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Les Bateleurs-Jongleurs: Word-lists in narrative,

with special reference to La Vie mode d'emploi by Georges Perec

Timothy Edward Beard

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with
the requirements of the degree of Ph.D in the Faculty of Arts.

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Abstract

The problems of how to make sense of a text that the word-list provokes in Rabelais' Tiers Livre and the solution offered of minimal sense-making structures are replaced in Georges Perec's La Vie mode d'emploi by an emphasis on ludic and intratextual ways of making sense of the word-lists. Perec uses the form of the word-list to problematize description and representation and the device plays a central role in the dereferentialization and defamiliarization of his text. The conventional hierarchies within descriptive techniques and between description and narration are redefined and emphasis is put on the individual word and connections made through juxtaposition. This enables Perec to create a network of inter- and intra-textual resonance which enriches the reading of the text. The ludic nature of the word-lists, allied with their content and endings, expose rhetorical and aesthetic choices that reveal the structure and concerns of the text, notably the denial of any attempt at being exhaustive. The word-list may also carry apparent contradictions in tension, creating a dialogic relationship between precision and ambivalence, order and mystery, fictionality and reality. The list is fully subsumed into the play of fictionality by fictional layering devices and allows us to approach many of the central concerns of Perec's novel, the play of problem posing and solving, precision and imagination, apparent authorial abdication and the balance of description and narrative.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare this thesis to be my own work, and that the views expressed are those of the author and not of the University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'T. S. Q.', with a horizontal line underneath.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The list is one of the earliest written forms, used in ancient Mesopotamia for administrative purposes; Homer, more famously, used lists to give the names of warships; the Bible uses lists as genealogies. It is surprising then that lists have not been more often exploited in literature. The form has several immediately apparent benefits - of concision, of being an aide-memoire, of being widely used in everyday life - any of which, at first glance, might be useful to a writer. Indeed, it is still a popular form in its own right - many books of lists are published: The Book of Sporting Lists, of Cricket Lists, of Football Lists, The Book of Literary Lists and The Book of Lists itself, which runs to four editions. Dictionaries are lists, so is the Hit Parade, so too is a telephone directory.

Lists form part of our everyday experience of language. They have always been used to classify our observation of the world. Most prevalent in Natural History, they have often been used for scientific reporting, giving an impression of being able to represent transparently the results of an observation of the world. Natural Historians have used the list form as a device by which to impose and reveal classification, and by which to nullify the distortion inevitable in the transformation of observation into language.

Novelists seem to have used the technique sparingly, however. Many novels have a list in them, but in few is it used as a fully worked-out literary device. Some writers have a reputation for using lists: Rabelais comes to mind immediately, and so do Jules Verne and Herman Melville. We are not going to study the texts of these last two writers in detail. Verne's use of the word-list is for the most part didactic;¹ the list forms part of a didactic topos and is not foregrounded as a problematic literary device in

his work, reflecting rather the expanse of knowledge and experience to be discovered in the world. Melville, going further than this, incorporates the word-list thematically - the long list of dictionary definitions of a whale at the beginning of Moby Dick establishes the verbal nature of our encounter with the whale, as Edgar Dryden remarks:

By naming the main divisions of his cetological construct 'Folio', 'Octavo' and 'Duodecimo' and calling the smaller units 'Chapters' he turns whales into books²

and this in turn expresses the difficulty that both Ahab and Melville experience in trying to pin the whale down, the problems of harpooning becoming a broad metaphor for the problems of denomination and representation. The device is used to reflect both a thematic concern and a problem within the writing of the text.

This implies a degree of literary self-consciousness in the use of the word-list and Georges Perec takes up and expands this enquiry. One important reason for treating Perec and Rabelais together is that they sit on either side of the realist divide. One writes before realism had claimed the novel for its own, and the other after the convention had been superseded. Verne and Melville write during the Golden Age of the nineteenth century realist convention, and perhaps this explains why even they, who do use word-lists, can only use them in a relatively limited way.

Word-lists need larger fictional boundaries to inhabit than the demands of nineteenth century realism normally allow. We find them in Epic poetry: the Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad is a famous example. William G. Thalman comments:

The catalogue may have originated as a way of preserving information in the absence of written documents. The Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad is widely believed to be such a poetic record³

and the interpretation of the Catalogue has often been made in terms of the historical information it has to offer. The catalogues are thought to have been inserted into Homer's poem:

the great catalogues sit very loosely in the framework of the Iliad. Some poems achieve catalogues, this one has a catalogue thrust upon it⁴

writes Sir Denys Page, and he notices that the historical record is at least to some extent determined by the poetic form:

the numbers are to some degree at the mercy of the metre. It is noticeable that the Catalogue includes all multiples of ten up to a hundred, except the only one (seventy) which cannot be fitted into the verse.⁵

This suggests the the presence of the catalogues is more problematic than the treatment of them as historical record may imply. And this is indeed the case of the word-list in general which tends to expand the boundaries of the work it finds itself in.

The list in biblical genealogies, for example, where the demands of vraisemblance, in nineteenth century terms, are absent, is used to establish and emphasize a tradition. It is the repetition of the form - begat, begat, begat, - which makes the sense, and J.P. Fokkelman argues:

The very monotony of the genealogical enumeration suggests that begetting children is a matter of course... Accompanying this is a secondary theme, that of the supreme importance of the first born son from generation to generation, so that only his name is worth mentioning.⁶

The variety of genres in biblical narrative is one way that the fictional boundaries of the works (the set of expectations that we bring to the fictional text and which are, in turn, modified by it) are expanded and the word-list plays its part in this. They also help to establish the fictional conditions of the Bible - Gerhard von Rad argues that the genealogies help to impose a linear concept of time and says:

Old Testament faith is conspicuous by its distinctive thinking about time (in contrast to the mythical, cyclical thinking of ancient Oriental religions!)⁷

thus playing a central role in establishing a particular view of the world - a world view that wishes to impose its own terms and conditions, as Josipovici comments:

The genealogies, like the narratives, keep alive the memory of the wondrous facts: that Abraham was called, that Sarah bore a child,... Such amazing things cannot be repeated often enough, but they can be repeated as a continuous and continuing story because Jacob is Isaac's son and Judah Jacob's⁸

fixing in the memory of the audience the basis of the tradition and helping to emphasize the importance of the father-son relationship which characterizes man's relation to Yahweh. Josipovici continues:

No less than Proust's great novel this is a book about memory and remembering and the product of memory and remembering⁹

so we can say that, just as in Melville, the word-list is used both structurally and thematically, to establish and expand the boundaries and import of the text.

Of course, the vast majority of novels published still pay obeisance to the conventions of realism. In these texts the word-list is most often limited to one of three roles: a didactic role, as is primary in Jules Verne, a thematic role reflecting character (David Lodge, in his series of articles in 'The Independent on Sunday', 'The Art of Fiction', treats the list as number thirteen in the series [Sunday 18th August 1991]. He examines a passage from Scott Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night where Nicole goes shopping and gives an interpretation that is entirely thematic, centring on character traits that the list reveals: Nicole is choosy, extravagant and so on and he discusses the contrast of the opulence of her shopping list with the drabness of the listed characteristics of the town). The third role, and one often

ascribed as the only role of the word-list, is that it makes an attempt at poetic description.

Let us take an example that will demonstrate at least the first two categories. In Ian Fleming's You Only Live Twice, there are two explicit lists.¹⁰ Fleming lists the six main categories of poison and the twenty two poisonous plants that Dr. Guntram Shatterhand has imported. Not only is this botanical exactitude reminiscent of Jules Verne, and even Jean Lemaire de Belges, the Renaissance Natural Historian, it also is an example of the didactic use of the list, as Bond and the reader learn this information (Bond, we assume, memorizes it instantly). It has thematic resonance as well, reflecting the scientific evil that the Doctor tries to harness, and perhaps Bond's ability to overcome it.

It also, most importantly, reinforces the omniscience of the author, an inescapable fact of any novel (but one which Perec disguises - though the disguise is playful - through using Valène and his painting as a narrative device). The fact that both Jules Verne and Ian Fleming can find a place for the word-list in their work suggests that there is no reason why a word-list should not have a regular and natural home in the linear narrative adventure story - the word-list is, after all, a very efficient way of maintaining and sharpening suspense as it holds up the narrative, and makes the reader wait for the working-out of the central story.¹¹ However, as we shall discover, Perec's fictional universe is very different from the linear narrative fictional universe of causality, destiny, discovery and inevitable resolution - the type of fictional universe that is implied by the adventure story that conforms to realist norms.

We shall see how the word-list allows fictional boundaries to be expanded in our extended discussion of fictional layering, where the word-list is situated in conditions which are the result of a

number of layering techniques being brought together. The list is not a rare literary device, then, merely one that is not often fully exploited, and whose literary qualities of exposing writtenness, raising questions about narrative, grammar and representation, are, in the main, inimical to the realist tradition.

The literary list was more common in Rabelais' time, and we have mentioned his reputation for using lists, but it is Perec who takes the device and exploits it more extensively. The very title of his 'romans' - La Vie mode d'emploi - suggests that we will find useful and functional information didactically and clearly presented. We discover while reading the book that this is only sometimes the case.

The title, incorporating two apparently contradictory elements - 'life', random and inexplicable, and 'user's manual', applicable and didactic - expresses a central feature of VME: the concept of two contradictory things held in tension with each other - the momentary time-span of the book and the range of historical periods in the stories, the play of the static and the mobile etc. The word-list plays a full part in this balance, as we shall see. The title also informs us that any reading contract that we might expect will be problematic from the very beginning. This thesis attempts to explain why the list in a literary text such as VME, fictionally presented, is not as straightforward as it may appear.

J.R. Goody writes of the ancient form of the word-list:

The most characteristic form (of early written discourse) is something that rarely occurs in oral discourse at all, (though it sometimes appears in ritual) namely, the list¹²

which tells us quite clearly that almost ever since man has been writing, he has been writing lists. Goody continues:

It is not literary works, but administrative lists that dominate the uses of writing in ancient Mesopotamia¹³

so it is obvious that lists were used in order to make a record, and to organize information. The important factor for us to extract here is that lists are almost exclusively (apart, as Goody says, from ritual uses) a written form. They say to a reader that a text has been organized, that it makes a record of something, and that it is not hiding the fact that it has been written.

When a word-list is found in a narrative, as part of a story, this problematizes its status as record, it means it cannot take on the pseudo-objectivity of scientific observation. This is because there is a level of transmission, a layer of fictionality, quite apart from the inevitable distortions that transposing observation into language imposes, for the text to pass through before we can be convinced that it does record the world. Our experience of reading is that we accept a list as transparent - as far as we know, nobody has attempted to subject Linnaeus' classifications to the type of literary analysis that would reveal hitherto unacknowledged and extra-scientific concerns of his text. These concerns are quite obvious - he is classifying the world for our benefit. A novelist also classifies the world, but in a much more complicated way, as we shall see.¹⁴

If someone gives me a shopping list I have no reason to doubt that its contents and intent correspond primarily to what that person wants me to buy. If I read the same shopping list in a novel, the effect is entirely different as there is a tendency to look for reasons why it should be in the text. I know the list is fictional, despite everything, and I might examine it for clues to character, for what this list can tell me about someone. Already, even at the simplest level, a list is no longer just a list - like any other part of a literary text it loses its innocence, is subject to ambiguity, to examination in terms other than representational transparency. In a fictional text we assume that

everything has a relevance and we seek to interpret signs having accepted this premise - a fictional world has to be organized. Although we do look at shopping lists in real life and make judgments about other people, the randomness of the world about us, the enormous number of explicable possibilities, make the judging a vain task; a fictional text, on the other hand, seeks to establish a more limited world for us to make our way through, and we demand, at the very least, some kind of organizing principle or set of principles that can be discovered through the interpretation of the signs on the page.

The same can be said for the organization of the list itself - there is always an intervening level of transmission to pass through, and sometimes several levels, before the organization of the list can be fully explained. If we examine these levels we should be able to discover important qualities of a text, of its relationship to the world it purports to represent and of the way it is organized. The reading of a text is a process of putting signs together, and the list can reveal not only some of the priorities that underlie its own organization but also those that underlie its context and surroundings.

Taking this in conjunction with the relative scarcity of lists in literary texts, which means that as a reader we are often shocked, even provoked, by their appearance, and acknowledging that they challenge our expectations of what we should find in a literary text with their connotations of scientific observation, imposed classification and objectivity, it becomes apparent that word-lists are parts of a text that will surely repay study. There are two areas that we shall concentrate on: the list and how to make sense of it in Rabelais' Tiers Livre, and then, in much more detail, the list as a fictional construct in La Vie mode d'emploi.

This thesis focuses on La Vie mode d'emploi¹⁵, Georges Perec's seven hundred page masterpiece. The novel is constructed in the

following way: the façade of a Parisian building ten apartments wide and ten apartments high is seen as a chess board; Perec organizes the order in which the Chapters appear following the movement of a knight landing in each room only once. This is known as the 'polygraphe du cavalier' on the 'bi-carré latin orthogonal d'ordre dix'. The content of each Chapter is determined by a list of forty-two elements and two quotations from a selection of authors (p.695) that must be included. Perec gives more details in his article 'Quatre figures pour La Vie mode d'emploi'¹⁶. This is obviously a constraint-based composition method, typical both of Perec and of the Oulipo, the group of which he was an enthusiastic member. One of the aims of the 'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle' was to find new forms for writers to use. Perec, in La Disparition, for instance, exploits the lipogram, using only words that have no 'E' in them, a perfect Oulipian constraint - simple in its principle, more complicated in its execution. VME is dedicated to Raymond Queneau, one of the founder members of the Oulipo.

A further aspect of the constraints in VME is that there must be a flaw in the system, to hide its symmetry, and to make the system less evident. Each Chapter, for instance, has an element 'manque' where something that the system dictates should be included in the Chapter is deliberately left out. This clinamen (a term Perec borrows from Paul Klee meaning the flaw in the system that paradoxically reveals the perfection of the system¹⁷) forms part of the ludic nature of the text where the paradigm of masque and marque identified by Magné concerning the quotations from other works in VME, but which also applies more generally to the functioning of the text, is important - things that are hidden reveal other things:

En définitive, l'énonciation se trouve prise dans la même contradiction fondamentale que celle qui était, pour Perec, au cœur de toute écriture: 'rester caché, être découvert'¹⁸

and he continues:

le discours fictionnel lui-même offre à son lecteur les moyens de repérer les impli-citations qu'il contient. Ce que je vais essayer de décrire pourrait donc être considéré comme la production textuelle d'une compétence lectorale.¹⁹

The masque/marque paradigm functions by offering the reader clues and then allowing him the means to solve the problems that those clues provoke. La Vie mode d'emploi, a novel with Indexes at the end, the Prologue repeated halfway through, with riddles and half-finished crossword puzzles in its pages, and this constraint system underpinning everything, is both explicitly and implicitly, both textually and structurally, ludic.

We are not going to study the lists of elements that make up the skeleton of the text to be included. Others are working on Perec's manuscripts²⁰ and our aim is to examine the effect and function of the word-list in the text itself. Studies of Perec's work have focused on several areas. Some critics concentrate on the autobiographical nature of his work, stressing his Jewish past, the death of his parents, his rootlessness, his use of writing to create a past for himself. Some concentrate on intertextuality, a rich seam running through his novels, with their quotations 'légèrement modifiées'. Others examine the Oulipian aspects of his texts, deciphering and deconstructing such elusive texts as Alphabets, Les Revenentes, and still others look closely at the text to try to elucidate its internal structures and techniques; this is our approach.

The range of Perec's work - from Les Choses to 53 Jours, by way of W ou le Souvenir d'Enfance and Espèces d'Espaces, and including a five-thousand word palindrome, weekly crossword puzzles for 'Le Point', which he likened to a musician practising his scales, and a description of every room he ever slept in - is enormous. He also wrote several texts that are explicitly lists. They are written from an observation, sometimes over a period of years, of

everyday life - in Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien he records the world as seen from the Place Saint-Sulpice.

The difference between these lists and the lists in VME is that the lists in VME are explicitly fictional, deliberately placed within the fictional world of 11, rue Simon-Crubellier. It is possible, however that others of Perec's list texts, such as some of the texts in Espèces d'Espaces, and certainly Je Me Souviens, might be seen as inhabiting a demi-monde between fiction and non-fiction. This passage from Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien, for instance, in its typography and use of numbers, confuses the boundaries between the poetic and the banal:

Passe un 96 il est plein
Passe un 86 il est absolument vide (seulement le chauffeur)
Passe un 63 presque vide²¹

but this is an issue that the necessarily limited range of this thesis looking at the word-list in a narrative and fictional context can only mention in passing.

Many critics have identified the word-list as a typical Perecian device: Jacqueline Piatier has written:

On le voit, Perec ne cesse de nommer, d'inventorier, de répertorier,²²

and Christian Burgelin claims:

Les objets sont inventoriés plutôt que décrits.²³

Paul Schwartz writes of Perec:

One of his favourite literary activities (is) the creation of catalogs²⁴

but Perec's use of the technique has not been studied in any detail. These critics give short explanations of the technique: Burgelin wonders whether Perec was setting up an aesthetic of cruelty, and Piatier argues that it seems as if Perec is trying to describe life through what we produce and consume.

Others ascribe different reasons. Harry Mathews, a member of Oulipo and a friend of Perec's, writes:

Perec's deliberate cataloguing enables him to reinforce his personal narrative with an apparently objective authority.²⁵

We shall argue, however, that the word-list does not give objectivity but, rather, denies the possibility of it, forcing us to acknowledge that everything in the novel is fictional. Warren Motte states:

The catalogue form excuses the otherwise blatant enumeration²⁶

without taking his comment any further, nor explaining why catalogue form should not also be blatant enumeration.

These quotations reveal that there is a problem of terminology. The word-lists are called catalogues, inventories and enumerations. We shall not use any of these terms because each of them implies a comparison with the real world, a strong mimetic function, and this is a transference that a fictional text denies, a transference that Perec obscures in many ways and notably through the use of the word-list. There is another problem with the term 'enumeration': Hugh Kenner says of Joyce, another writer who uses lists extensively, both in the text and in the composition of his work, but whom we do not have the space to discuss²⁷:

The delights of enumeration lead him inexorably to another principle: that of the book as a closed system, containing, even replacing, all that it concerns itself with; since the very notion of the inventory implies that the set of things inventoried is complete.²⁸

In Perec's novel, however, the book is not presented as a closed system - it ends with a puzzle to be solved, that of why Bartlebooth should have a W-shaped piece in his hand to fit into an X-shaped space, and Perec insists, as we shall see later, on the openness of his text, a consequence of its essential ludicity.

Furthermore, we shall argue that the use of word-lists denies completeness because it exposes some of the aesthetic and rhetorical choices that a novelist makes when he brings any phrase to an end. This is one of the reasons for our examination of the use of 'etc.' at the end of a word-list. We employ the term 'word-list' therefore, because it is neutral. It does not imply transparency, closure, or limits of any kind.

A consequence of this is that we cannot define exactly what constitutes a word-list. In deciding how many consecutive elements should constitute a list in this examination of VME, in order to have a preliminary basis from which to start, we had to find a point at which the effect of the list could be said to take hold. The editor of The Chatto Book of Cabbages and Kings, which is subtitled Lists in Literature, Francis Spufford, took a list to be composed of anything more than three elements. Discussing how he came to this conclusion he says:

For reasons of uncontrollable variety... all I could settle on was a simple rule-of-thumb: for my purposes, a list was any sequence in which there were more than three items; and, in which, as far as syntax was concerned, nothing other than sequence linked the items, whether they were²⁹ single words or larger units of prose or poetry.

For our purposes, however, namely the preliminary identification of a device before a prolonged examination of it, the simple rule-of-thumb was that any sequence of five or more elements, linked by nothing other than sequence, and all being of the same word class, or the same type of phrase, would constitute a list.

One way that we might justify this is with reference to Flaubert, another writer with a reputation for meticulous detail. In both L'Education Sentimentale³⁰ and Bouvard et Pécuchet³¹, although Flaubert often creates the effect of enumerating to a point of great detail, he rarely exceeds five elements in any of the so-called enumerations. This can easily be verified. On page 4 of

L'Education Sentimentale there is a list of five different types of garden wall that can be seen from the boat taking Frédéric away from Paris, giving an impression of detail, and reflecting the continuing motion of the boat. On p.55 there is a list of the five dishes of a dinner taken chez Arnoux, sumptuous certainly, but not beyond the bounds of contextual vraisemblance in this novel given the character of Arnoux, his social position, his supposed wealth. On page 192 we are told the names of five gentlemen that Rosanette has spent the night with - creating the impression of many more, no doubt, but not naming them as Perec names, on page 555 of VME, nineteen individuals believed by M. Echard to be manipulated by Hitler ('pour n'en citer que quelques-uns'.) Flaubert's lists seem designed to serve primarily the demands of vraisemblance, and he does not allow them to call attention to themselves.³²

Jonathan Culler might disagree. In Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty he argues that Flaubert does problematize the conventions of realism and vraisemblance, not only through use of irony but also by obscuring any notion of narrative voice so that the apparent objectivity demanded by realism is problematized. He writes:

Calling attention to themselves as language, exceeding plausible representational functions, implying meanings which they defer and postpone they [Flaubert's sentences] become the instruments of that realism which as Barthes says 'explores as deeply as possible that unreal reality' of language: the excess of the sign which, more than and other than its own referent, imperiously insists on its own primacy.³³

This may be true of his sentences, but we shall argue that it is not true of his word-lists which deliberately limit their own disorienting effect.

We might also add that any attempt to classify and define a technique that itself throws up many problems of definition and classification brings us up against the problem that, as Winckler

discovers while trying to classify the postcards that Smautf has sent him:

en choisissant deux au hasard, on peut être sûr
qu'ils auront toujours au moins trois points communs.
(p.54)

And we could say the same thing of any attempt to classify the word-lists in VME. A single, ideal attempt at classification would reveal itself to be arbitrary given the variety of lists in the novel, so we limit ourselves to studying their implications and consequences.

We begin our examination of Perec's 'romans' by considering how the static nature of a word-list plays a part in the time structures of VME, allowing Perec to escape from a linear temporal and narrative structure - a vital escape since the entire novel takes place in the instant of its main character Bartlebooth's death. The technique of fictional layering, where the text is removed from any primary reference to reality, by telling a story, for example, from a book that a character holds in his hand, is exploited by the author to expand the temporal and fictional borders of his world, an expansion in which the word-list plays a full role.

The fictional layering, or dereferentialization, of the text can be seen in terms of the technique of defamiliarisation defined by the Russian Formalists, where it is the defamiliarisation that renders the text artistic, calling attention to its own artifice. This is one of the main functions of the word-list. The contents of the list - disparate elements made to seem heterogenous - can sometimes achieve this defamiliarization, but the juxtaposition of word-list and narrative always achieves it. It is only once this dereferentialization has taken place that Perec's text begins to express itself fully through its metatextuality, defined by Magné as:

l'ensemble des dispositifs par lesquels un texte désigne, soit par dénotation, soit par connotation, les mécanismes qui le produisent³⁴

and therefore we spend a certain amount of time establishing this as a principle of the text before moving on to closer examination of individual word-lists.

In this first chapter on Perec, we take a close look at Chapter XXIX, the long word-list concerning the aftermath of a party and examine how Perec sets up context inside the list to guide our imagination, reflecting the quotation from Paul Klee - 'l'oeil suit les chemins qui lui ont été ménagés dans l'oeuvre' - which prefaces the book. We will discuss how juxtaposition can become a technique that liberates the text from the apparently static sterility of the word-list, by denying that there are any necessary connections in the text, by reinforcing the central puzzle metaphor of joining pieces together. We shall discover that VME is a puzzle that allows of many different solutions.

We make a distinction in the text between story and description passages. The novel is made up of narrative sections, what we might call subsidiary stories, where action is recounted, and apparently descriptive passages where no action is recounted and no time, not even the internal time of one of the subsidiary stories, passes. This distinction is by no means clear-cut, but it enables us to differentiate between those passages where an internal time structure is set up and those where either the time structure of the moment of Bartlebooth's death is dominant or where time is fixed inside a photograph or painting. We try to make the difference more obvious when we discuss the question of description in the fourth chapter.

Following the Formalist distinction between story and plot,³⁵ Perec's novel is all plot. All that happens within the time structure of the book is that Bartlebooth dies. Everything else,

in Tomashevsky's terms, is 'free motif', inserted by the author and not advancing the story. Each of these 'free motifs' moreover, can be linked to any other in VME by the network of interrelations that help us to construct an overall coherence in the book. We shall continue to call these subsidiary stories 'stories' because they also are subject to the story/plot distinction - VME has plots within the plot as well, a structure reflected by the 'tables gigogne' that represent one of the central metaphors of the novel. The reader is continually invited to make links, follow allusions, answer riddles and solve puzzles. We shall argue that literary games and devices, allied with the essential ludicity of the text, replace linear time and narrative as a dynamic in the text.

Our third chapter will show how the word-list fits into the play of intratextuality, the network of relations in VME, to expand the internal cross-referentiality of the work. We will also examine the problems of linguistic relativity as Perec presents them to us in the story of the anthropologist Appenzzell and the timid Kubu tribe, and this will lead us to discuss the different import of the word-list in stories and in descriptions.

We shall argue that Perec uses the list, within the fictional world of VME, to refuse causal explanations. He also suggests that the word-list represents a store of possible fictions when there is no human action to be reported (in the absence of story and plot.) We shall see how the use of the word-list combines with the narrative conceit of Valène painting the picture of the house, holding in tension the explicitly written and at the same time apparently pictorial presentation of the text, as Magné explains:

dans la Vie mode d'emploi, lorsqu'il est question de peinture, c'est très souvent d'écriture qu'il s'agit.³⁶

This is by no means a new technique in literature - Henry James' Portrait of a Lady and Nathalie Sarraute's Portrait d'un Inconnu

come to mind - but Perec, through the device of the word-list, holds the two in contradiction and tension, and so reveals flaws in both conceits.

In our fourth chapter we shall examine the word-list in terms of hyperrealism and in terms of poetic description, using theories by Riffaterre³⁷ to guide us. Then we shall discuss whether word-lists, as used by Perec in VME, can be said to describe, or whether we shall be obliged to say that, in VME, there are, in fact, three different types of enunciation - description, narration and word-list. We shall conclude that there is a difference of degree, not a difference of kind, between description and word-lists, and that the distinction between description and story, although vague and unsatisfactory, is still useful when talking of VME because the text itself makes this difference and asserts the two as equally important.

We shall examine the characteristics of description that Hamon puts forward in his book Introduction à l'Analyse du Descriptif³⁸, including the role of 'descriptaire' that he posits, the notions of long- and short-term memory as a distinction between narrative and description, the hermeneutic and didactic role of description, the difference between understanding and recognition in a description, and the idea of the competition between the reader's knowledge and vocabulary (what he calls 'son stock lexical') and that of the writer. In applying his arguments to Perec and word-lists, we shall examine three matters: first, that Hamon does not define the concept of a list even to the minimal extent that we have, although he says it is central to description, second, that descriptions not only make a call to recognition but also to imagination and that this leads to a loss of hierarchies in the text, and third, that Perec turns the competition into a game, and into a way of reading his text.

We shall see that word-lists play a more complex role in the text of VME than that of simple descriptive passages (if we can imagine such a thing in a novel) tending towards the 'irréel' (this is the term used by Perec when he describes the dislocation from reality that he claims takes place at a certain point in a word-list, and therefore we shall also employ the term), demanding awareness of the fictionality of the text, denying the possibility of closure, and being a part of the more general topos of the double functioning of VME, where each clue may be a trap, and also, each apparently simple reference to reality may also be a complicated and ludic mixture of quotation and self-reference. We will also see, from a discussion of the list of motorcycles and of the different possibilities of Cinoc's names, how much a word-list can destabilize enunciation by distancing itself from the precision it apparently implies.

We shall then move on to the problem of the closure of a description, in which we will examine how Perec uses 'etc.' at the end of some of the word-lists, to expose, mock, sidestep, and hide this problem. We shall argue that the impossibility of closure inherent in a description, the fact that there is always more to describe, and never a necessary reason for ending the description, means that the metonymy inherent in all description affects the lists, and therefore that it is impossible to take a description, and a word-list, at face value and impossible to say that a list can be all-inclusive. We shall examine the ironic use of 'etc.', and look closely at the use of the abbreviation in the Marvel House Incorporated section. This will take us to an examination of the way Perec closes his word-lists, and we shall argue that this reveals the inaccuracy of calling the word-lists in VME inventories, and the inaccuracy of the term 'sociologie du quotidien' which is often applied to his work, for we shall see that the rhetorical and aesthetic choices that determine the ending of a list are entirely based within, and only refer to, the novel.

We conclude with a brief discussion of the hallucinatory Chapter *Machinerie de l'ascenseur II*, an extreme case within the extreme case of VME, which describes the bas-monde below the building, and we argue that its main function is as a guarantor of fictionality in the text.

This concentration on one novel allows us to examine the word-list within its context. This is a vital consideration because no part of a text can be considered in isolation from its surroundings. The nature, function and effect of the word-list in narrative come precisely from the fact that it is set in a narrative. To take word-lists from many novels and compare them would lead to the danger of distorting the most important features of their impact in the text.

The thesis begins with a consideration of the two longest sets of word-lists in Rabelais' Tiers Livre - the Chapters XXVI and XXVIII concerning the couillons of Panurge and Frere Jan, and Chapter XXXVIII, the blason of the fool Triboulet. There are two reasons for this, apart from establishing the literary heritage of the device: to show how Rabelais can integrate the word-list into his non-linear narrative, and second, to show it is used in a non-realist narrative. This is important because Perec's novel is neither linear nor realist, and so we will have some grounding in how the word-list will function in his text from this examination of a writer who stands on the other side of the realist divide, and we might add that no text that exploits the word-list extensively can be said to be linear. A word-list does not explicitly deny linearity - a list of stations on a railway line might be an example - but the lack of externally imposed hierarchy in a fictional word-list (shown by the repetition of the key word 'fou' or 'couillon' in the Tiers Livre and by more complex techniques in VME) means that other factors must be providing the forward dynamic in the text.

An important aspect of the use of the word-list that we shall take from our consideration of the Tiers Livre is the notion of dynamic doubt, where the questions that a reader is obliged to ask himself about a text replace linear narrative and time as the motors driving the text. The chapter on Rabelais will also show how the device is used for satirical purposes, and how it can both be serious and not so serious at the same time - a vital consideration when examining a text as ludic as Perec's, where the joke can often be on the reader. We will also see that one of the word-list's most important functions, in the Rabelaisian text also, is its ability to hold two apparently opposing concerns in balance or in tension. This manifests itself in the Tiers Livre as a balance between authority and parody, as Panurge humbles himself in his search for an authority to answer his question 'doibs je me marier ou non?', and in Perec's text most strongly, among other tensions, as a balance of the dynamic and the static. We call this the double function of the word-list.

The scale of the Rabelaisian word-list is often attributed by commentators to the fact that the form was popular at the time - one editor notes:

Ces litanies ont dû faire le bonheur de nos pères et par cela seul Rabelais est justifié de les avoir écrites. Aujourd'hui le goût est changé. Lecteurs et éditeurs se complaisent peu dans de pareils passages. Pourtant, force nous est d'y apporter les mêmes soins qu'ailleurs.³⁹

His thinly disguised reluctance to afford the lists the same attention as the rest of the text is understandable - some editors feel obliged to give as many as eighty-six explanatory vocabulary footnotes to Frere Jan's lists describing Panurge's testicles. Our argument is that this is unnecessary as Rabelais, despite the subversion of language that the word-lists encourage, still offers his readers enough material to make sense of the lists. A combination of lexical and semantic associations with aural and comic elements allows the reader to read the list. This is to say that the individual word is not as important as the effect

created. The word-list in the Tiers Livre stands as part of the play on the interpretation of signs and so has important consequences for the establishment of the reading contract, allowing Rabelais to set up particular forms of contextual vraisemblance.

Taking into account the fact that the word-list has affinities with the litany, blason and dit, and allying this with the fact that, as Amory states, word-lists also have roots in rhetoric:

...adiectio was classically a satirical device...⁴⁰

(adiectio being the leaving out of words such as conjunctions to economise on syllables in a line of scanned poetry which would thus tend toward a word-list) we can see that the word-list has had many uses. There is also a similar rhetorical technique called frequentatio that Amory tells us was used in Horace and in Juvenal, for essentially satirical purposes. Although the rhetorical definitions do not apply to the use of the word-list in narrative - 'accumulatio' being the 'heaping up of praise or accusation to emphasize or summarize points already made', 'enumeratio' being the 'divisions of subjects into adjuncts, causes into effects, antecedents into consequents' - because of the different demands of Rhetoric⁴¹, we see that the word-list in Rabelais brings together many traditions and forms. The Grands Rhétoriciens also used word-lists, and there are forms with names such as 'Catalogue Verse' where people, things, places or ideas may be listed for didactic or elaborative effect. This is a veritable minefield of definition, classification and distinction, which is less interesting than close examination of the text. The vagueness of the term word-list does not pre-empt any classification or interpretation of the device, nor does it obscure the presence of a word-list. We have to say that a word-list is always fairly obvious and stands out from the surrounding text, demanding attention.

The word-list, as we shall see, merits the attention it is given, not only for what it can tell us about a text as a whole, but also because, in itself, it is a device which can serve a number of different purposes in a text, almost all of which lead us to question the major problems of the novel: realism, representation, description, the qualities of literary language, the way in which we read. Word-lists are sections of text that demand our attention, confront our notions of what literature is, and insist that we reflect on the text. J.R. Goody says:

'List' is one of those polysemic words in which English abounds. The OED gives (lists) seven substantive usages, relating to listening and lusting etc. The third has to do with the 'border, edging, strip, selvage of a cloth'. Closely associated with this meaning is that of a boundary, for example, 'a place within which a combat takes place'; hence 'to enter the lists' means to go into the area marked out for combat.⁴²

They lay down a challenge to the reader, a challenge, that, in the near absence of other commentary, we have chosen to take up.

Notes

1. But if, for example, we agree with A. Martin's argument in his book The Mask of the Prophet that Verne's writing often represents a clash between the scientific and the poetic, we might be able to argue that the list is one of the battlegrounds for the clash.
2. Dryden, E. Melville's Thematics of Form, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1968. p.94.
3. Thalmann, William G. Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Poetry, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1984. p.26.
4. Page D.L. History and the Homeric Iliad, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1959. p.133.
5. Page D.L. p.152.
6. Fokkelman, J.P. 'Genesis' in Alter, R., Kermode, F. ed., The Literary Guide to the Bible, Collins, 1987. pp.36-55. p.43.
7. Von Rad, Gerhard. Genesis, SCM Press, London, 1961. p.66. He speculates about a book of genealogies ('Toledoth' is the name he gives to the genealogies) as a separate entity. Homeric scholars also speculate about the catalogues being inserts in the text, almost as if one could not accept a list as a deliberate and integral part of a text. Perce, of course, does deliberately quote from other authors and also deliberately uses lists, as though the presence of a list always represented a fragmented text.
8. Josipovici, G. The Book of God, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988. p.141.
9. Josipovici, G. p.152.
10. Fleming, Ian. You Only Live Twice, Jonathan Cape, London, 1964. pp.90-94.
11. The question of delaying the narrative flow applies less to texts that are not linear (such as VME) and so is an issue that we only discuss in its subsidiary context in VME, despite its importance when a list is found in a linear text.
12. Goody, J.R. The Domestication of the Savage Mind, Cambridge University Press, 1977. p.80.
13. Goody, J.R. p.82.

14. Perec insists, as we shall see, on removing his text from primary referentiality.
15. La Vie mode d'emploi, Hachette, 1982. All editions have the same page numbers. This is the paperback edition (the first edition is from P.O.L. 1978) and Perec did not like it. He says to Gabriel Simony ('Entretien avec Georges Perec', Castor Astral, 1989, p.28): 'Ils l'ont photographié pour tout vous dire!... Moi, je n'étais pas du tout d'accord. Il est beaucoup plus difficile à lire en édition de poche.'
16. 'Quatre figures pour La Vie mode d'emploi' in L'Arc, 76, 1979. pp.50-53.
17. Ewa Pawlikowska explains in 'Citation prise d'écriture' in Cahiers Georges Perec 1 pp.213-255, on p.214:
 Le fonctionnement de ces structures aussi élaborées que lacunaires subit une espèce d'anti-contrainte, un clinamen. ('Le génie, c'est l'erreur dans le système' - cette citation de Klee que Perec utilise à plusieurs reprises, signifie que l'erreur est une manière de casser la symétrie et en même temps une manière de dissimuler le procédé de la fabrication, afin d'échapper à une pure dénudation des composantes textuelles).
18. Magné, B. 'Quelques problèmes de l'énonciation en régime fictionnel, l'exemple de La Vie mode d'emploi de Georges Perec' in Actes du Colloque d'Albi, Langages et Signification, Pouvoir et Dire, Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail, 1982. pp.217-255. p.246. Hereafter referred to as QPERF.
19. Magné B. QPERF p.234.
20. Hans Hartje, the Secretary of the Association Perec at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris, is working on the manuscripts of several texts, and Philippe Lejeune has recently published La Mémoire et l'Oblique, Georges Perec autobiographe, POL, 1991, in which he examines the notes and unfinished projects that Perec left at his death.
21. Tentative d'inventaire d'un lieu parisien, p.35. We should mention in this respect the list of events on March 7 1936, listed on p.32/33 of W ou le Souvenir d'Enfance, the list of artists in the frontispiece of Un Cabinet d'Amateur, the quotation of the inventory made by Salomon Novaliers after the death of the Duc D'Arschot on p.87, and the list of names in Quel Petit Vélo, p.40.
22. Piatier, J. Le Monde 29.9.78.
23. Burgelin, C. 'Perec et la cruauté' in Cahiers Georges Perec 1, pp.31-52. p.47.

24. Schwartz, P. Georges Perec, Traces of his Passage, Summa Publications, Birmingham, Alabama, 1988. p.32.
25. Mathews, H. 'Life a User's Manual by Georges Perec, That Ephemeral Thing' in New York Review of Books, vol XXXV, no. 10, 16 June 1988. pp.34-37. p.37.
26. Motte, Warren F. The Poetics Of Experiment, A study of the works of Georges Perec, French Forum, Lexington, Kentucky, 1984. p.80.
27. Joyce worked from vocabulary lists, according to Kenner (see reference below); Roussel is another whose use of the form would repay study. Beckett sometimes has lists, and these are often a working out of logical possibilities of variation; see Watt, Picador, p.55 and the discussion of a man's man and a woman's woman.
28. Kenner, Hugh. Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett, Beacon Press, Boston, 1962. p.72.
29. Spufford, F. ed. The Chatto Book of Cabbages and Kings, Lists in Literature, Chatto and Windus, London, 1989. p.25.
30. Flaubert, G. L'Education Sentimentale, Garnier Flammarion, 1966.
31. Flaubert, G. Bouvard et Pécuchet, Livre de Poche, 1983.
32. Perec's text sets up its own vraisemblance, as we shall argue when talking of fictional conditions.
33. Culler, J. Flaubert, The Uses of Uncertainty, Elek Books, London, 1974. p.232.
34. Magné B. 'Le puzzle, mode d'emploi, petite propédeutique à une lecture métatextuelle de La Vie mode d'emploi de Georges Perec' in TEXTE Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire, vol 1. Toronto, 1982. pp.71-96. p.71.
35. See Tomashevsky's article 'Thematics' in Lemon, Lee T. and Reis, Marion J. ed. Russian Formalist Criticism, Four Essays, Bison Books, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965. pp.62-95. esp. p.67ff.
36. Magné, B. 'Lavis mode d'emploi' in Cahiers Georges Perec 1, pp.232-245. p.239.
37. Riffaterre, M. 'L'illusion référentielle' in Barthes, Bersani, Riffaterre, Watt, Hamon. Littérature et Réalité, Seuil, 1982. pp.91-118.
38. Hamon, P. Introduction à l'Analyse du Descriptif, Hachette, Paris, 1981.

39. Burgaud des Marets et Rathéry. Rabelais, Oeuvres Complètes, Librairie de Paris. Dates from 1870. note 1, p.641.
40. Amory F. 'Rabelais' hurricane word formations, lexis and syntax', in Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Librairie Droz, Geneva, 1983. p.72.
41. Definitions from Lanham, R.A. A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968.
42. Goody, J.R. p.80.

CHAPTER TWO

Two word-lists in the Tiers Livre

This chapter is a consideration of the two longest sets of word-lists in the Tiers Livre - the 'couillon' lists in Chapters XXVI and XXVIII and the 'fou' lists in Chapter XXXVIII. These word-lists are extraordinary even by Rabelais' standards, extreme examples of an extreme technique. Their excess draws attention to the form of the list as a device and problematizes the reading of the text. Charpentier, one of the few Rabelaisants to have taken an extended look at the word-lists,¹ comments:

On peut presque établir en loi que, chaque fois que Rabelais adopte un mode d'expression étrange, on touche aux intentions fondamentales de l'oeuvre. Ce qui est une invitation renouvelée à en interroger toutes les zones apparemment indéchiffrables.²

We intend to take up this invitation by explaining how the lists integrate themselves into the text thematically, and then by examining how we might make sense of them.

Rabelais' third book distinguishes itself from Gargantua and Pantagruel by an absence of gigantism - the amazing feats, appetites and feasts of the giant and his son are replaced by a concentration on the more human level represented by Panurge, the philosopher-clown. The Tiers Livre, follows, for the most part, Panurge's quest to find an answer to the question 'doibs-je me marier ou non?' He rids himself of his cod-piece in a gesture of symbolic humiliation, and seeks an authority to answer his question. Each expert frames his speech in a different form of discourse and the problems of their interpretation are foregrounded - interpreting dreams in Chapter XIV, the mute signs of Nazdecabre in Chapter XX, the dice thrown by Bridoye in his legal career in Chapter XXXIX. The word-list is one of the different forms of discourse introduced - not, in the cases we

discuss, in the replies to Panurge's search for an answer, but in his own discourse.

Roots of the form

Rabelais calls the joint attack on Triboulet by Pantagruel and Panurge not a word-list but a 'blason' - 'Comment par Pantagruel et Panurge est Triboulet blasonné' is the Chapter heading. The blason is a poetic form that was popular in Rabelais' time and often used for descriptions of people and things, especially parts of the anatomy - needless to say, the length of the Rabelaisian blason satirizes the procedure. The Dictionnaire des Littératures de Langue Française describes the blason:

le propos du blason est la description; son mode:
l'énumération des qualités ou vices, sous forme de
litanie ou de liste.³

The first four lines of Clément Marot's 'Blason du Beau Tétin':

Tétin refaict, plus blanc qu'un oeuf
Tétin de satin blanc tout neuf
Tout qui fais honte à la Rose
Tétin plus beau que nulle chose⁴

give an idea of the sort of poem that the blason often was. Marot is said to have brought the device back from Italy and the strambottista poets. A blason competition, which he inspired and of which the tone rather degenerated, was so successful that he tried to organize a contre-blason competition 'à chanter en style espouvantable'. Rabelais is said to have attacked a blason by Coquillart, asking which, of its 'outrecuidance' or its 'besterie', we should admire the more,⁵ so it is obvious that he knew and mistrusted the form. Burgaud des Marets et Rathéry footnotes, to Panurge's first epithet 'à haute gamme' in the 'fou' list, in his edition of the text, the following:

Marot a dit:
Je fus Jouan sans avoir femme
Et fol jusqu'à la haulte gamme⁶

which suggests an interplay between the two writers.

The device also has roots in the 'dit', as Zumthor says:

Le 'blason', enfin, qui de très loin tient au 'dit' des treizième et quatorzième siècles, dont il amplifie l'aspect descriptif, semble, bien, une création de la seconde moitié du quinzième⁷

and Le Dictionnaire des Lettres Françaises au Seizième Siècle tells us:

On peut regarder le blason comme le développement d'un autre genre médiéval, le DIT. Sous ce nom les trouvères avaient traité souvent, non sans bonheur, des sujets empruntés à la vie quotidienne. Ainsi dans 'Le Dit des Métiers' toute une série de petits poèmes s'attachait à nous renseigner sur les diverses professions.⁸

So both the dit and the blason were techniques which were used to treat and convey information and subjects that would not normally be seen as poetic. This has affinities with Perec's use of the word-list to introduce different types of discourse into his novel, such as the D-I-Y catalogue in Chapter XX of VME. It is obvious how the introduction of apparently non-literary language will lead to an interrogation of the way language is used in a poetic or fictional text.

Terminology

Rabelaisants use several terms to describe the word-lists - not only blason, but litany and stylistic accumulation as well. Charpentier explains the nature of the litany:

Ce qui définit la forme litanique, semble être la répétition et le dialogue: à une invocation variable prononcée par un célébrant, désignant les saints qu'on invoque ou les intentions qu'on exprime, le peuple des fidèles répond par une acclamation toujours la même.⁹

We can see how this applies: in both lists there is a repetition of the key word, and there is a dialogue between Panurge and Frere Jan and between Panurge and Pantagruel; and the two 'couillon'

lists are prefaced by the adjectives 'endiablé' and 'praedestiné' respectively, suggesting a religious atmosphere at least. There are, however, also differences: in the case of the 'couillon' list the responses are not ritual and come later, and in the 'fou' list our two heroes might even be thought to be speaking simultaneously, satirizing perhaps the notions of a dialogue between celebrants, of a dialogue between man and priest and between priest and god - a pattern that the author, narrator, reader trio mirrors.

The form of the litany is at least as old as the Church and probably as old as man's earliest prayers. Supplicatory in nature and designed to praise and persuade, the litany is ideally suited to Rabelais' text once he has turned it on its head to mock and to condemn. The target of this mockery is both religious and linguistic - Frère Jan is a fairly libidinous cleric (is it suggested that it will be he who would cuckold Panurge when Panurge is warned 'guare moyne' by the fool Tribouillet?) and language, in the TL, torments Panurge with its ambivalence, despite his supposed mastery of it - we recall his first meeting with Pantagruel where he speaks several different tongues.¹⁰

Others use the term accumulation. Amory says:

Amidst...(the) ups and downs of Rabelais' prose, one may feel subjectively that a bare accumulation of words or phrases in a sentence is not after all stylistically superior to a word list, but in fact such syntactic accumulation was a well-accredited stylism in the eyes of Rabelais and his contemporaries, a word list was not.¹¹

An example of a stylistic accumulation might be found in the passage concerning Diogenes. In the story of Panurge's search for an answer to the question 'doibs-je me marier ou non?', the use of word-lists begins at the beginning, in the Prologue. Diogenes treats and mistreats his barrel in at least sixty-four different ways:

Diogenes, les voyant en telle ferveur... ... y roula le tonneau fictil qui pour maison lui estoit contre les

injures du ciel, et, en grande vehemence d'esprit
desployant ses braz, le tournoit, viroit, brouilloit,
barbouilloit, hersoit, versoit...

This fervour is the fervour of the Corinthians which itself has
been recounted in five lists - 'Les autres remparoiēt murailles,
dressoient bastons...', 'Les uns polissoient corselets,
vernissoient alecretz...', 'Les autres apprestoient arcs,
fondes...', 'Esguisoient vouges, piques...', 'Affilioient
cimenterres, brands d'assier...'

These Corinthians around him are making furiously busy preparing
for war:

Les autres apprestoient arcs, fondes, arbalestes, glands,
catapultes, phalarices, micraines, potz, cercles, et
lances a feu, balistes, scorpions et autres machines
bellicques repugnatoires et destructives des Helepolides

and Diogenes, in order to look busy himself, sets about his barrel
in a variety of ways to give an impression of being equally busy.

Screech comments:

But, most striking of all, a cascade of words succeeds
in giving us an impression of purposeful activity on the
part of the military Corinthians, while another cascade
of words - used for their sound, not their sense - leads
us to both see and hear Diogenes trundling his barrel up
hill and down dale in a flurry of apparently purposeless
activity.¹²

Rabelais gives the Corinthians, in their accumulation, a great
variety of nouns, and this gives an effect of work. Diogenes, on
the other hand, accumulates a string of transitive verbs with
their direct object almost hidden at the beginning, suggesting
that the list, the profusion, is more important than the actions,
and allowing the words to slide into a referential limbo, as
Mazouer notes:

tous ces verbes, qui désignent des actions précises,¹³
sont appliqués ici à un tonneau, ce qui est absurde

and with the homoioteleuton of the imperfect ending -oit repeated,
this creates, through the off-rhymes, an effect of hollow

endeavour which is entirely appropriate to this particular passage:

Diogenes... ..le tournoit, viroit, brouilloit,
barbouilloit, hersoit, versoit, renversoit, nattoit,
grattoit, flattoit, barattoit...

A word-list cannot really be distinguished from this. Despite the high standing stylistic accumulation enjoyed, it is still a list of words, and the point where accumulation becomes list (or, indeed, vice versa) is difficult to determine, as Amory drily suggests - 'one may feel subjectively...' - and the distinction appears hard to maintain.

We should note, however, that it is the context which determines these interpretations, and the context of the 'fou' and 'couillon' lists is problematic, the first describing someone the reader has yet to meet, the second something the reader is unlikely to see, and unlikely to be able to compare to Corinthians. They take place not within a story, but in some way constitute the story of the section themselves. This raises the problem of how to make sense of them. This is the main thrust of our examination of these lists - and in trying to make sense of them we may find ourselves in the same situation as Panurge, trying to find an answer to his unanswerable and circular question 'doibs-je me marier? ou non?'

The list in Garagantua and Pantagruel: fantasy and reality

The lists in the Prologue reveal that the use of the list in the Tiers Livre will be as much a question of form as of content. Rabelais uses the list in this book not to establish an epic contextual scale: both the episode involving Diogenes and the famous 'Eloge des dettes' at the beginning of the book (Chapter III) establish a different scale for this book (although arguably they continue to parody the epic scale), pushing forward themes of human interaction and intercourse. This is not to say that the Tiers Livre is any more or less realist in intent or effect than

the two previous books, but rather that it forgoes the combination of fantasy and reality that characterizes Gargantua and Pantagruel in favour of combinations of reality and folly, and of authority and parody.

The list form is one of the ways in which these balances are established and maintained. We have seen in our Introduction that the list form is an ancient form of writing, has roots in religious discourse, and is also used in Natural History classifications, especially in the Renaissance. In the first two books the fantastic adventures are balanced by lists of animals and foods - fantasy in the action, and reality, or, rather, apparently realist techniques such as the list (albeit in an excessive and parodied form) in the description of those actions.

In Chapter XXVI of Pantagruel, for instance, Carpalim plucks out of the air with his own hands:

Quatre grandes otardes,
Sept bitars,
Vingt et six perdrys grises,
Trente et deux rouges,
Seize faisans,
Neuf beccasses,
Dix et neuf hérons,
Trente et deux pigeons ramiers,
Et tua de ses pieds dix ou douze, que levraux, que
lapins, qui jà estoient hors de page,
Dix huyt rasles parez ensembles,
Quinze sanglerons,
Deux blereaux,
Troys grands renards.¹⁴

This remarkable hunting exploit is recounted by means of a word-list. Rabelais combines the apparently scientific form of the word-list with the fantastical exploits of his characters to establish a particular contextual vraisemblance. The fact that animals are listed gives the passage the resonance of a Natural History classification - almost as if Carpalim catches everything that surrounds him - and so anchors it in a recognizable and credible form of discourse. Even though our credulity may be

stretched, we do not contest his hunting prowess and the word-list is the form that allows Rabelais to impose a minimal kind of vraisemblance and realism on to his text in this case. The contextual vraisemblance allows us to believe in Carpalim's skill, and the form of the word-list, despite the fact that Rabelais encloses it in a repetition of 'number + grand + animal' - 'quatre grandes otardes' and 'troys grands renards' - does not limit of itself the amount of prey he can be recounted as catching.

Spitzer comments:

Pour ce qui est de l'invention, on comprend maintenant pourquoi il nous raconte des histoires de géants légendaires et les acclimate dans le terroir tourangeau: ils doivent être chez eux dans un HOME français, mais en même temps dans un monde fantasque de NOWHERE.¹⁵

The word-list embodies this balance as a recognizable observational form of discourse with an implication of transparent reporting of the world and by its ability at the same time to exceed our normal expectations of the limits of a fictional world.

