

Intertextual Assemblage as Fictional Generator: *Topologie d'une cité fantôme*

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Alain Robbe-Grillet's most recent major work, *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* of 1976, is called on the cover a "roman," and bears on the back a typical Robbe-Grilletian "*prière d'insérer*" pseudo-résumé suggesting a complicated and richly "destructured" plot involving a narrator "*enquêteur*," a lost city once the sight of various civilizations; a precocious child basing his sexual fantasies from materials in books on art, history, and religion; an architecture of theaters, prisons, harems, temples, and houses of prostitution; and a "topological" series of cataclysms, massacres, and ruined documents. Readers familiar with his earlier "ciné-roman," *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* (1973), will find in this summary statement an extension of the compositional method described in the Introduction of *Glissements*: the author there states that he uses a panoply of popular thematics (extended, in *Topologie*, over centuries) as materials from a saussurian cultural *langue*, and by cutting them into pieces in a "mouvement de rétrogradation" makes of them his own *parole*, a new *écriture*. The traditional *référentiel*, or correspondence between text and reality, as well as the expression of conventional *sens* or meaning, are both altered to the point of virtual destruction. The similarity between the evolution of Robbe-Grillet's fictional structure and that described as early as 1925 by B. Eikhenbaum is startling: in *On the Theory of Prose*, Eikhenbaum wrote: "In the evolution of each genre, moments occur when the genre used until then for wholly serious objectives . . . takes on a comic or parodic force. . . . Serious interpretation gives way to irony, wit, pastiche . . . and the author himself occupies the foreground. . . . He often destroys the illusions of authenticity and seriousness; the construction of the work becomes a game. . . . This produces a regeneration of the genre, which discovers new possibilities and new forms."¹ If we view the changes in Robbe-Grillet's compositional strategies from *La Jalousie* on as trending increasingly towards the developments analyzed by Eikhenbaum, we can establish a basis for a new complex of fictional structures involving not only irony, wit, and pastiche, but also a manipulation of elements from other areas of the author's previous writings, resulting in new forms of intertextual assemblage.

In *Topologie d'une cité fantôme*, two major lines of structural evolution in Robbe-Grillet's works come together: on the one hand, that of major plot alterations with respect to chronology, point of view, *liaisons de scène*, and paradoxes of décor and action, as well as other deviations recognized by critics of the *nouveau roman*, on the other hand, and that of intertextual self-reference, a technique which, from *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1965) onward, plays a developing role in his novels and films. It is evident that intertextuality for many authors has become an important type of fictional generator, along

¹"Dans l'évolution de chaque genre, il se produit des moments où le genre utilisé jusqu'alors avec des objectifs entièrement sérieux . . . prend une forme comique ou parodique. . . . L'interprétation sérieuse . . . fait place à l'ironie, à la plaisanterie, au pastiche . . . [et] l'auteur lui-même vient au premier plan, et il détruit souvent l'illusion d'authenticité et de sérieux; la construction du sujet devient un jeu. . . . Ainsi se produit la régénération du genre: il trouve de nouvelles possibilités et de nouvelles formes." Quoted by Tzvetan Todorov, *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1965), pp. 208-209. My translation.

with the linguistic and situational generators currently used by writers from the Oulipo group of Georges Perec and his colleagues to members of the *nouveau roman* group other than Robbe-Grillet, such as Claude Ollier and Jean Ricardou.²

Since *Topologie* involves the use of intertextual elements, integrated into a wholly "new" text, some remarks on types of intertextual forms appear appropriate. Obviously, when intertextual repetition is limited to reprises of elements from the work itself, the procedure relates to traditional techniques of forecasting or "planting," tragic irony, *mise en abyme*, and the conception of dramatic preparation implied in the abbé d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre* of the 17th century, with its admonition that the outcome of the plot must be "préparé mais non prévu." More subtle modern forms of the reuse of textual aspects taken from the same work would include the reappearance of unaltered sentences and paragraphs, as in Ricardou's *La Prise de Constantinople*, and the almost subliminal reuse of verbal elements to create metaphoric assimilation, as in Claude Ollier's *Été indien*, in which the description of the protagonist's taxi ride in Yucatán to visit a ruined Mayan pyramid furnishes the vocabulary and syntax for the description of a later taxi ride down Fifth Avenue in New York, creating a metaphoric-metonymic kinship between the geometric structure of the Yucatan pyramid and that of the pyramidal skyscrapers of New York, without the use of "overt" comparison. While Robbe-Grillet, as early in his career as the writing of *Les Gommès* (1953), has made some use of such techniques (compare the *pont bascule* passages of *Les Gommès*, the corridors of *Dans le labyrinthe*), his "repetitions," in general, have involved dechronology like that of the recurrent scenes of *La Jalousie* even more than the metaphoric joining of separate elements. Nor has Robbe-Grillet so far introduced *textual* extracts (as opposed to *visual* borrowings, as we shall see) from the works of other authors, as Ollier and Ricardou have done with respect to Flaubert and Mallarmé. In the first stage of his writing career, Robbe-Grillet did in fact think of "rewriting" novels by other authors: in *Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet*, I quote his remark of 1957 that "Les romans de Graham Greene m'ont souvent donné envie de les récrire."³ At the time, however, his employment of this type of intertextuality was limited to the use of small "objectal" elements from other works, such as the items derived from Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* in *La Jalousie* (in which Greene's novel also serves as the model for the *mise en abyme* inner novel read by A and Frank). The widest development of the technique of *rifacim-ento* or "*riscrittura*" has occurred in Italy, and has been excellently studied by Renato Barilli with respect to Calvino and Arbasino in *Tra presenza e assenza* (1974). Even such a work as Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, in which quotations from *Hamlet* are augmented by large textual areas invented by Stoppard, fits to some extent into the phenomenon of "littérature citationnelle" as practised by Georges Perec and even by Thomas Mann (in *Doctor Faustus*).

