I understand the fictional and other creative and critical works (e.g. autobiography; ciné-romans; criticism in volume form) by Michel Butor, Robert Pinget, Jean Ricardou, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Claude Simon.

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