The difference of the Tiers Livre: authority and parody

In the Tiers Livre there are no such exploits, as Kennedy remarks:

not once does it recount an action which could be called fantastic or grotesque or in any way extraordinary¹⁶

but there are still word-lists. They are used to the same pattern but with a different thematic consequence, appealing to classifications and religious forms in order to suggest and subvert authority. This is a manifestation of a central question of the text - Panurge seeks an authority to answer his question. Rigolot says of the lists:

Ces louanges ne sont pourtant pas le fait de la seule fantaisie. Elles contribuent à créer un climat de supplication naïve et d'obséquiosité tapageuse qui n'est pas étranger au livre tout entier. Panurge veut désespérément sortir des 'goulphres et dangers' d'Incertitude et, pour ce faire, il conjure un plus-savant, un 'mieux informé' (ou qu'il pense être tel) de

lui donner une réponse claire, déliée de toute ambiguïté. C'est le thème du Tiers Livre: le refuge du scrupuleux, de l'hésitant, dans une garantie verbale qui s'impose de l'extérieur, Domination d'un 'quod scriptum est' illusoire.¹⁷

Panurge seeks a verbal authority to reassure him - an authority parodied in two ways: the mute Nazdecabre, the fool Triboulet and the others consulted cannot provide it, and nor can the word-list, despite its apparent objectivity and authority as a form. The fact that Panurge himself sometimes speaks in word-lists reminds us not only that the litany is originally a spoken form, but also that he hopes to find his reassurance in communication.

This turns out to be a vain hope; the wise giant Pantagruel confirms his worst fears and so Panurge, stripped of his cod-piece, (another balance of fantasy and reality in the earlier books, the recognizable garment being able to produce unlikely amounts of objects) sets out to ask other authorities, Nazdecabre, Raminagrobis and Her Trippa among them. The last consultation that he has is with the fool Triboulet: the folly of asking the question is represented by asking it to a fool.

Before the fool's arrival from Blois, Rabelais shows us, in Chapter XXXVIII, Pantagruel and Panurge listing the many ways in which he is mad. The list form gives this enumeration authority, while at the same time being implicitly parodied as madness expressed madly, as Rigolot notes:

célébrer un fou ne peut se faire qu'en ayant recours à la folie, qu'en étant assez fou pour justifier l'éloge.¹⁸

The suggestion is that madness should be expressed madly, and we shall examine whether this is possible later. Charpentier overstates the case when he says:

Ce blason de Triboulet, démesuré, échappe à toute règle, n'a pour règle que la fantaisie des récitants¹⁹

because the form of the list provides a rule, albeit a minimal one, and one which determines the nature of the interpretation of the text.

The implication that Panurge will find no authority to answer his question - and the consultation that Tribouillet finally gives him (Chapter XLV), as proof of this absence of authority, needs to be interpreted (Chapter XLVI) - reflects another central problem, that of making sense of the text: we are required to interpret the signs before us. The responsibility for answering the question is thrown back to Panurge. He cannot escape by appeal to authority, and nor can we escape by the conventional means of making sense - grammatical structure, for instance - and the play of apparent authority and parody throws into question all our reading strategies.

Panurge recognizes his folly in Chapter XLVI:

Non que je me veuille impudemment exempter du
territoire de follie; j'en tiens et en suys, je le
confesse,

and his interpretations bear this out. Pantagruel interprets the 'morosophe' Tribouillet as confirming that Panurge will be cuckolded, declaring that the words 'guare moyne' mean that he will be cuckolded by a monk; Panurge replies that these words reveal that his wife will keep a pet monkey (this, of course, is also open to interpretation) - two different possibilities are offered to us, the first semantically more convincing, the second more in keeping with the context of madness and the search for significance going beyond the literal transcription of the words.

Panurge also decides that the fact that Tribouillet gives him a bottle means that they must go and consult the Dive Bouteille (thereby acknowledging the failure of his quest to find authority and reassurance through language and communication) and Pantagruel replies that they should visit his father on the way. These are the two authorities of the book: Gargantua the keeper of the

Rabelaisian world, and the bottle the guarantee and apparent inspiration of the Rabelaisian tone. Gargantua agrees with Pantagruel that fathers, mothers and close relatives should all give their blessing to a marriage and undertakes to find a wife for Pantagruel. The decision is taken out of his hands, and he therefore has no need to search for an authority to make this decision. Panurge, on the other hand, the clown that we are laughing at, as much as with, in this book, has committed himself to the vain search for an authority, and both search and authority are parodied throughout the text.

This has the further result of calling the certainties of the reader into doubt. 'Guare moyne', apart from the interpretations given by Pantagruel and Panurge, and also suggesting that it is Frere Jan who will cuckold Panurge, as well as being a standard anti-clerical joke, may also, as we have seen, be interpreted by the reader. Amory has called the Rabelaisian universe a 'multiverse' and this is one of the ways in which this manifests itself - the plurality of possible interpretations. It is not only the extravaganza on the page that stretches the limits of a fictional system, it is also the response and reaction of the reader once the responsibility for making sense has been devolved by the author in this play of parody and authority.

Observation and classification

Frere Jan is Panurge's partner in the other set of long lists, the 'couillons' of Chapters XXVI and XXVIII. Most commentators agree that Panurge praises his friend's testicles while Frere Jan describes Panurge's in less flattering terms. This epideictic formula is typical of the blason, and although it is the 'fou' list that is explicitly called a blason, the resonance to the blason adds another layer of parody to the 'couillon' list. It parodies the blason by its subject matter - though not as strongly as one might imagine, since certain blasons took the equivalent part of the female anatomy as their subject²⁰ - and the subject

matter itself represents a parody of Natural History classification. This works in two ways: first, straightforwardly, because testicles are inappropriate because of their vulgarity in the pseudo-scientific context, and secondly because the lists are made up of adjectives. The apparent authority of the form gives them the status of observation, suggesting that different types of couillon may have the same status as different types of, say, rose, where similar divisions between things that are essentially the same can be made, but the adjectives and the epideictic structure reveal that the descriptions are subjective.

This word-list attacks the notion of observing and recounting the world objectively - all these things **may** be true of testicles at a certain moment. In this sense, the list does not exceed the boundaries of realist conventions, it merely presents many different and feasible possibilities - setting thereby the realist conventions of the Tiers Livre where proliferation and abundance are important factors in the multiverse. In another sense, however, the excess breaks the conventions of narrative, even in the Rabelaisian context, causing problems for a reader wishing to make sense of the text, a reader wishing to interpret these signs as part of a coherent whole.

The account of the word-lists given above allows us to incorporate them thematically into the text through the play on authority - Charpentier incorporates them thematically by saying:

Les litanies de Rabelais se rattachent à deux thèmes capitaux de l'oeuvre: la génération et la folie²¹

- but these incorporations, thematical recuperation of problematic passages, do not help us to read them. Each of these lists takes up at least a page and a half of text, and although we can say that authority, generation, folly and interpretation of signs are major themes, this only helps us to make sense of the word-lists on the grand scale, and does not help us to make sense of them in the same way as we make sense of the other sentences and

paragraphs in the book. The lists would have the same thematic effect if they were half as long, or twice as long, and we cannot say the same for the other sections of the text.

Some critics take Rabelais' use of the form also used by the Natural Historians as proof of his own desire to mark down the world, to translate observation transparently into language. Paris, enumerating for us the subject of some of the other lists in Rabelais' text, writes:

Des géants primitifs aux diverses bacchantes, des plus célèbres cénotaphes aux peuples de l'Antiquité, des armes en tous genres aux deuils historiques, des philosophes et savants aux poètes et musiciens, des métiers aux vêtements, des meilleurs crus aux nourritures, des pierres précieuses aux herbes, fruits et légumes, des animaux légendaires aux terrestres, aériens, aquatiques, et jusqu'aux reptiles rangés par ordre alphabétique, on suivrait chez Rabelais le projet encyclopédique de recenser, classer, éterniser les éléments d'un monde qu'il semble croire compromis à brève échéance.²²

It is difficult to see Rabelais as a linguistic Noah, preserving the world in this way. The idea that his text is purely denotative does not sit easily with the experience of reading it. Amory states:

The humble word-lists through which I have chosen to approach the Rabelaisian style are more declarative than one might suspect, not because (absurdly) they have some out of the way information to impart which must be footnoted by the text, but rather because by their seeming superfluity and interminability they initiate us into the subversive tendencies and subversive teaching of his literary style.²³

Paris acknowledges and clarifies this as he continues:

Seulement, très vite cette tentation de réalisme se défait dans la forme ludique qui la traduit.²⁴

He suggests that the list form is ludic by its nature. This takes the argument too far the other way - the list form in Jean Lemaire de Belges, the Oxford Dictionary, and the Top Twenty is not ludic. The form itself is not ludic but the use made of it may be. This springs from its combination with and juxtaposition to a

narrative. It becomes ludic in the context of a linear story, parodying the linearity of the story by its own perfect appearance of linearity, and then denying that perfection by parodying the classifications made and the order necessary to tell a story.

The subversion of language

Rabelais follows a more insistent linear structure - Panurge's journey of self-discovery - in the TL than in the first two books, the lists reflecting and parodying this structure. This has the effect that the subversion that the list encourages also falls on the language of the text. The problems of making sense that it provokes are difficult to resolve - this is the challenge that the lists put before the reader. The subversion of language that takes place has affinities with Panurge's failed quest for authority - language can be seen as failing in its search for stability and fixed meanings. Two hundred different types of testicle amply illustrate the problem of finding **the** word to describe a testicle. Rabelais opts to give his reader two hundred types of fool rather than, as Erasmus did, merely opting to say 'stultissimus'.²⁵

The word-list may illustrate this apparent failure of language, but the failure is not a complete tumbling into meaninglessness. Alice Fiola Berry claims that in the Rabelaisian word-lists:

Language is freed from the burden of signification and communication, words are piled up and played with for no reason at all, 'for the hell of it' to use Spitzer's felicitous phrase.²⁶

Language can never be freed from the burden of communication - this is precisely the burden.

The void

Rigolot, more subtly, talks of a void behind the text, a void revealed by the difficulties of the word-lists:

Comme l'a très bien vu Léo Spitzer, et plus récemment, Manuel de Diéguez, derrière ce 'Niagara Verbal', il y a un grand vide.²⁷

This is a difficult point to accept if we insist that language is condemned to meaning, even of the most minimal kind - 'this means nothing' is still a meaning. And this is especially so in a fictional text where we may interpret the signs on the page as part of a system that the writer presents to us - the reading contract implies this minimal sense structure and implies that it cannot be breached. Insignificance is an impossibility in a novel.²⁸

Critics of Perec have also argued that his word-lists reveal a void, accumulation being seen as an attempt to paper over the cracks. B-O. Lancelot has even suggested that this is a reflection of the void left by the Nazis.²⁹ This is a remarkable piece of interpretation - claiming that a void is created and then giving the void significance. The apparent flatness of words in a word-list reveals rather that they are just words, and nothing more. But this, of course, is quite enough to cause many problems.

Solutions through Bakhtin

This leaves us with the problem that, once we have recognized the difficulties presented by the word-lists, and once we have rejected the suggestion that they are meaningless, we still have to find some way to make sense of them, as Amory asks:

Le Tiers Livre témoigne d'une inquiétante libération de la logique, vers le verbalisme pur. Aventure du rire. Aventure du sens aussi: sur quoi peut déboucher ce jeu mené avec la parole humaine?³⁰

This questioning of the role of language has affinities with Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais' work and the questioning of the structures of society. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist comment, in discussing Bakhtin's views:

The parodical litanies which play so important a role in Gargantua epitomize the distinctive features of carnival language. Insofar as they both praise and abuse simultaneously, they speak to the 'dual-bodied world of becoming'... There is an awakening of the ancient ambivalence of all words and expressions, combining the wish of life and death, of sowing and rebirth.³¹

The ability of a list to do two things simultaneously is one of its most important characteristics, and in the Bakhtinian view this double function would play a part in the removal of the old world order and the installing of the new. Bakhtin writes:

This fusion of the polemical and affirmative tasks - the tasks of purging and restoring the authentic world and the authentic man - is what determines the distinctive features of his fantastic realism.³²

We have already seen that word-lists play a role in the balance of fantasy and realism and Bakhtin's suggestion might well apply directly to the word-lists. However, notions such as 'authentic world' and 'authentic man' imply a transparence of both the world and of language that we have seen that the word-list, despite suggesting, in fact denies. Clark and Holquist's phrase 'awakening of the ancient ambivalence of all words and expressions' is where we see the force of the word-list in this context - the problems that it causes for making sense of a text, the reverberations it provokes in our response to the narrative surrounding it because of our loss of faith in the transparence of language due to the revelation of its ambiguities.

Rigolot identifies the content of the lists as:

Une parole gratuite, délibérément située hors du champ des significations pratiques, hors des contraintes linguistiques de la prose signifiante.³³

Word-lists insist on their literary status by refusing transparence, by causing problems of reference and signification, problems that are by no means easy to resolve. Language is laid bare as a system that is neither fixed nor static, its ancient

ambivalence, even multivalence, is exposed. Pantagruel himself reminds us of this:

C'est abus dire que ayons langage naturel. Les langages sont par institutions arbitraires et convenence des peuples.³⁴

Rabelaisian language is most certainly not fixed or static, and the TL demonstrates this through the play on the interpretation of signs - both thematically, through the stories of Nazdecabre and Bridoye and so on, and formally, through the problematic presence of the word-lists.

Although we have criticized Bakhtin's conclusion, his analysis of the text is still brilliant. He explains how the old world will be broken down and the new built:

The essence of this method consists, first of all, in the destruction of all ordinary ties, of all the habitual matrices (sosedstva) of things and ideas, and the creation of unexpected matrices, unexpected connections, including the most surprising of logical links ('allogisms') and linguistic connections (Rabelais' specific etymology, morphology and syntax.)³⁵

The lack of syntax, the change of typography, the interruption of the narrative, the strange juxtapositions, all these can be seen in the word-lists - they play a central role in the linguistic complexity of Rabelais' text.

Bakhtin's view of a rebuilt world implies a reconstruction, and our view of a rebuilt and revived language (restored to its 'authentic' state, to use Bakhtin's word, of ambivalence and flux) must therefore imply a new, or different, way of making sense. We have seen a void suggested as a consequence of the breaking down of normal ties. Amory, however, says:

His [Rabelais'] was not the voice of the modern poets calling us confusedly to the silence of the abyss³⁶

and the void ignores the essential reconstruction that follows the breakdown.

Reconstruction: a. semantic

One of the ways to make sense of the lists is to attempt to find internal structure to them in semantic terms, as Rigolot bravely attempts despite his mention of the 'vide'. He shows that Pantagrue's adjectives are more celestial, relate more to the government, Panurge's are more earthly and relate to human pursuits. He also claims that language can take on strange properties:

La fixité du genre, la monotonie du rythme, la répétition du nom d'appel forment une sorte de basse continue qui permettent de faire ressortir l'originalité du récitatif adjectival. Pleins feux sur l'épithète et ses mille reflets sémantiques et phonétiques, voilà ce que permet une telle liturgie de la parole.³⁷

The problems that we have making sense of the text - problems that Rigolot tries to resolve by examining the structures of the 'fou' list and making comparisons between Panurge's adjectives and those of Pantagrue - reflect one of the central concerns of the Tiers Livre, the use of different forms of communication and interpretation. Examples of this are the 'bon lanternoy's' (complete nonsense to the uninitiated) in Chapter XLVII, the mute Nazdecabre whose signs must be interpreted in Chapter XX, Bridoye's use of dice in Chapter XL. The ludic dimension of the book extends to the problem of making sense of signs, a problem that the word-lists play a full part in expressing, being grammatically unconnected strings of words and so posing the problem of how to interpret them in terms not only of the context (the thematical reverberations) but also of the individual sign as part of a whole.

Rigolot is forced to acknowledge the difficulties:

A mesure que les épithètes s'ajouteront et que les louangeurs s'échaufferont, il sera de plus en plus difficile de suivre les ramifications de la pensée, les renvois sonores et sémantiques, les associations d'idées et les évocations en chaîne.³⁸

So it seems as if the Rabelaisian word-list, despite showing us words isolated and individual, in fact takes attention away from the individual word and obliges the reader to locate and examine the patterns that will allow sense to be made. Rigolot concludes:

Quant (sic) bien même il aurait vidé tout le dictionnaire de ses adjectifs et créé une multitude de néologismes, **l'homo loquens** ne serait pas arrivé à créer la qualité à partir de la quantité. Le mot échoue à épuiser la définition de son objet. Rabelais tente l'impossible: faire naître la Folie à force de la qualifier.³⁹

The word-list holds this contradiction in tension - exposing the individuality of a word and the difficulty of meshing references together to find significance. There is also another contradiction held in tension: the appearance of exhaustivity and objectivity in fact leads to an acknowledgement of the impossibility of expressing an exact equivalence of language and the world - the word fails to exhaust the definition of its object. Language cannot become mad, as Derrida comments:

Or la folie, c'est par essence ce qui ne se dit pas: c'est "l'absence de l'oeuvre" dit profondément Foucault⁴⁰

so it must recognize its own limitations when it attempts to express madness - madness cannot be expressed madly, despite this attempt by Rabelais, and Rigolot remarks:

Erasmus avait peut-être raison de s'en tenir au seul et unique 'stultissimus' pour qualifier son fol humain.⁴¹

The word-list points out this limitation of language and, by its insistence on the individual word, at the same time allows sense to be made of the apparent madness.

Paris expresses the elusiveness of language in another way, speaking of the 'couillon' list:

C'est d'abord par la trivialité du terme inducteur qu'est signifiée l'intention destructrice. Choisi pour sa plasticité, pour son indifférence à toute association - mais de quel mot ne dire la même chose? - 'couillon' ne peut entrer avec ses adjectifs qu'en relations fortuites,

superficielles, puisqu'aucun ne s'imposera de nécessité.⁴²

It should be added that it is the internal plasticity of the form of the word-list, where there are also no necessary relations (nor any demanded by syntax and other sense-making structures) that helps to achieve this elusiveness. The Rabelaisian text, by exposing the ambivalence of language, its multiversal properties, provokes a game where it is signification that is being played with, a result of both Panurge's strange choice of consultants and the formal and thematic ramifications of their discourse and his own. The reconstruction takes place through the questions that must be asked, and these reveal ways of making sense.

Reconstruction: b. aural

Another way to make sense of the lists and emphasize each word of them is to examine their aural structure. Tetel says:

Les énumérations savantes ne sont pas un simple étalage d'érudition; comme les autres énumérations elles ne sont pas censées ennuyer le lecteur, mais l'amuser par les sons, le sens et l'accumulation exagérée des vocables.⁴³

Rigolot goes further than this in his establishing of a correspondence between the terms used by Pantagruel and those used by Panurge, and suggests a series of 'mots chocs' that hold the list together. This order would be fragmentary:

pour mille raisons qui tiennent au son et au sens⁴⁴

as he says. The goalposts keep changing, and the reader-goalkeeper can never be sure of his footing. Amory comments:

Rhyme, assonance, alliteration, homoioteleuton, anaphora and epiphora are the binding threads of which the web was spun that by contrastive parallelism holds together his 'chaotic enumerations' and variegates his dulling repetitions.⁴⁵

This is almost to say that we make up the sense as we go along, clinging on to recognized devices in order to satisfy our desire

for order. Charpentier makes a slightly different point and argues that word-lists liberate language:

A quelque chose près la litanie se présente... avec une partie variée et une partie fixe. L'effet produit est celui d'une sorte d'envoûtement rythmique. Les sociologues remarquent que le mot est chargée d'une 'puissance' (mana) que la répétition rythmique libère et décuple.⁴⁶

Not only is there a contrast between the variety of the epithets and the unchanging key word, but this suggests that the key word takes on strange properties by being repeated, turning the words into something more than parts of a sequence, elements in a network, an argument that can be taken side by side with our suggestion that the individuality of a word is suppressed while the patterns of making sense are emphasized. Even when language is apparently fixed, Rabelais uses the literary device of the word-list to balance the dynamic and the static in his text - no action is recounted in a word-list, but this does not make the passage any less dynamic, because it allows doubts and cracks in the system to replace adventures as literary motors.

Paris develops this argument:

Vis à vis de la langue usuelle, figée dans ses catégories, ses formules, ses règles, ces débordements représentent un influx de vitalité, dont l'excès fait le burlesque, par le déni qu'ils opposent apparemment à tout système. Leur verticalité - sens même des cataractes - prête d'ailleurs à une lecture aussi mobile que décentrée, puisqu'elle encourage plusieurs combinaisons d'une colonne à l'autre, à la manière des litanies, - par fractions de colonnes à la manière des répliques entrecroisées, - par séries parallèles, à la manière des monologues, et ainsi de suite.⁴⁷

Rabelais takes language out of its fixed state through the use of a static form, and Paris suggests, in line with our argument, that the challenge that this represents is what enlivens the text.

The phrase 'une lecture aussi mobile que décentrée' reminds us of such self-consciously modern writers as Butor, who claim to allow

the reader freedom to read as he wishes - Mobile, for example, is a book which allows multiple reading strategies and in which no single linear structure imposes itself. Rabelais offers this to his readers - the TL uses many of the techniques of more modern self-conscious novels - and it makes it all the more difficult to accept any simple argument of order or structure in the word-lists. Not only do these lists parody the notion of moral and linguistic authority, they also parody the idea of order. They suggest that the description of a couillon is a difficult task, but that giving order to that definition and classification is equally difficult and equally fruitless. Rigolot, as we have seen, argues that this points out a failure of language to translate the world:

La prolifération du qualificatif est l'aveu d'une impossibilité de qualifier, et toutes les tentatives verbales pour rivaliser avec la matière resteront en deçà de leur projet, donc vouées à l'échec.⁴⁸

This is a failure that it is easier to posit if we assume that Rabelais has realist, rather than ludic, intentions. Once we have accepted that language is not being used to translate the world transparently, this apparent failure becomes a dynamic and an invitation to find ways out of the problem.

Reconstruction: c. comic

The reconstruction of language is also achieved through the comedy in the text, another pattern of signification. Allied to the semantic and aural implications this gives the reader enough things to be coping with so that the failures and flaws of language that are revealed can be balanced by the dynamism and exuberance of the part-significations that these three effects represent. Critics have discussed the comic effect of the word-list in the context of the 'vide'. Spitzer says:

Le lecteur de Rabelais se meut sur cette étroite bande qui sépare l'irréel et le réel, l'horreur et l'hilarité... L'hilarite devient rictus.... Le comique

grotesque est précisément cette horreur qui se dégage du vide qui a été, il y a un instant encore, du solide.⁴⁹

This seems to work as revelation - you laugh, realise there's a vide, and laugh again, frightened, desperately. Our argument disallows this sort of humour because we insist that there is no vide, that the form of the list always maintains at least a minimal linguistic structure suggesting a resolution of the failures implicit in its presence. Panurge may be a pathetic figure, but he is not a desperate or tragic one - he always has an escape route into humour. This is Rigolot's argument:

De là cette sorte de 'comic reenactment' d'un problème existentiel dont il faut se presser de rire de peur d'être tôt ou tard obligé de pleurer.⁵⁰

The point being here that the laughter comes before the realization of despair, as an escape not as a reaction. The same can be said for the subversion of language in the text - language is attacked at its foundations but linguistic comedy allows it to escape falling into meaninglessness. The Bakhtinian reconstruction takes place not when there is nothing but rubble to rebuild, but when the flaws of the system have been revealed. This is the case because language is the vehicle of its own interrogation - complete breakdown is impossible. The word-list holds the two concerns in tension, favouring neither the destruction nor the reconstruction but allowing them to play off each other creating the linguistic dynamism of the text.

Tetel makes this distinction:

Il faut distinguer entre le comique que le langage exprime et celui que le langage crée par la structure de la phrase ou le choix des mots⁵¹

where in the latter case, the comedy is independent of the related action. The comedy in the word-lists falls into this category, according to Tetel:

L'effet comique provient justement de la surabondance des détails qui nous abasourdit. Cette surabondance crée l'irréalité de l'accumulation et devient risible.⁵²

He suggests that when the text is taken away from its realist pretensions, and these are minimal in Rabelais, a comic effect arises. This would explain why there is so much comedy in Rabelais, and Tetel goes on to explain why the same overabundance in Jean Lemaire de Belges' text is not comic:

C'est pour aboutir à un tableau détaillé et plastique qu'il accumule les mots qui conservent toujours leur signification. Rabelais, lui, amoncelle les vocables sans avoir l'intention d'adhérer à la réalité; au contraire, il veut la déformer.⁵³

The same overabundance, he suggests, loses its comic effect because of the author's intention. This is a difficult idea to support, intentionality being a notoriously problematic concept, and is not convincing. Rabelais' word-lists are comic in the Tiers Livre because of the combination and contrast of serious, almost philosophical, epistemological, form with the inappropriate subject matter. Tetel's initial distinction between content comedy and form comedy limits the comedy of the text, and means that he cannot see the combination as the provider of comedy in the case of the word-lists.

Resolution

This combination is central to an understanding of the function of the word-list in the text. It functions as a vehicle for the breakdown of normal sense structures (an important factor in any comedy, the logical surprise that the ambiguity of the words allows, the deformation that Tetel mentions) while at the same time being part of the reconstruction of sense within the framework of comedy, parody, and allusion. This is the same pattern as the appeal of the word-list to authority (be it a bogus authority or not) where, in this case, the resonance to, say, litanies, provides an enduring sense-making structure that provokes satire and comedy. The Rabelaisian text does not escape from the reader's grasp or the author's control, as Auerbach insists:

I wish to add one thing - namely, that the intoxication of his multifarious play never degenerates into formless ravings and thus into something inimical to life; wildly as the storm sometimes rages in his book, every line, every word, is strictly under control.⁵⁴

The structure of this control, however, is not a direct appeal to realist vraisemblance, asking us to match our observation of the world with the observations made in the text, but a more subtle mechanism whereby we are cajoled into accepting a radically different world-view. It is not that something inimical to life would destroy the coherence of the text, but that something inimical to the terms and conditions established by the text would have this effect.

The fictional conditions

Rabelais achieves the establishment of his thematical concerns through the technique of using the word-list as both problem and solution, allowing his text an appearance of freedom, anarchy and disorder, but which in fact insists on a specific order which is characterized by the phrase 'the Rabelaisian world'. The problems of making sense that arise are solved by reference to the cause of the problem, returning to the word-list as the solution, falling back on its historical and intertextual connotations. The word-list thus characterizes the nature of literary language in this way as the vehicle of its own interrogation.

Spitzer calls the world created by the text an intermediate world:

The appearance of this intermediate world is conditioned by a belief in the reality of words, a belief that would have been condemned by the realists of the Middle Ages. The belief in such vicarious realities as words is possible only in an epoch whose belief in the universalia realia has been shaken.⁵⁵

and he is correct to say that this is conditioned by a belief in the reality of words, if we mean by this their ability to signify, rather than a direct appeal to reality. Reading remains a private

experience where we enter into a contract with the text on the terms set up by the text in combination with our own expectations.

Zumthor expands Spitzer's point to say that the beliefs of both the nominalists and the realists are undermined:

La jonglerie des sens... provient moins encore d'une fantaisie verbale, que d'un jeu avec l'essence des choses, prisonnière du langage commun; virtuellement elle nie les universaux, tourne en dérision le nominalisme des doctes, mais aussi bien le réalisme qui s'y oppose: rien n'a de sens que les significations mêmes émanées du discours, et proprement inépuisables, sources d'associations sans fin, conciliatrices de tous contraires.⁵⁶

One of the opposites reconciled is that of the proliferation of language leading to apparent meaninglessness. The reconciliation is an important part of the sense making process in Rabelais and the double function of the list helps to express this. Rabelais goes so far in confounding and deforming our expectations as to be able to set up a world which is almost entirely self-supporting in its own context and vraisemblance. Belief in Rabelais' world is conditioned by our accepting the reading contract that he offers - it has no correlation with any external concerns of vraisemblance or our metaphysical state of mind; this world and the belief in it are the result of verbal constructs.

Bakhtin, however, would disagree with this, arguing that there is a dialogue between the world and the text. This is not excluded by seeing the text in our terms because we can say that this is one of the aspects of the minimal sense-making structures - there must be some kind of external referentiality. We would insist that these are minimal because a modern reader does not have the incidental knowledge to make sense of a Renaissance text semantically and lexically so structures and reading contracts play a large part (editors, however, still feel it necessary to give fifty or more footnotes to each of these lists). Certain sections of the Rabelaisian text emphasize the dialogue with the world, other sections the ludically verbal nature of his

referentiality - the Librairie de L'Abbaye St. Victor in Pantagruel, a long list of books in a library is a reading experience about reading: codpieces, carnivals, and facts about 1540 have much less to do with making sense of this passage.

We might add here that if we wish to say that a text is satirical we emphasize the relationship to the real world and point out the minimal and necessary realist intrusion into language, if we say that it is parodic, we emphasize its relationship to other texts. Perec, as far as possible, will remove his text from primary referentiality, creating a certain set of fictional conditions. Rabelais, in the sections we have been studying, does much the same thing (he does the opposite in Chapter XXVIII of the Quart Livre, where he explicitly refers to himself) allowing language to play with, subvert and reconstruct itself and doing exactly the same thing to the reader's expectations and reading strategies.

A reader does not have to be an agnostic to accept a new set of beliefs, he merely has to be a reader, as this accepting, or perhaps, negotiating, of terms is a central part of the reading process. Rabelais' text illustrates the paradigm put forward by Iser in The Act of Reading:

We may assume that every literary text, in one way or another, represents a perspective view of the world put together by (though not necessarily typical of) the author. As such, the work is in no way a mere copy of the given world - it constructs a world of its own out of the material available to it. It is the way in which this material is constructed that brings about the perspective intended by the author... The text must therefore bring about a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things that would never have come into focus as long as his own habitual dispositions were determining his orientation, and, what is more, this standpoint must be able to accommodate all kinds of different readers.⁵⁷

Rabelais' text really is universal because its standpoint is created and its material exploited in such a way that reading the text is enough - there is only a minimal need for any external

knowledge, any expertise in Renaissance matters. Literary devices help to determine our responses - letters from Gargantua, the father, are given importance and emphasis by being presented as letters, the written and serious consideration of a wise man, feasts are inflated by the use of the word-list and its implications of many many more animals, and word-lists also embody the Bakhtinian topos of destruction and reconstruction, which is in itself a mirror of the effect of the text on the reader.

Conclusion

Rabelais strongly challenges our belief in the power of words and then reassures our faith through comedy and parody, (and also the tantalizing glimpses of correspondences of meaning and sound revealed by Rigolot's analysis) thereby reflecting one of his main themes - the curative power of laughter. Rigolot comments:

Tout ce savoir pillé, empilé, recapitulé, était
nécessaire pour conduire ensuite à un doute immense, à
une remise en question par le rire.⁵⁸

Language appears to be outside all grammatical, syntactical and lexical rules while at the same time producing laughter, a laughter which implicitly recognizes the problems posed and which is the proffered solution to these problems - Panurge may be going through existential problems, searching for authority and a wife, but he remains a comic character.

The direct consequence of the consultation with Triboulet which has started with the two 'fou' word-lists is the visit to the Dive Bouteille - the Rabelaisian values reassert themselves. Madness, the subversion of language, the 'vide', all are overcome by visiting the oracle, an oracle which is an escape from the serious responsibilities implied by the text. The reader is also subject to this - even if the text is taken seriously, the result is still the same, the conclusion still that laughter wins out. Rabelaisian values of comedy and doubt re-establish themselves: the word-list is the vehicle of both the doubt and the

reestablishment. The doubts provoked, the subversion, the satire, the bewilderment even, all, in the end, reaffirm our faith in the reading contract. The TL is not a text that breaks its own rules although it reveals the complicity of author, narrator and reader in accepting those rules and it also foregrounds the devices which govern those rules - such as the word-list - but one that stretches and exposes them. This makes the TL a kind of 'Ur-novel', as Mazouer notes:

Il est vrai que notre roman est plus un livre du dialogue, du discours, que de la narration⁵⁹

and so has its rightful place alongside Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy in the pantheon that establishes and illustrates the limits and techniques of the form.

Rabelais uses the word-list as a vehicle by which to interrogate language at the same time as using it as a vehicle to escape the serious consequences of this interrogation. The double function of the list is evident. Perec's use of the word-list also reflects this double function and in the next chapter we shall examine the fictional conditions that he sets up to allow the word-list full play in his text. The fictional conditions of Rabelais' text are in part created by the word-list: in Gargantua and Pantagruel as an element of the fantasy/reality balance and in the Tiers Livre as an element of the play of parody and authority. This play of parody and authority then allows language itself to be foregrounded and be put into question in the same way as Panurge is put into question. And all parties find the same solution - not to be too serious.

The word-list, because of this ability to carry a double function, because of its explicitly written nature, because of its flexibility as a form allowing of any content, is another of those techniques that foreground the writing of the text, and expose the conventions of linearity, realism, vraisemblance and reading as conventions to be played with and subverted. It is proper to the

novel in the sense that it exposes this contract, as defined by Alter in his book Partial Magic:

The act of literary communication can take place only by virtue of certain tacit contractual agreements between writer and reader - about the meaning and nature of words, about typography and pagination, about chapter divisions, about characterization and motivation, about cause and effect in narration and much more.⁶⁰

Rabelais, in common with other self-conscious novelists, exposes these tacit agreements, challenging assumptions about sense-making structures, foregrounding typographical presentation⁶¹ and therefore showing the materiality of the text, and exploiting the thematical relevance of the intertextual and contextual implications of the word-list.

This is the result of his use of the technique of the word-list in a non-linear and non-realist fictional universe. Perec also creates a fictional universe that is non-linear and non-realist - we shall examine in the next chapter the way Perec avoids linearity by the establishment of particular time structures and how he avoids primary reference to an external reality. These are the fictional conditions in which both writers exploit the word-list and we shall see how Perec uses the device within the confines of his constraints and within the confines of the reading contract set up by La Vie mode d'emploi.

Notes

1. Jean Paris in Rabelais au Futur, quotes the reaction of some of the early Rabelais critics to the lists:
On sait ce que la critique devait en dire: exactement le contraire que ce qu'il en convenait. "Rabelais abuse du procédé peu comique de l'énumération" (Doumic), "Rabelais ne sait pas se borner. Il vide son sac ou son tiroir, et lorsqu'il entame une énumération, sait-on jamais où elle finira?" (Pierre Jourda), "insouci des proportions... abandon complet de l'écrivain à son inspiration créatrice" (Jacques Boulenger), "Kyrielles de mots vides de sens qui n'ont jamais eu la moindre saveur et ont perdu pour nous leur grace" (Pierre Villey) ou "jettent la froideur au milieu des meilleurs pages" (Béatrix Rava) etc... (p.63)
2. Charpentier, F. 'Variations sur les litanies: à propos du Tiers Livre de Pantagruel', in Revue des Sciences Humaines XXXIII, 1968. pp.335-53. p.352.
3. Dictionnaire des Littératures de Langue Française, J.P. de Beaumarchais, D. Couty, A. Rey, ed., Bordas, 1984. p.280.
4. Quoted from Schmidt, A-M. Poètes du Seizième Siècle, Gallimard, Paris, 1953. p.331/2.
5. Kinch, C. La Poésie Satirique de Clément Marot, Boivin, Paris, 1940. p.113.
6. In Burgaud des Maret et Rathéry's edition (Librairie de Paris, from 1870-80). note 4, p.695.
7. Zumthor, P. Le Masque et la Lumière, la Poétique des Grands Rhétoriciens, Seuil, 1978. p.194.
8. Dictionnaire des Lettres Françaises au Seizième Siècle, G. Grente, ed., A. Fayard, Paris, 1951.
9. Charpentier, F. p.340.
10. Perec quotes the nonsense language that Panurge speaks in Chapter IX of Pantagruel as an incantation to summon up a devil. We discuss this later - it constitutes a list following our definition in the Introduction.
11. Amory, F. 'Rabelais' hurricane word formations, lexis and syntax' in Etudes Rabelaisiennes XVII, p61ff., Droz, Geneva, 1983. p.72.
12. Screech, M.A. Rabelais, Duckworth, London, 1979. p.218.

13. Mazouer C. 'Le comique verbal dans le Tiers Livre' in Le Comique Verbal en France au Seizième Siècle, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, 1975. pp.141-155. p.149.
14. Pantagruel, Chapter XXVI. Page 334/5 of the Gallimard Folio 1964 edition.
15. Spitzer, L. 'Le prétendu réalisme de Rabelais' in Modern Philology 37 (1939-40), University of Chicago Press. pp.139-50. p.144. Hereafter known as LPR.
16. Kennedy, William J. Rhetorical Norms in Renaissance Literature, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978. p.119.
17. Rigolot, F. 'Les langages de Rabelais' in Etudes Rabelaisiennes X, Droz, Geneva, 1972. p.164.
18. Rigolot, F. p.167.
19. Charpentier, F. p.344.
20. Eustorg de Beaulieu wrote a Blason du Con.
21. Charpentier, F. p.352.
22. Paris, J. p.65.
23. Amory, F. p.62.
24. Paris, J. p.66.
25. Quoted by Rigolot, F. in Latin on p.163:
Nomen igitur habetis, Viri.. Quid addam epitheti? Quid,
nisi **stultissimi**? Nema quo alio honestiore cognomine
Mystas sous compelet Dea Stultita?

Urquhart, in his translation, ignores such concerns and adds more than seventy elements to the first couillon list, more than 200 to the second, repeating 'besysted' as note 1 on page 168 (Master Francis Rabelais volume II, A.H. Bullen, London, 1904.) tells us:

'In his anxiety to swell this catalogue as much as possible, Sir Thomas Urquhart has set this word down twice'.

And he adds another hundred or so elements to the fou list. He even turns passages where Rabelais has used the device in a restrained way into much longer lists: in Chapter XIII of the TL (page 90 of the Flammarion 1970 edition) Rabelais writes of a philosopher holding forth while all around him:

abayent les chiens, ullent les loups, rugient les lyons,
hannissent les chevaulx, barrient les éléphants, siflent
les serpens, braisient les asnes, sonnent les cigalles,
lamentent les tourterelles'

Urquhart expands this list of nine elements to more than fifty including many other bird and animal noises which he inserts

between the dogs and the wolves: the sussing of kittlings, clattering of magpies, whimpering of fulmarks etc. (p.103 of Urquhart).

26. Berry, Alice Fiola. Rabelais: Homo Logus, Chapel Hill Press, University of North Carolina, 1979. p.15.
27. Rigolot, F. p.166. He is referring to Rabelais par lui-même by Manuel de Diéguez, Seuil, 1960.
28. We discuss later Barthes' notion of the useless detail as a guarantor of reality.
29. Lancelot, B-O. 'Perec ou les métaphormoses du nom' in Littératures 7, Printemps, 1983, Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail. pp.11-18. p.17.
30. Mazouer, C. p.141.
31. Clark, K. and Holquist, M. Mikhail Bakhtin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984. p.319.
32. Bakhtin, M.M. 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in Holquist, M. ed., The Dialogic Imagination, University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1981. pp.84-258. p.169.
33. Rigolot, F. p.166.
34. Chapter XIX, p.113. The paragraph beginning 'Rien moins, repondit Pantagruel...'
35. Bakhtin, M.M. p.169.
36. Amory, F. p.65.
37. Rigolot, F. p.164.
38. Rigolot, F. p.171.
39. Rigolot, F. p.171.
40. Derrida, J. L'écriture et la Difference, p.68. In the essay 'Cogito et l'Histoire de la Folie', pp.51-97.
41. Rigolot, F. p.172.
42. Paris, J. p.71.
43. Tetel, M. 'La valeur comique des accumulations verbales chez Rabelais' (1962), in Buck, A. ed., Rabelais, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1983. pp.344-355. p.345.

44. Rigolot, F. p.165.
45. Amory, F. p.74.
46. Charpentier, F. p.340.
47. Paris, J. p.73.
48. Rigolot, F. p.166.
49. Spitzer, L. LPR p.142.
50. Rigolot, F. p.166.
51. Tetel, M. p.344.
52. Tetel, M. p.346.
53. Tetel, M. p.347.
54. Auerbach, E. Mimesis, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1968. p.281.
55. Spitzer, L. Linguistics and Literary History, New York, Russell and Russell, 1962. p.21.
56. Zumthor, P. 'Jonglerie et langage' in Poétique II, Seuil, 1972. pp.321-336. p.332.
57. Iser, Wolfgang. The Act of Reading, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1978. p.35.
58. Rigolot, F. p.170.
59. Mazouer, C. p.155.
60. Alter, R. Partial Magic, The Novel as a Self-conscious Genre, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975. p.33.

61. Editors of the Tiers Livre have been in disagreement over how to present these two lists. Barre (Garnier Frères, Paris, from 1854-1880) gives no f's and no c's in front of the adjectives and sets the couillon list out in three columns. Burgaud des Marets et Rathéry has three columns but has capital c's and capital f's for the two columns of the fou list. He says in Note 8, p.651 that he uses three columns for the couillon list because two 'enlève le sel de certains rapprochements, comme le lecteur en jugera'. Demerson (Seuil, 1973) gives two columns and capital c's for the couillon list and capital f's for the fou. Marty-Laveaux has two columns and small c's for the couillons, and gives the fou list with 'Pantagruel' and 'Panurge' printed down the side of the fou lists in a squiggly bracket. Lefranc (Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931) copies this design for the fou lists but gives the couillon lists in three columns with small c's. The

edition we are using to give page numbers from (Garnier Flammarion, 1970) gives the couillon lists in two columns with small c's and the fou list in two columns with the names at the top and small f's. Screech (Droz, Geneva, 1964) follows the text of the 'F' edition (Paris, Michel, Fezandat, 1552: Bibl. nat. Res. Y² 2163), and points out where there are variations from the 'A' edition (Christian Wechel, Paris, 1546, Bibl. nat. Res Y² 2159) by the square brackets in the text. He declares (p.xxviii) 'Le lecteur a donc devant lui le premier et le dernier état du texte du Tiers Livre' so we give this in the annexe. He gives the first couillon list in three columns with small c's and notes seven additions (fourteen adjectives) to 'A' in 'F'. The second couillon list is also in three columns with small c's and there are twelve additions (twenty two adjectives). He gives the fou list in two columns with small f's, with 'Pantagruel' in full at the top of his column but only 'PA' for Panurge and prints the name of the speaker down the side of each column. There are two additions of four adjectives each.

It seems unlikely that any other passages of the text could undergo such different presentations, and this is perhaps symptomatic of the indifference with which these lists have largely been treated.

CHAPTER THREE

Beginnings: context and fictional conditions in La Vie mode d'emploi

Many of the characters in La Vie mode d'emploi are collectors: Lord Ashtray collects Indian horse rugs, Rémi Plassaert collects blotters, James Sherwood collects 'unica'. The word-list is, at a simple level, a way of relating their collections and creating an atmosphere of precision and obsession appropriate to their pursuits. At an even more simple level, the word-list can be one of the techniques used to establish concrete belief in the world created by the author since proliferations of objects demanding to be visualized help us to build a foundation to the fiction that we are taking part in. Many other techniques may play the same role - indeed, at this simple level, it is possible to say that almost any recognizable description, such as 'It was a dark and stormy night', can have the same effect. However, the insistent exploitation of the word-list in different contexts suggests that its use in Perec's novel is deliberately more complex.

We have seen how Rabelais exploits word-lists to maintain balances between fantasy and reality, authority and parody, sense and subversion. Perec also uses the technique to establish a fictional world under certain conditions. Perec's text is superficially much more transparently referential than that of Rabelais but in fact insists on its ludic and verbal nature very strongly, and this expresses the paradox of the word-list in his text: the more referential it appears, the more complex it reveals itself to be.

In this chapter we are going to examine some of the fictional conditions that Perec creates when he uses a word-list in his novel. We shall examine the narrative and novelistic context within which Perec exploits the device and see how he is able to

escape a specific time structure by techniques of layering, exposing and expanding the narrative, thereby avoiding primary reference to external reality. The word-list, with its connotations of referentiality, is both a device to establish the world of 11, rue Simon-Crubellier, and a device to reveal the fictiveness of that world.

We shall look at Chapters III, XXIX and XCIII of VME in detail, as these Chapters represent an extreme example of the use of the word-list in the context of this balance between referentiality and fictional constructions. One of the things that we shall concentrate on is the way in which he uses word-lists to illustrate his narrative techniques and to maintain a balance between the illusion of realism and the creation of fictions. This is one of the techniques that allows Perec to create a completely fictional construct where reference, as far as possible, is to other parts of the text; he uses the device as a part of his minimalization of reference to what is commonly called the real world, and, by distancing the reference to the external world, he foregrounds the writtenness of the text which, in turn, allows him to play games with language - a central concern of VME.

Poetic description

One of the most common explanations used to make sense of a word-list in a narrative is that it represents poetic description. It is not our aim to examine what might be called the 'poetic' qualities of the word-list in the novel - play of assonance, dissonance, close interplay of connotation and so on - for two reasons. First, because we must not fail to recognise that these lists, problematic, and ungrammatical as they may be, still constitute part of the text of a novel, and this means that a list cannot stand in isolation as a sudden outbreak of grammatically meaningless but all the same beautifully harmonic prose. And, secondly, as we have already seen in our discussion of the

'couillon' and 'fou' episodes in the Tiers Livre, it is the juxtaposition of word-list and narrative which is one of the factors that gives the word-list its dynamic power.

A short discussion of the use of the word-list in poetry will show some other differences. The list form has been used in poetry from the mediaeval blasons, through the Grands Rhétoriciens, by way of Victor Hugo, to the twentieth century. Eluard, for instance, uses the list form. The beginning of 'Poésie ininterrompue' is an example:

Nue effacée ensommeillée
 Choisie sublime solitaire
 Profonde oblique matinale
 Fraîche nacrée ébouriffée,
 Ravivée première régnante¹

and the poem continues in this vein.

This meets the criteria we set in the Introduction of being longer than five elements and composed of groups of words of the same word class. There are two vital differences: a list-poem establishes its own individual context, whereas the list within a novel sits in a context of the fictional universe that has already been established around it and which it has helped to establish in conjunction with other contexts. Secondly, our expectations of poetry, of what we are not surprised to see a poem do with language, are very different from the expectations that we have of the language that we read in a novel.

It is possible that Perec is interested in blurring these differences, but there is a difference in the use of, and reaction to, language in the poem and language in the novel, and it is a difference that the word-list seems to reflect - the difference between Eluard's list above and the list of say, radio stations (p.571), or motorcycles (p.402), or the contents of the Altamont's cellar (pp.201-3), is evident. It is the narrative or non-narrative context and function of the list that we are interested

in, and also the way in which it contrasts with the linear narratives that Perec uses to tell stories. We shall discover that there is much more to the word-list than merely a superficial resemblance to poetic form.

There is a lack of secondary material about the word-list - Perec's critics have yet to give serious consideration to a technique they recognise as typical, but do very little to examine. Most of them, however, correctly insist on the importance of a relationship between the list and the 'regard' of the narrative viewpoint in VME where we are asked to believe that we are looking at, or reading a description of, a painting by Serge Valène. This has at least one serious consequence - it means that the text throws into question the efficacy of verbal reference to reality. Lists are a device by which Perec points this out: they stand outside conventional expectations, they make no claims to making sense in any conventional grammatical way, just as in the Tiers Livre, and they allow the reader, or rather they allow Perec to leave the reader with, the impression that it is the reader who is composing the picture from the raw materials that Perec provides. We shall see that the device is also more subtle than this, and indeed that Perec, in his use of lists, has refined a technique that other writers have rarely used for other than didactic or simple thematic reasons.

The play of time

We shall begin by concentrating on the use of time in VME, and, specifically, on how this affects the continuity of the overall and internal structures. Perec has one of his characters from Quel Petit Vélo au Guidon Chromé au fond de la Cour? exclaim:

(Ah! Littérature! Quels tourments, quelles tortures, ton sacro-saint amour de la continuité ne nous impose-t-il pas?)

Où en étais-je?²

and he often sidesteps notions such as literary continuity in VME. The time span of the novel is both momentary - the moment of Bartlebooth's death at around eight o'clock on the twenty-third of June 1975 - and expansive - ranging from several minutes to several centuries before the fateful moment.

A good example of this can be found in Chapter LXXVIII. We are told that the piano tuner has been coming for forty years to Madame de Beaumont's apartment; so this event already has a past, a sense of time associated with it. For the last five years the piano tuner's grandson has been accompanying him, and at the precise moment of the narrative (the moment of Bartlebooth's death, as we learn later) the grandson is sitting on the stairs outside the apartment reading, in a copy of **Le Journal de Tintin**, 'une biographie romancée' of Carol van Loorens, an adventurer of the early nineteenth century. This story is then told to us and we are transported into a world of piracy, Napoleonic intrigue and heroic gallantry (although the distressed damsel is recaptured and executed for her effrontery in trying to escape.)

Fictional layering

A typical Perec device is being used in this chapter - he uses another text to tell a story, in this case a comic book, in others letters, detective novels, invented autobiographies.³ The introduction of another fictional text is a device used by Perec to enable him to escape the confines of the one moment in which he is supposedly attempting to have Valène describe the life of the building. He escapes the immediate present of the narrative by slipping into the present of another narrative and of imagination. The way that Perec uses the present tense is something we shall examine, and, indeed, the way that he omits to use it in passages where he has no verb, such as a word-list. This layering device - fictions within fictions, pictures within pictures - is crucial to our argument, as an example of how Perec escapes the limitations

of a chronological structure, and it is not only paintings that allow this but also photographs, posters and labels, and that what is hidden is the fact that in six hundred pages of novel, no time passes from page one to page six hundred, the whole book apparently taking place in the moment of Bartlebooth's death.

Essa Reymers has written:

Or, les descriptions des tableaux dans les appartements aident à intégrer les contraintes, parce qu'elles servent à unir des éléments hétéroclites qui selon toute vraisemblance ne pourraient jamais être réunis dans une pièce d'appartement. Le recours aux tableaux permet à Perec de dissimuler l'énorme diversité des éléments de base ainsi que le caractère arbitraire des règles du jeu⁴

and this, allied with what we have said above, reveals to us that the compositional demands of the constraints that Perec imposed on himself have structural, technical and thematic reverberations - the diversity and heteroclism of the elements not only lead to the necessity of devices so that they can be incorporated, but these devices themselves have consequences in the text: this is what we are studying in the case of the word-list.

The mention of forty years of regular piano-tuning maintains the impression of a regular, repetitive life in the building, and at the same time reminds us of time passing. A similar mechanism is found in Bartlebooth's grand puzzle project - no causality or meaning is implied, things just come to an end. The characters, however, are still living lives in which time plays a part - Bartlebooth's project is undone by time as his arbitrary decision of how many years to use falsifies the mathematical perfection of the project. We are told that he should have chosen to do four hundred and eighty watercolours, or five hundred and twenty, instead of five hundred, as this would give him two watercolours a month, or one every two weeks respectively, to paint and to

reassemble. He finds himself with five hundred, that is, one every two and a quarter weeks, and this, we are told:

compromit minusculement le déroulement temporel du
programme (p.481)

and his is a programme which depends for its success on its perfect completion and complete perfection.

The author plays with and exploits time - it is a central concern of the book. Paul Schwartz expresses it in the following way:

Lost traces, fragmentation, the obsessive ordering of time and space - these images haunt Perec's fiction and autobiography. For Perec and his alter egos the smooth continuity of time and space is interrupted; the round faultless eternity which Perec imagines in 'L'Eternité' is flawed by folds, by lacks, by disappearances, cuts, separations, by the absences which haunt his life and work.⁵

Schwartz's main argument is that Perec's writing is motivated by absence - the absence of family, history, identity - and that his writing is a search to fill those gaps. For the moment we shall concern ourselves with one of the points he makes here - that Perec and his characters obsessively order time and space (Bartlebooth travels to paint his watercolours, and being a collector is another way to order time and space) and add that this is presented as an impossible task. The archaeologists and hotelliers who attempt to conquer time and space fail - Fernand de Beaumont commits suicide, and the International Hostellerie Inc abandons its projects for the wonders of the world to be available to each guest in each hotel in its chain. Defeat, as surely as death, would seem to be the natural end of all projects and things in the fictional universe of VME.

The novel is not devoid of all continuity - the continuity of time is played with but continuity is not forsaken. As Bernard Magné points out, Perec achieves a different sort of continuity through the metatextual puzzle metaphor that leads to links between

different stories and episodes. These are not tainted by the linearity of the more conventional narrative structure of the traditional novel, as the story, and the making of the story, also function in a different way, being neither linear nor causal, but with links being made through a network of interrelation:

...tout le travail métatextuel qui multiplie les relations d'équivalence entre écrire et relier les bouts doit être à son tour relié à l'entreprise de Georges Perec faisant de l'écriture le moyen privilégié de (re)construire sa propre histoire et notamment d'en retrouver la continuité.⁶

He takes an example: the case of Lino Margay, injured cycle racer become confidant of South American gangsters, whose ability to tell his own story and listen to others, to be both narrator and narrataire, allied to his prodigious memory, enables him to rebuild his life and his face - in Magné's phrase, 'le greffier greffé'. His father-in-law is a trained 'bourrelier', as is the grandfather of Cinoc, and these similarities allow us to build for ourselves an overall picture of both the writtenness of the text and the metatext (which Magné defines as metaphorical text which represents itself) by exposing and discovering the way in which individual pieces of the puzzle relate to other pieces.