Most of Robbe-Grillet's more recent fiction, prior to *Topologie*, contains rather elaborate internal self-references, especially the ironic use of characters' names and pseudo-symbolic objects from previous novels and films. Examples are the appearance of the names Mathias and Jean Robin in *L'Homme qui ment*, assorted objects from *Le Voyeur*, such as the bicycle, in *La Maison de rendez-vous*, and typical Robbe-Grilletian object fetishes, such as shoes and broken glass,

²I have studied these aspects of the question at some length in an article entitled "Post-Modern Generative Fiction: Novel and Film," *Critical Inquiry*, 2, No. 2 (Winter 1975), 253-62.

³Bruce Morrissette, *Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1971), p. 117.

more or less *passim*. Rich materials for critical research await investigation into this subject. It seems evident that the area of popular thematics from which Robbe-Grillet admittedly chooses the elements of "langue" to be restructured into the author's own "parole" has been extended to include objects from and allusions to his own works. "Matériaux" first selected from familiar areas of popular culture (Freudian symbolism, adventure myths, and the like), and then used in specific works, are extracted and included in later works as elements having a double or triple level, thus augmenting the "decompositional" irony.

Meanwhile, an accessory development had begun to occur in the author's creative process, one which now comes to light in *Topologie*, as well as in *La Belle Captive* (1975, with 75 illustrations taken from pictures by Magritte), *La Construction d'un temple en ruines à la Déesse Vanadé* (1976, with engravings by Paul Delvaux), and the forthcoming joint work with the painter Rauchenberg, *Traces suspectes en surface*. With necessary variations (e.g., in the case of the Magritte project, involving an artist already dead), the procedure follows the formula described by Robbe-Grillet in connection with the Delvaux "collaboration": "The more I think of it, the more I am persuaded that to obtain an interpenetration of text and visual image . . . the most amusing formula would be a dialogue. I write the first text, Delvaux replies with an engraving which re-starts my own themes and transforms them. I answer in turn with a second text, and so forth, up to ten. The ten short stories (*nouvelles*) would resemble then the chapters of a continuous narrative."⁴ If only this were involved, the Delvaux project, like the joint work with Rauchenberg and even, *mutatus mutandi*, the Magritte project, could be considered as rather specialized types of illustrative cross-influence. But the publication of *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* as an independent novel, not accompanied by illustrations of any kind, changes the situation, and illustrates the emergence of intertextual assemblage as a genuine fictional generator, productive of new narrative forms.

The gradual evolution of this method, style, and aesthetic doctrine of Robbe-Grillet began some years ago with a number of "projects" involving works of visual artists. Some of the projects have been completed and published in limited or special editions, some are still unpublished in part or in whole. One of the earliest was the work entitled *Rêves de jeunes filles* (around 1970), containing photographs of very young girls by David Hamilton and ten short texts by Robbe-Grillet, mostly printed in a format of Apollinairian free verse arranged by the editor to flesh out the pages and to create a "poetic" tone. Details on the reuse of these and other such texts are given below. Probably the most ambitious project, dating back to the late sixties, is the Rauschenberg-Robbe-Grillet *Traces suspectes en surface*, now scheduled to appear in a de luxe edition of forty copies, with the artist's lithographs and the writer's caligraphed pages of text both individually signed. An incidental benefit to common readers is the accessibility of the expensive Rauschenberg text in *Topologie*.

Not only does the assemblage method bring together texts from various preceding sources; it also creates complicated interlockings or *emboûements* of elements from different texts. An example is the appearance of the theme of three eggs (also present in the film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*) in sections

⁴"Plus j'y pense, plus je suis persuadé que pour obtenir cette interpénétration du texte et de l'image que vous souhaitez, la formule la plus amusante et la plus originale serait un dialogue. J'écris le premier text, Delvaux me répond par une gravure qui relance mes propres thèmes et les transforme. Je réponds à mon tour par un second texte et ainsi de suite jusqu'à dix. Les dix nouvelles seraient comme les dix chapitres d'un récit continu." Quoted by Jeanine Warnod in "Rencontre Paul Delvaux-Alain Robbe-Grillet," *Le Monde*, n.d. My translation.

of *Topologie* derived from at least two different projects. On page 155 of *Topologie* we read: "Et puis c'est l'image des oeufs qui surgit: trois oeufs blancs posés sur une assiette blanche, les trois coques ellipsoïdes—uniformement mates et lisses—se touchent entre elles par deux points de contact chacune, ce qui ne fait cependant que trois points au total."⁵ These eggs, no doubt the first in the Robbe-Grillet series of egg images, originated, according to Robbe-Grillet, from a Rauschenberg picture created early in the joint project with that artist, and "transformed" by the writer into its *écriture* form. The reader of *Topologie* could naturally conclude that the reappearance of the eggs on page 180 of the same work was a reprise of page 155: ". . . l'enfant . . . défroisse la feuille blanche quadrillée, relit le message: 'Après les vendanges, l'assassin menacé prendra garde aux oeufs de l'oiseau qui brûle.' . . . il place à l'intérieure la petite clef . . ." etc. The second egg allusion, however, derives demonstrably from a different project, namely, *La Belle Captive*, whose elements are interlocked with pictures by Magritte. Among the Magritte titles reproduced in *La Belle Captive* are "Le Mois des vendanges" and "L'Assassin menacé"; among the related images, the three eggs of Magritte's "Le Domaine d'Arnheim" (with a huge bird above), the flames of many pictures, and the keys of "Le Sourire du diable" and "L'Échelle du feu," the last of these in flames. Moreover, the section of *Topologie* beginning on the next page, entitled "Un Autel à double fond," consists of the first 38 pages of *La Belle Captive*, whose entire 150 pages of text form only "un petit morceau," according to Robbe-Grillet, of his next novel, to be called *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*. At the same time, *emboîtements* of names of intertextual characters, with variations, proliferate throughout the whole assemblage of texts: David H., Vanessa, Vanadé, Divana, Divida, Diana, etc.