The continuity of time, therefore, as an organizing factor in the narrative, is denied, but imaginative continuity is not sacrificed. Perec does sacrifice, however, the meanings that may be given to time and linearity: destiny, inevitability, completeness of an individual's story. Robbe-Grillet has expressed this, talking of what he calls the traditional, Balzacian novel:

Là, le temps jouait un rôle, et le premier: il accomplissait l'homme, il était l'agent et la mesure de son destin. Qu'il s'agisse d'une ascension ou d'une déchéance, il réalisait un devenir, à la fois gage de triomphe d'une société à la conquête du monde, et fatalité d'une nature: la condition mortelle de l'homme. Les passions comme les événements ne pouvant être

envisagés que dans un développement temporel:
naissance, croissance, paroxysme, déclin et chute.⁷

Perec is able to subvert the notion of time as an outside agent of destiny. He takes the ghost out of the machine, and allows the machine to run purely on the power of fiction. And his fiction is centered around 11, Rue Simon Crubellier, so those who leave may have gaps in their story. Paul Hébert is an example of this. This teacher of chemistry, whose initials and nickname are 'ph', who has spent time in Buchenwald, who runs off with the wife of a neighbour, Madame Grifalconi, is glimpsed selling regional products in the street in Bar-le-Duc many years later. His eyes tell the person who has recognized him that he has no wish to be recognized:

Lorsque Paul Hébert lui rendit sa monnaie, leurs regards se croisèrent une fraction de seconde, et le jeune Riri comprit que l'autre s'était senti reconnu, et qu'il le suppliait de partir. (p.165)

So we never learn how he has become what he has become, nor is it what we expect might have happened to him. All we know is that it has not been good, that time has not been kind to him, no causality, no inevitability beyond the inevitability of death is implied. We never know how, or even, why, Paul Hébert has arrived at this situation.

Josipovici has a point to make here:

Novelists usually provide answers to such questions; indeed they only raise them in order to resolve them. Perec, on the other hand provides no answers, he merely allows the play of contrasting stories to reflect on each other...⁸

and this allows us to construct our own webs and stories. Josipovici goes on to give a not-altogether-convincing reason for this. He says that it happens because the characters themselves do not know what is going to happen to them. We are not entirely sure that one can talk about this in all cases in VME as many characters, and especially Bartlebooth, do their very best to

limit and control what is going to happen to them. He is more convincing in an explanation he gives slightly earlier in his article:

There is thus no revelation, but only pattern, and lives do not make any figal sense but are simply seen to take on certain shapes.⁹

Sometimes Perec retains linear structure as a shape and a pattern in his stories because this allows him to do two things. First, so that any story may come to an end, as life comes to an end. Secondly, many of the characters are engaged in obsessional quests to discover something. But Perec strips the quest structure of its notions of destiny, fulfilment and resolution for the good - time passes and all, if it is resolved at all, is resolved in death and in endings. This is the only revelation, and the final resolution.

Story/description

This leads us to the major distinction that we mentioned in the introduction, that, in VME, there is a difference between stories and 'descriptions'. The word-lists that we shall concentrate on in this chapter are mainly to be found in the 'descriptions', that is, in the parts of the work which fall within the restricted time structure of Bartlebooth's death, and not within the unrestricted time structure of the telling of tales which need only conform to their own internal constraints. The stories escape from the restricted time structure through the layering devices of pictures and other texts, as we have already seen, so what we shall focus on is the way in which the 'descriptions', in their turn, also escape the restricted time structure, and thus enable the present narrative time to remain static.

Some Chapters make no attempt to base themselves in the present of the book - Moreau 3 and Moreau 4, for instance, contain no present tenses. Moreau 3 tells the story of Joy Slowburn, Blunt Stanley,

Carlos and the devilish apparitions they conjure up. Moreau 1, however, is not a story Chapter, but a description Chapter and the description is in the present tense. The Chapter contains the D-I-Y catalogue (pp.102-6) - which has a similar effect to the word-lists in other Chapters: emphasis on different forms of discourse, inviting questions about the nature of language, forcing 'unliterary' language into the literary domain, thus exposing the mechanisms of the text in the classic Russian Formalist defamiliarization conception.

Evidently, the distinction is not always as neat as this and most Chapters contain both stories and 'descriptions', but these Chapters illustrate the distinction that we wish to make. Also, word-lists may sometimes occur within stories - the list of 'unica' within James Sherwood's story, for instance - but we shall lay these aside until we come to examine them in more detail.

Once this distinction is made it becomes easier to understand remarks such as the following:

L'écriture de La Vie mode d'emploi, obsessionnellement descriptive, consiste à inventorier l'inénarrable, et en faire un récit. L'instant de la mort de Bartlebooth ouvre la voie à la narration figée qui n'aura pas lieu selon l'oxymoron spatio-temporelle.¹⁰

We take the second sentence of this quotation from an article by Ewa Pawlikowska to refer to the stories, their narration being frozen in that it follows the linear narrative pattern, and in that it escapes the space-time oxymoron by expanding this death moment to seven hundred pages. The first sentence is more problematic. We shall discuss elsewhere the extent to which Perec can be said to be describing, and the purpose of these descriptions, but it does not seem that Perec is trying to make an inventory of the unnarratable. He is only describing rooms, after all, and there is hardly anything unnarratable about that.

If, on the other hand, he is trying to escape the passage of time by establishing a fixed and whole moment that stands outside the space-time continuum and if he is trying to do this by contrasting or illustrating his point with stories where the passage of time overcomes and defeats the characters, then, by denying the passage of time that is inherent in all linear narrative, and using his 'descriptions' to express this denial of the passage of time, his rooms do become unnarratable, precisely because he refuses to narrate them as this would bring them within the time structure of a linear narrative, and subject to the defeat and decay that linear time and linear narratives are elsewhere presented as leading to. This is a point of view shared by the dedicatee of VME, Raymond Queneau, who writes, in Une Histoire Modèle:

Tout le narratif naît du malheur des hommes.¹¹

The problem is apparent - if the whole book is to take place in an instant to avoid these connotations, in contrast with the individual internal narratives that exhibit them, then those things that happen in that instant must be presented as fixed. Perec solves the problem.

The book itself escapes this because Bartlebooth's death does not close the book off, it leads to another puzzle that refers us back to the book - we are invited to wonder about the signification and significance of the W shape that he holds in his hand, a shape that he has been trying to fit into an X-shaped space in his final puzzle. And, of course, as Essa Reymers emphasises, seven hundred pages do not just disappear:

Perec nie vers la fin du livre l'ensemble qu'il vient de décrire. Le tableau de Valène - la peinture de l'immeuble parisien - s'avère être inexistant et par analogie, le récit de Perec - la description littéraire de ce même immeuble - tout aussi imaginaire. Le projet de Perec échoue pourtant exactement de la même façon que celui de Bartlebooth: "il voulait que le projet tout entier se referme sur lui-même sans laisser de traces" (p.481) mais 'tous les puzzles ne furent pas détruits'. Perec n'arrive pas non plus à détruire le produit de son travail; il a beau nier, par un jeu avec la fiction,

le récit de l'immeuble, il n'en reste pas moins un roman de presque sept cents pages.¹²

The book appears, by insisting on and returning to its own fictionality, by becoming a circular, never-ending puzzle, to have overcome the destructive effects of the passing of time, even if its ironic mirror and role model, Bartlebooth, cannot. All men are mortal, and therefore, all men die. Puzzles, paintings, books and photographs are not mortal - this leads us to our examination of the techniques Percec uses to escape linear time in his 'descriptions', to step outside the way the present turns irrevocably into the past.

Escaping linear time structures

How does he go about this? He uses a number of techniques, of which the most transparent are:

1. Delaying the introduction of a present tense verb.
2. Omitting present tense verbs either in the first line of a description, or in the entire description.
3. Using present tenses in the tableaux and photographs that he depicts.
4. Using ambiguous time constructions such as 'il y a'.
5. Using passive and active verbs to relocate the time element of a verb.
6. Including an 'appartement fantôme'.

Delaying the introduction of a present tense verb

The first technique in our list is that of delaying the introduction of a present tense verb. In several chapters - Chapter LIII Winkler 3, for instance - the story of the Chapter is told before the room is described. In this Chapter we learn of Winkler's love for the painting on his wall (critics have not been slow to note that this painting of the waiting room before execution is very Kafkaesque in mood), of his meeting with Valène,

and of his reaction to Marguerite's death, all this narrated in past tenses, before we are told:

La chambre est aujourd'hui une pièce grise de poussière
et de tristesse, une pièce vide et sale avec un papier
terni. (p.314)

This is the first real present tense of the Chapter (which has begun (p.308) 'La troisième pièce de l'appartement de Gaspard Winckler.') and brings us right up to 'today', the narrative moment, after we have learned about the past. The first apparent present tense of the Chapter - 'C'est là, en face du lit...qu'il y avait' - is, in fact, subsumed into the past by 'il y avait' and has no reference to the present moment of Bartlebooth's death, but rather to the way the room was while Winckler was alive.

The room has in fact been empty for two years since the death of Winckler (as the mouldy bottle of Pschitt reminds us) and is presented to us in the present of the moment of Bartlebooth's death, for time has ceased to have its human effect in this room when Winckler dies. The objects in the room are subject to decay, but the room itself stands outside this in the same way as the external time structure of the book stands outside the internal time structure.

Chapter LIV Plassaert 3 begins in the present tense. This keeps us in the external time structure of the moment of Bartlebooth's death before it moves backwards to tell the story of the Plassaert's commercial attitudes and success. This story in the past tense starts after an extract from another text - the 'Libvre mangifique dez Merveyes que pouvent estre vuyes es La Egipte (Lyon, 1560)' (p.316). This text is fictional on a second level - it is quoted from Rabelais. This element makes it stand outside the time structure of the narration of the Plassaert story and also the time structure of VME. Revealingly, it is also a catalogue - we are beginning to discover some of the fictional

conditions that Perec creates around his word-lists in the 'descriptions', static time surrounded by jumps into the past.

The narration of their commercial affairs slips into the present tense as it brings us up to date before the chapter ends with first, a shopping list and secondly, the captions and titles of the pictures on the wall of this room (pp.320ff). The shopping list - today's item - prepares us for the temporal move to the captions which cannot be placed with regard to the internal time structure nor the external time structure as they are fixed on a painting. So there are three time structures - the first of Bartlebooth's death, the second of the time of a particular story, and the third of the pictures, labels and so on, which can both separate and link the two others.

The citation of the captions thus liberates us from the first two time structures and allows Perec to begin the next Chapter, Chapter LV Chambres de Bonne 10, in the past tense, jumping from unfixed time to the past, the unfixed time of the caption deliberately obscuring the time reference of the moment:

Henri Fresnel, le cuisinier, vint vivre dans cette chambre en juin mille neuf cent dix-neuf. (p.323)

Not only is this the same year as Valène moves into 11, rue Simon-Crubellier, (an example of the interweaving, the apparent coincidences that one can find throughout VME) but it also shows us the way in which Perec arranges for his Chapters to move from one time structure to another. This Chapter is also one where the introduction of a present tense verb is delayed until the very end:

La chambre est aujourd'hui occupée par un homme d'une trentaine d'années (p.331)

throwing us back into the present where we are shown a young man surrounded by five inflatable dolls. Josipovici again has something to say:

Perec's novel continually forces us to question our sense of what is probable and what is improbable but likely to be true.¹³

This also raises the question of what we would believe in a novel and whether this is any different to what we would believe in our everyday life. Would we believe that one of our neighbours had a collection of inflatable dolls? In this case, however, Perec has so manipulated the time structure that the incongruity becomes believable when we fully accept that we are in the present and cannot avoid intruding on this remarkable scene, and, of course, we have fully accepted this - voyeurs looking into the man's room, and voyeurs turning the pages of the book, we have accepted the reading contract. Vraisemblance, in VME, is a function of the novelistic context and not of any comparison to an external reality - unless it is another book, and therefore another fiction. Mimesis has been replaced by an extended system of cross-referring fictionality.

This is not a pattern from which an exegesis of Perec's use of time in the structure of his Chapters could be extracted, but it reveals three of the techniques by which he manipulates the time structures - the delay of the introduction of a present tense verb until the end of a chapter, the use of other texts to allow him to stand outside his own internal and external time structures, which in turn allows him to reenter those structures at any point convenient to his constraints and systems. The example of the lonely young man also reminds us that Perec is a joker who is not averse to exposing the conventions he exploits to ridicule - we must return to the present, but at an unfortunately embarrassing moment for the occupant of the room.

Omitting present tense verbs

The second device in our list is 'Omitting present tense verbs either in the first line of a description or chapter, or in the

entire description'. We have seen above how Chapter LII starts 'La troisième pièce de l'appartement de Gaspard Winckler' liberating the time play of that Chapter, and this is not an isolated example. Chapters XX, XXIV, XLVII, XLIX (to mention but a few) do not have a verb in their first line. This bald statement of our location is not innocently informative. It refuses to place the chapter at a specific moment and thus avoids being subsumed into a linear narrative time structure - Perec never writes phrases like 'La prochaine pièce sur notre itinéraire est...' as this preempts not only the order in which we read the Chapters - and he has advised that a second reading might profit from following individual characters and reconstructing their stories - it also falsifies the movement of the knight on the 'bi-carré latin d'ordre dix' as each of its moves is determined by the coherence of the whole system and not merely by the move before. To say 'next' would imply an individual series that is not appropriate; it would also introduce the idea of linear time (as in 'what happened next') that our argument suggests he is trying to avoid. He does use phrases such as 'où nous nous trouvons maintenant', but these do not imply anything for the time structures beyond our presence as readers and a problematic narrative presence.

This consideration of what is absent from the text rather than of what is in it is slightly unorthodox. However, Perec is a writer for whom absence can be dynamic (see the quotation from Paul Schwarz above) and one of the forty-two elements that each Chapter is made up from following another of his preset systems is 'manque'. So each chapter is made up of only forty-one elements, unless he wishes to express this manque by telling us what is not there. Two of the most important paintings in the book - Winckler's waiting room before the duel, and the narrative device of Valène's tableau are, in fact, missing (as are other implied pictures, the pictures accompanying the D-I-Y catalogue, for instance). The text is explicit about this, and one hopes that

this idea of absence may be extended to include what might, by common sense or literary convention, have been in the text, but is not.

The bald statement of a fact brooks no argument from the reader, but there is a difference between beginning a chapter:

C'est une chambre de bonne au septième, ... (p.38)

and

Caves. La cave des Rorschash. (p.403)

and this difference lies in the fact that the first begins fluently, fixed in the present time of the book, whereas the second is not only more direct but also is unfixed with regard to the book time. In capital letters, six lines later, in the same Chapter, Chapter LXVII, we find the word **ARCHIVES** glaring at us from the page. We take this to be an invitation to consider further the role of time in a text - archives are records of the past, recording historical fact and they become historical documents - all we have left of the past in many cases, something written, our only way of confronting history 'avec sa grande Hâche'¹⁴. And we remember Goody's remark:

The most characteristic form (of early written discourse) is something that rarely occurs in oral discourse at all, (though it sometimes appears in ritual) namely, the list.¹⁵

Archives may take the form of lists, and so these capital letters baldly ask the question of the word-list and time.

From our standpoint as readers (or rather than standpoint, 'à plat ventre', like Anne Breidel reading her calory-counting book, p.230) we only know that something has happened because there is a record of it - if there is no record, it might just as well not have happened. Bartlebooth tries to leave no trace of his project, Beyssandre, the art critic employed by International Hostellerie Inc to buy paintings for their planned super-hotels

interferes in the disappearance of the project, and Valène also interferes. If he is to record the life of the building he must include Bartlebooth, but by doing so he goes against one of the principles of Bartlebooth's project -

il voulait que le projet tout entier se referme sur
lui-même sans laisser de traces (p.481)

- and so falsifies one of the main supports of the life of the building.

It is possible that this falsification is inherent in the project:

Imaginons un homme... dont le désir serait... de saisir,
de décrire, d'épuiser, non la totalité du monde -
projet que son seul énoncé suffit à ruiner - mais un
fragment constitué de celui-ci. (p.156)

Valène is trying to describe the totality of the fragment in which he finds himself, and this is also a 'projet que son seul énoncé suffit à ruiner', until it is not the project itself which is important but the fact of doing it. Perec is foregrounding writing and the written nature of his text, and also pointing out the flaws, failures and apparent contradictions that this involves - such as the desire to leave no trace, the painter drawing the life of the building in one moment while at the same time drawing himself and impossible adventures in the Sahara, in South America, in Spain, and the absence of important and implied pictures.

The form of the word-list, didactic in appearance and historically used as a record, reflects the way in which the fictional world of 11, rue Simon Crubellier is established. It also, through the part it plays in destroying our faith in the referentiality of language and the text, by being incorporated in the fictional layering technique, expresses Perec's reluctance to use the device in its primary role as recorder and points to the way he uses it more subtly.

'Caves. La cave de Rorschach', this ungrammatical, anti-conventional beginning to a fragment of text, coupled with the occasions when Perec leaves out verbs in an entire description, moves us very close to a word-list. In fact we often have a word-list. Let us take the following example, from Chapter LXVIII Escaliers 9:

Tentative d'inventaire de quelques-unes des choses qui ont été trouvées dans les escaliers au fil des ans.

Plusieurs photos, dont celle d'une jeune fille de quinze ans vêtue d'un slip de bain noir et d'un chandail blanc, agenouillée sur une plage,
un réveil radio de toute évidence destiné à un réparateur dans un sac plastique des Etablissements Nicolas,
un soulier noir orné de brillants,
une mule en chevreau doré,
une boîte de pastilles Géraudel contre la toux, (p.406)

and it continues. The first thing to notice (after wondering whether this photo is in black and white or in colour, the swimming costume is resolutely ambiguous) is that these things have been found 'au fil des ans', that is, they are not time specific. We are drawn not only to ask who found them (and who lost them) but to ask when they were found. The answer to this is merely 'au fil des ans'. The years are no more than a thread in this Chapter - they may still be linear (time always passes) but they carry none of the implications usually associated with the passing of time in a linear narrative, such as destiny, coming to knowledge, the straight path to the end. Time here creates mysteries rather than helping resolutions. It is no coincidence (nothing is merely coincidental to a reader of VME, we are free to juxtapose wherever and whenever the text offers us the possibility, which is almost constantly) that one of the objects that has been found on the stairs (p.407) is 'une bobine de fil bleu ciel' - almost as if this actually was 'le fil des ans', the thread holding the years together.

Perec is doing more than this, too. It is not just that by omitting verbs he creates timelessness, the use of 'au fil des ans' is also a device to liberate his imagination under the constraints that he has imposed upon himself. The expansiveness of time is used positively here, as the Latin quotation that ends the chapter attests. This chapter should contain quotations from Roussel and Rabelais, following the system devised for incorporating quotations, two great exponents of the word-list, and the thread of the years connects these three writers together through this technique. And, indeed, Perec is also playing with time by mingling other texts into his own in the play of, in Magné's word, 'impli-citation'.

Present tense in the tableaux and photographs

Our third device is the way that Perec uses the present tense in tableaux and photographs. There are two main strands to this - often the first verb of a 'description' passage comes in a relative clause and describes something in a picture, and this present tense in a photograph, for instance, does not have the same status as the VME narrative present tense, because it is distanced from the narrative moment by belonging to another fixed moment, that captured by the photograph. Both techniques layer, expose and expand the text, and allow the word-list its full play of apparent specificity (is that photo a colour photo of a black and white bathing costume?) and lack of narrative movement.

An example of the first technique can be found in Chapter XLVII Dinteville 2:

La salle d'attente du Docteur Dinteville. Une pièce assez vaste, rectangulaire, avec un parquet à point de Hongrie, et des portes capitonnées de cuir. Contre le mur du fond, un grand divan recouvert de velours bleu; un peu partout, des fauteuils, des chaises à dossier lyre, des tables gigogne avec divers magazines et périodiques étalés: sur la couverture de l'un d'eux on voit une photographie en couleurs de Franco sur son lit de mort,

veillé par quatre moines agenouillés qui semblent tout droit sortir d'un tableau de de La Tour. (p.267)

There are seven lines of text before the first present tense verb and when it arrives, or when it leaves the waiting room, it refers us not to something specifically placed in the narrative time of the book, such as one of Dinteville's patients, but to a photograph. The photograph is of interest - Franco died in November 1975, after Bartlebooth, and his death is given as 1976 in the Index, a clue pointing to the clinamen, the fault that proves the system of the time structure? - but it will always be the same, it will never change, it is a representation of a fixed moment in time, and Perec reinforces this by telling us that the monks seem to come from a painting, which in turn would also be fixed in time. We might also add that the structure of fictional layering is alluded to by the 'tables gigogne', an appropriate metaphor for the technique, and a central metaphor in the book.

The 'on voit' serves an important purpose. It insists that we are seeing the photograph, of course, when it is in fact being described to us verbally, and the blurring of this distinction (is the book supposed to be Valène's putative painting or a description of it, we ask during a first reading) enables Perec to suggest that we are seeing, in the same sense, his text. That is, that Doctor Dinteville's waiting room is like a photograph to us, and this is corroborated by the absence of the time specific verb when we are reading, or seeing, the waiting room. This means that the 'descriptions' can take us out of time into their own world in exactly the same way that the novel envelops us in its own world. The blurring of the distinction between the supposed painting and the words describing it is central to Perec's narrative technique in the static parts of the book, the conceit that the words are describing a painting to establish a referent for what would otherwise be a purely fictional text - in other words he replaces the referent to reality that most writers postulate ('Tous les écrivains pensent être réalistes', as Robbe-Grillet claims¹⁶) by a

referent to another fictional construct, the painting. Bernard Magné affirms this:

Le projet de Valène est au coeur de la narration; il constitue en effet la motivation générale de tout le roman, lui donnant sa cohérence référentielle et la caution du vraisemblable.¹⁷

This is the role that we suggested for the word-list in the Tiers Livre within the confines of Rabelaisian vraisemblance, but Perec employs the conceit of Valène's painting to establish the convention of vraisemblance. The word-list then is free to have its full effect in the internal play of the novel.

This technique of using a delayed verb in a relative clause is also used in a more refined way. Chapter XC Le Hall d'Entrée 2 begins:

La portion droite du hall d'entrée de l'immeuble. Au fond le départ de l'escalier; au premier plan, à droite, la porte de l'appartement des Marcia. Au second plan, au-dessous d'une grande glace encadrée de moulures dorées dans laquelle se reflète imparfaitement la silhouette, vue de dos, d'Ursula Sobieski... (p.550)

The first verb, in a relative clause, is 'se reflète'. The rest of the description is in the present tense, and is released by this verb. The reflection, however, is most important. Ursula Sobiecki is the young researcher come to find out about Bartlebooth's story (a reader and a writer figure combined, therefore) and herself reflects another young woman, the estate agent of Chapter One, who also carries a bag and has a plan of the building in her hand at the entrance to the book, as Ursula has a bag and a list of occupants, in the 'Hall d'entrée'. Perec would seem to be using these characters to further illustrate that time is static in the 'descriptions' - time for us as readers of VME only starts to pass as we begin to read the book, and Ursula becomes a clue that no book time has passed, since she reflects a character at the beginning of the book, and is still reflected in the hallway (and always will be.)

Thematic relevance is here joined by technical adroitness - reflected in the mirror one sees... Many authors, from Lewis Carroll to Kurt Vonnegut, have used mirrors as gateways to other realities - in Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions¹⁸, the science fiction writer Kilgore Trout - who shares the same name as a science-fiction writer, the author of Venus on the Half Shell¹⁹ - calls mirrors 'leaks' into another world, and Vonnegut also uses this as a technique to expand what the normal demands of vraisemblance would not allow in his text. In the entrance hall of this building, another reality is certainly being offered to us. The first character that we see - a reader figure - is on the threshold of this other reality, because she leads us into the world of the novel. Without wishing to labour the point, we see once more that Perec is offering us ways of escaping the linear and destructive passage of time.

The technique is here used with a mirror, but in other Chapters the verb comes within a painting or a photograph or a piece of a different text (for example, the first verb of Chapter LXXVI Caves 4 (p.452) is in the label of a toothpaste advertisement) In Chapter XCI Caves 5, the third line of the Chapter reads (or is seen) as follows:

des caisses de champagne portant une étiquette bariolée
sur laquelle un vieux moine tend une flûte à un
gentilhomme en costume Louis XIV... (p.554)

and the story continues to tell us of the invention of champagne by Dom Pérignon. The present tense on the label, however, has transported us to the time of Louis XIV. The first verb of the chapter has completely defocussed our notion of time and the paragraph ends with the picture on the bottle of 'Stanley's Delight' whisky showing negro porters carrying cases of 'Stanley's Delight' whisky with labels of negro porters carrying cases of 'Stanley's Delight' with labels showing and so on, ad infinitum and, perhaps, ad absurdum.

Two of Percec's layering, exposing and expanding techniques come very closely together in this Chapter - the possibilities of jumping in time, and the infinite regress of ordered space (Stanley is best known as an adventurer and explorer, after all.) The Chapter also contains a list of twenty names of people exploited by Hitler according to the argument of M. Echard, a third decentring device in the same chapter. So we think of Louis XIV, the African jungle and the Berlin bunker all in the space of two pages - novelistic notions of time must have been subverted for all this to be coherent. And it all begins with the first verb in a relative clause as a verb which shows text, reflection, or pictures, thus taking us away from 'reality', and from the present tense of the book, into another more fluid, more fantastic realm of time.

The stories take us into a fantastic realm, too, but one that is fixed and linear. If the 'descriptions' take us to fixed time, it is time which is not linear. The movement in a photograph is fixed, although it might represent a moment in a series of moments, one particular moment has become fixed and isolated from the linear flow of time. This is why the status of the present tense changes when it is used to describe paintings and photographs - it ceases to imply future and past. The whole book, perhaps, happens within a painting, but within that, there are things happening within paintings within the main painting. The technique is extended within a specific painting description. Motte remarks:

But if descriptions of paintings abound in VME, the large majority of the paintings are fictive. This, of course, obviates the necessity of translating real phenomena into verbal form.... The objects described are fictional constructs. Unlike Les Lieux, description in VME depends entirely on literary convention for effect; the link to the referential world is secondary rather than primary.²⁰

So he confirms for us two things: the fictionality of the text - that Percec removes his text from reality and real time (and Motte

traces the development of this through texts like Les Lieux and Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien which are strongly referential, to VME, which is not) - and the fictionality of the paintings, creating a secondary level of fictiveness.

Pedersen, too, confirms what we have been saying:

En fin de compte le projet de Valène est de la plus grande importance pour la présentation de tous les personnages: c'est en vertu de cette idée initiale que les chapitres constituent une série de tableaux, où souvent, tout mouvement semble suspendu, comme sur une photo instantanée²¹

but he does not develop this idea. We have already mentioned the link to what Motte calls 'the referential world', and now we shall concentrate on the way Perec uses language within the secondary level of fiction, and specifically, how this affects the present tense.

Perec himself has mentioned the question of immobility, replying to the question of Gabriel Simony:

Mais cela peut paraître pétrifié, comme une vie immobile? Parce que c'est un tableau!²²

So it looks as if what we have to say about the use of the present tense within specific paintings will be more generally true of the present tense in the descriptions too. We should remember, however, that if Perec reinforces the point by using a general narrative device in more specific situations, then these specific situations take on a larger importance as reflexive of the whole.

Il y a

We have mentioned above the temporal ambiguities of present tense verbs. Perec does similar things with 'il y a'. Hutting 4 XCVII begins:

Il y a longtemps que Hutting ne se sert plus de son
grand atelier... (p.582)

and this construction is deliberately time-ambiguous referring to both past and present - the time since Hutting last used his studio and the fact that it is, 'today', unused. This opens up a time gap for Perec to tell the story of the 'salons' in, and to introduce the young metaphysical poet, among others, whose poems are written by his mother and who uses titles like 'Dénombrement des choses et des êtres perdus en cours de route' (p.584) - another author figure, perhaps, then, a metaphorical self-personification.

Towards the 'appartement fantôme': Chapter L, an example of fictional layering

Let us take Chapter L Foulerot 3 as an example of fictional layering. The chapter begins:

La chambre, ou plutôt la future chambre, de Geneviève
Foulerot (p.283)

so we are warned that the room is not yet a bedroom. This is one of the rare anticipations of the future in the book (we will come to others when we discuss the 'appartement fantôme') and this forward-looking perspective is one of the ways in which Perec creates the fictional conditions to tell the whole chapter in the present tense - normally he moves backwards, he has to move backwards, to report the life of the room. Here, the chapter is concerned with the present life of the room and as it has none, Perec is able to stay in the present and construct a fictional edifice of some sophistication. The third paragraph reads:

La pièce est entièrement vide de meubles. Un tableau
de très grand format, est posé, non encore accroché,
contre le mur de droite et se reflète partiellement
dans le miroir obscur du parquet. (p.283)

There is no furniture and so nothing to talk about in the book present (apart from the position of the painting.) We move then

to the painting, and the obscure reflection warns us that we are moving to a different world:

Le tableau lui-même représente une chambre

- because mirrors can only reflect what they see, after all. Were we wishing to discuss *mise en abyme*, and surreptitious author figures in the book, and there are many examples of both, this would be a Chapter where we could find much useful material. As we are discussing use of the present tense we shall limit ourselves to remarking that the verb 'représente' here is different from the 'est posé' that precedes it. 'Est posé' is in itself curious - the words suggest an action by someone, and have connotations of both present tense - 'est' - and past tense - 'posé'. It is an incomplete statement, rather as the room is an incomplete bedroom. 'Représente' can be entirely non-time specific, and is also a layering verb, in the sense of moving the narrative from one picture to another, and implying no direct transmission.

Le tableau lui-même représente une chambre. Sur l'appui de la fenêtre il y a un bocal de poissons rouges et un pot de réséda. (p.283)

The status of this 'il y a' is problematic. It does not present something as present, it describes a state of affairs in the painting, and it describes it as a fact.

Par la fenêtre grande ouverte, on aperçoit un paysage champêtre: le ciel d'un bleu tendre, arrondi comme un dôme, s'appuie à l'horizon sur la dentelure des bois.

'On aperçoit' is ambiguous. We can either see through the window from outside the painting or from inside it - 'aperçoit' must be a de-personalized and de-temporalized verb. Nevertheless, we have already moved into a third level of fictionality, from the room, to the painting, and now through the window of the painting. We are at several removes from any possibility of realistic description of either the room or the painting. When we learn that the painting is a representation of the story of a detective

novel 'L'Assassinat des poissons rouges', the text is fully encircled by its own fictionality. The painting of the book is present in this case, but in the case of VME the painting that the words are describing is absent - Valène has left only a few faint marks on a huge canvas.

Perec's use of words to represent pictures involves, in this instance, a very careful manipulation of tenses. For the story (also a deep level of fictionality, a fiction about a fictional painting in a fictional room - in a fictional or future room, in a fictional painting by Valène, in a fiction by Georges Perec) is told in the present tense. Perec does not step outside the time structure of this particular story, despite its being in the present tense, because he has established quite enough layers of fictionality for there to be no confusion with the present tense of the moment of Bartlebooth's death.

Let us now turn to the story told of the origin of the painting by Geneviève's grandfather ('davantage connu comme décorateur que comme peintre' p.284). (We leave the last sentence grammatically ambiguous.)

L'action se passe dans une région qui évoque assez bien
les Lacs italiens, non loin d'une ville imaginaire que
l'auteur appelle Valdrade. (p.285)

The action in the painting is immobile, 'se passe' might suggest that it happens all by itself; 'évoque assez bien' might be a comment on the painting or on the detective novel; an imaginary town further deepens the levels of fictionality, for even the assassination of the gold fish is fictional; 'l'auteur' could be either the grandfather or the detective novelist, or, indeed Italo Calvino, from whose book Invisible Cities this passage is quoting - another level of fictionality. It seems more likely to be the novelist, but doubt has been sown in our minds, especially by 'qui évoque assez bien'. If we are talking of the novelist, who makes

the literary judgment? We barely have time to consider this question before we are told in the very next sentence:

Le narrateur est un peintre.

The deepening levels of fictionality are beginning to offer themselves as circles. Inspecteur Waldemar is called in, (and we notice that Valdrade, Waldemar and Valène share the same first syllable and that the name is taken from Poe's story of mesmerism 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', about a man kept alive on his deathbed, rather like the way the moment of Bartlebooth's death is expanded) and he is a man:

auquel le peintre-narrateur sert complaisamment de
confidant... Il fouille conscienceusement chaque
pièce... (p.285)

and the plot of this novel is as complicated (all the suspects have tried to kill a man who was preparing to commit suicide) as the levels of fictionality that Percec is playing with.

Despite all this, the entire episode is narrated in the present tense. We are plunged into levels of fictional illusion that take on a momentum of their own, as literary devices and games replace the linear time device as a means of providing a driving forward dynamic of the text. It is in this context that word-lists play a part in Percec's narrative strategy as part of the ludic and literary play that has been devised to eliminate linear time as a dynamic device. Suspense, anticipation, and thematic considerations are now provided by these replacement devices - word-lists are able to provide all three, as we shall see when we discuss the party in Chapter XXIX Troisième droite 2 (pp.173-6).

The 'descriptions', then, are distinguished from the stories which use linear time as a dynamic by these features. In the stories the dynamic of linear time is presented as leading towards closure, defeat and death. Percec admits in an interview:

Il n'y a qu'une seule histoire sur trois cent quatre-vingts qui soit optimiste²³

and this is the story of the Réol, a young couple who buy a bed and then need a pay rise to afford it, and actually get one. It is therefore only in the 'descriptions' that we will be able to find any open-ended elements. If, indeed, we wish to. However, the list just before Bartlebooth's death, and the piece, the puzzle he holds in his hand, would support this reading.

Perec's use of metaphor is an important element in the book, and problematic. There are so many possible analogies, extended metaphors, allegories, parables and so on, that we can hardly decide which to take seriously. Our difficulty is not helped by the introduction to the puzzles which reveals that decoys and displacements are as much a part of the game as fitting the pieces together. It would be unwise, then, to insist on a single metaphorical reading and much more rewarding to try to follow all the possible paths, play all the games, and try to solve all the puzzles; never-ending, but fun.

Hubert Juin points out the technique of layering in his short article 'Le réalisme irréel de Georges Perec':

Mais comme Serge Valène entreprend de peindre cette maison ouverte à tous regards, il montrera ces fenêtres qui donnent immédiatement dans les territoires de l'imaginaire: les tableaux, gravures, ou photographies qui ornent chacune des pièces de cet immeuble. Et comme, on le sait, de nombreux tableaux, de nombreuses gravures, beaucoup de photographies reproduisent, dans leurs motifs, d'autres tableaux ou gravures, ceux-là aussi devront être peints. Autrement dit, chaque 'figuration' sera sommée de **dire** sa fiction. Et ainsi de l'une à l'autre.

De telle sorte que la maison offerte comme j'ai dit, loin de dessiner un espace clos s'évadera, de tableaux en tableaux, vers l'espace de la fiction...

Georges Perec ne refuse aucunement le trompe-l'oeil: il s'en sert.²⁴

This technique is crucial to our reading of the word-list because it allows us to show how Perec escapes the bounds of an apparently realist descriptive technique. Once this has been achieved all the boundaries of the realist fiction are done away with. We argue later that the word-list denies inclusivity, indeed Perec would seem to be pointing out that more can always be said, and therefore that an enumeration must always be incomplete as a reference to reality. It is much better seen in its purely linguistic effect, as Andrée Chauvin says:

La liste peut être considérée comme un trait d'écriture descriptive, et par là au service d'une précision avertie, d'une spécification du vocabulaire qui la destine au trompe-l'oeil référentiel.²⁵

So that the list would tend rather to problematize these questions of reference and totality, leaving them incomplete, curious, elusive. The same is true of a puzzle - when it is complete it is no longer a puzzle. The impossibility of completion is one of the things that makes it appropriate to VME - failure is built in - 'un projet que son seul énoncé suffit à ruiner.'

Claude Burgelin also recognizes the layering technique:

Affiches, images, tableaux semblent remplacer les fenêtres qui ne donnent que sur une rue endormie. Ce sont autant de vitres ouvertes à même les cloisons sur d'autres espaces et d'autres temps.²⁶

But he, too, does not examine fully the potential of the word-list. In fact, he concentrates on the negative aspects, the possibility of boredom, of hammering the reader into a stunned submission. Speaking mainly about the descriptions of rooms at the beginning of Chapters, he takes a completely opposite position to the one we have taken. He says:

Notre imagination est neutralisée. Elle ne peut guère décoller, tenue en laisse par l'exactitude de l'inventaire, bridée par ces définitions sommaires des objets énumérés. Devant de tels décors, le jugement, le plaisir, sont en suspens. Au mieux une impression d'ensemble est notée, qui ne s'écarte guère des registres convenus... Il inventorie sans vraiment

décrire, ni détailler, ni ouvrir par là même à des résonances ou à des jeux d'interprétation.²⁷

We shall argue in the discussion of the 'appartement fantôme' that follows that Perec's use of the word-list liberates our imaginations, allows us to compose a picture for ourselves, and that he does not ignore his ludic game of intertextual and self-referential resonance. We have also argued that we can learn from the word-list that VME is a puzzle that allows of many solutions - and so it proves.

L'appartement fantôme

Now we come to the question of the 'appartement fantôme' - the apartment situated at 'troisième droite' and in Chapters III, XXIX, and XCIII. Perec begins by saying of it:

Ce sera un salon, une pièce presque nue... (p.28)

using a future tense. This future may be explained by reminding ourselves that we are at the beginning of the book and Perec is still trying to establish the device and conceit of Valène actually painting the picture of the house. There is also the possibility that this may be the use of the future that implies probable situations. In this case, merely sowing the seeds of doubt is enough to start readers worrying, as with the word 'fantôme' - the 'gouvernement fantôme' may be real people, but they are not the real government.

In Chapter XXII Réol I, after discovering that Mme Hourcade, who made the boxes for Bartlebooth's paintings, used to live there, we read:

Les Réol seront dans leur salle à manger, viendront de finir de dîner. (p.67)

After mentions of Smyrne, Corinth and Louis XIII, the narrative moves into the present having established the presence of Valène painting these figures and also having established the dislocation

of time. In Chapter III this also happens: the first two paragraphs are related in the future tense, and as we read the beginning of the story of 'Les Trois Hommes Libres' in the present tense, there is a mention of a Louis XIII armchair, like a signal, or a detonating time-bomb placed in time. But this Chapter III appears to pose more problems than XXII: the four men in the room are described in the present tense and yet:

Il n'y a personne au troisième droite. Le propriétaire est un certain Monsieur Foureau qui vivrait à Chavignolles, entre Caen et Falaise dans une manière de château et une ferme de trente-huit hectares... Personne ne semble l'avoir jamais vu. Aucun nom n'est écrit sur la porte palière, ni sur la liste affichée sur la porte vitrée de la loge. (p.31)

Nobody is there, but we have been led to believe that there are four men in the room. Perec explicitly removes this image from our mind, but not from the painting. Questions arise: if there is nobody there, where has the Japanese sect come from? It is first mentioned on the first page of the Chapter in the future tense 'Quatre hommes seront accroupis au centre de la pièce'. So they too are fictional, as fictional as the painting of Valène's that purports to be the subject of the book - neither exists in the book, in reality, in one of the rooms of the book, nor anywhere except on the page that Perec has written. In only the third Chapter of the book the fictionality of the work is being revealed to us - and let us not forget that Monsieur Foureau, who only conditionally lives in Chavignolles, as if either no-one is sure of the fact, or as if he doesn't really exist at all, is not the only fictional character to have reportedly lived in Chavignolles - Bouvard and Pécuchet lived there too.

Alain Goulet explains this problem of the future tense in a slightly different way:

Tandis que les deux premiers chapitres s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'une mise à plat spatio-temporelle de l'immeuble, avec 'cette femme qui monte les escaliers' et la description du salon de Mme de Beaumont, le troisième fait l'objet de curieuses ruptures énonciatives et

référentielles. Le narrateur affirme qu'"il n'y a personne au troisième droite" [31], mais le chapitre s'ouvre sur toute une série de futurs qui comblent le vide par ce projet de Valène: "Ce sera un salon...Quatre hommes seront accroupis [...]"[28]. Or ce médaillon virtuel de son tableau est aussitôt actualisé par l'écriture, après une nouvelle rupture de l'isotopie narrative: "Le seul meuble de la pièce est [...]. L'homme qui fait face aux trois autres est Japonais." Nous sommes bien en 1975, mais ce présent est celui de Valène et se substitue à celui du narrateur. Le futur qui ouvre le Chapitre 27 s'explique de la même façon par le "souvenir pétrifié" du peintre recomposant son propre tableau. La clé de ces distorsions énonciatives nous est fournie au Chapitre 7: "Sur le tableau la chambre est comme elle est aujourd'hui" [46]. Le tableau de Valène est présenté comme réalisé coïncidant pour cette chambre de Morellet avec le point de vue du narrateur.²⁸

It is true that Perec employs both a narrator and Valène to tell his stories and we have seen that Perec's manipulation of the time structure is more than a simple narrative game, and is, in fact, also a liberating and dynamic device that helps to replace the more traditional linear narrative structure.

Chapter XXIX, the next Chapter about the appartement fantôme, begins:

Le grand salon de l'appartement du troisième droite
pourrait offrir les images classiques d'un lendemain
de fête. (p.173)

This conditional reminds us that the owner of the apartment 'vivrait à Chavignolles', he, too, a victim of the fictionality of this particular flat, and a double victim of fiction. 'Pourrait offrir' might refer to Valène's imagination, thinking up what to paint in this section of his work, but the conceit of his painting depends on his being a strictly realist painter - if one's second level narrator was a Cubist, after all, coherence would be more difficult to come by. So it cannot be Valène employing this conditional. Nor can it be the narrator of a story, for he narrates, he does not imagine. This falls into the category of 'book fact', in exactly the same way as 'L'appartement est au

troisième droite' might, something we are told as a fact within the book and can hardly argue with. In the Chapter, the next paragraph begins 'C'est une vaste pièce...', thus enclosing the conditional within the book fact. But the conditional works on the realism of the present tense here, too. Everything becomes conditional, a 'might be' or 'would be if' situation.

The whole Chapter is surrounded in conditionality. But 'pourrait' can not only be a 'could' but a 'might' as well. A potentiality, perhaps, corresponding to this Oulipian definition:

Bref, tout texte littéraire est littéraire par une quantité de significations potentielles.²⁹

Whatever the outcome, there can be no doubt that this Chapter demands analysis.

Chapter XXVIII has ended with a direct appeal to the reader:

Qui, en face d'un immeuble parisien, n'a jamais pensé
qu'il était indestructible? (p.171)

It is pointed out to us that although a building may appear solid to an individual or to a family, the fever that caused it to be built will eventually destroy it in order to replace it. Thematically, this is important - the life-giving force that burns itself out and causes death afflicts Ferdinand de Beaumont, Bartlebooth and many others. What gives their life meaning is what will eventually destroy it. When a puzzle is complete it is no longer a puzzle, and life, in VME, consumes itself in the same way.

This is a fairly depressing Chapter (and we shall study the lists of it in more detail in our next chapter), exposing as it does our illusions of immortality, of stability, of certitude. But the User's Guide does not stop there - the very next Chapter offers us an illusion of happiness, a party. An illusion on two levels:

illusory because it is over, and illusory because it is conditional.

Of course, this context only applies if we read the novel in a linear way, from page one to the last page - and we are forewarned of the dangers of linear structures. Fresh from imagining the destruction of the building, we now imagine a party that might never have happened - the reader's expectations and certainties are being swept away, as we climb the stairs and open the door to a room that is not even there. It is a phantom, a figment.

The scene is set for a word-list: our normal expectations of sense, of structure, of description, of temporal linearity, no longer apply and we have little expectation of referential vraisemblance. There are also techniques in the beginning of the Chapter which set up the conditions for the list. We have already looked at the effect of the conditional 'pourrait', the word split over the first and second lines, just as, in a less serious vein, 'enta-mée' is split over two lines later in the passage. We shall now turn our attention to the phrase 'les images classiques'.

Two considerations arise immediately - we are dealing with 'images', that is, pictures or representations, and they are 'classiques'. That is, that we are being asked to bring our expectations into play - the Preamble of the novel begins with the quotation from Paul Klee: 'L'oeil suit les chemins qui lui ont été ménagés dans l'oeuvre'. Warning lights, as Derrida explains, in a different context, are switched on:

For my part, wherever and whenever I hear the words "It's true", "It's false", "It's evident", "evidently this or that" or "in a fairly obvious way", I become suspicious. This is especially so when an adverb, apparently redundant, is used to reinforce the declaration. Like a warning light, it signals an uneasiness that demands to be followed up.³⁰

"Classiques", an adjective, has much the same effect here of turning on the warning lights. It defines a 'chemin' to follow and is also a provocation.

Perec is doing two important things. First, he is stating boldly that he is only giving us an image denying referentiality, and secondly, he is asking us to compare this image to our own image of what the aftermath of a party looks like - there is no appeal to an objective reality. This allows him to play within a set of expectations and to exploit those for the more universal effect implied by 'classique', rather than by the exhaustiveness of the inventory of debris that he gives. For, as we shall see, the list is by no means exhaustive - certain possibilities are offered and excluded, and the technique is laid bare.

First, however, he offers us more confusion and ambiguity. Words and phrases such as 'en évidence', 'en réalité', 'trompe-l'oeil', 'à demi recouverte', 'manifestement' interplay so as to cause us to doubt what we can manifestly see, or rather what we are, at this stage, manifestly being shown. Appearance and certainty are being contrasted - we are being invited both to question the nature of what we see and the nature of the way it is presented to us: 'on aperçoit' is inserted in the centre of the doubt-inducing play of evidence and 'trompe-l'oeil' plays this role as well.

While all this is going on Perec does not forget the connections this Chapter can make with the rest of the book - this young girl is holding in her right hand a glass of milk, while young Caroline Echard, at the beginning of the next Chapter, is holding something else in her right hand. And we shall see that Perec uses a combination of innocence and sexual innuendo within the Chapter to create dynamically ambiguous impressions in the word-list.

The other young girl - to whom the glass of milk is destined, its reviving qualities contrasted with its status as inanimate object - is also surrounded by the contrast of certainty and appearance:

elle **apparaît** vêtue seulement d'un blouson de nylon
~~manifestement~~ trop grand pour elle. (my emphasis) (p.173)

He uses the ambiguity of 'apparaît' to suggest both 'seems' and 'appears' as in 'appears in the picture,' allowing himself to begin to create an impression that has no realist pretensions, because he denies the link to an immediately perceived reality through both layering the fictionality and this use of ambiguous 'appearance' words. The use of an expectation-inducing phrase such as 'images classiques' then leaves the reader with the task of relating the picture to a perceived reality - the text makes no pretensions to represent this reality transparently and unchanged through the medium of language. The referent is, rather, to an imagined reality.

The phrase 'Par terre, partout, les restes du raout:' introduces the word-list. In passing we note the rhythm of this phrase with its alliteration and its rhyme, we also note the use of the archaic word 'raout' which the Collins Robert gives as '++' - 'words which the user will normally find only in classical literature'. Perce is insisting on the literariness of what follows. Also to be noted is the inclusive use of 'partout' - it is used as 'everywhere on the ground', while also suggesting everywhere all around, which is, in fact, more true of the scene depicted, for we move after only eight lines to the debris left on a low table. Again Perce is using language specifically while at the same time expanding the context of what he is saying - a reflection of one of the features of a word-list, the emphasis simultaneously on the specific and on the group. The first impression we receive is that of a dissolute and wild party where there have been fun and games, dressing-up, and undressing. We should also mention the long white sock, an image both virginal and fallen, for this becomes a refrain in the list.

'Des assiettes de cartons, empilées...' expands the focus by moving from the floor to the things in the things on the floor. 'Déchets' becomes the word on which the others hang, to which the others refer back, within the larger context of 'les restes'. A further expansion takes place with 'barquettes' as we begin looking at the things in the things that have been left on the things that are on the floor, another expression of the objects within objects metaphor of 'tables gigogne'.

Our eye is then taken to the low table, as we pan around the room with the list - and this panning is an external shell to the list. A list of places that we look at, and where we can see the following things, these cuts are themselves simply listed. From the low table our eye is taken 'ailleurs' and after that 'plus loin, dans un endroit un petit peu plus dégagé'. The specificity continues to be dropped as we look and see merely that 'çà et là traînent', until this list is swallowed up and itself discarded with 'd'autres reliefs ont trouvé refuge dans des endroits parfois improbables'. This is another appeal to our imagination as we do not know where they find refuge, merely that the location is improbable, and the explicitness of the fact of the picture is restated by 'reliefs'.

This structure allows us to imagine specific places to begin with. As it goes on, however, the location of the debris becomes more and more vague. Not that this makes it any less difficult to imagine, for we begin to shape the room for ourselves. That this is happening is exposed by the use of 'un petit peu plus dégagé' which leads us to ask from where and to where our viewpoint is being 'dégagé', and it is being moved from 'ailleurs' to 'çà et là'. We scan the picture in this vague way, first because that is the way that we look at a picture, we are not obliged to start in the top left-hand corner and look across in lines until we get to the bottom as we would with a page, and secondly, because it is we, the readers, who are making and composing the picture in our

deliberately refusing to attempt to depict the whole picture. This is a further step away from realist description, and one which gives the lie to the assertion that his inventories are all-inclusive - he acknowledges the impossibility of saying everything, of leaving nothing out. The realist descriptive technique - taking small numbers of objects to describe a whole and appealing to our perception of the world to complete the picture by use of complicit devices such as 'un des ces', or 'as we all know' - is reductive and hides the problem of an accurate description. Perec points it out by being expansive. Leaving the reader to do some of the imagining paradoxically increases the text's chances of being all-inclusive - in both the realist and Perecian description, the difference being in the realist reduction as opposed to Perecian expansion - as it opens it up to the diversity and variety of the things that we, too, can imagine.

The same is true of the language. By acknowledging the impossibility of connecting all these objects together in coherent sentences, and then making a deliberate choice to expose the phrases or words individually, he allows the list to be more powerfully evocative. Since Perec is being neither didactic nor dogmatic, he can allow the words he puts on the page to interact between themselves and with the reader, without hindrance from conventional sense-making structures. This is not to say that he ignores the grammatical altogether. On the contrary, he exploits it to his own ends. In the section of the list from 'çà et là traînent' to 'de tranches de citrons crénelées':

çà et là traînent des tasses à café, des sucres, des petits verres, des fourchettes, des couteaux, une pelle à gâteaux, des petites cuillers, des canettes de bières, des boîtes de coca-cola, des bouteilles presque intactes de gin, de porto, d'armagnac, de Marie-Brizard, de Cointreau, de crème de banane, des épingles à cheveux, d'innombrables récipients ayant servi de cendriers et débordant d'allumettes calcinées, de cendres, de fonds de pipe, de mégots tachés ou non de rouge à lèvres, de noyaux de dattes, de coquilles de noix, d'amandes et de cacahuètes, de trognons de pommes, d'écorces d'oranges et de mandarines; en divers endroits gisent de grandes

assiettes garnies copieusement de restes de victuailles
diverses: des rouleaux de jambon pris dans une gelée
d'sormais liquéfiée, des tranches de rôti de boeuf ornées
de rondelles de cornichons, une moitié de colin froid
décorée de bouquets de persil, de quartiers de tomates,
de torsades de mayonnaise et de tranches de citrons
crénelées (p.174)

one of the more subtle aspects of the passage is the way that the all-too-common and easily-overlooked word 'de' is exploited. At first the objects are all grammatically dependent on 'traînent' and therefore, the substantives, all plural, must be prefaced with 'des.' Then 'des bouteilles presque intactes de gin, de porto...' breaks in and because the substantives are grammatically dependent on the bottles they are prefaced by 'de'. We return briefly to 'des' for the hair pins, before the deceptive '~~d'innombrables~~ récipients'. The preceding adjective changes the 'des' to 'de', and the vowel changes that to 'd'' and we are unsure where the recipients refer back to. It is hardly important because the rest of the list up to 'mandarines' depends on 'débordant de'. Not only is this the same focussing technique as earlier with the plates, but it is all achieved through the grammatically various use of 'de', without the rhythm and continuity of the list being broken. The rhythm is even enhanced since 'de' is repeated almost every second word from 'débordant' to 'mandarine' - an example of Perec's skill in avoiding the problem of a thudding and tedious rhythm through the variety of grammatical functions in the repeated word.

Let us take the phrase 'des tranches de rôti de boeuf ornées de rondelles de cornichons'. The 'des' depends on 'gisent' (ironically followed by the richly described and life-givingly copious victuals). The first 'de' connects the meat with the type of meat, the second connects the decoration with the shape of decoration and the third connects the shape of the decoration with what the beef is decorated with. This is deceptively simple language to communicate a complex picture and a lot of information. Four 'de' and one feminine plural agreement tie

together six pieces of information, without privileging any one piece of information above any other - in exactly the same way as the list form refuses to discriminate between the different items of the list, once it has been established that the list does not represent a hierarchy. Although without the beef there would be no gherkins to decorate it, the decoration is accorded exactly the same amount of importance. Even the possessive use of 'de' - the 'rôti' describing the beef - is hidden by this arrangement.

Perec has played with grammar in a similar way before. In his Tentative d'inventaire de quelques-uns des aliments ingurgités... he plays with 'un', 'une' and plurals. He says that he has eaten:

Quatre artichaut, une asperges, une aubergines,
une salade de champignons...³²

He uses plural noun forms as generic nouns to describe dishes that he has eaten in restaurants, with a play of singular and plural (he has eaten one artichoke four times, and several asparagus once) and it is an interesting and disturbing effect. In VME he has refined his exploitation of the quotidien of language, and has also taken care to hide it, whereas in this other list he deliberately exposes it.

We shall now turn to looking at some of the other connections that are made in the list - connections that are made by the connotations and contrast of different words, by juxtaposition and by paradox. It is suggested in the list that the mess has deliberately been made. While cigarettes are '**soigneusement**' stubbed out, attempts to clear up the leaking and spilt Côtes du Rhone are made '**capricieusement**'. The depiction of the party is at first sight a mess - no grammar, no correct sentences and so on, and yet closer attention shows us that it has all been put together '**soigneusement**', with a lot of attention to detail. Nor should we ignore the suggestion that our attempts to clean it up, to explain and make sense of it, are nothing more than '**capricieux**'.

Juxtaposition

Connection by juxtaposition is a central technique in VME. Individual Chapters have no other explicit connection to the Chapter that precedes or follows them other than juxtaposition. The moves made by the Knight in the constraint system determine only the structure (which Chapters go where), not the content of the Chapters. If we wish to make connections between neighbouring Chapters, as we did above, then these connections are solely dependent on the fact of their juxtaposition. The advantage of this type of connection is that it does not rule out any other connections. Along with the lack of a dominating linear narrative line, and a diverse and expansive time structure, this allows us to make connections between almost any two events, stories and descriptions. We are free to connect wherever the connections can be made.

This process of connection through juxtaposition, and juxtaposition as a justification for connection, is reinforced by the puzzle motif. In a jigsaw the determining factor of whether a piece fits in a certain place is whether it connects, and whether it juxtaposes with the piece next to it - connection and juxtaposition are one and the same thing in a jigsaw puzzle. One can even imagine a puzzle where all the pieces fit together in a number of different ways to reveal a number of different pictures. This is the case with VME, we can fit together the pieces in many different ways and reveal many different novels, thus justifying the sub-title 'romans'. It is also the case in this Chapter and in this word-list since it is the reader who is composing the picture after the partial abdication of the narrator it is possible to connect different things in different ways to reveal many different pictures.

The word-list is a form particularly suited to this, since it merely juxtaposes different items that can be seen, or found on the stairs, or imagined by Valène. Within the list then, many interesting juxtapositions can occur. Is there an obvious connection between a nearly full bottle of crème de banane and a hair pin? There is certainly no necessary connection, for Perec's word-lists create a situation where necessary connections no longer occur and indeed remind us that, as we found in Rabelais' word-lists, there are no necessary connections between words. Indeed, the whole method of composition of the book - the 42 elements to be inserted in each Chapter - explicitly denies any necessary connections. Connections are made because they produce fiction, make stories, because they appear appropriate to a certain reading of the book. Not only is Perec exposing the arbitrary nature of fiction and fictional creation, he is also allowing the imaginations of both himself and his reader free play within certain constraints, notwithstanding the fact that these constraints might also liberate the imagination. The list, as Andrée Chauvin remarks, plays its part in this:

Si l'on considère l'ensemble de l'énumération comme
une série de rappels³³

where the elements of the list can be connected with other elements of the book, a central part of Perec's network of intratextuality.

The fiction that the reader composes is subject to this constraint: we must work within, or not too far outside, certain guidelines - the 'images classiques', even though, enclosed in this, we are entirely free to create our own image from the material that Perec has chosen to give us. So there is no reason why we should not imagine a blonde girl with crème de banane in her hair, since this is still within the confines of the sort of thing that can happen at a party. On Perec's part, the juxtaposition is not accidental, he is the puzzle maker; on our

part, so long as we create one of the pictures allowed by the context, we fit some of the pieces of the puzzle together.

Perec is also expanding the central metaphor of the puzzle, and revealing it to be more complicated than it at first appears. He insists, through the word-lists, on the difference between jigsaw pieces and words. He does not allow us to make a simple and direct comparison between the solving of a puzzle and the reading of his book. As the puzzle solver, we are warned:

chaque geste que fait le poseur de puzzle, le faiseur de puzzles l'a fait avant lui; chaque pièce qu'il prend et reprend, qu'il examine, qu'il caresse, chaque combinaison qu'il essaye et essaye encore, chaque tâtonnement, chaque intuition, chaque espoir, chaque découragement, ont été décidés, calculés, étudiés par l'autre. (p.18)

But the relationship between reader and writer is different. Perec liberates us from the tyranny of Winckler over Bartlebooth, of Bartlebooth over Winckler, by allowing us our own role in the composition of the text. In the word-lists we have the pieces, the words, and we make of them together, writer, narrator and reader, the many possibilities that they allow. VME is not just one puzzle, nor does it have just one solution. And this is the game that the reader and the writer play together, either in opposition or in concert, treating VME as a puzzle that allows of many solutions from the same pieces. We should remember that, in La Disparition, anybody who solved the problem, who believed there was a single solution, also disappeared.

Perec says to Jean Royer:

Tout discours quel qu'il soit - poétique, amoureux, romanesque, littéraire, etc. - ne sera jamais que le prétexte d'un autre discours, puis d'un autre...
Finalement, il y aura une poursuite de la 'vérité' qui changera au fur et à mesure que l'on parlera. Le discours ne s'arrêtera jamais. Et la vérité ne sera jamais atteinte. Il y aura toujours finalement une ouverture vers quelque chose à dire: le besoin de dire quelque chose sur le monde. Et l'énigme se multipliera

sans cesse. Sa propre solution ne sera qu'une autre énigme en plus...³⁴

Bartlebooth dies holding a piece that looks like a 'W' but which has to fit into a 'X'-shaped space.

This is entirely consistent with the refusal to describe in explicit and conventional realistic terms. Indeed, it is a consequence of it. Perec refuses to dictate to his reader how he should see the room, because he refuses to insist on his description's primary relationship with immediately perceived reality, and therefore he allows the reader space to imagine a room for himself, to make the connections between the words and the image, between the words and his own experience, for himself.

Paradox

The third type of connection that we mentioned is connection through paradox. A good example of this is the phrase 'des bouteilles presque intactes'. It is not possible for something to be nearly intact. 'Intact' is a word which loses its meaning if it is qualified in this way. As soon as we start to wonder about the word 'intact' other things from the passage come to mind. 'Intact' is repeated later in the passage in its more correct sense and contrasted to 'partiellement ou totalement rongés' to reinforce the point. Another connection can also be made: the discarded stockings of the beginning of the passage lie near to a long white sock. Two images are jostling together - the erotic and the virginal. Perhaps it is possible that the girls at the party left it only 'presque intactes'. Perec is using the play of apparent contradiction as a dynamic force, as a way of enriching the suggestiveness of his text - Bartlebooth's Whatman paper must be left 'intact et vierge' (p.158) after the watercolour puzzle has been returned to its place of origin, for instance. This is part of the double function *topos* prevalent in the book and

typified by the word-list - the holding side-by-side of contradictions so that they complement and enrich each other.

These connections are offered to us by the odd use of 'intact'. We follow the paths that have been laid out for us and make our own conclusions. To take another example, we notice that, in the passage, only a very few things are whole (and some things are even wholly gnawed away.) At an obvious level, because the things in the picture are leftovers this is entirely explicable - at another it is yet another invitation for us to complete the picture. Thematically much could be and has been made of missing things in the work of Perec - Schwartz, for instance, in his book Georges Perec, Traces of his Passage³⁵ concentrates on absence as a central issue in the texts - but that is not our concern here.

These three techniques - paradox, juxtaposition and contrast - are all part of the ludic nature of the text. Perec plays other games in this word-list, too. The erudite mention of a classical sculpture, Ares au Repos, as an aside to a bowl of radishes, coyly masks the significance of the statue. The Ares au Repos is reputed to have been made by Skopas and installed in the Temple of Brutus Callaecus. However, Andrew R. Stewart remarks that the Ares Ludovisi, the only surviving statue of Ares sitting:

is perhaps one of the most puzzling statues of the fourth century; almost all scholars agree that it must copy a first class original and that its style is very close to that which we have been following (that of Skopas) yet few can bring themselves to the point of attributing the piece to Skopas himself.³⁶

So we realise that not only is this statue of doubtful origin, but it is also a copy, and therefore at one remove from its original state. It has been layered, that is, it is at at least one remove from the original, a mere representation of another sculpture representing Ares. Moreover, the only record of the original is in Ovid's Metamorphoses³⁷. The only proof of its existence comes from a text - the actual historical existence of the sculpture is

heavily disguised. Another level of fictionality has intervened. The sculpture we are shown is not a sculpture but 'un presse-papier de bronze **représentant** le célèbre...' a third and fourth layer. The third layer is the fact that it has now become a paperweight and the fourth layer is the repeated representation. The story of the sculpture follows the same pattern as the story of the apartment - undercut by several layers of fictionality.

We mentioned earlier that the narrator had only partially abdicated from the text. On p.174 he is only present by implication - words such as 'innombrable' and 'improbables' indicate that there is a controlling viewpoint. They both have an individual function - the ashtray imposters are uncountable because it is implied that virtually anything may be used as an ashtray, and this is all that is important about them, and all that connects them, our narrator seems to insist. But, as we have already seen with the 'assortiment de petits raviers', this also leaves us free to try to imagine them and denies the inclusivity of the list.

'Improbables' functions in three different ways. It reminds us of the context of the 'images classiques' and shows that the improbable is what we should expect in this situation. It also works as an ironic comment on the Ares au Repos, and thirdly it leads us in to the explicit reappearance of the narrator (because it implies a judgment) in the continuation of the list on p.175. Phrases such as 'dont on peut raisonnablement supposer' and 'd'où l'on peut conclure' are introduced. At first sight they are didactic, telling the reader what to think, but at second sight they make no claim to being correct, in fact they become tentative and unassertive. We are told that it is reasonable to suppose that the music box plays Happy Birthday rather than being told straightforwardly that this is what it does - we are under no obligation to accept the statement. Another interpretation of 'images classiques' comes into play - that of the cliché, the

commonplace, the things without which no self-respecting birthday party can be worthy of the name, (a party is by definition a break with the norm, and 'classiques' reminds us that it, too, has its norms) just as a real Norwegian must always carry his **Dolknif**.

'D'où l'on peut conclure' has a slightly different role. The small box of English watercolours might refer us (as part of the network of intratextuality) to Bartlebooth. Our conclusion might be that painting is popular in the building, that the Chapter is referring us to another one, and suggesting that this young girl is Jane Sutton who helped Bartlebooth with his puzzles towards the end of his life. But not at all. The conclusion given to us is that the girl likes painting, a banal and perhaps incorrect conclusion since birthday presents are not always appropriate. This phrase also exposes narrative choice - the watercolours could be described, but are not. What is described is the poster 'faussement en abîme', where the possibilities of regressing into smaller and smaller self-representation are denied by the difference between the first poster and the one it shows on the wall behind it. The list then includes certain almost representative elements - an enormous spider 'assez effroyablement imitée'. The question of imitation and representation has come right to the fore.

The elements of the list have now expanded. From 'on lui a offert' each present is listed. Three or four lines to each element slows the pace of the list down from the intensity of p.174 and prepares us for the conclusion of the Chapter. The presents are listed and this takes us back to the non-specificity of time in a word-list - they are being shown to us as simultaneously as possible, and they are also not presented in any hierarchical order.

We return to a narrative voice for the last paragraph of the Chapter:

On peut déduire de l'apparence générale de la pièce
que la fête fut somptueuse, et peut-être même
grandiose, mais qu'elle ne dégénéra pas (p.176)

and we notice that the narrator can only deduce from the **general** appearance of the room, not from any thing specific, least of all from his description of the **appearance**, not the actual state, of the room, which has been anything but specific.

In this closing paragraph it is almost as though the narrator is trying to regain control, saying the list did not degenerate, to take back the composition from the reader, and reestablish his sole position as describer and depicter. He seems to be reining in our expectations, reasserting his control of them. We can overlay this sentence with authorial comment as well if we wish, for there has been a sumptuous feast of language that has also not degenerated. Language has been given a long leash, freed from convention, and the same is true of expectations. This is a point we mentioned earlier, but it is worth repeating - both are returned to a more conventional mode by the beginning of Chapter XXX which relates the Marquiseaux in their bath in a standard, mildly pornographic way, returning us firmly to a narrative where it is not the language which is exciting but the content. We also return to the book present that has been displaced in the word-list - 'C'est une pièce' - and to a supposedly realistic description that undergoes no extra fictional layering. The return to more conventional text is foreshadowed by the mini-description:

quelques verres renversés, quelques roussissures de
cigarettes sur les coussins et les tapis, pas mal de
taches de graisse et de vin, mais rien de vraiment
irréparable, (p.176)

which, in another type of novel, might have constituted a sufficient description for the whole Chapter.

Perec has created the fictional circumstances in which a word-list may sit: removed from reference to reality, purely fictional,

bound neither by time nor space. He has even created an 'appartement fantôme' for this word-list to inhabit. By isolating us from time and from space he is able to expose the expansiveness of language, to expose the control an author needs to assert and to expose the relationship between reader, writer and referent in the text.

Chapter XXIX is the second Chapter about this room (Chapter III is the first) and the third in the series, Chapter XCIII Troisième droite 3, begins:

La troisième pièce de cet appartement fantôme est
vide. (p.561)

It is entirely painted in black, like a black hole in space, perhaps, and the only objects it contains (despite being empty) are twenty-one engravings, hung in three rows of seven. There is a play of framing and inclusion in the first two paragraphs. Words such as 'encadrées', and the specifying of the first and last engravings before describing the nineteen before them, achieve this effect.

One of them, the third, is of:

un compositeur famélique écrivant fiévreusement dans
une mansarde un opéra dont le titre, **La Vague Blanche**,
est lisible. (p.561)

La Vague Blanche is the French translation of 'Shira Nami', the Japanese name of the sect in Chapter III. One hesitates before laughing. And we would not be surprised to learn that this opera takes as its subject a group of young men who... refer to Chapter III. Once again the text exposes its own fictionality, its writtenness through a painting, and its own self-reference, swallowing itself up. And, in fact, another of the engravings shows:

deux hommes en frac, assis à une table frêle, et jouant
aux cartes; un examen attentif montrerait que sur ces

cartes sont reproduites les mêmes scènes que celles qui
figurent sur les gravures (p.562)

and the Chapter swallows itself up as well.

Conclusion

We have found a word-list to be present in extreme circumstances and adding to that extremity, and this partly justifies the long introduction, and the examination of the use of time in order to expose the techniques that Perec uses to place a word-list in Chapter XXIX. Completely isolated from any of the time structures of the book (except reading time) this list carries no sense of progression, no sense of realistic description, but only one of presence. Words written on a page and making no pretence to being anything other than that, no claims to reference to *perceived* reality, no inherent truth, no didactic or dogmatic force, merely there to read and play with - an essential part of the play of the book.

We have found that this list is placed within certain fictional considerations: the absence of a specific time structure, the denial of reference to reality, the presence of fictional layering. And we have seen why the word-list is an appropriate form to be exploited in these conditions: absence of verbs, of conventional sense structures, of hierarchy, apparent narrative abdication, ability to allow the reader more imaginative freedom, emphasis on writtenness of text corresponding to emphasis on fictional layers and the ability to replace the narrative dynamic with a ludic dynamic, a reflection of the wider structure of VME.

All this obliges us to ask questions about the nature of verbal reference to reality, and about the nature of artistic representation of reality, whether through painting or language, or indeed through language describing a painting. It is because these questions have to be asked that Perec is able to introduce

what one might call 'unliterary' language - D-I-Y catalogues, shopping lists, diagrams - into his text. He expands the terms of reference of the literary text, and the word-list is one of his techniques for doing this.

The description of paintings also has another important function:

Ce tableau est pour moi une machine à fiction³⁸

Perec says. He is attracted to constraints and pre-determined patterns precisely because they liberate his imagination and produce fictions:

au fond je me donne des règles pour être totalement libre³⁹

and the same can be said for the word-list - the constraint forces the writer to create, to do something different, to make fictions. The word-list of Chapter XXIX is very carefully fictional, as we have seen.

Creating fictions, however, is not Perec's sole concern. It is also important that they be self-sufficient, that they depend on nothing for their existence, very much in the Flaubertian sense of the 'livre sur rien'. One way of achieving this is to create a totally imaginary text implied by your own text - as Borges, in a minimalist version of what Perec has done, reviews books that have not been written. One of Perec's techniques is to have his text swallow itself up. We have seen some examples - Valène's painting is no more than a few marks on a piece of paper, for instance, but there are others, and one of them is directly related to Chapters III, XXIX, and XCIII. The apartment at troisième droite used to belong to a M. Colomb. He is mentioned only twice in the book, we learn from the Index,⁴⁰ and on p.276 we learn that it was he who rented Valène his apartment on the top floor. Troisième droite is, as we know, 'un appartement fantôme' and the only one described explicitly as such, and therefore on a different level of fictionality than the other Chapters not explicitly described in

this way. So, if there is no apartment, there is no Colomb, no rented apartment for Valène, and therefore no Valène in the building. The book, denying its bulk and proliferation, like Bartlebooth denying the range of proliferation around him in the building trying to live a completely self-contained life, attempts to swallow itself up again.

We hope to have shown the great care with which Perec avoids primary reference to reality, and how the lists contribute to this play of fictionality and ambiguity. We also hope to have shown how the lists help the time structure of the book, are indeed necessary to it, and how this reveals the balance of stasis and movement not only within a list but also in the novel more generally. This type of double function is something that we shall expand on in later chapters.

Notes

1. Poésie ininterrompue, in Paul Eluard Oeuvres Complètes II, Gallimard, 1968, p.23. This continues for approximately twenty lines.
2. Quel Petit Vélo à Guidon Chromé au fond de la Cour?, Folio, 1983. p.40.
3. Madame de Trévins' never-published and entirely fictional biography of her non-existent sisters - La Vie des Soeurs Trévins - and recounted in the conditional is an excellent example of this.
4. Reymers, Essa. 'La création artistique dans La Vie mode d'emploi de Georges Perec' in Littérature et Postmodernité, ed. A. Kibédi Varga, Crin, Groningen, 1986. pp.90-99. p.93.
5. Schwartz, Paul. Georges Perec, Traces of his Passage, Summa Publications, Birmingham, Alabama, 1988. p.112.
6. Magné, Bernard. 'Le puzzle mode d'emploi, petite propédeutique à une lecture métatextuelle de La Vie mode d'emploi de Georges Perec' in TEXTE, Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire, vol 1, 1982, Toronto, pp/1-96. p.78.
7. Robbe-Grillet, Alain. 'Temps et description dans le récit d'aujourd'hui' in Pour un Nouveau Roman, Les Editions de Minuit, 1963, pp.123-134. p.133.
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9. Josipovici, G. p.188.
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CHAPTER FOUR

Middles: the content of the lists, theme, effect and consequence.

We have examined the fictional conditions in which word-lists are exploited by Georges Perec, and we shall now proceed to examine some of the lists in VME in more detail. We are going to try to find out what happens when there is a list in the text, examining the context and consequences of the shockwaves that a list can send through a text, and examining the integration of a list.

Not every Chapter in VME is so explicitly fictional as those concerning the 'appartement fantôme' that we studied in the last chapter. Chapters III, XXIX and XCIII put themselves outside the frames of reference of the other Chapters and thereby gain an extra degree of fictionality. The others work within the frames of reference that these Chapters exceed: it is only through the abundance of stories that do not explicitly challenge the realist illusion that we can see that the word-list of the party in Chapter XXIX is challenging that illusion. It is because Perec lures us into believing, (or we lure ourselves into believing) through the devices that we examined, in the existence, the fictional reality, of the other Chapters, and the rest of the house, that we are able to see that this 'appartement fantôme' has something different about it.

We shall be concentrating here on lists of nouns and examining how Perec uses them within the terms of his introduction of other types of discourse, above and beyond the use of chessboards, crossword squares, facsimiles and so on - all devices of defamiliarization, inviting examination of the nature and materiality of the text. We shall also examine how he creates tension between the distance that a list creates in the text and the appearance of meticulousness that it also creates, how the

lists fit into the *marque vs masque* paradigm that Bernard Magné has identified, and how he uses the list within quotations, and we take as examples quotations from Rabelais.

In the most general terms, we might say that Perec uses five different types of list: lists of nouns, lists of adjectives, lists of verbs, lists of proper names and interrupted (or expanded and annotated) lists¹ - these all come within the criteria we set in the introduction. We shall concentrate on examining the noun list because it is by far the most common in the book - there are over one hundred examples of it. It is possible to determine certain subsets to this categorization - itself an activity fraught with risk when the subject of the categorization throws up so many questions of order and classification - or even to make a completely different type of classification, but our focus will be on the formal and technical implications of the word-list in the text, and we examine the content of an individual list wherever this is appropriate to the other issues that we will be discussing, rather than starting with the content and expanding from that rather fragile base. This is especially appropriate in a text as elusive as VME.

Description/story

In order to progress further in our quest to understand the use of the word-list, we shall again have to make a distinction between the stories in the book - where there is linear narrative and where, more importantly now, the actions of the characters are reported - and the 'description' passages. This time, this distinction will help us to move away from a discussion of the effect of objects on characters (which we discuss in the next chapter) to an examination of the background, or, rather, accompaniment, as Philippe Hamon points out, to these actions, the descriptions:

Un texte comme La Vie mode d'emploi (romans) de G. Perec se présente à la fois comme une suite de descriptions juxtaposées, comme une pluralité de récits possibles, (romans), et comme un texte opératoire, un 'do it yourself' (Mode d'emploi.)²

We have noted before that there are fewer word-lists within the stories and this suggests that this is not where their importance is most greatly felt. Their effect must, then, have more to do with the static parts of the book (as we saw in our discussion of fictional conditions where the word-lists, by the impression that each word is simultaneous with the next, created this motionless impression in keeping with the fixed time structure, and where this gave the text the opportunity to move into other, independent, time structures) than with the 'action'. However, two very important word-lists do fall within stories, the list of synonyms in the Marcel Appenzell story (p.148), and the list of the sorts of words that M. Cinoc kills off for the Larousse dictionary (p.361) and we shall later examine the reasons why these two examples should be different.

Jane Sutton's instructions

So let us now turn to the text. Of the many lists in the book, there are surprisingly only two, perhaps three, excluding the D-I-Y catalogue, of the sort that we might reasonably encounter in our daily life. There is a calory count by Anne Breidel (p.231), a list of the Plassaert's household expenses (p.320) and also a list of instructions, instructions given to Jane Sutton by Olivia Rorschash:

- faire faire une livraison de coca-cola
- changer tous les deux jours l'eau des fleurs, y ajouter chaque fois un demi-cachet d'aspirine, les jeter quand elles seront fanées
- faire nettoyer le grand lustre de cristal (appeler la maison Salmon)
- rapporter à la bibliothèque municipale les livres qui auraient dû être rendus depuis déjà quinze jours et en particulier **Les Lettres d'amour de Clara Schumann, De l'angoisse à l'extase**, de Pierre Janet, et **Un Pont sur**

la Rivière Kwaf, de Pierre Boulle

- acheter de l'Edam étuvé pour Polonius et ne pas oublier de l'amener une fois par semaine chez Monsieur Lefevre pour sa leçon de dominos⁽¹⁾
- vérifier chaque jour que les Pizzicagnoli n'ont pas cassé la grappe de verre soufflé du vestibule. (p.485)

Nothing, it appears, could be more simple: a list of instructions given to an au pair. Let us repeat here the quotation from Charpentier that we used in our chapter on Rabelais:

On peut presque établir en loi que, chaque fois que Rabelais adopte un mode d'expression étrange, on touche aux intentions fondamentales de l'oeuvre. Ce qui est une invitation renouvelée à en interroger toutes les zones apparemment indéchiffrables.³

We do not expect a footnote in a novel and Perec shows us that the footnote is not that simple: in it we discover that Polonius is a lonely, forty-third generation, domino-playing hamster. The unexpected, the bizarre can always intrude, not only in a list where its arrival is both hidden and revealed, but also in the universe of 11, rue Simon-Crubellier, and Perec makes the point forcefully by hiding this extraordinary hamster in a list that is otherwise nothing but banal.

The existence of the footnote excludes the list from primary reporting; the passage is not just a transparent report of the list written by Olivia Rorschach, it has been commented upon and elucidated. The footnote is an explicitly written comment on the explicitly written text of the list, an intervention by the author, as Vincent Colonna remarks:

(les) notes infrapaginales viennent renforcer sa présence dans les marges du texte, et amènent presque inévitablement à confondre le narrateur anonyme avec l'auteur 'Georges Perec'...⁴

and one wonders how Valène could make this explanation in his painting. Once again the reference to the fictional reality of the painting and its clash with the written fictionality is

exposed. The text is presented to us at a third layer of transmission.

This list is also a 'producteur de fiction' - an important consideration for Perec - producing as it does the story of Polonius the hamster, a story dignified by being included in the 'rappel de quelques-unes des histoires racontées dans cet ouvrage' (p.691-4) - 'Histoire du hamster privé de son jeu favori, 81'. So even this list, which we might encounter ourselves, fulfils two roles: it foregrounds the writtenness of the text and it creates more text. Its banality camouflages its fictional dynamism, and this is a point that we should not forget - it is often when the text appears to be at its most innocuous, that the most important things are happening, a basis of the masque/marque paradigm, 'rester caché, être découvert'.

Perec, we are not surprised to learn, was already aware of this. Speaking of what Genette has called the paratext - what surrounds the text, but which is not, strictly speaking, the text, but footnotes, titles, advertisements and so on - Perec calls it:

Des zones d'urgence dont on sait seulement qu'on ne sait pas grand-chose, mais dont on pressent qu'on pourrait beaucoup y trouver si l'on s'avisait d'y prêter quelque attention: faits banals, passés sous silence, non pris en charge, allant d'eux-mêmes.⁵

He signals the importance of looking more closely, we can only find what is hidden if we are looking for it, and if we are following the right clues. The clue in this case is that Olivia Rorschach herself is rereading the list:

elle relit la série d'instructions qu'elle laisse à
Jane Sutton (p.485)

suggesting to us as well that it might be worth looking at twice. Perec calls this list 'une série d'instructions', implying not only that there is a connection between each element in the list

but also that it might continue - what is the next in the series...?

Abel Speiss's riddles

Perec highlights the serial nature of lists in the passage concerning Abel Speiss, whom everybody called a Russian although he was in fact from Alsace. Inserted in the games that he is obsessed with is the following puzzle:

Quel est l'intrus dans l'énumération suivante :
français, court, polysyllabique, écrit, visible,
imprimé, masculin, mot, singulier, américain, intrus?
(p.509)

The text tells us that this type of puzzle is a 'problème de logique' and several answers present themselves. First, perhaps, that 'intrus' is the intruder, a trick question. But a case can be made for each of the words to be the intruder: 'français' is the only one with a cedilla, 'court' is the only one that is a present tense verb form and an adjective and an English word all at once, and so on. The solution, however, lies not in finding what differentiates the words, but in what links all but one of them together. And the solution, we are told, will be a logical one. We also learn that Abel Speiss could solve such puzzles 'avec une facilité déconcertante' (p.508).

It is perhaps surprising that the answers to the puzzles in this Chapter are not given in the text, given the strength with which Perec suggests that they can be solved. But the answer to some of them is given in the Index - there is an entry, as Andrée Chauvin points out⁶, for John Leland, the friend of Thomas Wyatt, and for 'Mari de Prudence, le, jeune homme de 18 ans' giving the answer to that puzzle, too. However, not all the solutions are given, not even the remarkable decoding of the Marseillaise achieved by Speiss.

The point to emphasise here, however, is that the word-lists are explicitly put into a ludic context. It is a game to examine them, and to expand the analogy from this list we could say that although there will always appear to be a simple answer, and there might well also appear to be many answers at the same time, there is always suggested through the ludic construction and presentation of the text the possibility of a solution. This forms part of the unwritten laws of this particular game in VME, part of the reading contract, similar to, and an expansion of, the implication that a text will always make some kind of minimal sense that we examined when talking about the Tiers Livre.

Mme. Marcia's boutique

Let us move on to another list that appears simple in its effect. Madame Marcia keeps an antique shop, and rotates her stock between four locations: the shop itself, her flat, the cellar and the room behind the shop. This 'arrière-boutique' is described to us and it is:

une pièce étroite et sombre, au sol recouvert de linoléum, encombrée, à la limite de l'inextricable, d'objets de toutes dimensions. Le fouillis est tel qu'on ne saurait dresser un inventaire exhaustif de ce qu'elle contient et qu'il faut se contenter de décrire ce qui émerge un peu plus précisément de cet amoncellement hétéroclite. (p.139)

There then follow two paragraphs describing furniture and the stories told in their engravings. The last paragraph of p.139 contains a list of nine items of military equipment, in the middle of which can be seen a number of infantry sabres, and beyond which is a couch in the shape of the letter 'S'. This list:

Plus loin encore, au-delà d'un entassement d'équipements militaires, armes, baudriers, tambours, shakos, casques à pointe, giberne, plaques de ceinturons, dolmans en drap de laine ornés de brandebourgs, buffleteries, au milieu duquel se détache un lot de ces sabres de fantassin, courts et légèrement recourbés, que l'on

appelle des briquets, un canapé d'acajou en forme de S
(p.139/40)

follows the passage of the eye on its way to the couch, in an 'S'-shaped direction, as the distance markers show: 'Plus loin encore, au-delà de' moving away, 'au milieu duquel' returning in the 'S' bend of the swords and then back to the couch.

The list of nine items of military equipment is entirely in keeping with a room full to bursting with different objects and also controls the pace of the paragraph as it shadows the 'S' shape of the couch. The list in the second paragraph of page 140 'Puis, en vrac, posés sur des étagères...' continues, with its mention of 'des centaines de bibelots', this impression of overflowing abundance that meets the eye as it moves around the room. There is no disjunction between the contents of the room, the impression created, the form used to express it and the expectations of the reader. The diagram showing the possibilities that Madame Marcia's system offers to her antiques of moving from room to room in certain directions and never in others reflects the mobility of the text within certain rules and this, in turn, reflects the metaphor of displacement, the mental leap needed to solve a puzzle problem.

Andrée Chauvin's remark that:

La forte individualité de la liste la rend fragile sur le plan de la motivation narrative ou référentielle, et révèle en fait sa soumission à la fonction poétique

is accurate in that the referential motivation of the list is indeed slight, but its narrative motivation is to reinforce the mechanisms whereby we can make sense of the text - through a displacement, a comparison, a joining together of mobile elements. The fact that we could easily say that these three factors represent poetic function shows that the antithesis between poetic function and narrative motivation is, in this case, a false one.

This Marcia list is individual in the following ways: not every room in the building is as full of objects as this one and so able to give an easy reason for a list, nor are we always warned of the coming list in this way. The disclaimer in the text that an exhaustive list will not be attempted is a ruse that enables an impression of plenitude to be created while in fact the list technique is used in a very restrained way. There are only a few internal structures to the list on page 140, nor do there seem to be any Oulipian structures, it is comparatively short, there are no archaic words, and no supplementary fictional layers. This is a relatively straightforward list.

Mme. Moreau's factory

The case of the list of workmen in Madame Moreau's factory (pp131-132) is more complicated. In Chapter Moreau I we have seen the D-I-Y catalogue of her company. This catalogue forms part of the polyphonic discourse in the book, coming from the world of commerce and forcing us to examine our view of what constitutes literary language, introducing the illusion of an unknown author, constituting a complete text in itself and contributing to the declared and explicit intertextuality of the novel. It also has another, more playful, purpose. It is hardly possible to call any of the lists in the book 'catalogues' of what is in the room, or which characters are absent, when there is an apparently genuine catalogue also in the book.

The first element of the list of workmen contains all the others:
'deux mille personnes':

deux mille personnes, fraiseurs, tourneurs, ajusteurs,
mécaniciens, monteurs, câbleurs, vérificateurs,
dessinateurs, ébaucheurs, maquettistes, peintres,
magasiniers, conditionneurs, emballeurs, chauffeurs,
livreurs, contremaîtres, ingénieurs, secrétaires,
publicistes, démarcheurs, V.R.P., fabriquant et
distribuant chaque année plus de quarante millions
d'outils de toutes sortes et de tous calibres (p.131-2)

and those people are defined within the list by their professions, so that the list becomes a shorthand to describe all these people. Far from being an overlong list of all the people necessary to a business, it is, in fact, a remarkably economical way of describing both all the skills needed to do the work and all the people involved - a conclusion also suggested by the last element in the list, the abbreviation 'V.R.P.'. Without the mention of 'deux mille personnes' none of this would become apparent. Professions are used in a list in a different way in the same Chapter on page 133 where the guests at Mme Moreau's business dinners are listed by their profession - leaving the men themselves anonymous and important only in terms of their function, and their susceptibility to being impressed by the apartment created by Henry Fleury and perhaps there is a political connection between these different representations of different cogs in the economic wheel.

There is an important issue here of the use of general rather than specific nouns in a list. We shall see later the use of the brand names in the list of motorcycles, but one of the effects of using general nouns is to increase the economy of the list - fewer things have to be listed, and this also poses questions about classifications since individuals and individual things have already been classified by the time they find themselves in a word-list, which then further classifies them.

The first three professions in the list are all professions involving 'déplacement' - 'fraiseurs, tourneurs, ajusteurs' - the word Perec uses to describe the sort of lateral thinking and movement that is necessary to solve puzzles and this is a warning to watch out for internal resonance, quotations, all the ludic elements of the book (not least the list.) In this case there is a resonance to Cinoc - these people are creating forty million new tools a year while some of the casualties of Cinoc's profession of

'tueur de mots' are precisely names of old tools, the appropriately named 'losse', for instance:

LOSSE (s.f.)

Techn. Outil de fer acéré et tranchant, fait en demi-cone coupé du haut en bas dans l'axe et concave en dedans. Il s'emmanche comme une brique et sert à percer les bondes des barriques. (p.364)

This list of workmen is inclusive, we have everything before us, while the list of furniture on page 139 was exclusive and effusive, leaving us to imagine many other things. This leads us to an important consideration that we shall return to in more detail when we come to consider the use of 'etc.' in conjunction with the list device - the question of what is left out and the different ways in which the reader is asked to respond to this absence.

Marguerite Winckler's desk

Let us now turn to the list that concerns the disorder at Marguerite Winckler's desk, and examine how textual resonances can be made more powerful by the list device, and how Perec exploits the tension between distance and detail and the tension between the order implied by the use of a list and the disorder apparent in the items that he lists which are just lying around on her desk.

Marguerite Winckler works as a miniaturist. Everything about her work is meticulous, detailed and, above all, small. But, as the text tells us:

Cette femme si précise et si mesurée avait paradoxalement un irrésistible attrait pour le fouillis. Sa table était un éternel capharnaïm, toujours encombrée de tout un matériel inutile, de tout un entassement d'objets hétéroclites, de tout un désordre dont il lui fallait sans cesse endiguer l'invasion, avant de pouvoir se mettre à travailler: (p.309/10)

The three words 'encombrée', 'fouillis' and 'hétéroclite' have also preceded the Marcia list, and the same effect of clutter and of too many objects being in one place is also obvious here, aided by the rhythms of singulars and plurals in the list. At the beginning, thirteen plurals precede two singulars, 'menue monnaie' and 'compas', which are followed by six plurals then three singulars; Perec mixes the singular with the plural in order to gain not only the effect of clutter but also the sense of seeing individual objects among the mess, moving from the general to the individual, in the same way as the list meshes the ordered and the disordered through its apparently minimal linguistic organization and we can see this in the Marcia list, too, with 'giberne', a curious singular among the plurals.

There is more, however, both from within the text and from outside. To start from outside the text, the list of objects on her table contains a quotation, we learn from Ewa Pawlikowska's 'Dossiers Georges Perec'⁸, from an article by Butor, 'Le Parade des Sournois' which discusses the paintings of Saul Steinberg and describes one of them and its 'Curiously strong altoids peppermint oil'. We read a quotation from an article that is describing a painting in a book that is supposed to be describing a painting in which a character who is a miniaturist painter is being described. This amounts to a strong suggestion to look very closely at the passage.

There is another intertextual aspect, Perec's article 'Notes concernant les objets qui sont sur ma table de travail'. The last paragraph of the article is:

Ainsi, une certaine histoire de mes goûts (leur permanence, leur évolution, leurs phases) viendra s'inscrire dans ce projet. Plus précisément, ce sera, une fois encore, une manière de marquer mon espace, une approche un peu oblique de ma pratique quotidienne, une façon de parler de mon travail, de mon histoire, de mes préoccupations, un effort pour saisir quelque chose qui

appartient à mon expérience, non pas au niveau de ses réflexions lointaines, mais au coeur de son émergence.⁹

The article tells us that Perec had already started another text, some years earlier, about the same subject, and this is how he expects to be able to write the story of his tastes from his work table, by using time as a measure and by comparing the desk at different periods. The project does not have as its goal to reveal states of mind, but to approach a story, to liberate a fiction. The 'distant reflections,' as he calls them, are the a posteriori rationalizations of the first project. What he wants is that the story be told as it emerges, almost that it should create itself.

Earlier in the article he has listed the objects on his table. This list has two elements in common with the description of Marguerite Winckler's desk: 'des feuilles volantes' and 'un soliflore' - loose leaves of paper (no mere coincidence, of course) and a vase for a single flower. But it is not so much the common elements that are important as the fact that Perec's earlier project, and Butor's text, have led to this text in VME. He has created a fiction from his own reading and his own workdesk - an ambiguous statement, of which both meanings are appropriate.

This list plays an important role in character development, but this is not simply because of what it reveals about Marguerite, we learn something of her husband, too. We are shown in meticulous detail all the objects on Marguerite's desk. Then:

Elle mourut en novembre mille neuf cent quarante-trois,
en mettant au monde un enfant mort-né.
Pendant tout l'hiver, Gaspard Winckler resta assis à la
table où elle venait travailler, gardant dans ses mains
un à un tous les objets qu'elle avait touchés, qu'elle
avait regardés, qu'elle avait aimés...
Puis un jour il jeta tout ce qu'il y avait sur cette
table, et il brûla la table. (p.313)

Winckler's mourning is expressed to us in all its pain by the fact that we know what each of these objects are - the detail of the

earlier list has returned as a way of increasing our perception of Winckler's grief, a much more subtle way of describing a character than simply, say, listing his emotions, and a reading reward for playing the game of examining the text.

Claude Burgelin has attributed this emotional power to the:

Statut ambigu de l'objet - à la fois gardien fidèle du désir de qui l'a fait ou acquis, qui a le pouvoir de ne pas disparaître, de faire trace, de témoigner par-delà de la mort de son créateur ou de son propriétaire, et en même temps déchet périssable, objet qui ne sera jamais autre chose que lui-même, signe de vie et affirmation de la non-vie.¹⁰

This is a very good example of the balance that Perec can achieve between the distant, the overview, and the detail - a balance that is supported by the form of the word-list, with individual items named in an unhierarchized whole - leading to expression of emotion, where it is the objects themselves who act as both cause and expression of the emotion. This is an entirely different technique from the psychological recuperation of objects that we shall discuss in the next chapter.

The entry for Perec in the Dictionnaire Bordas de Littérature Française reads:

pour P., la littérature est le moyen de transcrire et de calquer l'ambiguïté de la relation de l'homme avec le monde: relation ludique obtenue par la technique du désengagement de l'écriture par rapport à sa matière, mais aussi relation vitale traduite inversément par la présence minutieuse dans le texte d'un matériau réaliste.¹¹

In this case, we have both the ludic relation - the reference to another of his own texts - and the vital relation - the mourning of Gaspard Winckler. It is the list device which achieves both the disengagement of the writing and the presence of the apparently realist material. The dictionary entry goes on to say:

VME, où tout en opérant une reproduction méticuleuse du réel, un peu à la Flaubert, P., à force de neutraliser

ce réel dans l'affirmation de sa matérialité pure, entreprend de libérer de toute référence le jeu proprement littéraire de l'écriture. Et pour mieux encore réaliser son propos, ce romancier singulier pratique systématiquement la technique de la prolifération: de la sorte, 'les choses de la vie,' selon le 'mode d'emploi' proposé par l'écriture même se vident sinon tout à fait de signification, du moins de valeur, et de même, le foisonnement pluriel des histoires, dont aucune ne l'emporte sur l'autre, se neutralise lui-même.

This is similar to what we are saying, although we have already argued that Perec does not meticulously represent the real but, rather, meticulously avoids representing the real. However, despite the fact that Perec uses the technique of proliferation mentioned here, as is obvious from the example of Marguerite Winckler, the writing does not empty itself of value. It has a carefully weighted and deliberately structured emotional force. The list itself does not carry this force, it is its conjunction with the act of mourning that relays the emotion. The neutralization that this critic talks of can only therefore be said to happen if we take each story and each list in isolation. This is not the case. This list, for example, refers explicitly to the passage of Winckler's mourning and so cannot be taken in isolation and loses its force if it is. One of the dominant narrative techniques in VME is a constant reference to other parts of VME and to other texts by other writers. The novel demands to be compared, contrasted and expanded, and therefore the value of individual passages often only becomes apparent when they are taken in conjunction with another - the list of the objects on Marguerite's desk in itself contains no implications of haunting memories for her husband until it is reintroduced and made the central part of his mourning.

Philémon and Baucis

The self-reference of VME may combine with reference to other texts and make certain passages stand out all the more. In

Chapter III, one of the riddles set for meditation to an aspirant member of the Japanese sect, 'Shira nami' or 'La Vague blanche', is 'Quelle est la menthe qui est devenue tilleul? question que surmonte le chiffre six dessiné artistiquement' (p.29). On page 534 not only is there a quotation from Rabelais, but Perec claims that it is the description that Philémon gives to Baucis of a landscape that he has seen. The legend of Philémon and Baucis tells us that when Baucis was buried a lime tree grew over her grave. 'Quelle est l'amante qui est devenue tilleul?', and a possible answer is Baucis. Jean-Yves Pouilloux has seen more:

un beau six, soit Baucis, amante changée en tilleul¹²

The self-reference of the book provokes these little games for the reader and our pleasure in finding a tentative reply to the riddle can affect our reading in two ways - we either move on, looking for other games to play, or we stay where we are and examine the passage containing the answer more closely. We shall take the second option this time.

The words that Perec ascribes to Philémon (p.534) can be found in Chapter XXIX of Rabelais' fifth book, a Chapter entitled 'Comment nous visitasmes le pays de Satin'. Perec, of course, does not reveal this to us. In fact, the quotation is hidden, or as Magné would say, 'masqué', by several other factors. The lead-up to the quotation involves Véronique Altamont sitting at her desk, on which there are several books, among them Espigole's 'Dictionnaire des Abréviations françaises et latines utilisées au Moyen Age', and 'Les exercices de Diplomatie et de Paléographie mediaevales' by Toustin and Tastin, whose left hand page shows a typical rental contract, and whose right hand page shows an extract from the 'Veridicque Histoyre de Philemo et Bauci' by Garin de Garlande. This account is a free adaptation of Ovid by a twelfth century clerk who has changed the story to add to the traditional flood visited upon the Phrygians by Zeus and Mercury a legion of wild animals which Philemon describes to Baucis.

This is an excellent example of the fictional layering of a quotation. There are at least five levels of fiction, if not more. The first, as always, is VME itself, the second is the Toustin et Tassin text, the third the Ovid, the fourth Garin de Guirlande, the fifth the changes he makes. If we add to this the fact that the authorship of Rabelais' Fifth Book is in dispute, and that Rabelais himself (if it was) had sources for the text such as Pliny and Aelien, according to Jourda, we can see that Perec presents this text to us far removed from its original context, and presents it to us as the result of many changes and adaptations, linking Ovid to himself through all these literary transmutations.

With any masque - and we recall Magné's explanation:

En définitive, l'énonciation se trouve prise dans la même contradiction fondamentale que celle qui était, pour Perec, au cœur de toute écriture: 'rester caché, être découvert'¹³

- there must also be a marque revealing the game to be played. The marque in this case comes in three parts: first, the Dictionary of Middle Age abbreviations, pointing us to the genuine date of the text, and secondly and most importantly, the reference to Paleography - the art of deciphering ancient writing - which Perec gives us a chance to practise, and the third part is the rental contract on the facing page, acknowledging the debt.

Deciphering the Rabelaisian text is a task we are set. Jourda gives eight footnotes and twelve translations in his commentary of the text¹⁴ and he is writing for readers of Rabelais. This passage, in the context Perec has given it, demands commentary and elucidation, it demands that we decipher its opacity. We cannot possibly understand the passage unless we refer to a mediaeval dictionary, (and, teasingly, Perec provides us with one in the text) or locate the passage in Rabelais. Perec is opening the

door from his text into other texts, broadening the already vast expanse of reference that a reading of VME requires.

The word-list fits into all this not only from the fact that Perec and Rabelais are blood brothers in the matter, but from the content of the list. Natural History was one of the first areas that the Renaissance man chose to classify and record - we have already mentioned Jean Lemaire de Belges - and he chose to do it in list form. A mediaeval classification refers us directly to the question of how we order the world, how we classify our observations. Rabelais parodies the technique with his fantastic names for animals from a fantastic land, and Perec quotes the parody, throwing into doubt the possibility that we can arrange the world according to classifications, hiding his text within many others so that the question becomes an integral part of his fictional universe.

We have looked at some of these issues already in our chapter on Rabelais' Tiers Livre, but further considerations come into play in VME. Perec surprises the reader with this collection of archaic words. This passage is fairly typically Rabelaisian, but it causes ripples in Perec's text. The reader of Rabelais can read the list as part of the balance of fantasy and reality, as part of the balance of the play of authority and parody, but Perec's reader must read the passage in the terms set out by the fictional conditions of his text, and those conditions include a strong ludic element and one which, in this instance, plays on the very possibility of reading and understanding the passage. Not only is some action demanded of the reader if he is to make sense of the passage, not only are we invited to think about questions of order in the Middle Ages, but we wonder if we can think of these animals at all (without the searching required to find out that they are, in fact, commonplace gazelles, antilopes, monkeys, serpents and Sardinian sheep.)

Borges' 'Enquêtes'

This question of the unthinkable is one raised by Foucault in Les Mots et les Choses. He quotes the way Borges classifies animals in his story, 'Enquêtes'. This is the classification:

a) appartenant à l'Empereur, b) embaumés,
c) apprivoisés, d) cochons de lait, e) sirènes,
f) fabuleux, g) chiens en liberté, h) inclus dans la
présente classification, i) qui s'agitent comme des
fous, j) innombrables, k) dessinés avec un pinceau très
fin en poils de chameau, l) et caetera, m) qui
viennent de casser la cruche, n) qui de loin semblent des
mouches.

Foucault comments:

Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie, ce qu'on
rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue,
nous est indiqué comme le charme exotique d'une autre
pensée, c'est la limite de la nôtre: l'impossibilité
nue de penser cela.¹⁵

So the text must remain mysterious.

This is not the case in VME, Perec is not a mystifier - the ludic nature of his text enables us always to play the game and make sense of it. He enters into a contract with the reader in this sense. Borges does not, and the wonderment of his classification is all that we get. Foucault is right to say that it is impossible to think it, but it is also true to say that it has not been written to be thought, but to stretch, perhaps, existing thoughts, as Foucault also comments. The deliberate mystification in the passage, its self-containedness, its disappearance into itself ('Inclus dans la présente classification') before its end, mean that the reader can do no more than admire it, and the list form it takes on is a convenience to shape the opacity of the content, which the form is appropriate to because it entails no sequences of sense or grammatical rules. What is striking about Perec's use of the list form in VME is that he does not use it for this type of mystification.

Perec had something to say about this passage from Borges himself:

Michel Foucault a popularisé à l'extrême cette 'classification' des animaux que dans *Enquêtes* Jorge Luis Borges attribue à certaine encyclopédie chinoise qu'un dénommé Docteur Franz Kuhn aurait eue en main. L'abondance des intermédiaires et le goût bien connu de Borges pour les éruditions ambiguës permettent de se demander si cet hétéroclisme un peu trop parfaitement sidérant n'est pas d'abord un effet de l'art.¹⁶

Perec's slightly ironic comment suggests that Borges is seeking a deliberately artistic effect, and using a technique, that of the intermediary - the doctor - that Perec also typically uses, and that the classification itself is less important than the mystification. Perec is not impressed by the individual elements of Borges' classification:

De simples ponctions dans des textes administratifs tout ce qu'il y a de plus officiels suffisent à produire une énumération presque aussi ronde-flanesque:
 a) animaux sur lesquels on fait des paris, b) animaux dont la chasse est interdite du 1er avril au 15 septembre, c) baleines échouées, d) animaux dont l'entrée sur le territoire nationale est soumise à quarantaine, e) animaux en copropriété, f) animaux empaillés, g) et caetera, h) animaux susceptibles de communiquer la lèpre, i) chiens d'aveugles, j) animaux bénéficiaires d'héritages importants, k) animaux pouvant être transportés en cabine, l) chiens perdus sans colliers, m) ânes, n) juments présumées pleines.¹⁷

There is a footnote relating to the 'etc.'. It reads:

Cet etc. n'a rien de surprenant en soi; c'est seulement sa place dans la liste qui le rend curieux.¹⁸

Perec seems to be saying that we already do classify animals in strange and apparently unthinkable ways and that the ronde-flanerie is an effect of the device of listing them in this way - all the more emphatic, then, that he does not use the word-list to mystify, even though he recognizes that this can be one of its effects. For Perec, the everyday is mysterious, we do not have to strive after 'sidérant' effects, we merely have to observe and fictionalize (the list above is a bringing together and re-

organizing of information within a structure, a technique similar to that of telling a story.)

His comment about the 'etc.' is revealing. He thinks that there is no surprise that such a list should contain an etcetera - it is not the sort of list that is aiming to be definitive. The place in the list gives it its curiosity - it is not at the end. The effect of its coming in the middle gives the elements that follow it a supplementary status. The 'etc.' introduces a hierarchy where otherwise it would be absent and this position also denies the inclusivity of the list: 'and the rest' is then followed by some more, strongly suggesting that the list could go on forever. Perec is no stranger to the exploitation of 'etc.' at the end of a word-list, and this is something we shall study in more detail in the next chapter but one.

Al barildim gotfano dech

There is another quotation from Rabelais that might be seen as a list, in the terms we have set out - there are more than five elements, and they certainly do not correspond to recognizably different word classes, and so might be taken as the same class, especially in the context of an incantation, where they might be seen as a list of gods being called upon. On p.387/8 we find a passage of nonsense said to be the incantation that summons up the devil in Ingeborg's fraudulent Faustian manipulations.

**"Al barildim gotfano dech min brin alabo
dordin falbroth ringuam albaras. Nin porth
zadikim almucathin milko prin al elmim..."** (p.387)

is the beginning. The quotation is from Chapter IX of Pantagruel, the Chapter where Pantagruel and Panurge meet for the first time. Panurge talks in a variety of different languages, which Pantagruel pretends not to understand and entreats him to 'Parlez aultre langue' and this is one of Panurge's other languages - complete nonsense.