At least one semi-independent project, involving not another artist but rather a commercial journalistic enterprise, has been intercalated as a part of *Topologie*. It is the section called "Cérémonie rituelle," running from page 157 to page 165. The Japanese liquor company, Suntory, commissioned Robbe-Grillet to supply a text whose only requirement, from the company's viewpoint, would be that a character in the text should consume "une boisson alcoolique." The text has in fact appeared in Japan in millions of copies, as an advertisement for Suntory liquors. The alcoholic drink appears discreetly in *Topologie* on page 158: "Elle boit de sa lèvre pâle le sombre vin couleur de sang," and again on page 161, "Et l'alcool brûlant se répand dans son corps de glace." Other phrases in the same section indicate that at the time of its composition Robbe-Grillet probably had in mind textual and thematic relationships with both *La Belle Captive* ("Elle écoute les pas de l'assassin dans l'escalier," page 159, also reminiscent of *Projet pour une révolution à New York*) and *Topologie* in general ("l'adolescente déplace de nouveau ses prunelles élargies par la pénombre depuis la fenêtre que protègent à l'extérieur cinq forts barreaux en fer forgé," etc.). This type of textual reuse differs noticeably from the collaborative interchange and cross-modification techniques of the Rauschenberg, Magritte, and Delvaux projects, and shows how a more pragmatic assemblage can be incorporated into the generative procedure.

Information furnished to me by Robbe-Grillet in late 1976 yields the following summary of assemblage materials in *Topologie*. As indicated in the table of contents of the novel, the work begins with short text called "Incipit" and ends with an equally brief "Coda"; only the last of these two texts is not taken from the preexisting projects that form the basis for the other 200-odd pages. Each of the five major sections is called an "espace," all but

⁵Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1976).

one of which ("Deuxième espace: Répétitions à mouvement ascendant pour une demeure immobile") are divided by subtitles into a considerable number of subsections. Arranging the various parts in chronological order of their original composition produces the following schema:

1. "Deuxième espace": from the earliest David Hamilton text, published first as part of the *Instantanés* section of the 10/12 edition of *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1972).

2. Section I of "Quatrième espace," called "Vagabondage mièvre en attendant" (a section in turn subdivided into 10 short titled parts): from *Rêves de jeunes filles*, with photographs by David Hamilton.

3. "Première espace": generated by the Delvaux project, begun around 1972, originally to be called *Prisons de jeunes filles mineures*, and now published with the Delvaux engravings by Editions "Le Bateau-Lavoir" in a limited edition under the title *La Construction d'un temple en ruines à la Déesse Vanadé*, which is also the title of the first *espace*.

4. "Quatrième espace," part II, "Deuxième cycle initiatique": text published in a limited edition as *Les Demoiselles d'Hamilton* (a "titre-hommage" to Picasso's famous *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*).

5. "Troisième espace": previously unpublished continuation of the Delvaux project of "Première espace."

6. "Incipit": from the Rauschenberg project, to appear with Rauschenberg's lithographs *Traces suspectes en surface*, in the aforementioned limited edition.

7. "Cinquième espace": Part I, "Retour," from the Rauschenberg project; Part II, "Cérémonie rituelle," from the Suntory commissioned text; Parts III and IV, "Paysage avec cri," "Rétrospective des fouilles," from the Rauschenberg texts.

8. "Cinquième espace," Part V, "Un Autel à double fond": this text is identical to the first "chapter" of *La Belle Captive* (pages 9-38, with some 20 related pictures by Magritte), and theoretically at least will reappear in the expanded novel of which *La Belle Captive* will form only a part, under the title *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*. Integration exists, therefore, joining the fifth *espace* to three novels, *La Belle Captive*, *Topologie*, and the future *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*. Details of these multiple intercalations appear below.

The most important critical question posed by the complicated assemblage procedure schematized above is, no doubt, whether *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* constitutes a "unified" fictional narrative, a true novel, or merely a pragmatic reuse of preexisting texts, forming a somewhat suspect example of what critics have called Robbe-Grillet's "later," "purist," and "meaningless" novels. Study of this problem may profitably begin with a brief investigation of the case of relationships between one group of external "sources" or transformed borrowings (the Magritte pictures), and the narrational plot and object descriptions (the novelistic diegesis), of *La Belle Captive* (whose opening section reappears, as noted, as "Un Autel à double fond" in *Topologie*). First, the quite identifiable "story line" of *La Belle Captive* involves an ambiguous murderer-doctor-narrator who closely resembles, in appearance and action, the "Assassin menacé" of Magritte's picture of that title. It is safe to say that without the existence of that particular picture, *La Belle Captive* could hardly have been organized diegetically as it is, since nothing else in the 76 Magritte reproductions to which the novel relates suggests definitely the dominant theme of the murderer. Robbe-Grillet's constructional art has created a marvelous overall series of connections between "L'Assassin menacé" and the other paintings, taken non-chronologically from decades of Magritte's work. It is as if a surrealist *hasard*

objectif brought Robbe-Grillet into contact with the seminal visual image, completely akin to actional thematics already present in his own novels and films: the watching assassin, the murdered nude girl, the phonograph, the *voyeur* spectators, etc. The Magritte titles, as well as the subjects of the pictures, pass "naturally" into Robbe-Grillet's text, as outright quotations or modified references: "L'Assassin menacé," "La Traversée difficile," "La Mémoire," "L'Idole," "L'Échele du feu," "Le Noctambule," "La Réponse imprévue," "La Maison de verre," "La Belle Captive," "Les Profondeurs du plaisir," "Le Faux miroir," "Le Mois des vendanges," "La Femme introuvable," "Le Coup au cœur," "Lectrice agitée," "L'Oeil," "L'Invention collective," "Le Principe du plaisir," "La Chambre d'écoute," "L'Entrée en scène," "La Représentation," "Les Objets familiers," "À la rencontre du plaisir," "L'Homme blanc," "Le Maître du plaisir," "Le Plaisir," "Le Char de la vierge," "Le Poison," "Le Temps menaçant," "La Goutte d'eau," "Le Retour de flamme," and others less evident. A complete list of "éléments Magritte" which recur in one form or another in *Topologie* itself (in addition to *La Belle Captive*) would include: falling stone, murdered girl, bowler hat, eggs, flames, boots, eyes, umbrella, fish, bicycle, cigar, valise, dagger, flower, book, shoe, apple, "noeud papillon," poison, mask, keys, glass, wine bottle, birds (including one being eaten), etc.