Perec exploits this list - for we cannot discern any grammar in nonsense and must treat the words as being merely juxtaposed, as they are in a list - to create an illusion of communication. Pantagruel asks 'Entendez vous rien là?' of his audience after this passage, before demanding that Panurge speak French. Perec uses the passage to summon up the devil, or, rather, he uses it as an incantation to call up the devil's presence in front of people who believe that the devil will appear. Communication - not strictly necessary due to the trucage of the whole experience of Ingeborg's summoning of the devil - appears to be achieved, and there is an ironic comment on Epistémon's reaction to the speech: 'Je crois que c'est langage des Antipodes, le diable n'y mordrait mie'¹⁹.

The Rabelaisian context - this speech surrounded by speeches in Basque, German, Italian and Scottish - gives the impression that the speech should make sense, that this is an intelligible language among others. Perec does away with this and replaces it with another context. This speech does not need to make sense - in the same way as a litany does not make grammatical sense - because the people listening to it have an inherent belief in it:

Ces ingrédients n'auraient jamais suffi à persuader un être un tant soi peu sceptique, mais ceux qui avaient accepté les conditions d'Ingeborg et qui avaient enduré les épreuves préliminaires arrivaient le soir du pacte prêts à être convaincus. (p.391)

Nonsense is as good as sense, then, if you are willing to believe in it. Perec is making an ironic comment about the power of communication that we ascribe to language within the context of an ironic comment on the power of language to summon up Gods and Demons. The list form is particularly ironised: he has made a passage into a list that was not originally a list.

Perec also manages to give the nonsense a sense by including it in a story. It takes on the sense of being an illusion - it has no meaning, but it has a function; the words are not wasted. By this

manoeuvre Perec points out not only the ritual quality inherent in language but also the way in which it is not necessary for words to have a meaning for them to be able to play a role in a story, echoing the acceptance of minimal sense structures that we argued for in our reading of the 'couillon' and 'fou' lists in the Tiers Livre. He points out the limits of our credulity, exploiting a principle of sufficient vraisemblance - and we are reminded of the neighbour and his five inflatable dolls.

He also gives an irreproachably ironic example of the notion of iterability as defined by Derrida:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition,) in a small or large unit, can be CITED, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context but, on the contrary, that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring (ancrage.) This citationnality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/ abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called 'normal'. What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?²⁰

Even nonsense is iterable, and can be copied, and a copy is not the same thing as the original. In Perec's quoting of Rabelais, it is therefore perfectly natural that the quotation should be given a Perecian context and should be removed from its Rabelaisian context. Perec's use of 'impli-citations' always follows this rule, but this is a particularly clear example.

The two lists that quote from Rabelais have raised these questions: questions of order and questions of language and sense, the same questions that we see arising in the word-lists in the Tiers Livre. Perec takes up the Rabelaisian enquiry and turns it to his own ends, demanding in the one case commentary and elucidation of a text, and in the other, acknowledging that this

commentary and elucidation is unnecessary since the passage's import is not due to its meaning but to its function in the story.

Appenzzell and the Kubus

The emphasis on disappearing words that we saw when looking at the list on p.131, and relating it to Cinoc, returns in a list, or rather, a series of lists, that are much more complex. In Chapter Altamont II (pp.143ff), within the story of Marcel Appenzzell, (the anthropologist who chased the apparently nomadic Kubu tribe until he realised that they were in fact fleeing from him) there is a discussion of the way ancient tribes use words. They may retire a word, putting it out to grass, as it were, whenever a member of the tribe dies, for example, and therefore, as time passes, one word has to make do for twelve different objects that another language still has twelve different words for.

It is no coincidence that this Chapter Altamont II also contains a diagram of a crossword puzzle for many questions concerning different types of discourse and different ways of making sense arise, as they have while we looked at the list on p.534 that was taken from Rabelais. The polyphonic discourse is a double play of words used ambiguously and of different ways of situating them. Crossword puzzles incorporate both these functions, as the words are produced from cryptic clues and are placed in a context that isolates them from the text.

The first lists that we have studied have shown us how a list can be used simply to create an effect of abundance, how a list can be used economically to describe a variety of different, related functions, and have reminded us that we should not forget, as in every other area of VME, the ludic element of the text. We have also seen how Perec includes quotations from other texts, and how he refers back to his own earlier work. The list that we are now going to study is not so much an example of how a list can be used

for description as a provocation to consider the nature of language in a relative context.

Bernard Magné has written:

Le paradigme des objets poly-mimétiques constitue une métaphore métatextuelle globale de l'impli-citation définie comme discours polyphonique.²¹

His theory is that the different layers of fictionality that the quotations from other works reveal causes a polyphony to arise as one text, or type of text, 'talks' to another, or is redefined by another, and that this makes for a metatextuality as the text of VME constantly refers to and informs itself; and, in any given example, to expand Magné's explanation, we would say that it is not an object that has a number of different functions, but a word.

The displacement that is needed to make this point evident in this example is that another language is introduced, and this is one of the reasons, a practical fictional reason of straightforward vraisemblance, why this list should come inside a story. Another consequence of the list being within the story is that it comes to us reported through three filters - that is, in this case, that Appenzell has written a letter to the Swedish philologist Taskerson, who has published it, and the entire story is reported to us as part of the Chapter Altamont II.

Perec exploits this layering to show Appenzell sliding a conjecture into his argument as a fact. Appenzell, after having noted the linguistic phenomenon of the very small vocabulary of the Kubu:

se demanda si, à l'instar de leurs lointains voisins les Papouas, les Kubus n'appauvrissaient pas volontairement leur vocabulaire, supprimant les mots chaque fois qu'il y avait un mort dans le village.
(p.148)

This conjecture becomes a fact in the very next line:

Une des conséquences de ce fait était qu'un même mot désignait un nombre de plus en plus grand d'objets.
(p.148)

The word 'Pekee', that is taken as an example, has seven equivalents in French, not including its original meaning in Kubu, and also not including the fact that we learn in Moby Dick that 'pekee' is the Fijian word for 'whale'. The word 'indifféremment' which precedes the first part of the list:

Ainsi, **Pekee**, le mot malais désignant la chasse, voulait dire indifféremment chasser, marcher, porter, la lance, la gazelle, l'antilope, le cochon noir, le **my'am**, espèce d'épice extrêmement relevée abondamment utilisée dans la préparation des aliments carnés, la forêt, le lendemain, l'aube, etc.
(p.148)

is a disclaimer on two levels: first, of nuance in the Malay, and secondly, of any other correspondence between the French words listed. 'Pekee' has a direct French equivalent, 'la chasse' (and which meaning of 'la chasse'?), but the later element of the list 'my'am', can only be defined in French as 'espèce d'épice' and the difference between two codes of reference becomes more apparent.

The 'etc.' that finishes this list is curious; it is almost as if Appenzell has heard the word 'Pekee' in other contexts without being able to give it a French equivalent. Also, perhaps, Perce is teasing us and suggesting that we search for words similar to forest, the next morning and the dawn to complete the definition ourselves.

'Sinuya' is the word that has the most layers incorporated into its explication:

De même, **Sinuya**, mot qu'Appenzell rapprocha des mots malais **usi**, la banane et **muya**, la noix de coco, signifiait manger, repas, soupe,alebasse, spatule, natte, soir, maison, pot, feu, silex (les Kubus faisaient du feu en frottant l'un contre l'autre deux silex), fibule, peigne, cheveux, **hoja'** (teinture pour les

cheveux fabriquée à partir du lait de coco mélangé à
diverses terres et plantes), etc. (p.148)

First, it has to be broken down into Malay, before its French equivalents can be discovered, and then the final equivalent that is given for it is not a French word but another Malay word, 'hoja', which has to be explained. This reminds us that there are limits to the French vocabulary as well and sets up some kind of linguistic relativity where it is the context that means more than the word itself. The 'etc.' that comes at the end of this series of words shows us that the range of equivalents for 'sinuya' is not exhausted.

Everyone knows that the Eskimos have many words for snow. They need them because it is the greater part of their environment. Perhaps the French language, then, has more words for cooking and grooming than the Kubu language, because the French do more cooking and grooming. However, where the language is impoverished and has no new word to suggest a new action or object, it is not suggested in this passage that misunderstandings arise. The Kubus, we assume, still understand each other. Just as, in the example that Perce includes to make sure we do not miss the point, the Western workman asks for the 'machin' when he has seven precise words for the different tools he may want:

Au passage, il fit remarquer que ces caractéristiques pourraient parfaitement s'appliquer à un menuisier occidental qui se servant d'instruments aux noms très précis - trusquin, bouvet, gorget, varlope, bedane, riflard, guillaume, etc. - les demanderait à son apprenti en lui disant simplement: "passe-moi le machin."

The emphasis is firmly placed on the contextual meaning of words. As an example, the cricket on a balmy evening in Big Sleep, Texas, and the cricket on a rainy day in June in St. John's Wood are not the same cricket. The context eliminates the possibility of confusion. In Rabelais' word-lists words are liberated from this limited context enabling their full connotative force to interplay - part of the reason why it is so difficult to determine a

structure to those lists. Perec is using the word-list here to make the opposed point, that although words may not be limited in their possible meaning, they are in their actual and immediate meanings, by the context that they are used in. The listing of the words in juxtaposition makes the point by forcing us to recognize the difference between the words while at the same time grouping them together as if this was a feature of the French words, that they all have the same Malay equivalent.

The example of the workman goes even further than this. It shows us that as an insider, someone aware of the exact context, someone aware of which tool is needed at a precise moment, we have no need of the precision of the specific word for that tool. The layman, however, needs the specific word in order to identify the tool and differentiate it from others. The suggestion is that language helps us to discover the world, but once this has happened, and we are aware of the specific context, we no longer use the specific words, which is the opposite situation to that of the Kubus who have a word for lance even when they do not know how to make one. Perec is not exploiting the arbitrary nature of the sign in this passage, but, rather, showing the way in which language is used to introduce us to new experiences, to induct us into new contexts, to enable us to make sense of what we are doing. And when we know what we are doing we have a tendency to forget the words - perhaps another way of trying (and failing) to ensure that his text swallows itself up.

Le tueur de mots

When the words have been forgotten, Cinoc kills them off. His job revolves around the curious notion of the restricted size of the Larousse dictionary; when there are new words, words to induct us into new experiences, Cinoc has to eliminate some old words 'pour leur faire de la place'. In this Chapter, pp359-366, we shall concentrate on pp361ff, and leave the first part of the Chapter,

where there is an exposition of the possibilities of Cinoc's name, until we come to discuss the lists of names.

Cinoc makes room for new words not only by killing off old words, but by killing off old meanings, too. We are reminded that a word can have different contextual meanings. The text tells us that when Cinoc retired in nineteen sixty-five:

il avait fait disparaître des centaines et des milliers
d'outils, de techniques... (p.361)

and we notice that what he has made disappear are not the words for the objects, but the objects themselves. If the word exists, the object exists, if the word does not exist then the object does not exist, that is the implication. The word gives life to the object by allowing man to discover the object and the object's context. Language is being presented by Perec as the primary medium through which we experience the world - a consequence of the removal of primary reference in his text, since language becomes the world, as far as possible; the text refers to nothing but the text.

Another reason why this and the Appenzell list should fall within 'stories' is because the description passages use the illusion of the eye moving around, of the, however disingenuous, immediate link between perception and description in a realist reporting illusion. This technique interrogates the way we perceive and relate to objects, while a word-list within a story does away with the realist reporting illusion because it is placed in an explicitly written context and interrogates the notion of language much more explicitly, thereby establishing language as the primary medium of communication between world and the observer, actor, reporter. Knowing the name of an object is what makes that object exist, and Cinoc's story is a story of the loss of knowledge, of running after a past that is continually slipping away from his grasp, just as his forefathers' names continually change.

The paragraph that begins 'Quand il prit sa retraite...' contains four separate lists, separated by semi-colons and each introduced by a pluperfect verb, followed by an expression of number or scale:

Quand il prit sa retraite, en mille neuf cent soixante-cinq, après cinquante-trois ans de scrupuleux services, il avait fait disparaître des centaines et des milliers d'outils, de techniques, de coutumes, de croyances, de dictons, de plats, de jeux, de sobriquets, de poids et de mesures; il avait rayé de la carte des dizaines d'îles, des centaines de villes et de fleuves, des milliers de chef-lieux de canton; il avait renvoyé à leur anonymat taxinomique des centaines de sortes de vaches, des espèces d'oiseaux, d'insectes et de serpents, des poissons un peu spéciaux, des variétés de coquillages, des plantes pas tout à fait pareilles, des types particuliers de légumes et de fruits; il avait fait s'évanouir dans la nuit des temps des cohortes de géographes, de missionnaires, d'entomologistes, de Pères de l'Eglise, d'hommes de lettres, de généraux, de Dieux & de Démons. (p.361/2)

Once again the mention of 'des centaines et des milliers' or 'des cohortes' implies that there are many more elements to add to this list than are actually on the page, and in the first list at least, each of the words mentioned is a general word - tools, beliefs, games - with its own variety of subsets, and this again increases the possibilities of the numbers of words that have been killed. It is the vagueness of the terms in the first list that allows us to imagine the number of words that Cinoc has killed to be enormous.

Perec could not specifically name the words, of course, because they have been killed off. This means that we do not know what is being talked about specifically by these lists; that there is an emptiness behind the general nouns that Cinoc has created and that we feel as readers. A sense of loss is exacerbated by the second list which hints at the towns and rivers, the geographical features that have disappeared, that Cinoc has scratched from the map, as if these towns had disappeared in a war and been bombed into oblivion. Lists of names are often read out at Remembrance

services, and this kind of commemoration of the disappeared is suggested here.

This religious subtext is continued as Cinoc sets up his commemorative dictionary of 'mots simples qui continuaient à lui parler' (p.363) not to perpetuate them, nor to eternalize them, but to **save** them. Perec represents him as a misguided messiah of language - we are told that the eight thousand words he has saved have become 'une histoire à peine transmissible' (p.363.) Cinoc is ineffectually fighting the changes of context that entail changes in our use of language.

Cinoc sends species back into taxonomic anonymity, and this suggests the structure of these four lists. The first is general, what might be called Human Science, the *second*, geographical, the third is Natural History, the fourth historical. This follows the type of classification made in older dictionaries (and still made in reference books like the Guinness Book of Records.) Listing the disappeared also has some correspondence to a dictionary, which is an alphabetical list, but Perec does not list these elements alphabetically. In this case, the lack of order reveals that everything is touched by the dying of its words, by time moving on. Death and decay are again presented, as we have seen before, as inevitable, as universal, and as random. The list form expresses this universality by its grouping together of objects, and expresses this randomness by refusing to hierarchize them.

Valène, l'irracontable

The difficulty of transmitting Cinoc's word refugees is echoed in Chapter XXVIII. We are in the presence of Valène's pessimistic imagination in a 'description' passage, and in the paragraph that begins 'Encore une fois se mettait à courir...' we find the phrase:

toute cette somme d'événements minuscules, inexistants,
irracontables... (p.169)

where Perec points out the impossibility of telling a certain type of story. In the case of Cinoc, the problem is that the words fail to communicate, in this case, the problem is that these events are 'irracontables', that is, that no story can be made of them. The words are part of Cinoc's story and so we are able to interrogate them more directly; in Chapter XXVIII, their relation to us and to the world they are purported to represent is *much* more problematic.

This is the list:

toute cette somme d'événements minuscules, inexistants,
irracontables - choisir un pied de lampe, une
reproduction, un bibelot, placer entre deux portes un
haut miroir rectangulaire, disposer devant une fenêtre
un jardin japonais, tendre d'un tissu à fleurs les
rayons d'une armoire - (p.169)

This is a list of only four elements following infinitives with two nouns added (and so making six elements) and implying a repetition of 'choisir'. We note that it is the choice, and not the existence of these objects, that cannot be told, which denies psychological import to what Perec writes as description. Lamps, reproductions, mirrors are all abundantly used in the descriptions of the rooms, and used as creators of fictions.

When the lamps can be seen, they can be reported, drawn, used to create fiction. But the **choice**, the act of choosing, of a lamp, cannot be seen and so cannot be reported. The link between the object and its location cannot be told, the cause of its being there must remain hidden. In the case of Cinoc's dead words, the cause of their being there was a changing world and a certain relationship between man and language. Now we are being asked to examine the other relationship, that between world and language.

If Perec's meticulousness of detail is a hyperrealism (and we shall discuss this in the next chapter), it is a material hyperrealism. The mysterious why of things is refused - the conventional causality of time and linearity is forsaken - it is only the fact of them that can be reported.

This is another constraint. Perec evades the temptations of causality, of explaining, he shows and only shows what the realist reporting illusion determined by the painting framework of the supposed authorship of Valène allows him to show, the 'être-là des choses' as Robbe-Grillet put it. In VME, however, it is not so much 'être-là' as 'être fictif' that is important, as stories are inspired by the presence of objects, books, and pictures.

The stories allow him to escape the constraint of Valène's supposed painting, but in the 'description' passages, if there is blood on the floor, this can only be reported as a fact. If Madame Altamont has shot her husband, that is obvious, but the why of it is left to speculation - and we note that the 'brusques cassures' we are given, Réol running off with young Madame Marquiseaux, for instance, are things that are only alluded to and not reported in the book. The speculation will be informed speculation since we know their tragic story, but there will be no authorial, no external hints as to the why of the event in the 'description' passage. Perec expresses this apparent transparency:

Je crois effectivement important qu'il y ait quelque chose qui reste ouvert: que ça ouvre sur l'imaginaire sans se refermer sur soi.²²

The refusal to give causes allows this space to open up, to give the reader room to imagine, to speculate.

We have examined the presence of a list in the middle of this paragraph. We must now see if it is possible to account for the lists that surround it. The first list of the paragraph reads:

Encore une fois se mettait à courir dans sa tête la triste ronde des déménageurs et des croque-morts, les agences et leurs clients, les plombiers, les électriciens, les peintres, les tapissiers, les carreleurs, les poseurs de moquettes. (p.169)

All these people represent change - they take something away, they mend something broken, they cover the floor of an apartment with new material. They are all people who are only passing through the building in the event of misfortune, and the workmen are linked closer to the funeral directors by the change of article. 'Des déménageurs et des croque-morts' is implied as including all these workmen who are preceded by the definite article. Valène, who is trying to fix the building in his painting, who has such an apocalyptic imagination, can only conceive of change as resulting from misfortune and probably from death.

Painters are among those listed - contextually, of course, these will be painter-decorators, and the contextual meaning must be the strongest. But it does not rule out the secondary meaning of artist painter, and this provides a haunting irony in the thoughts of Valène - he, too, is an agent of change, he, too, is subject to destiny. In this list he is both 'author', because we believe the illusion that he is thinking it, and character, because he is in the list. In the book, and more specifically, in the 'description' passages of the book, he is both 'author', if we believe the illusion of him painting the life of the building, and character. He plays the double role of agent and victim. In this way he mirrors the reader who is invited to paint Valène's picture from the words on the page, and who finds out at the end that there is no painting.

The list of professions - people defined by their relevance to the context, as with the list of professions in Mme Moreau's factory - is followed by a list that leads in to the remarks about 'toute cette somme d'événements ...irracontables':

il se mettait à penser à la vie tranquille des choses,
aux caisses de vaisselles pleines de copeaux, aux cartons
de livres, à la dure lumière des ampoules nues se
balançant au bout de leur fil, à la lente mise en place
des meubles et des objets, à la lente accoutumance du
corps à l'espace. (p.169)

Everything goes more slowly in this list. Each element is longer, the repetition of 'à la... à la... à la lente' is not only explicitly slower, but poetically, too, with its languid 'L' sounds. The ambiguity of the previous list, namely that decorators, plumbers, electricians also prepare a place for living in, is clearly brought out after it has been suggested by the juxtaposition of 'triste' and 'ronde', which is traditionally a happy dance. This list emphasises the way we move in to, the way we become used to, a room or a space - another of Perec's preoccupations: in Espèces d'Espaces he puts forward the notion of arranging a house with a Monday room, a Tuesday room, and so on, and says that this is no more absurd than having a whole villa that is only used for sixty days a year.²³

'La vie tranquille des choses' will remain tranquil until the 'brusques cassures' happen - until the people come to disturb them. In the same way as the workmen are defined by their function in visiting the building, so objects are defined by what has happened to them. A floor can only be reported until M. Altamont's blood flows over it, when it becomes part of a story. And as this has not happened yet in the book - nor does it ever happen, nor does Réol run off with Mme. Marquiseaux - it cannot be made into a story, it can only be alluded to.

The long lists in the 'description' passages are subject to this condition - that objects can only be part of a story, can only be narrated, when something has happened to them, otherwise they remain in 'la vie tranquille des choses', in their undisturbed state, their unrecounted state, that of the list. Objects have no ability to act on, or to reflect, characters, they can only be

acted upon. Exactly as a reader's imagination brings life to a book, so the characters bring life to the objects, taking them out of their inert, listed state and into a story. A book is an object unless it is being read, and the objects in VME are the same - unless they are being acted on, they remain in 'l'état brut'. 'Un quotidien sans histoire' can only take on a story when the people arrive and act.

The relationship between the world and language therefore, can only be fully realised, that is, turned into narrative, when there is action to recount. This introduces characters as the agents of easing the problematic relationship between the world and language. Perec's characters are fully fictional constructs in that their relationship to their environment is completely language-based, that is, that they only exist as stories. This is made explicit by the distinction between the 'irracontable vie tranquille des choses', and the 'racontable' when the characters are involved.

Perec is examining the problems of perception and world-language-man relationship, by creating two different fictional contexts, which interact with each other, not explicitly, but by contrast. The use of the same technique, the word-list, in both of the fictional contexts reveals the different problems he is examining.

In the paragraph after this, Valène reflects:

Un jour surtout, c'est la maison entière qui disparaîtra, c'est la rue et le quartier entiers qui mourront. Cela prendra du temps. Au début cela aura l'air d'une légende, d'une rumeur à peine plausible... Puis les bruits se préciseront: on apprendra le nom des promoteurs et la nature exacte de leurs ambitions que de luxueux dépliants en quadrichomie viendront illustrer.
(p.169/70)

The rumour remains a rumour, in this more concrete example, until it is reported, until a story is made of it and Perec quotes these possible stories for us, giving an example of their style. The

objects remain 'flou', unfulfilled, mere possibilities, until they become part of a story.

Valène, il se peindrait

In Chapter LI, in the middle of an interrupted list, a list where Valène's act of painting is repeated, where the mise en abyme of his being in the painting reflects the structure, the realist reporting illusion, of the book, the third paragraph begins:

Il se peindrait en train de se peindre et autour de lui, sur la grande toile carrée, tout serait déjà en place: la cage de l'ascenseur, les escaliers, les paliers, les paillasons, les chambres et les salons, les cuisines, les salles de bain, la loge de la concierge, le hall d'entrée avec sa romancière américaine interrogeant la liste des locataires, la boutique de Madame Marcia, les caves, la chaufferie, la machinerie de l'ascenseur.

(p.291)

The conditionality of Valène's plans for the painting correspond to the fact that there is no painting, and also to the illusion that this is what he is thinking. 'Everything will be in place' introduces the list, but the list does not contain everything that would be in the painting. There are only fourteen elements to the list and, with the exception of 'la romancière américaine interrogeant la liste des locataires', everything in the list is fixed, static and solid. The inclusion of the American novelist has two effects. First, we are reminded indirectly of all the characters, the list of characters, in the book (which prepares us in the structure of this individual Chapter for the inventory of stories that follows on page 292.) Secondly, and more complicatedly, it reveals the time structure of the book at the same time as giving the impression that the action in the book will somehow be included in the painting. The transition from painting to narrative is called into question, and this is a central concern of the novel, the painting of pictures and the telling of stories as two different ways of reporting the world,

but which are not mutually exclusive since descriptions of pictures so often lead to narrative fictions.

The last element of this list is 'la machinerie de l'ascenseur' and the second Chapter called 'La Machinerie de l'ascenseur' contains one of the most problematic lists in the whole book and one that we shall discuss later. For the moment what we should note is that this list leads into the other. Everything will be in place, we are told, even the subterranean, twentieth century Dante hallucinations of Machinerie de l'ascenseur II - and the realist reporting illusion of Valène's actually painting the painting is stretched to include even the most 'irréel' of Chapters.

The fourth paragraph on this page contains a long list of objects. The objects share the conditionality of the two verbs that introduce them - 'il se peindrait' and 'déjà l'on verrait'. They are not there until they are painted, until they are seen in the painting. They must remain in this listed form until the painting is complete. This is not to say that the lists represent the raw material of stories that are going to be told, but instead that Perec makes distinctions in the book between the potential and the acted and holds the two in tension. That is, while the stories may not use the material in the lists, they fulfil the possibilities inherent in, and promised by, the form of a list by becoming stories.

The second half of this paragraph contains a long list which includes many of the characters' names, almost as if it were a promise of stories to come and a confirmation of stories already told, like the American novelist we examine 'la liste des locataires'. And then we have the inventory of stories. This is the centre of the book - where what precedes arrives, and what follows departs. It is all presented to us within the framework

of Valène's imagination, enforcing the illusion of the painting. Yet, in true Perecian fashion, there is another side to this.

The characters are said to be in the painting 'avec leur histoire, leur passé, leurs légendes.' This gives the lie to the possibility of a representational painting. We have seen how for the contents of a list to be activated, a story must be told. This list gives the promise of stories, not of pictures. The possibilities of a list can only be activated as stories; words cannot exceed their own medium. Valène's conditional imagination promises a picture, but the literary form of the list promises a story. Perec again balances the two narrative techniques. On p.290 this is described in microcosm; the fact of the painter's being hidden in the painting

deviendrait une anecdote qui se transmettrait de
génération en génération

to the effect that anecdotes - stories - proceed from the painting.

Perec balances his two narrative conceits at this point in the book: the one, that Valène is painting a picture, the other, that everything can become a story, but that the story may remain latent. The illusion that Valène is painting the picture is central to the distinction between the 'visible' and the written parts of the book, between the 'descriptions' and the stories. It is on this conceit that any difference of status between what is reported and what is seen or shown rests.

This Chapter meshes the two together, the better to point out that in other Chapters, they are distinct. The combination of the list form for the stories and the painting motif in the Chapter achieves this. This list of the stories to come is a 'description' that impinges on the territory of the stories by being about them.

Conclusion

In this Chapter we have seen some more ways in which Perec uses word-lists and some effects that are specific to noun lists. Mme. Moreau's list was seen to be relatively straightforward. Clutter, abundance, disorder, untidiness can all be expressed in this way without raising further questions. This list also showed how a list can be used to control the pace of a description and to guide the eye over the room that Valène is purported to be painting.

Perec foregrounds the writtenness of his text by the use of a footnote in the list of instructions given by Olivia Rorschach to Jane Sutton. This foregrounding might be said to be a consequence of any of the lists in the book, but this example is fortified by the way it shows us how Perec is able to elevate the banal to 'literary' status, part of the fascination of the extraordinariness of the everyday. It also showed us how he uses the list form as a 'producteur de fiction', and we saw how he used the device of the word-list to achieve this.

We also saw a list that appeared to be present for similar reasons - the list of objects on Marguerite Winkler's desk - and that raised further questions. This list gave us an example of how Perec integrates one of his own earlier texts into VME and also how the list was exploited in the Chapter for emotional effect, increasing the sympathy of the reader for the mourning of Gaspard Winckler. This list also provided us with an opportunity to show how Perec balances the meticulousness of detail that a list provides with the distance from the text that it also implies - exploiting the one, before redefining the other. Balances of this type play a crucial role in VME because it is one of Perec's most often-used techniques to set one part of his text against, and in comparison to, another. This is part of the self-referential resonance that we mentioned at the end of our last chapter.

The ludic nature of the text, which we can never ignore, was seen to be present in the word-lists. Abel Speiss' games present us with a word-list and Perec deliberately invites speculation about his text in this way - much as he invites us to take the book apart by including indexes and reference points.

This invitation is even more concrete in the passages concerning the Rabelais quotations. The necessity of commentary opens out the text, offering the reader several different books to construct and several different points of focus, reflecting one of the possibilities of the word-list, that the reader might make a choice of which elements to concentrate on. Perec's ability to make his text both mobile and responsive comes about not only through his use of quotations from other authors, but also through the use of the word-list which the reader can shape in his own way in the apparent absence of authorial dictats. Thus the apparent blandness of the word-lists in fact becomes a source of rewarding insights and revealing intertextualities.

The second Rabelaisian passage showed how Perec was able to give function to a nonsensical passage escaping the implication of the void that nonsense threatens to create. The escape from the literary void is also a feature of the Appenzell passage where Perec shows one way in which languages can relate to each other. It is also from this episode that we are able to begin to uncover some of the linguistic implications that Perec is playing with in this section of his text. Cinoc offers further evidence of this. We found that Perec was suggesting through his text that the existence of the word and the existence of the object were interdependent - that the loss of one led to the loss of the other. Man was seen to relate to his environment through language, and language to be the primary medium of man's ability to survive the changes of this environment - as Perec says of his parents in W:

l'écriture, est le souvenir de leur mort et l'affirmation de ma vie.²⁴

Words shape their own meaning context and so create ambiguities and misunderstandings, that might, and often do, especially in a literary text, lead to alienation and absurdity. The ambiguity that Perec is exploiting is of a different kind. He does not exploit the ambiguities inherent in language to allow language to alienate readers and characters, but rather, his text is hard to pin down because he continually offers the reader any number of different possibilities of ways of reading the text, and any number of different ways of solving the puzzle. The ambiguity in VME is not only linguistic, it is also structural and comes from the complex web of citations, self-reference and games. Word-lists play a role in this as a way of structuring the text to offer possibilities, and as a way of offering options to the reader.

The most problematic passage that we faced was Chapter LI. It was necessary to treat the Chapter as a whole, rather than examine a list and its immediate effects as we had done for earlier examples, in order to come to some understanding of it in its proper context. We saw Perec treating the central flaw of the narrative technique, the clash between Valène's painting and the writtenness of the text, which, following the central feature of VME of opposites pulling together, of paradoxes informing each other, (lists and stories, masque and marque, hiding and inviting to find, life and method) is also a dynamic, balancing between the conditionality of the painter's thoughts and the promises of further stories. This is vital to the narrative dynamism of the book and we argued that word-lists held promises of stories, almost as if they were coiled language springs waiting to unfold.

In this chapter the word-list has been shown to be a device that Perec, far from using in isolation, has made an important strand of his narrative technique, exploiting it to maintain, on the one

hand, the realist reporting illusion of Valène's painting, and on the other, to counterpoint the stories. The different uses of word-lists in 'descriptions' and stories were seen to be a way of treating different concerns by the same device.

Examining the word-lists allows us to unearth many of the central concerns of the novel and to elucidate its narrative technique. We should not be surprised to find that the word-list incorporates almost every facet of the novel within itself - the production of stories, the language games, the turning of the ordinary into the extraordinary. It also has a role in the play of time structures, the play on vraisemblance, the fictional layering and the constraints, the new dynamic for the reader, and the play of quotations and self-reference.

In the next chapter we shall turn our attention more to the contents of the list rather than their structural implications and examine whether the word-list can be said to describe.

Notes

1. A rough count gives more than two hundred noun and name lists and six lists of verbs - p.465, p.179, p.56, p.485, p.395, p.370. The longest, of eleven elements, is p.56 where we read of the actions that M. Guttman goes through to make up his stock again after having sold the last batch and spent all the money in two or three days: 'sculpter, tisser, tresser, enfiler, broder, coudre, pétrir, colorier, vernir, découper, assembler'. This would seem to be set out in the order in which the actions are undertaken. On p.395 Mme. Marcia and her clients 's'offrent le thé, s'invitent à dîner, jouent au bridge, vont à l'opéra, visitent des expositions, se prêtent des livres, échangent des recettes de cuisine, et font même ensemble des croisières...' This is an example of how the time structure can be fixed - although the passage is in the present tense, these people are said to be habitually doing things together, not actually doing them at the moment we read. And this suggests that these actions are not as exciting as 'qui dépassent de loin (les) strictes relations d'affaires' has led us to believe they might be.
2. Hamon, Phillippe. Introduction à l'Analyse du Descriptif, Paris, Hachette, 1981. Note 18, p.135.
3. Charpentier, F. 'Variations sur la litanie: à propos du Tiers Livre de Pantagruel' in Revue des Sciences Humaines, XXXIII, (1968) pp.335-53. p.352
4. Colonna, Vincent. 'Fausses notes', in Cahiers Georges Perec 1, pp.96-109. p.107.
5. Penser/Classer, p.109, in the essay 'Lire, esquisse socio-psychologique', first published in Esprit, no.1, 1977.
6. Chauvin, Andrée. Ironie et intertextualité dans certains récits de Georges Perec, Université de Franche-Comté (Besançon), 1991. Annexe II.
7. Chauvin, Andrée. p.741.
8. Pawlikowska, Ewa. 'Dossiers Georges Perec' in Texte en Main (TEM), Hiver 86, Grenoble. pp.70-98. She gives all the programmed 'impli-citations' that Perec's notes allow her to locate. The Butor passage is from 'Parade des surnois' in Répertoires IV, Minuit, 1974, pp.341-349. p.344.
9. Penser, Classer, p.23. The article is pp.17-24.
10. Burgelin, C. 'Perec et la cruauté' in Cahiers Georges Perec 1, pp.31-52. p.48.

11. Dictionnaire Bordas de Littérature Française, ed. H. Lemaître, Bordas, 1985. (article unattributed.)
12. Pouilloux, Jean-Yves. 'Une écriture en trompe-l'oeil' in Cahiers Georges Perec 4, pp.19-25. p.23.
13. Magné, Bernard. 'Quelques problèmes de l'énonciation en régime fictionnel - l'exemple de La Vie mode d'emploi de Georges Perec', in Actes du Colloques d'Albi Langages et Signification Pouvoir et Dire, Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail, 1982. pp.217-255. p.246. (QPERF)
14. Garnier, 1962. p.395/6. Jourda gives the Chapter as Chapter XXIX, but Boulenger's edition (Gallimard, 1955) gives it as Chapter XXX. This is in some part due to the confusion over the authorship of Rabelais' Fifth Book. Boulenger's introduction (p.19-20) says that there are three sources - L'Ile Sonnante, a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the 1564 edition of the book. Up to Chapter XVII there is no problem but thereafter the editor has to follow the manuscript which is disfigured and full of mistakes. This adds to the layering that Perec effects as even when we know where the passage is from it is still difficult to find it.
15. Foucault, Michel. Les Mots et Les Choses, Gallimard, Paris, 1966. p.7. Perec gives, in Penser/Classer, item 'k' as 'dessinés avec un très fin pinceau de poils de chameau'.
16. Penser/Classer, pp.164-5.
17. Penser/Classer, p.165.
18. Penser/Classer, p.165.
19. Chapter IX of Pantagruel, p.145 of the Gallimard, Folio, 1964 edition.
20. Derrida, Jacques. 'Signature, Event, Context', Limited Inc, Evanston, Illinois, Northwest University Press, 1988. pp.1-23. p.12.
21. Magné, Bernard. QPERF. p.234.
22. Fardeau, Patrice. 'En dialogue avec l'époque, entretien avec Georges Perec' in France Nouvelle, no. 1744, 1979. pp.44-55.
23. Espèces d'Espaces, p.46.
24. W ou le Souvenir d'Enfance, p.59.

CHAPTER FIVE

Description.

In our last two chapters we have made a distinction between 'description' passages and 'story' passages in VME. The structure of the novel sometimes makes this distinction very clearly - as in Chapter XXXI, for instance, where the description of Madame de Beaumont's bedroom and of the page of *Ars Vanitatis* that she is reading is separated from the story of the revenge of Sven Ericsson on her daughter by a typographical figure that resembles four balls of wool arranged in a square (p.182.) Other Chapters, such as Chapter LXXVIII (p.459), where the story of Carol Van Loorens is recounted, have no typographical figure, but merely a double-spaced paragraph break separating the 'description' - the piano tuner's grandson reading *Le Journal de Tintin* - from the 'story'.

The distinction between description and story, or rather, in more general terms, between description and narration is firmly established. As Philippe Hamon remarks:

L'opposition narration-description fait partie, très certainement, des évidences les plus ancrées, les plus fermement expérimentées, de notre pratique de lecture.¹

It is a well-established distinction then, but one that, as he also remarks, has not been fully elucidated.

Genette, in his article 'Les Frontières du Récit', has said that description is always 'ancilla narrationis', and supports this with reference to Balzac, and the nineteenth century realist novel:

Les portraits physiques, les descriptions d'habillement, et d'ameublement, tendent, chez Balzac, et ses successeurs réalistes, à révéler et en même temps à

justifier la psychologie des personnages, dont ils sont à la fois signe, cause, et effet.²

The implication of seeing a novel as a system made up of signs is that every sign is there for a reason, and description is subject to this.

Butor has written about the problem of objects and their relationship to characters as a justification for description, in the specific context of furniture in the novel:

Car l'ameublement dans le roman ne joue pas seulement un rôle 'poétique' de proposition, mais de révélateur, car les objets sont bien plus liés à notre existence que nous ne l'admettons communément. Décrire des meubles, des objets, c'est une façon de décrire des personnages, indispensable: il y a des choses que l'on ne peut pas faire sentir que si l'on met sous l'oeil du lecteur le décor et les accessoires des actions.³

This is a pretty banal statement and he does not even go so far as to say that objects may reveal psychological states, preferring to err on the side of vagueness, or perhaps, resignation, claiming that there are some things that cannot be otherwise described. He brings us no closer to finding out what these might be, but he shows us the way forward by opening the possibility that objects are linked to life in various ways. It is within this framework, as we have seen, that Perec often exploits the word-list, within the framework of man's problematic relationship to his environment.

This relationship has been described in terms of the Absurd - objects overwhelming a character until he can no longer make sense of his place in the world. La Nausée is the classic example of this; Roquentin's displacement from his environment is both the symptom and the cause of his mental anguish. Perec's characters, however, are not displaced from their environment - although Winckler uses the disorienting technique of making Africa-shaped pieces that need to be turned through ninety degrees to be seen

correctly to fit in their place, Bartlebooth solves this problem and overcomes it.

The word-list allows Perec to avoid the psychological recuperation of objects, as we argued at the end of our last chapter where we saw that objects remained in an *état brut* when there was no action to recount, promising stories but not being part of them and playing a role in the text as part of the network of intertextuality and metatextuality, in '*ancilla metatextualis*'. In VME Perec moves beyond the position of objects describing the characters to which they belong - a device that he exploits in Les Choses to show the aspirations of Jérôme and Sylvie - to the position of leaving objects in their '*état brut*', listed and apparently unordered, until the characters intervene to create stories where these objects play a part.

The psychological use of description, one of the main reasons for a description being in a realist novel, has the effect of making man the central part of a view of the world, and Robbe-Grillet attacks this:

On voit tout de suite pourquoi les objets balzaciens étaient si rassurants: ils appartenaient à un monde dont l'homme était le maître; ces objets étaient des biens, des propriétés, qu'il ne s'agissait que de posséder, de conserver ou d'acquérir. Il y avait une constante identité entre ces objets et leurs propriétaires: un simple gilet, c'était déjà un caractère et une position sociale en même temps. L'homme était la raison de toute chose, la clef de l'univers, et son maître naturel, de droit divin.⁴

Although Robbe-Grillet did not always completely escape this psychological recuperation of objects himself - La Jalousie, for instance, can be read in this way, taking the centipede that crawls along the wall to be a metaphor for the husband's fear of adultery, his inability to kill it to be his inability to hold the attention of his wife, and so on - and perhaps did not always want to, this is still an accurate description of the situation in

realist novels, and we shall see that Perec's text causes many problems of referentiality that the realist tradition seems to take for granted. We should say, perhaps, the realist tradition in general, for we must not forget that Balzac, the supposed exemplum of realism, and anti-Christ to the moderns, in fact describes the furniture in the Pension Vauquer in Père Goriot as 'borgne' - one-eyed - which is far from being mimetic or realist, especially as 'borgne' may, when referring to a house, have the meaning 'hôtel de passe'.

We mentioned in our introduction that Flaubert also had a reputation for meticulousness as a writer, but there is a difference between his approach and that of Perec - Perec is trying to do something completely different. His debt to Flaubert is a debt of inspiration, not a debt of imitation. Let us isolate two important factors. Critics insist that objects reveal personality traits, or insights, about Flaubert's characters. Pierre Danger has written:

Intérieurs et objets, en effet, participent, d'une certaine manière, à un univers plus humain: ils sont l'expression du personnage qu'ils entourent et qu'ils contribuent ainsi à révéler dans sa personnalité profonde...⁵

and this shows the sort of reflex that Flaubert can be said to be exploiting. What Arnoux eats is telling us what sort of man he is - Perec does exactly the same things in Les Choses, inviting his readers to make judgments about the characters based on the consumer desirables that they covet. In VME he has moved beyond this, and Danger reminds us that the case may not be all that simple in Flaubert either:

mais ils ne cessent malgré tout (les objets)
d'appartenir au monde de la matière vers lequel ils
tendent toujours à retourner...⁶

warning that such simple remarks as we are making here can be misleading. One wonders what sort of personality trait might be

revealed by Charles Bovary's notoriously unimaginable hat, for instance.

There is another important difference between the two writers and it is only on reading Flaubert that an omission of Perec's becomes obvious. When Perec is describing a room, he rarely mentions the quality of the light, while Flaubert can hardly resist doing so. Puns come to mind, and we might say that Perec throws very little light on to a description, leaving it dense, opaque, dark. Flaubert creates moods, reflections, psychologically apt atmospheres, through the way he uses light. Perec forgoes this mechanism - the pictures he evokes are not mood pictures, but story pictures: behind each of Bartlebooth's watercolours is not a psychological portrait, but a story of a journey. Perec's characters do not have minds so much as they have histories, they do not have thoughts, they have stories. He examines not their motivation, but their actions, and then reports those actions. Although Frédéric, the pathetic hero of L'Education Sentimentale, scarcely acts at all, much of the action presented to us is his own mental inactivity that contrasts with the political volatility that he finds himself living through.

Flaubert uses light in order to point out a character's perception of things. He gives one standpoint, which may be ironically counterpointed and which emanates from an individual consciousness where it is the perception of the objects that reveals the character traits. Perec, however, reveals almost nothing of the character of the supposed observer in VME, Valène, through the way in which he is supposedly observing the rooms, or painting them.

Let us make clear these differences between the two writers by looking at an interview Perec gave to Ewa Pawlikowska. Perec says, talking of Les Choses, that:

Les choses nous décrivent. Nous pouvons décrire les êtres à travers les objets, à travers le milieu qui

les entoure et la manière dont ils se déplacent dans ce milieu.⁷

This is the more traditional, Balzacian position, according to the majority of critics, the 'objective correlative argument', that the expression of an emotion needs an external description. But Perec says also, in the very same interview:

Je déteste ce qu'on appelle la psychologie, surtout dans le roman.⁸

It is obvious that he cannot be using objects in the strictly psychological way, and he makes this explicit:

Les choses ne déterminent pas l'existence de l'homme, elles déterminent - peut-être - la possibilité d'écrire.⁹

That objects represent the possibility of writing for Perec is obvious from his article 'Notes concernant les objets qui sont sur ma table de travail' where he lists the objects on his desk. Although this might seem the act of a desperate man, a writer lacking imagination, the important thing for Perec is to produce a text, to produce a fiction, and this list is the raw material of a fiction, in this case, and it is obvious that Perec believes that the description of objects is a springboard from which to construct fictions. We have seen in the last chapter how the lists of objects remain promises of stories until there is action to recount - 'la possibilité d'écrire' is integrated into his text as part of the mechanism that allows the reader to play games with the text.

We have already seen that Perec's novel denies explicit reference to external reality by several means. Among them is the conceit of using a narrator pretending to describe a painting, a painting of which, as we learn only at the end of the novel on page 602:

La toile était pratiquement vierge: quelques traits au fusain, soigneusement tracés, la divisaient en carrés réguliers, esquisse d'un plan en coupe d'un immeuble qu'aucune figure, désormais, ne viendrait habiter

thus swallowing up the entirety of the book. A second device is the description of photographs, paintings and labels, the layering of the fiction that we examined in an earlier chapter, leading to reference only to the text. A third would be the system of intertextuality, and a fourth, more simply, the fact that there is no 11, rue Simon-Crubellier in Paris.

This, however, is a general condition of VME, and not a consideration limited to the word-lists, although we have seen that they contribute to it, as they contribute to other central concerns of the text. Our task in this chapter is to provide a suitable distinction between 'description' and 'story' and then to see if word-lists 'describe' (notwithstanding the fact that if we are obliged to ask this question, then description is already problematized to some extent). Let us begin by trying to find an appropriate terminology.

A terminological distinction

Bernard Magné, quoting Jean Ricardou, makes use of the terms 'hyposcriptural' and 'hyperscriptural' to distinguish between two different types of text. The first refers to:

le texte, ou fragment, pour lequel l'écriture est restée sous une ferme dominance expressive ou représentative¹⁰

and the second

le texte, ou fragment, pour lequel l'écriture s'est affranchie de certains ukases de l'expression et de la représentation.¹¹

This is then refined according to history - the first being a 'paléotexte', a traditional text, and the second a 'néotexte', a modern text. It is obvious that in VME, Perce mixes the two types of text: his stories can certainly be said to be under a firm expressive and representative dominance. That is, that despite the fact that they, too, are subsumed in the fictionality of the

novel, they retain their structure and comprehensibility as narratives. This is not the case for the word-lists, and they side firmly with the hyperscriptural and the neotext, the modern text, being anything but transparent in their representativeness. Let us then accept these two terms in order to avoid the vaguer distinction between 'story' and 'description' that we have hitherto been using. Let us call the narratives in VME hyposcriptural neotext, for this seems to describe their combination of readability and modernity, and the descriptions, hyperscriptural neotext, where the transparency of representation is obscured and even denied.

The question still remains, however, of whether the hyperscriptural can be descriptive in the same way as the hyposcriptural. Magné has considered the problem of the disappearing painting at the end of VME, and he says its absence is an example of 'aporie énonciative'. He explains the consequences:

La narration n'est point l'imitation d'une action (celle de raconter) mais le produit d'une scription. Et précisément, ce qui se réussit, avec l'aporie énonciative qui clôt La vie, mode d'emploi, c'est par un véritable coup d'écriture, une production d'énoncés fictionnels soumises au régime de la discohérence, c'est-à-dire la mise en oeuvre d'un dispositif scriptural dont le fonctionnement n'a aucun équivalent dans le système discursif ordinaire et qui se présente, vis-à-vis du vraisemblable et du réalisme, comme absolument paradoxal et irréductible: bref, une manoeuvre antireprésentative.¹²

This is an argument he puts forward with regard to the narrator, and he continues to say that representation is replaced by metatextuality, in his sense of self-reference, as a way of providing a referent for, and making sense of, the text.

This holds good as far as the narrator is concerned, and when we apply these conditions to the hyperscriptural neotext, that is, the word-lists, we see that the same denial of 'normal discourse' is

at work and that, once again, Perec is using a double function. A word-list, with its insistence on the single word on the one hand, and its textual appearance as a unity on the other, gives the impression of being comprehensible while at the same time being part of an anti-representative manoeuvre. And in the case of the word-list, the individual elements become metatextual if, for instance, they appear in more than one list. The words 'fouillis', 'hétéroclite' and 'encombrée', for example, as we have seen, appear both in the list of Madame Marcia's antique shop and Marguerite Winckler's desk, allowing us to bring these two lists together. As Andrée Chauvin writes:

En même temps qu'elle masque l'hétéroclite, la liste autorise son appréhension ludique et joue le rôle d'un révélateur métatextuel.¹³

The fact that the word-list insists on the metatextuality of individual words greatly increases the possibility of metatextual play in the novel, and far from being passages where the narrative stops, where the reader hits a concrete block of language, they increase the mobility and dynamism of the text. They enrich what we might call the relational fabric of the work.

Perec is therefore able to insist both on the individual element and the unity of the list. Through this mechanism of metatextuality he avoids the implications of the useless detail that Barthes pointed out in his article 'L'effet du réel':

La notation insignifiante... s'apparente à la description, même si l'objet ne semble être dénoté que par un seul mot (en réalité, le mot pur n'existe pas... il est situé, pris dans un syntagme à la fois référentiel et syntaxique); par là est souligné le caractère énigmatique de toute description¹⁴

because the enigmatic character of these apparently insignificant signs becomes ludic and therefore, in the context of the puzzle metaphor, imply a solution to the problem that they pose.

Todorov, in the introduction to the collection of essays Littérature et réalité, explains Barthes' argument succinctly:

Roland Barthes démontre l'un des principaux procédés par lesquels ce discours cache sa propre nature: c'est le détail inutile...exception apparente à la pan-signification réaliste, qui porte en fait un message essentiel: celui d'une 'authentification' de tout le reste.¹⁵

Which is to say, that the apparently useless detail, which adds nothing to the psychological portrait, or the advancement of the narrative, in fact, in the appropriate type of novel, plays the role of guarantor of realism - this is not just a story, it's a representation of real life, and here is an object that you can find in real life, and which has nothing to do with the story, and which proves that this is not just a story.

Barthes explains:

Le 'réel' est réputé se suffire à lui-même... assez fort pour démentir toute idée de 'fonction', que son énonciation n'a nul besoin d'être intégrée dans une structure et que ~~l'avoir-été-là~~ des choses est un principe suffisant de la parole.¹⁶

This is true of hyposcriptural texts, where transparency is regarded as a virtue, where the problems of verbal representation are largely ignored, where the author, narrator and reader combine to conspire in the belief that this story is not just a story but a faithful, accurate and objective account of reality.

Perec, however, explicitly and implicitly demonstrates that his novel is just a fiction, (or rather, just a lot of fictions, or maybe even, just a lot of words) and so the useless detail cannot be explained in this way, nor does Perec give us much of any other kind of enunciative guarantee - the problematic narrator is an example of that. We have already seen that the word-list fits into his design of metatextuality, but it also plays a larger role.

Barthes poses this question:

La singularité de la description (ou du 'détail inutile') dans le tissu narratif, sa solitude, désigne une question qui a la plus grande importance pour l'analyse structural des récits. Cette question est la suivante: tout dans le récit, est-il signifiant, et sinon, s'il subsiste dans le syntagme narratif quelques plages insignifiantes, quelle est, en définitive, si l'on peut dire, la signification de cette insignifiance?¹⁷

In VME this 'insignifiance' takes two forms. The first, the denial of simple reference to external reality, we have already discussed, and the second comes from the abundance of non-grammatical passages in the text, the abundance of passages that make no attempt to make sense in a conventional grammatical way, and these passages, these beaches, are, of course, the word-lists.

There are two main ways of assimilating word-lists to some kind of significance other than to simply insist on their metatextual importance - the first is to say that they have a different kind of significance to grammatical passages, and this is the argument of the 'irréel', and the second is to say that they cannot be treated as prose, but must be treated as another genre of discourse, as poetry perhaps, as self-contained elements. Perec uses description not so much to anchor his text to non-verbal reference, nor to illustrate a character's psychological state but, in contrast to the reductive nature of nineteenth century realist description which seeks complicity with the reader in accepting archetypes (exemplified by the use of phrases such as 'un de ces'), as a launch pad to imagination.

L'Irréel

Hubert Juin, in a review of VME, says:

L'ivresse du catalogue illimité le quotidien et dé-réalise le réel: l'accumulation des détails exacts (soit: cette fascination du nominalisme) provoque un

vertige par lequel l'imaginaire paraît et s'empare de tout. C'est le réalisme de l'irréel.¹⁸

He describes the paradox that we have called the double functioning of the text - the detail leading away from the particular into the vagueness of the 'irréel.' Hamon notes:

la description, en elle-même, comme texte, se déplace du particulier (les 'détails') au général (l'objet global syncrétique décrit) selon les lignes de frayages de la synécdoque (la partie pour le tout) ou de la métonymie (la contiguïté).¹⁹

Perec's word-lists differ from this in two respects - the first is the flight into the 'irréel', and the second is that his lists often do not so much describe objects as spaces - Marcia's boutique (p.139-40), Marguerite Winckler's desk (p.310), the space below the lift in *Machinerie de l'ascenseur II* (p.444-7), the long list of objects in *Caves I* (p.201-3), the list of advertisements on the walls of *The Oriental Saloon and Gambling House* in *Cinoc 2* (p.505).

Not all the lists do this, of course; some are of makes of motorcycle, of radio stations, of the names of Indian chiefs and they do not raise questions of description so much as questions of denomination. In the spatial lists the container of the space, the walls themselves are rarely described - we know what the room contains and not what the room itself looks like. This has the consequence that these lists cannot be said to describe in a conventional way because there is no movement, in the text, from detail to general, we see either the detail or the general. We shall see that the movement from detail to general moves, in fact, from overtly and insistently realistic detail to the 'irréel'.

Perec often mentioned this movement in interviews. Talking to Gabriel Simony, he says:

Il faut néanmoins que la description continue jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit tellement précise qu'elle devienne irréelle. Je ne sais pas si vous connaissez ce peintre italien, Gnoli; un peintre hyperréaliste qui

peignait par exemple des cols de chemise avec une cravate et cela sur un tableau qui faisait deux mètres sur deux. Il peignait un pli de pantalon. C'était extrêmement précis. Simplement le changement d'échelle faisait que ça devenait un objet complètement de l'ordre du rêve.²⁰

We shall take three points from this quotation to compare with others - first, that Perec uses the word 'description', second, the notion of 'hyperrealism', and third, the idea of 'rêve'.

'Hyperrealism' and 'rêve' he mentions again in conversation with Jean Royer:

Des peintres hyperréalistes m'ont particulièrement influencé: par certains tableaux où l'on a le sentiment tout à coup que notre sensibilité par rapport au monde bascule complètement. On n'a jamais fait attention aux objets de la quotidienneté ni aux bruits de fond de la vie. Et on a soudain par ces tableaux le regard étonné de ce qu'on ne voit pas et qui est mis ainsi en lumière. Cela devient insupportable, onirique, imaginaire. Le réel bascule dans l'irréel.²¹

In VME, Perec uses the conceit of the painter-narrator to change the things we do not normally see into things that we do not normally read. He insists, in this conversation as well, on the 'irréel' being an effect on the reader - one produced by the text (or the painting) but one that takes us away from the text. In this quotation he expands the notion of the dream to include the imaginary - which is an issue we shall discuss later with regard to Hamon's argument about description as recognition.

The fact that the 'irréel' is an effect on the reader can also be inferred from this comment that Perec makes to Essa Reymers:

Je m'inspire de ce qu'on appelle en peinture l'hyperréalisme. C'est en principe une description neutre, objective, mais l'accumulation des détails la rend démentielle, et nous sommes ainsi tirés hors du réel.²²

It is sometimes true that Perec drags us out of the real into the realm of the demented - and we shall have to consider this when we come to examine *Machinerie de l'ascenseur 2* - but we have already

seen that one way in which Perec avoids the real is by carefully arranged and insistent intertextuality and metatextuality, and the effect of the 'irréel' is another way of doing this. That is, that it leaves no explicitly referential traces because it is produced by the text and invites us to move out of the text into our own imaginations and, perhaps, nightmares, but does not refer us to external reality.

The reader is invited to absent himself from the text for the length of a daydream or a speculation provoked by the text - this contravenes one conventional rule of the novel, and one conventional rule of criticism. The first that the reader's attention be held at all times, and the second that there is nothing outside the text that should concern the reader. The text breaks the two rules at the same time by inviting us to dream - dreams always provoked by the text, and which because of the self-referential play, most often return us to the text. It is not only the eye that follows 'les chemins qui lui ont été ménagés' but the imagination as well.

This also forms part of the openness of the book. We recall Perec's remark:

Cette idée d'un livre ouvert est très important pour moi: qu'il soit en quelque sorte inachevé, en porte-à-faux. Il faut qu'il y ait une sorte de distance entre le livre et le livre, entre ce qui est raconté et tout ce qu'on peut imaginer derrière.²³

The lists and the production of the 'irréel' force us to use our imagination, to keep open all the channels of suggestion and imagination that each individual word, and each juxtaposition of words, and each unit of a list invite us to consider.

Burgelin has a different view:

Perec ne cherche pas à troubler l'imagination du lecteur (son obsessionnalité n'est pas celle de Robbe-Grillet). Le metteur en scène et en mots semble s'effacer. Il inventorie sans vraiment décrire, ni détailler, ni

ouvrir par là même à des résonances ou à des jeux d'interprétation. Les objets, désignés de manière aussi exacte qu'opaque, sont assignés à résidence, ne disent rien, à personne, et n'offrent au mieux que des indices socioculturels sans grand inattendu. Sur de tels dénombrements, l'excitation semiologique, l'effervescence imaginaire n'ont guère de prise²⁴

and neatly encapsulates the exact opposite of our interpretation of the lists. He assimilates the lists into the play of printed cards and 'faire-parts' and argues that 'la lettre relève de l'art graphique autant que de la littérature' (p.199) and so the lists presumably lose their literary force. This is in direct opposition to our argument that the lists are a fundamental part of the literariness of VME - an example, perhaps, of yet another double function, and certainly a proof that the text can be read in many different ways. The calling cards do emphasise to the reader, however, the fact that we accept without assumption words substituted for objects, and this is, for us, their real importance.

Perec's interview with Royer continues:

Il faut qu'on puisse rêver sur le livre et qu'on ait envie de jouer avec...²⁵

He makes a rapprochement between the dreaming produced by the 'irréel' and the ludic nature of the text, so certain is he that his play of inter- and meta-textuality is bound to make us dream about other aspects of the book and pull us unwittingly, perhaps, but certainly not unwillingly, into all that is involved in playing with the book and with the text. The dreaming and the playing go together as the author, the text and the reader engage in the happy combat of laying, avoiding and falling into textual traps.

Perec also says to Jean Royer:

Le sens final, je ne sais pas ce que c'est. Mais je sais que ce qui est produit par l'accumulation des lettres, des mots, des phrases, c'est une fiction. C'est-à-dire

un jeu qui se fait entre deux personnes, entre un écrivain - homme - et un lecteur.²⁶

He explicitly states that the accumulations - the word-lists - produce fictions, and that these fictions lead to games.

Talking to Jacqueline Piatier of *Le Monde*, and answering a question about the effect of the 'enumerations' on the reader, Perec replies:

Je pense un effet proche de l'asphyxie, une sorte d'ivresse qui déforme l'image de la vie. Ecrire un roman ce n'est pas raconter quelque chose en relation directe avec le monde réel. C'est établir un jeu entre l'auteur et le lecteur. Ca relève de la séduction.²⁷

This remark brings together the three points that we have been discussing so far - the refusal of reference to a reality external to the book, the 'irréel' where our view of the world is jostled into imagination by the accumulation of details (rather than a 'détail inutile' insisting on the transparency of the transcription of the world) and the engaging of the reader in the game of reading the book.

The last aspect - the ludic, the seduction of the reader - is one of the particularities of VME. The novel relies on its ability to drag us out of the real into the game in order for the game to become apparent. We have seen what Perec thought of the effect of the accumulation of details, but Robbe-Grillet, for instance, in his 1963 article, 'Enigmes et transparence chez Raymond Roussel', has a different point of view:

Plus s'accumulent les précisions, la minutie, les détails de forme, plus l'objet perd de sa profondeur. C'est donc ici une opacité sans mystère: ainsi que derrière une toile de fond, il n'y a rien derrière ces surfaces, pas d'intérieur, pas de secret, pas d'arrière pensée²⁸

suggesting that an accumulation makes for a flat text which denies a richness of connotation. This is not the case in VME: the metatextuality of the book - offered to the reader, in the first

instance, as Magné has pointed out, by the puzzle metaphor and the recurrence of *mise en abîme* figures - creates the mystery and the secrets to be discovered and unravelled behind the text. We could also remark that there is a certain irony in the fact that Robbe-Grillet uses a 'toile de fond' as an example to deny anything behind the details when Perec uses a supposedly non-existent 'toile de fond' - Valène's painting of the building - as a central part of his narrative and ludic structure.

It is also evident that the seduction of the reader is not a *fait accompli*, especially in the absence of complicity-seeking phrases such as 'un de ces'. An antique dealer, or a stocktaker, for instance, might read the list of objects to be found in Madame Marcia's shop in an entirely professional way, estimating their value, wanting more precision, wondering where she got hold of them. Perec sidesteps the possibility of this professional reading (for one of the demands of reading VME is that we should all be amateurs together, all playing the same game) by two means. The first is the wide variety of things listed in the book as a whole, which forces us out of our accustomed language contexts, and the second is listing things that are explicitly fictional, such as the imaginary world below the lift in *Machinerie de l'ascenseur 2*.

The fact that hyperrealism (which is obviously not a realism at all) relies entirely for its effect on the imagination of the reader or the observer means that it has constantly to provoke this reader or observer so that his reaction is not just 'o yes, what a large shirt that is.' Perec's use of typography - where he has crossword puzzles, strange diagrams, footnotes, frontispieces, calling cards and so on, in his text - contributes to this by offering another type of text to inquire into and means that he is not solely reliant on the effect of the 'irréel' to inspire the dreaming and game-playing that expands the reading of the book.

A further use of the explicit visual representation of calling cards and their like, as we mentioned above, is to point out to us that we accept words substituted for objects. And this is a fundamental trait of any kind of description - verbal, pictorial, sculptorial - that it is, in fact, a substitution. We are reminded of Magritte's picture of a pipe that bears the accurate and precise title 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe': accurate and precise because it is not a pipe but merely a picture of a pipe. By presenting us with the materiality of his text, Perec breaks another fictional convention and problematizes still further the question of description.

It does not seem possible to take an individual list and determine the moment in the list when the 'irréel' takes effect - this is bound to be subjective. But if we take this effect of the 'irréel' to be one of the purposes of the word-list in the text, then we are obliged to say that word-lists do not really describe, since their intention is to provoke reveries about the text. Perhaps, however, we can say that they describe to some extent - Perec, talking to Gabriel Simony, does use the word 'description' - and again we can see that there is a double function. It is necessary to establish the world of 11, rue Simon-Crubellier at the same time as inviting the reader to leave it to play imaginative, intertextual and metatextual games. This is the same double mechanism at work as in the lists in Rabelais' first two books Gargantua and Pantagruel where a balance between realism and fantasy has to be maintained in order to make the juxtaposition of the satire and the epic exploits of the giants convincing to the reader.

Poetic integers

The second method of recuperating word-lists to sense-making structures that we mentioned was the device of treating them as units in themselves, as poetic integers. Perec said that he, on

occasion, read out the D-I-Y catalogue as a poem at poetry readings²⁹. This takes away from the main import of this passage and *Machinerie de l'ascenseur 2* in the text - that of guarantors of fictionality. We shall discuss this point later.

It is important to remember here that the lists do form part of the global narrative and much of their ability to bewilder comes from this, but perhaps it is possible to take a word-list as a unit, make sense of it, and then reinsert it into the body of the narrative. We shall examine later how Perec is able to integrate a list of, say, seven elements, seamlessly into the text.

Michel Riffaterre's article, 'L'Illusion référentielle', where he examines the referentiality of poetry, will be our guide through this next problem. His explanation of the way poetry expresses itself might refer explicitly to VME:

La poésie exprime des idées et des choses de manière indirecte. Même la description la plus naturelle n'est pas un simple énoncé de fait: elle se présente comme un objet esthétique aux connotations affectives. La représentation littéraire de la réalité, la mimésis, n'est que l'arrière-plan qui rend perceptible le caractère indirect de la signification. Cette perception est une réaction au déplacement, à l'altération ou à la création du sens. Déplacement, quand le signe glisse d'un sens à l'autre, quand un mot est 'mis pour' un autre, comme c'est le cas dans la métaphore. Altération quand il y a ambiguïté, contradiction ou non-sens. Création quand l'espace textuel est le principe organisateur à partir duquel des signes naissent d'éléments linguistiques peut-être insignifiants dans d'autres contextes - il s'agit par exemple des significations qui dérivent de la symétrie, des rimes etc.³⁰

Let us go through this point by point to show the relation to our reading of the text of VME. The indirectness of Perec's text, the fact that it is not just the simple enunciation of facts, comes from the refusal of the reference to external reality and also from the quotations from other authors, which take the phrase away from the possibility of being simple, that is, of being read at

one level only - 'le mot pur n'existe pas,' as Barthes has reminded us. This has the consequence of presenting the text as an aesthetic object - other people's art, the art of inserting - and Perec's text can be said to be an aesthetic object on another level in that it claims to be the verbal representation of a painting.

The notion of mimesis as a background to understanding the text is central to Riffaterre's argument as he claims that we read the poetic text once in a mimetic, naïve manner, gather the misunderstandings, ambiguities and contradictions and read the text a second time in order to unravel them. He makes a distinction between 'signification' as the direct meaning of words, the vertical meaning, and 'signifiante' as the horizontal meaning, or the meaning that emerges from an understanding of the whole unit of the poem:

Le texte est perçu comme variation sur une structure, thématique, symbolique ou autre, et c'est cela qui constitue la signifiante.³¹

'Signifiante' is also internal to the context of the poem, we are constrained to:

chercher le sens à l'intérieur du nouveau cadre de référence donné par le texte³²

and he also says:

La signifiante, c'est-à-dire le conflit avec la référentialité apparente, est produite et régie par les propriétés du texte...³³

We have seen in earlier arguments that Perec's novel invites us to read in an inter- and intratextual way, and indeed specifically creates frames of reference to be compared to each other by breaking up the stories of certain characters (Mlle. Crespi, for instance) between Chapters and giving us an index to help us link them together again. We are also warned (twice):

l'élément ne préexiste pas à l'ensemble... ce ne sont pas les éléments qui déterminent l'ensemble, mais l'ensemble qui détermine les éléments. (p.15/p.248)

So we see that in the manoeuvre of reading the lists and undergoing the effect of the 'irréel' we allow the contradictions and ambiguities to lead us away from 'signification' into a different realm, but we can also look for 'signifiante' to make sense of them - a manoeuvre reflected in our global reading of VME as an entirely fictional text and as an internally coherent unit. We may read the stories once as stories and we may read them twice, and are explicitly invited to fit them into the whole in exactly the same way that Riffaterre suggests we read poems once mimetically and the second time to fit the discordances into a comprehensible whole. Riffaterre sums this up:

La difficulté même qui a fait renâcler le lecteur est précisément ce qui lui donne une prise pour comprendre. Autrement dit, l'obscurité à laquelle on s'attend en poésie est aussi l'agent de son élucidation.³⁴

One need hardly say that this is true of Perec's text once we have committed ourselves to playing the game after the provocation and frustration of our expectations.

Mimesis also functions necessarily as a background to understanding the text because all language necessarily starts from our being able to understand it as a reference to something else - a point Hamon exploits when speaking of description as a work of recognition. But Perec and, according to Riffaterre, poets, use this necessity as a launching pad to demand of the reader a more complex understanding of the use of language. This has the consequence of placing the responsibility for the initial mimetic referentiality in the hands of the reader and not in the text, for the text has not simply been written to relay facts to the reader, there are complementary considerations and this is another way in which the text can effectively deny explicit reference to external reality.

Riffaterre continues in the quotation above by saying that a 'déplacement' is necessary to understand fully the text. Perec makes this explicit by his use of the puzzle metaphor, and the difficulty of fitting the pieces together. This is set out on p.415 and the warning ends by reference to Robert Scipion's crossword clue 'du vieux avec du neuf':

tout le travail consistait à faire opérer ce
déplacement qui donne à la pièce, à la définition,
son **sens** (p.416)

The reference to the crossword clue brings the application of the 'déplacement' from its first application to the puzzle into the verbal sphere. The notion of 'altération' is also included in this, as a consequence of the polymimesis, the polyreferentiality of the sign, the word, that an intertextual reading (and a crossword clue) demands. Riffaterre's implication that apparent nonsense can be made sense of, given 'signifiante', by this means, is something that we have already seen demonstrated by Perec when he takes the nonsense spoken by Panurge and gives it function as a ritual incantation summoning the devil on behalf of Ingeborg Skrifter (p.387.)

The creation of sense from spatial textual organization is illustrated by the list of some of the words, given in dictionary form, that Cinoc has killed off (p.364-6.) These are words that, we have been told, no longer have any meaning in the modern world - their referent has disappeared - and the fact that they are given to us in the form of dictionary entries reincorporates them into making sense. Were they to be included baldly in the narrative we could not make sense of them as they no longer have sense, therefore the only way to make sense of them is to give their dictionary definition. The spatial textual organization is therefore an essential factor in their recuperation into sense-making structures.

The fact that Perec's text illustrates these properties of the poetic text is not to say that Perec's text is poetry. Rather, it is to say that his text makes the same demands on the reader as a poem may make and that the reader is obliged to read it in this way. This fits in to the wider aspect of the novel where many different forms of discourse are included - letters, D-I-Y catalogues and so on - and which all require different reading strategies. La Vie mode d'emploi could be retitled in translation 'Life a reader's manual', asking of us as it does so many different reading strategies.

In the specific case of the word-lists we are offered at least two possibilities, as we have seen: to read them as hyperrealism where we are invited and provoked to lift off from the text into imagination, and to read them as poetic integers. The first provokes the reader's imagination and asks him to look at the world presented to him by the text in a new way. The second provokes the reader to attempt to unify the disparate elements he *has before him*. *The first allows the bomb to go off, the second attempts to defuse it (and to retain the lessons learned from this process) though the two are not mutually exclusive.*

There are still problems to be met in this second method: the problem of determining the beginning and ending of such integers, the problem of deciding whether there are necessary connections in a word-list as there are in a poem, and a larger problem of intertextuality and cliché, which is not specific to the word-lists.

Let us begin with the problem of necessary connections, for it is here that the double status, the double problematic of the word-list as, perhaps, both description and poetry makes itself felt. Riffaterre says of poetry:

Ce doit... être une séquence de détails motivés,
chevillant description et symbolisme de manière serrée
en un monument verbal au sein duquel on ne saurait

changer un mot ou faire une substitution de synonymes
sans détruire l'ensemble.³⁵

The balance between the two functions - the self-containedness of poetry and the contextuality of the novel (evident as linearity in a linear narrative, and as inter- and metatextuality in VME) - is not held constant in VME because of the variety of the lists. The motivation of the details comes initially from the lists of elements to be included, but in the text that we read we assume the motivation of the details to be determined by the metatextual play.

David Marcia's motorcycles

If we take the example of David Marcia's motorcycles, we see that there is some psychological recuperation of objects to a character's mental state (a supplementary motivation for the detail rather than an exclusive one) because it is suggested that there is a link between his emotional state and the size of the motorcycle:

Quoi qu'il en soit, la cicatrisation sentimentale de
David Marcia peut se mesurer à l'augmentation de la
cylindrée de ses machines (p.402)

which is linked with the fact that Caroline Echard left him and his Suzuki 125 for a certain Bernard Gourguechon and his Norton 250. The structure of the list depends therefore on the numerical increase of the numbers following the words rather than the words themselves; its organization, then, is not entirely verbal. The important thing is that a 350 is bigger than a 250, rather than that there is a difference between a Yamaha and a Kawasaki.

The list reads:

Yamaha 250, Kawasaki 350, Honda 450, Kawasaki Mach III
500, Honda 750 à quatre cylindres, Guzzi 750, Suzuki 750
avec radiateur à eau, BSA A75 750, Laverda SF 750, BMW
900, Kawasaki 1000. (p.402)

Although the organization of the text gives it its significance - as Bellamy remarks:

Ainsi une liste peut être à la fois dérive lexicale ludique et instance d'une économie narrative³⁶

the listing of the increase of cylindrical capacity, the content of the text, has another role that is lexically ludic - the introduction of 'non-literary' language, of terms with no SPECIFIC referent, being brand names, (or professions, or items on a menu,) and Perec also shows us that for this type of reference it is not necessary to have a word, an abbreviation will do - BSA, BMW - thus pointing out the connivence between reader and writer that is necessary to make sense of a text, especially when that text is not entirely verbal, and that a meaningful sign in a novel does not have to be a word - the precise role of those four balls of wool arranged in a square on p.182 remains problematic, however.

Each motorcycle is one of a group of identical motorcycles, one of a series, and has no individual identity - we are not told the colour or distinguishing marks of any of these motorcycles, we are only given their model. There is an illusion of precision which comes from the technical connotations of the names, but this is only an illusion, for as soon as we try to imagine one of these motorcycles, we find we are obliged to start making up these details for ourselves - an example, perhaps, (and suggested by 'Mach III' and 'SF') of hyperrealism, where our imagination is called on to launch us into imaginative hyperspace.

The fact that this list has no necessary internal verbal connections (bearing in mind the numerical structure) does not mean that there are no internal connections at all - on the contrary, in VME, juxtaposition is an important means of connection, as in a jigsaw puzzle, where you juxtapose to connect, and juxtaposition has the advantage of being changeable. In the same way as we are invited to juxtapose the Chapters of the book to make different connections so we can juxtapose the elements in

this particular list to make different connections - we could put the three Kawasakis next to each other, and make the last bike a Honda 1000 and so on. This makes the reading of the text a game not only for making sense of the text but also for the sake of trying all possible combinations offered. This is the same distinction as between the hyperreal and the poetic way of reading the lists - the one continues the game, the other tries to pin it down.

The nature of the 'words' used also contributes to this; because they are brand names, explicitly conventions (pointing out, then, that all language is also convention) the individual units, in the given context, are interchangeable, so long as each successive bike has more c.c. than the last. The brand names are bland words, devoid of connotative value (except for the connoisseur, but we have already seen how an antique dealer might read Madame Marcia's boutique differently, and VME depends, in effect, as we have said, on its reader not being an expert in too many fields, so that he can be easily seduced into the game.) They are foreign, strange words, and they belong to a kind of international, untranslatable, linguistic limbo - Perec points out that there is no necessary connection between word and referent either, and that different types of noun refer in different ways.

The list of advertising hoardings decorating a restaurant on p.505 is an extreme example of this - the hoardings are displaced, everything about them is off-centre from their primary purpose: no longer on billboards but surrounding diners, their function is now not to advertize but to decorate, and their essential absurdity and elision is pointed out, for the English reader, at least - 'Grove's Bromoquinine stops cold' - stops what cold, we might ask. Announcements in capital letters that cry out for attention have lost all stability as signifiers. Perec's text maintains the capital letters and the shouting competes only with itself. Another factor is the loss of their accompanying photographs

causing part of this loss of stability - readers of VME lose the photograph, or the visual aid, too, when Valène's painting turns out to be a few lines on a page, but can be reassured by the fact that Bartlebooth reconstructed his puzzles without looking at the picture.

Perec undermines reference to primary reality again, and also makes us stop to think about the language we see all around us every day. One of the questions we might ask is - how does it get meaning? Riffaterre comments:

Car ce n'est pas dans l'auteur, comme les critiques l'ont longtemps cru, ni dans le texte isolé que se trouve le lieu du phénomène littéraire, mais c'est dans une dialectique entre le texte et le lecteur.³⁷

We 'realize' the meaning. This reminds us of Perec's insistence on the game between the text and the reader; in the case of this type of list these brand names offer next to nothing in terms of normal verbal significance, and so we are obliged to go looking for something else to make sense of them. As group nouns, in the case of the motorcycles, describing a group of which they are also the substantive nouns they resist referential explication.

We have already seen how every text depends on the illusion of referentiality in order to hook the reader into making sense of it and VME is no exception. In our topos of the double function, the text refers to external reality while at the same time denying this reference to external reality, the text names while at the same time denying that it names, and the text describes while at the same time denying that it describes. The word-list plays a role in these functions, indeed it conveys them: it appears to name any number of objects but the effect of this is to cause us to wander off into the 'chemins qui ont été ménagés' for our imagination, and it appears to describe as a unit when in fact the elements of the unit can be moved around to construct a different ensemble, an ensemble that will affect the elements in a different

way, and it allows us to experience the referential instability of much language.

Hamon and description

If we are to say that the word-list describes while at the same time not really describing then we should examine further the characteristics of description to see how this particular paradox might be explained. Philippe Hamon's book, Introduction à l'Analyse du Descriptif, can serve as a catalyst in this field. In his introduction he surveys the remarks of critics through the centuries and identifies description as the site of a triple danger in their eyes:

- a) elle risque d'introduire dans le texte des vocabulaires 'étrangers', et notamment le lexique spécialisé des diverses professions qui s'occupent de l'objet décrit, donc d'introduire la trace du **travail** dans le texte littéraire... D'où de surcroît un problème de lisibilité;
- b) devenant fin et non pas moyen, la description, par son inflation même, risque de compromettre soit l'efficacité de la démonstration... soit...l'unité globale de l'oeuvre. Le terme de 'morceau'... ou le terme de 'détail' ont toujours une forte charge négative...
- c) la liberté incontrôlable du descriptif (son signe emblématique pourrait être le 'etc.' infini) peut aller de pair avec une impossibilité de contrôler les réactions du lecteur... ce lecteur qui a alors la possibilité de s'absenter du texte, de le 'sauter'...

Before we move on to Hamon's remarks about this, we shall note that Perec almost systematically breaks all the rules of this conception of the role of description - he willingly introduces the world of work, delineates beginnings and endings to 'morceaux', often through typography, and willingly gives the reader rein to do whatever he likes with the text, setting up his own fictional conditions and vraisemblance. The D-I-Y catalogue (pp.102-6) is an extreme example of this, and functions as a warning to the reader not to expect anything conventional about VME.

This is what Hamon says about the propriety of these ancient critics:

Tout le discours normatif classique sur la description passera, plus ou moins explicitement selon les époques, par la mise au point de batterie de règles et de préceptes destinés à conjurer ces trois dangers. Cette normativité est présumée, on le voit, à la fois par une conception de l'oeuvre (qui ne doit pas être agrégat instable de 'morceaux' ou de 'détails'), par une conception de la communication (qui doit être efficace, finalisée et contrôlée) et par une conception de la langue (médium à la fois transparent et neutralisé qui doit exclure les idiolectes trop spécialisés des lexiques du travail); aussi, ajoutons-le, par une conception de l'homme (donc des 'personnages') qui doit rester le centre de l'oeuvre.³⁹

None of these 'conceptions de l'oeuvre' sit easily with VME, as we might expect. Perec's constant invitation to the reader to take part in the games that help to construct signification in his work means that the communication cannot be finalized and controlled. And the conception of 'literary' language is so expanded by Perec as almost to lose any meaning - if it's in a novel like this then it's literary, is the implication.

Hamon puts forward some different views on what constitutes description and concentrates on two main areas that have particular reference to the word-list. The first, quite simply, is his view that:

On pourra donc dire que l'énoncé descriptif privilégiera les opérations de la grammaire et de la syntaxe qui permettent à la fois la récursivité infinie d'une même unité, ou d'un même syntagme... et à la fois d'économiser, par la parataxe et la juxtaposition, le maximum de matériel à investissement narratif (les verbes 'pleins' par exemple); d'où cet 'effet de liste' qui est le trait fondamental du descriptif⁴⁰ (my emphasis)

and the second is his argument concerning the competition between the writer and the reader, and he writes:

Appel à la compétence lexicale et encyclopédique du lecteur, la description est, plus exactement, une compétition de compétences.⁴¹

Didacticism

Hamon also warns:

L'appel à la compétence lexicale, à la connaissance des mots, se confond, souvent, avec l'appel à la connaissance du monde⁴²

and this would be certainly be true of texts to which, in Barthes' definition, the following applies:

Le réalisme (entendons par là tout discours qui accepte des énonciations créditées par le seul référent)⁴³

and which make the attempt to be transparent filters of realities external to the text. We know that Perec's text is not like this, and we can, with some confidence, change Hamon's general warning to a specific warning about VME and say that the appeal to lexical competence is always an appeal to our knowledge of words in VME. This is a consequence of the avoidance of reference to external reality but, combined with the list form, gives a strong didactic impression. Even the title 'mode d'emploi' suggests that we are going to learn something useful reading the novel, notwithstanding its mainly ironic force.

Hamon argues that description can be didactic and points out that in traditional texts there are certain types of characters who give authority to the lesson - the old salt who has seen it all, the doctor, the explorer - and certain types of characters who listen to their informative descriptions - the young, the ignorant, the traveller. He says:

Toute description a toujours quelque chose d'une leçon de choses⁴⁴

in these transparent texts. And explains the system:

un statut de lecteur enseigné par un descripteur enseignant (spécialiste des mots, d'un lexique, des choses, donc possédant un savoir plus élevé), lecteur occupant le poste de 'moins-savant' dans une communication de type pédagogique et didactique.⁴⁵

livre' (p.202), strongly suggesting that it is the book that determines the contents of the cellar and not the contents of the cellar that determine the content of the book. Moreover, the reader of VME might take this phrase as a 'marque' signalling a quotation from another text.

Ewa Pawlikowska's article 'Dossiers Georges Perec'⁴⁶, where she gives the references for the quotations to be found in the book, reveals that the programmed quotations for this passage are from Perec's copies of Kafka's La Muraille de Chine et autres récits, and Mann's La Montagne Magique. The sections she quotes, unfortunately, do not correspond to the passage following 'gérée par un livre', but the effect is still to make us read the passage more closely. It provides its own hierarchization and invites comparison with other passages.

The reading becomes not so much didactic as hermeneutic - that is, we are not told, but are asked to find out. And what we learn comes from other fictions. Perec says to Jean-Marie Le Sidaner:

le texte n'est pas producteur de savoir, mais producteur de fiction, de fiction de savoir, de savoir-fiction. Quand je dis que je voudrais que mes textes soit informés par les savoirs contemporains comme les romans de Jules Verne le furent par la science de son époque, cela veut dire que je voudrais qu'ils interviennent dans l'élaboration de mes fictions, non pas en tant que vérité, mais en tant que matériel, ou machinerie, de l'imaginaire.⁴⁷

We may learn about fictions, but what we learn will also be fictional - there are always traps to fall into if we insist on seeking 'truth' when reading VME. There is a minefield of destabilization of the narrative to contend with - the conceit of the painting, the insistent fictionality, the facsimiles of cards, the word-lists, the various typographical figures. The solution to this destabilization lies with the reader's constructions - Perec's reference to the machinery of the imaginary applies equally to his constraint-based composition method and the game-based reading method.

This is one of the areas where VME differs from the topos of description put forward by Hamon. He writes, talking of the different demands made on the reader as 'descriptaire' rather than 'narrataire':

De plus, il (le système descriptif) fait peut-être appel à une 'mémoire' différente: mémoire des stocks lexicaux **in absentia** à reconnaître (quand Zola décrit une maison je m'attends à retrouver un certain nombre de termes architecturaux) plutôt qu'à **comprendre**, compétence lexicale à vérifier plutôt qu'à modifier.⁴⁸

We have seen that reading a word-list in VME is not just a matter of recognizing the words but also a matter of using imagination. If we are obliged to look a word up in a dictionary, this is not so much a question of coming to terms with Perec's apparently inexhaustible supply of vocabulary and verbal invention, as a means of expanding our understanding of the text and of the use of reference to other verbal constructs. That is, we do not meet it at its own level, as mere recognition of the terms would imply, but, rather, we are invited to examine the other levels of the text, metatext, self-reference. The text is, after all, a mode d'emploi and not merely a vehicle for imparting information - the teacher/writer does not just write on the blackboard as repository of all knowledge, but engages us in a debate where he is merely the prompter.

This is the same mechanism that we saw in Riffaterre's article of the apparent difficulty of the text in fact being central to the understanding of it; the initial obscurity leading eventually to a brighter light at the end of the tunnel. The problem of reading becomes an integral part of the reading, the initial 'illisibilité' revealing a greater 'lisibilité'.

Hamon continues:

D'où la possibilité de supposer que le descriptif crée un statut de lecteur (le descriptaire) particulier, lecteur dont l'activité est plus rétrospective que prospective⁴⁹

but we have seen that in VME the reader is invited to go in many directions, the status of the reader being in fact what we might call 'autaire', the partner of the writer. It is this lack of linearity, this freedom of the reader that means that VME does not allow of the short-term versus long-term memory distinction that Hamon suggests. He argues that reading descriptions requires the use of short-term memory while reading narratives requires long-term memory to remember what has happened all those pages ago, whereas in VME both types of memory are constantly being called on through the play of metatextuality as we move forward and backward across the relational fabric of the text, and the memory of other books is also inspired by the 'impli-citations' of the intertextuality.

Hierarchization

Another facet of the descriptive that Hamon suggests is the recognition of hierarchies, and he argues that a description of a house which involves the terms 'roof', 'chimney' and so on, will ask the reader to put these terms into a hierarchy, to see 'roof' and 'chimney' as integrated into the house and not as integrating the description, and that the description puts these subordinate terms on the same footing:

tout système descriptif, qui est réticulation d'un champ lexical, fait appel aux deux notions sémantiques clés de **hiérarchie** et d'**équivalence**: hiérarchie entre terme intégré et terme intégrant; équivalence entre un terme syncrétique global (maison) et une série de termes, qui peuvent, dans certaines conditions textuelles (métonymies, synécdoques), permuter. Toute description fait donc appel à la compétence du lecteur à classer, à reconnaître, à hiérarchiser, à actualiser des stocks d'items lexicaux.⁵⁰

If these are the characteristics of description, then the word-lists in VME cannot be said to describe. The reader is not asked to hierarchize the lists, as we have seen, because the text is presented as juxtapositions (from the puzzle metaphor) thus denying the distinction between integrated and integrating terms.

We saw in our discussion of Chapter XXIX that the integrating term of the description (if it is one) of the aftermath of the party was 'images classiques'. These were the words that guided and enclosed our response to the list, asking for our imagination and setting the limits within which the description would function (there would be no surprises apart from the normal, the classic ones.) The rest of the list, therefore, was not subject to the hierarchy of one integrating term, and each item functions as an equivalent to the next, or the last.

The list form - where there is no externally imposed organizing structure, such as alphabetic order - contributes to deny this hierarchisation, and this is one area where Hamon is not as precise as he might be. He uses the term 'effet de liste' to describe the non-narrative effect of a description, and acknowledges that it can sometimes have an 'effet sidérant'. However, it is possible to distinguish between a list, in its 'état brut' and the 'effet de liste'. The 'état brut' of the list lacks certain important pointers and indicators that also play a vital role in the construction of the description and in limiting the 'effet sidérant' of the bald list.

Perec's descriptions of a room rarely provide a good example of what we might call a nineteenth century linear novel description, since, as we have seen, the text very often starts to talk of the cover of a book, a painting, a photograph, etc. Let us take an example from Madame Bovary instead. This is the beginning of the description of Charles' house given when Emma, newly-married, arrives, and is invited at the end of the previous Chapter 'à prendre connaissance de sa maison' while dinner is prepared:

La façade de briques était juste à l'alignement de la rue, ou de la route plutôt. Derrière la porte se trouvaient accrochés un manteau à petit collet, une bride, une casquette de cuir noir, et dans un coin, à terre, une paire de housseaux encore couverts de boue sèche. A droite était la salle, c'est-à-dire l'appartement où l'on mangeait et où l'on se tenait.⁵¹

The 'effet de liste' is present with the three things hanging behind the door, but is controlled by Flaubert because there are a limited number of things, in all vraisemblance (a condition that Perec largely redefines in VME with his insistence on the fictionality of the text) that can hang on a door. 'Dans un coin, à terre' is not as spatially specific as the next indicator 'à droite' which fixes our perspective on the room. The importance of the indicators, however, is that they break the 'état brut' of a list and constrain the viewpoint of the reader. Perec's use of such indicators is different - we saw in Chapter XXIX that the words 'çà et là traînent' and 'un peu plus loin' were no help in either situating the viewpoint of the reader nor situating the objects that were located there - a technique similar to Robbe-Grillet's unhelpful use of time indicators in Dans le Labyrinthe, for instance.

The absence of these indicators in the list, or their use to broaden and delocalize the list, in no way limits the description, and enhances the demand for imagination. In the case of Flaubert's description, the viewpoint is deliberately limited, perhaps so that we notice the reference to the 'casquette' that reminds us of Charles' school cap, so that we notice the muddy boots telling us that this is not a sophisticated menage, so that we notice that both the description and the house begin with a façade.

The mention of Charles' cap reminds us that Flaubert does employ an 'effet de sidération' in the description of the cap that leaves the reader with an object impossible to visualize, and we would not want to suggest that this effect can only come about through the use of the word-list. Nor would we want to imply that Flaubert limited his descriptive technique to this degree of simplicity. The very title of Jonathan Culler's book on Flaubert, The Uses of Uncertainty, suggests other possibilities and Ricardou has asked:

Qui de moins réaliste, en somme, que Flaubert?⁵²

But the important thing, in this instance, at least, is that these indicators limit the 'effet de liste', and when the 'effet de liste' is limited it loses all possibility of 'sidération' and hyperrealism. Flaubert's intention is, of course, specific - we are being invited to see the room from Emma's viewpoint and to compare it with her romantic notions of the state of marriage - and so the description is thematically recuperated into the narrative, unlike, say, *Machinerie de l'ascenseur II*, which is a list in all 'sidérant' glory.

Redefinition of priorities

Bernard Magné has noted the inversion of normal hierarchies that Perec gives us:

beaucoup de tableaux de la Vie mode d'emploi ont un statut exactement symétrique de celui que Philippe Hamon attribue, dans le roman naturaliste, au topos descriptif de la fenêtre. Comme celle-ci, le tableau est un lieu frontière entre intérieur (l'immeuble) et extérieur (un ailleurs et/ou un autrefois.) Mais alors que la fenêtre fonctionne comme 'signal introductif d'une description', le tableau, à l'inverse, fonctionne comme signal introductif d'un récit, ce qui est parfaitement conforme à une grammaire narrative qui renverse la hiérarchie traditionnelle ou la description est soumise à la narration.⁵³

Perec's narrative grammar, and his descriptive grammar, are indeed entirely different, and one of their features is that they throw up the problems of their own nature. The word-lists, even if they give the appearance of describing and describing accurately, in fact play a second role, in that they point out the difficulties of description - Josipovici remarks of the 'polygraphe du cavalier d'ordre dix':

One of the interesting things about Perec's novel is that it is an exploration of the implications₅ of such procedures as well as an example of them⁵⁴

and the same is true of the word-list.

The word-list therefore interrogates itself at the same time as interrogating the notions of description, representation, hierarchy, order and grammar. We have also seen that the list carries in itself the possibility of a double function, of holding in balance a contradiction. A stark example of this is the fact that word-lists both describe and do not describe. That is, that in the conventional novelistic sense of description furthering the narrative, supplying psychological insights into the characters and their motivations and being a guarantor of realism, the word-lists in VME do not describe. Yet, at the same time they enable the reader to build vivid images of rooms in the house; a different type of descriptive topos is at work. Michal Mrozowicki has written:

Jean Ricardou, dans Le Nouveau Roman, a divisé les écrivains en deux groupes: ceux de l'euphorie diégétique, qui, comme Homère, multiplient les actions à l'intérieur des descriptions, et ceux de la contestation diégétique, qui, comme les Nouveaux Romanciers, multiplient les descriptions à l'intérieur des actions. Comment pourrait-on classer Perec, auteur de VME? Ou bien dans aucun de ces groupes, ou bien dans les deux. Ceci résulte de la fonction double de la description dans cette oeuvre, description, qui, loin d'être 'ancilla narrationis' dans VME, y règne au contraire incontestablement. Tout en enlisant, ou même en anéantissant le récit premier, la description dans VME engendre les récits analeptiques. Son rôle, sa position envers le(s) récit(s) est, par conséquent, très équivoque. Elle est destructive et constructive à la fois.⁵⁵

Description is problematized but the text still describes. Sidestepping the primary reference to reality, Perec exploits his word-lists to make appeals either to other verbal constructs in his and other texts, or to the reader's imagination, in an explicit way. What appears to be an anti-representative manoeuvre, and in many ways is, since it problematizes representation and perception, turns out also to be a way of creating coherent images in a reader's imagination from unhierarchized information.

A further double function is that lists are an example of text generated - by the cellar book, for example - and are also a way of generating more text and more textual understanding through the network of inter-relation and intertextuality. This is one of the cornerstones of the book, and the word-list, by throwing up problems of description and representation forces us to look more closely at the stories and descriptions and this is always rewarded by discovering things relating to each other within the self-contained world of VME. Overall narrative coherence is not established by the coherence of a dominant story - 'le récit premier' - but by the network of interrelations; no hierarchization of narration and description is implied. Mrozowicki remarks:

D'habitude c'est le récit qui assure la cohérence du texte... Cette situation dans VME est renversée. Ce n'est plus le récit qui assure la cohérence du texte. Le rôle du récit premier, anéanti, ou en tout cas enlisé, durant 600 pages est très insignifiant⁵⁶

because it is the descriptions that ensure the coherence. We might almost say that, because of the network of metatextuality, each word in VME is as important as every other.

Ricardou says:

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.⁵⁷

Perec turns these around - his stories fragment his narrative, they only have internal coherence. His descriptions unify his narrative by providing its global coherence, the role of description is no longer to illustrate but to tell the story of the way the building, the lives of the people in the building and the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

This still leaves us with the problem that, once these positions of description and narration have been redefined, the process of infinite fragmentation is arrested. So the next problem for us to

consider is the ending of the lists. We have mentioned above that it is perhaps possible to take a list as a unit and then reintegrate it into the text having made sense of it - although it is much more rewarding to see the list in its novelistic context - and we shall examine the endings of the lists as a way of revealing the implications of the necessary delimitations that bring a list to an end.

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CHAPTER SIX

Endings

One of the main difficulties of description in general, and of the word-list in particular, is the problem of closure. The realist convention of *vraisemblance* dictates that description be seen to translate the world, but does not dictate how much of the world should be seen. A truly realist description, if such a thing were possible, would be all-inclusive and three dimensional. In this examination of how Perec ends his lists we shall see how, by denying inclusivity, by denying that everything can be said, he points out the choices made when a word-list is ended. We shall approach this through the use of 'etc.', a sign not traditionally found in a novel, and a sign that points out the presence of a narrator and/or an author.

We have seen that VME redefines the position of description and narration that is conventionally found in a novel by refusing hierarchizations. This has the consequence that each word, or sign, is seen as equally important as any other. This demonstrates Ricardou's comment:

la leçon du jugement flaubertien, selon lequel, *en art*,
il n'y a pas de minuties¹

and he continues:

En fait, les minuties descriptives découlent, non pas d'une manière de voir, mais d'une façon d'écrire. Elles proviennent de la pratique descriptive, en laquelle l'écrivain subit une tentation permanente: celle de toujours descendre, jusqu'aux microscopies, l'arbre logique de la description. Le problème est donc double: saisir d'une part le mécanisme qui suscite cette descente, d'autre part le mécanisme qui en assure le freinage et l'arrêt.²

The list would seem to be a good example of the logical tree of description and we remember the things in the containers within containers of Chapter XXIX, and the 'tables gigognes'. Bellamy remarks:

Le texte listique gère des unités ayant souvent perdu toute spécificité conceptuelle et pouvant chacune être soustraite du texte sans attenter à celui-ci (d'où la question de savoir pourquoi une liste littéraire à telle longueur, pourquoi elle s'arrête à tel moment...)³

and although we cannot agree that a list could be removed from a text without damaging the text, the problem is to account for why, once signifiers have been destabilised, once questions of representation have been asked, once a static text has been established (all effects of the word-list, as we have seen), a list should end where it does. Such is the concern of this chapter.

Hamon writes:

Quand je commence à lire une description de maison par Balzac, ou une description de figue par Ponge, ou une description de jardin par Zola, rien ne peut laisser prévoir la fin de cette description, puisque cette fin dépend du stock lexical disponible de l'auteur, stock lexical qui risque d'être beaucoup plus étendu que le mien. En cela le signe emblématique du descriptif paraît être, nous l'avons déjà noté, le 'etc'⁴ qui clôture, sans la clôturer, toute énumération.

This notion of closing without closing sits perfectly with one of the global features of VME - the double function of solving problems and falling into traps, where there is masque and marque, where the lists describe while not describing. Description opens limitless horizons, and we have seen how Flaubert, for instance, controls them by indicators of location, and it hardly needs to be said that the demands of the narrative also impose limits. Perec, however, does away with both these concerns, as the word-list testifies, and as Magné explained when he told us that Perec inverts the traditional narrative grammar.

Hamon states too strongly, perhaps, that the available vocabulary of the author is the only reason for a description or an enumeration to come to an end. Barthes offers a second reason for closing a description:

Si elle n'était pas soumise à un choix esthétique ou rhétorique, toute 'vue' serait inépuisable par le discours: il y aura toujours un coin, un détail, une inflexion d'espace ou de couleur à rappeler.⁵

The demands of the narrative can be included in these rhetorical and aesthetic choices, as can the demands of vraisemblance, realism, surrealism, hyperrealism and so on. We can therefore see two principal reasons for closing a description or a word-list - a rhetorical or aesthetic choice (which would always include the choice not to say everything) and an exhaustion of all the possible things to say.

Perec, in a passage of Penser/Classer entitled 'Les Joies Ineffables de l'Énumération', expresses this view:

Il y a dans toute énumération deux tentations contradictoires; la première est de TOUT recenser, la seconde d'oublier quelque chose; la première voudrait clôturer définitivement la question, la seconde la laisser ouverte.⁶

This is yet another double function within the text typified by the word-list - the tension between exhaustivity and open-endedness, and we have seen its effect in our discussion of hyperrealism and the 'irréel'. So we can say that when an 'etc.' closes a list, it either limits the horizons of the list, or opens them, or, both. The apparent contradiction of 'all the rest' being a limiting factor can be explained by the refusal to continue that it represents and we might also add that the 'all the rest' referred to strongly points to the metatextuality of the work so that 'etc.' becomes the emblematic sign of VME's metatextuality.

Etcetera

Let us turn to the text. In VME, there are at least seventy two instances of 'etc.'. Of course, not all these 'etc.'s come at the end of lists; on p.386 we find the following:

Ingeborg traduisait en phrases sibyllines émises d'une voix sifflante et étranglée:

"J'ai franchi les mers. Je suis dans une ville centrale, au pied d'un volcan. Je vois l'homme dans sa chambre; il écrit,... ...Il se lève; il est une heure sur la pendule qui orne sa cheminée, etc."

The 'etc.' within the inverted commas has a subversive effect - it underlines the fact that this is a reported speech, underlines the fact that it has been written and does not merely transcribe the words of someone (which is an impossibility in a novel as highly-layered and fictionalized as VME, hence perhaps the almost complete absence of dialogue, which would be overly referential.) It also focuses attention on the 'etc.' and invites us to consider its other uses.

Perec remarks, in a footnote, in Penser/Classer, of the 'etc.' in Borges' list of animals, that we quoted in an earlier chapter:

cet 'etc.' n' a rien de surprenant en soi; c'est
seulement sa place dans la liste qui le rend curieux⁷

and the same is true of his own use of 'etc.' here. In VME, once something is rendered curious, there are things to be discovered. Not all the lists end with 'etc.', but the use of the abbreviation focuses us on the problem of closure more clearly, and this problem is general to word-lists, and we shall see that some of the conclusions we come to after studying the use of 'etc.' at the end of lists will also apply to lists without an 'etc.' at the end.

Perec writes in 'Notes concernant les objets qui sont sur ma table de travail':

Rien ne semble plus simple que de dresser une liste, en fait, c'est beaucoup plus compliqué que ça n'en a l'air: on oublie toujours quelque chose, on est tenté d'écrire etc., mais, justement, un inventaire c'est quand on n'écrit pas etc.⁸

This testifies to the inevitable failure of the attempt at exhaustivity. Another reason why the word-lists cannot be said to

be inventories is that inventories imply transparenence between the things described and the words describing them, and, as we stress repeatedly, Perec's text denies this primary link to the external world - and we shall see later that the closure of the lists generally comes from a rhetorical choice, and therefore denies completeness.

Hutting's materials etc.

To take an example from the text, let us look at the list of Hutting's painting materials:

Tout son matériel - tubes, godets, brosses, couteaux, craies, chiffons, vaporisateurs, grattoirs, plumes éponges, etc. - est soigneusement rangé dans une longue casse d'imprimeur... (p.350)

The mention of 'tout son matériel' emphasises the fact that the list is limited, and that what we are given is a selection and justifies the 'etc.' by pointing out the rest that there is to be described. We note in passing the little joke of the knives cut over two lines, reminding us of 'enta-més' (Chapter XXIX, p.173), and note also the recurrence of 'soigneusement' echoing back to that same Chapter XXIX. The effect of 'soigneusement' here is to ask us to search for a hidden order in the list, and to contrast with the apparently random organization of the list. It also suggests that, while these things have been put into order by the artist, the transcription of them in the text has also been put into order, put into a 'longue casse d'imprimeur', and once printed, they come out like this.

This is a classic use of 'etc.' to limit the length of the list and to close off the description, with, perhaps, after the mention of 'tout son matériel', the implication that it would be 'fastidieux et inutile' to continue. This is more strongly suggested where we are told that Réol's job is writing insurance reports:

(assurances souscrites auprès des agriculteurs, des commerçants, des professions libérales, etc, dans le Centre-Ouest, dans la région Rhône-Alpes, en Bretagne, etc.) (p.587/8)

Here, a sample is given, one which appears to be sufficient, and the other geographically wide, and there seems to be no reason to continue, once the beginning of a longer list has been started; and we do not need much imagination to know how it continues.

An 'etc.' is also used to cut off lists of clichés. Once again, the Réols can give an example of this. They are forced to work at all sorts of jobs to try to pay off the debt they incur when they buy their new bedroom, and although Perec says this is the only happy story in the book, the couple suffer a lot before their happy ending and he suggests that the husband will run off with Caroline Echard later in his life, so perhaps the story has a happy ending, but the couple do not. One of the jobs that Mme. Réol takes is that of 'marchande de cigarettes et d'articles de Paris' and these are listed:

(cendriers, foulards avec la Tour Eiffel et le Moulin Rouge, petites poupées french-cancan, briquets lampadaires marqués 'Rue de la Paix', Sacré-Coeur enneigés, etc.) (p.591)

Once the banality of these articles is established, the 'etc.' intervenes to save us further torment.

Olivia Rorschach's films

The most extreme example of this is the 'etc.' that cuts off the list of Mme. Rorschach's tourist films, where, in her younger days as Olivia Norvell, she has played the role of a young American girl of good standing and full of good will experiencing all there is to experience about the world (for a young American girl of good standing and full of good will):

allant faire du ski nautique aux Everglades, se bronzant aux Bahamas, aux Caraïbes ou aux Canaries, se déchaînant au Carnaval de Rio, acclamant les toreros à Barcelone, se cultivant à l'Escorial, se recueillant au

Vatican, sablant le champagne au **Moulin Rouge**, buvant de la bière à l'**Oktoberfest** de Munich, etc., etc., etc.
(p.485)

And the truly horrific thing is the films, and the fact that we are told there are at least fifty-eight, no, fifty-nine of them, which justifies the three 'etc.'s, that also point out the almost interminable boredom of the films - the fifty-eighth is called 'l'Inoubliable Vienne', for example, and the three 'etc.'s help to ask us to imagine how bad, how unforgettably bad, that film might be, and to be thankful that Perec has not listed the forty-five other titles. The 'etc.'s spare the reader and strongly suggest, not altogether seriously, that there are some things that just cannot be written in a novel. This has the more serious consequence of sidelining questions of whether the lists are boring are not, because in this case a list that would be boring, or that the text suggests would be boring, is cut off by an 'etc.', as with the lists of the regions of France just beforehand.

Rémi's blotters

This principle of the sufficient sample, albeit a larger sample than most novelists would give, and an expansion of it, can also be seen in the lists of journals. The reviews from which young Rémi Plassaert gets his blotters are listed as:

dans les revues spécialisées **La Presse médicale, La Gazette médicale, La Tribune médicale, La Semaine médicale, La Semaine des Hôpitaux, La Semaine du Médecin, Le Journal du Médecin, Le Quotidien du Médecin, Les Feuilles du Praticien, Aesculape, Caeduceus**, etc.
(p.255)

The variation on a limited, or specialised, theme is established and we do not need to be told of the journals 'La Gazette du Médecin', 'Le Quotidien médical' and so on, as a game of permutations is established. The word play on 'quotidien' as daily and as newspaper maintains the verbalness of the text and the analogy between Caeduceus and 'caduc' implies the uselessness

of continuing. In this way, the possibility of its being exhaustive is sidestepped by the implication of a limited variation on a theme. This list cannot be said to be describing anything, or anything more than the lack of imagination in the titles of medical journals, in which case it would describe itself. A list is not obliged to describe, despite what Hamon's remark about the 'effet de liste' being a fundamental trait of description would imply.