The role of visual models as textual generators is illustrated by the basic "transformation" effected by Robbe-Grillet in his use of the initial Magritte picture reproduced in *La Belle Captive* in the text included in *Topologie*. The "generative" picture shows an enormous aereolitic rock falling into the ocean. On top of the giant boulder stands a Carcassonne-like walled castle, reflected in the title, "Le Château des Pyrénées." To Robbe-Grillet, the interest of the picture lies obviously not in the château but in the great falling rock, so that the château disappears from his text, which speaks only of "une pierre qui tombe . . . de très haut, aérolithe, bloc rocheux aux formes massives," etc. Significantly, the giant rock reappears in at least two other Magritte pictures, where it stands without the château, as if following the lead of Robbe-Grillet's omission in another surrealist *hasard objectif*. Although no creative interchange occurred between Magritte (who died in 1967) and Robbe-Grillet, comparable to the cross-fertilizations of the Delvaux project, it is as if something similar had taken place: Robbe-Grillet's method has produced a sort of imaginary retrospective collaboration with the painter Magritte which repeats itself creatively throughout *La Belle Captive*.

Why the term "topology"? Apart from the title, Robbe-Grillet's sole use of the word is in the form "topographie" in the *prière d'insérer* text printed on the back of the novel's cover. This implies a first level of meaning close to the nonmathematical or nongeometric dictionary definition of "topology" as the "observation of the peculiarities of places" (*Webster's New Standard*): "Une ville perdue . . . sa topographie particulière . . ." However, the mathematical aspects of the new topology in relation to the works of the *nouveau roman* in general and Robbe-Grillet's novels and films in particular appeared first in two papers presented at the 1971 Cerisy conference on the New Novel: Claude Simon's illustrated presentation of his *bricolage* method of composition, and my paper "Robbe-Grillet N^o 1, 2, . . . X," also using the term "*topologie*" as well as topological drawings to show analogies between novel structures and such new topological forms as Klein "worms."⁶ The critic Françoise Meltzer has written that the case of Robbe-Grillet's novel *Topologie* shows that the author has integrated theoretical categories used to

⁶These papers both appear in *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions 10/18, 1972), II, pp. 73-97 and 119-33; an adaptation of my own appeared in *Boundary 2*, No. 1 (Fall 1972), 45-57, under the title "Topology and the French *nouveau roman*."

analyze his works into his own fictional structures, implying a "dialogue between critic and author." She states: "The title itself opens such a dialogue, with its first word: topology. In 1972, Bruce Morrissette . . . advanced a theory of topology. . . . Topology, said Morrissette, 'represents the primary intellectual operation capable of revealing the modalities of surfaces, volumes, boundaries, contiguities, holes, and above all the notions of *inside* and *outside*, with the attendant ideas of insertion, penetration, containment, emergence and the like.'"⁷ Miss Meltzer goes on to show that by adding to topological analogies the use of categories such as generative metaphors, correspondences, *mises en abyme*, and other devices whose definitions she derives from my article "Post-Modern Generative Fiction: Novel and Film,"⁸ one may say that "here, in essence, is the basis of *Topologie*." My own views coincide with much of Miss Meltzer's analysis, and I cheerfully salute her knowledgeable contribution to my theory and method.

That Robbe-Grillet views each element of *Topologie* as a type of generator is made evident by the title of the first section of the first *espace*: "Dans la cellule génératrice." Everything in the novel forms an amalgam assembled from linguistic, metaphoric, situational, and other generative devices. The "unity" of the whole demonstrates the existence, even in the earliest texts here incorporated, of multiple connections between themes: erotic violence afflicted on young girls (mostly in a state of nudity), the secret movements of an ambiguous narrator-murderer, the transformation of narrative elements into theatrical scenes; and, in the case of linguistic intercalations, a vast cross-system of names (such as the Vanadé, Vanessa, Victoria sequence) leading in turn to words (Vampire, Vanquished, Vanadium) expressive of the thematic connections.

As a "novel," *Topologie* is marked by the virtual absence of dialogue: a few indirectly reported remarks, one or two spoken lines surrounded by *guillemets*, and the often repeated wordless sound of an outcry, the "long cri aigu" which forms, throughout, a leitmotif, an integrative sonority. The "successive civilizations" found on the sight of the phantom city form a thematic metaphor for the chronologically different connective elements that join the separate texts of the generative assemblage. Aesthetically, the effect of the novel depends on two main types of reading: the reading of apparently discrete scenes appreciated in and for themselves, then for their progressive correspondences; and the reading that involves the accompanying recognition of generative cross-references, intertextual relationships with both previous works of Robbe-Grillet and, as the reading progresses, with passages of *Topologie* itself and with its pre-diegetic outside references, such as the Magritte pictures listed above.

Since the days of critical battles over the existence or nonexistence of a chronological pattern in *La Jalousie* (1957), a general conclusion has been reached that the novels of Robbe-Grillet have become progressively less analyzable on the basis of diegetic chronology, and the critical use of résumés, even "liberally" conceived as structural rather than anecdotal in nature, has become increasingly less acceptable or even possible. Nevertheless, each of his works continues to have an *order of reading* (or viewing) which, so far at least, constitutes a *textual chronology* (since Robbe-Grillet has not, like some experimental novelists, left his pages loose or designed to be read at random

⁷Françoise Meltzer, "Preliminary Excavations of Robbe-Grillet's Phantom City," *Chicago Review*, 28 (Summer 1976), pp. 41-50.