Geneviève Foulerot's work clothes

Sometimes, however, as with 'tout son matériel' before the list of Hutting's materials, Perec gives a generic indication before the list. On p.246 we read that Geneviève Foulerot's work as a model involves being dressed and photographed:

dans une multitude de vêtements de travail de toute nature: blouses d'infirmière, de vendeuse, d'institutrice, survêtements de professeur de gymnastique, tabliers de serveuse de restaurant, vestes de bouchère, cottes à bretelles, combinaisons, blousons, vareuses, etc. (p.246)

'Une multitude de vêtements de travail de toute nature' gives us the subject of the description that follows. 'Multitude' justifies 'and the rest', because a multitude should really include more than ten elements, and 'de toute nature' implies the selection of the particular elements. Just as there are no necessary connections between these elements, there are no necessary reasons for the inclusion of these particular elements - the uniform for any job would fulfil the criteria. And when we examine the elements that are given, we find that they are dependent on these criteria. A gymnastics teacher's track-suit, it is suggested, is different from an ordinary track-suit, a primary school teacher's blouse different from an ordinary one. In what way, we are bound to wonder: extra elasticity? extra resistance to finger paint? So although the elements themselves have no necessary reason for being there, they serve to ask questions about the classification of professional clothes, and

make of 'de toute nature' a ruse, for, in fact, the list implies that the clothes are of a very specific nature. The 'etc.' that closes the list limits it, after the elements of the list have opened up speculation. That is, that it is not in this case the exhaustivity of the list that causes the hyperrealism, the speculation, but the strange classification that it offers to us.

Mme. Echard's bitterness

'Etc.' can function in an expansive way, asking us to fit other things into the classification (rather than asking questions about the nature of the things in the classification) and this is the case in the list on p.179 of the restrictions that Mme. Echard imposes on the life of her daughter and son-in-law:

Mais très vite son naturel acariâtre reprit le dessus
et brimades et interdictions se remirent à pleuvoir sur
le jeune couple: défense de se servir de la salle de
bains après huit heures du matin, défense d'entrer dans
la cuisine sauf pour y faire la vaisselle, défense de se
servir du téléphone, défense de recevoir, défense de
sortir après dix heures du soir, défense d'écouter la
radio, etc. (p.179)

The 'etc.' here asks us to imagine further restrictions that the young couple have to suffer, further ways in which bitterness and selfishness can manifest themselves. It serves as a way of drawing the reader emotionally into the text and implicates us into sharing the burden of the newly-weds, reinforced by the repetition of 'défense de' illustrating how fast 'son naturel acariâtre reprit le dessus'. As with the list of objects on Marguerite Winkler's desk, the list belies its neutral and flat appearance to deepen, not the amount of information that we are given, but the identifications and the emotions that we experience while reading the text.

A similar enhancing effect is present in the list of conflicts that Bartlebooth and Smautf avoid on their travels - they avoid, between 1935 and 1954, for the most part, eleven regional

conflicts and the Second World War. The 'etc.' that closes this list enhances the isolation of Bartlebooth's project - an isolation from historical reality that mirrors its isolation from referentiality. This is emphasised when we are told that on one of the two occasions that they were inconvenienced by conflicts, in Port Saïd, when a bomb exploded in their hotel:

La charge était faible et leurs malles n'en souffrirent
pratiquement pas. (p.83)

Bartlebooth and Smautf, and the rest of the novel, are as isolated as possible from the real world and 'Port Saïd' is not to be found in the Index.

Hutting's portrait project

The use of 'etc.' not only deepens our awareness of the emotional content of the text, it can also play the role of deepening our awareness of the complexity of the text. In the next example we are invited to fill in the gap that it leaves. The following list concerns Hutting's portrait project:

Soumises à divers traitements linguistiques et
numériques, l'identité et la profession de l'acheteur
déterminaient successivement le format du tableau, le
nombre de personnages, les couleurs dominantes, le 'champ
sémantique' [mythologie (2,9), fiction (22),
mathématiques (5), diplomatie (3), spectacles (19),
voyages (13), histoire (14, 17), enquête policière (7),
etc.] (p.356)

The numbers refer us back to the list on p.352-4 of the portraits that Hutting has planned (where the names of the collaborators in the Oulipo are incorporated.) Not only can we check for ourselves that the 'champ sémantique' of portrait number five is mathematics:

5 Le Comte de Bellerval (der Graf von Bellerval),
logicien allemand disciple de Lukasiewicz... (p.353)

we can also investigate and propose that the 'champ sémantique' of portrait number eleven is education -

11 R. Mutt est recalé à l'orale du bac pour avoir
soutenu que Rouget de l'Isle était l'auteur du **Chant
du Départ.** (p.353)

We have to make our own classifications, we are asked to provide our own description of the generic. A lot of the work of classification is therefore done by the reader and we have to reread the list of portraits looking for a 'champ sémantique' (a way of hiding even further the hidden names, masque and marque at the same time.) This is what Magné calls the 'double couverture'⁹ - following the principle of Ferri Le Rital whose night club hid a casino, and also hid a group of political Panarchist agitators, the first serving to deflect attention from the second (p.440-441).

Appenzzell and the Kubus

Another expansive use of 'etc.' can be found in the lists of Kubu words. In our discussion of this list earlier we emphasised its highly constructed nature: Appenzzell had destroyed his report and this information had been put together from notes. Interestingly, his findings are not presented in list form, but related more discursively, and the list is reserved for the vocabulary of the timid tribe of the Kubus. There are three 'etc.'s in the passage, and we shall concentrate on the first in order to illuminate the other two. The list comes after the sliding of sense from wondering to fact - 'il se demanda si,' becomes 'ce fait':

Une des conséquences de ce fait était qu'un même mot désignait un nombre de plus en plus grand d'objets. Ainsi **Pekee**, le mot malais désignant la chasse, voulait dire indifféremment chasser, marcher, porter, la lance, la gazelle, l'antilope, le cochon noir, le **my'am**, espèce d'épice extrêmement relevée abondamment utilisée dans la préparation d'aliments carnés, la forêt, le lendemain, l'aube, etc. (p.148)

We already know that we can find out in Moby Dick that 'Pekee' is the Fijian word for whale. There are then two 'déplacements' of sense and context at work - the quotation and the changing of the original written meaning - before the further variations given in

the list. One wonders if it is possible to read 'désignant' as 'dé-signant', taking the sign away, taking it away from its original referent and supplying it, indifferently, with ten others.

'Indifféremment' does not function as a generic indicator, but has the same role as 'multitude' in the list of Geneviève Foulerot's clothes, opening up the possible choice of elements. The 'etc.' at the end of the list is not, therefore, a closure of the list, but an example of this indifference, the proof that it is possible to go on. The same is true of the 'etc.' after the list of possible significations for 'Sinuya' (p.148), and we see that an observation about the nature of language as contextual, as indifferent to the object, as infinitely varied and as limitless in its possibilities is being made. It is the nature of language itself that makes these two lists unfinishable, and not the nature of our perception of the world or of our response to a novel.

The third 'etc.' is applied to the list of tools on the same page, precise words, words with one specific referent. The 'etc.' points out our indifference to this, which is then borne out by the fact that the only person likely to use them in fact uses the word 'machin'. In the context of the use of tools, 'guillaume' is perhaps very precise, but the word itself, this collection of nine letters in this order, has an unlimited number of referents, and again Perec throws us back to the use of the word determining its referent, and the importance of context to signification.

Cinoc's names

We find 'etc.' in this instance where there are games of language, reference and signification to play, and we also find an 'etc.' after the list of Cinoc's grandfather's cousins, in Chapter LX, where language is killed and resurrected, where names are

distorted and expanded, where words dance elusively across the page:

et Cinoc se souvenait que son père lui racontait que son
père lui parlait de cousins qu'il avait et qui
s'appelaient Klajnhoff, Keinhof, Klinov, Szinowcz,
Linhaus, etc. (p.361)

There are no infinite possibilities to be closed off here; the list could not continue 'Smith, Dupont, Garcia,' for instance, so the 'etc.' suggests a relatively limited number of possibilities with 'n' in the middle and a suitable sound to suggest the name of someone originally from Szczyrk, and reinforces the indifferent and feigned illiteracy of the Central European bureaucrats.

The second 'etc.' of the paragraph is more curious. We shall quote the context to show the growing doubts:

Comment Kleinhof était-il devenu Cinoc? Cinoc ne le
savait pas précisément; la seule chose qui était
sûre,... ..ensuite, sans doute...ou bien...et de là,
peut-etre, à Kinoch, Chinoc, Tsinoc, Cinoc, etc. (p.361)

The family name, normally so fixed, floats in doubt, develops, and becomes Cinoc. And this, for the readers of the book, (after a brief excursion to the Epilogue [p.601] where we learn that Cinoc has overcome his fear of Ellis Island and gone off to visit some relatives in the United States, one by the name of Linhaus, as above, and the other by the more complicatedly come by and unexplained name of Hallowell) is where it stops, except for the fact that 'etc.' follows the result of this development. The suggestion may be that the name goes round in circles, that obscure Jewish patrimony can never be pinned down. This parodies the relative inclusiveness of the Biblical genealogy that emphasizes tradition and shows that the Jewish tradition has been interrupted quite brutally. It is a strong reminder of the play on the instability of the signifier that we saw in the example of the motorcycles and the advertisements in the restaurant, and an even stronger reminder of the hero of Quel petit vélo, Kara——, who has some seventy different names.

The 'etc.' comes after the logical end of the list, and one way that we can recuperate it and make it coherent is to slide from spelling to pronunciation, that is, to refer back to the twenty different possible pronunciations given on p.360, and reread them as possible future developments of the name. The paragraph ends:

De toute façon, il était vraiment secondaire de tenir à
le prononcer de telle ou telle façon (p.361)

which takes us from the discussion of the spelling back to the discussion of the pronunciation and makes a link between the two, a link that is suggested by the printing of the whole word for the pronunciation but the emphasis on certain letters for the variety of names, reversing what we might expect, by emphasizing the individual sign in the name for the written and whole word for the spoken variety; and we have to assume that the decision about the pronunciation is secondary to the general discussion of the possible variations of the name. This narrative judgment is the real closure of the passage, and leads in to the verbal complexities of what comes next - the story of Cinoc's job.¹⁰

Marvel Houses International

These are some examples of 'etc.'s that expand the list, demanding our attention to contents, classification, context, the nature of language, the variety of the individual elements of language (words or letters). In other passages, there is a systematic use of 'etc.' until it becomes almost thematic. One of these, and the most blatant, is the story of MARVEL HOUSES INCORPORATED and INTERNATIONAL HOSTELLERIE. There are twelve instances of 'etc.' in the first six pages of the story.

These two firms have come together, we are told on p.517, with the intention of providing a new style of hotel tourism that will be based on:

le respect des trois valeurs fondamentales: loisir,
repos, culture (**applaudissements prolongés**) (p.317)

They decide that, because each company has twenty-four letters in its name they will set up twenty-four hotels in twenty-four different countries, and their choice of locations allows them to compose a table in which, read vertically, the names of both companies appear 'grâce à un raffinement suprême' (p.517) and illustrated in figure one on page 519. This bases the story firmly in the literary, or rather, the 'lettré', as it has its origins in a word game. There is even the required clinamen in the system as the United States have two hotels, despite their desire to situate all the hotels in different countries, and this is excused because Orlando, the site of Disneyworld, is said to be really a world unto itself.

This explanation and the 'supreme refinement' of the word game set the narrative tone of the section, which is lightly ironic throughout. The use of 'etc.'s falls within this tone as its exaggeration is a provocative jest at the scale of the project and at the imprecision that it is prey to, despite its ambition, from the very beginning. 'Etc.' was also used with this reflexive ironic function in the case of the documentaries starring Olivia Norvell.

The more serious thematic consequence of the project is that, due to Puerto Rican corporate legislation, the conglomerate is obliged to spend one per cent of its budget on contemporary artwork and so retains the art critic Beyssandre to decide how to spend this money. Beyssandre, as we know, seriously threatens the integrality of Bartlebooth's project as he decides that it is Bartlebooth's artwork that he will procure for the hotels. The story, therefore, has its own internal construction of the acrostic, and its reverberations in the wider sphere of the book. It is self-contained but it makes waves, and so reflects the structure of the whole novel, where self-referentiality is a vital part of its richness.

The project, which in its entirety aims to offer all the wonders of the modern world to its clientele by means of transport between hotels, reproductions and video cassettes, ends in failure when the bankers pull out because their money would only be paid back in six years and two months instead of the five years and three months originally foreseen, and this is the end of Beyssandre as well:

De Beyssandre nul n'eut plus jamais de ses nouvelles.
(p.531)

The dance of 'etc.'s is concentrated on pp518-22. We shall see that there are three main uses of 'etc.' in this section. The first is to emphasise the non-specificity of the world; that is, to enhance by suggestion the project of the two companies to move people and things around so that they lose their specificity in space:

ce qui sans doute constitua la véritable originalité de toute l'entreprise: la pure et simple négation de l'espace.
(p.521)

The 'etc.'s emphasise that, to these hoteliers, all things are equal so long as they can be offered to the clients.

The second is to emphasise the hypothetical status of the whole project and here the 'etc.'s serve to underline the fact that the whole project is just that, a project - it might not be these specific things that are used by the enterprising hoteliers, but these are examples of the sorts of thing that they will be exploiting. This hypotheticality is supported by two phrases in the story:

architectes et urbanistes avaient accompli, en tout cas sur le papier, de véritables miracles
(p.523)

and

Beyssandre se retrouva donc à la tête d'un budget fictif
(p.525)

where we are reminded that none of these hotels are to find their way into concrete. And the third is self-referential - to refer us back to earlier lists.

We can see this triple role if we examine the case of the four 'etc.'s in a row on p.520. We shall have to quote quite a long passage to give the context:

le client d'une des nouvelles Hostelleries Marvel, non seulement disposerait, comme dans n'importe quel quatre-étoiles, de sa plage, son court de tennis, sa piscine chauffée, son golf 18 trous, son parc équestre, son sauna, sa marina, son casino, ses night-clubs, ses boutiques, ses restaurants, ses bars, son kiosque à journaux, son bureau de tabac, son agence de voyages et sa banque, mais il aurait également son champ de ski, ses remontées mécaniques, sa patinoire, son fond sous-marin, ses vagues à surf, son safari, son aquarium géant, son musée d'art ancien, ses ruines romaines, son champ de bataille, sa pyramide, son église gothique, son souk, son bordj, sa cantina, sa Plaza de Toros, son site archéologique, sa Bierstübe, son bal-à-Jo, ses danseuses de Bali, etc., etc., etc., et etc. (p.520)

There is no 'etc.' at the end of the list of attractions in a normal four star hotel because this list has to be limited so that more can be added to it to illustrate the scope of a Hostellerie Marvel hotel. The four consecutive 'etc.'s are evidently provocative. The simplest thing to say about them is that they invite us to believe that anything and everything can be turned into a tourist attraction; this list really is endless and a single 'etc.' would not seem to do justice to all the possibilities it contains. They also contribute to the ironic tone of the passage with the narrator subtly undermining the grandeur of the project.

The non-specificity of some of the attractions - an ice rink, a museum and a battlefield can be located anywhere - is contrasted with the specificity of certain others - a souk, a bordj and a Bierstübe - which are normally found only in certain places. The 'etc.'s force these national attractions to mingle with the others and so to lose their precise context, and even to lose their

attraction, perhaps, but certainly to lose their individuality. The list form is the perfect vehicle for this paradox - the individually-stated item shares the same status as its neighbours, while at the same time being given importance by being individually stated, a balance of the specific and the non-specific. And the four 'etc.'s together also suggest a paradox: the rhythm of 'one, two, three AND four' suggests closure while the 'etc.'s deny it.

This leads us to suggest that one of the thematic resonances of Perec's use of the word-list is to ask questions about the individual's place in the world surrounding him. Bartlebooth tries, in vain, to control his world, while others, Paul Hébert, for instance, seem to have been daunted by the world. The 'etc.'s at the end of certain lists help to show, then, the difficulty of precisely situating any one thing in its own context, by pointing out that there is a 'rest' to be taken into account. They therefore give the lie to the assertion that these lists are to be read as inventories, as an attempt to delimit the world - as Perec remarked, an inventory is when one does not write 'etc.' - and rather, point out the impossibility, not only of saying everything, but of even attempting it.

We see the list used in a similar way in Moby Dick. Melville begins his book with the dictionary definitions, etymology and extracts from other works concerning whales, and then recounts the story of trying to catch a whale, an attempt which ends in failure in the same way as the dictionary definitions fail to describe a whale. He combines the two approaches of empirically attempting to say what a whale is and of describing what a certain whale means to certain people and the effect is to illustrate that this can never be complete:

For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the Great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark nearer

than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness.¹¹

Moby Dick is an extraordinary, unique, whale (and so therefore not in the dictionary which gives generic classifications) and Ishmael is a narrator who refuses even to tell us his name ('Call me Ishmael') and so we understand that the failure is inherent in the nature of the project. Perec also exposes this inherent failure through the use of word-lists which, as we have seen in our discussion of description, suggest and deny inclusivity at the same time.

Adding 'etc.' to a word-list makes this failure more explicit and also reveals the presence of a narrator in a way which has parallels with the use of paratext. The supplementary commentary on a text reveals another level of fictionality and we have discussed at some length the way in which Perec insists on the fictionality of his text. And he exploits 'etc.'s as another way of revealing the filters of fictionality through which the text passes - 'Call me Ishmael' is a filter in this sense, because it implies that this is not the man's real name, and asks us to rely on his authority for what follows, an authority that is entirely fictional, as Dryden suggests:

By calling himself Ishmael, the narrator establishes his identity as a purely verbal one.¹²

The fact that an 'etc.' acts as a signal of the presence of a narrator, whether in the first or second degree, points out that the business of reading is a business of convention, or, as VME would have it, a ludic business, where there are rules to be followed to set the game under way. The sign itself, as an abbreviation from a foreign language, suggests this rerouting of our expectations, and is part of the provocation that is central to the establishment of the ludic reading contract in VME.

In the present case, the 'etc.'s are just one of the ways that fictionality is illustrated. The hypothetical nature of the

examples is introduced by the two conditional verbs 'disposerait' and 'aurait' - a typical Perec device, and one most fully exploited in Les Choses - and reinforced by the 'etc.'s because they imply that it does not really matter what the examples given are.

This use of 'etc.' is different from the use we saw earlier of focussing attention on the content of the list to oblige the reader to ask questions about the classification that made up the list. In this case the classification is very broad - anything that a rich leisured client might find interesting to look at. The negation of space means that there are no constraints of plausibility, (due to the redefinition of vraisemblance that the fictional conditions have effected, and the invitation to play the game of imagining just what these hotels might be) and asks us to believe that it is perfectly possible to find a souk next door to a Bierstübe, with the implied statement that it is possible so long as we are in a Hostellerie Marvel hotel, that is, so long as we have accepted the rules of the game. Nor is moving structures and stalactites to be seen as an impossibility - London Bridge really has been taken apart and transported to the United States, a fact of which Perec was no doubt aware, and which does not affect the referentiality of the book because the intercontinental moving of structures is done by Grace Twinker who buys and transports a convent 'pierre par pierre' from France to Connecticut (p.32).

The third use of 'etc.' is as a signpost for self-referentiality. Four 'etc.'s in a row are bound to arrest our attention and the next 'etc.' after these four refers us directly back to the list they appear to close:

mais cette idée, qui ne visait au départ que les
 personnels (danseuses de Bali, apaches du bal-à-Jo,
 serveuses tyroliennes, toreros, aficionados, moniteurs
 sportifs, charmeurs de serpents, antipodistes, etc.)...
 (p.521)

This list in brackets starts off in reverse order to the end of the previous list: dancers, apaches, waitresses. We can deduce in passing that an archaeological site needs no staff, but the important point is that this 'etc.' closes a list that we can complete for ourselves from the earlier one by adding museum curators and safari guides, for instance. The 'rest' that it implies is something that we can fill in - a series is set up which is not closed by the 'etc.' - and the repetition of 'etc.' at the same time continues to allow the expansion of the second list to allow other staff from other attractions that have not been mentioned earlier. The 'etc.' refers us back to the earlier list but is not limited by it.

The repetition inherent in this list may seem superfluous; we could, after all, work out for ourselves the professions of the staff needed for the project. Its first role is to offer this possibility to us quite explicitly, and its second, in the wider context of the whole novel, is to remind us of the other lists of professionals - Madame Moreau's employees, for instance (p.131), and might even suggest that all these workmen are also needed to complete the hotel project.

Parenthesis

On p.518 we find a play of 'etc.'s in parenthesis, as with the list above. Parenthesis always implies a hierarchization of the text - that the passage in brackets is less important than what surrounds it. Bellamy expresses it this way:

D'un point de vue plus général, c'est l'absorption par une structure listique homogénéisante d'une certaine hétérogénéité, la captation du différentiel par le redondant, qu'expriment les tirets ou les parenthèses, enfermant gloses et citations dans le corps listique.¹³

This is not always the case, as we saw with the passage regarding Polonius the hamster, (p.485-6) where the supposed hierarchization is implied by the footnote and denied by the richness of the text

it contains (and Bellamy also makes this point) and we also remember that the positions of narration and description have been de-hierarchized. An 'etc.' in a parenthesis, however, implies also that it is time to return to the more important matters around it and we shall see that there can be a difference between the use of dashes and the use of brackets.

Perec takes this further, as usual, by having an 'etc.' in a parenthesis in a parenthesis finished by an 'etc.':

l'idée force des promoteurs était en effet que, s'il est bon que ce lieu privilégié de repos, de loisir, et de culture que devrait toujours être un hôtel, se trouve dans une zone climatique particulière adaptée à un besoin précis (avoir chaud quand il fait froid ailleurs, air pur, neige, iode, etc.) et à proximité d'un lieu spécifiquement consacré à une activité touristique donnée (bains de mer, station de ski, villes d'eaux, villes d'art, curiosités et panoramas naturels [parc, etc.] ou artificiels [Venise, les Matmata, Disneyworld, etc.], etc.). cela ne devait, en aucun cas, être une obligation... (p.518)

The first 'etc.' of this passage is rather in jest. If we go to a region for its climate, then sun, snow and clean air are the principal reasons - tourism normally falls off during the monsoon season. But the jest has a further aspect: the invitation to wonder what other climatic conditions might lead us to visit a certain place invites us to invent specific cases - a man studying plant growth in tropical foliage might travel during the monsoon season, for instance. Perec is inviting us to invent stories to fit these conditions; the list and its 'etc.' lead us on a voyage into the 'irréel', a voyage into the land of the strange but entirely possible, and we might say that the fact that this is possible from within a parenthesis shows that this text is not really secondary because it can have the same effect as text outside parentheses, and perhaps that the parentheses function like 'images classiques' to suggest limits to what can be imagined.

The second, third and fourth 'etc.'s also repay attention. Let us start by looking at the lists they follow. In the first instance, we have to admit that one item - 'parc' - does not constitute a list. The 'etc.', however, implies a list inside the parenthesis, and we are not given this list. There must be natural panoramas that are not in parks, but the narrator of the story cuts us off before we can find out what they are - so we ask ourselves the question, and perhaps we wonder whether 'panorama' is not a strange word for a park, or for Venice. There is a strong suggestion, if we start reflecting in this way, that 'panoramas naturels' are not natural at all, that they have been manmade, that boundaries have been imposed, that the *important thing* is that they are curious and interesting to look at, not that they are places but that they are panoramas - which reinforces the undercurrent that the Marvel project treats the world as a place to be changed and arranged to make tourism easier and more agreeable. There is something reminiscent of W in this, of the artificial world created for a single reason and Perec says, in an interview with Patrice Fardeau, that both Bartlebooth and Beyssandre are

complètement noyés dans leurs rêves à cause de ces machines à fabriquer des vacances organisés¹⁴

directly after talking of the organization of sports in W.

The two 'etc.'s that follow 'Disneyland' - punctuated '...etc.], etc.)' - close their respective parentheses. The first seems quite simply to be an invitation to consider which other locations could come under the heading 'panoramas artificiels', a use we have seen before, and the second to close the list of given tourist activities. It is their juxtaposition and punctuation that make them curious. They expose the hierarchization of the text that is due to the parenthesis and therefore force us to make this hierarchization. They almost act as a warning to pay attention to the punctuation - just as the 'etc.' inside inverted commas on p.386 might. Although the repetition of 'etc.' might

seem to be superfluous at a first glance, the punctuation reveals that each sign in the text has its own importance. This is not a profound reflection but it shows us how far from the 'la marquise sortit à cinq heures' type of novel Percec has taken us. 'Le mot pur n'existe pas', and neither does the pure abbreviation.

Other endings: full stops

The problem now is to see whether these factors apply to lists that do not end with 'etc.'. The ending of these lists may be just as arbitrary but this arbitrariness might be more hidden, and so, following the masque/marque paradigm may be more revelatory. And, as we stated earlier, there are other rhetorical and aesthetic choices to be revealed by studying the word-lists than just the desire to make inventories. Jean-Yves Pouilloux remarks of the list of the location of religious unica on p.119:

Dans la tortueuse affaire de la **Vita brevis Helenae** (VME ch. XXII), on trouve une impressionnante liste des reliques de la Passion, qui se termine par une énumération des lieux où l'on trouvait le Saint-Suaire: 'à Rome, Jérusalem, Turin, Cadouin en Périgord, Carcassonne, Mayence, Parme, Prague, Bayonne, York, Paris etc.'; ce qui rapproche les six dernières villes semble à chercher plutôt du côté des jambons que de l'Eglise.¹⁵

Percec uses three principal devices to bring his lists to an end. The first, quite simply, is to use a full-stop. The second is to end the list with a phrase such as 'and other such things', and the third is to put the list between dashes.

In the first category, simple as it may be, there is a distinction to be made. Some lists end a sentence and a new paragraph then follows whilst others are followed by merely a new sentence. The effect of starting a new paragraph is to give an impression of exhaustiveness, to imply that the subject at hand is now fully treated and that it is time to move on.

Gertrude's kitchen

Let us take an example from the text. Gertrude, Madame Moreau's cook, resists the vulgar artificialities of the ultra-modern kitchen that Henry Fleury has designed. She demands and receives a traditional kitchen furnished and equipped in traditional style:

Elle réclama une fenêtre, une pierre d'évier, une vraie cuisinière à gaz avec des brûleurs, une bassine à friture, un billot, et surtout une souillarde où mettre ses bouteilles vides, ses claies à fromages, ses cageots, ses sacs de pommes de terre, ses baquets pour laver les légumes, et son panier à salade.

Madame Moreau donna raison à sa cuisinière. (p.394)

The list ends with the salad basket, the last container to be put in the 'souillarde', the movement of this list, containers put into containers, reflecting the deepening levels of fictionality of the goldfish story, perhaps, and the 'tables gigognes', and also reflecting the general theme of absence, as there is nothing yet to put in these containers. This is also another example of the sufficient sample. The ending of the list is abrupt - this abruptness is allowed by the impression of the sufficient sample and enhanced by the punctuation. This remains only an impression, because there are obviously other things that might be required in a traditional kitchen, but it allows the text to appear to read as less of a narrative hiatus than a list of twelve items would normally allow.

Ferdinand Gratiolet's business

The fact that Perec hides the 'brusque cassure' that a list can make in a text in this way, after some of the lists at least, reveals that the list is not always meant to shock, to stand out, or to break the flow of the narrative. And he does use the list in a more subtle way. Let us take another example. Ferdinand Gratiolet, the third of the Gratiolet brothers, loses all his money in an African mining adventure. Preliminary expeditions

were carried out to estimate the probability of profits but the results were contradictory:

certaines confirmaient la présence d'importants filons de cassitérite mais s'inquiétaient des conditions d'exploitation et surtout de transport; d'autres prétendaient que le minerai était trop pauvre pour justifier une extraction dont le prix de revient serait nécessairement trop onéreux; d'autres encore affirmaient que les échantillons qui avaient été prélevés ne contenaient pas trace d'étain mais renfermaient par contre, en abondance, de la bauxite, du fer, du manganèse, du cuivre, de l'or, des diamants, et des phosphates. (p.110)

The list ends the paragraph and sits perfectly with its context of, on the one hand, scientific accuracy, and, on the other, variety of opinion - another example of the double functioning of the list hiding and revealing, specifying and not making distinctions - and this also shows how a list can be integrated as a necessary way of expressing facts in a narrative.

This allows the seven items (and we remember that Flaubert only very rarely used more than five items in his lists or descriptions, and that this was seen as minute accuracy) to flow smoothly by, hiding the 'sidération' that Hamon claimed was part of the 'effet de liste'. The paragraph break solves the problem of how to continue after the list once it has been so skilfully integrated into the sentence, because one does not continue, one starts a new paragraph.

Martiboni's painting

Perec sometimes takes this further - on p.152., an invitation to the funeral of Gaspard Winckler follows a list of postcards. The black humour and the typography bring the list to an end and move us on to the next paragraph where Bartlebooth's servants are waiting for his summons. And on p.499. the list of things to be seen in a painting by the Italian Intellectualist Martiboni ends

the Chapter. In this example it is the ending of the list itself that is interesting:

c'est un bloc de polystyrène haut de deux mètres, large d'un, épais de dix centimètres, dans lequel sont noyés de vieux corsets mêlés à des piles d'anciens carnets de bal, des fleurs séchées, des robes de soie usées jusqu'à la corde, des lambeaux de fourrures mangés aux mites, des éventails rongés ressemblant à des pattes de canard dépouillées de leurs palmes, des souliers d'argent sans semelles ni talons, des reliefs de festin et deux ou trois petits chiens empaillés. (p.499)

The list ends, not in hyperrealism, but in vagueness - **two or three** stuffed dogs. There is perhaps an implication that now, when looking at the block of polystyrene, one can no longer be precise and so can no longer list the things to be seen. This is an isolated example of vagueness, because normally the lists become more and more precise as they continue. The fourth part of the book ends at this point, and so ends with a list of the contents of a painting in which we cannot be sure of what we see, a mise en abyme of the overall structure of the novel, perhaps, and a reminder that there are no guarantees of authenticity and accuracy in a ludic text. Of course, this vagueness, part of a tension between the random and the significant, itself a central part of a ludic text such as this, where we play games to distinguish between the two, or to try to integrate the apparently random, might constitute a kind of ending, reflecting the ambiguity of the ending of the book where Bartlebooth holds a 'W'-shaped piece in his hand to fit into an 'X'-shaped hole - we can no longer be sure of what we see and how we are going to make sense of it. The game is the important thing, the putting together, and in the list above the items are rarely whole - the dresses, the furs and the shoes are all incomplete. And so is the final puzzle of the book.¹⁶

Other endings: no full stop. Frénel's recipe

Other lists, however, end with a full stop without a paragraph break, or a postcard. The list intrudes in the middle of the

paragraph, even in the middle of the sentence. This type of list tends not to be a list of the visible parts of a painting or of a room, but rather a list of examples. Henri Fresnel is the cook who left his wife to become an actor and ended up rich in America:

Il préparait d'une façon assez suave les poissons et les crustacés, et les hors-d'oeuvres de légumes: artichauts poivrade, concombres à l'aneth, courgettes au curcuma, ratatouille froide à la menthe, radis à la crème et au cerfeuil, poivrons au pistou, olivette à la farigoule. En hommage à son lointain homonyme, il avait également inventé une recette de lentilles,... (p.323)

This extra specification of what he cooks adds nothing to our appreciation of how well he cooked it, but it introduces another type of reading. That is, that we normally find a list of foods on a menu, not in a novel, and we also read a menu. This forms part of the play of the novel on different types of discourse and reading (of which the D-I-Y catalogue is the most extreme example.) We start reading in a different way, not shocked or provoked - nothing could be more normal than a menu when we're talking about a chef, and a menu is a list - but rewarded: there are two other inventors of recipes in the book, Herman Fugger and Doctor Dinteville. This apparently innocent passage, and the apparently irrelevant listing of hors d'oeuvres, in fact is yet another way of leading us into the interplay of the book and its resonances of self-reference.

Mme. Altamont and Mme. Nochère

The list, here, therefore, has its effect precisely because it does not stand out from the text, and does not cause any punctuation or typographical breaks. A second example will show us another aspect of this integration; Madame Nochère and Madame Altamont do not get on with each other and this is explained to us:

Madame Altamont partait en vacances. Avec le souci d'ordre et de propreté qui la caractérise en tout, elle vida son réfrigérateur et fit cadeau de ses restes à sa concierge: un demi-quart de beurre, une livre de haricots

verts frais, deux citrons, un demi-pot de confiture de groseilles, un fond de crème fraîche, quelques cerises, un peu de lait, quelques bribes de fromage, diverses fines herbes et trois yaourts au goût bulgare. Pour des raisons mal précisées... (p.213)

The leftovers from her fridge are surrounded by the two phrases 'le souci d'ordre' and 'Pour des raisons mal précisées' and it is the list between them that allows Perec to move from precision to mystery: the double character of the list as both specifier and de-individualizer means that this shift can take place. The list is a functional part of the explication of Madame Altamont's character, showing her propriety and her pettiness at the same time, and so belongs to the narrative and does not stand out from it, the character elucidation being achieved less by the content of the list, as in a realist, traditional, psychological description, than by the form of the elucidation, the list reflecting, in this instance, the order and propriety that so characterized her, and illustrating by contrast, supported by 'mal précisées', the trouble and mess that this gets her into with Madame Nochère.

Other endings: 'pour n'en citer que quelques-uns'

The second main device that we identified was that of ending the list with a phrase such as 'and other such things,' or, and this is the most explicit, 'pour n'en citer que quelques-uns'. This has the effect of denying the inclusivity of the list. There is a relation with the use of 'etc.' here, and the refusal to continue, but this device allows for a more specific context to be exploited for humour, elucidation of a character and so on.

Henri Fresnel can provide us with an example, this time not as a cook, but as Mister Mephisto, the healer of all ills, who uses:

une poudre gris bleuâtre qui n'était autre que de la galène concassée, mais qu'il appelait Poudre de Galien, la dotant de certaines propriétés opothérapiques susceptibles de guérir toute affection passée, présente ou future, et particulièrement recommandé en cas

d'extraction dentaire, migraines et céphalées, douleurs menstruelles, arthrites et arthroses, névralgies, crampes et luxations, coliques et calculs, et de telles ou telles autres opportunément choisies selon les lieux, les saisons et les particularités de l'assistance.

(p.327)

The ending of the list gives away the contextual nature of the contents of the list and is one of the factors that points out the charlatanism of Mister Mephisto (who's good for your maths as well.)

Another example shows us something similar but slightly different. Réol's boss, whom he desperately needs to see to negotiate a pay rise or a loan, is seldom in the office:

Entre le premier mars et le trente novembre, le chef de service avait réussi à être absent quatre mois pleins et Réol calcula qu'entre les weekends prolongés, les ponts, les tunnels, les jours de remplacement, les missions et retours de missions, les stages, les séminaires et autres déplacements, il n'était pas venu cent fois en neuf mois à son bureau.

(p.592)

In this instance, the ending of the list with what could be a generic description of it, asks us, in the same way as an etcetera might, to imagine what these other outings might be. It also suggests that when the boss could not find an official excuse, that did not stop him from leaving the office. This suggestion is dependent on the presence of the valid (or not so valid) reasons given in the list and so justifies the list. The ending of the list colours the way we read it in this example.¹⁷

Other endings: dashes

The third device is using dashes. This is also used more often when examples are being given, and is often used when lists of names are given. Let us take the example of the list of names of radio stations on p.571

...des stations aux noms exotiques ou mystérieux -
Hilversum, Sottens, Allouis, Vatican, Kerguelen, Monte

Ceneri, Bergen, Tromsø, Bari, Tanger, Falun, Horby,
Beromünster, Pouzzoles, Mascate, Amara, - un cercle...

The dashes not only have the effect of emphasising that examples are being given, they also serve to isolate the list from the text. This is a different hierarchization of the text from the hierarchization we saw with parentheses. In that instance, the content of the parenthesis could be seen as secondary, whereas here the implication is that the information is supplementary, and has a closer link to the main body of the text. In this instance the closer link is the fact that there is a tension between the apparent order of any list and the fact that we have been told that these names are mysterious, as Alain Goulet has written:

la surabondance des précisions ouvre sans cesse vers le
mystère, et l'érudition vers les pièges et les leurres¹⁹

and so we can see clearly how the list functions as part of the masque/marque paradigm. We can also see that the context of the list is an 'exotique ou mystérieux cercle' - a self contained world such as VME, perhaps. The insistent metatextuality does not allow us to slide over passages of text.

Isolating the list in this way does not quite give us a licence to treat it out of its context, but it does allow us to linger over it before returning to the narrative flow - which perhaps we do more exaggeratedly in the lists which provoke the hyperrealist effect. The dashes mark very clearly the beginning and ending of the list and would allow us to jump over it if we wished. We are, however, warned that the names of the radio stations are exotic and mysterious, a warning that is also an invitation. Where is Hilversum? What on earth do they broadcast all day on Radio Vatican? Aren't Monte Ceneri, Bergen and Tanger also Second World War battles? All these things can go through the mind of the reader as he reads the list before he continues to learn the fate of the family who first owned the building at 11, rue Simon-Crubellier. The dashes allow this sort of speculation by creating a permeable barrier for the list, as Andrée Chauvin remarks:

Une part de la force de rassemblement de la liste provient de ce qu'elle est un lieu textuel particulièrement bien défini et délimité, ou naît et s'organise un mouvement d'entraînement²⁰

leading us to question the categorization, as we have seen, into hyperrealism, as we have seen, and in this instance leading to the type of question above. And the dash ending the list cuts speculation off by returning us to the narrative.

Rorschach's cinema journals

On p.569 we find a list of cinema journals that is isolated by dashes and which also ends with an 'etc.'. Rémi Rorschach was a subscriber to the following magazines:

- la Cinématographie française, le Technicien du Film, Film and Sound, TV News, le Nouveau Film Français, le Quotidien du Film, Image et Son etc. -...

We are given a sample which enables us to continue the list, in a similar way to the sample of medical journals, and the combined effect of the dashes and the 'etc.' doubles the implication of this being a diversionary game - ironically undercut by the fact that Remi Rorschach only used to leaf through the magazines at breakfast time and also by the fact that, now he is dead and they keep arriving, no-one will ever read these magazines. They thus maintain the level of fictionality that runs through VME, and underline the fact that, in the context Percec gives them, it is only their titles that are important and even these form part of a game.¹⁸

Les bulldozers infatigables

Percec only once ends a list with '...'. During the passage where the inevitable destruction of the building is envisaged, we find the following:

des ferrailleurs à gros gants viendront se disputer les tas: le plomb des tuyauteries, le marbre des cheminées, le bois des charpentes et des parquets, des portes et des

plinthes, le cuivre et le laiton des poignées et des robinets, les grands miroirs et les ors de leurs cadres, les pierres d'évier, les baignoires, le fer forgé des rampes d'escalier...
Les bulldozers infatigables des niveleurs viendront charrier le reste: des tonnes et des tonnes de gravats et de poussières. (p.171)

The effect of ending the list in this way is first, to imply that there are other things of value to be recovered from the ruins of the house, for the three dots normally imply something incomplete, and second, to pass a comment on the indignity that the scrapmen will impose on the house. And third, and this is more tenuous, to represent the falling away into dust.

This reveals, however, that the lists that do not end like this are not to be seen as incomplete; endings are imposed on the lists. Coupled with the acknowledgement of the failure of the pure realist representation of the world (which, as we have seen, Perec circumvents by layering his fictionality) this denies any attempt at inventory, at enumeration, at the ability to exhaust what we can find in the world to write about or to create stories from. We hope in this way to have laid to rest any accusations of inventory and 'sociologie du quotidien' that have been levelled at VME.

We have come to this point through a discussion of whether a word-list can be said to describe in the normally accepted sense of the term, through a discussion of the problem of closure that the word-list raises in a description, and then through a discussion of the way in which the word-lists themselves are closed. We saw that the word-list did not fit into the traditional nineteenth century conception of description and we also saw that it did not fit neatly into the schema put forward by Hamon. This does not mean that word-lists do not describe, but rather that they describe in a different way - through hyperrealism, for example - and that they expose some of the problems of verbal description. It also reveals that Perec exploits the word-lists as an

appropriate vehicle for the problematization of description. By concentrating on the problem of the closure of a list, a concern which was raised by the problem of the closure of a description, we saw that Percec used different techniques to deny closure - certain uses of 'etc.', for instance - and also techniques that closed without closing. The aesthetic choices revealed by these closures lead us to the conclusion that a word-list can not be called an inventory.

The word-lists, as we have now seen, deny these accusations, and at the same time reveal many of the fundamental themes of VME such as the double functioning of the masque and marque paradigm, the layering of the fiction and the full implication of the reader and his imagination in the reading of the different levels of discourse in the novel. That is to say that Percec uses the list as an essential tool in the writing of his novel, and not as a marginal device, used to shock and alienate the reader. Of course, he does use a list to shock - the D-I-Y catalogue - but this is shocking in the same way as an alarm clock is shocking: it forces us to wake up and take notice of the world of the text around us again. Percec does not interrogate so much our notion of what the world is like as our notion of what literature is like. He helps us to learn to read again, and nothing appears simpler to read than a list, despite all the hidden complexities. We also saw that lists obliged us to read in a number of different ways, to leave our established strategies behind and open our minds to the play of connotation, quotation, and impli-citation in the novel.

The role they play, then, within a descriptive topos, is to expose certain of the mechanisms of the book and certain of its central concerns. This is a novel which tries to do away with the dishonesty of language claiming to represent the world transparently and substitutes a coherent fictional world which refers only to itself. All reference to external reality in the book is brought by the reader - engaged in the game, carrier and

curer of the disease, playing the game and bringing significance. La Vie mode d'emploi is a user's guide to life because it teaches us the distinction between reality, what is true, and fiction, what is imagined. And leaves us the choice to believe in either.

Notes

1. Ricardou, J. Le Nouveau Roman, Seuil, 1973. p.125.
2. Ricardou, J. p.125.
3. Bellamy, G. p.19.
4. Hamon, P. p.48.
5. Barthes, R. op.cit. p.86.
6. Penser/Classer, p.167.
7. Penser/Classer, p.165.
8. Penser/Classer, p.21.
9. Magné, B. 'Le puzzle mode d'emploi', in Texte, Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire, vol 1, Toronto, 1982. pp.71-96. p.72-4.
10. There is a book called: L'Obsolète, Dictionnaire des Mots Perdus (A. Duchesne, T. Leguay, Larousse 1988). Cinoc's project is alive and well.
11. Melville, Herman. Moby Dick, Bantam Classics, New York, 1981. p.251.
12. Dryden, Edgar, A. Melville's Thematics of Form, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1968. p.87.
13. Bellamy, G. p.39.
14. Fardeau, Patrice. 'En dialogue avec l'époque, entretien avec Georges Perec', in France Nouvelle, no.1744, 1979, pp.44-55. p.47.
15. Pouilloux, Jean-Yves. 'Une écriture en trompe-l'oeil' in Cahiers Georges Perec IV, pp.19-25. p.21.
16. Other examples of the list ending a paragraph can be found on pp.91,291,309,351,143,428.
17. Other examples of lists ending in this fashion can be found on: p.555 '(...pour n'en citer que quelques-uns)', p.390 'le reste des candidats', p.318 'et toute une foule d'articles...', p.107 'et quelques outils...', p.511 'et clefs de toutes natures', p.207 'et plusieurs rubriques', p. 462 'toutes marchandises', p.238 'et ses lubies diverses', p.45 'et autres produits miracles.'

18. Other examples of lists isolated by dashes can be found on p.283, 82, 94, 101, 155 and 224.; and of dashes and 'etc.' p.423 and p.156.
19. Goulet, Alain. 'La Vie mode d'emploi, archives en jeu' in Cahiers Georges Perec 1, pp.193-212. p.210.
20. Chauvin, Andrée. p.740.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Conclusion

We have examined the characteristics of the word-list in Perec's text in some detail, but, of course, have by no means exhausted all the possibilities of the word-list in narrative. Studying two non-linear and non-realist texts has meant that we have not fully discussed the didactic possibilities of the list, because we were obliged to point out that Perec's lists do not fulfil a didactic function. A different and complementary study of Jules Verne, for instance, would allow an examination of both the didactic use of the list and the role of the device in his play of scientific and poetic discourse. Nor have we fully examined the effect a word-list may have of delaying a more conventionally linear narrative - Perec's primary narrative goes nowhere, being static, so this becomes a peripheral issue. He has created an explicitly ludic structure to his novel so the ludic effect of delay identified by Rimmon-Kenan:

Delay turns the reading process (or one of its aspects)
 into a guessing game, an attempt to solve a puzzle or
 riddle¹

does not apply, because the context in which the question 'what happens next?' that might be important in a detective novel, say, is not asked in VME - everything is momentary: Bartlebooth dies.

We only learn of his death in the last Chapter of the book, and the Chapter is presented as a series of lists with both an external listing structure and an internal one. The repetition - 'légèrement modifié' - of 'C'est le vingt-trois juin mille neuf cent soixante-quinze et il n'est pas loin de huit heures du soir' followed by lists of the present activities of members of the household establishes the moment of the, as yet, unrevealed death. The ending of a list-dominated Chapter and of the book in a puzzle - Bartlebooth holding the wrong-shaped piece in his hand - expresses quite clearly the fictionality and the self-reference

that are central to the literary construct of VME. The list denies temporal advance, establishes the characters' presence within the fiction and allows the circularity of the ending and the reference back to what has gone before because no ending is implied by a list.

This particularity of the momentary time structure in VME is also expressed elsewhere through the use of static and fictionalizing devices, as we have seen. There are two extreme cases of this in the novel and we have made passing remarks about one of them, the D-I-Y catalogue in Chapter XX. Let us bring together some of the things that we have said about this D-I-Y catalogue. We have said that it plays a major role in the exposition of different types of discourse and text in the novel, undermining and expanding our conception of literary language and ways of signifying in a text. We have said that the presence of a 'real' catalogue in the book jestingly denies that the other lists can be catalogues. We have said that its early position in the novel is an important part of the realignment of our reading strategies and of the setting up of the ludic contract between the text and the reader. We mentioned that Perec read this passage aloud at poetry readings. We might add that it is another example of a text missing its pictures, like the advertisements and the novel itself, and so plays a further role in emphasizing the wriitenness of the text. This textual provocation through the use of other types of discourse has another consequence, as Vincent Colonna explains:

L'oeuvre romanesque de Perec est ainsi exemplaire par ce que Lyotaud a appelé un travail de bibliocaste. Non pas que comme d'autres, cette oeuvre s'attaque à la matérialité du livre, à la dénégarion de son support matériel

although, as we have seen, it does, through the use of calling cards, insistent fictionality and stories implied but not recounted by lists,

mais parce qu'en exploitant des possibilités paratextuelles inusitées dans les oeuvres de fiction, elle déplace ce qui fait notre logique de la lecture, en

particulier pour ce qui est de l'instanciation du discours littéraire. Par là Perec est aussi à inscrire dans une tradition qu'on a peut-être passé sous silence, une tradition de bibliocaste dont quelques représentants pourraient être: Rabelais, Sterne, Poe, Hoffman, Larbaud, Mallarmé, Aragon, Butor et Ricardou.²

It is not only paratextual possibilities that ask us to read in a different way but also the use of texts that conventional expectations do not expect to meet in a novel, like the D-I-Y catalogue.

Interviewers often asked Perec about the catalogue, and he replies to Jacqueline Piatier:

J'ai peut-être fait là un peu de provocation, mais nous vivons avec des catalogues... ça fait partie de notre vie. Ce catalogue je l'ai composé comme un poème. Il a ses strophes, ses retours de mots: vanadium, métal chromé, son refrain: garanti total un an.³

Of course, the list is provocative, but the fact that he not only read it as a poem but also composed it as a poem is revealing. The catalogue presents itself as a block in the text - first, in that, like other lists, it does not advance the narrative, and second, in that, unlike many of the other lists, it appears to be self-contained and therefore gives an illusion of exhaustivity. The other lists deny this but the D-I-Y catalogue would seem to suggest it (and perhaps thereby point out its impossibility). Its internal coherence is also in contrast with the other lists which provoke questions through asking us to make classifications about them and are not predictable in the sense of having refrains.

This catalogue seems to resist metaphorical reading, and be strongly referential; it presents a flat surface to the reader. This has the effect of making the reader search for significance - within the text, fitting this into the play of the different types of discourse, and outside it, in imagination. Talking about shopping catalogues, Perec says to Gabriel Simony:

Ce sont des livres de mille pages souvent et qui font rêver les gens autant que des romans, parce qu'ils y

voient la roulotte de leurs vacances, la perceuse avec laquelle ils yont construire leur résidence secondaire...⁴

so this catalogue fits into the hyperrealism of some of the other lists. That such a text, paradoxically composed and performed as a poem, should create dreams reveals Perec's attitude to literature. The interview continues:

Tout ça pour moi fait partie des littératures. Tout le monde écrit, tout le monde en fait partie. Il n'y a pas seulement la littérature avec un grand 'L'.⁵

The important point about the play of different types of discourse is not that it makes Perec's text unliterary but that it makes those other discourses literary and points out strongly that the literary, or we might say fictional, in VME, at least, draws its power from the combination of the effect on the reader and the nature of the language - be it technical, everyday, quoted from Flaubert, narrated or listed. This is true of all texts, of course, but very few express the seduction and partnership of the reader quite as much as VME.

The flat surface of the catalogue is one of the differences that distinguishes it from many of the other lists: they often follow the pattern of the 'tables gigogne' in a descent, or journey, from one thing into another. The other extreme case in the novel, *Machinerie de l'ascenseur II*, Chapter LXXIV (pp. 444-447), does just this with a repetition of 'plus bas' running through it. There are also other differences: 'Machinerie de l'ascenseur II' does not seem to originate in another text - even a fictional or implied one - or from one of the stories in the book and so does not point out fictionality and question reading strategy in the same way as the D-I-Y catalogue. The question of the narrative picture here - the realist reporting illusion of Valène actually having painted the picture - is part of the exposure of the conceit of Valène's painting and its clash with the explicitly written narrative. There are then similarities with 'Le Chapitre LI' where this conceit is exposed by Perec's posing the problem of

whether it is possible for this list of stories to be painted, and we are forced to wonder whether this Chapter can be painted.

The Chapter begins 'Parfois, il imaginait' emphasizing that it is Valène's imagination, rather than his painting, that takes the enunciative authority here. This explicit mention of Valène's imagination - a fictionalizing device, of course - takes us back to Chapter XXVIII, where Valène's imagination also runs riot, and where the word 'parfois' also introduces these fantasies. In Chapter XXVIII he imagines that time has stopped:

Valène, parfois, avait l'impression que le temps s'était
arrêté, figé, suspendu, autour d'il ne savait quelle
attente (p.168)

before he remembers the deaths and lives of his friends, the continuing, sad, dance of undertakers and removal men, and the eventual destruction of the building. Time is suspended in the novel's overall structure and Valène's imagining of the removal men takes us a further step back to page 19, and the first page of Chapter I, where the removal men are also mentioned. These references allow Valène's imagination to appear to encircle the book and so integrates this Chapter into that narrative structure rather than the intratextual, story, or fictionalized and layered structures of other Chapters.

Time is suspended on p.444, not only by the static book time, but also by the fact that Valène's imagining becomes conditional - 'plus bas il y aurait', another of those vague spatial pointers that we saw at work in Chapter XXIX, is repeated - 'plus bas encore il y aurait' - setting the conditionality in both the sense of something to be put into the eventual picture, and the sense of fictionality. It is then forgotten (or taken as established as book fact) until the reminder 'recommencerait' almost a page and a half later. This reminder is important: it shows that we are not meant to forget that the passage is said to come from Valène's imagination. The conditionality, allied with the references to the earlier dream of the destruction of the building, serves to

emphasize the fact that the building is built on strange foundations. By analogy, the whole edifice is based on Valène's imagination in this Chapter, and on his imagination of the painting in the rest of the book, thus encompassing the other narrative structures. The passage insists that all this is conditional, and conditional on our accepting the ludic contract of reading the book, which includes accepting the conceit of Valène painting the picture.

By foregrounding Valène's imagination and exposing the conditionality of the novel's narrative techniques, this Chapter, in a similar way to the 'appartement fantôme', functions as a guarantor of fictionality. Underpinning the book, there are words, a word-list, which have no guarantee of primary reference to reality, merely to other words. Allowing ourselves to emphasize now one of the many mise en abyme figures in the book (and the last Chapter, especially, is full of them: the river Méandre, the city 'récemment mis à jour', Isabelle Gratiolet's 'fragile château de cartes', Gilbert Berger wondering how to resolve 'L'énigme embrouillée de son roman-feuilleton' and so on) we read the book as:

toute une géographie labyrinthique d'échoppes et
d'arrière-cours, de porches et de trottoirs, d'impasses
et de passages, toute une organisation urbaine verticale
et souterraine avec ses quartiers, ses districts et ses
zones. (p.446)

Imagination and different means of interconnection are foregrounded as the ludic bricks from which the novel is built and organized.

Perec's compositional constraints are still at work in this Chapter, of course, and this reminds us of the fact that our imagination is not free to run away, but must express itself within the guidelines given by the text, which reflects the way Perec creates the text within the guidelines of his constraints. Once again, we have a guarantee of fictionality. The analogy is

reinforced by the title of the Chapter 'Machinerie de l'ascenseur' - this is the way up to the rest of the book - and the reader's role in creating the links in the chains that connect the text together and replace narrative cohesion as a dynamic is insisted upon by the fact that we already know that the lift is most often in disrepair and subject, like the rest of the text, to an 'arrêt momentané'. The responsibility for making these chains is shared by the text and the reader; the machinery itself is useless unless it has an operator. The text presents itself as neither the machinery nor the operator, but merely as a 'mode d'emploi'.

The fact that the Chapter is a series of word-lists is important for two reasons. First, the word-list helps to deny, in this instance, the idea that each Chapter advances the narrative, and therefore helps to point out the analogical importance of the self-reference deepening our awareness of the textual complexity, not only in the Chapter - 'plus bas il y aurait' - but in the text as a whole. Secondly, because, as we have seen above, as a descriptive technique, the word-list, by omitting all kinds of connection here other than juxtaposition, leaves the space for the reader's imagination that Perec emphasises as central to the book, the distance 'entre le livre et le livre'.

This series of word-lists, therefore, is both a dynamic and a revelation of the composition of sense in the book and the reader's appreciation of its fictionality. Not because the lists here are explicitly developed from another type of text but because they deny normal expectations of narrative and impose the rules of the game that allow us to understand the 'mode d'emploi'. Everything, but everything, in VME, is fictional, and no claims are made for anything in the novels to be anything but fictional.

Perec, through the use of the word-lists, is able to assert that the words in his text refer only to other words, his book only to other books. This is both modest and bold. He asserts that La Vie mode d'emploi itself will tell us nothing about life, and also

establishes his text as a literary construct. It is the reader who provides the uses to be made of the lives - the referential, thematic and moral judgments - by solving puzzles, by using imagination and by referring back to other events and words in the text in order to inform the present reading.

In this way, La Vie mode d'emploi in fact emphasizes the disparity between life and literature - this text is most emphatically merely a manual. It is, however, a specific type of manual: a literary one. This is because it refuses didacticism through its fictionality and also through the variety of presentation of the text. The narrative material is presented to the reader in at least four different ways: first, of course, the text itself, secondly, the Index, (Andrée Chauvin comments: 'L'Index tend ainsi à établir qu'il n'existe ni version unique, ni version définitive du texte'⁶) thirdly, the 'rappel de quelques histoires racontées dans cet ouvrage' and fourth, the list of stories in Chapter LI. We are obliged to conclude that there are many different ways of seeing things and many different ways of telling the same story in the world of 11, Rue Simon Crubellier.

The word-lists (and the familiar structures of some of the stories) tempt the reader to read simply, referentially, passively. This, however, is a trap because they also provoke the reader to accept the challenges that the text offers (where the familiar structures function as a contrast to the unfamiliar, and the word-list carries in itself both functions). This is a reflection of the puzzle mechanism, presenting a problem to solve and refusing to give the answers. Shklovsky says of the artistic trademark:

The artistic trademark - that is, material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception⁷

which describes the way the puzzle metaphor and the word-lists work to invite and deepen an understanding of the text. Solving a puzzle, after all, requires the solver to:

faire basculer sa perception, voir autrement ce que fallacieusement l'autre lui donnait à voir (p.415)

and to decide whether to take the 'other's' information as fallacious, which we do not when we accept the reading contract, notwithstanding the traps and masques that make up part of the ludic nature of that contract. The advice continues:

Tout le travail consiste en fait à opérer ce **déplacement qui donne a la pièce, à la définition, son sens** et rend du même coup toute explication fastidieuse et inutile.
(p.416)

This is where the reading of the text overtakes the puzzle metaphor. The puzzle is an introduction, an invitation, to the complexities of the text. The putting together of the pieces of the text is much more complicated, however, than the putting together of the pieces of the puzzle - each puzzle has only one solution, but there are many solutions to the reading of the text. The proliferation of possibilities has obvious affinities with the aims of the Oulipo, and Perec has succeeded, at least partly through the use of the word-lists, in providing this proliferation, which, in itself, as we have seen with the hyperrealist effect, can be dynamic. Jean-Yves Pouilloux remarks:

L'entassement fascine par la seule vertu du nombre, comme le jongleur par la quantité de boules qu'il sait faire voler.⁸

This also contributes to the problematization of description and the insistence on fictionality. Manuals do none of these things: they present information simply, straightforwardly, and strongly referentially. The ironic force of the title and the binary tension it conveys thus helps to establish that there are two different modes of language - the literary and the non-literary. The variety of texts, the problems raised, the conventions questioned, all these might lead us to retitling the book 'Literature, a User's manual'.

Paul Zumthor, discussing mediaeval poetry, says:

J'englobe sous le nom de **jonglerie**... tous les jeux, procédés, trucs, trouvailles sérieuses ou saugrenues, apparaissant au fil et au niveau du discours, et y suspendant l'effet de 'déjà connu' propre au langage pragmatique commun.

This is why we have taken 'Les Bateleurs-Jongleurs' as our title, because the image of the juggler can be used to help to elucidate the literary games that both Perec and Rabelais play, and because the language of both the TL and of VME seems to demonstrate the distancing from the 'déjà connu' that exemplifies literary language. The making of a new world through language implies the making of a new way of using language. We have shown some of the games played, some of the procedures exposed, some of the important 'trucs', some of the 'trouvailles sérieuses ou saugrenues' that the word-list - a form of language that we are very familiar with in other contexts, but which is used, because it conveys a double function, to defamiliarize our notions of language in the literary context - provokes in a narrative text.

Zumthor continues:

J'opère mes distinctions, autant que faire se peut, selon l'objet servant à la jonglerie: boules colorées, oeufs de bois ou séries de bâtonnets, ici:

1. les unités fondamentales:
 - a. lettres;
 - b. sons;
2. les éléments composés:
 - a. mots;
 - b. phrases;
3. les significations, telles qu'elles se constituent:
 - a. dans le mot;
 - b. dans la linéarité du discours.¹⁰

We started by looking at how to make sense of the Rabelaisian lists in the Tiers Livre and found that sounds, alliteration, variety of structure and comedy all contributed to allowing a reader to make sense of the listed text. The important consequence of this examination for our study was the establishment, through the denial of the possibility of the linguistic 'vide', of a contract of minimal sense-making structures. This was expanded into the ludic reading contract in

La Vie mode d'emploi where solutions were always implied by the puzzle framework. This allowed us to show how the word-lists did make sense as part of the overall structure of VME and how they contributed to establishing the fictional conditions of that world and how this affected how they might be read.

The Rabelaisian word-list, in the TL, at least, posed problems of making sense in the novelistic context of Panurge's search for answers and through its linguistic complexity. Mazouer says:

Rabelais, non content de jongler avec les sonorités,
jonglera avec les sons et les sens.¹¹

A play of sense and nonsense is set up by Rabelais within the framework of a play of authority and parody, and the authority of language is one of the issues parodied. The Perecian word-list takes the debate further: the simplicity of the presentation of the language hiding the complexity of the issues at stake: narration, description, denomination, endings. Riffaterre's concept of 'signifiante' holds the key to understanding both sets of word-lists - a primary reading is not enough, and a secondary reading is demanded. In the TL, the secondary reading reveals the minimal lexical and aural structures that allow us to begin to come to terms with the lists. In VME, the secondary reading reveals the problems which can then be resolved by reference to the intratextual, intertextual and fictional context of the novel as a literary and fictional construct.

Perec's conception of the literary involves seeking to establish his text as part of the family of literature. In the issue of *L'Arc* given over to him, Perec says to Jean-Marie Le Sidaner of his literary influences:

Il faut encore une fois partir de l'image du puzzle ou,
si l'on préfère, l'image d'un livre inachevé, d'une
'oeuvre' inachevée à l'intérieur d'une littérature jamais
achevée¹²

and he continues, some lines later:

un certain nombre d'auteurs (de Joyce à Hergé, de Kafka à Price, de Scève à Pierre Dac, de Sei Shonagon à Gotlib) définissent, circonscrivent le lieu d'où j'écris.¹³

It is obvious that Perec feels himself to be involved in literature as an entity, as a place to live, as a huge cavern of games, and it is a commonplace in Perec criticism to emphasise that he searches for and creates his own identity through the fact of writing and of being a writer. One of the consequences of this is that his text is unashamedly elitist - it declares implicitly and explicitly its own difficulties, compares itself to other literary works and demands to be considered in this rarified context.

Although, as Robbe-Grillet has said:

L'art pour l'art n'a pas bonne presse: cela fait penser au jeu, aux jongleries, au dilettantisme.¹⁴

Perec turns this to the advantage of his text, making the game, the juggling, the lack of referentiality to the strange and over-worked concept of the real world, a central pillar of his establishment in his imagined literary canon. We saw in our first chapter on Perec the devices he used to avoid primary reference to reality (fictional layering devices) and how this contributed to the setting up of the fictional conditions of static, layered and ludic text appropriate to a word-list.

Examining some of the lists in VME - and there are many others that we did not have space to treat in detail, though we hope to have taken a fairly representative sample - showed us how the network of internal relations functioned to determine the motivational vraisemblance and fictional referentiality of the text. We discovered that there were complications because of the *marque/masque* paradigm which hid as well as revealed those 'trouvailles sérieuses ou saugrenues' that we were seeking to elucidate. Each aspect of the novel becomes a game, and description, we saw, was not excluded from that. The important consequence of Perec's descriptive and narrative balance in VME is

to redefine the accepted balance of description and narration; if nothing happens during his novel, then the language is obliged to carry the strain of the reader's interest and this is precisely what happens when devices, techniques and games become the motors of the text. The redefinition of the accepted notions of the place of description is a necessary consequence of this.

The endings of the list that we studied showed us some of the ways that aesthetic and rhetorical choices can be revealed and reinforced the suggestion that every sign in this novel is as important as any other by showing us how 'etc.' was exploited thematically. Running through the whole study is the notion of the double function of the list, holding apparently paradoxical concerns in tension - implying reference to reality while denying it, establishing fictional conditions while provoking questions about the nature of literary language, holding order and mystery tantalizingly together, showing that simple language can reveal complex concerns given the context in which it is placed, and emphasizing the individual unit at the same time as implying a common element to those units. This emphasis on the individual word is a central part of the ludic character of VME, and creates much of its textual dynamism.

Rigolot has written of Rabelais:

A une époque où la question du plagiat ne se pose pas, le bateleur peut jongler en toute quiétude avec des bâtons empruntés, on le jugera sur la qualité du jeu et non sur la couleur des bâtons.¹⁵

And this is also exactly Perec's case - and we are forced to judge only the game because the whole literary edifice is presented as a game, a diversion, an amusement. Perec's text denies through its formal construction and through its intertextual and self-reference the weighty significance of political, ideological, moral importance - he reveals to us that literature is just a way of passing the time, just a game. Perhaps we are all Bartlebooth sitting in a quiet room solving endless puzzles when we read VME.

We have seen that the lack of didacticism allied to the ludic quality of the text means that it is, for the most part, the reader, guided by the text, who determines the significance of the text. This is true of any text, despite didactic and complicit devices designed to deny the independence of the reader, but Perec makes it explicit. This is where the double function of the word-list plays a central role. The contrast of the play of fictionality and reference, as well as showing the fictional conditions that determine the fictional world we are involved in, as well as the problematization of description and endings, and the strong association of the word list with non-literary language points out the literariness of the enterprise, another productive contradiction - there are only, three, perhaps four, if we count the D-I-Y catalogue, of the lists in the novel that we could reasonably find in our daily life.¹⁶ This makes the word-list a device particularly suited to the novel; if, that is, we accept Bakhtin's view of the genre, as explained by Michael Holquist:

'Novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits and constraints of that system. Literary systems are comprised of canons, and 'novelization' is fundamentally anti-canonical. It will not permit generic monologue. Always it will insist on the dialogue between what a given system will admit as literature and those texts that are otherwise excluded from such a definition of literature.¹⁷

The word-list explores and sets boundaries for Perec's fictional system - the fictional conditions of VME - by calling into question the boundaries of literary language. The word-list is a dynamic part of the anti-canonical play (where anti-canonical means not accepting accepted ideas) in VME, contributing with the 'stories' and diagrams to this questioning of styles of language, of genres of story, of ways of ordering a fictional world and recounting it.

The presence of word-lists in the TL and in VME is thus an important formal justification for calling them novels. The list expands the boundaries of a novel and calls into question the

functioning of the genre through its apparent clash with the conventional demands of realist narrative as envisaged in the nineteenth century and which remains the norm from which many of the reader's expectations are derived. From the reader's point of view, the list is a provocation. Josipovici tells us:

Northrop Frye once remarked that there are only two types of readers, those who skip lists and those who relish them.¹⁸

If we skip the lists in either the TL or VME we skip the very passages which make up the dynamism of the novel genre in these texts. Lists interrogate language, sense, classifications, the building bricks of fictional vraisemblance. The double functioning of the lists also allows them to establish a different way of reading, of making sense, of making classifications as a consequence of this interrogation.

Perhaps this why W.H. Auden declares:

Here are four questions which, could I examine a critic, I should ask him:

Do you like, and by like I really mean like, not approve of on principle:

- 1) Long lists of proper names such as the Old Testament genealogies, or the Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad?
- 2) Riddles and all other ways of not calling a spade a spade?
- 3) Complicated verse forms of great technical difficulty, such as Engligns, Drott Kuasts, Sestinas, even if their content is trivial?
- 4) Conscious theatrical exaggeration, pieces of Baroque flattery like Dryden's welcome to the Duchess of Ormond?

If a critic could truthfully answer 'yes' to all four, then I should trust his judgment implicitly on all literary matters.¹⁹

Reading Perec allows us to answer at least the first two questions in the affirmative.

Word-lists are only a part of what makes VME the novel that it is, but they are an important part, as we hope to have demonstrated. Now that we have seen the result of Perec's excursion into the

form, this will inform our examination of the use of the word-list in other texts, and this should, in turn, inform our reading of those texts, and fill the gap that the various sidesteps that allow us to ignore lists - dismissing them as poetic, didactic, boring, meaningless, improper in the novel, unliterary, calling them insertions from other, less worthy texts - has left open.

Studying lists in Perec's text is rather like starting a journey at the end to try to determine where it has passed through and where it has begun. Reading Perec is rather like this as well, because the quotations from other texts will remind us of those texts only if we have read them; if not, when we do come to read them, we will be reminded of Perec. This, in turn, reminds us that reading literature is not a journey with a beginning and an end, there is always a redefinition, especially in the novel, of forms, meanings and reference taking place. Lists have played their part in this, from Rabelais through to Perec, and they represent, as the poet Jacques Roubaud comments:

une forme particulière, universelle et constante de
l'amour de la langue.²⁰

Notes

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6. Chauvin, Andrée. p.926.
7. Shklovsky, V. 'Art as technique' in Russian Formalist Criticism four essays ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion Reis, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965, pp.3-24. p.22
8. Pouilloux, Jean-Yves. 'L'amour de l'oeil' in L'Arc, 76, pp.61-65. p.62.
9. Zumthor, P. 'Jonglerie et langage' in Poétique II, Seuil, 1972, pp.321-336. p.326.
10. Zumthor, P. p.326.
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12. Le Sidaner, J-M. 'Entretien avec Georges Perec' in L'Arc, 76, pp.3-10. p.3
13. Le Sidaner, J-M. p.3.
14. Robbe-Grillet, Alain. 'Sur quelques notions périmées' (1957) in Pour un Nouveau Roman, Minuit, 1963. p.42.
15. Rigolot, F. 'Les langages de Rabelais' in Etudes Rabelaisiennes X, Droz, Geneva. p.10.
16. The instructions left to Jane Sutton, the calory count by Anne Breidel, and the Plassaert's shopping list. Everyday lists can still provoke inquiry, Woody Allen comments: "List no.5. - 6, undershirts, 6 shorts, 6 handkerchiefs - has always puzzled scholars, principally because of the total absence of socks." ('The Metterling List, in Getting Even, New York, Random House, 1966. p.8 and quoted by Umberto Eco on p.532 of the Picador Edition of Foucault's Pendulum.)

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*Comment Panurge prent conseil de frere Jan
des Entommeures.*

CHAPITRE XXVI.

Panurge estoit fashé des propous de Her Trippa,
5 et, avoir passé la bourgade de Huymes, s'adressa à
frere Jan et luy dist, becquetant et soy gratant l'au-
reille guausche :

« Tien moy un peu joyeux, mon bedon. Je me sens
tout matagrabolisé en mon esprit des propous de ce
10 fol endiablé.

« Escoute, couillon mignon,
« Couillon moignon, c. de renom, c. paté,

7. Sans doute un sinistre présage (cf. ERASME, *Adages*, II. III. XXXVII, à propos d'*Oculus dexter mihi salit* : « Dictum per muliercularum superstitione, quae ex membri pruritu divinare solent, quid sit eventurum »).

12. Dans l'édition de 1546, cette liste est disposée sur 3 colonnes ; en 1552 il n'y en a que deux. Puisque les variantes des lignes 48 et 66 vont par trois, nous restituons, comme l'a fait LEFRANC, l'ordre de 1546. Nous avons ici, comme plus tard au chapitre XXVII, un exemple du blason comique en prose, mais, admettons-le, en gros, le principe comique de l'épisode nous échappe. La fin du chapitre semble suggérer qu'il y a une connexion entre ce blason du couillon et la satire des notions galéniques à propos des testicules. (Rappelons qu'au XVI^e s. les mots *couillon* et *couille* s'employaient souvent comme synonymes, ce qui permet à R. de passer facilement du terme de familiarité plébéienne à la question du sperme, qui joue un rôle si important dans la philosophie morale du livre).

| | | | |
|----|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| | c. naté, | c. plombé, | c. laicté, |
| | c. feutré, | c. calfaté, | c. madré, |
| 15 | c. relevé, | c. de stuc, | c. de crottesque, |
| | c. arabesque, | c. asseré, | c. troussé à la le- vresque, |
| | [c. antiquaire,] | c. asceuré, | c. guarancé, |
| | c. calandré, | c. requamé, | c. diapré, |
| 20 | c. estamé, | c. martelé, | c. entrelardé, |
| | c. juré, | c. bourgeois, | c. grené, |
| | c. d'esmorche, | c. endesvé, | c. goildronné, |
| | c. palletequé, | c. aposté, | c. lyripipié, |
| | c. désiré, | c. vernissé, | c. d'ebene, |
| 25 | c. de Bresil, | c. de bouys, | [c. organisé,] |
| | [c. latin,] | c. de passe, | c. à croc, |
| | c. d'estoc, | c. effrené, | c. forcené, |
| | c. affecté, | c. entassé, | c. compassé, |
| | c. farcy, | c. bouffy, | c. polly, |
| 30 | c. jolly, | c. poudrebif, | c. brandif, |
| | c. positif, | c. gerondif, | c. genitif, |
| | c. actif, | c. gigantal, | c. vital, |
| | c. oval, | c. magistral, | c. claustral, |
| | c. monachal, | c. viril, | c. subtil, |
| 35 | c. de respect, | c. de relés, | c. de sejour, |
| | c. d'audace, | c. massif, | c. lascif, |
| | c. manuel, | c. guoulu, | c. absolu, |
| | c. resolu, | c. membru, | c. cabus, |
| | c. gemeau, | c. courtoys, | c. turquoys, |
| 40 | c. fecond, | c. brislant, | c. sifflant, |
| | c. estrillant, | c. gent, | c. urgent, |
| | c. banier, | c. duisant, | c. brusquet, |
| | c. prompt, | c. prinsaultier, | c. fortuné, |
| | c. clabault, | c. coyrault, | c. usual, |
| 45 | c. de haulte lisse, | c. exquis, | c. requis, |

42, A : c. banier c. luisant c. duisant

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | c. fallot, | c. culлот, | c. picardent, |
| | c. de raphe, | c. guelphe, | c. Ursin, |
| | [c. de triage, | c. de paraige, | c. de mesnage,] |
| | c. patronymicque, | c. pouppin, | c. guespin, |
| 50 | c. d'alidada, | c. d'algamala, | c. d'algebra, |
| | c. robuste, | c. venuste, | c. d'appetit, |
| | c. insuperable, | c. secourable, | c. agreable, |
| | [c. redoubtable, | c. espovantable, | c. affable, |
| | c. profitable,] | c. memorable, | c. notable, |
| 55 | c. palpable, | c. musculeux, | c. bardable, |
| | c. subsidiaire, | c. tragicque, | c. satyricque, |
| | c. transpontin, | c. repercussif, | c. digestif, |
| | c. convulsif, | c. incarnatif, | c. restauratif, |
| | c. sigillatif, | c. masculinant, | c. ronssinant, |
| 60 | [c. baudouinant,] | c. refaict, | c. fulminant, |
| | c. tonnant, | c. estincelant, | c. martelant, |
| | c. arietant, | c. strident, | c. aromatisant, |
| | c. timpant, | c. diaspermatisant, | c. pimpant, |
| | c. ronflant, | c. paillard, | c. pillard, |
| 65 | c. guillard, | c. hochant, | c. brochant, |
| | c. talochant, | [c. avorté, | c. eschalloté, |
| | c. syndiqué,] | c. farfouillant, | c. belutant, |
- c. culbutant, couillon hacquebutant, couillon culletant,
frere Jan, mon amy, je te porte reverence bien grande,
70 et te reservoys à bonne bouche. Je te prie, diz moy ton
avis : me doibs je marier ou non ? »

Frere Jan luy respondit en alagresse d'esprit, di-
sant : « Marie toy, de par le Diable, marie toy et car-
rillonne à doubles carrillons de couillons. Je diz et
75 entends le plus toust que faire pourras. Dès huy au

63, A : c. *diaspermatisant*, c. *timpant* c. *pimpant* (chan-
gement d'ordre).

70. Panurge a retardé sa consultation avec Frère Jean,
afin de mieux la goûter.

tu es coqu, *ergo* ta femme sera belle ; *ergo* tu seras
 50 bien traicté d'elle ; *ergo* tu auras des amis beaucoup ;
ergo tu seras saulvé.

Ce sont Topicques monachales. Tu ne en vauldras
 que mieulx, pecheur. Tu ne feuz jamais si aise. Tu
 n'y trouveras rien moins. Ton bien accroistra d'adven-
 55 taige. S'il est ainsi prædestiné, y vouldrois tu contre-
 venir ? Diz, couillon flatry,

| | | | |
|----|------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| | c. moisy, | c. rouy, | c. chaumeny, |
| | c. poitry d'eau froïde | c. pendillant, | c. transy, |
| | [c. appellant,] | c. avallé, | c. guavasche, |
| 60 | c. fené, | c. esgrené, | c. esrené, |
| | [c. incongru, | c. de faillance, | c. forbeu,] |
| | c. hallebrené, | c. lanterné, | c. prosterné, |
| | c. embrené, | c. engroué, | c. amadoué, |
| | c. ecremé, | c. exprimé, | c. supprimé, |
| 65 | c. chetif, | c. retif, | c. putatif, |
| | c. moulu, | c. vermoulu. | c. dissolu, |
| | c. courbatu, | c. morfondu, | c. malautru, |
| | c. dyscraasié, | c. biscarié, | c. disgratié, |

57-58, A : *Couillon moisy, Couillon rouy, Couillon chau-
 meny, couillon transy, Couillon poitry d'eau froyde, couil-
 lon pendillant,*

55. C'est le problème classique (et médiéval) de la pré-
 destination qui est en jeu ici, non pas le problème de la
 prédestination *au salut*, question mise à la mode par les
 « nouveaux hérétiques ». Cf. QL, *Prologue*, l. 484 seq.
 57. « Cette longue énumération, parallèle à celle du cha-
 pitre XXVI, en est la contrepartie : aux termes expri-
 mant la vigueur ou la santé, R. oppose ceux qui peignent
 la débilité » (J). C'est donc un *contreblason*, analogue
 au *Laid tétin* de Marot, qui fait pendant à son *Beau
 tétin*. (Nous suivons la disposition de la liste sur 3 colon-
 nes (A) ; F. la dispose sur 2 colonnes).

| | | | |
|----|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | c. liegé, | c. flacque, | c. diaphane, |
| 70 | c. esgoutté, | c. desgousté, | [c. acravanté, |
| | c. chippoté,] | c. escharbotté, | c. hallebotté, |
| | c. mitré, | c. chapitré, | c. baratté, |
| | c. chicquané, | c. bimbelotté, | c. eschaubouillé, |
| | c. entouillé, | c. barbouillé, | c. vuidé, |
| 75 | c. riddé, | c. chagrin, | c. have, |
| | c. demanché, | c. morné, | c. vereux, |
| | c. pesneux, | c. vesneux, | c. forbeu, |
| | c. malandré, | c. meshaigné, | c. thlasié, |
| | c. thlibié, | c. spadonicque, | c. sphacelé, |
| 80 | c. bistorié, | c. deshinguandé, | [c. farineux,] |
| | c. farcineux, | c. hergneux, | c. varicqueux, |
| | [c. gangreneux, | c. vereux,] | c. croustelevé, |
| | c. esclopé, | c. depenaillé, | c. fanfreluché, |
| | c. matté, | c. frelatté, | c. guoguelu, |
| 85 | c. farfelu, | c. trepelu, | [c. mitonné,] |
| | c. trepané, | c. boucané, | c. basané, |
| | c. effilé, | c. eviré, | c. vietdazé, |
| | c. feueilleté, | c. mariné, | [c. estiomené,] |
| | [c. extirpé,] | c. etrippé, | c. constippé, |
| 90 | c. nieblé, | c. greslé, | c. syncopé, |
| | c. souffleté, | c. ripoppé, | c. buffeté, |
| | c. dechicqueté, | c. corneté, | c. ventousé, |
| | c. talemousé, | [c. effructé, | c. balafré, |
| | c. gersé, | c. eruyté, | c. pantois, |
| 95 | c. putois,] | c. fusté, | c. poulsé, |
| | c. de godalle, | c. frilleux, | c. fistuleux, |

70-71, A : c. desgoutté, c. avorté, c. escharbotté, c. eschal-
lotté, c. hallebotté

72, A : c. chapitré, c. syndiqué, c. baratté

88, A : c. feueilleté, c. fariné, c. mariné

91, A : c. ripoppé, c. souffleté, c. buffeté (changement
d'ordre).

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| | c. scrupuleux, | [c. languoureux, c. fellé,] |
| | c. maleficié, | c. rance, [c. hectique,] |
| | c. diminutif, | c. usé, c. tintalorisé, |
| 100 | c. quinault, | c. marpault, c. matagrabolisé, |
| | c. rouillé, | c. macéré, c. indague, |
| | c. paralyticque, | c. antidaté, c. dégradé, |
| | c. manchot, | c. perclus, c. confus, |
| | c. de ratepenade, | c. maussade, c. de petarrade, |
| 105 | c. acablé, | c. hallé, c. assablé, |
| | c. dessiré, | c. desolé, c. hebeté, |
| | c. decadent, | c. cornant, c. solœcisant, |
| | c. appelant, | c. mince, c. barré, |
| | [c. ulcéré,] | c. assassiné, c. bobeliné, |
| 110 | c. devalisé, | c. engourdely, c. anonchaly, |
| | c. aneanty, | c. de matafain, c. de zero, |
| | c. badelorié, | c. frippé, c. deschalandé, |
| | [c. febricitant,] | |

« couillonas [au diable,] Panurge, mon amy, puy
 115 qu'ainsi t'est prædestiné, vouldroys tu faire retrogra-
 der les planetes, demancher toutes les sphæres celes-
 tes, propouser erreur aux Intelligences motrices, es-

97-98, A : c. scrupuleux, c. mortifié, c. maleficié

112, A : c. frippé, c. extirpé, c. deschalandé

117. Les *Intelligences motrices* sont les anges qui pré-
 sident aux astres et qui contrôlent ainsi leurs influences
 sur la destinée des humains. (Voir H.C. AGRIPPA, *De*
occulta philosophia, III, xvi). Quant aux trois Parques,
 elles filent la trame de la vie de chaque homme (d'où
 leurs bobines, fuseaux etc.). Pour les géants, cf. ERASME,
Adages, III. X. XCIII, *Gigantum arrogantia*, « Tractum
 a notissima gigantum fabula. Proverbium admonet, in-
 auspicato cedere, quaecunque citra consilium, adversus
 Deos, adversus pietatem, adversus jus et aequum, per
 vim instituuntur ».

[*Comment par Pantagruel et Panurge est Triboulet blasonné.*

CHAPITRE XXXVIII.]

« Par mon ame (respondit Panurge) je le veulx.
5 Il m'est advis que le boyau m'eslargist ; je l'avois
nagueres bien serré et constipé. Mais, ainsi comme
avons choizy la fine creme de Sapience pour conseil,
aussi vouldrois je qu'en nostre consultation præsi-
dast quelqu'un qui feust fol en degré souverain.
10 — Triboulet (dist Pantagruel) me semble compe-

10. Triboulet était le fou de cour de Louis XII et de François I^{er}. Les oracles et les sages ont parlé. Leurs réponses aux questions qui tracassent l'esprit de Panurge ont été claires, elles ont satisfait tout le monde, sauf Panurge, le principal intéressé, dominé par une philautie qui, pour être diabolique, n'en est pas moins comique. R. abandonne, dès ce chapitre, la quête de Panurge, à laquelle il ne revient qu'une seule fois, au chapitre XLV. Le problème qu'il traite maintenant est plus large, plus fondamental. R. s'intéresse surtout à la question des difficultés qui arrêtent même les hommes de bonne volonté, lorsqu'ils doivent prendre des décisions dans des domaines où la complexité des problèmes surpasse l'intelligence de l'homme. R. s'adresse alors à la folie, mais à une folie précise : la *folie de l'évangile* prônée par saint Paul (*Rabelaisian Marriage*, VII). Le blason qui suit, analogue à ceux des chapitres XXVI et XXVIII, marque la transition. Pour des accumulations d'épithètes semblables, cf. MONTAIGLON, *Anciennes poésies françaises*, I, 11 ; II, 11. Sur les origines de ce jeu populaire et littéraire, consulter PLATTARD, *Sources*, 315.

tentement fol. » Panurge respond : « Proprement et totalement fol. »

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | PANTAGRUEL : « F. | PA: « F. de haulte |
| | fatal, | game, |
| 15 | f. de nature, | f. de <i>b</i> quarre et de |
| | | <i>b</i> mol, |
| | f. celeste, | f. terrien, |
| | f. jovial, | f. joyeux et folas- |
| | | trant, |
| 20 | f. mercurial, | f. jolly et folliant, |
| | f. lunaticque, | f. à pompettes, |
| | f. erraticque, | f. à pilettes, |
| | f. ecentricque, | f. à sonnettes, |
| | f. æteré et junonien, | f. riant et venerien, |
| 25 | f. arcticque, | f. de soustraicte, |
| | f. heroicque, | f. de mere goutte, |
| | f. genial, | f. de la prime cuvée, |
| | f. prædestiné, | f. de montaison, |
| | f. auguste, | f. original, |
| 30 | f. cæsarin, | f. papal, |
| | f. imperial, | f. consistorial, |
| | f. royal, | [f. conclaviste, |
| | f. patriarchal, | f. buliste, |
| | f. original,] | f. synodal, |
| 35 | f. loyal, | f. episcopal, |
| | f. ducal, | f. doctoral, |
| | f. banerol, | f. monachal, |
| | f. seigneurial, | f. fiscal, |
| | f. palatin, | f. extravagant, |
| 40 | f. principal, | f. à bourlet, |
| | f. pretorial, | f. à simple tonsure, |
| | f. total, | f. cotal, |
| | f. eleu, | f. gradué, nommé en |
| | | folie, |

| | | |
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| 45 | f. curial, | f. commensal, |
| | f. primipile, | f. premier de sa licence, |
| | f. triumphant, | f. caudataire, |
| | f. vulgaire, | f. de supererogation, |
| 50 | f. domesticque, | f. collateral, |
| | f. exemplaire, | f. <i>a latere</i> , alteré |
| | f. rare et peregrin, | f. niais, |
| | f. aulicque, | f. passagier, |
| | f. civil, | f. branchier, |
| 55 | f. populaire, | f. aguard, |
| | f. familier, | f. gentil, |
| | f. insigne, | f. maillé, |
| | f. favorit, | f. pillart, |
| | f. latin, | f. revenu de queue, |
| 60 | f. ordinaire, | f. griays, |
| | f. redoubté, | f. radotant, |
| | f. transcendent, | f. de soubarbade, |
| | f. souverain, | f. boursouflé, |
| | f. special, | f. supercoquelicantieux, |
| 65 | f. metaphysical, | f. corollaire, |
| | f. ecstacique, | f. de levant, |
| | f. categoricque, | f. soubelin, |
| | f. predicable, | f. cramoisy, |
| 70 | f. decumane, | f. tainct en graine, |
| | f. officieux, | f. bourgeois, |
| | f. de perspective, | f. vistempenard, |
| | f. d'algorisme, | f. de gabie, |
| | f. d'algebra, | f. modal, |
| 75 | f. de caballe, | f. de seconde intention. |
| | f. talmudicque, | f. tacuin, |
| | f. d'alguamala, | f. heteroclite, |
| | [f. compendieux, | f. sommiste, |

| | | |
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| 80 | f. abrevié, | f. abreviateur,] |
| | f. hyperbolicque, | f. de morisque, |
| | f. antonomicque, | f. bien bullé, |
| | f. allegoricque, | f. mandataire, |
| | f. tropologicque, | f. capussionnaire, |
| 85 | f. pleonasmicque, | f. titulaire, |
| | f. capital, | f. tapinois, |
| | f. cerebreux, | f. rebarbatif, |
| | f. cordial, | f. bien mentulé, |
| | f. intestin, | f. mal empieté, |
| 90 | f. epaticque, | f. couilart, |
| | f. spleneticque, | f. grimault, |
| | f. venteux, | f. esventé, |
| | f. legitime, | f. culinaire, |
| | f. d'azimuth, | f. de haulte fustaie, |
| 95 | f. d'almicantarath, | f. contrehastier, |
| | f. proportionné, | f. marmiteux, |
| | f. d'architrave, | f. catarrhé, |
| | f. de pedestal, | f. braguart, |
| | f. parraguon, | f. à xxiiij caratz, |
| 100 | f. celebre, | f. bigearre, |
| | f. alaigre, | f. guinguoys, |
| | f. solennel, | f. à la martingualle, |
| | f. annuel, | f. à bastons, |
| | f. festival, | f. à marotte, |
| 105 | f. recreatif, | f. de bon biés, |
| | f. villaticque, | f. à la grande laise, |
| | f. plaisant, | f. trabuchant, |
| | f. privilégié, | f. susanné, |
| | f. rusticque, | f. de rustrie, |
| 110 | f. ordinaire, | f. à plain bust, |
| | f. de toutes heures, | f. guourrier, |
| | f. en diapason, | f. guourgias, |
| | f. resolu, | f. d'arrachepied, |
| | f. hieroglyphicque, | f. de rebus, |

Pantagruel

Panurge

| | | |
|-----|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 115 | f. autentique, | f. à patron, |
| | f. de valleur, | f. à chapron, |
| | f. precieux, | f. à double rebras, |
| | f. fanaticque, | f. à la damasquine, |
| | f. fantasticque, | f. de tauchie, |
| 120 | f. lymphaticque, | f. d'azemine, |
| | f. panicque, | f. barytonant, |
| | f. alambicqué, | f. mouscheté, |
| | f. non fascheux, | f. à espreuve de hacquebutte. |

125 PANT. Si raison estoit pourquoy jadis en Rome les Quirinales on nommoit la feste des folz, justement en France on pourroit instituer les Triboulletinales.

PAN. Si tous folz portoient cropiere, il auroit les fesses bien escorchées.

130 PANT. S'il estoit Dieu Fatuel, du quel avons parlé, mary de la dive Fatue, son pere seroit Bonadies, sa grande mere Bonedée.

PAN. Si tous folz alloient les ambles, quoy qu'il ayt les jambes tortes, il passeroit de une grande toise.

135 Allons vers luy sans sejourner. De luy aurons quelque belle resolution, je m'y attends.

— Je veulx (dist Pantagruel) assister au jugement de Bridoye. Ce pendent que je iray en Myrelingues, qui est delà la riviere de Loyre, je depescheray Car-

140 palim pour de Bloys icy amener Triboullet. >

132. Cf. plus haut, XXXVIII, 37 et note. *Bona dea* est un autre nom de Fauna (BOCCACE, *De genealogia deorum*, VIII, xii : Senta Fauna était tellement chaste, que « mulieres illi in aperto sacrificare consueverunt, et Bonam appellare Deam » ; selon ROSCHER (*Lexicon der Mythologie*, s.v.) βοναδία est un autre nom de la *Bona dea*.

CHAPITRE XXIX

Troisième droite, 2

Le grand salon de l'appartement du troisième droite pourrait offrir les images classiques d'un lendemain de fête.

C'est une vaste pièce aux boiseries claires, dont on a roulé ou repoussé les tapis, mettant en évidence un parquet délicatement cloisonné. Tout le mur du fond est occupé par une bibliothèque de style Regency dont la partie centrale est en réalité une porte peinte en trompe-l'œil. Par cette porte, à demi ouverte, on aperçoit un long corridor dans lequel s'avance une jeune fille d'environ seize ans qui tient dans sa main droite un verre de lait.

Dans le salon, une autre jeune fille — peut-être est-ce à elle qu'est destiné ce verre réparateur — est couchée, endormie, sur un divan recouvert de daim gris : enfouie au milieu des coussins, à demi recouverte par un châle noir brodé de fleurs et de feuillages, elle apparaît vêtue seulement d'un blouson de nylon manifestement trop grand pour elle.

Par terre, partout, les restes du raout : plusieurs chaussures dépareillées, une longue chaussette blanche, une paire de collants, un haut-de-forme, un faux nez, des assiettes de carton, empilées, froissées ou isolées, pleines de déchets, fanes de radis, têtes de sardines, morceaux de pain un peu rongés, os de poulets, croûtes de fromages, barquettes en papier plissé ayant contenu des petits fours ou des chocolats, mégots, serviettes en papier, gobelets de carton ; sur une table basse diverses bouteilles vides et une motte de beurre, à peine entamée, dans laquelle plusieurs cigarettes ont été soigneusement écrasées ; ailleurs, tout un assortiment de petits rapiers triangulaires contenant encore divers amuse-gueule : olives vertes,

noisettes grillées, petits biscuits salés, chips aux crevettes ; plus loin, dans un endroit un tout petit peu plus dégagé, un tonnelet de Côtes-du-Rhône, posé sur un petit chevalet, au pied duquel s'étalent plusieurs serpilières, quelques mètres de papier essuie-tout capricieusement vidé de son dérouleur et une ribambelle de verres et de gobelets parfois encore à demi pleins ; çà et là traînent des tasses à café, des sucres, des petits verres, des fourchettes, des couteaux, une pelle à gâteaux, des petites cuillers, des canettes de bière, des boîtes de coca-cola, des bouteilles presque intactes de gin, de porto, d'armagnac, de Marie-Brizard, de Cointreau, de crème de banane, des épingles à cheveux, d'innombrables récipients ayant servi de cendriers et débordant d'allumettes calcinées, de cendres, de fonds de pipes, de mégots tachés ou non de rouge à lèvres, de noyaux de dattes, de coquilles de noix, d'amandes et de cacahuètes, de trognons de pommes, d'écorces d'oranges et de mandarines ; en divers endroits gisent de grandes assiettes garnies copieusement de restes de victuailles diverses : des rouleaux de jambon pris dans une gelée désormais liquéfiée, des tranches de rôti de bœuf ornées de rondelles de cornichons, une moitié de colin froid décorée de bouquets de persil, de quartiers de tomates, de torsades de mayonnaise et de tranches de citron crénelées ; d'autres reliefs ont trouvé refuge dans des endroits parfois improbables : en équilibre sur un radiateur, un grand saladier japonais en bois laqué avec encore au fond un reste de salade de riz parsemé d'olives, de filets d'anchois, d'œufs durs, de câpres, de poivrons en lanières et de crevettes ; sous le divan, un plat d'argent, où des pilons intacts voisinent avec des os totalement ou partiellement rongés ; au fond d'un fauteuil, un bol de mayonnaise gluante ; sous un presse-papier de bronze représentant le célèbre *Arès au repos* de Scopas, une soucoupe pleine de radis ; des concombres, des aubergines et des mangues, maintenant racornis, et un restant de laitue achevant de surir, presque au sommet de la bibliothèque, au-dessus d'une édition en six volumes des romans libertins de Mirabeau, et le reste d'une pièce montée — une gigantesque meringue qui était sculptée en forme d'écureuil dangereusement coincée entre deux plis d'un des tapis.

Dispersés à travers la pièce, d'innombrables disques sortis ou non de leurs pochettes, des disques de danse pour la plupart, parmi lesquels surprennent un instant quelques autres

musiques de genre : « *Les Marches et Fanfares de la 2^e D.B.* », « *Le Laboureur et ses Enfants* raconté en argot par Pierr. Devaux », « *Fernand Raynaud : le 22 à Asnières* », « *Mai 61 à la Sorbonne* », « *La Tempesta di Mare*, concerto en mi bémol majeur, op. 8, n^o 5, d'Antonio Vivaldi, interprété au synthétiseur par Léonie Prouillot » ; partout enfin des cartons éventrés, des emballages hâtivement défaits, des ficelles, des rubans dorés aux extrémités vrillées en spirales, indiquant que cette fête fut donnée à l'occasion de l'anniversaire de l'une ou l'autre de ces jeunes filles, et qu'elle y fut particulièrement gâtée par ses amis : on lui a offert, entre autres choses, et indépendamment des denrées solides et liquides que certains ont apportées en guise de cadeau, un petit mécanisme de boîte à musique dont on peut raisonnablement supposer qu'il joue *Happy birthday to you* ; un dessin à la plume de Thorwaldsson représentant un Norvégien dans son costume de mariage : jaquette courte à boutons d'argent très rapprochés, chemise empesée à corolle droite, gilet à liséré soutaché de soie, culotte étroite rattachée au genou avec des bouquets de floches laineuses, feutre mou, bottes jaunâtres, et, à la ceinture, dans sa gaine de cuir, le couteau scandinave, le *Dolknif*, dont est toujours muni le vrai Norvégien ; une toute petite boîte d'aquarelles anglaises — d'où l'on peut conclure que cette jeune fille s'adonne volontiers à la peinture ; un poster nostalgique, représentant un barman aux yeux pleins de malice, une longue pipe en terre à la main, se servant un petit verre de genièvre Hulstkamp, que d'ailleurs, sur une affichette faussement « en abîme », juste derrière lui, il se prépare déjà à déguster, pendant que la foule se prépare à envahir l'estaminet et que trois hommes, l'un à canotier, l'autre à feutre mou, le troisième en haut-de-forme, se bousculent à l'entrée ; un autre dessin, d'un certain William Faltén, caricaturiste américain du début du siècle, intitulé *The Punishment* (le Châtiment) représentant un petit garçon couché dans son lit, pensant au merveilleux gâteau que sa famille est en train de se partager — vision matérialisée dans un nuage flottant au-dessus de sa tête — et dont à la suite d'une bêtise quelconque il a été privé ; et enfin, cadeaux de plaisantins aux goûts sans doute un peu morbides, quelques spécimens de farces et attrapes, parmi lesquels un couteau à ressort cédant à la moindre pression, et une grosse araignée noire assez effroyablement imitée.

On peut déduire de l'apparence générale de la pièce que la fête fut somptueuse, et peut-être même grandiose, mais qu'elle ne dégénéra pas : quelques verres renversés, quelques roussissures de cigarettes sur les coussins et les tapis, pas mal de taches de graisse et de vin, mais rien de vraiment irréparable, sinon un abat-jour de parchemin qui a été crevé, un pot de moutarde forte qui a coulé sur le disque d'or d'Yvette Horner, et une bouteille de vodka qui s'est cassée dans une jardinière contenant un fragile papyrus qui ne s'en remettra sans doute jamais.

CHAPITRE LXXIV

Machinerie de l'ascenseur, 2

Parfois il imaginait que l'immeuble était comme un iceberg dont les étages et les combles auraient constitué la partie visible. Au delà du premier niveau des caves auraient commencé les masses immergées : des escaliers aux marches sonores qui descendraient en tournant sur eux-mêmes, de longs corridors carrelés avec des globes lumineux protégés par des treillis métalliques et des portes de fer marquées de têtes de mort et d'inscriptions au pochoir, des monte-charges aux parois rivetées, des bouches d'aération équipées d'hélices énormes et immobiles, des tuyaux d'incendie en toile métallisée, gros comme des troncs d'arbres, branchés sur des vanes jaunes d'un mètre de diamètre, des puits cylindriques creusés à même le roc, des galeries bétonnées percées de place en place de lucarnes en verre dépoli, des réduits, des soutes, des casemates, des salles de coffres équipées de portes blindées.

Plus bas il y aurait comme des halètements de machines et des fonds éclairés par instants de lueurs rougeoyantes. Des conduits étroits s'ouvriraient sur des salles immenses, des halls souterrains hauts comme des cathédrales, aux voûtes surchargées de chaînes, de poulies, de câbles, de tuyaux, de canalisations, de poutrelles, avec des plates-formes mobiles fixées sur des vérins d'acier luisants de graisse, et des carcasses en tubes et en profilés dessinant des échafaudages gigantesques au sommet desquels des hommes en costume d'amiante, le visage recouvert de grands masques trapézoïdaux feraient jaillir d'intenses éclairs d'arcs électriques.

Plus bas encore il y aurait des silos et des hangars, des chambres froides, des mûrisseries, des centres de tri postaux.

et des gares de triage avec des postes d'aiguillage et des locomotives à vapeur tirant des trucks et des plates-formes, des wagons plombés, des containers, des wagons-citernes, et des quais couverts de marchandises entassées, des piles de bois tropicaux, des ballots de thé, des sacs de riz, des pyramides de briques et de parpaings, des rouleaux de barbelés, des tréfilés, des cornières, des lingots, des sacs de ciment, des barils et des barriques, des cordages, des jerrycans, des bonbonnes de gaz butane.

Et plus loin encore des montagnes de sable, de gravier, de coke, de scories, de ballast, des bétonneuses, des crassiers, et des puits de mine éclairés par des projecteurs à la lumière orange, des réservoirs, des usines à gaz, des centrales thermiques, des derricks, des pompes, des pylônes de haute tension, des transformateurs, des cuves, des chaudières hérissées de tubulures, de manettes et de compteurs ;

et des docks grouillant de passerelles, de ponts roulants et de grues, des treuils aux filins tendus comme des nerfs transportant des bois de placage, des moteurs d'avion, des pianos de concerts, des sacs d'engrais, des balles de fourrage, des billards, des moissonneuses-batteuses, des roulements à billes, des caisses de savon, des tonneaux de bitume, des meubles de bureau, des machines à écrire, des bicyclettes ;

et plus bas encore des systèmes d'écluses et de bassins, des canaux parcourus par des trains de péniches chargées de blé et de coton, et des gares routières sillonnées de camions de marchandises, des corrals pleins de chevaux noirs piaffant, des parcs de brebis bêlantes et de vaches grasses, des montagnes de cageots gonflés de fruits et légumes, des colonnes de meules de gruyère et de port-salut, des enfilades de demi-bêtes aux yeux vitreux, pendues à des crocs de bouchers, des amoncellements de vases, de poteries et de fiasques clissées, des cargaisons de pastèques, des bidons d'huile d'olive, des tonneaux de saumure, et des boulangeries géantes avec des mitrons torse nu, en pantalon blanc, sortant des fours des plaques brûlantes garnies de milliers de pains aux raisins, et des cuisines démesurées avec des bassines grosses comme des machines à vapeur débitant par centaines des portions de ragoût graisseuses versées dans des grands plats rectangulaires ;

et plus bas encore des galeries de mine avec de vieux chevaux aveugles tirant des wagonnets de minerai et les lentes processions des mineurs casqués ; et des boyaux suintants étayés de madriers gonflés d'eau qui mèneraient vers des marches luisantes au bas desquelles clapoterait une eau noirâtre ; des barques à fond plat, des bachots lestés de tonneaux vides, navigueraient sur ce lac sans lumière, surchargés de créatures phosphorescentes transportant inlassablement d'une rive à l'autre des paniers de linge sale, des lots de vaisselle, des sacs à dos, des paquets de carton fermés avec des bouts de ficelle ; des bacs emplis de plantes vertes malingres, des bas-reliefs d'albâtre, des moulages de Beethoven, des fauteuils Louis XIII, des potiches chinoises, des cartons à tapisserie représentant Henri III et ses mignons en train de jouer au bilboquet, des suspensions encore garnies de leurs papiers tue-mouches, des meubles de jardins, des couffins d'oranges, des cages à oiseaux vides, des descentes de lit, des bouteilles thermos .

plus bas recommenceraient les enchevêtrements de conduites, de tuyaux et de gaines, les dédales des égouts, des collecteurs et des ruelles, les étroits canaux bordés de parapets de pierres noires, les escaliers sans garde-fou surplombant le vide, toute une géographie labyrinthique d'échoppes et d'arrière-cours, de porches et de trottoirs, d'impasses et de passages, toute une organisation urbaine verticale et souterraine avec ses quartiers, ses districts et ses zones : la cité des tanneurs avec leurs ateliers aux odeurs infectes, leurs machines souffreteuses aux courroies fatiguées, leurs entassements de cuirs et de peaux, leurs bacs remplis de substances brunâtres ; les entrepôts des démolisseurs avec leurs cheminées de marbre et de stuc, leurs bidets, leurs baignoires, leurs radiateurs rouillés, leurs statues de nymphes effarouchées, leurs lampadaires, leurs bancs publics ; la ville des ferrailleurs, des chiffonniers et des puciers, avec leurs amoncellements de guenilles, leurs carcasses de voitures d'enfant, leurs ballots de battle-dresses, de chemises défraîchies, de ceinturons et de rangers, leurs fauteuils de dentiste, leurs stocks de vieux journaux, de montures de lunettes, de porte-clés, de bretelles, de dessous-de-plat à musique, d'ampoules électriques, de laryngoscopes, de cornues, de flacons à tubulure latérale et de verreries variées ; la halle aux vins avec ses montagnes de

bonbonnes et de bouteilles cassées, ses foudres effondrés, ses citernes, ses cuves, ses casiers ; la ville des éboueurs avec ses poubelles renversées laissant s'échapper des croûtes de fromage, des papiers gras, des arêtes de poisson, des eaux de vaisselle, des restes de spaghetti, des vieux bandages, avec ses monceaux d'immondices charriés sans fin par des bulldozers gluants, ses squelettes de machines à laver, ses pompes hydrauliques, ses tubes cathodiques, ses vieux appareils de T.S.F., ses canapés perdant leur crin ; et la ville administrative, avec ses quartiers généraux grouillant de militaires aux chemises impeccablement repassées déplaçant des petits drapeaux sur des cartes du monde ; avec ses morgues de céramique peuplées de gangsters nostalgiques et de noyées blanches aux yeux grands ouverts ; avec ses salles d'archives remplies de fonctionnaires en blouse grise compulsant à longueur de journée des fiches d'état civil ; avec ses centraux téléphoniques alignant sur des kilomètres des standardistes polyglottes, avec ses salles des machines aux téléscrip-teurs crépitants, aux ordinateurs débitant à la seconde des liasses de statistiques, des feuilles de paye, des fiches de stock, des bilans, des relevés, des quittances, des états néants ; avec ses mange-papier et ses incinérateurs engloutissant sans fin des monceaux de formulaires périmés, des coupures de presse entassées dans des chemises brunes, des registres reliés de toile noire couverts d'une fine écriture violette ;

et, tout en bas, un monde de cavernes aux parois couvertes de suie, un monde de cloaques et de borbiers, un monde de larves et de bêtes, avec des êtres sans yeux traînant des carcasses d'animaux, et des monstres démoniaques à corps d'oiseau, de porc ou de poisson, et des cadavres séchés, squelettes revêtus d'une peau jaunâtre, figés dans une pose de vivants, et des forges peuplées de Cyclopes hébétés, vêtus de tabliers de cuir noir, leur œil unique protégé par un verre bleu serti dans du métal, martelant de leurs masses d'airain des boucliers étincelants.