⁸*Critical Inquiry*, 2, No. 2 (Winter 1975), 253-62.

or in changeable order). The following "reading notes" may, then, be given in the textually chronological order of the narrational sections on which they are based.

"Incipit," the beginning text, starts with a fragmented phrase sounding the themes of sleep, the city, and textual repetition: "Avant de m'endormir, la ville, de nouveau," followed not by a period but by a line space and points of suspension(. . .). The dominant narrative masculine first person appears in passages reminiscent of the beginning of *Dans le labyrinthe*, except that the "je" of *Topologie*, far from disappearing to hide behind the text until the last page, will continue to speak. As in the opening statement of *Dans le labyrinthe*, time and external events are contradictorily combined: "C'est le matin, c'est le soir." Everything is presented as beginning again (as, for example, with the "une fois de plus" of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*): "de nouveau," "encore une fois." Yet the text opposes to the *reprise* structure (utilized throughout *Projet pour une révolution à New York*) a system of negative anaphoras which reinforce the degradation of narrative orthodoxy: "Mais il n'y a plus rien, ni cri, ni roulement, ni rumeur lointaine; ni le moindre contour . . ." Obviously, "Incipit" forms at once an exposition and a preparatory foretaste of diegetic and scenic elements: avenues, ruined buildings, a falling rock, mutilated statues, twisted iron, houses of prostitution, theaters, mirrors, a prison, beds, dusty windows, and—closer to the actional narrative—a nude girl combing her hair before the glass, another nude girl lying dead on a low divan, a long knife ("l'arme de mort"), a pool of blood on the marble floor, and the cold wall on which the narrator writes the word CONSTRUCTION, the "construction imaginaire par laquelle je nomme les ruines d'une future divinité." *Nomination*, to name, is then, as it was in *Project*, to create; Robbe-Grillet can say with Mallarmé, "Je dis une fleur! et hors de l'oubli . . . musicalement se lève . . . l'absente de tous bouquets," the aesthetic rose, the created flower.

The seven "chapters" of "Première espace" may be recognized in several ways as belonging to the Delvaux project for which they were written. The original project title, *Prisons de jeunes filles mineures*, is related not only to this text, but also to the film *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, which contains a similar "prison for young girls." The highly developed geometric elements in this section of *Topologie* sometimes suggest an illustration of the film's images: the five vertical bars of the cell's window, one of which ("immédiatement à droite de la barre médiane") is cut off in the middle, corresponds exactly to the bar in Alice's cell in *Glissements* (reproduced on page 40 of the *ciné-roman*). The fact that the first seven of the ten Delvaux chapters contain no narrative pronoun permits Robbe-Grillet to divide the work and to place the remaining three chapters after the "deuxième espace," at a point where the return to the first person narrative mode of "Incipit" gives greater unity to the later first-person sections. Pictorial analogies with Delvaux abound, ranging from streetcars to locomotives. Even the basic image of the engraving process (Delvaux) engenders an objective correlative in the form of the *stylet* or etching needle which joins visually and linguistically with the *styletto* or poniard as the murder weapon. In turn, the *caillou* or rock about the size of a fist, which accompanies the stylus, prepares for the enormous boulder of the later Magritte passages in the image-integrating process that makes of the whole *Topologie* assemblage a self-contained topological "interior" to which the referential "outside" (Rauschenberg, Delvaux, Magritte, etc.) leads in a structural operation corresponding to those depicted metaphorically in drawings of Klein "worms." A further development of analogical relationships among referential outer sources, interior thematics or imagery, and evolution from

diegetic to generative theory, is shown in the *mise en abyme* passage (page 33) in which the “novelistic” scene is transformed into an engraved image by a young *graveuse* using “un fin stylet d’acier.” Engraving, then, is writing; and the scraping of the artist’s needle is accompanied by the repeated sharp cries of agony in the “symbolic” wounding of the creator’s subject.

Triangles and letters, adumbrated earlier, predominate in the “Inscription” section. The V of Vanadé, the goddess (of pleasure or desire) who ruled the ancient city of Vanadium, appears in the terms of the inscription surviving on her temple, such as *volcan, au sommet du vé, triangle, visiteuse, voluptueuse*, etc. Miss Meltzer has described much of the letter wordplay in *Topologie*, pointing out such examples as “the V-shaped slice cut from the ovoid . . . its red wound mirroring the violated, bleeding virgins.”⁹ A sound anagram with G (in French, V and G both employ the sound *é*) yields, on page 49, another inscription of some fifteen highly charged words:

vanadé - vigie - navire
danger - rivage - devin
nager - en vain - carnage
divan - vierge - vagin
graveide - engendra - david

Thus David G., whose name will blend with that of David H. (the “real” photographer David Hamilton of the projects mentioned), enters “sur scène” to become the youth whose mother takes him to the theater to watch the play “La Naissance de David” about his own double: “Tu vois,” says the mother in one of the rare spoken lines, “le petit garçon s’appelle comme toi” (p. 62). Thirty years later, the text states (p. 73), the adult David will dream of the same events, with the same “arrêts, bifurcations, ruptures brusques et reprises”—a familiar *mise en abyme* allusion of the type found in Robbe-Grillet’s novels at least as early as the description of the “chant indigène” of *La Jalousie*, joining, in a kind of metonymy, phrases that describe both diegetic events of the fiction and the generative techniques on which the narrative order of the work is based. There is even a museum of “collections historiques” whose contexts derive from assorted projects, earlier novels, films, and objects found in pictures by Delvaux, Rauschenberg, or Magritte: an iron cage (*L’Éden et après*); an umbrella, wicker basket, and bowler hat (Magritte); a bicycle with its front wheel twisted into a sort of figure of eight (*Le Voyeur*); daggers (*Dans le labyrinthe* and other texts); and various sharp cutting tools, etc. The “message clandestin” (metaphorically, the hidden meaning of the novel) appears “une fois de plus” in the scene wherein “la jeune actrice manie . . . papier, caillou, et stylet,” or, in prosaic terms, wherein a character-creator manipulates writing paper, object, and engraving tool, elements forming the basic triangle of the generative assemblage principle, leading immediately to a descent into the “generative cell” (p. 74).

The analectic section of *Topologie* most likely to be recognized by readers of Robbe-Grillet’s previous works is the “Deuxième espace,” entitled “Répétitions à mouvement ascendant pour une demeure immobile.” The text is identical (except for a change in name from “Hamilton” to “David H.”) to that added by the author to *Instantanés* at the end of the 10/18 edition (1972), with a preface by Franklin J. Matthews, of *La Maison de rendez-vous*. The style, although somewhat different in tone from the previous and subsequent sections of *Topologie* (as, for example, in the use of paragraphs as long as seven pages),

⁹Françoise Meltzer, p. 46.

strikes many of the same notes and themes: anaphoras ("aucun bruit" repeated five times in one sentence, "quelques secondes, ou quelques heures, ou quelques années," etc.), motionless girls at their dressing tables, with an interplay of mirrors, the whole transformed into a photographic image by the click of David H.'s camera. The borrowing is almost a textbook example of the type of *techné rhetoriké* called *memoria*, or the "mnemonic mastery of stereotypes" reusable from one discourse to another.

The "Troisième espace," or continuation of the first section's "Construction d'un temple en ruines à la Déesse Vanadé," is marked by the sudden emergence of a narrative "je" (used only in the "Incipit" until this point) who refers openly to the previous details and contradictions of the "ensemble du texte." Even the diegetic murder theme is identified openly as "l'assassinat de la jeune prostituée," one of the main points of contact with the extract from *La Belle Captive* (the last section of the "Cinquième espace") in which Magritte's murdered female appears "une fois de plus." From this point of the text onward, the *contaminato* technique employed by Robbe-Grillet to create out of seemingly independent parts a work to which each element becomes essential evolves in a display of apparent textual unity which adds greatly to effect of generative creation. Among the intertextual details of this *espace* are the Vanadé-Danaë analogy, with its "fleuve de métal précieux"; the automobile accident similar to that of *L'Immortelle*; "le gommage d'une lettre," evoking *Les Gommages* (in which the ambiguity of the ". . . di . . ." fragmentation of *Oédipe* prepares for the reference to a matter "traité de façon exhaustive dans le premier roman que j'ai publié jadis," page 98). The floating débris of page 100 make an easy generative transition from the canal of *Les Gommages* to the river of *Topologie*. The procedure continues: the "immobilisation totale des acteurs . . . suspens de tout l'orchestre" derives again from *Les Gommages*; the theme of the "cri" leads to the heavy boulder that falls (Magritte); Hamilton's "déclat du déclencheur" accompanies a series of provocative photographs reminiscent of "la photographie . . . la photographie" of *Le Voyeur*; Magritte's umbrella and bowler hat appear with a policeman; and the mysterious handwritten message found in the water below a landing stairway near the protagonist's body in the film *L'Éden et après* evolves into a *mise en abyme* fragment of manuscript also floating in the water in a similar location, containing a disguised allusion to the structure of the novel itself: "1) analyse du sens probable de la maxime, 2) c'est bien vrai, 3) c'est tout à fait faux, 4) conclusion proposant d'autres sens possibles" (page 108).

One very early text as yet not mentioned shows to what extent the preoccupation of Robbe-Grillet with certain thematic motifs was related in his compositional process to pictures of scenes similar to those later associated particularly with Magritte and Delvaux. It is "La Chambre secrète" of 1962, dedicated to the painter Gustave Moreau, and now included among the short texts called *Instantanés*. The common elements are numerous and striking: the dungeon-like vaulted room, the assassin in the black cape, the body of the young sacrificial victim lying on cushions with the point of the V of her sex organs exposed, the blood oozing from a wound on her breast, the red stains, the ring and chains, the implication of other tortured bodies. "La Chambre secrète" shows not only the presence of such thematic interests, but also the kind of "hommage" recognition of the role of similar preoccupations in the works of certain painters, that could explain Robbe-Grillet's later inventive collaborations with Rauschenberg and Delvaux, as well as his imaginative reconstructions of images of Magritte. One can almost see Robbe-Grillet reexamining his earlier works, looking for elements corresponding to his present themes; abandoning those in which "je n'y décèle aucune inscription

digne d'être rapportée" (p. 116), while reassimilating appropriate objects and décors such as a "vaste cave voûtée à . . . colonnes" (as in "La Chambre secrète"), the collection of heteroclitic objects reminiscent of the storage room of *Glissements*, the "anneaux de marine . . . fixés aux parois" of *Le Voyeur*, the endless corridors of doors as in *Projet pour une révolution à New York*, etc. The "ruines" of the temple to the Goddess Vanadé under "construction" consist of creative fragments of novels, films, and paintings, whose interrelationships move constantly between interior and exterior in "Kleinian" displacements which, like a modern counterpart of the "meaningless" castles, bowls, lances, and "uninterpretable symbols" (the phrase is Auerbach's) of Chrétien de Troyes, play upon the reader's search for meaning by offering him *entrelacements* of tantalizing but always ambiguous fragments.

Ten relatively short titled texts, ranging in length from a brief paragraph to about a page-and-a-half, constitute the "Vagabondage mièvre en attendant" of the "Quatrième espace," whose second section, the "Deuxième cycle initiative," consists of twelve short texts from a later work, *Les Demoiselles d'Hamilton*. The general title of the *espace* itself is no longer that of the first source (*Rêves de jeunes filles*, with photos by David Hamilton), but "Rêveries des mineures séquestrées entre fenêtre et miroir," bringing the work in line with the theme of sequestration and "prisons de jeunes filles mineures" developed from the "Incipit" through the "Première espace." The more lyric tone of *Rêves de jeunes filles* remains evident, however, despite the elimination of the free verse format used in the earlier work (at the publisher's insistence). The feminine *je* of the original narrative concept of "dreams of young girls" emerges at once, and throughout the *espace* clearly implies a *récit* made by one girl on behalf of two or more, from the initial appearance, "Je suis au-delà des parois en verre de la cage, de l'autre côté du miroir. Fugitive grisée . . . je flotte . . ." to the later sections in which "nous sommes enfin arrivées au rivage." An inner book, another *mise en abyme* of the novel itself, in the form of Hamilton's pictures, duplicates the images of the text: "C'est un drôle de livre, où ils ont mis seulement des photographies de jeunes filles enlacées, plus ou moins dévêteues . . ." (p. 141). The camera clicks (p. 130); intertextual cross-references appear—to the Villa Bleue in Shanghai (*La Maison de rendez-vous*), to the coffee pot on the table ("La cafetière est sur la table," in "Le Mannequin" of *Instantanés*), "la bicyclette du voyeur," the window with the missing section of bar as we find it *passim*, and even a brief *hommage à Raymond Roussel*: "On lit des vieux romans démodés qui se passent au fond de l'Afrique fantôme, pleins de drames psychologiques incompréhensibles . . ." Analysis clearly shows that the writing of the "Deuxième cycle" was done at a stage of Robbe-Grillet's evolution in which future possibilities of narrational assemblage were more clearly envisioned than in the preceding "Vagabondage" texts.

With the "Cinquième espace," called "Le Criminel déjà sur ses propres traces," the narrative *je* returns to its masculin form, and the general diegetic movement moves definitely into the thematics of the murderer-narrator which will become the basis of the remaining sections, taken from the Rauschenberg and Magritte projects. Although the *cité fantôme* may be glimpsed here and there (pp. 154, 166), it is the ambiguous murderer who now dominates the text. Again, pieces of paper float near a quay (illuminated by a "vieux réverbère" reminiscent of *Dans le labyrinthe*); they are referred to allusively as "pages imprimées arrachées d'un livre" (p. 151), duplicating the *contaminatio* process, which is revealed even more clearly in the next reference to the lamp post, with its "bec électrique, dont les ornements démodés on déjà été décrits à plusieurs reprises, l'éclairage est juste suffisant pour que je

déchiffre avec peine le texte imprimé" (p. 152). Now the aforementioned three eggs appear; their role in the study of the *contaminatio* visual-verbal interplay between Rauschenberg and Magritte has been discussed above. The text can indeed state, "L'image des oeufs, une fois de plus . . ." (p. 156). The familiar theme of the young girl listening for the steps of an approaching attacker, as in *Projet pour une révolution à New York*, "guettant quelque bruit sournois dans le calm menaçant de la vaste maison" (p. 157), appears in the "Cérémonie rituelle" section (the Suntory whisky text), with its sacrificial decor, its series of *mise en abyme* photographic enlargements of chained adolescent girls, the iron bed, the key, the gold *stylet* or engraving needle, and finally the broken glass of so many scenes in Robbe-Grillet's previous novels and films.

Visual patterns in the text of *Topologie* become increasingly metaphoricometonymic as the novel draws to a close. They range from metaphoric *topoi* (a young girl is a "jolie caille rousse enlevée au nid pour le goût fondant d'une chair de lait," p. 162), to extended syntagmatic metaphors whose "*signifié*" is verbally suppressed ("des bruits de la grosse clef introduite sans douceur dans l'orifice exigü," p. 160, for the act of rape), and even a metaphorization of the metaphor itself ("comme une mer sournoise, grouillante d'adjectifs et de métaphores, prête à vous happer," p. 198). Every sentence becomes part of "un réseau pourvu de multiples anastomoses" (p. 166). The last two texts from the Rauschenberg project, "Paysage avec cri" and "Rétrospective des fouilles," as well as the final section of the last *espace* described in detail earlier as the verbal component of the Magritte images of the first section of *La Belle Captive*, form a veritable stretto of cross-references to earlier portions of *Topologie* and its various sources, as well as *néo-citationnelle* evocations of other texts and images, some of which are engendered by resemblances recognized but not "created" by Robbe-Grillet, as in the "anastomosis" or junction between the Comte de Lautréamont's famous "beau comme la rencontre, sur une table de dissection, d'un parapluie avec une machine à coudre" and Magritte's umbrella (*La Belle Captive*, p. 68), in the phrase "machine à coudre, sommier métallique ou parapluie" (*Topologie*, p. 179). In fact, no full reading of "Un Autel à double fond," the last part of the "Cinquième espace," seems possible without a complete investigation of the visual relationships with Magritte's pictures as listed earlier in a partial account of the elaborate visual-verbal *entrelacements* of this remarkable text. Such a study should logically form part of an analysis in depth of *La Belle Captive* itself. It is evident that the role of this inclusion in *Topologie* is to enhance and justify the constructional principle of generative assemblage itself: the text not only progresses from the previous elements of *Topologie* and leads to *La Belle Captive*, but is destined also, as has been pointed out, to become a principal part of the larger work yet to appear, *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*. As the narrator-author of *Topologie* states in the final line of the novel (still quoting himself, this time, in a paraphrase of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*), "Et moi je m'avance, une fois de plus, devant la succession de portes fermées, le long de l'interminable couloir vide" (p. 201). The multiple transformations, the "déliations" process of progressions and retrogressions of image and "destructured" meanings, of *Topologie* in its interlaced thematics of complicated cross-references to outside elements, from the author's own texts to other artists' lithographs, paintings, and photographs, works by artists whose direct or indirect collaboration have played such an important role in the construction of the novel, all these terminate in an elaborate *retour en arrière* which is also a prophetic *retour en avant*, another link in the extending narrative chain of Robbe-Grillet's "parole nouvelle, une structure non réconciliée, ma propre parole" (*Glissements*, p. 14).

To those critics who may accuse Robbe-Grillet of attempting to represent as a creative network what is in reality only a pragmatic pretext for a work that could be unkindly compared to TV spin-offs and reruns, or those who may view thematic stereotypes or *contaminatio* borrowings as destroying the possibility of finding "unity" in *Topologie*, one may make several answers. From the outset of his career, the author has been attacked for not observing the "principles" of novelistic structure; for having rejected causal plots, point of view, chronology, character "psychology," and even *liaison de scènes*. In each case, however, it has been possible to demonstrate that these traditional devices were still present behind apparent changes; for example, the absence of a narrative pronoun in *La Jalousie* still leaves the implied first person of the *je-néant*, etc. In his latest fiction and films, even the implied "humanistic" referential content of such a work as *La Jalousie* has given place to an artificial set of materials taken, as the author himself states, from popular, worn-out, "ignoble" fictional situations and themes from pornography, detective fiction, adventure films, popular exoticism, and social violence, with a heavy dose of sado-masochism and tortures. The way in which these elements are arranged produces the "unity" of the work: certainly not the traditional unity derived from classic theory (one main action, developing from a situation that progresses to a climax and a denouement, followed by a resolution), but a type of unity which develops at the aesthetic level in a manner presenting many structural similarities to certain recent analyses of Freudian theory of dreams and of the unconscious, involving the metaphor-metonymy complex, condensation and displacement. Much of the analysis offered in *Le Signifiant imaginaire*¹⁰ by Christian Metz, following Barthes, Lacan, Genette, Lyotard, Greimas, and others, of the analogies between these Freudian theories and the structure of literature and the cinema, can be applied as well to a novel such as *Topologie*. Even without necessarily accepting the Freudian interpretation of the "meaning" of dreams, or even of the existence of the unconscious process, one may point out the persuasive similarity (equals metaphor) and contiguity (equals metonymy) joining Freudian dream texts and the novelistic texts of *Topologie*. The narrator of *Topologie* is constantly on the point of falling asleep, so that "avant de m'endormir, la ville, encore une fois, dresse devant mes yeux fermés ses parois calcinées," etc. (p. 13). Moreover, and the point is crucial, the basic "psychological" foundation of the images of the text, both borrowed and invented, is the Freudian pleasure principle. The *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* of the film are now joined by an elaborate series of *plaisir* titles from Magritte (listed earlier) and the "immense cité des plaisirs" of *Topologie* itself (p. 93).

In a recent text which has appeared only in English translation, "Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction,"¹¹ Robbe-Grillet has acknowledged the interplay of metaphor and metonymy in the basic structure of his work. The author states:

Causality and chronology are really the same thing in a traditional narrative. The succession of facts, the narrative concatenation, as is said today, is based entirely on a system of causalities: what follows phenomenon A is a phenomenon B, the consequence of the first; thus, the chain of events in the novel. . . . Now if one takes a *nouveau roman*—let us choose a text like *La Jalousie*—what happens is entirely different. Instead of having to deal with a series of scenes

¹⁰Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire* (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1977), especially pp. 179 ff.

¹¹Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction," *Critical Inquiry*, 4, No. 1 (Autumn 1977), 1-20.

that are connected by causal links, one has the impression that the same scene is constantly repeating itself, but with variation. . . . Using the terms of Jakobson, a modern critic has said that the contemporary novel, and I think he was talking about *La Jalousie*, arranges metaphors in the order of metonymy—that is, arranges elements which should be interchangeable in an order, a succession, which should be causal. . . . This new order has the great advantage of calling attention to its own artificiality.

The passage applies equally to *Topologie*, with the difference that while Robbe-Grillet is speaking primarily, in the above remarks, about a fundamentally referential “psychological” subject, under new constructional conditions of formal “condensation” (equals metaphor) and “displacement” (equals metonymy), the vastly extended diegetic subject(s) of *Topologie* may be viewed as obeying, at the textual level, the elaborate system of image and figure relationships analyzed by Metz and others to show the similarity of advanced constructs in novel and film to the Freud-Jakobson doctrine of parallels between linguistics, rhetoric, and literarity on the one hand and dream structures on the other. The main difference would be that whereas Freudian analysis aims in theory at the discovery of a “true” referential meaning (the “explanation” of the dream), the metaphoric “dreams” of a work such as *Topologie* seek no prosaic or “meaningful” translation. The reader remains at the level of the dream; his phantoms of desire and pleasure flow into optical and verbal metaphors, metonymys, and synecdoches. Even the traditional structuralist linguistic combination of *syntagmes* and *paradigmes* is caught up in the interplay of verbal condensations and displacements; in his general conclusion on “imaginary meaning,” Metz sees both literature and film as involved in a vast neo-rhetorical system: “La Métaphore, ainsi, assume l’héritage global de la ‘similarité’ et absorbe le paradigme. . . . La métonymie digère le syntagme et reprend à son compte toutes les contiguités. . . . Il ne faut pas se laisser abuser: la démarche analysante est forcément ‘référentielle’ (même si ce mot, aujourd’hui, a mauvaise presse): . . . on ne parle pas de rien.”¹² The inevitable “referentiality” of both diegesis and visio-verbal imagery in a work such as *Topologie*, even if only at the level of the popular culture basic materials admitted (even vaunted) by the author, must not be, however, raised to the height of clues to latent meaning. Even for Freud, the purpose of the dream process is not to create meaning, but rather to disguise, alter, and even mutilate the latent meaning which the analyst (critic) attempts to discover.

Thus the elaborate use of assembled materials in *Topologie* engenders a formal network whose “meaning” remains at the level of “construction” (a frequent allusive term in the work). The real critical challenge of the novel invites the reader to identify consciously the elements and components of the entire text, somewhat along the lines attempted with respect to portions thus analyzed above. James Joyce said that critics needed to spend their lives reading and analyzing *Finnegans Wake*; less grandiosely, one may say that the study of *Topologie d’une cité fantôme* requires that following the “dream reading” of free non-interpretation there should come an in-depth textual study of images and words, involving not only derivative sources, intertextual cross-references, and textual assemblages, but also a structure of visio-verbal condensations and displacements, metaphors and metonymys, paradigms and syntagms, all forming a new generative fictional system which has brought about a remarkable renewal in the art of Robbe-Grillet.

¹²Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire*, p. 370.